



*When the words are leaving*

My valley is a word of water  
squeezed out of slate and grey men  
falling short of grey clouds,  
where the skilful speech of hammer and chisel  
finds the hidden flaw  
beyond the dark workings, the high footholds;  
and then there are waterfalls. My valley  
has a taste for wind and a far-tang tongue of salt  
that speaks of sails and oceans,  
of lands where sweat does for tears;  
where mountains birth till, not rock;  
and prayers take hold, not just hold on. Yet  
if I ran to the sea far enough to fill my skirts with its breathing  
this breath is not enough  
when all the words are leaving.

Grey land. Naked land. Bone land.  
Who carved you your brave face  
but my heart?  
Who called you your high names  
but my tongue?  
Who nursed your broken feet  
but my lips, my blood? The grit  
that ripped the light from my eyes  
was blown on your winds;  
the midnight at my parlour door  
coughed up from your lungs. Yet  
the songs that prop up your crushing skies  
are my songs;  
but songs are not enough  
when all the words are leaving.

Moon-dark hills, stiff in silhouettes,  
are the prows of ships;  
the shiftless winds on abandoned roofs  
snap like un-sheeted sails.  
There is a sea beyond this valley –  
sea on sea; wave on wave; ocean  
and all the restless valleys of water.  
What stars do you see out there  
with your brighter, salted eyes?  
Are their patterns still the same?  
Do you see my face  
somehow traced  
across your stranger skies?  
And how will you name all those new stars  
when all the words are leaving?

