

The Exile

Wednesdays at the Symposium

it is always like this:

peonies and Greek music

young Marxists analyzing the Chilean disaster;

it is a moth they have tacked to the table

and they are recapitulating its brief,

bright flight.

Facing me across a table

wide as fate

wide as the separate hemispheres

which mark our birth,

our genders,

you are alone, I see,

in a stagnant estuary

of the river Lethe.

Your eyes, I observe, are shades

rolled down to hide the horror:

Black mouths sucking dust at Sharpeville;

blood lust boot at your back as you flee

through the streets of Johannesburg.

Your eyes, I see, are sleek young geese

stricken in flight by the hunter.

An exile's loneliness, you say, is worse than death.

I feel the cold sheets
and the silent room of your heart.

Your stare murders frivolity.

Stung, I plunge
into the soft yellow comfort
of my feta cheese omelette.

Tentatively, seeking to assuage,
I reach across;
but your hand is 3000 miles away
in a small flat in London
caressing her who
sits on the bed's edge,
singing *Suzanne*.

Tyranny kills more than freedom:
there is no more grief
than exile from a touch.

~Sheila D. Collins