

The Lighter

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The Lighter Fall 2004

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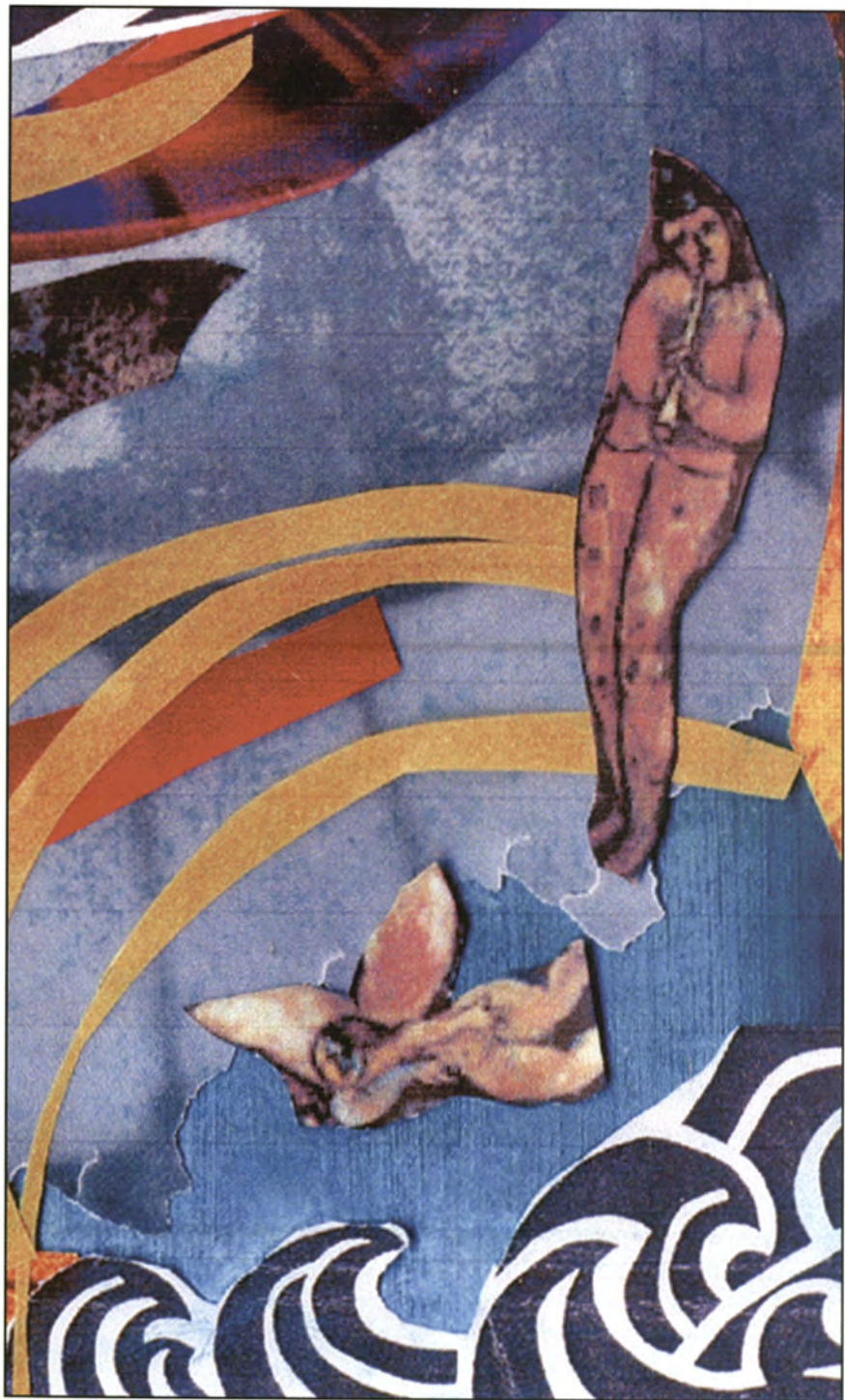
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Fall 2004

501



the **Lighter**



the **Lighter**

Fall 2004

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the **Lighter**

Fall 2004

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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. The editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this magazine. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.

Cover Art taken from **Uprising Collage** by *Lauren Schreiber*

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Introduction by Aaron Bobb

We all tell stories, and these stories—both those told and heard—inform our visions of reality and reveal these visions to others. Poets are no exception to this; nor are photographers and artists. With this in mind, there is much to gain from reading this semester's *Lighter*.

In "A Brush with Greatness," Joshua Vredevoogd locates his poem firmly within one of the oldest poetic traditions: the celebration of a hero's deeds. But, rather than Beowulf slaying Grendel, Vredevoogd gives us a decidedly modern hero—an overweight man playing the popular video game *Dance Dance Revolution*. Though the image is no doubt an amusing one, as readers we cannot help but feel a bit of awe for the "massive, sweaty grace" of the dancing man as he "pulls together the unexpected / and the utterly predictable, forming / phrases in precise and sequenced steps." We further feel the suspense as the pace quickens, imagine with the author that the gaming device may indeed begin to smoke and finally explode from the rapid dance steps—and sense the anti-climax at the missed step that brings the game to an end. In "A Brush with Greatness," the poet invents a story of grace, humor, and excitement.

The story Jonathon Boggs tells in "Musca Volitans," on the other hand, is a simple, meditative one. Suffering from the presence of small black spots in his vision, a minor disability referred to in the title, the speaker ponders other things he has seen. Because among these have been lewd images, his eyes have lost some of their luster:

Today I am confronted by my eyes.
How they are more a dying
hazel-grey than before,
when they were brown.
How they have turned
to things they shouldn't
have.

His eyes have done more than dimmed from brown to hazel-grey, though; he can no longer see the "fresh slate of sky" without "floating blemishes." Boggs' story leaves us with many questions: Are we to trust the doctor at the end of the poem, who advises the speaker to ignore the spots? If not, how might his vision be restored? Clearly, here is a story meant to convey something about our loss of innocence as we grow older.

In Benjamin Mueller's "Old Stories," as the title might suggest, stories pervade. The speaker tells of a family confrontation at dinner over a piece of broken glass that found its way into the soup. The Jewish grandmother's violent reaction to the father's complaint over this is no doubt provoked by her remembrance of another story: her own father's tradition of picking up the broken glass of his shop window in Germany after every Good Friday. In turn, German Christians shattered his shop window each year in response to the story of Christ's suffering and death. In "Old Stories," we see, through the innocent eyes of a child, how these and other stories from the past continue to shape our present.

This semester's *Lighter* is full of such stories. In paying careful attention to the works presented here, we learn to appreciate the richness of both our own experiences and those of the authors and artists featured here.

my english teacher – formerly

Joshua Vredevoogd

in those days when i longed
to dream in poetry,
my english teacher – formerly
a hippie – told me that
 poets feel everything
a shade deeper than everyone else,
and i suspected
that this must be the case,
since they grasp the language
 by the throat
and shake it until it comes
to speak in sense. it must
require agony deeper than flesh
to live as such a masochist.
 now i see
that a poet does not feel
deeper than the average man only
he has learned to hide
 between his words.

Dining Out

Amy Sample

It was after they had cleared
our salad plates
and we were waiting
for our artichoke hearts
that it happened.

In trying to grab my hand—
oh how romantic he can be—
the wine glass spilled
across the white table cloth
and my dress.

And I laughed.

For once my favorite nail polish
would have matched something.

Papered Devotion

Niki Kranich

If you asked me to leap
through flaming hoops,
I'd draw you some, cracking
this rouge colored pencil
against the chaste page
in a hurry to fulfill your wish—

this wish which hangs
over me like an orange
moon that ripens by night,
splits by day, tart
against your rosebud tongue—

until the last stroke is down, until
I am ready to jump, ready
to lose the edges of my self,
knowing I will burn,
if you ask me.



Kate
Lauren Schreiber



Untitled
Melanie Schapp



Untitled
Melanie Schapp



Amsterdam
Beth Grimaldi



The Stairs
Zac Huber

Sunday Bound

Evan Bryson

I never went to the big city because I wanted to.
The big city wanted me to come to it, and how do you say no?
When skyscrapers talk, I listen. Anyone would. They are so big
And hungry, and their shadows gnash at Lake Michigan.
The skyline frightens the seagulls. The Hilton captures the limousines.
Rich people attend rich events, and I don't even know how to hail a
taxi.

I took the train – my second time. Roselle station, Train 5,
Milwaukee District West Line, Sunday Bound.
I read a copy of *Lost in the City*. Thanks, Colleen, for giving me tangible
irony.
I thought the city would be fun. It was just big. –
Some parts were rusty. So those parts were big and rusty.
Like lockjaw isn't fun, too.

Jesse examines the horizon.
I rolodex my life, Jesse is on the later cards.
High school was everything. Thanks for the city,
I say to him. Thanks for having an apartment on the 22nd floor, too.
The view –
Well, the view is spectacular.

The horizon line doesn't end in peridot forest or amber field. It ends in
gravel or steel,
Vistas of projects and suburbs and the suture-scars of train tracks,
Tar over razorblades.
And he says, I guess I kinda like that.
This is the same boy that just told me last night,
After years of swearing against it,
That when he visited Jeremy at Miami University,
They drank. He and Jeremy and Josh. Often. Every chance.
The imagination makes them so little, so gifted,
I'm seeing us with shit-eating grins but not shit-faced.

My friends drink now.

And lied about it all the while, like I'd freak out about it.

Or, write a poem about it. I'm not reacting.

I'm just trying to process this, I say to him. I need to know when we all
grew up.

When I stayed on the fucking ground and you swelled twenty two
shitty stories

With us divisible only by a cell phone, and describable only by
remarking, dryly,

Lake Michigan is scary when you think about it.

I'm thinking about it now. All that blue but it isn't an ocean!
Isn't that illegal? Whadda con job!

Chicago, thanks for the heebie-jeebies!

I get it now: College teaches you everything you loved about

The friends scattered and left behind,

They were uncomfortable pauses in the conversation of your life.

They'll trip your tongue only if you remember them.

Parents should tell us this, in middle school,

You know,

Before we get too attached.

A homeless man happened upon me out of the Metra.

Handed me a postcard with a map and required a donation of

Five or ten dollars. He would not leave me alone,

So I cussed him out.

He said:

Lissin, eyes ain no hustluh, eyes jess po—

Eyes sees the cash you carryin, you can donate, sho.

And then I explained to him, I said to him:

Listen—

And then I cussed the rotten bastard out.

The fleas in his dreadlocks, they winced.

Even I was made undignified.

That takes a special gift, a spark, you could say,

Of being a vicious absurdist, of being an asshole
Extraordinaire.

I called my Dad immediately afterward-and this is
Just getting into the city. Nothing is chronological anymore.
(After the atom-bomb, everything is post-modern.)
I called my Dad to say I was safe and free and in Chicago,
And on my way to see Jesse,
And that I cussed out a persistent bum, and that it felt
Wonderful.

And we laughed and he explained I needed to chill out
Before I got myself stabbed.

And Dad could've said it then, he could've explained
The infinite ways to be stabbed without being
Stab stabbed.

Got Jeremy's email today. I told him not
To glaze my donut-bites with sugar coated
Recreations of Oxford. Talk to me about
Your girlfriend, your alcohol, your new friends. I tell him,
You're the most closeted heterosexual I know.
I'm reminded now, I didn't ask if she deserves him.
In the email, he told me the kiddos down there don't compare to me.
I nodded. Well, duh.

He gave me two paragraphs and I gave him a novella.
That's the fun of emailing me,
It's always overload on the reply side. At the end I wrote,
Love ya kiddo, I mean, you know that's true, right? —
So keep your dignity. We're too young to treat it like
Carrion, and some of these college boys — well, they're
Turkey vultures.

I told him, Chicago was a million faces walking
South Loop, each pretending to matter.
They simply could not be not noticed!
The paradigm shifts around the homeless, when
We all go invisible.

I tell him,
I miss the combines of home. I miss
Watching them eat the corn and soy away.
I miss not having a cell phone bill, I miss not having to worry about an
Electro magnetic field sapping my genitals. You know, to be crude
about it.
Ambiguously nostalgic. Needing rectified. Needing.
I miss thinking what I'd look like
Harvested.

Chicago, you owe me nothing. "I've paid my whore."
October-you owe me anything.
Pumpkins. Fall. The thrush is about-
Indian Corn? First Love? Ghosts.
Mostly, October, you owe me back all my
Ghosts.

A Brush With Greatness

Joshua Vredevoogd

A fat man floats
from pad to pad like a frog
with defiant ambition;
he is overweight with spare time.
But I swear, he garners wings
behind or underneath
his spare-tire tummy,
because he moves
like young angels' dream of flight-
kissing color squares in time.
He is rhythmically decisive,
creating combos like jazz
pulls together the unexpected
and the utterly predictable, forming
phrases in precise and sequenced steps.
His massive, sweaty grace accelerates
now easing the throttle to
full burn, breaking laws of nature
that I'd known as unchallenged
and in my heart, I never want
him to stop. In fact,
I want that stupid arcade game
to explode, smoke the room
to coughing darkness
which—of course—plays prelude to
the true (ellipsis and pause)
Dance Dance Revolution.
I begin to sense its coming.

— It's coming —

and He Misses.

Those were dying-breathseconds,
when my only chance to be happy
was our robust-rotund hero exiting
(stage left),

before he caught the corner,
sending him cascading against the machine,
twirling like a figure skater,
smashing into the ground.

And I?

I don't even chortle,
so much as I bust my boyish belly laughing.

"To JoJo, Upon First Sight of your Newborn Son"

Ralph Asher

I am a boy in all but age and suspect
you, though birthed into manhood, are alike.
Our origins identical: sons of big-bellied
steelmen who sweated pride and sorrow
and toiled, to lose all. Steel and pewter
both from one cast of molten iron.
No Olympian dice cast us to our stations.

Looking upon his fragile fingers
and birth-battered brow, I ponder if the son
will proceed from the father. Your union
with Bathsheba has brought forth a child –
yet you are not David, nor will you ever.

Simon, you have borne
Your own cross of failings, indelible marks,
scars burnt upon wisdom's face. Is your life
your own? Maybe not, but surely your legacy.
Still, one as naïve as I must ask. Is this child,
lying in my arms helpless and innocent, cursed
to carry to Calvary the cross of Freud's god?

I don't want you to read this poem

Ralph Asher

unless you will give it the respect
it surely deserves. Dear reader,
though you may be educated, filled
with knowledge of Byron and Shelley,
Coleridge, Eliot, Tennyson, and (of course!)
Dr. Johnson, that lexicographer of old,
do not approach this versatile verse if
you cannot understand the monstrous
eloquence that lies within the lines.

Pretension, you say? Do you think, old chap,
that this poet's evaluation of his august work
is too generous, that I must have my head
stuck too far up my ass? Though you maintain
that your – *critique* is poor word choice,
let's call it *asininity* – be on target,
I must, for your best interest and mine, for sure,
refute your charmingly bourgeois criticism.

Or perhaps I need not. Really, what have I
to prove to your kind? Have you ever peeled
like an orange *The New Yorker* to see your work
facing, monarch to monarch, an Updike tale or *Talk*?
I have, and more. Have you ever sailed
The Atlantic with P.J. O'Rourke, or taken a ride
in a *Prairie Schooner*? If not, dear mouth-breather,
then - how can I say this politely? - shut up.

Indeed, I have no need to defend my masterpiece
from hack *auteurs* like you who have failed
to produce work of worth, instead railing
against that which is both indefensible
and unassailable. You don the armor to attack
an ice-cream sundae, or a teaspoon of pistachio.
You, dear reader, can you create verse
more superb? Surely not. Yet if you insist
to continue in your obstinacy, then do not,
do not read this poem, for you surely will not
appreciate it.

Where Apple Trees Grow

Benjamin Mueller

"women your age have decided
wars and the beat
of poems..."

-William Carlos Williams

Where apple trees still grow
deep in the woods
there once was a house,

your grandfather told you this.
You walked with him,
five fingers wrapped around

his one, and he showed
you how to watch
for the woodcock's

sky dance in May.
You sat on his knee
and he gave you the facts

of life by candlelight,
about how you'd fall
in love one day

when you were older
and about the birds
that poked the sky

and made the stars at night.
You still remember
how to prune the branches

of an apple tree: take
the ones that reach heavenward,
leave the crooked, down-

turned shoulders for next
season's apples.

If anything, he meant

to teach you how to tell
the stories that aren't
written down yet,

so when you sleep
in the crook of some-
one's arm you can

promise to show him
the stone foundations
where a house once stood.

For C.L.B



There Is a Foot Somewhere in This
Philip Nadasdy

Starving Artist

Ian Hughes

One day you snapped and became an artist
by painting my eye black. I was blind
to your existence but shortly became
your favorite canvas. Everyday, I was
apprehensive to feed your starving need

for work. When you tracked me down
before class, you promised to color me
with rust reds, blistering purples and alley
black shades. For fear of the ways your art
hit me, I scurried past corners, hid behind

bushes and avoided strolling through
the neighborhood of your house. Eventually
you forgot about me and moved on to higher
accomplishments when you dropped
out of school to live like a true artist.

I Know Why Van Gogh Killed Himself

Jonathan Boggs

"I did see a great many crows on the Great Church in the morning. Now it will soon be spring again and the larks, too, will be returning."

-Vincent Van Gogh

All the black crows that have flown
over the wheat field, come,
one by one, to my green trees
and fly away, steady wings beating,

leaving yellow pine needles, gnarled
leaves on the stiff grass below.
I cannot read when I see their bleak
backs through the window;

my feet slow to a shuffle
when one lands in the street,
claws clicking on cold blacktop—
nature's metronome.

As a child though, I'd chase the late
birds stalling on the church lawn
among the bracts. I used to love
the way their wings sounded

against their feathered breasts,
reminded me of the arid pop
of white towels from the line—
my mother's ritual before folding.

-inspired by Van Gogh's "Wheat Field with Crows"



Puddles Are Wet
Philip Nadasdy

Old Stories

Benjamin Mueller

Before he left Germany it was tradition
after Easter for my great grandfather
to erect new windows for his small business,

because it was some Christians' tradition
after hearing the story of the Passion,
to cast stones at some Jew's storefront.

In the morning, glass strewn like confetti,
great grandfather knelt on old knees
and with pierced fingertips collected

the pieces of a glass puzzle we'd never solve,
Decades later, we sat around
my grandmother's dining table, the tablecloth

like everything in her house, expensive and faded.
While grandmother said the prayer in Yiddish
I traced a strand of the lace I had been thumbing

and mumbled softly the only grace I knew
from my mother's side: *come lord Jesus,*
be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed

Amen. Grandmother brought soup first
in wide white bowls with spoons too big
for my mouth; then a plate of hotdogs and hard rolls

with flour that fell down the front of my shirt
when I broke one and passed it to my father.
Grandmother told us how that afternoon

her mother's vase had tipped from the sill
and shattered in the sink. My father while raising
his spoon to his mouth found a piece of glass

settled in among the celery and lentils. I then
heard a language I had never heard
before come out of my father's mouth.

It was German, but rich and piercing with an accent shaped by glass and glass broken, and years spent in New York, Chicago, and Pennsylvania.

My grandmother stood at the opposite end of the table, her accent thick and sharp as the day she learned to speak yelled back

in punctuated German: *Du Bist...Du...Du...Du!* Grandmother, who had been holding a skewered hotdog on her fork like a scepter,

launched the link across the table—past my mother, brother, and me—and hit my father. She slammed her 92-year-old-fists down on the table.

Verflucht! The silverware jumped in its place and the flour from my shirt fell to my pants. At the time, I smiled to myself, not knowing

how deep the roots of tradition went. It wasn't until we got home and my mother, still dressed in her church clothes, sat down

on Sunday and dictated the old stories from old books that were written before I was born.

House of Blues

Sarah Werner

I.

Smoke flows and curls, rising from lungs
pumping life and music,
twining among dark intangible breezes,
mirroring the sinewy fluidity of his body
as his heavy soul plunges
morphs

bulges

through the twisted brass
of the saxophone,
filtered,
muted, muddy, hazy,

by the smoke and mirrors. . .

smoke and blue lights
dance

thick on the moldy plywood platform
under the sagging sky
to which he sacrifices
the son it has sent him.

II.

"I'm all for you body and soul,"
her thick, throaty alto rasps
from its lounging-place on the baby grand,
hot sweat falling to steam
and back
on the cold smooth varnish,
echoed by the liquid honey-strings of her voice,
mirrored by fat raindrops squeezed
from the emerging electrical storm
above the gritty tin roof.

III.

Now this is true communion;
oblivious to one another,
they feed on the music
they feed each other.

Her mind clouds
with the heady,
 smoky music,
its thick wild weight
freeing, captivating,
 giving, taking,
grating, soothing,
 inspiring, blinding;
all senses long gone, poured
undiluted into the tenor that hangs
around his neck;
his brother, his keeper,
 himself.

Espresso Reading

Niki Kranich

I slip my finger down
your hardback spine
which cries
to me. No dust
on its edges, no stains
of coffee or chocolate.
Nothing to coax the ink
to slide the silk
cover off your trembling,
blushing beauty.

Dreams escape like light,
their infusion jamming
down the throats of phantom guards
who scream *get back*
here. A few drinkers look
up from the printed news
with faces full of infantile
confusion before crinkling
the paper, a shield
once more.

Classified
information: people
kill for you, to feel
your talcum skin
against nails, break
open you like a fire
extinguisher, palms
up, outstretched,
even as flames
writhe and die.

I leave you
open and alone
between the magazines
and self-help section.
There, because I broke
you, your essence
exposed to all
daily drinkers
of life, for you
give birth on this page.



Untitled
Stacy Gherardi

**Looking On as My Nephew Plays
with Caterpillars Outside**

Jonathan Boggs

For Brycie

There are those tree-scalers
who—reaching a treetop,
the crisp tail-wind of fall—
clasp at the line between sky and land
for some far-off teetering tops, like boys
with sparklers,
spattering light in July.

Then there are those who,
with fingertips like small boats, sail
the chapped channels of an old oak, smile,
and run, shoestrings flying,
away from trees
to long lives of telling stories,
making pink hands green
with wear.

Musca Volitans

Jonathan Boggs

Today I am confronted by my eyes.
How they are more a dying
hazel-grey than before,
when they were brown.
How they have turned
to things they shouldn't
have. Like when my brother—
with his then small hands
filling in wrong letters
for simple words
on Dad's new computer—
led us to naked
portraits of men
and women together.

How they have seen
similar images since
then. How never again
will they search
the fresh slate of sky
and find it blue,
uninhabited by black, squirming
flies—the floating blemishes
somewhere in my retina
Doctor says I am to learn
to ignore.



Uprising Collage
Lauren Schreiber

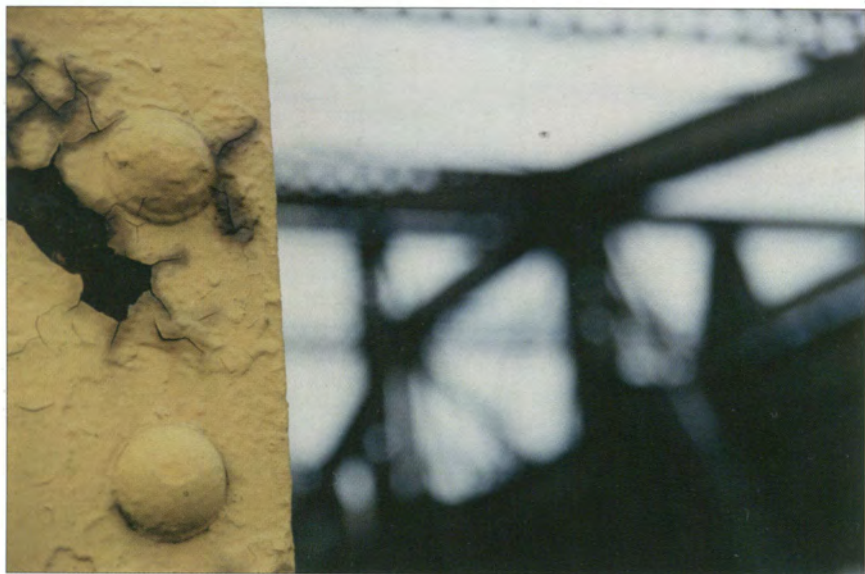


Collage: Mary Cassat Study
Lauren Schreiber



Windows of Italia

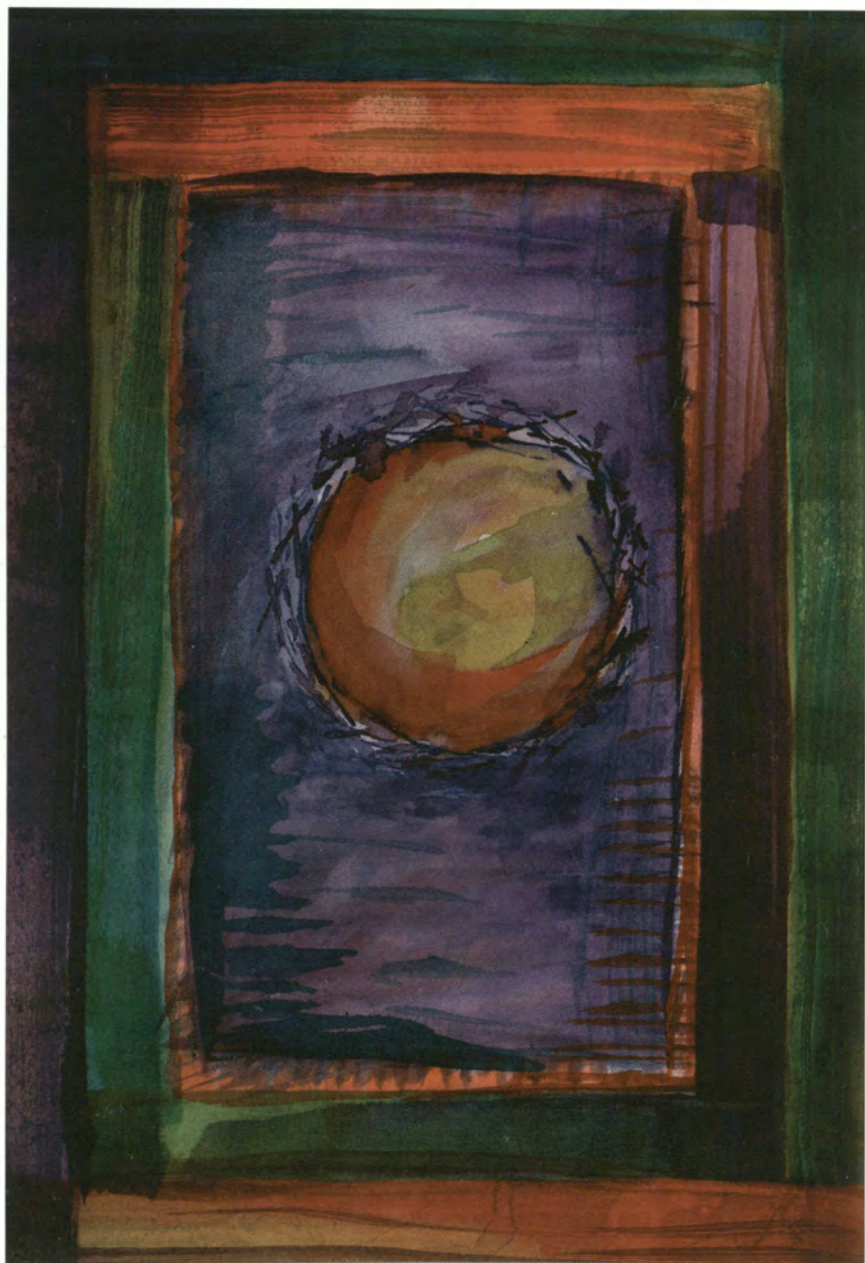
Lauren Schreiber



Untitled
Jared Swift



Untitled
Melanie Schaap



Moon Through the Window

Lauren Schreiber

Kirby

Zac Huber

"Looking back on it, I should have used a dust buster. . ." I commented.

"Actually, you shouldn't have done it at all" the nurse checking my wound said. But it is way too late for that now.

"What ever possessed you to do this anyway?" she asked.

"Well two reasons really. One is that my family always makes fun of me for getting fat every time I come home. Second, think of the market for it! Every housewife from the Midwest will want one because they will think people in Hollywood have them. College girls will want them to avoid showing up at home with the dreaded 'freshman 15.' Desperate, out of work models in New York and Los Angeles will want them to sculpt the *perfect* body. And without question, the largest market will be a toss up between middle aged men in mid life crisis and couples that are separating and looking for new mates" I thoroughly explained.

"I think you're underestimating people. Don't you think people will realize how ridiculously dangerous this is?" she questioned. Her name was Kelly, just like my good for nothing ex-girlfriend.

"Are you kidding me? I have three words for you *Jackass: The Movie*. Do you know how much money that movie made? Even though it only sat at number one in the box office for a single week, it made money, \$22.7 million. And think of the merchandising!" I exclaimed.

"That is totally beside the point. No one got hurt watching *Jackass: The Movie*. They may have been slightly less intelligent after watching it, but the kind of person who went to see it isn't exactly the next Einstein to begin with" she countered. I could tell she was agitated by my explanation because she had her hands clenched into fists on her hips.

"Is it really so hard to believe? This is America, land of the quick fix! What's that? Iraq has nuclear weapons? Then we shall bomb them! Beg pardon? You need to lose 50 pounds in two weeks so you can go to your high school reunion? It's time for the Atkins Diet! Or was it South Beach? Either way, no one should underestimate the power of instant gratification" I said, smugly.

"You are wise beyond your years young man" she said sarcastically. She began to check my vitals, which is her job I suppose, but I was determined to prove to this nurse that my idea was genius.

"It's not even a seasonal product! It's the quintessential Christmas gift because you can use it to fulfill your New Year's Resolution. Hell, if I perfect this, it may be small enough to be a stocking stuffer or fit into an Easter basket. Everyone gets more self conscious around their birthday.

It's even so diverse that once it goes out of style, novelty stores will pick it up. It is *the* perfect invention," I proudly stated.

"You are abnormal. . .and your white blood cell count is unusually elevated. Looks like you and your little gizmo will be staying here again tonight" she said, "you're going to need to hit it rich to afford this little stay."

"Oh," I said, "I was asked to leave it at home. My insurance company wanted it for evidence on my claim. But I think they're just trying to cash in on my idea. That reminds me, I bet you have great insurance being a nurse. Once my parents kicked me out of the basement I had to find my own. . . damn HMO." Unfortunately, my wanting to continue the conversation had no effect on her. She was already out of the door, and into the long hallway, on her way to check on the next anonymous cripple.

Of course my fiasco made the paper the next day, and to my surprise, I was featured on the David Letterman show for "Stupid Human Tricks: Gone Wrong." I knew it was only a matter of time before Fox wanted to showcase me in some sort of "World's Stupidest. . ." special. Sadly, no one wanted me personally, they just wanted the story about me. Andy Warhol is full of shit, where's my fifteen minutes? I'm not really sure why either, I don't look that bad, and besides, since the swelling went down, the scar doesn't look bad. But, if anyone asks, I am going to joke with people, tell them I got in a knife fight, but then cover up my story by saying I had my appendix taken out. If nothing else, I can take advantage of the "B-List" celebrity boom and go on one of those stupid Reality shows. But I refuse to eat pig uterus or wear a "bug helmet."

On the sixth day of my stay in the hospital, a representative from the Kirby vacuum company came to visit. He had heard of my little incident and wanted to know if I wanted to make light of this situation, and a little money too.

"Sounds damn good to me!" I said.

Before he would let me sign on the proverbial dotted line, he asked me to explain how exactly I set up my little gadget. I felt I could trust him, we were business partners now. It's not like there was a bet back at the office as to how the machine was put together.

"This is all there is to it," I began, "First, you need a syringe, hollow needle, baby bottle, clear plastic tubing, superglue, clear packing tape, and a *wink* Kirby vacuum. To ready the syringe, pull out the plunger and throw it away. Hook one end of the plastic tubing into the end of the syringe and seal it shut with super glue and packing tape. Next, take the nipple off the baby bottle and toss it aside. Put the other end of the plastic tubing into the cap of the baby bottle, where the nipple used to be. Seal the tubing in place with superglue and wrap it up with packing tape. Punch a hole in the bottom of the baby bottle that is sufficient to fit the

hose from the vacuum . . . I mean *Kirby* vacuum, into the bottle. Seal that orifice shut with superglue and packing tape. Because I was looking out for my own safety the whole time, I used my Zippo to get the needle red hot. It kills the germs you know . . . can't be too careful." He nodded, looking completely dumbfounded.

"How did you know how to do this? Not make the machine, your landlady says you spend most of your days watching *Junkyard Wars* on cable instead of job hunting, but perform the procedure?" he inquired.

"Oh man, that was the easy part! Wait, I forgot to say that before I used the needle I put a numbing cr me on my stomach. Anbesol I think. Do you know their people? They may want to get in on this. Anyway, have you ever seen that episode of "Real Life: Plastic Surgery" on MTV?" I asked, but obviously he had not. "Well anyway, those two girls got it done, and it looked really simple. It's an outpatient procedure for Christ's sake!" I quipped. I had seen that episode about five times before my accident, but I haven't since. I bet the producers fear litigation. Never underestimate the power of an injured man in the hospital.

"Yeah. . .but so is cataract surgery, is that your next project?" he joked. We both laughed pretty hard at that one. Well, he did, my stitches still hurt. Thank God for the morphine drip controlled by my touch of a button.

* * *

The commercial opens with me in a big, open living room. I am dressed in a HAZMAT suit and the audience cannot see my visage. There is blood everywhere. The camera pans around the room exposing a Kirby vacuum lying on its back in the middle of the floor. I take off my helmet, revealing my face of new found fame, look into the camera and say very earnestly, "When will people learn that home liposuction just won't work with a Kirby. . . they're just too powerful." The scene ends with the other members of the cleanup crew, still in their protective suits, shaking their heads. I wonder if commercials can go into syndication? That's where the real money is.

Self and Sun

Drew Blomquist

"I am no fuckin' Buddhist, but this is enlightenment," Bjork triumphantly snarls in her Icelandic accent through the high-end speaker system of Dale's Toyota. The thought dawns on me that she sounds like an angel coughing up her own heavenly phlegm during an orgasm. And it sounds great. I'm having trouble voicing this eloquently witty observation of the song to Dale, but I do manage to mutter the shortened, "This is heavenly, man" to give him some kind of idea what I'm thinking.

He looks over at me from the driver's seat, nodding, as his mouth curls into a smirk that's not too big to lose its grip on the final drag of his black clove cigarette. The window rolls down and he flicks the butt into the autumn.

"Hell yeah it is," he finally agrees after combining a singular burst of a chuckle with a cough. "This is from her fourth album, 'Homogenic.' It's the only one she produced entirely on her own."

Dale has been sharing trivia like this with me for the past three years since we met freshman year, slowly filling my head with the essentialities of the music-nerd world from which he thrives. Bjork is one of many superb artists he's exposed me to, allowing me to realize that, yes, there is other music out there worth listening to besides Miles Davis and Billie Holiday.

"Do you think she's trying to create, like, movements instead of the traditional pop song?" I inquire to the expert, attempting to speak with the sophistication of a professional critic.

Dale furrows his brow. "What the hell are you talking about, Steve?"

"Well Christ, this song's been playing for like twenty fuckin' minutes." I paint my speech with "fuckins" here and there as a testament to the fact that I've finally crawled out of the iron shell of doubt and discretion that was my youth.

Dale presses whatever button on the CD player that displays the time duration of the currently playing track, and I am baffled when I see that the song is only at the one minute and fifty-seven seconds mark. He stares at me with bulging eyes of intrigue and a glowing, bearded smile of amusement.

"Somebody's trippin'!" he roars with delight.

The CD player counter continues on, now at two minutes and three seconds, two minutes and four seconds, two minutes and five seconds . . . and a double bass beat seems to cue the screen display to shift back to the time of the day, which is apparently 4:48pm. That means

that it was about an hour ago when Dale and I were pulling out of the Burger King drive-thru. I consumed a Whopper with extra onions, no tomatoes and an eighth an ounce of psilocybin mushrooms.

Dale deserves just as much credit for developing my appreciation of hallucinogenic-induced experiences as he does for that of the music world. An additional drum loop layer suddenly emerges within the electronic landscape of this infinite Bjork song. It sounds like it's sampled from the quick metal hiss of Dale's lighter sparking my very first hit of marijuana, behind the locked doors of his dimly lit freshman dorm room.

And here I am with Dale again, my first time with mushrooms. He's not tripping himself, but rather hosting me through the experience like some sort of psychedelic tour-guide. Right now we're driving to some little movie theater I've never heard of that's having a special showing of the original *Fantasia*, which Dale insists will be an ideal setting for the loss of my mushroom virginity.

"That's called time dilation," he informs me. What? Oh, the thing where I thought the song was playing for ten times as long as it really was.

"It's a common effect. It's been almost an hour since you ate 'em, so you should be moving into the onset period of the trip—right when your neurochemistry starts to significantly change. Nice dude, that means you'll probably peak right in the middle of the creation of the earth."

He's talking about a scene in *Fantasia*, but that phrase sounds so cool outside the context. I'll probably peak right in the middle of the creation of the earth. Whoa.

"But don't you worry about time, slugger. You'll start to feel your mental clock slipping away and the present moment will resonate with you in a way you've probably never experienced." Dale pauses for another one of his efficient chuckle-coughs and shifts his voice into his stereotypical stoner impression to finish of his advice. "Just live in the now, man."

I continue to gaze at the CD player clock, but I'm no longer computing what time it's displaying. Instead I'm enjoying the hypnotic glow of the neon blue digits, which seem to rhythmically pulsate with increasingly bright intensity for every strip mall and chain store that darts past the passenger-side window.

Radioshack.

Dunkin' Donuts.

Hollywood Video.

The further west we drive down the highway into the sunset, the further

we drive from our university, the less familiar the stores.
Zel's Famous Roast Beef.
The Dawg House.
Simon Sez.

What the fuck is Simon Sez?

I shift my focus towards a big crimson midwestern sun and am freed from this unfamiliarity. The ball of fire floats motionless over the flat horizon, its warm colors blending into the glowing red letters of the signs for all these goddamn stores that now flicker in the corners of my eyes like they're the sun's hyperactive children.

How far away are we from this theater? I feel the soft intricacies of my lips opening as I turn towards Dale to ask him this question, but the words will not come.

"We got another twenty miles or so," he responds. But wait, did I actually ask him? Coincidence. I'm glad he gave me the distance rather than the length of time until we arrive, as that would mean absolutely nothing to me at this point.

What is this point, anyway? I've definitely started tripping, right? I'm finding myself making a conscious attempt to breathe slower. Is that because I'm uncomfortable?

I'm not worried about this. This is going to be fun. A new experience. I'm all about new experiences. I'm about to see a new dimension of reality.

Is there anything I can do to prepare for this? It's going to be intense. I don't know, maybe I can't handle this. I may not be ready for a new dimension of reality.

The clock says 4:50. Only two minutes have passed! Because before, it was only 4:48, right? Maybe it was earlier. I don't remember. How can I not remember? Just relax. This is only going to last for three or four hours.

God, I have a paper due on Monday, don't I? Whatever man, don't worry about that now. I can do it tomorrow. I always wait until the last minute to do my shit. I'm so irresponsible, out here doing drugs. I can't even remember what class the paper is for. What's wrong with me? What have I done to myself? I'm on drugs! God, just listen to how that sounds! So many people would be ashamed of me. I was so much better off before I messed around with this stuff. Wasn't I?

What was I before?

What am I now?

I'm trying to conjure up the elements of my life to remember who I am. An image of my father arises within the dim splotches of light behind my closed eyes, but the image morphs into a vague representation of the idea of a father, and then into nothingness.

What do I want to do with my life?

What are my ambitions?

What is life? What is the point?

Dale questions my status.

"So, how you feeling buddy?"

His voice vibrates from a realm of comfort and self-assurance that my perception has fallen out of. Amidst a pitiful struggle to speak, I long for his sobriety.

"What. . . what is going on? What is this?"

"Oh dude, you're freaking out aren't you? I should have given you a stronger pep talk before we left. . ."

He doesn't sound worried at all.

"Relax. Breathe."

Another cough-chuckle, and he continues.

"Ok, this might sound a little strange, but you have to let go your conception of self for a while. If you cling to it, you'll feel it slipping away and that'll lead to panic. You will come back man, I promise."

His head rotates steadily back and forth toward the road, then back to me- like one of those oscillating fans, cooling me with reassurance.

"Think of the trip like it's a roller coaster. You've gotten on the ride and you have no way of getting off it until it's over, so you might as well try to enjoy it. Right?"

I nod like a four-year old.

"Don't think in terms of 'Steve's perspective'. Fuck, don't even think in terms of perspective at all. This might sound cheesy, but think of being one with everything, especially your immediate surroundings."

Dale pulls a glass hitter overflowing with fuzzy marijuana from his pocket, and the sun casts a glowing red stripe along its borders.

"Thankfully for you, sir, I packed this little bastard with my finest bud before we departed. A couple puffs of this shit'll cut your anxiety down to a minimum, for sure. Not only that, but it should enhance the overall quality of your trip."

What a generous host. My speaking ability still feels impaired, but I thank Dale with my eyes. He hands me the hitter and lights it for me. Tiny clumps inside the bowl swell with an orange glow that grows brighter as my lungs inhale the smoke, which travels through the hallways of my chest and back out of my mouth.

The hitter is passed back to Dale. My arm extends to ignite the green frost with the lighter, and he proceeds to embark on a far more ambitious inhalation. Epically spiraling helixes of smoke quickly fill the Toyota, nestling inside every curve of its interior.

Think of being one with everything, especially your immediate surroundings. I'm going to forget myself for a while. What is "self" anyway?

Whatever it is, I can feel it morphing into a third person viewpoint. There is no difference between what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. There is no tense, man. "I" has escaped these boundaries of time. "My" perspective is now the perspective.

Cloud-gray highway asphalt tinged with the glow of a fading Indiana sunset continually sweeps below the car, the sedans and mini-vans of middle-class America dance around thundering semi-trucks that float ominously in the right hand lane. Fast food restaurants, gas stations and mini-malls fly along both sides of the highway, while a ruby sun being swallowed by purple streaks of clouds hovers in the center.

"I" am objectivity. "My" presumptions regarding what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen feel synonymous with reality. A moderately priced, mid-sized Kia SUV maintains a steady 55 miles per hour in the right hand lane, as the driver is a firm believer in obeying any rules set upon him. The man behind the wheel is driving home from his office job at a small software company about thirty minutes east of here. Today at work he informed his boss that one of his coworkers arrived twenty minutes late, and he hopes that his boss appreciated the tip enough to, perhaps, give him his own parking space. He thinks to himself that his outstanding attendance and strict obey of company policy surely must be setting him up for a very strong chance of a raise in the near future.

That raise, he thinks, could allow him to pay off his Kia monthly installments up to two years earlier than what his current payments amounts are allowing. That, in turn, would leave him with enough extra money to upgrade from the inadequate selection of TV channels basic cable currently supplies him with to the far superior offerings of Direct TV.

The man comes up behind Dale's car, which is currently traveling 52 miles per hour, a speed slightly lower than the speed limit and therefore slightly slower than the speed the Kia's cruise control is set at. The nature of the circumstances forces the man to put on his left blinker, look over his left shoulder to assure he can safely change lanes, and pass Dale's Toyota.

As he accelerates in the left lane, the man looks over at the occupants of the car that he is passing. He his taken back by the thickness of the smoke that billows through its interior, and the man becomes quite curious. Taking advantage of the superior elevation that his moderately priced SUV offers, the man takes a closer look at the passengers of the Toyota as he passes it. As he comes up alongside the car, he sees the driver inhaling a small glass pipe as I reach across from my passenger seat to light it.

The glass pipe reminds the man of a similar pipe that some of the

lowly colleagues from his old vocational school would use to smoke marijuana in the parking lot before class. The memory causes the man to reach the sudden realization that these delinquents must be smoking marijuana while they are driving! Have they not seen the numerous government advertisements that explain the dangers of smoking marijuana while operating a vehicle? Beyond that, what about the reefer's terrible effects on one's health? Are they not aware of the legal repercussions one faces if caught possessing this dangerous substance? These youths are a hazard to the road!

This prompts the man to immediately reach for the wireless phone he recently purchased from his local Cingular dealer and call the police. The man is pleased that his wireless phone plan gives him 200 daytime minutes on Fridays, only 32 of which he's used today, meaning that this call will most certainly be free.

The man flips the cruise control mode to off, the button for which is conveniently located on the lower right corner of his steering wheel and can thus be reached with his thumb. He is now able to slow his Kia down enough so that he can trail behind the Toyota and read the license plate number to the police.

My name is Steve, and right now I am one with everything. Especially my immediate surroundings. I am the heavenly Bjork croons that vibrate out of Dale's speakers. I am the blue digits on the display screen of the CD player. I am the strip malls, the fast food restaurants and the gas stations along highway. I am the highway, and I am the pavement. I am Simon Sez. I am the semi-trucks and I am the mini-vans. I am the pot smoke that circulates throughout the interior of the Toyota. I am Dale's wisdom of experience with hallucinogens. I am the cubicle that cages the man in the Kia 40 hours a week, and I am his wireless calling plan. I am all these cynical presumptions about his life, his thoughts and his actions that may or may not be true. I am the reflection of the blue and red sirens in Dale's rear view mirror, and I am the "reckless possession of paraphernalia" charges. I am the great, red midwestern sun that is always ultimately consumed and defeated by the flat Indiana horizon. Man.



Not For Sale
Philip Nadasdy

On Eraserhead (1977)

Joshua Vredevoogd

The man in the grey suit stares.
The woman in white returns his blankness.
She sings.

—In heaven, everything will be fine—

His empty heart resonates.

The words are . . .something. . .

They strike a chord

that drizzles on the resounding no of today.

He is empty; they are bound for fine.

He is not—

He is caught between

the black and the white,

the shirt and the tie—

He is pathetic; he is crushed.

Crash and crumble the exploding planet;

Blatantly maladjusted undesirables waddle slowly;

Small crushed souls slink to sleep.

The Professor's Corner: Kathleen Mullen

Amator Poeticus

When talking about Professor Kathleen Mullen and poetry, the word "amateur" comes quickly to mind. Not for its connotations that express a lack of skill, but rather for its root in Latin: *amo*, to love, and *amator*, lover of. Professor Mullen is a lover of poetry, and before she will admit she's a poet, she will explain that first and foremost she is a teacher. One of her larger goals as a teacher is to draw others into a kind of love affair with poetry and the written word. As she writes in the first selection in the feature, "I want – too much – for you to love the things / I love in him [Henry David Thoreau]." Although Prof. Mullen retired last spring, her goal as a teacher will surely manifest itself in other forms of teaching if not in a classroom setting.

In her own life, Professor Mullen sees writing poetry as an avocation, which challenges her to think and feel in different ways. The writing, she says does not have to be great, but it must satisfy the writer. The ability to forgive oneself exemplifies an eye keen enough to find what is good in one's own writing and a humility that leaves room for falling short. In the end, this causes a poem to grow. The poems she has selected for this feature represent this growth. Time has given shape to their form. The only anomaly is the poem "Being with Mr. Burchfield," in which she attempted to write like the painter Charles Burchfield sketched, "without correction or erasure". All three, though, are filled with a music and richness of image that deserve to be read aloud and carefully so as not only to please the intellect but also the ear.

Professor Mullen is the first to be selected for this new section of *The Lighter* which will feature each semester a professor's work. Professor Mullen has been the advisor of *The Lighter* and the poetry editor of *The Cressent*, all the while she has been an important supporter of poetry and the arts on Valpo's campus.

-Benjamin Mueller
Editor

For My Students: Henry David Thoreau

I want—too much—for you to love the things
I love in him, forgetting how I'd fought
at first, dismissed the metaphor, the springs
of mood, misread the heart. He smiles; "You've caught

infinity; awake with me, and let
your genius lead you on." Heartened, I cast
our thirty years of courtship like a net
of silver, lightly to draw you, caught at last,

to Walden woods, the dawn-struck settler there.
He slouches down the pond's far shore, intent
on seeing only what is there—but where
to make an end? Survey his heart's content,

dear hearts, and let him twirl the stars above
your ears. Link arms, find simpler paths to rove.

Cleome

for Curt Hoffman (1945-1998)

So thick on the ground they look like weeds,
Cleome come up, it seems, from every
Seed they sow. Winter doesn't daunt them,
So in spring they're a small carpet spread
Between the daffodils, a soft, mild green.
Soon it's textured; some (part of some design)
Rising above the rest, so saving their lives.
Their stems grow thick as toothpicks, skewers,
Pencils, dowels over the long season.
Downy stem hairs coarsen, pricking careless hands.

All this noticing came after I'd planted
Them myself. Before, they were only tall, feathery
Flowers in Curt's garden—pink, shades of pink
From hot to pale to blush; elegant
Lacy globes of bloom, some a handspan full,
Small parachutes that kept opening upward,
Flowers for dreaming in, for cradling
The intricate airs, the light of the world,
And for starlight. He taught me
The name—clee-OH-may—rounding the sound with
A kissing mouth, planting them
Part of the passionate universe.

Not a man's flower, you'd think, not phlox
Or hosta, or pungent marigold.
But Curt could surprise you that way. Spiky
And strong-stemmed, he could bloom in a minute
With tenderness, hold out a delicate
Hand, invite you to dream. Soft as petals,
His eyes would widen at the spaces his
Imagination held, the light cradled there.

My cleome came up on their own this year,
Some mixed in with the four-o-clocks,
Three in the sidewalk cracks. One's pink, but I
Remember planting only white last year.
Likely that's accident, just seedy persistence,
Some way, through several seasons. Or I'm just
Forgetful.

But maybe it's a gift
From that same passionate universe where my friend
Lives now, still teaching and naming and
Growing, at home in the surprising light.



Wild Sweet Peas

Charles Burchfield

Being with Mr. Burchfield

Your spare pencil
reaches down the fifty years
you're knowing
this place, this angle
of the underbrush
and snags
("without correction or erasure")
tendrils, slim stem, flower heart,
a pair of leaves
like dragonflies resting,
the mazy scent of wild sweet peas,
just now poised again after
a quick cool breeze blows by.

Mine catches at sounds
to moor your fine movement—
springtime wriststrokes.

Contributer's Notes

Ralph Asher is a junior physics major whose genius should at least partially be credited to his beautiful, cruelly honest, witty, and anonymous English-major editor, who tells him when his poetry sucks. More of his "work" can be found at <http://student.valpo.edu/rasher>, where he is accepting applications for literary groupies.

Drew Blomquist is a senior English major at Valparaiso University. His studies in creative writing have led to him to write several enticingly peculiar short stories and poems throughout his academic career at VU. "Self and Sun," a story designed to experiment with the first-person narrative perspective, showcases Blomquist's tendency to weave bizarre, poetic description into his prose.

Drawing upon his fascinating experience abroad in Hangzhou last semester, he is currently working a collection of fictional short stories that confront the American experience in China. He is also continuing to write and perform with his local hip-hop group, Hogwash, who will be seen in the upcoming Battle of the Bands.

We are *Jon Boggs* and *Philip Nadasdy* ! Ahoy! I write words. I take photographs. We are like fire and ice with a happy little puddle in between! Sometimes we change roles, becoming fire or ice respectively, and vice versa. But the puddle always exists, and it always happy. We have enjoyed four long years of enjoyment at Valparaiso University. We would like to enjoy more enjoyment, but we are smart and must graduate! We hope to make you fiery and icy happy! Respectively!

Evan Scott Bryson

O man. This baby was a corker. I wrote it over the course of sitting down maybe four times in front of the computer, which is saying a lot, 'cause usually I can just roll these puppies out if I know I've got one with wheels waiting in my spine. If the poem seems like a downer, that's 'cause it is! Way radical. The poem is true. Psychologically realistic and all. So.... Sorry Kirk and Tanda that your son uses cusswords to artistic effect in his first recognized poem. I've got others that are clean, so... just gimme a little while longer. Hullo, Andrew Jordan. Here's the poem, finally. Jerrod, Todd - you kiddos, too: Here's one of 'em, one of my poems. Jerrod, keep safe. Todd, keep your mouth clean - perv. Jeremy, Jesse: I'd either be talking about you buckos in "Sunday Bound" or "BATTLE ROBOT", but that'n was declined (this time around, gnarly!), otherwise you'd get to read about how we all fought off

Leonardo Vincent Vassily and his posse with the help of a machine from the future, all in the Target parking lot with rain just pouring, I mean, pouring down—fiction, baby. And I rhymed at the end of that'n, so don't think I'm not a poet just 'cause I'm utilizing free verse. Battle Robot = way cool, eh? Sarah Toschlog—hooray! Colleen Tichich, I haven't finished *Lost in the City*. Just FYI if you're all like WTF? This is for us all, for all of us growing up.

Zac Huber

My picture, "The Stairs" or whatever I called it, was taken at Mont Saint Michel in France when I was studying abroad in Cambridge, England.

Ian Ross Hughes

I graduate in December with a major in English and a minor in writing. I was published in the March/April edition of the e-zine Lunarosity.

Jared Swift

"I am a first year senior, psychology and visual communications major. I took this particular photograph in Boston, off of the Red Line Trail on the way to "Old Iron Sides," just outside of Little Italy. The photograph was taken in August of this year at dusk with a CANNON EOS ELAN 7 35mm film camera. My work is characterized by strong symmetry, with an initial eye-catching element. A majority of my photographs represent my appreciation for simplicity, avoiding chaos and clutter."

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the **Lighter**