

our words, we slither into the brocade pod
of sleep overembroidered with our charms
(though neither of us is moonlike or beanlike).
But I wake, and want you again, and slide down
into the harmony of your arms.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DÉCORATION DES NYMPHÉAS

The surface is not water. It does not forge
water. It does not shimmer, tremble or shudder
as water does. There are the monstrous black-purples
and indigo-purples of rotten wisteria
only a half-choked eye might be forced to utter

as it dabbles its wings too close to the flame,
and wide, trowel-shaped slashes of cinnamon red
that surely have no place on water unless fresh
embers of war are falling there or the shadows
of a vermilion lacquer bridge. Webs of lead,

meant to collect the jasper-green and jade-green
glass of lily pads, enriched instead with fused
enamel and luster in strange salamander shades,
bristle -- they cannot float -- above the shattered
malachite facets of the pond. We are used

to such encrustings, as though the efflorescence
of liverworts on stone or the rosepetal scales
that flake from fish, in the gold and cloisonne
work of Byzantine book covers or the altar
front of St. Mark's, sometimes on the wings and tails

of Mogul enamel geese and ducks; we least
expect mosaics or shell cameos on cloth.
And yet, beneath this deceptively amorphous
web -- we scarcely call it 'paint' -- lie the fossil
Gothic bones of those years and years of behemoth

cathedrals that Monet so laboriously
reconstructed there: the pillars, arches, vaults,
braces, purlins, ribs and buttresses. Moated
inside the nineteen panels of his last work,
one senses the lack of wind, of sun; the faults

of color that will never abide dragonflies.
Then, among those violet-rinsed greens and blue-browns,
a substance flows. It sounds with the solemnity
of sculpture but pulses with trills; and the eye,
and what lives through the eye, flies in it and drowns.