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riverSedge

a journal of

art

poetry

and

prose

Vol. IV No. 1



Vol. 4, No. 1



riverSedge

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riverSedge press

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Richard Peabody

**OF MAKING MANY BOOKS
THERE IS NO END**

All the words ever written
amount to nothing more
than a drop of rainwater
on a car window,
which a small child
will stop with its finger,
and then lick clean.

Katharyn Machan Aal

THE MAN READING HIS POEMS

Fat and short
he sits there
reading his poems,
fat with believing
people will listen,
short with knowing
they never have.
He looks the part:
stained gray shirt, pants
the color of aging rabbits,
hair yellowed
like greasy feathers,
eyes that mixture of milk and blue
reminiscent of shadowed marble.
I read a poem, too;
he tells me he likes it.
I am young, I whisper,
hoping to grow.
I am getting old, he pretends to laugh,
see where it may lead you.

Joan Rohr Myers

TENURE

The professor

wines

his lecture

in rimless

cups of doubt

sucked from

stacks

of dusty books,

with titles

crowning his head

like flies

he stumbles

over words

as easily

as a drunk

in the dark.



Nancy Cowing Umphres

Ronald James Costarella

A WRITER'S DREAM

The vast hall was jammed. The walls were dripping with anticipation. The great writer had finally agreed to speak to us. After months of wheeling, he had succumbed. He was on his way, we were told. We waited, hushed and poised.

All we asked from him was truth. We didn't seek wit, intelligence, wisdom, even sense. No, all we wanted was truth as dazzling as a child's smile. Nothing more or less should be expected of an artist, we were told, and we expected nothing more or less. If we could understand him--we didn't expect this--we would learn why we thought our thoughts and felt our feelings. We might even discover what thoughts we were thinking and what feelings we were feeling. But we didn't expect that. We had no right to, we were told.

He was drunk when he appeared--but we expected that; we were told that all great writers are drunks. He was short, he was dowdy, he was slovenly. We were told to expect dowdiness and slovenliness; we expected those. We weren't told about shortness; we didn't expect it. His shortness alarmed us.

The hall was dark. We led him gently up three steps to the stage, our fingers barely grazing his rumpled sleeve, and left him there alone. A spotlight found him gently trembling, swaying softly where we had left him. He looked frightened. His eyes were muddy with fright. He squinted out at us. We were there, hushed and poised. Another light plucked a wooden lectern out of the darkness and placed it at the front edge of the stage, in the center. He stepped softly into the darkness and walked with small quiet steps to the lectern. When he reached it, he slumped on it as if he had just crossed a vast desert, and his face glowed white with the light. He straightened and stared out at us. He couldn't see us, but he knew we were there; he could hear us breathing. He began to speak in a

soft quavering voice. He spoke about the artist as outcast and revolutionary, as vagabond and troubadour, as saint and sinner. His voice fed on his words, and grew robust. We fed him drinks on demand. He slurred his words and tottered; we took notes and steadied him. We fed him more drinks. (We were told to be compliant.) He drank and spoke, spoke and drank. He passed out. We broke for lunch.

We returned. We revived him and he rolled on like a perfect wave until he crashed and lost his memory in the undertow. He rambled and wept; some of us took notes, others dried his tears. We were alarmed. We gave him copies of his most recalcitrant book to autograph. (During this interlude we took no notes.) The pen trembled in his trembling hand and his name skipped from his mind. We steadied his hand and whispered his name in his ear. He said--to excuse himself or to offer us an intimate glimpse of his working habits, we cannot say--"I always work on a typewriter." We nodded, excuse or glimpse gratefully accepted. (We were told not to expect any excuse or glimpse.) His memory began to seep back, and soon a trickle of speech became a torrent. We took notes furiously. He gulped down more drinks. The more he drank, the clearer his speech became. Soon he was speaking diamond clear. He read us long rambling sections from his books. They were about us, he said. We were flattered. He read us stories about pimps and whores and thieves and murderers--we were flattered--and poems about the death of God, the death of love, the death of death. We wept for their beauty. He wept too--and vomited. We broke for dinner.

We returned bloated and eager, hushed and poised. We rummaged our notes and found nuggets of truth--sharp jagged nuggets on which we cut our fingers. We bled. We led the writer to the stage. His sleeve was smeared with our blood. He was no longer weeping or vomiting, but his cheeks were streaked with the dried paths of tears, and his face was pallid and puffy. He stood short--his shortness was appalling and alarming--and nearly straight, leaning only a little on the lectern and occasionally sipping from a tall frosted glass. He invited us to ask him questions. We were alarmed; we didn't expect this. We cast glances, we averted our eyes, we looked askance. Questions? Questions about what? His books? We were ignorant. His life? We were squeamish. We sat mute, hands tightly knotted, hoping his invitation would melt into a puddle we could mop up later. But it didn't melt; it froze, Standing on a glacier, he encouraged us, he chided us, he hectored us; finally, he shamed us into asking him a question.

Timidly, a wisp of a voice in the middle rows carried the question into the air. It floated a short distance, then dropped. He asked the asker to speak louder. He leaned forward, straining to hear. The repeated question fell into our laps like petals from a dying rose.

"What?" he shouted. "What? What?" His face was livid; his knuckles were white against the dark wood of the lectern. We were alarmed; we were puzzled. Was the question too trivial? (We were ignorant.) Or too impertinent? Or too meddlesome? Or too indelicate? Or did he fear incipient deafness? What was at stake?

He hadn't heard. We were relieved; we were anxious. "Please, please," he begged. (He was almost sobbing now.) "PLEASE! STAND! AND! SHOUT!" He was screaming.

Someone stood and shouted.

A smile sprang on his face like a trap on a rat. He had heard; we were relieved. We exhaled in unison and blew him down. He picked himself up and refused to answer the question. Refused to answer the question! We were outraged; we felt tricked, toyed with, humiliated. We pleaded with him. He was adamant. We plied him with liquor; we offered him precious cargo; we promised him an amusement park. His eyes twinkled, but he shook his head no. We tried shaming him, but when he seemed to be enjoying it, we stopped. We called him a hack. He winced and stiffened. Hack-hack-hack, we chanted. That triggered him; he shot his answer at us in languaged so blunt and explosive it pinned us to the backs of our chairs. We blushed and broke for a break.

We returned. It was growing late; we were running out of liquor. The writer was tired of standing. We fetched him a chair and a bottle of bourbon. He smiled in appreciation and drank from the bottle. He told us about the pain of creating, the frustration of being misunderstood, the anguish of not being understood at all. He said writers were beings possessed. (We were alarmed.) They alienated wives, friends, pets, delivery men, even themselves. They were alone. (We were sad.) But there was no escape, he said. No way out. Artists had to create or die. He fell asleep.

We were deeply moved, profoundly touched. We wept. To show our appreciation, we wanted to applaud, to toss foreign coins, to hurl bunches of dried flowers. We would have stood and shouted and clapped and tossed and hurled for hours, but we didn't want to wake him. We filed out of the hall silently. We looked back as we were leaving. He was still sleeping, warmed by the spotlight, with the bottle in his hand and a smile on his face.

William M. White

**MY FRIEND IN THE OBIT IS
TEN YEARS YOUNGER THAN I AM
AND IN MUCH BETTER HEALTH
UNTIL YESTERDAY**

Apples and men rot slowly
Each in their time
And only at night
In a moist wind
In a moon-clad shadow
Before the ice
Does truth appear
Just once.



Dorey Schmidt

Jan Seale

COMING DOWN THROUGH OKLAHOMA

In McAlister there's a big shadow out from town aways
and jailbreaks get first priority on the local station.

Oklahoma City they specialize
in different kinds of crime like
freezing teenagers in meatlockers
and shooting families but not their dogs
on supermarket lots.

And out in the little towns
someone's always torturing a church secretary
or a paraplegic.

Once we saw an 18-wheeler explode
and burn at a roadside park
just north of Red River.
"Something got too hot coming down
through Oklahoma," the man said.

My mother writes from Enid
there was a little boy abducted
from in front of her TG&Y
so be careful in Texas too.

The land suffers its history out
in its people.
The wheat fields seduce the harvesters.
Cantaloupes perfume before they stink,
and oil fields pump books
into new living rooms.

Why do my Scotch-Irish uncles
from Oklahoma look like Indians?

My grandfather writes of the
Indian Territory in 1898,
"Every bridge we came to
seemed to have snakes under it
for which we took a little poison,"

and of his train ride
in the Eastern I.T.,
"Upon looking out the window
I discovered that mountains
were causing the darkness."

They tell us Oklahoma
is getting known all over
for its cancer centers.
It's like the man said,
Something got too hot
coming down through Oklahoma.

Edward C. Lynskey

EASYCHAIR

This is Washington.

At every corner

a newspaper hawk's necklaces

of bones sucked clean.

Everyone carries the city in his pocket.

A streetlight flicks

its ashes on a bench.

The Potomac slides

murky under the high heels of Memorial Bridge.

I latch the windows,

draw the shades, stuff

the keyhole with mothballs.

David Ruenzel

THE UNIVERSE OF THE SMALL TOWN

The pungent odor of fresh tar
is an attribute of a universe
usually no bigger than a neighborhood,
no smaller than the porch
Now it expands as a dog
howls from a nearby yard,
the universe no more limited
than the crescendo of a siren,
than the line of a train
clattering out there
in the dark

Paul A. Lamphear

CADENCE

Leming, George West, and all points south,

Sighs to another anthill stop.

The station crawls with prospect and fatigue

As they push the crust of travel out,

Feed on the driver with baggage dangling,

Then clench like parasites to their seats.

Roads whore across hot Texas

Tickled by autos and grapefruit trucks.

U.S. 281 sleeps in the cactus and brush,

Awake to the horns and dance of sun,

Accumbent in the percussion of night,

She bellies under the buswheels

To dream of scrubtangle dawn,

Drawn mat in sequin sweep.

HUB
CAFE

NO
TRUCK
TRAILER
PARKING
ANY TIME
←

JCT

BUSINESS

83

Coca-Cola

Large T-Bone Steak	2.25
Filet Mignon	1.85
Prime Steak	1.85
Wain Steak	2.25
lb Steak	1.50
Red Chicken	1.25
above with French Fries & SALAD	

The
SAHARA
Lounge
AIR CONDITIONED

FRIED CH
To Go

George McLemore

Roger Jones

**A WHIPPOORWILL CAUGHT IN TOWN
to Nancy Young**

A transformer kicks on,
growling dully.
Cars gnash up and down
the Interstate
in an epilepsy of travel.

Within these sounds
his small tones
drip into the
living pools of themselves.

I rise from my bed,
go to the window,
thinking about yellow farms,
and open the window wide.
Spring winds
brawl through the curtain lace,
the blinds clap the walls.

From where he sings
the city must rise
imminently around him
like four walls
of dark, gray fire.



George McLemore

Patricia Grant

THE RIDE

Vachel turned right off the bridge onto Belle Isle and turned right again to reach the outer edge, the longest drive of the park. Ada sighed as if she had found her way home and could kick her shoes off. They said nothing. They passed the canoe rental, a long low open building with rows of stacked aluminum canoes that flashed in the last light of the day. Out on the water people were bumping into each other, in a rush to save a penny, their voices rising to the trees, falling back from another century in a different tongue. The hollow clang of the canoes floated down the canal, disappeared at the bend. Water dripped from the tips of wooden paddles.

Vachel remembered when the canoes were green and made of canvas, when the varnished ribs were almost human. "They're not Indians, that's for sure." He spoke more to himself than to Ada but was pleased to hear her laugh.

"They're only having fun. Don't be so critical." Ada was grateful for the breeze that came in the window and for Vachel next to her. It was good to know she could call him anytime and ask him to take her for a ride.

"I don't see them out here in the winter playing in tepees."

"Of course not. Why should they? That wouldn't be any fun." She looked west at the buildings lining the river, on one side, Detroit, the other, Windsor, and her heart stopped when she saw the sun. It was an orange, hanging just at the edge of the water between the cities, its peelings scattered seven miles up the river to the island.

She was relieved when the road turned away from the view of the sun and the burning buildings, passed Scott Fountain, its white sculpted dolphin's turned salmon this time of day, and moved along the edge of the island that faced Canadian trees and cottages, the

trees nearly black, the cottages whiter than possible. At the shore people folded lawn chairs that snapped below their yawns. They looked around for stray beer cans, a way to delay going. Water crawled over the rocks. The people moved slowly, exhausted from the day, like children playing outside called home to bed, obeying but taking a last look at the needles of minnows spinning around the rocks as if set crazy by like magnets. Arms were stretched by the weight of red coolers and brown shopping bags, or raised, waving their own children in, shirts and blouses curling to the wind like flags. Ada listened to car doors slam, trunk lids thump and knew in half an hour the island would be empty of everything visiting but litter and lovers. She sighed again and wondered where they were all coming from, those sighs. It was not like her. Groan, maybe, raise her voice, cry. But sigh? They passed the Casino, the Conservatory, the aquarium, and she thought of her mother sighing and was as startled by her inheritance as she had been moments before by the sun.

"Let's drive through the woods while there's still some light." Ada pointed to the turn-off and the car cornered in the direction of her finger tip as if pulled by a string, indeed pulled by a string of history more permanent than she could hope for, stronger than she could dream. Vachel wanted her happiness, she realized, even if he could only show it in short drives through woods, by staying sober for a couple of hours.

The light in the woods made her think of loose gold stitches running through a heavy green and black material. She could not recall where she had seen it or when, and the inability to place it annoyed her, she who had a perfect memory for every detail down to the smallest soap bubble bursting into a thousand rainbows in the kitchen sink. In a very short while, the stitches would be gone, the woods would be grey, and then she would not be able to find it at all, which meant she would wake up in the middle of some night, months from now when it would not matter, stunned by the connection and lose sleep. She heard herself sigh again. "Damn."

"What's wrong?" Vachel lifted his foot from the accelerator, ready to break, certain Ada had left a one hundred dollar bill on the coffee table in full view of robbers, or, worse, she had left something cooking on the stove.

"Oh, I don't know, Vachel. I'm getting old." The trees nearly stopped and it dawned on her she had not been feeling the car move at all, had thought the trees had been moving like long slants of rain pushed by the wind, just missing the windshield, sweeping around the car. She was glad to have it righted. "I've taken to sighing."

"Is that all?" He let his foot fall back to the accelerator. "That's not as bad as living in the past."

"What do you mean?"

"I lose time--you know, the present--and when I get back, I'm not certain where I am or how I got there or what happened five minutes before."

"It's all that booze."

He thought a minute about blacking out and decided that was not what he was talking about. "No, I don't think so."

She knew it was not the booze because the same thing happened to her at times, and, even though she trusted life, trusted god, it frightened her, gave her the feeling of a big blank that said there was no meaning to life, and, even, god forgive, there was no god. "We're not that old, are we?" She really did not want to talk about it because talking about things made them real.

"Old enough. Next in line." He pressed the car forward slowly. There was no hurry: Twilight would bow to blackness soon.

"What a terrible thing to say."

"Yes."

The woods greyed like an old photograph. The sun had sunk and left its memory in twilight, its only known shadow.

"But true enough, I suppose."

They drove on in silence until the woods ended, and Vachel pulled out onto the paved road. "Too bad we didn't get to see the deer."

"Maybe next time."

The street lamps eased on when they reached the tip of the island that pointed like an arrowhead to Lake St. Clair, cutting the river in two, half for Ontario, half for Michigan. Ada looked out over the black water, its edges marked by strings of lights, and up at the clouds, fuzzy from the reflected glow of the city. She had not noticed the moment when it turned completely dark. Seeing the blackness came as a surprise, and she remembered her mother saying nothing ever happens suddenly, there's always a build-up, you can trace it all you want and never find the beginning, but one thing for certain is that nothing ever happens suddenly. "Let's get a cup of coffee and watch the freighters."

Vachel pulled in front of the concession and turned off the engine. "Do you want to come or wait here?" His hand was on the door handle.

"I'll wait."

He opened the door and Ada watched him step over a fallen ice-cream cone which had melted into three wobbly circles with tentacles that ended in a tired grey. She saw him get in line, noted there

were five others ahead of him, and calculated it would take ten minutes. The yellow lights gave the scene the color of home movies when they first came out and no one knew how to use their light meters. Green flies sucked at the chartreuse mustard dispenser. The faces of the people were jaundiced. Two cars away, a radio blared some wild, colored-people music she could not understand and did not want to hear. She turned her face away from the concession and did not know she was crying until the tears hit her neck.

When Vachel opened the door, the light came on reminding Ada of the question about refrigerators children loved to ask, her children, grinning, proud of their clever probing of one of life's mysteries. Vachel slid into his seat and handed her the paper cups. She flipped open the glove compartment whose light also popped on and put the cups on the horizontal door, just so, as if she were setting a table, and a small laugh squeaked out as gratuitously as the lights had come on.

"What's funny?" Vachel started the engine.

"It's too silly to tell you."

He pulled away from the glowing concession and circled back to the Coast Guard Station where he parked. "Good. There's a bench." He walked around the car to open Ada's door and was struck in the darkness by a tenderness that had been trailing him for days. His arms became as heavy as tree trunks, his chest as deep as the Windsor tunnel. He wanted to be kind to Ada, not just to open this door, but to be kind, to give her a rest. He pulled the door open and watched her legs emerge like two full roots and thought if he did not watch out he would fall in love with her again and start all kinds of trouble he was too old to take. "Be careful."

"I will."

He took her by the elbow and led her to the bench, wondering at the silliness of thinking of love at a time like this, wondering if it were the first stages of senility. He had fallen down earlier this day and that was an old man's trick. Was he now turning into a dirty old man? No, they looked at young girls and dribbled in their pants. He was looking at a woman he had known for forty years and feeling the hollowness, the weakness that comes when the most one can say is "Be careful."

They sat on the bench and sipped the coffee which was as black as the river before them, as hot as the day had been. The water curled around the rocks and reached into the roots of the grass, hissing, then slid back into itself as lightly as a run on a harp. The horns of freighters crawled up and down the river announcing their silent ships which pressed the water aside, pushing it shoreward in

swollen waves that splashed like shovels full of broken glass, one after the other. With the freighters gone, the water returned to the hissing of its natural business.

"Why did we never marry?"

Vachel, deafened by his thundering inadequacy and the river beating behind it, heard her voice but not the words, as one can hear a song without listening to it. He turned to her when the last vibration struck the base of his skull and saw her face, faded blue in the darkness, and was not certain he recognized her. "What?"

"You heard me." She set her coffee down between them.

"Yes, I guess I did. Yes, I did." He looked to his feet for the answer, hoping the familiar would tell him. "Why did we never marry. . ." He looked across to the Canadian lights for the answer, wondering if the foreign could tell him. "Maybe we did." He crumpled his paper cup into a small hard ball. "Maybe we've lived together in separate houses for years."

"Oh, you know what I mean. *Marry.*" Ada wanted to know. She wanted that at least settled. Too many things were spinning down the drain and she could not keep up, could hardly watch. It would make a difference if she would understand just one thing, if she would hold one hard thing at the end of it all, if she could say *This meant something*. Things got away so quickly. Babies didn't stay babies, children didn't stay children. They went away. Turn around and they're gone and the world you've made has disappeared, and it wasn't what you expected of life, it wasn't what you planned. Now it was nearly gone. All but Vachel. She reached for her coffee and sipped it indifferently. "Well, Vachel. What do you think? Why didn't we?"

She should not have asked that question. It was better to let habits go unexplained. Her stupid question hardened the love he had just been feeling back into the anger he had lived with dispassionately for the last 35 years, the anger that began when he knew she had betrayed him. "You married someone else." He did not like the tightness in his voice and wished he had not spoken.

"You went away." She spilled the remainder of her coffee on the ground. Catching light from a passing car, it made a long silver slash through the air and broke into pins as it sprinkled the ground. She set her jaw. He always blamed her, always. After all, it was not she who had gone anywhere. She had stayed put. He. He left. What was she to do? Sit on her hands and rot? Stop living her life?

"There was a war." His head filled with the greyness of it, the quiet terror, the waiting, harder to take than the noise: and in the middle of it, the letter, the one that said, *I don't know how to say*

this so I'll just say it I'm married, the three cent missile that penetrated his chest, imbedded in his spine, refused to heal, flamed on rainy days. The rest of the war was a blur: he took no other wounds, though he tried.

"The point is you were away, Vachel." She grew uneasy and regretted starting this talk, for the truth of the matter was that Vachel simply had never forgiven her and never could. "It happened very quickly."

"You always bring that 'very quickly' garbage up, when you know that it did not happen quickly." He stood and threw the ball-ed cup into the river, and it did not clunk and sink like a rock as he wanted but bobbed like a bell-less bouy, a meaner insult than Ada's "very quickly." He slumped back onto the bench. "You were finished with me. You used my being away as an excuse."

"How can you be finished with being in love?" Ada sensed her life was not drawing forward to a conclusion, but moving backward to a beginning, a kind of unraveling: this piece was tied to that; it is no longer; it cannot be re-tied; the strands are stretched. Had she stopped loving Vachel? And was that stopping there in the beginning? She felt woozy: all this talk was an utter mistake. Why did she bring it up? "Let's just forget it. Forget I ever asked."

Vachel ignored her; he was on the track of something and was not about to stop until he clutched and caught or clutched and missed. He remembered how afraid he was when he began to notice she could look at him without smiling, pass him without touching. Then she was able to sleep in his bed. It was not long after that that she stopped the night visits altogether, saying it was impossible to come up with the lies that made their times, though rash and dangerous, smooth and devoid of shotguns or other recriminations. When she began to kiss him as a mother kisses a son, he knew it was finished. "Yes." He stood and kicked a stone. "It stops when the boredom hits."

"Boredom?"

"Boredom. There comes a time when if you don't marry and have babies and start buying houses and cars and insurance policies, the boredom will hit, and there is nothing to keep you from noticing it. The miracle is gone, and once you know it is gone, really gone, well, you can't lie your way back to it, once that happens. You'll find any excuse not to marry." He sat. The bench wobbled.

"I was not bored with you." She folded her arms under her breasts. The weight against her body pressed like a knotted rope. It was true, what Vachel said, but for something to be true was not enough. You had to go beyond, and she could not and neither could he.

"Yes, you were, long before you knew it." He stiffened to conceal his heaving chest. This was the closest they had ever come to having it out, and he did not want to lose the little of Ada he had had all these years.

"What makes you say that?" She hated it when he made declarations about how she felt, when he pretended to know her better than she did herself. That was one of the things that was wrong with him.

"Even when you were young, you needed someone to give you a sense of victory." He stood again and his arms hung at his sides like broken branches. "I was too easy. I did whatever you wanted without an argument."

"That is not true." She sank into herself and did not want to say or hear any more words.

"Yes it is."

"No. It's not." Ada rose and the bench creaked. "Let's head back now."

Vachel followed her to the car.



George McLemore

Lyn Lifshin

GUILT

grows like fur
on a melon over
night don't look
too close and it's
like a blue shadow
a soft glow that
won't scrape off
as easy as you've
heard spreads
invisible roots
deep into what it
touches so you're
left not knowing
what is ruined
and what isn't

Robert F. Whisler

REPRISALS I

It's snowing canaries and parakeets.

Their feathers float down and fly

in the cross-currents of wind.

Their bodies lie naked and shivering

white as snow. Their song is silent.

The blood in their veins congeals.

Soon they will turn blue and cats

and dogs will eat them up.

Ted Daniel

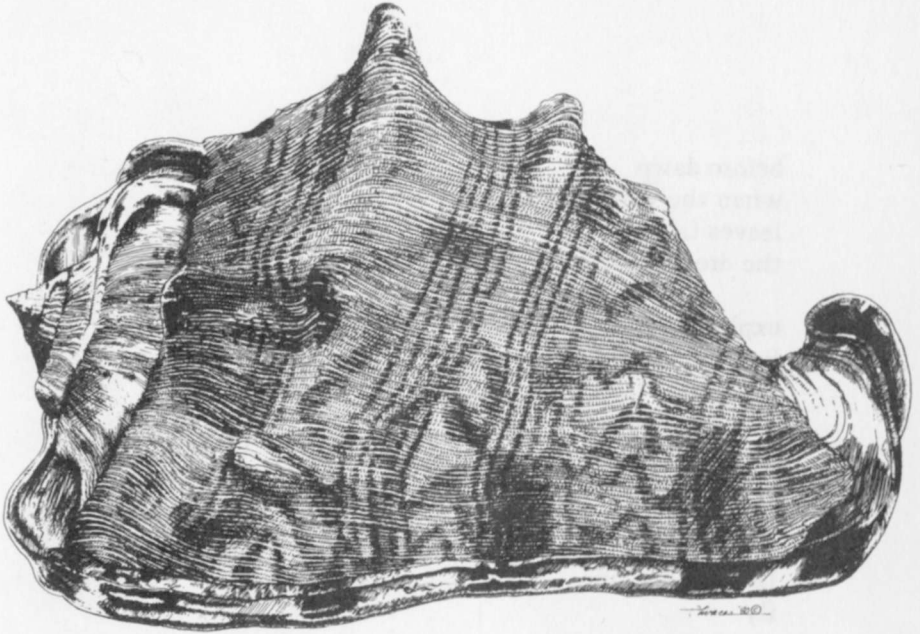
ON WAKING THE DEPRESSED

they hide
like naughty children
smothered in dreams
thick as blankets

bad eyes
closed like drowning pirates
behind night's patch

till dawn flies open

and they rise
blind as mushrooms
in morning light



David Olivares, Jr.

Ted Daniel

DREAMER'S SEARCH

before dawn
when the wind stops,
leaves fall. Then,
the dreamer dives,

exploring sleep like a sea cave:
fingertips surprised, twitching;
sex erect—thrust
like an anchor in the sea bed —
drags the darkness,
wild. . .

his eyes —
like sudden fins —
fly.

Thomas Bost

A LIZZARD'S SHARE

A spindly spike holds a head against the sun

Casting a shoestring shadow

No more than a lizzard's share.

A reed driven by yesterday's wind,

Planted by some passing flight,

Lifts the last bloom high

Before the winter frost that night.

David Olivares, Jr.



David E. Cowen

PROMETHEUS ON THE ROCKS

he savours his meal of savior's liver
and smiles at my chains,
making his appointment for tomorrow.

I heal,
and he returns.

but one morning
the sun will shine in his eyes
and while the light blinds him
these links will be broken
and I'll make a pillow of him.

Robert B. Bowie

HERITAGE

in the wind there is a
grace of lakes
you turn to it as
a series of strange events
a friend of hosts

it takes you to a place
you never come all the
way back from

your flesh has long known
its counseling

your songs are its songs

your blood is the blood of
its blood and revivalist

Richard Gaillard

THE VARIOUS WORMS

I believe in grease worms
That eat machinery
And rust farm tools
While a man is sick,
And wind worms
That gnaw flags
And truck tarps
And elbows out of good coats;
And I believe I sense today
The silent gnawing
Of an unfamiliar worm
beginning to feed
upon things
Which I cannot repair.

Peter Krok

NIGHT

Solitude wraps the evening
with black linen gauze.

Night enters in my pores;
I listen to the undertow.

The solemn spider dozes
in his airy castle web.

The lightning bug squirts
his lemon-pill flame.

I sit on the edge of my eyeball;
the silence hugs me like a shawl.

Richard Gaillard

I USED TO USE A GUN

I used to use a gun
As an excuse
To walk the fields,
Much the same as other folks
Use Sunday as an excuse
To be idle
And visit,
But I've since left the gun in a closet;
For I became aware one day
That something in its turn
Was stalking me.
And now I walk along the ridgelines,
Exposed, unarmed,
With the vague hope
That whatever is hunting me
Will take courage
And show itself,
That I may see its form
Before I die



Ansen Seale

Jan Seale

**SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE,
I HEAR YOU**

“At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification . . . all the rest had passed away.”

--Preface to Kubla Khan

I got out of bed in the dark
with the most moist poem
I had ever thought.
It felt right.
It smelled right
and was holding still.
I turned on the light
because obviously,
I said,
I can't see the lines
unless there's light.
I found a pencil.
The thing immediately
jumped down,
crawled under the bed
and refused to come out.
All night it made
obscene lumps
in my mattress.

Joyce Meier

GREEN CUSHIONS AT JARNIE'S

I have forgotten a lot.

"Of course," you say, "you've forgotten a lot. It's been thirty years or more," and then, in respect for what has happened, you remain quiet and though I've forgotten so much, I don't want to deny your respectfulness, so I sit quietly too. I think, thoughñabout the parole board that you tell me is meeting next month to review my case. Your eyes are watchful and they try to read some honest emotion in my face as I agree to tell you again about Carla. As I agree to set down as truthfully as I can the story of your mother, Carla.

So with the sun filtering through that cracked window over your head, making no obvious effort, but somehow finding its way through the grime, the two of us watch each other for signs of needing each other and we lean back a bit, away from the screen that divides us, and you study me while I think of that young woman again -- that Carla.

Merely closing my eyes, I can bring Carla's face back to me. Through all the kaleidoscopic colors -- the pinks and mauves and blues and, always, corals -- that fall into perfect designs on the floor of my mind and through all the shades of our desire for each other I can see that face and my heart twists with each shake of my head and the colors scatter every which way before they find their new patterns and then I see that it was like that with us.

And it could have been different . . . so different.

She is always on my mind. I picture her against a stark white wall -- stuccoed -- in a straight back sitting position with an umbrella or picture hat in bright colors in her hand, and the hand, dainty with a

wisp of lace at the edge, falls away from her lap, as though she wanted you to think her posing like that was something she enjoyed, though her nature was not to deceive. Her objective did not lie in complicity. Carla had a plainness of purpose and a simple directness about her and she was never at ease in giving false impressions. Maybe that is why, when I think of her now, I catch a glimpse of the wry smile that was part of this discomfort, and I see it for what it was rather than her impatience with me, which I thought it was. To go back into those mildewed crevices of my mind, is my hobby now. Almost it has become a duty I perform by myself to absolve one unconscious, premeditated, kindness, which is considered outrage.

It is funny I would forget that space between Carla's front teeth that you mention. If you hadn't said just now that the space was there, it would never have occurred to me, and I would only remember those small white teeth of hers being even as a row of white corn. We remember what we will. We worry about things that are not perfect about ourselves, don't we? Hoping for approval in the face of our imperfections and seeing only what we want to see in others. But about that matter of Carla's mouth; all I reflect on now is the plumpness and ripeness of those coral lips of hers. When I wasn't staring into her freckled eyes, I was conjuring up all kinds of brave and beautiful attempts at kissing her mouth.

If anything, I thought I would forget Carla's friends. My mind has a way of protecting me from my own misfortunes. I could never remember if Verna was going with Paul and Betty Jane with Harold, or if it was vice versa. What I do remember is that wood dance floor of the bar out on the highway where we danced and drank beer on Saturday nights during those years right after the big war. I guess I've seen a million of those roadside oases since then and they all smell the same and have the same damn Budweiser clock on the wall behind the bar and the gray, damp cuptowel hanging over a half-door gate to the back room. I can still see the coil of fly paper that dangled its victims carelessly over the grill where Kennie scraped the steamy black bed of the grill -- burnt onions and droppings of cooked twice hamburger falling into space. Oh, God, the pleasure there was all wrapped up in her face. And her hair -- soft as a chamois cloth I used on the polish jobs. How can one face that's not even beautiful by standard measure take such hold of a man that he can't think of anything but watching the expressions change. Like getting caught up in watching the river rush past your eyes

while you're sitting on the banks and feeling the solidness of life as surely as the hard ground you're sitting on . . . feeling that seep into your skin and stay there and knowing it will be there forever.

Dancing on those bare floors with the juke box going lickety-cut over near the wall and the carousel lights of the hulk of it winking at us like some easy woman and the overhead beams of the old barn building exposed like the pleasure we felt in each other -- bare on our faces. Harold, his curly red hair aflame under the overhead light's unshaded glare, groped in the darkness of the oil cloth booth for Betty Jane's thigh and Verna and Paul railed against each other, only because they did not know how to rail against the whole world. Carla and I sat still. While the others bared their teeth at the fate that had become theirs, Carla and I sought the quiet way. Pure romantics, both of us, we sat for hours in the cushions of music that filled the high ceiling at Jarnie's on the highway. We danced slow in the circle of Nat's *Mona Lisa* and we sang softly and only in tune to our own feelings when *Secret Love* spun around and around on the turntable. Hours I sat spellbound looking into the speckled brown of Carla's eyes and their depth seemed then to be the very source of sound. It was quiet there beneath the first brown of her eyes, because I saw past the passion and the endless demands of her psyche and sometimes when the others had separated themselves from us and they sat at the bar on the high stools away from us and to be closer to the Jim Beam, then Carla and I exchanged part of our secret selves and we were not ashamed to share our dreams and I told her about wanting that college education and we held each other and she promised it would be so and all my longings U-turned back to her sitting there next to me on the torn green plastic cushions at Jarnie's and I wasn't thinking anymore of a jungle on the other side of the world where we breathed humid malaria heat and where we crept on the bottom of Hell's floor from Asiatic tree to Asiatic tree and where there was not water for our stinging throats . . . only the safety of the next strange tree. My beautiful therapy, I called Carla. My God, how I thought I loved her then. She completed me. Wherever there were empty spaces in me, they were filled then with Carla -- thoughts of her -- the breath of her stirred me to impossible accomplishments and the triumph of her logic to WAIT. "Wait," she would say, "trust me and wait till we marry."

And we did wait. It was Carla's nature to loiter near the edge of the maelstrom, cautioned by her morality to stand outside the center of the storm, so that she could see it more plainly. But I did

not know this then. My impatient demands -- my need for her that left no order in my life at all, until we swore to the minister of her church and some God, that this would last forever. And so her family did not come for the wedding. I rushed her and there was no time and no money for their transportation.

Afterwards when Carla's pale blue cotton dress swirled over the shiny oak floors at Jarnie's and Harold and Paul each took their turn to dance with the bride, I watched her brown eyes search for me in the green booth near where the juke box played and I saw how they lighted up fiercely when she found me -- my eyes memorizing every curve of her body and every variation of her movements -- and then we danced. There we were the two of us at Jarnie's . . . married. The cuptowel hanging like a dirty flag over the end of the bar and the fly paper pennant displaying its victims. There it was - all the ugliness in its place as always, but it was beautiful now and the only clouds were the ones we danced upon.

I should have stopped there. We should have left then when we wanted to. But when we shouted it was time to leave, the four of them were back at the bar and that wedding of ours was all but forgotten and they didn't even know what they were celebrating. Easy friends. Cop outs. We felt expelled from their gaiety; already too serious to be a part of them. The bubbles had all disappeared from the champagne Carla had worked so hard to save for and the cut glass pitcher her Moma had sent and she had used for the pouring was hanging like a broken neck chicken from her hand now, out of place, but there was no place to keep it safe, so she held it in her hand. "What's the rush?," they hollered back at our pleading. "You're going to be married a long time and there's only one tonight," they sang and then they laughed and were a group without us who reveled and got a little drunk and we, excluded immediately from the young and carefree by our marriage, were surprised that this change was so prompt and we watched them raise their glasses together and rock back and forth on the rickety high stools and Ken- nie's face was sweaty from the grill steam, but he smiled and drank from the long necked bottle of beer he held in one hand and we envied even Kennie's uncommitted future until Carla's hand fell into mine as we stood there and it was as natural as water the way we fit and we shouted again, "Come on, the party's over, time for married folks to go home," and so finally they slid off the stools one by one. Betty Jane's dress caught on a rough place of the oak stool and snagged the slippery synthetic past her garter and she giggled and fumb-

ed for her modesty. Harold looked at the whiteness of her leg and grabbed at her hand and then they were falling against each other and their wet lips were pressing together and Kennie was wiping the rings off the counter with the damp cuptowel and moping the gray innards of a glass ash tray with the tip end of the rag and someone had the screen door open and in the ring of neon light I saw the maroon Studebaker parked at an angle on the white gravel and I could see the headlights and hear the zoom - zoom of the traffic up the slant of the hill on the highway where we were heading.

Harold drove. I sat in the front with him and Carla sat in the middle between us with Betty Jane, Paul and Verna all in the rear. Harold still had hold of a bottle of Bud, but he handed it back to Paul when he stretched out full length under the steering wheel looking for his keys. I had my arm cross the back of the front seat and I could feel Carla's hair touching on my bare arm. My hand cupped her shoulder where her summer dress ended in a ruffle and her freckled skin was warm. The gravel spun out and beat against the sides of the car and tiny stones flew at us in a rage to be disturbed on such a peaceful night, and Harold backed out fast and knocked the shift into second before the gears had changed and we plunged forward up the hill and onto the highway.

I had known for a long time that Carla cried in the bathroom. She'd be fine when I came home from the job and then out of the blue she'd get up from the yellow table we had there in the kitchen and she'd dab at her face with the napkin and then she'd walk fast as she could straight to the bathroom and close the door behind her and, of course, for a while I never knew she was gone. So busy eating my dinner and glad to be away from the acrid fumes of the auto shop that I never noticed how it was with Carla. Then, slowly, I'd realize the toilet was flushing over and over again and then I'd think, Oh, God, what have I said now. Sometimes I'd go ahead and knock on the door and ask her was she all right, but most evenings by that time I was too tired to move. I'd think to myself, though, just hang in there Carla girl, two more years in this damn metal hut and I'll be out and I'll have my degree and you can stop working and I won't be so tired with school and a job and the damn attacks of malaria will disappear and everything will be shiny and bright as toy money. But I never said a word to Carla about how nice it was going to be. She got so she'd work out in the yard a whole lot. She had a little victory garden by the side of the Quonset and she grew tomatoes, snapbeans and cukes and she spend a whole lot of time working out there in

the evenings while I studied. Then winter time came and her garden froze over and one night I came home from the repair shop and found a note on the kitchen table -- propped out against the salt and pepper shakers -- next to the napkin holder with the rooster squawking at a sunrise. The note was from Carla. She told me she'd gone out with her old friend Betty Jane and for me not to worry. I supposed they'd gone to a movie together and so I sat myself down at the kitchen table and studied for the semester exams. I was still reading when Carla came in that night. I heard a car stop out front and some voices and Carla's laughter floating high like it used to out there at Jarnie's and I remember thinking how nice that sounded again, and then her key in the lock, while behind her I heard the car engine whine off in the night. I must have looked a sight to her, my hair all messed from running my hands through it as I studied and so caught up in my exam paper and her still caught up in the fun she'd been having, but she smiled at me then and her face was soft again like it had been on that night at Jarnie's after our wedding. She came over to me and her arms came around my neck and her face was near and I could feel the warmth of her skin and when we kissed, I tried not to notice the drinks she'd had with Betty Jane after the movie.

I think I knew, even before Carla suspected. When you are the oldest of five kids, it doesn't take a crystal ball or an OB to tell you a woman's pregnant. I could tell by the color of her eyes, and I couldn't sleep at night worrying about how we were going to handle that little wrinkle. We handled it all right, though. That was the end of February when I got my hunch about the baby. Carla realized it the middle of March because she was sick a good deal by then and I had it figured out to finish that second year, work my ass off all summer and get a good start on the fall term before the baby got here the first part of November. That didn't work; the baby came early. It was the end of September when little Dorcas arrived and Carla was slow in getting back her strength and so I quit the University and took a full time job with McClasky's Auto Repair. He made a good offer and I needed the money and McClasky said it was a good deal whenever two people each needed what the other could give and so the two of us -- McClasky and me -- we agreed on an arrangement. That's what we did. We agreed I'd work full time at his shop in exchange for a fair wage from him, plus the use of the little stucco house at the back of the lot. So I never did go back to the University. All my books and that part of my life were just swept away when the baby came -- like they'd been playthings or something. Seemed like one day that baby was just a hunch in my mind and when I looked

around again, she was a squawling red ball of tiny fists and angry thrusts of blue and white bow legs coming at me. We named her Dorcas after the Christian woman in the Bible and after that there was no place it was quiet anymore.

The chills and fever of my malaria came and went all that fall and winter. While I fixed the bottle for Dorcas in the red rimmed white porcelain pan, she lay in the crook of my arm and together we waited for the bubbles to form in the water and we watched the steady roll of the boiling water and we were grateful for the blue flame that danced in the middle of the night and warmed our kitchen, too. And then, while Dorcas and I stayed in the heavy silent night together, I sweated and I felt the parasites occupy and destroy my red corpuscles, all while from the narrow bedroom next to where we stood and waited, I could hear Carla cry into her pillow and I imagined I saw her heaving shoulders shake the world. And when the milk was warm enough and the baby was quieted, Carla still cried. Until Dorcas was in her crib and the purrs of the night-time ticking clock could be heard, I held myself awake and then I returned to the bedroom to comfort Carla and I found her exhausted, finally, her pillow damp and her soft brown hair curled from the moisture and scattered in a lace design on the white muslin and so I moved in silently beside her and drew the quilt carefully over both our bodies. And then I would lie there in the tight darkness and wonder where Carla had traveled so far to bring this child and what evil had she met on her way to feel such remorse, and what weakness in her skinny soul to turn from her own child.

The doctor had the answers. The treatments would be of great benefit, he said. So I took the baby Dorcas, and I loved the part of her that was Carla and the part that was not Carla -- or me. And for years I cared for Dorcas and watched her grow while Carla stayed behind her window at the hospital -- outside the center of the storm.

There you have it. Those are the things I remember now. Detail by detail I see things plainly after all the thirty years. Even the design of the dampnesses on the stucco walls of the house when the rain had stopped and we were left with the deep smells of earth and cement and our love, and it all becoming one scent that clings to the walls like moss. Those memories when Carla and I were in that house together . . . there is no division. The good parts and the bad share equally in the background that has become muted with age and other living, but I remember them through layers of cloud that

are like bandages on a wounded soul and there is only one injury that still bleeds and seeps through like the dark spots on the stucco walls. Buried, I thought, and now I am laughing at myself (never at how it was) for feeling even now the ache in my bones to hear that voice and see that face and touch the softness of her pale brown hair, and knowing that this is the forever we talked about thirty years ago when we vowed that forever is the way it would be.

And it could have been different. I would have waited for Carla to mend her sinful soul. There were years still left to us then and she saw how I loved the baby Dorcas. I was willing to forgive her the evening out with Betty Jane (I never mentioned to her that I knew where she had been that night she came home with the whiskey still on her breath). My forgiveness just waited for one word from her that would have made it all right. But she never said a word about that night. Never said she was sorry for being with Harold and we never talked about it again. She just kept crawling farther and farther into herself, until one day I knew I had to put her into that hospital.

Carla's Moma was living by herself then so she came from Oklahoma to take care of Dorcas and I saw her for the first time when she came to live with us in the little stucco house and I grew to love the gray-haired mother of Carla.

In time, the treatments the doctor suggested pushed Carla deeper into the valley of her shadow where she lived alone in the ward of women, until one day, years later and years past now, I went again to the hospital where she was. I left Dorcas, who was ten and a half years old that spring, with Carla's Moma and I went alone to see her. I walked into the room five floors up with bars at the window and I saw how the pale brown hair had grown misty with gray like her veiled brown eyes and the smile was gone -- drowned inside -- and I heard the mumblings fall from her coral lips and she rambled softly of a love lost long ago. "So little faith," I heard her say and then too tired to hold her head up any longer, she let it fall back onto the bed. And there is where it came to me that I could comfort Carla and so while I was alone with her, I pressed the unforgiving foam hospital pillow over the pale eyes and old lips of her and I soothed Carla's soft weeping at last.

"Time is up. I must go," you say.

"So soon. It seems you've only just got here," from me.

"Next month, Pops," again from you, "I'll be back," you say and your voice has already taken on its outside sound -- no rounded edges for anyone to use against you, but I know. You're on your feet now. Your head is bent and I can see the clean white center part in your auburn hair -- the auburn hair that caused such pain -- as you fumble in your handbag for car keys. You want to be gone from me, but not without leaving some hope.

You have the keys in your hand now, but something falls from your open purse. I see that it is a snapshot and I ask, "A beau?," and your gesture is shy and abrupt as you push the small shiny picture underneath the screen for me to see. A young woman smiles at me from the colored photograph. Her red hair is full at either side of her face. "A new picture of you?," I ask.

"No," you answer, "but we look alike, don't we?," you say and bend close and I can feel your breath on my face and you tell me, "It's Grandma when she was young."

You straighten. "Only two more years to go," you say and then you have turned away and you are moving toward the large double doors of the prison and the glint of patent leather handbag at your side and your straight back is all I can see.

"Goodbye," I call, but you don't look back. The metal door claps shut behind you and your figure grows small while I listen to your high heels punctuate the empty hallway like a long sentence. Then softly, so as not to wake the dead, I call after you, "Goodbye, Dorcas, goodbye . . ." and my voice falters with the new thought before I can finish, "goodbye, my daughter."



☛ SHE THOUGHT ABOUT HER ANCESTRY AND REALISED ☛

Olivares
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David Olivares, Jr.

Gloria Hulk

THE GYPSY

The blood of the gypsy
runs in my veins.
I am as restless
as the wildest
wind, born under
the balsamic moon.

I could mold wax
dolls, prick them with needles
and make things happen,
but that rough wicked
magic is not for me.

The blood of the gypsy
runs up my back,
out my dark
hair, and in the sun,
runs to red,
catches fire.

I could stand
in a circle of salt,
raising a sword,
drawing a line of fire,
but there are other ways.
And I cannot help it
if I was born Pluto
rising, Persephone's own
daughter, with a bat's
wing on my left breast.

Jeanne Ranker

THE SWIMMING OF WITCHES

1. The Accused

Even fish could not have swum with fins tied tight
against their sides. Air pockets in the full-length
dresses helped keep the women afloat before
the homespun cloth drank its fill and hung
around their arms and legs, heavy as armor.
Stone necklaces helped pull the fiends down where their evil
eyes could not cast a final spell upon the shore.
A gasp for air was fatal.

Anyone who surfaced was guilty.

11. The Guilty

Some Salem ladies learned to swim in secret
and grew gills inside their cheeks.
When they learned to breathe in soft O's
they lost their fear. In the trial by water they sank
to the bottom and feasted on stray souls.
Scales sprouted on their bodies. They laid many eggs.

Lyn Lifshin

**THERE WERE TOO MANY MEN
IN TOO FEW HOURS**

too many to
eat or even
hold. If

I could pickle
them in a jar
fingers, tongues

and smooth ripe
ready penises
like armfuls

of cukes you
pick in the dusty
sun in august

picked in your
arms your baskets
overflowing a

green that will
keep be there
to eat thru the

months when all
is snow

Katharyn Machan Aal

CLAIMING

she professes to like poems
quick and
easy over
like a sprawl in the sack
with someone whose body you'll enjoy
whose name you'll forget
dark and handsome
but not particularly significant

poems that slap you in the mind
and squeeze you hard for an instant
then vanish
like a hand that prefers to wave good-bye

I'll bet you
she's a poet in a corner
between fairy tales and the *Sunday News*

knowing separation
is most accomodating
but believing in forever
all the same

Katharine Privett

SURVIVOR

Where are you whose keeper I was not?

The table of space is sprinkled
with the bright blood of stars;
night is smeared with sacrifice.

The slit throat gleams that bleated
innocence and all the sleepless
waters of the earth sing passionals.

Where are you, my brother?

Shifting ashes, shadows cannot
cause themselves. They are
the crusts of cinder from some
radiance. When I lift my hand to you,
a pantomime flies by, a solitary bird,
an empty gesture that survives.

Robert F. Trotter

COMMUNICATION

Living here inside my skull
is like looking at a bright
sunlit world through a narrow
window from a point of quiet
darkness. The exit is a glassless
hole too small to let all of me
through and no one else, it seems,
can enter in. But every now and
then I take emotion and fold it
(bird shaped) and throw it fluttering
at the light. Sometimes it hits the
wall of my subconscious and falls
(unseen from the outside) to the
bottom of this lightless silent
room. But once in a while it sails
out and someone picks it up and
unfolds it and recognition comes
in smiles or tears or quiet wonder
and I see mirrored in that face
the things that keep me
shouting I love you in a crowded room.

John J. Soldo

TILL THE END OF SONG

"I will sing to my love as the night is long."
So he vows their life as the work of art.
"Flow on, sweet sound, to the end of song."

She receives the one to whom she belongs
Like melodies moving the heart.
"I will sing to my love as the night is long."

As this is winter let the dawn
Delay to bless in darkness their start.
"Flow on, sweet sound, to the end of song."

Let their song never end for that would be wrong;
As music is love let them soar like the lark.
"I will sing to my love as the night is long."

A song in their hearts, eyes lifting along
Let them rejoice like children in a park.
"Flow on, sweet sound, to the end of song."

There is among men no finer art
Than life's poetry coming from the heart.
"I will sing to my love as the night is long."
"Flow on, sweet sound, to the end of song."

John N. Miller

THE WORD IS FLESH .

Turn on the light now, Mary, and behold
His figure heavy on your bed,
Grounded asleep, his shoulderblades sloped bald
Of feathered tierings. See his matted head
Burrow, escaped from you, within his arms.
Trapped in leaden hands, the dulcet
Strokes of his message lie becalmed.

Who is this angel-male who pulsed
In dove-winged glory, who came unto you
In full fledge from on high? Behold the wan
Skin paunching at his waist; gaze on those few
Inches of manhood, blood withdrawn,
Retracted into fleshed and private death.

Brood on your revelation, Mary, Mary,
You who must bear the issue that his breath
Imparted in one wing-spread flurry.
Study him, crumpled underneath your light--
He will be gone when he regains his flight.

Richard Gaillard

ODYSSEUS'S CHILD

I had seen those same three children,
Two boys and a girl,
Torment a neighbor's little boy
On many occasions,
And I was present
At the unannounced
And unnoticed
Rebirth of the human race
One afternoon
When he picked up a broken tree limb
And thrashed his tormentors
Into the shelter of a nearby garage.
He strutted back toward home,
Taking a swing at my mailbox,
Breaking his new weapon.
He later reappeared,
A sort of gnomish Ares,
At the edge of my drive
Wearing a plastic football helmet
And hefting a large baseball bat.
Finding no enemies,
He smashed the fluffy head
Of a thistle growing on my lawn.
Then he spit at my elm
And again, with a pirouette,
At the world,
And went down the street
In the general direction,
I think,
Of Armageddon.

CONTRIBUTORS

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