

Edging Dusk, Ars Poetica

When we meet now, we meet always
at dusk to play. The hard sun soothed,
easing off, is a mere sky of placid sea,
a pale plain of dimming blue and dun.

Even against the forest of walnut,
sassafras, and oak hedging our court,
I can see his silhouette clearly,
as if he were a distinct piece of night
broken away, the sureness and potency
of night taken shape and set before me.
I imagine a greeting.

I serve. He receives. We play.
He's quick, anticipating me, meeting
each volley squarely. The *thunk* of the ball
found and sent speeding back and forth
is a smooth, fulfilling pleasure in the body,
as keen, as sweet as the swallow
of warm bread dipped in vinegar oil.

My aim determines his position; his return
predestines mine. I like what I become.
I adore his reckoning. More than once, I want
to jump the net and take him down. Pin
his shoulders. Kiss his face. Our game
is more than memory and prophecy.

Gradually the screen of trees dissolves,
disappears; or else the night expands,
absorbing the spaces inside each vein
and limb; or else the forest and the night
switch names, trade places. I lose sight
of him among the cast of stars.

His return comes from farther
and farther away, the thrust of the ball
sounding more and more of shadow,
its journey back to me a longer
and longer message. I can still judge
his angle, still hear the nuance
of his strategies. I know his study.

I dart forward, swing high,
send the next ball back with all
the might of my several minds, watch,
listen, ready in my stance, wait
for as long it takes.