

Duck Season

My aunt had a wall with ducks;
a turquoise flock frozen in flight
above a darkly polished potted palm
too dignified for such
a silent and persistent clamour.

But we children flew
around the living room. Past rustling fronds
we'd stretch our wings and sing the ducks
in wild, wan voice

Until we grew up and grew ashamed.

'Oh God, those ducks!' my cousin prayed,
her very gut twisting in exorcism.
Aunty, herself a dear, domestic bird,
took flight for summer. We took to the hunt
armed with good, modern prints,
Aunt raged for the death of ducks
but in the end got used to Braque.

In Cairo once, reaching for the past,
I chanced on antique flight
stilled through millennia, waiting for me -
prised with care from three thousand years
of sand that clogged some dead Egyptian
Aunty's living-room:
one museum fragment, crazed a bit,
but most joyously alive with reeds,
rustling papyrus, and three
tense, turquoise birds flushed from their hide.
They knew me - summoned me with harsh duck cries;
swept me upward into old, pale air.