

Winter 1988

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Valparaiso University

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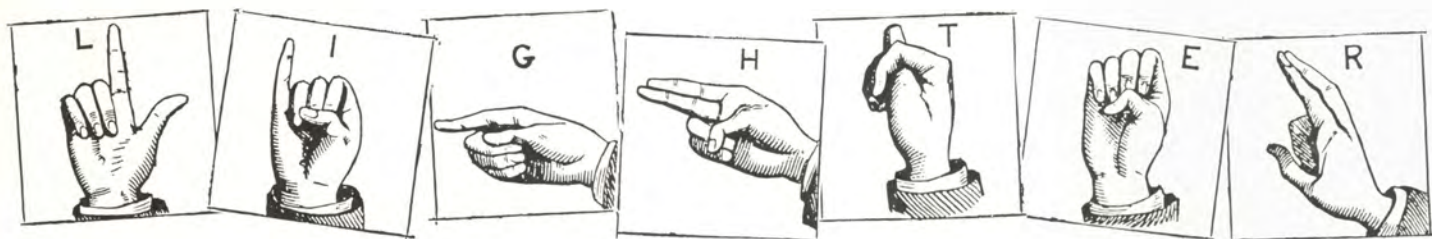
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3/7



So you think you hate poetry...

Prose pretty well holds its own. Poetry, however, has a tendency to baffle people and, as a result, is often left unread. For those of you who are fairly new to poetry, here's some optional advice. Read a poem two or three times if you really want to 'get' it. It's not a newspaper article and it should not be read like one. A good poem is more subtle, using words in a different way. Listen to the sounds and rhythm and look for double meanings in the line breaks. For 'Ocean Dictation', loosen up your western mind and trust the illogic of contradiction. In Duane Johansen's Arizona poem,

feel the open road in the poem's conclusion. With Marcia Boggs' poems, look hard for the pun in one, let the repetition of whispers flow over you in the other. Other poems will ask you to view snapshots full of meaning, to let memories of names and places swirl around you, to hear the story of a local romance gone sour, to live several lives without ever leaving the present, to share a nightmare that is both private and universal. All these poems are trying to communicate a story or feeling, but the means they employ may require you to stretch your mind a bit. We think you'll find it worthwhile.



Bill Rohde

Bareth's Tale

In Halliel fair beneath the trees,
Before the world had learned of hate,
There lived Nuniev who from the seas
Had risen pure with eyes of gold
And walked the garden with a gait
Of love. Her heart could bend the trees
It's told, but not the heavy fate
That tumbled her deep in water cold.

In meadows soft she wandered round,
With creatures crawling by her feet.
The birds would flock to hear the sound
Of winds that filled her silken veils
And sang her praises mild and sweet.
Her shadow often graced the ground
With blooming flowers by her feet,
For flowers by her face would pale.

This self-same shadow followed her
To gaze in waters still and clear
But when she spied her shadow there
Gazing toward her from the pool
She spoke into the misty mirror,
"Who are you that sees me there?
Your face is boyish, it appears,
Yet I'm a girl, or I'm a fool."

For in the pool's reflectant face
A boy gazed forth with curling locks.
He said, "Your image I replace,
I live below in nether worlds,
In adverse space beneath your docks.
But you I'm longing to embrace,
To bring you down beneath these rocks
And hold you as the day unfurls.

But Nuniev cried, "Forbid such things
Your world would tear this world of mine
For up is down and legs are wings,
Sky is earth and earth is sky.
It is not love but hate that pines
Within the praises that you sing.
But I lie safe behind this line
Of water where you'll always lie."

They boy cried thus, "You soon forget
That I your life-long shadow be.
When night draws close, when sunlight sets
I'll slip this liquid rim right through,
As shadow roaming shadows, me.
And in your womb I'll quick beget
My shadow children—set them free
To bring me ever unto you."

And Nuniev answered, "Shadow boy,
You never yet shall know my love,
For candle light I shall employ
To keep you shadow nothing more.
Ev'n at night, this world above
Can rest in all its steadfast joy,
For Nuniev's heart is fearless of
The shadow boy and shadow shore."

And so that night 'neath candle light,
Nuniev slept soundly. Shadows stayed
Beneath her form and out of sight.
And when the morning sun awoke,
O'er Halliel fair where Nuniev laid
Her head, the woods were warm and bright,
And creatures slept within the shade
Forgetting words the shadow spoke.

And so the days passed fair and warm
Until one night's capricious breeze
Blew from the lake a raging store
Which doused the candle's timid life,
And set the boy to roam with ease
Through Halliel in daemon form
To reek the damage he would please,
And pierce Nuniev with shadow knife.

Next day in Halliel, Nuniev woke,
And mourned the death of birds and beasts.
Remembering words her shadow spoke
She gazed into the turgid lake
And said, "Oh what a wretched feast
You've made of all my world's folk.
But you, unholy, wholly beast
Never again shall ever wake."

The shadow boy then said, "I will,
For I'm immortal through your life.
Yes, there is nothing that can kill
Me while you live. And while the breeze
Blows, I will call you yet my wife.
For by your womb my children will
Be born to tear their minds with strife.
But, unlike me, you will love these."

The time did come when two were born,
The children of the night and day.
Her son Nuniev named Midithorn,
Her daughter Maldi of the Wood—
She loved these more than she could say.
But these small ones inside were torn
With two strong natures to obey.
They could not hold to only good.

Each night by candlelight she slept,
Each night she held her children there.
For them and for herself she wept,
And for their father's evil hate.
In the morning she would stroke their hair
And think how shadows might be kept
From crawling from their darksome lair.
She plotted to escape her fate.

When Midithorn had grown of age,
She charged him to his sister's care,
And left her clothes upon the sage
That bordered on that mirror pool.
And Nuniev called her husband there,
"I've come here bearing mother's rage."
She dived. He raped that mother fair.
She drowned herself, and drowned that fool.

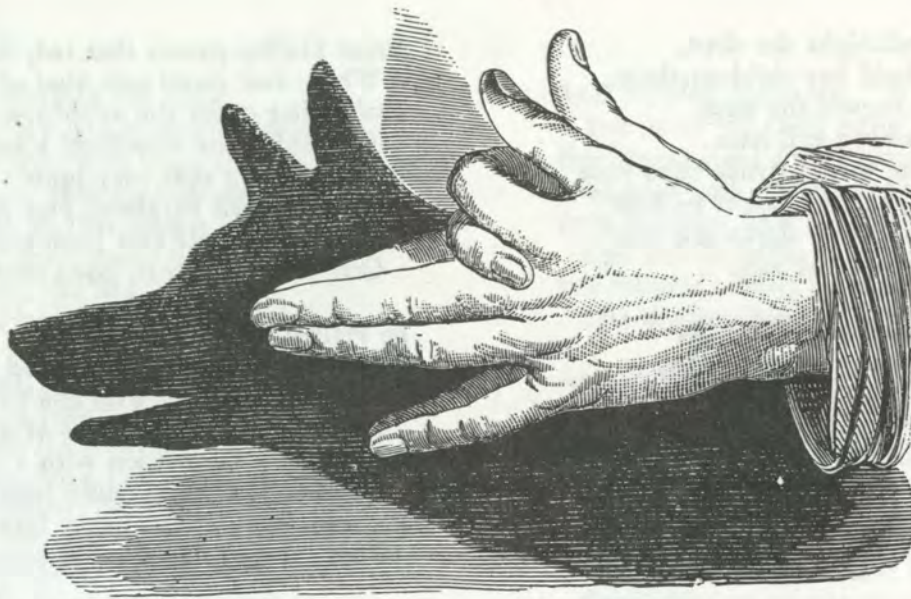
From Halliel passed that lady kind
Whose face could pale that of a flower.
Embracing death she killed the mind
That filled the woodland with such dread.
But ever from that very hour
No peace can barghests ever find,
For in us struggle two great powers,
Our comfort, great, good mother, is dead.

In Halliel beneath the trees,
Before the world had learned of hate,
There lived Nuniev who from the seas
Had risen pure with eyes of gold.
And walked the garden with a gait
Of love. Her heart could bend the trees
It's told, but not the heavy fate
That tombed her deep in waters cold.

Rob King



David Gracely



Life as a Rodent: Two Fables

The Paradoxical Existence of the Gopher

The leader of the gophers of the North Woods, a wise old philosopher-king, walked along with his pupil, a young gifted student whom the wise old gopher had chosen as heir to the throne. The elder talked of philosophy and leadership.

"My son," the old rodent began, "a gopher leader faces immense challenges. He must be both wise and innocent, both open-minded and consistent, both strong and sympathetic. In effect, a true leader must be both right and wrong."

His philosophizing had taken his full attention and the leader failed to notice that he had wandered well ahead of his student onto a country road. He turned to see an automobile speeding towards him. He became so frightened that he lost all decision-making skill. First he ran to the left, then to the right, then he froze directly in the car's path as it bore down upon him.

But just as it was about to hit him, it swerved suddenly, missed the gopher, and ran over a fox who was on his way to devour the entire gopher population.

With his fur standing on end, the wise old leader returned to his pupil, who was greatly confused by the incident and asked "How did you know that—" "Ah my son," the old gopher interrupted nervously, "the world is full of paradoxes."

On another day the philosopher king was lecturing the boy on geometry. "Now let's say we're trying to find the volume of a cylinder." The old gopher placed his hand on a long stick to display an example of a cylinder.

The cylinder, however, was not a stick but a rattlesnake and as it coiled itself up to strike, its volume seemed of little importance. The old gopher stood completely frozen from fear. The young gopher had no idea what to do. The rattlesnake hissed and rattled.

But just as it was about to strike, a fox on his way to devour the entire gopher population saw his chance for an easy meal, pounced on the rattlesnake, gobbled it up and died of food poisoning.

The old gopher, sweating and shaking, turned to his student and expounded, "My son, existence itself is a contradiction."

Several weeks later, the old philosopher was off to the South Woods, delivering a lecture on the nature of reality, and the young gopher was forced to fend for himself. He wandered along thinking of existence and paradoxes and contradictions. He became so wrapped up in thought that he failed to notice he was walking between a hunter and his prey, a large red fox. The hunter fired at the fox but hit the gopher instead, killing him instantly.

Meanwhile, the fox slipped away and devoured the entire gopher population.

Lemming Have it My Way

Thousands of years ago on the Alaskan tundra, the lemmings had a problem "There's too many of us," they said. Several young politically active lemmings decided to march to the wise middle-aged leader and present their problem to him. They went at three in the morning since they could not sleep in their overcrowded quarters. The wise lemming had a great palace of a burrow and had his own sleeping chamber which was not overcrowded at all. He was quite asleep when the young representatives charged into his room. "There's too many of us!" they shouted.

"Oh, go jump off a cliff," the wife lemming grumbled drowsily.

The young lemmings ran outside and announced that their leader had told them to jump off a cliff. The flock charged blindly toward the cliff and jumped off. They were all killed except those who slept through the incident. The survivors saw the wisdom in what the wise middle-aged lemming had said and decided to institute the plan again if conditions demanded it.

Several weeks ago in the South Pacific, a Naval fleet of sea turtles noticed small rodent bodies floating in the water. They decided to investigate the source. So they set sail for Alaska, fully armed with the latest, most advanced weapons.

Upon reaching the Alaskan coast, a delegation of sea turtle officers went ashore and after only a few questions discovered the meaning behind the floating corpses.

Back aboard the commanding ship, the top-ranking officers met to discuss the problem. After hours of deliberation and discussion, the turtles reached a conclusion: Suicide is wrong and it must be stopped.

Once again the sea turtles sent ashore a delegation, this time armed with pamphlets such as "Ten Facts You Should Know Before Committing Genocidal Suicide" and "How to Control the Population of Rats, Mice, Gophers and Other Rodent Pests." They brought specially-designed lemming birth control pills and condoms and tried to educate the lemmings on how to use them. But not one lemming could see things from the sea turtles' perspective. Everything they did was met with fierce opposition. "Get away from here!" the lemmings told them. "Next week we will once again leap to our deaths whether you like it or not."

The next week the lemmings ran blindly to the cliff, but when they saw the sea turtle fleet anchored just off the coast with all its high-tech weapons pointed at them, they halted before jumping. They formed a long line down the cliff's edge.

"NOBODY JUMPS AND NOBODY GETS HURT," the turtle admiral announced through a ship's PA system.

There was a long frozen moment and then one brave lemming took the fateful leap. He was blown to bits before he hit the water.

"Better let 'em have it," the admiral said to his crew.

When the sea turtles were finished, not one lemming was left standing and not one lemming had successfully plunged to his death.

Satisfied that they had prevented millions of suicides, the sea turtles set sail for Southern California, where, they had heard, some whales planned to beach themselves.

Brian Jung

chapel of doom

I woke up this morning
feeling like a mead-hall bully
my palate was aching
for the taste of Christian *tartar*

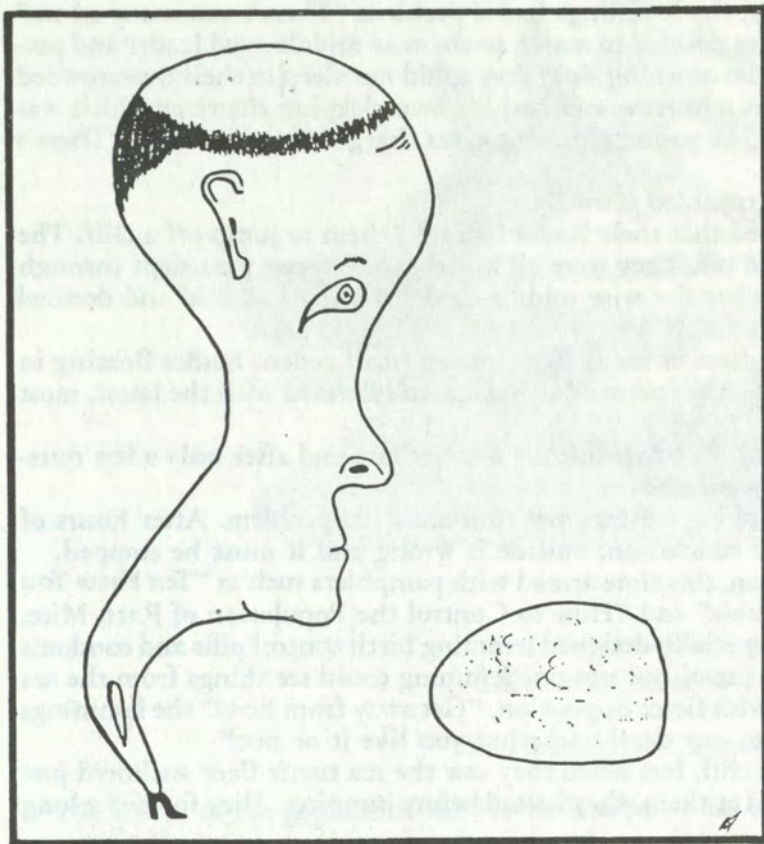
Went on the rampage tonight
no Bible Study for me
at the inside of the chapel door
was waiting a whopping great Dane

Now I stumble home bleeding
waylaid by your braggartly deity
moaning because my shoulder has been torn
by the heroic hand of Yahweh



Pat Burnette

Dumbism: Representative Examples

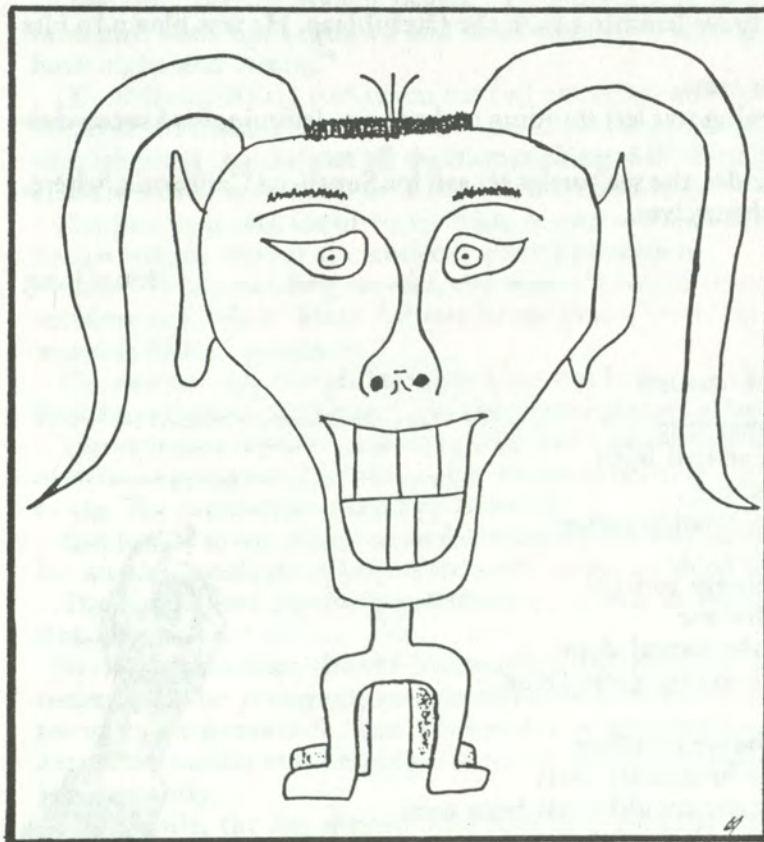


The wind blows in my ear.
I can feel it swirling in the emptiness
Of my skull.
Then it escapes, unhindered.

—Masson Baton
(Dumbist poet)

This Scandanavian painter can hardly be called a Dumbist. His style belongs unquestionably to a pre-Dumbist movement known as Idiotism. He was, however, essential to the formation of Dumbism and greatly affected the work of Jan Jensen who said of Jorgsen, "He is absolutely the stupidest painter alive." Jorgsen despised scholars who attempted to interpret his paintings, insisting that "My work is quintessentially meaningless."

1. *Man wearing heels and egg*, 1904. Eilert Jorgsen, Norwegian (1870-1942)



Chien, during his most fervent artistic period, was an active member of the occult. In this painting, he claimed to have portrayed Satan as "a nice guy if only he weren't so deformed." Later, Chien fell in love with a nun, converted to Catholicism and began painting angels in much the same style.

2. *Satan*, 1917. Paul Chien, French. (1880-1954)



3. *Peace*, 1940. Daniel Bentley, American (1910-1967)

This highly celebrated and controversial work marks the climax of Dumbism, shortly before its shift into Sheer-Unintelligiblism. Scholars debate ceaselessly over the forms in this painting—whether the central figure is a cloud or a well-roasted chicken, whether the sandwich is tuna-fish or PBJ, whether the small figure in the upper-left hand corner is a bird or a representation of Bentley's mother. Communists, Fascists and Freudians alike have pointed to this work as support for each's cause.



4. *Untitled No. 4*, 1935. Georg Spitten, German (1900-)

Spitten was often criticized by his contemporaries for his high IQ (108 compared to the Dumbist average of 74.3). He attempted to combat this disability by beating himself over the head with a large silver spoon—now on display at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Some critics argue that Spitten is not a Dumbist at all but belonged to a distantly related branch known as Dullism.

Brian Jung

Harvey Dreamer

So little of what might happen
does happen.

—Salvador Dali

Your job keeps your hands
busy but gives you plenty
of time for your vocation:

working every factory in the seven shades of grey
or going back to law school; wearing white collars or waiting
on white-cloth tables, unplugging hair-clogged sinks; working
job after job till you've run out of contacts
or pink slips upon which you then rest
your drink,

loving every woman from the first grade teacher
to your wife's blonde sister to the neighbor's daughter
who's barely legal; marrying those your father would
love, or hate, in cathedrals full of echos or forests
barren but for leaves,

dying dozens of times: a drowning at the cottage trying
to save your only son; double gunshot wound from the cruel
crossfire of a robbery; suicide by hanging when your wife leaves with
your brother; and the worst, beginning inside
your bones and blood and ending in a hospital bed,
but slowly, giving you plenty of time...

Planning all futures so that
when one arrives, you slip
into it like it's the only one,
an old show waiting, warm
and foot-worn by the fire.



Bill Rohde



Whispered never to the foggy night—

Never watched him, taking off his clothes

Whispered never

never will again

Outside his window watch him with that man

Watch him watch them taking off his clothes

Never whispered never will again

Marcia Boggs

Ours

He said, "I love your glasses"
And he leaned across and gently took them off
Just 17; already he has
quite the way with a cliché.
I am not chastised—it is I, after all,
Who's using him.

Mary wears a big, red "A" upon her chest
And she's not kidding when she finally lets it go
Every word you've ever heard
is true; her lips to God.
The rebellion to watch is inevitably that
From those with something to rebel against.

"You know, there's something poignant in a kiss."
Ah, yes—your kiss contains the world and more
To the point; more than one needs
or wants responsibility for.

Our tryst is no mysterious thing (hard as we try).
A well-placed pun is no escape
From pathetic lies,
And well-worn insurgencies; straining at the seams
Torn at the knees,
And oh so fashionable.
God save us (make your choice)
From all we've learned
And even worse, from all we know.

Marcia Boggs



If You Look at it Right

See the same old go-round down: at last that moment's here.
I never know how to say goodbye
Like empty storefront windows staring quiet tears
Quickly reflecting one brief passing moment...never quite enough.
When many worlds collide so suddenly it's hard to understand explosions
Of fear rippling to the surface of your face or mine.
The smells of empty lots and ghosts I see from all and each and every face
Half-turning down my hometown streets
They sing like sirens marching on to fall
And changing winter colors.
Sunshine stain across fire-cracker parks and long dead romps
The laughter shriveled down to its bones
So many teeth set close on edge
And one more dream quiet face sets off silent noise again.
Inches on maps tease fantastic highway ramble runs, turn
Across the forever black expanse of midwest nightlight skies...
And Chinese incense crawls the carpet length, serene, unknowing,
Calming changes clean,
Content to set the sun and wait
For rain to turn to snow to turn to winter sea-walls
Caught by Big Wheel neon streaks in 3D strands of still tree shadows.
And awake at night I can hear again
Her slow sweet whisper
That nothing lasts forever
But no things come to nothing.

Fritz Eifrig



Eric Levin

Time Low

The snowball you threw
On Caroling Night
Would have missed but I slipped
And got floored
My passion was simply a saddle
For you
And you rode me
Until you got bored
I followed you deeper
Then deeper
Remember Time Low at quarter past two?
The hints that you dropped
Were like bread crumbs
They left me lost here searching
For you
But you were so good at hiding
In shadows
Because you knew that all the while
I loved what I thought you were thinking
Behind that I've got a secret
smile

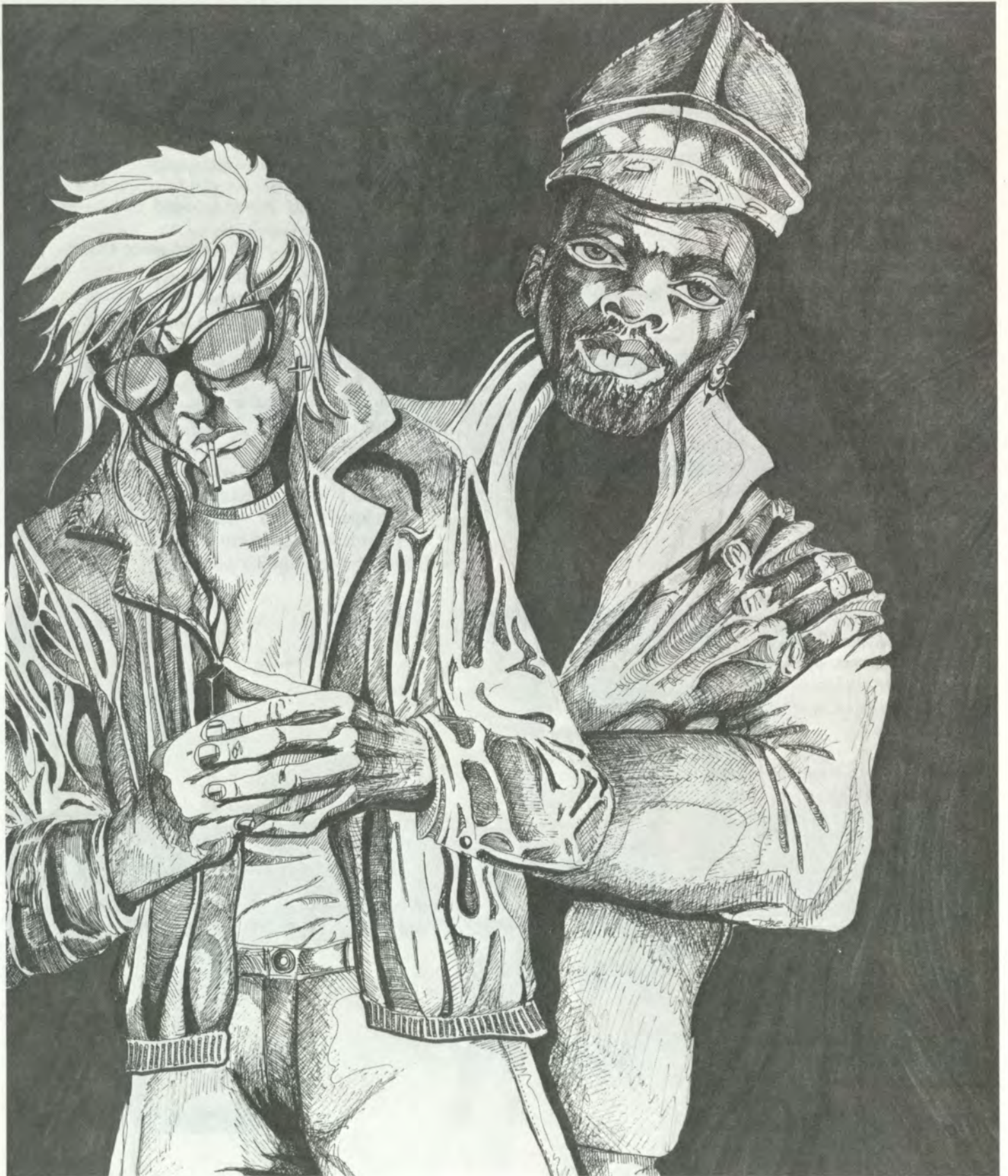
Then one Saturday night
I regained my sight
So you turned on your act
As you turned out the light
We danced until dawn
But the music was wrong
And your skeletons gone
So we laughed while a freshman threw up
On our lawn
I called him names
While you fanned the flames
Until it was blistering hot
And my toes gripped the sand
Your mind on sea gulls
And sailing
And such
I wondered out loud
If we'd be here next year
You told me I wondered too much

Maybe you were right
Because I wonder what you say
To your roommate
Do you tell her
You didn't have fun
Making love
To the national anthem
And drowning
In the Florida sun

I walked to your room
On Good Friday
You were with him
In front of the store
A handful of change
For the video games
Your eyes laughed when I called you
A whore
Have you thought of me once since then?
Because last night I dreamt
That I touched you
In the phone booth
In front of the store
I slipped a finger in
To check for change
And said I'm not lost in the dark
Anymore

John Speckhard





Kenny Dale

Street

Around here all you need to get out of a bad scene is something that looks like a blade. Most of the guys on the street'll come after you for money or whatever, but they don't want to get messed up.

Usually.

I've got that comb in my pocket, the one I ordered out of an old *Spiderman* when I was eight. Dad said it was just like the one he had when he was a kid and we went looking for his in the boxes in the attic but it wasn't there. Anyway all it really has to do is make the right kind of sound, like a blade coming out and that scares people enough that they'll lay off.

I don't know if these guys see me. They look kinda dangerous, like maybe they might not be afraid of the comb even if it was a knife, which of course it isn't and these guys look like they wouldn't be too scared of gettin' cut up a bit with a switch anyway. Hardcores—they look like the ones that hang out over on Willard in the burned-out apartment building. They smell like sweat and beer and other things that don't smell too good. One's got an empty Little Kings bottle that he's trying to break on the wall, like he's gonna use it for a knife like in old movies or something.

They started hanging behind me on Clyde after I came out of Record Mart cause like a crack I forgot to put away the cash I got from selling all those old Zeppelin albums I stole from Kreeger's girlfriend. So here I'm walking out on the street and I'm playing with twenty bucks like some tuckass from downstate so these 'cores get on my ass cause they figure they'll scare it out of me or maybe bust a few bones in the common cause. I'm like so damn clueless sometimes.

I'm down behind a dumpster at the back of the alley and if they come back here either I whip out the blade real fast and get past 'em before they see it's a comb or I get my ass wiped with a brick wall. One advantage of wearing black is that people can't see you in the dark so you have an advantage when you're hiding from someone but these boots have real thick soles and I'm sure they'll hear me if I try and move. Unless...

There's another dumpster on the other side of the alley and if I can get up there I can get on the fire escape and cut over the roof. Wayne said he had to do that once when some deal he made went bad but that's Wayne and he'll be dead before he's 25 with all this dealing crap. Plus he goes through his own stuff all the time and Andrew and I are always coming down to the apartment and there's Wayne stoned off his ass listening to old Tommy Dorsey records and sayin' like he's God—Tommy Dorsey, not Wayne, who'll probably never meet God and might get thrown outta hell for screwin' off.

There's an old Seagrams bottle behind me and if I can pick it up real quiet maybe I can throw it...but I mean real quiet cause skins have real good hearing what with no hair in their ears or nothing.

That was a joke. I try to keep a sense of humor when I'm about to get my brains beat out so maybe when it happens I can just point to 'em and laugh and say, "Ha ha you assholes that's not my brains" and then spit blood on whoever did it and then die.

Okay, I got the bottle. There's still some Seagrams in the bottom but it's probably mostly just backwash so it's not worth drinking even though I could use one right now. Maybe a beer when I get back to the place.

Someone's got some old Stones album on real loud a few streets over and I'm almost starting to sing before I remember where I am and huck the bottle real hard and high towards the mouth of the alley. That last mouthful goes all over me when I throw.

The skins turn around when they hear the smash and I'm glad they haven't seen too many old movies or else I'd be really screwed right now. I take off across the alley and then I'm up on the dumpster and Damn! I take this flat-footed step down on the lid that makes it go "BONG" real loud. The skins turn round and see me and start coming so I jump up real fast and go up the ladder. They're starting up on the dumpster right behind me so I pull up the ladder and start goin' up the steps. The 'cores are yellin' at me and sayin' they're gonna rip me apart money or no money when they find me and I yell back something that's anatomically impossible but real funny to think about skins doing.

They're starting to give each other legs up to try and get the ladder down so I haul ass up the escape to the roof. The roof door's locked but it's an old lock and my boot's stronger so I'm in real fast. Then I try and lock it up again and stick this old chair under the doorhandle like Andrew did to me when I was in the can the other day.

I get out real fast before the hardcores think of goin' round to the front door. There's nobody on the street and I start heading down Walcott towards Bingley where the Villa Costa is. That's this restaurant where me and Andrew work. Andrew's working tonight and he should be off by the time I get there. Just in case the skins come after me I kind of move faster than average, but skins usually have real short memories and I'm not real worried cuz they'll probably forget about me and mug some old lady.

This Buick drives by with New Order blaring real loud and these baiter trendy bitches from the suburbs yell at me and ask how to get to the Eyeball and I flip 'em off. They yell at me and drive away but I don't feel too bad cause trendies'd get mugged or lynched at the Eyeball. Sometimes Andrew and I go to watch and Wayne goes there a lot to sell to the rich high school kids from the 'burbs. I'm almost glad my parents were fascists and kept me in a police state so I didn't turn out like some of these high school all-American quarterback fags who beg daddy and mommy for an extra fifty bucks "allowance" and then blow it on one of Wayne's Coffee Mate mixtures. Sometimes he dicks the assholes real bad and there's nothing but baby laxative and coffee mate and these suburban kids who never bought before act all cool until someone tells 'em they got done. I think it's funny cause these kids still buy from Wayne even though half the time it's like he cuts laxative with coke instead of the other way around. If they're stupid enough to buy the stuff then it serve 'em right.

There's all these flyers around for the Terminal Ground show at Hopper's. Me and Andrew are goin' for free 'cause we know this guy Tim from Locked Claimants—they're the opening band—and his band gets an extra guest list 'cause Ron, the drummer, is gay and he lives with one of the Hopper's bouncers so almost

everybody the band knows gets in free and anyone they don't like gets beat up and thrown out, which is a pretty good deal, depending on how you get along with them. The fag stuff makes me nervous but I know Ron isn't a flamer and I can turn my back on him without worrying about him moving in or something. Anyway I got the new Terminal Ground album at Walpole Records for five bucks cause I had a coupon from the Reader. It's pretty good, they sound a lot like the Sisters but Hereward isn't as deep-voiced as Andrew Eldritch. There's this song on it called "Mire" that's really wild and full of good guitars so if Andrew and I ever get a band together we're gonna cover it, as long as we can learn the solos.

Under the Clement Street bridge there's these two old guys who push around a shopping cart from Super-Low and fill it up with empty bottles and cans and some other stuff I never looked too close at. The one's named Ed and we call him Chainsaw Ed even though he probably never saw a chainsaw before but we figure he'd like cuttin' people up with one. The other one's called Martin and he's got a glass eye that he likes to take out and polish in front of you. They're both real crazy and I hope they don't talk to me 'cause all they do is hit people for money for cheap booze.

"Hey hey hey how you doin' there son?" Martin talks real fast and kinda high-pitched like he's on speeders or something.

"You're looking well," says Chainsaw Ed and his eyes are glimmering even though they're real filmy. Martin has his glass one out for a cleaning.

"I don't have any money," I lie and they know I'm lying.

"Just a little bit, please," Martin is trying to put his eye back in and drops it in a puddle and he wipes it off on his undershirt which used to be white maybe ten years ago.

"We're the underprivileged, you know," grins Chainsaw Ed like I just gave him a skilsaw to mess with and by some coincidence there are small children playing in the street. I throw some change into the street and they fight over it as I walk away.

"There's the bastard!" A Little Kings bottle explodes by my foot and I run into a streetlight avoiding shrapnel. If this was a cartoon there'd

be all those little asterisks and extra key symbols and crap in a bubble over my head but I don't know how to pronounce those.

I don't look back. I just run like I'm not ever gonna see my ass again if I don't which is probably true 'cause if I stop I'll have three pissed-off skins on my back and they won't feel like playing Trivial Pursuit. I've got half a mile to go before I get to Bingley and I might not make it.

I step on a beer can and feel myself going down but I come out of it. Up at the corner there's Witton Park and I can cut the distance off by cutting through it but it's a tougher course. I cut across the street with the skins behind me and I hear one swear when he steps on a bottle and falls on his ass.

I'm over the low fence in a jump but my jacket gets caught and I feel it rip some but I just yank it free and start through the park. The ground is wet and muddy and there are trees all over the place and benches, too, which I didn't remember until I almost raked myself on one. The hardcores are still behind me. One got his mohawk caught in a tree branch and it'd be pretty funny if I wasn't gonna get killed.

Meanwhile my heart's going pound pound pound and my boots are getting full of mud and I'm having a hard time not falling on my face.

There's the border fence, and past it, on the other side of the street, is Villa Costa. This fence is higher, but I'm almost there and that inspires me to climb fast.

Somehow, my foot gets stuck in the fence and I'm hanging half over it while the skins run up to me.

The one in front grins and pulls out a switch, a real one and not a comb. I don't think my "blade" would be too impressive here.

He moves up to take a slash at me and as he starts I get my foot free, so he cuts my leg a little and my boot catches him in the face as I fall over the fence. I'm up real fast and running around a parked van while the skins are coming over the fence, and I'm so scared I forget to look and almost get run over by this Impala that's hauling through a yellow light. I jump and go over the hood and fall off onto the street and I can feel my nose bleeding but I'm across the street while the guy in the Impala beeps his horn at the skins standing in the street watching me as I run inside Villa Costa and into the back. Andrew follows me and all the guys in the back look at me and ask crap like what war was I in. I go in the washroom and clean myself up and spit blood in the urinal for a minute and then go out and sit in Andrew's section and order dinner just to piss him off.

George Zahora

From Where he Was

"Lady, you gotta be careful about giving hand-outs to strangers. They don't want you thinking you're better than them."

She heard him hacking on the sidewalk, asked him in. Knotted rug hair, he smelled like the dumpster he slept in.

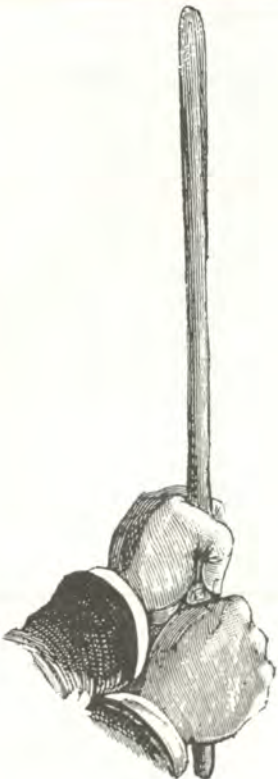
Later, the cops would have to scissor his pants, peel the strips that'd grown onto his skin.

She gave him a sandwich, some soup. He never thanked her, just kept thinking she was just a bad break away from where he was. Nobody asks for little demons like red smoke scratching your eyes out from the inside.

She brushed a crumb from her habit and told him to wash up. He took her last twenty bucks and kicked her till she died.

[Based on a true story.]

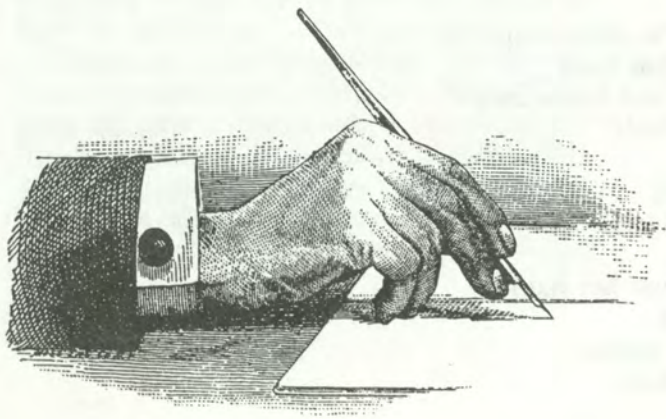
Bill Rohde



1974 Buick

The sky has greyed the past
few years, clouds clutter above
me, the wind seems stronger,
and today, from afar, I heard
they took you away.
Back then it was easy
to steer along dusty country
roads; we'd feel our souls
in our throats as we did eighty
over those short hills. I laughed climbing
in when your torn seat snagged
my faded jeans. Chipped and rusted
outside, you could always warm me
under that cold winter moon, we'd rest,
watch strong Orion silently
traverse the clear sky, I'd ask how
he got there. That night
of senior prom I lost
a pearl earring, in the midst
of steamed windows and rustling slips,
and never found it.
When I left, I left you
alone in the garage, unused, but returning I cried
in disgust when, entering, you caught
my hose, and failed
to start up at once, the old way. I wish
you could hear me
now, under dusty sky, one heap alone
among so many, for I finally feel
ancient tears shed
on your seats, and recall with a slight,
silent smile that between your cracked crystal
and flattened framework somewhere
lies my pearl.

Amber Schaefer



Letter after the Movie

Again, from the el
after a private movie and in a hand
that careens across this scrap
of paper with every sway and buck
of the car along imperfect
rails. Beyond my broad window,
past the interior reflections
of fellow passengers and outline
of my face, the rain desperately
wants to turn to snow,
but can't, hesitating beneath
streetlamps in silvery whorls
and slowly coating cars in white
sheaths of ice. If it weren't
for the glistening pavements
underneath us I could talk
myself into believing the first
snow of the season. Perhaps
as I lay naked on my bed copying
this into legibility I will look
out a window clothed in condensation
to find true flakes floating
down on a city made clean and clear
by the rain. That is when
the music should leap from where it
has been playing through my head
all evening to provide a soundtrack
for time, credits rolling trapping
me in what could be a happy
ending against warm flesh and roving
fingers. But few things end
and the train slides beneath
the ground, rolling to a stop.
At the sheltered bus stop
there's a stooped old man with a cane
and yellow cap pacing behind
the benches talking to himself.
I've given him coffee money
before, but now, I don't even wonder
what he's saying.

Eric Appleton



Valpo

There's a hatred out on the big city streets
that greets little kids at the playground.
There's hatred too in the rural southern town.
And it lynched some poor nigger chained to a tree.
It's the hatred that fills the gun racks in pick-up trucks.
It's the hatred that flies a confederate flag in a dorm room window.
"Yeah, just last fall the Nazi party carried an American flag in Cincinnati, Ohio."
Hop into the 4x4 and its off to the hatred rally all the haters will go.
They boil and fester out there in the woods.
Hatred burned a cross at a Valpo High football game when we played
the all Nigger visiting team.
It's just like the hatred that put 13 million Jews in summer
camps across the Rhineland.
It's Cicero, Illinois with a bomb in a nigger's living room.
It's Skokie, Illinois with Nazi picketers taunting shoppers
at the Tel Aviv bagel store.
Or maybe it will be Valparaiso, Indiana a future site of a battle in
the great hate war.

Andrew Griffin



Aaron Becker



Barb Brown

J.P. Glass at the Tee-Shirt Factory

This is a story about a fight with this girl I used to know pretty well. It's kind of a personal story, so I'm going to tell it using this persona I've picked up reading this author J.D. Salinger. I don't know why I like him so much, the books he writes aren't true at all, actually they're all loads of crap, but I guess I love the way his characters say "hey buddy" all the time. I mean, the story can be kind of dumb, and not *mean* that much and all, and the characters can still say neat things sometimes. It's like Shakespeare. Boy, his characters could be cleaning a goddamn *sink* and still say really great things. But anyway, this girl caught up with me a couple of years ago, when I still worked at the Tee-Shirt Factory. Ran the Tee-Shirt Factory, actually. I sort of owned the place.

When she walked in I was holding up this tee-shirt design I had just made. It was pretty late, around ten o'clock or so, and I was working in my spare time. I mean, I was doing stuff that I didn't really expect to sell to anybody, stuff that was really just for my own amusement. This one I was working on I liked especially well. There was an ugly, dirty little boy, with kind of a funny nose, and crossed eyes and all that, and he was kind of bending forward to get a kiss from this really cute little girl. And she was smiling real broad and getting ready to plant this big kiss right on the boy's dirty little cheek. And the boy was holding a quarter in his grubby hand, sort of behind his back, but still where the girl could see it if she looked pretty hard. And there was this caption, in really cute flourishing script, that read, "Money Changes Everything." Anyway, I was working on the tee-shirt design, not really chuckling, but grinning in this sort of ironic way I have, when this girl I used to know walks right into the Tee-Shirt Factory. It was a really hot night, and I had left the door open because the air-conditioner had really given up the ghost and was absolutely not running, and so it was pretty toasty in the old Tee-Shirt Factory. But even though the door was open, I didn't expect to see Micky and all standing right in front of me. I mean, I hadn't seen this girl in years. Just all of a sudden, completely out of the blue, she was standing right there in front of me. I was pretty surprised, I can tell you. She just stood there, kind of waiting for me to speak or something, but I didn't have anything to say. So we just stayed the way we were, with me sitting at my board, holding up this tee-shirt design and all, and Micky just standing there, with her arms folded across her chest. It was a really cute chest.

"Hello, J.P."

"Hi, buddy. You've got a really cute chest, you know that, buddy?"

Micky looked really mad for a moment, and then she looked just about ready to cry. I never know what to say to people I haven't seen for a long time. I guess I could have skipped the part about her chest.

"That is all you can think to say to me after three years? No explanations or excuses or apologies? Absolutely nothing to tell me but I've got cute *tits*?"

"Um, so how are you, Micky?"

"I'm sorry' would have been nice. I would have even accepted something predictable, like: 'how did you find me,' or 'what are you doing here?'" But no. Even the simplest social skills are still completely beyond your grasp. You..."

Micky was basically a nice kid, but she really liked to beat you over the head with a point when she was angry with you. I mean, she could go on forever if she was mad at you, and really on a roll. I didn't want her to get on too big a roll, so I sort of stood up and gave her a kiss.

She stopped dead, because I always go straight for the old lips when I kiss a girl. When I let go, she looked like she was going to slap me a good one. Instead, she punched me right in the stomach. I nearly threw up. Micky has a really good punch.

"You son of a bitch! How dare you kiss me after what you did? Three years, and you think you can insult me and kiss me and not even apologize?"

"I never apologize. You know that, buddy." My voice was really muffled, because I was doubled up and sort of clutching my stomach.

Micky stopped being mad and got concerned. "You're really hurt aren't you? Let me help you to the chair."

She got me settled in the chair, and I sat there, clutching my stomach and all. I felt pretty bad.

"I didn't mean to get so angry with you. I promised myself I would be really calm when I came to see you. I guess I forgot what you're like. Sorry I was so bitchy."

"It's not happening now, so don't worry about it." That's a really favorite sentence of mine. It handles problems in the past and the future pretty thoroughly.

"You haven't changed much, J.P." Micky pulled up a chair, and turned it around, and sort of straddled it, looking at me. She looked really cute doing that, but she wasn't trying to look cute, she just sat in chairs that way. Micky's

pretty short, and she's got this light brown hair she wears in a kind of crew-cut. She got the idea from this Laurie Anderson person who she listens to constantly. The crew-cut looks really good on Micky, a lot better than it does on Laurie Anderson, but since old Laurie did it first I suppose she deserves the credit. Anyway, Micky sat there, just staring at me. She's got these fantastic eyes, and it really kills me sometimes when she stares at me, but I really wasn't in the mood. I was kind of uncomfortable, actually.

"Why did you do it, J.P.? Just leave like that?"

"I don't know exactly, anymore."

"But you didn't even leave a note. Not a word of explanation. Just one day you're there and the next you've checked out with no forwarding address."

Micky and I had kind of set up house in this hotel in Chicago. We moved in right after graduation, but we were living in separate rooms because we weren't married and the management wanted to see a goddamn *marriage license* if you were even going to hold hands in the lobby or anything. I moved out very unexpectedly one night.

"Don't you know, I wasn't just mad at you for running out on me. I was really worried about you. Anything could have happened to you. Why did you do it?"

I really hate it when people ask questions like that. "Why." There's really no way you can answer, because you don't know. You can't know. There's a thousand reasons you can give, but half the time they're really just excuses you made up, and the other half is just stuff you were taught to believe were reasons, and in the end it's all pretty damn arbitrary anyway. I mean, it's very hard to say why anything happens. But people always want an answer, and it has to be one that makes sense. I hate that part the worst. Talk about your loaded decks.

"It's really hard to say at this late date, buddy. But it's good to see you again. Would you like to go to dinner, or to a movie or something?"

"You're honestly trying to stick to that bullshit about 'living in the present'? J.P. I really like you, even after the way you shafted me at the Royal, but I wish you'd get your theories straight."

The Royal was the hotel we were staying at. Micky kind of worded that sentence funny, but I thought I better let it pass. Anyway, I was a little upset with the part about getting my theories straight. I was an art major at college, but I always thought my theories were pretty goddamn straight, a lot straighter than most of the *philosophy* students.

"My theories are perfectly straight, buddy." Micky sighed. She has a really cute chest, if I forgot to mention that earlier.

"You've got a really cute chest, buddy."

Micky sort of smiled. She reached out and held my hand, which was hanging free since my stomach had stopped hurting. Her hand was pretty warm, and it was nice holding it again after three years. I hadn't forgotten as much about Micky as I probably should have in that space of time. Micky looked into my eyes and squeezed my hand.

"You're theories are not perfectly straight, they're completely fucked."

Micky could say things like that with this really sweet, concerned look on her face. I really used to like her a lot.

"I don't even know where to start, J.P." Micky let go of my hand and started prowling around the room and talking. It was kind of nice watching her, even though I got a little dizzy. "You seemed so well-adjusted at college. Not dead to the world and ready to swallow every piece of bullshit you ran into. Just able to think about where you were and what you were doing without freaking out or anything. I always used to say you could see life steadily and see it whole."

"You were fantasizing, buddy. I could never see life whole, and now I can't even see it steadily."

"You could three years ago. J.P., what's wrong with you? I looked for you for a whole month before I gave up, and I just found out your address here by chance. Three years ago you were painting and reading and *coping* and now you're out here designing *tee-shirts*, for God's sake."

"What can I say, buddy? You took the package deal and it didn't work out. I told you when I met you I never apologize. It's just not worth it. Things happen. No, they just occur. I liked what I was doing, I liked living in Chicago, and I liked being with you. Then it stopped working out."

"But what happened? We didn't even have an argument the night you left. It was a perfectly normal night."

"No it wasn't, buddy. It wasn't normal at all. You keep acting like the only things that happen have to be on the outside where you can see them. It's not that way, buddy. No sir."

"So it just came to you that it 'wasn't working out'? Where did it come from, J.P.? Was it a message from heaven? Jerry Falwell on TV? A stray fortune cookie? I want to know. It's very important to me."

Micky can get pretty verbose and all. She was an English major.

"It's pretty hard to explain."

"Try hard. I really want you to, J.P. I don't think I'm ever going to be able to forgive you if you don't."

"That's the whole thing! That's it right there! What do you mean, 'forgive'? You've already forgiven me if you're talking to me. If I say the wrong thing you might get mad and walk away, but how long will that last? A few hours? Days? Or until your memory slips when you start to get senile? Or maybe you won't walk away. You might punch me again or something. And whatever you do, it's purely chance that you did it and purely chance that you were in the mood to do it. It's an ounce of some chemical somewhere or other that decides whether you forgive me or not. Forgiveness is too arbitrary for me, buddy. And that kind of stuff is all you care about. Christ. Forgiveness."

Micky looked really shaken, and I felt pretty bad. That kind of stuff can really get to you, even if you know it's all chemicals. But she asked for it, and I couldn't hold everything back.

"All right, J.P., if you feel that way about it, I won't try to use my emotions as a lever anymore. Just for a joke then, just as a diversion, could you please tell me what I did wrong?"

"Look, Micky, it wasn't you. I mean, if it was, I'd let you know. I just got kind of tired of the *ridiculousness* of the thing. I mean everything. I mean, it was so damn...arbitrary. I mean, what was really happening, or what could have happened but didn't, or something entirely different, it started to get really mixed up."

"Absurd. Is that the word you're looking for?"

"Yeah, buddy, that's the word."

"Jesus Christ, J.P., you are one self-centered S.O.B. You are really more screwed up than I thought. You sound like you got drunk and read *The Stranger* one night, and woke up with a hangover and Camus and merged it into a philosophy. You surely aren't going to tell me you came up with this stuff on your own?"

Micky can be pretty sarcastic when she wants to be.

"No, buddy, I'm not going to tell you that. It's just that I think about what I read. You're the goddamn English expert, not me. I'm not so sure you ever think about what you're reading. I mean, you never claimed any more religious belief than I did. And you keep talking about *coping* and *forgiveness*. Christ, what good is forgiveness? I want something that lasts."

Micky sat down in the chair, straddling it. She looked very sad.

"I'm sorry I blew up. But you are *feeling sorry for yourself*. And you have got to pull yourself together."

"Somebody convert you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Christian. Are you a Christian now?"

"I suppose so. I believe in a higher being. I don't think emotions are chemical reactions. I think forgiveness is real."

"I'm glad you got yours, buddy. I've really got to go home now. Early day tomorrow."

Micky looked really frustrated, and pretty close to tears.

"Is there no way I can get through to you?"

"I'm sorry, Micky. Really."

There isn't a whole lot more left to tell. I haven't seen Mickey since, but maybe she'll show up again, sometime. You never can tell. I think maybe we could have talked if I could have said "I'm sorry" earlier. Or had the strength to never say it at all. But I never quite walk the straight and narrow path: it's a pretty tight squeeze, I can tell you. The problem is, I don't care too much for forgiveness, but I'm secretly hot for salvation, no matter what I told Micky. One of these days, I'm going to get around the guy that's always peddling forgiveness and find the other one waiting for me, with a big smile on His face and an explanation of where He's been hiding all these years. Or maybe it won't be a He at all. If not, I sort of hope She's got a cute chest and all...

Pat Burnette



The Lighter Interview with Dave Smith (Part Two)

In the last issue, we brought you part one of an interview with Dave Smith, one of America's leading contemporary poets. Well, here's part two. By this time, you've had a chance to read through much of the poetry and do some thinking. Now take some time to read the rest of what a famous poet and creative writing teacher has to say on the subject. Perhaps you'll feel inspired to put pen to paper.

Lighter: I've read some of your essays and some of your ideas about poetry writing and things like that—the whole Faulknerian what is the proper subject, and problems of the heart in conflict with itself—your whole idea of *Pietas*, a concept that, as a Latin major, I find appealing...How do you—I know you teach creative writing classes—how do you judge a student poet? What do you look for in new works that you read by students?

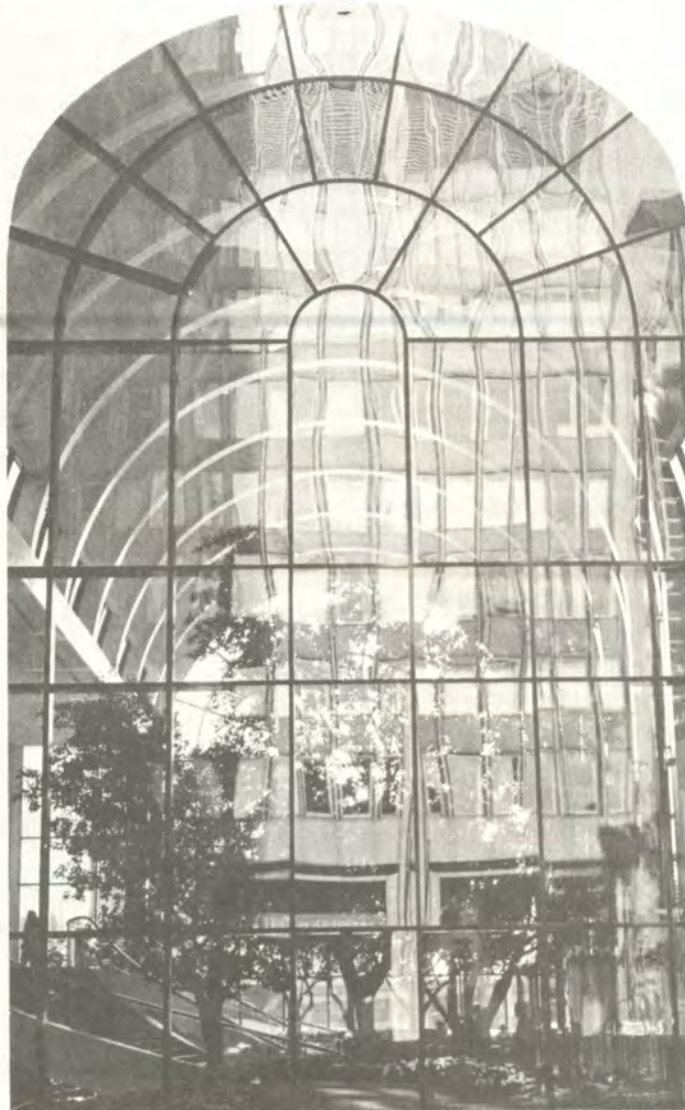
Dave Smith: It changes a little bit every time I teach because something like that is partly defined by your mood. If I'm in a bad mood, if life is not going well for me, it's likely to find its way into my teaching when I'm reading a poem, by a student, that I've never seen before. But putting aside all those little vacillations...First thing you look for is that very undefinable quality: excitement. You look for something that makes you read it again as opposed to—this is kind of a dumb way to put it—the difference between picking up *Time* magazine and a shopping mall newsletter—one you want to read more of and one you don't. I'll leave it up to you work out which it is. But to some extent it's just the first level of interest. Tell me something I don't know or don't know in your way of knowing. Now, how does that happen? It happens because of quality of language ultimately, less so than by subject. Now if you want to tell me about a poet who writes a poem about tearing a bird apart to see what's inside...That's sensational and that would get my attention but it would get my attention only to say this isn't dramatic and interesting unless the language were sufficient to keep my interest. Matter of fact, I'm referring to a poem of Emily Dickinson's called "To Split the Lark," and she says you won't find the music inside which is kind of interesting. You wouldn't think of Emily Dickinson tear-

ing apart a lark but there is this poem where she does. It gets your attention and the language sustains it. So the first answer to that question is: you want somebody whose interest in the world is passionate and conveyable. you're not interested in boring people and boring people write boring stuff. Often enough that happens. People who are not boring are more likely to be interested in the kind of language that says something differently—a love poem for example. That is the oldest and tiredest of literary forms; there are more love poems in the world than anything else. If you sit down to write a love poem you have to think about it in terms of facing all the competition of the century. "How can I say something that's never been said?" You can't. It's impossible. Everything on every possible level's been said, but it hasn't been said by you in the way that you felt it. So there's still the possibility that you might be able to write something because you're unique, can touch me and interest me. How do I know if it's there or not? I know it two ways—one of which is because the world has spent all these centuries writing. All those examples are there as successes and failures for me to be aware of as comparative bases. And I know about them because I've educated myself either in class or by reading and I've lived enough to have some sense of which are the right ones—which are the best poems and why. Now it's fair to say, and it must be said, one's sense of standards and what's good, over a lifetime, changes. That's because we change and what expresses our most complicated feelings changes too. When I was a young person beginning to write poetry, I liked e.e. cummings. I thought he was absolutely...that's the way it should be said. Now I realize e.e. cummings is not so hot. There are things he does well but there are many poets who do the same things better. You learn that partly by growing up and partly by being educated and partly by trying to write and learning for yourself what feels right and what doesn't feel right. So the answer to that, while it is finally subjective, is based on some objective realities. That's what I can tell you. Then there are the easy answers—your sentence is wrong here; you didn't spell this word right, that kind of stuff is just housekeeping. It's when you get beyond the housekeeping chores: trying to decide which subjects matter most and why, how the expression matters

most—you run into the really tough ground. Sometimes you don't know. I think you have to be honest enough to admit that. I expect once a week a student shows me a poem and I really don't know what to say about it. So I may say, "This is fine," or I may say, "Try it again," or I may say, "Go and compare it to so-and-so and see what you think." It's not a scientific subject. What all of us would like to have is formulaic answers but there aren't formulae for poetry or for fiction or for any art. That's why it is an art. You can't reduce a painting—anything—to formulaic good and bad. You all probably have greater affection for abstract expressionists than I do. I have almost no interest in lines on a canvas. I don't care much about the people who are famous from the 50's: Jackson Pollock and others. I must prefer a different kind of painting but I recognize that's an art too. It's also very subjective.

L: I'm interested in the idea of poetry and fiction and the difference. Is there any major way you differentiate, when you write about poetry and how that relates to reality and when you write fiction, the way that relates to reality?

DS: Well, I would cite two—two distinctions but I would tell you first that many poets talk about this. They talk about line theory. I once asked the poet William Stafford if he had a line theory. He said, "Yes," and he stopped talking. So—I was impatient—I said, "Well, what is it?" Of course I was really asking him what the difference between poetry and fiction is. He said, "Well, the lines of a poem look different on a page than fiction does." I thought that was an evasion. But so some extent he was absolutely right. The difference between fiction and poetry had to do fundamentally with rhythm and rhythmic construction. The line in the poem is the index of the rhythm; that is, it tells



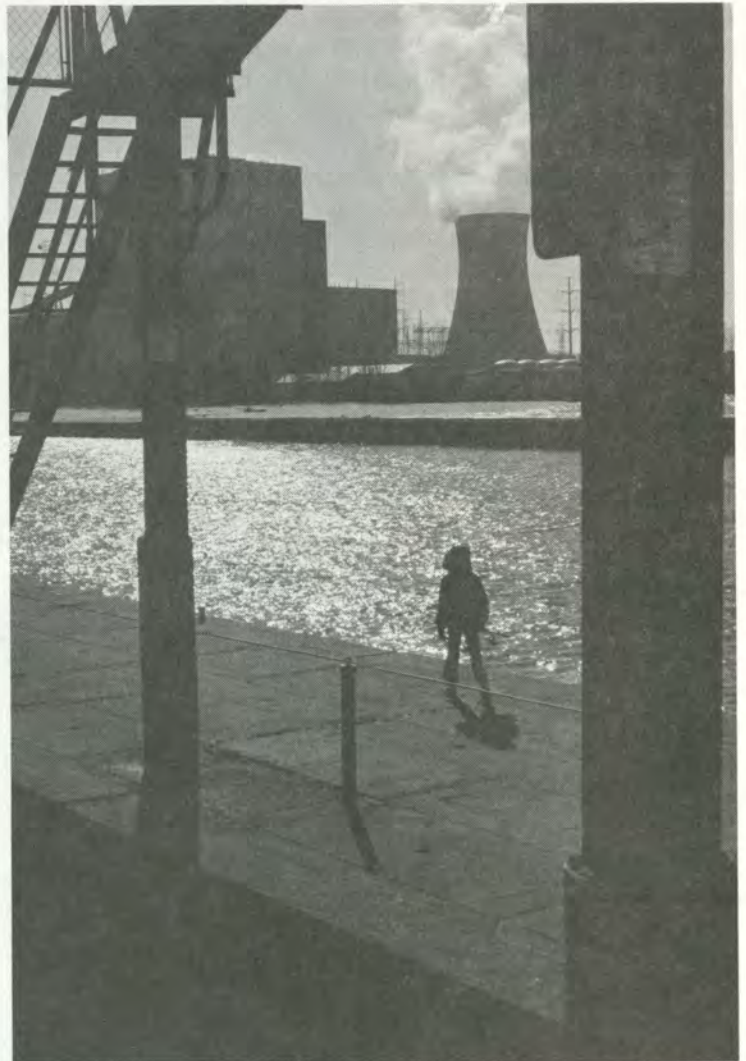
Barb Grim

you how to read it, how to experience it. Almost literally, I think, it tells you how your heart should beat when you're reading a poem. Fiction operates by a different rhythm. On a page, its convention—it's printed in a squarer shape, that's printer's convention. That is, that shape is derived from the way printers determine to make books. It's not determined by—it doesn't say anything about the line on the page or how to experience it. It's a long—I'd have to go into a long explanation to say why—but fundamentally that's the different. There is one more difference that ties in here and it's not exactly the same. That is that all writing that's of any interest to me begins in story. Even a little poem like Robert Frost's "The Secret," he says "the secret sits in the middle and knows/ we dance around a ring and suppose"—that's a little story; that if there's something we don't know we try to find out. It's just a little story. Still it's a story. Every poem, every story, every fiction is based on that impulse, to tell what the world is like, what our experience is like. But the difference between a poem and, let's say, a novel or a short story is that the world is much bigger that you allow to take place. In any story there's characters, there's scenic development, there's plot, there's all kinds of expository descriptions that you don't allow in a poem because you are going for the essence of the experience as opposed to the development of the full experience. Another way to put this is to say you are much more intently symbolic in the poem than you are in the novel. Again this has to do with various kinds of rhythm; has to do with emotional rhythm, thought rhythm, and most particularly language rhythm. As I say, we could go on at great length talking about these things, but without going on at great length, that's the best I can say about the distinctions. Which is to say, I don't regard them, in some respects, in the receiving of the two types, I don't regard them as radically distinctive. I can enjoy a poem in the same way I can enjoy a good story but normally my enjoyment of the poem is an enjoyment of the use of language whereas my enjoyment of the story will tend to be enjoyment with what happens to the characters, the scene, and the plot, and so forth. Let it go at that.

L: This is really changing gears here—what did you think you were going to be at age 20—see your future as?

DS: At age 20 I didn't have the faintest idea of what I was going to be. More than that, I used to wonder in a certain despair what I was going to be. At that point, I was an English

major in college and I had vague thoughts about going to Law School as everyone I knew was going to Law School. But I didn't really want to go to Law School—I just felt I had to because everyone was going to Law School. Then some of my peers were going to go to Business School and I thought about that for a little bit until I realized I had to take Statistics and I didn't want to do that. I'd already decided I wouldn't be a doctor, or my science profs had decided that. So I was such an innocent kids I thought, "If you couldn't be a doctor, or a lawyer, or a businessman, what else was left?" I didn't know and in that despair, I sort of wandered. I graduated from college, sort of expecting, because of what the recruiting office was telling us, (it was a liberal arts degree) that IBM or Xerox or someone would be standing at the door waiting to give me a job. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. I wound up teaching high school and coaching, almost entirely because my draft board said either you



Mary Speckhard

get a deferment or you go to Vietnam which I did eventually, anyway. At the time I was waiting to go into the Air Force and the draft board wouldn't change my classification so I got a teaching deferment in order to wait until my OCS school date came through. And as I've done with almost everything in my life, I drifted into writing. I never made a decision to be a writer. It never occurred to me I could be a writer. Just never thought about it, really. That's not entirely true, now that I'm remembering—there was one undergrad prof I asked if he thought I could be a writer and he said, "No." And I was one of those kind of kids who thought, "Well, he's a professor so he knows." I dismissed the idea, but ultimately drifted into it in any case.

L: This is a good required question: What advice do you have for anybody who's in college right now—especially aspiring writers?

DS: Well, I don't make it my business to give anyone advice because I can't give myself enough good advice. I can tell you what was good for me and that's about all I can tell you. What was good for me was exactly what I've described—drifting. I used to—I still do this—go to the library when I was in college and walk up and down the stacks and pull down the thin books because they were the books of poems. I'd read 2 or 3 pages and if I didn't like it, I put it back in the stack. I never was the kind of person who did what I was told to do because I was told to do it. I didn't read books because people told me they were great, even though I knew they were great. For example, to this day, I have never read *Anna Karenina*; I haven't read *The Brothers Karamazov*. I know I'm supposed to as an educated person. Maybe in some future life I will but as of right now I haven't done it. That walking up and down in the library looking for something that interested me is sort of an emblem of how I have lived my life: which is I did things that interested me because they interested me. Ultimately, I sort of followed my nose into what interested me more. On the way, occasionally there were times when I had to do things I wouldn't have done otherwise such as taking 3 semesters of old English but I found some interest even in that ultimately. So my advice to myself was, as Emily Dickinson says, "The heart asks pleasure first." That's all I wanted—pleasure first. My father would have said that was selfish. It was. But it's led me to a life in which what I do for a living I enjoy. I don't complain about my life. I don't feel that I could have done better because I like what I do. I like getting up and looking forward to

what I'm going to do next. In that sense, everything I did ultimately pointed me to being a writer; that meant living and teaching in 7 states; traveling around this country doing a lot of things maybe "normal" people wouldn't have done. I am a compulsive reader. I read a little bit of everything. Again, I would cite Henry James: be one of those people who try everything—I paraphrase it to that extent—and recognize (I think this has been critically important for me) recognize that though you try everything you are not going to succeed at everything. Melville says only the man who has failed can be great. There's a very important truth there: most of what we will do we will fail at. But that important thing is to let yourself fail and go on to try again. You've probably heard, for example, of a thing called "writer's block" where you just don't write. It's a little different from when you're in college and you just don't get the paper done. There really are people who have been successful writers who sit down at the typewriter and become catatonic. What's happened with them is they've become afraid; they have started to censor themselves to the extent that they are afraid to fail. They're convinced that if they write it, what they write will be bad and because it will be bad, if they don't write it they will avoid it. They don't think this out logically but it's what happens. So, what's the answer? The answer is: convince yourself to understand that the largest percent of what you do over your lifetime is eminently forgettable. But there's going to be a little bit that is not. Using Emily Dickinson again: she wrote, that we know of, 1775 poems. Of those 1775 poems, less than 10 percent would be poems you'd want to take to the bank with you. But that's still—10 percent—175 poems—that's a lot. Randall Jarrell, who is a very fine poet and critic, once said if you stand out in the rain and get struck by lightning 6 times, you'll be immortal. If you think of all the great poets or novelists that you study in the course of your lifetime, ask yourself the question, "How many of them wrote 6 great pieces?" Not very many. So if what you're saying is—if Emily Dickinson wrote 175 out of 1775—what you're saying is it's an extraordinary success and a hell of a big failure. I mean 1600 and some were failures—most of her life was a failure. In the end it doesn't matter. What matters is your willingness to try to succeed when you know you are going to fail. That's the one thing that allowed me, when I was drifting, to finally become disciplined as a writer; just to be willing to fail. You just keep doing that all through life.

Ocean Dictation

I.

hello darkness is hello light
to walk here is to walk all places
to walk here is to walk no place
again, speak thy soul.

the ocean speaks: that brave chasm
which feeds the pine-
that fierce petal which tears
from each grass blade
and therein sleeps
informing, whispering as weather.



II.

to whisper here is to whisper all places
is to scream no place
to hate here is to hate no place
is to love all places
within is outerworld.

listen to trees
for they speak truth
as morning speaks to evening

to rain here is to shine all places

tree spirit, return us to day as you
return us to the sun.
tree is ocean is being,
being bears fruits, its only witness is itself,
harvest ripens with season.

III.

harvest of life! in marvelous skies, in deepest rivers
from all depths of maritime solitude
patience for the Wire Hanger

Wire Hanger, you are always present.
never in bacchus, never in june
never in pearls, never in sandstone
never in eyes, never in petals
but in all things.

IV.

the ocean is being and nonbeing
look to the sky
purity is impure in all things in nothing
look to the sky

the sky is within
to look to sky is to look at land
sink into fire and water
be free in this harmony

swimming in the sacred timeless ocean.



A Nightmare

College kid on the ivy covered ledge of a lecture hall.
Bottle of spirits fills his head.
A newborn's love for every passing girl.
Beautiful black chic strides down a night time path.
"You! You're the lost daughter of Eve.
I love you."
Politburo issued a storm warning tonight.
It's gonna rain hard nuclear dismayal.
"You and I will weather it baby.
And propagate a new race."
With all the lust a half gallon of cheap wine could muster.
"I want my fun now, thanks.
Before this town and every other town just like it blows up."
Whole damn planet's gonna smolder for a week.
Without my help.
But I'll live, I'm eternal.
I made a deal with the Sun God.



With a sweat that burns the body tossed and turned.
All night long.
The child recited a mantra in his sleep.
"John threw the ball. I caught it."

Andrew Griffin



Eric Levin

Long Strange Days

It was midnight. The stars were blacked out by clouds. There was no moon. A hot humid breeze stirred the invisible jungle foliage, strangely the only sound in the clearing.

David stood quietly, waiting. He had been doing so for several hours, and would continue until dawn, if necessary.

A few feet in front of him stood a massive stone block, the clearing's dominant feature in the day. Now, its position could only be roughly judged by the slight phosphorescence of a peculiar lichen which clung to the carved face of the monolith.

As he watched, even this began to waver and fade, as though obscured by mist.

He tensed himself, tried to mentally prepare his body for motion.

Abruptly, before him a sharp rectangle appeared. Or, rather failed to appear. It was of a black so absolute, the rest of his surroundings seemed brighter.

David knew there was nothing there.

He stepped through it.

It was midnight, of course.

Imagine color. Light and color, easy on the light. Make the color brown. Now brown and orange. Add little flecks of contrasting hues and shades. While you're at it, make some of those spots other colors, colors that periodically swell and shrink.

Now add sound. Sound in every range, sound that comes and goes. There seems to be some kind of correspondence between the size of the spots that aren't brown or orange and the intensity and the clarity of the sound. Maybe it's not fair to call it sound; it has certain annoying qualities. Let's call it noise.

This is the setting, as he perceives it, in which David will find himself, when that self coalesces.

If the point of view seems not quite human, it's because David isn't quite human. Anymore.

Hardee's was the scene of an exceptionally heavy bar rush.

David sat quietly in the corner and stared into his cold coffee.

Eventually, he looked up at the crowd of drunks.

"Hey, Dave. How goes it?"

Reflex took over.

"Hi. Fine, just fine."

"Where ya been, man? Nobody's seen you in weeks."

"Huh? Oh yeah. I went to Mexico for awhile."

Who was he talking to?

He looked around and noticed that the only two people in sight were bored employees, keeping busy by wiping off the counter.

He closed his eyes.

And stepped back.

He was negotiating a difficult path along a slender ribbon. On one side was the abyss, on the other the searing white light. It was getting increasingly difficult to keep his consciousness on the interface. The ribbon kept buckling and shifting, and its width frequently changed without warning.

The Other was pressing to get in. David knew he couldn't keep him out and stay on the narrow track much longer. Desperately, he sought a way out.

Suddenly, a ripple in the interface caught up with him from behind, and he saw before him a peak that he had previously traversed.

He knew it was dangerous, but if he didn't take it, the Other would surely get it.

He crossed over and faded in.

"Maybe this is what the French phrase means."

"What French phrase? And what does that have to do with what you were doing in Mexico?"

"What? Oh, hi, Tom."

"Are you feeling okay, man?"

"Yeah."

"Come to think of it, it is a little strange to run into you here. I thought you hated Hardee's."

"I gotta get out of here. What time is it?"

"About one-thirty. The bars will close in a little while, and this place'll be a war zone."

"Oh, God."

"Are you sure you're alright?"

"Yeah, thanks," Dave mumbled as they extricated themselves from the booth.

"You forgot your coffee."

Dave smiled.

"That's alright. I drank it when it was cold."

Dave got in his car and drove off.

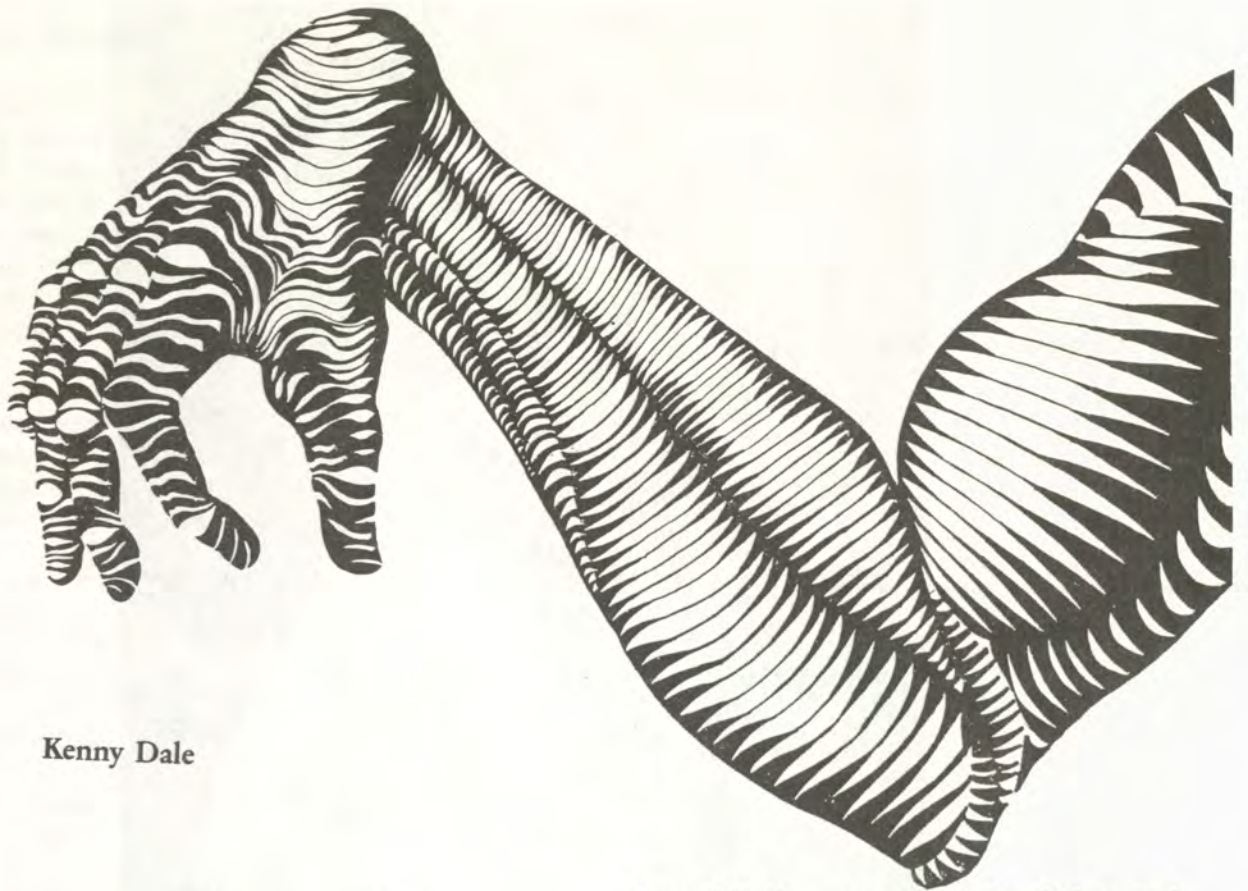
Tom and the Other watched him go.

Dave pulled to the side of the road and set the parking brake on the little car. He turned on the dome light and fished a small plastic bag from the pocket of his leather jacket. Unrolling the baggie, he tore a centimeter long strip from the paper within, careful to follow the perforations.

He held it up to the light and examined the almost imperceptible water mark.

After a moment, he laid it on his tongue.

He turned off the light and reached for his coffee.



Kenny Dale

The jungle was incredibly quiet, with an almost solid feel to the air.

Although it was dark, Dave noticed that he could clearly make out the brightly colored birds and snakes that adorned the black trees.

Hardee's was the scene of an exceptionally heavy bar rush.

Eventually, Dave looked up at the crowd of drunks, half eclipsed as the multicolored, long-tailed jungle birds took flight around him.

"Hey, Dave. How goes it?"

"You scared the birds, man."

"Where ya been lately, man?"

"Deja vu."

"Huh?"

"You're not Tom."

David said it flatly, with no sign of the fear he felt.

A black rectangle appeared to his left.

"Excuse me," he said, and stepped sideways.

The Other snarled.

Tom split down the middle and exposed the formless mass of writhing pink tentacles and needle-toothed mouths.

David knew there was nothing there.

The ribbon appeared as an infinite white plane under a black sky. It was slowly tilting, like the deck of a ship rolling on ocean waves.

He staggered to keep his footing.

Dave felt the presence of the Other and began to run. As he ran, his weight seemed to overbalance the plane, and it tipped until he was sliding down it. It continued to rotate, stopping directly overhead, and David was falling into the black sky.

He fell through Hardee's.

His car wouldn't start. Oh, yeah. First he had to put the key in the ignition. And before he could do that, the door needed to be unlocked, so he could get in.

Dave began to panic.

He was getting sick.

He sipped his coffee, hoping it would settle his stomach.

He felt pressure inside. His body was shaking uncontrollably. He felt like he was falling.

"Oh, God."

He opened his eyes and saw black, and white, and black again. He closed them and saw Hardee's.

Where was his blotter? Did he drop it?

Of course he dropped it, but how did he lose the rest?

Imagine color.

Add sound.

"I gotta get out of here."

Fade to black.

"What time is it?"

It was midnight.

Of course.

Brian Roy



Bill Rohde

Concession

Ted froze part way through flipping on his cap.

"But it's cold out!"

"I don't care. I'm not going with you if you wear that hat."

"For Christ sakes, Eliza, we're just goin' to the corner store."

"I don't care, Ted. I've told you a thousand times I think that hat should have been thrown out years ago. It's trashy looking and a disgrace to the neighborhood. I'm not going."

Eliza sat down resolutely on the faded, floral pattern couch, crossed her legs and kicked her dangling foot. She opened last month's *McCall's* to any old page and started thumbing blindly through it. "Hmph," she snorted. Flip, flip, flip.

Ted looked at his aging wife in silence for a moment, then heaved a gravelly sigh that turned into a cough. He finished putting it on—a ragged aviator's cap from which one furry earflap was worn clean away. He had sent for the cap from a mail-order catalogue just after the war. He turned to go, then hesitated.

"Hey, eighty percent of a man's body heat escapes through..."

"...Through his head," Eliza finished impatiently, not looking up. Flip, flip, flip. "I know, I know."

Another sign, and Ted turned and went outside, turning up the collar on his heavy, woolen jacket. It was bitterly cold, and after a few steps he realized that he was shivering in spite of his cap.

Rick Van Grouw

Black and White Memories

I came home
after a long time away,
you weren't there.
I sat on the porch
waiting for your return,
a beer in my hand,
an overturned box
of photographs at my feet.

I.

On a summer day
under a faded grey sky,
the last time I saw you.
You smiled when I told you
I would return. You knew
the truth.
When you said 'I love you,'
you meant it.
When I said 'I love you,'
it meant good-bye...

II.

On a bare mattress
in an unfurnished room,
my mother speaks
about my father,
"a driven man,
married to work.
He was far away
even when he was home.
I wish you the best
when you marry..."

III.

In the moonlight
under trees,
my sister questions,
"Do you think he loves me?
He never tells me, but I know
he appreciates the little things
we do. I like him so much.
He just cares, you know.
I hope I don't ruin it..."

IV.

In the rain, the thunder
of my father's voice
booms across the years.
"I'm tired, Son, just tired
of all the bullshit.
No one's willing to work
anymore. They just want
the rewards. It's a shame..."

V.

A November wind blows cold
across my face as I turn
to look at the house.
I close the door and lock
it tight as I get in
behind the wheel. There is
a photo of you on the seat,
one of my black-and-white memories.
I look in your eyes a long time
before I start the car.

Dave Donahoe



Jayson Mellom

Near a Billboard in Arizona

Stopping at the edge
Of Cross Canyon
For just a few moments
On our trip from Detroit
To Las Vegas,
I maneuver the rented
Mini-van to the shoulder
Of highway 264 and step
Out with my son.
He stays back on the asphalt,
While I venture to the strip of grass
Next to the retaining fence.

Diesel fumes linger in the air
From passing semi-trucks bound
For Vegas and L.A.,
But I just kick a rock
And watch it click down
The wall of the cliff
Before my son calls
Me back to the van.

Joan's parents are expecting
Us for dinner in an hour,
And Jeff wants to know if
He can get a t-shirt at
The Fort Hubell Trading Post,
Nine miles down the road.

Duane Johansen

Blades

Some days, I just sit
on this couch, retracing the lines
on the prickly fabric, looking
out at the quicksilver sky.
The trees rattle and tick, swaying
stiffly, away and back, waiting
for the wind to blow in the spring, bringing back
the leaves and the warmth.
But you've become immune
to the wind. And for the first time
in four winters, the river flows with ice.
Soon it will be frozen clear
through to the bottom;
your blades leave tracks as you slowly skate away.

Scott Sandberg



Robyn Werberig

The Lighter

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Impoesy

"Your teeth, glittering ivory, piano keys
I wish to play.
Your lips, rubies red, what else
can I say?
Your eyes, two lanterns, dual beacons
to my own.
Your ears, tender conch shells, receivers
of my moan.
Your breasts, great towers (as Solomon
once said).
Your legs, a forked road, leading
to my bed."
Anticipating passion, her mouth opened,
and she wailed.
But when pushing came to shoving,
his metaphor, it failed.