

6 Poems by Stanley H. Barkan

L'ANTICA FILANDA

*The restaurant of the gods
(for Nat Scammacca)*

When the ancient gods,
Zeus & Hermes,
tired of their daily fare
of ambrosia & nectar,
decided to descend from Olympus
to seek a restaurant that might
prepare some enticements,
comparable but different,
they came to L'Antica Filanda
in Galati Mamertino.
And after homemade bread,
quattro antipasti,
piatto primo e secondo,
coniglio e agnello
—each dish with its own wine—
semifreddo di pistacchio dell'Etna,
tortino di cioccolato,
they refused to leave.
They kept eating & eating
and drinking & drinking
and eating & eating,
demanding, “More!” and “More!”
until an uproar arose on Olympus
demanding their return—
Chaos was reigning,
Eris was wreaking her discord,
people, who were seeking
the intervention of the gods,
found their supplications
going completely unanswered.
Finally, with genuine concern

for Humanity and not a little pity
for the gods themselves,
the cook at L'Antica Filanda
agreed to go up to Olympus
to cook there for a time and
to teach the cook of the gods
the specialties and secrets of L'Antica Filanda.
And that is how the ancient gods
continued to reign on Olympus for a time . . .
that is, until their cook died.

*June 1, 2000, Galati Mamertino,
prov. di Messina, Sicilia, Italia*

IN THE CASUZZA

(1 June 2000, Castel di Tusa)

Dusk.
He is tired.
All day
he has harvested
from the vineyards.

The grapes
are fat with
sugar of the sun,
the baskets
full with sprigs.

A slight wind
blows down
from the mountain
in the distance,
the vines
gently sway.

The sun peeks
from the top

of the mountain.
A cloud shifts,
the sun streams
into the cavern
of the casuzza.

He picks a piece
of bread,
a small bottle,
some black olives,
and a ball of cheese.

He cuts the bread,
a piece of cheese,
fills his mouth.

He downs
a large swallow
of the red wine.
He bites
three black olives
in slow succession,
spitting out the pits.

The sun drops
below the mountain peak.
The wind blows harder.
The sound of insects
fills the space of the casuzza.

He remembers
his wife
bringing him
fava beans,
hot soup,
fresh bread,
his son
swaddled
under her arms,
her face burnt olive

by the sun & wind.

He takes
another drink,
another bite
of cheese & bread,
two more olives.

The insects drowse,
as he nods off ...

THE ALLEYS OF CEFALÙ

So narrow
I have to turn
sideways to pass . . .

Towels, dresses, stockings
hang from balconies overhead,
the sea just beyond
the edge of archway,
a woman & her child
step out of a hidden doorway.

Shadows and sunrays . . .

Passing through,
down steep steps,
the varied stone floor,
mosaics, ancient walls . . .

A fountain offers water
to wet the dryness.
Flowers cover windowsills,
plants form foliage in the alcoves.

No sound disturbs the passage . . .

Only eyes are amazed at the profusion
of so much in so small a space—
the alleys of Cefalù.

(1 June 2000, Castel di Tusa)

TEQUILA

(13 August 2008, for Tasha)

She opens the birthday card,
which immediately begins to play
Tito Puente's "Tequila."
She starts to shake and shimmy
to the Latin rhythms.

Her four-year-old smallness
turns the living room
into a rattan-furnished cabana
where brass horns blare
under slow-turning ceiling fans.

Time slides
into a passage
across archipelagos,
faraway islands,
and long-lost eras.

It's the time of
the hot tropic nights,
the swaying of palm trees
in the trade winds,
the whistle of the coquí.

Dark-eyed beauties
with long black tresses
lurch backwards, forwards,
tossed up and down—

a mambo of motion.

She is just a little girl,
but she recalls
what used to be
and foretells
what is yet to come.

BABBALUCI

Gathering the stalks
of wild babbaluci

sprouting out of the rim
of hills where temples

and amphitheatres
signify the ancient days

when a simple people
climbed out of the valleys

to find the wind
to touch the source.

Now we stand
like thistles amid the snails

the conic shells
spiraling around the peaks,

wondering the how and why
of the rise and fall.

THE GIRL WITH THE BLUE GUITAR

for Tasha, after Wallace Stevens

Tasha plays her blue guitar,
Cool notes from an inner star.

Long hair glistens with twilight rays,
As fingers pluck the strings she plays.

Once trapped inside the mason jar
Lured by tunes of the blue guitar,

Out of the wood, the fairies fly
To greet the sounds that make them sigh.

Like the unicorn's mythic dream.
Her chords flow in a crystal stream.

Tasha smiles and swirls while she sings
As she plucks the guitar strings.

This is music from deep heart's core,
Never, ever, played before.

Hear the girl with the blue guitar
Solve the riddle of why we are.

(18 December 2012)

