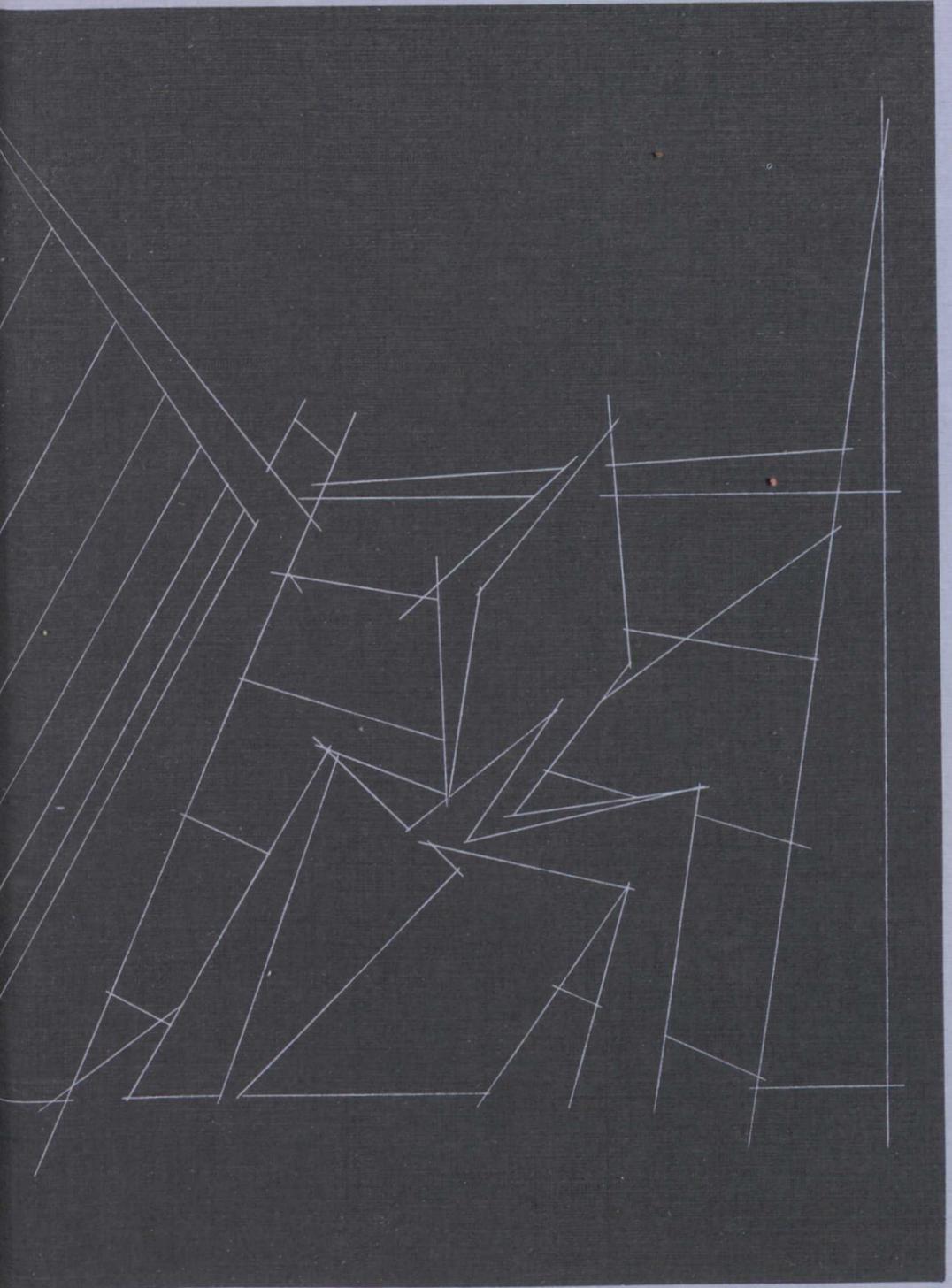


[Vol. 67]



TOWERS

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Editors' Statement

Any medium that allows for the spread of creativity in any form—artistic, poetic, or prosaic—across the NIU campus is both a boost to our university's reputation and an asset to any student who takes part in enjoying it. Students have preserved TOWERS as a publication representing the elite in creative achievement. Of course, we all have our favorite genre—poetry, art, short stories, creative or critical essays—but we firmly believe that all of the works presented in this issue are of outstanding quality.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed in the selection process, especially editors Laurie Evans, Diana Jackson, Pandra Kroll, and Amy Poskon for their hard work, dedication, and professionalism. Also special thanks to Janet Heller and Ben Mamoud for their contributions.

Our contributors have made the high quality of this issue possible. We hope it promotes reflection, emotion, and fuels a certain creative spark within.

Daniel Bingley

Jeanne Forst

Co-editors

(Cover) Untitled—Kelly Day

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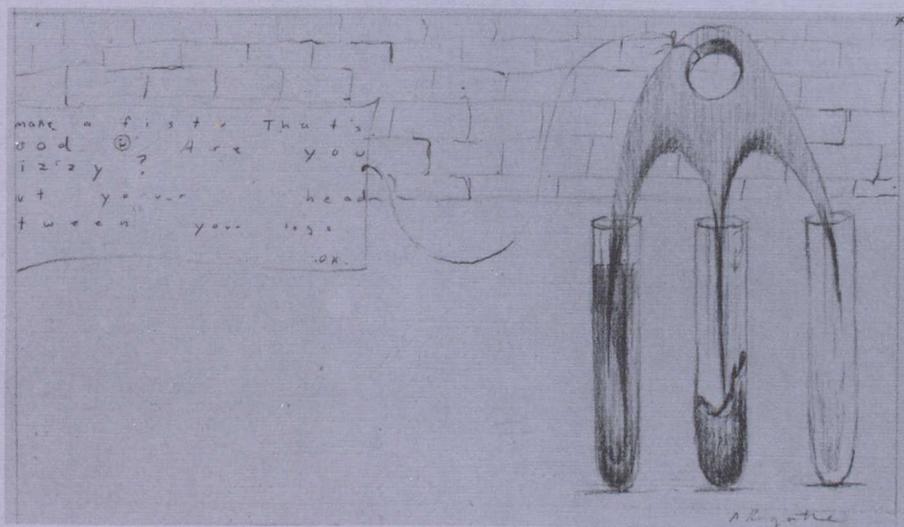
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Dizzy Spell—Amy Regutti

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Swim Hole

Head down to the swim hole
in old tennis shoes-
pack of cigarettes
from Super Valu.

Muddy catfish water
skirts slick green stumps
collecting foam.
Nettles bristle the sand bar.

Pungent Saturday-
Eddie cannonballs in
with mouthful
of lit cigarettes.

Tad A. Vogl



Women Who Marry Gay Men—Adele Rose



Untitled—John Boyd Brandon

Los Manos de la Tierra

An old man swings a rusted scythe.
He pauses, explains, continues.
A child struggles to mirror
the smooth, well-worn strokes of the man.
The man and the child labor together
among the stalks of corn,
until the sun dims the land.

La tierra es duro y suave.
The hands blister, callous, and harden.
Dirt embeds in the creases,
the fingernails yellow and split.
The hands come to echo the land
which sculpts them.

Tierra es buena, the old man whispers,
crouching toward the child's ear.
The old man kneels and praises the soil,
the harvest, the daily bread.
The child kneels, smiles,
and pats the earth.

C. G. McCabe
poetry prize

REALITY

by *JoAnne Dowdell*
fiction prize

Seated at the kitchen table, she fanned herself vigorously with a magazine. The room was hot. A small fan perched on the countertop. The whirring blades turned right, left, back. Hypnotic. The curtains at the open window hung limp. The table was set for two, lunch meat, cheese and bread. Yellow plates and napkins matched the flowers in the oilcloth. A small jagged tear crept along the stem of a flower. She moved one of the plates to cover it, then saw a chip in the plate and frowned. The glass of iced tea was sweet and cold. An icy chill pressed in her hand. The happy screams of children playing in an open hydrant came from the street below. She envied them, tried to imagine herself running back and forth under the icy water, closed her eyes and smiled.

At half past five the downstairs door opened and slammed shut. Heavy booted footsteps sounded in the stairway. He came in carrying his hard hat and lunch box. She got up quickly, took them from him and put them on the counter.

"This overtime is great for the pocketbook, Rose, but it sure is tough workin' in this God-awful heat," he said. He sat down and wiped his face on his sleeve. She took a beer from the refrigerator and set it before him. He flipped the cap off with his thumb, drank and gave a hearty belch.

"Supper's ready," she said.

"Can't. Union meeting tonight."

"Tonight? it's Sunday."

"I know, I know, but Charlie thought we ought to get together. The boss is making noise about cutting back if we don't get this job done. He's pushing us as it is—"

"But the overtime—"

"Only temporary, he says. You know Kendall—always trying to squeeze a buck 'til it yells."

He chuckled to himself, finished the rest of the beer.

"I'll eat on the run, Rose."

In a moment she heard the bath water running, heard him splashing. She slathered two slices of bread with mustard, piled them high with bologna and

salami and wrapped the sandwich in waxed paper. As an afterthought, she took out a dilled pickle and laid it on top the sandwich.

He came back wearing a fresh shirt and slacks. His sleeves were rolled up, heavily muscled forearms covered with fine blond hairs. His face was shaved and scrubbed to a pink shine. He had scoured the dirt and dust from his hair and it lay wet against his head save for a few yellow curls that had escaped his comb.

“You look nice,” she said.

He grabbed the sandwich and started for the door. She walked around the table and tilted her face. He kissed her lightly on the cheek, went down the stairs. The door slammed.

She put the plates back in the cupboard, wrapped the lunch meat up and put it away, then wiped the crumbs from his lunch box, rinsed the thermos. She made two cheese sandwiches, took an apple, polished it with her apron, put everything into the lunch box and put it in the refrigerator. She set up the ironing board, plugged in the iron, adjusted the fan to blow directly on her. She tested the iron, then flipped on the radio next to the stove, turned the dial back and forth a few times, finally settled on music. Picking up a dampened pair of work pants, she spread them carefully on the board and began to iron. That first hiss of the hot iron always made her feel good—so useful. Her work was slow, careful, as she pressed heavily with the iron so there would be no wrinkles. The room was hot, sticky. The sweat trickled down her sides and tickled her forehead. Several times she set the iron down to wipe her face. Five pairs of work pants—three to go—four cotton dresses—two shirts—three aprons—the fan droned on. Over the radio a chorus was singing, “All alone, I’m so all alone—There is no one else but you...”

Scarlett sat demurely on the sidelines, hands folded primly in her lap, feet tucked neatly under her black dress. She tried to ignore the stares of the other ladies. She smoothed her skirt, despising the rough cloth under her fingers, thinking about the green voile with the wide sash she had worn to the summer party. How wonderful it had all been, how admired she was, courted by every young man there—oh, how they had vied for her hand, for a moment’s grace—a smile—a word of encouragement—all but Ashley—her Ashley. She glanced about casually, hoping no one could read her inner thoughts. Ashley. She lowered her head, focused on the black dress. Widow’s garb. Was this her punishment for marrying a man out of spite? His death had not stirred her. She bit at her lip. He stood before her, tall, handsome, the slight hint of a smirk crossing his dark features. I would be delighted to dance, Captain Butler. He extended his hand. Audible gasps rose from the cadre of ladies. He led her to the center of the room. You’re quite scandalous, he mocked gently. Oh, fiddledy dee, she pouted. I want to dance—why shouldn’t I? She gathered her skirt up in one hand and they danced the reel. They whirled and spun wildly, Scarlett’s skirts whipping about to reveal slim ankles, her black bonnet straining at its ties. Her face grew flushed and she laughed with joy. The clucking women became a blur. When the music ended, he offered her a glass of punch. Hardly the grieving widow, are you? he said...

The iron sputtered and hissed, sending up a fine mist of steam. She refilled her glass with iced tea, pressed the glass to her forehead, then drank.

Scarlett did not answer, looked steadily at him over the rim of her glass. Someone called for quiet. As an upturned hat passed among them, the ladies solemnly removed their jewelry and placed it into the hat—gold for the war effort. She looked at the hat brimming with bracelets and pendants. He was watching her. Without hesitation, she removed the wide gold wedding band and dropped it into the hat. Well, I never—one of the ladies blurted. She looked at him, a satisfied smile on her lips. The others buzzed and turned away. He bent close to her. Come away with me, he said earnestly. We're two of a kind. She drew back, haughty now, smug in her self-righteousness. Certainly not, Captain Butler. I love you, he said. We are alike ...

She spread the apron out on the ironing board. Over the radio Andy Williams crooned softly, "If it takes forever, I will wait for you ... Through a thousand summers, I will wait for you ..."

No—no—her face began to crumble—I love Ashley—my heart belongs to him—my sweet, blond Ashley. He doesn't love me now, but he will, he will. Someday—someday I'll make him love me. Someday he'll be truly mine. Ashley ...

She finished the last piece, folded it and placed it in the basket. Outside it was quite dark. The fire hydrant had been long shut off and the children had gone. She turned the radio off, unplugged the iron and put the board in the closet, then carried the basket to the bedroom, put his shirts into the second drawer, his work pants into the bottom drawer. She arranged her things in the other bureau. She liked the neatness of it, the cotton dresses still warm from the iron, nestling in the sacheted drawers smelling of apple blossoms. Sighing deeply, she again became aware of the oppressive heat. On her way to the bathroom, she stopped before a closed door, paused, then opened it and turned on the light. She stood quietly, taking it all in. Everything was in order, the little white chest stenciled with yellow, pink and blue tulips, frilly white curtains at the window, the small iron bed, rescued from a junk pile, sanded and painted white. She stepped lightly to the bed, reached out hesitantly, smoothed the pink and blue coverlet. Soft and sweet. Her eyes welled with tears. How long? Two months? The early morning silence broken by the sound of sirens, gentle hands lifting her from the bloody sheets, the buildings flying by, no, no, it's too soon, hoping, praying, wishing he were there, nurses fluttering around the bed, the doctor's face. Sorry. And tears, nights filled with tears ...

The long journey had been difficult. He eased her down from the back of the little animal. She hobbled painfully on stiffened limbs to the pile of hay and sank down upon it. The pain gnawed at her belly. The man knelt beside her. I am so sorry, he said. This isn't the right place for you. He stroked her damp brow glistening with her effort, removed his heavy cloak and covered her. Another spasm gripped her. She reached for his hand, clasped it and squeezed until her knuckles whitened. Not much more, he soothed. I am so afraid, she whispered, her eyes wide with animal terror. She moaned and twisted beneath the cloak. His eyes were filled with pity, tenderness. I must be brave, she gasped. Oh—give me

your hand again. I need your strength. Give me your hand! She strained, her body pitching wildly. Then a final spasm of agony, so great she thought she was being rent in two, so white-hot it consumed her, and then—then—the piteous wail of a babe. Hands shaking, the man lifted the infant from between her thighs and placed it gently on her chest. She put the squalling baby to her breast. It quieted and began to suck greedily. So beautiful, he said, in a voice hushed in awe and reverence. Tears of joy and relief flooded his eyes. He put his huge hands to his face and wept. She looked down at the babe. Oh, my rose, she whispered, my life, my sweetness. She touched the tiny blond head, the pale delicate lashes, the pink cheeks. The man lay down beside her then, fitting his body close to hers under the cloak. It is done, she said softly, touching his wet face. I will take care of you, he murmured. I will always be your strength. He closed his eyes and slept. She gazed at them, the big burly man and the tiny infant, resting peacefully against her body—blooming now with life and vitality. A quiet serenity filled her. Behold, she whispered, I am the handmaiden of the Lord...

She switched off the light, closed the door quietly. As the bathtub filled, she undressed, pinned her damp hair up off her neck, and appraised herself in the mirror. Plain, so plain. She frowned, a furrow appearing across the bridge of her nose, studied the pale blue eyes under white brows, pinched the thin cheeks, watched a hint of color rise then quickly fade. My little bag of bones, he teased her. True. All angles and knobs, long arms and bony fingers, curveless thighs, breasts small and flat against her ribs. She looked ruefully at the image before her, bland, without shape, empty.

The woman in the mirror grinned at her lasciviously. I am strong, I am life, the woman laughed, caressing her swollen breasts and rounded stomach. She stood with legs apart and folded her arms across her chest. She laughed again, winked knowingly. Her teeth were even, blue-white under full red lips, her auburn hair curly and wild around her smooth plump shoulders. And who are you? she demanded.

She turned the water off, eased into the tepid coolness. She closed her eyes and lay quiet for a long time. Then she washed slowly, deliberately, patted herself dry, slipped on a fresh cotton gown, pink and soft as her skin. She lay down on the bed, closed her eyes. Tonight. It will be different tonight. Slowly she caressed her arms, felt their thinness, touched her abdomen, concave and hollow between her hip bones, felt the pain and desire there. It will be different.

She ran as lightly as a deer, kicking up spurts of wet sand with each step. The moonlight shimmered on the shore, silvering each wave as it broke. The waves covered her footprints, then fell back to the arms of the sea. A wave splashed softly against a rock as she passed. She felt the salt spray against her face, heard his steps padding eagerly behind her. She shook her long mane of hair, laughed with excitement and quickened her pace. Then a stab of pain in her foot and she tumbled to the sand. He ran to her. What is it? Only a bruise. He grasped her foot, brushed away the sand, lifted her foot to his lips and touched the spot where a dot of blood showed crimson. She stared at him, her breath coming in quick gasps. He was extraordinarily beautiful, his hair pale yellow in the moonlight, his body tanned and hard. Come, he said, lifted her in his arms and carried her to a grassy

dune. He released her gently, but she clung to him with desire. Give me life, she whispered...

The sharp banging of the door startled her. His footsteps were heavy and uneven. She shifted her body, waited. He came into the dark room. She heard the shuffling of clothes and the dull thud of shoes on the carpet. He bumped the bureau and swore, got into bed. She waited.

"Darling," she whispered. She touched his arm. "Darling?" No answer. He mumbled, turned violently, thrust one arm over her and began to snore. He smelled of beer. She lay quietly for a moment longer. Then she eased herself from under his arm and turned toward the window and stared out at the darkness.

Hand and hand they walked toward the sea. They stopped, he kissed her. She leaned heavily against him, sensed his pleasant weariness and felt her own strength. He smiled and led her into the water. The coolness covered her knees, her belly, her breasts. She reached out for him, pulled his face to her. I am so happy, she said. I love you, he said. I know. She smiled blissfully. I have everything now, my dearest, she said in a tremulous whisper. I have you, my darling love and now I have life. You'll soon see. She whirled and sent silvery ripples spinning from her fingertips. Tears of happiness slid down her cheeks and mingled with the sea.

She lay perfectly still, felt the heat of his body against her back, listened to his heavy even breathing, knew he would not wake until morning. She sighed, curled her legs up and closed her eyes. Tomorrow, perhaps tomorrow. She hoped he would come to her in her dreams.



Eat The Glass Shards—Adele Rose

Just a Feeling

Some days
I'd just rather jack off

or caress your teeth
with a ballpeen hammer.

It's nothing personal,
just a feeling.

james tolan

G
A
S



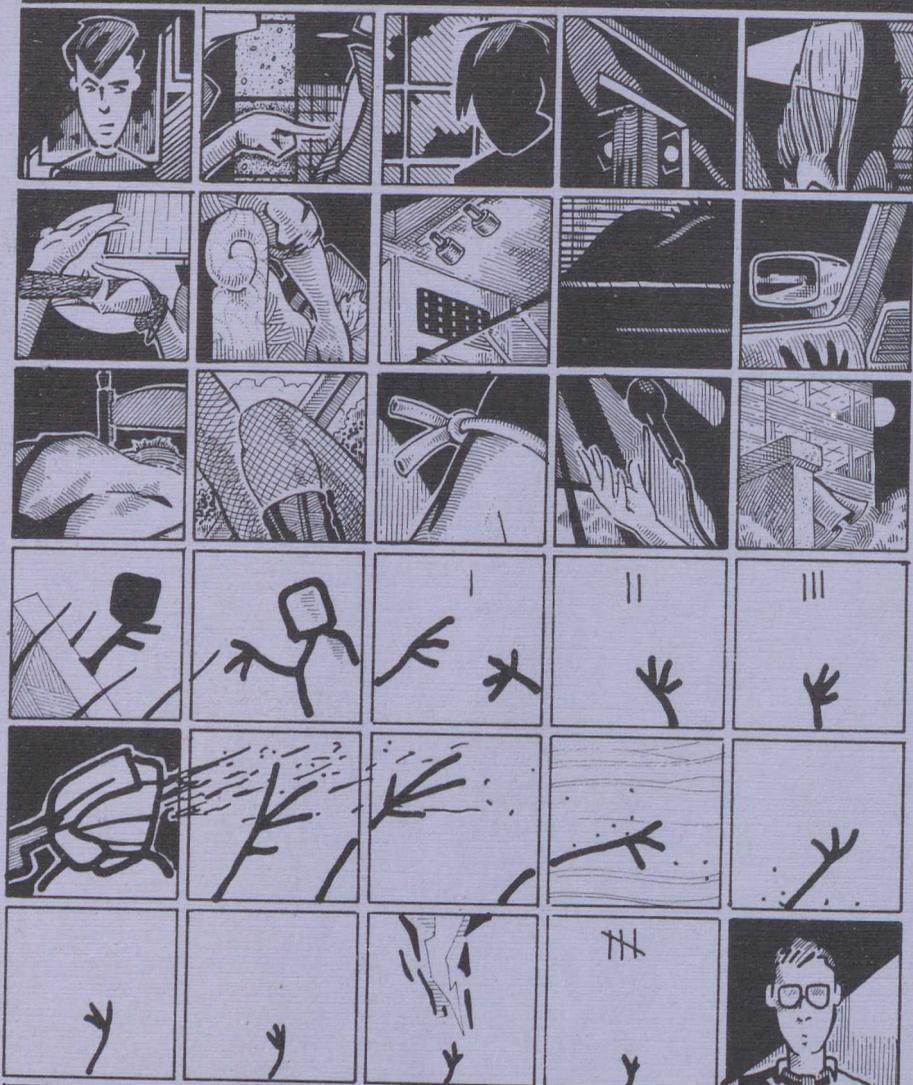
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COMICS

1987 BY JOE CHIAPETTA

DIALOGUE



THE LAST FOUR YEARS OF MY LIFE (1983 - 87)
ENCAPSULATED INTO 30 FRAMES... T.S. HART

Palm Sunday

My grandmother
was skilled
in the braiding of palms
She would moisten
the pale green blades
in holy water
and weave them like hair
into crosses
and crowns of thorns
to hang over
scratched mahogany bedstands
in her basement flat
Even when I no longer believed—
I marveled at the art
faith had created

Today
I struggle with
clumsy third generation fingers
to recreate those Old World emblems
and her full moon face
comes back to me
wrapped in a faded gold braid
The yellow palm crosses
have crumbled
over my mahogany bed
and she has gone with them
No one remembers
how to weave green palms
anymore
and again
it is almost Easter

Susan E. Stemont

Lucien Stryk Award

Hierarchy and Bodily Members

by *Andrea Manning*

“The body consists not of one but of many members . . . If the entire body were an eye, where would the hearing come in? Or if all were hearing, what of the smelling? As it is, however, God has placed the members in the body, each particular one of them just as He saw fit.”

1 Cor. 12:14, 17-18

C.S. Lewis, writing in **A Preface to Paradise Lost**, sets out to describe to modern readers some historical developments and beliefs that would have been wholly familiar and largely accepted by authors before the revolutionary (Romantic) period. His motivation was to show that we can make mistakes in critical judgments if we misunderstand the basic worldviews of those earlier authors, from which their intentions would follow, more or less, and in particular he aimed to refute the position of Blake and Shelly, who had maintained that Satan is the hero of **Paradise Lost**. One of Lewis' topics is the Hierarchical concept of order, which holds that: “Everything except God has some natural superior; everything except unformed matter has some natural inferior. The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors” (73). After further elaboration, in which he cites other prominent writers besides Milton who embraced this belief, Lewis arrives at a statement of the categories of disobedience stemming from the definition of Hierarchy:

“Now if once the concept of Hierarchy is grasped, we see that order can be destroyed in two ways: (1) By ruling or obeying natural equals, this is by Tyranny or Servility. (2) By failing to obey a natural superior or to rule a natural inferior - that is, by Rebellion or Remissness” (76).

So we have these four: tyranny, servility, rebellion, and remissness; and since Lewis cites Shakespeare as one of the staunchest supporters of the Hierarchical concept of order, four of his characters whose lives seem to exemplify one of these types of disobedience shall be examined.

Certainly Richard III is Shakespeare's fullest personification of Tyranny, although in the play itself our sense is that Richard spends relatively little time on the throne before Richmond arrives to do battle. Richard's tyranny, then, lies just as strongly in his incessant scheming to attain power, in his belief that he is free to do anything he needs in order to reach the throne, even though it means the elimination of every human obstacle—anyone who has even the remotest claim or link to the throne. This is especially tragic in the case of the two young princes, Edward and Richard, who are innocent of any designs to power themselves. Yet

Richard mercilessly leads them to believe he is their advocate and protector in the family. On one occasion he says to young Edward: "God keep you from them, and from such false friends!" (III,i, 15). Then later he mutters to Buckingham: "Shall I be plain? I wish the two bastards dead" (IV,ii, 17), which is his design all along.

Richard simply aspires to a position he was not meant to have. Actually, kingship was in the realm of the possible for him because he was royalty, after all. But the fact that he must impose his own will on the situation, using evil means to achieve his ends, is an obvious indication that he has created a false calling for himself. Does the ear say to the nose, "Let's us two switch places so I can see what it's like to be where you are"? No—that would be disorderly and singularly unsightly, and we have plenty of testimony from Richard himself as to his unsightliness: "deform'd . . . lamely and unfashionable" (I,i, 22). Of course that is no accident; usurpation was ugly and distasteful to Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience, who believed that the monarchy was divinely constituted and whom Lewis would agree brought a better, in the sense of a predisposed, understanding to a Shakespearian play than modern audiences can bring.

Titus in **Titus Andronicus** comes closest to exemplifying Servility, or the obeying of natural equals when one should be leading them. At the play's opening, Titus is returning to Rome after battling the Goths, but we do not meet him immediately. Rather, Saturninus and Bassianus, Caesar's sons, are 'center stage,' stating their claims to the throne. Next Marcus arises to present the absent Titus as rightful ruler of the Romans since he has triumphed on their behalf over the Goths. Titus' claim is meant to be seen as at least equal to the claims of the brothers and indeed the crown is offered to him before Saturninus, but Titus refuses it, saying he is old and feeble; all he wants is "a staff of honor for mine age, but not a sceptre to control the world" (I,i, 198-199). It is certainly understandable that he should be weary after war, and yet I believe Shakespeare does indicate, from the direction the rest of the story takes, that Titus was wrong not to accept the rule that was freely offered to him. The price he pays is servility for a time, until he gets his own revenge plots going. But to return to the opportunity presented him: Titus chooses to support Saturninus, who in return for Titus' loyalty comes to show him only contempt. Admittedly, revenge was not the motivation in Saturninus' original plans. He is a party to it through his wife Tamora and her lover Aaron, and in some instances he is not even aware of all the behind-the-scenes intrigues.

The strongest incidence of Titus' servility comes in Act III, scene i, in which he is begging Aaron for his son's release and offers his hand as a ransom. Here he has been reduced from a great army general to a desperate and powerless man whose humiliation is complete when his severed hand is rejected, making his 'ransom' ineffectual and unnecessary. Given the preceding transaction, it is obvious that another bodily-member analogy would be superfluous here, as the play itself furnishes one already. The blatant (and pervasive) presentations of dismembered heads, hands, and tongues are dizzying. All of these are more than analogies but are symbols for the fact that everything is out of order and disrupted in this play, and (presumably) could have been avoided if Titus had taken authority. It is true that we cannot know whether his rule would have been just or troublesome, but apparently Titus was the Chosen One in Shakespeare's schema.

Lewis treats the characterization of the famed Katherina (from **The Taming of the Shrew**) specifically in his chapter on Hierarchy. Modern critics go wrong, he says, in “describing Katherina’s (final) speech of submission as ‘melancholy clap-trap’ ” and modern producers and directors do no better (and reveal a misunderstanding of Shakespeare’s intentions) when they make “Katherina give the audience to understand that her submission is tactical or ironical. There is no hint of this in the lines Shakespeare has given her” (76). While Katherina certainly typifies a rebellious spirit at the play’s opening, she has good reason to question and resist the lead of those around her. Certainly the examples of her father and sister, who perhaps ‘know their places’ or roles as Father and Daughter in the more conventional sense, are no examples at all because they lack dignity and morality (while they may be ‘correct’ in the first sense). Baptista thinks of his daughters largely as chattel, mere tokens in the marriage game, while Bianca (the younger, more beautiful and “popular” of the two) is not presented as a model of virtue. This makes the issue of Petruchio’s credibility crucial: is he a worthy model to whom Katherina should submit? I believe the play says ‘yes’ to this question, and this points again to another issue dividing “moderns” from Elizabethans, women’s roles.

Certainly Petruchio is distinguishable from most characters in this play because he is free from bothering about what other people may think of him, from worshipping the outward appearance, and this is the first lesson he aims to teach Katherina about himself after their marriage (which he attends dressed in rags). Although his means of teaching her seem harsh, he wants her to be free in the same way. Katherina can eventually submit to him, probably because of the examples of her father and sister, which were better to be left behind. Petruchio also is forthright and makes no attempt to hide anything, even his motives in pursuing Katherina: he originally desires her wealth. This is in direct contrast to Richard III, of whom Lord Hastings mistakenly asserts: “For by his face straight shall you know his heart” (III.iv, 53). Both men are alike in their busy-ness and restlessness, so Petruchio is clearly a foil to Richard. But Petruchio is credible in his aims whereas Richard is not. Katherina recognizes her husband’s insight and hence can willingly call him her lord and sovereign. She, then, is like a mouth wont to pout and frown, which now curves into a smile, where a frown would symbolize a twistedness associated with rebellion, and a smile, the release from it.

According to Lewis’ definition, Remissness is the failure to rule one’s natural inferiors. In the case of King Lear this failure is demonstrated both within the present action of the play and previous to the present action. This latter case involves Lear’s failure to understand his office of Father of Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan. We can surmise that he has been remiss in raising his daughters, judging from his values and theirs (i.e., the extent to which they accept or reject what he has communicated to them as important). In raising them he has forgotten the rule of love—rule *by* love—which is revealed on one occasion when he laments to his new cronies, the Elements: “I never gave you kingdom, called you children” (III.ii, 17). The property he has handed over to his two eldest daughters is his first consideration and obsession, while parental affection must always have been a distant second. Goneril and Regan largely accept Lear’s values: at the play’s opening they both relate to him on his terms and are rewarded for their flattering words, but then come to show insensitivity to his appeals once they are in power;

it can be surmised that this is a result of how they were raised. Cordelia is an exception, however, and refuses to relate to her father in terms of the outward show, and so she is banished.

The fact that Lear is willingly handing the kingdom over to two females would have been a signal to the Elizabethan audience that folly was ahead. Furthermore, Lear and Kent (his attendant posing as Caius) have a revealing exchange after the changeover:

L. Dost thou know me, fellow?

K. No, sir, but you have in your countenance which I would call master.

L. What's that?

K. Authority.

(Liv, 27-30)

So the qualities of leadership and authority are still associated with Lear (perhaps for the audience's sake, since certainly Kent is not an unbiased stranger). Nevertheless, Lear still should have been in power. Perhaps we can say, figuratively to a painful extreme, that Lear desired to go from being an eye to an eyebrow—still keeping a nice front-row view of things but not having to do a whole lot, just arching occasionally to attract a little attention. And for his sin of remissness—premature abdication—Lear can be likened to a grizzly, perpetually furrowed brow.

Perhaps at this point Shakespeare and C.S. Lewis as well both seem like mean old ogre-codgers, urging all of this obedience on us. So it would be an appropriate time to say what the purpose of obedience and discipline is. Lewis cites the example in the Book of Revelation where the angel measures the dimensions, or confines, of the New Jerusalem and says the reason is “not because even saved souls will still be finite; not because the withdrawing of discipline is some privilege too high for creatures. No: . . . Discipline” — consisting of learned obedience — “exists for the sake of what seems its very opposite — for freedom, almost for extravagance” (81). The truth of this statement may be hard to conceive since we do not see many characters who exemplify a joy in obedience, in Shakespeare or in other authors. For if we did see it, then where would the drama be? Or, if all were peaceful, where would the tension come in?

Work cited:

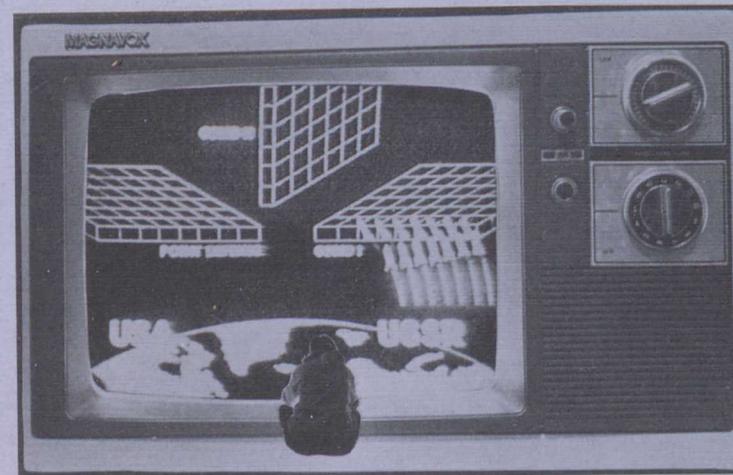
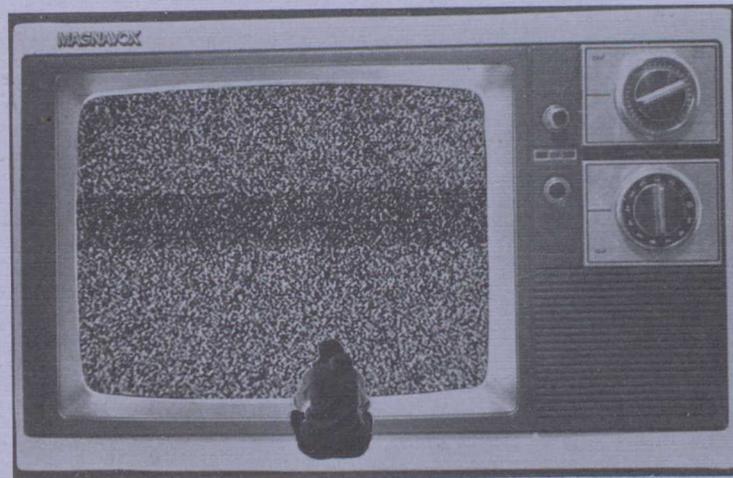
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ATLANTIS

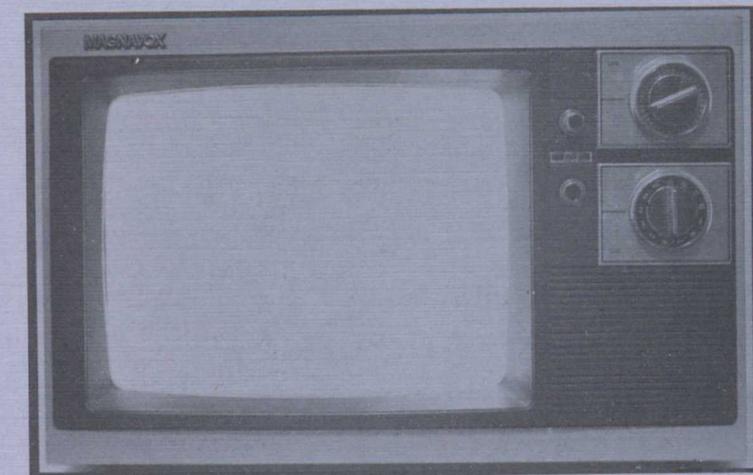
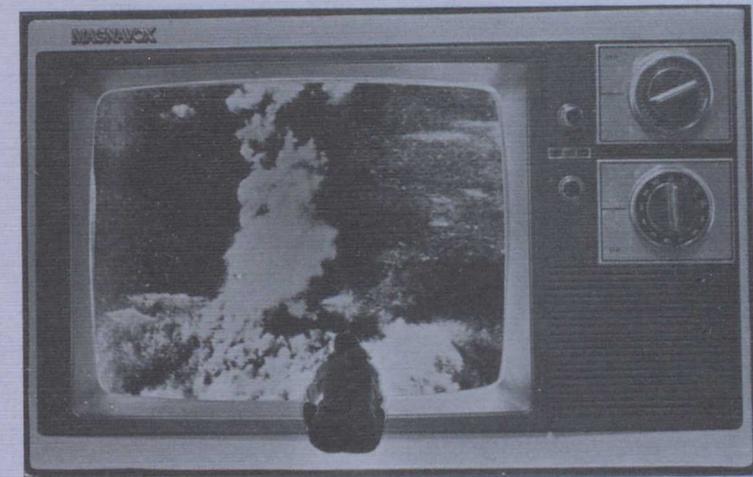
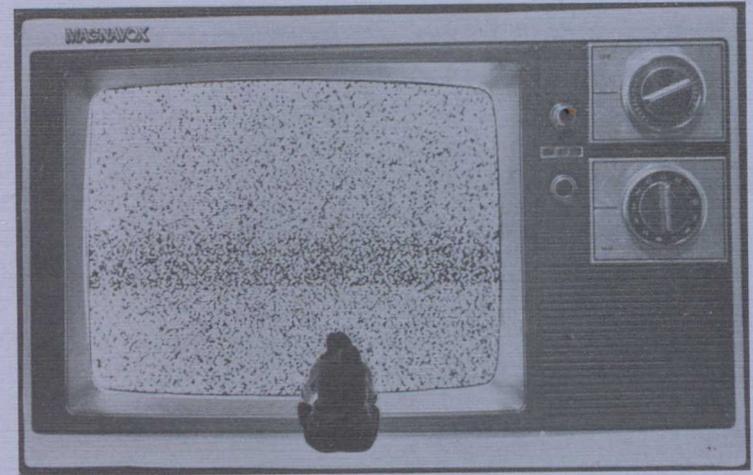
Late one dusky, baroque-pearl day,
The screen overlooking my back yard
Splintered a raindrop
To build a Washington Monument.
To the left,
A cluster of high-rise towered, while
Two- and three-story garden apartments grew
In the empty lots between.
There to the right, the suburbs spread,
An open plain beyond.

Suddenly, the sun burst clouds:
On one silent-switch the city blazed
Briefly,
And drowned.

Louise Eastman



Untitled—Martin Brief



Three Haiku

I.

Full moon night in June,
swimming in a placid river,
the moon swims with me.

II.

Across Illinois,
elephants on mammoth wheels
haul carts heaped with gold.

III.

Once reality
was an oak tree standing here;
today it's a bank.

Richard Parsons

CLOSE SHAVE

by *Gail Sosinsky Wickman*

I don't see it. The friction scream of rubber on concrete, the dissonant chime of shattered glass, the fingernails-on-blackboard scrape of steel grinding steel—these are the sounds that tell me it has happened again. The car door slams shut before I realize I've gotten out. My brain disengages, watching with detached interest as the adrenaline runs my legs to the first car.

"We're fine, we're fine," the father says as the mother gathers the children to her like fuzzy chicks. Blood trickles from the split in the father's lip. Before I can acknowledge him, my legs turn me toward the second car. My feet crunch the thin ice crust, and the dry snow beneath spills cold into my shoes. My breath billows like dragon smoke.

The sedan rests against the split-rail fence that borders McDonalds. Steam rises from the warm engine, shimmering up to the golden arches. The side windows are gone, and the doors on both sides are fused shut by the primary and secondary impacts.

They aren't moving. She, on the driver's side, has her head back like a grandpa sawing lumber lullabies. Blood pools in the corner of her right eye. She breathes. He is twisted in his seat belt, facing the passenger window, his knees gravitating toward his chest. His mottled scalp shows through the gray of his crew cut, the soldier-straight hairs looking as soft as the seat's blue-green velour. His face is buried in the headrest, his nose smashed against the cloth. He gasps. And shudders. Gasps. Shudders.

Hands from McDonalds bring coats, and we lay them over the inert forms. A high school letter jacket with creamy leather sleeves covers her brown quilted coat.

Gasp. Shudder.

I work my hands under his face and pull the headrest away from his nose. He breathes. I am grateful as the air rushes into his lungs. I am grateful as his exhalations warm my hands.

The cold reaches my knees. I swallow, but the knot in my esophagus halts the movement, and the fear builds, layered like sediment. Through the windshield I see in the restaurant's parking lot a tall, thin man with dark hair focusing, adjusting his shutter speed, refocusing, snapping, forwarding the film. I feel I must retch my disgust at the thin man's action, must purge myself of the terror in my

throat. But I can't leave. His cheek is soft against my hand. He shaved for his trip to town.

"Gene. Gene." She raises her head. The sun backlights her fine gray-brown hair. Blood rushes through her wrinkles on its way to her chin, like water flooding a dry gulch after spring rains.

"Gene!" Her pale eyes grow wide, and hysteria cuts her voice.

"Help's on the way. Try to relax. Help is coming." I want to pat her hand, dry her rusty tears, but instead my fingers cramp as I dig into the headrest. The cold crawls up my backbone.

The sirens bring officers, paramedics, the jaws of life and acrid, blue smoke as the firefighters pry metal doors from frames.

"Did you see what happened?" the officer asks.

"No. No, I didn't see anything." I hunch my shoulders against the cold as he turns away. I shiver and walk back to the car, thinking of a smooth cheek against my hand.

END

Cowboys And

“The only good Indian is a dead Indian.”*

Fifty plastic cowboys—
One for you, one for me—
quarreling... *bickering*
our mother called it
as in “Stop that
bickering”... over who got stuck
with the ten Indians.

Only the rifle-totin’ cowboys
were bowlegged enough
to ride the slick as butterscotch
palominos and the one black stallion
frozen in a gallop.

Dumb Injuns squat-um still, crippled
bows and hatchets poised.

Always we set ’em up in one straight line always mowed ’em down

with a whoop and a holler
of a smart-alec horse.

We kicked ’em to
their Happy Huntin’ Ground
in under-the-sofa dust,
grabbed up their threadbare
carpet corner of land
then tied red bandanas across
our good-guy noses and
got down to horsethieving
our kid brother’s Happy Hour Farm.

* popular variation of a statement by Philip Henry Sheridan at Fort Cobb January 1869: “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.”

Judy F. Ham

“Oh Give Me a Home Where the Buffalo Roam”

As I bathe at midnight
Chief Lone Bear glares down
through the clouded glass
of his great gilded
rummage sale frame;

It pleases my fancy
to have captured seven
fading sepia warriors
on that one bathroom wall
with some baskets that could

pass for Indian. Chief Running-
Something wears a fedora;
Tall-Singer sports six coup
feathers across his brow
like wilted decorations

of Aunt Maude's once best hat;
All gussied up, beaded
mocassins, that long hair ...
No-Name might be a squaw,
who can tell? What counts is

that row of seven
triangular chins
match gray wallpaper
patterned behind them.

...
Then dry August days
on a Dakota
reservation, no
wallpaper backgrounds,
no running water,

no lots-of-things; Old
red chiefs do not all
look alike; And framed
on welfare, do not
glare quite so proudly.

Now as I soak nightly
in my decorated
fantasy, I yank
shower curtains over my eyes.

Judy F. Ham

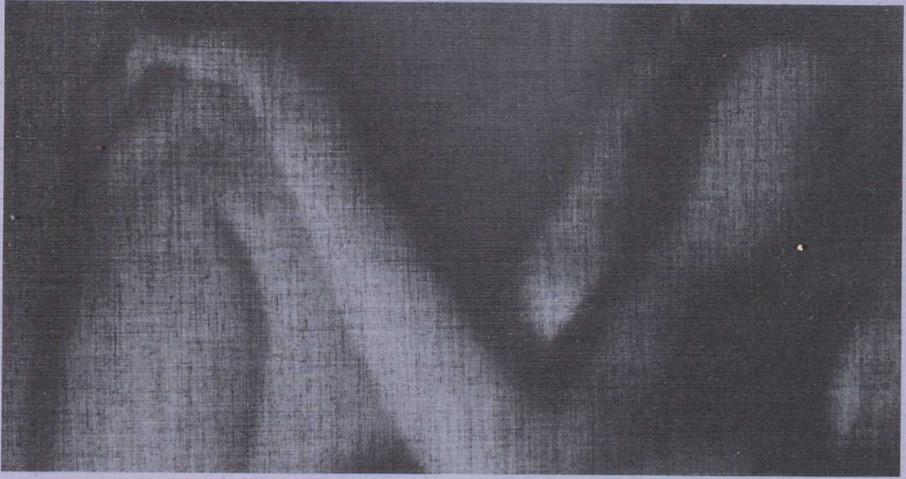
LOST

She was lost in the backseat of
a 1970 Ford LTD
Nothing looked familiar
A passing motorist noticed her frantic
pounding on the rear window
and opened the door
“God, I’m glad to be out of that Buick”
she breathed thankfully
She really didn’t know her cars

Terry J. Fox



Untitled—William Reece



Untitled—William Reece

Theodosia

A figure stood
upon the rocky ridge
peering across
a vast wasteland,
into the sun.
Its red glow
that spread across the sky
reflected off the jeweled hilt
and the sharp blade
which hung
on the wanderer's side.
The pointed ears,
hidden underneath brown hair
that feathered in the wind,
listened
and the elf
reached up to rub
a beardless chin.
A sigh escaped
lips which seldom
smiled
and deep blue
eyes,
that could swallow
your soul
if you looked to far,
gazed too deep,
told stories of adventures,
quests,
success.
The being
caused fear in the underworld.
Undefeated,
until now ...

Kathy Falout

Parting Shots

by *Sally M. Walker*
fiction prize

Perhaps the beginning of the end came the morning we drank orange juice. Kathy seemed awfully edgy.

"Charlie, I'm going back to school."

"Good idea," I said, chewing on pulp remnants I wished were grapefruit instead, "the high school has really branched out in their adult school offerings."

"I mean real school. University."

"What for?" I cracked the top off my egg with one quick chop of my knife. Damn, only three minutes. Yolk dribbled in a series of yellow globules down the sides of the shell. I hate it when yolk is too runny. I tried to put my knife in front of the creeping glop but was too late. It reached my toast and formed a yellow outline along the crust. Ruined.

"I have to do something with my life. You want me to fix another egg?"

"Yeah. But you have me, the kids, the house." Was this really happening?

She stood and walked to the refrigerator—one of those that makes ice water on the door. "I need more, Charlie." She took out another egg, but I had lost my appetite. Yolk congealed in a halo around the knife blade on my plate.

"More? Don't I give you enough? The cars, your clothes? Look at this place." Our house was in the right area of town. In a city of mostly ranch houses ours was a colonial that lent an air of composure to the sprawling nature of the other houses on the street. Spring Lawn sent a man out once a week to take care of the grass during the spring, summer, and fall. We often joked about not needing an alarm clock on his scheduled day: the drone of his automatic edging tool was more penetrating than the classical music switched on by our digital extra-doze clock. We had two cars: a spiffy red import for Kathy and a more suitable gray domestic model for me. Julie took piano lessons, and her teacher said she showed promise. Peter seemed to be following in my sporting days footsteps, although at seven it was difficult to be completely certain. Andrew was too young to make definite decisions about anything. How could she say such a ridiculous thing? Especially now; she knows I have to leave for work in ten minutes.

"Not things. I want something constructive for me." She began packing bologna sandwiches into lunch boxes for Julie and Pete.

"I can't believe this. What are you trying to prove?"

"Nothing." Her voice rose higher in pitch as she began to lose her cool. "I want to do more with my life than sit at home."

"But the kids need you."

"They're at school all day, and I can get a part-time sitter for Andrew. Lots of women do."

"Great. What if there's an accident? Or one of them is sick?"

"I can be reached at school, or you can at work."

"Wait a minute, you're talking like this is a fact."

"Well ..."

"You never asked me."

"I didn't want to upset you before it was definite."

"Who have you been talking to? One of those women's libbers? My mother stayed at home. She never worked."

"Don't be an idiot. Your mother has nothing to do with me." She started to leave the room, but she wasn't going to get away that easily.

"Hold on. Why the university? You already finished college. You'll be the oldest in the class."

"For my master's." I could tell by her tone she had already lost interest in the discussion.

"For what?" It was almost 8:30, and I didn't want to be late for work.

"To be a counselor. For that I need a master's."

"A counselor, huh? They make good money, right?" I was on the right track now.

"I suppose." She sighed and gave me an exasperated look.

"So that's it. You're worried about money. If you want you can get a little part-time job. At Eagle they pay their baggers ..."

"Stop it, Charlie," she practically shouted. "I don't want to discuss it anymore."

"But Kathy, you don't understand."

"I *do* understand, it's you who won't."

I really had to leave. I would be late as it was. "We'll talk about this again," I assured her as I put on my coat. I swear I heard her mutter, I'm sure we will, as I went out the door, but it could have been my imagination.

We did have the talk again, several times in fact, but she couldn't seem to understand my point of view. She told me to grow up, can you believe it? Finally she said a separation might be a good idea. Right like that, out of the blue. I was stunned. Of course I moved out. What else could I do? She couldn't support the kids, and I had to be noble. No one could say I treated her unfairly.

The kicker came when she sent me a letter last week. Dear Charlie (it read), I was sorry you couldn't make it to my graduation. I'd hoped you would change your mind. Maybe something else would always have been more important. My lawyer says the divorce should be finalized in a few weeks. I decided to sell the house anyway. You said you wouldn't take any money if I did, so I put it into trusts for the kids' education. I hope that's alright. I'm sorry Charlie, I really tried. Love, Kathy. She's probably crazy, and I thought I knew her.

I shook my head ruefully and opened the glass door of the medical arts building. God I hate going to the dentist. The antiseptic smell assailed my senses as soon as I reached his office. My palms started to sweat and my stomach went into its usual flip-flop routine. I gave my name to the receptionist.

"It will be just a minute Charlie, why don't you have a seat." I smiled nervously and sunk into one of the lushly upholstered chairs that try to fool patients into thinking they're anywhere but where they are.

One hot, sticky Saturday evening a bunch of the neighborhood kids were playing baseball. The other team had uniforms, but we weren't bad. If we'd had snazzy suits . . . well what difference does it make? Anyhow, the coach chose me to pitch. I was pretty good too. When I was on the mound, my team could count on me to deliver.

In spite of the heat things were going fine. By the top of the ninth I'd struck out twelve, so you know I was smoking. The score was one to nothing, ours. Sweat trickled down my forehead soaking my eyebrows and cheeks. Dust streaked my tee shirt sleeve from when I'd wiped my brow. For a moment my arm ached so I rubbed my shoulder and took a short walk around the mound. I stepped to the rubber and scuffed the toe of my sneaker. Their first guy up waited for my windup then cracked the ball past our shortstop. We got the next two: one on a pop fly, the other on a grounder to third. The fourth batter got lucky, and the ball soared over my head into rightfield. Pete drifted back and back until he leaped, crashing with metallic clinking, into a chain link fence. The ball was gone. Pete stood, brushed the dirt off his pants, and spit. The score was two to one, theirs, but I wasn't too concerned. Twilight sun stretched my shadow into a giant lying across home plate. I still felt invincible. Strike out number thirteen; the side retired.

Even though we were behind, our spirits remained high. Pete, Don, and Zack, three of our sharpest players, were due up. Their pitcher rubbed the ball between his palms, shook his head at the catcher's signal, and wound up. The bat swung around in a blur, and a solid crack hit our ears as Pete slammed it for a double. We screamed like crazy against the boos and hisses from the other bench. They made hooting catcalls as Don flexed his muscles and took a couple practice swings at an imaginary ball. He strolled to the plate and waited for the pitch. Low

and inside. The next was a curve, but Don caught a piece of it—enough to get him to first and Pete to third. We were a bunch of monkeys on the bench. Unfortunately Zack struck out. So did Max, and that left me. The rumblings on our team were drowned out by the cheers on the other side. But, like I said, my team could count on me. I walked confidently to the plate and raised the bat to my shoulder. Strike one; then high and outside. After strike two my team got real quiet. All of a sudden—

“You couldn’t hit the ball if it was glued to the bat!” It wasn’t even one of their guys. It was some dumb girl. I froze. The words rung as clear as a bell and sort of hung in the air echoing over and over again. It begged for a snappy reply.

“Huh?” You can probably guess the rest. Forever after I am doomed to relive it.

“Charlie!” boomed Dr. Higgins jovially. Easy for him. It’s not him in the hot seat.

I walked jauntily into his examining room and lay back in the chair. We exchanged pleasantries and a few jokes. What a sham.

Recently I returned some overdue library books. So what you might say. The thing is, I go to the library an average of three times a week. How can I possibly end up with overdue books? Life is full of mysteries. What really gets me about the whole thing, and it happens all the time, is that the fine is always two to four cents more than the amount in my pocket. I’m starting to get the reputation of a cheapskate. Why don’t they take credit cards? Everyone else does. Anyway, this particular time I was prepared. Two dollars practically burned my palm, its glow craftily concealed in my fist. Do your worst lady, I’m ready for anything. I placed my books on the returns desk with a self-satisfied air. The librarian looked up and smiled. A foreboding chill chased down my spine.

“Hello, Charlie. I’m glad you dropped by. The funniest thing happened yesterday. The owner of Reynolds Car Repair came in. One of their mechanics found several library books under the front seat of a gray rental car . . .” Her words blurred, and the chill turned into a body long icicle. “. . . I’m afraid the fine will be \$2.46.”

What can I say?

“Everything’s fine, Charlie. Keep up that flossing and I’ll see you in six months.”

As I eased into a sitting position, a soft buzz sounded as someone entered the outer office. A low mellifluous voice asked to schedule an appointment. Its tones were like a melody played by a cello. It continued to play until a day was chosen. I leaned forward in the chair to catch a glimpse of the exquisite creature who possessed such a magnificent voice. A chortle in response to a remark by the receptionist arrested my movement. Was its owner a woman or a man? I honestly couldn’t tell. I deliberately waited until the buzzer sounded and then stood up. I left the office and walked down the deserted hallway until I reached a door.

"Don't turn that knob!" For an instant, I thought the door had spoken. I wouldn't be surprised if an inanimate object spoke to me. After all, I say enough to them, and turn about is fair play. "Don't open that door!" The command was repeated, this time its urgency conveyed by staccato footsteps. I half turned and looked over my shoulder. A woman approached at what would have been a dead run if she'd been wearing anything but black stiletto slingbacks. By the time she reached me, her generous bosom heaved with a righteous indignation Janet Dailey would envy. I wondered, half amused, half irritated, if the bun perched precariously on her head would stand up to this workout, or tumble to her shoulders in a fireworks display of hairpins.

"What?" Certain situations call for concise, direct response.

"That door. You can't touch it."

"Why?"

"It's not allowed." She was beginning to regain control over her breathing.

"Oh." I felt an absurd need to justify, or at least explain, my apparent transgression. "I had an appointment in the dentist's office across the hall. I thought this might be a side door..."

She shook her head firmly, reminding me of my kindergarten teacher who never stood for nonsense. Funny, even now when I'm so much older, she still makes me feel like a five year old.

"No one is allowed to go through that door." Her arms folded across her chest, and she assumed a stance strong enough to repel Attila the Hun let alone me.

"Oh." I turned and walked back the way I'd come.

Perfect parting shots: some people have the knack, others don't. I've envied that all my life. It would be great to have the perfect answer for all of life's bullies. I suspect millions feel the way I do, but of course they would never speak out about it either. My mother always said not to worry about it, but she was wrong. It does matter. I walked a few more steps and stopped.

Everyone reaches a point in their life where they must make a choice. You can go on forever, the same old way, or you can make some changes.

"Then what the hell did they put the door there for?" I shouted loudly. I had to be sure she heard me. Two blocks is a fairly long distance.

Lake Stone

I have a lake stone for a wedding vow.
I keep it in my coat pocket
and hold it as I walk.
Its grain is stained with my skin's oil.
It shapes to the contours of my grip
and smoothes my calloused joints.
It cools my palm and I warm its face.
An untamed remnant of a pristine world,
it tumbles against the waves of my hand.
I cradle it in the shadows
of my instinctual caress.

A. D. Fallon

The Great Dissembler

Father

I see your lost eyes
in the dream of
another man's face
I have been looking for you
everywhere
these days
a tall shadow
with wide shoulders
against the burnt brick wall
of the corner bar
lighting a cigarette
big hands in the doorway
and a voice
that could stop time

Sometimes at night
late
when you came home
you carried chaos with you
in a paper sack
and I woke to noise and angry light
when there should have been
deep quiet
You were meant to
 ride the rails
 catch salmon in Oregon
 share the company of men
and stay a little drunk
until your dying day
Instead you were a husband
and a father by default
painted into a corner
of the South side
frightened
all the time

Remembering
thirty years later
I wake confused
in the middle of the night
thinking you are alive again
In the still hours
I lie awake in bed
with all the lights on
too old to make my peace with you
and you
too far away

to hear my whispers

Susan E. Stemont

The Field—Daydream on Waking

This morning
diamonds shimmer
on a jade sea
sliced by dragonflies
A cool breeze
bends the wheat
of your hair
as you sit by the window
still dusty
with sleep

You hold me
by a whispered word
strong
as spider silk
The curtain falls
and we touch
by fingertips
You leave a kiss
like a cloud
in my hand

Susan E. Stemont

Memorial Day Revisited

by M. Johnson

It had all the earmarks of a day guaranteed to last at least a fortnight. As Dunbar remarked in **Catch-22**, it was a “ten-week summer vacation that lasted a hundred thousand years and still ended too soon.” A languorous melding of a family barbecue-less Memorial holiday with dizzying doses of sunshine and sun-sweat (weathermen call it humidity). Even today, the tickle of heat fleas battling their way through the coagulating baby oil and spilt lemonade on my outstretched legs is palpable. I had stumbled into a time wrinkle, Grant Park-style. So had a multitude of Vietnam veterans. This was, in fact, their party—Chicago’s tribute to both the survivors and the casualties of the Vietnam war.

Ostensibly, it was a typical festival. Several bands were scheduled to perform. Old Style flowed abundantly, as evidenced by the Playmate-cooler, and litter-ridden field. And, of course, capitalists cashed in on this event, too, as vendors sold war memorabilia, posters, even T-shirts.

The gala’s only problem was the guests. Many had to be wheeled about and nursed. Eye patches and limps were almost the norm. It became difficult to avoid looking at them in the way that healthy people nervously look at the ground, their fingernails, *anything*, but the cripple confronting them. We all talked and laughed among ourselves in a selfish attempt to shield our young eyes. Like a healthy and merry pack of marauders, we sensed that we had crashed the wrong party. We hadn’t come to gape at the veterans, but to hear my date’s friend, Brian, perform in one of the bands. We grew anxious for the testing hum of a microphone.

I hadn’t counted on a surge of guilt for being strong and healthy when I first sprawled out on the grass and contemplated only the itch of the grass blades on my shins. I felt betrayed by my endless, carefree day. The most cerebral thing I was obligated to do on such a day was to pick out my outfit, a task which I had labored enough to coat the floor of my room with wardrobe rejects. Finally, black shorts, frayed and torn, miniaturized combat boots, and a much-too-big shirt with spontaneous splotches of paint conveyed the right image of “controlled messiness.” Ironically, my contrived Salvation Army look was due to a well broken-in Visa card. Selfishly, I reasoned that the wardrobe decision represented as much stress as I should have to contend with. After all, it was my time wrinkle.

Time became irrelevant again, as veterans straggled straight out of 1969 in bell-bottoms, long hair, and bandanas. We pretended not to stare at hippies made haggard and old by war, by injury, by the cold reception they received from the country they suffered for. Our little group encased ourselves in our bubble of youth like embryos bottled for science. Wheelchairs scuttled by as we nonchalantly asked the guy next to us if there was any Michelob left. A skinny relic of a veteran with burn scars and a wandering eye came by; and for all we understood of him, he was simply a walking pair of felt boots adorned with a tie-dye shirt. It wasn’t as though we were compassionless; it was simply easier to pretend not to notice anything. It hurt less.

The miniature wall listing the thousands of casualties did procure its share of "How sads," etc.. We slammed into the reality of thousands of people dying—dying at our age—and a hush fell. Twilight brought rain which pelted and eroded the flowers and trinkets of love flanking the wall. Veterans knelt and prayed for the dead boys. I felt my new clothes begin to stick to me, and I was repulsed by them and their odor of newness. I thought of my drowned-rat appearance, and my vanity once again surprised and repulsed me.

As we walked, Nick held my hand, partly to keep me from being accosted by numerous suffering veterans' lips. They simply wanted to kiss something new. One faceless inebriate whispered "You're lucky" as he aimed a kiss at my ear. Fatigue-clad veterans hovered together, crying and laughing in their mutual pain. As we walked and waited for Brian to come onstage in damp silence, I stared down at my mock combat boots, now drenched and muddy, with a cringe.

Brian and his band made their appearance somewhat anticlimactically at about 10:30. Although most of our group had given in to the deluge and gone home to look for a drier party, we stayed, watching blurrily from under a vendor's umbrella, as our friend sang a song he had written about Vietnam. He finished with, I'm embarrassed to admit, a rousing and inappropriate version of "So you want to be a rock and roll star."

The crowd dwindled. Hangers-on were unruly or passed out; so, with soggy, trendy jackets covering soggy spirits, we tramped out. One of Nick's friends came up to us with a pathetic sales plea. He had one long, glow-in-the-dark piece of plastic, like those sold at carnivals, to sell before he could go home. Nick obliged and now owns—or has probably discarded—this scrap guaranteed to do absolutely nothing.

My whimsical day had turned into an unwelcomed, uncomfortable day of soul-diving. The final self-condemnation slapped me as a green garbage bag-covered veteran asked us to buy a soaked poster commemorating the victims and survivors of Vietnam, the proceeds of which would go to a national support fund. But Nick had spent the last of our "play" money on a silly strip of green plastic . . .

Wasted

How do I tell you, Fools-Crow,
you do it all wrong
this looking for brave visions
under August suns,

skewers threaded beneath
breast skin, hanging until
you rip free, drop mutilated
to your sacred earth.

I bathe at midnight
to Bach's cello quartets,
in honey candlelight
that quickens up your
photo face old Indian

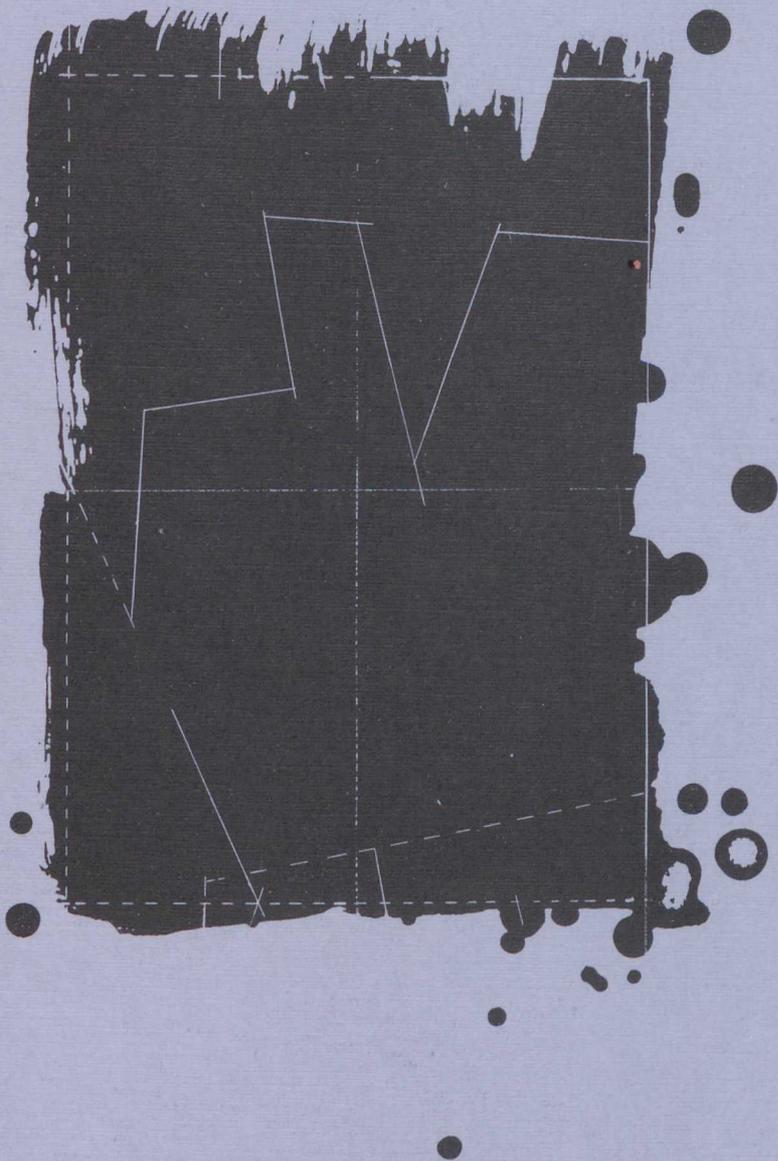
Man-On-My-Wall. I sip
orange cappuccinos,
fingertips tapping centers
of cabbage roses
on a warm china cup,
as if metering a poem;
rub my broken lifeline
three times over, feel where
my wedding ring cuts
my finger, and just where
I could sever my white wrists;
Before tension oozes into
bubbly water, I see
Plenty visions—
emerald bracelets, silver Mercedes,
flamingo-lined pools—

...

Rumblings: of revenge
for stolen land, buffalo—
no whiteman dare walk
Dakota roads at the hour
I play with my fingers
cream my fading body,
call myself a lady,
a civilized lady.

Dear Old Warrior, eagle-bone whistle
blowing, how can I tell you
there is no honor to grab,
this life is a test of nothing.

C. G. McCabe



Untitled—Kelly Day

The Emasculate

The castrated condor fell down upon a golden limousine,
stealing away with the Ernest Hemingway
shrunken head hood ornament—
freshly cubed in ice.

Carrying the famed man's wee noggin between his legs
like the dripping remains of once productive loins,
the condor circled the bullfight arena
before dropping Papa's quickly melting head
into the rum punch of a wilting widow
fingering herself in a private box.

"Perfectly charmed,"
she had a hole drilled between his ears
and wore him as the center piece
among her string of gems.

james tolan

