

# Balsamic Vinegar

*David K. Isom*

I didn't go for vinegar  
but for the smell of life  
for organic tomatoes  
not mall tomatoes of feldspar  
or other inorganic stuff

I went for narrow aisles  
to brush against purple leeks  
galvanized tubs of flowers  
so intense their blues  
need more than eyes to smell  
crimsons more than tongue  
and pores to see.

Cheeses and mushrooms  
and other mold  
with French and Danish names  
chocolate  
dark and tart and strong  
fruit to eat and suck and paint

A place too simple for America  
but right here just the same

As if fresh were a new idea  
exuding from squash  
not yet dead,  
not pandering of orange juice  
concentrated and calcified

Sure.  
I was vulnerable to vinegar  
not steeled against seduction

But I had not planned  
even to think of four ounces  
of balsamic that cost more  
than some make in a day

A bottle in a wooden box. (I  
had hesitated to buy an upgrade  
casket for my father that  
would just be buried anyway.  
People knew my love for him  
did not need gilded coffin.)

Vinegar dearer for  
its hardwood case, reared  
for generations in casks of  
mulberry, juniper, chestnut  
and cherry wood  
as lovingly as wine,  
but no inebriation,  
except of soul

I bought the pedigreed,  
handcrafted gall  
to celebrate new life  
awake and clear