

ON A MAUNDY THURSDAY IN MACAO

If the sea is calm, the machine walks on water,
hydrofoiling gamblers from Hong Kong across
the blue half-inch of map to Macao. Reclaimed by
its original owner, its surface is still the same.

Inside the city glut you can still see
the one-sided Basilica of St. Paul, long ago
burned-- a front presiding over sweaty tourists,
shadowing the commerce of Cantonese hawkers,
Portuguese sailors, mixed-blood hookers. Nearby,
saffron-robed monks train shefflera stems
to coil back on themselves, greenly squandering
their juices in leaves like parasols
shading huge cloisonne urns consecrated daily.

The operative shrines gleam magnificence. Polyglot
patron saints bow as you enter. You can choose
your denomination, your game, your brand of booze.
Prayed-over wheels are not Buddhist.

The baccarat dealer wears twenty years
of uncut fingernails on his left hand, thickened
switchbacks, dragon coils the color of fossil tusks.
On his cigaret break, he ignores a woman wearing
a gold cross who asks to touch his grotesqueries.
Other players tease him about breaking a nail
but he never laughs.

Outside, conspiracies of summer steam across
the river from China, steeping in the detritus
of trade, abetting the fish stink.
Casino windows wisely admit no scent or sound.
As long as air conditioning blesses
the pilgrims, neither religious preference
nor national origin affects shared willingness
to lay down the tithes in unison.

A peak of angry words juts up suddenly
from two English couples. The croupier looks over
his shoulder; three well-pressed hosts appear
on either side of the foursome. Even without a prince,
quick peace is restored in the heart of the old colony.
Across the room a slot machine erupts an avalanche;
all heads turn toward the silver offering.
Macao's waiting-for-the-Easter-rabbit smile prevails.