

## Mormon Tea

*Emily Updegraff*

I.

They left  
Denmark's ripening wheat fields,  
crossed moss-covered paths  
of England and Wales, forsook  
the saturated air  
of Tennessee to build homes  
on ground glazed in the open-air kiln  
of the western sun.  
Called by God,  
they did not think to ask  
first peoples for their blessing,  
and the land gave nothing without struggle.  
But one palatable thing,  
they learned from the Diné,  
thrived already.  
So-called Mormon tea.

II.

I have read the book  
they changed their lives for. I have made  
the same promises to the same God.  
But I start my days  
by filling the kettle, waiting  
for the whistle  
and the alchemical union  
of fermented leaves and hot water.  
I could not make those promises again.  
I have traded

*Ephedra nevadensis*,  
dust-dweller  
of the west,  
for *Camellia sinensis*,  
cultivated evergreen  
of the east.

III.

I remember the feeling when friends  
stopped living the Word of Wisdom—  
like a thread between us  
snapped.  
They are my people still.  
The men who sent my ancestors  
to the desert are still speaking their instructions  
through the mouths  
of their children's children.  
They are not my cup of tea.  
But their God is my God also.  
Mormon tea tasted like inside knowledge,  
peculiar, ferrous.  
My breakfast tea,  
color of the eastern brink,  
tastes of my own  
ripening.

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