

## The Layers

By Stanley Kunitz

I have walked through many lives,  
some of them my own,  
and I am not who I was,  
though some principle of being  
abides, from which I struggle not to stray.  
When I look behind,  
as I am compelled to look  
before I can gather strength  
to proceed on my journey,  
I see the milestones dwindling  
toward the horizon  
and the slow fires trailing  
from the abandoned camp-sites,  
over which scavenger angels  
wheel on heavy wings.  
Oh, I have made myself a tribe  
out of my true affections,  
and my tribe is scattered!  
How shall the heart be reconciled  
to its feast of losses?  
In a rising wind  
the manic dust of my friends,  
those who fell along the way,  
bitterly stings my face.  
yet I turn, I turn,  
exulting somewhat,  
with my will intact to go  
wherever I need to go,  
and every stone on the road  
precious to me.  
In my darkest night,  
when the moon was covered

and I roamed through wreckage,  
a nimbus-clouded voice  
directed me:  
"Live in the layers,  
not on the litter."  
Though I lack the art  
to decipher it,  
no doubt the next chapter  
in my book of transformations  
is already written,  
I am not done with my changes.

*The Path I Walk*  
Wilmington, North Carolina  
Photo by Dan Hardison

