

as we look into this world brought to life
by Giotto's hand, it seems the donkey's eyes
must still hold kindness, they are so deeply kind,
no matter the knowledge of affliction burning in his body,
no matter the weariness, the meekness,
as he pulls the farmer's cart over rocks
and thorny vines, pressing hard into the forest's
haunted promise, deep into the mangled beauty of the world.

The Annunciation

This is the honest grace of her body:
that she is afraid, and in this moment does not
hide her fear. That as the pink-robed angel
bends before her pure with the power of lightness,
she wants to turn away, she cannot look
into the angel's graven face. Because the child
meant to form in her will change her.
Because all she has known will dissolve,
pulling back from her like water.
For there is so little softness in me,
she thinks, and my hands are simply empty,
my hands that don't know how to fill.
I am no more than these shadows now
darkening the garden, no more
than these rigid, frightened hands.
She bows her head; her arms are crossed
against her brittle ribs. The lilies
should have closed by now, she thinks,
and still they have not closed.
Look how they breathe, such white hungers,
white mouths. And she, who must enter
the fear of her waiting, the door
of her waiting, no longer wants to see them
breathing, their smoothness like the angel's
steady face. She would lie down on the stone floor
and curl up there without thinking.

Until in the cave of her body
she might feel without willing it a tenderness
begin to form. Like the small, ghostly
clover of the meadow, the deer hidden
in the hills. A tenderness like mourning.
The source of love, she thinks, is mourning.
That worldless loss by which we come to see
the opening of these lilies, this doorway
arching onto gardens, the child that will soon form
inside her body, this loss by which we come
to bend before the given, its arms that open
unexplained, and take us in.