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Vale of Siddim

On the River Jordan out of the Dead
Sea the gypsum is made and Lot's wife is wed
to the salt. Here spirit never drowns and the dead-
man's float is for the living. Fed

in plasters and spas, flesh is sick and seized.
What wedding vows death writes:
in lava and sulfur Persephone is pleased;
remains of fire at sea like hell's honeymoon sites.

Seas shift in a great gorge of moving faults.
The fish and the birds abandon this sea's
strange shore's alkali weather of salt.
Here one's ever-sinking melancholy floats free.

Winds' heddle weaves waters' warp and woof
to cleft cliffs—and death not aloof but as fruit
held in the devil's avid hoof.

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Author biography

Valerie Wohlfeld's most recent book of poetry is *Woman with Wing Removed* (Truman State University Press, 2010). Her first collection, *Thinking the World Visible*, won the Yale Younger Poets Prize (Yale University Press, 1994). Publication of her work includes *The New Yorker*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Yale Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Poetry Review*(UK), *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *The New Criterion*, *New England Review*, and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Her poems have been nominated six times for a Pushcart Prize. She holds an MFA from Vermont College.