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Four photographs
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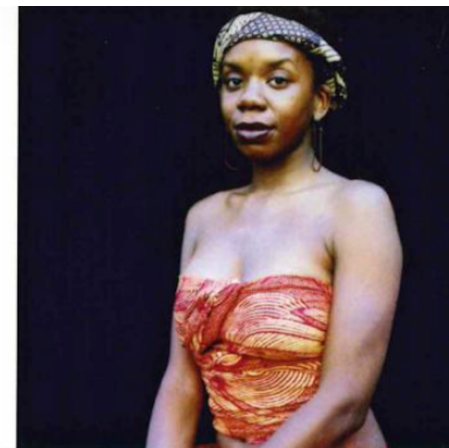
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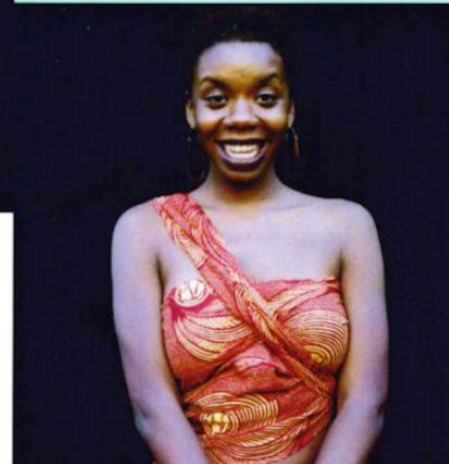
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Crab Orchard Review

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Including
Our 2000
Fiction &
Nonfiction
Prize Winners



**The 2000 Jack Dyer Fiction Prize
&
John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize**

We are pleased to announce the winners and finalists of the Fourth Annual Jack Dyer Fiction Prize and John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize.

In fiction, the winning entry was "Still Life with Saints" by Siobhan Fallon of Highland Falls, New York. Finalists in fiction were "The Mother of Invention" by Laurie Stone and "Under Stones, Under Water" by Amy Stuber. The final judge in fiction was Carolyn Alessio.

In literary nonfiction, the winning entry was "Motherland" by Jane Satterfield of Baltimore, Maryland. Finalists in literary nonfiction were "Under the Sun Block" by Mimi Schwartz, "Raking the Ashes" by Bill Smoot, "Tenderly" by Kwanlam Wong, and "Coal Country" by Jackie Zakrewsky. The final judge in literary nonfiction was Richard Peterson.

Both winners will receive \$1000 and their works are published in this issue. Congratulations to the winners and finalists, and thanks to all the entrants for their interest in *Crab Orchard Review*.

Please note the details of the 2001 Jack Dyer Fiction Prize and John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize in the back of this issue of *Crab Orchard Review*.

Crab Orchard Review's website has updated information on subscriptions, calls for submissions, contest information and results, and past, current and future issues. Visit us at:

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A Note on Our Cover

The four photographs on the cover of this issue are the work of Fern Logan, a professor in the Department of Cinema and Photography at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Jane Satterfield

Motherland

The maternal space is a place both double and foreign.

—Julia Kristeva

... This country makes me say too many things I can't say . . .

—Jo Shapcott

At the end of a dry, cool English summer, I got on a plane in Manchester and brought my daughter home. The sharp-smelling, shining, Continental liner was a far cry from the Red Cross transport I'd made the journey on myself, a child in my mother's arms—no seats, a twelve-hour flight, no way to warm milk. As we lifted up into the clearing sky, I didn't dare look down to where the terraces of the troubled city dropped into the green grey scrubland of the northern moors. I didn't want to watch—again—the distance grow between myself and my motherland.

Despite my birth in my mother's hometown of Corby, a small steel town in the otherwise sleepy county of Northamptonshire, I'd grown up an American. Because I'd never lived in Britain for an extended period of time, my connection to my homeland had dwindled over the years. In college, I studied English literature like archaeology, as if by reading I could uncover the image hoard of a landscape I'd learned by exile but had inherited by birth. So when the opportunity presented itself, I took a year off teaching to finish a poetry manuscript while my husband taught on a Fulbright exchange at a British secondary school.

The plan was that I'd write and travel, explore the vibrant English poetry scene. "Don't come back without the grand design for your own volume of 'not-so-ancient but equally glittering eyes,'" a friend had written in the flyleaf of a Bloodaxe anthology he'd bought me as a farewell gift. This was 1994, and the controversial New Generation Poetry Promotion, showcasing the work of thirty young poets and hailing poetry as the "new rock and roll," was in full swing. Poetry, it seemed, was everywhere—on buses, the underground, radio,

newspapers, in clubs, and on TV. But before long, those bright mornings setting off toward the Tube with timetables, the *Independent*, and pocket A-Z turned into something else: darkened skies, endless rain, the steadfast grime of the famed Six Towns, Stoke-on-Trent, home of the English pottery empire, and borderland to the North: a middling ground between Birmingham and Manchester. A life I'd learn I carried.

I was introduced to the National Health Service's adept antenatal care programme when the community midwife, bedecked in an iron-grey A-line dress, watch pinned to her chest like a medal, smiling student assistant alongside, knocked at my door.

The day before, when I'd received a call from the local surgery confirming my pregnancy test results as positive, I was told I'd be put on the midwife's list. As I stood in the drafty hallway and placed the phone back in its cradle, I fought back tears of disbelief, the overwhelming urge to vomit. So much, I thought, for catching a bad flu. The damp air of the coming autumn pressed in around me, my breath seemed suddenly laboured as light fell through the clouds and the wavering glass of the windows, coming and going in pulsing intervals. The pane was dulled, then lit again. A bus stuttered toward town. I could hear the hum of traffic along the ring road and the motorway just beyond. The staggering beauty of routine. The whole world outside—motion and inexorable progress. My marriage had long been imperiled, a tangle of obligations which bound two people in an exquisite, hurtful orbit. And here, a life etched out inside my own. This child, a future I had not dreamed of having, knotted into flesh.

Now here was the midwife, ready to take my details, my medical history, and "book" me in, which meant I'd have a bed reserved on the maternity unit for my due date. I pictured myself among the other expectant mothers, a mountain among mountains, ticking off hours like detained passengers.

Elaine and I got off on a bad foot at first because our cultural wires were crossed. Although the handful of Americans I knew endlessly described their adjustment troubles, their impatience and irritation, my passport had paved a different path from the moment my feet first touched ground when I was whisked through the European Union customs line and greeted warmly. While dress and accent made others obvious targets, I was taken for Australian, Canadian, someone from the south of England. Immersion came easily, and with it, a not always welcome invisibility. But at first, on arrival, I could hardly care. I was

stamped, approved, rapidly making my way toward the sign reading "way out." I glanced around eagerly, noting my surroundings, as if to brand the moment on my mind. For months I had looked forward to this moment, when just after my thirtieth birthday, I'd step across this foreign threshold and away from everything I knew.

Assuming I was British, Elaine rattled on about GP units, midwife delivery, scans and blood tests at the antenatal clinic where appointments would be made for me. I could expect my appointment notice in the post. Suddenly, my fate *was* my body; *it*, and therefore *I*, would be directed, assigned and as a result, I became all the more anxious for answers. My "morning" sickness only complicated things. I kept thinking back, to the afternoon years ago, when I sailed across the Bay of Fundy to Nova Scotia. Seasick, my only recourse was to remain on deck throughout the crossing, despite heavy winds.

Exasperated with my questions, Elaine kept eyeing her watch. Sarah, the student midwife, was happy to fill in missing information but was cut off by Elaine. "Nothing you can do, my dear, only cope the way you can." I slouched back in my seat, unmistakably irked. I was looking for something—assurance, a storyline, some consolation or compassion for the surprising position I'd found myself in. I wanted detailed and explicit answers to my every question. At the time, of course, I had no idea I was asking the impossible—she was doing her best to translate the unsayable.

At times my confusion over British medical terminology was compounded by Elaine's use of idiom. My British-English was an odd composite of the literary and whatever up-to-the-minute vernacular that I picked up from contemporary poetry, pop music, and imported BBC TV. Elaine's speech was far removed from the peculiar Potteries dialect one heard in the market and in the terraced housing districts of Stoke; still it was colored by the archaisms that mirrored the Midlands' remove from the more cosmopolitan points due south. When Elaine asked if I was "on the phone," I stared at her in surprise. My silence made her repeat the question, as if she spoke to a recalcitrant child. As I recited my adopted phone number, I felt the heat rising to my cheeks; I hadn't expected to feel like a beginning language student, incapable of comprehending the most basic requests at the hands of a native speaker, rapid-firing the questions. My voice cracked as I answered the series of routine questions; I blinked back tears. The GP unit, I quickly learned, meant midwife delivery, no serious drugs, a cylinder of gas and air only if desperately needed. It was October and wind knocked at

the single-glazed windows, whistling through the chimney of the gas fire. I shivered. Elaine sat pen in hand, intent on the paperwork.

Initially, I'd expected a lengthy chat over tea, the passing-on of friendly advice. But in less than an hour, I was left alone with my "notes," which encapsulated my family's medical history and assessed my pregnancy risk level, as well as listing the medical personnel my child and I were now assigned to: Midwife, General Practitioner, Maternity Unit. There were numbers for the antenatal clinic, the labour ward, the on-duty head midwife of the maternity unit. The notes, I was reminded, were to be carried at all times throughout the upcoming months. "I'll see you in a few weeks at the antenatal clinic," Elaine said, standing up, as she passed along an information booklet.

The gravel swirled under the tires of Elaine's Fiat *Panda* and the sound of the engine faded into the distance. How could I begin to comprehend the immensity of my changed life? Over-zealous student I had always been, I sought the solace of words and devoured the booklet Elaine had passed along. This text outlined the series of steps one would take toward motherhood, when to go for your appointments, who to see and what to expect. Resources for support groups were outlined, as were legal matters, when to apply for maternity leave, statutory maternity pay, and child support allowance. Motherhood and birth, it seemed to suggest, were completely comprehensible. A few well-meaning sentences could sum it all up. Things might not go as you'd imagined, but in the end, you'd accept the changes in your body and your life, and you'd be if not altogether happy, well on your way.

The emphasis in this official glossy NHS publication seemed to be on birth as *spectacle*. The plentiful photographs of natural birth were windows to another world, one seen through the diametrically opposed points of intimacy and medical necessity. These undoctored images emphasized the organic nature of the experience. Other cozy scenes—fathers massaging their spouses' backs or snapping photos as the newborn nuzzled its way to the breast—hardly coincided with the gruesome Victorian scenes which played out in my mind.

Although there were brief quotations from new expectant women and new mothers to accompany many of the photographed images, there weren't any "personal" comments about labour, just the reassuring language of the "text" which attempted to describe labour in a factual yet empathetic way. You were clearly meant to feel secure; the sketchy nature of the "facts" could hardly frighten even the most

skeptical reader. Pain-relief options were listed; great emphasis was placed on the disadvantages of medication. As I would learn later, the NHS advocated use of gas and air, and, more cautiously, pethidine. Epidurals seemed to be reserved for crisis cases only. As an outsider, of course, I thought this peculiar. After all, I had come of age in a country where personal choice counts for much, a culture where there are always within an arm's length more ways to mask than manage pain. Later, I understood. Although the NHS intends to offer equal care to all, a county's funding ultimately determines the quality of its care. A hospital might have one anesthesiologist; a woman in labour might well be denied pain relief if a more pressing need arose whatever her birth plan read or her desire of the moment might be. Practical considerations often reinforced the inherent injustices of social hierarchy and eroded any sense of individual entitlement.

As the dark nights drew in, I found myself missing the abundant beauty of American autumn, crisp air, leaves underfoot, streams of reptilian colour. Twilight fell just after two with a bone-chilling damp that seemed to seize the house. I wrote letters home with macabre twists, laughing over oddities and indignities like having to carry samples home, seeing nurses push records in rusted-out shopping trolleys along the antenatal clinic halls, and being examined by the replacement "midwife" I swore was Robbie Coltrane, "skiving" from rounds on *Cracker*. The Blitz mentality, what my husband's colleague's wife described to me when I first arrived as a peculiar brand of stoicism in the face of adversity, a tireless resignation and "making do," had taken hold. I took a perverse pleasure in enduring these indignities and supposed them preparation for the total effacement of motherhood. Rushing to make the last post, lines from *Letters Home*, which I'd read as a student while lounging in the stacks and smoking cigarettes, surfaced in my head, muted hints of difficulties I had yet to imagine.

Years of schooling had done little to enlighten my notions of motherhood. As young women, clad in kilts, buttoned-up oxfords, and knee-highs, those uniforms we perpetually readjusted when safely out of our elders' sight, what models did we have? Mothers who slapped bread into shape, held open their arms to our every need, litanies of self-denying, self-mutilating saints, anchoresses, abbesses, nuns, and holy women whose names we took, aspiring as our own mothers did, a bit too closely to those lives . . . I thought back to those years I sat at my desk in my own house, at the desk in

the second story study I shared with my husband. Marriage, career, education. None had quite liberated me. One summer night, just weeks before I left the States, there was a flash of lightning, a few drops of rain. Then the electricity went out. Voices drifted through the screen. I caught remnants, just shreds of narrative, the smallest details of the day, tomorrow's list of things to do. I lifted my head from deBeauvoir's letters to Sartre and looked out toward the fluid darkness. I was hearing—at a distance—the conversation of women.

In *Ornament and Silence*, Kennedy Fraser recounts a troubled period in her life that was made bearable and comprehensible by her reading of women's letters, diaries, and biographies. "They were like mothers and sisters to me," Fraser says, "these literary women, many of them already dead; more than my own family they seemed to stretch out a hand." This "murmured chorus" of voices provides a map of possibility for self-creation to many women who find themselves "catapulted" out of their context and whose mothers' ways of life are not much help. Thinking about impending motherhood, I became fascinated with reading women's letters. Reading Charlotte Brontë's letters to her friend Ellen Nussey or Plath's letters to her mother, I was relieved to hear voiced many of my own concerns. I could see that letter writers, often confined by domestic routine, could shape so much out of the material at hand and found great solace in the epistolary form—a testament to voice and craft.

As days turned into weeks and months and a five minute walk to the local surgery turned into twenty, my bewilderment turned to bemusement. "Don't worry," a friend told me, "you get used to it. In the end, you'll feel like a piece of meat." I nodded. I'd walked the market stall, seen carcasses slung up on hooks, fish gutted on ice, the poultry unplucked and unwrapped, propped up against the windowpanes of the butcher's shop. My body had become public property—an instant and often uninvited conversation opener, an endless source of advice and speculation.

Alison taught French and German at a nearby secondary school and was married to one of John's British colleagues. The first time we met, during our husbands' departmental dinner at a nearby pub, Alison invited us over for a meal and so began a series of visits to Bostock Close. That she held down a job, adored her daughters, could pack her husband off for snooker Friday nights and settle in for a good read

meant the world to me. "There are those—ignore them—," she'd say, "who'll never see you as more than this child's mother."

The North Staffordshire Maternity unit to which I was destined had been state of the art in the early sixties and had changed little since. North Staffs, I learned from neighbors, who'd become increasingly friendly when they caught sight of my swelling stomach, would be "very basic" but I'd be in good hands, since it was the largest maternity unit in the country. I smiled, keeping my doubts to myself. During my visit for a scan and bloodwork months ago, I glanced about at the peeling paper in the smoke-filled waiting room of the labour ward. The raw functionality of the decor reminded me of military hangars—signs with curt commands were posted; even in labour one had to scrub facilities after use. One afternoon, as we drove by, Alison pointed out the hospital where she'd delivered her two daughters, a crumbling structure straight out of Granada TV's Sherlock Holmes set. The air was unexpectedly warm for March so we cracked the Fiat's windows letting in Oasis, tandoori, the smell of fish and sausage frying, grease upon grease upon second-hand smoke. I knew I'd landed in a world no literature course had glamorized.

Spring. Daffodils bloomed on the distant hillsides which were speckled with sheep, efficient grazing machines. At the surgery I was greeted by another midwife, as luck would have it, an empathetic mother of three daughters who helped me compose the birthplan I wouldn't follow, steadfastly listening to each query and request, smiling and adding, "Though none of this pans out in the end." Chrissie understood that a mother-to-be, whose physical and intellectual life was ruled by her shifting body, needed to construct for herself some semblance of control. Her confidence and enthusiasm alleviated much of my anxiety and I hoped she'd deliver my baby. The midwives worked on a complicated rotation and wouldn't necessarily deliver your child, though they were known to visit their charges in the hospital after delivery.

By Easter, I'd enrolled in childbirth classes through the National Childbirth Trust, whose philosophy was inspired by Grantly Dick-Read, advocate of natural birth, childbirth "without fear." Dick-Read's philosophy was that fear of childbirth was culturally conditioned, an essential innovation in the earlier part of our century when childbirth was becoming institutionalized within the medical

establishment. If women could "unlearn" cultural biases, they could change their perception of the "difficulty" and "pain" involved with labour. The NCT's goal was to educate women so that they could influence the course of delivery and monitor medical intervention according to their preferences. Our class of ten couples met in a local arts centre, led by Alice, an enthusiastic mother with several grown children of her own.

Talking in a pub one night just weeks after the babies were born, our group admitted we'd all initially expected Alice to be a sort of earth mother, braided and beaded, chastising those of us considering drugs our top choice for pain relief. We found ourselves being coached by a woman who was enthused about birth, as we had expected, but who wanted us to remain aware and in charge, empowered to resist intervention. Alice had the extraordinary gift of making the difficult seem manageable, demonstrating exercises for the mother whose baby had suddenly gone breech while rattling off the names and numbers of midwives who did breech deliveries rather than routine C-sections. On class breaks, between tea and biscuits, we swapped hints and home remedies, wondering how we'd manage parenthood when we couldn't keep the stages of labour straight.

When I found myself in the maternity unit at last, unexpectedly early, I was quickly settled into a room with a view of the Trent Valley. Rain slashed the panes as I looked out to the few remaining bank ovens which dotted the Stoke City horizon. The midwives seemed kindness itself, dispensing comfort and cups of tea, slabs of toast slick with butter. The day wore on and I heard shouts from next door over the UEFA cup, songs going up as Manchester United won goal after goal. GPs on rounds were called in to assess and administered a half-dozen internals; in the end, male faces and voices began to fade into the background and they were dismissed. Night wore on and the midwives came and went on shifts, each with their own version of expert care and kindness, offering comfort and reassurance mixed with memories of their own experiences. After endless complications and unsuccessful sedation, my self-help schemes had clearly run their course. When it became clear I "wasn't coping," I found myself on a high-tech ward, nodding consent to each and every intervention.

Because I had no framework on which to comprehend the pain of childbirth, the moment it exceeded my comprehension, the ground

of reasoning was ripped out from underfoot—it eroded any sense of self. My coping skills had been a mixture of positive thinking and practicality—*keep moving, go with it*. I walked, talked, recited poetry under gas and air. But the pain became so intense and extreme I was lost in it, so enmeshed in flesh as to lose my sense of self, my sense of language, the compass and rudder to steer by.

That moment—the thrill one so often actively seeks—in pleasure and in vice—showed its underside. One moment I was alert, borne off at intervals by waves of pain; the next I was extinguished—a voice crying out. My voice tore from me as if through a sound tunnel, endlessly distant and extreme. The world receded and the room spun off like a retrograde planet. Light like a migraine and motion . . . pinned down as an epidural was administered. By mid-morning the fog lifted, oxytocin dripped in my veins. The heartbeat of my child slid off the monitor's screen and I was breathing oxygen sharp and clear like glass, like sudden and difficult sight. Suction had failed; I saw preparations, imagined the knife cutting the infant free of my body. There were shouts of surprise, then another cry in the room. My daughter was wrapped and placed in my arms; I was whisked off to the ward's circle of women.

Later, after I'd brought my daughter home, Chrissie visited every day for two weeks, chatting happily as she did her daily rounds, weighing my daughter and watching our feeds. At first, I had been nervous, as I was under anyone's eye, imagining I was being graded, that I might fail. "That baby's so happy," she'd say, "you're both so well. Remember you're doing a wonderful job." I came to look forward to the visits and hung on her every word of advice. My mother, visiting at the time, would make tea as we all talked. They compared notes about their birth experiences and children; Chrissie asked about my job in the States. In the course of conversation one day, she told me that it was childbirth that led her to midwife training. As my daughter Catherine looked up and into my eyes with a deep blue gaze so much like my own, I knew what Chrissie meant. Her work was not to simply bring a child into the world, but to bring a mother into it as well.

During the birth and after, in those early days of getting the baby settled and fed, as midwives knocked at my door each morning for two weeks, I understood how lucky I was, not just for their help but their makeshift example. What struck me most was their sense

of authority, these women, wives and mothers, and students, the initiated and the uninitiated, their indifference to the GPs who openly countered their advice and their refusal to defer or be daunted. The doctors and health visitors, who were trained nurses assigned to community areas to conduct home visits, scoffed at their judgments as well as their equipment. Their scales, for instance, unlike the health visitors' precision instruments, amounted to little more than a canvas sling hooked on a knotted and weighted string. Technicalities mattered little to the midwives. They knew that numbers taken to several decimal points weren't the sole measure of whether a baby was thriving.

When my mother went back to the States, she knew she left me in good hands. Betty, a family friend who worked as a health visitor in a nearby area, had an instinctive genius for giving help where it was needed without being asked, taking in hems on what had recently become oversized dresses or dropping by at intervals with babygear or extra clothes. Betty's advice was forthcoming only *after* it had been solicited and even then, it was always countered with alternate views in the interest of learning to trust your own instinct. Conversation always came back to the mother: her background, her interests, ideas; what had she done before the baby, what in time might she do? As she cradled Catherine, I remembered the hazy moments after my daughter was placed in my arms, gazing into her eyes, which opened and fluttered closed, casting about for placement, connection, snuggling closer when she heard her mother's voice: *Oh, it was you*. From the corridor I could hear another voice—erratic, other women inarticulate, labouring. I drank in the steam rising from my cup of tea. That voice—inaccessible, unforgettable, what I wanted to bring to birth.

English midsummer seemed to go on forever, an illusion born of the unexpected prominence of light. Nearing eleven, I'd settle in bed, watch the sun dim on the horizon as I gave Catherine her last feed and prepared to put her down for the night. I thought back to the days when I first arrived in England, sitting in a smoke-filled pub over a half pint. Dinner hour, the unjacketed out of offices. Smell of beer mixed with smoke, flat and potent like the froth of yeast. In jeans, a t-shirt, it's August, I'm looking for a car. When the wind recedes, the mild sensation of heat. Followed by the shock I feel that I am no longer the girl in the long floral dress who sat with some lover in spring's green haze, idling over beer. Or the one who

worked late, long hours into night, as dusty manuscripts angled off a desk, the buttery colour of Chardonnay silvered by the moonlight as condensation from a wine glass dripped onto my black silk shift, the floorboards cool underfoot.

And the hours in the university library—once so very real—even more distant than that.

Three months before boarding the flight back to the States, I was propped on my side in a hospital bed in Stoke, the baby in a perspex tub beside me. Nothing could have prepared me for the sense of isolation I felt, a sudden disconnectedness from my own past.

When Catherine refused to drift off one night, I bundled her in my arms and walked the halls in tears. I hadn't slept since I'd come to the hospital the day before. I was exhausted and had no milk yet to feed my child. She was restless and unhappy; I wondered, had I failed her already?

One of the midwives pulled me aside, walking me back to bed, saying, "You can't do this. You're a mother now. You must take care of yourself." She made me a cup of Ovaltine and took the baby to the nursery for a break. When I woke she handed Catherine back, along with a packet of mail—mix tapes of American releases, cards and letters from friends, an article to edit—an implicit *get on with it*. There was a final version of a friend's manuscript, what later turned out to be his first poetry collection. I knew this work like the back of my hand, marveled at its new shape. I picked up the heavy collection of papers, held her tighter and started to read, first in a whisper and then out loud. "But how would it feel to be / Not one far from his true home, nor one lost / Past all hope . . ." Catherine's eyelids fluttered with her dreams. I had deadlines to meet and work to do. " . . . to behold a hidden universe, / Sketching it out, under a watchful gaze— . . ." I kissed my daughter's forehead and picked up my pen.

I had the sense one has on landing, stepping off and out of the enclosed air of a transatlantic jet, how impossible the passage seems—I'm *here*, and just this morning I was over *there*.

Jane Satterfield's first book of poems is *Shepherdess with an Automatic*. In 1998, she was awarded the Heekin Foundation's Cuchulain Prize for Rhetoric in the Essay. Her poems and reviews are forthcoming in *Antioch Review*, *Bellingham Review*, and *Notre Dame Review*. She teaches at Loyola College in Maryland.