

For the Missing in Action

Hazed with harvest dust and heat the air
swam with flying husks
as men whacked rice sheaves into bins and all
across the sunstruck fields
red flags hung from bamboo poles. Beyond the
last treeline on the horizon beyond the coconut
palms and eucalyptus out in the moon zone
puckered by bombs the dead earth where no
one ventures, the boys found it, foolish boys
riding their buffaloes in craterlands
where at night bombs thump and ghosts howl. A
green patch on the raw earth.

And now they've led the farmers here, the
kerchiefed women in baggy pants, the men
with sickles and flails, children herding
ducks with switches--all staring from a
crater berm; silent:

In that dead place the weeds had formed a man where
someone died and fertilized the earth, with flesh and
blood, with tears, with longing for loved ones.

No scrap remained; not even a buckle survived the
monsoons, just a green creature, a viny man, supine,
with posies for eyes, butterflies for buttons, a lily for
a tongue.

Now when huddled asleep together the
farmers hear a rusty footfall
as the leaf-man rises and stumbles to them.