

*ALEMBIC*

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## Pictures

Steven Pietros

Joe Plummer



*My heart of silk  
is filled with lights,  
with lost bells,  
with lillies and bees.  
I will go very far,  
farther than those hills,  
farther than the seas,  
close to the stars,  
to beg Christ the Lord  
to give back the soul I had  
of old, when I was a child . . .*

*Federico Garcia Lorca  
from  
Ballad of the Little Square*

*Poem: on being the only Cuban woman  
among you*

I.  
 a soft, hushed air breathes;  
 one thousand suns  
 light that island which awaits  
 the arrival of the sea.  
 the smell of rum  
 and her sugar  
 lures boats into the harbor;  
 everywhere, people  
 drunk with her virtues—  
 men, dark eyed  
 with mustaches  
 and her women.

I cannot recall such things.  
 yet the sight of molasses jars  
 on a grocery shelf  
 brings back the man at the sugar mill  
 tanned skin glowing from the heat  
 dipping a glass slide  
 into a huge vat of dark brown,  
 and dripping "melao"  
 into and around my mouth.

II.  
 I once dreamed of an old grey woman  
 wearing a red bandana,  
 sitting near a fire in the jungle.  
 she frightened me.  
 drawing from her vestment  
 a silver pin,  
 she stabbed a little figure in her palm.  
 her laughter is heard by the moon.

I could not stop the woman  
 one quick snap  
 the figure flew into the fire.  
 helpless,  
 it burns.  
 and still the moon watched.

## III.

sometimes when I am alone  
I rummage through a fireproof box in the den  
and pull out the plane ticket  
with my name and age on it  
if only I had used it  
I could walk to the sugar mill again  
or to the beach,  
where we swam for six hours every Sunday  
and ate mamonsillos,  
trying not to spill the little drop of juice  
that remained inside the shell.

I carefully place the ticket  
inside the box again,  
and lock with it my citizenship papers,  
my reward for the day when I swore allegiance  
in a court full of woolen immigrants  
with my fingers crossed in my coat pocket  
and the lace of my left shoe untied.

then I look out the window  
at the snow which makes this land so white  
and how it all falls so gently  
that even the cat on my lap sleeps undisturbed.

## IV.

in my father's drawer chest  
there is a Garcia Y Vega cigar,  
hermetically sealed.  
I was only seven  
when we took it with us,  
and left La Habana  
to live on the moon.

Ana Margarita Cabrera

## *The Moon and the Steeple*

I have made my rounds, and the evening is drawing to a close. It is that season again, and I have done my appointed duty. I have visited friends. I have visited friends of friends. None of them have left me feeling as warm as has their wine.

I have been standing beneath the tree for some time, though I am too late to catch even its dead leaves on their way. The snow is recent, powdery. The street lights are dim and occasional, little moons with powdery halos. The moon itself seems far away and silver; awake, however, to every possibility. Nothing will come from the houses lining the streets. Their fires are now low, the houses sleep in each others' shadows.

Someone approaches me from the far end of the street. It is Georges, I can tell immediately by his walk. His head is down, his body thrown forward from the waist up. His strides are too long for his legs, and his head bobs with each step. He will pass by in a moment, quite oblivious of my presence.

He approaches, head still down, and stops five feet away. With deliberation he scans the rooftops of the houses across the street, and the shrouded hills and trees behind them. He then turns to me, beckoning with his head, as though to say "Come with me. I must tell you."

We head back in the direction from which he has just come. I catch a glimpse of his face as we pass a streetlight. He has made a discovery, but discreetly wishes to wait until we have a warm seat in the tavern before telling it. It of course makes no difference to either of us where we talk, but such reactions are a second nature.

We reach the tavern soon, though the walk is a long one and we have not hurried. But the tavern too has long ago closed. No matter. He begins:

"Much earlier this evening before the snow, the moon, then gold, was on the rise. As I met her, the moon was perched precariously, yes, delicately, atop the old church steeple. I turned to her, asking if she saw the moon on the steeple. She said 'No', then turned to go. But I grabbed her arm tightly above the wrist. 'Really, you must see it.' 'Look for yourself,' was her reply. I looked up again and, surely enough, the moon had risen ever so slightly and was now also a little off to one side of the steeple. 'But,' I addressed her, 'it was that way, was it not?' 'No,' she replied sadly, slowly shaking her head. She threw a pitying look toward me, a thin sweater to help keep a pauper warm, and bid me good evening. I was, being the impulsive man I am, outraged. I cursed the heavens for drawing the moon away from me. And now look at the moon: cold, silver, and distant."

He stops here. Am I to say anything, about the moon, about the girl, whom I know quite well, about anything? I decide yes, but say nothing, for I really have nothing to say, knowing as I do that the moon will be back atop the steeple tomorrow and forever, and the girl too will be back as often, sometimes as a girl, sometimes a moon or a steeple.

I decide that it is late, much too late, though it is really just very early. Georges decides the same. Arm in arm, we turn homeward, for he knows all I know, I feel as he feels, and the girl is at least our sister.

Gene Gousie

## *Goose Rocks*

One night, I swung  
 my friend up over my  
 shoulder and  
     (prodigious cast)  
 tossed him into a folding  
 wave—(a game).  
     And I followed  
 into the opening  
 black water—  
     slap slap  
     glowing  
 of phosphorescent  
 plankton  
     easy over easy  
 of waves, I  
 listened, lying  
 in black Maine water  
 and slept  
 deeply  
     in the North  
 Country that night  
 under constellations of tiny  
 glowing creatures.

Terrence O'Neill



*To The Man Who Called At Midnight*

When I was once trying to contact  
the dead, I washed  
my mind with a wave  
and let them scrawl their messages  
as on sand  
the tracks of gulls.

They told me of a trellis with a small  
grapevine and sunlight  
gleaming on the edge  
of a butcher's knife washed slick  
with red blood.

And words—they had words—  
alchemizing slick-  
                                  red-  
                                  knife-  
(it all makes sense)  
So now you see,  
don't you,  
                                  Slick;  
don't you,  
                                  Red;  
                                  Knife.

The voice approaches me on the street  
selling tooth-  
picks, pencils  
and I LAUGH!

Terrence O'Neill

## *A Song*

A song  
 for the soldier  
       who      sprawls  
 in the rain  
 aware  
       of the pain  
       in his side.

A song  
 for the soldier  
 who misunderstood  
       but listened  
 to lies  
 then died.

A song  
 for the soldiers  
       who tramp  
 through the mud  
 searching  
       for pieces  
 of friends.

A song  
 for those  
 soothing widows  
       and wives, for  
 parents dead, sick  
       inside, collecting  
 smashed lives  
       to go on.

A song,  
 a sad song  
 for those shattered  
       by war.

A song  
 for all  
       who survive.

Donald Langlois

## *Emily*

Did you sit near a window  
 Watching the flakes slide down the pane,  
 Building up into Spanish lace,  
 Communion lace,  
 At the bottom?

As a woman did you smile  
 When you talked  
 With the men you loved,  
 For whom you never  
 Wore a wedding gown?

And as an old woman,  
 Knowing that because you could not stop for death,  
 He would stop for you,  
 Did you look back  
 And tuck scraps of poetry  
 Between your nightgowns,  
 Watching the dominie in gray  
 Put gently up the evening bars  
 As summer afternoon became winter evening  
 And the Spanish lace became a shroud?

April Selley

## *Rain*

She has many coats  
 And when she wears her grey, her autumn coat  
 she makes ships crash on rocks  
 she makes mailboxes and toys float away.  
 And when she wears her violet, her springtime coat  
 she makes brown ground sprout green, growing things  
 she makes rainbows and puddles for sailboats  
 she begins, she ends, she begins and ends again  
 the circle.

Suzanne Kealey

## *Breakwater*

The beam from the deserted  
guard house streaks into  
the ovarian dusk around us,  
hurting our eyes, as we,  
my spectro-sister and I,  
stumble over rocks—  
the sound licking our feet.  
We make way to the jetty  
where there is no light  
but beams from the pluperfect moon.

We sit crosslegged  
on a blanket of dry seaweed.  
Facing each other,  
our eyes meet.  
We transcend water and rocks;  
we become only eyes  
searching beyond eyes.  
I seek your soul  
as you find mine  
we achieve union—  
two souls urged  
by love, pivoted around  
brown eyes.  
Such peace, we breathe quick  
delicious hopes, fugitive desires  
realized in vain—  
my spirit breaks away  
from yours,  
exorcised by a fog horn.

I let your gaze fall  
shattering to the breakwater.  
Crevices are filled  
with glass splinters,  
I see you no longer, darkness;  
I feel your pulse  
retreat from my grasp.

I must leave you now,  
breaking your life  
on these rocks,  
metallic in the moonlight.  
My blindness is confirmed  
at daybreak by the sun  
reflecting in my eyes,  
drying them like pockets  
of mist and dew,  
delivering me to dawn  
and the sounds of bells and plovers  
on an approaching oyster boat.

Gary Bortolot

## *A Picture*

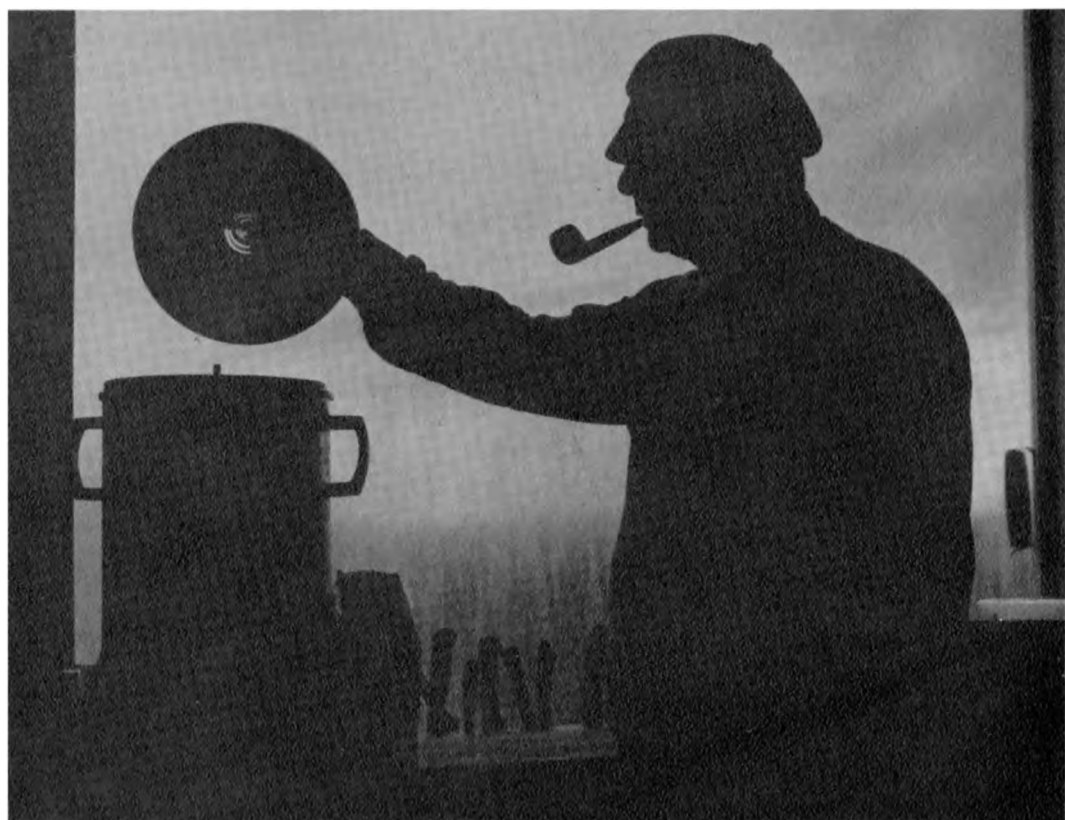
Colors surrounding colors.  
 A golden striped skeleton man  
 Hurls a molten red comet  
 Into the heart of my eyes;  
 And I see those things  
 A blind man sees.  
 Clouds ride on elephants' backs  
 Disguising grieving women.  
 A spineless snake chokes  
 A winged white Stallion,  
 Whose rider spurs  
 A colossal dream.  
 Faces hide faces, whose souls hide  
 In the metamorphic mushroom  
 Of an aquatic explosion.  
 A spiral staircase of liquid lightning  
 Paints my mind on a canvas  
 Of peacock feathers.  
 And I walk on a cloud  
 Of strawberry marshmallows,  
 Through a world inhabited  
 By Japanese beetles.  
 And the mirror on my wall  
 Reflects the ruins of Rome.  
 I see the world I imagine;  
 And Imagine the world I see.

Steven Ruzzo

## *The Old Heater*

In the eye of an old, black heater  
 there is dust and hell.  
 A magnificent marble floor surrounds a candle confessional  
 Where Satan burns in infinite retribution.  
 Colossal iron gates, dipped in gold;  
 Carved in a parade of dying swans  
 Open to the heart of a molten volcano;  
 Dead people dancing with lava lizards.  
 And I feel fire and the face of a monstrous black cat.

Steven Ruzzo



## *Grandfather*

It's been ten years  
since you rocked in your oak rocker  
or smoked your pipe;  
your pocket watch is still on the dresser.  
I remember sitting on your lap  
picking at crusted egg yolk on my playsuit  
while we checked the time.

The corner store is boarded.  
I remember the old floor creaked.  
You bought me chocolate bars,  
and when I got it on my face  
you wet the edge of your handkerchief  
and washed it off.

After school we'd sit in your kitchen  
you had tea in your plain white cup,  
and me with Oreo's and milk.  
We talked about baseball,  
arguing between Pete Reynolds and Frank Malzone.  
Mother would call at five, and I had to leave you  
to eat supper with them.

It's been ten years, Papa,  
mother cried, and father stared at his hands.  
The undertaker said, "He was a good man Joe—"  
no consolation as I sat in our parlor  
staring at the endless empty spirals  
on the grey floral wallpaper.

Joseph Osborne

*Fathers**for Chuck, Paul, Tom, and Herbert*

I chewed pencil stubs for love;  
(My name next to Lowell's!)  
The drive of sleepless nights  
sweating out my Great American Poem.

But you showed me a dirt road winding through wheat fields  
swept back by August.  
You showed me the old man pitching hay bales,  
smiling, not worrying about the holes in his blue jeans.

This peace of a July breeze fanning the Douglas firs,  
or a brook flowing over the back of a rainbow trout  
poised upstream;  
sunbeams that ripple the sea,  
diamonds sparkling, waiting to be picked.

Your eyes held me,  
your hand guided me  
like a kindergarten child  
fingerpainting.

Joseph Osborne



## *Games*

It is like the children's game  
of making boats  
from ice cream sticks and paper,  
setting them afloat  
on long gutter puddles  
and then afire  
with secret, stolen matches;

becoming flaming death pyres  
for fallen Viking heroes,  
or wild explosions creating  
disasters at sea;

this way we make our plans  
for future arks of tended love,  
setting them to drift between us  
before the fire falters  
and the last piece of paper  
curls and dies into black ash.

You have never let one boat  
reach dry land without  
that careful toss of the match  
that takes a moment to catch,  
then bursts and dances on your smile.

I have often wanted just one time  
to sail the sticks  
and not have charred bones  
left sinking into rain water;

but you insist, insist on burning  
and I continue to steal the matches.

Patricia Slonina

*Choir Boy*

This last stop before home,  
safe from the darkness  
locked in the heated car—  
at the gas station  
waiting to be filled.

A small boy,  
his black and white choir robe  
flung over his shoulders  
stopped for a moment  
in the blue light  
to stare at me.

We traded long looks—  
breathless with cold,  
his bright eyes  
and red, burning cheeks  
made me wonder  
why I couldn't be like him  
unafraid of the blackness.

Running lightly,  
robes flying, caught  
in the night wind,  
he crossed in front of the car  
and raced home.

I wanted to follow him  
to his warm house  
with bright windows  
and a mother  
scolding him for losing his gloves  
while rubbing his little red hands  
briskly between her own.

Patricia Slonina

