Moebius

Volume 7
Issue 1 *Food for Thought*

Article 20

6-5-2009

The Dinner

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Recommended Citation
Valle, Victor (2009) "The Dinner," *Moebius*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 20.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/moebius/vol7/iss1/20

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The Dinner

by Victor Valle

"We should be alert to the surface effects in which the Epicureans take such pleasure:
. . . extremely thin membranes, which detach themselves from the surfaces of objects and proceed to impose colors and contours deep within our eyes . . ."
—M. Foucault

She took pains to remind me:
They thrive on our senses,
She called them ghosts,
Visual idols summoned
To kitchens and tables
By promising aromas

Atoms of "floating epiderm"
Volatilized by fire,
The smoke of
Roasting garlic,
Chile anchos toasted
On the Comal

Which they swirl upward
With the steam
That rises from the tureen,
Translucent figures
Hovering above table
Betraying contours

Feathery forms, fins,
Both masculine and feminine
Mimics perfected in their

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Powers to detect the play
Of atoms upon skin,
Yet do not swallow

Aromas with mouths,
But take possession
Of the senses
Of their dinner guests,
The pleasures we emanate,
As a gauze of light

Changing soundlessly
With the courses served:
A crimson hue from
Seared beef
Amber light from
Tortoise consommé,

Yellow topaz from the
Flesh of flowers,
Emerald from perfume
Of *chirimoyas and vanilla*,
Luminous intensities rarely
Glimpsed by dinner guests

As sober apprehension
Would terrify the witness,
Who blots it out or
Suffers a pang of remorse
Reminded of the hunger
Death saves for us

Which she finds odd,
Yet sadly unavoidable,
Since nothing, not even
Calling out their names,
Will make them refrain
From tasting life again