

Two Poems from ARTEMISpoetry, Issue 22, May 2019

What to Wear in Pakistan?

Mirror, mirror,
what should I wear?
Mirror, mirror,
whose face is there?

I can't see her face.
Perhaps it's my grandmother's
hidden in the white burqa
she customarily wore –

a long white burqa
like a house outside the house,
with its single window
and all its little pleats.

My cousin said to me
'If you wear a headscarf here
you'll be more visible,
not less.' He said this

so pointedly
the house trembled
and the mirror cracked
from side to side.

Mirror, mirror,
what should I wear?
Mirror, mirror,
whose face is there?

Moniza Alvi

Blackbird Bathing in the Winter Light

Dipping and
flicking, dipping
and flicking . . .

I'm at arm's length from the orange-beaked bather
here by our bay window. The modest stone circle
mirrors the blackbird's world – winter-blue sky, high cloud
shimmering reflections complicated by bare branched trees
grand, motionless in leafless January's light breeze.

Little is disrupted by this dipping and flicking
only the surface momentarily broken, ruffled,
the watery mirror nonetheless open to the sky
faithful eye witness to any passing predator
poised to attack the orange-beaked bird at its bath.

But the bird doesn't dawdle, nor does he pause for even a second
to sip, his beak pointedly shut as he performs his ablutions,
eventually rising like a jet black helicopter, or a phoenix!
Or, for that matter a blackbird, flying off, sleek-feathered – soon out of sight
singing in the winter light, and no doubt, well into the night.

Alice Kavounas