

# Under Our Own Wings

Nellie Wong

Do not despair, my sister, of a brother's process.  
Laughter connects to self-examination.  
Laughter can be an opium poppy spreading  
its poison first among ourselves. Our selves  
our whole selves fragments chopped liver  
in a goldfish bowl.  
To remain private with change is to self-destruct.  
To go public with change is to begin  
to challenge the forces of white supremacy.  
Yet good fortune the good fortune of battles is not  
simply opening red envelopes containing coins or paper  
money.  
To believe that change comes about is to keep working.  
As someone said, dear sister, as someone said  
you are always working, working  
hammering away at lies myths distortions  
water hyacinths clogging  
the canals of Asian America.  
Yet we are not property  
to be sold disposed auctioned.  
What is antique what is held valuable  
is not necessarily unbreakable. A sea of faces stare  
at our invisibility our supposed assimilation. A man believes  
simply that to err is to be human  
and we sit and stare among whites yellows  
a few friends.  
Ears and tongues perceive  
the images of history swallowed in antiseptic schoolrooms  
on the battles of Vietnam  
in the bedrooms porno movie theaters magazines TV screens  
of America.  
Any wonder, dear sister, any wonder  
that sisters and brothers must exorcise through ritual form  
poems songs stories essays plays  
at its own pace  
the malaise of white America

To create our own histories culture  
restore our bodies to red health  
to battle with every warrior beneath our pores.  
Though we try because we must  
Though we try because we want  
to control our own destinies we are mirrored  
in the windows of clouds  
in the shattered glass  
of our race and our sex.  
How can we separate our race from our sex our sex from our race?  
And we hear again and again we must struggle against racism  
at the exclusion of sexism.  
And we hear again and again we must struggle against sexism  
at the exclusion of racism.  
These tactics. These words I must use, this language, this  
tiresome but necessary chant. We in the midst of struggle  
would love to ski downhill and breathe nothing but fresh air.  
And I must ask: how can we stand in isolation how can we blow  
away the blasts of destruction bombarding us from every direction  
because we are  
women because we are  
colored because we are  
feared?  
The sagas of long steam ladies.  
The sagas of long steam men,  
the talkers the orators the dancers  
they are here before us we are here among them  
brimming with language music air.  
We birth ourselves, our privacies exposed  
proud, seemingly free and yet devils nag  
    poke at our very bones  
to steal the art that is our lives  
the music that is our source  
the spring that is our imagination.  
To truly create is to struggle.  
To truly struggle is to present  
our selves our process of living learning  
and unlearning the garbage of self-contempt of self-defeat  
heaped at our own doorsteps. Sometimes we rein in  
the blinders sometimes we see no farther  
than our own skins sometimes we prick  
ourselves savor the cactus of our own pains.

