Ode to Langston Hughes
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Joe's Friend David

In a dirty yellow chair
In a yellowing room
Wearing yellow teeth
in the kindest sinister grin—
David sits with his knees like docks stretching
across the rug.

"Tea?"
And we
accept,
reluctantly,
drinking fish water.

We speak of more books than his shelves show,
of horses, art, France,
and relatives meditating.

We linger in the cat-hair sofa.
David rinses our glasses and wipes them with a
gray rag.
He shows me his green teaching certificate stored
on the back of a frame.

His speckled pants and painted sleeves,
the house reeking with paint thinner,
and even the artist is unable to decipher
his painting—
Which woman is the one reaching for the hem
of Jesus' garment?

—Rebecca Barnes

Rebecca Barnes lives in Louisville, Kentucky, where she
writes poetry and contributes features to The Southeast
Outlook. She is working on a first novel.

Ode to Gnats

What is it with gnats and merlot,
gnats and zinfandel?

Gnats often bath
on the mirrored surface
of my late-afternoon glass of tranquility.

Some gnats are partial
to the occasional tawny summer chardonnay,
no harm there.

Who'd stop them?

When you think about it,
who wouldn't want to backstroke
on a maroon lake,
on a reflection of maples
rippling their tiny black webs
to keep you from drowning?

—Alan Britt

Ode to Langston Hughes

You gotta understand,
that's how he lived,
perhaps the first Beat
to strut the sidewalks
of Harlem.

Well, there was Whitman,
then Lorca came along.

But Langston always saw something unique
in a blindfolded world
that tormented him so.

His poems were rubies
smashed against the wall of fate
in a bigoted crap game.

His voice was a crow
stuffed in the silk breast pocket
of misery.

His poems were shards
of blood splattered
all over the huge, white hands
of America.

—Alan Britt

Alan Britt teaches English at Towson University and
Goucher College in suburban Baltimore. He is a
poet-in-residence for the Maryland State Arts Council.