

Lombardy Poplars

They lined both sides of streets
In older Utah towns
And bordered close-in fields—
Planted no further apart than fence posts—
As alien in the West as settlers were.

Their thick-ribbed trunks and heart-shaped leaves
Marked them kin to native cottonwoods,
But with that peculiar spire-like form
That spaced so close, quickly
Made a hedge fifty feet tall.

It was always said that they
Were planted as windbreaks.
And true, the sweep of wind
Through empty valleys
Could do with some impediment.

But was it that the Eastern men
Emerging from their forest groves
That ever blocked the distant view
Found the scale just too immense
And needed walls against the space.

—John S. Harris