**On History**

*Ein Karem, Jerusalem*

A plentiful thing. With it we water

what remains of these and other places,

two churches, sun-scorched, and a tall steeple

where the mosque stood. A dirt path embraces

each holy site, skirts considerately

the artists’ village, hill-side bungalows

where some, arriving poor from the city

have settled for more. Come summer, the rows

of peony will hide these well. For now

we see the red roofs’ clamour at each tower,

spelling trouble. The cold brings, with its swifts

and blackcaps, other migratory threats.

An odd rebuke, neighbours given short shrift –

nothing so flammable as death or debt –

merely the slow heat of companionship

stretched across quiet months. As days begin

to grow and then meld we start to let slip

small kindnesses, our tempers lengthening

while travellers return to gather round,

in their flagged groups, the historical grounds

and take pictures. Passing over the signs

of such wonders as these: prayer’s still shared hour,

the shade of white brick, grapes thick on the vines,

our gardens, planted long enough to flower.

We fold winter away. Remind the men

to line the streets with stalls, decked full of plump

unseasonal fruit, whole crates plucked by hand

outside other walled cities. As they come

in their strange pilgrim way, to see and hear

from afar what’s past, and presently here.