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E. Hackney

# TOWERS

The literary magazine of Northern Illinois University.

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The literary magazine of Northern Illinois University.

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Judge: Dan Stryk

### J. Hal Connor Award for Creative Prose

*Christopher Tabert When Darkness Dies*

Judge: Walter Sublette

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**Cafe** Colin Ewald



**Enough** *Steve Tritt*

## Our Own Ice-Patch

Nightly  
I ankle around the howling ice  
Bumping into you  
Doing Figure 8's  
(Backwards, scarf flying).

"We cannot go into it here."

Coatbound,  
I wobble on, black wool evidence  
Bulging paper tissues  
Used to blot Spring's weepings.

Sheet lightning. Hail. Silence.

Under me alone  
Widening lies crack into  
The clear ice-crazed surface,  
Black water swirls beneath  
Trapped in the middle.

In June-green woolen earmuffs and matching vest  
You whistle tunes and tap your skate shod steel toe  
Watching me gurgle to the muddy bottom.

Gracefully  
You leap the rift, take a bow  
And skate to where the water meets the seawall,  
Crisp as a postcard reproduction,  
For a fruit drink or a beer.

*Judy Ham*

# The STFU<sup>1</sup>

(For Howard Kester)

The hard bell  
over the cotton  
singes  
bright C-notes  
in the wind

its glassy mouth  
hangs, flicks red  
arcs across the field—  
pulled taut as a snake  
in the hand of a pharaoh—

it revolves on its axis  
roped like a dead man  
from its blind head  
cathedral chimes  
dawn. The “darkness crumbles away”<sup>2</sup>

in Tyronza, Arkansas  
where colors heave up blood  
through skin too worn  
for countries’ lines—  
decay in scythed palms

and faces—cropper veins splintered  
blue in the lands’  
gold-green embers  
where nothing rose—  
the slightest pod!  
but the milecloud

of Kings—  
breadless, a waterless fall  
down the dark cells  
of cottonseed  
the treewells’ brimming leaves  
now stumps for burning—

this land of white ash  
and shanties—Kester, Mitchell,  
and you, and you—  
Southern Tenant Union dreamers—  
Great tongues have woven morning:  
Illiterate prophets

whose children’s bones  
webbed fields burning—  
whose lungs bleached—  
a clotted crop—  
first picked the notes to form  
the rising

in our black-white Midwest streets.

*A. Jozefiak*

<sup>1</sup> The Southern Tenant Farmer’s Union, begun in June, 1934, marked the first recorded time in American history that black and white sharecroppers joined forces against the semi-feudal plantation system.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Isaac Rosenberg’s “Break of Day in the Trenches.”



**Panic!** *Leonard Ladd*

## Late Walk On The Gravel Road

The day's hunt ends  
in a flamingo sunset  
under the equator.  
In heartland  
night creeps all around.  
Two battalions of crows  
loopdown on black furrows  
near the boarded warehouse.  
I'll stop here alone  
to walk along the forgotten  
fields.  
The old brown barn  
still standing —  
schoolboy running  
over loose gravel  
with his bamboo pole —  
no dormitories back there then  
over the roof  
against the first star —  
the creek's mirror wasn't so black then;  
your eyes weren't so gray then,  
brown-black: spotting water-  
bugs rippling the silence —  
Over the wood bridge  
no creak,  
now concrete cracks  
patched by crabgrass.  
A barking dog raises me  
to Orion;  
welded on my canes  
I feel as close to the Aeonian  
hunter  
as the shiver in my bones.  
Windows glow still,  
like owl eyes.  
Success caught blindfolded  
in the daybreaks  
the importance of making sense.  
A family, wealth, name.  
In stardom — late.  
And too late,  
after the goals, the accidents  
even deaths  
we return  
palm on the cooled face,  
limping on dimmed pebbles;  
absorbed in night  
amidst the glowrise of perching towns  
and trillions  
of clustered stars.

*Gus A. Vasilopoulos*



Owl *Jim Nelson*

# The Death of Will

by Daniel T. Riggle

Despite what I'd seen by the time I was twenty, I continued the search for a God, one which has not been fully realized, even now. When I was twenty, and watched combat-loaded choppers through the windshield of my deuce-and-a-half truck, their noses dipping groundward as if they dangled on strings, the whip of their blades against summer's advecting heat sent back a constant report, like some echo from the back of my mind: an incessant marking of time. August, 1976, on the D.M.Z. in South Korea, six days beyond the projected date for my return home. After the axe-murder of two American officers by a North Korean platoon, all changes of station and leaves were frozen, and the entire South Korean Republic was placed on "Red Alert." Yet, as it seems to me now, looking back on that time after nearly a decade, I either felt very confident of my previous combat training, or had not begun to perceive the significance of such an event. For all that I could think of, while the threat of armed conflict increased daily, was the death of Will two years prior to my enlistment. Those days of waiting could have resembled any other I'd spent in Korea that summer, as far as I was concerned. An oppressive manure odor hung above the wet-rice paddies, mingled with the stench of my own sweat, and the constant buzzing of flies, like some humming madness, penetrated all thought, seeming like a reminder of something primordial; still, contrasted with this was a beauty in the land almost too painful to view, with its ancient, time-worn, tree-topped hills, and valleys bright green with languid, swaying rice plants, terraced to accommodate the land, moving in rhythm to a breeze like sea waves that never touch a shore. In the villages, where huts clustered together and seemed to wind back ages of time, people dressed in loose-fitting clothes and wide-brimmed, bamboo hats moved in a deliberate pace to their places in the markets or fields. And, as one might often see with a careful gaze, a Buddhist temple sat on the side of a hill in an endless watch, like an eye sprung from the earth, gauging the modest movements of man. Still, I thought of Will, as if no such scenes stood before me, and it might have been just this escape into remembrance that saved me, triggered by those same choppers, droning in a distant hover, easing my slow loss of mind.

We sneaked through the forest, Will's brother and I, avoiding a police barricade at the park's entrance. After seven days of dragging the lake, they had not found a trace of Will's body, and that day would have been the last before they would abandon the search. We stood at the tree line some forty yards from shore, watching two rowboats waver as their chained hooks snagged the bottom. The small outboards groaned under their strain. Periodically, the men would anchor and haul in the heavy chains, inspecting the hooks for bits of clothing, or, God knows

what. Then they would drop them in and begin again. A helicopter pivoted and swung near the island's perimeter, echoing louder, then softer, as it turned. The trees cast lengthening shadows overhead, and cumulous clouds swept past the deepening blue. I could see Will's parents on the hill, as they watched with mixed hopes of finding and not finding their son's body. A crowd of police and rangers stood waiting, too, but I could tell that they shared none of the parents' anguish. As my mind wandered past the hill and toward the airport, where the whoosh of cars on I-294 seemed to beckon, Will's brother interrupted, asking if I could again tell him the story of what had happened a week before. I obliged him with no complaints since I realized that his request was prompted merely through a need to verify what we were then witnessing. Telling the story again, from the perspective of viewing the search for Will, whom I knew to be tangled in the weeds somewhere near that island in the lake, gave the telling a sort of eeriness; yet I told all that I could—and gladly—as if to relate it would have saved me from something. It was a confession.

I could not then interpret the "why" of it all, nor can I now; but time has revealed to me some of the event's significance and my need to confess. Even how Will and I arrived at the lake still appears vague. There were a lot of "freaks" present that day, I remembered, and they were getting stoned and dealing drugs, as we might have often seen them do in the city. We stayed "straight" and inquired into dope-deals only so as not to be viewed as "narcs." One old "stoner" walked around, bare to the waist and heavily tattooed, with a baby boa constrictor coiling around his torso. We figured he must have been "tripping" on some good acid. A couple of "chicks" approached us, half hanging out of their halters, tight in low-slung hip-huggers, asking if we wanted to walk around the lake with them; and Will's eyes just about bugged out at the chance, but I suspiciously declined. Will must have thought I was crazy not to accept their proposal, but I told him I had come to the lake only to get some sun, not to get burned. I could tell he was up for doing something, so I told him to go on ahead and do what he wanted. As I made my way to the hilltop to find a good place from which to watch people, he disappeared, apparently in hopes of finding some action. Looking westward over the lake, I recalled, the whole park that day seemed secluded, and the water glowed in high-sun, throwing a silver glimmer around its tree-lined shore. Near the lake's center sat that island, its thick, grassy middle enclosed by a rim of bushes. Voices and laughter mixed in confusion with passing cars on I-294, and an occasional jet swinging onto a runway quieted all with its loudness. Still, it seemed, looking west toward the lake and the people was, if nothing else, a visual escape. When

Will finally returned he was accompanied by some guy named Angelo, whose face even now I can't recall. Will explained that they were supposed to meet some chicks out on the island, and I told him that if he didn't hurry back I would leave without him. It was getting near 3:00 by then. Because Will could not swim well, he rode in an innertube, while Angelo hung beside and kicked them across the lake. By now the sun had fallen pretty low, and its light sparkled on the surface like flames darting across the moving wavelets. I watched the two recede and grow smaller, Will sitting passively as his friends pushed them along. From where I sat there did not appear to be any people out on the island, but I figured that they knew what they were doing and returned to my own distractions.

When I next looked toward the island I saw Will lying on his back, alone, arms stretched out, as if he had all the time in the world in which to wait for nothing. Then I saw Angelo returning to shore with the innertube, looking as if he had just completed some mechanical task and was glad to be done with it. When I walked over to him and confronted him about the situation, he calmly explained that Will had decided to swim back from the opposite side of the island. For some reason, I then began to panic, running back to my hilltop perch only to find the island empty again. It occurred to me then that Will was dead, yet my first reaction was to search for him. But, upon looking for Angelo for help, I noticed that both he and his innertube had disappeared. My heart was jumping by then, and the last act that I remember dictating to Will's brother was that of sending a "straight-looking" man and woman to inform the Sheriff's Office of a drowning. I then returned to the hill to await the coming of the authorities, and, while waiting, I stared again at the lake and its island, both of which now appeared more isolated than ever.

There were details that I could not relate to Will's brother, and some things have occurred to me recently which then appeared insignificant. Since that day of Will's death, and after my tour of military duty, I came to view parts of life as a kind of retribution for crimes that will not be known until the sentence is served. This belief became apparent to me after considering something that happened that day, something which I have not told to anyone, not even to Will's family.

After I had sent the couple to inform the sheriff, one of those late afternoon, summer thunderstorms arose from the western horizon. The clouds looked to me like mountains being pushed up from out of the earth, grey-black towering curls that tumbled overhead like an avalanche of

boulders. Everyone ran from the park, some laughing, some anxious, and warnings of tornadoes and lightning circulated. As the pall spread above, a weighted calmness enclosed the lake, making it difficult to breathe. Trees showed their white sides as an increased wind seemed to lift them from underneath, rocking them ungently. With the sun blocked, the water deepened to green, a mirror of the green hanging murk of clouds. When lightning did strike not too far away, the thunder crack followed just after; and this signalled rainfall in large drops that swirled in the gusts. The lake seemed to boil as it was struck by rain and blown by wind. It was then that I noticed I could no longer see the island, nor the trees, perceiving only the storm and my wetness. Later, I don't know how long, swirling police lights and the storm's subsidence stirred my senses, and I noticed with dread the arrival of Will's parents as they approached up the hill. Their faces foretold that they had little or no hope of recovering their son. Will's father stood behind me, speechless, looking out toward the now settling lake, perhaps running a boy's short lifetime through his mind; while Will's mother, clinging to one shred of hope, sat beside me and placed an arm around my shoulder as if I were her son, and asked a question for which she had had an answer since receiving her dreaded phone call.

• "Is he down there?"

I don't know if I cried when I told her, but the words "Yes, he's dead" seemed to come from behind me somewhere. And the wail that followed from deep inside her, deeper than any place on earth, seems to me now to have been an utterance of all the known despair that underlies this world.

I could not tell this to Will's brother when we stood at the forest's edge. Anything more that I could have told him was swallowed when we noticed a signal from one of the rowboats and saw men hauling in the chains, hand over hand, as if there was some weight attached. Turning before we left, I recall seeing a man and woman huddled close together on the hill, and a helicopter, its blades in continuous swirl, settling itself on the island.

When I had finally returned from my overseas duty and the war that never happened, I meditated upon all of these incidents under less troubling circumstances. And even now, as I sit feeling myself faceless before this worded page, in a dimly lit room, with the black night outside, this very silence seems to move, even breathe, like an endless tide. And I believe that I can feel the echoes of some past—many pasts—none wholly my own, which appear in likeness to a flow, every fading, ever dying away. □

## The Imagists

(For the Stryks)

You gave me  
the gift of curving—  
the track, oak-scented,  
its delicate whir  
of the miles-removed train—  
winding in still prairies  
grazing

And sleep for the circle  
of winter—my lids  
turned to walls  
without edges—soft,  
bright as the track's  
sighing creature

wingless, pulsing  
at the blushed apex  
of windowpane shedding  
and gold strokes of clocks sprung full  
in black melting numerals:  
I hung such years  
all about you  
clicking.

Now Northbound,  
the trainwheels arc  
as I turn to grasp their trace—  
they slip, splitting the blue  
Wildflower, uprooting  
the swan-necked  
lampposts:

track's woodlines burning wordless  
beyond our points of merging

*A. Jozefiak*

## A Trout And Violins

Sit  
On a rainbow trout's thin smooth back  
As it swims in place  
Behind a mossy rock  
In a clear sparkling stream

Spit the moss  
Out of your mouth

Grab at shiny objects  
As they twirl by

Whisper sweet little rhymes  
Into the trout's ear

Listen for violins

*Paul Engel*



(untitled) *J Magsamen*

## Rush

On 3:00 a.m.'s asphalt  
shifting gear and mind  
meet the ghostly mile;  
all around the dayless  
kernel shadows congregate  
to frame you on backroads  
crossed with the hissing  
winds, distorting out of  
corners white-rimmed eyes —  
sweating ice cubes, drips  
crawling still — along sides  
oh, the chasing-me  
roaring silence, broken  
high beams' kicks on tall  
birch silver —  
Four Corners  
neon idle signs  
county line  
autumn leaf tunes —  
music for the scared fool.

*Gus A. Vasilopoulos*

# A Celebration of Black Womanhood

by Margaret M. Cook

Ntozake Shange's choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf*, has been the subject of much controversy since the first Off-Broadway performance of it received the attention of the critics. It has been met with both joyous shouts of praise and heated cries of anger. Much of the divided reaction to Shange's work stems from one aspect of it in particular, namely, its portrayal of black men. Those who dislike *For Colored Girls* do so mainly because they see it as a put-down of black men: "The thematic emphasis is constantly directed at the stupid crudity and downright brutality of [black] men" (Hollin Flowers 51). They see it as little more than a blistering attack on the cruelty of black men, holding them responsible for all the troubles of black women.

However, while it is true that black men are negatively portrayed in this drama, to interpret that portrayal as Shange's main purpose is to miss her point entirely. *For Colored Girls* is meant to be a celebration of black womanhood; the portrayal of black men develops out of Shange's concern with the overall oppression of black women. She has explained numerous times that "her target is not black men per se, but the patriarchy in general, which she views as universal in its oppression of women" (Smith 12). Indeed, Shange flatly denies that she meant the work as the putdown: "I never intended it as a statement against anyone, period" (Ribowsky 44).

Rather, she sees her work as "an affirmation of the black woman's possibilities" (Ribowsky 45). It is pro-female much more than it is anti-male. Shange's main concern is the struggle of black women to be individuals in a world filled with stereotypes, and to assert themselves, as a group, in a male-dominated society. Because of the stereotypes of black women that persist in our society, their talents and abilities are regularly overlooked. This leads to a general negative self-image on the part of black women and a poorly defined sense of identity. Shange's hope is that *For Colored Girls* will help black women "clarify" their lives; her message is that in order to do so, black women must overcome these stereotypes and develop a positive self-image. For Shange, this development arises from black women's sharing of their pain—their common lot in life. She states on the title page of her work that "we must learn our common symbols, preen them and share them with the world."

Shange delivers this message in a very unique structure, which she calls a choreopoem. It is a synthesis of poems meant to be performed much like a play, with music and dancing. The work is divided into a number of sections, each structured around a main idea. The main characters are seven very different women who are unnamed and each referred to only by a color of the rainbow. These women, both separately and as a group, relate their expe-

riences describing what it is like to be a "colored girl" in modern society.

The opening poem, "dark phrases," illustrates the lack of clarity that exists in the lives of black women. They are smothered by the existing stereotypes, so much so that they no longer have a clear idea of who they are: "she's been dead so long: closed in silence so long: she doesn't know the sound: of her own voice: her infinite beauty: she's half-notes scattered: without rhythm/no tune" (Shange 3). Black women have no sense of identity, no concept of their possibilities. One line of the poem grieves for a broken promise, and Shange explains that "I've always felt somehow robbed of something . . . it's like I've been missing something, something good, something that was promised to me, and that because I haven't gotten it, it really wouldn't matter whether I was alive or dead" (Ribowsky 43). Perhaps what she has been robbed of, along with all black women, is her chance to use her abilities, to develop herself fully. She pleads in the poem for someone to "sing a black girl's song: bring her out: to know herself: . . . sing the song of her possibilities" (2-3). Shange goes on to realize in the course of her work that there is no one to sing the black woman's song, except black women themselves. Strength, and hope, reside in sisterhood.

The next poem, "graduation nite," deals with a young black girl's sexual initiation. This poem introduces dancing as a means for black women to deal with oppression; it is a metaphor for their struggle to attain autonomy (Brown 126). For Shange, dance is a way for black women to discover their beauty, which has been glossed over by the proliferation of stereotypes. She explains in the introduction to her work that "with dance I discovered my body more intimately than I had imagined possible" and that accepting "the ethnicity of my thighs and backside" allowed her to better understand herself (xv). Dance ties black women to the African past as a source of pride in their bodies. Shange urges black women to "[learn] the wealth of our bodies, . . . [make] the dance our own" (xvi).

The dance metaphor is prominent again in the poem "i'm a poet who." The characters give the impression that they use dancing as a method of contending with their problems and expressing themselves: "we gotta dance to keep from cryin: we gotta dance to keep from dyin: . . . we come to share our worlds witchu: we come here to be dancin: to be dancin: to be dancin" (15-16). Here, dancing provides concrete imagery for the togetherness of these women. Dancing brings them together to share their pain.

"Latent rapists" is somewhat different from all of the previous poems in the work because most of the women participate, rather than just one character telling the story.

The women discuss their fears of being raped, so it is appropriate that they all participate because all women are threatened by rape. It is a fear that stays in the back of their minds. In the poem they discuss their realization that it is not strangers on the street of whom they must be afraid, but rather their own friends and acquaintances. With this realization comes a devastating sense of betrayal: "we are left wit the the scars: bein betrayed by men who know us" (19). Unable to trust even their own men, from whom they have so eagerly sought love, these women are left completely vulnerable: "women relinquish all personal rights: in the presence of a man: who apparently cd be considered a rapist: especially if he has been considered a friend" (20). Furthermore, "their bodies are de-personalized, available for exploitation even by 'friends'" (Brown 121). Consequently, the women band together to share their fears, which becomes a form of therapy for them.

The poem "sechita" presents a picture of the degradation of black women. Shange explains in the introduction the background of this poem: "Studying the mythology of women from antiquity to the present day led directly to the piece "sechita" in which a dance hall girl is perceived as deity, as slut, as innocent and knowing" (xv). In the poem, there are references to Sechita as an Egyptian goddess, but in reality her appearance is pathetic: "her splendid red garters/gin-stained n itchy on her: thigh/blk-diamond stockings darned wit yellow: threads" (24). A contrast is created between Sechita's natural beauty and its suppression because of the degrading position she finds herself in.

The image of broken glass is important in the poem: "the broken mirror she used to: decorate her face/made her forehead tilt backwards/: her cheeks appear sunken/her sassy chin only large: enuf/to keep her full lower lip/from growin into her: neck/sechita/had learned to make allowances for: the distortions" (25). The distortions are not in Sechita's appearance, however, but in society's view of her appearance. Society condemns not only Sechita, but all black women for the way they look. This, again, leads to a lack of self-esteem on the part of black women: "Sechita's mirror is the mirror of society, distorting the black woman's appearance even in her own eyes" (Brown 123). But Shange does not characterize Sechita as being completely without hope. She remains defiant, trying desperately to salvage her pride: "sechita's legs slashed furiously thru the: cracker nite . . . [she] kicked: viciously thru the nite/ catchin stars tween her toes" (26). Sechita's fight for integrity and self-respect is the fight of all black women.

The poem "one" records the story of a black prostitute, but it delves far beyond the usual stereotype. This woman adorns herself with "orange butterflies and aqua sequins,"

creating a glamorous, glittering image. But it is this image which, in effect, causes her loneliness—she comes to be seen as a sexual entity rather than a full person. It is this limited view of her which breeds in her the desire to strike back at her oppressors: "she wanted to be unforgettable: she wanted to be a memory: a wound to every man: arragant enough to want her" (34). After sleeping with a man, she bathes, washing away the makeup and glitter: "she became herself: ordinary: brown braided woman" (35). She awakens the man and tells him to leave and he now sees her as a "regular colored girl: fulla the same malice: livid indifference as a sistah" (37). He leaves hurriedly, and "she has proven to herself once again that her real, black self is not interesting to these men who are only attracted by rhinestones and feathers" (Brown 123). And so, left alone once again, she "cried herself to sleep" (37), creating a lasting picture of her vulnerability. As with so many black women, she is a victim of society's stereotypes.

The poem "i used to live in the world" explores the oppression and fear that black women in Harlem feel. They are isolated within the grime and filth of their world: "i can ride anywhere: remaining a stranger" (38). Not only are they alone, but they are alone in a threatening environment: "i come in at dusk: stay close to the curb: round midnite: prayin wont no young man: think i'm pretty in a dark mornin" (39). They cannot afford to be pleasant to anyone for their own safety: "i can't be nice to nobody: nice is such a rip-off: regular beauty & a smile in the street: is just a set-up" (40). But in the midst of this oppression and fear, there is hope: "never mind sister: don't play him no mind" (40). They have begun to reach out to each other, to share their common problems.

This movement toward sisterhood as a source of enrichment continues in the next poem, "pyramid." The poem involves a multiple love relationship in which three women are pursued by one man. They are all attracted to him and he goes to them in turn, despite their efforts to resist him. The women are pulled together, rather than driven apart, when they discover how he has treated them. Each woman suffers the same pain and they seek comfort in each other: "she held her head on her lap: the lap of her sisters soakin up tears: each understandin how much love stood between them: love between them: love like sisters" (44). Their love for each other proves stronger than their attraction to the same man. Although it is painful, the situation actually ends in triumph for the three women.

In the series "no more love poems," the women share the pain of their failed love affairs and assert their needs to be respected. In the first poem, the dance metaphor is brought into play again: "i can make the music loud: enuf/so there is no me but dance/& when i can: dance

like that/there's nothin cd hurt me/but i get: tired & i have ta/come offa the floor" (45). Dance is not enough for her to outdistance the pain her lover has caused her.

The second poem extends the metaphor, with much the same result: "i cd: dance a dance outta time/ a dance wit no partners/: take my pills & keep right on steppin . . . i am really colored & really sad sometimes & you hurt: me more than i ever danced outta/into oblivion isn't far: enuf to get outta this" (46). Dancing will not be enough to cover the callousness and insensitivity of her lover. She pleads with him to accept her as she is—a plain black woman with an abundance of love for him.

The last poem further articulates the black woman's longing for love. The speaker states her "dependency on other livin beins for: love i survive on intimacy & tomorrow . . . my love: is too delicate to have thrown back on my face" (48). There is pathos in this statement, as in this whole series of poems, but there is also comfort in the woman's sharing of their pain. The experiences of spurned love and cruel indifference are common to them all. Again, they have united to seek sympathy and have discovered their sisterhood. Soon they begin dancing and chanting together, building a mutual sense of self-respect. Together, they turn their pain into triumph.

"Somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff" is probably the most straightforward in its statement about black women's struggle for autonomy. The speaker of the poem protests the loss of her identity: "this is mine/this aint yr stuff/: now why dont you put me back & let me hang out in: my own self: somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff": (52). The speaker's anger and desire to maintain control of her life come through: she "is driven by a woman's pain, a woman's anger, a woman's need to survive, to demand her space in the world: 'this is a woman's trip & i need my stuff'" (Washington 84). The speaker expresses great pride in her body—the same body that was a source of shame in earlier parts of the work: "i wants my: things/i want my arm wit the hot iron scar/& my: leg wit the flea bite/i want my calloused feet" (53). Undoubtedly, the speaker has developed her sense of identity.

This developing sense of identity is continued in the poem titled "sorry." The women refuse to accept the pitiful excuses offered by their wandering men. They are aware of their worth as human beings and will not tolerate the cruel treatment that they once accepted as their lot. They assert their independence: "i'm gonna do exactly what i want to: & i wont be sorry for none of it" (57).

"A nite with beau willie brown" is markedly different from all of the past poems in that it gives a sympathetic

portrayal of Beau Willie, the male character in the story. Even though Beau Willie repeatedly beats Crystal, his lover, he emerges as more of a tragic figure than an oppressive one, still suffering the trauma of his war experience in Vietnam. After Crystal obtains a court order barring Beau Willie from seeing their two children, he forces his way into the apartment and demands that she marry him. When she refuses, he threatens to drop the children out of the window. Crystal finally gives in, only to watch him drop the children anyway. Because Beau Willie is also a tragic figure in this drama, it is easy to see that Shange's anger is not directed toward him; rather, it is "in response to the dircumstances and impulses—whatever they may be—which result in men brutalizing women" (Hollin Flowers 53). Her anger is directed toward oppression, but in this case there is no easily identifiable cause for that oppression.

The work ends with the poem "a layin on of hands," in which all of the women participate. They feel that they are missing something, something that is vital to making them whole. Their search ends in their triumphant discovery: "i found god in myself: and i loved her/i loved her fiercely" (67). The inference here is that only together, through "a layin on of hands," could they come to this realization. Appropriately, the play ends with the seven women saying the line: "and this is for colored girls who have considered: suicide/but are moving to the ends of their own: rainbows" (67). The suggestion is that women are able to overcome the oppression and pain that mark their lives. For Shange, the rainbow represents the diversity and fullness of black women:

If you see only one color, it's not beautiful. If you see them all, it is. A colored girl, by my definition, is a girl of many colors. But she can only see her overall beauty if she can see all the colors of herself. To do that, she has to look deep insider her. And when she looks inside herself, she will find God and love and beauty (Ribowsky 46).

*For Colored Girls*, then, has two goals. One is for black women to see the beauty in themselves by overcoming society's oppressive stereotypes and realizing their own self-worth. The second goal is for black women to realize the importance of sisterhood—sharing—in the development of autonomy for black women as a class. Shange accomplishes these two goals by her use of the simple reality of the pain and struggle that all black women endure. Shange says about her work that "the message is a hopeful one. It is heartbreaking at times but most of it is an affirmation, a celebration, that it's truly wonderful being a colored girl" (Ribowsky 45). *For Colored Girls* does indeed "sing a black girl's song" (2). ▣

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**Moments Peace**    Howard C. Quednau



**Bucolic Love** *Alberto Meza*

## The Dance of the Emu

This is the beach of the Emu  
With jell-fish torn and twisted  
With crab shells cracked and hollowed  
With conches smashed and shattered

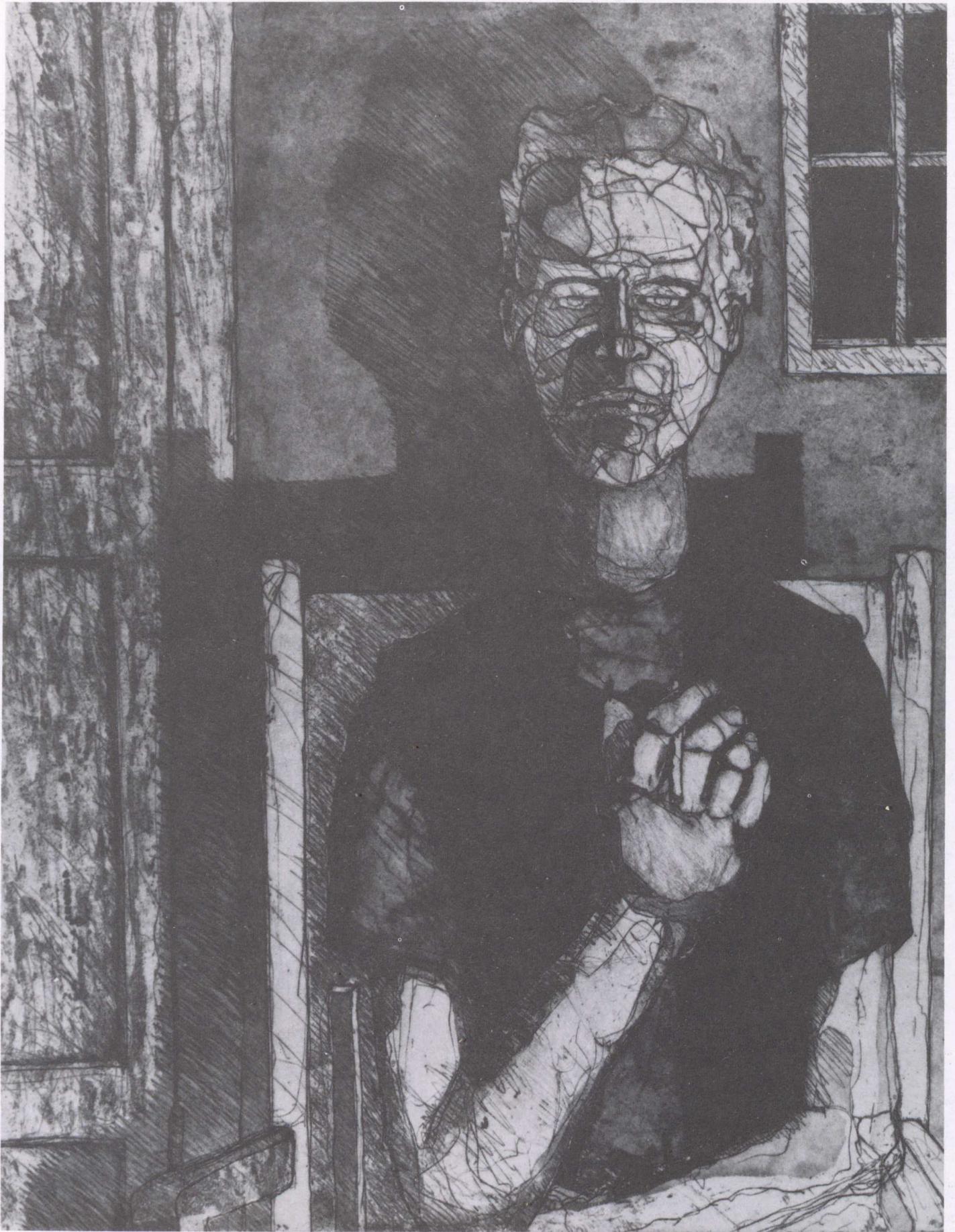
Bright white moon  
Over sand dunes

The Emu stands  
On rotting weed  
On sliding sand

The lick of a wave  
Sets him in a craze  
And so begins the dance  
That lasts for days and days and days

This is the dance of the Emu  
That only few can see  
This is the weird bird at twilight  
That dances at the edge of the sea

*Paul Engel*



**So Many Decisions . . . I Can Remember When** *Sue Orlando*

## Sammy

Did it scare you  
to see us grow up  
and race cars  
not bikes  
up and down the block?  
Were you angry  
when we cluttered the street  
with our heaps and junks  
while you kept your clean, green car  
in the garage?  
Sometimes we forgot you had it.  
Usually, you just  
gardened or shoveled snow,  
or sat on the step  
smoking a cigar,  
not talking to neighbors much  
since becoming sort of deaf.  
Then one day in July,  
you called across the fence  
to old Suzie,  
and shot yourself in the head.  
They hosed the blood off  
the fine, white patio,  
and it flowed  
into the thick lawn.  
They say you were upset  
because you couldn't get  
your driver's license  
renewed.

*Catherine Ward*

# When Darkness Dies

by Christopher Tabert

First came the breakup. On the way home after a normal uneventful evening, the whole thing exploded. I'm sorry to have to put it this way Billy, she said, but you just don't take hints. It's not working. You're going nowhere and I don't want to go with. You're never gonna be rich or famous or important. Or even average. I'm sorry.

She got out almost before I stopped the car. Goodbye, Billy.

I'll walk you to the door.

If you insist.

A goodnight kiss? I said. I thought one good kiss might change her mind.

She was fishing around in her purse. Here, she said. Will ten dollars cover my dinner? She started to shut the door.

Can't I even kiss you goodbye?

What would that accomplish?

We stood there in the doorway, an awkward distance apart. There was a warm summer wind and her hair. Then Ginger trotted out of the kitchen and stood right between us, sniffing at my pants and shoes. You musta stepped in something. She extended her hand to shake. Well, have a nice life Billy. I took her hand and tried to pull her toward me, but the damn dog was in the way. She took a step back and I lost my balance and started to fall forward and grabbed her shoulder trying to right myself and wound up ripping her blouse at the seam Ginger barking and snarling it peeled about four inches down her arm and exposed a patch of tanned smooth soft her father came downstairs then dishevelled and foul-tempered at having been awakened he came around the corner took one look figured I was some sort of a molester and came charging at me burly and furious.

\*

On still winter nights I'd lie in bed and listen to the clean *bamming* in the freightyards and imagine the men in clodhopper shoes and baggy faded blue overalls, their breath visible, telling dirty stories and wiping their snots with their workgloves, and all those boxcars and flatcars rolling through the night to faraway places. Getting somewhere.

It was the trains in the night that got me interested in maps. I always knew that as soon as I was old enough I would go to work at the factory at the end of the block. The Universal Map & Globe Co. plant was built in 1916 and looks it. The neighborhood went up east of the factory: red- and brown-brick three-flats with rickety wooden stairs and dark landings in the back. In the summer, laundry flaps on the clotheslines and the old people maintain the dying custom of sitting and visiting on the

front steps. In the winter, everything is heavy and gray and still, and the dogs just stare dolefully through the fences. Eleven years ago, when I was eighteen, I went to work in the factory. I figured that if I couldn't see all those faraway places at least I could make them.

\*

no kissing then with a fat lip.

\*

I come out of the factory and make my way home down the alley, through the grimy noisy kids who play kickball every day beneath the sign on the telephone pole that says NO BALL PLAYING ALLOWED. Hey don't you know that sign was put there for a reason, I say to them, to keep you from getting killed by one of those trucks. They can't stand to have their game interrupted. Ah fuck off why don't you, one kid mumbles—but only when he thinks I'm a safe distance away.

I bought myself a permanent, indelible, marking pen

I unlatch the back gate and go along the fence, looking to see if there are any good spots to make my mark on. I see one—on the side of Schmidts' garage where the paint has peeled off—but just then here comes old Kurt around the corner of the house. He likes to imagine that he's a farmer, pushing his wheelbarrow around in circles all day while his wife Helen bangs her bony knuckles on her kitchen window and hollers orders out at him. He's hard of hearing and doesn't mind.

I wave to Kurt and go inside. As usual, there's a note telling me to get my own supper. My mother spends most of her afternoons at the races, trying to get rich on \$2 show bets. Don't wait for your ship to come in, she says. Go out and *bring* it in! She might as well toss her money down the sewer for all she knows about the horses, but there's a condo in Florida at the end of her rainbow. Maybe I can put a down payment on one for her after I get my promotion. In the meantime, she'll chase all over creation looking for bingo games and lottery tickets, spending more on bus fare than she does gambling. I work hard all day and then have to cook myself a TV dinner in an ancient gas oven that's liable to blow up any minute.

\*

No matter what you do, some things blow up in your face quite unexpectedly.

We can still be friends Billy, she said. She wants a guy who pretends to need her less than she needs him. I made her nervous. Once I tried to treat her indifferently for half an hour, just to prove to both of us that I could do

it. I blew it, though. I started to make effusive apologies, and she hadn't even noticed. She said, What *are* you talking about Billy?

Mike Costa said, Don't you worry bout her Billy. Wait'll she's forty she'll be one of them bitches sits around smokin and drinkin all day, console yourself with that knowledge. She'll sit around in her fuzzy slippers and her bathrobe that shows more than you want to see with her trusty bottle under the kitchen sink. Like my wife, he said.

\*

#### BILLY MOROSE WAS HERE

For a while I was making my mark on drainpipes, fenceposts, windowsills, mailboxes, picnic tables, billboards, viaducts. Some people took offense, though—especially Helen Schmidt who saw me write on her garage and came waddling out and threatened to swat me with a frying pan *charging at me scrawny and cantankerous*

\*

When people talk of moving because the neighborhood's changing, they don't mean changing as in becoming racially integrated but as in falling apart. At first glance, it's leafy and discreet, the same as forty years ago: Mrs. Swenson still trudges up and down in her rubber galoshes, dragging her grocery cart behind her with nonchalant tenderness like a kid pulling his little sister in a wagon, rattling over bumps and cracks in the sidewalk. But people no longer call it nice. No one dashes out, anymore, on the morning after a thunderstorm to clear their yard of fallen branches. Paint flakes off, wood is allowed to warp, sidewalks go unshoveled. Kurt built a birdbath and some kids came along and knocked it to pieces.

Here, a dying neighborhood. Beyond the factory, to the west, there is nothing—only warehouses, lumberyards, railroad tracks and the evening sun.

\*

when she giggled

\*

When my mother isn't at the races, she's at the fence with Helen. Helen thinks that burglars come in every night and transfer her flour into the sugar canister and vice versa, while she and Kurt sleep.

You know, my mother tells her, I sometimes wonder if the bingo's crooked.

Crooked? says Helen. Sure, they're all crooked.

I hear the same woman wins the big jackpot every week. And do you know what she does Helen?

They took two teabags last night.

She turns right around, my mother says, and brings the money back to Father Ostrowicz Monday morning. Isn't that sweet?

And a whole bag of sugar, Helen says.

See they fix it that way.

Oh sure. They fix it that way, see? So you can't tell what they've been up to.

They talk and talk like that, about nothing, while old Kurt blissfully pushes his wheelbarrow. My mother calls me over to where she and Helen are. William, she says, you must apologize to Helen. You can't go around writing your name all over the place. People have been complaining, she says. They'll have you committed.

\*

City of the Big Shoulders: shouldering through the crowd my arm around her shoulder. Her shoulder showed her show hers. Show her.

\*

Something is going on at the factory. There are big secretive meetings every day, people skittering in and out of Wilburn's office with their briefcases. Wilburn's a devious old fart, Mike Costa said. With him you expect the worst until you find out otherwise. While everyone gossips and whispers, I just listen. The latest rumor has us opening a second plant in California or Arizona or Texas or Georgia or one of those places. If it's true I'll probably get not only a promotion but a one-way ticket out of this gray neighborhood. Maybe I'll look different then. Could it be?

\*

My mother was watching the Lotto drawing on TV when I got home. They purposely let you get a couple numbers right, she says, just to encourage you. So you'll buy more tickets.

Well it certainly works on you, I said.

Then she said, I've got some news for you. Guess who's getting married.

You, I bet.

For what it's worth, she said, I think you're better off.

No, I said. Are you sure?

Sure I'm sure. I got it from her own mother, she said. They're going to invite us to the wedding.

I knew she was seeing some guy but I never imagined

Whose do you suppose it is?

Whose do I suppose what is? You don't mean to tell me *Well she's always been a little too grown-up for her age.* What do you mean by that? *Just what I said.* Thanks for the

clarification. *Why do you think she's getting married* I don't know why does anyone I refuse to believe *let's not kid ourselves* mother people don't do that anymore I think you're jumping to conclusions *I'd think you'd be interested that's all I mean after all* well if she is it sure as hell isn't mine I'll guarantee you that *I know that you're not one of the suspects*

\*

not one of the suspects of course not a guy who's been carrying the same rubber around in his wallet for years still in the foil wrapper like a cold capsule buried in there somewhere maybe behind the expired library card just in case

Someone told me once it's a question of quality or quantity. If you fail going after one, try the other. You meet these smoky young women and you establish a precarious foothold, some conversation, a touch, and then sometimes you figure ah, what's the use. I've got a whole shoebox full of phone numbers—on matchbooks, scraps of paper, business cards. But you know the next day maybe this woman doesn't really want you to call her.

When darkness dies, there's nothing left but morning.

\*

It should have dawned on me sooner. Instead of making my mark on cheap temporary objects, like garage walls, and having people siccing their dogs on me and offering to crack me over the head, being called a fool or a shit-head, finding my message often dwarfed or obliterated by illiterate obscene spraypainted scrawlings, I should be writing on something pure and permanent. In the event of nuclear holocaust, what will survive? Rubble. Rocks. BILLY MOROSE WAS HERE. And no one will mind.

I'll talk to the geological cartographer and find out which kinds of rocks last the longest.

\*

Mike Costa said, Why do you think all these accountants and asskissers are sneaking around? You think it's so the company can give us all raises and a pat on the back? Come on now.

\*

I came home and found three things in the mailbox:

1) A bright green envelope containing one of those sweepstakes offers. YOU, Mrs. Edward Moross, MAY HAVE ALREADY WON OUR SUPER GRAND PRIZE MEGA-GIVEAWAY OF \$\$\$5,000,000.00!! WHAT COULD BE MORE FANTASTIC?!

2) One of the tabloids my mother subscribes to, which

bore the headline I HAD A SPACE ALIEN'S BABY!!

3) The wedding invitation.

It's bad enough to watch her get married but on top of it I have to bring my mother along as my date.

\*

Everyone is edgy. We attempt boisterous jaunty chatter, but the anxious whispers win out. Mulroyan shambles around adjusting his tie clasp and chewing antacid tablets. He's one of the vice presidents but you can talk to him. Hey Pete, Roland Feathers said to him, I mean Mr. Mulroyan. Tell us what's comin off. Mulroyan smiled with his mouth closed and said, We'll all know pretty soon.

We've stopped accepting orders for shipment. I'm not sure what this means. Joe Mace says there's nothing to worry about; the second plant's all set for Arizona. Apparently they're taking an old tourist-trap cowboy ghost town and turning it into a rootin tootin industrial park. Joe says we'll make all the big stuff out there, and they'll keep doing the smaller projects here. I hope Joe is right—the shop steward ought to know, shouldn't he? Even Mike Costa is starting to believe.

I think my mother will settle for Arizona instead of Florida.

\*

To think of you  
at the mirror  
tying a ribbon in your hair  
For me.

\*

The merchants put up drooping strings of bright blinking lights and make believe their shops are new and inviting. Business is bad: many shops open late and close early. Still, on dark wet afternoons you can see the shopkeepers leaning up against their windows, faithfully watching the traffic and the rain. With the houses and yards, too, people keep up their pathetic attempts to renovate or beautify. Kurt built another birdbath but the kids came along again and smashed it.

Leaves rustle at the window and the train whistles beckon.

\*

I survived the wedding. The dinner was good and the drinks plentiful. My mother threw her shoulder out of whack doing the hokey pokey.

\*

They dropped the bomb. On the day set aside for the big

announcement, Wilburn called in sick and left Mulroyan to do the dirty work. Mulroyan didn't have the stomach to face us; he made the announcement over the public-address system. The echoes and reverberations gave his voice the effect of confident authority, which was very funny because you could just picture him in there sweating and shaking. It is my unpleasant duty, he said, to inform you that the Chicago operations of Universal Map & Globe Company, Inc., are to be terminated in two months' time, concurrent with the transfer of our corporate headquarters and production facilities to Sunnyhaven, Arizona.

They weren't opening a second plant, they were moving the whole damn operation out there. At 4:53 p.m. Carla Poinsettia crept out and posted a paper on the bulletin board above the time clock. We gathered around. It was a list of people who were invited to accompany their jobs to Arizona. The list was not long. Everyone studied it as if repeated readings could change its contents. We knew something was going on but we never imagined . . .

See? Mike Costa said. What'd I say? Sure as shit.

Thelma Sage said, Lord have mercy.

The horn sounded quitting time. For a few seconds no one moved. We all looked at each other—particularly at Joe Mace, whose name was on the list. There were insinuations that Joe had sold us out. Joseph, Thelma said. Here all this time we thought you was on our side.

Joe ran a hand over his bald head. Now look here, he said. I'm as shocked as you are.

That's what *you* say, man! Roland Feathers rasped. I say you're in on it.

Then everything started to go crazy. I had a feeling between my throat and my stomach as if I'd just seen a murder. We knew something was going on but we never imagined . . . Hell, Roland said, we might as well get our money's worth. He started running around the plant, throwing piles of maps onto the floor, overturning tables, kicking boxes, scattering stacks of paper. I joined in. Mike Costa clapped his hands and stomped one foot, shouting encouragement. Joe made for the exit. Soon there were people everywhere dancing on tables, playing baseball with wadded paper and a wooden wall-map reel, throwing globes around, carrying on and making a shambles of the place. Lord have mercy! Thelma cried.

Carla Poinsettia came over the PA system, screaming at us to stop it. She could hardly be heard above the din, but it didn't matter—no one would have obeyed anyway. We were mostly docile people who had never taken part in a riot before, and we were discovering that these things have an irresistible momentum of their own. The uprising began to spill out into the street. On his way out, Roland

bounced a globe through one of the glass doors at the main entrance. I got an idea. I scrambled up the railroad embankment and looked around for rocks I had marked. Finding one, I hurled it through a window on the third floor. Bingo! as my mother would say (if she ever won). I found some more BILLY MOROSE WAS HERE and sailed them at the windows. Roland Feathers and Mike Costa climbed up on either side of me. Let me throw, Bill. What do you mean we don't have the right kinda rocks? They started picking up rocks indiscriminately and throwing them, which wasn't the point at all.

Jesse LaPew came around the corner and yelled, Stop this mischief!

Someone grabbed Jesse's security guard cap and frisbee'd it up to me. I put it on.

Jesse said, Hey I don't wanna have to shoot anybody.

Cut it out Jesse, Mike Costa said. You aint gonna shoot anyone.

I might . . .

You don't even have any bullets.

Jesse squinted up at us. By this time I was chanting an incoherent impassionate speech and drawing great tumultuous applause. Jesse took aim at his cap which was bobbing up and down on my head he went ahead and fired a shot to everyone's astonishment he had real bullets and in the shouting and confusion I went down thought I'd been hit a martyr for my cause

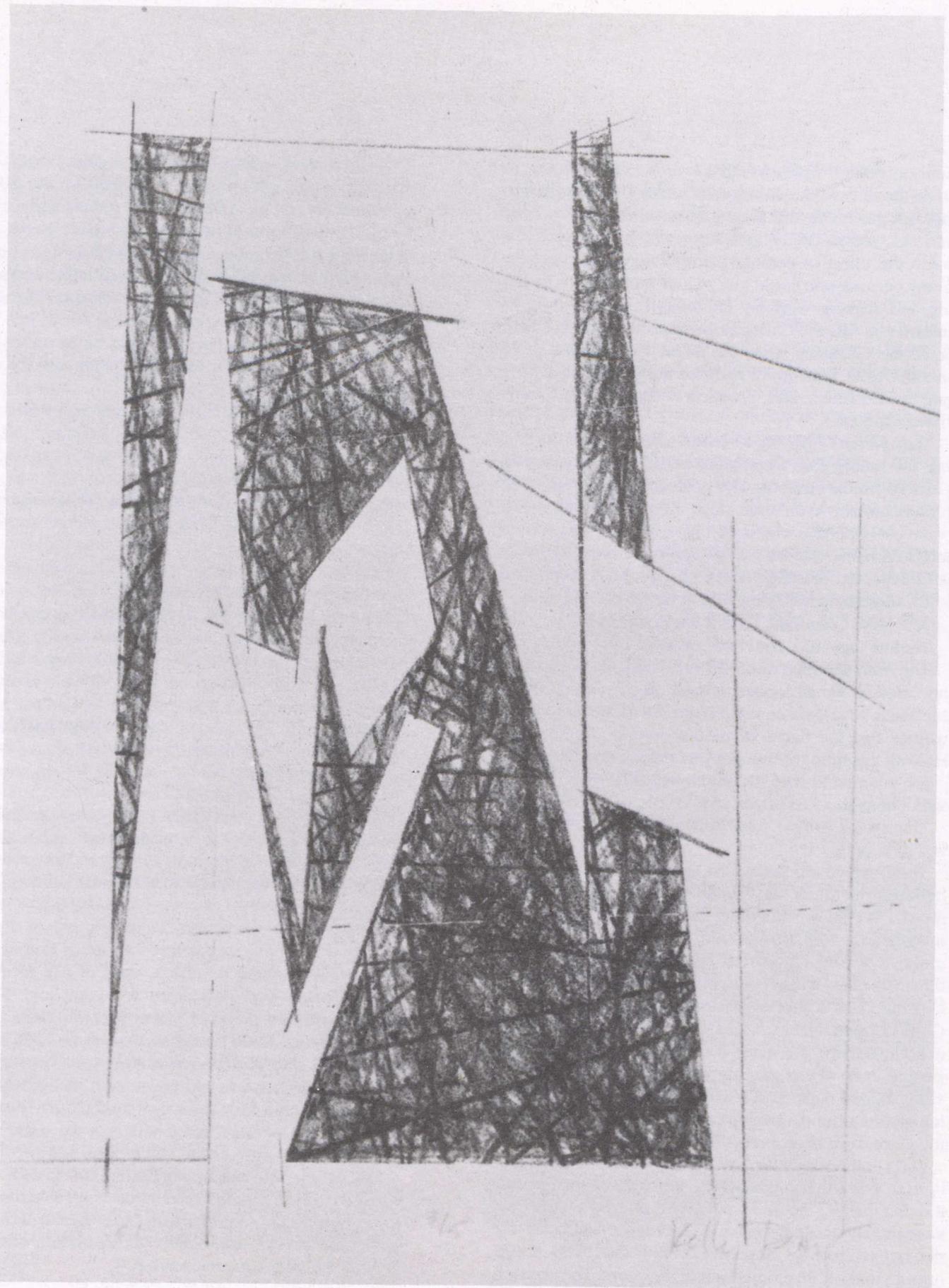
\*

My mother wins seven dollars at the races, takes me out for dinner to celebrate, and thereby winds up with a net loss of about ten. Thelma Sage runs for alderwoman. Kurt Schmidt builds a sturdier birdbath. Now how can you beat people like that?

\*

Along with the final paycheck, each of use received a sardonic thank-you note from the company. Wilburn pointed out that the plan was to demolish the factory anyway, and our little demonstration, as he called it, had merely expedited the process. So they went happily off to Arizona to resurrect an old ghost town while helping to create a new kind. One day we all turned out to watch the wrecking ball swing. When it was over we stood amidst the settling dust and looked at the pile.

Out of love and out of work. Mike Costa said, I hope you learned something from all this. Yes, I told him. True love doesn't jump out of a magazine. Wealth and power don't land in your lap. Mike looked at me sort of strangely. Well, he said, I guess it's a start. □



:01 Kelly Day

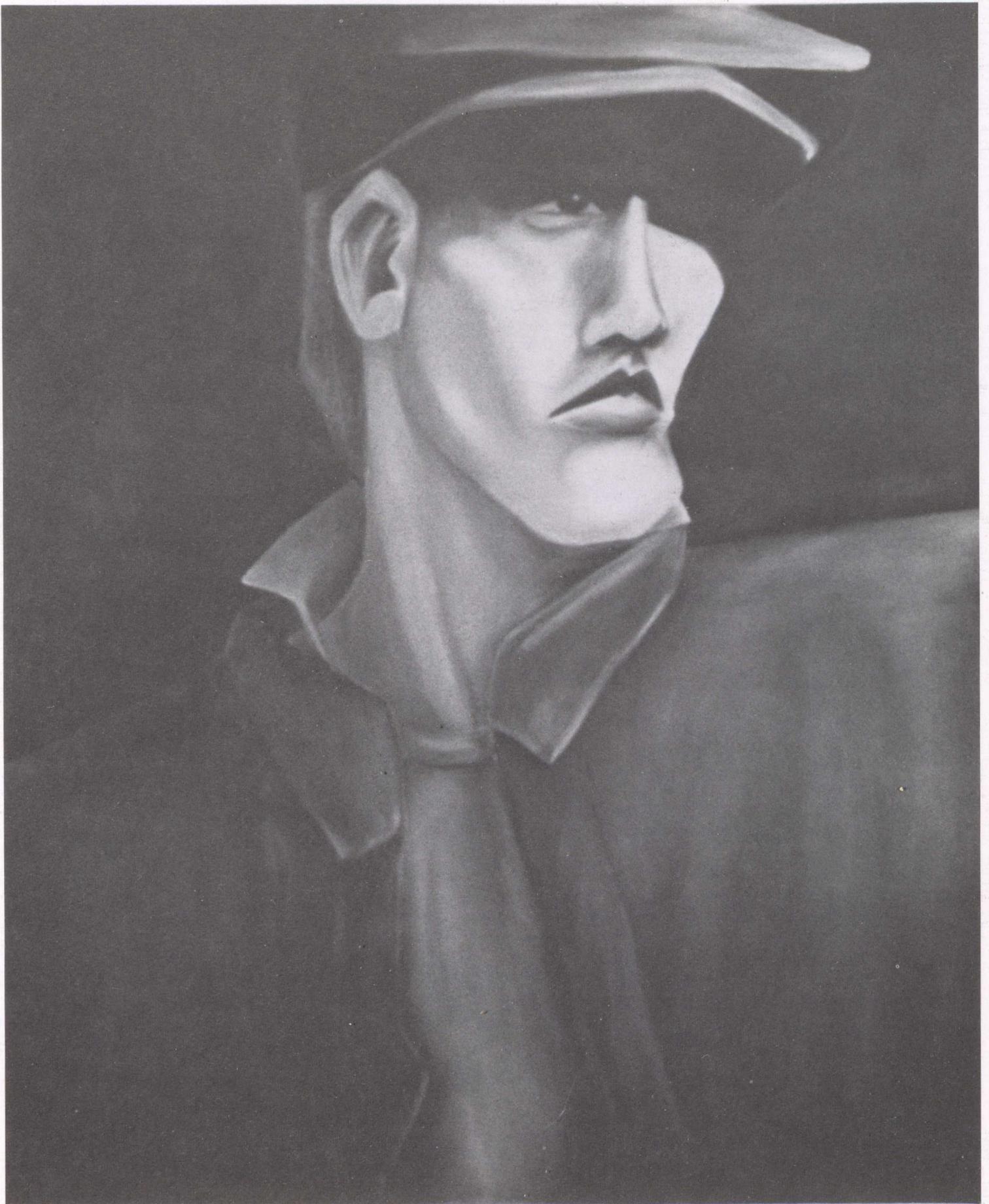
## Old Drive-ins

Drive in lovers  
taste Americana  
and tongues and  
twilight movie  
popcorn and beer  
so fine in the tense  
yellow dusk.  
Coolness is getting a  
coke deep inside  
and heat, keeps wafting  
from passion to car to  
screen to

bottle underfoot.  
Cars crush rocks  
headlights on  
and rolling slow  
to next movie screen  
where packs of boys or girls  
move and sway to dance  
a bit with a stranger  
who smiles and  
eats hot dogs and  
throws popcorn.  
Laughter strips the  
heat away as  
hugging friends  
drink fizzing beers that  
taste so sweet.

Meanwhile,  
through the windshield,  
stars burn hotly  
in the palms of  
lovers' hands.

*Jennifer Diven*



**A New Identity** *Charles E. Gneich, Jr.*

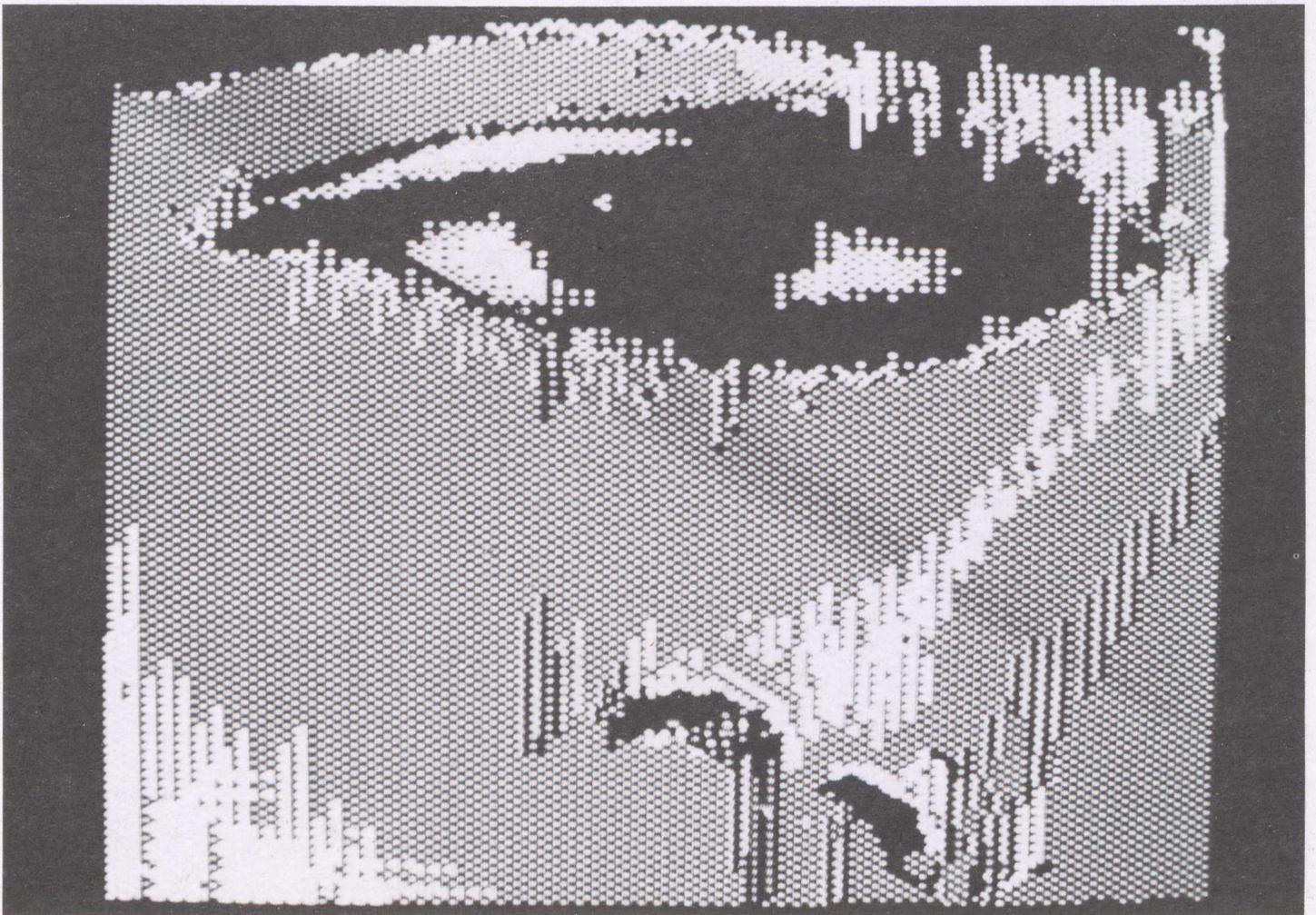
## Airborne Thanatophobia

Asphyxiation upon the tied  
crowd, in my death-stirred  
eye purple sunset swallows  
the falling stars, planets  
without course or cause —  
ours tipping south to north  
on broken axis — subcosmic  
booms popping the eardrums,  
ravine winds, goats crying  
to men — men crying to God.

Ribs pressing moss beneath  
the dripping springs, exotic  
maiden-shy bathers — lovers'  
unopened budding cladophylls  
to autumn full blossomed sky  
nereids pouring from the sea  
toedancing naked in the gale  
for their hallowed multitude.

Mountains outbursting loose  
from the weightless beings  
who grip the slippery rocks,  
centrifuged, scattered endear-  
ments in the void of future  
cold-glimpsing strobing suns  
in empty oceans, reflections  
of revolving stars — spinning  
over, beyond hope's strength —  
hanging, hanging, hanging  
glaciers over the equator.

*Gus A. Vasilopoulos*



Eye C 4 *Terre Layng*

## (No) Suicide Note

She thought  
it'd be different

She thought at least  
she'd wax poetic,  
prosaic

not so pathetic

Lacking in fine words  
for those travelers of light  
she lay, cheek on  
rug collecting its transient fare

and with characteristic scornful smile, thought  
well anyway  
Mill never came *this* far

*Ronda Rueff*

# The Java Monkey

by Laurie M. Johnson

## INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

August 15, 1984

All employees

Tensions are at the boiling point today in this usually peaceful workplace. A population is taking sides, polarizing as never before political and social relations. Islands are forming as long and noisy eruptions disrupt normal hours of operations. At the heart of this thoroughly disturbing phenomenon is a small brown bean with no calories and an aromatic and pungent nature. Yes, coffee, the mainstay of this economically disadvantaged place, has severed long-held community ties and played havoc with productivity.

Coffee cartels have replaced once harmonious cooperation. There are three: Brown, Fernelli and Collins-Scott. All are jockeying for power and position over the liquid gold. One takes the strong approach, the others respectively weak and favoring a java-mocha interface. No one wants to share-crop.

The government, in an effort to curb growing unrest and the possibility of violence, is considering declaring martial law. All coffee and its byproducts would be seized as official property and used for the benefit of the entire population—equally distributed and payed for throughout. The president, Frederick E. Clause, has given the various factions three days to reach detente before stepping in with massive forces to counter even the fiercest resistance.

—F.E.

## MEMO—FYIO

August 16, 1984

Our leader has dispatched the attached memo. Request your presence in the conference room at 9:00 a.m. today. Mandatory.

—Bond

MINUTES: Unscheduled employee conference.

SUBJECT: Inter-employee relations.

August 16, 1984

The employees of F. Clause Co. met at 9:00 a.m. August 16, 1984, to discuss the ensuing conflict as referred to in the attached memo, technical exhibit A. The following points were discussed:

1. Chairman Bond opened the meeting with a brief statement of a conciliatory nature then opened the floor for comments.
2. Ms. Collins-Scott commented on the rather "tumid" nature of F.E.'s memo. She said that she had no relevant data to contribute to the meeting at the moment.

3. Mr. Salina mentioned the opportunity cost involved while the meeting was in process. He said the whole affair "is not tumid but turbid. That wakeup pot is worse than Mississippi mud."
4. Mr. Fernelli then informed Mr. Salina that his comments were out of order and that he would vacate the conference room if he perceived any additional verbiage proceeding from Mr. Salina's orifice. In his opinion the meeting was a "farce."
5. Mrs. Brown would have no comment except "it's after nine."
6. Ms. Collins-Scott then moved to adjourn. The roll-call was read and the vote was unanimous in favor, Mr. Bond abstaining.
7. The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 a.m.

Attached: Memo August 15.

SPC

## INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

August 18, 1984

All employees

After three days of warring, the government of this small community has set its foot down. Martial law has been declared and all fire will cease. All coffee holdings will be expropriated within the hour, more or less. It is appropriate at this juncture to muse on the aftermath of such a measure. Will hatred and disgust melt away with oily build-up? Somehow that seems doubtful when one looks at this war-torn landscape. Coffee cups loom to mark off territory visibly partitioned by any conveniently rearrangeable object. How will peace be returned to such divided people? It is a hard task which will require all the inventiveness of the current despot.

—F.E.

## ROUTING SLIP

Mr. Bond

Mrs. Brown

Ms. Collins-Scott

Mr. Fernelli

Mr. Salina

Attached is F.E.'s memo dated August 15, 1984 for your immediate attention. Any suggestions as to plan of action would be appreciated. Correspond via the VDT system. Time does not permit the use of additional memoranda. Please route quickly.

—Bond

LETS HIDE IT  
WHERE? F.E.S GOT ALL THE KEYS  
GROWN ADULTS. CANT YOU STOMACH A TABLESPOON  
PER CUP??  
I KNOW THATS YOU BROWN  
AS MY DAUGHTER SAYS—GEEK  
ITS QUITTING TIME HE DIDN'T DO IT THE OLD MANS  
CHICKEN

*F.E. Clause Company*

August 18, 1984

I have prepared this speech formally and have given each one of you a copy. The purpose is to document the action I am about to take so that no one in this office will have any doubt as to why I have taken it.

We here at F. Clause Co. have had the java monkey on our backs long enough. We are becoming an unproductive, hostile treadmill of roasted grounds. I have tried to deal with this problem in a humorous manner, hoping that humor would make you realize how childish the whole affair is. However, as usual, you have not appreciated my subtle wit nor have you heeded my non-too-subtle warning.

A sage once said, "If you must use foreign substances to survive the day you are not using your full human faculties. If your taste buds override your brain, cut off your tongue." However much this would improve the atmosphere in our office I will not require you follow it to the letter. Instead I will remove temptation.

This is a dictatorship, not a democracy; private business, not federal bureaucracy. If I want everyone here to wear nose rings they will, or lose their jobs. I will no longer permit division among you due to coffee—its making, its purchase or its strength. I have thought long and hard (especially for an old man) about the proper solution, one which would not violate my belief in a benevolent monarchy. It was a difficult decision.

I spent many a sleepless night because of your coffee. Just last night I woke up at midnight with a powerful urge. Unfortunately it was to find a new legal staff. Then I said to myself, "You're an executive in charge and responsible for hundreds of thousands of dollars and you need your rest. You don't deserve this." I decided to exercise executive privilege.

To my right is the solution I have devised. You will find one for each of you. Please do not clamor or trample to get there. In return for my consideration I will expect absolute silence on the entire matter. The word coffee will not be uttered in or out of my presence. No one will mention anything relating to it. There will be no complaints, grumbles or witty remarks. We will live together in peace and harmony forever and ever or until I quit the business. If we don't, there'll be hell to pay.

—F.E.

MINUTES: Unscheduled employee conference.  
SUBJECT: Inter-employee relations  
August 20, 1984

The employees of F. Clause Co. met at 11:00 a.m. August 20, 1984, to discuss the turn of events in the ensuing internal crisis situation. The meeting convened at 11:00 due to heavy workload.

1. Chairman Bond opened the meeting with a brief statement of a complimentary nature, then opened the floor for comment.
2. Mr. Salina was quick to comment that F.E. had made a cost-effective decision and that he admired his superior more than ever now that he knew he understood the positioning of relative costs within the work environment.
3. Ms. Collins-Scott said that F.E. was playing Solomon but she had to admit his solution was unique and "not altogether disagreeable."
4. The assembled employees then participated in a long discussion on how much F.E. had spent and why. Frequent bursts of laughter interrupted the writer, who therefore could not record every comment.
5. Mrs. Brown had nothing to say except "it's 11:59."
6. Mr. Fernelli then informed Mrs. Brown that she was a "very perceptive woman indeed." Furthermore, he said, F.E.'s solution had made it easier for everyone to cohabitate. "The implementation of this scenario has decisively ended all comment on the unmentionable controversy that hit a high point only two days ago. I salute our administrator's knowledge of the human cohabitate. "The implementation of this scenario has decisively ended all comment on the unmentionable individual."
7. Ms. Collins-Scott suggested the formal meeting adjourn and that the matter be taken up over lunch in the cafeteria. All were in favor, voting unanimously.

INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

August 21, 1984

To: Frederick E. Clause

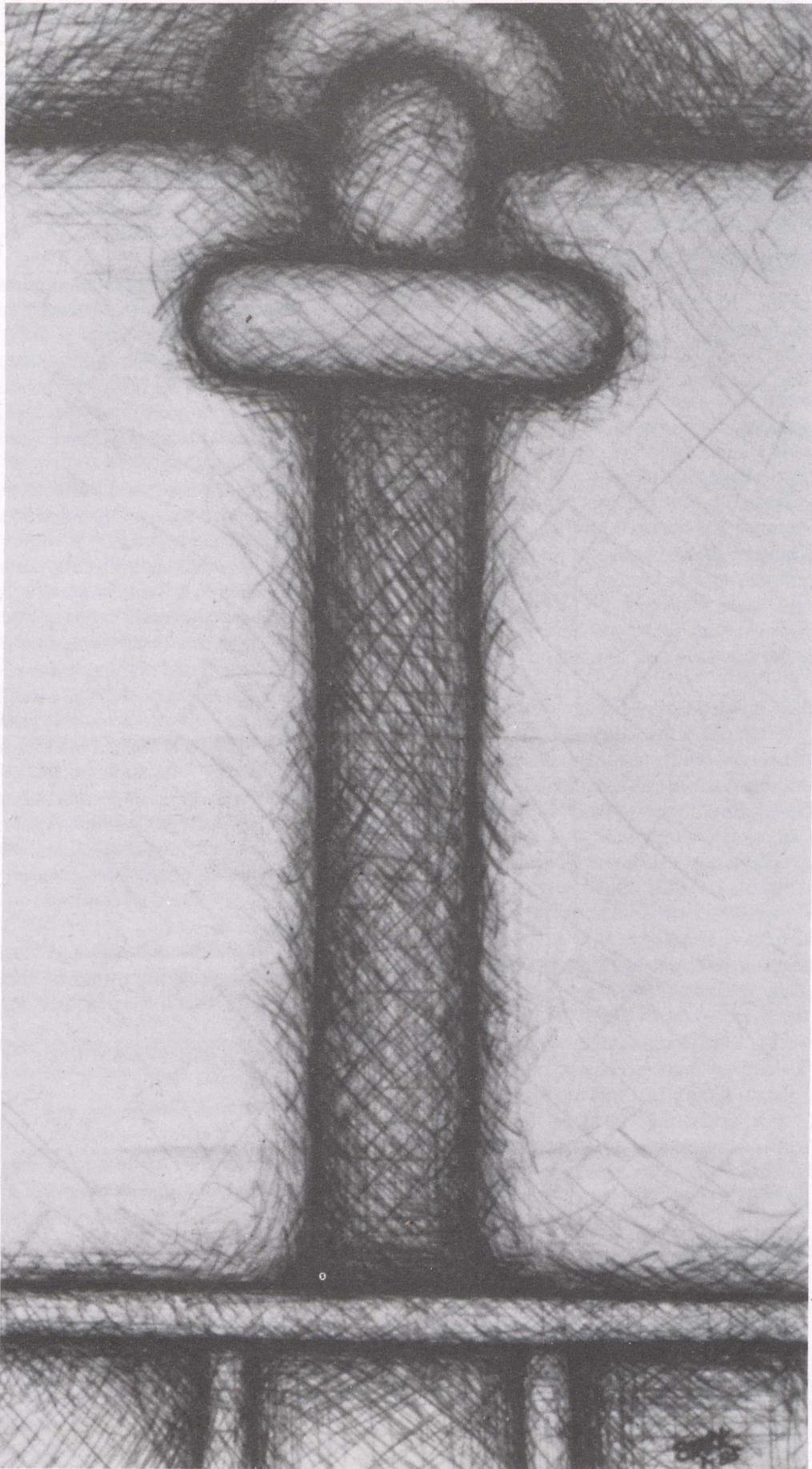
Without violating your wishes, we wish to first thank you for your gift. It should not have been given under such duress. Frankly, we as a staff are a bit embarrassed, considering what you felt compelled to do. It is an unusual boss who would handle such a sticky problem in such an untraditional, graceful style. We bow to you.

Secondly, we would like to apologize for keeping you up nights. You can be assured all unproductive activity will cease and desist.

Thank you,

The staff and employees  
of F. Clause Co.

P.S. Since Mrs. Brown is retiring, she felt it was alright for her to say "thanks for the four-cup coffee maker." □



**Chair** *Paul Stark*

## An Afternoon at Lutz'

I open the heavy walnut door,  
with its leaded glass eye,  
allowing me a prism of light into the Old World.

Women with skin as crusty,  
bodies as layered  
as the strudel they bite on, talk on.

Old World talk cushions me  
like the mauve velvet booths  
where the fedoras are seated, nodding to each other.

The men, in scratchy loden suits,  
prop their backs in hard chairs to trade stories,  
in accents thick and rich as schlag.

They can talk freely here, among the safety of pastries,  
the familiarity of embroidered napkins  
and dust-free chandeliers saved from the bombs.

*Linda Leverton*

## (Untitled)

Cindy Orcheski  
is twenty years old today  
The passages of time startles me  
Perhaps she is married  
Maybe she has children  
I don't know  
Yesterday  
she slapped her little brother's face  
for pulling up her skirt  
and I hit her with my magazine  
in a fury at their shrillness  
She is lost to me  
Maybe she is in college now  
or dead  
She held me tighter  
than any other living thing  
and shook her anger  
and fear away  
in sobs  
muffled against my chest  
futile rage at a father's betrayal  
a mother's indifference  
a dog's Judas bite  
She waved goodbye behind the storm door  
thirteen years ago  
I told her I would write  
Oh how I lied

*Susan Stemont*



**(untitled)** *Michelle Coakes*

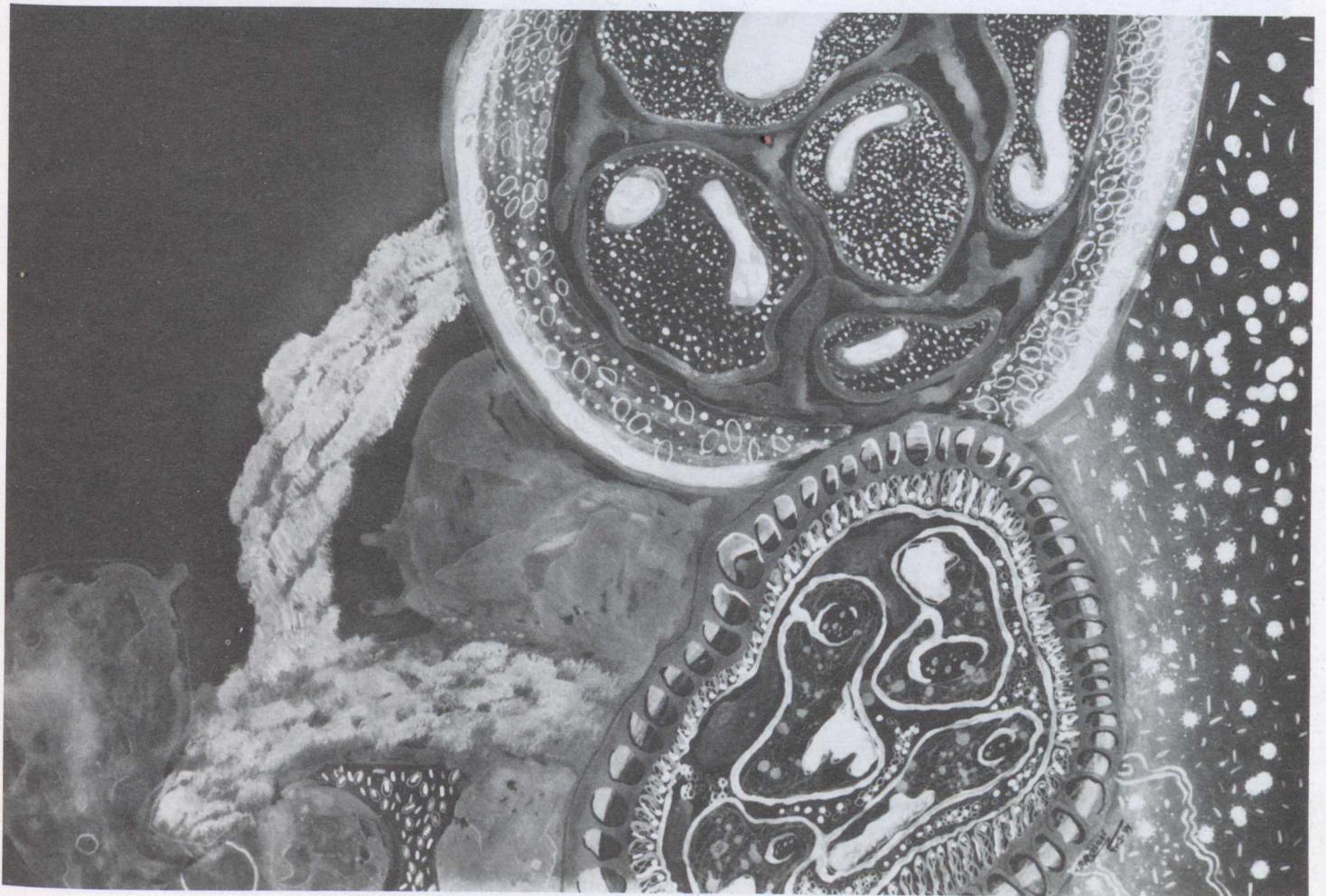
## Seaweed Tunnels

The salt-fresh air is stale now;  
I smell nothing but the waves  
that delight the younger children  
who come occasionally  
to pack new grains of sand,  
then, just watch it wash away.

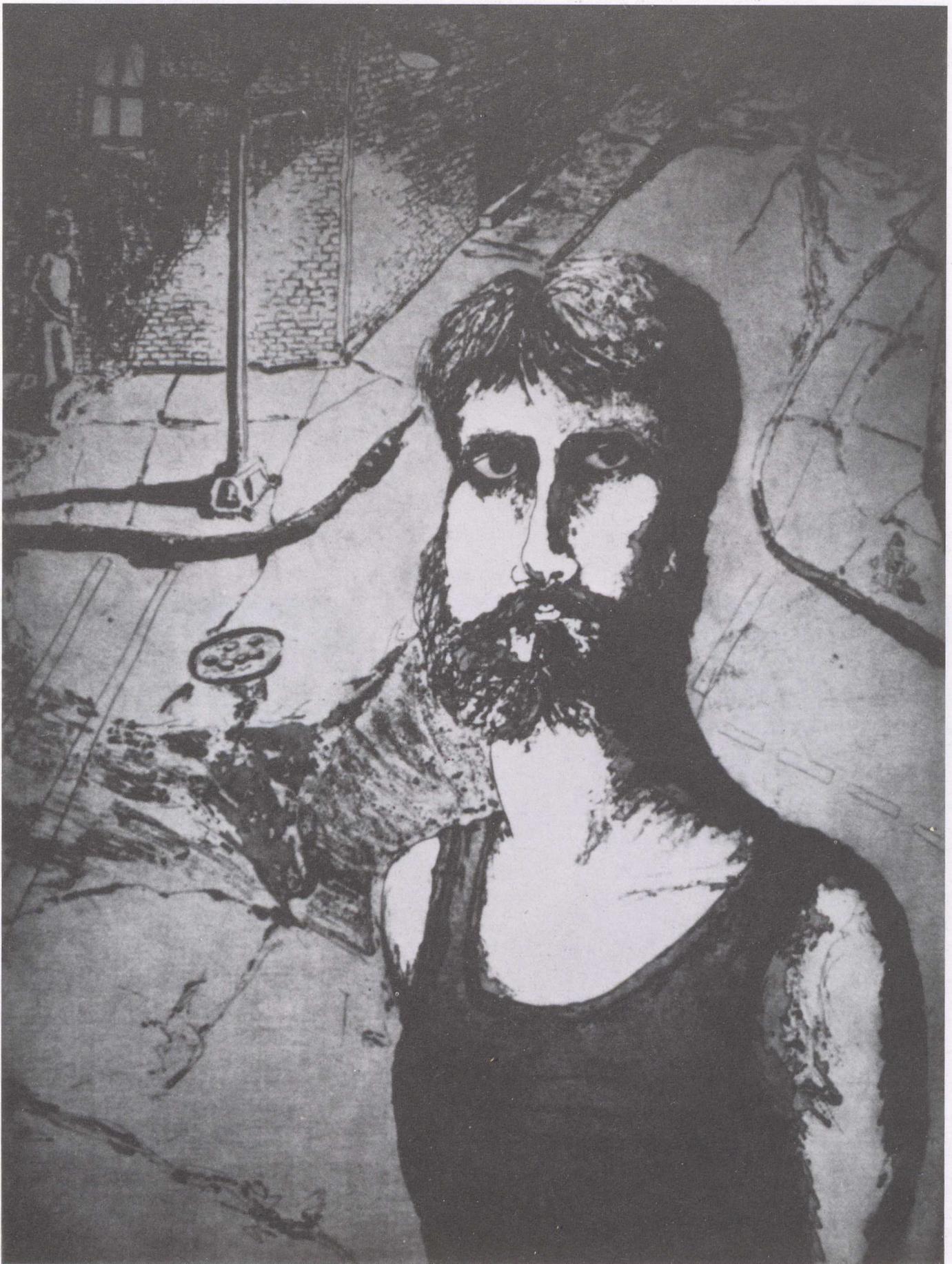
How long the journey is to make it back  
from the tunnels of water  
that envelop the minds of jellyfish  
and seaweed upward,  
sideways,  
yet never downward to the depths from  
so long.

Stepping in this sand again,  
I try to walk differently  
but the memories of the footprints washed away  
are the same each time;  
and the sun is setting lower now  
as the gull who's coming from whiter foam  
of distant sea  
flies over me  
and around me,  
through me,  
never noticing that I am there  
and he flies away to the surfaced treasures  
that I have never seen,  
nor will see,  
until my wings thus come  
as they have for the other drunken sailors  
suffocated by the journeying sand grains  
in the salt and seaweed tunnels,  
twisting,  
and weeping, over there.

*Mary Beth Parot*



**Tranquil Relations Micro Paradise** *Bob Apolloni*



**Light in the Upstairs Apartment** *Jordan David Dauby*

## The Distraction

Digital readout 3:02  
bear on the wall says this place is a zoo.

The blinds are drawn.  
The sky is painted.  
The desktop VDT shines  
a varnished sun.

Digits drawn  
to specific keys  
specific sequence  
specific spaces  
basso ostinato  
terminal drone.  
Conditioned air circulates  
from aluminum vents in the wall  
rising, falling  
convex vortex.  
Complex reflex  
on-off switch  
subtle twitch  
reaffirms one's being etcetera.

Staccato drone from the parking lot below  
draws involuntarily the eye.  
Chrome and glass  
the Beetle sniffs its pheromone path  
terminating in space 10.  
Chemical reaction  
vinyl traction—  
The front desk clears its throat.

Digital readout 3:04  
Mr. Przybylsky stands at the door.

Feel his warm glare:  
brown leaves sink in real air  
beyond the plexiglass.

Surprise.  
Get back to business.

*Phil Craig*

## Wordsmith and the Geophysicist

In response to the dullness  
of living with you,  
I have developed a catalogued collection  
of characters  
I slip into  
especially when you're demanding honesty.  
Anything can be said under the guise of honesty.  
Besides, whatever happened to ambiguity and wit?  
I miss understatement, flirtation.  
All this upfrontness is as bleak and thin as newsprint.  
I slip into voices.  
You usually don't mind.  
even like  
when I jump up, twirl on the balls of my feet,  
spinning a rifle of words  
like some crazed majorette,  
skirt swirling, thighs flashing,  
Heels click,  
and I am a pallbearer,  
pacing my words.  
You hand me your writing, and Miss Fix-it  
in honeyed, Southern drawl  
scrawls, "Try to be more clear dear."  
You protest  
the lack of morals  
of the last Miss America,  
and I say  
some of my best friends  
are sluts.

*Catherine Ward*

## (Untitled)

Instability binds  
Changing within  
And returning to a stable equilibrium  
 $F=-Kx$  : fire too is a constant  
I take a pride in my imagery

Tragic literary heroes  
Cloud the periphery  
Unlike the 'We'  
Emotion is blind to them  
A continuum of monotony

Inherent in me  
The seasons in chaos  
And there you stand  
Always levitating in someone else's globe.  
Questioning—Why?

If it were us  
To understand  
And explore  
And share  
And be

Climbing to the sun  
On wings of wax  
Worthwhile enough to die  
And Break free

Unlike Icarus  
Who remains ever cyclical.

*W. Steffenson*



**Til 2** Patricia L. Jackson

## “World Destroyer”

Afrika Bambaata  
rap song  
large fez-beaded  
sweat men  
dark and spice-colored.  
I smell creole and smoke  
I see bongos and brown eyes—  
on stage.  
Sing, they rap-flash  
about world ending  
tonight in  
shiny-edged filigree rings  
and feather boots  
they cross their bulk arms  
rap radically  
on life—nothing  
Afrika chanting  
physical beatings of  
drum and bass  
bouncing from  
wall to mind.

*Jennifer Diven*

## **Back To Basics**

BLACKLINE  
white space  
BLACKLINE

*Paul Engel*

