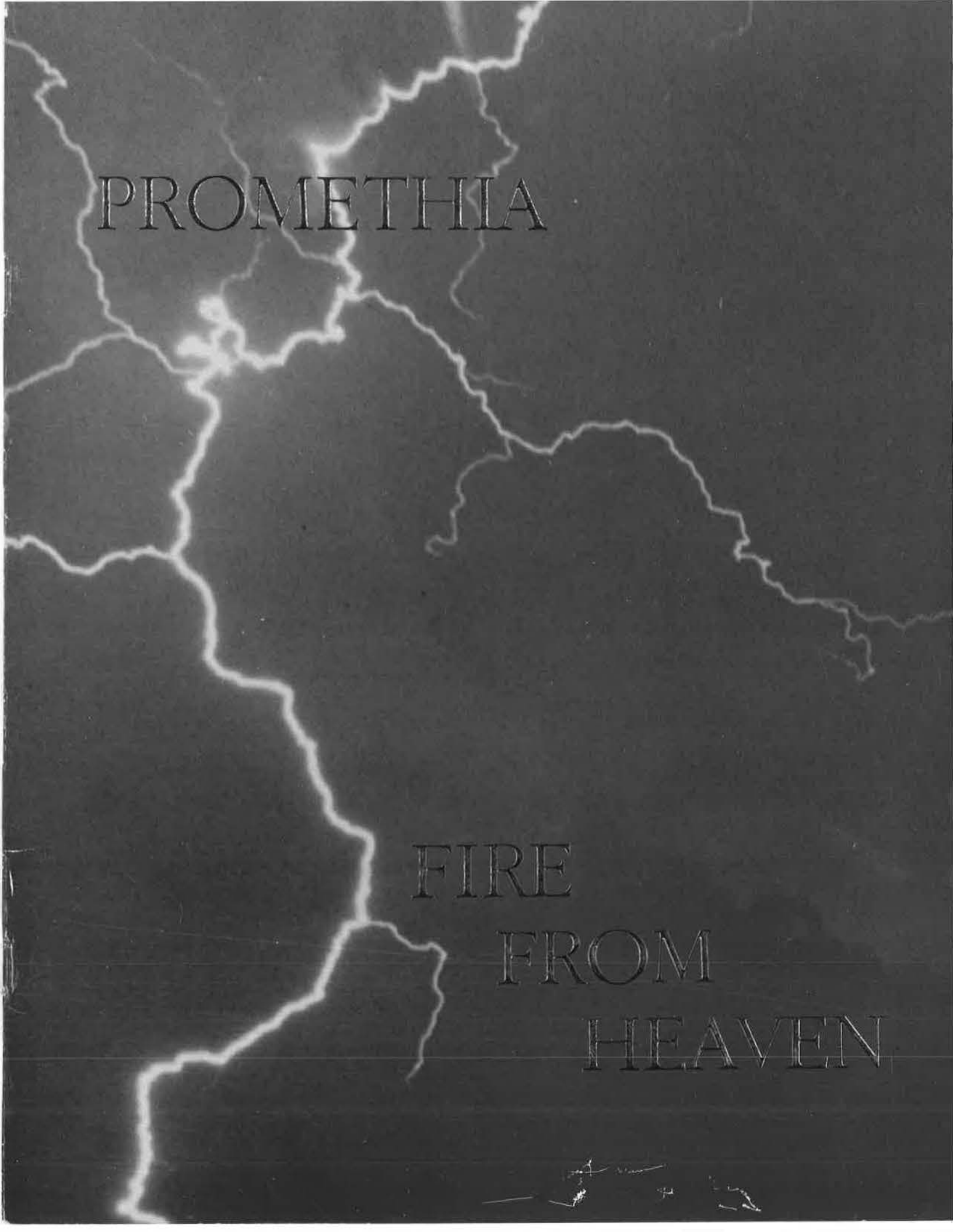




PROMETHILA

FIRE
FROM
HEAVEN

PROMETHIA '83

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FIRE
FROM
HEAVEN

*Desire
Pain
Glory*

EDITORIAL

“Lighting the Darkness”

It is strange to attempt to visualize within this written medium; I puzzle over adjective form and hidden meanings as if I have in mind some higher order of reasoning that must put forth great wisdom. That is hardly the case. As an unknown and unknowing, I have unwittingly crept from my safe confines of visual technology into this strange new world of swirling words and written terminology. No longer content with a camera and its zoom-ins for emphasis, I find myself with a pen making vague scratchings upon a college-ruled parchment. How strange, how strange indeed.

And yet it is by virtue of my position that I can continue to scribble before you now. Add to that the strange absence of any of my other submitted works (thanks to my dedicated literary staff), I feel I must play my part, be creative and put forth great wisdom.

Much more clearly now, I think I can discern the light. Darkness dims and the glory shines about me, I stretch out before morning rays and bathe in their warmth. I should be content but what of the intensity? The radiance seems hard and burning to my eyes.

What is the light? It glows around and within; touching, burning, brightening and distinguishing life and truth.

The light is as a candle, only a single spark to ignite the flame. It glows from my mind and wards off the darkness and cold. Despite an occasional disconcerting flicker, I am confident in my improved vision . . . yet when I begin to tread forth I find that my beacon only casts new shadows over my familiar surroundings.

Most often I see little blinkings of light through the floating debris of persons and projects crowding each day. These spectres strangle my time and when I finally emerge from their embrace, the blinkings seem farther away.

Only on rare occasions does the flashing bolt of a storm inspire anything more than just casual interest, and then, I look for insight but usually get a lot of thunder instead. When I am awakened in bleary-eyed disgrace, the flash sets before me a single thought - a simple concept of divine inspiration.

Divine inspiration; the shimmering revelation upon our silent, watchful faces. It is the Promethia, facets of light sparkling in our minds.

The Promethia begins in the storm's flash across the plain. And then a reverse process must be true, for not only does it thunder above our meager existence; it may be no more than curious little blinkings beckoning us through our clouded haze of daily activities. You see, the Promethia is not truth or any sort of wisdom . . . it is the images of these in light.

Like the candle, the Promethia leads a way in the search and discovery that we all make. But the flame is uncertain, revealing our fallibility in determining what is best or even entertaining; still we hold our beacon high, remembering that this shining insight will last only as long as the wick will burn.

So I put forth great wisdom: look for the light. As with certain blind men, I wonder about the flowing patterns of greyness before my heavy useless lids. A visionary, I find that I must grope in the sunlight and the shadows mock me.



Daniel S. Robbins, editor

“From darkness glows an ember,
From the ember flows the flame,
From the flame light breaks forth,
And warmth enfolds the soul of man.”

Promethia — Fire From Heaven

Fire From Heaven

I

From Olympus high in earthen sky
where thunder rolls in Zeus' hand
mid amber fog and crystal clouds
from whence flame forms a *kinderland*

Fell a bolt of lightening bright
across the cold celestial void
and left a cinder dim and pale
where man's grey light was soon deployed

And from that cell of ash and dust
arose a mist of empty sighs
that sailed before the towering thrones
of those whose hand the touch denies

Save one - whose marble heart was turned
by icy cries from darkness cold
that prayed for flame to burn within
and break the blackened glacier's hold

Prometheus in pity moved
stepped silently toward empty space
clutching to his burning breast
the fire to scorch and save a race

So Prometheus came with God's own fire
to kindle dreams and quench . . .

Desire

**HYMN TO THE STORMY CHILD
WITH THUNDER-COLORED EYES**

Oh, catch my eye,
Sweet lover's glance
That sets hearts free
And makes all chance
A slave to victory.
Ten thousand years of strife
Birthed from your hand
Would be a price too small for Wendalon;
But you have kissed all strife,

And as we dine
The language you have taught to wine
Makes sweet upon my tongue
All hopes and dreams I steal from wrong
And give to light; Uncoils
The gnarled motives of sweet Wendalon
And Whispers in her ear
The path to run.

Wendalon, dark child!
You know your love.
Fly to him fiercely:
Flee the dusk,
And do not wait to see
Where end your choices
But fly! Fly wild and free
To the hills of wanderer's victory
Where water speaks like wine
And wine like blood
And blood like love—
Oh, fly! Fly! Fly!
Like the dawn's own dove!

Mark Williams

ICONOCLASM

after four years of childhood more,
I thought I'd have the world in my pocket
or as much of it as any man of twenty-two
could squeeze beside lint-covered lifesavers
and leftover snowcones—
still melting,
five flavors pooling at the tip of the paper cone;
but instead of the world
I have only a gilt-edged diploma
clenched fiercely
in my disappointed fist,
and of course I have knowledge
about literature and biology
but hardly a clue
as to why it hurts
so much to turn another page of my soiled scrapbook
knowing your face will be buried
by other faces
just as you buried
those faces who were before—
my friends, whom I swore
I would never forget their freshness
or forgive if they let me grow stale first.

but rest my brother, rest
in token embrace
though I mean it of course
with all the nostalgia I can muster,
knowing as I do
that we're only a shadow of manhood
almost reached together.

and those boyish schemes

once facts on our horizon
are now no more than fading dreams;
self-promising promises
reduced to lies
for nothing on this path resembles
the phantoms that were in the child's eyes;
for happiness dies in the shadow
of the hypnotic swing of my pubescent locket
which has a picture of a perfect lover
on one side
and a perfect future on the other
—never opened
though I pick at the corroded
golden clasp.

but then who could have known
or ever dreamt
what this manhood meant alone
when we opened Pandora's package
of bubble-gum baseball cards
on a starry campout night,
when we threw eggs at the moon,
thinking we were vandals,
promising to stay up till dawn
to see a sunrise
we were both too weary and self-deceived
to recognize
the dawning beauty;
you were mad that we couldn't dance
along the orange horizon
and I,
I wanted to skate across the sun.

Stan Coleman

"RED SOLOMON"

They called his dusty town
"Queen of the West" and
Sometimes "Gateway to the West"
Under his greasy-gold bushel
of hair and under his
sweat-stained, aged, once-white
Stetson, banded with velvet
Brown dust, he walked,
Rather swung, like the
King of his namesake.
He "owned" the town and he
Held captive the notice of
everyone on the Saturday afternoon
Street,
He never said much; but when
He did, the more superstitious
of us half suspected divine
wisdom flashed thru those
blue-stained soul-windows.
He was an enigma, a clown,
a soothsayer, but never a problem.
That is, until one day when he
Decided he really *did* own the
Town and with his plastic 45
Demanded all the cash and valuables
from the Beckham County National
Bank.
"Don't be silly" said Miss Simmons.
"I don't have time to play games, Red"
"Neither do I," he screamed and roared
And he didn't. (have time to
play games, that is— and with that
he blew a hole thru the ceiling
and into Dr. Gum's desk upstairs,
a hole in the desk of a thousand memories
and 10 trillion particles of Beckham
County red dirt.
Everybody said it was some kind
of miracle, but they put Red in
the county jail anyway and
took away his fantasy.
The last time I saw him he
was sitting on a bench in front
of the American Hotel, whittling
a six-shooter out of shinnery wood.

Grady Walker

THE INNOCENT ONE

long lighted corridors
whited sides clothed with
artwork of artists' dreams
And down the hall the critics gathered
ranting and praising and raving a painting
an "artwork" of a newborn master.
Squeezing into the flow of them
I tried to find a glimpse of this wonder.

And pressed against backs and arms
—pressed against all that was pressed
I saw a canvas of color and line
—and color and line
flowing together unformed.

"the simplicity of childhood" they ranted
"the deeper insights of innocence" they praised
"the full freedom of babes" they raved

And I worried of myself as to why
I hadn't understood this simplicity of youth.

Then near nightfall
as the long lighted corridors were bowing to the dark,
a mother and child passed the color and the line.
And with eyes of evident eagerness,
and nose crinkled with curious facts,
the innocent one of simplicity asked
"Mommy, what is that?"

P. Diolordi



THE SUN ROSE FROM THE WEST TODAY

The sun rose from the West today,
just as I had said it would, during those long
drawn, dawn-pressing battles
when I would sit at the scarred kitchen table
absently picking at the diminishing finish
and sucking stale coffee into puckered lips,
never noticing that I had taken its warmth,
and now only held its cold bitterness.
"Nothing is certain," I would shout loud enough
to wake the baby,
"not even that the earth will turn or the sun will rise.
Why, I could say that the sun will rise from the West,
and you could not dispute me,"
Then, leaving my friends and their aching eyes
I would crawl into bed and lay, watching the night,
constantly craving to see the first arc of that blazing disc,
wanting so badly that I greyed the western sky with only my will.
But always the spiteful sun, bound by tradition,
blackened my irreproachable logic with each
disparaging ray.
Until today.
"The sun rose from the West today!"
I shout from a vengeful precipice, but no one will look up
and see my prophecy fulfilled.
The sun rose from the West today, but I alone
dare turn from the East
and wonder.

Michael Graham

PASSING QUICKLY BY

A set of railroad tracks leading into the night.
they cross a parched dirt road
that carelessly wonders through the back of the town
—I have never seen where they end.
Come with me, I don't want to walk alone.

A solitary streetlight waits at the corner,
it alone gives aid to the moon
and the brush of their light paints my shadow on the road
—I look smaller and denser than I am.
Come with me, I don't want to walk alone.

People lazitting on the steps of their porches,
but the conversation is only for me—
trying to feel what I'm trying to feel.
This is my past, but I've never been here,
and I know I'll never return.
Come with me, I don't want to walk alone.

Penny Diolordi

THE NECESSITY OF MYTH

Craig Albin

The word myth, in most circles of Christendom, is seldom used. It is avoided because, to many, it has come to suggest that which is pagan and untrue; that which is, in every sense, antithetical to Christianity. Yet there resides at the heart of myth a plea that is essential for the Christian to understand, for throughout the ages an identical plea has echoed in the heart of every human being. This is the plea which, voiced in the words of G.K. Chesterton, cries out "Why cannot these things be?"

Our first inquiry, then, is to wonder what there is in the myth of Prometheus which cries out in protest or longing, or both. The answer seems to be in an understanding, not of a myth's form, but of its essence. A myth is most often described in one of three ways: as a story, a legend, or a dream. But the essence of myth is less story or legend than it is simple longing; a longing invested with such urgency and seminal meaning that it proves eternal. This is why myths are better described as dreams, for when we wake from dreams our remembrances are not of actual events so much as they are of feelings and emotions: of the fear that tightens our throats till we cannot scream, or of the joy that, though we remember it only in its retreating, is both childlike and orgasmic.

Yet to identify myth as longing does very little. It fails to explain what the great unnamed "thing" is for which we long so desperately, and it does not reveal why, in all the forms of human expression, myth is the most appropriate clothing for it. But perhaps an answer to the latter resides in the timidity of the human being to lay bare his longings before the eye of any man, including himself. This may be seen in the demagogue's passion for power, which he describes to his people as the kindled fires leading them to a higher destination. Or it may be seen as easily in the life of a remote scholar who, secretly desiring fame, conceals his lust under the sacred auspices of intellectual devotion. Hence, both men create and employ what may be called a chronologically "new" myth. This myth constructs a defense against the piercing adequacy of their own vision, and they use it as a colored garment through which the shape and form of their longing may be suggested, but never revealed.

Yet Chesterton claims that the heart of myth is plea rather than deception, and so it is. In the Promethean myth the god Prometheus does not steal fire from Zeus and endure the torture of the eagle's beak because he believes that it will make him great, but because he believes that such heavenly fire belongs with man. He believes that certain things, though they are not, should be. It is here in this belief that the streams of Promethean myth and Christian revelation run together. To desire things which, though they are not, should be, is precisely the desire of the Christian. It is in an understanding of this desire that the mystery which St. Paul described to the believers of Colossia as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" may be appreciated.

Throughout the writings of St. Paul there is the poetic presentation of a coming glory that will mean both fulfillment and restoration for the Christian. He describes it to the Philippians by saying that "our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself." Yet it is not inaccurate to say that if this glory could be described as a statue, many within Christendom would cast their vision continually at its feet, never looking upward at the spirit of immortality within the chest, or the glint of heaven within the eye. Thus Paul has grounds for pleading so passionately that we lift our heads toward those things which are above.

To sense this hope of glory rising within is not wrong of the Christian. Nor is it self-assuming. Rather, there is an assurance that this hope, among all other hopes, has been purified by the lovely but aching pain of redeemed desire. There is an assurance that it seeks rightly and of itself to grow, to mature, and to subject to itself all lesser hopes, for in front of it alone did Paul preface the words "Christ in you." Therefore it is well that we heed the view of one so perceptive as C.S. Lewis when he writes that "if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desire, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Characteristically, this is true of myth as well. It stops short. It does not take the final leap. It quells with longing that which can only be satisfied by the revelation of glory Himself. But myth is not something the Christian can dismiss. It has at its center the plea of too great a portion of humanity, and it pulsates with the first element of spiritual idealism: certain things, though they are not, should be. We can therefore say, to again quote Lewis, that myths are the "mere beginnings—the first, faint whisper of the wind from beyond the world—while Christianity is the thing itself."

II

A hungering flame to cold earth came
concealed within a Promethean hand
it fell from darkness into night
and blazed within the arms of man

The lonely Titan stood and watched
as the faint inferno grew
to set awaiting plains aglow
with mists of heav'n and flames of dew

Then Zeus' showering voice broke forth
and, for revenge, in anger cried
against him who dared to share the light
that was ne'er to leave Olympus' side

"Impetuous god by passion moved
could you not see beyond desire
to those with hearts of sculptured ice
you have given tongues of fire."

"Now you must helplessly observe
the power you have loosed on earth
and smell the burning flesh of men —
the stench of death, the pain of birth."

Thus Prometheus was hung in chains
to live in guilt and learn of . . .

Pain

MY FATHER'S KEEPER

a Willow Tree makes me sad in the springtime.
her slenderness clothed in a trillion new leaves;
on an emerald hill
limbs bending deeply as if to sweep persistent dust from between
two mighty roots bulging from the earth
often Dad would lie between the roots,
thick green grass comforting his bare back,
her leaves tenderly shade Dad and the space below;
When Dad returned to the plow, the shaded grass would hold the imprint
of his body until he lay there again
— the earth was well accustomed to him,
until the season changed
And I've seen the taunt nakedness of her branches in winter
she becomes brittle like old bones do when a chilling wind
comes in through the cracks in a worn door: year upon year
her limbs clack upon each other, now and then like the
sound of an old man's cane feebly knocking against the floor
in the room upstairs
innocent snow traps her roots in frozen ground . . . she is anchored for the season
though she is strong, winter comes endlessly
and green leaves cover anew
yet, a few less and a few less . . .
the brown ground below blends with brown bark and the earth on which
she stands is flat . . . in winter
then warmth seeps back into the soil below
bringing new yellow grass to outline the long hump in the
ground at the foot of the trunk
And I am sad when I see a Willow Tree in springtime
I climb the hill to visit her and Dad
to where she resides;
inshielding the flowery grass with her roots where
Dad's imprint stays:
not for a while, but much longer
only a little deeper now

Jonell McFadden

ON THE BUS

Gentle Children —
with cherubic faces
and voices that fill the air
with a heavenly glow.

The epitome of innocence,
aligned in orderly files
like the clean pages
of a spiral pad.

As the bus pulls away . . .

They shatter reason with
irresistable ignorance. Regulation
is smattered with shrill gigglelaughter
that squirts from tender throats

and
drips
from
the
walls.

Gentle Children
with demonic faces;
if they are born pure and clean
the cradle must be a sty.

Michael Graham

THE NETHERWORLD

There is an in-between world
Where the soul touches no shore;
Where desire has no fulfillment
And no birds sing:
Vacuum, emptiness, netherness.
Emotions dim and wither
And the spirit walks on deserted shores
As waves of foam, promising life,
Rush in and fade into dead
Sand, never changing it, only
Rearranging it and leaving it dead.

In its aloneness the spirit soars
But finds no other spirit to join it
And even soaring becomes a weight.
Where is love? Feeling? Life?
The Netherworld: a space, void,
Where no one comes, where soul
Flaps wings feebly and beats itself
into deadness, collapsing into
suspension with an echo of nothingness.
I walk here but leave no footprints
Knowing that the absence of breath will be the only
Difference when I am dead.

Hollow corridors in the mind,
Liquid distortion; constriction and contraction;
Walls that disappear or elude when approached
Waving mazes leading nowhere
Grim trap of invisible boundaries;
I scream, but no sound falls,
Not even to me, for the walls
of my self allow no communication or
Communion; the walls are thick and
Impenetrable and sadly of my own building;
Machine-man drowning in nothingness.

Grady Walker

From LETTERS TO A DIVA

Send me your pain -
that sharp edged sphere
of glistening razors,
so I may press it to my bosom
like a new born babe,
a bouncing bundle of
joyous anguish.
Then,
as firm edges pierce yielding flesh —
While muscles are ripped from crackling bones,
and my warm blood flows freely from
severed vessels down to cold earth,
let me feel your red lips
as they gently whisper
“I don’t care.”

Michael Graham

ATHLETES

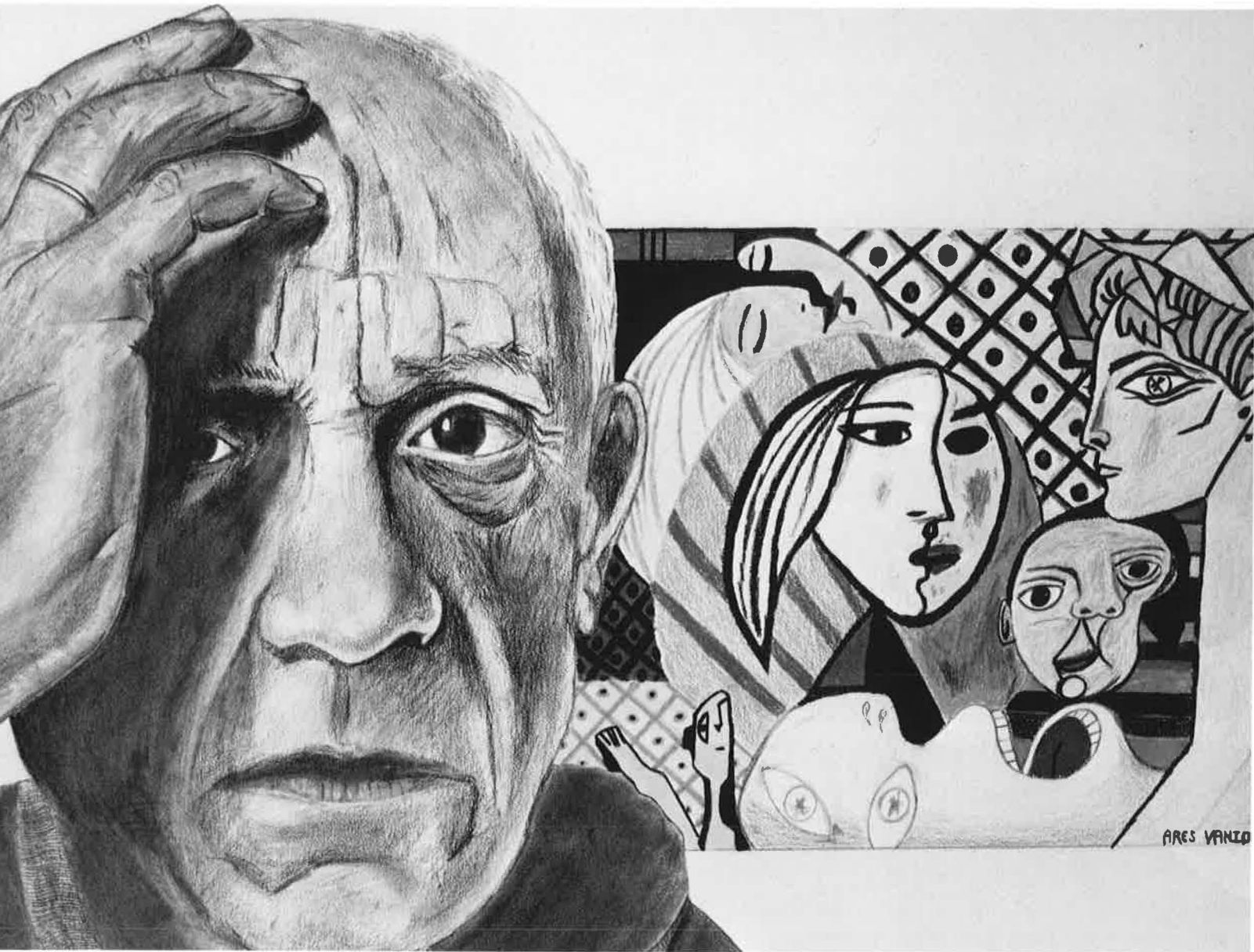
Here amid the Grecians,
Bodies glazed with glorified sweat,
I feel so small and insignificant —
Unhealthy — unholy.
Ballerinas are here dancing on ledges —
Leaping and Lounging —
Purifying pain
I sit here lethargic — a sinner
Nothing in common with beautiful ones?

Katie Whitlock

PEOPLE

Thronging; buzzing.
Hundreds.
    Hoarding around life's sweetness.
Tearing the wings from others.
There I stand
    the lonely corner.
Repeatedly being stung.
    Swelling from the pain of rejection.

Shari Nussbaum



But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition — and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain.

Joseph Conrad

SENILITY

When she was a young girl,
She dreamed of castles and princes
Fighting dragons.

When she was a young woman,
Her nights were filled with lovers
Who were only in her mind.
She slept in the embrace of dreams.

When she grew into middle age,
She was determined to do something for the world.
But her house was an empty oracle
And her pen left a
Blank page.

Now she is old and her dreams
Have been replaced
With the memories of things that
Have never been.
And she is content to
Rock and remember.

Katie Whitlock

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

Craig Albin

At 63 Gunther Mills believed that he was the last of a dying and, when he was gone, extinct breed. He had believed this off and on for nearly twenty years, beginning with the death of John Kennedy. But now, because the world he saw was one in which doctors and children and social security officials had inherited a kind of tired, puny authority, the only kind of authority that was left, he felt thoroughly convinced of his own pariah-hood.

Gunther never felt this distinction more strongly than when he was talking to Arthur Davis, his neighbor, whom he called Artie. He didn't know whether his using the name Artie really bothered Davis, but always he said it very loudly in the hope that the added volume would someday penetrate Artie's heart and reveal to him just how little Gunther thought of him and people like him.

Artie was a little man with white hair and a neatly trimmed white mustache. He was about the same age as Gunther, but the skin of his face and neck had not yet begun to sag. This made him look, if not younger, at least more conscientiously preserved. He had as well a habit of wearing dress clothes throughout the week, and this irked Gunther. Nothing enraged him more than sitting on the porch each morning and watching Artie go for the mail in a full three-piece suit, leather shoes, and a felt hat. He thought it an insult to his intelligence that a man, his own neighbor, would dress that way when he had absolutely nothing to do.

This morning Gunther was again sitting in his regular spot on the front porch and reading the "Missouri Conservationist" when Artie appeared. He was dressed in his usual fashion, but as he made his way down the steps of his house to the walkway Gunther noted with a deep-throated, indignant "umph" that Artie had changed his normal felt hat for a lighter straw one. "Feelin' the summer heat," he thought with satisfaction.

Gunther himself was dressed for summer. He wore a yellow golf shirt his daughter had bought him which clung smoothly to his belly and made it look solid, a pair of brown and white plaid pants, and light blue sailor shoes. He was quite proud of the overall effect. Yet he noted with dissatisfaction that Artie, having got the morning paper, was coming toward him rather than returning to his house. "Probably wants to talk about his children," thought Gunther. "He always talks about his children."

Gunther tucked his chin down close to his neck and watched Artie over the rim of his glasses. Artie had the paper under his left arm and a long white envelope in his hands as he sat down on the porch swing next to Gunther. "It looks as though my deed came," he said, and stared at the envelope he was holding.

Gunther said nothing. He had already decided not to encourage a conversation with Artie unless there was the chance of talking about something important, like what bad shape the country was in or how nobody ever stood up for what they believed in anymore. But Artie did nothing but stare at the long white envelope in his hands, and Gunther was becoming curious. Finally he weakened.

"Thinking about selling your house?" he asked hopefully.

Artie lifted his head and looked at him while the question registered. Then he smiled. "Oh no Gunther," he

said. "That's the very house I was born in. I could never sell it now that I own it."

Gunther responded with his second "umph" of the morning. Ever since the day three years ago when Artie moved into the old, ornately trimmed house next door, Gunther had felt that he was there to stay. There had been too many things, too many pieces of old, fine furniture, for a man of Artie's age to still own without intending to make a home.

"Do you know what I would like Gunther?" Artie asked suddenly, and rose from the edge of the swing so that it jerked back, lifting Gunther's feet from the ground.

"No Artie," he said irritably, "I don't know what you'd like."

"I would like you to come to my house for dinner tonight. About six. I have something there I want you to see." With that he slipped the deed under his arm alongside the paper, gave Gunther a formal tip of his hat, and left him sitting alone on the porch, indignant but very curious.

Gunther watched him go nimbly over the lawn and up the steps into the house, and then prepared himself for a morning of cogitation. If nothing else, he realized, Artie at least made it clear to him the difference between the kind of men the world needed and the type that was responsible for its mess. Artie was the type of man that would die dusting old furniture in a house he had bought simply because it was the one he was born in. He thought, Gunther Mills, would die fighting, fighting in spirit now that he was no longer able to fight well in body. The fight was the thing, the victory. Artie didn't know what it was to fight, but he had been born fighting, and he would fight till he died.

Stiffly Gunther rose from the swing and entered the house. The living room curtains were drawn, but he walked to the center of the room without touching them. Slowly, a half-step at a time, he began to turn a circle in the middle of the room, his eyes resting with each half-step on a different piece of furniture. Near the window sat a square armchair covered in faded green material that had been interlaced with silvery metallic stripes. A rocking chair of orange and brown flowered print, his dead wife's chair, sat near the couch. And in the far corner of the room, the points of its square back pressed into two separate walls, was Gunther's own chair. He stared at it longer than the rest, as if trying to discover how he could have sat in it for so many years without noticing it. In the end he decided it was better that way. If he had gone around noticing furniture all the time he wouldn't have been any better a man than Artie Davis.

There was one thing he was going to do, though, that would really catch Artie off-guard. He was going to show up at his house tonight with a new suit. That would do two things. It would show Artie that he could be just as dignified as anyone else, and it would put them, formally at least, on even terms. Gunther thought with pleasure of the sight of both of them sitting at Artie's dining table, each dressed in a suit, but himself dominating the scene by virtue of his greater size and manhood right there in the other man's home. Not that he was going to be arrogant, he told himself. That wouldn't do. But sometimes a man

needed to assert himself. Not just his power or his anger, but himself.

Confident now in what he was going to do, Gunther hurried to the kitchen to fix himself lunch. He had a chicken and ham sandwich with mustard and a glass of tea, and then hurried back through the living room and into the bedroom to get the money for the suit. He had two hundred dollars in his bureau that was hidden in an envelope his sister-in-law had addressed to his dead wife ten years ago. The bills were all new, unwrinkled twenties that lay flat in the browning envelope. He kept them there purposely, so that when he died and people came to divide up his possessions they would find that he was a man who believed that the important things were always on the inside, and that appearances didn't count.

He found the envelope and looked inside. They were there all right. Ten twenties so flat and unused they'd have to be taken out to be counted. He probably wouldn't need more than four of them for the suit. He hoped not. He hated to spend so much money for something he probably wouldn't wear more than one time. But it would be worth it just to see Artie's face tonight when he opened the door. And if it turned out to be a good-looking suit it would be the thing his daughter would pick to bury him in. That would make it a good investment.

He took five twenties out of the envelope, the fifth just to be sure, and then moved back through the house in stiff-jointed glee. Artie would be surprised, he thought. No. Better. Artie would be stunned. He would open the door, see him in his new suit, and then stand there without anything to say. That would be the moment to savor. It would be the first time in three years he had ever made Artie falter in his speech, ever made him unsure in his dignity. It would be that moment that made tonight a night to remember.

Absorbed in anticipation, Gunther found that the afternoon passed more quickly than he expected. The two hours he spent looking at suits seemed to pass in halves, as though the day itself were rushing toward the time when Artie would open his door and find him newly clothed. Clothed in the brown pin-striped suit he found in the back of Gorham's Men's Store for \$69.99, and in the brown leather-look loafers he bought to go with it. He tried the suit on in front of a mirror at the store, and then once again when he got home. It looked a bit big around the chest and shoulders; not like Artie's tailored suits, but like the suits all the presidents wore. Because of that he felt satisfied with the investment. It brought out his dignity. He lay down and slept for the rest of the afternoon.

When he awoke it was only a few minutes till six. He hurried at first, but then realized that he had never taken off his pants. All that was left was to slip into the loafers and put on the coat and his tie. "And anyway," he found himself thinking, "it might be just the thing to be a few minutes late."

He arrived at Artie's door at ten minutes after six and knocked loudly. The door opened almost immediately, and Gunther saw Artie standing in the doorway. He wore, not a suit, but khaki pants and a light blue shirt. "Hello Gunther," he said, extending his hand, "come in." Gunther took the hand automatically, and then stepped into the foyer. He stood there silently, looking at Artie in his casual clothes. The small man seemed harder, more embattled, than he had ever realized. He wondered if it could be the clothes.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he was staring. "Sorry I'm late," he murmured. Artie waved his hand to signify

that it was all right. "You're looking well tonight," he said. "I like the suit."

At once Gunther felt anger within him. He had been tricked. He hadn't wanted Artie to like the suit. He had wanted him to be caught off guard and intimidated by it. "But that's the way he is," he thought. "He lives by tricks. Tricks of clothes and compliments and looks. He doesn't have anything but tricks."

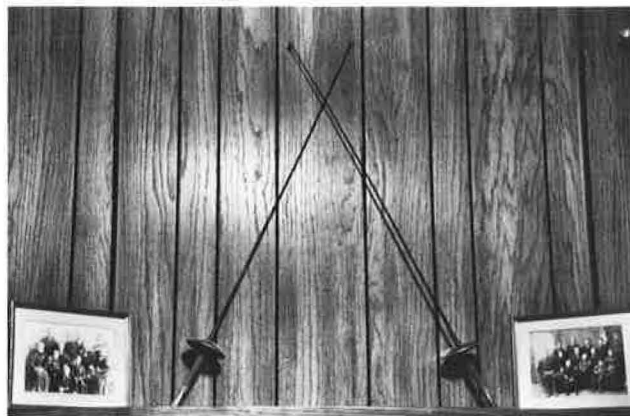
Artie led the way into the dining room and Gunther followed. It was a large, square room of oak paneling and French doors which opened onto the patio. In the middle of the room was a long rectangular dining table, grander even than Gunther had expected. The wood was dark, rich walnut, so smooth and depthless it looked almost drinkable. It pulled him toward itself, the most noble thing he could imagine.

"I'm sorry that dinner is not ready yet," he heard Artie saying. "I've never been terribly sufficient in the kitchen."

Embarrassed, Gunther realized that Artie was apologizing, that he had taken his preoccupation with the table as a sign that he had expected to eat immediately. "That's O.K. Artie," he said loudly. "I can wait for dinner. Why don't we have a look at whatever it is you want to show me. I'm sure I can find some interest in it."

For a moment Artie did not respond. He was standing to Gunther's left, one hand on the back of a chair and the other in his pocket. Gunther was not sure he had heard. "All right," he said finally. "It's in the study. The door to the left of the foyer. I'll be in as soon as I check on the meal."

Gunther left the dining room happily. He'd gotten to Artie that time. He'd heard it in his voice. There had been a terseness, a pride, which he had never heard before. He felt as though he were on the verge of victory. He opened the door of the study. Two sabers, glinting, and crossed as though in the hands of unseen combatants, confronted him. They hung on the wall behind Artie's desk, the center-piece between two huge cases of books. The sun, beginning its descent, shone upon them through the high west window.



At first Gunther did not want to go near them. They were an affront to him, a stink in his nostrils. How could swords belong to a man like Artie. He would be scared to death of them if he ever had to use them for anything but his tricks. Yet slowly the sabers, like the table, drew Gunther. He left the doorway and walked toward them, yielding to his desire to touch them, to hold them, and to be armed with them.

He grasped the first one by the handguard. It came down easily. It felt light and wispy in his hand, more like a

switch than a sword. "It would sting some to take a whipping with one of these," he thought. He waved it in the air. It hardly made a sound.

"It was my grandfather's," said Artie's voice. "He was very fond of fencing." Gunther turned and saw him standing in the doorway. "And that one was your father's?" he asked, pointing to the remaining saber. "No," Artie answered, "that one is mine."

Gunther felt a tremor in his chest at the words, as though some grip, some restraint upon reality, had given way within himself of its own accord. It made him feel light, thin, wispy; an equal brother to the saber he held in his hand. He watched Artie coming toward the desk out of what seemed a world of limbo, a world between worlds from which he could either return to his own, or else follow the gentle pulling he'd begun to feel in his chest.

"My grandfather gave it to me when I was very young," Artie was saying. "Every man has his cherished possessions. Sabers were his." He stepped behind the desk to a table which stood under the remaining saber. One book lay upon it. He took it in his hands. "This was my father's possession," he said, "and I suppose it has become mine. It is what I wanted you to see."

The binding of the book was greyish black and not particularly old, although the gilded lettering had begun to fade. Its front pictured a young king standing under an arch of flowers. Under the picture was the title *Idyll's Of The King*. "It's not read much anymore," Artie said. "Most people don't enjoy this kind of book." He turned to hand the book to Gunther, but stopped. The saber Gunther held in his hand was pointing at his chest.

Artie glanced once at the saber still on the wall, and then back at Gunther. He was holding the weapon improperly, like a long knife rather than a sword, but there was something in his stance, some zealous, unlaughing hilarity, which caused Artie's body to go rigid and a warmth to come upon his face and neck. "A saber," he said, "is a very dangerous weapon. It should not be used carelessly."

Gunther smiled. He stepped closer, and Artie gripped the book more tightly. "This," Gunther said, tilting the weapon higher, "it's just a long pin. A man wouldn't even notice the hole it made."

"A man wouldn't use it carelessly."

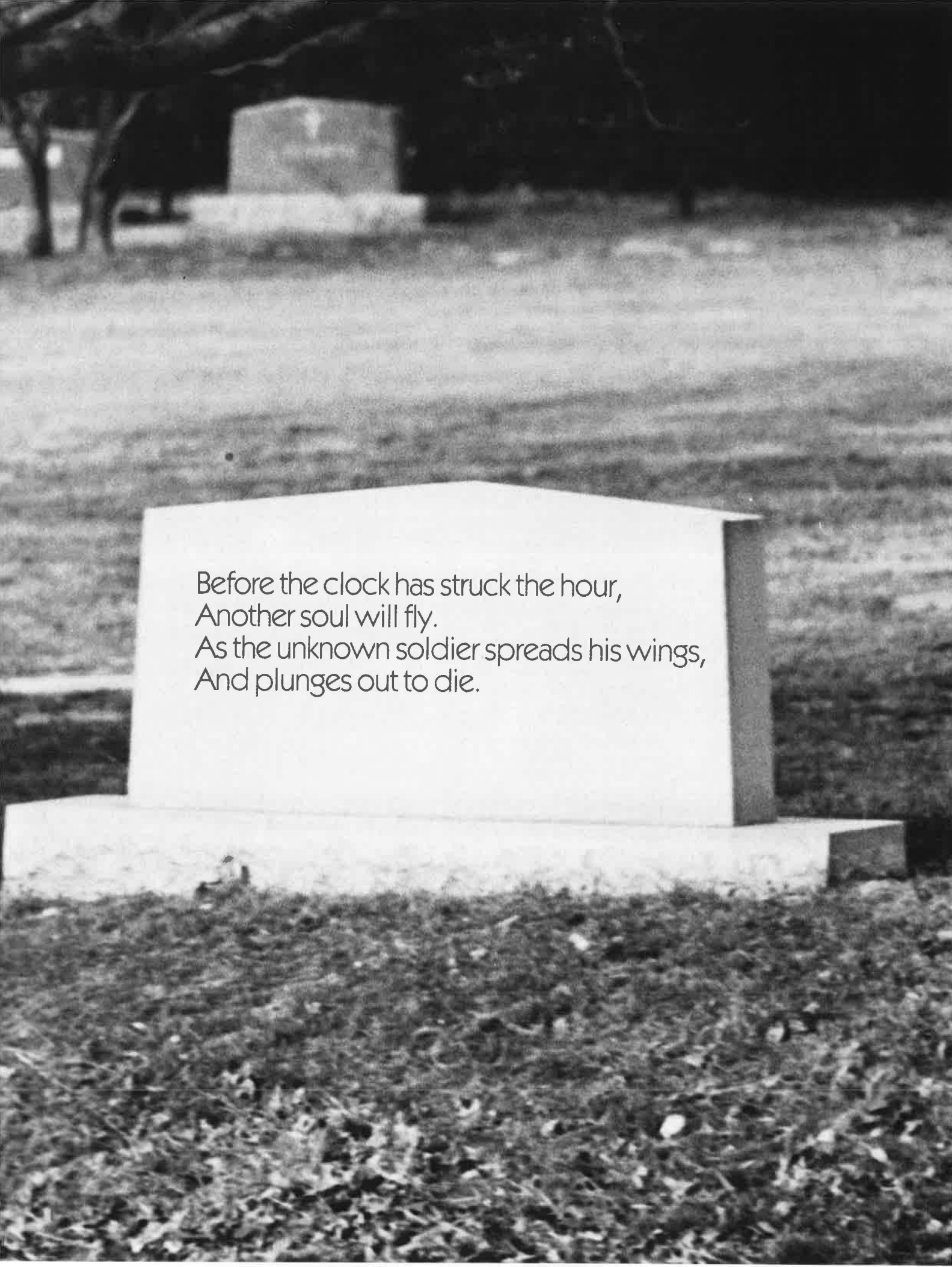
"He wouldn't use it like a trickster either. He wouldn't hang it on his wall just so people'd think he was a man."

Artie was silent. He watched the tip of the saber. "He's older even than I am," he thought. "His hands shake terribly." But as he watched Gunther began to move the saber back and forth, wider each time in its arc, until he brought it so close to Artie's chest that he slapped it away with the back of the book. He had hoped that the blow would knock the saber from Gunther's hand, but it did not. He saw him standing for the moment with it at his side, his face full with a solemn playfulness. Then he lunged. Artie swung the book as the saber came near, felt the sting as the flat, thin blade met his hand, then he heard it snap. He saw Gunther step back, half of the saber still in his hand. Then his own legs began to weaken. He felt a pricking, a long-stemmed stinging, deep within his chest. He looked and saw that the left of his blue shirt had turned a dirty, spreading red, a shaft of steel at its center. His elbow hit the desk hard as he fell, jarring the book from his hand.

Gunther stepped past Artie's body and walked to the wall. He meant to replace the saber, but it was no longer long enough to rest upon the nails. He laid it instead upon the desk. He looked then at Artie's body, and at the book

which lay a few feet from his head. An envelope had been jarred halfway out of it by his fall, and as Gunther picked it up he saw that it was Artie's deed. He saw also that a passage in the book had been tediously underlined in red. "My Lord Arthur," it began, "whither shall I go? Where shall I Hide my forehead and my eyes? For now I see the true old times are dead, when every morning brought a noble chance, and every chance brought out a noble knight. Such times have been since the light that led the holy Elders with the gift of myrrh."

"Sounds like something a trickster would read," thought Gunther, and the pulling in his chest suddenly became a stab, a demand, a claim which drug him forcefully from his place between the worlds.



Before the clock has struck the hour,
Another soul will fly.
As the unknown soldier spreads his wings,
And plunges out to die.

III

From his throne of towering stone
Prometheus saw in cold despair
the cruel scars of men on man
and painful heat beyond compare.

With this vision he cursed and cried
as eagles clawed and waters grew
until his granite eyes were locked
on death he loved but never knew

Suddenly his bonds of earth
were shaken from beneath the stone
Prometheus leapt from his painful womb.
He stood in freedom and stood alone.

Hercules appeared upon the mount
"You've been set free from Zeus' rage.
Now reach your hand again to earth —
send the flaming beast into its cage."

But Prometheus saw the burning dawn
and went instead with exhortation
to reach into the fiery pits
and save man from his own salvation

The greatness of the Titan's story
lies in the pain of flame, and the fire of . . .

Glory

BRASS INTO GOLD

Lying there on the table
a molten puddle
melted by the brilliance of the sun's heat.
Tarnished brass melting into new shininess
by the very elements that would destroy it.
Beads of copper and droplets of alloy
mixed with the gold
begin to roll away
until in naked, shimmering, clearness
the pure, untainted gold quivers all alone.
As soon the blows begin
the shaping and the forging
the bending and developing
into an ornament of beauty.
No longer just an instrument of usefulness
the refining is now completed
to adorn the crown of the Kind and Sun.

Janet Hamm

COMMANDO OF THE VACANT LOT

Dennis Johnson, Faculty

It was agreed: Vernon was a klutz. But he developed a kind of blindness for it and went on his way. Sometimes he klutzed out almost on purpose, like when he thought he could billy club Mike Mussberger into giving his bicycle back and Mike just took the club too. That had been a crisis for Vernon because he had given up his only sense of identity when all it took was one good swing to seal it forever. Anybody could figure that one out.

Mike gave the stolen goods back to Vernon a week later in order to get him to go home and hang around his own yard. "Here's your wheels," he said. "And here's your bat."

Only it wasn't a bat really, although Vernon swore it would be perfect for baseball. It wasn't a club. It was an old oar from one of the rent-a-skiffs at Spanaway Lake, an oar which Vernon had bartered off Jack at the boathouse and which he had amputated at the blade and bandaged generously with black electrical tape. Like Alley Oop, Vernon hauled it along wherever he went. And he named it the One Thousand Volts of Black Lightning, which agreed with most all of the boys since it would be equally ridiculous to call it anything else. Nobody paid much attention anyway.

Vernon Saucier had learned early not to bank on popularity. He left that to Evan, who was only eleven and pretty skinny besides, but who could already wrestle pretty good and could strap on his roller skates so at high speeds they never came off. Vernon's lesson occurred one afternoon when Kenny Barnes, who was the same age, was kicking around in the tall grass at the back of the lot hunting a lost ball. He found instead one of those blue metal broiler pans from the bottom of a stove. It was lying in the sun, so he decided to conduct a test of bravery.

He made everybody get in line and take turns laying a hand palm down on the pan's bottom for as long as they could stand the heat. Both Sauciers waited to be last, but when it came their turn, somebody called Vernon chicken, so he went ahead. He tried not to think of the pain, which bought him an extra five seconds, but finally the heat got to be too much. He grabbed his wrist with his other hand and wrung it, turning red in the face sort of laughing.

"Shoot-fire, that's hot," he said.

Now it was Evan's turn. He placed his palm on the broiler pan and started to turn red too, but Kenny grabbed his arm and held his hand down. The pan burned and burned more under Evan's hand, then it felt the same, then it didn't matter any more how long Evan kept his hand there. When he took it off at last, he laughed and said, "Shoot-fire, that's hot," and Evan was declared the bravest, next to Kenny.

That settled it. If you had to cheat to be popular, then Vernon had better things to do. He decided to become a specialist. Vernon had probably the largest collection of Commando Comics in the state of Washington, and from that secret fund of mercenary knowledge came his expertise in rock fighting, growling and shouting, and baseball. It was worth it to keep him around just for his rock fighting abilities.

Where the Sauciers high back yard was held in from the alley by a gravelly cement wall, Vernon excavated a foxhole. It was a three-man foxhole with pockets dug out for ammunition and a niche for the One Thousand Volts in

case of hand-to-hand combat. By the design of the hole, Evan knew without being told that he and Bugs Brownlee, who lived next door and didn't have any molars, were meant to be allies. He fetched Bugs and a wheelbarrow and collected a load of rocks. He brought them to the foxhole, but Vernon made him dump them in the alley.

"We don't need these."

"But why?"

"Yeah, why?" said Bugs Brownlee.

"Not big enough, dummy. Hit somebody with one of these and they won't even feel it. We'll get slaughtered. Now go find some real rocks, something to ruin the enemy in one blow, like the A-bomb."

"I know. Let's get Bugs's BB gun."

"We can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Yeah, why not?" said Bugs.

"Because it won't be fair, dummy. Now go get some bigger ammo."

Vernon went back to his digging. Evan tipped the wheelbarrow up and headed up the alley. "Klutz," he said.

"Klutz," said Bugs.

They got the right kind of rocks, and that afternoon large-scale rock fighting, contrary to the random clouting that had gone on before, commenced. The Sauciers and Bugs Brownlee dropped down into the foxhole. They were the Allies. Kenny led the attackers, who were Kamikazes. They would race down the alley on bicycle and foot, slinging missiles and grenades at the Sauciers' wall as they sped by. Large bombs would catapult blindly out of the foxhole in an attempt to smash the raiders off their bikes, and three heads would pop up to see it they got anybody. The Kamikazes would circle the block, reload at the head of the alley, and charge again. The Allies would crouch, waiting.

After about the sixth or seventh offensive, Evan said, "You're bombing them too late."

"Who's running this campaign, Private?" growled Vernon, who had on the only helmet.

"Well, they're already to the end of the alley when —"

"I know what I'm doing. I'm breaking their flank. You got to break their flank first."

"I thought you had to hit somebody first."

Vernon shook his head in disgust. "Don't you know nothing?"

Evan scowled and began prodding the dirt wall with a stick. He could feel his brother watching him, but he wasn't about to look up. He stuck his lips out in a loose way and made a noise to himself and drew a word in the dirt.

Then Bugs Brownlee, who was lookout, said, "He-ere they come." Evan dropped the stick and they were back in action. The Kamikazes sped past and a knobby boulder came to earth just behind the last bicycle. The game went on until almost dinnertime when Bugs looked out at the wrong moment and stopped a rock. He ran home crying and holding his head and a two-day truce was declared. Organized rock fighting was a success.

The boys waged a battle at the foxhole every few days for the next two weeks until someone for variety sneaked through the Sauciers' yard and dropped a piece of road on Evan's head. The culprit, who turned out to be Mike

Mussberger, leaped into the alley, where two cohorts waited, and took off. Vernon got a funny look on his face when he saw his brother down in the hole. Then he saw the blood and the look got funnier and he went kind of crazy.

Vernon bounded out of the foxhole into the alley with the One Thousand Volts in both hands. He skidded in the gravel and Mussberger, who had reached the end of the alley, danced about with his friends and shouted, "Come and get me, Vernon."

Vernon ran three steps, leaned low and to the side, and lofted his club in a looping heave toward the antagonists. He almost took out two of them. They hopped over the skittering projectile and looked up to see Vernon bearing down on them in a jerking sprint. They grabbed their bikes, which were stashed nearby, and fled. Vernon slid to a stop and spat out a confused string of obscenities after them and threw a rock. He began to cry. He was behind Kenny's house, so he scooped up a fistful of rocks and shot them as fast as he could against the porch and wall. He slung volley after volley across the back yard before Bugs and Kenny's mother could call him off. He scrambled back up the alley to find Evan.

Of course that spoiled it for any more rock fights. The boys for days avoided Vernon and talked about how he went nuts and couldn't even hit a single window out of all those rocks. Evan healed up soon enough, though, the stitches came out, and the neighborhood returned to normal. But in the absence of rock fighting Vernon had to concentrate on his reputation in another area, baseball.

The boys had taken to gathering at the vacant lot after Saturday morning cartoons for a game. Every time, you could see Vernon there with his One Thousand Volts, a partnership against grace. He would lean on it in a smug manner, snucking up a bubble of snot and looking down on the surrounding thicket of Louisville Sluggers. When all but one of the boys' names had been called for teams, Vernon would still be standing there, alone. But he didn't mind. Everyone understood that he would get on a team and that more than likely that team would win the game. For Vernon had this time been right. If a baseball happened to get in the bat's way when set in its terrific motion, it was a goner for sure. So in spite of a tendency toward dropped balls and strike outs, and a malignant fashion of base running, Vernon would get chosen. He was what you call the 51% advantage.

After the rock fight fiasco Vernon got better and better at the plate and worse everywhere else. All the boys by midsummer became aligned on the tension of competition, but Vernon played like he held a grudge. He played a stiff right field. He threw too hard and wild. On the way to a strikeout he looked like he would yank himself out of joint. He was no fun except when by chance the One Thousand Volts of Black Lightning sent the ball rocketing into the street and the players could watch him dog it around the diamond. But as if by calculation the team Vernon got on won or almost won every time, right down to the last Saturday in August.

An hour before cartoons were over that final morning, some pitch and a round of five-hundred could be seen in progress at the vacant lot. Two boys stood in the shade practicing their swings. Vernon toured the base paths collecting rocks and tossing them into the weeds. Time for the game rolled around and Kenny called the neighborhood together at home plate.

"Let me toss you the bat," said Mussberger, "so we can see who chooses first." He grabbed hold of Kenny's bat,

but Kenny snatched it back.

"Would you just hold on a minute? I got an idea. We're not going to choose," Kenny looked round the circle, stopping when his eyes met Mussberger's. "This is a challenge. To decide who's best for the whole season. I want Evan and Carl and Bugs Brownlee, and we'll take on all the rest of you. You have to supply your own catcher."

"No way. That's not fair. I'm just getting all the bad players."

"Okay, you can have unlimited pinch hitting. How's that?"

"Still not fair. I think you should take both the Sauciers. Since you're such good friends," Mussberger darted a look at the thin pink line on Evan's forehead, then squinted at Kenny. "I'll take Carl on my team."

"Have it your way, Mussberger. We're up first."

The last game of summer began. Kenny had Evan lead off the batting order, then Bugs, then himself. He put Vernon in at clean-up. "We'll show them," he said.

The short-handed team built up an early lead. Kenny instructed Evan and Bugs to hit the ball low and just get on base, and to leave the power hitting to the big sticks. The strategy worked. The first time around, Kenny knocked them both in with a double, then Vernon doubled to score Kenny. Then they loaded the bases and Vernon golfed one across the street.

"All right! A Grand Slam!" laughed Evan. He wagged back and forth in an irritating dance around home plate. Mussberger threw his glove down on the pitcher's mound.

"Whoa!" shouted Kenny. "One Thousand Volts. Can you feel it?"

By the fourth inning, because Mussberger's team got mad and began committing errors and because Carl hit what would have been a sure home run right at Bugs in center field, they were down, 11-3. Then Mussberger hit Bugs with a wild pitch, which got him on base but also made him a sure out from then on. The larger team worked its way back and in the seventh inning tied the score, 18-18.

Bugs struck out to start the eighth. Evan hit a single, then ran to second base on a throwing error. Kenny hit a long pop fly to sacrifice him to third, and with two outs and a chance to take the lead, Vernon came to bat.

He fouled off the first pitch.

"That's right, Vernon," said Mussberger.

The next two pitches came right across the plate, but Vernon let them go by.

"Come on, Vernon," said Mussberger. "Swing. What is this, a tourist attraction?"

Kenny jumped up. "You shut up, Mushmouth."

"Kenny," said Vernon.

"Who's going to make me?"

"Ken--"

"Vernon will. You watch."

Mussberger clutched his glove as if pleading for mercy. Kenny ignored him. Vernon stood peeling a corner of tape from his bat and sticking it back. He hoisted the club to his shoulder and stepped into the batter's box. On the next pitch, Vernon's swing plunged into the dirt and he almost fell down.

"Where's your One Thousand Volts now, Vernon? I think he needs new batteries."

"Time out!" Kenny called. He took Vernon aside.

"What's the matter, man?"

"Nothing. I'm okay."

"You look tired. Maybe you should choke up."

"No, I'm okay. If he'll just get it across the plate."

"You only need a single."

"I know, I'm okay. I'm okay."

Kenny went back to the bench. Mussberger pitched the ball. Vernon dribbled a grounder to the first baseman, who stepped on the bag. Mussberger trotted in from the pitcher's mound.

"Awesome. Truly awesome. That really made me shut up."

"You better," said Kenny.

"I'll let my bat do the talking."

Kenny struck out the first two batters. "All right, guys, let's get this one. The game's in the bag." But an error and a single put two runners on base and brought Mussberger to bat. "All right, Mushmouth, here's your chance. Let's see that big hit."

"You won't even get near it."

Kenny waved the field back. He threw a low curve. Mussberger stepped in front of it and bunted the ball down the first base line. He made it safely to first and one run scored before Vernon could run in and pick the ball up.

"Hey, no bunting!" yelled Kenny.

"I told you you wouldn't get near it."

"Yeah, but no bunting."

"You should have thought of that before the game started."

Kenny slapped his glove against his leg.

"All right, you just watch. You just watch. Give me the ball, Vernon."

Vernon tossed the ball to the pitcher's mound and took his place in right field. Kenny threw three fastballs and struck out the last batter.

The teams switched positions. It was the ninth inning, 19-18. Bugs struck out again, but Evan and Kenny singled and ended up on first and third.

"Come one, Vernon," shouted Evan. "Bring me in."

"Yeah, forget about last inning. You can do it."

Mussberger just smiled and made sure the batter could see it. He wound up and delivered a low slider. Vernon chased it for a strike.

"Strike one, Ver-non."

He pitched again, a fastball, and it was past Vernon before he even got his swing around. Vernon turned in a full circle before he could stop his momentum.

"Choke up, Vernon. And you don't have to kill the ball. Just get on base. Evan will score."

"Yeah, Evan will score," said Bugs.

Evan cupped his hands around his mouth. "Vernon," he called. "Use my bat. It's lighter."

Vernon looked toward third base.

"It's okay, you can use it. You only need a single."

Vernon looked at his brother on third base. Mussberger coughed and spat.

"Strike two, Ver-non."

Vernon turned to face the pitcher's mound and took two steps. Using both hands, he lifted the black club in a steady motion toward center field, like a gangly Babe Ruth. He lowered the bat. He stepped back into the batter's box.

"Vernon--" said Evan.

"There goes the game."

The batter got into his crouch and waited. The pitcher smiled. He went into his wind up. His arm snapped in a sharp overhand, but before he released the ball, a determined motion at the plate had already begun gaining velocity. Vernon summed the One Thousand Volts through a low pendulum swing and slugged the ball with a

concussion that made the other players wince. He ended up on his knees in the dirt.

The two teams followed the ball's flat climbing trajectory as it hurtled beyond the field and the street and onto the house opposite. It bounced twice high on the roof and dropped to the lawn. Then Bugs ran forward, beating Vernon on the back and shoving him up off the ground and toward first base. Evan sprang down the base path toward home, capering in the air every two steps and wailing, "Yuihoo!" The whole field, except Mussberger and two or three players still staring at the white speck on the lawn, went rampant with excitement.

Vernon took his time rounding the bases, watching the path in front of him and every now and then wagging his head. He looked up after he touched third base to see Kenny standing there. Kenny lifted an open palm to try to give his five, but Vernon reached up and grabbed the hand and wrung it. He forgot to stop running and the two collided in a handshake waltz.

Bugs Brownlee laughed. "Did you see that?" he said. "What a klutz."

"Ha ha," said Evan, but pressed his hand over his mouth. He dusted off his knees and picked up his glove and bat.

"Hey, where you going?" said Mussberger. "We still got our turn at bat."

"Yeah," said Bugs. "Aren't we going to finish the game?"

Evan looked at them, not really smiling. He stuffed his glove on the end of the bat.

"But we're in the lead," said Bugs.

Evan lifted the bat to his shoulder. He gave Bugs a look. He kicked a rock. "I know," he said, then turned to look for the One Thousand Volts to carry it home.



On the dew-frosted wings of morning you come flying
With your sweet voice beckoning to me
To leave oblivious sleep behind
And dance among my dreams
Your eyes cast forth a brilliant fire that arcs across the sky
As though the total universe
Burned within your heart
and lay at your command
Your touch is life, a quickening; a resurrecting force
I cannot but forget the past
The new unfolding day, so perfect
Awaits our discovery.

April C. Logan

THE WILD FLOWER KNOWS

A silent field painted by the sun,
and a breeze weaves in through the grass,
as one tiny flower grows wild.

And in the middle of the calm
and the quiet and the still stands
an old, old, very old large oak tree.

quiet there.
in stately elegance.
unbending to the years.

Each bough carries strength that dare not be challenged;
the courage of an old soldier,
who fought too many wars to fear.

It gently whispers to the wind
sharing tales of times long since past,
or drowsilops its eyes for a nap.

gaining wisdom.
Knowing there's far more to learn,
and far more storms to weather,
and far more fruit to bear.

So it simply stands strong,
faithfully holding up the sky,
to praise and glorify its creator.

Confident.
Assured.
it will sustain.

. . . and the wild flower knows—and looks on.

P. Diolordi

PRAYER IN CELEBRATION OF OUR TIME

William Epperson

Forty years ago today Enrico Fermi achieved the first atomic chain reaction. This is the birthday of our new age.

Fermi worked beneath a stadium at the University of Chicago. No one in Chicago noted the birth. The Magi watched and noted, wondering.

Two and a half years later, July 16, 1945, on the desert outside Alamogordo, New Mexico, dawn was anticipated by the flash of the first atomic explosion. J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project, saw this fruition of his work—energy broken from the elements. He quietly repeated the words of Sri Krishna, from the *Bhagavad Gita*, “I am become Death, the Shatterer of worlds. Death Fire. . . .”

* * *

Advent begins.

I await, with all God’s people, the Coming. I seek the star, the light above the dark stable, the light within the stable. The door is rough and low. Bending to enter, I come into the Presence. I know the light by loving the light, and I stand before it.

* * *

The whole secular project of our age, our present making of the world, rests on our seizing desacralized nature and demanding that it serve us. We enslave its powers, making of it an object, separate, and inferior to us.

Moses, declaring God’s holy transcendence, emptied the sacred groves, the haunted streams, expelling the dryads and nereids, cleansing the high places.

And we became Promethean, wresting fire from the old, outraged, and banished gods. We broke the death fire from out the earth. We asserted our wills to know the earth by analyzing and objectifying.

Advent.

After the late autumn frosts, rain lingers for days, fed by winds from the Gulf. The ground is soaked, the sky a heavy grey. I am content indoors. With my friends I watch a mediocre football game—Texas and Arkansas. Our interest wanes as Texas dominates the game. During the half time break, I go out into the front yard. Amazed, I see the surface of the lawn burgeoning with strange crab-like forms, bursting through the matted grass, pushing up on five fleshy points, spreading themselves like starfish around a central marble-like ball. I call my friends out. No one has seen such things before . . . some kind of mushroom, we’re sure.

Later I identify them by my *Mushrooms Of North America*. *Gaestrum Saccatum*. “Spore sac round, smooth, no stalk . . . outer skin ochre-buff to light yellow-brown, splitting starlike at the top and recurving against the base, revealing the nonstalked spore sac which has a dull brown, papery smooth wall . . . .” Their common name, “Earthstar.”

The earth is a wonder, breaking with stars.

Advent. Christ comes as God in flesh. “And He became man.” The very elements are divinized. Matter is sacred again. The holy wraps itself in earth. Fire from heaven is given, graciously, unexpectedly, nearly unnoted, burning out from Bethlehem, turning history on a still point.

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How can I celebrate the birthday of our Promethean fire?

Nearly all my life I have lived with the knowledge that my world could be consumed with fire. As a child, I would turn shameful with hidden fear on seeing a shockingly brilliant sunset. My man’s heart holds a deep longing to retreat within the earth, to shelter in caves, warming myself over the dim light of little fires in shallow pits, casting dim shadows by stone lamps agleam with oil.

The surface of the earth is an exposed, bright skin. I walk upon it with fear, defenseless, naked before the blinding flash of the sun.

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How can I celebrate Advent?

I wait. I pray, in the words of the revised *Book of Common Prayer*, for “this fragile earth, our island home.” Only in this age of moon walking could we see the earth as “island,” How does the quest of Promethean knowledge lead to a new prayer? How does a new way of seeing the earth transmute into Christ’s loving vision? How do I offer the earth as Eucharistic Host for Christ to incarnate?

“And He became man.”

Holy Mother, holding within yourself your God, figure forth for us the holy earth which houses Christ’s Body, the scattered limbs of Him Who will gather all together at His Coming.

The earth is the Lord’s.

Christ of the stable, we have remade Your earth and ourselves in the image of our Promethean quest. Redeem us from the destruction of that fire, that we may blaze with Your fire unto salvation.

You are the light of the world,
a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
Nor do men light a lamp and
put it under a peck-measure, but
on the lampstand; and it gives light
to all who are in the House.
Let your light shine before men
in such a way that they may see
your good works, and glorify your
Father who is in Heaven.

Matt. 5:14-16 NASB

