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.

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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 naivety. 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.