

The New Criterion

Poems

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Olives

by [A E Stallings](#)

A new poem.

Sometimes a craving comes for salt, not sweet,
For fruits that you can eat
Only if pickled in a vat of tears—
A rich and dark and indehiscent meat
Clinging tightly to the pit—
on spears

Of toothpicks, maybe, drowned beneath a tide
Of vodka and vermouth,
Rocking at the bottom of a wide,
Shallow, long-stemmed glass, and gentrified;
Or rustic, on a plate cracked like a tooth—

A miscellany of the humble hues
Eponymously drab—
Brown greens and purple browns, the blacks and blues
That chart the slow chromatics of a bruise—
Washed down with swigs of barrel wine that stab

The palate with pine-sharpness. They recall
The harvest and its toil,
The nets spread under silver trees that foil
The blue glass of the heavens in the fall—
Daylight packed in treasuries of oil,

Paradigmatic summers that decline
Like sin ...

A E Stallings's latest collection of poetry is *Hapax* (TriQuarterly).

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