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Exile Vol. XLIV No. 1

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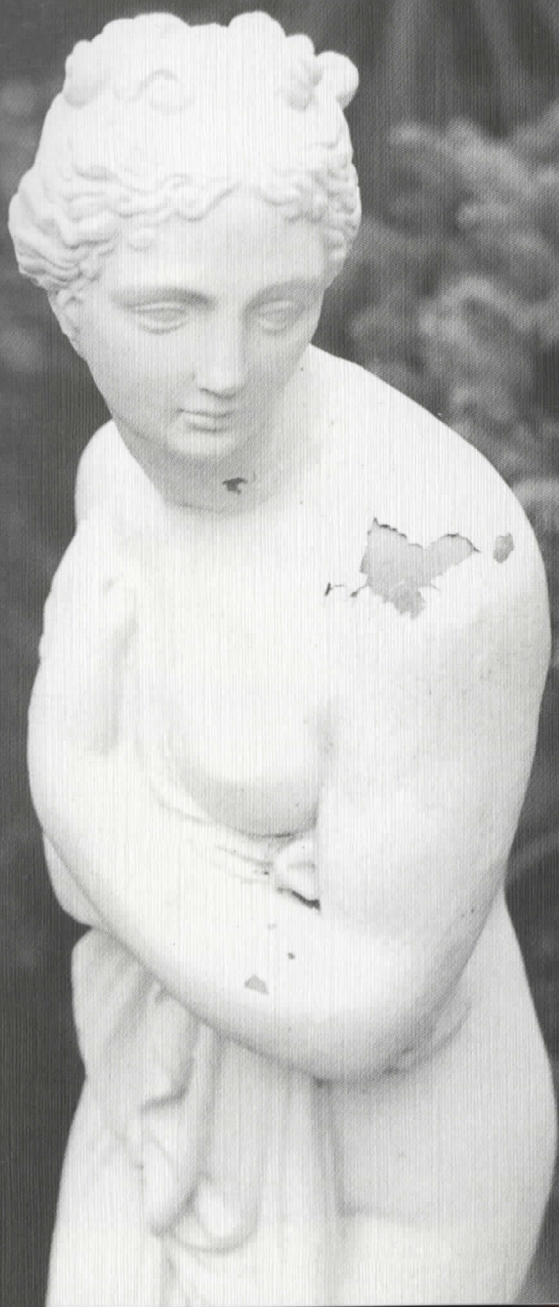
Exile Vol. XLIV No. 1

Authors

Ezra Pound, Colin Bossen, Edward Knotek, Erin Malone, Alison Stine, Angel Lemke, Bekah Taylor, Latisha Newton, Paul Durica, Hillary Campbell, and Kristina Garvin

Exile

Fall 1997



Exile

Denison University's Literary and Art Magazine

You of the finer sense,
Frown against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hark, that is, understand.

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have known all my exile.

—Edna St. Vincent

42nd Year Fall Issue

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You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

—Ezra Pound

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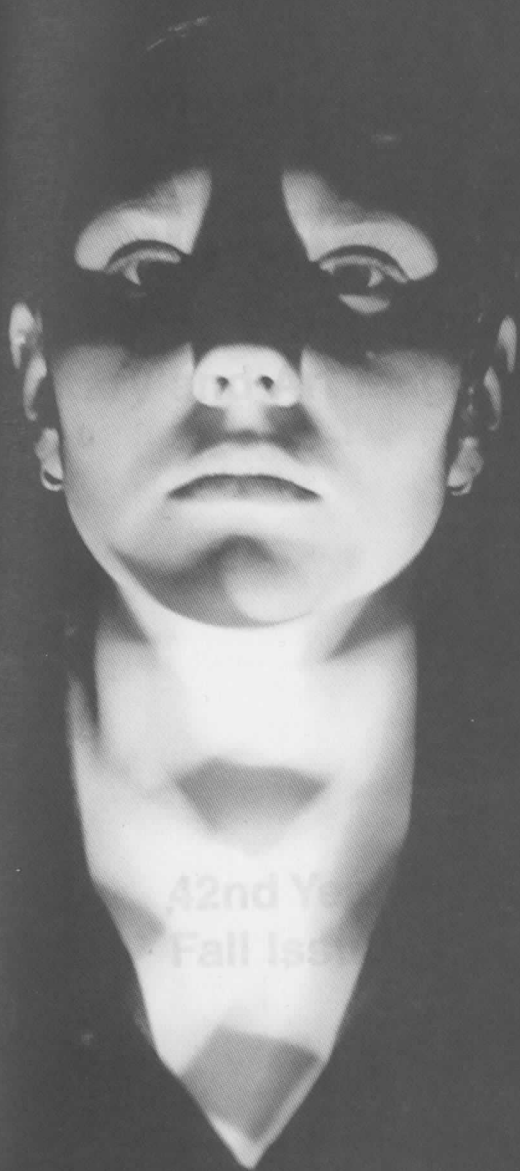
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Las Flores de la Luna (The Flowers of the Moon)

Veo el campo bajo la luna,
la tierra llena de flores.
Su enferma luz lo cambia todo,
aun sus brillantes colores.

No hay ni rojo ni amarillo
ni la púrpura real de hoy;
azul, sólo un azul pálido,
me rodea mientras que voy.

Mis floritas de la luna,
qué tranquilo es su sueño.
No se preocupan del cual,
la luna o el sol, es su dueño...*

*Translation:

*I see the pasture under the moon,
the ground is full of flowers.
Its sickly light changes all,
even their brilliant colors.*

*There is no red, no yellow,
not even the royal purple of today.
Blue, only a pale blue,
surrounds me on my way.*

*My little flowers of the moon,
how peaceful is their sleep.
They need not worry which,
the moon or the sun, is their master..*

—Edward Knotek II '00

the wife

*the newspaper said, "Marlene Dietrech lived
on both sides of the mirror."*

last month they auctioned off her things
at Sotheby's.
a man from Miami purchased Lot 54,
a recipe
for beef stew,
because his wife does not know
how to cook.

*she stood in her beaded, metallic cabaret gowns,
alone*

Lot 30, a travel alarm clock,
with the phone numbers
of her daughter and husband
taped to it,
was sold
to a narcoleptic
from Phoenix.

*until the beads fell away
one
by
one*

her grand piano,
Lot 18,
was bought by a man from
Pittsburgh
for his daughter
studying for Julliard.

and she was left, pale and freckled

undressed.

—erin malone '00

The Writer's Wife

1.

Sewanee, Tennessee.

Late July is music snug against your hips, legs draped
over the back porch of this hungry place, swinging.

They bring the sweet tea in cold water jars here
and write the menu on boards still black, in a girl's
smallish handwriting, chalk stub dangling like a cigarette, swung
on twine, poetry above the counter.

The whispered yellow waitress is pregnant with the busboy's hands,
measuring the wide circumference of her belly with soft fingers, pressed
for listening, asking, *If the mother laughs, does the baby?*

2.

The faces of the writing department reflect as whitefish
looming above their dinner plates.

You rise, gauze skirt whispering against the wax hem of tablecloth,
not to make a speech, not to toast, but pray
bow our heads close our eyes give thanks.

I watch your gray lashes shadow
your face with slanting fern shapes.

Light from the window cuts down your hair,
a perfect sun scar leading into the bone shrug,
disappearing in the white curve of collar, pressed, civilized.

I watched your face during your husband's reading,
the young talented fiction writer

pouring his formative heart before the scrutiny of seated undergrads,
professors shadowed in the back, suited pillars.

You did not blink when the words *whore white trash cock*
came from those familiar lips. No sound

at the metaphors for Carolina girls, white sugar-skinned and slow voiced,
spreading their bodies across men as quick as sunburn.

What were you thinking,

ankles crossed, hands crossed over the soft secrets of your lap?

I saw your lips, closed and listening, tremble

at the words *Jesus Christ*,

the disapproved rocking of that red mouth, your pale biscuit chin.

We passed a moment there, the three of us, then just us
as his eyes broke, his finger fought to find its place
in his well-received first collection.

3.

Dedication to you printed on the fat of his palm like a fortune,
where else could you go but down?
First in the white sheeted bed,
then on the mirror table with a masked audience urging
on all sides. You,
the only one without a costume,
wore white scales of sweat upon your upper lip,
paper on your swollen body.
The softest bed will be this one.

4.

Your stone is the title of his early drafts,
un-revised and always will be:
Annie, wife and mother,
should read: *wife and vessel*,
vehicle for his hands, his child, his words,
for surely we all know where his stories sprang from.
The tender white center of your stomach
has been immortalized
by the *New York Times* book review.

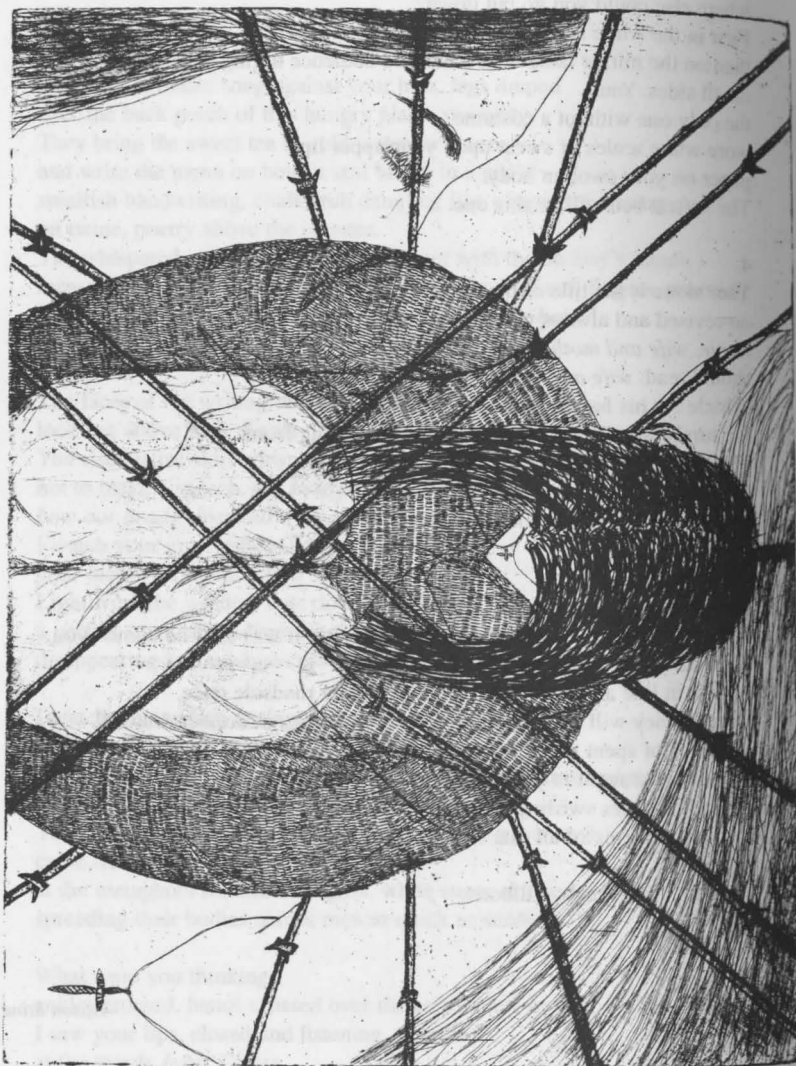
Oh Annie,

were you sorry you married a man
who could distill your movements so perfectly it was as if he coined you,
invented you from the scraps of a pretty girl
he saw in line at the store or walking along a roadside once.
Perhaps they will find folded poems in your solemn dresser drawers,
or scraps of spent paper floating, lily-like,
in the bath, caught in your perfume,
beautiful stories swirling around your hair brush bristles,
lost in the vortex of all that silk black softness, untouched,

trapped. Your words, stillborn

breath.

—Alison Stine '00



"Untitled" by Kate Graf '00

Angora

Emily wanted angora as a gag. You know, as a gag gift for her boyfriend, a big Ed Wood fan. She bought him the Ed Wood collection. The one with *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, *Bride of the Monster*, and the ever-classic *Glen or Glenda*—all housed in a lovely, portable, pink angora-sheathed case. Emily wanted a sweater to go with the video tape set, a pink angora sweater. I asked her if she bought him a blond wig. She'd considered it.

It was two days before X-mas; I had nothing to do. Shooting on my film was delayed. I was out of film. My mom was buying me more as a gift for the holidays. It's rather expensive. Emily appears in my latest project...but that's beside the point, really. I had nothing to do, two days before X-mas, so I went with Emily to Unique Thrift to shop for angora. Now this Unique is not as unique as the Unique on Lorain, just closer. But we had to travel on foot so we went to the Unique on Fulton. The Unique on Lorain was where Emily had purchased the blue overcoat she wore that afternoon. The purple lining was torn slightly, and a button was lost one time when we went out for coffee. Still it was rather stylish. Chic even. Framed her darling hips well. She looked like Faye Dunaway with that coat on. Especially with a black beret on her head. God, I really wanted to film her in that hat and coat, but I guess that's beside the point too.

Walking to Unique Thrift was no pleasure cruise. It was rainy. It was windy. Cleveland December weather totally. My fucking glasses fogged up as we trudged on towards Unique. Emily whined about my lack of a car.

"What—and miss this sure to be treasured experience?" was my reply.

Unique Thrift. I would start with a close-up of one sandblock and then slowly draw back to reveal the whole of the graffiti-plastered bland, beige building with its smudged and cracked showroom windows. Maybe I'll make this the site of my next project. Right now, as you know, I'm filming at the nearby Waffle House. Actually I'm doing something entitled *Twenty-Four Hours at the Waffle House*. It may end up being more like a structuralist film than a pseudo-documentary. I'm not sure yet.

Help Wanted. The sign would be my next shot. It was a big, red two-sided beast with white lettering which faced Fulton Road. I could never work at Unique Thrift. Could I ever put on a hundred extra pounds, emasculate myself, and don a blue smock? I might not have to wear the smock. Some of the women at Unique wore smocks; some didn't. I wanted to ask, how did they decide?

Unique divides its clothes first into gender, then into type, then into color. Emily raced to the female, sweater, pink section. She looked at several sweaters. Nothing woolen would do. Nothing knitted either. She, we, wanted angora, only angora. The many shades of pink thrilled me. I'd never seen so many different subtleties in color. Bubble gum pink. Carnation pink. Strawberry Quick pink. Pepto Bismo pink. On and on and on.

She finally settled on an angora-like sweater—fuck it, the genuine article absolutely could not be found—with a ribbon-like collar. I mean ribbon-like in that the collar of the sweater matched the X-mas ribbons Pops likes to tie to the shutters. "Perfect," she purred. "How much," I asked. Two dollars. Emily smiled; it was half off day.

She looked for skirts for herself. I admired the velvet paintings of conquistadors stuck to the pegboard walls. Toys were strewn across the tops of the clothes racks. Most

of them were dirty and broken. Some were relics from my childhood—the Fisher-Price little people house with all the front sticker stripped away. Guess its next owner will need to re-side it. I couldn't resist ringing the little doorbell as I passed. The toys were systematically scooped-up and dumped into a grocery cart by a Nice and Easy woman—the straps of the blue smock stretched tight around her waist. She was steadily advancing towards us. I nudged Emily, but she was completely entranced by a long, olive skirt. "Aw ya don't have ta move," the woman assured me, "This cart aw's full." I smiled, and so did she.

"What do you think?" asked Emily, holding the olive skirt against her long, perfect for celluloid legs.

"Perfect for your part, love. Very Brenda-esque." Brenda is her character's name in *Twenty-Four Hours at the Waffle House*. I did say it was only a pseudo-documentary. You have to use actors these days.

"What's Brenda-esque?"

"The height of fashion, love." Brenda-esque is simply Emily-esque. I modeled the character after her. Emily-esque is singularity. Consider that day's wardrobe—navy blue jeans with red-orange stitching; a black long-sleeved undershirt with holes cut in the cuffs so that her thumbs fit through—like Kate Hepburn's cuffs in *The Lion in Winter*—and a gray v-neck t-shirt pulled over the black undershirt; Doc Marten boots; and green glitter around her green eyes. I ran my fingers along the collar of the gray v-neck. "Exposing a little flesh, eh."

"Are you bored?" she asked, "Most men are bored by shopping. I know Tod is."

"I'm never bored when in the company of someone truly fascinating."

"Oh, Brent," she cried and threw one arm around my waist as she pulled another skirt off the rack.

I was bored. Truly, really, madly. At least in the women's section. So I ventured to men's, briefly pausing by the sweater racks. Nothing great there. As I was admiring the striped and paisley ties, an old man, reeking of gin and peppermint, pushed his way past me—bastard! I finally found the hat rack. I love hats. Fedoras. Homburgs. Berets. Whatever. This great old hat, kind of Fred Norton like, hung on the rack. But there was a large dusty footprint on the brim. I tried to wipe off the tread marks and failed.

As I headed towards the sports coats, a couple blocked me. They were searching for polo shirts. "The ones with the alligators on them," said the woman. She was rifling through shirts on the rack. The man was leaning against the rack and talking to her. "Now inner city McDonald's ain't of the same quality as suburban McDonald's, you see. At an inner city McDonald's they don't give two fucks about the customer. The cheese drips off the burgers, or it's hardly melted at all. You find your pickles under the patty. Now the suburban McDonald's, they treat you right. The inner city ones don't give a fuck about quality." That's going in the film.

Against one wall was a stack of puzzles and board games. That's where I found it. The buried treasure. A genuine *Battlestar Galactica* colorform set. I had to have it. Dirk Benedict. Lorne Green before Alpo. Thrill me. Chill me. Fulfill me. And only fifty cents according to the ink-filled strip of masking tape on the cover. And it was half off day.

"I told you to put it down. You can't have it," said a woman who looked like

leggy Pop. Her fingers, which gripped the steering bar of a grocery cart full of clothes, were stained tobacco yellow.

"But I wan' it. Why can' I have it?" asked the kid in the striped shirt—oatmeal flakes around his lips jumped with the words. He grabbed Mommy by one leg and pressed a Goofy puzzle against her thigh.

"That's not what we're here for. Put it back. I can't afford it."

The kid cried and stomped his feet against the white, easily-scuffed squares. I put back the colorform set. Some of the stickers were probably missing. It wouldn't be worth anything without Starbuck.

I went back to Emily.

She had found a corduroy skirt and a blue plaid pair of pants. She would try the pants on first thing when we got back to her house and keep them on the rest of the day.

"Aren't you getting anything?" she asked.

"I found a pretty groovy hat, but it was damaged." I only had two dollars left. I'm a fucking starving artist. I wanted paper at this moment, so I could write the McDonald's conversation down. Emily didn't have any in her purse. Fucking bad stroke of luck.

We strolled to the register. I held the pseudo-angora sweater as Emily peered into a glass display case full of old war medals and costume jewelry. I yawned. She spent six dollars in all. The toothless dame in the Buffalo Bills sweatshirt behind the register didn't even wish us Season's Greetings.

"Where to next, love?" I asked as we exited.

"I don't know. Why don't we just go to the Donut Connection?"

So we did.

The only other person under sixty in the place was a boy of about seven. His grandparents brought him to the Donut Connection as a treat. Quite the treat. Still he seemed to enjoy himself as he spun on the orange-capped stool and devoured a white-frosted donut with extra sprinkles. It was Christmas.

All the old people looked like TV truck drivers. Even the women. They all smoked, drank their coffee with heavy amounts of cream and sugar, wore ballcaps and windbreakers, and swore passionately while relating their vulgar adventures.

Emily and I chatted quietly about the project. She smoked an L&M. I told her that X-mas shopping was a drag. "More of a pain than it's worth," she said.

One of the truck drivers barked, "I think I'll go down to Unique and buy my wife a present." Har, har, har, they all went. Emily laughed. And so did I. If only the Donut Connection were open twenty-four hours.

—Paul Durica '00

In the Kitchen

My hands stained
with cilantro, pungent
garlic, rosemary.

The red pepper—roasted for
15 minutes at 375 degrees
rinsed in cold water
flakes skin and oozes juice—
bleeds.

Your blood rust colored on
my hands. Strong and sweet
Greased my face, my lips.

This is a metaphor for something
unspeakable, disgusting.

lost in it, in a kitchen
cooking pasta.

The portabella mushrooms
bleed gray juice
give everything
their distinctive flavor.

Somehow I am saying
“we are nothing more
than our fluids.”

Water, salt tear drops,
yellow mucous, white wine
and blood.

My hands reek of liquid
gray juice, rust blood,

I am reminded that both
sex and cooking are best
either silent or shrill.

—Colin Bossen '98



"Body" by Todd Gys '99

Cliché

Old line now,
“Haven’t we met
somewhere before?”
ruined
by images: sleazy
polyester jumpsuits
revolving discoballs.
But I swear
I thought
I knew you
that first time
you said hello.

And when I told you
about mothers, fathers
and lovers,
you nodded as if
you already knew.
And I thought
the very sweep
of your black lashes
was home.
And I thought
I remembered
your touch
as the first
and your mind
as my own.

You told me
last night
about the "love
of your life."
Another phrase
worn thin
so often
misused,
and she sounded
like no one
I'd ever known
or ever wanted to
know,
really.

And I answered
you, lips tight,
fighting
the grimace,
"I'm happy
if you're happy,"
and you went
home satisfied,
leaving me
to wonder
if it had ever been
anything
more than stale.

—Angel Lemke '00

Too Many Words

Frankie asked Sam to marry her on the last Tuesday in March, under the street-light in front of Hal's Barnyard Bar. She did it because both of them knew he would never get around to asking, and because the very slight wrinkles around her eyes were getting larger much too quickly for her to wait on him—or anybody else—any longer.

They got married in the small church on Dapple Street, Frankie's family making a big Italian to-do about the whole affair, but Sam's family...Sam's "family" not even acknowledging receipt of the marriage invitation. Needless to say, no one from the Feldman side ever showed up for the ceremony. Frankie tried to include Sam in every conversation, every sudden outburst of wild laughter, every love-filled hug between cousins and cousins and cousins. But as the reception came to a close, and she repeated her new name to herself in her head—"Francesca Maria Feldman"—she knew that, although she had taken his name, it would not be an even trade. Sam would never be a Cappellini.

For their honeymoon, Frankie's parents sent the newlyweds to the Poconos for a week, where the two made Janey, born nine months later and much to the excitement of Frankie's mother Sophia. Sophia, whose maiden name was Capra, would never understand her daughter's stubborn decision to break the family's "traditional" marriage to another Italian, but realized she could learn to accept it if she got a chubby pink granddaughter out of the deal. Frankie and Sam had been doomed from the start, Sophia believed—from the moment the two had met in the eighth grade, to the moment Frankie had been forced to propose to him, the poor girl. Sophia had yet to see in her son-in-law what her daughter had supposedly recognized from the beginning.

Samuel Feldman never spoke unless spoken to. Raised by his older brother, he'd never had any female to coddle him or tell him not to throw the first punch—until Frankie came along. And the fact that Sam didn't know how to "treat a lady" suited Frankie just fine, because she'd been smothered by chauvinist men all her life, and Sam was the welcome break she'd needed.

As for what Sam needed, nobody could ever really tell. When he was two years old, he hadn't yet spoken a word, and his alcoholic single mother had finally taken him to the doctor to find out the problem. Amidst her cloud of perfume and vodka, her flash of false gold earrings and her teased and hair-sprayed puff of bleached-blond hair, the grandfatherly doctor had told her that Sammy had nothing wrong with his vocal chords, nor his ear drums. Mrs. Feldman, gathering her elephant-sized purse and her silent, wide-eyed child, took the doctor's indication of lack of physical ailments to be a direct insult to her mothering, and left the office in a huff. This would be one of the last times Sam would feel the embracing arms of his mother, for she would leave six months later in the front seat of another man's Mercedes. Passed along from long-lost relative to long-lost relative, Sam and Michael eventually settled in the apartment three blocks from the Cappellini's house, Michael working two part-times, and Sam going to school whenever he felt like it.

No one expected anything lasting to begin when, outside the town movie theater on one humid September evening, the brown-eyed, eighth-grade Italian beauty approached the small black-haired rebel who had dirt under his fingernails.

"See those girls laughing behind me? See 'em?" she asked the boy with the eyes that were always looking, always silent. "They dared me to come over here and kiss you, and I'm sure as hell not gonna give them the satisfaction of calling me a scaredy-cat, so please just...just stay right there and let me do this real quick. I swear I'll never bother you again."

She lied. She did bother him again. And again. And again. There was something refreshing in the way Sam just sat there and let her do all the talking, something empowering about the way her parents looked at him when he came over at midnight and disappeared into her room, something exhilarating in the way his shoulders became so broad by senior year, and the way his long hair barely brushed the tops of his shoulders, and the way his great, paw-like hands could be gentle when they cupped themselves around her chin and pulled her close.

And by the time she got back from two years at community college, followed by four at the town university—a Bachelor's Degree in Education in one hand and a fraternity brother-induced badly broken heart in the other—he was still there, waiting for her. Waiting, with enough money stashed away from his job at the hardware store to take her out for long weekends at a downtown hotel, helping her to forget what's-his-name from the university, who tore her heart in two and left her with nothing but what she figured was inevitable—becoming Mrs. Samuel Feldman.

"Do you think of me as being your last hope?" Frankie asked Sam one night at the hotel, her knees drawn up under the covers, and his eyes glued to the football game on TV.

"Hm?" he muttered, placing his hand on her foot and keeping his eyes on the game.

She let her brown eyes travel over the length of his long, curving spine as he leaned forward to hear the TV better, and she realized with a start that she was 25 years old, and this was where her life was going.

"Never mind," she said.

Sam turned his head and looked at her as if he'd only just realized she was there. She half-smiled, and he leaned back and took her in his arms. As she drifted off to sleep, she heard him whisper "I love you," and she remembered what it felt like to be safe. It helped to be with him when she needed someone. After all, it had always helped before.

The next night, she proposed. It wasn't the fireworks display she'd always imagined that particular moment would be like, but it was at least something. There was actually more energy in the air at the moment when she told her mother, whose face promptly turned just a shade paler than the whites of her eyes, and who then proceeded to drop the pie in her hands straight onto the kitchen floor.

"Well? I love him, Mom, and he loves me, and why shouldn't I have asked him? This is America, Mom. The nineties," she had said calmly, picking pie off the floor.

The only Cappellini to understand was Grandma Rosa, whose leathery hands smelled like they always did—lemon verbena—when they gently clasped her granddaughter's face, and who, in her soft Italian accent, wished Frankie nothing but great happiness. Frankie had smiled and looked toward her parents when her grandmother had said this, but neither had been paying attention, and wouldn't have acknowledged such open-

mindedness anyhow.

And so life as a Jewish-Italian married couple had begun. The birth of Jane kept Frankie continually on her toes, especially when she went back to work as a first grade teacher, and Grandma Rosa came to live with them and watch over Janey during the day. As a result of the stress, Frankie yelled a great deal more at Sam, wishing he would yell back, and all along knowing he wouldn't. What she had once regarded as a cute and unselfish characteristic of his had now become a reason for suspicion and annoyance. Frankie had only the determination to show her parents that she could live the life she'd chosen. But sometimes she felt it took more than Sam's strong arms to chase away what lies she'd spun around herself, amidst her tiny daughter and her unlikely husband.

When Frankie yelled, Sam did listen. In Sam's mind, there before him stood the fiery chocolate-haired Italian vixen he'd always known, and, as usual, she spent all her innermost energies on him. Her words swam in him like the revival of his own sentences, gone stale and crumbled up into dust so many years ago. Sam's world was Francesca Maria, although no one seemed to know it but him.

What went on inside his head, everyone wondered? What did Sam Feldman think about when he worked morning till night at the hardware store, ringing up orders and restocking shelves and taking an hour at noon for lunch? "It's almost like I think he's a robot sometimes," he heard Frankie say to Grandma Rosa in the family room one night, while he took the dishes out of the dishwasher. "He's up at six with the alarm, he never says anything to me—let alone you—and when he gets home, he eats and watches TV and plays with Janey and goes to bed. I knew he was quiet when I married him, but this is getting ridiculous." And then Rosa, with her rickety accent and gentle eyes, "Ridiculous-a for who, Francesca? You love-a him, eh?" And Sam's ears would strain to hear her answer, "Yes, I love him." She'd pause. "But maybe..." And Janey would suddenly cry from her bed, and Sam would go in to quiet her, missing the rest of the conversation in the other room. When he'd return, he'd see the wetness in his wife's eyes.

It wasn't as if routine was somehow strange for Sam. Since he was a child, moving from house to house, he'd learned to accept the constant uprooting. Shouting at his brother never did any good, and neither did shouting at Frankie. He'd never wanted to shout at Frankie, come to think of it. She satisfied him in every way possible. So when he took the night job at the town university, he didn't even think about why, even when Frankie's eyebrows rose sharply and her lips pressed together after he told her.

It was a janitor's job at the campus coffee house, and he would be gone for only a half hour, beginning at 12:30 a.m. They'd earn a few extra dollars, and all he had to do was mop the floor and wipe the tables and wash the windows. Nothing more than a half hour's work, and then he'd be home in bed with his wife next to him, and his daughter a wall away. Things would be just as they'd always been.

But for one reason or another, things were *not* the same. Sam didn't ask Frankie what was wrong, and he didn't try and figure it out, either. She seemed almost as if having him home was a burden, and this was a feeling he'd never had before. Frankie always needed him—that was the one thing they'd always had between them. That was the one thing they thrived on. And that was the first thing to go when Sam began to leave the house a bit earlier on weeknights before he went to the coffee house.

It had been raining charcoal droplets all day when he first parked outside on the reflective asphalt and trudged through the door. Like a movie, the room was just as he remembered it from high school—dark, dry and full of drunken laughter and conversation. The juke box in Hal's Barnyard Bar played "Rock 'n Roll Party Queen" in the background, and the smell of beer filled Sam's nostrils, bringing back memories from school. Had it really been that long since he'd been there? And why had he come in tonight?

The calming taste of a cool beer was something he hadn't realized he'd missed so much—Frankie and Rosa frowned on having alcohol in the house with Janey around. He'd understood this. Part of him remembered his mother, in the years before she'd left. Part of him remembered loving her.

Leaving home early to go to Hal's soon became the usual for Sam, as did most things in his life. He reasoned that if he became tipsy in any way, he'd only go to campus early and swig a few coffees before the place closed and he had to clean up. The college kids were so nice to him, anyway, and, after a while, he went early all the time. They seemed happy to see him when he got there, after all, and he'd sit up there by the counter and talk with the kid running the place, or with the students already sitting nearby, starved for talk and avoiding their work.

Sometimes he'd wait until they asked him a question before he talked to them. One girl would always ask about Jane. He'd tell them all that Janey was fine—he'd tell them the story of when she'd spoken her first word, taken her first step, had her first haircut. Then there was the boy who wondered about Frankie, and whether or not she really was pregnant again. Of course she was, Sam would answer, and this time it would be a boy for him to play catch with and take out fishing along the river during the summer. He'd never been fishing himself, but a man had to learn sometime, now, didn't he? In the back of his mind, Sam thought back to when he'd asked his brother to take him fishing, and when his brother had refused, time and time again. After awhile, he'd stopped asking.

Did someone ask about work, or had it been Sam's imagination? He had hardly touched his coffee. It was cold now—better make him a new cup. Work was fine, he said, although you know what he really wished? He really wished the kids would leave the silver metal door to the radio unlocked so he could turn the radio on and listen to some rock 'n roll at night as he cleaned—that's what he wished. How was he supposed to get his work done quick and get home to his house if he didn't have music to work to? Songs make a person's legs move faster, he'd say, and laugh at himself, and laugh at everyone else laughing with him, too. The way they all looked at each other when he talked—it reminded him of how he had felt when Frankie had pulled him over to join the conversation between Sophia and her father on their wedding day, at the reception. He had no more wanted to listen to them than they had wanted to talk to him. But that couldn't be the way these kids felt now, because he *wanted* to talk to them. He was sure they wanted to listen.

At 1 a.m., after he finished cleaning, he would drive home through the engulfing darkness and enter the house without turning on any lights. Stale coffee taste in his mouth, he'd climb the stairs and crawl into bed with Frankie, feeling thankful that she didn't turn over and ask him how work went. She'd never asked before. He didn't know why he'd begun to be so afraid she would start now.

Sam's nights came alive when he went to the coffee house and sank down on the stool at the counter. He no longer needed the questions to get him rolling—he began talking on his own, and didn't stop for anything. He would wag his finger at the student behind the counter and tell her the radio had better be unlocked when he went to turn it on later that night. But she would only shrug and say she just followed the rules. Sometimes he would be talking about his brother when he would realize it was *his* voice making all the noise, and he'd think to himself that it sounded rusty—like the un-oiled parts of a clock that had only just started turning again. He would tell them all with his great big paw hands on their tiny innocent shoulders that he was 30 years old, and his wife's grandmother had just died in her sleep. In her sleep! he'd say, as if no one ever died that way. That Grandma Rosa, he'd say, that Grandma Rosa sold pasta in Italy when she was younger—she used to tell everyone about it all the time. You'd think those days selling pasta were some of the best days of her life or something, like no one ever did anything for her except buy her own homemade spaghetti, Sam would say, slapping the one red-haired kid on the back between cold cup of coffee after cold cup of coffee. And the radio would still be locked when he went to turn it on at 12:30.

The day of Rosa's funeral, Sam didn't go to work at the hardware store. He stood with Frankie and Janey and Sophia and Mr. Cappellini around the casket as it was lowered into the ground, and he was silent and stone for his trembling wife. He held her in his arms in the kitchen when they got home, and thought this was all she needed, all she'd ever need from him—to be held. Janey was sleeping, and Frankie was crying into his chest, and there was no Rosa there for him to eavesdrop on later that evening as she knitted next to Frankie on the couch.

After dinner, when he walked into the family room to lean down and kiss Frankie goodbye on his way to Hal's, she turned her cheek from his lips, and looked down at her long fingers, twisting her wedding ring around and around her knuckle. Sam stood up. Stood.

"Why don't you stay here tonight?" she asked numbly, without raising her face.

He knew she didn't expect an answer, so he didn't give one. But this time, he was wrong. She lifted her brown eyes to him, and they were ringed with red. He'd seen that look only once before.

"Why don't you?" she hissed again.

"I work tonight—" he said, but she turned her head away again sharply like he'd slapped her.

"No!" she yelled through clenched teeth. "I mean why don't you say something? Why don't you ever *say* anything?"

He stood still, not stopping himself from talking—he simply had nothing to say. As usual.

"We're not kids anymore, Sam! We can't go everyday playing this guessing game, with me always wondering what you're thinking, and always being wrong. I'm always guessing," she said, standing up and running her fingers through her short hair. She'd cut it only last week. Had he told her he liked it?

"I don't know what you want me to say—" he said, because it was the truth.

"But I don't want you to say what I want you to say! I want you to say what *you*

want to say! Grandma just died, Sam! You can't just go on pretending everything's the same..."

"But everything *is* the same," he said, confused. He wanted a beer.

"How can...?" she said, eyes dashing back and forth like she couldn't find him.

"You don't really mean that!"

"Mean what?"

"You don't understand. Nobody understands until it happens to them," she said, and started mumbling to herself over in the corner.

Sam stared at her and tried to think. He felt as if something were slipping away from him that he'd gotten used to having for too long. He tried to put his arms around her, but she threw them off and spun at him. Her words were like venom.

"No! No, that won't work this time!" she yelled.

"It worked before."

"Yes, but this is not 'before,' and I'm not who I was 'before,'" she said.

"'Before,' all I needed was your strength. But that's not enough anymore—why can't you see that? Why don't I deserve to be talked to?"

He looked at her.

"I hear how you talk to all those students at the coffee house—like, like *they're* the ones who need to hear your voice, like *they're* the ones you share your bed and your house and your daughter with, like *they're* the ones who need to hear you every once in a while. Don't you think there's something wrong when I feel like I need to go there to hear you? Why don't you ever talk to me? Why, Sam?"

"Because you never listened."

The words echoed strangely in and out of the house walls like the swish of a candle being blown out. They filled years of role-playing, and each one being what the other wanted them to be. They filled her loud reports at the dinner table about her day of teaching, and his silent smiles when she laughed at Janey gurgling in her highchair. They filled her proposal, and her gathering him up when she'd returned from college, having given up on love and settling for the arms that didn't speak, but held. They filled Sophia's knowing stare.

When Sam tried to start up conversation that night with his young friends, somehow he couldn't get started. Somehow, through his drunken eyes, he saw for the first time how they glanced at each other, annoyed when he sat down, how they searched for excuses to leave with their tired eyes, how they shrank from his touch when he slapped them on the back. He felt his words dry up in the well inside him, slowly and slowly recognizing the He he used to be. He didn't even remember saying "yes" when she'd asked him under that streetlight years ago. He thought he'd only sighed.

And later that night, when he walked over to the radio to try to open the door, he didn't expect the metal door to be unlocked. But for some reason it was, and he switched it to the rock 'n roll station, dancing around the coffee house on the dirt-trodden floor, singing aloud to himself for the first time in his life.

—Hillary Campbell '00



"Untitled" by Anne Couyoumjian '00

Your Worshipfulness

Princess Leia was so beautiful,
 she had braided coils around
 her ears and a long white robe
 that looked like a bedsheet,
 and she fell in love, and her
 brother was jealous, incestual
 until he knew he was her brother,
 and then they were best
 friends, and all the Ewoks
 loved her and cuddled and smooched
 at her as if she were their furry
 momma, and she gobbled them up
 one by one, and she shot a laser gun
 and yelled a lot, and she was
 a powerful lady and someday
 I'll be just like that.

—Bekah Taylor '00

Thoughts on a Word: A Song of No Joy in Six Parts

I.

Another somebody's martyr sits strapped to a
wooden framed, steel hinged, iron bolted chair
eyes blank, sedated
head rough shaven

preparing to breathe
last slow fatal breaths
or sizzle and sparkle
until eyes shine hollow

II.

The vernacular slang—justice
defined:
filthier than a judge's whore sheets
a new dollar bill
and true green bloods—war, factories and ever profitable famine

III.

On the other side
ax chops
muffled screams
gun shots
crack deals, broken windows, jacked cars, stolen change purses
red raw broken limbs
and passionate hate

IV.

Someone gently screams "Don't mourn me boys, organize."

V.

most state murders—black
black men, black flags, black faces, black blood
coal miner black, protester black, Indian black, August Spies black,
Mumia black, Socrates black,
peace black and sometimes anger black
land black, money black all black
most state murders—black

VI.

End note image:

Jesus, original peace prophet
strapped, fixated, crushed and
crucified
naked, thirsty, starving, bleeding
Drowning in his own fluids

—Colin Bossen '98

The Tearoom

Cold porcelain sink
allows a slow leak to be heard
dripping under the heavy
breathing from behind
the stall door.

The watchqueen watches
as they begin, enjoying voyeurism
through a small crack in the door
listening to them, the water dropping
and for footsteps.

Dirty tile reveals many
have passed through
either observing the sights
or became a sight, a stagnant
smell hangs in the air.

The smell of sweat and semen
and sweet aftershave of one
or all of them lingers.
The watchqueen blinks fast
taking pictures he'll later

develop in his mind. Flicking
his lighter to light a cigarette,
he inhales at the same moment
things come to an end
in the stall. He puts a hand

in his pocket and makes
an up and down motion
on the side of his inner thigh,
making sure his thumb touches
him. One more drag, cigarette out,

he's next.

—Latisha Newton '98

Underpass

Sometimes I think the most secretive place in the world is the underpass where Danny lives, late in the evening when the sky turns the grass a golden brown color and the autumn chill begins to seep into my bones and joints. I'm a little uncomfortable, so I crack my knee and sit up straight. I burrow down in my leather jacket, in an attempt to push the cold off the brink of my mind, but it's not really working. Breathing warm air onto my hands, I stare at Danny as he spreads himself across the concrete. He lies on his back and smiles at me, and I wonder if he's forgotten what day it is. Soon the sun will disappear again and it won't really matter.

After a few minutes, Danny stirs and takes out that little brown book, good as the day he bought it, and hands it to me. He props his head up with his hands and sighs contentedly. "Read this to me," he whispers, his breath forming into vaporous puffs that threaten to become icicles before my very eyes.

"Again?"

"Please." He points to the exact verse with a thin finger. "There."

I press my lips together and sigh. The words squirm on the page and I rattle them off to free them from their antsy anticipation. "You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken—"

"Steady Jeanie. I need time."

I begin again, with emphasized torpidity. The papers, reports, and unfinished homework loom like huge blimps on the edge of my mind. "You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains, At your rebuke they flee..."

An older breeze vibrates through the branches, and the sun sits atop the horizon, his inertia captivating my sweet sense of longing. From the edge of the underpass, I can see vultures circling above us in a sky smoky from a distant forest fire. When I finish the verse, Danny's eyes are locked shut and I believe him to be asleep. His eyelids are pale and blue and his face is pink like the foggy sunset. I stand on my feet preparing to leave, when his voice tolls once more from the bottom of his soul: "Again, Jeanie."

I sit down again, and without reluctance I read the passage one more time, my thin voice traveling through time and space, intercepting the stresses and obligations of the modern world, exorcising the demons of every day life. Danny has forgotten to breathe, I think—and I have forgotten to worry. The underpass becomes our world, and all I can see from the small opening are these blue hills silhouetted against a gray sky. As the sun disappears, so do the words from my lips, falling onto the ground like rose petals at the summer's end.

Danny breathes again, and I remember my math homework. The underpass refuses to flinch—but the hills are different now. They're rolling, rolling...rolling away.

—Kristina Garvin '01



"Untitled" by Sam H. Dodson IV '98

Nurtural Selection

1.

The skull traveled around the classroom.
I took it, and turned my ancestor over and over
noticing the canine teeth, the snout jutting out,
the ridges over the musty caves of eye.
The dust flaked off onto my hands;
I passed her to the next desk.

2.

*With food stamps, ma'am...
Well, there was a sale on those...
No, the Cap'n Crunch
is my son's favorite—
take out the strawberries instead.*

3.

She appeared before me,
the woman who would sling her baby
to her back and gather berries for hours,
who would nurse, who would create us.
Right now she is grooming her child;
she is showing him where to find the ticks,
how to grasp them, remove them with less pain.
She holds his fingers over new skin and brings
them together, a quick movement,
then crunching in his mouth.

4.

*If you have any hints
as to the whereabouts of this man,
please call us...he was last
seen at a Dairy Queen in Estes Park,
Colorado, after which he proceeded
to the young woman's house and at gun point...*

5.

Once I had a stuffed monkey
and it would put its banana
in its mouth and I'd pull it out and
he would never win—he just wanted
that banana like nothing else
and so I just let him have it

6.

While sorting the meals, she looks for the males
every so often, scans for a break in the plains.
She lets him have some milk.
It calms her. She rises and smells rain,
the storm's front challenging her own
as the wind tangles her arms in hair.
There is a herd approaching,
throwing dust up in circles.

7.

I want both!!!

*You can't have both. Choose—Barbie or Pink Power Ranger.
Okay. I'll pick one.*

She clutched the box to her chest and the plastic
gave under her knuckles and the store was
glinting and this was where she wanted to be, until
it was time to go home and they pulled in and the
bag crinkled as her mom locked the doors.

What's for dinner, huh?

*I don't know yet, sweetie. Come on, Daddy
will be home soon. Did you clean up
your paints? You better go do that.*

8.

Well, sir, I've been working here for five years and I just thought...

9.

He is home, and they are eating.
She hands him the rock she used
to crack the shells. Berry juice
runs down her chin.

10.
*My wife can't come in
 to work today...Yeah, she's really feeling
 under the weather...I know, last week she had
 a cold—I think this is one of those
 flu viruses goin' around...she doesn't have
 a strong immune system, you know how that is...
 I'm takin' care of her
 though, don't worry...mmm hmmm...
 thanks, sir...ok...bye.*

11.
 She is helping him walk,
 holding the fists
 that will beat her
 as the tiny legs take steps;
 she is collecting nuts and
 roots and grains to fill the mouth
 that will shout that she is a useless bitch
 and as she picks him up
 he flails his legs, heels digging
 into the soft of her stomach.

—Bekah Taylor '00

Exile Talks to Poet Deborah Digges

On Thursday, November 6, *Exile's* Colin Bossen had the opportunity to interview poet Deborah Digges. In addition to her most recent book of poetry, *Rough Music*, and her memoir *Fugitive Spring*, Digges has published two previous books of poems, *Vesper Sparrows*, which won the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award, and *Late in the Millennium*. She has received grants for her writing from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Currently, she is an associate professor of English at Tufts University, and lives in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Exile: I noticed that in your earlier books you tend to write a lot of formal poetry but in your most recent book, *Rough Music*, you seem to have moved away from formal verse. Has this been an intentional move? If so, why have you started to write more free verse?

Digges: I do feel that free verse is a form. I think I just got tired of writing formal poems. I think it's true that you write poems to an audience, but that when you do write a poem, you can only work with what interests you. You are not obligated to write about anything or write in any specific way. You can only write about what truly deeply interests you, and I think that most poets only have one or two subjects they write about. I think I used to work in forms so much, like the sestina, that I had to go into detox. The result of which is my poem "Rocks, Paper, Scissors," which is a great big formal mess. It is sort of like a sprung sestina. After that, I kind of gave up formal poetry. I think that these formal poems were teaching me something about the nature of my language. Sometimes I tell my students to adopt a form over the summer and work it over and over again and then give it up. I tell them that they will see that form influences their free verse or, as I would say, influences the spring inside their language. Because, you see, I don't really think that free verse is free at all. It is sprung from, in some ways, history and traditional forms. It is as highly wrought as a formal line. It has a spring inside of it that makes it work, like in old watches. Poetry is the highest form of human articulate language. It is like bird song to me.

Exile: If there are rules to free verse, how come no one has written about them?

Digges: In some ways the rules of free verse are more abstract than the rules of formal verse. It is not like you have 14 lines of 10 syllables or a toolbox with very specific tools. The form of free verse is point of view. You are answering one abstraction with another. The question is: who is thinking and from where? That is the most vital thing about free verse.

Exile: How is voice a form?

Digges: Well, let's look at a sonnet for instance. Or better yet, one of the odes. The form acts as the point of view. The speaker in those poems can go anywhere as long as the reader has something to hold on to.

Exile: I am not sure I completely understand what you mean when you say that free verse has form. Could you elaborate a little more?

Digges: When you say that free verse has a form, you are saying that free verse has limits because form suggests limits. So when I say that free verse has form, that suggests that it has limits, and you find that upsetting. That is not exactly what I mean when I say that it has a form. I am not saying that it has limits. I mean that the subject of the poem is what gives it form, because there is nothing else that can. The subject of the poem will find a form within the white space of a page. That form has integrity. It is not just anything—it is carefully thought out. Maybe it is the word “form” that you are having a problem with.

Exile: That is exactly it. I think of a free verse poem as the anti-thesis of form. It doesn't have set boundaries to begin. When you write a free verse poem, you are creating a form.

Digges: Look at Whitman. His free verse sets up certain problems for him. His line length, for instance. He goes beyond the classic 10-syllable line. What happens when you extend the line past 10 syllables? What does the problem become? It becomes: how do you keep the poem going? As they used to say, “out there, there be dragons.” And that is what Whitman is doing—he is going out there with the dragons. How is he doing it? Well, for one thing, he uses commas. He doesn't stop the line. So he is understanding that his free verse is finding form by suspending something—namely, the end of the line. His free verse is finding form based on its content. Dickinson, on the other hand, has the opposite problem. She writes a line that is subtracted from the classic line. It is filled with silence. Her problem is not so much how to keep the thing going, but how to keep the thing from going by so fast. One could argue that is why she uses those dashes. She understands that her content has certain limitations that she has to overcome somehow with her form, inside the line. Does that make more sense?

Exile: Yes, it does. It makes perfect sense.

Digges: You just have to remember to take it poem by poem. Every content has its own form, and the content will decide what the form will be.

Exile: What is the purpose of your writing? Or, putting that question another way, what kind of sound are you trying to make?

Digges: It is an interesting question, but I am relieved to say that I don't think there is really a purpose. As for a sound, I like being noisy. I think that language in and of itself is silent and abstract and sort of the means for things. Language resides and begins in the body and then it comes out of the body as noise as bird song. I think that is a conflict in language in that it is both nothing and only the names for things, and that it is a cry of some kind, of experience maybe. So I suppose the sound I want to make is loud and memorable.

Exile: Speaking of bird song, throughout your poetry you make reference to birds. Is there a reason for this? Are birds part of a symbolic language that you use? Or do you just like to incorporate them into your poetry?

Digges: Birds, and sparrows in particular, are a big thing for me. You know, I have a sister who kind of gave it all up and moved Sedona, Arizona, and became a sort of psychic healer, which I think is great. We had a discussion one day about what she calls your totem. I said that it had to be a sparrow because sparrows are everywhere—you don't notice them, because they are hardy little birds. They have tremendous courage. They are terrifically earnest and full of life. They can nest anywhere. I love their ability to survive and actually thrive. You know, they were imported from England in the 18th century. They were so prolific that they were actually called immoral birds. People tried to get rid of them. I also think that the human affinity with flight is very interesting. I think we have always had—because we have this thing called imagination—an obsession with flight. We have an envy of flight. The eating of the wing bones as if that were going to make you dream wizard flights. I guess I kind of fall into that fascination with bird flight. And now with the discovery of the left and right hemisphere of their brains, and that birds learn song the same way we learn language... So I don't know, I just don't have language for a lot of things that I write about, and birds seem to help me deal with that.

Exile: This might sound like an odd question but do you have an obsession with sin? I ask this because a lot of your poems, like "Rough Music" for example, are about being a sinner. They seem to be about how your past, or your sins, not only continue to haunt you, but shape you.

Digges: Sin is one word for it. I really think that poets—and I forget who I am quoting here—cannot be the citizens of any country. I can use science to explain myself. In ornithology there is this term called the abrupt green edge. It is the edge of a forest just before fields or open spaces. Interestingly enough, most of the life resides right there—right inside the tree line. Deeper into the forest is a lot of danger, and the soil is actually fallow. Out in the fields there is richness and fallowness, but most lives are lived right here on the edge—between the borders. This is true of poets. We do not live in culture, and not so far out to sea as to not be able to recognize culture. That is where poetry happens.

When you begin to affiliate yourself and begin to have too many opinions, I think it starts to ruin your poetry. There are a lot of poets who are really political and believe that one needs to take certain kinds of stands. I don't agree with that. I think that poetry takes care of all that eventually. I mean you can read my politics when you read *Rough Music*. I am not interested in political poetry.

I like the notion of the poet as being what Keats calls the chameleon poet: someone who is invisible in culture; someone who is not aligned with any side. When you start to take sides, you become limited.

In "Rough Music," of course, that person is a sinner who hasn't taken sides. Someone who didn't pay their parking tickets. Not because they couldn't but because they didn't want to. The narrator is someone who thinks themselves above the law, and then it catches up to them.

Exile: I think it is very interesting that you didn't start writing till you were older. Because of this, your poetry seems to speak of experience a lot. Would you like to talk about this a little bit?

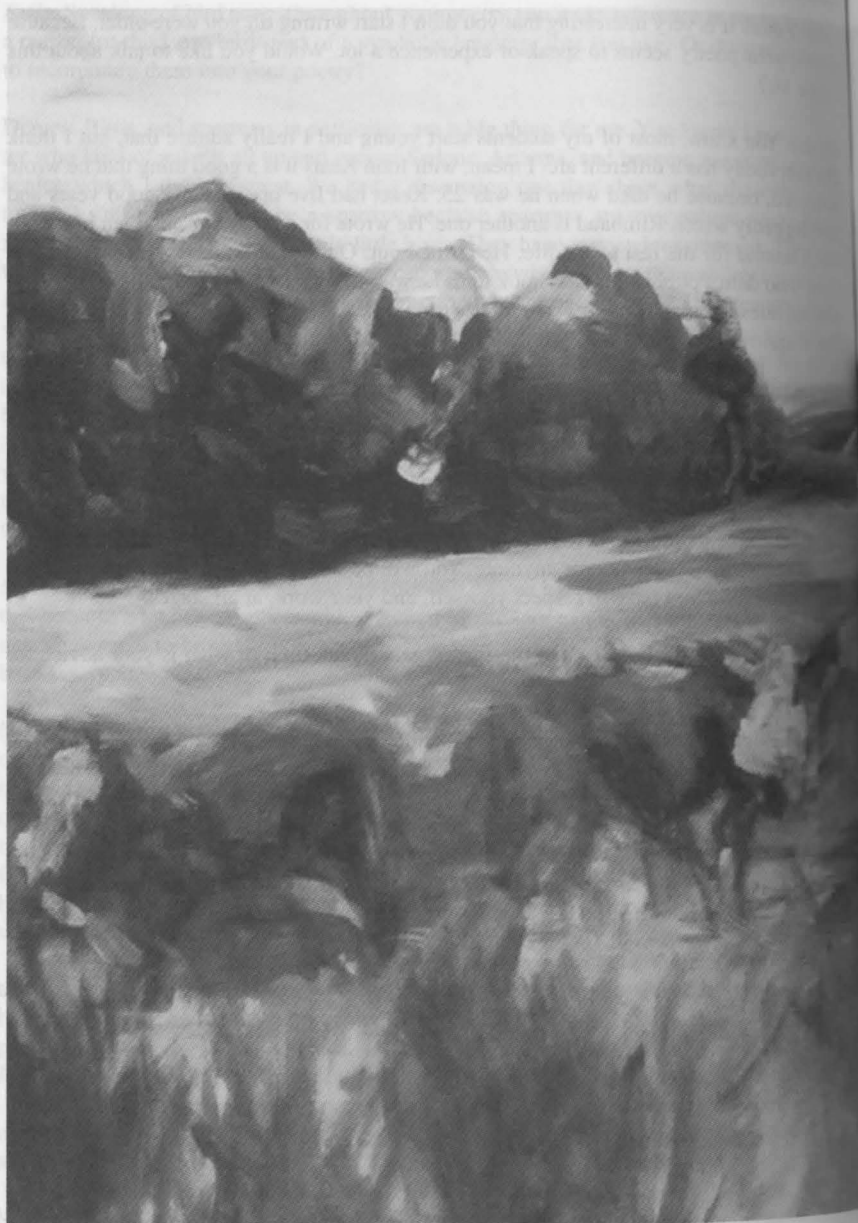
Digges: You know, most of my students start young and I really admire that, but I think that everybody has a different arc. I mean, with John Keats it is a good thing that he wrote when did, because he died when he was 25. Keats had five or six really good years and just doggedly wrote. Rimbaud is another one. He wrote for a few years and then just wandered around for the rest of his life. He burned out. On the other hand, you have Robert Frost who didn't publish his first book until he was 45. So, where does the fire start? And how far does it burn? There is no right or wrong time to start writing. For me, I am sort of like a squirrel who stores up a whole lot of nuts before starting to write.

I also believe that if one puts the kind of pressure on oneself, it doesn't matter whether one's poems will last. I don't think that we are getting any better as poets. What you are writing now are the great poems of your youth. Ten years from now you will be writing a different poem and you won't be able to get back to that. It is really important that you document what is available to you now—however abstract, however innocent it might be. It has its own integrity. It will be something that you will pick up later on and will not be able to duplicate. You will pick up strains of it here and there but you won't be capable of writing those poems anymore. You will be writing different poems from a different center. So you have to respect yourself, and your work, at all stages.

Exile: I guess that sort of ties into the sort of generic question of what is your advice for young writers, if you have any?

Digges: I don't think that young writers begin to write because they have read a lot—we begin to write because we have to. And then what is very liberating is the reading, because you begin to realize, in all great ways, that you have had that thought, too. Sometimes you read someone and say "You know, I was going to write a poem about that too," or "I also have a story like this that I need to write." In an odd way, reading gives you permission and kind of kicks you in the butt. I guess that is my best advice to young poets. Read books. Mind you, not just poetry, but all sorts of books. Also, I would say to them have fun.

—Colin Bossen '98



"Untitled" by Ashley Puckett '00

The Rest

On the morning of the first day of the rest of his life, Gregory oversleeps. He awakens with the blurred dullness of contact lens-less vision, the vertical stripes of light slipping from the edges of the blinds, making tick tack toes on the bedroom floor, across his feet. At age twenty-nine, Gregory realizes the futility of making his bed. It is noon almost. Stripping the sheets off and putting new ones on, warm from the dryer, will make him exhausted, he knows this without attempting. It is the meds that make him tired, the meds themselves, and having to get up several times during the night to take them.

Gregory combats the tiredness with coffee. This was Neil's job, to have the coffee pot going before the shower, to wordlessly hand Gregory a mug as he stood in the bathroom, naked, waiting for the water to heat up in its ancient pipes, snaking unseen through the old house walls like veins. Gregory liked to hear Neil moving around in the kitchen, making breakfast, settling things, as he, Gregory, flossed his teeth and borrowed Neil's electric razor. In the months before he died, Neil slept later and later, getting up after Gregory, and then not at all. This, Gregory knew, was what death was, buried under warm dirty sheets while the sun moved across you, starting with stripes at the foot of the bed and gradually moving on up.

He gets in the shower before the water has heated, wincing as the cold spray spatters against his chest, shrinking his small nipples. He puts his lenses in and shaves with Neil's razor, not stopping to wonder that he still calls it Neil's, or that he has an electric razor of his own, a Christmas gift, going unused in the closet. He dresses: boxer shorts, jeans, and a faded gray T-shirt. He has stopped bothering with shoes and socks unless he is going out, and Gregory has stopped going out.

He needs to go through Neil's things. His friends say this will give him closure, but he knows that closure is opening the medicine cabinet and seeing Neil's prescription bottles only half empty.

At least he can cook for himself, a skill he picked up from his college roommate and once lover. The joy of being homosexual in college, of living unsuspiciously together, even innocently introducing your lover as your roommate to your parents, has faded. Gregory sees the disillusion on the faces of men his own age, even younger than him. He wonders if this is what he looks like, if they are viewing him with the same emptiness with which he sees them, the kind of unspoken understanding which Neil called empathy and Gregory calls pity.

He paddles down to the kitchen and makes breakfast, flipping on the coffee maker's red plastic button before anything else. Its electric hum is comforting. The smell of eggs crackling in the skillet makes him nauseous so he turns off the burner and sits at the table, cradling his mug around his two hands, long after it turns cold, as though to warm them.

He has had the dream again. The first part of it is real, Neil small and white in the hospital with the light beneath the bed, a catheter dripping a clear, strangely beautiful fluid straight into his heart. Gregory held his hand, kissing the liver spots' pale brown, running his fingers softly over the opaquely visible green veins as though to squeeze them back into his skin, to push them back into unconsciousness. The veins were raised like

rivers on a relief map, recognizable even with his eyes closed. Sometimes during the night Gregory would reach for that hand, still comforted by its familiarity. Its warmth rested heavy in his palm like an answer.

Neil was asleep. Gregory kept waiting for the stirring just before death, for the moment of abrupt alertness just before he slipped out of the room, their last private window for good-byes. In the dream, Neil's eyes half opened and he slid his hand over Gregory's on the bed, and spoke. Gregory had to lean forward to hear his voice coming breathy from the tubes in his chest. In reality Neil did not wake up, and in their window Gregory heard only the beeping of anonymous machines, the gurgled mutterings of the man in the next bed, a snorer, for Christ's sakes.

He does not know what Neil says in the dream. That part is blurred, like the voices on television when he falls asleep late at night on the couch downstairs. Gregory has taken to watching more and more television, nothing specific. He likes the noise filling up the house. He sucks in the pictures and they fill him up like air, settling somewhere in his stomach. He doesn't know how many times he has awakened at three a.m., cold, panicked not by the chill on his skin or the blurry underwater sounds of the television, but by the fact that no one is there to switch the dial off, to wrap the afghan around his shoulders, to make sure his feet are covered.

Gregory goes out barefoot to get the paper. The cement of the front porch stings against his skin. They have not made friends with their neighbors, but he sees the woman across the street, a skinny blonde he knows to be Anna, plotting perversely red geraniums. After Neil died, she brought over lasagna, and stood in his doorway for the longest time, peering at the dark edges of the inside of the house visible over his shoulders. She wore a skinny top made out of the same material as old beach towels, and her skin glowed unnaturally dark. She was wanting to see the house, telling him she was there if there was ever anything she could do, anything at all.

He knows if he stays out on the porch any longer she'll look up from the flowers and wipe the sweat from her eyes, or stand up and stretch, brushing the dirt off her shorts and see him. She'll wave, she'll want to come inside, she'll want to repeat her useless offer of assistance. He gets the paper and goes just as quickly back in. The noon sun is screaming. He closes the door tightly to block out the hotness.

Gregory drinks the rest of his coffee standing at the counter, flipping through the paper. He uses the last cold cup to take his meds. Neil had charts for them both taped up in the kitchen, calendars he made on the computer with the times and days and pills color-coded in bright college highlighters. Now they look like children's paintings, ridiculous color rainbows that mean nothing, that are taped to the white door of the refrigerator for no other reason than pride.

He doesn't realize he is going out till he gets halfway through the laces on his tennis shoes. He puts them on without socks, grabs his wallet, and locks the door. As he is pulling out of the driveway, Anna shields her eyes from the sun and waves, as expected. He ignores her.

It has been awhile since he has driven just to drive. He leaves the radio off and rolls the windows down, letting the white angle of his arm catch in the wind. He wonders if he'll get a tan on his driving arm if he leaves it out long enough, if he drives all day. He

is not sure where he is going until he sees the sign for the reservoir *No wading, fishing, or swimming* which of course people are ignoring. He pulls into the park, familiar gravel grating underneath his tires—a greeting, watching the silhouetted bodies going in and out of the water, flashes of light between the trees. He turns into the empty picnic site and shuts the motor off, watching the gray dust his car has stirred up settle back into the hot dry earth. From this location in the park he cannot see the water; he knows this. He notices the picnic table is the same gray as the ground. He notices the sawed-off steel barrel being used as a fire ring is charred black and dented. He does not notice the boy walking out of the trees until he is nearly beside Gregory's car.

"Hi," the boy says as if it is the most natural thing in the world to walk up to Gregory's window and lean inside, one tan arm braced against the mirror. He is tall and lanky and wearing short cut-off jeans with ragged white strings dangling from the hems, tangling in his thigh muscles. The bottom half of his shorts are darker. Wet, as though he has just been swimming.

"Waiting for someone?" he asks.

"No," Gregory says.

"Going anywhere soon?"

"Not really."

Gregory knows what is coming next.

"Mind if I join you?"

Gregory nods. The boy grins and walks round the front of the car, giving the hood a little pat as he passes. He slides into the passenger side and closes the door. He is wearing a plain white undershirt over his shorts and those cheap black beach sandals that are really nothing more than plastic and Velcro strapped together.

"Got an air conditioner?"

Again Gregory nods.

"Want to turn it on?"

"Can you talk in complete sentences?"

"Sure I can," the boy grins. He has miles of straight white teeth, and a thumb print clef dimpling his chin. "Man, it's hot."

Still grinning, he begins to run his thumb over the denim tent of his shorts. He slowly slides down the zipper, watching Gregory. Gregory sees a bud of dark blonde hair, coarse tightness curled against the white of this untanned patch of skin. He feels the old feelings rise up in him. The boy reaches for his wrists, but Gregory shakes him away and places his hands hard on the steering wheel.

"What's the matter?" The boy has paused shucking off his jeans. He pats a round bulge in his pocket. "I've got one."

Gregory is struck with how ridiculous they look: the half naked boy, Gregory and his steering wheel. He grips harder.

"I can't. Not today."

The boy runs a hand through his hair, his fingers spread wide. The lines of his mouth are tight as he zips himself up.

"How old are you?" Gregory asks.

"Nineteen," the boy says.

"Jesus."

"Your loss."

He slams the door, but not angrily, Gregory thinks, and gives a little wave. For a moment Gregory almost envies him, his lank slenderness and incomplete tan, disappearing into the trees and the tall dark shadows. For a moment.

—Alison Stine '00





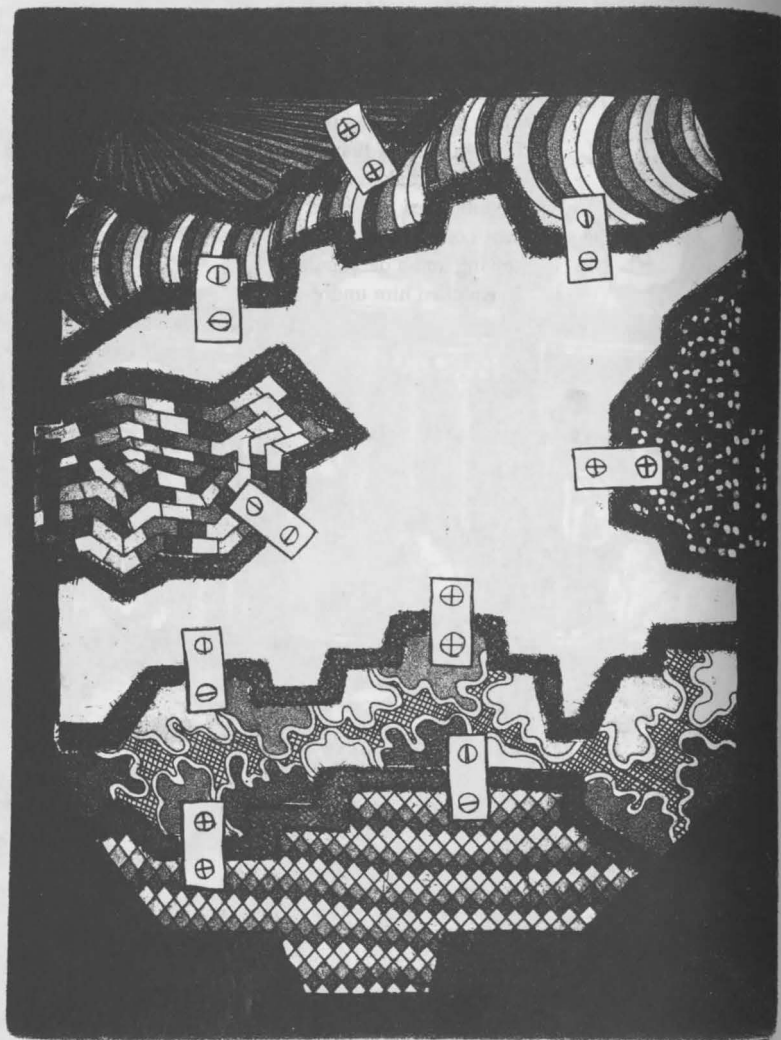
"Untitled" by Frederick Learey

Marriage Rites

The order settled itself in
solid between my pelvis and bellybutton
the crickets outside, methodical
the sheet settling down
into a mold around my legs
It was different than peace
more calculated
with boundaries an agenda
and the sheet was cotton in my mouth pressure and
chewing and a deep gulp as I
watched him undress

—Bekah Taylor '00

Marriage Rites



"Untitled" by Bryan Zink '98

Mi Abuelita

It was menial labor in the summer
of 1956, sweating in bean fields
under the Aztec sun, that left
her hands chapped, broken,
shedding skin like a snake.

I remember how she would snap
her fingers to the others
the master was coming; still
bending, digging, snapping
beans from the ground
avoiding sideways glances,
not wanting to be punished
for talking, the example
of the day. A cultivator
of land, mi Abuelita
was a workhorse with a loose
yoke, ready to journey
to a forbidden oasis

lapping along side other strays
for nourishment, replenishment.

Mi Abuelita, torn-skinned,
leather-fingered, knowing
only the pool of liquid can save
her heated body,
drink.

As I see her today, years later
a cultivator of her own
land, she wipes her glistening brow
in the sunlit kitchen, standing
kneading dough for tortillas,
mi Abuelita tells me from behind
a pot of black beans she stirs
that the well isn't dry.

—Latisha Newton '98

An Elegy for Allen Ginsberg

The day after you died,
I sat in the sun under a big tree,
smoked just a little marijuana,
and read as many of your poems as I could,
in the two hours between classes.

Where are you now, Allen Ginsberg?
Cosmic messenger, unknown mentor,
secret idol of a million kids,
obvious hero of this poem,
where are you?

Is your rebirth going well?
Are you being treated kindly for a lifetime of
flower power, LSD, civil rights, anal sex, Chicago conventions,
Jack Kerouac, the beat generation,
howls, painters' ears and poetry? And Poetry!

What fine verses you wove!
Give head to golden haired post adolescents and
write about it.
The CIA shipping dope from Thailand?
Write about it.

Still, where are you?
In bookshelves scattered across the world?
In the body of a baby dolphin?
In this poem?
In my head?

Allen Ginsberg, you were Rock 'n Rolls poet,
you toured with Dylan,
you sang with the Clash,
belted choruses while Joe Strummer banged his guitar.
You were the sixties poet, the seventies poet, the eighties poet, the nineties poet, you
were my father's poet, you were my poet and now you are
dead, God's poet, Buddha's poet.

Once,
I breathed air that you breathed,
1993, Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor,
while you "Howl"ed and banged your accordion
and taught things
and looked sad and happy
and peaceful and angry because
you were sad, happy, peaceful, angry.

You said "don't smoke the official dope"
and "Bill Burroughs he's 80,
still smokes opium every day" and
that you missed your dead father.
You were honest.

Allen, I am afraid of this future without you,
I am scared of technology,
the government, the world.
Somehow you always comforted me
and you are dead

You the crazy old man,
forever talking about Walt Whitman,
are now with Walt Whitman.

—Colin Bossen '98

circles

1

like a runner, your life turned
in circles for too long.
your feet kicked up the same stones,
leaving tracks like the scars that
mark your arms.

2

what excited us about math that year
was not Arithmetic Barbie.
we were too old
for dolls and the PTA mothers
scorned her anyway.
it was the way he punched
the calculator keys,
the way his hand ravished
the blackboard
with the white chalk,
the way the chalk coated his hands, melting:
mixing with the peach sweat of his skin.

3

he coached track and taught seventh grade math.
he divided his smile among us, longways.
our cheeks, flushed,
brightened by Cover Girl
stolen
from lingerie cabinets
of the mothers of the PTA.
in seventh grade we learned to flirt.

4

it's not surprising that i never noticed the
gold band, 360° degrees around his finger.
geometry came in eighth grade
and even then i failed it.

we never knew about you, the other woman.

5

yesterday i passed the old track
down behind the middle school.

i saw him there,
looking for a shadow of you
amongst the runners.

—erin malone '00

Lot of My Sister

1.

The only prostitute I ever met
sat on a black bench and offered to share her bread with me.
She was not that pretty,
but the bread was warm
and I was cold
and did not want to offend her long, thin fingers,
silver ringed, palely stripping off skin of a French loaf, white flesh sacrifice.
She chewed with her mouth shut and her head
down,
a stoplight, a blood circlet on the back of her neck,
watching her feet, maybe,
watching the cars slow at the curb, listening to the clang of a garbage trunk,
the streetlights buzz blue and come on,
I don't know.
I asked if she was waiting for a ride.
She said, "It's waiting for me."

2.

I am such a bad daughter.
I know exactly what dishes I will take,
how many spoons are in the attic box,
sleeping inside each other's spine,
reflecting the incestuous union of back into mirrored,
glistening back.
I have even tried the ancient ring on my finger,
and yes, it fits, and yes,
where it was,
I feel a pressure,
a naked heaviness tattooed on my skin:
inheritance.

3.

When my mother was pregnant with you,
our father worked nights,
and I fell asleep with my small ear against the skin hill of stomach,
listening.
We lived in an apartment then,
and I could hear music and people, a dog barking, someone crying.
I wondered if these sounds came from inside her,
or all around the three of us,
or if they were the same place.

4.

You were born,
and I was not old enough to see
how summer would shake the whiteness from your arms,
make your fingertips moon smiles the boys loved to kiss.
When you wanted to give food to a girl on the street, I said,
that is a prostitute, not a homeless person. *Walk faster.*
I wish I could have said,
I am not the right sister for you.

Once a drunk man threw his harpoon arms around my waist,
pressed his face into the unseen skin of my stomach, listening,
and I let him.

Do you hear me?

I let him.

—Alison Stine '00

Lot of My Sister



"Untitled" by Michael Klabunde '99

Siesta After Finals

He who is disposed to love with sensual love goes to war with himself, for a fool after he has emptied his purse cuts a poor figure! —Marcabru

Be drunken, if you would not be the martyred slaves of Time; be drunken continually! With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. —Symon's translation of Baudelaire

The final was easy. One-hundred multiple choice scantron questions and an essay. Piece of cake. Perry spent the last fifteen minutes of the period rubbing the eraser end of his pencil against his polished desk top. Brother Dan paced back and forth across the front of the classroom, hands behind his habit and fingers tugging on the white cord. Perry was thinking of Tamara Ashley Stein. He was thinking of all the fun they would have that afternoon. She wanted to do something. She wanted to do something after school, after finals. And she was keeping it a surprise.

Perry was in his usual green-cushioned booth at the Arabica, knees tucked under his body and pen in hand, when he saw the girl in the brown one-piece dress and combat boots. Like a girl he had put in a poem. He recognized her. She stopped by his table, extended one hand—her fingernails were long and burgundy-colored—and held a cigarette in the other. "I just love your work," she said taking his writing hand in hers.

His work? What did she mean?

"From 'Horizon'," she said quickly, "You're Perry."

"Yes." So she's read his poetry. He folded over a page in his notebook.

"Your poems are so wonderful. I just wanted to tell you that."

"Thank you." He slid his notebook under his arm.

"You look familiar. You were in my algebra class last year."

"I sat behind you."

"That's right. Oh, now I have a face to go with the words! The words! Honestly, Perry, you're the only one whose work I value in that magazine. Everything else is by some girl whining about lost boyfriends or suicide. I'm just sick of reading that type of work."

"So am I." He smiled. She looked different in class. She wore less makeup. More makeup made her face pale and her eyes very dark. She had long lashes and thin black eyebrows.

"I'm so sorry I didn't recognize you before. It would have been nice to have had someone to talk to in that class. Someone intelligent. It was so boring, and the students were so anal-retentive."

"You stayed busy."

"How is that? The class always filled me with ennui."

"Drawing. You never took notes, did you? You always took out your sketch pad and drew pictures of vampires or something."

"The class was incredibly dull. Like I care about substituting a for x. Art is more interesting than algebra, dear."

She took sharp puffs on her cigarette, placed between lips the color of her nails, and brushed long, straight strands of auburn hair away from her face. In class he remembered the hair raised by a network of pins. Now it was down and loose and long. She called him "dear." It just rolled off her tongue. Perfectly natural. He smiled whenever she said it.

She sat down and pulled the ashtray over to her. She propped up her boots against his seat. "I'm Tamara. Tamara Ashley Stein, if you don't know."

"A true honor to meet you." Her eyes were large and green. Cat's eyes. "I hated that class, too," he said believing himself lost in her eyes, "Mrs. Parker's a sexist. Remember when she 'threw out the gauntlet' to the guys in class?"

"Because the girls always tested better than the boys."

"I still got an A."

"Of course." She lit another cigarette. "What are you working on?"

"Nothing." He pressed his elbow against the red cover of his notebook and his forearm into his pen.

"Don't tell me that. I see the notebook under your arm, dear. You come here to write. To create in the coffee-rich, steamy air of the Arabica."

"I wouldn't say it like that."

"But that's what you do. Court your muse over cappuccinos."

"Mocha Lattes. Mostly I just watch the people here."

"Show me what you're writing."

"It's just a rough draft. I haven't finished it."

"Show me, Perry." She tugged the notebook out from under his arm and flipped to an ink-filled page. She mouthed the words as she read to herself, smiled, and waved her cigarette in the air. A waiter in boots identical to hers, olive pants, and a green-striped apron tied around his waist stopped by the table. "Cafe latte," she said softly between two whispered words, never looking away from the page.

"I'd like another mocha latte," Perry said to the waiter, "And a scone."

"Perry." Her eyes widened and smoke curled around them. "This is brilliant. truly brilliant."

"It's only a rough draft. I need to rewrite the last two stanzas."

"You really love women," she said, looking down at the page again.

"What do you mean?"

"I can tell from your work. The poems in 'Horizon' and this one. The words you use. They're so full, full of passion. You really love women."

"I guess I write about women a lot."

"All the time. What type?"

"Just girls I see here. Girls that look interesting. I don't know any of them."

"Any at high school?"

"No, never," he smiled and then lost himself in her eyes again, "Maybe one or two."

"As long as they're interesting," she said, smiling and blowing smoke straight into the air. The waiter returned with the two steaming lattes and the scone.

"Would you like some?" he asked, pressing a finger against a currant in the scone.

"No thank you."

"So what do you do besides draw?"

"Read. I read most of the time. Or I come here."

"You love books then."

"Adore them!"

"So do I. What do you read?"

"Right now I'm reading Ayn Rand. I just finished *Fountainhead*."

"I have that."

"Have you read it?"

"It's my mom's copy. What's it like?"

She told him, and they talked about books—her favorites by Joyce, Plath, and Woolf and his by Whitman, Melville, and Poe—until the Arabica closed.

The bell rang. Everyone, even the struggling students who watched the clock and sweat-ed, sprang from their seats and tossed scantron sheets on Brother Dan's desk. The class-room cleared in under ten seconds before the friar, fingers tight around the cord, could wish everyone "a safe and spiritual summer."

Shouts of "We're free" filled the halls, but Perry only thought of Tamara Ashley Stein. "Out of the way, fuck-head," cried Jesse, captain of the wrestling team, as he knocked Perry into the wall. He continued to imagine her surprise. Lockers were emptied; vanity mirrors, keychains, and magazine clippings of Morrison, Morrissey, and Madonna were torn down. Notebook paper and potato chip bags and aluminum pop cans buried the beige tiled floor. The hall smelled of b.o., and papers photocopied at the last second in the closet by the principal's office. Shaving cream flew everywhere. Perry pushed his way through the mass of jabbering, sweating peers and grabbed his bag from his locker. He removed his sole decoration—a photocopied picture of Poe from Tamara—and carefully placed it in a folder in his bag.

Two girls stood by Perry's locker their plaid skirts raised to tan thighs, their hair held aloft by cotton and elastic. They smelled of mint and face powder. Their lips diced the thick air as their fingers slowly exchanged a sheet of notebook paper folded into a triangle.

"Did she get it?" asked one.

"Yeah. Nothing great. Just Smirnoff's," said the other.

"Vodka is vodka, right?"

"Right." They laughed.

To Perry, they were like so many of the girls here. The type showcased in year-book prom pictures. The type who never went to a dance with Perry. But he had never asked them. They would spend this afternoon in a house in the suburbs, drinking vodka a big sister purchased and shooting pool in the basement, and this evening on the backseat of their boyfriends' sports cars, or if they were lucky, on the couch in the den. Like so many of the girls here. Perry frowned at them and slammed his locker shut.

Just then an unknown sniper shot him in the groin with a super soaker. It stung for a second. "Fuck," he groaned and drifted into the men's lav, where boys were standing in the doorless stalls and changing into shirts and t-shirts, already sweating from the

heat of the June afternoon. He wiped the small, wet oval on his pants with a brown paper towel. All he needed was for Tamara to see it! Oh, the embarrassment! Oh, the barbarism of this place! "What rogues and peasant slaves are these bastards," he said to himself as he tossed the towel into the trashcan. Perry exited through a side door, having said good bye only to his English teacher, Mrs. Blair. Junior year was dead. He and Tamara had plans.

She had said, "Meet me in the parking lot, dear." He found her black Celebrity in the corner of the lot. Tamara's pale arm—cigarette against the black of the door—was hanging out the window. She smoked on school grounds. He loved that. He quickly seated himself in the car and stuffed his bag under the seat.

"The final was easy," he said, tugging on his tie.

"Good," she smiled and extinguished her cigarette in the black plastic, tumbler-shaped ashtray hanging from the dashboard. "I want to change before we go."

She crawled over the driver's seat, landing on a heap of clothes on the back seat. "Jesus," he said softly, the maroon belt tight around his waist. "I just hate these uniforms," she said, unbuttoning her white blouse and pushing down her plaid skirt, "So confining. So not me."

She pulled a one-piece dress over her head and down to her hips. The dress had daisies silk-screened onto it. She replaced her penny loafers with black combat boots and put the yin-yang medallion which was tied to the rear-view mirror around her neck. Finally, she removed some pins from her auburn hair and allowed it to fall to the base of her back. "You can look now."

As an act of courtesy, Perry had placed his tie over his eyes. But not before catching a glimpse of pale, rounded breasts. Not before seeing her toss off her white blouse, unhook her white bra in one swift motion—it had to be white, he thought, because of the blouse—and pull one strap and then the other off her shoulders, pushing down the bra, revealing nipples the size of silver dollars, almost as pale as the breasts. Nipples he'd seen pressing through her one-piece dresses. He tried not to look. Breasts he'd seen pressed together when she bent over to light a cigarette, in their booth at the Arabica. He really tried not to look. He really tried to look at his notebook, the green cushion, the steaming mocha latte. Now he saw the whole of her breasts. Saw them with the afternoon sun pouring through the back window, making visible soft, white hairs on pale flesh. Botticelli breasts. Venus de Milo breasts. Pendulous he had called them in a poem hidden in his algebra notebook. Pendulous he had called them without seeing them fully. But he had been right in his description. And so he pressed his tie firmly against his eyes. She was *Ars Poetica*. Physical poetry was what he meant. More interesting than anything he could create with words. She must stay that way. But she stripped in the school parking lot. She stripped in front of him. He loved that. But he still pulled the tie tighter. He had to. She was like no girl he knew, no other one at the high school for sure, and they were going to do something that afternoon.

They stopped for a red light across from the bus stop where students stood or sat on the wooden seat of the shelter smoking. Bookbags were under the seat or piled on the grass. Everyone at the shelter smoked. Smoked in clusters. Smoked in lines. Because of the day, some took time between puffs to spray shaving cream on a telephone pole or

on each other. The guys stood with ties off, belts unbuckled, and shirt tails hanging out of their pants. The girls stood with raised skirts and untucked blouses. Perry looked at them through the rolled-up passenger side window.

"Look's like there was a breakout at the monkey house."

Tamara looked at the shelter and took a drag on her cigarette. "Don't you wait for the bus there?"

"Any other day I would be standing on that curb." He pointed a finger against the glass. "By the telephone pole, looking up State Road for the bus. And the bus, when it finally got here, would stop five feet away from where I was standing. I'd sit in the back. By myself, listening to the guys up front talk about who they were going to fuck that evening."

"Charming. You don't like the bus."

"I usually get my calculus homework done."

She took another drag. "When will this light change?"

"I don't like the people on the bus."

"Neither do I, dear."

"Look at them. Just look at them, Tamara. Wasting stupid, little..."

"So what have you been writing?"

"Why can't they just treat people with respect?"

"Anything new?"

"Maybe. Are we going to the Arabica?"

"No. We're going someplace else. Doing something different, remember? I think you'll like it." She swore softly at the red light.

"I'm sure I will. You're not going to give me any hints?"

"Let's just say it will make you re-sculpt any pedestal you've put me on."

"Sounds fun." He watched the bus slow to a stop beside the curb, and the students waving dollar bills and yellow tickets push their way in. "My mom's pissed about this. She thinks we're going to the Arabica. She's still pissed about last Saturday."

"I got you home by four."

"My curfew's midnight."

"You've barely lived at midnight."

"Don't your parents care when you come home?"

"Like they care about anything, dear. When is this light going to change?" She drilled her cigarette into the plastic ashtray.

"I know what you mean about parents. Like mine care about anything." He had asked his mother for permission over dinner, when his father was present. His mother didn't like Tamara; she said she was using Perry. She told him to wait, to wait for her to hurt him just like any other girl. She seemed to base her belief on Tamara's habit of calling Perry after midnight. Perry's father had nothing to say about Tamara. He just frowned when Perry said they could not go to Comic Town on Friday. "But the new Flash is out," his father said; Perry, his father, and his grandfather had all read comic books for as long as they could remember. Now Perry only read poetry, and he spent more time spinning the spaghetti on his plate around his fork and thinking of Tamara Ashley Stein than he did listening to his mother's warnings and his father's weak words of cartoon adventures lost.

Perry watched Tamara closely. She bit her lower lip, and her boot hovered over

the accelerator. "About what we're doing," he began, and the light flashed green. Just then a kid from the shelter ran out to the car and pressed a picture of a nude woman in argyle socks against the glass of the driver's door.

"Isn't that lovely," said Tamara, lifting her foot off the accelerator, smiling at the kid, "She has such form. Look, Perry."

"I don't want to." He looked out his window.

"Oh, Perry," she said, "He's just showing us a picture. It's just a picture, dear. Look, her socks are like yours."

"I don't want to."

"Where's the libertine in you, Perry? Byron would look."

"I'm not Byron. The light's green. We should go."

She thumped her boot against the accelerator. "I don't understand, Perry. It was just a picture. You've probably written worse."

"Thank you so very much," Tamara said and smiled at the round, middle-aged woman cradling a brown paper bag. "You know how it is. In a hurry to have a little fun, you forget a thing or two. We're going to have a picnic, and you can't have a picnic without..." They had exited the Dairy Deli and were approaching the parked Celebrity. "I can't say how grateful I am. I'm just sorry that I..."

"Nothing to worry about. I know what it's like," said the woman as she set the bag on the hood, "Now I'm not really supposed to be doing this, but what the hell, you kids have fun."

Tamara handed the woman the ten dollar bill rolled like a rug and squeezed into her hand. The woman folded the bill and placed it into her shirt pocket, "Now don't you kids drink and drive." Tamara smiled. The woman looked into the car and winked at Perry. "Sure there's nothing else I can get you?"

Tamara smiled, smiled politely. "No, we're fine. Thank you again. Bye." The woman waved at the Celebrity as she returned to the Deli. Tamara grabbed the bag with one hand but Perry pushed open the door for her. She sunk into the seat.

"Thank god that's over," she said removing a cigarette from her black box-shaped purse, "That woman was too nice."

"How'd you do it?"

"I just told her that we were college students headed to the beach for an afternoon of sun and fun. I forgot my id."

"Id?"

"ID, dear. It was all so spontaneous."

"And she bought it."

"With smiles and gratitude. It all works that way." She took several quick puffs and drilled her cigarette into the ashtray. "Turn on the radio please."

"So what did you buy?"

Tamara started the car and pulled out of the parking lot. She tugged

on the sun visor, swore, and began rifling through her purse with one hand while steering with the other. "Vodka," she answered while pulling from her purse assorted lighters, lipsticks, class notes, and breath mints.

"Vodka at the beach. Why?" He frowned.

"We're not going to the beach, dear."

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see." She smiled at him and pushed the purse away from her. A pair of sunglasses with purple lenses were now in her hand. She used her teeth to pull back the wire arms and slipped the glasses over her eyes. "Don't you like vodka?"

"Not really. I don't like drinking really."

"Hah! And you call yourself a writer. All the best drank. Dylan Thomas—plastered always. Hemingway with vodka over his Wheaties. Faulkner, dear. Joyce, I think. Was Joyce a drunk? Did he burn a hole in his gut? 'Ah, triesta, triesta, in triesta I lost my liver.' I know London was. And Fitzgerald. Your pal Poe. Truman Capote liked pink pepper vodka. Writers and alcohol are inseparable. An occupational hazard. It channels their creativity. You have to drink a little to be a writer, Perry."

"A poet," he said weakly.

"What's the matter, dear?"

Tamara smiled at Perry. He was looking at the brown paper bag. This was something unexpected. Not something he had imagined as part of her surprise. Sure she smoked like a fiend. That's fine. But she wasn't a drunk. She was *Ars Poetica*. Perry thought of pale breasts, of the back seat of the Celebrity, and of the surprise awaiting him. "Nothing. Just thinking about your surprise."

"That's good. You'll never guess." She smiled at him. "Perry, dear, can you get an L&M out of my purse?"

Perry placed the cigarette between her lips. She wore little make-up today. Her skin was dry, and, despite the purple shades, gray shadows were visible under her eyes. But she smelled like Tamara—a blend of vanilla and tobacco. Perry inhaled the scent as he lit the cigarette.

"So tell me about what you're working on," she said.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? What about the one piece for 'Horizon?'"

"I gave up on it. I couldn't find the voice."

"You'll find it. You always do."

"Yeah."

Perry looked at the bag again. The black bottle top peeked over the fringed edge of the bag. Vodka. Cheap diluted vodka. He sank into his seat and wondered where the car would stop next.

Tamara parked by the curb. Perry, to his dismay, recognized the place—a park where she had once stopped and smoked after an evening at the Arabica. Tamara had made a little fire by the swings, and they had discussed the works of Joyce by the light of it.

"What are we doing here?"

"You'll see."

She took the bag in one hand and her purse in the other and used her combat boots to kick open the door. Perry followed her to the merry-go-round and sat himself on

an elephant with a coiled spring for feet. "So you're going to get plastered in the playground."

She laughed and motioned for him to join her. She sat in the lotus position with the bag to one side and her purse before her. An L&M between her lips. Perry gave the round a spin, slid under a red metal support, and sat himself on his knees.

"Isn't this lovely, Perry? Just around and around we go."

"I remember falling under one of these things once. The kids on it just kept going round and round. My grandpa saved me. I was all cut-up."

"I'm so sorry," she said softly.

But what he didn't tell her was that the boy—the boy with the blonde hair and striped velour shirt—pushed him off the round. He pushed Perry off, and Perry rolled under it. And all the kids laughed. They laughed as the round spun, and Perry covered his face with his hands and screamed for his grandfather. He never went back to the park. He hated parks. Instead his grandfather took him to the library where they read *Ivanhoe*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *The Gold Bug*—all the Classics Illustrated. And the occasional *Superman*.

Tamara took the cigarette firmly between two fingers and threw open her arms. "We're free, Perry! Free from it all! Free for the summer!"

"I have to work tomorrow."

"But it's still summer, Perry. That's what's important. You'll have plenty of time to write now, and we can go to the Arabica, and I can..."

"Maybe. Maybe I'll write some more poetry."

"Perry, what's the matter, dear?"

"I just don't want to talk about writing now."

"But you're so good."

"I just want to talk about something else."

"Like..."

"You look tired."

"Really. I suppose so. I don't sleep much these days. Too much to do! To see! To live!"

"How were your finals?"

"They were." She smiled and took a puff on her cigarette. The round was slowing, and she was looking off to the side.

"You're really intelligent. I just wish you'd..."

"Oh, look," she held a green maple leaf in her hand, "How delicate. Every vein is visible." She held it by the stem and blew air across it. The leaf flapped forward, curved like a sail. She laughed and held her lighter against the leaf which caught fire. "So pretty."

"Why are you doing that?"

"It's dead, Perry. A beautiful corpse. It's just going to decay, dear. Why not let the beauty touch the sky as smoke and flame?"

"You've been reading too much Shelley."

She smiled.

Perry glanced over his shoulder at the other people in the park—an old lady and two children. He hated children. Pushing other kids under merry-go-rounds. Squirting

with a silver eagle and "Burton" printed in silver upon it.

"So what are we going to do now?" asked Perry.

"Talk." She held the bottle by the hand grip and unscrewed the top.

Perry looked at the tent. Uncle Jessie winked at him.

"And drink." She lifted the bottle to her lips and tilted her head back. Clear streams of vodka ran down the sides of her mouth, watering the daisies on her chest.

"Talk and drink," he sighed.

"Are you sure you don't want some?"

"I told you I don't drink." He wanted to crush the bottle, squash it with a rock by the fire ring.

Tamara weaved in and out of the circle of lawn ornaments, taking sip after sip. Raining vodka down on a mushroom umbrella-carrying elf. She ran into the woods and reappeared again, smiling at Perry each time. She hid behind a gnome. Put the bottle against its plastic lips. She smiled at him. She ran into the woods. She came up behind him. He could smell the vodka on her breath. "'Be always drunken,'" she cried, "'Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to earth, be drunken continually!'" He could feel her body moving against his. Into his. Her chest pressed against his back. "Drink," she whispered holding the bottle to the side of his head. "Drink," she whispered waving the bottle before his eyes. He could smell the vodka on her breath. He could feel her breath in his ear. Warm and wet. "'Drunken with what,'" she pulled the bottle back, "'With wine, with poetry. 'Yes, Perry, poetry. 'Or with virtue as you will. But be drunken!'"

She ran back into the woods. Her laughter came from all sides. High and wild. The old lady can hear us, he thought. She appeared again by a plaster raccoon, "This is Rick. He's from Parma. His ear is chipped. Say 'hi' to Rick. Oh, come on, Perry. Say 'hello' to the raccoon." She grabbed a gnome around its pointed hat, "This is Barry. Barry likes gin and tonics. But don't tell his wife that. Who's his wife? Why this lovely dwarf. But Barry likes the goose from Brooklyn, Betsy. Betsy was dressed in a yellow rain coat and hat when we took her. Then we stole all these other outfits from other geese in the neighborhood. Do you like what she has on?"

"What about the tent? Where is that from?"

She smiled. "Don't you like them? Don't you like my gallery? I brought you here because I thought you could appreciate it. You of all people appreciate artistry. Look at this one, a kissing Dutch couple. So in love. He'll be plugging the dyke soon. Hah! I'm sorry. I don't mean to be so ribald. I know how you hate ribaldry."

She approached him. "Isn't that right, Perry? You hate ribaldry. You're better than that. It was only a picture, Perry. Only a picture."

She leaned into him. Her dress was wet. The vodka soaked into his white dress shirt. He grabbed her shoulders.

"What? I don't need you to hold me. I'm not drunk." She pulled herself away and then leaned in again, "I wish you'd have some of this. I went through a lot to get it for us. Just for us, dear. To celebrate the death of Junior year. The birth of summer. I wish you'd take some. 'It is the hour to be drunken! Be drunken, if you would not be martyred slaves of Time; be drunken continually! With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you

will.”

She held it to her chest. “Take some. Please drink some.”

“I don’t want any vodka.”

“Then what do you want?”

“I...” The tent. The pillow. The sleeping bag. *Ars Poetica*!

“What do you want?”

“I want...” A wet dress. Pale breasts. Long auburn hair. Burgundy-colored nails. Vanilla and tobacco. *Ars Poetica*!

“Tell me,” she strained each letter, fell into him squeezing the bottle between his chest and hers.

“I want you...” They were all watching. The gnomes. The loafer. The raccoon. The goose. The Magi. The polar bear. The kissing Dutch couple. The Virgin Mary with one hand. Watching. Circling. Watching. Circling. He grabbed the top of the bottle with one hand and raised his other. He looked into her eyes. Green eyes. Cat’s eyes. *Ars Poetica*’s eyes. Her pupils were enormous. And there was nothing behind them.

“I’ll tell you what I want, dear. I want to sit down.” She fell to the ground, the bottle landing between her legs. She crawled to the edge of the fire ring, taking chug after chug. “Perry, dear, I wish you’d tell me what’s the matter.”

“Nothing.”

“Oh, stop with the ‘nothing’ words. Everyone says, ‘nothing,’ I want you to really tell me what’s troubling you.”

“Why do you want to know?”

“Because it’s killing our conversation. Because you’ve been like this all day. Because it’s a glorious afternoon. I want to have glorious fun and glorious conversation. But you won’t drink, and you won’t talk. You’re behaving...”

“Anal-retentively.”

“No, no, just...not like the Perry whose words I savor.”

“Stop with that. Stop with the poetry. I’m just a Little Chandler.”

“No, no you’re not. You’re brilliant. I read a lot, but I could never write like you. You’re wonderful. Your poem about the gazebo—so lush, so beautiful. You’re worthy of...”

“All we do is talk.”

“I love talking to you.”

“I know. But I want...”

“Fine.” She stood up and smoothed out her dress, holding the bottle against her hip. “There’s a lot of Mr. Burton remaining. I’m going to the tent to play Liz. You can join me if you want to talk. Or continue with this Hamlet-esque brooding. Your pleasure. Whatever.” She drifted off to the tent.

Perry crouched by the fire ring. He took two sticks in his hands and began to drum a crushed can of Rolling Rock. So this is what they were going to do. What they would always do. All that waiting and talking and coffee drinking for more waiting and talking and vodka drinking. She was like all the others. He beat the can and wondered when she would take him home.

—Paul Durica ‘00



"Red, Black, Yellow, White" by S. O'Farrell '00

Contributors Notes

Colin Bossen, a senior whose favorite foods are olives and artichokes, is an English (writing) and physics double major from East Lansing, Michigan. He is in his third, and final, year as co-editor-in-chief of *Exile* and is co-coordinator for ARA. He digs the words oscillating and anachronism and sure makes one mean chocolate chip cookie.

Hillary Campbell is a sophomore from Upper Arlington, Ohio, majoring in English (writing), obsessing over "The X-Files," and loving blue pens.

Anne Couyoumjian, a first-year student, is from Ann Arbor, Michigan. She says: "My intaglio print is a self-portrait embracing time as an element of frustration. It is my first attempt at print-making."

Samuel H. Dodson IV, a senior, is a philosophy major and art minor from Washington, DC. He is interested in music, drawing, and singing. He says that "printmaking is my favorite medium because it is easy to reproduce and work with."

Paul Durica is a sophomore from Cleveland, Ohio. He spends his time writing short stories and shopping for women's clothing with his darling Lolita. He knows a bargain when he sees one. He is co-prose editor of *Exile*.

Susan O' Farrell, a sophomore, is from Groveport, Ohio.

Kristina Garvin, a first-year student, is an English major from Columbus, Ohio.

Kate Graf, a sophomore, is from Delaware, Ohio.

Todd Gys, a junior, is from Ellisville, Missouri.

Michael Klabunde, a junior, is a cinema major from Granville, Ohio.

Edward S. Knotek II, a sophomore, is a Spanish and mathematics-economics double major from Strongsville, Ohio. He is the editor of *Adytum* and an active member in Sigma Phi Epsilon.

Frederick Learey is from Granville, Ohio.

Angelica Lemke is a sophomore English (writing) and philosophy double major. As of late, she has concerned herself with Lady Macbeth and Donald Davidson's theory of metaphor which has lead to some exciting dinner table discussion about hand washing. When she grows up, she wants to be either an astronaut or a pirate because she has the wardrobe for both. She is publicity editor of *Exile*.

Erin Malone, a sophomore English (literature) and theater double major, is from Poland, Ohio. She is assistant poetry editor of *Exile*, a columnist for the *Denisonian*, a member of the *Articulate* staff, a DJ for WDUB, and a member of DFS.

Latisha Newton, a senior, is an English (writing) and mass communication double major from Newark, Ohio. This past June, she was a teaching assistant for Denison's Jonathan R. Reynolds Young Writers' Workshop. After graduation, she will work for Miramax Films.

Ashley Puckett, a sophomore, is from Delaware, Ohio.

Alison Stine, a sophomore, is an English (writing) major from Mansfield, Ohio. She is the 1997 winner of the Annie McNeill Poetry Prize, and was the Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere for Halloween. Her play "God Is Chopin" premiered off-Broadway over the summer. She aspires to be a gay icon. She is co-prose editor of *Exile*.

Bekah Taylor, a sophomore, is from La Grange, Illinois. She is poetry editor of *Exile*. She lives with Cook, strums Grover, and beats on her drum Jawana.

Bryan Zink, a senior, is a studio art major from Zanesville, Ohio, studying printmaking.

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