Step After Step

In a desert night awheel with stars my feet scuffle sand and stones
pacing back and forth on a dry wadi bed
breaching the vast silence
and on either side
black blankets beneath the sky —
the rock walls I climbed before nightfall to look down on the ravine
our small encampment there and somewhere unseen
Bedouin and their tents whose homes we have intruded upon
thoughtless and eager —
pacing back and forth now while the others sleep
keeping watch scuffling sand and stones
not far from the mountain we will ascend before dawn
rock upon rock upon rock and a thousand steps carved into it
from the monastery of Santa Katarina at its foot rooms full of skulls
dank and musty climbing up into almost dawn sky
climbing into the Book of Exodus
step after step to a point half way up the mountain
where a stone hut is guarded by a lone cypress
a finger of olive green splashed upon brown and red rock
pointing upwards step after step
until the summit

and dawn and mountains and rocks spread out
in all directions waking from sleep waking into the day
filling the world with colour every morning for thousands of years
and here the endless pilgrimage
and here revelation
the burning bush the ten commandments
and here in a long robe white-bearded patriarchal
talking with G-d Moses
and here all the thousands that followed
and here now us for the one and only time taking the thousand steps down
bouncing jumping still children knowing little more than when we came understanding nothing
eager for the next place and the next.

David Adès