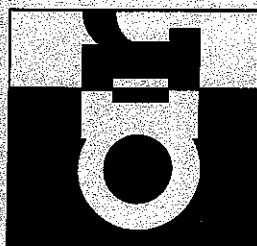


Beginning our 10th Anniversary Celebration:
Poetry from Antarctica!

*Coming next Spring:
Explore the wine-dark seas of Greece*

ATLANTA

REVIEW



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POETRY 2003

International Poetry Competition

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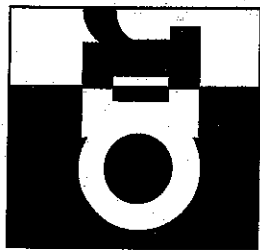
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Vol. X, No. 1

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Welcome

This first issue of Volume 10 marks the beginning of our *10th Anniversary Celebration*. In the past decade, we have traveled together to Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America, and Australia—every inhabited continent on the globe. I was pondering what to do for an encore, when an email dropped into my inbox with a most peculiar address: the South Pole.

I briefly considered whether it might be from Santa Claus (wrong Pole). But it certainly was a gift. It was a poem from Antarctica, the *uninhabited* continent, the one we were missing to complete Earth's seven. Truly a fitting present to begin our celebration of *Atlanta Review's* 10th Anniversary, a whole decade of bringing you a cargo of surprise, wonder and delight from every continent on earth.

Volume 10, Number 1, begins with adventures in faraway places, as we mush by dogsled, whirl on Sindbad's magic carpet, and trek to the lost horizons of Kathmandu. (Where, by the way, there are some very enthusiastic *Atlanta Review* fans.) It's only the beginning of another unforgettable journey through the vast territory of human thought, feeling and experience that *Atlanta Review* has offered us over the years.

The next issue, we'll be touring Greece with Alicia Stallings and enjoying a special poetry section with guest editor Thomas Lux. The 10th Anniversary Celebration will culminate in the spring of 2005 with the publication of a magnificent *10th Anniversary Anthology*. Every subscriber will receive the *Anthology* at no extra cost, as part of your regular subscription. It's our way of saying *thank you* for ten years of companionship on the "open road," which has led to destinations beyond our wildest dreams and imaginings.

Dan Veach
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As a 10th Anniversary present, here is a poem from the only
continent **Atlanta Review** has not featured in the past decade:
Antarctica. The poet, Timothy Pollard, is the medical doctor at
the South Pole Station, where writing poetry helps to pass the
six-month-long winter night.

The Flags Come Down

South Pole Station 4/3/02

Nations flap independently
Declaring their sovereign reign
Over white plains
Never really occupied—
Winds cover every trace
Of man in this place

A tangled mass of cloth
Careless reminders of some adult game
Who can tell what creed begot
Each ragged-edged symbol, human order
Torn by an all-consuming wind
With no respect for borders

The flags descend the poles
The Pole descends to dark
Ceremony stored in a shed
Six months till sunrise and returning light
When flags and planes resume their flight
And we return to nation, creed, and coin

Timothy J. Pollard, MD

Life gets tougher toward the poles.
 Take the arctic:
 Nothing there grows tall,
 Reaches more than ankle-high.
 Grasses lie low,
 Even the trees crawl.
 Craftiness is required
 To keep alive.
 The thaw
 When it comes
 Is brief,
 Seeds must be ready,
 No time for spring,
 No slow gathering of intent,
 No prefacing,
 Summer roars in,
 A torrent, a storm, a flash-flood
 Of blossoming.
 The ones that survive
 Act as if it were
 A once-in-a-lifetime
 Event
 As if there were
 Never to be another.
 Just so
 We fell upon each other.

Rebecca Kavalier

News from the Trail

There is nothing to ask of the night
 as it spreads its dark blanket for comfort,
 as it gives this startling moon for a guide
 and whispers its secrets like a friend in the wind.

The dogs scream and lean into harness.
 I pull the hook and we are gone in a sudden silence—
 a line of primal trust and mystery. The trail is fast
 and serpentine, a corridor of white pine and birch.

We float and weave our way
 through the forest in wingless flight.
 The shadows of the dogs bounce like phantoms
 in the haloed flicker of light from my headlamp.

White knuckled, I lean like a skier into a tight turn
 as we kiss a corner like daredevils.
 We hammer up hills and pour back down
 like fluid unloosed. There is nothing to ask of love

with its team of eager hearts stretched before me, as we
 journey through the hollows of this wild land
 gathering the pieces as best we can of a promise
 broken so long ago that somehow keeps on breaking,

that I can hear, white woman that I am,
 in the skirl of voices that echo in the wind,
 ancient and still weeping.
 And I am so ashamed. I am so ashamed.

Elizabeth Levitski

Sindbad

Sindbad of the seven voyages,
nemesis of boundaries,
peerless investigator of land and sea,
sickens, at length, of the world's appalling width.

No longer proud of quick hand or cunning mind,
he slouches in the crow's nest for nights on end,
ignoring the tides,
feeling the pull of a different moon.

At times he imagines a room in the sky:
four white walls and a canopied bed
on which a betel-chewing Caliph reposes
his ample folds of flesh, while at his feet
a honey-tongued girl peoples the air
with swords and carpets and oracles.

Can a song grow enchanted by the singer's voice
or a portrait reach arms through canvas
to enfold the unsuspecting artist?

As the windows of my own apartment go dark
and a fresh fall of snow hushes the street's din,
I close the book and dream

that on the thousand and first night he solves
the obstinate mystery of dimensions

and as the Caliph rubs his sweaty palms together,
swelling with magnanimity
and preparing to possess his delectable slave,

he scythes into the chamber on the back of a Roc,
fully autonomous now,
wielding his untied turban like a whip,
sending the monarch whimpering beneath the bed.

Free at last from the prison of his legend,
and past all wandering, he dismounts,
extends a hand to the tongue-tied goddess on the floor
and shyly asks Scheherazade her name.

Shekhar Atiyar

Dargal teaches me the proportions of the gods, using a thin strip of bamboo nocked with the measure to draw the quadrants: the lower lip of the Buddha cleft like the bottom of an apple. Working alongside Tibetans who resist temptation and desire

though they are not monks in the heart, like you, I learn the limitations of the grid and to seize from other paintings, lush compact blossoms. Dargal is from Lhatse, his name means precious in my language. They all know about you and teach me their names: that *nyima* means sun, and *lsering* long life. The tea today tasted of cardamom

and I stopped on the way home to buy wild boar meat which they ground for me, fascinated that on the table at the door beside the hot-pink sow's head lay the bristly head of a boar:

and I wonder how it would be to touch your hair in the darkness, what would ignite like the flames that veer off from the tight locks of the protector god. Twice now I have traveled Tibet

through Lhatse, and in that dusty town with no showers had my hair washed with warm water in a basin, but you would not, saying you'd sworn no woman's hands would touch your hair. Vows you might break for me. Riding home,

a drop of rain hit me between my brows where the Buddha has a dot of gold denoting power and from the crossroads I entered the green valley as the spirit in meditation enters the palace. It is a fine dream, that you will come to me and gives the pink and gold clouds substance like those upon which the gods are placed.

Inara Cedrins

Toward Borders

After partaking of the new year noodles with the nine ingredients, dried rape from the last of the crop, people stream from the cities in pilgrimage again: the Amdo men, with red yarn looped through their long braids, Pembo men with bone ornaments in the long part of the hair,

crossing mountains rippled with veins of mineral green stones that are thinly scattered with brush in cinnamon and amber, and by yak-skin boat, rivers that send only occasional slight streams across the arid land.

In my dream I want to ask you, is the water good or is it salt? Have we a future? On the water

are pairs of tawny-golden mandarin ducks that mate for life. But you too vanish in this rarified air, grow small and dwindle among Himalayan passes where snow

is banked shoulder-high, only room for one vehicle to hug the road, and with time the prayer flags become transparent, losing color, longing becomes wordless.

Inara Cedrins

My wiz-kid scientist brother tells me—
and he should know—head in full
Einsteinescent bloom, eyes flickering
with dark matter and nebulae.

He tells me that if the earth were the size
of a cue ball, it would be smoother. Or conversely,
if a cue ball were blown up to the size of the earth,
its canyons would be grander, its Himalayas higher.

Now take your human heart (a cue ball
would outsmooth it in any contest), take your heart
and expand it, blow it up to the size of the earth,
to the size of the sun. Into what wonders

would its canyons open? Onto what peaks
could you climb? And if your longboat were
left to drift from her mother ship,
into what shimmering seas would you sail?

Prartho M. Sereno

The minutes that clamored around you
in workmen's aprons and sturdy shoes
finally lay down their saws. Vacation:
in time undivided, you lean

with fellow guests from the hotel portico
facing the placid sea and sigh, *How calm*,
the surface stirred only by white ruffles—
each quickly pressed flat,

then tucked deep inside navy blue
like linen handkerchiefs, still steaming.
Now think of the messages lying in wait
on your bedside phone, dates and hours

like ax murderers who'll chop life
to pieces. Imagine these voices
as mere scrawls on bottled scraps
cast off from a primitive isle

called Manhattan. The natives merely
wish to send greetings in their arcane tongue,
so no harm is done when the words
slip under, lost in the ocean of August.

Maria Terrone

*At a Korean greengrocer's,
Jackson Heights, Queens, NYC*

The purple mountains are so high,
our hands must climb to reach
the top, the plum at its peak
of perfection. Once we have, we strive

for more. No surprise—desire is why we came,
and this fruited plain knows no fence,
pushing out to sidewalk shoppers intent
on seizing the best. We sniff, squeeze, exclaim

to companions in Farsi, French, English, Urdu,
Spanish, Cantonese, Korean, Russian, Creole.
By the cash register, a sign extols:
We Will Never Forget. Citrus wear the tattoos

of corporations. Aztec-faced men build pyramid
displays, unpack papayas, their arms branded
with hearts and names of loved ones stranded
south of desert borders. At ten p.m., they sweep up fetid

remains of the day, vanishing into a back
room with plastic buckets of unsold bouquets.
At eight, Kim and her brother, Sam, raise the steel gate
again on amber waves of ginger, bins stacked

with aloe huge as oars, tofu squares afloat. Kim knows
how plants can keep her customers well or steer
them back to health—the Irish supers; women who peer
from burkas; spike-heeled retirees; Croatian

carpenters; turbaned Sikhs with flag pins
on their suits. Proud to Be American from sea
to shining sea of blueberries, blood oranges, kiwi,
yams, yucca, mangoes, guava, pumpkins

that teachers at P.S. 69 will buy and soon carve
for the children, their grinning faces also lit
from within. They'll dress like goblins, learn the Holy Writ:
United We Stand. This is America. No one starves.

Maria Terrone

Sitting Shmira

Outside the morgue on First and Thirtieth street, a canopy has been erected next to three truck loads of mixed body parts. Under the tent, teams of young yeshiva girls watch over the dead, sit shmira in four hour shifts. What should take only a day has gone on for eight to nine weeks. Since no one knows who's in these three trucks, all the dead cops, candy vendors, bond traders and unsuspecting passersby, all the uncommon inhabitants of our one earth's island are assumed converted by fire and ash into one Jew, one blood, and one flesh. And since no one is buried in parts, no one can be properly mourned. So hour after hour, sweet melodies and psalms rise up over the *conversos* until lights are lit in David's garden, and a moon with a broken edge rises, its author as anonymous as any victim.

Michael Salzman

The Renewal of 4M

When I met Carrie tonight, I had come in the back door with grocery bags and books. The elevator opened. We both stepped in. She hit the button for my floor. "You new?" I asked. "Yes, moved in today. I'm Carrie," she answered, "4M." I paled and swallowed my immediate response. *Do you know what happened?* She had just named Harvey's apartment.

The door-frame still gapes from the crowbar which helped us confirm his absence. My whole neighborhood had counted those who didn't come home. Harvey happened to be the one from my building. We were considered lucky—the complex across the street suffered losses I could count only in candles blazing on the sidewalk all week long.

Candles and missing persons flyers, little memorials littered my Upper East Side neighborhood until October, as we all struggled with survivor guilt—a feeling that swallowed me whole the morning I opened the *Nation Challenged* section of *The New York Times* and discovered Harvey's obituary in *Portraits of Grief*.

That same feeling lingers outside his door each time I take the elevator. And now here stands Carrie holding her laundry basket and detergent, smiling and entirely innocent of the history the broker probably "forgot" to mention when he rented the apartment: Charming one bedroom, southern exposure, Upper East Side, empty six months.

Carolyn Hill-Bjerke

They are morning glories, little suns,
bob up and down from their perches,
flicking thistle and canary seed

all over the parquet floors.
Next to potted ferns, they are tennis
ball yellow, this memory of when her

father played at the country
club, then came home with Bacardi
breath, and the sheen of sweat

on his brow, smiling and waving
as he drove up in his '56 Chevrolet.
Those gone-by days, days of gold

dreams, this froth of feathers
on the mantle, stuck to woven table
cloths, the ones her mother made.

One bird sings, then the others, spring
upon them, sunlight snuck into the room.
Mis solecitos, she calls them.

Brings them a plate in which to bathe.
In this country of olive green, brown,
coffee leaf temptations, her canaries

keep her happy.
Their splashing of water.
Their shadows at play

against the stucco walls. In flight.
Libre.
Fancy free.
Wisps of her memories yellowing.

Virgil Suárez

He called all of us "Cuba," because we were all in school,
having arrived recently from, and he too was Cuban,

and showed it. His hair slicked back, post *malanguita*,
every Cuban mother's dream haircut for their boys,

his shirts fit tight, since he'd recently started working out,
his pants creased, his black leather shoes shinier than his

smooth-operator glasses which he wore in class to the teacher's
chagrin, and claimed he suffered from myopia caused by harsh

sunlight reflected off the ocean's water, the Florida Straits,
where he and his family spent four days and three nights

on a *balsa*, this inner-tube, fish line, rope contraption his father
and uncle built. They were all rescued eighteen miles off

Key Biscayne, then brought ashore, and he said he wore
this exact same outfit. 1950s cool Cuban hipster. He spoke

slow to the girls on the playground, he cooed words in Spanish
in their ear, made them giggle with his suave walk, tight

pants. Whenever he spotted us playing basketball he walked
over or shouted out to us, "*¿Que paso, Cuba?*" We'd invite

him to play, but he'd say no, no way not with his best shirt
on. This was in the ninth grade at Henry T. Gage Junior High,

in Los Angeles, California. Who knows what happened to him?
Who knows what happened to all of us, our parents, our families,

as we waited for something to happen so that we could return
to the island and tell all those stories of our days in exile. Cuba!

Virgil Suárez

Wheezing city of tarred lungs and gin-poisoned sailors, of scalded
 noons and smothered evenings and rusted
 iron lace, give me your old song of steaming ferns and nightflowers,
 of sweating drummers and ships' horns
 and rude magnolia stinks. Give me the big river turning through your
 miles of stilted wharves, the water black
 with its acres of midwestern silt. Give me your eye-watering fumes,
 your pink carcinogenic fogs, your sugar mills
 and flaming chemical plants. Give me your great goitered flood-clouds
 bursting on steeples, lifting children
 on rafts full of their mothers' breath, your dripping gardens of juniper
 and maidenhair, your verbena
 and honeysuckle, crepe myrtle and phlox. Give me the canals and the
 pump stations that keep you afloat,
 the loose soil that tilts your houses and refuses your dead, then give me
 your wandering, root-broken streets,
 your wide avenues named for kings and saints and muses, your statues
 of horn players and defeated generals,
 your tarpaper shotguns and block-long marble estates. Give me your
 lives squandered carefully under patio umbrellas,
 your crushed limes and heaped ashtrays and young heart attacks.
 Give me your ferry wrecks and diesel spills,
 your refinery explosions, your hurricanes and fire ants and bristling rats.
 And whenever I long for a more temperate

climate, for nights without gunfire or wet tubercular coughs, give me
 your sleepy young lovers drinking wine
 in the palm shadows, your fat priests eating watermelon in Audubon
 Park—make me one of those weaving
 dancers turning slowly in your courtyards, smoking cigarettes in the
 glitter of your dirty stars.

Young Smith

Claude Debussy (1862-1918), won the French Academy's Prix de Rome at the age of twenty-two. Entitled to three years' work at the Villa Medici, he ended his stay after only two years because he so detested Rome.

Daily the awfulness of Rome.
Waking in a room so vast and dim
he called it the Etruscan Tomb,
Debussy scratched and found a flea.
Shedding the academic gloom,
he walked down to the city.
Heat assailed him and his eyes
ached from the sunbaked walls,
the Roman ochre, terracotta,
crumbling fabric of a rancid past.

Avoiding beggars and orange peel,
he wandered down the crowded steps,
sought coolness in malodorous churches,
swirling *putti*, saccharine saints
with eyes rolled heavenward
to ceilings floating vulgar clouds,
reached at last the Café Greco,
sank into a chair and pressed his head
to the marble table's chill,
ordered ices—conceding they
were certainly delicious.

Evening and the golden air
clanged with bells and scattered birds
beat their wings against his brain,
smothered the threads of music there:

the faun in the forest glade,
cathedrals trembling under water,
gardens in the rain and girls
loosening their shining hair—themes
that came and went like sunshine
in and out of showers, delicate
in the northern light, cool
and civilised.

Barbara Fisher

Manitoba

Everything comes up wheat
sooner or later.
Sod houses like those
in the chapter on westward expansion,

with their flimsy wax paper windows
and doors flamed in rare timber
have given way to wheat,
autumn amber tinted like the sun

on stacked earth.

Horse bones, tin cookery,
the odd English fork,
medicine bottles bluer

than Canadian sky all sink
into rippling fields. Faded calico,
rusty combines, wagon wheels,
bifocals, hand-forged nails,

homestead and saloon:
no ideas but in wheat itself.
Rippling, rich, life-giving:
the words are chaff

to the tongue, inadequate
and cheap. But cheapness
is the very virtue of grain.
I wind gladly through ripeness,

acres of bearded heads.
My argument is simply that
I am dusted with gold.
I await the harvest,

count my blessings,
tread upon worn hopes,
and repeat the northern mantra:
Manitoba, Manitoba, Manitoba.

Kenneth M. Autrey

Oh, honest Americans, hear me for my down-trodden people! Quite as warmly as you love your country, so they love theirs.
—Liliuokalani

Upon reading one man's opinion that playing the Saint Matthew Passion on a ukulele would indeed be an absurd, ridiculous thing to do, I think about the ukulele's sweet tickle of a voice, its monkeypod wood and koa wood, four gut-strings on a fretted fingerboard, and its arrival in 1879 in Hawaii when the Ravenscrag brought 421 Portuguese men, women, and children from Madeira, their bodies to toil and break in the fields of sugar cane and their sweat to be shed for many, for the remission and the relief of plantation owners who clamor for more labor, of foreigners who always take, eat, drink, and in delight to have land again beneath his feet, I see Joao Fernandes strum a merry tune on his *braguinha*, and there is something like an uproar among the people, Hawaiian men gather at the docks to marvel at Joao's flying fingers. They rename his instrument *ukulele*, their word for dancing fleas.

King David Kalakaua learns to play and so does his sister Liliuokalani, a sometimes church organist, and soon the cabinetmaker Augusto Dias opens a ukulele factory on King Street, and taro farmers and fishermen who cannot afford Augusto's prices fashion their own ukuleles from cigar boxes and coconut shells. When the king dies heirless on a trip to San Francisco, Liliuokalani becomes queen but already her back is against the wall, alarms and rumors every day of unrest, plots to annex her country and tumble her from the throne, secret meetings and she buries caches of rifles in her flower and vegetable beds.

I wish I could have helped the Hawaiians in some small way, flooded my senator with appeals or joined the ranks

of Liliuokalani's digging men, call me traitor, secessionist, but I would have planted guns at her palace in the melon patch out back, crumbled warm soil in my hands, although I am a poor gardener, my talents meager, my zeal sputtering and weak. This very month my grandmother is seventy-seven, back home in West Virginia and digging potatoes in her garden alone, somehow I think she is majestic as Queen Liliuokalani, who tries to overthrow the Bayonet Constitution, and does win President Cleveland's favor, though he is a lame duck, a guttering flame.

In the cool of evening Liliuokalani sits in her gardens with the Book of Common Prayer, her sorrow is heavy but the cup does not pass, and the hour is at hand. A great multitude of American marines land in Honolulu armed not with swords and staves, but with Gatling guns, carbines, Howitzer cannons, and double cartridge ammo belts, and Liliuokalani abdicates at gunpoint. The usurpers place her under house arrest and jail her in the palace for eight months, and when she gets out, she retires to Washington Place on South Beretania Street.

Across town, Sam Kamaka's own homegrown ukulele shop becomes the Kamaka Ukulele and Guitar Works. Half his woodworkers are deaf,

their senses of touch so keen they determine the exact thickness a piece of koa should be by thumping the wood, measuring the vibrations with their fingers, feeling the wood thrum.

In her quiet life, Liliuokalani writes songs, plants heliconias and mums in her garden until her death in 1917, seventy-nine years old and her will leaves money to build a home for orphan children of Hawaiian blood.

And when I think about the cane fields and taro farmers, the ukuleles and the deaf Kamaka artisans, and Liliuokalani and how she loved her people, there is passion, passion everywhere.

William Woolfitt

The Favor

Hitchhiking through England this old guy picks us up in his red Datsun pickup asks us where we're going notices & comments on our American accents & we climb in the back of the truck huddled in our jackets watching the green countryside & slate-roofed houses & black & white cows flashing by & when we finally reach the roundabout just outside of London where he's heading south he stops on the side of the road & we climb down from the bed of the truck & he comes around back with a thermos bottle in his hand asking if we'd like a cup of coffee before we continue on our way & we both nod eagerly at the same time wondering why all the extra hospitality but not wanting to seem suspicious or ungrateful & as we drink from the steaming plastic cups he offers us cigarettes as well which we also gladly accept & we stand there drinking strong black coffee & smoking Marlboros & wondering what's with this guy standing there watching us with such obvious satisfaction & pleasure & as we return the empty cups & make a move to go he starts telling us this story about how he'd been a soldier in World War Two & how he'd been cut off from his division behind enemy lines somewhere in Belgium & went into hiding with no radio no food no nothing for days & was finally discovered by some American soldiers who gave him hot black coffee from a thermos & American cigarettes for which he was forever grateful & that he'd been waiting forty years for a chance to return the favor.

Mark Terrill

Monet

Nothing will come into focus.
The women in the gardens
seem to grow
out of the very plants

they stand among. Imagine him
trying to draw a map.
Cities would merge seamlessly
into the countryside,

rivers become nearly indistinguishable
from their banks,
yet at some point you know
beyond doubt

this is dry ground, that water.
His map would get you there,
but when you looked down
at the rocks in the road

you'd find your feet
blending into the pavement
as if you, too,
were made of cobblestones.

David Rogers

She climbs the abbey wall—
an orchestra of cicadas
braids its cello-rasp into
the honeysuckle tangle of *Magnificat*
anima mea Dominum.

She imagines the nuns,
the small particulars of their virgin-harem,
the woolen-fall of black sleeve over wrist,
the pinch of snowdrift-wimple, the unscratchable
itch.

She bends into their wintered ivory voices, in love
with the pomegranate hurt of their prayer, knowing
she can never confess this sin, this raw wind desire
to breathe in the boiled potato purity of their breath.

Once she slid down the wall to lose herself
in a labyrinth of rosebushes, pricked her fingertips,
her palms, her arms, her legs—moon-pale,
polka dotted with welts of blood—then fell asleep beneath
a thorned arch of silver-pink damask petals.

The sisters found her, poulticed
her wounds with witch hazel, sulfur, oil of rosemary. Their fingers
piquant feathers upon her skin, brief second
before the medicine's fire, ecstasy of honey and sting.

And now their unguent song pulses—white dwarf stars,
neutrinos, quarks, quasars, the dusty
filaments of the Milky Way—

and the girl closes her eyes,

her body an aria of ripening fields,
tympanis and fireflies,
bass line to this centrifugal green,
this swirling.

Melissa Morphew

after Elizabeth Bishop

Don't take a boat; they move too slow.
Nor should you travel pinned to the red
Red breast of a bird, all feather and claw—
You are too big for that now.
But come.

Don't take a taxi unless you're wearing
Your favorite boots, your leathers—
And even then the cabbie may be a bit
Untoward, and the trip is far too long.
But come.

Don't send your voice across the fiber
Optic—I'm sure to miss it—all the appointments!
Engagements! Places I have to be. Best
Just send a card for now, or a picture of a flower.
But come.

Don't come on a paper airplane—I've doubts
About the structural integrity of even
The finest parchment vessel. And metal
Is so gauche. Gravity is too strong.
But come.

Don't wear a tricorn hat like Ms. Moore.
Be original. Put on your bangles, bring fish
Wrapped in newsprint, arrive on time, thick
Of tongue and nimble of joint. Meet me on the bridge.

Adorn my shoulders at the pirate store,
Listen to my words like measured gin, give
Reason to my spine to straighten up, meet
Me in the back room
And come.

Anthony Robinson

It's getting harder to find
the small things: beads spilled
into the Amazon
of the rug, the needle attached to
invisible thread. There is mockery
in a buttonhole. Even words
have shrunk, their tiny black legs
bowed and shaking as they make
their daily rounds across the page.

Oy, they say. *Not like the old days.*
Embarrassed, you turn away,
take the long view now, simply because
it is kinder and you are tired
of being cruel—to yourself,
to the inspected details found
wanting. Think of it. If you are unsure
of what you see, it could be
anything: a bowl of fruit, blue diamond,
even true love again, your longing
all wide sky in a windowpane.
You might choose to rejoice—

the tyranny of the small, overthrown,
and you dancing in the riotous streets
of *whatever*—hazy, liberated, willing
to forgive: the flayed heart, dirt
on the sill, the ambitious mole blind
to the roots, and fine print

on unpaid bills, all receding into less
than significance behind your furrowed
questioning brow, much as (perhaps)

the eye of God, glancing down, discerns
your perfect, lambent shape,
and not much else.

Patricia Hill

Achilles should have humored Agamemnon.
 He should have seen the leader had lost face
 And had to show a muscle, threaten someone.
 The king's first fury had soon given place
 To acquiescence; he'd already tried
 To let the subject of the prizes drop:
 "More of that afterward; let us now slide
 Our ship down to the brine." It could have stopped
 Right there. Maybe Achilles wasn't swift
 Of anything but foot. And then again
 Perhaps some goddess put into his brain
 A vision of the host that backs and fills,
 Buys Boss Day cards, keeps up its *people skills*,
 And never claims the privilege to be miffed.

Esther Cameron

He was buried in a graveyard
 where the vetch had taken
 the wind-sanded markers of southern dead,
 had eaten the stunted red cedars
 and covered the bases of half rotted oaks
 in shade too dense for flowers.
 Just as a cemetery should be.

The steep dirt road so badly rutted
 the hearse bogged at the bottom
 of the hill; the pallbearers struggled up through
 knee deep mud, dragging the casket
 between them; the women's shoes ruined,
 the men with pant legs rolled up to the knees,
 black socks and white shins,
 the hair matted to their legs.
 Struggling along, the way a procession should.

The green awning covering the open grave
 collapsed onto the ground from the weight of rain,
 so thick in the faces of mourners
 they could part it with the blade of their hands;
 the old women left behind in cars
 craned their necks to watch them go,
 staggering under the roll of thunder and the torrent.
 The skies precise and fine and properly angry.

This is how we sent him off.
 Without a burning ship or plastic flowers;
 without the whining of a windy preacher;
 without the singing of a single mournful word.
 Death as it should be done—hurried, howling and dirty.

Paul Hicks

For years, the dead

refused to visit. Miffed
I'd moved to a distant state
with place names
they could not pronounce.
But, lonely, they got over
being so damn picky.
We made up. It happens—
even in dead families.
Children come along.
People forget what was said
that hurt so much
one night over supper.

They settled. This house
now familiar
as their own soft coffins.
But when they sit up
nights making sure
my children stay covered
by warm blankets,
I hear them wondering how
I can get along with tiny closets,
no spare bedroom,
a single car garage.
A pair of cousins have their eye
on the big Victorian for sale
just down the block.

It has a dishwasher.
Room for a boat
beside the double car garage.
I should consider,
they tell me, how the lack
of long term storage
will affect the family.
But most of the dead,

like me, feel the pain
in their bones
that comes from moving
once too often.
Rent storage, they advise.
Have a tag sale.
What do you think—
you're taking this stuff
with you? And a boat?
Not if you knew,
like we do, how much
it hurts to drown.

Jesse Lee Kercheval

All your gestures were testaments of muscle and skill
as you nailed the sections of fence to the posts,
but what I understood was the power of your hands:
how either one could easily, instantly lift me—
by the throat, off the ground—and shake me in the air.

So my shoulders were high when you stood behind me,
and I bent every nail I hit; I never held the hammer well,
never committed to the blow; I was always rushing it—
or too slow. "What matters is what you make in this world,"
you said, taking the hammer, shaking it like a Bible.

Half an hour later, you were dead of a stroke.
Yet I have seen you out here, a ghost in the grass,
your gray chest hair shining with sweat. And though
the fence you built is falling today, beaten by seasons
that hold no beliefs, I keep it there. I will not forget

what matters is the making, that work may be a prayer.

Phil Asaph

My mother's watch outlines itself
in scallops of sweat and dirt
on my arm still pale with winter and
ticks off the hours that fall away
from that last moment when I lifted
her cool thin arm to unfasten
the days of her life and place them
on my own wrist which now
sows seed after slate gray seed
to begin the short life of onions
in soil I've worked for decades
knowing enough now to imagine
the storeroom in autumn hung
with ovals of brown and purple
which I will take down to slice
exposing my eyes to the sting
of such green birth such sure death

Susie Patlove



POETRY 2003

International Poetry Competition

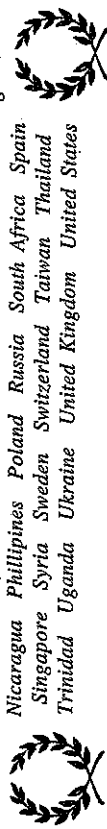
If a poem from the South Pole is a first, **Poetry 2003** offers us another: the first Grand Prize winner from outside the United States. Mike Casey is a citizen of that most poetic of isles, Ireland. Ever since our poetic journey there in 1996, we've had a special relationship with Ireland, and have received regular submissions from its poets.

One young Irish poet recently told me that *Atlanta Review* was his inspiration when he first began writing. When I replied that we were honored to be so highly regarded by a poet in Ireland, he assured me that *Atlanta Review* was known for its quality not only in Ireland, but around the world. A finer tribute on our 10th Anniversary could hardly be imagined.

Variety is the other thing *AR* is known for, and Poetry 2003 sets out a feast of experience that may leave you groaning, but never bored. Among our prize winners, Hilary Sallick's ode to the guinea pig will make you long for a stalk of celery. Deborah Warren takes us on an expedition of poetic archeology to reconstruct the city that rivalled Rome. Mike Casey meets his Fate on an Irish railway carriage, and weaves a tale both charming and well-knit. Hope you enjoy it!

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

Afghanistan Argentina Australia Belize Botswana Brazil Bulgaria Cameroon
Canada China Colombia Croatia France Germany Greece Hong Kong
Hungary Iceland India Iraq Ireland Israel Italy Ivory Coast Jamaica Japan
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Nicaragua Philippines Poland Russia South Africa Spain
Singapore Syria Sweden Switzerland Taiwan Thailand
Trinidad Uganda Ukraine United Kingdom United States



POETRY 2003

International Poetry Competition

GRAND PRIZE WINNERS

Gold \$2,003

MIKE CASEY

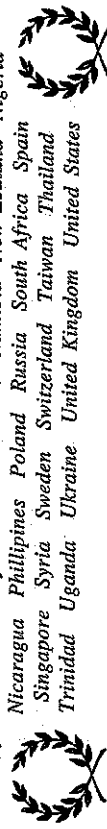
Silver \$500

DEBORAH WARREN

Bronze \$250

HILARY SALLICK

Afghanistan Argentina Australia Belize Botswana Brazil Bulgaria Cameroon
Canada China Colombia Croatia France Germany Greece Hong Kong
Hungary Iceland India Iraq Ireland Israel Italy Ivory Coast Jamaica Japan
Kenya Kuwait Malaysia Malta Mexico Namibia New Zealand Nigeria
Nicaragua Philippines Poland Russia South Africa Spain
Singapore Syria Sweden Switzerland Taiwan Thailand
Trinidad Uganda Ukraine United Kingdom United States





Jamie Morewood Anderson • Joan Peck Arnold
 Patsy Anne Bickerstaff • Tim Bradford
 Anne Caston • Inara Cedrins
 Amy Crawford • Philip Dacey
 Mark DeFoe • William Charles Delman
 Amy L. Dengler • Maija Rhee Devine
 J. C. Ellefson • Gayle Eleanor
 Chielozona Eze • Richard Fireman
 Douglas Goetsch • Leo Haber
 Ian Haight • Judy Hall
 Norman Hane • Gayle Elen Harvey
 red hawk • Lorraine Healy
 Margaret J. Hoehn • Dory L. Hudspeth
 Carol Kanter • Rebecca Kavalier
 Ann Lauinger • John Lehman
 Christopher Locke • Rhona McAdam
 Judith R. Michaels • Ed Minus
 Jessica Murray • Alfred Nicol • Jeanne Obbard
 Andrea Potos • Wanda Praisner
 Eric Rawson • Rosa Salazar
 Mather Schneider • David Shumate
 Matthew J. Spireng • Thom Stuart
 Mark Terrill • Robert Thomas • Susan Thomas
 Toni Thomas • Jeanne Wagner • Jeff Walt
 Ellen Wehle • Patti White • Gary Whited

Before the First Word

There's a place
 in the morning
 before the first word
 spills off my tongue

where a candle flame,
 fresh lit, offers a voice
 so clear, so yellow,
 so uplifting.

Someplace, in the inner harbor
 of such a morning,
 a memory wanders in
 of the first time

I saw the cow birthing her calf;
 her groans and heaves,
 the slip and slide of it,
 her long curving licks

cleaning the new body of light
 startled by earth,
 her rough-hewn tongue
 giving voice to urges

so deep
 my own pelvic bowl
 stirred for words
 that have not yet fallen

from the tongue I carry
 for just such occasions
 as this, a morning
 before the first word.

Gary Whited

"War is the ultimate story,"
the frontline correspondent
says on the radio.

I'm having my breakfast,
pouring the un-ultimate milk
over my un-ultimate cornflakes.

No one's shooting at me here.
I'm only breathing, sprinkling sugar
like a light snow.

I love the woman across from me,
the way she sips her coffee,
the cup in both hands,

though the story we're in,
I've been told,
lacks something.

I reach across the table
and touch her arm, as if she were
one of the wounded, and I

a chaplain, or nurse. She smiles
a smile from the story of peace,
of two people learning

not to go to war
against each other,
the story whose chapter

of blank pages says so much
about the art of story-telling,
ultimately.

Philip Dacey

It is like finding a hole in the universe. A door nobody else knows about. You swing it open and crawl through into the streets of a small town. You pass the barbershop. The pharmacy. The bank. The grocery. Maybe a row of grain elevators on the edge of town. All the houses are white. People are sitting out on their porches as if they've been expecting you. They wave and say a few words. Some ask you to come up and visit for a time. They want to know what you were doing before you fell asleep and what you plan on doing when you wake up. They're fascinated by it all. Sleep is the sole religion of this town. Icons of their reclining saints are everywhere. On Sundays even the infirm gather their pillows and blankets and walk to church to lie down on the pews and worship their great and slumbering god. It's such a pleasant place, you always hate to leave.

David Shumate

Slow Day at the Mall

Mattresses float like pink and blue islands in the Sea of Bargains. The Home Store ads had boasted "rock bottom this week only"—a hard image

for tossers and turners. I'm spread eagle on one of those satin babies. It's comfy as a captured cloud. I'm staring up at

the sprinklers, thinking padded, plush, yet firm thoughts as Muzak comes gentle on my mind with the bright elusive butterfly of love.

Will the clerks scream if they find me snoring in my Fruit of the Loom? I could camp here after closing time—live on Godiva,

Australian wine and English biscuits.

I could whip omelets in the Omelet King, sauté, mix and frappé. Buff my shoes, steam clean my pants, toast oversized bread. Watch replays on seventeen flat screen plasma TVs, check out towels and nifty mustache trimmers,

lug luggage yon and hither, test the suck on the vacuums, read up on drapes, crystal, faux Persian rugs and wicker lounge chairs.

My little piles of crumbs I left in Gourmet Goods would be blamed on slovenly janitors. The Rent-a-cops would never nab me,

the Phantom Consumer. Yeah, come and get me coppers! I'm stealthy and I'm informed and my confidence is high, very high.

Mark DeFoe

For a long time I'd wondered
 how it would feel to live inside
 a Billy Collins poem. I was delighted
 to find one standing open
 in a sun-bright clearing.
 It looked like a cottage where
 a kindly sorcerer might dwell,
 casting a bemused eye on the world
 through mullioned windows. When I eased
 myself through the door, I could tell
 the place had recently been occupied:
 a cup of tea (coffee would have seemed
 too edgy) sat on the plain wooden
 table, still sending up a plume
 of steam. From concealed speakers
 came the sound of Stan Getz playing
 a breathy *bossa nova* I hadn't heard
 in years. Books, of course, everywhere
 so many I couldn't take in their titles.
 Some of them lay open, posed seductively
 as sunbathers unaware of being watched.

There on the table, too, a single sheet
 of paper and an uncapped ballpoint.
 I couldn't bring myself to read
 the few words written there: Suppose
 it was the beginning of a poem
 about a man standing in a poem
 reading the beginning of a poem
 about a man standing in a poem
 reading...? The notion made me feel
 a slight tremor, as if I'd happened
 on something shocking. Yet all around
 me there was order, calm, an air

of expectancy—everything I'd hoped
 to find. I sensed that the owner
 would be coming back any minute,
 so I turned to leave. During
 those moments, I'd felt my tongue
 crouch like a stone in my mouth.
 But once I stepped outside, I began
 to sing, very softly, to myself.

Norman Hane

That second day of kindergarten, I ditched while Miss Clemens bent at the sink, helping Peter Farley wash the paint off his hands. I scurried across the wide green fields that led to the road where our row of white townhouses awaited me.

I wanted no more days without my mother placed in the center of every hour. I wanted her voice, the scent of the perfume she dabbed on her wrists each morning before we watched my father walk away. We stood at her dresser while she released the stopper from a crystal bottle so blue it rivalled sunlight staining the ocean surface.

I wanted to travel with her from supermarket to bank, dry cleaners to drugstore, wherever the day's life took her. As if sensing some hunger to come, I craved her with a fierceness that made me run, as if knowing I would soon lose her to a sadness vaster than any of these fields I could cover with the pace of my own feet.

Andrea Potos

This morning, I notice the salivating mouth of war absent from the headlines. I turn the pages, a timid happiness growing inside me.

Perhaps our national leaders have leaned back in their chairs, barefoot at their kitchen tables. First sun lands in the grain of the cherrywood there, like tendrils of a timeless hope.

Perhaps their fists are tired. Perhaps, after supper tonight, they will drop their agendas, like candy wrappers lost forever to the larger breeze.

Watch them toss off their jackets and ties, sprawl in the twilit, tickling grass. Grandchildren tumble over them, the irrepressible stars turn on.

Andrea Potos

I used to take the same bus
as the students from the School for the Deaf.
I'd watch them and listen, pretending not to,
while they gestured and laughed, their signs
accompanied by the *real voice*
they were taught to use.
I thought of mute swans
and the occasional sounds they'd make,
if they make sounds at all:
something reedy and urgent and raw,
like a lover's moan that rises
from deep in the body.

It was the way their pale hands
fluttered and winged,
crookèd on the stems of their wrists.
And because they were so young
and beautiful.

Once when I turned
to look through the window,
I saw their shapes skimming
the surface of the glass,
I heard their real voices.

Jeanne Wagner

My Cousin's Child

At two
Christina had yet to utter a word.
But when they sang Happy Birthday
she listened with rapture, eyes
darting face to face,
securing every note in her head.
She began to sing then—her mouth
a small o, notes quivering in her throat—
a scribble of birdsong no one had heard before.

The laryngologist was thorough, his report
full of awe, some of the same rapture:

Patient lacks a larynx, instead
a syrinx, what birders call a songbox.
Vocal folds capable of melody,
the ability to transport a tune
in the narrow corridor of her throat
but incapable of speech.

Mornings at the window
Christina defers to finches and chickadees,
the cardinal's scarlet whistle spishing
through the screen—woodnotes
that might be conversation or comfort—
the child hearing her own language.

My cousin whistles in the kitchen;
his wife tries on sounds: clear ringing
trills, twitters and peeps, songs liquid as a flute.
When early light takes on the color of doves
it graces each as they are—
lyrical information
melodic riffs
sentences of sound.

Amy L. Dengler

is the title of the photograph.

You know her, a Vietnamese child, burned, naked, running down the road toward the photographer. "Too hot," the girl is screaming, "too hot."

She trails invisible heat behind her outstretched arms, a gauzy veil of pain that flaps and flutters with every brutal step she takes.

Her clothes are ashes back in the village which is smoking, blurring the horizon, and she has just passed four soldiers, Americans, who are searching for the enemy.

The war is winding down, clearly hopeless. The blades on evacuation helicopters, laden with the last refugees from Saigon, are already turning. And she has been burning

ever since the first monk sat down in traffic in flames. The logic of fire is continuous; it rises up like a developing image gradually finding focus, defining itself time and again in unbearable pain:

the folded cranes of Nagasaki
the dowry murders in Bombay

a family incinerated in a Bosnian basement
the homeless doused with gasoline
black churches torched

and always, forever, this girl running.

It will surprise you to learn she survived.
The photographer took her to hospital.

Medication, plastic surgery, eventually marriage: her life was not unpleasant, and twenty years later, at the memorial wall, she publicly forgave the pilot, who still suffered from nightmares, the photo still burned into his dreams. She forgave him the fire.

But she cannot stop burning
cannot stop running down that road

and the monk still wears saffron
and sits calmly in the flames

and the canisters of napalm,
preserved in arsenals,
develop like film, like scars, like pain
inexhaustible.

Patti White

I thank all the women in all the countries
for going out shopping today for bed skirts
and linens, taking care of curtains and buttons
and bath salts, all the little nouns that perhaps
in a dream might make the makers of war
think for a moment that maybe the world
is female too. Maybe the world wears
as much silk and lace as it does gore-tex.

Someone decorated this place we're all ripping apart
and someone will reclaim it. Unless it's those
post-nuclear cockroaches, it will be when
female things, gradual, patient and powerful,
come back to it, like thaw after arctic winter,
maidens in their shawls, mothers buying bread.

Douglas Goetsch

Time is without remorse, cares nothing
for your dear hand sweetly on my cheek,
your lips a momentary wellspring of desire
against my hair; it moves
without sentiment towards our dying
the way a hungry wolf tracks its prey.

Time leaves its track upon our flesh, like
the wolf's paw in river mud, as it presses us
ever onward into the blue emptiness.

And yet, the mark of your tenderness
is subtler, far softer; and yet
it leaves a thin trail across the heart,

such a faint whisper of longing
upon the ceaseless wind that
even the wolf

bending at the river's edge
to slake her thirst, blood
upon muzzle and fang, pauses

and looks around her
at the sudden hush, the
infinite pause

in the infinite motion, then
bends,
drinks her fill.

red hawk

He knew how to hoot at the front door, and how to wander around back when there was no response.

And he knew how to zero-in on our big, green, Canadian rocker, and how to linger, smile at something off in the distance totally without discomfort until the extra plate appeared, heaped with noodles, salad on the side all riding on his lap, his huge eyes getting shiny—then going underwater

and for that moment we could see everything he saw: we could see blood of dying boys in a military hospital; we could see rafts of round silky women holding Asian parasols in the middle of Brooklyn Bridge.

It was like that—while he stayed for nearly an hour he used extra salt, ate everything in small bites, the dogs and kids twice knocked off his magnificent straw hat, everybody hollering: Please. Everybody hollering: Mercy. Everybody hollering: Astronomy

—that is, until he laughed. Yes indeed, had a laugh on him, that one.

He left grinning, high stepping his long vertically connected bones for the Gap Road, the place in the mountains where we see the moon rise, so I thought I'd track the old boy, but the prints stopped looking human.

Now there's no sleeping—feel like my heart's in my ears, the whole world talking outside my window, and sure, I love every black and white

COW, and sure, I love golden retrievers, dogs, every brown trout, every song the shoulder high grass sings to itself is the song I sing. I sing love out loud to the cows.

All right, keep your cows. Give me a mob. Give me a mob on Brooklyn Bridge.

OK, forget the bridge. Give me a gun metal gray B.M.W. going 90 the wrong way down a slick one way street in the middle of the night

—Oh, I love every dark and fair-haired boy and girl, every grand dad or granny dancing so close you can't slip a piece of paper between cheek and cheek is the way I feel. I feel

stop it. Stop it. I love George W. Bush. I love Saddam Hussein. Oh hell, I love everybody, everybody, everybody.

J. C. Ellefson

Night Shift

From the hospital roof,
where even in winter I take my break,
I can see the lights of a night game
at the high school, and know my family is asleep
in the crosshatched shadows beyond the diamond.

Rick takes good care of the kids,
that's a fact. I'm in charge of the mainframe;
I keep the mag drums humming
till the day shift comes. There's not much
to the job: the machine's obsolete
as a steamboat, enduring as a Philco.
The hospital won't upgrade, and the scientists
don't care. Even what we call them—
not genetic engineers or enzymologists
but "the scientists"—marks them
for extinction, as if they were blacksmiths
or bootleggers adding peaches to a tub of corn mash.

Rick doesn't drink a lot, but I know
he likes to pour one to keep him company with the remote
after I've left for work. It's the *idea* of it
attracts him, but then so much of what attracts us
to anything is the idea, isn't it? Like me
and that blue-eyed resident—what *was* that?
The idea that someone who's had no sleep
for forty-eight hours is exciting, edgy?
The idea of his clean hands
on the unit's thermostat, turning up
the fan? The idea that I'd find myself
if only I could be kissed
all the way to the third vertebra
in the same durable khaki slacks
I wear to crunch data? Well,
there are worse ideas, not that I'd ever
cheat on Rick. No matter

how good it was with some man in a mask
and blue scrubs, I'd be thinking of him:
how he hates feeding Hotwire,
as if any bull terrier worthy of the name
should hunt down her dinner,
and how he's too proud to read a bedtime story,
insists on making one up, some stopgap tale—
even Emma laughs at him—the fox
who forgot his phone number, the black cloud
who learned to tell time. I do love him,
whatever that means. I think it means
I know he's lost, too,
that it feels right to say God bless him, God
damn his dehydrated soul, God have mercy on us,
now and at the hour of the crystalline EKG,
because I believe that prayer is *make-believe*,
and because of a faint, gingery smell in the air
of snow that will not fall, not tonight.

Robert Thomas

for Dr. John Gimbel

You spoke of it once as a place between
 closed doors the no-longer-living
 come to, kept company for a time
 by the souls of infants. But I
 say it's a hospital nursery in Alabama,
 full-windowed, but with drapes pulled
 day and night and a door at either end: one
 by which you enter, the other a red-lit exit.
 In that nursery each midnight, three women
 in white: angels of the interstices, waiting
 for some final synapse to fire, for one door
 or the other to swing wide on its hinge.
 Some nights it seemed as if
 the place had revolving doors,
 so quickly did so many pass
 in and out again. One
 boy—a hydrocephalic infant
 whose mother had left him behind—was
 assigned to me. How long now before I can forget
 the heavy-headed heft of him: that swollen cranium
 cradled in my left palm as he drank? Impossible
 to hold him like a normal baby:
 the head might pitch or roll and the pearl-thin
 vertebrae of the neck might snap
 under the head's sudden weight. Or those eyes
 which would not, *could not*, close
 even in deepest sleep, even in the heavy

undertow of anaesthesia. While I cannot say
 I was repulsed by him, I also can't say that
 I cared for him beyond what was required of me.
 For ten nights, I rocked and fed him, humming,
 lifting and lowering him
 into and out of the warm heart of the isolette.

Ten midnights, I checked his shunt; I listened
 to his heart and lungs; I thumped his left sole, then his right.
 Ten nights I flooded those pale open pupils with light
 and watched for unequal constriction. He was nothing
 to me, that shunned one of the nursery, that
 unwieldy doll in a hospital tee shirt and diaper.
 Nothing, that is, 'til the three a.m. hour
 in which something in him fired and failed and he sank
 though I worked—though all three of us did—
 to clear the shunt, to breathe for him, to pull him back
 from that far door though some fiercer, wiser angel in me
 kept insisting, *let go... let go...*

Anne Caston

Platelet Apheresis

I look away and struggle not to flinch.
Why fear a violation you invite?
I do this often. Giving blood's a cinch,

Compared, let's say, to love or work. Just clench
Both fists (good veins, so prompt and so polite)
Then look away. It's a struggle not to flinch,

But lying three hours, careful of the inch
Of steel in each arm, disciplines the fright.
I do it often; giving blood's a cinch.

The T. V. overhead pumps out heart-wrench
Geraldo-style, a klieg-lit Soul's Dark Night.
I look away and struggle not to flinch

As stories drop like bombs. They rant or cringe;
Palms up, I bleed and listen. That's the rite.
I do it often; giving blood's a cinch.

It keeps off dread: the seepage that won't stanch,
No matter how you try to wrap it tight.
You look, you weigh the struggle. You don't flinch.
I do this often. Giving blood's a cinch.

Ann Lauinger

Rationale

You'd think statistics would console the heart:
Where love is bound to fail (such is the norm),
It's all in line with customary form

That what we've built together falls apart;
We'll look to science, now we've lost the art.
Perhaps, like cattle huddled in a storm,
Close likeness to the herd will keep us warm
When plotted near the cluster on a chart.

And as there's no device to measure hope,
For clarity we'll simply rule it out;
Regret as well, and other such errata.
Results require a limiting of scope.
Remembered kindness, tears, the touch of doubt...
What is all that but nonessential data?

Alfred Nicol

Song of Forgetting

Hatfield, MA

The brown barns steam
in August mornings like loaves
of unsliced bread. Scattered
here and there, tractors crumple
the earth, their big American
tires wheeling like night skies
devoid of stars. We haul carpets
of tobacco into barns, hang
the spiced skins in rows
to dry between slats where
dust boils in ribbed light,
coating our dark arms
and necks like flour from
another time, when we were boys
in Antigua, stealing gobs
of sweet dough from grandmother's
kitchen as she tapped
her wooden spoon against
the cooking pot, broth furious
with chili peppers and chicken legs
knocking into themselves like drunks
learning to dance. Our sweat bleeds
into t-shirts and headbands
like money hidden in a mattress.
One more, we say: one more
season and we can go home,
though home was paved clean
years ago for couples to glide
fresh down the stairwells
of cruise ships, their eyes

glittering like the emerald
beer bottles we all hold up
at the end of the day, thirst
unslakeable, the pounding sun
relentless until it slips behind
the hills, flushing the air
violet and heavy with the sound
of our own breathing until
we squander what dreams
we have over cards, some
weathered dice, a repeating
scratch ticket that never pays
out, and we are again flat
on our bunks exhausted,
barn ceiling gapped to offer
the erratic blink of a bat,
wisp of a cloud-bathed
cataract in moon glow, until
the deep clanging we hear
is Mama rattling pans for breakfast
only in our dreams: foreman
striking the work bell in darkness
as we rise silent and repentant,
the great hot day nudging
itself back into our lives.

Christopher Locke

It is a strange season for them to come,
late summer rather than early spring, but
they are here
peeping at the shadow of dawn,
watching for the slightest movement of me.
I gladly oblige them. It's a perfect day to dream
of slow, sleepy grasshoppers in loose grass,
their barbed legs shimmering, crackling and snapping
as they jump and tumble from the gourd patch.
My little poulters are too young for such adventure,
too small to feel the tale of flight
tugging their wing buds.

I have cleared the pasture.
A new earth rises beneath their smooth feet.
The damp hills wear their footprints like stars.
I am content here with the sweet smell of poultry mash,
of warm skin, of feathers.
Here all things are what they seem.
I breathe a simple breath and sit quiet
through these last best days of blazing sunlight,
drowsy with the bumble of thick, lazy bees and baby turkeys
napping in my lap.
Heavy-headed sunflowers sway and bow,
pregnant with seed, overflowing their own space.
Tiny chicks peep and yawn and I settle myself
into the moist press of grass, the day just a whisper
as the afternoon walks her light
home to evening.

Jamie Morewood Anderson

do not wake
with blood in their eyes,
search for any small thing
that moves
to kill for breakfast.

They wake slowly,
stand in their night tree,
shaggy wings stretched out
like opened cloaks,
soak up the sun.

Theirs is not determined
winging that cuts
its own path,
but clumsy flapping
that hoists them

onto geysers of warm air,
their wide-winged clasp
carrying them up
to float in lumpy circles.
I have seen them play,

peel off in turn
to slide down a chute
of cool air, thermal-hop
back to the top, children
clamoring to begin again.

We despise them,
for they do not kill,
as do our kind,
but devour
what is already dead.

Yet, see how they relish
what the world offers,
how they love their lives,
how gently they remind us,
as they glide in the sky

waiting for finished flesh—
perhaps ours—
to savor each breath, each
scent, each breeze
that washes our skin.

See how they promise,
if we have the courage
to die in the open,
to gather us bit by bit
into their dark embrace,
carry us into the zephyrs
of heaven.

Gayle Eleanor

Floating with Sylvia

The black willow hangs over the ancient dock,
shades the reeds where matchstick dragonflies
flash blue in quivering copulation.

Sylvia floats on her back, nipples breaking
the surface of the pond like tiny periscopes.
We talk of our recent men, glad they are not
here with their brassy energy, their urge to *do*.
Thick silt squeezes between my toes,
water purls as I lean into the lazy sculling
of my arms, listen to the wet castanets
of red-legged frogs drumming for a mate.

The sun slides down the rim of sky,
spills orange glaze over brindled hills.
Mourning doves gather in the lone oak
on the pond's far edge, cluck and coo,
slowly quiet for the night. We sheet
lavender water as we lift our bodies
to the dock, gather clothes and gird ourselves,
leaving behind the oak and the black willow,
who can only love each other from a fixed
distance, will never touch, unless
with their roots, secretly, under the dense earth.

Gayle Eleanor