

The bride and groom monitor the exit
like regalia guards checking passports.
The line shuffles past, more nods and grins.

*Do we have to kiss the bride after the ceremony?
No, we Chinese don't do that.
You Chinese are marvelously realistic.*

Michael Kuperman (Taiwan)

The Spring

The city after the rain is clean, wet
like a cold coffin parked in a courtyard.
The girl next to me said: "someone was hacked three times yesterday
and was thrown into the Rain Mountain Lake, just for a woman...."
Her lovely hairpin made the surrounding atmosphere uneasy
like crowds of fish swimming to the bait.

*Yang Jian (China)
translated by Ouyang Yu*

Someone

someone is having a morning coffee
someone is typing up an email letter to send somewhere
someone is glancing out the window at the blue september sky
someone is faxing something somewhere
someone is receiving a phone call from someone else
someone is dialing a number but that number is busy
someone is going to the toilet
someone is walking upstairs for the exercise
someone is taking the elevator
someone is going down
someone is coming up
someone is opening a large parcel containing poetry submissions
someone is writing a rejection letter to a novelist
someone is thinking of someone else
someone is having a little hangover
someone is chatting on the side
someone is restarting
someone is getting technical support and listening to the messages
someone is running whose high heels are being heard
someone is approaching 50
someone is approaching 23
someone is going to have a smoke outside the building
someone is worried about his marriage
someone is looking forward to her upcoming wedding ceremony
someone is checking and rechecking a large sum of money
someone is listening to birds singing on his dvd
someone is pouring tea into her pot of frangipani
someone is looking at his screen
someone is stretching his legs and arms
someone is a little unhappy about a difficult client

someone turns his head to see the enormous head of an airplane
near his window

someone is meeting someone

Ouyang Yu (China)

Theory

have you got a theory?

when you started preparing for your phd
that's what your supervisor asked you

sometimes I find it similar to someone asking before you get married:
have you got a dick?

now I get dirty
and I should say sorry

millions of people have died
as a result of marxist theory in china

and a huge number of academics are turned into slaves
by derrida and the french theorists

and of course they have become professors, too
a bonus I guess

enslaving their imitators
getting credits in the refereed journals

theory
you son of a bitch

(refer back to stanza 4, please)

Ouyang Yu (China)

Peace

Peace for you and me:
is that a small pond of clear water,
a village tucked far away,
laughter of the children, cooing of the doves
and chirping of the cicada? Is that the trembling night
as blue as your eyes,
brimful and crystalline? In other words,
shadow of the chignon, a flight
of green parakeets, a mosque
in a sleepy village.

Yet, accursed
We are picking the grains from the dust
like contending crows.

I remember the painting
of the close and intimate wings of the dove:
who cares if it is costly or not?
I know that you and I and they,
whatever our surnames,
belong to one world.

To live with the righteous,
I say, is a curse.

Sanaul Huq (Bangladesh)
translated by Shahid Naruddin

From Altitude 29,000

A letter to my brother Wowie

From my window seat
the sun seems nearer
as I sit on the wing.
Just as the glare begins
pushing me back, the plane
tilts at a slight angle
and the sun jumps off
to the blue depths.
It is then that my eyes
fill with the brown-black hills
far below, so far below
that it is only with the inner
eye of memory that I will see
the greens as well.

And so I lean back and begin
walking home in the woods,
the omnipresence of coconuts
and bamboos flowing over
to the early morning air.
At every bend down the path
loom the sentinel shadows
of *kaimitos* and mangoes
dwarfing banana shrubs
in their unkempt abandon.
The sturdy slimness of papaya
and *langka* heaves imperceptibly
with the ripe desire
of their pendulous wards.
Keeping their distance
the *sineguelas* and *duhat*

call to early summer
with bud-voices
on their boughs.
Dark watermelons nestle
in their earthbound vines
beyond the sleep
of drying bushes, scorched grass.
Closer home, flowers grow
senses in sunlight:
wide-eyed gaze of bougainvilleas
in burning bloom;
white outstretch of *kalachuchis*
palming the sky;
ethereal blush of *madres de cacao*
draping habits onto leafless limbs.

The seatbelt sign overhead
lights up and its sound
ushers me home,
where dewbead slides
down ferntip to heartleaf.
The inner eye blinks, and my face
fills the window once more
while I begin my descent
to the one earth bearing
our wanderings,
as on the seventh day
of our world's waking.

Randolf Bustamante (Philippines)

The Rolling Saint

Lotan Baba, a holy man from India, demonstrated his craft by rolling on his side for four thousand kilometers across the country in his quest for world peace and eternal salvation.

—Reuters

He started small: fasting here and there, days, then weeks. Once, he stood under a banyan tree for a full seven years, sitting for nothing—not even to sleep. It came to him in a dream: *You must roll on this earth, spin your heart in rain, desert, dust.* At sunrise he'd stretch, swab any cuts from the day before, and lay prone on the road while his twelve men swept the ground in front of him with sisal brooms. Even monkeys stopped and stared at this man rolling through puddles, past storefronts where children would throw him pieces of butter candy he'd try and catch in his mouth at each rotation. His men swept and sang, swept and sang of jasmine-throated angels and pineapple slices in *kulfi* cream. He rolled and rolled. Sometimes in his dizzying spins, he thought he heard God. A whisper, but still.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil (India)

The Sparrows Come Free

The future was already in the past.
The leaves were there in the seeds—
Brittle brown, black serration,
Wrinkled, desiccated,
Waiting for the clemencies of time,
And green thumbs, weather, earth, water.
In the mind's eye were visions of things,
The possibilities of lushness,
Of tangerine ripeness and yellow pungency,
The anticipation of the sigh of summer
Among the wayward branches,
Of leaves snuggling in pouring rain,
The nocturne of frogs rising from the ponds.
When you dug a hole in the ground
To bury the unpromising saplings,
When in the months that followed
You uprooted the irrelevant weeds,
Prayed for rain and sunlight to some god
Of dubious munificence,
Was it ever on the periphery of the heart's dream
That some years into your middle age
The seeds would have such a crown of abundance
For the birds to have made their airy sanctuary?
Now the garden is ablaze with their raucous summons.
And sometimes interfused with their ceaseless aubade,
As the saffron dawn recedes relentlessly
Toward common brightness,
The blue echoes of a god-like voice:
*The sparrows come free,
Come free,
Come free.*

Anthony L. Tan (Philippines)

The Anatomist

for my teacher, Martin Banfill

In this colony of bones,
he steps between cadavers
like a priest, benedictions on his lips
for the souls which no longer
inhabit these houses. His tapered
fingers guide my scalpel under
flickering lights, unzipper caverns filled
with flowers and serpents. He recalls

the prison camp near Shang-Hai
where he peeled the husks
from bodies punctured by bamboo,
enough holes to let the blood
run through like colanders. There,
he fell in rapture with cartilage and bone,
the way calcium wraps itself
in lamellae like rinds of bark,

becomes padded by muscle, tailored
in skin. He dissects from clavicle to coccyx
by torchlight and the rustle of rice
in the paddies, discovers how tendons
shackle tubercles, pull fingers and toes
like marionettes. He knows breath's end.
Death is his sextant
beyond the stockade's pyre. I study

his maps on heft of heart, pre-
ordained contour of brain. One winter
to voyage from pole to pole, to see
with Caravaggio's eyes, flesh's truth.
In this cathedral of bones he points
like a compass past supplicant hands
to anatomic north, each unwrapping
of skin with reverence, each body part

handled like a reliquary. Disrobing
of eyes reveals a celestial gaze
on the brink of another world. He
remembers his face reflected
in the pond of a soldier's last glance,
the sound of body bags
being zippered until dawn. We
are his disciples at the last table,

inheritors of priestly secrets.
In death he shares his humble skeleton
wrapped in linen, wills his body
to the pallet for dissection, an offering
to students of the human constellation,
exalted as the nameless soldiers
who gave their final gift to him
for resurrection in the classroom of war.

Arthur Ginsberg (China)

The Muscular Buddha

Formed in a world of rock-hard nipples pectorals,
discus-throwers and javelin-gods,
rippling backs and midribs, dimpled knees,
a world where boy-emperors sport torso plating
and the young David preens,
cocksure in his sculpted brawn,
where even Moses' marble mantle falls away from rosy wrists
and clings to swelling thighs,

my eyes slid without purchase

along the unfretted curves
of androgynes sleek with babyfat,
stiff-standing or seated solid as stones,
arranged and precise,
robes unwrinkled like smooth silken shrouds.

They left me flat.

The eyes, yes, the realized smiles,
the gentle hands—
but how could those bodies ignite
with hunger and thirst, combustible lust,
the scorch of appetite,
or smolder in rosy health,
the easy hum of corporality,
muscles at work, breath-rhythm,
the relief of sweat?

And then I saw a sign

of another's doubt and resolution—
from a Bactrian field, all rubble and weeds,
once Alexander's farthest camp,

where a city of temples had blazed
among bleached Mediterranean walls
and mosaics of azure glass,
and in the center, on a shattered *stupa*
this torso had flared
in gorgeous, carnal relief.

I recognized the body,

the shoulders meant for work
in this world, the deltoids tense
from hoisting brusque biceps,
the belly hungry and taut above crossed legs,
a form somatic, unrobed

and—what should I make of this?

—incomplete, the head chipped away,
as if to confirm the audacity
of this archaic blend,
a stillborn spark on a glowing frontier,
this last light before dualism's darkness
—but, oh Lord! if only I could have seen
those cloudless eyes, that shadowy smile
joined to this animal core!

Ken Turner (Afghanistan)

Bactria ancient country in northeast Afghanistan

In Borobudur I Met the Buddha

Volcanoes glowered behind him.
He sat in lotus pose on a parapet
wearing one of his worn stone bodies,
the black shawl of afternoon thunderstorm
wrapped around his shoulders.

People scurried for shelter.
I asked my question, *Were you ever
struck by lightning?* He only smiled
and beckoned me to sit with him.

Imagine! Face to face with Buddha
on his own stone wall. I perched
in one of his bodies, legs crossed,
palms up like small, thirsty flowers.

The storm broke over us. Rain
lashed us both with its black spears,
the points pocking my skin like his.
The ground in us shook with thunder.

By dusk the storm quit, and I had to leave.
He came along, though I was too shy to ask
how he would stand the planes and taxis,
airport lounges, final boarding calls.

I needn't have worried. Wherever I go
he's sitting *zazen*, even without a parapet.
His quiet pools in wood thrush songs.
He loves my apple pie and cinnamon toast.

The Sunday Uncle told his old-hat joke
we'd heard a thousand times, Buddha
laughed his big-man belly laugh till tears
rained down our faces, and my uncle glowed.

The Buddha doesn't answer telephones.
He folds his limbs, breathes as the cat
breathes, stroking white sparks from her fur.
Whatever he's made of, not bone, not stone,
lightning is one of his bodies.

Ann Silsbee (Java, Indonesia)

Borobudur ancient ruin in Java, Indonesia

ASIA FEATURE CONTRIBUTORS

(Listed by the last word in the name.)

The Aogiri Group of Japanese translators consists of Fukabori Shige, Honda Noriko, and Saito Tadatoshi. Their work includes *Hiroshima Witness For Peace*, by Hiroiwa Chikahiro (Soeisha/Books Sanseido).

Steve Bradbury teaches poetry at National Central University in Taiwan. His *Fusion Kitsch: Poems from the Chinese of Hsia Yü* was published by Zephyr Press, Boston. His translation of Ho Chi Minh's "Prison Diary" is nearing completion.

Randy M. Bustamante is from the Philippines, where he studied and taught literature and the humanities. He is currently an IREPM doctoral fellow at Boston College.

Inara Cedrins is a writer and artist who went to China in 1998 to learn to paint on silk. She has taught at Peking and Tsinghua Universities in Beijing and for the People's Liberation Army. She now teaches writing at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou and lectures on art.

Cid Corman has lived in Kyoto for more than forty years and is the author of more than one hundred and fifty books.

Xue Di was born in Beijing in 1957. A two-time recipient of the Hellman/Hammett Award, his books include *An Ordinary Day*, *Circumstances*, *Heart Into Soil*, and *Dream Talk*. Since shortly after the Tienanmen Square Massacre in 1989, he has been a fellow in Brown University's Freedom to Write Program.

Michael Fessler is an American writer living in Japan since 1986. His work appears in *Kyoto Journal*, *Harvard Review*, *Wind Magazine*, *New Orleans Review* and *Pangolin Papers*.

Andrew Fitzsimons was born in Ireland, educated at Trinity College in Dublin, and is now a lecturer at the University of Tokyo.

Gengoro, pen name of Yoshiro Tobe, writes in the *senryu* form. Born in 1930, he became director of the League of Senryu Poets in Chiba Prefecture in 1968, and belongs to the haiku group *Zasso* (Weeds).

Arthur Ginsberg is a Seattle poet and neurologist, widely published in both poetry and medical journals. His book *Walking the Panther* was published by Northwoods Press.

Kijima Hajime is a Japanese poet, translator and artist. He is editor of *The Poetry of Postwar Japan* (1975) and *A Zigzag Joy* (1998).

Sanaul Huq, born in 1924, is a poet and essayist whose thirteen volumes of verse include *Poems of Rivers and Men*, *Selected Poems of Sanaul Huq*, and three volumes of translated poetry.

Andrew Kaufman's chapbook *Cinnamon Bay Sonnets* won the Center for Book Arts chapbook competition. He appears in *Massachusetts Review*, *College English*, *Beloit Poetry* and *Carolina Quarterly*.

Kenko At a time of great social and political unrest in Japan, the Buddhist priest Kenko (1283?-1352?) composed *The Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*), a collection of opinions and reflections on whatever, he tells us, happened to enter his head.

Gilbert Koh, born in 1973, is a lawyer. He has poems in *Singa, Quarterly Literary Review of Singapore*, and two anthologies: *No Other City* and *Love Gathers All*, poems from Singapore and the Philippines.

Michael Kuperman is living in Lu Chan, Taiwan, teaching English at Kao Yuan Institute of Technology. He has poems in *The Madison Review*, *The Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Kimera*, and *Rattle*.

Leza Lowitz has seven book translations from Japanese, including the award-winning anthologies of contemporary Japanese women's poetry, *A Long Rainy Season* and *Other Side River* (Stone Bridge Press). Her latest poetry book, *Yoga Poems: Lines to Unfold By* (Stone Bridge) won the Josephine Miles Award. Her book on teaching in Japan, *Expat*, is forthcoming in 2002 from Beacon Press.

Wendy Lu is an artist living in Canada.

Taylor Mignon edited *Poesie Yaponesia: a bilingual anthology*, with Hillel Wright (Printed Matter Press, 2000). A member of the poetry group *Sei-en* (Blue flame), his work appears in *Japan Times*, *Japan Quarterly*, *Kyoto Journal*, *Bongos of the Lord*, *Printed Matter*, and in *A Zigzag Joy*, a contemporary Japanese poetry anthology edited by Kijima Hajime.

Toh Hsien Min is the author of *Iambus* (1994) and *The Enclosure of Love* (2001). He is the founding editor of the *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* (www.qlrs.com) and a former president of the Oxford University Poetry Society. He is published internationally and winner of the Shell-National Arts Council Scholarship for the Arts.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil is an American poet whose mother is from the Philippines and whose father is from South India.

Alvin Pang graduated with first-class honours in Literature from the University of York, UK. His first poetry book *Testing the Silence* (1997) was a Straits Times Top Ten book. He co-edited *No Other City: The Ethos Anthology of Urban Poetry* (2000) and *Rhythms: The Millennium Anthology of Singapore Poetry*. Involved in many projects such as the Poetry Billboard website (<http://poetry.s-one.net.sg>), he was awarded the Singapore Internationale Award in 2001.

Patty Paine was a clarinet player in the Marine Band at Quantico and is now an MFA student at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her poems appear in *Whisky Island*, *Alligator Juniper*, and *Spectrum*.

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Fahmida Riaz, a Pakistani poet, was born in Meerut, India, in 1946. She has been widely translated into English. Her works include *Pukhar ki Zuban*, *Dhoop*, *Apna Jurm Sabit Hai*, and *Adhoora Admi*.

Oliver Rice won the Theodore Roethke Prize from *Poetry Northwest*. He was featured on *Poetry Daily*, and has work forthcoming in *Ohio Review's* anthology *New and Selected*, as well as the Bedford/St. Martin's textbooks *Poetry: An Introduction* and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*.

Ishigaki Rin was born in 1920. Her mother died when she was four. After a middle school education, she went to work for a bank, became involved in labor unions, and became an award-winning poet.

Yamao Sansei was born in 1938 and died in 2001. Raised in Tokyo, he and his family moved to the wilderness island of Yakushima, where he lived in the mountains in the ancient hermit-poet tradition.

Hiroaki Sato is working on an anthology of Japanese women poets from ancient to modern times.

Keshav Man Shakya is Secretary General of Newa De Dabu and founder of Yuva Bauddha Samuha in Nepal. His works include *Binachvangu Pahar*, *Jhyalan Pineya Parivesh*, and *Bi Nibha*.

Sharada Sharma, born in 1958, is a member of the Royal Nepal Academy and PEN Nepal. She has served as a delegate to the United Nations for Nepal. Her poetry collections are *Simanta Anubhuti* (1987),

Yuddhoparanta (1996) and *Swarna Sutra* (1996).

Ann Silsbee is a composer with musical works in many genres. Her poems appear in *Seneca Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review* and the chapbook *Naming the Disappeared*.

Kirpal Singh has published four volumes of poetry and two of fiction. He was Distinguished International Writer at the Iowa Writing Program, and his poetry has been performed on Broadway by the New York Theater Workshop. He currently directs the Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies at Singapore Management University.

John Solt is author of three poetry books and winner of the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for translation. His biography of Kitasono Katue, *Shredding the Tapestry of Meaning* (Harvard U. Asia Center, 1999), is being translated into Japanese. He runs highmoonoon.com, "specializing in what never crosses your mind."

Irving Stettner is a poet and artist living in Japan.

Anthony Tan is a professor of English at MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology, Iligan City, Philippines. Winner of the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Award for Literature and the Homelife Magazine Poetry Award, his published books include *Poems for Muddas* (Anvil Publications, Manila, 1996) and the forthcoming *5 Stories, 5 Essays*.

Marie Taylor is a California artist specializing in sumi painting. Her work can be viewed at Zen Brush: www.zenbrush.com.

Ken Turner has spent the past eight years in Pakistan and the Ivory Coast. He has poems in anthologies in the U.S. and Pakistan, as well as appearing in *International Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *English Journal*, and *The Lyric*.

Scott Watson has lived in Japan for more than twenty years. From Sendai, Japan, he directs Bookgirl Press and edits *Bongos of the Lord*. His latest book *No Vision Will Tell* is forthcoming in 2002.

Cyril Wong was born in 1977. His books include *Squatting Quietly* and *The End of His Orbit*.

Angeline Yap, wife, lawyer, writer, mother of three, has contributed to various anthologies since the 1970s. Her work can be viewed on the "Postimperial and Postcolonial Literature in English" website: www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/literature/poetry/ayap/y.

Ouyang Yu is a Chinese poet living in Melbourne, Australia.

Model of the Atom

Schrodinger knew about yearning,
had felt the same tug, been pulled
inexorably toward the nucleus
of his attraction. He was
a small, insignificant electron
in orbit around her. The path
between them, he found,
was predictable: his offerings
overshooting the boundaries
of acceptable, his disposition
lovesick and despicable.

Leave her uncertain
of your intentions, Heisenberg
advised. But it was no use.
He was charged, cursed,
circling her house at night,
despondent at the burning candles
calling him through the glass,
his inability to enter.

And so he wrote their story
in the devoted language
of his distance, describing
equations as waves, the sinusoidal
joy and repulsion she offered.
If only there were another solution,
to alter variables in his favor, ignore
the geometry of his position.
He ran the numbers again and again,
refusing to believe.

Jennifer Gresham

Body of Water

The human body is ninety
percent water, more miracle
puddle than anything else and
not immune to the laws
of ebb and flow. If the moon
can move oceans, why not us?
It is why we flood into cities
by day, flow down crowded streets
past other bodies, fill tall glass
buildings to do our work.
At dusk, we retreat the way
we came, following the tributaries
of cement to suburbs like an undertow,
Atlantis deserted once again.

It is why we write these poems
that seem to go nowhere,
to lose all the ground they gained,
why we never recognize
our own thirst or the depth
of our longing.

Jennifer Gresham

Round the World

The man from Duncan Toys
came to school twice a year
with dazzling exhibitions
of yo-yo pyrotechnics
and rhinestone gear. Bursting
loose at final bell, we'd spot
the makeshift stage,
the jet-black suit, the suede
lapels, and flashing
from his fingertips,
arcing from both hands—
spools of light, fine-spun orbs
circling a kinetic pole,
a magnetized spiderman
tossing crystal filaments
off the slanting sun.
His webwork fell around us,
held us there in awe.

The catechism taught us
seven cardinal sins
but in second grade
I had to use imagination
to pin down Lust. So I thought
about the yo-yos, their glittering
gems. The lust came later...
her name was Ginny Horner.
In a peasant blouse with puffy
sleeves, she looped me to her finger,
snapped me up and down, spun
me round the world.

Michael B. McMahon

A Villanelle for Xerxes

*X was King Xerxes
Who more than all Turks is
Renown'd for his fashion
of fury and passion.
X! Angry old Xerxes!*

—Edward Lear

With brands and whips he tried to tame a river,
King Xerxes, in silk turbans green and red.
Xerxes' rage could make a soldier shiver.

His ripest mistress knew she'd best deliver—
She'd quit her count of brave boys he'd beheaded;
besides, he'd tried with brands to tame a river.

He screamed, "You hateful, muddy, salty water!"
and lashed it with his whip—he hoped it bled.
Such rage at rivers made his soldiers shiver.

The scribes could never paint him a forgiver—
he sliced one son in half, that thunderhead;
and, for loss of bridge, he whipped a river.

At Xerxes' side? His executioner—
those two so tight they should have shared a bed.
Decapitations made their soldiers shiver.

His little undertaker often quivered
while sewing those lopped heads back on with thread.
With brands and whips he tried to tame a river—
King Xerxes' rage made all the soldiers shiver.

Julie Moulds

Milk

Milk's a dream of memories, of myth.
Tongue white—and throat. Cows
Bend their heads to graze, gathering milk
In bags with bloated veins, dangling teats.
As a child, I leaned on fences, observing how
They clamped their teeth on grass and weed,
Tearing it loose, mouthfuls hanging out,
Pulling it in as they worked their jaws,
Grinding sideways, green with slobber.
Children for thousands of years have watched
Cows grazing in their wondrous hides,
Heads down, through everlasting grass,
Turning green to white.
I see them, back and back, out of sight
Down time's long meadows—grateful
To them, who've come so far with us—
Filling their bags, swinging them
Back and forth across the world.

Jack Crawford

No Cow. Every Day No Cow.

I go to the front door wearing my expectancy
like a shirt I've owned for years: this is the day,
I think. Every time I go to the door I think
this is the day the sweet-faced Hereford,
the Jersey, the Belted Galloway will at last appear
in my front yard, between the dark red salvia
and the Copper Canyon daisy, chewing,
wise, looking up at me, glad to be here.
Or even out the back door, why not? Up the one
broad step to the cedar deck, or out
by the rock-rimmed raised beds where
the feathered nandina set berries out to shine
red-lantern-like all winter; every day I go out
with the watering can, expecting,
knowing this will be the day.

I try not to take it personally.
I try not to think about how,
not far from here, in hill country pastures and up
beside long ranch houses cows stand
chewing, or lie in steamy bunches
waiting for rain, or celebrate breaches
in the barbed wire fence that runs for miles
without one place for a cow to get through;
and then one split, one break, one space
and a cow breaks out, breaks through.
For sure she'd find her way to me.
For sure today will be the day.

Nancy P. Daley

The Embargo

I cut myself off from caffeine
and find myself the governor of a forlorn land
who goes down every day to the crumbling pier
where once huge tankers docked
pumping thick black fuel
into his bustling economy. Now there is nothing
but an empty, endless sea.

Now it's back to napping at noon, unshuttering shops
at odd hours, if at all. And dogs, who sprawl
in thin strips of dusty shade
unable to raise more than one heavily lidded eye
when a poem, on tiny padded feet,
wanders by.

Amy Herring

The Drunk at the Laundromat

likes the dryers best
loves the vaporous trickle
that fresh clothes make
against clear glass
loves the spinning
and the heat
finds comfort in
the rhythm of the machines
wonders what
the tumbling flannel shirts
those yellowing sheets
might mean in someone's life
has this pure belief that
here she can get sober
here she can somehow come clean

Cheryl Stiles

Man Was Not Meant to Be Alone

The vet says
she has at best
one year.

You weep
and bring her home,
an old hound,

high-hipped now
and wooden
in her walk,

down
in her back
and legs,

heart racing
so that her one year
goes faster.

She wheezes
and shivers,
does not complain,

but patiently
turns her fur back
with her tongue

as wind
turns back the grass
and memory the years.

Sarah Patton

If This Were Egypt

Below a wet April sky
John dug your grave,
the lilac blossoms above it
just small thoughts kept to themselves.

We carried your body and laid you down
in that bowl of brown earth where you curled
clean and white, a wolf, sleeping.

To take on your journey we put biscuits and cheese
and slim crocus petals which the boy
who knew you his whole life
dropped in with shaking hands.

If this were Egypt, best good dog,
we wouldn't stop there—
adding one pizza delivery guy in a red cap;
a UPS driver, the one with blond hair
springing from his head like corn straw;
the whistling meter reader you couldn't quite reach
through the wooden teeth of fence; two smart-assed
kids on mountain bikes; one young plumber
with a tool belt; the doorbell with wiring attached;
three squirrels, one grackle, a raccoon,
and, if possible, the neighbor's slinking cat.

Lisa Zimmerman

Self-Improvement

My father was a big one for self-improvement.
How to Be Your Own Best Friend
lay on his bedside table for years.
I remember he had my mother quiz him
on the names of the other partners' wives
so he'd make a good impression at the annual dinner.
I remember a kit he ordered from a catalog
to help him memorize telephone numbers.
Each digit was an animal or object.
When he called my Auntie Anna,
he saw a fox and a sheep jump over a fence.
He jogged daily, learned Italian from a phonograph record,
saw a shrink named Dr. Lilienthal sporadically for 12 years.
But what I remember best are the voice exercises.
How he rose at 5 am to practice scales
in the darkened living room.
How most mornings, I woke
to my father trying to wring
the gray streets of his childhood from his voice.
He had an office on Wall Street,
a 4-bedroom, 3-bath house in a good neighborhood,
a wife and children he loved the best he could.
But Roxbury, Massachusetts, could come back.
He could lose his R's again.
Or any of the rest of it, really.

Alison Seevak

Basalt

Cruellest of the great and ancient rocks,
iron-armored igneous basalt,
your blackened columns hold the mesa tops
against the sky's repeated, brute assault.
Heat that severs shadows from the cliffs
and blasts its spawl down every cave and crack,
ice that shatters fallen granite blocks
and beats the sandstone buttes to vacant flats
only sharpens stains along your flanks
and chips the clotted lichen off your back.

Keep us, we pray, and save us.

Petroglyphs engraved along your base
where bronzed cicadas ricochet and whine
tell of ancient people blown to dust.
A handprint pecked in stone. A zig-zag line.
A stickman poised to spear a fleeing deer
makes us marvel at the miles we've come
since tribal kinsmen lit their fires in fear.
Now, we kindle bright uranium,
pitch our missiles past the reach of Mars
and think ourselves the universe's heirs.

Grant us forgiveness and guidance.

Tracing seismic echoes in the earth,
we find a sphinx instructs geology.
Our measurements of pyroclastic bursts,
tsunamis shearing sword-like through the sea,
or impact points where comets smashed the crust
take us back to what the ancients knew:
our best, our worst are destined not to last
much longer than a day. A lonely blue
mantles walls of blackened, scarred basalt.
And blessed are they who know you in a rock.

D. C. Frerichs

Set

For a week ahead of time
and at lunch and after work on the days
we spent stocking the job and demolishing
the old fixtures and tile—smashing
sledge hammers against solid ceramic,
prying jagged chunks of cast iron
and cement loose with crow bars,
goggled, leather-gloved, breathing
through bandannas—I searched for books
and pamphlets, asked anyone who might
know anything that could help me.

The lady was a dangerous complainer,
west county girl married to a city cop
instead of a banker. "If she's happy
I'm happy," trembling hand
hanging down by his pistol
after a day in the bombed-out
combat zone east of Grand.

I'd never cut or set a tile before
and I was tiling the entire room,
floor and four uneven walls with
alcoves and soffits and hundreds
of trim tiles flowing up and around
the bath enclosure while she
probed with paring-knife
questions at my hidden ignorance.

The bathroom we ripped apart
was the only one in the five-person
twelve hundred square-foot house.
Gritty dust snowed down on her carpet
and kitchen counter, sifting out of invisibility
like utility, insurance and material bills
fluttering onto the surface of my desk.
The children cried, had accidents.

It was a bitter, work-scarce winter,
week after sunless week of wind chills
far below zero Fahrenheit, phone
frozen silent. I'd been in business
six months and the whole future
seemed to shift with every
emotional fluctuation on that job,
imagined failure feeling
awful as actual disaster.

After the last lemon-yellow tile
was cemented in place and polished
to a sunny glow, the city inspector
poked his head in the door
for a quick look, did a double-take,
looked again, up and down the corners,
around the bases and tops of the walls.

"You got a first-class job, lady,"
he said and sent more work
my way. The husband referred me
to other cops. Even the lady
acquiesced, squeezing out something
similar to a smile when she handed me
the check. Twelve years and at least
three hundred jobs later
the first whiff of fresh-mixed grout
still smells like panic.

Steven M. Thomas

Metamorphosis

You think a caterpillar in its little woven contraption likes being broken down to fluid constituents and slapped together as a whopper of a butterfly?

If you lean toward a cocoon, you almost hear a whining voice say *the heat, the crowding, the terrible acoustics*. I'm guessing you sleep to forget, undo what you know,

the embarrassment of grief or tedium of keyboards. Caterpillars must do better, oblivious to formerly flabby bodies that crawled and chewed.

I don't think change is painless, not a gentle melting of snowfields or rivers willingly pouring themselves into a gulf, losing their forms and names.

I'm betting on boredom fierce enough to torture, dreams so vile and repetitive the dream police wave little white flags, begging for respite. Are you sure you want to be changed?

An ear stuck to your back or eye sprouting on your sweaty palm, your face stripped away? Your body's fluids effervescent, your arms transformed into terrible wings.

Barbara Daniels

Something I Can Name

At my kitchen table, I am rushing toward something unexpected like the scent of dried dianthus my wife pressed in a book, like the shape of a wren fledging from a gourd, like a goldfinch eating thistle from a stem, like the tail of a dead fox flaming from the road in the wind.

I am rushing toward some seismic rumbling in my skull, some volcanic eruption in my heart, some longing nestled in the bones of my feet. I find my hands around a cup of coffee gone cold. I take a sip, and choke on some opaque desire to shake off my skin like a dog emerging from a lake.

What time is it then? It is time for my blood to carry oxygen to my cells, for a transference of faith through something like osmosis into the star dust in my bones, in my cartilage, in my hair, in my nails. It is time for the fault of disbelief to crumble, time for some terrible angel to take me like a rattle, shake me from the manners of malls and mediocrity, from the concrete and steel of convention centers, from the magnifying glass of science, shake me from the world that I can name.

Bill Brown

Hawks and Handsaws

The abrupt jay's daily blade-bright zeal
springs the knife-quick snatch that snags the gnat.
A farmer breaking new ground wrestles with
the massive reluctance of geology
and takes his rest in noon's infinitude,
in which all noons are known. But now, new,

the surge suppressors are growing curious, crouched beneath
our cautious desks.

Look up, the tiny scarlet eyes of smoke alarms are glaring down
upon our intimacies with sharper than martian vision. And though
we can guess

the stars are still there, they're outshouted by TV sets.

It's getting pretty difficult to imagine, even, "a sacred store of unexhausted stillness."

Still, the moonfire-flickering ocean encodes
messages from the fishes' mute abyss
which next morning we can use as cosmic mortar
and build, with the common bricks of pain and pleasure.
And a yellow-shafted flicker, runaway rope-dancer,
loosely bastes the hem of a low sky
to the vivid stubble of a fallow field.

C. M. Boyce

An Invitation

Bring your boots. My cabin stands in an empty field
That once grew sweet corn and our dry winter promises
A rainy season the way laughter follows a grim joke.
We'll walk the mud and try to ignore the surrounding acres
Of new custom homes all flying their satellites
Like nation-states searching the air for something.
We'll watch the morning mist, bullied by a torrent of cars,
Disappear before breakfast while Sam, the last horse, rolls
In muck, scratching his back and snorting at the sky, his friends
Either put down or sold to a tourist barn in New Hope.
I miss their shy company and how they filled the pasture
With galloping sounds of desperate, penned-in pleasure.
Red-tailed foxes flee here now, and every year more
And more geese stop by as they stubbornly head north
For any open space. In summer, butterflies,
Once as rare as the foxes, find this place too, happy
(They know that rare, light feeling) to be butterflies
Wherever they happen to land. Today deer are grazing near
The pond, in the shadows of the few remaining black oaks
And pines I still call the woods. How these refugees, their young
Keeping close, got to the farm and where they'll go
I don't know. Don't know where I'll go when they build on
The only fallow property left in Chester County.
If you want to see how green the spring can be, and why
A heart, like a tree, will bloom until the very end,
Do visit soon.

Marcus Smith

Class of 2000

Luminous in your white shirts,
spot-lit, singing songs
so sentimental only
your earnest angel faces
carry them off, bringing
parents to tears, mascara
streaming, tissues daubing
eyes like large white roses,
graduation's bloom.
Oh sprung-up little ones
climbing the beanstalk future,
oh giants of bedtime tales,
oh dreamers, hackers, knights,
ballplayers, ballerinas,
doctors, pilots, poets,
brokers, lawyers, whooshing
by us in our seats,
too soon to be wheelchairs,
may we buy you one more
burger, one more coke,
before your hair turns purple,
ours white, your tongues spit studs
and ours more free advice.
May we rock you once more
in kindergarten arms
and toss you in the air
to land before our feet,
concerned about our health,
the fifth grade tables turned,
you morphed into the parents,
we the children tumbled
into comfortable clothes,
the Brave New World behind us,
one still stranger knocking
at your laptop's door.

Jerry Mazza

New York Dawn

Fade in New York dawn,
bridges crawling like spiders
from the black blue dark,
revealing a battered city
bleeding red police lights,
barricaded streets,
the buildings' skyline sculpted
from shadows, spill of light
like drops of rain on windshields,
streams of morning traffic,
rivulets of steel
pouring through twisted ramps,
this great mechanic heart
pumping across the rivers
through tunnels, subways screeching
muscle, millions rolling
to desks, to lives and deaths,
finding a beauty planted
in the window's box,
that Lady in the harbor
holding still her torch
that we shall also rise
out of the ash gray day,
the tons of trucked debris,
like tossed gulls stained with sun,
crowning the sky, pink jewels,
oh Walt, oh Hart, oh angels
jingling in heaven's studios,
laying down this song,
America, one more time.

Jerry Mazza

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