

Dante in Ravenna

She who has been my love of all the world,
dying long ago, left me alone to learn
out of my loss of her something of God.

I had no other teacher of the heart
but books; Augustine, Virgil, Bernard drew
maps for my journey from a nowhere place

of darkness to the patient light of truth.
And now, an old man in these foggy streets
of a flat city steep as purgatory,

I stumble towards the gold of San Vitale,
towards the candlelight, the prophets, marble
waves of the sea transfixed, mosaic walls

of green, white, scarlet, men alone with God,
Melchisedech and Abel, in their hands
offerings of the earth, and in the priest's

bread become God, the wine we never shared
become his blood for us, the life we share.
A matter of belief the gift of her

has been always, who took my soul through death
in love for which you have only my word,
my many thousand words. As so do I.

Out in the Adriatic the waves move
grey with the slowness of the winter sea,
their chill to fetch me soon to her, to God.

No more to do but kneel on the cold floor,
watching the emperor who stayed away,
the God who came, holding us in his grace.

LUCY BECKETT