

*Woman in a Rose Hat*

*after a photograph by Diane Arbus*

The drawstring of her mouth  
pulled tight against pickpockets,  
leaving tiny accents  
of pain around her lips,  
she knows what thieves might take  
from this moment of exposure,  
the pouches of her face  
emptied of their cherished contents,  
her vanity laid bare. The armored wings  
of her glasses launch against attack  
but can't defend the furrows  
where pity gathers darkly  
like water after rain,  
can't contain the one stray eye  
trailing off like a runaway ball  
into a stranger's hands. Around her head  
she feels the rummaging  
of fingers on her halo,  
each rustling blown-up blossom  
a flowering of gall  
and ugliness turned outward  
in the face of all who fondle  
what they can't comprehend.  
This is her crowning glory:  
not the hat, but the cowboy  
perseverance sucking in her cheeks,  
the smile bearing down  
in the corners of the frown,  
saying there are shoes  
to match this old bag.