

**Review of The Georgia Review:
“We Are All of Us Passing Through”**

review by Ralph Pennel

In his introduction to volume 65, issue 4 of *The Georgia Review*, editor Stephen Corey, seemingly offhandedly, draws the reader through a brief history of time as illimitable as our collective imagination and as succinct as the word “time” is in instructing our understanding of the concept of time. Corey, when he asks, “Whether the words old and new having the same number of letters could be a sign of similar meanings” (667), reminds us, by demanding we consider their relativity and flexibility, and the expansion and contraction of language itself, that words—and all narratives given breath by them—can be simultaneously culled from their etymologies into new histories and back again in a single postulation. Before we even begin to read this collection of writings, the boundaries of time have collapsed. And, with each new piece, both individually and collectively, these boundaries are refashioned into the spaces between the boundaries, linking us all to the dark matter between all points of light, the very spaces where we construct the meaning of our lives, the spaces where, “We Are All of Us Passing Through.”



Each piece housed in this issue of *The Georgia Review* is a reminiscence—ruminative in content and context from each piece’s own beginning and end, through the entire collection’s beginning and end, and ruminative in the way that most purposeful, personal resolve is emotional acceptance of the unresolved flesh.

Fittingly, the opening essay, titled “In the Flesh,” by Martha G. Wiseman, begins here, with acceptance of all she has gained from all she has lost. Wiseman finds herself, at the onset, “back among the dancers” (669), a lifestyle she inherited from her namesake and godmother, Martha Graham, and a lifestyle she extracted herself from years later before she caved entirely into herself. In reflection, she recalls her “futile striving for a perfect dancer’s body” (676) though what she was actually striving for was, “a clear attempt to defeat [her] shame” (676). She is at no time kind or forgiving, recalling each failed attempt to reconcile with her own body that resulted in a loss of her own sense of self, until the recalling is a kind of a mantra. A prayer of sorts.

This idea of paying homage to the letting down of our wills, of honoring the dark matter, is carried throughout the review, and pulls the works together the way time pulls together the dissonant trajectories of our lives into a cohesive narrative. This homage, this accounting for our failings as evidence of grace, is further explored in Carol Edelstein’s poem, “Close

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as I Can Get to Prayer." Edelstein's poem, with all its elegiac weight, like Wiseman's essay, begins at the end:

Slowly the amaryllis unpacks its massive blooms.
At the end you were a fighting bird, all sinew and
will. (689)

However, it is an end both seasoned with stoic resolve and almost unpalatable longing:

But I'll take anything—world in a stupor
after the night shift, emptying its pockets
of coins, bills, whatever can be cast down
onto the square of light. Anything—any creature
peeking forth, root or leaf, smudge, crease—
I'll take. (689)

We can't help but feel from Edelstein's poem that the size and shape of personal accountability, or remorse and repentance, is contingent upon our sense of relatedness to the world around us, to the interior landscapes of our lives, and to the land itself.

Eugenie Torgerson's works carry with them the same sense of longing. Charting and plotting the earth's surface in her work, she reveals the intimacies of the lives of the land she photographs, as if time itself were capable of longing. Torgerson's works inhabit the page, render the page as history, trajectory, stasis, and breadth. They are at once cartography and the land they map. Each landscape has two histories. Histories with us. Histories without us. Contiguous. Confluent.

Torgerson says of her own work that, "My own images are not of a specific site but are generalized and universal representations of the weight of the land and the energy and allure of the horizon . . . of what makes people decide to leave, what causes them to stay, how they endure with grace" (712). It is hard not to assume that in each of her images, when Torgerson says people, she is speaking of the land instead, the land a dancer, too, a body from which those who inhabited it have attempted to render perfection.

It is in the writings of Henry Crews where, at nearly the center of journal, the ideas explored throughout the works of the review culminate, edify, and expand, the way light is drawn to and then bends around a celestial body. Crews is not spare in his ideas or language, stating directly what each Wiseman and Edelstein (and even Corey) have already asked us to consider in their own way. Crews, in his essay, "We Are All of Us Passing Through," pleads with epistemological conviction, "Deliver me

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from men who are without doubt. Doubt makes a man decent. My most steadfast conviction is that every man ought to doubt everything he holds dearest" (723). And, once again in *The Gospel Singer*, that, "Suffering is God's greatest gift to man" (739). It is through the pain that we gain greater vision, that we achieve higher levels of consciousness, where the self is born with acceptance of the body's death, where beginnings are endings, where old and new concord.

That this is the final issue of the 65th year is not unremarkable against the backdrop of its content. It could be no other way. Though this issue marks the end of the season, it serves to also lead us forward into the next with unquestionable elegiac eloquence.