

poiēma**- for William Meredith****1**

The Russian olive tree is dead.
 All year its roots battled the maple's
 and lost. I put it where I could see
 it grow. Each doing its own thing
 we would grow old together.

Today a silver heaviness is in my blood.
 Gray leaves flutter,
 gnarled trunks heave upwards to join
 other things I have taken in
 that are frail and cry,
 which we run from or starve—
 the old, rain, desire.

2

This morning I read about Sartre's last days—
 of Simone de Beauvoir in the hospital room
 with his corpse.
 She wanted to be alone with him;
 to lie beside him under the sheets.
 "No," the nurse said, "the gangrene."
 So she lay beside him on the sheets instead.

I have often been duped by the fragrance of death—
 narcissus, gladioli—unmasked now
 as love's true opposite;
 its fraternal twin, monstrously continent
 and strong against friendship, blood, ambition,
 and—most fragile of all—desire.

