

so much like a bird it becomes my wish for you,  
    whoever you are—what I offer to the wind  
which wraps around my palm, opening, as if  
    this poem, this prayer, might reach you in time.

ELEGY, 1822

This time it's not so easy, holding a pose,  
shoulders back as he bends to gather driftwood,

build that final bed. All he can offer  
is this pyre—frankincense and salt which turn

the flames chameleon. Shelley's dead.  
And two years from Greece, the marsh disease

which will kill him, Byron turns from the smoke,  
dusky medusa-curls circling his friend's face,

the hand which held his own one summer in Geneva  
falling open as if offering something to the wind.

What else can he do but raise his head, that posture  
of defiance which makes the others envious,

Hunt and Trelawny ashamed of their own small love.  
Byron's thinking he must leave before he thrusts

his hand through the heat toward those lips,  
dark with their secret. He says he'll take

the skull for a goblet, swallow death whole.  
But now he will swim. Pushing away from shore,

everything around him's cerulean—water, sky,  
roots of fire—even the air looks blue, forgiving.

The bones of his foot seem to unfurl in the waves  
so he's kicking harder, strong. Something feels

endless inside him. The midday August sun  
scorches his arms as they rise and fall.

Out toward the Bolivar, his hands raining light,  
Byron is burning, and he gives himself to the agony,

its pure, rare, bite like fire in his veins,  
until he's laughing, blisters rising cruel as moons.