

Sky Lanterns

Yi Peng festival, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Dusk deepens, and the full moon
flames white in a soft aura.
In the company of hundreds,
all carrying *khom loi*,
she walks with her lover
toward the Narawat Bridge.

On their young skin the air
weighs moist and warm, sweet
with incense, full
of music and voices. They stop
to write a prayer on their lantern,
people flowing around them.

The crowd comes to rest
at the night market near the temple.
Holding the paper shell by its bamboo rim,
they kindle the waxy ring and wait
for the magical moment when
the air inside heats to buoyancy

and the lantern pulls
out of their gentle grasp
to lift moonward,
joining the countless others
that drift past the temple spires,
golden against the black of sky.

Rising vertically at first,
they lose momentum
and are taken by a slow current
that makes them swim together
like phosphorescent fish
across the darkness.

Dwindling as they recede,
they become a constellation,
then a galaxy,
the radiance and hope
that each one of us always carries
now made visible.

~ Deborah Bachels Schmidt