

BALLROOM DANCING

By Timothy P. McLaughlin

I've come down from the mountain and entered
the big room where everyone is named brother.
I've dipped my toes into a little-known river

of belonging. There's a pulsing even before the
drums begin. In their thunder, a delicious madness
claims us, three hundred men rising from the stiff

chairs of this windowless place to band in the
center and pound the smooth-tanned hides, the walls
melting around us as we drive a desperate plea

for something more on and on into the big Mystery
who looms with a mouth full of questions:

*What is this song you're thumping out?
Why did you go drumless and silently yearning for so long?
Is your heart likewise awake again and wet with rhythm?
Will you feed it to the river left unfed for ages?*

There's heat and water in my eyes now. The dazzling
desert autumn has crushed into the room
and these men have all turned to cottonwoods

who cannot hide the gold beaming on their
boughs or muffle the leaf song clattering
in their throats. The hard ballroom floor beneath

us fissures in a maze of lightning lines. Tiny tendrils
sprout from our unclothed feet and wriggle
down in the rooting we were made for. And then

we begin to *dance*: like rooty trees, like wondrous
unburdened beasts. Remembering ourselves after
a vicious absence, a Babelic mish-mash of speaking

bodies erupts in the wild dancing discourse we'd waited
our lives to find. A finding you could scour continents
to seek and never reach. A finding that noiselessly

waits in the plainest stand of trees or gentlest
floating river, that presents itself in the anyplace
where you stand wholly stripped and feel a

drumming in the dark clay, or catch a gleaming on
the water, and reach out to push open the doorway
where the known softly gives way to the real.