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POETRY 2009

Michael Lee Phillips
Grand Prize Winner

Vol. XVI, No. 1



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**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

In memory of Turner Cassity, 1929-2009

Volume XVI, Issue Number 1

ATLANTA REVIEW

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Welcome

Poetry in Atlanta, America, and the world suffered a great loss in the recent death of Turner Cassity. When I first met him at the Emory University Library, where we both worked, he told me that he was, in library parlance, an "original cataloger." As a poet, too, Turner was undoubtedly one of the *most* original catalogers of the ironies and follies of human existence. Nothing escaped his amused eye and penetrating wit, which was just as incisive in conversation as it was on the printed page.

Turner believed that poets should write about the world around them, and created a poetry wholly outside of the usual lyrical and introspective modes of our time. But in his eleven books, you'll find that Turner, like the painter in Borges' story, has spent a lifetime painting the world with stunning accuracy, only to step back and discover that he has really been painting a portrait of his own face.

The artistic news is considerably better than the economic news these days. There is certainly no "recession" in poetry, and this year's Poetry 2009 International Poetry Competition proves it. We received more outstanding contest entries this year than ever before, as you'll see in the largest Contest section we've ever published. So get a "Grip" on yourself before you start reading. Our prize-winning poem is, I can attest, enough to make a grown man cry.

After a disarmingly calm opening, this issue plunges right into the temptations of sex and chocolate, which even Death seems to find irresistible. Is garlic good for you? We have two deliciously different viewpoints on the subject. For the many who loved the Germany Issue last spring, we have three brilliant Günter Kunert poems. (I won't give away the ending of "Monologue" if you promise not to.) And I'm pleased to say that we had already accepted a new poem by Turner Cassity at the time of his death in July. Amazement awaits at every twist and turn of this ruggedly scenic road. Enjoy!

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

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Small Talk

It's raining and that's all
 we want to know.
 Not the mood
 this particular spell of rain delivers,
 or a discussion of rain
 as allegory.
 Just the simple fact of it,
 as simple and plain
 as the clock on the wall,
 the salt and pepper shakers on the table,
 the milk, the eggs,
 and the occasional squeak and bang
 of the back porch door.
 It's in the tangible we trust,
 in whatever can fit
 around our fingers,
 in whatever the waitress
 can package up for us to go.
 Though small it may be,
 it wields a fierce, uncanny magic.
 When it tightens its firm tiny palm
 around the gaping maw
 of the unknowable,
 the cacophonous roar
 of the ineffable is stilled,
 and following close
 behind it,
 the demons of discontent
 grow drowsy
 and suddenly begin
 to yawn.

Catherine Tahmin

The First Crush

I was wise until fourth grade gym,
when Alison's hips jagged and shimmied
to *The Hokey Pokey*. Before that day, field trips
through the diluted holiness of nature,
dissecting butterflies and stinkweed,
I was really getting somewhere. I learned how
plant cells have walls, but ours don't.
How we have nothing to fear from sundown.
I was the height of a verb, sure,
but fresh nouns streamed in every hour.
I bear-crawled across the gym mats
in my Wal-Mart sweats, immodest as a platypus.
Then it happened. The nuns corralled us
into a circle. Needle met record
and Ray Anthony's big band told me
it was time to shake my inheritance.
Across our little circle jived this ribboned thing
with her anatomical differences
of which we Catholic boys knew nothing.
But she met each command with naked gusto
and I felt that first tectonic shift.
Somehow I made it home, bewildered
but sensing that henceforth, grasshoppers
and baseball would not be enough.
No matter that the rest of the world stood still.
I have been wobbling ever since.

Michael Meyerhofer

The Judge in the Murder Trial of the Man of High Degree, Hearing the Testimony of Flora, the Lily of the West: Louisville, 1845

By godfrey, if she's this breathtaking
to a codger like me, it's obvious this young man,
this Edgar Wainwright—this slayer of a leading citizen—
was besotted by her as if by a barrel of bourbon;
she poured her potion down his throat, turned
his brains to mush, though her portcullis
was unbreachable to the penniless whelp,
opening only for Charles Beauregard, a man of high degree.
Alas for her, Edgar's dagger found him first;
alas, too, Charles was married to a fortress of rectitude.
If he even thought of leaving Lavinia for good,
she'd cast him into a penniless winter so cold
our Louisville would shiver white as Ultima Thule.

Flora testifies she'd never seen Edgar before
that awful morning, that he was a madman,
mistaking Charles for a devil to be cast off this earth.
Oh, Charles was a devil, but only with the ladies.
A wonder no jealous husband had killed him earlier.
Keep talking, Flora, pray, do keep talking:
your testimony, from cherry-luscious lips,
taunts me to kiss those fleshy rose petals,
but it's more prudent to court Charles' widow:
a hot-blooded woman under her puritan frown,
if only for the right man. Charles—confiding once,
over brandy and cigars—he never possessed
the patience: easier to seek excitement elsewhere.

Yes, this Flora, this Lily of the West weaves
alluring snares, but I'd rather the safe marriage mesh
of Charles's widow: a fine woman who aches
to be loved, and even finer when one takes into account
her slaves, her acres, and her bank statements.

Robert Cooperman

The Chocolate Factory

You can smell the roast from two miles away—
cocoa beans from the Ivory Coast, Ghana,
Sulawesi. Before I learned geography

I knew the names of the premium beans. Knew Criollo
came from orchid-clustered jungles in the wet-hot
tropics. Humming and alive—the family

chocolate factory—twenty-four hours a day.
They pumped out millions of satiny, brown pounds—
my candyman grandfather and his son.

Back when I was fourteen, Dad went a little nuts.
Too many gloom and doom books, too late
at night. He railed at the dinner table, *Economy's*

collapsing! There'll be mobs in the streets!
Out there. Out in the world.
We can hide in the factory

for months. Thick walls, no windows,
a power generator, and twenty-ton vats
of sugar, cocoa butter, chocolate.

I picture us there, sitting on a tall,
sparkling hill of sugar: Dad, Mom, six kids.
The walls hum with wires and copper pipes.

Continuous amber light—no day,
no night. We're surrounded by a warm chocolate
womb. Outside, mobs pound on the walls.

Janet Jennings

Master of Chocolate

After fifty-six years selling chocolate,
he knows what his customers want
before they know themselves:

The boy who slouches in,
chewing gum, acting tough, will choose
a chocolate heart tied in a pink bow.

The old woman who leaves her dachshund outside
wants foil-wrapped liqueurs for her sister
and a single hazelnut cream for her dog.

Lately he can tell where they were born,
which oceans they've visited,
the color of their bedroom walls.

Whole lives press against him
as he curls another ribbon
round a Valentine basket.

But it takes him a minute
before he understands who she is,
the woman in black, her head hooded.

She reaches right through the glass
of the display case for a truffle,
and he sees an hourglass

outlined in silver on her palm.
She eats slowly, allowing him time
to write a last note to his wife.

Mary Soon Lee

Deviant Dandelions

America is a place where even the poets
kill dandelions. But the dandelions—like the poets—
just keep popping up and up on the prim lawns,
unbidden and unloved, explosive little sunbursts rolled out
when nobody was looking onto the mowed and manicured
turf of consensual reality, where all are now required by law
to be one height and color and genus and species.

And it would be too, if it weren't for the dandelions. Toothy lions
baring each spring their gilded grins, like girls with braces, awkward
and wayward, and so much brighter than the green conformity
they invade giggling. They know what poets also know—that this world,
however prosaic it might appear, is worth returning to year after year.
Nodding their lemony manes at the sun, they laugh at the white-
smocked lab men who are busy plotting their chemical demise.

They are also announcing the demise of poetry. But whatever
the lab men throw at poetry, it never seems to die. Because poets
have learned to dwell upon the lonesome fringes, the untended margins,
places the suburban jihad has yet to desecrate with its weapons
of vegetable destruction— foremost amongst these, 2-4-D, one half
of Agent Orange, which doesn't kill the grass, only the dandelions.
The other half kills everything alive. Including poetry.

Still poetry hangs on, a stunted earth-hugging flower in this
boundlessly unflowering age—but that it's here at all is the wonder.
Literary dandelion, spartan and self-contained, renouncing sex,
fertilizing self by self alone. Then overnight the blossom-head
transmuting, like Cinderella after the ball, into a toady white puffball.
Each seed hung from its own silken parachute—a poem, which can drift
anywhere, plant itself anywhere upon the propagating planet.

They say a single dandelion produces up to two thousand seeds a year.
Poets are not so prolific— but their verse also navigates a scorched
landscape, and alights where the soil has been disturbed, places like lawns
and abandoned lots—human spaces. There are no dandelions in forests,
and few in feral meadows. Wild places don't need poems—they are already
poems. But in a heart that's been domesticated a single line can take root,
can become a feisty lifeline back to a wilder world.

Richard Schiffman

Jackson Hole, Years Later

Here in wilderness I meet my mother's ghost.
Ghosting here too is her aunt, who brought
her like a daughter here at seventeen.

A writer but a doctor's wife, the aunt
relinquished ink, settled for Society
and church, for airless parlors, bodiless
liturgy, beggary taken for worship—
worship I despised, deposed years later—

women's prison, until here in the wilderness
they joined cigar and dung society:
packhorsing the rivered evergreens,
with uncle doctor and the guides, casting
for cutthroat trout. Freshet-swelling mountains,
story-swollen campfires, lace falling into the dirt.

Unaware she's flirting with the cowboys,
my mother, for once, frees her soul,
conceives of the children she'll bear
to be freer than she. I see her soaring
over spruce on the upward thermal
of birdsong. Her aunt, beyond life's pivot,
frees her soul to grieve the children
her body denied her and, dead in the desk,
her writing. I see her sorrow, cradled in firs,
salting this greying stone bosom.

Cleansed in wilderness, two forgotten
women now remember how
to be a body of the body of the earth.

*am I the timber
am I the fallen log
am I the hawk
and the tumbled shell
am I the snow field
the bones of the boulders
the blade and the blossom
the song in the cell*

A body of the body of the earth:
alert as spider, sharp as fox bark,
certain as magpies completing
their tasks. Mother and unmother,
I feel their loosened pulses beckon
here years later. Years later,

watching the washing sky,
filmy with forms from Blake,
feeling the peaks pry me open.
For what? I dream of no children
but art. What flows down
these brimming stone folds?
Each life is an arrowing flight
of intention and joy is intention
enough, we are told. As a hawk
falls to prey, the reply: sooner
or later, the heart returns to worship.

Having sworn never to worship again,
having been bored to destruction by worship,
having denied any need to worship
while granting the need to bathe, to exercise,
to shop, and pay and scrub and fathom
and charter and transport—sooner
or later, the heart returns to worship.

Not for the sake of the god and the goddess
who will not be sweetened with measly sacrifice.
Not for the sake of the netted straw hat
or the pancake breakfast or bingo-paid missionaries.
Not to please elders or neighbors or friends
or to hear hymns again or to improve ourselves.
Nor for the fear of the soul, speared and crisped
on the spit of eternity. Or even the good

that demands to be done. Sooner
or later, the heart returns, for worship
is her native exercise. A body on the body
of the earth. Steeple, dome, or evergreen,
she limbers up, she stretches, and she soars
on the upward thermal of reverence itself.

Irene O'Garden

Hiking in Switzerland

with a bad back and doctor's orders not to fall,
through fields of bluebells and of buttercups,
daisies and milkweed to brow-level height,
and tiny orchids of pale lavender,
tiger-striped mossy rocks, forget-me-nots,
even the thistles tender in their bristly buds.

Hansel and Gretel house, with smoke
seeping the chimney, and the man—
the witch is dead, her husband lives there now—
stepping outside to peel an apple with a knife
too large. Now the danger is not in the house
but past it, in the beauty of the shining rock

slippery with summer melt and in my head
the warning *Do not fall!* when here the trail
juts from the narrow ledge, and the town
has plummeted. I have climbed too far
into a sudden sun, the floating clouds
shredded by crags, peaks under snow.

This is the trail that no one walks. Here
mountains hold their promised avalanche.
A herd of mountain goats leap past.
I have come too far. How shall I return
when the descent is herniated at cliff's wall
and my spine is hurting. Here there is danger

in each waterfall, madness in rivers rushing down
in heedless cataracts, and danger in
the maddened clouds that race along the crest,
and madness in the black-winged butterfly
that lands and fastens on my arm
and flutters, radiant, into the sun.

Jean Hollander

Equilibrium

There are times at night when the house locks
eyes with the moon and light soaks through
the transfixed windows and coats
the floor, the desk, half your sleeping
face, but not the other.

Does it stop there,
or do you dream, at these times,
that you stand in a doorway
or the mouth of a cave, half in shadow,
unsure whether to leave or enter?

The moon scans your bookshelves
while you sleep, explores beneath your bed,
slips its long finger into the curl of your one
exposed ear to disturb the small pool
that dwells there,

and this alone might be enough
to shift your balance in a certain
direction, to instruct both your body
and its dream of itself
which way to turn.

Brieghan Gardner

The Little Dog Upstairs That Never Quits Barking

has suddenly quit. And in the quiet
I wait for him to resume, imagining him
(for I have seen him—his tight white curls,
his anxious, mashed-in face)

staring into space, too sorrowful now
even to cry out, settling
with a sigh in the leopard armchair,
facing the wooden indifference of the door.

Poetry after all is a form of barking.
Yap, yap, yap,
someone please come back.
Take me outside to piddle

among the flower stalks. Cradle me
in the arms of your strange tall species,
grant me a biscuit shaped like a bone.
...And now I, too, fall silent. The clock

in the kitchen keeps clicking away
saying *Love me* to the skillet and saucepans,
the wire rack of dishes, cans of soup
and beans, O bowl of sugar, O dispenser of salt.

Kim Addonizio

Devotion

The Gandan Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

The morning chants echo from the monastery.
I approach the old monk. He is to read my sutras.
He takes both hands, turns the palms up.
Incense and sweat hang in the air. The monks silence
their chants, break for a bowl of porridge.
The old monk looks at me through tinted glasses,
says something. I look to the translator, she tells me,
“He says he can tell you, but only after you understand.
After more attention to your true work. Only then,
you must return.” He nods, turns to go, his maroon
and yellow robes sweep the floor. Outside the gates,
a homeless woman crouches on the street,
scooping rain water from the gutter into a thermos.
Old women offer small bottles of ablution.
Street children wearing plastic sandals,
their dirty soaks drenched, sell bird seed, beg
for spare change. Mist falls now a steady rain,
pigeons lift into the cloud-pleated sky, the chants resume—
the flutter, the rain, the boundlessness of human song.

Suzanne Roberts

Ode at Twenty-One Weeks

Praise the sonogram's glow: spine's colonnade
of bone from sacrum to skull—tiny cupola—
here soft, round. Praise columns of femur, tibia,
humerus, fingers and toes imagined; praise a hint
of ribs at the nave, black mass inside called "heart."

Praise this technological grisaille, the landscape
in process it renders, sketch called body.
Praise the expanse of skin suggested by shadow,
horizon of earth, sky. Praise the sealed sea
protecting face: profile's slope, chin's curve, bud
of nose. Praise caves named "liver," "spleen."

Yes, praise this musical hazelnut, mini bass drum
at *prestissimo*, new symphony's first refrain.
Praise the spiraled blue cord, pulsing placenta
echoing the heart's beat. Praise this organ fixed
fast to the acoustical eaves of uterine wall.
Praise whispered swish, swish.

And praise, as if an epilogue or epic's choral
refrain, the spine. Praise its white stitches,
binding arc—cervical to pelvic—narrative
start to finish. Praise its interlocking words, chapters
of nerve. Praise it, praise it, this burgeoning book.

Christine Stewart-Nuñez

Donna Sleeps

1965-1974

Someone had to stay with the sleeping child
and I was awoken,
shaken from fitful sleep
by voices in the night,
the stillness broken.

Someone had to wait by the phone for news,
and I was the watcher.
This child at least is safe.
I checked his quiet slumber,
then thought of the other—

Picturing her laughing, dancing dark eyes
the younger daughter
the ivory skin
the thick brown braids
—and the car that dragged her.

Someone had to choose when to turn them off,
the machines that breathed,
to harvest the organs,
what color the dress,
the verses to read.

Someone had to learn of a final sleep
from which no one awakens.
So much for promise,
innocence, and tomorrows—
all are taken.

Vernita Hall

Mother's Day Gift

To my daughter

As I admire these irises
that you brought, forgive me.
I picture how soon they'll drop,

blue petal by petal, all pretense
that they can live forever
in a shapely vase. Good daughter,

I'm sorry in advance for that day
when love's duties grow old,
no longer small or pretty.

I know that you will feed me
your angers mixed with love,
just as I have spooned

my own mother her pills,
bitter tablets crushed
in such sweet apple sauce.

Susan Cohen

Care Package to My Nephew in Iraq

Do not send things that will melt in the heat.
Send him Skittles, peanut butter, cracker packs.
Pringles—the chips survive
better in the crush-proof tube.

You must list every item on the customs form.
Kool-aid. Ramen. Cans of stew.
Send Ziploc bags that keep out the sand,
chewing gum, toothpaste, cigarettes. *The box*

and all its contents may be returned to you.
Send him aspirin, shaving cream, sunblock.
Never put toiletries in the same box as food—
Oreos. Ginger snaps. Dainty's Buttercream Wafers.

—soldiers complain their cookies taste like soap.
What else? What else?
He likes mysteries, wrestling, hockey. Does he need
good boots? A proper helmet? Why—
The box and all its contents may be destroyed.

—hasn't he written? Send him phone cards, pens, paper.
In case of non-delivery, treat as abandoned.
Send him body armor, a bullet-proof vest, steel plating for the convoys.
In case of non-delivery, return to sender.

Send him laser-enhanced radar, an intelligent commander,
satellite maps of enemy movements. Send him
back alive. *Items subject to return charges at sender's expense.*
In case of non-delivery

I do not want the box and all its contents destroyed.
In case of non-delivery
I do not want the box. Do not send back
the box.

Jeff Crandall

The Scream

voiced over by an on-the-spot
reporter, microphone in hand
amid the ruins
primal, pre-linguistic,
a doe in her death-throe's shriek
pitched higher, high
against the armored vehicles, soldiers
onlookers, TV cameras,
not strangled in her throat
not forced
out of the agony of childbirth—
her child now lying in rubble—
a living scream, a larynx strained
to its utmost,
a woman's
refusal to be calmed or comforted,
to let the voicing
of her loss be lost
in translation
as it is
on the hour in each newscast's
shrill cry
orchestrated
camera work panning in
a woman's face
set hard
against the visual montage
of urban carnage,
mouth
still stretched open
for the reporter's words,
firm, authoritative
medium
for the scream's message.

John N. Miller

The Wail of the Banshee

Who hears me cry
these days? Days of money,
endless days
of heat and storm, of empire.
They used to have the vision
to see me,
on a chosen windowsill,
raking my
grey (my yellow, my red) hair,
to warn them,
the ones with ears to hear,
that someone close
must die—
it's written in their blood. But who
bothers with me now?
I break another
tooth from my comb—
anything can be cut
down, everything decays.
Another war,
more torture,
is anyone still intact?
Oh, the rich—
of course—but they don't listen,
they're anointed—
tucked and prodded into
age, they're dead to the world
already. I
hear the bombs,
even softly, far away,
the gunfire.
Over such chaos—go on,
call it freedom
if you dare—who trembles
at my ordinary, quiet news?

Sarah Kennedy

The Captive

Kabul, 1996 / Kandahar, 2009

Call her Bastet, Demeter, Hathor, if you like,
or, more plainly, Life.
Entering her cell, he unrolled his text
Saying, "I am to be your teacher now,"
began to read the edicts, shalt
and thou-shalt-nots
his council had devised,
erasing, one by one, her face and hair,
her children's games,
kites and homing pigeons, music.

But here she sat up at an unexpected word.
Joyful, it said. *No joyful music*,
as if the inscriber of those laws
had let his attention go astray,
allowed, however inadvertently,
there was a time when the kite string
strained against his palm,
a song pressed upward in his throat,
pigeons were cradled, then released to air.

Joyful. The word, itself, said,
"You knew me once. Why do you turn away?"

He closed his text.
"I will be back," he said,
but, looking for the first time
at her eyes, too visible, too clear,
saw she would be difficult
to teach.

Marjorie Mir

The Ruin at Pompeii

The sun dissolved this morning,
and here I
lie—
where?—
in this darkness,
without the gods
of my latest master,
his Jupiter,
his Mars.
They would never abandon him,
his home,
if we knelt before the altar's
light and prayed
against the great
fist of cloud rising from that old mountain.
Forgive me,
my eyes idled to my arm,
the bracelet glittering there—
he gave it
for submission,
my service.
He called it
love.
From his high hand, a gift—
think of that.
And what power has he now?
The flames rain
on servant and Roman alike.

Listen:
imagine me as I was
when you pour
my bones from this shell of fire,
cast me in
plaster:
I would have been eighteen next moon.
My blazing skin, singed hair—
my master
wailed as he went under,
and my mistress.
I think of the poor gladiators,
chained
at the theater.
The price of empire.
My molten breath,
my palm against my wrist—
I feel his metal burn me even now.

Sarah Kennedy

Planting Garlic

You plant your Arawaks, no, I mean your Garlic around Columbus Day. That's the celebration of the man who said, "Let's in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold." So naturally you select the biggest, strongest looking native—Oh, NO, that's clove, and you separate them from their cluster, or, as the old timers say, their *family*, and you put them in mines, no, graves, NO! I mean trenches, yes, trenches. You place them roots down, six inches apart, two inches deep, pack firm with soil, and cover up well, mulch to resist heaving.
A young priest, Bartolomé de la Casas, participated in the conquest of Cuba. He received a plantation. In 1494 he grew three million people, I mean Arawaks, I mean Garlic plants. In 1508 he grew sixty thousand. In fourteen seasons nearly three million plants were trampled by war, slavery, and starvation, not to mention those planted too deep in the mines, I mean trenches. Bartolomé de la Casas gave up his plantation. And so, in October I suffer with the Garlic. Gently digging the graves of so many torched souls. Kneeling in the garden, looking towards the blue, crisp sky, I feel betrayed, lost in a past that did not exist. What finds me are memories of spring with long, strong, green reeds reaching out to the light of God.

E.P. Schultz

Cotton

My uncle, the town drunk, swept the
floors at Maag's cafe after closing,
slept on a cot in the back room,
never married.

They called him Cotton; I don't
know why. They said he was a little
slow, or not quite right.
Something.

Three wars ago in the Pacific he
crawled across a Philippine town
square under machine-gun fire
dragging two crates of ammo.

Bullets splattered the dirt, one even glanced
off his helmet but he saved his platoon.

In a box in a drawer somewhere,
the bronze star for bravery under fire.
His brother once asked, why did you do it?
He answered, somebody had to.

I didn't know him. Saw him maybe
once or twice at family gatherings.
He usually stayed away.

Today I buried him with the war
veterans in the town cemetery.
No one came, not the people from
Maag's cafe, not even his brother,
too ill to travel the distance.

Today I bought the burial plot,
paid for the coffin,
kept the bronze star.
Somebody had to.

Rex Easley

Trout Moon

A steady drift of ashen snow.
Dirges for Lent and hopelessness.
The seasons come round
and are almost too much to bear.
Yet under leaf and ice
green reliquaries
await a triggering sun.
And the borgo outside the ruins holds sleepy children
ready to sing when teacher finally rings her ancient bell.
And a woman, neither young nor old, stretches her arms
and is surprised to find herself reaching for a lover
who once lived where dreams ran like rivers
under all her days.
The forecast calls for tomorrow to be windy and warm.
A string band tunes and a barn owl whistles.
Even grandparents dance under the trout moon of spring.
We will bury the child on Friday and come Sunday
someone will toast a friend home from the war.
Life is like this. Better come late than never.
I'll uncork the wine and place a wafer of chocolate
upon your tongue like a sacrament, like a kiss.

Marc Harshman



POETRY 2009



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The Maître Fromager

This February in Brittany, I am learning the dialect of cheese. On market days, I dress warmly, wear my red scarf. I search for the maître fromager among the vendors on the square past the fishmonger, the mussels piled into a hill of wet, black stones, the old woman selling honey and eight varieties of apples, her husband with celeriac and fennel, hard knobs of winter fruit that yield only to paring knives and patient hunger.

From his white van, the maître fromager's counter glows in the buttery light of soft moons. *Machecoulais affine* wears a frilly dress, and weeps golden milk; the local *chèvre* rides in a fragile, balsa wood boat like a homemade toy raft— *Bleu de Severac* is streaked with tributaries of green mold, mossy and wild as the Rance Estuary. The villagers wait, shuffling their damp boots. To buy cheese, you must first be interviewed.

The maître fromager leans across the counter to question his first client: *What kind of character are you searching for? How strong? How firm?* As if he could find her the perfect match. She whispers back to him. This is slow work, there is silence. We all press closer to listen; I pretend to inspect a *St. Nectaire de Seigle* in its gray velvet coat of ashes. When he demands of her: *How will you serve it?* in my mind, I am already rehearsing the moment when he turns to me, and I will lie to him:

The cheese will accompany a small endive salad with walnuts and raspberry vinaigrette. You cannot say to the maître fromager: When I am alone, I will scoop the heart from this Epoisse and lick it from a spoon. I will be standing. There will be no plate, no bread, no linen serviette. You cannot announce in front of the village what you will do with this cheese on a lonely winter afternoon, while the root vegetables slowly soften in the oven.

Melanie Drane

Tuscany Dawn

What if I wasted one whole year
browsing through Tuscany, brown hills
cluttered with vineyards and olive trees,

villages cast in stucco and spiked
with brick towers? What if I tasted
so much local *vino* my face

exploded in puffery of veins
and my midsection inflated
like a World War Two mae west?

The light's so flaccid in the pines
I'm hardly compelled to obey
my biological clock. Three days

till Thanksgiving, family scattered
beyond recovery, father dead,
aunts and uncles nearly inert

with age, and my mother frozen
before *The Price is Right* and reruns
of *Murder, She Wrote* and *Matlock*.

I'll watch the Macy's parade
with its cartoon balloons and grisly
Santa Claus, watch it on TV

rather than hunker in the crowd
as it ploughs along the avenue
with pampered children screaming.

Maybe I'll watch the Detroit game
as well, but football bores me
with predictable tactics and big,

over-talented linemen grunting
head to head, plastic helmets creaking.
I want to lie in a dormant

but sunny vineyard while storks
migrate south to Africa and stones
rattle in rivers at the foot

of mountains spiked with villas
erected in memory of
Horace and Virgil, the somber light

a little more agile here,
and the sound of my own breathing
nearly rhythmic enough to believe.

William Doreski

Breakfast in Mykonos, 1980

Chalkwhite against the Aegean, the townscape all rooftops and dovecotes;
everyday someone whitewashes a house and its entryway, the labyrinth
of streets. It is only those of us on foot and the burro from the bakery
who navigate the narrow pathways. The sacrament of morning: slap of sandals
on stone past little houses shoulder to shoulder on the street, every window
and door cobalt blue, and then a red one arched within its wall, the May Day
wreath still fresh. Behind the stuccoed walls people enter the waking world:
the clatter of crockery knocking together, a man's rough cough from last night
cigarettes, a baby babbling. At the waterfront, a dory tethered to a rock
and a wooden box of flopping fish, scales copper and turquoise. Not yet seven
tables on the cobbles are filling up. Brazen pelicans beg for bread. The café
offers very black coffee in tiny white cups, a bowl of yogurt, thick enough
to stand a spoon up, and glossy, a little sour; sugar cubes compact as the house.
The waiter places a metal saucer on the table—two slices of Greek bread
and in the shallow recess, a pool of amber from the apiary outside town.
Thirty years and still, the sweetness on my tongue.

Amy Dengler

For Lhasa

March 17, 2008 I could not shake
the thought of you in flames.
Throughout the day whispering
the names of those I know still
living in your center, on your
periphery. Felt your misery.
Smelled burning shops, overturned
cars, Chinese flags. Saw smoke rising

incense-like over the Potala and Jokhang.
Heard the rumblings of a hundred
tanks moving through your hallowed
streets. Remembered the soldier
whose car grazed my arm, knocking
me down—bicycle and body sprawled
on the ground as he sped past laughing.
Today I said it out loud to no one

in particular, to the nameless faces
in the crowd, "I never left you nor
loved any city more." So tonight
I'll fill seven prayer bowls, make a
mandala out of Arabian desert sand,
remember as I dangle my feet in Gulf
waters the source of the Ganges,
and wonder if indeed I am a certain

lama's reincarnation. I'll take
that long flight back, walk the
famished, enflamed road leading
to the holy city where I'll rise up
like incense, a faithful wife burning
on her husband's pyre because I
can't forget you, most fragile
tragic city of Tibet.

Diana Woodcock

Angola, 2002

1.

I watched children in the streets
near my daughter's flat and marveled
at my inability to make things
even the slightest bit better for them.

Successful escapees from war,
they foraged beneath market stalls
for fruit and slivers of roasted meat,
then slept side-by-side in stairwells
or close to trash fires in vacant lots.

Peace had come. They wanted to go home,
washed their shirts beneath spigots
in the municipal garden
where cape jasmine and hibiscus bloomed.

I was used to being necessary
but in that country of the young,
that country of few survivors,
I was old and suspect
walking the cracked pavement,
graffiti scrawled in Portuguese or Umbundu
mysterious as markings on the moon.

2.

My daughter showed me her statistics—
malaria, polio, land mines, dysentery.

We were out on the Isla, at Club Miami,
owned, as so many things were,
by relatives of the President.
Ten U.S. dollars to use a beach chair,

the customers mainly locals, but a few aid workers
and some oil rig guys down from Cabinda,
lifting glasses of Castle lager, talking price per barrel.

Most people didn't talk, just closed their eyes.
That mile-long, breezy sand bar—
the closest thing to not being in Africa at all.

It was the year my grandchild was born,
grew chubby and thrived, a fearless one,
in love with sand, its grittiness against damp skin.
My daughter drank *limonada*, sighed.
Gulls strutted along the seawalls
pulling tiny crabs from beneath stones.

Then as if she had decided something, the baby
for the first time crawled away from us,
moving fast toward the water.
She would not be deterred.
I jumped and danced and waved my arms
back and forth in front of her,
laughed when she laughed, made the sea
unreachable. That was something I could do.

Sharon Fain

Light into Light

If I could go back for one thing only,
it would be this—the light coming off the mountains,
the wind pressing fireweed and purple lupine
against our knees, the shadows of clouds
spilling over us as they blow across the mountaintops,

and the sense, for a moment, of being one
with the created world, knowing at last that we are bound
irrevocably to the warp and weft of plant and earth,
sky and cliff face, all seething with ongoing,
unstoppable change. Nothing prepared me

for the immensity of the gray-green range
spread out before us, beyond which Denali rises
somewhere to the south, or to the shock of being here,
even for a short time, where everything
we see on the treeless hills wears a mantle

of streaming light and shade. Look.
In the valley below, a chickadee lights
on an aspen's swaying branch. The wind lifts the fur
of a mother bear that we can't see as she leads
her cubs home. We have not created this and yet

it was given to us to sing, and to remember:
how the grass grows without our direction,
or the merlin glides above us, beyond our command,
searching for prey, while silvery braided streams wander
where they will in the range below us. Perhaps this

is what was meant in Ezekiel when the Lord says
that He will take away our stony hearts and give us
natural hearts, for how can we see the world
clearly, unless we can be pierced?
Blake said that if the doors of perception

were cleansed, we would see things as they
are—infinite—and for a moment this makes sense
as the wind lifts once more, drawing water
from our eyes as the Word of the world
continues its utterance, arising out of

and flowing into the silence without which
our lives could not be borne, and we sense
once more what we have always carried within us,
how our lives are drawn across the loom of the world
in a pattern beyond our imagining, death into life, light into light.

Michelle Maher

Horses on the Elk River, Colorado

We want to watch them always where the river
Flows to us as to a friend;
They stand on the opposite bank, water rushing over
White stones, a roan and a sorrel, one bent

Munching spring grass, the other's chestnut head
Held high, looking straight at us, his blaze
A bright medallion amidst the aspens. We are led
Out of the air conditioned car to gaze

At something natural that seems
Unreal, dreamt, pulled by the clatter of leaves
And the shimmer of horses as they sweep
Past a stand of cottonwood. Uphill, blue spruce weaves

The light through its fingers like a spinner
And the valley opens to more horses, cream, white,
Palomino, browsing along the bank or trotting near
Each other, never straying far. A flight

Of meadow larks graze the willows and disappear
In squares of sky and rock. The chestnut springs
In a wide canter and the roan follows in tag, they steer
Around the herd while the sun clings

To their hides like a hand. The hand of Cortez
Is on these hills, these horses. They lean
Into the wind as one, as if waiting so
Will end in a signal to turn a great wheel again

Across frontiers, past rivers without names. A burst
Of olive sage shelves the bank where copper ore
Hangs like a blade. The river is a bracelet
On the wrist of the conquistadors,

And on my wrist the eternal camera hangs.
How are we to remember
In tomorrow's fixed routines, this change
That moves us as if we were children here?

I rub my fingers along a spine of mesquite, crush some sage
To smear the pungent foliage on my hand.
My wife, son and daughter take the stage,
Still as stone: landmarks as much as the land.

Ron De Maris

Osprey Sushi

*How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?*

—William Blake

Suppose you had to dive for food like an osprey.
You're riding on the sloping tail of two
Air masses left behind, a nice thermal, say,

And far below with your x-ray vision, stronger
And more acute than any human eye, you
See a school of mullet, or a little longer,

Mid-sized mackerel in silver sheen and polka dots,
Or needle fish in iridescent green and pink,
Better yet, among seaweeds, baby snapper and lots

Of bronze kelp to give you roughage and all
In motion, alive, fresh as can be, just think
How appetizing that selection in the full

Counters of the ocean. Yes, you, riding that
Invisible ridge, weightless, a seed pod in a Niagara,
And you drop like a stone, wings flat

And tucked to your side going wherever your whim
Will take you, claws tilted like landing wheels, raw
Speed without limit, better than skis, the trim

Of your tail adjusting to swerve this way or another
By the mere lift of a feather while you loop
Low over the sea's face, brain heady with power

And the display case of the reef offers its delights
Like a servant to master. You are away with a hoop
Of joy, great wings lifting you slowly, slowly, to the heights.

Ron De Maris

Map Lag

Map Lag: a syndrome resulting from intense travel planning, especially the overstudy of a distant place the patient would rather be. Hours spent poring over maps and guides result in a heightened desire to arrive at the destination weeks ahead of schedule.

Also known as hyper-peregrinitis, once thought to be caused by a 'travel bug,' it is now considered one of the psychogeospatial disorders, a class ranging from vacation envy to pre-departure panic.

Symptoms include inattention to the present and obsession with the future trip. Patients seek stimuli associated with their itineraries, often exacerbated by chronic cold weather in their home locales. In severe cases a persistent itch may develop.

Diagnosis is based on the ratio of reverie to reality. Clinical findings reveal a spectrum of travel fantasy and activity: mini-fugues may be accompanied by compulsive purchases of pseudo-safari wear, or by ritual behavior

such as the folding and unfolding of maps while deriving tactile pleasure (cartophilia), re-reading aloud from foreign phrase books (xenoglossolalia), memorization of lists of exotic avifauna unlikely to be observed, and the decryption of fine-print Fodorese.

Treatment consists of a therapeutic long-haul flight—the inability to remain here and now is resolved upon arrival there and then. If the travel is transmeridian, side-effects include a dislocated time zone (see *Jet Lag*).

William Keener

Living In Michigan

February 2009

Snow-trails of tiny tunnels
and the shadows of bare branches.
My friend has lost her job.
My favorite bookstore is closing.

Bare branches cast shadows,
expose houses, frozen in mid-build.
My favorite bookstore is closing.
My husband works at General Motors.

Rows of houses frozen in mid-build.
Farm fields blanketed with unsold cars.
My husband, at General Motors,
starts conference calling at 6 AM.

Unsold cars, shrouded in plastic blankets.
I worry about my sons' future,
about conference calls to other time zones,
engineers in India, Brazil, Korea.

I worry about my sons' future
costs, the prices of my dad's prescriptions,
little reporting from India, Brazil, Korea,
the *Free Press* thinning week by week.

The cost, the price of prescriptions,
of freeze cycles on Detroit streets.
Thinner week by week, good news:
Art Classes Are Filling Up.

Freeze-thaw-freeze of Detroit streets,
obstacle course of potholes and crevices.
Art classes fill something up.
I call it *work*, writing poems.

Obstacle course of potholes, crevices.
My friend has lost her job.
And I'm at work, burrowing for lines,
tiny tunnels in the snow.

Christine Rhein

Ria, Remembering

After a chance meeting with Lucian Freud, art handler Ria Kirby agreed to sit for him.... The painting continued from April 2006 for one year and four months, seven nights a week... only four evenings off. Each of the sittings lasted for about five hours, more than 2,400 hours in total.

—*Telegraph Magazine*, September 22, 2007

The narrowness of the bed, the white sheet draped over the mattress, the pillow, everything smelling of thinners and oils. Sometimes I imagined the true scents of *forest* and *fern*, *midnight blue* and *pale pink*, my skin from one sitting to the next.

He began by painting my head and my hair, by singing me songs, telling stories. Witty, sexy stories. Yes, in his eighties, older than my grandfathers, older than his own famous grandfather became. I pictured Sigmund once, watching,

and wondered how he'd analyze an artist who can't work from photographs, who must *know the model*, who said the curved metal knots of the headboard, shadow of the radiator, empty spaces of the room, were changed by my being there.

I learned to shed the day in the ten-minute walk from my office to his studio, to forgo the desire of doing, of appearing to be anything more than the exact angles and overlaps of my limbs, barely bent knees, one arm propping

the pillow, the other anchored in front of me, fingers molded around the strict edge of the bed. I savored the ritual, the care he took to arrange the lights, moving them only slightly, adjusting, it seemed, for the brightness or stillness

of his mood. I thought about the lamp that stood above my father's corner chair, how, alone one day I had dared turn it on, then quickly off again, fretting, in that intense girlish way, he would somehow sense my trespassing. I thought about my first kiss

under the glare of a streetlight, the darkness the first time I let a man undress me, the easel being wheeled to another spot, a new perspective. I didn't bother trying to be *natural*. Nudity, too, is a garment. And women are depicted

as aware of being seen because, well, they are aware of being seen, being studied. The nights became a world I didn't want to leave, a cave I was afraid I'd never escape. In the fall, he began to hint—*just another few weeks*, but proportions kept changing,

the painting growing. He had the canvas extended on both ends, join seams well hidden. By winter I could merge my heartbeat with the rhythm of his shoes turning away, the sighing floorboards, whispers of brushstrokes, bristles plunged

into solvent, his legs coming closer again, halting at some invisible boundary. During breaks, I'd stand, stretch, hunt for something in his eyes. He wanted me to know how he struggles over a painting being done, how he worries *in case it isn't really finished*.

Late in the second summer, in one moment, he knew. He'd been repainting my hair, thickening the blonde curls, untangling the months of observation, all he'd been feeling. I knew too. It was the way he dropped his arms, the way the portrait started breathing.

Christine Rhein

On a Korean Jar Known as *Full Moon*

Choson Dynasty, British Museum

Not for the swell
of your belly,
sky wader, wetlands
anchorage,
though your middle
has amplitude a plenty.

Not for the pale slip
of shade in the face,
solitary nun, ascetic
starved for visitation,
though your skin
has pallor enough.

Nor for the imperfections,
the pocks and dimples,
like a fishwife's
torn net, the blemishes
mottles and stains
that puddle your glaze.

Not even for the pregnant
symmetry of your shape,
like a sun in two worlds,
hovering on the brink,
crown high and dry,
foot getting wet.

A cello, maybe, humming
before a cord is struck,
a lone channel light
or bell buoy in between,
gut fret hook line
taut and ready to snap.

As if you were about to burst.
Your song the silence
of a ballooning sea,
a wave hugging her shadow,
the whitecaps breaking,
tossed onshore.

Two hands, say, cradling
a ball of damp clay,
face no longer young,
back bent to the wheel
till the wheel takes over,
a pillar of fire.

The bulb of a flower,
night blooming,
a sleeper waking from sleep
and seeing, close enough
to touch, every petal
slippery with light.

Steve Lautermilch

Garlic

Taut as muscles, tiny calves
wrapped in dry paper,
you come bunched and crested,
perfect in my hand
as if made for it,
as if you waited
in Eurasia's hard ground for us,
tramped over by Neanderthals
blind and mad for meat;
you wanted us,
heartsick for the moon,
because we would understand
you were not food, but food's halo,
that your hint of sweat
and whiff of crotch
ennobled us with stooping,
you were the small moon
we could dig out of the ground
after we sang our first song,
once we knew what magic was,
before we learned to wash our hands
and forgot that God
was under our feet.

Christopher Buehlman

Standing Firm

Now I'm standing firm by firm tomatoes
marketed by no firm's firm.
The hoe leans against the cornstalk.
Pollen falls in golden clouds,
drift of galactic dust.
Bees plow through the pollen
of a purple-blooming artichoke,
celestial thistle gone glad in every bract.

There are many navigation in this garden.
Immense flights of tiny leafhoppers.
Ladybugs and other beneficial predators.
Hum of the wings of a sacred scarab.
Hummingbird sizing up hollyhocks, bloom by bloom.
Even the wicked sweet transactions of ant and aphid.

Squash, my brothers and sister, attend!
Squash. Green, turban-shaped buttercup breed.
Preceded by pollen-throbbing
golden trumpet blossom announcing:
Squash, oh poetary dietary exegete.
Squash. Squash awash in sun.
Squash. How often do they serve it in a poem?
Squash. Green leaves cupped to catch the sun.
Squash. Spiral tendril gripping slyly.
Summer and winter squash.
Flecked and gourd-warted,
color and texture, tough-stemmed,
could occupy an artist's entire life,
stamen and pistil, male and female blossoms,
bees plow the pollen.

Let the world wheel beneath.
Let the wheels roll on to commerce.
I'm lost in the sprawl of green.
I pause by the hedge forever.

Bob Schildgen

Meatloaf

The Methodist Women's Cookbook lists seventeen meatloaf recipes and an apology for not printing more.

Saltines or oatmeal, Ritz round crackers crumbled, croutons, shaved bread, Heinz catsup, barbecue sauce or Campbell's tomato soup, prize-winning, beloved, family heirlooms.

They are about blood-is-thicker-than water.
They are welcomes or warnings.
Who doesn't know the kitchen is about ritual, iteration, the prayer shawl, hands in the body of something else—cow, the split torso of shell beans, the chambered tomato?

Here is the secret fear of Mrs. Bill (Edith) Montrose, hidden in the radical departure from tradition: mix ground turkey with beef for lower fat and cholesterol. Mr. Bill Montrose continues to snore in bed each night, his arteries saved by a trick of meatloaf. These are recipes dedicated to sons and husbands, and in clean, well-scrubbed kitchens the same bowls and breadboards have worn patterns off or even into countertops, and the hands of the good Methodist women have plunged into ground meat and raw egg and pressed the mixture fragrant with onion, peppers, sage and molasses into loaf pans and rubbed themselves under warm, soapy water

until the fat has dissolved and slipped down the drain.
The good Methodist men don't read these recipes, but the women do. Each knows her recipe testifies for her. It's what you give men—something to smell all the way into the throat, something heavy and hot to fill the mouth, thick, solid as a hymnal on a plate, something from nothing again and again until anything else, everything else, is distasteful.

Laurel J. Black

Haying: June 12

I follow windrows as they curve
around the field's geometry.
Rows of cut red clover and timothy
lie yet unsquared.
Driving our ancient tractor, I'm satisfied
with a perfect turn, the roller coaster rush
of throttling up over ruts.
I don't care that our finances are precarious
as the glue holding together my glasses.
A conjunction of deep blue and green
plus birdsong, equals peace.

My sons lift bales from the field
a smooth ballet of strength
that plays like baling twine
unrolling steadily through the day.
My daughter stacks teetering squares on the wagon
as her father pulls it, head turned watchfully.
Afternoon light shines in their hair.
They call to each other, laughing as they work
voices held aloft as chaff's long glittering.
Even swallowing this day I couldn't feel more whole.
Hay piles up in the barn's dark recesses
like stored sunlight.

Laura Grace Weldon

on the opening of the earth

William Carlos Williams in mind

i would say it all comes down to
the hulking gray, dull-eyed,
wide-nosed buffalo,
trailed by the black-clothed farmer,
as they shuttlecock their way,
back and forth, over the
patchwork field,
plying the dirt into mud.

no, vietnamese farmers will say:

it all comes down to a rickety,
wooden wheelbarrow,
weathered to gray,
filled with the spring-green
bouquets of rice starts,
sitting patiently on
its own shadow at mid-day,
waiting for someone to roll it
toward the water-rich paddy

no, other outsiders will say, earnestly:

it all comes down to the group
of village women,
wizened and young,
stooped through the day,
moist to just below
their soft hips, sliding slowly
backwards together across

the earth-floor of the pools,
as they quickly separate, lift
and point the green-bristled stocks
into the water, changing it
to a hedgehog's back.

we are all wrong, the saffroned
priest will say:

it all comes down to the misty spring
and the spirits of heaven and earth.

Simon Peter Eggertsen

Portrait of My Daughter as Dominatrix

You demand and I obey, slipping a breast
out on the bus, the bony man across the aisle

grinning his all-gum grin. You make him wish
for a mouth as facile as yours, how you hurl

your salvo of howls until I bend to you, fill
you up. You wail on me, into me, those lungs

braiding air thick as a whip until I grovel,
crawl like a wounded pup to where you wait,

the silence when I suckle you heavy and red
as a palmprint on my cheek. You won't remember,

but I will, all those months you wore my skin
like so much leather, blood and cord tethering

us like a leash, and then the hours you tied
me to the bed until I came away your slave.

Jennifer Perrine

Approaching the Actual

Dodge Poetry Festival, Waterloo Village, September 2002

My son, at eight months, stares
into the window of the 200-year-old
farmstead chicken coop where
black laced Wyandotte roosters
strut from side to side
crowing into the perpetual dawn
that is the gift or curse of their two
tiny apertures into the noon-time world.

He rubs his fingers over
age-grooved oak of muntin
and frame. He is like a printer
at his bench, pressing into being
pictures that might explain
this world. He taps
on rippled glass and paint
flecked sill. *Here is glass, I say.*
Here is wood. He listens—
as each calls out to the world
in its own peculiar language.

As we watch, the sill takes
a Daddy-long-legs into its folds,
and the glass, silvered by the sun
that has known this shed for so long,
reflects back to us my son's small face
shimmering below my larger one.
Overlaid are the roosters. *Good morning!*
Good morning! they crow, the glass
a silver plate twice exposed.

Here, in this historic village,
past and present inhabit one
another, as my son was once held
within me and I will be forever
within him, like the hardening
of each ring of life in the tree, the light
tint of color bubbled in molten sand,
and all of these poems dwelling
in the world, and the world
within them. I stand entranced

by the slow melt of glass and time,
until I am pulled back
to this place and this time
by my son's sudden cry
—*Ah! Ah!*

he squeals with delight
at his own reflection—
or is it the cocky crow of roosters?
or simply the song of finger tap
on wood and glass
as he keeps knocking
knocking on the actual world

Kelly Vande Plasse