

East Asian Studies

Its shadowing presence
had given me questions.

On the rare occasions
I'd attempted to listen,

my ear took the syllables
into its crucible

and tried to spell them.
My mind was too Roman.

Who knew there were ancient
tongues without declension?

I wanted a cliff
for jumping off

into something gentle
and elemental:

water, air, or earth, the sort
that dependably parts

for the falling daughter –
but not to install her

in Hades, nor to receive
the roots of the tree

she's becoming. Surely
there were alternate stories

and sounder reasons
for grieving, for seasons,

for fleeing a suitor
across land and water

even if he had to be
a god of poetry.