

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

*Joseph A. Cohen*

### **Cambridge Near the Charles**

I stare with wonderment  
at the newness of the old.  
Church spires pierce the sky  
wherever my eyes wander.  
Ancient cemeteries lie silent  
on ever so many green fields.  
Graceful wooden homes line the streets  
as they brave the rain, snow and the cold.  
With steely determination,  
grim joggers pound city streets.  
Droves of college students fill the  
town with joyful chatter and laughter.  
Eateries with menus from 'round  
the world are common and plentiful.  
Home to sports, women, no less  
than menfolk, root with wild passion.  
Very much a mecca for high-level education,  
medicine, scientific research, it is great to  
live in a community so ripe with ideas.  
Lectures, poetry readings, concerts  
of all kinds ring out from corner to corner.  
I reside in a garden that reflects the highest in creativity.

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### I Promised to Write

Waving adieu from the bus window,  
I pledge to write daily.  
How was I to know that daily  
was to be for three whole years.

War swept me overseas  
into holes of mud and clay.  
Fear of the unknown unsettled  
and scattered my thoughts.

Here was no spacious and gracious  
desk to write on.  
With only stubby pencils to use,  
I wrote on scraps stained by the earth,  
dyed by green grass.

The beat of thunderous gunfire  
tapped a somber cadence  
as words formed for the V mail.

The old world was fresh to my eyes.  
Olive and fruit trees bent low  
by the weight of luxuriant yields.  
Farms, fences, foliage  
lay in pastoral settings.

From afar, words served poorly.  
Amatory moods can best be woven  
by presence.  
Colors and hues of dawns and sunsets  
fill the pages with painterly images.  
Always, intimacy and passion  
are chilled by censors scanning the mail.

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The first letter was written on a  
ship pointed east,  
the last on one headed west.

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### The Plague

Like the tribes of Israel crossing the desert,  
I work in the sun in North Africa,  
baking on a sand dune.  
Coming from the south,  
a black cloud approaches.  
It billows, travels speedily, hugging the earth.

Is this a biblical tableau  
unfolding like a nightmare?  
Within minutes it envelops me  
and everything about me.  
Droning, whistling and buzzing,  
millions of locusts eat anything edible.  
They shield the earth from the sun  
much like an eclipse..

As children in Brooklyn, we caught  
innocent grasshoppers in empty lots.  
But these were larger, relentlessly driven  
by an invisible energy.

Soon, darkness turns into light.  
The deluge rises, heads north.  
Dazed, I return to my tasks  
working in a staging area,  
waiting for orders to go to the front.

Quiet falls upon the land,  
nothing left but metal and wood.