

In California: Morning, Evening, Late January

By Denise Levertov

Pale, then enkindled,
light
advancing,
emblazoning
summits of palm and pine,

the dew
lingering,
scripture of
scintillas.

Soon the roar
of mowers
cropping the already short
grass of lawns,

men with long-nozzled
cylinders of pesticide
poking at weeds,
at moss in cracks of cement,

and louder roar
of helicopters off to spray
vineyards where *braceros* try
to hold their breath,

and in the distance, bulldozers, excavators,
babel of destructive construction.

Banded by deep
oakshadow, airy
shadow of eucalyptus,

miner's lettuce,
tender, untasted,
and other grass, unmown,
luxuriant,
no green more brilliant.

Fragile paradise.

. . . .

At day's end the whole sky,
vast, unstinting, flooded with transparent
mauve,
tint of wisteria,
cloudless

over the malls, the industrial parks,
the homes with the lights going on,
the homeless arranging their bundles.

. . . .

Who can utter
the poignance of all that is constantly
threatened, invaded, expended

and constantly
nevertheless
persists in beauty,

tranquil as this young moon
just risen and slowly
drinking light
from the vanished sun.

Who can utter
the praise of such generosity
or the shame?

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Although born in England, Denise Levertov's long residence in the United States and her allegiance to the nativist vision and organic, open-form procedures of William Carlos Williams make her a distinctly American writer. Levertov came here in 1948, and was soon associating with the Black Mountain poets Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley. Her quietly passionate poems, attuned to mystic insights and mapping quests for harmony, became darker and more political in the 1960s as a result of personal loss and her outrage at the Vietnam War.