

Cemetery of Pseudonyms

for Stephen Yenser

Where do stargazers go in a city of light?
Here, where shadows draw back
lids on the abyss. Where trees raise a toast,
blossoms brimming, to the height
at which a note will crack.
Where it's your word against — your dust.

*

The area initially seems too small
to accommodate so many pharaohs
and consorts. Reduced as an amphora
to its handle, the person after all
may be shelved neatly in rows
and archived in the font of her era.

*

Up, down, and across: the crypts
feature mid-century names
which used properly to be faces —
and typed, at that. The scripts
graven into plates have the same
effect as an iconostasis.

*

As though this were a tumulus
accidentally excavated
where parking was planned,

the empty flower sconces
look like libation flutes that sated
the gods with a tip of the hand.

*

Note the burial of the burial ground
inside a city block, incognito;
din of traffic, sunlight
enough for a star to hide in. Are we bound
to the soil we're *born* or *consigned* to?
Or do we root in the air like an epiphyte?

*

Those unplanted plants — they would be
like words whose roots trail into myth,
a mixed medium, no monolith.
Likewise our souls are in our names, which flee
the gravestone, and like the moth
invent themselves out of whole cloth.

*

It is none other than Apollo driving a yellow
SLK 320 on the 405; when
I see him again, at the Getty
("Our Acropolis," you said) I am slow
to absorb the lesson I am given:
"A god's name has no etymology."