**VACANZE**

You could not imagine the intimacy
of this heat, the way it wraps your body,
gets up close, leaves you breathless,
or the slap of light as you step out,
a bagatelle of white, ochre, umber.
The elements here are stone and oldness
trapped in alleyways, hidden behind
iron portals; towns that assault you
with angles, a headache of roof tops,
and dizzy tiled mosaics. Biblical vistas,
the snarl of gargoyles, brass grotesques’,
doors out of kilter with walls, balconies

that wait for a Juliet. In restaurants we trade
words while light plays hide and seek and
hospitality extends the boundary of cognition.
We try out names of dishes, slip words around
in our mouths pebble-like. Watch old men
commune double book ended in piazzas,
loquacious yet attentive to the sideshow of youth,
re-visiting cupidity and forgotten moods, trying
them on like unnecessary coats. The lover
kissing the nuzzle of her neck, stroking
the wale of her arching back, steers her away

from hungry eyes into the nightly tempest
of mechanical chorusing. The adolescent
thrust of scooters, swallows screeking
dizzy in their own melodrama, unravelling,
magnetic, lost in the chase and this timed crescendo
of toneless tolling, a stifling blast, overwhelming
like expensive scent. We bathe in cool churches,
Baroque operas of white, gold and plaster saints
cocooned in splendour. Beneath benign Madonnas
someone always kneeling, whispering a rosary,
conversations behind closed doors.