

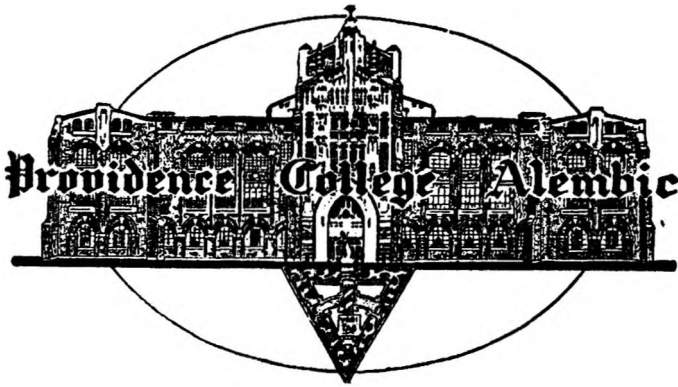
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THE ALEMBIC



PUBLISHED QUARTERLY
BY THE
STUDENTS OF PROVIDENCE COLLEGE
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this concerns you

I grew to dread those daily visits: the downcast eyes, the timid tapping at my shoulder, and the pitiable, hurt expression when I turned to murmur "Need some more." As he shuffled tragically out of the office, I infallibly thought him a defeated man and never expected to see him again. But return he did, always to be greeted with the same sad refrain, "Need some more."

Our exchange editor, in the absence of anything else to do, now served as the nagging conscience of our deficiencies. Poor crushed soul! Obsessed with the idea of reciprocating with the exchange editors of other publications, he remained thwarted in his burning ambition, simply because we did not have enough material for a worthwhile issue.

"But," we reasoned, "if the mountain will not come to Mohammed . . ." and the campaign began. With a corps of unscrupulous informers, we scoured the campus and discovered to our surprise, not only people who could write, but people who were willing to exercise their esoteric avocation for the ALEMBIC.

There are several aspects to this issue which (we hope) will serve to widen its appeal for the student body. It is only through this widespread appreciation that we will be able to obtain material for future issues. No one wants

to write for a magazine which is received with a certain amount of cold indifference by its readers, kidded by some and deemed by others not worth even a furtive glance.

Our first and most evident bid for popularity is an attractive new cover, designed for us by the young and talented Steve O'Neill. Next to catch the eye of the casual "flip-through" should be the change of format which we have attempted to make as modernly simple as possible. With all this enticing dressing as bait, it is our hope that the reader will set the literary hook himself and cast into every page from the first to the very last. Awaiting the reader are, among other worthwhile selections, the following:

- Shadow*: Mike McDermott's challenging story of the brief happiness of an introvert.
- Trilogy*: by George Riley, containing some prose which approaches poetry in its polish.
- Writ on Habeans Corpus*: Tom Costello's witty, very "Poeish" poem about a rather strange occupation.
- Two Poems*: by Raymond Shea which are evidently meant to be read more than once.
- The Stray*: a very meaningful and beautiful story by Charles Curran.
- A Complete Education*: a pointed article which asks some very pointed and timely questions by Robert Arrigan.

And so we optimistically make this offering to the steely-eyed ranks of our readers, bidding for an increase of support and material . . . Critics to the right of it, critics to the left of it, into the Valley of Apathy storms the ALEMBIC!

ROBERT ARRIGAN

a complete education

In this era of mass education with the stress upon higher learning and increased study in new fields, tremendous importance is attached to a complete education. Professional men and scholars would, without doubt, give diverse answers to the question, "What is a complete education?" Most students would probably hesitate in answering the question, for our modern industries are crying louder and longer for additional men with backgrounds in science, engineering, designing, and other highly specialized skills. Because of this a student preparing for college becomes confused. "Which course shall I follow?" he asks. "Some industries cry for specialists; others call for men with a diversified education." The student is confused, concerning not only the type of education he should seek, but also the motive behind his choice: should he determine the type of education he seeks by the opportunities industry offers or by a desire to develop himself more completely?

To obtain a more accurate picture of the situation, we must look into the past for an answer—a past in which our educational theories were born and one which continues to influence our institutions of learning. In the works of John Milton, we find one of the most quoted definitions of education. In his *Tractate on Education*, Milton states, "A complete and generous education is one that fits a man

to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.”

Today we need only look to the military academies, West Point and Annapolis, where young men are educated for the military, for part of the answer. These academies provide practical instruction along with classroom study and strict regimentation in preparing men as officers and leaders. Is this, then, a complete education? Hardly. Where are the studies in the classics which add to a man’s intellectual background? Where are the courses in philosophy and theology which add to a complete education? Are students at West Point and Annapolis allowed to delve deeply into the varied field of liberal arts as are students in less specialized schools? The answer is negative. An analysis of the instructional time at the two institutions reveals that less than twenty-five percent of their study is devoted to the liberal arts—hardly enough to fit a man to perform the offices of peace.

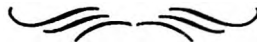
Students cannot obtain a well-rounded educational background by leaning heavily upon one subject and avoiding another; acquaintance with all the essential subjects is needed. A well-rounded education consists of a variety of study including theology and philosophy, along with the regular curriculum of English, history, foreign languages, mathematics, natural science, and military science. Then is had the ideal which Milton in his *Tractate* was attempting to advance. Students must search for an institution offering the above mentioned studies as the one which will prepare a man for the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.

Where is there a school offering such a complete education? Does not Providence College provide a generous

a complete education

education fitting a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war? Providence College has instruction in military science, preparing students for the rigors of Army life and providing the necessary skills in the scientific armed forces of today. Liberal arts studies round out the general education needed. Courses in philosophy prepare the student's mind and powers of reasoning. In addition, courses in theology provide the religious education needed to direct and complete his studies.

This is the type of education being offered to you. Are you evaluating it properly and profiting from it as you should?



THOMAS COSTELLO

writ on habbeans corpus

In the middle of the night,
Far below the moon so yellow,
When the moon has dipped from sight
Steals a wily, crafty fellow
On his way to ply his interesting trade.

On the way to ply his trade,
With a lantern full and lit;
Cross his shoulders leans a spade
(Quite essential you'll admit)
To pick at night a path
Between the piles of plots.

As he enters his still town
'Twixt the tombstones all awry,
He just sets the lantern down
(near a spot that's not too dry.)
Yes, here it is
That he begins to dig.

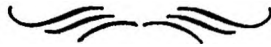
Let me put your mind at rest:
His job it is to gather
(If you've not already guessed)
Each fresh-interred cadaver
For willing students of
The Hippocratic oath.

writ on habeans corpus

Yes, to gather each cadaver
Is the object of his quest.
And there's nothing he would rather
Do with equal zeal or zest.
And while digging in the grave,
I am sure I heard him rave:

“Ah, yesterday the Mayor died.
Bless his soul, preserve the hide,
Until at least he'll have his ride
Uphill to where the “docs” reside.
They'll make incisions deep and wide,
Just to see what is inside.

“When comes the end of another day,
I think o'er my job and count the pay.
Tho' occupational ethics rule out mirth,
You'll admit, I'm sure, its financial worth.
I stretch my limbs, then heave a sigh,
My, but I'm glad that people die!”



GEORGE RILEY

TRILOGY

the picture

The tower rose above the sand in massive silhouette against the stars. Stopping the car in the shadow of its bulk, I turned the engine off and let the clinging blackness of two a.m. envelop me. To my left, dark and forbidding, lay the salt marshes. Their stagnant pools murmured with the myriad sounds of the night. Beyond, the sand dunes crouched ominously. To my right, the marsh-grass gave way to a beach whose silver fingers stretched into the sea.

The tower watched with empty eyes as I crunched across the sand to the fence.

Minutes later I pulled myself up the cold granite to the lowest of the open windows, and, hesitantly, slipped through. Darkness washed over me until, fumbling, I struck a match and lit my stub of a candle. In its fitful gleam, the demons of shadow contorted in a devil-dance across the walls. The rotted stairway groaned a protest as I mounted. Its creaks lent horrid voice to the shadow-imps that mocked my every move. Carefully to the top I climbed, over worm-eaten wood and missing steps. The steel door squealed a protest as I wrenched it open and clambered onto a narrow platform. A ladder led me up the shadowed wall to the flat roof.

The full moon struck my night-dimmed eyes as might

the picture

the noonday sun. Far below lay a panorama caught in the silver spotlight.

The grim marsh fled back until the huddled procession of sand dunes overwhelmed it. The dunes, shaggy with underbrush, rolled on and merged into the night.

The sand banded the inky sea with silver. It spread, a gleaming bridle on either hand holding back the eager waters. The waves cast themselves on it with muffled thunder, and fell back, vanquished. Their measured throb seemed the very pulse-beat of nature.

The black face of the water was creased and furrowed with phosphorescence. Each whitecap bared its gleaming teeth against the main, then merged again into the inky whole.

Watching from above was a full cortege of stars, cold diamonds strewn across the velvet sky.

The moon ruled over all with gleaming rod. Its silver sceptre lay across the waves. The beach stretched silent in its lordly gaze. Close beneath the dunes, cringed the marsh. The hills themselves bowed low in its chill light. Its cyclops' glare shrank me to nothingness. Surely I was but a spectator of this tiny manifestation of God's infinite beauty.

Dawn's fingers loosed the spell that gripped my soul. The reverie of thoughts and dreams was lost. The hours of vision faded with the morning star. They sank with the darkness which closed over them as might the sea, leaving no trace of their passage. The East's faint glow wiped out that picture which was beyond all human art. Yet it was not erased. It lives still in my soul!



a look at death

Have you ever looked Death in the face? I have.
I crept on him once, he all unawares,
Leapt forth, stared in his face, and therein found
A mirror. Only that.

As this I pondered, Death spoke forth to me:

“Thus have you found me, and thus it is I am.

No grim old man with sharpened scythe, who waits;

No shadowed angel threatening close behind.

I am what you are, nothing more nor less.

Your death shall be the mirror to your life.

As you face life, then face your death you must.

No better shall it be and yet no worse.

As you have lived,

So shall you die.”



light

Man says, "Let there be light," and moves
A switch. Then in great procession,
from the coal, the ghost of long-past time,
from the mines over the silver rails,
in the barge borne on the heaving sea,
on the dock in piles of ebony,
on moving belts through the great grinding jaws
down gleaming chutes into the maw of hell,
where dance the flames, giving their B. T. U.'s
to rise and heat the water in their flight,
whence rushing steam sucked up at superheat
by greedy turbines spinning as they drive
great generators, where in mystery
comes forth the surge of current then and flows
along the wires in electrons, amps, and volts,
till it arcs across the glowing filament
which gives forth photons, quanta, and lumens.
This is the proud procession of man's knowledge.

But God once said only, "Let there be light."
And there was light.

JAMES McLARNEY

the christmas week wake

“There are times,” said a thought somewhere in my head, “when life can be horribly confusing.” I suppose my head was fogged a bit as usual, but then again as usual those thoughts which did struggle through the maze were reliable ones. Here sat I, like a big chump-wise nothing, with a glass in my hand and the contents of that glass spinning lazily into my cerebral cortex. My eyes came back into focus when Maxinne opened her painted lips and emitted what could reasonably be termed a bona-fide bit of psychic phenomena.

“There are times,” she warbled, “when life can be horribly confusing.”

“Hmmmmmm,” I replied, deciding that Maxinne, under the reds and blues of the bar lights, was rather revolting to look at. Down at the far end of the basement somebody put on a record of *White Christmas*. It sounded like a dirge.

Maxinne juggled her svelte body about on the stool.

“Oh Georgie!” she giggled. “He’s getting drunk. I can always tell that he’s getting drunk when he goes ‘Hmmmmmm’ like that.”

Georgie, from his station behind the bar and closest to the booze, didn’t bother to answer his companion. I secretly suspected that he was feeling it more than I was and attempting to put up a good show fiddling with a bowl of mixers. At least I had a reason for a few extra drinks. I

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looked at Maxinne again and decided that Georgie had a pretty good reason too.

“You’ve got me all wrong, Maxie,” I said. “The one and only reason that I went ‘HmMMMMM’ is the fact that one of us is a telepath.”

Maxinne screwed up her little eyebrows in a way which meant that she would like me to believe that she knew exactly what I was talking about and didn’t especially care anyway. I’ll always be of the conviction that Maxinne is slightly telepathic. After all, when one becomes as vacant mentally as Maxinne, well then, one must have a little extra talent tucked away somewhere.

“I suppose it could be,” she said.

“You see, Maxie, it’s like this. . .” But I never did get to elaborate upon this because at that moment several more of the old crowd came down the stairs. Georgie lifted himself spiritually and physically from his reverie and joined in the greeting which came more or less spontaneously from all.

“Merry Christmas!”

“Hey, you old dog! Merry Christmas!”

“Man! How have you been?”

“Howdy there, Francie. Season’s best!”

“Merry Christmas, Frank!” said Rich whom I didn’t especially admire.

“Same to you,” I gave back at him and walked behind the bar for a refill. One thing you had to hand Georgie—when he threw a party he always had the best to drink. A party is a party, but even considering that this was Christmas week and there was the accustomed rash of parties, Georgie was not to be outdone by a long shot.

“Ohhhhh!” exclaimed Francie, accepting a glass of eggnog and at the same time nervously checking the sweep

of taffeta which cascaded from her waist, “what a lovely tree!”

“Trimmed her myself,” boasted Georgie, “with Maxie assisting of course!”

“Oh man!” quipped Rich, who followed me around behind the bar. “Lounging around under the tree! Man!”

Rich’s inference was not lost upon anyone. Maxinne was almost successful in laughing it off.

My behind-the-bar effort was in vain. Rich was breathing fumes down the back of my neck before I even had the ice cubes into the glass.

“What’s all this I hear about you, Dad?” he asked, smiling.

I took my time and dropped an ice cube into the sink with a crackle. “Oh, you know how it is.”

“Ho! Do I know how it is! Not me, Dad! A femme fatale has yet to sink the spurs into my scaly hide!”

The bourbon washed about the ice cubes and I reached for the soda bottle. Rich never spoke in normal tones like everyone else’s. One of his nicknames among the crowd was “Old Fifteen Watt.” There was little sense in letting my engagement fall prey to his wit. “Hold on about thirty seconds and it’ll be all over, Rich,” I whispered.

“You mean you’ll break it?” he asked, reaching for his own drink.

“No, boob, I mean I’ll announce it!” With this I stepped up upon a stool and from there mounted the bar. I kicked over an empty glass for attention. I began my very necessary and what I now realized was my very dreaded speech.

“Ladies and gentlemen of my alcoholic audience! Please! Your undivided attention! I wish to take this opportunity to announce that as of last Christmas

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Eve, I, Frank McNaughton, am betrothed, pledged to the holy state of wedlock, and in the vulgar, common sense of the situation, engaged!”

“My God!” uttered Georgie from over the cocktail shaker.

“Congratulations, Frank!” said Francie, steadying me as I dismounted from the bar and regained the floor and my composure. They clustered all around me and for once in my short life I was what could be called the center of attraction.

“You weren’t kidding us, were you Frank?”

“It’s for real, eh, Frank?”

Rich was the one who brought matters from the abstract to the dreadfully particular.

“Say there, Dad, if you don’t really mind my asking, who is the unlucky girl?”

I knew that this last was coming. It was inevitable. My hand shook a little as I took a long pull on my drink for the social fortitude to enlighten them. “She’s upstairs powdering her nose at the moment,” I said.

There was an uneasy silence which was punctuated by Maxie’s clinking the mixer against the side of her glass. Rich looked at Georgie, and Georgie looked at Maxie, and Maxie looked at Francie. Then they all looked at me. They had all taken it for granted that I was engaged to Lisa, but since she hadn’t arrived as yet and I was dating Vita that night, they knew. They looked at me, all of them. Who was I to go against the wish of the goddess, the Queen? Maxinne, God bless her for all her stupidity, broke the uneasy silence.

“I’m very happy for both of you,” she said and lifting her glass, continued: “Here’s to Frank and er. . .” She blushed, forgetting the name.

“And to Vita,” I completed.

"To Frank and Vita!" they chorused, disbelief in their eyes. The glasses went up into the smoky, Christmas tree-lighted air. I heard a faint rustle of feminine garments behind me. It was Vita. "To you, darling," I said and raised my glass. She didn't answer me, but slid back to her seat behind me at the bar, one of her strong, generous hands slipping into mine.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I added, "to Vita!"

The glasses went up for a third time. They went up, slowly and hesitantly. It was not imagination which made me think so. I took another long pull on my sour-mash and soda. Vita looked at me over the rim of her glass. She had the oddest pair of eyes. They were small eyes and a very deep, dark shade of green, accentuated by the funny way she did her eyebrows. I've seen lots of girls who have attempted to do their eyebrows in a "different" way. Vita, however, was and is the first and only girl who can get away with it and look natural and well-groomed in the process. She wasn't American born and her last name contained a horde of unpronounceable syllables. That is, they were unpronounceable to the likes of me who stumbled through three years of French and four of Latin. From what Vita had told me, Latvian was a rather highly inflected language and Latin was about as inflected as I'd ever want to get.

"To us, honey," she said and toasted me back while the conversation rose up about us. I estimated that in about fifteen seconds or so the various women present would come tittering over to inspect Vita's ring.

"Darling," she whispered, leaning close, "you forgot to introduce us. . . ."

"Ye Gods! So I haven't!" I caught the swooping girls in extended midflight with the introductions. I was never

the christmas week wake

very much of a social lion, but with all the polite syrup that poured about just then my bumbling went unnoticed. With all the chatter and noise there was still a certain subdued air of astonishment to the party. The bomb had been dropped. The goddess who was due to arrive any minute had been defied and there was bound to be some sort of retribution. I left the females to their chirruping and spun my stool back to the bar. The color of the star atop the Christmas tree was on the nauseating side. I came face to face with Rich who was leering, drink in hand, from the other side of the bar.

“Not bad, Frank. No, not bad at all.”

“Um,” I said, stifling a belch. “Fill me up, huh?”

“Why sure, Dad! There was a dirty something sticking in my throat and I couldn’t look him in the ugly face again. I watched his immaculate fingers plop the bourbon into my glass. Behind me I could sense that Vita was holding her very deft own with the girls. I knew without looking, too, that they didn’t like her and most probably never would. A girl like Vita only happens every several thousand years or so. It was my impossible, ineffable luck to be the guy to whom she happened.

Feet on the stairs; more of the old crowd arrived.

“Merry Christmas, you-all!”

“Hey, where’s the poison?”

The voices bubbled and swirled into the room. I frantically hoped that they would ignore me draped over my drink, and felt like strangling the fiend who had put on *White Christmas* for the third consecutive time. For a split second I had the fleeting, very pleasing mental picture of the whole awful bunch of them dead in a huge, sprawling heap— —Vita and I mounting the carnal pile, bloody

axes in our bloodier hands. There was a tug at my shoulder.

“Frank! You old moon dog! How the hell are ya?”

It was Hal, who was almost as loud as Rich. I knew that he always tried to be. “Fine,” I said.

The open palm thudded into my back.

“You old lover, you! Congratulations!” He downed a shot. “Say, where is she?” he coughed. “Wait a minute! I thought that you two were all broken up after last summer. Wa’ happen?”

Apparently Hal hadn’t bothered to get the whole story when he came in. “That’s just it,” I said. “Nothing’s happened. It isn’t Lisa.” I looked about for Vita. She was dancing with Rich in the corner. The dirty something in my throat got a little bigger. “She’s over there,” I said; “her name’s Vita.”

“Wel, er. . . anyhow, Frank. . .” I could see he was nonplussed. As far as his reasoning went, what I had just told him was against the natural order of things. He poured himself another shot. “Here’s all the luck in the world,” he said.

“Luck,” I said and toasted him back. Then I was on my feet, heading in the direction of Vita and Rich. I bumped headlong into Maxinne and spilled her cocktail down the front of her gown.

“Life can be horribly confusing, can’t it, Frank?” she said in a surprisingly calm way as she wiped off some of the liquid.

“I guess it can,” I replied, making an effort to help her. Maxinne may have been as dumb and thick as it is possible to get without being classed as an idiot, but she knew what was going on. I suppose I had it written all over my face. Or maybe Maxinne was a little telepathic after all.

the christmas week wake

“Lisa’s coming tonight,” she remarked, as if it were only an afterthought.

“I expected that she would be.” Yes, Lisa would be there all right. And as usual she’d be pulling her stock stunt of coming all by herself, or possibly with some jerk whom nobody knew for a social whipping boy. Lisa never mixed her own, or, for that matter, never walked over to get her own. There invariably had to be a male someone present to get it for her and then sit and hold her glass while she was off exciting another worshipper with catchy remarks on the dance floor.

“You had better take it easy on that stuff, Frank,” Maxinne said; “you’re sweating up a storm.”

I put my hand to my forehead; it was a little sweaty. I hadn’t even been aware of it before. “Don’t worry, Maxie, I’m a bottomless pit,” I said. Leaving her, I continued on towards Vita and Rich.

Rich was holding Vita in a way that I didn’t like; but in his oh-so-smooth manner, it couldn’t really be construed as flirting. I caught Vita’s look: “Get this character away from me!” and tapped Rich on the shoulder.

“Pardon me, Rich, but a married man does have a few rights.”

“*Mais oui, mon-sewer,*” he laughed, and bowing, left us.

I took her in my arms and two bars later the music stopped. We just stood there, not moving, waiting for the music to start again. Vita didn’t say anything and neither did I. We were in a rather dark corner of the basement, away from the lights of the tree and the bar. Because Lisa hadn’t arrived, the party really hadn’t begun. Georgie was behind the bar again, and while Rich made him another

drink, he was telling the old joke about the Irish drunk and the human fly. Everyone there had heard it at least twice but Georgie was telling it in a different way and framing it in a different locale. Francie and some other girl were putting what I hoped were fresh records into the player.

“Frank,” Vita said to me, “I think that you are drinking a little too much.”

I looked down at her. “You’re right, sweetheart; I won’t have anymore for a while.” I clasped my hands at the small of her back and she rested her head on my shoulder. The music got going again—*White Christmas*, for what must have been the tenth time. The unspeakable glob rose in my throat. I made no move to start dancing. It was funny, neither did Vita. She knew. I knew. I suppose everyone at the party knew. It was wrong, all horribly, horribly, wrong. I should never have gone there. I should never have gone there with the wonderful, beautiful girl I loved. They didn’t like her and in the back of my mind I knew that they would never like her. These were the people I used to know, whom I used to be like—dark, twisted, unreal people. I hadn’t seen any of them since. I had switched school the previous fall and gotten away from my heady success with Lisa. But then there was Vita and the clean sunshine of northern Connecticut and laughter without social obligation and honesty and the Confessional. I had discovered emotions within me which I did not know existed. It was a wonderful world of feeling clean, of being able to face myself over the shaving mirror in the morning. I had found myself. It was foolhardy, rash—this coming here, this drinking too much. I was afraid of myself then. I could see what I used to be—dark and twisted and unreal as were my old friends. I was afraid of Lisa and I

the christmas week wake

hoped she wouldn't come. I was afraid of myself and what I hoped and prayed I wasn't anymore.

"Would you rather go outside for a while, darling?" Vita asked, looking up at me again.

I laughed a little and didn't feel it. "That's all right, hon; I was just thinking of something, that's all." We started dancing. There was a certain hesitancy, a certain stiffness in the way Vita responded to my lead. She looked up at me once more and her eyes reflected what I felt. They were incredulous, amazed. Georgie finished his joke and then his drink. The laughter it begot was polite. The belch which the drink inspired was not.

High-heeled footsteps on the stairs. A laugh, low, throaty, unmistakable. *Lisa!* My hand tightened in Vita's. The very sound of that laugh spun my mind back to a million different things which I had thought were dead within me: the old days, the days of laughing, of hangovers in the morning, of tunes that were never forgotten, of the cleverly directed worship of the great, all-powerful, fascinating, white-bucked, party-party Eros, of the stallions with crew-cuts in the paddock patiently waiting their turn of favor with the goddess. The footsteps neared the bottom of the stairs and my heart was ready to break through my rib cage. I hated myself with a revulsion close to nausea.

She appeared at the foot of the stairs: imperial, sure of herself, body encased in a startling white gown, accepting the greetings of all, the hopeful looks of the males and the hateful looks of the females. Lisa was tall and slim and, if you looked at her closely, she was not actually beautiful. There was something in the color of her skin and the flashing depths of her black eyes which made her not beautiful, but immensely attractive, magnetic. She didn't smile often and when she did it served the two-fold purpose of

a rapier and a caress, depending on when and where she used it.

I turned on a beat of the music and put my back to her.

“That is Lisa?” Vita asked me.

“Yes, that’s Lisa,” I said. I looked over the top of Vita’s head at the Christmas tree. The light at the top, the star, had gone out. The conversation at the bar increased. Lisa was talking, as usual, with four men at the same time. I was very much afraid and was feeling sicker by the minute. Francie was a little bit drunk. I could tell by the way she was laughing.

“Shall we go over and say hello?” asked Vita.

I stopped dead, ignoring the music. “Do you really want to?”

She looked up at me and there was the suggestion a tear in the corner of her eye. I had never known Vita to cry.

“Yes,” she said. “I really want to.”

My knees were shaking. “Let’s finish this record out,” I said.

“Darling, let’s go over there right now. You are killing yourself.”

The manner in which she spoke was almost enough to make me wish that I had never been born. There was a do-or-die, inner confidence in her tone which was certainly not in me. I didn’t want to talk to Lisa. I didn’t want to go near her. My stomach was turning inside out. I forced my facial muscles into what I guessed was the approximation of a smile.

“Man and wife?” I asked her, kissing her brow.

“Man and wife,” she said with a break in her voice.

I took her hand and we started across the base-

the christmas week wake

ment floor to the bar. It was awful. It was impossible. It was horrible. I was the puny fly caught in Clotho's web.

"Frankie!" exclaimed Lisa, "where have you ever been keeping yourself?"

The conversation around the bar suddenly ceased. This was it. Francie stopped laughing. Georgie and Rich put down the ice cube tray they had been trying to force open. The Queen was about to chastise a philandering subject.

"Oh, you know," I heard myself say, "I switched schools and all and"

"Frankie boy!" She embraced me. It was purely reflex that forced my arms around her. I pulled back and caught the tail end of her smile at Vita. It was not the caressing variety.

"This is Vita," I said by way of introduction. "She's my"

"And I *was* in need of a date for that party of Rich's," said Lisa, cutting me off.

Hating myself more every second, I finished. "Lisa, this is Vita, my fiancee." And then I heard a voice which sounded vaguely like my own say, "The date isn't." Lisa looked at me in the way that only Lisa could. My flesh crawled. I was becoming the stallion in the paddock again and I couldn't help it.

"Oh," said Lisa. "This is the D.P. Does it speak English?"

The laughter which followed Lisa's insult was loud and cruel. I felt myself breaking up, sliding into a pool of despicable—of detestable depravity. I was utterly ashamed and I wanted to vomit very badly. Rita stepped forward and shook hands with Lisa.

"Yes, Lisa, I can speak English," she stated sweetly and valiantly. Lisa replied with the rapier-smile. The crowd

laughed again, more loudly, more cruelly. They knew the justice of the Queen well. Vita faced the whole bunch of them and the look on her face was not one of anger or humiliation, but one of pity. Her eyes locked with Lisa's and they both turned to me. Here was Lisa, evil, beautiful, brightly plumaged in her white gown like some strange, exotic bird, flushed with victory. And next to her was Vita, looking small and resolute and plain by comparison. The lights on the tree, the faces of the crowd at the bar, Lisa's eyes, Vita's eyes all screamed at me: *Choose!*

I looked at Vita and drank in the confidence that was in her very nature. I experienced a violent twisting sensation that was so strong it was almost physical. I was filled with strength and my stomach was suddenly empty. I took her hand—her strong, generous hand in mine and we went away from the bar. At the foot of the stairs I stopped and turned. The gaudy white gown was a muddle on the floor in front of the bar: the face-saving faint of a face that couldn't be saved. Clustered about the gown in various attitudes of helpfulness were the dark oxfords and blazers of the mourners.

Vita and I went out into the clean, cold night. I kissed her under the stars. We were very happy and the mourning stallions in the basement were very sad. The goddess of Eros was no more. The Queen was dead.

MICHAEL McDERMOTT

two poems

Sometimes in my mind I build a world
of tragedy or loveliness or reality.
My fingers are cold and the words do not live.
I think that I will Promethean-like mold
a boy, all muscle and beauty in a hard male way,
a girl, all soft blossoming femininity,
and my boy and my girl will meet on the grassless hills
apart
and stare across the valley and weep
and long and suffer,
and then
the boy will run with agile grace
and catch the girl
in his boy-man arms (muscle and
a little hair) .
and they will love,
til the dewdrops no longer glisten on the petal,
til the stars grow ugly to my eyes,
til
the boy is hoary and decayed,
all flabby and ugliness in a soft senex way,
and
the girl has withered into a shrill, rasping
shell of dead beauty.

The father stood in anger before
his son,
who,

In drunken exhilaration, cursed and swore and blasphemed.

The glass emptied much too quickly;
The olive was drinking too much,
and, in anger,
he ate the olive.

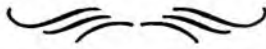
The father stood and saw in those little boy eyes
a grimy, dirty hand, clutching nothing on a foreign
field.

The father slapped and felt the parchment skin of a cadaver,
lying in a field-hospital.

The father set his jaw squarely, as he read the we-regret-to-
inform.

Why admonish a corpse? Why rant and rave at the
soon-to-be-dead?

The olives continued drinking too much, and, one crazy
slippery night,
A car sped off the road into nothingness.



the stray

One A.M. A light shone under the door of Clarence French's dingy third-floor-rear apartment. Inside, a pen of ancient vintage profaned the utter stillness of the night as Clarence scribbled his thoughts in an old leather-bound diary: "December 13, 1933. Today I must do it. It must end; I can bear it no longer."

A scant four years ago he had been living like a prince. Then, on that fateful Black Friday, he found himself a pauper—caught like many others with nearly all of his money riding on a rising stock or two. The vision of doubled money was shattered by the dread news. He had hung on for four years; but now with only thirty cents in his pocket he was ready to throw in the sponge.

As he wrote, a passing vehicle shook flakes of plaster onto his page. He flicked them off and continued writing: "Today I shall end this miserable existence. It shall not take long." He dabbed a heavy period at the end of the sentence and closed the book. Rising slowly, he went to his closet, donned the velvet-collared coat, and left the house.

He walked shiveringly down the hushed street, as the faint, jumpy glow of the old carbon arc lamps still used in that section projected his shadow alternately before and behind him. Every now and then, the unusually alert senses of the lone pedestrian detected the honk of a horn in the distance, or the funereal chimes of a clock striking the quar-

ter-hour in a distant church-tower. "Strange," he thought, "how one could hear these things a million times, and yet never really hear them."

As he approached the down-town section, he turned into a side-street lest he encounter people, and found himself in a small park. He saw a bench and decided to build up his strength for what he must do that night. A bell rang the hour of two, and to Clarence's fevered mind it seemed that from the droning a voice called: "Come to me, visit me." But Clarence was a practical man and dismissed the hallucination. He then rose and began walking towards the river as he had planned. But the damp air extorted rheumatic twinges from his jaded limbs, slowing his pace. The bells rang the quarter-hour again, and again the same, "Come to me, visit me." Clarence quickened his pace towards the river.

It was beginning to rain and he hurriedly sought shelter, running hard despite the tugging of the rheumatic twinges at his muscles. He reached an alcove and exhaustedly leaned against a door which swung open under his weight; the warm, dry interior appealed to him. "The dim red light at the front of the building! I must be in a church. But what's the difference, as long as I'm dry?" It was the first time in forty years that he had been in a church.

And then he heard the Voice, ethereal and deep, which made the very seats tremble. The Voice spoke as it had on Sinai. It warned, "Thou shalt not kill." Across Clarence's distraught mind flashed words from the dim past, words he had learned as a child, and he repeated them with child-like faith and fervor. "O, my God, I am heartily sorry—" Then the bells rang again.

Later that morning, an early worshipper found Clarence kneeling in the last row, dead.

and yet you ask!

The blobs of sunlight filtering through the drawn blinds teased the sleeping figure into consciousness. He laboriously stretched under the clinging warmth of the blankets and timidly exposed his eyes to the brilliance of the dawn. Then, in his daily unconscious ritual, he mustered his humors and members; it was then that he discovered the vague discomfort extending throughout his frame, his penalty for the unreasonable agitations of the night before. During the night, in his seemingly passive body, there had been waged a pitched battle between myriads of microbes to determine the outcome of his inordinate carousing and, though the beneficent microbes had won out, the jaded sensation he now felt was the toll of this battle.

In deference to his condition, he promised himself a minute longer in bed, but within him cried out the need to rise. The objective mind weighed pro and con, solicitously though firmly awarding the coveted minute, but no more . . .

Awaken, man, to your day of strife!
Within you Nature stirs
In her accustomed way;
She pits the strong against the weak,
The hot against the cold;
She plays the wet against the dry,
The young against the old.

And you yourself, proud creature,
 Of mortal clay and deathless soul,
 Each against the other always vying,
 You bear the seeds of strife within.

The shower's prickly needles goaded the somnolent pulse; then, with healthy appetite, he sat down to eat as he read his morning paper. The still-jaundiced eye skimmed over the printed words, picking up here and there miscellaneous bits of information: a labor strike . . . *monotonous recurring news* . . . a neighbor promoted . . . *replacing another neighbor, now unemployed* . . . a lovely miss engaged . . . *I know a disappointed suitor, poor chump* . . . political ads: "Sam for Mayor" and "Joe for Mayor" . . . *both nice guys, but one must lose* . . . a famine in India, a flood in Egypt, a hurricane in Haiti, a tornado in Texas . . . *Nature gone awry again, but what can you do about it?* . . . and here a prediction of war, and here the same, and here—but here it says there will be no war, and here, too . . . *can't these people agree?* . . . the sports section, some cheerful news: Petrone K.O.'s Armstrong, Yanks belt Indians, Tigers whip Sox . . . *Damn, it's getting late. I'd better get to the office.*

So he rolled up the paper and thrust it into his pocket, intent now only upon getting to the office on time. And so he rushed into the snarling irascible mob and became one of them; he pushed his way to a seat on the bus whence he could more comfortably return the snarls of his fellow-travelers (and then he will snarl all day while he strives to maintain the high-pitched frenetic pace against the production schedule.)

See how caught up is man
 In the whirlwind of contention.

and yet you ask!

It's man 'gainst man, or Nature
His rival, or man assaulting Time.
A winner, a loser, so must it be:
"Fight and snarl" Life's instincts decree.
And so in sport or endeavor grim,
Man must fight for his every inch.

Once settled in the bus's atmosphere of pregnant hostility, he reviewed the eve's excesses, then toyed with the coming day's schedule. His eyes flitted absently from well-turned feminine ankles to hairy-fingered masculine hands, and finally alighted on the paper which held these hands aloft. The headlines: War Imminent as Reds Mobilize. And he thought: "Why must war be?" Then his eyes sought again the well-turned ankle.

Why must war be! Thou dense, unthinking clod,
Look about you, look within,
Look above, beyond, beneath.
You see each atom charged with spite
That is chemical, biological, psychological.

There is your answer:
If proton tugs with neutron,
Can the aggregate of disunity
(For such is Man)
Agree with himself,
Much less with others?
And yet you ask
"Why must war be?"

JAMES McLARNEY

the howling wall

Rearing higher than the highest mountain
Like the half-remembered, quite impossible,
Very final jolt of a so-called Id-inspired
Nightmare there is the Howling Wall.
A terrible, entrail-freezing edifice, this wall—
This awful Howling Wall of verbs, of bricks,
Of adjectives, bolstered with coagulating con-
junctive concrete, designed by grammar, re-enforced
By rhetorical beams, a tower every fifty lines
Topped with a passive periphrastic promenade,
Dripping with dollops of parallel construction,
Two styles of contradictory facing: the Gothic Determined
Argues always with the Modern Synthetic.
Thus the Howling Wall broods gloomily downward
Upon the shifting mind-real stage of man
While overhead, in the prudish greyness, wheel
The sharp-eyed, black-winged watchers, the
Foul-smelling, ever-frustrated carrion critics.

Now against the wall—the awful Howling Wall—
In a constant, mind-cracking cadence buffet
The quill-happy regiments of every nation.
The anguished cries and shattering pen points
Are absorbed in deadening hilarity by the
Stolid, unmoving, linguistic hunks of brackish stone.

the howling wall


Here a Roman splits his aching skull on a flying
Buttress: his drumming dactyl did not penetrate . . .
Here a new-day Gaul topples from his wavering
Vault of realism and slips to a pre-arranged
Sartre-shroud, shrieking vowel sounds as he dies . . .
Here some introspective Englishmen weep in muted,
Proper wails over the shattered shards of the
Crooked spear of stream of consciousness . . .
Here a snap-brimmed, foolhardy Westerner vilifies
His miserable plight: he could not pistol-whip a stone . . .

The life blood spouts and spurts and
Stains the lettered litter against the
Foot of the Howling Wall. Newcomers have
No fear: for posterity's sake the carrion-
Critics practice thorough sanitation, ingesting the
Still quivering pages with ravenous red pencil beaks.
The birds glide down and the cries glide up.
The Howling Wall impassively absorbs them all.

Rarely, oh ever so rarely, someone does
Break through to the blissful other side.
Shakespeare made one horrendus rent in the
Mocking bricks: his approach was new. The bones
Of many fog the hole he made with Hamlet's bodkin.
Geoffrey, tongue-in-cheek, rode merrily through
On horseback, exuding the fragrance of nut-brown ale.
Aristotle tore his toga, but the lever of his logic
And the fulcrum of his wit were victorious.
Some learned Romans, although Ovid's remains
Bleach atop the battlements, also made the grade.
Thomas had no trouble. Was this Divine Priority?
Some few of our day must have qualified—we cannot

Tell—the clouds of linguistic debris are blinding
And the carrion critics are always efficiently busy.

The Howling Wall stares down, impassive,
Imperturbable, challenging, unchanged—but finite.
There are not many holes in the bloody bricks, but
The light that does peek through the verbal mortar
Is brighter than the glow of wrestling nuclei.
We fledgling quill-happy acrobats follow the
Burning beacon of reality as the truthful photons
Tumble through, sadly refracted by the odd-shaped
Holes of the timeless giants who have gone before us.



essential of variancy

I am the formless thing
Lurking in the shadow
Of your pointless table altars
Festooned with human pride.

I am the senseless imp
Riding on the haunches
Of the bolstered god of evil
Whom you thought was earth.

I am the dulling edge
Of that rueful blade
Which split in two
The union hypostatic.

essential of variancy

I am the little crinkle
At the corner of the mouth
Of the stony ikon Virgin—
Before you smashed her.

I am the unadmitted jibe
Sneering from the pages,
The dusty, outworn, feeble pages
Of the door-tacked tracts.

I am the plaintive bubble
Rising in the test tube—
That mocking hunk of matter—
The ape you never found.

I am the hollow giggle
Teasing the foolish whim
Of extending simple thoughts
In not-so-simple space.

All you who grope about
Without the Angler's Key,
You know my laughter well:
My name is Doubt.

RAYMOND SHEA

e g o

Ego is a little word,
Two syllabled but plainly heard,
Which Roman children rarely said,
But says much more, the Romans dead.

In fact it names a little man
Who'll grow no more, but thinks he can.
He prides himself on being wise
And manufactures curt replies.

We're all his puppets, walking around
Like fancied kings, ermined and crowned.
Our five senses and some inside, too,
Prime Minister E. tells what to do.

Compromiser in every way
He knows how hot and cold to sway;
He mirrors us as beauty's prize
With softer looks and bluer eyes.

Yet very quick his feelings chafe,
If others push aside the waif.
Only if we love Humility
The Roman imp as dead will be.



beginnings

There is a mystery in beginning
A tingling air that greets green spring;

Just as old prejudice, swept away,
Allows white dawn to newer day.

Remote horizons enticing ever:
Like first sparks of life whatever.

Bare bough's buds of misty leaves,
Life new conceived ev'r quiet weaves.

So open brave dark doors to peer
Down corridors of many a year

Yet to be born and feast wide eyes
On golden shrouds in moonlit skies.



shadow

At first Bill didn't realize he was being followed, and then he began to look forward to the appearance of the thin, ageless creature who followed him to school and reappeared, when his classes were finished for the day and he was heading home again.

"Shadow," as Bill had nicknamed his companion, was a small, sunken-chested Negro, who belonged neither to time nor place. He might have been twenty and a grind at school; he might have been a scrawny, shoe-shine boy, traipsing alongside of a potential customer; or he might have been a lonely bum, harmlessly dozing on a park bench. In any case he wouldn't have rated a second glance. But now he had become a "shadow," and a shadow is important, if only as a sign of normality, of the possession of depth.

One day Bill turned and spoke to Shadow in the shy, awkward manner of an introvert.

Bill very rarely spoke to anyone at school. They were all a part of something; they belonged to their family or a clique or a buddy. Only Bill did not belong. He had always been the fat, little boy, standing alone by the school fence during recess. But now Shadow seemed to have adopted Bill, and this was a chance to belong.

At Bill's words Shadow started and began to withdraw, but Bill offered him his hand. Shadow smiled, and the two were inseparable.

shadow

Shadow moved into Bill's apartment, a high-ceilinged, coffin-shaped room, cluttered with books and worn, old furniture. Shadow slept on the couch, while Bill had a cot in the corner.

The pair always had breakfast at the Waldorf and sat, staring into the muddy depths of the coffee, not saying anything—with words.

When Bill came near the University, Shadow disappeared, but he was always there at the end of the day.

At the sight of Shadow, Bill would feel like a child in a dark nursery. The darkness is frightening, and the child is insecure; yet he has the reassurance of knowing that he has only to call out and someone will share the darkness with him.

Bill learned never to ask where or how Shadow had spent the day. His friend, however, always returned with money, occasionally smiling, occasionally grim and bitter. And his fingers were stained with black and brown polish.

At night the two would sit up studying, Bill poring over the textbooks, Shadow sitting cross-legged on the couch like some scrawny, emaciated Buddha. When Bill laughed, Shadow laughed. He laughed until the tears streamed down his sunken cheeks. When Bill was sober, Shadow had the look of a man contemplating Reprobation.

And there was always music in the apartment—Beethoven, Grieg, or Tschaikovsky. Shadow would begin to sway to the rhythm, his face contorted, his eyes staring at the spinning disk, seeking to enter the soul of the composer.

Then one day Bill's world crumbled. He came out of class; Shadow wasn't there. He rushed home and took the stairs two at a time. In the apartment Shadow, sitting cross-legged on the cot, was gazing drunkenly at the wall. The records lay smashed upon the floor, the books were torn.

Angrily Bill punched Shadow, and then he felt the feverish skin. He remembered the nights, when Shadow, like some too small fish cast on the beach, had coughed and gasped for air. Bill called the ambulance.

Standing in the corridor of the hospital, Bill waited, only half-conscious of the movement around him. At a large cabinet, a lanky orderly was joking with the student nurse as she prepared a tray of medicine. The head nurse was busily filling out reports; an interne talked in hushed tones over the telephone.

Soon the interne, tired from overwork, approached Bill. They had done everything possible, but Shadow was dying. Why? Bill didn't care.

The interne tried to look sorry, but he was too tired.

Then, walking slowly down the ward, Bill saw his friend, all but buried in the cleanliness of white sheets. He already had the appearance of a cadaver. Bill stood, staring into the uncomprehending eyes. The gulf was widening; he clasped Shadow's hand, but they continued to be drawn apart. Bill was a child in a nursery, crying out and answered only by a mocking echo.

Soon a strong, competent hand was leading him firmly away from the bed. The orderly drew the curtains and began his work. Bill's friend was dead.

Lethargically he walked home through the bitter coldness of the night. Even the hang-nail moon was troubled by dark storm-clouds. He felt a deep and unrelenting loneliness, the awful reality of being unloved.

contributors

THOMAS COSTELLO (*Writ on Habeans Corpus*) was born in New Jersey where he attended St. Peter's Prep, graduating in 1953. Mr. Costello is a sophomore letters major and a very active member of the track team. We expect to see a lot more of him in the future, hoping that our newly discovered poet with the Charles Addams flavor will find time between the six hundred and the pole vault to grace our pages with work of similar metrical and precise quality.

MICHAEL McDERMOTT (*Shadow, Two Poems*) is a native of Providence and a graduate of Classical High School (1953). In his concentration, letters, Mr. McDermott has an affinity for A's. His first published work is one of the best pieces of introspection we have come across in quite a while. His poetry equaled his short story and caused us to blink our eyes in joyous disbelief.

ROBERT ARRIGAN makes his debut in the ALEMBIC with *A Complete Education*. A sophomore majoring in education, Mr. Arrigan, in our opinion, ably expresses the traditional viewpoint as regards the proper college curriculum. Having spent a successful year at Annapolis, he confronts a crucial issue with laudable candor.

JAMES McLARNEY, the ALEMBIC's Associate Editor and one of the men instrumental in its rejuvenation, is a junior majoring in letters. He is plainly in an experimental stage, as shown by the diversity of his material (see January 1954, December 1954), but he manages to reach the same high plane in all his work. His current selections, *The Howling Wall* and *Essential of Variancy*, have the same esoteric McLarney touch, while *The Christmas Week Wake* realistically and keenly captures the crisis in a young man's life.

RAYMOND SHEA (*Two Poems*) lives in Newport, Rhode Island. A freshman classics major and a graduate of De La Salle Academy (1954), Mr. Shea makes his literary debut in this issue with two carefully constructed philosophical poems. We are, in view of the fact that he will be with us another three years, decidedly optimistic about his future creative development.

CHARLES CURRAN is completing his third year of struggle with the classics. To this classical training can be attributed the crisp and precise diction so evident in his work—but Mr. Curran is no stuffy anachronism; you'll detect modern notes in *The Stray*, as well as religious experience, which is one of his favorite themes.

RENE FORTIN, the brilliant Editor of the *ALEMBIC*, as well as of the '55 *Veritas*, graduated from Mount St. Charles Academy in Woonsocket where he resides. Mr. Fortin's selection in this issue is quite a departure from his usual lightly-satirical vein. He has tried a new form in which prose and poetry are merged, something we wish more people would attempt. The immediate ambition of this exemplary P.C. man is too resuscitate the *ALEMBIC* before leaving for the Army and marital captivity.

GEORGE RILEY is one of the most delightful surprises of this issue. Though he is only a freshman, his contributions have made him a marked man as far as the staff is concerned. He will be haunted and taunted in the future for material of like quality. Investigating his background, we came upon the startling information that he is a physics major despite the obvious esthetic sense which is manifested in his works. Literature and science, we concluded, are certainly not incompatible.

