



THE CRUCIBLE

The Literary Journal of
Lock Haven University
Annual 2001

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Table of Contents

Homogenocide	Thomas Justice	1
Conversion Denied	Michael Kiser	3
Transfiguration	Michael Kiser	4
Christianity as "Opium for the Masses"	Michael Kiser	6
Whoring the Gospel	Michael Kiser	7
Jerry Garcia's Dead	Michael Kiser	8
Life as a Used Condom	Sheila B. Gernavage	10
Last Call	Matt Bower	12
Most Hosts Bring Out the Best Wine Before the Guests Are Drunk	Michael Kiser	16
The Innocent People	Debra Haddad	17
Fairy Tale Revision	Joy C. Kania	18
The Poet	Kyle Wooster	19
Revealer	Kimi Muir	21
Reflections on an Ancient Isle: The Experiences of an International Traveler	Meredith Lang	23
The Way It Was Meant to Be	Dawn Schindler	25
Sunflowers	Joy C. Kania	26
Tiny Treasures	Melissa Swartz	28
April	Debra Haddad	29
Grass	Amy Howard	30
Such Things are Interesting	Joy C. Kania	33
The Efflorescence of a Tree	Brianne Goldsmith	34
The Leaf's Last Lament Before Decay	Brianne Goldsmith	35
Broken Dreams of Glass	Candice Rayls	36

Table of Contents

The Lure of Flames	Alan Vezina	37
The Race for Gold — Well, Not Exactly	Matt Bower	38
Frames	Michael Kiser	41
From the Balcony of a Phantasmagoric State	Michael Kiser	42
The Father to Dylan Thomas: Thus Shall She So Soon Stay?	Robert Seth Moore	45
Atrophy	Melissa Swartz	47
Taking Inventory	Melissa Swartz	49
Who Gave Us the Right?	Lacey Mundrick	51
Ice Queen	Melissa Swartz	55
Communication	Dawn Schindler	57
To Lauren	Alan Vezina	58
Advice from a Fellow Human Being	Matt Bower	60
The Old Bat	Melissa Swartz	62
Duchamp Takes Rook Pawn	Thomas Justice	64
God Took a Bullet in the Desert	Matt Bower	67
Something About Expectations	Sheila B. Gernavage	70
Lost Left Sock	Sheila B. Gernavage	71
Touch	Kimi Muir	73
Dreams for Hannah	Candice Rayls	75
Hands	Candice Rayls	77
Spiritless Hand Turkeys	Joy C. Kania	78
Sherbet Runt	Dawn Schindler	79
Squirrel: Crushed	Thomas Justice	80
Contributors' Notes		82

Table of Contents

Photograph Contributors

Nicole Herritt	2, 31, 32, 43
Meredith Lang	5
Jacquelyn Boyer	15, 20
David Lee	22, 40, 50
Stephanie Caplinger	44, 63
Tracy Marshalllick	27
Nicole Cichon	46, 48, 56, 66, 81
Thomas Justice	65
Candice Rayls	73, 74, 76

Homogenocide

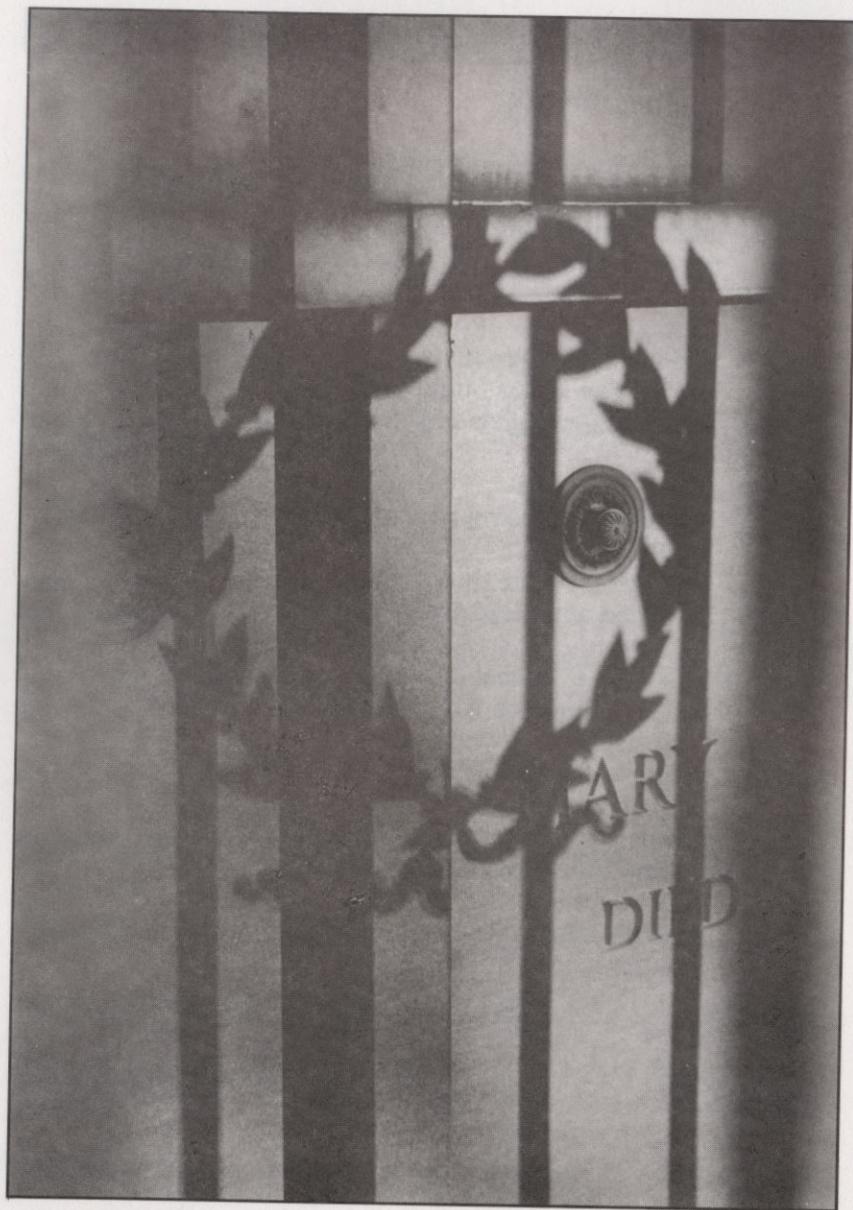
Thomas Justice

If the masses are an ocean,
the wave breaks at Wal-Mart
and evolution ebbs
upon the white-tiled floors,

the crash falls
into the beauty products,
and the salt kisses bright packaging
and rusts the wheels of shopping carts.

If only the water
would drown the registers;
if only I weren't
washed up before them
drenched with dead sea.

You can't even feel it,
but each time you wrap yourself
with aisles and rows
or allow the hum of
bleached lighting
to slur your senses
and sterilize your nerve,
your edges blur
and fade further
into the monochrome.



Nicole Herritt

Conversion Denied

Michael Kiser

I.

I spend summers
speaking to
winds and waves,
hoping to grasp turmoil
and make it sing,
but when it rises in pain
from my screaming white hands,
I let go.

II.

My parasitic ways
are forcing you outside yourself
where the world
waiting in arms
strikes
at your fragile layer
of ideas.
Shall I disarm them
or wait for you
to fall back to me?
Their inflictions will last
as long as
you fight me
and I will eat everything
save your will.

III.

Your presence is whorish
and intoxicating.
Your smell is urgent
and tastes of
my teeth in the morning.
I breathe through gills
when you are near
like an old man
in a tavern
trapped in a barrel;
take a shot.

Transfiguration

Michael Kiser

Why have You
returned
to Your
Arson

to see my
reaction
to the flames
that devour

or to breathe softly on those
flickering in my

eyes

I am fascinated
with Your

destruction

my beauty is ancient
and frozen

and fury

this was for
me

I am pardoned

leave

the ashes.



Meredith Lang

Christianity as "Opium for the Masses"

Michael Kiser

Your leaves were of olive,
not tea for the tyrants to be
sipped from fine china,
taxing the poor needing
not their elixir,
a delusion of order
for the savage world.

Revolution their milk that since
has turned sour,
stirring a world that
sent back their sweet.

Whoring the Gospel

Michael Kiser

They are cathedral and carnival,
embracing our carelessness
for a contribution.
They invade our streets,
inviting us in to their
amphitheater of
subtle mixtures,
diluting our truths,
so we can swallow
and choke and beg
for wine.

Like a young girl longing
to please her pimp,
they dress themselves
for the catch.
They cast out their fishnet
stockings, rise up on high
heel shoes.
Wrapped tightly in silk
and lace, they divide one
ass-cheek from the other.
Hair like a prophecy to interpret
the morning when we
will leave our tithe
at the end of the bed
so they can return
to whore the gospel.

Jerry Garcia's Dead

Matt Bower

He died in the jungles
of Vietnam,
lost an arm to a landmine,
his nuts filled with fluid,
face scooped out.
His brains scattered in itsy bits and pieces
over some grassy foreign field.
He's little more than a torso heap
decaying.

I'm afraid we'll have to send
a cardboard cutout
to Woodstock
unless it's possible
to sew together the remaining
body parts.

E. Pluribus Unum reeks of
tie dye regurgitation.
Higher than Cloud 10
on an overcast Fat Tuesday,
Dead Heads hiccup the National Anthem.

Like a burnt-out bald eagle that soared
too high
and melted in the San Francisco sun,
a George Washington who sniffed
whiteout until his brains sizzled like eggs
on a frying pan,
a Ben Franklin who smoked
crack cocaine
and decided to fly a kite
in a lightning storm,
an Uncle Sam who grasps an opium pipe
in one hand
and a draft card in the other.

Free love?
A blue-light special on the ravages of AIDS.
Rock and roll?
Exclusively yours with four
double D batteries.

Acids sheets?
The dollar bill.

An American icon?
An unplugged juke box in a third-world
dive bar.
A generation's voice?
A voice dubbed over the war cries of the
wounded.
A beautiful, unique, god-sent messenger?
A fat, filthy, raunchy, ugly, mumbling,
stench heathen.
A gift-wrapped savior?
A "Summer of Love" drill sergeant.
Jerry Garcia's Dead.

Life as a Used Condom

Sheila B. Gernavage

You lay at my feet,
a tattered security blanket,
an old Glad bag.
Which child used you
for protecting his snack
earlier today?

I tilt my head;
you ooze
across the ground
like an egg white;
you probably meant
to be
bulletproof glass
but were
merely a paper towel.

Your mouth-like rim hangs
open,
screaming,
sighing,
immortalizing your brothers,
friends
who still remain
shelved,
packaged,
untouched.

To the world,
you are a jellyfish,
avoided,
walked around,
stared at,
sometimes poked with a stick
by an unknowing child.

Could you know
your fate—
pried open
as a seafood house lobster?
as a slaughterhouse pig?
as her?

I can almost see through you,
but you have had enough
of that
today.

Last Call

Matt Bower

Good morning,
bartender,
a fine establishment.
Pour me a...draught?
Draft?

Whatever you consider
your finest on tap.

I've been out in the fields
on the front line,
maybe a mile or so
down the road,
defending our right
to swear at politicians
and choose which
fast food restaurant
will provide our caloric needs
tenfold
to give the energy
to lounge
for the day.

Keep me company,
bartender.
Let me tell you
about my day.

Just this morning
I was in an ambush with this fella',
my best friend, you know?
It was weird, I tell you,
the way his guts
dangled from the gaping hole
in his stomach.
The first time he cried to Jesus,
who probably couldn't hear him,
half his face was in my lap.
"No such thing as an atheist
in a foxhole."

Go ahead and vomit,
bartender;
we've won you the right,
but all that is in the history books,
and I left the bunkers unscratched
and decided to stop for a drink
at this convenient location.
I would like to forget
the war for ten minutes
until I leave for battle again.

Laugh with me,
bartender.
Let me reminisce.
This may be the last drink I hold in my hand.

I was once a young child who played
freeze tag at recess
and hide-and-go-seek at dusk.
I grew up like my father,
smoked dope once at sixteen,
and bummed the family car on weekends.
I did all a regular teen did.

When I matured,
I met my true love
and raised two lovely daughters
who would climb up on my lap
when I returned home from the factory.
My wife would kiss me on the cheek
and slide dinner in front of my face
as the "Six O' Clock News" stole my
attention.

Ah, don't mind me babbling.
I've got a few sips left.
Here's to the war.

Thanks,
bartender,
I've finished my draft,
and now it's back to my post.

If I didn't have to destroy
that new bridge across the river
at 0800,
I'd stay for Happy Hour.

Or maybe today,
I'll make my first kill
and put a bullet
through the skull of some poor guy
across the field
who played childish games in his youth,
tried drugs before he knew they were
bad,
borrowed his dad's car keys from time to
time,
and didn't yet realize how precious his
wife and kids were
before his draft card was drawn.

My orders from the intercom:
to make sure his distressed, little children
cry silently to themselves because they
can't sleep at night,
and his sweet catholic wife
sits patiently in the comfort
of her living room,
waiting forever
for her husband to come home.

Jacquelyn Boyer



Most Hosts Bring Out Their Best Wine Before the Guests Are Drunk

Michael Kiser

In cellars You are bottled,
stacked, vintage with new,
dust covered and in dark
cabinets to protect Your worth.
Birthed in fruit, trapped in rows,
pressured to extract the potency
of Your sustenance
for very organized importers,
exporters, who send You throughout
the world as first-
class missionaries
of stateliness and wealth.

The homeless do not sip You
tenderly when You fall
into their hands. They
accept your potential
other-worldliness,
mind-bending tendencies,
apologies.

The Innocent Apple

Debra Haddad

A pristine paradise
of chocolate soil,
enriched
with droplets
of sweet rain,
allowing
this caramel-colored
tree to bring forth
spearmint leaves,
blooming into
the birth of
a tender bud.

A baby green
presentation,
growing into
a crimson
sphere of
delectable,
mouth-watering
temptation.

Just so Eve
can bop along
and rip him
from his
contentment,
and take a
bite
out of our
future!

Fairy Tale Revision

Joy C. Kania

Oh, strange pen,
born in another land
like those two children
young—innocent—vibrant
manipulated by parents.

You leave a trail
to show where home is.
Your stomach empty,
ink runs out;
birds eat their only salvation.

Beautiful white paper
stricken with ink:
Hansel and Gretel
gnawing at the candy cottage.
Like the sugary roof in the forest,
your cap is chewed up
with teeth marks.

There's a new owner now,
the other, sad and devastated,
pen held tightly
between chicken-bone fingers.

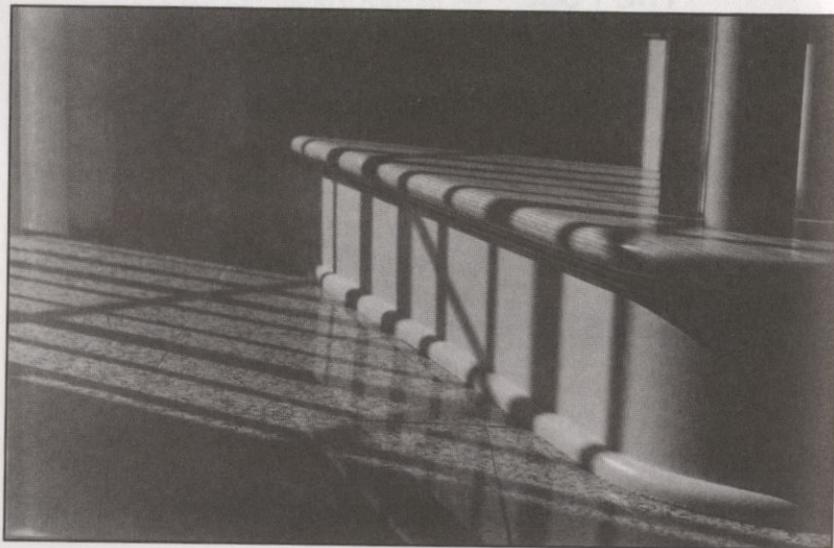
The Poet

Kyle Wooster

A man on a hilltop
In his camouflage suit,
Surveying the landscape
While writing.

His memoirs?
To his mother?
To a friend nearly forgotten?
To his lover?

Maybe for no reason at all.
Perhaps to move the pencil,
To trace his life
With words as his stencil.



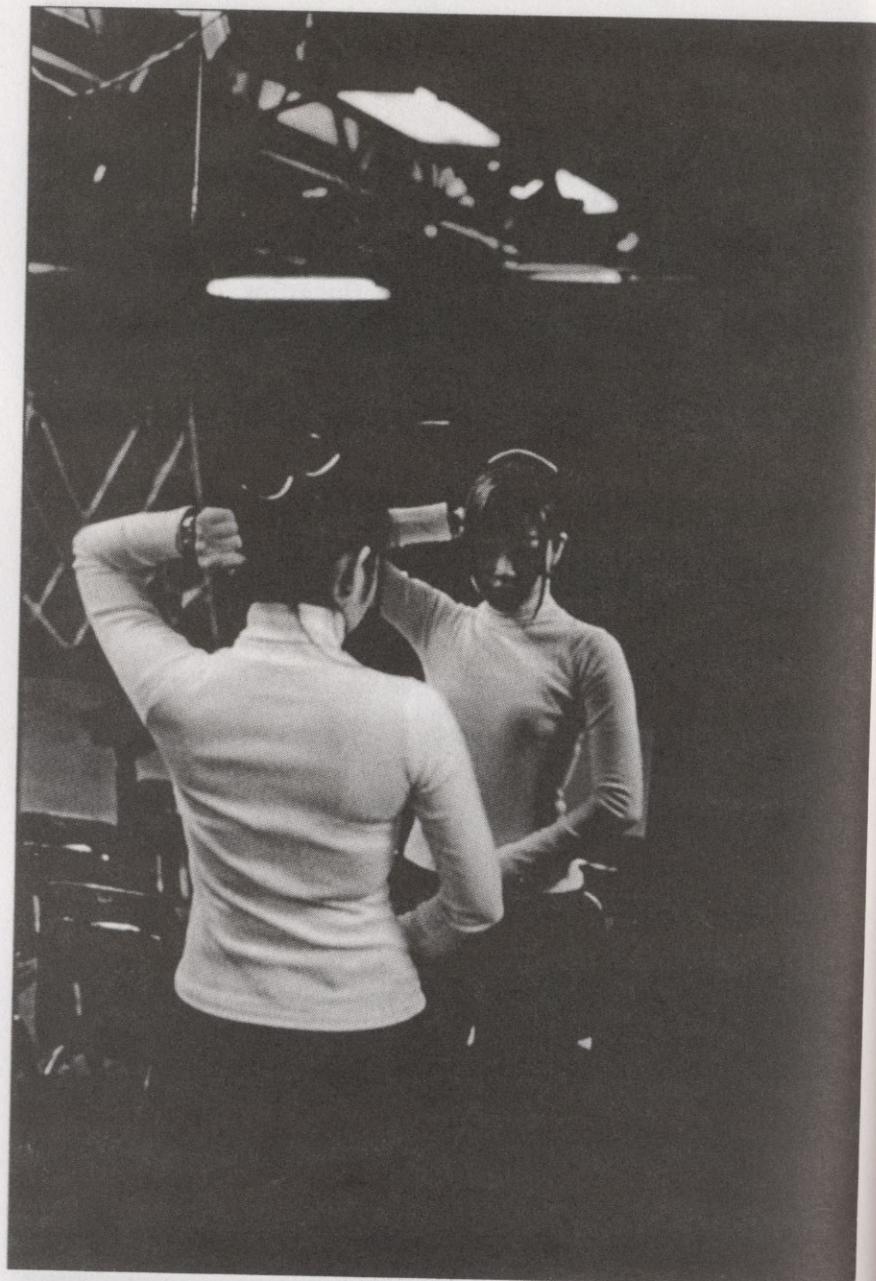
Jacquelyn Boyer

Revealer

Kimi Muir

Silver as a cold winter moon,
it looks back at me
with eyes like my own.
The smooth back of a killer whale's fin,
the jab of its teeth through my fingertips.
It's three eyes open for the ring on its finger
as if it were married.
Hexagon-shaped head
unable to fit just anywhere.
Wonder what size hat it would wear?

Searching for its home,
it spears through, twists ever so straight.
If this key were in Scotland,
it would be red, green, and blue
for its head is plaid in texture and shape.
The founder of electricity,
its metal body attracts me,
unlocking hidden secrets
bound inside.



David Lee

Reflections on an Ancient Isle: The Experiences of an International Traveler

Meredith Lang

Ancient streets mix with modern life, and a strange sense pervades the air. God, progress, beauty—all intermingle to form something special. History has seeped into every corner of this place; there is an antiquity that has not died with countless populations, and that will not let go. Time has forgotten some streets in this place; ghostly footsteps may as well walk down the narrow passages.

Magnificence personified in architecture: a cathedral of old wrought by holy hands. I stand in awe, feeling power and majesty, and wondering about the god for whom this was built. Only for a powerful one was this stone constructed. Ceilings arch and rise, tombs of ancients rest solemnly, tourists gawk and wonder, and I, I feel small and worthless at times. Angels look down upon me. I think about faith and wonder where I am in the world. I am only one of many footsteps in these hallowed and sacred walks.

This land of ancient lore and history—blood spilled upon the ground, legends made. Stone is all around; sheep scatter the sometimes-barren land. I think of beauty—it screams, unrestrained. Lonely hills, misty mountains, and lakes lie still. But I also see desolation and loneliness; the moors and fields stretch out and there is cold. I have seen and imagined this in my daydreams, in my Hollywood-inundated experience. Castle walls strewn with ivy speak of former times. History is everywhere, and I am within it. Who needs a classroom when one is within the walls of time?

A lone American, naïve and crying out, “tourist!”—I see progress and learning, homelessness and desolation, beauty and the raw scars of human advancement. I feel the joy of meeting new people and experiencing new things, and the fear of isolation and the bitter loneliness that comes with being alone. I travel in time; the modern is always surrounded by the prehistoric, and history will not be silenced. I soak up things only seen in a textbook, and see things that should not be seen. I am a pilgrim, traveling to the places where language was born and where it was fostered by great minds. Here, there is academia built for those who can afford it and learning offered for those who have the ambition to seek it, but there are also those who cannot afford even to eat. For even when my soul cries out in amazement at the progress and beauty that has

come from human ingenuity and skill, it weeps at the renewed realization that there is pain and suffering in even the most advanced of cultures.

People have come and gone; civilizations have flourished and fallen; monuments remain. I am only one of many whose footsteps have walked where saints have trod. I am on a journey of self-discovery. I find my strength as the train rolls across the countryside. I have sacrificed familiarity and comfort; I have done more than I thought was possible. My dreams become reality, and I feel immortal. Only through risk is greatness gained. I have achieved personal glory, and I feel as I never have.

Dreams come at night; I can never leave. I have forever been imprinted with an experience that will change me. My mind will not let me forget the things that I have seen and done. I may be back to things familiar, but part of me is really back in a glory of God, or in a modern metropolis, prison of human progress, or in my beloved countryside. I am surrounded by angels of stone, on that barren hill, beside that still lake, or in that ancient street, but I am not here, I am not here.

The Way It Was Meant to Be

Dawn Schindler

He was leaving,
taking himself. All of him.
Even his clothes.
In one big suitcase.

A flash, a double-take.

The sun was shining in my eyes,
on his hair. For the first time,
I noticed it had some red in it.

We were standing there, in the sun,
on the sidewalk, saying goodbye,
squinting.

Beneath us, a beetle hobbled by,
crossing the sidewalk.
We watched until it reached the grass.

Looking at each other, we grinned—
he scratched his forehead;
I shifted my stance.
A truck roared by, leaving a smell
of exhaust and dirt,
so we didn't have to talk.

And that was it.
Those passing by probably thought
we were having a pleasant chat.

It was supposed to be raining; we were
supposed to be staring sadly into each
other's eyes with breathless promises
longing for time to stand still.

Sunflowers

Joy C. Kania

Sun
flows
on
us
low
flowers;
we're
no
ferns,
nor
flour.



Tracy Marshallick

Tiny Treasures

Melissa Swartz

Those lazy days of sun
When bugs dance quiet ballets,
And blonde tendrils of hay whisper secrets
That slip away on the breeze.

Days when clouds puff out their chests to
Impress, as they pass by,
The poplars who bow
In courteous recognition.

When the air is scented
With oxygen, creation's perfume,
Breathed out by nature's
Tiny treasures.

April

Debra Haddad

The fly fishermen
cast their lines
against the sky,
and
I think of you.
I get caught up
in the draft
from the campfire,
as time passes itself
through my tears.

The screen door
slams,
and I look
for you there
among musty pines
and Adirondack chairs.
I will the wind
to stop
and it does,
but the burning chill
remains
deep within my
sorrow-filled soul.

The water washes
the stones
and the mountain
whispers secrets
to the stream,
and I know
you are there
somewhere
in their wisdom,
watching quietly
and knowing
how much
I deeply
miss you.

Grass

Amy Howard

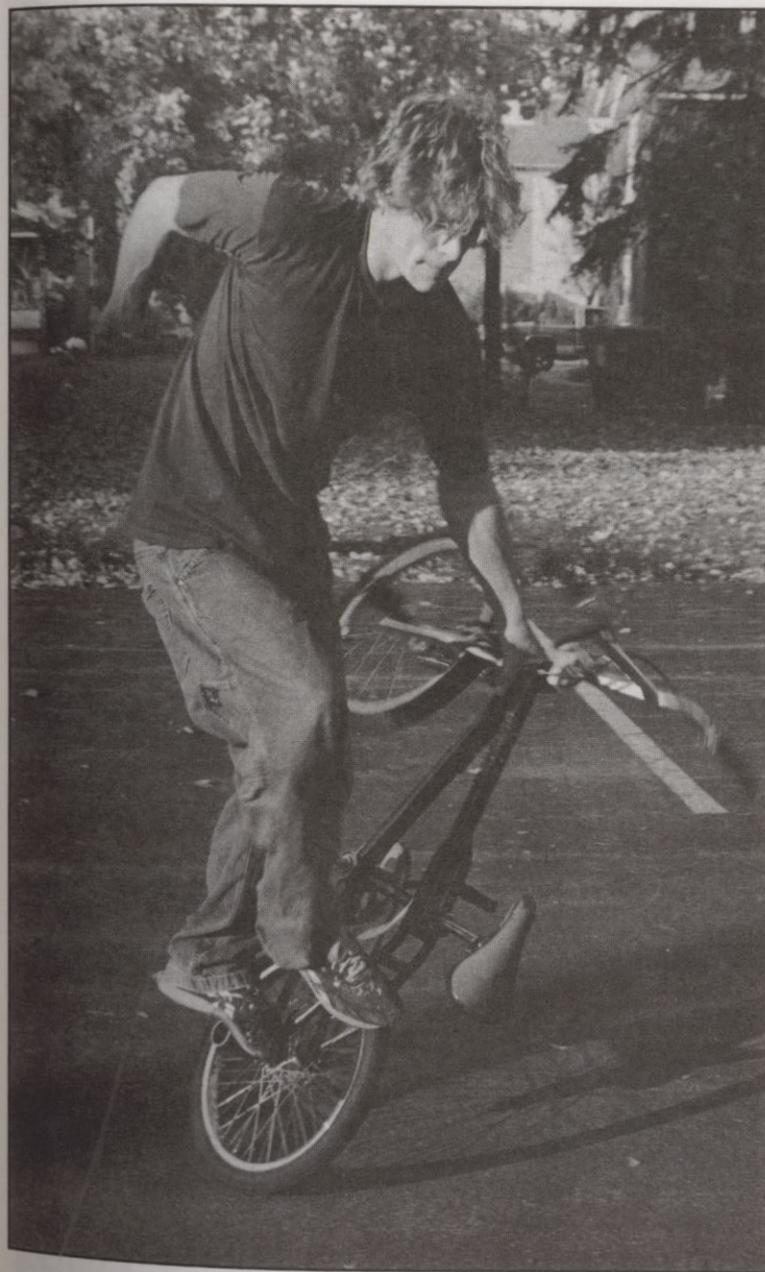
It's a child's playground,
Home to lovers' picnics,
A soft blanket to a slumbering baby,
A hiding place for deer,
Clothing for the dirt,
A roof for worms.

Green as money, it glows in the sun,
Captures the wind and dances to its own song
Of freedom and child-like innocence.

It can stretch as tall as the tallest tower
Or compress itself to the length of a teardrop
On a grown man's cheek
Trampled on, walked over, covered by dirt
and animal remnants,
It still shimmers, covered with dew
in the early-morning sun.

Easily swayed by the breeze,
Flexible yet breakable,
It hibernates in the winter
Under layers of ice and snow.

After frowning its sad brown color,
Its green face smiles again
In the comfort of spring.



Nicole Herritt



Nicole Herritt

Such Things Are Interesting

Joy C. Kania

Between branches of tall trees,
animals form clouds of
golden retrievers and bumblebees
while the wind whistles
the robin's tune;
grassy meadows of nothingness
inhabit areas of emptiness;
patches of moss and rows of ferns
feed off the sun's growing nutrients;
nightfall dons and the moon beams:
gentle noises, roaming crickets,
large open fields, enclosed by pickets.

Other things
intentionally ordinary are not:
days ancient-but-new are the sun's hours;
stretching grass, vast apple trees,
and uncontainable fields of wildflowers;
the helicopter-like hummingbird;
the determined salmon, so resolute
to hatch offspring upstream.
All these are interesting.

The Efflorescence of a Tree

Brianne Goldsmith

I stare at her
standing quietly
across the street,
illuminated by the pale moonlight above
and the muted yellow glow from the lamplight
shining up her dress
that through autumn's windy hand is now wearing thin.
As the days pass by and draw close to winter's door,
I wonder if she is becoming cold.
Does she mourn her friends
or take comfort that winter will blanket
her naked form in a glittering gown
of snow?

The Leaf's Last Lament Before Decay

Brianne Goldsmith

Like a drunken vampire bat
unbalanced from his latest drink,
losing his grip
from his perilous cavern perch,
I don't want to let go.

Cold air stimulates a light wind,
arouses new thoughts,
moves me.

Like a child hanging onto a limb,
legs swinging, lightly, gently,
I dangle, a tired gymnast
afraid to swing to the next ring.

Alive again,
the wind tries to sway me,
bend me.
I will not submit
to its careless whim.

I will not break.

I
Will
Not
Change.

Broken Dreams of Glass

Candice Rayls

Free-falling,
it crashes to a fatal landing,
cracking faith,
shattering the still
house, robbing its silence.

Jagged blades of snow
clutter the floor,
flakes of failure
slice through hope,
a homicide of fate.

The Lure of Flames

Alan Vezina

The November wind
Whips the house into submission.

Orange and amber leaves
Cover up the bruises:
Shattered dolls and broken toys,
Flung across the room in anger,
Wait for death.

I am wrapped in a faded green quilt;
Secure in a chair by the fire.
The warming light of the hearth
Burns away the memories.
Shadows gather outside the room
And in my mind.

Some things are meant to be forgotten
Like coins flung to the bottom of a wishing well.
Other things were never meant to be.

Images flash before me:
Blond hair and strawberries,
Emerald eyes and a baseball cap,
And too many tearful good-byes.

I lie inside a coffin being buried beneath the earth;
Each shovel of dirt that lands
Echoes in my head.

Steadily, the hole fills up
And the sand cascades through the pipe.
Roads never opened and books never walked
Turn to ash.
My life, my world, my universe—
Composed of the consuming flame.

The Race for Gold—Well, Not Exactly

Matt Bower

The bitter cold air blows in from Canada: the first sign that another harsh winter is closing in quickly. The plummeting temperature not only signals the beginning of the new season; it also reminds the residents of Mosquito Valley, a small, residential area in central Pennsylvania, that the great Frostbite Race is about to commence. The Frost Bite Race is held annually in late November and is run from one end of Mosquito Valley to the other. The participants consist of locals from the central Pennsylvania region who feel that they have what it takes to outlast the freezing weather—and each other.

As a resident of the valley, I have made it a habit to sit on my front porch and watch the competition. Grab a cold beer from the fridge, pull up a chair, and watch with me as the runners whiz by. You, too, will notice that there are three distinct classes of runners in this race: the “movers,” the shakers,” and the “who-gives-a-rotten-rip-snort-anyway-as-long-as-I-don’t-die” division. What’s that? I think I hear the starting gun. Prepare yourself for the most exhilarating “athletic” extravaganza since the ancient Greeks invented “paper, rock, scissors.”

Ah, here come a few runners. These guys are the “movers,” the true Olympiads. They are the fellows who head the field every year. Simply put, they move faster than everyone else. Without a doubt, they are the most boring to watch. They seem to be the same bunch of guys every year, reminding every onlooker that they haven’t lost a step since last year’s race. These are not the guys you and I have come to see. I could watch the Boston Marathon on television and see the same picture. Yeah, they may be good athletes, but they have no humorous characteristics; humor is what the Frostbite Race is all about.

Once all the movers have flown by, there is a huge gap of both time and space. You’d think the race was over because no one else can be seen running by for the next ten minutes or so. Hey, don’t retire to the recliner just yet; the race is just beginning to get exciting. The first couple of “shakers” have just arrived on the scene. These plump individuals are referred to as the shakers because their whole bodies shake and jiggle as they jog by. They mean well, and they try their hardest, but it seems that they could be part of the movers if they hadn’t decided to attend Happy Hour at the local bar every day for the last year. Some of these guys look as though they are trying to smuggle a bowling ball underneath their shirts. The repeating wave patterns in which the fat on their bodies flows when jogging is enough to put anyone in a trance. All joking aside, these men run the race for the right reason. Their reason is not to win but to prove to themselves that the race can be finished even though they are out of shape and could suffer a coronary any second. We onlookers should have

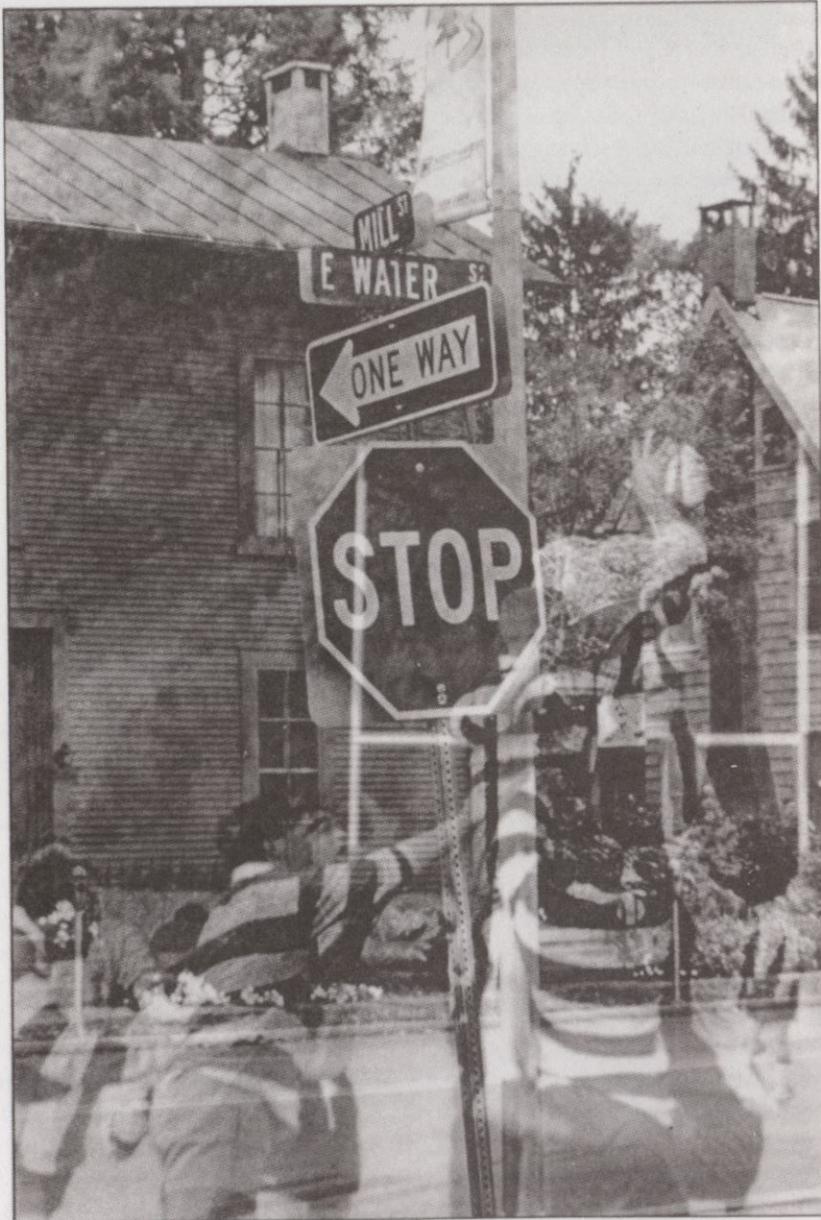
respect for the shakers, maybe just because they can move at all.

After another gap of space and ten minutes’ time, into view come the “who-gives-a-rotten-rip-snort-anyway--as-long-as-I-don’t-die” division. When one of these fellows finally does come into view, it is quite a great deal longer before you can begin to make out any of his features. They are so damn slow. Not simply because they jog slower than the shakers in a struggle to finish, but because they walk. By the time some of them begin strolling by, a few of the movers have already reached the end of the valley, turned around, and have begun to pass the complete slackers. Needless to say, the movers refuse to make eye contact. Their sole purpose is, ah, I have no idea why they enter, but they certainly are my favorite contestants.

There is a lot that makes the slackers fun to watch. They leisurely walk by and talk among themselves, seemingly totally unaware that they are in a race. I betcha’ I could lure one onto my front porch if I put a can of Busch on a string, tossed it out toward the street, and slowly retrieved it. Heck, I could probably get six or seven with one can. The only other technique to get one trotting faster is if one of their wives were hiding in a bush somewhere along the road, waiting for her husband. When he passed, she’d slither stealthily out of the shrubbery and strike from behind like a ferocious, middle-aged, housewife pit viper. The fatal venom would be a barrage of questions, such as “Where the hell were you last night?” or “When in God’s name are you going to fix the medicine cabinet?” The slacker would run like a flash for his life.

After an entertaining half-hour, the last of the slackers can be seen in the distance. Behind him is the huge steel beast which prompts even the least motivated to finish the race. The monster looms like the imminent peril of the Rapture. To the untrained, yes, it is merely an ambulance; I like to call this emergency vehicle “The Intimidator.” Although you would think the job of the ambulance would be to aid any who fall victim to the valley road, I’ve never seen it slow down, and I believe its sole purpose is to keep runners from stopping completely. The last runner in the pack has to be thinking, “The second I stop, “crunch,” better keep moving.” Legend has it that once, not too long ago, that actually happened some time back in the Reagan administration. This one fella’ rearin’ up the field stopped because he had to tie his shoe. Seconds later, maintenance people were coming out the back of “The Intimidator” with shovels and hoses to scrape his body from the road and rinse away the blood.

I don’t think I’d miss the Frostbite Race for anything. Even though every year renders the same pathetic scene, I sit in a rocker on my front porch and finish a six pack before the last runner leaves my sight; I’ll never break tradition. I mean, how many exciting things happen in rural Mosquito valley? Not much other than the annual competition between some of central PA’s most celebrated losers and laggards known as the Frostbite Race.



David Lee

Frames

Michael Kiser

All afternoon and late into the evening, the wooden chair wore into his bones. As if on cue, he adjusted his frames to focus in on the cold world around him. He stared at his water glass with apathy, as if its poison were inescapable. Slowly, he turned the glass in his trembling hand as the remaining warmth withdrew from his body. Faintly, he heard the ice cubes rumbling.

So indifferent and self-involved they were. So cold and hardened so as to avoid any impact on each other, but repulsion, only to melt into the same life-giving water. As they harden, they swell with themselves, attempting to feed off the lessening pool beneath them, prevailing to rise towards the top and reach the warming air that will, in response to their bitterness, melt them mercilessly. They will die, leaving behind only their frigidness, to be drunk without care, becoming part of a much more complex coldness.

Once again, he adjusts the blurry world around him, but nothing's changed; forget about it. He has decided that this is his lot, this coldness, this misery. He has failed to find happiness, he could not live up to such an ideal. But misery, oh, this was sweet and indulging, and infinite in its depth. Of this he could have all he insanely desired, that is, until he swells, freezes, and eventually melts, leaving nothing but this inflicted coldness to be savoured by another, perhaps more ambitious, self-pity.

From the Balcony of a Phantasmagoric State

Michael Kiser

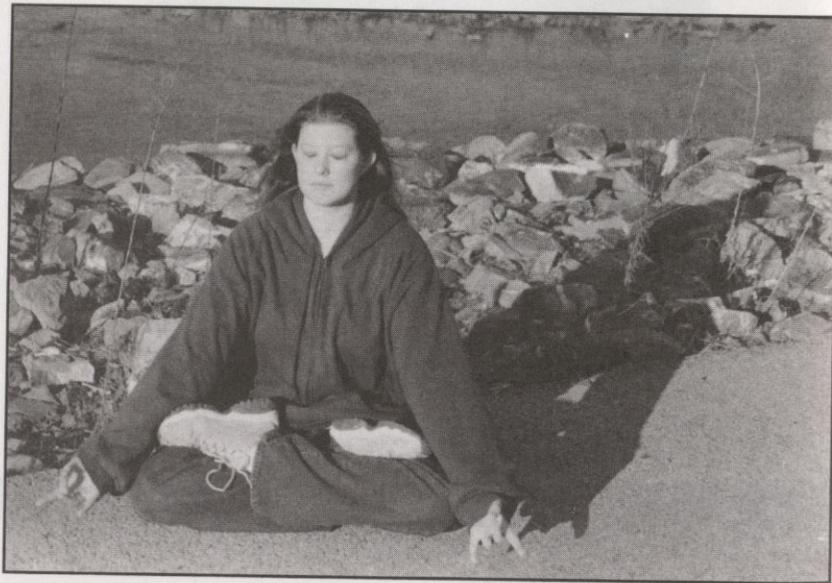
Steps, dragging anchors,
under low, oppressive clouds,
partly submerged, partly realized,
usher me through fallen brilliance,
widening zigzag fissures in
illuminated dust.

All could stop and lie down there,
feel comfortable, there
where the fallen colours lie.
One last glorious reminder,
before He sleeps, for those who lift
not their heads, lift not their eyes,
lift not their hearts towards heaven,
convinced He is dying,
that they are dying,
that there will be no spring.

An autumn leaf preserves
throughout winter
carefully pressed
between the pages of Poe.



Nicole Herritt



Stephanie Caplinger

The Father to Dylan Thomas: Thus—Shall She So Soon Stay?

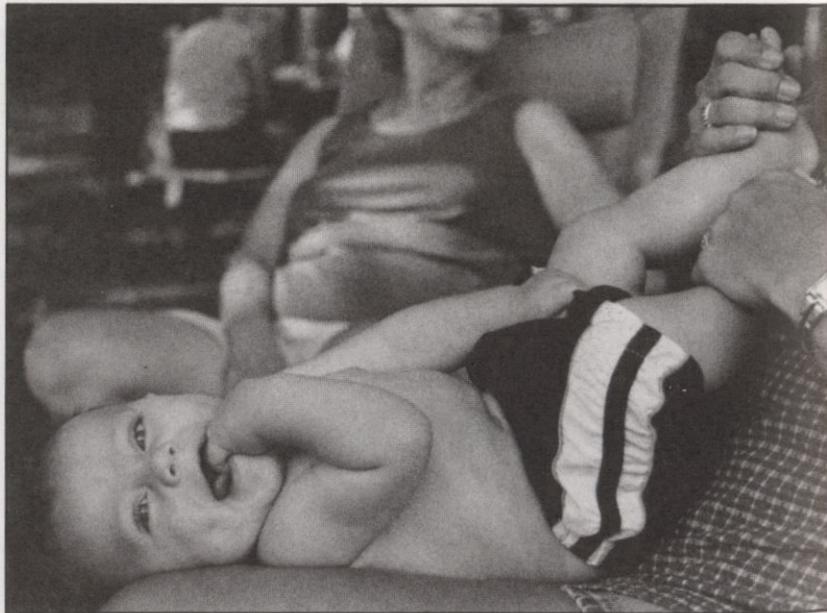
Robert Seth Moore

The moon shall fly with night's progress,
Sir Zephyr hails;
But wind will not have her success,
Save slow my sails.

Among the woods she leaves you; stay.
It howls, "Moon do not run!"
Yet this is why we will not stay;
He soon shall see the sun.

It will not stay; she soon will leave.
The dawn we see so near!
But — have for me —
A tear.

Go.
Gone,
Gentle.



Nicole Cichon

Atrophy

Melissa Swartz

Termite of the body,
Gnawing, carnage in your wake.
No exterminator a remedy.

Enemy at war with the flesh.
Can't kill you with poison
Or those invisible bullets.

Possessing the body,
Like one of hell's demons,
No priest to exorcise.

Like gypsy moths,
You devour, growing relentlessly,
Immune to pesticides.

Unmerciful, malignant murderer—yet,
No criminal to arrest.



Nicole Cichon

Taking Inventory

Melissa Swartz

There it was
Standing erect and proud:
One solitary, coarse, white hair.

Then, as I spun away from the mirror,
I caught a glimpse
Of my mother's butt
Hanging where mine used to be.

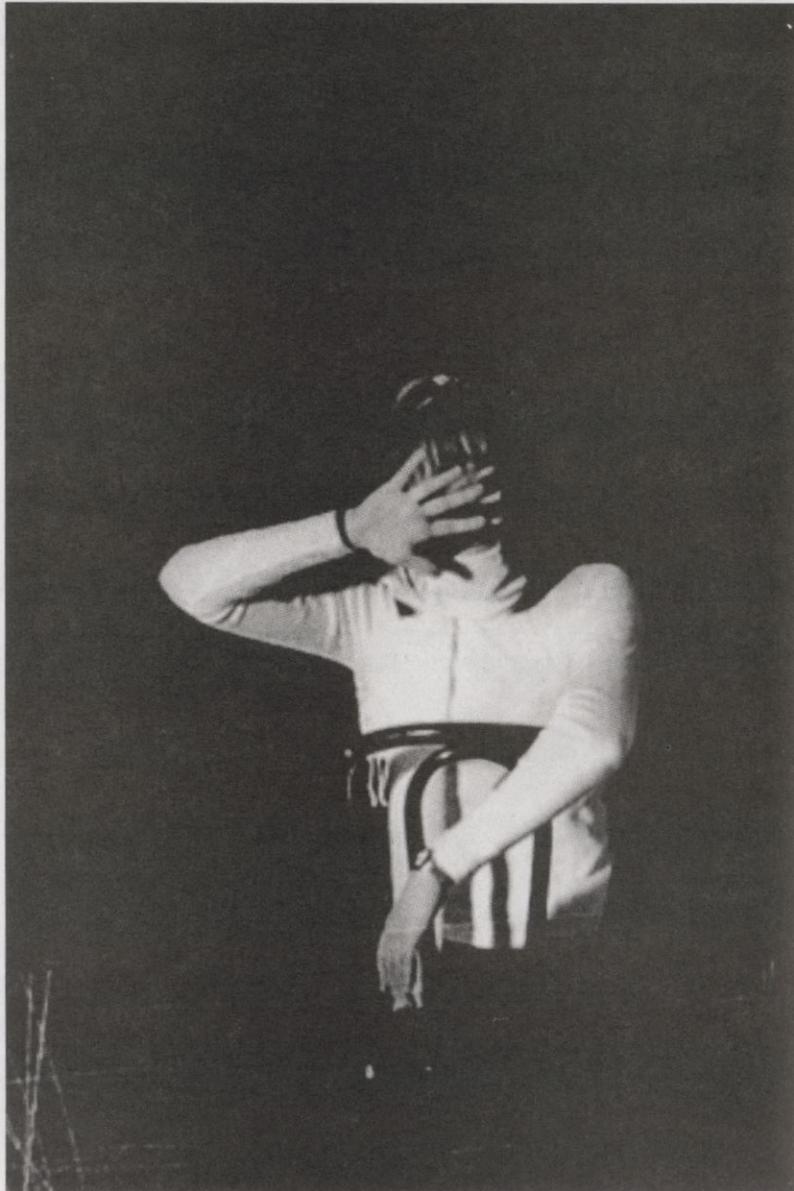
And my boobs,
Like a compass,
Were pointing
Due south.

And then I looked at you:

Sitting there, the sun reflecting off
Your head and
Using your paunchy little
Tummy for a table.

Your chest is growing
Some big ole granddaddy hairs
And some other things
Droop just a bit.

No more hardbodies
For us, dear one.
Just bags of bones,
We sag together.



David Lee

Who Gave Us the Right?

Lacey Mundrick

Prejudice: “an opinion made without an adequate basis...to damage by a judgment or action” (*Merriam-Webster* 577). One begins to wonder how people can judge one another merely by appearance. Has the world we live in become so consumed with material objects that it is all right to belittle one another? Is it acceptable to teach our children to discriminate because of race, appearance, sexual orientation, or heritage? Will it be all right when it happens to our children? Often, people do not think about these many things when they belittle others. Prejudice has simply become a reaction as common as crying or as being happy. Who gave us the right to judge? The major question that presses on my mind is who invented prejudice, and has it ever happened to them?

The tragic events that took place the night of high school graduation altered my viewpoint of prejudice dramatically. Graduation night is full of laughter, excitement, and many unexpected events. It is supposed to be our formal entrance into the “real world.” This is the time for us to mature in a way that we never thought possible. High hopes and great expectations fill the sky as our caps are tossed into the chilly night air. All eyes are on us as the magical feeling of the evening consumes us. I would have never thought that this night would change my outlook on life forever.

Flyers scattered throughout the student body like wild fire as soon as the ceremony was finished. It was a party on the mountain, and everyone was invited. The directions to the party were scrawled on bright, white paper in black ink with tiny little drawings of houses and roads. Muffled voices arose from the crowd as students paired up with rides to the party. I was still debating whether or not to attend the most important social event of the year, but anybody who was anybody was going to be there, so I decided to make an appearance. I would just stop by and have a little fun, so I thought.

All of the excitement had faded now like fireworks in the sky; although to us, the night had just begun. Everyone had gone home, including myself, to change for the party. I changed out of my dress and put some casual attire on. When I arrived at the party, I saw an old log cabin crammed full of people. Through the window, I could see clouds of smoke and colorful lights flashing on the walls. I took a deep breath and prepared for my entrance into the party.

As I walked into the crowded room, I instantly felt nauseous from the stench of alcohol and cigarettes in the air. My lungs felt like a balloon being filled with toxic gases that was about to explode. It was a dark room filled with mysterious faces blackened by the darkness. Wandering aimlessly through the crowd, I managed to bump into some fellow classmates. It was pointless to try to hold a conversation over the hammering music, so I moved forward, almost drowning in the crowd of students.

As I moved near the back of the room, I noticed a short, stocky girl with billowing black hair hiding in the corner. The right side of her face was covered by the shadows, and her black attire made her look as though she were vanishing into the background. I knew it was a familiar face, but I could not recollect a name. I moved closer to the girl who was holding a clear, plastic cup filled with a golden-colored liquid. Suddenly, her eyes met mine; she motioned for me to come closer.

As I approached the girl, I tried harder to remember her name. I knew that we had a few classes together, but we had never really held a conversation. I would have never imagined seeing her at this party; throughout all of our high school years, she had been the outcast, so to speak. She never wore any color other than black, and she kept completely to herself. Those qualities singled her out to be the center of humiliation for the last three years of high school. I still could not remember her name! I kept walking, and suddenly it hit me, her name was Amanda.

As soon as I got over to her, Amanda asked me to accompany her to get some refreshments. Considering this was a night of new beginnings, I decided I was going to make a new friend. It was almost as if I had given her a million dollars, and it felt good to make her feel accepted. As we walked over to the table, looks of utter repulsion were cast toward us with every step we took. It was as if I had entered a room full of strangers. These people were hateful and cruel; these were not my fellow classmates, were they?

We squeezed through the crowd to make our way to the refreshment table; little did we know that this was the biggest mistake we could have made. Suddenly, it went from the sporadic colored lights on the wall to bright, blinding lights. All of the chit chat and laughter had ceased to a halt, and now you could identify the faces amongst the crowd. Time stood still, and all was silent. It was as if we were about to be judged in front of a jury of our peers.

The voice on the microphone bellowed out in a very deep voice, "What do you think you are doing here?" The voice echoed throughout the room like booming thunder. The skinny, narrow finger pointed out into the crowd; it was pointing directly at Amanda. Amanda seemed to shrink in embarrassment with every cruel word that was spoken. I was bewildered at what was happening right in front of my face. After Amanda had caught her breath, in a soft voice she began to speak. "I am a part of this class, and I deserve to have fun too," Amanda replied as her face turned as red as the sweater I had on.

For the next few minutes, which seemed like eternity, Amanda did the best she could to defend herself. The boy on the microphone was belittling her in front of the entire graduating class. Beads of sweat began to form on her upper lip as she quivered with embarrassment. The crowd began to cheer the boy on, as he told her how she would never fit in, and that she had made a big mistake by showing up there that night. It was almost as if he were threatening her life, and the crowd was behind him all the way. I wanted to help her, but I did not

know how to do so.

I could feel the tension in the room getting worse as the insults became louder and more devastating to Amanda. I saw the tears welling up in Amanda's eyes, and this just gave the boy more reason to continue. Finally, like a volcano erupting, Amanda let him have it. She began to shout, "I will not stand here and let you make me feel as if I am not worthy of your company. Not one person in this room has taken the time to get to know me. How can you judge me? You do not even know me. I will give you the satisfaction of thinking you have won, but you are wrong. I will leave, but someday when your child comes home crying, you will regret every word you have spoken to me tonight. I hope those feelings of regret haunt you for the rest of your life!"

Amanda had won; the boy on the microphone was speechless. The crowd turned and waited for his reply, but he had none. Amanda bolted from the room, and I was right behind her. I had only just met Amanda, but I knew I had found a lifelong friend. I found Amanda sitting on the ground with tears pouring off her face. I really did not know what to say, so I just listened. We sat on the ground for hours sharing our inner most feelings and secrets. She was so much like me in many different ways, and if I had not been at that party, I would have never met her. Amanda was like a buried treasure, just waiting for someone to discover her.

I followed Amanda home because I knew she was devastated about everything that had happened. The entire drive to Amanda's house, I kept replaying the night's events over in my mind. I was trying to think what I would have done if it would have been me. I could still see the look on Amanda's face and the devastation in her eyes. I had made fun of a few people in high school, but I never realized how much pain it could cause—until that night. I knew, in that moment, that I would never forget that night for the rest of my life.

When I got home, I went straight to my room. Sitting on my bed, I began to think about all that had happened that night. Until then, it had never hit me that I had graduated; all of my carefree high school days were over. I remembered how excited I was the night before graduation. Until that moment, graduation was the last thought that had crossed my mind. What happened that night at the party had ruined the most important night of my life. It was as if I missed the most important night of my life, due to a bunch of immature kids. This thought rather depressed me, and then, I remembered how much pain Amanda had gone through. I had so many things to be thankful for, and to top it all off, I had made a lifelong friend.

In the summer, Amanda and I made many great memories, enough to last a lifetime. From time to time, we would run into people from our graduating class, and we would act as if they were invisible to us. Graduation night made many things very clear to Amanda and me; we realized who our real friends really were, and how cruel the "real world" can be. We learned the most important lesson of our lives that night, and it was something that no one could

have ever taught us in school. Prejudice is a self-defense mechanism for ignorant people who will never be true to themselves.

Now and then, Amanda and I reminisce about the party. Every time I see Amanda, I always remind her who came out the better person and that comforts her. I realize that the pain from that night is still fresh in her mind. The bottom line is kids can be cruel, and only the strong can overcome their ignorance.

By August, Amanda and I began preparing for our first day of college. Amanda had decided to attend an art institute in New York, and I decided to attend Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania. We were about to go our separate ways. It was a very sad day for both of us. As I watched Amanda drive away, I smiled. At that moment, I knew that our friendship had not ended because the bond we created would last forever. Amanda is in New York turning her lifelong dreams into reality. I know that she has not forgotten me, and in turn, I will never forget her.

Although I was very nervous about making new friends in college, it was not hard at all. In fact, tonight I attended my first college party. It was going to be a big event; everyone was going to be there. When I arrived at the party, it was like a flashback of graduation night. It was an old log cabin filled with people. I could see colorful lights flashing on the wall and clouds of smoke seeping out of the windows. The hammering music rattled the walls, and the smell of alcohol filled the air. I stood outside for a minute just staring in the window.

I collected myself and opened the door of the cabin. It looked like there were a million people crammed in the cabin. I looked over in the corner, and there she was. Could it be? Is that Amanda? I shoved my way through the crowd to get to her, and then she was gone. She was walking over to the refreshment table, holding a clear plastic cup filled with a golden-colored liquid. I ran over to her and placed my hand on her shoulder. As she turned around, she said, "Do I know you?" At first I could not speak, and then I managed to spit out, "I'm sorry, I thought you were someone else." As I walked away, the music stopped, and the room was silent. Over the sound system, a man shouted, "What do you think you are doing here?" When I turned around, a skinny, narrow finger was pointing directly at me.

Ice Queen

for Samantha

Melissa Swartz

A cold marble Miss
Whose heart shivers

Within her deep-
Freeze body.

Skin, translucent like ice,
Chilling blue eyes

That cut like
Raw arctic air.

Frost forms on her blue-tinged lips
As a blizzard of frigid words fly

Hard as hailstones
Aimed to injure

Those who would try
To warm her.



Nicole Cichon

Communication

Dawn Schindler

I could see it
in your face.

It was obvious

you weren't listening;
you were thinking
of what story of yours
you could tell next.

You licked your lips
and worked your jaw,
ready to jump into the gap
of my sentence—
I dared not even breathe
for fear of not having another chance—
I gripped my chair to hold on.
Your gaze shifted, flitting.
I almost expected you
to rub your hands together
in anticipation of your feast,
the white cracked spittle
in the corners of your mouth
disgustingly shining.

To Lauren

Alan Vezina

Self-righteous,
bitch,
fishing
in the gutter,

looking for change
to call a stranger,
make sure everything
remains the same.

Who are you
looking for?

I should kick you
while you're down—
for everything.

Remember the teddy bear
you gave me for my birthday,
impaled on my bedroom door,
cotton stuffing floating to the floor?

And the hockey stick,
and the metal baseball bat?
Still have a scar
though it's covered by hair
and time.

Pushed into darkness
so you could shine ever brighter,
I learned fast to sink
into the background
and not be
noticed.

While you had everyone's attention,
I sat on the floor
and played with the dogs.
I didn't mind it
after the first couple of years.

How the mighty have fallen
from grace,
hair matted down and greasy,
eyes glazed over
from that late-night bottle.

I should hate you.
Maybe I do,
but give me your hand,
if your pride can take it,
and let me help you up.

Advice From a Fellow Human Being

Matt Bower

I could live until all my hair falls out
and retirement is half a lifetime away,
or I could trip down the stairs after tomorrow morning's omelet
and crack my neck on the living room floor.

I could be "at the right place at the right time,"
be "discovered,"
and grace the golden streets of Hollywood
in a brand new Mustang,
or I could perform my act at "open mic night"
minutes late and miss the talent scout,
and end up tattooed to an eight-to-five desk job.

I could meet the female version of me
at Turkey Hill while pumping gas
late one Monday night,
or I could pass her car with its full tank
a minute before I pull in
for a refill.

No matter what number
the casino ball cradles,
I once
laughed at a blonde joke a friend cracked at lunch;
expected training wheels for Christmas,
but Santa brought me a bike;
asked the girl who runs the register to a Saturday night movie,
but she had to "fold laundry";
watched Mom cook me dinner although she was late for work
and I knew I was loved;
drove home from Joey's place after a few too many beers;
stuck ten bucks in a can that pictured a smiling,
middle-aged woman who needed a heart;
pointed and laughed at some poor, fat kid

who dropped his tray in the cafeteria;
asked an elderly lady at Wal-Mart
if she needed help reading medicine labels;
snuck downstairs at one in the morning
to watch "R" movies on Cinemax;
caught a trophy trout on opening day
but decided to throw it back in the stream;
missed church on Sunday morning
because I felt so warm under the bed covers;
slipped on a banana peel in front of a child
just to hear him laugh;
sat at a phone after dinner waiting for someone, anyone,
to call so I'd feel noticed;
called a friend after dinner because I thought maybe
he'd want to chat about his day.

And the seconds and minutes,
days and weeks,
months and years
tick toward a plot on the hill.
I'll hold the stair rail a little tighter tomorrow morning,
show up five minutes early for my performance,
and say "Hi" to the girl waiting in line at the gas station.

The Old Bat

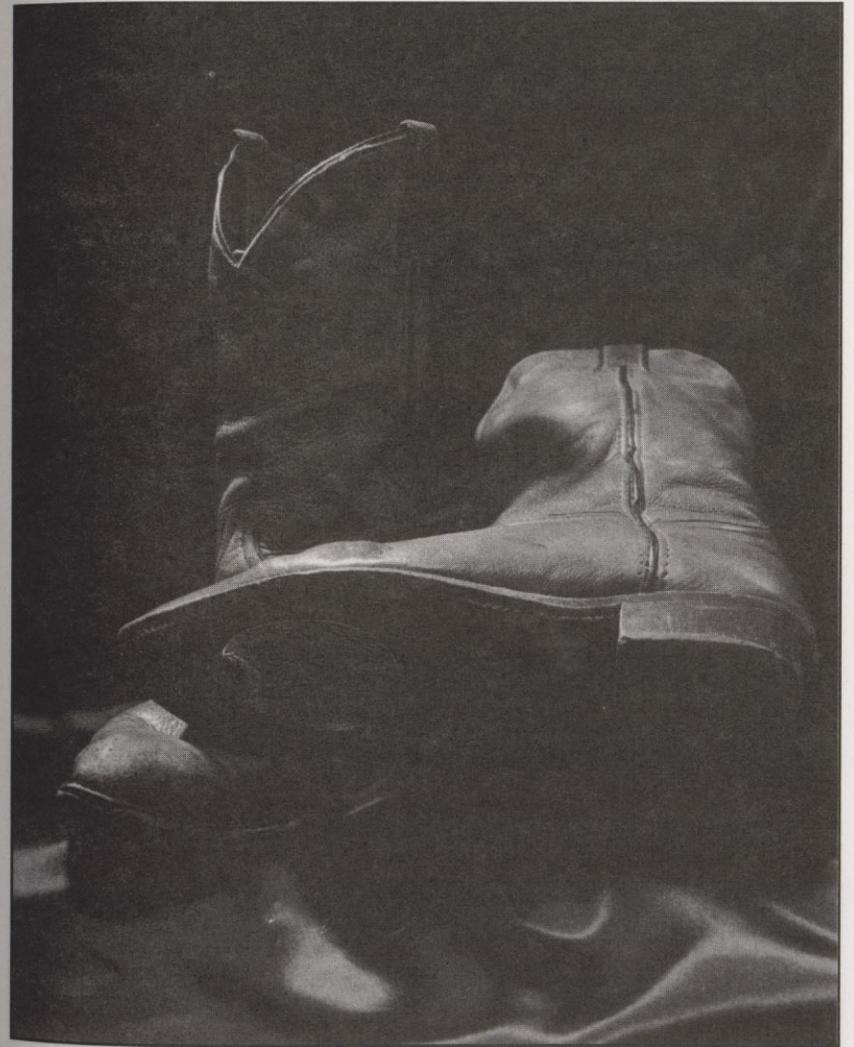
Melissa Swartz

Your face would splinter
Into tiny shards, like the glass of a window
Shattered by a baseball,
Should you allow yourself to smile.

Your chin sits on your throat
Like a golf ball on its tee
And your head, a basketball,
Bounces with old, stale air.

Well, here, old woman,
Take this pin, insert it
Into that little
Black hole—deflate
Yourself.

And let the rest of us
Enjoy the game.



Stephanie Caplinger

Duchamp Takes Rook Pawn

Thomas Justice

The chocolate grinder
is still spinning,
but as the clock unwinds
the rotations slow,
and it all starts to wobble
wild and random
like a dying top,
and here we are
getting dizzy
pondering our next move
on black and white squares.

Left below
to grind alone,
to meter out
the tired machinations
of another lost love
while she perches
on a cloud fished from
a dead sea,
graceful, arcing, stabbing
into nothing
but a crack in the glass.



Thomas Justice



Nicole Cichon

God Took A Bullet in the Desert

God is on our side:
President Bush before the Gulf War

Matt Bower

Why did a young pilot
get shot down over the Gulf?
Explain why an American son
lost a limb in a landmine explosion?
And some return as
disabled vegetables in wheel chairs;
some with poison in their lungs.
Thanks, God!

I don't recall God
giving a military press conference
with detailed charts and graphs
depicting why so many
lost control of their bowels in the trenches.
Did they lose their faith in
"The Man in the Clouds"?

With the Supreme Being in their dugout,
you'd figure those rookie soldiers
would have a different rally cry:
"Hey boys, let's pitch a shutout, then order a large pizza
with pepperoni."

You'd assume they'd gone
to the Persian War stage
just for shits and giggles.
But those poor lads didn't giggle
unless the shit wasn't theirs.

The news was heard
on the intercom one overcast day,
reports pouring in from overseas
that the Desert Shield
had been punctured,
and God wasn't omnipotent after all.
The Bible was a farce.
Genesis a knock-knock joke.

Through a speech to the Mid East
on Thanksgiving Day
the boys were informed,
so they wouldn't be surprised
if Mad Dog Dick took a pellet to the nuts.

Or maybe God chose the Americans
in His cosmic Atari game,
but He's having trouble because
it's set on the "hard level."

Uncle Sam wants...
No, God wants YOU
to join the boys overseas
because he can't help you
balance your checkbook
or grow your flowerbed
back home.

The soldiers on the other side must be quaking,
struggling against God's war machine.
If God is in the tip of every warhead,
the butt of every assault rifle,
the firepower of every fighter jet,
the guts of every bullet that slices the skull
of the innocent child who gets in the way,
why even fight?

God is an American,
but the hometown country boys
whose innards have been spattered
blame God, who had to run
to the corner store to pick up milk
in the heat of battle.

Or God didn't consider
the full potential
of Allah's arsenal
and He underestimated
the final death toll.

Things slip people's minds.
He's probably misplaced his car keys
once or twice.

What if God sold out
and the Allies paid Him
in exchange for
a ten-year contract
to use His name
in war propaganda?
It's hard to resist the green.

You'd think God would dock
His battleship and
watch the fighting with a frown
on His throne up above,
and convert the desert sand
into a playground
for the terror-stricken children
or a family picnic ground
for stranded refugees.
Instead,
God dropped the bomb.

Come on Big Guy,
let's go out for a cold one
and celebrate the victory.
It's on You.

Something About Expectations

Sheila B. Gernavage

Look at what we do to you!
Some twiddle you carelessly between their fingers.
 You are a baton, a hula-hoop.
Some nibble at you nervously.
 You are a bit of muenster, a saltine.
Some make you chatter “click, click” incessantly.
 You are a gossip, a world leader.
Others let you rest,
Tuck you neatly away in their pockets.
 A secret, a treasure.
And you,
my Pilot G-207 blue ballpoint pen,
you sit neatly, at ease, upon my desk.
Sharing coffee,
sometimes tea,
sometimes ideas, ideals.
Your ink swirls and waits patiently
for the next letter,
the next memory.
Permanent one, I only hope
you never leave.

Lost Left Sock

Sheila B. Gernavage

Waiting—
as I have every Thursday
for the past seven years—
on the folding table,
watching my friends paired
with their sole mates
for better or worse,
soiled or holed,
but today
you do not come.

Wanting to frantically tear
through the dryer,
filled with a horde of self-sufficient wearables,
soft cottony shirts,
finely pleated pants,
lacy red underwear.
As if through exquisite marbles,
I sift all colors and shapes,
but you're not there.
My lint-filled letter from the war department,
the “Kenmore” badge of glory glistens.
You are not coming back.

I can still see your
red stitches, purple stripes,
how you were
more faded than I.

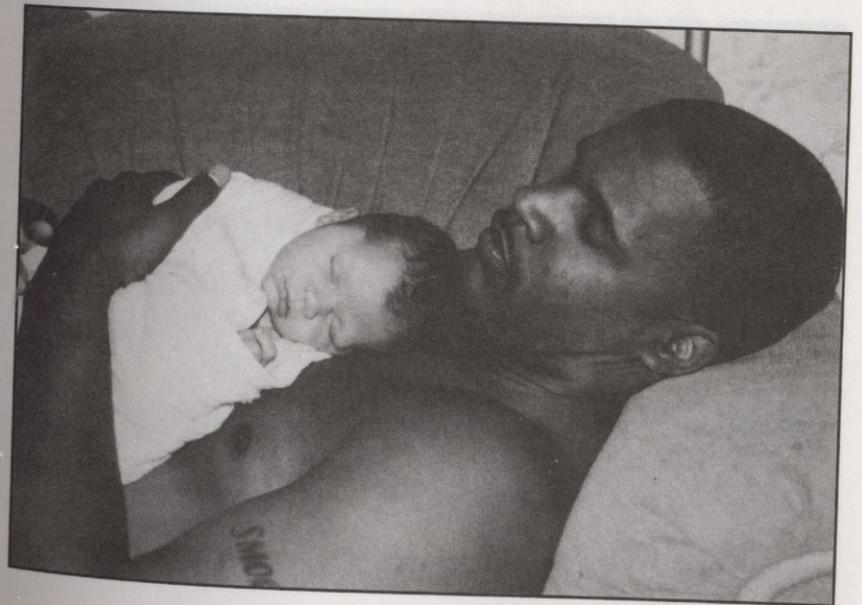
Will I later be paired with another?
Be mismatched?
Or does my destiny lie
in a rusty garbage can?
Wishing for a savior,
a one-legged man,
a dog in need of a plaything,
Christmas over the fireplace?

Was the lint trap checked?
Without you,
being thin
means being frail
and beautiful purple stripes
are not enough
to save me.

Touch

Kimi Muir

Swaying back and forth,
she rocks me into slumber,
my soggy fingers and saline tears tranquilizing my
tension.
Suds of soapy hair trickle down my back,
fresh scents of baby-bath on my skin
as a taming wave curls me up into a gentle crimson
blanket.
My baby doll's head in my chest, I cradle her with
maternal instinct,
like that of my mother.
Peaceful notes of my mother's voice ricochet
in my mind as I fall into a dream and
away from fear.



Candice Rayls



Candice Rayls

Dreams for Hannah

Candice Rayls

May you
rise in the morning with Hope,
even if your blanket of Weariness,
begs you to sleep in.

May you
make Faith your best friend,
being careful not to exclude Lonely;
you might be just what she needs.

May you
have Patience as your teacher;
she will partner you with Determination,
regardless of your own self-will.

May you
jump rope with Ease and Dexterity,
ignoring the trip-ups of Trouble;
he is a classmate to avoid.

May you
stay objective with your confidant Beauty;
she constantly nags at Self-Esteem,
creating needless doubt for you.

I will
set a place for Grace at supper
and make Unconditional Love our housemate;
they are a charming pair to have around!



Candice Rayls

Hands

Candice Rayls

Your tiny fingers nestled in mine bring amazement into my life. I think of all that your hands might do as you grow: dribble the ball down the court, score the winning touchdown, paint a masterpiece for your mamma, and play the piano. You will build castles on the beach and throw sand in a little girl's hair. Maybe you will love to write or play the drums. These same hands will hold a girl close as you dance. They will wipe a tear from a lover's eye. One day, you will experience the same wonderment in your child as I do now. But until then, I will relish in these times that your hand is spent held in mine.

Spiritless Hand Turkeys

Joy C. Kania

Poster paint in autumn hues
and white butcher-block paper,
crisp and unstained.

Paper squashed by five-year-old hands
swept with mud-brown paint;
fingers transformed to feathers
atop the palm,
colors of Indian corn.

Yellow stick legs with tripod claws
scratch like a yard rake at dead rotting leaves.

One odd plastic eye
cemented to the imprinted right thumb
stares blankly in my direction.

The blood-red gobbler waves like the Reaper's sickle
dangling beneath the triangular beak of twilight orange.

Guardian of my refrigerator door.

Sherbet Runt

Dawn Schindler

We bought her that way,
sick and weak. Felt sorry for her.
She would shit on the bed,
and the other cat would groom her;
she couldn't do it herself; now
she was a mother.

You threw her into the basement,
that damp hell flooded with old, dirty water
from spring's fresh thaw outside.
Cowering and curled up with no voice,
she hid on the ledge,
in the darkest corner behind the oil stove,
thinning, stinking like oil and shit and sickness,
her paws dark, her fur matted, her ears
unhearing and scratched. The only light snuck in
from a far window.

From time to time, I'd reach back
and take her thinning body out of her hiding place
where she slept and slept. It was her nightmare
to see light, to see any human face or hand. At my
gentle touch, she shrank back, cringed, and opened her
mouth. Nothing came out, not even
a whisper, not even a squeak, her pale tongue
and small teeth no defense, her eyes dim
from sickness and fear.

Oh, God, I thought in the pale light;
she didn't come here that way—and as I put her small body
back in the corner, hating myself, I heard the door
slam from upstairs.

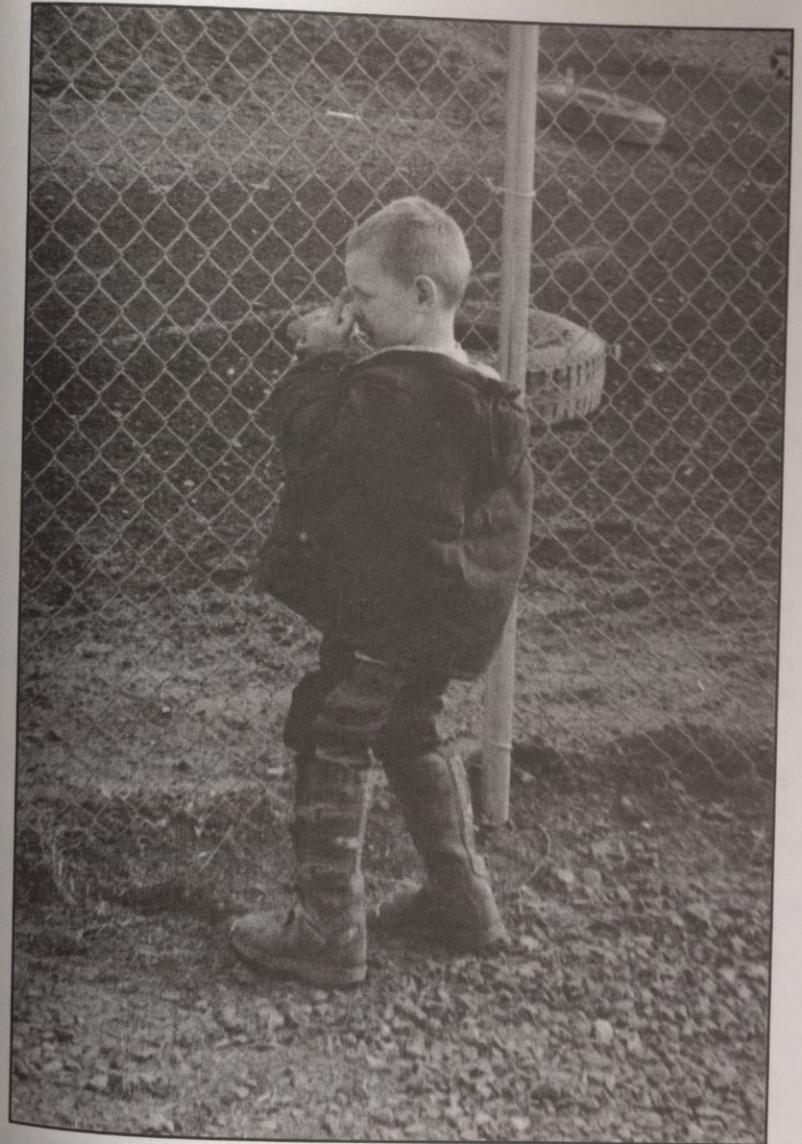
squirrel: crushed

Thomas Justice

We drive our cars
like intoxicated gods,
ignorant and reckless,
crushing all we meet
with a thud soft as sleep
between the black jaws of
rubber and pavement
pressing life
into an urban sandwich,
brains made grapes
in a wine of mortality,
bleeding into
the yawning mouth
of sideline gutters.

The season delivers,
brings you down from dark branches
hanging like inmates from gallows
above my head:

don't these tendrils trace
like smoke around my neck?



Nicole Cichon

Contributors' Notes

Stephan Baldwin is a senior art major with a concentration in graphic and web design. He is currently illustrating a textbook along with maintaining a full load of classes in his busy overworked life.

Jacquelyn Boyer is a Secondary Education Math major.

NASA originally designed Matt Bower as a futuristic cyborg capable of accomplishing lunar landing via jetpack. After failed attempts, he is currently "on leave" in Yemen where he is searching to complete his Middle Eastern hair net collection. His most recent novel, *Cooking and Cleaning Circus Clowns*, is due out next month. Says Matt, "For those of you tired of living in a world of clichés, your miracle has arrived."

Stephanie Caplinger is a junior Journalism major with an emphasis in print media. She is currently enrolled in photography.

Nicole Cichon is a senior Journalism major with a minor in Art, emphasizing photography. She plans to graduate in the fall of 2001.

Sheila B. Gernavage is an LHU senior majoring in Computer Information Science and minoring in English with a concentration in writing. She is an English Club and Sigma Tau Delta executive who just realized that she is tooting her own horn. (She now crawls under a fuzzy blanket.) She aspires to rule the world and/or be a cartoon.

Brianne Goldsmith has been writing poetry since high school. She is an English major and unsure what to do with her life, except to have fun and live for the moment.

Debra Haddad is a non-traditional student, majoring in English with a writing concentration. She is married with two children, Casey and Coty. When she isn't writing poetry or attending LHU, she coaches cheerleading and styles hair.

Nicole Herritt is interested in Photography.

Amy Howard is a junior Journalism major. She is active in RHA and Choir and plans to pursue a career in Advertising and Public Relations.

Thomas Justice is an LHU senior majoring in English.

Joy C. Kania is an English major with a concentration in literature. She will be graduating in the spring.

Michael Kiser is an English major with a concentration in literature and a minor in Studio Art. He is in his fourth year of study at LHU.

Meredith Lang is a senior Special Education major who enjoys traveling, spending time outside, writing, art and theatre, soccer, and reading—especially classic literature. This is the first time she has submitted work to *The Crucible*.

David Lee is an Art major, interested in computer graphics and Photography.

Tracy Marshallick is a senior Secondary Education Mathematics major.

Robert Seth Moore is a ghost; Robert Seth Moore is growing newly; Robert Seth Moore is not ubiquitous. He is a learner, laughing, finding now; a parabola.

Lacey Mundrick is a freshman at LHU, majoring in Computer Information Science. She enjoys singing, dancing, and just having fun!

Kimi Muir is a sophomore English major, who enjoys reading, participating in theatre, and writing poetry and stories.

Candice Rayls is a senior, majoring in Secondary Education/English. She enjoys creative writing and photography.

Dawn Schindler is a certification only student and is looking forward to teaching English and German. She enjoys writing, reading, and traveling.

Melissa Swartz, a senior in the Secondary English Education program, enjoys life as we know it and looks forward to teaching young minds the ins-and-outs of English grammar. In addition to contributions to *The Crucible*, she served as an editorial assistant for this issue.

Alan Vezina does not exist. There is absolutely nothing to see here. Please turn the page and continue with your life.

Kyle Wooster is an Art major, who likes computers and writing.

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