CECI N'EST PAS UN SANDWICH
SOMEDAY A LIFE
Gwendolyn Hill
Provost Poetry Winner

Dorothea Lange's
"Child and Her Mother, Wapato,
Yakima Valley, Washington, 1939

Her hair is a shadow that falls across her face,
and on her dress bloom the only flowers
to be seen for miles. Her fists clench barbed wire.
The grove is full of hide and seek and other childish
games, but she knows she is needed elsewhere.

The dust is ground under her fingernails,
worked into her heels. The dust holds
her fate in its cracks. It cradles the seeds
she so desperately needs to grow, the cash crop
that holds the promise of someday, a life.

She came to these irrigated fields in the shadow
of Mount Adams to plant sugar beets in the rich
volcanic soil, and fill countless hours with digging,
hoeing, sowing (and sewing), weeding, washing,
harvesting, cooking. She couldn't escape the dust.

Where she came from, the dust flew
in tornades large enough to carry
Dorothy to Oz, but all she remembers
is scratching it from her scalp, and finding
dark clouds on her pillowcase in the morning.

Still sometimes, on dry summer days, the dust
fills her lungs as the chickens kick at it, pecking
for dinner in a storm of their own design.
She can always find it lingering
where her socks meet her boots.