

The Valley

Surely you have met the dead.
Perhaps in the lull after laughter
You saw momentarily
The dead dragon behind their eyes

Oh, valley beyond time and place
I have curled in that barren nest
And heard the voice of a dragon long dead
Speaking in the language of bones.

“Pilgrim, did you not know
that to follow another’s path
upon the earth would bring you here?”

Many have gone before us in this,
And fallen, bloody, to their knees.
Knelt, rose, began again,
To what consequence for you?

“Pilgrim, is this truly what was
breathed into you as a gift?”

I, too, have known false tranquility,
The stillness of movement aborted,
I, too, have knelt at the point of dissolution,
Where all paths become none.

“Pilgrim, what have you done
with the life you said you were given?”

Do you wander among the bones?
Do you maunder among the bones?
Could you have lived without bones?
We have all been bones before.

The first sound is quiet,
And the silence before it
Was silence without an end
And yet,

Da!

“You have to give what you were given.”

Da!

“You were loved before you knew how to love.”

Da!

“Your burden has been prepared for you.”

Have not bones danced
In a dry valley before?
So shall you dance to the resounding
Of the rod upon the rock.

An Unreliable Self Portrait

My hair is two women at once,
Sisters who are neither soft, nor yielding:

One is the headmistress at a classical school
She buttons her blouse at the neck
She works at an oaken desk, and they call her Minerva
She has corrected Atlas's posture.
Children fall silent when she enters
They dare each other to defy her,
Yet they wait upon her nod,
And the smile at the corner of her eye.

The other is a wild pagan queen,
She wears iron at her wrists and at her throat,
She dances and they call her Diana
She once courted the fierce north wind
And lay with him in the cold, sweet heather.
Men rush after her into battle.
She has no throne and wears no crown
And yet the soft and cultivated lands bring her tribute.

My eyes are but one woman with three dresses:

She is the keeper of a lighthouse,
Who wears silk with an old, woolen sweater.
Her silhouette stands at the window, and they call her Vesta.
She has watched the sea, and knows its hidden colors,
The footprints that lie beneath the shifting tides.
Her house is filled with beautiful things,
Yet they are the treasures of lands she has not seen,
And there is no one to tell her their stories.

My mouth is an honest woman with many faces:

She is an actress of very little renown.
In the evenings, she wears her grandmother's velvet
She laughs and they call her Venus
She collects small, broken things
and keeps them on her dresser.
She never refuses traveling salesmen.
She gives her heart freely in the darkened theatre,
Yet never finds herself to be empty.

Leaves

We, the spring children,
The leaves of grass,
Have become leaves of the tree
Leaves falling on a breath of wind
In the longest autumn.
At last, we come to rest
On the surface of still water
And there return to the sky.

Impostor Syndrome

The morning I cried at my desk,
And got nothing done at all,
I stopped on the bridge
And watched the racing hulls slip towards
The interstate where it crossed the bay
With all the cars going to the mountains.
And since the day was wasted anyway,
I suppose I could have hitch-hiked
To a valley in the mountains for a picnic
Where if I had turned and looked back,
I could have seen the whole city
From a low place in the sky,
Just a little lower than the angels.