

Jaffa Gate

Thin as rakes, feral
they roam
the quadrants
of the ancient city,
wait at the legs
of iron tables
for scraps
disappearing
to safe spots
behind Roman stone.
Arching backs
next to churches,
mosques, synagogues,
next to dried viaducts
and wide stone roads
that carried
the trade of centuries,
they look at you
over bony shoulders,
ribs fanned out
like brick slabs
held in place
by the four columns
of their legs,
the ransacking armies,
slashing swords,
crucifixions, crusades,
starvation,
machine gun fire,
shrapnel, car bomb, bus bomb,
they have seen it all.
I have heard
the cats at night
from a small, rented room,
screech of mating, fights,
labor shrieks;
morning, have seen
blood streaked over stone,
tufts of fur, and once
a body half twisted
as if it were mid-air
righting a torso
nothing could straighten,

tail curled
like a pipe cleaner,
speckle of blackish red
on soft belly,
dead eyes open.
When I think
of Jerusalem
in its madness
I see only
that gray cat
stretched over
white orange brick,
staring dead eyes
black centers
dilated
as wide as daisies.