The Plaza Opens

Into a broken statue's empty arms,
gesturing, absently,
at the ever-presently not there,

a disintegrating fragment's unseen hand
muses, blankly,
on the unfinished without end.

After the Parade

Through the punch-soaked marketplace, where dumbstruck
cymbals
ring in jingling ears, and squeeze-twisted orange peels
float in drain-puddle glorioles, the old street vendor's chimes
echo matins to city doves, pecking almond-sweet scraps
of exploded confetti tulle, while the crushed rose petals
that a loose-haired flower girl gathers in an alms-basket
for the scent of expression, bleed fevers on the dust.

Let the parade end, so long as I am saved;
so long as I am saved, the world be damned.
But, should it not save me, damn the parade,
its acrid fragrance, and me, for strewing berry-leaves
like incense as it passed, for letting its booths
close down. But may the café stay open, and serve *absinthe*
in the shade of the orange tree, by the rosebush, across from
the chapel gate.

Aficionado

The Amorous Young Bullfighter to His Rivals

As every bullfight must have its steer,
you have your rights and serve your purpose.
She would be gored outright otherwise.
I charge the cape and drive these horns into its silk,
tearing at a blur of color in the air.
My head is thrust about wildly in anger and shame
to cheers that mock me cruelly.
It is an absurd and pathetic spectacle.
Yet still I try again, even as they call for my death,
for though I may be slain,
she makes such an art of murder
that I would rather perish on display as a fool
than live forever as you do.

The Fountain

The song that the old street singer sings sounds
like a song that has never been sung before,
or will be sung again, and yet has always
been playing, even before there were singers
or street songs, only the breeze. The waitress in the café,
overlooking the square, by the fountain,

has served whiskey all night, for so many nights,
it seems, and though she has never had one herself,
she pours a shot from the remains of the bottle
and sits down at a table as the boys put up the chairs
and sweep up the shells mixed in with the dust
at her feet. As the lamplight fades, she listens

to the song that the singer has been singing,
that she herself has been singing, without knowing
or hearing, but knows now, while the face of the Moon
lies on the surface of the water of the fountain
she will walk to later, when the café has closed,
when it murmurs like a song that has always been playing.

Incommunicado

I. First Draft

There is nothing left to say
but what it is to be elsewhere,
how it feels to be otherwise.

There is no more to tell
for the teller of the tale
than the tale of the telling.

And little else to know
of mystery beyond the stranger,
past whether it's the not knowing

that's mysterious, or the telling
that's estranging. To the waitress
at the café, he is just another

someone or other, a tourist,
who has found himself
nowhere else to get lost in,

stay gone awhile, for the time
being, between the waiting
for something to happen

and the not leaving before nothing
stops happening. Who raises his glass
until she sees it, and brings

him the bottle. To her
it's just the same—all one,
more or less—how far one will go

to be elsewhere, what one can come,
or be brought to, feeling
otherwise. *Gracias*,

he says, sucking the seeds
from his lime. *So this*
is where one goes

to disappear. Meanwhile,
he sits alone, writing letters
to the one whose not being there

is the only thing here
for him now. But the points
of the lines keep getting lost

in the spaces, the ink's stray marks
decomposing, till the Sun's dying fall
bleeds its shade, and the dusk's streaked flush

fades to blank. For as the hint
of a breeze blows the scent
of an orange across the burn

of a flavored cigar, through a haze
of blue smoke rings, the tap
of a toe, at the clack of a heel, leaves

the impression of its trace
on a swirl of white sand. So the back
of a throat, at the tip of a tongue,

vents its air, exhausts
its disgust, on pure wind,
as the palm of a hand

makes its mark, stamps
its print, on pressed leaves
under the indifferent Moon's

knowing smile. So all the letters,
in a word, mean nothing, to the signifying
I, but the *X*-ing out of *O*'s,

in a sense. And the pigeons still gibber
by the chapel gate, and the water
in the fountain, rippling

with the blur of spotted feathers
and speckled petals, still murmurs,
in its body's language, to the statue's

self-reflection, *Let there*
be babble, if not the utter
nonsense of perfect

Last Call

I

Sometimes when she sings she feels nothing
in particular, and sometimes nothing
at all. It is then that, unconscious, she senses

how dead airs, in blank space, make the music
of unbreakable silence; that, thoughtless, she knows
why the anonymous, uncalled for, give their untitled

songs a name, and why their listeners, unheard of,
take that name as a sign that means, in a word,
the unspeakable, which they can say without singing

and hear music; then that, speechless, she sings
of the undreamt of, in disbelief, the way the cats cry
for the pigeons over the babble of the fountain

and the ripple of the breeze. But either the song
is foreign, or song itself is foreign, to the listener
who sits watching, reimagining the unthinkable

inconceivably, calling out for the unseen, unknown.