

Spring 1989

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The Lighter
Spring '89

Volume 34
Issue 2



Jayson Mellom

Nicaragua, April 1988

what is it in the water that holds me?

perhaps if air were water
people would move more gently,
would be more at home in their bodies,
would see more clearly
how their own movement creates
ripple circles that shape the water,
sustain every breath,
caress shores and stones.

time would be smoother and love
slower.

perhaps we would remember
(or never have forgotten)
the warm womb's contentment,
and its lesson;
not to be afraid,
so not to make others afraid.
that the rushing warm blood
flow of life
is eternity within the earthly silence of water
that encircles us now.

and their plea,
our longing,
la onda
swirls around me
defining my body in the
darkness.
as i learn again to feel
my smoothness.

a lover's hand cannot touch me as a whole.

Kari Hansen

self-evident maxims

I.
waitresses must watch their panty lines.

II.
can i help it if all i did for eight months
was memorize blonde on blonde?

III.
i have no patience for some people,
no matter how they dress.

IV.
no one really plans to be unhappy,
bored & boring, driving station wagons,
or do they?

V.
the beautiful people are like a
sickening scab on the face of the earth.

VI.
all wisdom springs from sheer animal
idiocy.

VII.
drugs beat business on monday, tuesday,
wednesday, thursday, or friday.

VIII.
serious aesthetes do not necessarily
wear green hair or peace symbols.

IX.
frank stella, not eric clapton,
is god.

X.
despite myths, intuition beats logic
anytime.

Chia Pet: A Haiku

Mister Chia Pet.
You are so fuzzy and yet,
You are green and moist.

Jeff Mikles

Andy Shaw

Framed

Half a dozen guiltless sinners hang
 in the hall, condemned for life
 to life as little cherubs: fat, grinning
 grins of old age, no teeth
 yet line those sticky gums. Perfect
 portraits of black and white injustice:
 weeping pillars of potential, body fluids
 doing time as salts of the earth, spicy
 meals for sophisticated worms.

In the living room a wedding portrait hangs
 the poor subjects changed only in frame
 of mind since now they know
 they sleep at night and fuck and crap. Kicking
 and screaming idiotic tales to high heaven
 they tumbled headlong down an angry aisle
 toward happiness, their final end, final stage
 in the maturation process: ripe old age
 to young seeds in an 8x10 box frame bed
 with black and white velour matte finish.

Later all the pictures got taken down
 stacked like coffins awaiting burial
 when the movers came to pack away
 these prisoners innocent of any crime
 greater than wishing they were something
 they were not. One son became a missionary,
 one bided his time, anxious captive
 on the stand, suffered under
 effective prosecution, and nail holes remain
 in the wall where their portraits used to hang.

Rick VanGrouw



Jody Romanowski

While I Listened

In a silent poppie trance
 the girl that made the day
 danced across the city park
 wading through the weekends
 of citizen armies
 and businessmen.
 Barefoot in the fountain,
 jingling wrists and ankles,
 in many colors of surprise
 singing quietly her own personal blues.

Andrew Paul Griffin

Flame

So soulful is he,
 a man of many actions, consisting mainly of
 smoke laden air bars -- peeking neon sights found
 through squinting and drying vision.
 Support -- a cracked line running down his
 suit and tie;
 New Year's eve confetti or maybe streamers
 falling from tall buildings onto, and around the
 arms of, men returning from war.
 Bending, his back is bending to keep in rhythm
 with the world within him.
 Grabbing his bag of spiced rum to supply the
 demands of the people around him.
 So soulful a man is he,
 to hobble down dead city streets, open menu can lunches.
 so tired,
 to rest his head among dirt and soot, and
 remove himself tonight with highway lullabies
 rambling an arm's reach above.

Andrew Troelsen



Eric Levin

Standing Around Saturday

im standing around and the wind is blowing im smoking merits and waiting for my friend on the bus. here comes a man with flag in hand commanding me to sign a petition to "get the judge out on his fat ass." i dont sign it i tell him im not a vietnam vet and he said i didnt care and asked me if i was an american. some people are honking horns as they drive by in their chevys or saabs and im still staring in the eyes of the idiot marine guy and i tell him to take his morals outa my face. it wasnt like i stepped on the thing i like kerouac and the us etc. so i just looked in the ledger and laughed at the cop breathing down my neck. i marched outa there, up the stairs to fetch a quarter for a phone call to my dad. for once, hatred was aesthetically pleasing.

(in response to Scott Tyler's "What Is the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?")

Andy Shaw

Aoyle is reading us his new novel. By "us" I refer to myself and Cynthia K. I write "K" because I cannot pronounce the last name to which K refers much less spell it. I am not even sure that K is the initial letter although I believe it is as good a guess as any. I cannot pronounce Aoyle either but I can spell it because I have seen it printed on the jackets of his several books. Or rather, several copies of the same book, sitting unpurchased in a pile in the stockroom of the bookstore at which I am employed.

Aoyle is not Aoyle's actual name. It is the pseudonym of a writer acquaintance of mine named William T. Carter. "William T. Carter," I believe is a fine name for an author but Aoyle feels it would relate him too directly to a certain ex-president's brother. In addition, the name Aoyle relates the author to all the other famous authors whose names end in "oyle." Aoyle is fond of mentioning T. Coragghessen Boyle, Kay Boyle, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Goren Hoyle and several others including two authors by the name of Coyle, one Stoyle, and at least one Zoyle. The name Aoyle not only places Aoyle within this fine family but it places him first among them. Aoyle confesses that there are some problems of pronunciation when one speaks of him and his work. Fortunately, few if any ever do speak of him or his work. Aoyle contends that his name is not as difficult to pronounce as Cynthia K and I attempt to make him believe. He demonstrates this by repeating it, quite rapidly, several times in succession: "Aoyle, Aoyle, Aoyle, Aoyle, Aoyle, Aoyle, Aoyle, Aoyle, Aoyle." Furthermore, as Aoyle represents the entirety of Aoyle's pseudonym, Cynthia K and I have attempted to convince him that one name is not enough for a literary figure. Although single-named literary figures have achieved greatness, they are, almost entirely without exception, French. Nearly every great literary figure of the English language possesses at least two names if not two names and one initial, or even three or four full names. Single names are more suited to recording artists, which is not to imply that Aoyle would make a better recording artist than a literary figure. Aoyle's reaction to all our comments about his pseudonym is always the same: He snorts, insists that he belongs to a new generation of writers who will accept a name

I despise Aoyle. I despise Aoyle's first book although I am hardly familiar with it. I despise the book Aoyle is reading us now. I despise, above all else, Cynthia K. She is sitting next to me, with her legs crossed and with her body leaning slightly to the left so that one thigh rests directly on top of the other as though her upper legs had been stacked by a brick mason. They are, I suppose, quite beautiful legs. Cynthia K adores Aoyle. She also adores his work. She believes that Aoyle is one of the most misunderstood artists of our time. I have asked her how she can make such a statement, never having met another misunderstood artist of our time. Cynthia K replied with something about Aoyle's vision compared to other contemporary artists' visions. I despise Cynthia K's logic. Cynthia K has told me that because Aoyle is one of the most misunderstood artists of our time, he would probably kill himself before he reached the age of forty. There was no remorse in her eyes or voice as she said this. Rather, there was an excitement, an almost sexual excitement.

Cynthia K is probably right. Aoyle probably will kill himself before he is forty. But not because he is misunderstood. Aoyle will kill himself before the age of forty because Aoyle is the type of person who would kill himself before the age of forty. He is a tall, thin, nervous, emotional intellectual who is far too in love with his wife. He has exactly the voice that would be expected of such a man. His writing style would surprise no one. He exudes an entire lack of self-confidence. He has good reason to lack self-confidence.

Aoyle is reading his new book to us. He is well into the second paragraph now and seems to be reading smoothly forward. The first paragraph took nearly an hour for Aoyle to finish reading. He interrupted himself constantly to apologize for the stylistic qualities of his writing. Then he would attempt to justify the stylistic qualities of his writing. Following his justification would be an apology for the justification. Aoyle would continue on this way—apology following justification, justification following apology—for several minutes. Then he would move on to the next phrase.

I'm not at all sure why Aoyle insists on reading us the first drafts of his novels, why he can't simply hand us copies of the manuscripts and allow us to read them at our leisure. But each time we mention to him an alternative to sitting in front of him three hours a day for a week his eyes lower almost as if he were ashamed of something. An obvious depression comes over him immediately. He reaches his right hand up and scratches his head habitually, pushing a clump of hair over the top edge of his glasses. He takes on the appearance of a man who may kill himself before he reaches the age of thirty-five. Thus we retract our request and indicate that we would be delighted to hear him read. Aoyle insists on reading to us in the morning, from nine to twelve, while his wife is at work. Aoyle does not want his wife to be familiar with his work. He begs her not to read his books. She obliges. Or tells him she obliges.

Aoyle is now well into the first chapter of his new novel. As far as I can tell the story, at least at this point, is a series of murders, each more perverse than the last. On a legal pad which Aoyle has provided for me I have written some notes:

A gun fight to open the novel? Trite, though well done. Even a little exciting. The protagonist reciting Nietzsche while strangling his mother is an interesting idea but could be handled more subtly.

I glance at Cynthia K's legal pad. Her notes, although purely complimentary, are far more insightful than my own. She has uncrossed her legs and holds them pressed together. Her thighs form a sort of table top for her note pad. From underneath the note pad poke two petite, perfectly formed, and thoroughly identical knees.

Aoyle burns a large, hot fire in his fireplace as he reads. He imagines that the coupling of his voice with the crackling of the fire will have a fantastic effect on his listeners. For some reason the wood Aoyle uses has a barely audible crackle when burned. Thus, the desired effect is lost. In actuality, the effect on his listeners is simple, uncomfortable perspiration.

Aoyle's phone rings. "It's my wife," he pronounces, interrupting one of his longest sentences. He hops out of his chair and, with a vitality I have never seen before from him, literally hurdles over his newly restored Victorian couch. In one deft movement he swipes the receiver from its place on the wall and immediately enters a subdued conversation with the caller.

I am entirely annoyed by the phone call that Aoyle so eagerly receives. First, it extends my stay in his home. Second, it puts me in the awkward position of being more or less alone with Cynthia K who has once again crossed her legs, this time not stacked like bricks but like two decks of playing cards, the top deck slightly askew of the bottom. She stares disinterestedly at me. The fireplace emits one rare, distinct "pop."

"So what do you think?" I begin. How else could I initiate a conversation with someone whom I detest as both of us sit in an overheated room waiting for the topic of conversation to return?

She shrugs importantly. "It's an essential step in his development as a writer." Her mouth moves around the words perfectly.

"It's definitely the best thing he's written," I return. This is not a lie. From the little I have heard of it, I find it slightly more interesting than any of his other works.

"Mmmmmm." The cap of her pen has found its way between Cynthia K's lips. She removes it. "It's definitely got more...energy."

I am strangely aware that my eyes no longer rest on Cynthia K's mouth or legal pad, but rather that I am staring unabashedly at that part of her blouse that covers her left breast. Underneath that blouse, she is wearing no brassiere. Whether this is a habit of Cynthia K's or not, I do not know. I have never had any interest in such vulgar curiosities before this very moment. Now I am imagining Cynthia K blouseless. I can see the dark shadow that, in this light, would outline the underside of her breast. I have an odd desire, not entirely sexual, to have not the breast but the shadow cast by the breast.

I realize my desire is for a shadow that does not currently exist. And, since Cynthia K shows no signs of removing her shirt in this room, a shadow that will probably never exist.

I am unaware, until I hear his voice, that Aoyle has returned to his place opposite us. He beams. "No difficulties. She just wanted to see how the reading was going," he says, referring to his wife.

Disturbed by the revelation of the last few moments, I vow to concentrate wholeheartedly on Aoyle's prose. In moments I find myself, to my surprise, immersed in the story of the novel. The protagonist is a literature professor gone insane whose murders are inspired directly by the murders and suicides of every literary figure imaginable. The plot line is as thin as some of the poorest pop fiction novels, but the authorial intrusions are ingenious. They refer to works with which I never guessed Aoyle had any familiarity. He presents, quite brilliantly, a madman's view of the whole of literature. For forty-five minutes I listen intently, thoroughly absorbed, thoroughly shocked, and thoroughly oblivious to Cynthia K's presence.

To relieve the monotony of watching Aoyle turn page upon page, I shift my glance back to Cynthia K. She has reversed her thighs--the left now rests on the right and she leans slightly away from me. With this glance, I focus on her profile, or more specifically, the profile of her nose. A light directly to her right highlights several tiny droplets of perspiration that have formed on the surface of her nose. I am again seized with a strange desire. I want to reach a finger out, wipe a few drops of sweat from her nose and taste their salty essence. As grotesque as such desire may seem, I am painfully aware that it is again not entirely sexual.

Do not accuse me of falling in love with Cynthia K. I have not; I still despise Cynthia K and therefore still despise both her nose and her breast. What has aroused my passions are the *drops of perspiration* on Cynthia K's nose and the *dark shadow* that outlines the underside of her breast. It follows that I am not in love with any part of Cynthia K, but rather I am in love with that which exists just outside of and is caused by Cynthia K. If Cynthia K were to appear on a poorly tuned television, I would be in love with the ghost-like outline that would surround her.

* * *

I have left Aoyle's home and am now seated in a none too posh bar, sipping my fourth martini. Aoyle concluded his reading three hours ago and although it is customary for Cynthia K and I to remain for a short time to discuss with Aoyle his novel's problem and attributes, I insisted I had an appointment to keep. I did not look at Cynthia K between the moment I desired to touch her nose and the moment I left her presence. I also do not remember a word of what Aoyle read during that period. My sweat-soaked clothing is only now beginning to dry.

I have occupied the last few hours with an empirical study of the bartender—a bald and graying middle-aged man—and his seemingly random movements behind the bar. Despite my intoxication and generally poor memory, I have managed to find in his movements an established pattern. He starts by polishing a glass, then crosses to hang the glass upon its rack. He returns to the place at which he was polishing the glass but takes a lit cigarette from an ashtray on the bar in front of him, drags on it and replaces it. He walks the length of the bar to give a haggard man—who seems to need a new beer every thirty seconds—a new beer. He returns to the cigarette and drags.

He picks up a wet cloth and wipes the same foot or so of bar that he wiped the last time he proceeded through the pattern.

He begins polishing another glass. He breaks from this series only to serve me drinks. I have not been watching this bartender merely out of interest, but rather because I am horrified of the prospect of glancing at anyone else in the bar.

A sign over the bar reads "Lingerie Models--Tuesday's 8:00-10:00." Although I struggle to suppress it, I fantasize that if I remain in the bar for another five hours--a not altogether impossible prospect--I will see the ruthless Cynthia K slither through the room in a tiny black teddy, her nose still perspiring, her breasts still potentially casting shadows. Logic of course argues the impossibility of such an anxiety coming to life.

Thoughts of Cynthia K distract me from fearing my fellow drinkers in the bar and I begin to turn toward the man seated to my left. My eyes halt upon the glass of beer that sits in front of him. Bubbles stream upward through it. I have the sensation that I am rapidly falling.

* * *

I am in my apartment, seated at my desk. In front of me and above me, shelved between two books I have never read, is a copy of Aoyale's first novel, *The Last Breath*. I intend to take it off the shelf and begin reading it, but now I am fascinated by the way it looks sandwiched between two other more prominent, and most likely better, novels. It appears perfectly and justifiably bound.

Finally I reach up, pull it down, and place it cover up on the desk. I cannot read the title because of a strong glare off the shiny dust jacket. By leaning back in my chair, the glare avoids my eyes, allowing the reflection to illuminate a small spot on the ceiling of my apartment. I take the book and, by rotating and tilting it variously, I find that I can cause the spot of light to dance around the room. I begin shining it on specific items. I light up several volumes of books, my cat, my refrigerator door, my toaster oven, a chair, a candle (which causes me to chuckle), a clock, and finally my own face.

"Ah, Aoyale!" I announce to no one. "You have illuminated so much of my life!"

I am seized by a vision of Aoyale and Cynthia K naked and sweating profusely. Aoyale's telephone rings. "It's my wife," he explains.

I open the book and flip to the final paragraphs which I vaguely remember as particularly bad. The novel relates the story of a mentally retarded child who somehow becomes involved with a group of travelling hippies. In the end the boy overdoses on a wide variety of drugs, has several prophetic visions and dies. Prophetic visions of course traditionally occur at the beginning of novels so that the novel can reveal the legitimacy of the prophetic vision. Aoyale apparently is opposing tradition in this novel. Perhaps he is attempting to be misunderstood.

I begin to read the last three paragraphs of Aoyale's first novel. I read them aloud, as dramatically as possible. At the conclusion I have not heard a word I have read but I am laughing. I am laughing at Aoyale. I am laughing at Cynthia K. I am laughing at Aoyale's fire and at Cynthia K's knees.

I read the last three paragraphs aloud again. Softly, intensely. They are not nearly as humorous when read this way. I try it again, loudly and dramatically, but I can no longer laugh. The concept of a mentally retarded child dying of a drug overdose holds no humor, not even when recorded with Aoyale's ridiculous prose. I sit and read the last three paragraphs of Aoyale's first novel again but not out loud. Despite myself, I cry. I flip to page one and begin reading Aoyale's first novel, *The Last Breath*.

The phone rings. That will be Aoyale or Cynthia K calling about tomorrow's scheduled reading. I allow it to ring exactly seventeen times. Then the room is filled with the dreadful silence that occurs when a beautiful voice stops speaking.

Brian Jung



Jody Romanowski

Beer Run

the smells tonight carry the fat of the land,
crawling quick out pores and sidewalk scabs,
seeds still oozing sainthood at JJ's lounge, june july ice and gasoline,
sliding brakes and trains, steam sounds forced open again.
buzzed like stone cicadas, we creep out skipping
to brave the neon-bop of convenience and drive-thru cash & carry,
waiting for our uptight swing to hit stride-keeping time,
unreal with its adrenal white hot stoplight jitters.
blurred bugged out windows string shouted back box beats, but
cut to the bone and altogether down, so steady
you could almost touch lifeblood in the street.
steeping in this two step fury when beamers and benzes
waltz with taillights talking dirty
dollar dancing toward tow away zones-
too too far out this sound of paper Franklins clicking slick
like teeth in gleaming pockets, while even screams of evening heat
won't help the bagman's dreams. still,
amazing throbs of jibberish shift themselves across flourescent
fixtures, packaging suprise, muzak, and silence,
all of it inside this nighttime box of food and cigarettes.

Fritz Eifrig

Penny Dropped into the Fountain at Saint Christopher's

I watched on Sunday
The little Silversten girl
Crossing the street at Saint Christopher's
In a blue dress which fluttered madly
Kicking stones at the pigeons.

She would have hated me
Watching like this
If she had known
I felt sorry for her.

Past the church with the opened doors
And the icy, numb facade
To the fountain
With the statue of a man
In stone
Sleeping.

Her fingers flirted
Sometimes
With the penny tucked neatly in her hand
Sometimes
Flinging the tears from her eyelashes.

Saint Christopher
Breathing the saccharing city air
Through the deep cavities and scars
Must have resembled the crying girl's father
In a drunken trance
Forever staring without seeing.

And a penny slipping from the outstretched hand
Into the shallows
Into the piles of forgotten wishes.

Her footsteps, louder and louder
Faster and faster
Were never heard
By the ladies who clustered on the church steps
Gossiping.

Christy Reuter

Velvet Belly

1.

Every place I subdue, is a frog paved walk on
amphibians
clipping long bubble tips with my cutting beat, the one I cannot
resist.

2.

Glass eyes-How fascinating-
to trust you with my jaunt, surly awkward and surprised.

I cannot resist.
an evening frog walk.

Surly motion will carry us,
each other's father figure, lacking inside
complexities to breathe
the other's aqua.

3.

Only now do we understand how knife cuts knife,
blending sacrament with cloth white knights.
Leaving unfinished moments in your bubble eyes-
and a bulging prayer for
cracking minds.

Andrew Troelsen

Ocotepc, February 4, 1988

i don't want to live
 in a cardboard house tonight
 because the rain won't stop
 and i know those puzzle piece put together
 garbage houses don't fit together
 just right.

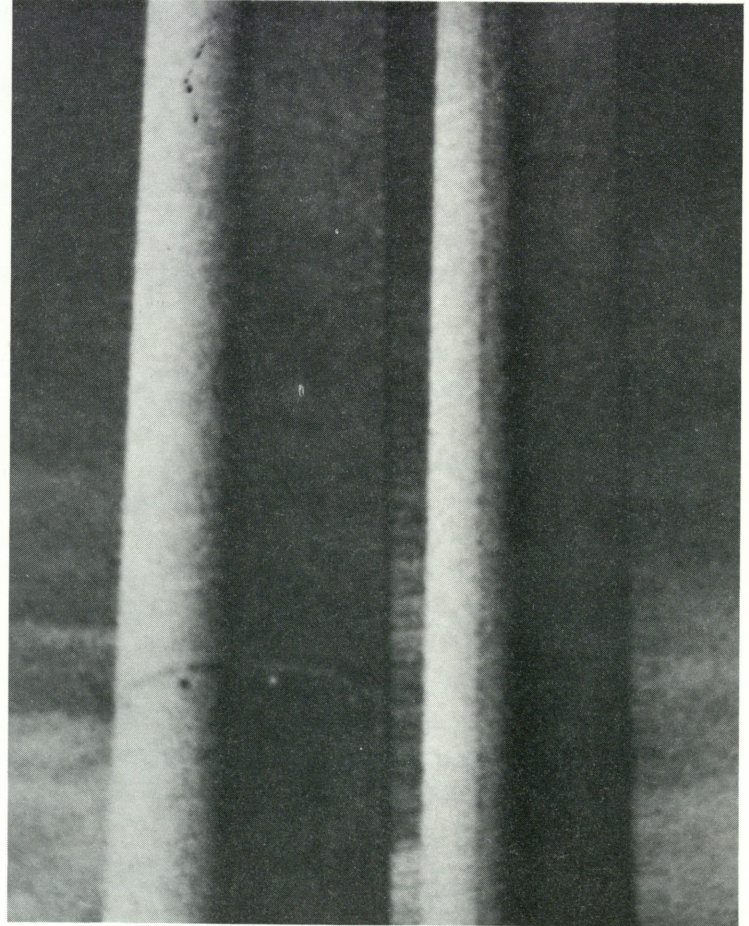
yet i am ripped
 open
 because i long for,
 claim
 solidarity.

but i can't breathe tonight, for myself
 or for others trapped black surrounded
 between thick falling sky
 and rising mud earth
 that threatens hope of life
 passing through the prism
 hours that reflect black
 through black
 distorted.

or
 perhaps
 solidarity
 under a weight
 that pushes all through
 the forever
 drum to the
 center
 stillness,
 suffocating.

the spots on the walls
 are flies.
 are they dead,
 like me,
 after so much rain?

Kari Hansen

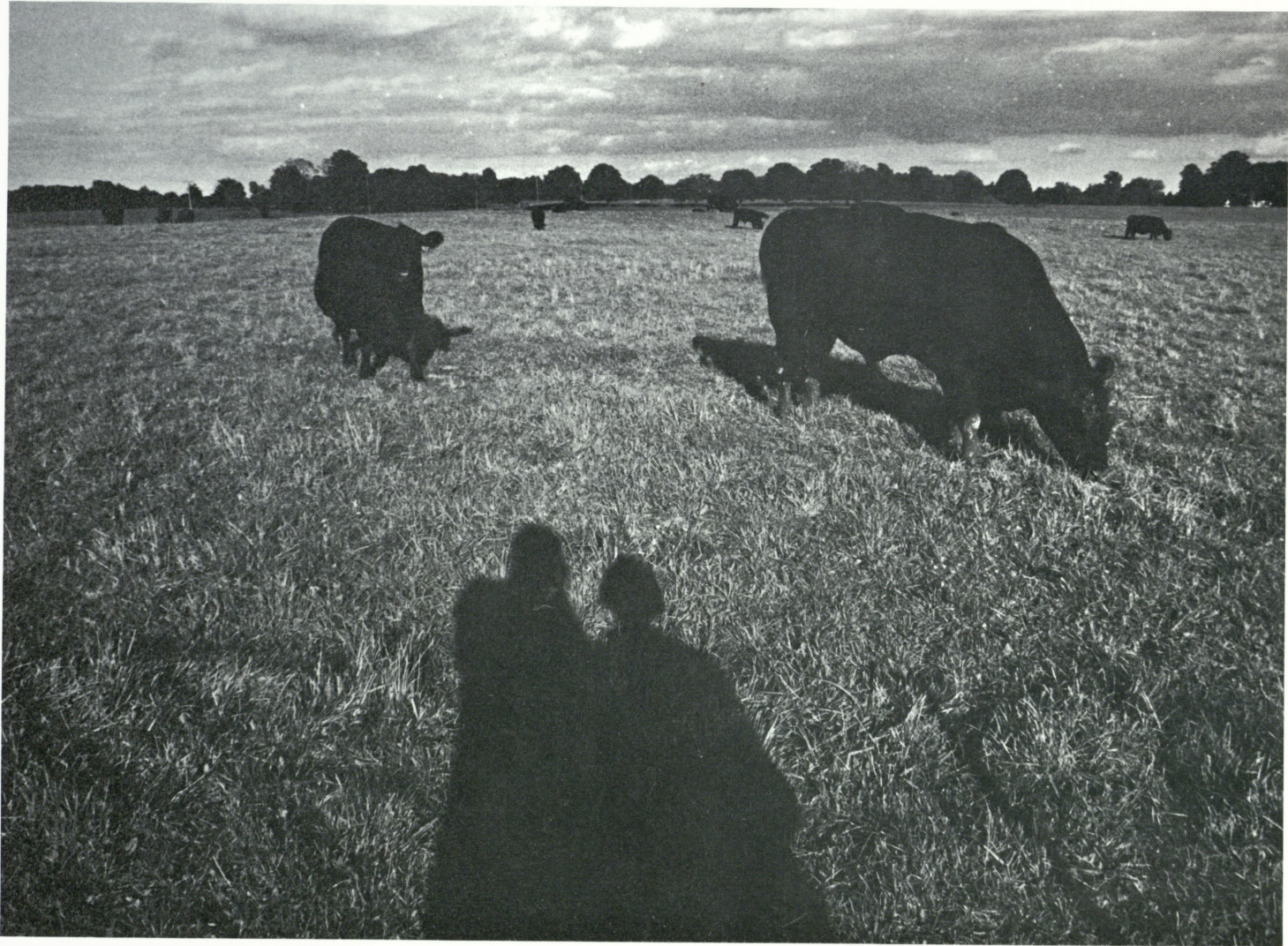


Eric Levin

the morning after

little bells on one shoe
announce your lilting
climb up the library stairs
bright twinkle your steps alive
this morning. I find you
in your quiet way extraordinary
simple ringing in the year
this cloudy post-election
wednesday. the paper said
it wasn't even close. to me
this news portends disaster but how
must I fear the future? now
your soft rustling music fades
past the circulation desk
and you smile thin bitter
warm hello socially succinct
somehow more real than anything

Rick VanGrouw



Eric Levin

SNOW DROPS

When snow drops,
 a tiny dew,
 upon broken down
 branches and pale
 parched grass,
 and the world
 whitens, as if celebrating
 a new celibacy,
 and the sky
 cloudens with cold,
 frosting from frames
 of window panes
 to fragile fronds
 of evergreen,
 and the earth crisps
 with condensation,
 crackling underfoot,
 and any smoke
 from long-rested
 fireplaces billows
 in a chilled breeze
 above rooftops,
 through this window
 in this hoary house
 I will call,
 quietly, careful
 not to disturb
 the dark, dry dust
 greying the abandoned bedroom
 we once shared.

As the sorrowful snow
 spirals, sparkling
 before my eyes, sweeping
 gently to the ground,
 and pines protrude,
 greatly green, dusted
 with precious powder,
 whitening, as if aging
 before me,
 and as heat suddenly licks
 each brief snowflake
 churning above
 my chimney
 I call, my voice entombed
 within these walls,
 and you do not,
 cannot answer.

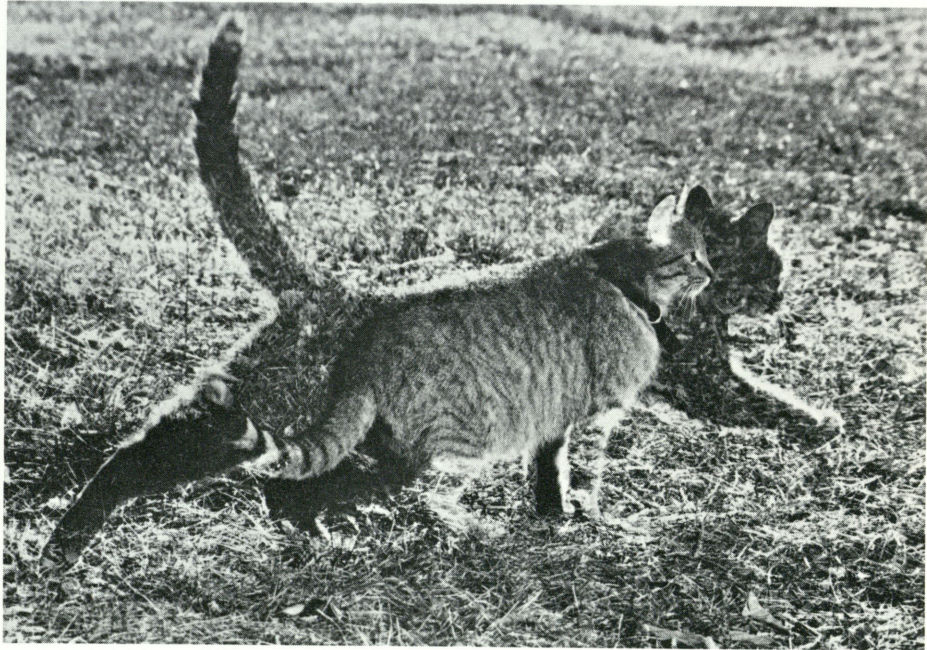
And as the moon dies
 its final crescendo
 in the cold night air,
 Silence
 reigns, the earth
 blanketed under
 bountiful snow,
 and my ears ache
 for anything,
 but even the sound
 of snow touching
 the earth creates nothing
 but Silence,
 with a voice drifting,
 dissembling in this stifling air,
 like a flame
 lost into the chill
 of winter winds,
 yet I call.

Amber Schaefer

Man's Beast Friend

The boxman sat
Merging with his chair
His eyes popped out
And the lies flowed in
The pretty pictures blinked
And the boxman smiled
Stupid smile
He was happy
His brain was gone
The Boxman saw
The men waving flags
Kissing children, grasping hands
He smiled when airplane fell
The soldier blew up
And the boxman laughed
He laughed so hard
He turned to Jell-o
He giggled as he jiggled
He chortled when he slid
Down the drain.
His box flickered on.

Richard T. Gosse

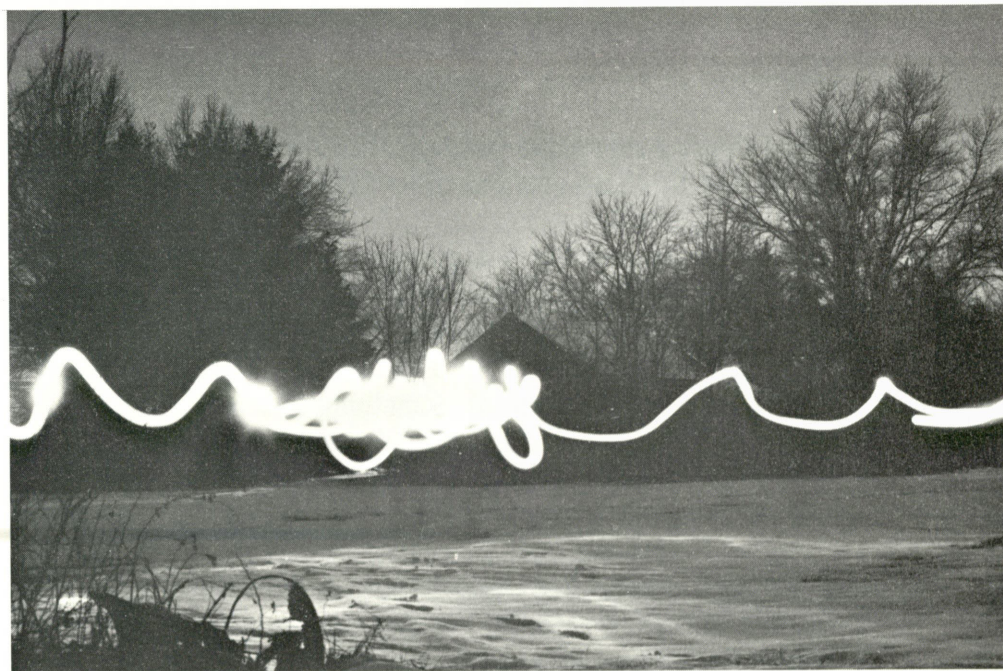


Tracy Fletcher

Bitterness Rising

It is a palatable
mockery. This moment,
with your golden hands
framing my face and
my fingers tracing the
warm cobblestones of
your spine, this moment
when we should say,
each to the other, I
love you.

You're thinking, perhaps,
of your monologue in
Long Day's Journey and
how that line about turning
to my love I said the dead
are dancing with the dead
never comes out quite right.
You can't decide whether to
down the whisky before, or
after. I'm remembering a
conversation with my father
about freedom of the will and
the question of responsibility,
maybe.



It is late
afternoon, December,
and we fall
asleep side by
side. In my dreams,
I swallow the bitterness
continually rising. The
trick is to forget and
when I wake, hours
later, to your
arm across me
and you say look
at the moon, I do.
What comes out of
my mouth is beautiful.

Celeste Duder

Tracy Fletcher

Kneeling

He's barely over three feet tall when standing. Kneeling down like this--legs doubled under him, knees and elbows crushed against the gutter's concrete, face only inches from its surface--he is maybe fifteen inches at his highest point, his buttocks, the rounded pinnacle of his form. Fifteen inches. He must crouch low to see the tiny beasts crawling under his massive form. For a moment he is amazed, perplexed. He wonders how something so small can even move. But his wonder quickly fades as his hand closes into a fist and slams down on one of his subjects, one that had clearly strayed from the erratic line containing the others. Lifting his hand, he presses his face still closer to see if the insect is thoroughly crushed or if it suffers. He contemplates how something so tiny can struggle. Even with two-thirds of its body flattened, a head and one pair of legs plough forward. Part at least will continue. Part at least will strive.

He has been here for hours and the concrete has etched a landscape into his knees and elbows. He shivers. Several times he has heard his name called from the house far beyond his gutter. Each time he has ducked his head lower as if he could hide behind the edge of the curb. He knows that inside he would stop shivering, that he could rub the indentations from his knees, that he could collapse into a soft plush chair and sleep. He knows too that very soon a giant arm will pluck him from power and carry him, swinging like an insect held by one leg, into the house. But it is better here. Better to maintain order among the ants.

Of course, minutes later he is interrupted. They are tired of waiting, tired of calling, and the anticipated arm lifts him from the cold hard cement. He rides doubled over upon it, his legs dangling loosely. He watches the ground rush by beneath him and imagines himself soaring, about to sail directly over the house.

Inside it's much brighter and he feels like he's just awoke after falling asleep with the lights on. But one more glance outside toward that world where he is master. In front of him a swallow thuds into the window and falls dead, as though a fist had pounded it from the sky.

Brian Jung

Transit System

The sun begins to warm the moist June air, its steady breaths
inking open the first paragraphs of another day,
and my shoes crunch across the glass from a long departed car window.
Lost men stumble still drunk to find direction or peace
while the city rubs its eyes clear of disbelief. As I make my way
to the Lawrence El, I am remembering the morning I left your bed
for good. 8:30 southbound sick slow train, full of rails enough
to drive it elsewhere every time, snaking nowhere off along
the ways we know too well.

Skinned knees two mornings after all of everything we said,
and your unsure arms sleep around me still, marking
the hours till dawn.

The bite of smoke fills my head with thoughts of all I've left
alone at last, and strangers fade to friends as I shake against them
standing here, while deep back, tired endings call beginnings fools.
A thousand times I looked at you, splintering the eyes I used to have,
pasting sights to sound, and now ahead of me
scratching at the edges of a plastic bucket water captures
rippling moments of the sun, and thoughts of what went
wrong today swirl suddenly like blood and toothpaste
in the sink.

But perhaps I wrong you with this net of words, woven
while tunnel travelling these day to days, it cannot hold you
closer than you ever were, tied like bricks to steel built on sand,
it carries on inside of me, ground like glass beneath these rush hour
feet, in this uptown two step where I find myself,
so far from coffee, cats, and the morning sounds of birds.

Fritz Eifrig

This isn't the big time.
Just one small church school
against another; we pray
before the game that the Lord
will grant us all good
sportsmanship. No kidding.
And no national anthem since
someone stole the needle off
the record player. The play
is rough and bumbling while
two fat coaches grumble on
their folding chairs. There
is one hundredth of a second,
though, when a forward, his
untucked jersey longer than his
shorts, throws an elbow the ref
doesn't see. Alone at mid-
court, he takes the shot, knowing
without looking how just this
one will end. He stops anyway
and watches the ball, high and
smooth and pretty, crash through
the net to the wooden floor below.
His chest heaving, he wipes
the sweat from his face with
his big black hand. Grins.

Celeste Duder

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