

DAVID SAPP

OAK LEAVES

The few oak leaves which,
just yesterday, escaped
the rake, lay prone
on the grass, outstretched
supplicants, cloaked in the bronze
and crimson vestments of Autumn,
and plead to the wind:
“Give me a pilgrimage!”
Their kin still cling
to treetops just as a few
over-ripe red apples do
in their barren haven,
and will stubbornly huddle
there, denying the transient,
the inevitable, immutable
in their high tower, buffeted
by the ice, battered
by petulant arctic tempests.
Their brothers, in whirling
gusts, let go and roamed
beyond the fence row,
creek and ravine to distant,
exotic lands. Now
suddenly, where each leaf
should or should not go,
to stay or stray,
is all for naught as
the sky hurls the first snows
of winter, hushing all aspirants
in a thick mantle of silence.

TWO BUDDHA

One hundred miles west
of Kabul once stood two
colossal Buddha cut into
sandstone cliff when the slow,
careening caravans of cloth, spices,
opium, wine, and coin passed
below on the Silk Road; when
the sun was not too harsh, the pilgrims
looked up, overwhelmed, and carried
the Buddha's gaze to China.

So far from India, so far from
the *Bo Tree at Gaya*,
the monks who carved the icons,
the beloved, hollowed out of niches
and abided beside the still ones,
tending to their whims.
And in our time, the refugees
of war who sought solace there,
puzzled at the frescos of angels
painted above their heads.

When the Taliban, when
Mullah Mohammad Omar decreed
the false idols destroyed, explosions
flung serene smiles into space;
the sacred returned to the infinite
grains of sand. The Buddha, now
more than two at your feet,
sift swiftly through the fingers.
All that's left are empty silhouettes,
shadows in the rock face.

From nations, scholars, and the devout
arose and outcry. "Why?"
But at last, after fifteen centuries,
the Buddha, red in the face, laughs
a big belly laugh; tears squirt
from his eyes, and after he slaps
his thigh and catches his breath
shouts out: "*Anitya!*"
"Perfect timing!"

