Prayer
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Sunlight is the best disinfectant.
—Louis Brandeis

When the sun come back and the first quail calls,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
—Negro Spiritual

Our state—of books, condition, the body politic—
Is disrepaired, or worse, and wanting light to spill
Past veils, the banks of secrecy (chadors, Swiss laws,
And airy fabrication: all the latent bric-a-brac of want), I probe the minor predicated clause,
Some ancient honey fungus, a continental shelf
For aims, designs. The world is tired of itself.

The quires of my childhood Funk & Wagnalls hid
A thousand hours in my home. The sentinel pines
Allowed so little light to illuminate the pages:
Patio candles, a doorknob handkerchief were signs.
A diagram of frontal lobes impaled by Phineas Gage’s
Iron tie. Each entry smelled of mold, of threat.
Outside, my mother lit a secret cigarette.

When mendicant Diogones connected light
And manumitted souls, what did he know of truth?
At twelve, first love at Fort Bend County’s fair
(The bulbs, the dollar bills): I led the line at the kissing booth.
The funhouse mirrors skewed signifier, sign.
In love: the picture couldn’t lie. Not far from there,
The Sunday School rehearsed its “This little light of mine.”

“Three strangers on a road: a priest...” begins the joke,
And Veronese’s painting is the sting where two
Men falling on each other forget the truth: one Jew,
One Gentile in convenient chiaroscuro, and we
Forget the fiction for the fact. Allow me smoke
Signals, the artifice of bone, skin, words: Provide me wind,
O Lord, inconstant and light, a fish, and a friend.

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work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Cincinnati Review, South
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