

201-47



TOWERS

Towers XLIX

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Lucien Stryk Award for Poetry
Cheryl Turman for Rite and
I Don't Make Love to the Canvas

Judges

Charles Hagelman and Vernon Lattin
NIU Department of English

J. Hal Connor Award for Fiction

Initials in Wood by Peter D. Barrett

Honorable Mention

Naked Ladies and Other Stories
by Dennis L. Schultz

Judges

Clifford Caruthers and Lynwood T. Oggel
NIU Department of English

E. Ruth Taylor Award for Critical Writing

Carl Sandburg: The Midwestern Voice of Whitman
by Robert P. Anderson

Judge

Martin I. Kallich
NIU Department of English

Maude Uhland Award for Freshman Writing

. . . dekalb
by Sue Greenspan

Judge

Rosalie Hewitt
NIU Department of English

Graphics

Untitled, Cindy Stackler	5
Photograph, 9¼" x 6¾"	
Plane Over House, Sigurds Bokalders	8
Photograph, 6¼" x 9¼"	
Rhodesian Skull, Jeanni Hites	17
Serigraph, 17" x 11"	
Untitled, Mark Roscoe	18
Steel, 48" x 60" x 39"	
Untitled, Joe Digangi	23
Painted Aluminum, 46" x 52" x 18"	
Arizona, Jacqueline Moses	25
Photograph, 6¼" x 9¼"	
Untitled, Yolanda Fernandy	26
Photograph, 5⅝" x 8½"	
Untitled, Bob Fenoglio	33
Lithograph, 18" x 24"	
Arrentz, Mike Flanagan	34
Mixed, 18" x 18" x 6"	
"Surface: Overunder, Keith Cumblad	38
Serigraph, 19" x 22"	
Stage Set One, David Holt	41
Ceramic, 14" x 14" x 15"	
Untitled, Erica Bajuk	47
Steel, 30" x 15" x 12"	
Espresso, Doug Whitehouse	48
Pencil, 15" x 13"	

Cover: Eileen Jorgenson

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Contents

Untitled	4
Robert Sandusky	
Ten o'clock August	6
Edward Shawn Brophy	
Ablution	6
Melodie Provencher	
Rite	7
Cheryl Turman	
The Auction	9
David Stine	
The Poet Man	16
Farrell J. Foreman	
Late in the season	17
Melodie Provencher	
Naked Ladies and Other Stories	19
Dennis L. Schultz	
... dekalb	22
Sue Greenspan	
Away in Midwinter	24
Mark Kimmet	
The Widow	27
Monica Heilbronn	
Initials in Wood	28
Peter D. Barrett	
Father I Dreamed	32
Tom Roach	
For This There's No (tribute to Ezra Pound)	35
Rodney Baker	
(untitled)	36
Sue Greenspan	
Against the Heart	37
Dorothy Kampf	
Bridge of the Gargoyles	37
Rodney Baker	

Untitled	39
Cheryl Turman	
Untitled	40
Farrell J. Foreman	
Carl Sandburg: The Mid-western Voice of Whitman	42
Robert P. Anderson	

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Untitled

Baudelaire loved the clouds, but he was afraid to look at them out open windows. Instead, he would go out at night, thru the alleys and small streets of Paris and peer into the candle-lit rooms of old ladies. This is the way he got ideas for poetry.

He would watch someone in a window and while walking home begin to make up a story about that person's suffering. In bed, he would feel a certain pride for having lived and suffered for others than himself.

Once, while looking into a window, he was confronted by a gendarme. He tried to run, but was soon in front of a judge. The hearing was short, as it was obvious that Baudelaire was guilty. Out of curiosity, the judge asked: "How can you be sure your story is really the true and right one?" Baudelaire answered: "What does it matter what the reality outside myself is, as long as it helps me to feel I am alive, to feel the nature of the creature I am?" To avoid a scandal, the judge ordered Baudelaire pay a small fine and go home.

Robert Sandusky

Cindy Stackler



Ten o'clock August

Ten o'clock August
sun glinting windows
car bodies hot
streets soft
trees bathed in moist, hazy heat
the humidity deadens
the amplified buzzing
of hidden cicadas. I am told

the hydrants are yellow hot, the
boys afraid to touch them.
What if there's a fire!
It could

race up the throats of hallways,
and arm itself into the attic,
groaning, swirling
gold and screaming in the rafters
blue fire, everywhere
It could.

What if
there's a fire

Edward Shawn Brophy

Ablution

Whispers hang in the square;
Sun glares from the pool;
Black-veiled women bob,
immerse thin hands,
rinse sin-filth from stone-baked feet.

Melodie Provencher

Rite

I slip from the sleeping house
Throw a coat over my gown
Clod-hop his boots to the clearing.
I seed in measured sweep
Hurry fistfuls in wild arcs raining seed
Then upturn all

I lean into the wind
Silently call them from the sky
Two . . . ten . . . now
Sixty or so—Flashing wheel
Darting fall from whirring air
A boil of wings in foaming snow,
As everyday . . .

I wait
For one among the churning wings
To slowly
Tiptoe
Out,
Amazed flamingo.

Cheryl Turman

Sigurds Bokalders



The Auction

A little after five it began to rain. The sky had looked all day like a painting I once saw of El Greco's "Toledo." A heavy sky all purple and gray. I put on the windshield wipers and turned down the radio until both sounds, the classical music and the lapping of the wiper blades, were of equal volume. I looked over at Marcia. She had fallen asleep. I was alone in my thoughts, away from the chilly rain in this heated metal capsule. The day was dark. I started to cry. I felt a loss—deathlike—and I was alone in this feeling. Good or bad, dark or light, I allowed my thoughts to flow as freely as my tears.

Indeed it was a day of loss. My childhood and early manhood cut away except for the memories. Marcia and I had forced ourselves out of bed at five-thirty to be able to leave by six and make Bend River by eight. The auction was to begin at ten. I wanted to get there early enough to take a last look at the farm and help Dad. As the only son, I felt it was my duty. The happy home I had known for the first nineteen years of my life was being put up for auction. Sold. This morning in thinking of my youth on the farm I thought it ironic that on this dismal day—my last look—all the memories were sunny and warm. My whole youth nothing but Junes of dazzling light. I would be a stranger to that little square of earth from now on.

Dad had been farming alone since I left for college a year after high school and Grandpa died. It was all he could do to handle the three hundred acres, so he refused to expand and become a farmer of the seventies. He never borrowed money before and wouldn't start now. I always admired his and Grandpa's aversion to borrowing or "buying on time." At the same time I wished he had "thrown in" with some of the bigger farmers and been able to keep the land, the house. Selfish. I decided that's what I was so I never expressed these

thoughts to him. He was getting older—sixty-two. He deserved a rest. The farm was an old friend. In my childhood play-time fantasies it was transformed into everything from medieval England to modern-day Africa. And in later years it became a park for a melancholy young man awaiting his first bout of love. I know every acre, tree, and bend in the river of that farm. I had been prepared for this auction for two months. I surrendered to its loss and put on my bright face when we arrived in Bend River.

We pulled up the drive a little after eight, Marcia chatting away excitedly. She loved to visit the farm and had fully accepted its sale. We had some coffee with Mom in the bare-walled kitchen and then I went off to find Dad. Marcia stayed with Mom. Being a city girl most of her life, the farm was a novelty at first and a welcome relief in our later visits. She still talks of the time we watched the farm for a week one summer, allowing my parents to take a vacation. Dad had sold the dairy herd a couple years before so our farm duties were minimal—feeding the livestock and gathering eggs. It was a beautiful week. We were children again with a three hundred acre playground. Still new enough at marriage we were devoted in time and love. We picnicked in the long, lush green grass under the oaks in the South pasture. And laughed as the cattle, made huge by our sitting, would timidly venture close enough to sniff the food we held out but would spook, wheel, and run at the slightest word. One afternoon we sat under a willow that hung over Bend River and read poetry to each other and watched the dots of cattle in their slow grazing. It was a beautiful, lazy summer day. Marcia said she could almost imagine a young Samuel Clemens sitting on the bank farther down under the over-hanging trees. The brown river wove its way slowly by us. She said she could almost see what Hannibal, Missouri must have

been like in the 1800's. We both love Mark Twain. As a boy I had sat on these banks in a straw hat with a cane pole. I felt very close to Marcia that day. Another day, so free and brave and isolated, we hiked to the top of a small hill near the wooded north corner of the farm. We picked wild strawberries and, lying naked on my old, open sleeping bag, wondered if we could be seen by the gnat-like jets overhead. It was a beautiful week. I don't know of a week we've been closer. In my mind it was a time hounding after yellow butterflies with the dog in the alfalfa fields, splashing through the creek with our shoes on and making love outside during the daylight and in my parents' big old bed at night. So far away from noise and smoke. Birds were our alarm clock and the neon fireflies advertised the coming of the soft nights.

Thinking of that week I look over at Marcia affectionately. I wish she was awake so I could tell her of my love. We'll never have *that* freedom to be children again. We're getting older. We're busy in our separate lives so much. I love you, Marcia. I felt a dull ache inside me. Outside the tires sizzled on the highway. Marcia looked beautiful curled on the front seat. Her cheeks are naturally a little red—like Grandma's peaches. Marcia would have made a good farm wife. So warm and understanding. Yet sometimes I think about dying. Sometimes by my own hand. Sometimes just fate. I don't know the reason. Sometimes I feel very alone in the world. Sometimes I feel sad when I know there's no reason. I reach over and brush back a strand of hair that has fallen across Marcia's face.

"Mmmmm—honey, what time is it?"

"About five-thirty. We'll be home in an hour."

"Could you put the heat up a little?"

"Yes. Do you have papers to grade this weekend?"

"Oh shit! I forgot. Not only do I have a ton, but I haven't

made out my lesson plans yet."

"Don't worry, we're still reading Keats—I'll help grade and you can do your lesson plans. We'll work it out."

"Todd?"

"Yes?"

"Can I sleep a little more?"

"Sure. Is the music too loud?"

"No. when did it start to rain?"

"About half an hour ago."

"Can I put my head on your lap?"

"Yes."

"Will it bother your driving?"

"No."

I stroked Marcia's hair several times as she shifted about to get comfortable. I thought of our dates, our wedding day and honeymoon. All had been perfect. There was no reason to feel alone. Enclosed. We have a little house outside of town—not quite a farm, but spacious. We have trees and a garden. We enjoy our jobs. We are happy. My father used to say one always pays for happiness. I laughed it off as another saying of the Depression generation. But, maybe, these death thoughts are my paying. Maybe it's just been too much of a day. Too much rain and gray. Marcia never seems to get depressed. Sometimes I don't think I'm good enough for her.

Marcia stirs a little, cupping her warm hand over my knee. My insecurity fades. Marcia, I love you. I won't let dark thoughts invade our life. Darkness. Be happy, Marcia. The mind is such a wonderful and terrible mystery. Darkness.

My grandfather died on a cold, dark November day. He was eighty-two. Like my Dad, strong and unbending—independent. I was off at school. We had some downed trees piled along the east fence-row. Dad and Grandpa had planned to saw it up after fall ploughing. That morning Dad had to run some

errands in town. He told Grandpa to wait and after dinner they'd cut up the brush. Grandpa pattered around the farm for awhile but finally loaded up the chainsaw and fuel. Mom saw him drive his old car up in the field. Dad got home a little before noon. Mom told him Grandpa was up at the brush pile. Dad had a feeling something wasn't right. He raced the pickup up the lane, but was too late. As he approached he saw Grandpa load the chainsaw in the trunk and sit down. Dad ran to him and tried to revive him where he sat. Grandpa was dead. The next day, on my way home from school, it snowed.

I suppose Dad thinks the farm had something to do with Grandpa's death—that it beat him down. Now he must get out before it beats him down. I believe the farm is what kept Grandpa alive. It gave him reason to live. But the farm is gone to another man. My Dad would say, "someone else's headache." I only see that lazy, summertime, shaded woods of timothy and sweet grass. The south pasture where I got paid a quarter for every Canadian thistle I unearthed. In the spring the river would flood its banks, take out the creek fence and the cows would have to swim home to be milked. My sister and I would hold some shaky, scared, new-born calf in the back seat of Grandpa's car as he drove home hurriedly through town to meet 'Momma' after her swim in the rain and assure her "her baby" was all right. The memories are as clear as slides in a projector. The black fields where I walked, too young for school, with my father, his father and my dog looking for tender corn sprouts in the damp, warm ground. July afternoons when the sky looked like South Dakota postcards, Grandpa and I would sit under the shade of the tractor, chewing on oat straws, telling stories waiting for Dad to come "chugging" over the horizon. How proud I was to stand with the bright, new fire extinguisher over the old Wisconsin engine that never wanted to start so we refueled while it idled in the golden

fields and I tried to be attentive and not watch the fumes make a wavy mirage of the distant landscape. I can almost hear that old combine engine. Thanksgiving mornings while the kitchen was warm with baking turkey, potatoes, casseroles and pies, Dad and I would crunch over heavy frost, hunting rabbits, neither of us killing or wanting to. Blue Christmastime evenings I would walk home from Bend River band practice through our "Robert Frost" woods enjoying the silence and the light snow that fell on my eyelashes. I felt warm to see the lights in the barns and houses scattered over the horizon. To hear some farmer on his machine roaring towards home on some far-off gravel road. The winter snow made the red barn stand out magnificently. I remember hopping out of bed in the dark into a pile of cold clothes, hearing Dad already putting on his "five buckles" downstairs and Grandpa's old Plymouth plowing its way up the drive. In an instant the cow-warmed barn was full of activity; the lights on, cows struggling to rise, dung steaming under the bare light bulbs, the "putting" of the Surge milker, the hiss as my Dad put on the teat cups, Grandpa penning up the calves in the shed, the radio blaring the news and me walking in front of those big, bony heads, soft eyes, among them their hay and ground corn. Haymaking brought my great uncle and cousins with their tan faces, tall tales, and straw hats. They called me "Toddy" and joked at me but never let me work too hard. At lunch, under the big tree by the milkhouse they laughed, ate numerous sandwiches, their shirts matted to them with sweat. I remember the day Dad bought the Ford tractor, he racing around the machine shed with my sister, Jane, and I laughing and screaming high over his head in the manure bucket. Will there be happy times like these again?

My thoughts drift to the events of the day. Today. The auctioneer, a friend of Grandfather's, was late. He's old; he had

forgotten. Jane, her husband, Mark, and kids arrived about nine. Mark came out to help Dad and me. Dad had arranged all the machinery the day before so we really weren't needed. The machinery was in neat rows near the corn bin. We had the tractors out, but close to the sheds. Dad brought out some things Grandpa had had and Mark and I divided them up—Mark took the two guns and I took the tools. The rest of the relatives came a little before ten. It was good to see them again. They kidded me about school, as usual, and my beard. I didn't mind the jokes. I knew everyone was a little uneasy. No one really wanted to see Dad and Mom move twenty miles away—to the city. Once the auction got started, it went quickly. I made it a point not to witness too much of it. Dad took it all in—he and Mark and the relatives. By four-thirty it was over and most everybody had left. The man who bought the farm, our neighbor for years, stayed to discuss terms with Dad. The uncles, aunts, and remaining grandparents all stayed. I made the rounds and made sure I had spoken to all the relatives. Dad had gotten twenty-eight hundred dollars an acre for the farm. They could pay off the new house and take a vacation. Mom would have her house, antiques, and Dad all day. She would be happy. I was glad. Almost everything had been sold. The auction was over.

Mom wanted us to stay for dinner—it was dinner now, not supper, at their new place. Marcia knew I wouldn't want to and fibbed, telling her we had a previous dinner engagement. I knew that Jane, her family, and the grandparents would stay. I wanted to get away. We said our goodbyes quickly and left. I was glad it hadn't rained.

Turning off the radio I put down the heat a little too. We had finally driven out of the storm, but I kept the wipers on. The traffic was picking up for Saturday night; the big trucks sent sheets of water over us every minute or so. It was

warm inside the car. I hoped my parents were happy. I looked out at the passing countryside. The pale, white sun was getting low behind the gray clouds. More towns dominated the landscape. The early April grass looked deep green against the purple sky. I thought as we passed farms about the people who lived in them. The families working hard, playing, sharing, growing old. How fast we get older. How fast the cycle. I imagined my parents in their twenties, young, handsome, full of dreams—a big, happy, wonderful future. Did they achieve it? Was Mid-western America in the 40's any indication of what it would be in the 70's? Will Marcia and I have our dreams?

Marcia awoke, rubbed her face with her eyes closed like a cat and sat up.

"I had a dream about snow, darling."

"You did? We haven't had snow for over a month."

"I was walking in the country. In a field. A cold, gray day and white snow was all over everything. Then I was in the woods. Night was falling. I saw a cabin tucked back in the trees. There was light beaming out onto the snow. I went up and opened the door and you were standing by the fireplace. You rushed to kiss me and hold me. You had tears in your eyes. You were afraid of something, but wouldn't say what. We sat by the fire a long time. You blew out the lamps. We kissed a lot. You said you wanted a baby—do you?"

"A baby? I sort of wanted one after Grandpa died. I haven't thought about it since. I didn't know you then. There wasn't anyone to have a baby with. I got over it. I know we've talked . . ."

"What do you think, though, about the dream?"

"The snow could mean anything—purity, coldness, death, Christmas . . ."

"Christmas?"

"I was thinking of Christmas on the farm while you were sleeping. We used to put lights on the evergreens in the front yard. Jane and I would go sledding with the town kids during vacation. We'd go caroling in Bend River too. It was nice." My voice cracked.

"Todd, are you all right?"

"Sure, just a little nostalgic, I guess."

"You're such a sentimental teddy bear."

"I know," I said quietly, a little ashamed. "We're getting close to home; do you want to stop someplace and eat? I know you're tired and won't want to cook."

"Let's just go on home. I'll make some snacks of crackers and cheese. We have some wine. We've got a few things and we can relax and watch an old movie or something."

"Who's sentimental?" I was almost vengeful in my attempt to point out Marcia's weaknesses too. "We used to eat snacks and watch T.V. when we were first married." I wasn't the only one who lived in the past.

"Will you miss the farm a lot?"

"Yes."

"So will I. Remember that lovely week we . . ."

"Dad got a good deal of money for it."

"I'm glad."

"Damn it! God damn it! I wish I could take it over. I wish I had learned to like it. Could make the sacrifices. But, no, I wanted to teach. Had to teach. Too many books. Mom always got me books. Jesus Christ, I can't blame her. I'm a romantic, I guess. I wanted to change the world through those young people. It doesn't happen that way."

"Todd, I hate it when you get down on yourself. Like in the dream you were crying. You were weak. Listen! Don't turn away! I love you, honey, but sometimes you're a stranger. You let the smallest thing upset you—upset us."

I felt hot. I knew she was right. I doubted myself way too much. Marcia couldn't count on my strength. I didn't know how to respond. I was ashamed. I chose to stay quiet.

"Todd, did you see what your mother gave us? A bunch of old Ball jars, an old kerosene lamp, that old oval picture of your great-grandfather and a pair of rubber boots for your moody, misty tramps through the woods along with some other stuff."

I was about to respond nastily to the "misty, moody tramps" line, but my thoughts were taken with the oval picture she had mentioned. It was a bright fall day. I was in fifth grade. It was report card day. I got an "F" in Math and a "D" in something else. I walked home from school in agony trying to devise a plan—but couldn't. Jane would beat me home and they would know it was report card day. Dad and Grandpa were still milking. I wanted to stop time as I dropped my books on the kitchen table. Mom called from the living room as I was about to go to my room to change clothes. She wanted to see my report card. Our living room was a light green then. She sat in a big chair behind which hung the picture of great-grandfather. She asked for the card I held behind my back. She knew then. It was my first "F". She looked it over slowly and carefully. Dad came in from chores—I heard him washing up. Soon he was there, seated next to Mom. My ears buzzed. I felt weak, hot and faint. Neither of them said a word. Great-grandfather's picture caught my attention. He looked a little like Robert E. Lee, but without a beard. Dark, intense eyes. The dark walnut frame and every line in his face were etched into my mind in those moments. His eyes frightened me, he looked so hard. They would never understand my humiliation. When at last I looked my Dad in the face, his eyes were the same—dark, intense. I couldn't look away. Fear. Mom didn't say anything. The sun was setting outside.

The living room filled with shadows. Time began to move again. Dad spanked me and mocked me saying "and you want to go to college." In those moments I felt I would never measure up. I hated him and myself. The feeling of inferiority never quite left me. That day became lost in all my sunny memories. That day I didn't want to cry—they never cry—the men. The tears made salty pools around my mouth. It was a misunderstanding. I went to my room. Mom and Dad apologized later and asked me to come to them for help with my schoolwork. No. The years had glossed this scene over. Poking back I see our happy farm life wasn't complete. We didn't communicate. I shouldn't have been afraid. I swore I'd never love them again. How silly. Oh God, how easy not to act. The outdoors became my solace. Into nature, into my books, into my fantasies, into Marcia's arms. Marcia! She was shaking my arm.

"Todd? Todd? Hey, come back."

"I'm sorry, Marsh, I drifted off. What did you say?"

"I said, 'Do you want to see the stuff in the box?' and then I asked if you were listening, then I asked if you wanted to just have snacks like we said, and then I almost gave up."

"I'm really sorry, honey. I was thinking about something long ago when I was ten. My parents and I had a lot of misunderstandings, it seems. We were never really close."

"They really love you, Todd. I was talking to your mother today. She said you were hard to reach as a boy. One time your Dad spanked you for getting a bad grade on a report card. They both felt awful after. They wanted the best for you. Your mom said your dad wanted so much for you to go to college—he never could—he thought he could scare you into getting good grades. He didn't know what to do. They love you, Todd. Guess what though."

"I don't know." I was weak with love. Marcia and her

words were a balm to my psyche.

"I told your Mom that we slept together before we were married, remember that night . . . ?"

"Marcia!" I was happy, pretending to be mad. "What did she say?"

"It just came out—while we were talking about you and everything. She and Jane and I were just really open and talking. Well, she said she wasn't surprised the way we used to look at each other during dinner. She's a smart woman."

"So are you, Marcia."

"Thank you."

"And I promise we're going to be close. Like that week on the farm. I'll take you on my misty, moody tramps through the woods. I've been shut off inside myself too long." I leaned over and kissed her forehead.

"I love you, Marcia Phillips!"

"I love you, Todd Phillips!"

"Yes, we will eat on the floor. Drink on the floor. Watch T.V. on the floor. HMMMMMM on the floor," I sang. "We'll go to bed early and tomorrow I'll help you and we'll get done early and I'll take us out for dinner, dress up—everything!"

"Oh, let's hurry home. We can leave the boxes in the back until tomorrow. I want us to be close tonight."

As we neared our house the gray clouds began to break up. Bits of sunlight splashed the countryside. The sun was close to setting. I squeezed Marcia's hand. We were almost to our drive. We stopped for the mail. It was good to be home. Our lane was full of puddles. The sun made a final, glorious blaze as I stopped the car. We both looked for a rainbow when we got out. There wasn't one. Marcia found crackers, cheeses, pickles and fruit. I dug out a bottle of wine I'd been saving—Bordeaux. We sat on the floor and ate.

We watched an old movie. A comedy. We laughed a lot, drunk on wine, on love. I held Marcia as she sat between my legs. Mom called just before we went to bed. She wanted us to come for dinner in two weeks. Marcia nodded yes. I was glad. I told her we would be glad to come and that I loved them. We made love, Marcia and I, like the times in Mom and Dad's bed. We were so tired, we were asleep by eleven. I held Marcia tight, very, very tight.

David Stine

The Poet Man

a wanderlust soul looking for answers truth
wool cap, dufflebag, fatigues, steel tipped boots
note pad in his pocket.
his eyes soft sensed are ringed
like a tree, a great redwood.
his hands, small for a man, are somewhat smooth
not worn—they do not tell stories of
the spade, pickax or long trips steering diesels to wherever
they do tell stories.

They all stand around him listening
intently
as if the new messiah has come
little eyes, little hands, little quizzical looks or smiles
he tells
he reads
it is all open
it is all raw meat
and they feed hungrily
these carnivores . . . they feed

They don't see behind the eyes
the shattered hopes and dreams
lost loves for want of constant
movement
the music that sounds in his head
of a familiar place, a candlelit dinner
small talk in front of a fireplace
walks in the park

he feeds the pigeons now
slowly spreading seed
to the warbles and beating wings
when finished he crumples the bag
and slowly walks away
verses ringing his steps
and the city lights behind him.

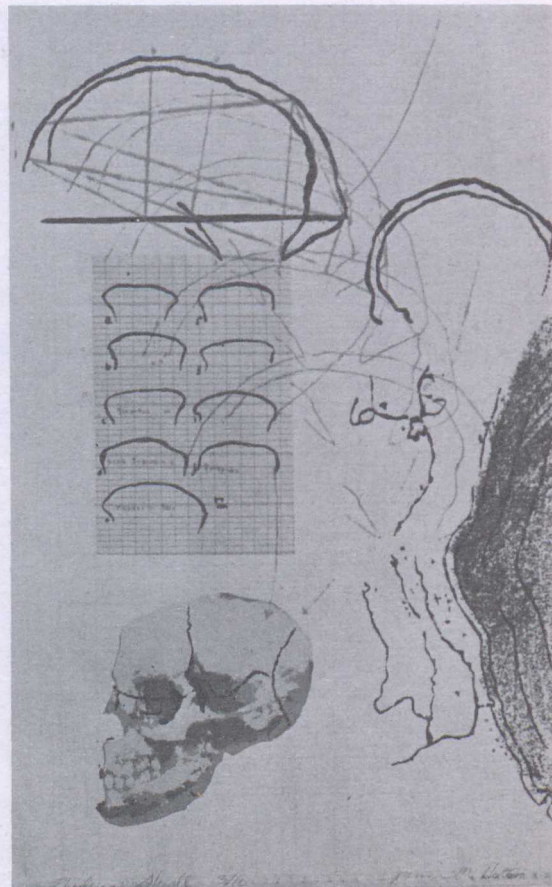
Farrell J. Foreman

Late in the season

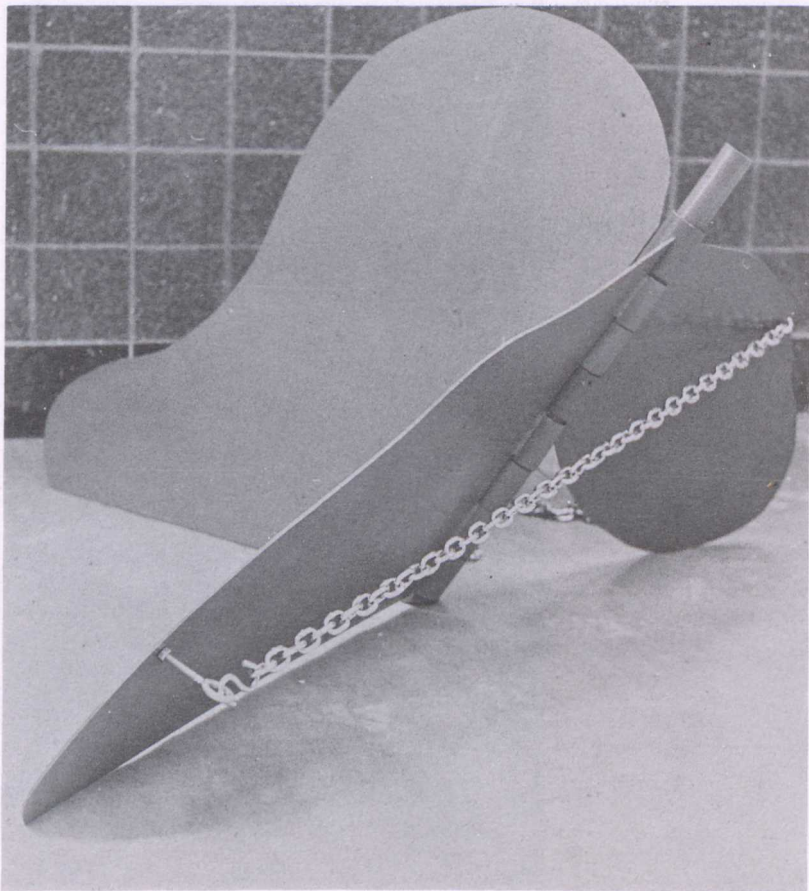
Jeanni Hites

It could be morning,
horizon washed in orange or rose,
but gray masks the sky.
Cold feet shuffle in worn socks,
winter freezes in,
and distinctions fold upon themselves
like linen on the shelf.
Outside, snow falls like dust,
drifts against the curb;
gray on gray

Melodie Provencher



Mark Roscoe



Naked Ladies and Other Stories *

I awoke to find myself staring at the ceiling. Not that that means anything but I always dream on my back. Funny. When lying on my side or my stomach there are no problems, just on my back.

Swinging my legs out of bed I sat up and tried to see the face of the clock on the dresser across the room. Couldn't see it without my glasses and checked my wristwatch instead. I had to wait a moment for my eyes to adjust, then the radium numbers focused. A little after One. Standing, I crossed to the dresser and groped for my glasses. The room focused in the blackness. Pulling a terrycloth robe from the valet, I slipped it on as I walked out into the hall. I paused at the door to Sara's room and peered inside. She was lying sideways in her bed on her back. I thought about straightening her, thought better of it and headed for the living room. Was she dreaming? Maybe it was best I didn't bother her. Maybe her dreams were good dreams. Beautiful.

The rhythmic splattering of rain on the roof soaked the room with sounds. Trying to ignore its distraction, I sat in a swivel rocker near the window and looked inside myself. It had been a strange dream. Why did it bother me so? I began to rock. I thought. First about my writing. Then about less important things. People. Places. Mike and Shirley. Hell, I hadn't talked with Mike since we had last gone out to dinner together. That must have been four . . . no, five months ago. Time was like that. Slipping on by so fast. I pushed the rocker faster.

Maybe I could work that story around . . . like . . . No. I had already tried that. It didn't work. Or at least I wasn't able to make it work that way. I bit my tongue. Mustn't let it get the better of me. The dream was strange. Why had I dreamt that? I didn't believe in dreams but this one had been so . . . I don't know . . . clearly vague:

Early morning. No wind. Warm. Rocky ground and rough terrain like the kind you see around mountains. A pool. Heavy mists pervade the area and mask its dimensions. Yet I have a distinct impression of size.

What was the problem with the story? I'd tried everything possible and yet it still didn't have flavor. The idea? The way I was handling it? Difficult to put my finger on what was wrong. I stopped rocking and listened to the rain. It seemed to be coming down harder. I stood and opened the drapes covering the window. It revealed a world almost blacker than the world inside the house. The dark shadows of trees swayed in the breeze and the sounds of the invisible, falling rain engulfed both worlds.

The sun rises above distant mountain peaks and the mists cling to the ground in a futile effort to escape the coming dawn. I can see the edge of the pool and a little ways beyond. I am not on the same level as the pool but higher and must look back and down.

I thought about making a raid on the icebox but changed my mind. Icebox? Where the hell had I picked that one up? It hadn't really been "picked up." A better term would be "handed down." Discarding that line of thought I sat down again and began to rock. A car drove by and the pale beam of its headlights turned the falling droplets into tiny silver strands. There must be a way. Was I too dumb to find it? I didn't think that. I first started writing, thinking my work would flow as easily as—as the rain fell from the sky. I knew now that that wasn't true.

I see the figure by the edge of the pool preparing to plunge into the tranquil waters. Slender. Arms raised above the head and pressed together at the palms, forming a neat little triangle with the head and shoulders as the base. The plunge. The legs flexing at the knees and then straightening as the

figure pushes off in the dive. A nice arch and the body enters the water cleanly with no splash at all. The ripples spread outward from where the body has entered and the water stirs again as the form passes beneath the surface. I watch, distracted, as the ripples glide towards the shore where they beat themselves into oblivion.

A head emerges above the water shaking left and right, throwing off droplets of water, which fall, like tiny strands of silver in the sunlight. The hair belatedly follows the motion. For the first time I realize it is a woman. From my position I can't tell if she is attractive or not.

What the hell difference does it make?

I heard Sara move in her room and paused to listen for a sign that she was awake. Silence. I hoped she wasn't dreaming. A gravel truck passed the house, growling by in third gear, its trailer bouncing noisily behind. I swung the rocker away from the window and turned my back to the outside.

I want to get closer. Her body continues to rise and she keeps her eyes tightly closed as the water cascades from her face. That, coupled with the distance and the mists, bars any recognition. Her nakedness is plainly visible. I see her breasts break the surface. Firm. Not large but well formed. The pink nipples elongated and hard. Reaching apogee, her torso starts to slip back beneath the blanket of water. Beautiful.

I strain for a better look. The desire for recognition forces me to watch her but at the same time the thought to get closer escapes me. I look, afraid of what I might see. She turns away from me then and swims away into the mists. I watch her go, unwilling or unable to follow or stop her.

The rain had almost stopped now. I swung the rocker back towards the window and peered into the blackness; tried to pick out a puddle of water to see if any rain drops were still falling. I couldn't find one. I heard noises from within. Footsteps

in the hallway. Pausing. Maria, probably looking in on Sara.

"Honey? What's the matter?" she asked softly as she came into the room.

"Nothing," I answered, still trying to find a puddle. "I couldn't sleep. Had a dream."

"Oh, Honey!" she came to me and held me as I sat in the rocker.

I finally found a puddle and tried to determine if there were any rain drops striking it. There were, but they could just as well be falling from the tree nearby. I pulled her down in my lap and held her close to me. Hugged her and gave her a kiss and she returned the affection.

"It wasn't a bad one," I said.

"What wasn't bad?"

"The dream. Strange. Just strange."

"It bothers you," she said.

"No."

"Sara's lying sideways in bed."

"I know," I said. "Checked her when I first got up." Looked at my watch to check the time and was surprised to see how late it was. Morning would be coming soon. I pushed her out of my lap and followed her up. "Let's get to bed." She gave me a quick hug and started for the bedroom as I reached to close the drapes. "You know," I called after her, "we haven't gone out to dinner for a long time."

She stopped and turned. "Yes, it has been awhile. Maybe we should give Mike and Shirley a call and see if they'd like to go sometime?"

"Why not give them a call this week-end or something." She didn't hear me. She was already gone . . .

"Oh well," I mumbled to myself, "sometime." I checked the puddle one last time before closing the drapes. There were still a few drops of water falling into it from somewhere

above. I imagined seeing the naked form of the woman gliding across its surface. Then, it too was gone. I had missed something. Maybe all that was important. I closed the drapes, shutting out the image and the darkness outside. I threaded my way to the bedroom through the darkness of the house. Even though I knew my wife had already checked, I paused again at Sara's room. She was still immersed in sleep—or dream. Something urged me to enter the room. To reach over and touch the child. I stirred and took a step into the room; stopped. She woke. Her eyes opened. She stretched her arms up over her head, yawned and then looked at me. She smiled, then said, "I love you, Daddy." Then turned over and went back to sleep. I saw her then, but what I saw was the full, supple body of a woman. Attractive. Unattainable. I recognized her. There was no doubt. Retreating from her room I went to my room, put my glasses back on the dresser and sat in bed next to my wife.

"I love you," I said.

"I love you."

I lay next to her and held her close to me. I felt . . . different . . . better. The conflict within recognizable, real. Yes, conflict. "You know," I said. "Sara looks just like you." She kissed me then. I could work that story out. At least I had a pretty good idea on how to do it, now.

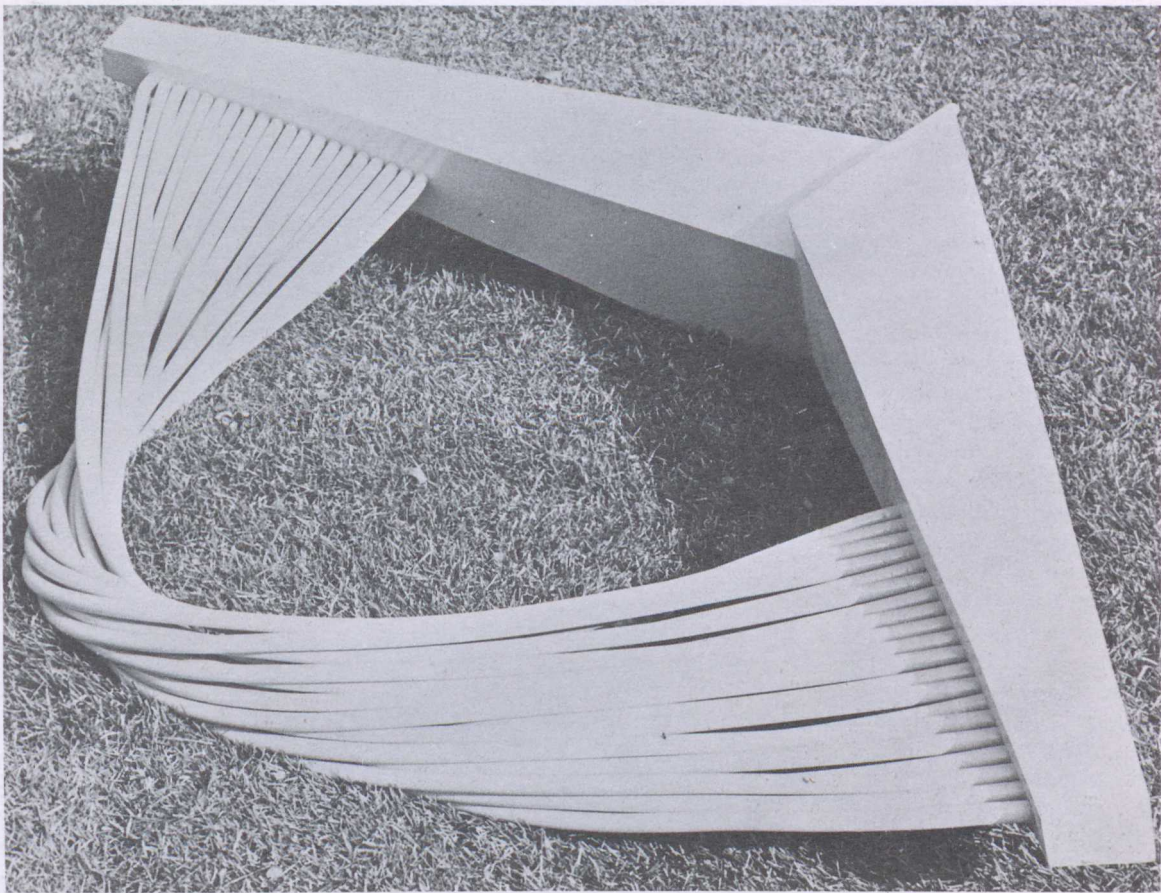
Beautiful.

Dennis L. Schultz

... dekalb

fog which serenades
 my window
 with sad smile
and guitar
 whose murmurs flow
 from the quiet of stars, diamond
 tears, whisky blood.
trafficlites flick in unison
 pacing the secret world
 before dawn.
reluctantly, streetbeam
 whispers through the mist,
 framing my one shadow against
 broken glass.

Sue Greenspan



Away in Midwinter

Abandoned cornstalks and telephone wires
are glazed in ice,
Chilled still.

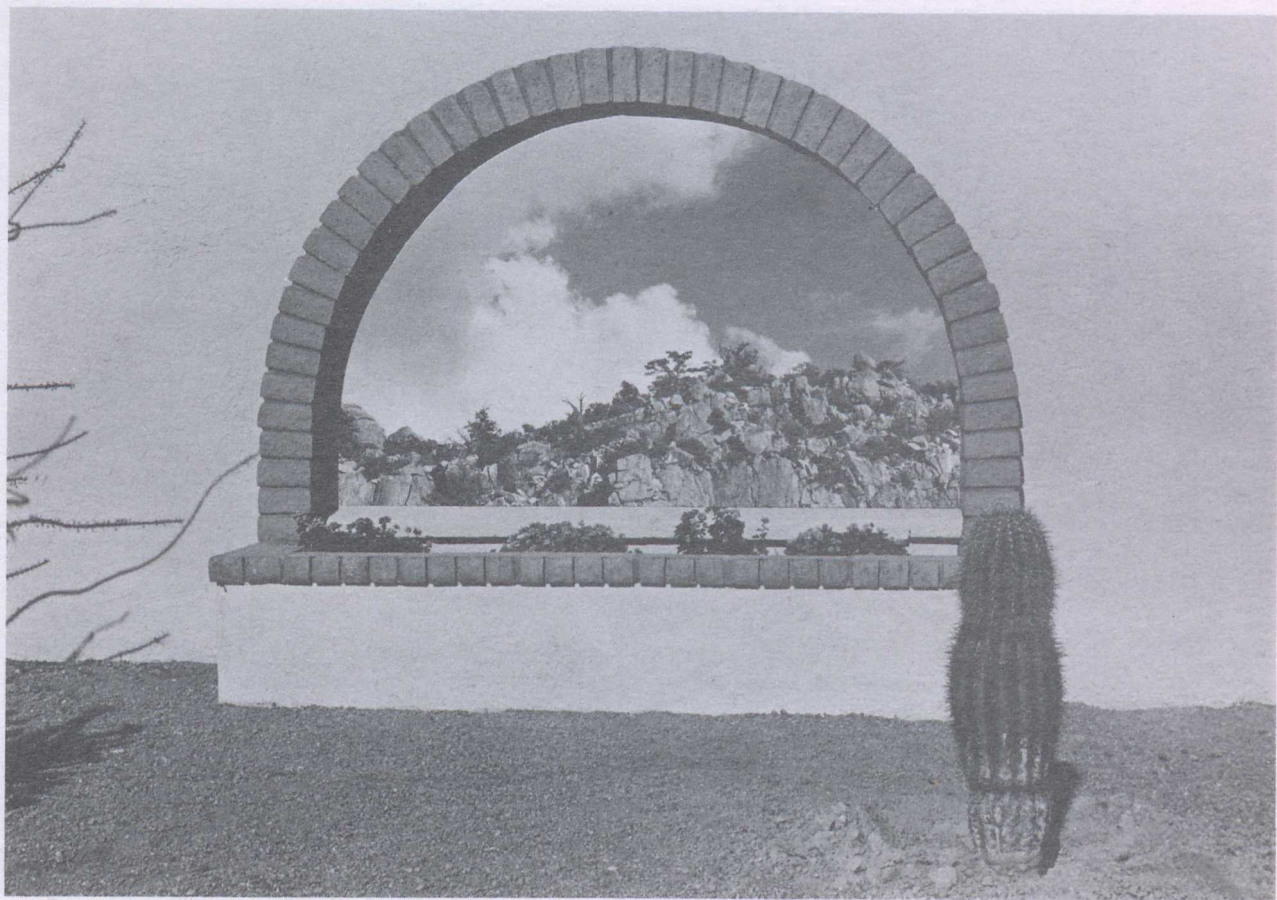
The barbed wire fences are stiff to the wind.
A lone crow moves and makes me see
this world isn't a postcard.
It's been three weeks since the snow has packed.
Only my gaze will venture outdoors.

Remember the snow rabbit
we built New Year's Day?
Mother wrote me last week—
it's lost an ear despite the cold.
That was the last thing we did together.

Once I thought I heard you
when I looked out over the snow-filled cornfields,
Your laughter, somewhere,
distant and muffled.
It was only the clanging of a flagpole
in the cemetery.

I stare out the window.
I imagine your dark hair against the drifts.
Of course you aren't there.
Only crows and thoughts
are black in January.

Mark Kimmert



Yolanda Fernandy



The Widow

keeps her castle clutterless
her cityblock fortress
well-groomed

each room a hallowed space
waxwood bright and windowlace
unruffled

the rustle of leaves' soundless
shadows on the walls' spotless
retina

she sleeps in a cinema limbo
her wide bed white and bold
in a ray of moon

so soon, a sheen of angel whispers
like a half-remembered strain of vespers
and whiff of incense long past noon,

so soon.

Monica Heilbronn

Initials in Wood

The classroom was much the same as any other grade school classroom: large windows, blackboards, a cloakroom, and orderly rows of under-sized desks. I hurried into the cloakroom to hang up my baseball jacket; if the 8:30 bell went off before I sat down I would be punished. Sister Gertrude stared, scowling at me from her desk at the front of the room, obviously displeased with my habit of rushing in at the last moment. I sat at my desk with my head resting in my arms, sweating from running and hearing my heartbeat sounding loudly in my ears. In the semi-darkness within my folded arms, I could see, closely, the work of some past artist. He had used a ballpoint pen to roughly carve out "Tom was here" in the wood, going over it again and again until it was dark enough. My breathing slowed as I sat up and brushed the hair out of my eyes. The blue uniform shirt peeled off my back as I became upright in my seat. 8:30 came. Sister Gertrude stood up; her long rosary beads, like a ship's anchor chain, clicked against the wood of her desk.

"Who's week is it to say prayers?"

A small girl with brown hair raised her hand.

"All right, Miss Gibson, begin."

Drawing in her breath, the girl began the prayer. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name . . ."

Like a drunken chorus, the rest of the children began reciting the words; words repeated so often they were reduced to a series of sounds and intonations. Nobody prayed.

"Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord be with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and Blessed art the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen."

After a brief pause, the girl began the final portion of the daily ceremony. The rest of the class stumbled along, half a vocal step behind her.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. And to the republic, for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

The class slid back into their seats. Sister Gertrude took attendance, all the while looking back and forth over her glasses from the grade book to the empty seats. Her face, standing out from her habit, was white marble. Her thin lips were forever in a semi-scowl. The mole on her chin, her scowl, and her horn-rimmed glasses were the only things that disturbed the blandness of the only part of her head that I could see. I wondered what color hair she had, if she had any at all.

"Open your math books to page 78 and take out your assigned homework on dividing fractions."

Between playing baseball and watching T.V., I had not found the time to do my homework. Looking around at my "neighbors," as Sister Gertrude called them, I could see I was the only one who hadn't. Calmly, I pulled out an old piece of math homework and placed it on my desk. There was a great bustle of small noises as papers and feet shuffled, people coughed and math book covers struck wood as they were opened. Finally, a perceptible sigh of resignation. We were prepared.

I reached into my desk and pulled out my math book, easing it slowly open. I was uncertain what page we were on. To my left sat Jeff Michaud, his blue uniform shirt hanging out of the back of his faded and patched pants. I tried to get his attention to ask him what page we were on. Looking sideways at him, I leaned low and whispered.

"Jeff! Yo, Jeff! What page?" He looked at me around a wisp of dark greasy hair, then pointed to the page number in his book. I gave him a short quick nod and turned back.

Joanne Stovitsky looked across the aisle at my desk top, snobbishly seeing if I had done my homework, I ignored her.

"Question one. Mr. Mitchell, will you answer that?"
"Six thirty-fourths divided by one-half equals six-seventeenths."

"Very good, Mr. Mitchell. Miss Rollinson, what's the answer to question two?"

"Five-sixteenths, Sister."

"Good. Mr. Schneider . . ."

I examined the back of the head of the girl in front of me. It was directly in line with Sister Gertrude's face, blocking me from her vision. The girl had barrettes in her dark hair and, if I craned my head a little, I could see her discreetly chewing the cap of her Bic pen. I sat back and began to fill in all the zeroes on page 78 of my math book with my fountain pen. The sounds of the public school children on their way to school filtered in through the open window; bicycles going by with their loose fenders scraping on the tires, kids yelling at each other. The crossing guard on the corner blew her whistle once and I could picture her waving her hand in front of her, motioning the public school kids across.

Making sure my head was obscured from the teacher's vision, I closed my eyes and tried to relax. I felt the early morning sun's rays coming in through the glass and striking me on the shoulder, making me slightly uncomfortable. I brushed a lock of hair off my forehead . . .

"Come on, batter, you're delaying the game!"

I drop my hand and put the baseball helmet back on. Back into the batter's box.

"Com' on, Bob, no pitcher, no pitcher."

The white ball whisks by and makes a popping sound as it hits the catcher's mitt.

"Strike one!"

I look out at the bases. Don is on second with the tying run. The pitcher looks down at me, his sweat darkening the

headband of his cap. He's breathing hard. I think he did a lot of running in the last inning. I plant myself close to the plate and raise the bat, my hands tight on the smooth handle. He moves his arm in a quick arch. The ball is sailing in at my head!

"None of that, pitcher, just no more. Next time you get tossed out." The umpire dusts off the plate.

Picking myself up off the ground, I replay what happened. I jumped backwards and heard the ball whistle past my right ear. Did it touch my hair or something? I pick up the helmet, dust off the uniform and stand upright in the box, just as close to the plate as before. The pitcher glares down at me.

"Cream it, Vogel!"

"Just like the last time, Bob! Com' on!"

He stops glaring and, with just a short pause to look at the runner at second, goes into his motion. The quick arch. I react. My hands sting. I look around for the ball and begin to run. The whiteness of the ball travels out over the short-stop's head. He jumps—but it is too high for him. It bounces into center field and rolls. I round first, stop, and walk back to the bag. People are cheering; the first base coach comes up to me, his face in a smile and his hand extended. He touches me on the back . . .

". . . Hey, pssst, Bob! Hey, B---"

"Mr. Vogel, are you with us? What's the answer to question seven?"

I froze momentarily. Then, recovering, I went into my act. Picking up last month's homework with a confident look on my face, I began my performance:

"It's seven . . . oh, wait—it's seven and . . . oh . . ."

I began biting my lips and looking around, as if the answer were just seconds' more thought away.

"Well, Mr. Vogel, what is it? What is the answer?" Her

eyes began to look at me over the tops of her glasses. Her thumb and forefinger, the edges flattened from a lifetime of holding pens, began to rub together.

"Sister, well . . . it's . . ." I looked down at my book, trying to see if the previous owner had written the answer in. When would she give up and try someone else? Why is she staying with me?

"Mr. Vogel, I'll give you three minutes to think of the answer. If you don't come up with it, you'll have a lot of problems to practice on tonight. And if anybody helps him, they'll be doing a lot of homework tonight, too. Miss Murray, what's the answer to eight?"

This was a new attack! Why didn't she just give up on me and ask another person, like always? I looked around for help, but no eyes met mine. The book before me was just a jumble of symbols and numbers, none of which I could possibly make myself understand in three minutes. I began to panic.

"Are you thinking, Mr. Vogel?"

I nodded my head.

"I hope so," she said.

I was trembling inside. The clock ticked off a minute. I pressed my hands against the desk, making sure they didn't betray me. The book was still incomprehensible, but I began to work on the problem. Even though I knew I couldn't get the right answer, I might be able to get an acceptable wrong one. The clock ticked again.

"Well, Mr. Vogel, what's the answer to number seven?"

"But, that's only two minutes, Sister." I was certain that was only two minutes.

"What? Are you questioning me? I do the questioning in this classroom. Where do you think you are, Mr. Vogel? At home? That kind of behavior won't go *here*, let me tell you

that right now! What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Well, . . . I . . ."

"Spit it out, Mr. Vogel, come on!"

I had in my panic, forgotten what she was asking for. I prayed she would decide I was too stupid to waste her time on and leave me alone. She didn't.

With a rustle of fabric and a clicking of rosary beads, she jumped from her desk and scurried down the aisle. She stood next to my desk, looking down at the top of my head. I noticed her hands were clenched. The crucifix at the end of her oversized rosary swung back and forth. I braced myself.

"You come here every day and sit, Mr. Vogel. Do you know that? You sit and do nothing, except to maybe throw a paper airplane and talk to your neighbors. This is school, Mr. Vogel, *school!*"

My head recoiled as she slapped the side of my face. The room fell suddenly silent save for the sound of her voice which I seemed to hear from a distance. She grabbed my ear and used it as a handle, lifting me from my desk.

"Mr. Vogel and I are going out in the hallway for a moment. Check over your homework answers because I'll be calling on everyone when I get back."

Through my pain and embarrassment, I heard someone laugh. It was followed by a few stifled giggles.

"Who's laughing? I said *who?* I want to know right now or the whole class is going to stay after school until I find out who did. Come with me, Mr. Vogel."

With my eyes on my feet, I stumbled out the door. The hallway was dimly lit by long rows of fluorescent lights hanging down from over-high ceilings. The temperature was noticeably cooler. I fixed my eyes on the white starched material below her chin.

She opened her talk with a quick right-hand slap across my

already beet-red face.

"Mr. Vogel, I don't know who you think you are, coming to my classroom and sitting around doing nothing day after day. I have yet to get a good answer out of you in class. And you're flunking everything. Are you paying attention to me?"

I glanced down the hallway at the doors being closed by students with curious looks on their faces. They afforded me a glance, then shut the door. Some heads turned around in the room across the hall, then snapped quickly forward.

"Yes, Sister."

"I don't know who you think you are coming to school every day and doing *nothing* and causing *trouble*." She poked me in the side of the head to emphasize her point. I had forgotten what she was mad about. "This is a Catholic school, Mr. Vogel. Do you know what that means? Probably not. It means you have the opportunity to get the best education in the city, and at the same time get a good and decent Christian background. God is working here with me." Her eyes jerked back into the classroom. The morning sun had filtered in through the sides of the shadows, casting bright rays around the front of the room.

"See that picture of Saint Thomas Aquinas above my desk on the wall, Mr. Vogel? See the sun shining on it? That's no coincidence. That's *God* in this school, in this classroom, here with us *right now*, guiding me and The Sisters of Mercy in the teaching of you, *you*, Mr. Vogel, and all the students of this school. Do you think God is pleased with you, Mr. Vogel? Do you?"

Terrified and fighting the lump in my throat, I couldn't answer.

"What high school do you intend to go to, Mr. Vogel?"

"Saint . . . Saint Patrick High School, Sister."

"Saint Patrick!" She almost seemed to laugh the words. "Well, Mr. Vogel, allow me to let you in on a little secret. You'll never make it at Saint Pat's. You will never make it past the first day of class. You will end up over at Austin with the rest of the public school kids. They'll teach you to be a great janitor. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

I began to cry silently. I couldn't help it. But I wasn't going to let her hear me wail or see me blubbering. I stood stock-still as tears ran down my cheeks.

"Some boy you are, Mr. Vogel. Some boy. Have you thought of the answer?"

Her words were lost to me, an absurdity and irrelevant to anything. I wanted to be left alone, to leave and never come back, to never see another school or book again. Her voice came back.

"Get back into the room, Mr. Vogel. But I have a new seat for you." She steered me into the cloakroom and shoved me down into a desk that was reserved for only the most ignorant. "Now until you apologize to the entire class for the commotion you caused today this will be your seat. I hope you like it; you've earned it." She strode out of the doorway.

I sat there for many long minutes with my head in my arms, smelling the wood and the damp coats and looking down at the carvings in the wood desk tops. I could hear my heartbeat sounding in my ears. In the semi-darkness I could see, closely, the work of some past artist. He had used a ballpoint pen to carve out "Latin Kings Rule" in the wood. I moved my arms and began to read everything there; Jack was here, 11/13/64, Don is the greatest . . .

I pulled out the ballpoint out of my shirtpocket and began to carve in the wood. Hard.

Peter D. Barrett

Father I Dreamed

One night after you died
You stood atop
Long unlighted stairs
Pressing against purple velvet rope
Hung between narrow walls
Blocking your descent.

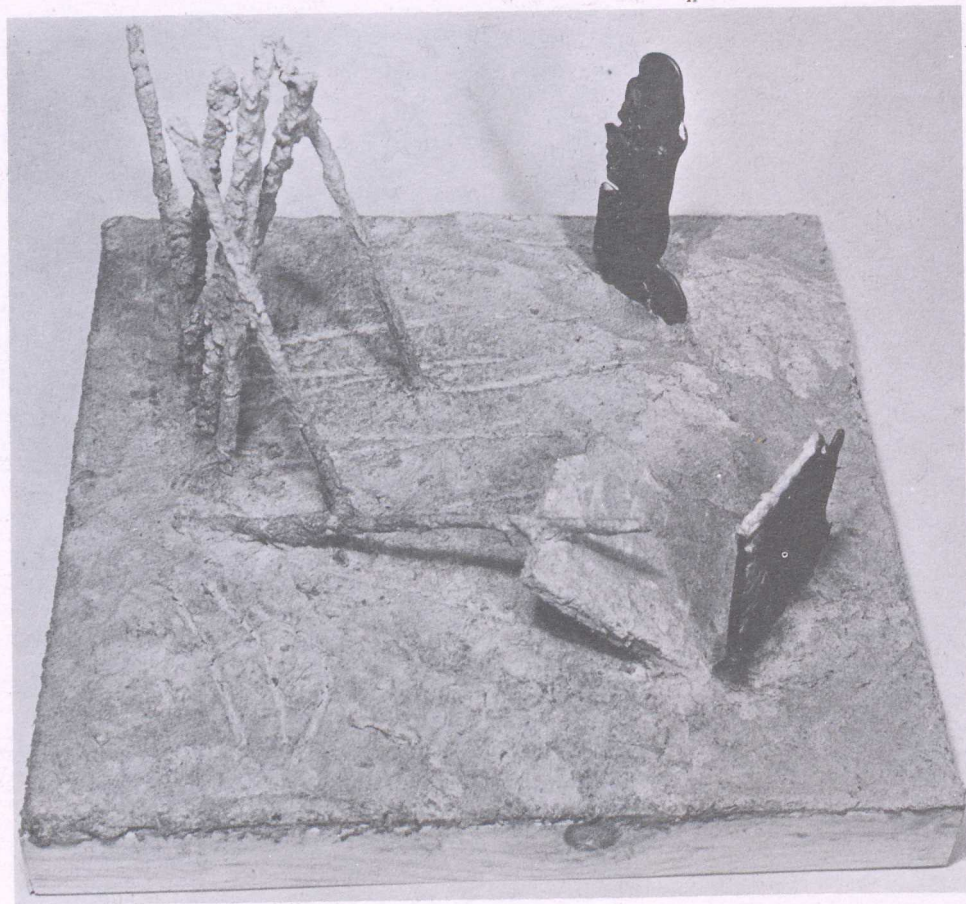
In the basement
Holding each other mother and I
Watched the rope stretch
Bringing you down

Until we almost felt your hands
Then pull you back
To a landing I could never see.

Tom Roach



Mike Flanagan



For This There's No

(tribute to Ezra Pound)

For this there's no mood-lofty man
To sing their deeds, but I, who set up
Many an oar for friends and pyred
Their boats. Heart-lashing cuts me,
For these were fishers, strong with blood
Of squid and seal. Water cutting beneath
Their keels, wake running off from the bow,
These bent wide backs on the oarshafts
And cast out heavy nets. With spears
And three-tined forks they fought
Great sea-beasts: Some kindled home-fires
With whale-oil, and some wore shark's teeth.
Some fell, and dawn we'd sail in search,
Their women solemn, sons at oar.

Now there is all this sea-surge.
Where's Archer, or Seth, where the sons
Who made them proud? Who remains
To set up the oars of an old man
On the hill of seven trees?

Rodney Baker

(untitled)

telephone wilted
down the wall
oozes milk from puckered seams
and fracture lines.

slowly wings cover windows
cloaking against midnight mist,
hiding teardrops or rust stained
into the glass . . .

he upsweeps,
snaps on his casing
enclosing washes of frothy blood he
lusted in.
her birdmangled body
covered with maggot leaves,
his valentines . . . he tucks her in.
punts away handfuls of hysteria-torn scalp,
covers bite wounds with mud,
fusses with the tatters of her clothes—
as her fear-bulged eyes gleam
frozen to the stars . . .

and he strides away
cleaning his murder from his teeth with his
tongue.

Sue Greenspan

Against the Heart

The needle makes it clean;
No blood. Only a saline solution
Forced inside; tears held back.

Automatically muscles contract;
The heart winces as the body rids itself of a seed,
Past sins sliding out of darkness

Into sterile white light
For doctors to examine, who pronounce
Success.

The information sealed and filed
In black metal drawers;
The remains thrown away.

The past buried, the only reminder
A headstone that scratches
Against the heart.

Dorothy Kampf

Bridge of the Gargoyles

Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark

John Berryman

How long will it last, this small thing?
Another snow, and he is wiser;
He will not allow himself to think.
Instead, he sucks his pipe and wades
The hills above the Mississippi and

the bridge.

The eyes of the gargoyles hold him,
As they have held their bridge. A skiff
Of shadows drifts across his face.
In the midst of mortar and stone,
He is mortar, he is stone.

"A change

Of heart begins with a change of skin."
Across the river, bone-songs sift
Among the reeds, winter rasping in his ears.
Years he has not sung, and now, too late.
"All the bees have flown to younger mouths."

Rodney Baker

Keith Cumblad



Untitled

I don't make love to the canvas.

Paint is not his supple shade

reaching across a sheet,

or trees reaching up on separate tiptoe

melting into the suck of other trees.

Linseed oil is not suntan oil

to palm into his back

tickle into the corners.

Canvas is not the tenseness of a lake's skin

waiting to be nuzzled, broken by fish.

And my brush is not . . . , well, you get my drift.

I don't make love to the canvas.

But daubing this twigged pole

When trying to stroke the wind

As it toe-holds up an oak

Wraps its thighs around the highest limb . . .

I wish I could.

Cheryl Turman

Untitled

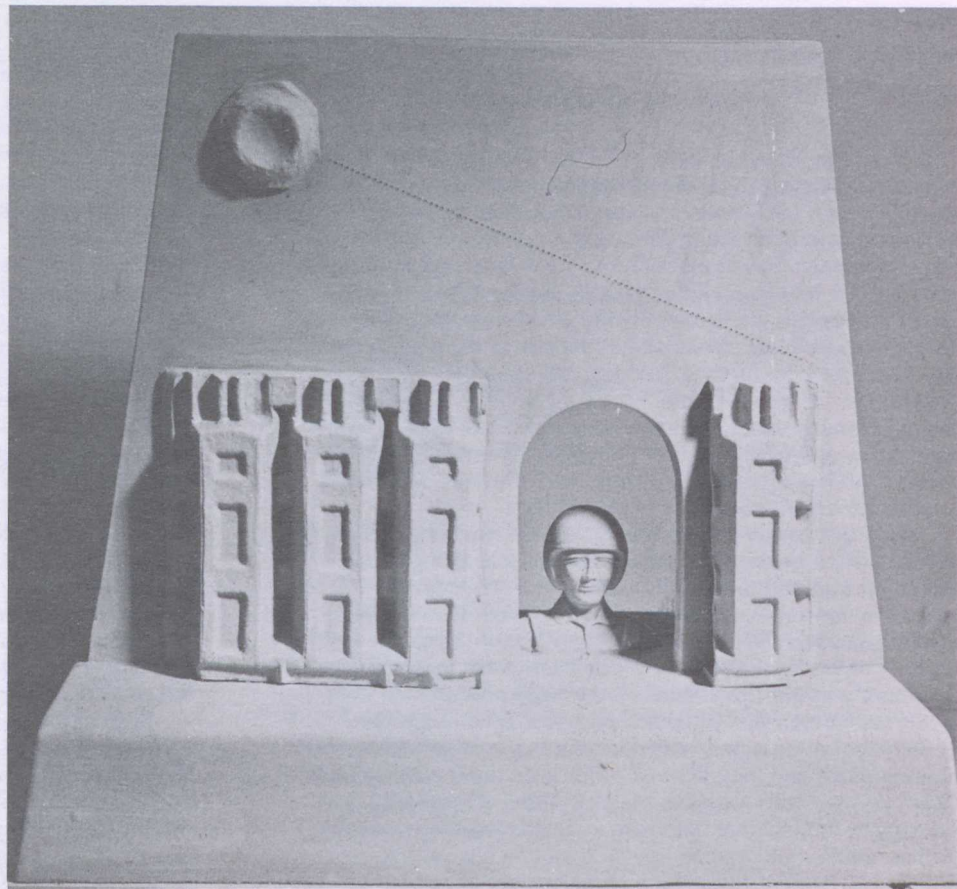
iam many faceted
at the same time singular, plural
cold, heated, tepid, warm,
yellow, blue, red—
iam at once hard as granite
and malleable as clay,
tone muscled and jostled fat.

my brown hue is aged in
travels, blood, sorrow and
dreams—yet iam pigtails
and light eyes
in a dark mask.

iam known to be jovial
and humble, not to be confused
with stupid and docile.
iam gnarled hands on a checkerboard
moving pieces wherein my life
i cannot.

those who think they know me
akin my nature to that of a child.
—what little they know
of dark men.

Farrell J. Foreman



Carl Sandburg: The Mid-western Voice of Whitman

"Poets to come . . . Arouse!
for you must justify me."
Walt Whitman

In a letter dated June 22, 1903, to Professor Phillip Wright of Lombard College, Carl Sandburg enclosed two poems, saying simply, "Whitman . . . haunted me into these."¹ This may well have been the beginning of what has been called the "Whitman—Sandburg tradition."² Whitman felt a strong affection for America and her people, saying "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,"³ a feeling shared by Sandburg. Whitman felt the role of the poet to be that of a voice, for himself, for man, but especially for the Americans.⁴ In his own time, Sandburg became that voice for the burgeoning Middle West. A critical eye cast upon a representative work from each of the poets, Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Sandburg's "Chicago," will illustrate Sandburg's adaptation and continuance of the Whitman voice.

Sandburg has long been linked with Whitman by critics. William Van O'Connor speaks of Sandburg as being in the Whitman tradition, and in discussing Sandburg's poems says "The tension . . . between the rhythm of the free verse of Whitman and the ordinary rhythm of spoken language is slight."⁵ In his book of 1924, Bruce Weirick felt that Carl Sandburg was the chief figure in American poetry since Walt Whitman.⁶ Very often these comparisons come in the form of technical discussions, noting similarities in style such as the enumerations and long lines of which both poets were so fond. Other comparisons are often made in terms of biography, reveling in the fact that both men traveled about the country in their youth, both had an affection for Lincoln, or that both tasted briefly of war. Both of these types of comparison are

valid, perhaps the former more so than the latter. Neither of these approaches listens to the poems themselves, and it is there that the strongest similarities may be found. Both poets possessed a talent for listening, and the result of this listening appears in their poems, in the words and voice of America.

Sandburg wrote to his sister while he was traveling around the country, describing one morning's breakfast, ordered from an Irish waitress; "'Eggs.' 'Fried?' 'Yes.' 'Both sides?' 'No, only the outside.' Biff, bang, and a batter of flapjacks . . ."⁷ Here is Carl Sandburg playing with language, a language not found in the dictionaries of his day; it is a language Sandburg would use well. It is a language that would find its way into the books and dictionaries by the circuitous route of Sandburg's poetry.

The matter of language may at times cloud the issue between Sandburg and Whitman. It must be remembered that there is a difference in time and locale. Whitman wrote a great deal about the East, and it was from there that he praised the western people Sandburg later moved among; it was after reading "Song of Myself" that Sandburg wrote "Chicago."

Between these poems there is a kinship, a sharing. Perhaps it is the inexorable American voice. Both of the poems are swaggering, broad-shouldered, and self-assured. They are as representative of their authors as they are of the American temper.

Both of the poems take the ambiguous first personal pronoun that is indicative of the Whitman philosophy. The "I" of the poems is never fully identified, and could represent any segment of society. The style of the poems is (depending on the critic's affection for Whitman and Sandburg) either over-written or, like the poem "Chicago" itself, "Stormy, husky, brawling."⁸

It is particularly apparent when the poems are read aloud, however, that the voice is a strong and defiant one. When Whitman says

I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell
are with me,
the first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I
translate into a new tongue,⁹

it is easy to imagine a great and proud being, unashamed in announcing its presence to the world. It is also easy to imagine this same being stepping over the Appalachians, striding over to the Great Lakes, pointing to Chicago and saying to all who would listen

Come and show me another city with lifted head
singing so proud to be
alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling
job on job, here is a tall
bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities.¹⁰

There is a sense of risk in this writing, of taking a chance with the language. It is almost a language of bluff: the poet bluffing us with his language and poetic vigor; the voice of the poem, baiting us, bluffing with us in its robust good-natured way. There is bluff in the feeling the language leaves us, the sense that some of the bully has rubbed off.

This bully, though, shares some of the traits of Whitman the wound-dresser and Sandburg the socially conscious socialists. The New England Whitman who says

I am he bringing help for the sick as they
pant on their backs,
And for the strong upright men I bring yet
more needed help. . .¹¹

is not so much different from the midwestern Sandburg who in the streets of Chicago has

. . . seen your
painted women under the gas lamps luring
the farm boys
. . . seen
the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
On the faces of women
and children . . . seen the marks of wanton
hunger.¹²

The sense of compassion is there, as clear-eyed and bold as ever, for only a strong voice can offer help to strong men, tell you in an even voice of the pain of urban injustice.

Of course this entity, or bully, is perhaps better defined as a concept of American people. As Whitman sang of the great birth of the industrial America, so Carl Sandburg spoke of its maturity. The industrialization of the country is, in both cases, dealt with as a reflection of the people, as Whitman telling us

The floor-men are laying the floor, the
tinnars are tinning the roof, the
masons are calling for mortar,
In single file each shouldering his hod

pass onward the laborers . . .¹³

With his unique directness, Sandburg tells us of the same scene, of people

. . . Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping
for action, cunning as a savage pitted
against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding.¹⁴

These are proud, out-sized views of the American working class, and they reflect a certain glory. Sandburg here shows us that though he admires Whitman, he is no imitator. Sandburg uses a style more spare than that of Whitman, yet the voice is the same, and it is a voice of a proud people, a people who are

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth
laughing with white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laugh-
ing as a young man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs
who has never lost a battle . . .¹⁵

Sandburg found much that he could make use of in Whitman, and adapted it to his own purpose. The difference in the style of these two individualists indicates more a philosoph-

ical agreement than a master-disciple relationship. Each poet, in his own way is

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist
is the pulse, and under his ribs
the heart of the people,
Laughing!¹⁶

Indeed, each had a need to feel that pulse, and to feel a oneness with that heart beneath the ribs. It is in attempting to do this that the two differ in approach. It has been noted of Sandburg that "His barbaric naturalism has more tang and bite than Whitman's, and is more suited to the uses of an industrial democracy than Whitman's is."¹⁷ Perhaps the tang and bite of Sandburg is the ". . . stormy husky, brawling laughter of youth, half-naked, sweating, proud . . ." ¹⁸ Perhaps it is the voice of a younger man. In any event, there is a freshness in Sandburg's approach to the material he shares with Whitman that indicates a distinct individuality, a sense not so much that he rejects the style of Whitman, but rather prefers writing in his own way. Most likely he is justified in doing this, for had Whitman's voice been literally echoed by Sandburg, it would not have so well represented the people of the early twentieth century.

Walt Whitman gave a major portion of his career to the forming of this voice, of breaking down the walls of structure and tradition that passed for discipline, in order that the people may be heard. Carl Sandburg heard the voice and gave it vigor, the power of *The People, Yes, Smoke and Steel* and *Slabs of the Sunburnt West*. Carl Sandburg gave voice to a new generation of Americans, a voice Whitman must have heard and approved.

... The people is Everyman, everybody.
Everybody is you and me and all others.
What everybody says we all say.

Where did we get these languages?
Carl Sandburg

Robert P. Anderson

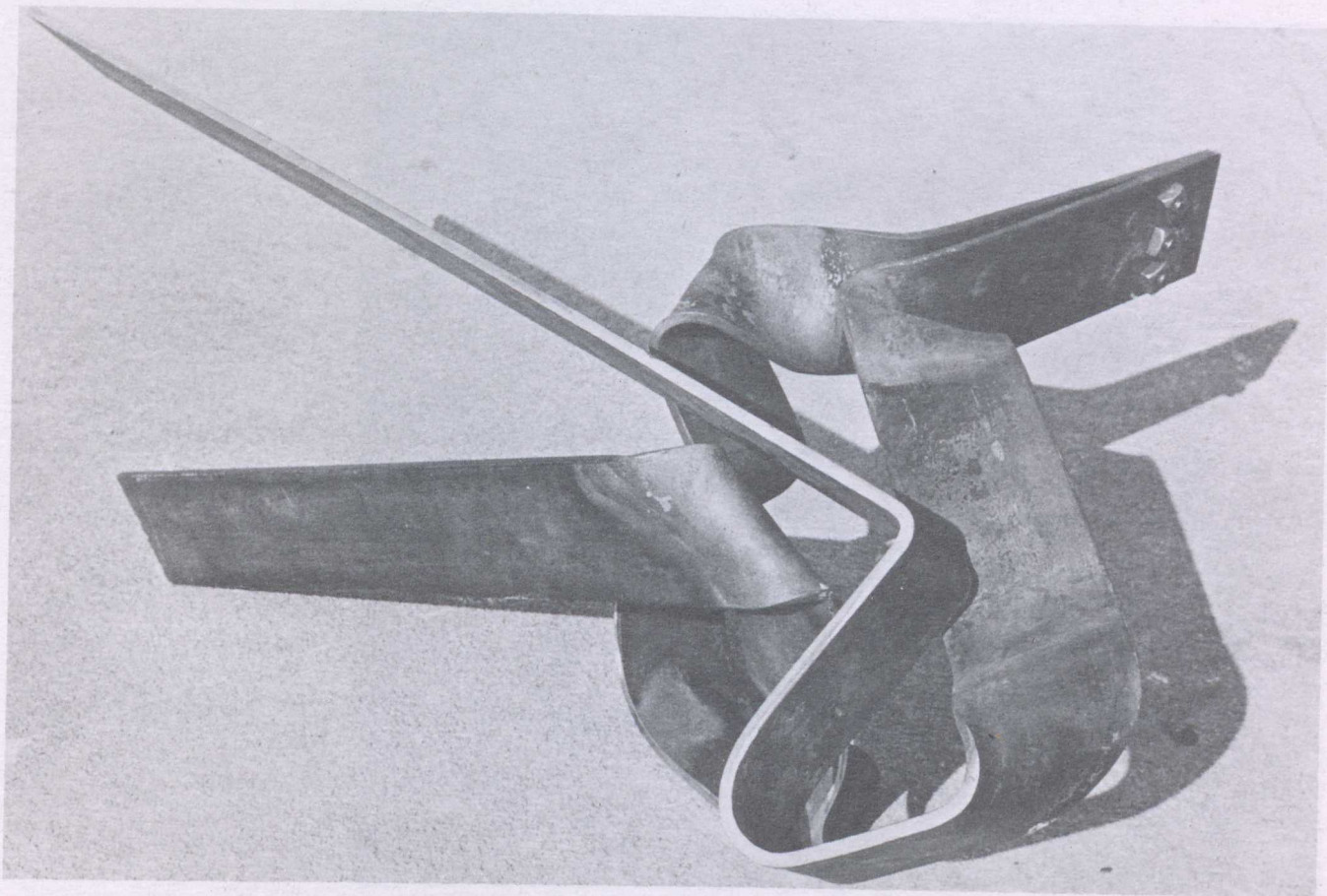
NOTES

- 1 *The Letters of Carl Sandburg*, Herbert Mitgang (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 12.
- 2 William Van O'Connor, *Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) p. 28
- 3 Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959) p. 411
- 4 John Berryman, *The Freedom of the Poet* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976) p. 230
- 5 O'Connor, p. 150
- 6 Bruce Weirick, *From Whitman to Sandburg in American Poetry* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924) p. 210
- 7 Mitgang, p. 11
- 8 Carl Sandburg, *The Complete Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969) p. 3
- 9 Whitman, p. 39
- 10 Sandburg, p. 3
- 11 Whitman, p. 58
- 12 Sandburg, p. 3
- 13 Whitman, p. 35
- 14 Sandburg, p. 3
- 15 Sandburg, p. 3
- 16 Sandburg, p. 4
- 17 Weirick, p. 219
- 18 Sandburg, p. 4

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