

“On the Steps of the Jefferson Memorial” by Linda Pastan

We invent our gods
the way the Greeks did,
in our own image— but magnified.
Athena, the very mother of wisdom,
squabbled with Poseidon
like any human sibling
until their furious tempers
made the sea writhe.

Zeus wore a crown
of lightning bolts one minute,
a cloak of feathers the next,
as driven by earthly lust
he prepared to swoop
down on Leda.
Despite their power,
frailty ran through them

like the darker veins
in the marble of these temples
we call monuments.
Looking at Jefferson now,
I think of the language
he left for us to live by.
I think of the slave
in the kitchen downstairs.