

H.L. Hix

This If Not That

This place's parchedness does not prevent plasticity of
palette.

True, no extravagant maples enable it
to rival your midwestern and New England splendors,
but just yesterday as its substitute my yard declared
a mushroom big as a catcher's mitt, heaped cap upon cap,
orange to rival any rust flared on any junked fender.
The leaves of the shrub shading it — a stunted tree, really —
fade, veins first, from alfalfa to buttermilk.
I've traded the tracing of tragic consequences for
a primary concern with precise color,

which seems more static only if one insists
that change occur quickly, that consequences follow
within one sitting and enforce a morality.
The cherry near my window evokes a childhood plum
bent permanently — grown — to the east for relief
from wind constant from the west. I trust few tenets,
but the ones I can't defy disfigure me
like that wind that tree. It is, I intuit, possible
to transcend our mundane perceptual limits
a few days at best, and often for only a few minutes

sprinkled across a lifetime. Which motivates
our trade in visual — or sonic, or haptic —
equivalents. Show me the tune of your world,
I'll sing you the feel of mine. My working-class wanderings
may never fetch me a glimpse of my old-money god.
God knows what she does in that mansion, what she meant
by these manicured lawns, whether she believes — I don't —
in swans

and willows, grazing thoroughbreds glazed by morning mist.
I doubt it can make sense to give an argument
for disappearance shading into disembodiment,

but what is this if not that? For my skill-lessness
I compensate with method, here as elsewhere, now as
always:

method, my embrace of the givenness of Givenness.
Maybe your swing creaked on ropes from a beech branch,
but mine
grated on chains from a rusting frame braced above gravel.
I'm a blister on the knuckle of mortality.
My unhappy childhood mildews in the basement.
Perception brings past and future into the present.
Even in apparent barrenness, when I really see
I remember a small ornamental tree.