

Woman and Harp

Her mouth is conscious
of the next note, played
or not. Listen:
not to the vein of beginnings
or the measured end—we
all accomplish this—but here
in the making towards,

where I sense an untouchable gathering
in my chest; where I can
lay my finger on the honeycombed
sharp now piercing towards
the balcony like a burst of thistle.

Lord, you are a gossamer veil,
a head of bees. And this note
she holds I can bear no longer
given the mortal casing I inhabit.

And she leaves that string,
breaking; and that gathering—that
which we can't call human
in view of our shortcomings—
secrets itself into a hive.

Bird Balancing Mozart

From this window, a cemetery;
it overlooks the valley, the houses
busy with bread and life. A fine day.

I'm glad death is uphill
from where I am—it seems a task
both arduous and slow.

All the same, a mountain would be
preferred, perhaps a pond
to row my short sorrows.

The ancient Greeks believed
Antarctica existed for balance—
a whole continent cultivated

to keep the world square,
positioned. Sometimes I see
a baptism of thought,

a twilling
from home to home to where
we bury sons and daughters

resting upon the shoulders
of a sparrow. If she ruffles
her feathers, the man dies;

if she readjusts her claw,
a Mozart is born; if she flies,
she takes the weave with her.

Saints in Stained Glass

His hands bless the same
woman since the sixteenth century.
For hundreds of lives I look
at the hue. Today the azure

fashions my arm into linden
leaves. When the sun strikes,
my chest bears a kaleidoscope.
I'm all color and prompt.

One breast holds sovereign,
the other snow; my heart is
a study in intaglio, fire
grips my knees; my ribs

raise winter's indigo. If I breathe,
the seasons flare to the rafters.
I'm fired and dazzling:
what have I done with my life?

On Turning 40

My father trimmed the young
maple; after forty years, it was a circle
in the sky. In another place,
the geometry would perplex giraffes.
But here, in a city, the tameness
was less than cruel.

Last spring, when the tree was cut down,
the squirrels circled for hours. They were
looking for what they left that morning—
the dark trunk of home.

Instead, the soft swelling of heart,
though not the heart exactly; the place
adjacent that shudders when something
is lost: tree, nest, home, father. The world
now unavoidably complicated and
tiresome. A labyrinth of missing branches.

The squirrels stare; the cardinal zips
through the phantom leaves thinking,
they're all so literal, the ones
who can't take flight.

I don't know where loss finally settles:
maybe in discarded limbs, the texture
of skin, or carried in the veins
until the weight pulls your hands
to the earth. When you hold your palm
to another, it fills with rubies.