



CIBLE

MEMORIAL

THE CRUCIBLE

The Literary Journal of Lock Haven University
Annual 2004

is warmly dedicated to

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Cheryl Kirkwood ♦ Chris Ruff

Student Assistant Editor
Jennifer Michaels

Graphic Designers
Maralea K. Staton ♦ Jason Turner

Faculty Editor
Marjorie Maddox Hafer

Graphic Design Advisor
Philip Huber

IN MEMORIAM

This issue of *The Crucible*
is warmly dedicated to
Professor Joseph Nicholson,
writer, teacher, mentor, friend—
1937-2003.

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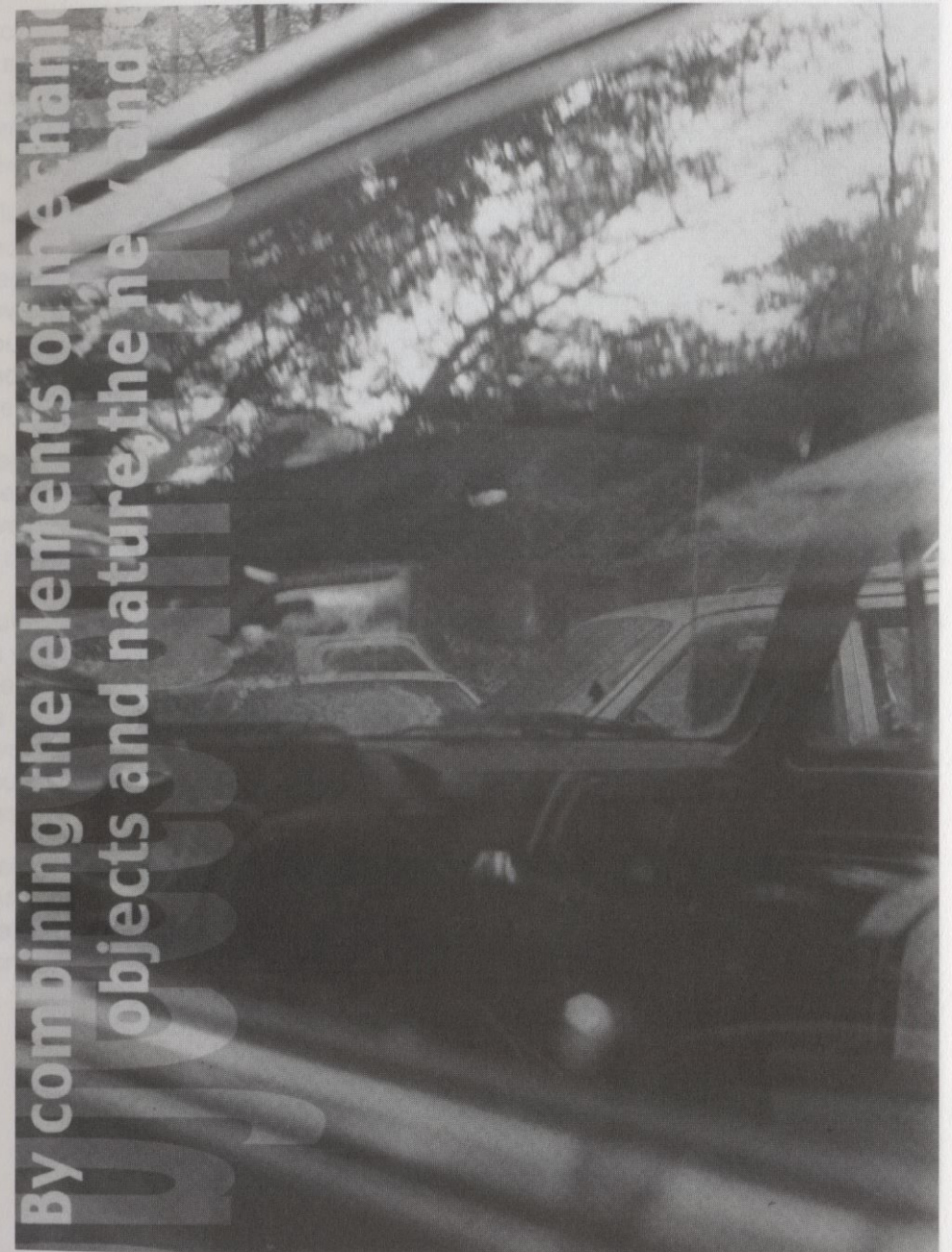
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Jen Manley

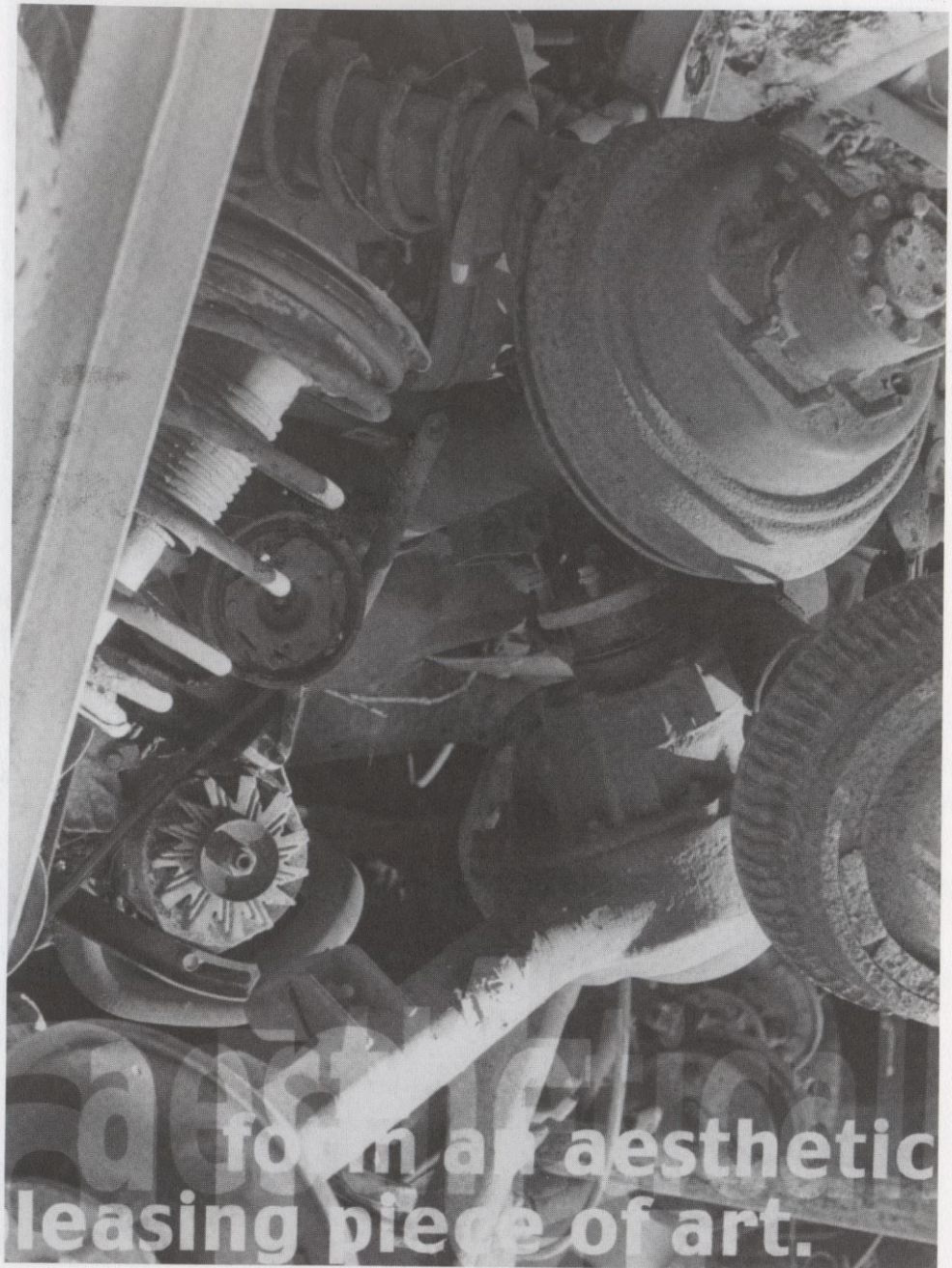


Jen Manley



Jen Manley

Jen Manley



form an aesthetic
 leasing piece of art.

On Writing Poetry

Amanda Boyd

A cautiously chosen trail
 is scrutinized for flaws,
 its surface like a termite-ridden log
 lying over a rushing stream,
 your only path to this creation.

With feigned confidence you stride across
 and hold your breath as you
 step
 down.

Your heart could burst
 and rain down golden embers
 like fiery willow branches.

Inspiration overwhelms
 like curling lily petals at dusk,
 sweetly suffocating you
 in a puff of pollen.

Outside the veined encasement,
 an ominous drone buzzes
 like the far-off engines of falling planes.
 As a swarm of shadows
 invade your sanctuary,
 you lie prone, defenseless,
 awaiting the pinching pin prick.

It sends you hurtling back to the buzzing room
 and blank paper page
 that stares like an accusing glare
 from a friend whom you've kept waiting.

PEELING OF AN ORANGE

Matthew P. Burne

He digs in as she watches his nails gather threads of rind,
his fingers curling like body hair with each puncture. His friends
blow their straw-papers at the lunch ladies.
She stares at the strings of spit holding together his slack lips
till one snaps. And now she cannot look as bits of pulp stick
between his fingers, between the veins and tendons that pull
down on the knuckles like her father's suspenders
when he tears through his daily chunk of mail.

WINDEX, PLEASE

Andrea Ault

Splat!

Slowly slithering to the Murder-
ous window sill

smudged with gooey, greenish grime,
the fickle fly that couldn't decide
which way to flee lies on its backside.

Limber legs like bent twigs

trembling,

quivering,

shaking

in the wind—hope-

lessly reaching

for rescue.

A clear, almond-shaped wing twitches,
waving good-
bye.

CIGARETTE BREAK

Allison Pruiksma

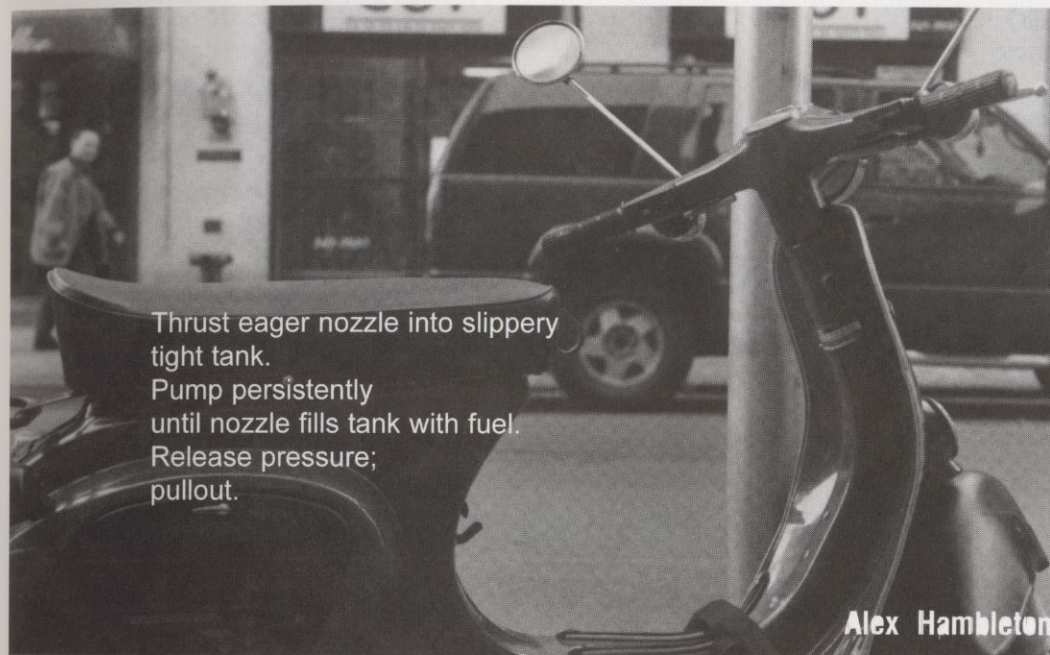
Sexy glances through the kitchen,
before the dinner rush, invite
me for a cigarette while everyone else
is busy. Nod and grin, not until
I'm finished borrowing the knife
that works the best, slicing
lemons into wedges, then twists
for vodka and rye.

Soon, loitering by the placed
plates dressed with paper doilies,
I sip on tea, ready to sneak out,
waiting.

As you strut through
the swinging door, I know to follow
as chefs prepare garnishes and sauces,
winking and staring,
witnessing the smile sweep
through my eyes, freckled cheeks
raised by a grin, with you leading
the way outside where a milk crate
holds our weight and you light
my cigarette.

HOW TO PUMP GAS

Andrea Ault



Thrust eager nozzle into slippery
tight tank.
Pump persistently
until nozzle fills tank with fuel.
Release pressure;
pullout.

Alex Hambleton

WHILE IN A TAXI IN BALTIMORE

Matthew P. Burne

You r
(cab
driver
with
his
greasy
hair)
stuck
to
your
status
I
(am) n
back
seat

LAUNDRY

Evan Reihse

He loads laundry into the tight
wet hole, pushing it all in
while thrusting change into the slot,
touching her buttons to increase the speed.
He spreads his cheap detergent over the garments,
listens to the purr and waits
till her spinning stops. Afterwards,
he removes his property, leaving
empty facilities for some
one else to fill; soon, moving
on in search of a dryer,
and finding remnants
from the previous man's load.

SIT DOWN CLOSE TO

Matthew P. Burne

"Each autumn that comes brings us closer to what will be our last autumn."
-Fernando Pessoa

It is evening, 5 o'clock. The sun will soon bow
down behind our homes, and the street lamp
will share with me its light. Yellow-brown,
steady and patient as it spreads across the pavement.

I love how it doesn't know it's appreciated,
this lamp. As though I am not here
in my dark home, staring out of my window
with half-closed
eyes fixed on its frail body,
waiting to take its lowly light into my open mouth.

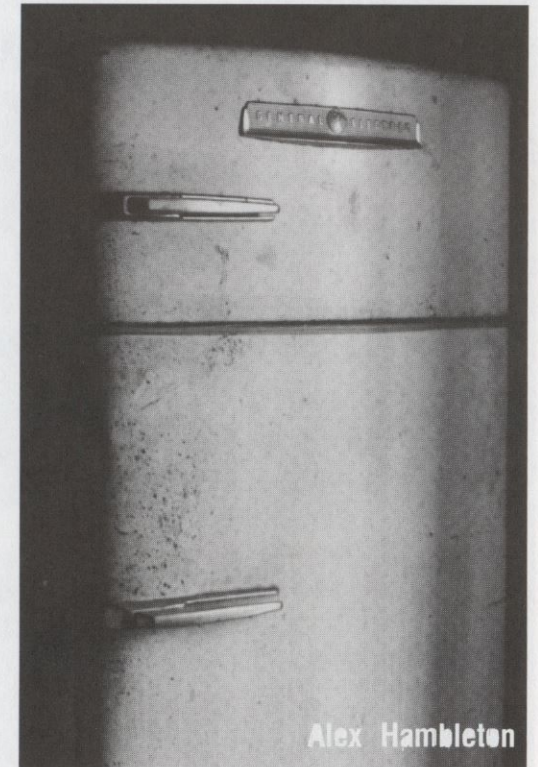
We will never know this light together. Never sit
towards one another, Indian-style in the tall grass,
arms draped across each other's shoulders,
palms of the hand
pulled tight against the scapula in a straight clasp.
Forehead to forehead, neck collapsed.

I will go out now. I will sit in the grass
like an autumn leaf that did not cling,
but fell willingly,
its body curled in worship.

NIGHTTIME MUSINGS

Daniella De Luca

Puddles of moonbeams
situate themselves deliberately
on the same spots
of my gray bedroom rug
every clear blue night.
Peering out from underneath my blankets,
I think to myself
how good it feels
to stretch, to yawn, to breathe,
and just to get lost for a while
as if time never really mattered.
When nothing lasts forever,
it all lasts even longer
when you let it.
And I wonder how and when
it will all end.
And I wonder if
I will be ready for it.
And I wonder what
time really is
as a lone cricket chirps,
and I calculate the temperature
in degrees Celsius
because that sixth grade math formula
was swimming in my head
when night began.



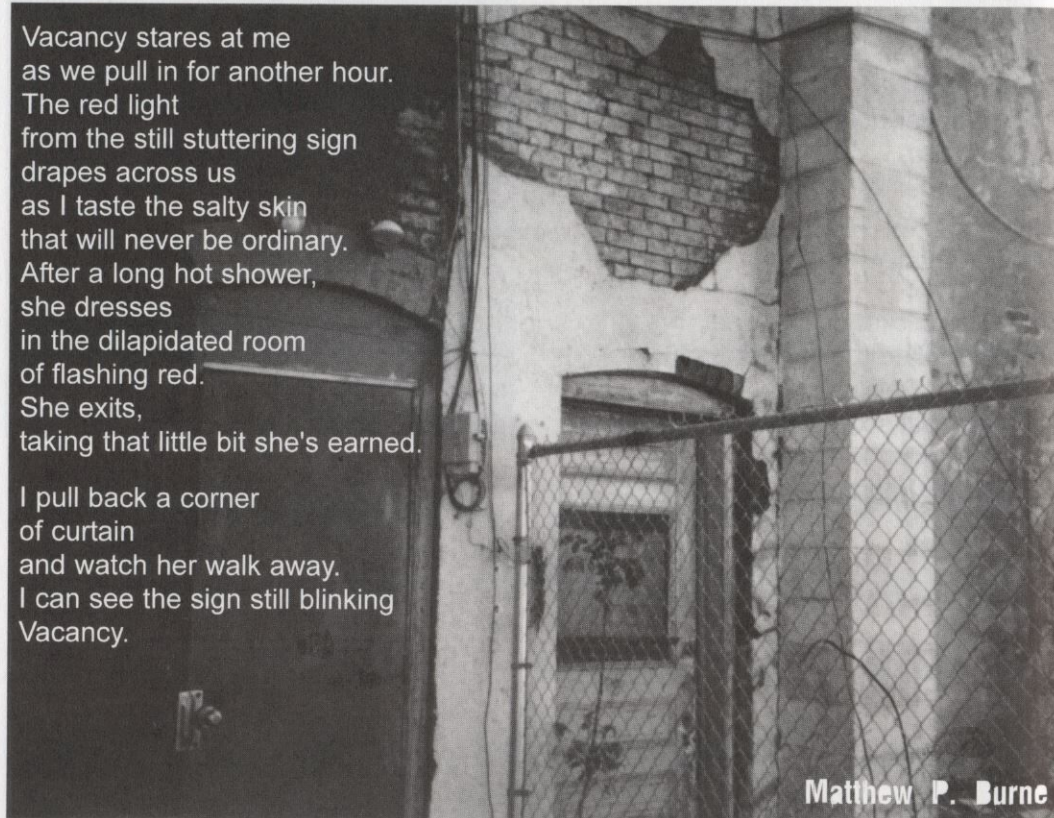
Alex Hambleton

VACANCY

That's what the neon sign flickers.
No one wants this space; the tiny room,
dirty faded wall paper,
worn out carpet,
heavily stained sheets.
None of those things
ever seems to be quite enough.
People stay for less than a night,
leaving their fake sweaty love.
Only shallow
hearts in a musty room.

Vacancy stares at me
as we pull in for another hour.
The red light
from the still stuttering sign
drapes across us
as I taste the salty skin
that will never be ordinary.
After a long hot shower,
she dresses
in the dilapidated room
of flashing red.
She exits,
taking that little bit she's earned.

I pull back a corner
of curtain
and watch her walk away.
I can see the sign still blinking
Vacancy.



Matthew P. Burne

William Lahr

THE LITTLE PRINCE AND FATHER TIME:

TIME, YOUTH, AND THE ILLUSION OF FREEDOM IN DYLAN THOMAS' "FERN HILL"

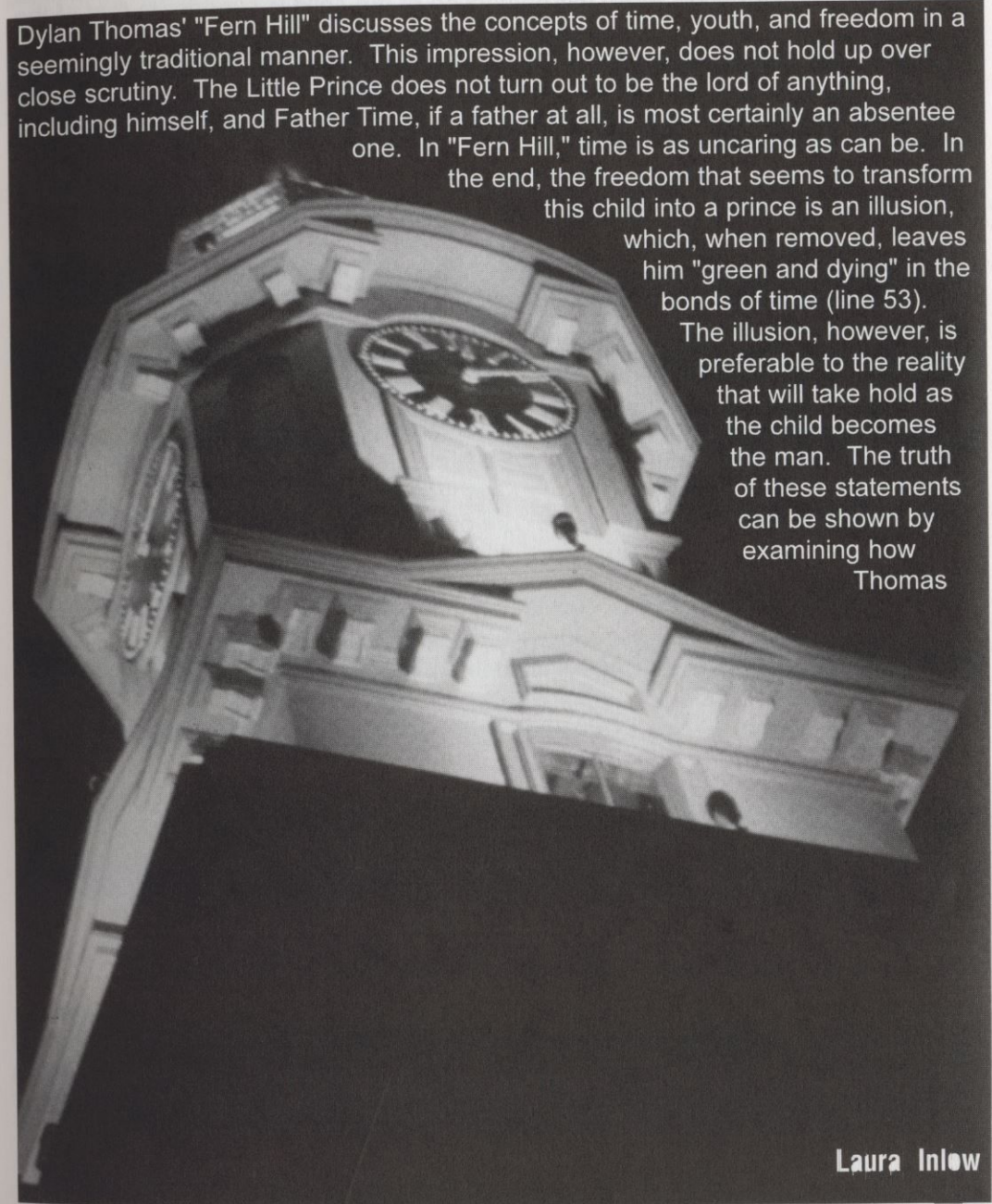
Steven R. Winkleman

Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill" discusses the concepts of time, youth, and freedom in a seemingly traditional manner. This impression, however, does not hold up over close scrutiny. The Little Prince does not turn out to be the lord of anything, including himself, and Father Time, if a father at all, is most certainly an absentee one. In "Fern Hill," time is as uncaring as can be. In

the end, the freedom that seems to transform this child into a prince is an illusion, which, when removed, leaves him "green and dying" in the bonds of time (line 53).

The illusion, however, is preferable to the reality that will take hold as the child becomes the man. The truth of these statements can be shown by examining how

Thomas



Laura Inlow

uses the concepts of time, youth, and freedom in "Fern Hill." These concepts must be examined both separately and in comparison to each other to find their true meaning.

In order to properly analyze the symbolism and message of this poem, one must begin with the illusion and work through it to discover the reality. So, what is the nature of the illusion? The illusion takes on the classical concept of the illuminati, or enlightened mind. Here, the perception of the child is superior to that of the adult, simply because the child imagines himself to be free in a way that the man never can. This perception of freedom creates an actual experience that lasts as long as the illusion is believed. The narrator's longing for this lost perspective is evidenced by the emotion in the statement, "Oh as I was young and easy" (line 52).

How does Thomas describe the youthful perception of the world? In the first stanza of "Fern Hill," Thomas writes, "Golden in the hey days of his eyes,/And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns" (lines 5-6). In this perception, we can see that the child is the ruler of his own world. Who honored this child and made him a prince? It is, of course, the child himself. The child's mind has created a world in which the child has power and influence over his own existence. Thomas goes on to state, "And I was green and carefree, famous among the barns" (line 10). The most telling phrase here is "green and carefree." The child is alive and vital, precisely because he is unburdened by the cares of adulthood. This creates the illusion of ultimate freedom, when, in fact, the child is actually less free than his parents. Not only is the child subject to the whims of fate that affect all people equally, but also he is under the direct control of his parents.

Thomas also writes, "I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves/Sang to my horn" (lines 15-16). These lines likewise feed into the notion of power. The child as herdsman, with the animals responding to his call, adds an element of control, or, more accurately, the potential for the child to control his surroundings. The child as huntsman adds the aura of excitement and adventure that the child seeks, and the adult tends to avoid. It alludes to the romantic idea of freedom, in which the individual is not tied to anything, including the farm. The hunter-gatherer, like the child, is free to move about seemingly at will. Even this, however, is an illusion, as the hunter-gatherer is tied to a natural timetable which includes the seasonal activities of prey and the harvesting of naturally growing foods. The hunter-gatherer who ignores this timetable is doomed to failure and starvation. All of these ties are controlled by time, just as we will see that the child is controlled by time.

Towards the end of the essay, Thomas states, "I ran my heedless ways,/...And nothing I cared" (lines 40, 42). Here we see the source of his power. The child is heedless of everything except for the world that he has created for himself. He does not concern himself with what occurs outside of the boundaries of this world. This exclusion enables the child to delude himself into believing that he has power and control, where no control can exist.

Just as time controls the seemingly free lives of the hunter-gatherer, so, too, does time control the life of the child. Thomas acknowledges this fact repeatedly throughout "Fern Hill." As the poet states, "Time let me hail and climb" (line 4). With this comment, we see that it is only with the blessing of time that the child is capable of this kind of reverence and freedom. Actually, the word "blessing" implies a concern that does not exist. It would be more accurate to state that time is not preventing the child from acting as he wishes to. How is it that time is allowing this reverence? Put simply, the child has not yet noticed the effects of time that would alter his perception of reality. It is possible because time has not yet caused the transformation from child to adult. This statement is backed up by Thomas' request, "Time let me play and be" (line 13).



Thomas likens this childhood perception to the story of Adam and Eve before they fell from grace. This can be seen by combining the lines, "it was all/Shining, it was Adam and the maiden" (lines 29-30) with the lines "Before the children green and golden/Follow him out of grace" (lines 44-45). The likeness comes from the fact that before eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were unaware of anything that we would consider the worries of the world. They were the children of humanity. They lived in a paradise world similar to that of children, in which no pain or danger exists. They were not, however, free. They were subject

to the will of God, and merely existed in the world that he had created for them. To them, however, it appeared as if they lived as they pleased. Upon eating the forbidden fruit, they fell from grace and were expelled from Paradise. But, what were they really expelled from? They were expelled from their perception of Paradise. With the knowledge that they gained, they were no longer able to perceive the world in the same way. As such, it could be said that they expelled themselves from Eden when they expelled the concept of a simple, pure Paradise from their own minds.

The same is true of the child in Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill." As Adam and Eve fell from grace by obtaining the forbidden knowledge that took away their childhood, so too will the child be removed from his imaginary world by the gaining of knowledge that occurs when the child moves into adulthood. This transformation, like Adam and Eve's fall from grace, is inevitable. As Thomas states, "And nothing I cared...that time allows/In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs/Before the children green and golden/Follow him out of grace" (lines 42-45). With the passage of time, the child is eventually caught up in the changes that occur around him. Furthermore, time can only flow in one direction. Thomas writes, "In the sun that is young once only" (line 12). Just as Adam and Eve can never reenter Eden, the man can never reenter the world of the child, at least not while retaining the knowledge needed to transform the child into the man.

What does all of this tell us about the true nature of youth? The truth is that youth is not at all a time of ultimate freedom, merely the perception of it. This feeling of freedom exists in actuality only as long as it exists in the imagination of the child. This is the reason why we find so many references to phrases such as "time let me" throughout "Fern Hill." Thomas is reinforcing the idea that as time passes, and childish innocence gives way to adult experience, this belief in the freedom of youth must fade. Thomas also makes numerous references to the fact that the child does not heed or does not care about anything but his own world. This disbelief in, or ignorance of, outside influences gives the child the ability to perceive the world in the way that he does. This hold on youthful perception is quite tenuous, however. At any moment, any number of events could occur that would shatter this world of illusion. The simple truth is that the child has absolutely no control over when this will happen. He is the prince only of his own imagination. In reality, he is enslaved by time. The Little Prince has most assuredly fallen down.

If all is subservient to time, then the question remains, what is the nature of time? According to Thomas, time is not the seemingly-kind, gray-haired old gentleman of conventional myth. Nor is time a metaphysical therapist with the ability to heal all wounds, whether physical or emotional. Thomas does state, however, "Time let me play and be/Golden in the mercy of his means" (lines 13-14). Does this not imply a certain benevolence? The answer would have to be a most emphatic no. The mercy perceived by the child is simply a carryover of the child's overall view of his existence. His innocence imbues everything, including the idea of time that seems not to touch him, with an image of compassion that experience will teach him does not exist.

Further examination of "Fern Hill" demonstrates that this view is merely a matter of limited understanding. Take, for example, the lines, "And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows/In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs/Before the children green and golden/Follow him out of grace" (lines 42-45). The truth is that time is not leaving the child untouched. The child feels unaffected primarily because the changes are too small to notice at first, and partially because he does not want to notice. These two factors combine to form a kind of time that would let me be.

In reality, Thomas shows time to be something completely devoid of concern for either this child or the whole of humanity. Time seems to let the child be only because it is unaware that he exists. If time really is a father, then he certainly seems to be an absentee one. Here, time travels endlessly down a linear path. It will not stop or go back to pick up someone fallen along the wayside, just as "the sun...is young once only" (line 12). On the plus side, time's lack of concern for the child allows him to hitch a ride for a little while. Here lies the only real mercy that time possesses, that of the killer that does not, for the moment at least, recognize us (or the child) as a worthy target.

Time's failure to recognize us does not, however, release us from its grasp. As Thomas writes:

In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea. (lines 48-54)

These lines from the final stanza are perhaps the most important lines within the entire poem. Each line is pregnant with meaning. The moon that is always rising refers to the unstoppable flow of time. When Thomas talks about riding to sleep, he is talking about the time between childhood and adulthood, in which experience has already imposed upon innocence, so that the individual cannot continue to view himself as being untouched by time, yet he is lacking sufficient understanding to be able to claim the mantle of adulthood. The next line shows time flying by and leaving the child behind in its relentless journey. The "farm forever fled from the childless land" refers back to the same idea that "the sun that is young once only." Once time has passed the boy by, he can never catch up to it and never regain what he has lost.

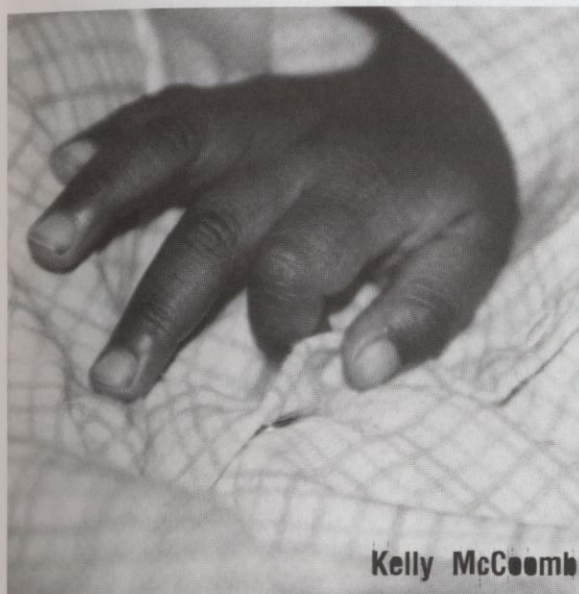
The last three lines of "Fern Hill" demonstrate the contradiction inherent to the child's perception. When discussing the "mercy of his means," the poet is reminding himself of his own childish delusions, knowing now, however, that even during this time, he was being held green and dying in chains. As a child, the poet experienced the green, the vitality of youth. Now, however, the poet is left with

only the memory of the green that came before, the experience of moving toward death, and the knowledge of the end that will eventually come.

The passionate yearning for that which exists solely in his memory, as evidenced by the comment, "Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means" shows that Thomas does not view this trade as a good deal. So, what does that leave us with in the end? We are left with an illusion that is preferable to the reality that destroyed it. Yes, the ultimate freedom of youth is illusory, and time is an uncaring thing. This illusion, however, has a value that no reality can ever replace. But, unfortunately, the slave can never become a prince, and the absentee father can never be convinced to come home.

NEWBORN

The first few days of a brother,
fragile as priceless porcelain,
lost. He held him in his own
small arms, pressed him tightly
against his heaving chest;
uneasy.



Kelly McCoomb

William Lahr

The babe stared
with hazy blue eyes,
dim headlights of a car,
searching, unable
to cut thick fog.

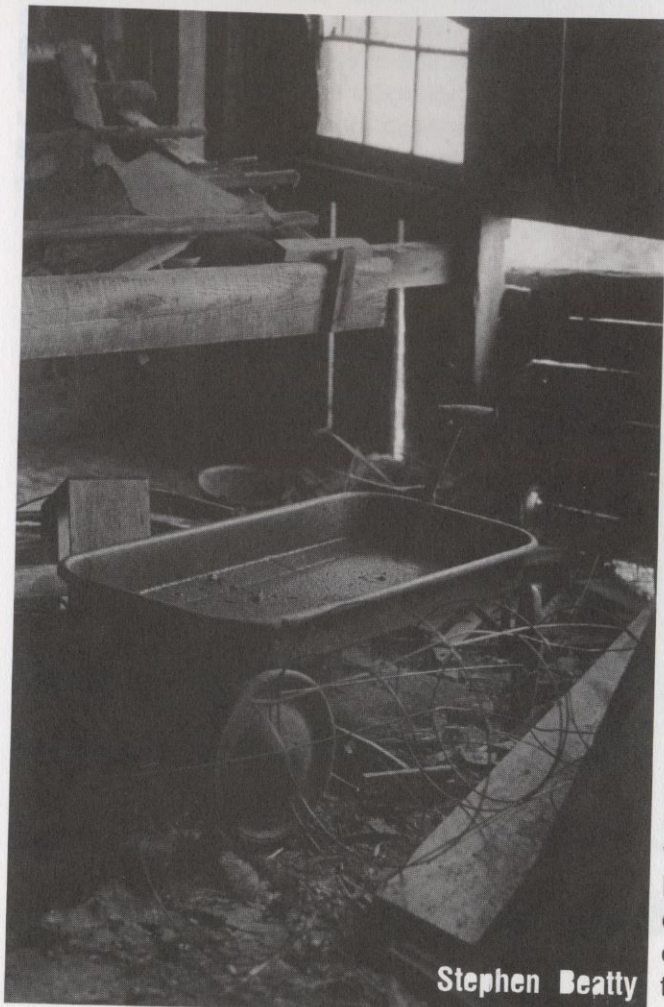
He remembered
the third-born son of my grandfather,
held up with blue-ribbon pride
for the crowd to witness.

The world's first—
only memory of a brother and a son,

covered in the peace
of spring-time Sunday mornings.

And I am the resurrection
carried cautiously home
to father on the third day.

LET ME BE A CHILD



Stephen Beatty

Thomas and Claudia, my father and mother, met at Southern Regional High School in Manahawkin, New Jersey, where their love intensified over two years, despite the strain of Claudia's white-trash mother and her own mental problems. During their junior year of high school, Claudia became pregnant. She decided to go through with her pregnancy because Thomas, the soon-to-be father, wanted to have the baby and believed they could make everything work. Now having to support a child, Thomas was left with no other choice but to drop out of high school and take up a job in the family business, Maaco Auto Painting and Body Work. Things were going as planned until Claudia confronted Thomas during her eighth month of the pregnancy with the sudden news that she and her mother had to fly to Florida to be with her father who was very ill.

Amy Rechenberg

Why are some children given the chance to be care-free, while others are forced to grow up so quickly? Why are some children given what seems to be unfair circumstances, while others are so privileged? I did not make the choice to be born to an immature, pathologically lying seventeen-year-old girl with no stability and no future. My father was at the young age of eighteen when I was born. The main problem was that he was in New Jersey, while my mother was in Florida telling him he was not allowed to see me. What a way to start off life. I do not believe that any child, given the choice of being a kid with no responsibilities, or being an adult, with heavy burdens and reality bearing on his or her shoulders, would make the decision to be an adult.

Thomas believed my mother and sent her on her way with his best wishes and full intentions of flying down to check on her in two weeks if she had not yet returned. A week and a half went by, and so he called to tell Claudia that he would be flying out the following week. I was obviously going to be born in Florida now, and he wanted to be there for this life-altering event. Unfortunately for him, Claudia's mother would not allow the two to converse anymore; she decided that she would now speak for Claudia. She would not allow Thomas there for the birth of his child or even one and a half months after his baby girl was born. I cannot be sure why my grandmother would not allow the two of them to converse; however, I am aware that she dealt with numerous mental and control issues that may have played into her judgment to make the correct and appropriate decision. People were already talking about the pregnancy of the seventeen-year-old. Now people began to wonder what happened to the pregnant mother-to-be and the unborn baby.

When I was about two months old, my parents were given permission to speak to one another and decided that my mother should come home to New Jersey despite the refusal of her mother. Two weeks later, my mother and I boarded a plane home because the two of them had determined that it was the healthiest and most appropriate environment for me to live in. One year later, the two families were still not talking, although I was seeing both my mother and father on a regular basis. When I was two, my father dropped me off at day care, just like any other day, but when Thomas came to pick me up after work, he found that someone unknown to the daycare had signed me out prior to his arrival. My father left in a panic and went straight home, but no one at home had signed me out. Claudia and her mother were nowhere to be found. The cops were called and a search began in the small town. By nightfall, the search spread to surrounding counties. After many long days, nights, and weeks of searching, putting up missing person posters, and putting his child on the front of milk cartons, Thomas and the police got a lead that helped him find me; I was being held on a farm in Sebring, Florida, by my mother and grandmother. I was brought back to New Jersey that night and a trial began the very next week to decide who would be granted custody of me.

The trial began and ended very quickly, with the outcome being that Thomas was granted custody. My father had a stable family to help him raise a child, an income, and he did not have any criminal background. Claudia was permitted to see me on the weekend and take me to the nearby park for a few hours each day. Although I have been told by some family members that I became very melancholy during the trial, I was far too young to remember my exact emotions.

One day, my father came home at the scheduled time that I was supposed to be dropped off, but Claudia did not show up. He went right to the park, but Claudia and I were nowhere to be found. Once again, the police were called, and I was located in mid-air on a plane headed toward Florida. Before Claudia even stepped off the plane, I was taken from her by the police. I was then given to a caretaker who flew with me back to New Jersey to put me in the secure arms of my father.

A few months later, yet another trial began, dealing with the matter of full custody, as well as the sentencing of my mother for kidnapping her own daughter. Claudia was found guilty and had to serve two years in jail. She was permitted, by my father, to see me one day a week for an hour with a social worker present in the room of a third-floor building. On the fourth visit, Claudia decided to throw me out of the window to her new boyfriend waiting below in a getaway car, where he was directed by my mother to take me to Claudia's mother's house. It was an unsuccessful plan because before he could even get his foot on the gas pedal, he was with his girlfriend where he clearly belonged: right behind bars.

Eating egg in a hole, watching Pee-Wee's Playhouse with my Uncle Jack and Grandma, I laughed so hard that my stomach ached. The segment called, "Word of the Day" was my absolute favorite, and it was on. However, this morning as I laughed at the word of the day, I noticed my grandma sweating like she had just finished a marathon, while she forced tears back and swallowed hard. My Uncle Jack, who usually was laughing and carrying on with me, sat silently staring intently at me as if he was hoping, wishing, or even praying that the news he had heard only hours before was untrue.

My father came in the room and asked me what the word of the day was. As I ran over to jump up and give him a hug, I said, "The word is silly, Dad, so make sure you don't say it." He said, "Oh Amy, you just said it," as we giggled. I noticed him hold his gaze in my innocent eyes much too long for my comfort. I sensed that something was wrong and, as any other young child would do, I inquired. As he set me down and pulled my hair into a pile on top of my head, I swirled around so he could make it a pony-tail. I giggled as I swirled round while my father made the comment that he was going to use my head of curly hair to mop the kitchen floor. I was four-and-a-half-years-old and about to be enrolled in kindergarten in the fall. What had been discovered was that my mother had leukemia and did not have much time to live. One month after my fifth birthday, and a few months after my first day of school, my mother died of cancer.

Not only was school new to me, but so were the roaring rumors about the poor little girl who just could not get a break. At the young age of five, I began to see how cruel and inconsiderate people could be. This is where I began to see the truth behind the saying "Life isn't always fair." I was shown the ruthlessness of grown adults and the way that they could not only damage a childhood meant to be full of laughter and joy, but how they could fill a childhood to the brim with tears and make cuts deep in the heart. However, in my case, the cuts were not deep enough to reach the soul.

I began to see as early as kindergarten and first grade that I got treated differently than the other students. I can remember very clearly one instance in which a lesson was being taught on family trees. Our job as the student was to go home and have our parents help us go back one generation and build a beautifully colored and designed family tree. I remember not even realizing that this would be hard for

me to do until my teacher, Mrs. Hamilton, passed brightly colored pieces of construction paper out and very loudly and clearly announced to the class that if anyone had a dysfunctional or broken family, they should come up during quiet time and discuss another project with her. Even at that young age, I could see the eyes of all my peers intently watching me, the only one who had been on a milk carton, the only one who had a single parent, the only one who had young parents, and definitely the only one who had suffered the loss of a parent. So I did as I was told and went up to her during quiet time while everyone slept with one eye open and both ears listening to her tell me what my new assignment would be. I was to design one side of a tree but attempt to go back two generations rather than just going back one.

At that point, I remember feeling that life was unfair and that I did not deserve to be the only one dealing with so many emotions at such a young age. I felt as if I was being singled out, yet my life had just begun. Time went on, and with each year, the story of my life was embellished even further. Just as a myth gets told around a campfire for campers' entertainment, so did my life become the entertainment of the town. Like a clock answering its traditional question, I answered my peers numerous inquiries, simply yet truthfully. For example, on the first day of third grade, the class was engaging in an exercise to better get to know one another. The exercise was to form a circle and go around the circle while each person asked one person a question to better get to know them. Most kids were asked questions like, what is your favorite color, how old are you, what town do you live in, or do you have any pets? "Why did your mom leave you and my mom says that you are a bastard child, what is that?" That was my question. I honestly do not even remember what I said, just that the exercise was terminated.

Every year I would have at least one parent or teacher tell me that I was doing well considering the circumstances, but they did not really know about my situation and did not want to either. Had they really wanted to know what the circumstances were at home, they would have found that I had an amazing family and, probably, a more normal home life than some kids that keep their problems secret.

In the sixth grade, I developed an eating disorder. The counselors and teachers told my father that, considering the things I had been through, they did not think that this was nearly as bad as they expected it to be. They said that drugs and sex are usually among the first things that an emotionally tormented child turns toward, and that eating disorders usually come later on in life. After hearing these people talk about me as if a bright future was not among my options, I decided to grow up a little faster, take control of my life, and turn my horrible life story into a success story. I had always been an average student, but when I went into middle school and was put into remedial classes, my father fought the school to get me put into regular classes. I proved to be a good enough student, and for the years that followed, I was put in the advanced and AP classes. I was finally judged by my ability as a student, and not by the circumstances surrounding my childhood, as teachers in previous years had done. I started to use the stereotype that had been pinned on me as motivation to succeed. I recovered from the eating disorder, and began to

as motivation to succeed. I recovered from the eating disorder and began to excel in every aspect of my life. I decided that I wanted to prove to everyone and to myself, that I was better than what rumors of distasteful parents had predicted I would become. I joined many clubs, volunteered, and had a wonderful G.P.A. Furthermore, by my junior year in high school I was class secretary and played varsity lacrosse, tennis, and track. During my senior year, I received numerous apology notes from teachers and from the parents who had boisterously added to the rumors. Many were received through the mail; I think because they were ashamed and could not deal with the face-to-face conversation and see my emotion and how badly they had hurt me. They wished me the best of luck in the future and told me to keep in contact.

I graduated with a wonderful education and a lot to show the world that had previously held me down. I had proven many things to myself over those years, but something that I wanted to know for myself was whether I could make it through college, five hours away from home, and very much on my own. I went off to college and earned a 3.925 G.P.A for my first semester. The feeling of success was overwhelming. I could not wait to go home and see the smile on my family members' faces when I told them of this news. The second semester I continued to be successful. However, as I thought of all the things in my life that I had overcome and all the stereotyping that had hurt, I began to realize that I had grown up much too fast. I had no time to be a child, and it still makes me wonder why some children are given the chance to be carefree, while others are forced to grow up too quickly.

SMILES JONES

Smiles Jones only care bout
that grow'n
sex appeal jones
rockin my Docs.

I was ridin'
my twenty n one speed
peddler right down the
center line
right.

And peddle I can, Cat,
cause don't know man alive
rival these mean upper
thighs.

Well now
so I come wheel'n right up
next this peddlin stoppen
piece
right.

And when I say "peddlin stoppen
piece"
I rap'n like
tall
'n slender
'n the locks

That's what stopped the
rockn of these here Docs.
Smiles ain't one for lie'n.

She sees me eye'n.
I whip a tight donut
in the street.

And com'n around

Timothy Rice

on my second pass
look'n her straight
in that big black eye of hers.

Now she only have
one eye
right
cause I guess that's all
the Father thought was
right.

So I'm scooping
her out now
right.
She don't mind though.

She knows Smiles ain't
gonna treat her foul.
Smiles' bed always got room
with a little aid
from my old pal trowel.

Now when I'm rap'n bout
my bed
Smiles ain't sleep'n with
no mattress.

No man, not me,
I'll rest my peddlen thighs
and lovin eyes,
my rock'd out socks
and careworn in Docs,

right here
in the shaded showers
of my greenhouse full
of sexy
sunflowers.

HOMEcomings

Squinting hard in the Georgia peach sun,
I search for you:
a thousand similar legs slicing
like pruners, quickly clipping
a field of drab green.

I want to leap these silver bleachers.
How I've missed softly singing
as chords rang from your acoustic,
your hand-painted dragons
licked blue flames at calloused fingers,
and you cast a conspiring grin
while I poured your 4 a.m. coffee.

But now you're standing proud
with a stern, icy glare,
embarrassed by my tears.
You stride closer—
a bristled, bald head
where brown curls once hung
like rusted coils and springs.

Don't push me away.
I promise not to tarnish
your glinting brass medals
and perfect new blues
with my trails
of black mascara.

Amanda Boyd

WEDDING DAY DIRGE

Amanda Boyd

The new bandana veils sparse, red curls,
framing your face with fiery hope
as your breath rattles paper lungs.

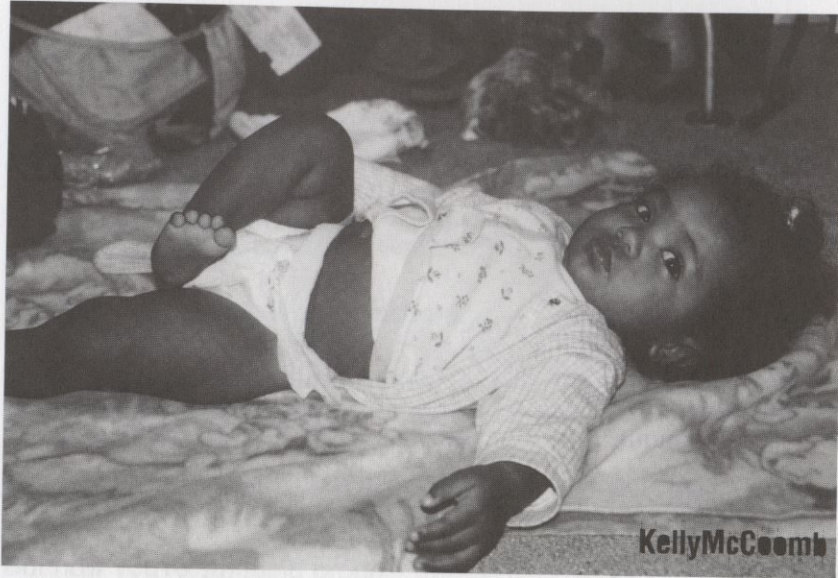
Blood-red roses adorn
blue life-support machines.
Drone on, discordant wedding march.

Your babies nearby, bedside:
ring bearer asleep in my arms,
flower girl clutching a tissue bouquet.

We borrow a nurse's white skirt,
tuck in threadbare ends of gown,
and smooth lipstick under your oxygen mask.

You whisper, "Till death do us part,"
praying, sun, stay in the East
and just let us remain
until dawn.

FLEDGLING MOTHER



Erica Shatzer

I see-saw a girl of 15
teetering like a clumsy waltz.

Young with young
still hiding in her womb.

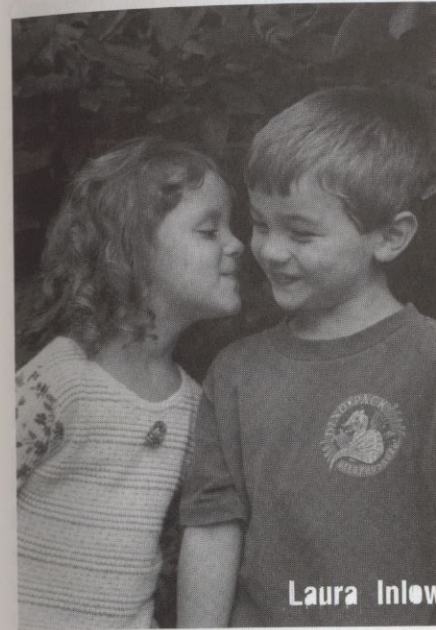
Kool-aid pink hair bubbles down her back
like a freshly uncorked champagne
bottle, half empty.

Petite, she flaunts her curving
stomach as if pleased with consequence.

Loose denim slouches around slender hips,
hips that soon will shriek:
child yielding child.

FAMILY REUNION

Debra Haddad



"Go find something to do," they'd say,
offering watermelon slices
to sit on the stone steps, spitting
seeds at wayward chipmunks. Then

sometimes we'd sneak up the back
wooden stairs and listen like mimes
at the old heating vent. They'd speak
of silly memories and surgeries, while
we'd wait to hear swear words,

snickering and snorting like we just heard
something shockingly sinful and enjoyed it
like lollipops before dinner. When boredom
set in, we'd tie knots in Cousin Charlie's
pajama pants, giggling and chuckling on

the bunk beds, pretending to be princesses
in two-tiered towers and playing
monopoly, someone always picking the shoe,
making me circle Jersey as a cowboy. Wanting

snicker-doodle cake at least every thirty minutes,
so off to the dessert table we'd dash, then out
to the catalpa tree to sway in the sunshine
on the red monkey swing. Leaving little Sarah stranded

over Pine Creek, we'd skip stones to her screaming
until a giant snake scared us back to the cabin.
With our arms flailing, we'd run breathless
through the screen door. Yet they'd always say,
"Stop bugging us and go find something to do."

THE PATIENT

Erica Shatzer

Slender fingers
clamp frigid flesh.
Callous nails
gouge tense skin.

Medicinal musk
inflames flared nostrils.
Polished steel
taunts a nervous girl.

Cool, salty beads
freeze on feverish face.
Eyelids plastered open,
sticky of stripped tears.

Fist firmly clenched;
veins swelled with anguish.
Dusty, ashen gloves pinch;
exposed, vulnerable to touch.

Metal penetrates
deep, inside
a dry well.

THE PIN-BALL CHALLENGE

Shaena Brantner

Gravity pulls you toward your end,
inside walls and a glass window.

Released from a spring,
you coil near black hole alleys,
bounce from bottles of medicine,
warning signs flashing before your eyes.
Pausing between games to START over,
you aim to defeat The Destroyer.

With each level of mastery,
your body adapts to the machine,
its clicking and swooshing
fluttering adrenaline to your heart,
panging down narrow shoots
like loose change in a coin return.
Landing in Blackout mode
with nine seconds to escape the slot,
you break free, launched by paddles
to less treacherous territory.

Bystanders rattle your focus,
nudging, redirecting more than needed,
nearly knocking you into quick drains,
reminding you to recover your
target score;
their suspenseful melody only makes
you nervous.

Gliding past hidden awards,
score intensifying X5,
fear of losing tilting into remission,

you double-check
records of former tournaments,
150 million repeated four times;
after wasting another bonus shot,
you abandon the world outside the
glass window.

Your quarters are spent; it's time to go.



Alex Hambleton

CANCER BONES

Bryann Lewis

Smells of chocolate swirled
about the kitchen after school.
Secret brownie snacks at night
tiptoed up our ancient stairs.
Scents of hairspray lingered
behind in every room.

You used to cheat at Old Maid,
cards dressing the floor when I lost.
You tickled me every evening
till my eyes gave in to sleep.
The rose-budded scarf
enveloped wise gray hair.

The cancer's drinking your life.
Soft skin clings tightly to your bones,
nauseating smells seep
under your door,
twisting and turning
inside my nose.

Rose buds growing above my bed,
I can still smell hairspray.
Brownies bring me simple smiles
and every night I slip
into dreams of you tickling
me so easily.

SUFFERING

Cheryl Kirkwood

Writing a letter with trembling hands,
selfishly scribbling apologies
between spots of tears.

Collecting your toys,
wrapped in your brown velour blanket
now buried next to you.

A small prayer circle
surrounding your white marble headstone
as the leaves begin to change.

Returning to an empty house
preoccupied with the silence
that you should be breaking.



Laura Inlow

ABSOLUTION

Callous words echo,
a deeply scratched record mocking me.
You ridiculed my faith, finding flaws,
I turned the other cheek.
Translucent hopes flee down
a frightened girl's face.
Prayers chanted in secret,
sanctuaries too silent for your numbed senses.
Popping pills, one more medicated
peace for a daughter in distress.
Your darkness devoured
my rekindled forgiveness.
I'd trade my soul for a way to let go.

SAND DOLLAR LOVE

Erica Shatzer

Where tide tossed you to rest,
I discover you beneath my toes.
I adore your petal pattern
in the palm of my hand.
Where surge rises and recedes,
cool salt-water grabs my ankles.
Shivering in the foamy swell,
my hand clenches for warmth,
and you crumble like bread
I feed to sea gulls.

After I bury you in a sandy coffin,
I abandon endless shore,
horizon's abundant arms
of low-tide doom.



Krista Shaw

INSECTS

She doesn't know what it is:
the long, dust-colored creature
whose infinite legs brush against her hand
as she leans against the toilet for support.

Men snake in and out
of the room.

She creeps slowly past the police,
down dirt streets.
A hand crawls up her leg.
Her body shakes.
She cannot keep the scream down.
It climbs out of her throat
on jagged metal legs.

BUZZING BEE

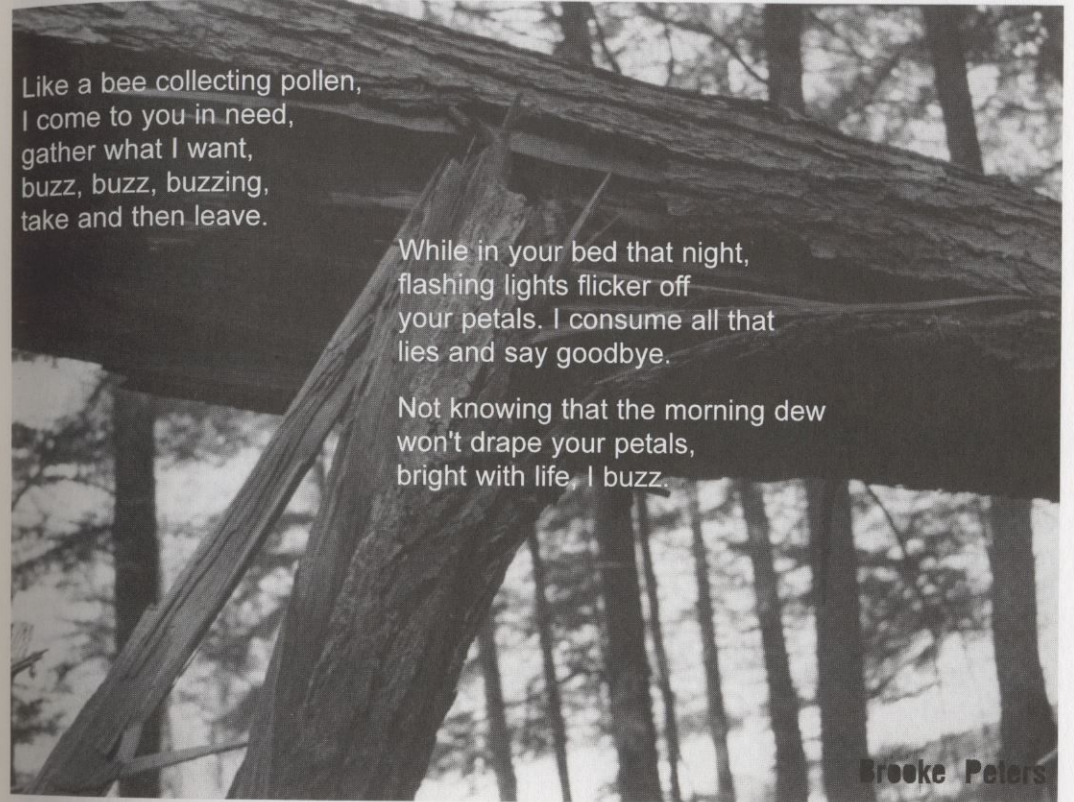
Brianne Linn

Your petals bright as a star
in a dark black sky,
embedded in your bud,
extending your beauty and spirit to my eye.

Like a bee collecting pollen,
I come to you in need,
gather what I want,
buzz, buzz, buzzing,
take and then leave.

While in your bed that night,
flashing lights flicker off
your petals. I consume all that
lies and say goodbye.

Not knowing that the morning dew
won't drape your petals,
bright with life, I buzz.



Brooke Peters

ARTISTS

Daniel S. Gordon

Frozen by fly fishing loneliness
rod guides jammed with river ice
tying and retying cubist insects
 dragonflies with too-big eyes
 legless crickets perfectly motionless
 the nowhere-in-nature red abdomens
 the distortion of truth works here

 line curling behind
 above the head
 tension on the rod creates
 tension
 the river accepts my offerings
 of time when the line resists drag

 today the trout prefer impressionists
 and I can't find a light slant
 anywhere on this stream
drift to silence of the vise
where beautiful things are
rearranged in order to catch
beautiful things tomorrow

BUFFALO

Brianne Linn

Our hooves remember the caresses
of beaten brown plains,
endless as time,
as we plod about
behind cruel metal.

We are lonely for our home.
All night we dream of it.
We leave this crowded place
and dash into the sky
on currents of air.

We travel to a time that was wild
where we can feel
the wind in our manes when we run
or can lay down to taste the grass
and tell old stories.

But the dawn brings us back
like prisoners who were almost past the guard
to exist another day
as the metal grows taller.

TO KNOWLEDGE

-FOR LACY

Daniel S. Gordon

Sometimes I am tempted
to discover what everything is:
the kind of tree I am
sitting under, the type
of grass my bare
feet slide over. Then I
know the name of the tree
is *shade* and the grass: *soft*.



Krista Shaw

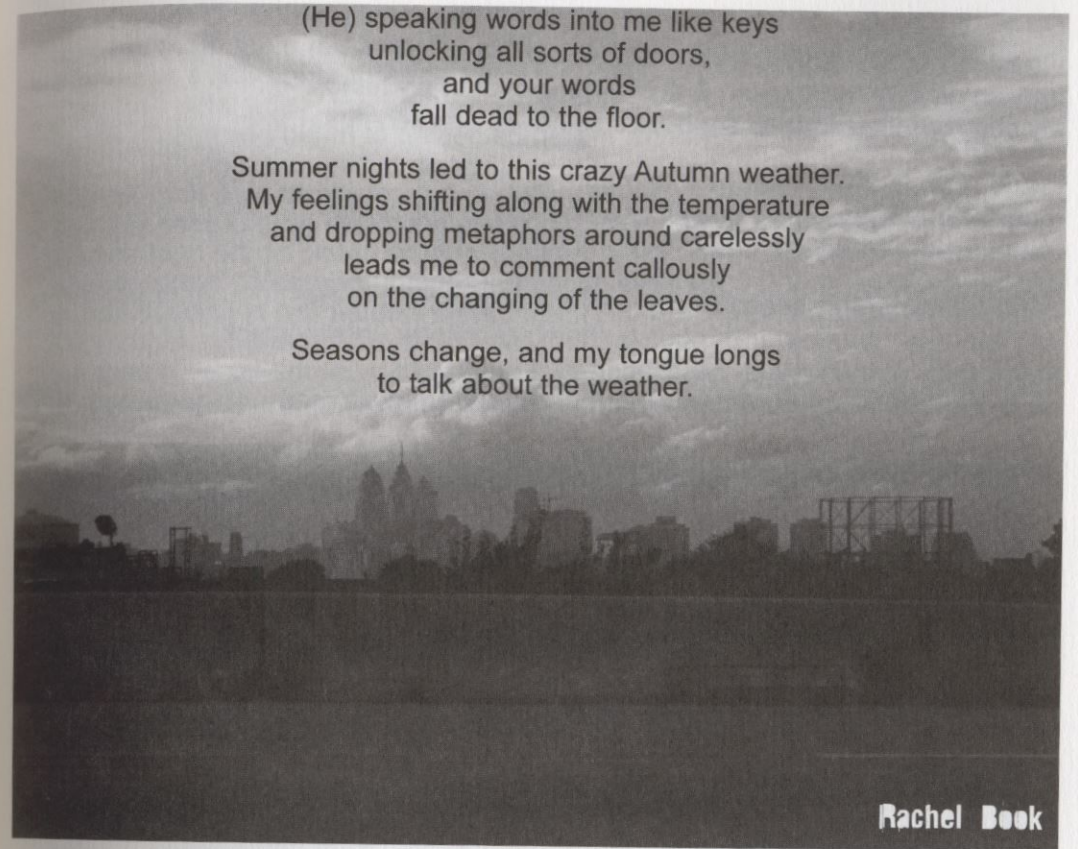
TO ONE LIKE WINTER:

Kayley Thomas

(He) speaking words into me like keys
unlocking all sorts of doors,
and your words
fall dead to the floor.

Summer nights led to this crazy Autumn weather.
My feelings shifting along with the temperature
and dropping metaphors around carelessly
leads me to comment callously
on the changing of the leaves.

Seasons change, and my tongue longs
to talk about the weather.



Rachel Book

OCTOBER BRINGS WITH IT

Matthew P. Burne

On the back porch, I fold my bones quietly into the cushion—
the chair you & I carried back from The Salvation Army,
portions of Steinbeck's corn & dust spilling over in my hands.
My chapped fingers wrap the book's spine like cracked ribs.

Inside, you pour wild rice, beans, & dark onions
together in a copper pot. Bring it to a boil. Bathe our supper
till the onions bleed into steam like an Oklahoma sky.

What is it about this season? When everything's about to die,
you and I are most alive. Of course, there are spices: parsley stuck
to the webs of our fingers, basil tangled up in our hair
while we wedge pellets of pepper into the pits of our back teeth.

But our life lies in the rubble outside: to see the mason in the remnants
of rock & paste. To watch a few pine needles pass through
rain-gutters. Bend our limbs to the pavement, drag a finger
across the dried-up veins of leaves
that gather at the curb with syringes & cigarettes.

And when you bring our dinner to the porch, you say,
"Let us eat the earth from a pair of plastic bowls."

THE AFFECT

Shaena Brantner

The climate dives without warning,
swoops south like a red-breasted hummingbird:
Florida on a November morning.
One rose petal wilts, others follow, whisked
to the ground and blown to garden corners,
mixing with debris in rooftop gutters.
Clouds loom over us like foreigners
trying to read English maps and symbols.
Bodies sit at school books in warm shelters,
where instead of learning, they gaze through windows
at hair flapping in wild autumn swelters.
Wearing heavy sweaters, colored white hues,
we ponder winter snows soon to rush in
as this season darkens like a rusted tin.



Laura Inlow

CAUTION: WET PAINT

Gray-scale landscape
focused in frame.
Sunny pastel umbrellas,
charcoal skies.

Delicate portrait in rain,
make-up melting.
Puddles of color,
sandals sketching ripples.

Paint smearing,
muddy brown consuming canvas.
Brush bristles limp,
tresses dripping life.

Erica Shatzer

FRESH PAINT

Debra Haddad

I'm fresh paint

adhering to this smooth
façade of low-luster finish,

hand-in-hand
pickets cast synchronized
shadows,

brushing worn character
aside with desirable conformity,

don't touch...

I'll be a different
color
when I dry.

EL FUEGO DE ESPAÑA

Like the grayish-white ash, she floats up
from the smoldering embers
of imagination—España!

Nearly a year has passed,
yet I still wander, searching
for fleeting sparks to rekindle
bright, vivid memories.

Driving through badlands
in Washington, by rivers snaking
through the desert,
navigating orchards and vineyards—
I smell the dirt of La Mancha,
taste the dry air and sage of Andalusia.

Fishing in Sisters, Oregon,
the Cascades reach gnarled fingers
up towards the sky,
and I am transported back to Granada,
below the Sierra Nevada,
or to Toledo, stretching my body
beyond the edge of an overlook
to watch carp pluck flies off the surface
of the Guadalquivir like hands
picking unripe olives from the tree.

But central Pa. persists,
and the truncated trees with their leafy arms
no longer hug me in shade;
dwarf mountains with sandstone walls
won't shield winter winds.
I find nothing in the rainy evenings;
watercolor memories smear into
the fire that threatens to sputter out.

Chris Ruff

I long for her,
grasp at smoky images
that dissipate in the winds
crossing the cold, Atlantic waters.

But ah, there!—winds that stoke the blaze!

—the flickering spike of flame dashes up into the air;

as would the horned bull, sleek and black,
thundering towards his costumed fate

—the glowing coals, bright orange against the blackened pit;

the penetrating eyes of the tocaore
in the back room of a Flamenco bar;

—the popping and cracking of charred wood;

the clicking of soles as men and women who awaken the sun
along Sevilla's winding river,

the clatter of the carnival that creeps out of Madrid's alleyways
to claim the Puerta del Sol on a random Saturday night.

She survives in the flames dancing behind my eyes
as long as I possess the strength and will
to open,

to close,

and to blink

when the match strikes—

ah, look!—the light!

GUERNICA

—A PAINTING BY PICASSO

Berlin swoops overhead,
their screeching whistles wake
the sleeping child,
the ensuing roar rocks
him back to unawaking rest.

Incendiary bombs burn
three days strong,
and smoke rises up to blacken
the sun like a misty swarm of locust.

Night comes as a gaping mouth,
swallowing the tormented
Basques at market.

And those watching through
a Parisian window
drop in on the nightmares of madmen.

Pyrenees winds blow smoke clear.
Pasty, thick ash paints everything
in shades of gray on a charred canvas:

The placid bull oversees
the slaughter:
men and horses stretching
over a disturbed peace,
spread like butchered beef,
torn at right angles,
each life shredded.

And we stop to gaze through
Parisian windows
at history handed down
by a master's brush.

Chris Ruff

But images of tanks crawl across Serbia,
on TV screens in side-street cafés,
over the heads
of morning men and women
on their way to work.

They watch their feet as they walk,
unable to raise their heads to face
mass-graves unearthed in Iraq.

They sip their lattes and squint
until newspaper headlines blur,
so they don't speak
of more murders or arsons or rapes
in miscellaneous American cities.

We blind ourselves with familiarity,
gorging out our eyes with CNN or MSNBC.

But where are our Picassos? our Kosovos?
our Bronxes? our Baghdads? our L.A.s?
to open windows and let us feel the breeze
of hollow pointed steel and calloused eyes
hacking away at human flesh
with 500 megaton cleavers
and 9mm serrated blades?

Here they are:
cubist reflections;
windows shattered in the street.

SATURN DEVOURING HIS CHILD

—A PAINTING BY FRANCISCO GOYA

Chris Ruff

Like a starved man
who comes upon a plum,
the doomed god grasps his victuals,
his nails digging into his begotten victim—
desperate hands, tendons bulging—
he eats for life.

His eyes wield the winds
of a troubled father,
the wisps and whispers
of progenic treachery;
he clenches tighter—
and gnaws at another chunk of flesh,
ruby juices squirting
from his injured fruit,
dripping, staining hands with hate,
hoping he can out-eat fate.

FLAMENCO

Chris Ruff

Slip through incense from cigarette tips,
duck into the backroom
of the bar—a small cathedral.
It's a plywood platform
painted in stark onyx,
a makeshift altar.

A congregation of tourists in t-shirts and shorts
and locals in button-downs and slacks
shift in the pews that radiate
out from the stage as they wait.
Order Sangria from waitresses
who move as nuns,
their trays offertory plates
seeking tithes and tips.
The sanguine liquid pours thick
like the sacrament transformed;
fleshy bits of fruit
float lifeless across its surface.

On the stage, the clergy sing—
aging man and woman, gypsy priests,
Los cantaores, wrinkled and crippled with song.
They chant the oldest of homilies,
those their ancestors sang
centuries ago in Analusian caves,
praising pagan gods.

Two *tocaeros* weave together
a tapestry for worship
with guitars projecting out
like extra limbs;
they pluck effortlessly, without thought,
as if they breathe from fingers and string.

Two altar children dance, *los bailaores*.
He spins and claps, then stomps
the wooden floor; she reels about

Chris Ruff

on two-inch heels, flinging
her long, ruffled skirt into air—
innocents trying to squash rays of sunlight.

Some beat that we do not hear
carries these six through their motions
of hand and foot and voice—*duende*.
Lines from chin to cheek,
forehead to nose, contort their faces—
their price of pain
to usher into the momentary
a piece of immortality.

They sweat and strain,
spin and spin music into motion—
baptismal beads splashing onto us.

The unfaithful tourists in front
laugh like bored children at church,
covering their drinks, dabbing skin dry
with paper napkins, unaware
of their blessings.

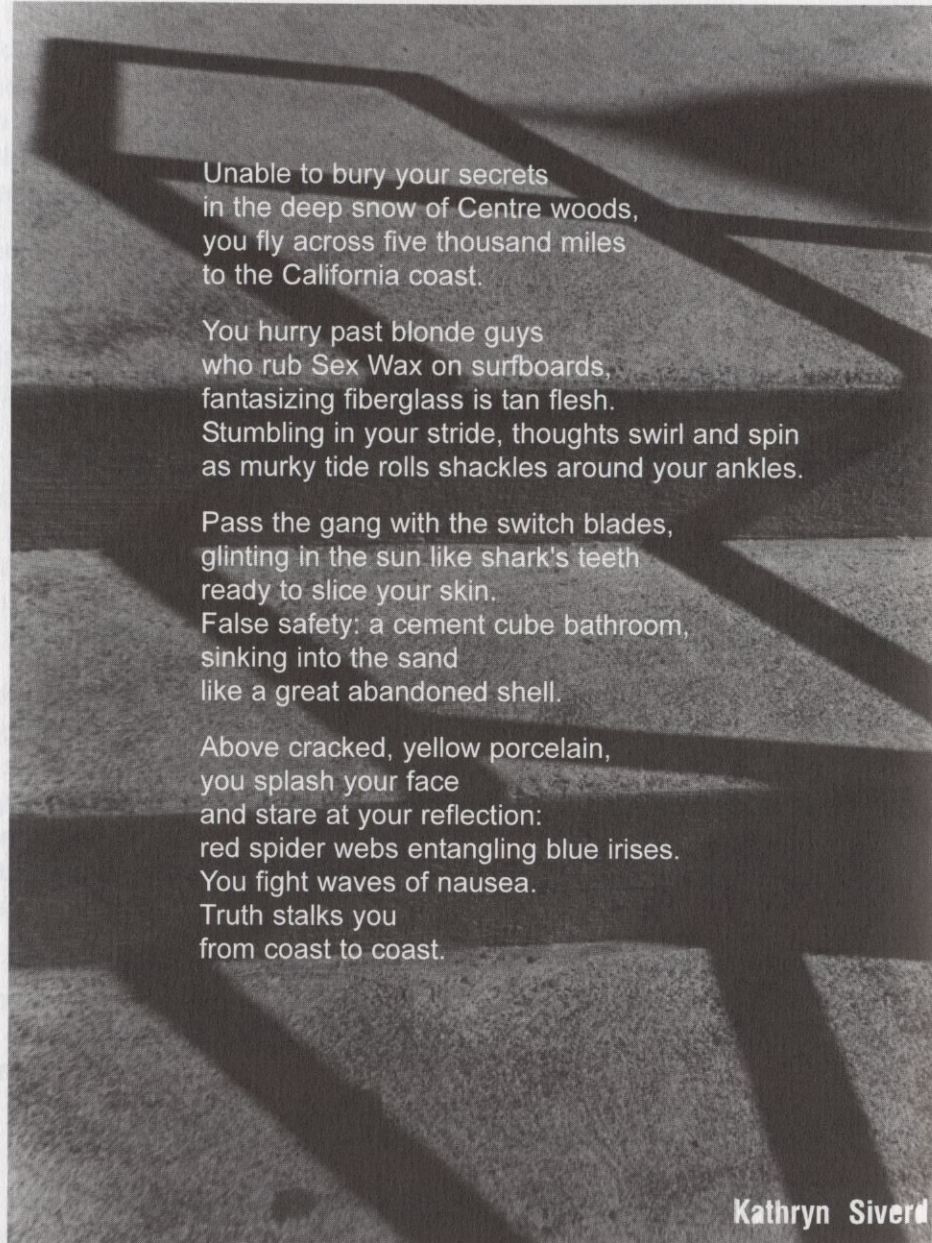
But those in back
clap and yell "Olay,"
as if the Holy Spirit—this *duende*—
surges through them
with each vibrating bass note
or trembling tenor.

I just sit and stare,
and sip and stare,
sweet Sangria washing my throat,
spilling out and down my chin.

I wipe the sweat from my hair
to taste—a salty, fleshy reality.

LA JOLLA RUNAWAY

Amanda Boyd



Unable to bury your secrets
in the deep snow of Centre woods,
you fly across five thousand miles
to the California coast.

You hurry past blonde guys
who rub Sex Wax on surfboards,
fantasizing fiberglass is tan flesh.
Stumbling in your stride, thoughts swirl and spin
as murky tide rolls shackles around your ankles.

Pass the gang with the switch blades,
glinting in the sun like shark's teeth
ready to slice your skin.
False safety: a cement cube bathroom,
sinking into the sand
like a great abandoned shell.

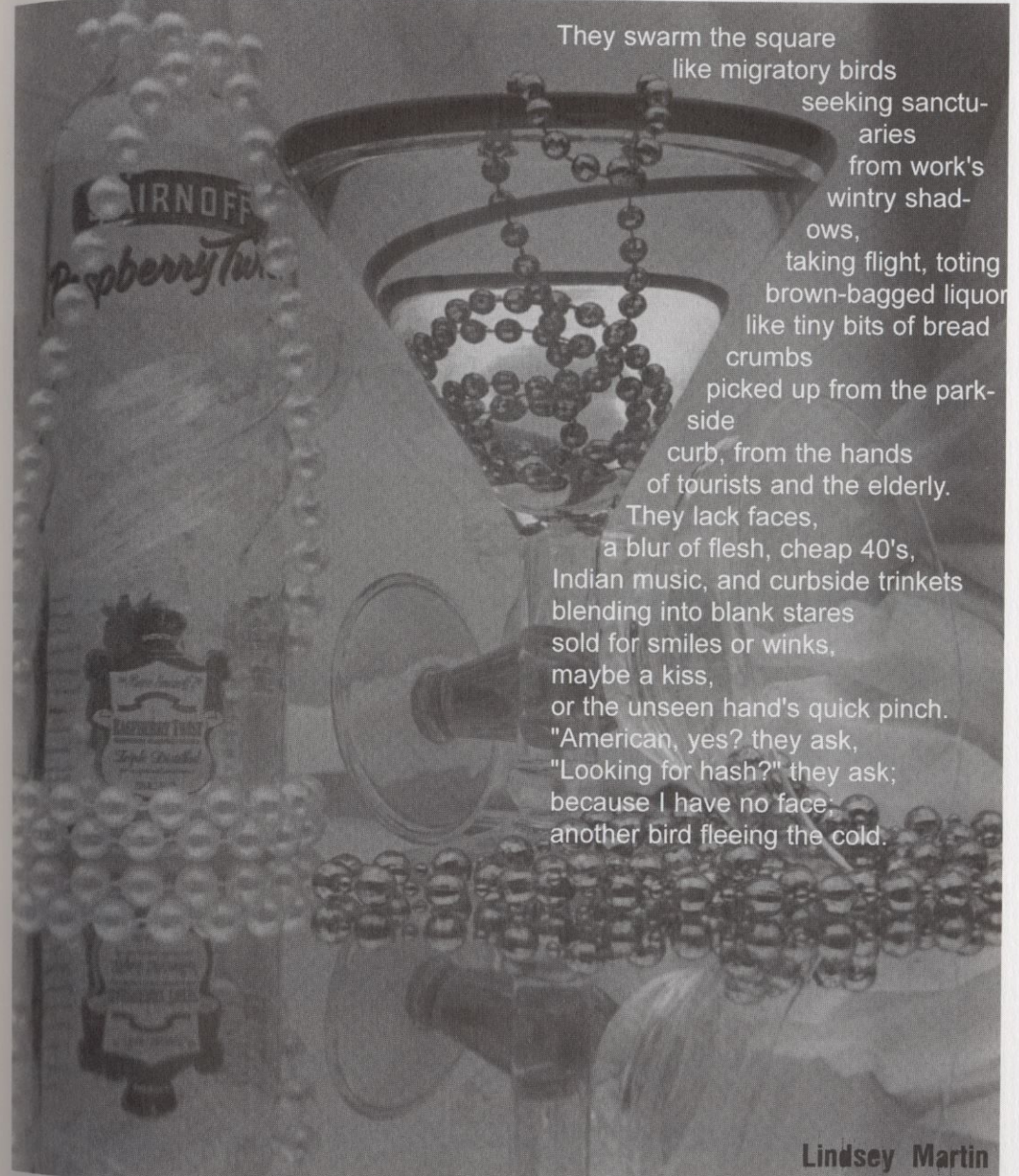
Above cracked, yellow porcelain,
you splash your face
and stare at your reflection:
red spider webs entangling blue irises.
You fight waves of nausea.
Truth stalks you
from coast to coast.

Kathryn Siverd

LA PUERTA DEL SOL

—ON A SATURDAY NIGHT

Chris Ruff



They swarm the square
like migratory birds
seeking sanctuaries
from work's
wintry shadows,
taking flight, toting
brown-bagged liquor
like tiny bits of bread
crumbs
picked up from the park-
side
curb, from the hands
of tourists and the elderly.
They lack faces,
a blur of flesh, cheap 40's,
Indian music, and curbside trinkets
blending into blank stares
sold for smiles or winks,
maybe a kiss,
or the unseen hand's quick pinch.
"American, yes?" they ask,
"Looking for hash?" they ask;
because I have no face:
another bird fleeing the cold.

Lindsey Martin

THE LAST GREAT MAN

William Lahr

I am one of them.
Inexpensive imitations,
we roll off the assembly line each day
everywhere on God's great earth.

No surprise we've dismissed
the great Sculptor
who shaped us while staring
at His shimmering reflection.
Lack of originality and class
make His recent works
little more than trash to be taken away
each Tuesday
by the last great man.

That man would never even carry me
in a large, black plastic bag
without the protection of gloves.

The glory of God's creation:
He never held a door,
never said, "I'm sorry,"
or, "I'm wrong,"
never meant, "I love you."
Fashioned all that fear and pride,
while ogling His own image.

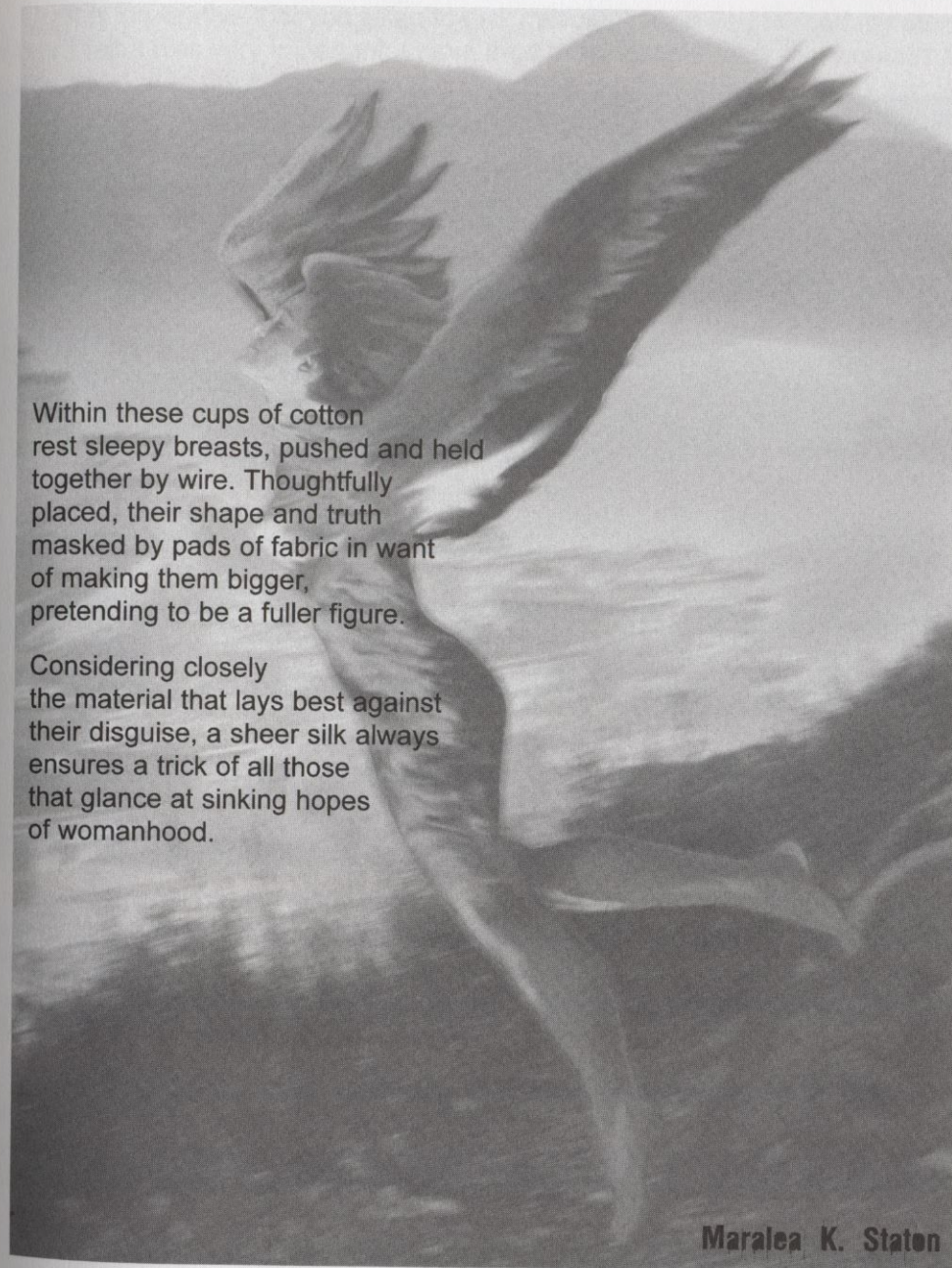
Casting your curse upon me,
I am not cursing back.
I have no fear of the last great man,
his gloves, the black plastic bag.
I was born without purpose.
I am one of them,
the disposable men.

*Matthew
Burne*

Matthew P. Burne

INSIDE THE COTTON BRA

Allison Pruiksmā

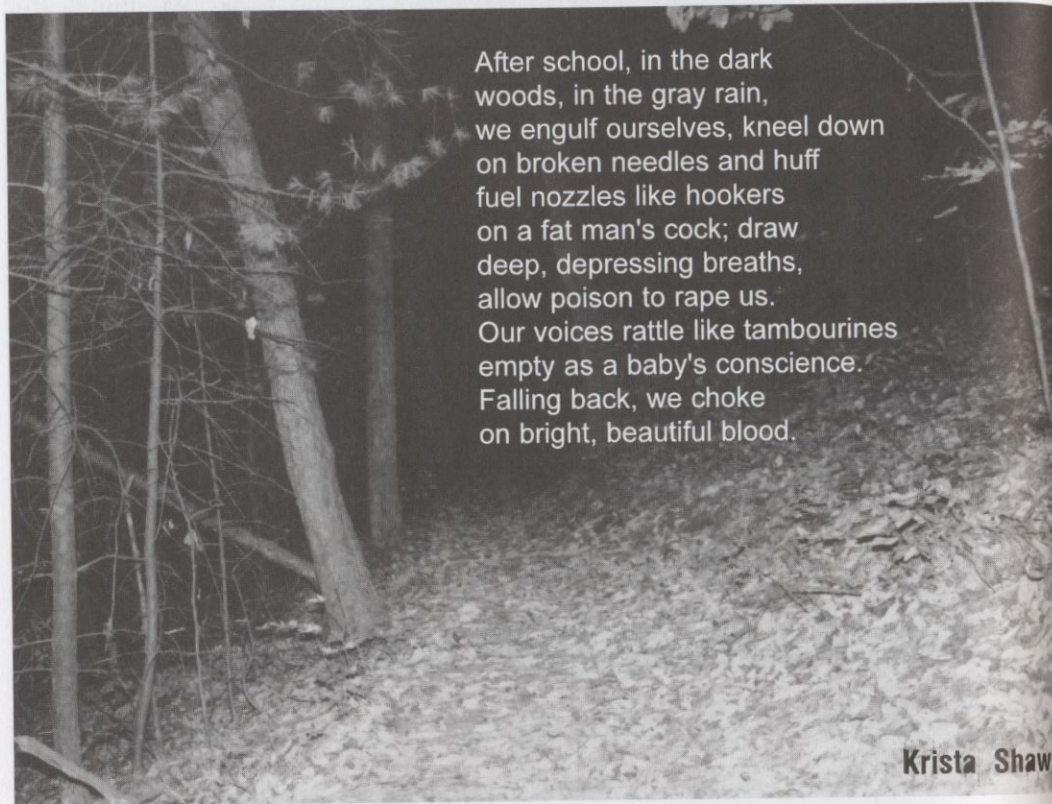


Within these cups of cotton
rest sleepy breasts, pushed and held
together by wire. Thoughtfully
placed, their shape and truth
masked by pads of fabric in want
of making them bigger,
pretending to be a fuller figure.

Considering closely
the material that lays best against
their disguise, a sheer silk always
ensures a trick of all those
that glance at sinking hopes
of womanhood.

Maralea K. Staton

Evan Reibsome



After school, in the dark woods, in the gray rain, we engulf ourselves, kneel down on broken needles and huff fuel nozzles like hookers on a fat man's cock; draw deep, depressing breaths, allow poison to rape us. Our voices rattle like tambourines empty as a baby's conscience. Falling back, we choke on bright, beautiful blood.

Krista Shaw

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I KNOW?

Debra Haddad

It is imperative that you listen to me. I wouldn't want you to read my story unless I felt it was very important. I have tried to tell people; they just wouldn't listen. I have decided to put it into writing. My daddy always told me—everything that is important needs to be in writing—actually, he said documentation, but when I was little I didn't understand the big word.

It was September; I returned to college for my junior year. I always did my schoolwork during lunchtime. I arrived at the dining hall before the mad lunch rush and grabbed a much sought-after booth. After selecting my territory, I liked to nest there for a couple of hours to study, leisurely sip my Dr. Pepper, and nibble my fries.

The first day back, I sat alone. No one bothered me, even though the cafeteria rivaled Wal-Mart on the day before Christmas. Greetings supported the rich aromas, mingling simultaneously like long lost friends. An occasional curse word pierced my ears and spoiled the amusement of the surreal moment. I had heard the university had a record enrollment this year—it was true—I never saw the hall so packed. I decided, in the wake of this confusion, it might be best to eat and retreat to the library to study. Then his voice cut the air, parting the static with a noticeable stillness. He said, "Do you mind if I sit here?"

I looked up and this nice looking boy was standing beside my booth. Of course, I told him he could sit down; the dining hall was full. He looked completely like a freshman—with that lost-in-space look in his eyes, AE ball hat, faded T-shirt, jeans hanging off his hips, and white sneakers. Freshmen always have new shoes. It is as though the parents joyfully push them out into the world not caring how they look...except for the shoes. Firm support—good foundation—who knows; it's probably symbolic or something.

Well, Joel (that was his name) and I had a good conversation. I told him I was a Psychology major, and he told me he was an "undecided." I did notice he seemed nervous—like a kid cheating on a test—always looking around and scratching. His hands would scratch about his neck, hair, face, and shoulders, like he had just gotten a haircut and the little cut pieces were driving him crazy.

For two weeks, every other day, Joel would look for me and sit down. I didn't mind. He seemed like he needed a friend, and I could do that. I told him about the ins and outs of campus life and which professors to take, as well as the ones to wisely avoid. In the course of the conversation, we learned our birthdays

were close. He was actually born on Christmas day. I always wanted that birthday; mine was two days later. My mom always told me I was due on Christmas Eve, but I was late. I'm always late! I figured the birth date was how he got the name Joel; it did resemble "Noel." After all, I was named Faith for that same slanted thinking.

I would always hear Joel's approach; he had keys clipped to his backpack, and they would jingle like a melody. I started to call him Jingle Bells; between the birthday and the keys, it seemed to fit. I soon shortened it to J.B. I could tell he liked it; he always smiled. That was good; he looked like he needed to smile; he looked like a lost puppy. I figured he was just nervous about leaving home for the first time.

One day we were eating a slice of pepperoni pizza and our fries—after he saw I always got pizza and fries, he would get the same thing. For the first time, J.B. commented, captivately, about my gold cross.

"I like the ends," he said, while making a circle with his index finger. "I like the way all four ends are really hearts pointed in; that's cool."

"Thank you," I said, while cupping my cross. "You are very observant. It was a graduation gift from my parents. I never take it off."

"I noticed," Joel said, with a nod of his head then he scratched his neck, fidgeting as usual. His leg would shake under the table. It felt like a car engine humming. I never said anything about it but I noticed the shaking.

"Do you feel that? Do you feel my leg shaking?" Joel asked.

"Yeah, I can feel it."

"I'm sorry if it bothers you. I can't help it. It's from the medication. It is better than before. Those pills really made me shake."

"It's okay J.B. It doesn't bother me. Are you okay?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'm better now; I just learned to live with it."

"I'm glad. Will you always have to take medication?" I was concerned.

"I don't know. I guess. If they make me. It doesn't really help; I just take it to make them happy."

"Why do you do that?" I asked, trying not to sound like I was prying. He became very still; a tension throttled the air. He stared into my eye. He had dark penetrating eyes, which held me decisively in his gaze.

"I see demons."

"Wh-what?"

"I can see demons," Joel said without moving a muscle. "They think if they find the right medication, it will make the demons go away, but they'll never go away. They think they are just in my head—but they're not."

"Umm...well, when you take the medication, do you still see them?" I heard what Joel was saying. I just had to get a grip on grasping it, but believing it?

"I always see them—sometimes I can feel them too."

He glanced quickly to his right, inspecting what seemed to be the empty spaces. He never moved his head, only his eyes. He looked back at me. Joel continued. "It's okay. Don't be scared. I don't want to scare you. Maybe because I see them, others don't have to. I don't know."

"Do you see them everyday?" I asked, not knowing what else to say.

"Not everyday," he said. "Sometimes they just pass by, or sometimes they poke me. Sometimes they just watch me. They watch me all the time. A couple of years ago, my parents put me in a hospital. They said it would help me, but it didn't. They locked me in a room and told me I would be safe; the demons couldn't get me there. And I was safe—for a while—but then the nurse looked through the window on the door and the demon was in her. It came right through the glass and sat there and tormented me for two days. Anyway, they keep trying different medications; they think that the demons are in my imagination. They will never understand that they are real. They think the demons came from when I used to smoke pot."

"Did you smoke, Joel?"

"Yeah, but not that much. I know the difference between tripping out and reality. Like, if I'm tripping, it would look like that poster over there was moving, but I knew it wasn't really. I know when I see a poster, a person, or a demon...I know what I see. I know the difference."

"Demons." I jerked my feet up onto the bench like I was avoiding an invisible snake. I nestled my feet into myself and leaned back a little, while discreetly surveying the surroundings. I cautiously asked, "So J.B., do you see any...demons right now?"

"No, I don't see any; that doesn't mean they aren't there. Sometimes they just like to watch. I can't see them then. I try not to think about it; sometimes I think too much."

It doesn't matter what I think. It doesn't matter if I can see them or not. I know they're there. They are always there. They're everywhere."

They're everywhere—that was the last thing I remember Joel saying to me. I never saw him at lunch again. I didn't know if I wanted to or not, at first. However, when the days passed and I didn't see him, I was worried. I hoped he was doing alright. Sometimes while walking around campus, I would think I heard him—his keys jingling—when I looked back it wasn't him. I thought about what it must be like to be him. Questions and intrigue filled the recesses of my mind, like a senseless addiction. I contemplated knowledge and understanding. I thought about emotions, about feelings, about faith. For the first time, I really thought about my mother's reasoning. Why she named me after a Bible verse—"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Mom was so ridiculously religious; she always oversimplified life in black and white. She'd say, "If you aren't serving the Lord, you're serving the other side." I wanted to call her and ask what I should do about Joel, but I knew what she would say—just pray for him. This was serious—praying for Joel wouldn't help. He was schizophrenic and needed psychiatric help. He needed my help. He trusted me. I wanted to help him. I couldn't stop thinking about it; I needed to see Joel again.

I was sitting on the bench outside the library one day; I felt someone poke me on the back of my shoulder. I turned quickly around, thinking it was Joel, but no one was there.

I continued to look for Joel, especially in the dining hall. I felt he was looking for me too. Sometimes it felt like that—felt like someone was watching me. It is a weird feeling to know someone is staring at you. Three weeks passed, and I finally saw Joel walking towards Stevenson Hall. I ran to catch him.

"J.B., where have you been?" I asked. He just looked at me weird. "I missed you at lunch. I saved your seat."

"I'm sorry, you must have me confused with someone else," was all he said.

"J.B., I'm Faith. Don't you remember? from lunch?"

"I'm not J.B., my name is Joel. I'm sorry; I don't know you."

"Joel! How can you not remember? We had fries at lunch, and you told me about...you know?"

"I am sorry. I don't know what you are talking about. I really have to get to class."

He just shook his head while rolling his eyes and kept walking. I was frozen there.

When he got to the door, he turned back and looked right at me, and I swear I saw him wink. He then disappeared into the building. I felt a slight chill breeze by my face; my skin tingled. I could sense eyes staring at me. I wasn't going to look around to see who was staring at me. I felt foolish enough. I put my hand to my chest and felt my cross. I began to rub it softly between my fingertips, and I felt better. I felt safe. Well, I would have felt safe, if it weren't for those eyes. Those damn eyes—staring at me. I could feel them on me. Now they are always staring at me—always watching me. I think they watch me to make sure I don't tell anybody. I know they are there. They try to make me think it's my imagination, except I know the difference.

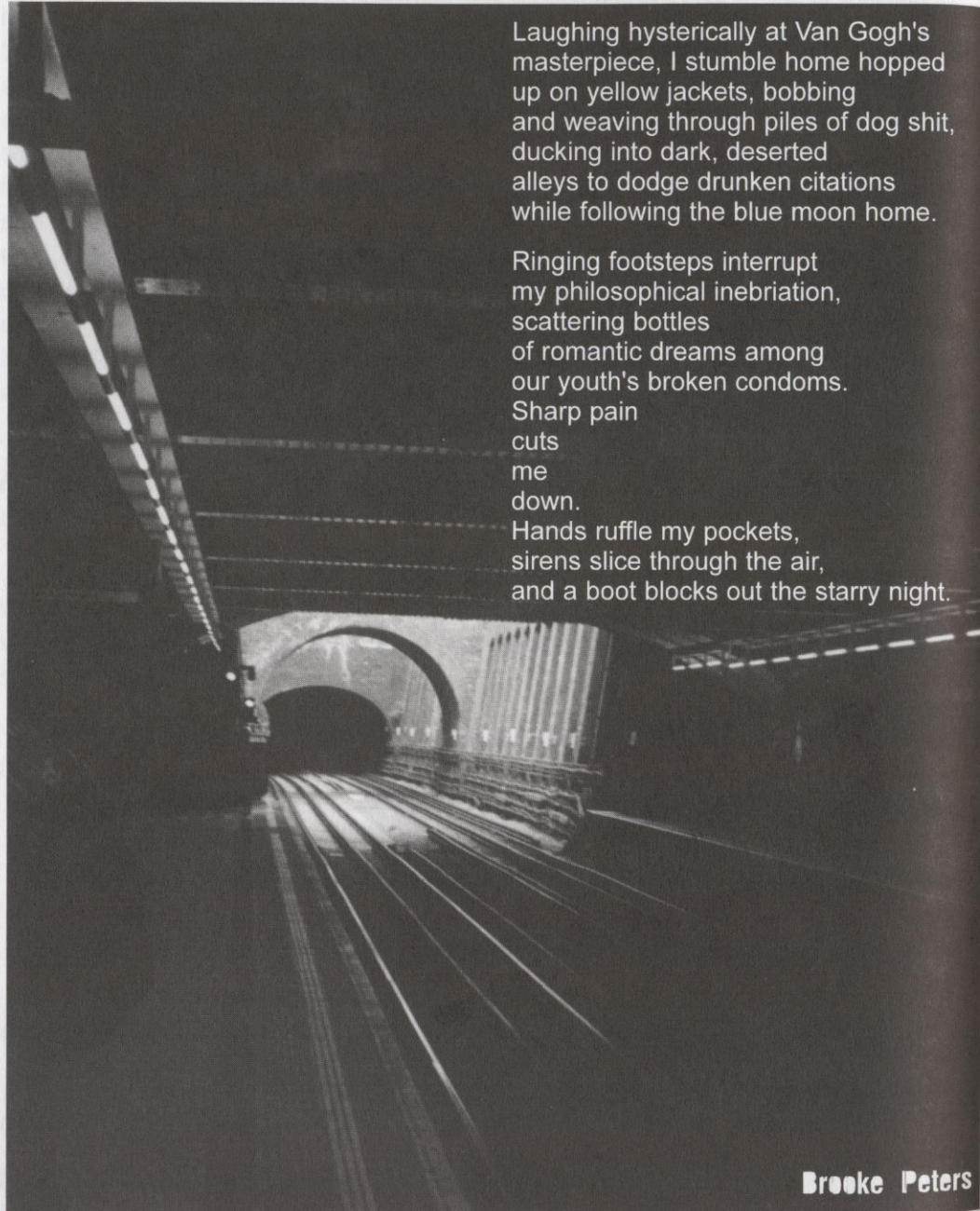
SOBERING

Evan Reibsome

Laughing hysterically at Van Gogh's
masterpiece, I stumble home hopped
up on yellow jackets, bobbing
and weaving through piles of dog shit,
ducking into dark, deserted
alleys to dodge drunken citations
while following the blue moon home.

Ringin' footsteps interrupt
my philosophical inebriation,
scattering bottles
of romantic dreams among
our youth's broken condoms.
Sharp pain
cuts
me
down.

Hands ruffle my pockets,
sirens slice through the air,
and a boot blocks out the starry night.



Brooke Peters

GOD'S IMAGE?

Evan Reibsome

I edge my way out
the branch, alone, nauseated,
knees shaking, ground
distant. I bury doubt
beside unforgotten
sins, wrapping twine
methodically around
my neck, each rotation
tighter, closer
to salvation.
I raise my wings.



Laura Inlow

LIQUID

William Lahr

You drink this news,
but you won't digest it,
what I am saying,
the importance of it.
Another cheap beer,
extracting flavor,
abandoning nutrition.
Is there nothing there
in the texture of it?
Why won't you sip this,
quench your thirst?
How nice of me to share
my world in a cup.
I wanted you to ingest it;
swallow the reality
of my song swirled by a spoon.
Why won't you absorb this,
savor the significance?

WHILE IN A CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA BAR

Matthew P. Burne

Our collection of chicken bones in a basket between us. A jukebox by our booth. Men with Nascar caps, hunched on their stools, turn from the tap to watch your fat lips gnaw the skin of a wing. They watch us talk, see us breathe the words from each other's mouth.

You pour your Lager down, thick in your throat. The dark apple bobbing up and down in your neck as you explain, "If I was born in America, you know I wouldn't be sitting here, talking with you right now."



Rachel Book

Q-TIPS

Cheryl Kirkwood

When I open the mirrored medicine cabinet,
the Q-tips commit suicide
as thirty sailors overpower the pastel
flowered paper cup that contains their anger.
They teeter their holding cell to the shelf ledge,
balance for an instant like thrill seekers
at the edge of Niagara Falls, huddled
in a barrel before plummeting.

Falling past Crest, Clean-n-Clear,
floss, retainers, their speed increases
until they hit the sink right above
the drain, narrowly missing the faucet
that protrudes as a last chance at life
for the depressed wax removers.

Still on the cold, damp porcelain,
their anorexic bodies snapped,
white cotton hair in disarray,
a poor imitation of Einstein.
Such miniature mayhem,
saddened cardboard swabs,
their daily self-destruction.

REALITY

-THEME FOR ENGLISH 2003

Debra Haddad

I would like
to Trade Spaces with the nitwit
network executive
who programs people
like puppets for Warhol's fifteen
Fear Factor minutes
of Dog-eat-Dog fame as

soon as I bet a cool Joe Million
that the next Survivor
of the American Idol
fresh-meat showdown
marries an Osbourne
and populates Mars because

Dr. Phil wants
US to "get real" and America follows
like Fisher-Price pull toys,
while Madonna and Britney
lock lips
to sell Gap jeans
to a nation of hip
visor-clad consumers,
who all need Extreme Makeovers so

call up the Queer Eyes
to straighten out our president
from voting off-our children
into Middle East ambush Hell,
to protect people
who do not want protected,
so we can have oil
to pump into our bankrupted
billion dollar
Infrastructure.

At least we lived
in the land of the free;
this is my page for English 2003.

VISIONS OF GRACE

Chris Ruff

The church stood out against the fields and few houses that made up Fisher's Cove, a small village five miles south of Martinsville. It looked like the many other old country churches that dotted the landscape outside of town—small, white siding, a fading red-shingled roof with a steeple, and a black message board planted out front in the grass—this one reading:

Grace Presbyterian Church
Today's Service:
"Don't Worry, Be Godly"
8 am & 10 am
Sunday School: 9 am

Inside the scene was also similar to many other churches on any given Sunday morning. The organist pushed the keys and pumped the pedals, playing a slow, loud overture of hymns. People filed in through the double doors in the back and took their seats on one side or the other of the sanctuary. A few stood in the aisle that divided the two rows of pews and talked to neighbors and friends.

While waiting for the 10 o'clock service to begin, Edward Fitzgerald looked up from his church bulletin to take in the sight of his wife and two children. He took pleasure in seeing his family lined up neatly in their usual pew. Each Sunday he watched them take their place below the stained-glass window that was donated by his grandparents, and each Sunday it reassured him that they were a family. Even if it were only for an hour, here they could try to forget their busy lives through the ritualistic recital of Lord's Prayers, Apostle's Creeds, and hymns.

As he gazed down at his family, he took special note of his children. His sixteen-year-old daughter Nicole and thirteen-year-old son Mike were both well dressed. Nicole wore dark dress pants with a thick white turtle-neck sweater while Mike sported khakis, a navy-blue shirt, and a tie. Ed scanned the room. Very few other children were dressed as nicely as his, which evoked a sense of embarrassment deep within him—for their parents and for the church. But he took some comfort (and some pride, too) in thinking that at least he properly presented his family at church.

Ed then turned his attention towards his wife Maria and looked over her intently. *She is so beautiful*, he thought. The full, natural curl of her hair draped down over her shoulders and her back. Her light brunette color blended into the darker brown of her sweater nicely. The light, nylon sweater was modest, but it clung tightly to her body, forming perfectly to her curved silhouette. She also wore a

long, loose fitting skirt that was a pale, pumpkin color and flowed over the edge of the pew, down towards the floor, covering her slender legs down to the ankles. Ed found her conservative attire alluring and temptingly attractive—so much left to the imagination, a secret wanting to be opened and explored like a beautifully wrapped Christmas present. He shifted his weight and put his hand on Maria's back, gently rubbing the indentation between her shoulder blades with his thumb. When she turned to him and responded with a gracious smile, blood rushed throughout Ed's limbs, and he wished that they were in the privacy of their home.

Abruptly, the music stopped and Reverend Gordon's deep voice thundered out over the congregation, "Good morning and may God be with you." Ed quickly pulled his hand away from Maria's back and shifted his attention forward, back towards the altar. "And also with you," he replied in unison with the rest of the church. He lowered his eyes and gripped his bulletin tightly in both hands. Embarrassment caused his face to become flushed with warmth. To Ed, it felt as if the pastor's words had caught him in his desire, chastising him for his momentary lustful urge. Unknowingly, he was holding his breath, which he let out with a *whoosh* when his nerves started to calm down a little. *Chill out*, he told himself. *Nobody, except for Maria maybe, knows what I was thinking.*

Having reassured himself of the privacy of his thoughts, Ed's shame quickly subsided. The pastor's thick voice was not accusing but familiar and comforting, and Ed quickly fell back into the secure feeling of routine as Rev. Gordon brought the WELCOME AND INVITATION to an end. Although he knew what was coming next, Ed habitually stared at his bulletin to read the bold-faced type—INVOCATION—before he closed his eyes and listened to Gordon's first few words of the opening prayer. "Heavenly Father, where two or more are gathered..." Shortly after he began, the pastor's voice trailed off in Ed's consciousness. He had heard prayers like it so often for so many years that it had become mere background noise to his wandering thoughts. *The lawn. Get to it today? Game's on at three. It'll probably take forever to get served at the hotel. Maybe get home around one, one-thirty. It's getting shaggy. They're only playing New York. They should win. I'll see how I feel after lunch. Probably get to it. Don't want it looking like the Anderson's jungle.*

But before the pastor said Amen, a shrill whistling noise had already brought Ed's attention back to the four walls and colored windows of the church: "essssss, eessssuss." He opened his eyes and looked around to locate its source but only saw people with their heads bowed and mouths shut, apparently unaware of the noise. He felt as if the sound had come from nearby, so he glanced back down at his children, thinking that they might be whispering to each other during the prayer. *I'll show them what it means to be respectful in church*, he thought. But while he stared at Nicole and Mike—their heads also down, eyes and lips tightly sealed like the rest of the congregation—he heard the same high-pitched "essssss, eessshssss" again. A chill went down his body like someone was dragging the flat edge of a knife across his skin—not actually cutting him, just teasing him with the threat of injury.

Then he looked up at Gordon to see if he showed any sign of having heard that grating noise, but the Reverend continued without looking up, seemingly oblivious to the sharp, distinct distraction that had cut through Ed's thoughts. He swerved his head around, scrutinizing some members of the church to see if their lips moved and released that awful hiss. But the pastor finished, "...and to be more like you. Amen." before Ed could pinpoint the source of the disturbing sound.

At the pastor's command, the congregation rose to sing a hymn, and so did Ed. He looked around once more to try and figure out just what he had heard, but brushed it off as someone telling their kids to be quiet, and soon he forgot about the piercing sound in the hypnotic music of the organ and mumbling voices of the people. The song ended and Rev. Gordon asked for the young children to join him in the front of the church for the CHILDREN'S MESSAGE like he did each week. Ed paid little attention to what the pastor said to the kids. Rather he studied the bulletin, again. He read the list printed in bold of what was coming up in the service—even though it was the same as every Sunday: another hymn on page 246, then the PASSING OF THE PEACE, the OLD TESTAMENT LESSON, the EPISTLE LESSON, the third hymn on the insert in the bulletin, the GOSPEL LESSON and SERMON, PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE, the OFFERING OF TITHES AND GIFTS, and finally the BENEDICTION. He read it once more before easing back into his pew and allowing his mind to drift back to the lawn and then onto thoughts about work for the upcoming week. *I wonder if I'll get Bill to sign on that policy. I should. I'm sound. Dependable. He sees me here every week with my family. He should figure that crosses over into my work. But that damn market. That's what's not dependable. It better pick up. God, please let it pick up.*

The children's message ended, and Ed mimicked the rest of the church's usual motions: rising and moving his lips to a song that he's been singing since his childhood. Yet, the whole time he still tossed the thoughts of his job, home, and family around in his head. The hymn came to a close and the pastor bade the congregation to greet their "fellow brothers and sisters in Christ" during the Passing of the Peace. The church churned in a bustle of moving bodies. Ed turned around to shake hands with the Wilsons, an elderly couple who were friends of his parents, just as he did every Sunday before he wandered into the confusing jumble of people that massed in the middle of the sanctuary. Today though, just as he reached the mess of hello's, how are you's, and God bless's, Ed had the sudden sensation to use the restroom. He quietly excused himself to his wife, went out the door at the front of the sanctuary, and climbed the stairs to where the children's Sunday school room, church office, and bathrooms were.

He quickly used the restroom and came back out into the Sunday school room to find a woman standing there. He had never seen this woman before, but the expression on her face made it seem as if she were waiting for him. Somewhat startled by her presence, Ed awkwardly stared back at her, without saying a thing. She was short and frail, but not exactly thin. Her body draped and sagged underneath her pink sweat suit. In her hand she held a small purse that was the same shade of off-white as her hair.

"Hello Ed," the woman said in a high, strained voice. She looked back at Ed with a sense of familiarity. Her eyes were full of power and strength and depth, which contrasted with her small build. Yet, even with such distinguishable eyes, he couldn't place her anywhere within the scope of his memory.

"Hello, how are you doing?" Ed asked cordially, trying to avoid her haunting eyes while covering up the fact that he didn't know this person who obviously knew him.

"You don't know me, do you?" she asked in return, just as he was fishing through his mind to recall who she might be.

"No, I'm sorry. I don't," Ed confessed.

"I'm a clossssse friend of your parentsssss," she wheezed in that same manner that he had heard during the opening prayer. Her voice sounded serpentine and provoked a sensation similar to what some feel at the sound of fingernails scraping across a blackboard, only more intense and severe—and vocal.

Immediately, the hair stood up on the back of Ed's neck, and he recognized her voice if not her person. He tried to regain his composure and sputtered out, "Uh, am? D-don't you mean was? They've both been dead for over five years now."

"Yessssss, I know," she simply replied, hissing through her smile.

"Where did you know them from?" Ed asked suspiciously, yet politely.

"I grew up with them," she told him, still smiling while staring at him with the fullness of her eyes' depth.

Now more convinced that this woman didn't know his parents, Ed responded, "But how? They didn't even grow up together."

"Yessssss, I know," she replied again. "Sssshe wasss from Harrissburg and he wasss from Sssyracussssse."

Her drawn out words slowly whistled through her teeth and echoed coarsely in the silent, still room. That voice dug under Ed's skin, making him nervous. His heart beat irregularly and he started to hyperventilate. And although he was entirely conscious of this, he couldn't control his growing apprehension. *Her voice, he screamed through his thoughts. I wish I could gag her goddamn voice!*

"Yessssh, Edward Fisssssshgerald. I knew you growing up, too," she continued. She then succeeded in making eye contact. Her eyes locked onto his, and he couldn't look away. They glared at him—prying into his thoughts, into his conscience—with the utmost authority, like she had caught him in the act of doing something wrong.

Ed stood motionless, his anxiety suddenly turning into a warm wave of panic that's similar to the shock of guilt. The piercing quality of her voice had cut through

his outer layers of formality—his social standing and proper appearances, his manners, moral righteousness—so that her eyes could bore into his conscience. He was naked and vulnerable before her eyes. They were the eyes of mothers and fathers, teachers and pastors—all those who had caught him in the minor sins of childhood: stealing a pack of bubble gum from the store, cheating on a test in school, or kissing the Jaime's, Carla's, and Krista's at church camp. However, her eyes, just like her snake-like voice, seemed to be more intense, condemning him for something more—maybe for everything. They scorned him leaving in the morning before his wife and children were awake and not returning home from the office sometimes until they're asleep. They rebuked him for having hit Michael across the back with his belt when he was caught smoking in school and for calling Nicole an easy tramp the night she sneaked out to go to Jay McAdam's party (not for sneaking out with Ray Miller but for wearing that scanty tube-top). They trapped him in his guilt as he paid for insider reports on the market, gambling on his career and wealth with other people's money that they had entrusted to him for their future security. Her eyes caught him doing these things and thousands of others like them—things that she couldn't possibly know about Ed. But it was as if he hadn't committed them previously and separately. His eyes condemned him for all of his sins like he had committed them presently, simultaneously—right here and right now in front of her. His guilt surmounted as he had never felt before. He needed to escape the grip of that judgmental stare and the sting of her voice. He tried to look away from her, but he couldn't. She controlled him and would only let him go when she so desired.

"Yesssss, Edward," the woman hissed again, "but you haven't known me for quite ssssssome time now."

Finally he broke away from her gaze. *Get with it!* he told himself as he tried to shake away these relentless feelings. *She's just a crazy old woman. She doesn't know my folks,* he rationalized. *Crazy. I need to get back before people begin to wonder about what I'm doing.* "Well, it's nice to see you again, misses....uh..." Ed said, fumbling for a name he didn't know as he anxiously lifted his eyes to the stairwell.

"You can jussst call me Sssssssophie," she told him.

"Yes, well...good to see you, Sophie," Ed said as he rushed past her and reached the stairwell. "Oh yeah," he called back without turning around, "the bathroom's free." *Crazy woman,* he thought again, trying to suppress the strange feelings that "Sophie" aroused in him.

He raced down the stairs to get back to the service. It seemed to him that he had been gone for an eternity, and he was sure that his wife would be filled with questions of why he had taken so long. So as he approached the door to the sanctuary, he carefully put his hand on the knob and slowly turned it. He tried to make as little noise as possible and enter without disturbing the congregation's attention from the pastor, who he figured would be reading from the Epistle Lesson by now. But when he pushed the door open slightly, Ed was surprised to hear the shuffling of feet

and low muttering of voices that indicated that people were still milling around and greeting one another. Ed swung the door open fully and was astonished to find the same sight that he had left earlier when he went to the bathroom. The entire church was up and stirring, shaking each other's hands and making small talk. *Why are they still at the greeting?* Ed thought, confused. *I had to be up there for at least ten minutes.*

Before he could figure it all out, though, Bill Stevenson walked over towards him with a spirited smile and an extended hand. "Hey there, Buddy," Bill said loudly, his voice filled with energy as he grasped Ed's hand with his firm grip.

"Hello," Ed answered softly, looking back at the door and then to his watch.

"You don't look so good. Maybe you're working too hard," Bill proposed with a chuckle. "Maybe I shouldn't buy that policy from you if you're so overwhelmed."

"No, no..." Ed said, bringing his eyes (and only some of his attention) back to Bill. "You're still coming on, on...uh," half of his mind searched for his previous thoughts about work and Bill, "...Tuesday. Yeah. Tuesday, right? for that...hmm..." while the other half was still trying to sort through his confusion. "...that ah, ah..."

"That home owner's policy," Bill completed Ed's thought.

"Yeah, right, right, on your new house. I'm sorry. I'm kind of out of it today," Ed apologized.

"Well, get some rest, Buddy. I'll be in on Tuesday," Bill said and turned around to return to his pew. Likewise, the others in the church were returning to their seats. Ed followed their lead and took his place beside Maria.

"That was quick," she said to him as he sat down beside her, nodding her head towards the door leading to the restrooms. "I thought it would be longer after all of those eggs and sausages you ate this morning," she added with a smile.

"Uh, yeah," Ed replied, his eyes returning to the door, too. "No, just too much o.j.," he said distantly, his attention and expectations focused on the door, waiting to see when that strange woman, Sophie, would return.

"What was that you and Bill were talking about?" his wife asked with a hint of annoyance.

"Nothing," Ed brushed her questions aside, still waiting for the door to open and reveal that old woman in a pink sweat suit.

"Sure," Maria said suspiciously.

Rev. Gordon began to read the Old Testament passage, but Ed didn't follow along in his Bible or listen to the pastor's words. His eyes kept darting from the door to his watch or the clock on the wall and then back to the door again; his mind kept trying to sort things out. *It must have been like déjà vu,* he reasoned to himself.

Yeah. It had to be something like that. To make me feel like that. To make it seem so long. As he was trying to make sense of it all, the smallest spark of revelation struck him. Sophie slightly resembled his second-grade teacher as he remembered her—aged and of meek stature but strong and in control of her classroom and kids. His thoughts then stumbled across the time he received a zero for cheating on a math test, and he remembered the feeling of guilt he had because of the way she looked at him. *Yes, that's it. She must have subconsciously reminded me of Mrs. Carnes. Déjà vu. Just worse. Déjà vu. When she called my mom and told her that I was copying Gerald Johnson's test. But stronger. Stronger than I've ever had it before.* His rationalizing helped to digest the experience a little better and clear up his puzzlement somewhat. Yet he wasn't completely convinced, and a heavy discomfort settled in his stomach.

By now Rev. Gordon was finishing up the Epistle Lesson, which Ed also had ignored entirely, and the congregation rose again to sing another hymn. Ed stood and imitated the others in opening the hymnal and moving his lips, but he didn't sing. His mind and eyes were still fixed on the door. He needed for it to open; he needed to see Sophie walk through. His reasonable explanation now needed proof by seeing her again so that he could prove to himself that she did resemble Mrs. Carnes and that it was just *déjà vu*—that he wasn't crazy. It was the physical actualization of her being—the fact of her existence—that would finally ease Ed's mind.

But as the hymn ended and the pastor began to read from the Gospel of Matthew, she still hadn't returned through the front sanctuary door, and the sour feeling in his stomach again grew into anxiety. "Therefore, I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink..." Rev. Gordon read aloud.

"Jesus. Where is she?" Ed muttered under his breath.

"Sssssh..."

Ed snapped around and looked over the congregation. *Where is she? How'd she slip in without me seeing her?* He frantically swiveled his head around looking for her. He jumped back around when his wife patted his leg. "Sssssh!" she censured him. "What's wrong with you? Turn around and be quiet." He faced forward at her command, apologized, and tried to focus on Gordon's words: "But seek first His kingdom..." But Ed could not concentrate. He tried to tell himself that it was only his wife—it was just *Maria*. *Just telling me to shut up*—but he did not believe that. "Do not worry," Gordon said, bringing the reading to a close, "for each day has enough of its own worries."

Christ! Calm down! Ed commanded himself, putting his hands on his knees to keep his heels from tapping on the wooden floor—something he did not realize that he was doing until then. Pastor Gordon bowed his head to ask God for His blessing on the sermon. "...and let my words be yours, and our thoughts, your thoughts. Amen." "Yesssss." The irritating serpentine hiss fell on Ed's ears when the pastor finished his short prayer. *Don't turn around*, he commanded himself.

Don't make a scene. Reverend Gordon began with his sermon, "Every day each of us allow the things of this world to distract our thoughts from the Lord," but Ed couldn't train his thoughts on the words. *Look forward. Don't turn around. Don't!* "So we come here on Sunday to refocus our minds on God," Gordon went on.

"Yesssss," repeated Sophie's voice. *Don't do it*, Ed thought while he rolled the bulletin nervously in his hands.

"But that is not enough!" boomed Gordon's voice, growing passionate as he preached his message. "For many of us leave here after an hour, lose sight of the Lord, and worry about the necessities of life: food, clothes, shelter, money-things that God will provide."

Maria laid her hand heavily on Ed's leg—his heel again tapping loudly on the floor. "Stop it!" she reprimanded with a harsh whisper.

"Yesssss." Ed heard it once more, a little louder this time, and he spun around, ignoring his wife, to look for the frail old woman's bright outfit among those in the church. "Where is she?" Ed demanded.

"Where's who?" his wife asked.

"Don't you hear her hissing!?" Ed barked at her with a poor attempt at remaining quiet—his voice a harsh and loud whisper that only lacked the tonal quality of his vocal cords or else it could have been considered yelling.

"Uhhhhmph..." Reverend Gordon cleared his throat loudly. Ed looked toward the altar to find the pastor glaring at him. He then realized that most of the congregation was also staring in his direction.

"And so," the pastor went on, ending his sermon, "God is in the little things. He's in everything. That's why you don't need to sweat the small stuff. Why worry when God worries about you? Let us bow our heads in prayer."

"What's wrong with you?" Maria lashed out at Ed. "Everyone's looking!"

But Ed didn't respond. Maria's reproaching words and eyes did not matter to Ed at that point and neither did all of the other eyes that were fixed on him just a few seconds earlier. Panic could not overwhelm Ed when it already had him fully within its grasp. When he obediently lowered his head for the prayer, the only voice or eyes that Ed could think about were Sophie's.

Ed did not hear any of Rev. Gordon's prayer. Rather, he silently chanted his own as the image of Sophie's bottomless, hollow eyes rose in Ed's mind, behind his closed eyes. *O God. Please help me. O God. Please help me*, he pleaded, his hands clasping around the creased and wrinkled bulletin.

"Yesssss," the voice responded, so near that it seemed to come from within his own thoughts—from the eyes that stared back from the inside of his red-black lids.

Please. Please for the sake of Christ, he begged. Pressure built up in his lower back, as if someone were twisting it like you ring a sponge.

Yessssss. The eyes replied.

Please. Relieve me. Make it stop. Make it stop. He tried to open his eyes, but he couldn't. The pressure rose up along his spine and then out through his arms.

Yessssss. *Jeeessssussss*, they cried.

I'm sorry. I'm s-ssssorry. His hands were clenched by a cramping sensation that made them look like gnarled claws, forcing him to drop the bulletin, which crashed loudly within his thoughts, sounding like the report of a shotgun to Ed when it hit the floor.

Yessss. *Jeeeeessssussss*. They persisted.

Leave me. Leave Ssssatán! Ed ordered. As he spoke the words, the pressure in his back and arms was released with a sudden crack, like a dam being breached, but he felt no pain. A pacifying tingle flooded throughout his body and caressed him like a thousand tiny hands massaged the very ends of his strung-out nerves.

Yessss. *Jeeeeessssussss*.

"Yesssss! Jeeessssussss!" Edward stood up and exclaimed, simultaneously with Rev. Gordon's Amen. "Thank you, Jeeessssussss!" he shouted again, in the same drawn-out whistling fashion that had evoked such anguish in him a little bit earlier.

Everyone lifted their heads from prayer to witness Edward Fitzgerald standing there with a strange glazed look in his eyes and a satisfied grin on his face. They also saw his wife jerking at his sport jacket, telling him to sit down. "Huh...ha..." Rev. Gordon chuckled, trying to relieve some of the thick awkwardness that hung in the air of the sanctuary. "Yes, uh...Amen, Ed. Thank you very much. Uhhh...praise the Lord," he said, nodding in Ed's direction, indicating for him to take his seat.

"Sit down!" Maria demanded with her own not-so-quiet whisper. Ed did so slowly, his smile not fading even though he heard the muffled voices of the congregation toss his name around.

The reverend wrapped up the service as soon as Ed sat down, completely forgetting to collect the offering. "So let us go forth today," Gordon finished, "remembering to let God sweat the small stuff for you, while we only worry ourselves with spiritual matters. Amen."

"Yessssss," Ed said softly. "Jeeessssussss."

As Gordon walked from the pulpit and down the isle to the main door in the back of the sanctuary, the organ began to play, signifying the end of the service. On cue, the congregation rose and started to mull around, gathering their coats, Bibles, and families to leave. Maria quickly gathered the children's jackets and thrust them into their arms. "Come on kids," she said as she grasped Ed's arm. She pushed him out of the pew and towards the front door of the sanctuary where they climbed the stairs and left through the emergency exit by the church office.

"I don't know if you're sick or what," Maria said as she walked down the wooden steps that led down from the exit to the parking lot. Ed followed behind her and the children, but didn't say a thing. "But I can't believe how you embarrassed us in there today! You really set a good example for the children."

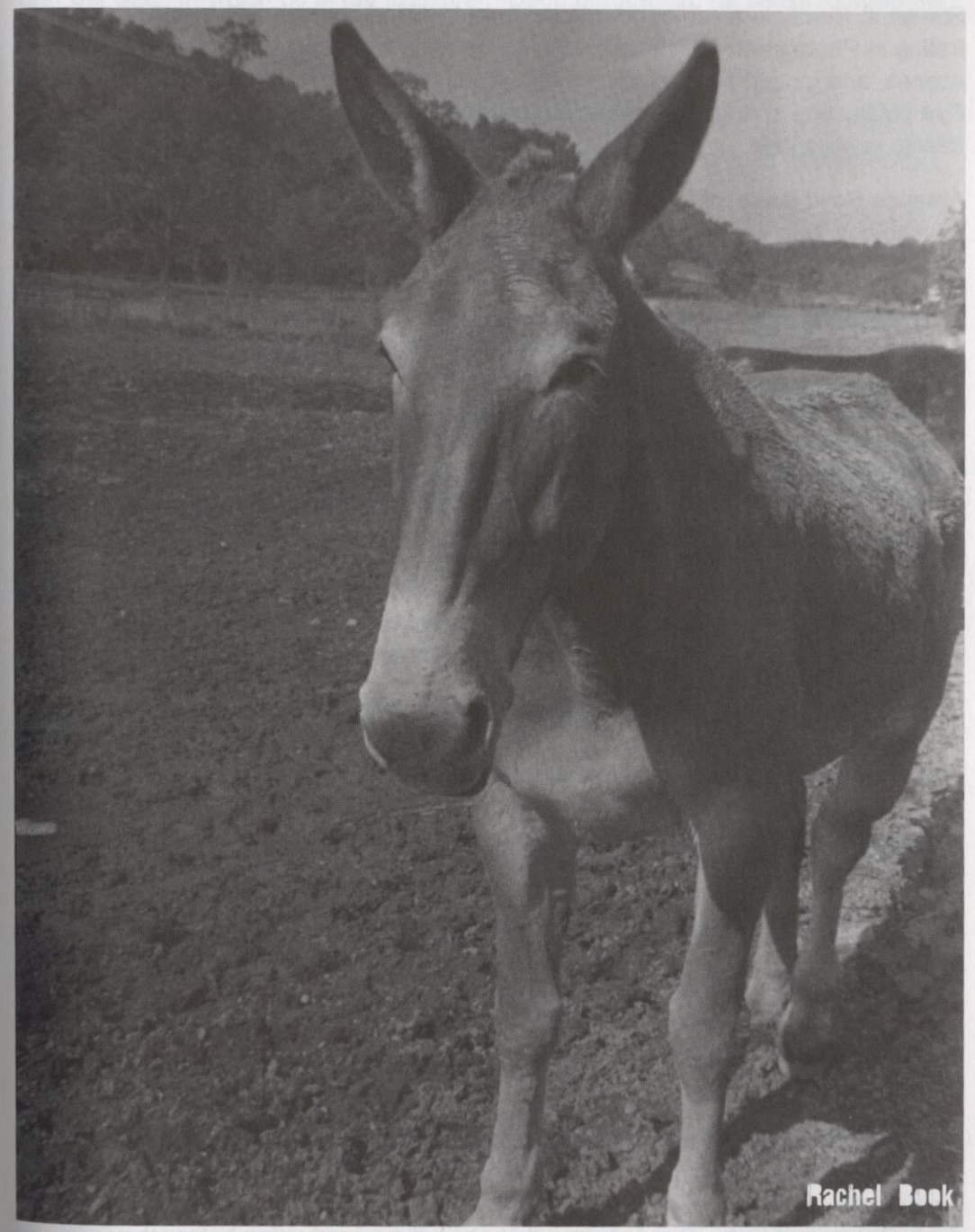
Ed did not respond. He just continued to smile. It's not that he did not hear his wife. He just did not know what to say. He knew that he had made a spectacle of himself, but he didn't care. For the first time in a long while, his mind was clear. He felt like his entire life he had been looking through a window, desperately trying to see something. But until now he could only make out the vague form of whatever it was he was trying to see. Now he realized that he had been looking too hard, that he had been standing too close to the glass, and that years of vapor from his breath had accumulated on the window. And now, finally, someone had whispered into his ear, *step back and let me wipe that clean for you.*

"First you talk about work with Bill and then that scene," Maria lectured on in Ed's silence. "Well?" she paused. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

Ed plunged his hands into his pocket, pulled out his keys, and handed them to his wife. "Here, you drive. I've got some things to think about," he said and stepped into the passenger side of his blue four-door Taurus while his kids got in the back.

"You're damn right you do," Maria agreed angrily, slamming the door.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES



Rachel Book

Andrea Ault, a senior from Sayre, PA, is majoring in Secondary Education with an English concentration. She enjoys reading, analyzing literature, and writing. In her spare time, which is ample, she likes to draw and create pottery sculptures.

Steven A. Beatty is a senior graduating from LHU in May with a B.A. in Art, concentrating in Photography. His most intriguing works include abstraction, naturalistic scenes, and motion studies. Steven is currently a staff photographer for *The Eagle Eye* publication and, upon graduation, his goal is to seek out work for other news or artistic publications.

Amanda Boyd is a senior, majoring in Secondary Education/English, with a minor in Psychology. She will be graduating in December.

Rachel Book was born in 1982. She is from Port Royal, PA. She is a senior at LHU, majoring in three-dimensional Art, specializing in pottery. After graduation, she wants to continue for her Masters in Art Education. She enjoys many arts, such as ballet, painting, pottery, piano, and photography.

Shaena Brantner is a twenty-two-year-old senior at Lock Haven University, majoring in Secondary Education/English. She enjoys traveling as much as the return home, reminiscing with friends and family, and setting aside time in her day to do absolutely nothing.

Matthew P. Burne is an English Writing major & Philosophy minor. In 2003, he was the recipient of the Isabelle Winner Miller creative writing scholarship. His interest/affection lies in aesthetics and transcendence.

Daniella De Luca is a freshman at LHU, majoring in journalism and mass communications. Dani is the Classifieds Editor of *The Eagle Eye*, the school newspaper, and enjoys all aspects of the news industry although she loves to dabble in all sorts of genres. Currently, she resides in Milford, NJ, but was born and raised near Seattle, Washington. This is her first submission to *The Crucible*, and she hopes to write for it for all her years at LHU.

Daniel S. Gordon is mostly from New Jersey. He received a B.A. in English and Education from Monmouth University. He is the Graduate Hall Director for Russell Hall. After receiving his MLA, he would like to study for an MFA in poetry somewhere in Manhattan. Joseph Campbell is currently his guru, but he is searching for one who is alive. If anyone would like to apply, he's sure your path and his will cross.

Debra Haddad is a senior, majoring in English with an emphasis in writing and a specialty in poetry. She loves reading and writing poetry, especially at her camp on Pine Creek. Debi is a non-traditional student and attends LHU with her two children, Casey and Coty. She is happy that she will be graduating before they will!

Alex Hambleton is a sophomore double major in Business Administration and Accounting from Lebanon, PA. He enjoys film, music, and photography. On campus he is involved in Alpha Kappa Psi Honors Co-Ed Business Fraternity and Ski Club, of which he is the treasurer. Upon graduation, he seeks to open his own business.

Laura Inlow was born in Clearfield, PA. She is a junior here at Lock Haven University. She is currently majoring in Social Work and Criminal Justice. She enjoys being very active in extracurricular activities and also enjoys photography.

Cheryl Kirkwood is a senior English major, concentrating in writing. She plans to go on to graduate school after graduation in May, 2004. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, being outdoors, and spending time with friends and family—all of which inspire her.

William Lahr is a senior, majoring in Secondary Education/English. He is 5'10" with blonde hair and blue eyes. He enjoys sports, movies, plays, working out, and good conversation. He is interested in meeting an attractive female with similar interests.

Brianne Linn is a senior, majoring in English with a writing concentration. She likes reading and writing poetry and fiction, and being with her friends and family.

Bryann Lewis is majoring in English with a writing concentration. She hopes to go back to school in order to become certified to teach Shakespeare in high school. Bryann's favorite author is Erica Spindler.

Jen Manley is a senior Graphic Design major. When she is not living in Sloan, she enjoys mountain biking, rock climbing, hiking, kayaking, and snowboarding.

Lindsey Martin is a senior Communications major. She enjoys photography, the beach, and daydreaming, and hopes to travel abroad in the near future. Her future depends on where the plane lands.

Kelly Colleen McCoomb was born in Texas, but she has lived most of her life in St. Louis, MO. She has done many things from skydiving, to driving to Florida just to see the beach, and much more. She loves to travel and plans to leave America and live over in Asia working in the Peace Corp. Photography will always be a part of her life.

Brooke Peters is graduating in December of 2003, receiving a B.F.A. degree in Art - Graphic and Online Design and minoring in Art History. When she's not busy creating art work, she enjoys traveling, hiking, camping, kayaking and landscaping, many of which are her primary sources for seeking inspiration.

Allison Pruiksma is a senior at Lock Haven University. She is an English major with a concentration in Literature and will graduate this May. She has no plans after graduation except to enjoy not being in school for a while and then continue her education at an unknown date.

Amy Rechenberg is from Long Beach Island, NJ. Some things that are important to her are her family, friends, her best friend Jenna Anne Brock, and her future. She is currently in her second year at LHU and is a Special Education major. She hopes to work with students who have behavioral and emotional problems and to give them a chance to show the world what they are made of.

Evan Reibsome is currently a junior enrolled in Lock Haven's secondary education English program. He enjoys long walks on the dike, and is looking for a girl who enjoys outdoor activities, reading, and football.

Timothy Rice is a Junior Secondary Education/English major. His hometown is DuBois, PA, and he is the fourth of Dr. Charles and Reta Rice's five children (all boys). He is excited to be part of this year's *Crucible* project, and he hopes you all enjoy his work.

Chris Ruff is a senior looking forward to graduation in May. Though he admits that it will be tough to leave the beautiful scenery and people that surround him, the anticipation of seeing what else the world has to offer grips him. After graduation, he plans to work for a little while to save up money for another trip to Spain, the land that inspired his poetry for this year's *Crucible*.

Erica Shatzer is a junior. She is a journalism major, concentrating in Advertisement/Public Relations. Erica enjoys camping, art, writing, watching movies, photography, and spending time with her friends and family. She loves Johnny Depp, green tea, tulips, and flamingos. Her favorite book is *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath.

Krista Shaw is a freshman here at LHU. She hasn't declared a major yet, and is stuck between Secondary Education/English, Art and Music. In her spare time, she likes to play the guitar and sing, do artwork, and go to punk shows with her friends.

Kathryn Siverd is a junior here at LHU. She is a B.F.A. major, concentrating in Graphic and On-line Design. She loves to read, listen to 80's music, spend time with her loved ones, and have a good time! She looks forward to graduating and having a successful and happy life.

Maralea K. Staton is a non-traditional transfer to LHU from Denver, CO. She is studying graphic design and is interested in designing print advertisements and other corporate collateral, back in a big city, after graduation. Currently she is designing brochures for several departments on campus in addition to designing templates for websites and finishing her junior portfolio.

Kayley Thomas is a Secondary Education major hoping to become a high school English teacher. When not trying her hand at writing poetry, Kayley enjoys working on her zine, playing guitar, thrift store hunting, reading fantasy novels, and forever trying to finish that book of hers. Among her literary idols are Francesca Lia Block, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Emily Dickinson, and Anne Sexton, but she draws most of her inspiration from her family, friends, and boyfriend, and the beautiful trials and triumphs they share together in life.

Jason Turner will be graduating this December with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in graphic and online design. Jason would like to thank the co-designer of this publication, Maralea Staton, without whom a large portion of this work would not have materialized. His plans are flighty at best for the moment, but some time back home in New Jersey is a definite.

The background of the cover is a dark, mottled purple and black texture. On the right side, there is a vertical strip of light, possibly representing a book's spine or a light source, with a series of small, bright, circular spots.

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