

WOMEN DRESSED IN BLACK

These women are never young;
they have no future either, though this doesn't seem
to worry them too much—or they keep quiet.
They look fine for a time, but children come
and they turn as dark as soil.

As a child, I saw them working in the fields,
behind the men, surrounded by kids,
silent, subdued as winter.
I thought the girls I played with
would also grow dark and bitter.

“Women are a plague, they are devils,”
Ninot stated. He whispered this in my ear
so that Mother could not hear him. Poor thing;
he pissed and shit in his pants, like a child.
Mother took care of him—“out of charity”—
until his death. “No woman has ever loved him,”
she said, “this is why he's so alone.”
When he died, I didn't cry for him.

One very sunny day, with ice patches
melting at the edges of the path, Mother
took me with her to the river, by the mill.
It was washday. Young women, white-skinned
and cheerful as the linnet's song.
“Last one in is a virgin or bride,” said
the pearly-haired one, and, then,
they all leapt half naked into the water.

Their energy amazed me.
“You haven't seen anything, young man,” Mother said
on our way back—but she looked worried.
She wrapped her scarf around her head
and everything was as it had been.