

Encounter

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The Card-Trick

Fifty-two cards have taken the place of life.
 Fifty-two amulets of painted cardboard
 have gently conspired to replace
 the great primordial reality
 of sufferings and pleasures of the flesh,
 and this smiling new creation
 goes to work peopling the stolen time
 with all the dazzling primitive deceptions
 of its tyrannical mythology.
 Along the edges of the card-table,
 life stops short. Within is another country—
 all the excitement of bidding and of wishing,
 the ace of spades, powerful as Don Juan Manuel,
 the seven of diamonds jingling our hopes.
 A lazy slowness settles on all talk,
 old words go slithering down the well-known slopes
 and, like the ups and downs of the game itself,
 are everlastingly the same. The players
 in the immediate fever of the moment
 take some unlikely tricks—an accomplishment
 which lends a touch of immortality
 (though scarcely more than a touch)
 to all their dead companions in the silence.

translated by Alastair Reid