PETER WILD

Lewis and Clark

Here I am again in the little house
    with its pots and pans still jumbled in the kitchen
behind the Mormon church, righteousness
rising up across the alley from our patch of desert,
a skyscraper blocking our view of the granitic Catalinas.

all day putting things away,
taking them down again,
I can hear him, sitting mouth agape
painting in his studio while in the huge window
the finches come to crack the seeds he throws out
and the thin cactuses writhe thinner in the heat,
the sputtering candles he puts into his paintings
with the finches, fresh leaping hearts at their bases,
hanging in every room of this pink adobe
    house with the sloping, dissolving walls.

it might as well be Ft. Dix
twenty years ago, tossed across the Atlantic
to be mustered out at last like Jonah
and stand bewildered, saved but marooned
before a whole continent of grizzlies and dancing girls,

to do what Lewis and Clark did,
starved, lost for years, but steady, writing it all down
as best they could, making sense for Jefferson
    the clinician, the flashes of an earthly kingdom,
or what they did, houses burned, their raped
women bleeding on the snow behind them
as they escaped from Nauvoo, then gritting their teeth crossed
the sandy, innumerable rivers to make the deserts indeed bloom
among the mirages, using that pain
    to grow a heaven all around waiting
for them in death, just beyond their fingertips,
where they stand arms akimbo on their glass planets
watching for their children still in their nightclothes
    to shoot up, fall down, worship them.