

Baker

Theory of Roman Literature (Part I: Tragedy)

There is no longer autumn in Akron, Ohio.  
Leaves willingly turn overnight from green  
to death. This is how we grow old.  
According to last week's dinner companions  
last summer's drought has blocked  
the so-called process of photosynthesis,  
the mutating struggle to replace cells.  
About this and how marriage  
won't turn our young heads grey  
our grade schools lied. They told us Venus  
would be visible, that California never crashed  
into Utah one Friday night forming the Sierras,  
that Columbus was a great white man.  
All sexual disease, replied Coach Beerbelly,  
could be cured. We became the unlucky ones.  
The Pledge of Allegiance became less fashionable  
and rigid Bon Jours! to Madame What's-Her-Name  
harbored nagging doubts. Wall Street made fathers  
glow as they moved from parked cars to hotels.  
Everything was perfect: the endless library walls,  
the frenzy to divide and dissect, the pleasures  
of our paved playgrounds. We thought we could slay Nero  
and in turn be slain, heroes' deaths,  
narratives read aloud a thousand million times

(Cont.)

("Theory," cont., no break)

turning meekly into sitcoms of smoking guns  
and faulty coffins, moving us offstage,  
handcuffed, passive victims prone to inbreeding,  
more eager now to live with beautiful nurses  
named Sophia, ivory clasping their dry bosoms  
as they rolled us down to the bottom of the hill.  
With the help of court-appointed translators  
at dusk we eat darkness and sing "Arrivederci, Roma."