

ABSTRACT

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REPEATING FIGURES

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A portfolio of poems addressing ekphrasis, composed in free verse and in some received forms, including a prose poem series. The formal poems include the sonnet, sestina, Japanese cinquain, pantoum and common meter. The prose poems use both a paragraph format and monostichs. While ekphrasis is a persistent concern, some poems extend media such as photograph and still life into a trope for actively accumulating image.

REPEATING FIGURES

By

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Repeating Figures

What is first there is a peeling stucco wall,
niched with paint and stubbled as a gourd.
Then the body of the jug, opening through a veneer
of fractured porcelain, and luminous as a planet
toward one side, which has given it the peculiar notched resemblance
to a human torso, but there are places in it that could also be
lips and chin, or an elongated bicep braided with hard
varicose knots. But mostly it is the figure of the torso,
neither male nor female, scoured to brightness and amputated
just above the growth of pubic hair, which is instead
shadows chiseling themselves like hard Etruscan geometries
into the sunlit wall, itself foregrounded, we must guess,
from a point beyond the eye's, by the alternately rising
and receding gesticulations of barn swallows, parakeets.

Pescara, Corso della Libertà

Loro chi hanno benedetto la nostra entrata, senza lo sapendo, senza l'intendendo,
domanderebbero, Chi guarda?

1.

Noon, a corrosion of light, the day's automobiles,
advertisements peeling, the postal office,
all green paint and corrugated iron, flagstone,
brick, solid brass faucets and the lintelwork of tenements,
pigeons' applause, the pungent flush of crated fish and oranges,
the light retracts into itself, like tons and tons of the sea
combing its bed, blackened enginery distilling
into the photographed aperture, its frowning archways,
edifices, and the noise of bicycles, bicycles.

2.

Enunciation, the blister of photographed streetpaving,
the government buildings blanked by afternoon; aluminum
handlebars and wheelspokes, shined leather shoe tips.
Unawares, the photographer has shot the man who isn't yet
my grandfather, bicycling on Corso della Libertà.
Afternoon tilts into the camera, the camera an unsounded
alarm; entering the lens, the luminated bath, the din that must
have sounded like a world. That the bicycle,
its shape cast on the flagstone, the stillness are a trap;
look at him, he knows it.

Photograph: Abandoned washroom.

The lip of the enamel tub, a light on the cornea, sits in the recesses of the photograph, the three walls bricked in the low room and turning the color of sod. There is a brass dark faucet, handles, a black plug on a drain cord, the linen bureau rubbed to the dense resinous blush of the cedar boards. Soap and cigarettes on a china plate, just visible, and a framed placard of women in kimonos; the repose of cologned hair, plums and heavy flocks of silk. The cement floor that slopes into a drain grate is punctured with hard seed-like maculae. Stained with long use, the inside of the tub has assumed the look of lacquer.

The water, struck open with forceps of light and stilled completely, moves toward the brick corners. Look, it is warmer than marble, there is even the crowded smell of ewes and aspen wood; all of which recalls a woman's nape exposed under a welt of hair; knotted up in fingers, wrists, this and the hollows of her shoulders hollowing one another. Brushed under the weight of the light, the small hairs that line the uppermost vertebrae; the face turned aside, balancing something.

Against Abundance

Persimmons that shine in bruised rinds,
tongued into opening, splitting a ripe welt,
like an offering that did not want to appear.
Their tree bowed under the resounding drive
of combed bees, heavy as an opened eye.

•

Lengths of dough pulled, punched, folded, smoothed with flour; even bread
can learn to be a body, pressed. A thumbnail, a pelvic bone, chorus of breath.
A prayer fingered and folded in yeast, and prospering.

•

Stripped from the wood fiber, that odor that ribbons through the rough husk
is like what the dead must carry in their mouths; a split kernel, hard pupil.
The communion that they make is housed only in the eye.

•

In the opiate of menthol cigarettes, afternoon
elongates the furniture. The potted palms
and all of their rooms lean forward into the brickwork,
the basement's smell of burned oil from lamb's fat,
waxed cords of ewe's cheese and vinegar, a pomegranate.
All miracles pause with open mouths.

Photograph: Chinese Paper Bark Birch

A grove of stippled birch, composed in bits
of desiccated branches, clotted sap;
the piled kernels that relax and snap
beneath the drum of insect combs and pits.
All this the light redoubles and remits.
It opens like a guillotine and traps
cicadas, finches, measured and elapsed
bodies that conjoin in ruptured fits.
The Chinese paper birches peel and split,
Each trunk releasing scrolls, unrinding rims
of resin odor to the blank applause
of years and years that had engendered it.
A severed gesture in the darkened limbs;
a wood rot filled with caterpillar gauze.

La scorza.

They brought lead pellets and wine blacked
as its grape seeds; the rough pelt of mountains grew
to a cockroach's molted husk. Geese laughed
in the blond wood grass. The woman's
fingers, gloved, tilt the bicycle handlebars toward us
where breath rubs its resin (opening
like the ripened cavities of a pomegranate, the light).
Sheaved through the long ribs of the beech trees,
this body in the blistered kernel, *il nostro*.

Study in Charcoal on Mimosa Paper, Woman Reclining

1.

This day the body, a comb of bees,
segmented cells of secreted wax
in the granuled weave of paper brocade, where
a hand is arranged, removed, remade.
A closed comb in the shaded room.
There, the oil cast in the gas light chooses
the body, bright as an oyster, lips, socket, the shock
of cold salt. That eye that moves, accuses.

2.

Regions bleached to the whorled lather of waves
laced back, gradations shaving off the charcoal nub
that form tendons in the throat, the interior opalescent
seam of a conch snail's calcium shell.
Across a tissue of pulped seed, stroke
joins to stroke: a wood duck's repeated cry, remote.

Four Analogues

1.

Under guard of a date palm potted by the Venetian blinds, a Virgin Mother pendant in the scalloped plate with macadamia shells and American money.

Something will seem to have moved, then become necessary.

2.

Century old marble bricked over, and motor diesel making everything twice as bright as it should be.

A child pulls a wooden caterpillar on wheels, repeating, *Dov' è il giallo, dov' è il giallo.*

Gulls flock over a packed crate of mollusks. The long sea recedes over the shale its bodied chorus of brine and sea lather, pulls ribs and ribs of tar.

A brace of light against the tenement rooms, sunken door frames, beam and joist.

It is noon dark over the shale.

3.

Men smoke marijuana over a burning skillet, the yard a pile of brass and nickel-plated radio parts, footstools upholstered in old leather.

All afternoon laundry steeps in a basin of tap water and hard soap.

4.

Finches in the teak wood table, wings kernelled in the waxed xylem, closed in blushing wood pores.

The dead will leave suddenly, like black hummocks of sea water.

Chinese hibiscus in black ink brushes; the alabaster elephant with the upraised trunk.

Cinquains: Five Months of Spring Snow

Rinsed bowl
left where a shift
in the noon dims a pane
of glass, seems to vanish beneath
blown leaves.

•

Plucked rice
in long strands stands
up in a brass topped pot
to boil with shoots and mussels
brought home.

•

Hornets
muster over
the crushed pits of olives:
hours ripen like heated glass,
seared eyes.

•

Egrets
tapping shellfish
on stratified rock grooves
wake us too. Fry dough, fold silk, wait
for lights.

•

Pitch pine
and dogwood fume
against the rain's applause.
A whistling in the sea's black course;
closed box.

Symmetry

The baseboard moldings peel off in flakes of Almond Cream paint. Dried feces from nesting mice under the sofa, a whole corsage of shrunken orchids. Unfinished marble tiles are nubbed with grout or crushed in places, lending their glacial cool, and still mounted on the wall, the fan with a mother-of-pearl handle piece. Further away is the other smell of waxed wood from furniture that waits upstairs, rumors of a piano. Cigarette ends are stuck in amber bottles whose glass is seared through and winnowed with light. The dust of pulverized marble hangs suspended and casts a kind of shadowed grain. Which would stay unmoving except for an enormous moth, equally alarming eyes with velvet pupils. An enormous tan moth with eyed wings brushes itself in circles, as if describing a separate law of space, not in the room at all, but alongside it or further in, a precisely described spiral, as though caught in a convex glass lens (the light shivers and pins him), a series of lenses; how Charybdis would fit (easily) on the ball of your palm.

Entrate.

1.

Light masses like sediments in a stream bottom;
a pustule of resin with a beetle trapped
in the Asian gum tree, the plucked *spiccato* of a cello in fugue,
pores that split and blacken, caterpillar burls,
a pinhaired split of densely rotting tree bole.

2.

A chorus that divides the light, furls like a flag;
with every time it sounds, asks for release.
Flushed out of the cypress, lunge of wings, hard
plunder, brown tailed geese.

§

Fabric

A tin can of cherry candy, embossed with a lady and parasol, advertises *Giù presto*, instead has a glass stopper of menthol inside, tree kernels roasted in an iron skillet, regulation issue playing cards. Opened hand, closed hand, dagger up the sleeve. The photographed faces burnished as pistol grease and surprised at finding themselves still here. That's sweat sprung in an opened eye, your prayer caught in the opening world of blessed things. *Non c'è niente che ci sorprende ancora*. A plaster Virgin recessed into a brick wall, whose robes could have been a table thick with muscat grapes, oysters plucked from salt, fabric meant for parachutes.

After the eclipse (1)

Hispanic families with children bundled in bright wool wait on the public transit line. A Hindi woman chews betel and buttons a somber overcoat. The van delivers canned California olives; across the street at the Korean laundromat a cello program is playing. Two men smoke marijuana in the back of the Toyota, staring at everyone, as regular intervals of light extend and recede through the long yards of chain fence. Someone else reads a paperback novel breaking out of its binding glue. The illustrated cover shows a spacecraft on the vacant red soil of Mars, yet the roaches alone were becoming decent historians. As we should know by now, anything eternal cannot be trusted. When something catches your eye, it's a sparrow on the traffic island, hopping around a busted liquor bottle.

As something about to vanish

The reproduction of Our Lady of Guadalupe was keeping watch over two bags of dried noodles and pinto beans. All the furniture had been polished. In another room the noise of a vacuum cleaner competed with an opera recording. Someone had ground out cigarette butts into the linoleum; a porcelain rooster sat in front of the coffee maker. Piles of guava and domestically grown tobacco, a bossed black cherry box with an enamel pagoda. Outside, the air was punched with the smell of fresh squid, resplendent with burning trash.

Cornucopia

It was winter, so we ate a dish with corn meal and sweet sausage and pulled wool caps over our ears. Coffee percolated and a Mass was being recited over the radio in Latin. We were very young and knew that winter meant a lot of mucus and steamed towels. Still, we watched northern mallard ducks huddle in the yards filled with snow and tires. Spores dropped from pine cones. We were wealthy in a litter of discarded things; afternoons hung in splinters in the window. The cornucopia opens: grouse, ptarmigans, hens with speckled tails.

Rumors from the next district

On the second landing a knapsack with ivory soap and crocheted linen stuffed inside, a kind of sweet bread made with almonds and black sesame seeds. All day light paced through the Venetian blinds, uncertain of landing anywhere. Noises tunneled erratically in the stairwell. On the bureau next to the rotary phone, cigarettes filled a ceramic white plate stenciled with blue irises, and next to that a set of pearls in a napkin and some very tarnished silverware. The photographs were taken in front of the café, and the larger stack of posters from a basement gallery; you won't remember which one. Faces lose their distinctiveness in this light, although eyes and lips remain prominent over the buttoned collar of a moleskin jacket. Winter turned heavy against panes of glass and chipped orange paint on the cement blocks. This is the year before we became children again; the long plough of the sea that turns over and leaves us its salt.

Suppliants

A small alabaster Madonna on the bureau top, the set of Peruvian gold earrings in brown liquor shop paper. That the sky has turned indigo and flat as a china plate means nothing. Its afternoon ripens toward us until our eyes turn heavy and begin to long for the definite trajectories of flight, evasion; then it recedes into the wild flax and bulrush with chortles, whistles, rising cries. Geese on the marsh flats have uniform markings like a threshed cereal field. It is that hour when nothing stays in place, a theater filled only with shouts of *here, here, here*. No one waits for these things, or sees what finally happens; the birds flown off the changing shape of the water having lent us the part of the Greek chorus.

Housed by the still occurring world

It is the day after Día de los Muertos. We are all wearing the bruise of dull light on bowed yucca wood, a hard rain chasing yellow leaves. Pigeons crowd under garage awnings and on the porches painted in old pastels. In the first room, children in Mickey Mouse tee shirts squatting on the ceramic floor tile and playing a game with dice. Some older women are sharing cigarettes and discussing the best kinds of poultice for sores on the palms and heels of feet. Someone adjusts the radio program, complains again about the slowness of the trains. Liquor is poured and mixed with egg whites. Upstairs a chair scrapes, sounds of moving on or off the mattress. The pink walls full of figures cut from agate or turquoise, woven yarn, laminated prayer cards. The girl ignores her husband's complaining and examines the color of her teeth against a mirror, then the moles on her shoulder. Colors receding, the long vowels of water shaping in the seminal dark. By morning the streets will be full of quail roasting with rice and honey sauce, loads of dates and lentils.

Etude

As though the boundaries of light would bend to our desiring. As they do for the smallest of birds, the brush lit wings beckoning out of absence, shallows of movement created over grass. Not asked for and not willed. We find them again and again in separate things; fractions of light in the porcelain water jar; persimmons, eggplant, arugula, set in crates with newspaper next to the bicycle in the hall.

Pendulum

A pendulum disc behind the poplars, and snow moving toward the foreground where there are hills capped with yellow grass. The snow brightens like a surgeon's table under prongs of light between the trunks, dark and flat as if emerged from a nitrogen bath. These things that gather mass and sediment against the light, a lode of grit and mica, and further down the loam and indigenous rocks, volcanic remains. The regions of snow and poplar, those descendants that keep expanding under the hefted dust of meteorites and pockmarked suns. If there is a universe, it resembles this, a quiet stadium where things move without elements.

Plumage

A set of ivory-handled bread knives packed with photographs of traditional Japanese kimono and headdress. Outside snow was beginning between the dumpster and the warehouse for Atlantic salmon. Further down the lurid yellow lights begin in the cafès; a skillet bangs. The suitcases are still filthy from the terminal, knitted fleece, silk skirt linings, ornaments pressed in wax and tins of assorted toffee. But these small coins and newspapers could belong to anyone, like the layers of busted ceiling plaster in the bathtub. Large sections of resin-based blue paint are buckling down from macaw blue ceilings. Heating pipes resonate dully. On the next floor they've begun to fry pork and ripened plantains in peanut oil, arguing loudly. Such as: *Il cuore, il cuore, il cuore, il cuore*, punctures of atmospheric interference. The bathroom mirror mirrors back the pattern of flowering bergamot on the wallpaper, and the blue tail blue breast of the blue macaw.

After the eclipse (2)

The young girl in corduroys and a Jimi Hendrix tee shirt sits at the bar under an advertisement for Puccini recordings stirring vodka into her milk and coffee. *Sarà in ritardo l'autobus*, a woman says into her cellphone, dispassionately stroking hair from temple to earlobe. *Chiamò un tassì*. Noise rears through the light. Hosiery and printed muslin hang in department store windows; an ambulance crosses the intersection. A child chews a baked pastry with brown sugar and dates, stubble of crumbs on its chin, grease on the jacket with the rabbit hood. Sun glances through spilled diesel where they're unloading furniture into the street. As a bowed wave pulling its dross of foam and sulfur over crushed shells and pumice slag, these pigeons break into flight with insistent, sibilant chuckles, while a woman in matching tweeds and gloves begins a laugh in the shape of her rouged mouth.

Eliding figures

The tempera on wood panels are piled next to a crate of bruised tangerines by the bathtub, a jar of change for tram fare, paper for rolling hash. In another landscape the eucalyptus leaves would have been parachutes, casting the same shadows. Or a troupe of twisting snails. The sink enamel actually hasn't been rinsed for weeks and is stacked with paints, magazines and cans of latex polish. *Perdo tutti i miei capelli*, she said, or was overheard saying; I'm losing all my hair. Then you'll need new lambskin gloves and lipstick, your eyes penciled fuller than that. See the hand-sewn sequin costume; the child's face shows reptilian gold, lids and lips a persimmon red. We're reading volumes of Gabriel García Márquez on dilapidated sofas, and all kinds of porcelain on the carpet; grinning llamas, tea saucers, lamps shaped like bowls. While someone is tuning a Grand piano in the next room, banging repeatedly the first few bars of *Für Elise*.

Sono io. Come brutto!

A velvet Easter jacket in the closed room, whole shelves filled with bottled cologne, packaged figs and cinnamon. Which has all begun to smell of drainage-stained plaster and shoe polisher. Fans of giant cattail and dry umbrella palm, a case of buttons, sewing scissors. How shade migrates like deposits of quartz and calcite in a delta, assuming different properties at the edges, now a viscous milky lacquer, now a stubble of coarse illuminant graphite; like the bowed figure of the woman in the armchair whose gaze, in the portfolio of nude photographs, is always trained elsewhere. As though the face of a woman will become the face of her sons, if what is blessed is also uninvited. Spores and fibers of light circle in the still air, the potted brazil tree, a wayward insect. Wait here awhile. It already weighs nothing.

§

Figures in transit.

In the shallows of the sediment, parts of a plumbing pipeline,
a carburetor, rubber tires. As though suspended
beneath a charred meteorite, great geese pluming back

the reservoir's dark stadium, their enormous napes and breasts
sounding a long bassoon over the flood basin.
Black as ore, it moves like a planet, laborious

and heavy, while light secretes a long resin
over the marshland. These lips chorusing stillness
in the sweet gum, blue spruce, multitude of lips

that never still: while a trout disturbs a rush of wild rice,
water records the dividing body and then recessional
of open wings, further and further into the black lens.

Fotographia, una bicicletta.

To the one side is the wheelbarrow, its dulled iron
and wood strips, the fleece grown into ropes
a forearm thick on the sheep that nuzzles one wheel.
The focus is less distinct on the woman standing with her bicycle,
which is petrol black against the grass, the only solid
body here. Hands closed on the handlebars,
one leather sole of one boot raised to the pedal;
it is difficult to tell where she is, a mountain region,
but with a limestone wall, and the trunks of trees striated
into the sulfur light. She is wearing a wool eyelet
that reaches the boot tops. Her long throat
tenses back as though pulling toward her some instrument,
as though ripening toward the shape of the light;
shape hinged in the bicycle and suggesting permanence;
that is more permanent than the cypress and gorse
tightening like dark aortal knots along the mountain
whose space can be split easily as a ewe's new birth cords.
The men in their olive jackets show charred gums and stumps,
fingers; the air stinks of ammonium and sheep dung.
The fermenting cellars are emptied, meat and cheese
cooling by the wine sacks. While a flock of wood thrushes
in a roused cry rises, like a grain sieve or a raked sea,
her face turns, but her collarbone darkens,
the mouth darkens; what you have thought was the sea
plotted in black trough tracks and opening,
is the body extinguished by light, is a hand,
or an eye, receding into the closed kernel.

Fotographia dei quattro guerri.

Posing, the four, as if to prove *we are lounging, we are bored:*
lean, polished, buckled into their fatigues;
there is something voluptuous in each eye, tightening, expectant.
They are not surprised. Tar blacked with rationed cigarettes,
all spit and canvas, you're greased in the stop valve
of opened eyes and mouths, and harnessed to a thing as small as light,
figured by lightness, combed hair and faces, lips
resembling those of women—amused?—and the one who has turned the pistol over
agile in one hand, its steel muzzle to the head of the third alongside him, who
stares forward, one hand at his hip. Will they tell us now that country
where not even the dead may follow; birds ascending among
suspended electrical cables, a glance thrown
forward like a shout?

Olive Harvesting

The noise of throttles troughs across the air.
Thrushes in plangent droves, assembled crates
of fruit pits crushed, those ripe or dropping late,
dot acreage clouds mill over; turgid, bare.
The sky seems to retreat from hill to hill.
The dust ignites. A grist of rough scales raked
from mica, flies welter on the ground and make
noise like the muzzled dead who never still.
(The trucks of olives turn lowland and to shore.)
Stars litter in their mineral dark. The trees
stand in a cooling portico; some still release
white flowers, bowing like waves of lighted ore.
Regions of silt and broken gravel. An unmoving sea,
somewhere else, goes heavy as a marble frieze.

Small invocations.

Like a scalpel, daylight pares
the membrane of each hour.
The cancer of a shuttered room,
its dark polyptic flower,

is opened like the tight wings of
a valve. Each aperture
a radiant surgeon's eye that's trained
against the umber blur,

exposing the doorjambs and the blinds
arrested in its glare.
The light repeats in years. Its portrait
is bleached against the air.

•

Small locus of a heavy world,
suspended ball of lead,
mercurial and pupil-like,
swings on a little thread.

Imperfect as if sweated from
a furnace; scalding, spit,
then cooled and dulled, and later scrubbed
with sand to burnish it.

Small scale that grows by restlessness,
and measured far as sin;
against it light can pick and steal
but whittle no way in.

Attori ed oggetti.

An antelope smells rifle powder, knows there is a cornucopia
to be served; surgical knife in the wash basin,
newspaper advertisements for ladies' corsets.
Noise trumpets from the radio,
through the general pop of static, a waltz,
a section of brass, following a ribbon of beeswax
across the parquet, the piano bench, *Two Courtesans With Lantern*.
The camera isn't ready yet, but afternoon progresses like a bruise
into the braided curtains, a man's fitted blazer flung over the back
of a chair. A hard cake of soap on a newspaper, shaving articles,
a darkly rotting banana. A boy in a grammar school uniform
heating milk on a gas burner. The room is going to remain like this.

Shadow Box, Sparrows

Pinned under the heavy wood frame, seamed
tight as pine needles into the fabric backing,
sparrows open like rice patterns.

Enamel buttons, sewn like scales, up to the cut pearl
of a crab's underbelly, a woman's face. A hand
cupped in offering, receiving and receiving a still world.

•

Charcoal on Bristol Board, Geese

They form against snow, breathing in dense lines daubed black, tongued opiate
of rolled smoke. The stippled water, piled forward like many seed husks, heavy with
moose maple
and petroleum, chasing
bass and carp, is now also black, turned and turning its elongated ribs
of light, the hardest instrument.

Photograph: Canal

The walls are too old for even the rats.

They are trying to close like a book, their thick text
frowning at the water, water darker than oil, clapping the cement (a mob
of human tongues,

che cosa stava facendo? Che cosa c'era?)

The light works as a surgeon on the marble
suspicious, watchful.

La figura di cui hai voglia non già sta qui.

In the far perspective,
the brilliance of street dust,
cheese paper, flapping laundry, a finch turns

itself into a fan and rises from a rusted shop shingle.

Still Life: Apartment of an unemployed Portuguese man.

1.

Pine wood planed and odorous, stripped resin,
glue, gouge and the body of the cello
intoning like a varnished comb of Chinese bees.
Pair of boots, cigarette pack, a milk bottle filled with chinaberry leaves.

2.

Filmed by the innards of exposed ceiling pipes,
lithographed wallpaper repeating the orioles' exactitude
of barbules, scaled eyes. Light moves across the birch boards
like husked rice, the moan of instep to the wood. That the body
of a cello is the husk left behind by simple touch.

Twelve lines from the portraiture of the Madonna and Child

Past the imported rubber plant on the stairs, the radio issues from an upper room, a classical guitar program, and the tick and knock of pipes behind marble conducting water to soldered faucets.

Abundance slouches dimly into itself; heavy tongues nursing at a dropped fig. Raw fish stacked outside, scoured fin on fin and the plush blood opening the gills.

Someone leaves a pair of athletic shoes, filthy from the trains; someone leaves an aluminum pot with sweet corn burned to the bottom.

A tonic rubbed on the ball of the foot is said to stop aching from the uterus. The mattress is left on the floor, bundles of linen in the hand-loomed Peruvian blanket, bottled beer and the wool dyed from yucca plants and waxy flowering cacti.

Under the heavy lines of cochineal pigment and lacquer, their torsos never seem to fit against the sections of illuminated cadmium. As if the Christ body were torn like an obscure page, loosening filaments.

Mustered under fabric, a locust will stir when her fingers open. This means an offering has been made, somewhere.

While the cavern has robed them in its grooved dark. Already the woman retreats into the child, bearing characteristically her armfuls of cut fruit, flowering okra, semolina grain.

In the basement with a mauve sofa propped on cinder blocks, a young family stuffs dates with rabe and goat cheese, which they'll sell, and rinses white rice in a ceramic basin. During the day they sell unlicensed alcohol and cocaine from a smaller cabinet.

Just afterwards two children in fleece-lined aviator caps are photographed against the wrought-iron porch enclosure, woodwork breaking from the window casements.

It is wild grouse under the noise of helicopters, tree trunks stripped bare by starving deer and wandering cattle.

Light moves into the lower tenement rises; a tram passes, pulling the noon after it, which turns to seared obsidian in the district streets.

Motorbikes tilt toward a cement park wall. Sparrows shoot through midday, continuously, like broken wheat.

Theories Of and Against the Miraculous.

The eye is a cornucopia,
the lobed arteries of the spreading okra,
an oil study of melons and a gored pheasant.
There are no revelations without violence.

The eye is a study in flight,
the mathematics of the finch's body,
its concise parabolas repeated in the spiraled tangerine rind
flattening a cigar advertisement.

The anima, roused by its own nightmares of repetition, repeats itself in inanimate things.
This might be a signal.

Meanwhile, in the boles and knots of the olive grove,
wild thrush bustle like a body misplaced beneath the noise of the heart.

Estuary

An illuminated screen. A body lit
with the stubble of polished volcanic rock
or crushed ore
split from a mountain quarry. Insatiate,
the long gills flush open,
the caudal fin a heated coil
from a furnace; the small
tucked fins are match-struck
paper, folding up.
Hammered out
in furrowing strokes, water's grist
of geodes, mineraled plateaus,
marsh grass; the light turns it
like a larva out of the spinning comb;
a noise in the incense, burning wax
of a host of saints' candles.

Sestina

The flowering white dogwoods open
on the reservoir bank, a drift of eiderdown
over black water, rocked shut as an urn.
In the smell of wood gum, geese move
through the shallows, shoaled by leafless brush.
Carp turn toward the reed beds. Water broods.

It is not the water but an hour that broods.
Like oil poured into a lamp, about to open
the colors of weeds and heather, to brush
formlessness out of the stones, shivering down
in the gray light of water that does not move
any more than a brass helmeted figure on an urn.

Lime and silt deposit fill, like an urn,
with the remains of light on the marsh flats. Broods
of mosquitoes, mergansers, white-tail deer, move
without astonishment, as if into the open
combustion of a meteor, quietly settling down
its incredible mineral dust, rolls of ash. A brush

stroke in noise of locusts, termites, the brush
of molted insect shells, or a whistling in the urn
of cereal, millet, pomegranate kernels, ground down
to a dust that remembers an older world. It broods
in indistinct hours and shapes, while crocuses open,
and, like heavy entablatures, the clouds move.

Turned under the white troughs of moving
clouds, all the dismantled freight of stone, seed, brush,
iron, molehill and slagheap is struck open,
blisters in the nearness of stars, rolls toward the waiting urn,
the dim resounding stadium. Nothing broods
there, and no records are put down.

Along shelters in the grass the deer fold down
to blackness and vanish. The forms of birds move
through gray space. Whatever firmament is there, broods
in the heavy resin of trees and brush,
the filaments of germ and spore. Patient as an urn,
the water leans toward the dogwoods, opens.

Their flowers, white bundled, bow and brush
again and again an image scoured on the mouth of an urn.
Releasing presence, these things that are pressing open.

Still Life

Swaddled in the woven mat brought back from the Yucatàn, a black burnished figure of a woman, pregnant, with oblong breasts and hardly any face, heavy still with the blush of resin. A rosary with black beads came with her, hemp strings dipped and coiled in wax, and a powder made with sweet pepper. This is a red dye made from indigenous beetles, ground with pestle and stone, much like cornmeal is. It is not found elsewhere on the continent. The lumps of bruised fruit are already breaking with their spoil. The woman you remember ate breadfruit when she learned of her pregnancy, and a flat cake with millet seeds. For days the work: roasted with roots and ground nuts, or the pulp fermented into a thick paste for baking. Even a kind of cloth can be woven from the fibers of the younger bark. The room where she rested was surrounded with small medals and conch shells. Rain claps the roofs; under the broad leaves, the tough buds clustering. Discarded rinds leaving a thin lace.

Amber

The heavy incense in the sea turns back.

Gathers various grains, granites, tips them as into a sieve. Miles of white foam pitched back, the mineral sea rolled under the sulfur.

As if settled in lumps of coniferous amber, a rough accretion:

granules of agate, grooved echinoids, plied spoilage of blue mussel shells, pounds of astringent kelp.

Something of its bruise on the air, its fitfulness.

Under the noise of petrels, the light blistering to the ridged waves, hardens them.

Bleached ceiling beams, cedar board and tar, go moving through the noise of the sea.

Recalling that of locusts, deluges, falling dust from meteors.

Seamed to the tree splinters, to the cleft in the tree body. Fossil resins, heated, release the incense sometimes called myrrh. Combined with linseed oil or animal fat, a salve.

The hard noon on the water is an incessant breath struck open. Which fills until there is no reply.

*That noise repeats in us, milled from the sea,
chafed, pressed, a harvest that is not salt
but heavier, less lasting, becoming less.*

Pantoum

As birds signal over a black lake,
rain nods through clustering dogwood.
The brush touched flowers bowing. Once again,
they cannot change course.

Rain nods through clustering dogwood
as birds' signal. Over a black lake,
they cannot change course—
the brush touched flowers bowing once again.

Reception

Sprung by a tension in the light, motes of fleamed wood form to the whorled ridges of a mollusk shell. Brushing wings say *white*. *Dark*.

The shutter claps, pushing open the kernel that is breath, breathing, but not speech.

•

There is no one now who watches the minute rituals of the dead, the year's hard callus having lodged itself in wait.

Shoaled beneath the light and punctured by irregular pores of shadow. Through which they move, saying *take* and *take*.

•

As if a glance opens that is not theirs; it will only hold under their weight for so long.

La figura di cui hai voglia non già sta qui. Nel mondo non avrà una casa—sarà come un rumore piano (devi aspettare, aspettare) e difficile a sentire.