

stirs once in its sleep,
then exhaustedly sleeps.

All day it sang
the same five notes:
Sorry, so sorry.
Why is it sorry?

Why do the blameless
apologize?
It did nothing wrong.
No, nothing is wrong.

It sings what it knows
but the heart still replies:
A song is narrow.
A life is narrow.

INTERROGATIONS OF THE SPARROW

All night, all night,
I lie on my pallet of straw.
All night, all night,
I hear its white-throated call.
Who am I? Who am I like?

A voice outside the window
hides in the holly tree.
It talks to itself without stopping.
Or does it talk to me?
Who am I? Who am I like?

In a dream I walked in a forest,
pulled by the sparrow's cry,
a shade among white shadows,
a shadow among flickering trees.
Who am I? Who am I like?

A voice as soft as a feather
 moved closer, then farther away.
 Which tree was the tree of my sparrow?
 Would I find it by break of day?
Who am I? Who am I like?

I fell to my knees like a beggar.
 I had no pride nor shame.
 Holding each tree like a lover,
 I begged to know its name.
Who am I? Who am I like?

But each tree withheld an answer,
 my cheek only scraped rough bark,
 the sparrow heart I was seeking
 flying from dark to dark.
Who am I? Who am I like?

Unanswerable question,
 I'll answer with my life.
Who am I? Who am I like?
 If I knew how I'd sing:
Like no one. No one thing.

MAURA STANTON

REFLECTIONS ON METER

I used to wonder why Shakespeare sounded like Shakespeare and Milton sounded like Milton. I wanted to sound like that, too. I wanted to sound like Chaucer and Keats and Dickinson and Frost and Bishop. All of them all had their own voices, of course, and no one could ever confuse them with one another, but they all had a driving power in their lines of poetry, and it was that power that I wanted. But I also wanted to sound like me. I have a flat Midwestern accent, and my mother told me that I shouldn't try to lose it in order to sound like a fake Elizabethan or fake Romantic or fake Victorian or fake Englishman. So I studied the mystery of their language and it was a surprisingly long time after I'd begun writing poetry that I realized the secret was that all of them all wrote in meter—not the textbook meter of abstract feet that turned poetry into algebra, but in the natural stressed meter of the English language that approximates natural speech.

So one day, after years of writing in a controlled free verse that accidentally fell into meter at times, I sat down to deliberately write a hundred lines of blank verse. It was a turning point in my life. I felt that I was speaking in my own voice, but that at the same time a deeper force was shaping my lines and giving me a mysterious new entry into my imagination.

I read some books after that, because I wanted to understand what I was doing. For me the most useful definition of meter is the one in John Thompson's li-