In 1925 America didn’t drag deep
with shuffling boots.
Wisps of smoke clung to the lips
of women like you,
gripping the nibs of jet-black holders
with their fingers.

Your words crushed men in tides,
with regular patterns and punches.
In sighs,
the short, stiff moisture of breath
licked the paper so the edges curled.

Your hair’s wisps were spit-curled
in the black and white flashes.
I pinned you next to Fitzgerald,
and on my wall each morning
you seem to dissolve him like gin,
warning with slight lips, in mantras
that American women
are composing, and they’re armed,
their sestinas curving to an arch,
the rhythmic iambs they hold
between delicate arms and thighs, whispering now:

We drove the puritans mad—
We are what make Whitman,
and make Ginsberg
absurd,
watching bathers through the blinds of windows,
trailing young men through alleys
in the dark.
(Give me the old, hot forms instead.)

Sometimes off avenues
in smoky cafes with their mouths
luminous, ready to swallow,
I sit and read your books, almost forgetting
this place, my days
knocked stickball down on paper.
Watching a waitress glide between tables,
through the background noises sliding—

through her curls,
your images and effigies.
“The world stands out on either side”
    I'd stroke your hair, your shoulders white
“No wider than the heart is wide”
    you’d breathe me sonnets of delight,
never loosening your forms
from the freedom of movement
found in the drawing
of lips around syllables.