

Act of Nature

At my wife's grave
I found the headstone
soiled by droppings
from the single branch
stretched above it,
the grave site chosen
for that branch to honor
what lay below it.
I asked the supervisor
why the headstone
couldn't be cleaned
more or less regularly
under my contract
for perpetual care
of this site I'd bargained for.
Those droppings, he said,
were a simple Act of Nature
not covered by the contract,
besides, he said, next time
if you're lucky enough
you might find a blossom
fallen on the headstone
from that very branch.
I went home unhappy.
But as I thought about it,
the urn in that grave
carries acts of nature

from the beginning and the end
as will the other beside it
no time at all in the future
waiting for its stain or blossom
as the great gods of nature
in their capricious wisdom
choose to mark that grave.

The Asphodel Plain

The poet she loved complained:
there are no asphodels or violets
exiled as he was in Transvaal,
so how could he talk to the dead
since the dead know only the language
of flowers, the flowers of Odysseus
and the asphodel plain of his longing
to return to his native land?
Her native land was Alexandria
and her exile out of Egypt
brought her back to the mainland
and the cobblestoned paths of Pelion
those her fathers climbed
in search of asphodel and violets
to bring home with the milk
their goats brought back themselves
along with whatever language
they'd devoured that day
in crossing the fields of their dead.
I bring flowers to her grave
in yet another country
but though the home of my longing
the flowers are not the right ones
for the things I want to say
the things I want her to know.

Animals

Animals can be human.
Our cat called Salome
was capricious to a fault
and sometimes lascivious,
the dog next door
out of love or anger
as if with a life of its own
now barks freely
when I step out for a walk
and mornings some lonely bird
out of its yearning or loss
chirps incessantly
for a missing mate
and wakes me to a world
of blossoming shadows
as I step into the light
with this life of my own
this yearning and loss
animal that I am.