Restraint

Forbidden from being together, talking, even texting, at least we share a palette of colors to paint upon this piece of slate. The future perfect continuous tense distracts me when I steal another look backward. Though shocking to recall, more stale to recount, I thought we will have been. We never were. Teals in a pond are seasonally monogamous. Can real-life fairy tales exist in a world where krill swarms squirt seawater past setal filters to entrap algae, where tea is still measured by silver taels in parts of Taiwan, where a tech entrepreneur who owns Tesla has a net worth greater than Pakistan? I refuse to build a stela to commemorate the moment we parted because when we parse the past into parts, it resists, le passé dragging along the après, like the sermon about how he who sows seed bountifully reaps the same. I would fling myself to the wind with time to spare.

Truth and Reconciliation

Hemingway is antwacky now, reduced to a macho iceberg; but once he flew by Pan Am Clipper seaplane to Victoria Harbour during World War II on honeymoon with Martha Gellhorn who wanted to cover the war

in China when he'd rather drink cocktails with acolytes, hunt pheasants in the New Territories, light off fireworks in his room à la Mario Balotelli (why always me?) while the military planes in the Sino-Japanese conflict

erased lives by the hundred thousand. Does the vapor of a militant past still clog our shared air today, seisen crusade, holy war, start of hakko ichiu, eight corners of the world under one roof—foreshadow the belt

and road initiative? Can we walk a veering line straight from the Marco Polo Bridge to the Port of Gwadar in Pakistan? Will Apple Daily revive from going dark? All I know is that the trophy elk horns, stolen by Hunter

S. Thompson from the Ketchum, Idaho home where Papa put a double-barreled shotgun to his head, and a year after the gonzo journalist did the same to depart "on top of his game," were finally returned home by his widow.

John Ashbery in Hong Kong

There are still junk boats in the harbor the sharp edge of presentiment flutters moon moth planning the moment he would ask her about the "dark shit" the calico showcases dragon's back hike soap bubbles reflecting a neutral colorway sound generated from kung fu.

The crowd gathers in the politburo—puffed sleeves by the pastry tray, not enough mental contagion for oyster crust. Tri-color bread designed petri dish for pure operation.

You remember that factory perching on the edge of the blizzard brutalist and poured they printed the Periodic Table in there after hyperphagia in den air coming through interstitial spaces in the typhoon the party wanted to feel that they had hoisted all your questions?

I avow how the grammatical terrorizes fact: high in the hills so soon after Beryl's biplane descended in a drone dive and crashed in a mountainous wood in the uniform of the Royal Flying Corps the bite marks grown over fingers too jumpy for a manicure.

I go on missing the queen like sleep the Lee Kung Man undershirts a decoction of fresh leaves for snake bites, or the grinding stone Cantonese is pluralistic tic-tac-toe of flow versus blockage etiquette don't point or cross your chopsticks a bamboo basket redefines usage then in the woods he made a clearing delicate as windblown sediment undercutting the Guangdong National Language Regulations: yum cha with transparent prawn dumplings proprietary puppetry the World Monetary Fund waltzing in moonlight chintz, the mainland gibbous,

incisors shining through the clerestory window.

Forcibly remove the dial to expose the skeletonized mechanical internals. He measures sleep in test tubes. Our pour-over windbreak, rows of rambutan, don thee mother-of-pearl prolific evidence-based wind-damage event the Archbishop pouring holy oil from ampulla to anoint the sovereign breast pouring up putty cat pronominal Causeway Bay pack-and-play participles stuck on the mirror a jellied suction cup: prayer.

Lather

Inside the bubble, anything was possible: gryphons could grow gills, a man become

woman, pleasure reshaping imagination overcoming the will until grows a garden

of two groaning tendrils of heavy fruiting. Like a forcefield, nothing could touch us

so long as we touched each other. Hands wrist-deep in the mouth not to impede

speech but to compel song. Nothing could ever persuade me that it's wrong

that a magnet pulls according to polarity blindly, how an argus pheasant primps

plumage covered in ocelli to splay later in seduction. Wordless because between

us, all connotation trembles, new sounds generate, history ripples through us:

once you interlaced your fingers in mine in a mountain cave; then centuries later,

living in a villa, we had a brood of oliveskinned children, pastures, wine, laughter

resounding in the Mediterranean dusk. Even if this whirl around we glimmer

in a soap-globe drifting above the sink, engorged on brink of bursting, still afloat

on the mirror-image of an underground bunker, a zeppelin alcazar. You are too far.

My Last Duke

After Robert Browning

That's my last Duke peering down the parapet With his councilor breaking out in a cold sweat, As he shows off his Frà Pandolf, his Brancusi, Sculptures he neither made nor bought. Boozy With inheritance, his orchards full of cherry Trees stay well-tended, his banquet-tables merry With goblets and grape-leaves stuffed with pork; Conjuring the smell of duck roast makes me retch. Thankfully I would have been made to fetch Linens or flutes and would dally in the kitchen Galley with simmering pots, never to pitch in, Mind you, that would reek of liberal entitlement, But rather to vex John Locke's enlightenment And dream of a hocking a loogie into the soup. My raison d'être? Breasts that wouldn't droop And managing the arrangement of piano sheet Music and staying silent, demure, agreeable, neat In appearance, always deferent to the mighty Duke, who lent me his name. But I'm Aphrodite, Not a 1650's housewife. My smile is my shield Against—how should I put it?—what men wield Implicitly and arrogantly as biological right, Providing us the stale binary of fight or flight— I chose the latter. See you later. Let him give Commands to someone as secretly combative As his staff, whose names, and children's names I know (not he), the one person who blames Herself less than a flower. Yes, a faint half-flush Springs from my throat, lilies from a paintbrush— Monet's, or an Edo Period master of ukiyoe's Lacguer-tinted woodblock prints of kabuki shows: A transitory, infinitely sorrowful, floating world Captured so perfectly wistful in a smile unfurled, Though he failed to notice, it was never the same Smile—sometimes it conspired to hide the shame Of being disregarded or ogled again, other times It curled contemptuously, plotting horrible crimes; Rarely it struggled to comply or brazenly to flirt, More often, offered casually as an untucked shirt. Ironically, it was never a Duchenne smile—which, Wife of a Duke and all—and still makes me twitch To remember the last grin to crinkle the corners Of my eyes with crow's feet. Not a foreigner's Sense of having dreamt a destination before a trip, But a leaf's recall of once being a seed. Ownership Is fiction, but there he is showing off his bronze Neptune taming a seahorse and his stuffed swans,

The coat of arms with his nine-hundred-year-old Name. Just ignore the trace and smell of mold Never quite rubbed away fully with linen cloth. Imagine once I was stuck in his jar like a moth, And now I finger potter's clay instead of sapphire Cluster earrings and build my own roaring bonfire On the beach where I scissor with a scullery maid—No one will ever convince me I should have stayed.