**The Mercator Projection**

Fran Qi

How easy it must have been

to draw a map when Earth was still flat—

when we were limited by scope of sight,

the world behind disappearing

each time we turned away.

Home is at the center, always,

orbited by neighbor states like satellite

stars framed by sea dragons and the precipice beyond.

We must have lived fearfully on our delicate plate

indigo waters rushing off the brink,

the precious ink spilling off the vellum sheet.

The end of ease began with Aristotle

who saw the world’s shadow on the moon

a smudged thumbprint.

He watched the stars unhinge themselves

and swing arcs across the sky

matching his own from Macedon to Athens.

He served his best purpose

and died a refugee,

having watched the ships sail away

swallowed whole by the curved horizon.

How to recapture it for ourselves?—

flattened, tucked into the pages of a book.

The Earth is round now—we follow

loxodromes, spiral lines to the poles and back

dragging weighted nets, equators

and tropics in grids.

We carve along its latitude,

peel it open in longing with our thumbs

let the oceans run off the jagged edge.