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Poetry 2019

ATLANTA



ATLANTA REVIEW

REVIEW

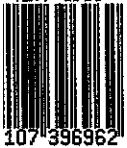
25th Anniversary Anthology

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**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

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ATLANTA REVIEW

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Up to five poems, without identifying information on any poem.
For more information, visit our website.

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<https://atlantareview.submittable.com/submit>

Postal mail submissions must include a stamped, self-addressed
return envelope, and a cover letter listing poet's contact informa-
tion, including email, and a list of poem titles submitted.

*Please send postal mail submissions and subscriptions requests
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*This anthology is dedicated to all the poets who
have shared their work with us over the past quarter
century, and to every reader who has invited us into
their literary hearts, and to every editorial staff member
who labored in love to make every issue a reality.*

WELCOME

After nearly twenty years of college teaching, there is one aspect of my job that haunts me: curricular design. Each semester when I design, or redesign, my syllabus, I worry about what I am omitting, knowing that each choice I make to include a writer's work is also a decision to leave out the work of many other writers. Putting together an anthology evokes the same anxiety. In twenty-five years, *Atlanta Review* has published over 2500 poems. The editors believed every one of those poems deserved an audience, which is why they were published. To pick and choose between them after years of nurturing their success, is like being forced to pick between your children.

The editorial work for this issue was an arduous months-long process. I invited back as many of the past editors as possible to be part of the process. They were joined by an equally stellar group of special issue readers. To a one, each of these readers is both a lover of and guardian of poetry. Each one of them engages in the art themselves. Some of them have appeared in our journal over the years, but by taking on an editorial role again, they relinquished consideration of their own work. I am forever indebted to all the work they have done to bring this issue to life, especially the tireless efforts of my Managing Editor, JC Reilly.

You will also find a second editorial introduction by Emeritus Editor-in-chief, Dan Veach. Dan was the heart and soul of this journal for the first 22 years, and his careful curation and shepherding has left an indelible mark. Most of the history is his to tell.

Editors and readers alike are also indebted to our donors and subscribers. Without this important support, we would not be here to celebrate 25 years. We hope we have made your proud.

In these pages you will find work by poets who have only ever published a single poem. You will find Nobel Laureates, Poet Laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, and those who have won many other prestigious awards. You will find poets whose careers lie somewhere in between. The poems are as varied as the poets who wrote them. We mourn those poets no longer with us, but we are consoled that their work lives on in our pages. There are poems from our 25 journeys to other regions of the world. There are poems representing each year of our journey together.

In the coming year, I will begin work on an inclusive archive of our history. While I am proud of this anthology, I also know that it is merely a small representation of the wonders we have published. I want the world to have access to *all* of the work we have published.

Happy 25th Anniversary to each of you and THANK YOU for being our poetry partners for so very long!

Karen Head, Editor

25 YEARS OF ATLANTA REVIEW

25 years ago, when we raised the idea of a brand new poetry journal, we were met with copious showers of ice-cold water. "Outrageously expensive," older, wiser heads informed us. Ravenously time-consuming. Doomed, like so many others, from the start. Only major colleges or foundations could fund the kind of international journal we dreamed of, not a gaggle of starving poets in Atlanta.

Fortunately, we paid no heed to wisdom or experience. We were poets, after all, used to stepping off the cliff and into the void every blessed morning of our lives. True, none of us really knew what we were getting into. But for years I'd sold radical papers at factory gates on freezing Boston winter mornings. How much harder could poetry be? (Teleprompter: pause for uproarious hilarity.)

To everyone's astonishment, *Atlanta Review* was blessed with the luck of the Irish—sometimes quite literally. Early on, at a pub in Sligo, Ireland, the great Seamus Heaney promised us a poem. Two months later, he won the Nobel Prize. And yet, even amidst that deluge of worldwide acclaim, he never forgot the promise he made to that little American journal.

It would not remain little for long. Atlanta hosted the Olympics in 1996. One of our editors, classics scholar A.E. Stallings, told us the original Olympics had contests in poetry as well as athletics. So we launched our first International Poetry Competition—a global success with thousands of entries from over fifty countries. Alicia Stallings would go on to win a MacArthur genius grant and be acclaimed as one of our greatest modern poets. I would go on to drive a big freight truck, dropping tons of poetry on loading docks all over the Southeast. Our Atlanta Gold issue went places, even big box retailers and grocery stores, where poetry had never gone before.

Atlanta Review was the best-selling poetry journal in the world that year. It remains one of the best-loved and most widely admired, known for its features on international poetry. Historic issues from IRAQ and IRAN, appearing at the height of the war and the pro-democracy movement, were republished as books by Michigan State University Press, winning national awards. Issues on China, Russia, India, and Pakistan gave us an all-too-rare glimpse of the hearts behind the headlines.

I'm overjoyed to say that this great tradition will be carried on by *Atlanta Review's* new editor, Karen Head, managing editor JC Reilly, and the wonderful team they've assembled at Georgia Tech. Like the poetry in its pages, *Atlanta Review* will continue to take us to places we've never dreamed of or imagined.

Dan Veach, Editor Emeritus

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What the Eye Lets Go

The small perfection of the blue oranda.
It rises between lily pads and hyacinth

like a dream the water had,
fish born in the moon's tranquil sea.

It swims into your mind
when you are weary

when you have touched
for the last time someone

you have loved and must let go,
just as the eye

releases this minnow-quick
breath from its net

and the water, without parting,
takes it in.

Lorna Crozier

The Unexplained

I used to fear the dark,
not bees the size of my big toes,
or rotting peaches where earwigs
and yellow jackets lived.

I didn't consider the blades
of planes and cutting tools,
or the fine poisonous coils
of cedar shavings.

It was the unexplained:
the yawning, hungry laundry tubs
in the depths of the basement,
behind the back stairs,
where that one particular spider
watched from the tinder box.

Margaret Blackwood

The Lake

For Sylvia

Rispetto (Italian)

The shining mirror of the lake
between dark mountain walls of fir
seems in a sleep no sound could wake,
no single sliding ripple stir,

lost in a peace man's never known
for all the journeys he has made;
I stand here troubled, half afraid,
and bend my back and throw a stone.

Robin Skelton

The Errand

'On you go now! Run, son, like the devil
And tell your mother to try
To find me a bubble for the spirit level
And a new knot for this tie.'

But still he was glad, I know, when I stood my ground,
Putting it up to him
With a smile that trumped his smile and his fool's errand,
Waiting for the next move in the game.

Seamus Heaney

Monteverdi Vespers

for John MacManus

The voices sing me to a dark room, with a wall
Three parts window and a grey sky.
Outside there's a terrace where gulls have stalled
On the eggbox chimney pots. I hear them cry.

I know the knack of gulls: after rain how
They stamp the lawns to fool the worms.
I know they fly to chimneys to be warm, cower
Nowhere, fought shell to be here, stern

As the shark and its off-shore wreckage,
Where I've heard they hover. *Jerusalem*,
The voices sing. City compacted in faith and damage—
The cry of the gulls accompanies you with knowledge.

Sinéad Morrissey

Bonfire Makers

start young, with a kind of architecture.
Their flammable one-room shanties
pepper demolition sites and crossroads, dada
haystacks, invitations to lightning.

All night sharp faces keep their eyes peeled,
all day they go collecting door-to-door
the incendiary trash of the streets—
forklift pallets, truck tyres, furniture.

With their nose for what catches, their instinct
for ritual and sense of timing, they
gather it all into the old charred circle,
its birthmark. Then burn it down.

Martin Mooney

For Clara Rosa

What is this virulence that eats at the cloth on the altar,
riddling its foam like the sea's lace, the space between the holes
or the fibre that knits them, the sound of the turned Psalter
multiplied into beating wings? There is no simile for our souls
if they are winged but insubstantial, there is no sound
like the coveys whirring from grass, silent as the elusive shoals
of mackerel from the brain's coral, shadows racing over sand.
Bright day, rippled morning, breakers and strokes of white sails
and a hymn rising from the morning pews, lace of the altar,
lace of white foam, opening wings of the Psalter,
widening wings of the frigate bird and the tilting gull,
at this very hour, in different islands, are they all one sound,
the mute hymn of glory, the organ groundswell of death, both
beautiful
and one? Rest, Clara Rosa. They all share a common ground.
And no sea is heavier than my heart, which is full
Of salt and the morning and the mourning; it has rained.
Back to earth, clear rose, close the wrinkled petals of your eyes!
The leaves sparkle, the grass is beaded, sorrow dries
from the concrete patches. Now they are taking you where
repetition and process continue, the sea, the blue days,
the fire of our flowers, the seraphic, the infinite air.
Which your red mouth is part of now, with its loud, easy laughter.

Derek Walcott

About Almonds and Ambergris

There is a perfume rising off the sea today.
A scent of almond top notes and base notes of ambergris.

I think about ambergris, a grieg ball of scent starter
coiled in the stomach of sperm whales or rolling free,

a pomander perfuming the waters of oceans.
Did Jonah know that he was valuable as ambergris

sought after and needed to touch pulse points?
I meditate upon these matters this day as I lie

upon the outer reaches of Lyssons beach.
I think that I shall add the scent of berries now

to the perfume rising off the ocean. Water berries,
bright red such as those which cheered the eyes of Columbus

when he feared the sea would dip under and that he christopher
and his colombo in the Niña the Pinta and Santa Maria

would be drawn down to the weed clogged sea floor.
O chrisobal Colun set out for Cipangu and China

sweet winds swept his caravelles out to sea,
blessed weather, April month in Andalusia.

Now three ships full of frightened men
who have crossed that fine line of foam

into uncharted waters. Then Christobal sights
carved board horses and green branches

fresh branches bearing berries, life cast upon water.
There is a sweet smell coming off the sea today

of almonds and ambergris and red berries.
I think about Columbus and how he thought at first

these islands would be a source of gold,
of cotton and mastic, aloes, wood, and things invaluable

to him, poor thing. That sweet smell rising off the sea today.
May the perfumed tides wash my people now bright berries.

Lorna Goodison

Light Like a Feather, Heavy as Lead

Marley, "Misty Morning"

All green light seeping into the morning
the smell of coconut oil and ackee,
lazy reggae pulsing through the thin boards.
This sleeping Sunday morning,
the hymns of the pentecostal church
tucked into the dense green of August Town
swim like prophecy in waves
threading through the faint drum and bass
of the transistor chatting upstairs.

I hear Marley's tinny voice
cut after cut until I ache
from the apprentice cicatrices,
ears now alert to the gravel thin wail
of the original shortass reggae organizer
dubbing me bloody truths from the thin
concentric grooves—round and round
maddening gyre of prophecies,
spiralling mysteries and no clue,
no vision of some monumental journey
over strewn palms fronds and the praise of believers
through holy Kingston—the prophet slips by unnoticed;
(Jamaicans have never understood the hysteria
of Beatlemania, we die, not for pop icons,
but for sweet-mouthed politicians, we die).
This black, glowing vinyl of trapped sound
is all that is left, all that is left
of the rhygin, word-weaving prophet.

My fingers stretch and flow through
the whisper of old revelations like mist
the rough of the crackled snare and one drop
sound is washed by something of a dream,
I cannot find my way through the smoke.

It is hours before a long-time-coming
sea breeze, still warm from its journeys
tickles the morning, everything giggles,
everything is light as mute anomie,
while she closes his stiff eyes.

Kwame Dawes

Greek Island Triolets

1. Entomological

This fly believes I'm dead.
I cannot lift a finger.
He buzzes round my head.
This fly believes I'm dead—
A body on a bed,
Safe place for him to linger.
This fly believes I'm dead.
I cannot lift a finger.

2. Sartorial

Why did I buy this Marks and Spencer's t-shirt
And, having done so, fail to take it back?
An average-English-frump-beside-the-sea-shirt—
Why did I buy this Marks and Spencer's t-shirt?
I needed something ace. This is a B-shirt,
Fit only to be worn beneath a mac.
Why did I buy this Marks and Spencer's t-shirt?
Shall I wash it once and take it back?

3. Arboreal

We hugged a tree last night,
And all of us enjoyed it.
Ecstatic, by moonlight,
We hugged a tree last night.
Trees can't put up a fight—
That oak could not avoid it.
We hugged it good and tight.
I hope the tree enjoyed it.

Wendy Cope

Mother Scrubbing the Floor

She had a dancer's feet, elegant, witty.
We had our father's, maverick spreaders of dirt.

Dirt from London, dirt from Kent
Mud, dust, grass, droppings, wetness, *things*,
Dirt barefaced, dirt stinking, dirt invisible.

Whatever it was, she was ready:
The rubber kneeler, clanking galvanised bucket,
The Lifebuoy, the hard hot water.

*Let me! we'd say, meaning Hate to see you do this.
Too old. Too resentful. Besides, you'll blame us
That you had to do it.*

She never yielded. We couldn't do it right,
Lacking her hatred of filth, her fine strong hands.

*Don't you want to do this, she said. Don't want you to have to.
Just remember this: love isn't sex.
But the dreary things you do for the people you love.
And 'Home is the girl's prison,
The woman's workhouse.' Not me; Shaw.*

I do remember. I stand where she knelt.

U.A. Fanthorpe

The Gift Horse

into whose mouth we're not supposed to look
stands firm on four legs, as many hands high
as a civic statue, almost a house
with a back-boiler and new pump and all its lights
on—as shiny and horsechestnutlike
as if painted by Stubbs. Though it's shod in lucky iron
and its teeth are flecked with a green foam of clover
it's precisely the gift horse whose mouth invites
something more than a brief once-over.
Think of the Trojans. In what remained of their
language that proverb was ditched
and replaced by the one about being beware
of the Greeks, especially those who bear gifts.

Jamie McKendrick

The desert tastes yellow

The desert tastes yellow on my tongue
and bitter like herbs in a narrow gorge
where water waits under the rocks
for the next rain in five years
and where fish suffocate
which were born in the mountain streams
but the frogs play their unending pan-flutes
as soon as the moon rises over the black mountains.

That then is the night: a dark blue ocean
filled with sounds of shifting sands:
Cricket chirping floats on the air
like a hot breath, a song turned to ashes,
vibrating between the white teeth
of springbok skulls, a sigh of the wind.

Here all the roads lead to nowhere in particular,
They end in a sandy ford of soundless tracks
through the whirlpool of dessicated dreams.

Somewhere under the Southern Cross
you lie on your back and hear
the desert owl hoot its loneliness
across the curve of the canyon.

Peter Horn

Our Fathers Flirt with War

The doors which were shut
were opened
to let us see a few uncertain profiles
peering out, like indistinct artichokes.

It was then I first saw you,
my darling.

And now the fragile sky
teeters above,
 a plate
full of cloud-chips. I can
no longer wash my hands,
no longer eat without your mouth.
There is a cracking sound
as we separate one from the other
as if we were
children called home from play,
or sad train lines uncoupling.

Locks are being bolted
with the keys of suspicion
all up and down the street.
The doors which were opened
are being shut again,
and your face fades quickly
from recall.

Kelwyn Sole

the return

the gods return
we hear them
unpacking on the stairs

the ones who come from
the gate of crocodiles
 the ones who cause
 the unpredictable weather

the guardians of the doorframe
 tuned to the night insects
 cracked as the tree of memory

with them a ghost
the tyrant father
 forgive me, he explains
 I was marooned in thirst

let him die a second time
his death will be a downpour
to extinguish electronic fires

 the wind returns
the *moya* of Biko returns

the wind asks
who will care for the people
 when out economies have turned into casinos
 when our ecologies have turned into zoos?

I asked the *igqira* from Cala
who goes down to the sea each year
to get instructions from the ocean snake
—the powerful dead answered him

*the ones who care are here already
the ceremonies of time will be restored*

language will be born from silence

*plants and animals will decide
which human voices speak for them*

Robert Berold

Lavender Ink

Look, there she is: Miss Bliss, dozing
in the shade of a Campari umbrella. Beside her
a book—something brilliant: Callimachus,
let's say, printed in an elegant Venetian type—
half-read, with the most alarming
metaphors to come
and a glass of gin, a cool dew
blooming on the crystal, the air
kissing her skin
and the neighbour's hi-fi playing
'I Can't Get Started' in a distant
corner of the afternoon.

The yachts on the water.

The tinkle of ice.

I'm thinking of you, reinventing Sydney
a thousand years from now, and not
getting it quite right: missing the
delicate hangover, the distant murmur
of the city, the scent of this ink
drying on the page.

John Tranter

The Moonlit Creek

falling asleep to the repeated note
of the mopoke hidden in the garden thicket
I am a child again
listening to the mopoke's call
from the moonlit creekbed
or standing by the German piano
singing *The Last Rose of Summer*
(my father's favourite song)

it's there by the moonlit creek
if you bury me deep enough
I promise I won't go walking
at night through the flocks of sheep
to worry the neighbours.

Dorothy Hewett

Mopoke: an owl of the genus *Ninox*, found in Australia and New Zealand, and having a call which resembles the word "mopoke."

There are places they won't go

There are places they won't go,
places they'll lose an acre or two
by keeping a safe distance, the crop
edgy and frayed where discs
didn't dig deep or where the seeder
ran out of super and grain, denuded boxes
like black holes drawing on each other's emptiness,
wheel-kick on loam-clod as the tractor
struggles to pull the machine
the hell out of there, though almost
wanting to be close—bright parrots
sarcastic in fruit trees, saying "it's fine over here,
the fruit is good." But they know better,
it's a patch to be avoided, old house
boarded up, water tanks rusted through.
"What a waste," says an outsider. The reply:
"Brings a glow to the rest of the place."
The shame hidden there, the bulk
of the farm productive, well-managed.

John Kinsella

Lemon Jam

*To Martín Espada,
defender of the downtrodden*

Take ripe lemons
with a nice thick rind.
Scrape away the peel of day,
making sure no bitterness remains.

Squeeze from it the juice,
leaving rinds
free of pulp.

Place in fresh water,
changing the water often
in this hot climate.

To make syrup, weigh the day,
add an equal amount of sugar,
and place over a gentle fire.

As with all jams,
once the syrup is just right,
place lemon rinds in it,
cooking the mixture until convinced
it's reached the right consistency.

Thus, each morning
the sun will rise, sweet,
with no bitterness at all,
among the Yanomami huts set ablaze
and tribesman
infected with fatal viruses
by white gods.

*Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz
translated by Steven Ford Brown*

Summer Street

The dry afternoon scratching the tiled roofs.

Two children jumping in a funnel of orange dust.

A shadow like that of an old woman passing, a breeze of sadness
in her trail.

Time that elapses.

The soul that turns the color of earth.

The afternoon that bends like an arc
beneath which children pass
holding their mothers' hands.

The rain that does not fall.

Only the lime in the air that bleaches temples.

Only the fire that penetrates blood and stains eyes yellow.
Only life like a dead animal
stretched out under the sky.

And the sun and air drying the cardinal marrows of time.

And the lugubrious wind, steppe-like.

And the heavy footsteps.

And the children grown old returning beneath the afternoon arc.

And the stones.

*Ana Ilce Gomez
translated from the Spanish by
Nancy Abraham Hall*

Nourishment

You are what you eat.

The body that falls to pieces, that is cooked, all food, is exiled hunger. It is cadaverous hunger, straight white humerus, naked with its notches, pierced back, dismembered, taken from the stomach.

The earthenware, the plate from which you eat, the cup from which you drink are the dry spirit of a violent clod, the force or furor of the humus, of the clay mixture that was once also meat and breath.

The nest of the drink is a glass and the nest of thirst is a glass.

On a plate the meat you eat loiters stiffly, lies is truth still alive, although dead and a bloody piece of stew.

But even after eaten, even after swallowed and inside, when emptiness rests on the plate, when absence is left in the saliva, on the same plate, in the empty fountain, the soul swells.

Among what remains, on that plate with the leftover divided meat, lakes of lymph and blood, is the only distraction that was sustaining, like another legged being, luminous, inside the animal.

The lamb or the pig, their matter greasy and viperine, along with the crowned cow, march to the scaffold.

But they will live. They will live like the fish lives in the eyes of the man who eats it for lunch.

The partridge will live. The strange word of the lettuce.

Rafael Courtoisie
translated by
Rebecca Morgan

The Anatomist

for my teacher, Martin Banfill

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arthur Ginsberg

The Spring

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

Yang Jian
translated by
Ouyang Yu

Farewell

On the straight avenue where buildings possess
the sky's light and reason of glass,
the crosses dusk's horizontal hour.

At the end, behind the blue chaos of the urban heart,
the sea burns in winter's shattered mirrors.

The city is an untied miracle in the air.

This cold light that wounds memory
and suddenly illuminates the blood
knows my destiny.

Here, on this straight avenue that goes to the sea to die,
the long burn of solitude shines now.

Will some part of this beauty be mine?

What pity is there beyond life
that bleeds to death now
when I lift my arm with infinite sadness
and the taxi appears
like that ashen mystery I already carry in my soul?

Miguel Anxo Fernán-Vello
translated from the Galician by
Steven F. White

Intimate Liquid

with my skin you can graft the apples trees.

some still bear the stretched names I engraved with a knife
every afternoon on my way back from school.

I pull at a poem like at a calf
when its legs appear,
when one is not at an age to grow
all maturation requires a tearing of tendons
it is then herds of goats run over my chest
going nowhere,
they climb to the walls from which I see you,
with their tongues they tear at the pasture as you depart.

the touch of your violins makes me cry terribly.

and I can hardly stand the caress of your hands
like the wool of sweaters my mother made when I was a child.

but with my skin
with my skin you can graft the apple trees.

Olga Novo
translated from the Galician by
Ingrid Martinez-Rico

My Keeper

The Salamander is desire
drinking the topaz of a lake
in Giotto's skies,
in the moist vaults of translucent ivy.
Mulberry and vine wilt in your hand.
Desire is a horse,
crazed by fear, below a torrent of water,
a waterfall where the rainbow explodes,
a spoiled braid between falling stones.
Your arm shields my waist
and exceeds itself like beauty, mercurial
shipwreck of vines that climb the cedar,
suffocating it, since desire is penetration and wound.
My passion overflows in your body,
a whole shield in sweet melting honey,
and your effort is in vain: not even the most deadly
laurel can stop an enamored lip.
You can no longer keep an angelic tessera intact
in its supreme domination.
Let my emotion trim this great cypress
in an elegant park
and contemplate the abyss from the railing
without getting dizzy.
Cruelty that drops you to your knees, that's desire.
And I surrender myself to its sword, and I don't want to flee
its teeth.
Stay away from me! I don't want you to keep me,
or hold back tears and gardens in my body.
And before all your complaints stoke my scorn,
before the warnings of my wrath, let this fall on your lips
as diligent fire, as pleading grenade:
the delicate death of me forgetting you.

Ana Rosetti
translated by Dan Sheff

An Inherited Memory of War

My Great Grandfather rides a white horse,
travels the Black Sea fields clip-clopping
the dusty roads from which the hardest
rain will run like blood into the stubble.
He wears black in the merciless sun,
sells tobacco, counting crops and profits
from a green leaf held to the light.
He knows with animal conviction
that steel burns white as the sickle moon,
that it takes a generation of dead
to raise another. He crosses himself,
lays a palm across his heart,
stands stone-faced in the smoky church
while the priest swings his blazer censer.
There are times in the insomniac dark
while his wife and children lie sleeping
that he doubts God, has a vision
of black angels and muskets rearing,
his home a rising cumulus of smoke
as the boys traverse the trampled rows
of the fading crop unpicked and curling,
and he hears a pop when young Aristotle
falls short of the fence, holds his chest and bleeds
into his father's field, plants his bones.

Stephanos Papadopoulos

Greek Grammar

The Possessive Pronoun

It was not my festival.
Not with our wings the fledgeling swallow flew.
Someone put the evil eye on Adonis,
Alien, not his; the crone knew what to do.
That wedding a pure love-match—his and hers,
The parents stayed away, umbrage was theirs.
A wizened poet died a death not ours.
My Theban fever did not chime with yours.
Each thing contains tears, not its own.
It was not my festival. I cried alone.

Roger Green

Last Words from Elpenor

Bewildered by the scent of clotted blood
and the clatter we dead made drinking it,
I heaved up to the sewer where you stood,
cursed you, master, a swine who would forget
son, wife, home, and me—this last betrayal
most appalling: we all must bury friends.
The mast of my neck snapped on Aeaea,
I want to say. You left me. In the end
we are forbidden to close our eyes
and we must watch our beloved lives slip
back down ladders we worked so long to climb.
Sailor, you too will lose your famous grip.
Before you go, chuck me a single oar.
May I be cool beneath these sycamores.

Christopher Bakken

Elpenor: One of Odysseus' men left behind unwittingly on Circe's island, after he falls off her roof and dies. The first shade to greet Odysseus from the pit, where he begs for a proper burial.

Neslihan

We are in a quiet Turkish city
of pale stone and orange roofs—
most likely once a fishing village.
The morning is cool
as though it spent the night
stretched out on the sea's bottom.
All the tables this restaurant
have been taken by natives and tourists
wearing sunglasses and bright colors.
While lighting cigarettes
or sipping tea from tulip glasses,
they reorient themselves,
change their bearings,
until every chair is facing the water.
I'm reminded of the Spanish *girasoles*
following the sun.
They gaze at the Aegean
as though looking out on a field
of the honored dead,
as if taking in a drive-in movie,
or remembering their first home.
I'm the only one who
hasn't recalibrated his view
because sitting across from me
is a woman with gray-green eyes
more beguiling than the sea.

Vincent Cxyz

Summer Rain

A summer rain rained into me
full grapes crushed on my panes
my leaves' eyes were dazzled

A summer rain rained into me
silver droves flew from my drops
my soil ran barefoot

A summer rain rained into me
a woman flung herself into my streetcar
her white calves wet

A summer rain rained into me
as it started it stopped
the heart remains in its former place,
on the dull rails, rusty and thick

Nâzim Hikmet
translated by
Amy Grupp

Nâzim Hikmet (1901-1963) was born in Selonika in the Ottoman Empire (now Thessalonika in Greece). He studied at the Turkish Naval Academy and at Moscow University, and returned to Turkey in 1924 a committed communist. His political affiliations and activities resulted in his frequent imprisonment in Turkey, and he spent more than the last decade of his life in exile. Besides being a political revolutionary, Hikmet is the father of Turkish free verse. His poetry, collected in eight volumes and periodically banned in Turkey even after his death, spans an amazing variety of styles, forms, and subjects. He is the most famous of the modern Turkish poets.

Istanbul at the Periphery

There is nothing here you haven't seen before:
water the cobalt blues and anemone
greens of medieval glass illuminating
our Lady of Chartres; water the hues
of a mussel's royal interior shucked
and tossed near driftwood on the Oregon coast,
the avenue for sale, its side streets murmuring
recessed mysteries, underground transgressions
not mentioned in the twenty-first century's dry light.

The storks live like dodos in the tall stressed trees,
their radical cries ricochet off walls
that cradled the Sultan's sullen kids.
They scream their conversations like parrots
In Iguazu, sick of migration the city
is a prison they're resigned to adore.
They gad about not like birds,
but dreams of birds in a boy's hallowed eyes.

The Drag Queens are detached and embossed
as any beauty in a San Francisco
pleasure dome. Their eyes sparkle
like Christmas lights, the same sadness
at the periphery. Techno pumps
the house like a pot-holed highway a gypsy's
wagon. The melons jump
and sometimes fall.

In the distance lights saunter along
the Golden Horn. Nothing is quiet
at night but distance. In spite of everything
a lone man below sings high in his throat.

It is a song about losing his soul, his girl.
He doesn't mind modernity at play
above. He passes under the bar

on the belly of a song and the blind giant hears
nothing but the frenzied thrust
of its own arrhythmic heart.

The woman with a cigarette and fruit plate smokes
and speaks of inequity and the West's double dealing:
"you can't change the rules just when we've learned them,"
she quotes, she laughs, and the seagulls, weird sisters,
cackle in kind as they circle the tower
that smokes in Autumn like a gun aimed at God.
The Genoese are seagulls that haunt the millennia.

Or the student: bootleg photocopies
in his borrowed bag, Mevlana and Decon-
struction on his restless mind. An avenging
angel with an attic smile he wonders
why he's so alive in a city of millions.

He delays the silence with words.
The city pulls its ringed fingers
from its leather pocket. And when
the hand guts the heart and eats it
like a plum it is a sudden sweet
feast, uncalled for, unaccountable,
except in tales told in the far Northwest.

Kim Fortuny
Istanbul, 2004

Genoese: Merchants from Genoa built Istanbul's famed Galata Tower.
Istanbul's *seagulls* have remarkably loud and almost human voices.

Mevlana: a Sufi order whose devotions include improvised music and whirling
dance. The Mevlevi monastery is near the Galata Tower.

Illusory Village

O lovely light

Passing away this night of love

You, enthralled by the stories in your blood:

By what the land said to the grass,

What the mountain said to the plains.

O lovely light

A flower is putting a crown on its head,

Conquering my kingdom and the laws of my soul,

And spilling me out in its hands.

I am a drop.

Do you see me?

What would you know of a star

That was not in any sky?

And what would you know of the power of a dream

Were you not, yourself, a dreamer?

What would you know about the masters of wheat

And the pride of the man in shackles

Or the rough mountain women

Or about the blood that opens the wound

Or two hands roaming the wind

Or a horse

Without a rider

Running free

On the mountain?

And what would you know about the whims of the mind

Or about harvest nights?

And what would you know about the body of a woman

That wears its nudity

In the night when the cannons thunder?

In that place, each house is like a village.

The village of the soul opens its windows to see

How houses look on a dark night

How a star falls

How a cloud is killed in the wind

How fields look like medals on the shoulders of the land

How a woman reaches orgasm

Or how the rain slaps me in the frosty nights.

There, hearths are brimful with fire.

A woman in love wears her slumber

Gets up warm in the morning

While another body of hers remains in bed

Pores oozing sweat and wine and lazy sleep.

Wait awhile!

You have gone back to love again

To die on the altar of a woman

Glowing naked

And dying of love every night.

O lovely light

You will dream that you call up the wind,

That you grant the sea a beautiful blowing,

And that you make a mouth for the morning from two kisses.

You will dream that you build temples,

That you toll the bells of an old tower

To announce the dance of the sea,

The wine of Easter,

The staircase to glory.

O you!

Who led us to be so alike?

Who told us to follow the footsteps of water,

To disappear in the wind,

To climb on the rocks,

Draw love on the sands,

Lie upon our two beaches?

The wine alone knew

How to make us magicians.

Khalil Al-Asadi

translated by

Sadek Mohammed

Croaking

I cannot stand exile anymore
And it cannot stand me.
I shall lose it like I have lost my homeland,
Palm tree
By palm tree.
Maybe I will lose myself as well.
When that happens,
I shall stand erect like a hungry crow
And paint the whole world with my croaking.

1989

Abdul Kareem Kasid
translated by
Sadek Mohammed

Christmas 2002

The snows always come before Christmas,
just as this year,
the child grown and far away—
no need for presents slid under his bed,
no holiday for adults
or Chinese,
but seeing others caught up in the season
makes me glad,
the waiter at the Sichuan hot-pot place
hauling in a Christmas tree,
his arms a roomful of spruce and snow.

Tonight I take my seat
alone, in this corner by the window
and raise a cup
to a music faint and faraway,
to this feeling without words
and to the snow beyond the glass,
falling from the black sky
steadily, swiftly down

until I almost believe in God.

Wang Jiaxin

Reflections on the Cultural Revolution

After a firefight, scores of trucks
came slowly down the street,
tailgates dropped, stacked with bodies.
I stood at the corner with a curious heart,
watching the others, listening to the talk
of how bullet wounds bloom.
I had a vision of many flowers
blossoming from heads, chests, backs.

On one truck, a pair of feet
stuck out from beneath the canvas,
the left in its shoe, the toes of the other
poking through a sock.
I thought of my grandfather
saying people in hell
had to wear forever
the clothes they died in.

Sun Wenbo

The Sugar Beet Cart

The horsecart grinds heavy down the road,
laden with snow white beets
for the sugarpress.

Night waves like a thread of dark blue wind.

Dreams come slow,
the radiator slow to spread its heat,
the clock ticking slow in darkness.
Only horse hooves clip along quick.
Does night sleep too,
its eyes shut tight?

In fact the night is not so deep;
children are still blowing bubble gum.
A few peasants
riding the bumpy cart
quietly feel sugar beets in the darkness
weighing this one and that.

Night has never been so long.
A loaded cart
in darkness
inching toward the chimney of the sugar factory!

Nothing sweeter than sugar.
No hope farther than the dawn.

Wang Xiaoni

at a borders

1976

you speaks germans?
speaks you germans?
you knows wolfs biermann?
you knows reiner kunzes?
speaks you germans?
you speaks germans?
you see my passpots—
knows you ernst jandls?
him you knows not allowed
you be should a good boys
wolfs biermann you knows not allowed
you be should a good boys
reiner kunzes you knows not allowed
you be should a good boys
you knows allowed
only alones
germans democratics republics

Ernst Jandl
translated by
Alistair Noon

Translator's note: In 1976 Wolf Biermann (b. 1936), poet and singer/songwriter, was deprived of his GDR citizenship while on tour in the Federal Republic. In the same year, Reiner Kunze (b. 1933), poet and author, was expelled from the GDR Writer's Union after publication in the West of a collection of his prose. He left the GDR for West Germany in 1977.

promises, weathered

behind bushes
and barbed wire
i promise you
a carousel
with three layers of rust
horses who
lose their heads
planks which
creak beneath us
and finger-thick
dust for
our initials

Achim Wagner
translated by
Mark Terrill

in wendisch-rietz

in wendisch-rietz the chilly saws
of autumn work the landing stages.
we watch, as if a pair of strangers.
on unseen routes a wild goose calls
and damp-furred twilight, as it draws
toward us, gauges
where to place its claws,
the rain bombards the boats on hawsers
in wendisch-rietz.
and there, lined-up along low shores,
the herons, like park rangers.
around them is a kind of pause
in time. no detail changes
in wendisch-rietz.

Jan Wagner
translated by
Alistair Noon

And Behold

Do they not consider the camel, how it was created?
—Quran, Sura 88:17

And behold the camel, how it was created:
not from mud and water,
but as if from patience and a mirage.
And you know how the mirage deceives the eyes.
And the mirage knows not the secret of your patience:
how you endure the thirst, the sand, and the salt marshes,
and gazing at the immense presence with your weary eyes.
And behold how this gaze is marked with salt grooves
like the dry lines remaining on your cheeks after a stream of tears.
And behold the tears that have drained from you
all means of consciousness.
With what nothingness should you fill this emptied space?
And behold in this emptied space the agitation of a thirsty camel,
made mad beyond the limits of its patience,
reluctant to carry meekly its heavy burden.
And behold its two incisors gleaming madly in a row of angry
teeth.
Patience spawns hatred and hatred the fatal wound:
behold with what vengeance the camel
bit through the arteries of its driver.
The mirage lost its patience.
And behold the camel.

Simin Behbahani
translated by
Farzaneh Milani and Kaveh Safa

My house is cloudy

My house is cloudy.
The whole earth is cloudy too.

The wind—desolate, broken, and drunk—
roars through the pass
lays waste to the world,
and to my senses too.

Piper, you whom your melody's charm
has steered you far from this road,
where are you?

My house is cloudy,
and the clouds are on the verge of rain.
I dream of the bright days I let drift and vanish.
I face the sun, the open sea,
but the world now lies in ruins from the wind
and the piper, ever-playing his song,
makes his own path in this cloud-afflicted world.

Nima Yushij
translated by
Sholeh Wolpé

A List of Names

*In the Evin prison in Tehran, each evening they
announce the names of those to be executed later in
the night. Prisoners keep their hopes alive by planting
the seeds of their brooms in their cells.*

A list of names
is waiting
for the night's turn.
I have come
as far as the light's last ray.
The bashful sun, ashamed,
melts away
at the bitterness of my glare.

The names are announced.
My chest splits open.

A storm of sounds
carries your bright name
to its vortex.
The rain that pounds on the doors,
the earth, whose cracks are healing,
and an invisible lily
that grows from my chest
are the absolute presence
of your name.

Time blazes.
I am tossed to the far side
of the world.
Years, stone-hard and quicksilver,
tear open memories,
but still
I use the spell of your name
to get through dreams,
through closed eyelids,
to spend my ration of hope.

With your name
I pass through walls,
through locked doors,
through the sound of the typewriter,
the copy machine and the computer,
through foreign languages,
through newspapers,
through the news.
I pass through picture frames
and in a pool of brilliant water
I see your image
in the shape of
a Nicaraguan man,
a Chilean woman,
a Jewish-Arab child.

Roads merge,
languages are blood kin,
and wide-split chests
are landscapes of astounding resemblance.

The sun
begins to shine again.
A woman, pierced with lilies,
passes through the walls
in search of you.

*

The seeds of the broom
that you planted
in your moldy prison
have made a green meadow
on the salt flat.

Partow Nooriala
translated by
Zara Houshmand

The Lemons

Listen, the poet laureates
move only among those plants
with special names: boxwood, privet, acanthus.
Myself, I like the roads to grassy ditches,
where urchins can reach into drying puddles
and catch a slender eel;
the lanes among the banks
wind down through cane-breaks,
emerging in orchards, among lemon trees.

It's better when the tumult of the birds
fades and is swallowed in the blue:
you can hear, more clearly, the rustle
of friendly branches in still air;
you catch the trace of this earthbound fragrance,
and an uneasy sweetness
rains in your breast.
Here the war of distracting passions
comes to a marvelous truce—
here even we, the poor,
hold our share of the wealth,
the smell of the lemons.

In this hush, you see, when things
abandon themselves and seem on the verge
of revealing their ultimate secrets,
sometimes we hope to discover an error in Nature,
the world's dead spot, the ring that won't hold,
the thread whose untangling will finally take us
to the center of a truth.
The eye rummages in the landscape, the mind
inquires arranges dismantles
in the perfume that comes flooding
when the day has grown languid.
These are the hushes in which one sees
in each estranging human shadow

some troubled god.
But the illusion fails and time recalls us
to noisy cities where the light appears
only in snatches, beyond the cornices.
Rain falls, wearying the earth,
winter's tedium thickens upon the houses,
the light grows stingy, the soul goes bitter;
and then one day, through a half-shut gate,
among the trees of the courtyard
the yellow lemons catch our eye
and the heart's frost thaws,
while somewhere within us songs
begin to shower
from golden trumpets of sunlight.

Eugenio Montale
translated by
David Young

Threnodies

in the dialect of Loguduro

I

Give me back your son
back-clad earth,
face of rain. He calls me
but you are an axe-blow.
Full of mud and thorns,
I can't answer.

II

You see it, candle, such ruin
in the things he didn't touch,
in his rusted shears.
I rummage through ashes
and leave the door ajar.
But you hear the angel who comes
and sits with the dogs by the fireplace.
He doesn't return, they say
he's in the casket.
So let me sleep,
my lips against the wood,
until the great Mass of Easter,
our lady of the crucified light.

III

At dawn he shuts his eyes,
in vain he desired
inside his silent howl.
You are late in coming, wind,
his face of death
is a cold stiff leaf.
I want to be alone with him,
and suck from him the venom
that has remained in me.

IV

He has no voice,
 he doesn't say "Let's go" anymore.
 It screeches like chalk
 on a blackboard.
 He felt death
 pass a red-hot knife edge
 between temple and ear,
 to squander pain
 on those who cannot heal.

V

He's among strangers
 in the hell of unfinished
 souls. He speaks
 but nobody answers
 because this is our punishment,
 that they fly around us
 with the voice of rain
 in their throats.

VI

The soul sinks
 toward every memory
 in a stone circle
 darkening with the lamb
 roasted under the ashes.

VII

I wanted to rub his chest with an iron sponge,
 wound him to blood like a christ
 to pretend he's resurrected.

VIII

How slow life is. The grass
 doesn't crackle, the sea doesn't burn.
 A frozen wind consumes me, the door creaks,
 its wood a star of pain.
 The earth is remote where the spouse has gone.
 The tools tinkle memory,
 the rat's gnawing resembles a splinter of frost.
 Oh, my spouse, cloak of darkness,
 and I a sheep grown wild.
 Spring sings in this
 Logudoro solitude.

Antonella Anedda
translated by
Moira Egan