

**In This Issue**

A celebration of poetry from around the world!  
*Poetry 1996* International Poetry Competition Winners  
"The Mad Gardener's Song," fiction by Louis Phillips

ATLANTA



**ATLANTA  
REVIEW**

REVIEW



**ATLANTA GOLD**



**POETRY 1996**

*INTERNATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION  
GRAND PRIZE WINNERS*

**BORN OUT OF WENLOCK?**

*ORIGINS OF THE MODERN OLYMPICS*

VIII, No. 1



Fall/Winter 1996

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**ATLANTA  
REVIEW**

Volume III, Issue Number 1

# ATLANTA REVIEW

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## Welcome to *Atlanta Review*

And welcome to the world! In celebration of Atlanta's 100th anniversary Olympic Games, let us take you on a whirlwind tour of the globe. We'll drop in at a cafe in Berlin, an Irish pub in Donegal, and a monastery high in the Himalayas. Spend the night in Australia and watch the sun rise in Afghanistan. From the Ganges to the Andes, we'll explore the heights, depths and vast expanses of the human experience on this planet we all call home.

Our international guests will find America here, too. Pramila Venkateswaran reminds us that America is as exotic a place as any. Gunslingers, ad slogans, cattle rustlers, prom night, King Kong and other popular American icons get their just deserts. We close the issue with poems of the immigrant experience in this nation of immigrants.

In "Born out of Wenlock?" Alicia Stallings discovers that the modern Olympics and a great modern poet have roots curiously intertwined in a little village in Shropshire. In "The Mad Gardener's Song," Louis Phillips takes us on a flight of whimsy in defiance of the laws of physics and of short story writing.

The Olympic spirit was never meant to be confined to track and field. It is a little-known fact that the original Greek Olympics included competitions not only in sprinting and wrestling, but also in poetry, drama, music and the dance. *Atlanta Review* has revived this original Olympic spirit with its International Poetry Competition, *Poetry 1996*. The response was enthusiastic and overwhelming—over 5,000 entries from every place imaginable, from Iceland to New Zealand.

Our Grand Prize winners are as different as three poems can be—the soaring lyricism of R. T. Smith, Shannon Hamann's stunning confrontation of cultures, Steve Kowitz's intimate magic. Yet each has the quality of grandeur, a large and generous embrace, enfolding ideas and history, culture and geography, human emotion and the human spirit. Other *Poetry 1996* entries are indicated in the Contributors notes. You be the judge, and tell us which ones *you* liked best!

When *Atlanta Review* published its first issue two years ago, we promised to set out on Walt Whitman's open road, in search of the "rough new prizes" that Whitman spoke of. Amid murmurings that American poetry had gotten too smooth, too polished, too predictable,

we pledged ourselves to traverse an incredible variety of physical, human, and spiritual geography.

Never could we have dreamed of the "rough new prizes" that lay in store for *Atlanta Review*. In just two years it has become one of America's best-selling and best-loved literary magazines. Its authors include the winners of the world's major literary awards: the Nobel Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, England's Whitbread Prize, the Governor General's Award in Canada, Ireland's National Poetry Prize, and many more. And we have just learned that our Fall 1995 issue, edited by Memye Curtis Tucker, had the extraordinary honor of winning *two* Pushcart Prizes.

I want to extend our heartfelt thanks to *Atlanta Review's* worldwide family of readers, many of whom have given far more than our modest subscription to ensure that this kind of poetry continues to have "a local habitation and a name." We are also grateful to the thousands of wonderful writers who responded so generously to our call for "quality poetry of genuine human appeal." Without each of you, this undreamed-of success would never have been possible.

We have a great year ahead—a trip to the Caribbean in our Spring issue, edited by Lee Passarella and Barbadian poet Anthony Kellman, plus another "state of the art" issue from Memye Curtis Tucker. The response to *Poetry 1996* was so enthusiastic that we'll be making it an annual event. You'll find guidelines for *Poetry 1997* at the end of this issue.

Thanks again, and welcome to *Atlanta*!

*Dan Veach*  
*Editor & Publisher*  
*Atlanta Review*

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## Quarry Stars

Summer, and eighteen,  
when the nights came on like hunger,  
I'd go down to the quarry lake  
and wait for stars: the largest ones  
first—Vega, and toward the horizon,  
Cassiopeia, the Queen. Then,  
sitting very still, I'd begin  
to see more and more,  
dimmer and farther away:  
Draco, his dragon head  
midway up the northeastern sky,  
and above Draco's head, above Vega,  
the stars of Hercules. And when  
it seemed they all belonged  
to me, I'd dive deeply, cleaving  
the black rush of cold  
against my naked breasts, my belly  
and thighs, down into the numbing  
quiet, until my lungs tightened  
and I was forced back up—  
while all around me sparked  
a phosphorescence that the thrust  
of my body through water  
made visible—my limbs  
mining star after star after star.

*Pam Bernard*

## The Bookmobile

I spend part of my childhood waiting  
for the Stearns County Bookmobile.  
When it comes to town, it makes a  
U-turn in front of the grade school and  
glides into its place under the elms.

It is a natural wonder of late  
afternoon. I try to imagine Dante,  
William Faulkner, and Emily Dickinson  
travelling down a double lane highway  
together, country-western on the radio.

Even when it arrives, I have to wait.  
The librarian is busy, getting out  
the inky pad and the lined cards.  
I pace back and forth in the line,  
hungry for the fresh bread of the page,

Because I need something that will tell me  
what I am; I want to catch a book,  
clear as a one-way ticket, to Paris,  
to London, to anywhere.

*Joyce Sutphen*

## Home

Like sapphire and terracotta mingling in the Ganga,  
washing the tender limbs of new-borns and the petrified  
dead, we live in the melting of colors and continents  
as transparent as haze hanging above the river at dawn.

Can the river be holier than the heart, I wonder, here  
in the arms of another world, where pain is as clear  
as the squeal of a child dipped into winter waters,  
more real than corpses floating among white petals.

When the drunk who drags her raggedness on urban streets  
moves us as much as the naked children elbowed out  
of the golden-domed temple, and when the maple that changes,  
sheds, and springs again seduces us as much as the jasmine  
flowering in torpid heat, then the heart has found home.

*Pramila Venkateswaran*

## The Translator

### I.

At midnight he leans over ancient manuscripts,  
Bending other people's words to his will.  
In the morning at the meeting of nations,  
He croons into a microphone  
A heartbeat behind the speaker.  
How he turns a phrase can make,  
He likes to think,  
A world of difference.

Standing beside the trembling witness  
Assaulted by aggressive questions  
In words he cannot understand,  
He whispers into his ear  
Like a white dove.

In the Kaufman Auditorium of the 92nd Street Y,  
The cultured audience endures  
Mysterious stanzas until he,  
In his young-old voice, tells them  
What the poet has just said.

### II.

Holding the hand of my long ago father,  
I lead him to the school, the factory, the voting booth  
Of the country to which he has fled,  
Forsaking the tongue of his mother.

I will not be needed when he stands  
At the elbow of the Recording Angel  
In whose book the words are already written.  
No intervention necessary or possible.

Until that final moment  
When syllables and sentences are no longer mandatory  
And we are all translated,  
I shall speak the languages of others,  
Never my own.

*Miriam Finkelstein*

## Glossary—Po Valley

Start with the words—  
it's the words I want to hold  
on my tongue,  
roll through their paces.

“Ascolta”—  
this one smoothes its skirt,  
the long red nail tap-  
taps on my forearm,  
so discreet

superimposed on the icy cut  
of crystal and real silver.  
The backdrop here is tapestry  
or fresco,  
gothic turrets viewed at eye level  
through a winter pane.

And “nebbia,”

—biting down the double consonant—  
that's easy.

Poplars on a ridge, whispers:  
button up—it goes for the throat,  
the white beast.  
Creeping with its disembodied smile  
through river plains  
it feeds on voices, footsteps, lives,  
and next day  
people wring their hands.

This road coils round embankments,  
runs down into yellow towns  
well below the water-line.  
Flood-eroded stone  
and Roman coins like copper flowers  
sprouting from the soil.

The Legions camped here.  
A sleepy outpost  
where you huddled in your cloak all night  
wondering when they'd call you home.  
I have known enough cold cloisters

in the shadow of their afternoon,  
touched the wet stone,  
heard the sweet cold voices  
singing one eternal season  
(brief sun fingering through porticos)  
held it in the senses, in the bone.

*Anita Olachea Bucci*

A painting of West Berlin, 1989

*for Susan Holder*

Courtyard voices vine up,  
the traffic grinds its raw noise.  
The waitress would like to bring you  
a bowl of her tears,  
but she just presses down harder  
on her pencil instead,  
thorning your order  
to the cook's board.

A long, beautiful bug  
climbs the dusty afternoon window.  
You have another coffee,  
wondering, where are  
the new world kings?  
the press barons...  
but it's better instead  
to think of fishermen  
under a cathedral of mist,  
with chess white swans,  
all poised upon  
their fluid dominion.

The old Turkish men  
snap at the calves of passing young women.  
But, pigeons at their feet,  
leaning on their canes,  
I am still moved by  
something in their pride-burnt faces,  
that speaks to me  
of knowledge earned  
in exile's hard season.

And the artists too  
evacuate afternoons  
in the cafes where  
their loud intimacy  
is almost expected,  
talking of  
projects in the making  
and  
relationships in the ending.  
They preen and confide,  
spill rumour and envy,  
they hang their hats and hearts  
on that artists' scarecrow cross  
of enthusiasms and excuses;  
and the moon, that gladly collides  
the egos of lovers,  
shines down  
and abides  
their feverish, exhaustive  
searching.

And so the people sit,  
amongst fountains and jugglers,  
looking for  
the truth in books and lovers:  
swans of word and touch  
that will take them beyond  
the pummelled history  
of all this city's  
nights and streets.

*Peter Bakowski*

## In the human night

The night comes down,  
each star asks us  
to wonder at  
the distance between  
lives and wishes,  
history and wisdom,  
honesty and sin.

I am different each day:  
sometimes  
the dozing cat in the sun  
mimicking perfection,  
sometimes the hooked fish,  
gullet and routine burning  
in the petroleum air,  
but mostly, a quiet man  
waiting for dusk and a hero,  
staring at something as simple  
as a cup or a shoe,  
while listening to my blood's  
destination.

Just allow me a room:  
a table, a chair,  
a place where  
I can mend myself  
with pen and paper.

Let me sit there,  
to think of  
twigs and gods,  
error and harvest;

the lovers,  
found ambered and adrift  
in the falling empire  
of a candle,  
and the lonely,  
the red moon  
behind their ribs  
that begs the armless night  
for care....

*Peter Bakowski*

I would like to know why  
in the middle of lovemaking I sometimes hear  
a crow telling a man  
he wants to see him on business

the crow is called Laghupatanaka and  
in the first book of Panchatantra it is told  
that marriage and friendship between equals is possible  
but not between food and the one who eats it

a lion ate Panini author of differential calculus  
an elephant killed Jimimi inventor of the cyclotron  
a marine monster devoured Pingala who knew electronics  
what do hungry beasts know about acquiring virtue

neither does it pay to believe in the promises  
of the enemy or the government police or the boss  
the flock follows the elephant in whom they have confidence  
the lion is king of the forest but no one wants to make love to him

nor do I know why these reflections  
fall like snow in Charing Cross where I love you  
and plunge into you as into a river  
of ambrosia and milk and honey and I love you

I don't know what will become of my remains  
except that they'll make their exit clearly marked  
by the days when you loved me and  
by the sadness of certain thoughts

*Juan Gelman*  
*translated by Joan Lindgren*

## Meeting the Buddha near Bangalore

It is only stone he kisses leaning across  
the giant toes, kissing the cold towering rock  
as softly as no flesh ever before, his hands pressing  
into the marks left by endless monsoon rains.

The Buddha doesn't blink, his eyes eternally  
veiled behind lids of stones, knowing about  
love and time and sorrow without looking,  
but a small blueish pulse travels slowly  
through the rock upwards.

The old man cries like a child at the huge feet  
and the god cries without sound at the foot of  
the mountain and when the man turns, adjusting his  
white shawl over his naked shoulder, he carefully  
licks his lips with the tip of his tongue as to taste  
that instant again when he was not himself.

*Hans Stahlschmidt*

## Forbidden Stitch

*Oriental embroidery so fine  
that it affected the eyesight of  
its practitioners and was banned.*

—For J. S. R.

Outside her window pear blossoms mound,  
white as the snow I've left behind.  
The courtyard fountain softly shatters  
light into sound, delicate  
as crystal temple bells.  
In her Pacific Coast dwelling I find  
my friend's childhood in China  
recalled everywhere. On her couch  
a pillow reclines. Across its moony silk,  
in ecstatic flow, runs *The Forbidden Stitch*—  
finest needlework, tiny clotted buds of thread—  
one ribbed melon, an iris of water blue,  
a russet chrysanthemum  
with moth-wing leaves.

She and I drink tea,  
speak of the seamstresses  
whose smooth young hands  
guided the needle as it dipped, circled,  
knotted and pulled tight.  
Who could never forget the hungry families  
dependent on their skill  
as each day their eyes grew more rainbows,  
straining to follow the needle's silvery flight.  
We cannot save them, can only

honor their lives,  
pay homage  
to the severe beauty  
of their creations.  
As we honor Mozart,  
racing to finish his Requiem,  
or Keats, Shelley,  
Rimbaud—  
all the lost  
young poets.

*Helen G. Reed*

## The Fragility of Flowers

Billions of tiny flowers  
like struck match sticks flare  
and cover the Himalayan pass like an ocher robe  
draped over bare knees.

A strong breeze from between peaks  
like breath from between puffed cheeks  
blows. The flowers flicker,  
prostrate themselves, and are saved.

The monk within  
the monastery cloistered in the cliff  
bows to a dung thatched wall  
patching the patches of his robe by candlelight.

A bowl of butter tea steams untouched  
his hands perform the mundane mudra,  
his entire attention to sewing  
the worn wool whole again.

*T. Clayton Wood*

## Labors of the Hand

I begin to notice: the hand  
that writes these lines  
has aged. It no longer loves the sands  
of the dunes, afternoons of drizzling  
rain, morning dew  
on thistles. It now prefers the syllables  
of its own suffering.  
It's always worked harder than its mate,  
a bit spoiled, a bit  
lazy, but lovelier.  
The hardest tasks  
always fell to it: to sow, to reap,  
to stitch, to scour. But also  
to caress, that's true. Exigence,  
rigor, finally exhausted it.  
The end cannot be long now: please god  
its nobleness be counted.

*Eugénio de Andrade*  
*translated by Alexis Levitin*

## Born out of Wenlock?

### The Modern Olympics and *A Shropshire Lad*

A.E. Stallings

1996 marks at least two important centenaries. As an Atlantan, I am acutely aware that it marks the centenary Olympic games, to be held here in our city. As a poet, I am just as aware that this year marks the centenary of A.E. Housman's first and most influential book of poetry, *A Shropshire Lad*. It is a marvelous coincidence. I have long wanted to make some connection between the two, however tenuous, because *A Shropshire Lad* contains the most idealized description of an athlete that I know of in English literature, "To an Athlete Dying Young." Putting aside for a moment the melancholy occasion of the title, it describes the Olympic ideal (as moderns imagine it): an amateur in the best sense, whose prize is victory itself—no crass remuneration—and an immortal name. Here is the poem in full:

The time you won your town the race  
We chaired you through the market-place;  
Man and boy stood cheering by,  
And home we brought you shoulder high.

To-day, the road all runners come,  
Shoulder-high we bring you home,  
And set you at your threshold down,  
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away  
From fields where glory does not stay  
And early though the laurel blows  
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut  
Cannot see the record cut,  
And silence sounds no worse than cheers  
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout  
Of lads that wore their honours out,  
Runners whom renown outran  
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,  
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,  
And hold to the low lintel up  
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head  
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,  
And find unwithered on its curls  
The garland briefer than a girl's.

In a lecture delivered in the mid-1920's as the Oxford Professor of Poetry, H. W. Garrod (like Housman, a classical scholar), complained about the falseness of this otherwise "beautiful elegy." "Mr. Housman," he said, "was at an English public school; he was an undergraduate here in Oxford"... "But the athlete of his poem is his fellow-townsmen; the scene a market-place; the prize a municipal challenge-cup."... "Do you really see him all that degree interested in the Ludlow sports—if in Ludlow they hold sports? This false-pastoral twist is altogether tiresome."

Of course, Housman's *Shropshire* is a *Shropshire* of the imagination, similar in many ways to the real *Shropshire*, but not to be confused with it, much as Virgil invented an *Arcadia* for his *Eclogues*. "I was born in Worcestershire, not *Shropshire*," Housman has said, explaining, "I had a sentimental feeling for *Shropshire* because its hills were our western horizon. I know Ludlow and Wenlock, but my topographical details—Hughley, Abdon upon Clee—are sometimes quite wrong."

Though set in *Shropshire*, the poem bears a strong classical stamp. "The strengthless dead" is a translation of Homer's "strengthless heads of the dead"; even beginning sentences with "And" is a Greek touch. Indeed, the very sensibility that informs "To An Athlete Dying Young" is Greek. The Greek example that springs to mind is the story of Cleobis and Biton. Croesus (as in "rich as . . .") asks Solon who the most blessed man is, assuming, wrongly, that it will be himself. When Croesus asks who the *second* most blessed man is, Solon disappoints again:

"Cleobis and Biton.... they were both of them prize-winning athletes, and the following story is told of them as well. There was a feast of Hera at hand for the Argives, and their mother needs must ride to the temple; but the oxen did not come from the fields at the right moment. The young men, being pressed by lack of time, harnessed themselves beneath the yoke and pulled the wagon with their mother riding on it; forty-five stades they completed on their journey and arrived at the temple. When they had done that and had been seen by all the assembly, there came upon them the best end of a life, and in them the god showed thoroughly how much better it is for a man to be dead than to be alive. After that prayer the young men sacrificed and banqueted and laid them down to sleep in the temple where they were; they never rose more, but that was the end in which they were held. The Argives made statues of them and dedicated them at Delphi, as of two men who were the best of all."

Here we have the same glorification of athletic deeds, the immortality of fame, the blessing of dying at the peak of one's glory.

It is fascinating that Housman should publish such a purely Greek, purely idealized image of the Athlete in the same year that the first modern Olympics was held. In so idealizing Greek athletics, both Housman and Pierre de Coubertin, the idealistic French baron who made it his life's work to found the modern Olympics, were products of their time. Both, of course, shared a classical education. Furthermore, the period from 1870–1890 was a hotbed of classical archeological discovery. Schliemann, the unearther of the city of Troy, was at the height of his fame. The world described by classical literature became tangible as it had never been to moderns before.

Interestingly, Coubertin absorbed the classical ideal of a healthy mind in a healthy body through the unlikely conduit of the very Victorian, very English novel, *Tom Brown's School Days*, which defines the ideal gentleman's education as proficiency in "Greek and cricket too." Coubertin was so taken by the novel that he made a pilgrimage to England to visit Rugby, where the novel was set, and several other prominent English public schools.

Numerous attempts at reviving the Olympics had preceded the 1896 games—in Greece, England, the United States, France, Germany and Sweden. Coubertin knew of many of them. In his 1897 article on modern sports, Coubertin wrote, "such meetings are of an essentially modern character; the games are modern; modern are the rules, the

dress, and the prizes. In Wenlock only something of the past has survived; it is safe to say that the Wenlock people alone have preserved and followed the true Olympian tradition."

Yes, Coubertin is speaking of the Wenlock in Shropshire! Dr. W. P. Brookes, who knew of Coubertin's interest in physical education and Olympism, invited him to the "Olympic Games of Much Wenlock" which had been going on in Shropshire since 1847. In October of 1890, Coubertin came to see the games—footraces, equestrian events, cricket and lawn tennis. But it was the pomp and circumstance of the Wenlock games that most influenced him, especially the opening and closing ceremonies. Indeed "the idea of victory ceremonies themselves, were planted in Coubertin's imagination at Much Wenlock." Prizes were awarded for literary as well as athletic accomplishments; there were "quotations from Greek authors inscribed on the flags and banderoles" and even actual laurel wreaths for the victors.

There is no way to know if Housman witnessed the events of the Olympic games at Wenlock. But it is almost impossible that he did not *know* of them. Spin-offs of the Wenlock games were held in Birmingham, Shrewsbury and Wellington. The winning Greek ode of the 1860 games was performed in London to a packed house by the students of the Royal Academy of Music. The Greek ambassador to England read about the games in the newspaper and asked Brookes for a memento of the games to take to the Greek sovereign, and in 1867 King George of Greece recognized the Wenlock games by giving a silver cup to the Wenlock association as a prize for the pentathlon. Surely such an event would be common knowledge in the surrounding towns.

I return to Garrod's complaint about Housman's poem: "I am even prepared to believe," he says, "that the victory was celebrated in 'pints and quarts of Ludlow beer,' and that the poet and his friends (I draw inferences here from other poems) lay down in the road 'in lovely muck' and went home leaving their neckties God knows where."... "But it will not do. And why does Mr. Housman do it?"

Why does Mr. Housman do it? Perhaps because the challenge cup, the town race, even the laurel wreath, all really existed in the English countryside of his youth. Perhaps because there existed there something of the ancient Greek spirit, the same ideals that were to inspire Pierre de Coubertin's revival of the Olympic games.

And no doubt the victors celebrated with "pints and quarts" of *Wenlock beer*.

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## Buckshot Roberts: the Mattress

People call me Buckshot  
because I've got a bunch of it  
in my hip, and because  
I use a shotgun.  
I may not be able to lift it  
above my waist,  
but that don't matter.  
I never miss. When I ride  
into the yard at Blazer's Mill  
Billy and the others say  
they'll let me live  
if I surrender. I tell them,  
"No way, Mary Ann,"  
then everyone begins firing.  
I shoot the Kid's hat off  
and hit Middleton in the chest,  
but I feel a slug  
tear through my guts  
and I know there's a hole  
where my back used to be.  
I make it into Blazer's house,  
grabbing a Buffalo rifle  
from the bedroom.  
I prop myself up  
against a feather mattress,  
watching it turn red.  
A slug from my Sharps  
takes Brewer's head off  
and Coe holds up a hand  
missing a trigger finger.  
I may be bleeding and dying  
but some of them  
are going with me and,  
Christ, this mattress is soft.

Arthur Winfield Knight

## St. John of the Cross

In the beginning was the word  
strung up like a cattle rustler, bootless,  
dangling from a rare tree somewhere  
just east of the Grand Canyon. The corpse  
is not cold and the buzzards  
do not neglect their duty—the body  
sways in desert wind, the word wriggles  
under your inspection, your fancy.

An illuminated text glows not from the eyes  
or light on the page, but from the incantations  
of lips, sacrificing one fictive creation,  
one god, for another. This is how  
the imagination works its rites of passage,  
how the congregation, or was it the posse  
on horseback, fired six guns and performed  
their sacred ritual, words were exchanged,  
sacrifice and sacrament, blood and rope and sepulchre,

one knot to ensure a longer dance, more  
time for holy contemplation, the sweeter  
the agony, the more profound the ecstasy.  
How will that sweet image survive  
in your mind? In the beginning was the word  
strung up, a sound wavering in the air, primary,  
abstract—Pine Bluff, Hawkins, rope, branch, desert  
sky stitched with clouds—which syllable  
triggers, in the beginning, the image

we are to imagine, pray to and forget. A child's  
mind, a white field, the soul not in need  
of redemption. Language is the tool of regret,  
of elegy, playing out guilty chords  
on the trail boss's guitar, men questioning  
the wisdom of afternoons spent...  
the language, the sentence, the word,  
rustler, the metaphoric hanging, the ritual,

they say it, hanging, in bed just before sleep,  
hanging, that old crisis, the curse  
of mortality, germination of the word, the solitary  
black spot, mushrooming, clouding over the desert  
sky as the last posse leads us by the hand  
to that final impotence. St. John,  
bring me thy cross, for neither flesh nor blood  
nor word can save us from that future rope  
dangling from some desert tree.

*Robert Brown*

## The Old Slow Swirl

The animals painted in dried blood  
on the sides of the basket purchased  
from a dusty roadside market in Pakistan  
are primitive as prehistoric paintings.  
Each animal a sign of the old blood flowing  
in this land of sharp rises and green grass  
struggling through rifts of sand layers  
old and enduring, not crying for cover,  
waiting for the step of the barefoot child.

Each step a signature like a name on a deed  
    this I stamp for barren ground  
    this for grass  
    this for our feet to touch each morning  
    as I drive goats to grass  
    or pull water up from the well.

Soil so beaten there is scarcely a trace  
of the hooves that have packed the ground  
or of steps of women, heads covered,  
hands clutching baskets, faces silent  
except for the eyes and even these masked,  
masked like the soil masks seeds.

Or the steps of sharp-eyed men stamping,  
their glances both hot and cold,  
men wild like the wind of the land  
and of the past that lives on in the pull  
swirling up the vibrant valley slopes  
while the mountain stream descends swiftly,  
melted from its cold northern source,  
come to feed the land and its people  
clinging with the bare toes of subsistence.

A land unlike life, a harrowing to the bone,  
singing to bone the wild flute of existence.  
The sun going, dark blankets the earth  
the chill of evening pounds like a drum  
in the ears of people and animals asleep.  
Each day awakening to the far-flung dawn.

*Wanita Zumbrunnen*

## The First Brush

In his dream he saw the sky open,  
a vast piece of paper in the air,  
and he wielded a brush like a rafter  
inscribing words among the clouds.  
Sunrays gleamed through the lines  
wavering with herons and cranes.  
The words he had written  
were breaking into water lilies;  
now and then he rinsed his brush  
in the Celestial Lake.

Waking up, he decided to stop seeing  
the girls at the pleasure house;  
instead he would devote himself  
to studying classics, poetry,  
calligraphy, to fulfill the promise  
just revealed by heaven.  
He also considered becoming  
a monk or a priest, if necessary;  
after all, life was brief  
while writing could be immortal.  
He wouldn't mind resigning  
his paltry position at the palace.

At sunset drums and pipes  
burst into his cottage—  
the king had just passed away,  
the prince summoning him to court  
to compose the obituary  
and the funeral oration,  
to write records, messages,  
lists, invitations, decrees.  
His parents squandered joyful tears  
while their neighbors smiled  
with green faces.

At this moment, scholars would kill  
to be the country's First Brush,  
a post he would hold for thirty years.

*Ha Jin*

## Ascent

Tired of living, Lunan went to town  
and stole a jar of Moksha Panacea  
which the monks claimed  
could help anyone go to heaven.

He took a large dose,  
then sprinkled the rest to  
his poultry, dogs, pigs, even  
to toads in his melon garden.

That night he slept soundly  
without tax-men splashing  
in the air like balloonfish.

At ten sharp next morning  
his farm burst out clucking,  
yapping, croaking, quacking.  
Following him, one by one  
the creatures were taking off—  
a valley of clouds opened for them.  
People stopped to watch,  
some crying, "Gods save us!"

Touched by the ascent, our prince  
had a temple built on the mountain.  
He named it Lunan Shrine.  
On its stela a poet inscribed:  
"When a man attains the Tao  
all his pets rise with him."

Under those words  
someone drew a fat man and added:  
"Like a rising official."

*Ha Jin*

## Ars Poetica

When the winds had flesh,  
wore togas, and blew syllables  
from the earth's corners, language arrived  
in storms. A single word in the desert could  
bury a city or a nation, and the whole world lived in fear of  
speeches.

And when the winds wafted  
from existence into essence and discarded words  
like brittle old skin,  
unnaming themselves,  
we were forced to gather the dried husks to our breasts  
and wear them like a string of cool shells,  
in order to remember.

And now that I too wear words  
like a sheath of powerful scales writhing between  
feathers and flesh, I fashion things at the cusp of my mind.  
With a power that is absolute absence, and omnipresence,  
I cradle things between opposites, carving  
the night sky into neat manageable sections.  
Shaping vowels into a sweet emptiness  
that licks into ears. Coloring infinity  
with my tongue and thumbs,  
naming.

And in the end  
I will enter your heart through the mouth  
or the ear and travel loudly, like thunder's low tearing  
through your veins, in the end I am always trapped  
here, at the base of my own tongue, consuming myself  
like paper's black curling  
in flame.

*Macky McCleary*

## Learning To Dance

I am disappearing  
into the side of her body.  
Her body, which when it lifts  
and turns, also moves the Earth.  
I have given up the toys  
of my childhood  
and my ambitions for old age.  
And have moved deep within  
the walls of her silver skin.

I am through with my love of suffering.  
And the words that describe that love.  
I am going to carry on a magnificent  
affair with the wind  
from the inside of her body  
where we both sleep.

Friends, I am going deeper, even  
deeper inside than the animal  
or the blade of grass—  
I am looking for the stones.  
The stones that lay to the side  
and in the bed of the Great River.  
Among those stones  
there is only one rock with my name.  
I will pick it up  
and hold it high above my head  
in the inner light.

I will know many things.

Outside, with her body, she  
is teaching the world to dance!

*Thomas Rain Crowe*



# POETRY 1996



*International Poetry Competition*

## GRAND PRIZE WINNERS

FIRST PRIZE: \$1,000

**Steve Kowit**  
*A Trick*

SECOND PRIZE: \$500

**Shannon Hamann**  
*The Body Burners*

THIRD PRIZE: \$250

**R. T. Smith**  
*Lilting*

## Lilting

### *Donegal*

In the lull just after  
McKenna's reel, a girl  
with a port-wine

stain upon her  
throat stood delicate  
as a heron, while

the hard-faced farmers  
all froze. Head tilted  
and both eyes closed,

she soared two octaves  
and trilled as a local  
grocer hummed

the drone. The surf  
and bramble of Irish  
syllables filled

the pub between  
sill and lintel,  
sweeter than linnets,

more urgent than  
a crow. And the scent  
of raw lavender

was anchored in it,  
thrifty and radiant  
as a mouse's clean

bones. Not even  
the barman dared  
clink a glass,

and every villager  
listened, as her  
wordless notes

shivered, then rose.  
A century ago  
on winter nights

like this, to the tune  
of no instrument  
but such a supple

tongue, two dozen  
outlaw couples  
in a shuddered

room whirled  
and shuffled  
to defy the priests

who banned the flutes  
and smashed every  
fiddle on a stone.

Within the hushed  
moment before chat  
and porter could

once again flow,  
she held every eye  
with the weary glow

of a wilting lily,  
and the wind outside  
was talking treason,

quiet as woodbine  
embroidering a trellis  
or native moss

softening the nest  
of a seaside heron  
just after she's flown.

*R. T. Smith*

## The Body Burners

The doms hoist onto the pyre the body  
bundled in cloth, a fat merchant who in life they never could  
have touched. They are untouchables,  
people who are said to grieve  
when a child is born  
and celebrate when one dies.

You may not believe it,  
but it is said we live in the time of Kali,  
the goddess of destruction,  
the one with green skin and a skirt of human arms.  
You see her on cigarette packages,  
on buses, she is beloved  
in Varanasi, like this minute's calendar girl.

Varanasi, the holiest city,  
is lit gold in the morning;  
the sun reflects off the flood plain sands  
white as butter  
on the far bank of the Ganges.  
Close to the river, under the watch of the temples,  
the doms burn bodies around the clock  
like mortician Sisyphuses. The fire,  
older than Christ and as sacred,  
is kept blazing by death.  
A dom lights a new one with sticks  
from another. Another dom  
tongs legs back over a pyre  
which has consumed everything else.  
He does it with the flair of a ham actor.  
Fat drips and spatters.  
Mourners are tearless.  
They glower at you or chatter or smoke pot  
or just watch.

Kali's tongue hangs from her mouth  
in anticipation of drinking the blood of everyone  
when she has lain everything to waste.  
Even motion will cease.  
But that is good,  
because Vishnu can go to sleep,  
and when he wakes  
it will start again, a new day.

Ten or more corpses are burning  
at any hour on discreet mounds of wood.  
It smells like the meal  
of a bad cook.  
A widow commits slow suttee  
by chain smoking.  
People are bathing in the filth of the Ganges  
into which the ashes are raked.  
Boats of wood pull up and park.  
There is no silence:  
Crackle, crackle,  
dogs fight over a finger,  
wood is stacked, hiss,  
footsteps.

Kali used to have flesh, her demon blood coursed through it,  
impulses roiled in her.  
Now she is only an image....

But that is the age of Kali for you.  
The world is already dying.  
Things lose their bodies, their creature-ness.  
Everything becomes metaphor.  
Things do not exist,  
but mean.  
No one believes  
in belief.

Like a loud champagne cork  
the merchant's skull pops when its  
contents boil, gases blow out the back of the head.  
It is the climax,  
it is the moment  
the soul is released from its prison.  
Mourners disperse  
and cannot look back.  
A centipede crawls over your foot.  
Your body is a church of nerves.  
The breath on the back of your neck  
is not Christ's.  
India changes your life:  
You have so much to learn.

*Shannon Hamann*

## A Trick

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

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

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

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

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

was harder—to blow that invisible coin into the sealed-up glass.  
The nice thing was you could see it fall in with a clatter,  
hear the luxurious clink of silver in glass as it dropped  
out of nowhere & settled. Needless to say, she was amazed.  
I mean *really* amazed! & so too, as it turns out, was our waiter,  
who'd been watching the whole affair from the wall

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

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

Steve Kowitz



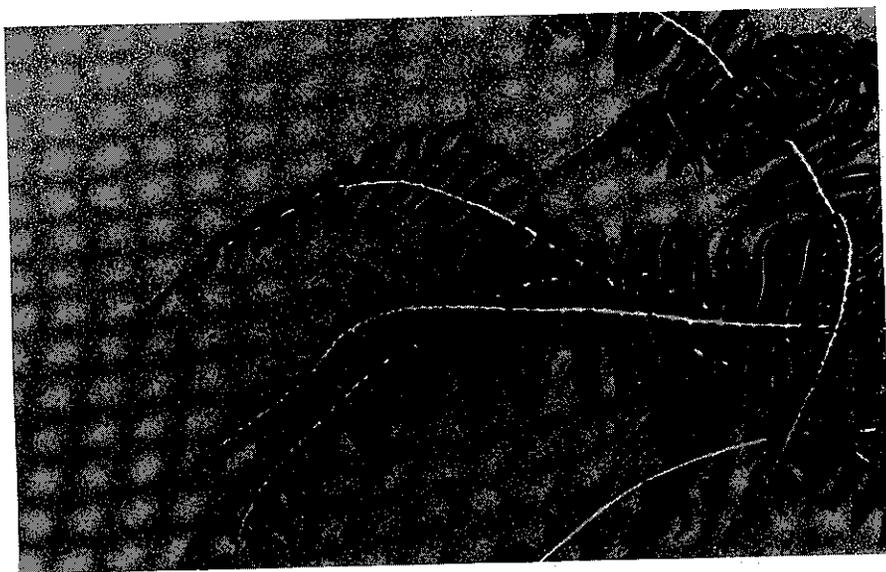
Golden Bamboo

*Douglas G. Campbell*



Lilies

*Douglas G. Campbell*



Ferns

*Douglas G. Campbell*



Devil's Walking Stick

*Douglas G. Campbell*

## PETS

### 1. Colonel Clemson's Flamingos

Newsmen report on their close order  
drill. The colonel, old foe to disorder

in men and other bipeds, precisely trains  
his pink platoons to march, restrains

their tendencies to straggle, keeps all heads  
level, eyes right, eyes left. Two steps ahead

"Hup two, hup two!" the colonel urges,  
"Keep those necks straight. No messy esses!

To the rear harch! Pick up those feet!"  
The reedy legs keep pace, the long-toed feet

tread in unison. And then a spasm flattens  
the colonel. His troops move in with flapping

wings, cut off their commander's air, abandon  
his corpse, drift towards the mangrove randomly.

### 2. Boa in the Bathroom

When you drink tea at Hester's  
you are caressed by the gentle  
air of her drawing room, the pleasures

of Limoges, orange pekoe, scones,  
loveseats with needlepoint pillows,  
the cut glass vases holding roses.

But the bathroom encloses a surprise  
to chill you. A spotted head sways  
before your face, two cold eyes

take your measure. Around the pole  
of the shower, coil upon coil  
rippling in power near the embroidered

guest towels. Hester is not defensive  
when you emerge pale. "A nice clean pet,"  
she says, "perfectly harmless if well fed."

He likes live food. Each Sunday two mice  
go down whole, their shrieks fill that nice  
house where Hester runs the sacrifice.

*Florence Trefethen*

## A Dream of Wilderness

Darwin lay dying at Down  
and dreamed about his voyage  
around a world then teeming  
with creatures made for Eden.  
Seas, sands, jungles yielded what  
they owned. Data washed over  
him, left traces for the half  
century at home, repose  
to impose order on all  
that expanse he'd looked at raw.  
The lushness distilled to a  
thesis; a vast wilderness  
fell back and untangled to

show the wilderness inside—  
thrust of pine against pine  
for sky; turtles lumbering  
up the beach, their young hatching  
skittering seaward under  
the swoop of birds; schemes of fish  
to stay alive, and ruin  
strike the rest; strokes of death  
around coral, under leaves.  
All bestiaries and their  
parables fell prey to an  
army of ants eating its  
way across the landscape of  
Brazil. The unicorn past  
flattened to myth underneath  
the piled bones of giant sloths.

No wonder men in their fear  
wanted Paradise back, where  
dangers belonged to a plan  
with no selfness, but all for  
the glory of God. Maybe  
Darwin regretted the storm  
his order unleashed, dreamed of  
the wilderness as it lay  
before his mind pierced through,  
but knew there was no return.

He dreamed of Jemmy Button,  
scooped up off Cape Horn, taken  
to England for a stint of  
civilization, then put  
back ashore with his tribe at  
Tierra del Fuego.  
He could not melt into the  
forest that once nurtured him,  
hovered outside disdaining  
the wild but growing wild with

aloneness. What price the chance  
for vision, and which is  
the wilderness—beasts groping their  
way out of Eden under  
God's eye, or making their shapes,  
remaking themselves to grab  
for space and food? Darwin lay  
dreaming at Down, died in a  
mist of lawns, larks, primroses  
with wilderness on his mind.

*Florence Trefethen*

## Beetles

*The famous British biologist J.B.S. Haldane, when asked by a churchman to state his conception of God, said: "He is inordinately fond of beetles."*

Spotted blister beetles. Sacred scarabs.  
Water beetles whirling on the surface of still ponds.  
Little polkadotted ladybugs  
favored by the Virgin Mary & beloved of children.  
Those angelic fireflies sparkling in the summer evenings.  
Carrion beetles sniffing out the dead.  
June bugs banging into screens.  
Click beetles. Tumblebugs. Opossum beetles. Whirligigs  
& long-horned rhino beetles.  
Cowpea weevils snuggling into beans.  
The diving beetle wintering in mud.  
*Macrodactylus subspinosus*: the rose chafer  
feasting upon rose petals, dear to the poet Guido Gozzano.  
The reddish-brown *Calathus gregarius*.  
Iridescent golden brown-haired beetles.  
Beetles living in dry wood, loose gravel, wasps' nests,  
sea wrack. Clown beetles. Pill beetles.  
Infinitesimal beetles nesting in the spore tubes of fungi.  
There is no climate in which the beetle does not exist  
no ecological niche the beetle does not inhabit,  
no organic matter, living, dead, or decomposed  
that has not its enthusiast among the beetles,  
of whom, it has been estimated, one and one-half  
million species currently exist,  
which is to say one mortal creature  
out of five's a beetle—little armored tank  
who has been rolling through the fields her ball of dung  
these past three hundred million years: clumsy  
but industrious, powerful yet meek  
the lowly, dutiful, & unassuming beetle—  
she of whom, among all earth-born creatures, God is fondest.

*Steve Kowitz*

the bugs  
seem busy  
always on the  
move  
life must be pretty  
exciting  
i like them better  
than my  
neighbors  
the bugs  
aren't noisy  
they keep the same  
hours as  
me  
they like the same  
food  
they spend a lot  
of time in my  
books  
they don't help  
with the  
rent  
but  
i  
never  
asked

*David Michaels*

## King Kong, You Is My Woman Now

King Kong, goddamn your eyes,  
You are so easy to understand,  
Le Dernier Cri of ape of ala mode,  
Four-flushing with Destiny,  
When did I ever give you nightmares  
Or strangle the sleep of your children?

I want to catch some Z's,  
When, O bete noir of sight & sound,  
You stand up with a clutch of  
Propellers in your paws, with  
Fay Wray no bigger than your navel, &  
The Empire State Building a  
tres phallic symbol, n'est pas?  
O King, with a heart  
Like a banana republic,  
Not for you the ditties of Anaxandrides.  
Face down you are your own country  
Where no white man practices *ahimsa*.  
Noninjury to all living things? Hah!  
Tell me another one! Not for you  
"Teleological suspension of the ethical"  
(Whatever that means) because  
No matter what you do,  
The many sidedness of reality  
Hits you right between the eyes.  
O Civilization's prodigal son,  
I grow older,  
But you remain like the etiquette column  
Of a 1930's newspaper,  
One evolution behind the *Times*.  
O King Kong, you are my hero now.  
Don't ever let them make a dish rag of your tonsils.

*Louis Phillips*

## Test Poet

This is a most dangerous assignment,  
Testing this poem. It cd. crack wide open,  
Causing massive injuries  
To thousands of innocent minds.  
The ghost in the machine vibrates  
Too violently, & an engine has failed,  
But we hold on for dear life, eh? &  
Pull back hard on the metaphor.  
Who dares predict what will happen?  
Climbing, climbing! What for?  
Will the bolts shake free? The jet  
Rockets don't respond. Oil leaks.  
No bailing out now. Test poet to reader,  
Test poet to reader: "Anyone hear me?  
The center will not hold!"  
"Sorry, sir. We've heard that one before.  
Permission to land not granted."  
With immortal longings  
Creating considerable dent,  
I know what's going to happen now:  
No one's going to walk away from this crash.

*Louis Phillips*

## The Mad Gardener's Song

Louis Phillips

In 1954, I did not know what it was like to live in the real world. I did not know that teenagers would push one another under the wheels of an ongoing train, nor that they would kill young women by dropping cinder blocks off the roofs of apartment buildings, nor that, to achieve immortality in *The Guinness Book of Records*, some young men would sit inside a cage of black mambas, puff adders, and cobras for almost a month. At twelve years of age, I was concerned with matters less gruesome and more heroic, one of those concerns being Salvatore LaRusso and his magnificent flying machine.

I have a book opened in front of me. The book is called *How to Write Prize-Winning Short-Stories in 12 Easy Lessons*, by Robert Jericho. Now Robert Jericho was also a classmate of Sal's, which shows you how far a person can go if he or she really tries. Why Robert Jericho must be world famous by now. Not only has he published the definitive work on short-story writing, but he has also published his own stories in *Modern Bulk Transporter*, *Golden Gate North*, and in *Brick and Clay Records*. That proves that he knows what he's talking about. Why, Robert Jericho should be writing this story, not me, but I'm too jealous to let him take all the honors. Anyway, I'm just letting you know that Bob was once a personal friend of mine.

Now the first rule in the book says, "You must never apologize for what you are about to say." It is a rule that makes perfect sense. It is also the same first rule in Bob's book on Public Speaking. Even when I knew him, Bob was able to get a lot of mileage out of one idea. I'm not quarreling with the rule, you understand, but it does not apply to anybody who has grown up in Hollywood, Florida. If you have grown up in Hollywood, Florida, you feel an overwhelming need to apologize for everything.

Obviously what I need for my story, as well as for my life, is a more exotic setting:

In November of 1941, in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, I did not know what it would be like to live in the real world. I did not know that one month later Japanese planes would sneak out of the early morning sky and batter my country into a life and death struggle, nor that kamikaze pilots would hurl themselves upon the decks of aircraft carriers, nor that, to

achieve immortality of sorts, a sailor would sit atop a flagpole for 68 days. At twelve years of age, I was concerned with matters far less heroic. One of those concerns was Salvatore LaRusso and his magnificent flying machine.

The truth is that not all writers are equally lucky. James Joyce, for example, was born in Dublin. I know that for a fact because Bob Jericho is always using Joyce's stories as examples of one thing or another. Mostly he uses them for examples of epiphanies, which I find very revealing. That is why I have decided to write about an epiphany. Unfortunately, not many readers understand how difficult it is to have an epiphany in Hollywood, Florida. Bob Jericho has had better luck than I. He was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. Why, I would give my right arm to have grown up in a place as wild and as exciting as Cincinnati. I'm willing to bet a lot of money that you can't walk down the street in Cincinnati without stumbling over an armload of epiphanies.

I am writing about a time when I was not grown up. In 1954, I was not officially a teenager. In 1954, I was not officially anything. Except in love. I guess you could say that I was officially in love. I don't remember her name, but she was the smartest girl in the class. She had to be. I can't imagine myself falling in love with any other kind. For the sake of argument I'll call her Nancy Nolasname. That's the great thing about short-story writing. You can make up anything you want, and nobody can come along and whop you one in the kisser for not telling the truth. Even Bob Jericho don't have to tell you that.

I'm talking about getting whopped in the kisser because that's the way Salvatore LaRusso used to talk. Sal was always threatening to whop somebody in the kisser. This led to some confusion in my Greek mind. I suspected that Italians were called Wops because they were always whopping somebody in the kisser. I didn't know about the Mafia then, and I didn't know anything about getting kissed on the cheek. So much for semantics.

One person that our friend whopped was Bob Jericho. Bob Jericho had a crush on Nancy Nolasname too, and Sal didn't like it one bit. Sal whopped him one. All three of us were not even teenagers, and we had all gone crazy. The sun in Florida can do that to you. You grow up in Florida and never wear a hat, and all of a sudden, your brains dry up. I know because I mow lawns for a living, and I can tell you what that Florida sun has done to me. When I die, they can use my skin to make shoes with. Even now as I sit here, tired and thirsty, my head splitting, "The Mad Gardener's Song" from the writings of Lewis Carroll keeps running through my mind (I was going to use the word "head" again, but

on Robert Jericho's advice I have bought myself a hard-bound edition of the *Thesaurus* so I don't have to repeat words as much as I used to, even though when I read the great writers like Descartes and Robert Frost I see those bums using the same words over and over. I guess when you get up there, you can do what you want):

He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk  
Descending from the bus:

He looked again and found it was  
A Hippopotamus:

"If this should stay to dine," he said,  
"There won't be much for us."

He thought he saw a coach-and-four  
That stood beside his bed:

He looked again, and found it was  
A bear without a head.

"Poor thing," he said, "poor silly thing!  
It's waiting to be fed!"

He thought he saw an albatross  
That fluttered round the lamp:

He looked again, and found it was  
A penny postage stamp.

"You'd best be getting home," he said:  
"The nights are very damp."

He thought he saw an Argument  
That proved he was the Pope:

He looked again and found it was  
A bar of mottled soap.

"A fact so dread," he faintly said,  
"Extinguishes all hope!"

The only reason I know that verse is because it is about a gardener. The only other work I know about a gardener is *Lady Chatterly's Lover*.

Now I've gotten a bit away from Nancy Nolasname. Jericho advises us writers to take names out of the phone directory. I've been looking through my truck and all I come up with is the Yellow Pages, which means that Nancy's last name is going to be the Ace Septic Tank Company. That name isn't going to endear me to her or her to anybody.

Like me, Salvatore LaRusso was in love. First, he was in love with model airplanes. He built them, flew them, crashed them, mended them, flew them again. Second, he was in love with Nancy. Maybe not officially like me, because Sal never sent her a Valentine the way Jericho did, nor the way I did. Nancy was the shortest girl in our class. She had straight black hair, dark brown eyes, a pug nose, and enough energy to heat a building for a month. When she wasn't in school, she was on her bicycle, pedalling furiously on some mysterious errand. She had no use for me. She had no use for Robert. She definitely had no use for Sal. 1954 was a pretty useless year all the way around.

Now we come to my epiphany. It's not much, but you probably didn't pay to read this story anyway.

I'll start again. Salvatore LaRusso wanted to fly. Not just model airplanes. He wanted to fly himself. He wanted to leap from the roof of his house and soar. It certainly was not an unheard of idea. Leonardo DaVinci had contemplated such a feat. And of course, there was Superman. Even I had been warned not to tie a towel around my neck and go leaping through windows. Every year some stupid kid is always pulling off a stunt like that, or not pulling it off, which is more likely.

Sal belonged, not to Superman, but to the Leonard DaVinci league. Sal had vision. Sal was hell-bent upon invention, not imitation. Superman was fascinating, but he had nothing to do with the real world. Sal lived, breathed, and slept airplanes. When planes droned overhead, it was Sal's eye that identified them. When engines whined in the distance, it was Sal's ear distinguishing one plane from another. His favorite planes belonged to World War II, and were U.S. Navy fighters—the F9F6 Cougar, with its maximum speed of 650 miles per hour, or the F6F Hellcat, with its single engine. Sal had a particular fondness for planes that required a crew of one. As for myself, I didn't know anything about planes, didn't know half the things Sal was talking about. History was not my strong point, and names like Captain James B. McCudden and Baron Manfred Von Richthofen held little meaning for me.

What mattered was that I knew that Sal knew. What he said impressed me, which is perhaps one reason why he trusted me and not our soon-to-be-world-famous friend, Robert Jericho. Even at this late date, when I am overworked and underpaid, when I often confuse bankers with hippopotami, when my finest prose turns to mottled soap, there is no doubt in my mind that Salvatore LaRusso had the makings of a mechanical genius. Not an Edison maybe. Definitely not a DaVinci. But for chrissakes, Sal was only twelve years old when I knew him. At twelve there are more important things to think about than being a genius.

About Sal's flying machine. It really wasn't a machine. It certainly was no lawnmower, for example. All Sal did was cut wings out of cardboard. There were huge cardboard wings that fastened to his arms. His idea was graced with a divine simplicity. Other wise men had failed to achieve self-powered flight, but their ideas were much too complicated. By worshipping the subtle, they overlooked the simple. By concentrating on complexities, they ignored the obvious.

From Tuesday to Thursday in the first week in May, Salvatore found the cardboard, traced the wings, cut the wings out, and fastened straps made from red cord. I was Sal's confidant. On Saturday, Sal would climb to the roof of my parents' house, make a running start across the white tiles, and hurl himself into the beckoning air, flapping with all his might. It was to be a historic event, and it was my duty to chronicle the accomplishments. Sal selected the roof of my parents' house because my parents both worked, and only my grandmother, who was hard of hearing, would be home. There was a good chance that my grandmother would not hear footsteps upon the roof.

"What about Jericho?" I asked.

Sal grew red in the face. "He can go stick his head in a sewer." What distinguished Sal's face was his Romanesque nose. Like our mutual but unspoken love, Nancy, Sal had brown eyes, black hair, a slender frame, and, like Cyrano De Bergerac or Pinocchio, my friend was destined to achieve a great nose. I never told him that of course. He would have whopped me in the kisser. He didn't like to talk about his nose. It made him feel self-conscious. I knew what that was like. I felt self-conscious walking around in cardboard wings.

Jericho's textbook says that you cannot lie to your reader. So, all right, I admit it. I knew that Salvatore was crazy. But there are people who give everything they own to be blessed, just once in their lives, with a certain kind of madness.

That Thursday night, to pass the time, my younger sister and I engaged in a terrible pillow fight. I was so wound up that the fight got out of hand, and by the time the feathers cleared, I had knocked the head off her toy bear. My sister cried, but I promised that I could get Sal to repair it.

"Sal's a creep," my sister wailed, her face puffed and blotched from so much crying. Why do children cry more than adults? Now there is a question I wish somebody would tackle. "All he thinks about are those stupid model planes."

"If it weren't for planes," I told her, "we would have lost the war, and we would all be locked away in concentration camps."

"Sal didn't fly planes in the war. His are only stupid model ones." My sister's logic, unlike Sal's or my own, was impeccable.

"Anyway he can fix the bear," I told her.

"I don't want him to."

"You had better want him to."

"Why?"

"Because one day Sal's going to be famous, and then your bear will be famous because Sal repaired it."

"Famous doing what?"

"Nothing," I said. "It's a secret."

Friday morning came and there was school. Something had changed. The blackboard was there, actually green, though I had never once in my life heard anyone call it the greenboard. And the chalk was there. And the desk. It was the very schoolness of things. But my perception of each and everything in the room had changed. Knowledge of Salvatore's on-coming, on-rushing, man-powered flight charged the individual particles known as Friday.

Sal was bored. There was good reason for this because Mrs. Baker was discussing an abridged version of the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," where the pictures in our battered readers looked as small as postage stamps and where the lines of verse made no sense at all.

I was watching Sal. He was passing notes to Nancy-Ace-Septic-Tank-Company, and she was passing her notebook back to him. It was more than a body could stand. Our teacher must have gone blind as a bat not to have seen them. Such was the way of the world. One kid could burn the whole schoolhouse down and would never get caught, whereas all I had to do was to whisper to the kid sitting across the aisle from me (the one and only Robert Jericho) and I could end up after school writing

"I Shall Not Talk in Class" some hundred zillion times on lined paper. I must have been thirty years old before I realized that there was such a thing as paper without lines and three or five holes along the edge.

Mrs. Baker was calling on me for something. Kids were taking turns reading the verses aloud, and I had no idea where we were. I knew where Nancy was though. "Clark, what's the matter with you?" Mrs. Baker, who was about 110 years old, with her white hair up in a bun, took her eyeglasses off. She wiped the sweat from her eyes. It was one of those terribly humid days that Florida is famous for. Even the nights were damp.

I lowered my eyes. There was an albatross hanging around somebody's dumb neck.

"Look at me, young man."

I glanced up from my book. My eyes met hers. "Sal thinks he can fly," I blurted out.

There was a long pause from Mrs. Baker. What I said had nothing to do with the lesson. "What did you say?" she asked, going behind her desk.

The entire class had taken a sudden single breath. About sixty eyes honed into my waiting soul. I didn't look in Sal's direction. "I mean he's going to fly."

"In a plane?"

"Oh no. He's made wings and everything."

Mrs. Baker sat down and looked sadly at Sal. "Wings?" There was a fit of giggling from the back of the class.

"He's cut wings out of cardboard," I said, "and tomorrow, he's going to fly."

There was laughter everywhere. Mrs. Baker picked up her straight-edge and whacked the side of the desk with it. "Class, stop it, this instant!"

Sal stood up. He was red as a beet, his ears especially. He had large ears.

"Sit down, Sal."

Sal was frozen. He did not sit down. "No, no, I can do it," Sal said. "You'll see. You'll all see."

"Sal's going to fly like Superman," somebody cried. Nancy Ace-Septic-Tank-Company buried herself deeper into her textbook. Actually, the textbook wasn't hers. It belonged to the State of Florida. They were on loan to us. At the end of the year, we had to turn them back in.

Mrs. Baker was embarrassed. She attempted to weigh her words carefully. "It's too dangerous," she announced.

"Sal made the wings and everything," I added. "He can do it."

"Oh, God," Nancy said under her breath, but everybody in the class could hear her. Sal broke for the door.

Mrs. Baker stood up. "Sal!" she cried.

It was too late. Sal had escaped, and didn't close the door behind her desk. Nobody said anything. "I'm going to call your parents," she told me.

"Why me?" I asked.

Mrs. Baker was very solemn. There was a sense of the high holy church about her. "Because I don't want any of my students killing themselves through stupidity." The way she pronounced the final word made it sound quite stupid indeed.

I decided to gut it out. "I didn't do nothing," I said.

Mrs. Baker ignored the grammar. "You have no business encouraging your friend in such a dangerous act."

"Yes, ma'am." It was the South. You could "Yes Ma'am" to death the entire world if you wanted to.

"Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy," Bob Jericho said. "Oh boy, you guys are really crazy."

"That will be enough out of you, Mr. Jericho." Whenever Mrs. Baker used our last names, we knew we were in hot water. How could she foresee that old Bob was going to become a great writer and that I would be studying his book instead of the poetry of Coleridge?

One good thing about school is that it ends. When the afternoon bell sounded, Nancy Nolasname got up and didn't look back. Jericho was out the door like a bat out of hell. I waited, disappeared into the boys room and washed up with soap and water, took a long drink at the water fountain, and walked around the playground. I was afraid to go home. Sal was waiting for me somewhere and I knew he was going to whop me one.

But he didn't. He didn't come around my house that weekend. And he didn't come to school the following week. He had come down with a severe throat infection, and Bob Jericho was in charge of bringing Sal the homework. Even when Sal got better and returned, he never said a word to me. The school year ended. Nancy moved away, to Canada some said. The following year, Sal and I were in different classes. Life was very huge, and we both had learned, as it were, a fact so dreadful, it had extinguished all hope.

## Pharaoh's Horse Trainer

*Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously,  
the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*

—Exodus 15:21

Always now I am haunted in my sleep  
by water, the indifference of its voice,  
its unfillable stomach and blank eye  
sleepless as sharks, digesting what it eats  
automatically. I wake up kicking,  
starved for air, staring into the dark.

Drowning isn't peaceful, isn't some dark,  
beautiful euphoria or quiet sleep  
of suicides. They died, hooves kicking,  
elegant heads thrown back, mouths wide and voiceless.  
Their bodies swelled, so much grotesque meat. Fish ate  
then hid inside the sockets of their eyes

or tugged at entrails. Who knows better than I  
who walk the shore, seeking my horses past dark  
among the bones of driftwood, finding gulls half-eaten  
by crabs, crabs pecked dead by gulls, who haven't slept  
in years without their terrified voices  
like alarms. Driven on by whips, kicked

with spurred heels, they'd raced in after, kicking  
wet sand of the sea floor behind them, eyes  
rolling, long manes blown wildly by the voice  
of the Hebrew god, the wind parting dark  
water, and Pharaoh mesmerized, asleep  
in himself somewhere, awake too late. The sharks ate

for weeks, the Red Sea red with their eating....  
600 horses. Among them, one who'd thrown me, kicked  
my teeth out like glass before he broke, so sleep  
is the enemy. I fight 'til my eyes

tear, stubbornly resisting in the dark  
each midnight, cursing that god 'til my voice

burns out, and blackness closes over.... Voices,  
horses' voices, mix with the sea as it eats  
rock, eats shipwrecks, rolls skulls around dark  
subterranean caves, makes leg bones kick  
and canter in deep weeds; not swirled up in shells I  
hold to my ear; my ears are shells, and sleep,

kind sleep, I've forgotten. It's their god's voice,  
the sea... its eye, mouth, stomach, how it eats.  
I kick awake, dress in the darkness, and wait.

*Rob Carney*

## In Wild Matrimony

The marriage has broken loose—  
Its people had been feeding and lodging it so long  
they didn't notice the beast it had become.  
They grew oblivious to its fury,  
its disdain for the processed oats they fed it  
until it nipped at the bride, refused  
to just stand there when the groom approached  
with his brush and handful of clippers.

Worse, they mocked it, wore their suit of matrimony  
like a vaudeville horse, she trotting in front,  
he stuffed into the hind quarters.  
And when they danced about so gracefully,  
who could blame them for thinking the thing was tame,  
even as it rose on its back legs to kick the guts  
out of their small house?

How pathetic they looked after they bolted the doors—  
Two adults stumbling through the neighborhood  
waving the thin ends of their rope like a lasso.  
Each wears the frayed half of a costume  
which has fallen around their knees.  
First the ass, then the head, scream at each other,  
*Come back, I'm warning you. Come back!*  
as they trudge past the intersection of Walk  
and Don't Walk, head on into the wedlocked traffic.

*Peter E. Murphy*

## Failed Explorations

He'd drag himself from surgery,  
recoiling at his wife's kisses,  
from questions about his day:  
conversation impossible  
after he'd slogged through  
the body's clogged rivers and swamps.

She hated the coldness  
required of a man who used a scalpel  
for precise, savage miracles,  
who spoke of "insults" to the body  
and didn't mean a slap of disdain.

"I'm sorry," he finally offered,  
angry that she didn't understand  
when he trudged in  
as if from a failed attempt at Everest,  
blood still seeming to stain  
his hands like tar, still seeing  
the young woman who had died  
during an operation delicate  
as a Chopin nocturne.

"Would you rather," he spat,  
"I come home joking about death?"  
then sat in a silence jagged  
as the exposed ribs  
of a crushed construction worker,  
a silence hard  
as if he'd accused her  
of being selfish as Salome  
at her pleasure.

*Robert Cooperman*

## Nobody's Hell

I'd always thought of cold as a slow drift into the center of me from my limbs, but at the bus stop on the first frigid morning in January I felt the prickle of hairs freezing in the caves of my nostrils each time I inhaled, and when Cathy Stegbauer arrived having just showered, I broke off pieces of her frozen curls. Later in math I studied her head thawing into a ragged mop, a torn curtain of bangs framing her face. I pressed my reddened fingertips together hoping for that warm tingle of feeling—I was always petrified of frostbite, of pieces of me never coming back, like the brown zones in freezer-burned meat, like a troubled memory where part of the heart dies, like when Chris Paffle dropped a penny on the locker room floor and said to me, "Pick it up, Jew"—I didn't believe this actually happened because a piece of me froze right then and there. I spent long hours not believing it. It dangled in the center of me like a clapper in a bell, like the diseased hamster Dad put to sleep in the freezer. If ever it defrosted it would smell like a murky pool, a place downwind of a nastier place. Later in college when I read Dante, I already knew why the Inferno's core was frozen, and why, coming up from that hole, the first thing Dante gazed at was the stars—someplace clean, someplace that is nobody's hell.

*Douglas Goetsch*

## The Forest of my Hair

I'm 28 years old in the flesh but in a mirror all I can see is a boy after his first crew cut, 5 years old and hating what happened to his hair. Unmoved by his grandfather's promise it would grow back, the boy wept silently, trembling air through his lips and pointing at his hair strewn across a tiled floor.

The grandfather unwrapped sour balls for both of them, and, leaving his Falcon behind, they walked together to the woods.

*These woods, he said, are yours. They were mine, but I give them to you. I am old, and it is only right they should now belong to you.*

I have lived most of my life in the absence of that gentle voice, and those woods of mine were clear-cut years ago, but my hair, I wear it long in honor of him.

*James Tolan*

## Children in Church

are the white the artist adds—  
the black—  
to paint, producing tints and shades, amending  
an otherwise too-pure pigment,  
one without nuance or grit.

They are at once  
new minted spirit, joy, small silver minnows  
and absolute body, appetite, distraction,  
the laundry after the rapture,  
what you're given  
to up the ante when it gets too easy.  
Monastics should  
import small children once a week the way  
batters swing three bats,  
runners wear ankle weights,  
oysters inhale the catalyst of pearls.

*Susan Blackwell Ramsey*

## The Clothes Make the Poet

Dressed to write in my red plaid  
pajama bottoms from Kmart and  
a T-shirt covered with sea horses  
that came from God knows where  
unless it was the garage sale where  
I got the bathrobe monogrammed with  
the initial Q which is not my initial.  
And because nobody dressed this way  
can think clearly enough to function  
I begin to wonder why I look this way.  
Maybe it's because I'm a man and  
men don't know how to dress or  
maybe it's because I'm not enough of a man  
and I should go to the typewriter  
in camouflage and boots. My face painted  
with grease. Or maybe I should get an  
Armani suit. *Dear Reader, this poem  
was written by a man wearing an Armani  
suit and a Rolex.* Or was it a ski mask  
and a jump suit? Maybe I could wear  
a gorilla mask or a powdered wig.  
I could wear an evening gown or a  
dog collar. Anyway, getting dressed to write  
is like getting dressed to kill or to die.  
It doesn't much matter what you wear.  
Like a man at a wedding or a funeral  
looking down at his mismatched socks and  
either laughing or crying.

*Seaborn Jones*

## Struggle

You wake up  
your self wakes up too  
you head for the bathroom  
your self close on your heels  
there in the mirror  
you confront each other  
your self wants to merge  
move in and take over  
like every other day  
but today you're not so sure  
you consider risking it  
going out on your own  
selfless, with just  
your rusty old soul  
your clunking heart  
to get you through  
you back up a step  
your self lunges forward  
there's a brief struggle...  
you finish in the bathroom  
go into the kitchen to  
get a cup of coffee  
knowing the day  
is lost already.

*Mark Stuart Terrill*

## Days of 1995

That man rooting through graveyards, sewing  
the parts of dead men together till his creature  
wails menacingly above him; the man dragging  
proudly on his cigarette in the afterglow  
of the bomb sight, do they bring good things  
to light? It's the heartbeat of America  
that calls to you rush hours on the car phone,  
heatwaves billowing above the pavement  
like Marilyn's dress in *The Seven Year Itch*;  
or, alternatively, it's the real thing  
reflected in the eyes of a homeless man  
begging dollars on Broadway, blaming inflation  
for the increase, his dream like yours  
everywhere you want to be. Have it your way,  
he says, as though gnashing his teeth  
while you walk blankly past, his fists  
two stones unable to fling themselves at the sky.  
You, too, would rather discover yourself  
here than run for the border, your true voice  
like a pear tree new each morning,  
all the sweet fruit waiting to be picked.  
Fresh is the taste, but not after Eden—  
that bedroom where nightly you cup your hands  
to your face as though to drink your own tears,  
baleful, bitter, and good to the last drop.

*Daniel Tobin*

## Dream

We sit and argue about Art all night,  
until I glance beyond the garden wall  
and see a man climbing up.

"Look," I say. "That man has a gun!"

We rush indoors,  
spilling grass and leaves from our clothes,

taking care to lock the doors.

But the man, elegant in evening clothes,  
turns all the locks with his gun,  
his strong key. "Don't get up,"  
he says. Three henchmen dressed like night  
in black tie and tails enter through the wall.

We are their prisoners inside the wall.  
They are a string quartet, with formal clothes,  
but without violins, playing each night  
at crime. They claim blunt instruments and guns  
will open any door  
when one has given up,

or failed, at Art. Bitter after nights  
without applause, bad notices, fed up  
with the silence of closed doors,  
left with only the clothes  
on their backs, they say, "The bark of guns  
is chamber music blasting through the walls

of critical indifference." Each night  
they find a captive audience, shoot up  
the place with strange music, leaving the walls  
full of holes, straighten their clothes,  
and leave. Unused to guns,  
the audience rushes for the doors.

Well, they begin to shoot. We run outdoors,  
fleeing the phantom quartet at sunup.  
But is this all a dream? The gun,  
the mad quartet... I struggle with bed-clothes....  
Thirsty for sleep after a long night,  
why am I once again against the wall?

It's tempting to give up, after a night  
facing the gun. Imagination clothes  
the wall as a door. It remains a wall.

But when the blue night pales before the gun  
of dawn, I wake up whole again inside my clothes.  
Each day is a door in the long wall.

*Juliet Kaufmann*

## The Tease

Clara was cast in no one's mold, none of this wrestling with her conscience, her standards. On slow numbers she gave the boys' shoulders a luscious massage that turned them to jello.

The censure in the chaperone's stare, the tsking of good girls behind her back at the lavatory mirror were irrelevant to her. She maintained her cool glamor in the cracked-tile chamber of mold smells and garish echoes, cleared the air

with a musk-scented cream, applied it to her pulse points with a languid massage, then stroked her mouth with passionate lipstick a shade deeper than raspberry jello. When she swan-glided back onto the dance floor, numbers of potential victims stepped forward

sacrificially. She nuzzled and whispered, leaned into their shaving lotion auras while her detractors floated like pastel organdy clouds to settle in backseats, behind bushes, protesting, wrestling, mussing their hair, yanked about in a way she would never allow as she controlled each encounter with her sleepy, meaningful gaze

and gave so little of herself away.

*Nancy Breen*

## Coming Home

The day my Dad got out of jail the circus was in town. On a bet for three hundred dollars he joined. He made friends with a family of trapeze artists and fed cinnamon sugar donuts to elephants, because elephants remember. He played black jack with DeNiro in Vegas, almost married an ice skater from Canada, and spent the night in a haunted hotel. For five years he lived on a train with animals and roaches, but he got old and couldn't stand the monkeys sleeping in his cot. When the train stopped in our town he got off. He sits around drinking whiskey, eating cinnamon sugar donuts, and smoking three packs of cigarettes a day. When I asked him what he missed the most about the circus he said, "The midgets, I never had to look them in the eyes."

*Rene Ribant*