



haiku: the mood of earth/ Ann Atwood

Photographs in full color by the author



the mood of earth/ Ann Atwood

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New York



To Joan
who knows the place is Here
and the time is Now

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haiku: the mood of earth



No verse form is as closely related to art as the three-line oriental haiku. Haiku has been called the poetry of sensation, but primarily, it is a visual experience. An understanding of haiku, however limited it must be in this brief introduction, should yield a deeper insight into the principles applied in art and photography. All art springs from the same fountain, and many of the techniques used in writing good haiku can also be used in making good pictures.

The haiku form itself, bound within the limitations of approximately seventeen syllables, is paradoxical in nature. It is both simple and profound, constrictive and expansive, meticulously descriptive and yet wholly suggestive. And it is the very limitations of haiku that demand the discipline necessary to all art. For with this meagre allowance of words, the poet must not be tempted to stop at the right word, but must enlarge his search until the *only* word is within his grasp.

Nor must the artist or photographer stop short of this same "only" — the one object, the one angle, the one possible slant of light which alone can express the fullness of his experience.

By linking itself with nature, with the moods of earth and the cycles of the seasons, the haiku telescopes in a single word a limitless range of sensations and ideas which are part of man's common fund of experience. One noun can swing the reader into spaceless flight.

So each of the season's names excite endless associations accompanied by emotional overtones. The mind spins outward on a far journey at the sound of these words: autumn, spring, winter, summer. For man, being made of earth, is sensitive to its every mood. Dusk . . . rain . . . forest . . . grass . . . these are more than nouns. They are the essence of being.

The pattern of the haiku itself suggests the rhythm

of breathing. Its length is the length of a breath drawn in, held for a moment of wonder, and then released. The written haiku is the re-creation of this moment of wonder, or this "haiku-moment," in which a purer quality of light illumines that which the eye sees, lifting it to new levels of interpretation. It was the radiance of such a moment which enabled William Blake to "see the world in a grain of sand."

Yet it is not solely his own experience which the true artist seeks to convey. The greater the art, the more clearly the viewer or the reader recognizes the artist within himself. This is the highest aim of haiku—to allow the reader the full spectrum of response. The poet induces this artistic impulse from the reader by harmonizing the three elements essential to every haiku: time, place, and object. The time is Now—yet in this Now is a sense of timelessness. The place is Here—yet in this Here is the hint of everywhere. And the object placed in its poetic setting generates intuitive waves of meaning in the mind of the reader.

For the word "haiku" literally means *beginning*. It is begun by the writer and completed by the reader. This creative balance is destroyed if the poem overflows with the poet's own feeling:

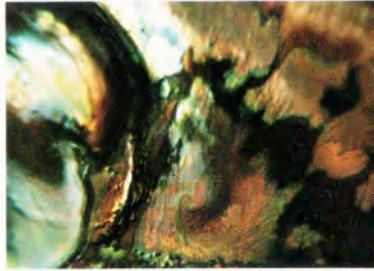
*This gathering dark . . .
alone with the last gull I feel
an unknown sadness.*

The writer's role is more the role of a painter, presenting the scene in such a way as to evoke sadness in the reader:

*This gathering dark . . .
a sharp wave driving skyward
the last hungry gull.*



Here both writer and reader, each in his own way,



can experience the poetic power of the moment. Since this direct contact with nature is achieved by specific haiku techniques, one wonders how far photography can explore this ancient art of painting with words. Are some of its elements, successful for so many centuries, adaptable to other art forms?

A haiku may be simply a vividly presented scene suffused with poetic feeling; yet often a single idea or detail is isolated and brought into close focus. This detail can create a second image totally unlike the first, yet rising naturally out of it:

*Musing on a gnarled
tree-root my mind leaps as a
stallion rears up!*

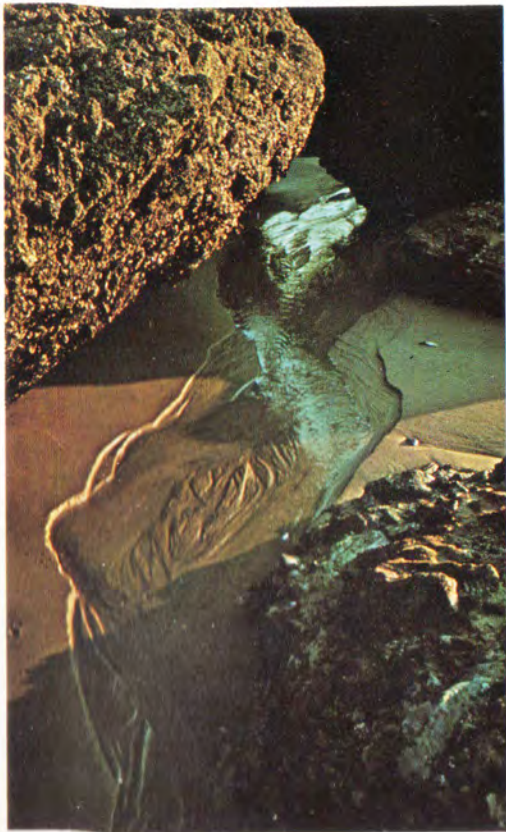
This deeper look—this second glance—provides a method for expressing a haiku by using two pictures.

Another technique often used is to magnify one fragment of the whole, letting it ripple in the reader's mind into wider and wider overtones:

*In a sea creature's shell
flashing in waves of sunlight
—the waking of wings!*

It is by this two-picture method—this concentration of attention from the long view to the close-up—that this book suggests the haiku-moment might also be pursued by a camera. In the pages that follow it might be said that the words illustrate the photographs, the three lines being divided in such a way as to unite the two pictures into one haiku.

This book is asking: can art and photography, by applying some of the haiku principles, find an effective way of getting inside nature and seeing it from the heart out? And is it possible to thrust off into that spaceless haiku flight without the wings of words?



A blank page of sand—
at the water's cutting edge
the pattern shaping.

In a sea creature's shell
flashing in waves of sunlight
—the waking of wings!





Half mocking the sea
the gulls dip within reach of
each exploding wave.





Ebb tide at sundown . . .

Now clouds of foam no longer
blur the bright mirror.





On wood returning
from a long sea journey
the deeper print of waves.



Musing on a gnarled
tree root

my mind leaps
as a stallion rears up!



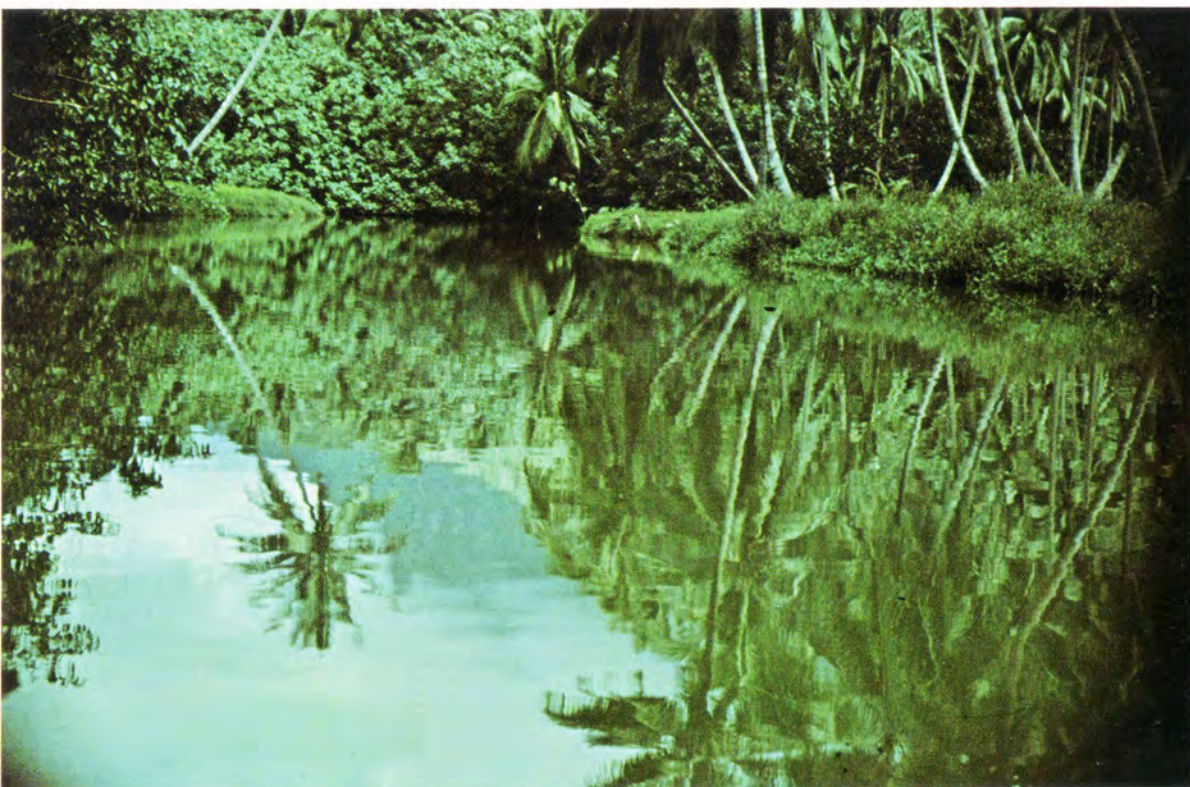
The curved lines
of the distant pond —
how sharp and straight
at the water's edge.





The swift growth of spring.
Colt mothered in the meadow
now you are alone.





Clouds of heaven and
trees of earth
merge into one
in the still river.



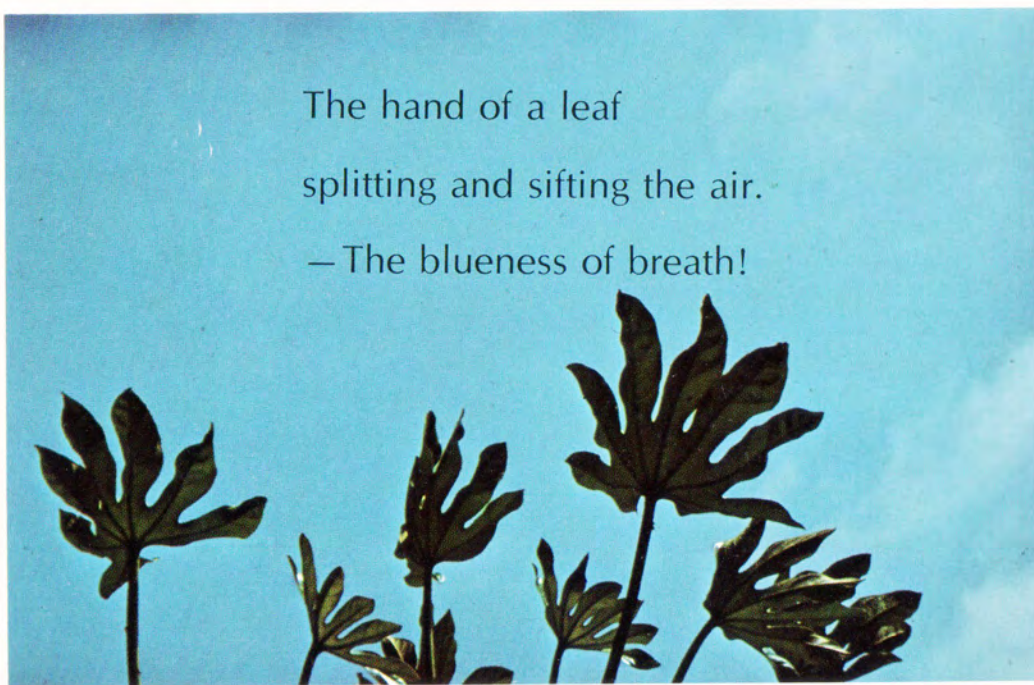


Sea rocks blown with fog . . .
Time locked in mist
long long forgotten.





The hand of a leaf
splitting and sifting the air.
— The blueness of breath!



Egrets on their way south —

The water left with



broken shadows

Trailing diamonds —

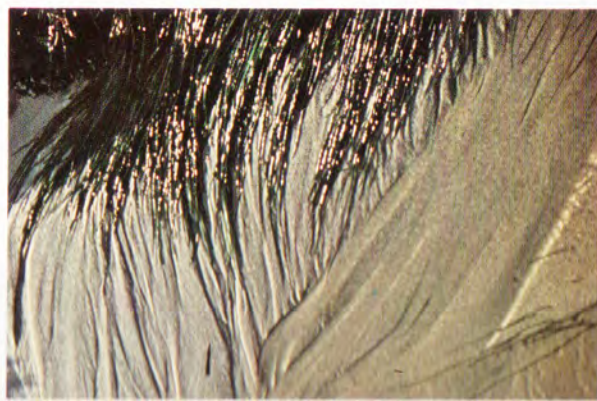




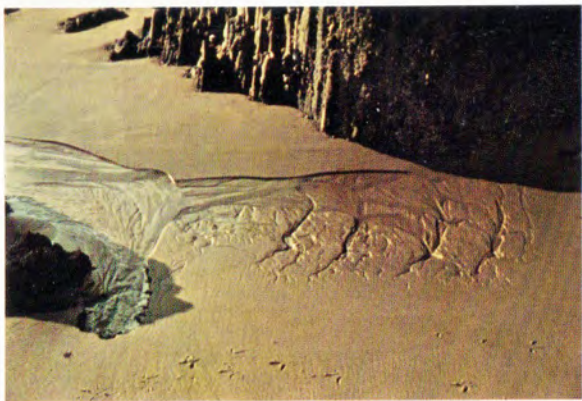
Green leaf dying . . .

What do they say, these inked letters
on yellow parchment?





Cold lick of the sea . . .
The birds fleeing from it
the grass flowing with it.



Gull with the starry prints
do you stand here and watch
these ballets in the sand?





The cooing murmurs
of doves . . .

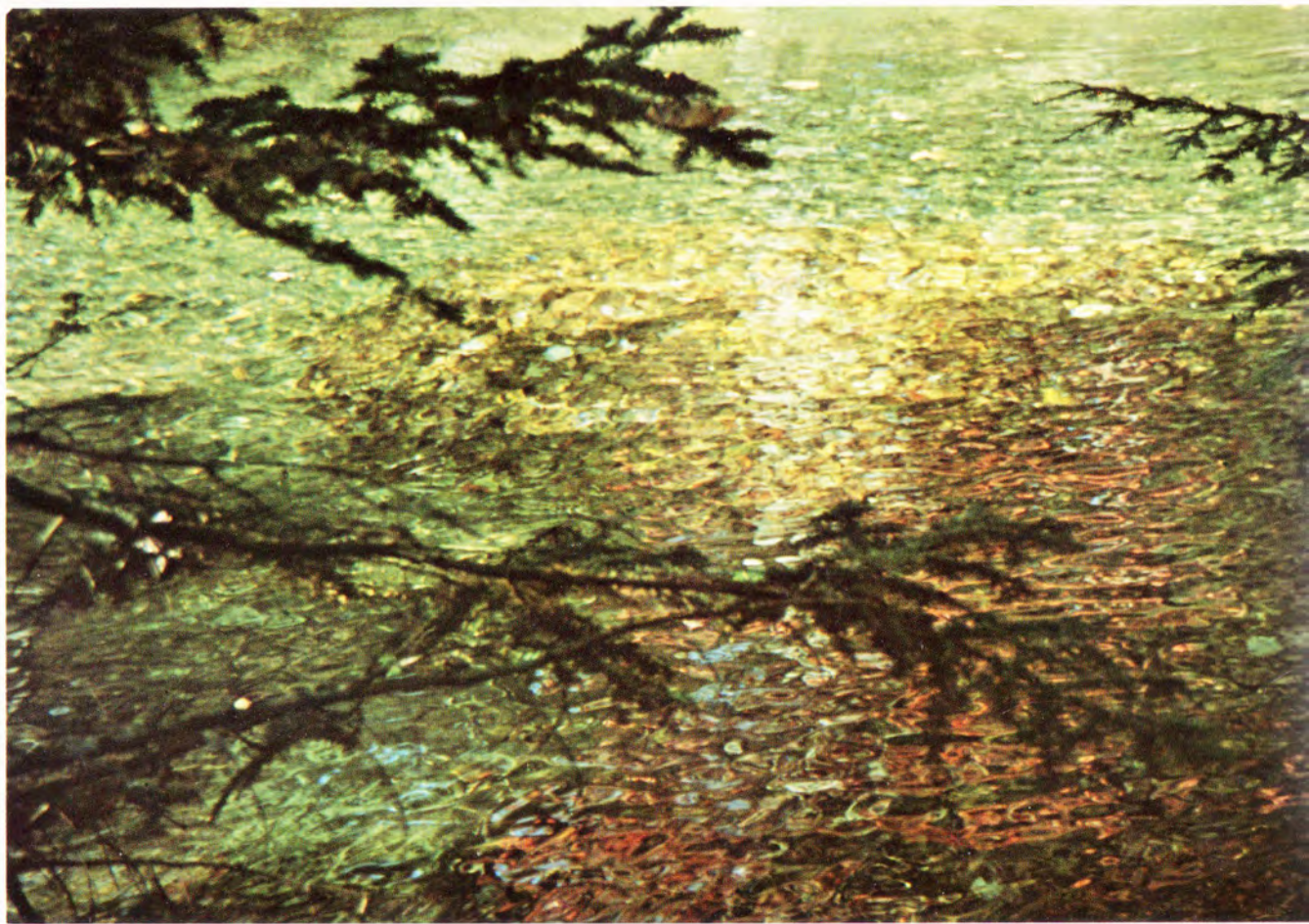
the blur of dreams
the scent of lost summers.



The brook leaps the steep
mountain



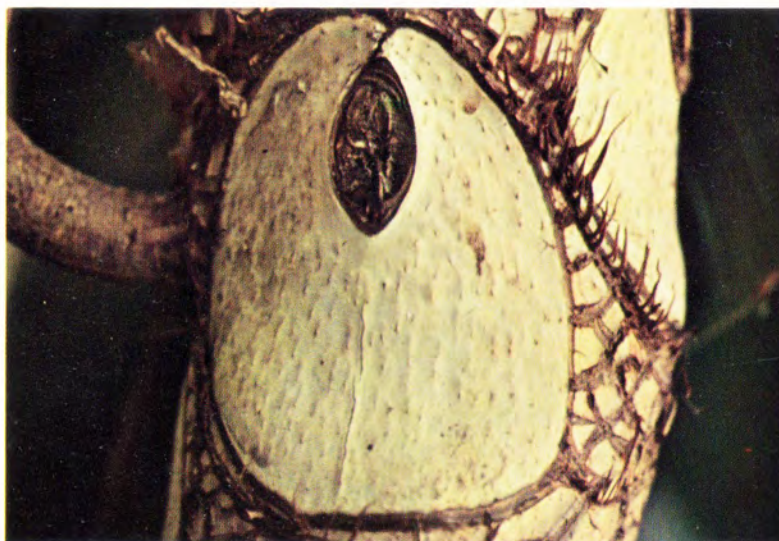
from every hollow
a swirl of new joy!



In the pool's shadowy
pocket lies autumn's plunder
of copper and gold.



Part of the growing
pattern now



the tears of plants
no longer flowing.

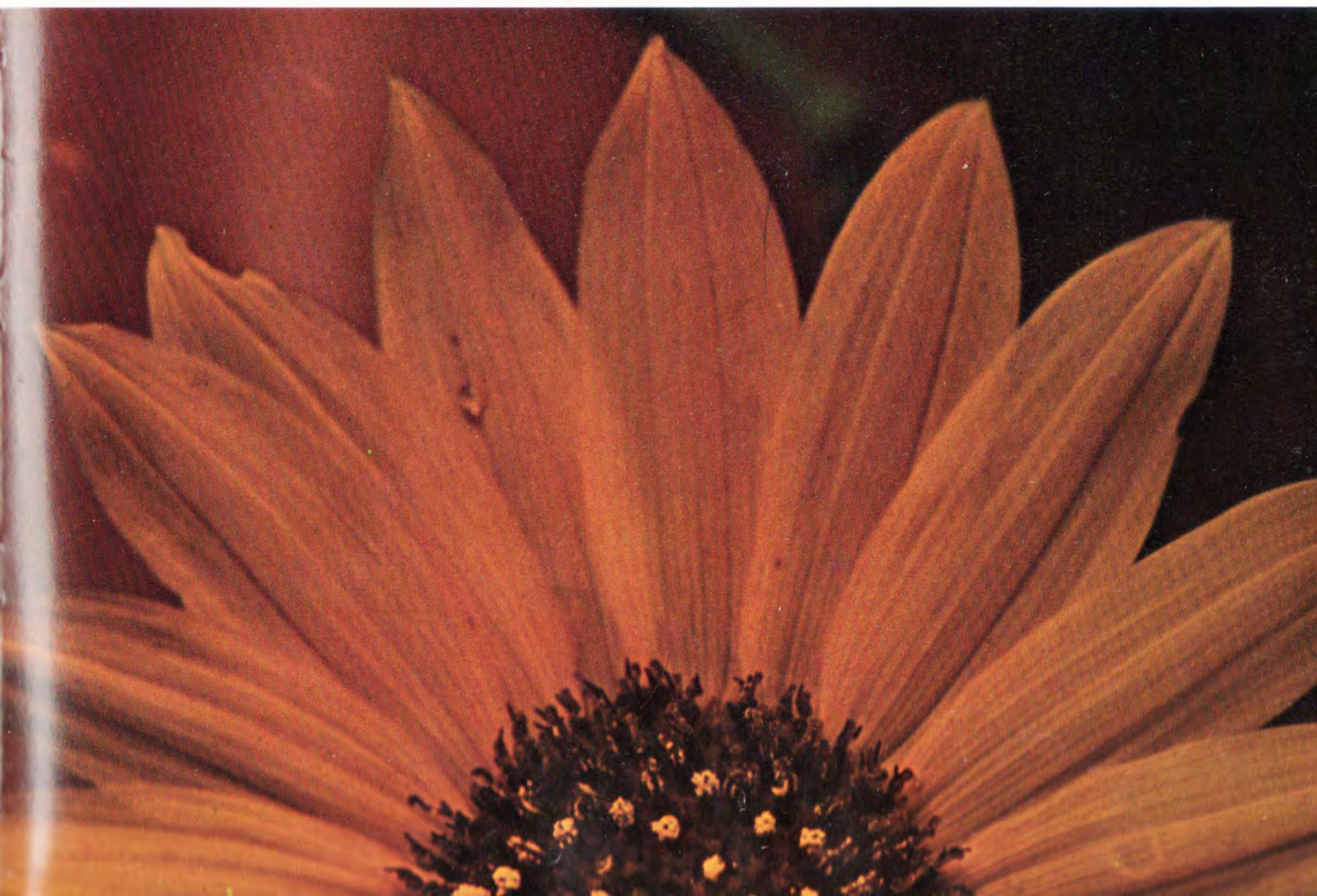


Summer dying . . .

In drying grasses

one last sun

so slowly setting.



Summer in Eden
still hushed and hidden,



guarded
by the flaming sword.



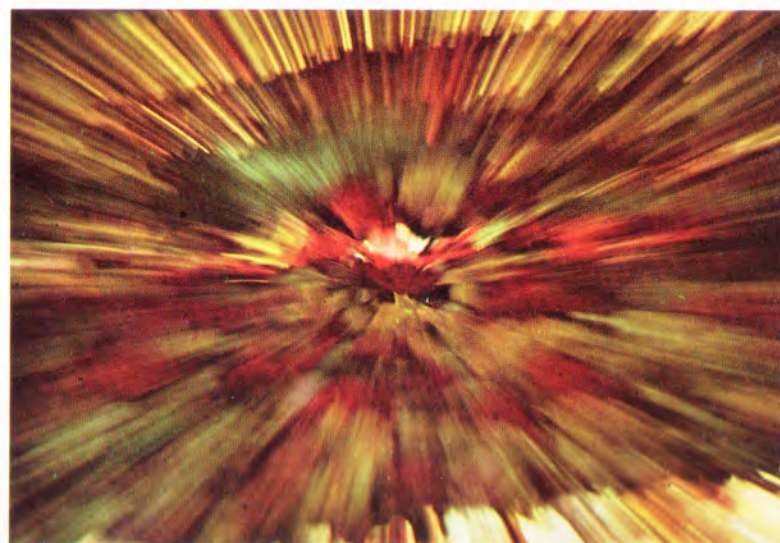
Through dripping branches
the woods and I are one
in the eyes of the rain.





On the tree's bright trunk
at day's end . . . its leaf, its life
written in shadow.

The light of bright leaves . . .
Tonight a pinwheel spinning
on the rim of sleep.





This empty mountain!
The thinning trail you travel
is ravelled in mist.



Also by Ann Atwood



SEA MOODS COVE

"A photographer explores a cove in Southern California revealing in beautiful, sensitively captioned color prints forms, patterns, and colors created by the sea." — *ALA Booklist*. "A thing of beauty, opening for all a wider appreciation of sea and shore." — *Elementary English*. "Pure lyricism in an album of color prints. Many are breathtakingly beautiful." — *Kirkus Reviews*.

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