

Coffee with Maria

Bet you a yankee dime, Jose said,
that you can't do it,
bet you can't. I'll give you a day.

Well, I thought,
to refuse when so provoked
would be a crime,
but at first and at last it seemed
more likely that he'd win.

I'm no good at this, I thought
but in time the very obvious words
did occur to me
but none would, could or should
chime as it might with the original
in the spirit of my task.

Which ones?
Lime? OK, yes, perhaps,
but like all the others
perhaps still too obvious
and so a word that would
barely survive any nuance test.

I slept on it and woke to cold and a frost

the world covered in a slight
rime (and don't think
that irony did not hit home)

Later, across the street from her balcony
to me on mine, Maria began
her almost daily mime
of putting to her lips a virtual cup
and drinking. Coffee? Now?
Anything, I thought, anything.

We met at Silvio's and I told her
how I was about to lose a bet.
Who cares, she said, who cares.
You men, she said, you men,
you lose yourselves in triviality
and don't notice that the world
is moving on.
Who cares.

But I do, I thought, I do, I care.
though I didn't tell her and risk
her further woman's scorn
(too much for any man to bear).

Ah, Jose would understand
when I told him I'd failed.

He was a fellow man,
and though he would crow, boast
and remind I had lost
and he had won,
he would, at least, understand.

So much for coffee with Maria.