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Passing Salt Flats in San Fernando, Spain

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Passing Salt Flats in San Fernando, Spain

LINDA CHOWN

Strange to be reminded of Japanese
men, of watercolor films tidy
as a plane's eye's view:
squares, vaguely green and brown
patches and wiry men
padding, barefooted in loose pants
and wide-brimmed hats
over the salt field's flat.
They are hoeing salt
from the land's pockets
the full tide has filled here
on the edge of Europe.

Regal this like a coronation
in its form and I remember more
of the Japanese woman
drawing water, the monk's
purposefully shaved head and towns
of dark wood and mats of straw,
towns whose paper walls
open into light
like a quiet maze of rivers.

But, here, now, the bus races
like a fool through history
past the mud flats and whitewashed shacks,
bouncing and heaving on the narrow road,
its glass eyes glittering
greedy to arrive
while just outside
the sun is high
and the world suddenly old and silent.
A chorus of men digging their toes
into earth and the salt seems to quiver
in the wind with all the beauty that can be
on the road of San Fernando.