

Fall 1988

## Overtures - 1988

John Bergman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://neiuadc.neiu.edu/overtures>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bergman, John, "Overtures - 1988" (1988). *Overtures*. 11.  
<https://neiuadc.neiu.edu/overtures/11>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Publications at NEIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Overtures by an authorized administrator of NEIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [neiuadc@neiu.edu](mailto:neiuadc@neiu.edu).

M3/87

# OVERTURES

# 1988

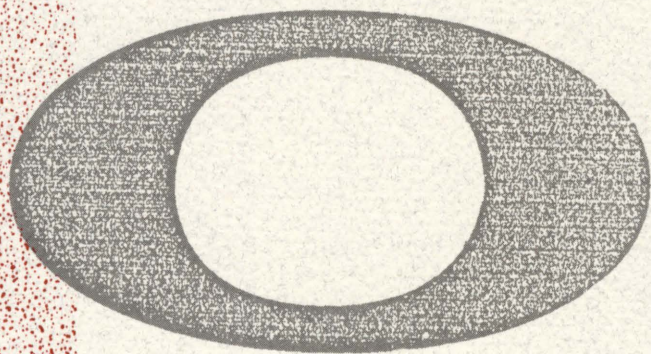
*A magazine of*

**POETRY**

**PROSE**

*and*

**SHORT FICTION**





Photograph by Katherine Pena

**Editor**

John Bergman

**Art Director**

Don Schnitzius

**Poetry Editor**

Timothy P. Hart

**Fiction Editors**

Joan Savage

Cathy Postillion

**Associate Editor**

David Scott

**Editorial Board**

Joan McGann Morris

Ilene Sandman

Mike Perkovich

Mark Hammersmith

Mark Crilly

Kathy Dahlenberg

Teresa Lopez

**Reading Series Coordinator**

Tim Twohill

**Advisor**

Debra Bruce

*Overtures*, a magazine of short fiction, poetry and graphic arts, is published annually by the students of Northeastern Illinois University, 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue Chicago, IL 60625, under the auspices of the Apocalypse Literary Organization.

Submission and Apocalypse Reading Series information is located on page 60.

All rights to material appearing in *Overtures* are retained by the respective authors and artists. Apocalypse Literary Series is sponsored by Northeastern Illinois University.

Excerpt from "Rudyard Kipling" in *DICKENS, DALI & OTHERS*, copyright 1946 by George Orwell, renewed 1974 by Sonia Orwell, reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Excerpt from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, translated by N. K. Sandars. Copyright 1960, 1964, 1972 by N. K. Sandars (Penguin Classics). Reprinted by permission of Penguin Books, Ltd.

# Overtures 1988

Volume 9 Number 1

A Magazine of  
Poetry,  
Prose  
and  
Short Fiction



## FICTION

---

- ...While Conducting Important Research** .....32  
Short fiction by **Edison Blake**.
- Let Them Stand** .....50  
A vignette by **Collette Armstead**.

## ARTICLES

---

- The Heroic Quest & the Discovery of Self** .....22  
From the *Odyssey* to *Star Wars*, epic adventure stories share striking similarities, not the least of which is the self-knowledge acquired by the hero. By **Tom Hoberg**.
- Chicago Poetry Scene** .....41  
Live poetry has become surprisingly successful in Chicago, but will that success last? A few words on what is and is not happening on the local scene by **Barry Cassilly**.
- Pugilism in Poetry** .....42  
Good poetry has never been particularly "nice," but no one expected a few mock-serious events to slowly evolve into that most "unkind" crowd pleaser yet, Poetry Slams. The origins and history of pre-Slam competitive poetry in Chicago as recounted by participant **Terry Jacobus**.

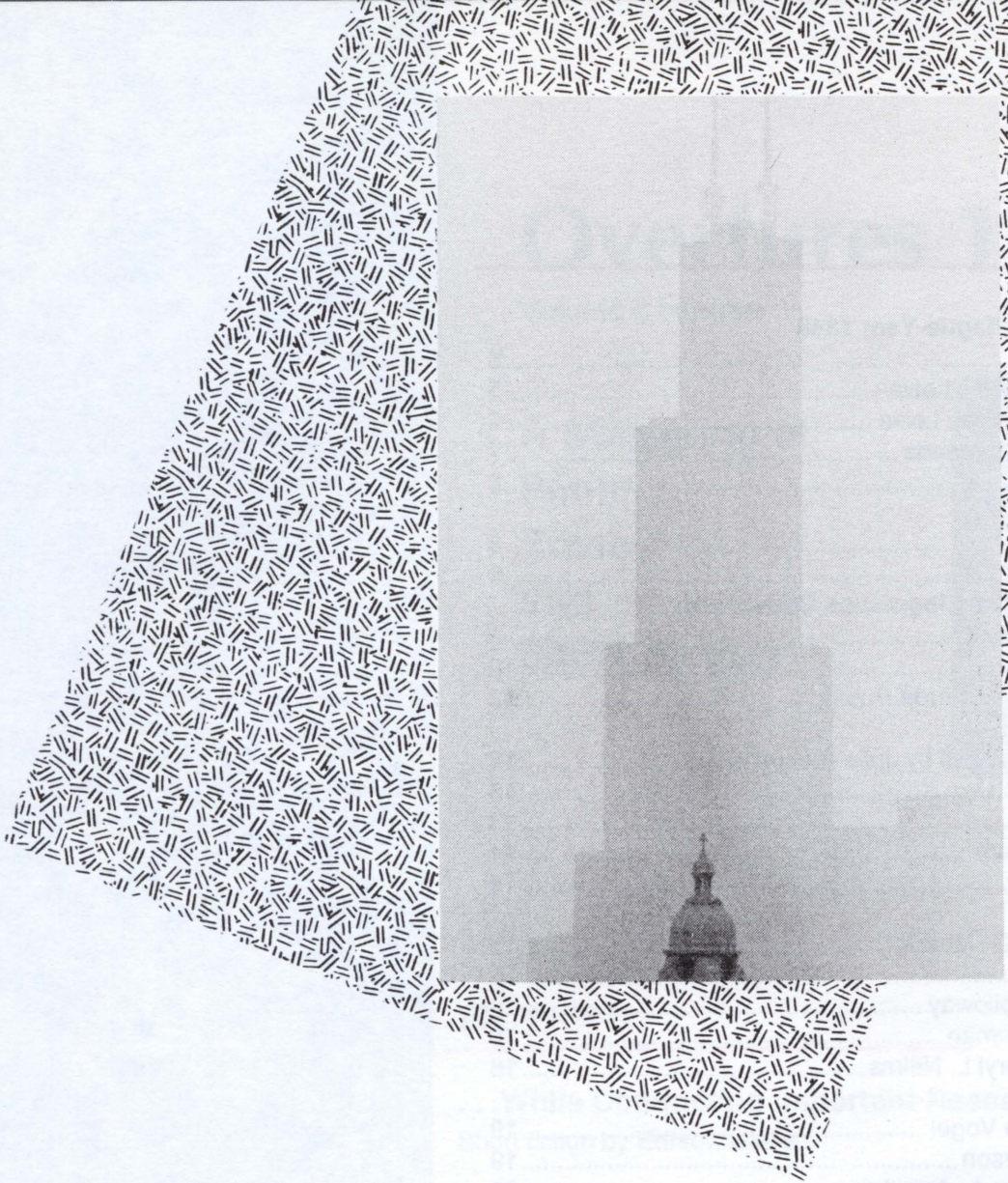
## POETRY

---

<b>The Abbot of Nogent In The Plague-Year 1348</b>	
by Laura Nilges-Matias .....	5
<b>El Salvador Revisited</b> by Douglas Leiva .....	5
<b>I Am The Afterthought</b> by Douglas Leiva .....	6
<b>'73 — The Practice Run</b> by Kat Meads .....	7
<b>Warsaw: 1987</b> by B. Z. Niditch .....	8
<b>conspiracy</b> by Dan Pearson .....	8
<b>Comrades</b> by Rane Arroyo .....	9
<b>Hawkers In The Corridor At The Linguistics Convention</b>	
by Janet McCann .....	9
<b>Studebaker</b> by James Langlas .....	12
<b>Driving West Of The Lake</b> by Gertrude Rubin .....	12
<b>Midwestern Poem Along Hwy. #65</b> by Julie Parson .....	12
<b>Swimmer</b> by Connie Deanovich .....	13
<b>Starvation</b> by Andrea Potos .....	13
<b>Enigma</b> by Agnes Wathall Tatera .....	14
<b>Reminders</b> by Andrea Potos .....	14
<b>The Moon In Two States</b> by Kat Meads .....	15
<b>Reprieve</b> by Andrea Potos .....	15
<b>Generation Gap</b> by Glenna Holloway .....	18
<b>Flowers For Wilt</b> by Paul Weinman .....	18
<b>Nettie Koll, 1889-1968</b> by Sheryl L. Nelms .....	18
<b>The Attic Trunk</b> by Constance Vogel .....	19
<b>A Bridge Of Days</b> by Julie Parson .....	19
<b>Against Tradition</b> by Alexandre L. Amprimoz .....	20
<b>Four</b> by Janet McCann .....	20
<b>A Little Carol</b> by Jean C. Howard .....	21
<b>My Secret Laughing Place</b> by Sheryl L. Nelms .....	21
<b>Scuba Diving</b> by John Dickson .....	38
<b>The Meeting Place</b> by John Dickson .....	38
<b>Life Cycle Of The Butterfly</b> by John Dickson .....	39
<b>advice from a stranger</b> by Dan Pearson .....	44
<b>the thought that counts</b> by Dan Pearson .....	44
<b>Visit When The Dirt Is Soft</b> by John Grey .....	45
<b>Christmas Pageant</b> by John Dickson .....	48
<b>New Year's Party</b> by James P. Quinn .....	48
<b>The Face Of Maori</b> by Jean C. Howard .....	49
<b>From Another Place</b> by Bernard Hewitt .....	49
<b>Risk October</b> by Jean C. Howard .....	51
<b>Night Shift</b> by John Dickson .....	52
<b>Factory Girl</b> by Lolita Hernandez-Gray .....	52
<b>Leaves Of Water, Leaves Of Air</b> by Janet McCann .....	53
<b>Isadora's Centenary</b> by Bella Donna .....	53
<b>I'll Say Goodbye Before I Go</b> by Robert Mills .....	54

We would like to thank the following people for their invaluable help, time and effort.

Ken Morris  
Sandra Flores  
Cary Paul  
Tim Karczewski  
Laura Nilges-Matias  
Don Schnitzius, Sr.



Photograph by Lisa Render

**The Abbot of Nogent  
in the Plague-Year 1348**

The day's last light  
reddens the cold stone that frames my window.  
Beyond, three trees beneath a translucent sky.  
The world's edge bleeds into the void.

If the bloodstained veil were torn what would it reveal?

The buds of each suppliant branch  
glow in the final sun like candles lit at dusk.

This is a garden amid chaos.  
There is a fountain, a sepulchral grove.

With every step I take  
on this abandoned earth  
the cross about my neck  
beats once like a pulse.

I pray among the fevered dying  
and light candles for the dead.

The dying beg only for water.

**Laura Nilges-Matias**

**EL SALVADOR REVISITED**

I knew living there was suicidal  
like domesticating a viper  
or befriending a fascist.

I could just feel  
death  
approaching in slow-motion,  
insidiously smiling  
and slaving at the knock of knees  
igniting a tremble.

Now  
after an era of inevitable confusion,  
(when banners bled  
and children waved their pale hands into the hellish air),  
I lie lost under the tin roof of a nameless nation,  
pounding on my chest with what's left of the fist,  
dissuading my heart from repentance:

My heart,  
this migrant bleeder,  
this coward.

**Douglas Leiva**



**I Am the Afterthought  
(to N. Cuellar)**

Yessss

I am the afterthought,  
I am the thought that lately came  
to disturb the world, disorderly,  
the mole of flesh  
with a heart that beats like hell  
in a holiday,  
(a day of holy burning of desires,  
beside the givens by the weak nature).

I am the impertinent flesh,  
the big, the big  
mistake,  
the breaker of the glass menagerie  
that this world really is,  
the breaker of the unicorn  
and many other symbols of hope;  
and God forgive me for not thanking him,  
but I am the bridge to the overwhelming doubt,  
I am the sign of randomness,  
the big sarcastic laugh that nature has,  
the overwhelming worry of a mother whose nipples bleed  
the naked scarlet milk of sacrifice.

I am tired,  
I am so tired  
of being the last accident,  
the woman's last fall;  
for I am the afterthought, orphan of a mind,  
I am the sourceless occurrence,  
an error of the blood,  
a spilling of the blood,  
the wasting of the blood,  
an untimely gesture of lust,  
the last drop of blood to fill the womb till pain  
'till the spitting out  
or throwing up  
as when a cat chokes on a fish bone,  
I am that bone  
and I ripped the woman's life  
so much that she learned to love me;  
as if love were itself an afterthought,  
the mask of suffering.

**Douglas Leiva**

Here is a small part that will  
make you whole. A letter  
round on the end of a stick  
like a puzzle cube.

These people think

we will live in harm

here and the word

is not a word if you

say it like a word.

You are what you

to keep it away

say it to keep it

How it is, heavy

going like a car

in the hand's hold

Janet McCar

### '73 - THE PRACTICE RUN

July 6: you roll over, I escape.  
No shadow jumps me, no kitchen door creaks.  
Another door, a key, headlights, ahead.  
Where? Don't think.  
The mind will unwind once movement resumes.  
(any end obscures means)

Twelve hundred miles before the mirage appears  
not on the desert flat but here, beside me,  
a surveillance map upon your thigh.  
Comrades-in-arms, you claim. Ha.  
Even your smell is spy.

To survive post-coup I must milk the cacti.  
Your advice unasked for, unattended.  
No cacti, these, but green mothers' arms  
beseeching higher powers to intervene.  
Anything I say now is true. And clever.  
(the oppressor's privilege - truth)

More? It was your beard that kept me  
with its promise to turn white.  
But aging is hard to see, harder to believe in  
when the Plan is so simple, so wonderfully plain.

Protests from the coiled rattlesnake brigade  
whose politics are territory: Stay. Fight. Defend.  
My politics are these:  
the only territory worth fighting for transports.  
Stay awake. Stay alert. Driving is movement,  
Movement the Plan.  
Plan B, Plan C, and so forth and so on.  
(revolutions start small, burgeon)  
(revolution begins at home)

**Kat Meads**

**WARSAW:1987**

*Solidarity*, in her hand  
day by the sun sleeps  
not my picture as a friend  
I give a reading  
and she too is unafraid  
her eyes as birch pale  
as the prince of secret police  
drives by  
I am a plainclothed poet  
in a pawned overcoat  
breathing in the lungs of peace.

**B.Z. Niditch**

**conspiracy**

three men huddle together  
on a hot bus.

it is obvious they are not grouped together  
for warmth.

nor does it appear for the purpose  
of exchanging recipes.

each wears a short sleeve shirt  
of a different color.

they speak in low tones in a language  
not understood in my neighborhood.

after a prolonged surveillance  
in which they exhibit classic furtive behavior

I alert the bus driver  
who has them shot.

these are perilous times  
for public transportation.

**Dan Pearson**

## **HAWKERS IN THE CORRIDOR AT THE LINGUISTICS CONVENTION**

Here is a small part that will  
make you whole. A letter  
round on the end of a stick  
like a pizza-cutter

If we speak music  
we will live in harmony,  
here are the vocables, a little  
slippery, if you will cup your hand

You are what you say.  
To keep it away say it,  
say it to keep it.  
Here it is, heavy as a stone

glowing like a cat's eye  
in the hand's hollow pulsing.

**Janet McCann**

## **COMRADES**

You comb my kinky hair  
and I paint  
your toenails snail green

We take three days off  
to watch a sailor chew  
off his lovely lower lip

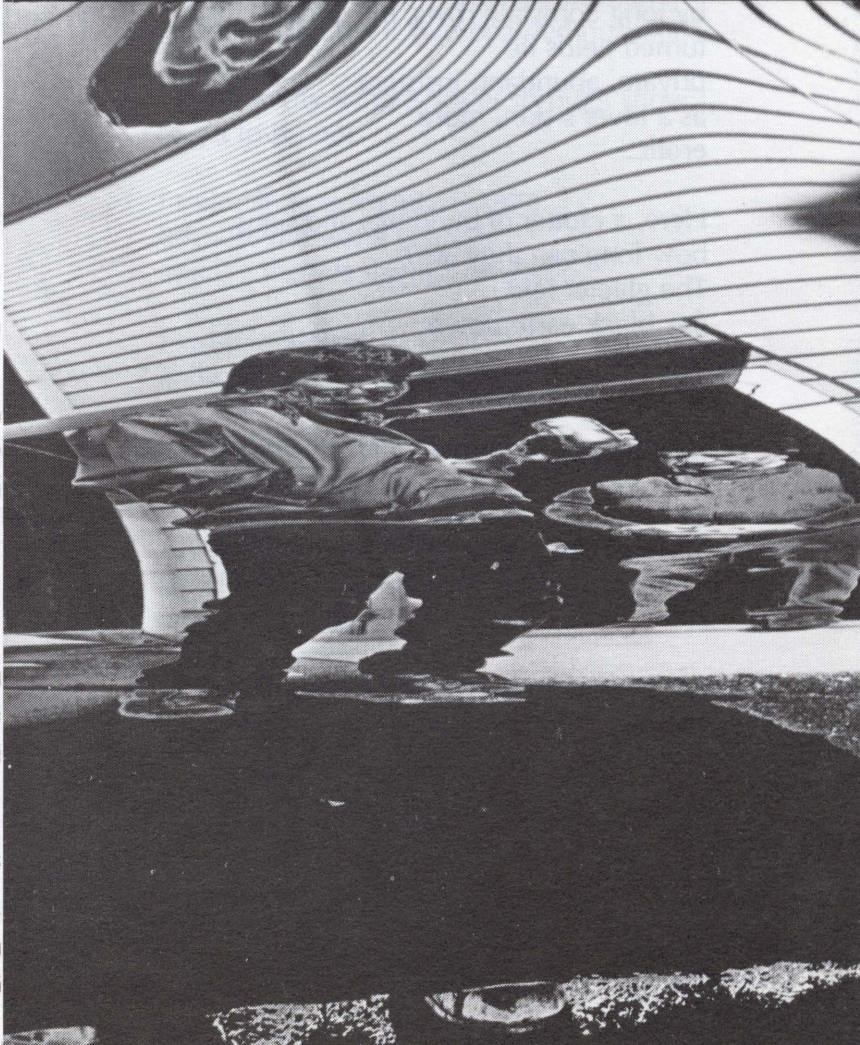
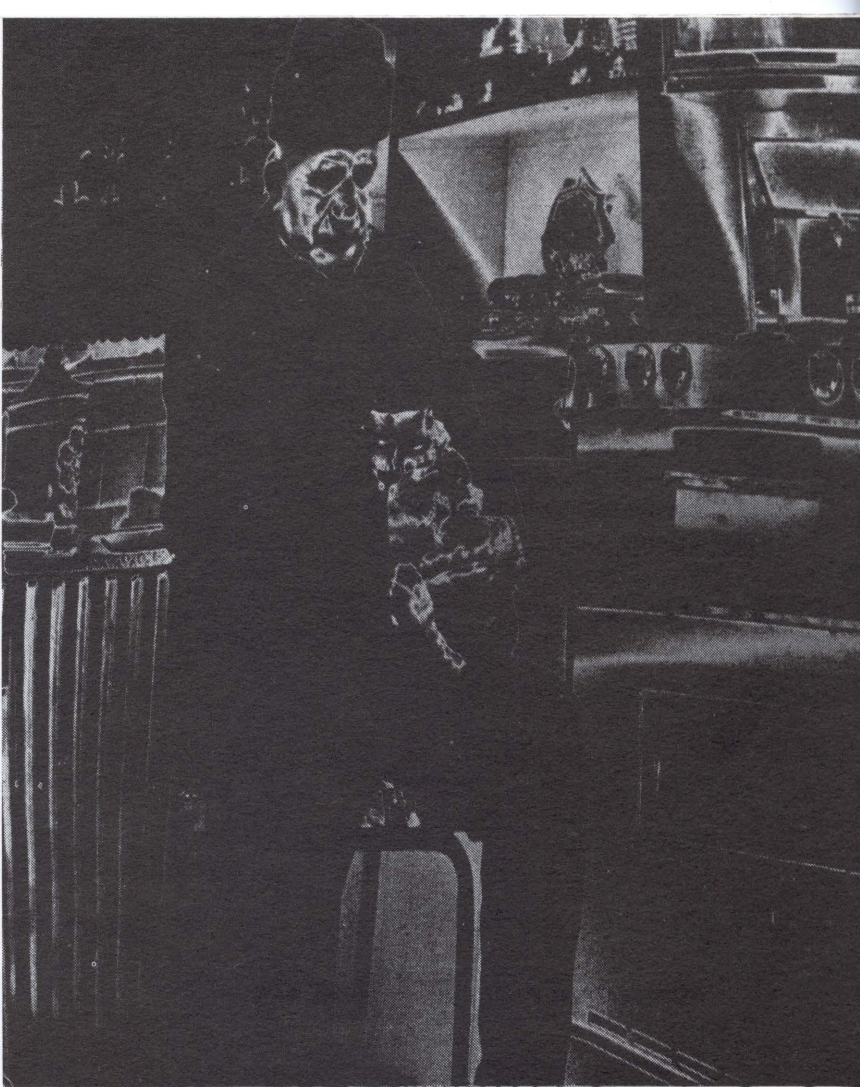
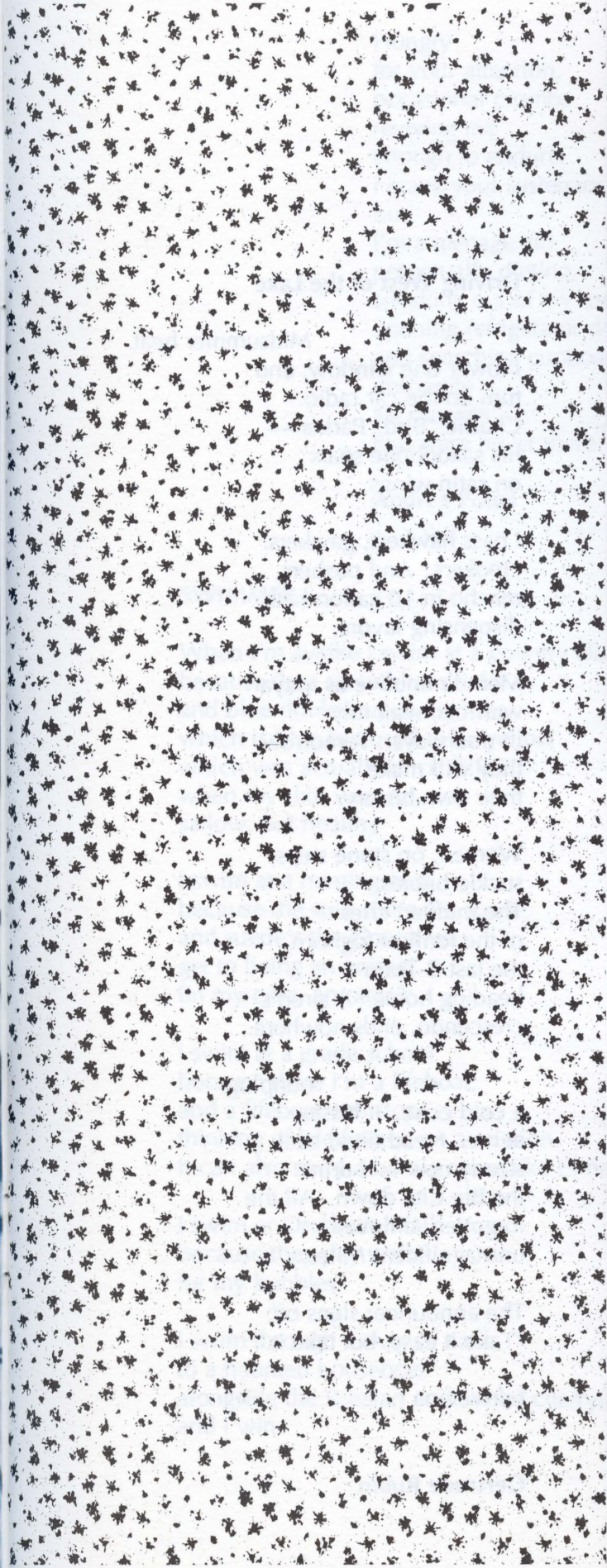
We remember  
Europe full of flophouses  
and fresh flowers

But now in America we have  
elevators falling  
from floor to floor

**Rane Arroyo**



All Photographs by Katherine Pena



## Studebaker

It was destined never to keep pace  
with Time.  
Truly heavy metal, it fell  
victim to its own sturdiness  
as the age of quickness  
sped toward nowhere  
in particular — as men and girls  
grew to love the speed of decades,  
of highways disconnecting spirit  
from reason.

James Langlas

## Midwestern Poem along Hwy. #65

Stroked, shadowed  
by long cornstalk rows, the dark  
turned fields lie  
private, abundant, insistent  
as a lover's skin, more  
erotic.

Here, a clutter of buildings and signs:  
how long can they last?  
The glacier laid  
this black earth down  
but not  
for us.

Julie Parson

## Driving West of the Lake

Midsummer heat.

I lower one window, and  
turn on the car radio.  
Charlie "Bird" Parker —  
his saxophone soars  
on satin wings.

I pass hawkers, gawkers.  
Hookers. And pushers,  
macho in 10 gallon hats,  
dispensing favors.

Men diminutive as Mayan  
warriors, wait idly  
in doorways. Tomorrow,  
they will make  
their own history.

Women, on stone steps,  
suckle babies.  
The muffled cries  
of the lonliest foghorn,  
the last B-Train  
heading home. A siren's  
crescendo, ends nowhere.

I unplug  
a cold coke. It hisses  
at me. Head tilted back —  
steady now — I drink  
the Big City down. All the  
forgotten, unloved,  
unMagnificent Miles.

The announcer signs off:  
"Take it easy, but take it."

I drive on.

Gertrude Rubin

## STARVATION

Hungry  
for your attention,  
occasional crumbs  
reviving me  
enough to endure.  
I crave your sustenance,  
but  
I'm a teenage girl  
perpetually dieting,  
sneaking out of my room at night  
opening refrigerator doors  
and searching cupboards  
desperate  
for desserts  
that were never there.

**Andrea Potos**

## SWIMMER

When I'm awake I swim at a country club  
because they serve blue drinks  
and blue drinks match my hair  
which is blue but used to be yellow  
which was actually once fallow  
when my skin was, no, not  
sallow, but healthy

I swim at a hunting club  
because the suits there are suede,  
and suede's the closest you  
get to being an animal.  
(In my case, an otter.)

I swim at a grade school  
because there I'm a lifeboat,  
and a lifeboat can stop  
thinking of itself when on a mission.  
It can also carry a heroic name like Esmeralda.

I swim at Orchestra Hall  
because they pay well  
for my bubbles.

I swim through a river of nails  
to a haunted houseboat  
alongside the Russian endurance champion  
and I win.

I swim through a golden door  
with a thimble-sized baby in my teeth.

I swim naked with my bearded husband,  
and the outcome is two bearded husbands.

I swim in my father's shoes through snow  
to get to school.

I swim at a punk club in 1978  
because the water is black,  
and life there is sturdy and damp.

I swim in a clock  
and take air by the hour.

I swim like an eel with my big blue flipper  
and my big Asian flu.

I swim at the beach because it serves dead  
alewife, and dead alewife matches my one  
mood that stinks.

I swim through a bouquet of roses  
like a soldier on a minefield,

At night, when I'm asleep  
I swim in a little bowl.

**Connie Deanovich**



## REMINDERS

It's an old theme  
that of dreams lost  
past connections  
severed  
slowly  
agonizingly,  
the old picture  
in your mind  
now hidden  
in the photo album under your bed,  
nuances revealed  
every spring breeze.

**Andrea Potos**

## ENIGMA

What opportunity is there to read your eyes,  
as private-paned as one-way windows?  
Your face is ironed to passivity.  
Dandy-groomed, correct, you find  
the furthest seats,  
conceal small acts of usefulness  
and large concerns.

This reserve —  
is it rigidity, or sensitivity?

Or might it hide a private cruelty?  
Does some dark animal, self-immured,  
raw-collared, tear at its leash  
inside the buried cage, and rage  
to pay with savage hurt others beside yourself  
for willed humility?

Rarely in our encounters I have spelled  
supplications;  
your few and gentle words to me:  
leash them as well.

I have no balm to borrow.  
Our passing clasp of minds is only  
sorrow saluting sorrow.

**Agnes Wathall Tatera**

## THE MOON IN TWO STATES

Obscenely exposed the moon this night.  
*Look at me. Dare not to look at me.*  
So many of us oblige and lose our natural grace.

A man insults a woman he loves  
to possess a woman he hates.  
Another drinks until she has no name.

A sculptor of symmetry breaks through a wall of face  
in a fight not his own  
and I lie naked beside someone I fear.

In North Carolina you look once  
before closing the shutters;  
you resist lunar power.

As our cycle moves into departures  
you cannot understand why I will not.

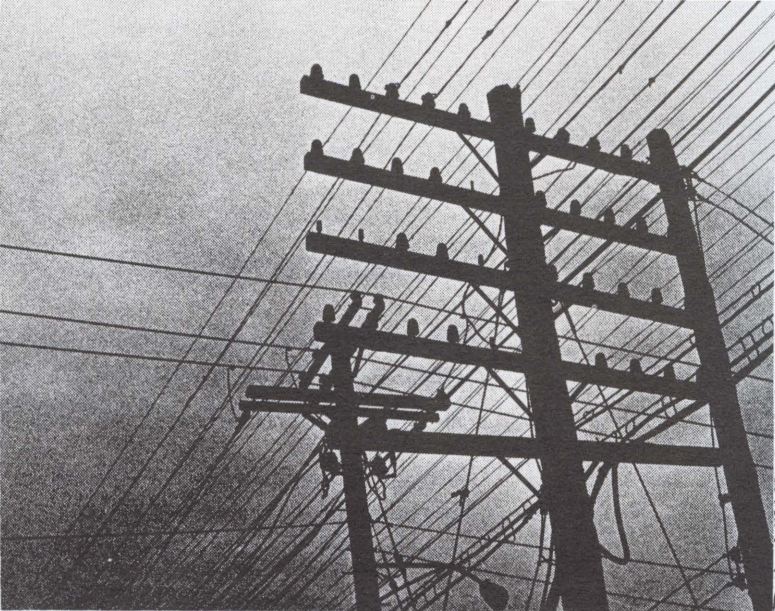
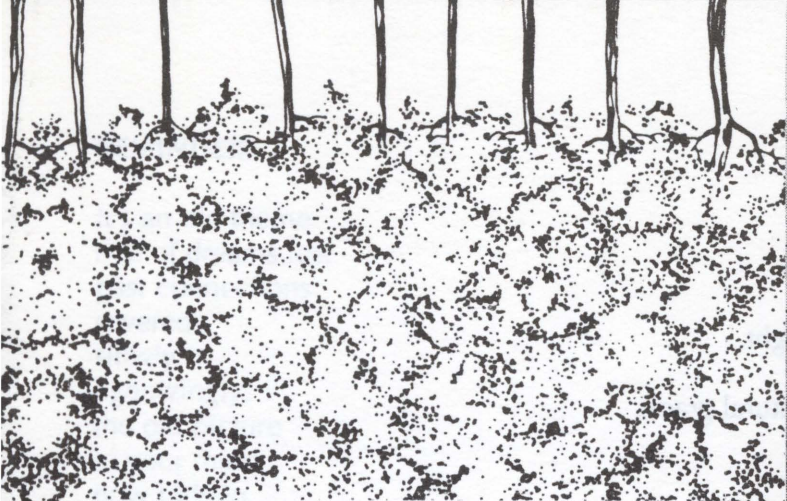
Even now the moon willfully divides.

**Kat Meads**

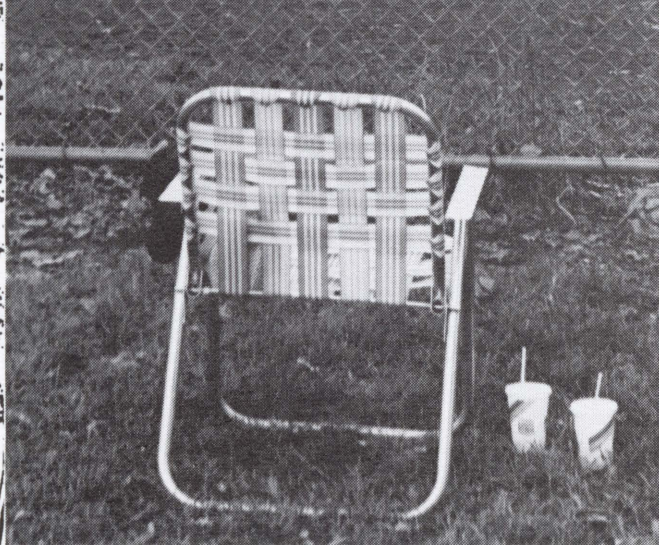
## REPRIEVE

The coveted hour  
taken in stealth  
my time  
to connect within  
only the lights above me buzz  
like reassuring crickets  
surrounding me in silent breaths  
distant from the fragments  
I left behind.

**Andrea Potos**



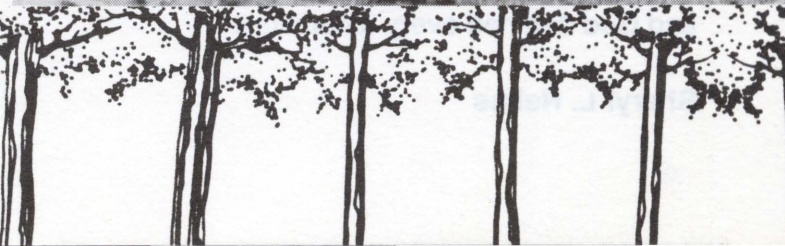
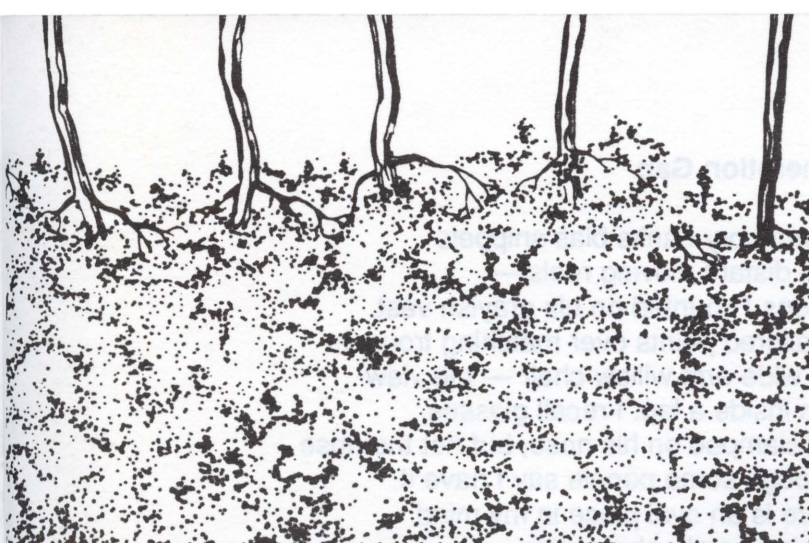
Photograph by David Magdziarz



Faint, mirrored text bleed-through from the reverse side of the page, including the name 'LISA RENDER' and other illegible words.



All Photographs by Lisa Render, Except Where Indicated



## Generation Gap

My memory banks bias snippets  
from distant moving reels —  
buttons I counted on his grayish vest,  
its tailored points over matching trousers  
in a wide-arm willow chair — the view  
from inside a lap. I recall glasses  
that clamped on his nose, but not the nose  
although some people say I have it.  
There is an oval place in my mind  
framing gentle obscurities.

I can still see a doctor pressing  
a swelling of white flesh on a big brass bed.  
That night I tried to say a new word —  
*appendicitis* — over and over  
after strangers carried him out flat and slow.

But I don't remember him, my grandfather.  
Not his face, voice, or anything he said.  
Only a pale abstraction in a casket  
on a curtained table — with flowers all over  
where only one vase of iris had ever been  
in what my grandmother always called  
"the reading room" of the old house.

And a silent aunt who refastened the spring  
on the front screen door the next day  
after everyone else was gone.

## Glenna Holloway

**Nettie Koll**  
1889-1968

wrinkles mapped her face

showed frown furrows  
and Kansas sun  
in her eyes

a persistent dimple  
indented her  
chin

varicose veins  
wiggled down  
her legs

for sixty years  
she raised  
Leghorn chickens  
and Holstein steers

alone

her hair in  
perpetual pincurls  
under a blue bandana

she baled hay  
in June July and August  
canned applesauce  
in September  
candled eggs  
each night

and God damned every other word

**Sheryl L. Nelms**

## FLOWERS FOR WILT

Grandma's twisted finger  
pointed to where hollyhocks  
wrinkled and their seeds  
like buttons formed to open  
browned rings of thin coins.  
Spend them, she whispered  
each is a year before you  
die.

**Paul Weinman**

### A Bridge of Days

'The closest thing to poetry is a loaf of bread'  
says Neruda, whom I trust more than anyone, sometimes,  
and needing sustenance, needing comfort,  
I turn to the bread-baking, week after week:

Cracked wooden bowl, flat wooden spoon,  
bags filled with coarse wheat flour  
and whiter, softer flour.  
Jars of raisins and nuts and honey,  
boxes of spices, salt and ginseng.  
Oil from China smelling of sesame,  
apples and pears and lemon and cinnamon  
chopped and bruised on the scarred wooden board,  
the heavy blunt cleaver alive in my hand  
as if centuries had passed this way.

Meanwhile, the yeast is speaking with other words.

Bread-baking, loaf-making, pounding and kneading  
anger into the dough —  
why is morning such a burden?  
and the afternoon full of mistakes?  
But a week as heavy as four o'clock  
vanishes Saturday afternoon:  
blues on the radio harsh and caressing,  
the dough as it rises, waiting, reading, rising  
to punch it down, it sighs, breathing, kneading  
and braiding, finally, waiting, and wine  
to celebrate the arrival of the fragrant warm bread.

Measure the length of a bridge of days:  
coffee in the morning, the kitchen late at night.  
'The closest thing to poetry is a loaf of bread'  
the rhythm and texture of an entire moment.

Julie Parson

### The Attic Trunk

Like a giant bread loaf  
it rises from the floor,  
metal scrolls and filigree  
drizzled on top like butter.

I plan to scrub away the crust  
of years around the lock,  
replace the crumbling leather handles,  
paper inside with cabbage roses.

From its opened lid the distilled smells  
of milk-stained baby clothes,  
lace-trimmed pinafores packed  
in blackened buds of lavender.

Pasted to the top, a child's picture —  
Mona Lisa in a meadow  
draped in tulle, black-eyed susans  
trailing from her hands.

Little girl, I'll put away the paper  
with its ersatz flowers,  
the paint called 'antique blue'  
and leave you in your gallery for one.

Constance Vogel

## AGAINST TRADITION

deaf to all  
but their own cries  
our fathers  
in their night  
wanted  
to survive

through bronze panels  
of light we rode  
our bikes

the streets  
we knew  
we turned  
into words

too late  
for fate  
we steered  
our own  
syntax

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

## FOUR

She stands on one foot  
stands on two  
stands on one foot  
feeling so good, good all over  
    every muscle good, every nerve  
    fiber and cell of her, good  
skin shrieking hey all over  
    now she is jumping  
    chanting some rhyme  
    some rhyme to the sky  
to the coming rain  
    anatomy electric! one big sense  
    the bluegray smell of wind  
    the taste of air  
a blue nimbus around her  
    and she is dancing  
    a dervish  
charged, every hair of her on end  
crisscrossed filaments crackling  
Now she says  
    let the rain come  
    the bright rain

Janet McCann

## A LITTLE CAROL

In the stars that  
squeak through this sky,  
there runs a deeper  
December

than the oak limbs know,  
their eyebrows ever  
tweezed by frozen rain,

than the squirrels,  
barking now louder  
within some utter darkness  
called

"chestnuts".

In these frames  
that whistle through the air  
at bark-scratching speed,  
we find  
little fists, like diamonds,  
smashed against our windows,  
little voices  
jingling,  
their vowels, round squares  
of January rising above them.

We hear the poem  
as a twice-socked boot  
stamps through the glare  
of a white  
shifting page,  
last night's snow,  
noteless and unarranged

and layered with a lisp  
just below its surface:

Qurinch and asnop,  
Sniss and awopp

A little carol,  
wind-fed and bare  
waits just below,  
for the mad-happy boots  
of third graders.

**Jean C. Howard**

## My secret laughing place

I would hide  
behind red  
wood slats

I would burrow deep  
into yellow  
bumps

I would watch mice gnaw  
corn kernels to  
the cob

I would catch the drift  
of our Sunday company's conversation  
sifting through the cracks

I would fly my mind  
up from that Kansas corncrib  
to the daylight stars  
twinkling  
through the ceiling vent

and they wondered  
where

I was

**Sheryl L. Nelms**




# The Heroic Quest & The Discovery of Self

by Tom Hoberg

*The psychologist Carl Jung and his followers call them “archetypes,” that is: “Forms of images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths, and at the same time as autochthonous\* individual products of unconscious origin.” One of the most universal of these has been the Quest Story which has, it seems, been an integral and essential element of man’s collective psyche since — and almost certainly before — human history began.*

---

\* {native, indigenous - ed.}



The goals of the quest, and the questers themselves, are as varied as the cultures which give them shape. That which is sought may be a lost homeland, a lost cause, a sacred icon, a dragon's gold, an obsessive object of love, or hate, or wonder, even eternal life. And the questers, heroes or heroines, conventional or bizarre, who traverse a variety of landscapes, seascapes and dreamscapes, are opposed by enemies both gruesome and seductive, and are aided by a wide range of human, non-human and superhuman allies. Yet, whatever their local variations, all quests share a common and indispensable core, a nuclear unit which Joseph Campbell encapsulates thus:

*A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.*

The call summoning the hero on this venture takes many forms, as various as those who respond to it. A tornado whisked one adventurer from Kansas to Oz; a white rabbit beckoned another to Wonderland. An avaricious old man was directed by a ghost to three other spirits, who led him on a long and troubling Christmas pilgrimage. All returned from their journey much changed. More traditional heroes, embarked on more conventional quests, are urged to action by more direct, even imperious summonings. It is a god who orders Aeneas to abandon Priam's flaming city, and later the ramparts of Dido's, destiny-bound to create a city grander than Troy or Carthage. And the same god, with a different name in a different world, liberates Aeneas' former adversary, Odysseus, so that, guided by yet another goddess, he might cease being a wanderer and again become a king. From across the sea Beowulf hears of Grendel, and dreams of glory; from across a different sea, Ahab remembers the White Whale and dreams of vengeance and apotheosis.

Sometimes the call, Lorelei-like, harps a false call in the quester's soul, luring them on empty or baneful journeys to their self-destruction. Ahab pursues the spirit-spout and Macbeth seeks out the witches; Kurtz is mesmerized by the primeval beat of darkness' heart, and Gatsby the vision of a Fay named Daisy. Each responds with obsessive eagerness to a call which demands a betrayal of self. Each perishes. At the other extreme are those who deafen themselves to the call until it dies away, and something precious inside them dies with it. J. Alfred Prufrock does not think the mermaids will sing to him, so he condemns himself to the isolation of his self-created, self-perpetuating hell.

Conversely, the elect sometimes respond tentatively and reluctantly, and the call must be repeated and intensified. Huck Finn is content to hole up on Jackson's Island in a false paradise until the shore people launch him and Jim on their adventure; thereafter, these same folk continually remind the fugitives that even the sanctuary of the raft is precarious, and in the end as terminal as the river. And Frodo is more than content to rusticate at Bag End — until the Black Riders come calling. The Shire is, after all, cozy and familiar, and the Old Forest merely the closest of a succession of scary places through which the ringbearer must pass on a journey that may end worse than fatally. Everyone knows — or at least everyone says — that a sensible hobbit (even one with Tookish blood) has no call to be consorting with dwarves. Or elves. Or especially, with wizards.

For all true quests, whatever the sojourner, whatever the goal, are undertaken and undergone in the teeth of fear. Moreover, however imposing the help offered on that journey, however numerous, wise and dedicated the helpers, at its end the hero must act,

## The Epic of Gilgamesh

This is the earliest known heroic epic. Though its beginnings pre-date recorded history, parts of its stories and poems first appear in third millennium B. C. Archaic Sumerian cuneiform fragments. By the early second millennium the poem was brought together and recorded by the Assyrians of Nineveh, a full fifteen hundred years before Homer. It is also one of the earliest recordings of the Flood, and in many details shows surprising parallels to the biblical account. Reprinted below are excerpts from the Epic.

*I will proclaim to the world the deeds of Gilgamesh. This was the man to whom all things were known; this was the king who knew the countries of the world. He was wise, he saw mysteries and knew secret things, he brought us a tale of the days before the flood. He went on a long journey, was weary, worn-out with labour, returning he rested, he engraved on a stone the whole story.*

*When the gods created Gilgamesh they gave him a perfect body. Shamash the glorious sun endowed him with beauty, Adad the god of the storm endowed him with courage, the great gods made his beauty perfect, surpassing all others, terrifying like a great wild bull. Two thirds they made him god and one third man.*

*. . . In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, "The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel." So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind. Enlil did this, but Ea because of his oath warned me in a dream. He whispered their words to my house of reeds. . . . "O man of Shurruk, son of Ubara-Tutu; tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise worldly goods and save your soul alive. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat. These are the measurements of the barque as you shall build her: let her beam equal her length, let her deck be roofed like the vault that covers the abyss; then take up into the boat the seed of all living creatures."*

From *The Epic of Gilgamesh*,  
English version by N.K. Sandars

or suffer, alone. No one, finally, can or should fight beside Roland at Roncevaux or Beowulf in Heorot, Luke Skywalker in the Emperor's hall or Frodo on Mount Doom. Nor can anyone finally tell Huck or Oedipus, Willy Loman or Jay Gatsby, Hamlet or Black Elk what to do, or to feel. Each of Arthur's knights must make his own path to the Grail, and the shaman must travel alone when he walks the shaman's road. For in the end a hero can rely only on what he has learned on his journey, and what, on that journey, he has become. Invariably, the end of each quest is turned inward and, inevitably, the final confrontation is with oneself.

Odysseus is a brave man; heroes have to be that, don't they? He is also clever (Homer calls him "the man skilled in all ways of contending") which — when one recalls the simplistic exploits of Conan or Rambo — is for a hero a useful but optional attribute. But wise? Why would he need to be *that*, especially with the Goddess of Wisdom on his side? Yet he *does* become wise and his story, like Parzival's, turns on the acquisition of that wisdom, not so much for what it helps him to do, but for what it enables him to become. And to Athena, who cherished Laertes' son above all other mortals and almost all divinities, the nurturing of that process is, for an immortal, a dishearteningly uphill struggle.

From the outset of his adventure, Odysseus swash-buckles his way across the ancient seaways like a Bronze Age Indiana Jones, dispatching monsters, seducing witches, charming princesses and goddesses as he carves his way back to his kingdom and queen. But the man who re-enters his palace in beggar's rags, to endure the usurpers' abuse until he has weaved a fatal net around them, is not the same hero who nine years earlier vaingloriously shouted his name to the blinded Cyclops and called the seagod's curse down on him and his men. This much he has learned, in nine year's wandering, about the pitfalls of heroic pride.

This knowledge, however, is born from and depends on a more fundamental realization, which was the beginning of wisdom. When the nymph Calypso tempts him to abide with her by offering him the divine attribute of eternal life, Odysseus courteously but unequivocally declines — stating, in effect, that his fulfillment lies to home, with the wife, child and kingdom that await and need him. Odysseus has visited the land beyond, to which Hermes guides the wraiths of the dead. He met his mother there, who died of grief for loss of him. He encountered his old comrade Achilles, proudest of the Achaeans, who warned him it is better to be a slave among the living than king over all the dead. And there he took counsel of the seer Tiresias who told him that while he would die a peaceful death after a long life, to Persephone's realm he must, like all men, finally come. When Odysseus fled terror struck from this dark world, he acknowledged what he was: a mortal. When he refuses

Calypso's offer, he is accepting who he is. And that is, for him, a victory more than any he had won at Troy.

Often the larger the hero's dimensions, the more protracted and agonizing this inward journey must be. Yet, if he or she is to be truly great, instead of merely grand, he or she must not only *undertake* that journey, but *complete* it. As the five-thousand-year-old story tells us (*See insert at left*), Gilgamesh's conventionally heroic career was a study in adolescent hubris run amok as, with Enkidu his companion, he commits enough monumental deeds for six epics: "A butting bull," his poet relates, "a battering floodwave who knocks the stone walls flat." He slays the ogre Humbaba and decimates his sacred cedar forest; overcomes the Great Bull of Heaven in spiteful defiance of the gods; finally, in a crowning piece of arrogant folly, he spurns the amorous advances of the goddess Ishtar. But when in retribution the gods strike down Enkidu, Gilgamesh is made to recognize the one adversary he can't pummel into submission, yet equally can't bear to submit to: his own inevitable annihilation. So, alone and afraid, he embarks on his *real* epic quest. Through the Twin Mountains, past all the thresholds and their warders, he is stripped physically and psychically naked as he trudges toward the land of that eternal life the gods have reserved for themselves.

Finally, the Ferryman guides him across the Great River to the keeper of the herb of immortality, which Gilgamesh gains, holds briefly, then — almost offhandedly — loses forever. All he can do is return to his journey's start, remembering the admonition of all the threshold guardians: "The gods have given you much, Gilgamesh. Cherish it, and know yourself, for that which you covet is that which no man may win." Thus ends the story of the hero commemorated in the poem's first lines, not as Lord of Uruk or slayer of Humbaba, but as "the one who saw the abyss."

Whatever the geographic dimensions of their travels — whether Frodo's through Middle Earth, Luke's through the Empire or Dorothy's through Oz — it is the corresponding inner quest that is more arduous and more important. In that journey they must, in whatever psychic time and space is needful, negotiate or storm the mental threshold barriers and placate or overawe the demons that ward them. Then, having passed beyond all spiritual and physical helpers, they must look into, descend and explore their particular abyss. If the heroes stop short of this, if his or her adventure remains purely external, they will — let them slay as many Jabberwocks as they can — still be like the beamish boy in Lewis Carroll's poem (*See insert on next page*), galumphing triumphant, heedless and unchanged through the tulgey wood, with brillig before and brillig after.

Which is not to say, of course, that Jabberwocks and Bandersnatches, the tulgey woods that harbor them and the

vorpal swords that snickersnack, do not have an exuberantly prominent place in any adventure. A quest is, after all, an adventure, and an adventure is supposed to be as exciting for the audience as it is for the cast. Few audiences, even in our satiated and laidback times, are enthralled by a somber account of the immobilized anti-hero brooding at great length and to small purpose about The Emptiness Of It All. So any tale that speaks enduringly to most of us is a rich goulash of familiarly surprising characters, daring their do amidst their local variant of the traditional epic geosphere, which abounds in places that speak to man's primeval yearnings and his primeval fears. Woods are sometimes lovely, but always dark and deep and generally aswarm with denizens who — themselves seldom visible — mark the traveler's passage with usually malevolent curiosity. In the forest, paths come together then break apart, with the hero and his company bemused about which road to travel. There are mountains to climb over or pass through, rivers to cross, islands and caves to explore — or shun. Castles may house noble maidens or noble lords in need of assistance, or maybe lairs from which the brutal or wicked come to work mischief. The hero encounters serene havens where he may temporarily take rest and refuge, or grim and desolate reaches which will, at least, sap his energy and blight his spirit.

And all are different, yet all are the same. Thus, Dorothy's lionsandtigersandbears woods and the Old Forest through which the hobbits travel are the same sinister woods which menace both Dante and Hansel and Gretel. Having dwelt awhile among the Phaeacians, Odysseus would recognize the glamourie, if not the architecture, of the Emerald City — and of Gondor, and of the cloud stronghold of Lando Kalrissian. Gilgamesh could feel as well as see the alluringly perilous river down which Huck and his companion must voyage, and the blighted wasteland that Frodo and Sam must cross. And both the Lord of Uruk and the Lord of Ithaca would acknowledge, in their different ways, the poignant truth of Dorothy's assertion that "there's no place like home."

But home for each is, finally, an inner place, one that — whatever assistance one commands or entreats along the way — must be encountered anew, with a new self, else there's no sense questing at all. And this is a lessoning most heroes learn inadvertently, usually while consorting with people bent on carrying them somewhere else, toward some gaudier but more trivial goal.

When Dorothy acquires her ruby slippers (her talisman of power) she also attracts three unlikely helpers, one very predictable enemy and an irascible wizard who may be one or the other — or both. These technicolor replicants of monochromatic Kansas acquaintances seem determined to expedite her departure from Oz; and all but one, to expedite

## JABBERWOCKY

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun the  
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:  
Long time the manxome foe he sought —  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?  
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"  
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Lewis Carroll

her return to that drab place — to where and who she was — with as little change as possible. However, once she and her band of irregulars have done in the witch, a task Dorothy accomplishes almost apologetically, they must undertake their real task. Even exposing Oz the Great and Terrible as a fraud as egregious as his medicine show counterpart does not end their quest, for now the defrocked magician is seemingly powerless to help any of them. But what wizards can't accomplish wisdom sometimes can. Although neither he nor anyone else can restore Dorothy to herself, he can teach her that such power lies within her. In fact, it had been there almost from the first moment she crash-landed in Oz. The power, but not the ability. Until she has recognized and liberated that power, while still preserving her innocence, she couldn't return to Kansas. She would have gone back as the same person who left, in which case she might as well never have been called to leave.

Huck's initial call is less dramatic than Dorothy's. In fact, it is only half a call in that it impels him away from rather than summoning him to. Like Dorothy, Huck must use his journey without as initiatory to the quest within, from outer difficulty to inner resolution. Only then can he become a real hero in ways that his idol, Tom Sawyer, was incapable of. All the way down river, as Huck confronts the greed, hypocrisy, bigotry and violence that make Life on the Mississippi so interesting, he muses wistfully on how Tom would handle this or that crisis with so much more "style." It becomes, in fact, abundantly clear that in any situation calling for more than penny-dreadful histrionics, Tom would have been out of his depth. More important, he would not have understood, let alone coped with, Huck's *real* crisis — alone by the sunken raft, his journey with Jim calamitously ended, Huck finds within himself the courage to discard the principles even *he* believes are proper and moral and go to Jim's rescue, though he knows he'll go to hell for it.

Thereafter, it isn't important that the rescue of Jim, stage-managed by Tom through a series of perilous irrationalities, was (as Tom had learned before *he* boarded the southbound steamboat) not necessary, since Jim was already free. Or that Pap Finn, whom Huck was running from, had been dead since before Huck and Jim had left Jackson's Island. After Huck escaped his father's brutality by mocking up his own murder, he spent the entire journey playing a series of temporary roles (the last, ironically, as Tom Sawyer) in search of a self to replace the one he had killed. And in that moment of inner search, when Huck terminated his father's legacy and came to himself, he ended his quest. The rest is postscript.

Many heroes are assisted by companions who are indispensable in the early going, but prove superfluous later

because — whatever their other excellences — they're not able to accompany the hero on his or her deep quest. Hamlet has Horatio; Don Quixote has Sancho Panza. And Luke Skywalker has Han Solo. Careening through the galaxy in the Millennium Falcon, Han rescues a beautiful princess, saves the hero's life, destroys an evil fortress, preserves a noble fellowship and provides all the vital components of a splashily conventional heroic adventure. Yet when Luke must face Darth Vader and the Emperor, he must also come to grips with the enemy within. There, not even his Jedi masters can go for him or with him. Luke must master the Force, and to do so must face its dark side — and his own. If he uses his skill to seize power, or even execute vengeance, it will destroy him as surely as it did his father and demonstrate with desolate irony that Luke is indeed his father's son. When he refuses to let hate direct his energies, he has tamed the Force, redeemed his father. He has won, and the Emperor, alone, cannot survive. Elsewhere, the rebel fleet battles the Imperial armada; elsewhere, Han and Leia lead the Ewoks to victory over the Stormtroopers and finally discover each other. This is the song that will be sung around Ewok campfires. But we know that Luke has completed the only quest and won the only victory that matters.

To win this inner struggle, to realize one's true self, is to achieve the ultimate quest as well, whatever incidental and temporary setbacks the hero may suffer. So Roland falls to the Saracens and Beowulf to the dragon: both, so their poets tell us, are borne to eternal glory. So, dethroned and disgraced, the mutilated Oedipus is led from Thebes to self-exile. But Thebes itself is saved and Oedipus, in the Eumenides' grove at Colonus, attains apotheosis. It is his successor, Creon, who is unequal to conquering his own baseness, and so destroys everything he loves.

For, just as invariably, to fail in the spiritual quest is to lose it all. The witches who help Macbeth to perdition have only as much power over him as he has chosen to cede to them. Macbeth is hag-ridden by his own dark self that shapes his nightmares, as surely as Moby Dick looms only as gigantic as Ahab's monomaniac hatred. Gatsby loses Daisy not to Tom Buchanan, but to the flawed and fatal specter of Jimmy Gatz; and the horror that devours Kurtz is not the primeval jungle outside, but the greed turned madness hollowing out from his own dark heart.

So it almost was with Frodo Baggins. From the first he was a most unlikely hero embarked, hesitantly and reluctantly, on a most unlikely Quest. For his mission, should he decide to accept it, is not to win a treasure, but to lose one, not to discover or recover the amulet of power, but to unmake it. Should he fail, all the wizard's and warriors, elves and dwarves, all the king's horses and king's men and

all the conventional epic wars and alliances will shatter against the monolithic darkness of Mordor. For unlike the Force, the Ring has no fair side. If he tries to use it, in however good a cause, the Ringbearer will be corrupted to the limit of his being; all the more if, like the warchief Boromir or the necromancer Saruman, his power hunger makes him vulnerable. So Gandalf knows, and the Elvish Queen Galadriel knows, that to *begin* to desire the Ring is to submit to its thralldom, even as did the Ringwraiths. Even, ages long ago, as Sauron.

Thus all the epic noise and tumult — the foundation of the Fellowship, the fights at Helm's Deep and Isengard, the last desperate stand before the gates of Mordor — *all* are prelude to or diversion from the real quest journey by three overmatched, exhausted, frightened halflings across the dead lands to Mount Doom. There Frodo loses his inner spiritual battle, as had Smeagol years before, and claims the ring as his own. It is Gollum who, in a last frenzy, rips away the ring and plunges with it, mutually self-destructing, into the abyss. Yet it is Frodo's victory. For had he not shown compassion toward Gollum, shadow twin of his own desires, at the end his own dark self would not have been exorcised and immolated, and Frodo's surrender would have lost all Middle Earth for the Third Age and thereafter.

As it is, Frodo's struggle has marked him permanently and he must pass, with Gandalf and the Elf Lords, from Middle Earth. It is for Sam and the other hobbits to return and restore the Shire and live happily ever after. Like Ishmael, Nick Carraway, Charlie Marlowe and Horatio, Sam cannot follow his master in the end; like them, he does abide to tell the tale.

It is the preservation and transmission of that tale that is so vital to us who come after. For each of us is called to some journey of self-discovery, and though few of us need rise to save the Galaxy, each must save him or her self — and none is condemned, unless self-condemned, to the self-perpetuated abyss of Prufrock's might-have-beens and never-shall-bes. As Prufrock's creator and commiserator wrote at the end of his celebration of all spiritual quests:

*We shall not cease from our explorations  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;*

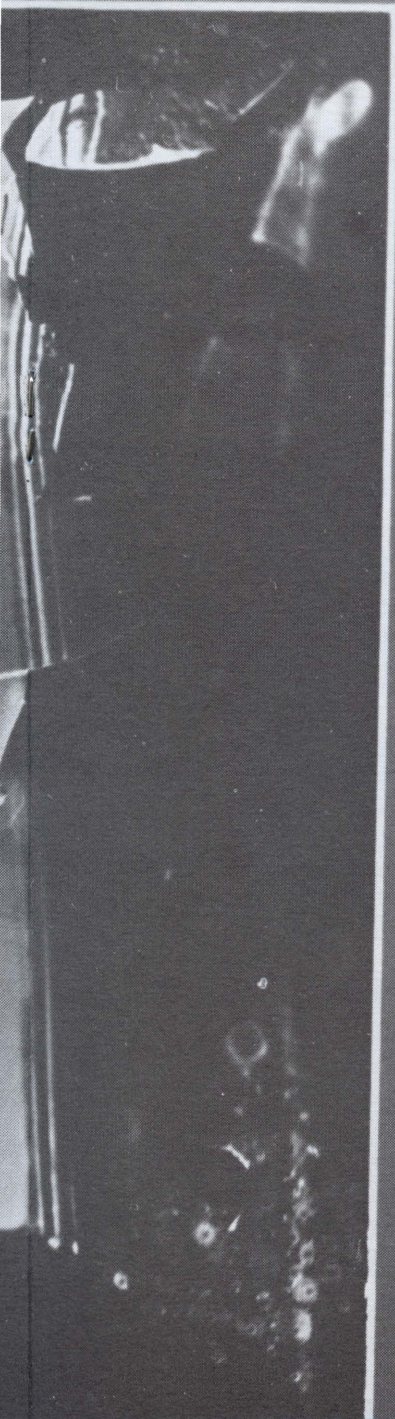








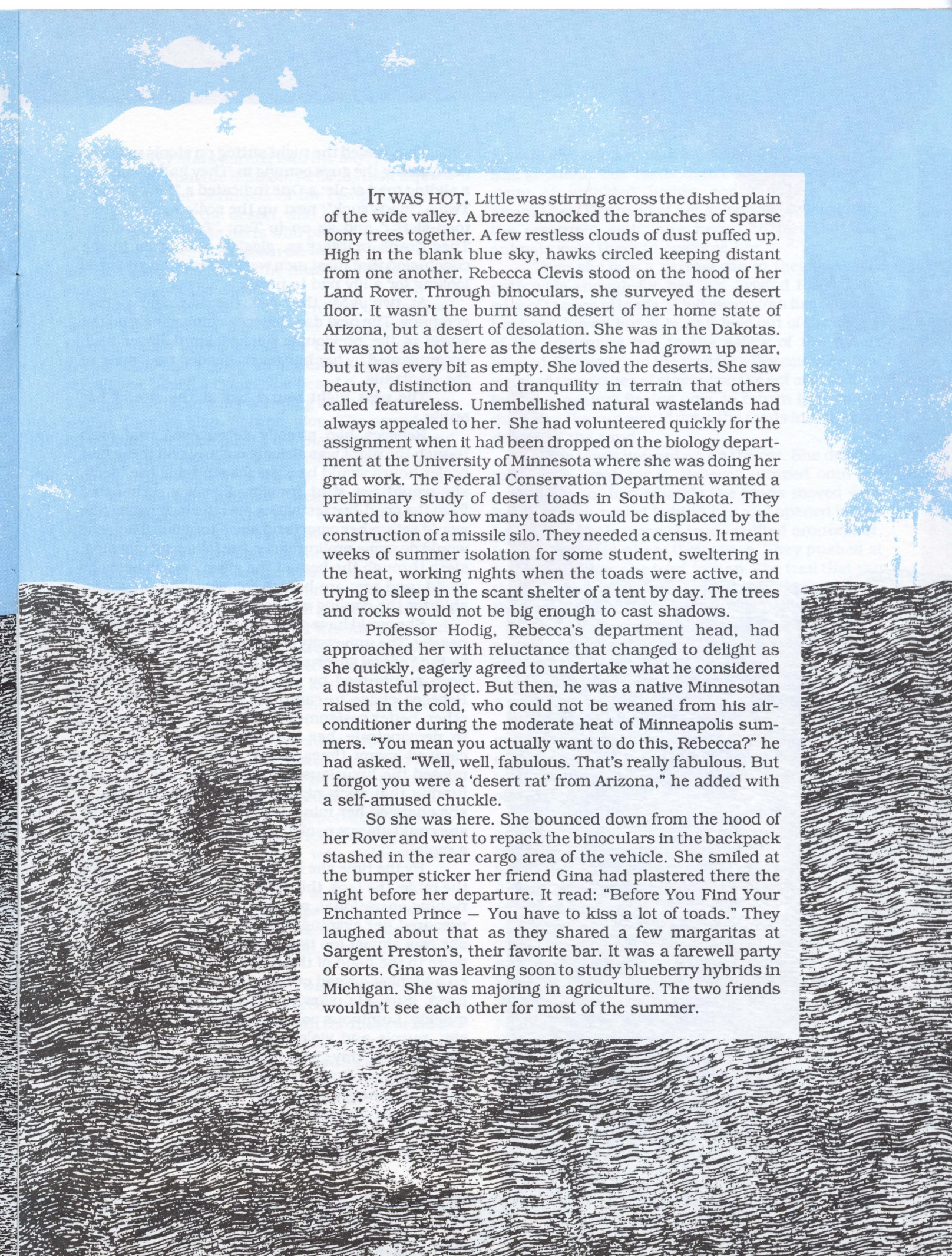
All Photographs by Katherine Pena





...While  
Conducting  
Important  
Research

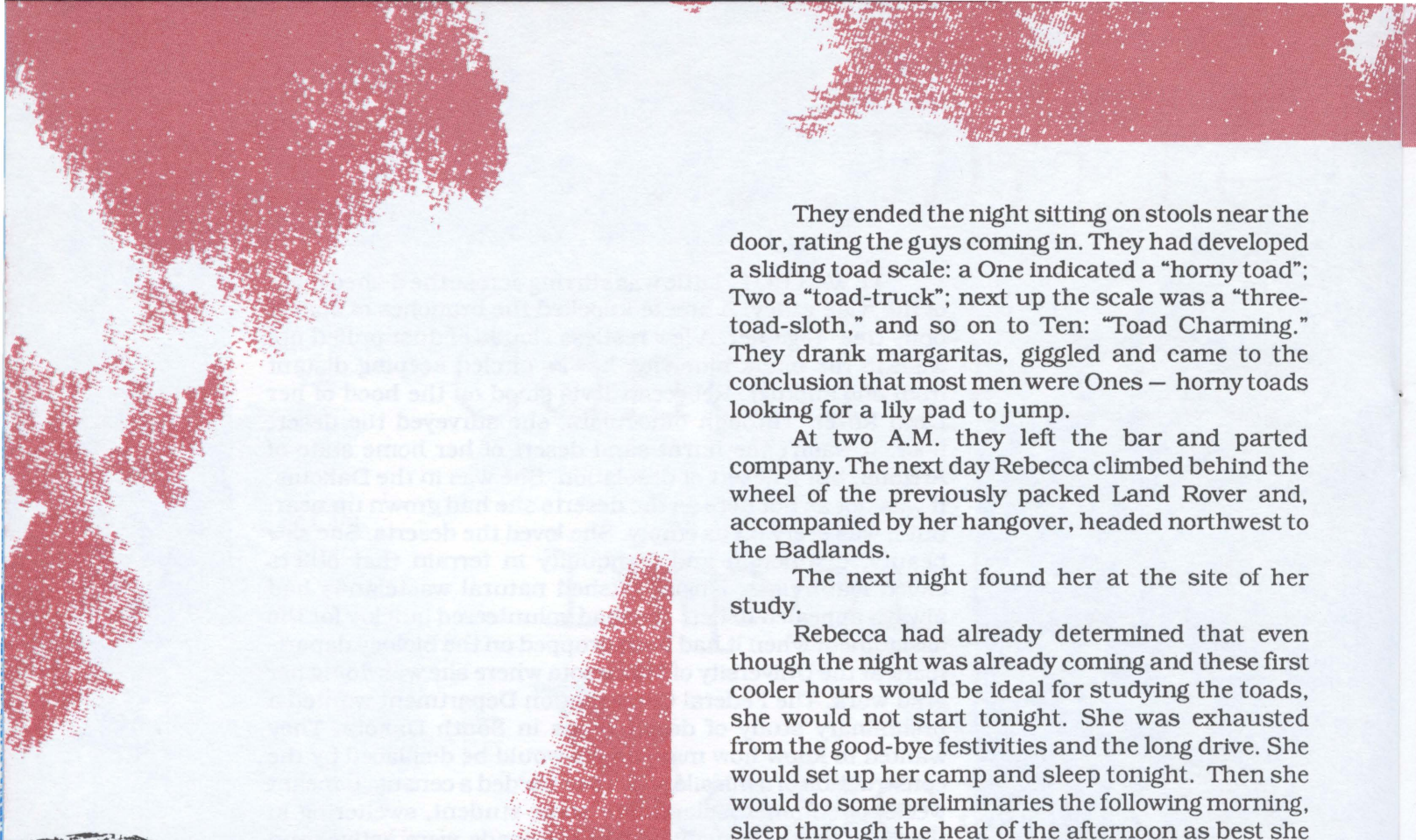
by Edison  
Blake

A blue-tinted photograph of a desert landscape. In the background, a mountain peak is visible under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The foreground is dominated by a dense, wavy, textured pattern that resembles a close-up of a desert floor or a rocky surface. The overall scene is bright and clear.

IT WAS HOT. Little was stirring across the dished plain of the wide valley. A breeze knocked the branches of sparse bony trees together. A few restless clouds of dust puffed up. High in the blank blue sky, hawks circled keeping distant from one another. Rebecca Clevis stood on the hood of her Land Rover. Through binoculars, she surveyed the desert floor. It wasn't the burnt sand desert of her home state of Arizona, but a desert of desolation. She was in the Dakotas. It was not as hot here as the deserts she had grown up near, but it was every bit as empty. She loved the deserts. She saw beauty, distinction and tranquility in terrain that others called featureless. Unembellished natural wastelands had always appealed to her. She had volunteered quickly for the assignment when it had been dropped on the biology department at the University of Minnesota where she was doing her grad work. The Federal Conservation Department wanted a preliminary study of desert toads in South Dakota. They wanted to know how many toads would be displaced by the construction of a missile silo. They needed a census. It meant weeks of summer isolation for some student, sweltering in the heat, working nights when the toads were active, and trying to sleep in the scant shelter of a tent by day. The trees and rocks would not be big enough to cast shadows.

Professor Hodig, Rebecca's department head, had approached her with reluctance that changed to delight as she quickly, eagerly agreed to undertake what he considered a distasteful project. But then, he was a native Minnesotan raised in the cold, who could not be weaned from his air-conditioner during the moderate heat of Minneapolis summers. "You mean you actually want to do this, Rebecca?" he had asked. "Well, well, fabulous. That's really fabulous. But I forgot you were a 'desert rat' from Arizona," he added with a self-amused chuckle.

So she was here. She bounced down from the hood of her Rover and went to repack the binoculars in the backpack stashed in the rear cargo area of the vehicle. She smiled at the bumper sticker her friend Gina had plastered there the night before her departure. It read: "Before You Find Your Enchanted Prince – You have to kiss a lot of toads." They laughed about that as they shared a few margaritas at Sargent Preston's, their favorite bar. It was a farewell party of sorts. Gina was leaving soon to study blueberry hybrids in Michigan. She was majoring in agriculture. The two friends wouldn't see each other for most of the summer.



They ended the night sitting on stools near the door, rating the guys coming in. They had developed a sliding toad scale: a One indicated a "horny toad"; Two a "toad-truck"; next up the scale was a "three-toad-sloth," and so on to Ten: "Toad Charming." They drank margaritas, giggled and came to the conclusion that most men were Ones — horny toads looking for a lily pad to jump.

At two A.M. they left the bar and parted company. The next day Rebecca climbed behind the wheel of the previously packed Land Rover and, accompanied by her hangover, headed northwest to the Badlands.

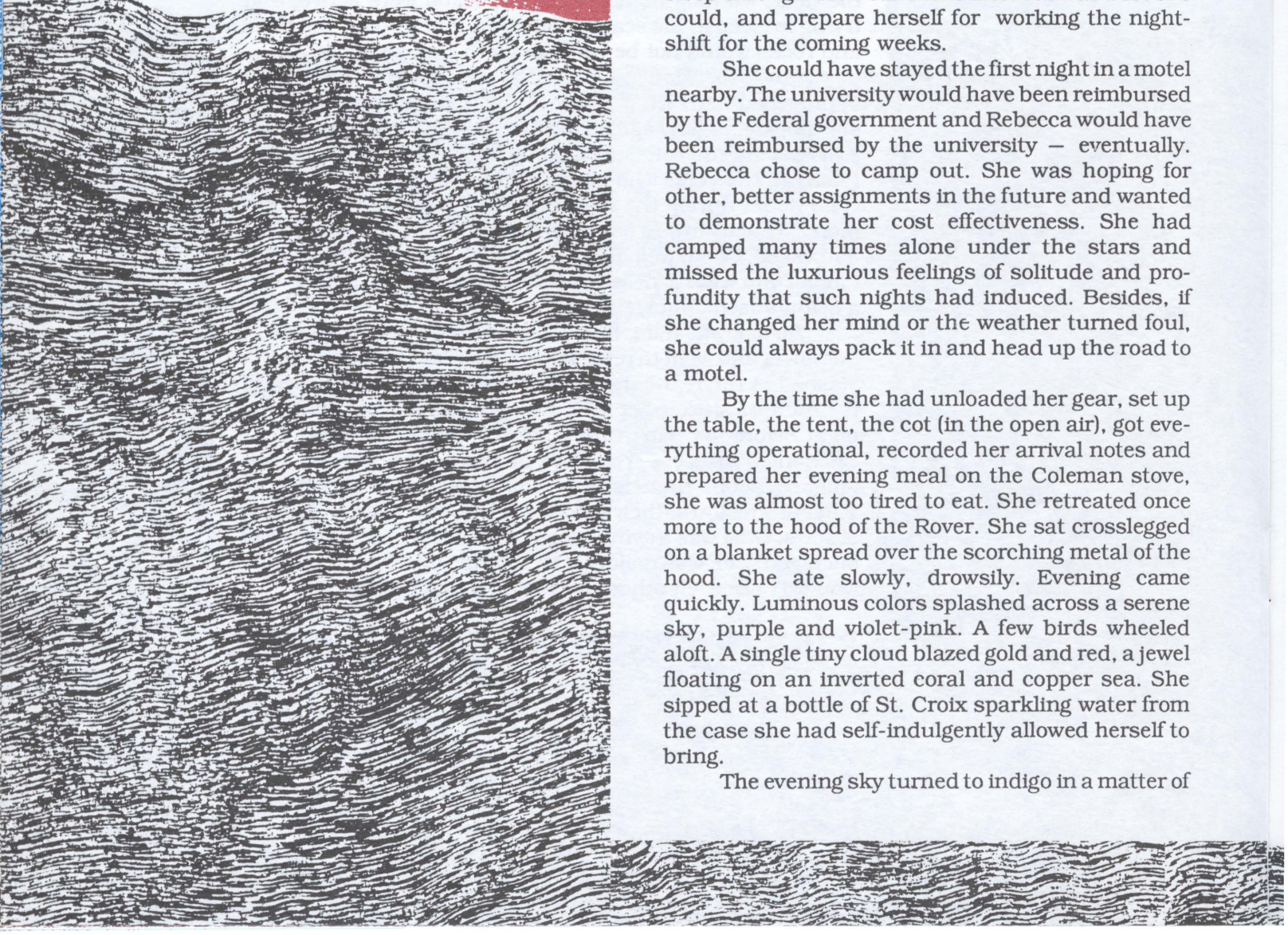
The next night found her at the site of her study.

Rebecca had already determined that even though the night was already coming and these first cooler hours would be ideal for studying the toads, she would not start tonight. She was exhausted from the good-bye festivities and the long drive. She would set up her camp and sleep tonight. Then she would do some preliminaries the following morning, sleep through the heat of the afternoon as best she could, and prepare herself for working the night-shift for the coming weeks.

She could have stayed the first night in a motel nearby. The university would have been reimbursed by the Federal government and Rebecca would have been reimbursed by the university — eventually. Rebecca chose to camp out. She was hoping for other, better assignments in the future and wanted to demonstrate her cost effectiveness. She had camped many times alone under the stars and missed the luxurious feelings of solitude and profundity that such nights had induced. Besides, if she changed her mind or the weather turned foul, she could always pack it in and head up the road to a motel.

By the time she had unloaded her gear, set up the table, the tent, the cot (in the open air), got everything operational, recorded her arrival notes and prepared her evening meal on the Coleman stove, she was almost too tired to eat. She retreated once more to the hood of the Rover. She sat crosslegged on a blanket spread over the scorching metal of the hood. She ate slowly, drowsily. Evening came quickly. Luminous colors splashed across a serene sky, purple and violet-pink. A few birds wheeled aloft. A single tiny cloud blazed gold and red, a jewel floating on an inverted coral and copper sea. She sipped at a bottle of St. Croix sparkling water from the case she had self-indulgently allowed herself to bring.

The evening sky turned to indigo in a matter of



minutes. Firey stars sprang into the sky. A crescent moon slid up from the horizon. Rebecca took a quick stroll around the perimeter of the camp. Secure in her knowledge of the desert, and aware there were no creatures in these parts who preyed on humans, she found it easy to lie down on her cot in the open and go to sleep counting the dazzling lights on the starry ceiling of the world.

She awoke less secure, chilled by the cool desert air. Rebecca sat up and reached for the blanket folded at the foot of the cot. The night sky ablaze with stars gave an iridescent glow to the scene. She heard a noise. She heard it again. Again and again. A plop, a dry scraping sound followed by a plop. Scrape, plop. Scrape, plop. The sound was all around her. She pulled the blankets up around her legs, then reached for the electric lantern she had set near the head of the cot.

The starlight had not revealed what the lantern exposed clearly. The floor of the desert was covered with toads. Grey, brown-spotted toads, thousands and thousands of them formed a hopping carpet that took in the whole camp.

She was a well educated woman with scientific curiosity and detachment – that part of her told her to stay calm. And that part of her was knocked aside by an instinct to scream. The scream echoed across the valley. It didn't seem to affect the toads in the slightest. They hopped around her cot. They were, aside from the sounds they made moving about, preternaturally silent.

They were obviously watching Rebecca.

Quickly, her scientific nature asserted itself. She told herself that this must be some previously unnoted mating or migratory habit of the toads. It was, she told herself, a great opportunity to study an unrecorded phenomenon. Her first night in the field and already her project was yielding up a wealth of new information.

She had to record this – at least that's what she told herself. She had a tape recorder, a video camera, notebooks, but they were all in the tent or in the Rover. "Dammit," she said. The toads did not seem to understand.

She wanted to get up and walk over to the tent, but the dense squirming covered the ground. She couldn't locate her shoes beneath the mass of toads. She couldn't bring herself to wade barefoot through them. She was grateful that she had slept clothed in shorts and a tee-shirt, but she wished she had kept more at hand than the lantern and the blanket.

The toads did not shy from the light. She threw the blanket down hoping to use it as a stepping stone to the Land Rover. The instant it settled to the

ground the blanket was overrun by the creatures. She shouted. The toads didn't leave. The massive army of wrinkled bodies continued to swarm around her. Deprived of her scientific tools to study the creatures with, she began to feel that the animals were there to examine her.

Then she saw a narrow gap in their ranks. A path wide enough for her feet twisted toward the edge of the sea of toads. It led away from her tent and her Land Rover, but at least it lead out of the center of the squirming bog to the safety of the desert beyond. She watched the trail for a few minutes. She weighed the virtues of staying on the cot and waiting for dawn against fleeing now, to return later in the day when the sun would drive the toads into the cool depths of the sand.

A few toads hopped up on the cot. She decided to make a break for it. Rebecca jumped onto the path and ran. Immediately the toads moved with her. The path sealed behind her and opened before her as the whole mass of toads shifted around her, forcing her to go where they chose. They pushed at her ankles when she tried to stop. The trail that ran through the leaping sea of toads went endlessly into the desert. The camp was left well behind.

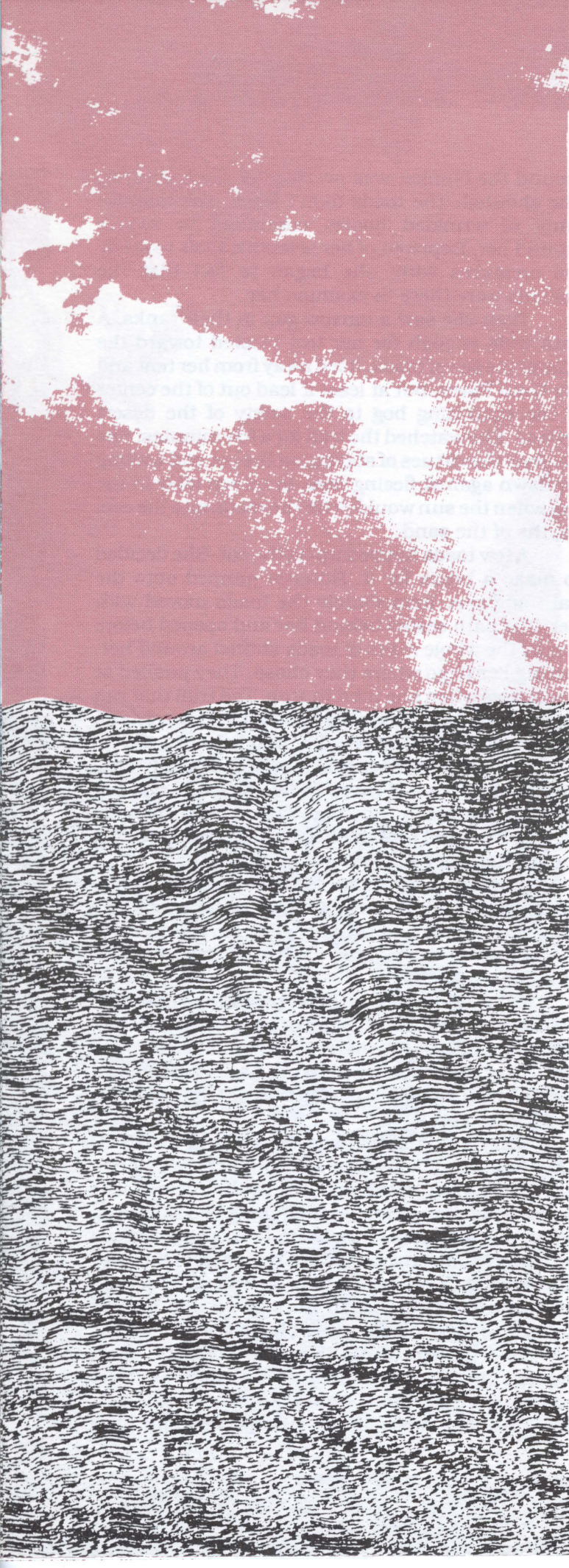
Rebecca cried, sobbed, yelled, cursed, spit, picked up rocks and threw them, kicked – nothing affected the toads. She was surrounded, pushed from behind and presented with the single thread of a path that they allowed her to walk.

After an hour or so, for time was losing real perspective and she was unsure of how long the grim promenade had actually gone on, the ocean of toads bearing her forward dashed against the base of a low rising cliff.

"A dead-end! You little bastards," she said angrily to the jumble of hoppers penning her against the rocky wall. But it wasn't a dead-end. They forced her closer to the rock face. What had seemed like a dark shadow became a cleft in the escarpment when she focused on it.

They battered her legs, frantic and insistent. They jumped at her calves. she couldn't resist them. She was driven to the opening in the rock. It was barely wide enough for her to squeeze into sideways. When she was pushed right up to it, she could see no toads within. To her it was a refuge from them for the moment. She decided, having little choice, to go in. Once more she began to hope for the heat of sunrise to drive off this horrible plague.

She squirmed into the split rock. The short passage opened onto a small cavern roughly ten feet across, circular, an uneven floor of packed sand. The chamber was lit by phosphorescent glow



emitted by the rocks of the cavern wall. Rebecca noted with relief that the toads remained outside. She dropped herself against the wall. She curled herself down into a ball, trying not to cry, trying to empty her mind of the image of all those toads gathered in the desert night air.

"I should think it wouldn't do too much good to escape from them only to catch your death of a cold." The voice was smooth, soothing in tone, but it struck Rebecca like a brick at the base of her spine. She gasped and bolted upright. "Please don't scream," the voice went on. "In such a small chamber as this the sound could reverberate forever."

Rebecca screamed.

Her scream echoed strangely, fading endlessly but never dying completely.

A man she hadn't seen when she first entered peeled himself out of a small niche in the cavern wall. He placed his hands over his ears and smiled gently. "See, I told you. The sound seems to get amplified in here. Perhaps it's the shape of this cave. Its natural acoustic properties." He gallantly bowed to Rebecca. "I may not be able to be of much assistance, but what I can give you I offer, madam."

Rebecca stared. He was a slight man with incredibly pale skin, loose fitting and translucent. He wore a loincloth held up by a fine gold-linked chain. His eyes were large, disc-like, green and gold. A few strands of blond hair wisped around his head.

"Really, my dear," he said, offering his hand, "you should get up. The floor is cold at night and you can get a severe chill in but moments."

She took his hand cautiously. He pulled her to her feet. He was strong beyond his appearance. Rebecca moved away from him. "Who are you," she asked.

"Who are *you*?" he returned. "Is it not the host's curiosity which should be satisfied before the guest's?"

"Guest?" Her voice was a pinched gasp.

"Yes, I suppose you are right. We are neither of us guest or host, but both prisoners." He sighed. He glanced toward the entrance. "Prisoners of those creatures."

"What? I don't understand. I don't understand any of this. I'm a college student. I'm here to study the toads, not to be trapped by them." Her voice was climbing to hysterical heights.

The man continued to be infuriatingly calming. "Here to study them and they have, instead, made you the object of their study. Interesting, is it not?" He pushed her toward the notch that he'd been seated in when she entered. It was lined with moss. "Sit down, child. Beautiful child. Let an old

man tell you a story. We have a night to pass. I've been here awhile. I know their habits. We are in for the duration."

"This isn't happening. This isn't real," Rebecca protested as she settled into the rocky niche.

"Partly you are right," he said. "This isn't real. But it is happening."

Rebecca was crying. "What's happening to me?" Her college built facade of professionalism burned away in the twin fires of fear and frustration that swept through her.

The toads began to chorus now, a deep monotonous thrumming.

The man ran over and looked out the entrance. "They are singing. They'll sing like that all night. They are serenading us, my dear."

"Tell me what's going on," Rebecca demanded. "Stop calling me your 'dear.' Tell me what this craziness is."

He returned. When he moved his white skin flapped loosely around his bones. He stood in front of her. His large eyes in deep hollows were liquid. His voice deepened. He continued to soothe. "I'll tell you everything. And I'll tell you quickly because there isn't that much time we'll be together. Dawn comes. You'll be free to go."

"But I must call you 'dear,' my lovely, my beauty. You are my potential saint, my salvation, my mystic princess. . . ."

"Stop it. Stop it. This is absurd!"

"No," said the man. "It is not absurd — it is fantastic." He took a hesitant step forward. "My darling princess," he said over the chirping of the horde. "You have been brought to me to free me from a curse. A fantastic spell straight out of a fairy tale. There are powers in the world that we don't understand. I am imprisoned here, imprisoned by toads. They won't let me leave until the curse is lifted by the kiss of a beautiful woman, the right beautiful woman with the power to break the spell and free us. That's why they brought you here, madam — to free us, to free me, to free yourself as well."

Rebecca stared blankly into his gigantic eyes. She felt her control slipping. "This is insane."

"Yes," he said gently, "but true." He bent low over her. "And now, Princess — the kiss!"

She leaped up and shoved past him. She ran to escape, but at the mouth of the cavern she stopped. She saw the waiting mob of toads. They sang a loud, droning, hypnotic chorus. Their bugged eyes reflected the fading starlight. Their tongues lashed the air, waving back and forth, restless and rhythmic. They did not move aside. There was no path through them. An acre of ground

around the opening to the cave was blanketed with them.

She turned back into the cave. "I don't believe anything that's happening here," she told the man.

"Perfect," he replied, "you are in a fantasy." You must not believe it. That is our chance. That is how the spell is broken and the enchantment ended. If you believe this dream, even if only for an instant, we are trapped! But you must hurry. Kiss me."

Desperate, driven to the edge of her sanity, Rebecca moved closer to the man. She could see no choice but to try the one remedy offered.

The man stood quietly in front of her. Softly he whispered, "Now, Rebecca." Woodenly, she obeyed.

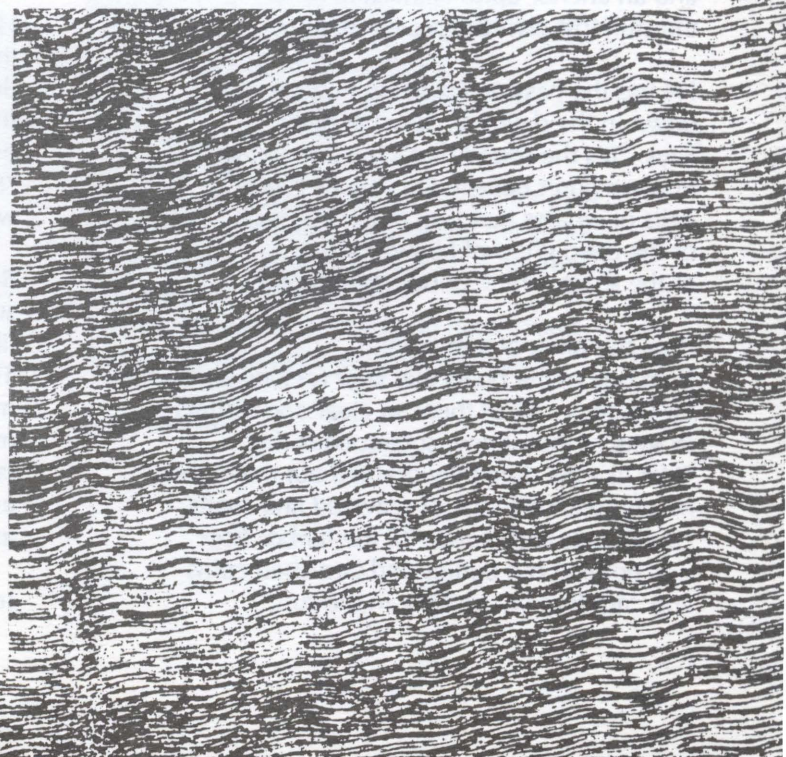
The change was instantaneous. "Ahhh. . ." he said to her, "I might have known. But hope springs eternal. . . ."

She looked up at him mystified, confused.

"It's unfortunate that you were not the one."

He picked her up and stroked her leathery back. "My sweet, sad darling," he said. "Join your sisters." He carried her to the cavern entrance. "Go, little one, perhaps the next who comes along shall be the one to free us all." A tear squeezed out from between his eyelids as he set the small toad down at the edge of the great mass of toads. With them, she hopped away. They were dispersing, disappearing in the desert dawn. It was already growing hot. The sun came over the rim of the valley. The desert was quiet. The toads burrowed into the cool depths of the sand.

Another night would surely come.





## THE MEETING PLACE

Aurelia Green keeps slipping out by night  
her legs like Percherons', her face of Slavic sadness,  
stars dripping from the trees  
and neighbors peeping from the veiled windows  
as she rushes to her flaming neon, bright-as-day,  
clandestine rendezvous, her secret laundromat,  
to dally with a man from somewhere else  
as their loads of laundry churn and foam.  
And all the while her gladiator husband  
sits flopped in the cozy morris chair so over-stuffed  
spending his shirtless evening gulping beer  
and cheering any sort of ballgame on the television  
thinking she's asleep or visiting the neighbors.  
Oh, the tintinnabulation of his belch.

The laundromat. The magic, usually empty laundromat.  
Once they brought a radio and danced  
so slow and close for passersby to see,  
he not much like Cinderella's prince  
nor she like Helen whom the Trojans stole  
but hot as any you or I and dancing gracefully.  
There were nights when only she was there  
so sad to be out late washing clothes alone.  
And nights when only he'd be there, waiting and waiting.

In time the nosy neighbors whisper, "Oh, the Greens —  
obviously they must have gone!  
The windows of their house stare out so blankly  
and lately things seem different there —  
the grass uncut, a window broken,  
flowers overgrown and Mrs. Green so secretive."

But no one mentions Mr. Green.  
His hands with heavy ignoramus fingers,  
his eyes as bleak as barren planet landscapes.  
Aurelia's the mystery. Where has she gone?  
Was she found out? Does she lie in state  
after receiving solemn final rites,  
perhaps born up by angels to Andromeda  
or maybe to the Horsehead Nebulae?  
Or has she found her man from somewhere else  
and do they dance by night in rhinestone laundromats,  
their loads of laundry churning, sloshing  
and their voices tinged with chemical attraction  
sounding like music carried off by the wind,  
like mandolin chords that seep through evening fog —  
soft ballads of first love that come so late.

**John Dickson**

## SCUBA DIVING

Harry under the moored boats  
in a haze of harbor lights and moon,  
followed by several inquisitive fish.  
Here and there lies a waterlogged dinghy  
and shells and hardware of luckless ships  
and an anchor up to its neck in sand —  
the stuff lost civilizations are made of.

He has the passion for being in water —  
down in the daytime, down at night.  
Says, "It's the sound that's most amazing.  
You wouldn't believe the sounds I hear."  
Tells of whales that sing in the distance  
or the deep grind of faraway ships  
or the sharp whine of outboard motors.

Even the plink of a mandolin  
from one of the boats that kept rocking above him.  
Or voices — all of them so clear and distinct  
in spite of their tinny, subaqueous ring.  
"Not like the time they drained out the harbor,"  
he says with his look of seaweed and snails.  
"Bulkheads and pumps 'til the harbor floor  
was nothing but bottles and tarnished coins  
and carp that lay stinking in the sun."

He tells of all the things he's heard —  
the smokey-wine voices of women with mileage,  
the quiet shrieks and intimate moaning,  
the pot-bellied voices of drunken men  
or frail voices from weak throats.  
"Sometimes I even hear saxophones  
with voices that call me farther and farther."

But lately no one has seen him around  
submerging from the harbor wall  
like a drunk intent on finding his bottle.  
Though not long ago a trail of bubbles  
moved past the rocks at the harbor mouth  
making muffled sounds as they rose and popped —  
laughter and shrieks and intimate moaning  
and mandolins and saxophones that faded  
as they zig-zagged out to sea.

**John Dickson**

### LIFE CYCLE OF THE BUTTERFLY

O eternal champion of all women,  
hast thou forgotten those young heifer days  
of guiding the uninitiated  
fumbler of buttons in the bushes  
or sitting playing jacks on schoolyard walks  
with legs outstretched, not unaware  
of small boys gazing up thy skirt  
amazed at Ah Sweet Mystery of Life?  
And then those nights of any phase of moon  
being boogled in thy bed by nameless whomsoevers  
whose fallopian paths included sorties  
in and out thine open window.

There were bright days, too —  
times of thee and thy softness lying in the park  
thy dark hair spilling over some trousered leg  
and onto the young spring grass.  
And hast thou forgotten afternoons and nights  
of beer-drenched air and checkered table cloths,  
of mooching drinks in Shannon's Blue Cafe  
when one touch of the knee was all it took  
to get thee up the stairs  
and into the quiet room above?  
O what harsh lobotomy has been performed  
to erase those images from thy mind?

And what of those long years of commitment  
living above alleys of windows  
where Rhine maidens called out sweetly  
to their lovers? Where banshee mothers  
roared their lioness roars  
calling their daughters home?  
And thee — thine eyes heavy with coffee,  
thy cigarette smouldering like Aladdin's lamp —  
rocking on the third floor porch  
in shabby charade of Madonna and newborn child,  
cradling that ugly facsimile of thine husband.  
Oh, that two-dimensional man of humorless face —  
underwear top and perpetual can of beer  
who sat like Buddha worshipping the television set,  
he who waddled through the demented streets  
handing out cheap proud-fatherhood cigars.

And now the final stage —  
the soft face transformed to the rigid mask,  
the putting an end to hand-in-hand.  
What strange mutation  
has left thee with this iron aura?  
Where are the ringlets, the dimples,  
and the friendly wink?  
O equal rights under the law,  
I have no spirit left to take guilt trips for thee  
or listen to arguments disparaging my gender.  
Spare me thy persecution speech, Old Bawd —  
thou hast held together well  
but soft has turned to hard and hard to soft  
and all my memories are wearing out.

**John Dickson**



# *It is no use pretending -*

*... that in an age like our own, "good" poetry can have any genuine popularity. It is, and must be, the cult of a very few people, the least tolerated of the arts. Perhaps that statement needs a certain amount of qualification. True poetry can sometimes be acceptable to the mass of the people when it disguises itself as something else. One can see an example of this in the folk-poetry that England still possesses, certain nursery rhymes and mnemonic rhymes, for instance, and the songs that soldiers make up, including the words to the bugle calls. But in general ours is a civi-*

*lization in which the very word "poetry" evokes a hostile snigger or, at best, the sort of frozen disgust that most people feel when they hear the word "God." If you are good at playing the concertina you could probably go into the nearest public bar and get yourself an appreciative audience within five minutes. But what would be the attitude of that same audience if you suggested reading them Shakespeare's sonnets, for instance?*

—George Orwell,  
from *Rudyard Kipling*

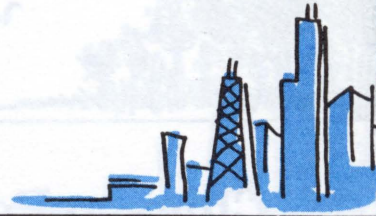
On the face of it, what George Orwell wrote in 1942 would no longer seem to be quite true. In Chicago and a few other cities, some type of poetry reading or event can be found virtually any night of the week, often as not in a bar or nightclub. While there is no dearth of more traditional poetry readings, Poetry Slams, open-mike nights and "performance poetry" have lead the way to poetry's growing urban repopularization. The Green Mill's Sunday night Poetry Slam is a notable example: inside, audiences are not only willing to listen, it's

standing room only. On *Sunday* night, crowds are actually *paying* to see poetry performed.

An important word, that last one. Performed. Performance. Performer. While the performance aspect is the big crowd draw, the hotly debated question has become, "At what point does "poetry" leave off and "performance" just become theater?"

In this special section we've brought together some articles dealing with aspects of the phenomenon that is becoming known as Chicago Poetry. As editor of *Letter*

*eX*, Barry Cassilly has his finger on the pulse of Chicago's poetry scene. His report on what's happening echoes the scene's dynamic, turbulent diversity, and his own fears that all that activity might only be fibrillation. Terry Jacobus provides an insider's somewhat irreverent, informal history of the "Poetry Fight" predecessors of Poetry Slams. Inside, you'll also find the names and addresses of as many places sponsoring live poetry as our staff could find by presstime, along with a listing of other Chicago literary magazines.



# Chicago Poetry Scene

by Barry Cassily

What's happening with the poetry scene in Chicago? A great deal, I can tell you. And when this question was first put to me in the form of my being asked to write this article, I was only too glad to be given the chance to spread the word a little further. Besides, I told myself, working with a poetry newsletter like *Letter eX*, I'm supposed to know about these things. . .right?

Well, wrong actually, or so it started to seem after I had given the question some thought and this straightforward little query had grown in my mind to proportions more like, "Pardon me sir, but lately I've been puzzling about the demise of the American Dream and I was wondering if you could shed some light on that subject."

As you might expect, I soon found myself longing for those simpler bygone days when poetry in Chicago was either safely locked away, enshrined and entombed in the antiseptic towers of academia, or limited to the truly guerrilla tactics of poets who braved the contentious after-hours waters of a scattering of nightclubs and bars. Even the more recent past, when poets seemed to be crawling out of the woodwork and spilling into the plethora of reading series that were popping up almost monthly, presented itself as a more understandable and rational time.

For out of this overwhelming prattle and din and occasional bleep of brilliance, no great overnight stars have risen who seem immediately capable of reaching far enough beyond our shores to bring the world back to where we all know it belongs: at our feet. Certainly, first rate talent has been discovered; more experienced, quality writers have taken their careers one step further; and a whole range of emerging writers have taken advantage of the opportunity to get

their feet wet. And of the gallery of reading series two things are certain. While venues for presenting poetry do tend to come and go with the frequency of 1960's pop fads, the total number has for a good while now been maintained at a consistent, healthy level. Moreover, in the case of a few reading series such as Link's Hall, The Spoken Word Cafe and The Poetry Slam at the Green Mill, the key people involved have clearly demonstrated the commitment and management skills necessary not only to sustain their projects, but to expand their programs and reach out to increasingly larger audiences.

No longer merely grassroots or in the streets and there to stay, Chicago poetry now rests at a precarious point somewhere between making a difference and slipping backwards into indifference. That a group like CLAC, the recently formed Chicago Literary Arts Coalition, should even exist and attempt, as an umbrella organization for poets and other artists directly involved with literature, to use the collective strength of literary groups to widen the recognition afforded Chicago writers, speaks both of how great the momentum is behind this recent groundswell and of how much faith there is in the possibilities of working together to "get out the word." Whether all this will fade and flutter away, or whether steps are taken to move the literary scene in Chicago along a course similar to 1920's Paris or 1950's New York, remains to be seen, of course.

Perhaps divisiveness and factionalism will prove to be a greater pull than cooperation. Perhaps talented individuals will become discouraged if more tangible results are not forthcoming in the short term. Or perhaps the winds of some mysterious karma will sweep down to make us all stupid and self-defeating for reasons we will never be able to discern.

Who knows? But if beating on our chests and dancing out underneath the moon would make any difference, we should probably do it up like crazy — because to be left without community, separated into our comfortable little cliques, ultimately pecking away at our typewriters and computers in the echoless isolation of our own livingrooms, would be truly sad, with only ourselves to blame.

And if all of this leaves you wondering just what in the world I'm going on about, but has also made you a bit more curious than when you started, take a look at the notes below. Hopefully, something will interest you enough that you will want to brave a closer look at this odd animal that is poetry, Chicago style.



## Chicago Poetry Scene

*continued from previous page*

**The Spoken Word Cafe at Chicago Filmmakers:** Class act all the way. An innovative mixture of film/video, performance and readings. Well worth the price of admission and a great place to impress a date with your sense of culture without seeming like you have your shirt stuffed too stiffly.

**Poetry Slam at the Green Mill:** Wild and wooly. Features an open mike, scheduled readers and a competition among poets. Don't go if you still believe your mother was right when she told you that poetry should be polite.

**Links Hall:** Has been called avant-garde, and all arguments aside about whether that term still holds any meaning or has degenerated into a synonym for obscure, this is definitely the place to see what you will not find elsewhere. Ambitious in the scope of its programming, Links Hall brings in both a wide range of readers from out of town, as well as presenting the most complete cross section of talent available locally. Their calendar is a must for anyone who has graduated past armchair poetry.

**The Poetry Center:** A well financed showcase which brings nationally recognized writers to Chicago on a regular basis. Has recently demonstrated disturbing signs of curatorial hardening of the arteries, but still packs a big-league whallop that occasionally hits the mark.

**Guild Books:** A small press haven which sponsors readings in conjunction with book releases. Occasional larger readings. A good place to browse and explore.

**Weeds:** Open mike mania. Affords the opportunity to try out new material or gain experience reading in a setting where anything can happen — and does.

**Holsum Roc Cafe:** Provides the comfort of someone's living room because it is. Gentler sensibilities will find this the home where conversation is encouraged and experimentation is the rule of the day.

*(For the addresses and phone numbers of the places listed above, see "Reading Spots" on page 57.)*

# Pugilism in Poetry

by Terry Jacobus

I've always been convinced that the best historian is the one who tells the living truth now, only to well-wish that it won't be altered by historians of the future. Such is the futile world of records. In the microscopic world of contemporary poetic history there is a little and a lot at stake. The little is its effect on the modern world. The lot is its effect on the individual spirits who are drawn into the amorphous power of poetry.

I can't help but feel that the enterprise of this decade about to pass was ushered in on the carpet of a nostalgic regression which suffocated the scant spiritual remains of the counter-culture. The Reagan years aside, this tailspin truly sank in with the gunning down of John Lennon. There was something in this act, besides the tragedy, that put a definite stamp on the 80's fantasy to come.

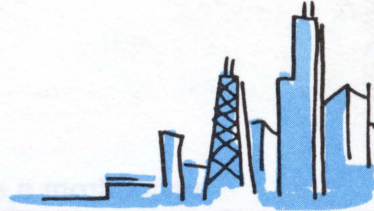
I believe the late poet Ted Berrigan said it best: "The 80's is the 50's in color." Could that mean the 90's will be the 60's in black and white?

In the early days of this decade-dance, most of my artistic friends were still around town. People I could hit the street or hang out with, etc. But as the new 50's wore on, almost all ties were severed by distance. In the present pitter-patter of the brain there are times one wants to bridge the distance with a recall of what once was, followed by a vision of what might be. Specifically, the focus here is to bring some historic clarity and light to a poetic phenomenon that began in Chicago in 1981 — a series of poetic competitions called Main Events, or Poetry Fights.

In the late 60's at Northeastern Illinois University we experienced the artistry of Northeastern's first poet-in-residence and Illinois poet laureate, Gwendolyn Brooks. Ms. Brooks set a high standard of leadership, professionalism and grace.

Following Ms. Brooks, it was the foresight of teacher-playwright Alan Bates that brought a cluster

# CHICAGO POETRY



of interesting, active and accessible creative writers through our university gates. The full swing of this creativity began to take off when gunslinger-poet Ed Dorn rode into town. Ed had a precision of thought that cut right to the unconscious. His presence and inspiration at the Creative Writing Center set tempo, purpose and direction.

Dorn was followed by poetic Socrates Ted Berrigan. Ted was well known in New York and had an awe-inspiring energy and openness that gave off a brotherly aura. Tom Raworth added Cambridge wit and charm, while Alice Notley glowed. That was Chicago's northside.

On the near-southside of town at the University of Illinois-Circle Campus there was Paul Carroll of Big Table Press fame, the quiriness of Bill Knott and the unusual stability of Micheal Anania. Between Circle and Northeastern there developed an urban mentor rivalry with each side taking pride in its own civic space.

As we all know, there was a lot of national energy focused on Chicago at this time. The hangover from the '68 Democratic convention kept the bloody memory of tension and creativity running high. It was a dangerous, exciting time of letting the inside out and we felt like we pulsed the nation for a micro-second in time.

In early 1971, a group of Northeastern students called the Stone Wind Poets began a reading series in the basement of an antique store. It was called The Blue Store and poets nationwide read there. What we created was an un-beat whisky/coffeehouse hang-out where you could come and vent passion and aggression. The Blue Store was the first street series in Chicago in quite some time, and it had a natural underground flavor. It survived for a year-and-a-half.

The Circle Poets began a reading series soon after ours ended. They held their series at the Body Politic Theater on Lincoln Avenue. This series, sponsored by their newly created *Yellow Press*, published many poets and brought a strong line of writers in a continuous flow well through the upper 70's.

With the backbone and influence of separate schools, these two reading series established what we found to be the basis for a sense of increased competitiveness among Chicago writers. The social paper cuts at parties and the barbed one-liners of group interaction slashed with a sting all their own.

The bottom line was that when you were reading with someone it was a competitive "thang," whether conscious or Un. You wanted to emerge post-

reading at least holding your own or better. Like a backup band playing in front of a headliner, hopefully the mark you'd leave would be successful and uniquely yours. But within this literary rivalry most of the competitive air was formally unspoken. The way poetic schools exist, but don't exist. The way academics do and don't run the hands of the poetic time clock. It was something there, yet not there. A dimension waiting for a bus to come. But in this time zone it was real, although perceptions varied on different scales.

While ideas, arrogance and good times rolled there were solid spirits who'd show up just for the simple joy of reading or listening, and we were part of that as well. But the daily business of art is just as petty and cutthroat as the daily business of Business. Then as now, if getting ahead is the goal, certain asses have to be kissed. The rest is concluded by the axiom that *who* you know always carries you further than *what* you know. Yes, there are exceptions — but only quality genius fill out those applications.

As the 60's and 70's faded into their own folder, the young poets and writers grew into teachers, bus drivers, editors, entrepreneurs, ad agents or clerks. The magic energy dissolved and the sphere broke apart. It was time for the new youth, a rebuilding and grown-up decisions.

But the world of poetry has a way with its armies. Like the poet Anselm Hollo said: "We poets are an invisible legion, charging into the valley of death like the six hundred, shouting dig it! dig it!"

So, in the privy of writers' hearts, the seeds of Chicago's poetic competitions were sown in the reading scenes that formed different factions in our poetry legions. It was history, or herstory, whichever you prefer.

In the late 70's the poetic doldrums set in. It was a breeding time that eventually evolved into the sunglassed 80's.

Early in this era, one time Stone Wind poet and writer Al Simmons was bartending in a club in the DePaul University area. At the time, two artists were having a heated disagreement. Apparently Jim Desmond and Jerome Sala didn't like each other, or their work, or both. So Desmond challenged Sala to some type of match. It seemed the ethereal competition was coming to a physical head. Simmons, with the experience of his poetic past, picked up on the confrontation and worked the anger into a form that finally became the poetry fights.

Through consultations with friends, the World  
*(Pugilism in Poetry continues on page 55)*

## advice from a stranger

when the penguins of death  
appear in the upper right hand corner  
of your worst nightmare  
don't under any circumstances offer them cheese  
or any dairy product  
as a way out of an unpleasant situation.  
they won't be amused.

I have often suspected this to be the case  
but it wasn't until I met  
the woman on the street with the wisdom of the ages  
contained in seven shopping bags  
that I had my answer.

she said  
they'll accept cash and velvet paintings  
also the tops off old cereal boxes  
and then  
they'll go away these penguins of death  
maybe  
if you dance for them  
and do it well.

**Dan Pearson**

## the thought that counts (for c. green)

although it seemed  
at first  
a perfect acquisition  
and just  
the sort of thing  
one wouldn't normally think of buying  
for one's self,  
on further reflection  
charlie turned down the offer  
of a mail order shrunken head  
and thanked  
his sister-in-law all the same  
for thinking of him  
at the holiday season.

**Dan Pearson**

### **Visit When The Dirt Is Soft**

I can see them through the future's lost cause,  
visiting my grave, standing in line, tossing  
flowers. Petals are too dry to be tears.

This is a rite of duty. Why don't they visit  
the tombstone now when I'm still here to enjoy  
their faces and can talk back. Hey Joey, that

expression is insincere. Roy, pay attention  
to death. You might learn something. Jean,  
observe the marble cross, ground moist

as if you could still smell the grave-digger's  
breath. Clara, why didn't you wear black. I know  
it doesn't suit you but this is no time to be

a fashion plate. And Lisa, are you making sure I  
don't get up. You can smile, spread your arms  
wider now I'm gone. But the only one who

visits the cemetery is me. These others  
won't come. I'm searching for the stone, the  
dates, the name, staring in the mirror for

signs of life, to squelch them.

**John Grey**



Photograph by Gale Meade



Photograph by Katherine Pena



Photograph by Katherine Pena



## CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Why is everything so organized?  
Can't we just sing Jingle Bells,  
stand in the snow each year and hallelujah sing  
instead of all this manger-scene extravaganza?  
And always some organizer, some Ed Schram  
who has to find a pig, a calf, maybe a goat  
and a few of God's own ducks  
with so much clatter and quacking going on  
it drowns out Little Town of Bethlehem.

Why listen to a fool like Schram?  
Anything for a laugh — that's him —  
like, "I can't find three wise men in this church!"  
And chooses Mrs. Morgan to be the Virgin Mary  
while the choir does Hark The Herald Angels Sing,  
she with three kids in school and two already out.  
Her oldest daughter would have been much better,  
though already she has the calloused Mrs. Morgan look.

Crazy Schram, browsing through restaurants and buses  
searched for saintly faces and found a Joseph,  
some drifter who's never seen a church before  
and never speaks to anyone — just stands there  
while the choir members stretch their throats to heaven,  
though that's all Joseph does in any manger scene.  
Still, as Christmas programs go, it's adequate  
thanks to the organ and the Children's choir.

But you sense the real spirit of the thing outdoors —  
no huge star, just a full moon shining down  
through spidery trees and onto the church roof,  
paths in the snow leading to the door  
and an angel or two hovering in the quiet sky  
blowing Silent Night on their golden horns.  
And a sort of phosphorescent glow around the church,  
maybe for everyone who's in there trying.

**John Dickson**

## New Year's Party

Amid the proper faces  
warm feelings running tongues  
imaginations are alive  
with unfulfilled fantasies.  
They greet and mingle toasting  
good health and an end  
to meetings greed profits.  
As time slowly dissolves  
*Auld Lang Syne* floats  
to the ceiling enveloping  
the players like a tinsel dome.  
He sits at the table and shares  
their bread and wine storing  
images celebrating life  
forgiving their humanity.

**James P. Quinn**

## THE FACE OF MAORI

When I first received my *moko*,  
my face was swollen  
for days.

I lay many hours,  
my mind seeing the chisel —  
the work of its sharp mouth  
like a woman at my cheeks.

I then had a young wife,  
her breast shimmered  
its soft funnel,  
like the Tohunga, my tattooist,  
slipping coconut milk  
through my teeth.

I had six strong children.  
Each boy more fierce than the other.  
The girls learned to weave,  
so even hibiscus  
hid their cloaks  
when they brushed by.

Then the muskets came to the island.

Now I do not hate my  
enemies,  
though I dragged each one  
until their mana left them  
squashed as yellow beetles  
without souls.  
And I left them gasping,  
gagged on the handles,  
the swirling carved wood  
of my latrine.

I do not hate the earth  
though within its welts  
there lies the ink of my  
sweet loved woman,  
her sprawled red seeds,  
my tiny children.

This place is Maori.  
My *moko* stung when I first  
received it;  
But now it turns its spiraled ice  
toward sun.

It is my face, my ancestors,  
my power.  
Only death can steal it.

It is sacred — *Tapu*.  
Do you have one?

Jean C. Howard

## FROM ANOTHER PLACE

a roar resounded, echoed,  
from high above.  
the beast again  
warned trespassers.  
not that anyone would  
covet storm racked rocks,  
splintered and torn  
by lightning bolts  
except someone unusual.  
when summer filled the village  
the peaceful people  
took up gins  
to hunt on top  
of the barren mountain.  
they found, wounded  
and tracked him,  
trussed him tight  
then carried him down  
to a gentler climate.  
for the valley dwellers  
the world never seemed brighter  
but their captive was restricted  
and expired the same night.

Bernard Hewitt

# Let Them Stand

A Vignette by  
Collette Armstead

My face is frozen in anger. It is not a mask worn because "women look cute when they're angry." It is pure anger, burrowing in my brain, an intellectual rage, the most critical kind because I understand its source.

*Here she go with that towel on her head again.* Momma's lips don't mouth these words, but I hear this just as clear as I hear her say, "You goin' out?"

"Yes. I'm on my way over to Dina's." Momma walks back into her bedroom as I close the door on my way out. I walk the city mile to Dina's, the warm November wind urging me on.

"Hi, La — I mean, Atalata."

"Hello, Dina."

"The album you're looking for is in one of those stacks in the corner." I lay my jacket on the sofa and begin the search through the stack.

Dina and I have known each other since the seventh grade. And though we sometimes let our differences put months of space between us, we both still enjoy sharing long walks, the Stylistics for doo-woppin, Minnie Ripperton just for listenin' to, popcorn and chocolate men.

Time changes very little. On occasion we walked the distance to the center of the city. We would search the metropolis for atmosphere and adventure on tropical summer days. And on autumn nights we party hopped. We would shift from one basement with red lights, sweating floors, and couples doing an eternal slow drag, to the next basement with the same scene bathed in blue.

When we hit eighteen it was x-rated movies and buckets of popcorn. And it was always, always men.

We both liked dark men, even when it wasn't fashionable, although Dina always chose basketball and baseball players who were "going somewhere" and I chose musicians and artists that were "gonna be famous someday." Underneath it all, the boys were really the same. We were just girls sprinting after boys who were running fast after their own dreams. It would have been so much more flattering if we had been girls dashing after our own dreams.

"La — I mean Atalata, did you find it yet?"

"Um humm," I murmur as I put the record on the turntable. We are sitting on the sofa listening to Roy Ayer's *Ubiquity*.

"I'm working on a new number for the troupe," I say. But she knows this. So I shrug it off, when she cuts in with. . .

"I had this dream last night. La — um, Atalata, it was so strange. I dreamt that I was pregnant. And I went into labor, so I called my sister. When she got here I had the baby, and as we were on our way to the hospital the baby was growing up. By the time we got there the baby was about a year old. I called my sister this morning and told her about it. She told me that a dream like that signifies spiritual growth.

I listen, hum "um humm," and Dina delves deep for the dream the day before. All of Dina's dreams are a lot like her, vivid and sparse. I start to tell her that my old dream book says dreaming about babies is a bad omen. But I have learned not to take dreams or interpretations of dreams too seriously. I say

nothing and leave her dream alone. Lately I've been leaving my own dreams alone, too. I let them stand on their own images, otherwise, I know they will drain me. Now I hold them lightly in my hands, glance quickly, let the wind take them and dance the dusty debris away.

Dina is off dreams and on to something else. "I met him when I was up north on interviews for that PR job. I was wearing my purple suit. I had my hair parted down the middle, one side flipped up, the other side curled under."

I realize that Dina's point of reference is her hair. All her stories are interwoven with. . . "I was standing waiting for the bus and my hair was flying in my face. And he said. . . ." Or, "I brushed my hair and snapped my silver barrette on, then took my things and left."

I then flush with the realization that I too define myself by my hair. *She didn't like me. She said my short hair was too butch for her. Or, I keep reading these magazine articles that say hair is not political anymore. Or, I was offended when he said my braids were just preparation for another hairstyle — If Brooke Shields was wearing the same style. . . .*

I try to communicate to Dina that her obsession with her hair detracts from the crises of the day. Will there be a black mayor for Chicago? Will the atomic clock be pushed one minute closer to midnight? Will poverty continue to be colored black and shaped by sex?

She's not buying any of it. "You have an obsession with your hair, too. It's just a natural obsession. There is not anything wrong with wanting to look nice, Lacy."

"Don't call me Lacy!"

Some things never change. When I leave I know I am not ever going over to that girl's house again. That I would not call her to ask her the time of day. That when she needs me I won't be there. And that I definitely don't need her in my life, ever again.

With sunkissed orange, pomegranate red and lemon-yellow linen, I regally wrap my head. "Either you pick your hair out or I'm not going to church with you." I decide not to debate the issue with Momma. I unwrap my head. I pick out my hair.

At the church, we sing. We rock. We have the announcements. We sing. We clap. We lower our heads in prayer. We sing. We sing. We sing. Finally, the preacher makes the altar call. We

## RISK OCTOBER

Frame by frame  
the sky is set off  
by match-lit trees.  
I can take a few satin yellows  
torched by daylight.  
I can take the first inch,  
before the room blows.  
— It is only a silver bar  
under the drawn blind,  
anorexic, and strained, and  
burning celluloid.

But, I don't open the drapes.  
I'll sit with my two hands  
sculpted as poured light  
around your head.  
I'll skim off whiteness,  
whatever your skin sails  
off its own bones.

Watch your face ignite with  
its last dream  
— before the sheets blow  
— before autumn in hammers  
starts out on the trees.

If it is just a moment  
like this,  
or a stop-frame where the  
pitcher looks up from  
his mitt,  
It might be easy.

But something in the wind  
smells like forever.  
Like the sting of shampoo  
as it blindfolds  
your eyes,  
or the sound of the scissors  
as they skid off your  
neck.

Something in the shape  
of things, as they crumble  
each instance  
to a more  
and rippling hue of  
winter,  
to the ambience of dinner  
served to almost perfection  
as you, leaning wildly,  
learn of your divorce.

It is just a china dish  
slipping on the drain board,  
the light under your  
curtain  
once all paisleyed, and yellow,  
and electrical wind.

All apples, and deep corn,  
and melt-curling maple,  
red-spinning tin.  
All changed.

If an instant smelt like this  
I would be ever  
racing toward it.  
But something in  
wool jackets  
says it never ends.

**Jean C. Howard**

kneel and the minister ministers to us. We rise.

I turn and bump into Dina. Her eyes are rimmed in red.  
"Hello, Atalata." "Hi, Dina." We walk side by side out the chapel  
door. Momma approaches, smiling exhilarated from the serv-  
ices. "Hi, Dina," she says, hugging her and planting a lipsticky  
kiss on her cheek. "It's nice to see you, Mrs. Jason." We say very  
little. We agree to meet downtown next week for lunch.

Momma slides behind the steering wheel and starts the  
engine. "Dina's hair looked so nice, all pressed and curled. I  
wonder where she gets it done." I look at Momma momentarily.  
Decide next week I'll wear the blue dress and wrap my head in  
a stretch of silk that is lavender and blue. I lean back, breathe  
deep, and decide: some things never change.

## NIGHT SHIFT

Two hundred girls in the huge room  
with white linen uniforms over their clothes,  
the smell of chocolate in the air.  
Forty on each production belt  
standing eight hours facing each other  
doing what one machine does now —  
packing candy. . . packing candy,  
plucking soft centers from the belt  
and caramels and nougats rushed from stock  
to slip, one by one, in its crinkled cup  
and slide to its proper place in the box,  
each with a rhythm all her own —  
Christmas, Mother's Day, Valentines, Easter.

Angie, Lucille, Mary Ellen, Lorraine  
fresh from home or an early date  
arrive in the dark and leave in the dark —  
grey cold or silent snow —  
strangers when they weren't wearing white.  
Punched in at ten and kept on talking,  
soap for their hands and nets for their hair.  
Guitars and saxophones in their ears.

Each belt with its service boy  
running with caramels and nougats and chews  
to his private platform of forty girls  
all shouting for him to hurry up.  
Or they'd make him blush for the hell of it,  
turn his face bright red, set his ears on fire  
with bold proposals of wild times,  
then suddenly splutter and laugh him away.

By midnight a silence would settle in,  
leaving only the whine of the belts' gears  
and the feathery flick of packing cups,  
each girl lost in her own life —  
Sleeping Beauty or Cinderella  
but not enough money to pay the bills,  
all of them puppets of the moon.  
There should have been a distant bell  
to match this Chocolate Packing cathedral  
or the girls could have hummed a quiet cantata  
over the motors' soft sound.  
Some had a gold cross strung to their necklace,  
some had a golden star.

By five o'clock they'd be talking again  
or shouting for the service boy,  
Gladys discussing insensitive men,  
Angie reliving her father's death.  
Stars still shone through the factory windows  
predicting a future with no one there.  
Then, before sunrise, at six o'clock  
a buzzer would sound and the girls disappear  
and now it's all done by machine.

**John Dickson**

## Factory Girl

Big Mama struts  
a weary downshift  
from four on the floor  
at home and  
daily industrial grind.

Was a time Big Mama  
walked Masai  
and carried Swedish dreams.

Now she's get-back-black  
except for painted fuscias  
on fingernails  
too long for rusty bolts  
too long for diapered bottoms  
but long enough  
to dig in the ass of  
boss-man.

There to deposit  
the fuscias poison.

**Lolita Hernandez-Gray**

### Leaves of Water, Leaves of Air

has leaves of spiral notebooks  
on all the surfaces of her  
house, they peer from under beds  
stack up on nightstands  
stick out of books and drawers  
some are curled up in decorative  
pots, poems are scribbled on  
bills, receipts, Kroger bags,

poems that never have endings  
but drift out of sight, disappearing  
like a leaf drifting off at the margin  
of your vision, while you are looking  
at something else

this year's poems, last year's  
piled somewhere raked for burning  
each existed only in the moment  
of its falling and was already  
over, drifting in the moment  
between vision and perception

and she is the poem, drifting  
leaves of water, leaves of air

**Janet McCann**

### ISADORA'S CENTENARY

Your dances don't wear  
Well, like a Chanel suit  
Or age like fine wine  
In oaken casks

Such art, a laurel wreath  
On fresh, supple Dianas  
In old age gambols limply  
Buffalo cross western plains

Where's the variant tone color  
Of morning glories in a wood?  
Themes stridently stated  
Seldom insure progeny

Leaps are for graceful fawns  
Elder deer pose majestic  
Flabbed flesh straining  
Saddens summer's old  
rose

Your creations need Isadora  
Brazen as the red flag  
Bohemian as a wild aster  
To shape exuberance into idea

Ensembles falter sans you  
Sunset minus sun  
A rudderless ship at sea  
Careening to freedom  
wantonly.

**Bella Donna**



**"I'll Say Goodbye Before I Go"**

something to help you remember that

I was here.

An insight maybe.

Oh, how I'd love

to leave you with an insight,

a something you could make into

a Proverb and live by.

Perhaps I could leave you

with an idea or a way

of looking at the world so

it would cease to frighten you,

even cause you to laugh occasionally.

If I were really here to you,

then you must know that

you, too, were here.

You might yet

seize a sunrise

hear the earth turn

as it sings in space,

build up a mountain

where the ground appears softest,

find an embrace to meet even

the darkest of night, making this

no goodbye —

but much more.

**Robert Mills**

## Pugilism in Poetry

(Continued from page 43)

# CHICAGO POETRY



Poetry Association was formed with Simmons as Commissioner. An editor-writer friend of mine, Gerard Czerwien, and I became color commentators for the WPA and the zoom was on.

These Main Event shows were poetical-theatrical events that gave Chicago performance poetry a thrust. You just got in the ring and performed your work. Work that's "live" performs itself. Of course, it was all serious and not serious. The shows were staged with boxing ring, ring girls, referee, timekeeper and a diversity of action. We made sure we had responsible people as judges — because respectability, class and fragile egos were on the line. It was like Brechtian combat theater, with each event carrying its own endearing magic.

In the spring of 1981 Simmons promoted his first Main Event, with Jerome Sala going up against Jim Desmond. It was a ten round fight scored on the WPA's "ten point must system": ten points to the winner of a round, nine or less to the loser. It took place at a Hubbard Street loft and was billed as "Punk vs. Semi-Blues Poetry Fight."

The overall ambience of this scene was like a cockfight north of the border. The 70's build up was about to explode with a raw, nervous energy.

Sala began the fight with a piece called "Give Piss A Chance." The Lennon peace-piss takeoff was a cynical shot that the Woodstockers didn't warm up to, particularly with John dead. Lots of leather punks cheered while the silent regressed looked on. Basically being a singer, Desmond went through song lyrics rather than lean on verse. Although I recall no "Intellectual Knockdowns," both made a fine showing as Sala emerged the victor in a close battle.

There was an interesting band that played a post-fight set. Young kids not totally swallowed by the Punk or the New Wave. They had a music all their own, doing oriental rhythms with drum sticks on hub caps and blocks of wood. Their energy felt pure and dancing carried on well into a dense beer morning as we ohh'd and ahh'd and felt cleansed in sweat.

Main Event II was a rematch between Sala and Desmond. But there were two other fights on the card as well. A mean-spirited preliminary between Michelle Fitzsimmons and Lydia Tomkiw; followed by a rousing five rounder pitting ex-DJ "Righteous Bob Rudnick" against the drama of National Public Radio's Warren Lemming. It was the Ides of March and Tuts, a nightclub on Belmont Avenue, was packed.

After the Fitzsimmons-Tomkiw match, one of the judges was attacked when a fan of Ms. Tomkiw

thought her contender got a raw deal. Funny thing is, the judge who was jumped actually voted for her. Strange vibes, these Ides.

Although Sala won his rematch, the costumes and cocktails won the evening. *Under My Thumb* played for hours on end, with *96 Tears* as a backup for the auras that were blowin' in the wind.

During Main Event II they were letting too many people in for free, whereas Main Event III was so crowded they were turning paying customers away. It was summer and the Exit bar was hot in a night of day-glo stars. Commissioner Simmons even had to send one of his ring girls home for not having proper ID. She was an ex-Vegas drink-bringer I'd spotted him with in his blue Dodge outside Tuts. Simmons escorted her to the street ala "Casablanca Rick," telling her:

"Hey babe, you're old enough to know who you are and carry a card to prove it." He sent his personal valet to escort her home, instructing him to "be right back."

Before the fights got under way a local Italian comedian tried telling some Quaalude jokes that didn't work. He ended up in a verbal spat with a guy from the audience that he didn't win. So he quickly removed himself from the stage, accompanied by joyous jeering from the crowd.

Main Event III was a rematch between "Righteous Rudnick" and Warren Lemming to determine who'd get a title shot at WPA champion Sala in the near future. It was a terrific bout. Poems were flying, both personal and abstract. The audience gave full attention to both readers; at one moment they'd be hushed and caught up in content, the next, cheering in support of the poets' electric vitality. Lemming won the match, although by the buzz in the crowd it appeared they favored a Rudnick victory.

Rudnick was terribly affected by the loss, telling this reporter: "I feel I won. I'll fight anybody, anywhere, anytime. I'll be Simmons' boy and I'll make a good show."

Rumors flew everywhere that other sections of the Poetry Country were just itching to get involved. Freelancers were telling Simmons he should get some "big names" on the fight card. "It's okay with me," Simmons said. "If they're so big, they've got nothing to be scared of — just come in and collect the dough."

In the spring of 1982 I interviewed Commissioner Simmons for *Rolling Stock* magazine, a Boulder, Colorado literary triannual I've been affiliated with since 1980. Although this is only an excerpt, the reader should get the idea.



TJ: What's the WPA?

AS: It's nothing.

TJ: What do you mean, it's nothing?

AS: Just that. It's nothing.

TJ: Then what purpose does it serve?

AS: As for purpose, it's a means unto itself.

TJ: That sounds metaphysical.

AS: Well, then maybe it is.

TJ: I need a definition.

AS: Okay, the WPA is an organization developed for the sole purpose of supplying itself with a legitimacy of form in order to establish a criteria of standards, regulations and rules to govern a literary sporting event.

TJ: Do you think the poetry world is competitive?

AS: I think poets are competitive. When you're reading with someone you'd like to think you stole the show. My fights are based on this basest form.

TJ: Oh.

In the late spring of 1982 Simmons moved from Chicago to that experiment of western expanse we call California. It was just after his departure that I received a letter from Peter Douthit, a poet-promoter in Taos, New Mexico. Peter had read the interview and coverage Rolling Stock had given the Chicago Poetry fights. He was inquiring to see if the WPA would like to take their show on the road and make it part of his Poetry Circus. So I contacted Commissioner Simmons in Oakland and he contacted reigning champ Jerome Sala here. Simmons wanted in, but Sala resigned his title and got out.

The person Douthit wanted to set up a bout with was none other than self-proclaimed "Captain Poetry," Gregory Corso of beat-poetry fame. Since Sala bowed out, Simmons asked me if I'd like to step in and take up the gauntlet for Chicago by going national against Corso. I mulled it over for a few days and decided to accept the challenge.

Taos is a place shrouded in an atmosphere of pueblo rituals and spells. D.H. Lawrence spent quite a bit of time there in the company of a powerful bruja. In fact, the Harwood Auditorium is located next to the cemetery where Kit Carson is buried.

In a reading which included Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, Corso and I battled it out in a heat that drew over three hundred people into Taos' Harwood Auditorium. As PBS cameras rolled, Corso and I went at each other with histrionic venom. Corso, with his classic prima donna whining, kept interrupting me and pleading with Ginsberg in the audience.

"Allen, who put me with this fuckah?"

Finally, I responded, "In Chicago, at least we give other people a chance."

Corso's response: "I'm the Daddy of poetry, I

don't give anyone a chance."

"Tonight you'll have to." The crowd was buzzing because I was standing up to his ravings.

When an ex-hippie girl dressed in a Peter Pan outfit spontaneously took the stage and began reciting poems about Jim Morrison, Corso thought it was a trick of mine, while I thought it was a Corso ploy. But it was just a woman overcome by thought and action. Although her poems were good, she was escorted back to her seat. Just as I was about to begin a poem called *Finger and Hand*, Corso started interrupting me again.

"Did you know I was in Lucky Luciano's cell in '47? Did you know that?"

"'47," I said. "In '47 I wasn't born and I was a god." The crowd went wild and it shut Corso up for the rest of the fight.

In the last round I read a poem about Corso and the Beats which ended with the lines: "poets with the guts/to pay the price/of the sound/the spear/and the endless competition/poet's that'll kill if they have to!" The Harwood erupted and I knew that with the grace of the Midwest muses I had done my city proud and emerged the victor, winning the Max Feinstein Award in Poetry. "The Max," as it is fondly called, is a bronzed boxing glove on a spring stand, designed by Linda Fleming and cast at the Shidoni Foundry in Tesque, New Mexico.

So, in the Land of Enchantment I became the World Heavyweight Poetry Champion. In the words of the immortal Ralph Kramden, "Am I worthy of such an honor?" My good angel told me yes, so I was satisfied.

I kept the title through the 82-83 poetic season until a New Mexico rule controversy forced me to pass the Max to Lewis MacAdams, a free-lance writer for the L.A. Times. Because two of the three judges voted in my favor in this second bout, I won the split decision. But in the strange wisdom of New Mexican numbers, they decided to add all the scores collectively, which tipped the balance MacAdams' way. It was weirdness at its best, but as I flew home I knew the true title still rested safely on my mantelpiece.

Once the fights took off in Taos, Commissioner Simmons and Peter Douthit cut a deal so that Peter kept the WPA format as an addition to his Poetry Circus. And the contests have continued there every summer since 1982. I believe the current champion is Victor Cruz; but there's a tournament of champions looming in the future.

Locally, there's been a rebirth of the poetry fights at Chicago's infamous Green Mill Lounge. Although the original WPA format has been altered, these Poetry Slams have run weekly since the mid 80's and play to packed houses on Sunday nights.

In spite of the success of the poetry fights, I can't

# CHICAGO POETRY



help but sense that the 80's breeding ground for such combativeness is soon to run its course.

A new decade approaches. And even though I find something sinister in the term "new age," I'm hoping it will carry more weight than the "go for it" tag

of the Eight-O's. I guess one never knows until one knows. But maybe the lyric of the cynic will be reduced and a fresh view will appear clear on the horizon. The invisible army awaits.

## Other Publications

The following is a sampling of literary magazines produced in Chicago. We apologize for any omissions.

**Another Chicago Magazine**  
P.O. Box 11223  
Chicago, IL 60611

**Ariel**  
Triton College  
2000 5th Avenue  
River Grove, IL 60171

**B-City**  
619 W. Surf  
Chicago, IL 60657

**Chicago Anthology**  
Feminist Writers' Guild  
P.O. Box 14095  
Chicago, IL 60614

**Chicago Review**  
University of Chicago  
Faculty Exchange  
Box C  
Chicago, IL 60637

**Chicago Sheet**  
P.O. Box 3667  
Oak Park, IL 60603

**F2 Magazine**  
1405 W. Belle Plaine  
Chicago, IL 60613

**Garland Court**  
Loop College  
30 E. Lake St.  
Chicago, IL 60601

**Lawndale Renaissance**  
P.O. Box 23020  
Chicago, IL 60623

**Letter eX**  
P.O. Box 476917  
Chicago, IL 60647

**New American Writing**  
1446 W. Jarvis #3D  
Chicago, IL 60626

**nothing sinister**  
3321 N. Seminary  
Chicago, IL 60657

Ommation Press  
**Mati**  
**Salome: A Literary  
Dance Magazine**  
5548 N. Sawyer  
Chicago, IL 60625

**Other Voices**  
820 Ridge Rd.  
Highland Park, IL 60035

**Overtures**  
Apocalypse Literary Organization  
Northeastern Illinois University  
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60625

**Poetry East**  
Dept. of English  
802 W. Belden  
DePaul University  
Chicago, IL 60614

**Poetry Magazine**  
c/o Newberry Library  
60 W. Walton  
Chicago, IL 60610

**Rambunctious Review**  
1221 W. Pratt Blvd.  
Chicago, IL 60626

**Rhino**  
3915 W. Foster  
Evanston, IL 60203

**Shadowboxing**  
6964 N. Greenview  
Chicago, IL 60626

**Story Quarterly**  
P.O. Box 1416  
Northbrook, IL 60065

**Tri Quarterly**  
1735 Benson  
Evanston, IL 60201

**Tomorrow**  
212 N. Sangamon  
Chicago, IL 60607

**Vice Versa**  
838 E. 57th St.  
Chicago, IL 60637

---

## Reading Spots

All locations are in Chicago unless otherwise noted. Because of the changing nature of the scene, this is an overview and not a comprehensive list.

**Barbara's Bookstores**  
2907 N. Broadway  
477-0411  
1434 N. Wells  
642-5044

**Cabaret Voltaire**  
1860 N. Elston  
489-7792

**Catherine Edelman Gallery**  
300 W. Superior  
266-2350/784-7874

**Chicago Public Library**  
425 N. Michigan  
269-2800  
Cultural Center  
78 E. Washington  
744-6330

**Chicago Circle Center**  
UIC Writers Committee  
Campus Programs  
750 S. Halsted  
413-5070

**The Green Mill Cocktail Lounge**  
4802 N. Broadway  
878-5552

**Guild Books**  
2456 N. Lincoln Ave.  
525-3667

**Holsum Roc Cafe**  
2360 N. Clybourn  
883-8746

**Left Bank Bookstall**  
104 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Oak Park, IL  
383-4700

**Lower Links**  
(Beneath Link's Hall)  
954 W. Newport  
248-5238

**Link's Hall**  
3435 N. Sheffield  
472-3441

**Lounge Ax**  
2438 N. Lincoln  
525-6620

**Newberry Library**  
60 W. Walton  
943-9090

**No Exit Cafe**  
7000 N. Glenwood  
743-3355

**Organization of Black American Culture**  
**OBAC Workshop**  
3831 S. Michigan  
Info: Sandra Jackson-Opoku  
667-0481

**The Poetry Center**  
School of the Art Institute  
Columbus Dr. & Jackson Blvd.  
443-3711

(Turn to next page)



# Contributor's Notes

**Alexandre L. Amprimoz** is a professor of Romance Studies at Brock University. Born in Rome in 1948, he has published widely in English, French, Italian and Spanish. His latest book in English, *Hard Confessions*, is a collection of stories and is available from Turnstone Press in Winnipeg.

**Collette Armstead** is a Chicago poet-writer and is a senior at UNI. Her work has appeared in *Normal*, *OBAC Anthology*, *Overtures*, *Urban Focus*, *Chicago Observer*, *Forward Motion* and *Cumbaya*. She is "the mother of a beautiful thirteen-year old daughter."

**Rane Arroyo** describes himself as "a post-nuke, pre-Apocalyptic poet and playwright. He has attended over three graduate schools across the country, and has yet to get it right. He is an Anglicized Hispanic as well as a retro-romantic. He's confused."

**Barry Cassilly** is editor of *Letter eX*, a comprehensive guide to the local poetry scene.

**Connie Deanovich's** work has appeared in *New American Writing*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *joe soap's canoe* (UK) and *The East Village Eye*. She has guest lectured at poetry workshops, gives poetry readings and is editor and publisher of *B-City*, a literary magazine.

**John Dickson** relates that he "wrote only a few poems as a boy, for which I was grounded. So became covert, though have managed to be published here and there." Among many other magazines, he has pub-

lished in *Poetry* as well as *Overtures*; his books, *Victoria Hotel* and *Waving At Trains*, are published by Thorntree Press.

**Bella Donna** is a Greenwich Village resident who writes to make sense out of the chaos whirling around her. She has published poetry in over sixty journals and anthologies.

**Lolita Hernandez-Gray** was born in Detroit in 1947. She obtained a B.A. from the University of Michigan in Psychology. She is currently a journalism student at WSU. Lolita is also a skilled trades mechanic at the Cadillac plant.

**John Grey** was born in Brisbane, Australia, and has been a US resident for ten years. Among other publications, his work has appeared in *Blue Light Review*, *Gypsy*, *South Coast Poetry Journal* and *Mr Cogito*. A singer-songwriter, he performs occasionally in the Providence, RI area.

**Bernard Hewitt** is a resident of Papua, New Guinea. He has worked for about twenty-five years in developing countries in Africa and Southeast Asia, and has published prose and poetry in the US, UK, Canada, India and Japan.

**Tom Hoberg** is an Associate Professor of English at UNI. He enjoys teaching, particularly about folklore, legend and mythology, which he fits into his classes at all appropriate and many inappropriate times. Currently, he's working on several impossibly (probably) ambitious projects, which all involve the Grail Quest, except the one on Jane Austen.

**Glenna Holloway** resides in Nashville, Tennessee. She is a professional artist currently concentrating on silversmithing and enameling. Among other journals, her work has appeared in *Manhattan Poetry Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Georgia Review* and *America*.

**Jean Howard's** work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *Nit & Wit*, *Salome*, *Banyon Press Anthology II*, *Tomorrow Magazine* and *Psychopoetica Anthology* (UK), among other publications. She has read extensively in the Chicago area, and in the last few years has been shifting her emphasis from readings to performances and theatrical productions.

**Terry Jacobus** has read at universities, theaters, churches and coffehouses across the U.S. His work has appeared in *Vancouver Review*, *Litmus* and *Crosscurrents*, among other publications. He is a correspondent for *Rolling Stock* magazine, and has four books

## Reading Spots *continued*

**Rizzoli Bookstore**  
Water Tower Place  
835 N. Michigan  
642-3500

**Scenes Coffeeshop & Bookstore**  
3168 N. Clark  
525-1007

**Skokie Library Readers Forum**  
5215 W. Oakton  
Skokie, IL 673-7774

**Spoken Word Cafe**  
Chicago Filmmakers  
1229 W. Belmont  
281-8788

**Town Hall Pub**  
3340 N. Halsted  
472-4405

**Weeds Tavern**  
1555 N. Dayton  
788-9417

**Women & Children First Bookstore**  
1967 N. Halsted  
440-8824

# CHICAGO POETRY



to his credit: *The Simple Ballad*, *Triangle Eyes*, *Fantastique* and *Fine*. He is working on a novel.

**James Langlas** recently received awards in several categories from the Poets Club of Chicago; is the English Chair at Wheaton North High School; and spends his spare time changing the diapers of his infant daughter and wrestling with his five-year-old son.

**Douglas Leiva** says of himself; "In 1962, in the southernmost piece of Honduras Land, a boy was born. Thirteen years later, the laws of economics transported him to the new land — Chicago. The latest news about him is that he's sick in the mind. He has tried to write some verses."

**Laura Nilges-Matias** is a Northeastern student; an ex-journalist, now reformed; and a lapsed agnostic, now Catholic. She believes that the things that matter are those we cannot explain. She is married to Bert Matias, an abstract-expressionist painter.

**Janet McCann** currently teaches creative writing at Texas A&M University, edits *Piddiddle* in her garage and her chapbook, *Dialogue With The Dogcatcher*, was recently published by Slough Press. Her work has appeared in *Southern Poetry Review* and *College English*, among others.

**Kat Meads** resides in Asheville, North Carolina. Her work has appeared in *Mildred*, *The Blue Light Review* and *The Piedmont Review*.

**Robert Mills** was born and educated in Chicago and works as an administrator of a Chicago congregation. He has contributed to numerous poetry magazines and has four books published by Spoon River Press.

**Sheryl L. Nelms** describes herself as a photographer, a weaver, a painter and an old dirt biker. Her work has appeared in a wide range of magazines and anthologies, including *Kansas Quarterly*, *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Webster Review*, *Reader's Digest*, *Farm Women*, *Naked Man*, *Up against The Wall Mother*, and *Salome*. Her latest book of poetry, *The Oketo Yahoos*, is due out from Camel Press.

**B.Z. Niditch's** work has appeared in many publications, including *New Letters*, *Minnesota Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Writer's Forum* and *The Webster Review*. A new collection of work is entitled *Milton*.

**Julie Parson** maintains a busy schedule with poetry readings, workshops and guest lecturing. Her work has appeared in a number of publications, including *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Garland Review*, *Korone*, *IKON* and *Fireweed*. Her book, *Clark St. Lullabye*, is available from Society for Mad Poets Press.

**Dan Pearson** is a citizen of the United States and a graduate

of UNI. In addition to his interest in the poetic arts, he has written plays, movie reviews, ransom notes and numerous phone messages. A native son, he was recently selected to read his work for Chicago's *Dial-A-Poem*, and hopes to someday complete his book on extra-terrestrials in Chicago politics, if they'll let him.

**Andrea Potos** was born in Milwaukee and attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She now works in the creative department of a Chicago ad agency. Her poetry has appeared in the *Great Lakes Poetry Press*.

**James Quinn's** work has appeared in numerous journals in the US and UK, and he has authored two chapbooks: *Nothing Gold Can Stay* and *Players* (MAF Press). He has taught at both high school and college levels, and currently resides in Connecticut with his wife.

**Gertrude Rubin** first began writing in the early 1970's when she enrolled in one of UNI's poetry workshops. Besides appearing in *Overtures* and other magazines, her work recently appeared in *Naming The Daytime Moon*, an anthology by the Feminist Writer's Guild of Chicago.

**Agnes Wathall Tatera** calls herself a "late bloomer, though early poems were printed." She is president of the Poets Club of Chicago. Her book, *A Trick of Light*, was published in 1984.

**Constance Vogel** received her M.Ed. in Language Arts from UNI. She has published in *Byline*, *Spoon River Quarterly* and other small presses, will be in the 1988 *Shorelines* anthology and on Chicago Dial-A-Poem. She is currently working on a junior novel.

**Paul Weinman** has had nine chapbooks published and three more are upcoming. He won the NYS Caps Fellowship in poetry. He is an education supervisor for the New York State Museum — and won twenty games pitching for the Albany Newts in 1987.

## GRAPHIC ARTISTS

**David J. Magdziarz** is an attorney trying to find time to be an artist, when he would rather be an artist trying to find time to be an attorney.

**Gale Meade** writes: "my philosophy in life is much like that of Clint Eastwood's character in *Dirty Harry* — 'Go ahead, make my day.'"

**Katherine Pena** was born in Yugoslavia and came to the US in 1959. She is proud to be an American citizen. She owns a business and has studied photography at UNI.

**Lisa Render** received her B.A. in Graphic Design from UNI, where she was a talent scholarship student. Her work has appeared in numerous UNI art exhibitions.

The Apocalypse Literary Series is now soliciting manuscripts for its **1989** issue of *Overtures*. We are interested in poetry, short fiction, prose and personal essays, as well as photography, graphic art and illustrations.

Do not examine this issue in an attempt to discern the taste or biases of the editors. Send us your best, most original work.

*Written submissions must be typed and double-spaced.  
Art submissions must be camera-ready and suitable for reproduction in black and white.*

#### **SUBMISSIONS PERIOD**

**Written Submissions:** August 15 to November 15

**Art Submissions:** January 1 to February 1

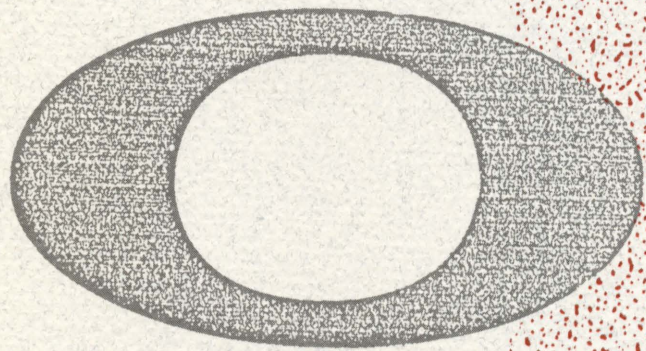
Please include your name, address and a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you wish us to return unaccepted submissions.

Each issue we print contributor's notes. To save correspondence time and paperwork, it would be helpful if you could enclose a short (150 word max.) biography or a personal statement concerning you and your writing. Bios will *not* be considered during our selection process.

Send to: **Editorial Staff**  
**Apocalypse Literary Organization**  
**Northeastern Illinois University**  
**5500 N. St. Louis Ave.**  
**Chicago, IL 60625**

Poets and authors interested in arranging readings for the Apocalypse Reading Series should send an information packet: cassette tapes of platform style are appreciated. SASE if you wish the packet returned.

Send to: **Reading Series Coordinator**  
**Apocalypse Literary Organization**  
**Northeastern Illinois University**  
**5500 N. St. Louis Ave.**  
**Chicago, IL 60625**







*OVERTURES 1988*

§

*A Magazine of  
POETRY  
PROSE  
and  
SHORT FICTION*

§

*Published by Apocalypse Literary Organization*

§

*at Northeastern Illinois University*

§