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GERMANY

ATLANTA



**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

REVIEW

The poets of Iraq have a message for the world:

FLOWERS of FLAME
Unheard Voices of IRAQ

In bookstores now!
from Michigan State University Press

POETRY 2008

Jamie Morehead Anderson

Grand Prize Winner

VOL. XV, No. 1



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ATLANTA REVIEW

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Welcome

We have *two* amazing new arrivals to celebrate this fall! First of all, our new book of Iraqi poetry, *Flowers of Flame*, has just been published by Michigan State University Press. The first book of Iraqi poetry since the war began in 2003, *Flowers of Flame* is being endorsed by Billy Collins, Sam Hamill, Thomas Lux, and Brian Turner, Iraq war veteran and author of *Here, Bullet*. All your favorites from the IRAQ Issue will be there, and more! Once again, *Atlanta Review* is honored to be chosen by the poets of Iraq to bring their message to the world.

Next, the "Home Pond," *Atlanta Review*'s unique web site, has been replanted and restocked with stunning new water lilies, frogs, fish—and of course, poems! Beautiful pictures of our flowers and fish have replaced the cartoons of the old Pond. All our Grand Prize-winning poems are there, along with samples from every section of our 10th Anniversary Anthology, *The Gift of Experience*. And you can now order, subscribe, and donate using credit cards and PayPal.

Our "letterary" arts in this issue begin, fittingly, with the letter "A" and move on to explore the comforts and ironies of "home" and the temptations of paradise. Poetry 2008 will take us to exotic locales from Lhasa to Marrakesh. Jamie Morewood Anderson, our Poetry 2008 Grand Prize winner, brings us home again in her beautifully realized poem "Winter Milk." In the last section we relive childhood's heroes, puzzles and games before taking flight on the paper and ink that brought us here in the first place.

Enjoy the trip, and be sure to visit our *new* Home Pond at www.atlantareview.com!

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

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First Love Letter

A, you were my first:
 I remember your strange angular
 red face looking up at me
 my fingers tracing along
 on the wood block of you:
 you stood for something, but what?

A, you flashcard into my memory:
 I remember a safe teepee to dwell in
 before I moved on to B, C or D
 or tried to figure out the mystery of X
 the odd nature of Q or the sinister Z
 & never mind the craziness of K

A, you with your 3 sturdy lines:
 you saved me, reminded me of home
 when I was scared to open the door
 of my kindergarten classroom
 I saw you above the blackboard
 standing there waiting for me
 at the beginning of the alphabet

A, you showed me the 25 others:
 but you went first, pointing the way
 unafraid, so all of us followed pushing
 & shoving each other along the thin blue-edged
 line wading brave into the deepest paper quiet
 drift of white knowing we'd make up stories
 for the rest of our lives under your spell

Arlene Tribbia

Love Spell

Some things are indelible,
like black ink, not just on paper
but on the parchment of the soul.
If you are one of the fortunate
the imprint is etched earlier
rather than later. As a boy I sat

beside him, the well-scarred desk,
the green-shaded lamp, watched him
dip the nib into the black well,
scratch out his *Baïkar* editorials,
his poems, his short stories
in Mesrob Mashtot's script—
letters of the Armenian alphabet,
exotic, ancient, cryptic. Mesrob Mashtots,

ascetic Armenian monk, who set out
to translate the Bible into the tongue
of his people after a vision, it was said,
in which the hand of God revealed the alphabet,
the written word birthed in letters of fire.

Spell my name, hairig, I asked, and with
a flourish of a conductor's baton he
dipped the pen. *Spell "love," grandpa*,
I want to see what it looks like. He smiled
with his eyes, tousled my thick, black hair—
janig (dear one), he whispered.

Krikor N. Der Hohannesian

My Grandfather's Tomatoes

I still see them, round and shining, red,
pale green, and all the nameless shades between,
still smell that back-of-throat itch from the leaves,
and feel the heft of shears in my small hand
while he loops twine around the stakes and stems.
He'd hoist me up to pick the ripest, then
we'd run it to the kitchen, find the knife,
and slice through skin and seedy flesh—the sweet
and acid meat would lie wet on rye bread.
We'd have our feast. He'd smile, boyish-like,
to watch me eat, and like me, wipe his lips
with wrist and back of hand. Now I'm as old
as he was then. But when I hold one ripe
tomato in my grasp, he smiles again.

Jed Myers

Dagestan

The truth in your heart has only one motherland.
Only one road will bring you to your home,
Only one cherished road
Which was given to you with life.

Many cities gaze at me.
I change them like cash.
I move around the world with my small bag
Packed with nothing but my wrinkles and years.

My Guneb! My Dagestan! My dear home!
The ember eyes in the fireplace,
The familiar aroma of bread,
The smell of smoke,
And the warmth of my mother's hands—are all with me.

Your home sets you free to thousands of roads,
But only one will bring you back.
It is the one that brings you to the graveyard, friend!
Where the voices of your ancestors are strict and smooth.

Magomed Ahmedov

Translated from Dagestani into Russian
by Valery Belanesky

Translated from Russian into English by
Galina Rahma and Sadek R. Mohammed

The Porchsitters

I wave to the porchsitters on my walk through the neighborhood,
couples loving their small dogs and purple flowers,
waiting for grandchildren and the daily newspaper,
their crimes behind them, all edges gone as they wave and smile,
dreaming of garden hoses and wet concrete,
a scatter of starlings in the short wet grass,
tracing the white contrails of jets through blue skies,
squinting through cataracts, burping their soft meals, puffing on long
filtered cigarettes,
moving through kitchens and bedrooms and back to the porches
where the yellow bees loll in hanging baskets,
searching for sweetness with their watery eyes and soft bodies,
in the droning monotone of days.

Andy Roberts

Ode to People Who Wave

You folks who wave have all kinds of waves,
the north-south wrist flip, quick and flapping;
the sing-song, five finger spread, side to side
wave straight out of a simpler time; or
the non-waving wave, the uncomplicated
raised hand held still, as if stopping time.

There is the head flip wave, big with men
and boys hell-bent on becoming men,
the tip of the hat, the faux military
salute, the thumbs up, the double thumbs
up, the "you're the man" point-wave.
I especially like the small child puppet
wave, how you pinch all five fingers together
several times—as if honking a nose, speaking
your "hello" from the back car window
or across the department store. All of which
tell the wavee the same important message:
I see you, and I am glad to see you.

You are always overshadowed, aren't you
by those who honk, those who "give the finger,"
but, thankfully, you are out there. Just today,
pulling out of my subdivision, one of you, a man,
you stranger wielding a tractor near Division's edge
found me in my van and stopped to
lift your hand. Surprised, I shot
my hand up, out the window instilling as much
gratitude, as much fellow-feeling as I could
in the simple facing of my palm to yours, desperate
to complete the connection. Why?

What is it about this affable acknowledgement
from strangers that stirs in me such emotion?
A sadness in the blood comes to attention
each time, as if I were some ascetic
emerging after years from a cave,

my first human contact unsolicited,
small kindness, to say welcome back,
remember yourself, brother, as one
of us, the human community. And I,
blinking through the bright sun,
can hardly believe my luck.

Richard Foss

Suburban Compline

These hours are palpable, they are velvet banners
parting in front of you like carwash ribbons,
sluicing in through your car's open windows,
a languid tide of ink. These hours bear up to you
the somnolent scents of this drowsing town,
an ozone incense of air conditioners,
the breath of plants snoozing in peated gardens,
thick spice of lawns lovingly mowed and seeded
on Sundays before churchtime.

These are anchoritic hours, haunted only by the housecat
stepping from one cool puddle of lamplight
to another, when your headlights distort neighbors' bushes
into zodiacs and savage topiaries, searching
each parked car you pass for anyone else awake.

In the driveway, with the car switched off,
the quiet rushes in, an orchestral fill of many parts.
From down the street comes the white noise
of sprinklers switching on in succession,
each sweeping a Poisson distribution of dots
etching a deeper, random darkness
into parabolae of sidewalk and street.
The electric sound of sprinkler heads
like battalions of marching feet,
approaching, building,
towards a temporary stillness.

Your car wickers and ticks itself to sleep,
still divesting itself of its highway heat.

The sound of your door closing
sets a dog somewhere to barking, once.

In the mulchy night, rinsed with cricketsound
and manmade rain, you at last take off your shoes,
your socks. You will be the only one all day
to feel how fond this grass is of your naked skin.

You crush the clipped blades, feeling dew
ooze between your toes, as the lush scent of the jungle plants
on neighbor's porch wells up around you,
winds you in its tender tendrils,
takes you in,
you a wild thing, too.

Mark Aiello

My Mother's Magazines

In the *Saturday Evening Post*
Norman Rockwell made the world safe.
Cute red-headed tykes
And kindly big-bellied cops,
Docs peering over spectacles
And pretty wives in flowered frocks
Waiting for hubbies wearing hats
And topcoats. Grownups who knew
What to do and how to act.

Better Homes and Gardens showed
The houses of our dreams,
Comfortable, crammed with chintz
And maple, fresh mums in
Milkglass bowls.
Sunlight poured in windows,
Beds were unwrinkled,
Varnished turkeys reclined
On platters garnished with sunset yams.

The body spoke chummily
In the *Reader's Digest*,
Joe's Kidney, Joe's Heart
Diagramming their functions
While Humor in Uniform
Insinuated even war
Can give you a laugh
If you look on the bright side
And condense the rest.

The *Ladies Home Journal*
Insisted marriage could be saved.
Togetherness was pasted on the sky
Like a gold star and nobody
Went hungry, nobody died.

Joan Colby

Age of Discovery, Discovery of Age

My granddaughter studies me as a scientist would.
Her small fingers
probe and push
veins in my feet
the way I've seen her take a twig
to a bug in the backyard:
observant
objective
without emotion,
a little pressure
here
a small movement
there.
Does it wriggle? Curl? Crawl? Pop back in place?

She studies old photos
of me with the same intent,
but here a bit of incredulity enters in.
"You? This is you?"
First the photo, then my face,
then the photo again:
"But the picture doesn't crinkle."

And for a moment I can almost feel
my firm and youthful skin.
I smile, and in my memory no creases form
no wrinkles crack
the picture-perfect glow
that once was mine
and now belongs
to her.

Dorothy Stone

La Cité des Enfants

*La Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, built on the
foundation of the old slaughterhouses at La Villette,
contains an excellent children's museum.*

—Paris for Parents

In the city of infants

new thoughts are
even now
being thought

new buildings built
by small workman
determined resourceful

—only those 3-5 *ans* allowed!

With foam blocks
they build, not a house,

but a temple/a dangerous tower
they climb atop
the toy crane

in ways expressly forbidden
by the stern signs they
cannot read

—these workers 3-5 *ans!!*

loading coal cars
then pushing them

with great glee

off their careful
tracks

Jesse Lee Kercheval

Rue des Batignolles

Bells

—over the traffic
—over the siren of the Fire & Rescue

Bells calling us

—from this world
—into another

toward

—a different nature of intervention
—of being saved

though no one's pace
down the street slackens

—the runners still run
one foot falling after another

—the walkers traverse the avenue
at the zebra crossing, looking both ways.

—the children in the park
climb the chain ladder

higher and higher
they rise, swaying, over Paris

—like the bells

—like the pigeons
taking off from the church tower

—like the planes rising
from *Charles DeGaulle*

headed, not for Heaven,
but home

Jesse Lee Kercheval

The Perfumer

I was twenty when my mother took me to see him.
He was French, silver-haired. He held my arm,
lifted it to his aquiline nose, sniffed the inside of my slender wrist
then nodded, scrawled a few things on a slip of parchment
in that Gallic hand: Rose Absolute, Ambergris,
I wish I could remember more, then one-by-one,
picked up the bottles, decanted viscous honey
into a slim blue vial. When he was finished
I touched the lip of the vessel,
smoothed a drop to my skin, inhaled
a scent like wine made by fairies,
like making love to the earth. Divine.
I wore it that whole year, the sweet musk,
under a sweater on my way to class,
over the soft pulse in my neck
where men pressed their lips.
And when my friend's mother died,
I wore it to her funeral.
It carried me—a sort of cloud
I walked in, a balm of certainty.
Now, all that's left, an absence, distilled,
fragrance of longing, that ache we walk with all our lives.

Danusha Laméris

Paradise

Words like *redolent* do not exist there,
as in "my hands, redolent of garlic,
held the poblano like an offering,"
as in, "her prose, redolent of Proust,
is a river with many tributaries,"
as in, "the scent of meadow pink,
redolent of childhood's sugary powdered drink,
recalls blue skies, bare feet, Gulf breeze
layered with pine."

As a child I tasted the bitter,
astringent beautyberry, crushing the violet
fruits with fingers already stickered and stained
from dewberries that arched
beneath a pasture fence. One berry is as good
as another, I must have thought, but
learned an early lesson.
We all grazed then, our breath
redolent of green things

gathered from fence lines, gardens—
stiff, tender horns of okra with seeds
globular and slick in their crunchy pericarp coats,
purple hull peas bulging and meaty, their red
eyes lined up in snug, unzipped jackets,
clear droplets of honeysuckle nectar pulled
with the string-like style along
the flower's throat to calyx end.

All this we have lost is the true paradise—
the mornings we balanced on thin limbs,
our delicate hands brushing past thick leaves,
around the plump fig pecked by mockingbirds, sweet
sticky syrup oozing from its wounds to glaze
those fingers reaching for perfection, the cool
magenta flesh of the ripest fruit
unmolested by bird or worm.

Anita Dugat-Greene

What if Jesus Had Spent Forty Days in the Dessert?

A poem I love illustrates oxymoron by describing
a wasp flying into a bowl of cake batter
just before the mixer churns its *delicious death*.
And I'm praying this morning for a death
by pie, perhaps at the Country Fisherman,
just off Route 48 in Mendenhall, Mississippi,
where after the catfish and mustard greens buffet,
I'll meander to the dessert table, try to keep
my hands from trembling as I begin with coconut,
then add a piece of lemon meringue, then chocolate,
and finally pecan, until my plate is brimming bountifully
with pie. And I'll return to my table, ignore family
and friends, focused only on pie, and I'll fork in
the delicious fillings, mixing the yellow with the dark,
the nutty with the smooth, until my stomach hurts,
and then I'll eat some more, until the Rapture, until
I hear the angel voices singing the chorus of more gospel pie
in the sky. And I'll rise from my gorged body, look down
at the dessert table, missing, for a moment, the pies I have
to leave behind. I know there is

more to religion than pie, and the good news
describes God assuming human form to save us all;
flesh became word and that language was spread
all over the world, even to places like

Pass Christian, Mississippi, where
I had a mud-pie one August day in the early 80's
when a hurricane churned in the Gulf
and big waves splattered over the seawall.
The pie featured a layer of milk chocolate
over the crust, hiding sweetly beneath
the pecan filling. The storm was still a hundred
miles away and sea gulls struggled
south and gave up as I ate
my pie and noticed Jesus' face
staring back at me from a shining pecan.

I considered for a moment
the theological implications of consuming the Savior
before I gathered that last morsel with my fork and chewed.

Jesse Millner

La Florida

*In the midst of this world
we stroll along the roof of hell
gawking at flowers*

—Issa

The black ibis disappeared from the Nile Delta
because the Egyptians considered it holy
and buried it with their dead.

In the 19th century, white ibis and egrets
were hunted in the Everglades for their precious feathers.
It's all about subtraction in this fading paradise
where the cumuli still form mountains at dusk
when the wayward blue heron strays from the wetlands,
becomes a statue in my backyard.

I have often assumed the solitary birds
to be reincarnated haiku masters
reveling in the last light
when the western sky
glows cornflower blue
even as the east slips into darkness.
It's a tropical moment, an almost equatorial
slanting of light that Issa would appreciate
after his long days in the cold
watching his breath wither
from grey to invisibility over the brown fields.

Each night the wrists of mangroves thicken
their grip in the brackish water.

Each night the wading birds slow to shadow
in the shade of cloud-deflected moon.

But in this land of no seasons, there is nothing
to attach our sorrow to, not the bright mornings,

the thunderstorm afternoons, night stars and moon.
There is no fall here, when the leaves wither
like the dreams of old men. Worse, no winter
of barren fields for the mind to wander over
until it reaches the frozen beach
where seagulls sleep and ice-flecked
waves beat the shore.

There is only this
long summer of endless flowers:
La Florida, feast that ends in famine.

Jesse Millner

Valencias

Most of the trees are dead,
frost-killed or starved,
and what oranges there are,
are shrunken and feral
and green with regret.

It's a kind of mercy
how the saw palmetto
and fetterbush take the measure
of an abandoned grove
and love it surely into nothing.

Bees throb in their devotions
among the random spill of limb
and leaf. This is what paradise
would be if only we knew,
the blunt stink of dissolution

blooming to swallow
every best intention.
The Spanish leaves
in their silence know.
Precious things lead one astray.

Where there is no form,
there is no desire.
But all this stubborn persistence
still moves us, these
green oranges hidden

in branches like secret birds
that can be caught with a little salt
and eaten sour out of hand,
rarae aves whose bitterness
fills the heart with tears

anodyne sorrow
as true and good
as any promise of redemption.

John Blair

Las Sombras de Sevilla

for Linda

Which came first, despair or the cry
of the *Siguiriyas*? The Gypsy
swears he knew before he was born
the mark of the outcast
that began with original sin.

In the *bodega*, an eastern moon stakes
its claim on the young *gitano*'s guitar.
Someone buys him a Tio Pepe and another
until his brain absorbs the smoky shroud
of voices crowding the small bar.

Inside the cathedral, the candles are cold.
Strange minor chords swirl in drafts
around the transept windows.
No one has witnessed the virgin's tear
break loose from its stone mold, or

seen it roll down the aisle past the dust
of Columbus, and under the great doors.
Silent as river silt, it flows
beyond *pueblos* and vineyards, grapes
bitter-red and dark as old blood, before
spending itself in the Sea of Morocco.

Flint-honed nails ignite the strings
to a fiery *rasgueado* while endless day
dissolves in cognac and sherry and
a thousand years of memory,

the ancient air revealing
mosaics of Moorish towers and faces.
The hour is late. The *gitano*'s guitar
stilled in the turning air.
On the *esquina* a small band of shadows.
He comes to them and together
they wind through the narrow passageways
of the Barrio Santa Cruz,
carrying centuries in their blood
where home is nowhere, nowhere else.

Gloria Lewyn

These Hands

These hands. Today they touch glass
on an outdoor table in Venice as
my wife laughs and we wait for our
daughter to taste the first iced tea
of her life. Other days these hands
turn paper, write words, gesture
to assist the expression of an idea,
and make food: the hands of the civil
man I've become over time. At other
times these hands, delicate but knowing, explore
regions of flesh that this woman gives over
to me, and to herself. Now they
rest patiently as we finish our lunch
in this elegant ancient city; these hands
want to touch the stones of these water-
washed buildings. Rest, civility, patience,
hands of love, softness. These hands,
part of this same body, once carried a hot M-16
in a country in another part of the world.
They were young hands, they were dirty,
strong, and deadly, hands that could
assemble and disassemble the weapons in sixty
dark seconds. After emptying six magazines
from the M-16, I saw that the palm of
my left hand smoked from the scalded flesh.
These hands are healed now, they rest,
and they touch my daughter's face.

Paul Batista

Levitation Gone Wrong

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! An ecstasy of fumbling....

—Wilfred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est"

I.

It turns out we'd been tear-gassed together
at the Levitation of the Pentagon, 1967,
and as the visiting Great Man stands
surrounded by a punch bowl circle,
I can't stop myself from pushing our bond:
"The Potomac really stunk, didn't it?"
He shrugs, gives the slightest sigh.
"We were like this parade of Santas," I go on,
"Chanting, 'Ho, Ho, Ho...Chi Minh.'"
Nobody laughs...because he doesn't,
and I get the message to just...shut...up.
"Hippie chicks," he eventually allows,
his smile savoring some lost promise.
"They were the only reason I was there."
Now comes laughter at this witticism,
a certified *bon mot* from the quotable,
which combines a rebuke to the suck-up
with fair notice that his potency lives.
He turns to a smiling woman in silk
who, even forewarned, leans from the waist.

II.

The autumn afternoon went from warm dusk
to cool dark so quickly it was as though
the planet had conspired to spin faster.
Shells landed behind us, soft, on-target
canisters trailing plumes of pale yellow
(the Great Man at least agrees on that).
Ranks of the 101st Airborne boys laughed
from behind their green masks at us,

the unequipped Armies of the Night
brought low, in full retreat now, crying,
stripping t-shirts to serve as half-ass veils.

An *ecstasy of fumbling*? Perhaps,
but our coughs were trivial next to Owen's.

We coughed nonetheless, speed-crawling
across endless Pentagon parking lots,
porch dogs with no business on a hunt,
gasping on curbed islands of grass

as routed Yippies ran past shouting
Che this and *Revolution* that...all in mere
tear gas, a distant cousin to mustard gas,
the Great War's scourge—that burned lungs,
blistered exposed skin, blinded, that sank
a generation of hollow-eyed young men
onto park benches all across England.

III.

Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves
convalesced near Edinburgh in 1918,
Graves shell-shocked and so sexually confused
yet loyal still to the lost cause of slaughter
in the name of Victoria's demented kin.

Sassoon even drafted a letter to Parliament
decrying the Scarlet Majors, but Graves, sensing
the hand of Bertrand Russell, repressed it,
all while Owen wrote "Anthem for Doomed Youth"
in those summer months at Craiglockhart,
a brownstone fortress of a hospital, the building
still there but now with double-paned windows,
a trendy, retro landmark for an urban college,
last stop on the 23 Line of Lothian transport
whose drivers "deserve the right to work
without fear of assault," the route winding
first down from the Royal Mile before
traversing the neighborhoods where both
Harry Potter and Grand Theft Auto were born
before up, up to Craiglockhart's hill perch,

the hill Owen left later that summer when he returned
to his unit, his duty, the Front, his death
with the Artists' Fuseliers only days before Armistice,
the hill from which Edinburgh Castle
and even the Firth are still visible as a horizon world,
a cardboard cut-out of a place somehow at peace,
the same view they must have so enjoyed
when winds swept the choking coal dust to sea.

Rupert Fike

Day of Rest

Today I'd rather argue
about the way
steaks should be cooked
than about the war in Iraq.
I'd rather watch the squirrels
leap from tree to tree
in a mid-air ballet
than turn on the TV
to the latest toll of dead
soldiers, never mind
civilian mothers,
fathers, brothers,
sisters. I'd rather
sit on my stoop
and wave
at the passing cars
than read the newspaper
advertising everything
we shouldn't want
even for free.
I'd rather watch my son
shoot baskets,
my daughter ride her bike,
than invite sadness
and fury
and the frustration
of knowing stupidity
sometimes wins.
I'd rather watch
my wife pulling weeds
looking beautiful
making little grunts
as she stoops
and tell my neighbor

who sits beside me
claiming he knows
secrets of tenderizing
meat that he's crazy
than weep, weep,
weep.

Neil Carpathios

But What Do You Really Want for Your Birthday You Ask

Kiss me like a meathook.
Make your lips a bouquet

of razor blades. Touch me
with fingers that burn

like glowing tips of cigarettes.
Look at me with pitchfork eyes,

flatten me like a sledgehammer.
Bowl a perfect game with your body,

I'll be the pins.
Tie me to the train tracks of your tongue.

Rattle the furniture of my bones,
rearrange me in the room of desire.

Remove my skin, peel me like a grape,
nail your arms to my arms

in a permanent embrace.
Swing the wrecking balls of your breasts

across my face, let the nipples poke me
in my eyes. Whip me with your long

hair's rope and mash me
in the vice grip of your thighs.

Crack my shell and spill me out.
Scramble, flip me in your

sizzling skillet.
Chew me up.

Neil Carpathios

The V

Always skinny,
one morning you couldn't
button the top of your jeans.

The zipper wouldn't go
the final inch,
leaving instead a little V

of belly where the stamped
brass button fell short
of its rightful place,

forlorn
button and buttonhole
curling gently toward me.

And our baby,
starting to claim its own space,
became staggeringly real.

From that humble start
our boys grew one by one
to occupy your body

then our entire life,
leaving us, in their aftermath,
overwhelmed, buoyed, wrung out, amused, overjoyed.

Leaving each of us,
and us together,
staggered, but real.

Mark Belair

Wedding Ring

What made it happen, what collision
sent the glittering mineral gushing
in veins, branched and hot
as buried lightning?

How foolishly protective
I was at first, timid
about clinking it against teaspoon
or coffee can, buckle
of the dog's collar, thinking
its clear shine could be marred
by the nicks of everyday life.

Now I see it's good that gold
is soft enough to be engraved
by the light touch of day after day.

Karina Borowicz

I've enjoyed being an animal with you

Curling into your body's heat in deep January cold,
both of us pushing our shoulders through the wind,

rubbing against the leather of each other's scars,
just two yoked mammals

slogging around the muddy track,
straining to turn the wheel

that grinds the wheat
and pulls the water from the ground,

the steam of our separate breaths forming
a fog through which we have no way to see

what's looming right before us.
I've enjoyed that.

Tom Chandler



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Year of Lhasa

Around the yaks' necks, golden flecks of sunlight fall on timbrel bells. Leavening the city with prayer, pilgrims arrive each day in droves. Dust clouds rise like incense off unpaved roads. Monks chant prayers, making ritual stairs to heaven from palace, marketplace and monastery. Rancid yak butter tea stinks in musty shops and cafés.

Wind whimpers through cracks in the wall. Bits of sod roof fall onto our bed. All day the dread of sunset and the cold of night. Dagger-like icicles cling to laundry hung drying on the balcony. Two Chinese men play elephant chess while keeping one eye on us, the range of the Himalayas wrapped round us all—stark and gray save for their snow caps, each peak sharp as the angel shark's backward curving teeth.

All day pilgrims wind their way around the Jokhang Temple, chanting and spinning hand-held prayer wheels. Nowhere to go—this city always their destination—they move in slow motion, some so old or sick they've come to die in this sacred place.

Before nightfall, they settle by the river, light their fires with yakpats, play homemade lutes and reed pipes, drink butter tea while their yaks graze and the haze of their fires rises like incense over the river, drifting with their prayers and the flashing shorebirds on the shifting wind across the Himalayas and the closed border to the exiled Dalai Lama.

Around the necks of the young girls, ivory pearls of moonlight fall on stringed shells. Every night every one of them dreaming of that thousand-mile flight.

Diana Woodcock

Marrakesh, 1970

Here in the désert, desire is magnified
and the wind blows dry as bones.
We cannot read signs or directions, Arabic

script a succession of scimitars and fish hooks.
We are unconcerned, the world not yet dangerous.
Jots and dots texture the calligraphy

the way slubbing characterizes a shirt
of raw silk. Lines flow to the edge
and into the open, everything an invitation.

We amble the *souks*, summer dresses
and bare legs, the only women so uncovered,
so brazenly bare-faced. The children, like children

everywhere, wear curiosity on their faces.
Through the labyrinth of stalls we wander
past storms of men in *djellabas*; they scribble

the air with conversation, follow us with their eyes
but when they drift toward us, we hurry away.
Must exotic always signal danger, and which is it

luring us deeper into the *medina*? But nothing
can tarnish the dazzle and we bargain for *tagines*
and copper pots, a camelhide valise, its dark interior

a cave of desert air. Flies buzz mounds of dates,
a pyramid of pistachios. Yellow dust talcums our feet.
A woman purchases semolina and lemons, a sack of figs. But

when we raise a camera, she tugs her child away.
Above the veil, dark eyes stab the air. This morning
in the square, drawn by the sweetness of a lute,

we crowded close. From an oval basket a cobra—
the hooded head swaying up and at us. Sweat snaking
between our breasts, we ran, the tight knot of the crowd

slowing our escape. Behind us, the laughter of men
and the lute, persisting. At the rug weaver's tent, the proprietor
motions us in but his eyes are too like the cobra's. Still

we linger, entranced when he unrolls corridors of cobalt
and madder, arabesque and cartouche, prayer rugs,
every *mihrab* a doorway to paradise. At the Atlas Café

we order tea that arrives in pewter pots, mint leaves
squinted in the bottom, steam rising like a *jinni*—
but there is nothing more to be wished for.

At dusk, a final call to prayer and the men disappear.
Chanting sounds out the syllables of the city. Around us,
the desert sifts down to shadow; to the south, mountains

close in the way skyscrapers announce evening
in the city. On the bus back to Casablanca,
the hum of rubber on the road and a song

from a boombox—something about love, we surmise,
yet even here, the melody tells us,
something sad, something gone wrong.

Amy Dengler

Pandora Speaks

for my aunt, Jozefa Bierzalo

In the beginning
Carpathian cake slid
from the wood stove
awaiting its chocolate frost.
Beets hibernated in silt
near the Vistula,
hot honey turned vodka into gold,
and stencilled snowflakes shimmered
over your only daughter's bed.
That day in December,
despite martial law,
geese zigzagged freely
in the snow, and steam rose
from the muzzles of horses,
their log carts piled with hay.
Back then, your daughter
didn't dream of London:
England still floated
off the far coast of Europe,
remote as Atlantis.

You welcomed us, your first Americans,
past the pigs and rabbits burrowed
in straw, to a room you called *izba*,
and spooned black tea into glasses
with rationed sugar. You beamed at me,
touched my cold cheek. I answered
in English, half-mute with ignorant love.

Then the mysteries of verb and noun
were revealed to me. Then came free elections
and border guards waved us through.
Satellite dishes bloomed on balconies, water sloshed
through new pipes, roads swallowed poplars, tractors
outpaced horses, ads for internet access fluttered

along country lanes. Then your daughter learned English
and hoarded duty-free perfumes. And though no angels
ravaged the land with swords of fire,
the apocalypse swept through your village store,
filling its shelves with Windex and Snickers.

You once marked your days by birth and slaughter.
Like an almanac, you knew July meant gooseberries
and August sugar beets. Checkered rabbits once spilled
from your swollen vinyl purse in September,
and threaded mushrooms hung in your pantry
like spongy brown thumbs.

Now, like a border guard, you dismiss me:
Bez powrotu, "without return."
Unconjugated, impersonal,
it's a phrase to be stamped in a passport
when the holder is banished.

Is my sin so original it can't be named?
Is it the peanut butter I once brought you,
the wedding years ago where I lost a shoe,
dancing with drunks? Maybe
it's the *thank you* and *please*
your daughter repeated after me.
Or is it my love of Warsaw, city
of pizza and billboards, where garlands
of neon blossom each night?

Ciociu, you know I can't narrow the roads again.
Nor can I ban imported Chinese beets.
It would take forever to demolish all satellite dishes
or unlearn the Polish I've acquired.
I can't play our lives in reverse, make
the borders slam shut again
and your daughter reappear in her room upstairs,
bored, counting snowflakes stamped in silver.

Karen Kovacik

The Peaceable Kingdom

The light is not heavy but caressing, blue
smoothing your skin like the hands of a nurse,
the pressure of depth hardly felt
except for the pain in your ear
you can sneeze away. No longer sinking,
but weightless, you glide in the pleasant chum
of your bubbles, supple as a sea fan
shimmies in the current,
and when you arch your back and lower
your head, you drift
into the peaceable kingdom
thirty feet down where parrot fish
lazily turn staring at you
two inches away. No fright faces here, no sudden
scatter. If you breathe slowly
and imagine you belong to the sea,
schools of yellowtail will circle
and take you with them. Once, with my ten
year old daughter, I swam in a school of tarpon
off Indian Key. They rose out of the blackness, great
silvery lamps shining
beneath us, seven of them, eight, ten,
a bank of lights closing with casual acceptance
as if we could ride them
like carnival horses, the calliope of bubbles rising
around us, a carousel spinning away
under the stars,
and we turned with the gleaming fish slowly
in arabesque shapes
back toward the blue of the shallows
where the surface shook its gray blanket of air
as if to say, "Hello, come home."

Ron De Maris

Revelation: Shatterings at Canterbury

If God is a light inaccessible,
a light beyond our comprehension, then
how shall mere eyes see? Pierce our walls
with windows, but shade them, shade them. At Chartres,
light seeps ruby, light pools sapphire. At Sainte Chapelle,
it's dazzling as diamond, all *lux* and *lumen*,
splendor in the glass.

If Christ lights the world,
they argued at the time, then his mother
is a window bodying him through, flesh
a translucent shade making the light
bearable. Even so, cathedral on cathedral,
window to window, the sky still blisters
before the Magi, and incandescence
shocks the sleeping shepherds.

If God is love
as we've been told, consider well the love
that breaks that glass, window on bright window,
idolatry on idolatry: *Lord,*
what a work was here! What clattering
of glasses! Let the light stream through direct,
they might have said, so every eye can see
God for himself.

Thus at Canterbury's shrine
perspicacious rector Richard Culmer,
known to his friends—and this is gospel truth—
as "Blue Dick," climbed *the citie ladder, near*
sixty steps high, with a whole pike in his hand
ratling down proud Becket's glassy bones,
illumination blazing out his eyes.

Nathalie F. Anderson

New York City Sandhog: The Third Water Tunnel, 1997

Work begun in 1970, to be completed in 2020

Like medieval stonemasons laboring
on a grand cathedral, the work of the father's
the work of the son—
everyone here's the son or nephew
of a sandhog. Irish, West Indians.

Nicknames passed down
like a prized gold watch—some modified
over time: Buster begot Chipper; Hard Rock
became Soft Rock; Ace, Deuce.

Still the most dangerous work,
despite machines to replace explosives,
hand tools, and horses.
Eighty stories of rock above,
rock four hundred million years old
objecting to intrusion—

being where no one's been—
the need for kinship, bonding,
sandhog to sandhog.
Tunneling, Westchester to the four boroughs,
will span a human lifetime.

Boots on, earplugs in,
bundled in flannel, wool, a yellow
jumpsuit and slicker, the descent
eight hundred feet in a metal cage—
connecting shafts and valve chambers
the size of zeppelin hangers—

a pearly haze, air poisonous with fumes,
silica dust that penetrates

filters on respirators—
noise enough to rupture eardrums.

No one lingers under a shaft: falling
rock, ice, tools, lunch pails—a cigarette lighter
can go through a sandhog,
head to foot, hard hat on or not.

Down the line till the conduit's done,
cemented over, shaft covered, maybe
a parking lot or small park above.
A billion gallons a day will scream
through the new tunnel

and no one will be here again.
That's why it's mapped, notes taken,
so engineers not yet born
will know the faulting.

For now, knee-deep muck to slog through,
dripping walls, weak rock banded to sound,
a ceiling studded with bolts
to ward off a cave-in,
metal stretchers with body bags
propped against the wall—

Smitty, from Granada, the latest—
his real name, Thomas Noel.
Always a smile, nothing got to him.
His leg ripped off. Cardiac arrest.
Hauled a mile, tunnel to shaft.
The mayor came to his wake.

A life for every mile,
already ahead of schedule:
twenty miles, twenty-four dead.
Only yesterday, another. Forty to go.

Wanda Praisner

Smith Canyon

Kerr County, Texas

That summer when loss took me by the throat
I came home to the parched Texas hills, in late
August a bleached bone-color, the grasses swallowed,
white caliche roads shrouded in thin dust.

I drove to the canyon, a great scar—beautiful
in the way of a scar, in the story it tells—
where a child can trace the stone swirl of a mollusk
big as her father's foot, and the cliffs are whales

that swim endlessly, tattoos of humped and eyeless
trilobites embellishing their flanks;
where along the steeper sides the untouched ledges
tease with their pale stippling.

The mind canvasses them, lies along them,
crouches in crevices cool with the chalky smell
of millennia. Comanches camped here,
chipping arrowheads at the water's edge.

Under the persistent wheeling of the buzzards
I walked the rocky shore, sank deep in the dark water
until green and fingering reeds brushed my hair, glad
that once the cliffs had whispered

with the scuttling of a million blind crustaceans.
I was their sister, the warm sun whitening
my bones, the curve of my spine
another decoration in the limestone floor.

Noel Crook

Now

I remember your archipelago spine, nape of knee,
inner ankle's secret spot, tender instep arch,
places in the body's uncharted waters, new worlds
lying green and deep off winter's bow

and now, spring. Boneache thaw, warm wind sough
through snow-scoured woods, bud swell
on bare branches, birdsong and blossom
and all that cruel choir of memory and desire

sung into the air's dredged honeycomb. Warm wax,
pollen, semen, slept-in sheets. Something like
hope opens folded wet wings and I find I'm alive
after all, weeping into laundry and lunchboxes.

Rebecca Foust

Dot-to-Dot

A rope of light
leaves my chest,
pulled by some
anchor's lead lung.

I wake up on sky-blue linoleum,
shaky, like when I had
chicken pox at thirty,
thighs shrunk from days in bed.

It's been years since
the last time I died.
I rise again
into the world

of fly swatter, salt
shaker, toothbrush.
All coated in
some holy varnish.

Dipped in milk-bright silence
the ceramic lobster dish
guards the keys to my car
on the chrome-legged table.

I laugh at all that naked light
and leave. Go get some fresh air.
Take a walk down the street.
Every face is a beam of light

connecting everything I see
in an angelic dot-to-dot.
I'd forgotten the world is God's body.
Too long between lives, it's been years

since my last bath in light
and I'd forgotten how it goes,
how, every time, I drown
again in common miracles.

Michael Kriesel

In Memoriam Steve Irwin

They knew you over there before we found you here, at home.
Your enthusiasm spoke to them. Your language bounced
like a marsupial, wonder un-pouched, unconstrained,
nothing mousy, nothing faint. Monotreme eggs cracked
in each monologue, hatching unique words of joy.

You loved the ugly ones as much as the plain lovely.
Flinging yourself full length onto grim-mouthed lizards,
submersible factories of teeth and cracking cranky whips
of venom. But the mad rodeo sought to teach us love.
Too easy to admire the arching flight of light-boned bird;

you looked hard and pointed out the obscure, rough-headed,
gnarly-skinned, foul-breathed. Smells and slime and grunge.
Kids loved you first, for they relish mud and mess and freaks.
You never lost that young understanding, or converted to drear
austere order. Those short shorts implied eternal schoolboy, but

you were our skilful teacher, sketching, indicating unsightly worlds.
A gentle heart-shaped ray reached up to love, pierced that eager skin.
The world is quieter, sadder, since that moment when you touched.
Who now will speak for the ugly, the damp, the weird? Exclaim,
and know explanation as revelation, an unforced hymn of joy?

PS Cottier

Song for Rana

*The frog (Rana, of the family Ranidae)
is disappearing all over the world.*

Come back to our dreams with your cold and warty skin
your sideways eyes
your played hands clothespin-fingered,
the liteness of your open thighs
ballooning of your singing throat
alarming
alarming

We knew before the forests came
and went that you were magic.
We'll look past your crude disguise,
we told you. Fetch the golden ball
and you shall sleep upon our pillows singing
buttercup
buttercup

We wove you in, we made you songs,
mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
We thought you were unpleasant but we did,
mm-hmm.
A prince of a fellow, all in all,
we listened for you spring and fall
mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

*When it was midnight, I held my breath
and kissed him handsome.
He waltzed me to my room.
Kick your shoes off, do not fear,
bring that bottle over here,
he sang, and I did. Outside,
under a black and silver sky
the voices of a thousand frogs
rang like muffled bells.*

But who needs the frog
when the prince is underneath?
we asked ourselves,
netting frogs from their dank ponds
by the thousands. We'd hand one,
pickled in formaldehyde,
limp as a potholder,
to any biology student
who'd mine for the gible heart,
the intestines rolled neatly as socks in a suitcase.

Such uses they found
for your body, Rana!
We've seen what makes you tick.
We know what makes you croak.

And now you answer
with an awful silence.

Please. Don't go.
We want you back.
We see now what we've broken.
We didn't mean to break it
break it break it. We didn't
mean to break it.

Charlotte Muse

Pigeon Lady

The one on my street
has stepped out of all
the pantheons, disguised

in faded jackets and knitted
caps. She appears daily
to look after these small ones.

If I walk too close
she stops, stands motionless
as a tree, or a god. The people

from Lincoln Park push
past her, past the birds,
in search of hip vintage

and cheaper rent. See their
heels and fitted coats,
their manufactured hair.

How visible they are, how blind,
missing the tousled one
who keeps this street awash

in flutter. She pauses,
opens her bag. It's a quiet
mind that gathers grain,

that remembers the hunger
of unloved birds. The soft nut
of her face bends toward

beauty: see the pigeons,
mottled and barred, as infinitely
variable as snowflakes, strutting

and bowing on lavender feet,
circling her with a skirt
of feathers. She moves, the skirt

flames and scatters, and the air
is suddenly nerved with
a hundred small wings.

Teresa Scollon

How My Mother Loves Flowers

First thing she shows me is her morning glories,
seedlings in Dixie cups, her little blue children.

Long ago she planted bulbs: narcissus and tulip.
She made a warm dark of herself and sprouted

homunculi, five little bulbs. She loved how they sprang
for the light above, but once they emerged

they lingered too low to the ground. This bores her.
There are roses but they are too rich for her blood,

too steeped in red; those sensuous pillows
wrapping their legs around the fence they love.

This frightens her—it's not the kind of communion
she's looking for. She wants to climb over walls

and fences, cover them, hide the nature of them.
It's the ambitious climbers she loves best,

morning glories, clematis, big showy blooms
with their pure arch, vault unencumbered,

straight up to the sun and its frantic heat,
flowers that cry, "Love me, love me, love me!"

that beg, "Shine full on my open face!"
that plead, "Make me believe it's still morning!"

Teresa Scollon

No Nest

ars poetica

It's not your standard, stick-built, mud-packed nest
for wren or robin in some common tree.
The words and ampersand seem to suggest
to certain birds the surest guarantee

for rest. Here, neon Bs and open vowels—
the hollow signage of the A and O—
provide a cozy roost. Inside, bath towels,
throw rugs, Wamsutta sheets, and shams are sold

to humans feathering their nests, while here,
high up above the carts and doors, in words,
a certain perverse group now perseveres
in maintaining this awkward home. These birds

have chosen—not a pin-oak, not a pond—
but this: their bed, their bath, and their beyond.

Elizabeth Klise von Zerneck