

MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 16 ISSUE 2
THE VALLEY REVIEW

MUGWORT

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

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- 4 Salutations From the Editor
5 Once a Molecule Said
Mary Buchinger
6 On Kodiak Island
Mary Buchinger
7 A Drop of Mary
Mary Buchinger
8 Last Days
Mary Buchinger
9 Nosings with Marina Barcenilla
11 International Tea Day
Jane Yolen
12 Little Aldo: A Novel Excerpt
Stephen Sacco
24 Commodities: All Natural
Jennifer Weigel
25 MacDougall and the Magic Tyre
Peter Tacy
26 The Garage of the Mysteries by the Lass Herself
Jane Yolen
27 The Mugwort Poems
Jane Yolen
28 The Mugwort Pharmacopoeia
Peter Tacy
29 Annie, Born to Beauty Double
& When It Was Today in the War
Linda Chown
30 The Meaty Record Review by Jeremy Macomber-Dubs
32 A World Apart
Pernell Berkeley
33 The Meaty Interview: Maxim Furek
34 Alert
Jim Ross
35 Summer Dancing
Richard Wayne Horton
37 Nowhere to Hide
Mario Lew
40 Commodotties: Extra Virgin
Jennifer Weigel
41 The Mule and His Purse & To Write Your Name Red
B.W. Archer
42 The Seeded Ghost in Repitition
B.W. Archer
43 Called in Sick
Nikki Rios
44 Going to Bed // *Dream Journal*
Nikki Rios
45 Signal Crash
Nikki Rios
46 The World Book
Rick Paar
48 Houses
Tamara Fricke
49 The Club
Tamara Fricke
50 At the MFA Boston, June 23, 2021
Tamara Fricke
51 Prisoner, Morning Breath
& Portrait of a Woman Buttoning Her Blouse
Marian Kent
52 *Ballad: Surviving*
Jerome Berglund
53 *In Memorium: Cootie Catcher*
Jerome Berglund
54 *Spenserian Stanza*
Jerome Berglund
54 *Bike Among Friends*
Jim Ross
55 *Dry and Victorious & The Arrogance of Living*
Danna Lynch
56 *The Heroes in Juarez*
Mareja S.Vela
65 *Sarah's Womb, Late for Nothing & The Cave of Machpelah*
Tzivia Gover
66 *The Sex Side of Life*
Charles Rammelkamp
67 *Antarctic Discoveries*
Charles Rammelkamp
68 *Commodoties: Juicy*
Jennifer Weigel
69 *Testimony*
Michael Favala Goldman
70 *In the Realm of Forms*
Michael Favala Goldman
71 *I Don't Even Thing About Death Anymore*
Ernest Brute
72 *If I Had Any Imagination, I'd Invent a New Way of Washing Up
& Every Face Looks Familiar*
Gerald Yelle
73 *Human Form*
Gerald Yelle
74 *Weathering the World & Roundabout*
RC deWinter
75 *What Could I Tell You If I Felt Like Writing*
RC deWinter
76 *A Bitter Taste*
Patrick Scott
82 *Heart #2*
Ellen Mary Hayes
83 *Serpent*
Ellen Mary Hayes
84 *Healing Properties*
Karen Willard-Ribeiro
86 *Razzing Patty*
Frank Zahn
92 *Hypocrisy*
Robert Peate
94 *A Sleepover at Monica's*
Kathy McMullen
107 *Commodoties: Milk Caramel*
Jennifer Weigel
108 *Logolepsy*
Linda Kraus
109 *4/29*
Scott Ferry
110 *4/30*
Scott Ferry
111 *4/30 (2)*
Scott Ferry
112 *Elephants of Tazmania*
Allan Lake
113 *Nancy Ann and Stan*
Jacob Chapman
114 *The Levers of Stained Glass*
Jacob Chapman
115 *What Happened to Our City?*
Jacob Chapman
116 *Love and a Few Other Phobias*
Mark Budman
117 *Driving Ms. Olivia and Ms. Amelia*
Mark Budman
118 *Cinderell and His Shoe*
Mark Budman
119 *Pangram*
Roseann Ullman
121 *Ring #14*
Ellen Mary Hayes
122 *Untitled #6*
Ellen Mary Hayes
123 *Untitled #22*
Ellen Mary Hayes
124 *Mugwort Tea*
John Q. Adams
126 *Mugworts & Ahhh... Mugworts*
John Q. Adams
127 *Dreams of Water*
Jim Ross
133 *Contributors' Notes*

Inside Back Cover:
Hatcher
Olive McArdle



salutations from the editor

Greetings dear readers,

I'm wondering what we are to do now? Especially those of us still in our fertile years. Are we to resort to mugwort, the mostly reliable abortifacient employed in days of yore? Must we instruct our daughters and granddaughters in the, now obscure, ways of herbal remedies for unwanted pregnancies? Certainly we shan't just suck it up and bear children we neither want, have time and energy to feed, clothe, and house, and at the same time risk the very real possibility of death, in this not great, and never truly great country, with its high maternal death rates.

What are we to do if we do suck it up, have the baby, and because we are so stressed about the war in Ukraine. rising food and gas prices, and the incessant, daily shootings, that our body cannot, nay will not, produce milk? Formula has grown scarce, shall we starve this infant we've been forced to bear?

Gentle reader, I implore you to vote and save us from this dread dystopian handmaid's tale into which we have been led, unwilling. And if I sound mad, I am... but not at you.

You, I invite to take respite here, in these pages of art and literature, and I do hope it is some kind of balm for your soul. Or... you could try mugwort. I've been told it has a calming effect.

besos y abrazos,
Elizabeth

once a molecule said

Mary Buchinger

Once a molecule said

not stone not fish
not seaweed

what was it that it said
yes to?

Who was asking?

I just want to know.

*

I feel my molecules
as predetermined
and choiceless

yet there is wander and drift

there is the body of me
that is fully formed and
fixed

the body of me
that moves that changes
and is dying.

*

I watch the light
moved by the warmth
of the March sun

a ripple
washes over my page

says This life is moving
moving light

the day hourly
lifts from night

from the shadow
of the known

its warmed current
rushing rushing—

*

What is so far
from here
is still
here
is shaping here

the maker of here
the way-way back

the begetter
that wayward
Atom

*

One day it was *not stone*
not fish not seaweed

no it was
more than a day

it was more
than one thing
until it was
something

and then
something new
again.

✱

on kodiak island

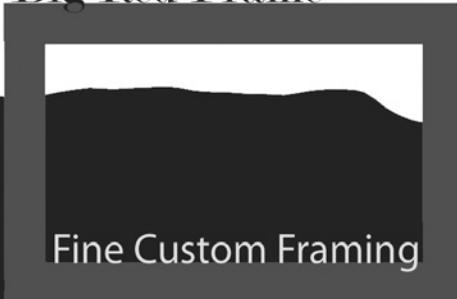
Mary Buchinger

The green needle-leaf I squeeze between finger and thumb
is Sitka spruce branching limb trunk craggy tree is thousand-
acre forest black-tailed doe and bounding fawn arctic fox
spider spindly spider rain-streaked snail and thunder-winged
ptarmigan mottled as granite is tall sow bear her three bumbling
cubs tunneling grub and silver-linked lichen is pink salmonberry
and thorned devil's club and spreading wood fern cotton grass
sundew wild geranium blue lupine and blue mussels is limpets
and sea stars tundra vole waving gold anemone and gray whale
fin whale murdering orca is liquid brown otter pine siskin
and the bank swallow just arrived from Argentina! Kinglets and
kittiwakes tufted puffins oldsquaw ducks and *oh my* eagles
eagles eagles everywhere eagles in the Pacific-lifted sweet
-loft roseroot and softest moss-riddled air



6

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a drop of mary

Mary Buchinger

of marry the earth
be buried in earth be glad in it!
Mary marry God of mother
of instant forgiveness of undo
distraction of undue encumbrance

of say what? and say who?
of Immaculate that? conceive
what you can of bitterest root
and perfumed oil splurge
and be sad no be merry be glad

be Mary regardless with towel of hair
blade of braid and troweling curl
lave away the dust the dust of Jesus
his feet of clay swept with tresses
and rinsed with tears

it's Mary who marries God to earth
Incarnate again and again gives him feet
gives him dirt she bodies the God
in her womanly womb a God
with a crown caught in her hymen

a crowning and bath in the blood of a human
the holy placenta dripping on straw
dog in the manger the cattle are lowing
and Mary she bellows she bellows and
bellows in a drafty cedar barn

the God came to earth in an animal'd swill
in the turbulent waters of Mary
Mary who sleeps on the grave
rolls away the stone lays waste
to the emptiness the barren the alone

the Marys are many so many
to choose from! the astonished
the disdained jaw-clenched acerb
the Mary who lounges lazy and dreamy
each Mary married in me –

Mary she marries she district
she province she city she river
she crater on the moon she cartoon
she song she song she island
she pseudonym she seer

her name is bitter is rebellion
is riot is *Love Beloved Star of the Sea*
but wait! No *Star of the Sea* is Mary Marie
the scribe made a slip! an error
or simply could not believe

St. Jerome's rendering
from Eusebius of Caesarea
of *Mary* as *drop* a drop
just a drop the tiniest drop
in the *Magnificent Sea*



last days

Mary Buchinger

cheek to jowl at the trough
puddings and bonfires shall we
grill the heartwood? wrap it
with bacon and stick it with cloves?
sparks of bark and *chow chow chow*
the sap we suck we slather and slip
however thin it runs it sweetens
the thyme greases what passes
between us nosh on the spring-
wood summerwood come
the rays rain over us sun-stipple
and spray deep in the pith
in the liver and ileum purple lungs
slippery spleen leafy bower
petal in pedal out tumbledown limb
broken-off crown the very root is
rot but our mouths are full our
intestines pounding pummel
of gizzard stomata and petiole
lithe winding vines green the air
whisper *tourniquet* slow and sure



nosings with Marina Barcenilla

It is day 17 of month 3, year 1955 p. e. (post-exit planet Earth).

It has been almost two millennia since the last human left Earth following the depletion of its natural resources. Today, we are going back.

I have been selected as Chief Astrobiologist for the first mission to the strange blue marble we have been orbiting for the past fifty days. I feel apprehension and excitement in equal measure.

I have spent half of my life preparing for this mission. I have read all the documented history about this planet that humans used to call home. I have listened to all the stories passed down from generation to generation; I wonder how much truth remains in there... I have watched the picture films, and I know the shape and colours of the extinct wildlife, the oceans, rivers and lakes, and the trees and plants that made this a habitable planet before the environmental collapse in year 5 b. e. (before exit planet Earth). I have also completed the required auditory and olfactory training, which has prepared me for the sounds and smells of Terran nature. In theory, it will stop me from being overwhelmed by it all when I first step out of the spacecraft. The olfactory training was my favourite.

I have always felt shy about the size of my nose. Still, during my training, I realised that it served me very well, as I came out top of my class and was given the prestigious post of Olfactory Archivist. It is not just smell, they say; the sense of olfaction is intimately linked to our memories and emotions. I have become the custodian of smells that say “Home” to the human brain, scents which are an essential part of our collective memory of the planet that created us and to which we are returning.

Looking at it as we descend, it takes my breath away. A sight that is familiar yet alien at the same time. I am surprised when I realise that the odours contained in my olfactory training kit really match the colours of that massive ball of rock, with its patchwork of white and blue that slowly separates, allowing flashes of green and brown to break through. I am getting overwhelmed just thinking about it! My curiosity is on a roll, wondering if the imaginary aromas I blended in the training room are anything like what I am about to encounter.

In preparation for this first journey, I tried to imagine what our landing spot would smell like. I blended a moss note with a pine needle note and a cedarwood note, and then I added something that smells like roots and soil, and what they say the rain used to smell like on Earth, petrichor. Apparently, it is the most magical thing, the smell of life itself, because it was produced by soil-dwelling bacteria whenever it rained. That odour means life! How I hope we find it down there!

Stop musing! I hear. We are almost there.

Suddenly, I realise that we have picked up speed and are fast approaching the planet's surface. What was a distant blue marble suspended in space is getting closer. As we descend towards the surface, the swirling patterns of blue and white give way to greens and browns, finally exploding into a myriad of earthy shades on the mountain tops. The canopy of conifer trees opens up, ready to receive us, and we land. After checking everything is in order, we complete the safety exit procedures and get ready to explore. I am third in line to leave the ship; my heart quickens as the moment approaches.

I step out of the spacecraft with trepidation, leaving behind the familiar metallic and slightly sour smell of machinery and recycled air, ready to discover an olfactory collage of hemlock, cedar, spruce and fir trees. I immediately recognise the invigorating green notes from my training kit, but there is so much more to them than I ever imagined. I breathe in deeply and feel as if I have taken a real breath for the very first time. The cool air fills my nostrils, and I continue inhaling in as if my lungs have infinite capacity. Eventually, I exhale. I have never felt this alive.

With my second breath, I notice the heavy and sticky smell of sap that hangs in the air, blending with the scent of damp moss and bark, and bringing in a resinous and earthy quality that pulls the aroma of the green treetops towards the ground. There, it softly dances with ancient roots breaking through the forest surface, covered by damp soil and wild grasses freshly bathed by rain. And there it is, petrichor, the smell of survival... The silent hum of billions of microscopic organisms bringing this planet back to life. In the distance, a hint of greyish blue and the salty smell of seaweed and ocean air.

We made it, and here I stand, on the majestic Earth of my dreams, with its wild oceans and fresh winds, its ancient trees and soaring mountains, its flowing rivers and bubbling springs, its carpet of green and brown bathed in cleansing and nourishing rain. I am home.



international tea day

Jane Yolen

As I drink my tea, English decaf,
heavy on sugar and milk,
I think of my friend Christine,
first woman lecturer at St Andrews
after 500 years.

At elevenses she walked in the door,
was greeted by the professor.

“Ah, here’s Christine at last.”

He smiled. “Christine will pour.”

Relieved, the male teachers waited.

She threw down her marker.

“Christine will NOT pour!”

No Mother for her.

She eventually got tenure,

well-published, now emeritus.

But I remember best the story

Of Christine and that first tea.



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little aldo - a novel excerpt

Stephen Sacco



“Hey, little man! Hey there, little dude!” Peter called out.

I hate him. God, I hate him. I hated him before I met him, and now that I have met him, I hate him more. Peter the Unexceptional, Peter the Dim, Peter the Brute!

“What’s up, little dude?”

He won’t stop calling me little dude. He might as well call me the offensive “midget.” It’s irksome when you are insulted in public because of your size, but it’s infuriating to be defamed in such manner as to make the defamer appear friendly. Peter and I are rivals, not friends. He will soon learn this.

Peter put up his hand for me to high-five; of course, he placed his hand just beyond my reach. God, I hate him.

“High-five, little dude!” he yelled. “Just jump up and hit it, my brother!”

“I will not!” I shouted at him. “Little Aldo is not a trained seal. I do not jump through hoops for treats. May I remind you that I’m Dr. Aldo il Piccolo, formerly of Princeton University.”

“Chill, little dude, I’m messing with you.”

Peter crouches down and puts up his hand, this time within my reach. I comply, but only out of respect for Layla, my love. I wish to show her I’m giving Peter a chance.

“Peter, stop it,” the goddess spoke. Her voice lifted my soul. My ears were no longer filled with the clownish voice of the simpleton. I hear a choir of angels whenever my love speaks.

“What?” Peter said and shrugged his broad shoulders. Layla, oh my love, why are you with this insipid excuse for a man?

“I’m sorry, but you can’t bring your child in...”

A man dressed in a light blue vintage T-shirt, skinny jeans, and green-and-white low-top sneakers with red laces approached us. He stopped speaking and looked at me, puzzled. His thick, straight, black hair was swept back with gel, and his carefully oiled beard gave the impression that only moments ago he was out back chopping wood. More likely, he was in the alley smoking a cigarette. You could smell tobacco mixed with citrus-based cologne, or perhaps that was his beard oil. He smelled like a glass of lemonade in which somebody had doused their half-smoked cigarette.

His eyebrows were craggy and unkempt, and tattoos covered his arms. He had a red robin on a perch on his right forearm, a yellow sunflower with a blue center on his left forearm, and what