

Greenhouses

First I wandered through the tropical house:
lush tendrils and serpentine fronds
reached out like evangelists to press the flesh,
tarzaned over mossed grottoes and, flush with leaf,
urged on me their passionate aromas.
It was so hot I wanted to undress.

Then among desert plants—agarve's dry
spears, stockades of fibre
constructed a spartan, rocky set-up, fit only for
ascetics, freaked out ecologists on stone-ground
bread and bean sprouts, clan leaders, instant messiahs.

At last I settled for the temperate zone,
grew acclimatized, nuzzled by most
and a clammy British reticence—roots covered,
the leaves all understatement, hedged with privets.
In this decent, laconic disorder, all seasons at once,
I was home in my flesh, in my house clothes.

But I had had to travel to know this.

— *Christopher Levenson*