In the Silkworm Pavillion, Hirohito 1937

Gail Shepherd
IN THE SILKWORM PAVILION, HIROHITO 1937

Half mortal, half divine, in sleep’s parenthesis
he drifts between worlds. Though old
with the meditative, figured inwardness
of Bodhisattvas whose gold-

leaf grounds are dust
beneath the rub of acolyte’s prayer
and tourist flash, he’s just
thirty-six. In the mulberry-scented air

the silkworm spins
a mile and a half of moiré
from a belly’s worthless crystallines:
the larva eats itself away

when trussed, and once the skein’s unwound,
resolves to a half formed wing
or crude mandible still bound
to the fractured thing

which gave it form. Thus undressed
in the silk-weaver’s palm, the lines
between monstrous and blessed
dissolve. Now, like airborne valentines,

the game survivors ascend through potted trees
to paste themselves flat where hothouse
and heaven separate: brittle congeries
of paper hearts. And only rouse

to spawn and die. Elsewhere the dead
litter the ground where a burning zeppelin thrashes
earthbound for prophesy. Around his dreaming head
pale wings flutter like ashes.