

The Train to Paris / Brenda Hillman

If a stranger's head rests on your shoulder
all the way to Paris, how can you
despise it? Though the breath is stale
from something he's successfully forgotten.

You try to recall the dragonflies in the Alhambra,
their freedom. The stars outside,
the jewels an idiot has tied with strings
of light; these midnight observations, clear as noon.

A woman, thick with former days,
faces you, and knits,
pulling the memory of your last weeks
with fuchsia thread.

The rust, the blatant pull of trains
becomes a flower cart, the shrillness
of imaginings,
the dark trees smearing into rosaries.

There were beaches south of Barcelona, whose white
lace eased the remorse of days spent
tied to someone who preferred the feet of dancers
on a waxy floor to yours;

and how can you now move to hear?
Throughout the Pyrenees, the woman knits
your thoughts, those skilled debaucheries.
A man sleeps on your shoulder, a true drunk,

his brusque touch searching out the nothing
you are making your escape to: Paris
scarves. Perfumes. The slate-grey smoothness
of the Seine.

And it's impossible to move.
The old man, whose sleeping you have come
to echo, leans in his sham
exotic dreams, to find you.