

# PETER COOLEY

## *The Dolls*

Chalk-white in moonlight,  
this house, our children's before dark,  
is almost theirs now  
their eyes say, blinking back  
at my sleeplessness prowling around them.  
Exhibit A: rising underfoot  
a rabbit, the spine cracked  
to stiffen in my step, the rug  
strung out with intestines; B:  
on the windowsill lifting her skirt,  
legs spread wide like her smile  
opening, impenetrable, opening.  
Or C: a thumb extended, hidden  
in philodendrons: an invitation  
to join her? a member severed clean?  
I wander alone here  
turned out, by mummy eyes  
transfixed, by bodies that plastic  
catches in gestures a human  
throws off, moving on, moving.  
Until suddenly I am dancing  
before a mirror with something held up  
in both my fists, my grip  
on the jugular strangling a small cry  
drowned by the voice box—  
dancing the dance they dance,  
static, but stumbling, falling,  
while the others look on,  
witnesses, unmoved.

## *Masques, Thirtieth Birthday*

Old age is the name of each face  
today puts on me, their features close  
where I sink in them, Peter surfacing  
with high tides at the extremities.

Myself at 40: balding, fat,  
a face that snaps his girls  
like flies; 50: the toad complete,  
fly-sodden, faces going down

swelling his girth but still wriggling  
to prick the next decade, alive.  
60: the faces reach my thighs,  
I stagger, run St. Vitus' dance

through whirlpools: calves, knees' quiver,  
garters they fall to, shins,  
ankles, the reflections that I wade  
into my 70's, watching while they rise

shrunk to meet me, rhythms  
of the pond each morning occupies  
where we swim smaller at the mirror,  
this last face I have reached to face him.