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The Old Philosopher

Linda Sillitoe

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The Old Philosopher

Linda Sillitoe

It is worth the coin in pain to wrench my head,
confronting the repeated noise of bird
that interrupts internal tedium.

There. Upon that slanting post a red
smudge between dark wings, a robin's word
to anyone, "here I am, I am,"

is the second thing I like. The first is this:
my cell is three doors past the delivery room
and every child drenched in sudden air
who finds his toes unraveled from his hair,
hands flapping no boundaries, the womb
well lost, wails his knowledge, I exist!

*My numbed and stricken wife, for my pleading
blinked one eye to affirm identity
true as one Indian intricately beading
a bricklayer slapping strophe after strophe
like a typewriter bleed blow breath
build brick whack blood death*

These thoughts unlatch the joinings of the walls
which float away. The sounds of bird and squalling
infant keen the idiom of skies—
not of stars, but of unseen thinkers differing
as star from star. One like a comet falls
in wingless flight, a newborn human cries.

My voice is mine, my hands grope loosening air,
within my brain a heart, within an ear
which hears another voice. Know that I
am Alpha and Omega, Lord of sky
and Earth, beginning and end, exalt and damn.

The robin spoke the word: Ego, I am.

Linda Sillitoe is a graduate of the University of Utah and a widely-published poet.