

That was the strange mine of souls.  
As secret ores of silver they passed  
like veins through its darkness. Between the roots  
blood welled, flowing onwards to Mankind,  
and it looked as hard as Porphyry in the darkness.  
Otherwise nothing was red.

There were cliffs  
and straggling woods. Bridges over voids,  
and that great grey blind lake,  
that hung above its distant floor  
like a rain-filled sky above a landscape.  
And between meadows, soft and full of patience,  
one path, a pale strip, appeared,  
passing by like a long bleached thing.

And down this path they came.

In front the slim man in the blue mantle,  
mute and impatient, gazing before him.  
His steps ate up the path in huge bites  
without chewing: his hands hung,  
clumsy and tight, from the falling folds,  
and no longer aware of the weightless lyre,  
grown into his left side,  
like a rose-graft on an olive branch.  
And his senses were as if divided:  
while his sight ran ahead like a dog,  
turned back, came and went again and again,

and waited at the next turn, positioned there –  
his hearing was left behind like a scent.  
Sometimes it seemed to him as if it reached  
as far as the going of those other two,  
who ought to be following this complete ascent.

Then once more it was only the repeated sound of his climb  
and the breeze in his mantle behind him.  
But he told himself that they were still coming:  
said it aloud and heard it die away.  
They were still coming, but they were two  
fearfully light in their passage. If only he might  
turn once more ( if looking back  
were not the ruin of all his work,  
that first had to be accomplished), then he must see them,  
the quiet pair, mutely following him:

the god of errands and far messages,  
the travelling-hood above his shining eyes,  
the slender wand held out before his body,  
the beating wings at his ankle joints;  
and on his left hand, as entrusted: her.

The so-beloved, that out of one lyre  
more grief came than from all grieving women:  
so that a world of grief arose, in which  
all things were there once more: forest and valley,  
and road and village, field and stream and creature:  
and that around this grief-world, just as

around the other earth, a sun  
and a silent star-filled heaven turned,  
a grief-heaven with distorted stars –  
she was so-loved.

But she went at that god's left hand,  
her steps confined by the long grave-cloths,  
uncertain, gentle, and without impatience.  
She was in herself, like a woman near term,  
and did not think of the man, going on ahead,  
or the path, climbing upwards towards life.  
She was in herself. And her being-dead  
filled her with abundance.  
As a fruit with sweetness and darkness,  
so she was full with her vast death,  
that was so new, she comprehended nothing.

She was in a new virginity  
and untouchable: her sex was closed  
like a young flower at twilight,  
and her hands had been weaned so far  
from marriage that even the slight god's  
endlessly gentle touch, as he led,  
hurt her like too great an intimacy.

She was no longer that blonde woman,  
sometimes touched on in the poet's songs,  
no longer the wide bed's scent and island,  
and that man's possession no longer.

She was already loosened like long hair,  
given out like fallen rain,  
shared out like a hundredfold supply.

She was already root.

And when suddenly  
the god stopped her and, with anguish in his cry,  
uttered the words: 'He has turned round' –  
she comprehended nothing and said softly: 'Who?'

But far off, darkly before the bright exit,  
stood someone or other, whose features  
were unrecognisable. Who stood and saw  
how on the strip of path between meadows,  
with mournful look, the god of messages  
turned, silently, to follow the figure  
already walking back by that same path,  
her steps confined by the long grave-cloths,  
uncertain, gentle, and without impatience.