

## The Planter as Translator

by Gary Paul Nabhan (For W.S. Merwin)

Our fate is that we wish to translate  
What divers plants upon this earth  
Have been struggling to divulge to us  
What they wish for us to decipher  
Before we undo the very foothold  
They have grown to offer us  
With every hazardous step we take  
From that first halting stumble  
As unruly children in some gorgeous garden  
To that desperate lunge we take  
As we grab for the last of the reachable rhizomes,  
Caudices, shoots or splayed-out roots  
As they loosen from the cliff face  
At the very ends of the island's mass.

We want to remember how exactly it is  
That we are joined in a cadence  
Few of our kind take time to hear  
For plants breathe in as we breathe out  
While we breathe in as plants breathe out  
Reminding us how we were born to behave  
In reciprocity with such luminous greenery  
Which scrambles up from the poorest, darkest ground  
As it reaches for light in the heavens.

Perhaps our trouble has always been  
How we pretend that we began:  
Rootless, stuck up somewhere  
In abstract/vacant air  
While the vines themselves were beckoning  
Reaching up and urging us  
To anchor as firmly as they must surely do  
Securing any fertile ground  
Held between barren rock and salty splash---  
Ground that we might find, not by sight  
As much as palpable touch or grace  
Instead of our incessant slipping,  
Skidding from the narrow trail  
Which opens up but then erodes  
Before our bleary eyes.

The trees above us bear silent witness  
To each and every reckless act  
Of our careening, acts which leave us  
Further away from what was ours  
To never fully know.