

[Vol. 61]

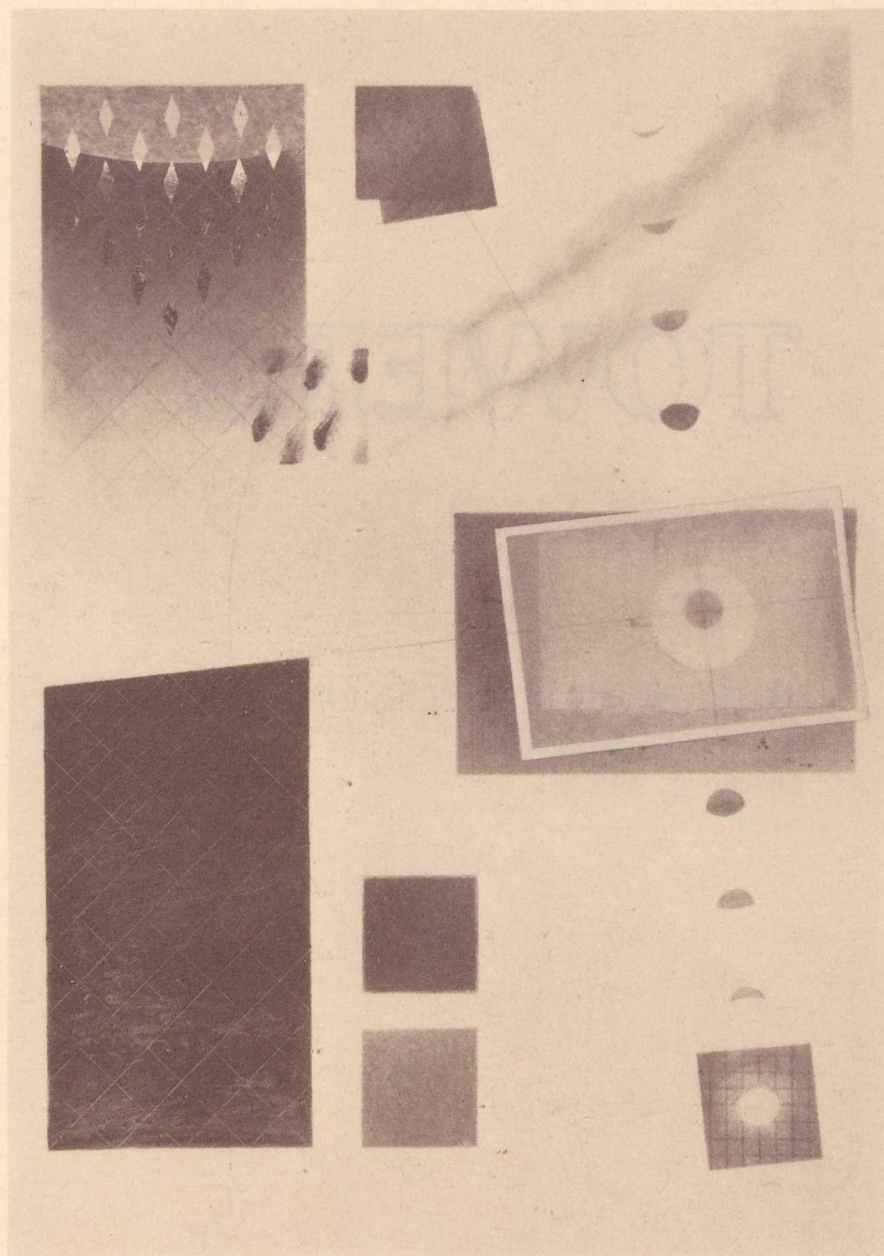


# TOWERS

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no. 61

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
DeKalb, Illinois  
Spring, 1984



David Ayer The Sun, The Moon, The Earth, The Stars



We would like to dedicate this issue of **Towers**, to E. Nelson James for his many years of service.

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Eliot Among the Birds: Women in the Early Poems

by J. L. Ollenquist

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NIU Department of English



## Visual

Rosary Bead Plant Daniel Grych	Cover
The Sun, The Moon, The Earth, The Stars David Ayer	2
Vinylesque I Jill King	5
Self Portrait Paula Martinez	8
What Potential The Lonely Heart Has Shown Teresa Iverson	11
El Cojo Cantor Alberto Meza	12
Afternoon With Anthony Andrew L. Arvanetes	16
Paths, #3 Mary Anne Boies	21
Whistlestop Emil Schlee	29
Couch Paul Stark	30
Untitled Howard Russo	32
Sepulchrel Imre Gonczy	36
Untitled Peter J. Gallagher	39
Untitled David Reninger	40
The Wonder Of Walking Steve Romans	44
I Don't See Anybody Around Here Going Out Of Their Way To Show Me A Good Time B.J. Scribner	46

## Verbal

Falling Poets Tad A. Vogl	9
The Engagement David Antos	10
My Soul to Keep Christopher Tabbert	13
Mornings in Moscow Christine Swanberg	17
Once More To Reavis Heather Z. McCandless	18
For Eternal Song Patricia Austin	22
To My Friend Contemplating Suicide Lupe Lynch	23
... And After Red Weather Tigers? Christine Swanberg	24
The Stroke Victim Tom Holland	31
Eliot Among the Birds: Women in the Early Poems J.L. Ollenquist	32
Untitled Denny VanDerGinst	37
Butterfly Net L.R. Camp	38
Scoop Laurie M. Johnson	40
Bell Bottom Hats Chris Stanley	45
As Worlds Collide Susan Eichner	47
Inspiration (Compliments of E.H.) Susan Eichner	48





Paula Martinez Self Portrait

## Falling Poets

i read  
other poets  
hanging themselves  
from walls  
where blind movers  
push past  
hurrying time  
and  
sometimes  
i will be  
to cushion  
falling poets  
against hard floors  
and  
always  
when i fall  
blind movers  
tramp mud  
across my crumpled paper  
tomb.

Tad A. Vogl

## The Engagement

Do you remember just when the fluttering chains  
dissolved in air  
and left us soundly numb, victorious? Family ties  
spun on dead necks and streamed into vapors  
as if intelligence like an avenging paw  
had struck for good.

So with a clawprick began the Light Ages  
and since then—when precisely did the old fabric  
shred?—we've glowed as only expatriates can.

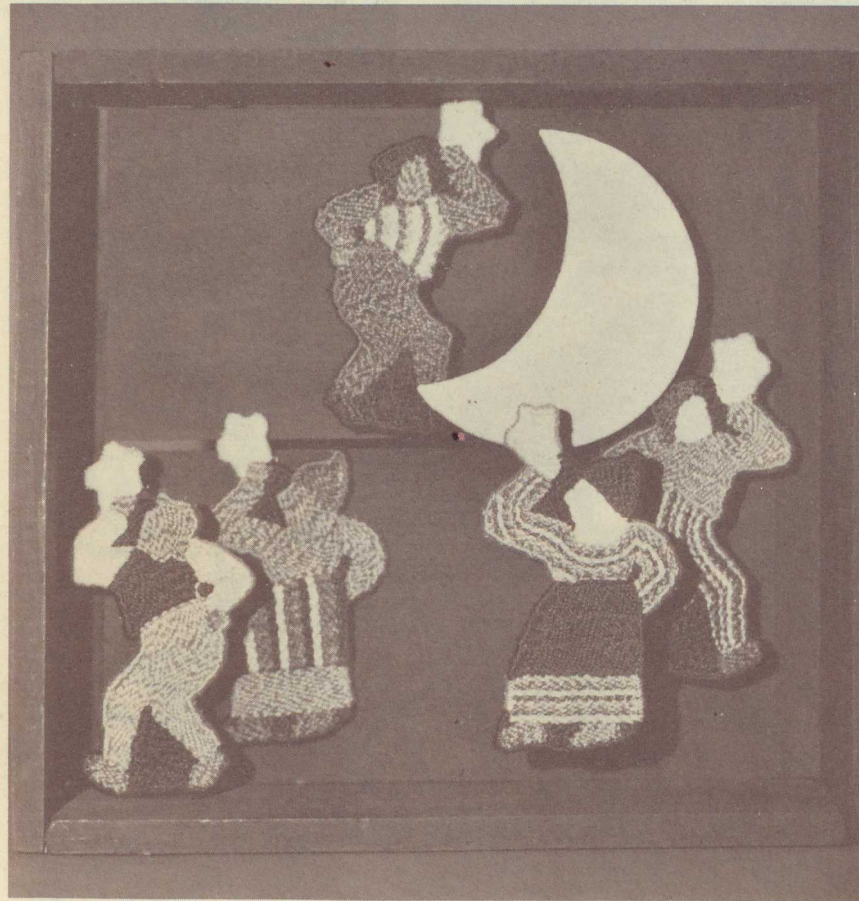
We've known ten years or more that legal bliss  
went out with the dodo.  
But expatriating through the patriarchy  
breeds an eventual halt: in like an insinuating lamb,  
hoof left, hoof right, fleece  
trapping our fine free radicals,  
a clump of old hair binds vision.

Dearly beloved, folds are gathered here  
and air shakes with a clump clump clumping,  
wall constructed for our safer passage,  
hairshirt risen from the earth we took for breath.  
How, faced with it, can we not dine?

Chew hairs we must and in our chewing  
contract. This for that.  
Our hearts bead this fiber, that fiber,  
are lost home, stuck bugs tapping at the linen.  
That's that.

Do you remember exactly when we created a free world?  
It was sometime during the period we said eek  
in imitation of mice and not because,  
tickled by our roots,  
we grew afraid and grasped them between ringed fingers  
to ease our laughter.

David Antos





## My Soul to Keep

Christopher Tabbert

When Justin was five years old he was extremely curious about everything, and he often embarrassed adults by asking them questions they preferred not to answer. Sometimes he received misleading answers or none at all. Still, he discovered new and amazing things every day. He memorized his address and telephone number. He learned that caterpillars turn into butterflies. He learned that his parents, whom he had regarded as elemental and inevitable, had parents of their own. Each discovery suggested new questions, and Justin always wanted to know more of the answers. And more.

One night he learned that his parents went to sleep at night. This somehow hadn't occurred to him before. He was sent to bed very early every night, almost immediately after dinner, and his parents were already up when he woke in the mornings. Justin knew that his parents had a bedroom and a bed of their own, but he thought it was used only occasionally, on weekend afternoons when he was supposed to be taking his nap. It seemed to him that his parents were above the need to sleep. One night in early spring, though, he found out otherwise. Justin's parents had gone out to celebrate his mother's announcement that they would soon have a new baby. Justin found himself suddenly awake in the middle of the night, and seemingly alone. The house was dark and silent. He called out, in a sort of stage whisper, for his parents; tired from being out late and buried beneath their blankets, they couldn't hear him. He needed a drink of water and he realized that no one was going to get it for him. So he made his own way. And from then on he knew that his parents had to sleep just like other people.

"Justin, baby—**please!**" said Justin's mother, with uncharacteristic impatience. "Stop that."

Usually relegated to the back seat of the car, Justin was impressed by the novelty of riding in front. From the moment his mother started down the driveway, he had fiddled with everything he could reach that interested or amused him. He buckled and unbuckled his seatbelt. He played with the push buttons and the volume control on the radio. He found a flashlight in the glove compartment and turned it on and off for a while. He took out a road map, studied it, then tore it trying to figure out how to fold it. Justin kept himself quite entertained this way. As he practiced rolling the window up and down, though, the squeaking of the handle had become too much for his mother.

"Could you please stop that?" she said. "For me?"

"I'm hot," Justin said.

"Well then just roll the window down and leave it down. We'll get a nice breeze that way."

Justin complied. He was not sure exactly why his mother had spoken harshly to him, but thought it might have something to do with the baby.

"I wasn't mad at you, honey," his mother said. "But I want to get to Dr. Quinlan's on time and I get a little nervous driving in traffic like this."

"Okay."

Justin folded his arms across his chest and squinted ahead. He could hardly see at all because of the intense glare on the car's hood. After several minutes he said, "Are you going to get the baby today?"

"No, not today, Justin. A couple more weeks—in September."

"Will it be a boy or a girl?"

"Well," Justin's mother said, "Dad and I were kind of hoping for a girl. Would you like to have a little sister?"

"That would be okay," said Justin. He began to perform a drumroll on the dashboard but then noted his mother's glance and stopped. "Where's she now?" he suddenly said, pointing. "In **there?**"

"That's right, honey." She patted the round front of her

blouse. "Right here."

"Where was she before that?"

His mother hesitated, regarding herself in the rearview mirror.

"Was she in heaven?"

"Well . . ." his mother replied.

"Was I there, too, before you got me?"

She only smiled, and reached over to squeeze the back of his neck. Justin pursued the matter no further. For the rest of the ride he worked on cracking his knuckles, which he hadn't yet learned how to do.

Justin spent the day with his grandparents, who had agreed to watch him while his mother was at the doctor's. Grandpa had several errands to run that morning and Justin accompanied him. They walked the few blocks to Clark Street. Whenever Justin slowed down or stopped to look at something, Grandpa tugged him brusquely by the collar. "Come on," he would say. "Keep up." Grandpa knew where he was going and he did not approve of dawdling.

Their first stop was a corner newsstand. Grandpa bought a paper and tucked it under his arm. The newsdealer, a rotund, balding man, flipped Justin a piece of butterscotch candy. Justin did not like butterscotch, but he unwrapped it and put it in his mouth, smiled, and thanked the man. After blending with Grandpa into the crowd of pedestrians, he stuffed the candy into his pocket. They went into a pharmacy, where Grandpa filled his and Grandma's prescriptions, a hardware store, for the purchase of paint and brushes, and a bakery. Justin liked the bakery best. Grandpa instructed him to choose any one from the available selection of cookies and cupcakes. His face pressed to the glass display case, Justin tried to decide between a yellow cupcake with chocolate frosting and a giant chocolate-chip cookie. Grandpa ordered two loaves of raisin bread and five cinnamon sweet rolls. The lady behind the counter packed them in white boxes and wrapped them with plain string. Outside—Grandpa with his packages and Justin with his strawberry jelly donut—they noticed a small crowd assembled by the newsstand at the corner and went to investigate.

It was the newsdealer. His round body was spread out on the sidewalk just outside the shade of his dark green wooden

hut. His eyes looked as if they were focused on something far away. Beads of sweat settled on his upper lip and on the ridge above his eyebrows. His lips were parted, his teeth clenched to form a grimace. His breathing was hard, slow, anguished: each time he inhaled, gasping, his eyes widened grotesquely. Like the other people, Grandpa and Justin stood reverently over him. Justin saw the people shaking their heads and muttering to each other. Grandpa whispered something to another man, who nodded solemnly. After some minutes an ambulance arrived. The man was quickly taken away. The passersby dispersed.

Grandpa and Justin walked home through the alley so that Grandpa could drop off his new paint and brushes in the garage. When they came out of the garage they discovered a dead robin in the backyard. Its head was crushed, its beak cracked and twisted; on its matted feathers were stains of black, drying blood. One wing, perpendicular to the ground and to the rest of the bird's body, swayed lifelessly in the wind. "Aw, the poor thing," said Grandpa. "Probably someone's cat got him."

Justin bent down to look closer. "Don't touch it!" Grandpa shouted, pulling him firmly by the arm and leading him toward the house. "Stay away from there."

Grandma had prepared lunch and so the three sat down to eat. As soon as grace was finished Justin said, "Grandpa, is the man we saw going to be like the robin?"

"I don't know, Justin."

"What happens if he died?"

"Maybe he'll go to heaven," Grandpa said.

"He will," Grandma said, "if he was a good man."

Justin let the subject rest a while and concentrated on his lunch. After a few minutes he held his fork upside down in front of one eye, closed the other, squinted through the prongs, and said, "Grandpa's in jail." He turned to Grandma and was about to announce that she, too, was in jail; Grandpa advised him to hush if he wanted any dessert.

"Does everybody go to heaven if they die?" Justin said.

"Not if," said Grandpa. "When."

"Shh!" Grandma said, giving her husband a pointed look.

"Why baby him?" said Grandpa.

Grandma dipped her index finger into her steaming cup and

then flicked a few drops of coffee at Grandpa. Justin had seen her do this before.

"Justin," Grandpa said, touching his napkin to his chin, "you're much too young to worry about that."

"But **do** they?"

"People go to heaven," Grandma said, "who live holy lives on earth."

Justin was not satisfied by this answer. He took a few mouthfuls of food. "What about birds?" he said. "Do they go to heaven?"

Grandma dipped her finger and said that maybe there was a special part of heaven reserved for birds.

"Dogs too? I like dogs. Not cats."

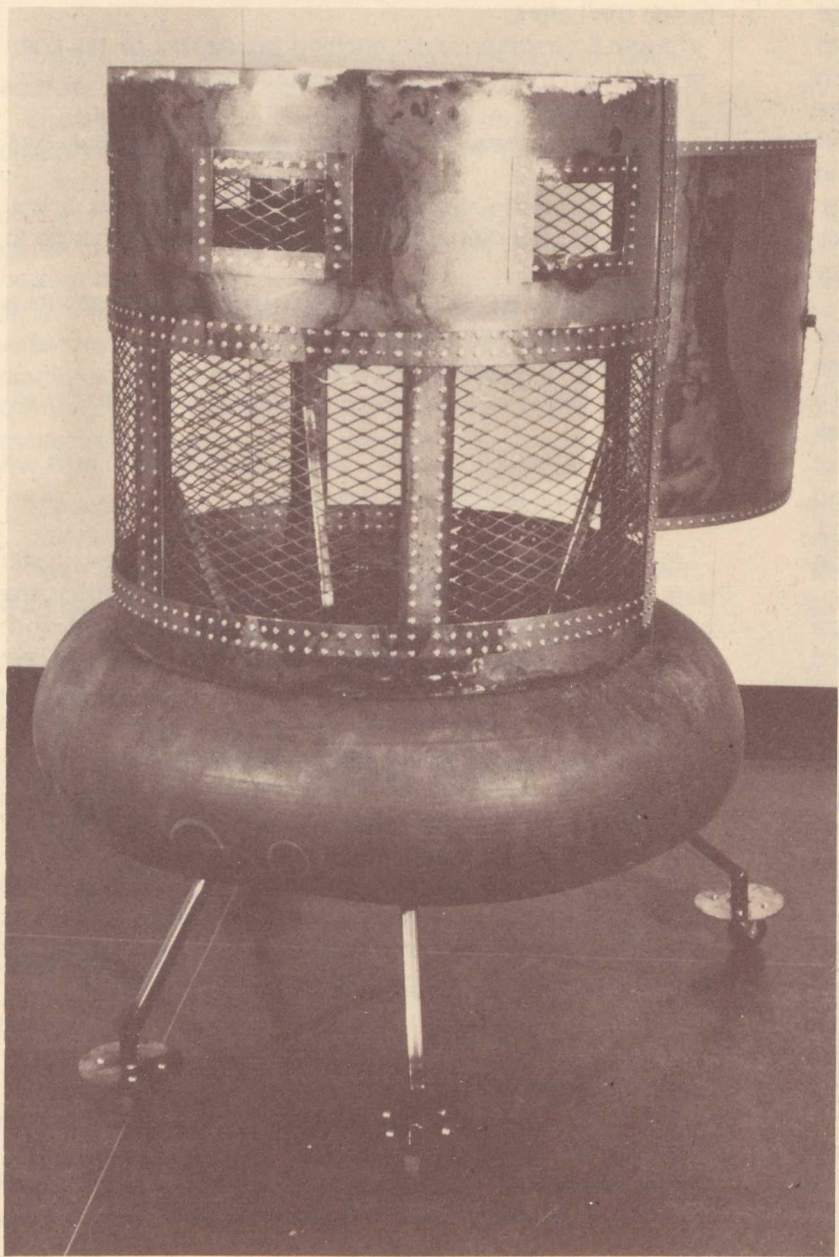
"I don't know," said Grandma. "You ask the strangest questions."

"Justin," Grandpa said, "try and forget about the man we saw today. And the bird. Try and forget it."

On the way home to the suburbs with his mother, Justin kept thinking about the mangled bird, dead, and about the stricken man, almost dead. Perhaps fully dead, by then. Suddenly he remembered something: he reached into his pocket and took out the sticky, lint-covered piece of candy the man had given him. Maybe the man was already in heaven. Justin could not understand why anyone would want to go there; it seemed a frightful place, full of dead people. (And dead birds, too, if Grandma was right.) He was glad that his new baby sister was now safe inside his mother.

Justin tossed the piece of candy out the window. There were some things he wouldn't learn until later. In the late afternoon on the way home with his mother driving, he felt quite sure that his parents would never, never leave him. T





Andrew L. Arvanetes *Afternoon With Anthony*

# Mornings in Moscow

I

Icy winds on white knuckles.  
Black coats huddle at bus stop.  
No one talks.

It arrives, painted lukewarm,  
hissing carbon,  
the same color as the air.

They tell me it is free;  
yet squeezed among dark shoulders  
I am shoved up steps

to the old woman, nodding,  
who rings paper kopecks  
for some Russian purpose.

II

Another old woman sweeps  
state's street with pine broom.  
Her heavy black coat

makes a small shadow  
against Saint Basil's.  
Even her babushka dims

in the swirling incongruous colors  
of this giant's turban.  
It is still white night.

I walk alone to Red Square.  
In vertigo, I sink into  
this red cobblestone lake.

There is blood beneath my feet,  
and I remember why there are so many women,  
so few men.

III

He is still preserved:  
A line of chaffed inscrutable faces wait  
as if waiting is the thing itself.

Perhaps it is hatred of lines  
or the remembrance of Easter crosses kissed,  
after learning of germs,

but I cannot bear to look.  
I choose to watch the children,  
whose fur boots, caps, and embroidered coats

reincarnate a time when red:  
was the color of children's faces,  
decorated tunics and sashes of cossacks,

the sparks of fires they danced around.  
Now, no trees break the bitterness  
of this cutting snow.

IV

"Beneath the floating landmass"  
sticks in my throat like bone sliver.  
I pierce through ground: a miner's canary.

Down. Down. Down the escalator,  
a three hundred foot broken arm of a giant.  
I am inside the cast.

When I slide off the giant's fingertips,  
I have become a Jack in the Beanstalk gone awry:  
blended marbles, gilted chandeliers for miles.

If red becomes giant nuclear sunsets,  
only these rooms will not hold those  
steamed eyeless in subways.

A strange idea of afterlife, I think,  
riding the subway nowhere,  
looking into faces I know are not the enemy.

Christine Swanberg

## Once More To Reavis

Heather Z. McCandless

Past the post office kiosk and the faculty parking lot, over the drainage ditch that supports a family of ducks, through a glass-fronted building, and I'm there: Reavis Hall. I walk the length of the building and stop to admire it. I carefully inspect every window, every door. I mentally hold my breath. Is it? Could it be? Yes. I breathe a sigh of relief. Nothing has changed. Reavis Hall is the same nondescript red brick that I remember. Oh, I suppose someone might distinguish the brick flower box out front as pretty in the Spring, when the ground crews fill it with petunias, as if four feet of beauty could intercede for the whole building. But in general, by all accounts, the building is hopelessly dull.

It didn't always matter to me what Reavis looked like. I just came and went, the typical college student. I attended classes, went to movies, took too many tests and constantly tried to weasel my way out of homework. One day I heard about a group tantalizingly plumed the English Club. It seemed perfectly logical for an English major to join the English Club, so I went to the first meeting.

To my surprise, I found that the English Club consisted of two old members, an advisor, and a room full of uncomfortable-looking people who, I assumed with good reason, were the 'new' members. I listened quietly as the advisor explained what the Club was about (anything) and what it had done (nothing), while I took a careful look at my environment. I was lodged in the corner of the ugliest couch to emerge from the Fifties. And, as if that wasn't distinction enough, it was lumpy and the springs stuck out. It was also the most handsome piece of furniture in the room. "The Lounge", as it was euphemistically referred to, consisted of several beat up end tables, a green fake naugahyde chair whose seat had been repaired with what looked like pea green electrician's tape, a couple ratty straight back chairs, a gray bookshelf, a love seat in taupe vinyl patched with silver duct tape, and two uncomfortable-looking red chairs, unlikely companions to my couch seat. One look told me that the entire suite had been donated from a none-too-successful rummage sale. Not that the furniture made any

difference in the room. It is impossible to do aesthetic harm to a cinderblock room painted in shades of Pepto Bismol pink and tiled in Early American Institution. Even the window ledge came complete with dead cactuses. I wondered, disconsolate, if anything worthwhile could happen in such a room.

Although I didn't hold out much hope for the Club's auspicious beginning, I listened. The Club's advisor continued on about the Club's activities and its plans for the future. I could not help but notice, as he talked, what an interesting looking fellow he was. He was rather short and stocky with an unmistakable New York accent and unruly hair that just covered his bald spot. His clothes gave one the impression that he had never fully recovered from the 1960's. His lapel was wide, his ties bright, and his trousers had not just a little hint of the bellbottom about them. And yet, I liked to listen to him. His words were sharp and witty. His sentences had a cadence, a rhythm, that invited listening. After a short while the hideous surroundings began to matter less. I do not mean to imply that they disappeared, but I didn't seem to notice them anymore. All that seemed to matter was what this man was saying. I went home that night wondering what sort of beings could live in such ugliness and not only function, but cause you to forget about the environment simply by speaking.

The next day I made the marvelous discovery that my Introduction to Literary Studies teacher could do the same thing. Imagine for a moment the classrooms in a building that boasts such a lounge, and you will be but half right as to the institutional squalor. The curtains in most classrooms were gray plastic with some odd-looking geometric print. I don't suppose that the print, itself, was odd-looking, but since most of the curtain rings were missing, the curtains dipped in spots, giving the print a rather ridiculously jaunty appearance. The rooms were of the same cinder block as the Lounge and the colors were worse. The only claim to gentility was a small table lectern that looked to be made of cast-off paneling hastily glued together. Amidst these dismal surroundings the professor stood out.

His appearance was not unusual, at least not to a veteran college student. He wore a cardigan and a tie with some type of polyester trousers (as much of a mainstay to the professional wardrobe as the sportcoat with leather elbow patches). His hair was too long, curling up a bit at the nape of his neck,

giving him (curiously enough) the appearance of a poet. He had a long face, his nose a bit too prominent, and deep-set eyes. He was tall and looked awkward somehow. It wasn't that he looked foolish or laughable; rather, that he looked almost as if he had been put together with spare parts. The man was a portrait of incongruities—until he spoke. And in that first instant of listening, you forgot the gangling body and remembered only the voice—a southern drawl with such mellowness and music in it, that merely listening seemed to warm you. Again, I forgot the dismal surroundings and concentrated on the man.

At first, I thought it merely odd that two professors could so command my interest that I forgot for a moment where I was. But as time went on, I began to realize that most of my professors, to some extent or other, could perform the same feat. That was amazing. I couldn't explain it. None of my professors in other disciplines could do it. As I sat in plush, comfortable auditorium seats in a building with perfect white cloth curtains, I wondered. As I surreptitiously yawned through dusty seminars across campus, I wondered. And as I consistently clock-watched through a semester of lectures delivered by the most perfect man I have ever seen, I wondered. There had to be a reason, I was certain. And I was determined to find it.

I didn't quite know how to set about my investigation. I thought that perhaps I should spend more time in Reavis. As it turned out, luck was with me because the English Club started getting busy. Although only a few people had returned after that first meeting, they were a determined bunch and set about stirring up the entire department. For the next few months I spent nearly every waking hour in Reavis Hall. I got myself involved in innumerable poetry readings, committee meetings, and film festivals. In fact, I was so busy that I nearly lost track of my investigation. All I ever seemed to do was come from, or go to, Reavis Hall. The funny thing was that I never seemed to mind it. I joked with the faculty. I planned events and programs. I gave advice that others actually requested. It was a wonderful swirl of activities. What I did not realize was that the building had begun to work on me.

I really didn't notice it at first; it was such a gradual change. I suppose the first thing must have been that I didn't find Reavis Hall such a dull building anymore. I suspect that I just stopped noticing. Then I began smiling just as soon as I stepped off the

bus. Sometimes I'd smile right on past the windowed newness of DuSable Hall. But the minute I saw that red brick corner, I'd start to hum to myself. I'd hum all the way into the building and on up the stairs to the Lounge. Then, finally, I noticed what was happening. It must have been in late March because the sun was shining and the air had a hint of Spring. I was making my way up the front walk to Reavis and I happened to see a good friend of mine waving from the second floor window above Reavis' front door. I intensified my usual smile and waved back, thinking what a nice day it was and how lovely Reavis looked. I stopped dead. Could I really have thought such a thing? Reavis—lovely? Surely my sight was going. But as I looked up at the building again, I saw that it was true. Reavis did look lovely. My friend, however, looked a little confused at my abrupt standstill. I went in shaking my head, wondering.

Ah, but the changes didn't stop there. It seemed that the more time I spent in Reavis, the more time I wanted to spend. I started doing my homework—in the Lounge. I began eating my lunch there. I told friends to meet me there. I spent so much time in that room that one professor jocularly offered to name a chair after me. That was the worst part. I started sitting in those awful red chairs—and found them comfortable. Not only did the room no longer bother me, I kept insisting that the place could be salvaged with a few bright well-placed posters!

But the changes didn't even stop there. I began to take an interest in my professors. They had seemed boringly the same after I discovered their collective ability. But now they became distinct personalities. And not just distinct, but interesting. Once I found a professor who interested me, I plied him with a thousand questions. What did he think? What did he feel? Where had he been? What did he dream? Until I suppose the ordinary professor would have shooed me away like any other persistent insect. But the Reavis-bound professors never did. They seemed to welcome the questions and the curiosity that bred them. And, suddenly, my life was a parade of personalities. There was kindly Dr. A. with his encyclopedic knowledge of just about everything. Our little chats frequently stretched to two hour conversations about history and philosophy and education and, his favorite topic, the good ol' days. I listened raptly to his arguments, occasionally clarifying a point or hazarding one of my own, as the conversation spun and eddied from one subject to another, ending finally, in a stalemate because he

had to get home. I met good Dr. B. whose regal air was not dissipated a whit by his little hand-knotted bow ties and baggie trousers. From Dr. B. I learned to love Byron and Keats and not a little about academic fashion. I also came to know the earth-bound Hera, Dr. C., whose marble brow could cause the masses to tremble lest it furrow with displeasure. She would have been a wonderful despot if the world would stoop to a female Napoleon. The world being what it is, she administered, marble brow and all, a small empire of graduate teaching interns. And, I made the acquaintance of Dr. D., the amiable giant, who lumbered down the halls shying like a colt when anyone tried to engage him in conversation. That man did the finest Foghorn Leghorn imitation in all of academia. And, when tempted on by shy student giggles, he was known to quit his brilliant lectures complete with names and dates and places (which he tossed off completely extempore) in favor of a ten minute comedy routine replete with sound effects. I guess the funniest part about the whole thing was that I not only enjoyed that world peopled with bizarre natives, but wanted to become a part of it.

That was probably the biggest change the building wrought, although I hadn't yet realized that it was the building that was doing it. I felt an intense need to belong to Reavis, but I didn't know why. I did not want to be a transient anymore, a student. I needed a sign, an outward symbol, that I was **one** of them, not just some intellectual hobo on a four year sojourn. I cast about looking for something. An office, that's what I needed! But I could not escape the fact that students were not allowed offices. So, I chose something a little smaller—a file cabinet. Ah, but even that was beyond my capabilities except for one half of one drawer that I managed to beg for The Club. I began to despair. There had to be something that I could have. And there was, although it took me a little while to find it out. Something that I could share with the mightiest of professors—a mailbox in the English office. And, though it took a little finagling, I got my mailbox with my name printed neatly in black, last name first, on a tag at the opening. I was content. But the building was not. I guess she wanted her share of the glory. So it happened one day that I found the answer to the question I had asked nearly a year before. Why **were** those professors so different from the rest. I had naively assumed that it was the discipline or, maybe, the people who attracted folks

of a kindred spirit. But it was the building.

It all became clear to me one bright Friday in April. I was sitting in my favorite red chair in the Lounge chatting with the professors who happened by, and feeling inordinately pleased with myself. My first attempt at a poetry festival had ended successfully with the President of the University reading his favorite poem. I had every right to be pleased with myself, I thought. Until she walked in. She—was a brand new instructor hired for the second semester who called herself Satin. Somehow, she had weathered the chilly winter that they didn't have in Texas and found herself smack in the middle of my musings.

"Gawd," she said. I smiled politely, not quite certain what she was talking about. "Gawd," she repeated, plopping down on the couch. "This place is a dump! How the hell can you sit in here?"

I was dumbfounded, the last vestiges of my smile disappearing. She waited a minute. I suppose she expected an answer. I had none. She looked at me—hard, as if the hardness of her look would elicit an answer. Then she changed tactics.

"Well? How do you stand it? That pink wall is enough to make me upchuck right here. And this Gawd-awful couch . . . Hell, the whole room is probably junk left over from some garage sale."

I looked silently at her and found that I was angry. I wanted to hurt her, to hurl a blind rage of invective and chase her from the room. But I only looked at her. I found my tongue, but having found it, I wasn't sure what to do with it. I took a deep breath and turned to her.

"I like it here," I said in a voice that was just above a whisper.

"Oh," she answered flatly. Then, without another sound, she gathered up her belongings and quit the room.

When I went home that night I stopped outside of Reavis Hall. I stood at the very same spot where I had first noticed that Reavis Hall was lovely. And, without even checking to see if anyone else was around, I blew that tired old red brick building a kiss. □



Mary Anne Boies Paths, #3

## For Eternal Song

There may be eternal song  
In a lake thawing,  
Cracking above rumbling fish.  
You hear its upsurge,  
Air and voices.  
The echo has wrenched  
Night from boredom.  
You measure the song  
Against the loon's, adding  
Points for nests and families;  
Maybe the three ruby-eyed birds  
Are vessels of real song. After all,  
Ice is not so lonely.  
The eternal song you want  
Might even be snaking  
From a skein of cobalt blue wool  
Into ill-fitting mittens,  
Or yodeling from the fact  
That we freeze to death  
Out there.

Patricia Austin

## To My Friend Contemplating Suicide

No man should summon Death  
Save God who made thee, gave thee breath  
Hold on to Life  
And if need be  
Through out the night  
Hold on to me.  
Together we will live each day  
As many as are made  
Til God who tallies reveilles  
Ordains that taps be played.

Lupe Lynch



## . . . And After Red Weather Tigers?

Christine Swanberg

May 25, 1970:

Journal. Page one. I've never kept a journal before. How does one keep a journal? O.K. My name is Penny Morrow. I am twenty-one and have red hair. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in art and anthropology last December. Someone that I loved very much gave me this journal—or should I say **still love**? Isn't the tooling on the leather beautiful? Rye was pretty good at stuff like that. God, I love him, but it's just never going to work. He's too much of a boy—always playing with toys: records, cycles, bands, drugs, booze. It's too much for me, that scene. He needs lots of people around him, and besides, he doesn't really dig art unless he's stoned. That's why we split up: Art: I do; he doesn't. Drugs: he does; I don't. Travel: I want to; he doesn't. Cheat: he does; I don't. It looks like a clear cut case of incompatibility, but I'm not off the hook that easily. The **feeling** is still there.

I've taken the best of him—this leather journal—and I'm finally doing what I want to do: vagabond through Mexico. I promise myself I will write and sketch daily. I'm going to fill this journal and my sketch book. I've saved enough money working tables to last me a few months. I don't know what I'll do when I return, and frankly, as Scarlett O'Hara would hear, I don't give a damn. I don't know what I want, except that I want to go somewhere wonderful and do something wonderful.

The plane leaves early tomorrow. I'm scared. My parents think I'm meeting Marcy in Mexico City. O.K. I lied—but it made them feel better.

June 3:

Oaxaca beats the hell out of Mexico City. Oaxaca has a feeling about it—the feeling I came for: Sun on adobe. Sun on ancient ruins. Dry, dusty heat. Burros must choke on it. Colors: Red, orange, gold. Someday, I'm going to come here to paint.

Today, I sketched scenes from a rickety old carnival that has come to town, with old, paint-chipped wooden rides. I've never seen such old carnival paraphernalia. My sketches just don't capture the **old** of it. The wheels of the dilapidated miniature 1950 Buicks and Fords chauffeured the little Mexi-

cans in bumpy, arthritic circles. They rode placidly, despite all the racket, and their gentle parents looked on with the same half-moon smiles. Am I in some kind of Fellini movie?

Eating here is going to be a challenge, and alcohol is the only safe drink except for pop, and it's too damn hot for pop. Today I drank **quatre cervezas**—Carta Blanca. Good beer to have in the hot sun. Vendors sell these strange looking enchiladas filled with mystery meat. (I know it's pork, but how it can taste like that is a mystery to me.) They line up the delicacies—pig snouts and ears—side by side, in a tray full of grease. These snouts and ears have a way of startling us **gringos**. The vendors chop them with a sweep of the knife not unlike the kind you find in Japanese steak houses. This spectacle is topped only by dessert. The pastry vendors allow live bees to swarm around to make honey on the already sticky brown frosting of the yellow cake squares. I tried to talk Spanish to the pastry vendor to find out why they let the bees do this. He said, "**Mas dulce.**" It's sweeter? And the people ate them—dead bees and all! Is this a preview of the kinds of surprises Oaxaca has in store for me?

I feel an adventure coming on. **Mexico on Five Dollars a Day** says that Oaxaca was the birthplace of Benito Juarez and the one time home of D.H. Lawrence. It is famous for its festival, the **Guelegetza**—no one knows exactly how it's spelled; it's an Aztec word. It feels like Indian country here. Tiny Indian women weave brilliant tapestries. They harness themselves to trees, babes in papooses, and weave all day in lotus position. Some kind of meditation? Their threads are in flaming colors—predominantly reds. I'm going to buy a weaving and a rug. There's no use pretending I won't. So I go home a few days early. It's worth it.

I'm writing this from a pension that Joclyn, the French girl that I met at the **zocalo**, told me about. It's really great here at the pension. This wild seventy year old Swiss lady runs the place—an expatriate or something. Does Switzerland have expatriates, being neutral? For some reason, Joclyn is very interested in me and wants to share a room in the pension—**Casa Suisse**. The French really get into the Indian scene here. They make an art out of playing tourist. I love the way they say **Mexique**. They try so hard not to look like tourists, and of course, no **gringo** can pass for an Indian, so their attempt is pretty comical. To make it even funnier, I think they all came on the same tour, but they are painstakingly avoiding one another. Noble! I love the French!

Joclyn seems interesting, but I wish Rye were here. The jerk! I love him. I think about his arms. I always see him in a white

T-shirt with a red bandana and blue jeans with a great looking belt—hand-tooled leather of his own creation, of course—and fine boots . . . Leather. Every time I see it, I think about Rye. Some **gaucho** has on a leather belt and suddenly I'm transported back to the Midwest. I know he's bad for me. He treats me just awful. The problem is, I **know** he loves me . . . and Becky . . . and Jeff . . . and Cerstin . . . and everyone else he loves. He's so goddam lovable, but he can't be had. No fucking responsibility.

Today I cheated. I sketched Rye from memory. Once with his clothes on, and once with his clothes off. Then I sketched myself in Rye's clothes. People used to tell us we looked like twins. How can two people who look alike, love each other, and get it on so well, be so bad for each other? Rye's the only person who can make me cry, and I'm the only one who can make him mad. How can a feeling that is so right be so wrong?

Shit. I've got to shake this thing. I'm going to the **zocalo** with Joclyn to have a good time.

June 6:

Joclyn and I had a fight today at the **zocalo**. Maybe it was the **mescal**. Maybe it was the **jalepenos**. Maybe it was the heat. I think it was Joclyn. I just lost it. I exploded. Joclyn is such a goddam systemophile! She's a communist and a lesbian and pissed off because I'm not. We were sitting at the **zocalo** and I asked if I could sketch her.

"Of course," she said. I noticed she tilted her head back for effect. Her ultra short hennaed hair was slightly tousled—Rod Stewartesque—and the sun hit her golden sculpted neck magnificently.

"You have a beautiful neck, Joclyn," I said, with all artistic sincerity. I didn't mean I wanted to **kiss** her neck, for Christ-sakes!

"I have many beautiful parts, Penny." When she said this, a rotten, stupid, prejudiced thought erupted in my brain: **Butch**. I had thought her look was some ultra chic French fad, but it's the same Army fatigue—once-it-hits-you-look you see in front rows of art movies. Why should this bother me? I'm liberal! Well, hell, it's simple. I don't **need** a lesbian love affair, and I sure as hell don't want one. Everything here is foreign enough. Rye would never have said a queer thing like "I have many parts"—beautiful or otherwise. Rye wouldn't have to. The feeling is real. Shit. Have I got it bad. A butch takes a crack at me and I think about Rye.

Women don't turn me on, goddam it!

I sketched her anyway. It was pretty crazy looking, bordering on caricature. Not subtle, Penny.

She liked it.

"Joclyn, I want you to have this drawing," I said after some suspenseful lapse into silence and drawing, "and, by the way, I'm not gay." Wasn't that a great way to handle it? Rye hated that about me: always blurting things out. Big mouth. I think it's one of my sterling qualities, but he could never handle it. I could have done a lot for that man if he'd have let me . . .

It pissed Joclyn off when I said it.

"Penny, you will never be free."

"I'm probably about as free as you are." What can you say when someone accuses you of being human?

"No. No capitalist can ever be free." She said this in that controlled condescending voice dean of women in junior high schools use when they are explaining why ten demerits is the only answer to the problem of short skirts.

"You may have a point about capitalists. Oink! Oink! Gosh, and all this time I was traveling incognito, but you're so brilliant you saw right through me." Why was I so haughty? Because I devoted a good portion of my college days to protesting the war. My senior project was a one woman show: Viet Nam scenes in a variety of styles. Now that I think about it, what kind of a capitalist would have Peace Corps applications sitting in her desk at home? Still, something was lost in the translation. How could I expect Joclyn to see this in me? Especially when the woman is so fucking stupid.

"Penny, **everything** is political. Absolutely everything. Until you realize that, you can never be free." She said this with all the panache of a born again systemophile.

"**Everything** can't be **anything!** You can't just make an absolute statement about everything. I could say that everything is art, or everything is spirit, or everything is science, or everything is fate, or astrology or illusion or evil or good or meaningless!" I, however, am not capable of controlled condescension, so I created a big scene. A friend of mine who is deep into astrology says that these outbursts are typical of us Aries. Rye was an Aries. Fire signs. Mars. War. Heat.

My yelling did not shake Joclyn in the least. The chick was **programmed!** "I'm warning you, Penny. You will never be free until you see that all relationships are political. Marriage is mutual dependency. Love is an illusion. No one stays in love. So, you see, the pleasures of the body are real for only a short time. To be free, you must realize this, and you must use your body for pleasure and not for prostitution with a man."

I can see now that there were many loopholes in her doctrine, but I was too angry to debate. I never was any good at debating anyway. Like a fool, I tried the socratic method. "Why is it prostitution with a man and not a woman?"

"Because the illusion of love leads to a political arrangement, don't you see?"

"I don't care. It's worth it." Pure and simple.

"You will never be free."

"Fine."

The crazy thing about it is that I really sort of agree with her. I'm liberal, damn it! I don't care what the rest of the world does in the sack at all. So why didn't I go for the experience? It's not a judgment. It's a preference. O.K. I'm straight. I'm square. The thought of making love to a woman repulses me. Why should it? I love drawing the female body. **Playboy** turns me on. I like women. I don't want them. So sue me, Joclyn and Gloria Steinem and Alice B. Toklas. The hell with you all.

June 11:

I've been going to the concerts and exhibitions of the festival. They're held under a gilded looking filagreed bandshell. My sketches show more contrast now. Perhaps this is because I'm drawing at night, or perhaps it is a change within me. My sketches are beginning to look bold, angular, Indian. My sketches of the **gauchos** drinking at the **zocalo** remind me of some of Picasso's earlier work. Is this the Latin in me?

Each night, the people sing jubilantly for the honor of Juarez and for the love of Mexico. There is no hint of the perfunctory in it. I have never had the experience of singing for my country as these people do. Where does it come from? In college, I learned about the White Man's Burden. Only a WASP could be so presumptuous. Dr. Lautenslager be damned! I swear to God these people are not suffering. The white man's burden in conceit.

Tonight a crowd gathered to cheer for their favorite beauties. The beauties wore costumes in a macrocosm of colors. Some wore billowy white blouses with canary yellow, brilliant purple, and crimson flowered needlepoint. Most wore sashes—**ceintures**, as I recall—hand-woven in ancient vermilion and emerald **quetzals**. **Quetzals**, parrot-like birds, and plumed serpents are the big rage with the **Zapotecs**, descendants of the Aztecs.

All the girls had thick, long braids—Indian goddesses. One had on a **sarape** with tiny pastel animals, little tigers and serpents. The winner of the Indian goddess contest wore a tall

Aztec headdress with Montezuma plumes, and a vest made entirely of the tiniest gold disks. Dazzling!

I remember reading about this ritual in Central American anthropology. In ancient Aztec days, the winner of the contest was led through the streets. She would be given **peyote** so she would be in a higher state of consciousness. People would throw fruits to her because this would be her last day on earth. She would be sacrificed at the top of the pyramid. Her heart would be rendered with a sacred knife. The high priest would fling it onto the myriad steps of the pyramid. Then her body, along with her precious clothing, would be flung into the sacred **cenote**, the sacrificial well. This was the highest honor a human being could be paid, and only the priestly class could be sacrificed. Archeologists have found hundreds of objects and human remnants in the **cenotes** throughout Central America. And it wasn't male chauvinism, either. The boys also participated. They played a soccerlike game, **pelote**. The captain of the winning team was sacrificed. Is it just a coincidence that the dominant color here is red?

Red. Red like my hair. Red like Rye's hair. Red like Rye's bandana. Red like the color of my love. Primary. Needing nothing to capture the light. What color is Rye's love? What color is fickle? Orange. Not primary. Cannot stand alone. Mixed with yellow, the color of cowards. The hell with you, Rye. Today I smashed a clay pot. It was orange too! During **fiesta**, the **Zapotecs** set up clay pot tents. They say that during **fiesta** it is good to smash a clay pot. Good luck. You buy the pot and you smash it right there, and the vendor sweeps it into a gigantic pile of clay debris, and smiles. The **Zapotecs** say it symbolizes the completion of a cycle and signifies rebirth like a phoenix.

But goddam it, Rye. What do I do with the red within me? Chase red weather tigers? I'll never forget the night we read that poem together, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock." It was the only poem you ever liked and the only poem I ever memorized. It haunts me:

The houses are haunted  
By white nightgowns.  
None are green,  
Or purple with green rings,  
Or green with yellow rings,  
Or yellow with blue rings.  
None of them are strange,  
With socks of lace  
And beaded ceintures.

People are not going  
To dream of baboons or periwinkles.  
Only, here and there, an old sailor,  
Drunk and asleep in his boots,  
Catches tigers  
In red weather.

You were so high you trembled through it. You only understood me when you were high. Strange. And I'm the one who's disillusioned.

June 16:

I am growing fonder of Adam each day. I've never made love to a Jew before. Why should it be any different? Adam is fine-boned and has wonderful profuse black hair. He looks part archeologist and part lawyer. He makes me feel good. He just finished his masters in political science. His parents want him to get a job with the government as a diplomat, but he wants to join the Peace Corps or become a political science professor. He's just like me. He wants to do something wonderful, but he doesn't know what it is yet. I really like him, but the red isn't there. I feel a dusty gold for him. He feels red for me, I can tell. What a switch. He wants me to move into his room. I don't know. He wants me to go to the desert and take peyote with him and the Indians. He says it will be a religious experience. Why do I always end up with people who want to expand my consciousness? I think it must be my face. I've been sketching self-portraits. I tried sketching one half of my face, then duplicating it **exactly** on the other side. Each side is an entirely different face when they are duplicated. One is an innocent Buddha moon face, all curves and light. The other looks like an old Indian, all angles and darkness. What do others see? I believe the light attracts them first. I tried the same sketch technique with Rye's face. All light. I tried it with Adam's face. All darkness.

Still, I am very, very fond of Adam. He's brilliant. His Spanish is excellent. I still say everything in the present tense or the infinitive. Adam's mind is so organized. He **thinks** in correct syntax—in two languages. I think in images. I am beginning to understand that I will never be happy unless I become an artist. Art is the language I understand best. Color, line, form, texture, sound, smell . . . these things speak to me more deeply than ideas. I realized that today at the **zocalo**. We were drinking tequila and the **mariachis** were making their rounds. The rich Mexican lady at the table next to us liked the music so well that she tilted her head back and cried, "Ayel Ayel Ayel!" At the

other tables, **gringos** like us pretended not to be tourists. The French and American young people wore **haraches** and **ponchos** and carried big Indian handbags. The trick was making the souvenir clothing look well-worn, as if reminiscent of an earlier trip or like you've been living with the Indians awhile. We're all so nonchalant about having this incredible experience: feigned decadence.

But Adam was thinking about the beggars through the whole scene. He pities the little urchins that sell rugs and souvenirs on the street. I don't. I think they're master thieves, and they're having a wonderful time conning us all. For me, they're not part of some political jigsaw puzzle. This is what they do. Period. No judgment. They look just as happy as I am, and I trust what I see in their faces. Why shouldn't I? In fact, in some ways, I envy their freedom. Otherwise, why did I weep during the **Guadalupe** procession?

The **zocalo** had gotten crowded suddenly, yet to my knowledge, another event had not been scheduled. I had not expected this parade with a tiny homemade float carrying little girls dressed as little virgins of Guadalupe with homemade crowns and stars on their heads. I had not expected the costumeless band members' off beat playing on dented and tarnished heirlooms that held no sheet music clips. I was stunned when the Mexicans left the **zocalo** so naturally to join the procession. But when the ragged tuba player passed, and an old man pounded his frayed bass drum while rounding the corner right next to our table, I just broke down and wept.

Adam took my hand, "I know it's sad, love."

"No. No. That's not it at all! It's sublime, Adam. Don't you see?"

After some contemplation, he said, "Join the Peace Corps with me."

"Adam, you're not understanding. They don't need anything from me. I need more from them that they need from me. I want to be part of them. Hell, I want to part of **something**."

Adam brooded all evening. We didn't say much. Then, walking back to the Casa, he said, "You just had a peak experience. I'm jealous. I've never had one."

Then we talked about Abraham Maslow and self actualization. The conversation ended with, "Sleep with me."

I did. He's not Rye. Adam is so red, I can't catch up to him. Is this how Rye feels with me? Adored?

I could get used to it . . .

July 4:

Another switch. Have I come all the way to Central America to get high? Adam has convinced me that I must experience peyote in the desert. He took it last week and wants to act as my guide. The Indians make the cactus into powder and mix it with mescal. It tastes vile. Adam says it will take awhile and that I might become frightened at first. He says I am with good company: Aldous Huxley, the Indians, and him. I will try to record my experiences in sketches and in thoughts.

I am somewhat nauseated and feel like I'm going to faint. Swallowing is difficult. We are near the village and ruins of Mitla. The Indians are very self-contained. It is very hot but I feel cold. Something is happening. **Hard to write. miracle. ALL. Adam. Prophet. I am forming letters. I? I? Who is I?**

Adam. Adam your face. Adam's face is wise eyebrows Moses deliver us to the Promised Land. My thoughts are echoes echoes echoes. **THE INDIANS ARE AND ALWAYS HAVE BEEN.** The plumed serpent sleeps. Watch him. Write poetry. Haiku. Five Seven Five. /the plumed serpent sleeps/ Oaxaca Guelegetza/ am image now stored/ the circle of man/ there beneath the tule tree/ gives a branch to me/ with vagabond shoes/ we follow Mexico's dust/ drinking fine mescal/ not eating the worm/ red banana plants open/ there hummingbirds drink/ at the zocalo/ mariachis play guitars/ we eat tortillas/ scorched paradise found/ sage brush, cactus, peyote/ scenes from old worn bus/ painted in sand coral/ Zapotec concentric squares/ cadmium colors/ indigo, sienna, red/ **muchos colores/ en el mercado/** tapestry of Mayan days/ last woven remnants/ remnants of Maya/ a circular way of life/ concentric I/ Thou/

In the concentric squares of the ancient ruins, in their concentric molecules, are the faces of the beauties, evaporating into my face, the face of Isis, goddess. I want to go to the altar.

Penny, my love,

I have taken you to the Church of Santiago.

You have asked me to write because you can

no longer write. You are standing by the statue of Guadalupe. You are smiling and crying because someone has left a bouquet of flowers at her feet.

You keep saying "miracle." I love you, Penny.

You were right. I meant to tell you. It **was** sublime that day at the **zocalo**. Now you have noticed the bloody chicken head on the door by the novena candles. You are terrified but

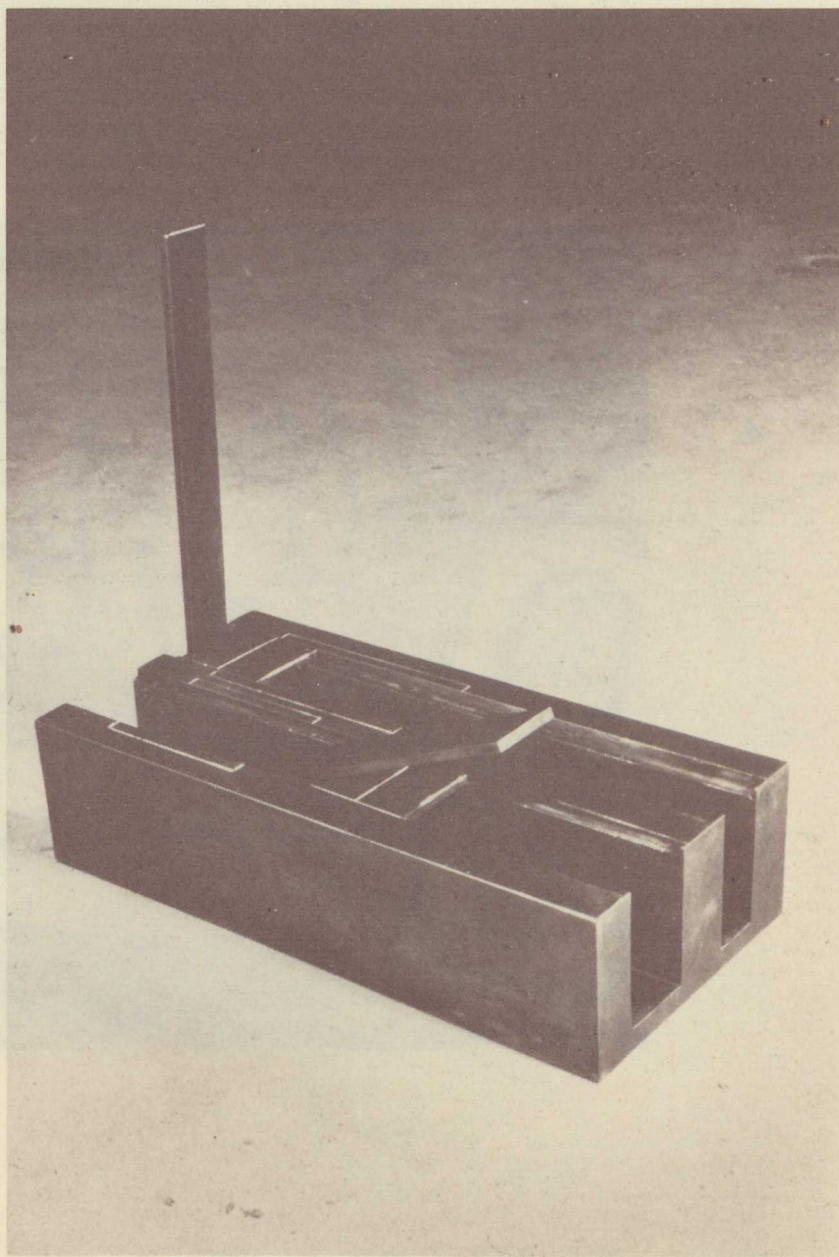
are going to examine it anyway. You just said,  
"Amazing. What a beautiful head. Why, though?"  
The Indian woman saying the rosary in the back  
thinks you are crazy, so I am going to take you  
to the desert now.

I am in control again. That's funny. Control. No one is IN  
control. Some people HAVE control. All of my atoms are alive.  
There are no dead atoms. Albert Einstein was right. About  
everything. There are tigers in the cactus needles. Red weather  
tigers, in red weather. Rye is my red weather tiger. He lives in  
everything and will always jump out at me and cannot be  
contained within a cactus or a single heart. I am no tiger  
hunter. Let him be his own trophy.

The red weather desert sun is setting. I'm tired, Adam. Adam  
knows.

July 15:

Looking at my sketch book, it's easy to see which ones are  
best: the desert ones. Surrealistic to be sure, but alive and  
commanding. Tigers in the cactus, snake/bird combinations,  
Adam's profile with a bouquet beneath. I bought some rugs  
and weavings, so I'm getting low on money. Called home.  
Mom sounds worried and says she hopes Marcy's fine too.  
Pulled that one off. I'll tell her Marcy is Joclyn if she wants to  
see the sketches. Adam is going back to school in New York  
and wants me to live with him. New York isn't a bad place for  
artists. Think I'll give it a try. Gold is, after all, a royal color. [T]



Emil Schlee Whistlestop



Paul Stark Couch

## The Stroke Victim

He sits  
quietly  
in his chair  
wheels blocked  
against the sterile  
white wall  
across from  
the nurses' station  
in this,  
his next-to-last  
home.

A patchwork quilt  
of faded  
blues and browns  
lies still  
as a shroud  
over his lap  
and legs  
collecting permanent  
impressions of  
knobby knees.  
bony hands  
dangle  
gnarled and useless  
from withered arms.  
with hollow eyes  
he stares at  
nothing  
thinks  
only bleached  
thoughts.

When dimly aware  
of a relative  
or old friend  
visiting  
he can only  
blurt  
one answer:  
"goddamnit!"  
to everything  
they ask him.

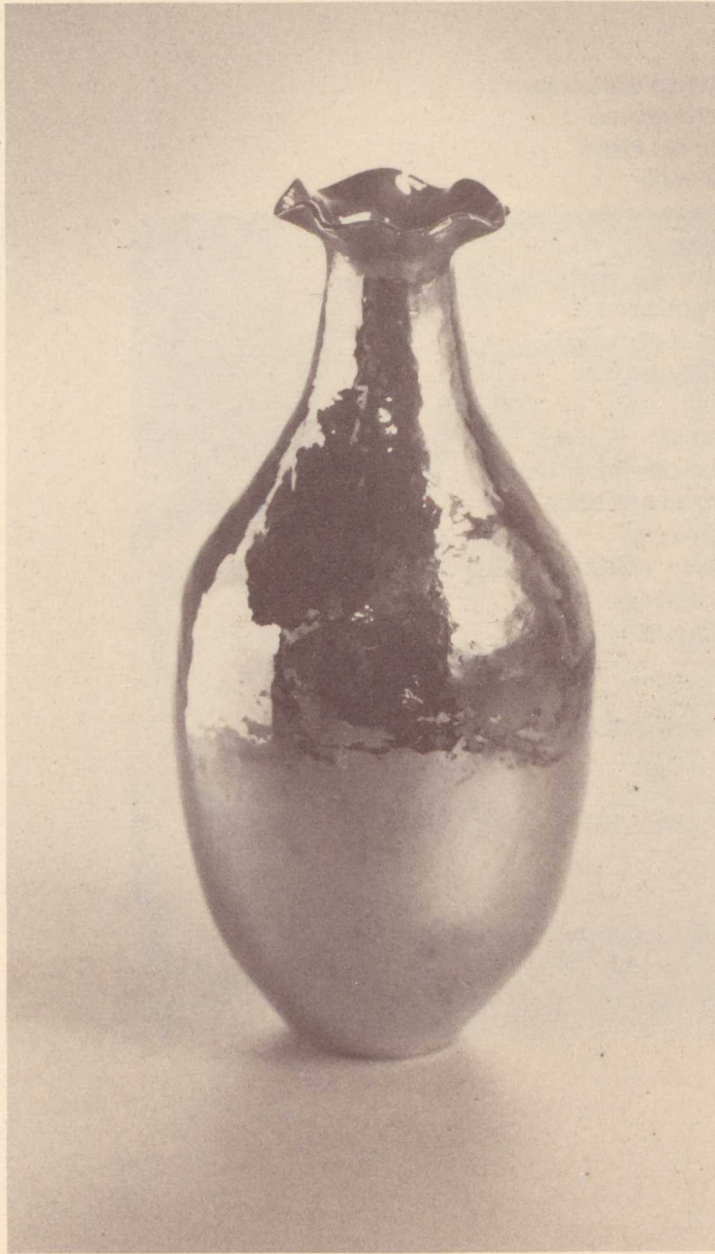
Visits  
become more distant  
mind and body  
shriveled  
until, at last  
he sleeps  
forever.

Tom Holland



## Eliot Among the Birds: Women in the Early Poems

J.L. Ollenquist



Howard Russo Untitled

T.S. Eliot's poetry reflects the cynicism of the Modern period. And like most cynics, Eliot is at heart an unqualified romantic, for his world-weariness is the result of seeing clearly the gulf between reality and a romantic ideal. When we consider the poems, we often see the poet's romantic cynicism focused on love relationships, which, in his view, fall far short of perfection. Although at first glance it might seem that Eliot is merely playing the cynic's game of criticizing yet offering no solutions, he does sadly help us see our own emptiness and, as Grover Smith points out, tries to find a way of bringing the actuality closer to the ideal (pp. 3, 6-7). In the later poems, we see the result of this endeavor: Eliot realizes that the emptiness of earthly love cannot be filled if we concentrate only on this world and its problems, but that we must focus on a spiritual or religious ideal to restore, at least partially, wholeness to our relationships. Only after attaining the "Shantih" of **The Waste Land**, after appealing to the "Lady" of "Ash Wednesday," will our lives be meaningful. We learn of Eliot's final decision in these later works, but we must examine the earlier poems to see the shortcomings he finds in emotional and sexual love—difficulties that are recapitulated in terms of the fertility myth in **The Waste Land**. Perhaps the most likely way to characterize these earlier relationships is through analyzing their most representative image: women. The portrayal of these female characters reflects Eliot's vision of the reality of earthly love as so imperfect and even threatening that we cannot improve conditions without help from a transcendent Being.

The women populating the early poems are, in the main, rather insipid. We see them first without men: the comic "Aunt Helen" and "Cousin Nancy" are portraits of women on their own in fashionable society. In the former work, "Miss Helen Slingsby" is the deceased aunt of the speaker. In life, she was fairly wealthy; we would call her a "pillar of society." However, we see that her only really memorable act was willing money to her dogs, a deed that inspires the nephew/speaker to comment sarcastically that "when she died there was silence in heaven" (Eliot, **Complete**). "Cousin Nancy" Ellicott, on the other hand, is a young girl who goes about shocking the staid "Aunt Helens" of society because she "smoked / And danced

all the modern dances." Her life, like Helen Slingsby's, is taken up in forgettable pursuits. When women like these are observed by men such as the perceptive Prufrock, their personalities are summed up in terms of this shallowness; fashionable society, in J. Alfred's eyes, is represented by dilligentish female chatterers who eternally "come and go / Talking of Michelangelo." According to this speaker, society is shallow women.

When women come into direct contact with men, their behavior becomes not only more inane, but damaging. Prufrock takes on the shallowness women embody. Although he wishes for a life unlike the insipid one he has, this pathetic figure is caught up in considering how "the women" see him; against his will, he is drawn to the "room" where the ladies meet. And part of the reason he never considers the "overwhelming question" is that he has realized that his female companion would not accept its significance and would respond only with "That is not what I meant at all." Caused by the inane attitudes of women, a similar breakdown in communication is present in the non-conversation of "Conversation Galante." As the speaker reaches for meaning, his female friend concerns herself with fashionably "correct" behavior: when he waxes philosophically poetic about the moon and man's inferiority to it, the woman either reminds him that this topic is not suitably shallow for polite conversation—"How you digress!"—or, missing his point entirely, takes his statements personally—"Does this refer to me?" Obviously, this woman is working at cross purposes with the man, who attempts to create a meaningful, interesting bond between them. In the end, the speaker realizes he is beaten and forms the only tie possible with the woman by admitting to her, albeit ironically, "'Oh no, it is I who am inane.'" The conversation (and the relationship) can be continued only if the speaker accepts reality, forsakes his ideal, and pays lip service to the vacuous woman. This sacrifice is essentially a vain one, for all we gain is acceptance from society while we lose the chance for meaningful connection.

Tawdriness, an aura of dirt and cheapness, also characterizes many of Eliot's women. Again, this trait is evident in women by themselves and as observed by men. For instance, amidst the description of a squalid lower-class neighborhood in "Preludes," we find references to a single resident, a female. All that we see of her is suggestive of dirt and decay: "the thousand sordid images" in her mind, "the yellow soles" of her feet, and "the palms of both soiled hands." Untouched by man,

this woman carries a film of foulness. We see a man's observation of this association in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night." The male speaker is directed by a personified streetlight to look at a woman entering a house. In the light he notices that "'the border of her dress / Is torn and stained with sand.'" Focusing on this detail, the speaker calls to mind other "torn and stained" objects—a dead branch on the seashore, rusty junk lying near a factory. Later in the poem, he observes the moon, which becomes a woman in his eyes and reminds him of

female smells in shuttered rooms,  
And cigarettes in corridors  
And cocktail smells in bars.

Whatever the "female smells" may be, they are certainly unpleasant, for this image is parallel to and therefore takes on the connotations of "cigarettes" and "cocktail smells." Together the three images conjure up pictures of cheap "one-night stands," reinforcing the idea of the physical and moral shabbiness of women.

The relationships such women take part in are just as sordid as their persons. Probably the sleaziest interactions between the men and women of Eliot's early poems are seen in the escapades of the Neanderthal Sweeney. "Sweeney Erect," our first meeting with this character, takes place in a boarding house, where, as the gross Sweeney gets out of bed to shave, his epileptic lover has a fit of "hysteria." What is most sordid about the situation is the imperviousness of the shaving Sweeney, calmly ignoring the woman who

Jackknives upward at the knees  
Then straightens out from heel to hip  
Pushing the framework of the bed  
And clawing at the pillow slip.

Adding to this already distasteful impression is the entrance of "Doris," who appears to be another of Sweeney's women.<sup>1</sup> She resolves the problem by giving smelling salts to the epileptic. Thus, the poem ends with a friendly *ménage à trois* that leaves us feeling almost soiled ourselves.

Sweeney is often found in decadent situations. In "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," we see a "person" in a "Spanish cape" making advances on our hero: she "tries to sit on Sweeney's knees." By placing this description immediately after the lines "Gloomy Orion and the Dog / Are veiled; and hushed the shrunken seas," Eliot creates in both languages and subject matter a bathetic disparity that makes the woman's overture

seem even more comic and cheap than it is on its own. Unfortunately, the caped lady fails in her attempt to captivate Sweeney and drunkenly falls to the floor, making a mess of everything around her. In fact, the whole scene is a kind of moral "mess": vile men and women pursuing each other like alleycats. The title of the poem reflects the decadent atmosphere—"nightingale" being slang for "prostitute"—but it raises a problem because of the allusion to the myth of Philomel, who was changed into a nightingale after being raped.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we are left uncertain whether we are to see women as cheap whores in their own right or as defiled yet noble heroines. Whatever the cause, though, the result is the same: women are tawdry, sullied objects that bring decay (moral and physical) into men's lives. By representing women in this negative fashion, Eliot bluntly indicates the imperfections of earthly love.

Because these relationships lack so much, they become frustrating and unfruitful. The poet makes this evident by creating female characters who are all in some way dissatisfying to men. We see this lack of acceptance even in Prufrock, who is obsessed with sex: "And I have known the arms already, known them all." Not only does he break women down into parts as one would a side of beef, but he finds the parts tediously interchangeable—"If you've seen one, you've seen them all." We see in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" and "A Cooking Egg" that women are eligible for rejection if they are either too aggressive or too passive. First, Sweeney repulses the presumptuous lady in the cape and then "Rachel *née* Rabinovitch," who "tears at the grapes with murderous paws." If we consider this an image of imminent castration (the grapes symbolic of male genitalia) as well as an aggressive movement, we see indeed why Sweeney avoids Rachel. But women are also to be shunned if they are **not** aggressive **enough**. The speaker of "A Cooking Egg" casts away his virginal sweetheart "Pipit" and fantasizes instead that when he gets to heaven,

Lucretia Borgia shall be my Bride;  
Her anecdotes will be more amusing  
Than Pipit's experience could provide.<sup>3</sup>

This man wishes for a sophisticated lover that most people would consider more of a potential threat than even "Rachel *née* Rabinovitch." It seems that neither aggressive nor passive behavior makes a woman a successful lover.

However, it is not only the two extremes that are repulsive, for as we see in "Portrait of a Lady" and the prose poem "Hysteria," even women who do not appear shallow or sordid, aggressive or passive, are frightening to Eliot's men. The central

character of "Portrait of a Lady" has a long-term yet superficial relationship with the speaker. We observe only three encounters in an association that lasts approximately one year, and during the second we learn that this is a very perceptive woman as we hear her judgment of the speaker:

"You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel  
You will go on and when you have prevailed  
You can say: at this point many a one has failed."

She is right; the man has no interest in going beyond "this point" with her, primarily because he regards her as a trap. In fact, at their next meeting, he breaks off the involvement with feeble excuses and is callous enough to be annoyed when his partner asks if he will write to her from abroad. Although the woman is hurt, not knowing " 'why we have not developed into friends,' " the speaker goes on to wonder insensitively whether the lady will "win" a contest if she happens to die, that is, whether she will "trap" him into feeling remorse.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the speaker of "Hysteria," when confronted with what seems a normal, laughing woman, feels embarrassed and trapped, sexually, by the laugh: "I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles." Finally, the man decides that if the woman can be stopped from laughing, a disgustingly **human** activity, then the social engagement can be salvaged. So small a detail as a woman's laugh revolts Eliot's men, and generally they see women as the old man in "Gerontion" sees religion—as voracious, all-encompassing.

From this depressing portrayal of love relationships, represented by negative images of women, we must emerge with very little hope for the improvement of human love. Given the spiritual emphasis of the later poems—especially "The Hollow Men," **The Waste Land**, and "Ash Wednesday"—we may be tempted to believe, along with J. Middleton Murry, that Eliot's message is this: "Whatever else may endure, romantic love does not. Sooner or later it is revealed as illusion. Love ceases to deceive only when it is transferred from a person to God."<sup>5</sup> However, this statement attributes too much Puritan "other-worldliness" to Eliot, for as we remember, his intention in **The Waste Land** is to find a way to bring fertility and meaning back to the tangible world. Spirituality, to Eliot, is the source of meaning for this life, but in his eyes love of man is as important as love of God, a belief made apparent by the time and care the poet takes to show us, in his women characters, the problems

of our earthly relationships and then to point out the paths of righteousness that will lead us closer to perfection. □

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Knust explains that "Doris" is an archetypal shepherdess or nymph, whose pastoral beauty has been degraded by association with Sweeney (pp. 204-217).

<sup>2</sup>Grover Smith supports this interpretation in his examination of the alternate epigraph to the poem (attached on its first publication), which refers directly to Philomel (p. 45).

<sup>3</sup>Smith suggests that the girl is a former sweetheart of the speaker (pp. 48-49); Cahill (pp. 26-27) and Williamson (p. 104) argue that she is his bride or fiancée. A combination of these seemed most logical to me.

<sup>4</sup>Spender attributes a deep sensitivity to the speaker and upholds him as a more attractive character than the woman. While this interpretation does focus on the "no-win" situation of the poem, it takes the part of the obviously callous speaker.

<sup>5</sup>Murry applies this judgment primarily to Eliot's plays but also refers to the poetry.

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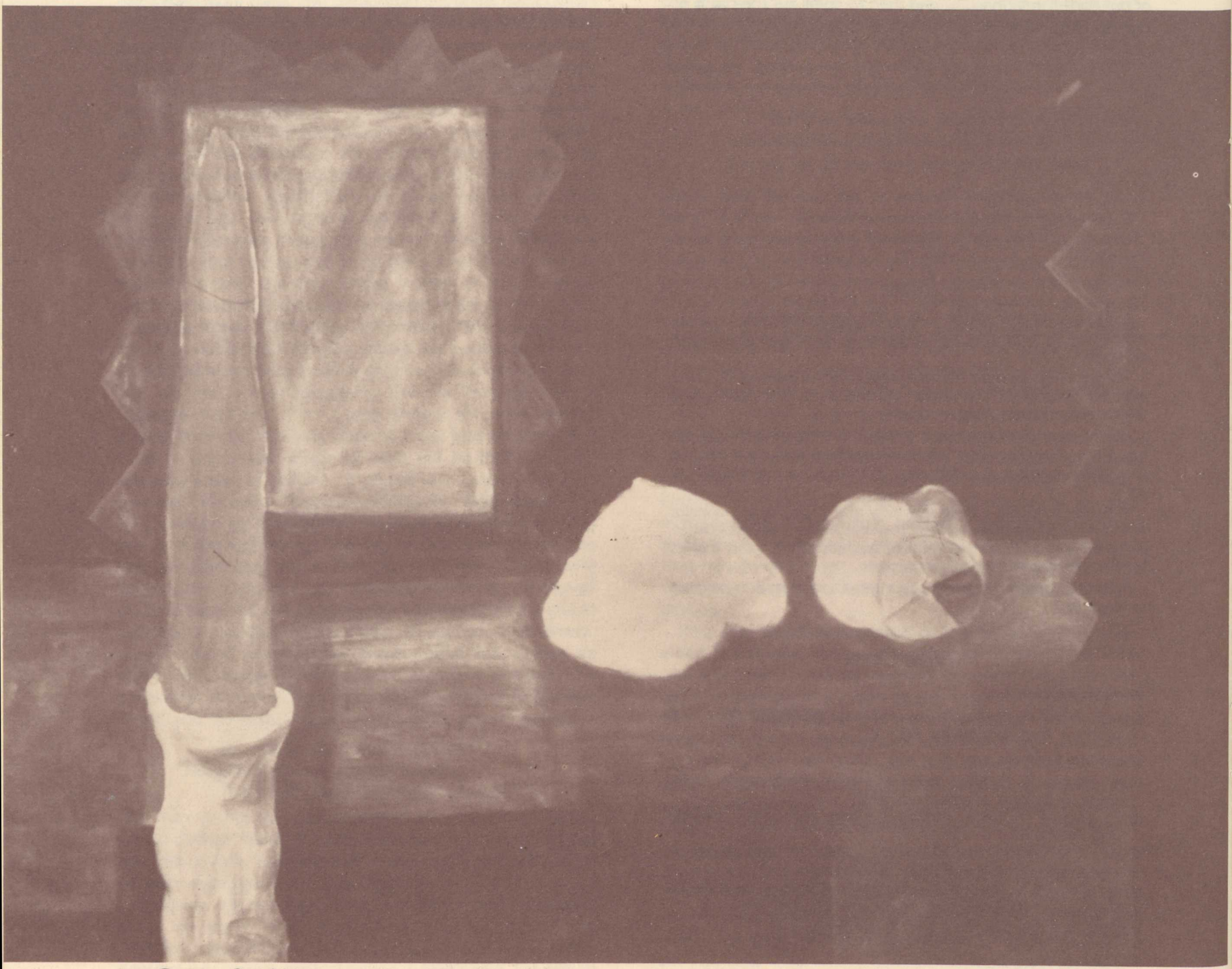
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Imre Gonczy Sepulchrel

I want someone to hug;  
Someone to hold hands with;  
I need someone I can cuddle up with  
under a warm blanket at chilly football games  
I want someone to whom I can speak for hours on the phone;  
Someone I can walk with and gaze at the stars with;  
Someone who will listen to soft music with me;  
Someone to whom I can say, "I love you."  
Someone I can fuck the shit out of

Denny VanDerGinst

## Butterfly Net

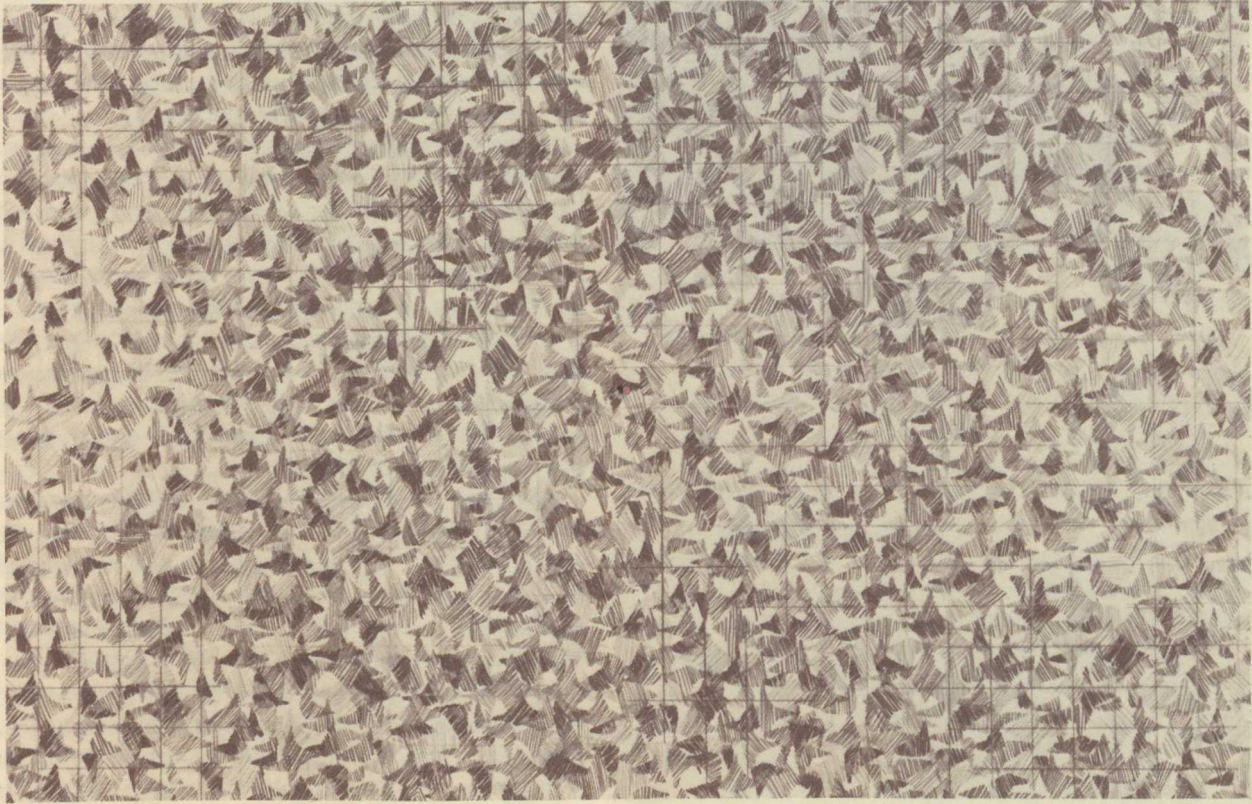
Poems aren't born on days like this,  
with robins singing joy  
to squirrels playing catch-me-quick—  
But leave this ballad stanza, boy,  
The day will not be caught,  
trapped in netted words of finery—  
Linguistic turns—  
no catch for spring.

Grab a breeze, he says,  
paint a sunrise, poet boy—  
drink water from a sieve,  
and as Tantalus, now I thirst.  
The more I long  
to find a verse,  
the more the thirst  
goes dry

Winter:  
Cold, Icy, Dark.  
Now there's a poem—  
of frozen wastes,  
with frostbitten words  
strewn with emptiness  
and cold;  
Cold, Icy, Loneliness.

But where's the verse  
for happy spring?  
So commonly nice—  
truly fine.  
No tears,  
No cold,  
Therefore  
No Poem.

L. R. Camp





## Scoop

by Laurie M. Johnson



David Reninger Untitled

Elise B. Ford sat comfortably in the president's receiving room. She scanned the walls and bookcases for anything significant. Some of her best leads came from an erroneous memo tacked to a cork board or a novel pushed only halfway in on the shelf which indicated what her interviewee or his secretary had been reading.

She could hear the president, presumably on the phone, in his office. His voice resonated through the double doors of carved oak into the receiving room:

"I don't care whether he understands English or not, Peterson! You present that medal in the language you were taught. Do those commies think we're going to bend over backwards for him just because he saved one puny little American? We're not a nation of bleeding hearts, contrary to what they think. Just give it to him and read the speech I gave you."

Yes, the president was a bit brash. A lot of people didn't like that. But Elise had found that when the going got tough the president shut up—he was, foremost, a politico. Besides, his off-the-cuff remarks made good copy, and that was really all she was concerned with.

She was a half hour early, as usual. What was unusual about this interview was the way it had been called. At 4:30 a.m. she'd answered her phone after five or six rings to hear the president's voice, wide awake and bordering on cheerful. He wanted her to have first crack at "something touchy. A major shift. I need the press to be sensitive about it."

Ever since she's tipped him on a leak-gone-sour, she'd been his favored reporter. Jim Duly's "disinformation," as the president put it, had led to her writing a rather embarrassingly false series of articles. Duly burned her, so she burned Duly. He was quietly fired.

This was a ruthless world of administrative jockeying. If a top aide didn't consider the power of the press they weren't tops for long. Sure, she had a lot of power being on such close terms with the president, but she didn't let it get to her. She used it wisely.

"When do the Russkies get him back?" the president's voice boomed. "In May? I guess we can tolerate the pinko hero until then, eh, Rob? Just you keep a close eye on him. Have our people observe him closely. I don't like to see those guys

come over here, take advantage of our generosity and then leave. They go back to the fatherland loaded with free American know-how."

Elise smiled back at the secretary, who looked as though she wished the president wouldn't talk so loudly. As always, there was a fresh pink carnation on her desk, supposedly a daily gift from the president. Rumors had it—wild rumors to be sure—that she was his mistress and that she couldn't type twenty words per minute but could roll the president's old-fashioned cigarettes neatly and knew how to wear a mean bikini at his summer hideaway. Her nameplate said she was Betty Jones, but reports said she'd had it changed from Janetine Renier, a distant relative of the Royal family of Monaco. Supposedly, her permanent residence was there, for tax purposes.

Miss Jones smiled again as she rearranged her still-blond tresses and pulled several bobby pins from her bun. "I'm sure he'll be ready for you in a moment, Miss Ford. He's been so busy this morning he didn't even get a chance to read the papers or jog." She began to shuffle some papers and Elise looked away. Amazing, she thought, that this woman had been raked over the coals—albeit by the less respected press—and her politeness was still intact.

Above Miss Jones hung a picture of the president out for his morning run. He was in vintage shape though in his middle 60's. He seemed to grow more distinguished-looking with every year. He was a big man, with only a hint of grey at his temples in otherwise black hair. The picture was there, no doubt, to impress on important visitors that they would be dealing with a vigorous man, a man who could not be worn down with endless rhetoric.

On the left, framing his office doors, were two other reminders. One was a Ph.D from the American Academy of International Administration, with its golden seal. The other was a certificate of Recognition of Athletic Prowess from his undergrad basketball days.

It was almost 9 o'clock, time for her interview. Elise readied her tape recorder and note pad. She knew too well that the president was easily put off by fumbling, unprepared reporters. She also knew he liked pretty women. Unlike some of her colleagues, she had no qualms about looking, well, slightly provocative if it would get her a more candid interview.

She checked her face with her compact and powdered her nose and chin. She was a gracefully aged thirty. The difference between her and her less-successful rivals was upkeep, not only physical but professional. It was not unusual for her to put

in 20 hour Saturdays traveling in high-level social circles, distancing herself from the reporter image to appear more like a confidante. Most of what she heard never made it into the paper. But when something big broke she knew she could count on her sources while the rest of the reporters scrambled.

Elise looked up as one of the president's top aides, Edward E. Laws, rushed in and stopped at Miss Jones' desk. The secretary blushed ever-so-slightly, Elise noted, then pushed the red buzzer on her intercom.

"Mr. President, Mr. Laws is here to see you."

"Send him in," the president's voice answered abruptly.

Miss Jones rose and decorously opened the president's doors. Elise was waiting at her desk when she returned.

"I had a 9 o'clock with him," she said.

"Well, I'm sorry but these things happened, Miss Ford. You should know that." Miss Jones seemed rather worried, her eyes occasionally glancing at the double doors in expectation.

"He called me himself at 4:30 this morning and I've been on hold ever since—"

A loud thump issued from the inner office as if a book had been thrown or maybe a plant or a tape recorder.

"You're my right hand man, Ed," the president said. "I've counted on you, you son of a —, and now I find out you've been knifing me in the back for the past six months. You'll never work in this town again. By God, you'll never work in the country again—not in an administrative post. You've had it!"

Miss Jones shuddered and her face turned a violent red as though she were having another hot flash only five times worse. She stepped forward then back as if not sure what, if anything, to do. Suddenly she had become a red-eyed rabbit fidgeting in its pen, an unusual reaction for her even under such trying conditions. Elise recalled that she hadn't so much as flinched when Arthit Kung, Director of Public Statistics, had walked in and thrown up all over the Ch'ing dynasty rug.

Another bang came from the president's office. Elise edged closer to the door but still had her eyes fixed on Miss Jones, who was now turning white and seemed to be looking for a place big enough to crawl behind. So far as Elise knew, Mr. Laws had not yet answered to the president's accusations, but now he let fly.

"You, sir, cannot get rid of me as easily as you'd like."

That comment caused a silence as big as the president's angry voice. Elise pressed her ear to the door, as any well-trained reporter would be obliged to do. The silence lasted for several seconds, then Mr. Laws continued in a precise, even

voice:

"I can give you three scenarios, Mr. President. First, as I'm sure you're aware, your administration has had a perverse history of affirmative action hiring. You have only two minority officials installed in the upper echelons. If you fire me you'll only have one, and the Civil Rights Commission, not to mention the NAACP will be nipping at your heels. They'll demand a credible reason for firing me. What will you tell them? What will you tell the press? I've made the Office of Public Information into a hallmark of efficiency."

"You shouldn't be doing that," Miss Jones said timidly.

"Oh come off it—and miss this? I'd have to be crazy," Elise said.

The secretary shrugged nervously as if realizing she couldn't argue with that answer. She had backed up a good five feet and was leaning against, almost clutching, the filing cabinets. She watched with meek curiosity as Elise grabbed her coffee cup which said "WORLD'S BEST SECRETARY," drained its contents into a nearby philodendron, and pressed it to the door so she could hear better.

"—and not only that **part**, but your entire relationship," Laws said. "Not only would you lose your lovely and charming wife, but your name would be worse than mud . . . worse than the plague. And how long do you think you'd hold on to this precious job of yours? Thirdly, once you're an average Joe again, don't think I'd forget you. Don't even consider writing your memoirs in peace. I'd never let the public forget this. You'd never get anywhere in private business. Do you really want that, Mr. President? Do you want me to take you down when I go?"

Another silence followed. Elise breathed for the first time in what seemed like five minutes.

"What are they saying?" Miss Jones whispered. She had her coat on, a short mink, and a file drawer had been opened. She was trying not to show it, but she was on the verge of tears.

"Nothing." Elise listened again. The ticking grandfather clock fairly thundered in the quiet room. Brown liquid trickled noiselessly from the bottom of the philodendron pot and Elise wondered if she'd killed the thing. She moved away from the door and replaced the coffee cup on the desk.

Miss Jones was slowly removing a manila folder from the file drawer marked PERSONNEL. Elise positioned herself for a better view. She was always striving for the nuance in her reporting, and a secretary with her coat on, going through a personnel file while her boss was having a gangbuster fight could

produce for her story just such a nuance.

The label on the folder said Edward E. Laws, in bold lettering. Miss Jones' trembling fingers lifted each item inside separately. "Commendation for Fiscal Budgeting Below Allotment," said one. "Promotion to Director of the Office of Public Information," said another. When Miss Jones had flipped through all of them and replaced the file dejectedly, she began to weep. Elise felt fleeting remorse for having looked over her shoulder. Nevertheless, she pressed on.

"What's wrong, Betty?" she said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, why don't you go back to the door and listen," Miss Jones said with a sniff. "I don't have anything for you, and there's nothing in—" She stopped abruptly and shut the file drawer. Her voice faltered and she put her hands to her face.

Elise backed off, not out of instinct, because instinct told her to pump the woman while she was weak, but out of compassion and a tinge of guilt. There was no one reason for that guilt. Maybe it was an accumulation of all the times she'd asked "what's wrong" out of the corner of her mouth while pressing the record button. In any case, the president's door began to open and she rushed back to her seat.

Miss Jones quickly took off her coat and decided to stay. She sat down and stared straight ahead. Her eyes burrowed a hole in Elise's neck. Edward Laws stepped quietly into the receiving room. He stuck his head back through the doors and gave the president one last, long, look. Then he shut the door behind him.

His spectacles had slid down his nose and he carried the suit jacket he'd been wearing on his way in. His eyes strayed to Miss Jones for a moment with a caught-stealing-bubble gum expression, smiled briefly and apologetically, then stumbled on an untied shoelace and left. No doubt fighting with the president was a draining experience, Elise thought. On top of that, it appeared he had won.

Miss Jones' eyes trailed after him and remained fixed to the open door. She was in a trance, polarized by some emotion Elise could not identify. The carnation on her desk swayed in the draft from the central air. The intercom buzzed, then buzzed again. Miss Jones' hand descended on it like a falling petal.

"Yes, Mr. President?"

"Is Miss Ford still waiting?"

As the secretary didn't reply, Elise gathered her purse and tape recorder and tried to compose herself. For the first time

since she'd gone on her first assignment, her heart began to pound and her throat went stiff. She'd talked to the president countless times, under official and unofficial circumstances, but she'd never talked to him after a fight. The interview about to take place would be crucial to their future relationship. Could she make him comfortable after such a scene? Could she make him talk about it?

She opened the doors for herself. Miss Jones was in shock, her finger still on the intercom and her mouth flung open.

The office, as always, surprised her with its largeness. The president sat behind his huge mahogany desk, but he had pulled up a chair for her along its side. She felt relieved. He was, above all else, a professional. He didn't look particularly tired except for the aura of tiredness which naturally surrounded important men. A cigarette on a long, black holder smoldered in a marble ashtray by his left hand. Whatever had been thrown earlier had been retrieved, for the office was impeccable. Who had thrown what would have to remain a mystery. She certainly wasn't inept enough to ask him.

"Would you like some coffee, Elise?" he said in his usual, melodious voice. His un-angered voice was one that could calm the masses. How easy it was for her to forget who she was dealing with—a man capable of making the most lowly person feel comfortable, if not equal, in his presence.

"Yes, please." She smiled and looked directly at him to communicate that she knew exactly what had taken place. He needed to know that before he could plan his next move.

He reached for the pot on his desk and filled a cup that had been placed there especially for her.

"You mentioned a major shift. In administrative makeup?" she said.

He cleared his throat and emitted a small burp, the only outward sign of a peptic ulcer. No one knew he had one; at least not the general public.

"Yes, I did. And there was. That is, there was going to be a shift." He cleared his throat again. "It's always you when I make a major change in policy or in the ranks. You're always the first to know because you always give me a fair shake. I did have something for you, and I wanted it written from the right perspective."

He stood and crossed the room to a bookcase lined with leather-bound books he made no pretense of reading. Elise felt in her bones that a letdown was coming.

"But, doggone it, I've rather changed my mind," he said, looking her in the eye. "The situation has changed."

Elise put her notebook on the floor and shut off her tape recorder, hoping he'd go off the record and not sure what to do if he didn't. He was being astonishingly honest with her which could only mean that he had no other choice.

"You have always had my confidence," he said. "And I--"

Elise weighed her position. She would obtain a glorious but temporary coup if she pressed him to give her some sort of a story, or if she dug one up herself. On the other hand, if she did print a story it would no doubt sound Enquirerish and she would lose as a source just about every administrator here.

He was a nice man, she rationalized. He was something of a womanizer, but not outrageously so. And this was a scandal, not a story.

#### PRESIDENT FIRES TOP AIDE IN SEX SCANDAL ACCUSED OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION VIOLATION

Now **that** would be a story. However, it was not to be. The president and Mr. Laws had settled their difference behind closed doors.

"You always have mine," Elise said, "until something **important** comes along."

He laughed heartily and opened the doors for her.

Outside, Miss Jones couldn't help but stare at them. Her carnation was beginning to wilt. It was unlikely that she would get a fresh one tomorrow. Perhaps she'd be transferred to Statistics, or maybe even Laws' Office of Public Information.

"We'll have to have lunch," the president said, then added with a chuckle, "together, of course."

"Call me when I'm not out of the state or in a conference," Elise returned. They shook hands and the president went back into his office to do whatever presidents did when they weren't firing top aides or scolding others.

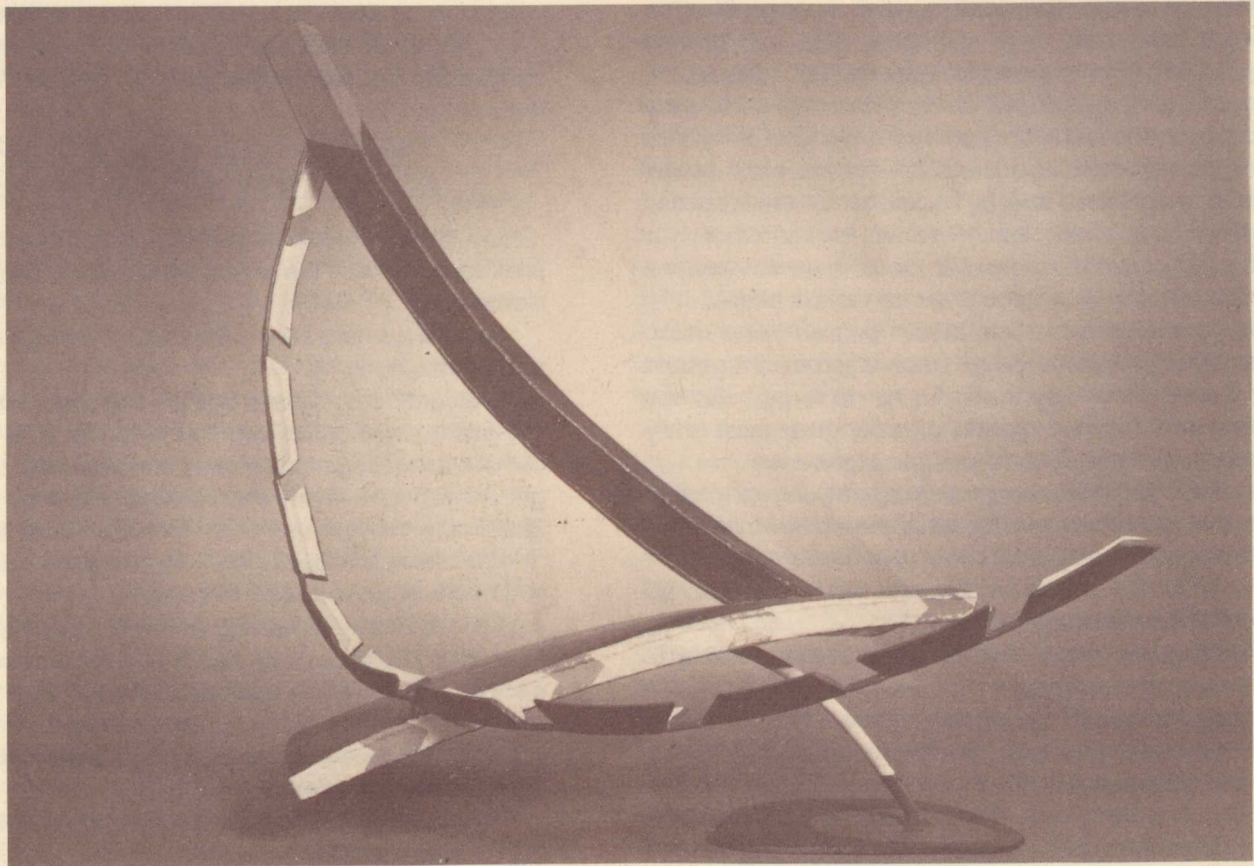
Miss Jones looked up at Elise and shakily marked her off on the appointment calendar.

"Have I ever told you how helpful you are?" Elise said, feeling somehow terribly guilty.

"Why, thank you," Miss Jones said with a faltering, sad smile.

As Elise walked out of the Administration Building and crossed the University's mall to her car parked next to the library, she saw Edward E. Laws entering the building which housed his offices.

They caught each other's eye for a moment, his gleaming with triumph, hers dimmed by a certain unshakeable frustration. Then he turned away and disappeared in the revolving doors. □



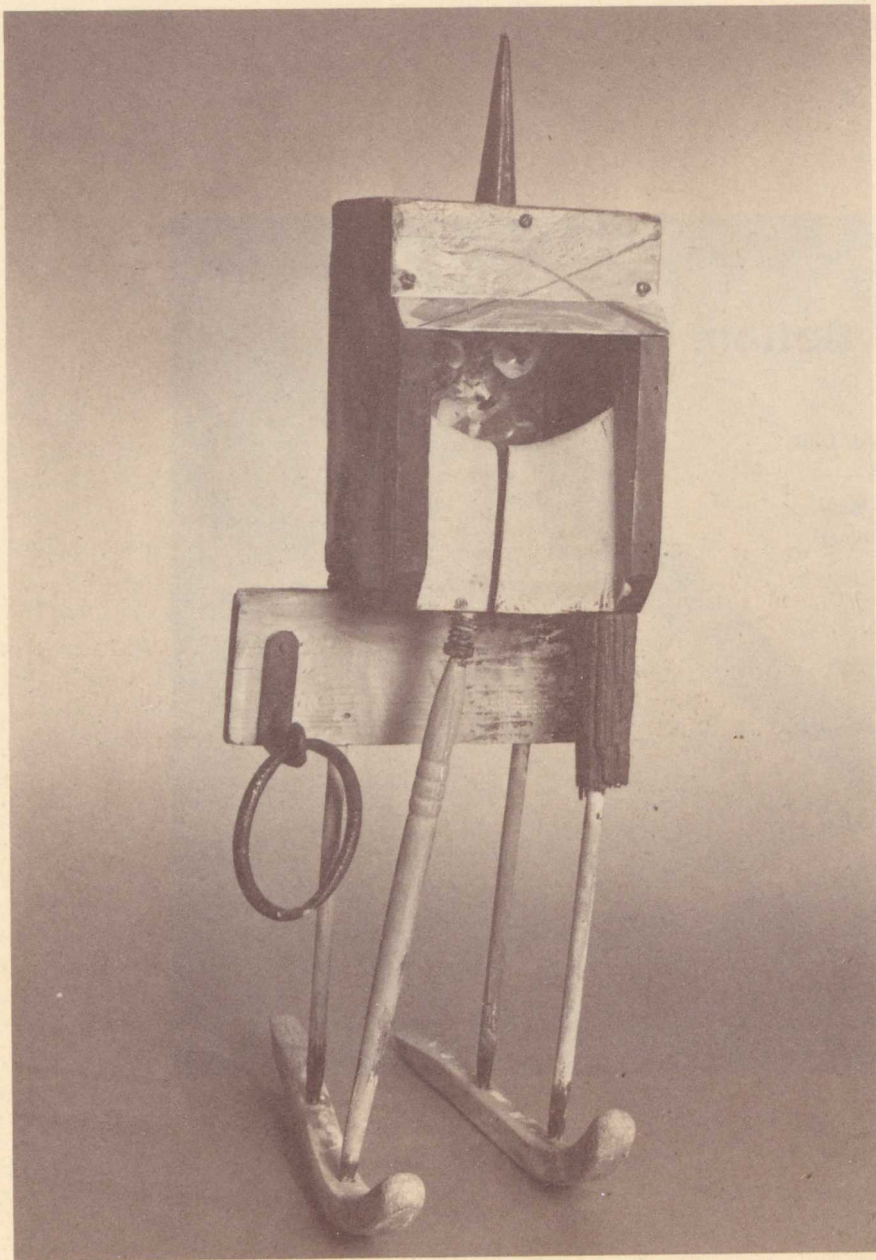
Steve Romans The Wonder Of Walking

## Bell Bottom Hats

Jazz essence of screw balls  
on the pool tables  
take their ques from Dizzy  
and refine their humorous  
crescendos with  
Gillespian modifiers

Boulder dash and piggish  
animals  
down the side of a Colorado  
mountain scape  
with goat  
in the river

Chris Stanley



B.J. Scribner I Don't See Anybody Around Here Going  
Out Of Their Way To Show Me A Good Time

## As Worlds Collide

**P**rose flows upstairs  
While the flamenco beat  
Prints another's words.

As world's collide in a sound-proofed room,  
The maters hang on the walls.  
For all to ignore.

"Giverny? Must be some foreign place."

Oblivious to Monet's best,  
The work goes on in syncopated rhythm,  
Endlessly driven by a machine  
That could reproduce his brush strokes.

Susan Eichner



## Inspiration

(Compliments of E. H.)

If you're writing for me,  
don't bother with rhythm.

I haven't heard a beat in over 15 years.

If you're writing for me,  
discard your prose and poetry.

I only admire little brown bears.

Old men carve them of wood  
and sell them on street corners.

If you can duplicate their beauty,  
I will read what you have written.

Susan Eichner

