

Last night on Mount Zion

what were we thinking when we clambered up
above the synagogue beside Dormition church
to a roof that sloped through history? Still flimsy
and white, in a pomegranate sky, the moon
was growing over domes and minarets and spires.
It was the eve of *Tu B'Av's* holiday of love. Like children

on a picnic, we'd come to pray: maybe thirty, or so,
chittering grey heads, sombre young, an English Methodist,
a tubby side-curved man in black fedora, a mum of four
in purple hijab, a bony brown-robed monk,
Subcontinental clerics, and the rest of us, led
by a twirling-skirted woman in flat-heeled shoes

with the bouncy cheer of a kindergarten teacher.
The abbey bells reverberated in our chests, so rocked
around the yellow limestone walls that David in his tomb
below might well have stirred. (He'd have had a soldier's
interest in the days' events: of mortars fired over Gaza,
of Golan's ruptured peace accord; he'd have understood

how tempers fray, but not foreseen this would be so near
Rachel's Tomb; and he'd know - too well - how men
might conjure murder in god's name.) What did we
imagine we'd achieve when friends from Hebron on
makeshift rugs bowed towards Mecca, raised open hands
in their *Takbir Allahu*, observed *Rak'ha*? Or when others

turned towards the Temple site to chant their *Aleinu*?
Or others, towards the setting sun, sang a gospel
spiritual somewhat out-of-tune? Had David heard,
his fingers might have tapped the rhythms of exuberance
but winced, at New World renderings of a psalm.
What did we hope for, together in a circle passing goodwill

hand to hand? What did we think when from below,
a band began to play? The courtyard wailed with Klezmer
strings and wind and keyboard. The abbey bells
arc-ed through our soles, rang metal in our skulls.
The moon by now had let her gold soprano loose.
So, there we were,

haunted by old East Europe in lament amid
jingle-jangle tambourines, clapping, chanting,
leather sandals' click-slip-click on stone,
and the ricochet of clanging steel, against
distant sirens, car horns' arrhythmic syncopation
in a circle on a roof upon Mount Zion wanting peace.

What could any person's god hear through that din?
Not much, it seems, for when we woke this morning,
there were no surprises: only news of Syrian rockets
splashing down in Galilee. Of disturbances again
at Temple Mount. Of a fifteen-year-old Arab boy
lying in Beit Jala's morgue.

Still, tonight, we'll come again to Jaffa Gate. We'll make
our motley way along the slippery limestone flagging,
grasp the rusted rail to climb the steps and take
our place for evening prayer upon the roof. We know
we will not change things, (though we might hope).
We do this, not to change the world, but so as

not to change ourselves... We'll sing. We'll dance.
We'll greet each other, face to face, by name. Earth,
metal, fire, stone and wood: it's flesh that brings us here
to assure ourselves we're not impotent nor pawns, nor
complicit in the carnage; that we are decent folk in deed,
and song, dance, fellowship can stand for something

more – I'll take the hand, so like my father's
stiff old farmer's-hand, of Abu from near Hebron and he
will smile and tell me that he knows me from some other place
as sun sets in the gullies life has carved into his face.
Against phosphorus, fire and mortars ours a feint manoeuvre.
Yet in its frail resistance, it brings some comfort.