

William Stafford

(1914-1993)

“*Understanding Poetry*, by Williams Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens” (1987)

The jar on a mountain, the tree that thinks
for the rest, these return when they seem to begin.
They realize out of the earth, brought back
by the sun and stirred by the wind for a storm.

And the *you* that thinks—where can it find
a song in the branches?—feel the becoming?
A formula that you carry around
has the universe like a spring inside.

From anyone, from a tree, a hill,
everything else may arrive. It has
a little box with a sign on top:
“Open on your birthday. The inside is yours.”

What waits, the old discoverers found,
is often disguised. It sleeps in the sun,
or it escapes, too small to see.
But it, or lack of it, can kill a man.