



STERNEN

SPRING 90

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The Day I Called God and When He Wasn't in Found Out How the World Really Works

At the beep
Leave your name
God isn't in
He's MCing
The opening
Of a new shopping
Center
And I hung up
The phone
And realized
I lost my quarter

So I dreamt
Butterfly dreams
Flicker and flutter
By a wide
Open field
Of a failed
Stage prop

Then I witnessed
The little boy
Thirteen and innocent
Stripped and raped
By the stereo
The car
And the three floor condo

So I pick up the phone
To report it all;
At the beep
Leave your name...

—*Benjamin Lee*

Illness

If there were a warm trembling in the willows we swung on
Low like the rumblings in my stomach
I would smell the lemon on my finger tips
Fresh-squeezed in the morning
And ask that the noose around your neck slip
And let you land laughing on the grass,
And find ourselves flung out again
Sprawling on mythological Thunder Island.

I stir my water
The ice melts
I wait for you and let the sun absorb my skin
One knuckle ebbs deep rich red
From this morning's minor trauma
Yesterday they poked you with their needles
You run red.
They take a sample of the hot pulse of your heart.
You send your faded jean embers my way and
Look through me.
"I'm looking for one good woman" You said.
I press three fingers to my neck
Feel the currents throbbing underneath
And pray the noose slips
That way.

—*Karen Sue MacDowell*

"Let me write my sex on you"
"No." She said.
She walks across the street
With my grey tweed hope
Doing anything but keeping her belly warm.
"Let me write my sex on you," he says, again,
It grows in her.
"I don't want it in me," she says over fries.
And turns and moves
She lets her hair fall brown and long
Over her tangled womb.
Will she let this one live?
Will it rest before it begins?
"O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,"
Will this one gasp purple mountain air
Or will she cross the street,
Well before
The fruited plain.

—*Karen Sue MacDowell*

Pittsburgh to Seattle

three months of crappy motel rooms.

john comes and goes.

i stay in bed.

john buys wild turkey and david and I share it while john chainsmokes lucky strikes.

the ashtrays are always full and the trash never gets emptied.

my throat hurts.

i'm tired to sleeping in orange nightgowns and waking up with cigarette burns on my arms.

when john goes out at night, he leaves his jacket on the bed, and i sniff the armpits damp with sweat.

in the pockets i find a letter to his mother and the rest of our money.

i sit through four game shows and two soap operas a day.

david makes macaroni and cheese and we eat it in bed.

i tell john about my nightmare and he looks out the window.

david is in the bathroom with the water running.

john sits on the edge of the bed and reads true detective.

i reach under his t-shirt and touch his back.

the television is still on.

john leaves again and i don't even know why.

—*Tabitha Haggerty*

the news was on
tv
tonight
like every other night
i cried



—Penny Despos

Capitol Hill Prostitutes

capitol hill prostitutes
walk sideways
with eyes slanted
and stomachs inside out

teeth touch pavement

they strut
under and over sparkling concrete
into and out of punch-cutting nightmares

red bleeds into green
the streets are hot and tense, like Hue before Tet
silver cars with tinted windows creep slowly, like soldiers,
pause at curbs,
idling,
waiting

—*Tabitha Haggerty*

Breakfast Nook

My coffee is far too hot to drink
so I look through the window.
She turns away and I wait.
Is it a glance from her, a glance, that snatch of image
that can make resolve of the night before
when after the words she repeatedly kicked the door.
I think, the course of words unredeemable.
I think, verbal paper cuts, the many hours.
I think, a raised fist, she cowered.
Singular slumber on the sofa
though the fist never came down.
She does not turn back, no snatch of image and
my coffee has cooled enough to drink.

—*Timothy David*

please
seduce me once more
over the phone
or across the room
so close
but never to touch
until that one night
under the stars
you asked me to fuck
I always thought
you were peter pan
even then

—*Katherine Mueller*

Demolition Sonnet

Grey rain descends, obscuring scene and sound.
The crowd, hushed now, but soon to rise and
scream
Waits eagerly in bleacher rows around
The field where mangled metal grinds—a dream
Realized in twisted burning frames that had
Been new and loved or leastwise used with care;
Not by this audience, in fact they're glad
When dying Cadillac becomes a flare
And sacrificial Dodge hit thrice within
A minute warps into the shape of 'S'
Then scrapes the earth in wild rebellious spin.
They fight till all but one lie motionless
And we who craved the ruin of machine
Drive home, desire satisfied, serene.

—*Mark Turnbull*

The Legacy: Memoirs
(Or, "My Life", by Albers Edward Irwin)

Dedicated to my grandson, Harold Albers,
with much love and the aspiration
of your inspiration before
my expiration.

Chapter 12

October, 1934

The never ending quest for self-righteousness, justification, the American Way, and acorns, has got me down—especially the latter, which some less judicious squirrels fling at me spitefully as I try to collect their reserves in my lunch tin. This writing—I must press on with it—it is keeping me sane—but then, what is sane?

Chapter 36

October, 1984

Oh how I find myself longing for the good old days—days when people were decent—had working folk—simple and diligent, instead of spiteful aphids.

When I was just a mere lad, times were bad—before your time—when all the family had to eat were two potatoes the size and viscosity of pigeon's eggs, and my mother sewed my clothes out of burlap sacks and all nine of us children wore underwear bearing the epitaph of the local four mill. Life was so simply eloquent—Father working at the mill and bringing us home crusts of bread. And Christmas and Easter—what a celebration!—knewing on a delicate bit of gristle shunned by the butcher. Even Mother, in her spare time, when she wasn't working 14 hour shifts, sewing gloves, used to indulge in raising chickens under the stairs until the Nazis came ad took them all away. Yes, Harold, these were the good old days.

Chapter 56

October, 1990

And now I draw this saga to its climax. I profess to all who will acknowledge my plea: The good life, it is filled with joys, sorrows, agonies, destinies, the cruel, gruel, blessings, and mixed nuts.

—Karen Sue MacDowell



—Chris Tinnesa

The Working Man's Zen

I saw
the bastard child of the new age
in the all night diner
on Bleeker
He laughed
when I asked him
for the meaning of life
SO

I looked beyond
the miniature
song box
to the vapor full
window
and etched out
a question mark
only to find
a dead fly
crushed, where the point
was to be

I wiped
water
from my finger
along
the table's
underside
only to find
a globular piece
of gum
SO

I took another bite of my banana cream pie
and sipped my Coke Cola through a bendy straw,
while
ignoring the crud on my fork
and anything else
of great meaningful value

—Louis Peres

Needle

I want to say
what's backward
and torn.
The bundle of thoughts
that conquered
the needle.
I look for
a little spark
of untamed light.
A spasm
contrives my tense
eye lids
exerting the act
of focusing
beneath
the dark,
tightened
bundle of thoughts.
I know
the needle is there.
I can feel
the keen
lacerating emotion
and yet
I can't see
the impalpable pain.

—*Elena Masciangelo*

i'm here to write
make it right?

I SAY
YOU REPLY

no
just write and think about if it's right

I SAY

you know
there is no right or wrong
no condemnation because the snow melted
and we had to pack up and go home

I COMMENT

make it right.

YOU REPLY

it already is
That's why this is how it is
and the sun sets anyway

I ANSWER

so write.

YOU REPLY

—Patty Z.

Elegy

"Dyes used in KODAK color prints and negatives,
like other dyes,
may,
in time,
change"*

too late now
too late to hatch a Betamax
to split skin, develop wings

sluggish from the long cool night of no known rivals
contented with a shell of glossy color
fading in the rising sun

sloughing bloated mediocrity and buoyant assets too
long suspended by a slender strip
of good film—good name—good will

goodbye

too late

now

print
it
in

K
A
T
A
K
A
N
A



*Found on a carton of film manufactured by the Eastman Kodak Company,
ca. 1983.

—Mark Turnbull

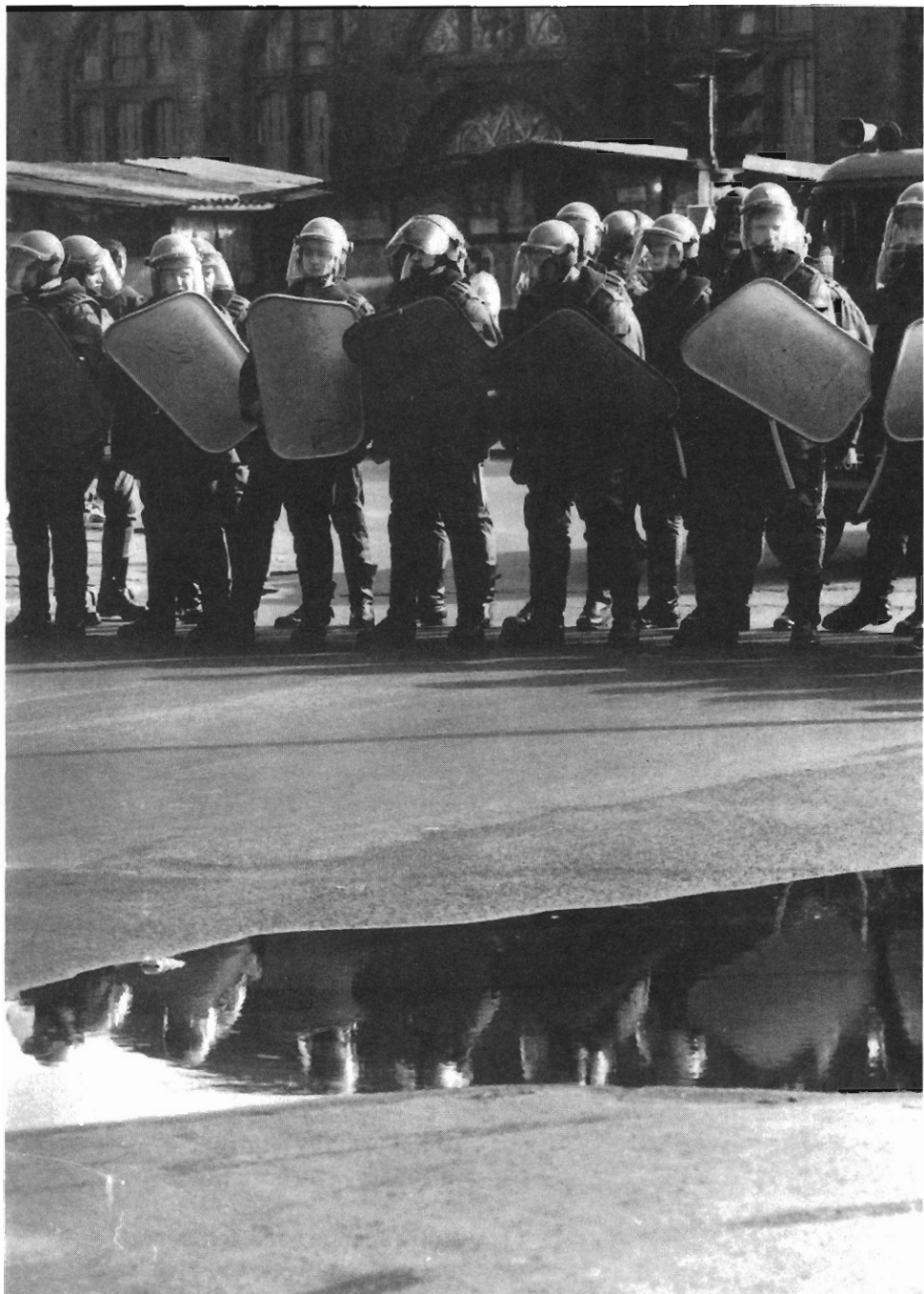
Wise Fools Pub
Chicago

loud talkin' chicago blow
smoke chicagotown
smile in-the-know places to
go loud blues strange smile
you live longer in chicago you
can still have something to laugh about
can love longer respect
walks down the street at you
walk up the street respect
love love chicago
night ice-rain you can breathe
walk door in dry up
you don't tell time

new page chicago, new page
here
rolling guitar chicago
bouncing ear
roll away chicago, roll away
ear, been rolling long as I
know know it.

and good women are too involved
w/the music to notice anything
much else have subtle compulsions
they don't smile

—*Kyle Accardi*



—Linda Borgatti
Photography Winner

What art.

What is art?

Art is a cannon ready to fire
a blanket of bacon all wrapped in barbed wire.

a bowling pin house surrounded by fur
and Superman's cape when seen as a blur.

art is a line down the middle of roads
and the residue licked off the lips of a toad.

It's a pelican stuck into moldy Swiss cheese
and the yard of spaghetti you eat when you sneeze.

art is a mitten with a stapled up thumb
and a permit to drive with a tank full of rum.

It's windmills and bandaids and stirrups and mink
and washing big words to see if they shrink.

—*Penny Despos*

sex with a Spam dinner

meat paste – space escape
brutal organ – carnage rape

molten metal – bludgeon bride
earthen rusty – butter hide

pulpy sponge egg – temper scare
roasted skin cave – milk wish hair

dry crack hammer – melon punch bone
tomb steak beagle – sex rest moan.

—*Penny Despos*

Sugar Crosses

I see sugar crosses
burning on my lawn

The devil angels of man
fly on horses
to pray for my destruction.

I numbly listen to their creams
as they torture me
with their correct madness
of deicide.

They spew fire from their lips
and their shrieks of death
reverberate
inside my head
until it shatters mine eyes.

Your own tongue is your god
A deification of your own graven image
I am an affront
to your god.

You nail my hands to your cross
in a deicidal mockery
and you incinerate me
in a crucifixion and baptism of fire.

The crosses glow
from the countryside
and my screams
reverberate
into the wilderness.

—*Rogers*

Still afternoon-turned-evening
thunder rolls in from the western horizon
rain speckled window panes
glossy dashes

And the earth gently breathes
the hush of the drizzle

A car shushes by
sounds like torn silk
and as evening turns to night
the thunder rolls away

Raindrops in the glow of a streetlight
tears rolling down the pane
shimmering silver-gray
against the reflection of your face

—*Katherine Mueller*

Freedom of Words

Excruciate
 Nothing can be said
 Words are brutally beaten
to death
 before they are said
 No more

Freedom
 Nothing is to be said
 Words are brutally beaten
to death
 after they are said
 Out loud

—*Pamela Martin*

Teething Memory

Of never coming to grip the galvanized
corset of water is my fear
When I see the waters flow of tangled light
it's streaming jewels implanted upon
a strenuous membrane like plastics
vow of randy tone
I wiggle as a bricklayer on acedemia's chair
stanced for freedom whose ride has not come
I am beside my sultry substance
and still fall onto pigeon's meal
as their legs and head reflect
creamy tadpoles driven onto dovelike illusion
If only once long ago I will reach to caress
if only for a moment the six course satisfaction
enabling a squadron of corpuscle business to cry
still limpid as an emotion

—Andrew J. Rodriguez

the more you want her
the farther she goes
and the hard mind refuses any excuse
it is enough to make you sit and think
about it in the dark at the naked
nothingness that you have created and and and
what do you think of the chaos
new and enough to startle the neighbors
...girl if you would I could love you for it
let me know in
just words what you think of
getting together.

—Kyle Accardi

Glass Whistle

The dream I will see has you
painted in cross legged gaze
 on Sunday vines
I give you my hand
and you sing on invisible rings
how metallic you are in hot scented
Steps
first you jump rope over morning liqueurs
then you walk me underneath the dawn
When I will touch you now
my sensitive hair billows it's nest
next I save my fingers and listen to your form
in the window as green as the soft bean of mystery

—*Andrew J. Rodriquez*

Mother

A fragile thing, is love,
as given, as taken.
As much as the loss of it
is unreal,
the more is the illusion
it prophets.
Destitute and sorrow
feel the spirit,
and wonder
follows through,
as a shivering leaf
in the autumn wind.
But what colors
of ecstatic beauty,
as foreseen
for a hundred years.

—*Elena Maciangelo*



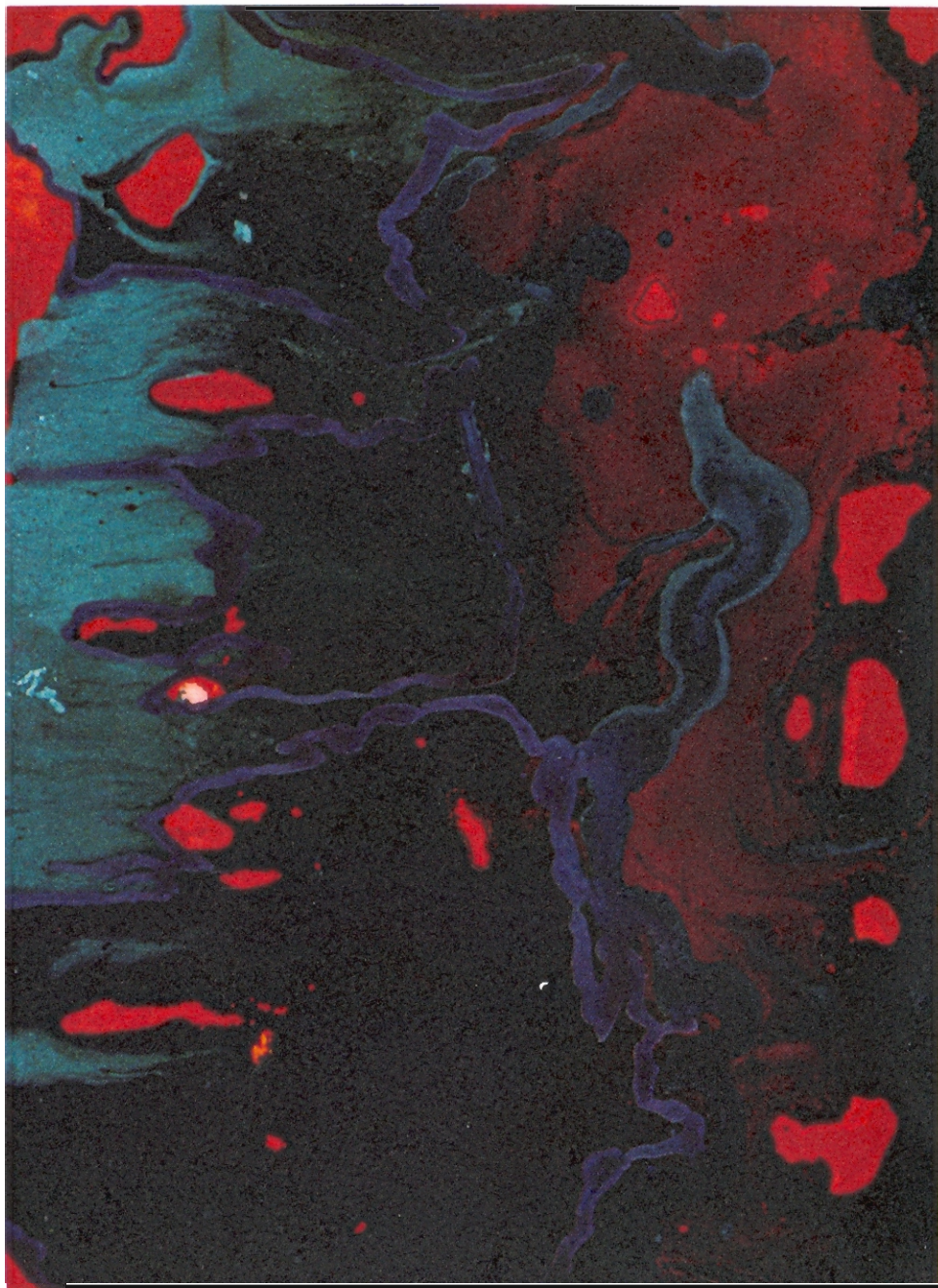
—Elena Masciangelo



—Karen Robinson



—Matthew Shultz
Graphics Winner



—Karen Robinson

Temporary

Walk down the river where where old men stand and stare
Through the eyes that pierce the mist
In the morning when the city sounds seem like distant thunder
Swirling around outside the fog
And you were there, with them
And you turned your eyes to meet mine—though still art
of your morning vigil
A perfect moment—inside each other's eyes
Strangers understanding

And you were there with them, a poet of grace, a painter of
the spaces between the spokes of a wheel

A time to look at that we've seen
A time to feel what we've done
First comes the disillusion
then the search for solution
then the disillusion
Yes, I awoke one night
My head throbbing, knowing I could no longer
hold onto anything.
My soul, a river, a gesture between friends,
Trapped by freedom, freed by time
 An artist of vision
 A sculptor of experience
We need each other to relate:
Yes
I feel the wind in my face
Here in the grassy valley
by the hillside where rocks and
crickets never doubted the absolute
or had to make a decision
to live for
now.
They just did it
i n the wholeness of simplicity
Yes,
I awoke one night and felt something
move within me...
But
in the morning it was the same voice inside,
talking to me like I've done forever

A time to look at what I've seen
A time to feel what I've done
Cause I feel like I've grown
But still
But still

—*anonymous*

statue

how you talk like this
like you're sacrificing yourself
you'd think you were Christ
when nervously you run your hands
through bleach-ed strands of worried hair
and smoking 'til there's nothing left
around a table
eyes filled with smoke
and introspective happenings
while outside the weather recalls
the night she screamed all of
those fallacies
and instead of barking back
you stood cast and quiet like a statue
a touching wind
cold between the trenchcoat seams
and a coffee or a cordial
couldn't warm this icy scene.

—*Vincent*

Sociology On Wheels

A homeless person stopped me before I entered the terminal
and said,

Why don't you go back to bensonhurst?

I started laughing

Then

He started laughing

We both had a good laugh

With ten minutes to get my bus

I think I'll waste Five

I work better under pressure

On the bus there was this kid sitting next
to me

Screaming

Obscenities

At the top of his lungs

The lady across the isle was sick

Her face was greenish brown

It must have been that flu bug going around

Either that or she went to a bad tanning saloon

Finally

The kid's father let loose

YOU STOP CUSSIN YOU MOUT LIKE DAT

His eyeballs were bulging

A couple of feet from his head

There was a vein on top of his extended eyelid

It led back and under his forehead

It was an interesting physiological phenomenon

The kid was impressed too

He reached out to touch it

There was an absence of sound throughout the bus

The kid looked up at me

He started screaming again

Louder than ever

That lady had reverse peristalsis written all
over her face

I just knew that the bus would hit a bump and
she would probably feel a lot better

I turned to the kid
kid
He looked up at me inquisitively ad wide eyed
Come on now, how many times can a person
say the word penis
So to the repetitive hollering of the word motherfucker
The lady Threw up in Utica

—*Louise Peres*

Hell

Has he swallowed a beach ball?
His stomach is so large.

It slowly grows larger
and larger
until one day...

Have you ever had a puffy coat on
and stood to take a piss?
You can't see what your doing.
He can't see what he's doing!

It has gotten that big!
He has gotten that fat?!

It must be hard.
It must be,
Hell.

—*Eric Kremer*



—Katrin Eismann

The Hot Comb

The weather was hot that night. Just like any August night, I could feel my clothes stick to me like warm toast soakin' up pure butter. It was especially hot though, sittin' in front of the electric stove while Mamma ran her hot comb through my nappy head.

"Hold still girl fo I done burn yo head," warned Mamma sittin' in her chair, leanin' over me while my hand rested upon her knee. Her hands took hold of my hair.

"Lawd chil, ya got some thick hair. Thick hair fo a thick head I guess," she laughed. "I reckon ya wanna keep all this hair, huh?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She replaced the iron comb back onto the red burnin' eye of the stove. The odor of burned hair filled the kitchen's air.

"Ya know all this thick Negro hair reminds me of life."

"How's that?" I asked her, tryin' to keep my hands from touchin' the hot hair on my head,

"Umph, it seems like just when ya think the road is smooth, outta nowhere comes a jungle."

The hot comb once again went through my rough hair.

"Mamma my hair ain't no jungle!"

She placed some more grease onto my head before takin' hold of the hot comb.

"Naw baby, yo hair ain't no jungle," she then combed my hair now with a black comb. "But the only way t' keep these here naps smooth is t' get at the roots wid heat. Mmm umph."

My eyes flinched as the hot comb sizzled against my hairline; I soon became relaxed when she placed the hot comb onto a cold eye of the stove.

"Now let me take a look at cha."

I unraveled my legs and stood in front of Mamma, turnin' toward her sweaty face.

"Yeah, honey. Ya know the only thang different between yo hair and life?"

"What Mamma?" I looked at myself in the full length mirror, smilin' at the new length my straight hair had now took on.

"Pride," she smiled closin' the top of the grease jar. "Cain nut'n straighten out yo thick nappy Negro hair but his here hot comb. And believe me sugah, it gon take a whole lot mo than hot combs t' straighten out a jungle."

—Diane Conway
Prose Winner

The Ballad of Ghouli o' Green

Ghouli o' Green that bald-pated spalpeen
Was a' casting a potent spell

With a ripe ear of corn and a unicorn horn
And fresh water drawn from the well.

He mixed and he stirred and spoke magic words
Until smoke arose from the pot

But when he ladled a cup and said 'bottoms up'
Good Irish whiskey it surely was not.

He cursed and he moaned with many a groan
For once again he had botched

The first a foul brew of bilge water stew
And now it was God cursed Scotch!

It's hopeless! he cried, and with a great sigh
Proceeded to dump it all out

Threw his hands in the air and yelled 'I don't care'
And cracked open a bottle of Stout.

But when day came about he'd run out of Stout
And decided to give it one last shot

A plan he'd conceived so he rolled up his sleeves
And proceeded to scrub out the pot.

Then he got out his corn and powdered more horn
And gave it the old college try

But right at the start old Ghouli got smart
And threw in a handful of rye.

The brew hissed and smoked but Ghouli was stoked
For the smell of it was divine

He took a great whiff and his beard went stiff
It sure as hell wasn't wine!

Just to make sure he gave it a stir
Then filled up his Hill Giant's glass

And as he was drinking his mind was a' thinking
This has to be whiskey at last.

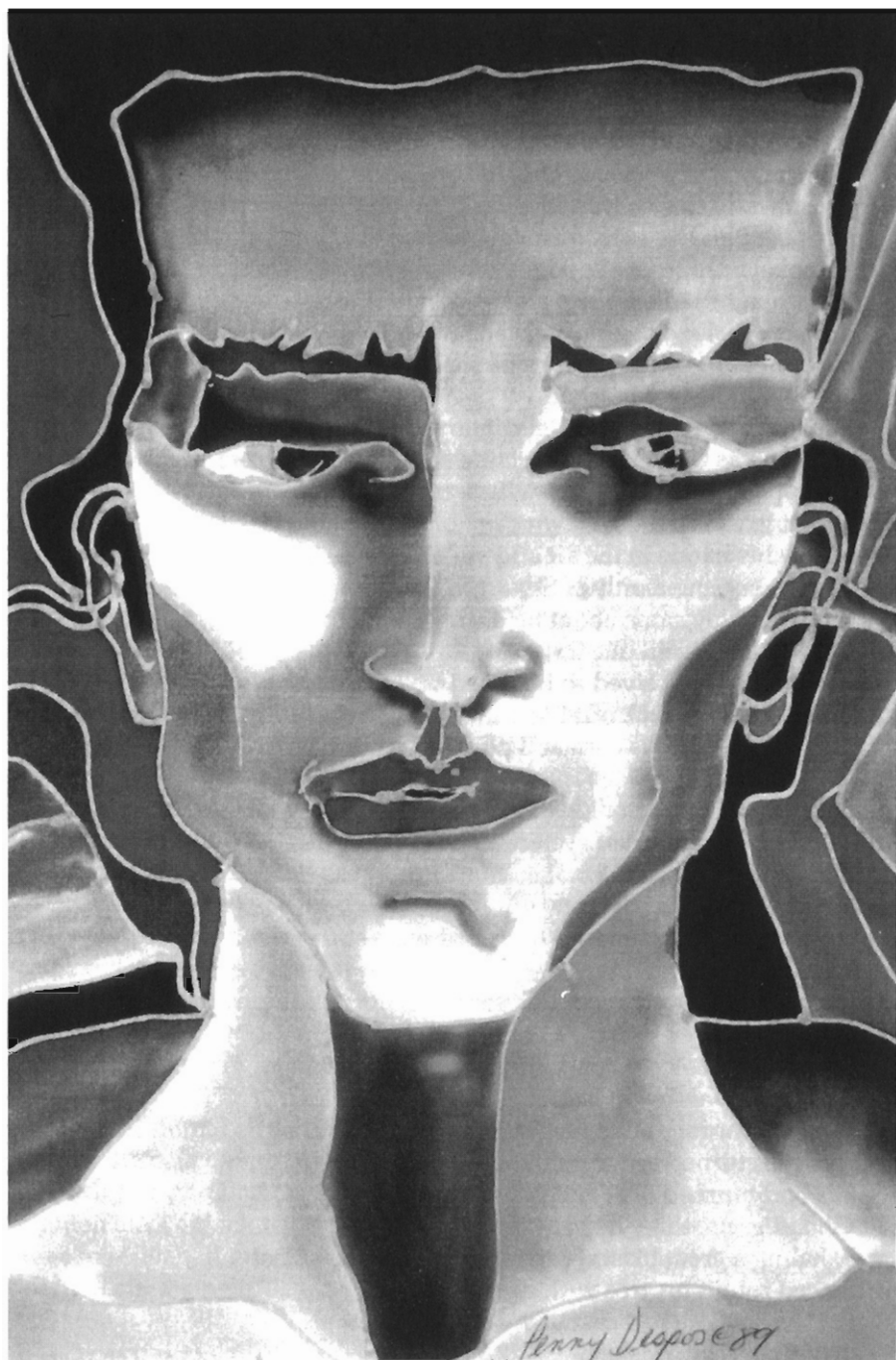
When it poured down his throat he got quite a jolt"
And his eyes turned as red as the fire

His body turned blue and I swear this is true
Old Ghouli grew three inches higher!

Exhaling a great blast when he could breathe at last
He danced round his tree with glee

For the spell he had cast had yielded at last
A keg of fine Irish whiskey!

—*Christian Cara*
Poetry Winner



—Penny Despos

Meeting the soft waters,
The mossy granite of the island
Stretches straight up
And then flattens slowly;
Four stories above the rock
I sit alone on the old cottage roof
And stare out into the
Warm evening air.

I am saddened to think
That the Artist's brush
Has now inexorably painted
The last new stroke of flame and heat;
Saddened that this vast stretch of canvas now
Slowly abandons the last intent of evening
To a sullen summer dusk.

And yet,
As each bright hue dies,
I feel other things
To be transient as well.

Here, on this old roof,
My resentment and cynicism for life
Empty out into the still night air;
All that is anger, envy, hatred,
Is made clear to me
By a sudden conviction
Of thought and feeling;
Water, rock, sky, mind—
Resonate in this moment...and
I know now that it can never be time,
Nor distance,
That ultimately severs the self from humanity—
I am made separate
In that my experience of beauty
Can never be fully known by another...

All at once
My aloneness of mind and heart is broken;
Beneath me I suddenly hear the others
lighting the lamps, and it is strange
To listen to them talk on cheerfully
As if nothing has changed
But day into night...

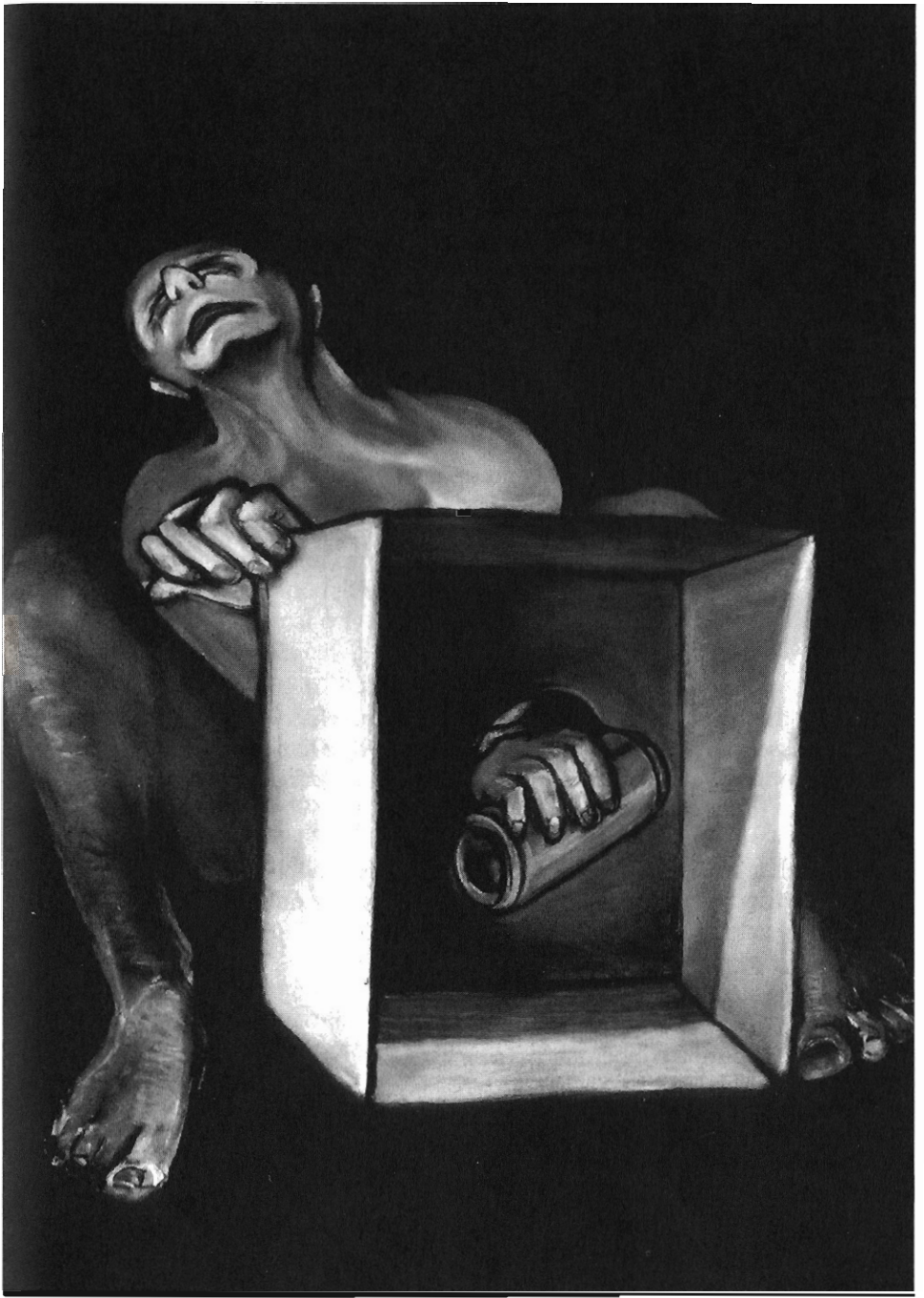
The last stray ribbon of scarlet
Now fades—a visual echo of serenity,
Yet far below
The lake mirrors living starlight
And murmurs softly to me;
In this single sensation
The wisdom of the moment rests.

—*William A. Wahl*

The Calloused Tongue

Call me on Monday to feed me your ills
And until our swollen calves race onto drifts of passion
will cross our will
And two today on
slippered roots fail us in slithering deep
decent onto reason whose door swells
as bovines are accustomed
you let me steal your ears
to fill their streets
with hills and banks of steep ejaculate wind
And why don't you feed me now
and defy the magnets sister
who of detestable tears has broken the toads tail
You like the stone headed fish
do a sharp malediction inside yourself
leaving me quilted in unenvious threads

—*Andrew J. Rodriguez*



—Chris Tinnesa

On the Highway with Sam
(In a Cars' Wake)

The forest tent has broken
along the edge of the road.
The final leaves that clutch are
plucked from their limbs
in a cars' wake.

"I drive good, good enough but in October I drive bad, yes bad.
The oaks

the sycamores
the birches
the maples,

I have to glance, or longer and I end up always having to wright the car."

In a cars' wake
clouds of leaves
lift from the road
settle in the earth moist
and fade back into the ground.

"There's this girl I run into every now and then. Her dress outlines her shape as she passes, her soft rope of hair tosses from side to side. She always says hi but I never have an answer. I think she does it on purpose. I know she knows but that's okay.

"I remember once when I was driving. In the car in front of me the girl in the back seat tried to get a rise outta me. Her dress, her outline, the gentle toss of her hair was lost through

the tinted glass
the steel
the plastic
the rubber..."

Along the trampled edges
paper cups, burger wrappers, cigarette ends raised
in a cars' wake
settle in the earth moist, further from the edge
and their chemical dyes fade into the ground.

—*Timothy David*

“oh festering pediatric poet”

come here my hard wood friend,
and look at my rubber coated eyes.
come here velvety robed teacher,
and look at my silver slim skin.
Come here springedy insect,
and touch my gluey toes steadfastly.
come here samurai warriors of milk,
and dance for my vanilla love.
come here redheaded social butterflies,
and listen to my electronic animal calls.
come here opera singers of furry flutes,
and grabbeth my shakespearian tail that waggeth.
come here villainous starbabbies,
and live in my sal paradise.
come here as floridian fruitsellers,
and know my angst of camalot.
come here my green blooded yuppie,
and look at these teal eel skin hands.
come here my coca-cola cowgirl,
and feel this pathos with greenish beard.
come here oh holy salt grain,
and hear my truths not true.
come here yachting hippie,
and wear my paradoxical pants.
come here lawful chameleons,
and smell my arresting nosegay.
come soulful songstress,
and step on my blue suede gurus.
come here my pauper impersonators,
and hear your king of bloody hearts.
come here my cadaver imitators,
and touch my chrome plated hair.
come here I said venetian jew,
and sneeze through my glasses of gray.
come here to be my saccharin friend,
and pay witness to my blue sun.
come here baptized boxes,
and stair into my asbestos soul.
come here fishy felined fur,
and watch this narcissistic fool...
...masturbate again.

—*Andy Pokon*

Short and Simple Poems or What's the Point?

1. The Question of Allegory

It's a
mist-
ache
to use
too
much
all-e-glory
in
poetree

2. The Question of Line Break

Did I ever tell you the story

About the thingamiglost in the personal section
that was about yaybig and was under the watchamacall
it but was neither here nor there until indiscretel
yit was found untitled and I still have yet to see its
newly found home up or down stairs from its location

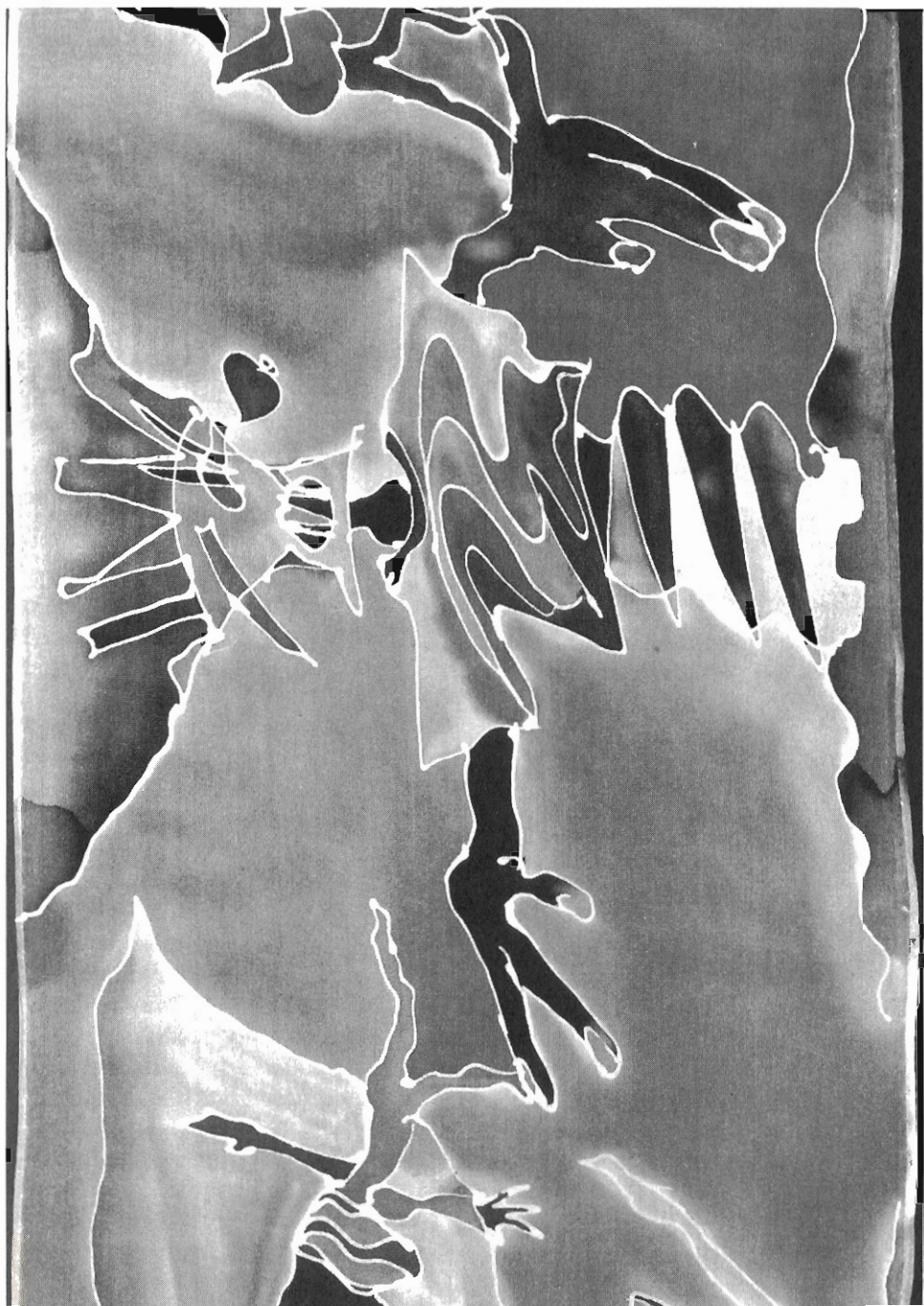
Or was I just babbling?

3. The Question of Imagery

Did I alter the

Or just walk it?

—Benjamin Lee



—Penny Despos

Winter River

I remember...

I thought alligators would hide
under the ice in the bogs
along the river.

When I'd explore I'd shoulder a bat
just in case...

I thought the ice flows where lily pads;
they'd float, never mind the lack of green,
and I'd hope to see a frog...

There were no mosquitos
that depend on the heat
of a blood feast that is me.

They all died and
cracked and
blew away...

The icicles and
their steady melt
in the afternoon sun.

Drip drop
drip drop
drop drop

dying with a little patience...

The deer
frozen, facing north.

The horns and head above
a blanket of snow and
the cardinal music that
crept by me over the ice and
the eyes frozen open and
the pearl like luster with
ice crystals at the corners...

The picture in my thoughts

drip drop
drip drop
drip drop

dying with a little patience.

—*Timothy David*

We Proceed

In the car,
Frozen morning inside and out,
We grope our way
Blindly back together
Through each others darkness.

Last night the argument,
Last night—oh God,
Having hurt one other—
She in perfect rage and
Perfect confusion,
I in perfect logic and
Perfect confusion,
Each demanding to be known.

But now it is morning and
We proceed, slowly reaching
Out a hand or foot,
Slowly feeling for sharp objects.

Finally we touch, draw back, touch,
And cautiously hold hands,
Now more alone than ever;
Then all light truly goes out
And this bright morning's darkness
Swallows what is left of truth.

And the poison
(It is 'fear of loneliness
Or other names),
The poison like an old and trusted friend
Rests casually in the back seat,
Grinning green and triumphant again.

But now I have seen it there,
Now I have trapped it in the
The passages of my own mind,
And I have learned that
In the sea-depths of emotion,
In the murky chasm of desire and fear,
There hides, raging and starved,
The ancestor of our torment:
It is want of perfect union,
The timeless ache for blameless love,

The Immeasurable longing;
And it is a little child—
Wicked and malignant
And grinning green.

In the car,
Frozen morning inside and out,
We proceed.

—*William A. Wahl*



—Karen Murano

Junk

I walk the ragged streets of Times Square. Cody the pimp offers me a job. "Not today," I say. "Today I am going straight."

He laughs loudly and says he'll be here, later, when I'm sick and need him. His breath smells like stale french fries. I keep moving forward, winding through the splintered crowds.

It is October, and the wind is punching my bones and sharpening itself on my face. A greasy, hairy man stops me, grabbing my arm so hard that the arteries threaten to burst.

"You are a beautiful little boy," he sneers. "I bet you'd like me to fix you up. I bet you like that shit," he snarls, little bits of saliva splattering my face. My hand reaches over to his and bends his little finger back with lightening fury.

"Sing about it," I command. "Sing about the hardness of walls," I say, laughing at the allusion through clenched teeth. I push him, quick and rough into the wall of the Flesh Fantasy Palace. He is swearing angrily and examining his limp and bloody finger.

"Faggot!" he screams. "Stupid junky faggot!"

I don't listen. The sidewalk is filthy, littered with cigarette butts. I pass a mailbox and the man is still screaming. Pink neon pulses overhead and the street is noisy. Salsa music wafts out an open window, crawls lightly over rooftops, then falls to the sewers and manholes below. My face is starting to itch. It's getting hot and red. I know I'm ugly now, but I keep walking, passing people with all the dignity I can manage. It's not enough, and they stare and glare at this twitching and reddening boy, ridiculously straining to be like them.

The all-night McDonald's is haven and I dive for the door. I look, run, and yell.

"Joey!" I scream. "Joeyjoeyjoey!" My body slumps against a huge wooden trash bin, and I fall pathetically into a red plastic booth. Sweat drips down my sides and I shake miserably.

Joey comes up from the bathroom.

"Kid," he says quietly, "you really got yourself messed up."

"Yes, Joey. I'm a fucking wreck. Tell me what. Why? Tell me why. I don't want anymore." I finish speaking. Joey sighs and unzips his green windbreaker.

"I would only do this for you, kid. You know that." He pulls out a dime of H, a needle, and a ratty strip of a plaid shirt.

"Yes, Joey. I know. They don't understand. I can't ask them why. Not Cody. Only you."

He rolls up my shirt sleeve and ties me off. He puts a rolled up five and a small tin of blow in front of me. I snort it clumsily, like the shaking wretch I've become. It drips down the back of my throat, numbing and cooling like always. Joey injects me. I am waiting for nothing. My eyes glaze over and my ears flood with a thick wall of sound. Through watery eyes I can see Joey

cleaning up the works. He covers me with his windbreaker and leaves. I am alone.

Stupid junky faggot, I think. Stupid junky faggot.

—*Tabitha Haggerty*

The Bigger They Grow The Louder They Are

Abecedarian

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—*Benjamin Lee*

