

Red Cedar Review

Red Cedar Review

volume XI issue 2

RED CEDAR REVIEW STAFF

EDITORS— Rose Arenas
Marilyn Basel
Greta S. Bolger
Lynn Domina
Janet Flegg
Ron Mieczkowski
Sam Mills

EDITOR— Randall K. Roorda

GRAPHIC ART— Kim Bauer
Mark Neering

RED CEDAR REVIEW is a biannual magazine of the literary arts published at Michigan State University. Manuscripts may be submitted to 325 Morrill Hall, Department of English, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan , 48824. Please include return postage.

SUBSCRIPTIONS — one year (two copies): $3.50. Single copies: $2.00.

OUR THANKS to the MSU College of Arts & Letters, English Department, Student Media Appropriations Board, George Kooistra and University Publications, Joe Kuszai, Abbey Press, The Lansing Star, Albert Drake, Jim Kalmbach and other friends.

COLOPHON — The text is set in 11 pt. Univers Bold, heads in 18 point Zentak Grotesk. Printed on 70 lb. Nekoosa Offset vellum finish,pink. Cover stock is 65 lb. Beckett Text laid finish Latigo brown.
Printing and binding by Wellman Printers, Lansing, Michigan.

Copyright *Red Cedar Review* May, 1977.

Contents

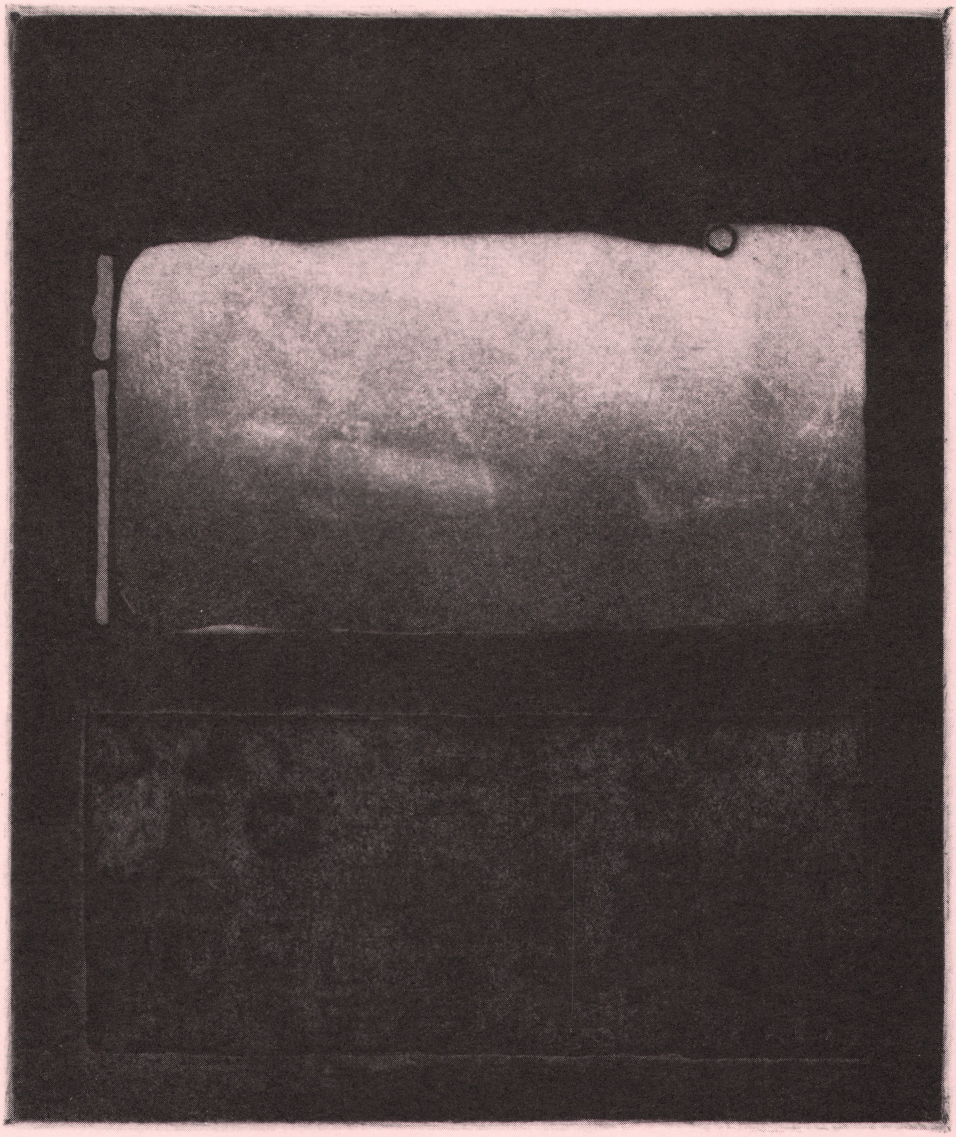
POETRY

Overnight Projects with Wood	*Diane Wakoski*	5
Flash Cube Prophecy	*R Bartkowech*	7
Listening to the Sounds of Spring Under Bamboo	*Frank Graziano*	8
Imperfect Prisms	*Barbara Drake*	9
Two Poems	*Herbert Scott*	17
Billy's Gone	*Shelby Stephenson*	20
Gray Stories	*Ann Pulsipher*	21
Three Poems	*Hugh Fox*	22
A Ranch in Mexico	*Jim Daniels*	26
Two Poems	*Casey Bush*	27
Freud's Hat and Cane	*Joel Dailey*	29
A Sort of Complaint on Behalf of a Would-Be Rapist...	*Michael L. Johnson*	30
Two People	*Laurie Cosca*	31
The Sweet Small Blue Air of a Plum	*Lee Upton*	32
The Wedding Curse	*Ron Mieczkowski*	34
Waiting To Be Let In	*Brenda Swope*	35
Challenging Situation No. 3: The Rolling Skull	*David Citino*	36
Three Poems	*Dan Gerber*	37
To J. B.	*George Lewis*	49
Promises	*Richard E. McMullen*	50
Two Poems	*Judith McCombs*	60

FICTION

Three Mothers	*Susan Schaefer Neville*	11
Web	*Andrew Scheiber*	41
Palimpsest	*Gerald Williams*	53

Contributor's Notes 63



Number Two *Kim Bauer*

Overnight Projects With Wood

for all the plumbers, carpenters & mechanics

Lined up
like chocolates in their perfect paper jackets,
the boys on one side of the room.
The girls,
little shelled filberts,
on the other;
The girls are going
to home economics for the first time.
And the boys,
to shop. To Manual Training.
But you thot "manual training" means learning
to be a man.
And thus today you are a carpenter,
plumber,
mechanic,
woodsman.

I,
I knew that home economics
had nothing to do with being
a woman.

Now, two friends speak to me.
Rilke, with his jet black mustache curling like a scythe,
smiled this week as he told me he won a silver dollar in sixth grade
for building the best birdhouse.
His father, the tailor, had just built a house in Ohio,
and the wood, like scraps from a new suit,
fresh and unscarred, made a house
snug beyond any of the dreams of a poet.
When I see him,
he jingles the lonely silver dollar in his pocket,
a medal for his beautiful hands.
And he feels no need to build a house of his own.

The man from Receiving, at Sears,
did not begin his birdhouse until seventh grade.
And though his book promised this as an overnight project,
this birdhouse required two years to become a
chaotic tower of babel.
Or, so he says.

I have all these stories from men,
while I remember my own perfect blanket stitch, and neat patching.
A good batch of biscuits.
Tho I rebelled against making a nice apron, cut a hole in the middle of it,
and mine was thus, too disgraceful to be shown on parent's night.

Oh, we were all little ice cream sundaes then;
butterfingers,
or creamy fudge.
Such babies,
such children,
thinking, dreaming,
You, of manhood,
Rilke and his brother, the man in Receiving at Sears,
training for wisdom.
I,
what was I doing?
Making my own perfect blanket stitch,
patching neatly,
making good biscuits,
And rebelling, rebelling, against a plain apron.

Diane Wakoski

Flash Cube Prophecy

He jumped up in the middle of darkness
Sleep and silence
Aiming to record the last few minutes of the dream
Disturbed by waking
He stood in the black room camera ready
Said smile and set the shutter speed down slow
But when the flash went off this moment kept repeating
Three men with torches rushing back into a cave
And the transparent figure of a dreamer
Dispersing in the artificial light.

R Bartkowech

Listening to the Sounds of Spring Under Bamboo

From the rock
a wind rises to its feet
no one hears a word
the river that spoke
has laid down its music
the sun mixed its brown
in the air
but one bud
like an oyster
prys itself open
the sound
of cocoons unravelling.

Frank Graziano

Imperfect Prisms

They were having a sale
on imperfect prisms.
What's wrong with them? I asked.
Imperfect, said the salesman.

They looked fine to me.
I'm not perfect.
So I bought seven
and took them home in a box
like hamsters
or a carton of fish
and placed them in a row
on my east windowsill.
Then I went to bed in the dark.

Next morning
it was like when your dog
has puppies.
The white ceiling
wavered with young rainbows.

Prisms are pretty, you know,
but sharp. All
that morning, light
kept falling into the prisms,
breaking
and getting color
on my clothes and on my face.
I had my hands full.

I'd do it again.
It was worth the price——
getting seven
apparently perfect rainbows
from seven
allegedly imperfect
prisms.

Barbara Drake



Flying Salmon Series –3

Mark Neering

Three Mothers

Eran remembered this from when her mother was really her mother. They each held one end of the wishbone and pulled, but it didn't crack right away; it twisted and stretched. We should have let it dry more, her mother said. A wet bone is like green wood, it won't break easily. But they kept pulling, both of them laughing, twisting the bone around and around, finally holding the bone up in the air while Eran twirled under the bone and her arm like she was doing a turn in a dance, chicken skin hanging, the bone tearing and twisting until it snapped apart. And then laughing because neither of them could ever remember which part of the bone was good luck. Eran had the long end, she said the long end was good luck. Her mother agreed; it must be the long end that was good luck, it had been years since she'd seen any. I'm eight, Eran said. Had it been that many years. Eight years ago, her mother said, that was the best luck of all, and she took both ends of the bone into the kitchen. Eran started to take a plate off the table. Her mother came in and said no need for that, you'll have plenty of dishes to clear when you're older. She turned, arms full of smeary dishes and she stubbed her toe on the door frame. Later that day, it got red and swollen. It's because I said the luck was in the long end, Eran thought. Having said that made it so.

The worst part always came in late August. It was like a slow frost that lasted through September and which began, despite the heat, as a sharp chill like glass beneath the skin. It caused the muscles on Eran's mother's face to slide and sag downward like the skin on the overripe tomatoes in her garden or like red unbaked clay. Her grandmother, who had lived with them throughout the summer, through the other part, would leave when the frost came. She would say: your mommy's much better. Her grandmother didn't understand about the frost, she would only say: give her this lavender eye shadow, it will perk her up. Her mother would sit on the sofa knitting, head bent like a nun. When her grandmother walked out the door, her mother would move from the couch and crawl under the piano, hugging her knees. Often she cracked her head on the blonde wood underside and the keys roared.

The other part was when her mother was too happy. That was when her father would begin to look worried and her grandmother would come to stay. Sometimes they would send her mother to the hospital for weeks. She would leave too happy and come back quiet. When her mother was too happy, laughs would stick in her throat, delay, then rise to the surface uncontrollably like air pockets in mud. Sometimes, when she was older, Eran could feel the same laughs forming in her own throat like bubbles. She would try to catch them before they escaped. She learned not to laugh unless she was very sure that what she was laughing at was funny. When she was sick, her mother would play the piano six hours a day. She would dream once again of being a concert pianist. She would play only Rachmaninoff, which sounded loud and crashing. When she wasn't sick, she would only play the piano when she dusted the keys. Her father told her that when her mother played the piano and sang she was sick and when she dusted the keys, she was well. Eran tried to stop her fingers from tapping when a song came on the radio.

When she began to play the piano and laugh, her mother would get her hair done twice a week, the gray hair fixed in a youthful style. She would tell Eran that she was having an affair with her beautician, that he would be her manager and they would travel across Europe. He would fix her hair in the style of the country they were in. He would buy her designer dresses. Eran went once to see the beautician, to tell him to leave her mother alone, to make her calm again. The beautician was an old man with pictures of his grandchildren spaced between the bottles of hair spray and pink gel. Her mother sat in the chair like a quiet child while he combed out her set. Eran left the beauty shop without them seeing her.

Her mother told good stories when she was too happy, but not very many of them were true. Her mother told her about her other affair with a man who's breath smelled like almonds, who had bits of bran under his nails. Her mother told her about how she was secretly a spy, not a government spy, but a spy from *God.* And her mother bought things, one hundred dollars worth of Broadway Show music and ten dozen six ounce cokes because they fit her hand. Her mother poured the cokes out of the bottles and into baggies then she hid the baggies under the bed and put cut flowers into the coke bottles and arranged them in the living room so the bottles would have two purposes: when she wanted a coke she took the flowers out and poured the coke back in. On hot days some of the baggies would burst, making the floor sticky under the bed. Her father's feet stuck to the floor and he got mad because her mother was spending money and he stopped all the charge accounts. Eran learned that when her mother bought something for herself to wear she was sick and when she went a whole year wearing the same sweater every day, she was well. Once when her mother was between being too happy and too sad, when she was really her mother, she had stopped and looked for about an hour at a teal blue

dress with a feather, in a store window downtown, but she wouldn't buy it.

During the day, when everyone was gone and the frost had started, her mother said to Eran, there's no escaping. Tears covered her face like rippling glass. Her stomach was as round as a bubble in her knit slacks. Last night, she said, there were earthquakes in Italy. There could be one right underneath this house *in the next minute.* I can hear the rumblings, she said, oh Eran I can hear the rumblings. Eran looked out the window. The tree she saw looked filmy. There isn't any rumbling mother, I'm sure of it. It's quiet. Still. The ground is solid. Let's hide under here, her mother said. She pulled them both under the ebony grand piano. The day was hot, late August. The grass was scorched, the leaves dulled and bleached by the sun, the sky wedgewood, opaque. Other children were playing, Eran could hear them through the window. Everything mocked her mother. Eran wanted to hear the thunder her mother heard. She wished at least that it would rain.

The cost of oranges keeps getting higher, her mother said. Crop failure. Soon no one will be able to buy oranges. And the car wouldn't start last winter. Ice age. And there are nuclear bombs hidden all over the world and one could fly by this window right now and explode in our front yard, and no one can tell you that the world won't end in the next second. And no one, her mother said, seems to be at all aware of that but me. Where is the control, she said. Where is the control. Eran tried to move away; she didn't want to hear. There's really no sense in doing anything, her mother said, not when in the next second God could rip the sky like so much paper.

When her mother was in the hospital, her grandmother told her stories about her mother when she was Eran's age. She said: there was a fire in the house and everyone was too afraid to move, but Patty. She picked up Harry and she pushed me out the door and she called the fire department and they came. And then, after it was all over, she collapsed, right there on the sidewalk. Eran vowed that if she were ever in a fire, she would let herself burn if she had to, waiting for someone else to save her. Your grandfather, she said, watched Patty play the piano for hours; he told her she was a genius. Your grandfather died and left me with two young kids-- Harry still to educate and Patty to finish. Her grandmother said: your grandfather lost his business during the depression and I had to embroider handkerchiefs to make money for food. And I got a job finally, at a publishing company and I did well, better than any woman had ever done. Sometimes, she said, I wonder if we would have lost the business if I had been in charge. Her grandmother spent all her time making clothes for the family. Her hands were arthritic, knotted, but she never made a mistake, though often she would stick a needle into her finger and blood would form in a small shiny dome which sometimes rubbed off onto the fabric. Eran had a seersucker dress with a stain of blood on the back like rust. She didn't mind it because she couldn't

see the stain when she had the dress on. Her mother had a white silk blouse with a dot of blood at the throat, covered by a button.

She woke up in the middle of the night and saw her mother, standing over the bed, face wet and cold, eyes someplace else, saying Eran, Eran, when the world ends please don't let go of my hand. Her mother touched her face, smoothed back her hair, reached under the blanket and pinched Eran's fingers. Eran said: I won't let go of you mother, I won't let go.

Her mother was ecstatic and she wrote a check for 50 Datsuns. She said she was going to start a dealership. She and her mother had fun, driving all around the city for a whole day, stopping at the Datsun dealer every hour to get into a new color. Her mother touched her tongue to the hood of each new car as she got in it for the first time. Each color tastes different, she said. Just like M&M's.

Her mother drove the Datsuns to the grave of everyone she had ever known who had died. At the gravestone of her father she talked for a long time, and very seriously, asking him to please tell her mother, Eran's grandmother, to stop telling her to wear blue eyeshadow and to tell her husband, Eran's father, to stop telling her to lose weight and to tell Will, Eran's brother, to stop demanding elaborate desserts. Eran, she said, is the only one who doesn't ask for anything. That was the only time her mother was serious that day. Eran thought her mother looked pretty, like Loretta Young. Eran thought her mother looked prettier when she was crazy than when she was her regular mother, even if she didn't wear blue eye shadow. Eran was sorry when her father said they had to give back the Datsuns.

Once her mother and her father went to a college reunion. After dinner, during the keynote speaker, her father said her mother had stood up and screamed *Don't talk about Frisbees,* which Eran thought was very funny, but which was what caused her father to put her mother in the hospital that time. Eran decided never to scream anything that didn't make absolute sense.

Her father took away her mother's checkbook and hid it. Her mother borrowed a few dollars from Eran's piggy bank, then she and Eran scraped the sandy grit from inside their pockets, the bottoms of old purses and ripped hems. They put the grit into five different envelopes, one addressed to Austria, one to Turkey, one to Brazil, one to Sweden and one to Paris, France. They went to the post office and mailed the envelopes just, her mother said, to prove that they could do it. You see, her mother said, you can be anywhere if you put your mind to it.

Eran's grandmother dressed her mother like a doll, in outfits where everything matched perfectly— never a stripe with a plaid, a dot with a check. Her grandmother said: when my children go out any place, I like to know that I'm somehow with them. Her grandmother tried to make her mother wear her dresses short, when that was the style, and when she was sick her mother lengthened them, saying they made her look too much like a child. Her grandmother would stare at her mother, the white part of her eyes bug-yellow, and smile and if her mother looked like she was thinking, she would say 'what are you thinking?' and if she were humming she would say 'what are you humming, Patricia?' and if she looked like she might cry, she would say 'why are you going to cry?'

When her grandmother had been sewing, there were bits of thread all over the house, spools of thread in baskets and purses. Whenever Eran's mother walked by a spool, thread would catch on her hand or grab at the leg of her slacks and follow her around the house, unraveling. One day she followed a piece of red thread for an hour before she found the spool, hidden in a box in the basement, and she wound the thread back onto the spool without saying anything.

Eran tried to tell her father about the frost but he said: your mother's fine, she's not talking to radios. She tried to tell her grandmother but her grandmother said: she's fine, she's not dancing for strangers. Her mother brought them all dinner and whispered something to Eran on her way back to the kitchen. She said: there was an earthquake in South America: hold onto my hand.

Eran sat on the floor in her bedroom surrounded by plastic dolls sitting quietly, freshly combed and brushed, legs spread out in V's. A plastic ballerina doll on top of a music box sat directly in front of her. She wound it up and it bobbed, arms always in fourth position, brown painted hair swept back in a plastic bun, always dancing the same steps to the same song. When the ballerina began to slow, Eran held it upside down and tried to pluck the prongs herself, but it sounded too tinny so she wound it up again and she decided she would never let it stop all the way, that the doll would die if she let it stop, that she would keep the ballerina with her forever, the brass key where she could reach it so that it wouldn't die. Things occurred to Eran as she sat there watching the dolls, things that had never occurred to her mother. Things like: how can a planet full of so many things that are so heavy— granite rocks and trucks and millions of people— float in empty air without falling, how can that be. And she got very angry at sidewalks and new buildings she had seen going up, digging out holes in the earth in

slabs and adding it in other places, destroying the balance. She herself would be very careful. She would keep the dolls quiet. She wouldn't run. Soon her mother's face would slide back, face muscles resting, thawed. But Eran wouldn't give up the vigil. She would think of things that were funny, but she wouldn't laugh. She would think of things that were scary, but she wouldn't scream. She would be too busy, sitting in her room watching her dolls and keeping that ballerina doll in the pink tulle dress wound up so very tight that she would never ever miss a step.

Susan Schaefer Neville

Gloves

On his first date with Mary
he closed his eyes and kissed the screen door.
Later, they both laughed about this.

They spent their honeymoon at Candlestick Park
cheering for the Giants. At home they hung
a pennant on the wall above their bed.

As a corpsman he shoveled bodies into rubber bags.
When the stench became too bad
he stuffed *sen-sen* up his nose.

After parties floral-scented Airwick
was a lifesaver, and Saran Wrap
for the leftover hors d'oeuvre.

She was glad when they bought the Dart
with bucket seats. When drunk he could not
put his hand on her thigh.

On vacation they watched the President
through the bullet-proof glass
pulling at his ear, his mouth moving.

He played cards with the boys
five nights a week. She drank wine,
read *Cosmopolitan,* was asleep when he came home.

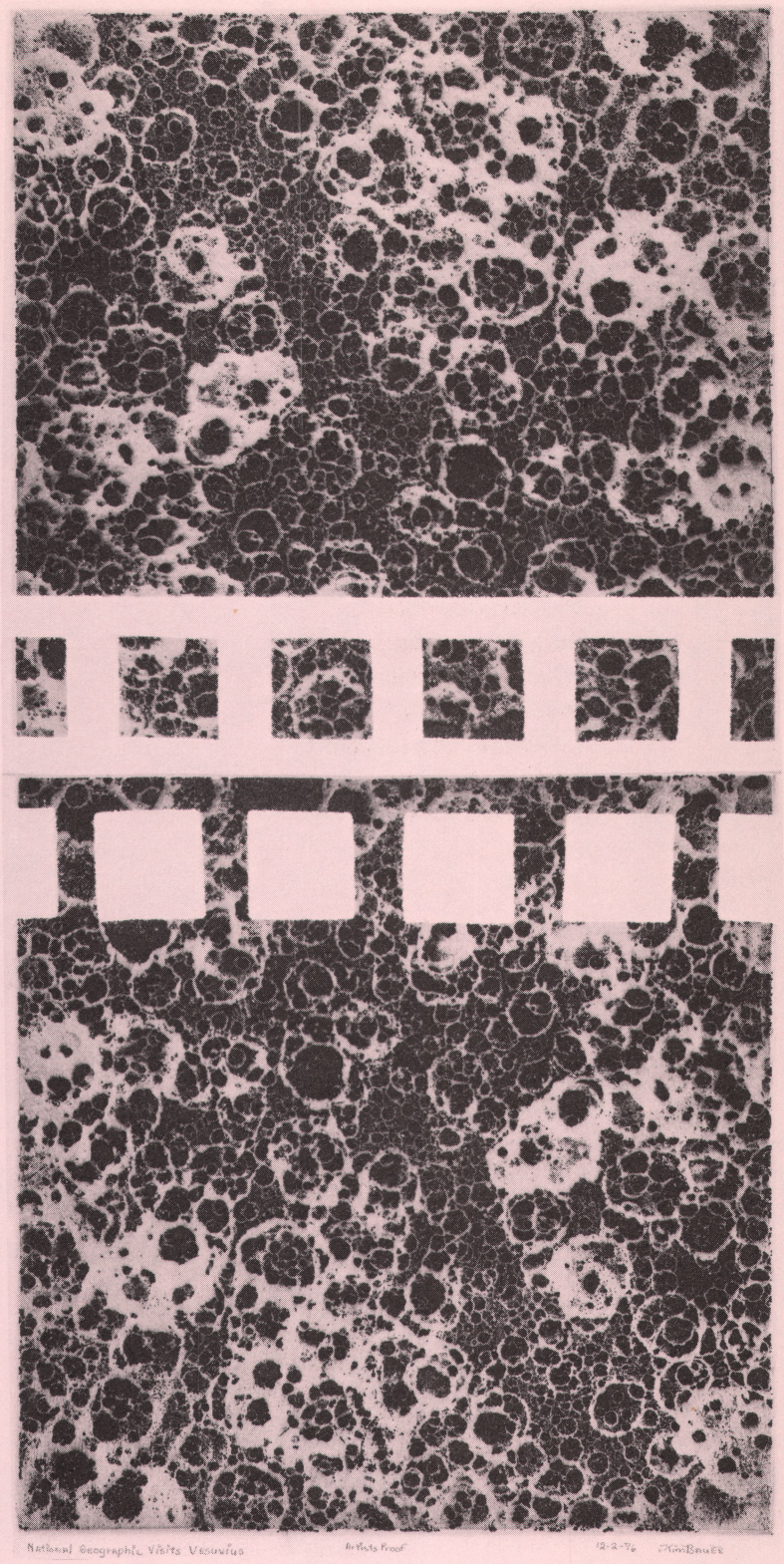
It was only exploratory, but he died,
the pure hands of surgeons
rooting in his belly for coin.

Herbert Scott

In New Mexico

The road rusts
away. I follow
the yellow sandstone ridge
edging the sky.
In this desert
the past is a mirage
you almost believe in,
almost remember
from the last time
you entered your wife,
the heat welling up
like water
you would dig for
in the dry sand.
You scan the horizon.
Is it the rider
you look for, a fleck
in the lens of your eye,
hellbent forever?
Later you discover
the white ribs
of his horse, read
the scripture of his death,
witness to your own
private betrayal.

Herbert Scott



National Geographic Visits Vesuvius *Kim Bauer*

Billy's Gone

His hair hackled, front legs flexed,
he arched his back just right
to poise the neighbor boy
backward off the porch.

Flocks of sheep
nudge the grass
where Billy raced
the far pasture trees
before he got too wild.
Head to head we press.
the rifle cocks.
grace.
supper.

Shelby Stephenson

Gray Stories

I want to finish writing these essays tonight
even though my eyes have dripped down my cheeks
in sloughs of tissue,
but how can I concentrate
when you insist on telling me
about your brother who carries a hatchet when he sleepwalks
or your aunt who attends the funerals of strangers,
spends hours in graveyards, and the police
have to come and take her home.
I am sick of your brother stories
your aunt stories
in fact, I am tired of hearing about your whole damn family
and your job last summer cleaning hospital rooms
how many men you've gone to bed with in the last two months
how different you are from everyone else
because you're not.

leave me alone.

leave me alone to my desperate gathering of words
like tin-foil chocolates,
melting, then solidifying into a small fist of images
that clutch at the edge of my brain,
a sedum growing from the white regions under my hair.
I need time to pull them apart.
take your gray stories someplace else.

Ann Pulsipher

Will

I've started singling out
which beggars I give money to now,
and how much,
the guy with the sore of his leg, the sore isn't sore
enough and he's too fat, I can imagine him prodding
it every night with a needle
to keep it "alive",
and the guy who comes out at you aggressively,
little runt-face on top of a grey-rag bag overcoat
that looks like a bathrobe,
too fucking nervy, practially takes it out of your hand,
and the Gitana with her kid on the sidewalk, just sitting,
whining,
she whines too much, or I wouldn't mind it if she
meant it,
she doesn't, it's fake, contempt, really means
FUCK YOU!
The guy with one leg off above the knee, the other
off up to the hip, he doesn't even ask, let's his leglessness
ask for him, I give him 10, 20 Pesetas at the beginning
of the month, at the end 5 at most, I begin to get afraid
myself, buy cans, get ready for the check not to come,
begin at night to walk through massive furnitured marble-floored,
portrait-filled homes of the 100 wealthiest families of Spain,
looking for the kitchen, the secret room where
they hang the salami
and the hams.

Hugh Fox

Toward a descriptive analysis of the sociology of the Spanish lower classes: 1975-76

Am I saying that
the restaurant owner's
wife who asked the
old couple when
they went into the
back and sat down,
"Just resting
or do you want to
eat or drink anything?"
was compassionate,
or that the waiter
who had been out and
came in and when he
found out they were
just sitting bought
the old man a cognac
and the old woman a
cafe con leche was
compassionate too,
am I making a case
for Spanish slob-
classes as
compassionate or
is it just a carryover of the
pre-industrial small town
hick mystique
that I never had a chance to
see born in 1932
Chicago,
the Hog Butcher of the World?

Hugh Fox



Flying Salmon Series – 2 *Mark Neering*

Headlines

two 19th-century watercolors – a still life of cuttlefish
(sepia), 5 varieties of shrimp/lobster, 20 varieties of clams/shell-
fish, anchovies, flounder and 16 other varieties of fish...and a
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Orange Grove –– invaded the
Aphrodite Detergent Works today,
all stench stopped, and the entire workforce stared
for 3 bleached minutes at a claw of light
coming in through the frosted glass window the
invaders had broken.
Seafoamian –– the deep-in cleansing miracle of APHRODITE ––
began to accumulate in the Seafoamomamian,
overflowed the vats and the
watercolors
dissolved into two
small piles of
dead (former-green)
brown.

Hugh Fox

A Ranch in Mexico

I.
40 people under a mango tree——
eating *mole* out of a big pot over flames.
the men play dominoes and cards for money.
the women talk fast and loud, and
watch their men.

II.
the small children break a piñata and
scramble for sweets; dirty their clean clothes.

III.
the older boys play soccer in a field until dark,
when they come sweating back to the tree to
drink with their fathers; all the while
the older girls sit with the women,
waiting, watching the older boys.

IV.
After dark, the women quiet down and
talk in low voices, while the teenagers wander off into the dark.
Some of the small children fall asleep on laps, and
others sit at the feet of their mothers.
When it is time to go, the men say so.

Jim Daniels

Lee Trevino Gets Hit by Lightning

how a media event did not do the sports figure in

the Free Press Lies!
the Times they lie!
the Herald Tribune
it lies!
the Chronicle
the Examiner
the Chronkite
the Chancellor
they all lie!
they ALL Lie!

there was no mother in the garden
with a chain saw, the F stop
was stuck
the camera man
said it was for fuck,
no pictures in this journal-----
telephones spit back dimes,

the sports section speaks no truth.
no truth! Lee Trevino
was on the 18th green
holding his putter
defiantly
towards storm clouds
when
ZAP!
like a lightning rod
connected
the earth
and sky
and lived
to tell about it.

Casey Bush

we lose touch quickly with the underworld

I have lost days
perhaps whole months
gone

the smell of the camel
in the desert
his eyes sunken

I am inside an elevator between
floors, my companions
a pull tab
a cigarette butt
soon
we will all know each other

Casey Bush

Freud's Hat and Cane

A bent-over charwoman mumbles
every morning as she throws
open the closet door and finds

the forgotten hat and cane.
She curses Sigmund Freud thoroughly,
believing he is in love with her

and only leaves his hat and cane
as a sign that he wishes to return
to the closet and surprise his

most diligent charwoman. They
will make wild, unrestrained love
on the hardwood floor of his

private closet. But he always
fails to appear each morning,
and this morning is no different.

She closes the door and continues
to allow photographers and their
cameras up the winding marble

staircase, through the master
bedroom, and into the famous closet.
Someday, she smiles to herself,

they will come begging my picture.

Joel Dailey

A Sort of Complaint on Behalf of a Would-be Rapist Arrested at 3:00 A.M. on November 22, 1976 Near Wichita, Kansas

One has the sense that in his urgency
he had misunderstood
the whole thing from the start:

wearing just socks, a pair of pantyhose
over his head, unarmed
he walked into the all-night grocery store

and tried to grab the female clerk—
only to be run off
into the subfreezing darkness, his sex

bellowing in the vast
emptiness of his disappointed dreams
for hours as he scurried and hid,

hunkered and shivering, until at last
he fell into the long,
willing arms of the law.

Michael L. Johnson

Two People

They entered the store like slow animals,
heads slightly forward, arms swaying.
He asked for three shirts of the same color.
"Do you think I'd look good in powder blue?"
and winked, slapped his pot belly.
He smelled of cigar smoke,
the woman tattoo on his arm danced.
His daughter, with large features
like those from mirrors at the circus,
played with her hands. She was pregnant,
wore no ring. Her father bought her presents,
called her Sis and Lover.
His voice covered her face like a veil.

Laurie Cosca

The Small Sweet Blue Air of a Plum

She has passed a truck in the alley
between the two stores every morning since January.
Today is the first she sees the man
whose gloves would be yellow.
He is pitching boxes into the truck, into rain,
the tail gate down and swinging.

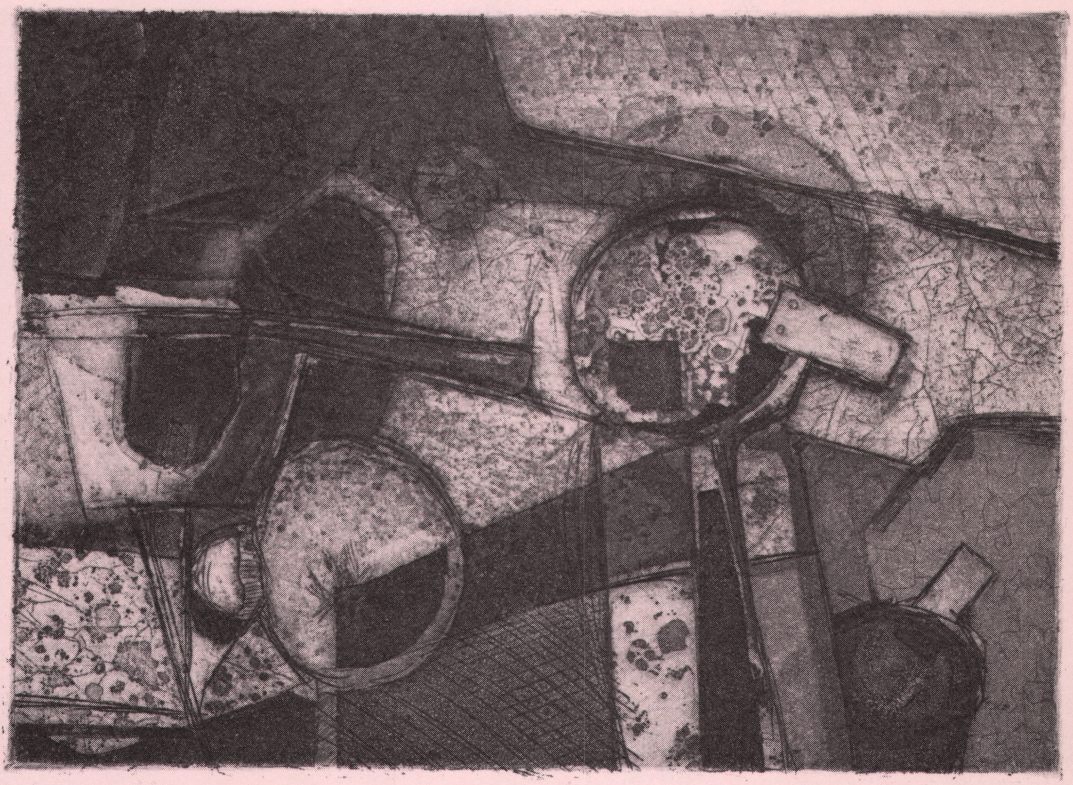
If there is a purple almost clear
as the fluid eye held between leaves,
somewhere in the truck orange is sunken.

The rain finishes and everything smells of the opening ground.

She is just out of a bath and the man
who does not love her is sleeping,
the first time he has let her
see him like that.
Her body is warm and still bright.
She smells the water from over her shoulder.
The man who pitches boxes stops
and the side of the green paneled truck wants to shiver.
He is telling her it is best
she does not hurry,
it is best she is wearing her first dress
the color of the small blue breath on a plum.

If a sleeper walked with her
she would not hear so clearly
the man's boots, the rain pooling,
the soft spilling sound of earth.

Lee Upton



Process Piece *Kim Bauer*

The Wedding Curse

The couple
walks down smiles,
rice
showers at them.
The old
fertility symbol.

Relatives and friends
shove thick fingers
in paper bags.
Throw handfuls
of the grain
like small pebbles
into a lake.
Concentric circles
spreading
to the edge
of veils.

Tonight
the bride will
dream
of insects
crawling
between her legs.
The touch
of antennae
in her uterus.

Her screams
will rise like gulls
over Mormon Utah.
Now swooping
down
on the locust
the plague
the children
eyes blind with rice,
diving
into her womb.

Ron Mieczkowski

Waiting To Be Let In

It has always been that small thing in the back
of the mind; that needle point that probes through
the base of your brain to look out from your eyes,
ripping through, making tunnels where the
rats will play and store rotten fruit, where
they will burrow in.

You cannot make the shopping list anymore– wandering
up and down the aisles you knock things from their shelves,
the labels so obtrusive– pictures of Cling Peaches with
no pits, cakes that are not mixed, coffee that must be perked.

Returning to the parking lot you cannot remember where you
parked your car or if you brought it. People walking
by are staring, staring and you getting on some bus
that you hope is the right one.
It is blue, the one that brought you here was blue.

The children are sitting quietly on the front steps,
tracing your movements with their eyes.
They have been waiting since they got home from school
to be let into the locked house. They have been
waiting for two hours. They have been waiting for you.

They sit leaning into your sides, pressing their faces
into the folds of your wrinkled skirt.

Brenda Swope

Challenging Situation No. 3: The Rolling Skull

Having fashioned
what you could not accept
of your self and your parents
into a figure your own size,
you call it "enemy"
and in a great struggle
during which you prove
to the world and to your lover
your purity of heart,
your courage and strength
you behead this new man
but the head
becomes a grinning skull
rolling after you in the dust,
follows you into your tent
when you try to rest
or to lie near your lover,
grows wings, a great tail
and slithers or flies
after you through mud,
water and sky, laughing
at you as if
it knew you better
than anyone else
in the world.

what do you do?

David Citino

Butterfly

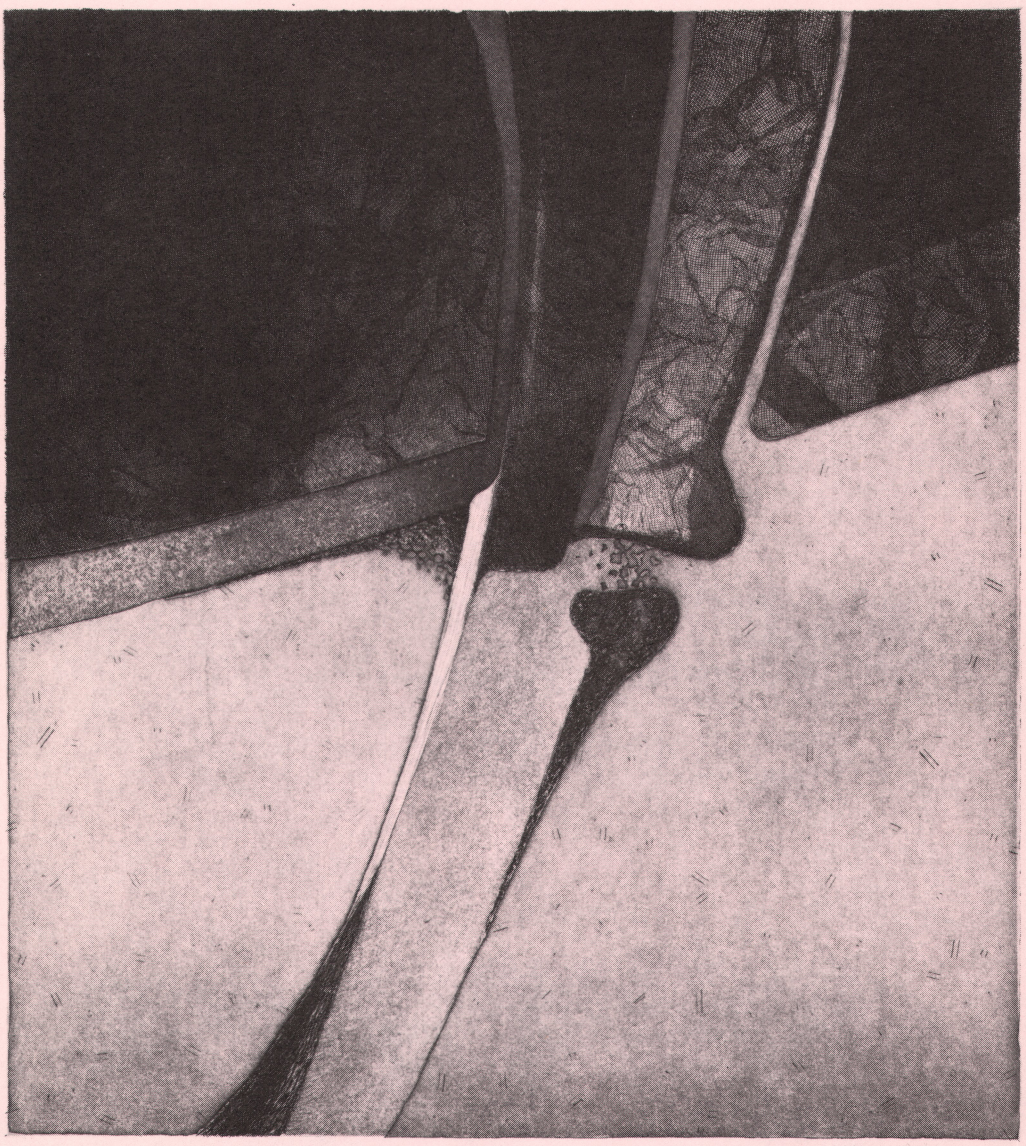
I lived in a house
where it rained every day
and the wind played middle C
on the windows

She was the only woman alive
for miles
and I forgot there were things to be done

I don't remember the first time
I went there
or the last time I closed the door

She said she was going for the groceries
and when the wind stopped
I was gone

Dan Gerber



First Mass *Kim Bauer*

Canticle

How I want to use the word
in a story in a poem in speech
the ring of the chair on its axis
the whir of the heater in my room
the bell-like sound of this word
saddles and candles and gongs
chanting in the dome of the Taj Mahal
my tongue rocks in its bed
water in a subterranean pool
sweet desire
that draws me with its heat
a fine distinction between this and that
welded in a sound bearing
the mind in its tone

Dan Gerber

December

Night has been falling all afternoon
I'm not concerned with what comes or goes

Below my feet
snakes coil together
not one bird is flying
not one fish cares about ice

The last flies buzz
slow and clumsy
They stumble across my knuckles
and I let them

They are old and the year is old
and I haven't lived
a more perfect day

Dan Gerber

Web

"Web," Little Johnny Clement had said, his face glowing smooth and brown in the yellow motel lamplight, "you reckon we'll ever get to play the Opry?"

"Why sure we will," I answered. But even as I spoke, I found that eager, ingenuous face a cruel place to aim such a calculated lie. I tucked him in, drawing the stiff motel bedsheets across his pajama shoulders, then got up and snapped off the light. There was a small comfort in the darkness, which was broken only by the fluorescence of the gasoline island across the way filtering through the gaps in the venetian blinds. "You bet we will," I urged softly, "go on to sleep now." As I finished speaking, Henry roared drunkenly from the room next door with all the gusto and surprise of an air-conditioner kicking on in the dead silence of a hot Texas night.

I had never in my life wanted so badly to believe a lie as I did that night Johnny Clement, wide-eyed, and earnest, had asked me about the Opry. My answer had been as much to myself as to him, a testament to the false hope that, out of desperation, I had kept kindled for myself for some years now. I believed — or, rather, professed to believe — that there was a way out, a way off that grinding roadhouse circuit the Panhandlers had been playing for almost a decade. It seemed impossible that the long upward struggle could end here and now; but in those ten years we had achieved practically everything except the success we so earnestly sought. The Panhandlers had started out well enough, with more than enough raw talent, ambition and energy to go around, and a string of hit singles, the first of which predated Hank Williams by a full three months; but it had all been, in effect, too much too soon, for it was Hank's death six years later, and the cresting of the rock'n'roll tide that shortly followed, which washed away almost all of that early, hard-won fame. After that, getting back on the track proceeded to get more difficult by the season. The big tours were all rock and roll, and not country, as they had been in the days of Hank Williams and the Hadacol Road Show. The only place where times were

not hard was at the top, where the Opry survived, packing them in every Friday and Saturday night; but for acts that had not escaped the middle belts yet, the effect of rock and roll's takeover was paralyzing. The only choices were to change over to the new style (as many did) or simply to hold on, playing to whatever pockets of loyal followers already existed, until the new craze blew over and things settled back into perspective.

Things had begun to settle some by 1957, when Little Johnny Clement came into the Panhandlers. The country-western market was still cool at the bottom of the line, where folks like Doggie Clement eked out meager livings by playing for barn-dances and such; but at the top of the heap there was a little elbow room opening up, and Henry became inspired at the prospect of finally having a fighting chance at fulfilling his destiny. His singing, in spite of his alcoholism, had begun to take on some of its old fire, and the addition of Little Johnny Clement proved to be one of Henry's master strokes. There was something peculiar and wonderful in the way the boy could lay his sweet, mournful steel lines in between the sung phrases, which more and more were laden with the tension of Henry's wheezing, crackling voice; they seemed to balance each other out perfectly, and there was a truth, a revelation you could almost say, in the tableau that the man and boy together comprised.

It was not long before the two of them, answering each other with voice and steel guitar, became the central music conceit of the entire band. The audiences loved it, the sight of this bright-faced wonder child sharing stage center with the fat, balding figure of Henry Grabnell, who himself seemed the embodiment of a kind of ravaged innocence and vitality. Johnny would smile with careless glee, shimmying the steel slide bar across the strings as Henry, bodily mirroring the down-and-out desperation and occasional forced gaiety of the Hank Williams tunes he so loved, would waver drunkenly before the microphone, rasping and coughing out the vocal lines with chilling authenticity.

The climax of every performance came with "Lost Highway," the old Leon Payne tune in which an innocent boy is ruined by a life of sin and sings his warning out to those following in his footsteps. Hank Williams had made it famous, but Henry made it into a near-mystical kind of truth. He would sing it, his guitar slung uselessly by his side and both hands gesticulating wildly, as if it were a message of imminent doom, an onrushing apocalypse which, no doubt, Henry in his desperation truly felt. But it was addressed not so much to the audience as to the sunny, half-laughing person of Little Johnny Clement., who answered every agonized phrase with a deftly mournful lick from his upright guitar. Henry's delivery was like a cry of warning from the lost to the living, a haunting thing which in those moments recaptured the energy and inspiration which had until now been gradually dissipating.

But all of this had still gotten us nowhere. The band was now as good as

ever, but none of us, especially Henry, seemed able to sustain it much longer without at least the promise of moving on to something better. 1957 found us playing pretty much the same circuit we had started out playing in 1948, and it could not be long before our present burst of inspiration failed us, and the depression and weariness that had been stored up in the intervening decade broke loose to consume Henry and the rest of the band. The Opry, and the hope of national recognition, seemed the only place left for us to pin our ragged dreams, and Henry, dangling the apple of Little Johnny Clement before the men up in Nashville, had been assiduously courting their favor.

But the man who was supposed to have come down to see us at the gig that night at Brownwood never showed, and it was just after I had sent Little Johnny Clement off to sleep with those false assurances that the bad news came. Henry was letting me into his room when the phone rang. He staggered over to the night-stand and uncradled the receiver, bellowing a drunken acknowledgment.

He listened for a moment, his face growing dark and angry, and then swore, slamming the phone down without so much as a good-bye. "Well that hangs it," he said, his eyes darting, like those of a caged bird, about the walls of the motel room. "Fuck them all. I don't need their goddamn Opry anyhow. I'd still rather play the lousiest shit-hole in Texas than their fucking Ryman Hall."

I winced at Henry's distraught bravado. "Another blow-off?" I asked.

"Worse than that," he said, slumping forward on the edge of his bed. "You know why that bastard didn't come down from Nashville? They decided, he tells me, that my image ain't exactly up to Opry standards. It's my drinking, I suppose——but hell Web, Hank Williams was a drunk——they had to drag him out onstage, for Christ sakes——" He shook his head, reaching with trembling fingers for the bottle that was on the night-stand. "They say they'll be happy to pay for a temporary release on Johnny, but they ain't interested in the Panhandlers."

"Johnny?" I said. "You mean they just want the boy?"

"That's it," Henry answered, swigging his Jack Daniels. "Don't that hang all?"

"You going to let them have him?"

Henry's chest heaved in a futile attempt at laughter. "Hell no, I've got an exclusive contract. Besides, the Opry might come around anyway, in time——if they want the boy bad enough. But you know we ain't got a chance without him.'"

"I know," I said.

"But don't you mention nothing about this," Henry said, his eyes widening, as if for emphasis. "Especially to the boy. Damn it all!" he cursed, glancing about the room. "To think it would come to this."

"Henry," I said, "you ain't going to be able to keep it quiet forever."

"Maybe not," he said, "but that's all I can do for now. Just until we get that

break we"ve been looking for——and we're going to get it too, God damn it! You know why?" He stared at me, his grey smile weak and insincere. "Because of all those old songs——'Mind Your Own Business' and 'Lost Highway'——why, people still love the old songs, I don't care what you say——I mean, look at us the past couple of months——like new again! I never did believe this rock and roll thing would hold on forever. 'Be Bop A Lula'——what the hell kind of crap is that anyway? It ain't real feelings. Hell, it ain't even real words! And here we are, the best goddamned Western swing band in the country——and they ain't interested. Well they goddamn well better get interested, that's all I got to say!" He sank back on the bed, as if exhausted by the effort of his speechifying.

"You buck up now, Henry," I said, opening the door to leave. "There's a way out of this somehow. There's got to be."

"Damn straight," Henry muttered, his sagging face propped against the bedstead. He raised the bottle to his lips, and I left him as he set it back down, staring blankly out at the walls, his shattered world.

Ben Black surprised me that night as I was pulling Henry's door shut behind me. "Beautiful night out," I heard him say, and as I wheeled around I saw him standing in the doorway of his own motel room, his eyes flickering alertly from beneath the brim of his hat. He was staring up past the eaves to the stars that shone crystal-like in the dark blue spread of sky. "Yes sir,"he said, with a lingering glance towards the horizon where the moon, silver-dollar-like, was beginning to set, "ain't nothing prettier than a clear night in Texas."

"Yup," I said, without any real conviction.

Ben leaned against the door-jamb, his head turned absently away, with one heel making a screwing motion into the ground, as if he was crushing out a cigarette butt. "He's crazy you know," he said softly, without so much as a twitch to indicate whom he was talking about. "We ain't never going to play the fucking Opry."

I took a deep breath, wringing my hands, and sat down with my butt against the cold cement of the walkway. "They don't want him Ben," I said in a whisper. "It's a shame too. Maybe he don't deserve to play the Opry now, but there was a time he did. They ought to consider that."

"Aw hell," Ben said, "it ain't that he don't deserve it. But I'm tired, you know? I mean, here it is, almost ten years now——"

"I know," I said. "You and me are the last orifinals, except for Henry. It don't seem possible, somehow."

"Course it don't," Ben said, "but it's true, ain't it? I mean, ten years——and what have we got? A family? Or a home even? Hell no——we ain't got nothing——except tired, that is. At least I'm tired——tired of the whole goddamn thing——and you ought to be too! Why Christ Web——"

"Henry and me," I said, with a weary toss of my head, "we're kind of in this

thing together. Both crazy the same way, I guess, being in the war and all. We got to keep on going, you know? It was a damn good band once——and it could be again——hell, you remember what it was like when we started——"

"Seems I do," Ben muttered vaguely. "And I'll grant it has been better here of late. But it ain't never going to be like it was——even if we are doing the same damn songs." His voice was thick with regret. "Aw hell, Web, I'm sorry. But a man just gets tired, you know?" There was a pause as he yawned, glancing at his watch, and then he said: "Well, I'm beat. This here is just too much talk for a tired old rounder like me. How about you?"

"Think I'll stay up awhile," I said. "It's a right cool night out."

"So it is," Ben said. "Well, at least that boy can sleep. He don't know no better I guess."

"Yup," I said, forlornly, "I guess." And as Ben shut the door behind him, the spill of light on the narrow walkway snuffing itself out, I knew that he was right. I was tired——tired to death of the whole thing. But I felt now more than ever that there was no way I could quit, because quitting on Henry would have been quitting on myself as well.

I got myself a chair, the kind with the aluminum frame and synthetic seat and back, from down the walk a ways, and setteled into it, staring out at the white disc of the moon. The stars seemed to burn, white-hot, against the dark carpet of sky, like tiny pinpricks of light, and the open prairie, beyond the sheen of highway which basked in the pale moonglow, stretched all the way to the horizon, where it stopped being prairie and became drier, breaking into gulches and arroyos, and finally into foothills which in the daylight could be seen in the distance as a kind of jagged, hazy silhouette. Ben had been right about the Texas night, too; there was nothing more beautiful than this, nothing I could think of anyhow, but tonight there was something both placid and sad about that shining, silver-dollar moon as it bit lazily into the far-off foothills. It was the quietness that did it, I think— not just the quietness of that empty expanse of plain and sky, but something akin to that space I felt inside, as if the stark silence of the scene itself had somehow penetrated and become a part of me. The view was not that much different from the one that lay out the front window of my rented motel room back in Santa Teresia, but there was something about the stillness here that was not to be taken for granted. There were some words running through my head, a snatch of an old Hank Williams tune. But for some reason, despite the fact that I must have played it a few thousand times, the melody eluded me. The words themselves Hank Williams had scrawled on a piece of scrap paper for his friend Jimmy Rule little more than a half-dozen years earlier, but on this crystal-like Texas night they struck me as something timeless, like words of the ancients almost, as if they were truth from another age, another world, with the power to hush whatever melody might presume to despoil the purity of their meaning:

The silence of a falling star
Lights up a purple sky
The moon just went behind a cloud
I'm so lonesome I could cry.

The moon had slipped further beneath the hills, what was left of it glowing pale and large and inscrutably faceless. Somehow I sensed that the lost melody would only have broken the solitude, the aching silence that seemed suddenly reserved for this moment, this place. I felt at last my body urging me towards sleep, but what I wanted instead was to remain in that moment, to make my peace with the silence, the desperation, that was taking hold in me— to embrace it almost, remaining in that moment, in the placid, terrifying eye of this, my own private storm, and stare wordlessly out at the setting moon and dark, glimmering plain.

But there was something else besides that silence reserved for this night. There was the explosion of pistol-shots from Henry's room, and I leaped to my feet, my hand instantly reaching for the door-knob. But I jumped back with a cry as one final shot, a delayed one, whined and with a dull, whizzing sound, splintered through the wood of the door itself. "Henry," I shouted, bracing myself against the motel's adobe wall, "are you all right in there? What the hell's the matter?"

The rest of the lodgers were, of course, on the patio in an instant, crowding towards Henry's room. Ben was there before any of the rest of them, looking with an expression of wonderment at the long tail of splintered wood that hung outward from the bullet's exit. "Henry!" he shouted, and together we lunged against the door, feeling the chain snap at the pressure.

Henry was sitting up in bed, his Jack Daniels in one hand and smoking, pearl-handled Panhandler's pistol in the other, staring at his feet where they were propped up on the bed frame. "I done it," he was saying, with a tearful, childish grin that seemed more expressive of madness than intoxication, and it was only when I looked to where the smoking pistol was pointing that I realized, in the half-light moonglow that fell through the open door, that the foot-shadow was somehow not right— that there were toes missing, or dangling, and in a sudden awful moment I noticed the black, frightful glistening mushroom of blood across the bedsheets.

"Jesus Christ," I mumbled, unable to scream, "he's gone and shot himself."

"I done it," Henry was saying stupidly. "I sure done it now, ain't I?"

Ben was yelling for the people outside to get a doctor, and I turned to say something to him, something like I don't believe this, and as I turned my eyes tracked along the wall opposite the bed, where there was a shattered mirror and, next to it, a circular pattern of fractured plaster, in whose center there was the unmistakable bore of a bullet hole. In an instant, I thought of Little

Johnny Clement, who had been asleep in the next room. "Ben!" I yelled, choking with terror for the boy. "The kid next door— he's shot through the wall—" Ben nodded, moving out of the doorway. There were clusters of people, dark shadows, closing around the outside of Henry's room and blocking the blue-white spill of moonlight. Teeth clenched, I reached in through the darkness to where the mangled foot was spraying blood outward across the sheets, and gradually closed my hand around it, feeling for the place where the pulse, the wild spurt of blood, felt the strongest.

"Damn," I hissed. "Where's the fucking light?"

"Piss on it," Henry cried, his body jerking with a convulsion that could have as easily been laughter as a sob, and as I looked away from him, to the right of the bed, I saw that the lamp-shade was tipped askance— as if, you might say, someone had put a bullet through it, too.

"God damn you," I said, squeezing his bloody foot, the nearly-severed toe pressing like a pebble against my palm. "Why'd you do this?"

"The boy's O.K.," Ben said, returning from next door, "and the manager's got a doctor on the way. What about him?" He nodded dubiously towards the sobbing, hysterical figure on the bed. "Jesus Christ Web— the gun—"

Something exploded like a sulphur flare from the darkness of the bed, and in an instant Ben had leaped from the doorway and knocked the burning pistol from Henry's limpid, trembling hand. The two of us stood at the foot of the bed, our breath coming in fluttering, adrenal gasps as we stared up at the fresh hole in the ceiling. Plaster dust filtered down through the darkness from the jagged concentric cracks which now encircled the lodged bullet.

"We could of been killed," I said, my grip on Henry's leg frozen tight in shock. "I— I'm sorry Ben— I forgot about the gun— must have been the sight of the blood that done it—"

"Never mind," Ben said. He took a deep breath, and stepped back from the bed the bed. "That foot hurt, Henry?"

"Hell no," Henry answered loudly, his voice crackling and gurgling. "I shot her good through." He pointed with incongruous pleasure towards where I stood pressing the bloody foot against me. "There was a fly on it— a goddamn fly, would you believe it? Right on that fucking toe— I got him though— blew him to hell and back—"

"Just like Hank," Ben muttered hopelessly.

"What?" I said.

"Just like Hank Williams," he answered, turning to go back outside. "He tried shooting a fly off his toe one night down in Shreveport. Plugged the headboard in the next room— six inches above where Billy Byrd was sleeping."

"Jesus Christ," I said. "Henry's lucky he didn't hit nobody but himself."

"Especially that boy," Ben remarked, leaving the room. A host of shadows

crowded around the door staring with unseen eyes at what must have been the rediculous sight of one man clutching another man's foot in the total darkness of a comically shot-up motel room. It was only when the doctor arrived that someone was finally able to peel my hands from the shattered foot and exasperatedly push me out of the way. Outside, the moon was down; the only light, glimmering beyond the press of shadows was the glow, off to one side, of a flourescent gas island where now there was a huddle of cars with red lights flashing and rotating, flinging fiery tracers to the blackest corners of the dark, endless plain.

Andrew Scheiber

Excerpt from Cadillac Blues: A Western Lullaby, *a work in progress.*

To J. B.

midnight dancing hourly before my eyes
visions of the October wind on Mercer St.
and posh hooded women hurrying from theatre to theatre
speaking slowly of Pinter and essence

told you I had no money that fall
on the subway to 3rd Ave. Brooklyn
before I left

now married
have only been back once
when it rained

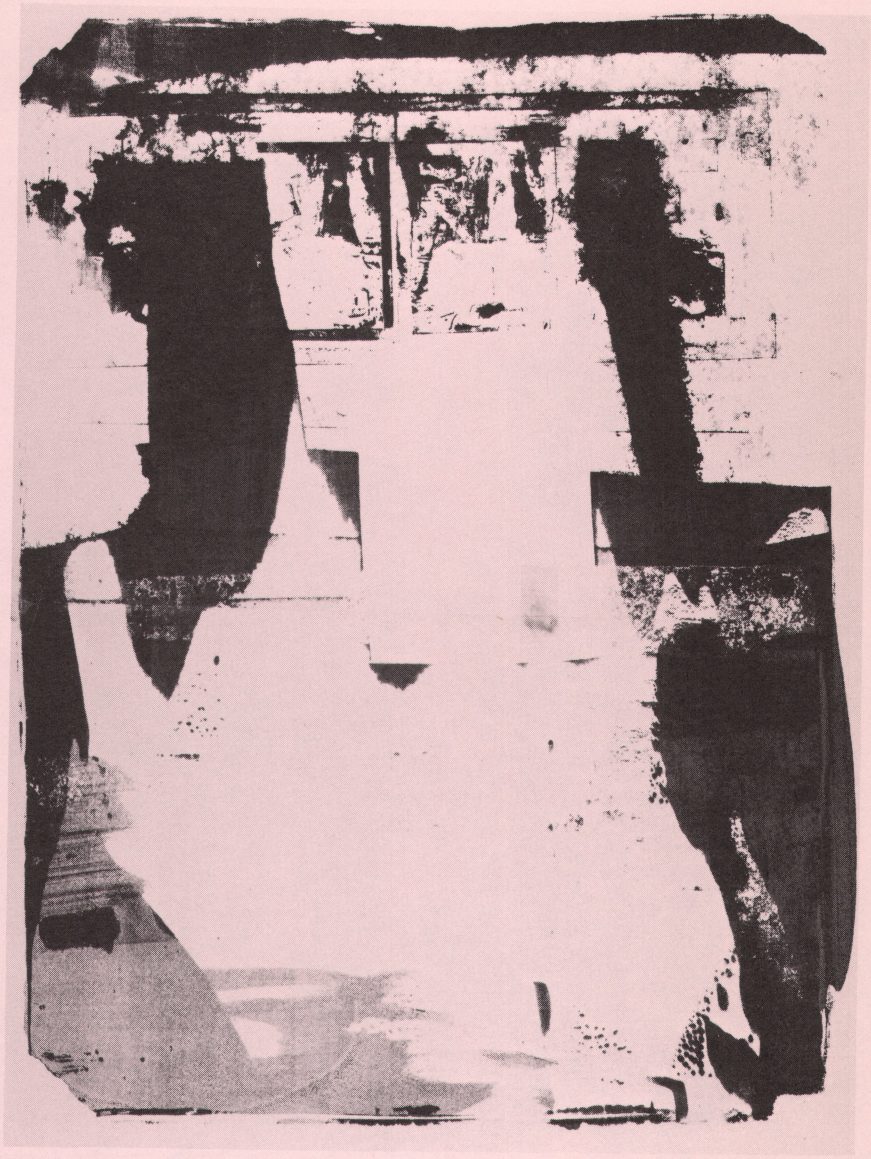
couldn't remember where you lived now
only
that night
and how casually you removed your blouse.

George Lewis

Promises

When she punches
the seedlings in
she must make promises:
Come up, and I'll feed you
with water, protect you
from bugs and boys.
They always come up.
Flowers grow at her.

Richard E. McMullen



Untitled *Mark Neering*



Untitled *Mark Neering*

Palimpsest

(found in a drawer)

On the back of March 30, 1927

Have found this old diary thing in a box of worthless books. It's not really a diary. Just an old ledger book with some diary entries in it. It's hard to read the writing. A yellowish-brown ink that has faded because of age and dryness. I can't even start to read it since it's so old-fashioned. The 'T' and the 'F' are both so fancy that it would probably take forever to get used to them. So I won't read it. Why bother? But there's so much blank space that it seems a shame to waste it. And in some places the writing is so faint that it's all but disappeared. The backs of all the pages are completely blank so I'm going to use them myself from now on. With no one to talk to and nothing for entertainment, I need some kind of outlet. The only trouble is I have nothing to say. Not today at any rate. Maybe tomorrow. As usual, work was boring and TV was not worth watching.

On the back of March 31, 1927

Still can't decipher this stupid writing. Have determined that it was written by a woman. Will call her Mary. Mary seems to have had lots of leisure time. She spent all day this day...that day?...reading a book called *The Roses by the Well*. She gives a long plot summary that I couldn't/wouldn't read. Says she can identify with the heroine because both of them are in love with a guy named Kenneth. Well, on this day there is nothing I can identify with, except maybe that dead dog I saw in the middle of the road driving home tonight. Work was incredibly tedious, as usual. Watched TV. Wanted to go to a movie, but there isn't anything good in town. Couldn't stand it anymore and went out to the Pizza Hut. It was crowded and there were a lot of kids there laughing and joking. Just wait until they grow up and have to go out into the real world. Then we'll see how long they keep up with the laughing and the joking.

On the back of April 1, 1927

Mary must have attended a tea party today. It was her April Fool's Day, but I don't guess anyone played any tricks on anyone. It was my June the Fifteenth, not that I keep track of that sort of thing anymore. I think I would have rather been where Mary was. She lists a bunch of names of others who were there. I am not impressed by the guests, but the food sounds great. Somebody brought an almond rum cake with cream icing and someone else brought a lemon cake that was twelve inches high. Would have loved it, especially since my own dessert tonight was from the Safeway frozen food section and it was a cheap little chocolate thing that tasted like dry sawdust. Am trying to figure out what Mary's age might be, but have decided it wouldn't be fair to thumb ahead looking for clues. I'll take each day as it comes. It gives me something to come home to. Work today was OK because Wilson was sick so we just goofed off a lot. Nothing on TV. Nothing to do.

On the back of April 2, 1927

If Mary doesn't do something pretty soon, I'm going to lose interest. Today she went to a book circle meeting and socialized. I think she wants to be a slut from the way she talks about Kenneth, but she can't do it because they're still so old-fashioned and Victorian back then. If she was going through all that now, she would be in the back seat of Kenneth's mustang, smoking dope and everything. She's always talking about how boring the Ladies Club Socials are, but chances are she was never as bad off as I am. At least she doesn't have to work a 42-hour week and cook her own meals. I think she lives with her parents and has a lot of leisure. Lucky girl.

On the back of April 3, 1927

Was wondering why Mary left so much of her diary blank. Now I know. It's hard to fill up blank pages if you don' have a lot to say, and Mary never has anything interesting to say. Today, she wrote about an ice-cream supper at the church that Kenneth took her to. It really gets tedious when she starts talking about how "handsome and gallant" that fruitloop is. I thought I would barf before the two of them ever said goodnight on the porch swing. Thank God he didn't try to give her a little kiss or she might have gushed on for another whole page about how thrilling it was. Mary is such a dull person. A real zero. But I guess that's what comes from being raised back in the Twenties. It wouldn't surprise me, though, to learn that she marries a millionaire and never has to worry a single minute for the rest of her life. So what's the use of

having the day off if you don't have anything to do? Went to the Mall and bought a new pair of shoes on sale. Ate out. A Bob Hope special on TV. It was really funny, especially some of the jokes about Ford and Nixon. I don't see how he gets away with some of the things he says about politicians. That's the good thing about living in America though, I guess. You can joke a lot about public leaders and not have to fear getting sent to the salt mines like they do in Russia.

On the back of April 4, 1927

Can't decipher anything Mary did today. Mostly I think she sat around working on a new dress, but I can't tell what she was doing to it. Technical terms. I just don't think it's fair some people don't ever have to work or sweat or worry. If she's going to complain about her future, then I'm not going to read anymore. Christ! She doesn't have anything to worry about. Two guys have asked her to marry them! Her parents apparently have lots of money because she says something about a summer vacation in Europe! I should have worries like that! Today they were talking about maybe laying off a few people in the office, and if they do, I'll be the first to go. I know I will be because I haven't been playing along with the office politics like the rest of them, sucking up to old Wilson and laughing at his stupid jokes just to get in good with him.

On the back of April 5, 1927

Mary wrote something in code today. Either that or her handwriting is getting worse. Was tempted to just sit down and read through this whole thing to the end, to see what really happens to her, but then I decided not to. If I have to live my life one day at a time, then by God she's going to have to relive hers that way too. She's probably some old biddy by now. In a nursing home with a dozen grandkids. Such a waste. Have decided I'm not going to let my life be so empty. If something hasn't happened by September, then I'll try to find another job. I'd like to go to L.A. or New Orleans. At least there I'd have something to do with my nights. I just can't imagine what it would be like to open the entertainment pages of a big city newspaper and find dozens of things to do. I get so lonely around this six-cop town I wnat to yell my damn lungs out and shake everybody up.

On the back of April 6, 1927

Mary really has the hots for Ken now. She's a real schemer too. It seems that Daddy is in a position to offer Ken a good job if he'll marry her. Some people

have all the luck! I can't even get anybody to look at me twice, not that there's anyone in this town I would want to look at me, but here Ken is about to marry a small fortune and have it made for the rest of his life. It would be so easy to just lay down and die. If there is justice in this world, I'll get a better job and move away from this dump. Only two movie theaters and one of them seems to show only old Disney junk. Mary's so dumb. She's gushing all this time about how rich and full her married life is going to be. If she only knew she was just a couple years away from the Depression, she wouldn't be talking so much about parties and picnics on the front lawn! Thumbed through the back pages to see if she's still around after the Market Crash, but the last entry is dated February 18, 1928. Poor Mary. Wonder whatever happened to her? Sometimes I look at the ancient bags limping toward church on their canes or studying prices through thick bifocals at Safeway, and I wonder "Are you Mary? Did you used to be Mary?" but I can't ask such a thing because Mary's not even her real name.

On the back of April 7, 1927

Have decided Mary is making all of this up. Either that or she's mixed up on her calendar. Today she says she mailed a letter to some guy in Boston and he answered her...the same day???...proposing marriage. She's now telling herself that she is going to be a Big Society Dame in Boston with servants and jewels and furs. So. Mary's a fraud too. Just like everyone else. If she's going to lie, she might as well lie big. After all, she's only lying to herself. And to me I guess. But then I don't count. Her mistake was in not throwing this thing in the fireplace and getting rid of it. I will. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe the next day. Sometimes I wonder what the purpose of it all is. I mean, why even try? The thought of having to work twenty years and never getting anywhere except to the end of a social security line is really depressing. Mary probably does luck out though. She'll grow old and fat and happy. Never a worry, even in the worst of times. At least she didn't have to worry about a car. Just when I thought I had my bank balance back up above a thousand, it looks like I might need new rings and valves and God only knows what else! There's a knocking and I'm using a quart of oil every hundred miles. It'll be just my luck to throw a rod on the way to work some morning. And Mary's back to worrying what kind of lace to have on her wedding gown.

On the back of April 8, 1927

I was right. Mary's a real fruitcake. She thinks she's going to marry this guy from Boston who will grow up to be governor or something. It's a shame she and I never got together. I could have probably straightened her out. Letter from

home. Dad is sick again. They lost a calf. Want me to come home some weekend and help repair the fence along the highway.

On the back of July 28, 1927

So. Mystery! Mary skipped a couple of months on me and doesn't even tell me why. Can't have been that European vacation because she would have been gushing about it. There's no explanation. But then, who cares? They probably had her in the nuthouse. At least she seems cured. She's no longer engaged to the Boston millionaire. She's back to attending Luncheon Club functions, telling me who wore what kind of dress and brought what kind of food. As if I cared! Mary, you are a very boring person. I liked you better when you first had a little mystery about you. I saw you with long auburn hair that took an hour each day to comb and braid up. I saw you in a long dress sweeping into a crowded room. I bet you could accept and hold a saucer and cup like a ballet dancer holds an impossible pose. When I have nothing to do, I just like to think about you and how easy your life was back then. I don't belong in this little town earning a hundred bucks a week, although today was a little exciting. Jim P. showed up forty minutes late and Wilson fired him on the spot! They had words. Lots of shouting. And we just sat there like statues pretending we couldn't hear. Really shocked everyone. But at least maybe that'll keep me from getting laid off now. I volunteered to do some of Jim's clerical work in addition to my own drudgery and Wilson was impressed by my savvy. He said if he'd known I was so capable, he would have gotten rid of Jim years ago. Of course nothing was said about giving me any of Jim's wages in addition, but I can't have everything.

On the back of July 29, 1927

So I cheated. Went to the back pages to read them carefully, to see what happens to Mary. Nothing. Not a clue about whatever happens to her. I thought maybe she would marry, move away or wise up. Just the same old drivel about luncheons, choir practice, and school dances. Can't say as I blame her though. If I'd been living a life as dull as hers, I might have been desperate for small details like that to write in a diary. But I bet if she'd ever taken the time to go back and read what she wrote the day before, she might have seen how boring it all was and tried to write something a little more interesting. Maybe that's what she did right before she wrote that nonsense about the guy from Boston. I'd give anything to have her walk into my room right now so I could say, "Mary, or whatever your name was, forget about Kenneth and the guy from Boston. I'm what you need. I could straighten you out." Wilson is already

looking around for someone to replace Jim. I said I could handle the job, but he doesn't believe me. I asked for a week to prove myself, and he's going to give it to me. One week. I'll show him. If I was doing Jim's old job and getting his salary, I might not hate that place so much. Might not even think about moving.

On the back of July 30. 1927

Back more or less to a normal routine, Mary and me both. But who cares? Mary can be such a pain sometimes, but I guess that's part of her mystery. I find it very easy to speedread through those sections about her latest dreses and her latest social function, yet I find myself being drawn to every word, dress hoping she'll say something that might somehow make us seem closer. I keep wishing old Ken will rape her some night so that she'll really have something to write about. There has to have been more going on back then. And there has to be something better for me to do. Work is the smae old grind, although I'm being super-efficient whenever Wilson is around. Sometimes I want to just toss a chair through the TV, the shows are so dumb. Especially the reruns.

On the back of July 31, 1927

The same. Not even interested in reading about Mary and her dumb socializing and her gushy romantic crushes on whoever walks into her line of sight. I think she's making it all up anyway. I ought to just throw this thing away. It's such a waste of time. If I had any sense, I'd throw this away, pack up and head for California, except that stupid car probably wouldn't get two hundred miles before it fell apart on me. Work is a pain. At least Wilson thinks I can do the job now. He said it's mine now. He didn't say anything about a raise though. It would be just like him to make me do a harder job at my same old salary. Sometimes I just want to stomp his face until it looks like hamburger, him and that overweight wife of his both. I'd really like to see that white Buick explode in a big ball of flame with him at the wheel and her sitting there by him with one of her sleazy champagne blonde wigs on. That's one funeral I'd show up early for, just to get a good seat.

On the back of August 1, 1927

Work was better and Wilson did say he'd give me thirty dollars a week more starting from last Monday! Love it! Love it!! Mary is reading another novel no one else has probably ever heard of. All about a summertime romance in Paris. That means for the next few weeks, all I'll be reading about is passion-

less love around Parisian landmarks. There are better things I could be doing, but it's still nice to drive home and know Mary's waiting for me, ready to tell me what she did all day, just like any other regular housewife. Another letter from home. They lost another calf on the highway and they insist I come home and help Dad fix the fence this weekend, so maybe I will. I'll be able to brag about my raise. *Hello Dolly* was on TV tonight. Big lavish sets and costumes. Expensive. But well worth it.

On the back of August 2, 1927

Gerald Williams

Inheritance

Did you not father me?

Father, I am not your son.
Though I have your heavy habits
& your heavy bones, your blue straight eyes
whose gaze goes outward from the dark within,
I am not your son.
Though I sit with half my life lived through
as you sat, slumped, my heavy forehead
clamped to paper reckonings,
my heavy words held back
before the quick & baffling, peopled world,
I am not your son.
Though I see the proud, disordered hills
contoured with certainties your surveys made,
though I prove your numbers & your distances
in alien wanderings,
though your measures chart my wilderness
in lines you would not recognize,
I am not your son.
Though I seek your faith & do not find,
though I follow still your straitened righteousness,
& count the doubts that keep the vision off,
though the chill of your despair spreads in my skull,
I am not your son.
Though I live as you did, narrow, good,
steadfast at work, mistrusting play,
longing for the easy, noisy joys,
yet keeping loneliness my closest friend
& silence as my habitat,
I am not your son.
Though I know you did not know why you lived thus,
though your death is one year past & done,
though you are my father still,
yet I am not your son.

Judith McCombs

Photograph Taken at My Father's House

This is his house. In the foreground the grandchild
leans on a mallet & squints at the sun;
she smiles with her pumpkin teeth at someone,
it must be the in-law. No one will play her,
we are all too busy. She has his hair,
perhaps his knees. In the background the road
lies empty, a white merciless curve
between lots. Over the top of the picture
Atlantic clouds are floating, sky-high,
beautiful white out of beautiful blue,
safe as the developer promised, beyond cities
& winter. Between the child & the road
is the square screened porch with the sky-blue chair
where he sat in the mornings, a K-Mart special,
cruise-style, where my brother with nothing to say
will sit tonight.

Now, in the foreground
beyond the camera, my brother is burying
flowers & garbage, in the compost plot
which is next to the garden no one will want.
These are the flowers from another ceremony,
glads & irises, white, the church
sent them over, to help. Flowers do not last
in this heat, the glare is too much. At the florist's
they told us, Buy mums, Mums are the best
to stand up in this heat, & we dutifully bought
all of their mums, from us & the others
who could not attend. I am out of the picture,
hosing the garden & the struggling geraniums
Mother forgot, hosing the yard
& the driveway, for guests. I have tried all morning
but the water sinks down through the green-brown grass
& is gone in the sand. Plants have to thicken
to stand it down here, even the gaudiest
live with drought at their roots.

Soon we are going
where the mums have been sent, under a canopy
the directors provide. & after the ceremony,
when nothing has happened but words & silence,
the flowers will be left under the canopy
to help them stand up. & the director's son,
correct in black, will lead Mother out,
holding her elbow to be sure she keeps going
back to the black provided car.
& she in her dress of not quite black,
not quite correct, will leave him abruptly,
walking too fast, not looking at us
on the long ride back, she didn't expect
to be left alone in the house of the photograph
where we will try to help, answering the doorbell,
thanking the guests who are trying to help.

Judith McCombs

Contributors

R BARTKOWECH is in Boulder working on a second novel. His works are forthcoming in *The Little Magazine, DeKalb Literary Arts Journal,* and *Quarry West.*

KIM BAUER from Bay City is a Studio Art major at Michigan State University.

CASEY BUSH has won a pair of writing awards in the last four years. He lives in Grayling and occassionally surfaces to edit *News of Lansing.*

DAVID CITINO is assistant professor of English at Ohio State's Marion Campus where he edits *Cornfield Review.* His work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal, Cimarron Review,* and *San Jose Studies.*

LAURIE COSCA works at the Chico State Bookstore and has been published in *The Denver Quarterly, The Reed,* and *The California Quarterly.*

JOEL DAILEY is finishing his MFA at Bowling Green, Ohio. His poems have turned up in *Poetry Now, Hollins Critic, Mikrokosmos,* and *Bird Effort.*

JIM DANIELS edits *Pine River* at Alma College.

BARBARA DRAKE teaches writing and women's studies at MSU and edits *Stone Press* publications. Her work has appeared in *Transpacific, Epoch,* and *Sumac.*

HUGH FOX has just finished a non-fiction novel and *First Fire,* an anthology of South American Indian myth, will come from Anchor Books this fall.

DAN GERBER's work has appeared in numerous magazines and several anthologies including *The New Yorker, The Partisan Review, Inscape, The Third Coast,* and *Contemporary American Poetry* (Hokusei Gakuen College, Sapporo, Japan).

FRANK GRAZIANO works for the Arizona Poetry in the Schools Program and edits *Grilled Flowers.* Floating Island Publications in California has his first chapbook.

MICHAEL L. JOHNSON has published poetry and scholarly articles in several dozen little magazines and journals, also a chapbook *Dry Season* by *Cottonwood Review.*

GEORGE LEWIS is working toward an MA in Linguistics at MSU.

JUDITH McCOMBS, co-founder of *Moving Out,* has published widely in little and feminist magazines. Her first book: *Sisters and Other Selves,* Glass Bell Press, 1976.

RICHARD E. McMULLEN's poems have appeared in *Anon, The Massachusetts Review, The New York Times,* and *Periodical Lunch. Chicken Beacon* is available from Street Fiction Press, Ann Arbor.

RON MIECZKOWSKI studies English at MSU. He won 2nd prize in the *RCR's* Creative Writing Contest for his poetry, which appears in *Descant, Invitation,* and *RCR.*

MARK NEERING's works were recently exhibited at *120 in the Shade* gallery in Lansing with Ed Hall and the Art Yard Graphics Group.

SUSAN SCHAEFER NEVILLE is moving from Ohio to Florida, having received an MFA from Bowling Green. She has taught workshops at University of Toledo.

ANN PULSIPHER studies English at MSU. This is her first time in print.

ANDREW SCHEIBER is a graduate student at MSU, two-time winner of 1st prize for fiction in the *RCR* Creative Writing Contest.

HERBERT SCOTT teaches at Western Michigan University. He helped edit *The Third Coast,* and his poetry has appeared in *Poetry Now* and *The Chariton Review.*

SHELBY STEPHENSON chairs the English department at Campbell College, North Carolina. His work can be found in *Southern Poetry Review, Texas Quarterly, International Poetry Review,* and many other small magazines.

BRENDA SWOPE, sophomore at MSU, won 3rd prize for poetry in the *RCR* contest.

LEE UPTON, Journalism major at MSU, won 1st prize for poetry in the *RCR* contest again. Her work has been accepted by *The California Quarterly, Invitation,* and *RCR.*

DIANE WAKOSKI, widely-known prolific poet, will return to MSU to conduct workshops in the fall. Her latest book is *Waiting for the King of Spain,* Black Sparrow Press.

GERALD RAY WILLIAMS is from Gene Autrey, Oklahoma (pop. 110) and this is his first time in print.



volume XI issue 2