

# Promethia

The poetry and prose of Oral Roberts University



*Melissa Coursen*

1997-1998



**"These fragments I have shored against my ruins. . . ."**

**--T.S. Eliot**

**from "The Waste Land"**





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Tulsa, Oklahoma

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Promethia is published by     Department of English  
Oral Roberts University  
7777 South Lewis Ave.  
Tulsa, OK 74171

Contributions accepted from the students, faculty, and alumni of Oral Roberts University.

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## Editor's Note

The Editorial Staff expresses its thanks to all the writers and photographers, the faculty, students, and alumni of ORU, included in this edition. Your work, which we found moving even in our most objective mindset, was a joy to experience. We are both grateful and proud to publish each of you.

Special thanks belong to Dr. Grady Walker, who, these past months, was not only an indispensable advisor but the very extension of and counterpart to the spirit of Promethia in me. Also, thanks go to Chris, the brave and often lone dissenter, for his seasoned and visionary insight; to "Jules," for her natural aesthetic vivacity; and to Joe, for his easy, ironic frankness. The wonderful chemistry exhibited in our raucous sessions was, I think, a sign we were all meant to be together. Working with you was truly a delight.

To the faculty of the English Department, I say thank you. Your encouragement was fuel to Promethia's fire. Your lovingkindness is mine.

In Walden, Thoreau said, among many other things, "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." It is precisely this we have done with Promethia. Last year, in producing Promethia Unbound, John Affleck and crew resurrected the magazine from its fatal sleep more than a decade long. This year, we have secured Promethia's status as the official literary magazine of Oral Roberts University, thus laying the foundation beneath our hovering castle and providing for a literary posterity. At last, her sails are set full, and we have marked a bright star to guide her. Godspeed, then, my friends.



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The quote preceding this edition of Promethia hearkens, I think, to the idea of art as a kind of salvation: a craft of spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical proportions by the perfection of which we might identify the human condition and, thus, in finding our way back to ourselves, find our way back to Eden and salvage the best of what humanity has left and, perhaps, if we are lucky, raise it by some divine degree. The writing you find here is our effort to capture the essence of not only our human but our Christian condition, and so I wish to make a brief statement on the general nature of this creative writing.

### On Writing

When you write, you step out on a limb that inevitably will not support you.

Realization of this is the source of the fear wringing out your stomach like a sponge, a curious sensation which in turn causes the hesitation you experience while you stare with a blank face at a blank page or a blank screen. First, you question your own worthiness to write. Then you ask yourself what the point is to all of this, what difference does it make, who cares? These questions haunt you. And you have no answers. You never actually have the answers. You always end up looking for them just when you need them most, searching frantically under sofa cushions and through piles of laundry as though they were car keys and you late for an appointment. These questions, these questions which haunt you, defeat you, mock you, you with your shy little whisper among a million people screaming at the top of their lungs, and all this before an audience of deaf mutes, these questions are each other's answers: if writing really is pointless, then why would you feel unworthy? And if there is even the chance you really are not worthy, then how could writing be pointless?

In spite of all this, you must write, must type, must step out on a limb that you know cannot hold you. You do so in faith or defiance or delusion, whichever works best for you. The branch, of course, breaks, and you fall. This freefall and the screaming and praying you do while it happens is called a rough draft, a broken limb: yours, as well as the tree's.

Unable to walk, due to your broken leg, and unable to crawl, for you have no strength left after the trauma, you set about building a fire with the branch that broke beneath you and the leaves and twigs that came with it. The fire warms you, gives you light, protects you from carnivores, or critics, through the night. By morning, nothing of what you started with is left. Your rough draft is gone up in smoke, and all you have is a pile of ashes and a few embers. Those embers are what is good enough to keep, so you do. They are your final draft, for now.

You touch one to your lips in memory of Isaiah and in like hope of purifying yourself, of purifying yourself the way your work was: by fire. You nearly cry, though, when you remember that "the refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests hearts" (Proverbs 18:3). You know you are in for it. So you sigh, resigning yourself to a life of climbing up a whole forest of trees then falling out of them, breaking the same limbs over and over and lighting fires and spending nights completely alone, listening to coyotes howl. And you smile. Those few embers pure as gold (if you ever have the privilege of laying them down like so many crowns at the feet of Christ) are, after all, worth it.

G. A. Wright  
Editor-in-Chief



*Liane Verstraete*

## Meditations



### Shakespeare & Company

The day begins when I want, lasts until I am finished with it. I control the borders of time. I control the infinity of each day.

Perhaps it's only an illusion that there are fewer bugs on the floor. Little difference; the illusion and resulting peace of mind are reasons enough for sleeping there. Besides, on the floor there would not be bed bugs. Habits are easily born and die hard around Shakespeare & Co. A good night's sleep is our goal, and if we realize it on the floor, so be it. Of course, Anders and I know that the real trick is to become so exhausted that we could sleep anywhere. On those nights when we are in before Charles locks the doors, we talk ourselves to sleep with long discussions in the dark. Eyes never meeting, we speak fleeting truths to some meditative presence between the dark beams on the ceiling. Truths spoken in the demilitarized zone between thought and dream. They exist only until the last, inconsequential word finds its way into the books that surround us and is quiet. Heavy eyelids drop, and then come the dreams.

Anders claims to control his dreams. Lucid dreaming, he calls it. A state of awareness within a dream, in which one believes he has a capacity to choose, to alter his own destiny in the dream world. He tells me of a sensation of free-fall, during which he converses with another man. "Don't worry," he tells him. "It's only a dream."

And I tell Anders that Paris is not real. It is our magic wardrobe, our village emerging from the fog, with its own cast of characters. Act with them, if you like. Only, do not follow the script you've been given. Say none of the lines you have learned. Play any character other than your own. And when you are falling, remind one another it is only a dream.

There is no need to catch anyone.

*John Affleck*

### To Live is to Breathe

To live is to breathe  
And to have trouble breathing  
That everyone fights to gasp  
And wars that the last  
Is good and joy.  
Among my days are notes of praise  
In the margins, written  
Backwards,  
Filling a page perhaps  
When compiled and earned.

It is heaving at times  
And sucking through a straw others;  
All for moments of rapture bursting  
Fulfilled,  
That last a lifetime,  
a breath,  
the same.  
And life is sicker than before  
or not,  
but both.  
Breathe once, long and hard  
If you must.

For slowly the faculties  
Numb to match the eyes,  
The light-hearted to deep-hearted  
Can settle life to a single lung  
To store at one spot of air  
While every other spot  
Bounces from your eyes  
Never seen.  
But now, the vigorous  
Shake their shoulders and limber limbs  
With a panoramic chin,  
Half-stretch, half-view.  
The pain or inconvenience forced,  
Sort of willfully injected  
And pushed down to  
Pile-drive out the feet.  
Swallow hard to catch  
The bullet in your teeth.  
Purse your lips and  
Smell your breath, for  
It is all you will know.  
For death is toil too—  
This is practice.  
But hopefully smells best just before you leave.  
If good, then stays as  
Condensation.  
Oh that the last  
Is good and joy.

*Jared Anderson*

**Life**

The veins start  
in one long  
faded line  
extending up  
my arm until they  
break into their  
separate blue  
tributaries

I can see them  
winding up  
along my thumb  
while others fade  
up, up, up  
into rosy fingertips

It is a great tree  
with no leaves  
only bare  
blue branches  
of winter  
taking life to the end

Though I know  
the blood must be hot  
pumping underneath  
and it would pour out  
thick red life  
if it touched the air

*Nicole Baxter*

**Impressions of Turner:**

*[Venice: The Entrance to the Grand Canal  
and the Salute]*

Real and reflection  
Mixed in a  
Blur of warm  
Summertime yellow

The softness of love  
And cool breezes  
Boats in vague blue  
Floating in yellow

Water and sky one  
Cloudless dream  
Weightless whispers hover  
Yellow is all

*Nicole Baxter*

### **The Midnight Hour Before Oz**

Wandering around a house which isn't mine, wrapped in a blue throw blanket--some help. Crazy, the wind whips around the foothills, banging the white gates around the garden, punishing the already barestripped trees. The gusts draft through the plate windows as if they were not even present; they, in some way, might just as well not be.

Curious who can sleep tonight. (The dog, the parrot, two parents long dreaming in the bedroom down the hall. . .) If I believed in wrathful gods, surely I'd know someone was being punished, someone being pursued. Every crevice of the house whistles, whimpers, whines; some glasses rattle on a shelf against an outside wall. There is nothing gentle about this.

Am I the punished one? For being terrible to my mother? For questioning God? For paying my car payment late? (Again.) Out the front picture window--we are far into the country-- I can see the city light eerily illumine the sky. The clouds glow, poisoned. (When did light become poison? It is billed as antidote for all that ails.)

There is a book on the kitchen table in this unfamiliar house, "story of those left behind." Who is reading this book? Is this windlash what Armageddon will sound like? --What will I do then?-- Despite my efforts of avoidance, thoughts of eternity (and Oz) fall bountiful on a night like this; I refrain from sleep lest I miss something. Shall I click my heels and be home? Is the answer here before me, all the while, and yet I know not? (Likely.)

From whence cometh my help? Surely it does not ride on the train sounding in the distance, lonely whistlecho and rumble and tremor as loud as the wind. Surely the locomotive carries only freight: scrap metal and the like. I pull the blue blanket tighter, closer, alone and holding myself.

*Jessica Obenauf*



## In Spirit and Truth



### Collect for Beauty: A Liturgical Prayer

Dear Father, we come to you in this stillness of our souls, our hearts upraised. The grass is bathed in warm, soft sunlight and reaches down its roots, drawing forth from below the cool, sweet moisture to refresh its insides. In the wind, it gently waves its praise to you; the same wind which blows across the land like a ship, carrying the souls of the faithful petitioners over a gentle ocean. They are refreshed by the cool spray and by the breeze in their faces; it is this breeze that winds through the forest, rustling the leaves in a gentle sonata, which nature plays on the instrument of the human heart. Softly green, the leaves each hold a hundred droplets of water and thousands of tiny suns reflected in them; the trees shine like living candles in the morning sun. The wind shakes the leaves, casting water and light all about in a sublime shower. The trees whisper praise, the billows bow in majesty, the grass waves its gratefulness; this same wind it is, the Holy Spirit of God, that, stirring up all nature to praise you, Lord, stirs us up also to praise you, moving our hearts to whisper, bow, and sway gently before your throne.

Lord, accept from us this praise; make us one with Creation, let the praises of all that has breath, and those things that have it not but are given your own breath to speak, mingle and be one great praise to the glory of your name. Out of the silent stillness of our hearts, bring forth the fruits of peace and love, and may they be sown as worship in our lives, this one moment of blessedness blossoming into a lifetime of devotion.

Gloria Patri, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti; sicut erat en principio, et nunc, et semper, et saecula saeculorum, Amen.

*Junius Johnson*

**Psalm 23, Revisited**

Mud-stick, fortified, wooly sheepfold,  
Safe-sleep soft-sounds, dream-bleating;  
Brother-herd, stirring slowly, softly  
Responding to rude sun-intruder, sleep-nemesis,  
Time master for vulnerable creatures,  
Nudging gently shepherd-man, wrapped in  
Slumber and rough, strong hand-woven  
Garments, symbols of authority and ordered intellect;  
Shepherd staff and rod, sceptre-like  
Bedfellows, never far from rough-ridged  
Hands lying loosely, extensions of  
Sheep-king, flock-favored tool-weapons  
Touching lightly dozing sheep, not yet  
Stirred by Jehovah's bright day-timer,  
Wooly waves, weaving like an  
Undulating caterpillar, movement  
Rythmating toward unbarred sheep door  
Entering world of black-leathered wings and  
Blood-soaked fangs, now receding to  
Darker lairs, night-stalking wolf-  
Eyes, lurking in diminishing shadows,  
Reluctant receders to the dank woods,  
Dying night-dangers, weakening as  
Shepherd-king bursts into wider  
Adventure-space, leading dependent denizens,  
Hungry, bleating, thirsty, reticent sheep.  
Morning hunger now seizing released ones;  
Temptations to run, explore, plunder, and gorge  
Come in overwhelming brain-waves, urgings  
For solitude, single individual space;  
Wooly flood streaming out in small  
Points, like poured water seeking lowest levels,

No more close-quartered, fettered-feelings;  
Wide-scoped wanderlust blots out  
Valued security-peace and treasured sharing.  
Fragmentation threatens, looms like a tornado  
Over the vulnerable, delusioned flock, and  
Then, the shadow of the towering  
Shepherd-figure, in pastoral majesty,  
Floats above them; harder than steel  
And wider than outer banks of all the universes,  
Love-shadow communicating to them  
Magical promises of still waters and green pastures.  
Restoration and feasting images come;  
Elevation-promises over devouring enemies and  
Ultimate defeat for the arch foe, the  
Devourer of devourers, flash in revelation splendor,  
And peace settles over the softly bleating flock;  
Order, God's most basic trait,  
Prevails as a thousand trusting, loving eyes  
Rivet on the beaming Father-face, and the  
Shepherd of souls moves in regal confidence  
To the head of the flock, signals with His staff,  
And the mass motion toward the outer world  
Orchestrates, metamorphosing into an  
Army of princes, prancing with God-pride  
After their mesmerizing Shepherd-King,  
Now immeasurably exalted, visible and  
Self-empowered *to* and *for* every eye that searches,  
Now committed to His favored project, to  
Comfort, protect, guide, eternally exalt, and  
Dwell inextricably with His beloved "sheep."

*Grady Walker*

### Undone

knowing King Saul killed himself long  
before he fell on his own sword, while David  
killed his ten thousands and danced naked through streets beneath  
almond-eyes of women but fell from a rooftop  
beneath wide-eyed stars, while Christ came from heaven  
on a donkey along avenues paved with palm leaves and praises  
sung by stones because Lucifer refused to serenade him  
any longer and Adam and Eve began singing to themselves  
before shores of placid water like a mirror--knowing this,  
Christ was shattered like glass, spilled water and life  
blood from his side while thieves hanged by his side  
like shadows hung round the margin of a fallen soul,  
curtains hung over the window to ward against the second  
coming of sunrise on a bloodstained morning in the east--  
the soul tossing in bed at the foot of curtains, rolled in  
blankets like a dead pharaoh in rags, smothered beneath  
woven sheets of sand melting into liquid glass,  
viscous like olive oil emptied on the head in blessing  
but blessing the wrong head, running  
down the wrong beard like water and blood  
from the side of Christ, guilty of crimes committed by  
the soul of man in black alleys in the back of the mind  
when it hid behind a corner to sing a song of its own, turned inside  
itself like a snake twisting on itself, a blessing turned  
to cursing, the mind singing itself to sleep and dreams, stagnant  
comas where cancer swarms like locust and the brain gnaws  
itself in garbage pails behind black corners in alleys dead-  
ending at the end of night when morning comes  
and digs up caskets and rolls away stones and drags  
Lazarus rotten from his own tomb and bathes him in water  
still like glass, sloughs off dead skin and poises  
him before braided borders of life and death

*G. A. Wright*

## Of Nature: Rural, Urban, and Human

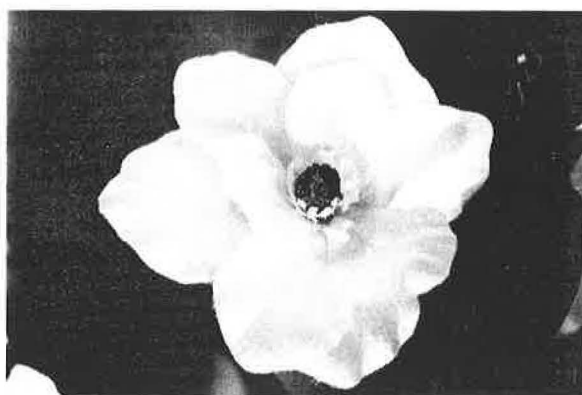




**Sunrise bursts above**

Sunrise bursts above  
Crowns of purple mountain-clouds  
A flower opens

*Nicole Baxter*



*Seth Jensen*

**Barren-seeming silicate grains**

Barren-seeming silicate grains  
Cramped and crushed by unheeding feet  
Wind-scattered and sun-scorched—  
Ignored.  
But underneath, seed  
Crouches wakeful  
Waiting to shoulder aside  
Unportentious soil  
And bursting from earth's womb  
Unfold its frail frame  
To a golden flood.

*Christiane Hofmann*

**Natchez Trace, Revisited: for Eudora Welty**

“Coming upon the Trace, he looked at the high cedars, azure and still as distant smoke overhead, with their silver roots trailing down on either side like the veins of deepness in this place. . . .”

Welty, “A Still Moment”

to stand in this place  
is to conjure the wingbreath  
of Audubon’s heron  
in rushing gray air  
in a downdrift of memory  
old as mimosa  
and feathery fragrant  
recoiling from touch  
as if from the stain  
of the sudden bright bloom  
on the leaf  
or the ghostly white down  
of the bird

it’s to rise with the earthbreath  
in sapling oak tipis  
like ribs of cathedrals  
all narrowing up from  
their grave-breaking roots and  
their greening remembrance  
of violent lives and  
bright deaths

up through cedars that  
innocent  
point in denial  
toward azure enchantment away  
from the skeletal roots  
that breathe the dark breath  
that confirms earth’s dark stain

that lifts up my logic  
a lyric away  
from the still haunted Natchez  
that treatens and lures  
every innocent traveler  
through deep  
sunken traces  
of dream

*Ruth Weston*

## La Puerta

"You be careful, old man . . . remember what Doc Dominguez said," Ricky said, not bothering to pull his head out from under the hood of the primer-spotted Ford Bronco. "Don't worry about me," Rudy replied. Ricky knew that what his father was about to do was not very dangerous, but he knew that he had his limitations, just like anyone else. They had talked about that the night before after a little reminiscing. There was the day Ricky was born, when Rudy had to rush his wife through a snowstorm to Española. Then there was the time Ricky almost severed his toes with an axe, the time he was almost struck by lightning up on Borrego Mesa, and the day he finally graduated from high school. After that were Ricky and Carla's wedding, and the time the big contract with the people up from Albuquerque fell through, and then Ricky and Carla's divorce. And there was the day that the woman most important to Rudy Garcia passed away. Hardy and weary, blessed and cursed, Rudy had seen a lot in his sixty-seven years in his remote northern New Mexico village, but he wasn't one to complain. All he wanted to do on this perfect October day was to get to his favorite spot atop La Puerta Peak, something he had done at least forty times since he was a teen.

He had first gone up there at age fourteen when, on a hunting trip, he was drawn unexplainably to its treeless summit. At the time, he had never been above timberline to the realm of rock and snow and wind that seemed so inhospitable and barren from below, a wasteland, God's mistake. But on that excursion, he had discovered an altered world of unlimited space and bracing freshness that lifted his soul out of the narrow valley in which he lived, in which his father had lived, and his father's father. It had become his peak, his place.

Rudy's uneven shuffle carried him down the rough dirt road to the trail head enshrouded in tall, shaggy Douglas firs. The hard chill of the autumn morning didn't faze him. The walking and a well-established layer of fat kept him comfortable, as did the pile-lined denim jacket he wore, opened, over the spruce-green twill work shirt, whose color and texture matched that of his trousers exactly. His boots, black leather with royal blue laces, seemed mismatched with the rest of his clothing. Top-of-the-line hiking boots he had bought at a resale shop in Taos for only thirty-five dollars, they were the only concession to modern hiking gear he had ever made. He didn't have the bright blue Gore-Tex parka he had seen in the window of the outdoor shop at the Taos plaza, but he did have his fine, black boots, which were difficult for him to see because of the blocky overhang of belly beneath his chest.

At the trail head, Rudy passed the wooden Forest Service trail sign without pausing. This was always the easiest and hardest part: easy because the trail was level and smooth, and hard because it was only the beginning. His breathing, labored and audible, produced puffs of vapor that disappeared like frightened ghosts whenever he entered a sunlit stretch of the trail. A thick noise was growing louder as he followed the trail deeper into the mountains; the Rio Del Cambio was cutting its way down the canyon from the higher country, just as it had been doing since its formation from the snow and ice that once choked the peaks when they were younger. The thought of fishing crossed his mind; he and Ricky had managed to pull a few trout from its icy waters more than once. But today was not a day for fishing.

Rudy realized when he passed the aspen with the oddly bent trunk that he was a third of the way to his destination. The trail grew rockier but was softened underfoot by layers of moist aspen leaves, which smelled sweeter in their decay than they ever could when they were young and green. After about two hours of steady walking punctuated by two beef jerky and water breaks, he entered the runout zone of the snow avalanche that had thundered down from the high ridge line above back in '78. The area was still a large open patch in the dense forest, which had begun to reclaim

parts of the clearing already. From the opening, he could see his peak, brilliant white with new snow, solid as eternity.

It was a little after one o'clock when he stopped to have his lunch. Sitting on a log parallel to the trail, he unfastened the supple leather straps on the green canvas army rucksack and pulled out some tortillas, some jerky, and a Twinkie. A gray jay danced around him, not quite sure if the visitor was friend or foe. He ate his lunch quickly, knowing that sundown comes early in October, but he did take the time to pull his wallet from the back pocket of his trousers. He flipped the wallet open and looked at a photo of him and Juanita taken a few years ago. He wasn't saddened this time. His thoughts jumped to Ricky. "He'll be okay," he thought. "Good kid. Except when he drinks. But he's getting better." Just then, a gold aspen leaf, heart-shaped, drifted onto his lap, breaking his contemplation. He got up stiffly, gathered his belongings, and continued up the trail.

"Switchbacks," he thought, looking at the trail ahead of him, which began to make an ascending series of sharp bends back and forth. He was on steeper terrain now; slender, black Engelmann spruce replaced the Douglas firs. At the bend of the third switchback, something stark and white caught his eye. The skeleton lay there, bleached and forlorn. It had been some kind of small mammal, killed or starved or just run out of life. He paused for a moment looking at it, cracked a slight, weary smile, then trod on. Even though by now he was almost three thousand feet higher than he was when he had started out in the morning, it had warmed up enough to convince him to remove his jacket and put it in his rucksack. As he labored up the trail, the Engelmann spruce began to thin out and shorten until they eventually disappeared. The transition between forest and barren mountain top had always fascinated him; it seemed like some kind of disputed borderland between two very different lands. Here, the sky, previously a mere suggestion above the treetops, opened like a great blue umbrella above him, dominating everything.

He was in snow now, about three inches. Breathing even harder, he slowed his already slow pace. He had to be more careful now; the trail surface alternated between a narrow, snow-filled rut and sharp, loose rocks. The intervals between his upward steps grew longer, almost to the point at which his progress nearly ceased, but he persisted, sweating and heaving. About thirty steps from the large, flat summit rock, clearly visible and blown free of snow by the wind, he sat down in the snow just off the trail, which disappeared in a chaos of broken rock. Even though he was not yet at the very top of the peak, he had a stunning view: rows of green ridges bristling with spruce and fir, black-shadow canyons, and the buff-colored flats of the Rio Grande Valley to the west. Rudy sat there, Indian style, peering out his glasses, still and silent as a stump, until the darker blue of the eastern horizon had crept westward noticeably.

The chill roused him. He rose to his feet awkwardly, almost falling down. Leaving the rucksack where he had been sitting, he took two steps toward the summit rock, paused, reached into his trousers pocket, and extracted a crucifix. He studied the figure on it for a moment, grasped the t-shape of it in his right hand, and wrapped the metal chain around that hand with his free hand. Squeezing the crucifix tightly, he moved up toward the summit rock as if in slow motion. Minutes later, triumphant but spent, he stood on the summit rock, the highest point around him. After a strange dizziness had come and gone, he looked to the valley from which he had come, then to the western horizon, now sunless but retaining a faint orange glow. Taking a deep breath, he raised his right foot high and shifted his weight onto it, as if to step up into space, only to discover that his step was pure energy, his body was as light as a leaf, and that he was, indeed, climbing above the summit rock.

*Keith E. Gogan*

**Grapevine Swing**

its long sinewed arm  
once swung me  
weightless  
almost free  
of earth  
to green and purple transports  
high and sweet

its gnarled and ragged reaches  
twined through oak and sweet gum  
wove a fringe of Texas prairie  
to the summer sky  
and seemed to weave  
Rapunzel's braid to mine

now  
like the vine  
worn decorous  
and smooth  
I swing a safer arc

at apogee  
my toes  
no longer reach  
the place that was my tower  
but are content  
to let the cat die  
slow

yet now  
as then  
while swinging  
in  
and almost  
out  
of time  
I spin  
my thought  
to golden vision  
weave my voice  
with scarlet rhyme

*Ruth Weston*

**Mimosa**

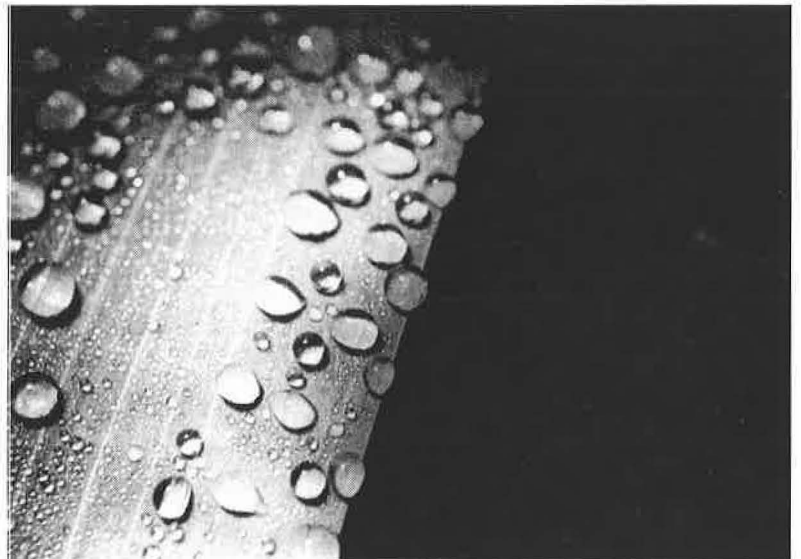
Strolling beside leafy fans,  
I saw a battalion of whiffy-pink dusters.  
With upstanding rays of sun-setting fuchsia splendor,  
They proudly proclaimed themselves to my attention.

Flame-like, yet gentle,  
Cooling, not burning enters my thoughts  
As I stand and take one humbly into my hand,  
Marveling that such brutal delicacy could be married.

*AJM*

**Rain**

Soggy brown leaves  
pasty, muddy, silent  
slipping on pavement  
covered in grey  
earth  
wet with  
sky-tears  
falling  
dropping  
crushing  
cold  
stinging faces  
drooping petals  
slimy  
on wet earth-canvas  
red worms scattered  
thick and warm  
squishing under  
naked feet  
oozing between  
mud-soaked toes



*Julie E. Pape*

*Melissa Coursen*

**Foggy February Night****deep**

mirrored shadows  
gliding across  
boundaries  
suffocating  
stretched. torn.  
jagged  
sails in the wind  
full and thick  
with salty sea-dew  
billowing out  
breaking the diamond sunlight.  
effervescent  
in the dark deep  
the dark emerald deep.  
naked  
clothed with shadows  
singing and rocking  
the deep coral catching  
fiery blue-green hues  
of salt-bathed eyes.  
Sunlight pokes  
through  
soft flowing seaweed,  
entangling,  
embracing her coral nakedness.  
A darkness emanates  
echoing shadows  
licking the sand  
beneath the forlorn creature  
at the bottom of the sea.

*Julie E. Pape*

Cold block buildings  
cry their grimy tears,  
edges dulled  
by the humid veil,  
darkened doorways lost from view.  
Street lamps suspended  
on a canvas of gray,  
wires cast  
shadows in the air,  
widening into infinity.  
Spring warmth's passion  
kisses winter's ice.  
Street soiled,  
the blanket rises  
wispy toward the thickening sky,  
my breath joined with it.

*Allyson J. Sutherland*

**Claim**

With a slow wave of his arm he said,  
"All this land you see here is mine."

As we walked back to the truck  
He brushed against a pine branch  
That  
In its back-and-forth recovery  
From its encounter with the man  
Seemed to say  
Something  
Quite  
To the contrary

*Keith E. Gogan*



*Misty Jensen*



## Vistas of Our Society



**An American Fall**

Piles of leaves covered by snow  
In the front yards of old women  
Broken-hipped and gasping for air  
Back porch steps to which I aspire  
Iced over and bent to the North  
In Colorado where the snow falls  
Through the winter, beginning after the Fall  
And not wanting to stop  
Even for bags of leaves resting in the dump  
Only furnace heat to melt our alabaster facade  
The dim eyes opened by pale reflections  
From glass screens and white sticking to the window panes  
Piles of leaves and bags of leaves  
Concealed under snow cover  
Now fallen and frozen and waiting  
Amid Emptiness and Time  
For when Spring comes back to torture us  
With songs of pity and longing

*Christopher Dooley*

**Leaders These Days**

Crown the corpse  
Wrapped in gold  
Led by dead  
Men pretending.

Prince in the pauper's grave,  
Princess on the street corner,  
Priest in the prison cell,  
Poet in the asylum,  
Learn the lessons never taught,  
Teach us of your holiness.

*Joe Spann*

**Miami, South Beach**

Run-down,  
metropolitan.  
Palm trees  
and beaches.  
Dirty clubs  
closed for the day.  
Blank faces  
closed forever.  
Overloaded Paradise.  
Futile fear of being smaller than it all.  
Miami, South Beach

*Joe Spann*



Misty Jensen

### Heimkehr

Zu spät kam ich heut' von der Stube Heim—  
 Viel früher schon wollt' ich  
 Hinaus gehen in die Kälte,  
 Doch wagt' ich nicht die Pfützen,  
 Die steiffen Finger und den Wind  
 Der sausend durch die Kleider dringt—

Mir war die warme Stube lieber,  
 Gemütlich, trinkend lauen Most  
 Mit freundlichen Gemütern,  
 Einmal Gespräche führen ohne Widerrede—  
 Und deshalb ging ich nicht.

Doch als ich heimkam  
 Brannt' kein Feuer hier;  
 Das Haus stand still und starr,  
 Und keine faßte mir die kalten Hände.

### Homecoming

Too late I returned home from the stube—  
 Much earlier I'd intended  
 To go out into the cold,  
 But I did not dare to brave the puddles,  
 The stiff fingers, and the wind  
 Whose cold rushing creeps through one's  
 clothes—

More pleasant to me was the warm room,  
 Comfortably drinking lukewarm cider  
 With friendly faces,  
 Conversing for once without contradiction—  
 And so I did not go.

But when I came home,  
 No fire was burning here;  
 The house stood stark and empty,  
 And no one took my cold hands into hers.

*Christiane Hofmann*

**For Isabelle***En hiver,*

She writes  
pauses  
cocks her head  
watches a final leaf fall  
on paper pleasantly pink  
(snow at dusk)  
I imagine she bought specially  
from a stationer on St. Germain  
quartered to fit into the  
air-mail envelope  
licked shut with a prolonged  
glance at the garçon, who,  
askance, sets a second café  
noir beside my letter and  
retrieves her empty cup.  
She writes,  
*tout semble plus profond.*

*John Affleck***The Modern Invincible Woman**

I file my nails with a grinding stone  
I have a son and a husband and a dog named Harry  
During my lunch hour, I visit the spa and pump a thousand pounds of iron  
(I'm not bionic, just in charge)  
My three o'clock report is always turned in early  
(I start ahead)  
Walk behind me, man. I'll get that door for you and the tab  
(I'm liberated)  
Haven't failed a case yet (I've got the stuff)  
Haven't laughed in weeks (more important things to do)  
Haven't hugged my son today (write that down)  
But I have a corner office and a parking space  
And everything I need.  
Success is...  
mine

*Heather Crammer*

## A Foreign Chord

She usually comes in waves--her personality, what she likes and dislikes, a certain poem today, a certain song tomorrow. I expect it, now. Welcome it, knowing the next wave could be high tide.

This day, it's the jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt. "He was unbelievable at picking," she says. "Not so much at chords. Except every now and then." She turns up the volume on her small portable stereo then relaxes. "Even when the violin plays," she continues, "you still concentrate on the guitar, especially when he's picking the strings. Like right here." She refers to a point in the song when the sounds of a violin and a guitar mesh, though (I have to admit she is right) the guitar dominates. "It's strange, almost, that the two could go together...a guitar and a violin. I mean, you wouldn't think. But they do." She says this while closing her eyes, believing in herself.

I am tempted to wonder where and when she acquired this fascination with an obscure French guitarist. But I don't. I accept it, her next wave, and try not to understand. I'm past all that now. Instead, I marvel at her features as they evolve before me. The lines of her face change with the tempo of the music, somehow contradicting the notes. As the song crescendos, she scrunches her eyes and purses her lips. Then a transition, both in the music and her face, until the sounds fade into a placid, untidy lament. She smiles at this. She smiles with her whole body: all of her curled up in a chair, empathizing with the discord among the notes.

A new song begins, and she changes positions. "I don't think I like this one," she says. "They harmonize too much."

I want to ask what she means, but I decide I should try to figure it out on my own. A few seconds pass, and I realize I like the song. More than the one before. This one is smoother, more languid. Without the harsh open and close. It slips through the room then disappears. When it finishes, I feel that I miss it.

She moves to the couch, stretching out and pulling a blanket over her body. Her eyes are open and staring at me. I flash her a small smile, but she doesn't accept it. "What would it be like to express yourself in a way that few people understand?" she asks. "Like Django and his guitar. That's real power, I think. To know that maybe only one or two people get it." She rolls on her side and draws the blanket up, exposing her bare feet. The smallness of them amazes me, and I feel like a detail, an extra note that was, perhaps, not meant to be played.

"It's been so cold here," she says, grabbing the bottom of the blanket with her toes and stretching it down. "When will it ever get warm again? It's always cold when I'm here."

I get up to adjust the heat, but she stops me. "No, I don't want to pay for the gas. The blanket'll keep me warm," she says. So I sit down again and pretend I am satisfied by her inconsistency.

The next song has no violin, just layers of picked notes falling on top of one another. I hear them merge then splinter, and the complexity of it all baffles me. With each pluck of a string, the music sinks farther into a corner of the room, curling up under its own blanket.

"I've been thinking," she says without looking at me. "I don't know how to say..." She pauses, then says, "Je pense...à déménager à Paris...au printemps."

Her words commingle with the tidal progression of the music. All the single notes push each other out of the way. And then I hear it, the one strong chord at the end of the song: Django speaking French with his guitar.

*Christopher Dooley*

## Snakes

Sunday Mornings  
Southern Baptists,  
Summer Heat.  
All those S's "Hissing."

In the garden,  
the preacher  
warned,  
"Snakes will  
lull you to sleep."

My head  
in grandmother's lap.

Twirling fans,  
suspended  
from the ceiling.  
Never pushing  
air enough.  
Sweating.  
Hearing voice,  
not words.  
Rising, Falling,  
Rising, Falling.

The stroke  
of her fingers.  
Tongue  
at my neck,  
in my ear,  
Hissing.

Preacher's voice,  
distant and hollow,  
as though listening  
underwater,  
to a voice calling  
softly, tenderly,  
softly, tenderly,  
rising, falling,  
Hissing in my ear  
sleep, sleep, Ssss. . .

*Scott Aycock*



## Caligula

### Characters:

Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus "Caligula," *Emperor of Roman Empire (AD 37-41)*

Cassius Chaerea, *Head of the Praetorian Guard*

Philo, *Member of an Embassy from Alexandria*

Gatellus, *Caligula's Head Advisor*

Guards 1, 2, and 3

A Scribe

### Scene:

*The throne-room of the Roman Emperor. Caligula enters attended by servants and his advisor, Gatellus. Caligula arrogantly sweeps across the room and pompously plops down upon the throne.*

Caligula: You know, Gatellus, my mother always said that if you don't step on the little people, they will step on you, and if we don't get rid of this annoying problem, we will suffer for it.

Gatellus: Yes, but he is your brother-in-law, and your sisters, well, you used to love them.

Caligula: Ah, but I can't very well let someone conspiring with those rank Germans against me—I whose veins flow with the blood of the Jupiter—I can't very well let him live, can I?

Gatellus: Your anger is understandable, but couldn't you simply exile him along with his wife and her sister?

Caligula: I suppose I could, but when word gets out that a ruler's gone soft, it's nothing but work, work, work all the time, so you see, Gatellus, that we simply have to kill him.

Gatellus: My, your logic is impeccable. Guard!

*A young guard rushes up to the throne.*

Guard 1: Yes, my lord?

Gatellus: *Reading.* His Royal Eminence, the Divine Princep of the Glorious Roman Empire, Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus orders that one M. Aemilius Lepidus be executed immediately for his role in a most unseemly conspiracy against the State, and that his wife and sister-in-law be exiled to the island of Corsica, never to return to Rome, an action that most certainly will result in death. *Hands the paper to the guard.* See to it that this initiative by his Divine Imperial Majesty is carried out.

Guard 1: Yes, sir! *Takes paper and rushes from the room.*

Caligula: On a lighter note, how are matters with my sister going?

Gatellus: Which one?

Caligula: What do you mean, "which one?" I only have one sister left after this incident, and she being the one that always loved me, Drusilla, of course!

Gatellus: Ah, yes. Well, it seems to be a little sticky. I am having a bit of trouble getting her deification cleared through the Senate. . .

Caligula: What! Who do they think they are? I am the One, the Supreme Ruler of this State!

Gatellus: Well, I believe they think that they have some right in governing the State, something about centuries of tradition. . .

Caligula: I don't care about their rusty tradition! Do it!

Gatellus: Very well. Scribe!

*Scribe rushes into room and up to the throne.*

Scribe: Yes, my lord?

Gatellus: Take this down. A shrine is to be erected to his Majesty's sister, Drusilla, and a priesthood of some two and twenty men and seven women are to attend it, offering sacrifices daily to her image. You may leave.

*Scribe exits. A troop of seven soldiers enters the room and marches to the fore. The foremost steps forward, addressing the Emperor.*

Cassius: Greetings, Most Beloved and Noble Gaius! I bring you news from our forces on the Northern border.

*At this, Caligula breaks into hysterical laughter, which lasts for about ten seconds.*

Cassius: *With feigned respect.* What is it that pleases his Majesty so?

Caligula: *Suddenly sober, with perfect clarity.* It suddenly struck me that I could have you killed with two words from my mouth. *Laughing again.* That is what pleases his Majesty!

*An uncomfortable silence follows.*

Cassius: It is an honor to be pleasing to the Emperor. We have defeated the Gauls and have returned with the spoils, including the spoils of the sea, which you so graciously constrained us to. Where would you have us put them?

Caligula: *Whispers to Gatellus.* What is he talking about?

Gatellus: *Quietly to Caligula.* I believe he is referring to the seashells that you requested your troops gather from the defeated Gallish shores.

Caligula: *To Cassius.* You may divide up the plunder equally among those within the conquering legion.

Cassius: We thank your Eminence. *Turns to leave.*

Caligula: Cassius!

Cassius: Yes, my Liege?

Caligula: What of my plans for the Bay of Baiae?

Cassius: They are coming along smoothly, sir. The boats should be aligned tomorrow for your triumphant crossing on their gangplanks.

Caligula: Wonderful! You may leave.

Cassius: Thank you, my Lord. *Turns and exits, followed by his companions.*

*An embassy from Alexandria enters, and one of the delegation approaches the throne.*

Caligula: Greetings to our most lucrative city of Alexandria. What news have you?

Philo: We come with news of civic unrest and riots.

Caligula: What, pray tell, has caused this most indecorous trouble in our great city?

Philo: Your majesty, lately ordering the appointment of Herod Agrippa as King of Judea has caused some certain grievances among the moneylenders in our most learned city, which he stopped at along the way to his appointment. Furthermore, your Imperial Majesty's insistence on erecting a statute of yourself to be worshiped in the Temple at Jerusalem has caused much animosity from the Jews.

Caligula: *Standing to his feet.* How dare they defy me! Since my Great-Grandfather Augustus defeated that traitor Marcus Antonius and his bitch, Cleopatra, her city has continually given the Principate troubles. When I choose to make someone a king, it is my Divine Imperative Right to do so, and no mean bankers will have a say otherwise, and as for the Jews, they have also continually defied the Imperial Religion, saying that theirs is the only true god! And now, this Jesus is being worshiped by those same Jews that professed to worship only one god! Ha! If they will worship Jesus, then they will worship me first!

Philo: But, your Majesty. . .

Caligula: Don't you dare defy me to my face! Be gone! Guards! Escort this rabble from my presence!

*Guards rush into the room, grabbing the ambassadors and escorting them gruffly out of the court.*

Caligula: *Slumps back onto his throne and says to Galletus.* My head aches. Leave me alone.

Gatellus: Everybody out! The Emperor desires to be alone!

*Everyone but Caligula leaves the court.*

Caligula: O that the gods would deliver me from my torment, that I might join my great fathers, stars in the heavens! My mother and father murdered by that ignoble tyrant Tiberius, and he, my great-uncle, drawing me close, whispering delicacies in my ear that I know all too well to be false. I know his trade. I used it against him, gaining his trust—and his Empire. Now I make a show of it! Fie upon you, Uncle! I will make the foundations of your Empire tremble. This State that has brought either death or exile to all of my family save me alone. Yes, it is this State that I will cause the death of! All that you worked for will be in ashes! That is how the Fates and I will requite you! So, rest well in your grave, dearest Tiberius, and watch your Empire fall!

*Caligula storms from the court. Enter Cassius and three guards.*

Cassius: Now is the time, my friends. I have suffered one insult too many!

Guard 1: But sir, are you certain this is the course of action we should take?

Cassius: It is a certainty. He is mad, and he does us and the Empire much harm by his office.

Guard 2: But how can we be sure that Claudius will not dispose of us as he does Caligula?

Cassius: Let us say, I have secured certain means of ensuring our survival. I have friends in the Senate who back me, as well, and they will see to it that Claudius does not overstep his bounds.

Guard 3: What's to ensure that Claudius does not repeat Caligula's insolence?

Guard 1: There are ways to deal with emperors that we are well aware of. They can be retired, and as you know, there is but one means of achieving this. . .

Guard 3: Of course! Roman emperors cannot relinquish their powers without simultaneously relinquishing their lives.

Cassius: Hence we must retire Caligula. Tomorrow is the ceremony in which he plans to name his horse consul and then ride him across the bay at Baiae on the planks of the Imperial navy's warships. . .

Guard 2: I have heard that he plans to do so wearing nothing but a hat. . .

Cassius: No matter. After the Senate and the equites see the spectacle tomorrow, every doubt will be removed from their minds as to the necessity of his removal.

Guard 1: When are we going to do it?

Cassius: We shall catch him after his "performance" tomorrow. . .

*Interrupted by the scuffling of feet. The group looks and sees Caligula attempting to exit.*

Cassius: Do not let him escape!

*The guards draw their swords, rushing after Caligula. Cassius stabs him first in the stomach.*

*Blood pours from the wound. He is followed by the other three. They continually stab him as he slumps into a bloody heap upon the floor. The guards make a hasty exit after wiping their swords on Caligula's garment.*

*Iain Little*

## In Memory



### His Hands

He lay there, silent and stiffly still,  
His eyes closed completely, letting in no light.  
In appearance, he looked comfortable, rested,  
But I knew better.

I looked at his hands.

Those well-formed, well-loved hands, I've known so well for so long,  
They were pseudo-casually plopped down as if to show how relaxed they were,  
But I knew better.

My Dad's hands never kept still in their life.  
They worked both day and night.  
But when he was home, his hands gently hugged me to sleep,  
And with whispered gestures told me bedtime fairy tales formed from  
    fragments of my mind.  
His hands touched my beingness, and I was happy.

Now, there he lay with quiet peace on his face,  
But his hands lay limply at his sides.

I only had to see his hands, and I cried.

*AJM*

## Many Fathers

What will I find  
among the broken leaves?  
I who have many fathers.  
When I forget,  
Grandmother Ruby says,  
"You are so lucky,"  
"Just more to love you."  
And then the list.

"Uncle Bill,  
Great Uncle Ralph,  
your stepfather,  
Grandpa D.B.,  
Grandpa Pittman,  
Great Grandpa Parker and all fathers, stepfathers, uncles and grandfathers,  
everywhere . . . . AMEN!"

It is her rosary.  
Names slide like beads between her lips,  
single file.  
I do not share her faith.

(Many fathers, much love, so lucky)

Where is my father?

Names like patches of a quilt  
she wraps me in,  
covering my mouth,  
my nose.

Smothering!

"You're from good blood," grandma'd say.  
"Only strong branches on your family tree."

(And missing branches.)

If I let go,  
dropping to the ground,  
will I find  
amongst the broken leaves,  
My father?

*Scott Aycock*



*Melissa Coursen*

### Ash Wednesday, 1977

Dusty sky, like an old woman's  
Woolen shawl, holds little warmth  
To this day's bones.

I count the dead,  
Laying them one by one  
Upon the wrap of sky so  
Carelessly thrown down.

I name them to the wind--  
Each I loved.  
The air spits dust.  
My eyes, wide open, catch the dust.  
I see myself falling from the sky,  
Tumbling over the flat horizon.  
No one catches the figure.  
I count--  
Adding it to the sum of the dead.

*William Epperson*

### The Day God Cried

The wind blew today,  
and I was cold.

Darkness engulfed this place;  
Like a river of boiling water,  
the sudden-darkness heart-scalded.  
Chain-link fences stood like uncertain sentries,  
keeping watch over their guardians,  
the voiceless ones, faces plastered on metal,  
mementoes tied by string to uncompassionate arms,  
no life there,  
only memories of birthday parties,  
park rides, prizes from contests,  
a senior prom, a Christmas morning,  
all imprisoned on the frigid frame.

The wind jabbed its icy fingers  
grabbing the ripped-out fragments of sliced hearts.  
The craggy teeth of a skeleton stood,  
a gruesome reminder of the day the bomb exploded  
looming like an echo of the holocaust.

The sounds roared,  
loud and brutal and full of fury  
fomenting the rage of a deluded demon  
ready to steal the souls of unwary victims.

Even the sky wept,  
God-tears splashed on the pavement,  
pattering in rhythm, why die, who die, all die,  
leaving a trail of tears,  
ghosts of a persecuted people,  
shadows of a past sorrow shared in the present  
screaming like the Banshee with no wife, no son, no future.  
Childless they wander, wondering why the nights still shriek.

God-pain splattered on the walls,  
crimson in color and flowing like red fire through the city streets,  
igniting the dead-night.

The teddy bear still clings desperately to the fearful place.  
"For the love of Jonathan," it proclaims,  
the rain-soaked bear with little fur left,  
its bow untied, and unraveled,  
deserted by the little boy.  
Yet in this moment a gift is given,  
Jonathan is there because I am there,  
we both caress its material face,  
we with God shed trickled tears.

The wind still blows,  
and I fear I will never be warm.

*Mark R. Hall*

## On Not Remembering

He says he doesn't remember us--doesn't remember ever being here.  
Thirty years.  
Twelve thousand days.  
One's whole life; the majority of the other's.

He doesn't remember, but we do.  
All the days and nights.  
All the breakfasts, lunches, and dinners.  
Hundreds of restaurants.  
Hundreds of movies.  
Holidays. Birthdays. Vacations.  
Good days, bad days, in sickness and in health.  
A little girl in ponytails; a young woman in a prom dress.  
Girl Scouts, soccer games, softball games; ice cream and pizza.  
Speedy, the duck cake, Victoria, Orlando, Rehoboth, Boston.  
Norman and Hartford and Chickasha and Tulsa.  
Heidi and Star and Steve.  
All the houses.  
All the cars.  
All the people and places.  
All the hopes and dreams and fights and hugs and kisses.  
All the love.  
How do you catalogue the stuff of lifetimes?

He says he doesn't remember us.  
But we remember.  
On stormy May days, we remember watching him, as the creek waters rose, standing on the front porch, defending our house with a broom as we were rowed to safety in a boat.  
On sunny summer days, we remember the heat and the sweat and the sound of the mower as he pushed it back and forth across the lawn, little black dog at his heels.  
On dark winter nights, we remember how safe we felt knowing he was there, our protector.  
We remember, not with anger or bitterness, but with pain that has settled to the depths of our souls, a silent sorrow from which we will never recover.  
Faded furniture, funny photographs, silly souvenirs, an aging basketball goal rescued from the trash heap--symbols of a past we remember.

He says he doesn't remember us--but we remember.  
Now we have the little ones.  
They don't remember, will never have memories of him to share.  
That will be the real tragedy of his life.

*Kay Meyers*

### 316 Madison Street

Golden blue and green surrounded me as I stepped onto the paint-chipped wood of our front porch. "Come over here so you can see the rainbow," my dad said. My bare feet hesitated where the dry bottom stoop and the wet sidewalk met. It had rained all day, and I knew what a rainbow meant: Noah's flood. Yet, mom had told me, when the rain began, that it was a summer shower--a sun shower--where the sun shines while the sky rains. This bewildered me, but dad was out in the open air, so I decided it would be safe for me to leave the porch. The wind was warm and the little rain-pools on the sidewalk cooled my feet. House windows shone pink and yellow, and the muddy brick of the school across the street now looked orange. Sky, grass, sidewalk all embraced my attention; then Dad said, "Look, sis, there's the rainbow." I stood under its bent arm. It was bigger than my block--bigger than my school. I looked hard to find where its beginning and its end were and decided it might even be bigger than the whole city. I counted the colors and determined to memorize their order so I could draw a correct rainbow in school. Eyes squinted, I noted purple, blue, green, yellow, orange, pink. Somehow I felt that this was important. And even though the sun was saying good-night and the wind tricked me by turning cold, I made myself stay.

*Melissa Coursen*



*Melissa Coursen*

### **I'll Be Glad When the Moon Burns Out So It Will Always Be Morning**

*Calm clear evening in Detroit, riding with John and Johnny,  
Surrogate son and grandson, listening to Johnny,  
Watching the expression in large, brown, Italian eyes.  
Nondescript street shops slipping by us,  
"Baked goods," "Saugin's Laundry and Cleaners,"  
"Vietnamese Cuisine," "Joe's Sporting Goods,"  
All streaking into a blur of sight/sounds.*

*Pewter-disc moon rising blatantly in the clear air,  
Outrageous intruder, not decent enough to wait  
Till the sun, his superior, his reality, is gone.  
Four, going-on-five Johnny looking at his "Grandy"  
Out of unfathomable depths that only he and I recognize,  
Says, "Grandy, I'll be glad when the moon  
Burns out so it will always be morning."  
Echoes from Jesus of Galilee float into my brain:  
"Out of the mouths of babes. . .,"*

*Haunting words: "I'll be glad when the moon...  
Always be morning" come back in the night  
And in moments between every-day thoughts.  
I remember the evenings of my visits  
When he hated going to bed, wanted to stay up  
And play with his Grandy.*

*Pajamaed feet running to my arms  
Whispering, "Hide me, Grandy!"  
Note of desperation, hating to yield to the dark,  
To the "narrow bed," the confines of private space.*

*The others heard the five-year-old's babblings  
About the moon and morning;  
I heard the voice of humanity speaking  
Through my beloved little grandboy, the  
Reluctance of giving up to the night of death  
And longing for "always morning,"  
The age-old resistance and hope born out of desperation.*

*The longing for "morning," the fresh time,  
The time of nourishing, new energy, play-time,  
And reunion with family members and loved ones.*

*Memories of John placing his son gently  
Under the covers, telling him a favorite story,  
Hearing his prolonged prayers, any scheme  
To stay awake a bit longer.  
"Son, you can see Grandy in the morning," and  
"You can play in the morning; we might  
Even go to the zoo, see the dinosaurs."  
So Johnny floats away peacefully with  
Promises and images of morning roiling in his head.*

*In spiritual imagination, visions come,  
Scenes of love as our Father tucks us in for the "night"  
Touches us gently and whispers promises of "morning";  
Lines from an old church song ring again  
From my memory bank: "O, that city where there cometh no night,"  
And I yield to the sleep and the dark, knowing  
That I'm watched over and will wake up,  
Not to play Nintendo or blow bubbles or  
Swim in the plastic wading pool in the backyard,  
But to explore the Celestial City, to pick  
Fruit from the tree of life and swim in  
The eternal river that flows from the throne of God.*

*"I'll be glad when the moon burns out  
So it will always be morning."*

*Grady Walker*

## Games We Play Before the Dark

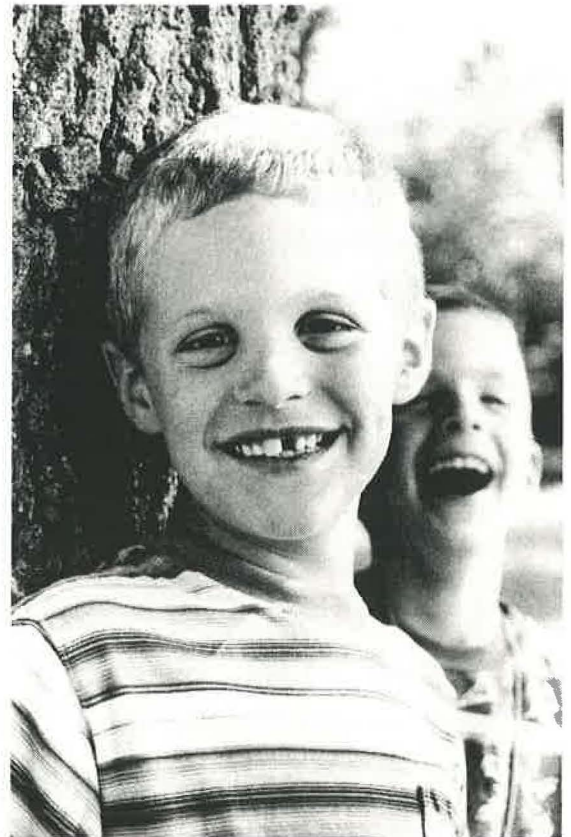
*and when I saw you running on the darkening field  
and heard you sing against the sudden quiet of night,  
I knew the courage of all children  
who make worn paths  
and paint a face upon the earth...*

### I Annie Over

Grandmother's house rises out of the dusk,  
Out of the maples' shadows.  
The boys play, throwing the baseball  
Into the dark sky, over the roof.  
"Annie Annie Over!" they shout.

Uncle Don is poised, alert to every motion  
Breaking from the black line of roof.  
His body rises in air.  
He cups the white ball.  
Running silently, he vanishes into the  
Cusp of night.

I squint my eyes, straining  
From the empty sky  
All the falling things  
I must grow up  
To catch.



Melissa Coursen

## II Statues

Evenings when the aunts and uncles  
Gather in the canvas-slung chairs  
Around Grandmother's porch  
Laughing above the tide of crickets  
And clear drops of the whippoorwills,  
The cousins play statues.

Don grabs our wrists.  
We run till we are lifted  
Flung on the air  
We fly  
Round and round  
He holds us  
He lets us go  
We drop to earth  
As if dead  
Stiff as taffy  
Drops in cold water  
Arms and legs stringing in air.

Released, I melt.  
Never formed  
Clumped upon the ground.  
A mass, a lump  
Before the breath  
Of God.

## V

### Ring Around the Rosie

I love Susie first  
Till I need Hedy more  
And loving Donna best  
Till Sally holds me last

and we all dance in circles  
bowing in  
weaving out  
dreaming dancing girls  
like suns all flaming  
burning loves

And they all burn away.

And sings a single  
Nowhere voice:

"Ashes!  
Ashes!  
All fall  
Down."

*William Epperson*



### Red Pony Rifle

I remember the day  
my brother put down his red pony rifle.  
"I'm too big for kid games," he said.  
He stood, ducking his head,  
exiting the door to our fort.  
I pleaded, don't go, but  
my brother was through the door.  
Then taunted,  
What's the matter? Too big to play with me?  
The voice of a child  
could not bring him back....

He shook off his childhood  
as though the fit weren't right.

I watched as he strode 'cross Uncle's pasture  
toward giggling girls  
huddled at the gate,  
speaking a language I could not understand.

He walked stiffly,  
creased jeans barely breaking line,  
and it occurred to me,  
he walked like my father.

I knew  
I would walk that way too.

The door closed  
and there was sadness,  
until I remembered the red pony rifle.

*Scott Aycock*



*Melissa Coursen*

"What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing?--it's the too huge world vaulting us, and it's good-bye. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies."

--Jack Kerouac  
from On the Road

