

Laura Foley – Three Poems

The Return

Our steps are the path, the path is made by walking.
—Machado

I stood in the rumbling homebound train,
for three hours, happy that my legs,

grown strong from walking
the width of Spain, didn't tire.

Still, it's odd not to be striving,
as if struggle were the reason for being,

rather than standing in one place,
or breathing the sweet scent

of honeysuckle, blooming

through the opened windows of home.

The First Stage

We bring a taste of home with us,
espresso machine, cream,
my favorite chocolates.

In the common room,
we make friends with our future,
women wearing bright scarves
over baldness, like monks
in some early stage of detachment.

The next day, I push her wheelchair
across an enclosed walkway,
the Bridge of Hope, decorated
with blue and red-painted birds,
Dickinson's *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*
inscribed on the wall.

We rise through each floor
dedicated to a different cancer,
to find our own on the ninth

we try to think of as heaven,
with its summit view of the city
from our infusion suite,
the famous red Citgo triangle of hope
lighting our dark morning,
red brake lights painting the road below,

their reflections and ours
in the windows, blinking
their stop-and-go's,
buses, cars, trucks inching forward,
thin rain turning to snow,
our winter dawn beginning,
as the bright Red Devil—
I'd rather they named
Red Angel, for redemption,
despite its hellish side effects—
inches slowly into Clara's veins.

If this is our Camino,
we're at the first stage,
climbing steep Pyrenees
from France into Spain,

five hundred miles to go.

Belief

Walking the endless *Meseta*, we turn to see
yellow broom flowers, orange poppies going by—
the only way to know these pilgrims' progress.

Each night, an ancient town new to us,
steps closer to our journey's end—
we feel no mystic pull toward Santiago,

but we believe in the awe of those who do,
as Gregorian chants pipe through a darkened church,
and a friend we meet weeps freely at a café table.

We leave Castrojeriz in the graying dark,
before dawn, before cafés open, our shoes
tapping a slow rhythm on quiet streets,

and though at this moment they're empty of all but us,
we know the road, the path we've chosen,

takes us somewhere many have gone before.

We feel them all in the hard-packed trail,
in our aching feet,

in our will to keep going, a mysticism we can believe.

Laura Foley's books are *Why I Never Finished My Dissertation*, *WTF*, *Night Ringing*, *Joy Street*, *The Glass Tree*, *Mapping the Fourth Dimension*, and *Syringa*. Her work has won the Common Good Books poetry contest, the Joe Gouveia Outermost Poetry Contest, *The Atlanta Review* Grand Prize, Foreword Review Poetry Prize and others. Her poems have appeared widely in journals and magazines including *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *DMQ*, *Room Magazine*, *McClellan Poetry*, *Crannog*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, and many others.