

The Hiss of Nothing

How long now have I been losing interest in the world
out there, watching the colors and faces turn gray,
people and animals become mechanical,
the spectacle and drama gone rank then flat.

Not that I've converted to belief or faith in abstract
universals or essences beyond existence
or become convinced that appearances are unreal
rather than polymorphous reality itself —

the sparkle of sunlight off water, sunset after rain,
a bird or flower, insect, pebble or night sky
can still put me in a kind of ecstatic state, dumb witness
to their . . . beauty? Is that what it is? — but that my eyes

turn inward more often these days as if to know
what can be known in the biblical sense of never knowing,
that self-contradiction doctors of the church call
deus absconditus but poets call love incarnate.

Tonight, the longest of the year, I fell asleep again
reading the words of long-dead men and women
and woke again after in my sleep listening in
on snippets of conversations of ordinary people

on several continents going about their business
speaking in their several tongues of what people talk about:
love, money, the weather, the passing of time for better
or worse — more vivid to me than I am to you now

their very ordinariness making me wonder again
if something of us does sometimes leave behind
our sleeping selves to eavesdrop in foreign lands
and if they're lands of the living or *tableaux vivants* of the dead.

and now, sitting by the fire recalling the light in their eyes,
their easy conversations, I listen to the cat purr,
refrigerator hum, the dog whimper in his dream,
the discontinuous hiss of nothing in my inner ears.