

CHRISTINE LINDBERG

OLD WOMAN REMINISCES (A POEM FOR FOUR VOICES)

- Voice of time: Just below the eyelid
 just behind the lash
 the eye turns in
 on the country
 of the past.
- Old woman: My body now a dry creek bed
 where once a river ran
 a twisted tree
 that clutches yet
 sun cracked claypan
 a shrivelled stick
 to beat the wind
 a barren waste
 a no man's land.
- Woman: I was a fertile valley
 between my rolling hills
 man ploughed and seeded
 and in my season
 I bore a rich harvest.
- Young girl: My tender earth
 lay fallow
 waiting for the spring.
- Voice of time: Womankind why earth
 yourself in archetype
 Is this the elemental self?
 What of air and fire?

Young girl: Oh Time!
I waited in a fairy tower
 all airy expectation.
I dreamed I was Rapunzel
 waiting for a handsome lord
to climb my golden tresses
 or the girl whose moonsong
spellbound her Prince.

Woman: We are all love's prisoner.

Old woman: No love leaves us finally
 when the worm has
 eaten its fill
 and ripeness rots.

Voice of time: Memory unwind
the silken thread of time
alchemize this leaden thought
into a golden kind.

Woman: I dreamt I woke
 in the teeming Ganges
 (river of life)
amidst giant white water lillies.
 And on a raft
 oriental ladies
floated by beckoning
 me towards them.
Incapable of other motion
 my limbs lap the
warm blood of the river.
 The eye turning feels
the slow slithering
 from shore to water,

body pulses with the
rippling shadow
of the snake
come to drink at my lips.
Inside me the serpent
coils tighter and tighter
until it is a seed.

Young girl: Such alchemy
is pregnant fantasy.

Woman: I swelled with knowledge.
My womb filled and
I was air and fire
earth and water
all elements and time.
In me the resurrection.

Young girl: And did you suffer?

Woman: Every mother knows of
Calvary.

Old woman: Where is the babe
that suckled at my breast?
Did sweet milk swell
beneath these shrunken pods?
Do I forget the blind mouthing
at a blushing nipple;
the blind touch of tiny fingers
seeking the soft curve
of cheek or lip
or the silk thread of hair?

Gone, long gone
is this perfection
of mother and child.

Only the shadow song
of memory remains.

I walk on sand
slipping grain by grain
through the needle of time.

Voice of time: Come.
Come old woman
through the fog
of forgetfulness
sailing on the wind
of remembrance
across the open sea
to the shores of youth.

Old woman: I see a young girl
turning.

Young girl: Turning and turning
I wind the day in
my white dress
billowing in the wind.

Old woman: Was I ever such a beauty?

Voice of time: Can Time lie?

Old woman: I recollect a photograph
in sepia
a girl, poised between
child and maidenhood,
posed in an Edwardian frame,

a backdrop of looped silk
a chinoiserie screen
a string of pearls
below wide artless eyes.
One perfect curve of flesh
disarming the
stolid mahogany chair.

Voice of time: Ah the stage of innocence.

Young girl: Follow me
through the creaking
cast-iron gate
to climb the stone steps
into the house of yesteryear.
Disconcert the grandfather clock.
Wipe the dust from
the porcelain figurines.
View from the balcony
the panorama of the past.

Voice of time: Through
the omniscient eyes
of a child
see the world as it
was, is now and
forever shall be
in time unseen.

Young girl and Woman: An Empire of happiness.

Old woman: My toy empire
broke into pieces.
A king died
and the world turned wicked.

I shed my innocence
in a silent scream
when father died.

Voice of time: Beat the drum.
Beat the drum.

Old woman: Has time come
when I must leave
this country of the heart?
What cold, planetary landscape
will I find
on my awakening?

ANGELIKA FREMD

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

Shrill, forlorn,
her voice rises
through the floorboards.
My steps above,
reassure.

When the wire gate,
one cypress coloured
screeches, we look up;
she, expecting news from home
and I from habit, watching.

I grow old.
This hard-rayed sun
eats moth holes
into my European skin.