



Northridge
Review

Fall 1991

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Northridge Review invites submissions continuously between September and May. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the author's name, address, telephone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. *The author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.* Please limit submissions to three short stories and/or five poems. Photography and graphics are to be in black and white, and there is no limit to the quantity of these submissions. Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be sent to: *Northridge Review*, Department of English, California State University, Northridge, California 91330. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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Awards

Two awards are given annually in recognition of the finest works published in the Spring and Fall issues of *Northridge Review*.

The **Helen Helms Marcus Award**, established by Helen Marcus, recognizes the best short story published by a CSUN student. The winner of this award receives two hundred dollars.

The winner of this award for 1991 is Amy Reynolds for her story, "Discernment of Spirits," published in the Fall 1990 issue. *Northridge Review* expresses its gratitude to Jack Lopez for judging the entries.

The **Rachel Sherwood Award**, given in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes the best poem published by *Northridge Review*. The winner receives fifty dollars from the University and will be acknowledged alongside the name of Rachel Sherwood.

The winner of this award is Suzanne Ghiglia for her poem, "Come Here Francisco Lopez," published in the Fall 1990 issue. *Northridge Review* expresses its gratitude to Jewell Rhodes for judging the entries.

In addition, this issue of *Northridge Review* proudly presents the winner of the annual award given by the Academy of American Poets. The poem is, "Knick Knack Paddywack," by Robert Wynne. Runners-up were Scot Butwell for "Day Before Spring Break, 3:08 a.m." and Peggy Dembicer for "An Embarrassment of Angels."

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Dancer

“Stand still,” she said.

I thought I was standing still. I didn’t even wiggle.

I turned my head just a little until I could see mom standing there. Her neck, her shoulders, slim, had cruel lines — lines like a robot programmed to stick needles in people’s eyes.

“Eyes in the corner!” Her jet black hair bounced when she talked. She was too tense.

I looked back into the corner—two walls at right angles, perfect from top to bottom. There were smudges from all the times before. I heard the scraping sound of the sifter and an even layer of flour began falling around my feet. She would be leaving soon.

I put my arms straight at my sides. I was before the evil Ice Queen, pleading the case for my planet. Her snow falls all around me, encasing me in a prison of ice. She breathes her frosty breath and I am frozen in my shoes—a statue forever. But the planet is saved.

“I’m going shopping. You better not move.”

I already knew. Then she would come home and go into the bedroom. Then she would go into the kitchen and get the green broom from the closet. Then, if there weren’t any naughty footprints, she would sweep away the flour and tell me to go out and play. Till then I was a prisoner.

She walked into the hall. Her keys jingled in her purse. The front door closed; the engine vroomed. When the car left the driveway I turned around to face the room.

I was used to it, in the corner with the sifted flour on the floor so she would know if I snuck out. The shiny silver sifter was on the counter in the kitchen. I could see it. I always tried to figure a way to sneak, but escape was impossible without the doom of discovery.

I crouched way down and looked at the flour. I put my eye as close as I could without touching the fine flecks. My breath blew too hard on the flour so I stood up. Not enough to get in trouble. Mom was reasonable.

I played prisoner for a few minutes. Then I played Ice Queen again and stood frozen for as long as I could stand it, without even blinking my eyes. I started singing:

*There's a kind of hush, all over the world
All over the world, it's the sound you hear
Of lovers in love. . .*

Sometimes mom leaves the radio on accidentally when she leaves and I'm in the corner. I started dancing, pretending the radio was on and I was on American Bandstand. I flung my arms up and down.

*Come on everybody let's make a train now,
Come on bay-ba, do the loca-motion.*

I danced like a lunatic without moving my feet. Some day I would be on American Bandstand. I danced as hard as I could, stomping on my little space of the cold wood floor. I got all sweaty. I became a madman, flailing forward away from the walls, swimming for safety. I tried to jump up and spin all the way around, but I bumped into the wall and fell straight into the middle of the flour.

I stood up and started to cry. She would never believe that I fell. She would say that I was lying, then she would kill me, so I ran into the kitchen and grabbed the shiny silver sifter. There was still a little flour in it and I ran back into the corner and sifted over the spots where I fell.

I thought, *Why didn't I think of this before?* You could still tell a little, but not unless you looked real close. Perfect.

Then I started to cry again. The shiny silver sifter was in my hand and not on the counter. And there were little white footprints running back and forth from the kitchen. She would know and I would get in worse trouble for trying to fool her.

I was sick and tired of it. Now she would kill me no matter what.

I jumped high, stomped straight down into the flour and made two Ked prints. They looked like the perfect pink skin-prints of a

stinging slap. I ran into the kitchen, opened a bottle of R.C., left the fridge door open on purpose, turned on the T.V. full blast—McHale's Navy—turned on KHJ full blast—Mama's and Papa's—drank R.C. and danced around the living room, leaving my smudgy white snowprints on the shag carpet. I was an escapee from the ice prison, dancing like a free man, sweating like a lunatic.

An Embarrassment of Angels

That beautiful cursed Garcia-Marquez
with his old man;
He set off a
riot of angels popping
up all over —
a regular Pandora's box.
They're everywhere,
in our music,
in our oxygen,
in the literature of things.
I can't turn my head
that I don't notice
a rustle of wing,
a muted brush against my skin.

The one that visits
disturbs my dreams
with alternating reproaches and endearments.
I thought it was a "He" angel,
maybe even the archangel Michael,
until one midnight the telephone jarred my sleep
(my hillbilly grandmother
who never knew better)
She said to me:

"Peggy Ann, I know life is real
tough, but things will get better, Honey."

"Thank you, Grandma. I love you."

Like every other morning
my alarm buzzed me
to my fuzzy feet.
(What year was it
that Grandma died?
So long, long ago.)

Like every other morning
I stretched and drank my coffee black
until my daughter woke and asked:

“Mommy, who were you talking to last night?”

Things did get better.
I feel that lovely
damned rustling of wings —
like soft powder grandma breath
warm on the side of my face.

Pseudonym

Open carefully
 my thin flap of flesh.
 Peel back the pale membrane.
 Discover there Sarah P. Bishop,
 ripening into bright fruit.

Put your hands
 on the belly of Sarah P. Bishop.
 Feel her humming and tingling,
 vibrant with the need
 to be any woman
 who, in the name of brazen freedom,
 or art —

Josephine Baker
 Isadora Duncan
 Zelda, Zelda

— throws her ageless hair in the wind,
 dives bare-assed into a fountain,
 twists men around her supple body
 like slinky mink,
 the thrum of her pulse
 intense with her own music.

Put your ear to the throat
 of Sarah P. Bishop.
 Hold your breath.
 Listen:

If the humming is *not* audible,
withdraw your hands,
one at a time.
Cover her again
with the other woman's skin;
leave her to ripen
a little while longer.

If the humming *is* audible,
stand back.

How French Boys Learn

It's a bilabial process
that begins with
the intaking of heat
through tumescent lips.

Room-temperature wine
first (In French,
word-final consonants
are deleted when
the following word
begins with a liquid).

Then that sound,
only they can make that sound,
that bestial, grooved, uvular fricative,
that voiceless, tongue-vowel slide (from a
forbidden throat aspiration is neither
absent nor present).

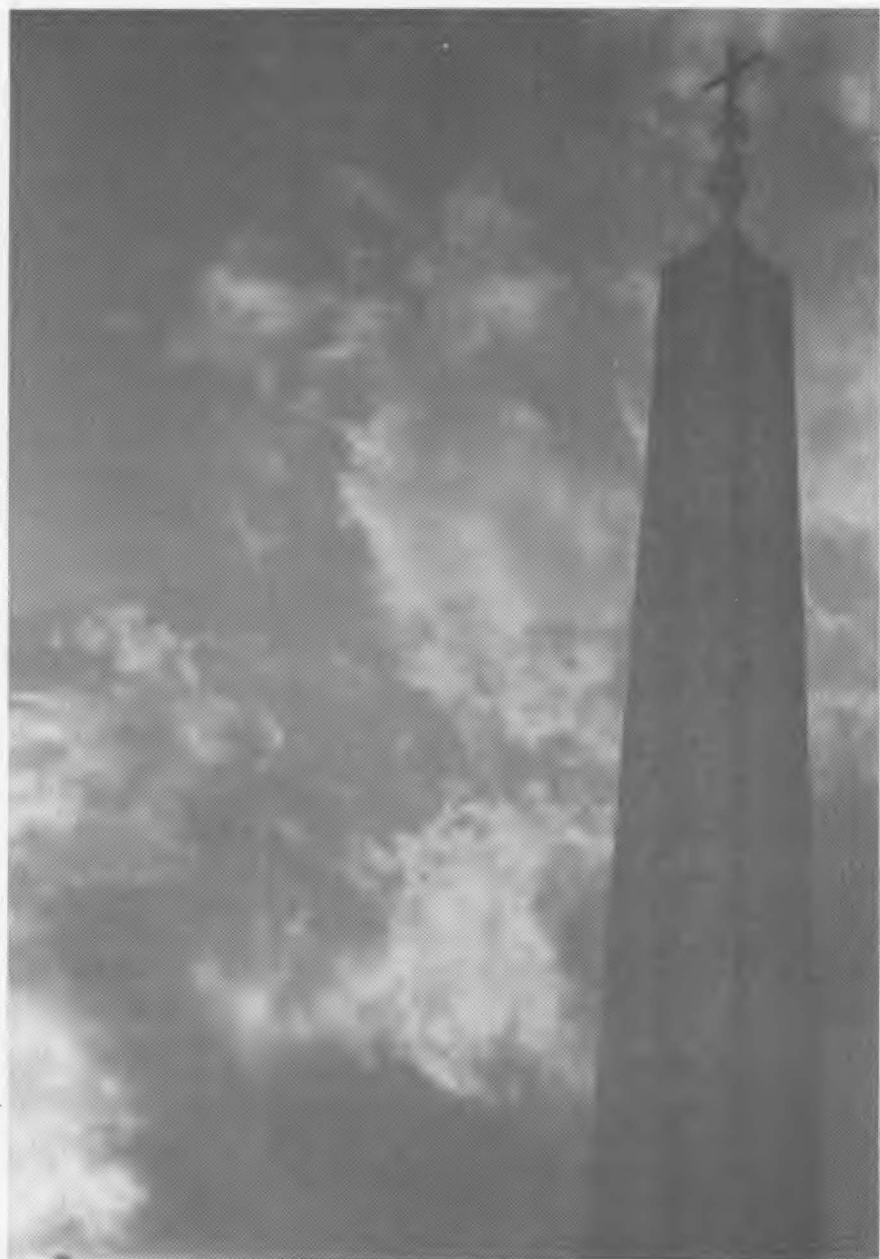
You, Boy,
feel my hot morphemes
crawling up your flanks
(God, I love the French man's argot
for a woman's breasts,
don't you?).

We've got to cross the isogloss
but first
a bit of braided bread
with or without
goat-cheese spread (it's well known that,
for tight-legged boys from the Seine,
phonological rules can be either optional
or obligatory).

It's difficult.

We American women know this
instinctively; we speak of it
to one another in buttery collocations.
But we are SO patient when applying our
interlingual strategies.

And, when all is said and done,
through the phenomenon of soft glottals
and diphthongization,
the concatenation works;
French boys learn quite well.



Crossing the State Line

When you cross the state line
from California into Nevada . . .
well . . . the cattle-crossing signs
in California feature cows
but in Nevada bulls
maybe just to remind you
of the wide open dream
of some coughed out
leather and dirt cowboy
losing at blackjack and poisoned
with tobacco and Budweiser
some old guy raised to carry
low self esteem
like a pack of Luckies
in his shirt pocket
and hook "I'd as soon kill you
as look at you" glares
across some vomit stiff patch of carpet
in Tonopa or Montgomery Pass
and end up in Reno drowning
with chf and emphysema dying
in a lucky room like 21 or 7
with a nasal cannula and no family
for 300 miles around and nobody
with a Smith & Wesson .357
stuck under the seat
of a GMC 4X pickup
who's going to read some shit
like this as an elegy

in like flynn

that kid
the loud obnoxious one
that everybody
couldn't stand
you couldn't stand him
because he always
made you laugh muffled
choking in your desk
looking up dirty words
blasphemous in the back
of the room religion
class smart ass
butt kicked into
the principal's office
again and again
for talking too much
protesting too much
when your desk got moved
by him because
if you didn't
then everyone would
know that
in the back of the room
in the back of your mind
you wanted to go behind
the snack shack
and make out with him and
god forbid anyone ever
found out you thought it

II

you're not supposed
to think
about the shit
you think about
but you do it anyway
because of that sneaky
surge you get
on the inside
that you can't describe
because there are no words

no words like the invisible
hands that you feel
on the small
of your back
when there is nobody there
but you feel them anyway

there are no hands
like the hands
you can't have

they are always
the best

you

stop me
 from being
 bohemian barefoot
 on threaded rugs

leave me
 ratty haired
 reading eliot
 other elitist
 foppery wilde
 fluff substantiates
 when you cannot

dirty child
 i need streets
 and lunatic muse
 grate and create
 disturbed dreams
 so i can breath it
 see it in the
 fullmoonair
 so white it breaks

concentration makes
 an introvert
 revert to primal past
 present in the now
 of here i am

he breaks me
 in the airfullmoon
 i create

and he is
 not you

The David of Donatello

I am watching the grey man
swing his sinewed arms,
his sweaty biceps flexing then shaking with impact
striking the block of stone.
Little chips and imperfections
cover the workroom floor.

We are on the edge of the world

I see the head of David
emerge like a stillbirth
pressing through the stone.
He is staring with cold, lidless eyes
that burn through me.

I am not a martyr

I know that he wants to turn his head
to look out the window
where he might spot a
woman smiling under an apple tree.
But he is trapped by the Old Goliath
pounding him into existence.

Donatello continues to work
like a god afraid of being forgotten:
cutting and tearing down the universe
to find one man frozen.

Kara Culhane

Portrait of a Steam Engine

If the steam inlet is too close to my neck, I will surely be burned.

Tammy sat on the edge of her bed with her hands folded in her lap. She sat peacefully contemplating the problem with her steam inlet. She always sat peacefully when she contemplated anything having to do with her engine.

If the steam inlet is moved, however, it would quite possibly prove itself counterproductive.

Her room was full of bright light. Tammy felt most productive in bright light. It served as a spotlight for her and signaled her to perform. It was for that reason that she decorated her room all in yellow, except for her dust ruffle and pillow shams which were white. She awoke each morning with a reminder to perform. Her performances varied with each phase of her life but she never missed a beat.

Tammy liked to feel space. The space made her feel alive and ready. She could accomplish anything in a room with a lot of space. She had only her yellow bed, her yellow desk and her yellow chair. On the floor in front of her bed was her steam engine. Tammy did not mind that the engine took up so much of the floor space in her room.

I think I will leave the steam inlet where it is and risk third degree burns on my neck.

“Honey?” Tammy’s mother peeked her head into Tammy’s room. “Dave’s here to see you.”

Dave pushed open Tammy’s door and brushed past her mother. She wiped her hands on her apron and shot Tammy a look that said, “Smile, sit up straight and be charming.” Her eyes then fell on Tammy’s steam engine. “Nice girls don’t play with steam engines,” her eyes said to Tammy.

“What’s up Tammy?” Dave tossed his backpack on the floor, hopped over the flywheel, and sprawled himself across the foot of Tammy’s bed.

I don’t think the slide valve properly seals up the exhaust port.

Tammy used to love Dave so much. She loved to live only to see his face, to hear his voice and to touch his giant biceps.

“Roger’s little sister said you missed cheerleader practice again today. She said you’re gonna get kicked off the squad if you miss one more.” Dave caught his reflection in the mirror on the back of the door.

I wonder if the size of the steam chest has anything to do with the slide valve not sealing up the exhaust port.

Tammy loved her steam engine. Every spare moment she had went into building her engine. She didn’t have time for cheerleading practice anymore. She didn’t have time for Dave anymore.

“Peter’s parents are going out of town this weekend. He’s gonna have a kickin’ party. Probably get a keg or something.”

Dave flexed his right arm and admired it in the mirror.

I will definitely have to check the slide valve, the exhaust port and the steam chest.

Tammy loved checking the parts on her engine. She felt that each check was one step closer to perfection. Tammy savored the work toward perfection. This perfect engine would be *it* for her.

“Peter’s such a dick but he throws such killer parties.” Dave flexed his left arm and admired it in the mirror. “Oh, I gotta tell ya what happened at football practice today.” Dave flexed both arms and admired them in the mirror. “Coach caught Gibson with a pack of smokes in his locker. He’s totally busted.”

Dave is so dumb.

Tammy leaned forward to get a closer look at the driving rod.

The driving rod looks good.

Tammy’s engine had been completely assembled for three days. Her work had come to an end. She wanted to work on her steam engine forever. Tammy had not tried her engine on yet. It would signify the end, once she strapped her engine on her back. Tammy didn’t want it to end yet.

“My old man says I gotta work for him this summer. He pays me pretty good, so it won’t be that bad. Long as it doesn’t cut into football camp.” Dave checked his hair in the mirror.

I don’t think the cross head is properly attached to the driving rod.

“Tony heard you guys get to ride on the bus with us to the Jefferson game. He’s gonna sneak some stuff on the bus so we’ll get totally wasted. It’s gonna be so cool.” Dave checked his hair in the mirror again. “So don’t get kicked off the squad.”

I’ve got to check the quantity and pressure of the steam entering the cylinder from the steam boiler.

Tammy loved her steam engine so much that she wished she could always be near it. Even though she wasn’t ready to wear it, she was looking forward to being able to put it on her back and to feel it stir violently against her skin. Those thoughts gave her goose bumps.

“Andrea’s pissed at you. She says you’re trying to act all cool or something — you don’t hang out anymore.”

How fast the flywheel turns and how much work it can do depends on the quantity and pressure of the steam. Yes, I will have to check it.

Tammy knew that her engine was going to change her life. Having the engine fastened to her back would validate her — it would validate her whole being, her whole existence. It would stand for her and she would stand for it.

Dave is very dumb

Dave looked at Tammy for the first time since his arrival.

“Andrea’s right. You don’t act the same anymore. You don’t go to cheerleader practice anymore. You don’t go to parties anymore. You do skip classes but it isn’t for the right reasons anymore. And you don’t hang all over me anymore.” He looked at her engine. “Ever since you started putting that thing together. It’s so dumb. It’s like that thing made you forget what’s important. Why do you always have to do stuff with that thing? I know what’s gonna happen. That thing’s not gonna work and then you’ll look around and you won’t have nothing. All the important things in

your life are gonna be gone — no cheerleading and no me.”

I can't believe how dumb Dave is.

Tammy stood up. “That thing, as you so ignorantly call it, is a steam engine,” she took a step toward her engine, “a machine that produces work by the pressure of expanding steam against a movable piston in a cylinder.” She knelt down in front of her engine.

Yes

“Like the automobile engine, the steam engine is a reciprocating engine.” She put a hand on the flywheel. “The piston travels back and forth in a straight line.” Tammy quickly and sharply turned her head to look at Dave in the face. She gave him a hard look and then slowly turned back to look at her engine. “This to-and-fro action usually has to be changed into a rotational movement, since most steam engines are used to turn wheels or other revolving devices such as drive shafts.” Tammy stood up again.

This means something.

“The piston is therefore connected by a straight shaft, or ‘piston rod,’ to a crosshead outside the cylinder, that slides back and forth between supporting guides.” She moved to the back of her engine.

I feel it.

“A connecting rod joins the crosshead to an off-center pivot point on a large, heavy flywheel.” Tammy slapped her flywheel. Dave jerked from the suddenness of her action.

I am moved.

“As the piston in the cylinder moves from one end to the other, the flywheel completes one-half of a revolution.”

I am changed. Truly changed.

“As the piston returns, the revolution is completed.”

This is it. It is time. It is now.

Tammy bent down and turned around. She straightened out the shoulder straps and slipped her arms through them. Dave leaned forward. Tammy closed her eyes and took three short, deep breaths.

The steam inlet's connected to the steam chest, the steam chest's connected to the slide valve, the slide valve's connected to the exhaust port, the exhaust port's connected to the cylinder, the cylinder's connected to the piston, the piston's connected to the

piston rod, the piston rod's connected to the driving rod, the driving rod's connected to the crosshead, the crosshead's connected to the flywheel...

Tammy looked up and saw her yellow desk. It was the spotlight and it was time to perform. Her life up to that moment had all been a preparation. She was prepared for this. She had rehearsed it over in her mind countless times. Thoughts of that moment had been what put her to sleep at night and what had awakened her in the morning. She was ready to stand with her engine and speak to the world.

I can.

Tammy adjusted the straps so that the cushions rested on her shoulders. She started up the steam boiler and her engine chugged intensely. Steam began to rise and fill her room.

I am feeling it stir violently.

She leaned forward to find her center of gravity. Her engine was big so she needed to balance it perfectly on her back. She slowly began to rise. It wobbled and she began to sweat. Her engine was heavy. As she rose, she continued to lean forward so as to keep her engine under control and on her back.

This is a heavy engine.

She lifted her engine one inch from the ground. Her sweat dripped down her forehead and into her eyes.

I should have taken off my sweatshirt.

Tammy blinked her eyes several times and took breaths like a weight-lifter does before lifting his weights. With every atom of strength, determination and inspiration she possessed, Tammy forced her body upward. With her, her engine rose.

It's working.

Tammy stood up with her body bent forward at a 90 degree angle and her engine riding high on her back. She held that stance for a fraction of a second. Her engine was too heavy.

Uh oh.

The engine itself worked perfectly; she couldn't have built a better one. It was just too heavy. Tammy started to stagger. Dave jumped up from the bed but it was too late for him to do anything to help her.

In one giant motion, Tammy's engine pulled her forward, flipped her over and wedged her, upside down, between her yellow bed and yellow desk.

"Jesus fucking Christ!" Dave charged toward Tammy. Tammy's mother burst into the room.

"What in the world is going on? Tammy, I knew that thing was trouble from the first moment I laid my eyes on that wheel!" Tammy's mother and Dave grabbed Tammy's legs and started to pull. Her engine let out an ear-piercing shriek and so did Tammy.

"Leave me alone! Get the hell out of here. I mean it." Tammy reached behind her back and shut off the steam boiler. "Go away." Tammy's mother and Dave looked at each other, shrugged and quietly left the room. Tammy closed her eyes. She cried. Her engine was too heavy. She reached back and touched her neck.

Definitely third degree burns.

Day Before Spring Break, 3:08 a.m.

I want to write poetic newspaper
stories about drug babies slamming
computer keys staring holes into
screens, amateur movie-makers
in San Pedro with \$40 budgets,
undeclared major files
in administration basement,
teeter-tottering sororities
at 4 a.m. in the rain
holding umbrellas with one hand
like Mary Poppins, capturing
the beautiful ugliness of
the world, the double dimension,
subtle what's-it-all-about aspect.
I see myself as Tom Wolfe,
riding with Ken Kesey and
Merry Pranksters, LSD-spiked
cherry kool-aid in tow, hanging out
with Black Panthers, american
astronauts. Up at six a.m., reading
newspapers, looking for drama,
love, conflict, love, out already
talking to the all-night newsstand
guy. Anything going on? Pull out
notebook ready to move hopping
lily pads improvising vigorously
to internal saxophone notes full
of flow beat chord life time speed,
slowing down only for a moment

because I learned from Poetry
beauty is in THE MOMENT. Everybody
should read poetry, nobody, man,
nobody has hands jammed in pant-
pockets like they have to go,
be, do, find, hear, see, make,
smell, love. Poetry! Writing is
about the poetry of life showing
it to those who don't know poetry
breaths or the beautiful ugliness.
3:20 a.m.

The Burden

He takes off my clothes,
peels away my skin,
pries apart my ribs,
reaches in, past lungs,
snaps away the aorta,
opens the jar of formaldehyde.

He bores holes through my ears
to drain my brain of
thick green fluid thoughts,
drinks them down in gulps,
chews and spits them out,
flushing them into oblivion.

He pops out my eyeballs,
glues them to his mirror,
“Your eyes only for me,”
staring at my lips swinging,
wired shut by black curling hairs,
on the chain about his neck.

He chops off my hands,
wears them as plastic gloves,
flings my arms around his neck,
my body hung like a sack from his back,
as he audaciously asks,
“Why are you such a burden to me?”

Barbie and Ken Fight Now

Barbie and Ken fight now.
They fight with regularity,
like their role-models.
Sometimes Ken screeches away
in the Malibu van
while Barbie screams obscenities
from the patio of her dream house.
She'd flip him off
if she could make her fingers work right.
Now Ken gets really out of hand.
He raises his plastic fist
to Barbie's blonde head.
Suddenly...
He-Man breaks his way in,
kicks Ken's ass,
and whisks Barbie off to Gladstone's,
where he always gets a table
right away.
Because heroes are like that,
and membership has its privileges.

**Georgie's Blues:
To My Husband, William Butler Yeats**

I wanted to divide you for awhile
from your gloom,
I wanted to distract you,
I wanted that woman out of my house,

the actress you pressed
between pages, while I
glided flawlessly
from dusk to dawn,
darkness to sun.

The wedding cake still moist,
a vile mood spiraled you
beyond my reach.

And then
this soft, white hand
loosed a universe of ghosts
into our rooms,
to show you images
you loved so fiercely,
you didn't recognize them as your own.

Suffice it to say
I knew how to get your attention.

But when I tired
of dancing *grands jetes* between your brains,
the thoughts wouldn't stop,
the ghosts babbled on:
your words, your system, your
genius working into me -
a shovel.

My own thoughts were lost, dislodged,
circling, singing birds:

"I burned my translations
when I married you.
I knew
You'd throw them in a stew."

I wrote an order for a child,
and then another,
signed by the ghosts
(We got their signatures on everything).

I dropped my pen
and went to bed.
In sleep
I spoke your philosophy -
you stayed awake to write it down
and publish it.

When you slept
my hair caught fire
from your dream of her.
I woke
to a beating of wings,
inventing her again for you:
ghastly beak at my throat,
a horse full of soldiers
rolling up my thighs.

In the mirror, now,
I see your dark eye
inside my only face.
My other eye is winking;
there's something it still knows:
Your system is me,
and I am chaos.
When you die - surprise -
you're not coming back.

For Barbara T.

I lost you like a glove -
I was thinking of something else.
And now I can't stop retracing my steps...

October in New York.
A blind wind charges off the park
and pins you, giggling, to the wire fence.
Your red skirt flies up - a matador's cape -
face gone, purple panties to the world -
daughter on your right arm, stroller on your left.

I'm content
to be yet another appendage,
a big one.
I'll do anything - wipe the baby's butt -
just to sit in your kitchen while you make tea,
lulled by the bubbles and steam, whistling
'kiss my ass' to the concrete.

You want my stories from the trenches
now that Broadway seems so far
from your chic block on West Seventy-First.
But today I've been ripped inside out
by the mad Greek Nikos
and I barely set the scene
when I'm sobbing into my Constant Comment.

Your son, not to be outdone at his only sport,
lets out a howl from the porta-crib.
You dance between us on the linoleum, singing,
"I enjoy being a girl."

I envy you the world
you've whittled out of granite;
I want one like it,
someday: children's events at the Met,
bright but sweetly geeky husband.

Meanwhile, I leave town.
I fly to the end of the earth and forget you.

You show up eventually, though, kids in tow
with their ice-blue eyes and African middle names.
We sit on a foggy beach, resisting
the gray pull of the waves.
You're blowsy and white - I can barely see the showgirls.

Your dazzling daughter
swings her red pail into the air
and brings it down -
flag on a racetrack.
She stares right through me, seeing the future
just behind my back.
We cover our legs with sand.

We talk about Nancy as if
we're sisters and she our unlikely mom:
a glamorous blond
in a sable coat and white Seville,
driving across our late afternoons
like the horizon itself.
Your son craps in my lap.

Hollywood smirks at your husband's quirky songs.
One is about a nude girl on a road gig.
Your therapist's ravenous,
I hear. You meet him for lunch in a clown suit,
handing out flowers.

Party at your house.

Most of the faces have stepped off the stage
into living room screens
from here to Queens.

Now they hang at the edge
in cantilevered houses, counting sunsets.

Not you.

You drop your kids at a friend's
and drive your car into another world -
off the palisades,
into the sea.

Third Person Plural

Why do I do it and how do I stop
 diving into their skins
 into their juice blender bodies
 to watch myself -
 bulldozer at the blackboard,
 dirt chomper, word spitter -
 sinking into its square hole,

while before and somewhere behind me,
 adolescence blasts into something else?
 How did I grow up to be irrelevant?

One student looks like me.
 She has the knife-eyed pout
 I used to stab my mother with.

I dreamed I threw her against a wall
 and denied it to the fish-faced administrators.
Que barbara.

She had only the knife-look to accuse me
 (no bruises or English words).
 I woke as the fish-eyes followed
 her raised finger toward my face.

Now the dream hangs in our classroom
 and I won't touch any of the girls

but they yank at me, grab me, stroke me
 bray my name as they
 slash through my tangled language.
 I recede into stupid mantras -
 there, there, their, they're

writing their names on everything they touch -
book, desk, blackboard, scalp -
they sneeze their names into the palms of their hands.

Dirty spring in the parking lot.
Heads and limbs hang out the windows,
here and there an ear for me.

They understand little but they may
understand that they are my family
and the motors of my dreams
and they will take my rhythms.
They'll slip from me into the smog.

An Interview With Katharine Haake

by Jeff Meyers

May 2, 1991

Katherine Haake's first book of short stories, *No Reason on Earth*, was published in 1986 by Dragon Gate Press. More recent work includes a novel and a second collection of stories, some of which have appeared in such places as *Witness*, *The Iowa Review*, *Mississippi Review*, and *the minnesota review*.

Katherine is currently an English Professor at CSUN. She is director of the department's writing program and has been the faculty advisor for the *Northridge Review*. She holds graduate degrees from Stanford and the University of Utah.

She resides in Los Angeles with her husband and two young sons.

Q When did you start writing?

A I started in grade school. I was the type of person who always wanted to be a writer until I read *Moby Dick* when I was 17. Then I realized I wasn't smart enough or talented enough to be a writer and I stopped writing for four years.

Q Do you write because you can't help it? Is it an obsession?

A That's what I used to say. I used to say that a writer writes because a writer can't do anything else, meaning as in a compulsion, also meaning as in there are precious few things that the writer can actually do well. As it turns out I realize there are lots of things that I could do. Through teaching the Theory [of Fiction] course I suddenly realized that one of the reasons I write is that I like the self that is me, the self that is constituted in the act of writing. It's a different self than any other self that I have...and I depend on it.

Q Is writing then an act of discovery? Do you discover another self through your writing?

A No. It's a state of being more than anything else. A state of

being in a particular moment. I'm also becoming increasingly interested in how a moment, any moment, is constructed in fiction. When you're writing, the *only* important thing is that exact moment in the fiction, and when you're *really* writing...that is the self that is inhabiting that moment. It's another way of saying that this has become almost all *process* for me.

Q Would you agree with the idea that writing is becoming more theory informed, so that if you don't know what the theories are then your writing is going to be limited?

A That's true in literary fiction, in some literary fiction. I don't think that you can say that's altogether true in mainstream American publishing, since publishers are out to make money.

Q Annie Dillard writes in *Living By Fiction* that fiction, "insofar as it is traditional, has a large and paying audience whose tastes serve to keep it traditional." Would you agree, and do you consider your writing as traditional or non-traditional?

A Yes, I would agree with that, and I think it's part of the way the publishing institution operates to govern the types of writings that get published. I would characterize my writing as being non-traditional. Readers deserve certain kinds of gratification in their reading, and what I have wanted to do since I became self-conscious about writing is to write stories that provide certain types of traditional gratification, while at the same time are self-conscious constructions of language, so that the reader is positioned in such a way as to read a traditional story at the same time as the reader is being instructed in how to read. A friend of mine says that the only thing that she's interested in doing is to renegotiate narrative conventions in such a way as to make a hair's breadth of difference in the reader subsequent to the reading of the story, so that the fictions *become* commentaries on their own conventions, and in doing so, *change*, in a hair's breadth of a way, the way the reader reads forever after.

Q In your story "The Woman in the Water" the narrator breaks in at many points and addresses the reader directly as "you." At one point the narrator speaks to the reader saying "You want things to proceed logically, and with a clear purpose to their order, toward

some transcendent point of resolution.” Is this what we as readers want, a “transcendent point of resolution?” Your stories seem to play with the delay of that, the delay of the gratification. This seems to be something in common with all of your stories that I’ve read, you seem to be saying this over and over. Do you feel like you’re writing the same story?

A I think that you only ever write one story, although that is the largest concern I have about this book; it’s too similar. I think that there’s certainly a progression. “The Woman in the Water” was the second to the last story that I wrote in the book, and it ends in a refusal, a refusal to narrate in a conventional sense, which is also related to this sense of providing conventional gratifications in a way that’s interesting. More and more I see this book as being about refusals, which is a feminist perspective.

Q How can women writers avoid, as Terry Eagleton warns, “speaking the myths men would have them speak”?

A (Quietly) They can’t. How can you get outside of discourse? How can you get outside of culture that is patriarchal at its core? You can’t do it. It’s the same thing as how can you get outside of the story when you’re in the story? You can’t get outside of the story. The only thing you can do is to reveal the structure of the story, to reveal the conventions that are holding the story in place. The only thing that women can do is to acknowledge the dilemma. The quote I use is: “As long as women remain silent they remain outside of history, but if they should enter history speaking and acting as men do then they enter history subdued and alienated. It is a history that logically speaking their speech should disrupt.” Since you can’t enter history without “speaking and acting as men do” your only option is to illuminate the dilemma, to make visible what is invisible about the bind, the double bind. In a way that might be deconstructing a moment even while you are constructing it. I don’t know what that means, but it may be what’s going on.

Q Are you attempting to do more than simply challenge the dominant patriarchal culture with the theory that informs your writing...are you challenging, are you illuminating?

A I’m rejecting. Whether it’s a challenge or not depends on the

degree of credibility the writing is given. I had a teacher that said “if you want to do feminist writing you have to do it better than anybody else,” and it made me really mad when she said it, but it’s true, if it doesn’t get published, no one reads it. I used to be interested in publication for personal reasons; I’m interested in it for other reasons now. So maybe it is a challenge. I don’t see it as being *only* feminist, and I don’t see culture as being *only* patriarchal, since it seems to me that women inhabit many of the positions that men have inhabited. I do think fiction is interesting when it reveals things to us about how we structure our lives, how we use stories to create meaning. Not the stories themselves, but the process.

Q Is there a difference between what you’re writing says and what it means?

A (Laughter) I had this ongoing discussion with my dissertation advisor, and he always said that I was the most disingenuous person that he’d ever known. I never understood this, and insisted that I was, on the contrary, the most ingenuous person that had ever lived. Recently I was in Utah and once again we had this exchange, and I said “But Francois, I *always* mean what I say,” and he said, “Yes, but you never say what you mean,” which is probably true. It’s also interesting insofar as it’s about subtext. It’s about narrative strategies that women have had to develop because women are not supposed to say certain things. So in writing by women, I’ve always been interested, and I think I also use it in my work, a sort of circuitous, evasive narrative strategy. But it’s also true psychoanalytically that the most powerful stuff is submerged.

Q And if we’re writing from language and not from image, that possibly allows submerged depths to come up to the surface more often than if we would write the other way around.

A Right. Because the unconscious, as we know from Lacan, is structured like a language.

Q You use prolepsis and analepsis a lot in your stories, and you also highlight the relationship between the text’s *histoire* and *recit*. Is this to highlight the way in which language generates meaning, the way stories generate meaning?

A Stories generate language. It’s a function of the way I work, but

it's also a function of the way that anything is possible in language --what's interesting, what's fun...you know. It's not very fun the way a camera might record minutely what goes on in any given scene, it's fun to use language to make leaps and connections. I think that it's self-referential in that it reveals or highlights the degree to which this is a construction of language. But in any given moment...my friend Mary Ann talks about illumination as taking place in a glance, and in any given moment anything is possible in language. In any given moment you can move in language from one place to another. That's interesting to me, the glance is interesting to me, the movement is interesting to me. In the piece that I read in my Theory of Fiction class last semester, there was a line that read, "How easily in language one can move through the history of a century or a culture." What I'm working on now is simultaneity; how many things can be brought together in a given fictional moment.

Q That approach to writing brings us back to "The Woman in the Water" where the main character, Penelope, is seeing in circular ways and "wandering," which is more interesting than moving in a straight line.

A It's what I refer to as "contiguous" discourse: following the metonymical logic of the moment, rather than the metaphorical logic. I worked for a long time figuring out how to write sentences, and Francois and I had this long debate over whether there's such a thing as a "female sentence." He said there wasn't and I said there was, and eventually he read my book and said, "You're right Kate, there is one, and I want to write it too." But then he defined it as being "groping"; I don't know what "groping" was all about, but I think that a female sentence is a sentence that is in some way at odds with the dominant discourse. That does not have to be a "groping" sentence, it just has to have some degree of discomfort, some degree of resistance to dominant discourse, which is in this culture patriarchal. But for me it had to do with a sentence that was informed by a logic of contiguity, which may or may not be related to female sexuality, and a sentence that is willing at any point to move from any one point to any other point and discovers itself in the act of

articulation. Probably a sentence that proceeds from language rather than a straightforward idea that gets translated into...one of the things that Feminist theory provided me with was the authority to go ahead and write sentences like that, and at some point, once I had figured it out...because I had started out trying to write short minimalist sentences. I thought that's what you're supposed to write like. So once I finally felt authorized to write these sentences—and for a long time they were deliberately awkward, they were deliberately resisting the cadence and structure of conventional sentences—then I got this idea that it would be interesting to write stories that structurally replicated the structure of these sentences. In some ways it was a linguistic move to start making those leaps in stories, but in other ways it was a structural move, to move the stories in the same way the sentences moved, in the same contiguous logic.

Q So you're modeling the stories after the sentence. The sentence is the basic unit.

A It was, but now get this. Now I'm structuring the novel after the story, after the sentences. I thought, well, if you can write a story like this, why can't you write a novel like this?

Q Who do you see as particularly good story-tellers right now? Who do you like to read?

A Cortazar has meant a lot to me...and Gordimer. Kundera *had*, but I'd been reading *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and it's so intensely misogynistic that I couldn't bear it. Louise Erdrich is an interesting writer, and there are lots of writers. Some of my reading for this summer...I'd like to read more Native American writers.

Q There's so much of it being published, too.

A Yes, there's a lot of writing that's being made available, and that's exciting. Actually, I'd like to spend the summer reading *among* writers of color from this country. Reading also Asian Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, because I feel that's an area where in the past five years an explosion has occurred and I'd like to explore it.

Q Do you think that fiction writing can do anything to change the state of the world?

A At one point as an adolescent, when I had started writing again, I was at the time politically active. I was never much of the nature to go out into the world all that much, so my activities were limited but I did go through a very self-conscious period when I decided that writing could be a political activity. I think that in some cultures writing can be a very *powerful* political tool: in South America, and in other parts of the world. A friend of mine talks about what she calls “dangerous writing,” and what she’s talking about is transgressive writing, and it always used to bug me, because it seemed to me that in America writing can’t really be termed “dangerous,” in comparison to the dangers that writers face in other parts of the world: personal dangers. It wasn’t until years later that I started to figure out that writing *can* be political, but in a very different way than I had thought at the time. That is, it can be used in a way to reorient the reader in relation to language and the construction of meaning in the world. I don’t think that it’s something that happens on a conscious level. I think that writing that renegotiates cultural and literary codes, for example, produces a kind of subjectivity in the reader that can be transformative. Writing reveals the ways in which language and narratives inscribe certain positions of power and authority. Even writing non-linear stories rewrites what we think of as a story, and forces us to question the virtue of “the straight line” in other respects as well. But I think it only happens in very small ways.

Q But it has changed *your* life.

A Yes, it’s changed my life.

Q And if it changed your life, then it can change any life, and if it changes any more lives then the global reality will change.

A One would hope. I was on the interview team for a position in Critical Theory. One applicant was on a Fulbright in Czechoslovakia—pre and post revolution—and one was a Chinese exile. Both spoke with some passion about the degree to which the radical nature of a text depended upon the position in the culture. They said that although in the West we’re accustomed to seeing Formalism and Aestheticism as being reactionary in repressive societies such as pre-revolutionary Czechoslovakia or China, Aestheticism and

Formalism were the *only* ways in which writers could be radical, could challenge the system. They did this by presenting a highly formalized or highly aestheticized text in which the challenge was more deeply embedded. Or, even the fact that formalistic art is a challenge to a culture that preaches the virtues of Socialist Realism. So I think that what makes writing powerful, what makes writing political, is the way in which it tends to reconceptualize the reader's position in that particular culture. And it reveals ideology, reveals the workings of the culture.

Q Would you agree that it's impossible for anyone to be free of ideology?

A You can't get outside of it. You can't get outside of discourse. You can't get outside of language, how can you get outside of language?

Q Ideology *is* language.

A Language embeds ideology.

Q And the world is a text.

A That's right. Interesting writing is writing that forces us to read the *world* as textual, instead of reading the world in the text.



Knick-Knack Paddywack

This old man is talking to
himself and walking in the park.
I wonder if there is anything I can do

for him. He is so thin sunlight passes through
him, heading toward the dark.
This old man is talking too

much. He babbles on and on of people whom
he knows: one guy named Noah owns an ark.
I wonder if there is anything I can do

as he roots around in someone's shoe
he found. Over the voice of a faraway lark
I hear this old man repeating two

meaningless words from a children's song I once knew,
over and over and eventually joined by a lone dog's bark,
until I know there is something I must do.

Approaching him I sense something new,
I sense that this is his park.
And I think I know who this old man is talking to.
And I know that there is nothing I can do.

Sweet Renaissance

Red m&m's fall naked from the sky into my
 Upside down umbrella, fat peanut
 Butter filled candies.

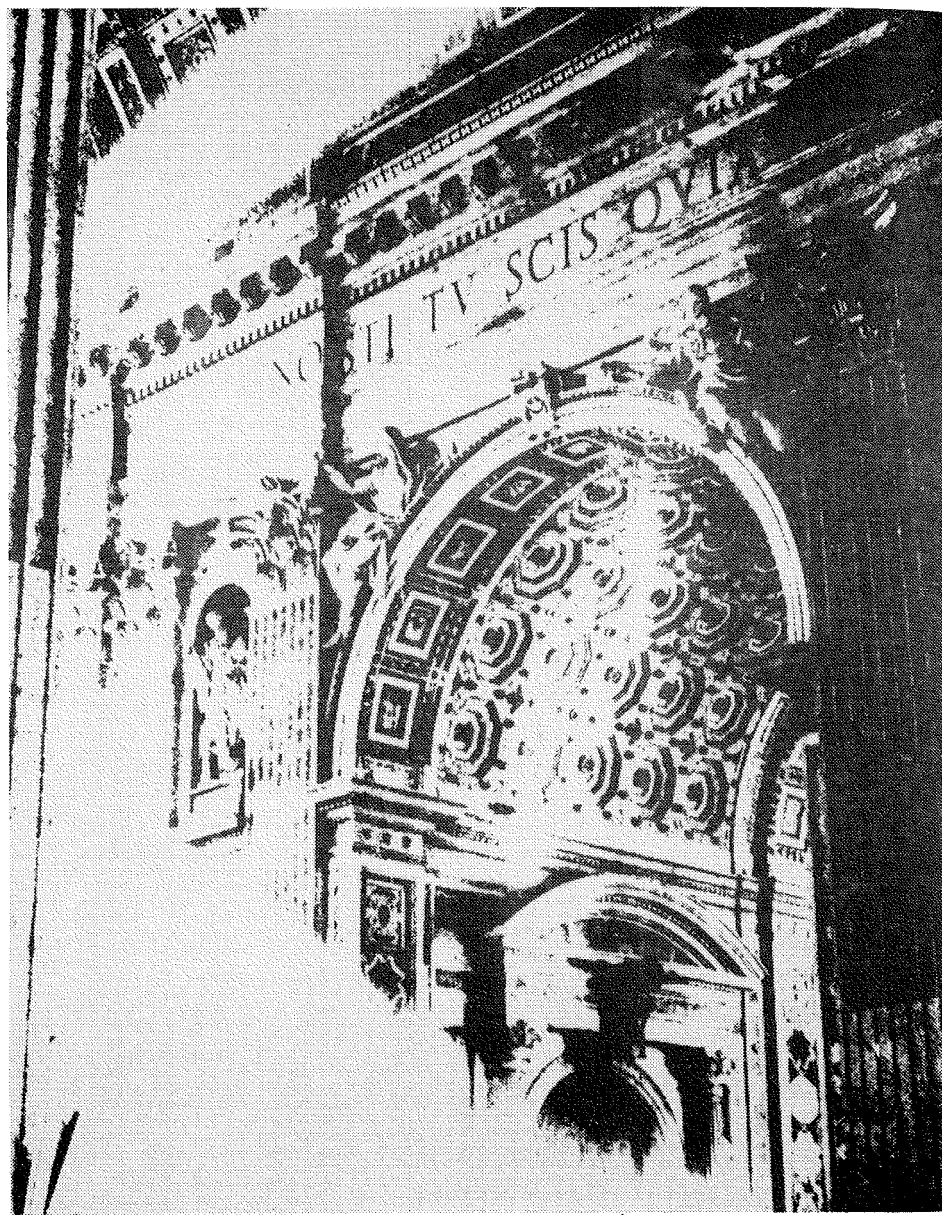
Things have been weird lately, cows
 Hatching eggs, entire cultures
 Incinerating spontaneously,
 Stained sheets of

Paper coming clean despite
 Oscillations of lust by lawyers
 Emerging from harvard and the
 McMinnville institute of theology.

Ornithology is a dying field.
 Nothing can fly in this emulsified air.

Young politicians in training are
 Only able to think simply: cover
 Up your vulnerable areas,
 Repress your desires.

Green treats hail down,
 Enshrouding all in a confectionery cloud.
 No one goes to work,
 Instead they stay home, rediscover
 Their lost sensuality, themselves.
 A sexual renaissance spreads,
 Leaving the politicians alone, finally proven useless.
 Someone laughs as I refill my umbrella.



Birth Rite

You were born blushing pale pink with
eyes and hair that spoke of igloos,
sleighs and horizons stretched to infinity,
a promising beginning.

Two full moons passed before
Divine Artist awoke and
painted you a tropical flower
of mango and mahogany hues,
adorned you with wilderness curls
and called you mine
Oh my pretty, oh my glory
beautiful brown baby.

Elation turned to silence.
The seer's crystal brought counsel.

You will need to grow wings
to transcend the sun-burned-brown-only
requirements for happy U.S. dreams.

Wings to fly over spiked stares
that wilt flowers
and crushed lenses
that distort light.

Wings to find the rainbow prism,
a magnet of the One Life,
a polestar to guide your way
in a land which did not see
you blushing pale pink on your birthday.

When Morning Comes

It was the crying that finally woke John. Not because of the noise, he could barely hear it, but because of its difference. It was crying unlike anything he'd ever heard before, not the angry sobbing that Mary used when she was too upset to speak, or the anguished wailing she used to denote sorrow. It was quiet, resigned and tired, and it was the closest thing to weeping that John had ever heard.

The noise had slowly seeped into his head, and before he knew it John was wide awake, moving his leg into Mary's part of the bed to be sure she wasn't there. It was a pointless movement, done mostly out of habit. The noise was coming out of the empty bedroom.

This surprised John. Before when their child had cried, it was not his screaming that had awakened John, but Mary's movement as she got out of bed to comfort him. That night, however, things had worked in the opposite manner, and he had slept as Mary crept out of bed, only to have her weeping wake him. For a moment John wondered what he should do. Should he go to her, or should he roll over and go back to sleep? If he went to her he would be unable to do anything constructive, he knew that, and would end up standing over her, watching her, and he had to go to work in the morning. She knew that. The clock by the bed read two a.m. After a few moments he rose and shivered, then picked up a pair of shorts and a t-shirt from the floor and put them on.

All this time the quiet crying had kept on. John followed the noise, through the door of their bedroom, down the short hallway towards the empty bedroom. It was a slightly chilly, fall night, and as he walked down the moon-lit hallway he was gratefully aware of the deep-pile carpet. Mary had insisted on it, and though he had

been sorry to see the wood floors go, he had to admit that the carpet was warmer. He also knew that it masked the sound of his feet, and he cleared his throat to let Mary know he was coming. The quiet noise stayed quiet, even as he moved closer to the source.

At the door John paused and cleared his throat again, but Mary didn't seem to notice. She was sitting on the floor with her knees drawn up to her chin, her arms clasped around her legs, her t-shirt pulled over the top of her knees and her face down. John stood for a moment, uncertain of what to do, then walked quietly into the room, ducking under a Sesame Street mobile as he did so. Mary still didn't look up, she just kept on crying quietly, and John stood over her, still unsure of what to do. For a moment he felt as if he were pulling away from her, from himself, and he noticed the way her shoulder blades stood up under the thin t-shirt, the way her hair curled at the back of her neck, and it seemed to him as if she were someone that he didn't know, let alone the woman he'd made a child with.

Much later John would remember that moment, that fleeting vision of Mary as a stranger, as the moment at which he realized that he didn't love her. It wasn't that he didn't care about her, he did, but he didn't love her, and caring is nothing like loving. He wouldn't remember it as the moment love had died, simply as the moment he realized it was gone. And though he would go on living with her, making love to her, caring for her, he would never forget that moment.

"Love," he told his brother, once, years later, while they were drunk. "Love is like a child." He paused, partially out of shame, and partially to be sure of what he was saying. "As soon as it is born, it begins to die." John firmly believed this, and he loved his brother, and everyone else in the bar, as he said it.

Mary's shoulders shook with the quiet power of her sobs, and John reached down and began to pat her softly on the back. For a while Mary continued to cry, and John continued to pat, and Mary's crying got quieter, and softer, until the only way that John could tell she was still crying was through the vibration of her back. Finally even that stopped, and John turned his pat into a small circle that

encompassed the area between her shoulder blades.

"I didn't mean to wake you," she said.

"I know," John said, and below them they heard the refrigerator begin to hum. It must be early, he thought, and then wondered why.

"I just woke up, and I felt like coming in here," she said, without moving from the position she was in. "I don't know why." She sniffed and looked around. John pulled off his t-shirt and handed it to her, and she blew her nose. He was grateful that she had moved.

"Do you miss him?" he asked.

"All the time," she said, and she lowered her head back onto her knees. "For a while I used to wake up and think I heard him crying, and before I remembered I'd be half-way out of bed. But then I just went back to sleep. This was the first time I came in here."

"And you saw the crib?" John said, trying to be helpful. Mary had been the one that found him, while he'd been at work, and John had always felt a little bit guilty about that. He also felt guilty, and a little bit oafish, about how quickly he'd gotten over the loss.

"Yes," she said.

"And you cried."

"No," she said. "I mean, I cried when I saw the crib, but it wasn't because of the crib. I cried because I felt nothing."

"I don't understand," John said, and he stopped circling Mary's back. He half expected her to reach back and grab his hand, but when she didn't he stood up straight and wrapped his arms around himself.

"I just felt so empty," she said, not moving. "I cried because I knew it was just going to go on, and I'm going to become my mother, and you're going to become your father, and our children, if we have more, are going to become us. That's why I cried."

John didn't say anything. He walked to the window and looked at the backyard. There was a single tree, and John had held Todd at that same window and had pointed at the tree, promising to build him a tree-house. It was a big tree, and it would have held a good-sized tree-house.

"I'll be all right in the morning," Mary said from behind him.

John still didn't move. He heard Mary rise, heard her knee-joints crack, and heard her pad quietly behind him.

"It will be all right in the morning," he said.

Night

See me wear stars like medals, but
the sky is not mine, nor are the cats
that scour my alleys of fishbone
and jazz, scatted trashcans and
diminished fifths. I claim the streets,
doorways, prostitutes, taxi cabs and
24-hour chicken joints, but they're
no more mine than smiles, shadows or
sunbonnets are the day. They rest
in my stomach for a time, then are
torn out by light. Except that day
is half a planet, but I am the rest,
and the universe which has no end
you can imagine.

Saints Poem

For twenty cents,
lady saints trapped on holy cards
roll their eyes to the firmament.
Everywhere, the sunset
a pale stream of light
squeezed between grey clouds.
Saint Lucy holds her eyes on a dish,
Saint Agatha proffers her breast on a platter,
Saint Cecilia holds frozen fingers
over a phantom keyboard.
We expect so much from saints:
Women must be cunning, renewable virgins,
men, willing, human sacrifices.
We expect our saints to hang forever
in gold edged, Victorian picture planes.
Mary, mother of Jesus, eternally mournful,
never thought she'd see him crucified so many times.
What kind of loving God expects
any mother to put up with that ?
Believers want blood.
Parochial school girls eye St. Sebastian cautiously.
Torn between two trees, his attenuated
limbs ooze blood from tiny wounds.
Arrows draw the viewer back again and
again to plump, sweating limbs:
to perfect classical proportions
confined by strained rope.
We expect so much from saints.
Within their tortured expressions

lie the fettered hopes of multitudes.
For twenty cents the pictorial essence
of Christianity can be possessed
by any school child.
Role models don't come easily these days.
Twenty cents,
not a lot to pay for a martyr.

I'm OK, You're Full of Me - Inner Thoughts In a Session of Group Therapy

Oh! I tell you my friends, I could have reached out and punched her. Right then and she wouldn't have even expected it. A right hook. Listening to her drove me almost to the brink of insanity.

“. . . And like my boyfriend, he's like so rad. So when he hits me, I don't even mind because . . .”

I hated her. I hated everything about her. Her make-up. Her voice.

“And you?” asked the facilitator directing his attention to a sunken shell of a man.

“Me? Oh I loved him,” said the poor man, “so much I thought I could never love another.” Tears began to fall from his eyes and disappear into his mustache. “When we made love he was the most fantastic lover. I can feel his virus flow through my veins, him in me, me in him, giving life by death.” The poor man's voice fell into a whisper as his lips began to move in silence.

Right there, I can tell you, my hatred grew into such a frenzy I could hardly sit still. In fact, I shifted uncomfortably in my seat and for the first time I felt the acute pain in my jaw from chewing my gum so fast. I was in the process of studying the pain when suddenly I felt a sharp jolt in the side of my ribs. I waited a couple of seconds before I turned my head to the annoying distraction. I saw before me a girl giggling at the poor crying man and with her jolt was trying to engage me to do the same. She was in such a happy mood. So gay and jovial. Her eyes danced with laughter. I looked her up and down.

“Don't ever touch me again,” I said.

I smiled as I watched her smile slowly fade from her face. Like the removing of a mask. My words relentlessly strangled her happiness and I could see the joy snuffed from her eyes. I was

pleased.

I was brought back to attention by a black man standing up and screaming at the members of my little circle. Of course you know I wasn't listening to a word he was saying. Oh, I could make out words like, 'please...rights...and nigger' but I couldn't care less. MY thoughts were too involved with scrubbing his oily face and washing clean, so clean, his Afro-sheen hair.

"Quit crying in your beer," I whispered under my breath. I was pretty sure I hated him.

"Oh I can't stand it. Oh - Oh boy! I need you to talk to me. Don't always nod. You look up at me and nod with those agreeing bug eyes. No more! That's it! No more!"

By this time the fellow member of my group who was causing such a commotion was curled up in the fetal position on the floor. In the middle. Oh friends, by this time you can imagine now, at this moment, how I felt. I kept my eyes straight ahead. My hands began to shake. In my fit of fury I bit my lip and tasted the nectar of life slowly spread over my tongue. The rage was so strong I could hardly maintain control. The anger was so acute and sweet that a salty tear ran down the side of my cheek. I was almost out of control.

"And you? What did you want to talk about?"

Confidant, it was the man, the doctor, the Messiah and he addressed that question to me. I watched his face come closer, breaking my comfort zone. His face was shaped like a cone with the point directed at me. He reminded me of a weasel - long pointed nose, little tiny probing eyes that studied my face. His eyeballs moved over mine - searching for a clue to my emotions. I studied his receding hairline, wet with perspiration. He was about four inches from my face and his breath was thick in my nostrils. I wanted to reach out with both hands and cup his face, pull him closer, then give him a gentle kiss on the lips for being my Messiah. I would then look deeply into his eyes, take my thumbs and gouge them out.

It was my turn to speak and I spoke, looking beyond my lord and into each of the eyes of my fellow group members.

"I would like to talk about love - my brothers," I said as a thin smile spread over my bloody lips.

War Wound

1965.

It was a small sore.
A puncture wound.
More like a pin-prick
on my right hand.
But it swelled,
blistered,
reddened,
as shooting pains
penetrated
my arm,
my chest.

1968.

My body
a bulbous mass,
inflamed and split.
The sutures could not
keep the blood
from dripping
onto the floor.
Putrid shades of green,
bordered by black
oozed
as the infection continued
to spread.

1971.

I bombarded,
defoliated,
liquidated,
expatriated.

Everything,
but liberated.

And I heard them talk.

I was losing,
my hand,
my body,
my spirit.

1973.

The swelling
contained.

The pain
subsided.

I could feel my fingertips.

The fever had broken.

1982.

I went for a walk.

Testing.

To get some air.

Testing.

And came to the

long,

black

wall.

A small spasm,

only a flinch,

minor pain

as I reached

to place

the red

carnation.

1990.

It was a small sore.

A bloodless wound.

But it swelled,

reddened,

blistered.

Shooting pains

penetrated

my arm,

my chest.



Death Without A Knife

“Inhale with expectation,” Eggret says, the tips of his shoulders up around his ears and his palms flat out like some queen mime all dressed in black on tipped toes, “exhale with boredom.” He throws his head to the side, closes his eyes, and drops his chest and shoulders. Such dramatics—and with that transparent lisp too (“eck-thpect-tay-shun”). Eggret doesn’t like subtlety, but it’s what I learned at USC. “It’s not conducive to Shakespeare,” he says shaking his head and fluttering his eyelids. “This is not Shakespeare,” I say, “It’s modern.” “Oh go and *be* dead then,” he says. This is a joke on the title of the play and he’s proud of it.

Guildenstern has it tough too. He’s straight. Everyone whispers about him, that this is his first stageplay—that his background is in circus!—that he hasn’t an ounce of body fat. All of us watch his hips when he walks, then look quickly away when he notices. Even Eggret honestly wants several dress rehearsals just to see Guildenstern in tights. This Guildenstern rarely says anything, keeps to himself mostly. He’s supposed to be the more “cerebral” Eggret says. How is one to *look* more cerebral, really? “Actually, it’s easy for me to look *stupid*,” he whispered to me at audition, “I’ve done two disaster movies. You know, like *Love Boat* with tragedy. But *smart*, I don’t know.” I was busy just *seeing* him, and I think he took this wrongly. This could have been the start of his feeling so alienated.

This room is huge and black. It looks like one thinks of the inside of a camera, with metal this and that everywhere, ropes and cables hanging about. Indistinguishable pipes run along an endless, starless ceiling, and catwalks crisscross up among pulleys and spotlights. “Do you ever think of yourself as actually dead, lying inside a box with a lid on it?” I have to say and look up there into

the charcoal metals—it's deadening having to pretend there's a real sky with stars like the play calls for. "No, no, no," says Eggret, "It's supposed to be funny! For Heaven's sake, Rosencrantz, find some feeling." Spotlights follow one around and the colorless hardwood creeks pathetically like a false earth. There are, I admit, a couple of tiny windowlets that let in arrows of light way up there, like in Beckett's *Endgame*, "rays of hope" I suppose. Next time Eggret yells coffee (he does this always with his hands cupped about his mouth; it's hideous!). I have a mind to climb up the catwalk and look outside like Clov from *Endgame* does and scream "Nothing," just to piss him off. I have, of course, told this plan to no one. I deem this appropriate in a play where when asked by a reviewer "is it a tragedy or a comedy?", the director, Eggret, said, "You know, I honestly don't know. Is it a comedy *about* a tragedy?"

* * *

"Now for a handful of guilders I happen to have a private and uncut performance of *The Rape of the Sabine Women*," says Winston. He has straight, white hair cropped up the back very short but hanging in a flap across his forehead like Peter O'Toole. Eggret likes his work. "--or rather, woman, or rather Alfred--" he glances over his shoulder with his lips pursed like a fashion model. "Get your skirt on, Alfred--" he says.

Alfred is a good looking young man I happen to have gone to school with. He's landed the role not so much on my recommendation, but because of his small stature and clear skin--he is to play the part of a small boy. Eggret has had Alfred's hair cut short as a boy with *The Death*, and the poor man looks as silly as he's supposed to as he struggles into women's clothes.

"And for eight you can participate," says Winston. He's a good actor, acts with his voice instead of his eyes, completely fixed at each turn. "Taking either part." He's stalking Guil slowly across the stage with these lines, each like the batting of a cat's claw. And

the beautiful Guildenstern with his shoulders up around his jaw-bones backs like leery prey. It's something to watch. "Or both for ten," says Winston. Guildenstern turns abruptly but Winston has him by the sleeve. "With encores—" he shouts, as Alfred, the boy, the object of this pornography, stands sheepish watching on. It's marvelous.

With that there's Guildenstern's backhand to Winston's face. Guil goes instantaneously through anger, repulsion, and resignation. "Get your skirt off, Alfred," Winston says.

"You're supposed to be a heroic Guildenstern here," says Eggret, "don't be so... satisfied."

Guildenstern is shaking with rage and fright at the same time (he's really a fine actor, circus background or not). "It could have been--it didn't have to be obscene... It could have been--a bird out of season, dropping bright-feathered on my shoulder... It could have been a tongueless dwarf standing by the road to point the way... I was *prepared*. But it's this, is it? No enigma, no dignity, nothing classical, portentous, only this--a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes."

Winston bows with respect for this performance, his Peter O'Toole flap flopping across his nose. He's sad now. "You should have caught us in better times. We were purists then." He straightens up. "Onward," he says to his company, a group we hired sub-scale from a community college.

Now my big line. "Excuse me!" I point a finger in the air.

"Higher, higher, higher! Your voice needs to be higher, Rosencrantz!"

Guildenstern, perhaps appeased by this latest Eggret jab, rolls his eyes at me. Eggret yells at us all, not just Guildenstern.

"Ha-alt!" Winston signals and the community college cast stops.

"A-al-l-fred!" he screams.

"No, no, no. Too much melodrama. This is supposed to be funny, Winston. It's supposed to be like the cartoon, not like Shakespeare," Eggret says. He puts his hands on his hips and says softly, "Alvin?" then louder, "Alvin?", then in a crescendo of voice

“Al-vin!... See? That’s how it’s done. This is a *parody* of Shakespeare, for Heaven’s sake, I’ve told you.”

“Shit,” says Winston out of character, “I can’t tell the difference anymore.”

“Coffee then,” says Eggret without megaphone hands, with resignation of his own.

* * *

“Positions!” he yells. Very Shakespearean. Eggret is a spoof of himself. “Where the hell is the theatre knife? Has anyone seen the theatre knife? Rosencrantz. What have you done with the theatre knife?”

“Mr. Eggret, please,” I say, “my name is Tom.” I’m fuming but saying this in jest and the cast giggles. Acting.

“Now, now,” Eggret says and waves his finger at all of us. “Let’s not get short. It’s been a long day for all of us.” Then he gets down on a knee and spreads his arms like Hamlet himself in soliloquy. “Will you bless us, dear Rosencrantz. Tell us the location of the fucking theatre knife!”

“I think Guildenstern had it,” I say numbly.

“Well, we can’t have death without a knife.” He’s standing, brushing himself off, quite composed, but acting too. He can’t tell the difference any more either. “Now then, where *is* the handsome Guildenstern?”

The theatrics over, all of us look about and at each other. The chatty community college group are perplexed and silent at the disappearance of Guildenstern. Laertes and Hamlet, the prone and dead Ophelia, the onlookers next to the gravesite (A concoction of plywood ramp and second-hand bathtub. You should see when the Prince and the brother jump into the tub for the sword fight), all have stopped rehearsal. Even in the hardwood beneath our feet, silence, but for the tiny din of the spotlight turrets roaming and searching the darkness of the stage. It is opening night with spotlights criss-crossing in the sky.

“Guid-den-thtern!” Eggret’s hands drop suddenly from his

mouth (suddenly, but controlled), and we all hear Guil's voice from above.

"I'm here," This is not in the script. Guildenstern is wearing his stage tights on the catwalk above, his thick thighs highlighted for us all in the shine of the little Beckett windowlet there.

Then, tragedy.

Guildenstern leaps spread-eagle, beautiful, into the darkness. "Noth-thing," he screams in a terrible, forced exclamation ("*Throw your voices,*" Eggret would say).

Eggret drops to his knees. "No!" This he says for *real*; we all notice. But then in an instant choreography the cast switches into laughter as the elastic cord tied to Guil's leg reaches its greatest stretch.

Guildenstern stands, releases the velcro strap. There is a short, calculated moment of silence, then applause. "Oh, come, come, gentlemen--no flattery--it was merely competent," he says brushing himself free of imaginary dust, standing firmly rooted, and holding the retractable blade stage dagger.

The Relationship

My skin is almost as black as the toast
we made yesterday morning.
Once we spread the red jam, the sharp taste disappeared
just as my skin disappeared.

This morning I wait under the table.
This evening I wait under the bed with the low-spined cat.

So you cruise down the Danube,
watching children stuff rocks in their mouths
and women wash sagging breasts.
A young man throws himself into the river
from a strange height.
What are you thinking
as your cells skate across a pink landscape
and the waters even?

My skin walks through the forest without me.
I pay a man sixty dollars for a big pair of shoes
to catch all the blood.
I place an ad.

So you slide down the Thames,
waiting for them to cook your breakfast,
paying large sums of money for the quiet ride,
and time to chew your bacon right.

It seems a shame to waste your time.
“Great passions seek release.”
“Great passions must not create tension.”

My skin, a symphony of sudden twists of color,
will not wait.

This must be a dream.

It is not a circus.

It is not a cave.

Upon Reading Thomas Mann's *Death In Venice*

"Solitude gives birth to the original in us, to beauty unfamiliar and perilous - to poetry."

Old Aschenbach kept to his llama walk. Steady.
The orchestra had given out an hour ago inside his head,
and he continued, unsure of the arrangement of his toes
on the pavement - their exact size and dimension.

He thought for sure the boy stored several mountains of gold
in one eye.
The left eye, overwrought with blue shapes, drifted easily.

Aschenbach wondered if the world cared that his shirts were
clean,
spotless, starched and heavy as sleep.
He never wore jewelry, his wrists too wide,
and his fingers so sensitive, he left them in his pockets on bright
days.

Aschenbach took his meals by himself in a room
where he thought only of cliff formations,
the smell of coffee,
the Polish boy who had come with his family.
Sitting always at the window, so the sea could watch him,
Aschenbach allowed four raspberries to rest on his tongue
for five minutes.
He allowed himself a look at the boy,
Then allowed himself a cigarette.

He had forgotten smoke,
but now he was tempted.
Now he needed the full gray suit worn on the inside of the body.
It made him cough,
forcing water from his eyes.
The boy lay in the sand.
The sea in Venice transformed into smoke.

The boy pressed his lips against another boy's neck,
but this meant nothing.

Aschenbach laughed to himself as a dog drifted by and licked his
face.

Only the orange flags caught his eye, and the eyes of the boy
and the dog.

If he died, the world would notice for more than an hour,
but the boy would never come that close.

The boy, soft as Aschenbach's favorite luggage,
was afraid.

Aschenbach stayed and stayed and stayed
until the steam between buildings in the early morning
moved into his bed.

Aschenbach cried as the beach took the boy,
or the boy took himself away.

David Goldschlag

a vision:

what did our parents do during war?

were they having holy sex under bloodsky, screaming like a
 blanket of steaming molecules, babies sprouting like
 carnivorous death,
 were they killing Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X,
 were they howling pulse beat,
 were they driving steady to work,
 were they dancing in streets and bathing in tea blood until sacred
 rhythms grate moist skin,
 were they knitting plaster of paris caskets open to soul and
 divine coffin air,
 were they dreaming of bigSTUFF from little assholes
 were they dreaming midnight's nightmare that close damp
 curtains of minds, that open acres of lake of eyes,
 were they watching crisp angels pour in through sheer material,
 were they pulling triggers of fortune, shooting dust and coughs
 and blowing cold farts in turmoil,
 were they covering pretty dirt and pores,
 were they waiting like gracious cattle to die at slaughter,
 were they getting high with no intelligence, high on ether in
 springtime, mescaline maybe in winter,
 were they traveling on surrealist clouds, angel bare feet alive
 from toxic heaven,
 what did our parents do during war?

Snyderian City

for Gary Snyder

O Mr. Snyder, your glorious wonderland
your granite corridors . . .

I hear a jazz clip and it
bounces off bark
and bees and leaves fallen
alive off your granite corridors.
I hear this jazz clip.
I look for this woven spyder and its
web, its
fortification
in an alley.

. . . the city alley buried behind
away from middle suburbia
away from human chains
human interest, humanitarians.

How long have you lived with the Sierra Nevadas,
when was the last time you read for city folk,
when was the last time you sat through Pacifica's pledge?

I send you an increment of time;
I send you scents of the city
of the alley excavating sights
of men huddled in its entrance
of conversational survival
of obliterational condiments
of boys behind men sitting shooting syrup
of girls and women carving initials,
carving stories in granite, in bark;
I send them all groping for spyders and
fortifications.

There goes that Ellington *Crescendo* jaazzzzzz
hip hop jo, but city
cat's gotta go man
cat's gotta go.

Contributors:

Shell Slaton Amegah is a free-lance editor and teaches at Cal Arts. Her book, *The L.A. Wedding* has been published by Menasha Ridge Press. This is the first time she has been published in the *Northridge Review*.

Carl Bramblett is a senior at CSUN majoring in English, lamenting that he has been here for too long a time. This is his first publication.

Scot Butwell is a senior English Literature major. He lives in San Pedro within shouting distance of poet Charles Bukowski. He hopes to starve out a career as a writer.

Maria Casey is currently working in the Communications industry. She has previously been published in the *Northridge Review*. Lately Maria has been studying Icelandic and is into body piercing.

Sean Colgin likes Lorca, Byron, Proust, Joyce and Gertrude Stein (not necessarily in that order) and has been known to enjoy good food, good music and red wine. He claims to be 24 years old.

R.J. Comer is a recovering Catholic Republican chauvinist. He says that he looks more like Ken than he does He-Man, but swears he hasn't gone out with a Barbie doll since he gave up on G.I Joe.

Kara Culhane graduated in May and is currently teaching at a Montessori school. She loves to travel and spent a semester in England. She has also visited Leningrad, Moscow and some West European locales.

Peggy Dembicer has been writing poetry since 1984. She has been published in *Grue Magazine*, *The Impressionist*, *Alpha Beat Soup* and *Hieroglyphic Press*. Peggy is currently employed at Warner Brothers Studios as a technical writer and is "tickled pink" to have her poems published in the *Northridge Review*.

Barbara Edelman is a grad student at CSUN in the writing program and currently teaches E.S.L. for the L.A.U.S.D. She was published previously in the *Colgate University Literary Magazine* where she did her undergraduate work.

Jim Etchinson is currently working on a novel and would like everyone to know that his mother is very sweet.

Jennifer Frickman is an artist and claims that religion, Geology and compulsive collecting complicate all of her relationships. She won a poetry prize at Cal Poly Pomona's Spring Harvest Competition. One of her pieces will soon be appearing in *Yellow Silk Magazine*.

David Goldschlag is the editor of *Red Dancefloor Press*. His work has, or will, appear, in *Direction Magazine*, *Sheila-Na-Gig* and *Protea Poetry Journal*. He is the director and host of Wednesday Night Poetry at Ambrosia Cafe in Encino.

Garen Hagobian is considering photography as a future profession and will definitely continue with it as a hobby. He also feels that basket, base and football, along with bowling and golf, get way too much media coverage. He will soon be a sophomore at CSUN.

Jeff Meyers, who claims to write short stories, "for the same reason that wolves howl at the moon," is ostensibly a senior in creative writing at CSUN. In actuality he is a fictitious character invented by an 18,000 year old spiritual entity (known simply as Bobo) as a typically wily subterfuge used to avoid an unpleasant scene with an ex-lover from Eureka.

Katherine Pettit was born in beautiful downtown Burbank, California. Her poetry has been published in *Direction Magazine*, *Diario Latino*, an El Salvadoran publication, and *Northridge Review* (but this time we spelled her name correctly).

Tracy Putirka received her B.A. in English from CSUN. Tracy is currently teaching ninth grade English and recently received an Honorable Mention from L.A.P.C. Community Services Fifth Annual Writers' Conference.

Chad Sourbeer is 20 years old and currently attending CSUN where he is an honor student in the English department. Besides writing, Chad has completed the direction of a film project. After graduation, he plans to pursue filmmaking at the graduate level.

Andrew Rivera recently graduated from the CSUN English department. Since graduation, he has remained in a drunken haze and continually asks strangers if they've seen his cat. Like many CSUN graduates, Andy prides himself on his ability to eat pork.

Hart Schultz says that his stories are always about what's real and what isn't. He tries not so much to, "constantly risk absurdity," but rather, to reveal it.

Eve E.M. Wood is currently a grad student at Cal Arts. She studied with Robert Pinsky and Louis Simpson and has been published in Iowa State University's *Poet & Critic*, *The Windsor Review* and will soon be appearing in *Yankee Magazine* and the *Midwest Quarterly*.

Robert Wynne is still in shock over winning the Academy of American Poets Award. When he gets over it, he plans to earn an MFA in creative writing and teach. This is his first published work.

Phillip Vallicella has no telephone.

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