

Memento Mori

Although they lost their way
at one point, the girls come at mid-day
below the cut in the rocks. *The roads are built
and we girls do so wish to go.*

The girls started out with slickers on.
The mist and bad weather are swift walkers.
The edifice persists in tumbling down.

The way has revealed near-by
and distant views, the sequestered delight
where the girls feast on wild
strawberries, which are then soon discarded.

But what bars their progress? We need the girls
to gather so favorably at an angle. They are
so friendly in the night, lying close,
finding their source at so convenient
a distance, the restraint of their good
mothers thrown aside the year before.

With the after-glow faded, the girls
come down from the summit. *We are here
but for a brief time*, until one has followed
down these little streams.

Only the hardest attempt to clamber down.
The wildness of this place is quite a difficult
undertaking, a valley of uncommon beauty
seen from the summit, its whole length dotted
with bright points, the shattered outfit
ever so far below.

We find ourselves happy to be like things here.

It is the stillest place. I live again—
that is, when the girls

are not shouting.

You may not find it now:
the wildness of the place blossoming
out in the neatest of bloomers,
when all the world was young.

But to continue our drive
after the summer—to disclose
perfectly its every part—
such days fail to find us.

How cold the ride.

ABOUT THE POEM

“Memento Mori” was created from *The Glory of Greylock: Written as a Souvenir of an Excursion* by Francis Williams Rockwell (1921). About the poem and the process of composing it, Colleen Coyne writes:

I’m interested in travelogues, interpretive signage, and other linguistic elements that can mediate our experience of place, and I came across this particular “souvenir” text about Mt. Greylock while researching a different nearby site. I experienced the beauty and charm of Rockwell’s excursion on one of my own trips to Mt. Greylock, on a glorious autumn day—but I’ve also been there during a night of dense fog, navigating treacherous roads, and my experience was tinged with tension. As I read through a digitized version of *The Glory of Greylock*, I pulled phrases and sentences that resonated with me, and then I remixed them into this poem, in which I aim to reflect the hint of fear and loss that can accompany even joyful journeys. The only text I added is the title, which is Latin for “remember you will die.”

