**Sudden Light**

I have been here before,

But when or how I cannot tell:

I know the grass beyond the door,

The sweet keen smell,

The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before,—

How long ago I may not know:

But just when at that swallow’s soar

Your neck turned so,

Some veil did fall,—I knew it all of yore.

Then, now,—perchance again! . . .

O round mine eyes your tresses shake!

Shall we not lie as we have lain

Thus for Love’s sake,

And sleep, and wake, yet never break the chain?

—Dante Gabriel Rossetti

A Charm invests a face   
Imperfectly beheld—  
The Lady dare not lift her Veil   
For fear it be dispelled—   
    
But peers beyond her mesh—          
And wishes—and denies—   
Lest Interview—annul a want   
That Image—satisfies—

—Emily Dickinson

**Tractatus**

*(for Aidan and Alannah)*

‘The world is everything that is the case’

From the fly giving up in the coal-shed

To the [Winged Victory of Samothrace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winged_Victory_of_Samothrace).

Give blame, praise to the fumbling God

Who hides, shame-facèdly, His agèd face;

Whose light retires behind its veil of cloud.

The world, though, is also so much more—

Everything that is the case imaginatively.

Tacitus believed mariners could *hear*

The sun sinking into the western sea;

And who would question that titanic roar,

The steam rising wherever the edge may be?

—Derek Mahon

**Industrial Lace**

The city had such pretty clotheslines.

Women aired their intimate apparel

in the emery haze:

membranes of lingerie—

pearl, ruby, copper slips—

their somehow intestinal quivering in the wind.

And Freihofer’s spread the chaste, apron scent

of baking, a sensual net

over a few yards of North Troy.

The city had Niagara

Mohawk bearing down with power and light

and members of the Local

shifting on the line.

They worked on fabrics made from wood and acid,

synthetics that won’t vent.

They pieced the tropics into housecoats

when big prints were the rage.

Dacron gardens twisted on the line

over lots of Queen Anne’s lace.

Sackdresses dyed the sun

as sun passed through, making a brash stained glass

against the leading of the tenements,

the warehouse holding medical supplies.

I waited for my bus by that window of trusses

in Caucasian beige, trying to forget

the pathological inside.

I was thinking of being alive.

I was waiting to open

the amber envelopes of mail at home.

Just as food service workers, counter women,

maybe my Aunt Fran, waited to undo

their perms from the delicate insect meshes

required by The Board of Health.

Aunt Alice wasn’t on this route.

She made brushes and plastics at Tek Hughes—

milk crates of orange

industrial lace

the cartons could drip through.

Once we boarded, the girls from Behr-Manning

put their veins up

and sawed their nails to dust

on files from the plant.

All day, they made abrasives. Garnet paper.

Yes, and rags covered with crushed gems called

garnet cloth.

It was dusk—when aunts and mothers formed

their larval curls

and wrapped their heads in thick brown webs.

It was yesterday—twenty years after

my father’s death,

I found something he had kept.

A packet of lightning-

cut sanding discs, still sealed.

I guess he meant to open the finish,

strip the paint stalled on some grain

and groom the primal gold.

The discs are the rough size

of those cookies the franchises call Homestyle

and label Best Before.

The old cellophane was tough.

But I ripped until I touched

their harsh done crust.

—Alice Fulton

**Veil**

The doll told me

to exist.

It said, “Hypnotize yourself.”

It said time would be

transfixed.

                     \*

Now the optimist

sees an oak

shiver

and a girl whiz by

on a bicycle

with a sense of pleasurable

suspense.

She budgets herself

with leafy

prestidigitation.

I too

am a segmentalist.

                     \*

But I’ve dropped

more than an armful

of groceries or books

downstairs

into a train station.

An acquaintance says

she colors her hair

so people will help her

when this happens.

To refute her argument,

I must wake up

and remember my hair’s

already dyed.

                     \*

As a mentalist,

I must suffer

lapses

then repeat myself

in a blind trial.

I must write

punchlines only I

can hear

and only after

I’ve passed on

  —Rae Armantrout

**The Poem is a Veil**

V E I L, — as if silk that you in fury must thrust repeatedly  
high at what the eye, your eye, naked cannot see  
  
catches, clinging to its physiognomy.

—Frank Bidart