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Special to this issue:

*An interview with poet Rob Cook
& a selection from his current work*

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ORANGES: SICILIA

A rustling of crickets fills the hillside. The young man returns to his small town in Sicily to see his mother, after a long absence. They proclaim the names of places and foods as if they had a magical power: “Oranges...bread...oil...” She places an empty plate on a table in front of him, then a glass of red wine, a clay pitcher, a precious round melon brought down from its storage place in the attic.

The son and the mother face away, declaiming their memories to the walls and windows.

The mother’s face is rock-hard, like the side of a mountain. She tells her grown son how it felt to give birth, how she goaded her weak-willed husband into helping with the birthing. Years later, she offered herself to a travelling soldier returning from the war, her lover for awhile.

An old woman. A slab of bread on the table,

And all the while, the sizzling sound of a herring cooking over a flame. A son’s return after a long absence.

Oranges...bread...oil...

(Sicilia [France/Italy, 1999, directed by Jean-Marie Straub, Daniele Huillet, inspired by Elio Vittorini’s *Conversations in Sicily*, 1939, banned by the fascists in 1942])

LINDA C. EHRLICH

SHOES (*Tree of Wooden Clogs*)

L'albero degli zoccoli. A poor child's landscape is measured in how long it takes to walk from the schoolhouse to home with a broken clog. A clog held together with his belt. The child stops to rest by a stream.

The son of peasants who own no land, the boy is needed in the fields. But the priest has convinced the father to give his bright child a chance.

Distance is no excuse; the child rises at dawn.

The landscape is full of trees, but only one tree houses within itself wooden clogs—resilient, sounding like bells. The father knows he must not cut down the landlord's decorative mulberry trees but, under the cover of night, he cuts down a piece of the trunk and hides it under his cape. Late into the night, while the family sleeps in the loft, he carves a new clog out of the coveted wood. He carves the whisper of a chance. This is a landscape of childhood.

There is something heroic in a pair of shoes. Van Gogh knew it. So did Chaplin.

When the landlord discovers the loss of one of his avenue of trees, he casts the family out of their dwelling, newborn baby and all. They leave in the early morning as other workers watch from behind closed windows. No one dares bid them goodbye. The child gets onto the cart along with all of the family's belongings. The boy is going nowhere. This too is a landscape of childhood.

Inside the early morning mist, a bird who weeps. When a man enters the mist, he becomes a shadow moving between trees.