Poems

Jo Shapcott
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Abstract
THE MAD COW BELIEVES SHE IS THE SPIRIT OF THE WEATHER, LEONARDO AND THE VORTEX
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THE MAD COW BELIEVES SHE IS THE SPIRIT OF THE WEATHER

People out walking lean into the wind, the rain; they believe it thwarts the weather to welcome it like that. I can happily get lost for hours in a swirl of showers because I was born into weather. They still tell how my mother pushed me out of her body onto a rock and I split the stone in two while the rain washed me and the thunder broke overhead. I was a junior cloud goddess, with storms following me, winds and whirlwinds, shots of rain and a split sky above my head. Always moving, I kept one jump ahead of getting wet, kicking back at the clouds with my hind legs to keep them there. It's harder now, here in the future: my brain has the characteristics of a sponge and the rain seeps into the holes. I think I'm making chaos. My vests don't keep me warm and when I last sneezed a volcano in the Pacific threw a sheet of dust around the world. I'm dangerous to the earth. I spat and a blanket of algae four miles long bloomed on the Cornish coast. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and a meteor large enough to make the earth wobble in its orbit came very close indeed. I have been sad recently and now the weather has changed for good.
LEONARDO AND THE VORTEX

I get like him sometimes:
seeing the same shape in everything
I look at, the same tones in
everything I hear.

So I’ll never make a deluge drawing
or be gripped by the science of circular
motion. And I won’t learn to care
how many complex collisions happen in a pool
when water is trickled in from above. How
currents percuss against each other,
bouncing from the walls of the container,
how waves rebound into the air, falling
again to splash up more water up in smaller
and smaller versions of the same.
How it’s different in a storm where air and water mix,
bursting again and again through the thin skin
which separates them. How a woman’s hair
moves in spouts and spirals just like water
and how the leaves of the star plant
trail on the ground in a loose coil.
And look at your sleeve, folding and swirling
around your arm, and the pattern of fine black hairs
curving from your inner wrist to your outer elbow,
and the underlying muscles relying on that slight
twist around the lower arm for their strength,
and the blood coiling around your body
through the little eddies in the larger veins
and arteries, coiling towards the vortex
in the chambers of your heart where I sit,
where the impetus has pulled me in.