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TOWERS

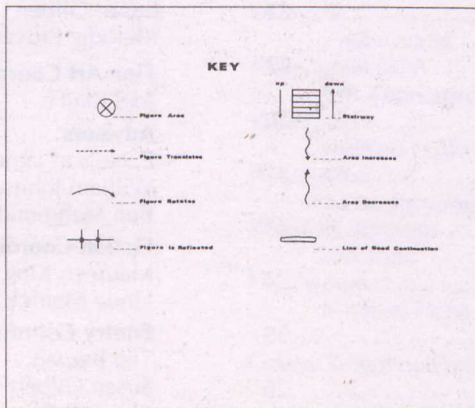
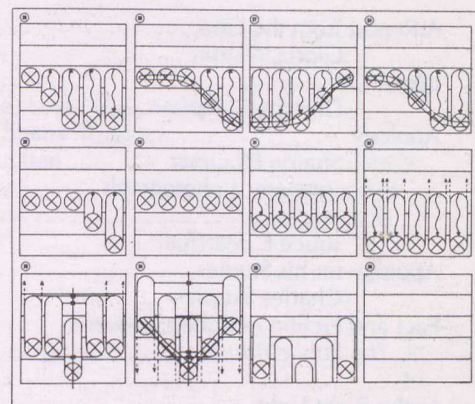
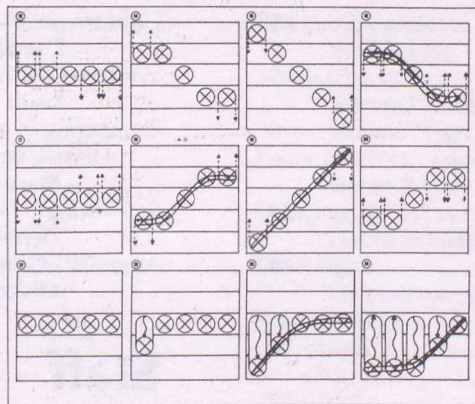
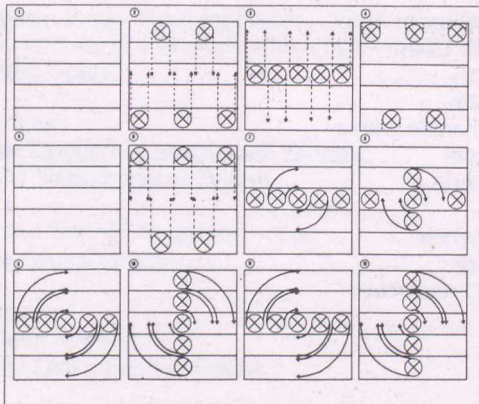
Letters From the Editors

We were very proud when the 50th issue of *Towers* was published last semester. Now, we are even prouder to announce that the Fall 1977 and Spring 1978 issues of our magazine have been awarded an honor rating of All American by the Associated Collegiate Press.

We wish to thank E. Nelson James and William Johnson of the English department for their unending support and stamina through our long meetings and Ben Mahmoud of the art department for his support and encouragement. A special thanks must go to the Student Association who have provided the funds needed to publish *Towers*. And, of course, a warm thanks goes to both old and new members of the staff for standing by us and providing fresh thoughts and opinions.

There is only one thing we regret: we were unable to locate a picture of a moose for page thirteen.

Cordially,
Susan Gilbert
Melodie Provencher
Editors, *Towers*



A Report from the Line

Army keys don't open doors.
The buttons march in drilling tiers
As he types "Ninety casualties,"
Then blots the words by stamping keys.

His fingers pound and shift and pull
The ribbon through machine-gunned spool.
Two steel types collide and twine;
He flicks their bars, stops to design

A silent bell for his line's end.
The carriage leaps and whirrs around;
He reckons out the cost of men
Skipped from the line, soon dead again.

To him, death's not unusual,
And casualties are casual.
The typewriter snaps to do his will
As if it knows that words can kill.

Gloria Wardin

Like a Cat

In the evening I find silence,
Resting as I open the door;
The wind plays like a cat
Pawing at the curtain hems;
Pinks and lavenders drench the sky,
Wash the room, and fade.
Deep shadows pocket my thoughts.
I cannot see the red-winged blackbird
Whose trill pierces my mind;
Hypnotized as his song flashes memory
Of the sun setting silver yellow,
And the sound of a lake
Crawling up the sand.

Dorothy Kampf

Apology

"Let me feel your forehead."

I grabbed my youngest daughter Rosa's warm, round arm and pulled her toward me. She jerked away suddenly, and had I let go, she would have tumbled over backwards. One of the kids was always getting sick, you couldn't be too careful. Now that we were visiting my mother, the first time in a month, I supposed it would happen again.

"I'm fine," Rosa insisted.

Knowing better, I arranged a temporary bed of throw-pillows and afghans on the sofa where I could keep an eye on her. I decided to take her home that evening after I finished my mother's promised house-cleaning. All that remained was to straighten the contents of a large, old, oak buffet.

The task was almost completed when I discovered, tucked in between tablecloths, trivets and a stray pillowcase, a small box containing the pieces of a broken pepper shaker. I was puzzled by this discovery and disturbed by the memory it stirred . . .

It was a light and sunny day near the end of July. I was sitting at the kitchen table by the window alternately sipping iced tea and molesting a two-day-old blister on my hand. In our neighbor's backyard I could see several children: a squealing, sexless, colorful tribe of animated stretch-knit, darting in and out, in and out, of a three-ringed inflatable pool. Rosalind, my mother, was hanging out the wash. I watched as the sun's white rays baked her Cannon sheets and pillowcases; they became pliant in the afternoon breeze. Rosalind spread two small hands like cookie cutters across a lace-edged pillowcase she had hung, carefully smoothing away wrinkles.



In the cool, shaded darkness of the kitchen I thought how easily Rosalind's fair, dough-like form might disappear into that sea of white sunlight and Tide-scented sheets, the pale seer-sucker rectangular shift her only definition. I squinted my eyes enough to complete the illusion. Rosalind's image melted away just as it had from the warm, summer nights of my early childhood when I sat perched like a frail wren on the sill of the bank window, the roughish concrete surface faintly scratching the backs of the thighs through my dress. Every Friday night I would sit in this scratchy little nest, my father at my side, smelling the caramel corn as its fragrance drifted our way from the popcorn stand, watching the ominous rotation of the black, overhead fans through the dime store windows, and waiting for Rosalind to reappear. Once, when I had asked her why I couldn't go along with her, she told me about germs.

Perhaps having received a psychic message, Rosalind gathered up her clothespin bag and empty laundry basket and disappeared from sight. Seconds later I heard the backdoor open and shut followed by slow, heavy steps on the basement stairs. I attended my blister.

"Isn't this weather awful? And the weatherman says it's going to last until Sunday at least . . ." Rosalind called from the basement, automatically assuming that someone listened in the kitchen. "Sandy really ought to take better care of those kids but all she does now is go, go, go." I slid the chair away from the table and leaned back on its two rear legs. I knew from experience Rosalind's idea of "taking better care of the kids" meant frequent tests of the forehead's temperature with the back of the hand, too many clothes regardless of season, and not getting a two-wheeler until fourth grade when "You'll be old enough to not get hurt."

"Yeah. . . ." I automatically tuned Rosalind out.
I stared at the smiling plaster Dutch boy hanging on the





wall below the clock. I had always thought it was a silly decoration, but today, for some reason, I found his innocent, child-like smile hideous, his rounded pink lips antagonistic.

"Whud you say?" Rosalind called louder.

I picked up the sweaty tumbler and swallowed the last few drops of tea; pieces of partially melted ice slid down its metal walls and slapped my lips. I reached for the Nestea on the counter and nearly lost my balance in the chair.

"The lid's stuck, like everything else around here," I thought.

I rapped the ribbed edge of the lid with a mustard coated knife, a souvenir of my late lunch. "Ah, got it." I dumped just enough brown powder into the tumbler to cover the tops of the pieces of ice. The Dutch boy continued to smile his ridiculous smile, apparently pleased by my judicious handling of the ice tea.

"What? I can't hear you!" Rosalind was intent on talking to me.

"I said, we have an air-conditioner, MOTHER."

I was surprised by the amount of abrasion in my voice; the Dutch boy, however, took it all in stride, the corners of his mouth plastered up into a permanent crescent. In the basement, Rosalind was silent, only the sound of a torrent of water gushing from a faucet into a stainless-steel laundry tub could be heard. Rosalind let the water run a long time. Finally, she shut it off and I heard her shuffling around. "Probably rearranging the detergent," I thought. She was forever rearranging things: shelves, cabinets, closets, furniture, and when she could get away with it, my life. She was never happy with things the way they were. Ironically, even after her best attempts, the shelves, cabinets, and closets still didn't hold enough; the furniture still made the living room appear crowded; and I still stayed out too late.

I dropped my chair down flat on the floor, stood up and

walked over to the sink to refill the tumbler. I heard Rosalind ascend the stairs in heavy, careful steps. She stood in the kitchen doorway, slightly puffing.

"The Avon lady was here yesterday," Rosalind offered. "She left a book." I sat down at the table and looked out the window at the screaming children in the pool.

"Would you like to look at the book?"

I stirred the brown powder and water mixture with the clean end of the knife. Rosalind frowned.

"I don't think so." I turned and looked at her; she had advanced as far as the refrigerator.

"They have a two-for-one sale on their perfume . . . Let me get it." I watched as she began to fiddle with the pieces of paper held in place by flower-covered magnets on the refrigerator door, as she waited for me to reply.

"Where did you get that?" I tilted my head toward the Dutch boy.

"When we went camping in Minnesota. You remember that, I told you all about the cute little shop I bought it at." She smiled at the plaque.

"You want to see the book?" She had stopped her note arranging and looked at me for a moment.

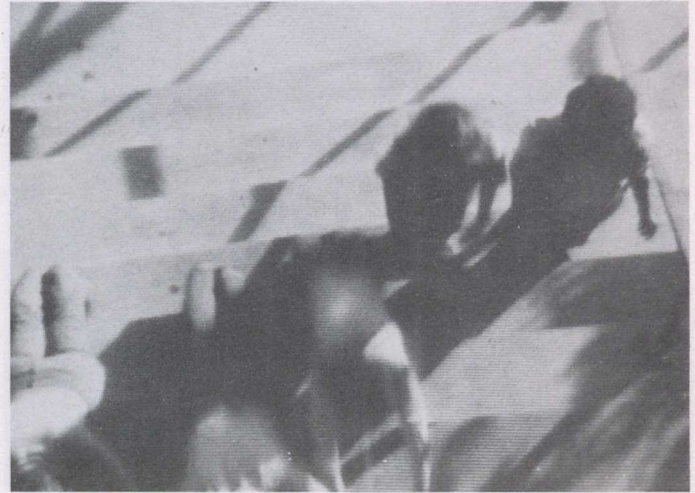
"Mother I really can't afford to get anything now."

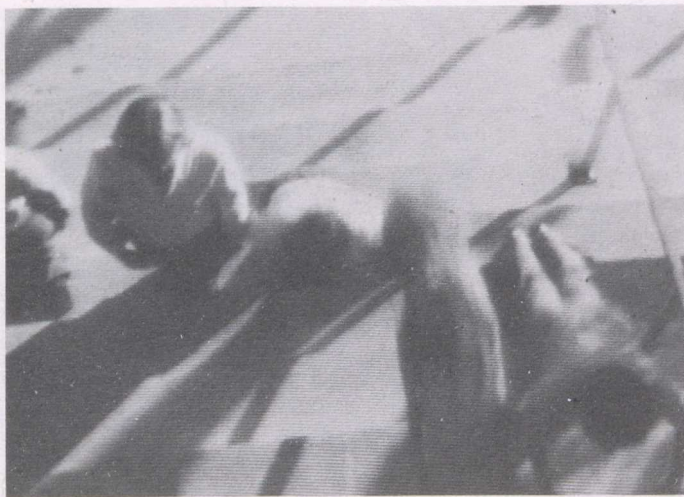
Her hands once again busied themselves with the magnets and paper. "Don't worry about that," she said, "I can get it for you now and you can pay me back later . . . Let me get the book."

I looked back out the window.

"I've got tons of that stuff to use up already and besides, I'm not really interested in it anymore." I loosened a piece of dead skin on my blister, removed it, and deposited it in the ash-tray on the table.

"You must not be my daughter." Rosalind laughed a soft,





confused laugh. "I just can't get enough cosmetics or jewelry." She removed a paper note that had '1200 Calories' printed at the top, crumpled it up, and threw it under-hand at the wastebasket.

"I know, you have drawers full."

"Well, everyone has to have something." She opened the refrigerator door. "Your father likes his T.V. and I like my jewelry. Hm, I wonder if this roast is still o.k. Maxine likes . . ." The conversation was becoming an annoyingly familiar repeat of the conversations we had ever had; only the brand name had been changed to protect the manufacturer. Rosalind would chatter on and on but we would never talk. There were so many things I wanted to do and people I wanted to tell her about, but it never worked.

High school had been the beginning of my emotional exile. I had made futile attempts at discussing long hair, boys and drugs with her, but whenever the conversation slipped too close to hippies, sex, or grass, a tight white look would seize her face. I knew we wouldn't talk anymore, that she would do no more than issue blander judgements from her terror. The world beyond Rosalind's laundry tub frightened her like a giant boogie man about to snatch her child or herself.

I interrupted. "I'm going to the show with Ellery tonight." The shadow I anticipated crossed over her face. Lately, the corners of Rosalind's mouth frequently were plastered into an upside-down crescent.

"Can't you ever stay home?"

I knew she would say that. I also knew that she was irritated and that irritated me. I was tired of her incessant question: "What do you two do that you spend all that time together?" I was tired of feeling guilty for having friends.

"I'm around here alot. What am I doing right now?" I bit too deeply into the dead skin of my blister. "Mother, I'm twenty years old! Everyone I know has an apartment of their own and

does what they want."

Rosalind walked over to the table and looked out the window, her back to me, and stared at the small neighbor boy sitting in our driveway crying over two skinned knees.

"I told you one of those kids would get hurt."

She was ignoring me; my anger was building. "You were married when you were nineteen. Are you listening to me?" I leaned the chair back, colliding with the cabinets behind me.

"Nothing I do is right to you anymore."

"You were pregnant when you were my age." I smacked the tumbler of iced tea down on the counter, brown liquid slopping over the lip. Rosalind was silent.

"Well? . . ." The volume of my voice began to escalate.

Her silence continued: a familiar tactic, a refusal to recognize me.

"Mother, are you listening to me?"

Silently she wiped some dust from the sill of the window with her fingers.

"Mother!"

She turned and looked at me, her face tight with tension.

"Yes, but you still live here." Her voice was shrill.

"You're afraid." I wanted to hurt her, to expose her.

"You've plastered your life shut; the smile on your face is as fake as the smile on that plaque. I won't stay here and be your ten-year-old forever. I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!"

The corner of her mouth twitched and there was a dullness in her eyes. She inhaled a long, slow breath. "I wish you wouldn't lean back in that chair that way. It's hard on it," she said softly.

I dropped the chair down hard, jarring the table. A glossy white pepper shaker toppled over and rolled onto the floor, shattering into tiny jagged pieces at my feet. Rosalind flinched.

"Look what you've done! . . ." A whimper was in her voice.





Her hand rose to her mouth. "Your grandmother gave me those."

Immediately I knelt down on the floor and began to scoop the chips and fragments into my hand, Rosalind at my side.

"Let me do that, you've done enough!"

The anger that I had felt so strongly only moments before dissipated and left in its place a gnawing in the hollow of my stomach. I took a deep breath.

"Maybe Dad can glue it."

I tried to reassemble the abstract, cookie cutter-like fragments, but there were too many and they were too small. They repeatedly collapsed.

"You can't fix it, it's done for. You might as well throw it out." Rosalind began to sneeze as she inhaled the now airborne pepper. I set the chips and pieces on the table.

"Don't put those there, you want to get glass in the food?"

Rosalind carefully gathered up the precious, shiny pieces in her hand muttering, "It's done for, you can't fix it." She sat down on the floor, almost under the table and repeatedly tried to reassemble the shaker; a new tear rolled down her cheek with each failure.

I rose from the floor, unsure what to do. I stroked the still intact salt shaker on the counter, then squeezed it gently.

"I'm sorry Mother . . . Mother, I'm sorry. I didn't mean for the shaker to break."

Rosalind looked up at me in silence.

"Mother. . ."

I read somewhere once that a woman matures when she forgives her mother. I assumed that meant forgiving her mother for trying to keep her a child. I wonder if mothers ever forgive daughters for growing up.

Rosalind, I'd like to think you've forgiven me.

Sharon Pflaumer

... to accompany a photograph of a moose

I wonder if a strictly metric verse
Of fourteen lines of five iambic feet
Would favorably be viewed, or would it meet
With puzzled frown and visage grave, or worse—
Would members of the literate elite
Say, "Tripe!" and "Doggerel" "We have no use
For sing-song in this day of poems that, loose
And free, refuse to march to any beat."
Or might not someone with a wit obtuse
Propose that this is just what "Towers" needs;
"The top of page thirteen is dull—it pleads
For this to go above the picture of the moose!"
Are quatorzains today reviled or prized;
Are sonnets currently unrecognized?

Bruce E. Marshall

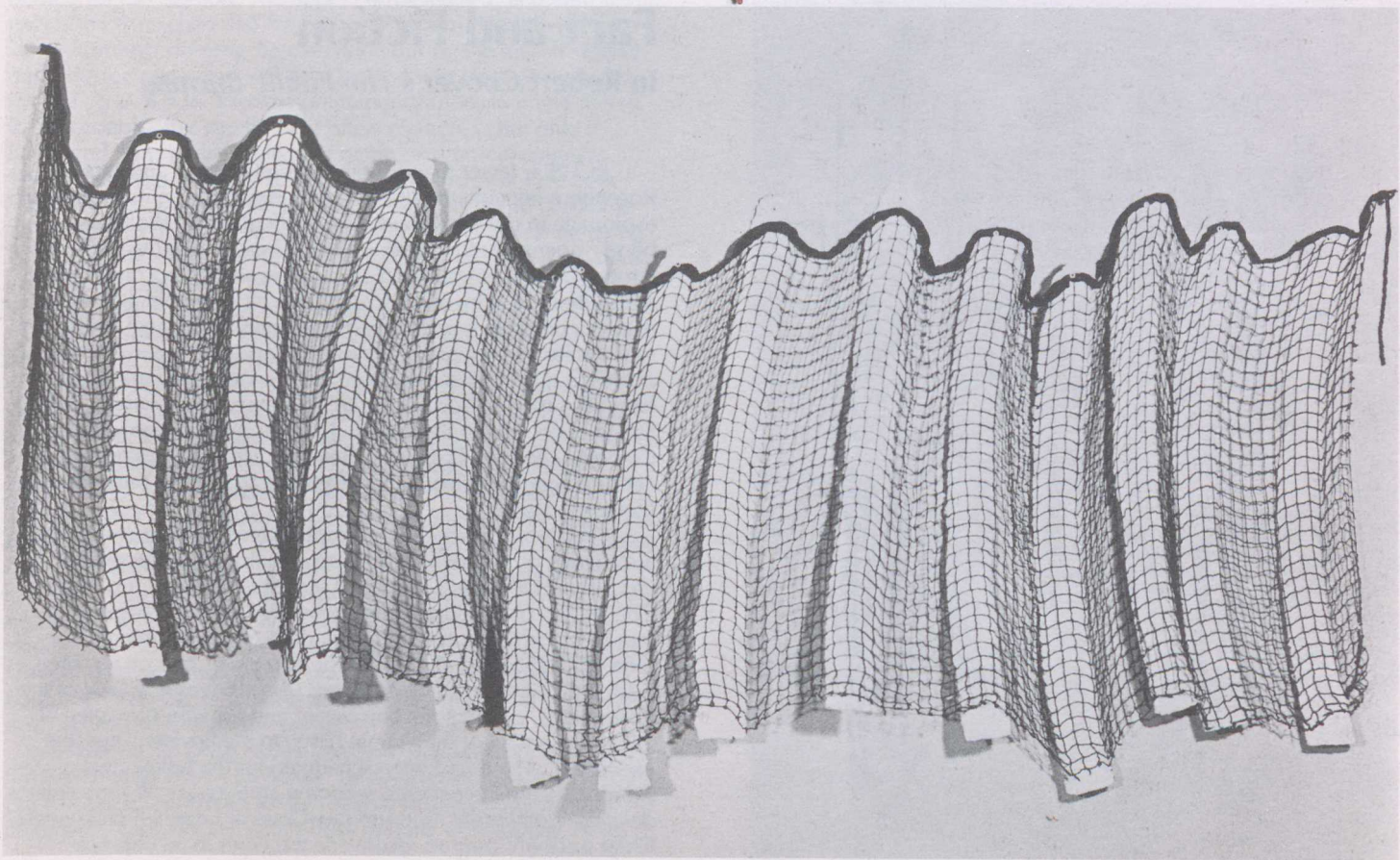
Apology for His Studies

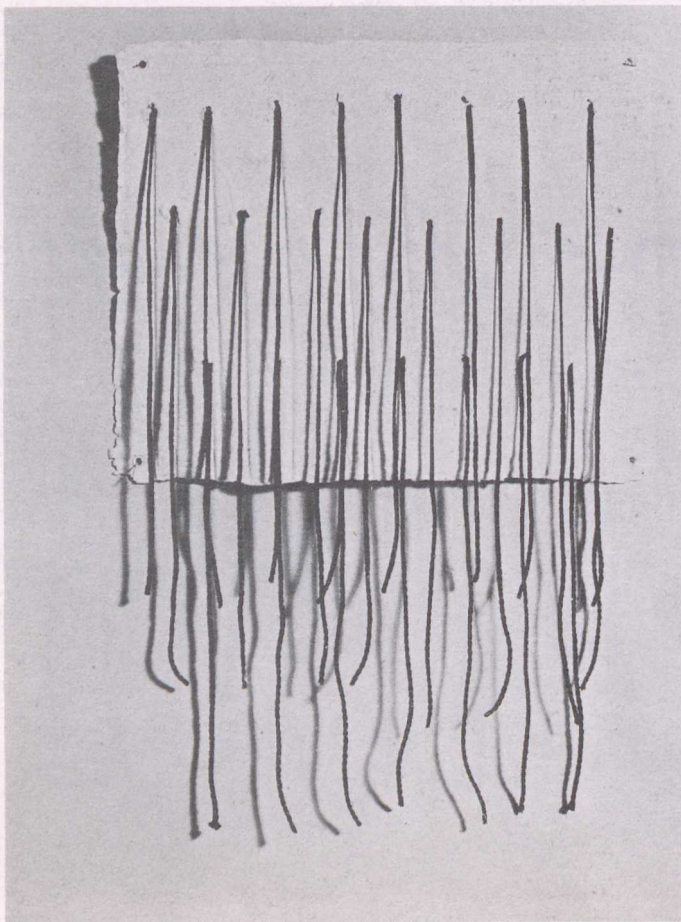
Equations, just as words,
Exist to be toyed with.
In truth, there is no surety,
Surely, no surety in truth.

Keats, had he given art to numbers
Instead of words,
Might have found a bride as worthy of his muse;
No cubist vantage can rival for absurdity
The scientific thought of supposed sober men
(Heisenberg was a Dadaist, indubitably)

Review the pantheon!
Replace stern Roman eyes with some more mischievous
And place (discreetly) a smile upon the lips
For even Einstein must have smiled
To find space curved
Playing upon his violin a gypsy air
As Euclid's laid to rest
Smiling still, removes the pin
That holds the world in place

Charles Skupien





Fact and Fiction

In Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*

In 1953, fewer than four months after Julius and Ethel Rosenberg became the first and only Americans put to death for espionage in our civil court history, the drama "The Rosenbergs" opened at the London Unity Theater. *The Daily Worker* wrote, "This is not only a play. . . . It is also an act of recognition that the story of the Rosenbergs must be told and retold in every possible form." Defense attorney Emmanuel Bloch had told the Rosenberg jury, "Playwrights and movie script writers could do a lot with a case like this." In fact, poets and novelists have also tried to "do a lot with" the case. These writers include Sylvia Plath, Helen Yglesias, E. L. Doctorow, and now Robert Coover, author of *The Public Burning*. Almost a quarter of a century after their deaths, the Rosenbergs still live through their literary avatars.

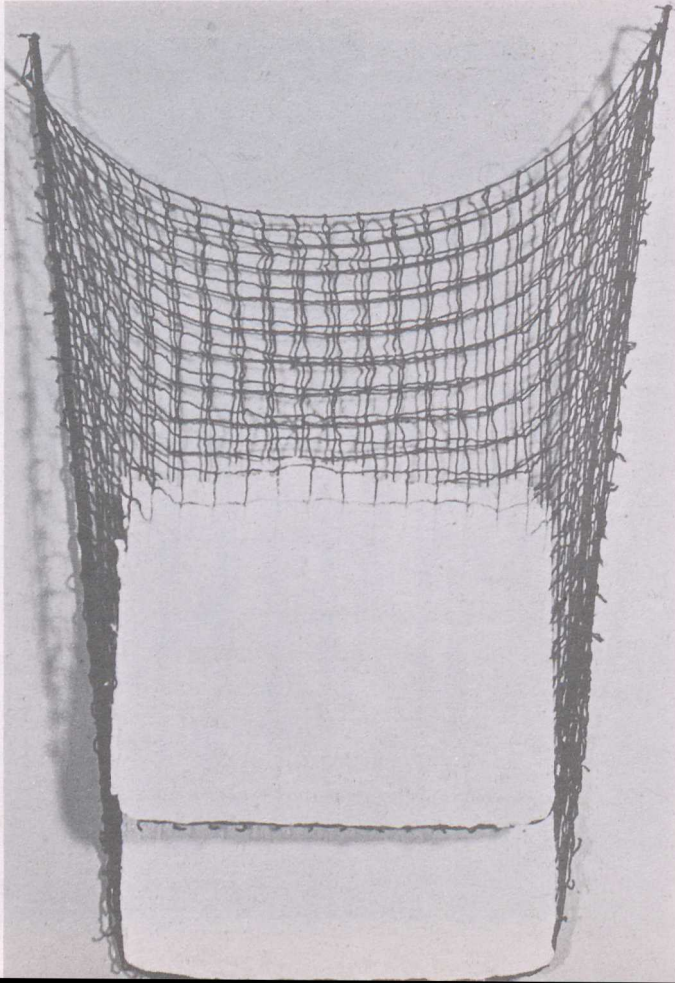
The Public Burning is an inspired blend of fact and fiction, a romance of insane history. Coover's plot seems incredible, the crudest melodrama; yet the real author is no hack; it is History. Coover has painstakingly researched the events of three of the most extraordinary and traumatic days of our republic. On June 17, 1953, with the rest of the Supreme Court on vacation, Justice William O. Douglas agrees to consider the appeal of the Rosenbergs, a machine-shop owner and his wife convicted of giving the secret of the atomic bomb to the Soviets. Thus, the execution, which had been scheduled for the following day (ironically, the Rosenbergs' wedding anniversary) is apparently delayed indefinitely. But Attorney General Brownell pressures Chief Justice Vinson to reconvene the court in an unprece-

denied special session. The appeal is denied 6-3, and the execution is rescheduled for Friday at 11 p.m. The Rosenbergs' lawyer protests holding the execution during the Jewish sabbath and asks for a two-day reprieve. Instead, the electrocutions are moved up to 8 p.m. Worldwide demonstrations demand mercy for the couple; the government offers clemency, but only if Julius and Ethel plead guilty and name their co-conspirators. The Rosenbergs continue to assert their innocence. President Eisenhower has doubts about the case and wishes to commute the sentences because he abhors the thought of a woman dying in the electric chair; yet he fears that if he does so, the Russians will use only female spies in the future. At Sing Sing, while reporters watch, Julius is electrocuted; Ethel is next. After the switch is thrown three times, Ethel is unstrapped and found to be still alive. Two more shocks kill her.

Coover makes use of many other facts of the case that would seem just as implausible as these, even in a second-rate crime novel. For example, the two main witnesses against the Rosenbergs are Ethel's brother David Greenglass and Harry Gold, a man who admits to never having met the couple. Though Gold is a pathological liar who confesses that at an earlier spy trial he "lied so hard it's a wonder steam didn't come out of my ears," incredibly Emmanuel Bloch chooses not to cross-examine Gold. Furthermore, the major physical evidence includes a Jello box, a "secret sign of conspiracy," and some hopelessly childish drawings by Greenglass of an atomic device. Government scientists would later admit that the drawings could be of no use to anyone and that, besides, there was never any "secret" to the atomic bomb.

However, as Felix Frankfurter said of Sacco and Vanzetti, the Rosenbergs were convicted "by the atmosphere and not by the evidence." Coover's long Prologue to *The Public Burning* effectively captures the witch-hunt hysteria of the fifties. After





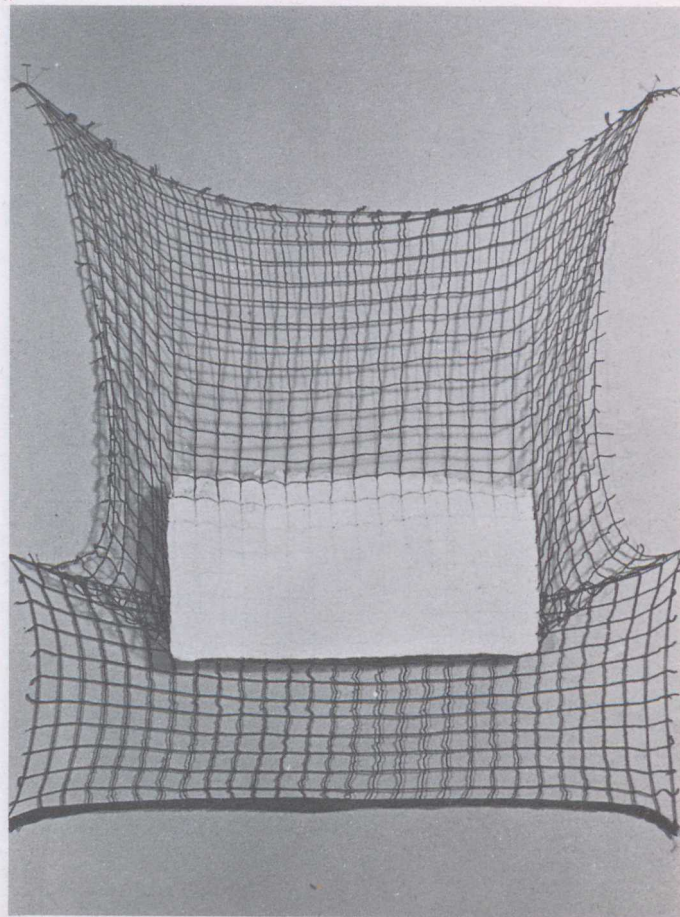
World War II, America alone has the Bomb, the big stick to secure a "lasting peace with honor." But Eastern Europe falls to the Communists; China falls; Russia detonates a nuclear device; and the Korean war begins. Scapegoats are needed; Richard Nixon and Joe McCarthy find them. However, Alger Hiss and the Wheeling 205 pale next to J. Edgar Hoover's catch, the Rosenbergs. Eisenhower, with deadly *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* logic, blames the Rosenbergs for the Korean war. Most of the incredible dialogue and action in Coover's book is from the public record, and no detail of the time is too small to be irrelevant. In an exhaustive, almost encyclopediac fashion, everything from 3-D movies to Christine Jorgensen to Eisenhower's (a Louis Marx toy beloved by Ike) is recaptured. Moreover, Coover's method makes an already outlandish reality seem surreal.

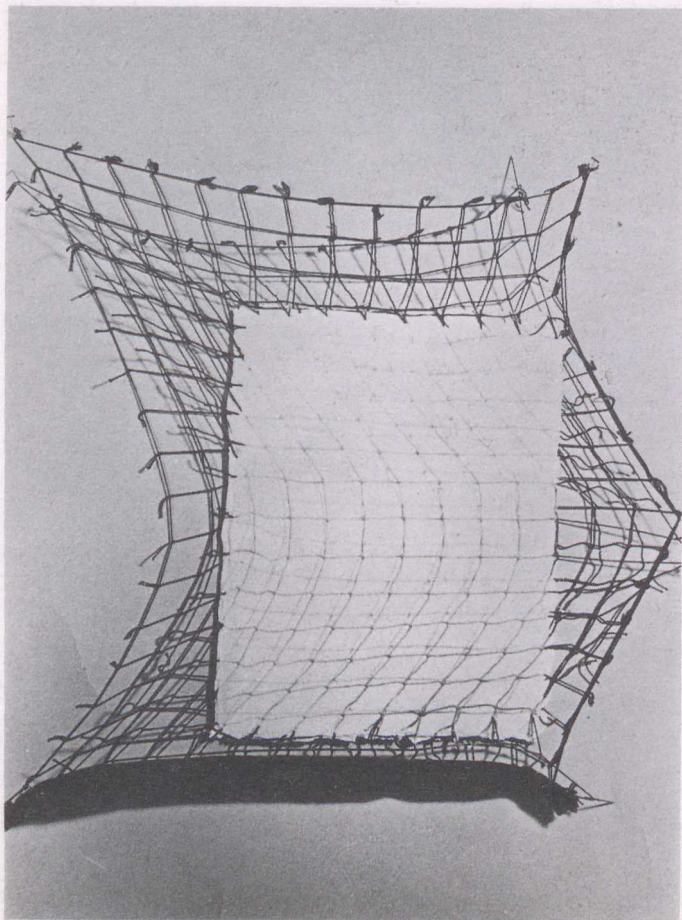
To these impossible facts Coover adds absurdly plausible fictions, carrying historical actuality to its black humor extreme. In *The Public Burning*, the government decides that the Rosenberg executions should be part of a gala public affair held in Times Square. The event becomes a proto-Honor America Day, with guest appearances by Mickey Mantle, Betty Crocker, Ezio Pinza, Jack Benny, and both houses of Congress. The show is emceed by Uncle Sam, alias Sam Slick, "an incorrigible huckster, a sweet-talking con artist" who welcomes the biggest crowd "since the hanging at Mount Holly in Aught-Thirty-Three," adding "and lemme say right here and now, it's you ordinary folks who've made the show possible tonight!" The Rosenberg executions become a High Mass of Middle America and "there are reasons for this: theatrical, political, whimsical. It is thought that it might provoke public confessions: the Rosenbergs, until now tight-lipped and unrepentant, might at last perceive their national role and fulfill it, freeing themselves from the Phantom's dark mysterious power, unburdening them-

selves to the people, and thereby might bring others as well—to the altar as it were—to cleanse their souls of the Phantom's taint. Many believe, moreover, that such a communal pageant is just what the nation needs right now to renew its sinking spirit. Something archetypal, tragic, exemplary."

Coover thus satirizes the need of spokesmen on both sides to think of the Rosenberg case in archetypal terms. To Eisenhower, it was a battle of "lightness against the dark"; to Sartre it was "as if the atom, like Zeus's fire, had been stolen from Heaven, while the Rosenbergs . . . played the roles of anti-heroes." Yet seeing the Rosenbergs in symbolic terms alone either reduces them to villains or elevates them to what *Le Monde* called "expiatory victims of the cold war." If we view the Rosenbergs solely as such, we are in danger of losing sight of their individuality and humanity. Only one character in *The Public Burning*, the narrator of the odd-numbered chapters, tries to look at the Rosenbergs as people and attempts to make sense of them and their case. Coover's choice of narrator will undoubtedly be the most controversial aspect of his novel; it is a choice perhaps unequalled in its magnificent preposterousness: Richard Nixon.

In some ways this is a familiar Nixon, the Nixon who to know was to loathe, the man we love to hate, the unreliable narrator of all time. Coover's Nixon compares himself to Lincoln, defends his deviousness, and claims that if he were the Rosenberg's lawyer they would "beat the rap." Yet Coover does not present Nixon merely as the Machiavellian Devil (as Philip Roth had in the splendid satire, *Our Gang*); nor is Nixon the Inarticulate Buffoon (as in another absurdist work, *The Watergate Tapes*), though Coover amply documents these Nixonian personae. Instead, jarringly, Coover presents a new New Nixon, a Nixon who uses such words as "dialectics," "paradigm," "transubstantiation," and "efficacious," a Nixon





who can write a sentence such as this: "Indeed, the conversion of Dwight David Eisenhower was as great a proof of the immanence and immutability of Uncle Sam as the renewed preaching of the Disciples after their Good Friday dismay and dispersion was of the Resurrection of Christ." For the first few chapters the reader struggles to suspend his disbelief.

Yet somehow this Nixon, like the real one, fights his way back. Coover's Nixon, for all of his public deceit, can be disarmingly, even engagingly, honest in private, as when, speaking of an important vote in Congress, he says, "It was just the kind of political battle I loved: nobody gave a shit about the bill itself, it was a straight-out power struggle, raw and pure, like a move in chess." Most incredibly, Nixon wins the reader's sympathy. A "lonely outsider" in the Eisenhower administration, with a cold wife, no friends, and no "sympathy from those sonsabitches" in his own party, this Nixon finds purpose in his life in a last-minute attempt to save the Rosenbergs. Nixon's fascination with the couple is in part a fascination with himself, for he finds that "we were more like mirror images of each other, familiar opposites," the capitalist and communist sides of the Horatio Alger coin. He also associates the Rosenberg death-house letters with his Checkers speech: "Our purposes, after all, were much the same; to convince a stubbornly suspicious American public—our judges—of our innocence." Ultimately, Nixon is able to understand the Rosenbergs "as no one else in the world could understand them." In his bumbling, solitary quest to save the couple, Nixon rises to the status of a comic hero.

The Public Burning includes hilarious and acerbic parodies of *Time* magazine and Burns and Allen routines; an inspired "Sing Sing Opera"; a moving "Intermezzo" in which the heart-felt words of Ethel's final clemency plea alternate with Eisenhower's coldly stilted rejection; and ends with what may be

literature's most sensational act of sodomy, Uncle Sam's brutal rape of Nixon. Yet perhaps the most remarkable feature of this mad work of genius is Coover's linking of Nixon and the Rosenbergs. Nixon did not play a big role in the actual case; in the book he realizes, "I was more like a kind of stage manager, an assistant director or producer, a presence more felt than seen." However, "in the larger drama of which the Rosenberg episode was a single act, I was a principal actor—if not, before the play is ended, *the* principal actor." The Rosenberg case "was like a little morality play for our generation," Nixon muses, "our initiation drama, our gateway into History," and just as no case so well captures the era's conflicts, so no figure more than Nixon better typifies his generation. Yet in *The Public Burning*, Coover reduces neither Nixon nor the Rosenbergs to easy archetypal formulas; instead, his figures are all complex, enigmatic, achingly human. It is surprising to find such exquisite subtlety in a work that is also as scatologically excessive and raucous as *The Public Burning*. This work mixes tones as well as genres and points of view, however, and only a writer of Coover's audacity would attempt to blend such radical extremes. Only a writer of his skill could have succeeded.

Dennis Lynch



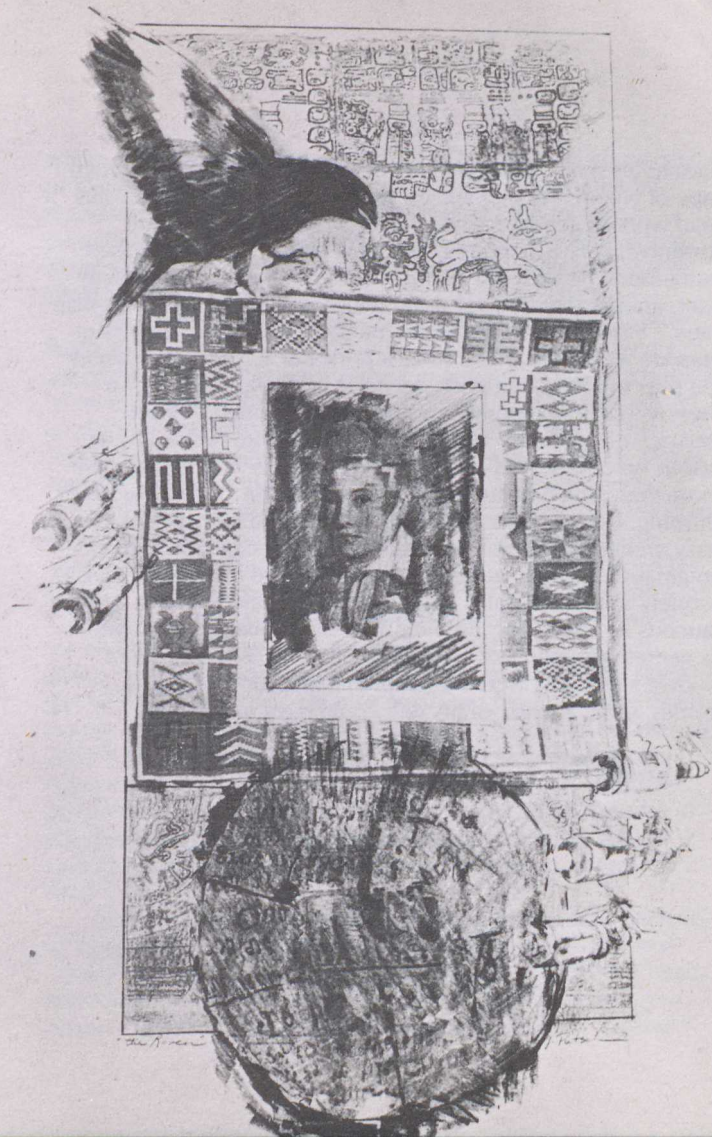
In the Right Light

Shiploads
of thoughtless words
dissolve,
on incoherent bottled weekends,
into escapist foolery.
Until the sun.

Magnitudes
of sacrilegious spells
abrogate,
in mutually blessed pews,
into divine love.
Until the amen.

Lifetimes
of inane actions
dissipate,
at clear sounding knells,
into loyal kinship.
Until the burial.

Keith Brant



shadows

streetlamps ooze
silver through the windows,
veiling the room in timeless chill.
the bed hides from windowlight.
it is buried, consumed by silence.

your fingers pry gently at my flesh,
sifting skin for traces of my soul.
your face shadowed beyond reach;
this silence enshrouds . . .

silent wind rushes through my thoughts.
the silver warms, momentarily hot,
then freezes again.
fingers cease their search.
i focus on an outline, your silhouette.
the bed creaks,
the wind rises,
i lean to kiss you, seeking warmth.

Melodie Provencher

Illinois Daydream

Let us tangle ourselves
in a cornsilk quilt
in the gingham meadow

and spin
for each other yarns
of the soybean lilies

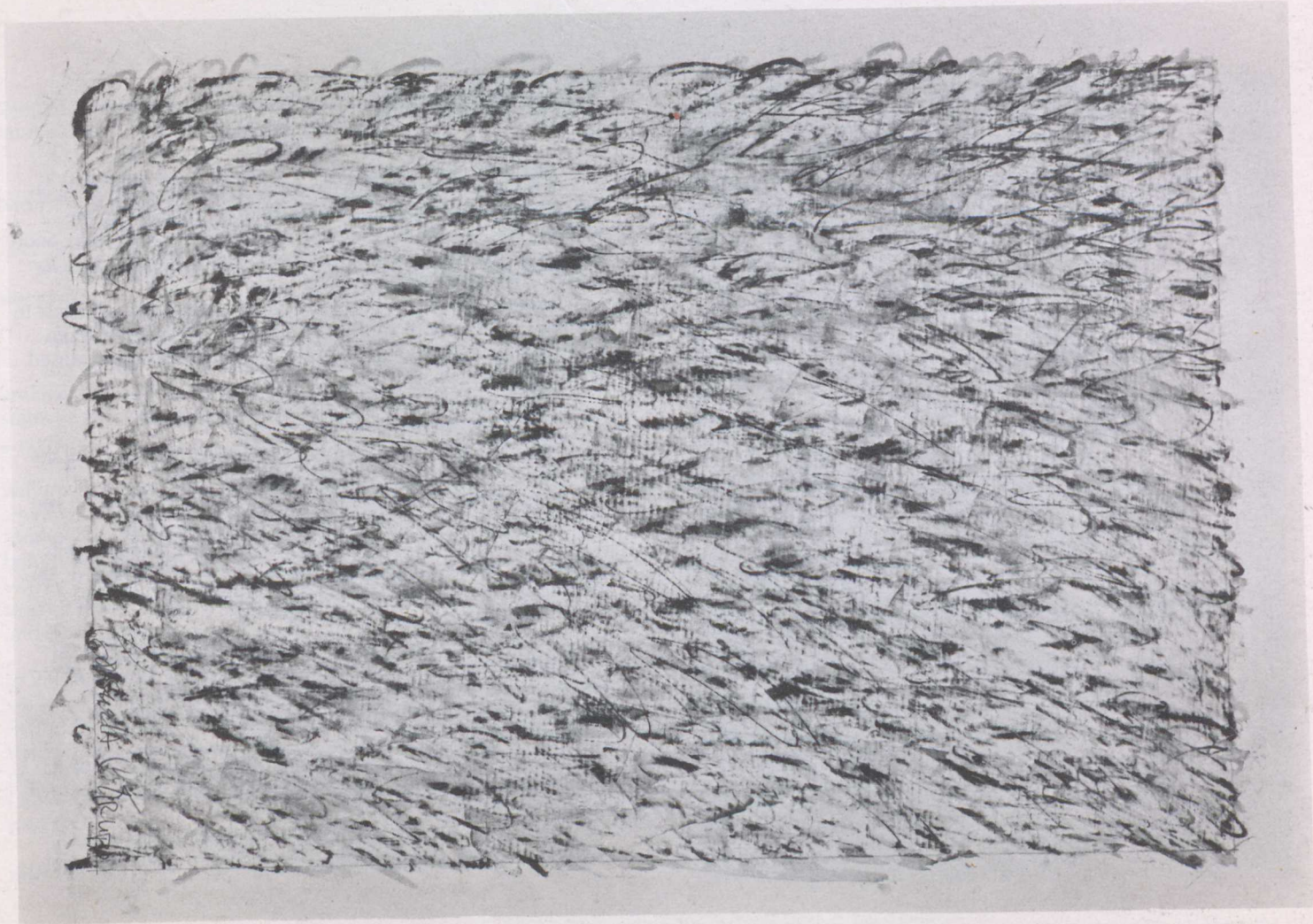
that float like
calico freckles on
pale ponds of wheat.

Beneath the slingshot
sun on our backs
we'll lie, you and me,

making monkey-faces
at ourselves
in the looking glass sky.

Robert P. Anderson





Consuela Krupp

The Mantis

It is early. Morning fills the room as the sun peers through the windows. Someone is already up, running water in the kitchen sink and letting the cook in through the back door. Soon that someone, your mother, will come and make you dress for school. You contemplate hiding.

Instead, you drop your feet over the side of the bed, slide to the floor, and smooth the bed's only sheet. Already the room is too warm. Your younger sister is awake, dressed, and poised on the headboard.

"What are you doing up there?"

"I'm a caterpillar," she says.

You roll your eyes in response and begin to search out the blue and white jumper you must wear to school.

The Younger jumps suddenly from her perch. "I'll see you by the car in a little while," she calls and skips away.

Mom arrives and hurries you to dress. The jumper smells bright and perfumed but Mom curses gently; it isn't ironed. She tries brushing the tangle of your hair, then sends you, books in arms, downstairs to wait by the car.

You sit on the bottom step. The Younger is no where in sight. She has probably gone off with a neighbor child to play. You wish she would have stayed. You dread the coming morning at the convent school and you want to talk with someone before it all begins.

A butterfly, laced in yellow and black, drifts lazily down from above. It lands just beyond your hand and begins to crawl along the concrete.

Mom keeps a book with the bright remains of flowers, crushed but safe. This butterfly is flowerlike. It would be great

to open a book and see this very creature always there. You raise an open hand up over your head . . .

"Don't kill it!"

Shocked by the command, your hand hesitates and falls harmless to your lap. The butterfly flutters away.

"You might have killed it!" The Younger is outraged.

"So?" You are disturbed.

"So you might have destroyed the soul of someone dead," she says.

"But we don't know anyone who's dead!"

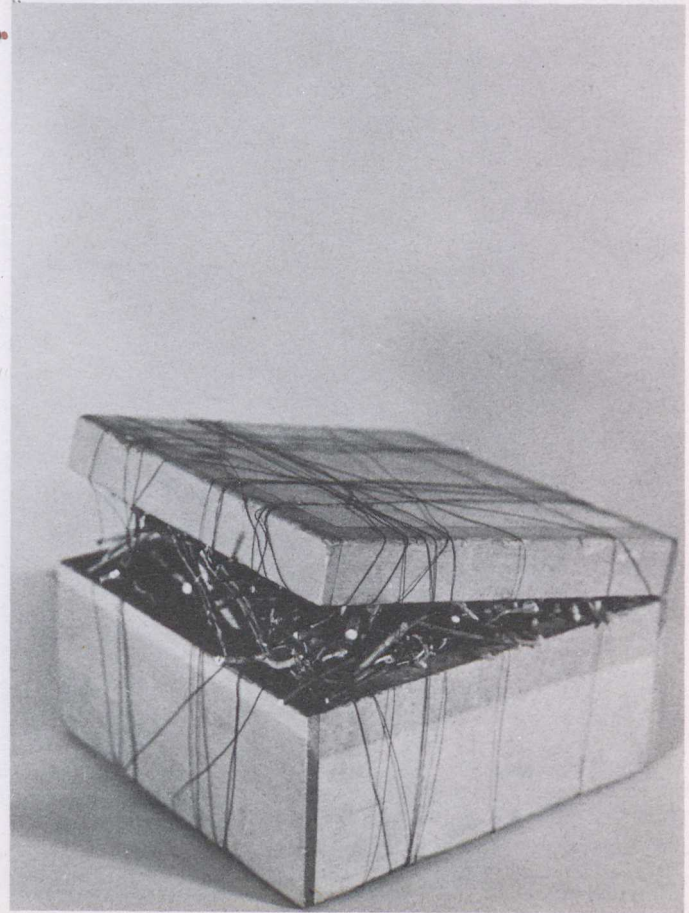
"Hah!" she shouts, tensing in defiance.

But before you can retaliate Mom comes down the stairs and ushers you into the car. The Younger is sent back up the stairs for breakfast and you are given two pieces of toast on a napkin.

The car is slow, the morning fast, and you are late. This will make things unpleasant. You tumble into the back of the small church just as the morning prayers are being said. The Mother, with awful authority, recites the words as the group before her murmurs back. As always, you are awed by the voices and the hard edge of the words. They cling like magnets to your mind, but their meaning evades you . . . the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

The group marches single file out the side door and away to the shacks of classrooms. You remain dutifully behind with six or seven other victims of slow cars and moms. The Mother methodically begins another ritual, punishment. Her magnetic voice scolds and rations out guilt and anguish which, of necessity, go with tardiness, laziness, and something called The Devil. But the torture soon ends and you are sent, repentant, to join your class.

Open windows bring the odor of jungle and forest. The growing greens of a continual summer call in whispers. Your



eyes wander, catching the blues of a flower or the flickering yellows of a butterfly. From somewhere between you and the forest, a voice squeaks on and on about numbers and tables. It wrenches you from the lush reality beyond the windows. Deep greens lure but that voice objects and wrestles for your attention. It slows and softens and becomes almost pleasant as it makes a slow transition from numbers to stories of a man who lived ages ago. The voice now speaks of lepers, miracles, and love. For a few minutes you are captured by these words, but still, the greens win.

* * * *

The hill you are standing on is enclosed in the endless warmth of a summer's afternoon. From this point everything can be seen and controlled. Butterflies, millions of them, drift across the sky in neat, colorful clouds. Mom's flower book is propped up on a rock several yards away. You make plans to fill it with the clouds above. But the plans are scattered by a deep smog that suddenly rolls in, pushing the clouds aside. For a while you are secluded in murky air and can see nothing. You realize someone is standing next to you. He is not very tall. His skin is dark. He is clothed in rags. You ask him if he would take you to the place where the butterflies are so that you can finish your project. He frowns, looking calmly down at the book, then turns to walk down one side of the hill. You follow eagerly. After quite a while, you notice that the smog is getting thicker and, not long after that, the strange man disappears. In wonder, you realize you don't know where you are.

* * * *

"He died for your sins!" The voice shakes you. You long for it to return to the monotony of numbers. The voice is becoming much, much too shrill. Sins and Death and Hell. The

voice trails off as the last hour ends. A sigh breaks from your lips as you gather your books and your senses.

But at the door, the Miss captures you.

"I do hope you were listening," she says. Her eyes are loud.

"Oh, yes." Your answer drips with false eagerness.

"What was the lesson for today, then?" She thinks she is setting a trap.

"Jesus died for our sins," you answer, grinning.

"OK, child," she smiles. "Run along."

You smile back and hurry out.

Soon, Mom and the car arrive and you scurry in. As the car slips from the city to the village, the colors change from loud reds to somber blues. A garbage dump along the road screams to be seen. You look and wonder where the garbage came from. When the car groans to a stop on the gravel driveway, you jump out.

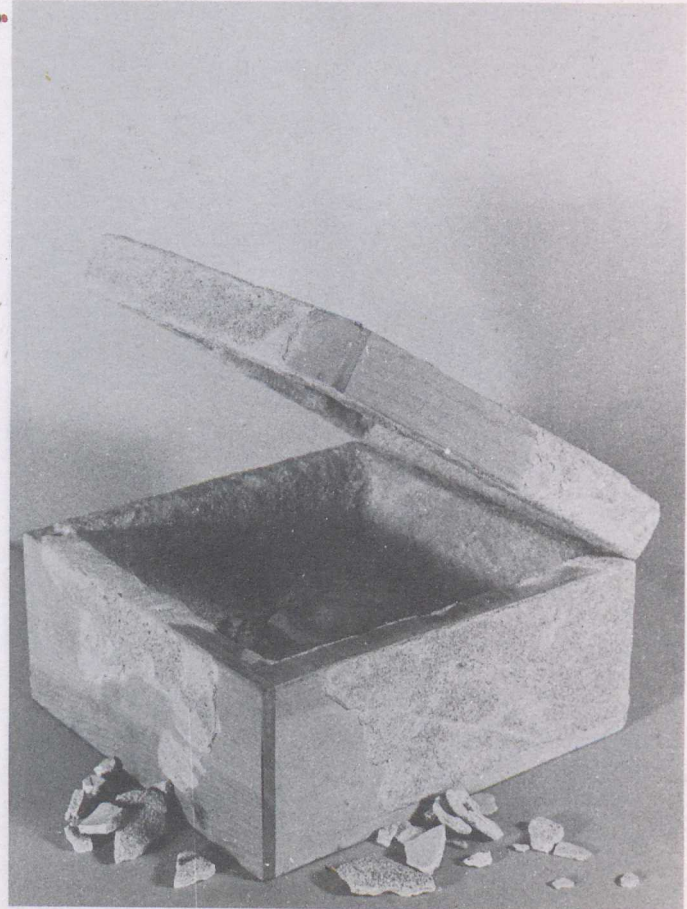
The afternoon is gone too soon. Yet today you can't wait to get inside the warm electric rooms of home, because, resting in your pocket, is a big wafer-thin butterfly, pure white. You saw it and caught it while the Younger was busy racing between the coconut trees. It's a baby powder-white butterfly. You hope Mom will keep it in her book.

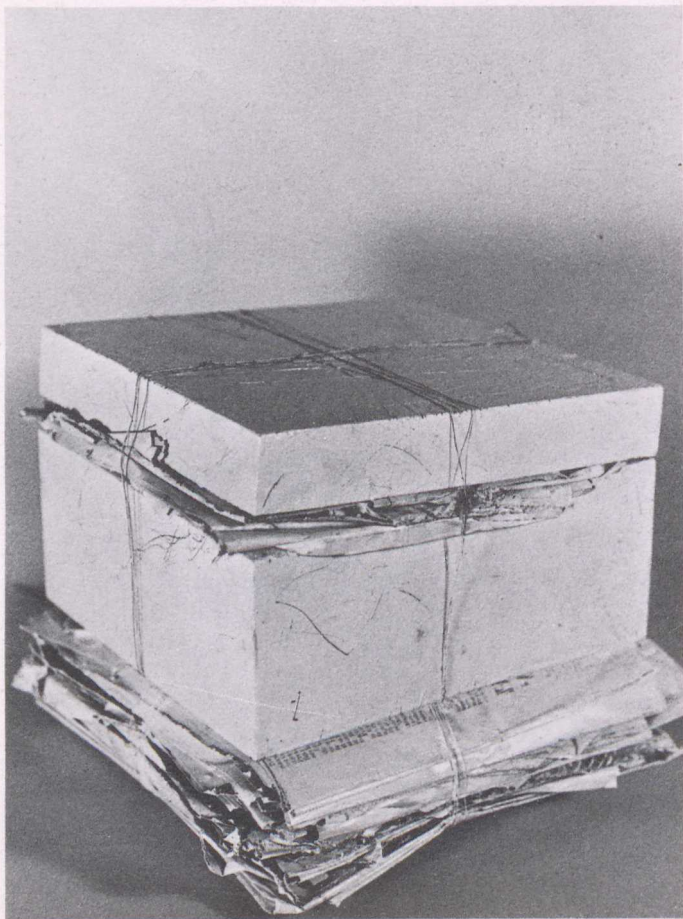
The Younger runs ahead. She catches the evening breeze and flies. Just like the butterfly a moment before it was whipped from the air.

She stops ahead and waits. As you come closer, she turns around and stoops near the base of a huge coconut tree. Her eyes glare at a point near the bottom of the trunk. Curious, you let your eyes search out the victim of her evil-eye.

Almost invisible, an old praying mantis clings to the tree. You laugh at the Younger's intensity. She is instantly angry.

"It's only a praying mantis," you snap back.





"Yes! Yes, the preying mantis," the Younger cries.

"That's what I said," you respond.

"Preying," the Younger says, baring her teeth, "not praying," she explains with clasped hands.

"It's just an insect!"

"Some insects eat other insects," the Younger says with concentration. "He kills butterflies. He eats them." And quickly, she smashes the mantis with her open hand.

Night comes. You are in bed. The Younger sighs beside you, already dreaming. You are amazed that she can sleep.

Sounds of a village not quite asleep hang on a breeze that has entered through the windows. There is usually something tranquilizing in this half-quiet of early night. But now the day returns as an echo that comes and goes and re-echos again. Butterflies, books, flowers, souls, a mantis at sunset. The night suffocates. You flung a dead butterfly from your pocket to the gutter and you can't remember why. You don't know anyone who's dead.

A wispy mist slips through the windows and hovers, cool, above on the headboard. Bursts of color flash quietly in the air clustered in room-bound clouds as the mist on the headboard thickens, darkens. And the last rays of consciousness bring a sudden thought. There is someone.

And you relax in the thickening smog.

Melodie Provencher

Lover

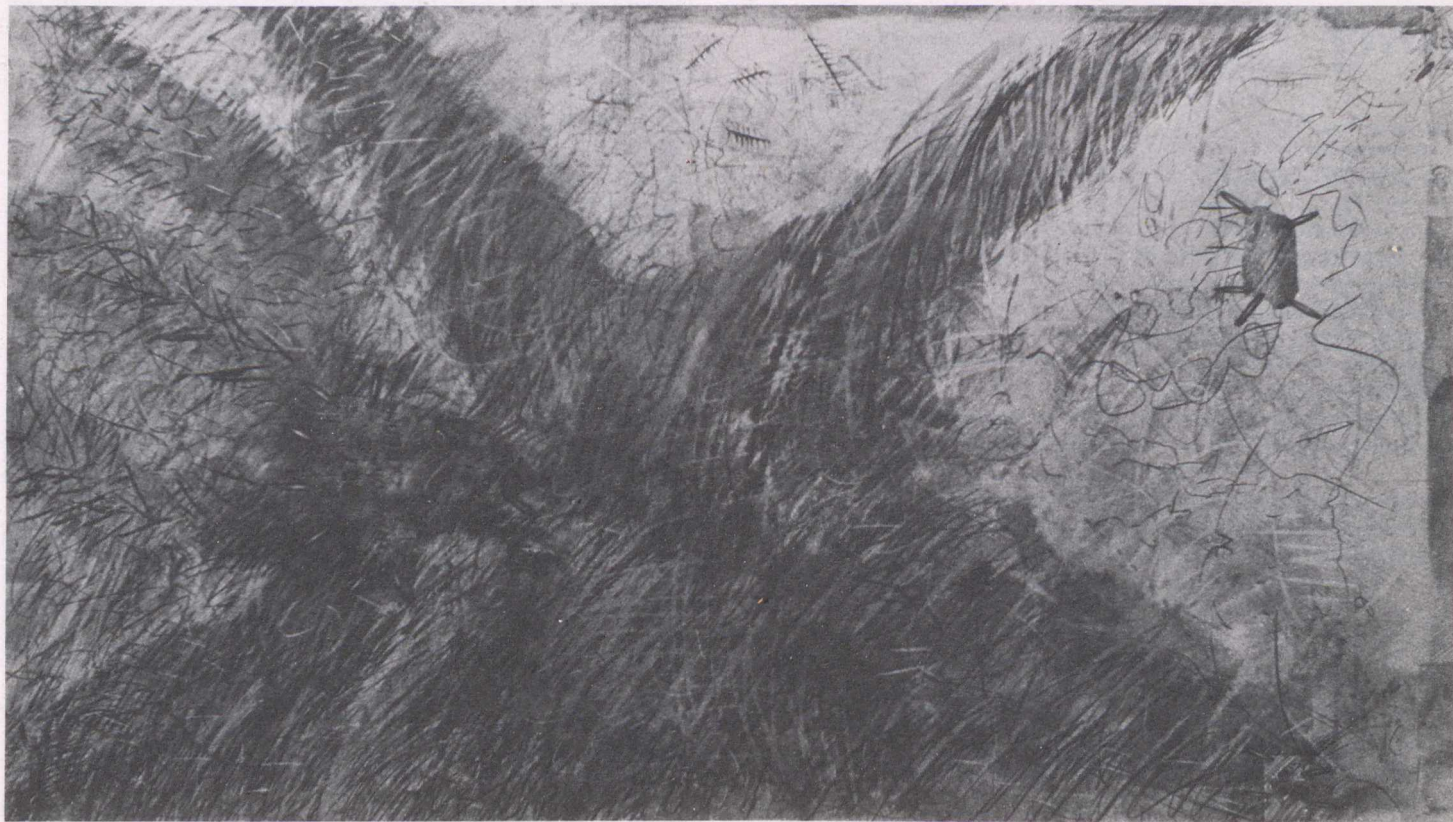
The beach at Nice
is no lover;
she sings her long song,
unrelenting,
and it is not of peace.
She does not care that she rubs
the rocks so—
now pulling them out, now
pushing them up the beach
breaking
them into pieces
which chafe for a while
but soon go round.

She is most cruel for her note,
which is unrelenting.
One begins to hear

a melody or the dream of melody—
but it is only
a wish.
She returns to her note
which is the same
and always so.

She has draped herself
in a clever blue
and wears sails
for jewels.
But the eyes
eyes can touch nothing,
this she knows
and as she dances
her white scarves turning
she smiles.

Gloria Wardin



My Frontroom Wall

I'll have to fix those broken drapes.

I read a streaky window.
Blurs go by and by.
The light of day is folded
by the creases of my eye.
And what's the gimmick
of the light behind
the clouding of my sight.

Curling drape.
My eyes, shut wholly from
the day, recede from
curl to curl to curl.

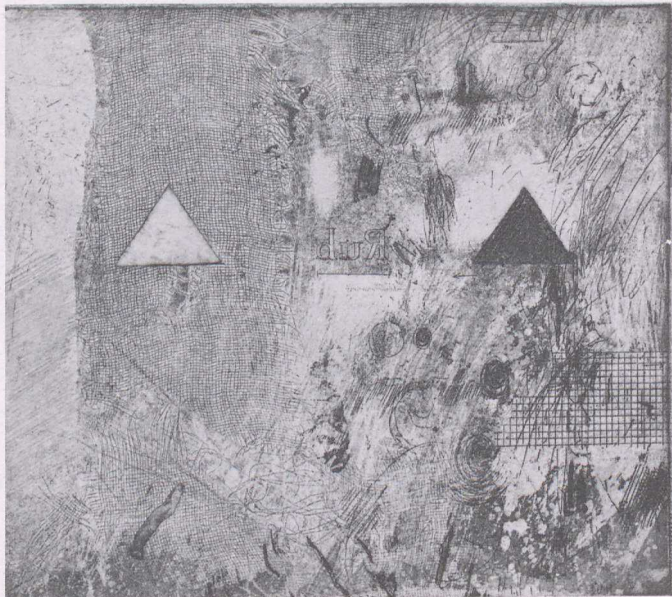
Meandering pattern
stitched in sleepy-blue
satin, fills my focus
as far as I dare to see.

One half works:
Curling pattern
saving my light,
hiding my night
from all who dare to
see behind this
fantasy of stitchery.

ow fogs the pane but
still a fan with
flickering frames of
people passing, dar-
ing to glance be-
tween the rush-
ing blades at my
fragments acting who-
le and blanching
back where no wind-

I will not rest until I mend those curtains shut.

Joe Zagorski



Behind the Cliff

A coastal town, California

A different world behind the cliff
above the high school
beer-drinking stomping grounds,

above the dead-end cinder drive
that forks up from the riverside road.
Here homes of all shapes, sizes

stand in roomy spaces,
all as old as the net of streets
fanning out, a geometric plane.

Who lives beyond the high curbs?
The grass, in pavement cracks,
spreads into the street.

Ed Manuel

Wallace Stevens Sold Insurance

One has to see ajar
The actuary's tables.

Love paints columnar death:
We live and rinse the brush.

Statistical beauty
Pours through standard deviations.

Our days are numbered
To significant digits.

Truth settles wincing claims
With skewed and random grief.

Gloria Wardin

On Leaving a Friend At Yarmouth, Maine

Song of Myself cut through those Atlantic-Maine waters
Like the gulls chasing her sail-spilled wind.
Nova Scotia built and given thick,
Strong ribs bent from Northern oaks,
She pounded the ground swells and
Challenged the Nor'east winds.

Tacking down the Eastern Coast,
Gathering the chill October breeze to her canvas chest,
She lathered her teakwood deck salt-spray green
And heaved her island-bred bow through shoal-water waves,
Never failing to make home, always running before
The squall line and the backing wind.

Leaving my island and those lone, loved waters,
I left Song of Myself, and hauled her out;
Back to the salt-marsh forest she cut from.
And thankfully took her apart,
Board off board, plank off plank, rib from rib;
Never to serve another man.

Donald R. Libey

Bear

Along Main Street
a thousand rituals have died.
From the flat porch,
dogs paw up the day's remains.
Shadowed onto storefronts,
they sometimes seem like bears,
until the light goes
and their howling drifts
to other doors.
Once,
I saw along the Yellowstone,
moon-drenched bears
dipping in the swirls.
Shaking rainbow trout,
they staggered onto land
like old samauri,
toothed and long curl clawed.
For years,
I woke each night,
their pearl sabers
planted in my brain.
I'd dream of stalking,

pulling bow,
but could never let it fly.
Days on days,
I forgot.
Once,
I saw, dancers
rise from T.V. screen,
bear robed circling to a
drum.
And traveling, I've seen
monsters mounted in hotels,
but their vacant eyes betray.
Lately,
walking over city bridge,
I notice white carp
float like lilies
down the stream.
One day, I imagine
walking on,
a huge bear
waiting,
prowling,
at the river's head.

David Williams

Field Hospital— February, 1965

Choppers buzz down
Flies land in blood
Needles, lines, tubes
Slip in and snag out of grief
Surrounded by fleshed debris.

Moving past the fear-silent "Will Dies"
To the scream-clinging "Good Chances,"
Tears and sweat blend
And drip on ashen foreheads;
Baptizing nineteen year boys
Into the covenant of the condemned,
And washing the stained hands
Of veterans jerking to a
Fetal position.

Across the dismal sea
New York sun dries a tear
On Liberty's cold, eroded cheek.

Donald R. Libey

CONFUSED YOU ARE
CONFUSED ARE YOU
YOU ARE CONFUSED
ARE YOU CONFUSED

IS YOUR NE
CK BENT?

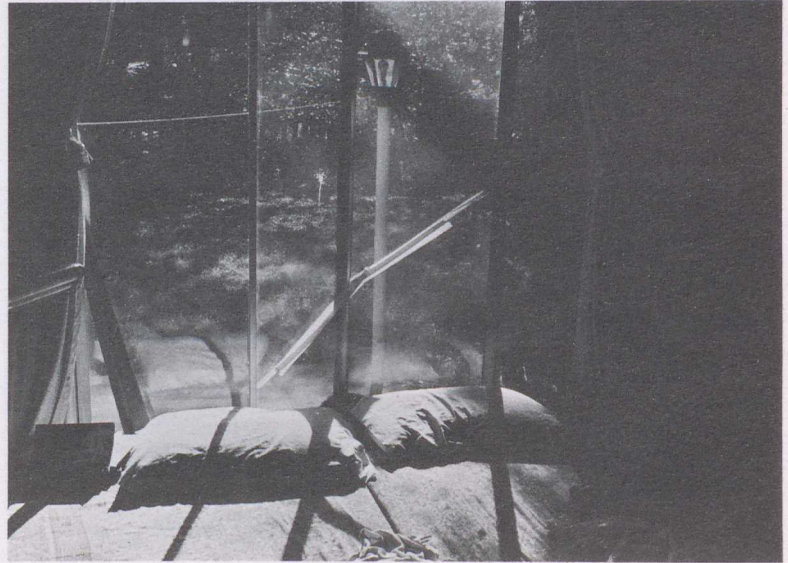
Western Ornaments

Big Mac boxes
box blades of green
along stroboscopic highways
way beyond smudgy
Pittsburgh mills of steel
stealing your eyes.

Drink Coke billboards
bordering on banal jingles
on old Sioux trails
featuring a historic cast
casts the limelight loose
losing your faith.

Baby Ruth wrappers
wrap floating asphyxiated fish
down Sawyer's tack
tackling rusted pop-tops
drift out unto the seas
seizing your world.

Keith Brant



Competing in a Charade with a Hometown Poet

To get inside the swish
of a lace skirt
was the magic
trajectory
of my youth.
I shot air balls,
content to spell out
H-O-R-S-E
on a buckling
driveway.
I was brought up
with the uprights,
the only thing
I lettered in,
the initial
downfall,
chased by my Dad
in a Santa suit
or out of the garden

he was weeding;
followed by Darla's
binocular boobs,
propped out of her blouse
in both hands
for all to see.
I pinned the tail on it,
riding away with myself,
away from her,
from all of them.
Every other guy
went through with it,
except me—
and you never even played.
I only remember you,
black pants, white shirt,
with no imagination,
watching us once.
You only kept score.
I never imagined
you a poet.
Did you ever see Darla?
(for D.G.)

Mark Guerin

Self Portrait, 25

Hair unruly in recession,
eyebrows growing together, seeking
the Promontory Utah of my forehead;
large nose broken blocking a kick,
eyes (the best feature) mocking pale blue
and usually bloodshot;
face peppered with pimples and shaving cuts,
lips smirked, teeth discolored.

So why do I presume
to look at beautiful women
with the leering assurance
of a rock star
a copywriter
or a muffler repairman?

Dennis Lynch

America's Ginsberg

In the 1960's in America, the poetry of Allen Ginsberg became associated with the discontent on college campuses, the discontent of America's youth in a world gone mad. His poetry, especially that which followed "Howl," spoke directly to and about the twentieth century in America. Ginsberg himself said, "I'm beginning to see my poetry as a kind of record of the times. . . ."¹

Most of Ginsberg's later poetry seems very much bent on creating a gut-level reaction in the audience. Nonetheless, his poetry can not be labelled anything but "poetry"; it has depth. Paul Zweig's reaction to Ginsberg's poetry is probably a common reaction to first-time readers to Ginsberg. Zweig writes,

. . . by creating the experience (or enchantment) of 'too much,' it [Ginsberg's poetry] claims for itself all the privileges of form, i.e., the privilege of being this irreplaceable, absolutely achieved word-vision.²

For Ginsberg uses the natural rhythms of the language and the flow of everyday speech as the basis for the "form" in his poetry. One critic remarks about the lines in Ginsberg's poetry, "Most people, most critics, would call them prose—they have a infinite variety, perfectly regular; they are all alike and yet none is like the other."³ The "music" in the lines, then, is not consciously metrical, but instinctive, just as the subject matter is instinctive in its intensity.

No subject is really safe from the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, but his themes center predominately on the chaos of living in the twentieth century. The nature of his poetry is difficult to describe. Ginsberg claims to be a follower of several literary traditions, among them, transcendentalism and imagism; ". . . poets like me," he told one interviewer, "are based on Stein

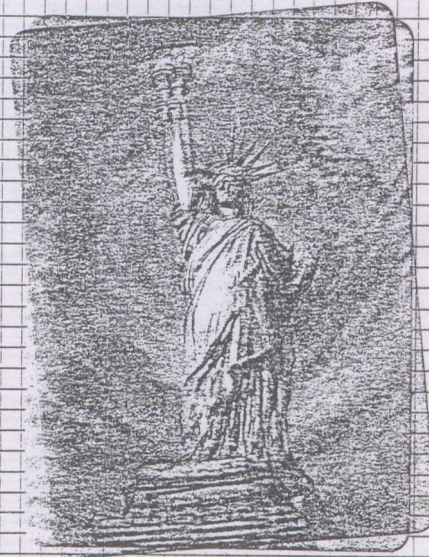


and Pound and Whitman and Williams."⁵ Ginsberg's contact with William Carlos Williams in the early '50s *did*, in fact, change his ways of thinking about his own poetry. He began to think of writing in his own voice, or in the voice of the times.⁶

An early poem, "After All, What Else is There to Say?" from his first collection, *Empty Mirror*, concerns the writing of a poem and, by extension, the discovery of Truth. The narrator of the poem finds that his mind is filled with "a kind of feminine/madness of chatter" (ll. 3-4), a disorganization and babbling when he first sits down to write. He is unable to proclaim a truth of any sort. He turns his mind outward, beyond the limits of his self to try to make sense of the outside, the universe, in order to create poetry. And since he knows that it is impossible to *really* know the Truth, the narrator wishes only "to *think* to see" (l. 5). Looking outside himself, the narrator realizes that he is waiting for the poem that he is about to write, to define him by defining reality, or "the truth."

"After All, What Else is There to Say?" reflects a bit of the transcendentalism that Ginsberg claims to follow; it reveals a twentieth century hope for revelation, a hope for transcendental experience, and it is for this reason ultimately optimistic (in contrast to some of Ginsberg's other poems). But as a reflection of the concerns of the imagists, the poem fails. It does not focus on one central, physical metaphor, and it does not show a concern for concentration in words. Instead, Ginsberg presents an *idea* for consideration.

Another early poem by Ginsberg, "A Desolation," is also reminiscent of earlier transcendentalists. The clearness of mind, the peace, found by the narrator comes immediately and is connected with a time and a need to return to the wilderness—something like Thoreau's moving out of town and into "nature." The narrator says that earlier, only his eyes had sought the wilderness—"What have I done but/ wander with my eyes . . ." (ll. 5-7).





A return to the wilderness, in the second stanza of the poem, begins to be associated with the “natural” callings of a man in this society, i.e., to “build: wife,/ family, and seek/ for neighbors” (ll. 8-10). The alternative to this calling is death from “lonesomeness or want of food”—perhaps spiritual nourishment—or loss of masculinity, as symbolized by the hart and the bear. In the final stanza, the narrator (already in the wilderness, in the natural order of things) proposes to build a “shrine by the roadside” as a symbol of his wanderings before he came to the wilderness. The shrine would serve to tell travellers, who have not found a home and place in the wilderness and in the natural order of things, that he is “awake and at home” there.

The concentration of words—“makes a home in wilderness” instead of “make a home in the wilderness”—in “A Desolation,” reflects the imagists’ concern for precision in language. By removing words that have no real meaning in themselves, Ginsberg has managed to create a more clearly focused physical metaphor for what he means to say than he did in the earlier “After All, What Else is There to Say?”

Later poems by Ginsberg concentrate more completely on the concise use of words, and they also begin to develop the “powerful Ginsberg-line. A. R. Ammons writes that “the unit of form (meaning), rhythm, and power in Ginsberg’s poems is in the line.”⁷ This idea can be seen in the late ‘60’s poem, “Violence.”

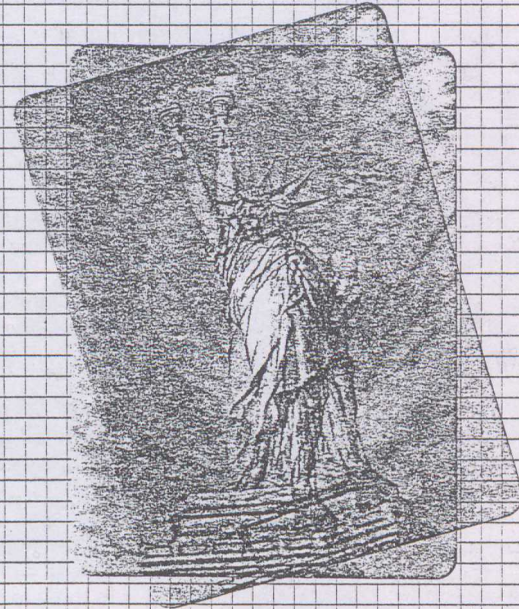
The division of the lines in “Violence” corresponds to a vocal phrase-by-phrase rendering of it. All the images are sharply focused and developed with a minimum of words. Concise wording and the visual and auditory rhythms give the reader a false sense of security. The poem proceeds quick-paced and with incredible smoothness. Then, at line twenty, the pattern breaks just as a bit of confusion develops in the narration—there has just been a potentially violent

encounter, but the only resolution to the scene is a glimpse of a "sixpack/ of coke bottles" which "bounce down worn black steps . . ." (ll. 20-22). It is almost as if someone had turned out the lights just before the final round of a boxing match. But by line twenty-six, the pattern has re-established itself. The voice speaking to us is a natural one, one we are used to, a twentieth century voice telling of the horrors of the twentieth century.

Though the poem has characters, it has no real, human personalities, except that of the narrator. This can be found in other poems by Ginsberg and it has prompted at least one critic to comment, ". . . we are never really hearing anyone other than the poet, his interpretation, characterization, and embodiment of all that he describes."⁸

The inhumanity of America in the twentieth century is the main emphasis of "Violence." All the images are of men hurting one another—the "giant/ sexfiend in black spats/ Sticks a knife in plump faggot's sportscoat seam" (ll. 1-4), the junkie waiting on the stairway, the "Angry Democrats" in Chicago, and the "fairy gangsters with bloody hands" who are waiting to get the narrator. Or, the images are of mechanical things—the "giant machines" in the Pentagon, the robots which "pencil prescriptions," and the "plānet television." This view of America spoke to the despair with the state of the world in the late '60s and early '70s. The final image shows a strong (and within the confines of the poem) well-founded paranoia as the narrator looks around him and sees the "fairy gangsters." To complete the pessimism of the poem, the final suggested act, that of cutting a man's throat from his beard, is ultimately useless and completely shocking to the rational mind.

One of Ginsberg's more recent poems, "Love Replied," seems to be a twentieth century version of William Blake's nineteenth century "Song." The narrator in "Song" meets the prince of love and is captured by him. This "prince of love"



takes the narrator "through his gardens fair,/ Where all his golden pleasures grow" (ll. 7-8). The personification of love is fairly carefree, playful, and a bit selfish. Sensuality is implied, but never specifically stated. The personification of love in Ginsberg's poem is more serious and less selfish. And sensuality is expressed plainly through sexuality. The theme of homosexual love works to bring forth the central question of the naturalness of physical love between men. "Love" answers the question with, "I myself am not queer" (l. 41), meaning both that Love is not homosexual (an apparent contradiction of fact), nor is Love unnatural. The voice of Love says that "this is straight hearts' delight" (l. 48), thus putting all physical love within the same realm of "rightness." The final lines spoken by Love, "Hold me close and receive/ All the love I can give" (ll. 50-51), is a calling for all men (and women) to love one another.

Some lines in "Love Replied" show playfulness on the part of Ginsberg with language and structure. For example, when Love says to the narrator, "I am here to serve/ You what you deserve/ All that you wish" (ll. 3-5), notice that without punctuation the line can be read several ways. The middle line serves as the pivot for these two paraphrasings: "I am here to serve you what you deserve" and "you deserve all that you wish." Another reading might be "I am here to serve you what you deserve, all that you wish." While each of these do not vary greatly in meaning, they are a richness in the flow of words. Another example of Ginsberg's playfulness is in the line "There, love is our bed" (l. 29). Does Ginsberg want us to read this line as if it were written, "There, Love, is our bed" (which is structurally parallel to the following line, line thirty; "There, love lay your head)? Or does he mean for us to read line twenty-nine as something closer to "There. Love is our bed"?

In the course of American literary history, Ginsberg may be seen as a style-setter. In the '60s, Ginsberg was a phenomenon.

He set the pace for protest and anger-oriented poetry for the university "hippies." But whether or not Ginsberg turns out to be the best in the trend he began remains to be seen.

Melodie Provencher

Notes

- 1 Jane Kramer, *Allen Ginsberg in America* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 114.
- 2 Paul Zweig, "A Music of Angels," *The Nation*, March 10, 1969, p. 312.
- 3 William Carlos Williams, "Introduction" to Allen Ginsberg *Empty Mirror* (New York: Totem/Corinth, 1961), p. 5.
- 4 A. R. Ammons, "Ginsberg's New Poems," *Poetry*, 104 (1964): 186.
- 5 Kramer, p. 109.
- 6 Gordon Ball, *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), p. 165.
- 7 Ammons, p. 186.
- 8 David Lehman, "When the Sun Tries to Go On," *Poetry*, 114 (1969): 404.

