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POETRY 2017

ATLANTA



ATLANTA
REVIEW

REVIEW

NEW ZEALAND

Edited by
Ivy Alvarez

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Welcome

When I agreed to take over the Atlanta Review one of the things (and there were many) that excited me most was the notion of working on each year's international issue. As our dedicated readers know, each spring brings an opportunity to take a poetic journey—to explore a place through the work of contemporary poets living and writing in a specific country or region. In the past twenty-three years, these journeys have been extraordinary. Unpacking boxes filled with back issues, I found myself struggling with the organizational task at hand, instead pausing with each box to explore the poetry of such places as Pakistan, Greece, the Caribbean, Iran, China, Scotland, Germany, Iraq, and Russia. In reviewing all the countries and regions we have published, my first challenge was to decide where to take our readers next.

Finding an excellent guest editor is fundamental to having a great international issue. In considering the places left unexplored in our pages, I also needed to think about the person with whom I would most want to make my “maiden voyage.” Fortunately for me, there was a place I wanted to feature where one of the poets I most respect in the world also happens to live—all I had to do was convince her to agree.

The first time I “spoke” to Ivy Alvarez was about thirteen years ago via social media. In the intervening years, I have had the pleasure to meet her, to teach her books, to have her give guest lectures in my courses, and to read with her at events in Wales and England. An award-winning New Zealand-based Filipino Australian poet, editor, and critic, Ivy is a truly international poet. She has presented and published work in many countries, and has held a variety of visiting writer and artist in residence positions. Rarely have I met anyone as cosmopolitan—or as generous and kind. Ivy has written an introduction to the New Zealand section, but I will add that it is one of the most varied and interesting collections I have read in a long time. Her work on this issue has been nothing short of marvelous.

Before you get to the international section, you will find, as always, work from our general submissions. Our editorial staff has been impressed by the beauty of the work we receive—here is the craft of poetry at its best from poets who have published several books and from poets who are publishing their first poem with us. The poets themselves have a variety of backgrounds, as well, from an art museum director to a journalist to a prison inmate—proof that art can happen from anyone, anywhere.

We love having you along for all our journeys—far away or close to home. Thank you for supporting our writers and our journal, and if you love what we do, please tell a friend.

Karen Head
Editor

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At Edith's Ranch Along Washoe Creek

One again, autumn stands by my door.
It kills time at a half-open window —
curtains rippling, the wind checking in.

Edith, who's hired me on for the harvest,
phones late in the day. Says come over
for what she calls her office hours.

She's a half-hour down the road by foot.
I amble up her drive. On the porch,
she points to a wicker chair beside her.

Sundown. Bourbon in our fists. We talk
feed grinders, bale trailers, hayracks,
the rain that refuses us like bad love.

We stare out over her fields. Blackberries
crawl through the vanished windows
of her dad's '60 Studebaker.

Hatred for this drought surges
from our mouths the way dust devils
rise over roads, like an ambush of grit.

Falling dampness soddens the porch rail.
Night swells in the muted wind. In a poplar,
the moon's caught like Absalom on the run.

Jeffrey Alfier

Menagerie: A 40th Birthday Poem

*In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.*
—Sylvia Plath, "Mirror"

Spider veins peek through the pale translucence
of my thin skin—
purple paths leading nowhere,
slow-motion streams
that lengthen with each coming year.
Crows feet line my eyes
like petroglyphs carved into ancient caves
while moles of increasingly asymmetrical formation
dot my body like the spots of a washed-out cheetah.
The skin on my neck
has grown rough as a reptile,
and my wrists as wrinkled as an elephant.
On my head, gray hairs nestle among the brown
like the disparate debris woven into a bird's nest.
Meanwhile my egg count declines
as this menagerie of mine
remains, an uninvited house guest
in the exposed rooms
of my aging body.

Or should I be more gracious
and say instead
that my surfacing veins are like a burst of underground fireworks,
a phosphorescent fish beneath the surface of the ocean?
Could I re-imagine my wrinkles
as the elegant rings inside the trunk of the mighty Redwood,
my neck the beautiful bark?
Could I compare my gray hairs with tinsel,
with a flickering star or a silver ribbon,
the runner-up prize in a contest
I entered without realizing.

Lea Aschkenas

The Wild Chattooga River Just Below Lick Log Creek

The weather was crisp and clear that fall day.
Tall white pines, so different
from loblollies and slash pines,
grabbed my eyes, again and again,
as I followed the trail above Lick Log Creek
with its rushing waters echoing
in my head long before I saw them.
Turkey vultures drifted on the air currents.
There was repeated cawing of crows,
but I only heard a few song birds.
I did see a ruby-crowned kinglet in a bush,
a white-throated sparrow aground,
and several other good feathers,
a-wing, darting hither and yon.
I crossed the creek twice
on narrow wooden bridges with log beams.
I stopped to enjoy Lick Log Falls,
cascading down two tiers for eighty feet.
The trail took a sharp bend southeastward,
and I was finally there, at eighty,
looking way, way down
on the wild Chattooga River
that had been calling my name for years.
From the trail where I stood
down to the river bed,
the bluff was wondrously laden
with mountain laurel, saplings, huge trees.
It was far too steep for my old bones,
and yet the boy within me
kept urging me to make that descent.
At last, reason prevailed
and sent me back up Lick Log Trail
with the boy dragging his feet
and the old man stepping lightly.

Frederick W. Bassett

A Late Spring

After a long winter of deep snows
these hills look rough, brown, and bleak.
Few shoots and buds have emerged
by the last days of March.
But we remember
how in some years at this season
there can be a great blossoming.
The crabapple was fiery,
the sunlight harsh on the lilac
the spring our son was killed.
By the creek I can see a willow
of a shade of green so pale and fresh
you'd think a child had colored it.

Robert Brickhouse

Girl with Sparrows

The roses have no answer to the wind
that's saying "why" and want it to be more
specific but the wind thinks the roses can't
hear and keeps asking the question and snags
on beauty's thorn. It stops to listen to
the singing of a girl with sparrows in
her hair but when she hears the silence
she stops singing and the sparrows fly off
and all she has to do to get them back
is to whistle but she's not very good
at it and the sparrows think it's the wind
up to its old tricks and don't come back
and she says to the wind "have you seen my
sparrows" but the wind is gone and can't hear
and the sparrows are scratching for worms
among the rotting leaves of the rose
and the girl is trying to learn how to cry
her way back to her mother's broken door.

Noel Conneely

Muget des Bois

We thought we knew what made a girl.
We drank orange juice from concentrate,

rolled our hair around the cans, lined
our eyes, threaded talismans

through our ears—sure to draw a lank
lover to sigh outside our bedroom door.

We experimented with scents, haunting
perfume counters

in search of a particular flower we
thought was missing

from our essence.

We were human in our liberty and
in light of everything—with more

wishes than decisions—we fed
on the thunderstorms in our heads

and cranked our quilted monsters up
to dark exploding skies.

And before sunrise—while stormwater
still ran in our veins—

we would venture out into the streets
to retrieve our scorched poppets, the night

unfurling around us like bolts of indigo
fragrant with lily of the woods.

Jane Craven

What Names the Moon Gives

Blood beneath my fingernails swells
purple like wild grapes during the third week
of October when men smoke by the river
and wait for the current to rise
with autumn rains. Trains from Detroit
howl from the banks, and cousins who sleep
alone in fear of the space winter brings
turn over to face empty walls. Walking
the spine of the mountain
to where the trees break, I remember
the way my brother collected black
walnuts, his shirt stained with the smell
of millrace, skin of his hands burnt
green. The day my grandfather died,
my brother and I lay in the twin beds upstairs
and fell asleep while our father drove
to the hospice to drop into the open cavern
of his father's mouth, resting on the back
of his tongue. Early in life I remember
a woman holding my hand after church,
telling me our souls become color and fall
heavy at the end of November, grey,
like the collar feathers of doves or
the moon in the high water of early April.

Noah Davis

With Nothing Between Us and the End of the World

After a line by Shann Ray

Another hot, dry summer. Cutthroat swim
from the main river into the north fork, waiting
for October and November, gray days
with the possibility for rain, then snow.
I'm here alone, our sons having drifted on
into lives of their own. I imagine the house
is quiet, cat asleep at the foot of the bed.
When we talk, you tell me the cantaloupe
in the garden have ripened, the final tomatoes
green. A shadow swirls from between two rocks
as a trout rises to a fly outlined by the sun.
Even a few days separation hurts. The absence
of your silhouette when you wake in the night,
out of habit walking down the hall to look
into the boys' rooms. Water churns, collides,
wears away the rock, creating a new path.
This close to water I wouldn't hear a bear
until it was so near there'd be little to do
except pray. We're always at the mercy
of the world. I cradle the cutthroat I've drawn
from the creek, point its head upstream,
allowing cold water to flow through its gills.
The fish swivels out of my hands, across the current,
like you do after we make love.

Todd Davis

Echolalia

—meaningless repetition of another person's speech

1.
We rolled into Spain's unholy rain,
just before the black-necked grebes
returned to the amber light.
(It's true I'm still in love
with how the light hits
your wiry hair.)
But mostly I loved
the gray wet earth,
your hands curled into your pockets.
We were angry, as usual,
yet your syllabic drum
tapped against my heart:
How silence feathers a room.
So I walked the dark music
of Madrid's slate spires,
its unimagined angles,
its strawberry madronos.
Of all the things I've learned:
How to paste our stories
into paper boats
and set them sail
into the sky's white square miles.

Christine DeSimone

2.
Before I knew
how easily I bled,
I tried to tell you
this: I loved the way
the sky unlidded
its frenzied shower.
But mostly I loved
how we hulked words
at each other
so fierce, so real.
I didn't know how to
be in rooms with you:
How the notes hemmed,
how umbrellas whirled.
It took so long to get us
to nowhere.
At the train to the airport,
my arms died around you
like old snakeskins.
Of all the things I've learned:
If it requires a miracle,
then it can't be love.

As the Crow Flies

From sufficient height we make a kind of sense,
the designs we scratch in the dirt and dry grass
appear reasonable, if desperate. The white stones
like rows of teeth, roads like knotted shoelaces—
we move and a wave presses the crow's belly.

What can rival the sight of us scrabbling over
ridge and moraine? The crow feathers his wings,
hovers a black eye above the country bent under
its load. Pinfeathers whirr like cards in spokes,
the shrill cry—gravel on tin—rattles downslope.

Under clouds that threaten more than they can
deliver, two fences, one stone, one woven boards,
rise and fall across the pastured swells. Rain
falls where it will, and where it won't we root
ourselves deeper. Strive, by custom and need.

And yet the crow's straight flight from A
to B confounds us. We focus on our cooling coffee,
arrange our chairs on listing decks, while all the
tumulting glaciers carry on—without us, at last,
having had our say. Our era borne out in error.

The light's gone out, my headless chickens.
We move, such delicate dead, by sheer nerve memory.
Out along the bluffs brimming with lupine, the blue
on black wing clapping overhead like a kite. Our fall
gentle, not to wake the Pacific from its dream of us.

Jeff Ewing

At Ghost Ranch

You can't stop the sage
from entering your room,
folding its scent into every pleat,
every strand of hair sings
of sage even as you fly back East
and the star-saturated sky erases
all sense of self-importance,
and the Milky Way never speaks
but says, *Bow down, bow down*
no matter how many
of your tribe have vanished.

If you drive south from Taos
toward Tularosa you'll see bald
mesas ringed with pink, teal, sky
blue, that play off the stereo
of sunlight. And deep purses
of land called *bolsons* that fill
with ephemeral lakes in deluge season.
And when the rain is spent
and the sun swallows
up the lakes, what's left
are acres and acres of salt
and more salt, and milk-
white and bone-white and talc-white
lizards and snakes and geckos that run
up and down tree trunks and rest
on white stucco walls. See
how invisibly they survive,
sun themselves?

But if you stay at Ghost Ranch
you may hear the tick-tick-ticking
in my chest. Never mind.
You have your own crow sounds,
caws in the sunlight follow you.
I do not have anything to teach you.

I have only this cracked blue mirror.
Only strong hands. Only this shaking
in my cells. What is it that shakes
your cells? Is it the Pueblo
ghosts leaving and entering
Box Canyon at will?
Or the mesa's loneliness?
Or fear of seeing the Black Cow
that flies over Box Canyon?
Local legend says you can't see her
without dying on the spot.
Here, in these ghost lands,
I have missed those I love
back home. When I leave,
I will miss red crumbling shale,
carved bird heads swelling
above canyon walls,
I will miss the dark-skinned woman
with coal eyes who says
she can live on cactus
juice and unfiltered river water,
yet her head, each night, aches
as I rub her back and hum
until she falls asleep.
I will not forget the spot
on Kitchen Mesa
where she stood so close
to the hawks circling
the sunset.

Doris Ferleger

Intimations of Adulthood

The whole long drive south,
she keeps Kari's salamander safe,
in a box on her lap, feeding it leaves,
per Kari's instructions.
When she plays the alphabet game
with her mom, she keeps one eye
on her best friend's lizard. On arrival,
the balmy wind on her legs, skinny
and pale from winter, eases some tension.
She steps into the woods near the motel,
frees the reptilian city dweller,
who spreads its jaws wide,
traps a fat juicy fly in one gulp,
disappears into the tropical night—
leaving her alone in the black gulf
of horrified silence
she learns will always follow violence.

Laura Foley

License to Fly

In a night sky over the Atlantic
past Gander past Bangor
just short of home
comes your longed-for call:
“Is there anyone aboard who can fly this plane?”
You can, of course.

You stride to the cockpit.
Passengers wild with hope
whisper, “It’s a woman.”
From the captain’s seat
console lights
a familiar galaxy,
each star and constellation
burning in its own color.
Your slightest touch moves all—
what are rudder and flaps
but extensions of you?

The pilots groan on the floor; they dream
of the wives and children you’ll return to them.

The tower crackles, “What do you need?”
“Coordinates. Tell me where I am,
where you are—I’ll be there.”
You know all the angles,
it’s only a matter of feeling the wind
the ancient, prevailing wind.

You begin the descent.
The sadness of landing encroaches,
the tower of voices speaks more insistently:
“Who are you? How did you know?”
Your perfect approach makes them think
there might not be disaster.
They decide they believe in God.

Touchdown.
The passengers will mob you
and cry, won’t understand—
they think you did it for them.

Dorinda Hale

Christmas Card

Backed up against winter woods that are not lovely, dear
though certainly dark and deep
a small red house
simply gabled, without windows
a child's drawing with the requisite twist of smoke.
Somebody's home,
fire inside
the only invitation.

How calming the firm edge between snowfield and woods
where treetops limn a cobalt night sky
with a fringe of bruised lace.
A single star, round in its bigness,
could pass for the moon, can't account for
stippled and cross-hatched snow—
shadow requires light.

I send you this on the darkest day of the year,
a day without which light's only a burden,
to tell you I live in this house with you,
held there by bounty in isolated beauty.

Dorinda Hale

The Hour's Poem

The lifeguard's poem was about sunblock
and fins—a terrible poem really

The farmer's poem concerned rainfall and
the fisherman's poem touched upon drowning

The builder's poem—a lament about permits
was an exceptional poem read poorly

The undertaker's poem was all about
handshakes and it almost made me cry

The poet read a poem about figs—in hindsight
the lifeguard's poem wasn't that bad

My folding chair growled a couplet of bone
The bone mumbled a haiku about dancing

Outside—the sycamore's poem spoke of its love
for the shifting tearing river

The river's poem mourned the oxbow where
it left a part of itself to dark still water

and I liked your poem—wordless—just that
enveloping gaze and I liked the dusk canopy

that was the hour's poem—its tick and rustle
of hands moving to where they entwine

Gregory Hischak

Twilight Venus

after Geoffrey Platt's Twilight Venus

You are *Phosphoros*—bringer of light—
emerging from a gold disk
to circle and thread
light behind you
and you are *Hesperos*—
star of the evening,
although we know you are not a star,
and more than planet
orbiting within our planet's orbit
close to our sun.

I want simply to rise like you,
one arm attached to a tendril of dusk
spiraling behind what could be
both dawn, twilight...

oh, you've caught me. Of course I want
everything and its opposite
and want it all to balance
to have you, goddess of love,
embrace us with sensuous poise,
possibility, innuendo.

Everyone wants to be
wrapped by love. I imagine you
touching each person's wanting...

Kathryn Jospé

"Hoping to hear from you"

René Magritte, letter of 1/12/1963

When Icarus fell, the feathers,
some of them, took flight

and leapt the world. Wave
by wave, the others came and went.

A mailbag weighs more
than sincerity. And gossip

depends on weather. We yearn
for news from elsewhere,

of hidden sun and cross-
wise winds smelling of death.

Athena Kildegaard

Before the Fall

Wind on winter mornings carries the fragile scent of cut pines

Please don't bother, my uncle would say when his granddaughter
came with his cane, and he'd lean forward almost
to his knees to gain leverage, and he'd thrust himself up

Elevators scare only those unwilling to go up

Rouged apple bright, the old woman lifted her bony hand to wave
at the hippopotamus

In case of fire, break glass; in case of disappointment, break glass

Remember balancing a dictionary on your head, forcing
your neck to lengthen, your shoulders to brace the past

Wind plays at a sandstone surface, a giant tongue fretting a mouth of teeth

A church's spire points out of hard lava—
everyone in the village led their donkeys, laden with china,
linens, photographs in black frames, out of the disaster

Drone pilots count down on the fingers of one hand

The eye is no more perfect than the flange

Eric Satie lay at the foot of the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde,
March 13, 1918, composing music as the Allies dropped bombs

You need a step stool and a wooden spoon to reach the martini shaker

Boy Scouts learn to tie beautiful knots as practice
for when they touch a woman

The scientist dead set on measuring the speed of pitch falling
died before the fall.

Athena Kildegaard

Preventing Implantation

Some preachers tried to tell me it was a sin,
that the single-celled were babies
whose selves—
so thin they were already ghosts—
would haunt me in mirrors
or candle-lit prayers

if I didn't collect thick blood
to cradle them
in my deepest body-self.

But at night I dream of them,
the single-celled, as stars
spinning without anger or unrest—
no bird wishes to unwing.
They are the plume of the dandelion,
not the seed,
the top of the Doppler curve
steepened by the brevity of time.
They are the tiny lights
over the banqueting table
at the end of the age
when we all sit down together
and feast.

Meredith Stewart Kirkwood

The Widow's Handbook

Everything you assumed is wrong. The important part of the word *bereft* is *reft*. You have been reft. You are reft. You will be slow in scraping that word from your face.

Riven. There's a word of force. Think of muscle; the muscles of your daily day after the ceremonies after the gathering and coffee drinking after the clearing of closets and the workshop.

The force required to rise and brew morning coffee will rip the edge from an autumn sky. You will be required to learn machines: lawn mower, snow blower; you will learn dripping faucets first hand,

and wonder at the ease with which you once said this or that needs fixing. You will sit alone in restaurants and sniff the wine, order the meal, pay the check: everything you assumed done

you will need to do yourself. You will learn to sleep in the entire bed. And you will not be wiping whiskers from the bathroom sink.

And then one day the world will see you striding out to greet the dawn.

Sharon Rose Kourous

Corn Mother

Lie down with me
here where the heavy loam
smells like rainwater.
Your long creamy
hair falls golden
under the round moon,
soothes my shoulder,
fire in your eyes,
your musk on my tongue.
We've known thunder,
you and I, and we've known
cold—when love stings
like a wasp—comes
and goes like desire.
Many yearn for your
sweet milk, for arepas fried
warm and brown stuffed
with cheese and black beans,
your intoxicating chicha.
Dance with me,
my hot fingers need your
translucent skin.

Nan Lundeen

Istanbul Moments

I

By the Blue Mosque, under a canopy of trees
Bright orange in October, and the smile of the day
At its broadest, I sit in a stone garden surrounded by
Sun-blached statues and mute edged ivy that
Daggers a living frieze upon the ancient bloodied
Bricks. The comfort of fountains and bird song
Blunts the city's underlying rumble, sun my drowsy
Companion as I stretch into silence.

And then the muezzin calls for afternoon prayers,
His cry tossing across the city like an unwrapped gift,
His song reflected in a living turbulence of voices all
Greeting the hour in a turmoil of mirrored harmony.
I am strangely moved, as if this singing has released
Some faint echo of love within me that has been
Latched tight for centuries. It is the moment to think
About God. It is the one moment.

II

It is five o'clock. The light grows golden stippling Topkapi
Trees, and all along the Bosphorus the minarets of a hundred
Mosques needle the sky, the muezzin's plaintive call covering
The city, a gleaming pathway from earth to heavens.

Smoke feathers upwards from countless chestnut bonfires
Marking the air with impossible fragrance. And date-eyed
Children, made solemn by poverty, sell gum and handkerchiefs
To indifferent husbands and their shark-eyed wives, women

Who speak the subtle language of the glancing look,
Imagine passion's caravanserai, the touch of honeyed hands,
The love beyond reason all yearn for in the quietness of dreams,
Their faces marble tombs of unspoken regret.

The water twists in pale turquoise pleats beneath Galata Bridge,
Past grizzled fishermen who know there is nothing left to catch,
Spending empty-rodded hours hooking the memory of fin or
Scale, waiting, as dusk falls, for the miracle of fish.

Agnes Meadows

Wednesday

How Sylvia Plath should have reacted.

She woke alone time and again, he still not home,
The light on the stair tired of burning, weak with waiting.
And when he finally returned, night after night, scratched
And grinning, a tom cat yowling at elusive cloud-bruised
Moons, tarnished with illicit passion,
He would fall into an instant unremorseful sleep,
His dreams a Sheherazade of consummations
Into which he vanished without trace.

In the darkness she would sniff his skin hunting out duplicity,
The cheap scent of betrayal fogging her nostrils,
The gleam of foreign sweat polishing limbs glossed by alien hands
Whose ardent nails had carved multi tracks of lust upon his back,
A tangled web of treachery that brought the bile rising to her lips.
She would lay awake, heart scythed and screaming,
Tongue trapped behind her teeth, words castrated in her mouth,
While he slept, curled and nestled like a puppy.

In the morning her breath would be sour with anguish, lungs
Thin and rattling as a corpse in its final moments. This was not
The love of fairy tales, she seethed, but a changeling, viper-bred
Love whose forked tongue slithered silent through sleep to leave her
Snarling and vituperous. In her winter of discontent, unhappiness
Had become a habit, a shroud holding her fast, emotions immobilised.
Yet still she clung to the desire of the dream,
Of love un-petrified and days of kindness without cost,
Unwilling to relinquish the illusion.

Loneliness turned slowly into sorrow, transforming over seasons to
Ice-pricked ire that made her weep on buses, or in the middle of the day,
When she might look up, catch sight of autumn's first brown leaf sifting
Through sunlight, a foliate clock marking her solitary time. The dream
Slipped inexorably away. She turned her face to the wall, became a
Shadow leaden with loss. Ideas come from moments of transformation;
Rage begets resolution. Resolve coagulated in her heart.
She became patient, a compliant wife, her lips a parentheses of
Submission. She would kill him, she thought, on a Wednesday.

Agnes Meadows

The Potato: Splitting a Small Fry To-go

I eat French fries, imagining a simpler time
when tubers of all types were gathered as a prize
along with silver, gold, jade, toucans and jaguars, maybe,
and loaded on ships that weathered the sea or didn't,
lost to things like rogue waves, fierce winds and pirates.
These storm-tossed potatoes landed in the court
of Isabella and Ferdinand in battle-scarred Spain
before some mistral blew these tubers through the Pyrenees.
Their foothold fixed in France brought English scorn.
The potato then borne into Ireland
where moisture brought blight, starvation.
There, trading a plot and a shed for passage,
was the man my mother's family sprung from.

Since this is my history of the potato
I'll skip ahead to us.
Where we scream at each other in whispers at this place.
You pluck at my cold French fries, spilling
salt and ketchup on the paper that lists our possessions.
We carefully pick each other's favorite things.
I take your storm-tossed trunk,
the one you salvaged from a flea market.
You take the battle-scarred books that you'll never read.
The people we were, blighted and starved for something more.
I eat French fries until I'm sick,
thinking potatoes are no prize,
before we climb into our cars and sail home alone.

Matthew Mendoza

On Playing Scales on the Saxophone

I could almost forget she was dying
as I stood at a window playing scales.
Allow diaphragm to find Buddha's
serenity at enlightenment, the mind's
metronome to hush the mad cuckoo
shrieking off its cerebral wall; again,
seek solace in precise vertical ritual.

Prayers, a rosary to say every day,
Major and Minor, blues, Chromatic,
Pentatonic, Mixolydian, humble
exercises of devotion while testing
the five hundred parts of the horn,
that skeptical tribe of pads, keys,
screws, springs and ingenious levers.

Scales ask that leather pads not stick,
or leak, that ligature wed fresh reed
to mouthpiece with perfect overlap,
that fingers not forget fervent vows
of obedience, that embrasure not
buckle with every other muscle set
I barely control and too seldom use.

Miles away, I know she was seeing
out a window her last, quick cardinals,
a few desperate wrens. Birds were here,
too, their tracks an unplayable score
on garden bed snow. Through double
glazed windows I heard only the cuckoo
that hasn't stopped singing since she did.

John O'Dell

signs of god and art in barcelona

all day over textured walks
the *bombonerías*, each a horizon

cielo in those storefronts, impressionist style
the pastels of *pasteles*
blend a creamy pink mauve mocha
crucifixion sunset
each blur of pastry emits
the urgent splendor of
a hallelujah choir

the omnipresent shank of pig
idol, fetish, counter display, sacrifice
scrape by scrape
with come and go customers

gypsies spit seeds, sell
dry white purple garlic slick yellow lemon
still lives on sun-cut corners

and pious coffee drinkers
flock to *café*
breathe clouds
I could go and be holy

another window
there's the hoof again

and proclaimed from high above
"El Placer de Ser Mujer"
so let it be written
so let it be done

Tamra Plotnick

Desolations of March

Out of a gray depression of sky,
a cold rain falls. Stark, black branches

shake in rough wind. The birdbath is toppled,
the wood fence gapped. The garden,

the stonework in ruins. Meanwhile old friends,
like last year's leaves, are scattered all over,

or under the earth. Above these floodwaters,
hunched on a limb, a crow now broods.

It's been here before. It knows what to do.
All we know is to fasten our coats

and bend like a branch in a bitter wind,
cling like a root to a cold, wet ground.

Tom Raithel

She Was Not Medea

Diane Arbus would have followed her, sat
at the counter next to her.
“May I take your picture?” she would have asked.

The startle would have made Carla’s wrist jiggle, sloshing coffee
over the side of her cup. Her thickly penciled brows would rise.
She’d look into Diane’s dark eyes that were caverned in grief.
Each would foresee the other would take her own life.

“Yes,” Carla would say in a voice no one would remember.

But they would remember her face.
It would be framed on a wall at the MOMA.
I would stand before it, gazing at her, unafraid.
After all, she was not Medea.

Carla didn’t kill her two kids to spite her husband
when he left her for a young, mega-rich wife.
She didn’t kill the new wife, even when the woman
seduced the kids into living with her and their father
with safaris and trips to Disney World.
All she did was axe her appliances,
the metal folding inward like origami.

But after that, I never waved, never said hello,
never let my eyes meet hers. What if
she asked me for a ride and slammed the car door
on my fingers, crushing them like my drunken mother had?
Madness builds a tall barbed fence around itself.

As if hexed, each morning Carla trudged
in pink poufy slippers to Frederick’s, hunched
against an imaginary wind, her red-dyed hair teased
into a beehive, her white nightgown hanging
below her raincoat like a flag of surrender.

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

Tikkun Olam

(repair of the world)

The arms of the ocean
can no longer hold the dead. Like driftwood,
they wash up on shore. May the spirit
of Raoul Wallenberg who passed out 100,000 passports
to Hungarian Jews and found them safe houses, return.
The Tigris is full of bull sharks and alligators.
No bodies. Not even ashes. No time for mourning.

May the spirit of Chiune Sugihara return,
the ambassador who spent 20 hours
a day writing out false visas to Japan for Lithuanian
and Polish Jews, and who, when forced to leave,
threw blank paper with the consulate seal and his signature
out his train window to the Jews. “Please forgive me,” he said.
“I cannot write anymore. I wish you the best.”

The camp on the Macedonian border,
an icy pool. No food, no medicine, no passage.
May the spirit of my Russian grandma, my bubbie,
come down from the ethers with her *bankes*,
placing the small glasses over nubs of lit candles
to heat them, kneeling down on stiff knees
to press the glasses into the earth,
to draw out the poisons.

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

Nativity

after Claudia Emerson

You must have wanted something, I said,
having just lost your mother, now assigned
by siblings far away to break up the house—
to keep what was wanted and donate the rest.

But each item I suggested you refused, perhaps
not wanting a reminder of those last years,
the hard ones, the dying. Not the mantle clock,
still ticking, striking the hours as we worked,

not the state spoons she loved, the fashion magazines,
the teakettle. Nothing was enough, you said, until—
until, sorting the hall closet, I uncovered
the nativity set you remembered, hand-carved

and painted, though chipped in spots: an ear here,
a finger there, a cow's horn gone. But you
arranged it perfectly, there on the floor.
Mary's blue robe faded, her arms held out,

Joseph's crook, the wise men kneeling, the child
in the center, treasured by all those around.

Tori Sharpe

This Is Not Another Poem About Dying

I thought the woman on the bed
in the next ICU room was resting—
without covers, pillows, tubes, monitors,
just a nap, arms at sides,
the way tanners strain to look relaxed
face-up on the shore, slightly
angled to let the underarms breathe,
legs modestly veed so the crotch
senses the tease of air.

Her heels were pasty, finely cracked—
the insides of flea-market teacups.
She needed a blanket, I worried
when I drifted by on Monday.
It's about not knowing the dead.
On Tuesday, I learned she got a spade.
Someone had to shovel and lift dirt,
gently shake tendrils and roots.
I hoped they placed her close to the top
so she'd feel the pull of the sun.

Jane Simpson

for Arthur Ashe

July's too-hot night seeps
through screen, past sill. Twenty floors below,
shore lights spill
and surface the Hudson. It's nearly midnight.
The Financial Center stands a bleary sentry,
its million-seeming window-eyes
cast down to the floodlit court on Chambers,
to teenaged boys dribbling a basketball—
rhythm rising, voices rising
into the filmy hour. In February,
with that dark Saturday's news, snowfall
shrouded the court and the tennis court
adjacent. Someone carved large
across Sunday's now-blank expanse: *Goodbye Arthur*,
and slow into spring that warm
icy epitaph seeped
into asphalt and air... Summer, a city; boys,
a ball pulsing
until, court shut dark, they draw
into the triangle's shadows, weave
its warren of streets toward
Broadway, Canal and Vesey, voices trebling
before fading...

Roseanne Smith

July 29, 1890

Dear Walt, I am the night and you're the earth,
but we have lots in common: we're both Dutch,
our whores brought problems to our house and church,
and as I write with paint you paint with words
so freely. Fuck! This form of mine is blank!

I love your lusty *Leaves*—"magnetic night"
inspired me to paint *The Starry Night*.

Inside the sanatorium the earth
was such a black mare's nest I drew a blank,
but then the sun/moon burned. I was in Dutch
for loving Paul Gauguin too much. My words
became a nautilus of stars. The church

like earth was butch. The church had words with me.
I thought the charge was blank. My Earth, Good Night

Richard Marx Weinraub

On Being Told: You Must Learn to Burn Like This

Cities should be seen at a distance at night at the halfway point between enter and escape. Look—how our manmade stars cluster together for warmth: archipelagos flickering in a sea of glass, fireflies burning into the distant ridgeline. I only ask to be as dangerous as a failing bridge. As a cigarette sparking refuse in a barrel, warming a dozen empty hands. I only ask to be this version of a man. But living takes its time making a fire of me. The city still looks like the sky a child holds. I don't ask to be that beautiful. I can't ask what you see in me when all the lights go out, from that middle distance of leaving and, *maybe, please*, returning,

John Sibley Williams

Their Humming

Cutting back the vigorous magnolia one spring
I spot a nest smaller than a hen's egg,
bigger than a thimble. About the size of a
generous tablespoon. Two thin black needles
point above the rim, my loppers just inches away.

Daily I visit this eye-high nest built into the crotch
of a side branch and limb, stand silent and still. Soon
we have two shiny black eyes, a small curve of
feathered crests. The heart shaped leaves grow larger
than my palms. Like parasols they shade the gray nest.

Before I leave for a long weekend, I talk
to the nest, to the little black eyes. "I can see how
crowded it is getting in there. Please don't fly away
until I come back. I want to see your fledging."
When I arrive back at my post, only one needle,
one eye. Soon that one goes away, too.

The next spring backyard hummingbirds
fly up to my face, hover in one place,
humming their wing songs. All season,
as if they know me, my big face, my two eyes.

If I had not already left you, I would have
told you this story. It might have charmed
or irritated you. Hard to say. Now that you
are dead I give you this story.

These last few years, the hummingbirds hang
a little further off. I am now just a story to them,
as you are to me, passed on from the season
when we stood eye to eye. I think wherever
you are, there must be hummingbirds.

Marty Williams

NEW ZEALAND

Edited by
Ivy Alvarez





Introduction

On a map, it is a slim finger of two large islands, resting on the edge of the Pacific Rim. In summer and spring, it is the first country to see the sun. Aotearoa: land of the long white cloud. This is New Zealand's Māori name, and what it means.

This Aotearoan edition of *Atlanta Review* is a notable one in the journal's 22-year history, for while it has twice featured Ireland (another island of numerous, numinous poets), this is its first to gather a sizeable number of Kiwi poets together. Within these poems are lineations that go beyond what one might gain from a glimpse on a postcard or movie background.

How does one define the New Zealand voice? Even here, in such a young nation, one's status as an outsider comes to the forefront. To the stranger, the poems of a country can reflect to its inhabitants how they seem to others. Being *l'etranger* is an advantage, for in many ways, none can see more clearly than she who is newly arrived, when vision is unclouded by the scrim of the familiar, and much about a new home can still astonish. Reading and rereading these poems is akin to tracing along this finger of land, and finding ley lines and landmarks to navigate a still-wild terrain. There are many paths to follow. They are not always safe.

You might discover how creation, conflict and need interleave the work of Elizabeth Morton, Ya-Wen Ho, Makyla Curtis, Karen Zelas, Vaughan Rapatahana, and Tony Beyer. You would uncover poems by Anna Jackson, Jamie Trower, and Piet Nieuwland that examine beliefs of the self and the spirit. And you could follow Rata Gordon, Serie Barford, John Dennison, and Alison Wong as they negotiate and contemplate questions of mortality.

There are animals, with all their symbolic weight, which flicker in and out of poems from Piers Davies, and Rosalie Liu. Humour, both caustic and gentle, trails through the work of kerrin p. sharpe, Nicola Easthope, Erena Johnson, and Gregory Kan, a welcome companion. And, as befits an island nation, water laps, surrounds, drowns and falls between these lines by bernadette hall, Kiri Piahana-Wong and Janet Newman.

There is majesty and there is dirt, and traversing these states is not without risk. Belief, creation, conflict, need, mortality, humour, water, animals, plus a Middle Earth-like quality, elusive, yet perceptible and sensate all the same—whether in thematic alliance or opposition, these Kiwi elements surface again and again. Every one rubs off like gold dust, a fine substrate of words. Let the poems abrade, reveal, rise.

Arohanui.

Ivy Alvarez

There's birds in the family (excerpt from Triptych)

When my grandmother died a kingfisher flew
into the church, perched in rafters above her
coffin, escorted the cortège to the graveyard.

My mother wasn't surprised. People from her
village have ancestral spirits and the sultry hens
cackled for three days when my grandfather died.

I have an affinity for birds. They surround my house,
lead me to vantage points when I'm lost in swamps,
valleys or subtropical forests, appear in my dreams.

When I tell my family that I love dogs
they just laugh. Call me Bird woman.

Serie Barford

my mother darned the windsock

my mother darned the windsock
at the airport because flying
put the wind up her

she grew up near
the Rongotai Aerodrome
her house never touched the ground

my mother delays flights
by bird feeding near the hangars
and loitering in airport
restricted areas
especially the runway

when planes bring the soldiers home
she's always there with the flag
of Aotearoa
broken-hearted like any mother

kerrin p. sharpe

Memorial Service

Twenty years
of sorely missed;
I thumb your number
into my contacts list
so the new phone displays
your resurrection day:
Love's Name—saved.

Emma Neale

Ahako he iti he pounamu
(Although it is small it is greenstone)

I choose pounamu / it is a river stone / she was of the earth / she was
orchids in the hothouse / less difficult than her husband / fruit trees
/ their hard graft / plums / nectarines / a child we never spoke of /
another a castaway / I choose to plant my legs / to ground them / I am
the child of which we won't speak / I am the castaway / I am orchids
/ fruit trees / I can bear more than you think / I am a river stone / and I
choose a ring made of pounamu to remind me

Louise Wallace

Whale and barnacles.

1. Office and barnacles.

It is very bright in my office this morning
but I feel like a whale in a very dark sea in need
of barnacles. Yesterday when Amy was talking about
the poetry of James K Baxter she told me and Mark
how whales collect barnacles by swimming
through warm waters where baby barnacles
float helplessly in the sea before
attaching themselves to the first thing
they float on to, or the first thing that floats past,
such as a whale. Today I am imagining being
a young whale floating through a sea of barnacles
like walking for miles through one of those
beaded door curtains some people used to have
except you come out on the other side
of a curtain without any more bite than before
you walked through. Whales, Amy tells us,
use their barnacles in fights with other whales
as both weapon and armour, which makes me wonder
whether James K Baxter would have figured God
as the whale or as the barnacles?

2. James K Baxter as the whale.

When I look for God in the emptiness of my life
Am I as foolish as a whale looking for water in the sea

And finding instead only barnacles?
Certainly I am covered in barnacles: they have dug themselves into my flesh

Until they have become a part of me.
And when I welcome these barnacles, nga mokai, to dig themselves in

And imagine I am opening myself up to you, God, are you
All the time washing around me, laughing at me and my barnacles?

Whales use them, I am told, as both weapon and armour --
But I have no wish to clash with another whale.

I am far too preoccupied searching the sea for my true opponent
To whom I address these poems, my sonar system,

Searching for their target, that elusive body of water
That returns to me precisely nothing at all.

Anna Jackson

Flood

When the floodwaters rose up
covering the plain with mirrors and veils

our backyards looked like other people's
and the roads we drove failed under rivers

that seemed to have been here longer than we had.
Belongings stacked on pool tables sagged.

Sixteen sand bags might as well have been
a cache of illegal toheroas for all the good

they could muster against the weight of water
spilling over the stopbanks.

When the floodwaters rose up
we sank down

into our steamed-up cars if we could find them
or our fire-warmed lounges if we could reach them

watching the rain gauge, the tide times,
the insurance claim, the surge line.

We wrote everything down in the record books
but the numbers didn't look like much

because we stopped feeling
like we were the ones who counted.

When the floodwaters rose up
we sank back down to the bush

with the weka
and the powelliphanta snails

and the katipo
clinging to waterlogged webs

and peketua, paddling,
holding up their heads.

Janet Newman

Like daily bread

I wrote like daily bread,

A line of surf, verse breaking into foam

A cotton thread, bundling twisting and knotting

A fence line along a battened ridge,

Catching shreds of sheep's wool, grasses and twigs

Opening where the staples have pulled,

Beef cattle strayed onto the gravel road

I wrote lines like kites

Soaring and diving over Ruakaka beach dunes,

tails flicking, full stops

Lines that wove with harakeke

tangled with weighted nylons

courted with flashy silver lures

stretched braids to breaking point

and beyond

Lines that crossed and matted

fibrils clung, hung together, with clay

in pages, pale unbleached sheets and planes

Lines in pages

hollowing out a place, a space

of meaning shared

the exchanges we make

The loaves of bread we bake

and break

with lips of labyrinths of jam

And marmellata

because I wrote because I wrote I'm alive

porque escribi porque estoy vivo. Enrique Lihn 1928-1988

Piet Nieuwland

A Contemplation of Girls

i They wear their school uniforms like
haute couture, each embellished
with the limits of their imagination.

ii. Well-brushed, their hair suggests
long January days at Papamoa
or Whangapoua, or on the ski-
fields of Gstaad where they gather
to count their blessings.

iii. Draped in green, the Willows
make hang-dog sculptures
as though in trouble for staying
out way past their curfew,
celebrating with crepuscular sparrows.

iv. Only the crusts survive. Upper
or lower, there's no distinction
when notices from the bank
disturb the delicate balance.

v. No-one steps in the same river
as another. The ornate decorations
of their educated minds clash
and resound like cymbals
behind the brass section,
deafening everyone in reach,
bringing the symphony to an end.

vi. They rest on their Laurels,
their willowy souls satisfied.

Laurice Gilbert