

Pompeii

Peter Hammill

The golden dream, the seat of all decorum,
a satellite to match the light of Rome:
its silver children chatter in the Forum,
the bath-house, and the brothels, and their homes
about the latest fashions for their clothes.
Across the Tyrrhenian Sea comes drifting
a song that none of them have ever known.
The golden dream that holds back all the hours
for the ladies in their Dionysian rites,
blonde heads all garlanded with flowers:
wine and love and laughter through the night
in constant masque and pageant, constant flight.
The ground below them whispers in a murmur
of passion which is hotter yet than white.
The golden dream, the city of all cities,
its towers piercing into the azure sky,
whose hand is dealt, regardless of all pity:
condemned to martyrdom, but not to die.
Two lovers look up from their hidden bower.
The wine has stood too long and it turns sour.
I see the tall and bending of your streets
but now they echo only leather tourist feet
and waking, ashen, grey-blue blinding death
your sudden winding-sheet.
