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The Mercurial Wheel

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GEOFFREY NUTTER

THE MERCURIAL WHEEL

One type of perpetual motion machine
is the mercurial wheel. Below two turning pivots,
water flows into a cistern, where it shimmers,
clear and still, but the series
of bevels and spirals keep turning.
This machine, however, is imaginary.
It works very well in the realm
where the red flower of opium is carved
in stone or jet above the gatehouse,
a harbinger, perhaps for argonauts,
of things to come. Do you think
scalding emeralds count as money
in that town? That could be. That could be.
But more than likely friends and friends of friends
will see them flowing down a channel,
past a birdbath overflowing with green
and moss-covered water in the overgrown grass,
past Garibaldi, bearded on his plinth
of marble. Does he sheathe or unsheathe
the curving saber? It is both, and neither.
And as the melody coming from the music box
is only a suggestion, it too is mercurial,
with no discernible use. Now let us read
a poem...