

Renée A. Ashley

The Generosity of Souls

Look at them, there in the moonlight, shedding
the dry sparks of being, sparkling like mica,

like gold, or not shining at all, but heady
with substance, their vague mouths open to the wind

and, indistinguishable from that wind, their edges
the wispy contours of apparition. These are the hallowed

souls, as all souls are hallowed in their partial light,
as all souls starve, wasting in the ravenous wind.

There, wild in the half-faced moon, are the poets
lingering with children and dogs; and those other uneasy

men, excited, insubstantial in the face of more women,
more women than one man's eye could take in in his solitary life.

And despite their restless hunger, the souls are tenacious, burdened
by the root strength of the dead, their open hands spread wide as fans,

their palms empty, dimensionless. And if, by chance, one thrusts
his blowsy fingers deep into the crisp earth, if he grasps the untenable,

or should even one soul fish out of the air the nameless thing it seeks,
all souls' hands will gather at that single hand, and dreamy hand

to vapid hand they will eat, reaffirm the glory of substance—at that instant
of their coming together their light will quicken, a unanimous

fire, beyond all light, beyond all simpler burning. And if a god,
any god, were to come across them then, he would be blinded and stumble;

Renée A. Ashley 165

in his desperation to find his way clear to understanding, the souls
would be lifted from his path, carried from the windy earth

to the calmer place where souls gather in the semi-dark, their holy
spirits risen like dust from the dusty earth to the place

where their giving would be simple as starlight.

How I Would Steal the Child

From the darkness, from his native blindness,
drag him into my world. Like a dream,

in a keen, necessary plan—penitent
and anxious—bathe his limbs, his small head,

feed him the starry milk, own him. Lash
him to the rim of the grassy shore,

listen to him breathe; study his closed
eyes, see the wistful heart in the pulse

at the narrow wrist. Slip him between
the colors of night, the gradations of dawn;

he will know nothing. Blank-eyed
and needy, he will make himself known.

I can save him; he must love me. I have been no
place, done nothing. I am so ashamed.