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*Volume XXXVII Issue Two 1992*
a conversation in Dragor

"do you see it? the old man's face in the girl?" he asked, pointing at one of the many living statues surrounding us.

...we wandered around England and America and history and other things, then I left the teacher and my olive branch, and boarded the bus.

-Joe Lehner
The Cathedral, Auguste Rodin

You’d think they’d neatly carved themselves, the hands rising from stone to completeness, as if to say we could escape anything. Funny how origins disturb us, those pinpricks from which everything runs in waves. This circular motion we know.

Strange, we prefer the hands pressed flat to each other, penitent. What words we understand rattle empty in their phrases, incomplete as rivers emptying into other rivers. That space the sculptor leaves. The hands are open, frailly hinged at their arches, because we would rather them closed.

-Christine Rueter
Release

Like propellers keeping beat
to some mechanical code,
the sculling crew responds
to orders rhythmed out
by one beneath a parasol.
It's beautiful to watch
four men who move as one.
Muscles quiver in the sun
and goosebumps from the flying spray
gleam in the sweat that pours
from such religious work.

You almost wonder why
the men are training on a day of rest.
You almost wonder why
the men respond to shouts
from one beneath the parasol.
You almost wonder why
they don't stop to take a swim
to soothe their metal forms.
It's Sunday in the park,
and even on the lake,
the sailboats breathe
in Sabbath relaxation.

But then you catch the grins
of four determined men
who laugh as if each stroke
will lift them from the waves
and give them the power
to fly.

-Michael Chasar
The Last 20 Seconds

Wasted time. Quarterback falling on the ball. When the players walked across the field with their heads down, the clock was still ticking away. This time is insignificant. It eludes us, dances on our face, and then slips away quickly between our fingers.

-Keith Nipper
Three Men - Melina Weigmann
He used to see her in the cafe,
sliding between tables and chairs
stuffed with people,
wafting through the room
thick with swollen clouds
of assorted tobacco smokes,
while a guitar hummed in the background
and an amateur vocalist harped out a tune.
She would walk up to him
bravely, perhaps munching on a pear
or an apple in a seductive way,
sinking her teeth into the moist flesh,
letting the diluted nectar drip down her chin.

He was never impressed,
though he straightened
when she stood in front
of him, wanting to look down
at her up-turned face.
Enjoying the fact that everyone
could see them together,
confident that he would never
succumb, he allowed her chattering,
while his haughty shoulders laughed.

She always tied her hair up,
and her flowing skirts
covered her slim ankles
with too many colors.
Sometimes, she would ask him
about the music, if he
liked it, and whether or not
he thought he could do better.
Without saying so, he thought he could,
and the tilt of her head agreed.

When was it that he fell,
helpless, like a virgin skydiver
who cannot trust the parachute,
but fights terror and doom
in a gulping breath,
who begs forgiveness
for the pettiest of sins
in exchange for sound earth,
until that moment
when it finally opens
unexpectedly, after a tug on the cord
that had seemed so monumental
and doubt is washed
away by relief and joy and religion:
the sudden return to life.

She had been walking toward him
through the cafe, as usual,
but her hair was down—
a waterfall of autumn leaves—
and in that first breath,
he noticed the gentle curve
of her smile and the slight sway
in her hips.
Her face was at last noble,
no longer just pretty,
and her eyes were a color
he could not place.
As she moved,
his hands curled into hot fists,
though he wanted to reach
out and claim her as his own.
His heart hammered,
and he was sure it would never stop,
sure that the crowded floor
heard its hollow droning,
but assumed indifference.
He wished things
had been different,
that he had been kinder,
wished his heart
would still itself, wished desperately
that he could swallow
every silent cruelty
he had cast in her direction,
as she walked past him,
beyond him out the door,
on the arm of a man
he did not know.

-Marjorie Thomas
Dreamtrout blue

Open to the suggestions of the moon, I walked the long wet streets that took me past your porch. As I stood smoking from across the road I smiled at the fish tank of your evening.

I entertained tapping the glass but reconsidered, letting the smoke of my mouth encircle my face until my light went out, as yours did, and I too drifted off.

On down the way I huddled over a puddle that was reflecting a street lamp. A tire swam through it, and as it settled it strobed a foreign film. I couldn’t read the subtitles and so I moved on.

A peculiar night to taste the air, when the earth is cooling and the steam gives way to newborn clouds. When the trees leave whispers like waves on the shore, washing up yesterday’s catch.

“Can’t sleep,” I thought, paddling home, and it seems I’m not alone as a light wakes up in the fish tank as I pass.

-John Schaefer
Driftwood Dance
(for Lucy)

I. On Lethe Wharf

Treading Beyond the Buoy,
Embroiled
In a turning of
Turgid weightlessness,
It strikes me as rather ironic
As I see Mr. Klein take his tonic flask
From a large overcoat.
He empties the bottle and
Tosses
The remains over the side of his tiny open boat.
You see,
They all drink to forget
While I struggle to remember what it’s like to be afloat.
Ashes to ashes and we all fall down
Like a bundle of plumb-bobs.

II. Castaways

Closing vessels become bashful,
Lest they dash their feet
On some strikingly sound Stones.
They heed the marred cavity of darkness
In the tooth
Of the scarred ivory tower,
Turn tail,
And skip the Stones
Of the aborted port
In the spiraling sound
Altogether.

As chance would have it,
Azar, the open Mar,
Has a warmer breast than the icy coast,
Whose feathered breath rises and falls,
Humming hopelessly.

As choice would have it,
The ships sail for Schicksal’s sound,
A voice which severs the minor chords
Of Rocks and Scars and misty mirror breathing.
A Drift kisses the coast and lulls
the Lorelei,
Who lift hair and turn heads
Toward the ballad inexorable.

III. Piering

The fisherman found
A heart on his sleeve
And brushed it to the sanguined sandpaper,
But like the artist that he was,
He dared not peek
Beneath the sheets of his canvas covered soles.
My Anger was the rock in my pocket,
And brushing past him I was pricked
By the sidelong slap of his overhead cast.
The Mar was sixty-two.

I passed the glass which probably pointed
Toward Atlantis or maybe Alcatraz,
But a dark mask limited the scope,
And a tragic mouth begged
A quarter for the peepshow.

A freak unnatural,
The black rock burned
My pocket and dropped
Like a heavy heart from my sleeve
To my sock, skipping like clockwork
Across the pierwood
(pok-a-tok)
Tickling the gull-dropped dock
And slapping sidelong
Into the sixty-two blue.

-Corey Baden
Approaching Winter
(for my father)

It is Autumn. Not an easy time
for definitions, this slow slide
from summer-moist heat
to inevitable snow
that makes a blanket of the ground.

The beauty of the days
will soon be over,
but you’ve abandoned all
duty and enshrined yourself
in our basement. You resurrect
from the rubbish a cuckoo
that hasn’t worked in fifteen years,
and spend your days hunched over
it in that tomb, vainly
trying to bring back life.

Friends call, but you’re not answering
these days. You send no message
when I visit your brother. In silence
I study the slow rise
and fall of his chest
beneath the hospital gown.
You stay underground worrying
over the clock, won’t stop
until it’s on the wall, regularly
telling how much time you have.

Watching you, I think of the difficulty
with which the pines must resist
the annual fall of leaves, denying
winter in their determination
to remain with arms spread wide,
creating a cold, silent burden of snow.

-Meridith Brand
Creature
-Todd Wetzel
Dormitory

I must admit it was a funny room.
I always hated to open the door
and push against the piles of dirty clothes
that bumped across your oriental rug,
the carpet’s mildewed corner
curling like a piece of parchment.
I remember the leaky sink,
the steady thwop of water drops
falling on a Converse tennis shoe.
The walls collected “No Smoking” signs
and laughed with bricks of irony
since you said you only smoked to hide
the rot of molding carpet.
Dusted in the greys of ash, the room
almost seemed to take on mourning,
scattered cigarette graveyards
pocking the shelves and dresser-tops.
Once exotic ferns, now dry and withered,
stretched their bony feathers,
seeking water from the drip-drop sink.
Candles, melted to the base,
overflowed their primitive stands
in suspended waterfalls of colored wax.
“It’s an artist’s room,” you said,
but I never quite figured out
how the velvet scum on top
of an unfinished glass of juice
could produce your beautiful verse.
Despite my fear of disrepair,
I found that I kept coming back
to watch the movement in your little roost.
I’d listen to the songs of sculptured words
pushing through the dust of your lair.

-Michael Chasar
On The El Nighttimes

(Chairs in a configuration similar to that of an el car. Night. The BLACK: he sits for a long moment; shifts slightly, then is still again. Enter WHITE TWO, sitting in a seat directly in front of the BLACK. Silence. Enter WHITE ONE, with a bag.)

WHITE TWO

There you are.

(ENTER WHITE ONE sits in a seat some distance away, and reads. Silence. WHITE TWO moves to sit next to WHITE ONE. Silence.)

THE BLACK

That is a beautiful bag.

(Silence.)

WHITE TWO

Walt...

WHITE ONE

Hm~

(Pause; looks up.)

What~

WHITE TWO

Urn... that gentleman...

WHITE ONE

Yes. What~

(Silence.)

THE BLACK

I was just saying...

(WHITE ONE yawns. Pause. WHITE TWO clears his throat. Pause. THE BLACK smiles. Pause.)

WHITE TWO

Um... that gentleman...

WHITE ONE

Yes. What?

(Silence.)

THE BLACK

Now I jus gon say this. Jus gonna throw it out to you all, now you take it for...whatever, you know. An it’s this: Some people might be tellin you shouldn’t bring a bag like that on the el nighttimes.

WHITE TWO

We’re just traveling. We won’t be on here for long.

THE BLACK

Well, it only take once, my man, know what I’m sayin to you?

WHITE TWO

Yes, well, I think...

WHITE ONE

Ignore him.

(Silence.)

THE BLACK

You say what?

WHITE ONE (not looking up)

We’re ignoring him. Simple.

THE BLACK

I hear you.
(Silence.)

**THE BLACK**
So I ask you this: Mebbe you wan give that bag to me... what you gon say to that?

(Silence.)

**WHITE TWO**
Walt...

**WHITE ONE**
Hm?
(Pause. Looks up.) What?

**WHITE TWO**
I think we're going to be robbed.

**WHITE ONE**
Nonsense.
(Silence.)

**THE BLACK**
You read that story bout that white man? Big ol lawyer uptown, got his very own heart shot right out his very own chest? Forget what for.
You member how that happen?

**WHITE TWO**
I believe it was during a robbery.

**THE BLACK**
Mmhm. You right on that. I member that now, it was a robbery. One a the brothers had him a gun...

**WHITE TWO**
Walt...

**THE BLACK**
... showed that gun aroun, that lawyer, he so fulla shit, he jus be lookin at the brother, talkin bout "Why that gun is not real, you n—"
(Pause.) Now thass how I heard the story.
What you suppose the moral to that story?

**WHITE TWO**
I would imagine it's... do, perhaps, as you're told.

**THE BLACK**
Thass right. You do as you muthafuckin told you got a gun on you.

**WHITE TWO**
My God. Walt?

**WHITE ONE**
Hm?
(Pause. Looks up.) What?

**THE BLACK** (simultaneously with "What?")
It all diffren. Now, you know how that is. Am I tellin the truth? You go wait in that subway, everbody jus a lookin you up, down, ever which way, see which is got that nice jacket, maybe a bag, (I don know) who mebbe got that gun, or a nice little box cutter, slice you tonsil to tummybutton.
(Pause.) It all diffren.
(Pause.) Everbody scared.

**WHITE ONE**
Some are. Not all.

**THE BLACK**
You scared?

**WHITE ONE**
Not in the slightest. Does that disappoint you?

**THE BLACK**
I don't give a shit.

**WHITE TWO**
I believe it was during a robbery.

**WHITE ONE**
A comfort.
(Silence.)

**THE BLACK**
You scared, my man?

**WHITE TWO**
I... I'm...

**THE BLACK**
You can say it. Don be fraid to say it. You say, "I'm scared." you jus sayin you human.

**WHITE TWO**
Well, I'm human.

**THE BLACK**
Course you are. I'm human.

**WHITE TWO**
Are you scared?
THE BLACK
What I got to be scared for?

WHITE TWO
You said if you're human, you're scared.

THE BLACK
Thass not what I said, my man. I said, if you scared, you human, not the other way roun.

WHITE TWO
Then... I'm a little... what is it that you mean?

THE BLACK
Only what I said. It okay to be scared. You scared, you not alone. Not in Chicago.
(Pause.) Course, you the only one scared roun here. You fren, he not scared. An I'm not scared.
(Pause.) You odd man out roun here.

WHITE TWO
I... I don’t understand...

WHITE ONE (not looking up)
Then just stop being baited by him. Can't you see what he's doing? Must I draw you a picture?

THE BLACK
What am I doin, my man?

WHITE ONE
Just keep to yourself. I am neither amused nor frightened.

THE BLACK
Well, thass nice.
(Pause.) This train go all the way to Evanston?

WHITE TWO
Yes.

WHITE ONE
No.

WHITE TWO
No?

THE BLACK
Oh, thass right. I member that now. You get off at Howard Street, you got to wait on the other train.

WHITE TWO
We can get off?

THE BLACK
You haf'to.

WHITE TWO
Well, that's a good...

THE BLACK
Whussat?

WHITE TWO
I mean...

WHITE TWO
I didn’t mean anything...

THE BLACK
It a good thing you offa the train wit the n—

WHITE TWO
No, no, don’t say—

THE BLACK
Hm?

WHITE TWO
I didn’t say—

THE BLACK
Pardon me, but thass what I thought I heard.

WHITE ONE (not looking up)
Then you heard wrong, didn’t you. He said that’s not what he meant.

THE BLACK
Oh.

(Silence.)

THE BLACK
Yessir, we all gotta get off.
WHITE TWO
What?

THE BLACK
I mean, we all gotta get offa the train.
(Pause.) I'll draw you a picture, my man.
(Pause.) You ain gon get rid a the—
(In a soft, sing-song falsetto.) — nig-ger.
Thass all I meant by that.

WHITE TWO
You know, I didn't say. . .of course, you. . .You Have
As Much Right As Anyone. . .

THE BLACK
.mmmhm... 

WHITE TWO
...To Ride Anywhere You Like... 

THE BLACK
...li'l piece a you hopin I live on Howard Street...

WHITE TWO
...I...

THE BLACK
...li'l piece a you hopin it gonna be me...

WHITE TWO
...what...?

THE BLACK
...li'l piece a you hopin it gonna be me walkin home...

WHITE TWO
...no...

THE BLACK
...alone...

WHITE TWO
...no...

THE BLACK
...in the dark...

WHITE TWO
...no—

THE BLACK
DON'CHOO LIE TO ME, MUTHAFUCKA!

WHITE TWO
I'm not lying I swear to God In Heaven please don't kill me!

(THE BLACK roars with laughter. WHITE ONE looks at WHITE TWO. Pause. WHITE ONE returns to his reading. THE BLACK giggles and sighs. Silence.)

THE BLACK
Say now, my man, you hear that other story? Whatchoo do for you livin?

WHITE TWO
I'm a male nurse.

WHITE ONE (overlapping)
Don't tell him...

THE BLACK
Now thass funny. This story bout a male nurse. Thass a huge whatchamacallit.

WHITE TWO
Coincidence?

THE BLACK
No. Thass a huge lie. This story not bout no male nurse at all.

(Silence.)

WHITE TWO
What. . .what story?

THE BLACK
How long you live in Chicago?

WHITE TWO
Jus. . .just moved.

THE BLACK
Oh, thass why you ain heard this one.

WHITE TWO
No. No, I haven't.

(Silence.)
WHITE TWO
What one?

THE BLACK
Right up here. Howard Street Station. Man waitin on the train. Gon zip him on home to Evanston, he waitin on that Evanston train, gon zip him on home to his li'l partment wit warm lights...dig, an he jus bought a puppy dog home for his kids, he got that nice fat deadbolt keep all them niggers away...

WHITE TWO
I wish you wouldn't keep say...I never meant...

THE BLACK
...an he waitin there on that train, an it late, my man. It not as late as it is now, dig, but yes it late. An he unprotected. Ain no deadbolt on no train station. An whatchoo think happen?

WHITE TWO
I don't know.

THE BLACK
Well, long come the brothers...

WHITE TWO
...the brothers...

THE BLACK
...maybe five...

WHITE TWO
...six...

THE BLACK
...six of em, mebbe more.

WHITE TWO (simultaneously)
...more.

WHITE TWO (simultaneously)
(Pause.) Whatchoo think they do?

WHITE TWO
They...they kill him.

THE BLACK
Why, thass right. But not right away. They scare him firs, just like...say now, my man, you wan sump'n wipe off under y'nose? Thass ugly. Anyway. They talk to him awhile, they talkin bout honky...

WHITE TWO
...honky, yes, I've heard that...

THE BLACK
...an White Bread, an then you know what one of em do?

WHITE TWO
They...they pull a knife.

THE BLACK
Thass right. An they put that ol knife an how big that knife be?

WHITE TWO
Big. Very very big.

THE BLACK
You right again. An they put that big ol muthafuckin knife right up against his neck they say "You tell us where you live." An whas the firs rule you learn here on this train tonight?

WHITE TWO
You do as you're told.

THE BLACK
Whatchoo think they do? THE BLACK
Why, you right again. An he did what he was told. He told the brothers where he live, they say, you listen here: We goin to you home. Wit the warm lights, dig, an the puppy which jus bought home for you kids, an you nice fat deadbolt (which don really keep us niggers away at all) we gon fuck your ol lady.

(Pause.) What you think a that?

(Pause.) An that man, he say: Please oh please don do that to my ol lady, an the brothers, they say, Okay:

(Pause.) But only if you do sump'n for us.

(Pause.) An whas that rule again?

WHITE TWO
Do as you're told.

THE BLACK
Why, you muthafuckin right about that. An they say to him...say now, you know sump'n bout these trains?

WHITE TWO
Um...
They lectric. They run on lectricity. An it a funny thing bout these tracks. Y'can walk on mebbe one a the rails or the other a the rails an you fine. But they's this third rail that you got to be watchin for, an you make connections on em, what you think gonna happen!

WHITE TWO
. . .lec lec lec...

THE BLACK
Lectrocute yo ass an thass no lie.

WHITE TWO
Lectrocute yo ass, yes.

THE BLACK
So the six a them push the one a him down in the trough where them tracks are. An they say...

WHITE TWO
Dance.

THE BLACK
. . .you dance, muthafucka, you dance you honky white-bread ass off. An they start throwin rocks at him, they edgin him aroun wit them rocks, makin him dance roun one rail, then they edgin him roun, make him dance roun the other rail, then they edgin, he dancin round em both, but:
He never makin the connection.
Then what you think happen?

WHITE TWO
Oh my God. The. . .the...

THE BLACK
Go on now, you say it. . .

WHITE TWO
. . .the...

THE BLACK
. . .you know you want to. . .

WHITE TWO
. . .the train. . .

THE BLACK
Thass right. The muthafuckin train comin, she be comin roun the mountain when she come. An jus at the las second, jus when that train gon wipe him offa the face a the earth, one a the brothers throws him a rock, an it catch him square in the muthafuckin chest, right where he live, my man. An it knock him cross them tracks, an very soon (quicker than even that, wink of a eye in fact) he be so black and burn to a crisp, that what you know? He be one a the brothers too.
(Pause.) An that train hit his ol black body, send it in a million pieces like the way black burn paper be floatin in the air when you burnin you trash.
(Pause.) An what you think about that?

(Silence.)

WHITE ONE
I think it is the most preposturous thing I have ever heard. I have lived here all of my life. I have never heard of a story like that.

(Silence.)

WHITE TWO
What?

WHITE TWO
Was that all just a story?

WHITE TWO
I mean it! Is it?

(Silence.)

WHITE TWO
Why is this happening?
It's it's it's can't you see?
Is it any wonder?
Come in here (the both of you) decent people riding on a train together, come in here (the both of you) come here with your stories, your fucking ghost stories, I mean, what are we here, children?!

THE BLACK
And are you frightened?
WHITE TWO
Of course I'm frightened!

THE BLACK
And why are you frightened?

WHITE TWO
BECAUSE THAT COULD REALLY HAPPEN!!

(Silence.)

THE BLACK
Your friend there just told you that it did not happen.

WHITE TWO
That's right!

THE BLACK
So then, if you don't mind my asking, why then are you frightened?

WHITE TWO
I...I...

THE BLACK
A story. A child's story. Ah. Have we not left the boogeyman in the closet?

WHITE TWO
I...I...

THE BLACK
I am filled with a wonder. How may I, one of the lowly and (dare I give voice to the creature?) the repellent, wonder that I hold such power...such...ah.

(Silence.)

WHITE ONE
The train has stopped.

THE BLACK
Howard Street.
(Pause.) And now we must all get off the train.
(Pause.) Why, there's a lamp burnt out on the platform.

(THE BLACK stands. Silence.)

THE BLACK
Well. See you there.
(Pause.) Eh?

WHITE ONE
Yes.

(THE BLACK exits.)

WHITE TWO
All right. Now, what are we going to do?

WHITE ONE
Well, we have to get off the train.

WHITE TWO
Now?

WHITE ONE
Yes.

WHITE TWO
Yes, yes, yes but...but he's out there.

WHITE ONE
Who?

(Silence.)

WHITE ONE
Mm.

WHITE TWO
Do you think the story was true?

(WHITE ONE smiles and shrugs.)

WHITE ONE
There might be more of them.

WHITE TWO
Coming?

WHITE ONE
Coming!

WHITE TWO
I...I...I...

(Pause.) I can't dance.

(WHITE ONE looks at WHITE TWO. Pause. Blackout.)

-James Serpento
I’ve never seen you
so afraid so afraid
to talk to me so afraid
of what I’ll say
I’ve never heard your
voice quiver so much
just to say hello
on the phone to hear
what I won’t say and
it’s beautiful to flick
an ash when you ask
if you’ve been a dick
it’s beautiful to laugh
like an ass when you ask
where am I today to
burn your shoes to walk
home to pay my own
way if I could I would
make you pay but
you’re too afraid.

-A. Shepler
Icarus

-Melina Wiegmann
-Todd Wetzel
Il Miglior Fabbro

_for Chris_

What’s funny
is that you think
you’re no good, assume
second-rate status,
while ogling others—
names dropped
at faculty meetings, printed
in leather-bound anthologies. I’ve read
you closer, swallowed
whole the lines
you pencil
softly, afraid to chisel
words into the page, afraid
to face ill-chosen verbs
or flimsy images.
As I mark
characters en coitus
(a woman, raw back thrust
against a splintered wall, a man sliding
his palms under her linen dress,
feeding from her hard, open mouth),
you capture passion, harness
it in stanzas, amaze
with colors—a wash
of Autumn’s leaves,
wind-weaved, the nakedness
of Winter’s black boughs,
pink and white blossoms
for greener months giving
sweet red fruit.
Your fingers write
a dance for these, stilling
like a Middle Eastern girl,
her soft belly tracing
small, fast ovals.
Tonight, you whisper
_art_, shape Bellini’s nude
and Dineson’s lions
into oil and clay
of your own. I want
you to turn to The Slaves,
watch them pull
out of the rock _alive_.
I see them gray and heavy,
but in your words
they float light, free
from unfinished pain.
What’s funny is the way
we differ: you believe
your work is no good—
to me, your poems
are the cherry trees
Spring has seduced.

-Marjorie Thomas
Phallic Stage: The Heartbeat of America

Right now, in this shabby one room paneled apartment, whose walls could contain my dreams and whose carpet so often burns my knees, I wonder. I wonder how far, how long, how anxious I have to become, to quiet the stereos and T.V.s and thumping feet, in order to satisfy my thirst for ecstasy. Why ecstasy? I don’t know. Maybe because I can dream it and sense it, but I can’t tame it or taste it. What happens when the soul is liberated? What happens when my penis fills with blood to the point of explosion while watching two women play lovers on T.V.? Who do they pretend to be, and what caused them to get that way? Could I join them? No, I can’t step from my white house into the shanties of the student quarter (Latin quarter) La Rive whatever the hell it is—in France where all of that sleazy shit happens. What lies in the heart of a manipulator—who never said, “I love you”—who never understood the words? I am afraid of passion, afraid of where it might take me—I’m curious though—like an angelic virgin wandering into the throws of a festival, with dangling breasts and whetted lips. I’m real in the sense that I can feel her heart beat. My heart beats and I hear children’s voices outside the window. Children whose parents have sprung for tickets to see Rowdy Roddy Piper and Hulk Hogan dance and hug in a ring. Their voices go up in cheers as the famed faggot dancers lumber into the stadium. Will their appetite for violence be quenched tonight? Flips and tumbles and I suddenly realize where I am. Why aren’t I in there; what makes me better? I get thrills from lesbian sex, not large “pumped” males coarsely caressing before 3,000 fans. What do the children see? “Daddy and Mommy like it, I’d better too.” I also hear 13, maybe 14 year old girls. What are they dressed up for, and what do they want? The eye shadow is too thick and their hearts are overpowered by an incredible curiosity to be touched by that greasy Seventeen-year-old Junior, with the thin black mustache, who drives a Camaro, and wears size 23 jeans.

-Daniel A. Youngren
As If I Was Homosexual

You, looking at me stare into my coffee
thinking to yourself
again how spineless I am.
You tell me I need to start sticking
up for myself,
and all I do is think

with anger. I can remain calm
though, focusing on your relaxed posture,
and considering why your clothes
always hand so loosely on you,
like the skin on a mad bulldog’s face.

Yet I think of how I look up to you
with fear, so afraid to see myself
making love to your body,
cressing your small firm muscles
kissing my chest.

I ash my cigarette and decide not to say
anything for now. I focus on the rush
of people outside on the Manhattan street,
somehow finding beauty in their walk.
I manage to finally lose you
with the quiet rhythm of the morning.

-Keith Nipper
Les Gens D' Armes

Two twin soldiers
stand beneath the trees.
They’ve been standing like that
for quite some time now.
Like tombstones, you can never read
emotions on their faces.
I sometimes wonder if they know
it’s Sunday Afternoon.

As if they’re carved
from a single block of wood,
my soldiers seem ingrained
with a proper sense of duty.
Standing at attention, hands held
behind their backs for posture,
they police the Island of La Grande Jatte.

It’s not that the park needs
to be policed. They’re not
standing there for decoration,
however. It’s just a Sunday thing,
a tradition started years ago;
nobody remembers why.
Some people simply sit and watch
their sculpted military shades
arc across the lawn
like shadows on a sundial.

-Michael Chasar
I look at Kelvin now when I had Kelvin we had
Had when I had Tony we had running water. Then
Tabitha come.

Along and we had a pump
then
Stephanie God blessed us with running water.
Two born in the bed
Tabitha born on the railroad ties.
My husband was driving real slow
So out Tabitha come. I wanted peanut butter
and Kelloggs and I went back to bed and
then Kelvin to come. I put him on my chest
and hugged him. These are my kids
Mary

Love

Thinking back to S.C. a well in our back yard
I thing that they should have more Sesame Street on TV.

Big Bird is my favorite.

I like this kitchen.

The white people on TV is rich.

Her car.

It feels like country real peaceful.

Indiana St. is very caring, but racist. One day I was cutting the hedges and two boys then pass by my house and call me an nigger.
If I was in S.C. I would be in the tobacco field and my kids had to stay in the car. It was very hot and the tobacco rows were long. I de hurry Ing up to check on them. It was hard because some stalks had a lot of tobacco and some didn't. When it was 12:00 pm we took out the pots and we built a fire. And all the workers and me and my kids ate rice and Beans and we got finished. I had to leave to the kids again.

When my mom when in the tobacco field as I look at the Clouds and I imagined where would I go when I died?

Kelvin
Once upon a time, there was a mom named Man Tabitha. She had four kids, and their names are Tony and Kelvin. I say thank you for the home in Valparaiso.

Stephanie, I love her.

Momma

Very much.

One day momma ran after Kelvin. She got a switch. And she got to his head and he red. Bootie. Whips that Bootielocks.

I was walking to my neighbors' house and got shot by young white college boys.
Afterlights

On warm summer nights
when the cool blue moon
drops lazy rays into the countryside
and quiet ponds make occasional splashes
for no apparent reason,
people blush easier,
and grins polish up from the darkest of places.

Minds wander along paths in the woods
and strangers whistle tunes you thought
only you knew.

People close their eyes,
not to sleep, but to see
nothing, makes the stars shine brighter.
Makes it easier to mistake
a kind word for a
whisper of love...

but even the loneliest of creatures
shrug off love
on nights such as this.

-John Schaefer
For Sharon

I was clear mountain water,
recently melted by the warmth of your touch.
I dove off the highest waterfall
alone and falling until
the deep green pools in your eyes
accepted me. I sank,
only to emerge and tumble down
the sloping rapids of your continual kisses.
I followed that growing river later in dreams to a delta
where sleepy waters mingled with warm sands
and dolphins swam together as the sun rose
and sparkled on a never-stopping ocean.

-Andrew Gaertner
I could touch the deer if I wanted, moved slowly and quietly, but though I wondered at their cinnamon coats and liquid eyes, I would not leave your side. I do not know what I understood the deer to be, but saw the grace they shared with you and felt the surrender that was needed. Always, finally, I would turn off the lights, releasing my hold on the deer. Sometimes I could hear crashing through the underbrush as they bounded back among the trees. Other times, there would be no sound of flight. These were the times I waited for, crouched on the tailgate as the night slowly filled with noises. Although too dark to see, I pictured the animals fanning across the fields to graze. I was never sure they were there after the lights went out. I like to think they were there, to think they were aware of my presence in the night, in the wisdom that was shared in the summer fields.

-Meridith Brand
Approaching Winter Sunset, Connecticut Woods

It is a strange time for a sunset, 
it is often missed in the late afternoon. 
But here we are on time, 
knowing that we need to talk. 
You ask me about God, 
but I cannot think of that. To me, 
what is more important is how distant we 
have become, and why this trip 
was to be our salvation. 
As you walk on ahead of me, 
I catch the last shadow of you, 
fading from this orange, sunlit woods, 
shouting "My God, my God," 
while the trees whisper around us, 
indifferent to the rustling leaves beneath our feet.

-Keith Nipper
-Amy Sanford
After Hearing That the *Aurora Borealis* Was Spotted Down South

I.

I learned at eight
to pencil in the world’s waistline,
a stroke simple as sectioning an orange.
From this I knew of
all things divided by lines.
On colorless circles
I drew indistinctions,
islands eroded at their coastlines,
continents formless as milk spills.
After it all,
a blue’so confidently covers
everything.
As if identity were a lie.

This is the wisdom of a child,
to hide imperfections
under the boldest greens.
As if they never existed there at all.

II.

That night, it was a thin fire
consuming the treeline.
The women who saw everything
believed nothing new.
Such colors are rare.

They whispered,
“Northern lights”
at the trees like a spell.
The language it grew out of
was defiant. Into the forest,
it poured its mythic dance.

What they celebrated was its weakness,
a magic lacking in the world.
The colors died into echoes,
indistinct and beautiful as islands.

-Christine Rueter
Secret

It seemed innocent at first—a game
I thought you played with all of us,
and I relished the attention.
But soon, it was clear you were toying with me, and though it never bothered my peers, they'd always tease after class, smiling slyly, after poking with fat, childish fingers.
You would sing whenever I handed in a paper; your dark eyes, hawk-like, pierced to reach me.
I don't think you meant to take it as far as you did, but after that day, locked in the shadowed room among the worn and dusty maps hinting at uncovered treasure, you made a promise—nobody will ever know.

We shared few evenings, only weekends in an apartment you borrowed from a friend.
I think you felt young again, while I absorbed your years, aging as you watched, but never noticed. Wanting to please, I'd do anything you asked, sometimes catch you fixing an easy meal in the kitchen, not seeing as I stared at your shirtless body, lulled by the way the sunlight from the corner window massaged your shoulders.
I'd study your face, the lines I loved, those muddy eyes that could hide any truth, picture tricks you could get me to do without once questioning, and disgust would ball in my stomach, slowly rolling to my throat, a choking I could not escape.

It ended because I had to have something left.
You displayed your regret by discarding a few tears, but I felt no sorrow for you, only my soul I thought I could reclaim, then found you had taken that too—there was no part of my life you hadn't molded or shaped or enjoyed, no place you hadn't felt with your big searching hands.

-Marjorie Thomas
Circles  
*For Seamus Heaney*

Circles are unlike us,  
lineages folding back  
against each other  
because they cannot die.  
This secret keeps its distance.  
You offer me these words,  
perfectly round.  
Today and tomorrow,  
they will oversee everything  
like a curving sky.  
I only know lines,  
roads mounting over roads,  
my elliptical womb  
waiting to continue.  
Around me  
lie the broken circles,  
pieces to hold on to.  
Rarely, a circle floats in  
knowing *me*.  
It is hollow  
and inside itself like words  
withheld by the dying.

*Christine Rueter*
Bing and Donald

-Nate Gilbertson
"If I didn't think what I was doing had something to do with enlarging the boundaries of art, I wouldn't go on doing it... art which has slept so long in its gold crypts, in its glass graves, is asked to go for a swim, is given a cigarette, a bottle of beer, its hair rumpled, is given a shove and tripped, is taught to laugh, is given clothes of all kinds, goes for a ride on a bike, finds a girl in a cab and feels her up..."

-D'Linda Reitz
Contributors' Notes

Heidi Nagel is a senior art major from Valparaiso, IN with the lifelong ambition to have more tattoos than Cher. A senior English major from Orange, CA, Corey Baden plans to spend the next two and a half years as a member of Overseas Volunteer Youth Ministry. His German ancestors, invited to Russia by Catherine the Great, were later sent to Siberia and had nothing to eat but the bark off trees. He has been published in Spiritquest and The Lighter. A past contributor of The Lighter, Keith Nipper--senior English and philosophy major from Merrillville, IN--likes to listen to Bach loud enough to make his neighbors complain and call the police. Todd Wetzel is a graduate student and works as Valparaiso University's Arts Coordinator. He lives in Valparaiso and believes Rhythm and Blues to be a cure for many ills. Senior English and Biology major Christine Rueter has published in The Charlotte Observer, The Hickory Woman, as well as The Lighter. From Hickory, NC, she has been quoted saying, "I get this feeling that plants are smarter than me. No matter how many times I shift them around, they always grow toward the sun." Though she is getting married in Salt Lake City, senior Jen Kempfert's dream is to tour with the B-52s. Until then, she will complete her advertising major here at VU; Jen is from Mundelein, IL. "Blowing bubbles is still cheaper," says Joe Lehrer, a junior English major from Rockford, IL. Junior meteorology major of Buffalo, NY John Schaefer has been published in several illustrious rags, most notably: the November 1977 issue of Newsweek with "Cheese: The Power of Dairy," Better Homes & Gardens October 1982 with "Pesticides, Lawn Homicides" and the Christian Science Monitor's April 1987 edition with "If We Had More Sun We'd Be Twice As Hot (And Bright)." When asked for comment, he responded, "Hey, what can I say? I've been cut. I just don't bleed." If she graduates, senior Marjorie Thomas plans to use her English and writing majors to the fullest extent in Amsterdam and other far regions of the eastern hemisphere. Originally from Manhattan Beach, CA, she does not feel showers are as necessary as most folks believe they are. Daniel Youngren, a sophomore marketing/psychology major from West Dundee, IL, has been published in The Lighter, and quotes Sam Shepard from Suicide in B-Flat when he states, "I prescribe to no particular system of thought." Sophomore art history major Nate Gilbertson names Flathead Lake, MT as his home, claiming "I would rather be living out of a tent." With a BA in speech from Iowa State University and an MFA in acting from Indiana University, James Serpento's experience with the dramatic arts is extensive. He has written, directed, and acted in several plays, a number of which have been produced Off-Off Broadway, in Los Angeles, and in the Midwest, in addition to working as Assistant Professor of Theater and Television Arts at Valparaiso University. In the fall, he will return to Chicago, where he will continue to pursue his professional career. When asked about On the EL Nighttimes, he said, "If the play simply gets people talking, I am content, because talking does a lot of things: in those with brotherhood in their hearts, it strengthens their resolve and increases their powers of articulation and so, in turn, of healing." Nik Englebert is a senior Central European Studies major from Liberty Corner, NJ. Sophomore exploratory major from Big Rapids, MI Anne Shepler has been published previously in The Lighter, and forwards the wisdom that the dog's influence on the development of the soul has been ignored. She also wants to remind everyone that "although fish all bathe together they do tend to eat one another." Overseas in China, junior English major, Michael Chasar, has been featured in The Lighter and has also won a number of poetry competitions, including last year's Wordfest Academy of American Poet's Prize. From Northfield, OH, his other writing endeavors include drama, essays, and news columns. An advocate of the word "pastiche" and a proficient creator of cheese and home-made paper, senior art major, Gretchen Beck, enthusiastically promotes the arts on campus. She readily admits to having a terrible case of cyberphobia. Amy Sanford is a senior from Valparaiso, IN; she has co-oped in D.C. and enjoys creating prolific prints. Melina Weigmann is "once again hunting for the perfect school." For now, she remains a sophomore art major from Seward, NE, while commenting, "I hope to graduate from the next one." A student overseas in Cambridge for the semester, Meridith Brand, a junior English major from Wheaton, IL was published in The Lighter last fall and has been involved with the Valparaiso University Theater. D'Linda Reitz is a senior art major from St. Louis, MO who wonders 'when 'Ken and Barbie' will ever stop doing the WILD THING?" While he anticipates being published in the Proceedings of the Sixth National Conference on Undergraduate Research, senior Biology major Andrew Guertner has also published in past issues of The Lighter. He has been known to claim Memphis, TN as his home; however, after graduation, he plans to serve in the Peace Corp, but as of yet, he doesn't know where, so stop asking him.
All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process and are chosen by an unbiased group of interested university students. Each semester, The Lighter welcomes contributors and members to its staff from all faculties of the university community regardless of race, creed, gender, or orientation.

If you have any questions or comments, or if you would like to become a part of the 1992-93 staff, please call The Lighter office at (219) 464-5058.

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