

TERRANCE COX

After Olive Picking

Devout, on knees, raw-knuckled, down
in mud of Jifna, I am—
foreign hand to local harvest—
a gleaner of fallen olives

Exultant up, at daybreak, ladder,
fingers to task & basket,
plucking zeitoon, I was
inept—snap off, ready or not

Back to earth brought by
patriarch of grove's urgent
exhortatives that little
need translation, I assume
assigned lesser role, alongside
aged aunts & toddlers,
crawl on all fours as
we, for hours, winnow windfalls

From low new vantage, I lose
any high romantic
notions vis-à-vis the olive
harvest in your holy land
tote no further mystic
burden for fruited groves
for gnarled arthritic trees,
their roots in hallowed muck

Yea, tho in the valley of Jifna
grows wizen yet bounteous
this legacy of forebears who
tasted not its flesh nor zeit

I do not give a good goddamn,
less than zero care how many
begats of begats here have
gathered these olives before us

I will not stoop to palm off
late in this poem an easy
metaphor so close to hand
that ripeness is all

I reap no numinous symbols—
in drizzle, with backache, wincing
rise up, apostatic
stand not slightest in awe