

## Memory – Lawson Fusao Inada

Memory is an old Mexican woman  
sweeping her yard with a broom.  
She has grown even smaller now,  
residing at that vanishing point  
decades after one dies, 5  
but at some times, given  
the right conditions—  
an ordinary dream, or practically  
anything in particular—  
she absolutely looms, 10  
assuming the stature  
she had in the neighborhood.

This was the Great Valley,  
and we had swept in  
to do the grooming. 15  
We were on the move, tending  
what was essentially  
someone else's garden.  
Memory's yard was all that  
in miniature, in microcosm: 20  
rivers for irrigation,  
certain plants, certain trees  
ascertained by season.  
Without formal acknowledgment,  
she was most certainly 25  
the head of a community, American.

Memory had been there forever.  
We settled in around her;  
we brought the electricity  
of blues and baptized gospel, 30  
ancient adaptations of icons,  
spices, teas, fireworks, trestles,  
newly acquired techniques  
of conflict and healing, common  
concepts of collective survival. . . 35

Memory was there all the while.  
Her house, her shed, her skin,  
were all the same— weathered—  
and she didn't do anything, especially,  
except hum as she moved; 40  
Memory, in essence, was unmemorable.

Yet, ask any of us who have long since left,  
who have all but forgotten that adulterated place  
paved over and parceled out by the powers that be,  
and what we remember, without even choosing to,  
is an old woman humming, sweeping, smoothing her yard: Memory.