

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

*Jeff Schiff*

**Buying Broccoli from the Wretched**

Even in the day's last head propped  
against celery root

there is no eminence  
to cauliflower

no mitigation in skillfully mounded  
custard apples

nor social recompense to fennel  
guarding cress

abutting endive  
framed by leeks and edible thistle

in the stalled and sawdusted *frutería*  
at the bottom of *cerro Panteon*

To tell you her contempt is vegetal and autochthonous  
corrupts us

both  
To imagine the lumpen are saved...

the same  
I have come to *Plazuela Ecuador* to buy broccoli

midsummer on the coast of Chile  
for *Brassica* for sulforaphane

If I must I will settle for the disdain of kohlrabi  
for a fist of tarnished kale

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### The Guilt of Grace

It's the third world

    It's aftershock temblor

        big shake city

couple of hundred clicks

    & a week

        from epicenter

streetscape

    three guys ubiquitous

        on rope scaffolds

hewing buildings apart

    the clawside of a hammer

        an *obrero* named Donde

shirtsleeved prybar & thermos

    a ruptured main

        kettles of hoisted adobe

the trolleybus sizzling down *Colon*

    I sidestep wheelbarrows

        skirt plummeted plaster

& plummeting still

    the guilt of grace

        gnawing its fretwork

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its malignancy

A sister is eating *humitas*

a sister is eating *hallullahs*

The sun is arrogant

The Monkey Puzzle conifer is arrogant

Viva Chile *mierda*

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### They Burn Judas Here

crammed with excelsior  
manured straw with coins  
for effect rolled fireworks

You can for a dime *Semana Santa*  
relieve yourself in a hilly plaza  
lynch your sins

within steeple shadow  
50 pesos local  
tinked into a grease can

There but for vicarious atonement  
go I  
proper neighbor

tourist interloper  
Coveralled  
draped in sackcloth

pegged jeans blousy  
they dangle  
their clothesline recompense

head or neck  
hoisted under monstrous arms  
made to order effigies

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strung from cedar

from monkey puzzle pine

Every onlooker a deputized apostle

shufflefooting

slanderous

driven by a covetous heart

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### Travel Semantics

*after Count Alfred Korzybski*

The fig is not my urgency to coauthor its sweetness  
blunt sun light wind  
staggered drying screens

The Carménère is not the *phylloxera*  
that felled the noble grape  
that once again melts the gouda

that is the gluttony  
that butters my tannic mouth  
last night Chilean colloquy

imminent leavetaking  
The bus station is not the vendored hallway  
milksteam sugarclumps

kneebend coffee service  
The bus is not the radio funk  
rank air boxed lunch switchback machismo

The border is not the jittery queue  
Andean meadow  
gunned checkpoint

jackboots buzzcuts  
passport check contraband fruit  
The cab driver is not my innate trust

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back seat left duffel camera fenny day  
kiosk dash for suitable change  
My Argentine apartment

is not the poem  
that rises beside the pears  
that prop and ripen

arm's length blue bowl  
satiety in the offing  
The map is not the territory