

MATRIARCH

Albert W. Dowling

On this crumbling terrace
 (with the neatswept bricks)
Tea is timed
Precisely as the thin lemon
And the slivers of bread and spartan butter

Grandmother in graying silk pours
Opinion as well as oolong
For her brood, the text of the hour
As usual the pitfalls of "progress"

"Regrettable!"

The spoons are only coin silver
Old and unaccountably bent,
But it's the way of using them that matters
And the ritualized hour

One cup is cracked, others crazed
But nothing past is discarded:
 ("You do not buy Spode;
 You have it.")

The family listens to her words
As familiar as the cameo brooch
And slowly sip, wishing for sugar
But not daring

Any afternoon in this her court
Grandmother presides
Balancing weak tea
With strong power and iron will

The world remains
Outside