

Terese Coe

Traces

If we could know, if we could understand,
the currents of the seas, the breathing land,
the dreams that carry us across the dark,
what hits us from upheavals on the sun,
if we could fathom the elephant and the lark,
nightshade terrors, bounteous healing plants,
the place of scorn for those who try to feel,
what more becomes of life when it is done —
it may be we'd awaken with a touch.
The truth is we have never known too much.

My Songs are Tainted

Translated from Heinrich Heine's German

My songs are tainted with poison —
how could they be benign?
You have suffused with poison
the blossoming life that was mine.

My songs are tainted with poison —
how could they be benign?
My heart is home to a nest of snakes —
and you, dear saturnine.

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On the Drawing of Keats' Death Mask

Translated from Rainer Maria Rilke's German

And now the face of the silenced poet-priest
is touched by distances of wide horizons,
and sinking back into its darkening owner
is the pain that we could find no way to reach.

And this goes on a for moment in his face
till the suffering is a structure broken free,
and it turns away—now gentle,
shunning the transition to decay.

Countenance: now whose? The bonds,
though still agreeable, are gone.
Eye that can no longer prise
alluring things from disintegrating life.
The threshold of songs,
the youthful mouth, forever given way.

And only his brow possesses something constant
across the frail and vaporizing ties,
as if it spurned the wilted curls for lying
as they capitulate, tenderly mourning.