

## MIRRORS AND ARCHIBALD GEORGE BARNES'S *CONTEMPLATION* ●

Kelly R. Samuels

Never a mirror you bought yourself.  
This one, now: round with etching  
and a flaw just left of your left eye.  
Given and hung by others.

And the first: inherited, fixed  
in the three-drawer dresser  
with its curves, those you fit your back into  
as you sat and read, the heat  
from the floor register reddening  
your thighs.

And all those in the middle years,  
if we are to break this up  
into stages, as if you are an artist.  
Those in the rentals, cheap  
and thin, the glass not even glass.  
That space where it wavered, and you briefly believed  
in ghosts, spirits that dropped by,  
floating, clamoring to be seen.

The one hung on the back of the bedroom door that fell  
and splintered that time.

Even the handheld, the one made of pewter.  
Heavy and dull. A present, this, after.  
As if he were saying: *Go ahead,  
take a good close look at yourself.*

Here she is, contemplating something.  
Her hands at her hip, weary.  
She's not smiling, but who does looking  
in a mirror? You've never known anyone – all those girls

leaning forward over the sinks in the dorm.

It's a plain enough tabletop mirror,  
certainly not one she chose. Her mother, probably.  
Or part of the furnished flat.

And, so, we have this in common.  
And how we sometimes  
just gaze – not out of vanity. No busyness, no plucking  
and application. No admiration.  
Nothing but a good long steady stare,  
trying to figure out something,  
trying to understand.

All these mirrors not really our own.