

The Eyes of Lawrence

You were born with coal dust
 in your eyes, a mother
 who placed your cradle
 on top of Mose's mountain,
 a burning in your lungs
 crying for fresh air
 and pansies in the hands
 of all those women
 who would touch you
 when the moon went out
 and the only candle
 was the passion of the desert
 in your eyes

your coal dust eyes
 the mark of beauty
 in the fog of England
 the grimy garden
 where a man stripped
 off his pants
 and the ideal of a woman
 planted figs on his ankles
 and gentians on his thighs

the eyes of eighteen hours
 on the body of a poem

the slipstream vision
 of serpents trapped
 within a mine
 within a drawing room
 of dark intellects
 within a microscope
 of groin
 where heaven wears
 an angel to stop
 the sun from growing
 larger than the sky.

Those eyes
 they could not crumble
 like your bones

 no man could hide them
 on a shelf

 they have nothing
 to do with popularity.

Some wear them now
like glasses
others paste them on a canvas
and call it art
one woman held them
to her belly
and thought of marriage

but no-one swallowed them
with wine
no-one shared them
with another
no-one knew enough
to crush them
and spread the dust
on pillows, bread
or soap

the neglected eyes
the misused sight
of Italian winters
German love
Mexico full of mirages
and the strange dry horses
of hope.

The eyes
coal dust eyes

they sit in our memory
like a reputation
instead of flying to the pinnacles
of chrysanthemums

instead of growing
to the size
of an island

instead of covering
bare dreams
with a dust
to turn gold
in the first raw movement
of morning.

—Barry Dempster