

Anna Nickerson

Delphi

I think we have to conclude
that the Greeks
were mistaken.

A girl on a stool
high on drugs
up a hill
could hardly translate
for a snake
that was itself
spokesperson
(spokesnake?)
for old, chaotic
Mother Earth.

But they came
nonetheless
the feeble
the old
the rabid
looking for folk answers
to folk problems
hoping today
she'd speak
common Greek.

No one asked
if she had any interest
in sour milk
the sick cow
and the blight
that had fallen on the vineyard.

A few self-confessed skeptics
privately thought
that this was
one
 great
 conceptual
 joke

about our failure
to realise
that riddles
are just riddles
and the Earth
just the earth.

Later, of course,
another priest came
who stood over the dragon
speaking powerful words
not a reader of riddles
but the riddle himself
and the poor came
the feeble
the rabid
the lame
looking for folk answers
to folk problems
and finding
the man
who came forth
from the earth
had something to say
that was not
of this
earth.

But now
a new form of reverence
is practised in Greece
the self-confessed skeptics
run workshops and digs
and stand in the temple
announcing
UNESCO
 world
 heritage
 status

but saying
that the earth beneath
is completely
indifferent
and that there's nothing
above
or beyond
or below
that has anything to say
to the poor folk of Greece.

But I've always thought
that there's something to be said
for the wisdom
of poor folk
who come from the hills
looking for folk answers
to folk problems
and though they were wrong
about the girl on the stool
the earth is not silent
and the riddles
not
untrue.