

NATHAN SLAVIK

Wallace Stevens in Philadelphia

At the earliest ending of winter,
The roots are a weapon
The sunlight is ill regardless.

In March, a scrawny cry from outside,
A silencer muzzling the valley,
Seemed like a sound in his mind.

Eyes closed and untouchable,
He knew that he had heard it
Trapped up in the belly.

A bird's cry, at daylight or before,
Not sweet, but like a slave auction,
In the early March wind.

Against the cornerstore wall
The sun was rising at six,
Intentions began to shatter.

No longer a battered panache above the snow,
John the Baptist swung his icepick...
Until he had crushed the outside world.

Disturbed by the formation of words,
the vast ventriloquism,
The cipher was uncontrollable.

In sleep's faded papier-mache...
He blinked himself away from the block,
The sun was coming from out the flicks.

Above the diceraw crews he heard
That scrawny cry—it was
a scrap among the 5th.

A chorister whose c preceded the choir,
The verse spits the end of times,
It was part of the colossal sun.

Brushstrokes bring darkness
Surrounded by choral rings,
the scrape of a ghetto gospel.

Still far away. It was like
Ella's rhythm burned
A new knowledge of reality.