

1981

Reflections 1981

Randy Waters

Joyce Compton Brown

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Reflections





REFLECTIONS

Volume 13

1981

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COMPANION PIECES

I. Soliloquy for Blanche Dubois

I am the cliché
"A hot night in the South"
With dusk hanging heavy
 like muted plaid
Street-lamps reminiscent of
 Fitzgerald's haunting pier lights
Beckoning
 in the hush of a twilight rain

Swimming toward the light
I find myself
 trapped against its piling
Floundering in the curb-stream
A moth, whose fragile wings
 are daunted by the heaviness of water
Unable to soar
Toward the distant beacon

II. Ghost Dance in a Small Southern Town

Midnight
A train rustles the track
 not far away from here
I listen to the whistle's night-song
Lost in its honky-tonk jazz
Sole participant
 in a shadowed black ballet

HIBERNAL INANIMATION

Hard to believe they're still alive
large, small, and reaching alike
into cold spaces
 little green.

So pretty not long ago
 with spectacular array
of spectrum tones scattered.

 Changing slowly at first
then as unison display
 became they were
nabbed by breezes of colder
surprise.

 swaying, swaying
as they did
 before
with glossy textured
 layers
with morning dew.

 now
stunted
 swaying
with arthritic
 limbs
with occasional whitewashing
 exonerating
deceiving
 romantic airs.

Brittle and bare
 they cling to the whiting
 the large the small still reaching alike
into cold spaces.

 The green's gone for a while.

ANTHEM FOR SATURDAY

Every Saturday night
of every college month
We ate salted pretzels.
And TV lovers had the
Power to make us
Passionate.

Every Saturday night
of every college month
We wore reckless lingerie
And consistent loneliness
Contributed to our
Boredom.

Every Saturday night
of every college month
We planned queenly weddings
And phantom boyfriends
Chose to make us
Ladies in waiting.

INTERRUPTION

A student/friend brought me a copy
of Bronowski's book,
a heavy discussion of the
Science/Art conflict
And a poem, quite good.

I read the poem with interest,
compounded minutely.

But, well into Bronowski's introduction,
a fly buzzed
(obviously not Emily's).

A rude interruption of the pursuit
of serious matters,
Especially inconsiderate, coming just after
A thorough spraying of 10x36 Forever-Residual-
In-Your-Genes-Also-Removes-Floor-Wax
Insecticide.

Quickly, Bronowski came down heavily
on the science side, albeit
primitively, leaving quite
disgusting impressions on my desk,
Theory in action triumphing over applied science.

Edwin Blankenship

Ashes to ashes
Death to birth
We are earth
The breath is the
Life alive
We are air
It burns we burn
We seek we turn
Inside fire
Outside
The pool of cold
The cool of old
water

Cyndy Porter

Open the brutal
mind
with one tender hand
quiet the roaring madness
inward isolation
— solitude fascination —
the friends
are those whose
patient ignorance
can pretend to understand
the murmur of truth
but you see —
that is all they can
ever be
is friends.

SATURDAY MORNING
FOR JEAN RITCHIE

Grandma stood on the path
between the springhouse
and the kitchen
and with one snap of her wrist
like so
wrung its neck
and threw the whole of it
to the killing rock
and walked away.

I stayed; it flopped about
silently
unlike the moment of capture
except for wings.

I could not say what there was,
some exchange:

coup to rock
to scalding pot,
pan to dinner table.

Her hen, her family.

MISERABLE CREATURE

rather convulsively
sits and
orients itself blindly
toward something
else with scope
frantic
who knows how long
inside
flying headlong into
transparent spaces of
delusionary lure
for
flight is ended
sharply by
solid mass
glass
saw it dead
just then
with intact wings
in usual state
(intolerable)
losing life
with visions
of the
"outside"
salty human lure
and quickly
stolen memories of
dinners
gone by.





AN OLD MAN'S REST

When coffee has rusted your pipes
And you can no longer sleep all night.
You'll sit quietly for hours and read
 with your glasses
Unable to spring like a trap.

You will rely on aids for your senses
 that have become slow and dull.
When politics has lost its appeal
And religious faith has gone away,
The daily fight offers no reward.

The sound of the piano is harsh.
Food is no longer savory
Any kind of drink causes so much trouble
It is easier to go without.

But you will go on reading and searching
 high and low
Increasing the effort in desperation
 To find a reason to live.
You think not in terms of a man called to action
But close your eyes and pray that you can
 sleep for awhile.

CAUGHT BETWEEN

Caught between the past and the present,
The present and the future;
Between wants and needs,
Hopes and longings,
Joys and sorrows;
Between friends here and friendships there,
Who I was, who I am, who I want to become;
Between strengths and weaknesses,
Failures and triumphs,
Trust gained and broken confidence;
Between love that lives and love that hurts,
Reality and fantasy,
Time and eternity.
It seems that I'm always caught between
Now and then,
Searching for when and how,
And losing out on what.

Tim Wilkins

STUNG

Stubbornly, I reached for the object of my attraction.
Tensely, my fingers encircled it's exterior.
Unskillfully, I gripped the luscious red.
Nervously, I abducted it from it's home.
Gently, a buzzing kissed my hand.

Sweep her up
in pieces
and run a thread
of magic
through the splinters
of her mind
they will hold
but not for long.

David Gardner

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

How sad her movement takes her to the next small step;
a triumph in itself.

The useless muscle dying on bones too brittle to endure
the stress of vitality.

Nerves await the signal that never passes over the great
expanse of time and lack of training.

Her mind is quick to see the need but slow to find the
motivation.

The pain in lungs too weak to fill themselves with
energizing air cuts short the time already brief.

Her body, youth, and spirit melt to a trickle of hope
and hopelessness for what they were and what they are.

FAREWELL

Intuition prompts me
to send you on your quest
for the Misty Mountains
Not with dirges,
But fanfares heroic
full of promise and anticipation.
But I am not Beowulf
and the force of Gandalf
whispers in my mind
Twining itself around buried fears
Like cobras curling
from the mystic's basket . . .
In open defiance of reason and logic.

The best farewell I can summon
Ulysses, through the Smaug
haze of destitution,
Is to send you through
the arches of experience
with expressions of gratitude
for your deliveries of Arkenstones
Which bear the Ring of a truth within.

IN RETROSPECT

Once I watched a farmer friend,
With sickle held in hand,
Mowing the stalks of ripened grain.
Effortlessly he moved ;
Stalk by stalk he gathered them,
Falling before the blade.

One by one the reaper death
Stalks our friends,
Cuts them down with unswerving blade,
Never falters nor misses a stroke,
Gathering in the harvest.

AN ARCH, AN AXEL, A SPAN: PROSE POEM

It's **nearly midnight** and I've just finished watering the lawn; it took me about **1½ hours**. I know that there are all kinds of gizmos to do it for you. **My landlady** even offered to buy me one. But I'm resisting. I have friends who swear by their gizmos, who claim they are scientifically calibrated to give just enough water in all the right places, without waste, without bother, without even a brown patch of burned grass at the corners. I wince a bit at the latter. I definitely have brown patches at the corners. A few in the middle too, But I'm resisting anyway. I just plain like watering by hand, at night, in the dark, armed with only my dripping hose. Standing in the wet spots barefoot. Sometimes I drink. Sometimes I smoke. Sometimes I do both, setting ash-tray and glass on the porch so I can walk back, arching the hose high through the air, wetting the leaves of a giant oak to drip on me as I clink ice and make the ash on my cigarette glow. I know I could use the time to read, or write, or sew on a button, or do something other than get dripped on by an oak. But I'd rather water by hand.

Often when I water I go off into some reverie and later can't even say where I've been. Definitely it's no place profound. I rarely think about Kafka, for instance. And I'm sure I've never thought about Shakespeare, who I usually think about a lot. Tonight, for instance, I was thinking about hoses of my past. When I was little my greatest pleasure was to run through the spray as my father sprinkled. This would be just after supper. I was perhaps five. Though I now realize that my play was ritualized, expected by my parents, planned, prepared for — then it was all surprise and daring. First, I would ask to drink from the hose, then I'd break the stream of water with a bare leg or my hand. "Now stop that," my father would say. "Can't you see this tree needs it's supper? You've already had yours." The challenge had been issued. It seemed then that for hours I would run in and out of the streams, giggling, screaming when my father "got me" if I — deliberately — were not looking, intent to see if I could stand in the absolute center of the spray and make it break around me evenly,

always, always trying to stand in some completely dry place between the fine lines of spray. Then my father would say "your teeth are chattering. Perhaps you've become a squirrel!" and next I would be wrapped in a towel and rubbed dry.

Do you remember how your mother's towels were both rough and good? How they smelled of grass? (no dryers then!) And how that towel completely wrapped you. You could put it over your head and be someone foreign and strange. Or wear it like a long dress and dance about the bedroom until you stepped on it and off it came. Which was alright too because your naked, child body felt good, seemed appropriate in your nighttime bedroom. (Now when I dance about my room naked — as I sometimes do — I pull the shades and draw the curtains and put out the lights. It's enough that I amuse and offend my neighbors with my night watering; they do not need to know that I have other, stranger still, peccadillos).

But as I say, I don't always think about any particular thing. Sometimes, usually when I'm watering around the oak (here when my landlady bought the house 40 years ago, and massive then, she says) I think about root systems. Not being a botanist, my thinking is filled with metaphors rather than exactitude. Or perhaps I simply haven't progressed beyond my father's joke of "You had your dinner — let the tree have hers." But despite the fact that I know that such a tree's root system is large, I imagine my small arch of water helps — actually gives it pleasure. And I think of how its roots, each larger than even my thigh, run beneath me, cross the streets, and soak up my neighbor's scientifically calibrated, low to the ground, exactly the right amount spray. In fact, that tree is so large that I bet it gets a good bit of the even more scientifically calibrated spray from the Church around the corner (which would like to buy this house, this lawn, and yes, this tree, and turn it into a parking lot). I like that notion and occasionally tell the tree — but only when no one's on the street — that it's watered by grace. I like the notion that this tree is big enough to get its water where it damn well pleases, especially when I walk two blocks to the store to buy that expensive water from

France. Then I think of the tree's roots as being right under the store, and, should they quiver in anger, tumbling the sophisticated green bottles right onto that non-absorbent grey floor, tumbling, in fact, the whole store, so that the expensive French waters cascade out the door, sweep across the asphalt parking lot, and soak into a friendly lawn. But, of course, I'm being hostile and anthropomorphosizing.

I know this house will go. My landlady is 72, and she's been offered a lot of money. Though she'll hang on to the bitter end, hanging her laundry on lines beneath the very sacristy nose of the corner church. The tree will go. The lilac bushes and bridal wreath. The border of 40 years of purple and yellow iris. And the brown, burnt corners of the grass. Even the peonies and poppies, rhubarb and roses. Scientifically calibrated Volvos will drip oil on all. And perhaps in a fit of nostalgia, I'll drive by in 20 years to remember where the Juniper and Maple were, where the four stunted tulips never grew. Maybe. Maybe not. But even if I don't, I'll remember how the lilac smelled, just outside my door, so close that I had to part it to enter. And I'll remember the odor of summer pavement getting wet. And how the oak dripped on me, drips still as I write on this porch. And I'll remember standing in the dark, hose in hand, not thinking much of anything as I held the hose above the green and let the water fill the ground, as I stood, an axel for some utterly mundane, utterly lovely time — a joint in continuity. A span.









THE CURRENT'S NEVER STATIONARY

Forgotten too many times
the moisturizer
to delay the wrinkles
and
the ointment
to glaze "those places."

With crossed legs got very visual varicose
and
after feeding Sylvia's fish this past year
found the monster had
swum the currents
of Ponce de Leon's
vision
and
soiled the fountain
forever.

MEMORIES OF A FRENCH STREET

Chocolate, wine
and opiates
Flies buzzing slowly on the curtain
catching the breeze

Below in the street
The cries of the women selling their wares
Echo
from the marketplace

I watch the sweat glisten
on your brow
Your sinews stretch
catlike against silk

Perhaps,
After the grayness of dusk
recedes
We will sleep

Fire they say permitted man to come down out of the tree
And eventually to go into a house, warm and comfortable.
Now houses are burning down in various places
When there are enough houses and they are close enough
together,
One big fire could put us back up the tree
If it hadn't been cut down to build the house.

Debbie Drayer

SUFFOCATION

Nothing is so stifling
As the aftermath
Of a summer storm:
Rain-burdened leaves
Pass self-destructing raindrops
Onward, like so many agents of secrecy.
The 'jay screeches for air:
Like the victims, he knows
That even a whisper of wind
Would be welcome.

RITUAL

The refrigerator kicks on
again, I roll over
to the other side again, clutching
the pillow against my bare chest,
shutting my eyes painfully tight.

The face of the clock,
an unpleasant reminder, is clearly visible,
reading 3:00 AM, then 3:01, 3:02.
I think about prying off
the hands, placing them beside
the sleeping tablets and water glass. I settle
for turning the face to the wall instead.

The idea of warm
milk turns my stomach as I pad
across the cool kitchen tiles, stumbling
over the cat's stuffed mouse, searching
for the means to sever the straining, twisted
wires that suspend my body and mind
just above the inviting nestle of darkness.

My nerves ring in unison
with the neighbor's telephone, jangling
loudly through balsa-thin walls. My heart
pounding slightly, I decide to look for the cat, finding him
crouched beneath the open bathroom window, staring
intently at a beetle on its back, wriggling
in panic, anticipating the smother of a warm, furry paw.

Without emotion, I watch
the endless ritual enacted:
predator and victim. I don't know
which of us is more bored,
the cat or myself. I leave
the beetle's fate in restless, playful paws.
As I slip between the sheets,
everything is silent until
the refrigerator kicks on
again.

MELLOW

While laden with disgust for fall's crop of folly
Anger over arrogance
Despair from futility
Late shoulder high okra
A glut of yellow blooms
Enveloped me in delight near glee.

Too soon returned disgust, anger, despair
Then I saw a bird's bamboo prison
Containing its own bit of yellow
Beauty.

These reminders of
Mirth and beauty
Survivors promising more than survival
Triumph.

INFINITY I

Icy streams
And crystal dreams
Sometimes shatter
As they flow over the falls . . .
But fragments remain
And carry on.
Sunny skies
And honest eyes
Sometimes make rainbows
In the spray of the falls . . .
And linger still
When the color fades.
Forest scents
And innocence
Sometimes confuse
As they glide under the falls . . .
But they always reach up
And hurry on.

STREET BABIES

Street babies are a rare breed; they are not your ordinary babies, not your run-of-mill let-them-sit-there-and-cry-babies. These are your rough-and-tough rugged babies; they wear their diapers with pride, whenever they get a chance to change them. They crawl around at night in search of partly empty Gerber jars and used teething rings. It is a hard existence but they can handle it; they are street babies.

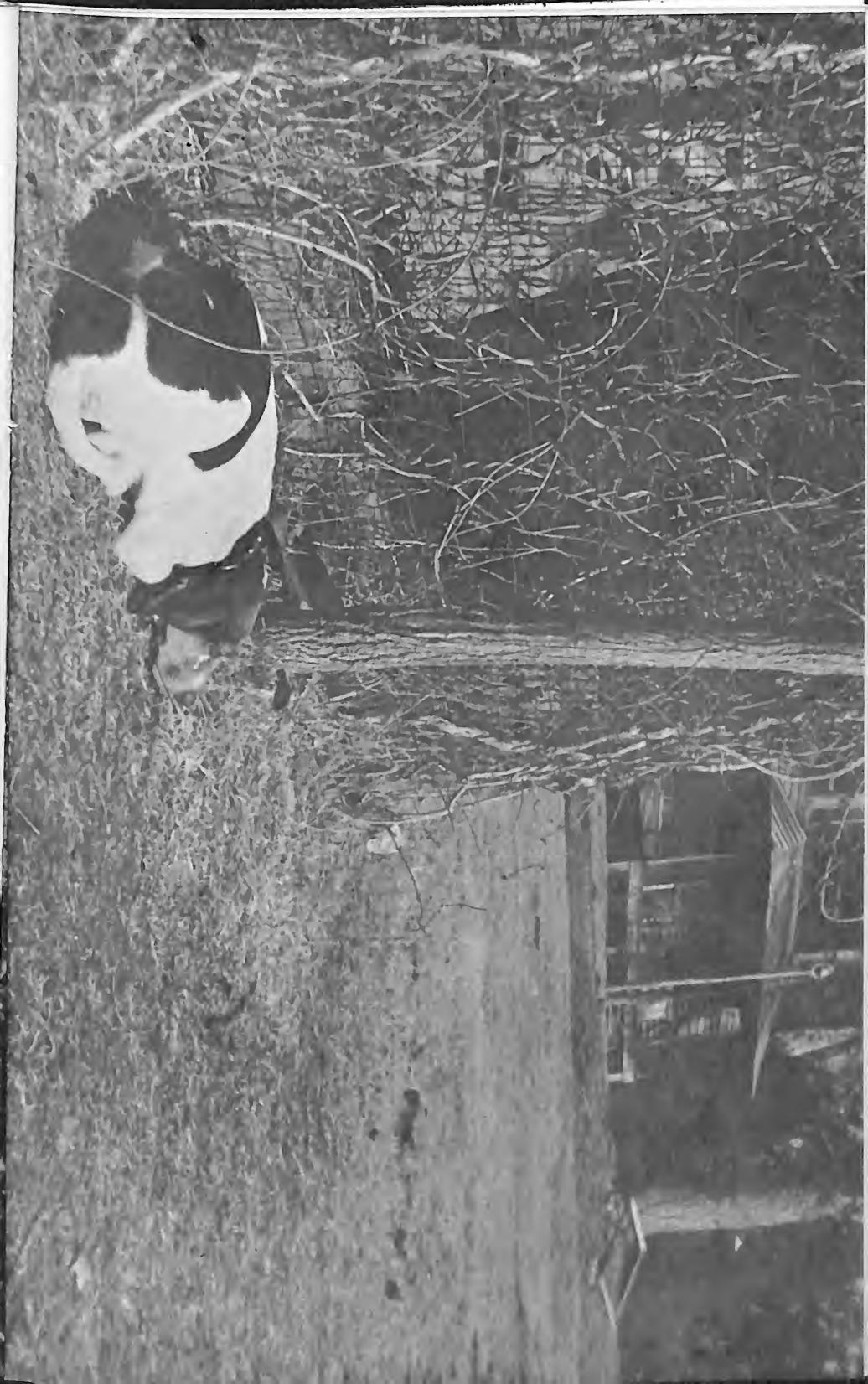
Every now and then, luck comes their way and they have money to buy a few warm bottles. They will sometimes sit around cooing and babbling songs from the womb, and tell short stories from the past.

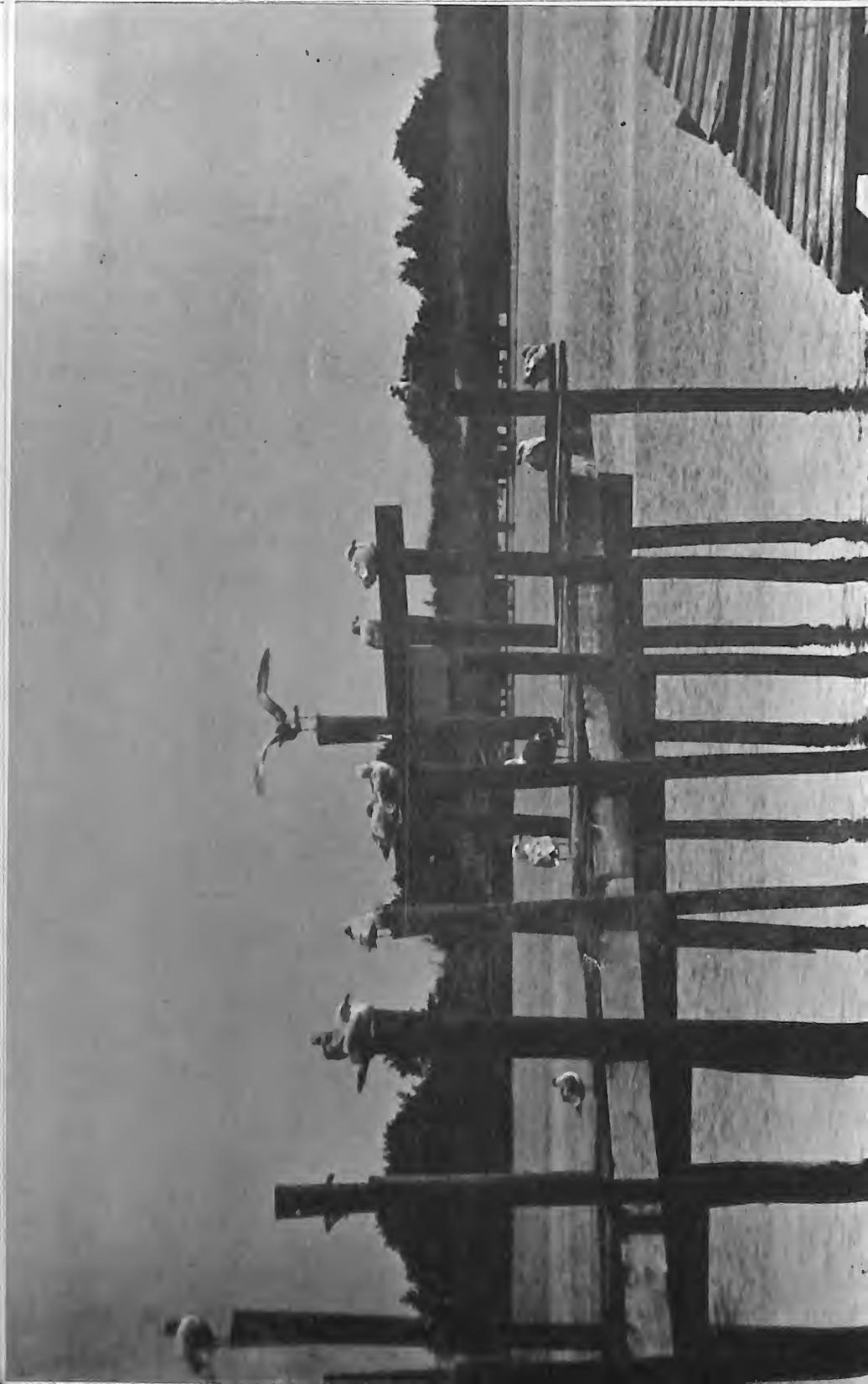
But some do not make it. Little Lester, the one they called the Little Nipper, passed away. Yes, life is rough. The junkman thought he was a toy doll and threw him in the back of the truck while he was asleep. Actually, he was frozen and now is never to be seen again.

The street babies keep on going; they sit around cooing and babbling around a pack of matches that they set on fire. These are not dumb babies but smart street babies. They don't have a place to call home. So the next time you see a baby crawling aimlessly, don't worry . . . just stop and say, "AH! A STREET BABY."

THE TEARS OF A FOOL

I loved a child:
And as a child
I loved a fool.
He was the boy
With the heart
Of gold
He brought melody
But not harmony.
Someday when I'm
Older
The damage
of a boy who sought
The love of men
Will be forgotten.
As of now
I am still fighting the tears—
The tears
Of a fool
Who loved a child.





Nothing is as brief as a dream
Nothing more fragile
There is nothing stronger than a nightmare nothing more
Horror comes and goes swift and terrifying
Despair comes, slowly, the worst sometimes gradually.
Does it ever go? Hell.
Maybe I turn to writing painting music because of fear.
I fear a vacuum behind my eyes. I hate despair. I
Cannot accept emptiness in my self.
I know the crying out, the fighting back, the occasional
communication lead back the beginning. Silence, and waiting
for something to do.
I can listen to what you all say, and live like that but
I can't, I don't believe in it.
I know that my seeking that thing may lead me back to
contentment, but
maybe I'm just young and crazy
The arts seem sometimes to give a glimpse of something that
I want. sometimes
The warrior in me died. The visionary died. Who am I now
to die?
O my beauty. Is it you I want??? Here I am saying to everyone,
that I want to break on through and I am still here. I am a
confused fool.
If I wanted to bad enough I would give my self the choice
of doing it or die.
But,
There still is joy for me
My deaths were in my mind. And I have killed no one.
I must live for the love I find I must give joy to the world
I must be happy
It is the best path I see. I like it best
If I cannot be innocent
I must be wise.

TROPHY

Infectious present spreads
 desire so quickly
 overwhelming its pleased
 recipient making him
victim.

With smile, blush the
 reward is received.
Taking place, making abode
 on a dusted bare
Shelf adding
 glitter
edifying; guests also
 smile.

He sneaks quick glances just
 to make sure
it's still there almost
 in disbelief
he's really
 the proud owner. Without warning
intangible symptoms mount,
 the infection spreads
still too
 bare a shelf it needs
more glitter and
 things are done, shiny things
as a means to an end.
 The shelf fills.

He sneaks a quick count
 noting an uneven figure and
the cancer aches for a nice
 round number.
Compelled with new vigor
 shinier things are done
Lustrous things creating
 nodding cheers and
a tearful embrace.
 He pauses.

With a hypnotic gaze he
takes account of
the shelf's state: no vacancy,
then falsely rests
in a freedom
that is destined
to reoccur
in other pursuits
in a new shelf.

Though momentarily dormant
the infection still lives
while
he fails
to notice the glitter itself
has become quite
dusty.

Cyndy Porter

Tripping clumsily
over words
where thoughts
could have quietly
stepped.

Cyndy Porter

I have believed
in the inward
insanity
that balances
unpredictably
on the illness
of my present
insecurities
and I have
believed so long
I know no
other reality.

Lynn Carpenter Keeter

I wonder—
when I get to be
where I want to be,
will I be like
the folks
who are where
I want to be?

DRESS GREENS

It was a hot summer day, like the one the day before, and probably much the same as the one to come tomorrow. The heat rose in shimmering waves from the pavement, and barefooted boys quickly scampered into the shade caused by the cover over the gas pumps. The screen door slammed intermittently, and the people inside moved slowly, as if to savor the dark, cool air.

A boy of about twenty let the screen door slam as he came in and moved easily around the cheese crackers and dog collars to the drink box. After sliding the lid back on the top of the box, he felt around until he found a drink that appealed to his touch, and after enjoying the coolness a moment, closed the lid. As he bent to open the drink, he said, "Mornin' Newell," without looking up.

"Tim," said the storekeeper respectfully, searching for the younger man's eyes with his own, "glad you're home, missed seein' that ol' car of yours comin' up our road of a evening . . ."

"Yeah I know, thanks Newell," said the youth, brushing the hair out of his eyes. His hair was long in the front, coming nearly to his eyebrows, and blonde, the color of corn silk in late June.

Rubbing the side of his face as he talked, the storekeeper asked hesitantly, "Have you, uh, have you seen her yet?"

"No," answered the youth, "not yet." He quickly drained the remaining drink from the bottle, then placed it gently and quickly in a crate near his feet. He moved back around the white tin bread rack to the end of a long wooden counter containing every candy known to man, and widemouth jars of spicy sausages and oatmeal cookies. The storekeeper stood at the other end with one elbow resting tentatively on an old brown cash register.

"Guess Joe and your Mom are glad to have you home," volunteered the storekeeper, trying to be cheerful.

"Yeah they are," replied the youth with the beginnings of a smile, "they really are, it's good to be home."

The youth turned slightly, and with eyes searching the bare wall above the storekeeper's head, he asked, "you haven't talked to her have you **Newell**? I mean not since . . ."

"No, **not even** at church, don't see much of either one of 'em," answered the storekeeper softly. Then turning about abruptly, as if to resume some busy activity behind the counter, he addressed his friend, "Tell your mom I got a new hoop a fresh cheese when she's by."

"I will," said the youth as he let the screen door close gently.

She often imagined him running in the late afternoon like he used to, but it always turned out to be someone else, or a schoolboy with an armload of books.

This morning she lay loosely wrapped in white sheets, trying to sleep a little longer. Her long dark hair lay around her head like a halo. The window was open, and the sunlight carried with it the strong, unmistakable smells of summer. Only half asleep, she dreamed she saw Tim at the wedding, in the back with his face pale and drawn. Upon seeing him, her senses seemed to merge, and everything was swirling, like the dust dancing in the sunlight above her head. She awoke with a start and gave in to the morning without bitterness. She thought how nice orange juice would be.

Many times in the late afternoon or early evening he would drive by their house, hoping to catch at least a glimpse of her. He did see her once, standing at the fence that ran alongside the house, with her back to him, gazing intently towards the mountains. The sight of her caught him in the stomach, and he drove for some time until the numbness returned. He went in the house and up the stairs to his bedroom without speaking to either of his parents. Seeing his dress uniform, he slammed the closet door and threw himself on the bed. After sleeping fitfully for several hours, he arose and made his way downstairs through the now dark house to the kitchen. He found the plate his mother had left

for him, and leaning against the counter as he ate, he forced his mind into neutral and thought of nothing beyond the moment.

In early September the leaves begin to turn hesitantly, as summer begins losing its grip. For a time the days are hot and the nights cold as summer makes the transition into fall and winter. But the little stone church and the cemetery set in front change little, oblivious to the parade of seasons.

Tim began running again, to ease his bottled up feelings, and to give him time to think. He still had not found a job; it seemed that people just did not feel the same way about vets anymore. By the first of October, when a winter wind like icy fingers began to blow, he was running several miles a day.

The road turned and went downhill, only to level off for about half a mile in front of the stone church. There it dropped again before it began the climb north to the mountains.

Tim ran along easily, enjoying the sharp, cold air. He saw the steeple in the distance. He ran on tirelessly and was almost to the corner of the church before he saw her little red car. He slowed to a walk, his eyes scanning for a sign of her, and then he saw her kneeling at her brother's grave. He hesitated and started to stop and go back the other way.

She didn't see him until he was almost upon her.

"Tim," she said, startled, "I didn't know anyone was around."

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he said, leaning against a monument for support. She looked more beautiful, more desirable, even than he remembered.

"That's okay," she said smiling now, "I guess I was kind of day-dreaming."

"I'm sorry about your brother," he offered.

She tilted her head back with closed eyes in an effort to hold back a tear, but in vain. The wind carried dark ringlets of hair into her face, but she did not notice. She did not answer, and they both stood in silence, neither knowing what to say.

"How is Jimmy?"

She turned her head to avoid the pain in his eyes, and to hide it in her own.

"Fine. He's fine," she said. The wind whispered softly among the stones; they were both silent for many moments.

"Why did you stop writing? You could have at least told me."

"Because I didn't know what to say," she answered quickly.

It was silent again except for the winter song played by the wind. When she turned to look at him again, there were tears in his eyes.

"Tim, I loved you . . .," she said helplessly, earnestly.

"But what," he answered, "you loved me, but what?"

"I just couldn't take it anymore, not knowing, not knowing if you'd ever come home." She knelt beside her brother's grave, and after pulling the hair from her face, began tracing the letters of his name with her fingers.

"Is that it?" asked Tim with a trace of bitterness.

"No, that's not it," she said, standing to face him. "I loved you; it's just that being away from you was so hard, and Jimmy was here . . ."

He searched for something in her face, and not finding it, turned to face the stone church, so solid, so unchanging. When he turned back, she was crying again. He wanted to reach out and take her and hold her, but they both knew that time was past.

"Tim . . ."

He took the road north that rose to meet the mountains, running until his heart pounded and his lungs burned, but he knew he could not stop.

CONTEST

Each year the Gardner-Webb English Department sponsors a contest for the poetry and fiction chosen for publication in *Reflections*. This year's judges were E.M. Blankenship, Thirlen Osborne, Bill Stowe, and Jim Taylor. All works were submitted anonymously to the judges. Faculty and non-student contributions were not eligible for the contest.

AWARDS

1ST PLACE:	RITUAL	Randy Waters
2ND PLACE:	FAREWELL	Debbie Drayer
3RD PLACE:	POEM ("I have believed")	Cyndy Porter
HONORABLE MENTION:	TROPHY	Teresa Yingling
	ANTHEM FOR SATURDAY	Debbie Drayer
	DRESS GREENS	David Hamrick

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