

Daywork

Close your eyes he said and took my hand.
There was something he wanted to show me,
something I couldn't see: the seam called the *giornata*,
raised like a scar, running through the fresco,
which marks where one day's work ended,
the next began. I wanted to trace that limit,
to know where the painter had found an edge,
and stopped, the scaffolding descended
and the brushes washed, the figure left to dry

in the dark room, his one eye painted open,
that will never see the rearing horse he rides—
you know the posture, you've leant back in the saddle,
the beast beneath, you pulled at its reins
and told it to quit. It can't quit, the bit in the mouth
and no sight in its eyes, seen and yet blind—
this was the drama he wanted to show, don't you think,
or think of the women holding the room up,
the stone-like caryatids with their gray, empty eyes,

have you ever felt like that, like you are to keep
very still while the others move around you?
In birth I remember the midwife took my reins,
is that right, she held me here and there and reached
inside, she was touching my baby, I had nothing to do
but let it happen, I let it happen, so well trained really,
a vehicle, you ride me or drive me oh but if you are

the head I am the neck, I will turn you to my advantage,
will make you see what is wrought through me—

Shadow Play

Autumn. Light. Under what
sun were you born, did you grow.
Under what king, what tyrant.

What window. What door. The four
horsemen, the seven sisters, at rest.
Whether a thousand years, five thousand,

is a long time. Still, a stone
held in the hand will warm.
The same goes for bone.

Who fed you, a hand extending
the spoon. What fed you, music
art or light. Was there an empty room,

shadows cast upon the floor,
the boards liquid with sunshine,
and was that how you imagined

the soul: open, ready, very still,
even if the day itself was windy.
Or was it for you like the wind,

tempestuous, infiltrative,
lifting the fallen leaves.
Did you think about it at all.

Many lights cast many shadows,
so that the hand on the paper
is reflected time and again,

the knuckles like the mountains,
one range after the next, and each
a fainter version of the same color,

so that our sense of the faraway
is brought close, the brush dipped
again into the water, a little less paint

for the next stroke. The path
curving away to the right, around
the hillock, into the copse.

A little gate breaks the view.
Beyond, the beyond,
given as a stripe of blue.

This is how I came to know you,
as a smudge or trace—thumbprint
on the potsherd, residue in the flask.

Listen

The page as the sea, or the sea a page on which what is written, will be read only in this instant—

so many dark nights, the line of waves breaking again and again, so many times when even you who were there, looked away.

Listen now. My voice, if it is a voice to you, rendered or carried here, comes as surely someone has come to you, mother or lover,

someone shouting through the break of the waves, under the cloud-filled sky, on the beach that was as dark as inside,

no light on the water, no substance to the sound. So it was when you listened through sleep to the voices heard through wall or door,

when the door opened and the beloved lay beside you and spoke, though you were asleep, and did not hear.