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Overtures - 1989

Ray Olinger

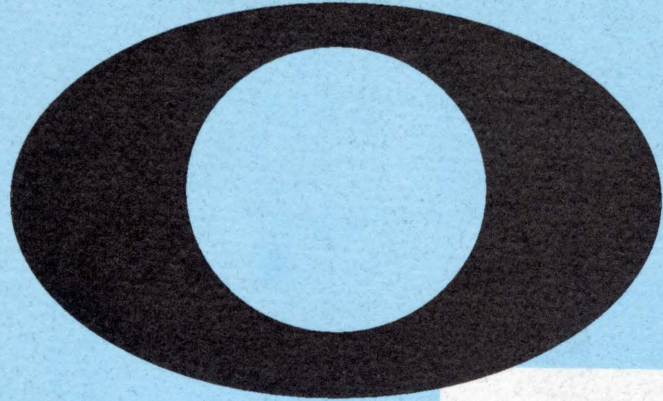
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OVERTURES

1989



***A MAGAZINE OF
POETRY,
FICTION, AND
ESSAYS***

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Overtures

Volume 10 Number 1

1989

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POETRY,
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Beate Minkovski

*Pamela Miller's poem,
The Green Pelvis,
was previously published
in Oyez Review.*

ALTERNATE ROUTE

A man kills two children,
pins down twenty-five policemen,
wounding ten.
They close the road home—
I can't get through.

I get lost in grandma's neighborhood,
where Hester and Cherry flirt
with lords like Henry and Essex,
or solid citizens like Gold and Pike,
and wander near Water.

Unruly streets
with tricky angles, dead-ends,
and trash mountains
deceive me, a weary refugee
from even streets that go straight home.

A spectre approaches,
arm upraised in warning as I lock the doors.
He washes my clean window and the mote
from my eye,
booming his message, "Cherry pink
and apple blossom wine, cha-cha-cha!"

I don't know when
the road home will open again,
and I have forgotten how to find
a new way.

At any moment, someone
will surely go sane.
I have to get through.

B. B. Adams

Ontario

Distances deceive reciprocally.
The gas station light just ahead
needs a half-hour's hike to grow larger,
While the shapes of trees along the road
creep visibly closer.
The sky clearly sags
with the weight of so many stars,
as the road rises
like a staircase to a ceiling.

A country night terrifies,
the illusion of space
shredded by thick willow limbs
and crushed under dark stars.

No TV, theater, bars, or books,
no job,
no lover.
There is only me,
crowded and alone.

I can shiver and think
of my friends in the city,
push on to the light
and come out untouched.

Or I can welcome this stranger
and feel the night explode,
the trees leap away,
the sky reel back,
and the stars recoil,

and I can breathe again.

Of course, even that's a matter of perception.

Lawrence Hunt

A NORSEMAN AT MAESHOWE

"The cleverest man in the Western Ocean
carved these with an axe."

—from an inscription on a
neolithic tomb on Orkney

Neither wind-riven waves
Nor fear of man made ghost
Thirty centuries before
Could keep a Norseman
Outside the holy bounds:
Stone igloo heaped with earth,
Tomb of chieftain and reputed gold
That yielded shelter only
From a winter storm and the chance
To axe the barbarous lie
That man should be meek.

Refusing to stoop in the entrance,
Barrelled, low, canted for drainage,
He tore through the roof
And tossed debris widely,
Drinking to imagined booty
Always the stuff of legend;
Before the whale oil was spent
He carved fast and hard those lines
That first catch the invading light,
A priceless treasure of runes.

G. O. Morpew

Along the Coast

Sod piled high on the Irish countryside.
Peat like black knuckles on a battered fist,
the wrist sloping out of sight.
The sea moves inland through the air,
a wrinkled sheet coming to settle over things
asleep. Here is a picture framed by age,
the corners blurred by too much repetition,
grey from the brushing it has endured
over time, moistened by damp breath,
rubbed.

Who can come this way
without meeting himself on the road,
a slender figure in a long coat, striding evenly,
passing without a glance, going to warm himself
before making the journey once again?

James Langlas

The Seduction Of Still-Life By Movement

The river is stiff as death,
one pervading shade of blue,
guarded by silent half-green trees,
glued to the banks.
No indication that this thing can gallop,
hurl cattails aside, stir up blue gills,
slap an angry fist of water cross
a bed of rock,
roll a discarded branch onto
the muddy shore.
The surface is granite-still,
waiting for a lazy hand
to fill in moss, clumps of floating weed,
lily pads, alligator heads,
paint a lazy, unlovely swamp.

Beside it,
exhibit 232 buzzes with light,
each layer of air
atomizing into the next,
nothing fixed,
symmetry a shapeless, moving,
transient breath of the eye.
It's not even of a river
but is still more of a river than the other.
This fluid rips away from itself,
tears at the temerity of splotches
of paint that dare fix it there,
scoops up barrels of illumination
and dashes them through
miles of fidgety oaks, pines, willows.
My friend says it's a woman
bending over in her garden,
but I hear the roar of spring melt,
listen to it race the wind,
at once defy its neighbor
then beckon it with a
come-hither look of splashy irreverence.

John Grey

A PURITAN THINKING ABOUT THANKS-GIVING

As we are gathered here today,
victims and victimizers,
a secret, fatal contract is about to be signed,
a tacit agreement to annihilate these noble savages.

Some of us victimizers
do not even realize it;
others insidiously pass the poisoned white breast.
And yet,
within all of us,
an ancient broth boils and dilates our pure veins;

within all of us lies
the dormant blond beast
that shall ravish or conquer
'till this land is as pure as the Lord commands.

Thus, this meal shall be their last supper,
for in the future, they shall never savour as we will
the blessings of this god-given land.

This shall be a day to remember,
a day to thank God.

Douglas Leiva

AMERICA

I left the unemployment office
the day after my father's burial.
With a legacy of debts and no job,
I slumped against the bus stop sign.
An old man with a shopping cart of cans
nudged me and told me to smile.

"Fuck off," I said, and stared for a bus.
Two girls with names all over their clothes
told me to chill out. "Relax.
Cheer up. Things could be worse."
"Fuck off," I snarled. "Chirp somewhere else."
I pulled my collar up to my nose.

"It's not that hard to be happy,"
called a woman over her shoulder.
I grabbed her by the throat till her eyes
popped out and she spit blood on a girl's Guess jeans,
threw her body into the cartful of cans,
and smiled just as nice as you please.

I sat quietly to wait for the van.
The cop screamed, "What the hell's wrong with you?"
"Nothing," I said, "but it's nice of you to ask."

Lawrence Hunt

LOCAL COLOR

I show up in swamp mist,
eclipse, Dixie's Barbecue Pit.
I'm a tight wrap, a short
fuse, insomnia and zen indigence,
a quick study in gothic lust.
Here's what you get: St. Rogue
showing his scars at the party,
brass knucks and patois, red
dirt and a mean streak for Delta
gris-gris. A Saigon tattoo.
My sky is the blue of cue chalk.
My sea's damp arsenic green.
Dry wishbone lightning, I've
grown a Van Gogh eye for whirl,
grits and gristle, wine-eye
gravy. Scavenging for language,
I'm venal, venial, grizzled
of sinew and tranced by joss
wisps and pitbulls, lip sweat
and secrecy, minor keys, hail.
A flash in the scorched pan,
a stitch in time, I'm all mongrel,
catfish and Buck knife, a pawnshop
guitar, hot licks, bitter sin
and the deepest storm kiss, Cheri,
you'll ever get and live.

R. T. Smith

Edwin Lenny Learns to Fly

By Charles Newson



One morning a strange thing happened to Edwin Lenny. He woke up and he could fly. Of all the people expected to sprout wings overnight while sleeping in a single bed under a bedspread of mechanically woven cotton with blue fringe, he was not one. He mused on this while resting in a horizontal position on his right side, with his wings folded uncomfortably behind him.

He lay there thinking about the stewardesses high in the sky. He thought about them every morning while daring his legs to stretch over the corner of the mattress to brave the frozen linoleum. He thought about their supple movements, their well-fitting uniforms. How they'd envy his wings!

Then a memory encroached on his daydreams: the day he'd splurged on a billet for an Emperor Class flight. He'd strode down the aisle in anticipation, and regally plunked himself into his throne. The cut of his suit was better than before. The stewardesses were pretty and flirtatious. His conversation acquired sophisticated assurance, so he threw himself into discussion with his seat-mate, who studiously and methodically buried himself into the in-flight magazine.

By the end of the flight, Edwin knew nothing had changed.

He rolled out of bed. The creases in the sheets were cramping his wings. This morning should have been like any other morning. The first order of the day was disguise. He brushed his wispy hair over the spot of flecked brown on the top of his head. He shaved and rubbed cream into his dry face, deepening the colour and masking the line of his heavy beard. He cleared his throat and got his vocal apparatus functioning, albeit shakily. He was worried about the wings.

He couldn't ignore them. He couldn't let anyone see them. That would mean doctors, and he was terrified of doctors. He could tape them down! No, that wouldn't work. The tape would stick to his feathers, and besides, it would pull away from his skin when he sweated. But he could put something under the tape. His genuine Ronco Spandex tummy tucker!

He scurried through his sock drawer until he found his Everything Knife, and fumbled with the corkscrew, the soup spoon, and finally the tiny scissors. He pulled the Spandex tight and measured out the

width of his torso, then snipped out armholes and threads of elastic until the girdle could fit like a tube over his chest to bind his wings. Then he wound strips of 5.08 centimeter tape around the apparatus as he spun around the bathroom like a crippled mummy.

It would work. No one would know. Mr. Bankhurst-Twittington did not approve of employees with wings.

He headed out towards the office, late and self-conscious. His raincoat was slung over his shoulders to hide the bulge on his back. He saw a group of pilots coming towards him, and moved to the opposite sidewalk. They behaved too boisterously in their brown leather jackets. Their boldness and their dark glasses frightened him. When he discretely glanced up, he saw only his own cringing reflection in the plastic and he secretly suspected that behind it they had no eyes.

He studied the sidewalk moving beneath him, and moving, he tried to even his stride so that he straddled the first crack and stepped on the second. Miss the first, hit the second . . . It was his way of organising his thoughts, but today the sidewalk obstinately refused to be ordered. It moved too fast and too erratically.

Edwin whined to himself, because the sidewalks were turning against him.

The effort of moving forward was immense. He was damp with sweat, and his glasses were slipping. When he raised his hand to wipe the bridge of his eyes, his Spandex tummy tucker constricted around his chest so that he couldn't breathe.

What was he trying to do? He wouldn't be able to bend down to the bottom file or reach up to the top shelf of the ledger cabinet. Besides, they'd all see the lump on his back. They'd all know. Mr. Bankhurst-Twittington would know.

He stumbled as the sidewalk came to an abrupt end, and barely recovered his balance by crashing against a trash can. The wings made him top-heavy and they seemed to wobble beneath the tight elastic. If only he could get down on his hands and knees! He could make it with four feet pulled against the ground.

He looked up and saw two nuns looking at him with thin smiles on their tight faces, and he melted in shame. Mr. Bankhurst-Twittington disappeared in a sizzle of steam. Edwin, with one foot greased by the wrapper of a Pop-o-Mallow, gripped the mesh of the receptacle and was struck with terror for his mortal soul.

All the stories from Church Instruction came back to

him; all the fairy tales of the saviour and the beast. The stories had bounced away as he grew, like a butterfly corpse over the pavement. They'd melted away. They'd left nothing but a sense of nothing. Something out there that was dark and ordinary, like a chill between the filing cabinets.

It flew on the same plane as he.

His eyes stung. All he wanted was a church.

In the distance a cross was blinking on and off. Edwin disappeared at its door.

Far down the nave a choir was singing. Edwin shuffled into the pews and picked up a prayerbook, aware that a tall, thin priest was eyeing him over the top of a set of square frames, in much the same way as Mr. Bankhurst-Twittington when he handed over the weekly paycheques. Edwin knelt with the book. He couldn't sit in the pews because of the lump on his back.

Singing floated out from behind the altar, swept along the floor and lifted itself off the cracked varnish and into the stained glass air.

A boy soprano voice cut through and above the others, and pulled the other voices around it like a cloak. It rose Edwin up, called him, and he followed it.

The priest beckoned to the little closets at the side of the nave and Edwin burst into sweat.

The little closets belonged to *them*. They owned all the small spaces: all the phone booths, all the little closets, even the bedroom wardrobes. Every time he went to reclaim a tie from his own wardrobe, he would peek cautiously, grab one, and slam the door shut before they could pull him in. He studied the flyers that came like warnings with his monthly phone bill. He read between the statistics. Disappearing subscribers who vanished without paying their bills and with no forwarding address.

He knew that people went into phone booths and never came out. He knew the phone company had every house on a leash. Billions of little houses with little rooms, all mapped by the phone company, all charted by the phone cards and . . .

"This way, Sir," the priest intoned solemnly.

They each entered a closet, side by side. Alone.

Edwin couldn't breathe. A little window banged open like a shot.

Nothing.

Edwin was expected to say something.

Nothing.

They waited. Edwin's fingers were turning blue. Something was expected, but Edwin couldn't remember what.

"Well," the priest boomed, "cat got your tongue?"

"I, um, nope," chirped Edwin.



"I see. Is there something you'd like to be forgiven for?" he prompted.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"You can tell me. That's what you came here for, isn't it?"

"I don't even know you!" burst Edwin, overwhelmed by the unfairness of it all. "If you know that much, why don't you know the rest?"

This was going to be difficult. The priest decided on an alternate tack. "My name is Father Herman Vulpert. Now you know me. You can call me Father."

The priest was no older than Edwin, only taller and skinnier. Edwin giggled and choked it back.

"I see," said the priest coldly. There was no respect in *the young* these days. They were always asking for sacrifices. "Call me Herman if it helps." Herman was used to making sacrifices. "What did you do?"

Edwin started out according to formula. "Forgive me, Herman, but I woke up and . . ." He stopped.

"Was it a sin of the flesh?"

"No." It was a sin of the feathers.

"Did you perform an unnatural act?"

"Maybe . . ."

Herman was getting annoyed. Why couldn't these people take penance and get on with it? There was no time for dilly-dallying. The devil was working through idle hands.

"I just can't say it! It's too confusing! When I woke up I sprouted . . ."

"What?"

"There's a bump on my back."

What did you do to bring this affliction upon yourself," inquired Herman, who was pleased to get to the hump of the problem. Medical afflictions build converts, and he had a quota to meet.

"I wished I could fly. I meant in a plane! First class!"

"That's not a sin!"

"Nobody understands!" whined Edwin, pulling off his shirt and wiggling his tummy tucker down. His wings popped out like a jack-in-the-box.

The priest screamed!

Edwin screamed!

The telephone monsters closed in and Edwin burst out of the closet and skidded face-first along the hardwood floor. The priest burst from his own box and fell on Edwin, choking in his feathers.

They screamed again and broke apart. Edwin fled into the aisle of a pew, and the priest skittered into an

aisle one pew away, screaming, "Satan! Satan! The Devil has fallen!"

The devout disappeared, leaving an empty church.

They had no desire to confront Satan or assist God. Edwin rushed towards the centre aisle with his wings dragging on the seat rests of the row. His Spandex tummy tucker was half snapped and hung like girdle straps around his middle. The choir kept singing a hymn to the angels.

Herman was frozen.

Then the light and courage of the Lord shone upon him. His ultimate grace and wisdom was revealed to Herman in a flash of one perfect word: *Deification*. Sainthood for the capture of this devil! Herman was facing an impersonator of an angel of the Lord. He was facing one of the damned. He could kill it and be saved!

Herman knew the law: good will always prevail over evil. The right will survive. The meek shall inherit the Earth.

Saint Herman girded his ten stone frame. As the demon ran down the centre aisle towards the back of the church, he rushed after it.

They met at the font. The demon flapped like a terrified chicken, feathers deserting him like fleas. Herman dived to the east of the font. The demon slipped west and flapped his wings uncontrollably. The demon began to rise! Herman leaped for its feet and hauled it down to earth.

The demon fell, but nipped Herman's nose, rolled to the other side of the font and started to rise again. Saint Herman reached for him blindly, but instead found the basin full of holywater. He splashed with all his might, hoping to blind the demon. A red haze hovered in front of his eyes. He splashed and splashed and covered the demon. The water soaked into feathers and a musty smell of wet pillows rose from the demon as it fell.

The voices singing to God rose.

And a whistle blew. The voices screamed away in the distance as the white helmets swarmed over Edwin and all over the church.

Edwin felt himself dragged from the grasp of Father Vulpert.

He was wet and cold; the air was as blue as his bruises. The back of his toes banged on each stone step as he was descended and stuffed inside a vehicle waiting below.

Two officers climbed in behind Edwin, and the vehicle started to accelerate. The force pressed him into the padded canvas bench. He felt very safe.

"Thank you, sir," he gasped.

He looked at the two officers. One was serene and



senior; as calm as a judge. The other was large and surly-looking. They both wore badly tailored uniforms. There was a third man in the corner wearing little round glasses and a rumpled suit.

"I don't know what happened. That priest went crazy. All I wanted to do was confess."

"You can't do that here, son," said the older officer kindly, "we're police officers." He spoke like Mr. O'Flannagan, the man at the potato market. Edwin felt much better. He started to open the door on his explanation. This officer could surely help him out.

"I told the Father I woke up . . ."

"Shaddap!" growled the other helmet, raising his baton. "S'not allowed."

"But I just want to tell . . ."

"Elucidation is not permitted at this time," said the wispy man in the corner.

"Who are you?"

"I'm your lawyer, of course. Don't you know anything at all?"

Edwin decided he didn't and fell silent. The van hit a bump, and he splattered face first in the padded canvas deck. The other men watched without moving as he picked himself off of the swaying floor and crawled back into his seat.

The door was opened into a vast fluorescent parkade.

The lawyer and the surly helmet capered out.

"Here, lad," said the kind officer softly, and he pressed something into Edwin's hand. "This'll help." Then he hepped out and was gone.

Edwin peeked around the corner of the van, and seeing only his lawyer waiting impatiently against an endless row of gleaming patrol wagons, he slid his legs out until he rested on his belly with his toes touching the pavement.

"Hurry along then, I haven't got all day!" The lawyer bustled off towards elevators in the distance.

Edwin looked down at the round object that was still in his hand.

It was a potato.

He stuffed it into his trouser pocket and hurried along like he was told.

They were disgorged from the elevator on a floor listed as Department of Criminal Activities. There they joined a very long line of people accompanied by lawyers. This line stretched up to a little kiosk

where one girl was frantically directing complainants to smaller lines beyond.

"Damn this stupid system," muttered the lawyer as he strode with Edwin in tow to the front of the line.

"Excuse us. Sorry George, special case, you know. Press'll be here any minute."

"Lenny, Edwin *Habeus Wingus*," he said to the girl. Her eyes were puffy and her hair was all askew. She wore a little blue cap with the letters D.o.C.A. like a half-moon above her eyebrows.

"Anatomical Abnormalities, line eleven." Then she smiled at Edwin as a wet feather fell onto her keyboard. "Next!"

Edwin was in love! But he was also swept away from her and into the next queue.

The people in lines ten and twelve stared at him and picked at his feathers. He tried to draw his wings in closer to his body. With the Spandex tummy tucker lost in the church along with his shirt, he had nothing but feathers to cover her pale downy chest.

"What did all these people do?" He suddenly appreciated the companionship of his lawyer very much indeed.

"Heinous Behaviour, first degree, to the right. Economic Malfeasance to the left."

The line to the right was full of a circus of people, mostly shuffling their feet and looking belligerent.

The line to the left was characterised by business people, smug and important. This line seemed to be moving faster than all the rest.

"What about them?" asked Edwin, pointing to a group three lines over. They wore a stunned, overwhelmed look that Edwin suspected he was mirroring.

"Bad news, those ones: Aggravated Naivite, Spurious Inqui . . ."

The room erupted in newsreporters and camera lights. Pandemonium and clamour exploded like grenades.

"Press! Duck!" shouted the guardian lawyer, pulling Edwin to the floor and out of the line of fire. The clerks at the back counter pulled out submachine gun pistols and were defending themselves indiscriminately. The noise was deafening; there was carnage everywhere.

Edwin shut his eyes tight, pressed his hands to his ears as his lawyer dragged him across the tile floor and through a massive walnut door. The noise stopped as it shut.

It was a beautiful office with soft pastel carpet and silk draperies, and Edwin knew right then and there that he was in a lot of trouble.

The man who owned the office was sitting out on the balcony, which stretched around the building. He



was dining at a picnic table covered in a fine linen tablecloth. A catering wagon lounged nearby, and a waiter in a black tuxedo was crossing from it with a bottle of champagne on ice. The lawyer tapped on the window and the figure seated at the picnic table motioned them out.

"Come on, but don't try anything funny. This building is protected thirty feet from the walls. There's a shield around it and you can't fly high enough to get away."

They pushed aside the curtains and stepped through the sliding doors.

The balcony was the roof of wider floors below, it's patio inlaid with tiles of rust and yellow-brown along with basic grey. There were sliding doors pulling off into the distance. Other picnic tables with fine tablecloths. Other men in fine silk suits. This was the executive floor, well suited for decisions and casual dining.

"So this is our little seagull, Mr. Denison?"

"Minister, this is Edwin Alphonse Lenny. He used to be a clerk at Bankhurst-Twittington's."

"Well, Edwin, you certainly are a duck out of water," the Minister chortled, and Denison, the lawyer, joined in politely.

Something white exploded against the picnic table.

"Damn! Waiter! Clean this up!"

Edwin looked up and saw pigeons flapping for position on a ledge far above. Watching over them were huge hunched figures, but without his glasses Edwin could not make out their details.

"Damn pigeons! The exterminator can't get at them. Well, do you have anything to say for yourself, Edwin?"

"No, sir. Well, yes, sir." Edwin bundled up all his deference and took the plunge: "I wanted to be a Frequent Flyer, sir, but I knew Mr. Bankhurst-Twittington wouldn't like it. I tried to hide the wings but my tummy tucker broke and the police came. The press tried to kill us so we came here to your fine office, sir. I just want to go back to work. I'm very late and Mr. Bankhurst-Twittington is going to kill me!"

"I see," said the Minister. "Have you used the wings yet, Edwin?"

A picture of his take-off at the font flashed. Edwin knew the answer was yes.

"No," he said, and looked away down the balcony.

The same hunched figures from above were hovering obliquely at points along the balcony railing.

"This seems fairly straightforward, Mr. Denison. We can handle it from here."

The lawyer nodded and turned to leave.

"Wait a minute! Where are you going?" roared Edwin, who did not want to be left alone with diners and gargoyles. He wished he could fly away and hide in a niche with the pigeons.

"My job is done."

"Then I can go?"

"Not quite, my fine feathered friend," injected the Minister.

"THEN WHERE ARE YOU GOING? I pay taxes! I'm entitled to a lawyer!"

"Actually, you're not," replied Denison.

"I am, too!"

"No, you're not."

"Yes, I am."

"Taxes come out of paycheques, paycheques come from employment, employment means work and you are not working right now . . ."

"Because you're holding me here!"

". . . and therefore not paying taxes at the present time and not entitled to a lawyer. At the present time.

The Public Defender's Office works on time allotment and yours is used up. Good day, sir."

"Wait a minute . . ."

"Calm yourself, Mr. Lenny," the Minister said. "After all, I am the Minister in charge of Anatomic Abnormalities, and if I can't help you, who can?"

"What's going to happen to me?" wailed Edwin, tears threatening to spill out onto his finally dried down.

"Why, nothing whatsoever! This is a bureaucracy, after all."

"I won't go to jail! I'm not going to lose my job?"

"Of course not! We want you to work and be happy. That's what we're all about."

Edwin felt better. He had the word of the Minister.

"There will be a short recovery period, but we have excellent social programmes, which will compensate you for one hundred percent. You are a fortunate man, Edwin."

"Recovery?" Edwin was not feeling very well.

"From the surgery. Why so pale, man? Do you want to go around looking like something the cat dragged in?"

"You don't understand, sir. I hate knives. I don't even have any scissors in my desk. I failed paper cutting in nursery school! You can look it up in my records — I can't have any surgery!"

"You don't want to keep those wings, do you?" There was steel in the Minister's stainless voice.



"No, I . . ." Edwin stopped. He hated the wings. He wished he'd never woken up with them, but the thought of knives was making him queasy, so he stumbled to the balcony rail with his stomach signalling revolt.

He clutched the rail and the nearest gargoyle, gasping. The breeze wafting up from below helped to revive him. The metallic tinge on his tongue was choked out by a mucous of carbon monoxide.

He wished he could fly! But he was trapped as sure as the pigeons by the thirty foot limit around the building. They were so beautiful, flapping about the gargoyles twenty-five stories above him! All he wanted was to be left alone. Like the pigeons.

"Come on now, Edwin, you're not thinking rationally. A little snip and tuck and it's done."

"No! Nobody's going to cut into me like a Christmas turkey!"

"It will be over before you know it." Two large men thumped out onto the balcony. One of them was carrying a beige canvas garment that looked like a tummy tucker with straps.

"Are you going to come quietly?" The Minister advanced on him, his arms spread benevolently. The two hulks smiled, their square jaws studded with gold teeth.

Edwin backed away down the railing, erupting in fresh sweat. Panic rose, and he compulsively rubbed his palms on his trousers.

There was a lump in his pocket. He grasped it for security.

The Minister lunged. The gorillas lunged. Edwin twisted and started to flap. One tackled his feet, football style, and he kicked out hard. The other jumped at him, using the canvas jacket as a shield, and Edwin ducked under it flapping furiously. Retreat was cut off so he flapped straight at the Minister like a demented chicken.

The Minister (who had been attacked by a goose as a child) sought a hasty refuge behind the catering wagon, and scattered the hapless waiters.

"Out of my way!" he cried.

Edwin's feet swung away from the ground, his body almost horizontal, a metre above the deck. There was blood in his eyes as he flew straight at the Minister, who was cowering behind the punch bowl.

He raised the bowl and the punch sloshed like acid.

Edwin pulled his shoulders back and struggled for altitude. His eyes were riveted on the punch bowl, the pink liquid, the ice cubes, the lemon rind.

The Minister knew. He leaped out, and pulled the punch bowl back like a vat of boiling oil.

Edwin reached for the lump in his pocket and flung it like David with all his might.

The potato struck the Minister between the eyes. He fell with a thud. The punch bowl shattered with a tinkle and a whoosh beside him. Edwin sailed higher, higher, circling, stretching higher, reaching for flight. Around and around the building. Inside the invisible field.

Receptionists, data programmers, inputters, outputters, Clerks One, Clerks Two, Clerks Three, security men, baliffs — they all looked from their sealed windows in awe.

Edwin was soaring! For the first time he was soaring on the thermals that lifted him up into the air.

They watched from inside, floor after floor, their noses pressed to the glass, scarcely breathing, not thinking to cheer. Flattened against windows that weren't designed to be opened, until he was a speck as small as the pigeons in the sky.

•

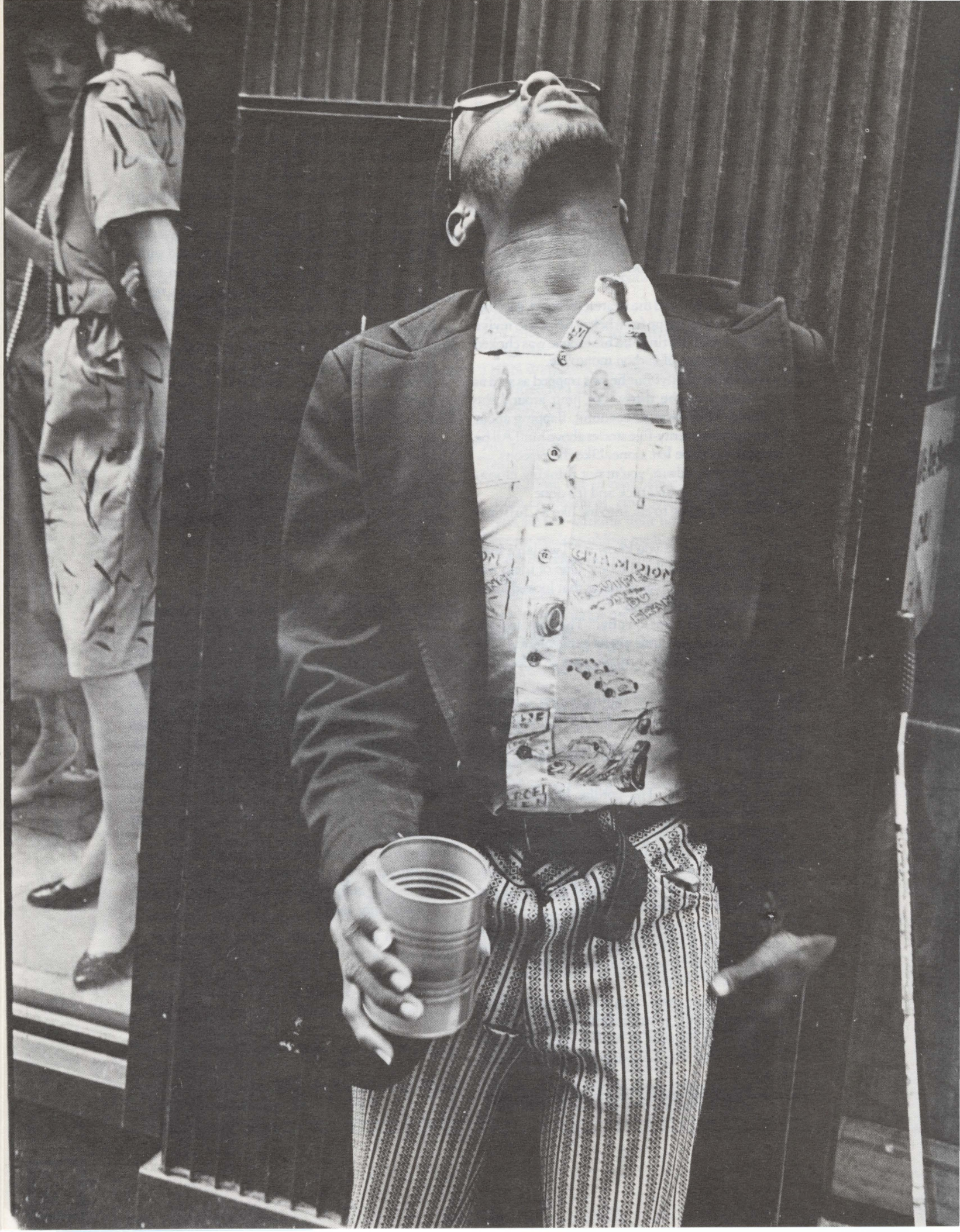
He's up there still, nesting between the gargoyles, swooping down occasionally, preying upon the catering trays, treating the balcony with no more respect than the pigeons. Keen-eyed visitors stare into the sun, swearing they see an extra figure silhouetted in the row of sentinel statues.

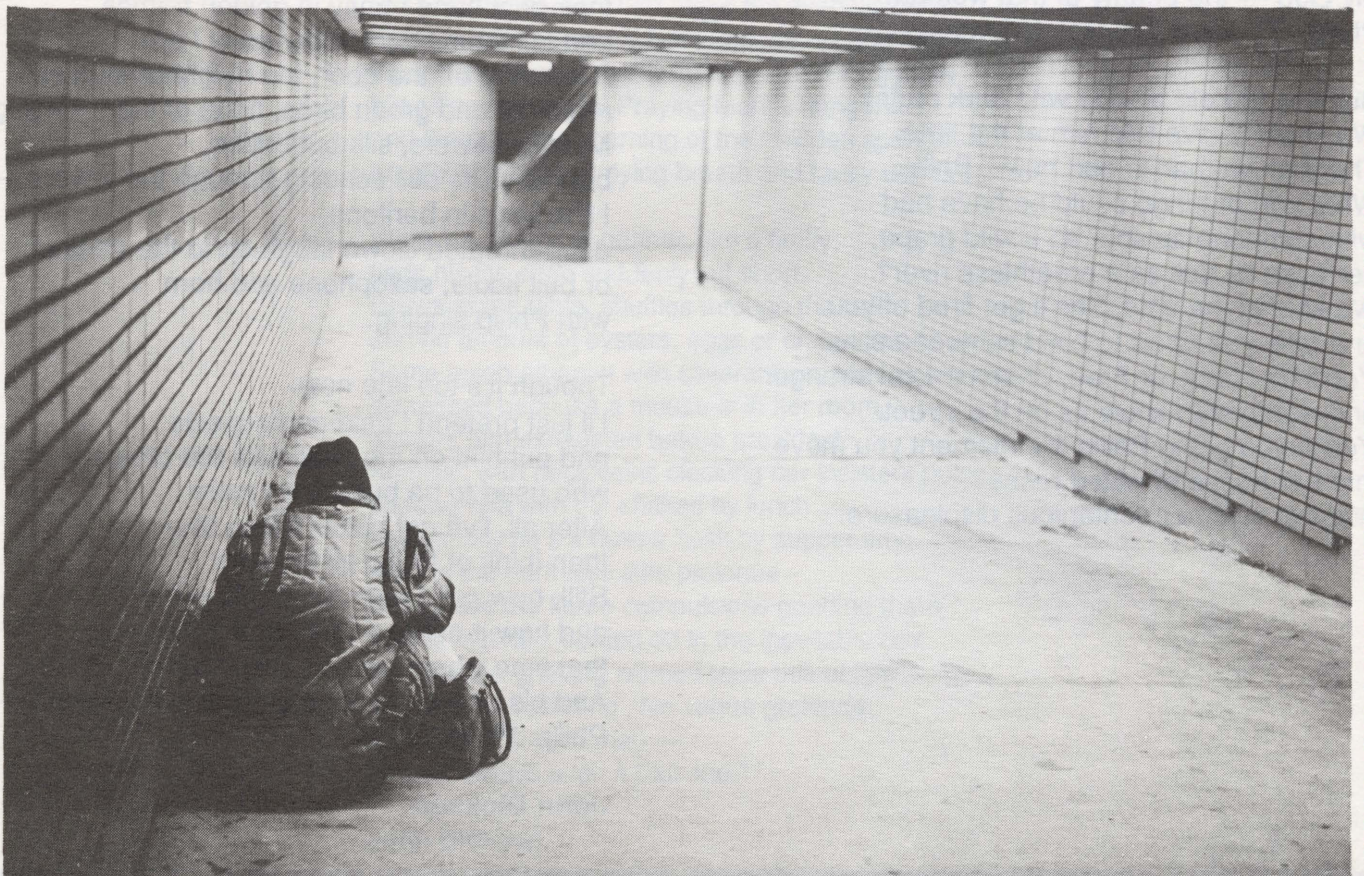
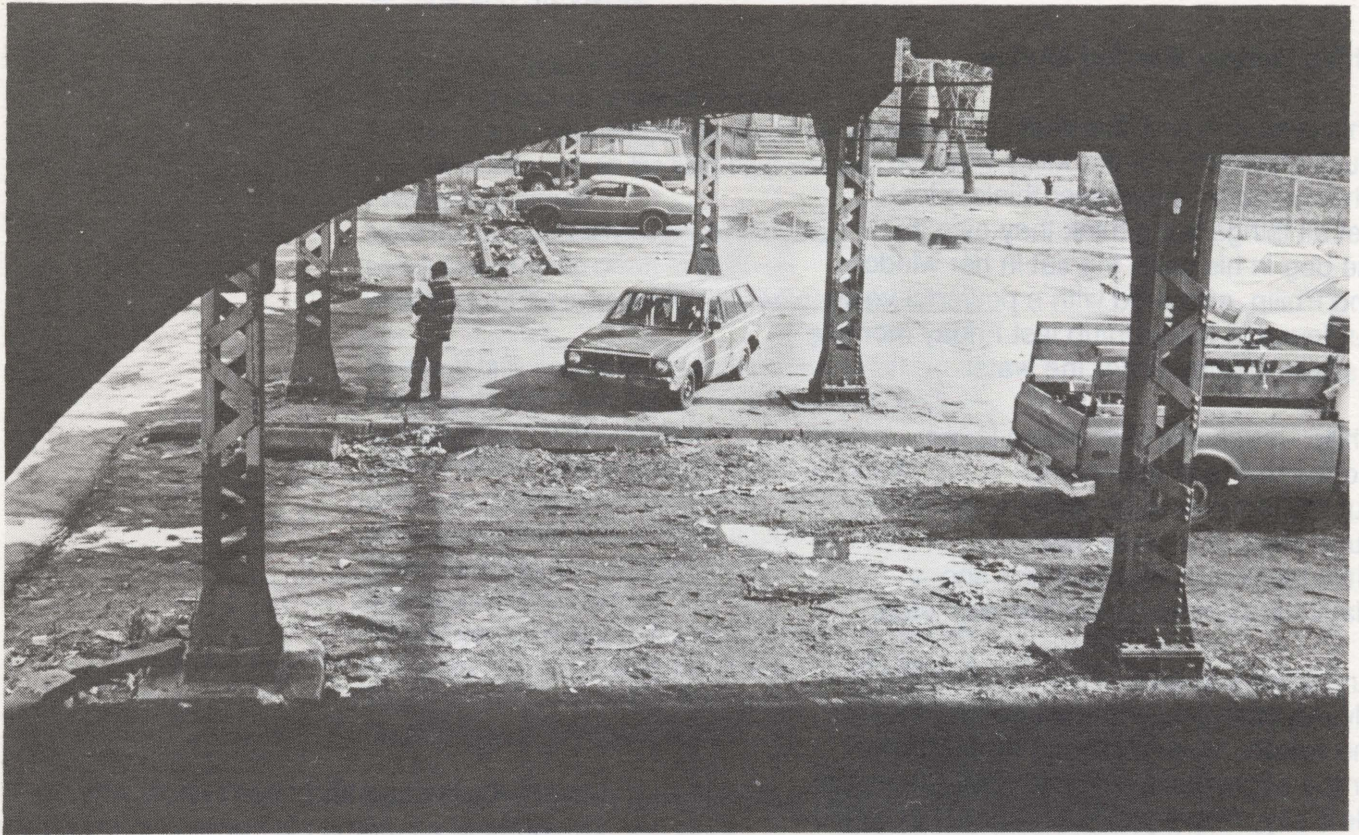
The Birdman also has an entrance into the building, perhaps through the air-conditioning ducts. A certain receptionist from the Department of Criminal Activities has arrived at her desk on three occasions to find a bag made from silk draperies, tied neatly with a bow, and containing gifts of glossy white feathers.

He's up there. Untouchable and unable to get out.

The Minister sits on the balcony, stewing and plotting, raging at the feathers and gifts that fall occasionally from above.







Photographs by Tom Rand

Philip Danley Married Money

This is such a sad little world
stuck on a fringe of the Milky Way
where no one would ever think to look.
Yet all things living think they own it —
the dog in his yard, the cat in her window
and Philip, endowed with a powerful voice
but found in the bathtub last Friday morning,
his face slightly under the water.

Philip — to know him was to laugh.
Dogs grow to fit their paws
but Philip never fit his voice —
huge voice in a small man.
Little black suit, narrow black shoes
black moustache for his flashing teeth.

And always in love,
always completely human-bondaged —
the watery, willowy blonde from Mobile
or the sophomore redhead from Cheyenne.
He'd say, "Have you seen her at her window?
Have you ever watched her fix her hair,
arms raised above her head,
her hands living a life of their own.
My God — the beauty of that woman!"
Philip. To know him was to laugh.

But why the old blonde with dark roots?
We knew it. We told him at the time,
The Rich woman is bad news, Philip.
What sort of tango could he have had
with someone as sour as a wild grape,
her eyes as dull as a breathless river?
We said at the time, She'll get tired of you
and take you apart to build someone else.
You'll be Harry, or Fred, or some total stranger
and won't even know us on the street.
You'll stop being Philip the moment you move
into her house of wilted roses
and live with her contagious displeasure.

Now Philip is dead and I don't know why.
The parts of his name play games in my mouth.
I'll ride the apocalyptic train,
its windows weeping in the rain
down to the hills where his parents live,
their past hung neatly in golden frames,
and tell them how terribly sorry I am.
A wreath on the door, the neighborhood sad,
red birds and green birds, none of them singing.
Metallic flowers, silk butterflies,
but his voice still echoing through the valleys —
I Pagliacci in baritone,
deep-throated clown laugh up to the treetops
or bull fiddle, saxophone and horn
with Philip singing.

Though it's too late now.
I'll just pretend I paid my respects
and put him on the shelf with the others
who used to be but are no more.
After all, I've got better things to do
than think of Philip all the time.
Still, how can I ever forget his voice
and how it echoed through the hills
that time when I wasn't even there?
And his name still hops around in my mouth —
Philip. Philip. Philip.

John Dickson

Victims and Survivors

Stay away! Avoid if possible
the Golden Years Retirement Hotel.
Better a life of hobo jungle, rot-gut gin and beans.
Even a healthy prison life with men you can rely on.
I've seen it happen,
seen the unsuspecting man investigate,
check in and settle down to finish up
what's left of life in soporific geezerhood.

Peace at last — until he finds the dining room,
entering as any slave bound for the auction block —
octogenarian virgins frantic to be toppled,
widows whose clocks have long ago run down
aching to rekindle one more lover, one more bed —
all observing him with sensual appraisal.
Then, for a day or two, though often less,
the irresistible barrage of
“Would you care to see the snapshots of my home?”
“Or of my nephew's daughter, bless her little heart?”
Finally smiling, one foot in the door,
“I just dropped by to say ‘hello.’”

Soon their fingers like a hundred little mice
arouse again his dormant flesh
each predator, of course, a trifle different.
Some with warm hands, some with cold.
Some with layers of lipstick, or wearing cheap perfume
or sharp deodorants that make the eyeballs burn.
Some with shattered figures and depressing legs,
though some remarkably intact, buxom as guitars,
but all consumed by Praying Mantis hungers
and the constant churning of their hidden springs —
amorous in spite of dying breath and faulty dentures.

While he, like a tail gunner, like a firefly,
finds his life span suddenly cut short.
Dozes at the table, shuffles through the halls,
and no amount of oysters, eggs or cream can save him.
Some aging amazon with several husbands to her credit,
distressed because a mouse is in her room,
renders him exhausted before breakfast.
Another, with neck veins clocking her insistent pulse
endows him with the shakes by lunch,
and usually he's a hollow husk by supper time.
Always the harmless little prologue
to disguise the fierce compulsions goading them
until at last he's carried off in the inevitable box.
It's then the grieving women table talk of him.
No tears of mourning. No vague gratitude.
Just, “Ah, the poor man —
he was always such a frail one.”

John Dickson

Separation

The yard below burns in domestic tranquility.
I see the fence, bushes, flowers, placed
Exactly
Where I wanted them,
A Landscape of need for an order that would
confuse the best of differences.
Even in wars men still go off, row by row
in step, all facing forward.
But my mind this morning is filled with
Breakings —
Not anything material or of substance
But, things breaking, nonetheless;
It is Spring beyond this window
Yet I see trees in autumn,
Leaves like years that no amount of wishing
can hold.
Children play in the leaves,
A dog romps in a celebration of sepia.
Endings give meaning, I'm told,
to life, to love, to going on.
I feel my soul peeled from the flesh,
The anguish is silent, each fiber pulls
and separates
the memories from the bone,
Breaking free,
In halves
They shine:
The image from the feel,
The life
They will change no more;
They are about to die in pain.
I cannot help.

Harold Hild

Mauthausen

I stand in place of murder.
I stare at national monuments:
Russian, American, Hungarian, Polish, Slav
But last,
Italian.
I see the photographs of faces trapped now
in protective glass, cemented to the stone.
Bits of ribbon, flowers, notes of family members
surround the dates, times, places
where these faces will never be again.
A woman says in German,
"How like the Italians."
I silently agree.

All the other monuments, grand and glorious
Great words: "vergessen nicht" everywhere.
Bigger, taller griefs compete in terms of style
and design.
Only this one dares look back,
Dares to stare back,
Locates within its gaze the pain I feel,
Makes me, forces me, does violence to all
the wordy sentiments that seek to comfort
that seek to ward off
the truth of these eyes.
How like the Italians to persist upon themselves,
to bring the vacancy of numbers to life again,
to insist upon one self seeing another.

I know of the others
the Jews
They lie with the rest, dust and ash together
with the earth.

But no one speaks for all to me as well

Around me
At my feet
Families spread luncheon cloths,
Bread, cheese, wine seem magically to appear
As if this were just a park,
they talk and eat
as if nothing's happened here.

And nothing has
But man being man to man.

A woman offers me a crust.
I see my hand reach out, touch, eat.
then I see no more.

All of me, every part that calls me home
is ablaze.

I burn

Bread turns to words:
"Gratia mille"

Her eyes widen to embrace the all
I have ever wished to be.
At my back I feel a thousand smiling eyes.
In this place of horror and death
I am finally
Happy.

Harold Hild

The Green Pelvis

This pelvis is shaped
as is common

for such a thing,

but green. Your lover's eyes
and my lover's eyes were never

so green. Perhaps

it was once part
of some human form; perhaps not.
You see,

now its rounds and hollows
are stuffed with living things

that are also

green things: short
scratchy grasses, shy tendrils
and fluffs

of moss are growing,
curling inside. They are

quiet things,

serenely relentless in
their outward
pushing, like an increase

in population in a young
city. Along

the upper edge, a lily
with folded leaves
basks in, admires

its own antique odor, and here
a little tree

has begun to push through —

it will
be worth waiting for. Frogs
are chuckling

in the flowers. A green
bird quivers in the pelvis; its beak
curls round

a leaf and prepares
the best song of its life.

Pamela Miller

The Poet and Other People

"Oh, look!" said my mother
as a rabbit hopped,
then hunched a few feet
from where we sat.
He was so scrawny
I could see where his bones
pressed against his flesh.
My aunt said, "Isn't he cute!"
His tail was not cotton-white,
but a lackluster brown;
his fur, smudged with dirt.
My mother said,
"Aren't they always?"

Robert K. Johnson

Feeding Time

Red ice cracks
beneath black boots
walking across the dung
field. The Mother
of Calves moves calmly
through the flock of white-
faced calves lowing
for the false tit
his white breath forming
circles around his head.

The old cow follows
him to the familiar
feedhouse, stumbling
through the crumbled door.
He stretches his hand across
her white face, gently
strokes her red neck
rubs her bulging ribs
squeezes the cold tit.

He moves the bucket
aside, ties the lead
to the trough where
he pours the grain
and quietly steps outside
closing the door behind him.
He fingers the knot-
hole above the trough
slowly inserts the barrel
and waits.

When the feeding is finished
he notices the warm
smell of her coat on his
red ice moving
around his boots
smoke circling
the sooted barrel
fat calves running
like frightened children
across frozen pastures.

Scott Owens



A Good

by Gwy

I know you see me in the bars a lot. Well, I guess I spend some time in the bars but you see it's not really my choice. What I really want, all I've ever really wanted was to find a good woman, settle down and have some kids. Lead a good, Christian life.

Now let me explain myself here. If I'm in the 4 o'clocks, looking like I'm looking to get laid, you've got me misperceived. Sure it happens sometimes, but you see it's not truly my intention. My intention is to find a wife, someone to have my baby and lead the right kind of life with me.

I'll tell you about women and myself. Look at me. What do you see? A nice guy. Sensitive and caring and all that. And that's true. Somehow in this life a good woman has not come along. I mean a woman that's right for me. Because, believe me, if and when I do meet this woman, I will make her my wife right off and do right by her. And don't think I haven't been honestly trying all this time. I seriously tried it twice. First time hardly counted. We were just kids and I figured it was the right thing to do. You know how it is. You get to a point and you think well, what next? And next thing you're married. So that didn't work out once we got to know each other, maybe six, seven months later. But believe me I wasn't discouraged.

Well, things were a little different with my second wife. When we met I was just crazy about her. We went out, had some good times, and I thought we got to know each other pretty well. Well, not being a kid anymore, I didn't just rush

Woman

by Anne Gertz

into things. We saw each other for a good five-six months first, which I believed was enough time to get to know just about everything about a person. And I thought she wanted a family same as me. Are you with me so far? So here we are married, me being a good husband working hard, maybe six days a week, making some pretty good money, too. And she's pulling in some extra cash working part time at the diner when what does she decide? Somewhere out of the blue she decides she wants to go back to school, make something of herself, you know, a nurse or a teacher. Now, here I am busting my ass to provide her with things, figuring that she will do what's right and provide me with kids. So, she gets upset, says I'm not supportive of her (me who's supporting her by working six days a week) and next thing I know she's moved out. Left me.

Another guy might just give up. Figure women are a jinx. But not me. I'm just a romantic fool at heart. Another drink? Yeah, sure with a shot. So I go out, meet some women, usually in here.

Do I have relationships? Well, usually for about twelve hours if you know what I mean. That's it right there. I'm out looking for a wife. Someone I can think of as decent and respectable. These women I meet, I'm not exactly sure what I'm supposed to do with them. So I do what I figure they expect me to do and next thing I'm looking at them in the morning wondering how they got here and how the hell I'm going to get out. A woman like that is wasting my time. I'm looking for a wife.



Entropy

In these times fidelity fails memory.
Always, until the gears lock up,
Hot and dry and final.
Who doesn't jump out of the car and curse the machine?

You likened that life together to our yellow Pinto
Station wagon on an early Monday two Januarys ago:
Never comfortable and rarely hitting
On all four cylinders.
We never trusted either engine or
Suspension; eventually somebody
Just walked away.

And throughout that last week, reclined and
Acutely aware of the few joints that still
Touched, still somehow fit,
I strained to memorize the
Back of your knee and your syntax.

"Why didn't you check the oil?"
"I had no idea the time had come."

Robert Caskey

The Hunters

When was the last time
we really looked at each other?
Our conversations are rare as heirlooms.
Here in our cabin in the woods
we sip tea on a couch
whose faded cordoroy has worn smooth,
windows uncurtained to frost,
silver webs on nearby fields,
and ripening leaves.

Your hand on mine seems older,
veined rivers deeper.
We talk, picking up stitches
dropped along the way,
become silent at the sound of geese
migrating to winter feeding grounds.
A shot.
One bird falls like a stone.
Which one is left, I wonder,
to fly alone?

Constance Vogel

Smoke

His moistened finger crushes
an errant ash from her cigarette,
rubs it into oblivion.

“A filthy habit.”

He dips the corner of his napkin
into his water goblet,
cleanses the finger.

“You should quit.”

Relentless, the finger taps
against their Duncan-Phyfe table,
finds a minute bread-crumbs,
drops it into his saucer.

“I want a divorce.”

A lump forms in her throat.

“A younger woman?”

The finger touches his lip,
presses a dot of spittle.

“Don’t be absurd.”

Pulled away, the finger pounces
on a strand of gray hair.

Miniscule tear-drops form in her eyes.

“But, I love you.”

The finger wags in her face.

Dust-particled sunlight halos it
like a fairy-wand.

“Your slovenliness disgusts me.”

Thin blue veins throb in her neck.

“Obsessive neatness is sick.”

She strikes the pointing finger,
grinds her cigarette
into the antique table-top.

The odor of burnt wood rises to their nostrils
like sulfur from an exploded pistol.

Frances E. Gabino

Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in Fire,
Some say in Ice,
Which is probably why
You fascinate me as Ice fascinates Fire.

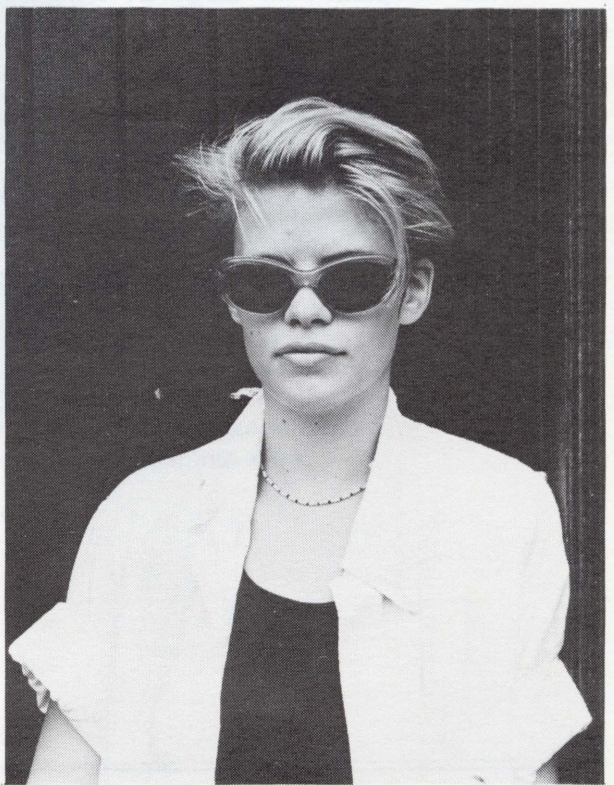
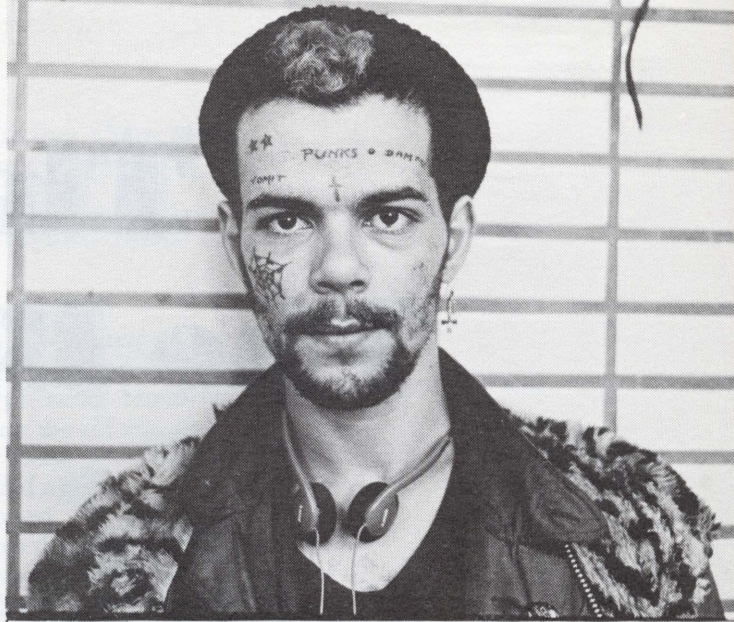
When the landscape crowds too close,
and I have to throw some sparks as a warning to back off,
You chill with a sang-froid
that freeze-dries everything for yards around.
Yes, we wear our protection so comfortably, so easily,
No one would ever know it was armor.

But Alcohol, though flammable, cools,
And Dry Ice, though frigid, burns the touch.

So though you are a person of few words,
And I am a person of many, many words,
You have nothing to fear from my flames
reaching out to you, fingers flickering in your frost.

Ice and Fire can embrace quite harmoniously:
We've all seen Bonfires on Frozen Lakes.

Mary Shen Barnidge



Photographs by Tom Rand

The Man With The Blues Guitar (for my wife)

by Roger William Gilman

*Things as they are/ are changed upon the blue guitar.
- Wallace Stevens*

Cutting the Placenta

"The first cut contains them all."

I.

You were the other woman.
The first one played
the bloody string so long
it struck unnatural chords.
Even so, at early age mom left us,
with words for flesh and formulas
dripping out the edges of our mouths:
"Little poems with mouths left hanging,
open, exposed to war."
(Or was it we who left and she the one who lost?)

We often wonder, don't we? ... wonder,
did she ever feel our deaths?
"I have lost my flesh and blood;
God has gone against me.
(Or have I gone against myself?)"
Did she even grow slowly barren
and bitter to the bone:
"I went away full,
but was brought back empty."
(Or was this our petty wishing?)

We try to play a tune
beyond ourselves, yet of ourself;
of things exactly as they are.
But it is equal to living
with confused and exiled fingers
to live in this confusing time,
when the sun, for all our fighting,
comes up again, the sun, and we rise
and fumble yet again (with the writing hand)
at music and the blue guitar.

Note: This poem is from the novel *From Where the Railroad Leaves the Sea* which was awarded a completion grant from the Illinois Council of the Arts.

David, the protagonist of this novel, is required as part of his psychotherapy to compose poems out of lines and images taken from the works of well-known poets, in order to create a self-analysis, a poetry, by allusion — out of memory.

II

Mom warned me of you this way:
"When a man marries a woman
he mostly marries his imagination;
a possibility, a wish, or a dream."
But I considered myself a wolf
creeping in the throat of night,
a man who knew no fear. Yet
the taxi driver and I *did* race, finally,
hot and rocking down the streets of Chicago;
I did leave town playing the blues.

It might have been the twittering tongues
or the orchids on the testicles
and the sag in the tightrope
that sent me running from you, made me
stretch my fretting brain along the board
and pick the acrid music out. Running away,
playing thoughts of you on blues guitar,
I trade wasteland for wilderness: I'm
no longer red roach running city pantry walls;
no longer rat laughter from the storeroom.

Perhaps I ran because finally
I needed someone to give up sleep for,
needed the eager note on the door
"Call me. Call me when you get home."
Needed reasons to throw a few quick tangerines
in an overnight bag, straighten the eyelids
and head straight for the door.
Perhaps the going to bed unknissed?
Who knows? Maybe the ties in my blood
untied me. You lost interest.

Maybe the end was just too near the beginning:
Was it because our anger,
finally turned, headed in all directions,
was out of luck and love?
My leech no longer made perfect by your blood?
You no longer purified?
Maybe the turning into all turns
without grace, too equal the perfection and desire?
Perhaps the taking too seriously
bruised poems hung between legs?

* * *

Whatever: Now only fingers play;
the veins refuse to consort
(or consort with) the tongue. Split. Twist.
(You know how grief can run away
with the mind — leaving the body desolate;
It is the silence of bandages.) O, will
the words ever jerk off the tongue again
supple and rugged enough to come in
by the ear, jive with snap of nerve and bloodpulse,
jibe with conscience in the wrist of forepaw ?

Playing with Sara, Guitar Mother of Diasporatic Music

"Jacob wrestled with a word."

I

Alone. In the mountains.
Your dog in the shop for repairs.
Guitar on the radio: Muddy Waters.
About music the old master
was never wrong.
His ten blind men
knew their way
down all our dark alleyways,
like little sisters know strings
in the cat's cradle.

You pick up Sara, and
warm up to the possibilities:
a young writer tuning up.
With careful curiosity you bend
over the paper with your pen
not with a conqueror's arrogance
to command both sound and sense,
but as a man with the loved guitar or woman
might inquire with humble hand
what subtle, vital things she had to say
before they started, he and she, to play.

But if her young strings start to lose memory
of our people and our mother's voice —
if your fingers finally fumble — place her,
like a blueplate special, solid on the table
and dig into the pasta, twirling
and lifting like a fork.
For, it's possibilities of cut imagination
that draw first drops of ink: not sensual venom
hitting the heart that shocks ejaculations
into print, not words that rhyme or rhythm;
it's the underside of words which go
two ways at once — screwwise down the brain —
that reams away the film and scum which grow
like plaque on words so singularly plain
and poor they numb your throat and tongue:
Only words with tines can twist an insight from
this noodled pile of pasta. Composing one
figure full of memory plucks a sum
of more than parts which happen to consort;
it transforms a blues guitar into a fork.

* * *

The next morning, hungover from striving,
 crawling back to bed with poem-making equipment
 and cup of coffee regular,
 you'll begin to manipulate her absence, again,
 in order to endure it.
 You'll begin slowly — with one hand:
 a guitar, hanging by one wrist
 to the wall,
 tuning up with the other.



II

"Where you go, I will go; Your language
 will be my language; Your memory, mine."

A. Captured

Mountain yoga. Meditating toward sleep. And further
 into dreaming ... beneath a mountain bush ... beside a
 rocky trail ... a girl comes upon you by surprise and
 shepherds a sheepish grin across your face because
 she caught you dreaming of her. (Like raisins,
 some dreams dry up when interrupted; others, never.
 You've dreamt this one before and you'll dream it
 again.) She takes you in her hand ... past big
 boulders and bushes (as poets pick their way around
 blues guitar) urging you to mountain meadow with

"Let's leave the beaten track, avoid the reeking
 herd, for flowers never grow in the road."
 Gone are the tinsel, chrome circus and clowns ... and
 as she pulls you down to the wild stream she
 whispers, "Bend down your cares like grass, pleasure
 the peace of the moment, make me feel healthy as
 treasure: ... and you enter another world. After
 hungry stillness, rhythms of the stream establish.
 Desire is acknowledged: Arch. Push. Corkscrew.
 Jackknife. Quietly. And with cadence.

Mountain zen. Flyfishing. Poeming possibilities:
 fish flopping up from unconscious feeling ...
 fresh food flipping on a slender line.
 Before they break and run, you kneel, scooping
 with net result of water all over the place.
 Mountain zen. A practice of musing on her power ...
 how using power is an art ... putting wrist into
 rhythm ... wrist flick over arm pump ... and the subtle
 body sway ... musing on her grace ... how

all good things come by grace ... and that
 grace comes by art ... and that art
 does not come easily ... especially on the powerful
 rivers running straight and hard to the sea ...
 musing on how bending a line blue transfigures
 the commonplace into Picasso ... into music ...
 makes us imagine other worlds ... or other ways
 of being in the world ... makes us free ... free
 as dancing dice ... responsible as gamblers ...
 pagans in a varnished car.

B. Addicted

In the end we depend upon the blue guitar,
make outrageous promises in order
to continue dreaming — say we'd do anything for her;
and then she asks us for the weather!
We have never in our lives
given orders to the morning
or sent the dawn to its post,
told it to grasp earth by its tail
and shake the shining out of it.

We have never in our lives
cleared a star's dark socket
or janitored for shadows,
opened the clouds where snow is stored
or frozen water hard as stone.
But at the point of a pen
we'll demand of our ink
a / passion / pulse / and power /
in songs that will make her laugh and sing
as if skies were always blue

we'll never let her grey and weather
like some pilgrim soul
run out on rusty spur
past deadgrass tincans bedsprings and brokenglass
where the rail breaks off / dead
(though our ties might seem
to go on forever
under the barbed-wire fence)
We'll make her go on smiling, as if
worms could have no dominion.

* * *

But I digress, too easily distracted
from politics to art, too weak to work
against the devils that destroy our dreams.
Too easily I forget that lack of money
is the root of all evil, and remember
all too well her dark eyes and saliva:
Who says, imagination is a sex
that stops when you pull up your pants, but
conscience is a love; it never lets you go?

C. Distracted

Damn!
Here I go again.
I shouldn't be writing of legs and lust
but of the victims of this earth.
But I saw you pass my way again
and lost my resolution:
instinct chased my thought
like a dog, bitchtrailing, circling
tail to tail
with taste reduced to appetite.

Playing blue, with
light conscience and heavy imagination,
I sing, not curse,
because I'm thirsty
for dark hair, long legs and luck.
My song suggests
a barefoot beachwalk
to show the rough rocks
and pigeon shit
our preoccupation and devotion: for

"Love just is not love,
if it waffles
like the moon moved water
tiding in and out
the land's long thigh;

and lust just is not lust,
if it's constant
as the far fixed stars
that look in on the tempest
but are never shaken."

I suppose if I'd been lying heaped
in concentration camp or ghetto,
I'd not have noticed you;
or if my stomach, starved, was groaning
or my pain too rich to doctor
I'd never thought of chasing you.
O wretch of this poor earth, forgive me;
forgive me for my interval of joy,
but I've not suffered near enough for your
dull pain, despair and dread to touch me. Yet.

Genesis at Santorini

In the beginning fire
cleft the mountain,
teeming ragged
white rocks to dominate
over the wastes of earth:
and the boy learned, like the rock
to project, to impose
on the landscape.

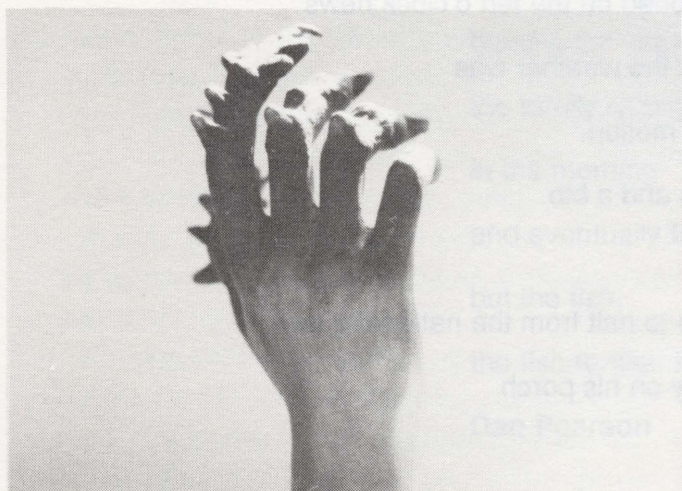
But the earth was still
so uniform and monolithic
without reflection.
So the rivers gave rise
to a sea to reflect
the obdurate rock:
And the girl learned, like the sea
to mold, mold herself to another's
form, lending definition.

The gods rose over
the unsullied blue of the sea,
drowned and rose again —
always in different disguises.
And each time the earth was racked,
yet nothing altered.

Even now, that man sits
on the white cliff, withdrawn
in thought
and the woman flows out
surging and ebbing around it.

In this chiseling light
they look so hopelessly divided:
for he will not speak
his thought until it is fixed
and impenetrable
and she will go on
shifting ample, provisional
mirrors
until he can see
his thought reflected.

Kathrine Jason



Sculpture and photographs by Gina Klauba

All other photographs by Carolyn Hava Stern

The Paperboy Speaks

there are those in the neighborhood
who have not been able to decide
whether it was the heat or the humidity
that drove mr. novotny
to shave his head
paint eleven people blue
and invade kenosha in a stolen tank.
some blame the owner for leaving the keys in the ignition.
other say novotny's "death to cheeseheads" remark
shouldn't have been taken so seriously.
I think it was only a matter of time.
I saw the way he would finger his hedgeclippers
when the ice cream truck went by,
the gleam in his eye when someone would mention
a runaway train or a twelve car pile-up,
the satisfaction he derived from the cancellation
of a long running tv show.
this was a man born to be mentioned on the ten o'clock news
and I don't think it mattered what the weather was
when this wild mouse was set in motion.
they say he was wearing mittens and a bib
when he charged the state line.
I doubt he even heard the orders to halt from the national guard
with his hearing aid resting safely on his porch
in a glass of water.

Dan Pearson

Furor and Chagrin

armed men break down the door
and rush into the room.

after a furious tumble and toss

there is a chat

in front of the tropical fish.

it is the wrong apartment at the wrong address

but, it is pointed out

by the man wearing the best suit

that all the punctuation on the warrant

is correct.

he steps forward and offers the family

gum and chocolate and nylons

by way of apology.

there are promises made for a new door

a sturdier model

less likely to cave in to sledge hammers

or poor penmanship.

bidding the intruders good night

the family changes religion

in the morning

and eventually forgets

but the fish,

the fish remain nervous for weeks.

Dan Pearson

Chapter One

by **Donn Irving**



The knock comes in the middle of his night. His grey eyes open; crow's feet disappear. The shock of it is accentuated by gusts of wind. He has no clock. When he retired there had been no wind. Who would come out here, this far out and this far in? The forest is dense. The macadam roads narrow, narrow some more, then they are gravel, not macadam. Still unmoving, he knows he has been asleep a considerable time; he feels nearly rested. Near morning, must be.

Or was it a shutter? They'd seemed a good idea at the time of his building the cabin, seven years ago. He'd wanted shutters rather than curtains or blinds for it. Airy, private, no screens necessary. These are real shutters, on hinges, not nailed back on blocks. Wind sometimes unhooks them and they flap and bang. And if not?

He sits up, reaches to the chair, pulls on his trousers. Only wind persists, incessant. Then the knock again, not loud but insistent. Noticing, he cannot believe he had not noticed before. The light above the half-shutters, a brightness through the mullioned panes that whorls like a web in the glass. Headlights, rays diffracted, beams below the level of the shutters. He has no arc-light in the grove, unlike the farms and vacation places miles back on macadam.

The shotgun crosses his mind. That thought negates in a hot, deep flash of disabused bravado, like a swallow of whiskey. "Shit!" he exclaims. In his haste, he kicks a leg of



the bed with his big toe. "Shit!" he repeats.

He impels himself, disabled, through two rooms to the kitchen.

There is a startled look on the woman's face as he flings open the cabin door.

"Well?"

"I've got a horse in trouble. Out there." She twists about, points at headlights. The wind winds her long hair. . . . blonde, silver?. . . around her face and neck. When she twists back around to face him, she must blow ends from her mouth. The wind is northerly now, cold. Change. Her face lies in shadow as he has turned on no light inside, her body a silhouette in headbeams.

"Step in. Can't talk out here. Can't hear," he shouts.

Inside, with the door shut, a tomb by contrast. He lowers his voice: "Now, what's this about a horse?" He snaps on a kitchen light, indicates a chair near the table.

She declines with her hand, remains standing where she is. "I think it's colic," she says.

She has a good face, he thinks. Maybe kind. Certainly handsome. She is not large. And the hair is both blonde and silver, now that light lends the possibility of discovery. Maybe forty and only one chin.

"Colic," he repeats, remembering when the word meant something. Remembering when emergencies were events, not just words, and remembering. . . . at least where horses

are concerned. . . . colics were both the worst and the most usual among them; when he was something more than a self; when he was younger, on the edge of a pretty town with a family and two dogs and a cat, with a hammering clutter of schedule far more important than world crises, for even the death of a president was no excuse to refuse an emergency; clean wrapped instruments, rows of bottled drugs wiped clean of dust every few days, a portable clinic on a pickup truck with four-wheel drive.

Maybe twenty years ago.

Pain in a horse's belly disennobles the horse, he's always believed. In health, name another creature that exuded invincibility. But with colic they are infants. Their surrogate for incessant bawling is a pitiable stamping of a foot, an apprehensive look at the offending flank, a biting at the belly. . . . or a sudden tantrum, coiling into a folding collapse and a roll while making heaving, nickering sounds. Infantile. Pain takes them over.

Or is he a fascist, he wonders.

He really wants to ask how she knows he was a vet, but he says instead, "What's he in? A trailer?"

"Yes."

He wants to announce to her the long-ago annulment of his former calling, but he says, "Do you have a good light? A lantern?"

"Yes, in the pickup I do." She is moving to the door. He wants to proclaim how futile is all this. . . . he has no drugs to relieve the creature's pain, no instruments, but he says, "Wait until I get some shoes and a jacket."

She seems to notice just then that he has on no shirt, no socks. He makes a self-deprecating gesture in response. She says, "I'll get him out of the trailer. Not so easy, this wind."

"Yes," he agrees as behind her he closes the door against

the howling that takes her into it.

He cannot cease the shaking of his head for the myriad thoughts that visit during the pulling on of socks, the finding of a shirt, the tying of shoes and zipping of a fragile jacket. He opens the door into the brittle leafy clattering and a new northern howling on the upsurge.

The lights of the idling pickup blind him so he must turn askance to approach, like a walker in a driving rain must turn aside to see the walkway, to walk into fury with his flank.

Sidling along, he approaches the pickup. His jacket flaps against his collarbone with the slapping sound of too-large slippers on a floor. The saplings bend with gusts into parabolas. She has backed the horse outside the trailer but has to haul hard on a lead shank to keep his attention, to keep him upright while she leads him around in front of the truck for the light. The horse wants to curl and fall, roll over and over, relieve the pain even if by twisting a length of his gut in the process. Wants to roll into his own death if need be, roll out of, away from, pain.

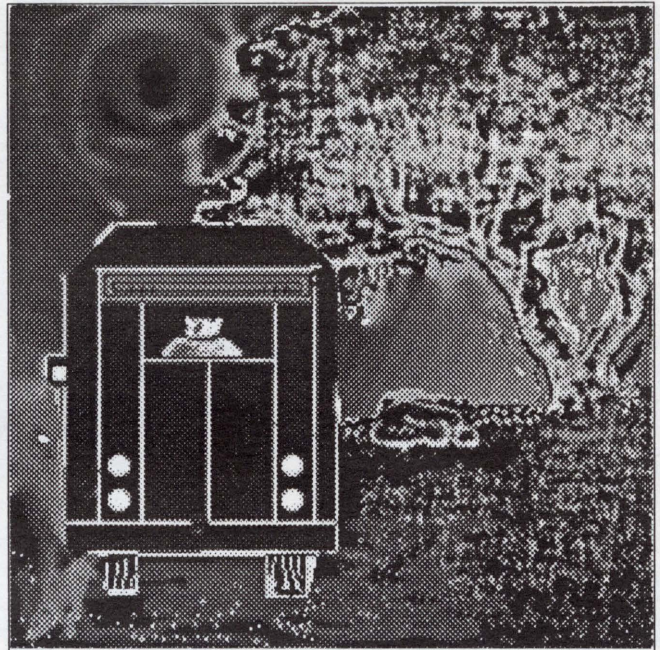
Dirt clings to his coat on one side. He has gotten down, somewhere, the trailer, or back in his stall, a field, wherever that is.

He motions for her to take the horse back around behind the trailer. Too much wind, too much light; he will be fractious, crazy as a spinning bug on the surface of a pond.

He hangs the lantern on the back of the trailer.

"Lead him close as he'll come to this light."

It is a struggle. At one point he gets behind the horse and shoulders his rump forward. Her hair wraps her face and neck, again. The wind also rearranges her clothing to better outline her shape. Her profile has an elegance, he thinks; she is shapely as a finely-turned vase. No extravagance.



He comes around front. The gelding, maybe sixteen hands, draws back, sorrel mane flying in the lantern rays, all whites to his eyes. Momentarily, he is not preoccupied by pain, but then he relapses, looking around. She jerks the lead. He rolls down an eyelid. Murky. The whites. . . 'sclera' his mind says in recall. . . are infected, the red outline is that of arboreal branching. A fallen tree.

He thinks of the grove where they stand as it appears in daylight. Most leaves are still green or subtly purpling at the edges, yellowing in the middle, but the Virginia Creeper vines that spirally ascend the boles and boughs are flaming red; the gelding's eyes look like them. A scarlet, espaliered treelet sluggishly taking over the white of his eye.

He peels back the lips with both hands. The membranes and gums are muddy-colored. He presses the upper gum. Color is slow to rush in when he removes his finger.

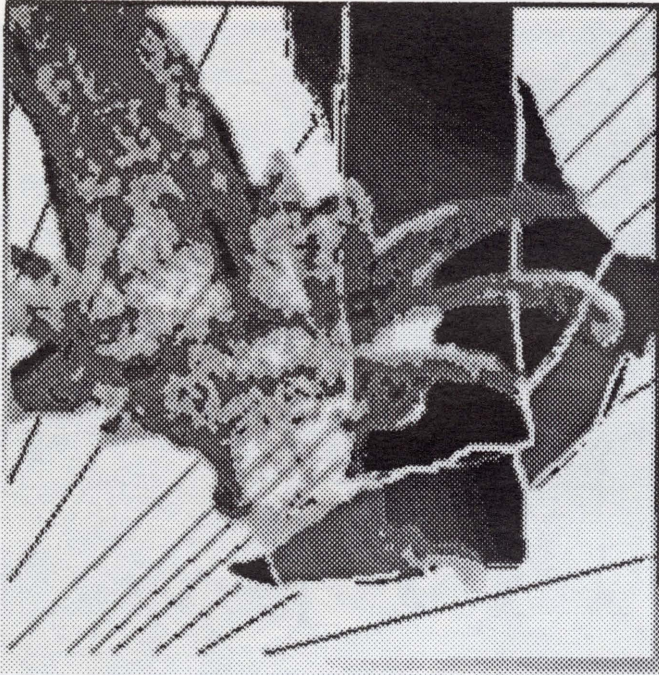
"He's in trouble," he says, bending down to place his ear on the horse's chest...in lieu of a stethoscope, not thinking of the wind. Instead, he places two fingers under the ramus of jaw, halfway back. The pulse is fast and thready.

"Not so good," he shouts.

"What do you..."

"Wait. I need something. Keep him from going down, will you?"

She nods. She begins to speak soothingly to the gelding, then to lead him away from the light and walk him in a



circle. He heads down the walkway away from them, toward the cabin, but enters a shed across the walkway away from it, turns on a light. He rummages and curses only for seconds, then holds up a small-gauge garden hose like some precious artifact. He withdraws from his pocket a clasp knife so sharp that one pass cuts the hose, leaving a length he takes with him of six to seven feet.

"What's that?"

"I have no stomach tube."

"So that's supposed to...why do you...?"

"And worse. I've no twitch. Can you help me 'ear' him down?"

"Jesus," she says.

A twitch, a loop of rope, cord, leather, chain through a hole bored in one end of a short handle, or a loop passed through a short handle, or a loop passed through a short length of pipe, could be twisted tight on the gelding's lip, or his ear, thereby allowing a tube to be passed through his nose to be swallowed without a rearing and striking match between them. Counterpain, or the principal of lesser evils allowing the worst evil to occur by a transfer of attention.

They manage to pull down his head, each on opposite ears, he with his grip, she with her teeth. He admires her ability nearly as much as her willingness to do the distasteful effective thing. The gelding stands firm-footed while he starts the hose he's lubricated with his own spittle up the

gelding's nose.

It's like swimming, he thinks, amazed he remembers by instinct to push the head to the right so he can see not only the act of swallowing but the actual descent of the tip of the tube down the right side of the neck. He blows, satisfied which channel he's in, then proceeds until with a sudden rush gastric reflux spurts from the tube. Under pressure. He allows it all to drain without answering the unspoken question her look projects. Then he withdraws the tube.

He shakes his head. "Needs surgery. Got a twist or a gangrenous section. Some blockage."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Well, let's get started. Where? That barn?"

At the edge of the circle of lantern light can be seen the corner of his rustic barn. He looks to see where she's looking and shakes his head negatively. "Do you always jump so at things? On such little evidence? Lady, I don't operate. I don't know how you found me," he shouts, "or where you got the information I was a veterinarianonce...once, not now. . . but it's 'long ago and far away,' an old forties song, sorry, you wouldn't know it. I haven't so much as held a scalpel in twenty years. I haven't got a scalpel. . . or suture, anesthetic, desire. Besides this fellow needs clean, as in a hospital. Shiny and with autoclaves, drapes, padded recovery room, gas machine. Real doctors. You've got one helluva drive ahead of you. And by the look of him, you're on a tight schedule."

He stands there, holding the tube that drags in the dust. The horse's head hangs some, now. He thinks she might outrace the need for an analgesic, the pain-killer usually needed to keep a colicky horse upright in a trailer. But that's unlikely, too, he thinks.

He notices he is shaking his head as she tries to load the horse. He stops. She turns to him: "This wind," she says.

He gets behind the gelding once more and shoulders his rump as she coaxes the forelegs into the trailer. After two reversals, they get the gelding to enter with all four.

Immediately, the horse takes on the look of dejection and does not try to go down. He knows this could be good or bad but does not know which is represents, not with the lack of laboratory wherewithal that could settle the matter.

"Well," she says, turning the two latch bolts behind the gelding's hindquarters and taking down the lantern, "what do I owe you?" She turns so he can look at her, can see her face more clearly than ever.

"The value of what I did for your horse . . . which is nothing. So, nothing."

"Why, that's ridiculous. I got you out of bed and you did what you could do."

"Which limitations make the whole thing absurd to talk further about. You need to be on your way. I'd telephone ahead to the diagnostic lab at the university if I were you. As you probably already know, I have no telephone out here. Sorry. Stop in town, though. Make sure there's someone there who can roust out a surgical team . . . late as you'll be arriving."

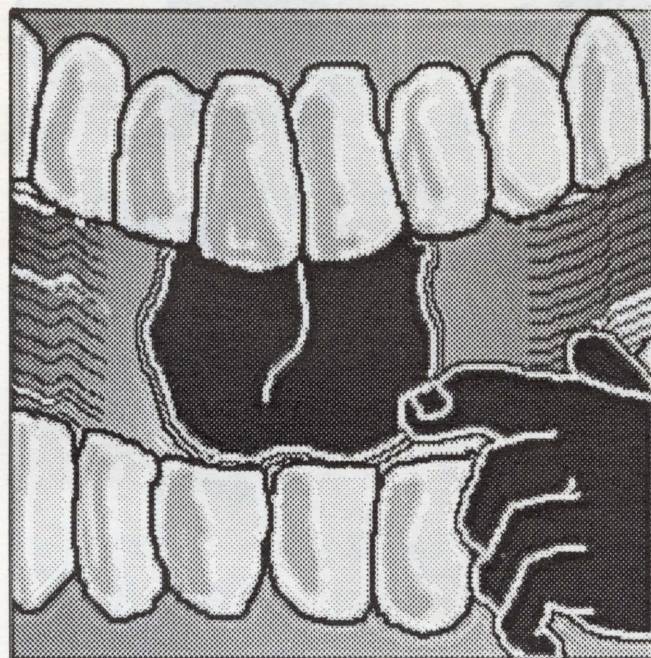
"Can I use your name?"

"Do you know it?"

"Loerner, right?"

"You must tell me how this fellow comes out . . . if only so you can fill me in on how you found me out. My former profession, that is. I'm serious as hell. However, get moving for now."

Her face lightens for the moment. She has been under more strain than he could discern, he sees, as this is terribly



apparent. She is quite strikingly handsome, maybe beautiful. He is no longer sure if he would know that now.

She waves. "Thank you, very much. I will do that. I'll let you know, you've been kind." Her hair is blown back across her face.

"Drive carefully."

She backs an arc expertly around a clump of oak saplings, changes the gears when the tail lights brighten, and pulls smoothly away into the night. He watches the red tail lights for perhaps half a quarter before they are swallowed by the forest that remains between his grove and the gravelled county road.

"That's one dead sonofabitch," he mutters, shaking his head, still dragging the hose as he returns to the cabin. The wind continues its lust for leaves and bent trees.

What he thinks will happen does not happen. Sleep does not take him in like a vault and slam its heavy door. He lies awake refusing to believe he could. He is so used to the relief of his solitude, especially if it has been interrupted, as rarely it is and ever so slightly, by having to pick up stamps or mail at the post office in town, say, and then returning, stepping through a wall into his own world, being swallowed up safe and whole and away from all distraction. This does not happen.

Even if he must remain awake as hostile party to a host of thoughts not his, not summoned by him at least, why



must they be of this gratuitous event, this interruption, the sort of thing he normally discouraged, refused in no uncertain terms? What bothers him more is how welcome the return of need to his life, one it imposed. Inconsequential, yes, but the woman needed an opinion. Something inside, some part of him, met that need halfway, greeted it . . . as once before, years and years ago.

And yet, what good was done? In a world of purported 'giant leaps,' of hymns of heavenly powers . . . 'ten thousand times ten thousand' . . . gibberish and blather. Certainties shatter before one simple fact: we can't even get the small things right.

Some of this he thought he dreamed, so vague and disconnected it seemed. Chuckholes on the road between consciousness and sleep. He felt less angry than impotent. Bothered and beset by things incomprehensible, he tossed and turned until the wind lay, toward morning. Then, he slept.

Daddy

Saturday afternoons.
I remember anticipation
in the back seat
of the car.
You, taking me to one of your places.

I remember the Grill.
Perched on a stool,
like you,
both elbows on the counter.
That waitress with white paper skin
frying hamburgers.

I remember
your hot dog stand.
Eating
right in the car
with you
handing me food
like presents from a bag,
meals wrapped in greasy papers.
We ate in silence.

I remember
where we went
what we ate.
God, if only
you had looked at me.
Then maybe
I could remember you.

Gwynne Gertz

Inheritance

On Sundays sometimes my father's
softness showed. A pat on the head,
a touch of the shoulder.

We stepped between the bread trucks,
stationed like sentinels, toward the
powdered sweetness of doughnuts.

I knew nothing about his stale marriage,
a business dried up and blown away
with the chaff, the cold ovens.

His father's ghost rattling
the empty trays, dusting our
lungs with flour.

James Langlas

I Was Once a Rat in the Race



Although I found Terry Jacobus's brief history of Chicago-style poetry

"scenes" interesting ("Pugilism in Poetry" *Overtures* 1988), I fear Jacobus's concluding statement: "The invisible army awaits." Indeed, much of the rhetoric throughout the article disturbs me: "the daily business of art is just as petty and cutthroat as the daily business of Business," "poetic competitions" (my emphasis) and "a rebirth of the poetry fight." I do believe Jacobus captures the essence of art in Chicago, that of competition. I was once a rat in the race: a poet in Chicago.

I always found the Poetry Slam at the Green Mill (Uptown, Chicago) a "discouraging atmosphere." In major urban areas there is a genuine need for individuals to find refuge from crowded, profit-making activities. The last few hours of my weekend (Sunday evening) are precious. Although I consider "live" poetry a positive addition to my quality of life, the last thing I would consider doing is attending the Poetry Slam. I lived blocks from the cocktail lounge; I could have walked there. In fact, I attended the Slam on two separate occasions. Like so many open mikes or poetry happen-

ings in Chicago, this is another arena for the "poseurs" and poetasters. I gave the Slam two "chances," and I vowed never to return. I gave Chicago five years, and I hope never to move back.

The Slam is an event based upon competition and consumption. I fail to see how competition, "poetry fights," raises the level of quality in live poetry. Perhaps the Slam has nothing to do with "art" or poetry other than exhibitionist, lyrical performance acts — in that case, I give Marc Smith (the organizer) his due. Yet the Slam boasts that people are paying to hear poetry. It seems to me that people are paying \$2 a piece for the privilege of being able to drink, smoke and mingle while waiting for the Slam itself to begin, almost a two hour wait by my watch. I have no moral objection to drinking during live poetry, but inhaling carcinogens adds little to my appreciation of art. If people are paying to hear poetry, are the participating poets pocketing much-needed cash? The "winning" poet gets \$50, a drop in this

bucket. Is the organizer getting rich? Probably not, unless he gets a cut of the bar's tab which is what this event is all about: the consumption of the bar's alcohol supply. The participating poets may be quite talented, but by the time each "performs" he or she is merely an organ grinder's monkey; the music of the cash register can always be heard in between strophes.

Chicago, like other major urban areas, encourages artistic "bombardment." Because "the cities have been built, not for man but for industry and profits," (Augustin Girard, *Cultural development: experience and policies*. Paris: UNESCO, 1972. p. 15.) leisure time activity is structured similarly, and it becomes another form of alienation. Jacobus is not empowered to conscript me into the service of any "invisible army." My battle is internal: to be the best poet I can be, period. That is the reason I moved away from the city; and if I ever read my work at the Slam, I would consider it a low point of my career.

by Glenn Sheldon

Cells

by Dorry Ross

She studied her freckled left breast in the cracked mirror, poking it with her right forefinger, wondering if the poison eating her showed through.

It wasn't fair.

Three weeks ago, her husband felt the lump while they were having sex. She ignored it — already had ignored it for two months — blaming it on nursing the baby. He told her mother. She made an appointment with the doctor. He took that lump seriously. He scheduled an operation in 10 days.

Suddenly she was special. Her mother cooked special meals. Her husband came home on time with special gifts — hankies,

earrings, golden boxes of fancy chocolates. Neighbors she hardly knew watched her baby. Church people who had paid her no attention gave her hugs and sent flowers and books about beautiful princesses who lived in romantic castles. The apartment never looked so pretty.

The 10 days passed too fast. Her pastor knelt beside the hospital bed and prayed for God's will and her salvation. Her mother wrung her hands and offered a trip to Disney World. Her husband cried and promised to reform.

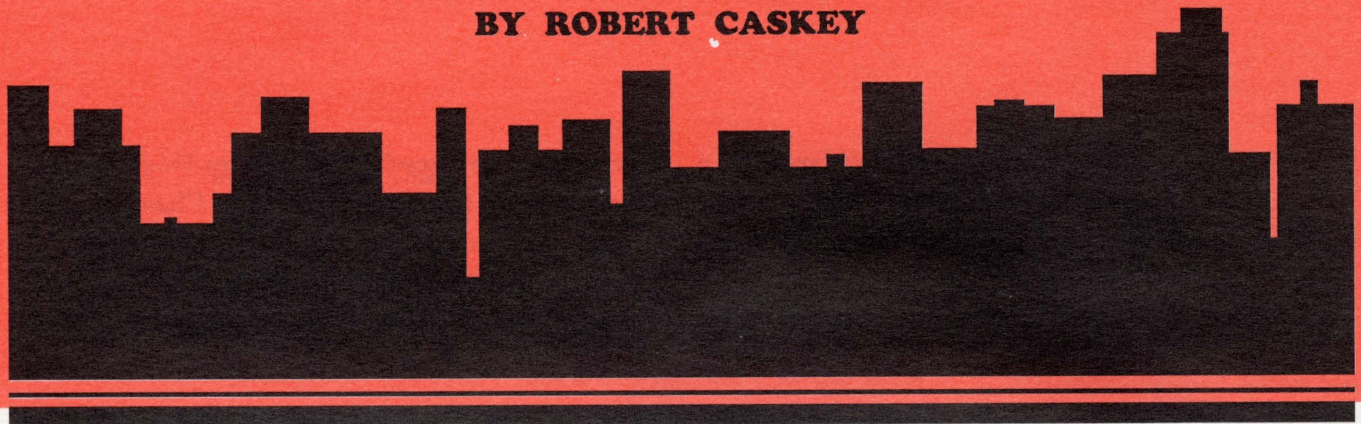
Then the doctor shouted into her anesthetized brain, "The lump is benign."

She'd soon be her old self.

It wasn't fair.

Chicago Poetry Scene

BY ROBERT CASKEY



I was excited to see very significant changes in *Overtures 1988* from previous years. The format was greatly enhanced and the poetry selection improved. Yet I was most intrigued by two articles in the back of the issue. Terry Jacobus outlined the history of Chicago competitive poetry while my friend Barry Cassilly penned the inaugural essay that bears the same title and goal as this article. An annual literary magazine is the perfect vehicle for providing the needed perspective on the changes in the Chicago literary community. I encourage *Overtures* to continue publication of such useful features in future issues.

As Mr. Cassilly pointed out last year, "What's happening with the poetry scene in Chicago? A great deal, I can tell you." The explosion of readings that we've witnessed over the past months is continuing unabated. Many very good poets are constantly surfacing and sharing their work. More importantly, as I will discuss later, there has been a good deal of consolidation taking place at the many poetry locations around town.

In this year's essay I'd like to briefly examine how the poetry scene has emerged in its present incarnation and where we're likely to go from here. I referred earlier to Terry Jacobus' "Pugilism in Poetry" article which appeared in last year's issue of *Overtures*. Mr. Jacobus accurately surveys Chicago poetry from the late 60's to the mid 80's. I accept his historical account as faithful to the truth. Yet I must respectfully distance myself from his final conclusion. Assuming that every influential poetry movement in Chicago has been born, become dominant, suffered a breakdown and died, Jacobus prophesizes the emergence of a "new age" movement in Chicago poetry. And he may be right.

But I'd like to propose a different analysis. If we limit our discussion to the next several years, I maintain that the current poetry movement will remain vital. Let me first define what I mean by the current "poetry movement". If we must name this movement, let us call it Chicago Performance Poetry. We can best define this movement by looking at the recent careers of two of the most influential Chicago poets of the mid to late 1980's.

More than any two other people Marc Smith and Carl Watson have shaped the fundamental form and content of the contemporary Chicago poetry reading. I met Marc at a session of *Alice's Restaurant* in Evanston. Always a little short on the necessary type of memory I can tell you it was very windy and dark but can't remember if it was during the fall of 1984 or the spring of 1985. Other people I recall at the workshop were Ron Gillette and Joe Roarty. Gillette went on to work with Marc Smith on

his next two projects.

The Get Me High Lounge was a proving ground for Gillette and Smith. They soon developed a loyal following. Almost simultaneously the Chicago Poetry Ensemble, at that time without name, was being formed. These two experiences validated Marc Smith's view of how contemporary poetry should be presented to the public. He was, and remains, convinced that the poet is fundamentally a performer. Not only is it necessary for the poet to rehearse her work and present it in a stylized form, the poem itself should be dramatic. Smith's best poems and finest shows with the Ensemble are/were highly cathartic.

Two distinct generations of poets have grown out of that experience and Marc Smith's next project, **The Uptown Poetry Slam** at the Green Mill. The first included Ron Gillette, currently running his own "Slam" in Milwaukee, Rob Van Tuyle (the Ensemble's current chief), Jean Howard, Tim Anderson (now **Get Me High** curator), as well as long time Ensemble members John Sheehan, Joyce Caskey and Mike Barrett. The second wave features such notables as Karen Nystrom, Pat Smith, performance artist Brigid Murphy of the **Orchid Show**, Inka Alsade, and Tony Fitzpatrick. I include Tony here because he gained his current wide popularity only after his appearances at the Slam and because his style is so reminiscent of the good Slam poets.

Marc Smith's influence will continue to prevail for one very good reason. As is the case with Carl Watson, Smith has nurtured **both** very good poets and poetry organizers who develop Smith's poetic vision. In that direction, the Chicago Literary Arts Coalition (CLAC), mentioned last year in Barry Cassilly's article, is really taking root. Currently CLAC publishes a monthly broadsheet with notices from local poetry events. The listing is mailed (at this writing) to 700 people. CLAC is also developing a database of poets and information on poetry venues. Given these activities, it seems unlikely that Marc Smith's influence on the Chicago poetry scene will diminish any time soon.

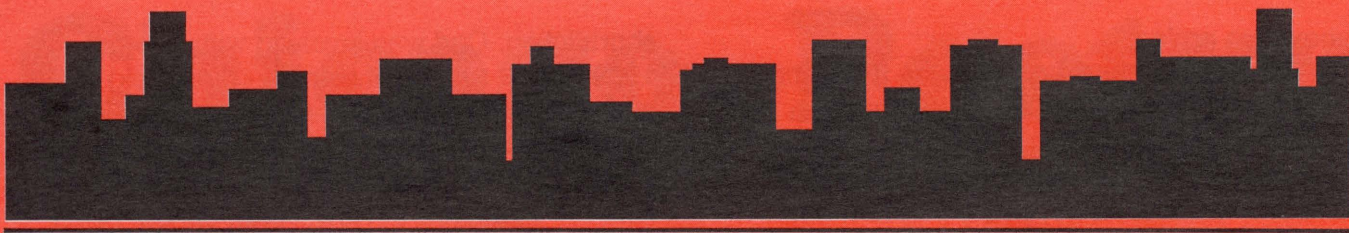
Carl Watson and the group of poets connected with Link's Hall (now **Lower Links**) also energized the local poetry community. Now living in New York and writing masterful

short fiction, Carl was involved with **Project 1999** (which may be making a comeback) before the mid 80's, but made his mark with his leadership at Letter eX and Links working with people such as Deborah Pintonelli, Sharon Mesmer (also now in New York), Jacqui Disler and too many more to recall here. Another project affiliated with this group is *B City* magazine edited by Connie Deanovich.

I think it is fair and useful to make a small distinction between the "Link's Poets" and "Green Mill Poets". Although Carl Watson continually called upon poets to be more expressive and promoted a lively debate in Letter eX on what a poetry reading should be, the "Link's poets" never aspired to reach the level of dramatic style promoted by Smith and his associates. Before I get into too much hot water with this appraisal, let me emphasize that these are general formulations and are not meant to offend or advance the cause of any of these individuals or groups. The influence of both groups continues to dominate the Chicago poetry scene. Letter eX is advancing under the editorship of Mr. Cassilly, and **Lower Links** is stronger than ever. At the same time the **Uptown Poetry Slam** endures as the most exciting and crowded poetry site.

In fact, I would maintain that these twin influences are further consolidating their hold over the collective imagination of local poets. Deborah Pintonelli and Lorri Jackson are recent featured poets at St. Mark's in New York. Tony Fitzpatrick and Seth Greene move their gallery to the south loop. Pat Smith reigns not only at the Slam championships, but also takes over the poetry series at the **Holsum Roc Gallery & Cafe**. Inka Alsade performs with a band, just like David Hernandez and Marc Smith. In my view, virtually all the organized local poetry events are heavily influenced by this "Chicago Performance Poetry".

What's next? I think the next few years will witness the strengthening of existing poetry venues. Even accounting for continued burgeoning public support and enthusiasm, it is hard to imagine that any more than two permanent weekly events can be supported per night. Already Monday (**The Get Me High** and **Weeds**), Wednesday (**The No Exit** and **The Gallery**), Thursday (**Lower Links**, **The Heartland Cafe**, **School Street Cafe**), and



Sunday (**The Uptown Poetry Slam** and **The Holsum Roc Gallery & Cafe**) seem to be booked. Maybe one or two nights a week could support three readings, but I doubt it. On the other hand, through personal observation of all these locations, I can vouch for the fundamental strength of the poetry sites listed here. All these venues will be active next year, when I hope, *Overtures* will commission another of these essays on the Chicago Poetry Scene.

The Green Mill. The top dog. The place is so popular they've added a "Nightcap" or second, late Open Mike.

Lower Links. This place is featuring both avant-garde and established poets. Wildly enthusiastic and big crowds.

Weeds. Gregorio Gomez sets the tone for this locale. Exploring other formats in addition to Open Mikes.

Chicago Filmmakers. You can always expect an exceptional show here. Very professional.

The Orchid Show. You ain't living if you ain't been at these monthly shows at the Lounge Ax. If it's Brigid Murphy, it's gotta be good.

The Holsum Roc Gallery & Cafe. The recently rejuvenated Poetry Tostada gets a shot in the arm with the arrival of new host Pat Smith. A great non-threatening place for Open Mikers.

DePaul University. DePaul finally hired a full-time poet and couldn't have done much better than Richard Jones. In the past few months he has organized exciting readings by Alice Fulton and Gerald Stern.

Batteries Not Included. The absolute latest word is that Batteries is going to be featuring poetry on Saturday nights. Quite a challenge for a bar. They have a great performance space and only lack a dynamite organizer.

The Gallery. A new entry into the weekly reading sweepstakes. Another Gregorio Gomez production. A quieter place than **Weeds**.

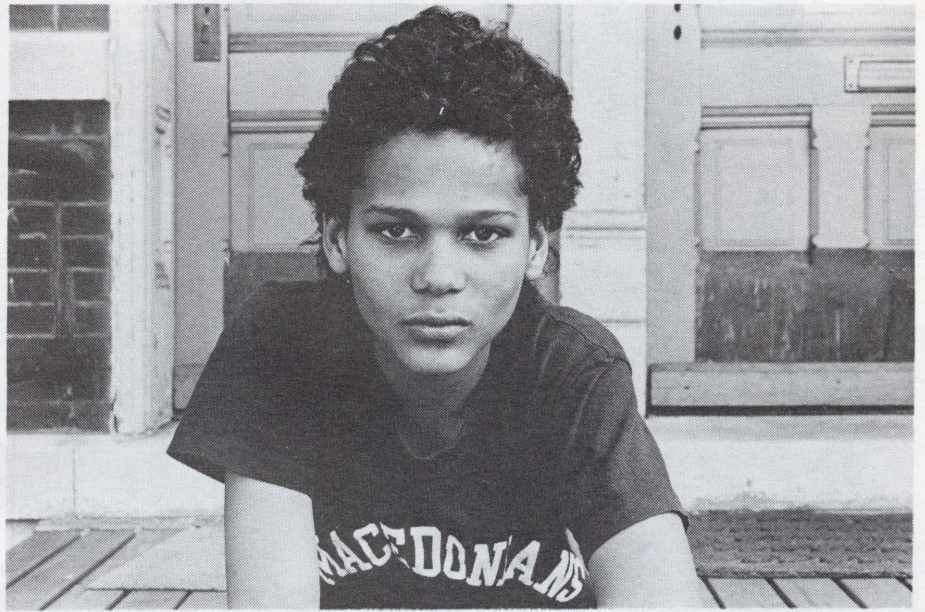
Northeastern Illinois University. Shows signs of joining the performance poetry bandwagon. Their choices for visiting poets have improved tremendously.

The Poetry Center. Unlike most poets I know, I frequent these readings. But they are not geared toward current Chicago poetry.

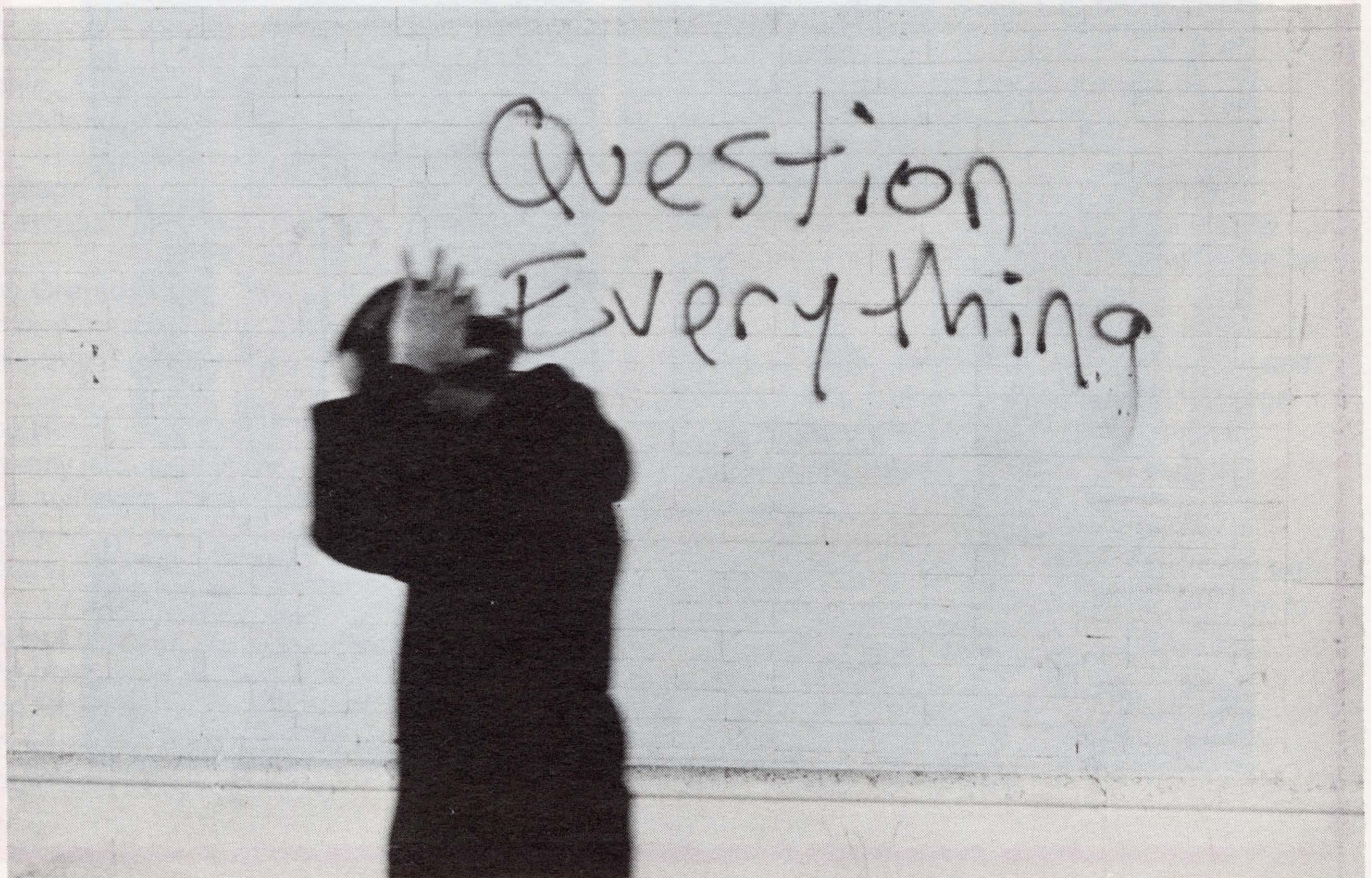
Guild Books. With appearances by such notables as Thomas McGrath, Reginald Gibbons, Tony Fitzpatrick, and Louise Erdich, this is one of the finest places to go to hear newly published work. Michael Warr does wonders with the space. He tells me that an expansion of the performance area will soon be a reality.

No Exit Cafe. I'm in love with this location and its tradition. It also draws a consistently large and young crowd. I never see the regular audience members of the No Exit at other readings.

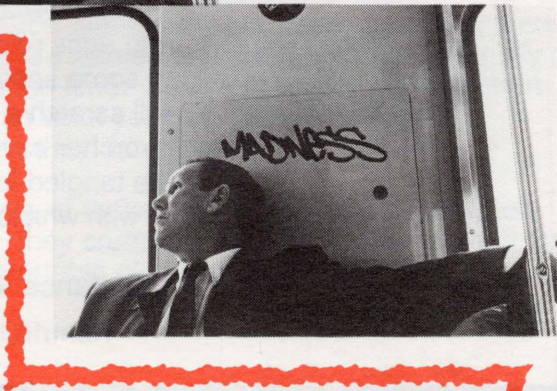
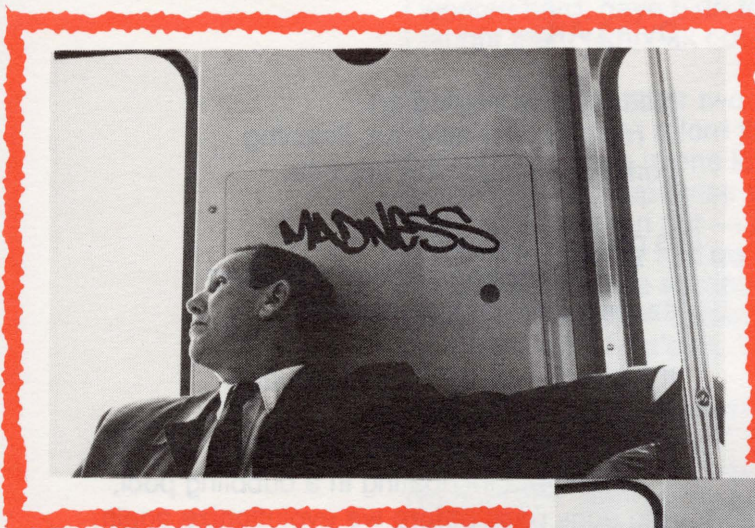
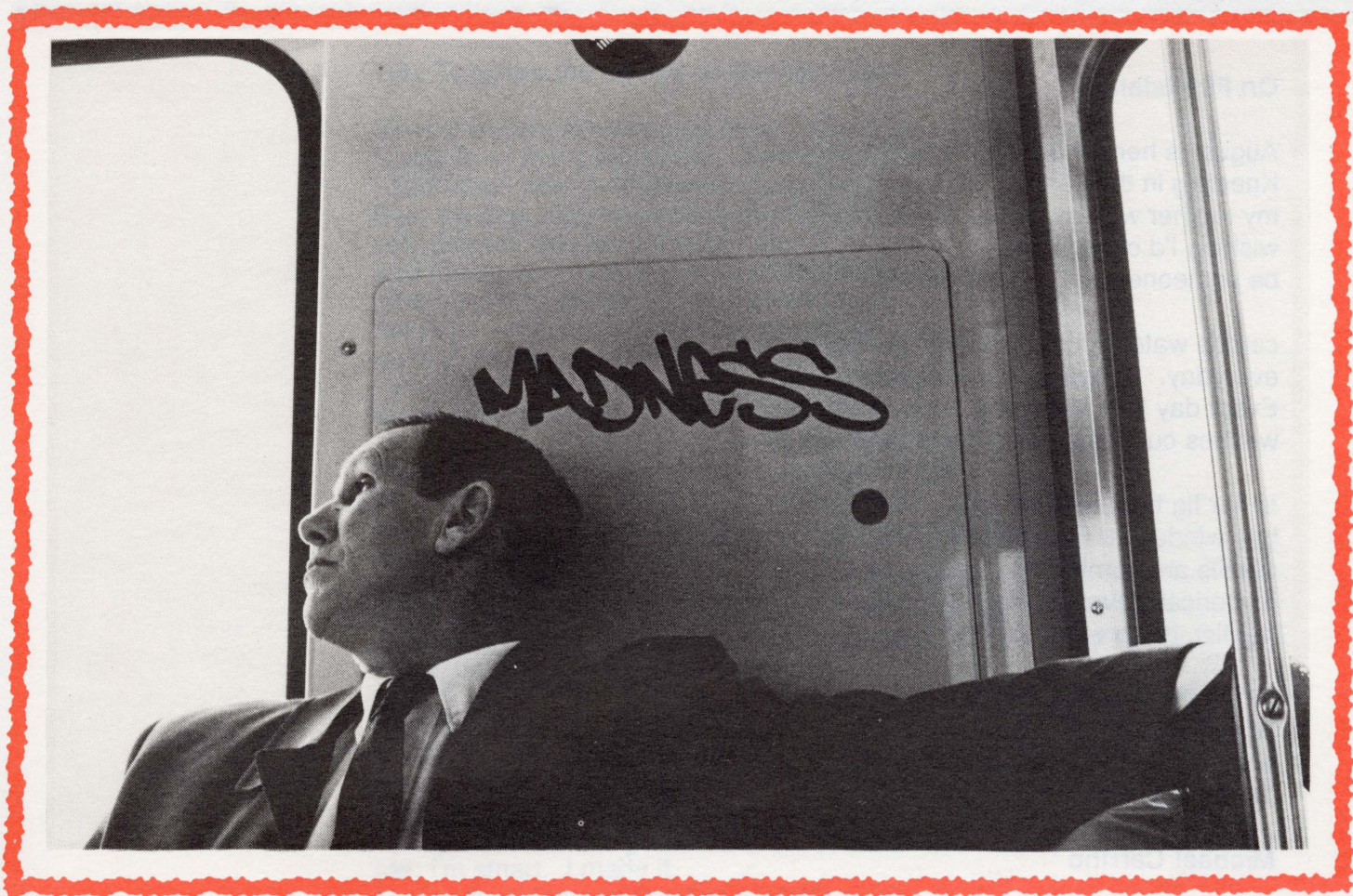
School Street Cafe. Another new location with a very bright future. From the sound system to the choice of drink, this is a first-class yet comfortable place. Seth Greene and Chris Murray have done a great job here.



Photographs by Tom Rand



Photographs by Tom Rand



On Fire Island

August is her desperate month.
Kneeling in the sand,
my mother worries rosary beads
wishing I'd change,
be someone else. An old woman

carries water to dead children in Nagasaki
everyday. It says so in a magazine.
Every day I try arranging August; my mother
washes cut glass below hand-sewn curtains.

Is her fig tree near the sink,
bay window or French doors? Misremembered
details are comforting. Demanding,
hysterical waves muffle my mother's prayer,
her list, her preference and expectation.

When the wind lifts her to her feet
I'll walk her home. Carelessly
seasons change without our gratitude.
Today is the shortest August day.

Michael Carrino

Dying Arts

Mothering is a dying art
my daughter tells me, flinching
from my hand taming her hair.

Is poetry dying, too?
The newspaper reports a reading
cancelled for lack of interest.

If someday we fight a global war
and more die than live;
if nothing survives but cockroaches
or bacteria incubating in a bubbling pool,
and eons pass before we evolutionize again,
some second-coming Cro-Magnon
will scratch a celebration of the sun
on her cave walls and comb
the tangled locks of her young
with whittled sticks.

Constance Vogel

Tilly Teaches the Secret of Mandel Brot

Mandel means almond, you know. But all we need
is vanilla — that's the secret. Now beat again.
I don't cook now — it takes too long on my feet.
See, my legs, they're swollen and I wear
soft slippers; this toe is twisted up.
Add the eggs — one at a time — but save one yolk.
How I loved to dance! I was a pretty girl —
red hair — down to here! They would have cut
my hair for lice — I almost didn't come.
I wrote to my uncle in America, "I'm not
afraid for work. I want to be treated right."

Mix in the flour — slowly now — *feel* the dough.
Moist it's got to be, not sticky though. There!
Now set it in the fridge to chill; we'll have a cup of tea.
My father didn't want me to go. I never
said good-bye. Mama, she took me to the station
while he was at work and the little ones off at school.
She cried 'till I thought we'd need another ark.
Hitler, he came and killed them all.

Now cut the dough in fives — roll them out
like snakes three fingers thick and lay them, so.
Brush on the yolk and sprinkle with the sugar.
You see now why I can't just give the recipe?
You got to watch — you'll learn with practice.
Me, I'm smart. I made it.
I knew three languages when I left Warsaw.
I came here, married a man with a business.
I worked hard, gave birth to two boys, you know.
I taught them to speak out — they visit when they can.

Did you know another two were never born?
I knew we couldn't afford them, living above
the weaving shop in one long room,
and who would supervise the rowdy shopgirls?
The first was taken out — cramps were hell
for awhile. I never told my husband.
He didn't ask. The second time I did it myself
(smart is more than books, I tell you!) —
jumping rope. That's all. Enough.

When they're golden brown, you cut them quick
on the angle, lay them on their sides
and bake awhile — turn and bake again.
I'm glad you married my grandson, gave him a son.
I'm glad you wanted to learn this — no one really cares
or takes the time. You want to give your children
more than what you got. You work hard.
You hope they don't forget.

Now some of these, they burn if you don't watch.
Too dry, they crumble. Too moist, you know, they spread
like comfortable old ladies in the middle.

Gail J. Lehman

Ellen

Buried in memory's marrow,
bone cold
November morning.
Steel and ice
sliced
like a dagger drawn
too quickly,
piercing a maiden's hands.

Too pink lipstick and a spit curl
they put on you.
Your hands that held the harvest,
the heat, the coolness, the snow
now white and folded
covered with cuts.

We wrapped you in your wedding dress,
crushed bones beneath.
Chiffon scarf, odd and out of time,
circled your neck
to hide the hell
of that early morning you flew
free of fetters:
overpass, car, gravity.
Airborne, your wings touched
sleeping sky
then plummeted to earth,
the car following
like a bad dream
pulverizing wings, bones,
hopes.

We weeping remained
while your spirit sailed
brightly toward the Sun.
You had heard your name called:
"Ellen, come out!"
And in your swaddling wedding shroud
you hopped toward the door, ripping
the silly scarf from your throat,
shaking the spit curl loose,
wiping the too pale pink
with the back of your healed hands.

That's what the blonde man told us.
We with our flowers stumbled
where the lawn had been
and found your marker missing.
Ellen came out,
so the blonde man says,
and ran away with the gardener,
and we were left
with a video of the bride
dancing in the Sun.

Maureen Noworyta

Taking Over Controls

taking over controls
the new season
sets its own time
on the city:
a sudden standard sunup
thick and yellow
a cyclone mist
laid sideways
blanking the concrete morning
with difference
misplaced leaves
an eye-shade walk
iron rail entrances
all slower steps
that make way
for the
lurking-behind-light wind
that colds streets

Joel Zeltzer

Smoke

Smoke curling
from a cigarette,
slow in a windless
room, is made of
words unspoken,
whole sentences,
repetitive, like
dreams, born on
the tip of fire
and gone; we try
to read what we
needed — need —
one after another
building up like
history, a love-
less time we try
to ground out,
only to relight.

Paul Genega

Longing: After The Chinese Poet Hsiung-Hung

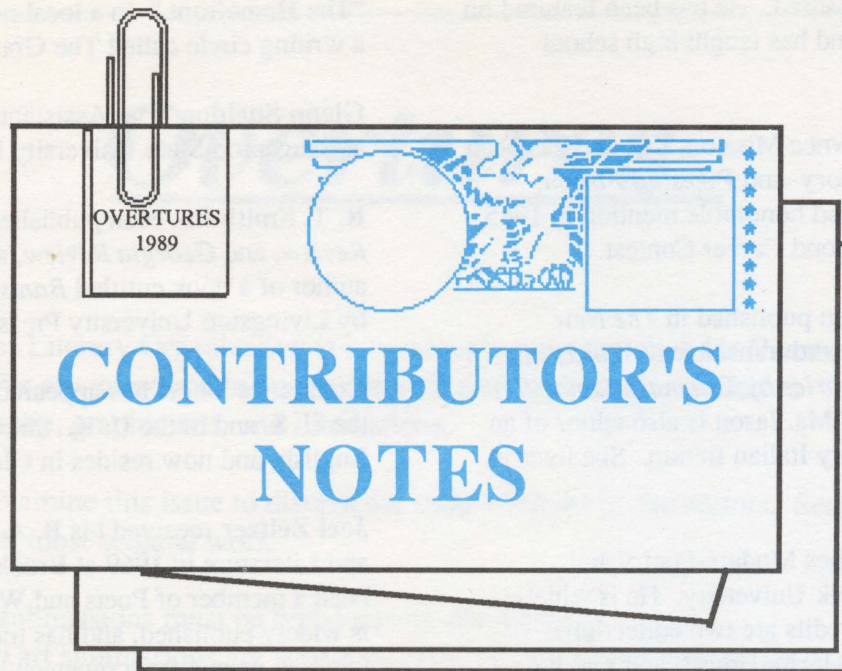
Fallen leaves big as a man's face
look up from the path.

You and I were a house, then
a room, finally a sill.
Caterpillars left their husks
on our back.

But sometimes when we looked away
or listened to light
stir the oak
the ancient song called us.
Then we rose and swayed,
tall grasses carrying a single current.

Until again that prince rode
in from the provinces
pushed open the door, threw
its shadow across the table
where we broke
and broke bread.

Carole Simmons Oles



B.B. Adams is an associate professor of English at Pace University, New York City, where she is also the Director of the Business Communications program. In 1989 she was poet-in-residence at the Cape Cod Writer's Conference, Craigville, MA. Ms. Adams is widely published in poetry, fiction, and essays. Her work has appeared in *Other Voices*, *The Nation*, *Poetry Review*, and *Negative Capability*, among others.

Robert Caskey has hosted the Poetry Tostada at Holsum Roc Cafe, and From the Heart at Heartland Cafe in Chicago. He is the Administrative Director of DePaul University's College of Law, Chicago.

John Dickson is retired, though not from poetry. He has been published in *Poetry* and many other magazines. His books, *Victoria Hotel* and *Waving At Trains*, were published by Thorntree Press.

Frances E. Gabino is a returning adult student at UNI majoring in Communications and Creative Writing. She says, "My work at UNI has put me on the path to self actualization again." She has been in the banking business for thirty-two years.

Levia Gallardo was born in Amapala, Honduras in 1962. He came to the U.S. in 1976 and received his B.A. in English Literature in 1987 at UNI. Gallardo

teaches English as a Second Language at Chicago City Colleges.

Gwynne Gertz returned to college after thirteen years. She is an undergraduate at UNI. "My philosophy in returning," she says, "is to try a little of everything, including creative writing." Last winter, Gwynne appeared in UNI'S Stageplayers production of *Killing Game*.

Roger Gilman is a professor of philosophy at UNI. His undergraduate degree is in English literature, and he is a former editor of the *Chicago Review* at the University of Chicago.

John Grey, born in Brisbane, Australia, moved to the U.S. ten years ago. He has been published in *Arete*, *Noospapers*, *Anemone*, and *Ransom*. Grey is also a singer/songwriter who performs in the Providence, Rhode Island area.

Harold N. Hild is a professor of speech arts and of the English Language Program at UNI. He is also the Performance Director of the Student Faculty Poetry Theatre at UNI.

Lawrence Hunt is a former editor of *Nit & Wit*. There he was responsible for propagating open poetry stages

which the magazine sponsored. He has been featured on *Dial a Poem*, Chicago, and has taught high school English for ten years.

Don Irving lives in Shawnee Mission, KS, and has been published in *The Long Story* and *Pikestaff Forum*, among others. He received honorable mention in 1985 as runner-up in the Raymond Carver Contest.

Katherine Jason has been published in *The New Yorker*. She is the editor and translator of *Words in Commotion and Other Stories by Tammasso Landolfi* (Viking-Penguin, 1986). Ms. Jason is also editor of an anthology of contemporary Italian fiction. She lives in New York.

Robert K. Johnson teaches Modern Poetry and Creative Writing at Suffolk University. He is widely published. Among his credits are two collections, *Blossoms of the Apricot* (Helix House) and *The Wheel of Daily Life* (MAF Press).

James Langlas has received awards from the Poets Club of Chicago and is chairperson of English at Wheaton North High School.

Gail J. Lehman is a senior at UNI. She writes occasionally. Before settling in Chicago Ms. Lehman lived in Cajun Louisiana and in the Adirondack Mountains of New York, both of which provide many of the scenarios for her writing.

Pamela Miller is widely published. Her work has appeared in *The Paris Review*. She has won prizes from the Illinois Arts Council and the Joanne Hirshfield Poetry Awards. Her poem "The Green Pelvis" was previously published in her chapbook, *Fast Little Shoes* and in *Oyez Review*. She lives in Chicago.

Charles Newson lives in Canada and has a short story coming out in *Edges*. He has spent the last nine years as a stage manager and properties master for a professional theatre.

Maureen Norworyta teaches journal writing and is a candidate for a Doctor of Ministry degree in poetry at the Graduate Theological Foundation.

Scott Owens resides in Charlotte, NC. He is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina, and is coordinating his first collection of poems which he intends to have published.

Dorry Ross instructs remedial English classes at the University of Delaware and publishes a weekly column,

"The Homefront," in a local newspaper. She belongs to a writing circle called The Grape Group.

Glenn Sheldon is an Assistant Editor of *Illinois Issues* at Sangamon State University in Springfield, Illinois.

R. T. Smith has been published in *Poetry*, *Gettysburg Review*, and *Georgia Review*, among others. He is the author of a book entitled *Banish Misfortune*, published by Livingston University Press.

Constance Vogel has appeared in numerous journals in the U. S. and in the U. K. She taught high school English, and now resides in Glenview, Illinois.

Joel Zeltzer received his B. A. in Spanish Language and Literature in 1969 at Brooklyn College. He has been a member of Poets and Writers since 1983. Zeltzer is widely published, and has translated over five hundred poems from nineteenth and twentieth century Spanish and South American poets. He lives and reads in the New York City area.

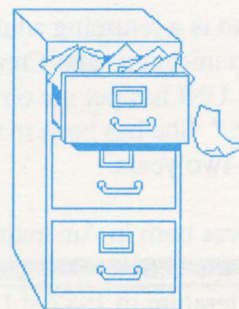
GRAPHIC ARTISTS

Gina Klauba is an art major at Northeastern Illinois University who specializes in jewelry and sculpture. She is the recipient of a UNI art scholarship and winner of the 1988 Northeastern Illinois University Student Show.

Beate Minkovski is an art major at Northeastern Illinois University. She is an active and vocal participant in both university and community art events and exhibitions. She is the recipient of a UNI art scholarship.

Tom Rand is a photographer whose subject matter is the streets and subways of cities. His photographs consist of images from Chicago, London, and New York.

Carolyn Hava Stern writes: "I want to challenge the reality of what I'm shooting and feed the fantasy of the viewer of my work." Carolyn is currently working on her B.A.



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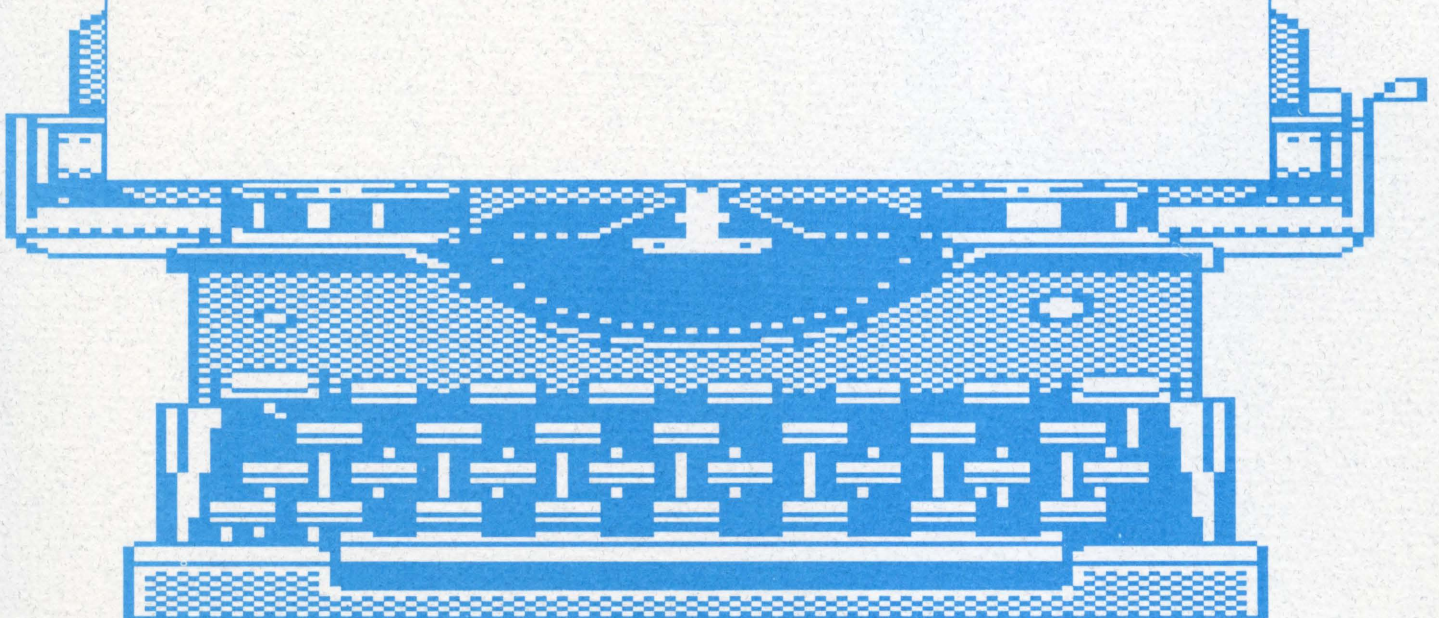
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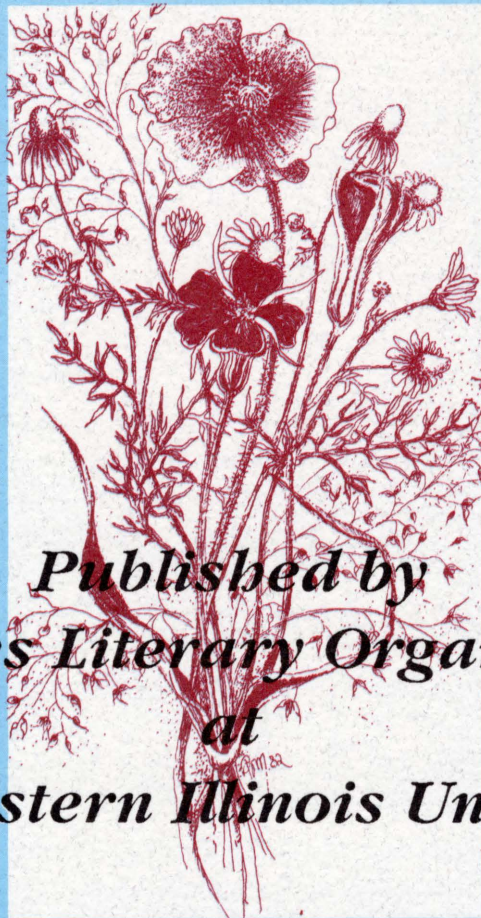
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