

Anchorite in Autumn

She rose from bed and coughed
for an hour. Entered her niche
that was also her shower. Shaved
her legs with Ockham's razor.
Rinsed her hair with holy
water. Opened the curtain
that was double-layered. Slipped
on her robe in *the widening
gyre*. Gazed in the mirror
with gorgeous terror. Took out
a cigarette and held it
like a flower. Lit it devoutly
like the wick of a pyre. Smoked
like a thurible in the grip of a friar.
Stared out the window
at the leaves on fire, fire, fire . . .

The Sweet Invisible Smoke

The whole time I was talking to you
I burned like cedar inside the stove.

Did you smell the sweet invisible smoke
from the diamond blaze that steeled my bones?

Did you see me glowing in the Heraclitian fire
that turned the windows, steel, and stones to ashes?

Did you see my tongue ignite in a flame
that burned my voice to silence in the hills?

Dress Poker

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness.

—ROBERT HERRICK

For as my heart, e'en so my eye
Is won with flesh, not drapery.

—ROBERT HERRICK

My mistress played poker with me last night,
donning a new article each time I won,

while also stripping me of a belt or shirt
or sock since I was dressed and she was not

when we began, the one condition to which
I agreed. But I grew tired of winning and wished

for losing hands, discarding pairs and threes
of a kind until she was nude again

and I was dressed like a child in winter
with so much on I saw what a fool I'd been

for wanting to win each time. How winning
was a ruse through which she saw from the start

with her poker face but continued to play
like a shark in reverse for the chance to win

by losing again. To open her boxes beneath
the bed, try on the dresses one by one, and then

the shoes and under things. To confuse me then
about which was best: Removing her heels

or slipping them on? Baring her breasts
or covering them up? Hoisting her thong

or the opposite? I was of two minds on this,
so unresolved, I couldn't decide, which stacked

the deck with random cards, doubling
my luck from there on in, despite my hands.