Fortuna

In Memory of Dr Jacqueline Kirk (1968–2008)

Charlotte Hussey

With her white hand she whirls round a wheel
As if she might suddenly upset it completely;
The rim is red gold set with rare royal stones,
Arrayed with richness and rubies aplenty.

Alliterative Morte Arthure

Did you dream as King Arthur did
before his final battle that Fortuna
would suddenly throw you down too?
August 13th, that unluckiest of days,
you are traveling a bone-jarring road,
dust blowing over the windshield
of your white truck, on a mission
from Gardez to Kabul. The rocky ground,
even the mid-day sun, is concealed.
With her white hand she whirls round a wheel,

or wheels bumping into potholes,
as you enter a dun-colored village,
mud homes, scrubby vineyards.
Here Fortuna, eyes nearly blinded
by the hanks of her greasy hair, hides
behind an orchard wall, deadly
its fruit of Kalashnikovs poised
amid the grapevines and pomegranates.
Your truck careens, strafed repeatedly,

as if she might upset it completely.
Flashes of fire; the villagers flee, the gunmen. Preferring anonymity, a doctor, traveling that scarred road, takes note: everybody in the shredded vehicle looks like they are curled up together in their torn seats, alone. Rolling up her blood-stained sleeves, Fortuna spins her hissing wheel. A line, beginning and end unknown, *the rim is red gold set with rare royal stones.*

In this nearly treeless land, your coffin is plain and narrow. Bleached cotton swathes you like an angelic burka. If only Bridget, prophesying at her loom, could raddle threads steeped in cloudberry, dandelion root, and lichen and deftly bind you back into a becoming cloth, a brocade that can never tangle, or break on Fortuna's fickle spindle, so treacherously *arrayed with richness and rubies aplenty.*