Mary Gilliland hails from the northeast United States. Her poetry has also appeared in such publications as AGNI, Hotel Amerika, Notre Dame Review, Poetry, Poetry Ireland Review, Tampa Review, Nuclear Impact: Broken Atoms In Our Hands, and The &NOW Awards: The Best Innovative Writing. She has taught at Cornell University and at Namgyal Monastery of Buddhist Studies.
EARTHLY MISHAPS

Faint, humming, inexorable in the damp
below the ruined walled castle garden
Mare’s Tail tunnels an eight-foot root.

Sly-boots, I’ve spaded the circle, reached to my elbow.
Still the plant breaks. As Eve brought a man
his labor, it will multiply tenfold.

I shop for survival: a sprayer to level pride, melancholy
and unwanted shoots. The canister is lowered from
its shelf, bagged in plastic. The till rings.

Keys in hand, I see the carpark as a horstracked swale
where Cadfael leads his roan, saddlebagged
with an apothecary box. Medieval herbicide?

As he stumps through mud, the monk’s brass scale tips:
one pan sways with the bitterness of interrupted life,
the other, Eve’s radical helplessness.
GUEST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

I was on chicken surveillance that night:
fowl to be roasted whole or split and fried,
delivered to the busy suburb.
My mind ran to last week’s manifest destiny
wanting to return to the meadow
thrust into the newly green, sun humming
off the pond. Working the line—a private
lake—would have to fill in that longing.
Then the night shift rooted its wishbone in my chest.

I passed the guard, crawled the sidewalk. But
a frenzy of messy barks—the beagle next door—
had me turn. Each tray of hens was carried from
the walk-in cooler, each carcass bathed,
patted dry, set on the appropriate counter
with a little clearing around it.
That odd feeling of walking in place
closed my throat, the inexorable remains
of feeding on wages, hungry for wings.