



April  
**Sara Nicholson**

The Song Cave

But I, a poor wretch, have need of everything.

—ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA



## What I Said, Where I Said It, and Why

To hear myself say it  
To listen to myself saying it to you  
Who listen, to them or who  
Cares why I said it  
That I said it for a reason  
Or not, to you or not to you.  
When I said it I said it  
On the street, by the pier, in a city  
On the water.  
I said it in the forests  
Of America. A little songbird  
Who is frightened of the moon  
She hears me say it to you  
Who listen, I hear her  
Who hears me too.  
I don't think she listens  
When I say it.  
She sings to us the vowels  
In a sequence—ee, ah, oo, ay; ee, ah, oo, ay.  
Did Helen say it to Clytemnestra.  
Did Laura Riding  
Overhear her say it to me.  
I believe what I hear  
In dreams, the people who speak

From inside me in dreams  
Who whisper to me  
The whys and hows of saying  
It to you. I can't believe  
I said it to you.  
Are there any good poems  
About saying it.  
If you find one let me know.

## Weather Talk

Something about the music grief is  
Either prey to or heir to  
Falls flat, the same way art is  
Subject to its objects: larks & light  
On a table, the pink green  
Breezes through all August long.  
I know the things I know  
Nothing about might be things  
Worth knowing. Weather  
Maps, for example, or how to read  
The Zodiac, the language of  
Dreams. I don't know how to write  
About the world, what art says  
Vis-à-vis the dark & bright  
Ocean; why black, orange, blue,  
And copper metaphorically  
Flower and fruit. I'd like to write  
An elegy in verse or prose  
But I've never been able to read  
Music, refuse to sing or sign  
My name. I know things  
Aren't quite so simple, that partly  
Cloudy days prefigure nights  
Without rain, rain the sun,

The sun the limits of my world  
And I, the plural form  
Predominant in November,  
December, January, calendrical  
Time, pain, grief, joy, energy  
And entropy, all the state  
Flowers: red, gold, purple, white.

## Spain

Having never been to Spain  
I left for it, as one who  
Hazards faith in vagueness. The rose  
Shrieks each autumn, dies  
Tragically. The pomegranate, too,  
Has nothing of interest to say.  
All fruit trees flower  
But in Spain, they *florecen*—minor  
Differences of sounds like these  
The traveler must learn.  
One must occasionally allow oneself  
Bourgeois imaginings  
As of wine flights by the sea  
Or the carpeted staircases  
Of castles, renovated by the state.  
I am a very rich woman  
Who winters in Tenerife, the Spanish crown  
Seeks my guidance on all matters  
Tenerife-related. I feel  
Melancholy when it snows  
Over the Atlantic, from the window  
Of my castillo. Mere presence  
With no cause for concern  
My life is lived

For me by others, portioned out  
In intervals of rest and music  
(It should be obvious  
By now that I have many servants.  
All are well paid).  
The white buildings of Cádiz  
Communicate in pictures other truths  
Than those intended.  
The act of reading  
Has become for me a form  
Of blunt force trauma to the head.  
Thus was I persuaded  
To enter this sanitorium  
Where beneath the well-clipped ilex  
Acorn-fed swine roam wild  
Until the peasants slaughter them  
For their sweet flesh, rumored  
To have healing properties—I am here  
For my health, trusting  
That the Mediterranean will work  
Its slow miracle on the brain. I was born  
For convalescence, the daughter  
Of Doña Maria, Baronesa.  
Each September  
I leave a flower on her grave.

## The Archetype

Even Cézanne painted her, naked of course,  
reclining on a chair. The mythical  
Leda, mother of Helen, raped by a metamorphosed  
Zeus in the guise of a swan.  
She faces front, and we can almost see  
everything—the hips, the uneven  
Breasts, the nipples that echo her blush-pink  
knees and cheeks, but not  
Her vulva, as it's cloaked by a twisted  
piece of cloth. She looks bored.  
Unlike Delacroix's Leda, who appears to be choking  
the neck of the swan, her back  
Facing us, hiding from view her naughtier  
bits which, however, I think,  
The swan can still see. Cézanne's Zeus  
bites Leda's wrist. Or maybe he's  
Shaking her awake? Like the way Yeats's bird  
pecks at her, grabs her "nape"  
In his "bill" in mid-air; this is a sonnet  
and by the volta we learn  
Her vagina is Troy. I don't like the modern  
paintings of her story. I prefer  
Those Renaissance Ledas, plopped in  
landscapes rich in Arcadian

Cliché—chasms, mountains, and clumps  
of woods; palazzi with views of  
The Florentine hills. Michaelangelo painted them  
fucking. Correggio, too, who stuffs  
His canvas with babies and angels, lyres,  
flutes, swans, and naked ladies  
Who bear witness to the mytho-erotic act.  
But Da Vinci's Leda forgoes  
The sex, depicts instead the hatchlings  
Castor and Pollux, Helen  
and Clytemnestra, sons and daughters of  
Zeus who bears the Aegis,  
Her fledgling brood, all pudgy, balding,  
and bandy-legged, tenderly  
Dwarfed by their shells. Still others chose  
to depict her inside, to move from  
The public to the private sphere, as in Veronese's  
Leda, where we, the voyeur,  
Watch the two embrace, she with a hand  
at the base of his tail, he sticking  
His beak in her mouth. She's naked, apart from  
her jewelry. The boudoir's  
Draped in velvet, her hair bedewed  
with pearls. We are meant  
To be titillated—this is adultery, after all,  
however grotesque—so it's ok  
If you feel a frisson as you eavesdrop  
on the primal scene.

My favorite Leda is also *en couchant*, splayed  
wide before divinity, so wide  
We get an unobstructed view of her  
vagina while the swan  
Peers into it, transfixed as by the void of  
archaic memory. Call it  
The ornithological gaze. This Leda  
has no author, is attributed  
to François Boucher, master of the Rococo  
nude, the plump and idle  
Venus on a chaise. Each of the above  
mentioned artists paints  
The sex as consensual, as seduction rather than  
rape. Therefore Leda's story  
Is the story of interpretation itself  
in every possible style—  
There are Pre-Raphaelite Ledas, cubist,  
surrealist and neoclassical  
Ones. You can find her in miniature  
and on the decorative  
Lids of snuffboxes, in mosaic and frieze.  
Yet Twombly's is the only Leda  
To eschew both nudity and naivete. Its subject  
is, we might say, movement  
Itself—the flapping wings, the shock and  
clash, the chaos and the strife.  
Crazy brushstrokes, lines and dripping paint  
suggest feathers, maybe

Blood, too. He has obviously painted  
a rape. I was inspired  
By my research to look up YouTube  
videos of swans mating and  
As you might've guessed, swan sex is difficult  
to watch—the male grabs  
The female's neck, holds her head  
underwater for so long  
She occasionally drowns. A user named  
Geof commented "Um there  
Bangin" and not to kink-shame the natural  
but with Mr.Bright68 I'd have  
To agree: "This is not normal not love."  
The Old Masters, I'm shocked  
Not one of them ever chose to paint  
the egg-laying, or to pair her  
With another of those mythical feminine  
archetypes—the Fates and Furies,  
The loathly lady, a huntress or gorgon  
with snakes for hair. I'd like  
To see Leda in Heaven, or like Persephone  
rule death, restore flowers  
To usher in Spring. To see her wander  
like Odysseus to Circe's  
Island, wave at Scylla and Charybdis  
on her way to Hell.  
She might have murdered Tyndareus,  
her husband, a King of Sparta.

Like Medea, she could've smashed her eggs.  
The oldest works of art  
To depict Leda's story—a Greek amphora  
now in Los Angeles, a fresco  
In Pompeii—show her kissing and fucking  
the swan, respectively. In one  
She stares right at us, from the ruins  
of a Roman bedroom. In one  
She is naked, but in the other, clothed.