



Walking in the Underworld

Sheila Hamilton

The underworld is winter,
and the ground, frozen.
Ice forms.
The days are dark.

It is winter but also the hospital,
that place with the fusty upholstery
and the clinical glare,
and the blank, shocked faces,

and somewhere in those corridors,
shambling around in the shiny whiteness,
through the fumes of Dettol, the fumes of Hell,
I meet with you, pale, articulate.

Are we really just machines, to breathe forever?
It would seem so.
Is this a hibernaculum where bees do nothing more spectacular
than sleep out the blizzard?

Sylvia, I will have coffee with you,
on one condition : do not tell me,
today or any other day, that destiny
bends everything in one direction.

It will be dark, will it?
darker than this, and more beautiful,
when they finally wrap us up?
I would like to think so.

We'll be tidier then, is that what you're saying?
Ishtar will be smiling in her dignified fashion?
That is how it'll be, you say.
Ishtar is kind in the lowest section of the underworld.

Sylvia, I'm not going to say you are wrong.
Are you ? Aren't you ? The jury's out.
But I have to live as if there is no destiny.
I have to bury and re-bury all my thoughts of Ishtar.