

A Fertile Balance

I

The ring of pure light
on the table, bread and wine,
under the roof of baked tiles,
rooms cool as a pantry.
Stiff dried flowers and herbs
spice the oak beam's
fertile balance: an interior garden.

2

Leaving, returning,
a round of ritual visits:
a tree creaks its slow greeting,
a windlass well, long deserted,
thickets of odorous lavender,
perfumed stone, a spade laid
in drills of aubergine, dense
and dark as hand grenades.

3

A half century ago, the poet
hides in the brush, rifle
butt cradled against shoulder
as the German convoy grinds near:
before he orders "Fire!"
a brief scent of wild thyme.

4
A warm day, the ochre earth
leaps before us: the khaki back,
bulging eye, of the cricket,
lifting away like a tiny helicopter
at an angle on its spindle legs.
The shrewd-eyed lizard sprawls
then darts along a corbelled wall
in a continuous thrum of flies.

5
Now the tall poet greets us
under his lintel, speaking
of rare flowers, scarce birds,
pollution in the rivers great
and small, the muscled Seine,
his homely Sorgue, the sun
on those waters darkening
as the trout turns belly up.

6
“In the land of the day before
The thunder rang pure in the streams,
The vine fostered the bee,
The shoulder lifted the burden.”
Now rocket ranges in the Vaucluse,
the stink of Rhone Poulenc.
“Voters, students of your townland,
of its beasts and flowers, do not
falter in your duty. This is a call
to order, to halt the march of death.”

7
*Starless night over the Luberon,
the drone of a friendly plane,
a blossoming of parachutes;
the watchdog lopes between
them, nuzzling their freight
of guns and grenades, but
making no sound, neither bark
nor whimper. before dropping
to sleep on the crumpled silk.*

8

“I try not to go to Paris now,
source and centre of all this filth.”

*Petrarch, fleeing from Avignon;
To redeem myself from that
pit of iniquity called Avignon
I fled to where a slate-blue
and white fountain pours,
while birds circle the cliff,
and drank till felt restored.
Now when I make love
it is for the last time.*