

When animals and humans still shared the same language, the Cree recount, Rabbit wanted to go to the moon. Rabbit asked the strongest birds to take him, but Eagle was busy and Hawk couldn't fly so high. Crane said he would help. He told Rabbit to hold on to his legs. Then he went for the moon. The journey was long and Rabbit was heavy. Rabbit's weight stretched out Crane's legs and bloodied Rabbit's paws. But  
5 Crane reached the moon, with Rabbit hanging on to him. Rabbit patted Crane in thanks, his hands still bleeding. So Crane got his long legs and blood-red head.

Back then, too, a Cherokee woman was courted by both Hummingbird and Crane. She wanted to marry Hummingbird, because of his great beauty. But Crane proposed a race around the world. The woman agreed, knowing Hummingbird's speed. She didn't remember that Crane could fly at night. And, unlike  
10 Hummingbird, Crane never tired. Crane flew in straight lines, where Hummingbird flew in every direction. Crane won the race with ease, but the woman still rejected him.

All the humans revered Crane, the great orator. Where cranes gathered, their speech carried miles. The Aztecs called themselves the Crane People. One of the Anishinaabe clans was named the Cranes—*Ajjak* or *Businassee*—the Echo Makers. The Cranes were leaders, voices that called all people together.  
15 Crow and Cheyenne carved cranes' leg bones into hollow flutes, echoing the echo maker.

Latin *grus*, too, echoed that groan. In Africa, the crowned crane ruled words and thought. The Greek Palamedes invented the letters of the alphabet by watching noisy cranes in flight. In Persian, *kurti*, in Arabic, *ghurnuq*: birds that awaken before the rest of creation, to say their dawn prayers. The Chinese xian-he, the birds of heaven, carried messages on their backs between the sky worlds.

Cranes dance in southwestern petroglyphs. Old Crane Man taught the Tewa how to dance. Australian aborigenes tell of a beautiful and aloof woman, the perfect dancer, turned by a sorcerer into a crane.

Apollo came and went in crane form, when visiting the world. The poet Ibycus, in the sixth century B.C., beaten senseless and left for dead, called out to a passing flock of cranes, who followed the assailant to a theater and hovered over him until he confessed to the astonished crowd.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hera and Artemis turn Gerania into a crane, to punish the Pygmy queen for her vanity. The Irish hero Finn fell off a cliff and was caught in the air by his grandmother, when she changed into a crane. If cranes circled overhead above American slaves, someone would die. The First Warrior who fought to create ancient Japan took the form of a crane at death and flew away.

Tecumseh tried to unite the scattered nations under the banner of Crane Power, but the Hopi mark for the crane's foot became the world's peace symbol. The crane's foot—*pie de grue*—became that genealogist's mark of branching descent, *pedigree*.

To make a wish come true, the Japanese must fold a thousand paper cranes. Twelve-year-old Sadako Sasaki, stricken with "atom bomb sickness," made it to 644. Children worldwide send her thousands, every year.

Cranes help carry a soul to paradise. Pictures of cranes line the windows of mourning houses, and crane-shaped jewelry adorns the dead. Cranes are souls that once were humans and might be again, many lives from now. Or humans are souls that once were cranes and will be again, when the flock is rejoined.

Something in the crane is trapped halfway, in the middle between now and when. A fourteenth-century Vietnamese poet sets the birds forever halfway through the air:

40 Clouds drift as days pass;  
Cypress trees are green beside the altar,  
The heart, a chilly pond under moonlight.  
Night rain drops tears of flowers.  
Below the pagoda, grass traces a path.  
45 Among the pine trees, cranes remember  
The music and songs of years ago.  
In the immensity of sky and sea,  
How to relive the dream before the lamp of that night?

When animals and people all spoke the same language, crane calls said exactly what they meant. Now we live in unclear echoes. The turtledove, swallow, and crane keep the time of their coming, says Jeremiah. Only  
50 people fail to recall the order of the Lord.

Richard Powers, *The Echo Maker*, 2006