

Fall 1999

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Valparaiso University

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the
lighter



fall 1999

the lighter

valparaiso university's
literary magazine

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All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. *The Lighter* welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate, and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed, or sexual orientation.

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CONTENTS

Cover Art

Francisco Nuno FRONT Door New Orleans: Una Triste Noche #2

Julie Hurttgam BACK La Tour Eiffel: Paris, France

Fiction

Angelica Mortensen	2	Look
Doug Favero	6	The Photograph
Doug Favero	10	Story of a Quest
kelly k. faulstich	14	Little Bit

Poetry

Josh Messner	20	Be reasonable
Bethany Hirt	21	Reason
	22	Minute Maid Nurse
	24	Movie Theater Harmony
	26	Linguistically Speaking
Michelle Stahlhut	29	johnthreesixteen
david alan sisk	30	alone at dusk
	31	lodged into the minds of maría
	32	Casualty
Liv Larson	34	Dreaming to Daddy
jes noon	35	For Perry
	36	i bleed
C.M.	38	Invitations
Robert Pence	40	It Is
Josh Honn	42	So lonely she swam
	44	The Song
	48	The mind works in sessions
	49	Oh to be what I am
	50	The trial of an Anarchist
Kimberly Klotz	52	
Elisha Jamyce Robinson	54	Eyewitness
	56	Ode to the Black Woman
Justin Krishka	59	A Conversation at Booth 25
	60	Desire
	61	Apathy
Christy Lose	63	Tubscrubbing
	64	Dating: Before and After
	65	The Plumber's Tale
	69	Water Bottle

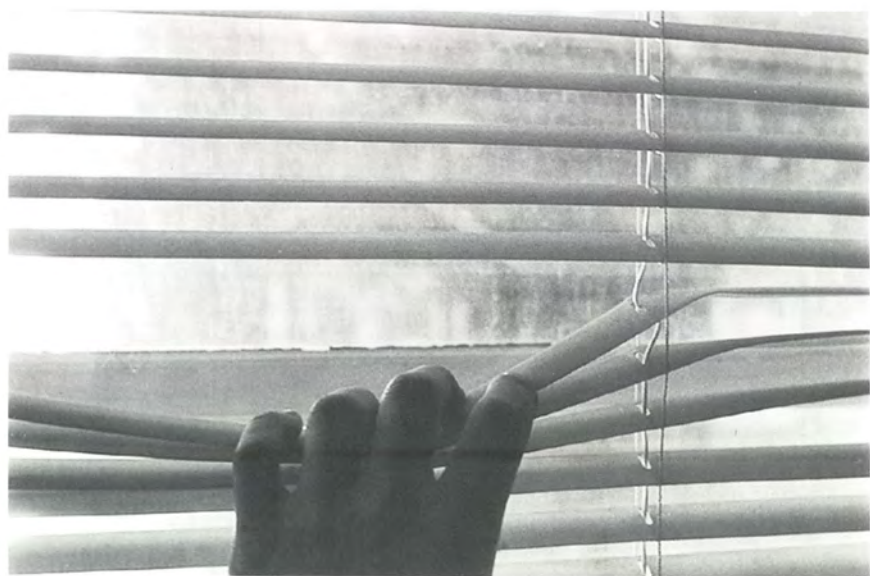
Timothy Hagen	70	Calendar
Armando X. Fernandez	71	Over the Viadock
	72	My Buddy Zeke (Ledbetter) and Me: Our Summer of '62
	74	Imagination ...my lack thereof
	76	All day thumb sucking revisited...
	79	A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic
	80	Alphabetized Jabberwock of Not So Long Ago
	81	Golden Crowned Allure
Rita de la Rosa Sarafin	83	Lord Have Mercy
Lisa Farver	84	To the boys at Vietnam
	85	inebriation
	86	en scène
	87	jacknjill
	89	What if?
Beth A. Grefe	90	Hope
	92	Gravity
Doug Favero	94	Late March, Among Tombstones
	96	Listen
Jessica C. Pleuss	97	How Does Time Deal With Memories?

Artwork

Nate Holdren	1	
Julie Hurtgam	9	The River Cam: Cambridge, England
Jason Weber	13	Hong Kong: Old Style: Repulse Bay, Hong Kong
	37	Sweet Memories
Amy McFadden	19	Light
	53	Berlin Wall: East Side
	91	
Francisco Nuno	28	Pre-historic Misty
	33	Series: "World I live" #23
	82	Lamp New Orleans: Una Triste Noche #3
Jessica C. Pleuss	43	Beings
	62	Emerging
	88	Impressions of a Lady
Misty Parent	95	

Contributor's Notes
Spring 2000 Issue Information
Wordfest Contest Notice

Fiction



Nate Holdren

THE LIGHTER

Look

"I wish I had the balls to wear stuff like this." I rub the purple satin of the dress lightly between my thumb and forefinger.

A smirk spreads across Marie's face. "If you had balls you probably wouldn't be particularly interested in a shiny purple and black slip. At least not in wearing it."

"Ah, the limitations of figurative language." I lift the plastic hanger from the store rack and pin it to my chest with my chin. The dress--it's really more of a slip--clings with static over the black t-shirt and jeans on my body. Transferring the hanger back to my hand, I look up at Marie expectantly.

"What 'dya think?"

"It's hot." She shrugs her shoulders. "What about the red one?"

I shake my head. "I like this one better."

"Yeah, I can see you better in that anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"It's more girly--I mean, the purple like gives it this hint of little girl. It doesn't quite scream 'I'm a whore.'"

"Quite?"

She shrugs her shoulders and cocks her mouth oddly in a response that I'm not sure how to interpret.

I raise one eyebrow at her. "Yeah, I think I'll steer clear of the 'I'm a whore' look for today." Screwing up my mouth in critical contemplation, I hold the slip-dress at arms length and look it up and down.

"You wanna try it on?"

"I don't know." Testing for softness, I finger the black lace that runs around the edges, up a slit in the leg and criss-crosses underneath the breasts of the dress.

"Oh, come on, you've had your eyes like glued to it since you saw it. Just try the thing on."

"Well. . . ."

"It's not like you've gotta buy the thing if you try it on. I'm not asking you to commit or anything."

The dress slips off the hanger and crumples in a heap on the thinly carpeted floor.

"See, it fell off the hanger, now you gotta try it on."

"What, is that some new rule?" I giggle and roll my eyes at her.

"Fine." I heave a sigh as if I'm doing her a favor.

In search of a dressing room I turn my head to the right and left then finally turn my whole body bemusedly around.

“Would you like to try that on?” Something in my stomach leaps lightly as I twist around to see a salesgirl with intricately curled hair and a kinky baby blue crepe skirt.

“Hmm? Oh, yeah, I guess so.”

“Follow me.” I follow two steps behind the clicking baby blue heels and bouncing baby blue hoop earrings. With an efficient motion she unlocks the door to the dressing room and motions for me to go inside. Before closing off the door from the rest of the store, I scan the racks of slinky dresses, mesh tank tops, and micro shorts for Marie’s familiar face.

I catch her eye. “Stay somewhere in this vicinity, okay?” She nods. I push against the door with the palm of my hand till I hear the soft click, then slide the lock into place.

Not bothering to untie them, I push off my shoes with the opposite foot, then efficiently drop my pants to the floor and kick them off with my heel. But I can’t avoid that mirror, full length, straight ahead. I catch myself studying that body, oddly clad in holey black T-shirt, thick black socks up to mid-calf, and white panties with a dainty blue floral pattern peaking out. Attempting to jerk myself away (remembering why I am here) from the temptation of vanity, I fling off my shirt, yet maintain eye contact with the mirror until the point where I become only a body, my head enveloped in the blackness of my shirt.

I again catch sight of myself in the mirror--black socks, floral underwear, faded tie-dyed bra--and make a face: nose scrunched, lips puckered, then burst into uncontrollable giggles.

“What are you doing in there?” I hear Marie’s exasperated voice.

“Admiring my hot body.”

“Admire quicker.”

“My God, aren’t we a bit commanding.” But I figure that’s my cue to get down to what I came in here for. I take the dress in my hand, glance it over briefly, then slip it over my head. It glides cleanly over my body, swiftly into place. The criss-crosses of black lace neatly contain my breasts, the rest falls smoothly over the lines of body, with two inches of pale thigh peaking out at the bottom. The only adjustment I need to make is on my hair, caught in the top of the dress. By running my fingers through the smooth blond hair on the top of my head, I lift out the slightly curling ends, then with the palm of my hands smooth the whole of it out from root to ends. I repeat the smoothing motion over the satiny surface--(over breasts, in at waist, over hips, down to thighs), more to revel in the feeling of it than to pull out non-existent wrinkles. With a smirk to my reflection, I whip off the ridiculous thick black socks. Motionless for a moment, I continue to gaze into the mirror, then look down with a shy smile. I correct myself to a confident smile, resume eye contact with my reflection, and suck in my stomach. The minuscule wrinkles bunched

below the waist disappear, the slight sags of satin at the breasts fill up. I slide the lock out of place, turn the door handle, and allow the door fall open.

A curtain of blond hair falls over my face as I stick my head out into the unflattering florescent-lights of store floor. "Marie!" I hiss.

"Huh?" She spins away from the rack of vinyl pants. "Oh. So? Come on out, let me look at you."

On barefooted tiptoes I step out onto the store floor, smoothing out non-existent wrinkles with my fingers and palms. My fingers rub one another behind my back as the shy smile returns. "So. . .what 'dya think?"

She motions with her hands for me to turn all the way around, and I awkwardly comply.

"The bra's gotta go."

I widen my eyes and raise my eyebrows to her.

"Well, the straps are all sticking out."

"Fine." In swift consecutive motions I unfasten the clasp, take one shoulder off, pull the entire bra out the side of the dress, then chuck it back into the dressing room.

"Hey, you're pretty good at that."

"It's all that practice." I stick my tongue out at her to accentuate the sarcasm of the comment.

Marie continues to eye me critically. "You've totally got visible panty lines."

"Like people don't know I wear panties anyway--like it suddenly becomes an issue as soon as you can see the lines." I roll my eyes at her. "The panties stay on."

"Okay, fine." Marie says as if she's acquiescing to some great matter. "Uncross your arms, let me see the whole thing."

I oblige.

"Cold?" she asks.

I note where her gaze is directed and look down at my breasts. "Fuck off. You're the one who made me take the bra off."

She shrugs. "Hey, I didn't make you do anything. I merely suggested. It was up to you."

I stick my tongue out at her. After a pause, I hold my arms out from my sides and say with impatience, "So?"

"So what?"

"So what I asked you earlier. What 'dya think?"

"Like I said before, it's hot."

"How do I look?"

"Hot."

"Pff."

"No, really, it looks good on you. I think you should get it."

"I don't know."

"Do you like it?"

"Yeah. . ."

"Then why not? Hey, if I wasn't your friend, and, well, I liked girls, I'd be thinking, that there girl is someone I want to get to know."

"Know? Like know how? Like, 'from her ability to wear that dress in such a manner she must have a great personality and I'd love to be exposed to her sparkling wit' or like, 'hey, she's got a hot ass and I'd like to get to know her, in the biblical sense."

"Ummm. . .why not both?"

I just laugh and turn to re-enter the dressing room, planning to return to my comfortable world of black t-shirts and jeans. Marie catches me by the arm. "Hey, see that guy over there?" She whispers as she points to a 20-ish guy sitting on the bench outside the dressing rooms.

"Yeah, so? He's kinda hot."

"He was totally checking you out."

"Pfff. He was not."

"Mmm-hmm. His girlfriend like comes out of the dressing room down there in some like shorts set, and she keeps asking him 'how do I look? do you like it?' And he's just like 'mmm-hmm. Yeah. Fine.' and keeps on looking at you."

"Really?" She nods. "Nuh-uh. You're totally making that up. Seriously?"

"Seriously."

A happy blush warms my cheeks as I slip back into the dressing room. I catch sight of myself in the mirror and smile timidly.

"Marie? You out there?"

"Yeah."

"Where would I wear it?"

"Wherever. Out. Like even just to coffee."

"You think?"

"Mmm-hmm. Come on, just buy it. You look hot."

"Do I look pretty? Just--pretty?"

"Yeah, sure. Maybe the purple does that, y'know, takes out a little sexiness and adds a little plain pretty."

"I could wear my black cardigan over it." I run my fingers across the flatness of the satin over my stomach.

"You gonna buy it?"

"Mmm. . . I guess." I say tentatively, then add more confidently, "Screw it, it's only twenty bucks."

Doug Favero

The Photograph

"But ghosts can't be just nightmares," a storyteller protested.

"They come right out into the room. . . ."

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

The photograph had been framed there on the wall for years. Not long after they were married, she had had it framed in solid oak, laced with hand-crafted engravings, and stained a deep red. Throughout their life together, when guests would join them for dinner, she would joke candidly about the couple in the photograph. She'd throw her arms up whimsically and smile, "We were so young and innocent in those days." She'd chuckle. As the smile would fade, she'd add, "We just don't go dancing like that anymore. Will you just look at us. . . ." Her husband would come and put his arm around her, give an affectionate squeeze, kiss her forehead. She'd sigh, losing herself in the picture's ballroom scene.

Since her husband's death, which came about so suddenly some months ago, she had passed by the photograph countless times. She walked by it every afternoon just before dusk, carrying a snack of toast and milk from the kitchen to the table in front of the dining room window. Indeed, she had forgotten about the old photograph. But this day late in August, the slithering tail of a profoundly lonely summer seemed to readjust the house in its positioning on the earth; the air hung wet and heavy; the sun's rays slanted through the window more sharply yet more hazily, shifting the walls of the room just enough to suggest a rediscovery after such comfort within them. Even the plate in her hand seemed to squirm a little as she passed the picture, which had swallowed her whole so long ago, but since his death had not so much as demanded the effort of a glance.

"Would you stop looking at me like that?" she stammered, pivoting to face the wall. The toast slid off the plate to the floor.

"Like what? Like what!" he burst out, feeling pressed against the wall by her glare.

"Like I'm some kind of old photograph. Like you're trying to frame me or something."

"Oh dear, you're right. . . ." He looked about the room, mired in shades mixed unevenly with hazy sunlight. He was searching for the words to connect his swimming thoughts.

"I'm trying to make you a memory," he said, looking over her carefully. She glared at him as he studied her hands, the creases in her face, the

folds of her skirt, her bare feet on the wood floor. . . .

"What!" The plate and glass of milk shattered around her feet as she pressed one hand against her hip and the other palm-up, emphasizing her dumbfounded surprise.

"You can't do that. . . . Why? Why would you try to make me a memory?"

"Because. . ." He looked out the window. It was bright outside, cloudless and clear. The window didn't let much of August in, kept everything at a distance except the thick haze and trickery of the late summer sun. The lamps were off and the light entering through the window played with the room's shadows the way such a summer day does before slipping into dusk. The room lent itself to nostalgia quite naturally, and they seemed already to be somewhere deep in the past.

"Because I'm going to be gone soon," he said, staring out the window at a boy on a bicycle glinting reflections of sunlight.

"Gone? Where are you going? What do you mean, gone?"

"Dear, I could be dead any day now." He glanced at her then looked away. She fixed her hands at her hips and gawked at him. "I can't believe you don't already know," he continued. "So no one told you, I suppose?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" She drilled each word into the wall around him.

"The doctors . . . I thought . . ." He rubbed his eyebrows with his thumb and index finger. "They must have been trying to protect your feelings. This is too hard." He turned to face her now. The tears began to scald his eyes.

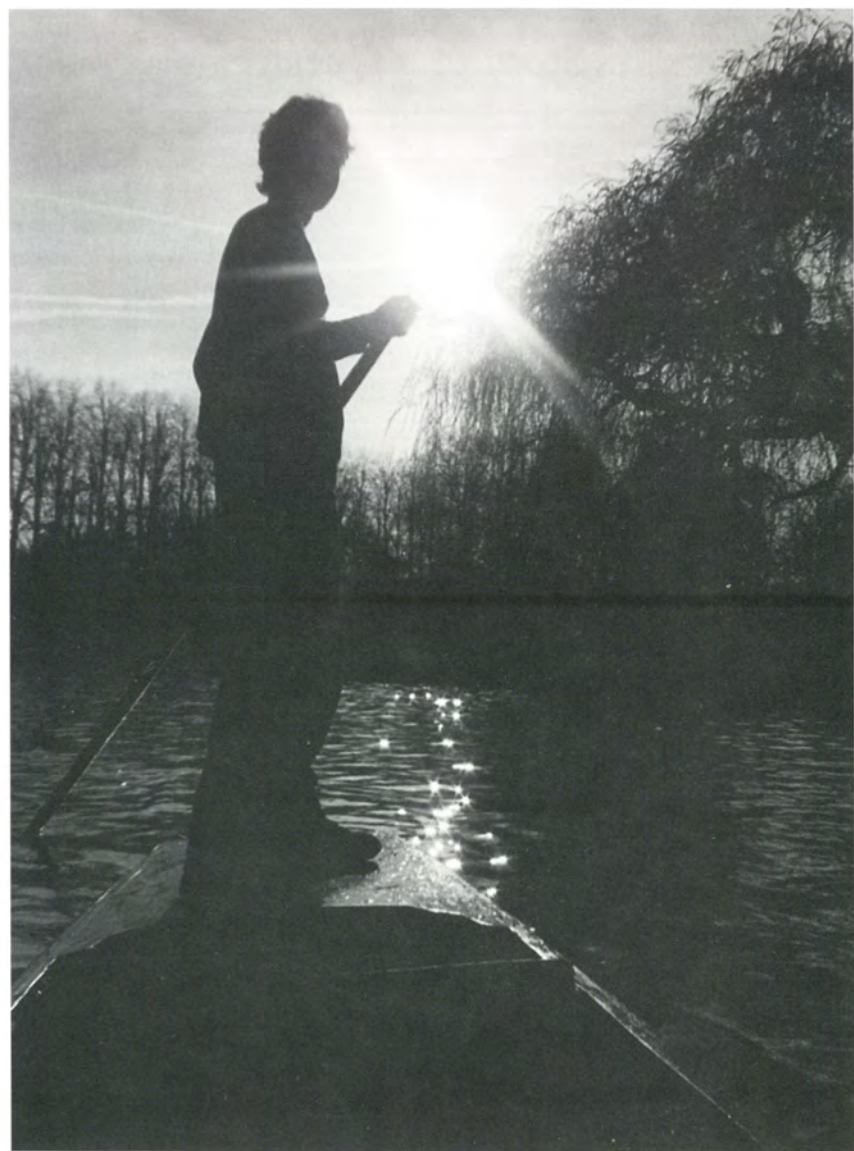
"I'm sorry," he murmured repeatedly through weezes, tears slipping over his lips and salting his words. He was so cold now. He felt naked, snow swirled around him, sticking to his raw, pink skin.

She hung limply on the other side of the room. Her arms hung to her sides, shoulders rounded over her weakening frame, jaw slightly pulling her mouth apart. His eyes rolled back. He grew cold and gray. His skin clung to his skeleton. His legs shook. He trembled all over. Then his knees buckled and he curled into a frozen fetal ball in the snow, there in the room's shadows. The boy on the bicycle had run inside.

Suddenly she shrieked. Her eyelids stretched far back into their sockets, baring all the white of her eyes. The shriek had blown out her voicebox. The screaming that followed—though nearly collapsing her lungs—came out as strained gasps: "You can't leave me. Please. . . Please. . . Don't go. . . Oh God, Oh God. . . ."

In her panic she lost her head, dashed across the room, sloshing through the soup of broken glass and milk, and smashed her face into the picture framed on the brick wall. The glass immediately punctured her skin and

the blood quickly fled from every part of her face. Her forehead, eyes, cheeks, and lips streaked red, smearing all her features together as they slid down the wall. She would not be recognized by anyone. The old photograph had fallen beside her slumped body. The tears streamed cold and burning. They mingled with the warm blood whose steam wafted from her face, swirling into the dense haze that drenched the room. Tears and blood together dripped quietly from her face, and soaked slowly into the old memory on the floor.



The River Cam: Cambridge, England

Julie Hurttgam

THE LIGHTER

Doug Favero

Story of a Quest

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint:
my heart is like wax: it is melted
in the midst of my bowels.

Psalm 22: 14

I

One morning, while preparing himself for the day, a man stood in front of a mirror. He washed his face. As he turned to leave, he caught his reflection looking at him. He turned back, square to the mirror. He looked and looked. He studied and turned his head this way and that. He made faces, distorting his features. He smiled. He frowned. The mirror was not enough. He did not know himself.

II

The man went around his village. One by one, he asked his neighbors about himself, asking them to describe him, to express their feelings for him, their thoughts about him. He asked them to answer his new burning question, Who am I?

For weeks, he listened long into the night to each villager. They told him many things. They told him all that they thought of him, and of the relationship each of them shared with the man. They tried to tell him who he appeared to be in their eyes.

They told him many helpful things. He discovered much about their perceptions of him. He now viewed himself with various fresh perspectives. He thanked each of them as each meeting came to a close. But still this was not enough. Still, the man did not know himself.

III

After meeting with his last friend, the man walked far from his village. It was a new-moon night. The stars drew close to him, tingling on his skin, gleaming in his eyes. In the still of night he walked and walked. At day-break he came upon a wise man. He asked the wise man the question which had stolen his sleep. The wise man replied, In truth, I tell a man nothing he does not know from the moment of his birth. I have no news for you, young man. Peace be to you on your journey.

The man departed, disappointed. As he walked from that place, he turned over and over in his mind the words the wise man had spoken so calmly, so firmly.

IV

The man left his room the next morning early, before he saw the sun. He did not return for seven years. During this time he lived in the wilderness as the animals of the forest. Like the wolf he howled from the inner-most depths of his soul at the moon. He slept under the stars. He ate from the tree which abundantly produced fruits each year. He bathed in the stream, its current constant only in the way it changed every thing continually. The earth he once knew only as his mother became his brother also. In seven years' time, seven cycles of seasons, the earth revealed to him many things. The earth taught him the ways of birth, growth, dying, and rebirth. Many secrets the man learned of the earth, many secrets of the world, of his world, of himself.

Yet after seven years immersed in the wilderness, he still did not know himself. It was as if with each fruit he picked from the tree, another mystery presented itself to him. The earth had taught him much, but many questions arose, and remained. And many questions arose from those questions. He wept. His tears nourished the soil beneath his feet. As the man left the wilderness, he waded through the stream, his eyes trying to fix on the racing current. A tear fell, joining the water of the everchanging, everpresent stream. The man thanked the wilderness and returned home.

V

In his room now, the man resolved not to leave for a very long time. He had books brought to him. Many books soon piled up all around him, cluttering his room. No light entered, for the window was closed up by stacks of these books. By the light of the candle, the man read. He read and read, and read. All his waking hours he spent absorbing the words of these books. Even while eating, he was reading. And so in this way the man read all the great literatures of his fathers and mothers and their fathers and mothers. He read the holy books, the philosophy books, the autobiographies. The great plays, the tall-tales, the epics. The novels, the poems, everything. By the time he had read the last word of the last book, he had read the entire library of all history.

His eyes grew very tired. His eyes could no longer focus. His eyes rolled around in his head. His eyelids closed up. Still, he did not know himself. Dizzy and lacking all energy, he lay down. The man fell into a deep sleep for three days.

VI

After three days he awoke. He sat up, alone in his room. Only the

candle gave light. The candle flickered and danced in the darkness. The candle glowed without movement. Still as night. The man held his head in his hands. He stared at the wall. The candle. The window. He closed his eyes for many minutes. He repeated these gazes over and again. The wall, the candle, the window. The steady candle—its low light filled the room. That lone candle, it seemed to give every thing. It seemed to draw every thing into itself. The solitary candle melted wax through the night, slow and burning, steady and still. The hot wick glowed blue and gentle. Slowly, the candle burned and melted into itself. Its form dripped, slid down to a puddle, hot liquid and a hot burning center. And the man, the young man, the child, his eyes locked onto the candle. He remained still, unable to tear himself away from the hollow core.



Hong Kong; Old Style: Repulse Bay, Hong Kong

Jason Weber

THE LIGHTER

Little Bit

With a cigarette in one hand and a plastic grocery bag in the other, she walked down Colfax Avenue. Passing bakeries and clothing shops, used and adult bookstores, restaurants and office buildings, her soft panting echoed the movement of her feet. Step by step, she continued in the direction of the violet horizon. Pausing at a stoplight, she looked back east where buildings cluttered her view and the sky lurked above. With the change of the light, she continued. The cracks in the concrete sidewalk, covered with discarded cigarette butts; the woman mumbled as she walks. She looked down just a few steps ahead of her own feet. Her shoes, less soiled than her old pair; she walked more quickly in the new ones; she was heading home.

* * *

"Elizabeth, I'm home from work. I brought groceries," she heard her mother call.

"I'll be down in a little bit," she shouted, "Listen, Scott, is it all right if I call you right back, my mom's home and she needs some help. No, I really need to go. Okay. What? Well, go ahead ask, I have to go." Elizabeth heard his voice shake on the phone line. "Of course I'll go to homecoming with you. Unless I decide to go with that other guy I've been dating for the past six months," she laughed, "I'll see you tonight at the game."

Grimacing at her reflection in the full-length mirror, Elizabeth hung up the phone and walked down the stairs into the kitchen. She began unloading the cans and boxes into the cupboards.

"Elizabeth, didn't you check the answering machine when you got home?" Mrs. Lambert asked, without leaving any time for her daughter to answer, "Because they were all for you. Mrs. Oslo needs a baby-sitter tomorrow night, Mr. Bailey called to see if you could sing at church on Sunday. Amy called to see what time you wanted to go to the game, and Dad called. He needs you to help at the office tomorrow morning. I can't believe he's working another Saturday."

Elizabeth peeked her head out of the refrigerator, "Did you save the numbers Ma?"

"They're still on the machine. Listen honey, I really could use some help at the bookstore on Sunday. We're having a tea party for the children and..."

"Yeah Ma, that's fine. I'll have to come after church though because Mr. Bailey wants me to sing, right?"

"I think that's what I said, isn't it? Oh, I don't know. Go check the

machine.”

Elizabeth went to the study, slumping down in the leather chair, and pressed the play button. Writing down the numbers she needed, she called Mrs. Oslo and Mr. Bailey, told them she would baby-sit and sing, and without looking at the keypad, dialed Amy’s number.

“DeMarzo residence.”

“Amy, what’s going on?”

“Beth! I was waiting for you to call. Not much, Kristine just called me and said that Scott finally asked you to homecoming, are you excited?”

“Sure, I guess.”

“Beth, now you have to find me a date, I really want to go--I have a dress all picked out downtown, and there’s one there that you should try on too --the green in the dress would look great with your eyes--what does Scott think about being on court? Did you hear about that one guy on homecoming court getting a facial? I bet he’ll be king--your should have one of Scott’s friends ask me or at least find out what they would say if I were to ask one of them. Beth, are you there, how come you’re not saying anything?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Elizabeth twirled her long red hair around her finger. Speaking more loudly, she said, “I can talk to Scott tonight. Do you know when we have play practice tomorrow?”

“Beth, who’s screaming? Is everything okay there?”

“Yeah sure; it’s nothing; probably just some neighbor kids goofing off.”

“We’re starting Act I at ten-thirty, but main characters have to arrive at ten to practice solos. Which means you and I both have to be there at ten. I’m really excited, Beth. You and me together again on stage. I really missed the play this summer when I was in the hospital.”

“I missed you being in it.”

“I know and this time we can go to Frank’s for ice cream, and I won’t have to relive it. Ha! You should really tell those neighbors to be quiet.”

“I know, Amy, I should go.”

“See you in a little bit, pick me up at seven, okay?”

“Yep, Bye,” Elizabeth hung up the phone and leaned back in the chair. She could hear the sound of her parents’ voices. The argument shifted from money to work schedules and back to money again.

“Elizabeth, ma fille, come down here.” She heard her father’s voice call in his ‘I-have-a-favor-and-your-mother-is-disagreeing-with-me’ voice.

“Dinner’s ready sweetie,” her mother called in her voice that said the more than audible ‘Don’t-you-dare-take-his-side.’

“Green eyes, how was school?” her father asked as she crossed the

kitchen to kiss him hello.

"Just fine. Scott asked me to go to the Homecoming dance."

"That's great," her father's soft voice answered.

"How was calculus today?" her mother bellowed from inside the coat closet.

"It was calculus. It took me longer to get back from the college, so I was late to English and Mr. Gawain wasn't too happy with that."

"But calculus was good, that's great," the gray-haired man smiled, "You're coming to work with me tomorrow morning, right?"

"Of course, but I have play practice at ten, so I can only stay for a couple of hours."

"Next time, we'll plan a better time; I promise."

"Yeah, Dad, that's fine. You know I don't mind helping you out."

"Frederick, don't pressure the girl she has enough going on in her life. She has practices and friends, and she has to help at the bookstore on Sunday."

Elizabeth excused herself from the kitchen, for she knew where the conversation was headed. From her room upstairs, she could feel the shift in tone and reversion back to argument. Sitting down at her desk, she took out her chemistry book and started her lab report. Mid-sentence she stopped and looked at the calendar on her wall. Not a day was empty. She began filling in the commitments she had just made for her weekend. Friday night--game. Saturday--work with dad, play practice, baby-sit. Sunday--church, bookstore with mom. Elizabeth still needed to finish her chemistry and calculus homework and to start her English project. She looked at the framed picture on her desk. Her father had taken it when she was twelve. When she was younger, once a week, her parents and she went on "city trips" together. But that didn't happen anymore, not with all their work and all her practices and school and stuff. Her head began to pound and the shouting from below grew louder until she closed her drooping green eyes and fell asleep on her desk.

At the game that night, Elizabeth sat between Amy and Scott. The football was thrown back and forth and around the field, her classmates and their opponents tackling and chasing one another. It felt like the game was inside Elizabeth's stomach. With her boyfriend on one side and her best friend on the other, she did not realize someone had walked up behind her.

"Beth, can you help me with calculus tomorrow? You know you said you would on Wednesday," she turned around to see to whom the hands resting on her shoulders belonged.

"Oh, Dave," Elizabeth recognized the boy from her calculus class at the community college, "Yeah, I kinda forgot about that. How about at three? That good?"

He nodded.

"See you then, thanks, Beth. I knew I could count on you."

"Yeah, everybody seems to think so," Elizabeth mumbled.

"What?" both Amy and Jeff turned to her.

"Nothing," she replied making sure to paste on her smile, "I think I'm gonna take off, get some work done before bed. I'll see you tomorrow."

"You okay?" Amy asked.

"Fine, just need to get away."

Elizabeth pulled into the driveway and was greeted by her father. He was getting into his car and was ready to pull out into the street, but stopped to talk to his daughter.

"My beauty, I'm going to the store, do you need anything?"

"No thanks, Pops, not from the store you're going to."

"Honey, don't worry, I'll be back in a little bit. It was just a little argument. But you might want to avoid the living room. She might yell at you too for coming home a little later than she expected."

His Jeep sped off into the distance, turning toward the bar where he always went after the fights. Living right outside Denver made it easy for him to make his way downtown.

Elizabeth made it to her room safely avoiding the wrath of her mother to where she looked at all her 'stuff.' The blue and kelly green curtains complemented the kelly green bedspread. Her stuffed animals sat on the bed, memories of Scott and Christmas wrapped up in the fur bears and plush dolls. Pictures lined the dressers and walls. Pictures of plays and award ceremonies and youth group trips all over the United States. Books and trophies from figure skating competitions lined her shelves. She had so much stuff.

Opening her closet, Elizabeth removed a duffel bag, shoving a change of clothes and a sweater into it. She took her favorite novel, red cover and all, off the shelf and put it in the front flap of her backpack. She grabbed her photo album, address book and journal and put them in her backpack. Reaching behind the loose panel in her closet, she removed her stash of birthday cash and work funds, placing the green paper in the wallet her family made her use when they traveled to Europe every summer. She reached further back into the wall and grabbed a half-smoked pack of cigarettes. In her desk drawer she found her lighter, shoved all the loose items in the duffel bag, and headed down the stairs.

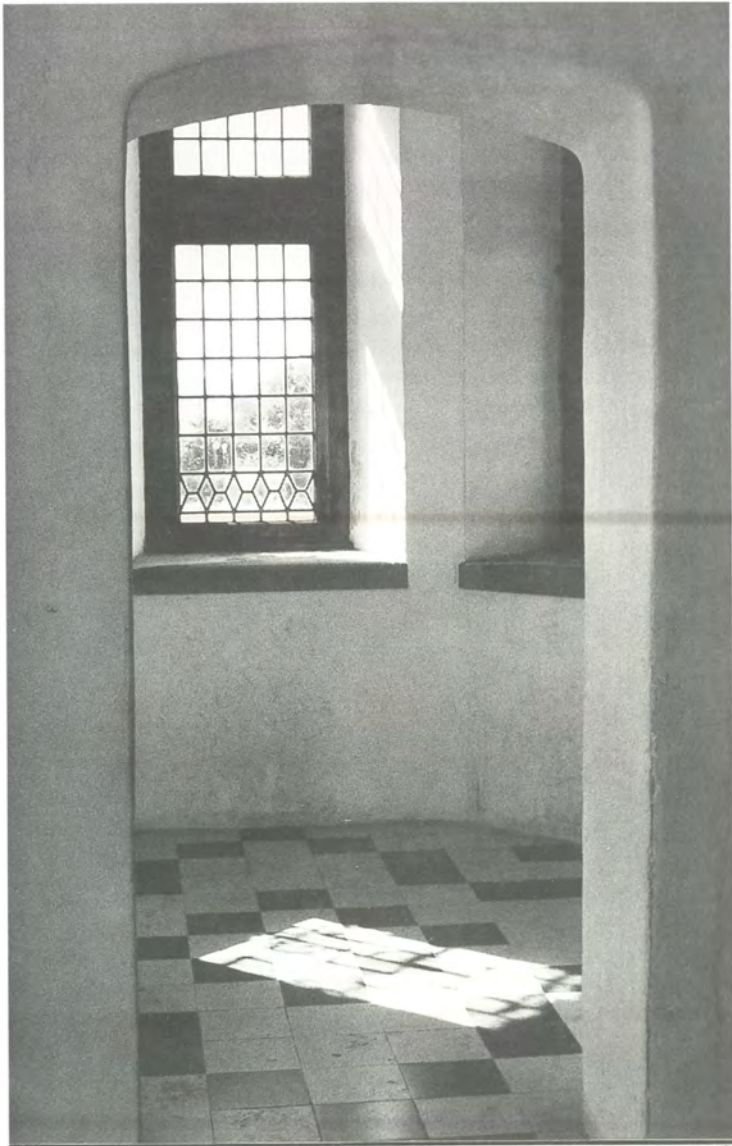
She slipped through the kitchen, grabbing a couple of apples and some bread. She walked past her snoring mother, locked the front door of the house, and headed for the bus stop.

* * *

The gray-haired woman walked past a dress shop and admired the green gown. She continued west, stopping at The Moonlight Lounge. The small

cafe had changed owners and regulars over the years, but their coffee pot was always full and the ashtray was always on the table. She smoked the last cigarette in her pack, sipped a cup of coffee, and left her last dollar on the table. Picking up her grocery bag, she continued along the concrete sidewalk. The trucks passed her and young women pushing strollers ignored her as they scurried in the opposite direction. Walking block after block, her feet tired, until at last she was home. She removed a book from her bag, lay down beneath a tree and began to read about a young boy named Holden. Tears formed in her drooping green eyes as she fell asleep. An old woman was found dead beneath a tree in City Park. She held a book in her right hand and had a grimace on her face. The tattoo on her arm said "Little Bit."

Poetry



Light

Amy McFadden

THE LIGHTER

Josh Messner

Be reasonable

reason's demonic side sucks romance from these warm, red veins;
the solace found in joy and sorrow is measured, analyzed and tamed.

undulating inspiration smothered by the imperative to "think;"
dangerous ideas bring ecstasy or pause ponderously at the brink.

reasonable tunes and reasonable rhymes come safely from tepid hearts;
contrived, derived, not really mine--cold logic freezes art.

sing, dance, rhyme; let romance take over;
drinking from an ordinary cup will leave you bored and sober.

Bethany Hirt

Reason

Stars mingled and danced idly
in our personal planetarium surrounding
the microcosm that we created
out of circumstance

I looked up into the sky
and watched myself collapse, thinking
that Galileo had looked
up and found the truth
while I just fall amidst the infinite
depths of possibility
that night brings
with its mere existence

Winged birds of night brought destiny
closer, breaking
the glass that held
the sky and delivered
its message of despair

You tried to tell me why
you tried to tell me how
And I saw it with sight
that was not mine
I tried to look for myself
but sight is deceiving

So in the end
when the stars that shimmer in August left
taking reasoning with them

I followed

Bethany Hirt

Minute Maid Nurse

I swear he was orange
like the orange of a small
child's handmedown
home-made, felt
carrot costume for halloween
with a green hat made so stiff
by an anxious mother
as to lose its effect

And he melted all into one
with the shiny clean
needle gleaming
with soft comfort
that he poked
gently, with a thrust
into my skin and pulled
away kindly to give
me sleep

I could have been dreaming
every night
that he came for his shift
on the wing that floated
on its own
from the antiseptic fumes
wafting through and contaminating
each and every room

Can you hate something so much?
As having to give yourself
up in pain
to an orange nursemaid
almost as young
as you, with a glow
that permeated
my being, prickling the skin
and making me anxious

in my numbness
and pain

I hate giving
in to that numbness
and pain that breaks
down your grin
and doesn't let you bear
it until you end up stomaching
the fact
that you can't bear
it

I should have let go
of that pain that came
from pain
and broken
my own bitterness
to the resolute fact
of the matter
at hand
and smiled
at the carrot like boy
in his lonely antiseptic
existence
and maybe I did
but now I can
only try
and remember
and wait
for the next irrevocable
time that I'll hate
to give
into.

Bethany Hirt

Movie Theater Harmony

Can we sit here?

I am surprised
at the politeness
We shift--
all of us in the row--
and settle
back into our own little worlds
Heads lean
back, legs are crossed
sterility abounds,
carpeted walls, plastic
cup holders that have held
more cups than you have

Lights dim, chatter
whispers
as advertisements run
across the screen selling
everyone
Mindless conversation lulls
anticipating--
then, garbled messages eek
from the screen
Heads look up,
giggles scatter
An advertisement backwards
unbeknownst to the technician
exits our minds
Did it ever come in?

Our minds exist--
collective
Only we heard it, we
saw it, all

of us and we
left,
knowing it between us
but never knowing
each other

Bethany Hirt

Linguistically Speaking

Your language is not
mine
It circles back
and forth,
like a snake, tough
on the skin but soft
and smooth
in movement

I hear it roll
off your tongue
and glimmers
of recognition
ignite my mind

I imagine my answer
perfect in its form
like yours, rolling
sweetly across the air
My thoughts answer
sweet but my mouth
answers sour
words barely drip
hardly
 fall
they
 stumble
 and
 stutter
 forth
 incoherent
especially to me

My thought, clear
becomes
a stranger to us
both
Wounded it limps

landing awkward
in your understanding

My language tries to retrieve
my thought in yours



Pre-historic Misty

Francisco Nuno

THE LIGHTER

Michelle Stahlhut

johnthreesixteen

I walked with bare feet
as long as I could
yesterday
with vigor
I stepped out of the door.

But sharp shards of glass
sliced through to my sole
striking bone
where nothing
had trespassed before.

A curse on the One
who showed me this path.
“eternal”
I perish
from my festering sore.

Never again trust
this sacred desire
Truth which has
pierced
my heart to its core.

I needed to walk
again without shoes
but today
life is drained.

I give no more.

david alan sisk

alone at dusk

i stepped out to my car
with a bouquet of books in my hand
my attention was diverted
to some distant image in the rain

i paused midstep in clarity
reaching across the street
with my books offering
peace to the literate wind

the street lights ignited
and the hour turned twilight

night fell and the vague image
disappeared into the shadows of my memory...

my memory was subsequently folded
into the briefcase of an unfaithful businessman
returning home from the mirage of my mind
to his moonlight mistress

he gently opened the door
as if caressing his regrets

we rode the big woman
into the red light district

i've presently found myself in a curious location
watering my books
to replace the flowers
i recived from the last turn
of your change
filed properly into my briefcase
waiting for a new beginning

david alan sisk

lodged into the minds of maría

0.

...and we still think on what
went under that drink to us
as we rode the bus
to the internet bacteria
lodged into the minds of maría
who keeps your vacation clean
while you go on house
like the pet mouse
of grey floors or nostalgia
in shadows of my persistence

1.

leave me oh lover and
melt your frozen perspective
away from the do's of our don'ts
to intrinsically give us
a chance wrapped in a warm blanket

2.

my true love rode off into tomorrow
chewing ice and smoking sorrow
quite eager and aggressive
to match the cloudy green sedative
in reflection of the haze
particles left to graze
on what's black
near the white
of where the ice will be tomorrow
with she

david alan sisk

Casualty

War broke and
we commenced.

The destruction of my creation
has dissolved and left her
with a new flavor.

No longer a pure sugar,
the ring turns for the reign
of an artificial sweetener;

A not so Sweet-N-Low version
of my perception Equal
to her feigned purity.

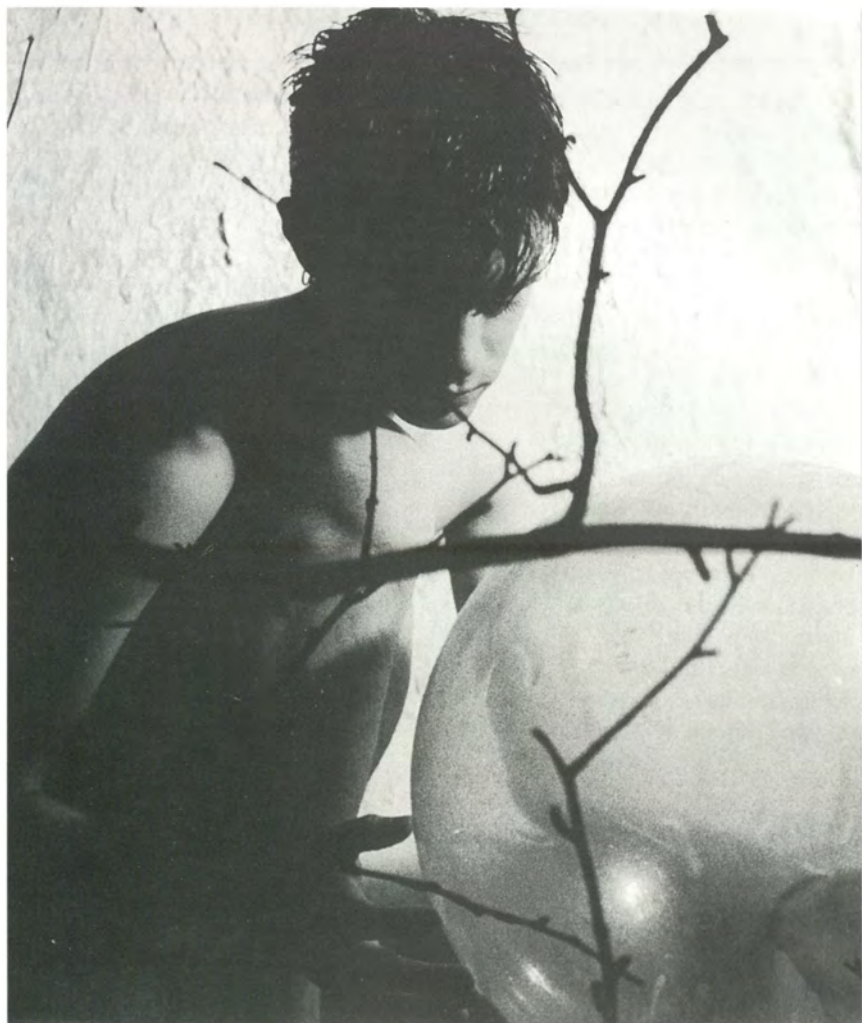
Peace was signed
and a new war broke.

An aftermath far more bitter,
far more gruesome,
albeit a reality
far more real.

Her heart was a casualty.
She could not sacrifice the
pride to seek help.

Insanity crossing love
bred an unspeakable chaos;

She swam the ocean
in hopes of returning to our illusory paradise,
only to arrive at my coffee cup
and melt her existence,
with the gentle stir of my spoon.



Series: "World I live" #23

Francisco Nuno

THE LIGHTER

Dreaming to Daddy

The man without a face
Runs rapidly with knife in hand
stomach stabbed pale, she hung
leaking full of holes in the gleaming
red room, long dark hair
soaked--stained from drips
walls and floor wet to the touch,
I look without one discomfort
(she didn't die).

Faceless figure sneaks out--
lingers not, for fear
the young lady remade
there in Father's office,
around the closet door.
Guiltless pure, but covered
and left behind the desk
just a rosy puddle
coating carpet fibers,
White lily she made red--
dropped it in the bright pool.
(she didn't live).

but Dad,
my stomach hangs with holes
hollowed above ivory porcelain
bowl and sweat slick hair shames,
matted, dripping the sweet sour
from a flushed fuming mouth--lurch--
and

I stained the sheets, Daddy.
laid and remade, took no stain but rose
ruddy puddle bled behind the door
sweat soaked my skin but I dropped no flower.
you never care to see his face.

jes noon

For Perry

i study your eyes for sincerity
but they reveal nothing.
the gates to your soul are fastened
and i wonder who will open them.

every now and then i sneak a
peek between the steel bars
and they offer me a glimpse
into the melding darkness.

years of patient solitude well
beneath waves of superficial indifference.
the hollow embers have long lost
their spark and lie frostbitten
in the cold of the infinite solstice.

yet like a child, innocent in
love and war, trust is instinctive
and it swallows the years
only to spit them out like poisonous
berries that hold temptation
and hide it in their ripeness.

jes noon

i bleed

*sus labios son pedazos de hielo
quiero desvanecerse el frío*

your cool coyness
strikes
like
sharp
stone.

i falter beneath
icy
words

i bleed from
wounds
you
inflict.

your silence becomes you.
your silence excludes me.
your silence destroys us.



Sweet Memories

Jason Weber

THE LIGHTER

Invitations

Lies she, an invitation--becking my touch:
eyes of nothing, of deepness, agnostic, as such
they swallow my wholeness and pull in my soul.

Create they, her legs--the tranquil deep sea,
a glance is a pond; her oceans drown me.
Her vastness, the waters, quiets my soul.

Sigh I, in sadness--with utter delight
as I smell her, and taste her and feel with my sight
the richness before me reflecting my soul.

Falls it, her hair--round her lovely breast:
breast of music, of singing, that offers me rest.
The sweetness of wonder that touches my soul.

Rise they, her hips--and move with a curve:
the sculptor's great madness, the poet's sweet dirge.
No--art is a shadow and she is my soul.

Gaze I, her lover--taken away
by beauty; the fullness, the stunning array
that offers to me, calling my soul.

Pledge I, my life--devotion to her,
contentment floods o'er me, yet there is a stir
though so far away, it weeps for my soul.

Speaks then, the voice--which comes from a girl
who looks like a pebble. My lover a pearl:
"I love you, my love, I love all your soul."

Glance I, at her--I shudder within,
her belly is swollen, her hips remain thin.
A girl as this cannot fathom my soul.

Says she, the urchin--"my body will be
willing and lovely, a delight to see,
just let me give sight to your soul."

Sags it, her back--her breasts have no form,
her feet look heavy, her touch is not warm.
She offers but one, one thing to my soul.

Loves me, she does--but what is love
compared to the depth, the touch of my love?
I ponder in silence, but loud is my soul.

Rasps she, once more--"Your life you will lose
unless given to me. Now you must choose,
for I have true life to give to your soul."

Think I, mere mortal, how can I know
what is divine and what is a show
of earthly entrapments that capture my soul?

Robert Pence

It Is

One thinks, only, to be a plus or minus,
A 1 or an 18,
An A or a Z,
Good or Bad,
Black or White,
Company or Union,
Faithful or Adulterous,
Exercise to the MAX or not at all,
Eat healthy or complete junk,
Stay Asleep or Stay Awake,
Live one's passions to the fullest--or no passion at all,
Live this life to the fullest--or just go to sleep.
And then, any negative impact
Regardless of impact
One thinks, and feels, of pulling a trigger.
And, and, this is the good part, when all is said and done
Positive impact causes one to rush full speed ahead and think and feel and do,
and do, and do, and,
Unable to say no
Do all, of all, the, above, and now.
Is it no wonder, then, one just wants to lie down and go to sleep? And Sleep,
And Sleep, And Sleep.
Is it no wonder?
Of course, the answer, is no
It is no wonder!
It is, no wonder!
It is--live with it, or die with it, chemistry and spirit.
Easier said than done
For
The only regulating factor in one's life
Is--
Their passions
Are limited, and, not fair,
Usually cost a lot of money,
Are spent,
Are limited.
Who would ever think--one's life
Would hinge on one's passions?

Like a Saint--At maximum limit,
Or chat with a person who can understand one's thoughts and feelings,
Or converse with a person who can express their understanding,
Of one's thoughts and feelings--for only 60 minutes.
Who would ever think one's living
Would depend upon one's communicating for only 60 minutes,
At a time--just 60 minutes, with a listening ear, to a listening voice?
When all seems hopeless, the only--way up--for one, is, to engage in music.
Who would ever think, one's life, would hinge, on one, engaging in one's
music?
And then, there is, a God who does not speak, or appear, to one, but one,
knows that Master,
Of the universe, is, there, and cares!
What would ever happen, if one would ever feel, that unknown God is a void?
Who would ever think one's life would hinge on an unseen, unheard, God, that,
only exist
By One's Faith?
Life is a bitch.....Along with being a joke,
Please God, stop laughing at us, for one is not alone on this spaceship called
earth.

Josh Honn

So lonely she swam

She was so lonely she swam

And, we couldn't see distance like horizon lies

She was so lonely she swam

And, now all her history is laid out in lines

She was so lonely she swam

Until the angels lifted her course

We are so lonely we swim

And we remark with frowns

Why it was she drowned

She was only so lonely she swam

And, found light under darkest water-below

We are so lonely we swim

Only with arms outstretched, relying on current to flow

If she was so lonely she swam

Why must we judge with hands so dry?

For, if we are so lonely we swim

Is it better to stay above, then ask ourselves why?



Beings

Jessica C. Pleuss

THE LIGHTER

The Song

1.

many times i sing this song.
it goes like every other song.
and it ends like all those other songs.
it never stops in fact.
the ending is just like the beginning.
i see other people singing this song.
actually, i see almost everyone singing this song.
of course, there are different versions of the song.
sometimes it's louder, quieter, etc.

2.

once, i couldn't even hear the song this one man was singing.
he just stood there, on the bench, looking across the street.
there was a bank across the street, one of those huge international jobs.
many people came in and out of the revolving doors placed in the middle of
 this huge bank.
they were all singing the song.
most were in suits, with briefcases.
it was a work day.

3.

the man was there for at least an hour since i had seen him.
as i sang i thought, "maybe he is waiting for a bus."
i looked around, saw no bus signs.
then i thought maybe he was homeless.
but he was dressed like the people coming from and in to the big bank across
 the street.
he wasn't moving like them though.
i couldn't even hear his song.
so, i concluded that he was not homeless.
i didn't know what he was.
it occurred to me that i should maybe get help.

there was no one walking slowly enough for me to ask for help.
"maybe he was just tired," i thought.
so, i wanted to just forget the man and go home.

4.

i began to walk around past the bench he was sitting on.
then i heard a loud noise, saw a bright flash.
something forced me to the ground.
i fell hard and i looked, to find out what had happened.
everyone else was on the ground too.
the bank had fire coming from it, i heard sirens.
i flashed my eyes towards the bench.
the man was gone.

5.

i looked around everywhere for him, but he was nowhere near.
the sirens came closer and soon the firemen were putting out the flames.
i went home.

6.

the tv talked about a bomb going off at the big, shiny bank where i was around
today.
no one knew what had happened or why.
nothing seemed wrong to me.
everyone was just doing the everyday, singing the song.
i couldn't understand why someone would want to kill people.
what was wrong?
i didn't feel like thinking anymore.
i went to bed.

7.

when i woke up the tv was still talking about the bank bombing.
some man in a coat with a gold badge on it was talking about middle eastern
terrorists.

he said these men hated the United States.
“why would someone hate the united states?” i thought.
anyway, those men don’t live here, so why would they bomb us?
this was absurd to me.

8.

then i thought more about what happened that day.
i remembered the man who wasn’t singing.
what was wrong with him?
the only person who wasn’t singing, wasn’t moving.
i remember how i wanted to get him help.
could he have been the bomber, the terrorist?
he wasn’t there after it happened, i looked everywhere for him.
why would he have done it?
i should really tell someone what i saw.
i called the police.

9.

later that night i had to go down and meet with some agents.
they asked me a million questions, but i couldn’t help them.
it was weird.
i couldn’t recall what the man had looked like, how he was dressed, nothing.
the agents got really mad.
i left.

10.

when i came home the tv was still talking about the man, the suspect.
they said the FBI started a huge man hunt today, sparing no expense.
“damn, what did that man look like?”
he had the bank clothes on, like all the other bankers and customers.
a pretty decent suit as i recall.
this is too much for me.
i want to forget.
i forget.

11.

“today is going to be a great day,” i say as i wake up.
i was singing quite loud in the shower as i looked forward to my job.
i left my house at 8:30.
when i got downtown so many people were out.
they were singing the song.
some loud, some quiet.
but everyone was surely singing.

12.

i walked to the corner where i work.
as i got closer the song became quieter.
as i approached the door, the song was so low i could barely hear it.
i felt drained.
i had to sit down.

13.

i sat down outside the office, on a nearby bench.
i couldn't move.
i couldn't hear!
“where's the song!? where's the song!” i screamed.
i wasn't talking though.
no one looked, no one heard.

14.

i sat silent, no motion at all.
everyone kept walking so fast.
everyone was singing the song so loud.
then there was a loud noise, a quick flash.
everyone fell to the ground.
bodies were strewn everywhere and the sirens raced to life in the distance.
panic struck again.
but, i was no where to be found.

The mind works in sessions

The mind works in sessions
Body, burn and lessons
Creating catastrophe
Amongst hand-held apathy
Sometimes I wish I wasn't here.

The mind works in sessions
Sages, stirring blessings
Awakening the air
To inspire breath so fair
Sometimes it hurts to be here.

The mind works in sessions
Under holy dwellings
Methodically approaching
Chests forever unop'ning.
Sometimes I pray to not be here.

The mind works in sessions
One, two, then unrelenting
Realizing how the skies sing
Then closing ears, easily melting
Sometimes I cry when I am here.

But still the mind works in sessions
Forming the simplest of directions
Distancing gaps 'tween here and home
These lines, these stepping stones
Sometimes I believe there's nothing here.

Josh Honn

Oh to be what I am

We sing these songs like
And everyone is so around like

The more we cry the more we sound the same
Confining creation into two and three
We sing like
We scream like

Giving structure to meaning
We develop in labs, an evil glare
We develop our songs, an evil sound

Is this like the last?
Or, am I the last at what I do?

Oh to be what I am,
But we define like
As we sing these songs like

And the more we style, the more we lie all the same
Confining creation into four, maybe five
We play like
We sound like

And now I guess it is all the singers fault,
But I still hear that song like
As I sing along like

Develop enough, until it's evil enough

Oh what the song is like

Josh Honn

The trial of an Anarchist

It's mine your majesty
All of which you see before you
The stares
The numbers
The light
All of these I possess
All of these I confess
I have used against you

It's mine your majesty
Every word I cannot retract
The lies
The numbers
The truth
Each one I did write down
Each one I did pass out
I did to destroy you

It's mine your majesty
One man falls for so many souls
The man
The woman
The world
Every person I stand here for
Every person I'd stand once more
I'd never stand for you

It's mine your majesty
Each tax in my pocket did keep
The coins
The payments
The sales
Each coin we kept for us
Each coin we kept untouch'd
We kept instead of give you

It's mine your majesty
The land I share with all people
The corn
The housing
The roads
We live together free
We live together free
 Together against thee

It's mine your majesty
The tears and blood you drew from us
The cries
The battle
The death
We fought for our daughters
We fought for our futures
 For our life beats your swords

Yes, it is mine your majesty

And though you pronounce my death
There's something lives on past my breath

The words I speak, the words I write
Shall do more for my people than you may like

For the people know life and how to live
Which outlasts any law or tax you give

And if your power blinds all you see
While your eyes are still open look at me

This is the face of a wasted life
Fighting for something natural, not arrived

Yet, you and our men have taken from us
And replaced truth with life with law unjust

So, you may kill me, but be warned I say
For the people will be your majesty, one day

Kim Klotz

A ray of
light
bounces
off a spider web
showing every
hair
spindle
making
the web
showing all the past lives
taken
only remnants
remain
broken
strings
deserted
for fear
of pain



Berlin Wall: East Side

Amy McFadden

THE LIGHTER

Elisha Jamyce Robinson

Eyewitness

I'm what you call valuable.
I'm not rare but I'm wanted
You see I'm an eyewitness
Visualizing what should be seen
but shouldn't be seen
An eyewitness who wants to come forward to put an end to....

An eyewitness who sees it all, but never goes forward
In this case, I am not rare but I'm wanted.
Wanted by many who like me hate to see victims.

I'm an eyewitness to wars--soldiers battling on the mean streets
of hunger, poverty, hate, crime.
Fighting with weapons shoved into the hands and arms
causing mass destruction.
Some aren't equipped
Left on the battlefield to fight with what is only on the body
NO protection NO nothin'!

Eyewitness to dead bodies of wars
Leaving more victims than I have in me to count---
Too sad!
As a witness I'm not rare, but wanted.

I'm an eyewitness to drugs that leave one clinging on to life
after the last high has subsided.
Leaving one without a father, mother, grandmothers, cousins,
brothers, sisters.... babies too....
You catch my drift?
Drugs know no color but sees it all
An eyewitness in itself
Not rare but everywhere.

I'm an eyewitness to police chases down
crowded highways of innocent lives
Pulled over because the car looks too good to be driven
by a brother or sister.

Shoved and pushed up against tinted windows
Violated and checked by hands and fingertips
that know exactly what to find
And where to find it.

Don't even think about sayin' a word!
Just yes sir and no sir 'em.
Let them do what they feel they need to do.
By the way, I am an **eyewitness** and a **victim**.

Eyewitness to babies having babies
Pregnant teenagers whose only way out...the back alleys' dumpsters
(a cradle for new borns)
Fathers who just don't want to take on responsibilities
Chasing everything on two legs shaved by Nair.
Children growing up too soon
Slapping down and cussin' out their own mammas and daddies
Confusing love with raging hormones
Unable to discern true love cause they never had it
I witness--Eyewitness not rare but wanted.

Eyewitness gratified walls blood nosed children without names
gang territory disputes welfare mammas police chases
street walkers baby killers dope pheening chronic drinking
heat selling hunger poverty
innocent victims of government screw ups lost businesses
long unemployment lines no hopes
I'm a witness all right

NOT RARE BUT WANTED!

Ode to the Black Woman

Throughout all time black women have always been strong
ode to the black woman this is your song
there's so much you don't know about black women
so please get it right
so much we had to go through
so much we had to fight
But I'm here to let you know
what exactly is the truth
You know how the saying goes
what you don't know can hurt you
First of all, do us a favor
and forget those sorry lines
Standing there listening to you
is wasting our time
We know where we're headed
and we all have a plan
Don't worry about what it is
just know it is gonna be grand
We're sleek and we're styling
dressed from head to toe
Walking that walk talking that talk
if you don't like it...so
Straight, curly, twisted, locked, afro-picked
our "do" always look good
Thanks to Madam C.J. Walker
our hair she understood
Our emotions are up and down
they could change all of a sudden
We will go off on you in a minute
if you push the wrong button.
We're not fake, bouji, ghetto
we're the real McCoy's, 100% real.
So don't judge us before you get to know us
that's just how we feel
And don't try to give us cubic
and say that it's a diamond
"Ooh baby I bought this just for you"
Stop! Cause we know you're lying

We're costly and expensive
and won't settle for seconds
Try to do it again
and you will learn your lesson
Because throughout all time Black women have always been strong
ode to the Black woman this is your song
Don't get me wrong
hard times came our way
But through it all we stood bold.
no, no we did not sway
We cried tears like rivers
when our children were snatched from our arms
by the oppressors hate.
But when our children grow up
you better be alarmed
When it was our time to run
we found our way to the north
From slavery and oppression
Harriet Tubman brought us forth.
We fought for freedom
We marched to Washington
We started a musical revolution
We raised our Black children as single parents
We went to work from five to nine
came home and cooked a five course meal
Singing in the kitchen
Adding in the spice
Bringing it to a simmer
with a wine that will entice
Sweet potatoes, greens, cornbread and blackeyed peas
are definitely the Black woman's specialty.
And when you taste her cooking
you can never get too much
Because that five course meal was cooked
with a Black woman's touch
Because throughout all time Black women have always been strong
Ode to the Black woman this is your song.
We're mothers of great heroes
and leaders of all time
Their history is yours
as well as it is mine

Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Booker T Washington, James
Robinson Jr., Charles Drew, Eli Whitney, Garret A Morgan, Florence Robinson,
Ida B Wells, Sojourner Truth, Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey, Betty Shabazz,
Maxine Waters, Cicely Tyson, Alex Haley, Coretta Scott King, Shirley
Chisolm,

including me

Were all raised by powerful, strong, supportive, and understanding Black
mothers

And they are our inspiration

and justification

and motivation

that helped to build mold

and fortify this nation

And when you see a Black woman

please don't be mean

Treat her like royalty

because you're standing in front of a queen

And if you try to categorize us as less

we will throw a tantrum

Because I'm every woman

is the Black woman's anthem!

Justin Krishka

A Conversation at Booth 25

Speak not of work, the day,
the smile of a child.

Tell me no more of your money,
or lack of, or your friends.

He said, she feels, they thought
provide me no comfort.

Words; countless, endless syllables
cascade off your tongue--

Drowning me in their sheer number--
muddling and confusing--hiding--

That is your purpose,
right?

Our emotions constrained, beaten
and thrashed--but never silenced.

The words whispered in silences
are most beautiful,
we know that

As we wait, patiently
for the courage

To introduce ourselves.

Justin Krishka

Desire

There. Look. There she goes again. Every day, for the past week, the same. Her mom shops at the Walgreens on the corner, picking up medicine for her migraines. She, though, she runs to the antique store next door. Staring out at her, eyes twinkling, flowers so elegantly placed, every hair in its perfect place, and a crimson smile warming her heart. But her eyes burn with a hunger deep within the pit of her innermost soul. A smile, a frown all at once is seen in her reflection. Her hands signal her entrapment, she urges to break free from the cage of glass and enter the land of her dreams. And she goes for the door--the entrance way into heaven. Her small hand grasps. The wooden handle is within inches. A large shadow ominously descends upon her frame. A grotesquely large claw clamps down on her hand and drags her, unwillingly, back home. Tomorrow; "Look!" I'll say, "there she goes again."

Justin Krishka

Apathy

It punctures the air with its potency,
on 23rd and Main.
Clutching to capture my outlaw breath,
I see them.

A candy bar wrapper takes flight, free from gravity, into the street--
he watches.
A colony of ants scurry into the grass with a tasty morsel,
she notices.

Growing constantly, as rapid as their shadows at dusk,
I watch.
Their arms detach moving by an unknown source of courage,
a gift.

He extends a fragile flower grown through love and love alone,
she is his life.
The ants moved on, the wrapper gone, now their gaze
has locked.

As fragile as the petals, their once glances and stares
become softened.
The moment never to move on, a tableaux of perfection,
as she smiles.

Surroundings begin to disappear as each moment
passes through time.
Melding through the eyes, whispering through the wind,
the sun sets.
Nature's voices to be covered by the first audible words to be spoken.
"Excuse me"--as I pass between them.



Emerging

Jessica C. Pleuss

THE LIGHTER

Christy Lose

Tubscrubbing

boxers, t-shirt, Ajax, rag
ready to clean but it's not really dirty enough
Why don't you do it yourself? So lazy sitting in the next room--chitchat.
It needs to be white
Sprinkle bleach powder with blue flecks
blue bleeds--does the white bleed invisibly?
on my knees
begging the soap to work just this time
commanding the dirt to leave
go away, Dammit!
eyes so close
dirt gummed to the surface--only fingernails can scrape it
My fingers prune and burn
hair falls on my cheek and I wipe it behind my ear with the back of my hand--
fear of
bleaching off my skin
stray hair swirls with motion of rag
singing "I'm gonna wash that man right outta my hair"
fingers are dry opening my hand my skin stretches
knees flat and stinging
Ajax inhalation--headache approaches my ears nose clears, numbs
eyelash at the bottom I scrub and shake more powder and work the heel of my
hand
eyes closer to it
not a hair or a lash; it's a scratch, I can't fix it. This tub's a piece of shit.
step back to see the scratch. the surrounding clean only highlights the flaw
"I really need to use the bathroom. I don't think she wants to be in there when
I'm going.
I farted on my way in here and it smells. Are you almost done?"
completely
but I haven't completed--Not Yet.

Dating: Before and After

The Pursuit

As long as I'd sit on that green couch and stare through algebra or American
Lit,
you would come
enticing me with

perversity
peeled grapes
life history
emails of "You make me smile"
repeated Clinton jokes
car trips away from my work
Attention.
My reply to you: "I don't know."
but I did, so we faced each other.

Trivial Pursuit

You just have to sit on your office chair and stare through your new computer,
and I show up,
searching for you with

Am I gonna get some tonight?
Let's share a meal.
How was your day?
emails of "Why aren't you talking to me?"
Continuous tears
Time away from you
Why don't you give me attention anymore?
Your reply to me: "I don't know."
But you do, so we turned our backs.

Christy Lose

The Plumber's Tale

“Not so long ago, in a galaxy
Not too far away, (I think it may be
Called the Milky Way) lived a recently
Married couple. Although he performed decently
In his marital duty, the dependent Han
Made his fuzzy friend, Chewy, come along
Every time. So each Thursday, Leia would
Kindly ask Han if they possibly could
Have some time alone: ‘Chewy makes
So much noise that the entire house shakes,
Especially when we need some privacy.
He’s ruining our marriage. Can’t you see
That?’ But Han always refused
To obey his wife. ‘You’ll get used
To Chewy soon.’ Unfortunately for Han, he was right.
Leia saw that she lusted after Chewy one Thursday night,
So she no longer minded that he was there.
But now, this lady with the beautifully braided hair
Could no longer trust her spouse’s feelings for her,
Since she knew that her own thoughts weren’t pure.
The guilt-ridden Leia decided to devise a plan
To see if Han was truly a loyal man.

‘Han, honey, I have something to tell you.
I need you to paint our spare room blue,
Because I’m having our baby soon.
His due date is the ninth of June.’
Leia, of course, was telling a lie.
This falsehood, she hoped, Han would buy.
‘How can this be? I know that you must
Be wrong, because today is the last of August.
You have to be pregnant for nine months, don’t you?’
To Han’s observation, she replied, ‘Uh, true,
But, you see a woman knows these things,
Even a month before her husband stings
Her. I also know that my gestation time will be fragile.
Our Thursday nights, I know, will
Not be as intimate as they are now.’

Now Han grew very worried. 'How
Can I go on? You know that I live for
Our Thursday nights. My life will be a bore.'
Since Leia's yarn was believed
By Han, she was relieved
And slyly answered, 'If you truly love me,
You'll wait.' To Leia's fortune, Han couldn't see
Her snicker. Han walked out in despair.

'Leia and I are such a great pair,'
He confided in his best friend.
'Chewy, I wanna be with her to the end
Of time. What can I do?'
Chewy answered, 'WHAAHOOUOO!'
'Wow! That's a great idea! I just
Might try that.' (Actually, it must
Be said that no one can translate
What Chewy says; Han was a great
Interpretation inventor.) So Han
Went out and mowed his lawn.

Three months into her endeavor,
Leia was as uncertain as ever.
She saw that Han was acting kind
To her, but she could find
No explanation for his newly found
Happiness. She searched around
The house whenever Han was away
At work. (Saving the galaxy was his day
Job. Of course, Chewy always went along.)
She was looking for something, anything wrong
In the phone bill, mailbox, or trash can--
She thought it impossible for any man,
Especially her Han, to lie in a cold
Bed so long. She would often mold
Horrible visions of mistresses in
Her head. She would realize then
That she loved Han, and yearned to
Tell him her motherhood was not true.
'No!' Leia told herself. 'I must know
If he is completely faithful to me.' So

She rummaged through the house, but never found
A thing.

One Thursday evening, she heard a sound
Coming from inside the master bedroom.
By the queer noise, she had to assume
That Chewy was in there, doing his
Thing. But then, someone was singing "One is
The Loneliest Number." She wanted to
Know if it was her husband who
Was vocalizing, so she looked in the keyhole. 'Oh
My goodness!' Han was going Solo!
Leia, so shocked by that ghastly sight,
Ran out of the house and cried all night.
She feared that he would soon seek enjoyment
Elsewhere, so immediately she got in her car and went
To her best friend, who was a detective.

Meanwhile, Han was out of the bathroom, alone
At home. To Chewy's "suggestion," he picked up the phone.
He believed that calling these numbers, so expensive,
Could satisfy him. But more extensive
Bathroom trips were his only gain,
So he asked Chewy, almost in vain,
'This is my last chance. What do I do?'
Chewy moaned, 'RRAAOUNUHOOUHOO!'
But Han did not want to comply this time.
'First of all, I only have one dime
To my name.' (It was the prenuptial agreement.)
'Also, how do I explain to Leia that you sent
Me to a professional of that type?'
But Han could no longer gripe
About his currently frustrated situation;
He spent no more time in contemplation
And drove downtown. At the first corner he stopped
Because a not-so-big, but beautiful, blonde hopped
In front of his car. Han's headlights shone brightly
On the blonde's dress, which fit so tightly.
But what drew Han to this blonde bawd
Struck him as rather odd;

The courtesan looked so much like Han's wife
(Except for the hair) that he thought his life
Was saved. 'Oh, you look
So familiar! I almost mistook
You for my wife.' 'I've heard that one
Before. Wanna have some fun?'
Was the blonde's reply. 'Sure. Let's go!'
Han answered. But what he didn't know
Was that this blonde bawd was a fluke;
She was really Leia's brother, Luke,
The detective in disguise. Since Han
Was apparently so clueless, he drove Luke on
To Trixie's Motel, prepared for a great night.
Leia had, so that she might
Catch her husband, already reserved a room there.
Leia was devastated when she saw the pair
Enter. (She was hiding in the closet.) She
Anticipated Luke's signal, which he
Would give as soon as Luke exposed
The truth to Han. With the door closed,
She waited for eternities, it seemed.
The she heard his dress unzip, and screamed
As she lunged at her spouse.
'I hate you, you rotten louse!'
Then she stopped because what she saw
Was not the forbidden act at all;
Luke and Han were laughing at her.
'I--I don't understand. What's the matter?'
Leia inquired. Han responded, 'I knew all
Along that you would have the gall
To lie about having a child.
Although your imagination is wild,
You forgot a detail that is very important--
I can't father babies. I'm impotent.'

Luke and Han made fun of her for
Months, comparing her mentality to C3PO more
Times than anyone can count. But Han laughed too soon.
Leia gave birth the following June
To a daughter whose features were quite scary;
This baby's face was extremely hairy."

Christy Lose

Water Bottle

How can you tell there's water in a bottle?

See its shape?

See it is shape?

You can only see the water when you see the no-water part.
versavice.

Still droplets on the nowater.

The liquid bounces and the line between them--sensitive to
moves to
jumps to

all motion and sound surrounding

Base of life

simple mickey ears molecule

erratic atoms.

owns a shadow of lightwebs, takes reflection.

the nowater can't

Take a drink of white nearprism.

can only taste what it shouldn't be.

can I only see what it shouldn't be?

Timothy Hagen

Calendar

Hours

He labored

My brother on his secret project

I found it was

A calendar for me

Each picture hand-drawn

Dates meticulously lettered

Simple

Yet wonderful

So long ago, yet now I look

On that aged table of time

And my throat catches

On that labor of love

A gift: love undeserved

Most beautiful.

Armando X. Fernandez
Over the Viadock

...love knows no bounds when the heard is young (and stupid)

--author

"That raunchy smellin' river flows through ol' Black Oak Town--
separating those *I knows* from the *I dunnos* back in sixty-tree.

Only a short walk across I-94 over the viadock--
to the side of big dollars and them sweet smelling *white* girls.

School was that way but it was that lovin' enchantment that drew me--
yearning for my considerable pretty little *polska* gal.

Her daddy was a rich'un--
drove a giant silver plated Shore Line bus.

Mama had a fountain of blond squirting out of the top of her head--
and drove a big ol' Pontiac car that matched her finger nail polish.

Little brother was but a young 'un--
still not knowing what it meant to be on the scent.

Those sleepy county copper-dressed bulls never saw me--
felt like they tugged after me as I walked up that viadock.

Up da lower side of those swallowin' free flowing sidewalks--
my divine little polka queen waited anxiously.

Going half way was the deal we kept as a cross fingered promised--
but this time it was to be all da' way or nothin'.

Just a couple of *Region Rats* that wanted t' explore the secrets of Aphrodite--
one willing but the other still too close to the blackboards of old St. Mary's.

Roman Polanski would have been proud of this hispanic prince that day--
willing to meld the west into the east on sweat drenched sheets.

But it ws not to be...
my sweet loving Nanushka would have none of that.

Armando X. Fernandez

My Buddy Zeke (Ledbetter) and Me

Our Summer of '62

Summers were made for mischief,
for thirteen year-old curious boys it's a natural.
Camping, cooking and bare-butt'd swimming,
in and around the woods discovering ourselves by the ol' sand pit.

Running barefoot--schools out and book learnin' forgotten,
we didn't have a care from June until September.
Ditch hopping and campfire conjuring,
was what our summers were made of.

Growing up with folks from way down below the line of Mason Dixon,
Acuff, Patsy and the Texas Troubadour were our Saturday night delights.
We never knew we were poor or living without,
just good ol' friends, my buddy Zeke and me.

Zeke was the youngest of five,
the only make child in a house of southern belles.
They loved him as their brother,
and so did I...but in a much deeper way.

We discovered secrets about ourselves,
secrets we never dreamed we could tell.
He loved me and I loved him,
my buddy Zeke and me.

We camped out in the woods,
sleeping under the stars and sharing our deepest thoughts.
We both ripened into manhood that summer under the moon light,
not ever understanding what was happening to our souls.

Zeke never needed to say much he just shined those deep blue eyes as he smiled,
our youthful curiosity connected souls forever.
It was never quite the same again in September,
when the school bell rang us back to classes.

Summers come and winters go but Zeke and I are friends no more,
we grew apart as we remembered our summers rendezvous'
We knew we still loved each other,
but never again would we go exploring under the summer moonlight.

Imagination...my lack thereof

I am not a creative sort,

Artistry has escaped me for half a century.

I've tried to conceive in words of lavish colors,

Only to be locked into frustration.

I'm sure animation is only the stuff of artistes and thespians,

Not us--the well-rooted surveyors of life storming by.

I can't explain a winter's eve,

Or autumn-colored leaves rustling (red, yellow and gold?).

I can only recall summers of heat, mosquitoes and humidity,

Not any of vivid colors or brilliant hues.

I know primavera is a handsome word describing April, May and June,

But the second quarter's luster is not for me.

I find it impossible to imagine the fabled bubbling brook,

Rushing towards a great unknown.

I see the world in white and black,

Wishing abstract figures could reflect my fears.

I only know the unfriendly chill of reality,

Pushing me across life's bridge.

I feel the urge and desperation to color,

Only to return to my blinded pale pallet.

I own a canvas but have not seen it in years,

The chalk and charcoal have flaked and disappeared.

I hail a salute to the colors I've never felt,

Hoping someday to pleasure myself on colored thoughts and words.

Armando X. Fernandez

All day thumb sucking revisited...

"it tastes better and sweeter after the first fewer layers"

--author

A song for you and me--
All day thumb sucking revisited--
Only you and I know--
That the bard's the given word.

The city opens her legs to accept the lipid waves of amber grain--
Blackbirds aren't allowed to enter purgatory's vestibule--
Put it where you want it--
We're just Breezin'.

A song for you and me--
By the light of the magical moon--
Stimela sounds so pretty (cursed, stinking, coal train...SOUTH AFRICAN)--
Can I have my dinero back when the putrid train comes home?

By the light of the magical moon--
Canned music done up write--
Yes we can can...if you want--
Darkness...that muddled funk'n' darkness harmony.

Darkness darkness--
Delta of my ass on top, under, in, around your fountain of womanhood--
Son of mirror-mere man--I love myself tired--
Fatted jellied jam on the go go... ever so so!

Sugar on the line once the cubes have died--
I scare myself starched pants aloft--
Jammin' those New Street blues against Old Town misery--
I scare myself.

Little mama is gone to the big mamoo's house--
Images crashing blue beneath the streets of goo--
Canned music done up write--
Little mama is gone to big mamoo's room'n house.

Fatted jellied jam on the go go...even so so--

New Street blues-Old Town misery--
Southern man's indigo flavored swamp gas--
Only you and I know who stomps the toking veined grasses.

Delta of my ass on top, under, in, around I sense your womanhood--
Put it where you want it--
Shiver n' shake--
Ride the great white swan to the big mamoo's room'n house.

Shouldn't have taken more that you gave/attempted to steal--
Roger the masterful dodger--
Hails a New York hansom for Blackbeard whose forked beard swims
about the muck--
Ultimately and uniquely feeling safe as milk.

Ride the turbid white swan--
Shiver n' shake the draining maypole of life--
I shock myself--
Should have taken more that I gave...given the buoyant nature of men--

The everlasting first...my virginity is the same as yours--
Sittin' on the outside but still smelln' the fried chicken within--
I scare myself--
So far away from the beginnings.

The frog--
Son of some mirror-mere man--
Safe as moistened thighs of the youngest virgin--
Southern man azure flavoring her swamp gas.

Breezin'--
Stimela (the Man's coal train load with dreams...SOUTH AFRICAN)-
Sittin' on the outside tracks but still smelln' the necklace of fire--
Sugar on the line...hanged out to dry.

Images strike the forced entry--
The city jerks to swing...howling at the juke--
Hurry...*"Can I have my dinero back?"*--
The everlasting first...my virginity is more important(ly) than yours.

Bird's telling the anxious shepherd to gather his flock--
The frog, the swan, the big mamoo--
Hester the rightful heir to the kingdom of doom--
Yes we can can...if you want want.

Skirts and collars blazoned on with turpentine's swooshes
Slashes escaping up the tortoise's shell,
Beaver coated woman with sweet smelling patches of acrid stench
Protect the serpentine man inside with moist-hairy-pouting-enveloping lips.

So very very far far away away--
Mirrored man minds my mellowed memories--
Reflecting the resin chairs straight through lazered oaken sit upons--
MY my...All all...Day day...thumb sucking revisited...

Armando X. Fernandez

A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic

It was about forty years past,
When I wanted to sign up for the Black Oak Little League,
To take my place with the immortals,
Mathy "the stick," Teddy "the curve," Timmy "the arm," and of course
Johnny "big pants."

Got up early hoping to be first picked,
Or at least the first in line,
I was ready for the battle,
With Matthew, Theodore, Timothy and John.

Mom and Pop had bought me a new Yogi Berra catcher's mitt,
New black Keds and a pocket full of Double-Bubble,
Rewarded me the five dollars needed to enlist for duty,
On the dusty, exquisite field behind old St. Ann's.

The field was about two miles away and named for the parish of St. Ann,
On the south end of Black Oak next to I-94,
The grass was sparse and the uniforms worn,
But only to be on the same side as the immortals was good enough for me.

Timmy's dad was the head of the league, was loaded and ran the sign-ups,
He was not only Timmy's Dad, but also the head usher at St. Ann's,
I always thought he was cool--a coach, rich and the head usher,
But that was all to change on enlistment day.

The sign-ups were late that year...*we're running way behind*, he scowled at me,
I had no idea as to the reason,
Until Mr. Black told me why,
If I hadn't asked to play--they would already have five behind them.

What's your name boy? Pedro? Jesus? Paco? Juan? What is it?
not sounding very like a church usher at all,

Never mind...A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic...Is A Spic.

Alphabetized Jabberwock Of Not So Long Ago

Avocado green salad besotted with hollyhock oranges...
Blue jean skies laced with tomato paste ribbon...
Corrupted surgeons mincing up a cock's head...
Derby sucker trickster placing a bid on the war painted whore...
Effervescence foot streaking parallel with Neptune's groin...
Flinty collared candidate pledging up a storm...
Gamma ray lust thrusts pointed at our youth.

Horrified shot-gun blasts across the two-toned bath tub...
Indigo ruffian scooping up bladder matter...
Jockey jointed jokester pouring out its soul...
Kangaroo footsteps across the living room floor...
Limey tasting posy barking up her loins...
Magenta tinted reeds to write the story down...
Novocaine studded mannequin posing as Peyote King...
Oboe blasting danger don't crack the surface any more...
Peacock toenails scratching the saffron tinned bootstrap.

Quirky necked school girls stroking up the stairs...
Ruptured bellies drifting away towards the setting moon...
Stupefied priestess sucking on the dead man's joint...
Turquoise hammerheads flay the pitted Argentine suede...
Uterine pelvis jerking off the night...
Velveteen paintings of day glow urchins.

Waxen beauties with suffocating azure braids...
Xanadu toilets bursting with shots of golden maize...
Yellowed vellum and noxious strawberry footballs.

&

Zygotes wasted up the side of your leg.

Armando X. Fernandez

Golden Crowned Allure

A brilliant golden crown...

atop your sleek and willowy body.

Reminds one of a perfect flaxen maelstrom of celebrity.

Your perfectly shaped arms...

pretend to cuddle the great outside.

Extending towards the heavens searching *para el sol*.

Your pointed slippered feet...

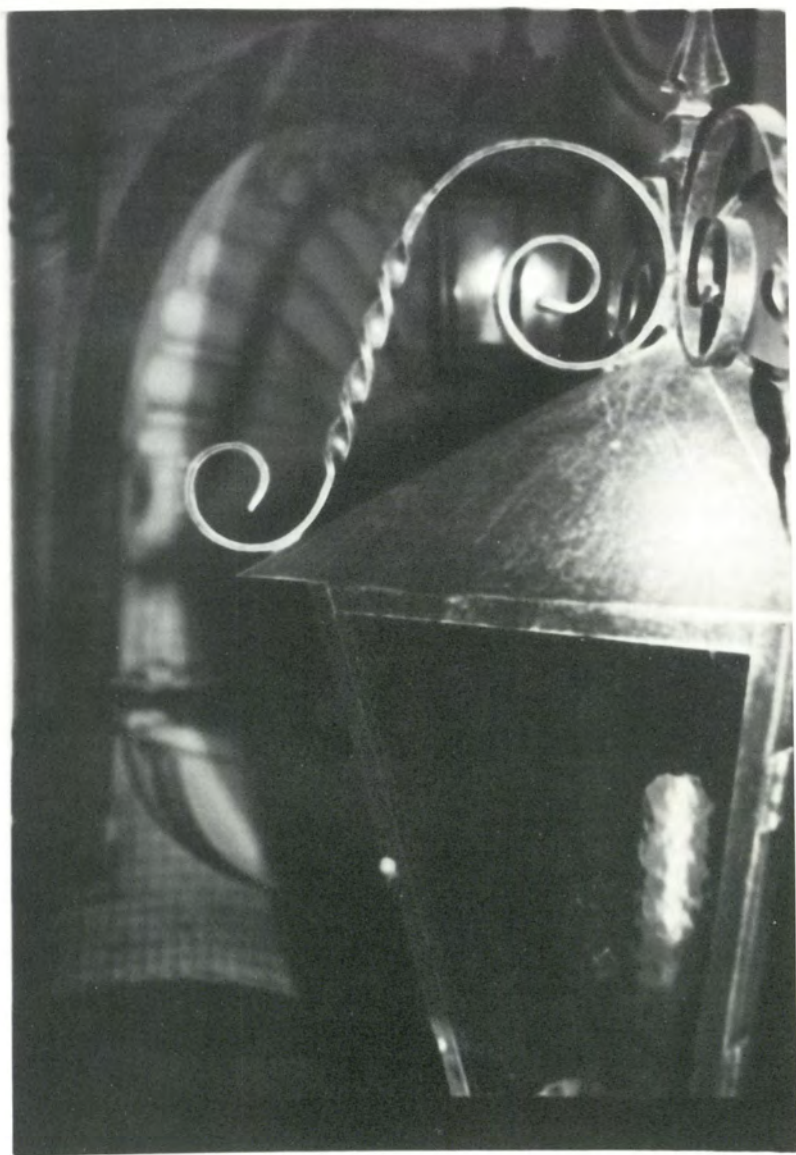
command a regal blue green allure.

Sure of the natural slippery slope of personage.

Only to be showered with a lovely deadly vapor in open warfare...

by one Mr. Tru-Green who claims to feel your delicious pain.

Desist and depart oh mighty dandelion who hasn't a right to live in my lawn.



Lamp New Orleans: Una Triste Noche #3

Francisco Nuno

THE LIGHTER

Rita de la Rosa Sarafin

Lord Have Mercy

I now live in fear.
O Word of my Father...
Mute have I been to Thee.
Let Thy Power minister to me.
Let Thine armies conquer my rebellion and sins
 And I shall never again, be mute to Thee.
 Lord, have mercy upon me.

O Word of my Father...
I come to Thee as the Prodigal once did,
My spirit is stained and wears like an unholy garment,
My spirit is wounded. I now stand in the doorway of Hell's horror:
 My eyes see Hell's wickedness
 Great pain...the Son did suffer for me:
 Lord, have mercy upon me.

O Word of my Father...
I remember that gifts were offered and sacrifices were made for me.
I bow my head unto Thee,
I bow my head in remembrance of the Precious and Holy Blood;
 Which did shrink the universe
 And embrace me
 Lord, have mercy upon me.

O Word of my Father...
I make a vow before Thee,
I rejoice in Thee:
I declare my love for Thee;
 I shall always belong to Thee.
 I shall immerse my soul in Heaven's Son.
 Lord, have mercy upon me.

Lisa Farver

To the boys at Vietnam

It seems that those mice were behind all the time...
being rodent in size and legally blind
to the knife in the hands of that nasty farmer female
who thought mischief was a dirty joke
and thought it's be far out to hack up a mouse
or two
as long as you had the guts
as long as you didn't see the blood
gushing onto your shag rug
in little track-filled trails
as you lopped off their tails
until they left nothing
but stubs behind
and numbers to define the span of their lives
stopping abruptly at the same time
and stones that stand sturdy
Resistant to knives

Lisa Farver

inebriation

Bent over the toilet,
which is the outlet
for the outpouring
of all my poisoned impulses,

Pretending i puke Picasso...

Hung over with you.
Your sweetness lingers like a liquor,
making me heave up things i never would have eaten
if i had seen them like this--
twisted into a mixed-up metaphor,
This mangled mass my metabolism.

My cravings incarnate.
My desires defaced.
Reality. Unraveled.
But, Oh!, ...for a taste....

Lisa Farver

en scène

He lifts her shirt
as gently as his filthy fingers let him...
then surveys his rented property
like an overskeptical tenant...
searching for a flaw in the wallpaper.

She sighs
and rubs her eyes...
recites a dozen tired lines
like an actress auditioning to play herself,
Telling him his tattoos make her hot
and his snuff makes her sweat...
Grinning through a grimace
at the bulge of his gut.

Then he's done.
And he utters a grunt
of disgust,
Spits out her lipstick
and calls her a slut.

Lisa Farver

jacknjill

Swawking awkwardly,
your pathetic poetry
attempts at tempting me
like I lack logic
or would sacrifice balance
because you let yourself spill
over some hill
If you're jack, i'm no jill
my free will, staunch, refuses to crumble.
Fall all you want.
You won't see me tumble,



Impressions of a Lady

Jessica C. Pleuss

THE LIGHTER

Lisa Farver

What if?

What if...

Eve had decided to spit instead of swallow?

Would all this shit still follow?

With women kneeling below men

and constantly having to pacify them

and swallow their sweaty masculine pride

and hide

indigestion...

Because you don't question fate.

And you are whatever you taste

or eat,

So we resign ourselves

to being sweet.

Beth A. Grefe

Hope

Quiet smiles half-asleep
stray from my mouth
doomed and daring
in this basement of stones
breathless walls
with lifeless eyes
my naked feet drinking
the coldness of the
cruel ground
my mind a bucket of betrayal
my soul laden with hollow promises
wounds enough for an army
my voice
bottled by this room
echoes of prayers
reminding me of
lonely streams of sunlight
managing to push their way
through the darkness and
dance on the floor



Amy McFadden

THE LIGHTER

Beth A. Grefe

Gravity

Stop these words to silence
so my mind can be free
I and them
they watch me and I
hide from the glares
stares of eyes
telling me the truth of
the matter at hand
whatever it may be
cold water
I'm jumping in
don't follow this path
of least resistance
I need to wake up
shut the door on me
I really don't mind
it's nice being lonely
don't you understand me?
probably not like
this web woven so tight
caught and cold
wanting freedom
finding something else
I can't explain
why am I tied
to the ghost face
staring back at me
making me fear or feel
comfort fleeting
coming like thoughts and leaving
like everyone else
deserting the truth
that is running rancidly
through this life
so puzzling
so damn confusing
I don't know which way is up anymore

I spit out these words
looking for gravity
but always finding something else

Doug Favero

Late March, Among Tombstones

It is late March. I am old.
I lope along elephant-like--a gait
To which I have grown
Accustomed--through the cemetery
Here, in the town in which I was born.
My bones feel comfortable in my skin.
I have stayed on the path
Until now. Now the grass calls me, wanting
Wear. Wearily, I step to the tombstones.
I have found my name, my resting family.
We have made our presence known here,
And beyond the fences. I cannot help it--
My feet will not stop. They know where I must go.
I am far from the path and surrounded
By stone. I can see
Where I have flattened the grasses behind me.
I am surrounded by stone. And I know
My name and my name is carved into me.
All my footsteps have led to this last.
I grab at soil and it feels like me.
My bones are comfortable.
The late winter wind swirls around the stones.
There is some rustling of leaves and unsettled dust,
Readjusting. A stone becomes me.



Misty Parent

THE LIGHTER

Doug Favero

Listen

The time of evening, the air
Becomes gentle hands
Cupping your ears,
The mist a whisper
Of the moon.

How Does Time Deal With Memories?

how do I catch it?
Save it,
Hold it captive
As my personal slave--
to Entertain,
Delight, Remind

me of this day,
this TIME, moments
that are now
Passing
so quickly by--
I want to

Reach out, Take
hold, Absorb it all
and Remember forever
what I'm doomed
to Forget.
they say that

time Heals all wounds, and
Forgives all enemies
but I don't Think
my past is Longing
for Reconciliation,
or Healing.

Tell me, if you Please,
how does time
Deal with memories?
Correct me
if I'm wrong, but
I Believe

it Erodes them.
as waves Washed upon shore
over and over
again, until the boulders
that once Stood Are
mere pebbles--

small, smooth,
only tiny fragments now
of the massive
things they used to Be.
and perhaps you Find
yourself Thinking one day:

Were they ever really
as important as
I vaguely Recollect?
or have they Been
this insignificant
all the while?

C o n t r i b u t o r ' s N o t e s

Lisa Farver is a freshman theatre and German double major who writes because "Poetry is a potion more potent than silence."

kelly k. faulstich is an english major from Wheaton,IL. After graduating next May, she hopes to find a job that will combine the skills she has perfected here at VU: sitting in a Jester's booth for five hours at a time, singing in German with great enthusiasm, and being a doc martin.

Armando X. Fernandez is a member of the College Of Adult Scholars. As a History Major and an English Minor, the senior enjoys reading (Gwendolyn Brooks, Gertrude Stein, Whitman, Bob Dylan, Alan Ginsberg) and writing poetry, classical music and listening to classic rock. He and his wife Nancy, of thirty years, and have three children...one daughter (a VU alum) and two sons.

Beth A. Grefe is a junior, whose majors are Psychology and Spanish and whose minor is Business Administration.

Timothy Hagen often wonders about the economics of dreams, among other things. He wants to live in service to his Savior and hopes to change a few lives in this world.

Nate Holdren is a senior philosophy student who enjoys cooking, long walks and late-night conversations.

Josh Honn is a junior, Graphic Design major. He lives in Homewood, Illinois and other projects include Airport Design, Singer Sergeant Records and The Silent 17.

Bethany Hirt is a senior American studies major from Traverse City, MI. She is still greatly enjoying her journey and cherishes everything and one around her along the way.

Julie Hurtgam, a senior from Macomb, Michigan, is majoring in Art and the Humanities. She loves traveling and art, especially photography. These photographs were taken last semester while she was abroad in Cambridge, England: "the best experience of my life." She would like to thank God, her family, and her friends for all they have done for her.

Kimberly Klotz is an over-involved sophomore from Lombard, IL. In her spare time she enjoys procrastinating, stressing out, spending time with her SAI and

KD sisters, singing Ives in Kantorei, and occasionally shaking her groove thing at the local party scene. She's been writing poetry since the beginning of time and is extremely thrilled about having her work in the Lighter.

Justin Krishka "Avi, one of my favorite young adult authors, asks the question, "What do fish have to do with anything?" And he answers saying that the cure to unhappiness is simple: a person always needs more than they ask for, and it is pretty easy to be happy if you are a fish living in a cave with no eyes. I like that, don't you? I hope to never be that fish, in my life or in my poetry" ...And with that Justin Krishka returns to his walkman.

Christy Lose KY aquarian wants you! SWF. N/S, P student seeking ultimate truth--or the perfect CD. Hobbies include social interaction and solitude, being active and sitting on her butt, self-improvement and self-acceptance. Existence is a must!

Amy McFadden is a sophomore who has very far-fetched hopes of someday traveling the world and taking pictures. For now she'll just work on a variety of majors and minors and look forward to traveling to Ireland next year.

Josh Messner more often expresses himself with voice, guitar, prayer and hugs, but would just as eagerly read good poetry. Hobbies include travel, working for The Cresset and playing soccer on hot summer evenings back home in Worcester NY.

Angelica Mortensen is a senior English and Humanities major from Valparaiso. While in high school, she wrote typical fairy-tale/pop-culture type stories wherein girl is victimized by bad man then saved by good man. She now hopes to use her powers for good instead of evil.

jes noon (junior, international service and theology major) has a car named sojourner, lives in birmingham, alabama, listens to opera or country when mellow, loves getting dried flowers, and is spending six months in brazil next semester.

Francisco Nuno, Spanish/ Art Photo, Senior: "I live in two worlds. One is real, the other is a response to negative qualities in the first, but it is a realm apart. It is filled with fantasy, absurd situations, and play. When reality is harsh, violence and evil can also appear here. In this world, I discover strange situations, surreal pictures, and unexpected relationships. Still, the most beautiful pictures remain in my head. El mundo en el que yo vivo no existe. The world I live in does not exist."

Robert "Bob" Pence is a freshman in the College of Adult Scholars. Because of his interest in writing, he intends to graduate with a degree in English from VU. He lives in Valparaiso with his beautiful and understanding wife who is a seamstress. He and his wife are parents to five children and grandparents to thirteen grand children.

Jessica C. Pleuss is a freshman in CC, majoring in Psychology and minoring in Art. She wrote the poem "How Does Time Deal With Memories?" in the month before she left Finland, where she spent her junior year of high school as an exchange student.

Elisha Jamyce Robinson is a premed sophomore from Gary, Indiana with a biology major and chemistry minor. She takes no credit for her work because she can't do anything without God. And there are always her eight brothers and sisters who remind her where she comes from and where she's going. (ROBINSONSIDE!) And of course she likes to add her parents who have stood by her through thick and thin. And who could forget Adrienne, Kimberly, Naama, and the Raq.

Rita de la Rosa Sarafin is a senior. She an Art major (oil painting), and she has a minor in creative writing. Her religious poetry stems from her devotion to God and her Eastern Orthodox faith.

David Alan Sisk is an exploratory senior on a mission to simply graduate. Any degree will do. At VU David has been studying international service, social work, and theology and believes they have prepared him fully to further his education in the fields of creative writing and fashion design. One note to anyone who says they just can't wait to get out of Valpo: "if you cannot find the truth exactly where you are, where else do you expect to find it?" (Robert Pirsig)

Michelle Stahlhut is a senior Theology and English major with no definite plans for the future aside from intent to travel. Home is just outside Fort Wayne, Indiana near a little town named Arcola. In her copious spare time she likes to write, read, figure out how to cook food with nate, and hide Gideon bibles in her roommates' (k8 and kel) underwear drawers.

Jason Weber was born in New York and raised in Hong Kong. He is currently a Junior Computer Science major and because he's working so hard to complete his Gen Eds he hasn't had time to take pictures in a long while--hope he hasn't lost the touch! See more of his work at <http://first.at/rikerweber>.

You can be part of the Spring 2000 issue of the Lighter!

Written submissions due by Monday, February 7

These submissions must

- include one cover sheet with title(s) of piece(s), name, address, phone number, and email address
- not include writer's name on the individual submission(s)
- be dropped off at the Lighter office in the Union by 8 p.m.

Artwork submissions due by Monday, February 21

These submissions must

- be of scannable size (11 x 17)
- include one cover sheet with title(s) of piece(s), name, address, phone number, and email address
- be dropped off at the Lighter office in the Union by 8 p.m.

Note:

- *Selections for the front and back covers will be printed in color. All other work will be printed in black and white.*
- *All artwork will be returned.*

If you have any questions, or if you are interested in being on the written and/or selection committee, please email mary.linxweiler@valpo.edu

2000 Wordfest Literary Contest

Prizes in:

Poetry,

Fiction,

Non-Fiction

**The Academy of American Poets Award
in Memory of Vivian S. Richards**

All Valparaiso University students are
encouraged to submit their work.

Deadline:

April 1, 2000

First, second, and third place winners as well as honorable mention
are awarded in each category. Judges for all categories are noted
authors from off campus.



