



Isabel Zuber, photo by Elizabeth Zuber

Isabel Zuber

Guided, a Path

My fields, he said, my land
and increase for my kind,
flung his arms over rows and rows
of autumn gathering
under a sharp, clear sky,

but the downward beckoned.
When someone waved in silence
from the edge of the woods
he went to see, following
the bare curved track

through yellowed stubble
into forest, into soundless dark
and then, seduced, he never stopped,
not even when leaves,
trees, branches, light

all vanished and
she came in gold
bearing a cradle
under a silken weaving
of webbed and circling flowers.

Lifting a corner, the golden beast
showed him the infant curled
inside, small, glowing, no
shape he could name
and yet he knew

contained therein
was all he had ever been
and all that he would be again
and that everything
every thing is kin.

Bane and Simples

A current physic
curses me, administered
without trial, insight,

for recovery or else.
I war among prescriptions,
tear off labels, jumble

pills. It doesn't matter.
Some remedy or other
will seek me. I can't hide.

Old practitioner,
wherever you believe,
is cure there? In plant,

dull bone, grass,
hank of hair, a touch,
the outlawed prayer?

They

After we had destroyed them all
we came to worship their art,
would sit for hours in conquered, fretted
doorways to watch the play of fountains
on paved courtyards, fondling the while
those carved stone dogs. We wrapped ourselves
in sinuous robes of a fabric we could
not name, hid our rough invaders' faces
behind bland masks with narrow plucked brows.
The smoke of pipes polished as water
curled from our nostrils. We drank
the bitterest, the most severe of all
their remedies, forgot our own memories.
Flute, drums moved our bodies in dances
we never made and in time we prayed
to the very gods who could not save them.

When the Queen

When the queen hurried to
the garden to plead for
her life her judges were

nearly assembled, a
cold stone whetting an edge.
Heads of tall gaudy gay

dahlia's nodded beside
the thyme-scented path. By
stifling then a private

theology she put
hand to her embroidered
heart, swore eternal faith,

and spoke so fair she saved
herself while her soul shrank
to the size of a fine

silver thimble. Something,
she thought, almost that small
could hold all of her blood.

Isabel Zuber was born and grew up in Boone. She lives in Winston-Salem, was a librarian at Wake Forest University for many years, and is now writing full time.

Her poetry and short fiction have appeared in a number of literary magazines, including The American Voice, Poetry, Now & Then, Pembroke Magazine, Shenandoah, and The Southern Review. Some of her prizes include the North Carolina Writers' Network's annual Randall Jarrell/Harperprints chapbook award, the Lee Smith Award for Fiction from the Appalachian Writers Association, the University of Tennessee Press prize for short story, and a Forsyth County Arts Council grant. She was selected as one of the readers in the North Carolina Writers' Network's Blumenthal Writers & Readers series. Her poetry collections are Oriflamb and Winter's Exile and her novel, Salt, was published by Picador USA. Salt was selected in 2003 for Virginia Commonwealth University's First Novel award, which is presented as part of the James River Literary Festival in Richmond. She was one of the guest readers at the Eudora Welty Writers Symposium at Miss Welty's alma mater in Mississippi and will give a reading as part of

the Hughlene Bostian Frank Visiting Writers Series at Appalachian State University in March.