

## Leaving Home, in Search of Home

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

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

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

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

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

*Zack Finch*

## Mango Season

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

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

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

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

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

No metaphors for our pain  
only julie mango  
hairy mango  
beefy mango

mangola  
the words is bounce off-a  
our tongues like desperate prayers.

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

*Christian A. Campbell*

## The Generosity of Pears

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

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

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

drawing flies,

plus one decorous Anjou  
minding its pale green manners

in a cool metal lunch box—

Remember how we knelt in the orchard  
between arched rows?

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

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

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

gone white at knee and crotch  
straddle the stacked lumber,

unbuckle their heavy leather  
carpenter's belts

and reach into the truck  
for the packed lunch.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Penelope Scambly Schott*

## The Twins

As Philip Larkin says,  
novels are about those  
numerous men and women who're not us,

entering whose complicated houses,  
following whose miseries and joys,  
we can for a while escape ourselves.

Poems, on the other hand, ask why,  
scream, whisper, cry,  
all (if they choose) wearing the guise of "I."

Spinning connection upon  
connection, leaping out along the line,  
they tend to lack solutions,

conclusions, plots. The questions  
poems pose are less *then what* than *how*  
we get from moment to

moment. In obedience to some law  
poems manage to reveal  
as rapidly or slowly they unreel

not what I only; also others feel.  
We go to prose  
hoping it will help us lose

track of our lives; in poems we find ourselves.  
There what began as alien—  
anger, memory, dream—

leaps the chasm. Poems clear the air  
so anyone can see from here to there  
into another's mystery or desire.

Walls that separate, doors tightly shut,  
all barriers that proclaim PRIVATE! KEEP OUT!  
poetry breaches, having made us so

porous I can suddenly be you,  
explore your mazy brain, as you do mine.  
Live and forget, but read and recognize.

Be a guest in the enchanted house  
built by twins who are identical  
only in being both miraculous.

*Rachel Hadas*

## Aftermath

In the beginning, blue light  
traced the hills. Time's  
snagged thread married *blue*  
and light from the beginning's

beginning, so night fell,  
and spring, and the worm,  
expanding its universe, began  
unweaving through the fallen

oak leaf's veil its own narrative  
lace of decay. Genesis is always  
the story of separation. No  
other reason she awoke, haloed

in light, her spine still a perfect  
constellation of china; no rhyme  
for morning's never fracturing  
his sleep. The clock

once wound, all days  
are sixes, creation the cancer that just keeps on  
blooming the body as morning  
wings noon and horseshoe posts  
spiking the lawn dial the sun

towards erasure. Since night  
spun itself into a funnel  
of dust, what's left but the rhythm  
of rootlessness, unbraided trees

clutching shrouds of earth, nights clocked waiting  
for that ascension up the stairs—  
the ghost of his face  
hovering, a remnant of day. Torn

between seasons, the fireplace's pilot light  
strung pearls of flames; the storm  
whined against glass,  
a bottled mosquito distant

as a star. Nostalgic thorns,  
birds stitched our morning drive  
down the mountain.  
As the radio spooled the names

of the confirmed lost,  
dogwoods bleached into bloom,  
the woodpecker's staccato knock  
went unanswered.

What is the half life of hunger?  
The amulet for absence?  
One day from spring, one beat from ruin's  
resurrection, I didn't want

apples for breakfast, to remember the coming  
morning when I'll be left searching  
rubble for the paper bits of a face memory  
will always seam.

I don't want to join her  
in the uprooted garden, unnamings  
the animals, amazed how weightless  
the stillness of air. Against

swords of sun flashing  
between surviving trees,  
the rapid pulse of perfectly  
marred blue light,  
I held your remembered  
breath in my hair, my  
unraveling name—

postponing arrival, all the way down.

*Sandra Meek*

## The Problem with This Poem

This poem will not invent anyone.  
Not a woman hiding  
from a storm under a bridge,  
not a man standing  
alone at the edge of a field,  
his family in the stone house beyond.

This poem will not reinvent the field  
as if nature cared and were necessary to it,  
or vice-versa. This poem will not deny pain,  
but neither is pain its essential condition,  
the way sky is essential condition,  
the way sky is essential to rain.  
What happens in that house,

what happens in the nebulae,  
happens very far away.  
What happens under the skin  
happens very far away.  
This is the reason the poem exists,  
if you can call it existence,

its solitary slow being that denies  
our solitary slow moving,  
that defies time and language  
the way corn defies weather  
all night under the stars  
and then, when it must, yields.

*Stan Sarvel Rubin*

## Downpayment

It was a round-trip ticket to Europe or a house on a street down the block from a Wawa; a stroll down the Champs Élysées or a back porch, five oaks, a small yard with a compost, a flowering dogwood out front. It could have been the Great Pyramid of Cheops, the Colossus at Rhodes, the ancient Wonders of the world, but for us—the modern Wonders of New Jersey, which are, in the order of their magnificence—the Great Swamp, Lucy the Elephant and the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital for the criminally insane. It might have been England and Ireland, Stonehenge and Tintern Abbey; instead, a basement, a place to fix things, the toaster whose bread doesn't pop up anymore, certain memories of my father that do. Love, we have signed our names on the dotted lines, the Coliseum slides from our sides like a fallen birthday cake. Here is our Spain, and here our Spanish Stairs; see they lead to the ordinary front door, to sheet-rocked walls and the replacement windows where the moon will drift at night like the poor old country that it is, always poorer at the end of the month, and where dawn will wash up like a bottle, messageless and gold or gray with mortgaged light.

*James Kirk*

## Eve Learns the Word Want

Eve wandered in the garden of inventing words,  
*walk, hum, smell, laugh, tease.*

She plucked a maidenhair fern, touched  
a snap-dragon's tongue to hers and watched  
a caterpillar hump across a leaf, then idly  
toed the garter snake coiled beneath a tree.

It drew back, hissing, a red thread  
flickered and Eve bent closer, not knowing  
what the snake knew. He poured himself  
from his nest exposing tamped leaves and, half  
covered by matted grass, *Victoria's Secret*.  
Eve frowned. "Pick it up," he smiled,

"you might learn something." On the slick page  
her finger, tracing leg, thigh and long  
curve, stopped at a fringe of black gentians.  
She looked down to her own moss-brown tuft.  
"Ah," Eve reached for a hand-shaped leaf  
to cover her mound, bluebells for her nipples.

"Nice," the snake said, "Adam will like that."  
A pleasing heat troubled Eve's belly. But Adam  
was out naming birds, stones, trees, things.  
She waited savoring the unaccustomed stir.  
Let Adam notice and uncover her curves, let  
him want her. *Want*. She shaped the word,

felt it flow from the hollow of her mouth  
and a vacancy unknown before entered her.  
Later, after the gate was closed and memory  
of the place faded, after the babies, the barns  
and sheep-paddocks, even after the new double-wide  
and a week in Vegas, nothing was quite satisfactory.

*Ann B. Knox*

## Miss Josephine March Writes to Indiana Jones

Dear Indiana,

While I am cooped up in Concord  
you're probably packing your battered rucksack  
heedless of the luckless buckles and tattered straps  
in a hurry and hell-bent for Caracas or Quito  
restless to ride down the rapids and into the ruins.

The best fun to be had here  
is throwing snow at the boy next door—  
he's a capital fellow.... But you,  
you're trekking up the Himilayas  
fedora pulled low against icy blows  
showing the Sherpas how.  
I'm sure I'm intended for something  
more splendid than running errands for Aunt March.  
the old pepper-pot!

Marmee says I have to wear my hair up, my skirts long  
and carry kid gloves which never care to pair up.  
I know I'm an ungrateful wretch but all this ladylike stuff  
makes for long days and let me tell you, I'm languishing.

Oh Indy...

Christopher Columbus! I like your name.  
Why is it that only boys get to go to college  
and war? If only I could join Father  
and take care of a few of those rebels.  
Instead I have to sew and be all spandy nice  
while you're having adventures.  
Say, could you use a sidekick, a scrappy sort?

I can just see you riding camelback  
across the desert, enroute to Marrakesh  
the hood of your *djellabah* shielding you  
from sandstorms and recognition...or  
hightailing it out of a canyon

Holy Grail in hand  
your hatbrim hazed by dust  
and at the eleventh hour on a wily hunch  
you choose just the right trail  
sparing yourself an encounter with ruffians out  
to eat your lunch.

Do you ever get to Concord?  
We often entertain guests in the parlor.  
I write plays and stories;  
my sisters and I act them out.  
I myself am at the eleventh hour  
and could use some rescuing  
some adventure, any advantage.  
Do stop by.

*Amy Dengler*

## Elegy for the Native Guards

*Now that the salt of their blood  
Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea....*

*—Allen Tate*

We leave Gulfport at noon; gulls overhead  
trailing the boat—streamers, noisy fanfare—  
all the way to Ship Island. What we see  
first is the fort, its roof of grass, a lee—  
half reminder of the men who served there—  
a weathered monument to some of the dead.

Inside we follow the ranger, hurried  
though we are to get to the beach. He tells  
of graves lost in the Gulf, the island split  
in half when Hurricane Camille hit,  
shows us casemates, cannons, the store that sells  
souvenirs, tokens of history long buried.

The Daughters of the Confederacy  
has placed a plaque here, at the fort's entrance—  
each Confederate soldier's name raised hard  
in bronze; no names carved for the Native Guards—  
2nd regiment, Union men, black phalanx.  
What is monument to their legacy?

All the grave markers, all the crude headstones—  
water-lost. Now fish dart among their bones,  
and we listen for what the waves intone.  
Only the fort remains, near forty feet high,  
round, unfinished, half-open to the sky,  
the elements—wind, rain—God's deliberate eye.

*Natasha Trethewey*



## Endangered Species

*To Bruce*

In a reverie of high grasses  
the rhino instructs, head tucked  
hiding the double horn. Hooded eyes,  
the plated tank of the body—a concentration  
of Greta Garbo and all that made her magnificent—  
balled up in a field.

He didn't sign up for us,  
And what we signed up for  
wasn't this. Yet the lesson  
I remember is how you dubbed it  
pretense: that grave, solitary boulder  
offering up his spine as crucifix, antidote  
to the tightening noose we made of our land rovers  
and clicking cameras.

Is that what you think  
when sometimes I threaten  
to run away, driven to panic like that  
solo in the field? Ah Love, how do we know  
another's shuddering heart? I only know what I saw:  
an acting out of what

the missing manual I was  
born with must've explained—

the care and feeding  
of blank, the necessity of  
vacancy before the interior doesn't  
recognize itself anymore, its mirrored walls  
tarnished with apologies. (Dried hoof on a rope.  
The market price for horn.)

*Alice Friman*

## Drinks Her Fill

Time is without remorse, cares nothing  
for your dear hand sweetly on my cheek,  
your lips a momentary wellspring of desire

against my hair; it moves  
without sentiment towards our dying  
the way a hungry wolf tracks its prey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*red hawk*

## Hymn to Restaurants

Forks, a glass of water fitted with a wedge of lemon, a knife, a basket  
of bread, butter by the slab, the sound of a man  
Opening and flapping and folding his newspaper, the sun tenderly  
glazing his bald head, art on the walls, aquarium  
Rectangular in the center, overhead fans, napkins clean seashells  
on the tables, jingle of ice cubes, slosh of water,

Conversation and quiet, cool soloists emerging out of the harmony  
of hum, "Honey, *do this okay?*" and "Sometimes  
He means a lot to me, but then there's an eclipse," waiters, waitresses  
filling my cup of coffee, asking, *Is everything okay?*  
Not realizing my sweet equilibrium of sugar and half and half  
is now ruined, but I nod for them, *Yyyeahp*,  
Shake more sugar in the cup, pour a thin stream of half and half out  
from the tiny silver pitcher and stir, the spoon  
Moving weightlessly through brown ether, forming ripples and eddies  
and currents, pulling morning inside the cup

In a soft swelling pool, the balance restored, waiters and waitresses  
moving to other tables and happily upsetting  
Other equilibriums, doing anything they can to maintain their own  
among so many bitchy moms and cheapskates,  
All the people moving through like minor tornadoes, spraying salt,  
exploding egg yolks and sugar packets, crunching  
Chairs, plates loaded and neated and lifted and lowered then greased  
and splattered and scraped, fatty run of red meat  
To be dumped, plop and smear of ketchup to be dumped, soggy mass  
of vegetables to be dumped, chairs straightened,  
Silverware lined up, salt and pepper shakers clicked, table brushed off  
and *voila!* a miracle rebirth, a fresh new place

To sit down to, a mooring for the lonely, the unable to cook, the artists,  
the readers, the couples on first dates, settling  
Into gazes, the married couples looking everywhere but at each other,  
the families tearing each other apart at home,  
Friends reunited, living in different cities, friends drunk and too rowdy  
from clubbing, insomniacs, romantics, fathers

Stuck with their sons, all those rejected by love, terrorized by the silence  
in their own apartments, they're clearing places

In Paris, New York, Florence and Barcelona, Jerusalem, Beirut, London,  
Dublin, they're clearing places in Cleveland,  
Downington, McLean, places unseen on maps, on the sides of freeways,  
they're clearing places in airports, skyscrapers,  
Malls, hotels, places covered by darkness, places pounded with snow,  
they're clearing places at Clark's in New Haven,  
The Neptune Diner in Queens, places of permanence, places like home,  
O morning, noon, and in the middle of the night  
They're keeping things light, keeping things clean, opening up a booth,  
calling out your name, showing you the way.

*Jason Koo*

## After Dad's Death

Sadness rises from opened drawers,  
stale smells of clothing no one wears.  
The window in my bedroom clouds over,

mist in the space between layers of glass.  
I lie in my bed, hoping nothing will happen.  
I've been loved and listened to all my life.

I should get up and walk.  
Walking's a simple thing to believe in:  
My mother continues her diligent mile

each day in the neighborhood  
she and Dad walked through for twenty years.  
I know there's a world out there.

Leaves and brown needles drift in rain.  
Bright colors seep up the sides  
of mountains. Fog slides

down darkness into the dirt.  
When I go out, I drive to the pharmacy.  
An anxious line of us forms at a counter.

While I wait, I touch nit combs,  
condoms, glitter bracelets for little girls.  
Avoiding the talk of the others,

I look hard at my own feet.  
Would I know them if they slipped out  
of my old blue shoes and strode away?

*Barbara Daniels*

## Explaining the Orchestra

The cello is the instrument of memory.  
The dragging bow pulls notes from underground  
and the memories trail along like an abandoned dog.  
What surfaces can be unexpected, like finding  
an old message on your answering machine  
from your long-dead mother.  
You listen to it over and over, ever willing  
for rebirth or even to relive the urgency of loss.

You can tell the wind players by the small twitch  
at the side of the mouth and the fingers,  
not always long or graceful, but eager to leap,  
as if the flute was painful to the touch.  
It takes such faith to play a wind instrument  
susceptible as it is to the whims of weather.  
You never know when the oboe will growl  
or fold in on itself.

The solo instruments are too like their players,  
luxuriating in the spotlight, unable to blend in.  
They know their importance and demand total allegiance.  
Obediently the audience responds  
like followers in a cult; it is easy to worship.  
Some think the instruments bend to the insistence  
of the conductor, but there are other factors:  
if the second violinist's husband is unfaithful.  
If the brass are neglected too long they become petulant  
like children who expect a reward for sitting  
quietly through a dinner party.  
Listen carefully and the stories will seep  
from under the chairs and podium  
like undercurrent, or fog, the notes tripping  
over one another, escaping over the tongue and  
through hollows of wood spreading like gossip,  
insidious as wildfire.

*Carol V. Davis*

## Ryoanji: An Assay

Wherever a person stands in the garden of Ryoanji, there is always a stone that cannot be seen. It is like the sliver of absence found on the face of a man who has suddenly glimpsed in himself a thing until then unknown. Inside the silence, just before he begins to weep. Not because of the thing he has learned—monstrous or saintly, it was always within him—but for the amplitude he hadn't believed was there.

*Jane Hirshfield*

## The Truth

*Thales speculated that the earth is an island in the river Okeanos. Legend has it that he fell into a well while gazing at the stars.*

It's what we wanted not to have to face:  
No, not the image waiting in the mirror  
But the absence of oneself, the much sheerer  
Horror of disappearing without a trace,  
Of everyone disappearing like that—  
Poof, and then they're gone, candles blown out  
On a birthday, life a general rout,  
And now the earth could just as well be flat  
As round, support an atmosphere or not,  
Be cooled, like thoughtful Thales, by oceanic  
Currents that are never harsh or manic  
But temperate as reason, or be hot  
As hell, which where we would think we were  
Should we behold all who have gone from here.

*Kelly Cherry*

## The Lost Poem

My father carried a poem with him all through his internment in Cabanatuan prison camp in the Philippines, carried it with him for four years, showed it to me one day folded and refolded, print blurred, coming apart. I, in my teens, not thinking, nodded and went on and forgot. Years later, I tried to recall what poem it was, even a single line of it but it was gone. The years go by, my mother's dead this long time. There's no one to ask. So I ponder it. And ponder motivations, what drives us, ponder what drives me still to write with the same intensity after all these years. And ponder the lost poem. Perhaps that's part of it: I'm driven to create that poem I can't recall, the poem that carried him through four years of Hell and home again. Or perhaps I'm driven to write a poem that will serve someone else as well. It's a nice thought anyway: my poem in someone's pocket, bent and faded, nourishing him, healing him through his own private Hell. A man could do worse with his life. I evoke my father's image, our eyes meet, he nods in agreement, starts

to speak then turns and walks off into the distance, bearing the lost poem with him.

*Albert Huffstickler*

## Noche en Español

*para mi amor, María*

Before you brought me this maraca romance  
and these crazy animals  
and God's horizon,

my heart was a Russian hovel  
full of Yiddish dust.  
I chewed on the stale blackbread dark,  
sipping my sour borscht.

Oy vey, no levitation was allowed.  
No spice and no oranges, no sunlit nakedness!  
No Latin syncopation,  
no monkeys, no silk!

So today, after running around in a ring,  
dodging the bull for hours,  
what a joy, coming home, to discover  
that the soul of this summer night has turned Spanish!

Who cares that my brain tells a lie  
when it says that these flowery scents on our path  
are jasmine, oleander, myrrh?  
Look, the stars are spangles glinting  
up and down a flamenco dancer's dress.  
And those glowing clouds are odalisques  
lolling on the velvet divan of the sky  
like so many "Naked Majas,"  
like you!

*¡Ay!* My body vibrates with a memory  
of the night, just after we met,  
when I took you to hear the Romeros—  
Papa Celedonio, Pepe, Célin,  
and dashing baby brother Ángel.

In the silvery thunder from their guitars,  
you embodied my Goyaesque dream,  
with your barely-more-than-hands'-breadth waist,  
your black lace bodice hugging  
the sweet arabesque of your bosom,  
and your long, full skirt of blood-red roses  
sewn onto ravishing black!

*¡Ay!* I was only a novice  
in the bullring of rampant desire.  
And how your beauty gored me!  
But even the *fascistas* of my thwarted past,  
the guilts, the jealousies, the brutal self-doubts,  
leapt to their feet as my heart beat out  
*¡Olé! ¡Olé! ¡Olé!*

For there, by my side, was the long-sought muchacha  
of my *cante jondo fantasia*.

And now, as I climb this walk,  
the castanets click faster and faster inside me.  
*El Brujo Amor* is laughing like mad, both loco and sane!  
Already, I feel myself buried  
in the Andalusian garden of your hair.  
Looking down, the moon, your devoted duenna,  
is wrapped in her dark mantilla.  
Her skin is pock-marked and cold.  
Yet she, too, is luminous with memory tonight.  
She understands well, and approves with her silence,  
my passionate Spanish intent.

Like a gypsy Mona Lisa, with a lingering wink,  
she smiles  
and lets me pass.

*¡Olé!*

*Lawrence Russ*

*Life:*

seal my pact with you.  
Sink your blue arms  
through the arc of my mouth,  
spill like a river  
through the brackish galleries of my body, arrive  
like a thief, like that one  
upon whose brow they suddenly print  
the burning impact of good fortune,  
like one who can no longer hide magnificent news  
beneath the overcoat and wants to laugh alone,  
and there is the love that sloshes head to toe  
and tinges everything,  
and there is not a soul who sees it and doesn't want  
to kiss her palms two times.  
Life: loom within my flesh, in the marine  
labryinth of my core,  
and care with infinitesimal rapture  
for this infinitesimal child  
plotted by the crossing of fire of two sexes.  
For him I must break my heart in two  
to cover his diminutive soles.  
Life: place over his head at the height of a bird  
the roof of your hand. Never abandon  
this cub of man who looks at you  
from the silvery dream of his pot of moon.  
Place, with wild lightness, your inaugural kiss  
on those ribs of a toy walnut ship. Don't abandon him,  
he is your earthly animal, the fistful of feathers  
where the wind splits.  
Life: welcome this being  
who fits within a peach.  
In his name I name you his godmother.  
I raise up my womb for you.  
Life: open your arms.

*Ana Isarti*

Tet

Hanoi, I come in the night of New Year  
by the lunar calendar, Tet, when everyone's out  
along the Lake of the Restored Sword,  
lights twined in the trees and shimmering on the water  
where the Tortoise Temple shines green  
and the vendors have brought yoked baskets,  
masses of fine noodles wrapped in huge leaves, cauldrons  
of broth and herbs, basins of big snails. Red banners  
stretch between the trees, Communist anthems and romantic songs  
broadcast. The next day I walk streets so picturesque  
it makes me dizzy—great red leaves fall from the trees  
against weathered walls of ochre, cream, pink, jade;  
the red flag with its single yellow star flies everywhere.  
At the Temple of Literature there's a ceremony:  
women in yellow satin with fantastic headdresses  
offer incense, candles, plates of oranges and apples.  
I suddenly see it as a painting, an epiphany—  
the sashes and ribbons mingle, weave,  
like when two wires cross and there's electricity;  
two fine threads cross and there's love.

*Inara Cedrins*

## A Trick

Late afternoon. Huancayo. We'd made the long haul  
down from Ayacucho that morning. Were hungry & tired.

Had stumbled  
into one of those huge, operatic, down-at-the-heels Peruvian  
restaurants: teardrop chandeliers, candles  
in ribbed silver cages, frayed red cloths on the tables.  
A building of three red brick walls & one of that massive, grey,  
mortarless, hand-hewn stone whose secret had died

with the Incas.  
Not a soul in the place but a sleepy middle-aged waiter  
tricked out in the shabby black & white jacket & slacks  
of the trade. He brought us two menus, goblets for wine,  
& a plate of *papas a la Huancaína*.

I was unaccountably happy. In one of those silly,  
insouciant moods  
that come out of nowhere, despite the fact that the planet  
was falling apart all around us. The previous summer  
I'd given the Army the slip, leaving to better men than myself  
the task of carpet-bombing the indigent peasants of Asia.  
We'd exchanged matrimonial vows in Seattle & then

headed south.  
Had been bussing for months from town to town thru the Andes.  
The truth is, the whole thing had happened by magic. "Hey,  
you know the trick where you blow an invisible coin  
into a sealed-up glass?" I lowered a saucer over her long-  
stemmed goblet so nothing could enter, & grinned  
as if I were going to pluck out of nowhere fishes & loaves.  
Mary said No, she didn't—& laughed, preparing herself  
for another fine piece of buffoonery. On the table between us,  
though it wasn't yet dark, the candle was already lit.  
In the distance, the endless sierra. I asked her to hand me  
a coin, placed it into my palm, recited some hocus-pocus  
known only to shamans from Brooklyn, then spread  
out my fingers, & lo & behold it had vanished!  
So far so good. But that part was easy. What I did next  
was harder—to blow that invisible coin into the sealed-up glass.  
The nice thing was you could see it fall in with a clatter,

hear the luxurious clink of silver in glass as it dropped  
out of nowhere & settled. Needless to say, she was amazed.  
I mean *really* amazed! & so too, as it turns out, was our waiter,  
who'd been watching the whole affair from the wall

by the kitchen,  
& flew to my side, flailing his arms like a sinner whose soul  
the Holy Spirit had entered—& who knows he is saved.  
He wanted to know how I'd done it. How such a thing  
could possibly happen. *Milagro!* I felt like Jesus  
raising the dead: a little embarrassed, but pleased  
that I'd brought the thing off—& that someone had seen it.

Huancayo. I liked the looks of the place. That sharp  
mountain light before dusk. Folks walking around  
on the other side of the window in woolen serapes.  
If it wouldn't have sounded so pious, or grandiose,  
I'd have said to that fellow: "Friend, how I did it  
really isn't the point; in this world nothing is more or less  
amazing than anything else." But I didn't. Instead,  
I just shrugged, the way that when Lazarus opened his eyes  
& shook off the dust & put on his hat, Jesus himself  
must have shrugged, as much as to say it was nothing, a trifle.  
The three of us chatted a bit & then we checked  
out the menus & ordered the meal we'd come in for—me  
& Mary, my wife, all wit & forbearance & grace,  
who one day had fallen by some sort of miracle into my life.

Steve Kowitz



## The Laughter of a Woman

In the singing springs of stony mountains  
Echoes the gentle laughter of a woman.  
Wealth, power and fame mean nothing.  
In her body, hidden, lies her freedom.  
Let the new gods of the earth try as they can,  
They cannot hear the sob of her ecstasy.  
Everything sells in this market-place  
Save her satisfaction  
The ecstasy she alone knows  
Which she herself cannot sell.

Come you wild winds of the valley  
Come and kiss her face.

There she goes, her hair billowing in the wind.  
The daughter of the wind  
There she goes, singing with the wind.

*Fahmida Riaz*  
*translated by*  
*Rukhsana Ahmad*

## Nothing the City Does

Nothing the city does is as good as the rain  
twisting its strands like a wrung mop,

rinsing in silver the grime of our labor.  
Who can wash us clean again? Rain,

pouring through drains, sounds the organ  
pipe of our forgiveness, drums the line

of stalled cars like a patient mother,  
drowns our little routines. Here at the hushed

center, under roofs, whether making love  
in the gray afternoon or idling with Cuban jazz,

the ghost of another life rises of of the  
drizzle. This is the day for great departures;

two by two we climb to the ark, already  
the gangplanks are down, the chief bosun swings

his oil lamp slowly, slowly, to light our way.

*Ron de Maris*

## It Rains on Gaza

Today, it rains on Gaza, that blessed strip  
Of desert by the sea. it rains on the fig trees,  
And on the one-room homes in cramped rows  
Like the rumps of praying men, every inch occupied.  
It rains on the white domes of Al-Azhar, rains  
On the wagons with truck tired pulled by horses,  
Rains on the orange blossoms, the Mediterranean  
And its hushed breeze. Now bountiful drops pummel  
The streets where soldiers advanced, shields  
Raised to a shower of stones as in the days  
Of the Philistines, dissolving the past,  
Dousing the heat and the heat of passion.

It rains on girls in skirts who sway as they pass  
The glass-metal summits of new hotels, pelted  
With stares, and on the hooded ones who shun them,  
Outcast in turn by years. It rains on those who cast  
Pebbles for God then ran for themselves alone,  
Who fell, kissed by a spatter of rubber bullets.  
It stuns and solemnifies, runs together  
Like their names, more Kufic, another mosaic  
In the wall of a Mosque. It cleanses  
The memory of their soiled lambskin coats,  
Of them asleep like beggars in the road.  
Like soft gravel, it strikes the living  
Aching to go on.

This rain stings policemen  
As they halt the ancient cars, question dark eyes  
Like theirs. It drips from barbed wire and the hair  
Of laborers along the Erez checkpoint path  
Waiting to get by. This rain wilts the impatient,  
The latest rebels, blue-jeaned kids with Walkmans  
Who plug the West into their ears. This rain  
Rains on the restaurants littering the shore:  
*Palm Beach, Love Boat, White Tent.* This rain becomes

The surf that drubs the rock to sand, ignored  
By the waiter who stoops to gather crumbs  
From a parasol-escutcheoned table  
Into his palm.

Rain veils the distance,  
A few Allah-begged miles of Canaan  
Where caravans and jewel-hubbed chariots paused  
Between Cairo and Damascus, where Samson shrugged  
Down the temple and the sweeping Crusaders ebbed.  
It stakes every bulldozed and resurrected house,  
Mohammed's grandfather who here lies entrenched,  
Rain that settles dust, tears the size of stones.

*David Moolten*

## How to Throw a Spear

Before you begin, you must love to hold  
the spear between your fingers, love

the heft of its notched and polished shaft,  
the sharpened point, deadly as innocence.

And when you begin, do not fear  
your enemy's skill, his decorations

and medals for heroism in battle.  
Do not think of the iron and leather

armor your enemy wears, his grimacing  
facemask, his fearsome galloping horse.

Practice throwing the spear again  
and again—you do not need a partner—

until it flies by itself in the chosen  
direction, the keen-edged point piercing

the target clean as your knife slicing  
an apple. That is also how to write a poem.

*Shulamith Wechter Caine*

## In the Parking Lot at Walgreens

A red blaze of neon stretches high in the misty rain  
as droplets hit me with the freshness of absolution.  
I'm free of the drum and trumpet of the ego,  
for my blue blazer's in the back of the car  
with the paper I've just read at the colloquium—  
yet any pretense that I'll make a learned breakthrough  
fades like the thinning light of this rosy cloud.

Whoever I am is local, for I'm not to be  
one of those distinguished heads  
wreathed clockwise on a page of the *Milton Quarterly*,  
poised at a conference as festive cocktailers  
over the glazed salmon of scholarship.

Hundreds of mediocrities accept their moist rank  
every day, as, through the vast window  
to the aisle just beyond the hemorrhoidal display,  
I see the democracy of arch supports and the aspirin  
I'm looking for.

Standing in the light  
of the undeniably average, I feel whole again,  
forgiven for missing the group photograph of eternity,  
for I'm neither hungry, nor hurt, nor unemployed,  
but thankful for merciful rain, this nimbus of neon,  
and all the hemorrhoids of happiness.

*Andrew Dillon*

## It Is Time: A New England Pastoral

It is time to gather sticks of wood  
so we can cook the sap that we have drawn from the earth.  
We will bore holes into the maple trees  
collect buckets, stir the froth as it boils.  
Then we'll finish it on the stove in the barn.  
We will do this together  
balancing the heavy iron vat  
pouring the hot syrup  
tasting the sweetness.  
We did it through the pregnancies, the births.  
Let's do it once again.  
And then we will cultivate the honey bees  
and tend to the alfalfa in the fields.  
It will be the best of times once more  
fourteen loads of fresh hay  
and my hair will be long and we will collect raspberries  
and make a pie.  
The garden will yield a bumper crop of beets and basil  
and we will split wood all fall  
and stack it  
and be ready for the winter  
when you will weave a blanket on your loom  
with dog hair and horse hair and my hair  
and some dyed wool too.  
And I will nurse the babies by the fire  
and neither of us will grow older  
and we will never forget  
and nothing will ever die.  
We need to gather sticks now  
and build a fire quickly  
before the season passes on  
before the field  
where you are sleeping  
blossoms.

*Laura Foley*

## Third Month Abroad

This morning as the sun rips wide  
the mists in the valley and flings  
its heat across every building face,  
the pigeons in their pigeonholes  
are cooing and moaning  
in that loud, obscene way pigeons do.

I break open the bedroom window  
shocked by the blow of vivid Tuscan air,  
by the scent of newly budding leaves,  
dazzled by the finches' aerial interplay,  
the chitter and chirp of all the unseen  
peepers in the trees below.

All night long two cats howled.  
When I walk through the noon town  
and school has just let out, everywhere  
on the low edges of the city walls  
the fair-skinned couples sit, murmuring  
in the most obvious of frontal embrace.

All I want to do is press back  
the pouring sunlight  
firmly, with both hands,  
The bedroom fills with a confluence  
of pollen. The crocus, the violets, the wild  
iris in the fields all purple.

With a stick I knock at the terra-cotta sill  
violently, "Get out of here!" The pigeons  
scatter into the air, the amour  
replaced by a flustering confusion.  
I cannot endure their reckless, public  
passion. And you so far away.

*Jeff Crandall*

## For the Sensualist

I met a man who made me think of cloves  
And pepper on the eastern coastal air  
And windy wheat that, cut, became the loaves,  
And ginger in the wind that blew his hair.  
Another made me think of bolts of silk;  
Another of the oranges of Spain,  
The shimmer of a stream of Jersey milk  
And mushrooms that would mingle with the rain.  
I never thought of socks or moldy bread,  
Of sandwiches that lie around neglected,  
That jobless wonder loafing in your bed  
Who leaves you feeling cheap and disrespected.  
So think about the world of useless oaves  
And tell me if you smell the scent of cloves.

*Alexandra Oliver*

## The Photographer's Wife

You say: *If we don't have photographs  
how can we be certain we were there?*  
But if we do have them, there aren't we  
in the photographs instead of Paris,

like the Japanese tourist who snapped  
each attraction to include his right hand,  
pointing where to look? Besides,  
the moment you aim, you exclude.

Take the jellaba-clad Moroccan, who  
sells tangled clothing by weight, and  
is about to be obscured by the glittery  
skirts and torn blouses women are tossing

into the air. What sort of astronomer  
are you, to zoom past whole universes?  
Now you think to trap the sugary dome  
of Sacre Coeur. Don't. You'll lop off

our afternoon, how much bluer than any  
of this it is. But you position me on  
the steps, and tell me *Smile this time.*  
*You never smile.* Your camera's a tumor

under your coat. Like a man who wolfs  
Napoleans every day of his life, you  
let it grow. Yet how can I deny you?  
You with the bloat of starvation

no matter how much you eat, you  
with such passion for proof  
you are always snapping me,  
even when your hands are empty?

*Lola Haskins*

## Goodnight Silents

The man beside me at the silent film festival is happy to be asleep in his seat in the *Teatro Zancanaro*. In the front row, you can stretch out your legs—the piano rolls in, the lights dim & in five minutes, you are dreaming your own silent movie. But first, there is the red velvet plush of your seat to enjoy, & the moviegoer will sleep here until dawn. He has already finished his furtive dinner, a *panino* & a warm beer from the worn briefcase beneath his seat. A few feet away, the screen rises from the stage: this close, it is hard to see it, it's that big. At this hour, it's fuzzy even in my eyes. Later, the projectionist, too, will fiddle & fiddle, trying to fix fatigue with focus. The moviegoer, beneath it, stretches further into sleep.

In his dreams, the silence is total, all films have the delicate hand tinting of early cinema: blue for moonlight, gold for lamplight, red for the flames of Mount Vesuvius, burning A model Pompeii to the ashen ground. Shortly, the house lights will come on. Painful & electric. One after another, we will stumble into the street, trying to wake our sleeping feet long enough To reach our hotels, our waiting, hard Italian pillows, while the moviegoer sleeps, dreams on. Then—in just a few hours—we will be back up again. At that time in the morning, the moviegoer, too, is just waking. No one has moved him, but he wakes no stiffer than we horizontal sleepers. He is heading for the cafe near the *Teatro Zancanaro* where he takes his morning coffee.

It is a pleasure to walk to the theater this early, past the moviegoer standing in his cafe, talking to the young waitress, past the stalls of the weekly market with their carpet slippers & artichokes

equally well-displayed. Past the grandmothers in from the country who all smell more strongly of life, & the sweat it takes to keep on living, than any of us sedentary, silent film and scholars, who are freshly showered, though all we did the day before was sit in our plush chairs & watch life flicker on the screen before us.

Life as lived in the days of these grandmothers' mothers. Before there were cars pushing, honking through the market. Cars to carry their husbands To Pordenone & bring them back with thinner wallets. Cars to take their sons off to meet the strange women who live in even further, distant cities.

Still, in exchange for their sons, at the end of this year's film festival—or will it be the next?—they will gain the moviegoer, the one too poor to bother with hotel rooms, the one who will never finish his dissertation on D'Ambra's *Two Dreams with Eyes Wide Open* because his never are, the one who prefers the cafe just past the theater to all others: in the end he'll marry that cafe & the sweet waitress who comes with it & he'll work from dawn to midnight, on his feet the whole day, but he'll drink cool beer from his own tap & leave this life of decaying celluloid behind.

Cars pass during the night, too, but more quietly, so quietly that, though the cleaners threw the doors of the theater wide open, the moviegoer hasn't woken. At night the beams of the headlights, as they round the curve, reveal the screen, blank white, waiting for the next day's movies. Near dawn, they glide cautiously along, you can't hear a thing except maybe the river & at the edge of town they disappear into the valley, sinking in blue shadow—blue for night, green for nightmares, red for *The End* of silent film.

Jesse Lee Kercheval

## Extinct

*There are as many as twenty species of flowers in this tapestry. They are depicted with great scientific accuracy—greater than in any of the botany textbooks of the time. They include English bluebells, oxlip, bistort, cuckoopint, and Madonna lily. Botanists haven't been able to identify a few; it's possible that they are flowers that have gone extinct since 1500.*

—Richard Pearson, in *The New Yorker*

Although we commonly apply it to species, it's only another way to say "extinguished." So a single candle flame can be, and obviously will be soon, extinct. Or a person: look at these people walking out of a square of the sepia morning light from the 1940's: what were they, to Time, these little parents, if not candle flames? My mother is holding a clutch of flowers they must have picked together, or that he handed to her as a gift, although the kind of flowers by now is as mysterious as the ones in the Unicorn Tapestries at the Cloisters, 1940 and 1500 being equal flames to the breath of the world.

---

As the Blahdy-Blahdy-Blah Distinguished Professor of Humanities where I teach, I sometimes have my students select one of the seven Unicorn Tapestries to inspire an in-class essay. I have two things to say. The first: the best included this: "So often I've heard the phrase 'the fabric of Time' used loosely, casually; it's a pleasure to find it made literal here. The weft and warp are so excellently plied, that over 500 years later these stems and petals look as if they were just whisked out

of a cone of florist's wrapping paper." I like that. The second: my friend's daughter Zoe, three, once blurted out: "Extinguished Professor!" Well, not yet. Still threading my way on through.

---

And some went horribly: they were dragged behind a car and partially skinned alive in the process; shot, while kneeled and begging the child's release; or slowly turned to stone by a fatal witchery in their own cells. Others, easily: at ninety-five, in a restful sleep. And some, in an unsolvable obscurity: a weekend out of town, and then... an open-ended nothing. So we see there's no such thing as Death—it's more of an ensemble cast; each, a different assignment. A different one of us. And what we are is names that linger only for a while, until the names too disappear. Goodbye, Sweet William, Daisy, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Lily, Black-eyed Susan.

*Albert Goldbarth*

## Self-Guided Tour, 1987

I, having seen Soweto thirty years ago,  
When it was still Orlando Township, feel no need  
To re-investigate, and while my traveling  
Companions are negotiating for a tour,  
I tour the Jo'burg Stock Exchange: the *Ur*-Transvaal.  
Anglo American, Crown Mines, DeBeers... The quotes  
Are writ in chalk; they speak in gold and diamonds.  
Security is lax; outside on Hollard Street  
Are Afrikaner guards, but in the gallery  
For visitors I could assemble tear gas bombs,  
Explosion of which might or might not jolt the shares.  
The second Sharpeville riot hardly made a blip.  
Three of the runners on the Floor are Indians.  
Transvaalers, one presumes, as they speak Afrikaans  
Among themselves. The Traders are, predictably,  
Illovo, Parktown, Wanderers. I know the look,  
As I observed their blazers as they left their cars.  
Their drivers seem to have, decades before cell phones,  
Communication. How else draw up to the curb  
On time? Diversifying one's portfolio  
Means here no more than buying into platinum;  
"Diversity" means so far only Boer and Brit  
(At home it still means Johnny Reb and Billy Yank,  
Though we do not admit it). Thunderclaps at four  
Serve as the closing bell; the limousines queue up.  
And, flashing in a darkened sky—Rand in the sky?—  
Gleam out the golden veins; until the blue-white hail  
Comes down in crystals up to seven carats. Where  
Are you Antwerp, not that we need you? I waste time  
Around the corner at a tribal herbalist's  
(If you prefer, witch doctor's, or a dagga drop)  
With kilted Cape Town Scots, two Bantu constables,  
A probable shebeen queen, and a Durban imam,  
To wait out limo traffic and the thunderstorm.  
Wind chimes and ostrich biltong dangle by my head.

*Turner Cassity*

## Main Street, Milky Way

For a few years after his wife died  
he lived only a three-block walk  
from the Menil Museum in Houston.  
The same walk took him  
to the Rothko Chapel where God  
was made invisible to him—even the dumb  
rocks hid Him.  
Just in front of the Chapel  
was Barnett Newman's massive obelisk  
upside down,  
like an angel's plumb bob  
snapped off  
and stuck in that cooling fountain spray  
that was always worth  
walking to,  
a little pleasure  
left over from creation.  
He wasn't the only one who thought so—  
every day, singly, in couples,  
many of them slowing around the fountain.  
At dusk, common swifts  
swept those mists free of damselflies and gnats—  
all of them holy, not one of them  
mattering,  
no one knowing.

*Arthur Smith*