

A special end-of-millennium issue
filled with mystery and magic!

Includes the winners of the
Poetry 1999 International Poetry Competition.

ATLANTA



ATLANTA
REVIEW

REVIEW

Twilight
of the
Millennium

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**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

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Welcome!

As befits the twilight of the millennium, this issue is filled with magic and mystery. At the very outset, a great bird descends to carry us away, and we encounter once more the mystery of creation and the Word in all its manifestations. A touch of sorcery inspires our fiction piece, and one of our prize winners gives you a Halloween gift you'll never forget.

The millennium is a time for pilgrimage, and so we embark for Mecca, Jerusalem, Calcutta. Our International Poetry Competition begins with a voyage through the Mediterranean, the birthplace of our culture. And on an island that Odysseus never knew, we find the golden apples of the sun. Our end-of-millennium culture, from the top to the pop, comes in for a lot of ribbing throughout this issue. And our Grand Prize winners remind us that the deepest mystery is still to be found in our everyday lives.

Our first cruise of the next millennium will take us to the biggest island of them all—the island continent of Australia. Come with us as we find what sort of creatures breed in the antipodes, a place the natives affectionately refer to as the land of Oz.

See you then!

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

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Life List

My friend the scholar-birdwatcher
is dying, after a quiet regular life
of Milton and birds, and if I could

imagine him a farewell, it would be this:
to look out into the small yard
he tended for forty years, to where

he placed the bird houses, the martin
house and the hummingbird feeder,
just in time to see a sweep of air

curve in and land, the great arctic gyrfalcon
not on his life list, there on the sill,
beak, feathers and pinions

and final knowledge, Adam's homecoming
after the story's end, better than Eden.
May he leave in his hand a feather, that his wife

might know where he has gone.

Janet McCann

Printing by Hand

It's hard to believe
how small beauty, almost hidden,
can roll through the press
like a summer storm.
I envision wind hounding cinders
of crows from the trees
and rootbound odors citing rain.
Flawless paper is kissed by your lines
on what's taken for granted
right down to the dirty work
no one would choose.
Where lead has a will, ink has a way
and cranking the miles out,
sheet by sheet, rhythm
gathers until it feels
older than faith, wholly untaught,
a point in the test of metal.
A midwife would understand
such finesse of pulse and pressure
when life itself is at stake.
Printing by hand, I can only speak
for a few simple things,
loving how cool cast iron
and reliable words
give none the place of honor,
but all the honor of place.

Barry Sternlieb

Visiting the Lady of the Lake

First you must come to the lake before dawn.
Before day draws you into an argument, come
and walk with me down to the shore west of town.
Wade through the cold and the scum of old pollen,
through plastic jugs trapped in the shallows.
Get into the boat as it lies in the reeds,
rocking a little in jittery waves.
It's shipping some water. You know how to bail?
This is not a reliable vessel.
Don't fidget and loosen your grip on the oars.
Someone or something is starting to row.
You have to go out where it takes you, through fear
and through every stray thought of the mud
on your jeans, and the prickle and stiffness of cold.
When the hand rises up through the mirror, the calm,
you must take the baby and carry it home,
through the rising east wind and the spatter of rain,
through those first shaky steps back on shore.
And then you must raise it as if it were yours.
Whatever it is. Whatever it is.

Priscilla Frake

In the Burren

for Roger

I go up there to find a first stillness
Plundered among poets who snuggle
Down in cities, squat, browning pubs
Where gossip becomes dogma—
Rainwater etches a deeper learning on
Hunched stones, their intimate reach,
Back to the simple and the absolute:
I have friends here who dig gardens
For a living, thrust their fingers through
The fruiting loam; others who play a driven
Music by turfed firelight, dragging old men
To their feet who laugh like boys, who make
Old women laugh, who dance them on
A flagged floor and magic them into girls—
Here, you can look up and see the stars,
No neon blinding of a shy universe:
The stars are uncountable, dying and being
Born in the instant that we look to them—
There is the sound, under the breath, of a tide
Moving like the trailed hem of a skirt over
A shore of fossily pebbles; a fox barks in a field
Swaddling in the dark; you can think here and
Not feel each thought and dream quenched under
The wheel of a monotony not your making—
I would sound the sacred here, cynical no more,
I walk at a slower pace, travel farther, come away
With talk beyond a bullish wounded poet's roar:
The poem fattens on this recalling,
 The wound upon which we build a world
 Festers, and I have found a less-hacked place
 To settle in.
Sitting on a paint-peeled bench, I take in
All of the blue shining Kinvara harbour and its boats,

Haunch-against-haunch with the harbour wall, masts
Delicate as a misted line on a painter's canvas,
An angled perpendicular aimed at the lowering sun—
This is why I come: to feel time take on a better
 Nature, make me childlike and aware
 Of what matters in the heart's drift and weigh,
 And what speaks there.

Fred Johnston

Leaving Home, in Search of Home

Men and women twice and three times my age
huddle around a table as if around a fire,
their backs to the window which holds
the winter night beyond its glass,
the darkness opaque and unpredictable
like the language they have come to me to learn.

Some have not taken off their jackets,
as if they might leave at any moment
to go back to the bones of their sunken country,
the desolate streets where their children once played,
where the evening sunlight lingered
among the leaves of the trees and the flowers
in the window boxes, real as summer.

I write on the blackboard,
and they stare at the arrangement of letters,
copying into their notebooks the words
for things they have known and loved
and feared and lived with
all their years—
things they never guessed
would have to be renamed
one by one:
house, family, bread, war.

I teach them how to pronounce
the name of their own country.
“I come from Bosnia.”
Every student repeats this sentence,
struggling with the sound of it,
and its meaning,
and how it explains everything.
Their voices are strong and bold
and carry like footsteps in the November woods.

In them, I hear crackling leaves
and branches snapping underfoot. I hear the sound
of lonely traveling, the chorus of migrating geese
that flew over my house last month,
darkening the sky for a moment
as they made patterns of an emptiness.

Zack Finch

Bread & Fish

A rainy winter Thursday morning in the German countryside 8:08 & it's not even light out but there's garbage to be taken out & shopping to be done so I hurriedly write out a shopping list while sitting at the kitchen table then lean back to consider what I've written & see the two words *BREAD & FISH* alone on the little piece of paper no milk no cat food no toilet paper none of that usual everyday bullshit & suddenly the stark elemental nature of these two words is overwhelming me with their bare essentialism approaching the metaphorical like the title of some exotic novel or the lines of a poem or something from the bible & then I'm thinking about that song by Lee Scratch Perry called *Roast Fish & Corn Bread* & what Jah Lion said about the genesis of the song *Scratch asked me what I'd eaten and the idea comes for a tune* & I get up & put on my *Southern Comfort* baseball cap & my black raincoat take out the garbage & climb on my bike & start pedaling through the rain towards the village market thinking about how art & beauty & metaphors are constantly working their strange magic on our lives altering their very nature turning even the most mundane existence into a window on a world of incomprehensible aesthetic depths expanding the parameters of consciousness & thus impacting everything with a meaning that outweighs all such chickenshit concepts as God & heaven & hell turning our lives into a truly magical experience more valuable more significant more purposeful than the greatest novel the most moving poem the hippest dub song so why does the baker look & act like a total zombie when I buy my bread why does everyone else in the market all look like extras from *Night of the Living Dead* why does the woman at the fish stall give me that fake-ass smile while simultaneously shortchanging me why is the rain running down my neck where is the sun where is the light that I know is waiting to illuminate each and every one of us with its gentle caress of warm glowing photons like in some old Rembrandt painting?

Mark Terrill

I Talk to My Daughter's Refrigerator

Arrogant ice box,
with your five tinned delights
placed just so, as if
hunger were something
artistic, I want to
hurl you back in time,
a cow flying
through the air, so that
you would know how
carelessly free you are.

She cannot begin
to understand you,
my shining knight
against the void. I would
always give back more
than I took from you.
Couldn't you fancy
an old-fashioned girl
who still remembers
1929?

If you were mine
you would know consuming
passion, as I filled you
top to bottom,
no mere ornament
but equal partner.
Lover, I can guarantee
that once starved,
a human being
will always be hungry.

Rosanne Singer

My Desire for Oranges

Rolling an orange from one hand to the other
finds me in the mind of The Orange Grower.
There is pleasure in a bowl of oranges.
Cezanne cannot be wrong.
...a painterly bassinet...a nursery of rounded sighs.
The hand feels good holding an orange,
and the palm is satisfied.

Mounded like extra luggage in the bin,
oranges are loud, commonplace salespersons
all heavy and handsome, and of sunny dispositions...
undiapered as bawdy jokes.
These enlargements around pinched navels
are a hale shout from among the vegetables.

Glowing with well-being, heavy with flavor,
they freely accept being popular.
These energetic oranges! this mound of exuberance!
dimpled and indented, in a youngster's planted stance,
these placeholders, one of nature's trillions
herded like hoboos...raised like soldiers...
...remind me of youth's proud insouciance
clambering to mount the ramparts.

Carl Nelson

Language Lab, Paris, 1989

Sometimes it comes back to me—
the muffling earphones, plug-charged,
my little half booth—*Elle epluche une orange*,
the words themselves like a thumbnail pressed
into the porous rind, that fine spray.
I tried to repeat with my sloppy American tongue—
hungover, sex-dazed, again and again
as if one day I could become that silken voice
and marry the French boyfriend
I barely remember now.
I say it aloud still in the simplest moments,
lathering a sliver of soap, stirring pancake batter, never
when peeling an orange; the words
are not their meaning, but if I hold myself there
for a moment I can remember
how my abandoned life had begun, the story
I would have told my French children
if I'd become a French wife
about their mother, young and in love,
the mornings I raced to class, windblown,
red-cheeked, the shop owners unloading trucks,
fish slapped on the St. Denis sidewalk,
the scales shining like a party dress
that slips on as easily as it slips off.
I would say it so perfectly,
Elle epluche une orange.

Julianna Baggott

Caliban as *Carbonero*

He brings the wood to the old man's house in Havana
every day, watches as the old man's hands tremble,
his thick British accent, his burnt, ocher eyes,

the frailty of his frame, and behind the old man,
his daughter, fairskinned, virginal, like in the wood
bearer's dream when he holds her and she isn't even

repelled by his scent of tree sap and fish carcass,
carbonero him, maker of charcoal which he sells
by the pound door-to-door, whistling a love song

as he goes, and they make eye contact, the old man's
daughter and him, the radiance of her simple flower
dresses, graceful in how she leans against the door frame,

light bursts forth behind her, this golden apparition
that keeps him coming back, in this god-forsaken
island where everyone is a prisoner, where love

burns holes through the palms of his hands, glows.

Virgil Suarez

Heat

This girl on the edge
of fifteen can't bear the exact
lines of summer, noon's point
blank look. She wants rain on the roof
of a half-ton truck, rain warm
as a gum's pink socket.
With the truck at low idle
she wants to lie down
in an oil stained drive she wants
to drowse under the shuddering
chassis, air fragrant
with axle grease, rain, six
pistons lined pumping
her red chambered engine
block heart near
to cracking, ready to walk
into fire for the anything
waiting to happen.

Rebecca Bailey

Thirty-year Driver

In the hospital. Family standing around.
Casper Kelley on a runaway school bus,
jabbers, holding on to the rails of the bed
and the bus. Family preacher walks in,
a last prayer for the old man.

Casper turns his head to one side.
Looks up to his twelfth and youngest:
Is that the driver? No, it's Pastor
Jackson, pa. He wants to pray for you.

Preacher takes a dab of oil,
anointing the wrinkles and liver spots.
Let us bow our heads in solemn...
Don't you think we'd better stop the bus?
Heavenly Father. Amen. Leans close

To say good-bye. The old man grabs him
by the shirt collar. *I said. Stop the gg...awl
darn bus!* Pastor Jackson straightens, shakes
his head, "We're not on a bus, brother."

The old hands ease, let go. Eyes dark
stone gray. Cold as a winter creek
baptismal touch. *Says you.* Casper
pushes the driver out of the way,
takes the wheel. *Geez...us, Christ!*

Michael O'Brien

My Enemies

The day I bought my first car, I called my father. We rarely
spoke, just at Christmas and sometimes Thanksgiving, and even that
seemed to be excessive: we had nothing
to say to each other, yet I found myself
dialing his number on a Saturday afternoon in April
to tell him about this car. One of the few things I remembered
that was good when I was small
was sitting beside him in the front seat of his dark green Bel Air,
the two of us singing "It's a Grand Old Flag" at the top
of our lungs while he drove. My new Honda
was dark green.

"I hope it has a gas cap that locks," my father said.

I asked him why.

"If you don't have a gas cap that locks, your enemies
will get you," he said. "They'll siphon all the gas out of your car
with a long straw and then you'll run out of gas on a deserted
stretch of road in the middle of the night with no one
to help you." He coughed. "Or they'll unscrew the gas cap
and pour in a bottle of Coca-Cola and then
you'll have to spend thousands of dollars
getting the engine rebuilt."

"I don't have any enemies," I said.

"I just don't want you to get hurt," said
my father.

Sarah Pemberton Strong

Aquarium

In the waiting room at the cancer center,
where in three months my mother
has aged ten years, her skin thinned
translucent, collapsed in soft pale folds
like the wings of a crushed moth
laid against her sudden bones,
there is an aquarium.

I sit in the chair behind it; seen through
long slabs of peaceful glass,
Oncology turns out to be nothing after all:
the beige walls, the patients, the humid smell
of fear, the cork board littered
with flyers for support groups
all blur out so that my eyes exist
for the up-close darting bodies of bright
fish in impossibly healthy, paintbox
colors: fuchsia, emerald, electrical blue. Through this lens
of clear salt water there is no cancer; there is only
the wonder of the lava rock, obsidian and porous,
and the fine vermilion branches
of the fire coral; there is no such thing as time
until, beside the rising column of air bubbles,
my pale mother emerges. I know her
at once, through all salt water I know her,
small and wavery against the double doors.
She turns, looking for me,
not seeing where I am. And I, I sit there,
behind the aquarium. I don't get up, don't
go to her. I'm busy, I'm busy watching the fish,
the brilliant lemon angel fish, I'm examining
the hard, maze-carved sphere
of the white brain coral, the texture and grit
of the pink speckled sand. But
when I stand up, finally, and call out
here I am my mother's face lights up and colors
with a flush as if she were still well,

and I see again, like turning a page
in a book that will never run out of pages
how much she loves me. She comes
toward me then, her last wisps of hair
floating like the tendrils of a young anemone.

Sarah Pemberton Strong

Court Room 6-F

If you close your eyes in this courtroom,
it almost feels like church. You can sense
the expanse where fate lingers
like a nervous, waiting witness in the hall.
It feels like truth with no god, raw justice
like a stiff shot of the purest whiskey,
the color of the high wooden walls.
Form follows function in the furniture,
and nothing appears to be more than it is.
Except us, all dressed up, hoping that our guilt
won't somehow seep through the cracks
of our naked faces, coats, and ties.

Edward L. Weir

The Afternoons Are Long

*Talk-show host: Why are so many writers alcoholic
and suicidal?*

*Writer: I don't know. Maybe because of the long
afternoons.*

The afternoons are long.
It's then things can go wrong
In the long afternoons.
It's then one must be strong.
The afternoons are long.

The mornings are austere,
The regimen severe.
With resolution fresh
The morning time is dear.
The mornings are austere.

The evenings are alive.
If one can but survive
Till somewhat after five,
The vital signs revive.
The evenings are alive.

But afternoons are long.
It's then things can go wrong
In the long afternoons.
It's then one must be strong.
The afternoons are long.

Robert R. Hentz

The Power

They had only wanted to be generous, our parents, to open their lives, their hearts, to every possibility The Absolute offered. To bring it all in. It was as if the Biblical maxim, *Be fruitful and multiply*, was a revelation writ just for them.

And we who were already born, the one of us, the two of us, the three, four, five, six of us, looked on in disbelief each time our mother grew round and rounder, trundling the nine long months of the latest pregnancy.

It seemed a kind of greed based on dissatisfaction, this constant dipping and dipping into The Void; it seemed to me, at least, an abstract yet intricate sin. Hadn't we tried to love them, to be everything sufficient to their desire: smearing

the chalky white polish, Sunday mornings, across the scuffs of our shoes, earning the difficult A's, the B's, or homerun after homerun? How many newspapers thwacked porches all along the paper-route; how many dishes were diligently washed and dried?

You could not count the number of bedtime kisses we planted on the cheeks of those adults. And yet, each time the new bundle was laid in my arms while the bottle warmed on the stove, I could only stare and stare at that delicate interloper; I could only watch

the slitted eyes slowly unseal themselves, watch them darkly watching me. I would offer my knuckle to the working mouth, the milk blister drawing me in. I would almost begin then to understand; I would almost have it inside me then, the power to forgive.

Lynn Lyman Trombetta

Before the rain

Four days it rained after she died.

The plants put to bed by her broke their spines and lay flat. Turned brown so we forgot they were there.

The government declared some districts as disaster zones. We saw roofs slide down the river and foreign aid arrive on TV; midnight blue blankets and bags of rice.

The world cricket series began in India and a 19-year-old made the first wicket. The men wore clean white clothes.

When I cried, I was comforted with updates on the latest death tolls.

A cow floated down the tumid river from one village to the next without any injuries. The newspapers named her "Trishuli"—for the river.

Numbers rose, the television flashed portraits of orphaned mothers and children. Mourners followed the colour of grief. Shades of white.

Three players were out in two hours.

Cremation in the rain allows for little composure. Umbrellas not forgotten. Extra wood. Mud on white.

The sun hot in India. One player from the visiting team complained of migraines. Throughout the day, transistors carried the scores from street to street.

Numbers had risen. On the fifth day, we had sun.

Everyone hung their clothes out in their yards.

Tsering Wangmo Dhompa

In Mecca, When It Rains

In Mecca, when it rains
scarred pilgrims flow softly together.
Their feet,
swollen and bruised with the blessings
of clay,
seek refuge in puddles that turn into rivers.

In Mecca, when it rains
every pilgrim is lonely
and husbands and wives unleash mountains
of tenderness through the night.

Years ago, in Mecca
I sat beside my mother and prayed in a gentle rain.
I remember how
she lifted her palms high
like lushly wounded gifts
towards the sky. Maybe

it was God
who received them
when they soared past the earth-ridden
immovable pilgrims
and the wide open wombs

of pain. I was young then
and could not comprehend the vision before me,
the immensity of want in this life.

In Mecca,
when the soaked
oldest night of vanished moons appears,
mothers and daughters gather
in circles,

and with little drizzles in their throats,
they listen
to the sound of the rain falling,
leaping with drops of prayers,
a universe aching with rain.

Deema Shehabi



POETRY 1999



International Poetry Competition

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Silver \$500

ANNE HILLS

Bronze \$250

CHRISTOPHER FAHY

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jeru
salem
sun
day

three muezzins call *idan*
where one's *allah* begins another's
akbar ends inviting the last to
witness mohammad's prophecies

church bells ring the sky
an ocean shade of blue above
christ's tomb and the stones
of this city witness man's weakness

boys run by, the torah
strapped to their third eye
ready to rock their prayers

the roofs of this city busy as the streets
the gods of this city crowded and proud

two blind and graying
arab men lead each other through
the old city surer of their step
than their sight

tourists pick olives from the cracks
in the faces of young and graying
women selling mint onions and this
year's oil slicking the ground

this city is wind
breathe it
sharp
this history is blood
swallow it
warm
this sunday is holy
be it
god

Suheir Hammad

Mango Season

"Happy are we who hunger now"
for we soon get our bellyfull
in plastic bags and brown
paper bags in the roadside gospel
of *Mango!* in fruit market
madness where ripe mangoes
is come like abundant blessings

Mango Trees of Life bring
blessings that is swell into
sunsets and sometimes
drop and bust open like
the first light of day.

And every Jesus-Christ-person
is share blessings and sell
blessings and buy blessings and
thief blessings for their God-given
right of a mango juice anointing.

People like us is bite
down into blessings and take
our communion in juicy
flesh the color of the Sun
in the Promised Land
(if we ever reach).

People like us is bite
down into blessings sweet
and forget that we
crooked and contradictory
sinful and sorry.

No metaphors for our pain
only julie mango
hairy mango
beefy mango
mangola
the words is bounce off-a
our tongues like desperate prayers.

And after the last golden
strings of the last
mango's apotheosis hang
from our teeth and
hunger come full circle
the dead white seed
is stick to our skin like sin
reminding us that
Jesus is come in season.
Jesus is come in season.
Jesus is come
in season.

Christian A. Campbell

Dear Ulysses

No offense, dear Ulysses,
but you needn't hurry home.
The house is in good repair
and I've managed to economize,
so we still have plenty of oil,
though supplies of sheep and wine
are low, due to much entertaining.

Your dog barks constantly at strangers
and waits for you at the door.
I missed you terribly
the first ten years, but
now have grown used to
having my own way.
I get up when I want,
eat when I'm hungry,
do whatever suits my mood.

And not to brag, but I have
one hundred twelve suitors now.
They never stop bringing me presents.
Last week I got thirty bracelets,
seventy pairs of earrings and a dozen combs.
I like presents. And I have my work.
I am quite the little artist now.

Oh, Ulysses, it's not that I
don't long to reach out at night
and touch your curly head.
I'd cover your face
and hands with kisses.
I'd run my tongue along
the old scar on your thigh.
Every day I weave your shroud

and pull threads out each night.
It's good practice for a weaver
and besides I'm superstitious.
It's as though time is standing still
and if the shroud's not finished
maybe you're not dead.

Susan Thomas

A touch of oregano

Home now from the bitter harbor
home from icy sunset
eastern sky striped in frozen batik.

Soup begins to simmer
burgundy, beef, carrots.

Longer ago than she wishes to think
the man with dark moustache
eyes deep as the outer harbor
name like a long, slow kiss

bade her goodbye in a parking lot
behind the blue and white Greek restaurant
taste of olives, oregano
fresh in their mouths

big white flakes of snow
falling all around
covering their shoulders
filling their dark hair.

It's Beethoven's Appassionata now
red candles blazing all about
warm, at last.

The soup, she says,
needs more garlic, rosemary, a touch of oregano.
I, she says,
need another glass of wine.

Barbara Claire Kasselmann

Bliss

Summer in all my bones.
The green hour
and children squabble over ball.
In the garden patch, roses,
one yellow in the midst
of so much red. The withered woman
told me it is the color of love
and luck—yellow: the wish drunk
into my pores, his touch all through me.
I wear my skin, my body
like some frayed dress. Silk and wrinkled
and so completely handled
it hugs my shape, forms itself
smoothly around the muscles.
The breath of it—night air
and the distant sea, completely still
in the hour he put himself into me.

Adrienne Kalfopoulou

All Souls' Day

A needle stitched into its line, rusting
in the half-finished sewing.
The coffee shops in winter
filled with voices
who measure time by the seasons.

A road twists into a slowly
rising hill, villas of neglect,
each corroding stairwell lifting
into sky, and a man is braiding garlic
against a church wall.

It is All Souls' Day
and the women outside the cemetery
where my people are buried
carry plates of *Koliva*
to feed strangers. I give them
no food, no birds come
to peck at the seeds.
The kitchen that was there for cooking
is no longer.

Like the talk, the pieces
come apart in the journey
that reaches back to a twilight kitchen
where I am laughing or serving tea,
a smell I thought was forever,
that and a turning star
and vines that always needed cutting.

The rest, a drape of night
in a long journey
that could have started anywhere.
So now I see in the eyes of strangers
the same story over and over,
the story with which I water the flowers,
the story of my life.

*We could not do what we wanted to do.
There was always one war, then another.*

Kemalist troops, Moslems...
Constantinople
fell in 1453 to the Turks,
we are always losing land...
Principos, Antigoni, Halke.
We have always been a people losing,
carrying loss in the flames, burning
darkness, burning ignorance.

*My people were from the Black Sea,
from the Sea of Marmara too,
the Aegean where the white rock floats—
Koutalis, Aphisia, Aloni, Marmara—they left
the quays, a black sea
of anguish, bodies into water
as the open wound of Smyrna spilled
its ruins.*

How many traveled, barefoot, orphaned...
Smyrna, Thassos, Patras—
The journey
was this way

*The waves dipped and surged.
Froth-edged sea
whipped the hull.
All around green-blue water
swelling to the winds
rising, wild horses
with manes in anarchy
The boat trembled,
a lame thing,
and our sun disappeared.
We lost the hills behind sombre
dusk-colored greens,
we lost the land.*

*My people came from the Black Sea,
from the sea of Marmara too.
Koutalis, Aphisia, Aloni—
names that climb
the vines of conversation.*

War at 18, than another at 25,
again in '45, the Civil War—
You do not know
what it is
war.

Along the waterfronts
in dusty cafes
sometimes hardly speaking,
the men recite their tales.
Their beads, the amber ones,
knock against themselves.
Each bead a year of Christ,
all thirty-three it took
to crucify
his mortal flesh.

Seafaring
wandering people,
we left the stark, blond rocks
to speak in tired voices
what survives—
a cargo of idiosyncrasies.

Torn, initialed pillowcases.
Loose keys of all sizes.
A rusted shoehorn.
Thimbles.
Gold *Lires*.

Adrienne Kalfopoulou

This New Country

We packed our bags and named our
destination: each other.
Climbed into the car
the bus, the airplane.
We knew there would be no accidents
the air bag would huddle under the dash
oxygen masks would swarm
above our heads, flotation devices
would herd under our seats. We couldn't
stop looking at each other. We didn't
know the new country, even after we
disembarked. Even after we lived in it
for years. Even now I don't know it,
as you turn forty beside me
and flowers bloom, I don't know it.
It's saturated with colour: azure,
persimmon, indigo; with light:
dawn, the harsh light of noon, the washed
light of rain, dusk; with heat.
We can't send postcards. We are dumb
with what's happened, exile into grace.

Jane Eaton Hamilton

The Ephemeral Charms of Ramona's Beauty Parlor

I.
Oh pink neon careening around mirrors!
Oh smells of ammonia and bleach steeped in a plastic cauldron
with almond, vanilla, orange peel, and bubble gum!
Oh suds! Oh snipping! Oh roar of the blow dryer in a rosy nautilus!

Take off your work shirt. Join us under the bib at Ramona's Beauty Parlor.
Bring us a picture—anyone's—a woman who looks too unrepentant,
too thin, rich or famous for this neighborhood.
Command us, "Give me that cut." We guarantee satisfaction,
seduction, stupefaction.
Look like power, money,
like the convertible is rounding the steep hills of Monte Carlo,
your hair a banner in the breeze.
Look like her Serene Highness did, like Thelma and Louise did,
right before impact.
Look like orgasm, freedom suspended in amber Dippity Doo and hair spray.

II.
You sit, and Gina pumps up your stool.
She tells you the latest: yesterday, your landlady came in for a rinse.
She evicted the Morrises in 2B.
The father, he's on drugs.
The lady in that stool last time, that one there, she had her baby,
a boy nine pounds.
See that girl in the corner, the cute one, getting flowers woven
into her curls?
No, not a bride, it's her sweet sixteen, only she doesn't know it yet.
She thinks it's a party tonight for her grandpa.

She floats over like Venus on the half-shell
to borrow the hand mirror to see flowers sprout from her tresses,
and you tell her she is ready for dinner on the *Titanic*.

She imagines this is a good thing, a thing with Leonardo DiCaprio
in white tie,
and swelling violins, and love. Love, even doomed love, is love.
She runs to an old woman in the corner, grins at her, points to you,
and says, "*Mami!* Spanish, Spanish, Spanish, Spanish, *Titanic*, Spanish."
The old woman nods and grins, too.

III.
This spell is cast over all the customers: Hair is mink. Nails are pearl.
Legs are waxed rosewood.
Eyebrows are arched, tango-dancer arched, as if the dream man
were about to dip us,
but the fandango orchestra topples over its instruments as we
rip into the iceberg
once we pay the bill, tip the shampoo girl, and hit the pavement.
The afternoon glare shows us no Rialto, no Rodeo Drive,
just the cobbler and the panhandler.
Our hair billows, our nails gleam, but we own no convertible,
not even to drive off a cliff.
A cliff of dishes, elbow-high, waits in the sink. So do roaches.
The milk turns sour.
Our husbands smell like socks. They control the remote,
flipping between sports.
Our ends split. We sag. We blow and pluck, but every day until
our next visit is a bad hair day.
No charm invoked in the railroad flat—no powder, gel, or mudpack—
airbags the crash.

Anne Babson

Me 'n Bruce Springsteen Take My Baby off to College

We hit the turnpike early, O Thunder Road,
every inch of the car packed: sweatshirts, prom gowns,
books, teddy bears, such heavy baggage.
She's both coming and going, this shy violet of a child,
the teenager too hostile to be in the same room, breathe the same air.
Now she dozes beside me as the car spools us the miles,
and I slip in a favorite tape, turn up the volume.
Her skin, edible, a downy peach, her long hair unwinding.
My foot taps the accelerator with the beat; the Big Man,
Clarence Clemmens, pours his soul out his sax, yearning,
throbbing, as the turnpike pulls us west, bisecting
Pennsylvania, tunneling through the mountains: Blue,
Allegheny, Kittatinny, Tuscarora, this big-muscled,
broad-backed hunk of a state.
We drive deeper into the heart of anthracite,
the wind blows through the dark night of her hair.
A harmonica wails and whines, brings me back to my tie-dyed
college years; sex looms like a Ferris Wheel,
carnival lights in the water, but we've reached our exit,
here she is, it's independence day, ready or not,
Pittsburgh, city of smoke and grit, polished chrome
and glass, soot streaked buildings, pocket handkerchief
neighborhoods, abandoned steelworks, the Monongahela River.
I deliver her again, heavier this time.
We set up the room, she turns cocky and sulky,
breaks into sobs when I leave.
On the return trip, I play the same tapes over and over.
Vultures float in the mountain thermals, a black convoy, lacy flakes of char.
The miles roll by, I'm driven by the beat, everybody's got a hungry heart,
nearly there: Lenhartsville, Krumsville, Kutztown,
green rolling hills dotted with cows,
Pittsburgh's iron and steel filling the horizon in the rearview mirror.

Barbara Crooker

Flamants Roses

They are more graceful in thought and name,
with beaks as big as their heads
and a neck that slackens like a rope
from all the weight of that crustacean bill.

Talk has it, in the salt marshes the Winter before I came,
their little brains froze, never thinking to lift their feet
as the circling tide hardened like shackles about their legs.

Men came with hammers and chisels
to chip free their feet, ducking like bulls
the furious scarlet and black sweeps
of their matador wings.

Rose flames, they could not
melt nor dance themselves free, their gawky beaks
clacking, scratching the ice like useless castanets.

Timothy Mayo

flamants roses (literally rose or pink flames) is French for flamingos.

Naming My Son

The jokes come first:

Smegma and Pustule, Ritalin and Excremento Alexander.

All names applied to genitals must go.

Forget Peter, Richard, Lance. Ditto Willie, John Thomas, and (if the OB GYN was wrong) Virginia.

Kids can mock anything.

Still, easy targets—Dudley to Dud; Ferdinand to Turd-in-Hand—should be shunned.

Too-common names and trendy ones must be avoided—even Jason (which I've always liked), golden fleece and all.

Charles is good, but I'm a Junior; "the Third" is unthinkable.

Relatives' names must be respectfully considered,

And those too antiquated (Ernest), silly (Mortimer), historically undesirable (Adolph) respectfully culled.

Quibbles on my last name—Spider Webb, World-Wide Webb, Webster Webfoot Webb—can be ruled out.

Also, names with bad associations: Tim, my wife's ex-boyfriend; Don, the junkie organist who wrecked my band.

Bizarre, "artistic" names—Tallulah, Rumer, Dweezil, Susquehanna—I leave to celebrities.

Why send a kid to school with "Kick me" on his back?

Neologisms—LaTrine, DeRayle—deserve the ax.

Combining my wife's name with mine creates Chakar (too like Chukar) and Karcha (too like Kachoo!).

I place my hands on Karen's belly to see what psychic hunches come.

Fidget? Balloon? Watermelon? Borborigme?

As in the story of the Indian "Two Dogs Fucking," we look around to see what strikes us.

I get Clothes On The Floor, and Unmade Bed. Karen gets Turtle Tank Needs Cleaning.

English speakers can't name children Makes A Mint, or Consistently Kicks Butt, so we weigh etymologies, seeking a name that, even when he's filled his pants, he'll hear subliminally—

"Noble Hero, aren't you ashamed?!"—and know he's more than what he's done.

He is my genes' continuation; so they hope he'll do what I could not.

Play big league baseball. Catch tarpon on a fly (I hope there'll still be tarpon). Win the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize.

They hope his Keri Kronenberg will "go around" with him, and not tell friends he asked, and laugh.

They hope he gets his scholarship to M.I.T.

They hope his band will land the record contract that eluded me—that he'll be tall, and earn his black belt in karate.

I'll try hard not to force him into a niche, but I hope his name will conjure qualities—Strength, Health, Intelligence, Determination, Talent, Good Looks and Luck—

That may spare him some hardships, and get him something akin to what he wants.

I hope he'll thank me for his name the way I thank my dad, who, when an eight-point buck walked in front of the blind he built us,

Touched my arm, and whispered, "Your shot, Son."

Charles Harper Webb

Fireman, Fireman

Alarms in our building sing out, electric locust,
plagues of blue flashing strobe in the halls
where thick steam swarms past chain, Yale and dead
locks. Warm, and rotten. The trucks can't save us.

We've seen the steam, suspect the boiler, dark
secret, crazy aunt in the basement. Morse for
help me, save me, they've locked me up down here,
there are rats and there are spiders, save my child, they are mad

pounds pipes and radiators, two and four, then six a.m. Good men
have lost their minds decoding it; they've disappeared
into the basement. The firemen, see, are wholesome,
sturdy in our midst. Four truckfuls worth of firemen, smiling.

They are just as we remember them. The crowd
grows, curious or ticked. Grown women in pajamas.
Books, signed documents singe in my head.
Where there's no smoke, ladders and hoses reach, uncoil.

No big deal. Firemen have hats with numbers, matching
trucks. Truck 29 the last to leave. They shake
their heads at worry, grin handlebar mustaches. They are fat
in boots and overcoats, thick suspended pants.

Truck 29 of Boston, I want to take you home. In miniature,
I tell you, you would soothe me. I want to pick up one small man,
a doll. My thumb, forefinger at his hips. Make him climb the little ladder,
knees too stiff and bundled up to bend.

They lift each leg by leaning backward, a jolly waddle to the side.
I could balance their stiff bodies on the rungs at awkward angles.
Firemen, cops and doctors of this world:
do they know how much I love them?

I adore the little costumes that they come with, the way they save
our lives. They walk with confidence and axes, cleft
chins and glinting teeth. They are innocent of evil. The old one,
when he passes me, he nods. Respectful as a sheriff.

We have cursed the fire hydrants for taking tithes of parking.
Let us pray for their forgiveness, let us bless their stocky selves.
Stubby totems for the gifts the hose returns. They are mascots, doll-bodies
of the firemen stylized, chipped paint on freezing metal, always here.

Jill McDonough

The Generosity of Pears

The small gravel of the brown Bosc
gritty between the teeth,

and a yellow Bartlett ripened too long
in a blue bowl,

its velvet flesh gone milky and wet
like custard before bed, juice

drawing flies,

plus one decorous Anjou
minding its pale green manners

in a cool metal lunch box—

Remember how we knelt in the orchard
between arched rows?

How we pointed our wooden ladders
into the rooms of the sky?

How we crated up beauty
side by side in its own perfume?

—as the rimmed sun touches noon
and three grown men in worn jeans

gone white at knee and crotch
straddle the stacked lumber,

unbuckle their heavy leather
carpenter's belts

and reach into the truck
for the packed lunch.

Remember the wet tip of the tongue
flicking the bow of the top lip?

The full curve of the lower lip
that slips over slick flesh?

The sweet swelling and melt
in the spaces between our bones?

You, I have loved completely,
your beauty like three pears

smooth in the hasp of calloused palms,
each man unshaven and fragrant

as the white blossoms of April,
each bud concealing its jewel.

Penelope Scambly Schott

Raga

Calcutta, December 1995

Forget the red dustswept avenues, the drumbeat of your heart, the taxis jiggling over cobbled stones; dodging opposing buses and rickshaws, the naked street men bathing at public pumps, their street wives squatting at every busy corner. Forget them all begging for charity and spare change. Forget the decay of dead palaces of the Raj; the ordinary people who cleverly squat there, now; and that they hang their laundry like a lynching mob. Forget hawkers peddling mustard seed oil and green bananas, the congested sewers: urchins and rats now fight for the trash and spittle you pitch out the window; the narrow alleys and closed minds, the buildings stacked and pushed against each other like gaily dressed children in a queue. Forget the little blue and red awnings of skinny tin-thatched stalls, the leering smiles of vendors whose eyes you catch and meet, the diesel perfume coming through your open window, the winter sun shining through your windshield, the clamor of commercial planes overhead. Forget the bellow of buses as they stream past you, angry as a stampede of mechanical bulls; your insomnia as the moon casts ghosts behind you, the ashen taste of the Ganges holy water under your tongue. Forget the roar of men and women everywhere as they feud, and that they brawl over everything and nothing and you. Forget you're visiting red fire ants, in a bay colony. Forget it all, the smell, the noise, the taste, the sounds of crows feeding and mating, mating and feeding; your appetite, which you lost weeks ago at an open market. Remember to watch a street boy bring a bag of stolen oranges to his ailing mother in that neglected grotto. Remember that there's no substitute for love or hunger. Remember me when I leave here. Wait, where do you think you're going?

Devi Sen Laskar

Ukiyo-e, Or Why the Japanese Have Sliding Doors

Spirit wraps us like summer silk
kimonos, and butterfly sleeves so easily
catch on doorknobs.

In each life
a thousand thousand thresholds.

Here in the West, enlightenment is now
big business.

Many have learned to make deals

look like pictures of the floating world—
paper lanterns strung on houseboats,
fog parlaying the mountain.

One snowy egret
in the shallows. So lifelike,
the airbrushed sails of junks
might pull your own craft into the wide

wake. It happens fast.

A thousand thousand chances
to catch the wings of your sleeves,
to tear the light
spinnings of the sacred worms.

Robin Jacobson

After Reading Eliot and Pound

A new rig has to be erected
and I need the men
with their detailed maps and hard black
hats here, off-shore, arriving
in small crafts, men with graphs, men who
after careful long and painstaking
deliberations, after putting in long exhaustive hours
of calculations, then, at last
begin to act. Brain,

I need you back.
I now see there can be nothing accidental
in the placement of the nip
of my drill. Every single word must now be welded
at the exact right angle, each one holding
the other one aloft. Here
on the high poetic seas, where men's lives
are constantly at risk, nothing can be shoddy
or accidental, or for God's sakes womanly
intuitive, or soft.

Amy Alden Herring

When

The cervix said, time
and then nothing

softening to bleed
and rising, invitingly

at the crucial moment.
But not a word.

Not a word.
Later, much later

unable to hold
it in any longer the cervix said

of what use are ideas?
And out came a child.

Sally Lee Stewart

Natural History

after seeing the tarsier

Five inches of cling and a long
thin tail on what might be bamboo
in a magazine I am reading. Large,
dark-rimmed eyes, brown pools,
like puddles with a thousand microbes
I dipped from and peered into
under a lens in a high school class

and a pin of black pupil, that, away from
the camera's flash, becomes a disk of onyx
able to see what's what in the dimmest murk.
The eyes are *immobile*, I read in the dictionary,
whose illustration matches the photograph,
but in black and white and not inserted in
a landscape impossibly emerald,
lush and disappearing.

You look caught, in shock, those bony,
knuckled fingers, their pads tight on the stalk,
as if you were the last remaining witness...
I think of the soul, how we wonder if and
where and how it would look. Would it be Thoreau's
"bright invisible green" or is it more like you—
peering into the dark of what's left
of how we choose.

Veronica Patterson

One Sunday

*"Yes, we were now in that enchanted calm,
which they say lurks at the heart of every commotion."
—Moby Dick*

I wake. A remnant of dream flutters
into swells of white curtain
at the window.

Late August margin, the breeze
entering the window cool
and you beside me

asleep. We can stay as long as
the ridge of your shoulder hides
the numbers on the clock.

Outside mountain-ash berries have begun
their descent into red. Again this year I missed
the first day of *orange*

after *still green*.
Long summery days are pulling
back, the pelicans leaving the lake.

The brisk days of October may come to us like luck
without penalty. My bare shoulder is chilled. I bring
just the sheet over it. And suddenly I remember

the mothers and newborn whales in the mid-ocean pool, a *sleek*,
it was called, a pod of watery time at the center of that mad book. Starbuck
scratches the back of a young whale with his lance.

Outside are griefs and lists and concentric tumults,
just beyond this table
of content.

Veronica Patterson

What Birds Dream

*For them, is not the earth a transparency
against a sky, dense as a body?
—Rilke "The Angels"*

Of course,
we'd all keep the song;
no one would say
otherwise,
but which of us doesn't
dream of a wet mouth
that wraps around
what it eats,
not hard beak
and the quick drain of gullet,
but lips
soft as their own hunger,

and a mouth that can cry,
wringing its shape
like a rag?

How can we birds
hold our ground
with only this dangling
afterthought of feet,
when there are feet that feel
the fresh mown grass
press between closely packed toes,
and savor dust from hard, dry paths,
their soles planted
firm as plinths?

Which of us has not seen,
as we hover over water,
wings spread wide,

the reflection of his own body,
opened like a crotch?
The little knob of head,
and the torso, a tube
tapering down
with the soft androgyny
of an angel's gown;
the forelimbs pulled up
over the head,
as if startled into surrender,
fingers like long stays
sewn inside the fabric of the wings;
the body always dressed
in the drag of flight.

Only in dreams
do we know the freedom
of unencumbered arms,
of refined touch and
fingered caresses;
those clutching frontal embraces,
where we can feel
each other's heart beat
through unfeathered skin.

And we wait for
the promised afterlife,
where all the hollow bones
will be filled and
the feathers hardened;
the body grown heavy and
homogeneous as a stone,
resting at last
on the heaven of this ground.

Jeanne Wagner