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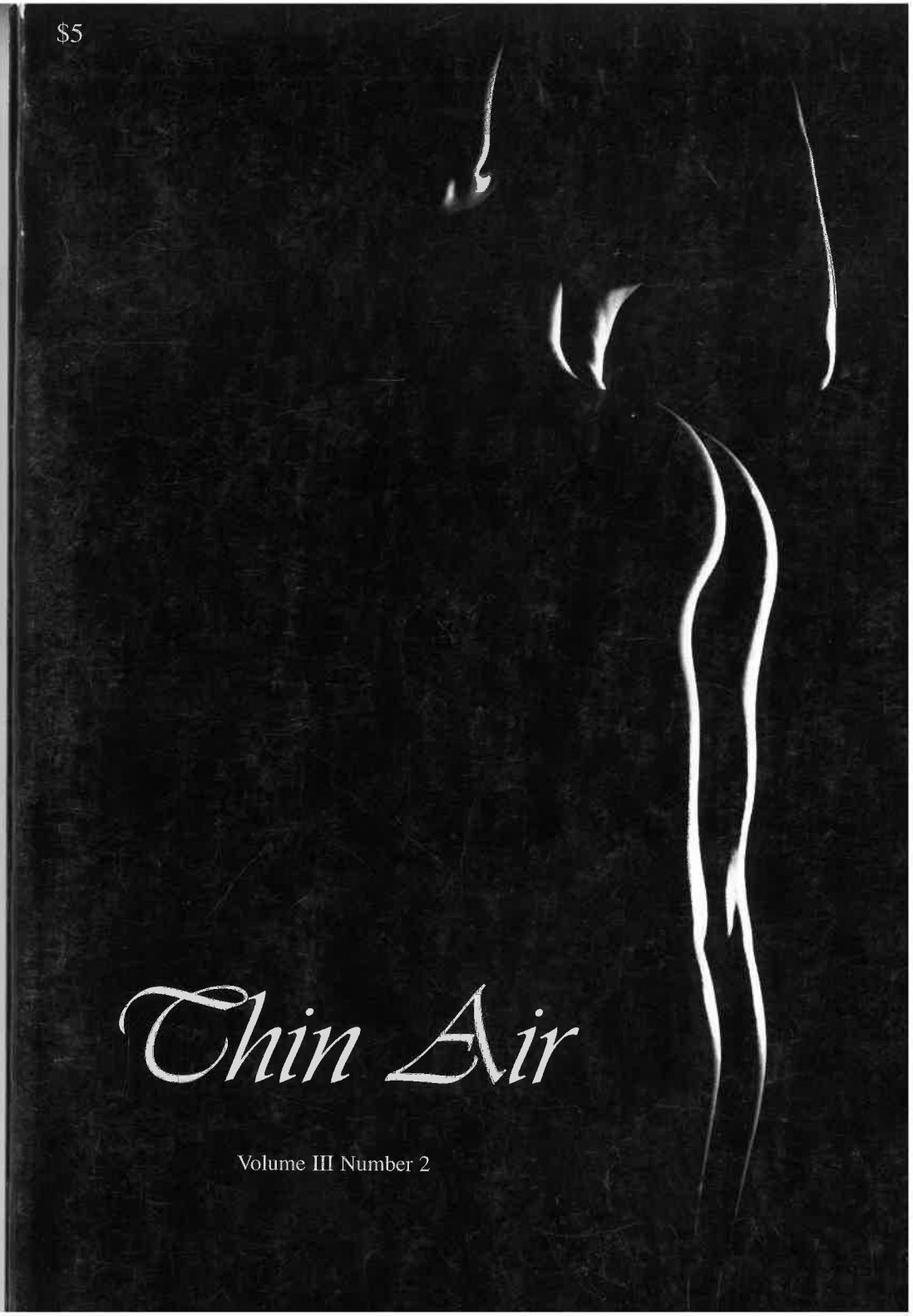

Thin Air

Volume III Number 2

Thin Air

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Northern Arizona University

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CONTENTS 1998

Of Silence and Scattering

Small black birds play leapfrog on the lawn
leaping over one another for crumbs.

They remain for a while doing their duty
diligently seeking the rest of food. Then,

in a half moment, the birds, all of them,
took suddenly to flight like wrappers in wind,

moved, at first, in a glob then separated into
black spastic dots darting thru the sky.

No one was around. I am a good forty yards
away. No cars or sudden calls from cat or dog.

They just flew into the depth of day, leaving
me alone with my own stirring and chirps.

I have spotted five people since the departure.
All of them solitary and throatless and strange.

MICHAEL SWEENEY

ALLEN GINSBERG'S SNEAKERS

My own life, scandal! lazy bum! Secondhand royal scarlet
ties & Yves St. Laurent Salvation Army blazers

Think of Walt in his opera suit & that wide-brimmed fancy hat & how you wept alone in China at his "desperado farewell," "who touches this book touches a man," of Burroughs who followed a season behind in his undertaker's garb, deadpan to the end, his Kansas backyard shotgun art splintered through MTV, through Nike & U2's "End of the World," "no choice but to write my way out," of young Jan Kerouac beat as memere, "when you go there use my name," peasant hands gnarled as her father's, beaten as Lowell itself on stillborn Saturday nights when lattice-grilles strangle the last drop of cheer from smokeglass storefront bars & no roman candles flower like spiders & no one's there to go "aww," of Huncke already gone a year who took the shirt off your back, who got you busted & trucked off to Bellevue but who you always took in no matter how strungout & "heartsick alone," "not till the sun rejects you do I," all your company's out on parole from their stretch on the Charnel Ground, their corpses nothing more than the cells they trashed to keep half sane, smeared graffiti on the walls & stopped the toilets up, set the mattresses on fire & chanted "all gone all gone all overgone all gone sky-high now old mind so Ah!" like nothing gets left behind, but my friend Mia's painting your sneakers & giving the canvas to me, some old photo from Life magazine that caught you on the fly 'twixt "Kaddish" & "White Shroud," she'll make those ratty black & white Keds glow like plutonium, they'll have a half-life long enough to say to your unborn sons just as I walk the Lower East Side this wind-swept April dusk, so will all of you walk, just as I climb these creaky stairs to my rent-controlled drafty rooms, so will all of you climb, just as I lay in my narrow bed & nod off forevermore, so will all of you nod, you can walk again in my shoes reading those scattered poems butchered out of my body "good to eat a thousand years," you were there & I'll be with you under bootsoles & grass, it all goes back to Walt, I'll be there waiting for you

SOFT

the soft part of
the afternoon when
the firebombings
have ended

when the bodies
have been pulled from
burning cars
and buried in
the tall grass

silence
or the sounds that
pass for silence

one cat asleep on
my lap
the other watching
from the windowsill

my father's friends
all staring down
the barrel of slow
alcoholic suicide

and for this
i smile

for this i consider
the possibility
of god

a lie of course
but told so openly
you believe it

THE NAME I WISH TO BE CALLED, THE STORY I WISH TO TELL

My bed is as wide as the river is long, from source to delta, crossing the land. The stripes of the sheets expand from end to end, stretching to the edge of vision and beyond. My bed could sleep a resting army, their figures neatly arranged on its soft surface, but instead it sleeps only me, my body small against its expanse.

In the morning when rays of sun press through the curtains of my room, May knocks, then comes in. "What shall I bring you this morning, Mister Villanova?"

I sink into one of my seventeen plush pillows. "I wish to be called Alexandra," I say, though I know she will never call me that. After a week, I will ask her to call me by yet another name, and she will not listen. I desire a name, any name, but not "Mister Villanova."

"What shall I bring you this morning?"

"Bring me a sugared pecan roll on a plate, and pieces of fruit—tangerines, strawberries, mangoes—in a china dish. And a cup of Darjeeling tea." She stands in wait. "Thank you May," I say, and she bustles out.

When she returns, she brings all I requested on a silver tray and places it on my night-stand. "There you are, Mister Villanova," she says.

"Please," I say, but she turns away from me to a window in the endless row by my bed.

"It is a beautiful day," she says. "A pity you cannot be outside to enjoy it."

I turn away from her, and begin nibbling on the roll. She gives me a look that implies pity, that she is lucky for being a servant, and I am unlucky for staying permanently in the bed. I try to ignore her.

She turns to me, and asks, "Is that good?" I nod and she leaves me behind. She shall not return until supper.

*

In the night, men and women sneak in through the windows and into my bed. I wake to their shadowy forms crawling over my bed, over me. Though my life is not a social one, at these times, these half-asleep times, I am happy to feel a warm touch, even though they crawl away, back and forth over the bed, as if I did not exist. Eventually they disappear through the windows; whether they climb down or fall, I do not know. Later it storms, and lightning momentarily illuminates a face, a man's face, though he is gone before the storm allows me to look again. I lie awake, waiting for him to reappear, but he becomes a shadow of memory, yet again.

I am alone the rest of the night, and asleep before sunrise.

*

In the morning I decide to tell May the first mystery. She comes in to take my tray and pauses. She seems to notice the roll is only half-eaten. She turns to go, but I stop her.

"May," I say, "I have a mystery for you."

She turns her head back. "Now, Mister Villanova?"

"Please. I wish to be called Violet."

She places the tray back on the stand. "What is the mystery?"

"There is a man who lives alone. He has a large bed, which he never leaves, and a maid who brings him two meals a day. He is not elderly or unhealthy, yet he never leaves the bed. All he sees of the outside world is the light which passes through his window."

May nods. "All right. So what is the mystery?"

"One morning, the maid comes in and finds the man

dead. What happened to him?"

She pauses, and stares off as she does when she's thinking. Then she turns to me again. "He must have tried to get out of the bed, and fallen to his death." She takes the tray and leaves the room.

*

While May is gone, I exercise by crawling the perimeter of the bed. I don't make it all the way around, but I make a considerable distance before crawling on a diagonal to the spot where I started. I would weaken if I stayed at the same spot. I cannot become soft, or helpless if I ever choose to leave the bed.

And I believe I will.

I turn to the side of the bed, and dangle my feet from the edge. They do not reach the ground, so I wave them back and forth, kicking the air before me. In time it becomes dark, and I must sleep again. There is nothing else to do in darkness.

*

When I tell May the second mystery, she has just brought my supper, a plate of wild rice with vegetables and mushrooms. The plate steams beside me as I announce the scenario.

"There is a woman who lives in a large house. The only other occupant of the house is a man who never leaves his bed. She brings him meals twice a day, but the rest of her days are free to wander the premises, the garden, the land. She brings him what he demands, and takes it away when he is finished. One day, she does not come to him. What happened to her?"

May pretends to be occupied in picking dust from the sheets. "She took a sample from a dish she was preparing for him, not knowing the mushrooms she picked were poisonous. She fainted on the sofa and died that night."

I look at the tray. "May, I do not wish to eat tonight. Take this away from me."

"Yes Mister Villanova," she says, and she is gone before I can reply to her.

*

It is clear tonight, and once again the faces appear at my window. I feel their weight on the bed, then their bodies climbing over me. I reach for them, but they do not seem affected by my touch.

Tonight, there are no flashes of lightning, only the steady glow of the moon, and the same man's face I saw the night before stands beside the bed. I see the face in silhouette. And now know he is not a man, but the ghost of a boy, a face I have seen many times before, but now the eyes vacantly gaze upon me, with none of the emotion I had seen. He turns to the window and in an instant jumps out of it. I listen for the sound of a plummeting body, but there is no sound. Then I know, I must tell May the third mystery.

*

"Please May, you need to listen."

"You," she says, "need to eat." She points to the untouched tray on my night stand. "What will become of you if everything I cook for you goes untouched?"

"It doesn't matter now, May. I have another mystery."

She looks away. "Is it important?"

"It is so much more important than the ones I told

you before."

"Well, then." She stops, and waits.

Before I can begin, something stops me. I shift in bed and try to force out the first words.

"There are three boys who live alone in a house on the ocean front. There they have food, and a safe place to keep warm when the cold breezes come in from the sea. They walk along the shore together, eat together, and even sleep in one bed, one large bed on the upper floor." May stares into space and I continue, "By the summer's end there are only two boys. What happened to the third?"

May says nothing.

"What happened to the third boy?" I repeat.

May says, slowly, "They had a boat."

"This is true."

"They—when the first and second boy tired of the third's company," May says, pacing, "they all rowed the boat out, under the pretense of catching fish. When they were far enough from shore, the two boys tied the third's hands with a strand cut from the fishing-net, and cast him into the water. Then they rowed in, knowing he would not return."

A cool wind blows in through the window. The rustling of the curtain is the only sound. May does not look at my face. After several moments, I say, "Thank you, May."

She breaks from her reverie. "Do you wish to eat your meal?"

"No." She turns and leaves, not taking the tray.

*

It has been a week since the third mystery. I have eaten nothing since. May has grown worried, a concern beyond fear for my health, lapsing into a fear for herself.

"Please," she says, "eat something. Take at least a piece of bread. I cannot take another full tray back to the kitchen. I beg of you."

And yet I stare at the window, where the ghost of a boy appeared before, appearing no more since the third mystery has been told.

"Mister Villanova, you must."

I turn to her. "I wish to be called Laura."

May bursts into tears. "Anything! Eat anything!" she cries.

"May, I have something to tell you. Come closer."

She wipes her face and stands at the side of the bed. I beckon her, and she leans forward, over the bed.

"Closer," I say.

She lifts herself onto the bed, directly beside me. I cover her with the blanket, and crawl over her as the ghost had. I feel her trembling beneath me, then I move away. I touch the floor gently, with one foot, to see how it feels, then the other. My full weight is on my heels, and I take a step forward.

"Come back!"

I must think of a name—Evans. I say, "Yes, Mister Evans?"

"I wish to be called May."

I face the bed again. "You are not May," I say, "not anymore. You are Mister Evans and you are staying in this bed. You know the rules. And now you must call me Laura."

She murmurs the name. "Laura . . ."

"What is it?"

"Please—leave the tray, Laura."

"As you wish."

SEARCHING FOR SIGNS OF YOU

Find it among the mud on the mussels,
eyes gray and sodden
from all that digging.

In the ambitious spade
cracking against the concrete
of unintended places.

In the back bent over
in a kind of cradle
and the grainy air washing
through it like silt.

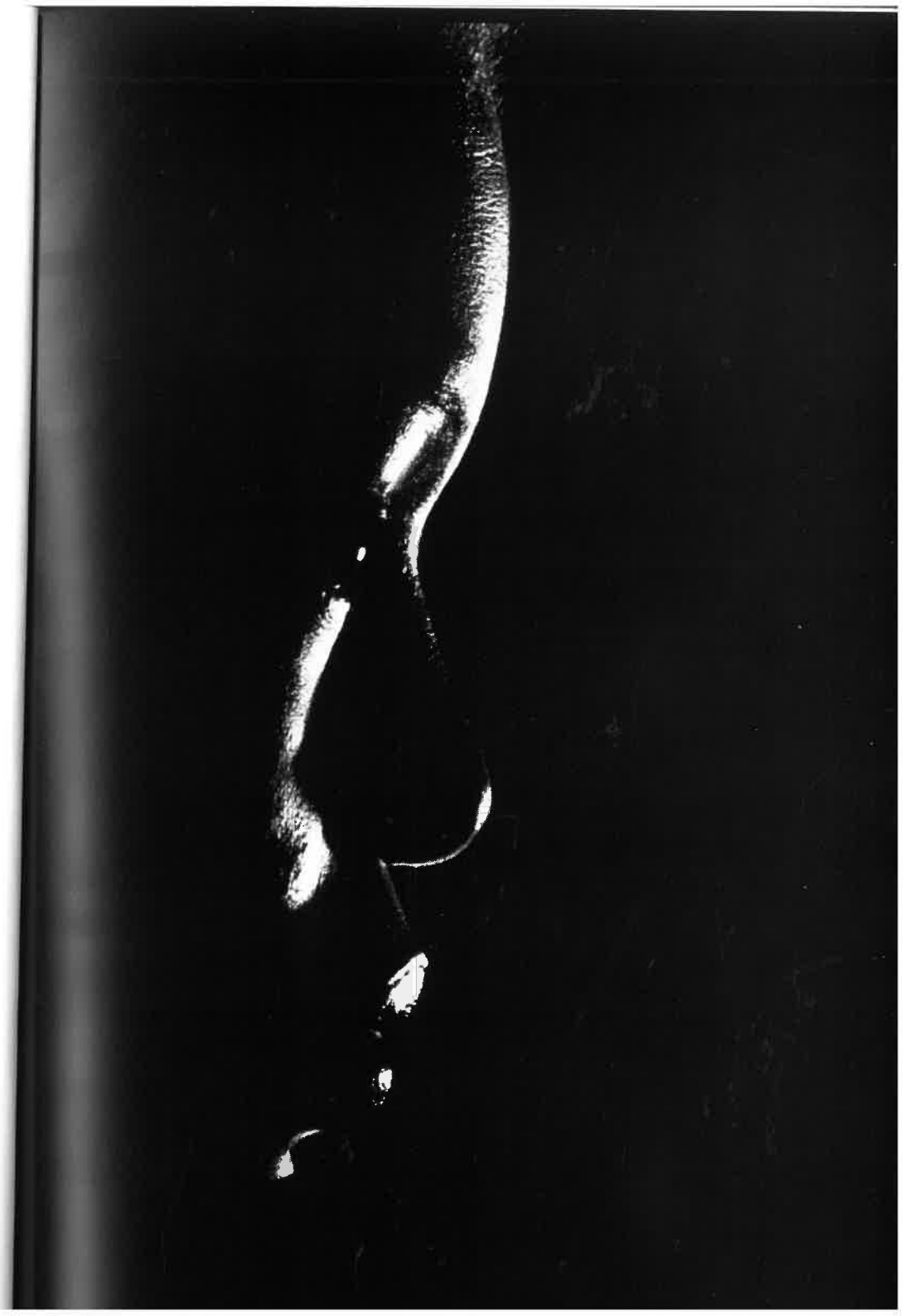
I am about getting down and dirty,
about tasting the emptiness
like rot on my tongue
even before I jerk it up
by its lusty, laughing roots.

Even as I hear
your footsteps on the stairs,
I am on the floor
with my nose
hard against the wooden meaning,
lick at its secrets,
tough and resilient,
with grain that goes on forever.

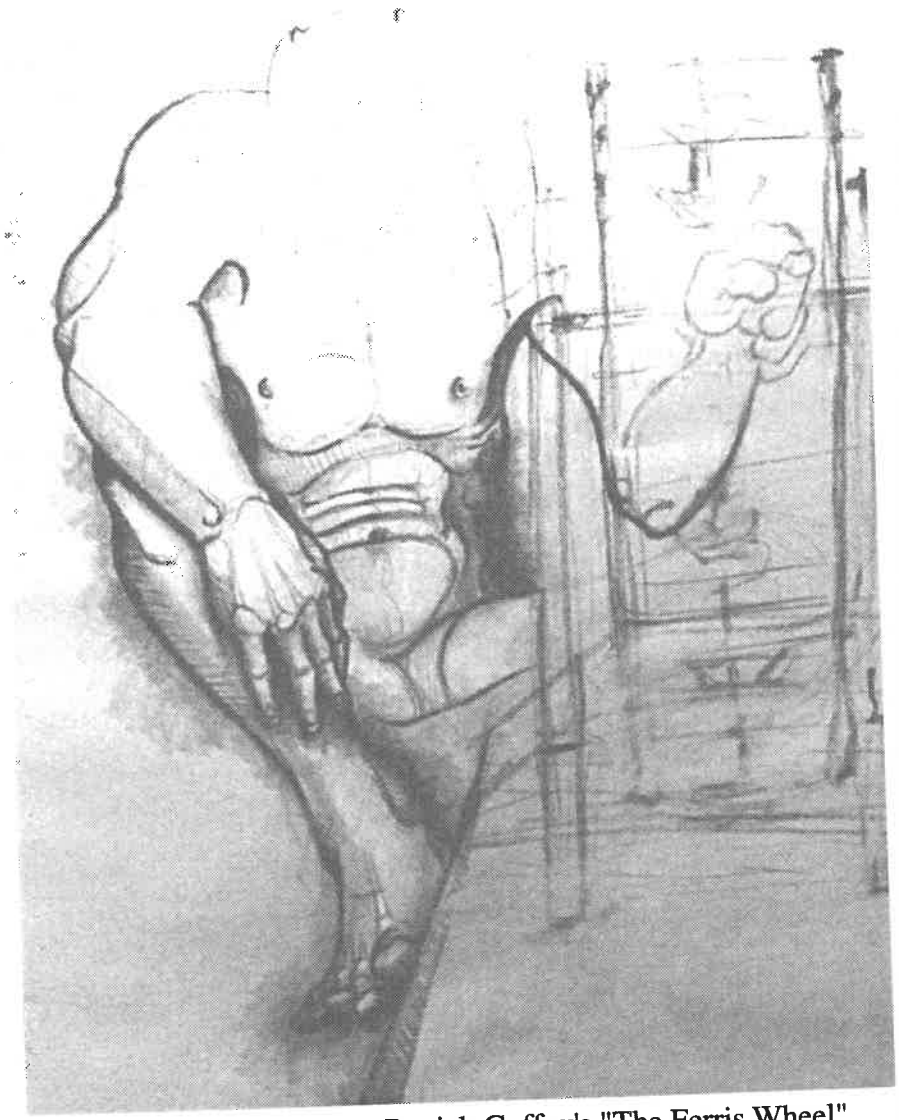
The Purity of the Line

Through the camera, Jean Vallette expresses his visions. The pictures are not simply fixed images in that light, color, and composition make them living images. Highlighting the curves of the body reveals the purity of the line. This technique of applying one light, one lens transcends appearance or va Au-delà du Paraître.

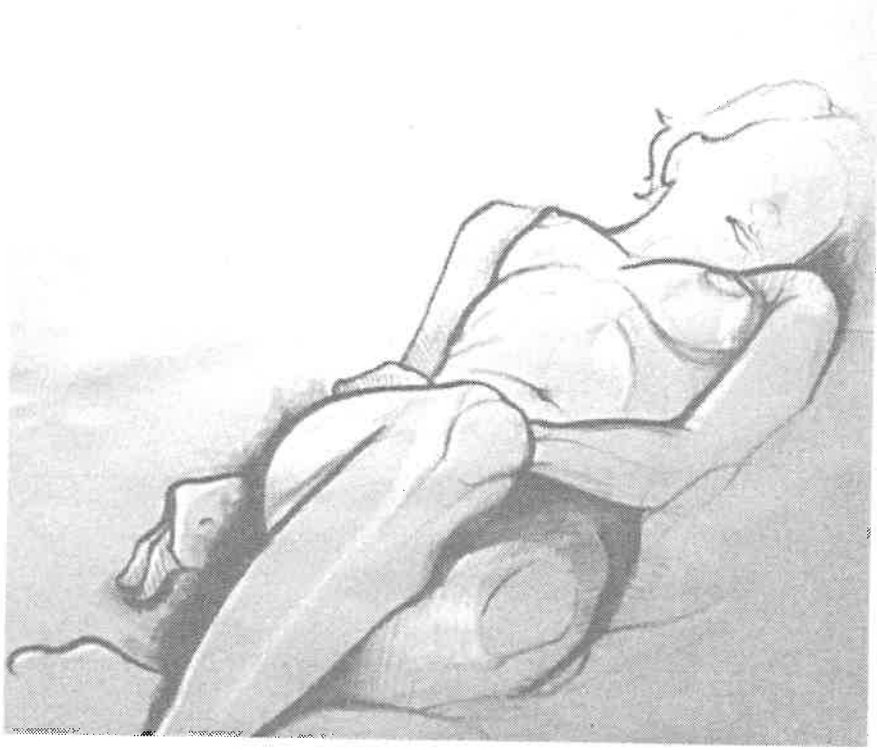
The following photographs are titled respectively: "Marcelle #3" and "Au-delà du Paraître #2, #1, and #7".



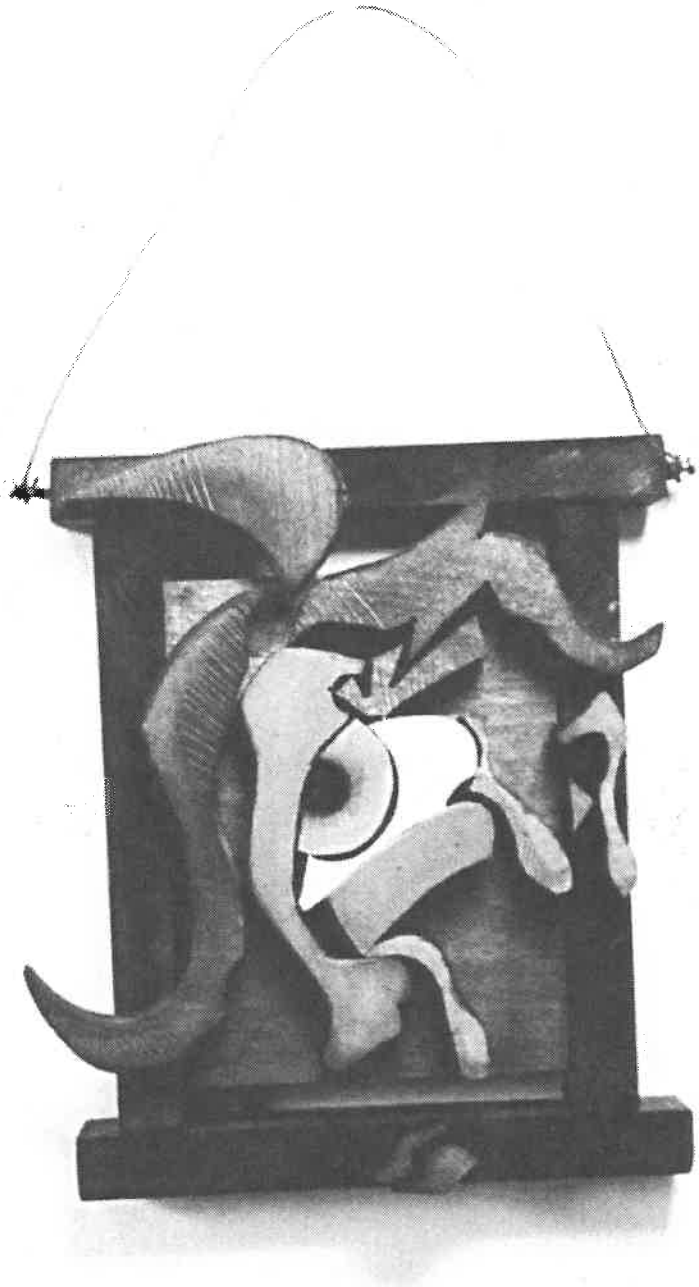
Patrick Coffey's "Man in Slumber"



Patrick Coffey's "The Ferris Wheel"

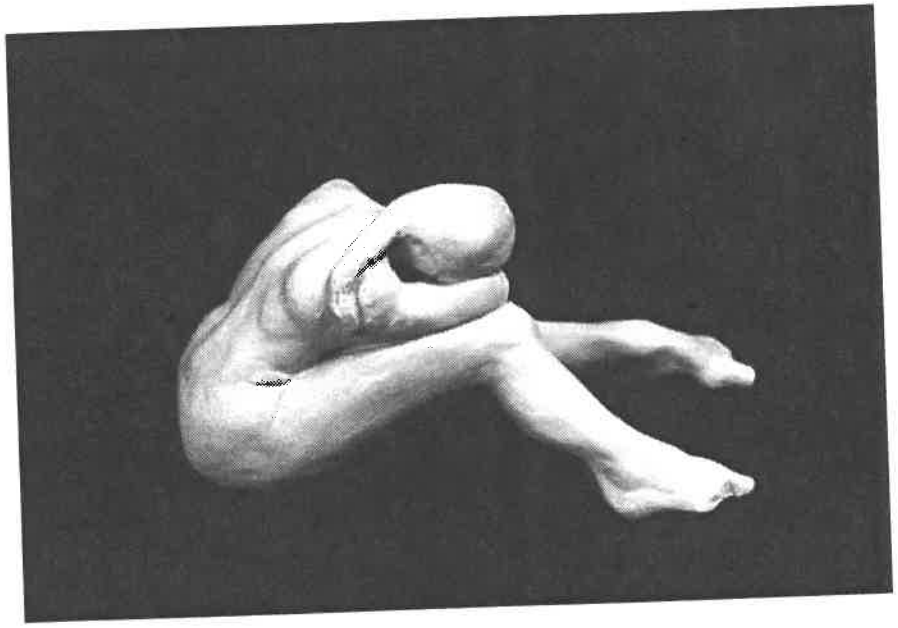


Patrick Coffey's "Nude Figure: Woman Reclining"



Patrick Coffey's "My Pain"

Patrick Coffey's "Untitled"



Patrick Coffey's "Despair"

NAMES

My name is the sound of birds
quarreling in the air
the flight of a crow driven
by sparrows. When you say it
the feathers are pure black.

What is the difference between
ravens and crows? The rook
holds its own between them.
This week, I am the scald-crow
with a name terrible as war.

This is my name, as well:
Green as sleep, as the
garden in which the black
snake curls up and about
the trunk of a barked tree.

Nothing that comes from air
is good. How the voice gasps
names, trying at the end
to pronounce the word,
or saved, as the tongue sticks
to the roof of the heavens,
the mouth.

There are messages we cannot
hear, and are not meant to.
Names that prevent us from
death and others that stop
love dead in its tracks.
Powerful words pronounced

correctly light fires on the
far hills, summon the gods to
our side. They do not serve us.

Remember. They have
their own fierce agendas,
warnings we cannot read
and we move like crows,
rooks, ravens into their hair
into their lives only to become
small fluttering bits,
words, scattered like paper.

HELL IS

a trailer house
outside Las Cruces, New Mexico

in August

with double-pane
windows

puttied shut

and no
electricity

3

My cane peeled clear
the way a morning sky
would bear more weight: this bird

weighed too much, feathers
like firewood, the road on fire
as if I were planting trees
that grow into crosses and the dirt
still blowing slowly across the wings
that stir, that crack —my cane

leaf over leaf each bird
holds on —a dry, bent branch
till something like a hand
guides step by step a place
the dirt will stop moving —the dead

everywhere listening for horns
for winds to curve their shadow
as the Earth each night this road
careens into the morning —the dead

hear nothing, they hear my back
that struggles like the sun
—they hear between my shoulder blades
something tries to lift this bird, they hear

another chance. It would be enough.
And my cane that sniffs the ground like a god
could here, here, here, call up a morning
no one, not even the sun, ever hears.

THE MAN AND HIS BOY

The sun makes everything in Oklahoma what it is. The boy always figured it made the sand yellow. A sick, dried-snot yellow that makes a person think of everything but the ocean. And it made the soil red like the heart of a dying man. Pale green was the only other color to be found out there, coming off the gaunt leaves of the trees and ragged patches of cooked sage brush. Or occasionally a dried-out thistle might raise up a purple top like some lonesome affliction dying to be noticed.

The old man had left him sitting there on the wooden stoop for over an hour, but the boy hadn't dared to move until he heard some sign of life from inside. So far, the only sign of anything had been the occasional neighing of a horse from down in the corral beyond the old hedgeapple tree.

A window was thrown open somewhere in the house. Without thinking, the boy put his hands on his knees and stood up from his seat on the back stairs. He pulled the dangling strap from his overalls over his left shoulder and wiped the back of a leather glove across his forehead to soak up some sweat. Through the open window he could hear his father yelling, his little sister's voice crying softly from a far room.

The wind carried a tumbleweed down Rural Route 1 over the gravel driveway. The boy's eyes followed its path until the scraggled mass of twigs finally lodged itself up under their mailbox. The busted record of his father's voice began to roll around inside his skull, "Get that damn thing off the postal box, boy. Get that damn thing off the postal box."

He looked towards the house again. There wasn't much sound from inside anymore. It was strange. Maybe the window had been closed. Mama's blue and white checkered tablecloth was drawn out on the clothesline over a small stretch of zoysia they called a yard. Next to the tablecloth

was his younger brother's bed linen.

Tom was nine and he pissed his sheets last night when their father came in yelling about the new horse not having any water in its trough. He got whipped for it too. Not because he'd played a part in forgetting to water the horse, but cause he'd pissed his sheets. Before the belt was brought out, Tom's father told him that pissing your sheets was for girls and faggots, and he wasn't raisin' no goddamned faggots in this house. Then this morning the old man hung the stained linens out on the clothesline so the neighbors could all see them as they drove by on their way to town.

The boy loved his little brother. Tom was only a kid and didn't yet fully understand the way it was with their father. He did already know enough to stay clear of the old guy whenever he could and to keep his mouth shut unless he was spoken to first. That was damn near half the battle. But the boy couldn't think about any of that stuff right now. He was too busy worrying about what the hell was going to happen to him.

The boy had been surprised at not getting whipped second last night. His father almost always whipped him second and about ten times harder than Tom, telling him he got the worst of it because he was the oldest and had to set an example for the others. But this time nothing had happened all night long. That meant something really bad was going to happen this morning. It was the only reason his father had gotten him up at 6:00 a.m., told him to dress for work and then made him wait on the back door stairs. Maybe he was going to get his legs switched with a bundle of sage brush out in the barn. Maybe he'd get whipped with a trainer's lash. All he knew was they never got dressed for work before church.

The boy looked at his watch. 7:15. He decided to walk down the driveway and pull out the tumbleweed from beneath the mailbox. At least it was something to do on top of the thinking. Why did they try and keep cows and horses in Alva in the first place? Horses belonged up in the real green of Missouri and Iowa where it must rain every week.

Why? It was a question the boy had started to ask himself a lot lately, but he never said it out loud. He'd seen the pictures of those other states in the family encyclopedia. That was how he knew that the sick sand in northwest Oklahoma looked nothing like the regular beach sand in Florida or California. Even the big dry Cimarron River that ran north of town didn't have regular sand. It was all blotched up with bloody pools of mud and streams of red dirt that ran down the banks like thin arteries cut open during a rain.

Halfway along the drive the boy suddenly began to feel sick to his stomach. Heated gulps of air had started moving down the back of his throat like the dry heaves coming up before you start to weep. He thought he was going to puke. He wanted to puke. But there was nothing to barf up besides stomach acid and water, so he did what he could and kept on walking. When he got to the mailbox he pulled the tumbleweed free and tossed it down into the irrigation ditch where it would snarl up on the barbed wire fence. Then he leaned back against the mailbox and looked up at the sky. The galvanized metal shape was good, warming against his shoulders. He tried to comfort his stomach by rubbing it.

He started thinking about the dumb-ass hick town kids his own age gnawing on beef jerky and chewing tobacco in the dirty alley behind the barber's shop. The community hunting trips every young man was expected to go on, riding around in the back of a pick-up truck relishing the opportunity to blow away some damn rabbit or hawk, or whatever the hell else there was to fire a rifle at. He thought about the fat white propane tanks that sat in everybody's front yard, about the stupid-ass rodeo, church functions and dress-up parades in the town-square.

His household had been nominated Presbyterian Fam-

ily of the Year back in June. They had to take a picture for the front page of the Alva Gazette. God, how he'd despised that. The image of his father standing there all dressed up and smiling responsibly behind the four of them was relentless. And what was most sickening about it was the fact that the whole town loved the old bastard. They thought he was a "real good guy," a community-oriented sort of citizen. The entire thing made the boy want to run and run and run and never stop until he was a million miles away from everything that had ever existed in his life. In two years he'd be fourteen and could get his learner's permit. Then he'd steal a hay truck and drive away until he reached Kansas City or Omaha and could get a job working on...

"God damn it, boy! Didn't I tell you to stay on the back stoop?" The voice came out like a piece of dried trash caught up in the breeze.

The boy wheeled in terror. His father stood outside the back door of the house. The man's tall, slender figure was nearly black, framed there in silhouette by the morning sun rising slowly behind him. He loosely held the center of an oversized baseball bat between the fingers of his right hand. Every few seconds he would twirl it round like a drum majorette's baton. His right leg was casually spaced off at a bit of an angle from the left hip which cocked itself slightly outward to gain a more comfortable stance. He wore his favorite pressed khaki slacks and a light blue, double-breasted Sunday vest over a heavily starched oxford dress shirt buttoned up unnecessarily tight all the way to the top with no tie. The wide brim of a Stetson worn low made it difficult to see the man's eyes. Only holes made themselves visible above the wind-torn grooves in his skin.

The boy could already tell as he ran back towards the house, his father was smiling. The sight of the man's thin, pursed lips made him feel sick to his stomach again like he might really vomit this time. But he couldn't stop running. He had to explain.

The man's smile dripped away as the boy approached. "Can't you do anything right?" he asked.

Out of breath, the boy ran up and stopped short, immediately in front of his father. The sweet stench of cheap cologne smeared itself into the air.

"I saw that a tumbleweed had gotten up under the mailbox again and figured I'd get it out before you saw it."

The man straightened his posture and let the baseball bat slide down until the base rested in the palm of his hand. "I tell you to chase tumbleweeds or wait here on the back stoop?"

"To wait, sir."

"Welp, there you go. It's just because of this kinda' ignorance that we gotta go do what we're gonna do this mornin.'" He shook his head in disdain. "So, less you have a somethin' else brilliant to say, let's head on down to the corral."

"Yes sir."

The boy put his hands in his pockets and fell in behind his father, following him silently across the scrubby field that stood out in front of their barn. His father twirled the bat again and began to cheerfully whistle "Bridge Over the River Kwai" as he strolled along. The other horses and cattle were out on the range except for the new mare which the man had purchased day before last. She was chained to a cement training block in the middle of the corral.

As soon as he'd saddle-broken her, this mare was intended to be the boy's first animal. He hadn't been able to come up with a name yet. Maybe Sunflower. He'd also wanted to call her Hodgepodge because of the brown and white mottling on her coat. Appaloosas were the old steeds of the Plains Indians and that added a peculiar sort of mystique to the breed which the boy found irresistible. He thought this particular animal was quite subdued for only being two

and a half, yet she definitely had a unique intensity about her as well. She was wise, he decided. Not like the cheaper Quarter horses his father usually purchased at the October farmer's market over in Enid.

The man reached the gate to the corral and started unfastening the two bolt locks which held it shut. He leaned the baseball bat against the lowest wooden plank in the first section of fence. Beside it was a double-barrel, twelve-gauge shotgun which usually rested in an oak gun rack on the wall above their kitchen table.

The boy stood motionless on the cracked soil just beyond the shade of the old hedgeapple tree. The scene before his eyes began to revolve in slow motion like a bad dream moving through warmed-over molasses. The sun was coming higher in the sky now and he could sense the masses of hot air churning painfully in the open spaces around him. Enormous white clouds drove themselves north across the blue morning sky and a place inside of him reached out instinctively, desperately trying to grasp the familiar momentum of time. But there was nothing. No meaning to any of it.

"Father..." he said.

The man turned abruptly to look on his boy. The sun shone directly in his eyes, revealing for an instant the sort of hollow simplicity and freedom one might expect to find in the lonesome gaze of an angel. His pupils were lean, black needles. The hazel green tapestry behind them seemed soft and unwilling to relent any scrap of its serenity. Then the brim of the Stetson fell and the light was cut away.

"I ask you to talk, boy?"

"No sir, but..."

"Then don't say another word or I'll give ya' a good one. Now you're here to watch and learn a thing and that's all there is to it, right?"

"Yes sir."

For a second the boy had wanted to say that Tom was the one who was supposed to water the horse, that they'd made a deal and Tom was to take care of the mare if he'd throw scratch for the chickens and check the windmill for the cows. But he knew what that would mean for Tom. It had been the first time. Besides, neither of them were going to forget again.

The man left the gate to the corral open and walked towards the center of the enclosure where the horse was fastened to a heavy metal ring set level with the ground. The ring was bolted to a block of buried concrete. The mare began to snort and strain backwards against the thick leather straps of her halter as he approached. Her ears flattened and she kicked up her legs, throwing clods of dirt and sand into the air, flailing to break free. The three-foot section of chain made a nauseating grinding sound as it worked itself around the rusted perimeter of the ring. It was too short to allow her to look backwards or use her hooves in defense.

As the man began to circle round the horse he let the baseball bat fall down off his shoulder to flow freely through the air. Then he charged, swinging the big bat up high, bringing it down across the right side of the animal's head directly below its eyes. That first strike cracked open the long bony septum. The flow of blood was instantaneous. The mare was dazed, shaking her neck back and forth convulsively, still straining wildly against the chain. The man didn't have to move two feet to position himself for the second blow. This time he got her on the other side of the head, smashing the heavy length of wood into the dense meat of her jaw muscle. The third came down square on the horse's skull between the ears, making a dull thud that brought her lunging to her knees. Then the man crushed in her septum again in the exact same place, causing more blood to spurt onto the ground. A dirty brown puddle began to pool in the dust beneath her head, mixing up with the frothing saliva that dribbled from the corner of her mouth. With each gasp for air the red spill bubbled

higher and higher in jets, spewing forth over her body and the soil.

The man waited a few seconds, watching the animal's form twitch helplessly beneath him. He cocked his head to one side like a curious dog, calmly observing the rhythmic spasms of her rear legs, how they scarcely even pushed up now, just shaking, barely able to hold her rump in the air. His face was stripped clean like a painter's new barren canvas full of nothing, the motions of his body almost graceful as he made the decision to walk around to the horse's left side and swing the bat across the bridge of her back with all his strength. And as the vertebrae in her spine snapped, the rear legs came sinking down like simple sticks made of wet rubber.

After a few seconds had passed the man jerked his head up, remembering something important. His voice was low and even. "Bring me that twelve gauge, son."

The boy had seen it all from twenty feet away through the open gate. His jaw quivered slightly. His eyes felt the biting sting of the salt in his sweat. All he could do was stand and get the gun.

The man extended his right arm without even looking at his boy, keeping his eyes fixed on the horse.

Once the weapon was resting in his hand, he glanced over and smiled vaguely. Then he turned off the safety, cocked the shotgun once, stood back, and blew a hole the size of a grapefruit through the mare's neck. Big droplets of blood flew through the air and splattered over both father and son.

That was it.

The boy squinted at the moist baseball bat caked with red dirt lying on the ground in front of him. He could taste some of the horse's hot fluid as it trickled over his lips. He licked it with his tongue, bringing it in, sensing its thickness and flavor, and for the first time he noticed that he was crying. His father stood beside him without speaking, focusing intently on the mare's mutilated carcass. His double-breasted vest, khaki pants and starched white shirtsleeves were speckle-painted with red points of blood. In his right hand was a shotgun.

Finally the man cleared his throat roughly, spit on the ground, then looked at his boy and said, "We got to get ready for church, son."

The boy just sniffled, wiped some snot off onto his gloves. He could still smell his father's cologne, newly mingled with the lingering scent of fresh horse death. The flies were gathering and he watched them land on the body. He wanted to run and brush them away, but couldn't.

As they walked out of the corral up under the shade of the old hedgeapple tree past the barn, his father turned and said, "What is wrong with you? It's a dead fuckin' horse. Get over it." And the boy felt the sun on his skin.

TWO A.M.

I arrived home late to witness
my father sitting by himself in the living room
while my mother slept upstairs.
He was sitting in his orange easy chair,
next to the staircase,
in his yellow bathrobe with the frayed belt
pulled tightly around his diseased waist;
his pale white legs extended,
his feet sunk into the orange ottoman.
He sat there reading,
a small halo of light illuminating
a thick hardbound in his lap,
listening to music, baroque,
from an old record on his Hi-Fi,
the volume low in the deep of night,
his dandelion-white hair bristled in clumps,
his skin translucent in the soft light.

I paused, then said goodnight,
and he looked up from his book
to wish me a good night.
Drifting off into the dark,
I heard his sad stirrings,
his ceaseless pacing,
like a tattered moth caught
between screen and window
as daylight approached.

A DAVID SKOLFIELD LOVE POEM

Your aunt sees God and though He sends His orders through spiders, we're relieved that her cutlery stays neat. God has not yet told her to harm. It must be a family thing: your mother can't stand to let grass grow in the yard. Our 40 years brought miracles and blessings, all small and unpretentious, the way you lived while the dozen jelly donuts made an unforgettable mess on the windshield. Isn't it odd how we're given knowledge in symbols, or so your aunt believes as the latest spider skates across her chin, legs waving like air traffic control to the heavens.

It's not that I think of you as a pile of donuts, but how a faster speed might have brought the windshield to you.

All I'm saying is slow down.

I've bored you with how ping-pong spawns love. Standing outside your mother's dorm I realized that if our date at the rec hall was reality, we'd marry. Love is like a lot of things but I never imagined two paddles. What I haven't told you is who won that first set on the snap of a backspin, the ball smacking squarely in the center and doubling back toward the net, causing one player to dangerously lean toward the other. She loved my poetry first. She loved my odd little family with too much time in the mission field and everything hanging on the hereafter, a word that on the surface makes promises: a future in the same place.

When you were eight we camped out west, forgetting that tarantulas sleep in cool recesses like forgotten spoons. I wonder how much of that scared you, or if it was the ride to the bottom of the

Grand Canyon where your mule tripped over the lip
of the path. It was my hand that shot like instinct
and grabbed you, made you let go of the airborne
mule.

REFLECTIONS ON THREE GREAT POETS

Walking from Seattle's Taco del Mar, trying to keep down
salsa'd halibut in gummy tortilla, I read rock venue paste-ups:
Rancid Sublime Garbage—jesus, what a beautiful final poem
for Bukowski; pre-death Hank circumcising a discount Macanudo
with one nip of chipped eyetooth, stink-umbrella hovering above
his San Pedro hot-tub, his black sparrow grunting out golden eggs:
rancid sublime garbage.

When I think of fraud, of the utter destruction of poetry, of pure
unadulterated human shit—well there you have Ted Hughes. Unable
to write, he tortured Sylvia, who could, who for god knows what
reason allowed this misogynist prick to knock her up & make her old
blowzy & self-disgusted & destroy the best voice since Auden.

My filbert is dying; I'll miss it and its helicopter blooms. Last night
some drunk asshole ran over my split rail fence, which can be replaced,
and shattered my fifteen year-old Japanese maple,which cannot. I
pressed two of its best leaves—one still green, the other mostly red—
inside my father's gigantic gaudy Reader's Digest Bible.
There's a decent poem in the life of that tree—Bill Stafford could've
coaxed it out. Stafford, my god what a loss, what a crowned life.

WINONA

There are some memories that replay themselves to the degree that they become definitive of one's existence. They are the big moments: a graduation, an exotic journey, a time when the eyes of a crowd are approvingly focused on you, your cliched fifteen seconds of fame. These remembrances are the stories you tell others to help them understand better who you are, or were. They serve as your story and as a rebonding ritual with old friends.

This is not about one of those memories. This is about memories that are no less defining, but only seem to come into your mind very rarely. When they appear, you wonder just where the hell they have been lurking. It is comparable to going through a closet that has been lying undisturbed since you moved in. It is amazing what you can find. Things appear that you have managed to live without, but must have been important or you would not have kept them in the first place. At least you thought they were important at the time.

It was from this more obscure branch of my memory that a past vision recently made itself known. It was from three or four years ago. I had been living in Flagstaff, Arizona and regarded it strongly as my home. My memory is of an early morning. I had been camping near Winona. It is a small town, if you can even call it a town. Mostly, it is a freeway exit ten miles east of Flagstaff. The spot at which I awoke was my friends' and my common party spot. The area included a blackened circle ten feet across from our many grandiose white-boy fires and, on this morning, a liberal carpeting of spent Olympia beer cans.

The evening before was not especially memorable. I awoke alone, and I do not recall any particularly heinous bout of vomiting before bedding down. The evening had just been good friends, cheap beer, and sporadic fire from the barking assault rifles we had been carelessly playing with. The night had taken its rightfully raucous course, but now it was morning.

It was cold. It always is, regardless of season, at dawn in Winona. The sun had not yet peaked over the horizon and the sky moved from dark blue in the west, to a paler shade in the east. No pinks, reds, oranges, or even clouds were present. It was the kind of sunrise I have only seen in the bone dry, high altitudes of northern Arizona. The juniper trees stood in dark silhouette against the brightening sky, not yet showing color or definition. My companions were not showing color or definition either — a scattered collection of huddled bodies amongst the wreckage. I have seen photos from Gettysburg that looked similar.

Nobody else was awake. If they were, they were hiding in their sleeping bags like myself. It was too cold to sleep, but definitely too cold to get out of the bag. I reached for my bottle of water and found there was still some liquid surrounding the ice block. I drank. It took away enough of the cotton and past to give some comfort.

As I sat there facing the lightening outlines of my friends, I was struck with a few moments of frightening insight. I was right where I was *supposed* to be. The place, the moment, the hangover, the cold, the friends: all was following the cosmic script. It was clear that, at that point in time, all was as it should be.

It is odd that such a memory comes to me now, for I am moving back to my old home in two days. Perhaps the memory helps me to justify the move. Even if only to myself. I doubt most of my family would find much solace in the fact that I am drawn back to Flagstaff due to memories of waking hung over in a field. It isn't about the

drinking, though; it is about place and community. Of this I am certain. A sense of community and sacredness of space are the two things which I have been unable to cultivate in my new home here on O'ahu.

This alienation from place has overridden any mythological notions about Hawai'i as paradise. While I certainly understand that to people born of this island it is sacred space, I have only experienced the great rush of mechanized Honolulu. It is a city like any other, caught up in the rampant destructive progress of industrial modernity. Here I feel as rigidly channeled as the Manoa Stream which flows by my apartment in straightjacketed embankments before being left to die in the stagnant Ala Wai Canal. I know that many people fight development here as I did in my native land, but solidarity in more than spirit is difficult here. My heart just isn't in it and this disturbs me greatly. I run into the dilemma of whether I believe in fighting for an idea or for a place.

I think the answer to that is that I fight for a place, my home. This feeling of attachment to a place has certainly caused some serious trouble this century. Often an allegiance to place has been hijacked by nationalists to promote a hatred of people "not from here," "not like us." I think, however, that when a sense of place is combined with a tolerance for different expressions of living and cultural diversity it is a powerful means for resisting the homogenizing onslaught of the capitalist machine. I believe I can do more good and feel more grounded in northern Arizona than I can here in Hawai'i. Not only because of the peaks, the forest, and the smell in the air, but also because of my network of friends and family. This more than anything is what is pulling me from graduate school in Hawai'i and leading me to an existence of washing dishes in Flagstaff.

The perfection of that moment when I awoke in Winona, I believe, was due to the combination of the land and the social. Everything was, as they say in Hawai'i, "pono." Although that word is usually translated as "righteousness," it actually conveys more of a symbiotic relationship between the land and its people. It was the comfort of being in a community. We had all acted stupidly the evening before, but few, if any, words of judgment would ever be uttered. As in any community, squabbles always came up, but nobody was ever completely ostracized for anything. If a member of the community regularly got raving drunk, lied, locked people out of their houses, never returned records, slept with everybody, drank all the remaining beer, hid narcotics in other people's rooms, wrecked cars, started fires, threw chairs through windows, smoked all the dope, played Julie Andrews records until four a.m., puked on the heater, got everybody evicted from their houses, stole porch furniture, talked incessantly about Marx, or switched sexual orientation each week, you could hate them, but you were going to end up drinking beers with them two days later. A real "my people right or wrong" attitude. It is a little bit sick, but it is human nature. People want community. Unfortunately all they are offered in a mass culture is fame or anonymity. Either you are on TV, or you aren't. I do not think people actually crave fame, they just fear the total anonymity only modern society can provide.

I believe I felt so right in Winona because of this tribalism. I was with my friends *in our place*. Ultimate security. All these people out there with their nuclear families, in fenced yards, in gated communities, in well-policed suburbs, want that security too much.

It must be remembered, however, that divorces do happen, the police are not there when you need them, and "your" house can be taken away by the bank in the blink of

an eye. These suburbanites traded away all their freedom for the comfort of security, and as Ben Franklin postulated, they neither got nor deserved either. Their only reward is a placeless existence alienated from history and community. Clinging only to the empty promise of a better tomorrow through progress, they're scared. Who can blame them?

I understand now the message that old memory was sending me. The Polynesians regularly named the new islands they settled on after the original paradise of creation, "Hava-iki" (or some linguistically altered variation such as Hawai'i, Savai'i, Tahiti, etc.) This is because they understood, as I believe I now do, that paradise is not a place to which you can go, it is only a place to which you can return.

That morning in Winona I had my friends, my community. I had my spot on the earth to which I had a title that no one could take from me. I had the entire Colorado Plateau sky. I even had one more can of Olympia.

Notes on Contributors

John Bidwell is a poet from Tucson, originally born in Shawnee, Kansas. He lives in a basement apartment and doesn't enjoy cats. He does, however, appreciate grizzly bears and Wagner.

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Patrick Coffey is currently obtaining a BFA in Graphic Design and Illustration. He is graduating from University of Arizona in December 1998. He ultimately hopes to achieve entrepreneurship in the publishing business.

Sasha Davis currently lives in Flagstaff, Arizona where he avoids dishwashing jobs by pursuing a Master's Degree in Rural Geography at Northern Arizona University. He spends his spare time mountain biking, frolicking with his golden retriever, and instigating the coming revolution.

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John Grey writes to us from Providence, R.I.

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Jean Vallette was born in Morocco in 1951. He spent his childhood in North Africa and his adolescence in France. Vallette currently resides in Saint Martin, French West Indies. He has worked exclusively with a NIKON F2 body, equipped with a 105mm lense.

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Acknowledgments

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According to an exhaustive survey by the US Department of Education in 1993, over 90 million adults lack basic literacy skills. Here in Coconino County, the second largest counry in the US, 1 out of 3 adults is unable to fill out a job application, read a bed-time story to his or her child, and participate fully in the community.

Founded in 1992, the Literacy Volunteers of Coconino County (LVCC) is a full affiliate of the Literacy Volunteers of America, a non-profit organization dedicated to the challenge against illiteracy in our communities. Coordinated by a volunteer board of directors and sub-committees, with a part-time executive director and part-time work-study students, LVCC provides free tutoring in basic literacy and English as a Second Language skills. As the leading center for adult education and immigrant rights in Northern Arizona, LVCC also provides free technical assistance to schools, Head Start, small businesses, health clinics, churches and other community groups.

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Literacy Volunteers of Coconino County

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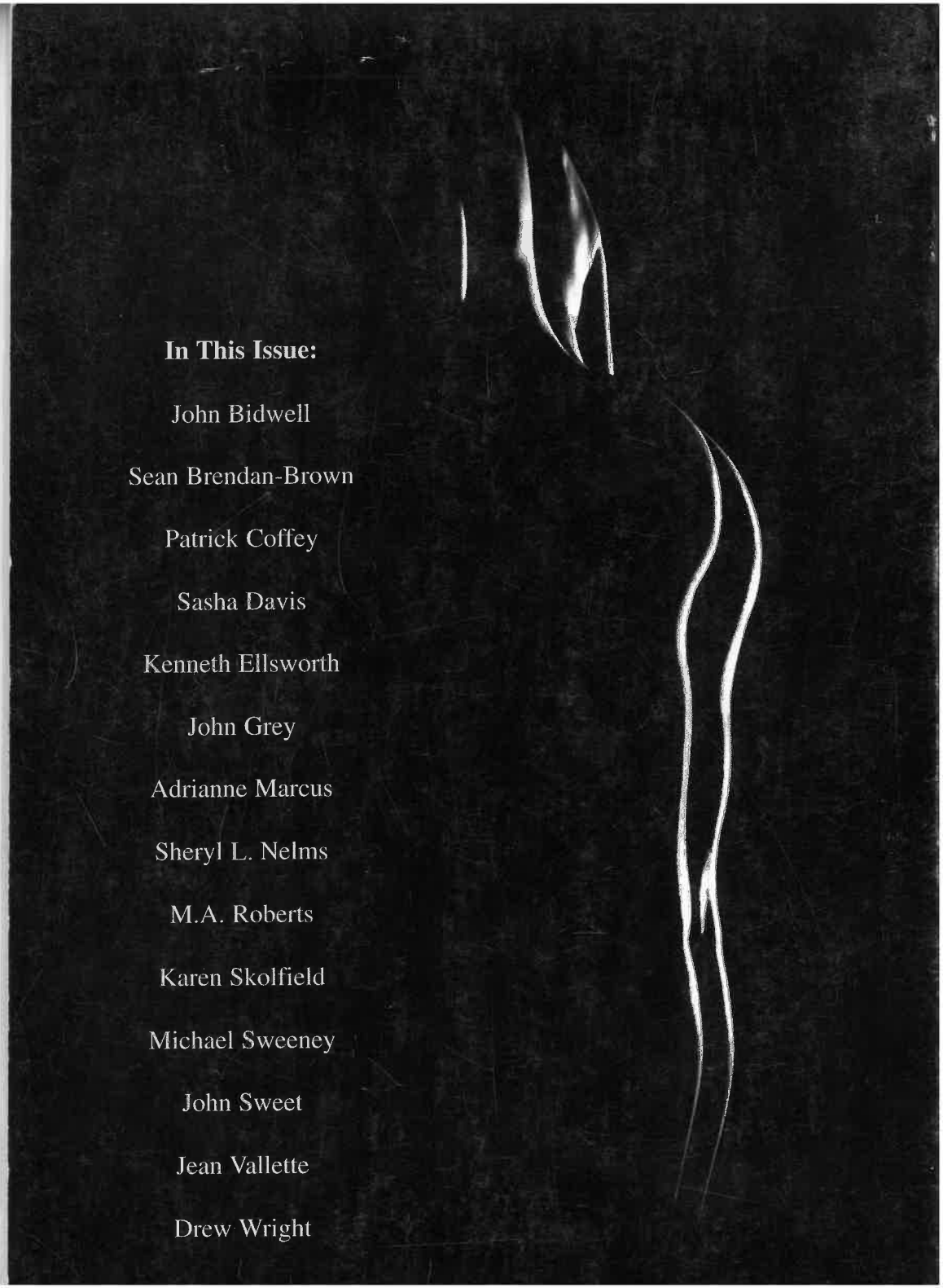

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