Maids

Can they speak,
be heard
like naiads become
sirens;

Or packing their bags
and spreading their legs in the sun
for a tan,
can they still be children
of saints and God;

And dreaming of life
bettered by yen, rial,
and ringgit,
can they sing
of red and green
turned black they cut into ribbons
of air for their hair;

Can they wash
and tumble their lack and grief
in a foreign air
to dry their soaking back;
and after they stroke the sky,
to say goodbyes, cross
their hearts and pray the Virgin
stand by;
And after all that in the shimmer
of water
and dazzle of sky,
can they bask in pools,
swim, dive, glide, and rising
from depths
of gold and chlorine
gasp
for a tangle of air.
The Firetrees Burn All Summer

In the tropics, the firetrees burn all summer—

The newsboys fanning the air with headlines:
In the West, sex sizzles constitutions and republics;
Nations lose tempers; and minds hitting highs
Spray among evergreens the copper shells.

Firetrees burn, split crimson in the sky,

And smoking out the stampede of fauna,
Turn black the vain bloom of flora.
Radio and TV pronounce the distant grief
Of villages, the despair of the dispossessed,
The red defiance, and obstinate rule of force.

How fire must burn trees, or how trees

Burning do not disgrace fire itself a gift from gods.
If nature articulates havoc to green its jungles,
Seethes and rages to flouresce opals and moonstones,
Will nations likewise, vent steam and wrath to power plants,
Emblazon the face of deserts with petalled smoke.

Still the firetrees burn every summer,

As men kindle passions, pile upon pyre
To fuel old feuds, and turning carnage to pride,
Will sit among the wisdom of the silvered hair,
Confer with the dark decorum of suits and ties
To legislate hatred as corollary to man
Loving the exuberance of tents and cities,
Holding sacred the word of prophets
When the firetrees burn mountains every summer.

In eloquent halls, men like gryphons,
Lions, and eagles convene at banquet tables,
Unfold with grace power like giant wings,
Survey the margins of lands, race, and history
And after charting the expanse of ambitions,
Concur on distances in knots and polite smiles—
The defined latitudes for the state to escalate
Vermilion among those long gone.

Every summer the firetrees burn—

In ancient temples firesticks stabbing ash and sand
Implore the sober and sane benevolence descend,
A golden leaf upon victor and the arrogant dead.
On holy grounds men in purple robes
Divine the unknown will, submit the rose-windows
And incense the aspirations of the dead—
The vain knowledge of hunter and prey in the night sky,

That against the stars the firetrees burn all summer.