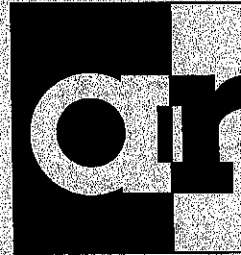


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Go underground in Paris. Read penguins in Australia.

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ATLANTA
REVIEW

REVIEW

Poetry Without Borders

POETRY 2001

International Poetry Competition

VOL. VIII, No. 1



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REVIEW**

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Short fiction and nonfiction. Reproductions of black-and-white artwork. All
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ii ATLANTA REVIEW

Welcome!

This issue will cross more borders than the Orient Express. We'll smuggle you into Iran, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Gaza, and dozens of other places, in search of the jewels of the imagination. By the time our quest is over, we'll have assembled a treasure that would turn a dragon green with envy.

R. T. Smith's poem "Beowife" (page 56) put me in mind of my Anglo-Saxon days under Professor Alfred, whose name in Old English means "advised by elves." The poets in this issue (who may have been advised by elves themselves) have unlocked their treasure chests, their *word-hoards*, to use a good old Anglo-Saxon term, just for you. I hope you'll spend many pleasurable hours amid the gleam, the clink and glitter of one of the greatest word-treasures this old dragon has ever seen.

Next spring we'll go hunting for dragons—and treasure—in a place we're sure to find lots of both: the vast continent of Asia. From the heights of the Himalayas to the steppes of Central Asia, from Bangkok to Tokyo to Katmandu, this is one adventure you won't want to miss.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all of you who have given so generously of *your* treasure to keep *Atlanta Review* strong and independent. People are constantly surprised to learn that *Atlanta Review* is not supported by any institution, that it survives thanks to its loyal readers and an all-volunteer staff. Its unique quality is very much related to this fact. To insure that this labor of love can continue into the future, we are establishing an Endowment Fund for *Atlanta Review* (page 120). We welcome your contributions and suggestions as we try to chart a new path for poetry in the 21st century.

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

ATLANTA REVIEW iii

The Ravenna Job	1	Kevin Murray
Reading E-mail...	2	Robert Parham
Trumpet Piece	3	J. R. Kangas
Thomas Edison, Insomniac	4	Bill Meissner
Coasting Toward Heaven	5	
Boy in Storm	6	Ciaran Berry
Desert Transformations	7	Jane Sasser
The Rain Dream	8	Robert Arthur Lewis
It Rains on Gaza	10	David Moolten
Ramadan, My Beloved	12	Mohja Kahf
My Son Exudes Peace	13	Yehuda Amichai
Voting in Kosovo	14	Phillip Corwin
Election Day	15	Robert L. Champ
...Gypsy Violinists	16	José Chaves
Reading the Penguins	18	Geoff Page
The Bullet Bible	20	Louis Phillips
Downpayment	22	James Kirk
Firmness, Commodity, Delight	23	Ann B. Knox
Eve Learns the Word <i>Want</i>	24	
Diamondback	25	Elizabeth Crowell
After You Were Born...	26	Jesse Lee Kercheval
The Beekeeper	28	Ian Revie
Toad Medicine	29	Michael Arvey
Prayer to Tear the		
Sperm-Dam Down	30	Charles Harper Webb
A Caterpillar on a Sleeping Fox	33	John Poch
Query	34	John O'Dell

Artwork by 35 *Cecilia Soprano*

POETRY 2001 36

International Poetry Competition

Black Forest	39	Walt Stromer
Landscape in March	40	Deborah Warren
Skiathos, 1973	41	Amy Dengler
Miss Josephine March		
Writes to Indiana Jones	42	Amy Dengler
The Moments After	44	Bruce Bennett

Leaving Jerusalem	45	Leah Weed
The Locksmith...	46	Mark DeFoe
Negative Space	48	Beth Copeland Vargo
Misconception	50	
Think of Death as a		
Subway Station in Paris	52	Mark Terrill
Uncalculated Move	53	
The Largest Ice Hotel in the World	54	Helen Sweeney
Beowife	56	R. T. Smith
Emotional Incontinence	59	MaryLee McNeal
Voltaire's Slippers: Sans Souci	60	Phillip E. Burnham, Jr.
In the dancing monkey school...	61	Joy Maulitz
Thigh	62	Roger Sedarat
Oh, My God, It's Hector	63	Louise Whitney
Needing a Bit of Heaven	64	Herb Kitson
Late Blackberry Season	66	Albert W. Starkey
Absence of Buddha at Bamiyan	67	Ann Silsbee
Glass	68	Dianalee Velie
Monet at Giverny	70	Laurie Robertson-Lorant
Chalk	72	John Minczeski
The Onion and the Accordion	74	Eleanor Stanford
A Husband's Refuge	76	Ginny Lowe Connors

Artwork by 77 *Cecilia Soprano*

Poetry 2001 Contributors 78

Linda's Home Improvement Loan	80	Michael G. Hickey
Don't Read This Poem	81	
Captain America at Home	82	Jarret Keene
Barbie and Mr. Potatohead...	84	Lynn Wallace
The Bibliothèque Nationale	85	Heather Hartley
Women's Work	86	Jacqueline Bardsley
An Inch a Year	88	Michael C. Smith
Constellations	90	Michael J. Zweigbaum
Looking for Orion	92	Priscilla Frake
Dovetail	93	Wendy Herbert

Artwork by 94 *Mollie Doctrow*

(over)

Words for You, Mother	98	<i>Alice Barton</i>
Red Tulip	99	<i>Melissa Range</i>
Work	100	<i>Shane Seely</i>
A Field Guide to Prayer	102	<i>Peter Serchuk</i>
Anniversary	104	<i>George Bilgere</i>
The Chosen	105	<i>Albert Sgambati</i>
Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in Dahomey	106	<i>Tony Grist</i>
Robert Johnson and the Devil	107	<i>William Miller</i>
Old Hustlers	108	<i>Johnny Cordova</i>
Folk Song	110	<i>Fred Johnston</i>
To a Goldfinch	111	<i>Lorri Lambert-Smith</i>
Airborne	112	<i>Jeff Daniel Marion</i>
Contributors	114	
Patrons, Donors, Friends	119	
Atlanta Review	120	Endowment Fund
Poetry 2002	121	
Subscribe!	122	

The Ravenna Job

Up here on the scaffolding I often think
 we're working inside the skull
 of the man who made this church
 with the drum of arcades, niches, vaults
 where no shadow can fall straight,
 and our mosaics are his Greek dreams,
 a rich mist of flora, stars and some angels
 soaring to The Lamb; white, simple.

We're in the apse now, finishing
 Justinian and his retinue who pause
 in their procession, heads in gold,
 feet on green, reminding the Ostrogoths,
 blond wreckers from some wolf-
 wilderness and their local Latin pals
 it is the East which allows their daily sun
 courtesy of Byzantium.

This Italy is a cold sour place.
 We're restless, aching for the Golden Horn
 and raising hell at the Hippodrome
 but it's nearly done. I trowel the cement
 for the dying priest at the Emperor's side—
 Archbishop Maximian, tall, gaunt, hollow-eyed
 and sift the boxes of bright tesserae
 for his marble chips of white and grey.

The lads suggest we leave him
 with a gift. I clip slivers
 from a black glass tile while they fuss
 about the sight-lines to the lovely girl
 in Theodora's troupe with the gown
 of cloth-of-gold and the knowing look.
 I give him his eyes. He is held fast.
 Locked into beauty while these stones shall last.

Kevin Murray

There is the intention to be brief,
but the impulse is odd to go on,
drawn perhaps from the joystick
in the gameroom when they were ten,
or the subsequent tap-tapping the keyboard
at the computer playing games,
or chatting with a chum,
or faking it with a stranger...

whatever the deepfelt impulse,
they go on: "I am not sure what
to write and I don't understand,
but..."

and that bridge
across the river—but—entertains
the notion that strange country
can be entered now, oh, yes,
the troll beneath the bridge
is zapped, and other monsters
must be dealt with, but a spot
of energy may be sucked
from behind some magic tree
right over there, and from it
words will pour like sugar
from the maple, and farther on,
tapping the stone, water will
flow like poetry and the faint sound
will suggest a new land
more than novelty and jest,
a place where stones are not just thrown,
but stacked upon another, sealed
with mortar, something civilized,
city, words, and meaning.

Robert Parham

Trumpet Piece

Ruing his father, in a new school
he shyly raised his open hand
when Mr. Hathaway asked
in class if anyone wanted to learn
the trumpet. It started then
once a week, a half hour
before the morning bell: the boy's
desire from some deep spring, his
nervous sweat, his unspoken worship,
his effort to please his new-found
idol (so golden—in collar, tie,
tweed coat, smelling of after-
shave and sincerity) who taught
the kid with unsuited teeth
an embouchure first, a decent
sound, a C scale, *Abide with Me*.

Abide with him? Yes, please. And
with fingers awkward on the mother-
of-pearl that capped the keys, lips
set tight on the cold metal cup
and his twelve-year-old's lungs,
he tooted his best on his tutor's
instrument, the brass (or was it
silver?) tubing redolent of holy
spit and valve oil, wanting
to feel on his flannel shoulder,
on his back, his neck, that strong
warm palm, to touch this
shining man's heart, to be to him
joy, star pupil, his prized
begotten flesh somehow, his
fanfare, anthem, voluntary.

J. R. Kangas

Thomas Edison, Insomniac

How could you dream so much
when you slept so little?
How could you, pacing the floor of your lab,
imagine light, unfolding like some bright flower
caught inside a glass bulb?

Necessity, they say. And you searched,
your brain twisted like a spiraling filament through the endless
labyrinth, toward
a narrow pinhole of light,
so you alone could see.

Those long hours at night, you needed something
to illuminate the room besides the blood in your brain
turning incandescent.
You needed a future, and it was out there somewhere,
illusive as the static just before lightning.

Oh, America was waiting for you, Thomas. There would be
headlights on cars and 3-D movies and searchlights at Wal-Mart;
there would be ultraviolet and lasers and night vision for wars,

but you knew none of this. You stood
for hours in your wrinkled pajamas,
in a room with one fluttering candle,
unable to sleep, thinking how much you hated
the endless blackness
that pressed itself against the paned window each night.

Necessity, they say. Look, Thomas, you finally
found what you needed: a bright globe on your desk.
It was enough for you. It was enough
for everyone—something small and shining
to comfort the lonely who pace and pace for hours
in the deepest vacuum of night.

Bill Meissner

Coasting Toward Heaven

They finally took out the confessional at St. Joseph's church;
they've remodeled for the Lord.
Now the place where my friends and I
confessed our first real sins is gone, leaving
just a bare wall with a rectangular, shadowy stain
where the wooden booth stood for eighty years.

Back in seventh grade, we rode laboriously to the church, full to
bursting with lying and stealing and swearing and gawking
at girlie magazines in Kluge's Gas.

Each sin leaves a stain, the nuns told us, and we believed
every word. I imagined my soul as a white blotter, smudged
to the comers with gray.

We steered our bicycles carefully—
Tommy said if a car hit us before we got to the church,
we'd go straight to hell.

Ah, Tommy, think of it:
eighty years of sins, coloring
the dark insides of that confessional even blacker.
Adult sins—much heavier than ours—weighing down
the musty air inside the booth so it took
a dozen workmen just to lift it.

After Tommy and I confessed behind the sweating curtain,
we circled the playground gracefully with no hands,
we gambled at intersections, coasted full speed
down the cracked sidewalk of Hospital Hill
to our houses, where our mothers asked us
where we'd been and we answered "Nowhere."
We'd eat dinners silently, then go to our rooms
where we'd lie on our beds,
our minds clear for one day, our bodies
feeling so light we thought we were floating above the mattress
as we drifted toward that pure, dark sleep.

Bill Meissner

Boy in Storm

Rain sluices from the cloud body's slashed belly,
slaps sea over the brim of Moynish Bridge,
joins puddles in the garden's grey sand-pit,
clatters in the gutters, cackles, drags,
drives into the roof, pries loose the slates
above my attic room where cold drops plink
and pock against old metal bowls and pots,
each new drip's struck note separate, distinct.

Crouched down, chin flat to white gloss window sill,
pug-nose pressed purple against rattled pane,
I wait, watch, half-expect storm's rap and thrum
to become the flood of Sister Aíne's lesson—
a deluge to scour the lichens off the stones,
wash us clean off the earth, lay out the drowned
like that *Inis Mór* fisherman I found
oil-skinned, crab-mauled, face down on the strand.

Ciaran Berry

Desert Transformations

We could disappear into this land
like pebbles thrown into a pool
leaving not even ripples
to mark the way we'd passed,
as though we'd fallen into
that bottomless sky, between
the stars like broadcast seeds.
We could be soft hills of silt
left by throbbing rattlesnakes,
or the purr of the wind, deep
in fragrant sage. Listen.
We'd be tiny brine shrimp eggs
in our red sandstone bowl,
waiting for spring rains
to explode like joy.

Jane Sasser

The Rain Dream

What I can't wait for
are the rains, falling like time
over ruins, repairing
the ground, reseeding the mind.

I have been busy all summer
raising ladders, lowering planks, scraping down
the failed faces of resolute houses.

The arm becomes a peculiar passenger
day after long day. It begins working by itself,
cutting its own lines of color

around doorways and roof peaks, windows
and gutters. Dip and glide, dab and feather,
it follows its own motion,
as the mind watches and rotates
around the same dull calculations:

gallons primer per square feet shingles,
painting days left
till the rains come.

And soon they will, cooling the embers
of September, chiming down
the down spouts.

All my houses will be sealed and sleeping
and I will have a chair
a table, a window
and hours.

Then the arm, which barely needs to move
to take a pencil across a page
will become a servant, asking:
what do I say?

I will turn
and look out the window.
Say what the rain says.

Robert Arthur Lewis

It Rains on Gaza

Today, it rains on Gaza, that blessed strip
Of desert by the sea. It rains on the fig trees,
And on the one-room homes in cramped rows
Like the rumps of praying men, every inch occupied.
It rains on the white domes of Al-Azhar, rains
On the wagons with truck tires pulled by horses,
Rains on the orange blossoms, the Mediterranean
And its hushed breeze. Now bountiful drops pummel
The streets where soldiers advanced, shields
Raised to a shower of stones as in the days
Of the Philistines, dissolving the past,
Dousing the heat and the heat of passion.

It rains on girls in skirts who sway as they pass
The glass-metal summits of new hotels, pelted
With stares, and on the hooded ones who shun them,
Outcast in turn by years. It rains on those who cast
Pebbles for God then ran for themselves alone,
Who fell, kissed by a spatter of rubber bullets.
It stuns and solemnifies, runs together
Like their names, more Kufic, another mosaic
In the wall of a Mosque. It cleanses
The memory of their soiled lambskin coats,
Of them asleep like beggars in the road.
Like soft gravel, it strikes the living
Aching to go on.

This rain stings policemen
As they halt the ancient cars, question dark eyes
Like theirs. It drips from barbed wire and the hair
Of laborers along the Erez checkpoint path
Waiting to get by. This rain wilts the impatient,
The latest rebels, blue-jeaned kids with Walkmans
Who plug the West into their ears. This rain

Rains on the restaurants littering the shore:
Palm Beach, Love Boat, White Tent. This rain becomes
The surf that drubs the rock to sand, ignored
By the waiter who stoops to gather crumbs
From a parasol-escutcheoned table
Into his palm.

Rain veils the distance,
A few Allah-begged miles of Canaan
Where caravans and jewel-hubbed chariots paused
Between Cairo and Damascus, where Samson shrugged
Down the temple and the sweeping Crusaders ebbed.
It slakes every bulldozed and resurrected house,
Mohammed's grandfather who here lies entrenched,
Rain that settles dust, tears the size of stones.

David Moolten

Ramadan, My Beloved

It is Ramadan my beloved,
come to me in Ramadan.
Nudge the sweet dateflesh
between my lips parted in sleep.

My lips are parched
and forsaken, my breasts
pinched and dry, like little
Zuleikhas without Yusuf.

Nourish me, my beloved.
No one knows that you came
to me once, a revelation,
joy. Datefruit, sweet flesh
at sunset.

*Remember me in Ramadan
How I came to you like water
to Hajar, like food to Maryam*

*How the bodies were strewn
in the abandonment of sleep,
and I came to you in the small
hungry hours with water
in the cup of my hand*

*You put your lips to the rim of my hand
You put your lips to the rim of my hand
Remember me in Ramadan
Remember how I loved you
Eat now, and drink*

Ramadan my beloved, come to me.
Nudge the sweet dateflesh
between my lips parted in sleep.

Mohja Kahf

My Son Exudes Peace

My son exudes peace.
When I'm leaning over him,
it's not only the scent of soap.

Everyone was once a child who exuded peace.
(And in the whole land there isn't left
a single millwheel that turns.)

Alas, the torn land is like clothes
that can't be mended.
Hardened, lonely forefathers are in the caves of Machpelah, too.
Barren stillness,

my son exudes peace.
His mother's womb promised him
what G-d cannot
promise us.

*Yehuda Amichai
translated by F. M. Black*

Machpelah Burial ground of Abraham.

Voting in Kosovo

On cratered roads in wooden, horse-drawn carts,
in cars that look like broken Christmas toys,
on mud-crusting bicycles, in boots caked
with fresh-spread dung, like pilgrims of the night
on an eternal *hegira*, they lurch
through dawn and mass quietly in school yards
while the dark rolls back its shadowy sheets
and muezzins cry from rafts in the sky.
Inside, black-eyed women with hair protruding
from their official caps, and men in black
with armbands of authority, prepare
the polling stations. *No weapons*, a sign
says outside each room. Lights sputter and wink
their approval. As sun gathers its strength,
blue uniforms harangue the tumid crowds.
The gated yards are treeless; the dry dust,
merciless; water, nowhere to be found.
The Albanian desert is alive
with prophets of the new millennium,
and young eagles drop from their aeries cloaked
in flags until the startled air is thick
with myths and invisible feathers. Tanks
hunting for poachers patrol the preserve.
Pandora appears with a ballot box.
Only hours later, as long lines extend
like a sunning snake and machinery
of the gods breaks down, can a mother teach
her restive child the lesson of the day:
"Be patient, my love. Democracy hurts."

Phillip Corwin

Election Day

The first Tuesday in November. Election Day.

At the Northwestern High School gym, voters line up—
polite and quiet, as if they had entered a church;

As if the polling booths were confessionals
to which they have come to be shriven for public sins.

In the classrooms, the teaching of history has stopped
for the moment. History itself has taken over,

Not in the form of generals and battles and laws,
but the familiar shapes of mothers, fathers, grandpas,

Feeble aunts, bundled against the outside wind,
tired of the distracting speeches, distrusting speeches.

They enter the booths unsmiling. The citizen's work
is serious, almost like the work of making a soul—

Serious even in the Northwestern High School gym,
with its shiny wood floor and odor of young sweat.

With their delicate hands, they fulfill someone else's
dream; create and rectify; endow and make endure.

The tensions of power do not touch them: they live
simply, weaned on the hard crust of powerlessness,

Up the street St. Margaret's carillon tolls *nones*.
The voters, one by one, open the booths' curtains.

Finished, they leave the gym, feeling clean; drive off
into the autumn twilight, headed for home—

To dinner and the slow arrival of returns: to which
they will listen in soft, unconscious togetherness,

Finding, in all those millions, whispers of themselves.

Robert L. Champ

For as Long as I Can Remember,
I've Been Followed by a Family
of Gypsy Violinists

*There's a man in the habit of hitting me
on the head with an umbrella.*

—Fernando Sorrentino

The first time I heard their music, I wept because it was so beautiful. Though I must admit, I have spent most of my life trying not to listen, as they only seem to play when I'm feeling upbeat and chipper. Each morning in the shower, I hear the father tap his bow softly on the sink, signaling for the mother and two children to begin.

They have also appeared when I was honored at awards banquets, winning at blackjack, even in bed with a woman. Their sad strings pulling me back into myself until a tear swells under my eye and I am forced to excuse myself from the embarrassment. At which point, they bow politely, pack up their instruments and head for the door, often to the thunderous applause of the onlookers.

At first I tried to rid myself of them by politely asking them to leave, but learned quickly that we do not speak the same language. Some shoving ensues, punches are thrown and I am pummeled into submission by a flurry of wooden instruments. I have tried the police, fire department, even prayer, but the violinists always return in a few days and I'm again serenaded from the front lawn or a nearby pay phone.

I have since, however, come to identify my happiest moments by the somber music of this gypsy family. As a gesture of gratitude, I have invited them—by way of hand gestures—to live in my house. But they shake their heads in refusal, preferring, it seems, to sleep in the green van parked outside.

My fear now is that one day they will leave me and I will find myself, caught in a moment of bliss, without the comforting sound of their violins, sawing away in the background. I only shudder to think what disturbing music might then begin to follow.

José Chaves

Reading the Penguins

We have come to read penguins
at \$9.95
and sit here on our bleachers

staring at the sea.
The sun has just now disappeared
leaving us this violet haze.

Far out as we wait
the sea becomes the sky.
Lights ignite as on an oval.

Some seagulls strut about on stage
until the waves deliver.
Tumbled backwards by the wash

the penguins recollect themselves
and muster for their rush across the sand.
On land their flippers make them helpless

stooped like pensioners in traffic.
They toddle in a sprint cross-stage
and up towards their nests

and chicks who need their fishy vomit.
Despite a show of rules and rangers
the audience is on its feet.

Flown and bussed down south from Asia
and all the upper half of earth
they watch a penguin pass and pause

as if reflecting on direction.
Later they will stroll the timbers
and listen to the chattering

of chicks and parents over dinner
busy in the grasses.
The crowd is reading them like print

that tells them of themselves:
those sallies over sand to safety,
that struggle in the undertow,

that carpark look when stuck for home.
Even the one-off round of mating
near the catwalk under lights

is eloquent as minor prose.
There's no suggestion of seduction:
the male on top with whirring flippers,

the female underneath, bemused...
who afterwards will shake herself
and waddle off, no wiser than

the male who mounts her...
who stands there afterwards as if
in need of more instruction.

Geoff Page

The Bullet Bible

Louis Phillips

In the beginning, God created heaven, the earth.

And the earth was without killing of any kind, and the spirit of God moved across the face of prospective targets.

And God said, Let there be guns. And there *was* guns.

And God saw all the guns, that they *was* good, and God distributed guns to his peoples.

And God called the peoples with guns victims of government oppression, and he called people without guns hopelessly befuddled. And the guns not registered in the morning and the guns not registered in the evening marked the first day.

And God said let there be gun lobbyists in the midst of the Capitol. And let the lobbyists divide the Congress in twain.

And God made the gun lobbyists in the midst of the Capitol and divided the people with political power from people without political power, and it was so.

And God called the people with political power self-righteous, and he called the people without political power ordinary voters with school-age children. And they formed the morning and the evening of the second day.

God said, Let the people with guns under the heavens be gathered together in one organization, and let movie stars appear in the firmament to endorse them. God saw that such stars were good. And meetings of gun-owners were held on the morning and evening of the third day.

And God said let there be bullets in the gun to divide the living from the dead. And let there be sophisticated weapons for firing off thousands of rounds in a matter of minutes. And God saw that this was good. And the inventions of the morning and the inventions of the evening were the fourth day.

And God said, Let gun manufacturers bring forth weapons abundantly that the moving creatures of cities and suburbs that have life shall live in fear of their lives.

And God blessed the gun manufacturers, saying, Be profitable and multiply, and fill the coffers of the weapon sellers and let school-age gun owners multiply on the face of the earth. And the evening and morning of selling guns were the fifth day.

And God said Let us make Charlton Heston in our image, after our likeness, and let him have dominion over popular opinion, and over every creepy thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created Charlton Heston in his own image; and God blessed him by allowing him to play Moses in *The Ten Commandments* and by paying him tens of thousands of dollars to give speeches on behalf of the NRA.

And God said, Behold I have given guns to every living thing, to every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of the earth, and to every tree, and to every beast of the earth, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there could be life filled with dread, and it was so.

And God saw that every weapon made, from the simplest revolver to the most complicated semi-automatic machine gun, was good. And the evening of children killing children, and children killing teachers, and humans shooting humans, and the morning of mourning all our lost innocence, was the sixth day.

Downpayment

It was a round-trip ticket to Europe or a house on a street down the block from a Wawa; a stroll down the Champs Élysées or a back porch, five oaks, a small yard with a compost, a flowering dogwood out front. It could have been the Great Pyramid of Cheops, the Colossus at Rhodes, the ancient Wonders of the world, but for us—the modern Wonders of New Jersey, which are, in the order of their magnificence—the Great Swamp, Lucy the Elephant and the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital for the criminally insane. It might have been England and Ireland, Stonehenge and Tintern Abbey; instead, a basement, a place to fix things, the toaster whose bread doesn't pop up anymore, certain memories of my father that do. Love, we have signed our names on the dotted lines, the Coliseum slides from our sides like a fallen birthday cake. Here is our Spain, and here our Spanish Stairs; see they lead to the ordinary front door, to sheet-rocked walls and replacement windows where the moon will drift at night like the poor old country that it is, always poorer at the end of the month, and where dawn will wash up like a bottle, messageless and gold or gray with mortgaged light.

James Kirk

Firmness, Commodity, Delight

Firmitas, utilitas, venostas

—Vitruvius on essentials of architecture

The old Roman had right
what satisfies: this cabin
set on square beams
close to the ground
steady as a weathered stump.

Four wide steps,
ample porch
and you enter clean
space, a loft of light,
a possible life—

table, two chairs,
woodstove, floor-boards
milled from local pines.
Nothing extra.

Build a bookshelf,
angle a chair to frame
the view of hills, set
on the sill a jar of pencils.

Hold it, don't dream,
you have what you need,
so inhabit the space, take
in sun, blue tablecloth,
the distant call of jays.

Ann B. Knox

Eve Learns the Word *Want*

Eve wandered in the garden inventing words,
walk, hum, smell, laugh, tease.

She plucked a maidenhair fern, touched
a snap-dragon's tongue to hers and watched
a caterpillar hump across a leaf, then idly
toed the garter snake coiled beneath a tree.

It drew back, hissing, a red thread
flickered and Eve bent closer, not knowing
what the snake knew. He poured himself
from his nest exposing tamped leaves and, half
covered by matted grass, *Victoria's Secret.*
Eve frowned. "Pick it up," he smiled,

"you might learn something." On the slick page
her finger, tracing leg, thigh and long
curve, stopped at a fringe of black gentians.
She looked down to her own moss-brown tuft.
"Ah," Eve reached for a hand-shaped leaf
to cover her mound, bluebells for her nipples.

"Nice," the snake said, "Adam will like that."
A pleasing heat troubled Eve's belly. But Adam
was out naming birds, stones, trees, things.
She waited savoring the unaccustomed stir.
Let Adam notice and uncover her curves, let
him want her. *Want.* She shaped the word,

felt it flow from the hollow of her mouth
and a vacancy unknown before entered her.
Later, after the gate was closed and memory
of the place faded, after the babies, the barns
and sheep-paddocks, even after the new double-wide
and a week in Vegas, nothing was quite satisfactory.

Ann B. Knox

Diamondback

Thick in places, glistening, flaking mica,
rattles still attached in a tinselly sheath,
there was no way to wrap it up.
I walked to school with it around my shoulders.
All I had to do at Show and Tell
was hold its gray translucent skin,
rattle the rattle, say *desert, poisonous.*

Before I was anywhere,
the snake had slithered in pink dust,
full rattle sounding like a whip,
and almost killed my father,
whose saved life became my life.
His friend shot and skinned the snake,
dropping the flesh and eyes into the sand.

But now, the prettiest girls
crowded to me to stroke its skin,
and I felt for the first time
my skin holding me in place.
All the rest could be hollowed out,
even my voice in my throat
as I begged *be careful.*

Elizabeth Crowell

After You Were Born, My Body Missed You.

Having you inside me,
daughter, was like
swallowing a porpoise
who happened to turn cartwheels,
a tiny drummer who beat time
on the taut skin
of my belly.
It was startling, unexpected,
feeling movement
where none had been before.

Having you inside me,
taught me life cannot
be scheduled.
No putting your birth
in my daily planner.
Your due date, I soon learned,
the only day
you were unlikely to appear.
Letting go
of all that daily order
was first like floating,
then like falling
from a great height,
trusting fate, or God,
old parachute maker,
to bring me down on grass.

Taught me too
how strongly biology
prefers the future.
Don't worry about the baby,
my doctor said, she takes
the iron she needs,
the calcium. Take your pills,

It's you who are anemic,
whose bones could thin.
She laughed. Just one
of those little sacrifices
every mother makes.

And why not? What better use
of bones than sacrament?
I imagined my body
as a steaming bowl of carrots.
Eat, I'd say.
I made these just for you.

Then you were born,
the doctor handing you
around the curtain.
I stared. You stared.
Both of us surprised to see
a stranger's face
on this person
we knew in other ways
so well. Like meeting
a lost uncle
at a family reunion.
*Hello, I've heard so much
about you.* And here you are.

Jesse Lee Kercheval

The Beekeeper

The name is a misnomer—he does not keep the bees—they own him. With the busy interest of proprietors they swarm all over him, inspecting their property. They sing their findings

like an ultrasound scan in constant readjustment, like a thousand faxes on the state of affairs. They possess his hands like combs of honey endlessly worked over. Single bees

drip from the mass of movement, some fly to his veil. The patient keeper swims in the honey of his slowness the lullaby of frantic wings demands, but moves with the

purpose of the bees amid their chanting of the ancient charms for floral fields and abundance of poppies. The beekeeper endures the slow trickle of sweat beneath his temple in his

hexagon of silence. He inserts the frame into the hive with the assurance of the mountaineer—he looks into the eye of death, his, by a thousand stings, and sings softly under his breath.

You must talk to the bees to keep them happy, even as you listen to their songs. He croons his encouragement, promise of sugar against winter famine. He possesses scissors fine enough

to trim the wings of queens but has a weakness in the male line—his son's allergy to bee stings. As he lies dying of prostate cancer, bees swarm over him to mummify his clouded eyes.

Ian Revie

Toad Medicine

Each week I'd return and mow, and the toad, his throat pulsing, flourished in the weft of his garden, daily taking stock of flies, ladybugs, moths seeping out of grass and flagstone, unpopular I suppose with his deft mandibular skills—this prince among poppies and thistle towns, soaking in a tub of rain-made mud or simply sunning.

I held him
once, little bladder bag, took a lick
of his slick skin
with my will-do-anything-once tongue.
I'd scout the lawn, make sure
he wasn't dreaming clouds
in the mower's whirling way.

I grew to look forward
to him and his few square feet of world,
would check if he had attracted
a mate with his sheepish grin,
put on a toad's rightful weight,
jigged to some other garden.

One week
I found him pancaked,
in the street not far
from the orange slashes of poppy light, nothing left
but a starburst husk—

my little pisser,
my little squashed god of rain gone.

Michael Arvey

Prayer to Tear the Sperm-Dam Down

*Because we need to remember
that memory will end, let the womb remain
untouched.*

—from "Prayer to Seal up the Wombdoor" by Suzanne Paola

Because we know our lives will end,
Let the vagina host a huge party, and let the penis come.
Let it come nude, without a raincoat.
Let it come rich, and leave with coffers drained.

Throw the prostate's flood-gates open.
Let sperm crowd the womb full as a World Cup stadium.
Let them flip and wriggle like a mackerel shoal.
Let babies leap into being like atoms after the Big Bang.

Let's celebrate fullness, roundness, gravity.
Let's worship generation—this one,
And the next, and next, forever.
Let's adore the progression: protozoan to guppy

To salamander to slow loris to Shakespeare.
Forget Caligula. Forget Hitler. Mistakes
Were made. Let's celebrate our own faces grinning
Back at us across ten thousand years.

Let's get this straight: Earth doesn't care if it's green
Or brown or black, rain forest, desert, or ice pack.
A paper mill is sweet as lavender to Earth,
Which has no sense of smell, and doesn't care

If roads gouge it, or industries fume into its air.
Beetles don't care. Or crows,
Or whales, despite their singing and big brains.
Sure, rabbits feel. Spicebush swallowtails

Feel their proboscides slide into flowers'
Honey-pots, which may feel too.
But they lack the brains to care.
Even if beagles are mournful as they look—

Even if great apes grieve, wage war, catch termites
With twigs, and say in sign language,
"Shit on your head," they still don't care.
Or if they do—well, join the club.

We humans care so much, some of us dub life
A *vale of tears*, pray not to be reborn,
And see heaven as oblivion. Earth will be charred
By the exploding sun, blasted to dust,

Reduced to quarks, and still not care.
If some people enjoy their lives too much
To share, let them not share.
If some despise themselves too much to propagate,

Let them disappear. If some perceive themselves
As a disease, let them take the cure, and go extinct.
Virus, spirochete, blue whale, Beethoven,
Kidney stone—it's all the same to Earth.

Let people realize this, or not. Earth doesn't care.
I do, and celebrate my own fecundity.
I celebrate my wife's ovaries, her fallopian tubes
Down which, like monthly paychecks,

Gold eggs roll. I celebrate the body's changing.
(I might as well; it changes anyway.)
I celebrate gestation, water breaking,
The dash to the hospital, the staff descending,

Malpractice policies in hand. I celebrate
Dilation of the cervix, doctors in green scrubs,

And even (since it's not mine) the episiotomy.
I celebrate my bloody, dripping son, head deformed

By thrusting against the world's door.
Let it open wide for him. Let others make room for him.
Let his imagination shine like God's.
Let his caring change the face of everything.

Charles Harper Webb

A Caterpillar on a Sleeping Fox

We have in common curling up in the sun,
a nose for ruin, a smooth remove of interest,
and a lazy doggedness about our afternoons.
I am enamored, thrilled as wheat field waves
to crawl across you lying on this boulder.
Do you dream you're drunk on grapes again?
And then you twitch: pursued by hounds
or some Samson brandishing a torch.

They say my mother was a butterfly,
though this tail of yours seems more
maternal, more me. This warm orange fluff brush
might have been stolen from my infancy.
I have your nose, but not your eyes.
Reunited, we're long lost kin on a daytime talk show,
and our audience, the ears of windblown wheat,
applaud and weep, applaud and wipe their eyes.
I feed on it; you're glazed over, perhaps in shock.

If I hang by a thread, risking a whisper
in your ear, will you wake and love me,
make me like you among the crafty and quick?
Yet you sleep. If you were a chrysalis for weeks,
you'd make your breakthrough, for heaven's sake,
your debut, as a woman in a red dress,
no dog, a cat-like indifference, a feline stretch,
and all the boys save one would call you vixen.

John Poch

Query

Out into the day lilies'
loud blooming take
your notebook like a net
to seize a few summer
specimens, chloroform
them in an inky blue
solution, pin them between
the page's stem lines
with your ball point's rigid
tip, and then, without
blinking or breathing, force
mind, fingers, to stillness,
as the monarch circles
above you, wings asking
air: *what have we here?*

John O'Dell



Cecilia Soprano, Artist

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POETRY 2001



International Poetry Competition

You've heard of the French group Doctors Without Borders. This year's *International Poetry Competition* brings you Poetry Without Borders. We'll cross the world's most difficult frontiers, from Iran to Afghanistan, to bring you vital supplies of much-needed inspiration. You'll have your pick of climates, from an ice hotel in Arctic Sweden to the glory hole of a glass blower's furnace. Like young Miss March clinging to the coattails of Indiana Jones (p. 42), we'll whirl through Jerusalem, Paris, Budapest, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Greek Isles. We'll even pause for a moment (in honor of John Keats) "silent, upon a peak in Darien."

I have to say something about our first poem, "Black Forest." The poem itself is extraordinary enough, an eyewitness account by an infantryman in World War II. Young British poets like Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke immortalized World War I in poetry, at the cost of their lives. But it is rare to find such poetry by an American G. I., much less a poem that puts you "on the ground" in World War II quite like this one. I think our readers would like to know, also, that the poet was blinded for life six days after the night of this poem. And that he went on to become a college professor despite his blindness.

Inspiration comes in many forms. I hope you find it in abundance here. Welcome to *Poetry 2001*, and welcome to the world!

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

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POETRY 2001



International Poetry Competition

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Albert W. Starkey • Walt Stromer
Helen Sweeney • Mark Terrill
John Troyer • Beth Copeland Vargo
Dianalee Velie • Deborah Warren
Leah Weed • Louise Whitney
Mike Wiegand • Cynthia Reynolds Wyatt

Black Forest

The darkest night of all my life
a black pine Belgian forest near Bastogne
the last day of the year of 1944
our Army regiment climbed down from trucks
just after sundown
within a whisper the dark was absolute
trapped among precisely planted pines
taller than the windmill on our farm.
At midnight by the colonel's ticking watch
the quiet order came, "Move out,"
unlike the raucous shouting of the previous year
watching the ball descend beside the Timely tower
we moved in silence, each with hand on the shoulder
of the man ahead
like caterpillars dumb and blind, following the leader.
We stepped out of the dark forest into the new year
into a breathless night of moon and snow and starlight
as fragile and enduring as that first Noel
we marched in single file, each side of the road
the only sound the crunch of boots on snow
the front 2 miles away.
Like shepherds on their pilgrimage we too were bent on peace
our rendezvous a different kind
with those who beat their plowshares and their pruning hooks
to 88's, to Stukas, and to Panzers
and as was true 2000 years ago
before the world would know a time of peace
there had to be some dying.

Walt Stromer

Landscape in March

It's smoke that sets the pace in this slow landscape,
smoke from olive boughs and last year's vines,
the same unhurried smoke we've seen before
here and there in the hills and distances
behind a Madonna—behind Annunciations,
Expulsions, Adorations, Crucifixions—
rising still, the same scene, same *sfumato*
blue as the rosemary climbing the garden wall.

And what they tell us—olive, vine, and cypress,
windless smoke and terraced hills—is this:
Nothing, after earth, is necessary.
Here is all our history and future—
here in this landscape, mysteries enough
to lift us up until we tread the air.
Just this world. And this is what to cling to,
like vines on a narrow terrace in the earth.

Deborah Warren

Skiathos, 1973

The young men of the village set up tables
and borrow chairs
from the blue-shuttered taverna in the square.

At dusk everyone gathers in the grove to anchor
white tablecloths with carafes of retsina
and fat wax candles.

The women scoop kalamatas from the crock,
their teeth busy with fruit and words,
tender and salty.

They turn their heads to spit away the pits.

In the clearing, men feed dry elbows of olive wood
into the flames and poke with sticks
at rows of fish striping on the grill.

Conversation deepens, the night blues
to silver with the smoke and intimacy
of the island; they have been together forever.
The moon declines and glasses are raised
to the olive...
where the sun is stored.

Each considers the cycling of seasons
the sky turning hour by hour
the Earth cleaving to its core
the olive to its stone.

Amy Dengler

Miss Josephine March Writes to Indiana Jones

Dear Indiana,

While I am cooped up in Concord
you're probably packing your battered rucksack
heedless of the luckless buckles and tattered straps
in a hurry and hell-bent for Caracas or Quito
restless to ride down the rapids and into the ruins.

The best fun to be had here
is throwing snow at the boy next door—
he's a capital fellow.... But you,
you're trekking up the Himalayas
fedora pulled low against icy blows
showing the Sherpas how.

I'm sure I'm intended for something
more splendid than running errands for Aunt March,
the old pepper-pot!

Marmee says I have to wear my hair up, my skirts long
and carry kid gloves which never care to pair up.
I know I'm an ungrateful wretch but all this ladylike stuff
makes for long days and let me tell you, I'm languishing.

Oh Indy...

Christopher Columbus! I like your name.
Why is it that only boys get to go to college
and war? If only I could join Father
and take care of a few of those rebels.
Instead I have to sew and be all spandy nice
while you're having adventures.
Say, could you use a sidekick, a scrappy sort?

I can just see you riding camelback
across the desert, enroute to Marrakesh
the hood of your *djellabah* shielding you
from sandstorms and recognition...or

hightailing it out of a canyon
Holy Grail in hand
your hatbrim hazed by dust
and at the eleventh hour on a wily hunch
you choose just the right trail
sparing yourself an encounter with ruffians out
to eat your lunch.

Do you ever get to Concord?
We often entertain guests in the parlor.
I write plays and stories;
my sisters and I act them out.
I myself am at the eleventh hour
and could use some rescuing
some adventure, any advantage.
Do stop by.

Amy Dengler

The Moments After

Silent, upon a peak in Darien
they stood. The vast Pacific stretched below
and far away; far more than they could know,
although it's true they had an inkling then.
But there was work to do. They must climb down
and struggle back to camp; repack and stow,
put all in order. Who knew where they'd go
now that they'd found what they set out for? When
in later years a few of them recalled
those moments, it was not as rushing surge
of wonder, nor astonishment, nor urge
to wander wider, farther, still to roam
the unimagined distances. What rolled
and broke in on them then was, *Let's go home.*

Bruce Bennett

Leaving Jerusalem

I

The place my heart would rent no longer grants
her lease. I follow roads which have begun
to take their stones back, one by one.
Not yours the litany—a whispered chant
of bearded swaying men, each bent upon
his own salvation. Plucked out from the weave
of her, unraveling, I take my leave.
No book will bind her to me when I've gone.

I come to stand in Abu Tor. Above
is *Tchelet*—blue of priests—even the sky's
forbidden me today. Brought on a breeze
the muezzin also wails for her, our love
El Quds. A schoolboy begs his green kite rise
out of the gnarled arms of olive trees.

II

The plane is rocked, is shaken, as we lift
into a gust whose chill I will not feel.
The Grandmothers have fed me my last meal
of *fool, sambusak, kibbe*—magic gifts
to fill my belly with an eastern son.
Beyond the pane, the nearest star heads west
but he will wake again in Judah, dressed
in desert rose and gold—and I am done.

Small silent tongues of blue—my chest is tight
to watch them lick an ancient port. I feel
beneath my ribs, a crowded gaudy place:
a Byzantine cathedral. From this height
it's perfect as a postcard, as unreal:
no flying stones, of turbulence no trace.

Leah Weed

The Locksmith Near the Corner of Iskar and Boudapeshta

Sofia, Bulgaria

He looks up from his paper, glad to leave
for a moment Bulgaria's woes, and our eyes
meet as I pass. From his window the street is his.
Here the new rich seldom wander, sleek
in Italian threads. Only a girl clips by,
black leather beauty, her lips pouting
scarlet from her pale perfect face.

Between customers, sometimes he plays chess
with Borislav, comrade from the old days
at the ministry. Boris plays badly,
but is liberal with opinions.

"Before the changes, we were lazy equals.
What was there to covet? But we trusted no one.
Now we steal eight hours a day, parading
with new toys. Of course, we still trust no one.
You can retire, Vasli. The rich buy locks
by the donkey cart." The locksmith waves a hand,
"Business is good. Business is bad."
He grins and checkmates his old friend.

He sips his *chai*. Though his sign says he
opens all, he's also in the business
of keeping tight. He knows how people crave
to secret from the light, cozy away,
bolt up, chain down, hoard from any eye.

His is the sign of three keys—Father, Son
and Holy Ghost? Reason, Flesh and Spirit?
If I came into his shop could he put
his ear to my chest, tap my ribs and hear
the tumblers of my rusty heart fall into place?

He nods as I pass. He knows about me,
wandering feckless down exotic streets,
believing here I lost that silver key
to all that mattered. A tourist, himself once,
his English is good. He would say to me
"Lift up your eyes, stranger."
Travel opens doors to nothing."

Mark DeFoe

Negative Space

It's where I go when I zone
out, entranced, the entrance to ozone

blue, that Orphic note, the Om
of snow on snow, zinc-white

Zen hole in the inkless
oval of the O or zero.

It's the helium halo around
the moon, the echoing O, O, O,

Rimbaud's omega
of the hallowed vowel,

the ohm of the dial tone,
the Zenith screen

dissolving into fields of white
noise and burning snow.

It's the osmosis of light
on Sugimoto's photographs of fog

taken morning, afternoon and night
over the Ligurian sea,

opaque layers of vapor and mist
exposed on cibachrome.

It's the gesso-white canvas
no brush stroke disturbs,

the vanishing point where heaven
and earth converge

in the void of the universe,
in the holy word.

Beth Copeland Vargo

Misconception

It was like catching a cold.
If he coughed without covering his mouth,
if he sneezed, you could have his baby.
Or so I believed

at the age of nine when I read the chapter
on reproduction in a medical text. I knew the facts
of life had nothing to do with storks and bees,
but I couldn't figure out the mechanics

of sex, that tab A had to be inserted
into slot B like the cardboard figures cut
from the Rice Krispies box that always fell
apart when I tried to put them together.

Conception was a kind of weather
or photosynthesis: as leaves absorb sunlight
and turn green, I thought a man's floating spores
could penetrate a woman's pores,

that they could be on opposite sides of the room
just looking at each other or looking out the window.
One could be reading the newspaper and the other
playing *Heart and Soul* on the piano

when, *slam, bam*, sperm and egg collide
and nine months later she becomes a mother.
I thought the microscopic sperm
could pass like germs from unwashed hands

contaminate a door knob, spoon or drinking glass,
or as Casper
floated through brick walls
on Saturday morning cartoons, believing

a wife could receive her husband's seed
like milkweed sown from the pod,
that every birth was a miracle, a gift from God,
that all you need is love.

Beth Copeland Vargo

Think of Death as a Subway Station in Paris

Think of death as a subway station in Paris; you enter the funky Art Nouveau portal leaving a bright spring day behind you and descend the gum-stuck, butt-strewn steps between dank tile walls tagged with graffiti. A stale breeze from the netherworld suddenly ruffles your hair and clothes, while a threadbare hippie busks bad Dylan next to a red velvet lined guitar case in which a handful of francs and centimes glimmers in the ashen fluorescent light. The woman behind the bullet-proof glass gives you your ticket and an oblique smile. You're alone in the crowd on the platform, separate yet indiscernible from the others under the common rubric of metropolitan desire, the wish to be transported expediently as possible, rushing through the stroboscopic darkness to your next destination in the City of Light.

Mark Terrill

Uncalculated Move

I finish rereading Thoreau's *Walden* & put it back on the bookshelf & step over to the window & contemplate the 154 years that have passed in the interim & the distance between Concord Massachusetts & Wacken Germany & the distance between myself and someone like Thoreau but failing to draw any sort of meaningful conclusion I end up just staring vacantly out the window at the empty green pasture between our house & the next & the sodden gray winter clouds moving in from the west & the occasional car passing by on the rain-slick road while listening to the hiss of the tires & the call of some bird in a nearby tree some bird I can't identify despite 16 years of living here because having been born & raised in California I'm not on intimate terms with all the flora & fauna of northern Germany it's all just trees & birds & animals & people acting under the pretense of "living" like they do anywhere else in the world & anyway how important are all the names & categories & classifications when it's essentially all the same thing now all moving together into the 21st century which is really just another empty name despite all the intrinsic & ominous associations you might find yourself making with mad cow disease or depleted uranium or faulty nuclear reactors or global warming or diminishing ozone layers or global dumbing-down & the dissolution in general of knowledge & virtue in the postmodern information age with its myriad bits & bites but nothing to really sink your teeth into & so I step over to the bookshelf again my eyes skipping over Thoreau & Emerson & Whitman & The Upanishads & Basho, then moving slower in the vicinity of Marx & Nietzsche & Orwell & Wittgenstein finally coming to a dead stop at Kafka of course Kafka the perfect inverse yin-yang complimentary opposite to the likes of Thoreau & I randomly flip open Kafka's *Diaries* and read the single entry for May third 1913 *The terrible uncertainty of my inner existence.* & immediately the much-needed solace is flying up into my face in the exact same moment that the sun suddenly bursts through a gap in the clouds shining through the window with its lifegiving warmth burnishing the glistening landscape with its stark yet all-encompassing light in an uncalculated move of such metaphorical brashness & theatrical aplomb that I'm almost ashamed to be witnessing it.

Mark Terrill

The Largest Ice Hotel in the World

So there's more than one—
if this is the largest, there must be smaller,
less expensive ones for geologists, poets—
mushers who've lost their dogs.
And one with a neon __ T E L sign
rigged to a die hard battery
that pulls a frost-bitten polar bear safari
off course to its slippery mouth,
every year.

But this is the largest ice hotel in the world,
carved from a faceless, frozen horizon.
For five months out of the year, some place
in the north of Sweden,
with a name you can't pronounce,
becomes a *hadj* for the restless and bored,
an Iditarod for the wealthy.

This is the atelier of the immovable object,
the iceberg that sank the Titanic,
base camp with no Everest to climb.

Outside is a boat of blue twilight
moored to an eternal minus degree.
Inside a reindeer skin has been thrown
over the shoulders of winter,
the breath still warms the path of idle chatter,
at the ice bar
Hypothermia sits gloved and smug
over ice tumblers of vodka—
beer freezes at minus twenty.

So they race from Concorde to husky
to room service on skates.
Bed is an ice futon wearing
(what else but) a borrowed kimono
of reindeer—the best insulator in the world.

Skinned, the best insulated in the world
stand shivering in ice outhouses,
hiding from the shock of the wind
and the constant gibes of the sled teams.

Five months—
then the chandeliers begin to weep into the vodka,
the ballroom is a Galapagos of down and orphaned taffeta,
futons float by with guests snoozing
past check out.

The reindeer have long since flown to Florida.
Sweating and chomping over tropical drinks
poolside, they amuse the tourists
with strange arctic stories,
ice cubes exploding in their mouths
like the faint thunder of calving icebergs.

Helen Sweeney

Beowife

for Tom McGowan

Yes, you know why a gaggle of scribes with their goose quill
swords cut me cold from the story. They needed to keep him
squeaky clean, free of sex, a savior. And no warrior Christ

could be shown as a brute. I was, after all, just battle-spoil,
May bride for an ice king. I accepted my fate—a slave, still,
though royal. I learned my queen-craft: how to be a scold

in the kitchen, a mastiff in the hall, a fox amid the pillows.
You can't know what he was under that tusked helm.
I'll say this much: boar is close, howl of a wolf, reptile with a voice.

I shuddered every time, entering that door with Grendel's arm
bolted over the threshold still luring the random fly. Trophy?
Call it the rank talisman of a broken life. Down in the fen

where the feuds rage worst, forging darkness, he fought the hag
with his famous grip. Bards say the skeletons of her victims
rattled where he walked. Black magic. Years had passed, but

I saw it in his eyes right away, behind the blue. He'd ripped her
open to find the seat of evil. That was no good place. It must
have sapped his marrow. Right away his thanes sensed it:

he'd changed. An angry dam, in death, can wreak that. A shadow
stood between us from day one. It was not only in his bones.
It was a spirit wound, a stain. When his loyal killers snored

on their benches, he was not the full dirk between the skins.
A fumbler, a panting raider, ravenous, hasty, slack.
He was glad and deft only in the bee yard, smoking the drones,

pulling out the oozing comb like a living creature's heart.
He followed the code, of course, kept up his mead and meat,
his hours of lore. He loved to swim: a whale, a trout, an otter.

could fall so far into the salty sea, I'd begin to dream
of another master, but memories of swimming with Breca kept him
fresh and strong. I had to wonder at that communal flagon—

the hunt, the harp, the fact that neither cousin ever made sons.
For the survivor, love was like lust, just a shackle for lesser men.
Instead, he had power, old Hrothgar's flinty eyes, the demon

gaze. Listen. He could drunk-swagger and roar like a dragon
and give rings and spears and deep keels to his kinsmen.
He could snort and spout fire. It was no wonder outsiders

balked at crossing his skull-crowned borders. Our Geatland
had the peace of isolation, fear, the absence of laughter.
Everybody was content, harpers say, under the hero's firm grip,

unfit the heirloom dragon surfaced. It hoarded gold, it was
unsocial. It did no work with oar, sword or anvil. It could offer
no charms, no holy words. It had to go. My ford was old,

yes, but he'd kept to his regimen - ax-work in the morning,
racing the fledglings on the shore, a nightly dip in the swan's
wake across the fjord and he labored with his treasured swarms.

He tended dozens of droning hives in their wicker skeps.
Bee honey gave him wolf strength, a family belief. Out there,
in the garden, he kept his real queen throned in golden

sweetness. More and more, what I got was the back of his hand,
the edge of his tongue. He was all war and winter. He bruised
my brow and yanked my hair. He smote his wife, he reasoned,

he could smite the wyrm. Monks in their sacred places
would scratch it out on calf hides, what suited their needs:
a scrubbed warrior too busy with sword, ale and oaths

to measure his own cursed nature. I was witness to his
every weakness. His nurse, I packed a wallet with scones
and berries, mead, amulets and a hart-crowned whetstone.

But I spat on his blade. He'd grown easy to hate. At seventy,
he entered the barrens for battle. The rest passes for history,
saga, the myth of this frost country. When he was gone,

scorched, his dying words recorded, the barrow raised,
loyal Wiglaf tossed me out from our strong hall and heaped
Beowulf's booty into the grave. Then the torchwork,

firethorns rose, smoke to darken the sun. His colony
of golden bees was thrown onto the boat-wood pyre. A wreath
of ravens circled moonward above the blaze. Heaven

swallowed the smoke. That was his fate. And me?
I was free at last of the ordeal of shadows, still young,
yes, but broken, ringless, alone. "And a woman lamented,"

the written record claims, "old widow," my title in the poem.
But my name is Hrefen, you see, Raven, an actual person.
I have held his secrets too long, too close to the bone.

I had to tell this nightmare, before dark took me, to someone
from home. My suffering, fear of oblivion, my song of scorn—
I knew from the sky in your Viking eyes you'd understand.

R. T. Smith

Emotional Incontinence

Now that my friend's formerly buttoned-up husband
bursts into fits of laughter, he's legions more likable
than before his stroke. Eyes squeezed tight, mouth open
in surprise at his own hilarity, he's doubled over, helpless;
gleeful spittle sputtering in arcs over all of us.
Laughter is a pool he falls into, flailing like a happy fool
until he gives up and floats off giggling where none of us
can follow.

My friend says this condition casts itself in tears, too,
which reminds me of my childhood: all those early years
of incontinent crying, eye-socket ache, *crybaby* nickname,
pitying looks from adults, the doctor my mother took me to:
What's wrong with her? She cries constantly over nothing.
I was too young to say: *Ma! It's not nothing—it's life!*
I'm not really sad, just brimming over. She had to accept
the doctor's dim diagnosis: a stage, which she claimed
I never outgrew.

But I did, somewhere in my thirties—there was no time,
and I had children who must have their own crying.
Now, mired in middle-age, there's too much tranquility:
gentle smiles, tears that fill my eyes but don't spill over.
Maybe in old age I'll laugh myself sick. It could be a stroke
of luck to go out roaring, howling, convulsed, until finally
I die laughing.

MaryLee McNeal

Voltaire's Slippers: Sans Souci

Take a pair of slippers from the bin,
They'll fit right on whatever shoes
You're in, the grey rag felt ample
Cover, keeping scratches from those
Inlaid marble floors, exquisite
Parquet of Frederick's summer place,
Seven simple rooms in varied
Colors, public and private space
For dogs, books, philosophers and
Music—all seven facing France
Or Italy. Today schoolchildren,
Laughing, run and glide to dance
A tribute to the old man who
In this summer house without a care
Could call the tune and make the music
Too, or summon up his friend Voltaire
To discourse on enlightenment.
Or did they, laughing, both collapse,
Breathless, in silken chairs from
Sliding on the marble floors? Perhaps.

Philip E. Burnham, Jr.

In the dancing monkey school of poetics,

I choose my subjects like a teenaged boy
executes a cannonball at the local pool,
hoping size and noise of splash
will compensate for lack of art.
Orgasms! hurricanes! you're bound
to look, like you can't help but look
at a crash on the freeway.

I admire those quiet poems
that other people write,
about their elderly parents or
the trillium by the mountain path,
poems that dare to be simple
on the inhale, slow on the exhale.

Those poems are the voluptuous woman
in the plain grey dress sitting solemn and glowing
in the corner, her body enough adornment
for the men at her hands and feet—
I'm the flat-chested girl smoking pot in the back,
wearing red and too much jewelry, the girl
who'll die if she doesn't get to dance.
When I was four I would turn and turn till I was drunk
on turning. Even now in a good-night kiss,
too much tenderness is like eating butter.
Thrill me, push me up against the wall a little.

Joy Maulitz

Sans Souci "without care," the summer palace of German emperor Frederick the Great, a musician and friend of philosophy and the arts.

Thigh

With the honesty of homemade butter,
paddle churned cream, (*eshta* in Arabic,
ecstasy foaming to the brim), a girl
river bathes, sheet of oil-black hair breaking
in rapids, cut lemon scintillating
olive skin free of tree-stumped chador, skirts
within skirts, peal of her bell-body rung
muffled in Iran heat a splash of white.
The rhythm of pumice scraping her feet,
sandbar against warm current, frothy cape
a bee-bubbled hive, honeyed trace curling
to her bare knees, thick transparent lather.
At a Tehran bazaar endless gold-stores
Could only make me lust for someplace pure.

Roger Sedarat

Oh, My God, It's Hector

Walking to the Golden Gate Bridge,
I behold four logging trucks, laden
with one giant Sequoia.
Four chariots, blue doors decorated
in white filigree, each pulled
by 500 horses, thunder past me
and past me and past me spewing
diesel fumes and bits of bark.

Through the city the chariots
drag Hector, fallen,
cut down by triumphant Achilles,
cut and cut and cut and cut
in leviathan sections, distributed
over the four-truck caravan.

The street fills with business as usual
as this profane rite of triumph
passes by the Golden Gate of Troy.

Louise Whitney

Needing a Bit of Heaven

It's lonely at the top
of the Eiffel Tower,
Empire State Building,
any classroom
after students leave,
become long-term memory
to be tested on years later
when they run up to you
in Food Towne beaming
"you remember me, don't you?"
expect you to say "yeah
you were blonder
had more hair
sat third row, fifth seat back
always on time
did the work
mostly made A's."

For them things never change,
it's like it was,
you're still excited about Shakespeare
quoting lines to the clouds
your colleagues, students
who could care less,
explaining stuff:
out out damned spot
didn't mean the dog,
frailty thy name really is woman,
life's a walking shadow all right,
et tu, Brute!
ate two whats?

They don't think
you blow your nose,
curse cry bleed
like everyone else,
go to the john,

you're the teacher
your upper lip's stiff
you salute the flag
go to church
throw the trouble-makers
out of class
make the world safe
for democracy,
they'd never suspect
that you loved them,
that you took them home with you
day after day,
agonized for their sake,
for their success.

You never walked among them,
you were the theme of the poem,
terms and concepts
to be learned,
an essay, book report, character analysis,
grade on a transcript,
the reference letter
they needed
for the perfect job,
they never saw you
as that dog
one bright fall day
on the lawn outside the classroom
lying on its back
in warm sunlight
rolling from side to side
kneading the heavens
with its paws.

Herb Kitson

Late Blackberry Season

The swell begins to stretch
Beneath a wispy blue cover
One autumn's day near Dun Chaoin—
Fair warning for what is to come.

Gray tweed finally issues off ocean's far rim
Mounting ominous burden
Pressing in deliberately
Toward acquiescing pastures of yellowing green

Where the hedgerows of berries are turning black,
Where the year is turning inward,
And aging vitality is waning
Near a broken stone barn.

It is the season of ripening
When there is little left to do
But greet the storms
And gather the fruit.

Albert W. Starkey

Absence of Buddha at Bamiyan

Here was his body extracted like a tooth
From sandstone cliff, knocked down and chunked,
The great right hand left propped on sand,
Severed at the wrist, dust-floured, pock-marked,
Broken thumb and forefinger touching.

So people learn what severed hands can mean,
The soldiers make mock show of its mute mudra,
Tender and precise, of wounded cliff,
And roots of rock which dangle from the mouth
Of earth in which the ancient carvers delved.

*Statues are mere objects made of mud or stone,
Easy to destroy, so leaders say. The hand
Listens to the body calling from its absence.
The people hear a humming in its finger pod
Where seed and flower hunker down to wait.*

Ann Silsbee

Glass

And not to have is the beginning of desire.
—Wallace Stevens

Mimicking raw glass pellets
blazed to malleable clarity
by fire, our time together melts
into molten memory.

Your departures hang
in my thoughts, like liquid
gathers of glass at the tip
of a glass blower's pipe,

this sigh of silence floating,
folding into the empty space
of your absence, a Journeyman's
breath with nowhere else to go.

This essential, perfected, pure void,
this vacuum molds everything,
the center of a vase,
a mug, or my heart

shaped bowl. Blocked in form,
emptiness contained, distinctly
hollowed, I close my eyes,
understanding the origin of desire.

Hallowed distance separates
us, like the pontil piece
used to sever blown glass
from its birth at the pipe.

Languidly, we turn in this furnace,
this glory hole of our detachment,
not knowing how deeply
Eros's hot iron has scarred

our fragile base. Will we
carry his elegant signature
or shatter into shards as disgraced
seconds, when coolness settles

into the comfortable atmosphere,
where glass anneals to avoid
stressful cracking, and healing,
we are transformed.

Dianalee Velie

Monet at Giverny

An artist could go crazy, nearly crazy,
nearly blind, trying to capture light
rippling on the water, constantly
changed by the prism of the eye,
the water black or green, depending on
the traverse of clouds and the angle of the sun.

The reflection of a tree in one painting
seems almost more vivid than the tree itself,
but even as he is painting it, a light wind
wrinkles the water and dissolves the trunk,
foregrounding a horizontal line of water lilies
floating on the surface of the pond,
seemingly disconnected from the blur of bushes
on a bank so green the water is invisible
until the light shifts again, and the breeze
Picks up enough to give the lily pads
rhythms and textures that change constantly.

As insects vibrate in the shadows, fish breathe bubbles,
and soft waves slap the undersides of lily pads
flinging flecks of gold into the artist's eye,
he sits squinting at his easel on a folding chair
made of canvas heavy enough to support his *derrière*,
but lighter than the canvas on which he tries
to transform wind and sky into shapes and colors.

A fish flaps and makes a sucking sound,
but the painter, busy refocusing his eyes and reaching
for a lighter shade of green, ignores such ephemera.
He would need countless canvases to capture
the myriad palpitations of one pond one August day,
and even if he could set up a hundred thousand easels
and had arms long enough to reach them all
with infinite shades of color, nuanced line,
he would still be unable to render

the mudsmell of turtles, the undulations of snakes,
the reeds and grasses shimmering in the sun.
So each day at dusk he sits stunned before canvases
filled with blobs of color and swatches of something
beautiful that is not the pond.

Laurie Robertson-Lorant

Chalk

It was alive once, inside
its skeletons, a million years
breathing ocean, eating and being eaten,

dying and falling, compacting
on the sea bottom until
you cannot tell where one ends

and another begins, and now I hold it, this tube
of too-distant ancestors, to scrawl
these loops and crossed Ts,

moving from nearly legible script
to a dandelion's wind-blown seeds;
from the calculus of white

to complicated equations
of death and pallor, the gravity
and compressed ecosystem of chalk.

With each breath
I take in the dust of millennia,
before ferns and palm trees,

when volcanoes pushed up
and the sun pressed down,
pollen white as my hair,

as my own dried and bleached bones.
And what should it matter if
the afterlife is a shrinking cylinder

like a cigarette, or a cloud
once I've rubbed
the board blank? What should it matter

if you leave yourself behind
like a vapor trail, if students
copy you into their notebooks, if

at day's end you are a mere
shadow on the board, or cling
to the eraser's felt like a lover

and matriculate through our lungs?
Tomorrow will be another day of students,
and one more wind will carry you

through a momentary rebirth and then
the death you always had,
only more deeply embedded now in the future.

John Minczeski

The Onion and the Accordion

*What's the difference between an accordion and an onion?
No one cries when you cut up an accordion.*

No one accords it its full due,
this armadillo of the music
kingdom, spiny burrowing creature few

can love. Shouldn't they be extinct
by now, these ancient clumsy targets
for tire treads and jokes? My Opa, quint-

essential grandfather, loves to repeat
the story of leaving Germany by night,
prayer book in one hand and instrument

case in the other. Despite
the unwieldy size, he carried
it aboard the ship, and wooed my tight-

lipped grandmother with a flurry
of polkas and French love songs. One hand
approaches and then pulls away, a slur

of impulses contracting and expanding
in the belly. Hunger's indiscriminate
in love: as the Spanish say, *contigo, pan*

y cebolla. And if their years of bread
and onions lasted longer than for most,
each day brought a gentle rising, a delicate

unpeeling of the layers. This lowest
vegetable is Latinate, offshoot
of the unexpected *union*. What else is lost

in translation from sun to root,
from breath to the sound produced?
This accordion's lain mute

for years, mother of pearl keys that seduced
my grandmother locked inside their box;
Opa himself has been reduced

to folded silences. And so it stops
me when, cooking dinner, I hear that old wail
on the radio. The d.j. jux-

tapes a dizzy Cajun reel
with the sequined flounce of *Carnaval*.
The voice cracks, even the fiddle is a frail

bone next to these fleshy notes. My table
is a mess of vegetables and meat.
The curry's forming a cabal

with the chipotle peppers. I cheat,
combining sweet and salty, mixing
metaphors. The music pleats

the air like curtains, a brisk
and sudden opening. Then tears are streaming
down my face. It's not the onions.

Eleanor Stanford