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The Present

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THE PRESENT

I look at the water and the rushes
of an arm of the river and at the sun
inside the water.

I looked, I was, but I am.
The mud dries between the roots.
My verb is in the present.
This world remaining after conflagrations
wants to exist.

Insects make
traps millennia long.
Ephemera vanish. They go out
impressed upon the gentle breeze of Arcady.
A boat crosses the river.
It is a servant of Bishop Baudo.
He passes the straw of a hut
defoliated under many moons.
I pronounce my ironical law
to the leaves that rustle, to the stag beetle's
nervy flight.
I confide to the would-be eternal rushes
the grand strategy from Yen-an to Hopei.
I follow the sign of an armed hand incising
the pine's bark
and prepare the amber fire in which I shall be visible.

translated by
Michael Hamburger