

Orpheus (1) (1984)

By Margaret Atwood (Canada)

You walked in front of me,
pulling me back out
to the green light that had once
grown fangs and killed me.

5 I was obedient, but
numb, like an arm
gone to sleep; the return
to time was not my choice.

By then I was used to silence.

10 Though something stretched between us
like a whisper, like a rope:
my former name,
drawn tight.
You had your old leash
15 with you, love you might call it,
and your flesh voice.

Before your eyes you held steady
the image of what you wanted
me to become: living again.

20 It was this hope of yours that kept me following.

I was your hallucination, listening
and floral, and you were singing me:
already new skin was forming on me
within the luminous misty shroud
25 of my other body; already
there was dirt on my hands and I was thirsty.

I could see only the outline
of your head and shoulders,
black against the cave mouth,
30 and so could not see your face
at all, when you turned

and called to me because you had
already lost me. The last
I saw of you was a dark oval.

35 Though I knew how this failure
would hurt you, I had to
fold like a gray moth and let go.

You could not believe I was more than your echo.



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born 1939