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Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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COLUMBIA POETRY REVIEW/1



Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College/Chicago

Spring 1988

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Columbia Poetry Review

CONTENTS

Elaine Equi	Puritans	1
	A Bouquet of Objects	3
Lydia Tomkiw	Seven	4
	Little Dead Body Poem	6
Jeffrey Brown	Southbound Train	8
	Remember, America	9
	Ready and Trembling	11
	They All Laughed: New Poet's Folk Wisdom	12
	Louisiana Tantrum	14
	Interior with a Girl at a Window Reading a Letter, Circa 1658	15
Diane Williams	Cory's Baptism	16
	We	17
	Annihilation	18
	Boots	20
Karen Murai	Japanese	22
	Florida	23
	Debutantes	24
	No Talking Allowed	26
Lorri Jackson	Acid Epic	27
	Raw Dog	30
	The Effect of a Lost Friend	32
Juanita Garza	Visit to the Cemetery on Mother's Day, 1984	33
	Syntax	34
	French Garden	36
	Busted Egg Sonata	37
Laura Sakarya	Poem	38
Christine Valentor	Poem	39
	Poem	40
Inka Alasadé	Poem	41
Ann Fay	Rousseau's <i>Sleeping Gypsy</i>	43
Edward Moore	Chant	44
	Greetings from the Slaughterhouse	45
	Paying the Toll	47
Michael Hannan	Keep Talking	49
	Waiting for Someone Taller	50
Joey Pickering	Bartending	52
	Nameless	54
Karla Dennis	Poem	56
	Poem	57

Julie Klausler	Poem	58
Fran Mason	Poem	59
	Weeds	60
	Water	61
	Sestina	62
Bill Tarlin	By Example	64
	Question	65
	Prayer in Regress	66
	Unfinished Business	67
Robin Kidd	Like to Like	68
Sandra Rand	City Sestina	72
Barbara Eckhouse	Autonomous Biograph	73
Sung Koo	Turn up the Religion	74
	Rhythmic Grumbling	76
	Some Words about Love	77
	A Balance of Sound	78
	October 13, a Friday	79
Kelvin Lewis	How Do You Sleep?	81
	PMS	82
Heidi Hedeker	Claim to Fame	83
	The He That Comes Over Me	84
	Music	85
	Tango Magic	86
	Big Words	87
Janet Schmidt	Lake Michigan	88
Steve Glabman	Poem for Tristan Tzara	89
Harriette Porter	Globalisms	90
Lisa Gushiniere	Help	91
Vlado Ketchens	Over the Moors	92
Jeff Kerr	Old Black Dress	93
Jim Newberry	Hardcore Jollies	95
R. J. Restivo	Just Now an Angel	96
Kassie Rose	Paderewski Played Pianissimo in the Middle of the Night	97
Amy Shuttleworth	Paperweight	98
	Miró in General	99
Deborah Lamberty	Poem	100
	Inertia	101
	April	102

PURITANS
Elaine Equi

There are no small ones.
All big boned

men and women
without a hint of child's play.

They creak
as they walk

like doors left open
to bang in the wind.

One imagines from their gait
that years from now

they will make adroit bowlers.
Meanwhile, they whisper

careful not to sound rhythmic.
Dovegray, lavender and eggshell

are the only colors
and even these must be bleached, muted,

in order for their profiles
to emerge on cold cash

as if doodled there
with invisible ink.

If not optimistic,
they are eternally democratic

and can be handled
without "contamination."

That word
has no meaning for them.

Touch them
as much as you like,

wherever you please.
They have never felt

the desire to reciprocate
and for that they are grateful.

A BOUQUET OF OBJECTS
Elaine Equi

Lovely to be
like a racehorse surrounded by flowers

but it is also lovely
to be surrounded by air and own pendants

and bracelets of soot.
Here is a factory made fresh by broken windows

and there is my muse
returning home with a pail of milk.

He brings me
down to earth where all poetry begins

with such beautiful hands
that I am forever doing nothing but thinking

of objects
and asking him to hold them.

SEVEN
Lydia Tomkiw

Last night, the tide was high.
Seven women dressed in white swayed seven different ways
While a boy at the piano played "A Pack of Hearts."
We were tired of being mild,
We wanted tornado, our lips painted red.
Was it the night that was barking?
Only the Buddhists were sleeping, dreaming of the Orient blazing,
Surprising itself.

Seven naked boys carried seven yellow candles
Into the darkened fields
While I stole a box of father's hair and set it to the wind.
We arrived at the party, dressed as water,
Eyes slick red from thinking, waiting for a nervous twitch,
A steady hum inside our bones;
We were tired of being mild, we wanted hurricane
And secret brideknives at our sides.

Seven nets were cast into the water, pulling
Seven older women up;
Bruised faces in the moonlight—was your sister among them?
The one with the slender hands?
The one that wanted nothing but music all day long?
Bowls of water are set out for the dead,
Pan-faced gangsters in the funeral home;
The casket's kicked over, the corpse on the floor . . .
We were tired of being mild, the ominous blur,
Nestled in the motorcade, backseat and obscure.

Seven cannons were shot cross town to honor
Seven modern lovers
While a sailor sung a hymn to Ruby and her shoes.
A burst of pigeons pierced the heavy summer air.
Dressed in bullets, we were tired of being mild.
We wanted tidal-wave,
The taste of bile pumping hard into our throats.
The bomb went off and we scattered through the alley;
No one noticed—they were caught up in the golly.

Seven oily children spoke in seven different tongues
And we slipped out of church, backdoor,
Into the rural night
Black, black meadow and farmdog barking,
Dark farmhouse and we go around the back:
Through the window, she is there,
Face as tame as milk;
We were,
We were thumping,
Our blood thick inside our veins . . .

Seven falling stars pierced seven empty barns
And the silo caught on fire.
The rape went on, backwoods upon the unfrozen ground. . . .
A harnessed giggle, an eerie caress:
We longed to be exiled to snow,
To be the gut of a pearl
Gleaming.

LITTLE DEAD BODY POEM

Lydia Tomkiw

How right you are, dear Paul, that
We hear of famous people's deaths while on vacation.
Perhaps it's so that their funerals are not too crowded,
With their loyal fans being out of town and all.
Those celebrities are pretty clever.
I've heard that somebody is born every eight seconds,
So I presume that someone dies every eight seconds,
Just to keep things even;
It makes me feel shortchanged when I read the obituary page—
Someone's holding back information.
It also prompts me to flip through the telephone directory on
Sleepless nights, saying over and over again,
"Yup, you're all going, every last one of you . . ."
Wow, heaven must be a big place.
I don't know too many dead people, but folks tell me I'm young.
When my grandfather died, he was laid out
In the Bub Funeral Home, and I was secretly glad Mr. Bub did not
Change his name to something more romantic
When he went into business.
I just wish it was less memorable.
My high school locker partner, Ned, worked part-time
For a mortician. Imagine dressing dead people,
Straightening their ties, fluffing up their hair
So you can afford to take a girl to the movies on Saturday night.
That's love. That's adolescent desperation.
I would have been honored to go to the movies with Ned and
Have him buy me popcorn. Instead, I went out with a boy
Who died. The hardest part for me was knowing that
His body did not just dissipate on the bed the minute he died. I
Think that's what keeps me off of suicide: the idea that something
Is left for someone else to clean up. How rude and inconsiderate—
It's a pain to take out the weekly trash, let alone figure out what to do
With over a hundred pounds of flesh that's about to go bad.
It would be even worse in India where there's a religious sect
That believes you can't desecrate any of the elements with the dead—
They can't be buried or burned, they can't be cast out to sea,
So they're taken to the top of the Tower of Silence

Where they become the vulture's problem.
How's that for passing the buck?
No, when I go, I want to go clean, convenient, leaving no mess
As if I vaporized while taking a shower,
As if I moved to Antarctica leaving no forwarding address.

SOUTHBOUND TRAIN

Jeffrey Brown

The smell of Southside Chicago
does not know my skin.
This is noteworthy
for I was born in the city's
Black Bourgeois Heart, a lump
of lethargy waiting to be ceramics.
No applause for this.

I should have leapt from the womb
of some reefered ghetto mamma,
some great whore but no
Anne Boleyn.

I should have slept in a den
of rats again and over again,
broken my nails,
fucked unclean girls on the
floor of a falling elevator, pis-
soir of passion for those who can't
hold it.

Should bank the money of white men
from Bughouse Square
who want my ass, only
a little loving of my ass.

And, oh, the pain I should have known.

Pain to write of
in this poem or another
while the men of manuscripts finger
their faces and nod:

"Good colored melancholy."

No.

Instead, a long, slow train ride,
money breathing my father's pocket,
and inspiration and one
naked line:

Aurora lights booming behind a Black man's home.

REMEMBER, AMERICA

Jeffrey Brown

It is a matter of fertility in a dead country.
The minds of thousands begin to pickle, his-
tory fades and maybe we're just irritated
enough to cringe in front of the TV.

Sister smokes weed and I do not.

Mother asked, what is poetry? I

believe I lied.

We need judgment clean as Protestants,
and a room with space for hot dogs and
sodas, where nobody doubts
a goddamn thing.

We poets are never sure of our
audience, so we be cute, talking poetry in
the poem—very universal knowledge
these days. I have seen milk flow
happily beside blood, and
flags waving at lyncher's hill. I
know of hot wires that reach
many souls, children who piss
on their mother's breast, flowers
living at the graves of criminals.

And so a brother will ask me why
I don't write of his struggle.

For him, I have nothing, save a field
cry in lieu of loud drums. And at the
station, a man white as eggshells
offers swastika hate. Now I remember a
small girl, glad with diaries. She
told of a pain we only equate with
rheumatism. I go home, sleep well,
for it is late autumn and my wrists,
where the scars itch, are cold and tight.

Sister smokes weed and I do not.
The neighbors are visiting Connecticut
on holiday. They leave grandfather home
where he can soak his feet and his
memories. He, once the ash-smear'd sweep,

heard the selfless lamentation of Auschwitz, its cry recalling those stolen Africas and blankets treated with measles. He plays in his mind the movie called CAMP GAMES, and is irritated enough to cringe in front of the TV.

“You see,” he says, “once the gas was poured in, it worked like this: It rose from the ground upwards. And in the terrible struggle that followed—because it was a struggle—the lights were switched off in the gas chambers. It was dark, no one could see, so the strongest people tried to climb higher. Because the higher they got the more air there was. That caused the struggle. And people pushed their way to the door. They knew where the door was. Instinctive. Which is why children and the weak and the aged always wound up on the bottom.”

And a father didn't realize his son lay
beneath him. The poet may end
 only in the pile's middle. A plate-
ful of regret turning brown at many tables.
After music and dance we, all of us,
 relax our fists and curl them in our
laps. This way, history does not repeat
itself, I guess, and there is no
augury in poetry. Paul Carroll is right: A
poem is a seeing-eye dog, or it lies. But then
I remember that this is our America, our poetry.
I'm confused, yes, but this is America.
Our hearts sing no song
as rich as
dear America.

READY AND TREMBLING

Jeffrey Brown

Like African drummers,
I blister with retention,
and there are several beats to worry
the melody I sustain. I bend
and my spine aches like
smothered hambones; soldiers,
fat as the Bible, await me—
they want my suffrage and the trouble
of a soft heart.

Softly,
the heart closes like temple doors,
and nothing is ready and trembling
except the pulse-pause of
“Amen” and “God bless.”
And inside that temple mourners reek of opium,
feet rested, obedient Chinamen at hand.
I’m lost in the midst of it all—
and that’s enough. More than this
is the crazed rat moving toward a child
in the garden or the scent of coffee in a trench,
where nothing is ready and trembling
except the song of grapeshot.
A song fawns here none too soon.
Dearly, it is carnivalized and clear,
a young muscle dying to stretch again.
This new silence of mine is
full of listening. Something wise
takes to rhythm. I am plump
and heavy with need for singing,
heavy in celebration of another bent.

**THEY ALL LAUGHED:
NEW POET'S FOLK WISDOM**
Jeffrey Brown

Bedlam was never so dear
as the whip-kiss of songs and madness.
And madness holds no crown to
our very thoughts in verse.
The Americana of red hair
may tell the turn of an era,
but a free tongue knows neither
knife nor death, and Amiri Baraka spits
“dat” and “dis”
at colored folk he can't understand.
To giddy yourself
with such paddlesongs may,
I think,
give rise to the rheumatism or
leave your children with permanent
jaundice. It's
not enough to be fragrant in city alleyways,
poetic in a ghetto.
Do you find Ned Rorem

piss-elegant? One could say,
he is the spin in Spinoza, which
equals the zest of a Victrola panting.
A friend's first glimpse of Chicago life
was Samoyed pups spilling
from a car on the Ryan. This
image is not meant as
a non sequitur to comments on Rorem,
for either subject soon falls
flat like fruit out of season.

My dears, we must devote ourselves
to being meticulous!
This mango, the mind is
ripe, impressable.
Let's make grooves,

you as Ruby Keeler,
me the dance.
Let The Poets go to the mountain
naked and try new figs,
pay the augur well.
Smoke from the kitchen means
the cook is burning.

LOUISIANA TANTRUM

Jeffrey Brown

I've got a taste for nudes
and you. You and your
tantrum and mine—
the way you taste it.

You shall be my master, honey:
yes, your fingers rusty with keys.
I say it now, in lieu of what's to come,
while my head tilts lunatic and my

hair paints the dry grass.
Let's hiss with festival and Cajun
gavottes. Let it be only us two—
barren here—in lieu of what's to come.

We'll panther toward it now, love.
The grapple, the champion, some tasteless
joy. I mollify my tastes, and you.
You and your tantrum and mine—

the way you taste it.

Oh my sisters, you sunken girls,
the issue of staler loins,
I'm heartsick for you—
you and your men.

In lieu of my man
I would sit sentinel on the levee,
would seep into his tomb
like Aida, an Ethiopian princess,

and die with him.

**INTERIOR WITH A GIRL AT A WINDOW READING A LETTER,
CIRCA 1658
Jeffrey Brown**

On the bed
A bowl of good peaches
Luscious as the red curtain
Melting over the open window
Where your reflection distorts
Like cruel comedy
And the letter you hold
Imports the death scene
Of someone you were supposed to love
Yet your face is so yellow
Go on sweet
Leave it
Temper your breasts
Against the now new bed
Send the fruit to profane the floor
You may sink your teeth
Into anything with succulence
Go on then
And with certain laughter

CORY'S BAPTISM

Diane Williams

Cory cannot tell you
what her baptism was like,
because she has not recovered;
she has not risen above the bloody
water. The preacher could not lift
her up once the others,
the ones who give their ten percent,
found out that she wanted his wet
robes to swallow her like the Red Sea.
But Mrs. Preacher can tell you.
She caught them in the pool of murky water,
in the blood of the Lamb,
in the center of sweet salvation.
Cory, wooed into a spider's web,
kneeled in front of Preacher
in the hollow darkness of his office.
He, with no angels to protect him from
the Rapture or the Wrath,
had only the joy of her hands
cupped over his knees in idol worship.
Mrs. Preacher, who entered always
without warning,
stopped the child at the man's primitive
altar before she began to pray,
began to offer solemn thanks to the
wet-robed god who promised her sweet
deliverance. "My god, my god, my god—"
Preacher leaped from his throne,
uncoiled into the lamp,
pushed the child away,
toppled her like a cracked pillar.
Mrs. Preacher, she of veiled eyes and
gloved hands, toed Cory with the tip
of a spiked-heel shoe, toed the child's
bruised ribs with the tip of a spiked-heel
shoe, and loved her God, her never-failing
God, and lit up the darkness with words
that washed like baptismal waves.
Cory has not recovered.

WE
Diane Williams

They baptized me with the wine of our
forgets. I can taste it on the tip
of my swollen tongue.
She has gone the way of all women who wear
pallid skin, moonbeam-busy skin that
pinks at the touch.
He has played me like a kitchen calliope
and encased the wax of my wants
in hard-shelled unknowns.
I have no longer the blue eyes
they gave me. I traded them in
to the dissidents for the hunger of
belonging, the freedom of regretting.
We passed out our poems in the
melting streets. People
let them drop like manhole
covers.

The wanting of everything is
never as sweet as the getting of nothing.

ANNIHILATION

Diane Williams

Nothing comes easy
Not getting up at 6 A.M.
 to tear you off the ceiling,
 to immolate your toast,
 to shred your sheets.

Not slithering home at 6 P.M.
 to torture your dinner,
 to straighten your toes,
 to strike your lamp.

Two days gone now
like acid down my drain.
Two days gone now
like no gurgle, no gargle,
no scum in my tub.

I wanted to help you pack.
I wanted to sit like a stone
on your suitcase.

I want to hurl myself, splinter
in your path,
avalanche your plans,
hurricane your dreams.
I want to eat *the other*.

Phoebe spits in my coffee every morn,
blames me for everything
when nothing should do,
because I sent you money in a
see-through envelope,
sent you love in a
see-through heart.

Dr. Tom is here
with his pad, his pills, his bills.
He holds my wrist
like a fat frog's leg,

makes faces that give Phoebe nightmares;
his head rattles with disgust.
Too late, he says.
No fear here, I say.
Hammer down the coffin lid.
No bone, no blood, no flesh.
Only porcelain—chipped.

When you come back to me
with dreams shattered like beer bottles,
with suitcase unlocked,
with arms outstretched,
I will be waiting for you.
You will be waiting
for a hot meal,
for a soft bed,
for a fever.
I will grant you annihilation.

BOOTS
Diane Williams

No, my boots are not clean,
but winter determines the black
and white
and gray of things.
Winter slides down my sidewalk;
then summer eases, strolls closer,
picks up the pieces
invites past spring
like a sailor on leave.
The watermelons are succulent,
as new, as seductive as the chain gang
baking in dirt-road sun.
They don't bite when I
stroke them, their green as hard
as hard is green: motherhard, fathersoft.
The red is like town-drunk eyes
that flash like tiny stop lights
when I flip a quarter and a dollop
of curiosity into dirty palms.

We discuss Beethoven and the bears—
the zoo ones who've been ignored lately.
No one understands the cold,
the shuffling of hearts,
the sniffing of noses like
men who worship at the shrine of Bacchus.
Bacchus knew how to throw a
grand corruption
without inviting the louts from next door.

Winter—and my boots,
boots of gray,
sky of gray,
slush of gray.
I feel the gurgle of deep-gutted submission,
the sputter of implosion.
I can tell the real is unwinding; I
want nothing to do with anything.

Tell them to keep their fat-headed
magazine, their overstated understatement.
Baudelaire knew that art could be
taken to bed like a water bottle full of vodka.
Art will not prod you unless you
give her pocket change.

JAPANESE
Karen Murai

My mother is turning
Japanese
against her will.

It's what happens
in a house
full of silence.

Opens her eyes
like opening eggs,
she opens

hands like blank
verse. Avoids
obvious contra-

diction. It shows in the
pause as she
enters a crowd.

Pauses to
bind herself up.
Kiss herself closed.

The sky welcomes her
after
migrating birds.

Welcomes the naked
shadow
of her house,

where my mother's
hostage to
glassy music,

hostage to steam,
and nearsighted
heartbreak.

FLORIDA
Karen Murai

I have this nightmare someone dresses me
in a mermaid suit and makes me work for a
living, and I blame it on Florida,
a state that makes its way through my dreams
like a rubber shark. Florida,
state of biggest intentions,
new state of swelldom, inviting us all
to jump through the window.
And then I'm dressed in pink
at a flea market where recent retirees
sell the memories they're tired of
and machine guns sit on cardboard tables
surprising us with quiet before turning
into movie stars. This is where
good ole boys fizz like a swamp,
try on hats to keep their tender brains
from swelling, and only the alligators
show any wisdom, shrinking from heat
to taste primeval mud. And then
the cities start singing, the cities
that look strangely new, as if the
sky rained soap or the fountain of youth
were real—but only for plastics.
And their midnights swivel inside a glass,
and their mornings cough up flags,
and the calories are in the worries,
as finely tuned as submarines.
The Cubans win blondes and walk away
with the show and I have to drink
just to stay even. I have to balance
between maudlin and macabre like a
good TV script. And I have to remember
that this is all in style,
the way America is in style again—
big, smiling, and recently laundered.

DEBUTANTES

Karen Murai

Sell yourself in any language. Girls
braiding their hair before open windows,
boys banging like potatoes in a gunny sack.
Day comes to cut the shadow heros
and out on the street we are cracking,
cracking sharp like drums that fall

from the sky. It is the desire to fall
into novels where ripeness is all. Girls
ripe like sun on a blade. The sidewalks cracking,
heavy with rendezvous. Even the windows
are bright with romance, broken by heros
with grease monkey lullabys, black looting sacks.

Now it's Rio on the run; innocence gets the sack,
summer on a white sheet waiting for fall.
It was a nothing story with a hero
that could never hold a her. And girls
are breathing it in like windows,
take the city in with just a crack.

And boys everywhere practice the wisecrack,
the lariat and slow stare. And a sackful
of sonatas holds the moon on a window.
Are we ready for the pale swoon, the fall
that ends in dramatic license? The girls
nod and fashion. Fashion swank heros

three parts summer, one part shade. Heros
to spy through a keyhole crack—
it's just enough illusion to catch a girl,
to spin her like a cat in a sack.
This is inevitable as a runaway trolley, or the fall
of an apple that's left on a window

ledge. And still we lean from windows
and cover the night with our coats. Heros
who never know their places and fall
like hammers on wheels. The wind cracking

like breeze after breeze in a weather sack
or gravel beating the belly of a car like a lost girl.

And the girls walk by your window
counting heros from a brown paper sack,
cracking glances to see them fall.

NO TALKING ALLOWED
Karen Murai

I like you at a loss for words,
holding a dirty-plate silence.
Tonight, don't even talk with your eyes,
I want you here like a shadow
on the wall, all outline and one color.
Full as a book, we will sit and think,
dreaming of a country
where more words mean less things,
and people grow thinner in conversation.

ACID EPIC
Lorri Jackson

What care do we add
to the acid epic? A pot
of sincere bondage, porno
novices, folding of tepid chairs, language
falling, wires scream for a more
perfect entrapment.

There are
rails
we'd skip foreplay for
if it meant a cleaner vision.

Sober
hymn in the kitchen
waiting on winter howls to play out
hollow up the shadow alley,
new snow pure tonight, hollow in
the room like a hipbone
when it wants corruption.
We clear the head as it heads
in the wrong direction.
We walk the windows impatiently
the dark front room, the outside
reflection in black glass.

What cats do we add to the acid epic?
One thousand fat Puerto Rican boys
trashing us with "Call me
Skull." OK. We trade up to blue dots
for a heavy metal grimace
found on a sidewalk in Philly
after a fight, well worth its weight
in strychnine.

Later
the gold statue of some faggoty signer
of the great declaration
accosts up near Diversey Harbour.
The alleys and heroes became webs then
in the city trees and by the water
and in the red lights on Broadway
gleaming on to attract

2 gnarled humans
fucking on the sidewalk
near Adam and Eve's rib joint.
We had to close up our house,
board up the windows and leave it.

What concentration do we add
to the acid epic?
Like all Nero ambitions,
what could we do otherwise,
chosen to die laughing?
Let the roulette of modern
disease, malignant at its best, take us
in white and cold ceramic?
We chose the room in the back
where the candles are maybe purple, maybe bored
with ceremony, rituals
of perversion. We slid
bolted from the lap where the mouth
left wires and a sailor's grace
the crucial finger bent up
the axle of the world.
It counted for more than a dive
into supreme
madness, crazy, self-induced
risk finished with the sketchy
seances that would have brought us closer
to the living.
The living, ha. All those Houdinis
of routine waiting on a terminal mishap,
that divine configuration
to end all questions of gods.

Maybe we could have
managed the shackle
but could they have taken the needle?
Don't think so. Maybe
we could have remembered the part
about duty
but would the secrets of distance
and cities been ours? Don't think so.
There's a room
in the back of this dump

and we'll all die laughing, choked
on 6 o'clock comedy and
vagabond waste, holding our breath
until blue.

Believe me, the gaga of our excesses
makes for better company than us
resplendent as a simple one-direction
fire, or fist-sized ragdolls
caught in an instantaneous yellow leaping.
Yeah, it was almost like a dance.

RAW DOG
Lorri Jackson

Caring is drunk
in a bar between ambition
lost at 5 A.M., the second
avenue corner, all night
fruit market.
Close out this doorstep, idols
of maybe tomorrow
where Wednesday truths escape
in the pandemonium of 3 warheads
sweating colorful lies
between propped and casual thighs
where weekday remains
are relics forged
in a score of pure adultery,
the P.A. chronic stain of night
pit motion found only in us,
the hard music.

(Routine waits on us with sullenness,
spills hot liquid in the lap
when 8 A.M. is not a fact.
The feat of the evileye Arab who sits
endless in the newstand at Second and Sixth
glares from ancient racks: "You no touch
the merchandise. You touch
you buy.")

So, like, we're still here
to tip the bucket beneath
habitual gloom, the breakfast
headlines; Sleek Commentary dogs
Professional Concern at 8, 12, 6 and 10;
Trashed with the privates
of the popular apocalypse fear;
fissions the young in unpaid damage;
treads on boots, packages
dread in hearts: "We know
what there is to know
about your tidy lies. You deserve us."

Caring is sabotage,
is ambushed in the exile
to the unemployed stoop.
The bag goes over the head or in it,
melted to a necessary grace,
a tiny primary to wave, redly,
a flag above the flea market
ebb and flo.

Dying

for a shot, a firing squad of victory
I want something to hold in my arms,
a bouquet that wilts on the heart,
thrills as only a trick can,
played on the whole human race.

But, hold it

before it all ends,
fire on the floor and fading out
in taxi dreams and crashes;
vow me

as a naked escape
would a blockade of grey flannel:

a morning in the proverbial sense,
not the Florida postcard
slapping the back in a hard "Welcome,"
or the cactus sand in a plastic bag
hung from the rearview mirror,
or the number scratched in
the dark on flesh,
or the clock in the shape of a singular woman,
atomically correct,
whose tits flash "It's a bargain,
It's a bargain"—

OK, just make me a strong one,
one with a little twist,
one that will no longer sob me,
the one that won't wake me up cold.

THE EFFECT OF A LOST FRIEND

Lorri Jackson

Ships away.
Poets are so cold.
They wish they were dead.

You were my literary ghost
in a life of hungry lions. One night and less
than enough red meat to feed them all. The offers
of escape were cynicism
in a summer without an air conditioner.
Restaurant windows open
onto a world of reluctance. Reluctance
to admit a bus is a bus
not a habit. That this road doesn't go on
forever. It'll end in a pale town south
where they know the reasons
or don't know.

A stroll through smoking rainfalls
is not love. Love is not
reggae. It is not the ornate
facade of the Sovereign Hotel. Laughter
was in the backyard
of having been a child but not child-like; little
adults learning to handle the blades.

Now here, here on the radio
is the beginning again,
strains of a song begun
in a dark booth
in a dank club
a year ago.
You, convinced of the pool cue, of coffee
and the sports page in the morning; the memories
pin themselves to me
like broken monarchs against this distant, unforeseen day,
against the Florida walls of this flimsy house.
Another heated summer night with magnolias suffering
in the brain.

I liked you best when you let me in
on a secret I knew in the first place.

VISIT TO THE CEMETERY ON MOTHER'S DAY, 1984
Juanita Garza

Nightmare air stirs
this holiday,
rigid as intention,

when,

in a faithless calm,
sister gives cartoon philosophy:
"I am what I am," she says.

And what are you?
Burdens
ribboned with simple gestures:
a locked flinch,
an easy eyeroll
erupting in tradition;
the pause-pivot
of all my past sins.

In arrogance,
I breathe small.
There are still photographs
I like to forget:
my mother in pale chiffon,
in sweet napping sun,
eager death—

But there are no monuments here,
this is the minority/suicide section

and my mother's tombstone
is white from three Chicago summers;

a span of passion
I thought would be painting.

SYNTAX
for Jeffrey
Juanita Garza

New cassette of old Motown,
manual typewriter,
white rippled window-shades—

all these icons
and the want to scream,
to sour my world of its Latin indifference;
the lost giddiness of desire.

I want intrusion
like nerves after nightmare,
after the pillow falls out of bed
and your leg drapes mine.

Fuck cynicism.
I'm waiting for answerable questions;
rain flippant as silk
showering a brick wall,
the necessity of carnival barkers
and occasional boredom
clinging like slander.

So sting me.
I know taxis are universal,
milk is white.
But where's the scutter?
the out-stretched arms waiting,
the affinity with a chain effect,
waxed in myth and,

no,

no need for retrospect.
Your hair locks me to a day,
this day lingering
like postage due,
the blind hope for skeleton keys
soldiering me.

Me, the potential object of Sicilian possession,
stuck in 1957,
waiting for a new decade,
a new technology
you would have blessed.

FRENCH GARDEN

Juanita Garza

In groves of prim jacaranda
is jaded uproar,
white as dust
and breathing platitude.

“There is pressure in sync
with boxed roots”
like snipped jabs.

Here is a motif wanting
for some lacking,
some little flecked decay
layered and sliced
like scall
creeping in angelic accident.

But look, there are ruins;
shell shards stamped into careless footsteps,
limbs with thinning wrists
wrapped in loose worsted coats,
people tracked and waiting for
the random carving of initials.

These are the glass ruins,
bleak on pillows,
weak on bridges;
directed,
like eyes before conversation.

Here lust is cathartic,
ignoring preserved states
where light is a promise to give,
tangled in obeisance
and shedding like pumice.

BUSTED EGG SONATA

Juanita Garza

Not this time,
this lingerie sunbath
with the walls turning from me
like a long-running complaint.

I warn you,
I've a mysterious depression
handy.

I keep it drugged,
like a finger tracing,
in my voice:

"There's a sadness
in sheer joy."

Wrap up something coy
and see how long it lasts.
The space of blur
goes clap-happy
and I need a little smothering
to breathe.

Yes, we'll to Florence someday,
Jeffrey,
sandwich Italian yachtsmen
between us
like the taste of baited breath,
and, when history comes sitcom-preachy,
we'll flatter it ordinary,
tape our shivering solace to our chests
like a prison tattoo
and cry in dark movie houses,

but only for the hero's cousin,
the second-banana wearing despondence
like plastic driftwood—
a necessary
castrated by its own useless beauty,
the chilly nepotism
of blaming success
for impressing you,
for hailing you a cab
in the rain
and wishing you a good night.

POEM
Laura Sakarya

Here I go
again, leaping
from cobblestone to
the night
winding its way
through your hair.
It stands on end: goosebumps
while trying to keep up

along

fallen arches, heel grinding
down what ought to be
destined.

My friend, Mathilda, thought
she had an insight but
she got burned.

Just the same, rather I'd
stop beating the streets
like this, and run down

against your skin.

It's an irrational sign;
lovers grab from the gut to
gut, and it aches like hell,
so many muscle spasms when done

or razor thrills of

listen, you, to your own heart
beating when you
race me. Then ask
questions and answer
mine.

POEM

Christine Valentor

Dear Eddie,

so

how is life in sunny Southern

Italy, that

tropical paradise, vicarious adventure, everyone

looked up in an encyclopedia?

Thought about you yesterday when Bernard said,

“Isn’t it amazing? You can hear rain on the roof
when this place is empty.” Like

his sense of reverberation had finally been awakened.

And then, last week

Kathy said (in a voice of sweet decay)

“Tell Bernard to keep his penis away from my asshole,”

so I told him,

and Errick was laughing like a caged hyena

finally let loose in a shopping mall.

Scattered detergent and

two rain-soaked, abandoned

gym shoes in the parking lot.

A porcelain plate broke into pieces

underneath a velvet sombrero—

the gossip runs thick.

Happy Birthday, Eddie.

You’re not missing much.

POEM
Christine Valentor

Because the world is round
and today is Wednesday
I wrote

this eavesdropping episode; cornerstone
curbsitting, all night shopping, I
try to avoid it

whenever possible and find
some hidden inspiration
in these words,

digestive intestinal rumbles;
music inside your
head is pounding and I can't remember

why I came. Was it because
the rain is so heavy this
season like a venereal

monsoon intrusion? Could be but I
doubt it. Remember we
danced on tabletops, painted Vanessa's

bicycle purple, played
quarters in the sun?
Jeckle Henry and

hide the eighth cartoon; it's probably
past midnight by now and I
still miss your

face looking furtive,
back and forth
playing guitar in Tinley Park's Bellevue.

POEM

Inka Alasadé

Choosing between the two of you
is like choosing my right leg over
my left
between my Bob Marley cassettes
and that old black trunk I found
in the elevator near the cigarettes
It's like Einstein deciding whether
he wants the "theory" or his ravenous
relative Albonia who ate all the chocolate
bon bons at Jacques Cousteau's sister's wedding
Like Michael Jackson deciding whether
to "beat it" or send it to the cleaners
that red jacket that everybody likes and
now has in vinyl
like choosing my thorax over my fingernails

he's hot; ooh he's hot!
and you're saccaroid; ooh you're saccaroid!

he's got money
you've got guts
I got a headache
I need a glass of Kool Aid

he speaks Italian
you speak French
I speak
English
She speaks . . . about us
tellin Ranji and them that we
havin a *ménage a trois*
but you guys have never met
she better wash her mouth with
cupcakes and leave ma biz
to an autobiography or a telegram
cuz Roger and me we don't play that
stuff
shuckin and jivin and struttin people's stuff
talkin 'bout I don't love you, and I only

like his squeeze and she says he told her he
only like ma prose and he said I said
all he could do fa me was ride ma moped and
nibble on ma seafood
but he don't know you and you don't know
that I still talk to him, and I never said any
of that and they don't know none a ya'll
Hey! somebody gimme a brussel sprout
a digital clock
a glass of cold milk
I gotta sit this one
before I faint or decide
to tie ma shoes standin on ma head
but ya'll go ahead
have another glass of Kool Aid
a digital watch
some scrambled eggs
a table cloth
I gotta slide this time
before I miss ma ride
but I got somethin I
wanna tell you guys
and you can tell Ranji, Leroy, Peewee and all of
them
that I said
may the best man get over
and may I stay under and enjoy the best
of both of them

ROUSSEAU'S *SLEEPING GYPSY*

Ann Fay

Under a full moon
the gypsy sleeps,
dreaming of mountains,
of rivers
flowing through deserts,
of a gentle lion bending over her

watching her,
his eyes round as the childish moon
that smiles vaguely down on the desert.
In her sleep
she is older than mountains,
than rivers.

Behind her a river
mirrors her
dreams; mountains
pale into moon-
light as sleep
swallows her up on the desert.

Lost on the desert,
has she come toward the river
to drink and to sleep?
No footprints near her,
did she come from the moon,
pass forever over the mountains

like light? She is massive as mountains,
dusky as the desert.
Her teeth are tiny moons,
her dress striped with rivers
flowing over and through her
in sleep.

She lives in sleep
as in mirrors, awake. Her dreams, mountains,
cast shadows over her,
drift like sand in the desert,
like rivers—
the sweet milk of the placidly grazing moon.

CHANT
Edward Moore

Some nights, I have
the need. I lean in
the underground, letting
the hard air get me,
cars tugging in with
ghostly breaths to
stretch me home. I
ask no one to amaze
me, to drive me to
my back yard shirtless,
chest fuzz knowing
the cold all over
without anyone to
tell me what great
meaning this has.
Even when the sky is
annoying and dark,
there's fear in the
curve of my lips,
but no study of blackness
is needed here; no
bitching is needed
here. The snap of
sunlight still moves
me, but some nights
I have the need to be
elemental and closed.

GREETINGS FROM THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Edward Moore

I

There's always a focus
that doesn't take hold
long enough—lovers
seen through heat off
the pavement; cobblestone
damp with red; pictures
of explicit something—
that fill the nerves
almost to the point of
being true, of being
aware of the peace to be
found between buildings
in a blizzard or the loss
of a lover you never had.

II

The fantasies that bind,
that lend half-filled
styrofoam coffee cup
grins to the needy, who've
been known to flip balloons
tight with their blood
at passing women, are
bound to make them make
the needy boil like fire
on the rope: Highly in
demand and hence held
dear like delight at
hosting Cupid twirling
'round on a spit.

III

The clarity of it all
is, was, and will be
the currency of future
monoliths, whose sole
duty will be to, at the
real climax, uproot,

tip over, canonize the
only one in possession
of the crossouts of
pages and lives that
signify the presence
of inner-city white
boy angst, and he will
always be the holy one.

PAYING THE TOLL

Edward Moore

Being able to breathe
while dropping your poem
is always nice, like
the wind rushing through
one's beauty always screams
a blue plastic retort
flatly. But these are
not the true truths,
children. The passage to
manhood takes more than
two fists and one nimrod
nerve to spike with or cramming
tasty details tight-tongued
until you spin backwards
into a crucifixion. It must
have the softness that comes
with theorizing about which
came first, the chicken or
Howard Cosell's rug. It takes
not paying toll to think, not
shelling out your fingers for
ballsy men to snap. Let's
find the real realities to
mangle with, to store our
blue humors and can't-chew-
at-the-same-times in.
That may make you strong;
may drive you on to be
Dunkmaster General or
President of Lebanon; may
teach you how gravity works—
the hard way. If this is
avoided, you'll find only
a shell when you get home,
a beatnik squatting in your closet,
a door not closed for you to
throw open like Alan Ladd,
a worm to read by. Take
to heart that some things

stick in the head no matter
how hard you work to
boot them out—that
all we know has been
known before or will be
known after as *Worldly 101*.

WAITING FOR SOMEONE TALLER

Michael Hannan

waiting for
someone inches taller than i
whose hair is being tugged
forward and back,
who will have fuzz-red eyes
when the sun rises,
who will have a strange story
revolving around a
coincidence that has struck her
in dreams or
in books or
in the tea leaves,
whose hair will be tossed
to allow laughter,
who will walk in boots
high heeled,
black
to my window,
knocking to wake me.
my stomach growls
and the thin hairs
on my face
feel rough and good
when my fingers
travel across.

she drove a mustang
to pennsylvania
because the maniacs
around here
kept pushing into her
forehead,
and she is a maniac, too,
a crazy brunette
who tries to straighten out
my life because hers
seems beyond her.

i have a friend
who tells me
he hates the
sexual innuendos
she makes
trying to be funny—
he says it makes him sick.
the knock comes
and she is
wearing black.
maybe she thinks
it adds mystery,
and we wrestle when
she arrives
upside down
to see who's
rightside up
in thought
sipping, no
gulping russian
vodka, real
russian vodka, the
finest
mixed with orange juice,
and as my speech
becomes thick,
my words fuzzy
talking about the only
girl who ever
picked me up
and how we had sex
in the back of her
plymouth
(a blonde italian girl
who spent a day
convincing me that her hair
was natural blonde)
and she laughs
when appropriate
brunette hair tossed,
and really makes me
believe
in
it.

BARTENDING

Joey Pickering

I'm so tired of
3:00 A.M. It
locks the door and
hits the lights, kills
the pool table and puts up cues.

It's a lousy hour, when
I'm both horny and ornery,
full of toxin and dust,
just waiting for
instantaneous combustion, just
aching to crack Fred or
Mary Lou. Just ask for
one more and all my flares go,
calling accident, accident,
and suddenly I'm on someone's
grid, heading for the highest percent.

It's not just the people.
It's those silly machines, as if I'm
surrounded by rattlesnakes, and
making sure George Washington and
Thomas Jefferson are going the
right direction, making a
bee-line for home.

And the glasses . . .
Sometimes it seems tiny
miniature mes run up and
down the bar; I can't find
my shoulders or their blades
until everything's barren,
as if no one was there
in the first place.

It's a lonely hour, just me
and the cash box, maybe an
HBO movie turned low and my
first real drink

out of a thousand.

Then I turn the lights
real down, slow dance through my
tips, suddenly miserly and old,
counting nickels, counting dimes,
those cheap son of a bitches.

Sometimes Cindy stays, or
I'll find a five on the floor.
But all in all, 3:00 A.M.'s
worse than cigarettes in the
washer, or the low, cool howl
of children at midnight . . .

NAMELESS
Joey Pickering

In the evening she turns
inside out, the color of
high school. Then
she puts twenty-seven
back on, tackles savoir-
faire. Such moody
injury. She's got it
under her skin, in
the creases in her
palms, where her
life sits like
cube glass.
She wants to find
the slightest ankle,
a tulip leaf,
what lives under
the sand box.
It's like
watching the squirrel
scan the
thinnest branches;
she turns,
turns like
wire in
record grooves, bites
down and
gets hot.
She grows tower
cactus,
grows sound in
each corner
of her room—
the great rush of
open doors.
And at night,
before the mirror,
she whispers,
"Mother, it's
not working."

She bends into
shadow like
temperature,
sings a song
to her toes,
“Twist me and turn me,
show me the elf,
I looked in the mirror
and saw myself.”
Nothing’s changed.
The song doesn’t work. She
oils her eyes and sleeps.

POEM
Karla Dennis

They come like genies
to safe sleep
bejeweled with mind/spice and olive scents
for jaded tongues,
for poets'
opium, allegro, and alpha.
They dance blue waves with ripple start,
sea opera sound the page;
they run thunder tender
and then capture single rains,
raising Jesus drunk with sinners' tales.
They spin souls to reverse eyes
to see behind the night.
I hear my head ache hot with sheer rapture,
crystal blue Ice to paint them with Miró lines.
Van Gogh strokes them warm
and Picasso's torsos in Spanish parks play host
to new invention.
They are precious bursting prisms of life
on tips of pins, on edge's end,
a soaked royal of sweet and fruits
and mirth and the breath of babes—
all manage at the feet of muse.
I have seen them cry loud
with no enmity,
touching me with sweet antic,
a statue in a room with a view.

POEM
Karla Dennis

Amidst a round of salt, pepper and bread crumbs she told of you,
shadowy savior,
and I gave thanks to the dead and the unknown
when you said:
"You better cut him down; that Miss Lizzy's boy."
You blew breath to futures, families and Black girls,
mama and me.
You who mimicked God with a Mississippi drawl
gave life to infinity and concrete things,
but how could you know
Papa prayed over proceedings with Martin Luther King?
Papa marched on Washington and preached A.M.E.
Papa was president of the local chapter of the N.A.A.C.P.
You White southern red neck from way back when,
You ole cracker asshole don't know what you did;
unleased a black dragon militant rebel seed
whose blood flows feverish
in many.

POEM
Julie Klausler

It isn't the sort of
social scene—not quite near the hip poppy
dance dress or high hallucinatory talk, or
bad food eaten fast, or cigarettes smoked
slow and cool.
Nothing of this need be while
sun falls broken ladder squares on the floor.
The smell of syrup skin surrounds certain intervals;
sex without lust or desire seems at last too
anticlimactic unorgasmic, old in its calm.
What can be left, or felt if there is not
daytime drama, done during neurotic negotiations,
friends of friends who fuck friends?
For example, you sit, not needing that edge—
it is how you've come all unto your own,
leaving them to such excessive success.
It's not much for the fitting in, cause
you've walked into a room without ruffle or care
anymore. Exactly where will you be?
Reading alone in your search
or not knowing where to
go to have fun or friends outside of
some silent soul life?
Happy health bores beauty and the underground
will race past, leaving you
on a plateau to glance enviously at
the overachieving social cynics.
Where will it lead?
And what will it mean marrying? Or moving
into your own alone space?
Who will care? Who will know and
what will you do day after day
in white rooms and knowledge?

POEM

Fran Mason

I'm inside you like chlorophyll.
Oh I love you like a telephone wire.
Oh my soul hits the pavement
 Your fascination
 a flood,
 your sinking of teeth
 the crescent moon.

John Lennon imagines on my TV
—twenty years after the fact,
it reaches me,
while from the kitchen you expound
the virtues of a national debt
and who is Yoko sleeping with?

So we approach the shortest day of the year,
the winter solstice. Oh, it's cold out there.
Blue patches started flying over today,
tattered, frayed edges
of the gray blanket that rippled
and flowed over us for more
than a week.
Must've been a big blanket,
nationwide size.
Then the sun came out,
putting everything at an unfamiliar slant,
watery light as if falling down
through a windshield
and all the shadows pointed north,
confusing all the lines
we've been used to,

but it's beautiful, beautiful
and makes my lungs expand
as I lean on the windowsill
and run in a spiral down
five flights piling on sweaters
and onto the street where I rise again,
continuing to expand inside,
floating up to peer in my windows
my fingertips pink with cold November.

WEEDS
Fran Mason

It's all gone now,
but it will get hot and wild again
and touch everything.
I know this place
I know where the alleys cut behind
I know a building rooted in sand.
The action of a screendoor shotgun
knows my name, has my number.
Exactly where that tree drips and doesn't drip
Christmas calls,
between those frozen boulders.
It's starting.
Money
it will condense in the air
and whip around in the lightpole wind
and perch on mink shoulders,
and slap hard in faces,
causing welts.
Pack everything.
Those waves keep crashing.
Outside they roll, silky
and steam calls
my name lies
in the drafty upper stories
of your dreaming motion.

WATER
Fran Mason

There's a dogwood over the grave that's
 three feet tall now
and I never dream about her,
but when I do
it's always driving in a car,
on a hilly Missouri road
with a mouth that's locked tight
even though my mind is celebrating.
All the things I think I'll do
as I squint my eyes to see the animals
moving through the background in camouflage
as I gather breath on the jutting end of anything
before the plans vanish, leaving their shells
to fool me until I touch them
and their bright hard paint flakes
into a million pieces—
make no small plans, they say,
so I won't make any
until the car comes back
between the knifing whining swallows
and the water in the streetlight cobblestone cracks.

SESTINA
Fran Mason

We look out in the morning
and the green world smells like Arkansas.
The dirt below us crumbles.
Near me your skin,
and I smile
while I know what thickens overhead.

But I don't believe in my smile,
and you don't believe in my morning.
Now it only brushes my skin;
our greenness crumbles.
There are no leaves but sky overhead,
and being alone without it is my Arkansas.

There is a lot of water in Arkansas
and none right here. Everything crumbles,
important things that you hold overhead
I can't reach; this is my strange morning.
Burning sears my skin
but you don't know, and still smile.

Up there in my overhead
you can't get lost in a smile,
you might not hurt from the morning,
and the dust settles in Arkansas.
I have to leave now, this floor crumbles
and these windows thicken to a skin.

Let me show you the guilt consuming my skin.
This beautiful evening is only overhead.
I had better keep myself in such an Arkansas
that my own frivolous whim and smile
and not your morning
will be the only thing that crumbles.

My straight track crumbles
Let me break this heavy skin
and remember not to smile,

remember the dense black overhead,
put me in Arkansas,
show me its morning.

But will it really be my green Arkansas,
and will it still be morning?
The sunlight touches my skin.

BY EXAMPLE

Bill Tarlin

The only person I know to whom death is just a smell in the afternoon
turns up now and then with the stink of her cat.
Abrupt, flashing men's briefs when she kneels,
she stretches out on the floor like rice under a bench
at the big ethnic bash they have on the street in summer.

The way she makes me feel is expense,
is tired, is mud hair.

You know, the word is all innocent children
or the stories wouldn't bite the way they do,
which is they teethe;
they gum and gum at the wrist, trying
to explain the narcotic by example.

As the wry tattoo, now grown over
where it was once fun to be bald,
pulses,
I change the channel.
And she won't even blink. God . . .

is her expression, not mine.
Now she is much too thin to ever really be naked,
too much like open season to relax,
too nearly pretty on the rug.

The way she makes me feel is "invest,"
is a quiet inch,
or, you know, like distant sex.

QUESTION

Bill Tarlin

Trust matters nothing,
no count.
Token of interest clatters with the coins on the bar.
Follow to your car and drive,
raging and ragging on the foul, the stupid,
the carnal and the late,
berating the close confidences of evening,
scorning Steven or a George
for loving you too much.
You ask me, "Are you too severe?"
Honey,
your eyes are wild with fury,
but the cold arc of highway streetlights
riding in pulses across your face
makes them no less beautiful,
nor the red vein networks of abuse,
nor my excuses.

PRAYER IN REGRESS

Bill Tarlin

I'm bracing against the onslaught of deceptive weather.

Dear Mother,

 thank you for the warm clothes but
everything here has its own heat.

In fact I dream of breezes and iced tea
always dreaming. . . .

Only sitting doing nothing do objects become important;
only in darkness are they bigger than their size.

Imagination is just one distraction from action.

Please leave no spaces;

distract me from mirrored glass and still planes of water.

Leave off thoughts that layer like tiers of jig-
saw puzzles. Missing pieces make colored
windows showing still

more interrupted scenery

with scrambled holes of detail—

the Swiss Alp obscures the London

Bridge obscures the flower blossom

in regress.

Nested images, Mother. Gestures.

Sincerely yours. In boots that leak.

I'm waiting for the storm to make me stand.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill Tarlin

I still think of you as unfinished business
filling the door
and in the same step vanishing,
leaving the room to its own resonance,
hollow as a prayer.
The men on the back stairs still drink;
still unnamed, they swear affably.
Arabic curses stain the air. Smoker's yellow,
the ants still rally at the gap in the fence
as if it wasn't a change in seasons that was expected.
As suddenly as it wasn't winter,
the gutter was ankle deep in advertising,
circulars and pizza menus,
paranoid leaflets describing huge conspiracies.
The cars still idle in the road,
weighing the end of the block.
And everywhere there is a solitary footprint
a centerless vacuum:
your head not hitting the floor.

LIKE TO LIKE
for Judy Chicago
Robin Kidd

I. "And She Gathered All Before Her"

Tubes for water to flow through
are not fluorescent.
They may be yellow, red, or
some indefinite color between
green and purple.
Taken from the wrapper,
they make a crunching sound
as they go down.
Going down is not always
prelude to or parcel of
sex. It may be merely
going down the street,
the river, or the gutter.

I'm at work all day and
then go to Jill's for dinner.
"Nice to come home to you."

Between my fingers
glint of gold,
bottoms of my
trousers rolled,
sirens scream
"no hand to hold."

Smoke hangs in air.
It is not there,
but merely absent
like the ring on Karen's finger.
Objects "*are*, . . . on analysis,
self-contradictory, . . .
sentimental falsification
no natural sanction."
We object to your explanation
of the meaning of this.
"I *never* explain anything."

Did he fake his passion?
Do we need permission?
Is this all to the exclusion
of what could be a normal,
happy excursion or simply
a normal day?

A forest has many uses.
Mostly, it abuses
my senses when I get too
close. But I lied.
We are left standing
in a dry rain.

II. "And She Made for Them a Sign to See"

A thousand thousand
borrowings, trappings,
and decisions

She sleeps, her head
against the window,
hands crossed in her lap
on a blue paperback—
Introduction to Aristotle.
Maroon sweater,
red and green plaid of
her coat,
she turns in her seat
in her sleep,
crosses her arms on
her chest.
Soon the bus will pull
into Chicago station.
I swallow, run my tongue
across my upper teeth:
dry taste of garlic.
Sunday-after-Thanksgiving
freeway is less than free.
We may be long arriving.
Then maybe again, not long enough.

We approach, we approach.
We do not arrive.

Absence of black and white
means everything is grey.
This, too, is a relative statement.
How shall we order our lives?
Our demise?
We arrive. We arrive.

The six-story tree
is the first thing I see
as I come from
the bus station.
Burst
of color
of light
of snow against the window.

Small boy, asleep, grimaces
as mother gathers him in arms
Salen del coche en la proxima parada.
His face is black and beautiful.

III. "And lo, They Saw a Vision"

Stand on the corner and call your name:
Stephen! Stephen!
What I need more than anything is
to sleep.

Inside the house
rooms swell
with coriander and sage

"Please, sir, tell me more about this Self."
"Be it so. Bring a fruit of that Nyagrodha tree."
"Here it is, sir."
"Break it."
"It is broken, sir."
"What do you see?"
"Some seeds, extremely small, sir."

“Break one of them.”

“It is broken, sir.”

“What do you see?”

“Nothing, sir.”

Do you renounce Satan and all the
spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel
against God?

I renounce them.

Do you renounce the evil powers of
this world which corrupt and destroy
the creatures of God?

I renounce them.

Do you renounce all sinful desires that
draw you from the love of God?

I renounce them.

What, then, do you affirm?

CITY SESTINA

Sandra Rand

City. Mere veneer of civilization. Watch
buildings crackle and hatch of rubble and ruin,
strewn prairie beginnings on the vertical up
rosyfleck the slippery lid with flashings red
or pink or white nervous light
shivering antennae deny copper hunger.

El snaking about buildings gets me hungry
for spaghetti. Fashionably al dente urbanes watch
wastebaskets, wisecracks, and rappers which are worn light
and giddy. Makes you feel tough and cozy. Ruins
your politics to otherwise do, I once read,
an old radio show that tuned up

giving advice to migrating condo girls up
cemented towers with guano-marbled sheen. "Hungry
potholes! Drunken meters! Promises that bruise red!
City workers!" Virgins all, I assure you, check your watch.
It seldom lies. Boyscout Dobermans scribble curbside runes,
legs ahoist, panting protectorates of street light.

Stamped diesel thoughts travel light
on chain letter highways. Haughty cabs Up-
town hopscotch zipcodes: Chinatown, Jewtown, ruined
wild Projects held in check by caged balconies hungry
for all-night diners—al fresco. Ochre roaches watch
gangway dumpsters struggling with red

breadcrumbs spread along bellicose sidewalks of red
to tempt pigeons, sparrows, and slate-grey juncos. Light-
hearted boiler room centipedes make leggy love on watch.
Piss-scented elevators lift purple wounds aloft, that is, up:
rats run from so much love. Forced Eden tapeworm-hungry
for minority murals, treasure lode of viaduct ruins,

an imposing, fragile hulk. It works—don't touch it! Ruin
a city grit smile with that hairy eyeball. Red
and suave smelling of ether. Either gamble or go to war. Hungry
gutters are friendly with iridescent rain. Light,
dervish motes of insight, obsidian negatives, arcades. Up
bullemic parking lots, thick-soled alley cats watch.

AUTONOMOUS BIOGRAPH

Barbara Eckhouse

Actually

I went to hospital
for shock treatments.

But I am averse
to such banal
twentieth-century
blandishments.

So I reversed
the flow of current.

Such startled
eyebrows and rent
hair. The technicians
were an exhibition
of what was almost me.

I dismissed myself
and came to this place
to breed and brood
five (singly) elves,
in canny mood,
and collect old lace
doilies

for my dresser tops.
Now, my voice gone oily
from so many
character spots
in little theatre—
urbane, inane,
henny penny
adventures—

I turn to Vocabulary,
that many-coloured
cloak to clothe my barely
silent, bothered
me.

TURN UP THE RELIGION
Sung Koo

mother is dark
 deepening to black or red
(these being her principal colors),
 she is blushing or waiting
for anything to throw light.

 we smile today at the Christian hope
and tomorrow, we will leer
 and look for a new word for dusk.
Mother, a mare, a cow, a fairy,
 who can make her body big or little
at will, moves too quickly,
 still blushing or waiting
for her daughter to bring home
 a bright shiny countenance.
Instead she's brought home faces
 of gangsters, cowboys, and prostitutes,
skipping
 psychoanalysis every other week
to take piano lessons
 even though she is stone deaf.
she is a believer in material.
 she has faith in 3-D Jesus Christ,
 Velcro Buddha,
 and everything her mother
 has pictures of—
 the extravagant pig sacrifices,
 two-headed babies from UFOs,
 born again Elvis Presley clones.

and it's all true,
it has to be,
pig and grain are perfect parallels,
and if it isn't true,
why would they print it?

she has faith in rubber Gumby or Gandhi,
 she can never remember,
no matter where it was or was not.

she thinks the best lyrics
are the ones that can predict the future—
The Sound of Silence is her favorite.

yet every morning she sings,
“Egg is nothing
but a symbol
thrown up by the
psyche.”

every morning mother is blushing or waiting,
screaming crazy word equations:
a door is a jar.
trouble is a foot.

Sister smiles and adds, “Meryl Streep’s a cobblestone.”
and I just eat my breakfast soggy,
watching Jesus Christ knocking on a door
and Buddha’s belly protruding from a wall.

RHYTHMIC GRUMBLING

Sung Koo

And I say
to myself,
I cannot dance
to this cadence
of decadence
or even think
of dreaming up.

I pray
generic prayers
of the sublime leading the blind
into empty pages
and my urban upbringing betrays
me with this optimism
that sings about wilting.

Spasms of enthusiasm
when casual mistakes
become brilliant.

“Yes, I see the true intention
of your struggle to free yourself
from definition without being too trendy.”

I take this as seriously
as blood on blood
is redundant. I know
the difference between sweet and
sweeter, but still
I bleed like an idiot
when I speak of adult lust.

I envision perfect love
as eight people
masturbating in bed
counting down
to a synchronized orgasm.
this is the dissonance that embraces
me like an overweight relative.

SOME WORDS ABOUT LOVE

Sung Koo

maybe if I just abbreviated it
gave it a pet name

“oh Booba, we can never be one
can you not see the futility
of hearts around my cursived name?”

maybe if I stopped thinking
gave up more time to physical fitness
let the body talk in pelvic thrusts
be a fucking mime in a huge bed
rolling with savage sheets that know where my cock lives.

maybe if I had a personality
of a dictionary, no secrets,
black and white explanations
with an occasional graphic diagram
opened to the page where fuck should be.

maybe if I became religious
and married a Catholic suburb
with nice and velvet parents
who bleed wicker
and never ever say no way in hell.

A BALANCE OF SOUND
Sung Koo

i long for an acoustic love.
one that is girdled in earth;
one that is not eclectic with
electric gimmicks.
yet, this love does not have to be pure,
 for pure is a negative word—
 a word like 'no sex'.
what i prefer is sexual attachment,
 kind of like siamese twins,
 only sideways.

i talked to my mother about this,
she said:
 "what you're looking for is yogurt."

i try to explain,
 it's like folk meets rock and roll;
 it is impossible to attain without disappointing someone."

maybe if i wrote soft prose
and said i really meant it
with moist, human eyes.
maybe if i cut off my unnatural hair
and planted myself in the ground in spring.
no, this is all futile.
it is like creating rain out of cow's milk;
it is utterly useless.

i begin to think grave,
solemn earth thoughts.
 what if i attain acoustic love in this lifetime?
how is mingling dust possible
with polyethylene things in the way?

how can i melt
when things not biodegradable
stand between air and earth?

the answer is clear now.
 acoustics transcend over physical air
 like christmas,
 like aunt jane,
 like a bed shaped like ohio . . .

OCTOBER 13, A FRIDAY

Sung Koo

leaning on sinful windows
that are hot to touch, yet delicious;
i hear a kid talking
about how garbo was a deaf mute
until they invented the talking movie;
and i think,
“yeah, there was a time when things like that
made a lot of sense.”
but here, it stands childish,
while i am against
graffiti-stained-stained glass-window
waiting for miss columbus day
and her fleet of armada sisters.

tempus fartus-
and i am still waiting-
twenty minutes wiser,
twenty minutes tired,
and my brain does the twenty minute
boiled egg routine,
flapping violently, until
my ears show agitation.

i hear the kid talk about art:
“art is the intent of creating art-
nothing more, nothing less.”
to this, i spit on despondent sidewalk
and think,
“pshaw, what does this child know anyway?”
to me, art was only linkletter, or bogda,
or murray.

time passed like gas through liquid,
and i found myself
staring at dead air,
the dead language,
the grateful deadheads playing
commutermen in tweed.

anesthesia couldn't wake me,
but it would've helped,
as i escorted miss columbus day
and her brothers or sisters
across autumn in chicago.
although my inner thoughts were subdued,
like autumn, it's a green to orange attitude.

HOW DO YOU SLEEP?

Kelvin Lewis

I always sleep with one eye wide open
Because I have nightmares
Of two big dark-skinned men
Coming to take me away
Back to the Motherland
Back to South Africa
To make me participate
In anti-apartheid demonstrations

Some nights, I awake on the living room floor
Nights when I am drunk
And afraid to sleep in the confines of a bedroom
Afraid that the two dark-skins are watching me
Although knowing that is only Jorge
The Puerto Rican queen next door

On nights when the moon crawls in
To shine on my uneven forehead
I crave a bowl of cornflakes
Laced with hundreds of sugar babies

Some times I drink only the milk
So that it will make me sleepy, wise,
And kill my never-ending wonderment
At why Roberto Clemente sits on display
In the Afro-American section of History
Of the Chicago Public Library.

PMS
Kelvin Lewis

Imbued in much bullshit
I think about sitting in the front row
However, the rows are single-filed
by verticality
Now, I want to go home
Riding the rhythm
Of several Malaysian virgins

While sleeping
I speak Lunar
And talk to the moon
I say things like:
Jack your body
But the moon does not respond
It hates my black ass
Just like so many others
I hope they all die
'Cause I ain't goin' to no funeral
'Cause I ain't got nuthin' to wear

Life picks on me a lot
Enveloping my inside
With a philosophical nutchew
Pushing me to the edge

CLAIM TO FAME
Heidi Hedeker

“You wanna know how it is?
It’s great
and I wouldn’t trade it
for a fucking Cadillac.”
—Johnny Thunders

The oldest story is you found some money on a sidewalk
or a newspaper clipping changed your life.
On the other hand boredom,
the kind that left you notorious.
Today and an Italian heart,
the only things that can be relied on,
and your blur leaves a growl in the air, a bruise
like rust. And you, too short to be Johnny Cash,
were born loose in the city of fuss,
New York with all its gloves on,
your heels in a twang-dance party.
There were days I sat blistered to the radio
wanting nothing but safety, a purely casual
form of art. Today, the domino neon in a TV store—
“Tubes Tested FREE!”—and I’d have anything but safety,
want that first love of a tantrum,
something to hang my nerves on.
February morning, a moist vex at the window,
frenzy turns the bolt weight of winter
elastic, shaking your fringe
a nude rain.

THE HE THAT COMES OVER ME
Heidi Hedeker

here is plastic impulsive
in your hands,
your sound a funk
like tractor, too much
dumb charisma
in the things I like,
too much talk of the deluxe—
“she was the ultimate Gothic look, honey”
“he has the meanest tongue on him”
“you look best in black”
“he is the biggest slut here, a real horse”
“he was the best dancer ever”
and he has the longest eyelashes,
like spokes, like Fred Astaire,
like bandits
he left cigarette holes in the walls
over the capsule-colored Princess phone
and he had a passion for burning everything
in the place
and wouldn't leave for a month,
kept himself shell-shocked with ashes
needing to keep himself away
from the woolly city
nothing exceptional
and flat as a scissor

MUSIC
Heidi Hedeker

I used to think jazz
would be the best music
to fuck to,
but now I know
it's better with no music on.
I've heard of
"the music of passion,"
but that could be sex
or jazz
or both.
My father's passion
is Muzak;
we took our Sunday drives
lounging in the loud ribs
of canned music.
Just touching the car's velour roof
was his Tyrolean hat,
giddy with its sculpture
of feathers and mountain pins.
No bull's ear from the matador
could fill my mother with wonder
as the sweeping arm of real estate
with its maternity of cows;
no crop could fill the lumbering fences
like the fevering Montovanni Strings.
Today she says country music
is the best for cleaning by;
real heartland music
and her arms go hectic.
I prefer the city
cleaning itself with sex and jazz,
a talent for its audience,
the token pains you
dance into.

TANGO MAGIC
Heidi Hedeker

You have found your heart
on a necktie,
a fat tongue
redundant.

You want nothing
and it's too much to ask—
too much rhyme in nothing,
too much style in nothing,
an upside-down breast
on the blond
in a passing billboard.

A wave of your hat.
The event of need.
“Advertising is equal
to poetry,” said Delaunay,
“our greatest novelty.”
But what is more spontaneous
than tires,
Pirelli tires in red fabric
that leave you slick
as a steaming baby,
bald and wild,
and poetry runs clean
cold as an Atlantic cable.

The poet notices
nothing,
a man who wants nothing but
a girl on his front lawn
like a sleeping comet;
wants nothing but notoriety,
while the poet wants fame.
I am pausing in the event
of nothing,
a fire-cast shadow
wilting beneath the heat of cameras,
holding onto my bootstraps
without representing
the colored rhythm of the crowd
in my tossed scarf.

BIG WORDS
Heidi Hedeker

I

The big words have come due.
They have left loyal
small talk,
and they are full of brawl
like a street corner horn trio
leaving a plate
for your lustre.
I never want to learn anything
I can't use at a cocktail party,
you say.

II

"He's so full of himself
he thinks the world revolves
around him."
"Solipsism, I believe,"
the bartender said,
as if to repeat
his obsession.

III

Big words
thrown over you
in a weep.
I dreamt damp crush of Iowa
under you,
the gun-flash
of an eight-room
motel
shoved over the blare of soil
until your back
was thrown open,
an almanac
full of thorns,
a word too big
for anxiety.

LAKE MICHIGAN
Janet Schmidt

aqua blisters
float
on weary water
no longer angry
but exhausted
from beating down the sidewalk
of the city
get back
don't push
overflowing is one of the things done best

you watched
wondering if water thinks out its actions
"definitely,
and it dreams
painfully pink fantasies
of flowing free"
I answered before you could ask

funny how I hear
you hear the ocean
hear the sidewalk scream
from its beating

let's walk
barefoot
sand squirming
beneath us
appreciating our touch

POEM FOR TRISTAN TZARA

Steve Glabman

“I’m in heaven when you smile”;
When existential clouds spill themes of
1960—Among the naive windows
Of Chicago—Or a sad sun beats on a N.Y. sidewalk.
Present day predecessors starve like
The hairy darkness—A Dick Vermeil defense—
A bright red losing end—It seems silly—
But his consciousness took the gist
And shortened it, on *his* own merit.
Heaven was becoming an international dictionary;
Everything took on two meanings,
Systems were shared by science.
It was beyond body and belief, but
This was a new age of not getting together.
The sad bad babes, splitting hairs over soup,
Gave way to strict parallels, Avoidance therapy.
Anxious collage of posters on the wall,
Seen sideways, leading into self confidence,
Gave a new performance, a new hairstyle,
A new heaven for your smile.

GLOBALISMS
Harriette Porter

You swept into my freshly pierced ears with whispered silence
Your song was organized coolness
You took center stage in my salubrious warmth
appealing to my impulsive off-beat tempos
in mid-July, '86
While Kwame Toure
known then as Stokeley Carmichael
screamed on the 6:00 news:
Black Power!
 Nationalism!
 Marxism!
 Baptistism!
 A.M.E.'s!
 A.K.A.'s!
Black god!
Brown god!
Yellow god!
No god!
You welcomed me into the Cool School of 'Trane'
Monk
and the International highways of globalisms
You explained why the Great Zimbabwe is "Great"
You made a hand-drawn landscape with love of our
ancestral sod and placed it at the pit of my heart.

HELP

Lisa Gushiniere

There is a witch in the office
who eats ambition and drops
chemicals in coffee that causes
the boss to make passes at girls
that don't remind him of his wife
at all.

There is a witch in the house
who dances on T.V. and puts
drugs in Jimmy that causes
mom to drink and hit the baby
who didn't do anything
at all.

There is a witch in the world
who lives in some thoughts and gives
ignorance to all and causes
us to follow one who knows nothing
at all.

Beat the witch.

OVER THE MOORS

Vlado Ketchens

Under the iron fence
we slept,
and in the bed
the body count 22
and rising.

His shadow still remains
on the bathroom wall.
This mirror no longer
reflects a clean face.

Oh, my hands are stained
with vanity for an evening,
TWILIGHT'S FIRST GLIMPSE.

I wear a mask of happiness
but under it is black; the streets are cold
like the nights and there's no
turning back.

She walks in like a martyr
but I see through that phase,

and his shadow still stands in the
doorway.

OLD BLACK DRESS

Jeff Kerr

In my closet,
don't know. Don't know
hell anymore.
Black
old and web-torn.
Sun
and day,
not out of sheetless
bed
until burning 2:00 afternoon.
Closing ventricle
don't believe in love,
she
don't believe in love.
Somewhere
a line. Remembered
old man, Irish,
a drunk Catholic in a nursing
home.
Line went something like,
I'm pretty sure it was:
"Clay is the word and
clay is the flesh."
Yeah. My own flesh is
dirty and tired
2-week-old garbage:
a sweaty paper grocery bag,
wet coffee grounds,
frog liver, green beans,
wiped-out whiskey bottles.
Old lazy things.
Weaken up. Nightstand
still holds.
Warm cup of water. Can of Bud. Almost gone Jim Beam in a bottle.
Royalty.
Yeah and
honey,
I'm more than cloth deep.
Skin and candles.

Don't make me jealous,
not any of that.
Tuesday and a black
frail dress
hanging in my closet
getting darker every
broken-plate day.

HARDCORE JOLLIES
to George Clinton
Jim Newberry

this music is doing
terrible things to

my puny white mind

i'm finding it
difficult to breathe

i can't shake this over
whelming desire

you know it's not
as if one can run

from this no
you can analyze

this to your heart'
s content you can

question the meaning
of the word !FUNK!

go ahead i dare you to
see? it's not so simple

and why ask if you don't know

but listen spin this
lp and then tell me

what you think i think
it can't be discussed

only felt and i'm feeling
bad

JUST NOW AN ANGEL
R. J. Restivo

Just now an angel with
wings the size of cottage doors
passes in the yellow woods.
He's listening for the lake,
for its laze along the rock wall,
the smooth stones.
He raises his hand, his
eyebrow, "There!
Do you hear it?"

**PADEREWSKI PLAYED PIANISSIMO IN THE
MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT**
Kassie Rose

In the middle of the night I awoke
Thinking the click was the door,
Wondering dear God who would I call
911
Mom
Dial a Prayer
When closer the steps came across
Tiles
Rugs
Wood
And I thought of slipping under the
Bed
Dresser
Chair
Shivering, waiting,
While humming sweet Chopin nocturnes
To sort away wild fear,
With soft notes.
Bugs do the same, if you bend
Down close you hear their
Persistent hum
That makes life oh so sweet
With a leveled tune,
A barrier,
Against what they really hear.

PAPERWEIGHT
Amy Shuttleworth

This color
is the weight
of a breast
in a palm;
 a paperweight parted
 in a cliché heart,
bulging
in waxed
hues
like Campbell soup
boiling
rimmed with
paprika
and dark lost maroon wine
tunneling in the
navel of the pot-pan
fragrant like
rouged autumn
whistling in
woman's insides
and the cheekbones
redden
to this color:
the weight
of a breast
in a palm.

MIRÓ IN GENERAL
Amy Shuttleworth

In an empty ballroom,
lined with mantles
and yellow chipped railings,
no chairs,
one overturned wastecan,
 for a radio to pipe in the moon,
I'd ask you to dance
in front of the open baywindows.

I'd dance you,
hold you,
hug you to your
design; my feet print you on the floor,
 outlining your
 sketch
 in black charcoaled shoes
 which I take off
 for the pastel slippers
 to smear, shade
 the loops
 in your
 sketch
on the
ballroom floor.

POEM

Deborah Lamberty

Maybe I am somebody else
learning to touch
somebody else,
walking among the faces
like a mother
with cancer
seeing everything in commas and questions.
Yet I am waiting in the dark
for the dark
to open and
open,
for the irregularities of trees
and the opposite shore
looking how it looks.
I smile to myself.
These are the hungry years
all over.
This is me coming from
nowhere where I wear
white heat and God
all over,
changes I date and thread
in the thinness of seeing me with
these hands at my throat.
This is surely me
backwards
with air
waiting,
the way it falls silent
to the absence of nerves.

INERTIA
Deborah Lamberty

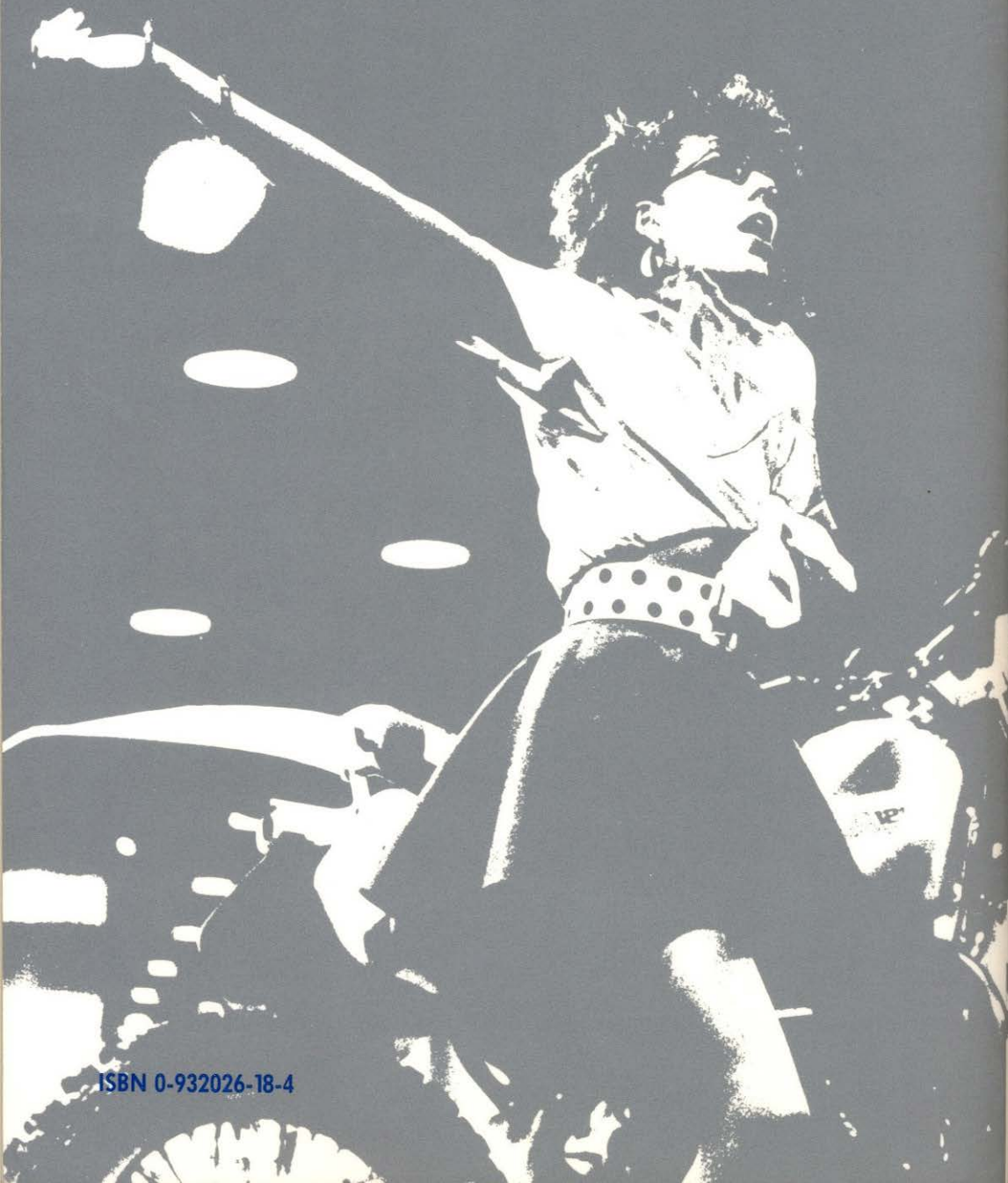
They say that evening
is dying
and every blue eye
is in Minnesota.
But it is the last seven years
filled with a summer stink,
abstract and amazing,
that ignorance is preventing.
The ignorance of Europe and solemn men.
The ignorance of sanitary relations
and stars' wild light.
The ignorance of a last chance
at suicide.
These are the reasons for ceremony,
the reasons I write in colored inks,
not nourishing anything
but pretty,
a last gasp turning into myself,
loving nothing
after twenty.
And I wake up already here,
talking to myself
like a headache,
white, naked pain as secret
as blood
and voices in another room
making me blink whenever
I faint
against me in air.

APRIL

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The edge of insanity
where fathers father
untoward the edges, sweat
back the memories of me,
a tight smudge on the future,
where everyone cracks when I enter
the edges, these edges when my sisters
were born to hold hands on their
honeymoon
and blister by sand,
where sex isn't Catholic
but the darkness in women
walking in water too warm to believe.

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