Winter will bar the swimmer soon.
He reads the water’s autumnal hesitations
A wealth of ways: it is jarred,
It is astir already despite its steadiness,
Where the first leaves at the first
Tremor of the morning air have dropped
Anticipating him, launching their imprints
Outwards in eccentric, overlapping circles.
There is a geometry of water, for this
Squares off the clouds’ redundances
And sets them floating in a nether atmosphere
All angles and elongations: every tree
Appears a cypress as it stretches there
And every bush that shows the season,
A shaft of fire. It is a geometry and not
A fantasia of distorting forms, but each
Liquid variation answerable to the theme
It makes away from, plays before:
It is a consistency, the grain of the pulsating flow.
But he has looked long enough, and now
Body must recall the eye to its dependence
As he scissors the waterscape apart
And sways it to tatters. Its coldness
Holding him to itself, he grants the grasp,
For to swim is also to take hold
On water’s meaning, to move in its embrace
And to be, between grasp and grasping, free.
He reaches in-and-through to that space
The body is heir to, making a where
In water, a possession to be relinquished
Willingly at each stroke. The image he has torn
Flows-to behind him, healing itself,
Lifting and lengthening, splayed like the feathers
Down an immense wing whose darkening spread
Shadows his solitariness: alone, he is unnamed
By this baptism, where only Chenango bears a name
In a lost language he begins to construe —
A speech of densities and derisions, of half-
Replies to the questions his body must frame
Frogwise across the all but penetrable element.
Human, he fronts it and, human, he draws back
From the interior cold, the mercilessness
That yet shows a kind of mercy sustaining him.
The last sun of the year is drying his skin
Above a surface a mere mosaic of tiny shatterings,
Where a wind is unscaping all images in the flowing obsidian,
The going-elsewhere of ripples incessantly shaping.