

CORNFIELD

REVIEW



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CORNFIELED REVIEW 1993

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SWIMMING

I

Black ants
and mosquitos
bite my legs.
Fish nibble
their way up my thighs.
Late at night
we swim.
And after,
bare breasts,
soft flannel.

II

The lights on the shore
are just closer stars
wrapped
in the black
lake of sky.

It is so still the ripples
stretch on above us
to rejoin the moon.

Trying to name the stars,
I say I see Virgo.
You say there are so many
triangles up there.

My head spins slowly.
There is nothing beneath my feet
but the fish swimming in the sky.

III

The young brave dove, ice autumn
water encasing him, stroke
for stroke to the island.

The Manitowish people
gathered a tithe of the harvest
loaded canoes and set out.

Two hundred years later
I follow their path.
It is summer, yet I gasp,
have to stop, float awhile.

Already sunning on the rocks,
you wave. I kick my legs,
stretch my arms, pull
this fragile body through the lake.

IV

I lie on my stomach in sand
and feel the mark along
each side of my gut
where hot beach stops
and cool air begins.

The sun scalds my back.
The waves boil in my ears.
My right hand holds a small shell;
my left clasps your thumb.

Your nose and one eyebrow
rise from the beach, corniced
in my Romanesque armpit arch.
A strand of hair crosses your cheek,
and I feel the moist hiss
of your breath on my arm.

I toss. I stare at the ceiling.
I can't get to sleep here
in my basement in Illinois.

V

Four miles out, a fog horn sounds.
Another fog horn halloos.
Two ships pass slowly,
port to starboard,
red and green.

On the beach
we search for their silhouettes
but see nothing except the sky
waving wildly before our eyes.

It is cold and our elbows
quiver beneath the binoculars.

I try to find the moon
but it slips past one lens,
eludes the other altogether,

as a ranger's searchlight
sweeps us from the shore
back through the paths
in the dunes to where

the only ships are stars
that bellow the night alive.

APRIL DOGWOOD

I search for the horse, Magpie,
who has flown the coop to God
knows where. It's a cold spring
day and the woods are alight
and trembling with blossoms.

My father rides his tractor
up and down the field. In the barn,
above the empty stall, tidy dice
spin in long shafts of sunlight,
then vanish. My mother's eyes
make me turn away. Look,
my father says at dinner,
and he smacks a ten penny nail
into a Pet milk can
with the heel of his hand.

Out on the porch I stare
at the trees and wait for the night
to raise its starry muzzle.

THE BIRD FARMER'S FUNERAL

Your eyes were dead cold when wagons pulled
away, always full speed. Only then,
from the blue above the granary, did birds
fall in a single flush, flittering
their seven-way motion, dull as wood bees
at first, until closer, their colors came.

Even against the dawn, they were golden
with ebony wings. Had you taken time
to see them, you would have loved their manic
flying lives, so like your own, possessed
with corn and business. And since today
you rest, if rest such lying is--

your urgent

piety, like Aaron's serpent, fat, full,
dead--tonight your son walks back to the mound
of mud and clods and sows a little bag
of corn on the ground that covers your head. He leaves,
and the wild canaries circle, then fall, working
above your eyes for cracked grain. This time

you see them drop from a dusky sky, like rings
your children took away before they locked
the box, like gold slipped from your own still hands.



NIGHT FLIGHT, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

For my father

Iced glass on the terminal's windows shimmered in the distance as we landed in fog and sleet for a short layover in Reykjavik.

While the Loftlieder 4-prop refueled for its flight on to Luxembourg, we spilled out into the waiting area of the tiny airport, wind reshuffling snow on the tarmac; half asleep, surrounded by other blurry-eyed passengers and American military stationed there for months on end.

Inside, a loudspeaker blared departures in languages we didn't know, as my father took me to the men's room.

A curious boy of seven, I took my time, gazing absent-mindedly around the vacant stalls and urinals, the steam radiators hissing, till a group of enlisted men stumbled in, drunk and loud, shouting more obscenities than I'd ever heard.

Scared and shocked, I stood frozen in front of the urinal, my business done, till my father's iron hand clasped me securely on the shoulder and led me, quickly, out into the dimly-lit corridor, his face stern and gripped with what seemed to be anger.

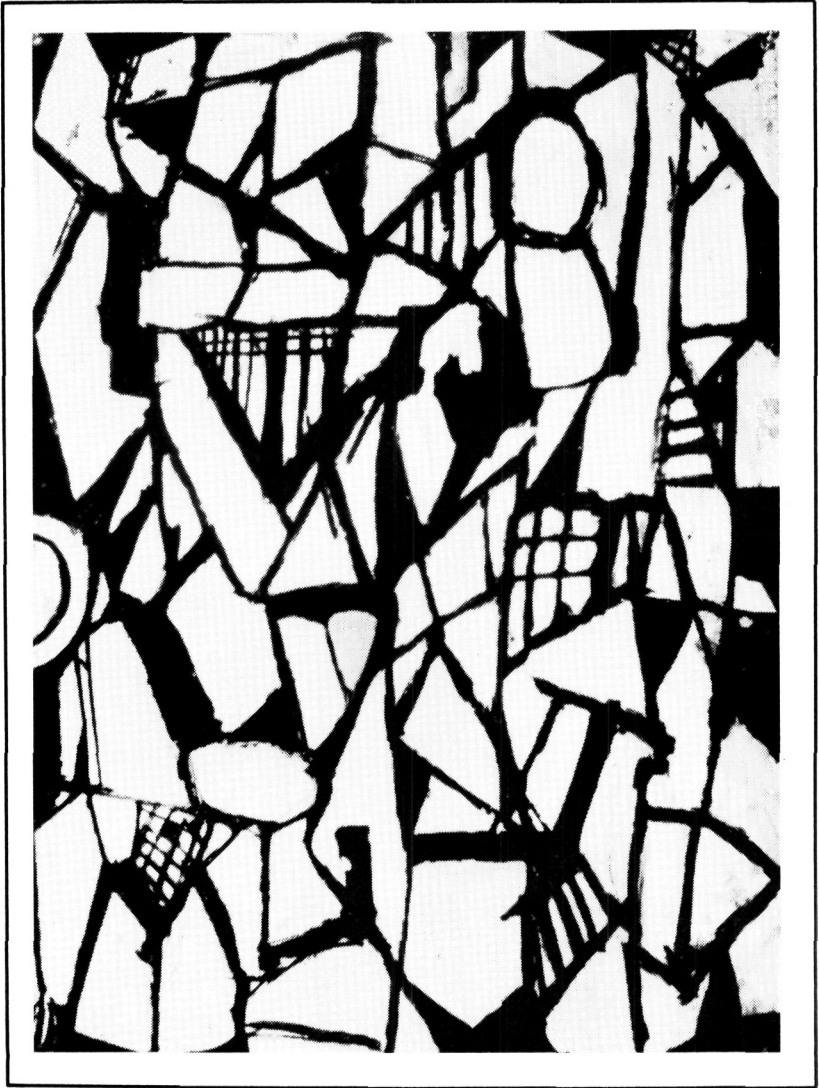
For a second I thought he was mad at me for taking so long. No words were said, but years later I realized the truth: How the pure indignation of his love sought to spare me.

We boarded and took off through mist,
my mother and brother beside us
huddled beneath blankets,
the cabin pressure easing as we leveled off.
Later, I awoke to the muffled drone of
the plane's engines, my family dozing,
the tiny aisle cold, vacant and dark,
except for a few overhead lights the
size of distant stars.

Through the small wind-swept window,
I could see gray cloud cover, barely visible,
below, and felt a kind of warmth all over
a long way down.

ECLIPSE

He is a shadowy god,
a god of walking under ladders
and twisting leaves into a night rain
that glistens with vigils.
He travels the length of a blackbird
with a hole for an eye
and pales the shadows of granite angels
broken down at the library,
their shamelessness clipped
with stone wings and golden dye.
He is a forgotten god,
dribbling ghosts and moths
out of his mouth,
a web spit with points of stars
settled in a dark corner of eternity.
He is a god with a certain preference
for gray mornings,
that sudden dullness of a
starving prophet
curled up
as he feeds on the sun.



THE DEGRAVITATION HONEYMOON

The Degravitation Honeymoon was first produced at Big Bend Community College, Moses Lake, Washington, on June 12, 1992. It was directed by Elsie Martin, with Pete Ortega as "Kip," Kristi Deycous as "Felicity," and Remina Jorgensen as "Pepper."

Time and Locale: The present, in a rural, slow-paced, small-town cafe.

Characters: KIP, in his twenties, dressed in a wacky tourist get-up.

FELICITY, Kip's bride, dressed in a nice summer dress maybe bought at K-Mart.

PEPPER, a woman in her twenties, a photographer, dressed sensually in semi-western wear.

KIP and FELICITY are sitting at a table at an outdoor cafe, wine glasses in front of them

KIP. Didja ever think Bugs Bunny was good lookin' when he was dressed as a woman?

FELICITY. Oh. . . I don't think I've ever been so happy!

KIP. Bugs always struck me as being an attention hound.

FELICITY. This is just the most fabulous honeymoon.

KIP. What did you say, darling?

FELICITY. Oh. . . Just a sweet nothing.

KIP. A sweet nothing?

FELICITY. I just love being married. . . to you. [*She gives him a peck on the cheek.*]

KIP. We're so happy . . . for now.

FELICITY. For now . . . Yes, for now.

KIP. I haven't been this happy since high school!

FELICITY. The poor late lamented Bugs Bunny. Didja know his great great great grandbunnies live in Spokane? That's right.

These bunnies live in Spokane. In cages. In cages in Spokane. But they eat loads of carrots. Like they're well treated. . . and. . .

KIP. Yes?

FELICITY. They breed like. . . **THEY BREED LIKE RABBITS**, Kip! [*Kip coughs.*] Kip, are you listening? They breed like damned rabbits. All these little Bugs Bunnies! In coed cages!

KIP. We vowed to each other!

FELICITY. But we're *married!*

KIP. For eternity!

FELICITY. But shouldn't we consume it?

KIP. *Consummate?* No, we agreed. Knowing what we know, we agreed. We made a pact: no breeding, and no false breeding. It's not right to breed, not while we know what we know!

FELICITY. Knowing what we know. . . But Kip. . .

KIP. No, please. . . I want to. . . to consummate our marriage as much as you do, but we know the truth!

FELICITY. Truth. . .

KIP. Yes.

FELICITY [*Pause.*] Still. . . I have not felt this happy since high school. I was in the adopt-a-grave program!

KIP. Adopt-a-grave?

FELICITY. In Prescott, Arizona. At the Pioneers' Graveyard. We all went out on Saturdays, with Brillo Pads, and we really cleaned up those old tombstones!

KIP [*Pause.*] Sad to think that all that work will be degravitated.

FELICITY. I try to look at the uplifting part of it.

KIP. And uplifting it will be, darling Felicity.

FELICITY. At any moment it will happen! [*They both look skyward.*] A huge, cold celestial body is gonna shoot outta space right at us! Its gravity pull will be stronger than Earth's! It will start tugging, this huge, big-gravity blob of meteor or a stray planet. This tugging planet will be so close to Earth and in a few minutes it will all be over for all of us.

KIP. It will be ugly and it will be beautiful. [*PEPPER enters, sets up a tripod.*]

FELICITY. All human life, bunnies included, will be snatched from the surface of the planet.

KIP. But first all of our clothes will be ripped and sucked off of all of our bodies.

FELICITY. Yes, we'll be naked, pure, pure, pure. . .

KIP. Pure. . .

FELICITY. Pure in our celibacy!

KIP. And as if caught in a tornado, we'll all shoot up off the Earth.

A few minutes later, heavier stuff, skyscrapers and redwood trees will shoot up out of the Earth's atmosphere.

FELICITY. We'll all rocket up to this huge blob of gravity.

KIP. And the Earth will break into millions of pieces and it will follow us. [*PEPPER now has her tripod camera set up.*]

PEPPER. Hi, folks.

KIP. Pardon me?

PEPPER. Don't mind me. My name's Pepper. And I'm just waiting for Tater.

FELICITY [*To KIP.*] Kip, darling, let's go be like a whole bunch of Bugs Bunnies, please.

KIP [*To PEPPER.*] We're on our honeymoon.

PEPPER. That so?

KIP. Yes. So we were wondering if we could have some privacy.

PEPPER [*To FELICITY*] Honeymoon? Uh. . . Was it fun? That grand opening?

FELICITY [*Pause*] We've been expecting degravitation.

PEPPER. Cool. What is degravitation?

KIP. You might not understand.

PEPPER. Say, let me take your picture.

FELICITY. Will you, really?

KIP. We may not have time for it.

FELICITY. Please, Kip, please?

PEPPER. Everyone's got time for a picture.

KIP. But you're waiting for a potato.

PEPPER. No, no, silly: I said *Tater*. I'm waiting for Tater.

FELICITY. Oh, do take our picture. Our wedding was very private, only degravitationists. So we don't have any pictures.

PEPPER [*Setting up the camera.*] Married, huh? Wow. I might like that. [*Pause.*] I don't want Tater to know it, but I'm a waterbed. Hell, I'm a whole damned bedroom. And I got a window that opens! [*Pause*] Smile. [*PEPPER takes their picture.*]

KIP. Thank you. . . Now we can use some privacy. [*PEPPER joins their table and takes a sip from each wine glass.*]

PEPPER. Tater opens my window and he can see the Rockies, pine trees and rivers. Sunlight filters through the pines and it falls all over me. It feels warm to him, if you know what I mean. [*Pause.*] So, folks, what's the address? [*KIP and FELICITY look at each other, but don't respond.*] So. . . yer gonna live

with her parents, huh? [*PEPPER gets up and sets the timer on the camera and sits down again.*] I'm gonna take a pic of myself. As if it's for *People* magazine. I take a lot of pics of myself. You know, to get in touch.

FELICITY. Pepper?

KIP. Felicity, we ought to get back to the motel.

PEPPER. Yeah?

FELICITY. We are people who believe in degravitation. And the purity of celibacy.

PEPPER. That's okay. I got nothin' against that. See. . . In my closet I got masks. It's full of masks. I own over four-hundred masks. Some of them are used masks.

KIP. Someday they'll get sucked into outer space. That's what Felicity and I believe. [*KIP takes FELICITY'S hand as if to leave, but she jerks him back down.*]

FELICITY. And who is Tater?

PEPPER. My friend, sort of, if you know what I mean.

KIP. Please, Felicity, before it's too late. We've been warned about those who want to tempt us, tempt us to fall from certitude.

PEPPER [*Stands to take more pictures.*] You're so cute. Cute as bugs!

KIP [*To FELICITY.*] Did she say Bugs?

PEPPER. I also buy up old clothes at thrift shops. Like black slips. Also old cowgirl stuff. Tater does go 'round with me, but don't tell him anything I tell you. Tater says I'm a kitchen, always cooking something up. Tater thinks I tell him the truth. He says to me, "What do ya take with yer camera?" I tell Tater, "I shoot nude guys." [*KIP tries to leave again, but FELICITY pulls him down.*] Nude guys! This is when we first meet at the rodeo. See, I go to rodeos, to check out the cowboys, their jeans. Wrangler butts drive me nuts!

KIP. We must get going, really.

FELICITY. Pepper, you seem so. . . so wise, yet earthy.

KIP. Wise? Where did that come from?

PEPPER. Why thank you.

FELICITY. Do you believe in science and the possibilities of overness?

PEPPER. Overness?

KIP. The end of life as we know it. The end of this planet of misery.

PEPPER. I believe in Tater, bareback broncs, and in taking nude pictures, the naked self-portrait. It can teach you loads.

KIP. Young woman, what is it you want? Money? I'll pay you to leave my bride and me alone. How much? Five dollars? Ten?

PEPPER [*To FELICITY.*] He sure does get into a fever, don't he? [*Pause.*] Oh, yeah, the naked self-portraits can teach you loads. Like how modest you are. What your body image is. What sorts of risks you'll take. And the naked self-portrait will tell you how creative you are.

FELICITY. Kip, darling, let's give her our address and then rush back to our motel room.

KIP [*Pause.*] Felicity, we. . . we. . .

FELICITY. Yes?

PEPPER. But most folks don't handle a camera real good. So for twenty bucks, I can do the portraits, artfully of course, and in the best taste, right in your motel room.

FELICITY. For only twenty dollars?

KIP. DARLING, WE ARE FALLING FROM GRACE!

PEPPER. Hey, don't be uptight, pal. Let your wife really thrill you. I've got some used black nighties she can probably fit into. A guy can't hide what he likes, not if he doesn't want to drive himself nuts. A woman is like one of them old time Cadillacs, with low-swung dreamlines.

FELICITY. Kip, we could just take a picture. Nothing more. We could have two copies made. Then we could look at that picture, look at it as the great big outlaw planet with huge gravity, as all that gravity sucks us into outer space. We'll have the pictures. You and I know we can't always count on holding hands when it starts to suck the Earth away.

PEPPER. She's got a point, buddy.

KIP. [*To PEPPER,*] I'll pay you twenty dollars just to walk away!

PEPPER. Nope. I'm an artist. I only take money for the pictures. [*PEPPER goes to KIP and quickly kisses his lips, an affable peck.*] Stop bein' such an ol' stew 'n fret. You can do better 'n that, can't you?

FELICITY. Kip! You just let her kiss you!

KIP. No, I didn't.

PEPPER. Yes, he did. I can't believe it myself. It must mean he wants us to do the photo shoot.

KIP. No! *No! No!*

FELICITY. Kip, that was unfaithful of you!

PEPPER. I might forgive him, if I were you.

KIP. Felicity, we love each other! We can't let this derail us. We have something vital in common: *degravitation!*

PEPPER [*To FELICITY.*] You know what love is, honey? It's taking a picture of Tater all naked on a Sunday morning, naked in his Stetson and hooks and him and me standing 'round some 4-wheel drive junkyard.

FELICITY. Kip, the first time I saw you at the degravitation rally, I saw you as a horse, but you had a mustache and you kept reminding me of a jackrabbit, of Bugs Bunny! Touch me, Kip. [*KIP backs away from FELICITY, but PEPPER shoves him back toward her.*]

KIP. Felicity, do you truly think I look like Bugs? [*FELICITY embraces KIP and they slowly semi-dance around and around in a circle as PEPPER photographs them from different angles.*]

CAUSA CAUSANS
For Robyn

Persephone's dreaming is what brings the spring.
Her patience, her slow,
even breath

as she wills the anemones up on their stems,
as she coaxes
the green into grass.

In her cave of black night where all deep
hungers live,
Persephone
stretches and yearns and her memory
lifts her, a clear beam
of hope
translucent
and bearing her up.

* *

There are women
in rags. There are women
in pearls. There are women in grey,
timid dreams.

On the backs of grey tortoises, these women ride
toward the soft morning that
never comes.

* * *

But the green turtle lifting
a thick, steady foot
takes a
 step, takes a
step, takes a
step.

 In his ponderous
manner, he knows how
to move.

 In the depths
of his small, solemn head,
he is plotting

 a course: from the elm
to the grass, from the grass to the raspberry
bush.

 It will take him
a day and a night. See? He clings
to the gradual slope of the earth.

THE WIDOW BEGINS TO EXPLAIN

They hard-sell the guilt-stricken: "Custom hairshirts!"
shout Rumpelstiltskin and his new recruit,

Penelope, waiting and flirting and longing
with pleasure and aimless intent.

He stamps his right foot to pick up
her pace, to quicken her dirges, her slow,

side-long glances, her bridled desire.
Odysseus wanders. A widow remembers.

The shroud she envisions would fit like a glove
around her own white arms, her smooth,

untouched body, the voices
of suitors, the buzzing of bees.

Once a woman lay hands on a terrible dream
and found she had entered her life:

a hollow so narrow -- the cave she was born in --
no one full-grown could escape.

This was it then: unable to draw the walls closer,
to pull her flesh tighter, to suck in

her bones, she sang open every closed
door in her memory. Lifted each window

by lifting her voice with the high C
that shattered the dust for Rapunzel,

the maiden who longed in her tower, to let down
her hair, feel her lover's sweet weight,
swinging up, hand over hand.





THE WAY LLAMAS BREATHE

A paper banner sagged over the fairground billboard, its red, white, and blue lettering runny from the drizzling rain. Though the outlines were vague and drab, the message was invitingly clear: WELCOME TO THE SECOND ANNUAL LLAMA EXTRAVAGANZA.

Emil bit down hard on this thumb. "Oh, jeez," he whispered. "You weren't kidding."

While she maneuvered the turn, Gina tossed the map of Wisconsin into the back seat of her Buick Electra. "You're gonna love the llamas, Emil."

He sneezed. "Look," he said, holding up his red, blotchy hands for inspection. "I'm already getting a reaction."

Gina wanted to tell him that his allergies were all in his head, but she didn't want to nag. "It's going to be perfect. Just wait."

But Emil didn't want to wait. He wanted to be home alone in his bed, drinking tea and staring at his feet. Now there were three things about Gina that annoyed him. She thought Sunday drives were fun, and she liked surprises (that was why she kept their destination a secret). And then this. She actually thought that something could be perfect.

They pulled into a gravel parking lot filled with livestock trailers and customized recreational vehicles. Some had personalized spare tires hooked onto the back that said things like "Bob and Betty's Colorado Packers" and "Llowe's LllamaLland."

A cowboy with a silver llama head belt buckle took Gina's ten dollar bill and felt-penned an X on the backs of their hands. As they walked through the gate, Gina planted a tiny kiss on Emil's cheek. "Thanks for coming with me," she said, her voice childlike and breathy. She grabbed his arm and nuzzled his armpit with her nose.

Emil's nostrils flared and a tumultuous sneeze exploded into the air. He wiped his nose with a red handkerchief and pulled away from Gina's grasp on his elbow.

Their first date had lasted three days and ended with words of love. Now, on the fifth day of their relationship, he wasn't sure if

he liked her at all. She kept wanting to touch him.

A cowgal with a buckskin jacket handed them programs. "Pretty cool," Gina said. She thumbed through the pages and took stock of the day's programming. That afternoon, there would be a llama rodeo, a llama auction, and a llama breeding lecture. It would be well worth the price of admission.

A tumbleweed of white llama hair rolled past them, and Emil clasped both hands over his nose. "Ahhh-chooo!"

"I have a theory about people who think they're allergic to animals," Gina said.

Emil ignored her. He had discovered yet another source of annoyance. Gina spouted "theories."

As they turned down a muddy path, Gina's mouth opened wide, and she stopped dead in her tracks. Never before had she seen such a spectacle. Llamas. Thousands of them. Tall, elegant creatures meandered freely around the fairgrounds. White ones, brown ones, dotted ones. Some were babies, some were more than six feet tall. It was nothing less than magnificent.

"Oh, Emil," she sighed as she reached out to take his hand.

But he sneezed again, his body thrown into convulsions. Once the spasms stopped, Gina turned to him and laughed. "Maybe it's me," she said. He sneezed again.

They passed a collection of llama breeders who were brushing and vacuuming their animals, preparing them for the show. Gina was fearless and met one large black llama nose to nose. Drool ran from its fleshy lips. It batted its long lashes and quietly mooed at her.

"He likes me!" Gina giggled, letting the animal press its snout against her cheek. It breathed in deep staccato rhythms to examine her scent. When it was done with its sniffing, it sighed and turned away.

As Gina and Emil wandered through the fairgrounds, the smells of wet hay and steamy feces seeped into their clothes, and Emil dreamed of going home. He itched, imagining millions of microscopic bugs burrowing into his skin. He sneezed and sneezed and sneezed. His sinuses throbbed.

"Look at this guy," Gina said, stooping down to a tiny white llama. It curved its neck around hers and buried its face into Gina's scalp, panting through its nose. "Tickles," she laughed. She went to touch it, but it pushed her away.

Gina had loved llamas practically her entire life--ever since her

first trip to the zoo. The event was documented by 24 black-and-white photographs of her father and herself--a miniature Gina in banana curls and a polka dot romper--feeding grapes to the llamas in the children's zoo. Gina remembered (only because her mother told her) that she cried all the way home that day because her parents told her she could never have one of her very own.

Emil kept measured distances from Gina and from the animals. He couldn't stand the thought of their wet noses examining his flesh.

One breeder sensed Emil's discomfort and patted him on the back. "Act like you're not interested in them, son, and they'll leave you alone."

Emil wished that women had such refined sensibilities.

Gina wandered among the animals, hesitantly petting their thick wool, feeding them bunches of long, wet grass, sniffing them back when they sniffed at her. But each contact was fleeting. The llamas easily tired of her attention. Preoccupied, she didn't notice that Emil had gone ahead of her.

Without his realizing it, Emil was changing. He mimicked the graceful postures of the smug animals, walking with a new grace, his neck stretched long. Each step became carefully constructed elegance. Each turn of his head was slow and sweeping. Now, the lids of his eyes drooped at half mast, and he disdainfully watched the activity around him. The llamas nodded approvingly at his aloof restraint and kept their distance from him.

With Gina out of reach, he had stopped sneezing.

Over at the cinder track, ten unfortunate llamas were having their dignity challenged by facing an obstacle course of sorts. There was a kiddie pool, a high jump pole set at about three feet, and tires laid down in even rows.

The emcee was announcing, "We're not looking for fancy tricks here in this kind of competition. What we're looking at is trust between the animal and the human. We're looking at their rapport."

A teenaged girl in a skin-tight jumpsuit and fringed cowboy boots tried to lead her llama through the course, but it stopped short in front of the kiddie pool, refusing to walk through the water. The girl pulled and yanked at the lead, but the llama still refused. She even went at it from behind and pushed on its wide, woolly rump. The curiosity seekers in the audience laughed. The llama experts expressed consolation with knowing nods. The non-competing llamas looked on, embarrassed for their species.

Gina searched the grounds for Emil. She finally realized she

had lost him in the crowd.

"Thing is about llamas," the emcee continued, "is that they don't see the sense of getting into something when they can easily avoid it."

Gina leaned on the fence and watched the next failed try to get a llama through the course. Then she spotted Emil from across the track, his face blending with the detached expressions of the animals. As the human spectators applauded and laughed, Emil found harmony with the silent and controlled.

"And now for our third round of competition," the emcee announced.

Just then, there was a loud crash of thunder and rain came splashing down. Gina raised her arms above her head and waved at Emil. "C'mon," she yelled. "Let's get to the car."

Emil looked at her with a bored gaze. He blinked once, slowly, languidly, then looked away. The people took cover, running this way and that, but the llamas and Emil seemed not to notice the change in weather. They remained calm, oblivious. They looked around, annoyed by the human commotion.

Gina signalled to Emil again. "Come on!"

He turned his back and disappeared in the field, his head held high.

Gina sat in the car and watched the drops of rain roll down the window. One drop would join another to form a rivulet for a split second, and the stream would dart down the window until it attached to another drop. The random connections and departures moved faster, more frenetically.

A llama sidled up against the side of Gina's car and she rolled down her window.

"Hi, little guy," she whispered. When she spoke, her voice cracked. She hadn't realized she was on the verge of tears.

The llama put his head into the car and began sniffing her ear and her hair. It hummed its low moo and wiped her forehead with a quick, sloppy lick. Just as she was about to smile and sniff it back, the llama turned away, its curiosity satisfied. It stood perfectly still and gazed out to the horizon.

Gina rolled up her window and stared at the rain splattered glass for a long time. Finally, with a quiet breath, she put the key into the ignition and started the motor.

Emil was gone forever. He would never be hers.

And not for the first time, Gina would cry all the way home.

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

*I have always depended
on the kindness of strangers.*

Blanche Du Bois

When they've all left
and Blanche is
alone with
her hunger,

 she tries
to remember the face
of the curly-
haired boy who

 would shiver
 and tremble
 and breathe
 fast and slide

 close and kiss
 till she shuddered and held on
 for dear life

 like
 drowning.

 The waves
 of heat. How they
 both sighed

 swept away, swept
away in-
to that land
of longing

 where no
 body ever
 tells lies.

* *

When they've all left and Blanche in
a peach satin pegoir
with a cigarette

burn on its hem,
finds a glass
of straight Scotch,

she glides up to
the window and opens
her arms to the moon.

And below, in the dark street,
Deaf Henry, Fat Charlie,
are snickering, "That
hard-up broad."

* *

When they've all left and Blanche is
alone in the wet grass,
her white

 linen skirt, smudged and creased,
hiked up over
the thighs that
were once white as marble,

a red smear
in the grass,

her blouse

her breasts,
licked to points
by anonymous
tongues,

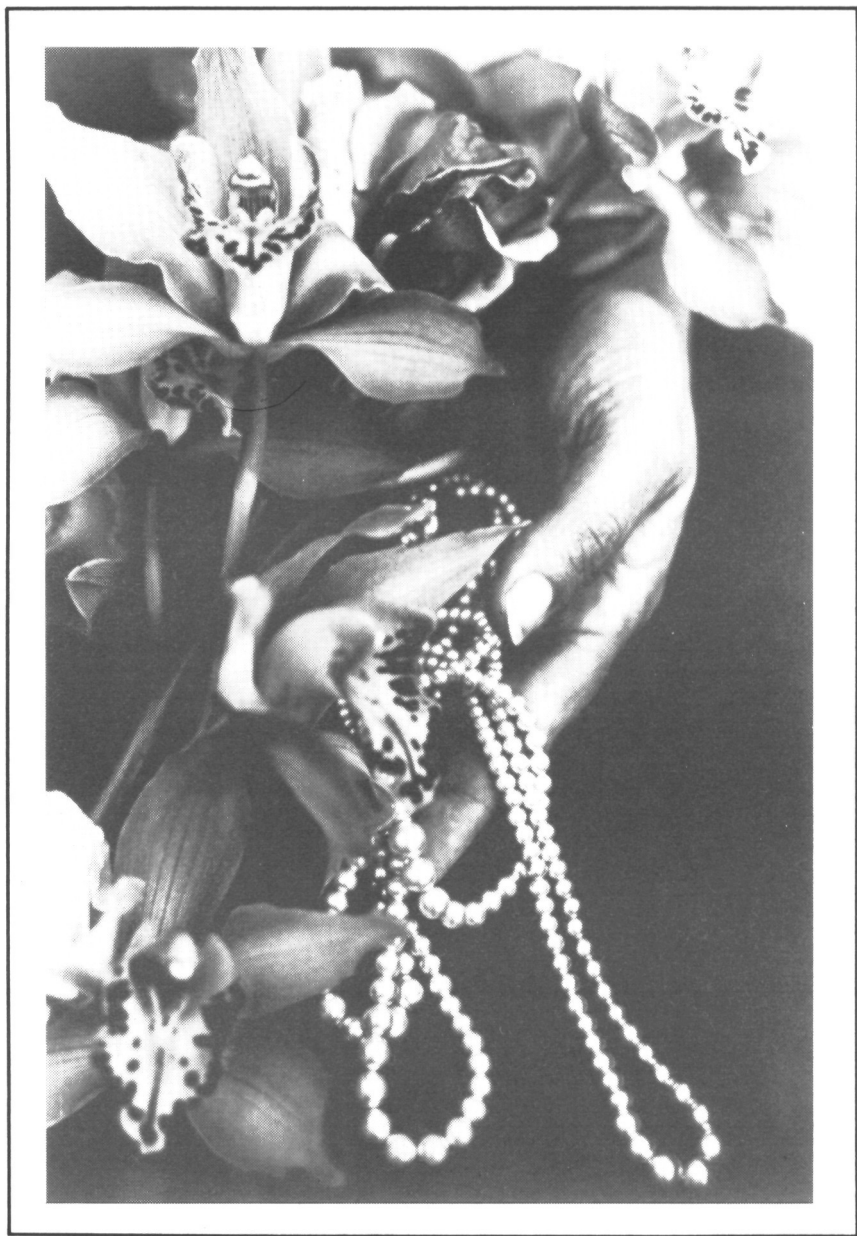
turn withered
and will not
stay kissed.

* *

When they've all left and Blanche
settles down in
her hot bath
and steam and My Sin

gently rise
to surround her,
tomorrow
takes shape in

the mirror.
She opens
her dream-
crusted eyes.





FAIR LOVE'S ANSWER

*Miss Fanny Brawne answers
John Keats' "Bright Star"*

Know me when your mind holds full
the swell and fall of my breast;
bring to me tonight the still
soft tenderness that starlight
feathers across my chest
when you think of me.
Know me when your lips explore
and my heart pounds up
to your shaded mouth, wanting more.
Shall I let your love sink in:
White rays, which penetrate my open skin?
Know me when the night breathes cool,
when the bright star slips down from view,
when the waters deep, stretch and pull,
but then recede, when the moon is new.
No -- let us pause in sweet naked plea,
until you come proud of your love for me.

SUNFLOWERS

I didn't know too many people in Port Holling, so having Bert around was pretty important, he got me "in" to places. He'd arranged my interview with the construction company, my inexpensive room at the Emerald Arms, and most recently, my blind date with Marlene. That was what we were trying to fix. "Should be another couple of blocks," he said, indicating with a nod. "If I remember, her house is yellow and there's a swing on the porch."

Marlene and I had met outside the Rialto Theater for an early show and possibly dinner or dessert afterwards. I wore a red carnation in my lapel so she would recognize me, just like in the movies. It worked.

A white top, heels, a tan skirt, and lots of lipstick. That's what Marlene showed up in. She was older, I don't mean as old as me, but she was older and still looked pretty good. She used to work with Bert over at the cleaners one summer, and then she got a job as a receptionist in the Tower Building.

Bert and I were listening to some Hank Williams in his truck when he started talking about baseball, going on and on with this trivia question he'd read in the paper. I got restless and started fidgeting, looking out the window, reading the street signs, even arranging the money left in my wallet, while he just kept talking.

"Hell, did I miss it?" he finally asked, interrupting himself. We had stopped at a dead end. "This is Comanche Lane isn't it?" I looked around for a street sign, but there weren't any. It was hard to even see the road with the sun glaring off just about everything and sweat dripping down my forehead. Bert hung a wide U-turn and stepped on the gas. "Look for a porch swing," he said, rolling down his window. "I know Marlene's house has a porch swing. And remember, it's yellow." I could sense his frustration.

Marlene had ordered a steak sandwich that night. A steak sandwich with fries, cherry coke, and a side of garlic toast. I wasn't too hungry, so I just had the grilled cheese. This surprised her I think, because she said "Oh, I thought we were having dinner."

I'd gone over the whole date with Bert step-by-step to see if we could figure out what'd happened, where I'd blown it, so I couldn't help but replay it in my mind even now. Bert was confused and couldn't come up with anything other than "Hey, she's a woman." I'd left out the part about the girl in the sun dress.

They'd sat across from us at another table, this pair of younger girls. One had her back to me and the other was sitting straight ahead. Marlene couldn't see either of them, and that was fine. While the waiter brought over our food, I noticed the first girl, the one wearing a sun dress and facing me, trying to get a glimpse of what we'd ordered. I caught her eye and she looked away and smiled. Then she got up and headed towards the rear of the restaurant. Marlene was talking to me about something, but I wasn't really paying attention. My eyes were stuck on the girl as she walked back, beautiful in her sun dress.

Of course I didn't tell Bert about any of this when I reconstructed the date for him. Nor did I tell him about how I ended up catching the girl's eye four or five more times that night, or about how, after we had ordered pie, Marlene got her own idea about what was going on and politely asked me to take her home.

"I don't understand," Bert said, interrupting my playback. "I thought she lived right here." He seemed a little anxious because we'd spent the last five minutes in silence, both a little too confused to say anything. I looked down at the flowers sitting in my lap and at the card Bert had written for me, attached with a little plastic garden fork to the stems. The handwriting reflected the size of his hands.

"Let's find a gas station," Bert finally said. "We'll get the address out of the phone book."

I guess a lot of other guys would drive around for hours searching for something instead of just stopping to get directions, myself included, but not Bert. He liked things organized. I'd learned that about him one weekend last summer. We'd gone up to the mountains hoping to get in a little relaxation time, do some fishing, and maybe drink a few beers. But it turned out to be a real disaster. Bert had the whole trip planned out right to the very last minute, and there was no time left for anything spontaneous. Whenever I suggested something that wasn't on the agenda, he kind of got annoyed. "Maybe I'm too set in my ways and all, but hey..." he'd always say, fading out in a tone that let you know the subject was over.

Reading off the street signs, I couldn't help but think that we

were going to a lot of trouble for nothing though, driving around trying to find Marlene's house just so I could apologize. Bert had rehearsed the speech with me a couple times, trying to convince me that it'd be easy. She'd come to the door and handing her the flowers I'd say, "Hi, Marlene. These are for you. Listen, I'm really sorry about the way things went the other night. I don't know what came over me. I was hoping maybe sometime I could give you a call and make it up to you." Bert said that was the way to do it, be real formal and unassuming, that was the only way out of the doghouse.

It was all starting to give me a headache. There was Bert with his talking, and there was the sun beating down pretty hard, and then there were all these houses on all these streets, and everything looked the same. "Maybe it'd be easier for me to find it on foot," I said, cutting Bert off. "Besides, dragging you through this isn't really fair. You're not the one who's responsible." I lied.

"You sure?" he said, looking down at the speedometer, waiting for an answer. I turned off the radio and stared straight ahead, trying to put a blank expression across my face, an uncommitted look. I guess I wanted Bert to feel like he was making the decision, that the idea had been his -- after all, when someone's as big as Bert, your instincts tell you to take the safe route.

"Maybe you're right," he finally said, pulling over to the curb. "Me waiting in the driveway probably wouldn't help matters." I nodded, reached for the flowers, and hopped out.

I kept walking up and down the blocks, certain that it wouldn't be long before things came together. Certain that Marlene's signature porch swing would be staring me in the face at any moment. Fortunately, the sun was starting to fade and a little breeze was coming in from the mountains. I couldn't remember if her street ran north/south or east/west, so the only smart thing to do was walk up one block and down the next, over and over. That way I could be sure.

A ways down Enderlin Drive, I thought I saw a park that looked familiar. From a block away, I spotted some younger guys lined up against the backstop, adjusting their caps toward the sun. The tallest one seemed to be running the show, so in my dazed state I headed towards him, figuring he'd know the way. But before I had the chance to ask, he said they needed another guy -- could I play? I didn't really have an answer, he'd caught me off guard. I just kept thinking, "if I play, what'll I do with the flowers?"

"Grab a mitt, you're in left field."

Marlene had said a bunch of things that night, but only one of them really stuck with me. "I made the last payment on my house today" she'd whispered real loud-like as the lights dimmed. It was during one of those real long previews, the type that basically showed you the whole movie. Most of the people in the audience were cheering though, like they still might go see the thing despite the fact that they already knew what was going to happen. "I felt so great writing the check out," Marlene added, as the opening titles came up. "It's probably the first time I ever actually enjoyed paying a bill."

I could tell that this was important to her, like maybe she'd been waiting to tell somebody about it all day long, and I felt guilty that she'd picked me. I couldn't think of any appropriate response, something that might've matched her enthusiasm. "Wow, that's great," I should've said, but at the time those words just didn't come to me.

The baseball game went just like you'd expect: first they scored, then we scored, and so forth. It all felt really natural though, like if I hadn't shown up none of it would've been possible. For some reason, it didn't seem to be getting any later. The sun was just hovering in the sky, refusing to go down, like it knew we wanted to keep playing. I'd completely forgotten about how summer nights could go on like that, about how it could stay so bright for so long. Half-way through the third inning, I took off my shoes.

In the stands, I could see a couple of kids sitting with their dog, not really watching us, just using the benches to relax. Maybe they'd taken the dog running or had him exercising with a frisbee -- I couldn't really tell from way out in left field -- but they were the only ones, the rest of the place was deserted.

I think we were ahead by a run or two when we reached the bottom of the ninth inning, but I'm not sure. "This is it," the shortstop kept turning around to yell. "We just gotta hold them." One or the other he'd say before every pitch. He was a young guy, and really into the game, so all that talking didn't seem too unusual.

The first two outs went real fast, a pop fly and a grounder. But then they put a walk and a single together and had another runner standing on third. Our catcher headed towards the mound to discuss strategy, and I crouched over on my knees, waiting. One

strike, two strikes, and with the third, I heard a crack of the bat and knew the ball was headed my way. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see their guys rounding the bases and our infield just standing there paralyzed. Everything tuned out, and all I could feel was the grass below my feet, while the ball hung there, suspended in the air.

The centerfielder yelled "Yours!"

Once it came down the game would be over -- if I caught it we won, if I didn't we lost. Neither situation seemed very appealing. I kept gliding back, trying to figure out a way to stop things, but I couldn't. With each step backwards the ball moved closer, until finally I had to reach out and pull it down.

There were a few faint cheers as I held my glove up to show that I'd caught it. When I got back to the infield, everyone was standing around the bleachers getting their things together. I tossed the ball over to the captain guy, half expecting him to invite me out for pizza, or back next week for another game, or even next month, but he didn't. "Nice catch," was all he said.

I walked to the end of the bench where my flowers were sitting patiently, the note still wrapped around the stems. I sat down next to them and watched as everyone gradually filtered out towards the neighborhood. A couple of guys were talking about how dark it was going to get during the winter, when the sun fades earlier, and about how things would be so much better when park lights were finally installed. A half hour later, the sprinklers clicked on, and it wasn't long before the entire field was covered in the mist.

My back's to the road now, the ballpark behind me, and maybe I'm daydreaming, but I'm still listening. Somehow I expect to hear the sound of Bert's '53 Ford Pickup rolling around the corner. It's bright lime green and makes noise, or at least a vibration, that you can pick up from almost a half mile off. I have to admit that it's what I like best about Bert, the sound of his truck. It sounds like it could take you someplace fast, whenever you were ready, whenever you wanted. It reminded me of the first car I owned -- the first car I sold too -- and about how it seemed like a lot of money back then. I'd definitely pay double that price if I could have it here with me now.

Bert always said the truck had been his life's focus for the last nine years. "Been working on her since '84," he'd tell anyone willing to listen. "Hit every junkyard in Whatcom County at least once." This all surprised me at the time. Not that he'd been

working on it so long, or even that he'd probably spent his last hundred weekends off in those auto wrecker lots. I guess it was just the math of the whole thing. Had it really been nine years?

Still, I kept listening for the sound of his muffler, sure that I'd hear him turning the corner at any moment, the sun shining off the truck's polished chrome bumpers and the music creeping out the open window. I can see him unlocking the door as he pulls up, then giving a little nod as he lets me in. We'd probably take the long way home, Old Cathedral Road down through the canyon. I can see us cruising slow past Burger Island, the teenagers resting on their mopeds, fresh from a rally or some big game, all waiting for their orders to be called, or maybe just sitting there talking, not really paying attention.

From behind me, a strong breeze picks up and blows through the park. It's dark now, only the faint white glow from a streetlight cuts into the blackness, reflecting just a little off the backstop. The sprinklers have clicked off, probably some time ago, and in the distance you can hear the muted hum of traffic up on the highway. I don't know how long I've been sitting here.

Not feeling any vibrations from Bert's truck, or anything else for that matter, I stare at the flowers and think of Marlene and the date.

The memory sits in my head, like a useless fact frozen on a slab until that one moment during your life when you might need it. The birthplace of our 12th president, the conversion rate of gallons to liters, the date the great Sphinx was built, or the position of a constellation up in the sky. I have a lot of these facts stored up, pieces of information that are buried so deep I forget they exist. But then like I said, every once in awhile something clicks and you finally get a payoff.

When the girl in the sun dress left the restaurant, my eyes followed her all the way out the door, waiting to see if she'd look back, even just a little. With Marlene though, my mouth was going on about something else, the movie I guess. The main character had told these kids that they could do anything, just as long as they put their minds to it. But I didn't buy it, and I'm pretty sure that's what I could've been going on about, about how that wasn't always true, and about how some things just weren't possible for some people. I'm not exactly sure. After the girl in the sun dress had gone out the front door, climbed into her car and drove off, staring straight ahead the whole way, my mouth finally stopped.

"Oh," Marlene said, and then she reached for her coat.

ALZHEIMER'S

His eyes mirror nothing.
Not her smile. Her fingers
unbuttoning blue silk. She handles
his head like an egg,

eases it onto her breasts.
Between her legs, a clenching,
muted as his speech
when, with Stick-ons

and syllables he can grasp,
he traverses the kitchen,
tabbing new boundaries: "Stove."
"Towel." "Glass."

She whispers his name
though the walls
won't echo it; as he pushes
against her breasts,

she smooths his thinning hair.
"Not now," she says. "Poor baby, not now."
He reaches. Touches both nipples
like tiny dark balloons.



BY ANY OTHER NAME

Hands and feet tied, hostage to love,
knees bent to my chest,
the rope circles my neck
and I'm flat-backed to the floor
ridiculous and helpless, a cockroach flipped,
squirming.
The voice that hisses threats,
the hand that tosses lighted matches to my skin.
Your voice, your hand,
cruel to know, I cannot see your eyes,
blind, you wrap my eyes and mouth closed.
Swallowing is hard, my thirst fills me, consumes fear,
focused, I free my tongue against the trap of cloth,
I can swallow.
Saliva rushes up
and for a moment my own taste is sweet, washing, wetting.
Tears slip along the creases of my clothed eyes,
to pool beneath my head and still you taunt,
drip boiling water on me.
A still point of light speaks one clear mantra in my brain,
A song, a call, a tolling bell:
"Never will my son have to hear his mother died like this."
My mantra sends concentric circles, round the numbing pain.
Hands and feet, cut off from blood, I feel nothing in my edges;
only in the deep of my back which meets the floor can I feel,
and my bowed neck, the noose,
love captures and holds, love chains.
A hand closes possessively around the wrist,
commanding tone.
The casual remark denudes the rose,
love embracing, strangles, suffocates with lips.
Never will my son say, "She died of love; madness took her."
By turning my sad head, from moments when you're gone,

I loosen the gag, and once I smell you near, I speak,
A grace pours words from deep within my mantra,
you untie me.
Today, I fear all love,
and know that it can come to this: a mummified death,
a voice that says, "you're mine."

A DEFINITION FOR RAPE

We didn't call it that then.
Someone,
attractive, tall,
says
"Poetry -- my place."

* * *

Fat girl of eighteen
without experience, flutter,
the swelling hope of romance,
flood of flowering words.

* * *

Not this time.
Just a few short stanzas,
then the offer: pot,
a fumbled kiss,
the groping, bleeding,
no waves breaking on a thundered shore,
a much too solid hand to neck.
The bubble breaks.

* * *

We didn't call it that though.
Instead of dinner
it was threats and beatings,
each unused orifice broken into,
left with bruises,
the neating-up after
as though cleaning off a table
sullied with crumbs,
not bones and serum.

* * *

You know the word just wasn't clear:
Memory fogged over
from the trick and tortures,
remorseless taking of innocence and hope,
The uncle, baby-sitter, family friend,
handsome youth, brutal maniac,
then sadly -- husband, too many and too often.

* * *

No one called it that
until the cracks opened up,
and small slimy things crawled out over my lips,
the ugly force of words of truth
shadowed by harsh eyes,
when last
the larvae molted into graceful form,
broke free from the shells and fur
producing winged light.
Those bruised choked lips formed perfect round words:
"No, NO, NO!"
and finally a quiet
into which bright waters clean the wound.





D.D. BLUME lives in Columbus, Ohio. About "Fair Love's Answer," she writes: *I wrote "Fair Love's Answer" in response to the John Keats poem, "Bright Star," written for Fanny Brawne. I imagined what it would have been like to be the recipient of such a passionate poem at a time when a woman's moral value was measured by her sexual abstinence. Perhaps "Bright Star" was so intense because unrequited love is often the most ardent. Perhaps Fanny Brawne needed an outlet for her passion, too.*

GLORIA BOWMAN lives and works in Chicago. Her work has appeared in *Hair Trigger*, *Heartland Today*, *Mississippi Review*, and *The Street*. About "The Way Llamas Breathe," she writes: *"My earliest memory was of feeding grapes to a big white llama who licked the side of my face and made me squeal with joy. Years later I had the opportunity to go to a real llama festival. The story began as a stark and story-less journal entry. When I went back to that entry, years later, all those surreal qualities rose from the page, and I decided to work those experiences into a story.*

TERRI BROWN-DAVIDSON is the Maude Hammond Fling and Gretchen Bechtol Lee Fellow at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her poetry, essays, and reviews have appeared in or are forthcoming in *TriQuarterly*, *Prairies Schooner*, and *Cimarron Review*. About "Alzheimer's" she writes: *The inspiration for "Alzheimer's" was non-autobiographical. Because I am concerned about the solipsism of much autobiographical poetry, my method is to summon the emotion that seems appropriate to the situation. In "Alzheimer's," I located empathy in the poignancy of the sexual: the two people "finding" each other again through desire and yet remaining lost, somehow, within that realm of ineffectual touching, struck me as both sad and profound.*

KENDALL DUNKLEBERG is spending a year in Ghent, Belgium, translating and studying the work of the Flemish poet Paul Snoek, on a Fulbright grant. He has published poems in *Farmer's Market* and *Mudfish* and translations in *Farmer's Market*, *Pinchpenny*, and *Dutch Crossing*.

WILLIAM JOLLIFF, director of Writing at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, was raised on a farm near Magnetic Springs, Ohio. His work has appeared in *Midwest Quarterly*, *Sou'wester*, *Christian Century*, and *Cutback*.. About "Bird Farmer's Funeral," he writes: *My father, who farms in central Ohio, remains a dominant psychological force in my life, especially as a creative artist. The vision of him trudging across the millyard, . . . always in a hurry, and often in a covey of the finches we call wild canaries, remains a strong one for me. In the poem, the words led me to conjecture a vision of him at rest.*

GREG LING is an editor/writer for an insurance company located in Gainesville, Florida. He has published poems in *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Hiram Poetry Review*, *Poetry Now*, *The Poetry Miscellany*, *The Panhandler*, *Coe Review*, and *The Boston Literary Review*. About "Night Flight, Reyjavik, Island," he writes: *This poem, which chronicles an actual incident in my childhood, deals with the importance of having a nurturing family unit, and it commemorates the acts of all loving parents. As such, its primary value is in illustrating by example.*

RICHARD E. MESSER, A.K.A. the KNIFE, lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. About "April Dogwood," he writes: *This poem began with the image of sunlight through the dogwood blossoms in early spring. I thought of the tale of how the dogwood was used as the cross for Christ's crucifixion and how it has had the imprint of the bloody nails in its blossoms ever since. It seems that the main occasion for calling on a higher power-- for me, is in times of loss, like the time Magpie disappeared.*

JEAN PRAFKE currently works in Chicago as a photography assistant. She holds a degree in photography from The Cleveland Institute of Art and wants to pursue an M.F.A. in creative writing. Her poems have appeared in *Whiskey Island Magazine* and *Toad Highway*. About "Eclipse," she writes: *One of my main inspirations for my poetry is astronomy. In "Eclipse" I was expressing a scientific event with a sense of deep superstition and the makings of a mythology used to make the world more understandable.*

KEVIN PHELAN and **BILL U'REN** are both natives of San Francisco and graduates of UCLA. Their stories have appeared in, or are forthcoming in, the *South Carolina Review*, *Midland Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Aethlon*, and the *Santa Fe Literary Review*.

RED SHUTTLEWORTH teaches English and coaches baseball at Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake Washington. His plays have appeared in *Near*, *Crosscurrents*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *Clockwatch Review* and have been performed at Penn Stats, Sundance Playwright Lab, and University of Nebraska-Kearney.

CORINA TAMALPIAS is previously unpublished. She is a nurse practicing in Columbus, Ohio. About "A Definition of Rape" and "By Any Other Name," she writes: *These poems are not metaphors, but descriptions of actual events in my life. Poetry gives wings to words, a voice to stilled heart, enduring through years of numbing minutia, a blessing always ephemeral.*

MARY ZEPPA currently edits The Sacramento Poetry Center's monthly publication *Poet News*, is a singer and lyricist as well as a poet and literary journalist. Her work has appeared in *Shaman's Drum*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Zone 3*, *Pivot*, 1992, *Mixed Voices*, and *Landing Signals*, *An Anthology of Sacramento Poets*. About "Kindness of Strangers," "Causa Causans," and "The Widow Begins to Explain," she writes: *These poems have something basic in common: underneath the surface of my language, there lives a subtext based on literature, fiction, myth. And if I have done my work as a poet, the fundamental truth of that subtext (Persephone's story or Penelope's or Blanche's) is illuminated by my poem.*

RICHARD ADES is an editor at Syndicated Press in Columbus, Ohio. He reviews plays and is a playwright as well as being a photographer.

ROBERT BROWN lives in Marion, Ohio. He is a continuing education student at The Ohio State University at Marion.

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VALERIE MALLOY lives in Columbus, Ohio. She is a student at The Ohio State University.

DARILYN ROWAN is a photographer and a professor of photography in Los Angeles, California.

KIM SNYDER lives in Marion, Ohio. She is a sophomore majoring in elementary education at The Ohio State University at Marion.

PAMELA THOMPSON works in Columbus, Ohio and is a native Ohioan. She is interested in form and color, but her primary interest as a photographer is to capture emotional content.



Marion Campus

*Funded Through
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The 1993 *Cornfield Review* presents voice and vision which encompass and expand the region known as the Midwest. The geography of this collection is that of the human heart, surveyed and mapped by the explorations of travelers, each with a unique perspective.

These pages chart memories of childhood and family, regrets, unfulfilled desires, even whimsy. Myth, fairy tale, folklore, and the natural world are points on the compass, and love, sustaining or cruel, leaves footprints on the landscape. We invite you to explore regions where the direction is true, but the path is neither straight nor narrow.

The Editors

