

# TOWERS

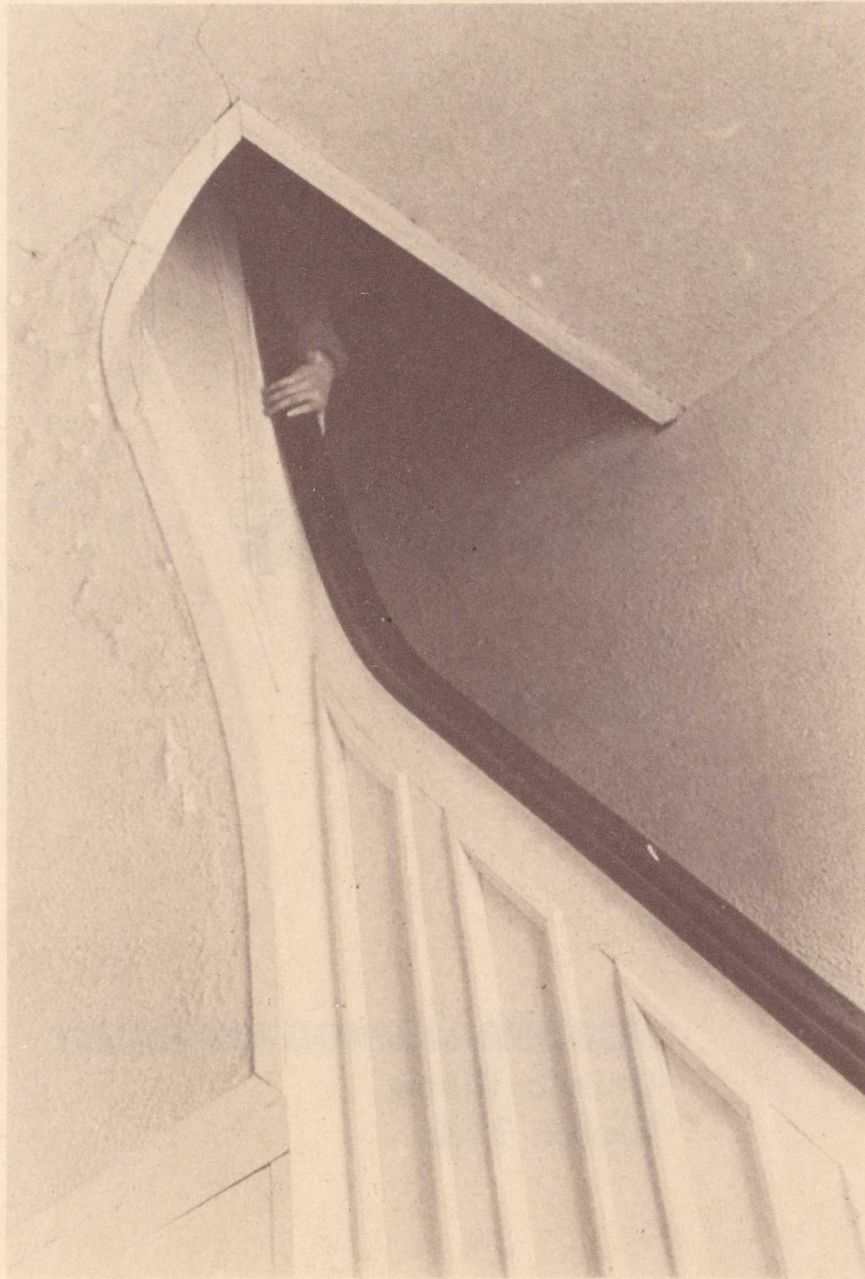


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# TOWERS

no. 60

**NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**  
DeKalb, Illinois  
Winter, 1983



Le Ann Switzer Untitled



## From the Editor

When **Towers** comes out each semester, I always find myself interested in the reactions it receives. Usually people are surprised that NIU even has a literary magazine. This surprise gives way to a series of questions which, roughly, follow the same pattern:

- 1) Hey what's this?
- 2) Who wrote this junk?
- 3) How did it get in here?

In this issue I'd like to try to answer those questions.

First, **Towers** is a literary magazine funded by the NIU Student Association. Any NIU student is eligible to submit his work or to sit on our editorial board.

Second, **Towers** tries to choose the best works that NIU writers and artists can produce, but we're limited by the number of submissions we receive. If we are not blessed with submissions, we manage as well as we can with the little we receive.

Third, all **Towers** submissions are judged blind. That is, the author's name is removed and replaced with a number. The submission then goes to the appropriate committee—fiction, poetry, or critical essay—to be judged by the members. The best submissions from each committee are brought to a committee of the whole, where they are voted on again by the entire editorial staff. We use a point system to judge the works, and the submissions with the most points are printed in **Towers**. It is only after a work has made it into **Towers** that we re-attach the author's name. I admit that this is a rather complicated screening process, but we want to make sure that every submission receives an equal and fair chance to be published in **Towers**.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who made **Towers** possible. At the very top of that list is the Acting Editor for this issue, Michael Welter. While I was out giving grief to innocent middle school students under the guise of student teaching, Mike was here at NIU keeping **Towers** running smoothly and efficiently. I would also like to thank our advisors, E. Nelson James and James McNiece, for their sage counsel and advice, without which the editors would have immediately thrown up their hands in despair. Thanks are also due to our Art Editor, the committee coordinators, and the editorial staff for a job well done. And finally, I would like to thank everyone who submitted to **Towers** and to all of you who have picked up a copy. We really appreciate your support!

Heather Z. McCandless  
Managing Editor, **Towers**



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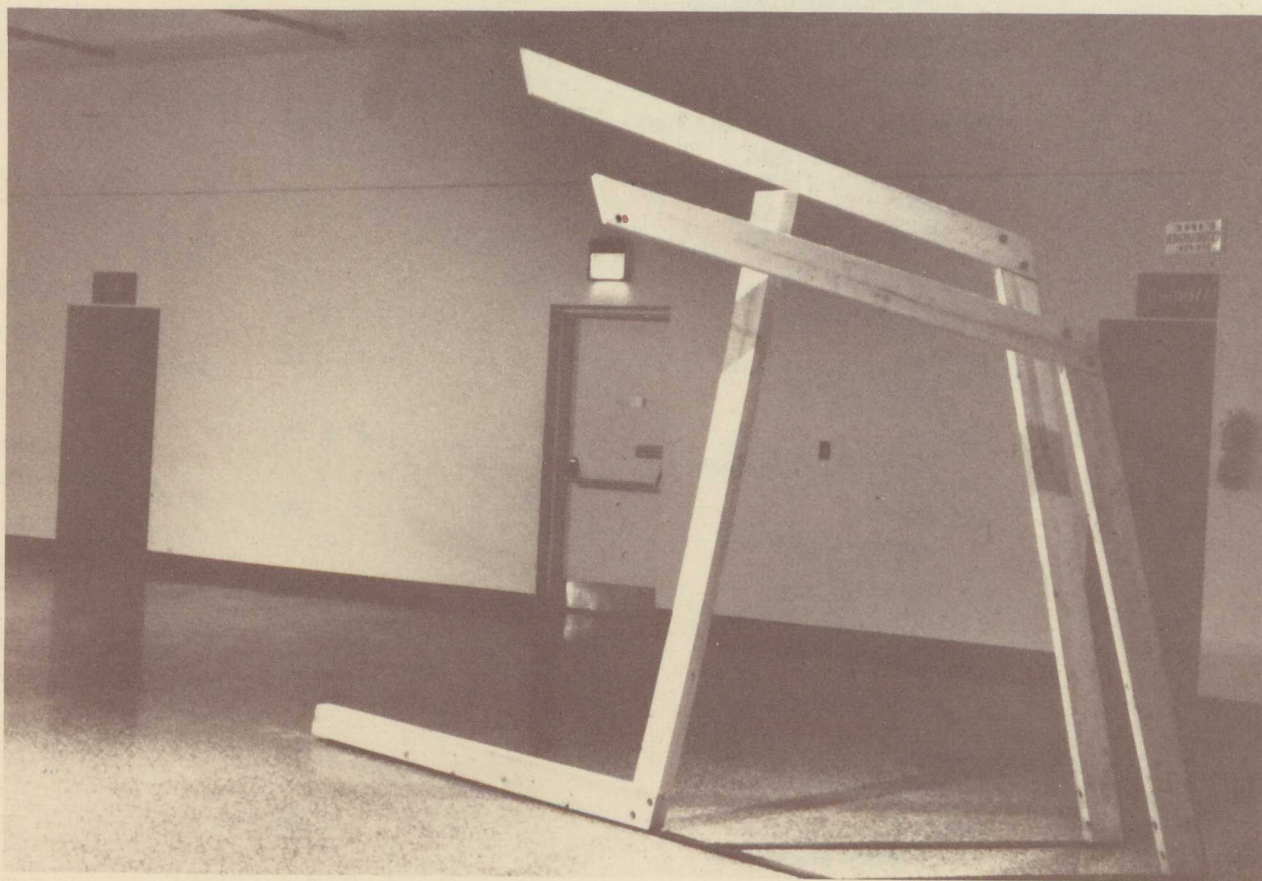
by Chris Swanberg

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NIU Department of English





Jane-Elizabeth Keniski CR 9



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## Mukti

I will not stay  
Look quickly  
at my changing colors  
Autumnal transitions  
Are they not  
the monarch  
from birth to death  
The sacred crimson rituals  
of sacrifice?

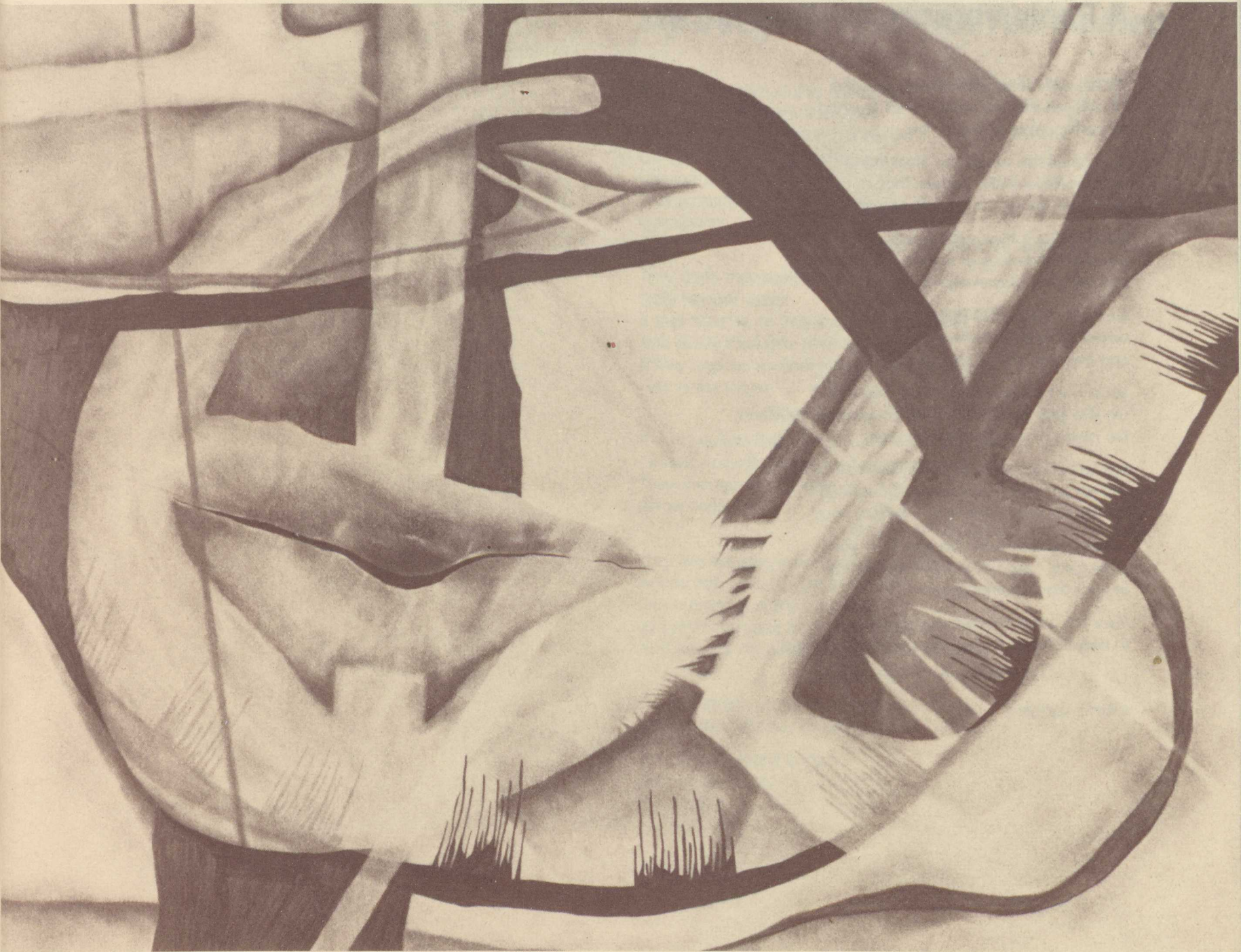
Touch the veiled face  
of flight  
Find me in the golden  
ebbing sunset  
Drain me into  
your rich, red earth.

Taken apart  
Stripped of caring  
Shoot through the aspens  
Find their rippling teardrops  
Copulating with the wind  
Turning with the current's force.

Slow  
In the night  
Know me  
To be of utter darkness  
The mind's delight  
The continuing cycle  
of the stars  
The winding sidewalk's  
autumn leaves.

Laurie M. Johnson





David Vogt Untitled



## A Remembrance for Panajachel

They tell me you have been ravaged,  
Mayan mother, small bones crushed  
by earthquakes and guerillas.

Your small son wears the black band  
on the sleeve of the perfect shirt  
you wove for him in ancient Mayan colors.

Lake Atitlan is blue with tears,  
the sulphur springs of my innocent sweat  
run red with Mayan blood.

Even the poinsettias bleed  
when no one picks the coffee beans  
and avocados rot in the jungle.

Who will buy your chevroned weavings?  
Do you pray to Quetzecotal, Guadalupe, or Marx?  
Do heads of slaughtered chickens

still lie beside the candles of your novina?  
Are your round thatched roofs burning?  
Or did the earth mercifully swallow you?

I swear by the cloth I bought from you,  
Little One, I did not imagine happiness  
in your black diamond eyes.

Your life, three thousand years rich  
in Mayan treasure, was no poorer than mine.

Chris Swanberg



## My Daughters Are Not Too Pleased

Scraps of calico clutter the carpet  
And stick to their bare toes  
And bits of stringy colored threads  
Cling to their school clothes  
Leaving a trail from home  
That screams: Our mother sews  
For a living.

other mothers are secretaries

They think they shall die a  
Truly horrible death  
If they have to go into another fabric store.  
And surely shall take their last breath  
If they step on another straight pin formerly  
Lost in the carpet.

other mothers are teachers

If they have to help iron just one more snip of  
Quilted material before they go to bed,  
They shall surely be dead  
Before morning.

other mothers work from 9 to 5

They are not too pleased, my daughters  
About sitting on scissors in the sofa  
Or on buttons in the bath water.  
By eyelets hanging from the chandelier  
And rickrack clinging to the bathroom mirror.

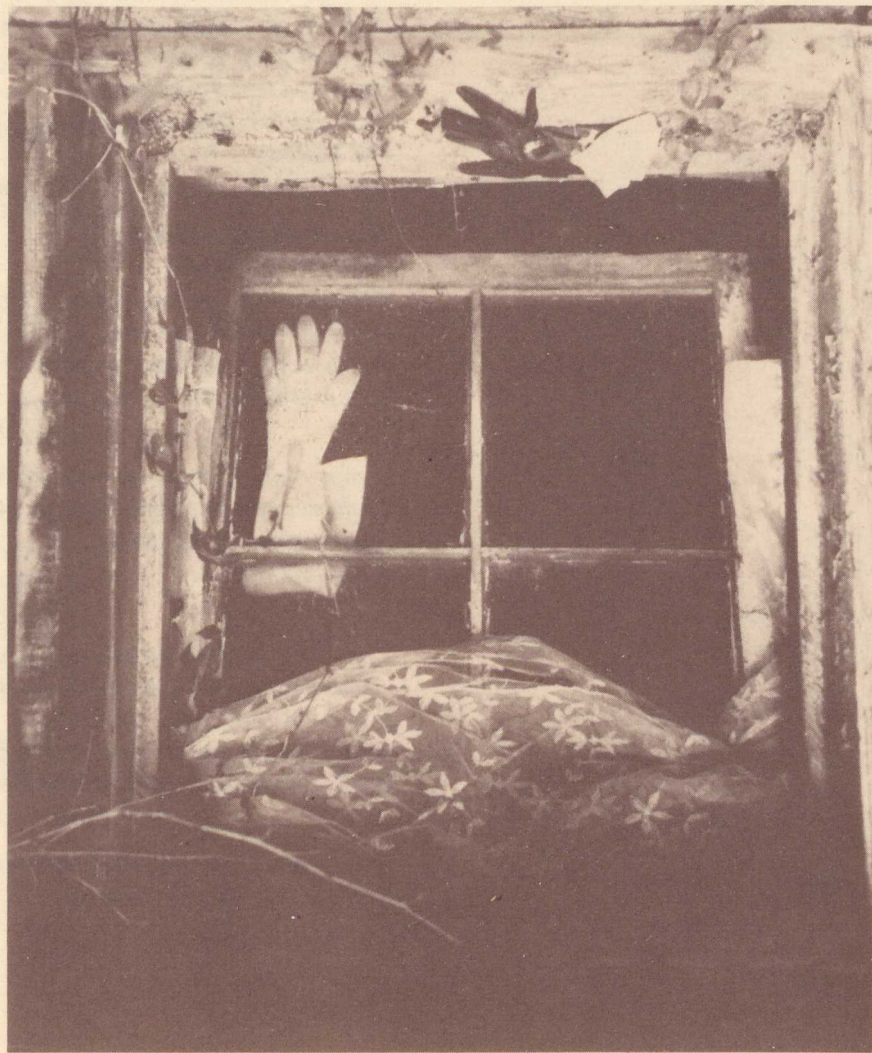
other mothers are dental assistants

The sweetness of the machine whirring  
and creative Mother cursing . . .

Oh God, everyone knows  
Our mother sews  
For a living.

Judy Ham





Florett Muirhead Gesture One



## Windows of Vulnerability

Laurie M. Johnson

I met God today. He came in the guise of two black suited men-boys. He asked me if I had been saved. I should have asked him why he didn't know already, but then, when God comes knocking at your door you don't ask questions.

I noticed a zit on one of His messengers. How odd. I wanted to demand "Divinity, heal thyself." But God obviously has ways of making his representatives humble.

Again, they asked if I'd been saved.

I asked them, appropriately I thought, "By whom?"

"By the Lord, our saver and redeemer," one of them answered sweetly.

I decided to play with God's messengers. "Well, let's see. The other day I redeemed eleven S & H green stamp books I'd been saving for over a year."

"No no, we mean your spirit. He can save your soul from eternal damnation and redeem your life for the good of mankind and the glory of God." (Ah, here was a real heathen. Pull out all the stops.)

"Oh, I see. You're talking about the Great Spirit," I said, looking dumb. These people infuriated me. They thought they had the exclusive rights to the Almighty. The trademark, the patent and the God Housekeeping seal of approval.

"Yes, you could call him the Great Spirit. We prefer to call Him Jesus."

"Right. I have him on a shelf in my living room. Hey, you guys wouldn't be selling incense would you? I'm running low and I don't want to make him mad. God knows what he'll do."

They fidgeted a little. I think it was finally beginning to hit them that maybe, just maybe, they were being hoodwinked. Too bad they weren't sure.



"May we come in and give you some literature? You can read it and we can explain anything you don't understand. If you find the **real** Lord, your life will be transformed."

I heard Mark get out of bed. I had to make a fast excuse to get rid of them or they'd attack him next.

"Listen, if you don't have incense and you don't have anything for burnt offerings, I don't want to talk to you. Why don't you go home? Doesn't your God ever get hungry?"

With that, I shut the door in their faces and watched them through the peephole. They looked perplexed for a second, then left.

If only they could take midnight walks. If they could be silent and listen. Instead they make fables to keep their minds busy. I would tell them, lose your mind and you will find your mind. Part of God might be the madness of not shutting anything out, accepting all things.

Mark came to the door. "What was going on here?" he asked.

"Oh, I just had a little talk with God."

Luckily he saw the two young men soliciting across the street, or he'd have thought me crazy.

## II

"Can't you see what's happening? Our President is taking food and education from our children and building missiles. I understand guns or butter, but children shouldn't have to pay for our guns."

"But we've got to protect ourselves. He's our President. He knows better than you or I how much defense we need. If it takes cutting back on education, that's what it takes. Would you rather have those same children killed because we didn't keep up? This window of vulnerability —"

"It's a farce, Mark. Both countries have many times over the

weaponry to blow the planet to kingdom come. When it gets to that point, what's the use in adding more? The additional weapons are no more of a threat than before they existed. Has it ever dawned on you that a lot of people have jobs designing and producing new weapons? Have you read about the excesses and waste in the Pentagon's budget? My God, they're still building tanks in a world where they can be destroyed in seconds. Nations don't meet in the field of battle anymore. They're either behind trees or behind computers. Reagan's not an imbecile. I'm sure he knows what's going down."

"You think he's an imbecile. What's wrong with giving Americans jobs and defending the country at the same time?"

"Because it's like a pie. The bigger the guns' slice, the smaller the piece for everyone else. It's immoral."

"Now you're an authority on morals?"

"I know this. If children and the poor and this country's schools have to suffer because some . . . over-zealous man clouded with over-simplified convictions wants to make more weapons we can't use, **that** is not right."

"You're a bleeding heart. A weeping liberal humanist."

"And you're a name caller."

"You can't support your claims."

"You claim to be a conservative. You voted for Reagan, but you can't give me any good reasons for what he does. You're a Republican because your family is. And you say that's good enough."

"And you're a Democrat — for some reason!"

"We cancel each other out, you know. Last year I drove you to vote."

"And last year I drove you to drink. You think I'm over-simplified. Why do you want me then?"

"I don't know, Mark . . . Because I love you. Because my bleeding liberal humanist heart loves you? I should ask why you don't hate me."

"When did I say I didn't?"



III

Dear—

I think that I shall never see  
A man as jealous as Marky  
Shifting eyes preoccupied  
His disposition like bromide  
If I were King I would decree  
Men not to be so rude as he

I think that I shall never know  
Machismo more puffed up to grow  
Suspicious flooding every will  
His manly tantrums over-kill  
If I were boss I would promote  
Marky in his sass to float

I think that I shall ne'er more do  
That thing of which he disapproves  
For Marky has drawn up the bridge  
And won't let down one little smidge  
He would attempt, in fact ensue  
To keep it fixed with crazy glue

I think that I shall never toy  
With publishers, jobs to deploy  
For though I don't agree with him  
Marky withheld is Marky thin  
I must admit this Princely ploy  
Makes contracts pallor by the boy

Dearest—

Once again you are charmingly crude in an elegant, verbal sort of way. You amaze me. But I think I owe you an explanation. Our week and a half (three hours, ten minutes) abstinence was not a "ploy." I have been progressively forgetting that you were with someone else. It does no good to argue that the experience meant nothing to you. In my mind, I already know that.

From your endearing poem, I assume you're swearing off further sacrifices for career — but for me? I appreciate that, but what about you? You showed a lack of self-worth, as though you didn't think it was a privilege for him to be with you. It is a privilege for **me** to be with you.

Anyway, my rude feelings have calmed down and I am prepared to do the best I can, that is overlook the fact that it ever happened. You can't understand that, I know. In a way I love you for that.

I am fully prepared to stop my games and come back to bed.

You are free. You always have been. The conventional doesn't suit you, I know. But marry me.

You seem to value my peace of mind. If you say no, I'll still be here. But if you say yes you will be no less free and I, with my conventional mind, will be so. And if I am happier, you might just be too.

In any case, I'll be home tonight, as I always am. Nothing withheld.

IV

The subject of reincarnation holds many possibilities for humor. For instance, instead of having the graduating lives go from the lowest animal to humans, I have eliminated animal participation. Instead, the succession goes from the poorest inhabitants of the planet, let's say the Bangladeshians we're always hearing about, to the richest — Americans of course. This would enable all Americans to consider themselves the highest life form with a direct link to God: something many of them have believed all along. This theory would justify so many things we do that perhaps I should suggest it to the religious right biggies currently dominating domestic and foreign policy.

This way when we intentionally disrupt small, poor nations' governments, bringing about coups, causing wars, riots and famine, we merely have to say that this is what God wants us to do and that if our poor brothers survive our meddling they are one step closer to the last state — *divinus americanus*.



Actually, the faster we killed them the sooner they would advance from their present untouchable state. We would then be doing them a favor.

On the flip side, another, perhaps more attractive theory is that Americans are the lowest and that the poorer nations are higher on heaven's ladder. This jibes with my notion that the closer you get to your goal, the more you have to pay. But, I must eliminate this theory because it not only makes little sense, but I would be kicked out of the country — or at least Beverly Hills — if it ever went public. I've been accused of being unamerican already. Besides there are rich and poor in every country and one might even suggest that every country has its own reincarnation system.

You know, maybe the Indians had a good idea when they made the cow sacred. Then no one class of humans could completely "Lord" over the other. Perhaps they should now tell Jerry Falwell this.

V

Mark asked me to marry him last night, in an uncharacteristic fit of jealousy. It is his conventional bandaid for all my 'unconventional' mistakes. It is also an expression of his obvious love. God, have I passed on that monstrous pain or am I still dealing with a child?

It could be that, as Mark has insinuated in various fights, I am the child. Children are funny when they intend kindness, cruel when they intend only fun. Children believe that they can control their world. They believe everything is their fault. Children cannot see themselves. They can set fire to a helpless kitten one minute and cuddle close to grandma the next. Children are animals with humanity. [T]





Florett Muirhead Gesture Two







## The Man Who Would Be Wood

If closer, we might see sweat crawling on his cheek, teeth clenched woodenly. He is trying to sweat leaves. He wants leaves sprouting from his knees and elbows, buds pushing out from beneath his nails, vines tickling his nose and lips. Working his muscles back and forth, he is trying to grind bones into branches: white wood for dark marrow. He is imagining his shins rough and covered with bark.

How he longs to be a tree, living off the sun, photosynthesizing his way through the days. Being human bores him. He hates the red fist punching inside his chest, its rude beat. But if a tree, he could take hot summer winds for lovers and tease squirrels leaping through the boughs. He would laugh leaves. There would be the miracle of birds. His laboring lungs he would cast off for a stiff trunk. He would die, rest, and be reborn.

David Charbonneau



# A Prayer To God The Father An Apostasy For The 17th Century

Written on the occasion of Dr. Pennel  
receiving the Excellence in Teaching Award

I struck the desk and cried, "No more!  
What shall I ever study, pine, and die?  
My time, my mind is free.  
Must I ever sup this muling slop of pigs,  
Ancient lore of fools? These men are dead!  
But no, I must enthrall."

Read this and this and this, he says  
My mind spins in a daze.  
What symbols, style, and metaphor?  
What syntax, meter, rhyme?  
Know ye not the history?  
Good Lord, you've had the time.

I moan, I sigh, I pine with grief  
But all to no avail.  
A weekly quiz, some notes to spare,  
And lots of show and tell  
I've found do not a scholar make,  
The verdict goes not well.

Dear God if you'd deliver me  
From sack and Penhurst's view  
From pulleys and canary wine  
I'd be so trebly blest  
No quiz, no paper, and best of all,  
I'd die before the test.

And yet, perhaps this hell on earth  
Might serve a useful turn.  
Adversity, Lord Bacon says,  
Engenders virtues three  
But does it cure the plaguey bill  
To pay the PENNEL-ty?

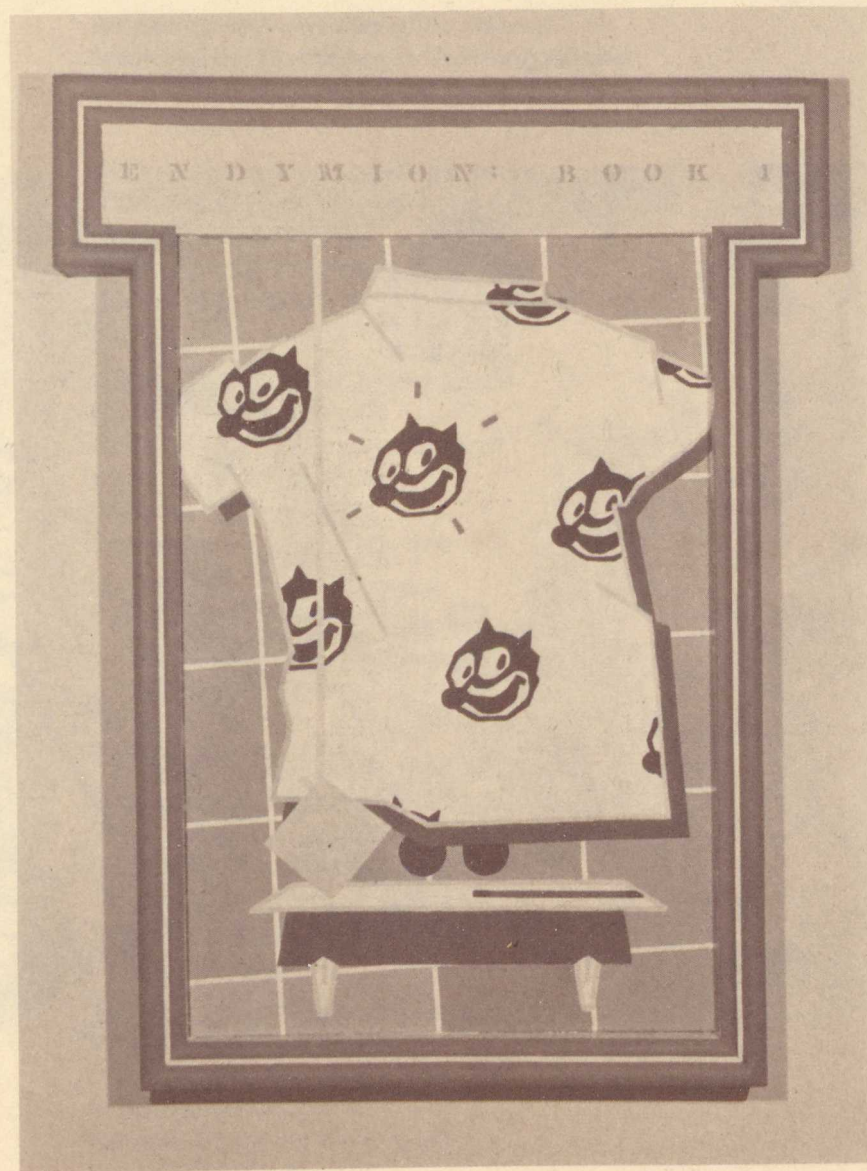
Heather Z. McCandless





Alberto Meza Dog Scratching Ear





David Russick Untitled



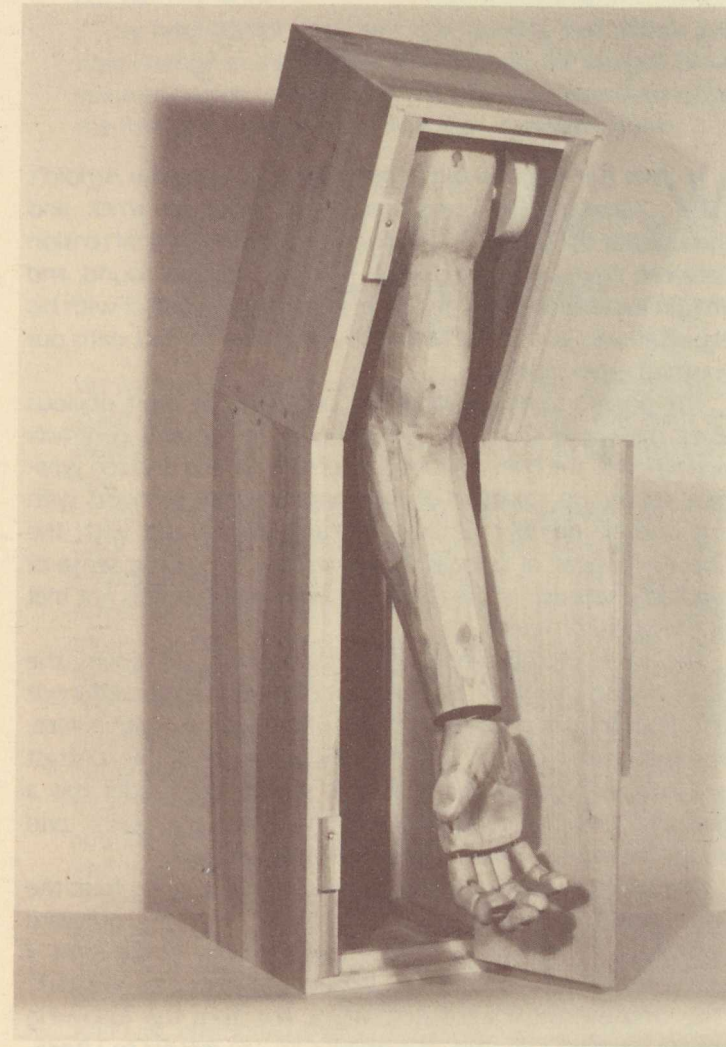
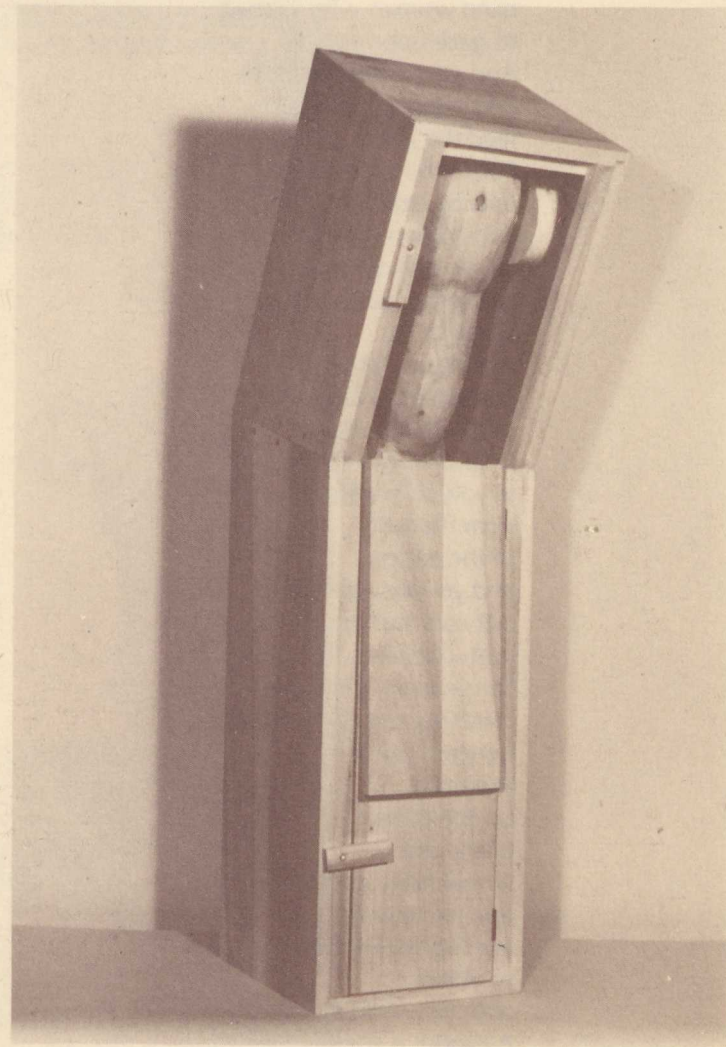
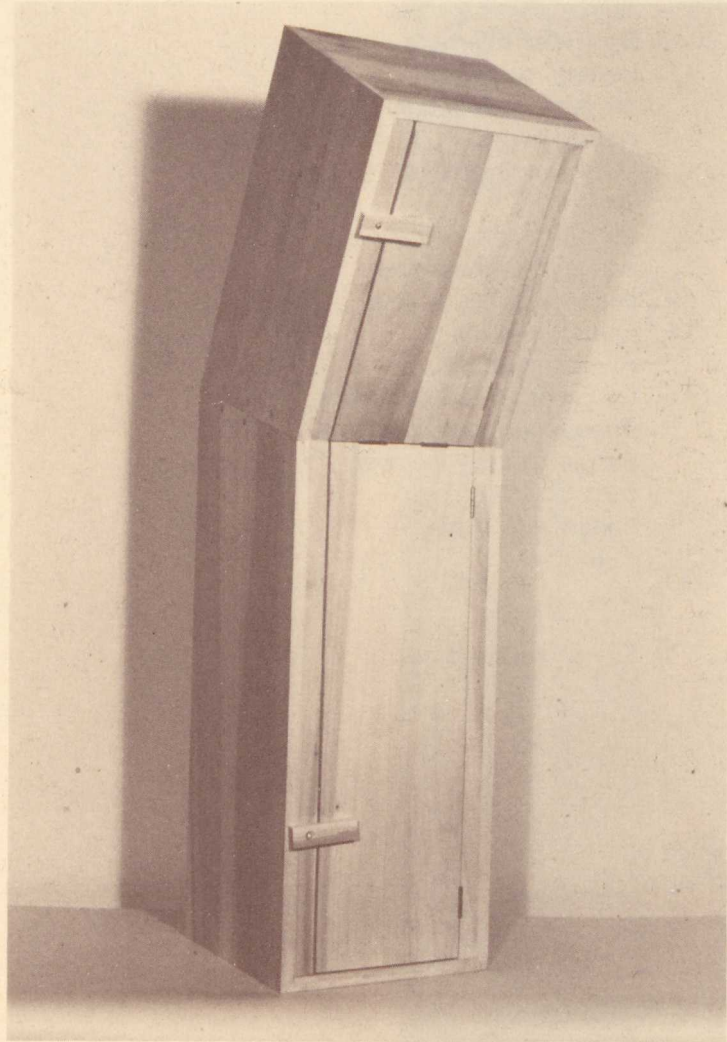
## Flesh of the Earth

We are the womb stuff,  
flesh born of that first  
blind woman who wished  
to gaze upon herself.  
And so the flesh feeds us  
and we, in time, shall  
feed the flesh.  
For even as the peach  
torn by mouths  
drips down warm throats,  
so we bite ourselves.  
And often does the flesh  
speak to us:  
in tongues, green  
and lashing in the wind,  
in syllables flung  
from the sea's spew,  
in vowels swelling  
from the belly  
of the earth;  
and yet are we deaf:  
our ears stuffed  
with ourselves.  
So we maim the flesh,  
crushing mute screams  
beneath our feet.  
We build,  
on the corpse  
of the old,  
a new flesh, cold  
and harnessed to  
our frightened need.  
In offices  
and sprawling malls,  
it exudes a stale  
breath.  
"But we are protected,"  
we whisper, tapping our feet  
against concrete.

The kinship of earth:  
finally denied.  
Ah yes, sweet success.  
But the earth broods,  
waiting, large with  
her dumb knowledge:  
we will return.  
Her vanity requires it.  
Even now,  
the grass waits to  
weave us to the stones,  
and the earth is anxious  
to map our skin.  
Ah, flesheaters,  
we cannot escape ourselves.  
Already our bones betray us  
and at night, by the river,  
our blood slips  
dangerously close  
to the flow.

David Charbonneau





Andrew L. Arvanetes Untitled

## Mothers' Day (for C.G.)

It's a  
| silent drive in a faded  
gray morning, dreaming cerebral  
screams for the  
nameless angel turning  
in her belly swell,  
the last taboo looming  
only an hour away. A  
woman does what she must  
with sealed eyes and  
clenched teeth, never to forget  
the sick sucking that clogs  
and gluts the tube, is  
momentarily vacuum-trapped,  
then spit into a jar.

Carol Joy Jaros



## “Growing Old” — Expectation and Reality

Margaret Green

What is it to grow old? The speaker in Matthew Arnold’s “Growing Old” says that it’s not what you think, and throughout the poem he progressively reveals this final tension between expectation and reality. The tone, rhythm, sound, and images experienced by the reader consistently conflict with his expectations, just as the reality of aging may conflict with our youthful expectations.

The poem’s complex variations begin at the most obvious level: the visual structure. The visual form contains contrasts within itself; the lines uniformly alternate six and ten syllables, setting up a pattern of even numbers that contrasts with the uneven number of lines in each stanza and with the uneven number of stanzas. However, the overriding sense of regularity sets up for the reader an expectation that is not met as the poem proceeds.

This same phenomenon recurs throughout the poem: the tone, images, sounds, and rhythm change unexpectedly not only from stanza to stanza but also within stanzas, within lines, and even within words. And even though much of this contrast is subtle, or possibly because it is subtle, the reader has a growing sense that his expectations about the poem, and about the realities of old age, will not be realized.

The poem’s initial rhetorical questions about aging treat the issue gently, figuratively, and deal only with the outward appearance of the body: “is it to lose the glory of the form, / The luster of the eye? / Is it for beauty to forego her wreath?” (This and all subsequent quotations are from the following source: Matthew Arnold, “Growing Old,” in **Access to Literature**, ed. Elliott L. Smith and Wanda V. Smith [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981], pp. 698-99.) The flowing rhythm adds to the impression that this is a contemplative poem, seeking an



answer to an eternal question. The last line, however, breaks the rhythm and bluntly qualifies its own affirmation: "—Yes, but not this alone."

The next stanza continues questioning, but with a perceptible change in the rhythm as well as in the images. Now the speaker begins to deal with the physical sensations of aging, the **feel** of it in more uncomfortable, concrete terms:

Is it to feel our strength —  
Not our bloom only, but our strength — decay?  
Is it to feel each limb  
Grow stiffer, every function less exact,  
Each nerve more loosely strung?

Yet we know these things happen with age, and so may anticipate the confirming "Yes, this" with which the third stanza begins. What we do not expect is the turn to the negative "but not."

This turn begins a play of conflicting messages that shift us back and forth between negative and positive forces. The emphasis now falls on what aging is not, an emphasis reinforced by the staccato rhythm of that first line: "Yes, this, and more; but not." The short monosyllables seem to hiss and sputter, but then we are confronted by the soft, contemplative "Ah," then further confused with still another unpleasant sounding negative — "'tis not." What we finally end with are negatively presented positive images of old age communicated in a melodic rhythm, and sweetened with the soft vowel sounds and liquid consonants of "mellowed," "glow," "golden," and "softened."

The fourth stanza continues the flowing rhythm and pretty images of the previous lines, yet even within these soothing images of what we falsely expect old age to be there are hints of mockery in the combination of harsh, cacophonous sounds and soft, euphonious sounds, sometimes even within the same word: "rapt" begins with the liquid "r" and the soft "a," but then spits out the "pt." "Prophetic" achieves a similar effect with its explosive "p" and "t" combined with the softer sounds of "o," "ph," and "i." Further, the references to weeping and

bygone years create a sad, empty feeling that contrasts with the contentment suggested by a "mellowed and softened" life, and the "fullness of the past." That unsettling feeling seems to foreshadow the increasingly ominous tone of the following stanzas.

Another unexpected, and perhaps unintentional, aspect of Arnold's poem is the negative connotation of the last word or words of every stanza but the last. When we link these words with the last two words of the final stanza, we have a brief synopsis of what the poem says old age is: old age is when the "living man" is "alone" and "loosely strung; he experiences "decline" and "weary pain," but "no emotion — none," until finally he is "no more." While it takes some careful consideration to make this connection, it may be that we subconsciously carry the implication of those words throughout the poem.

The last stanzas continue the poem's emphasis on feeling, an emphasis contrary to our usual expectation of feeling. Even when we experience sadness or pain, our aliveness is confirmed. However, most of us would be as disconcerted by a numbness — a lack of feeling — in a finger, for instance, as we would be by a pain in that finger. Therefore, the poem is able to augment its pessimistic tone by its emphasis on the lack of feeling old age brings. Old age, we are told, is **not to** "feel the fullness of the past"; we do "not once feel that we were ever young." We feel "but half and feebly," then "no emotion — none," until finally we are hollow, void, a ghost of our former selves.

These last three stanzas directly contrast with the preceding four. The questioning "Is it" and the negative "'tis not" are replaced by the unequivocal "it is;" nothing is uncertain or conditional now. We see more alliteration now, as in "prison . . . present . . . pain," "hidden heart," "no . . . none," and "feel . . . feeble . . . feel," but it seems to amplify the sense of doom. In addition, the rhythm slows and we are forced to emphasize each bitter word. No longer do the images pretend an illusion — here even the metaphors are stark and dismal. The images of old age become increasingly haunting until they culminate in the cold specter of the last stanza. "What is it to grow old?" the voice has asked, and how he answers:



It is to spend long days  
 And not once feel that we were ever young;  
 It is to add, immured  
 In the hot prison of the present, month  
 to month with weary pain.  
 It is to suffer this,  
 And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel.  
 Deep in our hidden heart  
 Festers the dull remembrance of a change,  
 But no emotion — none.

In old age, the speaker laments, we are tortured not only with the endless pain and infirmities of the body, but also tormented spiritually by a lack of feeling. The heart, the figurative origin of our emotions, is not stirred, but hidden. We cannot look back and remember the joys and triumphs of our youth because we are entombed in the present, and what small remnant of memory remains does not comfort — it “festers.”

The tone here is both unrelentingly despairing and convincing. The first few stanzas might have been written by any perceptive person, but in the final lines the tone is so certain that the reader feels sure that this is the voice of experience declaring our fate.

The last stanza brings the final and most stirring contrast. Outwardly, our speaker contends, we may be “immured / in the hot prison of the present,” but we will end our years “frozen up within, and quite / the phantom of ourselves.” The ultimate insult, though, is that we must live with the knowledge that the world does not see the reality of growing old — it ironically idealizes our sorry state and diminishes our earlier worth. This, of course, is a double irony since, if our speaker is correct, the aged cannot enjoy even in memory what he was in the past. So we are left with the haunting view that to grow old is the final irony: the best that we were is ignored, and the worst that we are is revered. We are reduced to a phantom, able to enjoy neither the past nor the present.

Arnold's poem ends far from the tone and images of the

beginning, yet we have seen a continuity, a constant building upon the first hint of gloom. The reader has been steadily, artfully maneuvered into believing a reality he would not have anticipated in the beginning, and that reality is so cold, so empty, so haunting, that he is sure to pray that his initial expectations about growing old were right after all. □

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Alberta Meza The Double

## Afterwards

Her skin was tighter around those black eyes and less inclined to accent her words. She boasted of silent pain and hummed the tune she had used like a strong hand—a popular song that repeated only a few times because it happened so fast. She paid back friends one at a time and laughed sharp like a night sound; they heard darkness in her and made plans to cry. They bought a gallon of wine and went to her determined to pull her back. She drank with them and watched them run water in the sink, soapy and hot. She sat still as they gathered her clothes—the good dress, the cotton underwear, the nylon slip—and when they pushed it all underwater the blood began again in her limbs; the white walls echoed “Burn it! Burn it! BURN IT!!”

Patricia Austin



## No Comment

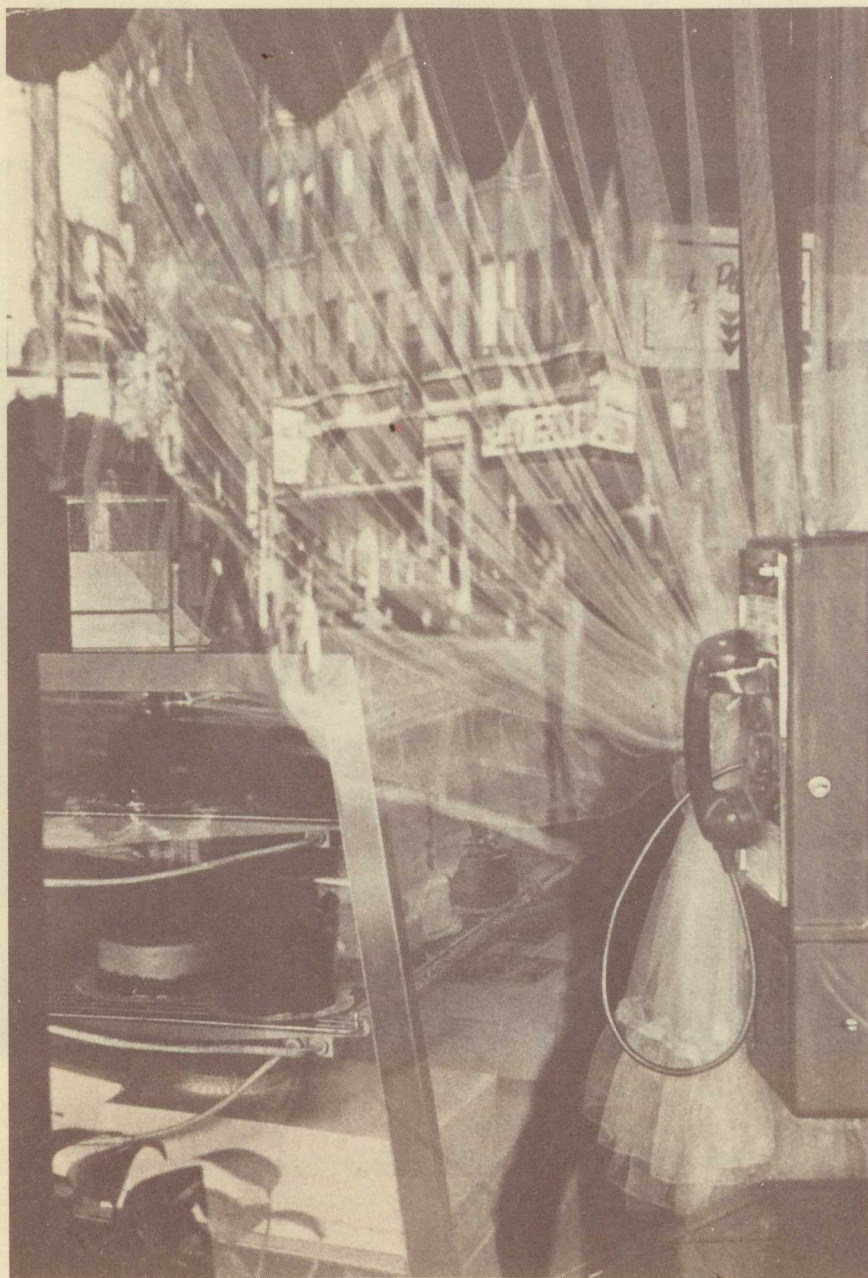
Little girl asks Momma  
Why the Indians they see look sad  
Why daddy is always drunk  
Why the janitor at school limps  
Why sister's every other word is fuck  
Why the neighbor boy died so young  
And finally why she herself  
Feels like crying all the time.

Answerless, thoughtless,  
Momma reads her fortune cookie aloud:  
This summer you will have a nice vacation.

The little girl—  
More alone now than before—  
Puts hair in hand in mouth,  
Looks out the window,  
And wonders why forever-on  
to herself.

Alicia Urban





Wynn Vos Let Them Eat Cake





John Heiland Untitled



## Poetic Catharsis in Auden's Verse of the Late 1930's

Janice Wolff

Aside from its value as pure art, poetry has been and continues to be used as a psychological outlet, an artistic vent for the poet's pain and frustration. W.H. Auden vents his pain through his poetry. Through a poetic catharsis he purges himself of the pain of a chaotic world perilously on the verge of war. Auden recognized this tendency toward poetic catharsis in W.B. Yeats (who died at the end of January, 1939) as he eulogized him in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats": "Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry." Auden knew that Yeats and perhaps all great poets are forced to cope with the pain of their environments by writing poetry. In the same way, Auden writes his pain out of his system — a sort of catharsis of the pen. A mad world racing headlong into global war hurt Auden into poetry.

The poems of the late 1930's that I plan to examine share many common themes and elements, the most central of which is the breakdown of the social order and the destructiveness of war. These poems were written in a short span of time, something like four years, through which Auden was watching as the world moved ever closer to holocaust. As in his elegy on Yeats, set "In the nightmare of the dark," Auden heard "All the dogs of Europe bark."

I sense that Auden sees the plight of man in relation to history, and by association, to technological development and modern warfare. In "September 1, 1939," "From Luther until now" seems to indicate some understanding of the mass-man mentality, his lonely privacy, his technology, the urban movement. He dates this dilemma from Martin Luther's era, implying that the post-Reformation world has abandoned traditional agrarian values and supplanted them with the minutiae of personal life, a focus on gadgetry, and the consuming claims of nationalism. Auden seems to subscribe to Ortega's theory of



mass-mentality when he states, "Intellectual disgrace / Stares from every human face." (From "In Memory of W.B. Yeats.") In "September," Auden discusses "The Strength of Collective Man," which may be his term for Ortega's Mass-man. Nevertheless, it is the same type of human being — a shallow one. This shallow man cannot see beyond, or much beyond, his small existence: "Lest we should see where we are / Lost in a haunted wood." Perhaps this man does not want to see real truth, so he dwells only on the mundane. Auden points out the smallness of the minds, as the commuters vow: "I will be true to the wife / I'll concentrate more on my work." This mass-mentality cannot see the larger moral issues. Auden voices this narrow-mindedness in at least two other works: "The Unknown Citizen," and also in "Spain, 1937." In characterizing the Unknown Citizen, Auden creates him as a vacillating personage: "When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, / he was for war." The citizen was a pawn and easily swayed by the whims of the times. The narrow-minded speaker, a bureaucrat who understands values only in quantified terms, is a fitting spokesman for his perverse culture. Spain, too, was a pawn when Auden personified the country as saying: "Oh, no, I am not the mover; / Not today; not to you. To you, I'm the / Yes, man, the bar companion, the easily duped / I am your business voice. I am your marriage." These lines may be attributed to both the country itself and to any individual citizen caught up in his country's social breakdown.

According to Auden, the city has had a hand in stripping man of his dignity and his individuality. The city has a central focus in "September 1, 1939," "The Unknown Citizen," and "Refugee Blues." In the first, the speaker has taken refuge in an urban bar: "I sit in one of the dives / On Fifty-second Street / Uncertain and afraid." In "The Unknown Citizen," the setting is an ominous "Greater Community" that overwhelms the rightful claims of individuality, the self. And in "Refugee Blues" Auden describes the city as having "ten million souls, / Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes." The city gives mass-man a strong-hold, a fortress, but it also fosters the "quiet life of desperation," one man lost among millions.

Ortega's theory of the masses may be associated with technology's undermining of man's emotions and his integrity. In "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," Auden makes use of "instruments" that are used ironically to measure disparate phenomena — the temperature outside, or the dying Yeats's life signs. But can technology measure the greatness of a man, or the quality of his art, or the depth of his soul? The scientific gadgets are not as much help as the average, vacillating "yes man" may think. Technology cannot measure the aesthetic nature, the beauty, the intuition of a man. In "The Unknown Citizen," Auden satirizes in terms of mechanization what may have been deemed the "Good Life": the Unknown Citizen "had everything necessary to the Modern Man, / A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire." Once man has acquired these contraptions, he supposedly needs nothing else to complete his paradise.

This misuse, or misunderstanding, of technology is carried a step further by the mass-man that Auden portrays. Man misunderstands the freedom that city life and industrialization have earned for him. In "The Unknown Citizen," the speaker asks, "Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd, / Had anything been wrong we should certainly have heard." In this mind-set the individual is sacrificed — if he were a shallow, lack-luster mass-personality, no one would know. But neither would anyone know if he had chafed against his bonds of invisibility, of being a non-entity. The cry of the heart cannot be measured, therefore it does not exist. In "September," Auden pictures "Faces along the bar" clinging to their "Average day," men praying pathetically, "The lights must never go out, / The music must always play." Here, he ironically reiterates the need for the average, the normal. Men must not make waves, must not disturb the status quo. So long as the average man is drugged with the sense of his own freedom, maybe he will not notice his lack of individuality. "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" echoes this false sense of freedom: "Each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom," and "The seas of pity lie / Locked and frozen in each eye." These lines allude to that mistaken sense of freedom; but even if man is not convinced, he cannot articulate the pain. Without the articulation, there



can be no cure, no "healing fountain" to soothe the aching hearts.

In "Refugee Blues," Auden negates the reader's false sense of freedom by presenting a story of fragmentation. In these pre-war years, during Hitler's ascendancy, the Jew is the scape-goat, displaced in a world in fascist flux. The Jew feels keenly his alienation; he has no sense of false freedom. He recognizes, "If you've got no passport, you're officially dead." This is the converse of the Unknown Citizen—who is respected and liked for being a non-entity. But the Jew is hated and displaced because he is a rooted person, someone clearly defined in light of his heritage. The ultimate misery, the cruelest irony, is that the Jew is persecuted for his personhood and yet animals are adored: "Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin, / Saw a door opened and a cat let in: / But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't German Jews."

Although Auden recognizes all these foibles of man and his tenuous version of civilization, in "September 1, 1939" he articulates the moments of brotherhood that sometimes occur in the midst of the struggle. He hopes that "tomorrow" will bring "the rediscovery of romantic love," and he cites some tokens of hope experienced "today": "The shared cigarette, the cards in the candlelit barn . . . today the / Fumbled and unsatisfactory embrace before hurting." Awkward and unsatisfactory as these moments are in the futility of war, they are perhaps more genuine than the mindless bending to the will of society. The actions of individuals seem to carry more authenticity for Auden than those of society:

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.

In these final words of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," Auden is employing a water image (one of baptism and therefore, healing) to affirm man's nobility. In a similar way, Auden states in "September": "All I have is a voice / To undo the folded lie." He has made a cathartic journey of sorts, through the

incongruities of man and his society. Auden finds or creates a sense of poetic relief or release through this personal "voice." When he avers, "There is no such thing as the state / and no one exists alone . . . / We must love one another or die," I understand that he is transforming a personal discovery into a public one. Auden asks for an "affirming flame" through the endorsement of the individual. Through the enlightened use of his pen, Auden has worked his way through his pain to an affirmation of human potential. But he has done more than this — he has turned his personal catharsis into a means of universal healing. [T]



## The Rim

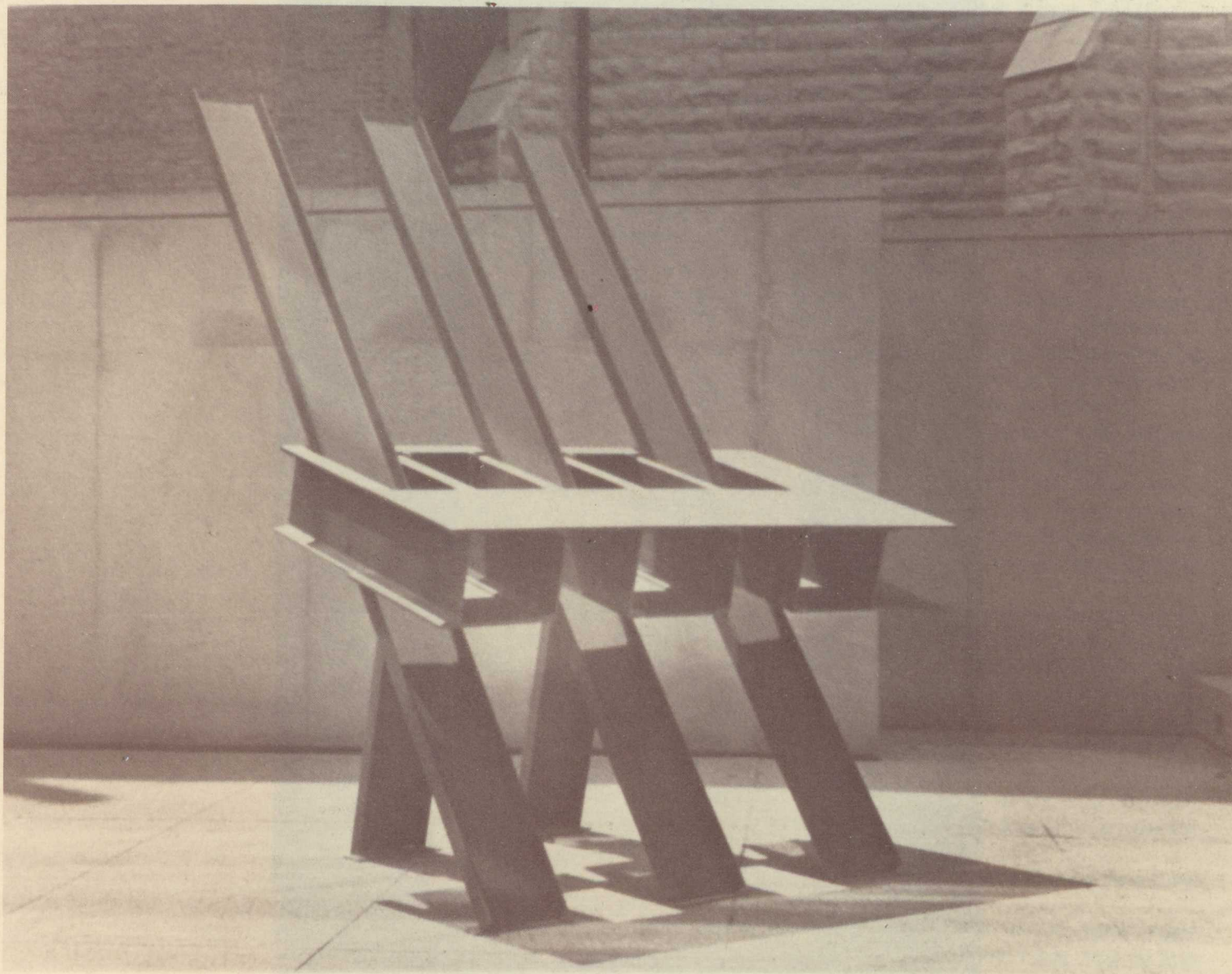
I take a new scar each year—  
A broken bone, stitches, drunk  
Concussion. Stepping back from  
The world's crazy light I see  
A round nothing, God's dim eyes  
Watching like two wise glimmers.

A step back each year, my skin  
Keeps track of time, professors  
Teach me how to peel back green  
Blinding ferns and look vacuums  
In the face, see my life a  
Funny hiccup of swirling  
Gas. The stuff hanging from my  
Bones moves me to class, to sleep,  
To talk frightened bubbling words  
At anyone with wet brown  
Knowing eyes. I'm rotting with  
Grief for my credulous heart.

The rim of the universe  
Becomes more focused with each  
Scar I take, stepping back from  
The noise, retreating to new  
Hushed ground. From young gulping mud—  
Squishable, laughable, soft—  
To dry places my hands hurt  
To touch. Peace would be a loud  
Bleeding demon, scaring me  
Into warm beds, children, cool  
Confessionals of marriage—  
But I am saving myself.  
The nothing is my panting  
Lover, aching to stroke my  
Clean stillness, kiss my bone mouth,  
Carry me over the rim.

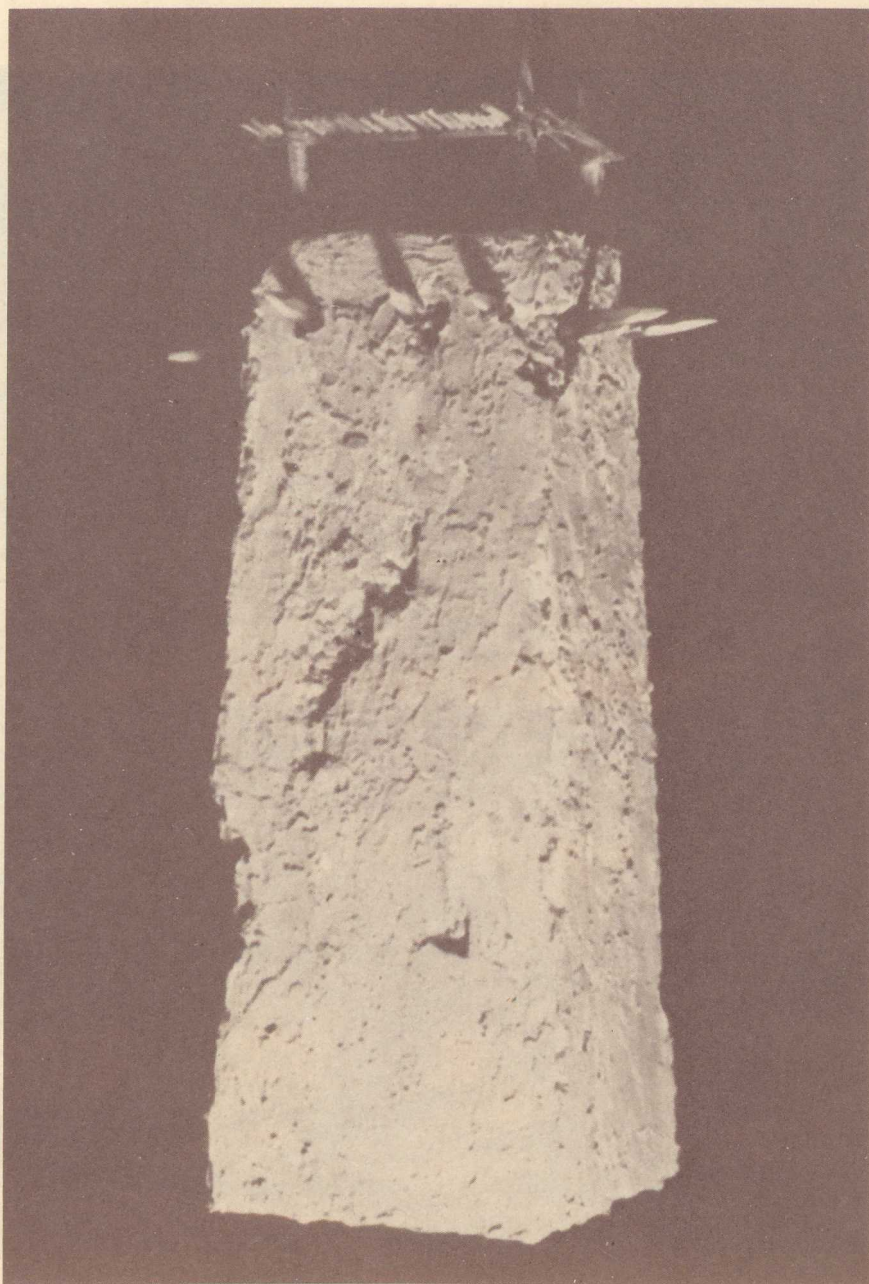
Patricia Austin





Scott Wallace Hip Roof





Stephen Brand Untitled



## The Other Side Of The Hill

Chris Swanberg

The hazy mid-morning light fiddled its way through fresh kitchen curtains. In the background, the day's first soaps began their dull drone that would end near evening.

As mother poured coffee, Constance didn't look up. It had been settled long ago: when Constance had a guest, mother poured.

"Thank you, Mrs. Colinkis. Such good coffee . . . always." Helen, the long time friend from childhood, knew the rules.

At the Colinkis house, you always had excellent coffee and Greek pastry. You could not say no. That was one of the rules.

Thick accent: "You girls gonna go shopping today?"

The 'girls' were both over thirty-five, but the rule was: any unmarried women whose mother still lives is a girl.

Another rule was that you always had to have some man in mind — some perfect marriage prospect, not mere companionship — for Constance, who was nearly over the hill. Preferably he would be a rich Greek doctor but concessions could be made.

The rule had turned into a ritual, a ritual which Constance endured as many endure sermons. The plain truth was, she wanted a man. Going out and getting one like everyone else was not one of the rules, and Constance was no rule breaker.

For years Greek yentas had invaded her life — all well-intentioned. Some arrangements were more interesting than others. Only a few mattered.

Peter Peplos, the florist who sang in the church choir, arranged an interesting one when Constance was twenty-seven.

"Say, you know Mrs. Colinkis, my friend Francis likes Constance's picture in the church book."

Peter Peplos threw a party. Beautiful flowers. Some champagne. Dolmades. Never mind that Francis was forty-six and



not Greek. He was rich. That was only bending the rules.

Constance enjoyed Francis. He was an interesting conversationalist. He was a good dresser and a gourmet. He made the Midwest winter seem shorter. She could have called it love and been done with it, but for months it was dinner parties, flowers, plays, a few foreign films — and perfunctory kisses.

Her sixth graders were beginning to catch on. "Where'd he take you this week, Miss Colinkis?" She was having fun.

After they saw *ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL*, Constance allowed herself a third glass of some fine wine at "Le Plum." She held the goblet gracefully in her manicured hands. People always said she had beautiful hands. Her rose nail polish and the claret reflected candlelight.

"Francis? May I be frank with you?"

Francis nodded unconvincingly.

"Francis . . . Frank. I've been thinking about something. Are you afraid of aging? I mean, you take care of yourself. You look so good. You touch up your hair a bit, don't you?"

"Constance. You've known all along, haven't you?"

"Known what?"

"I'm gay."

Suddenly Constance noticed the crumbs on the white linen. The rosy candlelight turned mauve as she brushed the crumbs onto her lap. A large crumb wedged into one of her nails. The last bite of chocolate mousse cake tasted absurd.

"Jesus Christ." She wasn't sure if she said it or just thought it.

The next morning Mrs. Colinkis asked how her date with Francis had been as Constance poured the coffee.

"Fine."

"Where you going next week?"

"I don't know. He's starting to bore me."

"He's not Greek, is he," mother said, more as a statement than a question, walking into the living room where the maudlin organ interlude of *The Secret Storm* gasped against the waves.

Right before Constance turned thirty, there was Nick. Nick, the proverbial Greek. She could thank Parthenios the restaura-

teur for this one. "Come to the Isles and have Constance meet my new waiter."

So what if Nick was eighteen, not fluent in English, and definitely not rich. He was Greek, yes?

Nick waited on the table. Adeptly. His lighter flamed the saganaki on the first try. "Oopah!" he grinned.

That summer he tried to show her what American women have been missing. Every Sunday night he took her to macho movies. She drove. Afterwards they would sit in her car in front of his tenement where he would attack her.

"Connie. Connie. Connie," he would whisper kissing her madly.

She loved it but within minutes would remember the rule: good girls don't.

The pattern began to change. As his language got better, his loving got worse. It stopped dead after he was smart enough to pass the driver's test and buy a bright blue Cutlass Supreme.

To celebrate the new car, he took her to **Saturday Night Fever** at the drive-in. Connie was ready to break all the rules in the cool dark velveteen back seats.

"Connie? How do you say . . . fee—on—say?"

"Yes."

"I want you . . . to tell me . . . how to bring her here."

"What?"

"She live in Thessalonika. You know the place?"

She crushed a popcorn seed deep into the velveteen, breaking a flaming peach nail. "Damn." Her mouth tasted salty and rancid. The large over-iced Coke tasted morose. She concentrated on John Travolta who was alone on a noisy subway.

"How was movie?" mother asked at coffee time.

"Rotten . . . I hate him."

"Who you hate?"

"John Travolta."

When she was thirty-two, her third cousin had a man for her. Tasso. So what's the big deal if he lives in New York and Constance lives in Chicago? Constance could take time off school in the fall. She'd been there long enough. They owed her one.



A tour of the East Coast was arranged with a stopover at Tasso's parents' home, where Tasso also lived. Just like Constance.

Tasso. Thirty-six. Grocery person. Rich. Saved one hundred dollars a week since he was sixteen. Tall Tasso. Tall like Constance. Photo looked good, despite green plaid slacks and greaser shoes. Nice arms.

Tasso's parents arranged a luncheon that Constance thought was very unGreek: tuna sandwiches and tomato soup. The parents were not brilliant conversationalists. Constance repressed boredom; they were shy, that's all. And Tasso did look good. She convinced herself that he was pleasant and soft-spoken. "Strong, silent type" she kept telling herself.

With him she saw the sights: New York in autumn, the Statue of Liberty, the U.N. He was fast but not as fast as Nick. At the end of the week, he proposed on the Staten Island Ferry. He produced a blue velvet box, a little dusty it seemed to her for a fleeting second. He did not take her hand in his, but simply handed over the box. Though it was a diamond, it was old and gaudy, though not an antique or heirloom. Awkwardly, he slipped it on. Her pearly nail was more elegant, but she remembered a rule: diamonds are forever.

Another rule is that the parents must eat together before the wedding. This was the responsibility of the bride's side. When Tasso's parents arrived, a war broke out. At dinner, the guest broke several very important rules: always rave about the food. Always smile, talk, and laugh. And never ask about a dowry in the presence of the dowress.

"What do you mean, no dowry? It cost us money to make this trip!" Tasso's father went from total silence to screaming. "Our boy deserves the best!"

Tasso's father suddenly got up and marched out. Tasso and his mother followed. They all got in the car and drove off. They never came back.

Late Friday a few weeks later, Constance deposited the invitations, neatly written in her own hand, in the waste basket next to the television. **Dallas** groaned away.

And so the arrangements came and the arrangements went.

Most lasted a night. But when she was thirty-four, even her father started to play the game.

"Connie, I met a guy who has a nice son. About your age."

"Ah, Dad."

"Really, I'm gonna have them for supper."

"Dad. It's so embarrassing."

"No. No. Friend to friend. That's all."

In the bright yellow kitchen light, sipping Rodytis and eating pastitsio, Constance examined Alex Mannis. Her discovery burned her. "Familiar. I feel I've known him forever. He fits." They functioned as family. No rules were broken.

"This is wonderful, Mrs. Colinkis. Where did you get the fresh feta cheese? — and these olives! This is the best baklava I've had since I went to Greece."

Everyone was charmed, and the coffee and Metaxa went down smooth.

Constance ascended Mount Olympus. "Helen, he's terrific . . . so interesting . . . and so sexy . . . Alex Mannis . . . yes, Alex, the man . . . I don't know what kind of money he has . . . some kind of management . . . yea, real serious . . ."

The three hour phone calls with Alex began — long distance since he lived in the suburbs. Then came the dinners at his apartment. She cooked.

She loved his place. It smelled like Alex — soft Greek sweat. She liked the plainness of the place, the big vinyl chair, the masculine woven shades. She had the urge to decorate. She planted crocus and hyacinth between the bushes in front of his window, the spring air adding to her intoxication.

Alex was not unlike Nick.

"Oh those hands. Give me those hands."

Finally Connie broke a rule: good girls come home at night.

He talked Greek weddings and honeymoons on Samos. Her Greek heart danced to ancient tambourines, tambourines never held, let alone played, with the others.

Then — one week, no call. She called him, the second rule she ever broke: good girls don't chase boys. He said he needed time. How much time? He didn't know.

Two weeks. She called his sister. What's going on with Alex?



Oh, Alex? He's always been like that . . . Always? Like what? How many times has this happened? How many Connies have there been? How many times? How many?

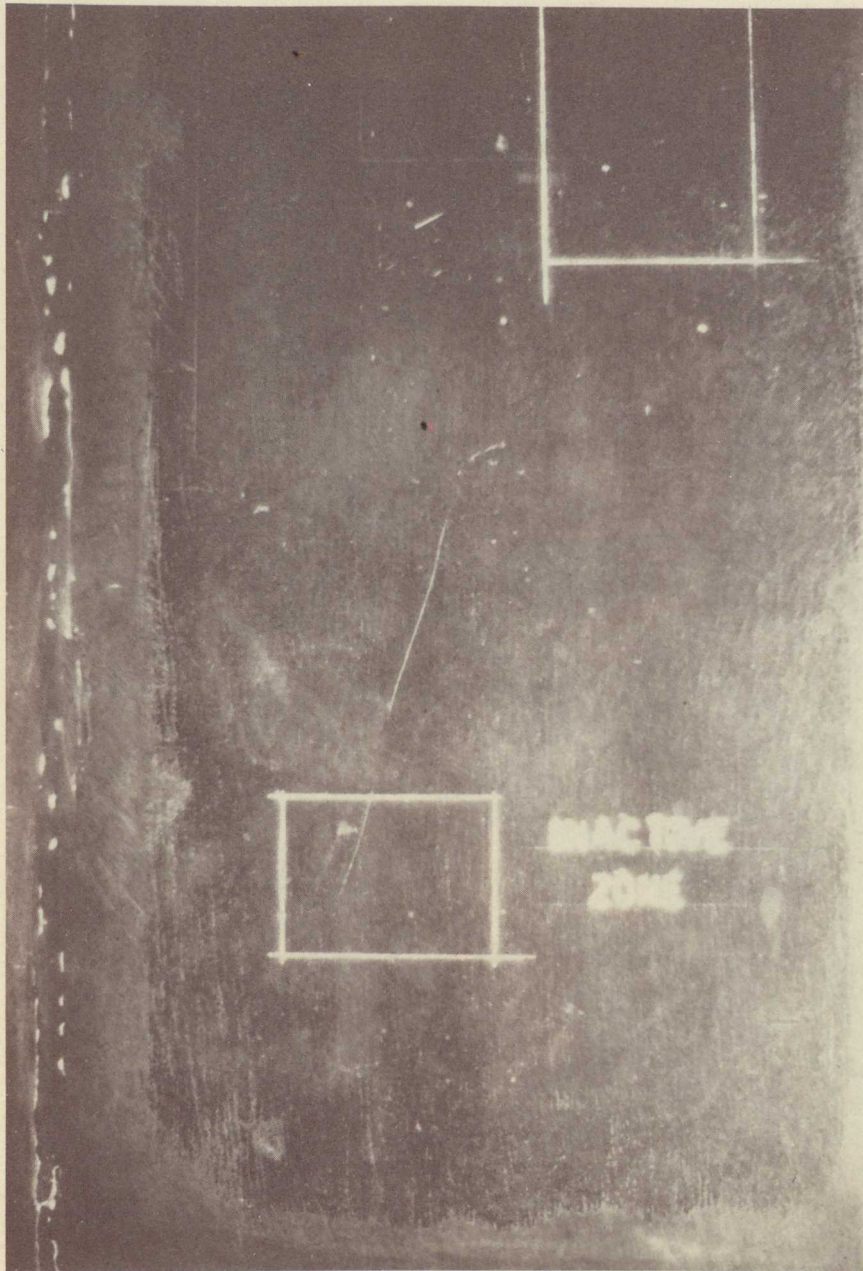
A month. She visited him. He is like a Dionysian dancer in a stupor. The energy is gone. She knows. She feels a kinship with Ulysses — her heart doomed to wander forever. She cannot solve the riddle of the Sphinx: what has two eyes, two hands, strong arms, and acts like a lover but is not?

And then more time. He had to clear his head. And then nothing. Nothing like a straight line cardiogram . . .

• • • • •

"Yea, Mom. We're going shopping." T





Emil k. Schlee Untitled for right now







## Nursery Nightmares

She told me  
how her room  
springs to life  
at night

of mirrored mobiles  
menacing in half-light

and the red cat  
in the corner  
that becomes a toothy  
wolf when the moon  
illuminates the room.

She said her sheets  
wind about and bind  
her down till dawn

when baby dolls  
no longer leer and sneer

and her hobby horse  
no longer mocks and rocks alone  
in acute pursuit  
of little girls  
who really ought to be  
asleep.

Carol Joy Jaros



## My Room

A sanitarium in drag  
Where nostalgic paraphernalia reside  
Where images of a past generation  
Like phantasms,  
Come to life and bedazzle me  
With the art of music and dance  
Inciting and inviting me  
Enhancing my surroundings  
But I know that when the illusion fades  
Beneath these patterns of images  
Are four white walls.

Eileen Austria







## Leave-Taking

it was  
hard on you,  
i know,  
to spend all  
night  
in loving,

but soon this  
ache that  
troubles our  
limbs  
will pass,  
tearing

at our hearts  
instead;  
deeply did we  
drink, each  
from the other's  
yearning,

and now  
we are left  
with the  
bittersweet  
dregs,  
of memory.

Al Balaz



