

Catherine Strisik

Festival of the Reversing Current

The moment the river reverses itself
into the mouth of the Tonle Sap Lake
it is the bonzes that return

from the search for their souls.
Monks drifting in their persimmon robes,
and the blood of fertility,

somewhat pale,
everything in motion—
bend to Buddha outside the curtained cloth.

The river flows.
It carries the past, present,
and future, curving through Cambodian

villages, fast and familiar,
its lips full with surrender,
its confidence turning

their heads. Heavenly apsaras
and the storks lost in the foliage,
the village elder sitting high

in the doorway of her stilted house
receiving from the flow
all that is recognizable, greater

than her pallor.
The old vast water, forceful and
god-like in its autumnal appearance sweeps

into the waiting estuaries
of their hearts
first to clean, then to harvest.

Who would not walk this
walk, this dutiful gesture
on naked feet, the unmistakable

dancing late into each night.