

King Cake

“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” ~Matthew 2: 18

*Bolo de rey, roscón, gâteau des Rois: what it is,
beneath the yeasty braid and its thick seal of sugar*

*in tie-dye colors (swirls of purple, golden yellow, green
sugar sprinkles), is that one wish buried in the bread:*

*not the plastic or resin molded baby, not even the truth
that three men from the east rode into the darkened world*

*to find because the signs, day after day more impossible
to deny—fish growing two heads in oily waters, birds*

*denouncing the light that crowns each season differently,
all nature out of kilter—were pointing toward coming*

*change. Who would not wish for understanding? At least,
some language to assuage those who’ve cried and shred*

*their sorrows’ garments, gathering up their slaughtered
children in their arms? In Tintoretto’s *Massacre of Innocents*,*

*the frenzied bodies writhe beneath the rust-red capes of soldiers.
In Giotto, the surfaces are flatter, the colors more matte, the dead*

*already dead, like a carpet underfoot, indifferent to the bickering
and power play. Whatever star may have flickered, celestial*

as some beacon of peace, has melted: run into the pavement's cracks,
syrupy as blood gritty with residues of salt. And why think of kings

and cakes, of prophecies gone stale? What will you do
if your mouth closes around the trinket glazed with sugar?

The baker punched the dough and pulled it into a ring, but yeast
was thrown into the milk hours ago. All rise, and rise together.

Carnival, Mardi Gras, Shrove Tuesday; sack cloth, ashes, penitence,
confession upon the heels of what we could not bear to see: epiphany.