

## Two Poems · Pattiann Rogers

### THE IMAGE IN A WORLD OF FLUX

As black as tropic heat on a windowless night, black as the center of poison, black as the scorched edges of an old prayer, the cat sits upright, tail curled around her paws.

She's the only consistent being here for as far as anyone can see, surrounded as she is by shooting and sinking pellets of plains, by fields that startle in rattles and coughs, rivers that mend in curtsies, relinquish in spells, reclaim in gales and graveyards.

Yet she sits, a composition of bone and bevy, throat strumming, satiated, oriental, dozing. Her reflection on the sky in the swarmy sea is split open and sealed constantly, copped and bound, snatched in hooks of salt, rocked by pistons and wheels of water, fang and whisker drawn under, yawning and licking lifted up.

Her reflection rests serene in puzzled fragments on the glass dome smashed and glued together again and again.

As still as a marble saint in a vault, as stopped as *12:00 midnight* spoken aloud, she's the measuring rod, the magnetic pole, the spine, the axis around which the rackets of the surf strike, ameliorate, reverse themselves, define their exploding equations,

deny their names in fog and ice. She's the base  
tagged and abandoned repeatedly.  
Watch out. Watch out. There's a sudden  
conflagration. A flame catches hold  
at the corner of this picture beginning  
to crisp and curl under, smoke and ashes moving  
rapidly in a diagonal across the world  
toward my fingers.  
But see, she's leaping, leaping,  
white now, invisible, up and out, escaping  
to clutch a bare branch as real and definite  
as this network of black cracks we see spread  
in its steady place across the blank,  
blank ceiling over our heads.

## TRIAL AND ERROR

The right prayer might be a falling  
prayer spiralling down in the throats  
and raised wings and white warmth  
of tumbling pigeons, the joy  
of a beseeching abandon, or a crossing  
prayer in the fingers of oak branches  
over themselves, their display  
of a hopeful wind, or a drifting  
prayer in the cerise petals  
loosed and dropping from a stalk  
of wild betony, a proclamation  
in dissolution.

It may take two every night, maybe three  
every dawn—prayers offered of one fact  
against another—milkweed against winter,  
reflected face against water, rapid  
barking against fear.