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First Prize Winner

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Restoration Triptych

The buttress leans against the scaffold, breathless,
Flying its last mission unsupported through the ages,
And the gargoyles tense above the masons' blades,
Their haunches flexed, and undecided still,
Pondering the leap of faith required
To bridge the centuries or return to earth.
The bell tower now is silent save for birdsong
And for scholding, as the hammers ring
In service of a reconstructed nave.

Uncobbling the ancient arteries of their neglected town,
A medieval wheel of radiant spokes staved almost to the hub,
Repiping life with fiber optic nerves, with water, gas, electric,
Ancestral city fathers gird the streets and grid the town,
Retrofitting custom to convention, hardening targets, multi-
Lingually labelling photo importunities, returning to the future
All the idols and the alleys of the guilds. The workers tile
And spackle, sift and dig and haul and hose,
Laboring to enchrism these weird ways with honest sweat.

Images glimpsed through the sooty windows of a speeding train,
Or savored on an aimless solitary stroll
Of embraced places, distant times and strangers,
Revisit me as often I do them.
I balance lightly on the couch prepared to root and scared to fly
And lift again that silent spade with once rough hands gone soft,
Determined to unearth and to inter a calloused soul,
To undermine, to tunnel out, to backfill and to plant.

Too Far Afield

I held a child's voice
Against an ocean,
And wondering too late
If it were mine,
Released it dumbly to a
Foreign wind.
Alone he was, and not,
Yet could not fathom
Such dark distance as must
Pass before we meet.



Local Custom [Field Journal/Amsterdam Station]

At last the rain relents.

Sunlight warms the bridge rails
And the smell of sweat and sausages,
Of diesel fumes and cold canals
Is wafted into town on measured gusts.

A ragged band of unwashed foreign boys,
A fluid claue of banter and percussion,
The very occidental tourist becomes

An accidental terrorist
Safeguarded by a bungling host.

Exchanging currency as they embody it,
They mount a raucous randy quest
For guilder bags and golden arches.

As life unfolds, Imbaya Kuna trill
Andean tunes outside the station,
Lilt and shill, accompany hawked tapes,
And dare ethnographers to record

The truth of this Dutch treat.

Market day
(photo by John Sherry).

