

M A R I L Y N H A C K E R

Itinerants

(extracts)

RUE DES ÉCOUFFES

The street is narrow, and it just extends
rue de Rivoli / rue des Rosiers
a street from which the children went away
clutching their mothers, looking for their friends—
on city buses used for other ends
one not-yet-humid morning in July.
Now kosher butchers co-exist with gay
boutiques, not gaily. Smooth-cheeked ephebes hold hands.
Small boys with forelocks trail after bearded men—
and I have dragged that story in again
and will inevitably next compare
the curtains of the creaky balcony
smelling of female exile, exhaled prayer
with the discreet shutters of the women's bar.

NULLE PART

The elegant engraver's grooves: soft dares
to follow down to the glass-roofed quai, embark
on the last train's last car hurtling through the dark
tunnel irregularly blazed with flares
alizarin, viridian. Lit by the glare's
a silhouette, androgynous, at work
setting (in Paris? London? Prague? New York?)
mosaic tiles. She leads you up spiral stairs
into the blue explosion of the air's
maternal brilliance. But she disappears—
avid flesh, mercurial avatar
desire or imagination sends?
And then you know exactly where you are:
the street is narrow; you see where it ends.

RUE BEAUREPAIRE

On a wide side-street that leads to the canal
job-seeking Meridional families,
retired mail-clerks, philoprogenitive Chinese
textile workers, Tunisian grocers
have found an issue everyone agrees
to disagree on—IV drug users'
right to a safe haven among neighbours:
a hostel instead of a hospital
ER, with coffee, washing-machines and showers,
a Moroccan intern who serves as nurse,
weekly rap groups, small tables to converse
across. From balconies, spanning the street
hang homemade banners, spray paint on white sheets:
send them to another street—not ours.