

*Jan Selving*

## **Against the Bureaucrats of the Apocalypse**

I was a good midwife  
and promised never to repeat

what I'd learned from a poor girl's  
feverish ranting — that our village priest

had raped her in the chancellery  
then bought her silence with a house

outside town. Her child was stillborn  
and thereafter I never graced his church.

The old man levied fines  
then scratched my name off the chapel roster.

When I died on July 15, 1648,  
the deacons buried me in the untended plot

outside the scrolled fence,  
that ground reserved

for the excommunicated dead.  
Not even a bramble for shade.

So the villagers I'd delivered  
and whose children I'd delivered

dug me up, concerned for the fate  
of my mortal soul, and kept me

in the blacksmith's garden  
until his pigs upset my casket,

threatened to consume *me*, Mrs. Horseman,  
honored citizen of the community.

I was moved to the kitchen,  
but by then the summer heat

had blistered my swollen body.  
Even barnyard cats refused to sleep

on my ample chest.  
While the bastard was up North,

the host tightly bound in sack cloth,  
the deacons planted me beneath the altar,

for some blackguard joke perhaps.  
But the freshly scraped mortar

gave me away,  
and I was exumed again.

Still the bellringers,  
schoolboys paid with beer,

rode the rope at evensong,  
pulled with each iron swing

to the dovecote, and higher, the rafters.  
Then my spirit came free,

travelled to London first —  
stronghold, claim the Calvinists

for the torturers of Christ  
all cities damned.

Then on to the shrine of Loretto  
where pregnant farm girls

toss garlands into the well —  
wildweed pleas for protection

against the bite of "The Bearing Mother"  
whose toad-like shape marks her

one with the wandering souls of purgatory.  
And I will repay the kindness of the villagers

by travelling on past wild wheat and barley  
to the windmills spinning

on the outskirts of our town,  
the slightest breeze quickens

the blades' momentum.  
They are prayers, white asters,

they are the best part of us  
they are . . . Dear Christ, windmills.