

*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.*

"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.*