

AN ORCHID DREAMS OF THE ICE AGE

—after Louise Glück

For a long time, I only believed in the present—
dewdrop, ray, fog, rain,
an ant's antennae tickling in thick mist,
spiders spinning their wires in spears of light,
valencies of water and sky.
I was a distillation of the elements
flowing fluently around me—
now was all and all was now.
Winter winds came, bitter and biting;
I shrivelled and withered. Then sun,
burning its black holes like terrible tattoos.
After a while, I lived long enough to sense the past.
I saw the great plates break apart,
rift after rift. The reptilian world disappeared;
its thunderous shapes fell to fossil.
My dreams branched and doubled.
Soon I had two lives, two selves,
a single consciousness divided by a zero horizon.
In one hemisphere, the dream of eternal flowering—
enfleurage of a fleeting bee's pheromones
venus flytrapped in my waxen throat,
carnal urgencies of coupling visitors
spurring a patois of taproot and bud,
vegetal leaf and shoot, the rush to become
overtaking me, and I wanted it all, all at once—
elaborate sanskrit, cuneiform, hieroglyphs
exploding simultaneously on my tongue—
brogue-dot and brindle blush, Rorschach-blot,
flushes of fuchsia and lavender,
rose hazings, pointillist hot pink intensities
tempered by lemon and tiger-striped capillaries,
blood lashings, frecklings and speckles,
morse and braille coded on a petal's skin
tempered by the austerity of a cabbage moth's
pure white architecture of wings,

pristine and sugared, a honeyed invitation
for flies and wasps, starbursts of gold and goblet pinot,
green whiskered lips, fragrant carrion—
this was the future with its endless variations.

At the same time, I had a premonition of extinction—
dragonflies sweeping backwards, phantom images
of ginkgoes and sycamores collapsing,
tadpoles unwriggling, nautili sinking in marine snow,
the magic lantern of my mind shuttling its pictures
into great banks of sulphurous cloud.

I threw off children, one after another,
so many keiki grappling at air
so that my overall idea might survive.

In time my offspring grew, changed,
and in their change, condemned me
as premodern, an antiquity. My instincts
became old grudges, ghostly diktats,
a daisychain of regressing wants and needs
from seasons I no longer recall.

Now my thoughts are stone cold—
they have crystallised into rigid forms,
floral ice, shawls and straws and flowstones of it,
and I hibernate like glacial moraine
mummified in perennial winter,
memento mori of a world *a priori*—
yet everywhere the green hunger persists,
the urge to inflorescence calling like a pleasure
I am hostage to but cannot release,
idling in me like the afterimage of a war
I have fought, lost, and would fight again.