

MATTHEW HARDING [ALONG THE CINQUE TERRE]
THIRD PLACE, WALLACE STEVENS POETRY CONTEST

It was the Germans who worried us most
with their peculiar way of walking.
Not content to go it alone, they struck out
obtrusively, in numbers, with walking sticks like so many
spider legs, their gaze fixed upon some further horizon.

Not so long ago, before History had found them,
they stumbled out of the heavy mist
with nothing in their stomachs,
and gathered along the banks of the Main.
And maybe it was hunger, or glory, or riches
that was smeared hard across their foreheads
as one moment they clamored beside ragged fires
and the next overran the fertile provinces
of Gaul, of Lombardy,
pillaging their way to the gates of Ravenna.
But now, on this narrow path
they are here before us,
crowding us out towards the frail edge,
the open space,
the empty blue.