



M. Lieberman, M.D.

Beginning in this issue, we will initiate a Poet's Corner edited by **Dr. Michael W. Lieberman**, former chair of the Department of Pathology at The Methodist Hospital and former director of The Methodist Hospital Research Institute.

Our goal is to provide for your enjoyment a poem in each issue of the journal from an award-winning, modern poet selected by Dr. Lieberman. We welcome your comments on the Poet's Corner and, as always, on articles appearing in the journal. *MDCVJ* does not accept unsolicited poems for publication in the Poet's Corner.

Returning to the Luxapalila

The river is the color of earth, fed by runoff
 from pastures and fields of cotton and corn
 and forestland heavy with humus.
 Kneeling by the water near a shale outcropping,
 I shatter my face and settle my outspread hand,
 palm up, until it fades from sight
 like something drowned in history's dark pages —
 now you see it, now you don't.
 Watching the hand disappear, I see
 the face of a girl eased down by the pastor,
 her paleness and blond hair darkened,
 held below that brown rush
 until she broke the surface again,
 arms flung wide in the flaring sun,
 face shining like an angel's,
 white marble with thin blue veins
 trailing from her temples to blend
 with water whispering off her hair,
 dress sheer and tight on her tiny breasts,
 Thank you, Jesus, he cried to the water and the woods.
 Here as a boy I curled at the end
 of a cable swing, flung out, released,
 hung there, wingless creature floating on air
 until gravity snatched me and I dropped
 breathless to the river, the flash of green bank,

the sun a yellow something spinning on blue,
 then my feet entering the water, my body
 going down through that wet tunnel,
 the color of weak whiskey across my eyes,
 a darker stronger bourbon, then nothing,
 slipping into the earth itself, and deeper,
 until my feet touched the bottom,
 the spongy primordial end of the world.
 A thrust and I rose through the tunnel,
 eyes uplifted toward the brightness,
 hands and arms battering like wings
 to burst breathless to green and blue,
 the steady round face of the sun,
 my vision bleared by water,
 the taste of Earth upon my tongue.
 My feet uncertain against the muddy slope,
 I clamber back to the level of brush and briar
 on the bluff, watch the brown ribbon below
 weaving around a grassy bar, and see —
 is it a simple slant of light
 breaking from behind me? —
 the girl's marble-white face rising free,
 hair streaming, cupped by my hand,
 her arms stretched out to the mounting sun.

Paul Ruffin, author of 2 novels, 3 collections of short stories, 4 books of essays, and 7 collections of poetry, is the 2009 Texas State Poet Laureate and Texas State University System Regents' Professor and Distinguished Professor of English at Sam Houston State University, where he edits *The Texas Review* and directs *Texas Review Press*. Printed with the author's permission.