



TOWERS

LIV

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Northern Illinois University

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Lucien Stryk Poetry Award

Winner: "Harbor Elegy" by Donald R. Libey

Honorable Mention: "Lovers" by Mary Douglas

Judge: Craig Abbott

J. Hal Connor Fiction Award

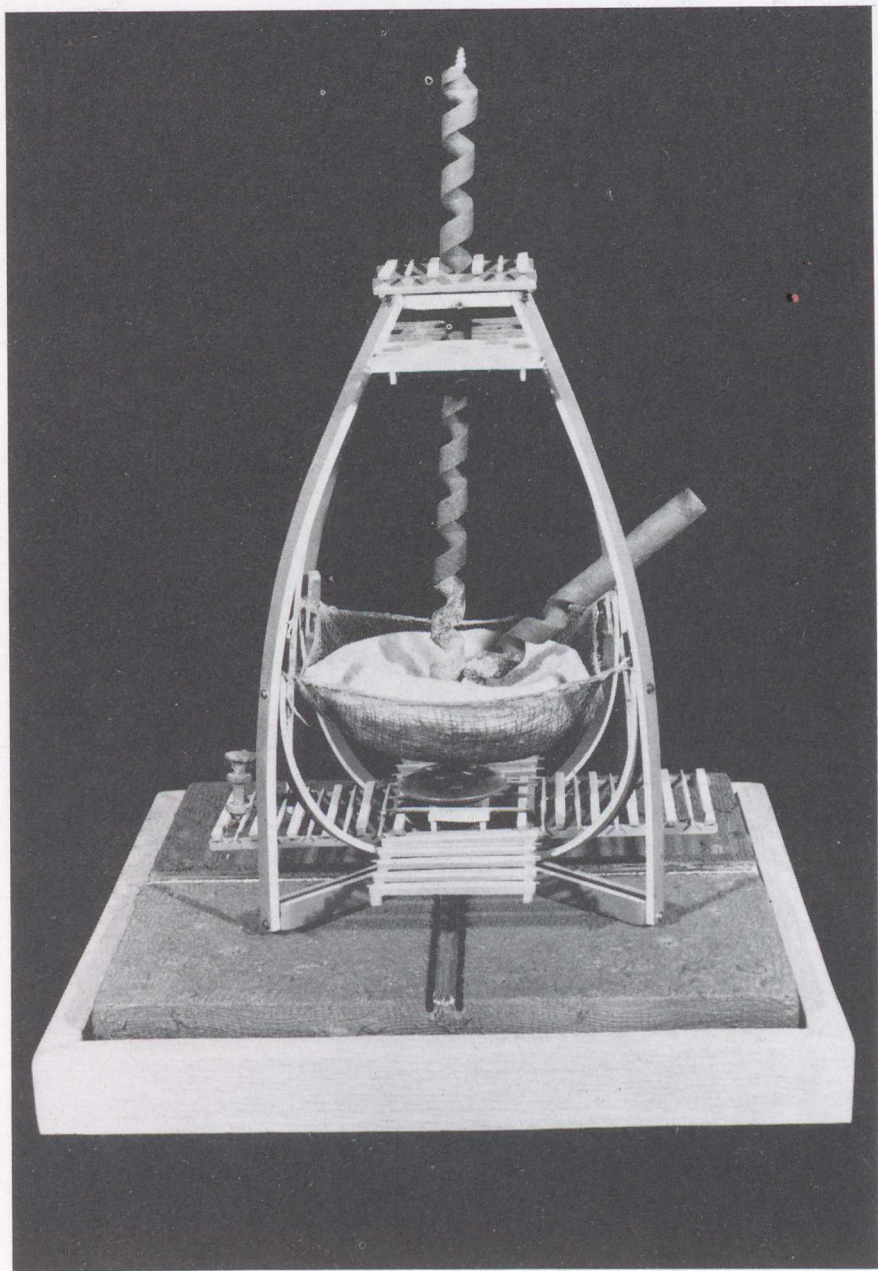
Winner: Buck 'n Wing by Gay Davidson

Judge: Lyle Domina

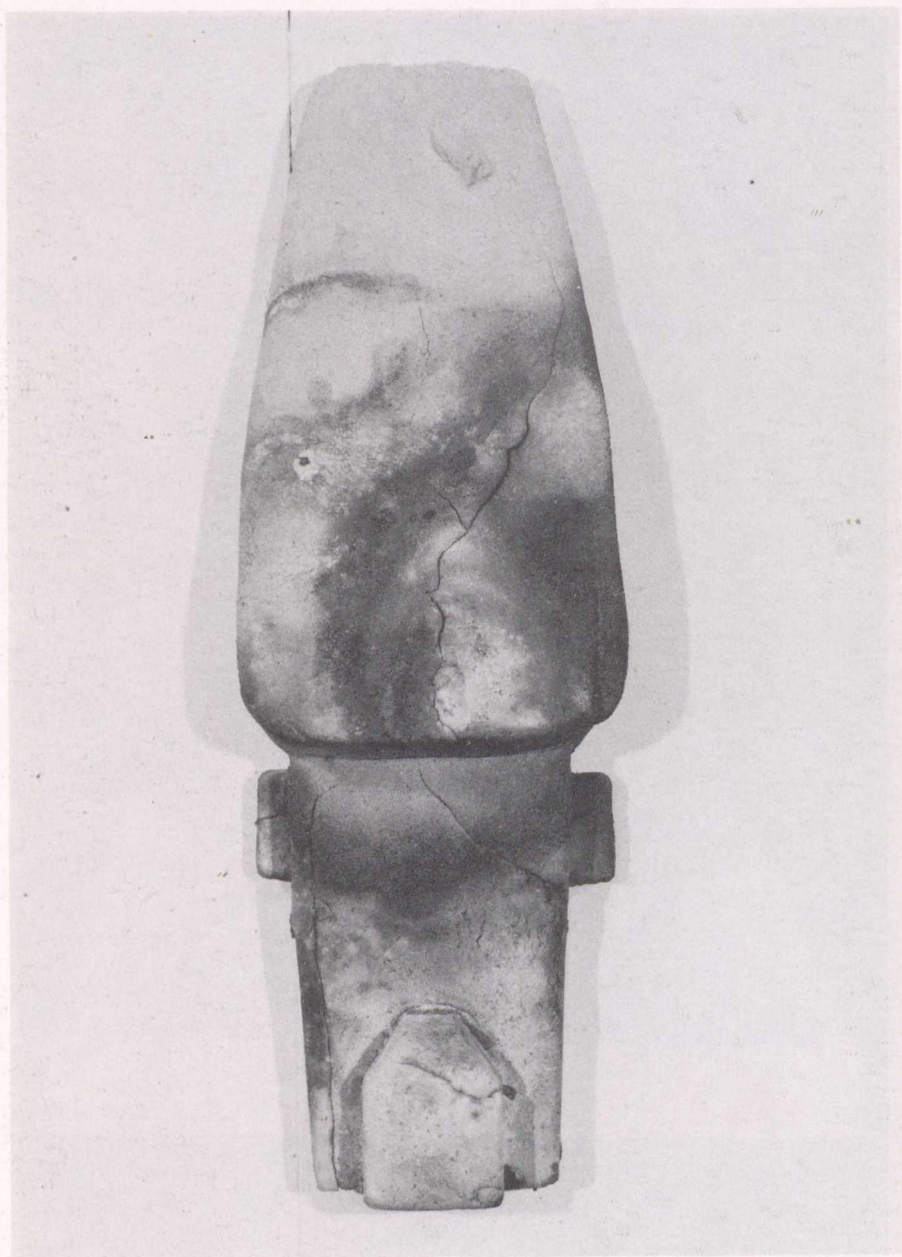
E. Ruth Taylor Award for Critical Writing

Winner: no award

Judge: Rosalie Hewitt



Tom Tomek



Gary Martin

LOVERS

Above the bed
Renoir's lovers forever dancing.
Some nights our shadow joins them.

Mary Douglas

AUTUMN'S FIRST MORNING

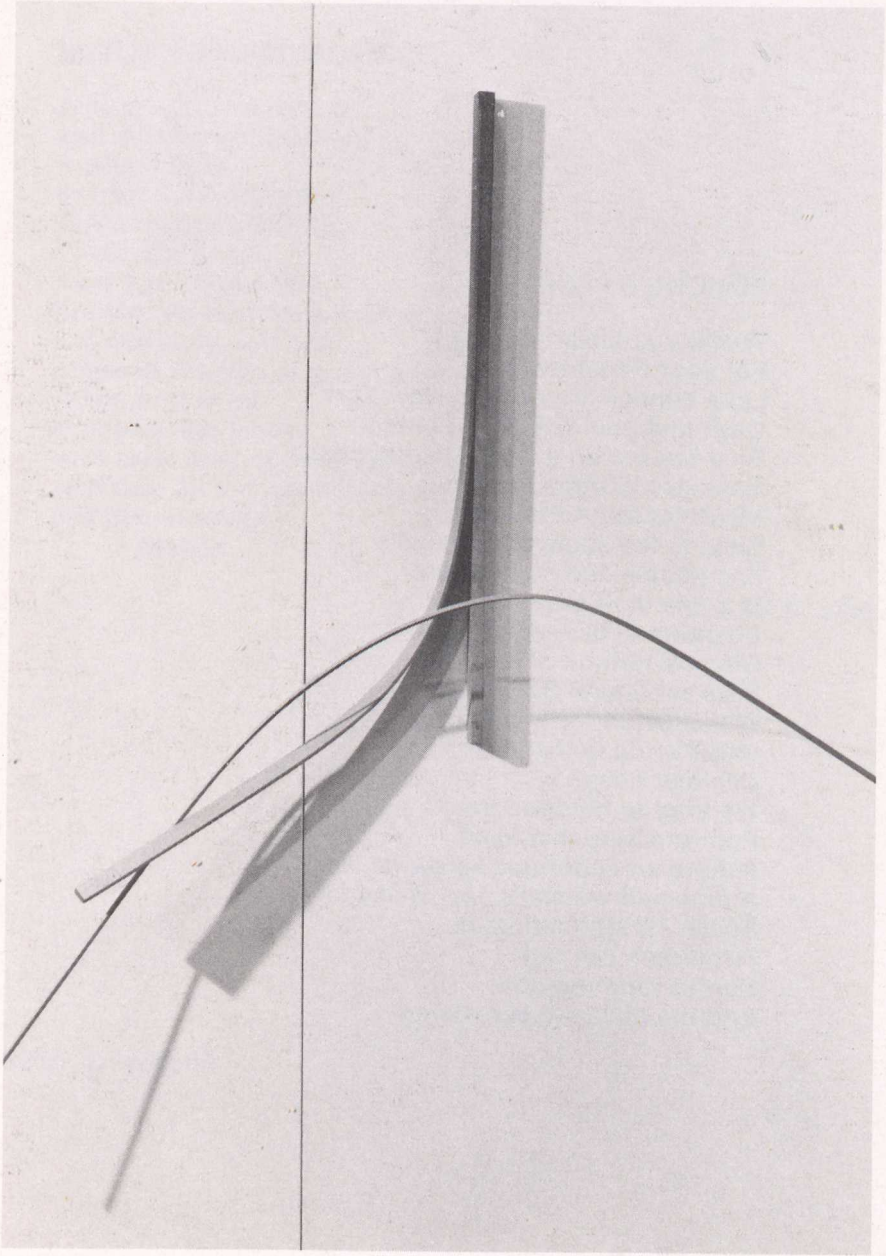
Autumn's first morning
and mists are spiced.
A wheat train
on night-chilled rails
rushes gold to Chicago.
Cider rain drips
from a backyard tree
turning red from yellow days,
and the slow, soft sun
draws to the tips of green things.
Down-drift wind
shadows ripe leaves
with early gray of bare, velvet winter.
And over all this gentle country,
this one morning
flashes.

Donald R. Libey

EDMUND'S PEOPLE

Thank you Lillian Hellman
For your Pentimento
Lake Windemere upstate New York
Dash and you discussing letters
By a bonfire on a dark Atlantic beach
Next stop Europe and the
Mournful fog-horn sound
Calls to the souls of Edmund's
Fog people and somewhere
In some dimension Ham
Prepares to dive into the
Gloomy turmoil of surf to
Save scoundrel Steerforth
Who steered forth with Emily
Into the fog is that the
Demeter I see?
We tried to befriend the
Poor creature that leapt
Ashore an enormous fellow he was!
A drowned woman's soul walks the
Beach tonight and dead
Fishermen call out
But it's morning now
And the gulls are screaming.

Michael G. Arden



Sandra Geiger

BUCK 'N WING
BY GAY DAVIDSON

It must have been in reaction to the nickname one of my students let drop one day—it seems I was being called “Ice Lady” because of my refusal to date the local Romeos or to frequent the watering holes on that long stretch of highway between Superior, Wisconsin, and the next little town—or it might have been my habit of daydreaming as I drove the fifteen picture-postcard miles between the junior college where I taught an afternoon class in Shakespeare and the little lakeside cabin I was learning to call home. By late November, duck season had closed and deer season had opened, and, being an outside, I noticed things that the natives had ceased to observe. I remarked the changes in season as much by these signs as by the weather. A line from *The Winter's Tale* kept tumbling over in my mind: “This place is famous for the creatures of prey that keep upon't.” Perhaps it was the subconscious need to brave full face some of these strange creatures that helped guide my car into the parking lot of the Buck 'N Wing Tap 'N Lounge that night.

Even as I entered the place I was worrying over my students' performances the way you worry a bad tooth that doesn't need immediate attention. My struggle to impart the wisdom of the Bard seemed mainly unrewarded to me then, and the two months I had spent teaching, or trying to teach, in the North Woods seemed already too long. Especially since evening play practice had begun. We had been doing *Hamlet* for two weeks, and as I pulled into the parking lot of “The Buck,” as my students called it, I was still hearing the affected British accents of the sons of lumberjacks (they seemed to have mostly sons; or perhaps daughters were sent to more refined centers to be polished) who refused to believe me when I told them their own American English was better for the Prince's stately soliloquies than that of the Australian comedian they made him sound like. What worried me most, I suppose, was that I, the teacher, was beginning to take on their attitudes. I was beginning to look forward to spring and graduation as much as they were. “Exit, pursued by a bear.”

In fact, I talked to myself and worried a lot in those days, and that long drive home gave me plenty of time. I wondered about my teaching techniques—whether it was really futile to try to bring Eastern Time Zone to Mike Fink and Paul Bunyan, or whether somebody else could have found the link but that I was not that somebody. Sometimes I ticked off the Prince's shopping list of complaints against the universe—as many times as I had heard them, I never could get past “the pangs of despis'd love” back then—and these sometimes got all mixed up with my personal litany of reasons for having exiled myself to this scenic, but forlorn, outpost. All in all, after the first few days of appreciating the scenery, I frequently paid attention to everything but channeling my battered Chevette between the stately, but boring, Norway pines that lord it over that two-lane trickle of a road, and would not have been too surprised if, instead of steering suddenly into the parking lot of the Buck, I had smacked into the building itself.

Still, my obliviousness alone could not have accounted for this rash break in my routine because there still operates, even in cerebral-type ladies, a kind of vestigial animal instinct that warns them away from exclusively-male hangouts like the Buck, especially during deer-hunting season. It was, I had heard, the epitome of the dinky, sawdust-floored country houses throughout that area where the pinnacle of local humor was represented by the inevitable half of a stuffed doe, backside protruding from the wall, under whose fluff of a tail was placed a lighted red Christmas-tree bulb, usually made to flash. Even the more “liberated” of my students had never been foolish enough to recommend that bar. In fact, they seemed to share their fathers' attitude that any female who entered there deserved to get what nobody doubted “she came for.”

But even after all this time, it is hard to admit that the most obvious cause for my having ended up bluffing my way among the campers and pickups that crowd the parking lot of the Buck was that one particular vehicle. Having caught sight of it from the road, I was convinced in an instant that the owner of that light blue Dodge van with the custom sky-light had to be he who I thought I had successfully staked through the heart before fleeing the East. Because of that kind of demonic coincidence that makes a joke of our human rationality, I think I remember that at that moment I was inventorying my personal reasons for having ended up where I was. It ran like this: an unhealthy “attachment” to men. No, that was not accurate. To a man. We (Lear's courtly “we”) must not generalize from one man to all men. But there had been that brief flurry of others and no real difference. Actually, it was to hide from Relationship, that ghost

that rides back and forth between "you" and "me," that diaphanous third party in every pair. Or was it "to find myself?" That glittering cliché was the worst of the lot, but with the scarcity of like-minded souls up there in that cultural black hole where, as my friends back East had warned me, "Men were men and . . ." (finishing the obscenity, which I was beginning to believe), I was driven to find someone I could tolerate inside my own skin.

I had just finished reminding myself, the usual end of the litany, that I was a cultured young woman, not horrible to look at, slim enough for my petite frame, professional, capable, and so on, when I noticed the plates of that Dodge. Still officially an out-of-stater, I was aware of license plates. Throughout the fall I had watched the summer's heterogeneous display of colors provided by the tourists change with the leaves to a dull Wisconsin brown, the brown of deer, the brown of 1979. Had the power of logic and self-preservation been stronger at that moment, I might have noticed that while the plates on this van were out of state, they were not those of the state. I did notice, retrospectively, a moment later; but it was too late. Before I could say "bare bodkin" I was launching my frail bark through the front doors of The Buck 'N Wing.

It must have been a jolly day in the fields judging from the din emanating from the Buck's darker reaches. The bar was striped with the orange jackets of broad-backed men with short-brimmed hunting caps punched onto balding heads. Clots of younger men, some about the age of my students, hunched and sprawled against tables and walls, gesturing, talking even louder than was necessary to clear the high-pitched squalling of the country-western tune on the jukebox. I recognized the tune—"Stand by Your Man." In my progress toward the bar I faltered only once, when I mistook one of these young bucks for the boy I had determined should play Hamlet.

But my legs continued to move, and feeling like, perhaps resembling, Ophelia floating down the stream, I wobbled toward the first slot of relative daylight I could see. The stool was a high one, and the contortions I performed while trying to climb on to it made me feel even more conspicuous than I knew I already was. Like a thumb clamping down over a bottle of fizzing beer, an ear-splitting hush overcame the room. Still enduring the hostile stares of the first men I had passed, I hardly noticed the assistance being given me by something about the size of a catcher's mitt at my elbow. And when what appeared to be a scotch and soda was deposited in front of me by the bartender, I was in no frame of mind to question the source. The drink was at that moment strictly medicinal—like amyl nitrate.

As I rebounded after the first deep gulp (if I remember honestly, the stirstick almost put out my eye), I heard the conversations, mostly bragging and kidding about ten-points and buck-fever, resume. Believing irrationally that the mysterious hand was somehow to be thanked for this also, I shot a skittery smile, which felt more like a grimace and must have looked worse, toward my right, meaning to thank its owner. But I lost my nerve at the critical second and could not get past the hand. Curled and tight as a bologna ring, it had some kind of brand—a tattoo, I guess, but stitched like a wound, running lumpily across the knuckles. With whatever sense it is that lets you know when something is about to fall or a door is going to fly open, I perceived that the man on the end of the hand was tensed for some kind of signal from me before doing something else, but I had barely begun to raise my eyes to chest level (whoever he was, he was big), with no idea what signal to give, when a sound like an engine turning over—a rumbling, choking, faltering sound—began. Nobody else seemed to have been listening to him, and certainly nobody was listening now, so the way he began was apropos of nothing. When the voice, finally wound up, had reached about buzz-saw level, or so it seemed to me, words began to splinter out like woodchips:

"The first thing you notice is how he stinks. Then you're in the big clinch with him and things are happening so fast you don't know which is you and which is him. Except he's the hairiest and the biggest one too. He's all over you and you've got to hang on, but you never have the time to think where. And he's got this leather contraption protecting you, and who knows, maybe him, from the business parts, but the thing looks so flimsy. It might give way any time, and . . ."

The man pivoted part-way around on the barstool and looked down at me, almost magically causing me to look up at him, and said in a quieter voice, like an idling saw, "But you're a young thing and don't remember the beginning."

Beginning of *what*? I remembered thinking to myself. If he meant the beginning of the wild story he was gifting me with, he was surely right. That "young thing" got to me too. Despite the craggy face, the ruff of beard, and a little silver in the black of his head, I put him at about the mid-thirties. He had put me somehow in the position of wanting to

protest that I also had just seen thirty roll by (usually I worried the opposite way) and I bristled.

Also, the familiarity in his voice, not to mention the crazy content, put me on guard. But another drink appeared before me and the bartender had come and gone before I was aware of his having been called. I decided to try to discover this man's technique. It could be a saving game, like counting blackbirds on a long drive. I was in no danger of falling asleep, but I craved the presence of something from my own world. Lear, there, to my right, had started raving again, and in light of the recent round of drinks (he had simply tossed his shot of slimy-looking liquid back and down), I felt obliged to listen.

"... well, the way I imagine it, it would be like the beginning of everything—sometimes I think I can imagine the beginning of the earth. Everything is dark and smoking and stinking. Fireworks start going off as things crack—and believe me, woman, things do crack. People did not evolve from anything—they were just one part of the spin-out and flame-up when the First Mind, the Head Honcho, when, I saw, the Creator went nuts and exploded and all things—little lacy ferns and mosquitoes and dogs and rocks so perfect you'd swear they couldn't have come from anything as crazy as the Creator—and bears and small women and big drunks—and every blue-blooded sportsman in this tavern—they all flew off in all directions and the bigger rocks got to be self-important and believed they were planets. And so they were because another thing, woman, people didn't need any Abe Lincoln or Thomas Washington or even God to tell them back then that all things were, hell *are*, equally everything. Equally alive and dead, at all times, you see, and they are just exactly because they believe they are . . ."

While he tossed back another shot, causing this lull after the storm of words, I watched the tiny, fat-footed Budweiser horses on the bar clock chase themselves round and round. I had been right about dubbing him Lear. Yet I didn't feel as leery of Lear as a single, vulnerable woman probably should have when faced with a drunken, raving giant who looked as if he had just staggered out of a hurricane on the heath. Although instinct and training usually tell me to move on when confronted with this type of man, I was feeling a miraculous thing. That is, I was simply feeling, for once not subjecting his presence and story to the analysis machine which generally runs full steam in my head. There was something compelling about this guy. Something apart from looks, God knows, for he was definitely on the brute side on that score. His theology, for instance, had been warped and illogical, but not half bad. It made a kind of weird sense to me anyhow. I listened much more intently than I appeared to, for, glancing back at the Budweiser clock, I saw that only a minute had elapsed while all this went through my head, but that hours had passed while he told the story, and that most of the men had left the bar, trooping home to supper, I guessed. Lear's voice had diminished accordingly, but still seemed pent-up and bursting at the same time.

"So at that minute you forget how he stinks and sweats from being on display up there under those lights hour after hour while he takes on Polacks and Eyetalians from Milwaukee—big city roughnecks and nobodies and troublemakers like me—and big dumb Swedes from the farm—healthy, milk-fed pinky bruisers who can stack a wall of hay without even breathing hard—and he beats them hour after hour. The wrestling exhibition is the last big deal of every night at the fair, and these fairs go on all across the country all summer and fall. But anyhow, all these guys, you see, are a part of the Big Guy or whatever they call that psycho, but great and kind psycho who lost it on the curve of the Universe in your neck of the woods. And you know he's going to beat you too, either by tossing you immediately to the mat and stomping you like a peanut shell or by playing with you and wearing you down until you just about beg for him to stomp you. And they're all called Victory because eventually they are. Or maybe there's no great number of Victors. And what are you called?"

It was a few seconds before I realized that this "you" was not the general "you" of the story, but rather *me*, Victoria, the only female in this rapidly clearing bar on what might have been the last day of hunting season for awhile and was being surveyed, along with Lear, by the bartender who seemed to be making lots of work to do nearby. Not that I hadn't been following Lear's story; I heard it the way you can't help hearing someone, even if you're in a big city and don't know anybody, carrying on in an adjacent room; but I was thinking fast because even I, the lover of symbolism, could not quite stand the outrageous cosmic irony of my name given the big deal he had made about "Victor." Having noticed that at least some of Lear's teeth were false, I said that I called myself Denise.

If he had heard my response, nothing registered, for his story compelled him so

mightily that he began again:

"And they'd come at him like albino Angus bulls, steaming like freights and built like battleships, whitey-blond hair or black bristly butches slicked back with water or butch wax so their heads looked like pink and black and white torpedoes, and they'd charge him, trying to get ahold of his neck or his shoulders or whatever. Or maybe they'd make like to bulldog him and think they could throw him like a calf. But it didn't matter at all what *they* thought they'd do because Victor knew they wasn't going to do nothing at all, and then the crowd might just as well set back and listen and not even bother to look, although looking is what you paid your money for, and besides that center ring is just about all you can get a good eyehold on because it's so friggin' (beg pardon, Miss) dark everywhere else, but the next thing you hear, and it's usually right away, is a big splat like a bug on a windshield and it's black fur settin' on top of white hair and pink skin like some little ladies' room rug protecting that grimy mat."

Lear went for his beer to chase the shot he had dispatched, but instead the huge hand wavered and with his thumb he gently rubbed the perspiration from the side of the bottle as he continued in a quieter voice:

"Then the ref will call the time and grab Victor's arm and hold it up as high as the little man can reach—they always pick these little guys, the kind that like to torment cats in their spare time, for the refs, like little Canadian Frenchies probably—maybe to show off Victor's size like they do in those trick pictures of which guy is the tallest. So old Victor knows he's gone and won again, so he lets this guy hold his arm up as long as he wants while some little boys, scared to death but loving every minute of it, sort of hose or pull the loser out of the ring. And all the time Victor's standing there swinging or swaying his big head from side to side—they say they do that because they can't see good, but to me he always looked like he was either crying or shaking his head and muttering 'tut tut' like he was almost sorry he had to be so ornery and hard on these guys. But he's also always ready for the next man, who's generally some farm hand who is put up to it by his buddies, if you can call them that, and goes up on a bet. And it don't matter to him at all what your occupation or religion is. He don't care whether you're a Jew or a Baptist or a Watusi. He forearm you sometimes or swipes you with a haymaker and it's exactly like getting caught in the gut by a four-by-four. Your wind is knocked out of you and there ain't a damn thing you can do but set on your butt—you try to keep settin' up for the sake of your pride—listenin' to your so-called friends cuttin' up out there, hollerin' and laughin' and already figurin' how much Him Boom they can buy with your money. And you wait for some kid to come and hand you back to them out of the ring, and maybe you're still mobile, but it's all you can do to get up and you've got to smile while you eat crow pie, all the while thinking you'd rather die. But you also come to love this guy. Don't get me wrong, Victoria. I'm straight arrow and I'm sure if some of those wrestlers heard me talking like this they'd cream me, but you just do."

I'm sure I must have almost leaped off the barstool when he said my name. For the last half hour or so I had shifted my gaze from the Budweiser horses to the little canoe on a lighted column that departs from the same shore hour by hour. I was now working on my fourth scotch and hearing my own name when I thought I had cleverly covered my tracks brought me and Lear both back into focus. Then, mind reeling, I recalled that the bartender had asked for an I.D. while I was recovering from the initial daze of finding myself a doe among the bucks here hours ago. I marvelled again at this Lear—now I had begun to wonder if *he* had any other name besides Lear. He sure didn't miss much.

At that moment, causing me to swing like a pendulum as if attached somewhere to this man, Lear reared back on the barstool and hit his chest with the flat of his right hand, simultaneously swinging his torso toward me, breaking for the first time the weld between his elbow and the bartop. I felt the bartender start and then move closer to me, but Lear relaxed and slumped back, speaking now very quietly:

"I'm a big guy now and I was a hot-shot heavyweight high school wrestler then and I had got a little liquored up and took a few bets from my so-called buddies. (Too many of them were betting on Victor to beat the tar out of *me* for my comfort.) And up I trot to wrestle this old boy, and he wasn't even spry, just big as a goddam train.

"It was getting chilly early that fall, about like now, and the . . . let's see, it must have been '59 or '60 Sports Show Hall was about the warmest place at the fair, even though it is big and drafty. You know, it's too bad about that hall. The Society for Prevention of Cruelty stopped the bear wrestling the very next year after I went up against Victor, and the next time I went back there, after the service, sort of just to stomp around, nobody had told me, but they had tore down the ring and cleaned up the place and there was a car

show, all lit up nice and bright with pretty high school girls in hot pants prancing around right where we used to put our behinds on the line. So anyhow, you could hear the boots of the boys and men shuffling and stomping, trying to keep warm, and it's real dark out there—too dark to see your breath, except for that big old center ring that's just shining like a birthday cake. And up overhead there's these big yellow flood lights and big bugs and flies and such are ping-pong away up there, but none of this really looks real, which might go a long way toward explaining why you get up there to begin with. And it's real noisy with the music from the rides outside and the little kids squalling and squealing, cussing and spitting and drinking and jostling of the boys inside. The smoke is also real thick. And they are just primed to see Victor beat the living stuff out of this fool and the next fool. There might be some ladies out there, but mostly there aren't except for real tough old dogs because women have the sense to stay out of that tent.

"So I look out to one side of the ring and there's this line of big guys who think they're real tough, even though some of them are just fat. Then, up front, ready to climb through the ropes, there's me, a big dumb kid in a little dago-T and a pair of khakis, no shoes or sleeves to hide a weapon in. So I go to step on the bottom rope and all I can look at is my big blue foot while the ref calls out the rules. Then I hear this big rattling groan and I just freeze, half-way in, and I look up and see he's loosening Victor's muzzle a little so the animal snorts and rolls his little blood-shot eyes and looks to me like a monster from a movie. He stands about seven feet tall and has this nipped-up ear. I don't know where they get these guys, but he's no zoo attraction 'cause he's too ugly, and he's no wild animal 'cause he's too lazy . . . except he's sorta been trained to really wrestle. And it's the funniest thing—once you get a lock on this guy—if you get a hand on him at all—it's easy to forget he's not a man because just like any real good wrestler, he's gonna trick you and circle with you if that's your style, and then he's gonna jist power you to the mat. The only difference is that he's bigger and stronger than any man you've ever been up against; and he's not much dumber than some and a heck of a lot smarter than most. And this guy becomes an individual.

"So I jump up there and I grab his head from behind—the muzzle's this big old beat-up leather contraption, and I'm hanging on him—I'm about 275 and wrestling men over that at this time, and not much fat like now, but he's 500, maybe 700—they follow all the rules for real wrestling except for the weight class; they don't give a rat's back end what you weigh if you've got the money and the stupidity to get up there—and I'm hanging on him and feeling lucky to even get as far as a clinch with this guy when all at once he stands way up, all the way, and I know right then I don't even have a prayer because I thought he was standing up before. But I don't have a chance in hell if I don't hang on—hell, the fall alone would kill me—so I hang on and he's dangling me and swaying like a tree about to crash. And I'm like a little bitty leaf on that tree and jist shakin' when all of a sudden I start to cuss in this little schoolboy cracky-voice way, 'cause it's either that or wet my skivvies. And I'm not even cussin' hard, just yelling some kind of trash to save my pride and show what a man I am because I realize that my time with him is ticking away and I can't have more than a minute left to do my damage when all of a sudden the muzzle begins to give way, and all I can think is, 'This guy ought to go to the nationals next year!' and I know, no matter how I wiggle or squirm, I'm not going to even faze this old boy when, like God talking, I hear a whistle and it gets real quiet, and the ref, this little skinny rat-like dude, calls out real loud and serious, 'Don't cuss the bear.' Here I thought I was finally going to get saved and he says, 'Don't cuss the bear!' And I think they must have stopped the clock during that too because about a year had passed while I hung there, helpless, feeling that slippery (from the sweat of both of us) leather giving way under my hand and imagining that Victor, whether he wanted to or not, but just to save face like I would, would feel obliged to take about half my arm off before he squashed me.

"But what was really weird was that I thought he had a right to. The man was a better wrestler than me, pure and simple. But feeling like I still got to put on a little show for the boys out there, and still shakin' to beat sixty, I roll out another string of curses, some of which insulted the old boy's mother, sister, father, whatever, but that just causes the boys out there to laugh louder. Now, I know that in about two seconds this muzzle's going to give way and I'm going to be one dead seventeen-year-old blasphemer. But to switch holds, even if I could, would be like swinging across those big steel bridge crossbars and going for one that's way too far away from you, so I yell out and it gets real quiet when I do, 'What the f--- do I call this guy?' (Excuse me, ma'am, but that's what I said).

"And right then the buzzer sounds, and the bear, like he knows something, lets me

down like a merry-go-round, or like handing your grandmother out of a car, very gentle, and I see I got the muzzle in my hand, but he's smiling away up there and he's got his paw resting real light on the top of my head like we're posing for a family picture or something, and I realize again how much he stinks, but that I smell just like him, and Victoria . . ."

The man swung full face to me and took both my hands and held them in his at about heart level. The bartender, who had hovered covertly listening to about the last half of the story, looked concerned. He started to reach over and separate Lear from me when my hands were suddenly released and Lear slouched back into his previous crouch and said, very quietly.

"... and to this day I couldn't tell you, and I've done some thinking on this—during the war . . . while I was a 'jack in the North . . . on various construction sites . . . sometimes even in bed, alone or not, if you'll pardon the expression—whether it was the ref, which it probably was, or that big hairy animal, who told me in this quiet voice, 'You call him Victor. They're all called Victor.'"

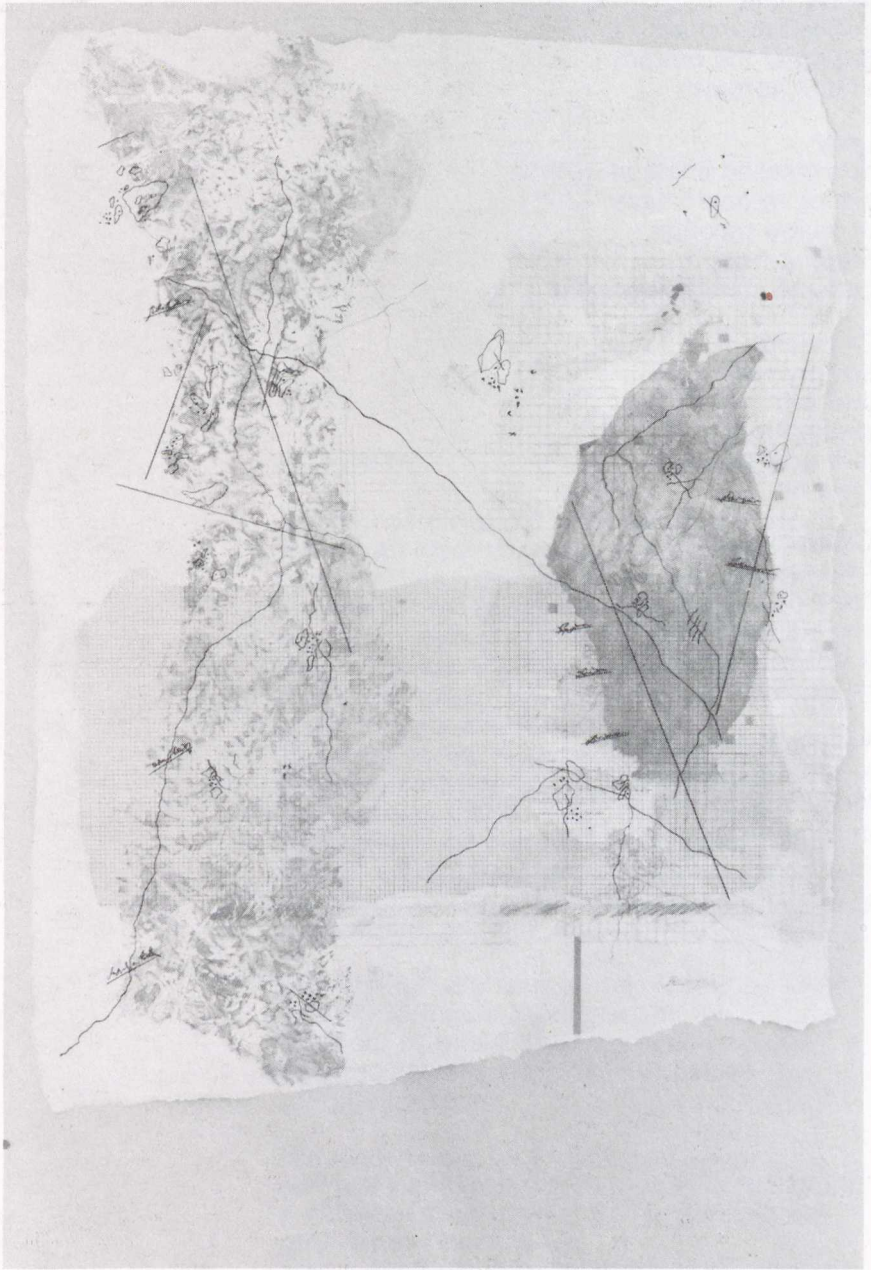
Lear smacked the bar suddenly and laughed. The sounds were very similar. Again, the bartender jumped and moved toward us, but Lear stood suddenly. He towered like a Norway pine.

"Victoria," he said "I don't know you at all and I've been running off at the mouth here for the greater part of eternity . . ."

I made some socially-acceptable gratuitous gesture and murmured some demurring response.

"... and I don't know what a lady like you is doing up here at all and especially here in this dive, but I do know you can't hide from Victor because he's everywhere.

While he spoke, we both shrugged into our coats. Despite the bit of staggering I did, I felt somehow bigger than when I came in, and more dignified. Outside, I noticed that my car and a pickup were the only vehicles left in the lot. (The bartender lived there.) As we plunged out of the light and into the snow and dark of our separate paths, I had first the unreasonable notion that I would see Victor lounging somewhere out there, and then the more unreasonable idea of following Lear, but a sudden gust of snow obliterated the tracks we had just made and I pushed on toward my car. Despite the chill, there was a certain thawing about the heart. Had I not been ashamed of myself, I might have called, "Good night, sweet prince." But I didn't.



Denise Bellezzo

ECLIPSE

Waking
Rising in
heavy dark
coffee ground air
Sitting at the bottom
of the morning

Lady
in a cracked linoleum diner
sits in an ochre haze
of yellow nicotine
Sipping from
caffeine tanned porcelain

Crushing
smeary red
into ash
she motions
to a gray apron
for a fill

Cigarette pack
held like the
hand of a friend
she stares through
a frozen window
to an alley

Yellowed magazines
in too full garbage cans
flickering pictures and memories
in a winter gust

Tom Ryan

IN CORTEZ

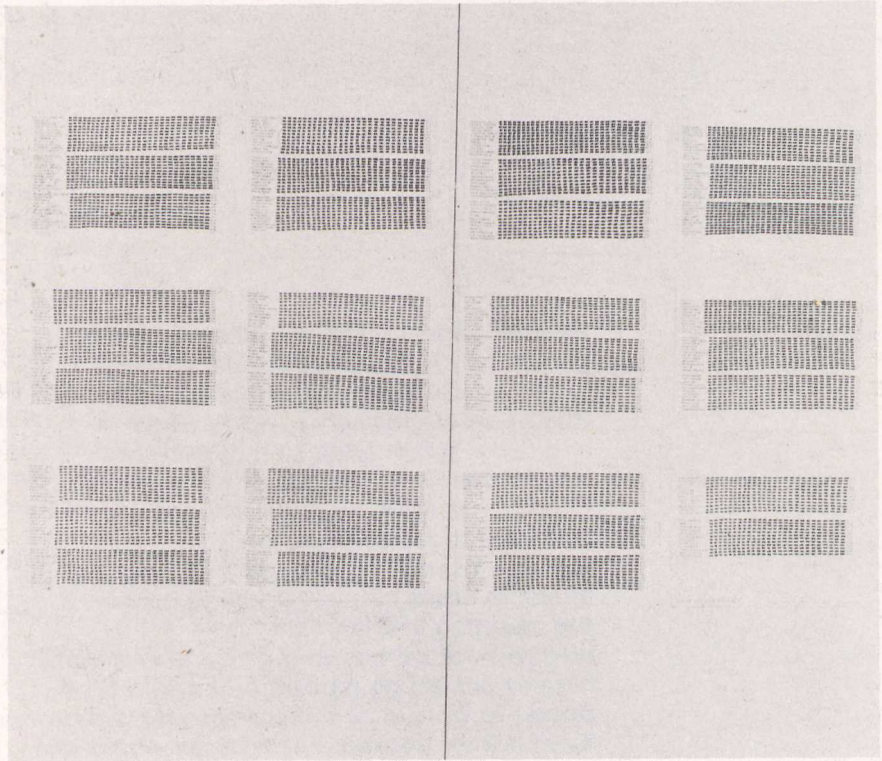
Another alkalai night in Cortez, Colorado.
And to an idealist traveler it is so hard
to accept the dropping of cheekbones.
Road-side stands selling silver rings
and cedar beads were to be expected.
Yet, somehow, a glimpse of wool-bound
braids or doeskin leggings did not
seem too much to hope for.
But these same, rigamorted in glass
museum cases can in no way appease
the yearning inside.

And rows of salmon and green government
houses cannot be packed on bare backed
ponies in pursuit of buffalo-sprouting pastures,
Even if their pocked, chalk bones could rise.

The barbed wire warp of this loom, the West,
is tautly strung in readiness for
the woof of wheat rows and feed troughs,
not smudges from soft leather bellies
of trailing travois.

But now, sitting on the edge of an iron
bed in a ninth floor room of the Cortez Hotel,
a delver in the pages of Remington's West
gets set to shake hands
with a good five-cent cigar wooden
Indian.

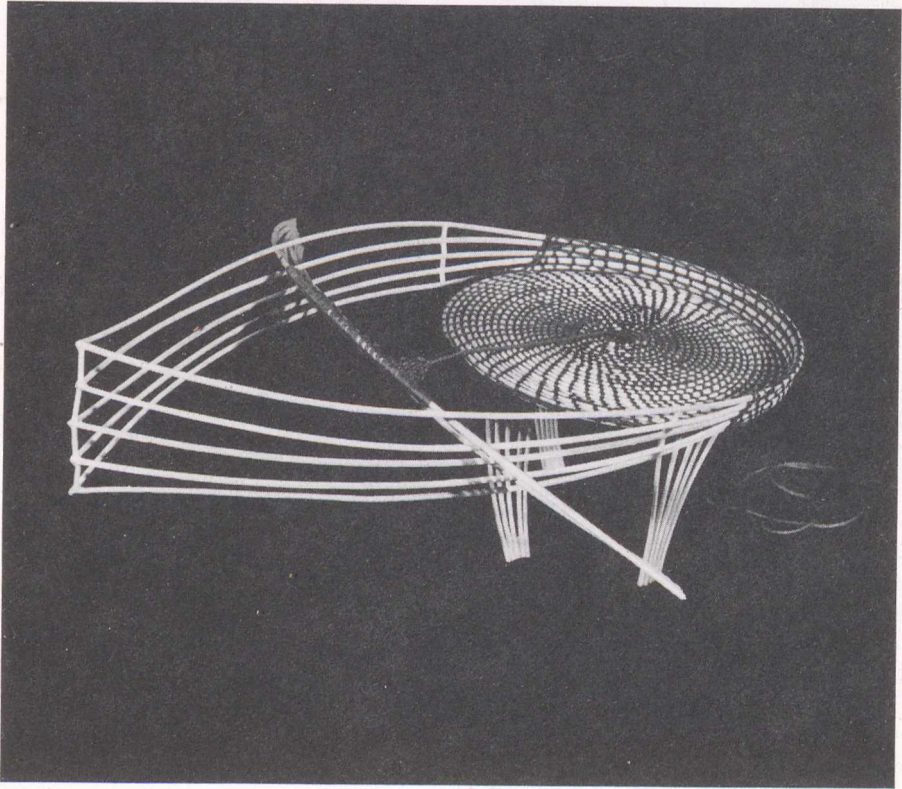
Tricia McNellis



RENOIR, AUGUSTE
BOCCIONI, UMBERTO
SULLIVAN, LODIS
KLEIN, YVES
KANDINSKY, WASSILY
VALADON, SUSAN

DELVEAU, PAUL
MÜNTER, GABRIELLE
FIORENTINO, IL ROSSO
TWORKOV, JACK
SISLEY, ALFRED
SIGNORELLI, LUCA
SCHMIDT-ROTTLUFF, KARL
TATLIN, VLADIMIR
ANTONELLO DA MESSINA
BONNARD, PIERRE
MAGRITTE, RENE
ALBERS, JOSEF

CARPEAU, JEAN-BAPTISTE
HONTHORST, GERARD VON
WHISTLER, JAMES M.
BRAMANTE, DONATO
BALLA, GIACOMO
MACDONALD-WRIGHT, STANTON
LAURENCIN, MARIE
COROT, CAMILLE
FRANCIS, SAM
OLDENBURG, CLAU
VAN DER WEYDEN, ROGIER
EVERGOOD, PHILIP



Sandra Sadler

VISIONS OF CHICAGO IN
CONTEMPORARY BLACK LITERATURE
BY DENNIS LYNCH

If you knew Chicago you'd talk about it too.

*If you haven't been in Chicago, you haven't
been in the United States.*

-Willard Motley

Since World War II black literature has become increasingly urban oriented; one may be hard pressed to find contemporary equivalents of *Cane* or *Banana Bottom* in their emphasis on the rural aspects of life. The city is now the primary center of black life, and it is not surprising that it is in the big city where black writers often set their works. As novelist Clarence Major remarks,

Black writers today are more urban than white writers. All the white writers have moved to the country and the upsurge of black literature, its vitality, may have resulted in no small measure from this recent development, not to mention all the other more obvious causes. I mean, you have to live in a great city in order to feel the pulse of the time and if you don't feel it the energy of it won't be present in your work. In the earth it is at the point of the most intense pressure that the diamond is created.¹

A look at the views of black writers over the last thirty years of just one major city—Chicago—may not only give insights into the urban visions of a diverse group of novelists, but may also indicate where black literature has been and where it is going.

Willard Motley's three large novels of Chicago—*Knock on Any Door* (1947), *We Fished All Night* (1951), and *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (1958)—are firmly grounded in the naturalistic tradition. At Motley's best his writing about Chicago is as vigorous and forceful as any found in Dreiser or Farrell; yet at its worst Motley's style suffers from some of the same failings of his naturalistic forebearers—an awkwardness of phrasing, inappropriate diction, and sloppy syntax. But blemished as it is, Motley's style in *Knock on Any Door* is still oddly appealing. Like the outfit of a skid row bum—a jacket too small, pants too large—Motley's work often seems hopelessly ludicrous; yet we can never really laugh at it. Instead, the style is curiously fitting for Chicago; like that city it is often lumbering, excessive, and crass, but it is also always human and ultimately compelling. Motley is Chicago's Rude Bard, his prose a melting pot containing everything from crude colloquialisms to would-be poetry. The mixture in this pot is never an even one; it is often harsh and odiferous. Yet it is like the city it portrays.

"The city is the world in microcosm,"² a conglomeration of all nations and peoples, writes Motley. When young Nick Romano of *Knock on Any Door* is sent from Colorado to Chicago, ironically to get "away from your bad influences" (83), he is initially happy. "This was all right! This was new and exciting. It wasn't smalltown. Things happened here" (88). However, Nick's first day on Maxwell Street is enough to change his mind while it turns his stomach. He sees beggars, blind men, and bums pass in a parade of depravity; he then witnesses an automobile run over a puppy and notes the unconcerned attitude of the city's people. This image of the dog's death, like the fight between the lobster and the squid which the young Frank Cowperwood observes in the opening pages of Dreiser's *The Financier*, will haunt Nick and will become a symbol of the coldly destructive power of the city; for this minor accident is merely a prelude to Chicago's symphony of violence. That night Nick has a vision: "In the street in the dark ahead of Nick were the reform school grounds. Again he was staring through the little diamonds of its tall wire fence" (97). The literal reform school of Colorado has been traded for the metaphorical prison of Chicago; and, as in Clarence Major's *No*, this psychological and sociological prison is a virtually inescapable one.

The only respites from the city's torment are provided by infrequent trips to Wisconsin or the forest preserves for fishing trips or idyllic lovemaking. It is on one such trip that Nick spends "the best day of my life" (260). Yet there is just one real escape from the city's squalor: only through the murder of a policeman will Nick win his passport to freedom, a seat in the electric chair. He fulfills his motto, "Live fast, die young, and have a

goodlooking corpse!" (163). But as his lawyer claims, Nick's crime is society's:

We might say Nick is guilty—he is guilty of having been reared in desperate poverty in the slums of a big city. He is guilty of having the wrong environment and wrong companions. He is guilty of the poolrooms and taverns whose doors were open to him from the time he was fifteen . . . (458).

We "leave" *Knock on Any Door*, like Nick, without "illusions." We see

Beyond the pile of factories, below the slowly spiraling smoke—shacks, tenement buildings, crumbling little slum houses, Nick's neighborhood. Ugly, vile, vicious. River, shamed, creeping away from Nick's neighborhood. Look around. A Nick in every block . . . in every third house. Furniture set out on the street . . . gas turned off . . . electric bill overdue . . . politician buying notes . . . police taking bribes . . . beating in heads, making the law . . . greatest percentage of relief, prostitution, unwed mothers, criminality, syphilis, juvenile delinquency, poverty . . . right here, in this pockmark, this hollow, this district . . . man with a gun, boy with a gun (474).

"The city doesn't change" (9), writes Motley, and neither does his view of it change in *We Fished All Night* and *Let No Man Write My Epitaph*, two notoriously poor novels. In the latter work, for instance, the recurring image of the town is that of "a blue-black beast in the night."³ It claws and gashes the people of the novel. There is "no cesspool so deep" as North Clark Street and "no night so dark" (181). "Chicago has a painted face and dirty underwear," and "The dead dreams of three million people walk the streets" (185). In Chicago "The living go on living. They are the ones who suffer" (287). Motley's urban vision, then, is one of virtually unmitigated bleakness; it pictures a world in which Nick could have remarked, as a character in Chicagoan Odie Hawkins' *Ghetto Sketches* (1972) does, "life is a cold-blooded game."⁴ A contemporary white counterpart to Motley's work is William Brashler's *City Dogs* (1976); both works are filled with the despair of the defeated urban masses. Studs Lonigan or Frank Cowperwood would feel at home in either work.

Though the two men cared little for each other, Richard Wright in his vastly underrated novel *The Outsider* (1953) presents a Chicago similar in several respects to that found in Motley. The protagonist, significantly named Cross, carries the weight of the Four A's: "Alcohol, Abortions, Automobiles, and Alimony."⁵ But Wright is a much subtler writer than Motley; he sounds his points with a soft manipulation of fictional elements rather than with harsh, polemical anvilting. Wright sets the Chicago portion of his novel in winter, a winter of Cross' discontent. (Wright himself first came to Chicago on a cold day in December, 1927, and was disenchanted with the unreality of what he saw.⁶) The frigid world mirrors the coldness of Cross' wife, mistress, and employer.

"You look like an accident going somewhere to happen" (70), his boss tells Cross (in an echo of Bigger's remark in *Native Son*, "I feel like something awful's going to happen to me . . . something I can't help."⁷); and, almost immediately, a freak El crash gives Cross a chance to switch identities with an accident victim and escape his troubles, the rubble of the wreck reflecting the tortuous twistings of his ruined life. He adopts the name of Webb, and this name is also prophetic as he becomes ensnared in a net of murder, a murder as unpremeditated but unavoidable as the initial murders in *Native Son* or *Savage Holiday*. After Cross changes identities, and is observing the church in which a funeral is being held for the man believed to be himself, the aspect of Chicago is bleak and barren, reflecting his own mental state:

He was empty, face to face with a sense of dread more intense than anything he had ever felt before. He was alone. He was not only without friends, their hopes, their fears, and loves to buoy him up, but he was a man tossed back upon himself when the self meant only a hope of hope. The church across the street was still there, but somehow it had changed into a strange pile of white, lonely stone, as bleak and denuded of meaning as he was. And the snowy street, like the church, assumed a dumb, lifeless aspect . . . Nothing made

meaning; his life seemed to have turned into a static dream whose frozen images would remain unchanged throughout eternity (101-2).

As Cross leaves Chicago for good he has a final vision of the city:

The dreary stretches of Chicago passed before his window; it was a dim, dead, dumb, sleeping city wrapped in a dream, a dream born of his frozen impulses. Could he awaken this world from its sleep? He recalled that pile of streaming garbage, the refuse the world had rejected, and he had rejected himself and was bowed, like the heap of garbage, under the weight of endurance and time (117).

Wright's Chicago is not as overtly malevolent as Motley's; the terrors of the city work more insidiously, come upon one more quietly. The final effect, however, is a numbingly overpowering sense of entrapment, doom, and despair; it is the coldness of an existential hell, the barrenness of a room with *huis clos*. And though Cross can leave the city, his problems will follow him to New York with a vengeance; there is no real escape.

Ronald L. Fair's *Hogbutcher* (1867)⁸ is a more optimistic look at the urban dilemma. The plot verges on melodrama: while running home one day, Cornbread, a young basketball star, a paragon of all that is gentle yet manly, is shot down in cold blood by trigger-happy policemen who think the youth is running away from a crime. A riot ensues. Later, witnesses to the shooting are subjected to massive pressure to cover up the incident. Only one person, ten year old Wilford, has the courage to testify to the truth; his simple honesty causes one of the policemen to confess.

As a tale of virtue triumphant, *Hogbutcher's* story is simple enough, and the book has become a staple at many high schools. Just as the work's fable is romantically pat, so is its irony often transparent: in the first paragraph of the book Cornbread makes a basket and someone says to Wilford, "You see that shot? Man, you see that *shot*?" But sandwiched between the narrative sections of the novel are interchapters of social history and commentary; these passages contain the most passionate and political pages of the book. One part reads, "This thing they called Americanism only worked when it was applied to someone else. This lie they call democracy, this insidious myth they call fair play, this vicious thing called the American way of life was not meant for the black man."⁹ *Hogbutcher* pictures a Chicago reigned over by towering factories which belch forth their detritus on the ghetto in the name of wealth and progress; a city of white vigilante committees; of bribed government officials; and, until the victory of Wilford, of a Kafkanian bureaucracy which renders impotent the average man seeking justice. Chicago is a city whose police action in danger situations stands in ironic contrast to the Police Department's own training bulletin which in part reads, "The police officer, by disciplining his emotions, recognizing the rights of all citizens, and conducting himself in the manner his office demands can do much to prevent a tension situation from erupting into a serious disturbance."¹⁰

When Wilford witnesses the violence men inflict upon one another, his reaction is as poignant as any Nick Romano felt:

He was suddenly afraid of grownups—all grownups—now that he had seen what torture they could bring on a man, now that he had seen the butchery from the other side of the counter, black and white carving each other to pieces. He was terrified (27).

Yet Wilford, unlike Nick or Cowperwood, refuses to play the city's game of exploitation, and thus Fair's book is finally not a dirge of dejection but instead a celebration of man's potential. Speaking of the day when blacks will finally master Chicago, the narrator remarks, "the city will be a richer place, it will be a place poets dreamed of, it will be a place with free people, and it will breathe again, it will be alive" (81). The narrator finds the promise of regeneration

among the black youth and those who have not. There is an awakening among the youth that says destroy—destroy the old obsolete systems. There is a vitality that is blossoming among the stone and steel weeds of Chicago. There is, among the young,

among the undeformed, the uncorrupted, the uncompromised, a desire to change the way of life. The young, too, like the system, have an awareness of history, and they don't like the history they know. The young are not afraid of losing their jobs. They look forward to the strength it brings to one. The young are not old enough to be silenced easily and the system will have to resort to harsh measures to contain them. And each cruelty that befalls the ambitious young will strengthen them and reinforce their dreams and they will survive and they will fight and they will destroy the system. Then there will be a new system. Then there will be a new city. And perhaps . . . [Fair's ellipsis](178).

Wilford's act of courage is a clarion call heralding the new city.

"There should be books written about these people right here" (118), a character in *Hogbutcher* remarks, and this book, written at a time when the media was misrepresenting the size, number, and causes of inner city disturbances, is an eloquent and non-apologetic explanation of black rage and disillusionment. Written before such events as the shooting of Fred Hampton made the general white audience aware of official coverups, *Hogbutcher* is also an indictment of government corruption; and written when meeting violence with violence was considered a valid form of protest, Fair's work affirms the power of simple, non-violent righteousness.

Perhaps the most stunning portraits of minority Chicagoans to be found in contemporary literature are contained in Cyrus Colter's remarkable volume of short stories *The Beach Umbrella* (1970). On the back cover of the work Kurt Vonnegut writes, "When I came upon his tales . . . I suddenly found myself having a lovely time. He was telling me all sorts of magical things about life I'd never known before," but a couple of Vonnegut's words have misleading connotations. I cannot imagine anyone having a "lovely time" with these stories, for these are tales of quiet and not so quiet desperation: an alcoholic woman tries unsuccessfully to leave her common-law spouse ("The Rescue"); an old man and his dog slowly die together in a rented room ("Moot"); two young heroin addicts attempt to console one another ("Mary's Convert"). These plots are not so much "magical" as mundane. In marked contrast to Motley, Wright, and Fair, Colter's work contains few acts of violence: he is concerned not with the sensational event but the commonplace one; not with the excessive but with the ordinary.

As in Motley and Wright, however, the picture Colter paints of Chicago and of human life is generally a dismal one. Colter's city is perhaps the most inclusive Chicago of any black writer, containing sketches of not only the poor ("Rapport") of Forty-third Street, but also the black bourgeoisie ("The Lookout") of Hyde Park and "le haute monde noir" ("After the Ball") of the Near Northside. Yet at all levels life is miserable. When her lover asks what is wrong with her, a young housewife replies, "I don't know whether I know myself, or not. Maybe it's that I'm just existing. Not living—just existing."¹¹ A dying businessman remarks, "Most of us are so damned mediocre and insignificant we're forgotten as soon as we're gone" (112). Likewise, a poor pensioner is forced by the death of his dog to reflect on "the futility of all life" (134) and is horror stricken; he soon dies himself of "a kind of ennui" (137). Alcohol is consumed in virtually every story—the poor drink rot-gut whiskey on Forty-eighth Street; the rich sip champagne at the Continental Plaza, with their common purpose being "to dull [their] miserable existence" (126).

Colter's Chicago, like Nelson Algren's, is a city where conversations are all too frequently spoken at cross purposes, where people suffering from a dreadful kind of lonesomeness try to "only connect," but meet instead hostility or indifference. Every major character in *The Beach Umbrella* is old, if not in age then in spirit. They seek release in fantasy. Of a depressed social climber it is written, "She had always loved the snow; it made the world look so unreal and insubstantial. Dreams had a better chance of coming true in a world of unreality." Yet these dreamers find that "sooner or later the snowing always stopped—as it had today—and [they have] nothing to do but to return to earth with a cold and bitter heart" (62). What we find in Colter is not the naturalism of Motley, pointing the finger of blame for tortured lives outward at society, but rather the existentialism of Wright, turning the mirror of awareness inward to oneself. The moments of existential awakening in Colter's work are not as overt as that of Bigger's in *Native Son*, but they are present nonetheless. Colter's characters are finally forced to consider the consequences of their own deeds. However, unfortunately, they do not move from nothingness to being; but instead, because of their own frailties, remain somewhere

in between. Colter's Chicago is a limbo of lost souls.

Colter's stories are stories that need to be told. One character remarks that the death of an old man is

"Moot. M-O-O-T."

"Say what? What do you mean?"

"I never looked it up but it's a legal work meaning it don't matter no more. Or not to worry 'bout it. Or it's water over the dam—it's moot" (138).

Yet this is surely not what Colter believes, as he gives to even his most superficially mundane subjects a tragic dignity. And though the stories themselves are insightful glimpses into the everyday world, we must agree with Lonnie of "An Untold Story" who remarks

"Th' story's only for th' unthinkin'—an' the unfeelin'. That's what Prof said. Hell, *it ain't nuthin'*, that is, compared to some uv th' deeper thangs. You just kinda hold ont a th' story, in the back of your mind, one-hand-like, while you're goin' in deeper—way deeper . . . into th' other . . ." (159).

He later adds, "I said th' story ain't nuthin' . . . nuthin'. It's what's buried way down underneath th' story . . . th' fucked-up world" (161).

Diversity is one measure of a literature's strength; if contemporary white writing can offer such diverse talents as Bellow and Barthleme, then contemporary black literature can offer Baldwin, Reed, and Williams. The varying views of Chicago in black writing range from Jean Toomer's view of the city as a place of lost connections in "Bona and Paul" to Odie Hawkins' comment that the ghetto is an American reservation, a Bantustan. Likewise, the poetry on the urban experience ranges from the range of Lawrence Benford's "The Beginning of a Long Poem on Why I Burned the City" to the nostalgic acceptance of Giovanni's "Nikki-Roasa." The differences in style and theme found in the fiction of Motley, Wright, Fair, and Colter are a testament to the sprawling growth of minority fiction; these four writers defy pigeonholing. For though the settings of their works are alike, in style and theme they are disjunct. Wright's understated protest in *The Outsider* is balanced by Fair's passion; Motley's lumbering and subjective prose is complemented by Colter's lucidity and objectivity. Indeed, stylistically, moving from Motley to Colter is not unlike moving from Dreiser to the early Joyce. The progression from Motley to Colter also reveals perhaps a greater self-reliance on the part of black writers. Motley, though black himself, chose to concentrate his novels on white characters. When asked, "Why do you write about people around West Madison Street rather than about Negroes?" he incredibly replied, "I find the plight of the people on West Madison Street *more* urgent."¹² In Motley, black characters exist only in relationship to white ones, either as victims or foils. In Wright and Fair, on the other hand, one gets an increasing sense that blacks can define and live their own lives. In Colter the transformation is complete; there is not a single major white character in *The Beach Umbrella*, nor does the work need one. Tensions operate not along racial lines but along inter- and intra-personal ones. We are witnessing an increasing tendency in black literature to turn inward, a returning in a backward motion toward the source. At their best, Wright, Fair, and Colter approach having written what Clarence Major would call "whole books, works with a rounded sense of humanity."¹³

NOTES

¹Clarence Major, *The Dark and Feeling: Black American Writers and Their Work* (New York: Third Press, 1974), pp. 18-19.

²Willard Motley, *Knock on Any Door* (1947; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1950), p. 9. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

³Willard Motley, *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (New York: Random, 1958), p. 34. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

⁴Odie Hawkins, *Ghetto Sketches* (Los Angeles: Holloway House, 1972), p. 118.

⁵Richard Wright, *The Outsider* (1953; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 3. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

⁶Major, pp. 62-63.

⁷Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 24.

⁸The work is now being published under the title of *Cornbread, Earl, and Me* to capitalize on the success of the movie of the same name which was based on *Hogbutcher*. The change of the title from book to film is telling, for the movie tones down the bitterness, outrage, and social comment of the novel.

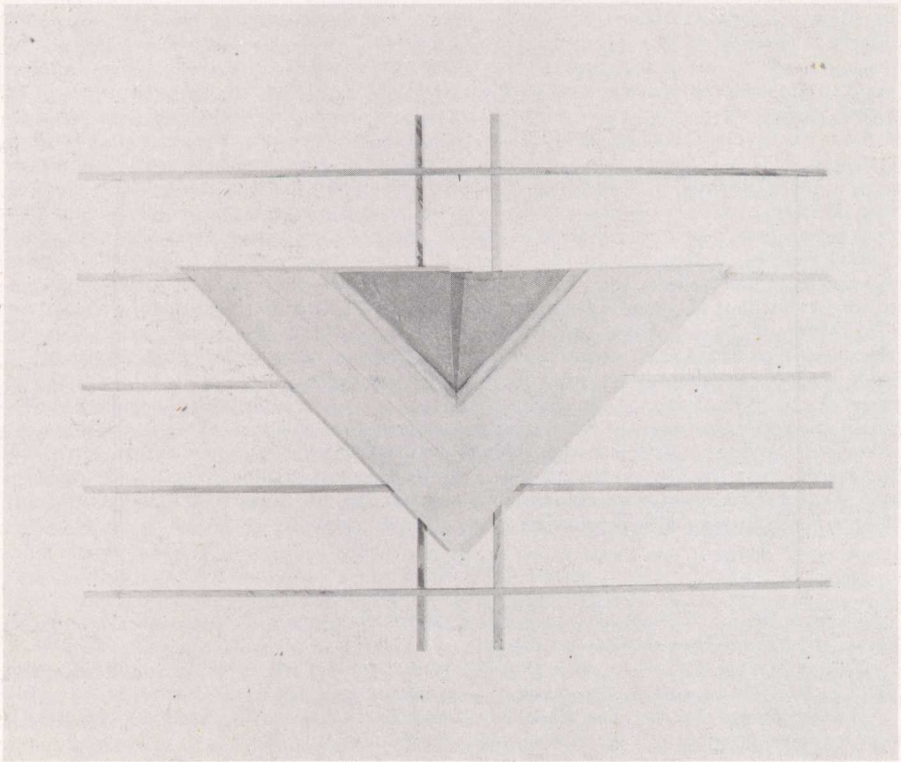
⁹Ronald L. Fair, *Hogbutcher* (1966; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1973), p. 101. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

¹⁰*Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968), p. 326.

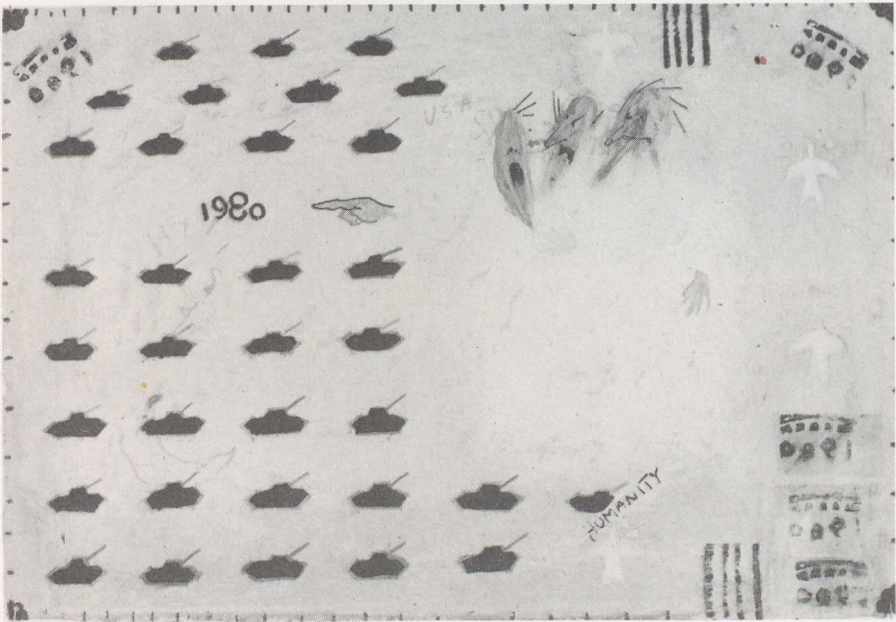
¹¹Cyrus Colter, *The Beach Umbrella* (Chicago: Swallow, 1970), p. 74. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

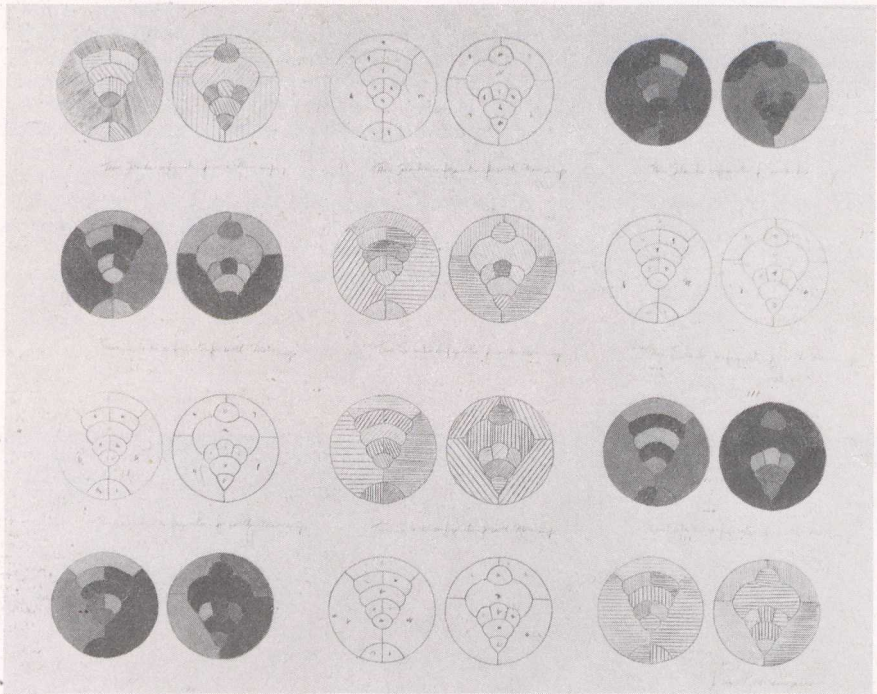
¹²Major, p. 96.

¹³Major, p. 15.



Gabriele Pietsch





HAVE YOU,

children of the flesh
searching for ultimate ecstasies
dreaming of creaming
in warm dark spaces,
heard,
in that silent gush
a child's unformed cry
in softest form fitting latex stifled,
or cared?

Guntis Bisenieks

HARBOR ELEGY

(The Drowning of a Young Lobsterman)

I

The mouth of the harbor
exhaled cold morning mist.
Straight white houses,
set in the curving ridge,
streamed white wood-smoke
over the clinging town
on the frozen edge of the sea.
The first snow-night of Fall
had drifted off the land
and covered the island
in white, morning silence.

A congregation of fishermen
stared into sea-smoke
boiling on the icy tide.

A black-hulled boat
swung on its mooring,
bow to the sea.

II

The evening wind had freshened
and the dry-leaf smell
of the mainland,
flaked with snow,
whirled down from northern forests.
The black-hulled boat circled late
on the fishing ground
running out lines of lobster traps
over the stern,
burying the oak deep in the dark
of the Monhegan Reach.

A solitary man,
tangled in the lines,
pulled into the sea.

An empty boat,
drifted with snow,
circled in the night.

III

With the frosted first light
waiting boats slip their moorings
and ride the swells
out to the middle-ground.
Searching alone,
in the vaporous black-streaked wake,
each man reaches into
the smoking water
and touches his own hand
rising to the surface.

For three hundred years
Vinalhaven's dead have returned
on the Spring current.

A middle-March moon
draws them from the sea
on the morning flood tide.

IV

The sun, lifting from the water,
incises lined faces
staring through the bars
of empty traps
piled on the dock
in unnatural order.
Outlined black
on the circle of white light
filling the empty harbor,
a lobster boat swings,
bow to the sea.

A flash
of ice-blue metal
glints from the stern.

Buried straight in the curving wood,
a knife
slices the sun.

Donald R. Libey

RELATIVE REPRIEVE

Isaac took all nows
and formed a universal
synchronistic singularity.

Albert broke it.

Space

is

time

is flying

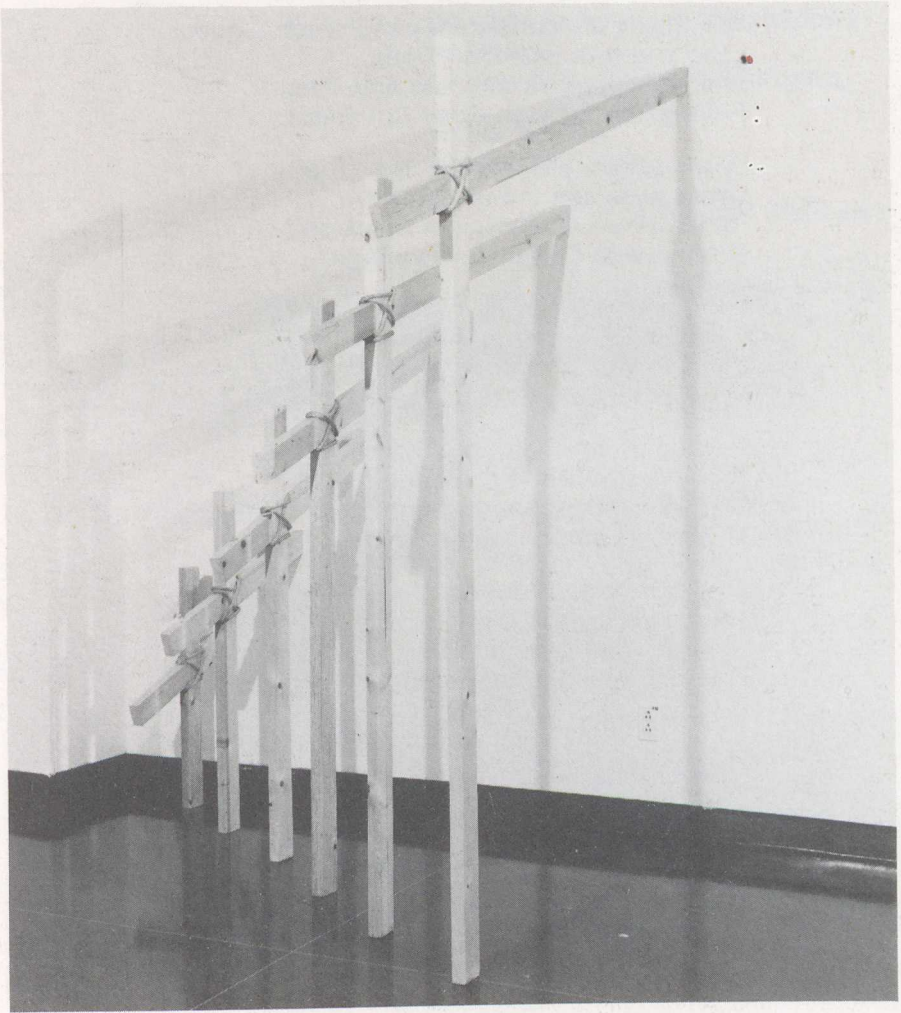
in

pieces

and not a moment
too soon.

Had time been undifferentiated,
on that night in 1921
when out there
where lovers hide their
wishes, one
star larger than a nightmare
blew up-out creating
the vast emptiness
that follows the last particle
of time toward every here and now,
all futures would have ended
in a singular
void.

Guntis Bisenieks



Jane Elizabeth Keniski

YOU WILL COME WITH THE LADY-OF COURSE

Her words the consistency of French Liqueur
Lead you to a dark Oak Door
She keys the lock of Brass and Time
Pulling you through Rose Cut Glass

"Vous aimez le Bordeaux, Bien Sur"
Green eyes slip out of Sable Fur
Hand carved cigarettes of Black and Gold
Offered with Crystal and Vintage

Long nails scratch at a Spiral Staircase
Each step a Different Picture
Framed with Diamonds and Emeralds
Men once Her Lovers

Her room the smell of Lemons and Snow
Blue silk and Ravine's Wings
She takes you flying through Silver and Ivory
Thick smoke and Candle Flames

She leads you through a Sapphire Door-way
Then leaves you Cold in Space
Looking out through Diamonds and Emeralds
Trapped on a Spiral Staircase

Tom Ryan

EPHEMERA

After the rain
the dreamer comes.

Walks through alleys
on stars the rain
washed along his path.

Listens to footsteps behind;
leaves tumbling across asphalt.
Clinking of dog tags;
water dripping from a gutterspout
onto an empty can.

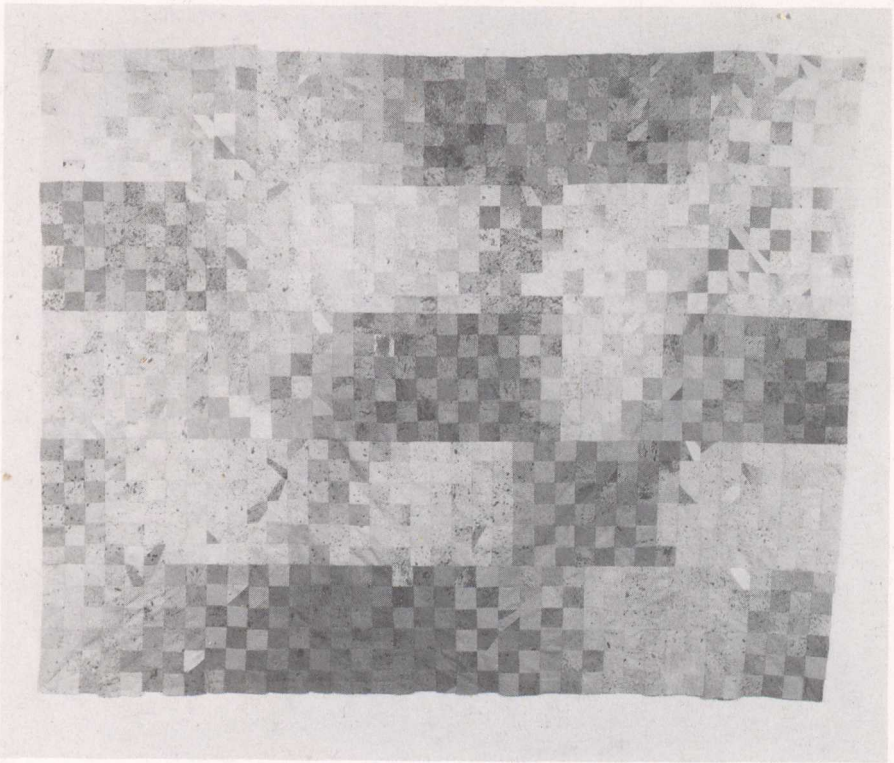
Watches someone in the shadows
reshaped
by branches and backyard lights.

Walks, listens,
and hopes to see . . .

Guntis Bisenieks



Jan Senungetuk



Lee Grzelak

MANITOU

She sits framed by a sloping doorway.
Her twisted body clad in rotting deerskin
Glued to her limbs by the steady rain
That plinks upon her head from gaps in the ceiling
And hops down the knobs of her graying braids
To congregate at the thread-bound ends
And run in tiny rivulets off the tips.
Tips that look like shiny black brushes dipped in white paint.

Round her neck hang dirty strings barren of their rainbow beads
That used to hang in profusion
Like choke cherries weighting down a tree.
Gone, too, are the tufts of feathers that hung in staggered lines
From the breast of her dress.
No more do they gyrate, tips up in the wind.
Only a few broken quills are left.

She sits cross-legged on a musty blanket spread on the dirt floor.
Her feet, drifted with a powdered sugar dust, lie curled at strange
angles from the gradual bending of her damp bones.
Her braids brush her thighs as she stares at her feet
with a toothless grin, amused at her own private freak show.

And the rain lets up, but the drops still fall.
Salt water spots turn a dark maroon on the red blanket
Spread on the dusty floor
Of a yawning-board shack
Of an old Indian woman.

Tricia McNellis

DEATH WISH

Take me high in a balloon,
mix my body in a bottle of
Chivas Regal
and spread me on the sea,
a slurry of ashes and scotch.

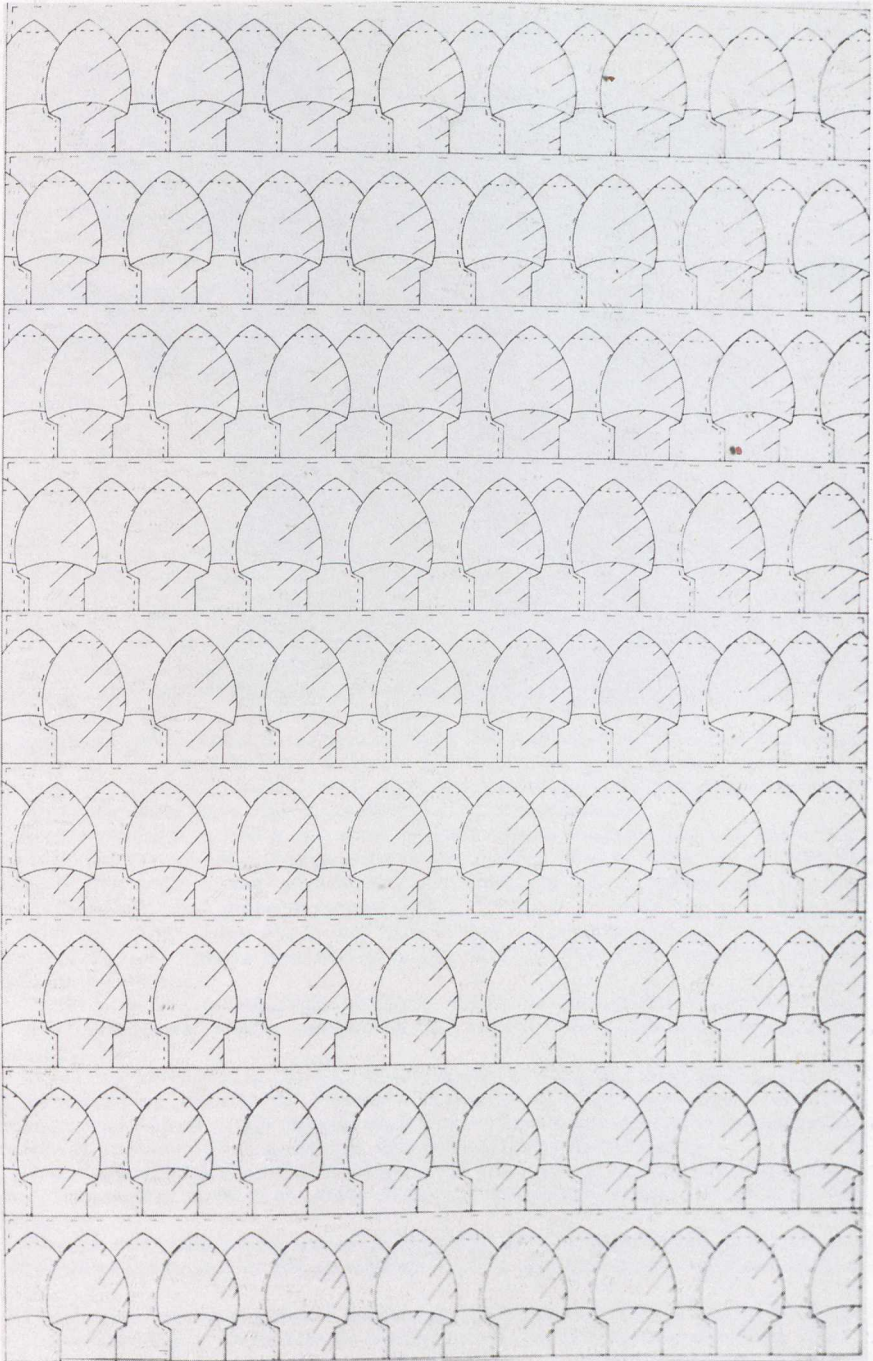
L. B. Gunbis

CELESTIAL HARBINGER

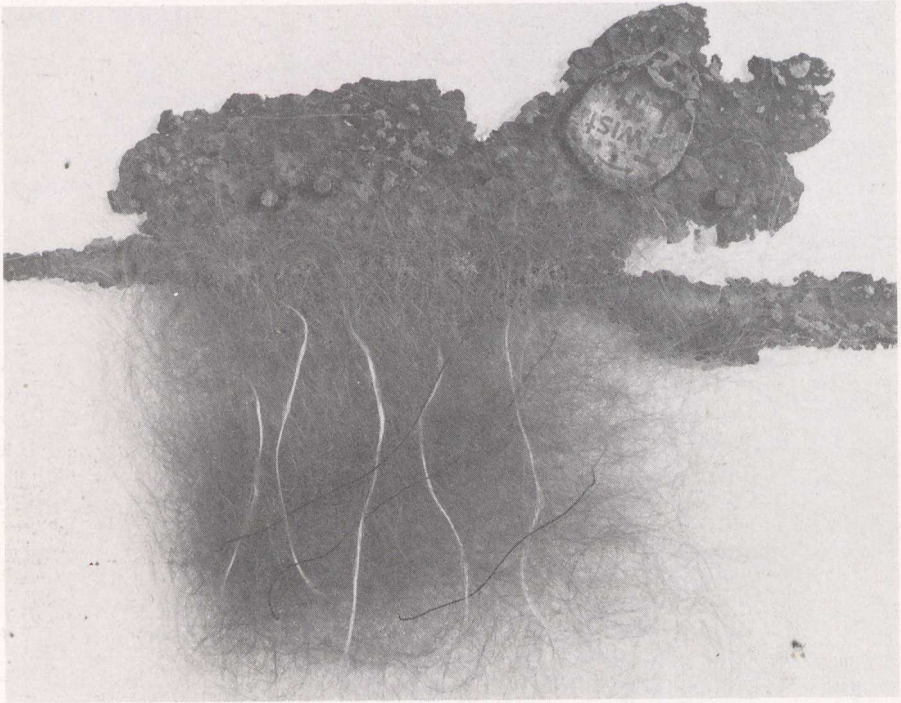
Set up
not unlike those goats
in whose innards augur's
fingers found the future.

Cerburus' barking dragged
me out of a sound sleep
through cold air
to the window where
rising Orion poked
holes in my eyes
cut out my tongue
and
with wind voice
whispered
Summer is over.

Guntis Bisenieks



Christopher Kondrath



Terry Reimer

... THE ORIGINAL SCENE
BY GAYLE HUMPA

"Jesus God," exclaimed Miss E. aloud, ignoring the fact no one else was in the room. For age, you see, gave her the privilege of ignoring what others must be aware of.

"What a classic day this will be! Just look at this room, such brightness and movement, it reminds me of a Monet. It's almost chaotic." Miss E. tugged gently on the cross hanging from the chain around her neck. This was a habit she had developed lately whenever something left a favorable impression on her. A silent hosanna.

"One of his later works, I should think," interjected Miss E. to herself as she reached for her make-up tray. She then stuffed a pillow behind her back making the position more stable.

Indeed, Miss Elizabeth Ashly was quite correct in her observation, for her bed-sitting room, though institutional in color seemed vibrant with the presence of today's mid-morning sun. Miss Ashley or Miss E. as she preferred, for she thought Ms was a pseudotitle for the insecure, looked quite vibrant herself sitting upon her ancient brass bed, primping. She was putting on 'her face' this morning with a certain flair.

"My, I haven't had this shade of red on since Paris." She licked her lips.

"Now perhaps a little dab of rouge. To get rid of this awful pallor." Carefully Miss E. touched each cheek. Then Miss E. gave herself a final once-over in the small mirror on her lap. Yes, she thought to herself, the effort had been worth it.

"That's done," she signed, managing to slide her make-up tray to the end of the bed. Then her eyelids dropped shut and remained so until the mirror rolled onto the floor with a crash, upsetting her inertia.

"Jesus God, my mirror," said Miss E. more aware than her appearance had suggested.

"You see, it cracked. Seven years bad luck? Well not for me, I haven't the time. Now then where are my photos? I must paste them down today. I just must!"

The waiting paraphernalia, on her bed stand, caught hold of her anxious eyes. Carefully she took hold of the collection and slowly she spread them out over her covered legs. Miss E. was now becoming sedulously absorbed in her photos.

Many of the snapshots were stigmatized by their yellow, serrated edges. Their purpose for most people was to be left in a drawer. For they were of a time past and were meant to be forgotten. However, when Miss E. discovered the photos had been packed in the trunk her attitude could have only been described as serendipitous.

Since then Miss E. had spent many of her precious hours sorting and re-sorting her photos. The correct order was essential if the pictures were to serve any purpose at all. Finally they were in the most logical, chronological order; representing the correct movement of time. A museum curator or a mathematician could not have done a more precise job. And so today was the day Miss E. was ready to start pasting down the photos for posterity. As always time was pressing. Miss E. was a bit worried the job would remain unfinished.

"12:30 already. I hope the light holds out, 4:30 is just too early for darkness to arrive."

"I do rather dread winter coming this year. It gets so very cold that everything seems to stop."

Miss E. slowly picked up the first of her treasures. The edges were quite frayed but the picture itself was quite intact. Her nervous fingers stuttered the pasting a bit but it was soon pressed onto the page. Miss E. clutched her hands to conserve their energy but not before giving her cross a quick tug. She then looked into her photo.

One of my childhood parties, a milestone at that time. It was my seventh birthday, a day to remember. Look at the table. Wasn't it just simply grand dressed in its formal attire.

Miss E. was catching the mood of the photo. Her memory began to refocus as she observed each image. She felt so childish but she squinted closely as she recalled each detail.

The flowers from my garden stood bravely in the middle of the table. The fork's silver prongs pointed up at them and the sterling candle holders surrounded them. The fresh cut daisies were fragrant as they quavered in the midst of all the activity. I found their presence reassuring as I sat surrounded by adults.

"Jesus God, how captivating. I sat there frozen to my seat staring at the perspiration developing on my water glass."

At times I tried to catch a glimpse of my reflection in the china but my birthday spaghetti was in the way. So I would look up, nod to the relatives and smile at my flowers.

"Mother always told me when I became seven I would become a young lady. I don't think I ever really had considered what that meant."

There I sat faced with cut glass salt shakers dulled by my finger prints. The fine silverware seemed too big for my inexperienced fingers. My starched napkin sat untouched, for its presence was far too proper for me to handle. So I cut my meat into tiny lady-like pieces and of course remembered to chew with my mouth closed.

"Such growing pains. How could one forget?" Miss E. coughed deeply, then repositioned the shaken album.

That's father's back to the camera. His shoulders were still straight and erect then. The vaseline he used on his smooth black hair made him that much more attractive to me. Father was so tall and strong then.

I would run into his arms every day when he got home from work. He would toss me into the air and catch me every time. Even after seven he would hug me. If mother wasn't looking he would swing me around making my skirt billow out. It felt so wonderful to be close to him. He'd look me straight in the eye and ask me if I had had a good day with mother. My clear eyes would meet his as I giggled yet but sometimes I would stare at his shiny black hair and just nod. I think that was the only time in my life I ever lied to make someone else happy.

Those are mother's hands perched on my shoulders; familial talons. I remember the color of her nail polish, flamingo pink. I hated it. Her face is hiding behind my head. Mother always did that. She would say 'Oh, no, you don't want a picture of me! Elizabeth is so much prettier.' I never was and Mother never let me forget that.

We were never, as many magazine adds promote, best friends. Mother was never violent but sometimes her whispers would ring in my ears for hours. I don't think father ever realized his two favorite girls never got along.

Miss E. chuckled, "It's a shame my age doesn't distort my memory. I haven't forgotten a thing."

That's bibulous Uncle Franklin holding his glass up to me. He smelt of whiskey and every time he spoke smoke would rush out of his mouth from his stubby cigar. I do believe he scared me half to death. Actually he was a harmless 19th century chimney in the 20th century. The poor old soul. He died the very next year. Emphysema was his disease.

Aunt Sadie, his wife, kept giving me puckery red kisses. Their marks on my face matched the spaghetti stains on the white table cloth. She also wore toilet water. I could smell it in between her wrinkles every time she grabbed me. She had a fat man's laugh. Often people would stop laughing once she started.

Until that day of the celebration I don't think I ever noticed they were real people or that I would grow old. But I did promise myself I would never be like them. It was after that when I began to read with such a passion, to find answers to things they had never thought of.

"You see, they were all characters, never believable people. Jesus God."

Then, pressing the cross to her flat bosom, Miss E. took up the next photo. But before looking at it she paused to rest her bleary eyes. Miss E. had to be careful and pace herself. Promenading with the past could be rather taxing to one's self.

if you 'click' your camera shutter, you allow a controlled amount of light to . . .

"What photo do we have here?" asked Miss E. aloud as she glanced at the afternoon sun.

"Jesus God, it's one mother took of me outside of St. Joan's University." Miss E. clasped her suspended cross to her breast.

"I look so naive thrown into relief by that weathered brick wall. My right hand seems soldered to the rung of that wrought iron gate. I do believe my knuckles are white but it's so hard to tell in these older photographs. They fade so quickly."

College, that was the first time I was ever on my own. I do believe once that black gate shut behind me my knuckles never turned white again. That surrounding brick wall gave me a freedom I had never known before. I don't mean freedom with men exactly, that came later. This kind was personal. It was a freedom that expanded on those young, innocent thoughts that parents try so hard to preserve in their young ladies.

The commodity of an education was the reason I was sent to a private school. My parents had faith that in four years I would be molded into a suitable, degreed debutante.

It would afford them the chance to see me become part of the same respectable income bracket, by marriage of course, as they dwelled in. As mother said to father, 'it will be a very good investment for our future too, dear!'

The background of mother's photo . . . all those marvelous classroom windows were shattered semester by semester for her as I began to satisfy my starving mind. I did not feel, as did many of my peers, that I was spending four years cloistered in an institution. Fortunately, for me, the air of this paradise was not stagnate. On the contrary, it stimulated my appetite and turned every day into a secular feast.

"You see, the grounds were so lush and so untainted by the ordinary world it was like a subsidized Garden of Eden."

It was sinful . . . my first introduction to hedonism. I developed a true lust for the first time in my life. There were thousands of books just waiting for you to pick them up and expore. Of course, being young I over indulged to the point of absurdity.

In the beginning . . . forgetting to eat I just lost weight. Then circles began to form under my bloodshot eyes, for sleep seemed like such a waste of time. I soon realized my body would fail my mind's expectations but by then I couldn't stop, the pleasure was too great.

Exhausted I learned . . . the flesh is weak. After three months of indulging, in more than lady-like frivolities, I ended up in the school's infirmary. I gazed out at that stoic wrought iron gate wondering where I had gone wrong. However I was one of the lucky ones, thanks to an older, more experienced woman who took an interest in my dilemma. She offered guidance and support to me. I hesitated. Her finger nails weren't painted flamingo pink and the only jewelry she wore was a simple gold cross around her neck. I accepted and dared to hope that we might become friends.

My devil's advocate . . . Miss Noel. Her facade matched the outside appearance of the university. Not even I, at first, suspected that there was a lustful woman beneath that professoric persona. She had never married so therefore was childless, but I found she did have her books. She was positively venerable.

"I did look so vulnerable then," Miss E. gave her cross a quick tug. "There was a certain decadence about the appearance of that secluded campus to the trained eye. Even, now, looking in an old black and white photo. The gray grass seems much more fertile than today's white cement. Miss Noel, God rest her soul, would not be pleased with the path education has taken."

Miss Noel's romantic sensitivity made the strongest impression on me during the next three years of my development. She instilled in me three very basic steps; to examine every detail, to speak with clarity, and to listen with an open mind. I, also, spent many joyful hours fondling dogeared pages, inhaling their bindings musty smell of leather, while savoring every word. As a result, to the dismay of the girls on my floor, papers were never laborious for me and were always delivered with ease.

These solitary times were balanced out by an equal amount of time spent recuperating; strolling in the garden expostulating with my beloved Miss Noel. I suppose my classmates thought of me in a rather queer way. For instead of spending my free time discussing the trivialities of womanhood with them I continued my childhood passion of reading; receiving satisfaction from the knowledge I was being faithful to a friend. I realized they were not capable of experiencing it. How could I expect them to understand.

"The girls' were always civil to my face but when I would enter a room or pass by them in the halls I understood the silence behind me. It bothered me a bit. However the sensations I received from my way of life over-ruled any possibility of conformity just to please them.

"It's odd that this is the only photo I have kept of my college days," said Miss E. as she loosened her fingers that had become tangled in her necklace. "And yet that silly cowering girl seems to demand that I remember she did not stay that way." Miss E. snickered out loud at that realization.

I only went back home to visit once. It was the summer of my freshman year. I waited for them outside that gate. I did not want to introduce them to Miss Noel.

"I felt guilty. Yes that was it," sighed Miss E. regretfully.

I was so afraid they would feel the affinity Miss Noel and I shared. How could I have ever explained all the books, the walks and the discussions to them? I hadn't even gone to one dance. So I rode home in silence. Mother didn't notice. And Father whistled quietly as his wife told me what I had missed while I was at school.

I did try to feel at home. I truly desired to share my new thoughts and ideas with them. However, it was too much to ask of them; they were 'set in their ways.' So Mother

criticized and Father, though he tried to understand, soon took solace behind his newspaper, hugging its pages. Often times when I walked into our family study both would cease their conversation, thereby avoiding any discussion with me.

I took a bus back to those opened gates that August. My parents and I only communicated by polite letters after that, for conversation between us was embarrassingly strained. Mother sent me this photo senior year. On the back she had written, 'Elizabeth: before going away to college.' I showed it to Miss Noel and I think we both laughed.

if you 'click' your camera shutter, you allow a controlled amount of light to reach your film. And by using the camera body to prevent the whole roll of film from being exposed to . . .

Miss E. turned to the next blank, black page in her photo album. "I do wish there were more than six pages in this album. I feel like I'm cutting my life so short. "Jesus God." She pressed her hand down flat on the empty page to steady its tremor. Miss E. noticed how the surrounding darkness brought out those ugly spots on her aged hands.

"It almost looks childlike if it wasn't for those spots of age."

The sound of ringing entered her room, bringing her back to a frame of reference.

"Bells? Oh Jesus God it's already time for their two o'clock Mass. Where has the time gone to? Why must it always move so quickly?" she said rather softly as she took up the next photo.

"You see, I put it dead center my first try. No use in wasting energy. I believe I took that one five years after I left college. Too bad color film wasn't being produced yet. Children always look more natural in color. I found it most interesting; the French women were so proud of their children. Yes, they all would come out on a spring day and parade them in the tuilleries among the flowers."

Motherhood? I could have been guaranteed at least eighteen years of steady employment. Are there any other careers as fruitful or creative?

"Children are probably much more influential than a photo, painting or novel," realized Miss E. as she looked down at the little characters in her picture.

Conception? How painful could it have been to bear such a small object? Their hands are so small you can barely make them out. Almost mystical. Their faces seem so flat and yet they are so expressive. I wonder if that ability develops during the nine months they spend evolving.

They seem to gulp at the world like a fish out of water. Their skin is like marble; smooth and fragile looking. When they cry their faces become so distorted, yet they never crack. They're always crawling, falling or crying. In fact their mothers never seem to have time to contemplate their creations.

"How frustrating it must be," reaffirmed Miss E.

That mother in my photo looks so young to be involved with a child; she hardly knows what life is about herself. Is that why she is smiling down at the little creature? Neither seem to have a care in the world nor seem to be dissatisfied just walking down the lane hand in hand. I wonder if she found herself in caring for that child or will she always be dependent on that child for her own sense of self. Such a fine line to walk.

"That poor cherub in the foreground was howling for its missing ball. So alive, all tears and snot but no one around to wipe them," said Miss E. as she dabbed the kleenex around the edges of the photo.

I wiped his face. Of course that's all he wanted was a little attention. Everyone needs that. He gave me such a big smile. Perhaps if I would have had a brother or sister I would have known what to expect. Most people do.

There were more children than flowers in the park that day. I've always found flowers so reassuring. I wonder why children seem so foreign to me. Regardless, I spent hours walking in the Tuilleries that spring. I always loved to be out-of-doors, especially after Miss Noel taught me the enjoyment of contemplating it.

It's odd I never planted a garden. I even resented taking care of house plants. But I always enjoyed and admired other persons. It certainly would be a dismal place if there were no flowers or children to enjoy.

"I wonder if the Tuilleries are still kept up so neatly? I dare say some of those very children are now promenading their little ones. The flowers come up the children come out. April in Paris!" remembered Miss E. as she clutched her cross.

Regret? I am sorry that I was never able to go back. Perhaps I would have viewed it

differently, but then spring was never my favorite time of year. It was always so changeable and uncertain. However I hate the thought of winter. The cold stops everything. It's like old age. Children are kept away and flowers are unreachable. Neither one ever seems to end."

Miss E. gave the photo one final wishful look and then quickly turned the dark page over.

if you 'click' your camera shutter, you allow a controlled amount of light to reach your film. And by using the camera body to prevent the whole roll of film from being exposed to the light at one time and using the camera lens to focus an image of a scene on the film and .

Miss E. hesitated, she sensed which photo was next. It had been taken ten years after the previous one. Another milestone. Perhaps if it had preceded, this photo album would not have been as vital as it was now. Miss E. turned her attention to the window and watched one of the Sisters walking by on her way home.

"The Mass must be over. That woman has just spent another hour with Him," said Miss E. as she hugged the serrated corners of the photo.

"Charles, I love you to this day." Saying that, Miss E. now dared to place the photo finished side up and looked down at it.

Behind the silhouette of him buildings could be distinguished. It had been taken on a sunny day which made the wear and tear of the city's character more apparent. If only we would have rendezvou'd together in the Alps or Caribbean, perhaps now it still wouldn't seem so real.

"But instead we chose to meet every weekend in an ordinary 42nd street hotel. We even used our own names."

What happened? Sex?

"Yes, that too."

When did I reach my peak of pleasure? Was it morning, afternoon or evening? I think my climax came every morning just after waking. The rest of the day was spent in a warm comfortable way of knowing, sharing. It was a mature involvement, nothing wasted.

The mornings spent in that mediocre room were disjointed. Rolling in and out of consciousness we viewed each other from a vertical position. The fuzz on the warm blanket slurred our movements. In seconds eyes would change from fire to ice; then fire once more. We never brushed our teeth before noon but we did manage to get bagel crumbs everywhere and to tangle up the 'Times' with the sheets.

"You see, the romanticized lapses our relationship had were typical," smiled Miss E.

In the afternoons, we would be drawn out of the awkward little room. Then we began it with a late brunch out somewhere. New York always seemed so empty on the weekends we were together. The weather never mattered. It always seemed like late summer, so warm and fluid, as we walked arm in arm. Sometimes we would windowshop so we could stare unobtrusively at our reflections.

"Jesus God, I always did enjoy those long afternoons." Miss E. coughed deeply and grabbed onto her dangling cross. "It was the nights that always seemed too short."

After dark we would stop at the corner deli before gleefully sneaking up the stairs back to our muted room. I always unwrapped our treats while he would spread the blanket on the floor and light the two candles; our roles were quite traditional. Then we would revitalize ourselves with words between bites of salami, greek olives and fresh Camembert. Everything was savored and mutually digested. However, as the bottle of Pinot Noir emptied the talk grew small and we withdrew into our own contemplations while abstractly picking at crumbs. By the time the candles had burned themselves out, we were staring at each other's outline, exhausted by our thoughts.

"It was so comforting to be able to look at that familiar face. I knew the origin of every line around his eyes."

We didn't treat it as a temporary affair, we didn't have to, we both knew. To speak 'until death do us part' seemed so ominous to us. The current fad of 'living together' would have also been defeating. We had no desire to watch one another decay after spending so many vital hours together. Yes, we were old enough to be frightened of death but growing old alone did not scare us. Compromise was unthinkable. Life does become routine and faces soon grow old. Then suddenly the inevitable occurs and you are left with a living death.

"I never wanted to imitate my parent's relationship. I'm glad I took this picture of him. I remember waiting until dusk so I could be certain of only capturing his outline. That way my specifics could be filled in later. I still think it holds a very good likeness though his image has faded some.

It was November the last time we saw each other. When I turned from him that last time I noticed the streets were packed with X-mas shoppers. The bitter wind chilled me to my marrow but I knew that spring would come and then summer so I kept walking. And yes I still ate salami, olives and cheese but I avoided looking into store windows at all cost. It seemed like such a waste of time.

"I'm glad we parted when we did. The natural pain improved my character. I never suffered from bitterness or disillusionment so I never went through a period of stagnation. Life is too short for that. I feel only love to this day when his face comes to mind. But unlike Paris I was never tempted to go back to New York." Miss E. reached for and took a dried roll from her breakfast tray. She remained looking at the photo until she had finished her last bite. Then carefully she brushed the crumbs onto the starched bedding and turned to the next black page.

if you 'click' your camera shutter, you allow a controlled amount of light to reach your film. And by using the camera body to prevent the whole roll of film from being exposed to the light at one time and using the camera lens to focus an image of a scene on the film and using the camera shutter and lens aperture controls to control the amount of . . .

"Jesus God did you ever see anybody that looked so pitiful? Am I being too hasty. Perhaps dignified would be a better word. I did amble out under my own power but I did have a doctor for an escort." Miss E. smiled down at the polaroid photo and continued, "Amazing thing that modern technology. It developed right before my very eyes."

It came to pass that I was slowing up a bit but life wasn't. So for my 47th birthday I decided to give myself a complete physical check-up because you always take a watch back to the watch maker when it starts running slow.

I remember watching the hospital being built. I didn't even realize what it was until they hung out their shingle, St. Christopher's Seaside Memorial. It didn't sound like anyone who went there could ever really be ill. Keep that in mind I told my doctor that's where I wanted it done, just in case. It seemed like a good substitute for the faith that I lacked.

"It was my conscience that told me to go in. I had to go looking for a disease because I knew I was only human. I think my guilt goes back to one of Mother's infamous lectures, 'Ladies don't smoke and they never drink' or something like that."

The hospital windows were all mirrored so the birds couldn't look in. In fact, looking out through the tinted glass subdued the outdoors so much so one did not mind being couped up. Thé bed and the suspended color television were both controlled quite magically by a red and black button. Pleasant young people waited on me hand and foot. Nothing like the institutions I had left my parents in except for the fact there was a Bible on my nightstand.

"That polaroid shot certainly captures the color well. It is almost deceitful. I look yellow next to that lawn. Grass was never that green."

It didn't take long for the aids to dehumanize me. I was awakened at some ungodly hour of the morning by a sharp cold needle sticking into my warm sleepy flesh. No sooner had they taken a vial of blood when they demanded a six ounce cup of urine and all before my morning coffee.

I also never realized there were sadists employed by the hospital. They appeared unexpectedly just as you were about to light a cigarette after the house breakfast. They ordered 'NO SMOKING' and then confiscated all the matches but left your cigarettes to stare at you.

"That's probably why I began to page through the Bible; to use up my nervous energy. I couldn't get up and no one stayed long enough to talk, so I decided it would have to do for now. Besides it kind of reminded me of an old childhood friend."

I always wondered why they bothered giving me breakfast and lunch when for dinner the entree was castor oil. I was lying there two hours later, feeling utterly exhausted and empty, when another uninformed sadist appeared holding a balloon filled bag and a long plastic straw. During her whole ritual I wanted to tell the woman she could stop smiling I wasn't going to smile back. Instead I just grimaced pleasantly. That Sister knew her job

well. Just before leaving she checked the toilet and blessed me. I do believe that she truly loved her calling.

My doctor stopped by and woke me up to ask how I was feeling. He took three vials of blood. I felt privileged that he was actually working for my money. In fact, I began to worry just a bit.

"I remember one page of the Bible was particularly wrinkled; the one with Psalm 23. I think Mother used to read that to Father a lot? How did it go . . . ? 'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:'"

Christ. I think he must have been very blunt for a doctor. He had no bedside manner. I had been enjoying my privacy and regaining my strength by paging through that book on my bedstand.

"He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

I had expected to see him because I was waiting to be released. We exchanged obvious pleasantries before he announced what was to be the name of my disease. So now I had one.

Intermittently I listened as he told me more tests would be needed. There was hope in my case, thanks to present day technology but the right medication was imperative. He stressed that I should not despair for new techniques were developed everyday.

"I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

He then drew pictures of blood cells and other vascular appendages. His sketches held no interest for me. Too bad. I'm sure his veins and arteries were drawn to comfort me. It didn't work even though he had gone to one of the best medical academies in this country.

The right medication proved to be hard to find.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

Eventually it was. It happened just in time. The sadists were becoming more likable every day but then close physical contact in intimate situations can break down most barriers.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

ACT III

Scene: Stage is framed. It appears to the audience that they are looking through a window into a room. In the middle of the frame sits a small, frail figure on a large bed. The surrounding furnishings that are pictured are minimal. There is a night stand and a tray at the foot of the bed. There are no pictures on the walls. Only a crucifix is hanging over the bed. The venetian blinds, to the left of the bed, are open but the light is fading. The sun is going down. As the scene goes on the lights dim gradually. Faint bells are heard coming from behind the woman's door followed by muffled announcements of doctor's names.

The figure in the bed, with some difficulty, is slowly trying to gather up a few black pages that are spread out on the bed. The old woman's face is overly made up and almost looks comical. Her hair, which was once probably caught up neatly in a bun, is now coming down. Her voice sounds very confident but feeble at times.

Miss E. (Fiddling with her stray strands of hair, she is trying to stuff them back in her loosened knot, as she orders the pages on her bed.)

Oh how maudlin I've become and to what end? To this? St. Patrick's Home for the Aged! I intend not to remember it to anyone. I should have done something about my state long ago. How did I ever let myself be so humiliated. The last page shall remain blank and black.

Jesus God, I've always had dignity. I now intend on keeping it intact.

(Lights dim slightly. Her voice fades and quavers a bit but gains strength as she goes on.)

Miss E. They . . . won't let me have flowers in the room because their fragrance interferes with my upper respiratory tract. The children don't walk by anymore. The administrative powers that be rerouted them to the back of this living crypt so they wouldn't rattle our skeletons. My food is mush. This is to aid my stomach in its digestive process. Can't say as I blame it. Why bother working when it is already done for you. (With some difficulty she disgustedly pulls the top knot on her head apart. Long gray hair circles her made-up face.)

Miss E. (Angry)

It may be true that age is overtaking my physical appendages but it hasn't touched my mind. It's life's catch-22. Once you achieve that certain age you must become dependent upon something. An unexpected death at 47 would have been more gracious than this. Why did I let technology play god?

(Light dims around her but she remains visible. Intense light is on her face. She sits up very straight and looks straight ahead.)

Miss E. (Chuckling with knowing satisfaction.)

Ah...but there is one solution. It occurred to me when I first found my photos. And now that I have gone through and pasted each one in its proper order I am sure of it. I've found a way.

(Laughs but not loudly.)

You see I found it under my bed among my photos. It must have dropped into the box by one of the nuns last night when she bent over to check if I was dead or alive. No matter how it got there it's the key I need to be free once again.

(Room is in total darkness, light on Miss E. dims but her features still are viable. She looks disoriented but her voice takes on a strong, calm quality).

Miss E. Jesus, God, it is becoming so dark. My Monet is gone. I wish I could stop that from happening. Darkness makes me so cold I have trouble keeping my mind active . . . but it has not failed me yet. It has always remained constant . . . they haven't disrupted it, only irritated it . . . at least that keeps it sharp.

(Pauses as she gropes for a piece of Kleenex)

I better remove my face. The Sisters prefer its pallor.

(She smears her face rather abstractly)

If time would stop I wouldn't age a day . . . no, no I don't want that . . . not after all my effort to get my photos in order for others. Their time is coming soon.

(She picks up her cracked mirror. It reflects light into the audience.)

Now let us see . . . oh I can't tell if my face is on or off . . . everything is so disjointed. How phenomenal it all is. I know I'm there but I can't tell where. The order escapes me but it is so hard to concentrate in this cold. If only the sun would come out.

(She tries to rub her hands together.)

Where was I? Oh yes, I have to finish my preparations so everything is done when I decide to go. I must place my photo album inside this last drawer under the extra dressing gowns.

(She struggles to achieve her intent.)

I pray that the next soul who is caged up here finds it and fills in the missing photograph. Then they will know too.

(Finally shutting the drawer she falls back on her pillows.)

Miss E. (Catching her breath she closes her eyes. Her left hand is hanging on the cross around her neck. Her right hand is holding something too.)

There it's done. Not a photo to be found and I still have the key.

(Light on her face slowly grows more dim until the stage is left in total darkness. Bells chime off in the distance.)

if you 'click' your camera shutter, you allow a controlled amount of light to reach your film. And by using the camera body to prevent the whole roll of film from being exposed to the light at one time and using the camera lens to focus an image of a scene on the film and using the camera shutter and lens aperture control to control the amount of light that hits the film you can produce an image on the film that closely approximates the original scene.

