**VACANZE**

You could not imagine the intimacy   
of this heat, the way it wraps your body,   
gets up close, leaves you breathless,  
or the slap of light as you step out,  
a bagatelle of white, ochre, umber.   
The elements here are stone and oldness  
trapped in alleyways, hidden behind   
iron portals; towns that assault you   
with angles, a headache of roof tops,   
and dizzy tiled mosaics. Biblical vistas,   
the snarl of gargoyles, brass grotesques’,   
doors out of kilter with walls, balconies  
   
that wait for a Juliet. In restaurants we trade   
words while light plays hide and seek and   
hospitality extends the boundary of cognition.   
We try out names of dishes, slip words around   
in our mouths pebble-like. Watch old men   
commune double book ended in piazzas,   
loquacious yet attentive to the sideshow of youth,   
re-visiting cupidity and forgotten moods, trying   
them on like unnecessary coats. The lover   
kissing the nuzzle of her neck, stroking   
the wale of her arching back, steers her away   
   
from hungry eyes into the nightly tempest   
of mechanical chorusing. The adolescent   
thrust of scooters, swallows screeking   
dizzy in their own melodrama, unravelling,   
magnetic, lost in the chase and this timed crescendo   
of toneless tolling, a stifling blast, overwhelming   
like expensive scent. We bathe in cool churches,   
Baroque operas of white, gold and plaster saints   
cocooned in splendour. Beneath benign Madonnas  
someone always kneeling, whispering a rosary,   
conversations behind closed doors.