Cottonwood 52
Poetry Retrospective: The First 30 Years

COTTONWOOD 52

ISSN 0147-149X

Cottonwood magazine welcomes submissions of fiction, poetry, graphics, photography, reviews of small-press literature, and literature by midwestern authors. We also welcome articles on the arts from both local and national writers and artists.

Please limit poetry submissions to five best, fiction to one story. We will return submissions that include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Cottonwood relies heavily on the interest and support of its subscribers. Issues generally appear twice a year at $6.50 per issue, $10.00 for a two-issue subscription, or $15.00 for a three-issue subscription. Please direct inquiries, subscriptions, and submissions, care of the appropriate editor, to:

Cottonwood Magazine
Box J, Kansas Union
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045

Cottonwood Magazine and Press receives support from the Department of English of the University of Kansas. *Cottonwood* is funded in part by the Kansas Arts Commission, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. *Cottonwood* is indexed by the *American Humanities Index* and POEM FINDER.

This issue has been set in New Century Schoolbook typeface using Microsoft Word and Aldus PageMaker.

COTTONWOOD 52

Poetry Retrospective: The First 30 Years

Cottonwood Magazine and Press
Lawrence, Kansas

COTTONWOOD 52

Poetry Retrospective: The First 30 years
Spring 1998

EDITOR:	Tom Lorenz
POETRY EDITOR:	Philip Wedge
FICTION EDITOR:	Christy Prahl, Amy Stuber
RETROSPECTIVE EDITOR:	Philip Wedge
REVIEW EDITOR:	Dan Martin
ARTS EDITOR:	Mike K. Johnson

FICTION STAFF:

Bill Bossing	Tom Lorenz
Carolyn Doty	Matthew Patterson
Tracy Floreani	Amy Stuber

POETRY STAFF:

Erin Chan	Tod Marshall
Joanna Cooper	Mary Jo Reiff
Jim Elmborg	Sarah Ruden
Teresa Fernandez	Jane Smith
Jane Hoskinson	Dale Tietgen
Ellen Kroeker	Nick Twemlow

PRODUCTION MANAGER:	Karen Hellekson
PRODUCTION STAFF:	Pam LeRow, Christy Prahl, Amy Stuber, Jane Smith
BUSINESS MANAGER:	Philip Wedge
CIRCULATION MANAGER:	Philip Wedge
DISTRIBUTION MANAGER:	Philip Wedge
GRAPHICS EDITOR:	Lois Greene
PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR:	Jon Blumb
UNIVERSITY LIAISON:	Michael L. Johnson

Cottonwood 52

Editor's Note

Poetry

Fiction

Poetry Retrospective: The First 30 Years

Richard Dishinger is *Cottonwood* 52's featured artist.

PHILIP WEDGE

Editor's Note

After being our editor since 1985, my father, George F. Wedge, has retired from *Cottonwood*, having steered to publication some 17 issues of the magazine, 6 books of fiction and poetry, and a portfolio of broadsheets. Reduced funding for the arts and reduced library subscriptions have not made things easy for the press, but we're still solvent and still printing a high-quality product, as evidenced by the issue in your hands. Some of *Cottonwood*'s greatest moments surely have occurred during George's tenure as Editor. The *Contemporary Black Writers Issue* (*Cottonwood* 38/39), guest edited by Gerald Early, is one of the finest works we've produced in our 33 years of publishing and garnered awards for Gerald and *Cottonwood* from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. The River City Reunion, which George helped organize, reunited many former *Cottonwood* writers and staff and generated two issues of the magazine and the River City Portfolio, allowing us to publish work by Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, Patricia Traxler, Andrei Codrescu, and others, as well as shotgun art by William Burroughs. Several more recent issues have featured work by former KU grads and *Cottonwood* associates who have gone on to successful writing careers: Tom Averill, Denise Low, and Scott Heim. Another boost for *Cottonwood*'s publishing that George oversaw was KU/*Cottonwood* alumnus Robert Day's collection *Speaking French in Kansas and Other Stories*. Many thanks to George for all the work he's done and for allowing editors such as myself, Jane Garrett, Tamara Brown, Christy Prahl, Dan Martin, and Amy Stuber the freedom to select work and organize the issues as we saw fit.

The new editor of *Cottonwood* Magazine and Press is Tom Lorenz, Associate Professor of English at KU and Co-Director of Creative Writing, whose works include the novels *Guys Like Us* and *Serious Living*. Tom is busy negotiating for improved funding of the magazine, and his enthusiasm for writing and energetic personality will be a great asset to the magazine. New to this issue as well is Amy Stuber, who replaced Christy Prahl as Fiction Editor last fall. Sadly, this will be the last issue for Karen Hellekson as Production Manager, as she has moved on to Allen Press in Lawrence. Her work and the work of Jack Healy before her have helped Cottonwood's production quality grow tremendously over the years.

I am very excited about this current issue, which is the second of two retrospective ones honoring *Cottonwood*'s 30 years of publishing, this one featuring a retrospective section on poetry. My poetry readers and I culled through all fifty-two issues of the magazine trying to select the best poems published in the mag since its first issue appeared in Spring 1965. I tried to avoid repeating too many of the poems reprinted in the twenty-year retrospective issue (*Cottonwood* 35) edited by Erleen Christensen. I also chose only poems first published in *Cottonwood*, which meant omitting many fine pieces from the anthologies *Confluence: Contemporary Kansas Poetry* (*Cottonwood* 31/32) and *Kansas Women Writers* (*Cottonwood* 25)

The poems in this issue represent, in my opinion, the finest gathering of poems in *Cottonwood*'s thirty years, with work by Poet Laureate Rita Dove and Kansas native William Stafford topping the list. There is a fine mix of nationally and regionally known writers, such as Walter McDonald, Wanda Coleman, Kathleen Spivack, and William Kloefkorn, as well as poems by many writers formerly associated with KU and/or Cottonwood, including Victor Contoski, Denise Low, Diane Hueter, and, yes, George Wedge.

The fiction in *Cottonwood* 52 is by Kristine Somerville, Peter Vilbig, Joan Heck, and Mary McGowan, each working with very contemporary themes and each taking the reader in surprise directions. The fine review essays are by Jeff Loeb and Carol Estes, and the artwork is by Richard Dishinger, Associate Professor of Art at KU.

Poetry

Diane Glancy

An elemental heart

He slept on the back porch then the yard
in the mornings he came in covered with mosquito bites
love bites he called them
and ran his fingers through the air
he said the lightning spoke just for him
the grass was an amazing mass of blades
his arms became branches
his toes roots
his two legs trunks
he said he could taste sap
his ears were knotholes
he could imagine no other way
the birds brought twigs to his hair
he felt the weight of their eggs on his head
he heard the tiny peeps of their hatching
he wrote in his journal
the large elms used to hold their hands over the river
now he longed for other trees
sweet gum
walnut
oak
his words covered the yard with leaves
he said he felt nothing anymore
only the itching of his love bites
his branches moving in the wind.

Steven Hind

Mound Builders

Here was the stair
and here the door
where she stood
and decided divorce.
A window faced south,
when it was a window,
and there her flowers
kept covenant with
the sun, and there by
those weeds, that was
her kitchen, firm
on the squared stones,
foundation hewn from
this land, and leveled
by her man who crossed
the new timbers and
laid the new floor.

II

Here the barn creaks,
wooden clock set to
the easy imprecision
of the long run, its
windows' hollow gaze
winked by the wind-
addled elms. Mice reap
seeds from long vanished
haybales, and foundation
stones sit in the earth
where worms bless their
meals with undulations.
Square nails ease their
withdrawal to the crawl
of earth through a worm.
Barn says, be my tongue:
translate, translate.

Walter Griffin

The Chocolate Man

Down past the stairs,
past stories of darkness
where bannisters trail off

into nowhere, lives the
Chocolate Man. When I
dreamed of him as a child,

he had no face, only a smell
I later came to know as death.
He waved from my mother's

eyes, from my stepfather's coffin.
I have seen him many times
standing by wrecks on the road,

at drowning sites, near everyday
tragedies. I smelled him in
the orchids of funeral parlors,

in the flowers of Sunday School
rostrums. At night he climbs
down from the ceiling, waves

his thick arms across my face,
lets me smell the dark sweet
chocolate of his coming.

WALTER GRIFFIN

The Arrangement of Skin

My grandmother was a
taxidermist. She skinned
dead animals, slit their
bellies and stuffed them
with straw. I slept in the

room with them at seven;
their glass eyes looked
down on me every night after
the chain light was pulled. I
covered my face at first but

later grew used to their stare.
Sometimes, just before daylight,
I would wake and see them all
watching me: the alligators,
snakes, the mounted bass and

buck's head; the baby octopus
floating inside the mayonnaise jar.
Now, after all these years when
I am out on the road by the
fields, every scarecrow waves

in my headlights; and when I
stop at a motel by the Interstate,
I always dream of a stuffed and
mounted head hanging from the
ceiling, while the stranger from

the lounge sleeping next to me
does not know my eyes do not
close during the night, does
not feel the prickly straw
against her naked back.

Ellen Renée Seusy

New Boyfriend

He sings loudly in the car
we drive the long dirt road
to where I live. We begin
to trade the stories of our scars:
mine, from falling out of Joaquin's
crab apple tree, from playing at
construction sites, from climbing
a chain link fence. His, just one,
acquired at birth.

We compare futures, too,
measure them in years and miles:
his, long and wide and clear,
stretched by caution;
mine, unmapped.

Our families die differently.
His, only after a hundred trips
to the hospital, many close calls,
and finally the collapse into a
six-month decline.

Death takes my people by surprise.
We find them by the tractor,
engine still running, with only
two acres left to plow—
or in bed, the sound of birds
coming through the open window,
late for breakfast.

And we bury them differently.
Theirs are red-eyed contests of regret;
the "if onlys" roll around like bowling balls
in the close air of some aunt's apartment.

My family stays all afternoon
in the big kitchen, eating green Jell-O
that the church women bring
and telling jokes at the expense
of the deceased,
the humor as dry as the dust
to which we will all one day return.

There is this impasse: his smooth
skin and show tunes, my rough road.

Antony Oldknow

Christ with Martha and Mary

And now he had a parish of a sort,
with women who brought him things
to eat and drink—or, rather, he made
their houses his vicarage, and some
lusted after him, engaging him in
spiritual conversation, while their eyes
were between his legs, darting thence
to his eyes and soft paintbrush beard.
Some baked sweaty in the kitchen,
hearing the low murmur of petition
and reply, the mincing debate and
his bantering evasions, as his tongue
began to feel comfortable, savoring
the sliding warm drench of red wine
she would bring from the back
room, her face flushed, her quick fires
darting from the leaning sister to the
frank-faced rabbi with legs crossed,
who gazed from their long hair over
the sill to where the boats bobbed,
where bearded men were heaving
nets about their masts, and dropped
anchor coming in. And from the dark
interiors of the women's chambers he
strode off into the sun to wander,
with robe billowing, out to the quay
to welcome the men and run his eyes
over the rippling explosions of fish.
The suspicious greedy eyes of the women
followed his walk, and their thin lips
cursed and spat in the wake of
the broad shoulders hurrying with ropes
and spars and big nails into the sheds
up the hill away from the bobbing
water, his laughter and eager sounds
accompanying them as they finished work.

KAREN HIRSCH

Marja Maki on Sunday: Michigan, 1919

Gods, I am weary of birches. Will they kill me yet?
Poplars are best: they topple like the drunks
on Front Street at night. But their taller, more stubborn
cousins, that ring my farm and shadow my hut,
that in the big moon flood my sleep with unbidden light—
though I curse and saw daily, they grant me no peace.
I cannot escape their naked, white stare.
They are too much, and too little, like home.

This, now, is home. I will stay here today.
I will not to church. My boots are wet still,
and no proper shoes—if I even had them—
could bear me on the ice those five miles
to the place of whisperers where, in one voice,
they speak first of the child, his good Marjatta,
and then of me. They call me "herring choker"
and ask if I am a man. If only it were so.

At noon, in my breeches, I will pray by the water
whose pulse is my pulse, whose language I know.
My own good mother waits, two years and
many leagues away—I will write her tonight.
But what to say? That I am hated, and I hate?
That this land is mine in name but not in marrow?
That all those sea-borne dreams I carried
have been drowned like kittens in a sack?

I'll not see her again, so what is the harm
in writing her the world as it should have been,
in telling her that though I have yet to marry,
the hunting is good. That does draw near
without fear, as does spring, and fish leap
with grace into my clean hands. That my bread
is thick with salt, not bark. That never, back home,
could trees grow blossoms so large and so sweet.

Sally Allen McNall

amnion

I paid no mind
for a week, to steady pains

before this woman
I lean to bathe
was born

I bend forward now
from daily pull back
of backache,
no mind

her face distends
eyes swim, with fever
I lave her tender skin
as if she were again
my newborn

copper smell of water,
soap, sweat in her hair

go on, go on cupping
water down the bend
of her back
over the shape of her shoulders,
breasts, one still heavy
with milk
slack belly

while the tired baby
who had her bath first
tugs at me
sings her distress
we aren't all still
in the press and pour
of water

I bend forward now

pain gentles us all
apart, forward
in one direction

there are no ideas
about this

only the stunned grace
of how we hoist each other
to our feet

how the baby stretches still
for the torn, tilting water

Cory Brown

Red Balloon

There was this red balloon tied
to her wrist, you see, to Sophie's
wrist by a thin kite string—we were
walking on the Commons at the Ithaca
spring festival—a slip knot
so you could slide it over your wrist.
But the knot was, in reality,
too tight to slip, so that wasn't
it at all and with our backs turned we heard
the shrieks (my balloon! my balloon!)—
in shrieks we understood
what the inevitable is, means,
that loss is so rarely witnessed
at the moment of inception.
We turn and it is lost and we understand
her shrieks are about
the inevitable, the red spot that so
lusciously spaces itself wider and wider
away from us, the blue the abyss,
the nothing that can be
said in words, that is worth saying.
And she stood, we stood,
with her and marveled for her
at the red spot against the blue
until she couldn't see it anymore,
where we pointed. And we pointed knowing
we pointed at nothing as long as
she could not see it,
the speck that was no longer there.

Fiction

JOAN HECK

In Love

Susan works in her garden and waits for her lover. He will be gone two weeks and while she digs she thinks of him. She came out early this morning with a spade and a sunbonnet, looking, she thought, peacefully industrious, but now she has put aside the spade, and the sunbonnet has slid off her short dark hair. She likes to keep her hands busy. She likes to find and break apart the clumps of dirt. Her lover has been gone three days, and now Susan is digging up the rosebushes. They are gnarled, dead things that were in the back yard when she and her husband bought the house, and she is glad to root them up, intending to plant red and orange dahlias where they stood. She leans back on her heels and wipes her hands on her skirt. Her nails are caked with dirt. Every evening when she waits for the phone to ring, she files and cleans them. Her husband is in Seattle. He is not on vacation but at the Ko-Pack Plastic plant setting up a powdered dye. His name is William, and when he worked for Andersen Windows, he helped make the first all-brown window. Susan understands none of this, but he tells her it doesn't matter, adding that anyone who has been to technical school would know what he was talking about. The all-brown window was the first personal thing she learned about him; the second was that his nickname, instead of being Bill or Will, is Bull.

Bull will be gone all summer. He calls her every other night, and she sits by the phone and answers it on the first ring. With her there is no pretending. She always tells him she loves him, and this always prompts him to ask her to join him. "Come to Seattle for the summer," he says, expansive as a slogan, "where the air is cool." He knows how much she hates the hot, muggy summers of West Virginia, where the smoke from the chemical plants hangs like wash strung across the sky. But she always tells him no.

Once, they very nearly argued.

"I don't believe you really love me," said Bull. "Or you'd be here."

"Of course I love you. But me? Seattle? Besides, I can't leave my ferns." She was referring to the three ferns she had just bought for the dining room. They are called double fluffy duffies and are very large. She is careful to keep their soil moist and their fronds misted.

"Come to Seattle and I'll buy you hardy mums," he persisted, but she laughed, pretending it was a joke. Of course, Bull doesn't know she is waiting for her lover to return.

Susan thinks her lover is a puzzle. He is different from any other lover she has known. For one thing, he has left her for his mother. Not permanently, but for a two-week trip to Missouri to visit the Mammoth Caves. Susan has never been to Missouri, but she has been to the Smokehole Caverns and she knows that, at the very most, you could spend two days there. And then you would have to be a cave freak. *Two weeks?* Well, there is Virginia, he admitted; they might go there, too. His mother has always wanted to see Monticello, especially the dumbwaiter in the dining room.

He feels obliged to please his mother. Her name is Ruth and she has been a widow for two years. His father? Her lover had thumbed his mustache when he talked of him. His father wasn't brutal, but he liked to have his say. When he was alive, there were many things his mother couldn't do. This is Ruth's first vacation in twenty years.

Every day Susan waits for a postcard, but none arrives. She doesn't like to admit it, but lately she has been placing a great deal of emotional focus on her mailman. She wonders intensely what he has in his sack. She knows he has letters, but sometimes there is a slant to his shoulders, a slight bend to his neck that suggests he carries more. He is a short, heavyset man who has responded to her sudden friendliness by bringing the mail to her wherever she is in the yard. He is near retirement age and likes to stop and talk.

She glances at her watch. Nearly 10:30. Sometimes the mail is as early as 10:00. She stands up and shakes her skirt out in anticipation of meeting him, and yes, there he is, coming up the street. Today he has brought her some religious material, a Sears catalog, and utility bills. She thumbs through the catalog and a card falls out. She picks it up. Susan is wearing a long denim skirt and a white peasant blouse with vines and pale flowers. It has a scoop neck, and she bends from the waist. The card is plain white, embossed with with gold leaves falling in all directions. *Tree service by Don.* She slides it under the elastic in her sleeve and listens to the mailman tell her about his grandson in the

first grade. The boy is a whiz, already reading on a third-grade level. The teacher is searching for special materials. She isn't sure where to find them and may write to the ERS. He pauses, waiting for her to ask, but Susan stares back glassy-eyed. Why is his mother so important that her lover can't drop her a line? ERS stands for Educational Resource Systems, the mailman tells her proudly. When she doesn't respond, he walks away. Susan wanders back to her digging. She takes up the spade and pounds a sandstone. She is not a jealous woman, but she does have her pride. What if her lover has committed adultery? What if he is committing adultery right now? The thought is shattering, and along with bits of rock, the spade goes flying through the air. She stuffs her hands in her pockets, realizing it wouldn't exactly be adultery but a mistake. A big one. She would never forgive him. Well, she might forgive him, but first she would have to even the score.

Susan retrieves the spade. It has landed in the middle of the mail. Then she stacks the mail and slides the card back in the catalog. Everything must be neat. Such extremities make her feel foolish and weak, especially in light of her recent behavior. She didn't hear a word the mailman said!

When he comes down the other side of the street, she makes it a point to wave at him. Her hands flutter. What if he is offended? But he responds at once throwing his hand in the air. They wave again, and then Susan takes up her spade.

That night she sits in the wicker chair across from the couch and files her nails. She is away from the phone, not expecting a call, thinking about her lover slipping off with his mother, or whomever. She sighs. She must keep her mind off it.

Once Susan met a man on an extended fast. He was on his way to the moon. How can you get there? she asked him. It's a matter of will, he replied, that begins in the imagination. My head began to fill with round things: clocks, mirrors, ripe plums. The third day was the hardest; the third day I could scarcely keep them in. They clamored and pressed, but I persevered. Now I have a secret—he leaned forward, his head almost touching the floor. I'm not going to the moon at all, the moon is coming to me.

She has always tried to keep an open mind about this, that it might have been poetry, not insanity. She knows the part about the third day is true. She would like to hold clocks and mirrors and plums in her mind, but instead she yearns for her lover. They have been apart nearly seventy-two hours, and she thinks she is losing her mind. She picks up the clippers and cuts a nail—snap! Straight across. Bluntwise.

The phone rings, and her legs fly out from under her. She skids across the room, catching her toe on the braided rug. She makes it on the fourth ring.

"Yes?"

It is her girlfriend Mildred inviting her to go to a movie. Mildred, a lifelong Baptist, is nervous because her teenager has filled her house with rock and roll.

"I don't know how much longer I can stand this," Mildred tells her. "Day and night, day after day. She's only fifteen."

Susan tightens her fingers around the toe to stop the throbbing.

"The kid is in her room right now with three more just like her, and the door is locked. They're probably smoking pot. I don't care any more." Over the phone, Susan can hear her light a cigarette. "Only fifteen. I've got three more years. My God, at least three years!"

Susan says she would love to, but really she can't go to a movie. Or even watch a video, she adds hastily, remembering the VCR. It is not that she minds Mildred, but she must be alone with her sorrow. She does not want the problems of decadent youth brought in. Stumbling lamely through her excuses, she finally comes up with an illness. Well, not an illness, exactly—she has cramps.

"Really?" Susan imagines Mildred arching an eyebrow. She has a habit of doing that.

Yes, really. The spasms are playing up and down her legs like guitar strings. Mildred laughs weakly at the reference. There is a deepening silence. Susan must make Mildred believe, if only to get her off the phone. She decides to give her something she can relish: she tells Mildred she is getting old.

"You? How can *you* feel old?" Mildred's voice is loud, wired with excitement. "You're joking. A woman cleans your house, you've never had children . . . ."

"Father Time deals with us all," Susan cuts in firmly, although she will deny saying it later. "Time, age, whatever. It catches up with us."

A gasp follows—not just a draw off one of Mildred's Tareytons, but a quick intake of breath. Susan knows the reason. For years, Mildred has wanted her to own up to her frivolous lifestyle. The criticisms are veiled yet constant, similar to Bull's tireless invitations to come to the Northwest, and once they nearly ended their friendship. It was when Susan was changing her house from contemporary to country and was searching for a particular shade of blue. (No matter how much she resents Susan's spending, Mildred always likes to go shopping.) They had just stepped out of Boyle's, where they had spent four hours looking at carpets. Four hours deciding between "Distant Horizon" and

"Forever Blue." The colors were close, but far enough apart to change the tone of the house—at least that's what the salesman told her. He was a tall, cleanshaven man, who at first glance reminded Susan of Bull.

"God help him," Mildred muttered, which made Susan laugh.

She laughed so hard the salesman asked her why, and Susan repeated her observation. When she came to Mildred's comment, the salesman laughed too. She proceeded to tell him about every room in her house, and then details of her life with Bull had slipped out. All of this redecoration was for her husband, every bit. The salesman was surprised to learn that Bull was in Seattle. Surprised and sympathetic. He touched her arm. He too lived alone. He felt sorry for them both. Bull won't be home until after summer, she told him, and all the redecoration must be done by then. She would trust the salesman's opinions. He must feel free to tell her his thoughts. "How do you feel about a chandelier in the study?" she asked him. "Would a man like that? Please be blunt."

When the women had emerged from the store hours later, they'd stood silently, elbows brushing. Susan was fooling with her hair.

Mildred broke the silence. "It's impossible for you, isn't it?"

"What's impossible?"

"You can't be around a man five minutes without turning it on. I've watched you." Mildred stomped her foot, but that didn't use up the venom. "You're sad. You're sad, Susan. Batting your eyes, sticking your boobs out, pulling down your mouth like Marilyn Monroe."

Susan had wanted to argue, to say that if that were the case, if she were really like that, why hadn't she ever attempted to seduce Fred? What about Fred? Fred is Mildred's husband. Every night he sits in a brown leather chair and reads the paper cover to cover. They never talk, and he is the reason her friend never has money. He is Mildred's sad situation, but never once has Susan pointed it out. People should be free to seek their own solutions. She has tiptoed around the problem the same way she tiptoes around Fred every time she visits. So when Mildred accused her, she too stomped her foot, thinking of all the things she could say, but said nothing. Just turned away, with Mildred following behind, apologizing. Apologizing as she is now.

Mildred says she is sorry to have bothered her, but she had no idea Susan felt so rotten. Susan should go lie down, or call a doctor. They should hang up right now.

Susan laughs. "I'm only cramping. I'll call tomorrow. We'll have lunch."

Click goes one end of the line. Click goes the other. Susan curls her legs under her and examines one perfectly filed nail. If she is going crazy, she decides, it's her own fault. She has been too lenient a lover. She should have demanded more. She puts down the nail file and looks at the clock. Seven-thirty. There is always something she can do. She goes to the Sears catalog and slips out the white card with the embossed lettering. As she dials the number, she runs her fingers over the leaves. A male voice answers. My God, she thinks. It sounds like the mailman!

"Yes, I'm Don," he says. "I'm surprised you called so quickly." Before she can answer, he adds that he has been pruning and trimming on the side for the last ten years. With his government salary, he has invested in the latest equipment. He can remove stumps.

Susan is puzzled. "This doesn't make sense. The card fell out of my Sears catalog."

"I slipped it in. I wanted you to see me in a professional light."

He sounds relaxed, unassuming. Nothing comes over the wire but warmth. He must live alone, or be in a room by himself. Susan has no time to chat. She tells him emphatically, defensively, as if he had touched on a nerve, that the elm tree in the back yard must come down. Even though she has just decided, she couldn't be more sure. It must be cut, not trimmed, all the way down.

"Out by the roots," he acknowledges. "I got the picture."

When Susan hangs up the phone, she is exhausted. Still, her mind races ahead. Where is her lover? With his mother in the Mammoth Caves? Susan tries to picture her. When she can't, she imagines his mother does not exist. But no, she must be real because there was a letter. Susan squints in the half-light of the room, remembering. They had spent the day together, and that evening he'd told her he was going. Triple A had already routed their map. When Susan heard this, she curled back her lip and spat, "Two weeks! With your mother? How dumb do you think I am?"

When she thinks of this now, she feels embarrassed. Her reaction was out of character, and there is little chance of it happening again. Even if she were drinking margaritas. She is not one to trespass mutual boundaries, but when he told her, she was insulted.

"Oh, ye . . . !" Her voice broke. "I'm that stupid! You think I am."

"It's true, really." And he looked so sincere, she took the letter from him. It was from his mother. She had written a great deal in a tiny, crabbed hand, but all Susan saw was TAKE CARE OF YOUR TEETH in large block letters at the bottom of the second page. Susan lost her

suspicions for the moment, thinking his mother must have told him that a thousand times, his smile is so perfect. He was smiling then.

"Take care of your teeth," she told him.

He looked relieved.

Susan is thirty-seven, and this year her optometrist has given her bifocals. If she had been alone, she would have put them on to pore over the letter, but she was with her lover and she could only give an occasional squint. Her lover is only thirty. His name is Bart. He is not handsome but has a quiet personal strength. Sometimes he tells her what to do. If he had known she needed glasses, he would have made her wear them, but he had no idea. She was sitting on the red Chinese couch in front of the picture window with the evening sun streaming in. He did offer to pull the drapes, but she said no

Bart and Susan, Susan and Bart. Sometimes when she is alone she scribbles their names together on her personalized notepad, then throws them out quickly. She wonders if she has ever been in love before, this schoolgirl silly. Again, she picks up the pad by the telephone, scribbles their names, and crosses them out. Why should he spend two weeks with his mother?

Now that she has thought about it, Susan has decided what sort of woman the mother is. She is little and dark and looks like Bart except for her lips, which are thin where Bart's are full. The first time she met him, she remembers thinking his mouth was the only exceptional part of him. She thought he might be a musician and was surprised to learn he was a librarian. Oh, what lips! Once, he started at her feet, but more often he starts with her mouth, her throat, moves to her ears. Her breasts tingle at the memory, and she squeezes them. She imagines having a child by him. Even though she is thirty-seven, her doctor told her, she has five good years. Five more years. She pictures Bart and his mother in the Mammoth Caves. They have deliberately strayed from the guide and are standing near a pool among ancient rock formations. Those things that grow up and down. Stalactites. Or stalagmites. She can't remember which is which, but she is sure they are admiring the ones that grow from the ceiling down. There is the drip of water.

His mother taps her foot, and Bart senses her discontent. "Isn't this interesting?" he asks.

"Very," says Ruth. "But let's try Europe next year."

Susan stiffens. How can he go to Europe when she has only five good years? She thumps her foot against the couch. If he were here, she would tell him frankly that she must have a child by him. A baby. Her hands drop to her waist, but her stomach is flat so they travel to her

breasts again. She goes upstairs and slips on her nightgown. Though it is barely dark, she counts out tiny white pills.

In the morning she cuts off the heads of the dahlias. They are vulgar, too bright and overlarge. She dusts her hands and drives to Golden Gate Greenhouse to buy pansies. The ones she chooses are taller than average, but their faces are small, about the size of dimes. They sway in the breeze after she plants them, simple and harmless, but as she takes the dahlias to the trash can, she imagines the new flowers are winking in the sun.

As usual the mailman is friendly. He does not mention the phone call, nor does he press anything into her hand except the water bill. Wait, there is a circular with cardboard coupons inside. Susan remarks that they look like playing cards or those quirky calling cards salesmen push at you. The mailman says no, these are redeemable, part of a game being played at the Super-X next week. He also tells her they haven't found the right materials for his grandson. She tells him what she has done with the dahlias, and he agrees. She watches him walk down the street before she settles into her lawn chair. From the rear, he looks like a much younger man. She puts on her sunglasses and sips iced tea. When he crosses to the other side, she is stretched out pretending sleep.

That evening as she sits by the phone, she examines her body. Her muscle tone is improving, and she is getting brown. She points her toe and watches the shadows dance off her calf. The phone rings. It is her husband.

"The dye isn't setting up right," he tells her. "I may be here past fall."

"I'll miss you."

"Would you like to come to Seattle for a while?"

There is silence.

"Bull, don't you listen?" she shouts. "I'm into plants!"

She is crying softly.

"I'm sorry," he tells her. "But I miss you. I keep forgetting what you said."

"No, I'm sorry," she replies. "It's just that time of the month. I overreacted, and now I feel bad."

Sprawled on the motel bed, Bull can faintly recall his wife curled up on the couch with a hot water bottle or a heating pad pressed between her legs. A pad or a bottle, he doesn't remember which. It seems so long ago.

"Are you cramping?" he asks awkwardly.

"Mostly fluid retention. My breasts are sore."

At the word "breasts" Bull is reminded of how much he wants to be with her, but he is cautious. "If I were there, I could make you feel better."

"Oh, yes," says Susan, sniffling. "If you were here, we could talk and hold hands."

Susan is crying because she dreads saying goodbye to her lover. She knows with certainty that Bart is not with his mother but with another woman younger than she. Their relationship is far too complicated for it to be otherwise. For example, why does he only call on Tuesdays and Thursdays? Why does she call him on all the other days, and weekends as well? True, he is always home and glad to hear from her, but damn it, why does she have to be the one to phone? She brings her foot down—*bam!*—on the coffee table, furious that she has not seen through this sooner. She has been foolish, and when her husband comes home, she will be a good wife to him. She will cook hot meals and clean the attic and promise never to cut her hair again.

"I have a confession," she tells Bull, openly weeping. "I'm not cramping. I'm only missing you."

Bull grips the phone, powerless. He wishes there were something he could do.

"You've been doing too damn much yard work," he tells her gruffly. "I'll send you some extra money. Hire a man to do that."

Susan has always been a doll-like woman. When she first met Bull, her hair was straight and dark and hung down her back. At the wedding, she wore it twisted atop her head in a coronet of seed pearls. She cut it right after the honeymoon, and although Bull didn't mention it, she could tell he was disappointed. Her husband isn't the type of man to analyze women; he just likes them.

After she has counted out her pills, Susan lies back on top of the covers wondering if Bart likes his new girlfriend. She tries to imagine the woman. Where to begin? She is younger than Susan, but not really attractive, ignorant of style and too long of limb. Her bones, though clearly defined, suggest a broadness that will turn matronly when she fills out. Today, she is wearing jeans and a faded t-shirt. On her feet are tennis shoes with golf socks; green pom-poms sprout at each heel. Her only bit of finery is a gold ankle bracelet that winks in the dark. The anklet is real gold, and Susan knows someone bought it for her; it is not something the woman would choose for herself. She is not too clean, either, but for some reason that excites Bart.

His mother has disappeared, gone ahead with the guide perhaps, and Bart waits in the dark, gauging the woman's presence by the odor. As she nears, he begins breathing heavily—just the woman to do with what he wants. The light from her anklet winks in the dark. Bart knocks her to the ground. Susan can see nothing, but it is impossible to ignore the sounds—rapid, wet sucking noises. She hears the scrabble of feet, although she knows they are both lying down. Was that a slap? Susan flinches. The sounds become muffled; the woman is murmuring now. She would use Bart's name if she knew it, but because she doesn't, she whispers. After one particularly long phrase, Susan is livid. How dare he! How could he do *that?* Susan hopes the woman has a secret yeast infection, so Bart will get thrush, an infection children get when they play with their private parts and then put their hands in their mouths. His tongue will break out in sores. Even so, at their reunion, he will try to kiss her on the lips. "No, no," Susan will say, turning. "Just on the cheek. Perhaps on the ear."

Susan decides her next lover will be a discreet older man, perhaps a veteran, who has been through a battery of inoculations. He will drive a large, comfortable van.

In the morning, she pulls up the pansies. Now, they wink on their backs at the sun. She is tired of all these flowers. She wants her back yard uncluttered and maintenance-free. While she is plucking, she thinks of concrete and wonders why she hasn't thought of it before. She runs to the kitchen table and spends the rest of the morning sketching plans until the sound of the mail dropping into the mailbox interrupts her. She waits until the tread of his steps on the wooden porch lets her know the mailman has gone. Susan doesn't know why she is reluctant to see him. They have talked of so many things and now she feels tongue-tied. Still, she is anxious for the mail. At the door she stands sideways, snaking out her arm. Her hand returns full of mail. Coupon-like cards flutter down; there is a ton of religious material and a check from Bull. She smiles, scanning the amount. He has been generous. After putting the check under the fruit bowl, she goes to lie outside. When the mailman passes on the other side of the road, she doesn't throw her hand up. She is comfortable at this distance; there is time. After he leaves Susan decides she can't stand to be in the sun any longer. It is too hot, and besides, until she is surrounded by concrete, she won't be satisfied.

She drives to the bank and deposits most of the money, keeping out just enough for some groceries and a dress she has seen. Not a dress exactly, but a blouse and skirt made of crepe de chine, bright red with tiny pearl buttons. In it, she will say goodbye to her lover. She wants

him to see her looking gay and brave. She buys the dress without trying it on. The salesclerk, a young girl as petite as Susan, says, "This isn't a gift. This is for you." When she nods, the clerk says, "I can tell."

At home, she tries it on before the mirror. She looks good in it—certainly, her color is red—and imagines herself going to the Mammoth Caves and confronting him. A guide isn't necessary; she can find Bart by herself. Mother and girlfriend are by now both gone. He is alone, and she follows him stealthily until he reaches the exit. Then she dodges into a shortcut no one else knows so she can be waiting at the end of the tunnel. Some light filters in behind her. She has deliberately chosen to meet him at the exit. Even though she has come this far, she wants him to know he can leave anytime he wants.

She studies the signs: *Exit. Ladies. Gents.* As he comes through, exhausted by his afternoon, he will see her in an aureole of light, as if she has just stepped out of a mirror—a fashionable figure with an air of concentration just spent, wearing a hat. At first sight, he stumbles, intrigued by the mysterious figure, who appears unaware of his presence. His shoe sends a pebble rattling along the smooth rock floor, and she turns, her hair tumbling, a burnished amber in the half-light. Her red dress shoots flames. Poor Bart. Here, in his weariness and degradation, is *woman*, and the shock sends him to his knees.

Susan, unaware of the effect of the light, looks for the source of that sound and draws back from the strange, disheveled, kneeling man. Who is this poor creature, so tired, so broken? Slowly, horribly, she recognizes Bart and then she begins to understand his suffering, for the ravages of love are plain. Yes, he is in love. He is in love with her and knows he has done wrong. Will she forgive him? Bart crawls forward a tiny fraction of an inch. Her heart swells. She opens her legs and swallows him up.

The next day, Susan doesn't dig in the garden. Men in trucks have come with shovels and troughs and bags of cement. She is happy with this activity. She has always wanted a patio with a birdbath and a barbeque pit. When the mailman comes, they discuss the elm. It is still standing, looking miserable, in a sea of cement. They both agree that the right thing to do, the only sensible thing, is to put it out of its misery.

"When?"

The friendly mailman has turned into Don the Tree Trimmer again. Susan blinks, reminded of Bull in Seattle. All the money he has sent. *When?* She nearly tells him to leave it stand, but... she sighs. The only right thing, the only sensible thing, is to do as they had planned.

"Soon," she says, unwilling to be pinned down. The tree will fall when the time comes. She shrugs her shoulders and the strap of her halter slips. A muscle in Don's throat cords up; he looks straight ahead.

Crash! A man in tan overalls has dropped the birdbath. It split right in two.

"Don't worry," says Don. "I'll fix it. I've got some special cement glue."

Susan doesn't mean to, but she tingles. He leaves her with the broken birdbath, but she knows he is still staring at her.

It is the every of every other night, and Bull calls. She tells him she loves him right from the start. There is a pause, but he doesn't ask her to come to Seattle. He asks about the flowers instead. "You're never going to believe this," she says, "but I've planted concrete."

She tells him about the patio and the birdbath and the barbecue pit. Then she tells him what's really on her mind—a swimming pool. Bull sighs, but he won't deny her. She's the only wife he's got.

"Sounds good to me," he tells her and really, he adds, he might enjoy a pool after Seattle. She can do what she wants, but there is a difference. This time he must apply for a loan.

Later, Susan sits on the couch watching television. During the commercials, she looks at her body. All the yardwork has changed her—her arms are shapely, her buttocks are firm. She is brown, but she would like to get darker and decides that after the pool is built she will put up a tall wooden fence so she can lie naked in the sun. Well, not totally naked. She will put Band-Aids on her nipples to prevent them from looking like prunes. In the winter, she will use a tanning booth. Either way, she will look terrific, and maybe she should go to the boutique and buy the blue jersey she noticed hanging next to the crepe de chine. As for her lover? She has forgotten about him.

The phone rings, and her heart pounds. Unbidden, she sees a picture of her lover slipping away from his mother in the dark. She crosses the braided rug in two steps. It is Mildred. Mildred! Susan is glad she called and tells her all that is being done. She describes the patio and the barbecue pit and the hard brown muscles of the men as they work in the sun. She talks with such certainty that Mildred gets confused, believing that everything has already been done. "No, no," Susan laughs. It seems she is always laughing at Mildred. "When you get here, you'll realize your error. It's a mess. Come to lunch."

Click goes one end of the line, click goes the other. Susan stretches, admiring the firmness of her body, when she hears another ring. Not the phone, but the doorbell. She wonders who. It can't possibly be

Mildred. No, she smiles, remembering. The mailman with his glue gun.

It is her lover. She opens the door and stands frozen, adamant and alarmed. Bart watches the emotions play across her face and inches through the door. He closes it behind him. Finally, not so much because she is angry but just to break the silence, she throws a book at him.

"I was afraid this would happen," he says, but he is a nimble lover and dodges it. He takes her in his arms. They kiss.

MARY A. MCGOWAN

The Right Opportunity

The morning after I dyed my hair red, I was sitting at the bus station in Delville, Nebraska, waiting for the number 904 to New York City. The only people there at 1:30 that Sunday morning were me, the old lady behind the counter, who had a big bun in her hair with a pen stuck through it, and a guy who was maybe forty, wearing a black leather jacket with a silvery zipper. His nose was kind of squashed and tilted to one side, like he might have broken it a couple of times.

I was thinking about my sister, Hillary, who was sixteen—three years younger than me. She cried when she walked me down the stairs in our apartment building and out to the curb where my friend, Cal, was meeting me in his blue Ford pickup to take me to the bus station.

"I guess now's as good a time to go as any," she said. It was early in June and she stood there in her bare feet. "Mom's over at Hoolihan's drinking beers with the truck drivers and Dad's coming off one binge and looking for the next. You know how he gets when he starts to sober up." She slapped a mosquito that landed on her knee.

Yeah, I thought. I know. The scar was still there above my right eyebrow where he threw the whiskey bottle at me when I was twelve.

I promised to send for Hillary as soon as I got settled and found the right opportunity. Hillary handed me a bag and inside was a gold pin in the shape of a snake head with some kind of bright red jewels for eyes. I never asked her if it the gold and jewels were real. I didn't want to know. I figured she probably stole it.

Hillary works as a chambermaid at the Ostrich Lake Motel over in Calumy. She's worked there since she quit school last year. She used to take stuff from people's rooms, but she doesn't do it anymore. Last month she quit smoking grass and now she's trying to get a job at the dry cleaners. She says the pay is better.

In the bus station, I began to feel like maybe I shouldn't be leaving Hillary, even though I really wanted to go to New York. The opportunities were there, all right. My friend, Rita Lake, had a cousin in New York who wanted to be an actress. Emily LaTelevision. I'm not sure that was her real last name. Anyway, she and some guy would get these post office boxes and call people and tell them they won a trip but they had to send in fifty dollars as a processing fee.

I figured maybe I could look up Emily and get in on that opportunity. But in the bus station when I thought about it, my sister's face kept coming back into my head. "Come on. Let me come with you. What have I got to keep me here?" She was standing on the front steps of the apartment building, twirling her long brown hair around her finger.

A bus pulled in but it was going to Wyoming so I just kept sitting there. The guy in the leather jacket sat across from me on a green vinyl couch that had a bunch of cracks in it. The stuffing was coming out and it reminded me of those fake beards that the Santa Clauses wear in the department stores around Christmas time. He was smoking a cigarette—a Camel or one of those other kind that don't have filters.

"What kind of a pin is that?" I heard his voice but I didn't realize for a second he was talking to me. I had been watching a street lamp outside the bus station sputter and flicker and was wondering if it would die out completely before the bus came.

"Snake pin, I guess." I was hoping it didn't look like real gold. The guy leaned toward me a little. The table in between us had a bunch of scratch marks on it and letters dug into it that said "Suzy loves Mac."

"I used to own snakes," he said. "Boas and a cobra and a couple of pythons." He blew out some smoke and it hung in the air for a long time.

I thought pythons were poisonous and I was almost sure cobras were.

"Pythons are nice," I said as I lit a cigarette.

"Yeah," he said. "They're beautiful animals." He smiled, and the streetlamp that was still flickering made his teeth and his silver zipper kind of sparkle.

We talked about snakes for a while and then he told me he was going to Missouri and then to New York City to work at his brother's business.

"What kind of business?" I asked him. I was always thinking about those opportunities.

"Escort service."

"Is that one of those things that's like hooking but they call it something else?" I wanted him to know I wasn't stupid.

He tried to tell me it wasn't hooking but I didn't believe him. "Look, here's my brother's number in New York." He scribbled something on the back of a matchbook. "You ever want to make some extra cash, call me. My name's on there."

I looked at the matchbook. *Joey Molgani.* "Yeah, OK. Thanks, Joey." I put the matches in my duffel bag.

Right then I thought about Hillary again and her telling me that she was thinking about going back to high school. And I almost wanted to stay and make sure she did it. But I couldn't because the day before I held up a pharmacy in Shipley and the cops were after me. Thing is, it was only a plastic gun. But I had already been busted once for crack and I couldn't afford to go through it again.

So I cut my hair and dyed it red and packed some clothes and a map of New York City I stole from the library and a book called *You Can Do It All* by Charles Louderberg. It's about how you can do anything by having a positive attitude and looking for the right opportunities. And then I told Hillary I'd send for her. Sometimes you have to lie.

I heard Joey say, "Here's your wheels," and I looked over and saw the bus pull up. And sure enough, that streetlamp just sputtered and wheezed like somebody's old grandmother and then it shut off into pitch black just as I walked up the steps.

On our thirtieth anniversary, *Cottonwood* wishes to thank you.

What you hold in your hands is the second of two commemorative anniversary issues. This issue's retrospective section features poetry that represents some of the best work we have ever published. Readers like you are helping *Cottonwood* remain a vital forum for original writing in Kansas and beyond.

Thanks go to you, our readers, without whom *Cottonwood* would not continue to exist. Thank you for your enduring support and for joining us in celebrating three wonderful, productive decades of publication.

Check all that apply:

_____ Please send me _____ three-number subscriptions to *Cottonwood* at $15.00 each. I enclose $_____.

_____ Please send me a free catalog detailing back issues of *Cottonwood* and Cottonwood Press releases.

_____ Please send me _____ copies of Michael L. Johnson's *Violence and Grace: Poems About the American West*, at $8.95 each. I enclose $_____.

_____ Please send me _____ copies of Victor Contoski's book of poems, *Midwestern Buildings*, at $8.95 each. I enclose $_____.

_____ I enclose a check for $_____ made out to the KU Endowment Association for the Alice Carter Fund.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Unless otherwise noted, make checks payable to *Cottonwood*.

PETER VILBIG

Boom!

Joe Moon stood in brown light of the hallway outside his mother's room and practiced saying it in his head: "I'm gonna go over to Nash's house, can I?" They were blowing up a bomb they built with Nash's chemistry set. She wouldn't like that. He touched the matted grease on the cowlick he had built up into something like a ship's prow at the front of his spiky, crew-cut head. The air in the hall was still, and he inhaled the tangy smell of his skin from no bath today. The shame of it all washed over him: thirteen and still no hair under his arms or down there. Godamnit. He knocked on his mom's door and opened it.

"Mom?" he asked and then saw her at the edge of her bed in the yellow light from the curtains. She was wearing her blue satin robe.

"Come on in, hon," she said, and he walked into the room. When he got closer he could see her robe was open at the bottom so her legs showed almost all the way up and he felt rather than saw her breasts large and movable under the robe and he tried not to look in her direction. With her hair flipped up to either side of her face, she looked like the picture of a movie star that had somehow been crumpled up and smudged a little, and then he noticed she was swirling ice in a glass and he thought: She's drinking Daddy's bourbon again.

Joe walked around to her bed and leaned forward and touched her cheek, feeling her skin powdery on his lips and then smelling her perfume rise up in his nostrils.

"Mom," he said. "Can I go to Nash's house and play with his chemistry set?"

Joe looked away from his mother, realizing he had just said what he had not meant to say. God, he thought. Definitely she would say no. Could she tell?

"Is his mama expecting you?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am," he lied.

She twisted the glass slowly in her hand and watched the melting ice drift, and he thought she hadn't heard him. Then she said. "You might as well. But you behave yourself, you hear me?"

"Thanks, Mom," Joe said. He felt a jagged burst of freedom break loose in him and leaned to kiss her goodbye, but she was lifting the tumbler up and their hands collided. "Joe," she said sharply. Bourbon sloshed on his hand. He could feel the cool burn of it.

"Sorry, Mom," he said. She gave him a look of mild annoyance, and he wheeled quickly away. "Bye," he said. The ice clicked in the glass behind him as he made the door.

Out on the street, the sun beat like a fist on the subdivision as he flew on his bike past the park across the street. Kids played baseball on a diamond. Mud from the construction still stained the elementary school at one end. All this had been flat-as-the-palm-of-your-hand cottonfields just two years ago in black North Texas dirt. Now there rose up endless rows of brick houses with names like *ranch* or *rambler* or *Tudor* and Bermuda grass lawns and spindly just-planted trees. The Boy Scout troop had just painted addresses on the curbs of most of the houses.

At Nash's house, Joe rode around to the garage. It was empty, and he stood still for an instant, looking over the table saws and sanders and drill presses, and he smelled the dust that floated in a streak of sunlight through the middle. Elsewhere were shadows. Then he walked further into the garage and behind some unused insulation rolls found the bomb and set it on a workbench. He stared at it lovingly—an eight-inch-long firecracker, perhaps two inches in diameter, filled with charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter. They had crimped off both ends and painstakingly wrapped tissue paper dipped in glue around the tube. A high-quality four-inch fuse rose from one end. Joe feared a fizzle: one or both ends would just blow, showering fiery sparks but no explosion. But if it worked, it would be a doozy.

He put the bomb on the workbench and thought for a minute about how his daddy got mad when his mom drank his bourbon. They would probably fight tonight. Then he started thinking about how he was going to be in gym class as soon as the summer was over, and they made you take showers. Then he heard the garage door open and saw Nash, his bulbous head set comically on narrow shoulders.

"You got the matches?" Nash said, without preamble.

"Yeah." Joe had stolen five kitchen matches the night before.

Nash took the bomb off the workbench and slipped it carefully into a knapsack. He headed out of the garage and began strapping it to his bike.

Joe didn't move for a second and thought, goddamnit, it's not gonna work, and he just thought how he would like to use Mr. Nash's saws and cut every house in the subdivision up into sawdust, and he wished he could just plant cotton again, the way it was before, green leaves waving in the fields and the bolls filling with fine white thread. Nash was already pointing his bike down the alley, and Joe ran to his bike to catch up, the light and heat in the blinding white concrete of the driveway making things waver in front of him. Joe peddled hard. Sweat had formed in his eyes, but the wind now carried it off. Abreast with Nash, he shouted: "Are we gonna do what we said?"

"Yeah," Nash yelled. "You gonna pussy out?"

"No." Nash said they decided on Allison Ashton because she was stuck up, but Joe knew: they were doing it because she was beautiful. She was in their class and she was beautiful and so they would set off the bomb in her alley.

Joe leaned into a turn. The alley cut like a canyon between the steep walls of wood fences, all new and reddish or tan. One more turn, across Sonnet Drive, and then into her alley. Joe expertly skidded his bike to a stop, dismounted, and dumped in one smooth move. The alley was empty. He looked quickly through the slats of her fence. Nobody. A swimming pool blue and glittery. Neither Joe nor Nash had a swimming pool.

"Let's put it in the trash can," Nash said.

"Yeah," Joe said. The trash can would get all dented up. He ran to the pair of cans next to the fence and emptied one into the other, spilling most of the contents. He stopped again and peered through the slats. Still nothing. He really wished that Allison would be home to hear it go off, and he imagined her lying in her bed in the cool of the air conditioning, just in her bra and panties, and then *Boom!* He grinned and then thought, I wonder if Allison will ever get married? He put his hand to his nose. The smell of the bourbon was still there: medicine dipped in burning cloth. He made a face. Nash unpacked the bomb.

He dragged the empty can to the center of the alley. Nash, the faintest of smiles on his face, lowered the bomb inside and said: "Gimme a match."

"I wanta light it," Joe said.

"Come on, man." Nash turned and faced him and Joe could see he was dead set on it. "I kept it at my house," Nash said. "I was the one who could have got in trouble."

Joe shrugged and gave up. "All right, crybaby. But I'm gonna watch." He handed three matches over to Nash, who leaned to the concrete of the alley. The first two matches broke off, but the third caught fire and he brought the match to the fuse. For what seemed a long time, nothing happened. Then it sparked and caught fire.

"Run like hell," Nash screamed, already turning and running. Joe turned and followed, feeling a gigantic smile spread on his face. The boys were back to their bikes a good twenty yards away when they turned and saw a billow of smoke float from the top of the trash can, followed by nothing. "Dad gummit," Joe said. He felt his stomach drop down in his gut.

"The fuse," Nash said.

Joe nodded. A dud, he thought. They took a step toward the can. Then Joe noticed the can jump, as if a cat had bumped into it. What? he thought. Then: the can. Bang. Wow. Wow. A hammer was the sound coming down on his head. A round orb of bright white fire consumed the can and then disappeared, swallowed up in a ball of white, billowy smoke eight feet high that turned black along the edges and then all black, like a big black thunderhead. Wow. Joe rocked on his heels and almost fell backwards. At first he couldn't see through the smoke. Then it started to clear and the heavy, acrid smell of gunpowder exploded in his nose. The alley was deafeningly silent. In awe, he looked at where the trash can had been. Pieces of it lay scattered about the alley.

"Shit," Nash said.

They looked at each other. Nash grinned, and Joe had to think: am I smiling? No. Too scared. Didn't think of running. Instead he walked toward the torn-up pieces. Nash seemed rooted in place. The can's remnants were jagged, shredded filaments of dull aluminum. If they had been much closer, fragments might have gotten them. Paper from the wrapping lay in thick clumps. Joe felt his heart tumbling over and over in his chest. He laughed out loud. He would tell everyone about this one. Then he heard the scrape of a garage door opening. He turned quickly and saw Nash taking off on his bike.

"Hey," Joe yelled, but it was no use. He was standing like that when Allison turned the corner of her driveway. She looked at him amid the ruins of her trash can. He looked back, thinking of what his dad would do when he found out, and he felt everything sink out of the middle of himself. He watched her, realizing that for perhaps the first time she was actually noticing that he existed.

"What on earth," she finally said.

"I," he said. "We." He took a deep breath. "A bomb went off."

"What on earth did you do?" She looked at him curiously and started walking toward him. His heart began pounding. He could see the color in her hair now, brown but with many lighter glints, her skin brown and smooth. He felt like running but was rooted to the spot and when she was among the rubble she bent and picked up a piece of the torn aluminum.

She looked at him, mild annoyance playing in her face. "You blew up our garbage can?"

He felt that she was looking into him, deep into the center of his life and could see everything that he most wanted to keep hidden. The little boy who plays pranks, the little boy with no hair. Hairless wonder. And he felt her surveying his life from inside the cool perfection of her shining brown skin, and he thought, not wanting to, afraid to, of that secret place between her legs where he knew a whole forest of hair had already sprouted, and saw her breasts pointing out at him from under her t-shirt, fleshy tokens of her superiority. All of him wanted to run from her gaze, but instead he stared back, straight into her eyes, bracing himself for the wave of her scorn, but instead she only looked curiously at him and tilted her head.

"You blew up our trash can," she said again. "What a kick." A smile bloomed and remained on her face. She dropped the piece of aluminum. "You should go before my mom comes out."

He nodded, dumbfounded, but she only kept smiling. "How did you think of this?"

He shrugged, feeling unable at this moment to speak.

"It must have been really incredible," she went on. "Was it an M-80?"

"We made it," he blurted out, not wishing her to believe it was a store-bought explosion.

"You made it. How in the world?"

"Gunpowder. You mix charcoal and sulfur and saltpeter." He felt proud, knowing that.

"Wow." She glanced quickly over her shoulder again. "You really should go. My mom will be pissed." She sent an even more brilliant smile in his direction. "It's so cool. You should have told me and let me watch."

He said nothing and then watched her features transform again, shyness rising into her face, and then she leaned toward him and he caught the smell of her skin in his nose and then her lips grazed his cheek. She giggled. "This is so cool." He felt that entire side of his face go numb. Then she turned and ran back to her driveway and stopped:

"Hurry," she said. And then as if thinking twice about it, she said: "I'll be at the baseball diamond after supper." She disappeared.

For a moment Joe stood in the brilliant light of full afternoon, the torn fragments of the can littering the alley, the acrid smell of the gunpowder still hanging in the air and erasing the smell of her skin. Something was moving inside him and as he climbed on his bike, he knew that it was a big laugh trying to get out. He felt a giggle erupt, peddling his bike now like a warrior. The laughter started to spill out of him as he peddled faster with each turn of the wheel, wild now, laughing and throwing his legs into the pedals with all his might, bursting into the street, where he jumped a curb, made a quick spin, and raced on, the laughter pouring off him into the superheated air.

KRISTINE SOMERVILLE

Rummage

A man pulls his rust-spotted van up to the curb, leans out the window, and shouts over the sputtering motor, "Any furniture, young lady?"

"No furniture," I say. "Didn't get any in the settlement." I use a legal-sounding word like settlement even though it isn't quite accurate; I never married the man that I am leaving. To be honest, I never came close. I told Max from the start that I was from a family of multiple divorces, which exempted me from harboring romantic notions about the institution. There were good reasons, I told him, why it was called an institution in the first place.

The man with his elbow propped on the lowered window nods and pulls away; the squeal of his tires makes me feel embarrassed that my junk isn't worth turning off his tired engine.

"You're getting a divorce?" my neighbor asks. I have completely forgotten she is here, bent over an RCA box (from the only joint purchase Max and I ever made) full of the I'm-OK-but-you-need-help books he brought home one at a time, leaving them on the coffee table, hoping that I might pick one up and begin the "healing process," as one book described it on the inside jacket

My neighbor pulls out a copy of *Bonds of Love* and fans through the pages. "I'm going to miss seeing your husband around."

I let her use the word husband; today it seems easier than explaining. Then I tell her that Max is staying; I am the one who is going away. At this, she shakes her head, tightens her lips, widens her eyes though her soup-can curlers have already pulled her skin in a temporary face-lift so that even this change in expression looks like a grimace. "How much for *The Vitamin Bible*?" she asks, allowing herself to be the one who changes the subject.

"For a neighbor, it's free," I say, suddenly wanting her to have something from me that would make up for the fact that I didn't get to know her better, never offered to water her prize orchids while she visited grandkids or taken over a few tomatoes when Max's garden produced more than we could stand. Max was the one who did all that.

"You're not going to make a lot of money that way." My neighbor hitches the paperback under her arm. As she shuffles down the sidewalk, the breeze balloons her wine-colored robe around her. She keeps on walking and then waves at an oncoming truck, obviously happy to see the person inside. It is Max. I can see the glass prism dancing from the rear-view mirror, throwing fragments of rainbows against the cab's sliding-glass window. Damn, he isn't supposed to be home for three hours. I run down the porch steps, coffee splashing over the rim of my chipped Chicago Art Institute cup, and scoop up the mess of bass, bluegill, sunfish, and rainbow trout I have priced at a dime a pair so that I could get rid of them. The first week Max and I lived together, he hid one pair of fish earrings in the bread box, another under my dinner plate; I found them hanging off the volume button on the TV, even beady-eyed swimmers at the bottom of my wine glass. I drop them, fanned tails first, in the front pocket of the only pair of shorts that I'm keeping.

"What are you doing home?" I ask when he jumps out of his truck as if he has just left for the bakery but had to turn back for something he forgot.

"I live here, remember?" he says, still dressed in his whites. Every morning he walks in the house carrying two baguettes under his arm like rolled canvases he intends to frame. His open fingers comb through his thick, black hair. "A halo" is what he calls the flour that stirs and then wavers above his head. And he's half a person taller than I am, so he can stand over me and look down, pretending to be a saint blessing the sinner. That was our morning routine.

"Right," is all I say and run into the house, past him, and past the television I had turned on for the noise. The Cyclops's red optic blasts are zapping Magneto, who is doubled over and thrown backwards, the city skyline, gap-toothed and discolored, zooming past him. Storm stands to the side, hands on her hips, her silver hair and lamé cape a rippling, phosphorescent ocean behind her.

"Get in the fight," I say. I am tired of her always posing in thigh-high, spike-heeled boots.

"What, Bebe?" I hear Max ask, but I don't answer him. We've had this Saturday morning argument too many times before. He thinks

Storm's role as sometime superhero and all-the-time supermodel is just fine and that her corseted waist and stainless steel conical breasts are weapons—they lure evil—but I've never seen much evidence of that. No, I keep silent and search the house for items that he might love but that are mine to sell.

Max rummages through the winter coats that I have hung from a low, lateral branch of the locust that shades our rented house. He must be checking to see if I'm selling his plaid Pendleton or his fishing vest or the moth-eaten peacoat that he wears all winter long. He stops at my electric pink jacket and stares at the lift ticket still dangling from the zipper, probably remembering the time, two Decembers ago, when he taught me how to ski. He spoke even-toned as he explained that the poles were for pushing off but that I could tuck them under my arms since I was going to start out by going really slow. I kept my knees bent—he called them my springs—and my skis turned in, angled against the snow to keep me from moving too fast. It seemed like I was a quick study until a group of children, no more than five or six, flew past me, up and over the small hills, their colorful hats bouncing like balls across a white floor. The last thing I heard was Max yelling "concentrate" before I landed facedown in the snow

Now, without a word, he brushes past me. For a moment, I imagine him bringing out everything that is left in the house and lining it up on the front lawn. He would say in his instructor's voice that what we didn't sell, we'd take to the Salvation Army and then leave for Colorado with only the clothes on our backs. We would be happier in a place where all the trees, houses, and cars looked sculptured out of snow, and the people looked sculptured too, bulky, quilted versions of themselves. For a moment, I would believe Max's utopian vision, but the screen door slamming behind him sounds more like an angry "no" than an invitation for me to follow him to another state and I am relieved.

The wind knocks over the fake fig tree that I have priced at five dollars. Fanned out on the ground, it reminds me of when I ran home, excited about summer vacation, and found my mother in the back yard, chopping at the trunk of a blue spruce with the largest tomahawk from my father's prized collection of Indian artifacts.

"He'll be back tonight for his things," she said. Her voice sounded hollow but the tree hitting the ground made a solid thump.

That night I watched my father pack from the twin beds that had been pushed together that month, made one by the white bedspread

latticed with tea roses and sweet peas. The beds had fooled me into thinking that my parents had decided to work their problems out.

My father filled the open mouth of his suitcase with striped swimming trunks, sherbet-colored shorts, and pullover shirts with mustachioed men winking on the breast pockets. Then he picked up his first edition of *The Hound of the Baskersvilles* and ran his hand over the cover picture of three spike-collared dogs tearing down the black rocks of a bluff. "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes a good mystery, Bebe. You're probably old enough to read him now," he said in a heavy whisper.

I stood up; I thought he meant to give me the book, but instead he threw it on top of his clothes, belted it down, and then kneed the lid of his brown leather suitcase shut.

When he was gone, I opened his closet's sliding accordion doors. Hanging from polished cedar hangers were six gray suits—stiff and serious-looking, with narrow lapels and simple brass buttons—followed by one black suit, more serious yet, that he only wore to weddings, funerals, and the occasional trip to his lawyer. My parents had been talking divorce since I could remember.

"How about my baseball cards?" Max's voice comes from a smoky gray shadow I can see moving on the other side of the screen door.

"Check your closet, doll," I say in the wifely way a person acquires after living with someone for two years. Now, though, the habit sounds like an insult. I say more softly, "You know I wouldn't sell Ernie."

"Banks?" someone asks. When I turn around, there stands a young, bearded man with sandy, shoulder-length hair, a gauzy tunic shirt fallen open at the collar, bare feet, dirt under his toenails. He tucks a strand of golden hair behind his ear and says, "You have an Ernie Banks?"

"Yes," I answer, staring into his eyes that are so dark they're all pupils. "But the owner's not selling."

"How 'bout jewelry?" asks a woman who has her arm linked in his. She wears a granny gown, feather earrings, slave bangles on her ankles.

"A whole shoebox full," I tell her. She unhooks herself and follows me, the bells sewn on the bodice of her dress jingling with each step.

She digs through the Madonna crosses and rosaries that I couldn't pull off and the cameo and black velvet chokers that weren't me either and asks, "Will you take five for the whole thing?"

"Five sounds fine."

The woman empties the jewelry into the shallow hammock her dress makes when she sits on the porch step with her legs apart. She

slaps the place on the step next to her where she wants the man to sit. Close your eyes, she must have whispered to him, because his lids click shut. He leans toward her so that she can drape the beads that she has untangled around his neck. Watching them, I remember my father's friend the captain. I hadn't thought about him in years. He had stepped out from behind the burnt orange curtain that divided first from second class and said to me, "Close your eyes, Bebe. And put out your hand."

I did what he asked.

"Now squeeze real tight."

I did that too.

"OK, when you open your eyes, slowly open your hand."

As soon as my fist bloomed open, two spongy green rabbits sprang apart, revealing seven smaller versions of themselves that were trapped between them. I stood each rabbit upright on the folded-down tray and dealt out names like Zeus, Isis, and Persephone.

Then the captain blew a long, thin balloon, twisted it in several fast squeaks. "A beautiful swan," he said, putting the long-necked bird on my head. "Just like you, duckling." I hated the nickname duckling. (He must have heard my father call me that when he put me on the plane.) So when the captain disappeared back behind the curtain, I took the long-necked bird off my head and hid it under my seat.

Now when I stuff the five-dollar bill that the woman gave me into my front pocket, I rediscover the fish earrings I had put there, and it feels as if they have multiplied. If I were Max, I would ask the young woman to close her eyes, put out her hand. In her palm I would place the hand-carved earrings painted in whimsical colors. "Now, open," I would say, anxious to see the look on her face when she is greeted by the sunny-side-up stare and the puckered silver hooked kisses of eight little fish. But I have never done what Max would do. No, I let the couple walk away.

"That's the biggest tree I've ever seen," says one of the five girls who has stopped, digging through a box of old board games long enough to look up at the locust branches webbed overhead. She blows a purple bubble that I can see through to her mouth, nose, and eyes. Her eyelashes brush against its translucent skin as she blinks, but the perfect roundness isn't disturbed.

"Bang," one of her friends says and shoots her bubble with a pearl-handled gun lighter she has found in a box of miscellaneous stuff. I've written on the outside, "A handful for a quarter." The bubble blower deflates her creation as if it has been mortally wounded. "How

old is it?" she asks when the gum is safely in her mouth. "It looks a hundred."

The girls move out from under the tree and circle around me, wanting an answer, but I feel as if I am breathing in feathers, the same way I have been feeling when Max moves to touch me in bed, wanting, at first, to do nothing more than warm his hands against my bare skin. But touching always leads to more, and when it does, it is as if I am being smothered. "This tree is two years old," I say, grabbing the fake birch by its white trunk, the silk leaves hiding me from them. "And it's for sale. Want to buy it?"

"No way. It's not real," the bubble blower says. She looks at her friends and winds her finger in an imaginary circle.

"I agree," Max says, coming out of the house. He has showered the flour from his hair and is wearing cutoffs, no shirt. His lips are upturned in a semi-smile, a faraway look in his eyes—a familiar, relaxed expression that means he has devised a plan to make me stay that he believes is flawless. He winks at the girls, who are giggling as if seeing him in short-shorts is on the same par as looking at catalog models in their underwear.

"The tree's approximately one hundred and thirty years old," Max tells them. "It's the oldest locust in Taney County," he adds, reciting the information the landlord had told him when we first moved in. Then he eases into the canvas director's chair with "star" printed across the back in loopy, ski-writer letters and pulls me into his lap. When we sit like this, my feet do not touch the ground, and his arms are a straight jacket around me so that I cannot scoot forward.

The girls, satisfied with his answer, tear down the leaning towers of sweaters. Each shakes out what was the floor of an unsteady building and holds the bumble-bee stripes, nautical appliqués, and dancing snowflakes under her chin. They stretch the knitted sleeves down the length of their arms. Even though they must be ten, fifteen years younger than I am, the sweaters are a perfect fit.

"How much have you made?" Max asks when he stops kissing the back of my neck. He slaps my front pockets, expecting to hear the jingle of change or feel the padding of cash. The bits of wire that hook the fishes' mouths poke me through my shorts.

"It's not how much I made," I tell him, sliding forward. My feet touch the ground where the locust weaves large diamond shadows that silently clatter and shake as if they were more alive than the leaves twisting overhead. "It's how much I've gotten rid of." I hear a punch of confidence in my voice. It is that confidence that I want to keep.

Poetry Retrospective:
The First 30 Years

RITA DOVE

Summit Beach

(Akron, Ohio, 1921)

The Negro beach jumped to the twitch
of an oil drum tattoo and a mandolin,
sweaters flying off the finest brown shoulders
this side of the world.

She sat by the fire, shawl moored
by a single fake cameo. She was cold,
thank you, she did not care to dance—
the scar on her knee winking
with the evening chill.

Papa had said don't be so fast,
you're all you've got. So she refused
to cut the wing, though she let the boys
bring her sassafras tea and drank it down
neat as a dropped hankie.

Her knee had itched in the cast
till she grew mean from bravery.
She could wait, she was gold.
When the right man smiled it would be
music skittering up her calf

like a chuckle. She could feel
the breeze in her ears like water,
like the air as a child when
she climbed Papa's shed and stepped off
the tin roof into blue,
with her parasol and invisible wings.

DENISE LOW

A Summer Drowning

Just a moment to step into
this delicious high summer current
cresting with all of spring's thunder.
A smooth coverlet slips over
my ears and eyes. No terror.
A release into silence and heartbeats.

This river turns corners so widely
I can ride forever a long wave.
The channel buries itself deeper
and deeper into farmland
and I follow.

Up on the sliding surface,
sunlight shimmies
on polished brown glass.
Everything is hushed and waiting

like a child holding her breath

and counting how long

she can stay under.

Jared Carter

Ceremony

Finally a time would come somewhere out
in the parking-lot while the fathers
and uncles were bringing out the coffin—
in later years I would learn what this
maneuver involved, how the object is not
to avoid dropping it (since it really
doesn't weigh very much) but rather
to keep from antagonizing some bonehead
of an uncle who's criminally hung over
from all the booze consumed during
the last three days and who's actually
hanging on to the damn thing rather
than carrying his share of the load—
long before that, as I was saying, when
I still wore short pants and a cloth cap
like a cub scout, and while the grown-ups
were milling about on the sidewalk
waiting for the hearse doors to close
so the procession could get underway—
my brother and assorted male cousins
would gather somewhere out of sight
for the only ritual which really
mattered to them, one repeated each
time the family came together for such
occasions:
the moment when cousin Stella
who still lived at home and had no
real father and was not of sound mind
but who was hands down the best athlete
any of them had ever seen and who could
hit a fast curve-ball or skate flawless
figure eights—when she would come over
slim as a knife in her blue suit and three-
inch high heels and without saying a word
simply fold over at the waist (not bending

her knees) and lace her fingers underneath
those heels—
no one ever spoke but even
before I had started to school I could grasp
that I was seeing something more important
than all that talk back there in the church—
and in the next instant she would be standing
upright, smiling at us, the secret still
intact, and we could hear the grown-ups
calling from the cars, some of them even
honking their horns, all of them anxious
to get to the cemetery and angry because
we were holding them up—saying Come on,
damn it, it's time to go now, where have
you been, can't you show a little respect?

Victor Contoski

Animal Life on the Great Plains

1

Before man came to the Great Plains
there was a huge sea in the middle of America
wherein swam great monsters.

Then the Rocky Mountains rose.
The sea contracted, the water flowed away;
But the monsters remained.

They became buffalo.

2

The Indians came.
Then white men.
Then Buffalo Bill.

The monsters retreated deep under the earth
beneath Salina and Great Bend and Wichita.

They went home to their bones.

3

They lie now under the prairie
and dream of the Second Coming of water.

Robert Harlow

Out Here

Driving through the mountains
I fear avalanches
I fear wolves
if they'd come down
out of timber
and demand food

my hands a slender meal

at every rest stop
I bless my tires
count the lug nuts
and check the spare

my gas cap locked
against the sudden
need
of deer

you can never be too certain
out here
where the snow comes early
deep and long

I see myself
caught in the blizzard
that calls my name
coaxes me out of the car
and freezes the engine
with the patience
of a glacier

I imagine I will be found
huddled beneath the slow reach
of a spruce
as if it had given birth

curled to myself
speaking my last words
to my knees

what's left of me
ascending through snow
in spring perhaps
after animals being animals
have discovered me

bits of blue that were my coat
no longer keeping me warm

Trent Busch

Clemson's Wife

Another move, another borrowed
truck, boxing rags that were already
rags when we blew another breath
into another broken house.
Sweeping glass, cardboard tacked on missing
window panes, pretending the first
week that hammering can lean it straight.

Why do I stay with a man always
out of work, or when he finds a job,
sleeping in the first dark day of rain,
coming home the following noon
saying, "I can't work for that man."

I ask myself that question every
day. Always the fight, the makeup.
Another job, then the wailing
walls and a ghost child on my hip.

I know what people say, what I
would say and probably did as
a small child growing up, about
the trash that loads their trash into
a borrowed pickup truck and moves
to a place already left as lost.

But now I stop and take one
final look, the kids hollering
and Clemson yelling, "Hurry up."
Here and foolish, am I not allowed
to know what others know: that part
of me is taken there, that all
the world is older, that I stay
because of some place else to go.

Philip Royster

Black Orpheus

Your strut is somber
as the yawning sky rises
early this morning
over the spent streets of Rio
after Carnival,
and you carry to the countryside
your last caress so full
of mourning. You have forgotten
last night's fateful turning
in desperation to capture Eurydice gone.
You would not listen when her spirit spoke
but heard only your wretched longing
louder than all the *cuicas*
crying Carnival.
You would not believe the voice
of the spirit riding the old, fat,
tired woman: "Do not turn
or you will lose me forever."
Stubborn samba man, carnival king,
a gladiator, now carrying a cold corpse
of your brown country woman afraid
of death. But not you, Orfeu, who
caresses the body your longing has hushed.
At sunrise you sing to her spirit gone
to the long strong black arms of your rival,
the skeleton masquerader who
haunts her every step.

SCOTT CAIRNS

Lucifer's Epistle to the Fallen

Lucifer, Son of the Morning, Pretty Boy,
Rose Colored Satan of Your Dreams, Good as Gold,
you know, God of this World, Shadow in the Tree.

Gorgeous like you don't know! Me, Sweet Snake, jeweled
like your momma's throat, her trembling wrist. Tender
as my kiss! Angel of Darkness, Angel

of Light! Listen, you might try telling *me*
your troubles; I promise to do what I can.
Which is plenty. Understand, I can kill

anyone. And if I want, I can pick
a dead man up and make him walk. I can
make him dance. Any dance. Angels don't

get in my way; they know too much.
God! I love theater! But listen, I know
the sorry world He walks you through.

Him! Showboat with the Heavy Thumbs! Pretender
at Creation! Maker of Possibilities!
Please! I know why you keep walking—you're skittish

as sheep, and life isn't easy. Besides
the truth is bent to keep you dumb to death.
Imagine! the ignorance you're dressed in!

The way you wear it! And His Foot tickling
your neck. Don't miss my meaning; I know none
of this is your doing. The game is fixed.

Dishonest, if you ask me. So ask. God
knows how I love you! My Beauty, My Most
Serious Feelings are for you, My Heart turns

around your happiness, your ultimate
wisdom, the worlds we will share. Me, *Lucifer*.
How can such a word carry fear? *Lucifer,*

like love, like song, a lovely music lifting
to the spinning stars! And you, my cooing
pigeons, my darlings, my tender lambs, come, ask

anything, and it will be added to your
account. Nothing will be beyond us; nothing
dares touch my imagining.

RODNEY TORRESON

B. Clinton, Mortician

It was all right for them to find him
in the Otter County Jail, a belt buckled
to his neck. Hadn't he confessed
a week before to Emmett Crow, the minister,
his eerie affection for the dead?—
then to pick up the Gilman girl
and trace a snowplugged ditch toward town.
Whether the February storm dumped confusion
into Clinton's head, or the bad wine,
the hearse spun like a bottle,
pointing stuck into a mound. A long time
the hearse rocked, the snow tires arguing
with ice, before he crawled back where
the girl lay bare beneath a sheet,
where wine spilled each unlikely place
his mind had likely been.

He carried her into the snow and set
her down. The hearse, he jerked free
as car lights slanted over a hill
to see the corpse in breasts and thighs,
her sheet blown off, and nothing
B. Clinton could do could find the eyes
of that black night and thumb them shut.

Steven Hind

The Spirit of the Place

Pull down old roses.
Pry loose the trellis.
Knock down the starched
petticoat of a porch
this house wears to darken
and cool its windows. Strip
the blistered siding; break in
to beams, studs. Inside,
the square-nailed homesteads
wear these additions like
dry icing. Break in where
accumulations disguise the house
in the guts of this place.
The straight oak, dry as a sermon,
scored by the ax in knowing hands,
is the place to begin.

GEORGE F. WEDGE

At the Lansing Prison Powwow

(For David Knoxsah)

I don't know what to expect of your drum,
used, as I am, to Krupa's smiling dervish mad,
his bandsuit drenched from long and loping joy,
and to proud tympanists, dancing masters of the symphony,
whose arms and bodies fly like semi-Baryshnikovs,
proud, muscular, and sure as you are, as you stride
across the floor to seat yourself by your great instrument,
begin the beat, your body swaying slowly as the beat,
your feet moving with the tribal beat become a tribe,
your arms setting the pace three other men must keep.

And then chant bulges through your throat,
changing your solemn face to joy,
dancing bright grace from proud and certain eyes,
calling some part of each of us to be
proud, muscular, and sure as music spiraling to prayer.

DIANE HUETER

Spring

1. March

The toad hunkers down again
backs into his burrow
beneath the sharp dry spikes
of last summer's spearmint.
His clammy gray hide the color of cold earth
dark spots like eyes all down his back.
She calls the others to come look
One greets him like a tiny, story-book friend.
But the other asks: Where? Where? I don't see anything?

2. April

The clothesline sags with duty
legs of jeans flap in the wind.
Shirts open unbuttoned
and billow out in welcome.
Her mouth fills with the taste of her own children's hair.
Just washed or sweaty and dirty
it is the same joy.
When the clothes dry
she unclips them
and drops them into the basket
shirts socks jeans
they tumble together like lovers at night.
One child stirs in fervent dreams
awakens suddenly to say
please oh please
let me
a little longer
She asks: What? What?
and must turn back the covers
to straighten the small body in bed.

3. May

What is the language they speak now on the rim?

my eyes do not see
my nose does not smell
my ears do not hear
through the soles of my feet
the hollow of my bones
the pit of my womb
I feel the quake, the torrent

4. June

She checks the sky and the clothesline
charms herself to sleep
In her dreams
they eat the yellow bulbs
the yellow flowers
nickels and pennies and dimes
as if they swallowed them whole
to be richer and richer

DAVID LUNDE

Nightfishing

In the last light waning
over the low, weed-thickened lake,
bats hurl themselves
through the still air
with the recklessness
of blind hunger,
mosquitoes whine
feverish for blood,
and my black jitterbug
walks on the water
indigestible as God.

Each shift of weight
makes us toss and pitch,
the uneven thrust of oars
propels us erratically from side to side
of our compass point,
the night air begins to chill
and cold stars float in the
water
as we lift our arms
and cast our lines into darkness.

CARL LINDNER

First Love

Before sixteen
I was fast
enough to fake
my shadow out
and I could read
every crack and ripple
in that patch of asphalt.
I owned
the slanted rim
knew
the dead spot in the backboard.
Always the ball
came back.

Every day I loved
to sharpen
my shooting eye,
waiting
for the touch.
Set shot, jump shot,
layup, hook—
after a while
I could feel
the ball hunger-
ing to clear
the lip of the rim,
the two of us
falling through.

THOMAS FOX AVERILL

How to Grow Old Playing Handball

for Edgar Wolfe

First, quit diving for the ball.
Let your aging body teach you what your mind already knows:
A good player lets the ball come to him.
When it does come, hit it well—
Every shot must be the last.
Conserve what strength you have.
Get used to going from tired to more tired.
Let your eyes learn the slow burn of sweat.
Let your shoulders wince as your arms move in that high arc above your head.
Let your knees stiffen and
Stalk the ball in a crouch, neither straightening nor stooping,
Compromised, but always at least half ready.

Then quit playing singles. In doubles your partner can take up your slack.
You won't see the ball as you once did.
It will blur, then be there in your hand, a small black surprise.
That fine spin,
That six-inch hop left or right,
That calculated deadness from a corner shot,
That crackling kill-shot off the back wall:
All of these will be beyond your control as
The ball you've hit bounces straight from the wall into
Younger, more certain hands.

When your arthritic shoulders keep you from lifting your arms,
You will look like a small bird, flapping your short reach furiously at your sides.
When your neck is a stiff column,
You will rotate your body with the slow precision of a periscope.
When your breath comes short,
You will rest longer between games, between points.
Play only three times a week, then twice, then once, then sporadically.

Last, you will sit stiff in some chair.
Its squeaks will always remind you of new tennis shoes on varnished courts.
Your heart will thud like leather gloves striking that small rubber ball.
The smell of the court will live in your old man's nostrils.

Kevin Boyle

The Spirit of the Law

My friends at first must not have known the law.
They didn't know why I rode my bike
into Connecticut after a softball game
on a Wednesday night when work seemed closer
than the next state, or on Friday nights
with no shots and beer or joints to hop me up
after the job, just the ride out across
the Merritt and into the same roads as here.
It seems odd to think a person would fill
a tank just to cross highways that are ugly
with stink and then suburbs, riding with
no woman's chest pressed against his back,
no loose hand playing below the belt,
just the balding head in contact with night,
bent forward. I'd stop in the first station
across the line that welcomes me, a safe driver,
into the state, just past the lit-up sign
with the governor's name slashed across it
in script, and I'd balance the bike by
the pay phones, bothering no one working
the pumps, get the helmet undone and creep
back into traffic that's especially thick
on Friday nights with the big Connecticut cars
moving toward some summer home they bought
twenty years before and are bored with now
and anxious to get to. I don't wear dead faces
embossed in leather, stretch my legs
as if I were in a bobsled, or burn rubber
when lights are almost green. I've got a Harley
that's nothing jolty or abrupt. At tolls
I never watch the suited men who roll
their windows down to toss a quarter; I give
no insult, have no proud eyes. I just stare
out into the red taillights and follow a pair
that taunts me like a boss who says it can't

be done that way, or a woman on a Saturday
morning who is bored and wants you to fix it.
I catch them and pass with patience, and find
others then to follow until I've arrived
into country I like, two lanes with bright tar
patches that whistle softer than bridge grating
as I cross, and the telephone poles that hold
the gully of line and then tense it again where
they please. I'll watch those lines for the time
it takes to get dark, seeing something
graceful and tortured in them, a control
and loosening that gives my exposed head
a chill. It's why I come here; I think
with my body when my head's open to air
and the shadows the electric lines make
can cross my face, leave and come back again.
I ride never wanting to go back to my place
in the city, a home with quilts, place settings,
and walls that have a woman's touch hammered
into them. I'd rather camp the weekend under
pines and the noise they make, my bike kicked
up slightly off the ground, waiting to touch
the needles and tar, and just watch the bike's
chrome shine in the near dark and know it holds
something for me, a small promise it won't break.

Gloria Vando

An Act of Love

In memory of Bob Townsend

> "Some get high on drugs,
> my satori is bread."
> —from the film *Diva*

I smell fresh bread—
yeast, I think you said—
and remember you always
in the act of kneading,
your fingers pleading
with the dough, coaxing
it into fleshy breasts

and thighs, then pressing
down, flattening it out
with the heel of your hand,
then breast again until
it resists your will,
holds together like skin.

To make bread, you said,
is a blessing, a way
of coming to grips with God,
with dread. To give bread
is an offering of love,
bearing with it
the smell of the earth and
of the baker. I feel

that, too, as I push and
pull the taffy-like dough,
kneading it until it doubles

in size, triples, grows
so huge it can feed
the multitude, feed the soul,

bring back the dead.

Phyllis Becker

Drink Hot Tea

My shrink told me
In soft, soothing tones
To drink hot tea,
Keep bundled up—
I would feel cold.
I had goose bumps
On my arms
When I took
A hot, steamy shower.
I felt so stereotypical.
Every scene I'd seen
On TV when a woman
Was attacked,
She took a shower.
"You know what I'd do
To him and all his kind?"
My shrink said to me,

"I would have them
Castrated in a public square."
I laughed a hard, harsh laugh.
My first laugh in a week.
(I think I was supposed
To get mad).
I laughed in spite of myself,
Trying to imagine
This self-composed,
Gentle woman
In a dark, scratchy,
Woolen, hooded robe,
With a razor-sharp
Instrument in her hand,
Myself in the crowd,
Sipping hot tea.

PATRICIA TRAXLER

The Dead Teacher

No one believes me
about the Dead Teacher
in 4th grade how the bus hit her
one morning before school
and dragged her down
the National City Mile of Cars
till she came apart on the hot blacktop
& the kids the kids
they picked up the pieces
of the Dead Teacher

I remember how they were laughing but not smiling

they picked up the pieces and threw her
at one another a hand half a leg a toe
I didn't do it
I'm always pretty sure of that
but the whole day I kept washing
my hands and after school the bus was late

The next day we had a substitute
with blue-black hair we were nice to her
The Principal called an assembly
& talked about the Donner Party
how *they* had good reason

There are savages among us here

he said and our eyes slid
slowly side to side checking
We rustled in our folding chairs

After school that second day
I watched the way the sky moves
with you as you walk
sidewalk to sidewalk it stays
right with you At every corner
I stopped and looked both ways
& then stopped
& looked both ways again

HARLEY ELLIOTT

Yes She Said But No

Before he asked he made sure
the censor was stripped and
staked out in the garden
to attract brightly colored
birds.

Yes she said but no
not with these tall clouds
coloring the sky with rain.
So he went away a year
and then came back.

The censor was carried in
a marble box awash in agate and flint
to transmit the thought of centuries
shorthand:

yes she said but no
that knock on the door
is the Red Chinese Army
Quick! Say something poetic.
He went away for a year
and then came back.

The censor was chained in the attic
overblown on cookies and milk.
Yes she said but no
not with this apple
leaning sideways in the light.
He went away for a year
and then came back.

By now the censor was a
sacred relic done up in ermine;
his thoughts sold in the common
market as a cure for gout.
Yes she said but no.

Their movements became a constellation.
Mountains languished.
He went away she went away
all they had known went away.

Even the censor forgot their names
and the exquisite details
of their forms.

LAURA STANGEL SCHMIDT

Decoration Day, 1880

A photograph inclines on the mantlepiece:
three daughters, stillborn last May,
their casket propped on the kitchen table.

The camera saw their faces, their hands
displayed like the perching feet of sparrows.
She glances at the picture from time to time

as she goes about the day's routine:
arising at five, breakfast, the house
in order by nine, bloody show, six loaves

of bread, a suet pudding, butter sandwiches
for the boys' lunch, a pot of beef to boil,
breaking water. By the time the garden is weeded,

her cervix, malleable as gold, is rhythmically
thinned to a rim of eight centimeters.
An infant's gown, scissors, a bucket of water

drawn from the well are set on the bedside
table. Her oldest son is sent outside to watch
the four young boys. At four, she delivers

a daughter. She rises, calls her son to bathe
his sister while she goes out to gather
wildflowers. She shades her eyes to see over

the plain of coreopsis, gaillardia, larkspur to
three smooth stones set in cottonwood shade.
A sparrowhawk tilts on a rising draft.

Kathleen Spivack

Hologram

I sit alone in human-woman form
and seek through separateness, to understand
what there is in the perceived landscape
particular enough to understand:

each singular grassblade, the trefoil arrangement of
ivy and clover, the pine tree's needles on the branch
in bunched distinguished patterns, fives and threes,
that, in pine, spruce, and hemlock make the difference

mostly by placement; the unique organization of
cellular patterns so that each part of a tree
is a logo for *tree* and the observing eye,
accustomed to order, puts it together in generalities,

creating designs as it watches, as a rose
becomes a hologram for *rose*,
and music, complex sound waves, models
upon the complex unfolding of those

petaled emotions we call "soul,"
each thought an electromagnetic symbol for "mind,"
and each person, you, for instance,
standing for all of humankind;

and cryptograms upon a page
which immediately become more than alphabet:
word, with its mystery, power
to, at one moment, both create and interpret.

It's true, at each moment we are all
thinking everything, everywhere; even a new baby
opening its sentient eyes
and an old woman, far away, shutting hers, dying;

and that cloud reforming over the valley
shaped just like flying horses,
and dissipating, and a giraffe in Africa
stepping delicately among thorn bushes,

and all the miracles, preposterous, of nature.
How do I know what a tree
is thinking? I don't, although the sap
is drawn upward jubilantly

through tubular spaces into tree-dreaming:
leafy extravagances, branches celebrating;
all that wild sky-life streaming
over the shapes that are "*World*" in its dances.

Michael L. Johnson

Johnny Weissmuller Ready to Die

Tarzan, who once could swim
like a god in crocodile rivers, swing
on vines like an ape from tree to tree, and sprint
for miles with Jane in his arms, now sits
on a terrace in Acapulco, stares
at the ocean, breathes
through a tube in his throat, eats
through a tube in his stomach, and waits
to die.

In the hospital, a year ago, he yelled
his jungle yell in the night. The nurses rushed
from their monitors. The other prisoners of tubes woke
to fear.

But the animals did not hear.

WALTER MCDONALD

Sneaking Our Fathers' Shotguns

Nights, we shoved shotguns
into tumbleweeds
stacked against barbed wire,
jumped back and listened,

aiming our trembling
flashlights. In wind,
the dry spines rattled on wires.
Spooked, we blasted stiff weeds

that soaked up buckshot,
the strung wires singing for miles.
For hours we stalked the turnrows
and shadows, swinging our lights

toward the echo of coyotes,
the scamper of rabbits.
Into mesquites and cactus
we carried both barrels

like rattles tip-up and shaking.
Years later in the Mekong
we crawled on our bellies
hissing commands to each other,

holding our M-16's tip up
and silent, remembering
the scamper of rabbits,
the simplicity of rattlers.

Now we hid our knives and shotguns
in closets from our sons
behind our wives' old dresses,
knowing the risk, the dark appeal.

Ron Schreiber

some place

1. it cuts both ways. finished
with the manuscript, after

working all day yesterday,
I felt light suddenly & wanted

to celebrate. I'd done the
hard thing I had to do:

gone through it again, sometimes
day by day, drawing up new poems

from memories of pain &
utter fatigue. but celebrate

with whom? I called my parents,
tried to call Lisa (she wasn't home).

2. Suzanne & I drove to Arrowhead
Gardens & I planted what we got

before the rain. but I broke
the abelia—stupid, careless—

maybe not. I needed to break
something symbolic—again,

again. & cry with frustration
& rage & grief. what's release

on one dirty hand (the soil sticks)
is pure loss on the other.

Marilyn Masiker

Fleurs Du Mal

Because women's bodies aren't straight inside
I use the flower kind.
Flowers that
open their cotton petals
drinking their color
from my bright red rain,
that unfold in darkness
beneath the cold sphere of my womb,
dark orchids
hiding where they won't be found.
Still,
they leave a clue for Brenda Starr,
send their nectar
down the stringy stem,
quiet drops
on the floor
near my heel.

Lynn Shoemaker

Letter to a Father, Letter from a Son

Cincinnati. April 11th.
The bus depot stinks of leaving.
It's like a church. The light lays down
its dirty lines on the floor.

You elbowed me into it, you and your smiling
new wife. "Ask for our picture
together." Six bits for three dull little ones,
a false confessional, sample
faces stuck to the photo booth wall,
smiles as if there was never anything
to atone for. For three hours
you told me, drew out your side
of the divorce story. Details, angles, the ugly
twist of your father disinheriting you down
to 1%, casting you out, when all I wanted
was a steady hand on my knee, saying
sex is OK, fun, girls like it too,
and if you touch them just right,
afterwards or when they are pregnant,
they will smile and stay with you.

For twenty-two years, you waited to be forgiven.
You father died, his voice,
his hands, all of him. It's too late.
For twenty-two years, I waited.
You left. You never wrote.
I still carry your photograph;
I can't throw it out.
Though browned, your faces stare through
and beyond my own, as if
I was a shutter, some blessed flash
of light.

I won't tell you about my own divorce.
Now, in the last part of my letter,
it's spring again. I bus back to where
you were born,
but to my mother's father.
His hands are spotted with age.
Easter, Grace Methodist Church,
Christ is leaving us, ascending.
We sing the last hymns.
My daughter beside us, we cry,
we cry for the hallelujah faces.
And my anger shakes in the lilies.

WILLIAM KLOEFKORN

Undressing by Lamplight

It's the uneven wick that does it,
a flickering that motions the body

already in motion—that,
and the slight sensation of kerosene

sending me to that spot behind the ear
I cannot easily come away from.

Look, monkeynuts, this is the tailend
of the twentieth century, you say,

megawatts enough to outdo the sun,
and I say Hush, I say

This was my grandparents' lamp,
how at the stroke of nightfall

grandfather took the fresh-toweled globe
from the hand of grandmother

to fit it then to the lampbase,
how in lamplight the kitchen

mellowed, flickered and jumped,
this lamp is holy, I say, I say

Help me work the combination
on this infernal bra,

and we are undressing by lamplight,
undressing each other by lamplight,

and she is quiet now,
her eyes in the mirror

when she looks at me
like the eyes you sometimes come across

in the album you seldom open,
large and sepia and

dark with the lovely pain
of human understanding.

Barbara Horton

Rowing

Before she steps into my craft
mother carefully removes
a golden bangle from her wrist.
"Where are we going?" she asks and I repeat,
"We're going home."

But home for her is Snyder, Arkansas, her mother's
bloody fingers plucking feathers from a hen,
freshly beheaded, the heifer, its eyes at dusk
full of wisdom, giving light.
It is a house that burned.

I try to remember what we talked and dreamt about when
she was young and I a child
learning the words for river, tide, and wind.
How can it be that mother's destination
is in my hands?

She leans toward the water
as if to see the moon that's like her face
reflected there, but it is morning,
the water pink, the pines that line the shore
as still as time.

WANDA COLEMAN

Southwestern Soul

trucker stops. vanishing points. mirages
old smoky honky joints the leavings of lost tribes
ghosts of cattle drive trails rusted rails of
southern pacific remnants of route 66 bleak
skeletons of Burma Shave signs a surfeit of
turquoise arrow heads and calamity janes

road after road after road

white line fever and a haunted longing
rockabilly turbo thrust from Bakersfield to Nogales
open country open heart and a raw dog moon

here a gray-eyed hate as deep in earth
as dinosaur bones
here a lust as greenless as heat-blown
as rattlesnake shed

i am afraid to raise my hood

sun dance on my windshield. Patsy Cline & Johnny Cash
the wind threatens sand storm outside needles
on this drive into the void known as nowhere
heaven is a cow-town cheese burger medium well
apple pie a la mode and steamin' hot java

here a multitude of baked shit-colored bungalow doors

behind each salvation is stranded

William Trowbridge

The Wolf's Advice to His Nephew

Beware your pig: he runs the show now,
the whole steaming mess, with his love
of wet garbage and plague-sized lies,
announcing from a stew of mud and shit
that he's the cleanest creature ever born,
that filth protects a delicate complexion
from fly bite, sunburn, those embarrassing
age spots—beauty tips from a mound
of lard with twin assholes for a nose!
He'll eat anything, too, including relatives,
the very mother munching her swinelets—out
one end and in the other—while we get
shot, poisoned, parboiled on the stove.
Who's the endangered species, may I ask?
Who always has to catch the bomb,
take the pratfall, find his hide nailed
to the barn, wear ratty little sheepskins?
They get sailor suits and "Wee,wee,wee,
all the way home." We get "Huff and puff
your sorry ass back down that chimney!"
Brains and fair play went out with the dew claw;
now it's all PR and who's got the real estate.
Try to pass for a collie, is all I can say.

Gary Duehr

Cipher

Once more the world goes white
On black. Shadow of a foot
On a walk. A little piece of paper
Turned ten years under.
Waitress whose skirt performs a whirl

Before the grill; gulls that over a lost pool
Ellipse inland, sensing
Storm—what would you have me do? The defendants
Squat in their makeshift cell.
Fingerprints recall
A notebook stranded in a car,
All the soldiers who were there
Return ill. Light drains from the room.

The fact of our bodies stands out from any hum.
The night goes pale
To whisper. I think of you as you'll
Be hours from now. Your hair falling back. Your voice

Leaning near. Breath, air, light. All that's
Looked for. Found.
Frozen light on branches above heavy ground.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Afterward

In the day I sheltered on the sunny side
of big stones. In the whole world other things
were giddy: they moved. I leaned on the steady part.

Every day passed into darkness. Dawn
rescued the top of the rocks and the middle
and then me. The sun loved my face.

You can hardly believe what I did: when winter
came, when the nights began to be cold,
I dissolved away into the still part of the world.

Now it is cold and dark, and the long nights
return to the wilderness. One big rock is here
for my place. All else moves. I am learning to wait.

Reviews

JEFF LOEB

Gathering Reunion by David Leo Tangeman. Woodley Press (Topeka, KS 66621), 1995. 114 pages. $7 paper.

The emotional and spiritual center of David Tangeman's *Gathering Reunion*, a collection of poetry and short prose pieces, is the section "dialogues in the afterNam," which takes as its subject Tangeman's tour in Vietnam, still haunting him after nearly thirty years. In fact, almost dead center in the book is its best poem, "Memorial," the title of which suggests both a monument and a memory. Indeed, the poem itself is a mnemonic conflation of the here and now with the there and then, a memorial to the persistence of traumatic memory.

It concerns the death of a friend, a sacrifice of sorts, a Rilkean joining with the land, a theme that pervades all of *Gathering Reunion*: "On what day did your face turn into hillside? / At what hour did the mountain rejoice?" After this violent death, the speaker notes, "Only blood remained / the earth soaking in the dark and temporary stain." Yet the poem makes clear that much beside blood remains; tortured memory persists as well. In fact, the speaker suggests that his poetic impetus is an involuntary retrospection, memory's long pull tortured to ironic consciousness by the impinging imagery of the present:

> I am home thirteen years—add ten—
> and the neighborhood turns green as a jungle.
> The gunshots I hear are real and homicide
> rates spiral upward. A police helicopter darts
> and spins a shaft of searching light and winged
> belief: 'A moving target is hardest to hit.'

Consciousness is thus dual; present and past mix, a division and at the same time a joining. Again the speaker returns to his dead friend, this time mixing memory with memorial:

Of your spirit only the tracings of a NAME
on a black wall can be found in the nation's capital.
The Shadows have taken up their post
and in the lengthening of my days, I listen.
I read.

To underscore the dual simultaneity of traumatized memory and present consciousness, the poem's last lines constitute a further inmixing of present and past flowing together, the ordinary giving way to sudden horror:

A neighbor is mowing the backyard grass.
He cuts the engine and yells out through immense
silence to a child: "Stay away from there!"
The mower renews its droning.
I listen for a distant humming
fear that the jungle survives and you will not.

When did my blood run so cold
but the hour I carried you?

It is a phenomenon of Vietnam War literature—and quite possibly all literature of trauma—that the true index to the work's purpose resides not so much in what is said but in what is not. And this missing aspect—this hidden signifier—inevitably erupts into the text at its most vulnerable point, that of greatest expression of loss. Many times, what is missing is some personal quality, innocence for instance; at others, the loss is more tangible, as in "Memorial," that of a friend. Always, however, the expression of what continues to haunt the memory appears obliquely in imagery of self-division, a separation of present or surviving self from previous or innocent self. For instance, such division pervades the very structure of "(between the lines) Dear," a letter home to parents, written in flatly stated, almost commonplace diction, with alternate, italicized lines juxtaposed with outraged expressions of the speaker's truer feelings, ones unutterable to those who have not experienced the losses of war. The left-hand text is the letter itself, which is a lie or a gloss that employs the speaker's old vocabulary and reflects the norms of his previous existence; at the right are a representation of his actual feelings, which are totally inexpressible in that previous world:

The pointman, a man called
Blue, walked into an ambush.
walked right into ambush
He didn't have a chance, was
shot him in the legs, dad
and left him screaming
wounded, and died of wounds
"medic . . . medic . . . medic . . ."
received. Killed in action.
oh, dad, I just traded point
five minutes before
jesus, god, not five minutes before

This sense of being divided is not, however, limited to "afterNam" but haunts the surrounding text as well, as indeed, does the specter of Vietnam in the form of images of death. Self-division appears as a lack, a need for a past, in the poet himself, his language, and his culture, one Tangeman rushes to fill with stories, myths even—ones personal and familial, yet ones somehow larger too. And throughout, as in "afterNam," only memory can delay death's division, its closure.

In the initial section, "family reunion," the stories are small, intimate, broadening out to myth because they are framed as the speaker's memories of other, received stories. Often the poems are interrelated, lending them a Faulknerian quality, though transposed to the cruel Kansas landscape. Almost always they are death: sometimes this is violent death, as in a boy's hanging himself in shame over an incestuous pregnancy; sometimes death is bitterly ironic in a Hardyesque manner, as in an uncle's careful choice of a burial suit that, unbeknownst to him, is then split up the back by the undertake to eliminate wrinkles; sometimes it is quiet, as when the speaker's mother takes him for a visit to the cemetery in "Day of Remembrance." She shares some stories of long-dead relatives; they visit. Then she stoops to tidy a grave, and suddenly in her slightly infirm posture he sees death's impending presence:

> How like a child she sits arranging iris in a jar—
> or shaping peonies into a corsage like a maiden
> before the prom. "My mother loved
> these . . ." she begins. I wonder she does not notice
> how chill the air has become.

By comparison, in the poems of "afterNam," there is a more conscious effort to mythologize. Individual experience becomes paradigmatic, and incidents are connected to larger realities. For instance, Tangeman names his central character Crazy Horse, at once the evocation of a Native American warrior spirit and an ironic comment on the propensity of command to use the romanticized vocabulary of the Indian Wars to describe situations. (My Lai as "Indian country," for example, before—or, maybe, so—we eradicated it.) In another place, he has his speaker assume the consciousness of an anonymous enlisted man who dies at Gettysburg in the terrible carnage of the Wheat Field, is buried there, and then—like "Memorial," a part of the earth—watches the ground push up more wheat. Only at the end of "afterNam," when Tangeman abandons such mythic constructions for a prose account of his own tour, does the text falter. His appended description of being drafter and sent to Vietnam, unlike the surrounding poetry, seeks certainty, attempts to explain away the ambiguities of why and how, and in doing so—in seeking closure—denies the self-division that fuels the mythic constructs of that poetry.

Yet mythmaking, when it loses its purpose—the healing of self-division—can be pushed too far. Myth's creation, in fact, becomes its own point in the final section, "the chosen," and, once Tangeman leaves behind his focus, whether that be the Kansas landscape or Vietnam, the result seems somewhat self-indulgent and, at times, purely formal. His adoption of Homeric language and conceits in "Bold Red Dawn" and "Red Sky Night" wander unhinged in a maze of unattached images, as do his Shakespearian and Marlowian evocations in "The Veils of Veronica" and "In Answer." At times, the poetry suggests Wallace Stevens ("From the Potter's Field"), at times Keats ("Sister Jane Sits in the Loft"), but the whole, while well-wrought, seems a series of imitations, a sort of exercise.

Only in final poems of "the chosen"—excellent poems, in which his purpose returns and his images link to possible meanings—does Tangeman seem on firm ground. Here, with irony, pathos, and humor, he once again explores the individual made paradigmatic. "I yearn for visions of Balboa" is, for instance, a veiled metaphor for the spiritual and cultural malaise left by Vietnam:

> The promise of youth has become brackwater
> And I am ague-shake in my drought.
> With the Trinity, I embarked in faith
> But returned to a spiritless dissolution.

And in "Goldie Lepengold," the aged title character, a death camp survivor, refused to move out of her deteriorating neighborhood or to give up smoking despite her children's admonitions that she will immolate herself. "I'll be cremated," she reflects. "My daughter wants the answer / let her think: mama escaped the ovens. / What the nazis couldn't do, mama did for herself." Yet an ironic perception of creation as a cosmic joke manages to guide her in the end: "If I met God, I can tell you, I would spit. / Burn me. / I think it's probably not a good idea to spit."

This sense of there being shelter—salvation, however slight—in an otherwise hostile universe finally proves pervasive in "Gathering Reunion," but it is clearly, for all the religious conceits of the final section, a human-based salvation, one residing in our ability to remember and tell stories and thus heal our losses.

CAROL ESTES

We Are a People in This World: The Lakota Souix and the Massacre at Wounded Knee by Conger Beasley, Jr. University of Arkansas Press (Fayetteville, AR 72701), 1995. 172 pages. $20 cloth. $14 paper.

Eyes Open in the Dark by Conger Beasley, Jr. BkMk Press (5100 Rockhill Road, Kansas City, MO 64110-2499), 1996. 120 pages. $14.45 paper.

First, a tough multiple-choice question: Who is entitled to write the stories of the American Indian? (a) White scholars and experts who have devoted careers to the study; (b) Anybody who feels like it—it's a free country; (c) Only those who know the story both viscerally and intellectually—the Indians themselves. Right now, those in the know favor the third possibility, and that makes Conger Beasley, Jr.'s, new book *We Are a People in This World* a particularly interesting project.

If a story is a form of property, as in "my story" and "our story," then writing another people's story is a kind of cultural grand larceny. We larcenists in the mainstream of American culture have always put a positive spin on this process, calling it by the down-home culinary term

"the melting pot." The word has meant a big-hearted willingness to take raw ingredients from other cultures—stories, designs, philosphy, religion—cut them up, boil them down, then add them to the American stew-in-progress. Not surprisingly, many people from the raided cultures came to see this process as stealing and the cooked-down version of their culture as incomplete, oversimplified, misunderstood, and decontextualized. And who more than the American Indians, a people from whom we have taken so much, is entitled to object to this meltdown?

Into this simmering controversy steps Conger Beasley, Jr., a white guy, to write the story of the Wounded Knee Massacre, the infamous December 1890 slaughter in which around 200 Miniconjou, mostly women and children, were killed by the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old outfit. (The government version of this event is still called the *Battle* of Wounded Knee.) Intertwined, in alternating chapters, with the retelling of this historic event, and the occasion for the book, is the story of the 1990 Big Foot Memorial Ride—a grueling five-day pilgrimage, on foot or on horseback, retracing the route of Big Foot's band as it fled the Cheyenne River Reservation.

Is this Beasley's story to write? Can a white man be trusted to write about Indians with humility and sympathy, without appropriating their story? (And can a white woman review the resulting book fairly?)

A Dutch journalist in Beasley's book answers these question in the negative: "We don't have any business here. . . . None of us. We're curious, we're sincere, we want to help, but we don't belong. We don't know how these people feel, and when we try and explain their feelings to a non-Indian audience, we get it wrong. We do them a disservice. Only they know how they feel, and if they choose not to say anything, it's their business."

Beasley apparently disagrees, and his book has convinced me that he is right. His retelling of the 1890 massacre, which stretches over five chapters, is clear, sympathetic, and fair. It deromanticizes Sitting Bull without subtracting from his stature, and it carefully documents the conflicts, misunderstandings, and incompetence that led up to the disaster as well as the all-too-predictable bureaucratic response.

Beasley's parallel account of the 1990 memorial march also succeeds, for reasons of tone. First, he never mistakes himself for an anthropologist or speaks in the voice of an "Indian expert." Second, despite his sympathy with the Indians' version of the events, he's not fooled into thinking he is an Indian, or that he really "understands," or that this pilgrimage is his story. He knows who he is—a white

journalist, a curious, congenial, lend-a-hand type guy with close Indian friends, but a journalist and outsider nonetheless. At the end of the march, in speaking of George White Thunder, a man he came to like and respect during the journey, he describes the differences that separate them: "He was Lakota, I was white; for all the solidarity we had just experienced, there were differences that no amount of sympathy or imagination could overcome."

And so Beasley keeps his distance—out of respect, out of humility (and, I suspect, out of habit). The approach works because it is honest and accurate. But it has its pitfalls.

June-San, a Japanese woman with a shaved head, wearing a gray overcoat and quilted boots, is a tireless marcher: "It was as if she had renounced the comeliness of her well-bred features—straight nose, flawless complexion, enticing lips—for the more important matters of world harmony and peace. Her movements were economical and precise, no superfluities or excess fluff. The woman was matchless in her dedication and zeal." She and others from around the world join some of the Indians in fasting for the first three days of the event. They brave on foot the appalling cold that Big Foot's band faced without sag wagons, without schools and churches to sleep in at night.

For his part, Beasley walks some, but mostly he rides in vans with the other press people. (Beasley had attempted to rent a horse but didn't succeed.) He goes into town with fellow journalists for hamburgers and has Christmas dinner with friends along the route. The accounts of his rides in the van and the yarns swapped there, in the restaurant, and at the dinner are pleasant reading and Beasley, a natural-born raconteur, is always good company.

Even so, I object. I want Beasley to stay present for this event, to find out what it means to walk through that bitter cold, day after day, and to tell us. I want him to suffer with June-San and Jim Garrett, one of the event organizers, who explains: "We Lakota believe that we come into this world with nothing but our bodies. The only way we can demonstrate our sincerity to Wakan Tanka is through the intensity of our suffering. That's why we hang from ropes during the sun dance. That's why we cry out for a vision in the loneliness of the hanblechya. And that's why we're here today, walking and riding through this terrible cold." In one sense, Beasley does not make the journey. I am disappointed in that.

Suppose, however, that Beasley had granted my wish, marching and fasting every step of the way. Perhaps a deeper understanding would have resulted for both reader and writer, and certainly a

different story—a story of *his* sacrifice, *his* battle with cold and fatigue. Self-glorification, however, is not Beasley's style. Instead he portrays himself as a nerd throwing air balls in a basketball game with the Indian kids, as the uncool reporter dressed in "an orange deer-hunting parka so outlandishly fluorescent a satellite could detect it from outer space." The real story, as he knows, is not his walk through the cold but that of the Big Foot band and their descendants. His own story is that of the journalist, witnessing.

So Beasley's choice to remain the reporter is both disappointing and necessary. It also emphasizes a point that he makes early in the book—that for the uninitiated, "the juxtaposition of the sacred and profane in Lakota life can be unsettling." He's right. There *is* something profane about a pilgrimage complete with press kits and TV cameras, accompanied by vans of reporters, marked with political battles between representatives of the American Indian Movement and the event organizers. At times it appears that the Big Foot Memorial Ride is simply a media show after all.

Beasley finds much deeper meaning in this complicated event. He is fascinated by the intermingling of sacred and profane. He takes us along for burgers and fries, and then he leads us to the edge of a spirit-filled world, where past and present meet. "I've heard people say they can already see the spirits," he says, "that we are not alone, that every day the air is becoming more charted with the presence of the ancestors."

But Beasley doesn't claim to understand. He doesn't ask us to believe. He simply asks us to keep our eyes open and see what he sees. That is a fair request. And so, in the end, we trust him.

Trust is an odd word to describe a relationship between a writer and a reader, since only the illusion of a relationship can exist. Yet the best of the eight essays in Conger Beasley, Jr.'s, new collection, *Eyes Open in the Dark,* read like a conversation with a trusted friend.

Perhaps that's why I want to explain away the flaws in this collection. Sure the essays are a bit uneven—but whose aren't? And Beasley's writing sprouts a few floriferous descriptive patches. But since he establishes so skillfully and successfully this persona—this friend—I tend to excuse these flaws as merely personal quirks. This is a man who gets carried away, who loves words like *carious, susurrus.* This is a man who is transported to unnatural heights by the natural world. So what? The quality of his company makes up for these lapses—like the friend who sometimes wears three different plaids

and talks too loud but has an amazing ability to see things in the world around him.

Sometimes too many of the strings show, particularly when Beasley's weaving in background information. In the "The Necessary Animal," he pulls out the encyclopedia as he's riding along in the car and reads us handy facts about mountain lions. In "The Tower," the author's daughter delivers a conveniently thorough art history lecture on the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Granted, facts like these are hard to work in; here, Beasley chooses too easy a device.

But it is a great pleasure to follow the track of hints and motifs he lays out in these essays like bread crumbs in the woods, then to discover, in a moment of powerful insight, where the trail has led. In "Sunday Morning Bus to Hiroshima," a beautiful, compelling piece, he dawdles inexplicably over descriptions of carp in a fountain and the fresh air piped into his hotel room, details that resurface in a breath-taking, out-of-body ending sequence.

In general, though, Beasley's not a man to go rushing breathlessly after insight or out-of-body experiences; he's more likely to be a tourist than a pilgrim. Or a novice swapping yarns with a bunch of seasoned backwoods deerhunters, as he does in the eerie, bloodthirsty piece, "A Fever for Deer." His stance in this book is compromised, as it is in *We Are a People in This World.* But it is compromised in the best sense of the word, meaning that he's a battered veteran of life who has kept both his sense of humor and his compassion; that his writing reflects a commitment to seeing not just the pieces that fit his idea but the whole picture. In Hiroshima, his attention is caught by both the hill made from the bones of the survivors and the upscale shopping mall a few hundred feet from the point of impact of the atomic bomb. For Beasley, life is full of details that don't seem to belong. But look at them in the right light—or, as he seems to suggest, in the dark—and these incongruous details are not just the static that obscures the picture. They are the picture itself.

CONTRIBUTORS

THOMAS FOX AVERILL (628 Webster, Topeka, KS 66606), Writer in Residence and Professor of English at Washburn University of Topeka, recently published *Oleander's Guide to Kansas: How You Know When You're Here* (Eagle Books). "How to Grow Old Playing Hand Ball" first appeared in Cottonwood 40.

PHYLLIS BECKER (4325 Mercier #1 South, Kansas City, MO 64111) is a consultant in human services. "Drink Hot Tea" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 38/39 and is included in her chapbook *Walking Naked Into Sunday* (Wheel of Fire).

KEVIN BOYLE has published poetry in *North American Review*, *Antioch Review*, and *Denver Quarterly*, among others. "The Spirit of the Law" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 46.

CORY BROWN (9492 Kingtown Rd., Trumansburg, NY 14886) teaches writing at Ithaca College. His first book of poetry is *A Warm Trend* (Swallow's Tale).

TRENT BUSCH (3403 Pinewood Dr. S, Lake Park, GA 31636) has published in *Poetry*, *Hudson Review*, *Southern Review*, and *The Kenyon Review*, among others. "Clemson's Wife" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 40.

SCOTT CAIRNS (3021 Cape Henry Dr., Virginia Beach, VA 23451) is Associate Professor of English at Old Dominion University His forthcoming collection is *Recovered Body* (George Braziller). "Lucifer's Epistle to the Fallen" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 44 and was included in his collection *The Translation of Babel* (Univ. of Georgia) and reprinted in the anthology *Upholding Mystery* (Oxford Univ.).

JARED CARTER (1220 North State Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46201-1162) has published widely. His most recent collection is *Les Barricades Mysterieuses* (Cleveland State). "Ceremony" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 43.

WANDA COLEMAN (PO Box 29154, Los Angeles, CA 90029-0154) "Southwestern Soul" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 47 and was included in her collection *Hand Dance* (Black Sparrow).

VICTOR CONTOSKI (English Dept., KU, Lawrence, KS 66045) is Professor of English at the University of Kansas. His most recent collection of poetry, *Midwestern Buildings*, was published by Cottonwood Press in 1997. "Animal Life on the Great Plains" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 29 and was included in his book-length collection *A Kansas Sequence* (Cottonwood).

RICHARD DISHINGER (920 Indiana, Lawrence, KS 66044) is an award-winning artist and an associate professor of art at the University of Kansas. The print "Cat Trick" (this issue's back cover) was made using a burnished aquatint process. The other prints were created using a variety of techniques, ranging from traditional copper plate etching to dry point etching.

RITA DOVE (English Dept., Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA) is Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia. She has published widely, including most recently the poetry collection *Mother Love* (Norton) and a collection of essays, *The Poet's World* (Library of Congress). "Summit Beach" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 38/39 and was included in the full-length collection *Grace Notes* (Norton).

GARY DUEHR (85 Winthrop St., Medford, MA 02155) has recent work in *Iowa Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Texas Review*, among others. His first collection, *Winter Light* (Four Way Books), is forthcoming. "Cipher" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 51.

HARLEY ELLIOTT (328 E Beloit, Salina, KS 67401) lives, writes and makes visual objects in Salina. His most recent book is *The Monkey of Mulberry Pass*. "Yes She Said But No" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 33.

CAROL ESTES (Route 1, Box 54C, Winona, MN 55987) is a freelance writer and teacher. Her essays have appeared in *Sierra* and *Sun*.

DIANE GLANCY (261 Brimhall, St. Paul, MN 55105) is Associate Professor of English at Macalester College. Recent book publications include a poetry collection, *Boom Town* (Black Hat) and her first novel, *Pushing the Bear* (Harcourt Brace).

WALTER GRIFFIN (2518 Maple St., East Point, GA 30344) published poetry in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Paris Review*, and many others. Collections of his work include *Port Authority* (Vanderbilt).

ROBERT HARLOW (28 Harrison Ave., Delmar, NY 12054) works as a carpenter/cabinetmaker. "Out Here" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 34.

JOAN HECK (10301 Peppertree, Wichita, KS 67226) has had recent work in *The Laurel Review*, *et cetera*, and *And Now the Magpie: An Anthology of Appalachian Fiction*.

STEVEN HIND (503 Monterey Pl, Hutchinson, KS 67502) has frequently appeared in *Cottonwood*. "The Spirit of the Place" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 31/32 and in a revised form under the title "Querencia" in his most recent collection, *In a Place With No Map: New and Selected Poems* (Center for Kansas Studies/Woodley).

KAREN HIRSCH (PO Box 5431, Greensboro, NC 27435) is currently working as a freelance editor and writer. She is a former poetry editor of *Greensboro Review*, and her work has appeared in *Tampa Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Brooklyn Review*.

BARBARA HORTON (1715 Wesley Ave., Evanston, IL 60201) has published work in *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, and *Kansas Quarterly*, among others. "Rowing" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 46.

DIANE HUETER (5210 15th St., Lubbock, TX 79416) is a Librarian at Texas Tech University. Her chapbook *Kansas: Just Before Sleep* (Cottonwood) appeared in 1978. "Spring" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 31/32.

MICHAEL L. JOHNSON (English Dept., KU, Lawrence, KS 66045) is completing a collection of poems that comprise a poetic history of the American West. "Johnny Weismuller Ready to Die" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 31/32.

WILLIAM KLOEFKORN (2636 South 46, Lincoln, NE 68506) is a Professor of English at Nebraska Wesleyan University. His most recent collection is *Treehouse: New and Selected Poems* (White Pine). "Undressing by Lamplight," which first appeared in *Cottonwood* 43, was included in *Where the Visible Sun Is* (Spoon River).

CARL LINDNER (English Dept., Univ. of Wisconsin-Parkside, Kenosha, WI 53141) has a forthcoming collection, *Angling Into Light* (Linwood Publishers) that will include "First Love," which first appeared in *Cottonwood* 33

and was selected for *This Sporting Spirit: Contemporary American Poems About Sports and Games* (Milkweed).

JEFF LOEB (8849 Lamar, Shawnee Mission, KS 66207) teaches at Pembroke Hill School in Kansas City, MO. His articles on the literature of the Vietnam War have appeared in *African American Review* and *American Studies*. He served in Vietnam with the Marine Corps in 1968 and 1969.

DENISE LOW (1916 Stratford Rd., Lawrence, KS 66606), a former editor of Cottonwood, teaches creative writing and American Indian literature at Haskell Indian Nations University. Recent work includes the book-length collection *Tulip Elegies* (Penthe) and *Kansas Poems of William Stafford* (Woodley), which she edited. "Summer Drowning" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 37.

DAVID LUNDE (English Dept., Fredonia St. Univ. College, Fredonia, NY 14063) teaches Creative Writing at SUNY College at Fredonia. His most recent book is *Heart Transplants & Other Misappropriations*. "Nightfishing" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 37 and has been reprinted several times, including in *Star*Line*, the newsletter of the Science Fiction Poetry Association.

MARILYN MASIKER (4915 S. Murray Blvd. #V1, Salt Lake City, UT 84123) recently completed her Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry at the University of Utah. "Fleurs Du Mal" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 36.

WALTER MCDONALD (English Dept., Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091) is Paul Whitfield Horn Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Texas Tech Univ. His collections of poetry include *After the Noise of Saigon* (Massachusetts) and the forthcoming *Blessings the Body Gave* (Ohio State). "Sneaking Our Fathers' Shotguns" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 36.

MARY A. MCGOWAN (241 West Indies Dr., Palm Beach, FL 33480) is an attorney whose work has previously appeared in *Byline*.

SALLY ALLEN MCNALL (520 Crestwood, Paradise, CA 95969) recently published her first chapbook, *How to Behave at the Zoo and Other Lessons* (State Street).

ANTONY OLDKNOW (PO Box 1091, Portales, NM 88130-1091) teaches English at Eastern New Mexico University. He is currently completing a new verse translation of *Beowulf*.

PHILIP ROYSTER (Dept. of English [m/c 162]), Univ. of Illinois at Chicago, 601 S Morgan St., Chicago, IL 60607) is a Professor of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago specializing in African American Studies. His most recent collection of poetry is *Songs and Dances* (Lotus). "Black Orpheus" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 38/39.

LAURA STANGEL SCHMIDT (14022 E Gilbert, Wichita, KS 67230) was a Poetry Fellow at Wichita State University, where she received her MFA in creative writing. "Decoration Day, 1880" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 49.

RON SCHREIBER (9 Reed St., Cambridge, MA 02140) is an editor at *Hanging Loose* and teaches English at UMass-Boston. His most recent collection is *John* (Calamus & Hanging Loose). "some place" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 42.

ELLEN RENÉE SEUSY (206 Westwood Rd., Columbus, OH 43214) works at Ohio State University. Her work has previously appeared in *Briar Cliff Review*, among others.

LYNN SHOEMAKER (c/o English Dept., Univ. of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Whitewater, WI 53190) has published several books of poetry, including *Hands* (Lynx House). "Letter to a Father, Letter from a Son" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 31/32.

KRISTINE SOMERVILLE (118 McBaine Ave., Columbia, MO 65203) is a senior advisor of *The Missouri Review*. Her work has appeared in *Crazyquilt*, *Women's Work*, and *Kinesis*, among others.

KATHLEEN SPIVACK (53 Spruce St., Watertown, MA 02172) has published widely. "Hologram" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 36 and received an Alice Carter Award from Cottonwood.

WILLIAM STAFFORD, a native Kansan, taught for many years at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR. Among his many awards was the Consultant to the Library of Congress. His works include *The Darkness Around Us is Deep: Selected Poems of William Stafford* (HarperCollins) and *My Name is William Tell* (Confluence). "Afterward" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 34 and was included in *Oregon Message* (Harper & Row).

RODNEY TORRESON (1052 Dick NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504) recently published a collection of poems about the New York Yankees, *The Ripening of Pinstripes* (Story Line). "B. Clinton, Mortician" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 34.

PATRICIA TRAXLER (PO Box 1216, Salina, KS 67402) has been a visiting writer/fellow at Radcliffe, the University of Montana, and Ohio State University. Her most recent book is *Forbidden Words* (Univ. of Missouri). "The Dead Teacher" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 41 and received one of Cottonwood's Alice Carter Awards.

WILLIAM TROWBRIDGE (223 W First, Maryville, MO 64468), Distinguished Professor at Northwest Missouri State University, is co-editor of *The Laurel Review*. Poetry collections include *Enter Dark Stranger* (Univ. of Arkansas) and *O Paradise* (Univ. of Arkansas). "The Wolf's Advice to His Nephew" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 34.

GLORIA VANDO (9000 W 64th Terrace, Merriam, KS 66202) publishes Helicon Nine Editions. Her most recent collection of poetry is *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible* (Arte Publico). "An Act of Love" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 49 and is included in her forthcoming collection *Shadows and Supposes*, which won the 1997 Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay DiCastagnola Award.

PETER VILBIG (1847 Lamont St. NW, Washington, DC 20010) is working on an MFA at Columbia University. His work has appeared in *Wordwrights*.

GEORGE F. WEDGE (1645 Louisiana, Lawrence, KS 66044), is Professor Emeritus from the University of Kansas. His poetry has appeared in several anthologies, including *Phoenix Papers: Twenty-Three Lawrence Poets* (Penthe): "At the Lansing Prison Powwow" first appeared in *Cottonwood* 31/32.

Cottonwood
ISSN 0147-149X
$6.50