

Rinsewater

*Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry  
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam  
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven  
-Richard Wilbur*

Innocence

is round and round in the cellar.  
Clothes drown, wringers roll, rinsewater  
whirlpools until there is nothing but slick  
slides around the side. Outside in light it's up  
and down as bare feet climb a box, so socks can pin  
a day to tree swings and brown bowls won't hold  
even one onion. At night between story sheets,  
innocence waits. Soon, moon-silk lifts  
to lands where bubbles never break.

Imagination

hangs bright clothes in darkness.  
listens to pebbles dance dry creek beds  
with Powhatan. He hunts the sacred paths  
where Algonquian women chant away anger  
with abrasive energy; change it to snow  
and ice. Unborn kicks against an apron,  
ends her fantasy. Inside, laundry frozen  
before pinned, balances on tables. Cold  
sneaks under crooked doors like summer's  
salamander. Lines of diapers flap  
mornings as endless as wind.

Wisdom walks, she wanders.

Dryer's false fragrance forces  
returns to green grass galleries. Up early  
denims, bend knees for healing touches of sun.  
Evenings, a slanted washboard gentles fabric  
with yellow soap, an art old as hands, water

and stones. Outside, whirring moths unwrap  
folded memories. Winter whitens autumn's  
palette; etches crystal window scenes.  
Tired of draped dampness, wisdom  
shoves despair inside a dryer  
and when things are smoothed  
flat, put away, she follows  
a rinsewater river.