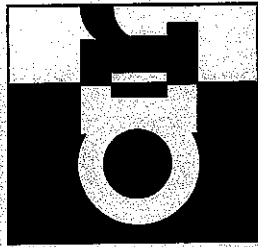


ATLANTA REVIEW



ATLANTA

REVIEW

Coming next Spring, a voyage to

ISTANBUL

Experience the poetry of Turkey

POETRY 2005

International Poetry Competition

Laura Foley

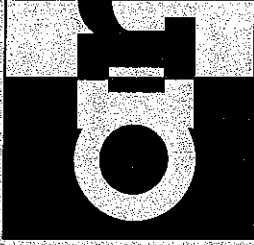
Grand Prize Winner

Vol. XII, No. 1



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**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

Volume XII, Issue Number 1

Editor & Publisher

Daniel Veach

Senior Editors

Memye Curtis Tucker
Lee Passarella
Alicia Stallings

Office Manager

Susan Shirley

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Atlanta Review reached a milestone with the publication last spring of *The Gift of Experience*, our 10th Anniversary Anthology. In this one volume are all the countries and continents that we have explored over the past decade. Sir Francis Drake himself would envy the treasures of the Indies and the Spanish Main that we have gathered in this remarkable collection. Thanks again to all the poets and the entire *Atlanta Review* family who helped to bring this *Gift* into the world.

Since the Anthology took the place of our regular spring issue, this one has a *double* helping of great poetry. We begin with an Irish poet finding ecstasy (and shades of Kit Smart's cat) in an Alabama monastery, and it never lets up from there. People frequently comment on the transitions between poems in *Atlanta Review*. At the end of our first section, a rather stiff Vladimir Ilyich Lenin serves as an admirable bridge between Snow White's Seven Dwarves and Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. One only wishes that history had been equally amusing.

You know how, once you've seen something you never noticed before, you start seeing it everywhere? Last year's Grand Prize winner, Timothy Walsh, brought the word *muntin* "out of the woodwork," and now it has cropped up again in this issue (I won't say where). Marty Walsh also wants to have a few words with you, and you'll be glad he did.

In the world of Poetry 2005, you'll visit Provence in search of the mysterious Poet of Poet Laval, wade jungle streams in Panama, scope out Pierre Lugosch's colon, enjoy a smile with Miho Nonaka in Japan, and return home to New England with this year's Grand Prize winner, Laura Foley. Our final section starts with some "bewitching" poems, and ends with the magic spell of poetry itself. I hope you'll find lots of it in these pages.

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

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Meditation in a Monastery

For Alabama's only Benedictine Abbey.
 For Brother André who gives me a bed, a candlewick spread
 and a crucifix over my head.
 For it does not matter Abbot Edwin's misgivings.
 For it does not matter twisting his arm.
 For it does not matter I am a misfit—a woman amongst monks.
 For I will avert my eyes.
 For I will safeguard the sanctum of the soul.
 For I will observe silence,
 befitting a woman amongst monks.
 For I will give no scandal
 in short pants, low-cut dresses, or spaghetti-strap vests.
 For my Marks and Sparks black jacket and scarlet slacks.
 For a scurry of black-clad monks, little windblown tents, flapping
 across the grass to chapel.
 For Brother Andre inviting me, blessed among monks,
 to join them at Vespers.
 For my first inkling of the glory of God.
 For the black monk who sails down the aisle with the air of a prince.
 For his cape,
 fleeing
 from nape to heel,
 leaping and dancing in its own breeze.
 For the world stops to watch him, a glorious Nureyev, in sandals.
 For it is worth travelling eight hundred miles
 to catch a glimpse of the pink of his sole.
 For what splendour he brings to the silence—spiritual or otherwise.
 For Route 65,
 For the heartland, com silos, Gospel Halls.
 For comfort stops, bread baskets, grits and streaky rashers.
 For fifty flavours of ice cream.
 For polished corridors,
 For flagged floors.
 For the sparkle of silence,

For Charlotte the cat, asleep at the feet of the Virgin.
 For she keeps the "Lord's watch in the night against the adversary."
 For she "counteracts the powers of darkness by her electrical skin
 and glaring eyes."
 For benevolence she bestows on Brother Jude, the birdman.
 For by stroking her fur, she unspools a Benediction of purrs.
 For my broken marriage.
 For my *broga déarg*.
 For quaking aspens.
 For orthodoxitis.
 For atheists and heretics.
 For barbarians.
 For the road not taken.
 For my last night here.
 For knowing by heart,
 For black swan eminence,
 For spotlight swiftness,
 For whirlwind sprints,
 For conferring wings,
 For the lilt,
 For the tremor,
 For he could swish by unheard—
 For, if I'm quick, I'll catch a whiff of the wind he left.

Peggie Gallagher

For the dissonance of air,
 For diaphanous elegance rounding a pillar,
 his cape in full sail.
 For God's light about him,
 For his wing sprouts;
 a sail,
 a wind,
 a living thing.
 For I will avert my eyes.
 For two ladybirds exploring the bulletin board.
 For the lions who ate the Christians whole.
 For air tremulous with incense.
 For Divine intervention.
 For his heel-sweep swivels.
 For Friday 13th—three stolen days here.
 For the States' highways.
 For the Children of Lir.
 For black swans.
 For the jeer of a jay.
 For a scarlet cardinal.
 For bread and wine.
 For lauds at sunrise.
 For my solitary room enroute to the dining hall.
 For breakfast in silence.
 For his soot-brown gaze.
 "For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest."
 For his kindness he bestows on older monks.
 For, with spotlight swiftness, he attends to their needs.
 For the light in his eyes in spite of the tremor in their hands.
 "For he is the servant of the Living God, duly and daily serving Him."
 For every poem is incomplete without him and "a blessing lacking
 in the spirit."
 For Brother Picomo who drops off, waiting for toast to pop.
 For Brother Celeste, who hauls a carton around asking:
would you like a cocktail?
 For Brother Joseph, a simple man, collecting rubbish for his building plan.
 For the monk with downcast eyes, who visits the kitchen when all is quiet.
 For the monk moving like a fish, pushing his feet along like fins.
 For the monk in an anorak.

God plans far ahead, we know that. Next week was taken care of years ago—He takes it out of its shed and gives it a test drive now and then—it still hums like a new, red Mustang. Or He tries it on to make sure it fits like a silk shirt with His weird Sumerian initials embroidered on the cuffs. And in His celestial kitchen He calls all the moods out of a jar and they circle His hand, ready to come to us. The following week is also done. It's His version of an interactive Norman Rockwell painting with perfect trees dripping color and, if you look down from above, fresh-painted houses in the middle of smooth, green rectangles. In the afternoon of this mini-masterpiece (which He is already calling *The Week of Long Days*, one of his absolute favorites) it will seem the sun will never go down and whatever mood has come upon you will cling and not easily go away. God keeps busy like this, restless, always gazing at cloud patterns for the next century, while in the day that is today, the stage sets often come loose and He has to run frantically around, nailing the paper sky back to the wall before you catch a glimpse of the house on the hill, the iron gate and the inexplicable red ribbon.

David Tucker

On the freeway, cars whiz by like flaming arrows—like owls with light-bulb eyes—like fantasies that flash across my ken, and disappear.

I'm a beer stein; metaphors foam down my sides. I'm a popcorn-popper; airy concepts spill across my floors. I'm a fisherman for Big Ideas.

Yes, and I'm the bobber too, riding green swells. I'm the bait, wriggling as thought-minnows nip—*Invent a hairstyle. Invest in baseball cards—*

none strong enough to pull the bobber down. *Marriage versus serial monogamy. Chronocentrism today. If truth is beauty, why the Wonderbra?*

I reel them in; I toss them back. Then all at once my quarry rises from the deep: huge as an aircraft carrier, black as the Mariana

Trench, except for picket-fence-sized teeth. I-the-bait scream, "Get me out of here!"

I-the-bobber dive. I-the-fisherman rear back and haul. This thing is bigger than *The Origin of Species*. Bigger than *Hamlet*, or Plato's *Republic*, or *Being and Nothingness*.

My reel explodes. My rod rips from my hands. Wheeling, the monster charges me. The sky goes black. One jolt, and I'm back in my car.

Mozart has turned to Mahler on the radio.

My thoughts crouch on the haunted shore of his genius as I drive home, my latest chance for greatness gone. Yet in my brain's dark depths, it hovers, gleaming:

I, Leviathan.

Charles Harper Webb

How The Argument Started

You say you'd like a word with me.
And which one might that be? Clinopinacoid?
Snollygoster? Clishmaclaver? Frabbled?
(You don't like frabbled? Frabbled delights me.)
Then how about smew, muntins, testudinous?
No word's too obscure, technical, archaic,
too esoteric to be brought to the table.
You know me, I'm no vegetarian at the feast
of words—one of those word-mincing namby-pamby
promulgators of euphemisms who eschews truths
that might disturb, seem harsh, give offence
(though I savor my fair share of clichés).
My plate is heaped, the board groans, my cup
runneth over—pull up a seat. And when you're through
with the word you'd like to have with me...
there's leftovers. I have a bone to pick with you...

Marty Walsh

Serenade

In a survey, non-English speakers picked "cellar-door" as the most beautiful-sounding English word.

—Associated Press news release

You are as beautiful as the word "cellar-door"
on the tip of someone's tongue, in someone's ear.
My tongue in your ear, my stellar dear,
tells all, and more, but mostly *je t'adore*.

I want to take you on the parlor floor—
as sailors holler "land ho" when they steer
in sight of hills or towers, vales that cheer
their homesick hearts, I cry out "cellar-door."

Not salary or celery galore
or cuspidor or salad says *amour*
like cellar-door, best-seller word for sure,
a thriller for the mouth for evermore.

And your eyes! That blue! *Mon dieu* and *zut alors!*
What else but (no soul's windows) cellar-doors.

Philip Dacey

Rip Van Winkle at South Beach

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek,
—Wyatt

I fell asleep in the sun and woke sixty
Years later sitting on a blanket with my wife,
The decades passing us by in a second (does
The mind travel back with the speed of light?).
My childhood close as lunch, my thirteen-year-
Old self the gift of Puritan America ("guilty")
For staring at girls in pajama bathing suits).
And now, here, no farther than the throw of a
Volley ball are three, age eighteen to twenty
Five, perhaps, undressing or naked, one cupping
Her huge breasts in her hands as she changes
From bra to bikini, the others flashing
Bronze hips and buttocks covered only with
String, displaying themselves as unself-
Consciously as sandpipers tripping the hem
Of the surf. Let me tell you I am grateful
For the gift of sight, for the sting of carnal
Desire, my wife's gentle hand still holding.

Ron De Maris

If the Language of Night Isn't Sex,

then I don't know.
For one thing, all of us can speak it.
Some of us well. Like a poem.
Like what we always knew but never heard
put quite that way before...
and *that* way, and *that* way, so exactly.
For another, just listen—
if it's summertime, listen—
a zillion ringing cicadas can't be wrong;
they wouldn't sound like life's own siren;
out every open window,
from porches, in darkening yards,
we wouldn't hear them sing.
Don't pretend we're any different;
so much of the night sky is empty
we *have* to fill it with something....
What do you say we go make a constellation?
What do you say we make two?

Rob Carney

Mounting: A Study on the Populous

It's strange how easy it is to make a baby. It can be done on a lunch break, in a stairwell, back seat of a drive in. On heroin, in a graveyard, between unwashed sheets of the Dream House Motel. By children, rapists, adulterers, even Republicans. Making a baby should be at least as difficult as climbing a tall mountain, perhaps not Everest, but Kilimanjaro or Ranier. 14,000 feet minimum. It should require years of training, weeks of preparation, illimitable commitment, prolonged exertion, an intense and unwavering desire of outcome. As well as sacrifices of basic comforts like air conditioning, oxygen, Budweiser. It should be lined with avalanches and sore calves, gnats, pneumonia, and many chances to turn back. Not this windfall of pleasure, this greased chute of nature's grain, bedding us down after the nightly news conceiving the future of the human race. Nature might have been more far-sighted to decree children shall only come from coital acts completed on top of mountains, at their very peaks. In which case most people would probably stay home and fuck (which is most likely all they wanted anyway) or—those with some vague, half-baked desire to have something to care for, a purpose, or a chance to redo their childhood—might stay home and domesticate dogs or cats. While every day a rare few couples with some stubborn genius for creation would head up into the azure foothills, hand in hand. Children, then, might have names like Fuji, Kilimanjaro, "What-A-Fucking-View," and if as adults they too wanted to produce another life, they would have to climb back like salmon to that ancestral spawning ground and lie on their backs at the top of the world

bruised and short of breath, but bearing a tenacious vision of what life might be, and bless the one to come, rubbing their bodies together, shouting out "Yes" and "God" in the middle of the deaf sky.

Sam Taylor

So, Demeter, did you think
you'd keep your daughter to yourself
for aeons? Forgetting lineage,
Persephone's the same as other girls—
moody, curious, not so innocent, perhaps,
as mothers hope.

Let me tell you, all the boys
are demons when they carry off
your darlings in their chariots of smoke.
Then comes one, so terrible,
so kingly in his leather, curly-
bearded and uncombed, that memory
grips you by the throat and there
stands Zeus, his lightning
in your womb.

Wasn't he a dude?
At least they're married, Demeter,
and you don't have to see their dusty home.
Settle, sweetie, get about your business.
You're a force here in this world.
Persephone remembers. You can count on
visits. Give it time, love—three, four
springs from now, she'll drive up with the kids.

Meg Gold

each month
a fertile grief
rent out,
requiring wads of tissue.
if only, I think,
it were green
or blue or came
out my ears,
if only it wasn't
so obviously
red, hot, sticky
and inevitable.
sopping up,
tidying, tucking in
I must be mother
to myself since
to no one else.
some months I think
I cannot, cannot,
absolutely can not
bear this
not-bearing
bearing down
upon me
until I am bored
through and through
with wasteful longing,
unable to believe
how it is I can still be
struck, newly undone
by each new moon.
how fresh and raw
remains the wound.

Elizabeth Simson

Suckling made of milk, I am your milkmaid.
I was made into a mother by
your milking it out of me.

Chastened and trapped in the bleak days of your long birth.
An off-track planet of two, in near-darkness.
Specter of a cracked egg—I groped to picture hell.

But when you first exhaled
your breath blossomed every tree.
And I came home among flowers, in hobbling triumph,
clutching you as eons went past.

The redbud, the flowering plum, the potato vine.
The pothole, the stop light, the wet steps.
The clouds dispersing, the soaking air, the strike of sun.

That day you were still smeared
with the faint crust of bloody mucus
I'd left on the bridge of your nose.
I liked to see that little shedding melt of the inside
of my body still upon you.

You were born in the thaw, and again it is the season
of flood and bud. Rain cloud, pearly shell, new egg. I crow.

Elizabeth Sullivan

I know you will be underpaid, your knuckles raw
from scrubbing bedpans. When you walk into the sitting room
heavy with wheelchairs, nothing will seem alive
but the smell of urine. But please, take a moment
to find my daughter among the stone stares.
Go to her, touch her shoulder, and look into her face.
Keep looking when she coughs,
when the phlegm dribbles over her cracked lips.
Smile. Hum softly. For five minutes, adore her.
Within those gray folds of skin are eyes
that once danced around the bright corners
of her nursery, a mouth that parted in wonder
at every leafy shadow on the wall, a face that dazzled
like a newborn galaxy the first time her mother looked down.

Tania Runyan

Sitting on the worn green rocker
while a cool breeze blows
through the pale amber air,
I listen to the thin, three-note
whistle of the chickadees,
the peck of their beaks
as they break black seeds
on thin birch limbs, then
flutter to the feeder again.
I used to spend such April days

in the solemn shroud of church,
amid incense and candles and chants
and promises of the dead rising.
Now I worship in this,
the Cathedral of Common Birches,

just me, the sun, and the dog,
a flock of monk-frocked juncos,
not one cardinal, but five,
and from the greening swamp rising
a lusty hallelujah of frogs.

Richard Behm

Wasn't it all filled with light,
light and books, the boys downstairs,
the neighbors on both sides, the cats collapsed
in pools of sun, sounds of
passing cars, somebody playing the Doors,
mourning doves and white-crowned sparrows calling
from the rooftops, cable cars rumbling
and racketing by, dust
from old exploded stars
drifting through the air, me
wandering from room to room, wondering
what to do next in
my light-filled, word-filled, wondrous life.

Landing at SFO

Then we began the long, slow mystery
of the descent, engines silenced, landing lights
spearing the dark, wing flaps louvering
like fins, the plane big-bellied,
awkward, tilting over intricate cities of light
lying below us like shattered jewels. Black
water, a necklaced bridge, bright diamonds of ships,
and us, angling down through black-purple
stratus clouds against a dark rose-umber sky. Quietly,
heavily, very slowly, like majesty, like priceless
cargo, we rode the night air down
until we landed, rocking, on the tarmac
and our lives started up again.

Carolyn Miller

The apple tree beside the house is dying
 Piecemeal. Our favorite tree. Each May
 Blossom and leaf urge hope, then take it back,
 Shriveled: another branch is dead. And now

A whole hemisphere of this tree that for years
 We tried to keep back as it pressed and pressed
 Itself against the house like the family dog
 Insistent at our knees, this tree through which

Outside her bedroom window our eldest grandchild
 Discovered the full moon, just like the moon
 In the book we read to her each night
 Of the first whole week she spent alone with us.

How is it we can have such affection
 For the inanimate, grieve so
 When it goes, gives out like an old car?
 We can love even an old car that has carried

Those we love. Sweater, rocking chair, mountain,
 Rubbed stones from a beach, the square foot
 Of grass I stared at so long one morning
 When I was, say six, thinking *This softness*

I will always remember. There is something in us
 Goes out to things, and to things an arrow
 From out there in the vastness pins us
 Like moths for the infinite to wonder at.

Charles W. Pratt

It Was Like A Baby's Cry

a small sound
 insulting the night. Little is left at dawn
 of the wildebeest brought down
 by lions. Two males, stomachs round,
 lie collapsed in the grass. A female feeds,
 ringed by a band of jackals
 and bloodied hyenas who quarrel,
 dart and dare, nervy with need.
 Between her paws a bare femur
 shines and still she licks its length
 so lovingly I want to sink
 into, become that bone, hunger's center,
 like sky burial when the birds swing in
 claiming the last shred of what I had been.

Marion Boyer

We Could Not Bear

It seemed to go on for hours—a painful cry like the screeching of tires, or the swing of a door on a rusted hinge, sometimes petering out for a minute or so only to start back up again, even louder and more desperate than before.

We weren't doing it to be cruel—it's what all the dog books said to do—let it cry, even if it goes on all night or it will be sleeping in your bed, on your pillow, for the rest of your life. But there was no telling that to the dog, so we went on trying to ignore it, trying to get some sleep.

But as we, snug in the same bed, lay awake listening to that pitiful cry, heard the sound of train cars colliding in the night like distant thunder, heard a horn honking on some far-off street, signaling to someone to hurry up, your ride is waiting, growing more desperate with every bleat,

the dog cried on, and we knew the loneliness of a horn that, for all its bleating could not draw the one it loved, the loneliness of those train cars that for all their clashing and coming together were really always alone, driving through the night across a still landscape. We knew the loneliness that froze within us like a snowy field in moonlight, its grass stiff and dead, its trees bare. It wailed within us like that dog,

a small but piercing cry not giving in even as we lay together.

But we knew what we could not bear. The next night, that dog slept in the bed.

Holly Karapetkova

The dwarves would always call in unison, seven coins in seven slots, to accommodate poor Dopey's belief that doing so raised the odds of response. It never worked. Spring, summer, fall, winter, never. They would hear the ring, the cheerful palace operator, then wait on hold until their coins ran out, and walk away. They felt like stubby fools for pestering Snow, ignoring the most obvious of hints. They didn't mean to dwell on the past, remind her of a certain small cottage, a certain large debt. Had they spoken, they'd have made no coy allusions to apples, no little jokes about throwing stones in glass coffins. The dwarves didn't expect a reunion in the forest, a Royal picnic for eight. They understood Snow had a fate beyond them, obeyed the law of happy inexorable endings. They had helped; now she'd moved on, married, likely ate petit-fours on the glassed-in verandah. Good for her. Good. And not bad for them. Mining was a good living. Long labor and hard, but the new lodes were rich. So They had their own happy ending, of sorts. It was just that they once had lived inside a fairy tale, and knew where it lived still, behind the castle's tall stone wall, past the polite but firm guard.

Ted Taylor

It seems as if a hundred years passed before they removed barbed wire like thorns protecting the Soviet border. Yet still the faithful, hopeful, curious file into Red Square take turns seeking admittance to the rose and gray granite castle guarding the prince of communism. Inside the mausoleum Lenin is propped on a pillow unaware that when he pricked his finger an entire nation bled with him fell under the same curse that put everyone to sleep for decades. Not realizing chances are good no one will ever want to awaken him with or without a kiss.

Judi A. Rypma

Born in 1761, Marie Grosholtz eventually became the famous Madame Tussaud.

On *rue St. Honoré*, Marie watched her uncle clone the rich and famous in his home:

*First, smooth the face with oil,
insert breathing quills,
then apply damp sheets of plaster;
now, squeeze and tease
until you've traced
the particulars of a human face.*

At seventeen she rendered Voltaire's satiric grin, then moved to Versailles to instruct Louis XVI's younger sister. Even when Uncle called her home—the streets of Paris beginning to thunder—Marie busied herself with telling all of those who rise

and those who fall. More than once her fingers met the same face twice: in the studio's calm light, soul and body whole, then in the chilly cemetery of the Madeleine, a head freshly severed by the guillotine.

In January of '93, a cheering mob dancing the Carmagnole, Marie cast a mold of the King's proud face, the ragged stump of his neck staining her dress. Later, her thumbs blessed the cheeks of Marie Antoinette,

and the scabrous Marat murdered in his bath, and Charlotte Corday—the Norman girl who'd dared to kill him.

Even the pocked flesh of Robespierre knew her touch before and aft.

What ghoulish knowledge Marie's hands held in the slender atelier of their grasp. What exact vocation had this lass been called to? *Sculpteur formidable*? Priest, mortician, god? All she knew was to give the common folk a glimpse of the royal and the wretched, the quick and the dead, evoke life's very essence, its slender warm thread.

Priscilla Atkins



POETRY 2005

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Anne Silver • Hans Jorg Stahlschmidt
Eleanor Stanford • Carolyn Tipton
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On our way to a concert in a small village we nearly were washed off the road as the vineyards disappeared under opaque sheets of a turbulent thunderstorm; we stopped our car on a small elevation while around us the sienna-colored waters from the overflowing fields covered the asphalt. Later the singular silence of

a cello struggled with the thunder and the rhythm of raindrops falling on the small church while we sat wet and relieved in the hard pews. Bach looked

to a heaven still blue and near as he filled his *Unaccompanied Cello Suites* with a repose and order of a universe we will never know, from a dream he dreamed alone, taking the bow from God's hand and playing on the body of the earth. There were only

a few listening and the simplicity of the Protestant church was the contrapuntal melody to the Sarabande and the lonely bass line in the midst of a land suffused with colors and saturated with wine and almonds; it seemed that all the music came from one note and our lives were only counterpoints between silences and the great resonance of the open strings.

Hans Jorg Stahlschmidt

Medieval Streets

She wanted her life to beckon her on like narrow cobbled streets of a medieval city dark twisting ways of monochromatic stone between balconied palaces, bridges arching overhead to block out sky and remind of another way,

split-timbered homes overhanging low wide steps of gentle ascent that round a bend into a steep stairway to another shadowy street, seemingly headed directly for a pair of relief-carved doors but taking a small jog into a cloistered courtyard cooled by a fountain.

Around every curve of the obscured way, surprises a cheese-monger's where you thought to find the wheelwright, thick impenetrable walls where you needed passage, and then, within what seemed a rocky labyrinth, suddenly a sunny garden with tall palms and yellow birds singing from the upper branches of orange trees, profusions of flowers

to shock the concept of color back into the gray-trained mind, and the canticle chanting of robed friars from a nearby chapel.

She asked that the stones placing themselves one before another like leap-frogging youngsters not let her know where they were going together.

And when, across a wide plaza, they arrived at the cathedral with its massive doors open wide, she wanted to be awed by rose-windowed light, beyond the last worn stone that laid itself sideways beneath the lintel, as gesture for her to step inside.

Maureen Tolman Flannery

The Poet of Poet Laval

writes prescriptions for sleep, listing
sonorous ingredients whose names
you only have to read before slipping
into a deep canyon descended
by way of rustling poplars, the humming
bees in oceans of deep-colored lavender, the slap
of the waves of those oceans, and there at the bottom,
dream's diagonal door of light and shadow, the one
you never are aware of passing through.

The poet of Poet Laval
is a useful poet, writes poems
that seed the heart you thought non-arable:
soon, stirrings, presentiments of
the wild and bright, red poppies.

The poet of Poet Laval
does not exist. Poet Laval is a village, very old,
in the north of Provence. Touched by the thought
of a village named after a poet,
I visited Poet Laval and asked after him:
who had he been, and where could I read his poems?
These questions made everyone laugh, until
a kind woman took me aside. "It's like this," she said,
"in Provençal, 'poet' means 'mountain!'" So,

no famous writer of poems ever lived here, no favorite
son who went to Paris and became renowned,
no local troubador, whose song about a woman's eyes
—though she's been under ground nine hundred years—is still
remembered. Not even one beloved in his time
for his lyrics celebrating big events: the spectacular
grape harvest, the long-delayed completion of the church,
the late birth to the lonely, childless couple.

And so I conjure a poet for this town.
In her poems—no matter what the words describe—
a window opens up: through it, the evening sky
of a summer long ago, its first stars
through the branches, the rhyming
white blossoms, whose breathed-in scent brings back
the sense that anything is possible.
All of it given back. Everything restored.
Just for the moment of reading, of course,
but the spaciousness lingers inside.

Carolyn Tipton

*And yf that olde bokes were aweye,
Yloren were of remembrance the keye.*
—Chaucer, "Legends of Good Women"

I've been rereading Chaucer, lugging *Troilus and Criseyde* with me on the bus. Each time I think I catch a glimpse of her in passing, a black umbrella obscures her face; she turns, and it is someone else. The yellow leaves unhook themselves, and press their blank pages to the pavement. I can't read this season; it's changeable and moody, hides behind an opaque sky. The bus window fogs, and old love notes reappear. This is how I feel these days, my body filling in along old lines. In dreams I sift through bins of all those books that have been lost, the ones locked up in pantries, those unglossed except by tears. Unlikely though it seem, my great-grandparents wrote their way through reams like this, circling in ink the blurred spots where the drops had fallen. Lena stirred the pot with one hand, clenched the onion skin letters in the other. If she could fling them in with the gefilte fish, she wondered, how salty would they be; how sweet? Under the sink, the mold wrote intricate stories that no one read. Other, more pressing worries crowded around the table with their spoons; her belly pushed at her dress, a waxing moon. Here it's fall. I spend the morning staring at the lake, the rough wind tearing

its flat page. I think how the rabbis compared the fetus to a folded notebook. Where did they expect these women to write their stories down? The fluttering inside my abdomen feels more like a half-finished thought. The tome resting in my lap is open to the end: *Go litel bok*.
Go kiss the steps that those before you took.

Eleanor Stanford

String Theory

One day while zooming air-cooled
from walmart to subdivision
with plasticized fish from the Arctic,
Juan, I saw you walking
the shoulder not a sidewalk
waste land not for walkers
uphill in august heat
looking hot and satisfied
with a big trout on a string
shining like church candlelight,
food for the family at the trailerpark
two miles out from town.

You carried back into my heart
the river, slipping under the highway
half seen half screened
by concrete and treetops. Seeing you
Juan
walking
from Tuckaseige to housetrailer
with a fish on a string
our parallel worlds collided
and yours made sense.

The sense it makes is not
the sense of place that should
be mine. It's yours: You
in this strange green country,
without a car
without a green card
without a fishing license
and so in possession

Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin

of a summer day
a cool living river
a long walk uphill
waiting hungry children
a shining fish
a satisfied heart.

Fish

We have to do our part, I'm told
make small but wholehearted gestures.
Fling, for example, thin silver offerings
in arcs over the water so they glint
against the sky like dragonflies.

Children catch on easiest.

With the day swimming through them,
by breakfast their laps are full
of bluegill and perch.

My friend Bodie casts his line into the mirror
each morning: *How come you ain't happy?*
he croons to the fish in the glass. He knows
how unexpectedly grace can leap from the water,
how entranced grace is with our rarefied air and light.

Coleridge kept his hatches unbattened
so the depth-dwellers would slither in and out—
strange primordial creatures, transparent as glass,
their phosphorescent skeletons flickering
in the murk. Maybe he knew

that every gesture was a prayer,
and that every prayer was answered.
And that every answer was a fish.
That's why we see them circling over death-beds:

Rabindranath shouting at the Brahmin priest,
who prays that the poet be freed from the wheel
of birth and death: *Stop all this nonsense!*
Tell God I want His world and His seas.
Tell Him I'm hungry for fish!

And Gertrude Stein grasping at the last
straws of knowing: *What is the answer?*
she warbles, but then shakes her head and laughs:
*All those years of hook, line and sinker...
and it turns out I am the fish!*

Prartho Sereno

Elegy on the Passing of the Tobacco Age

This is not a pipe.
—René Magritte

It is the ceremony of pipes we most regret
The loss of clay, briarwood,
Meerschaut, the magic pause
In mid-conversation while the smoker
Drops his eyes to focus on mid-bowl and sucks
The barely lit tobacco through the flume,
Dredging who knows what
Subtleties that lurk within the ash
While the smoke grows deeper blue and rises
In wreaths of almost laurel shape, the smoker
(Usually male)
And the pipe (O elegant
Phallic signature),
Two parts that make whatever gods
Inhabit falling cinders
Ignite like lightning in a teacup,
Or that stilled daze over coffee
When cigarettes cancel the day
With a neutral hue, neither good nor bad,
A legal stoned. Gone is the sip and puff
That clasp hands to pull you through lost hours
Like the sitting of a bodhisatva
In sacred nothingness.
What can we do with all this time to use,
Smokeless, breathing air like gulls
Darting on the sea? Think of smoke-
Filled seminars befitting disorder
And fog, everybody smoking,
The shared cough that bound us like galley slaves

On the oars of our undoing, Eisenhower
On five packs a day, Humphrey Bogart wrapped
In smoke, eyes squinting
Through perpetual haze.

What a sea of *schadenfreude*! All gone,
The first puff in the morning
Like CPR to start each day, gone
The offering or taking of a cigarette,
The bond, the sharing, the camaraderie, gone
The long loving roll of a cigar
Between clenched teeth, the penile power,
Sexist prerogative and subtle swagger,
Gone the rich smell of pipe tobacco
In a tobacconist's shop—some dark corner
Barely touched by light, gone
The sudden rush of exotic worlds, Latin America,
Java, the plantation South, O lost
Aroma of earth, nature's bounty and nature's
Balm, where is thy sting?

Ron De Maris

Wait Till Next Year

This season has ended
with the bleachers a field of headstones; sprinkles
of mourners have come to console themselves
and moan through the last inning.
Some sneak into luxury boxes as means
of compensation; others want distance from the futility,
lonely seats in the upper deck of despair

where they replay losses in solitude
and repair their spirits for Spring training.
I'm a fan of those fans,
those diehards who've come to endure
this opening day of the one-game season—nine innings
to go, twenty-seven more chances for redemption.

When our team takes the field
the half-hearted cheers are drowned
by the stadium's silence; one loud boo rocks the stands.
Men wearing the mitts of boyhood
wait for a chance foul ball to bless them,
give them something to hold onto till next season.

Not a bad place to be
at the end of summer, with batters still
swinging and missing, fielders diving for miracles
just out of reach. It might be that grace
that makes me a fan, that draws me
to the close of a season in which nothing can be won,
nothing lost; or maybe it's the odor

of cleat torn turf, or the organ grinding out
timeless tunes; or just the pleasure
of lolling under the arc of the slow-curve sun
watching the day drift
lazily out toward right field and vanish over the wall.

Sherman Pearl

*The authentic account of the under-reported
resurrection of Miles Dewey Davis
in the evening Mojave desert sky
September 28, 1991
the day he died*

Mojave sky already orange
erupts deep into red
as the sun falls
downbeat
out of sight.

The only electric power pole
within one light year
of Jackass Rock
stands forty nine feet west.
Crazy, like you and me.

Lean here against Jackass Rock, and watch
the damn universe pivot....

Molten Mojave sky pours out
a twenty-four carat gold ingot, the size of a man.
Man floats down, out of the sunset
in one stride—
right alongside the utility pole.
Man carves himself a pure black silhouette
from the orange sunset he poured himself out of.
Wears a big black silhouette Stetson hat
and carries an instrument case.
He leans against the pole, natural
like he planted it from seed.

Miles opens the instrument case, spins out a huge gold nugget.
It floats in the love of his hand. He kisses it—
draws his hand away like lightning!—
spinning the nugget into a b-flat trumpet
with Miles scribed across the bell.

Miles Davis blows
one
long
bending
sensuous note....

Its golden bloom transcends every nuance of orange
in the dark fiery September sky
he has given his life
to be.

His lips open the note
into three universes of Zen,
harpoon it suddenly into the deep merlots of red
and explode it all the way back into yellow
like a canary becoming the sky.

Miles is the sky
the whole sky

all hues
all blues... and

yellow

like the canary

Richard Greent

Blood

sisters, we whispered.
Head to head,
cornrows bowed against blond curls.
Stooped in our private huddle
in a blind brick corner, screened
by Mrs. Peterman's hollyhocks.
White families lived primly
fronting Sixteenth Street but
our backyards opened to each other
across the old brick alleyways
sharing kitchen quarrels
and the sight of our underwear
dancing on the clothesline.
Mmmm, my lonesome hungry
Southern mother would sigh,
smell those collards they're cooking over there.

Thrilled by an idea
we picked up from cowboys
and Indians (black and white
on TV) we gathered shards
of green glass from a bottle
broken on the bricks.
You bravely scratched a welt,
a thin threshold between
the in and out of us. It welled
a rich drop of blood.
Years later, reading Shakespeare
the jewel in the Ethiop's ear
would always be for me the ruby
that rose and quivered first
on your brown wrist.
Then on mine, though it brought tears.

See
you said
it's the same
color.

We pressed our skins together
where the pulses beat.
For the first time I knew the ecstasy
merging with a beloved could bring.
Maybe that's why it stays sharp
even though I cannot remember
your name, Sister.

Today I brushed my plain straight hay
into a bun and remembered my envy
of the dozen little bows and balls
pink, blue and yellow that hopscotched
on the tips of your pigtailed when
you stooped to pluck a dandelion
blooming in a crack between the stones.
We blew on it together, set hopeful seeds
flying on a single breath. *Goodbye,*
Thumbelina, we called softly, waving,
Goodbye! and twined our wounded little arms
around each other's waists.

Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin

Sunday Ritual

I would buy a bottle of cheap red wine
keep it on the dining room table
like a fine sculptured statue,
until Sunday came when I would pour its contents,
pretending it was the ocean
fermented to the point of red,
into a fake crystal glass and drink
glass after glass after glass
until all that remained was the bloody bottom of the sea.

Sundays were always hard on my heart, easy on my pen.
I was never a poet then, just a girl
longing to be home
in the presence of my mother's complaining:
"Why you young people don't like church? Eh?
The old choir so old that all of them combined
don't have a full mouth of teeth."

To be home again,
I would give the old people all my teeth.
Hand-wrap them and deliver them at the altar
like a mash-mouth virgin.
Here, my mouth is full but my tongue is numb.
Just for remembrance, I talk *patwa* to the furniture.
The brown couch is a broad back woman
with a basket of fruits on her head
and three sons at home sleeping in bed.
The coffee table is always my father,
stained in the middle and most days left unpolished.
The frigid snow stuck to the patio door
is the ripe belly of a coconut I speak to while eating.

Here, you must turn food into language.
Cook tin ackee and fresh codfish
until the aroma says,
Mawning, how you do? Long time no see.

On Sundays the heater is set to sunshine
and with my breasts drooping in a floral cotton wrap,
sweat trickling past my navel into my communion cup,
I curl up and die another day in this place.

Tanya Shirley

Talking About Scents With My Cousin

The autumn-warm smell of our grandmother's *avogolemono* soup, simmering on the back burner of our lives, her pantry infused with sesame, anise for Easter *koulouria*, and now this, my non-religious cousin's dose of the uncanny one year after her divorce: the aroma of church incense that followed her throughout her day, into her car, her office, the health club, *outside, inside, everywhere*, she could not locate the source, remembering the censors swinging from the priest's gnarled hands in the church where our mothers nestled in the close communion of the Greeks, the fathomless well of the cantor's voice, the gold dome invisibly, consoling above us.

Andrea Potos

Visiting the Supermarket

I welcome the runway aisles, the time it takes to steer the silver cart around the possibilities: crushed pineapple or sliced, soft whole wheat or flax 'n honey. In the air, a Mozart sonatina, the strings of Vivaldi. I take off my coat, pat it into the generous space of the cart. The linoleum tiles shine like the first day of elementary school before the cliques are congealed; the overhead lamps sift down a light I swear is tinged with gold. At the refrigerated shelves of biscuits and cookie dough, I choose the Tollhouse chocolate chip for later on this day when my daughter and I will slice into the dough wearing the pinafore aprons passed down from my grandmother, surrounded by enough of whatever it is we need.

Andrea Potos

Smile

If you go to any McDonald's in Japan, you can order a smile.

You see it on top of their menu priced at zero yen. Of course, you never *ask* for it, they give it to you anyway the moment you step in, so well trained they are for courtesy, those teenage girls in their red-striped uniform.

You think it's funny but it really isn't.

What is ours floats into the air, Rilke wrote, *like steam from a dish of food.* Then this:

O smile, where are you going?

It was when the girl at the counter handed us a plastic menu with a big smile on her face,

the poet's voice flashed through my head in silver.

I, too, wanted to work at McDonald's. If asked, I could've smiled endlessly, being of an age to laugh at everything even at a chopstick rolling off the table as they say.

My father pointed to a Big Mac, my mother considered a teriyaki chicken burger, and I got vertigo not from hunger but from the momentary radiance of the girl's smile, both genuine and wasteful.

*Does the infinite place
we dissolve into, taste of us then?*
asked Rilke. Oh I knew,
if his voice could be audible
outside my head, it would've ordered for me
one smile to accompany
my plain burger and fries. I wanted

to preserve the girl's essence
seeping out into the air, take it home
even. The world is April.

Behind the girl, frozen patties sizzle in rows:
behind us, through the windows,

you can see the roadside cherries already
scattering their blossoms in streams.

Kids leaving school walk past each window and look in;
their faces ripple with malice
and fugitive curiosity.

How all flowing things blur into a sherbet hue.

Miho Nonaka

You Dog You

At first she thought his messy habits carefree and endearing.

But soon she became a Weimaraner about them, even when he was Schnauzering up to her, whispering Husky love words,

and giving her sexy little Pinschers.

She just got tired of his Lhasa Apso attitude and started giving him Pointers about his behavior.

Acting as his lifestyle Shepherd,

she even suggested he join the Dalmation Army.

He swore to Saint Bernard he would do no such thing.

The seriousness of his tone was mitigated by the fact that he was standing in the kitchen in his Boxers, and doing some Pekingese into the pantry, looking for whatever Chow he could get his paws on.

He found something that hadn't turned Rottweiler, and decided to put it into a bowl and Whippet.

He Wolfed down his creation, but nobody else would have given you a Pug nickel for it.

Then he began crying Poodles of tears,

and started to lament just like that Great Dane Hamlet, "To Beagle or not to Beagle...."

That wasn't the question.

The question was whether he'd ever get his Shih-Tzu together.

Marian Wilson

Blue Book Quote on the Used Self

Mechanics shake their heads. Your cylinders misfire. Your carburetor flubs the mix of fuel with air, and gaskets wheeze *replacé*. Sentiment's sediment has sludged the points. Twitchy as pork bellies, the market value shifts hour by hour and never matches hope.

The gassy oracle? *Depreciation*.

In its pig-iron belly, the engine grunts and stalls. What is left to broker? Trade in asphalt for footpath, bike lane, bus? When the last chance mechanic turns his back, you roll all windows down. You leave the doors ajar, unlocked. You leave the keys in the ignition. You leave.

Carolyn Moore

My colonoscopy

I am of an age when men must have their consciences
And colons examined for hidden dangers.
Small sins and seeds planted in the darkness of the gut
May monstrous grow and rebel, and overcome the heart
If not watched, and uprooted from time to time.

So for a day I fasted like a Saint in search of sudden
Lightning lurch to grace and God and ate not Lenten crumb
Nor mite of meat; a rite for all who wish to know
What lies unseen, what lies inside.

Two angels, negro nurses, gurney-guides in white,
Glided me, intubed, to the O.R.; I sang to them alone,
In my sweetest baritone, "Swing Low Sweet Chariot."
At that they laughed out loud and blessed my soul
And called me "love," then turned me on my left hand side
To seek what occult thing might hide between the caecum
And the seat.

A quiet nod and then the chilled rush of an anodyne,
A drip, as sweet an opiate as Helen gave her grieving
Red-haired King to blot the pain and memory of time and Troy
And fallen friends and foe; the woes of any hard-lived life.

My ass, surprised by daylight and a draft, a beached behind,
In a burlesque negligee was beyond embarrassment.
I harassed the doc and tried my stock repartee and sought to flee
The moment, but I was no match in rectal humor with this analyst.
I heard the doctor ask the nurse a question and repeat it
And struggled to grasp the meaning as I slipped into the sea
Of lost memory.

What odyssey that doctor took I shall never know.

Did he travel the Styx and spot Chiron's specter or cut a hydra down?
Did they joke about entering the Great White Whale or discuss
My pulse and blood pressure? Or did they wonder what might be found
Deeper inside, where their scopes could not penetrate?

"Look nurse, I've found it. There's his soul, as plain as can be!
How noble, how pure and white, how filled with love and pain,
But stalwart and like a mighty fortress. There's a soul
That a man can be proud of. There's a rare soul that has lost everything
But not itself!" And in hushed awe, "What a beauty undefiled.
Let us withdraw from this holy place."

I heard a kindly voice urging me to breathe deeper, and asking
How I feel. I asked him when they were going to start and like
Others doped and duped before me was told that they were done.
"Impossible, I would have known surely... where did the time go?"
In the distance through the Demerol and dream I saw my nurse
Wave hello to me. "That went real well, you did real good."

But there are fifteen minutes missing from my life, fifteen minutes when
Even my dream clock was stopped, and oblivion like heaven's rain
Fell down upon me. Fifteen minutes when I was gone.
Would that I could sip again this magic potion and forget, forget,
Even the joy, and Troy, and my lost friend.

Pierre Lugosch

Apocryphal Story Told by My Mother Foretelling My Own Genesis

He drove a red convertible across the Huey P. Long, past freighters and refineries. She bumped down Canal to Arthur Murray's dance studio. Nights, they walked along the levee, the river higher than the streets. They passed the stained equestrian statue, and the Civil War submarine shaped like a potato. She stared at a paddle wheel, the city breaking into costume.

The gutters filled with beads, with masks, and bottles. At the Fontainebleau, he stepped into the numbered footprints painted on the floor, as if he were following the schematics he drafted at the office. Down Bourbon Street, into a vortex of trumpets, strippers, oysters, and beer, they fox-trotted. Like children, they grabbed at trinkets tossed from drunken floats. A rose-haired clown was handing out miniature coffins with little skeletons inside. On the trolley tracks, Adam and Eve, greased green from head to toe, carried an alligator on a bamboo stretcher. I was born nine months later.

Mark McKain

If I Were a Song

you'd listen to me again and again, trying to learn every word of my lyric— every *tra la la* and *oooh baby, baby*, every wordless mumble and stutter.

You'd buy the sheet music to study me, play me on the piano until your fed-up neighbors bang on the wall, sick of my chords. If I were a song,

you'd want me on the radio every day, spinning me in heavy rotation, every hour on the hour. I'd go Billboard Hot 100, then top 40, then top 10, then

all the way to number one, top of the pops, the hit parade, most requested song in America for the eleventh week in a row.

You'd hear me even in your sleep, sing me in the shower, hot sudsy water down your back. You'd play me until the cd quit, tape snapped, batteries dead.

Though the rest of the world would grow weary of my syncopation, you alone would still listen for my funky break, my guitar solo, my vamping on the chorus 'til fade out.

Allison Joseph

Just Another Season

We wait together patiently
The barren winter trees and me.
We seldom speak. We never pace.
We simply bear the cold's embrace

And keep our worries to ourselves.
Why publish them? Not even elves
Can give a satisfying reason
Why winter has to be a season.

We know there's nothing to be done.
No one to call. No telephone.
And even were a number given
Who'd answer for the when of heaven?

No one we know. No one we trust.
And so it's left to none but us
To watch the day's slow lengthening
The incremental inch of spring.

You might remark with what firm grace
We meet each morning's frozen face
Or how at dusk we watch dark fall
As if night didn't hurt at all.

It's not that we are not involved
Committed, at the root resolved.
The cause of keeping love alive
Is ours. We're clear. Love will survive.

But sometimes love is kept inside
Far better than when published wide.
Sometimes they serve each other best
Who give their protestations rest.

Chris Longenecker

Let feelings cool. If heartwood dies
It's part of growing up and wise.
Come spring we will be better fit
To meet it than the younger set.

For spring is not an easy lover.
And though he promises to flower
He sometimes breaks us with a storm
Before he shows he can be warm.

If we let be, don't make a fuss
Perhaps the storm won't level us
Won't break our hearts to make a point
Won't twist our feelings out of joint.

And when he finally says, "I'm here
At last, my darling, have no fear."
We'll hardly fling our branches wide
Shout out aloud, rush to his side!

Not likely. No. We'll hold our ground.
We'll look him over up and down.
We'll let him feel our silent stare.
We'll take our time in getting there.

Then quite politely we'll inquire
Before he sets our hearts on fire
Because, you see, we need to know:
"Will you stay then, or must you go?"

For staying is the only thing
That turns a winter thaw to spring.
And nothing, no, not God above
Nor anything earth's yet thought of,
Red breasted robin, turtile dove,
But this makes loving into love.

to Stanley Kunitz

Tell me, Stanley, have you not had iris borer
in your garden, eating out the hearts
of your rhizomes, planted years ago
and care-free, so you thought?
Perhaps you need not fence out
predatory deer on that small island,

but, then, tell me, don't you anger
if a groundhog climbs the cage
around your daisies, rabbits burrow roots
and devour swelling buds? Do you not rail
at the subversive mole, the slug that leaves
its slime-trail in the litter, curse
the persistence of both weed and worm?

And, while you dig, the grind of mower
from one side, the blower's roar,
a chain saw's grapple, chipper's drone
and whine next door, weed-eater's hiss...
or does the sound of the ocean
all around you
drown them out?

How to bear the din,
the waste, vain toil, imperative
of seasons in their march,
unreasoning wind and rain?
When the vulture's shadow
streaks right through
light summer shade,

can we trust in the grass,
can we still rejoice
as the wheel of the barrow
cranks a tune,
and sing?

Jane Rawlings

Bless the hothouse, Japanese,
pickling, waxed and organic cucumbers

Bless the sudden curve of a stadium dog
smothered in Heinz 57,

Bless the Costco employees
who wipe the condiment ledge clean.

Bless the doors of American fridges—
those cupboards of nothin' to eat—

And bless the shelf in the door
where you reside,

because the goddess of smooth skin,
and sound sleep,

the goddess of safe stocks
and pear-bottom buttocks,

and the goddess of flat stomachs
and running barefoot on high arches

have all deserted me
while you, goddess of relish,

who endure the chill air of the fridge,
uplift my soul and help me

bravely face the sour
surrounding all that's sweet.

Anne Silver

New York Times, April 19, 2005

In the dry morning,
Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador
dressed himself in eagle feathers, climbed
the voladores' pole in Chapultepec Park,
slipped a long vine around his left ankle,
looped the other end on the corporal's platform and
floated high above the ancient alhuehetes.
From there, only the creaking twist of his tether,
the thin voice of the corporal's flute.

All day long the people call for him.

Andres Manuel! Come down and pierce
the ears of our babies. The buses
that crawl the Paseo Reforma
spit fumes in our faces, blacken the
hands of fruit sellers. Come. Wash
us in the fountain Diana Cazadora.

Andres Manuel! We grope women
in the subway, lie at Alameda
while stray dogs jerk in their sleep.
Come. Hose our roads at dawn and
breathe the sweet pavement. Sweep the
gutters where hibiscus flowers wilt.

Please! We will wrap our dark worries
in fresh corn husks. Steam them slowly
in the streets. Feed you like we feed
our children. If only you will come and eat.

Kerry Dimneen

whirl

*I am a bird of the heavenly garden,
I belong not to the earthly sphere.
They have made for two or three days,
A cage of my body.*

—Jalaluddin Rumi

at the kiss of their hands
they shed their heavy cloaks
and begin to whirl,

one by one,
palm-up, palm-down,
planets circling the sun.

the divine breath
blows sweet love
through the ney.

their skirts rise
as they spin faster, satin tops,
orchids blooming.

somewhere nearby
a dervish boy
unfurls a Persian rug,

a Sufi woman
tills her garden,

and as the dancers flag in unison,
a bird
bursts from the cage of its body
singing,

Hu! Hu!

Michael Shewmaker

Hussein and Ali

As the night grows crystalline,
I realize I have moved
to the back of the open-ended shop.
On the floor, I sit covered in their rugs,
dirt and camel dust silver the air.

They are telling a story to the others
about knot tiers. Young children,
fingers thin, tiny, limber as lilies,
they sit eleven hours a day in the sheds
of Afghanistan weaving
part of the family's sustenance.

Under good managers they can talk.
They tell stories of the village dog
seen at dusk as they walked home,
of the apricots soon to ripen,
of an older brother who wants to go to school.

The knots are perfect,
mostly.
Sometimes late in the day, they tire,
heads droop and a stitch is loose.
We can forgive them this.

Once Hussein and his brother
tied knots, learned the trade
and when the war came near
their family fled.

I smuggle down in the stack of carpets
and look at the foreign visitors
listening to the tale. My fingers
trace the turtle and anti-aircraft guns
woven in the rug across my lap.

Carolyn Boyd

A young boy brings *chai* in tulip glasses,
an American buys a Baluch,
outside, cold white desert stars
blink in silent innocence.