

THE CRY OF CRANES IN BASSDORF¹

For Cornelia von Bismarck

life has one string
darkness has one string
twisting a tiny throat go back home

lake water is vacant land
put into hearing so early a tongue tip
opens the red pine woods a Song Dynasty fan

cranes waking notes bivouacked in the score waken
light-years carve with care a
sopping wet dredged-up feather

there are wingtips the journey begins dangling in the air again
there are eye pupils the skyline is still a wound
inviting you to fall endlessly into the impulse

cries toward home in voice after voice
home records the waiting immensity
how often quieted to be shattered so often

crane necks curve down dive into the dull pain of waterweed
upstairs bedroom window covered by dense foliage
ears expect bass green fate green

elegy is coming back elegy never goes away
until the shyest bodies
move into and fill our growth rings

¹ Author's note: Bassdorf is the name of a little hamlet in Germany where there are only three households. One is the summer retreat of the family of my good friend Cornelia von Bismarck, who is a direct descendant of the composer Mendelssohn, and is now Director of the Mendelssohn Society. The Mendelssohn family were Jewish, and were ennobled following the success of the Mendelssohn Bank: the bank's badge is a crane, and Bassdorf is on the cranes' migration route. As guests there one summer, we were regularly woken in the early morning by the crying of the cranes, and we seemed, in the darkness, to have been set inside a painting of a flock of cranes by Song Dynasty Emperor Huizong (1082-1135). Cranes migrate endlessly, always coming home by the same route. Yet, for us, with painful memories of German Jewry, and with our own wandering from place to place, the meaning of 'home' is so complicated, and so serious. I made the poem with this in mind.