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The Crucible

Lock Haven University's
Literary Magazine

Fall 1991



Kathy Lalor

Conversion

Contents

I used to go to church

but now I go to the mall

all of the gods I need

there, paired up with

on fluorescent pews,

in ready sportswear

professionals,

in hand in hand

only better

with a receipt neatly

but in hand I go

The Crucible

The Literary Magazine
of Lock Haven University

Fall 1991

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Kathy LaLota

Conversion

I used to go to church
but now I go to the mall—
all of the gods I need are right
there, paired up with matching handbags
on flourescent pews, posed
in trendy sportswear behind glass
confessionals, lying
prostrate in plush velvet jewelry cases,
selling me redemption just like at church
only better, because I can take it home in a bag
with a receipt neatly stapled to the fold
proving I paid in full.

Michael Montag

Hubris

He created us in his image.
Imagine,
Us on the ground,
 Raking leaves, damming seas.
Us, shearing sheep and writing stuff down.

Did He do It?
Are We allowed?
HmMMM.
Are We Capable?

Kicked by ambition in the groin we built a country and
Climbed the fence and had to fly and
Created a science creating more—
 Text books, Cities, Chainsaws, Telescopes
 (the things you trip over in the dark).

Us and Him, all on the same Plane,
Created by, Created for.

Amy Lin

 "Child Abuse"

Sam Muccio

 "Street Fable"

Doug Roles

 "A Dance in Summer"

Debra Vajnsky

 "Swans"

Manoah Baumgartner

 "COOP"

 "Swan"

Johannes D. Hofstee

 "Tepp-Gee"

Amy Lin

 "The Crossing"

Johannes D. Hofstee

Brooke

Your hand never leaves your mouth,
teeth sinking into a fist. The rage
is damned up behind the flesh.
You can't explain your feelings, ever.

A pendulum out of tune,
the music draws you to move and calms you down.
We want peace, not your problems.

Simple things like running water
leave you impossibly content.
Your dolls in the stroller make you
older than you will ever be.

Mother ignores you; I know
she blames herself.
Father loves you; he's the only
one who knows how.
And I can't help but smile at the things
you do, despite how sad it is.

Phil Ryder

Expiration Date

More hours had passed
since lunchtime than I
thought possible and
I was starving.
(You know how classes drag
their monotone feet in
the yellow afternoons.)
Captivity having ceased I
raced home barely arm's length
ahead of my growling
stomach
ripped open the front door
very hungry now
and fell up the steps
heart racing now
licking my lips at the
thought of satisfying
such an impatient need
Hours?
Days?
Seconds?
Later, in front of the fridge,
I notice in utter
disgust for the first time
the mold
on my ravioli
and
I think of you.

Kathy LaLota

Love—clean, pressed, and ready by next Tuesday

I took a brand new blouse to your drycleaning store
—I'd run out of dirty clothes—
I rumbled it first so you wouldn't see
the creases left by the store racks,
even so you probably know
what I'm doing
bringing all of these clothes to you
day after day
taking them home in plastic
condoms, just thin enough to hold
the hot starchy aroma of the presses
and you
wafting home with me
in fragments.

Matthew J. Dailey

**Lessons in Love
(Zen and the Art of Sexual Intercourse)**

Flesh unbraided
a rope
with all its threads of sorrow undone
unwound by the red tongue whispers
The skirt and bodice of a young girl
lying open on the ground
spread like an angel's wings
Overhead the great steely blue
came clattering
as the storm hammers drew near
etching moments of daylight
And as heaven's boiler broke
we wrapped ourselves
neatly inside each other's skin
playing out one last movement
After—we waited
together in the rain
naked and panting
catching each other's breath
Till a soap bubble moon
came rising in the East
and the sun, mating with the earth
left only a dim afterglow
And sudden
i see myself
masturbating
caught by the mirror's conscience
and you
just a shadow.

Heather Sicchitano

The Shattering

The glass
shatters
into a hundred
pieces
as it
slips from
my grasp.
I stand
quietly
and wonder
How'd I lose control?
The pieces
can't be put
back
together.
It's too
late.
I turn
from the mess
and go on.

Kathy LaLota

Driving with Daddy

I coughed
this time
and you awoke
to the steering wheel narrowly missing the guardrail
and my eyes; next time
I'm going to sneeze
unless I remember I did that
a few miles ago.
Maybe I'll just blow my nose
or maybe I should say, "Wake up, Daddy,
Goddamn it, after all you are the Daddy,"
big yeller, full of indignant surprise,
ready to leave every time Mommy hollers
the same old curses—get out,
but I won't 'cause I'm only eleven
and when Mommy started the familiar fight,
I stuck up for you
again, "He's a good Daddy,"
so Mommy's pissed
in the backseat sleeping
and I have to sit up front and prove
me wrong, you unworthy.

Amy Linn

Child Abuse

The old man left some time ago;
he was a real heel.
But where'd all these kids come from?
The only time we see the old lady
is when she beats us
and sends us to bed,
cramped in here like piggies
off to market. At least they
got to eat roast beef.
Bullion soup for us again,
no bread.
Thin as a shoestring.
The dark and dank lace around me
suffocating my sole.
No argument with her tonight.
I'll seize my tongue,
slip through the eyelet,
and blow this Old Shoe.

Sam Miuccio

Street Fable

Yo! What's up!?
Me and the boyz, King Z and Men Z,
We was downtown shootin hoops,
That was when we saw our homeboy,
Our homeboy, Hump D.

Yo, you see Hump D,
He ain't like the other brothers.
He was all fat and round and white;
All he did was sit on that wall,
Him an his stash.

He guarded that stash with his life,
Smokin an lauffin an smokin an lauffin,
Dumb muther Hump D.
Guess he had a little too much that day
Cuz Hump D fell off that wall.

We tried to help him, ya see,
King Z and Men Z, we pick him up.
We tried to help his sorry ass,
But poor, dumb Hump D,
We can't put him back again right.

Doug Roles

A Dance in Summer

In walks Jack dressed
in his usual suit
of style and grace.
He's splashed on
some extra cologne
which matches nicely
with the distinguishing
charm that he always
wears. He strides
to the far side
of the room
and reaches for his partner;
they dance to a tune
that only he's familiar with.
And while Jack's sweeping
this pure innocent girl
off her feet,
the boy that helps him
during the summer
has stopped washing
those grimy windows and
is now wondering
how this guy can be so happy
sweeping a floor.

Swans

A procession of white
 Descends upon liquid silver.
 Cutting stillness.
 Ripples form;
 Gentle rain (their cue),
 Spills in tuneful drops,
 Animating the creatures
 To dance upon the sighing lake
 Beneath a shelter of grey and green
 A ghostly ballet performs.

My private eyes become dewy
 As a curtain of mist
 Ends the show.

COOP

When I moved into the country, I thought I ought to do some country type things. I had always lived in the city and moving to the country was a new experience and I wanted to get the most out of my new life in the "sticks."

Since most country folk had cows or pigs or some type of farm animal, I believed that was what I should have also, only I bought chickens! I bought thirty chickens to be exact. Farmer Jenkins, who lives down the road from me, sold them to me for a dollar a piece. Good deal. Now I was living the country life.

The first thing I had to do was build a chicken coop. This was all new to me so I had some trouble figuring out what a coop should be like until my neighbor came over to help. He must have realized I never picked up a hammer, much less used one. I think he thought I was a real dunderhead.

I was truly beginning to like life here in the country. The first day my neighbor and I were working on the chicken house I saw a mink down by the creek. He said it was a weasel and I said mink. Weasel? Mink? What's the difference I thought. My dog, Butch, also loved the rural area since he no longer had to be tied and he really liked being able to relieve himself anywhere he wanted. I liked that too because I would never have to use a pooper scooper again. Thank God!

Anyways, back to my chicken coop. We got it finished that day and then I managed to put up a fence so the chickens would stay in and other animals would stay out. I put the chickens in the coop, loaded up to the feed bin and put straw in their roosting boxes. They seemed to be content.

Everyday I would go out and feed them and even talk to them. I must have been nuts, talking to chickens. What the hell was wrong with me? The third day I went out and I only had twenty-nine chickens. I counted again and again and I was still missing one chicken. Gone! It was nowhere to be found. I asked my wife, "Honey, did you see one lone chicken running around?"

She hated the country and she also hated my dog. "No, why should I look for one lone chicken running around?" she barked at me. "Maybe that mutt you have ate it."

"Thanks, Honey."

She was such an invaluable help. I asked my dog if he ate the lone chicken.

He said, "No, why would I and secondly, how could I even get into the coop?" Then he just looked at me kind of stupidly like he was thinking I was a moron. I thought and thought, but I just didn't know what happened to my chicken. Oh, well!

The next day, to my dismay, I found another chicken had been thieved. I also saw some type of tracks that led to the coop. Whatever this thing was it knew how to get into the coop and obviously it liked the ready meals just waiting inside for it.

A trap! That was my answer to this chicken coop invader. I knew nothing of traps either, so I went to the local Farmway store and bought myself a box trap. If I was going to catch this "thing," I was going to do it humanely. No need for unnecessary death, or so I thought. The box trap was pretty neat. The "thing" was supposed to walk into the box and when it did the door would fall shut trapping the intruder inside. Foolproof! I set the trap that evening just inside the chicken coop door and baited it with a fresh piece of New York Strip steak. I was so excited. Now the intruder, the "thing," would be mine. That night I could barely sleep. I tossed and turned and dreamed of catching something—that is, something besides a cold or some nasty disease. The anticipation of capture was very intense. I thought, "This is what Teddy Roosevelt must have felt like marching up San Juan Hill."

Morning finally came after an eternity of hopeful anticipation, but the feeling of hope was dashed. The steak was gone and the trap was open. I couldn't believe it. It's like this "thing" was purposely playing with me, trying to egg me on. It was probably trying to see how stupid I could be. The "thing": two chickens, one steak; me: zilch.

Next step. I was done being humane. The box trap was a failure, so I decided to get nasty. I bought a leg trap. That evening I set the leg trap in the same place the box trap had been, but covered it with straw. Now he was mine. If the "thing" were to step upon the trap, he would stay right there until I got up the next morning. I told my wife what I was doing and she just looked at me sort of stupidly, just like my dog had. I often wonder if my wife and my dog are related. Could be.

When the alarm rang the next morning, I was up like a fireman, dressed and ready to slide down the pole, only I didn't have a pole to slide down. Excitedly I went out to collect my bounty but again, my hopes were dashed. The "thing" had taken a stick and poked the trap to set it off. Then instead of walking past the already sprung trap it went around the back of the coop, dug a hole under the wall and nabbed another victim. The "thing": three chickens, one steak; me: zilch.

Now I enacted my next phase of defense. I needed another trap so I went back to Farmway and bought a snare trap. This one would catch the whatever-you're-trying-to-catch around the neck and strangle it. I was seriously lacking humanity.

When I got home, I set up the snare trap at the back of the coop and reset the leg trap at the front. This time I buried the leg trap with only a slight layer of dirt over it. Now I was set! That night I went to bed confident that my certain kill/capture would be found the next morning.

Morning came uneventfully. I had begun sleeping well by this time, so I was refreshed and ready to fix the dam in the small creek next to my house. Beforehand I went out to collect the remains of the "thing." (I was so confident.) But it wasn't there! Instead there was a chicken in the snare trap and the leg trap was again set off. One more chicken was gone also. The "thing": four missing chickens, one strangled chicken, one steak, success at driving me mad; me: . . .zilch.

I wasn't about to give up yet. I had exhausted my supply of traps so I took a different turn. On my way to town I realized this was no longer just some dumb guy trying to catch a chicken thief. This was a battle of wits. It was almost a deadly game. In Farmway I got 60 feet of steel sheeting, the kind you fix holes in cars with. I wasn't going to fix my car though. When I got back to the coop, I wrapped the bottom, two feet of the coop in steel. I figured whatever the "thing" was it probably didn't have anything to get through the steel. After I reinforced the coop I realized I had blocked the door and the chickens couldn't get out, so I cut a hole about five feet high on the side of the coop. I always thought chickens could fly so when they got tired of being inside they would fly out. I know now chickens can't fly. It got real hot in the coop and four of them died from heat exhaustion. I cut a hole lower on the wall so they could get out. Meanwhile my dog says, "Why don't you just give up?"

"Shut up Butch," I replied.

My next door neighbor, the one that helped me build the coop, has cows and his cows are kept in the field by an electric fence. That gave me an idea. If I would electrify the wire around the chicken coop, then the "thing" wouldn't be able to squeeze through the mesh, or go under without getting shocked. I didn't have an electric fencer, those things that electrify fences, so I pulled my car up to the fence that evening and hooked jumper cables from my battery to the fence. I was sure I would not have any chicken theft now. To bed I went. Seven a.m. the next morning my wife got me up.

"Get up! Get up! Why is the car hooked to that damn chicken fence? Get up and get the car. I have to go to town, we need poultry for dinner."

I got up due to Honey's wishes and walked outside. The crisp morning air was cool and refreshing, but there was a familiar "city" smell to it. What was that? It smelled like Kentucky Fried Chicken, you know, Colonel Sanders and the breaded chicken thing. I dismissed the curious odor and walked towards the car. As I began to unhook the jumper cables, I saw three fried chickens stuck to the fence. The car battery was dead too. I hadn't seen the chicken thief/killer in two days.

I was worn to a frazzle. My nerves were shot and I couldn't look at a chicken without thinking of death and death made me think of chickens. My traps had failed, I'd burnt three chickens and heat exhausted four more. It was time for a gun!

I went to Billy Joe Bob's Sporting Goods and bought a twelve gage single shot. Billy Joe Bob asked me what I was hunting.

"Chicken thieves," I said. He gave me one of those stupid looks like my wife and dog do. I wonder if Billy Joe Bob is related to my wife, or my dog? Who knows?

That night I sat up on the top row of the chicken roosts, now that all those chickens were dead there was plenty of room, and waited for the "thing." The fence was not electrified, no traps were set and the door was open. I had a new flashlight taped to the barrel of my gun, so I could see what I was going to shoot. I was ready!

Laying there I began to think how silly I looked...then I heard something. I shined my flashlight/gun on the floor, but I saw nothing, only the remaining twenty-one chickens looking up at me. One chicken asked, "What are you doing up there?"

"I'm saving your ass, so shut-up chicken," I said.

I waited and waited. It seemed like forever. Then I woke up. Sun in my eyes and a dead flashlight. I guess the thief wasn't dead though.....nineteen chickens, the "thing": three missing chickens,..three fried chickens,..four exhausted chickens,.....one strangled chicken, one steak, my frazzled mind; me: zilch.

I dejectedly walked toward the house when I heard a cocky voice, "Hey Buddy!" I turned to look down at the small animal. Its head was triangular with a long sleek body, sort of like a slinky. It had beady little, black eyes and he was picking his sharp, pointy teeth with a...a chicken bone!!

"What do you want?" I yelled.

"You raise mighty good chickens, Buddy."

"So!"

The long black thing looked at me and said, "My name's Weasel, Joe Weasel that is. I want all the rest of your chickens."

I asked him what he would give me for them. He told me he would just take them like he'd taken all the others.

"I'll race you for them," he said.

"O.K."

"First one to the coop gets to keep the chickens. GO!"

He ran. I ran after him. Then when I was just about to shoot him, I tripped over the jumper cables still laying in the yard. As I stumbled, the gun went off and I shot the car. The bullet must have hit the gas tank because my car blew up. Since it was parked near the coop, flames licked at the chicken "condo" and slowly began to spread. I couldn't move; I was now at fault for the death of my remaining chickens. I had killed more of them than Weasel had. Once the fire hit the straw, the coop lit up like a Roman candle. You know how those things shoot colors; it was the same, only my coop was shooting out chickens.

Joe Weasel stood there, still picking his teeth, and said matter-of-factly, "Well, there goes your chickens, Buddy."

I turned back towards my house, then paused, "Hey Weasel."

"What do you want, Buddy?"

"Would you like to come in for some coffee . . . coffee and poultry?"

Matthew Baumgartner

Braun

Like a heavy breathing fat man,
the coffee machine gurgles and sputters.
He breathes in as he sucks the water from the reservoir.
He dumps the water into the grounds and
magically the water turns a grimy brown.
As the coffee rolls out, he begins to breathe once again,
over and over—breathing in—breathing out.
I prepare the cream.
I prepare the sugar.
I pour a cup as he exhales his last morning breath,
quiet again until tomorrow morning.

Johannes D. Hofstee

Pepsi Can

The red, white, and blue bullets
stand on the desk.
Empty shells lay all around.
The more you shoot yourself,
the more wired you get.
Pull the trigger,
Pop the primer,
Hear the muffled hiss.
It bleeds down your throat,
Your head jerks back with pain.
A burning ice cold sting
that fades.
Then the empty casing drops to the floor
And you load another bullet into your hand.

The Crossing

Poking along at its own pace.
Forth and back, forth and back,
Jerking off on the track.
Doesn't know whether it's going or coming.
Finally—the caboose.