

DECADENCE  
or  
FANTAISIE D'HIVER

Harp  
polished wood curved in a bold  
gracious salute against a screen  
where silk-embroidered peacocks  
balance  
on angular feet  
their starry-eyed sweep  
of gorgeousness

and curling chrysanthemum flames  
flower  
in a delicately bulged wrought-iron grate

vibrant with shivers of warmth  
as the strings of the harp  
shimmer with strange arpeggios.

Pizzicato passages pluck at the ear.  
A smell of resin lingers on the air.

Flames crackle  
on the dark window panes  
unquenched  
by ice-flower flakes of snow.

The harp is silent.  
Ash sifts to silken nothingness  
below the grate.

— Elizabeth Jones