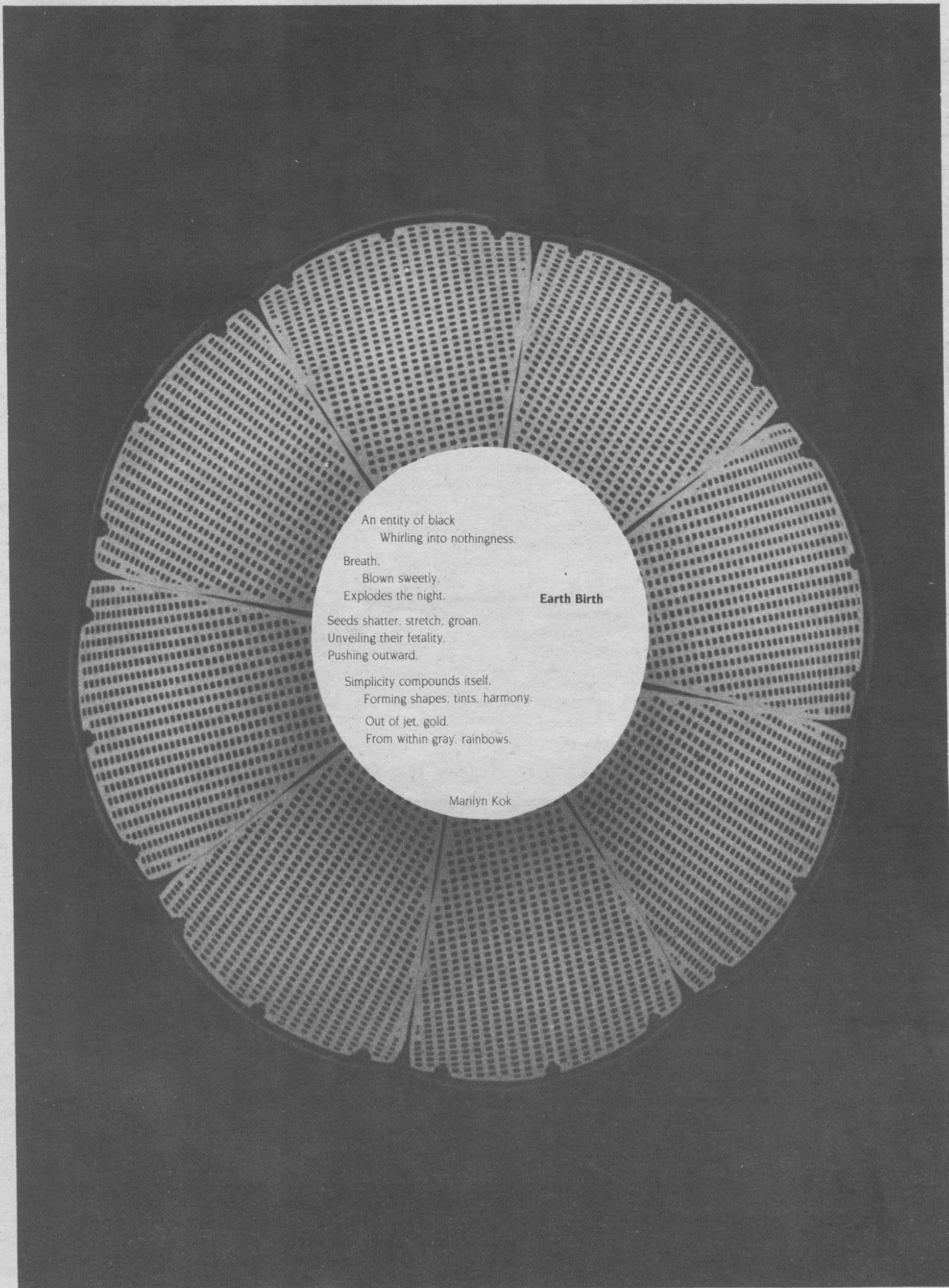

Tableau



Katry Bumgarner

Apples Look Like Hearts

I still remember
Hanging
On that tree...

As a delicate
White blossom
Blown by the breeze
Visited by bees
Rejoicing in the promise
Of life

And I grew

All through the summer
I felt the blush
Of the sun on my skin.
The kiss of rain
And life surging
Within

And I grew

The air became crisp.
I no longer hung
On that tree.
Someone delighted in me.
In my smell of sunshine
In my spring blossom flavor

And I grew

There's a sadness about an apple that's not eaten all the way.

Nancy Brown

Dawn (mine)

On the verge of a sunrise,
when day glimmers brighter.
—It travels—
By minute, by mile, by eternity.
As night sky melts to day,
violet-grey, white-grey...
Hydraulic lift, garbage cans,
The yap of a yearning mutt,
A fleeing jet,
The rattle of rain,
Change the night's silence,
Echoing, echoing,

A groggy thought,
Fall back to a daze.
And feel even less inspired.
As the sun creeps . . . brighter,
My alarming clock prepares to burst,
a despicable moment of unrelentless bother.

Till the moment of conversion,
When eyelids open, eyes focus,
to a world limited by sight.

Waiting to Come Alive

Waiting to come alive
Inside where the knots squeeze black frustration;
Inky madness desiring form.
The urge of creation, big banging
On a small scale.
Life emerging from black space,
A comet basin, a breeding pool,
Existence stringing through the void.
Ideas with no limits.
An artist copies the creation
Pretending at God
Waiting to come alive inside.

Rick Borsten

To Grow

Impatient to grow
Grow like a weed
But weeds should be pulled
Pull away from shore
From shore one sees sky and sea
Sea stars at night
Night and darkness
Darkness isn't bad
We all need darkness
So we can see and understand

The light
Light the way
It is so far to go
But to get there we must begin
Always beginning
Beginning never ends

Nancy Brown

Night/Morning

Lying naked here . . .
Wrapped in sheets,
Of a tartarean womb.

Heart that inflates gentle hills around.
A mind that sleepily dreams upon origins, and

Limitless night —
Till once again
Awakening . . .
Another day unwinds
The passage of my destiny.

The Cave and the Light

How black the night
That holds no light
By which my eyes can see
My stumbling feet
Forget the beat
Of striding symmetry

My fingers grope
With steadfast hope
For some familiar mark
And ears now strain
Intent to gain
Direction in the dark

I hesitate
To stop and wait
For time does not stand still
○ A challenge lies
Where fears arise
A way where there's a will

With thankfulness
I then must bless
The bright return of dawn
Where I can see
With clarity
And freely journey on

Genene



Cristian Miller

Old Midway and Hercules

Old Midway and Hercules were pastured upwind of the house that spring.

"Oh, God," we groaned each morning. "No renters in their right mind would put up with this."

The musty, earthy reek of them permeated everything — and they blithely lolled in it. Battering their heads in mock sex clashes, they would leap up on hind legs tirelessly coming down in bony thwacks resounding all over the hill.

The ocean fog didn't help any, it kept the aroma in close. Indeed the fog seemed its special conveyor until I thought of the fog as musk.

Those two old goats: Midway, huge and brown — named after the grassy drive-in theatre he was loaned out to every summer; Hercules, white-once — his beard and fetlocks yellowed with years and mud. Those two crusted range billys, they thought themselves princes they way they "put on."

I grew to hate going out. Feeding my ducks and chickens became a dreaded chore. The promise of eggs — still warm — or new babies just hatched did not unseat the doom I felt.

I had to walk along the line fence to the coops and pause to open and close several gates on the way. Each pause hung on tenterhooks. I knew the gate would creak and then down the hill those damn billys would come.

They would rear out of the fog (like mythical creatures), snuffing and snorting and grinding. Leaning into the fence — their noses pressed thru the cracks, lips rolled back, they would breathe heavily in and out.

A shudder would set me tingling, each hair on end, as I fumbled at the gate and there the two muscled bucks were, licking & sucking, only three feet away. Mocking me, mocking me: Goats — two coarse, mud matted scruffy goats!

Quickly, I would slip through and hurry to the next gate. I pretended not to see them, shrinking back under the hooded blinder of my raincoat.

Ugh, the pure, thick sex of them! Anything feminine they snorted and groveled after: sucking through their bared, yellow teeth. A mockery of beauty: of the fine and delicate attributes of love. Femininity sluffed through their coarse, distended nostrils.

Noses pressed against unwilling rumps of the does, slurping each drop of urine, of sweat, of come.

Leering, clumsy — what princes these?

Gretchen Notzold

Fall

Leaf smoke grays the fog,
Cloaking the hill top steeple
In a sooted shroud.

Winter

Finely etched wren prints
Track across the frozen pond
Like herringbone lace.

Spring

Chrysalis trembles
Beneath April's brief breathings
Of birth bathing warmth.

Marilyn Kok



My Reflection

It sees me in my best moods
And remembers my worst.

It knows my happiness
And has seen my tears.

It sees me in victory
And knows my defeats.

It looks deep into my heart
And sees both love and hate.

It sees the real me
The me hidden from the world.

I can conceal nothing
from
my
reflection.

Diana Youngblood

Out of the Burrow

Out of the burrow
Popped a furry, frizzled head,
Blinking at the brightness of the day.

Its brow scrunched a furrow.
That emphatically said
In the darkness it would much rather stay.

The light was disturbing,
Shadows danced awry, •
Meadow grasses sparkled in the sun.

The radiance was perturbing,
Brought tears to the eye.
Wonders glowed where once there were none.

"Gulp!", said the creature,
Caution held it back.
Curiosity was nibbling at its toes.

Sun kissed every feature,
The past was wrapt in black.
To risk was the future that it chose.

Marilyn Kok

My Valentine

Hot fire-honey, throbbing
finger-like
pulsing, pumping
Scarlet cob-webs

Blood, blood
my blood
Whispering, seeping
(pomegranite jewels)
Droplets, creeklets of blood

Gretchen Notzold

Desert Camp

There is silence
and then:
The sun moves the night over.

Morning steams muffle a coyote yip
Stars slide down the sky
Cold earth turns warm.

Sun traces the moon,
piled rock
turns pink
turns red
turns gold.

There, yucca tipped, a crow watches
I, too, watch
Shivering from night's sharp teeth.
Daylight prickles my face.

Gretchen Notzold

Cristian Miller

Seek

Seek, he said.

In crystalized rain drops.
Slimey slug trains.
Blue burning stars.
Blood crusted nails.

Search out the faces
Of people in pain.
Fat, giggling babies.
Drunkards in rain.

Look into rainbows.
Fires in the sky.
Blasting atoms.
The wink of an eye.

Listen to laughter.
Earthy and strong.
Silent, smiling.
Loud as a gong.

Hear sounds of sorrow.
Anger and fright.
Starvation, ignorance.
Fear of the night.

No!, they shouted.

We have the answer.
Stop all this fuss.
Scrap all that garbage.
Listen to us!

Enter our tunnel.
Shut out the light.
We know the score.
Our way is right!

Some have been chosen.
Others will fail.
We'll point the finger.
Put them in jail.

We'll put up fences.
Barbed wire and glass.
Lock doors and windows.
Keep off our grass!

We're the appointed.
The ones in the know.
Follow our footsteps.
Come, join our show!

Seek, he sobbed.

Marilyn Kok

"Lovemaking is such a lonely place. It takes two to get there." John Updike.

Why? It is true! The closer I am with someone the more lonely I become.

I will describe! We discover us. Carefully, tenderly we probe; we touch.

We find we both love mustard; we both love words. We learn that as children we suffered from insomnia and would make the same croaking frog-noises to hum ourselves to sleep. We were both shy in school and both loved to dream and loved Greek myths.

Yes, Yes, Yes. We kept discovering affirmation.

Finding things & falling closer.

All this and yet... the terrible lonesomeness.

At night... in his arms... leaf shadows on the night walls. A buffeting storm outside. Drying & warming from shivering rain walk. Melting in soft of bed; safe. Night-shapes in the room muted by dim window light. On the other side of these thin walls wind and rain wrestle. Raging storm is diffused through the walls.

And I... I am alert. My heart aches and is empty. I am restless, shiftminded. Yearning. I am so-o-o lonesome. Bittersweet, a soft pain, I cherish. I feel it. It strains within me.

I stir.

"Hmmm" — he stirs. "What is it?"

"I am so lonesome. I ache here and here and here." I point. "I am so very empty."

"Come m'here" he opens his arms and I sink in.

"I am still lonely." I murmur.

"Yes, yes. I know... I know... I know. We are lonely together."

Gretchen Notzold

The Fish

... We never talked about it again...

It is like that silvery trout we left tangled on the log in the lake that evening. Time after time, we cast out trying to un snag him until all we could see was a silver shimmer at the bottom of the dark lake in the mountain's shadow.

... We'll never know if he lived or died...

Evening's last light
Caught the line
slanted taut...
Caught the two people
with one pole bent...
Caught the silver shimmer
deep in the lake.

They cast out and cast out
to untangle the line
'Til straining day's edge
they were unseeing, deep in the dark.

The pole shivered, snapped slack
They left that trout
snagged on the log
untouched
in the darkness.

He left her at the station
Tipping his Stetson, (he said)
"So long, Kid. So long."

She sat and night
sped by her face.
(In the window)
Something shimmered
untouched
In the darkness.

Gretchen Notzold

There is a Child Within

There is a child within
Screaming for the moment
the break occurred
Chopped off
Snapped on
a tree limb.
Swept up
in a tizzy
Tail-less and free
Blown
All over the sky
Flying
out of sight
over the trees
over the seas
Over the sky
in a last flash
of blue:
Then
Gone.

Mark Borax

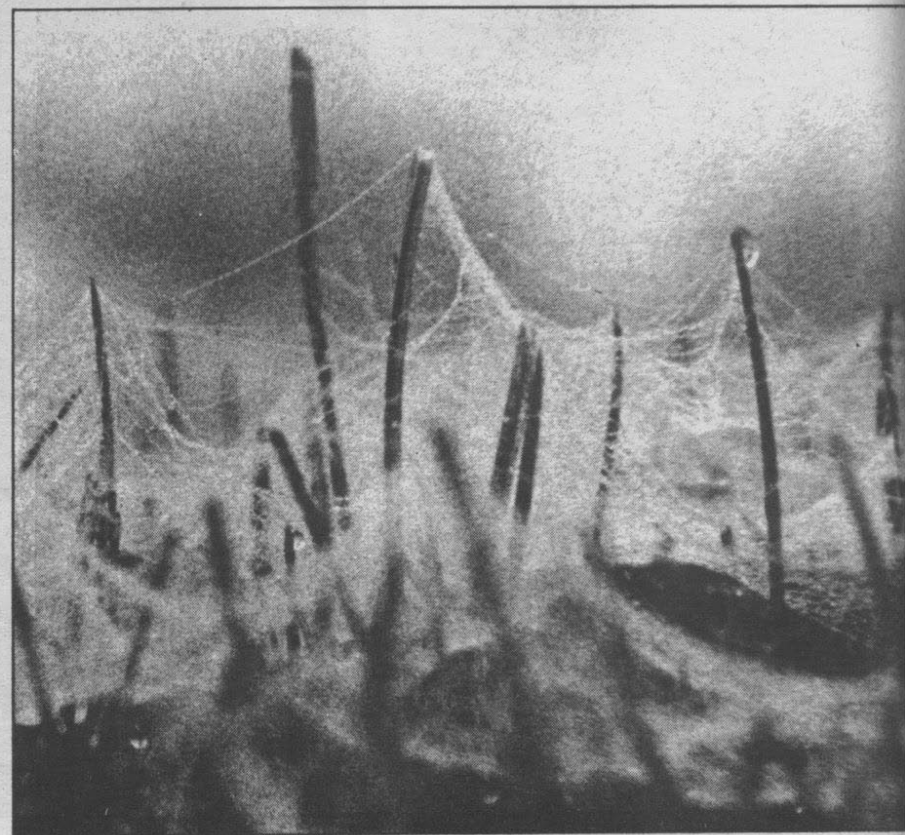
The Rose's Tears

She broke like a fast wine —
on my lips I felt her touch upon the bro

At our disposal, we ripped the dawn in two
we rode upon the stallion of twilight,
prancing in the moisture of the nurse

Oh, she touched me,
and my mind set sail upon the ocean of
In her quiet chambers we held cloister,
and rose's tears were our drink.

Cristian Miller



A Tribute to Joe

How do I see a tree?

There is a huge cedar standing before my house. Here, my kitties loved to scratch last summer:
Shalimar, Owlet and Little Joe.
I remember how Joe stood: tall, muscular and beautiful in his bold stripes, marking the highest on
the bark.

Now, you are fallen low, little friend. Your days to rejoice are numbered.
The terrible thing that has struck you down in the pride of your youth has struck my heart deeply.
As I see you there emaciated and weak, your big eyes loving and trusting, I must bow to the in-
evitable, to the mercy to come, and give you up sadly.
Yes, Little-Joe, you shall sleep beneath a tree, the breezes singing your lullaby.
How lucky I was to have known you, to be loved by you, your deep purr rumbling in your chest,
your big paw patting my cheek.
You are leaving me, I know, but you leave me the memory of the precious times we had together.
Vale and farewell, Little Joe, tender tiger in my home.
Marker of trees.
Marker of my heart.

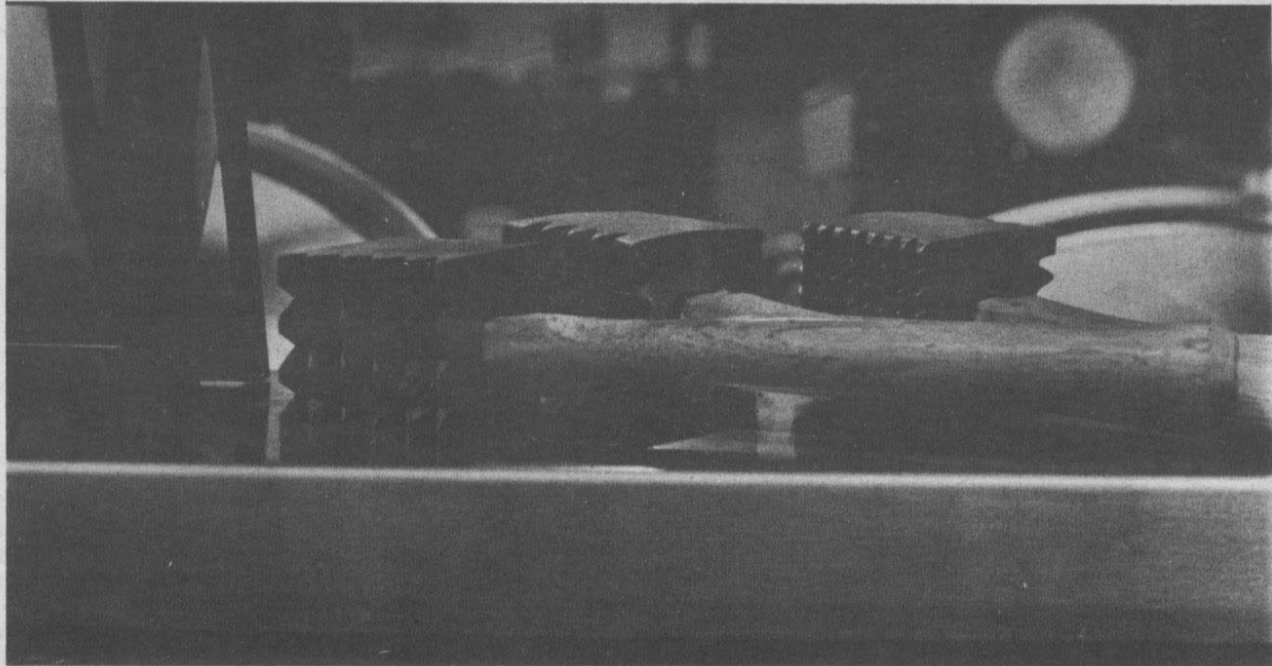
Little Joe died Tuesday.

Betty Westby

Religiously

Inside the hidden gnome sanctuary,
deep in ensnaring forests' dusk...
Gnomes
gnash
green
gnats
between grimy-grey gnome teeth.
And the venerable gnome bellwether,
preaches of a gnome heaven;
From atop a Sunday-stone.

Erstwhile and cornerward,
flippant gnomes of youth assemble.
Toying with gnome ideals,
Inside fragile eggshell minds...
Then
begin
gathering
gnats.



Cristian Miller

A Kiss is What I Need

Bottles stand
like reeds in a row
silent—
but unbending.

A search of labels quickly shows
no words
no comfort
I understand—
only talk
only smoke
rings of dreams—
that have no mass...
little form
and less body!

ah, spirits—
the only mist—
(more like a shroud)
Protection from the cold
lonely search for self.
A self with meaning—
I want to SHOUT
IT OUT...

Every word stands alone:
A kiss upon my existence,
A breeze of a touch
is my need.

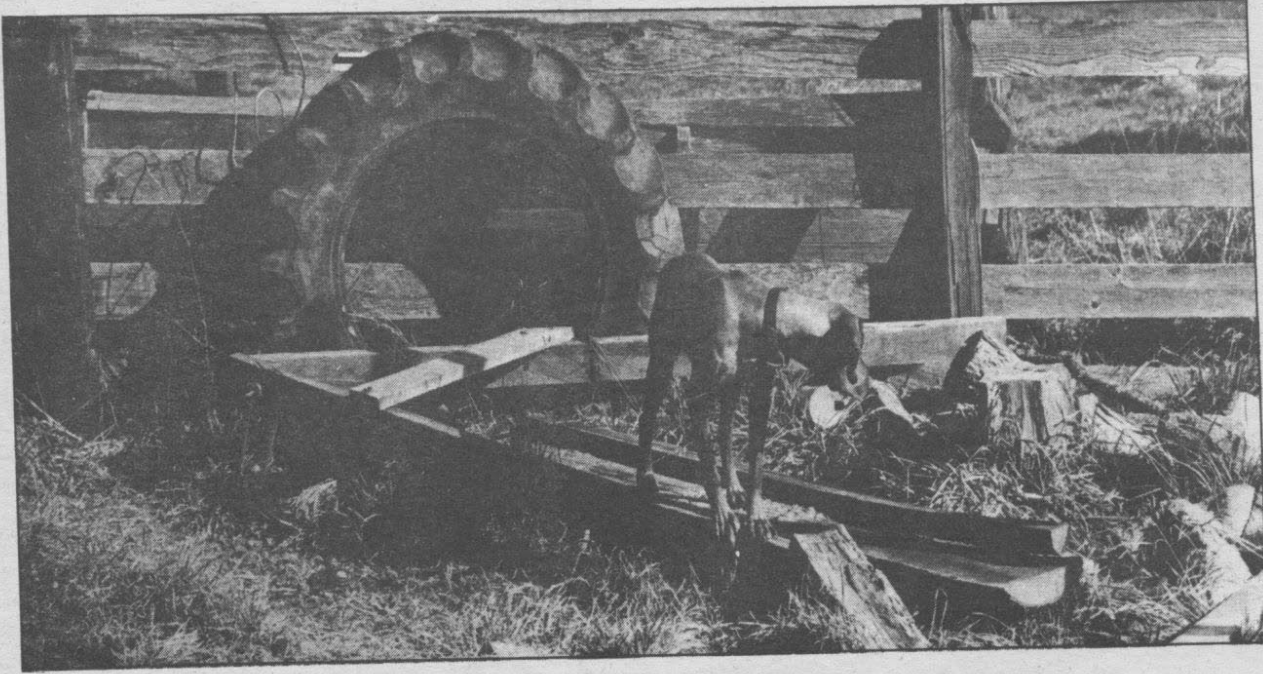
A Blank Page

A blank page:
waiting for someone
to come along, anyone
to write down their dreams
and hopes and fears
to draw their inmost fantasies
to create what was not before
to express their happiness and melancholy.

A blank page:
is like space—
the background for stars
is like silence—
the background for music
all the worlds of time and infinity
lie hidden on the blank page
waiting to come to life.

"What's that daddy?"
"Oh, nothing important, just a
blank page."

Wayne Dobbins



Gretchen Notzold

Rocking

You sit in the window
 Rocking the days
 Alone.
 No longer whistling
 Tunes down the path
 Lonely
 Your bones ache with age
 Your eyes lost in mist
 Tearing
 The business of life
 Placed in a box
 Locked
 Teacher of minds
 Holder of warmth
 Empty
 Singer of songs
 Listener of dreams
 Vacant
 Lost in the present
 Drifting in clouds
 Hazy
 You sit in the window
 Rocking the days
 Waiting

Cat Act

Homer and Iethro went out on the town,
 Bouncing and pouncing the moon.
 Shadows raced along rickety pickets
 Chanting a song out-of-tune.

Furry black notes chorused the night,
 Tilting octaves askew.
 Allegro attacked, Andante rebelled,
 Staccato joined in the hue.

Sprinkles of stardust magicked the two,
 Enchanting the revelous pair.
 Tails flying high, they danced in the sky,
 Till dawn light silenced the air.

Marilyn Kok

Perceptions

My apologies and thanks to e.e. cummings:

Margaret, Cindy and Michael John
 All went out to sit on the lawn.

"Gracious," said Margaret
 I haven't a chair!
 My dress will get stained
 If I contemplate there!"

Michael plopped down
 And emitted a groan,
 As he brushed off his pants
 And kicked a stone.

Cindy breathed deeply,
 Pillowed her head.
 "I smell my childhood,"
 she said.

Marilyn Kok

Whither Thou Goest

In the drama of the Great Emigration,
 men turned their faces to the West
 and their wives followed obediently, but their hearts, like that of Lot's wife,
 looked back to other scenes.

The woodsman's axe rang clear on the darkly wooded hill. Lucy awoke in the wagon, knowing that her fate was sealed to Andy's dream, here on the most distant claim. She covered the child, Mary Emaline, wondering if she would ever see a school, wondering how she could give birth to the coming child, here in the wilderness.

Draping a damp shawl over her frail shoulders, she climbed awkwardly from the Conestoga wagon. A big iron pot hung from a tripod and she stirred last night's cornmeal tiredly. Andy had said last night that he would bring down a deer before night.

The mist still clung here in the hollow and she sighed, deeply. Would Spring ever really come? Did the sun ever shine in this dark land? Her heart turned back with poignant longing to old Virginia; the magnolia would be in blossom around the white Georgian mansion, festooned with yellow cinnamon roses.

It was here at the age of sixteen that she had first seen Andrew Wiley, who was playing the violin for the hunt ball. His tanned face was handsome under the silver hair, though he was only twenty-five. His bright eyes followed the graceful girl in her crown of roses and her white ruffled flock. But he knew that the daughter of the manse was not for him: surveyor, hill-man and fiddler.

She did not accept the barrier between them and rode her quarter-horse toward the mountain trail. She pretended pretty surprise but as they rode along, their resolve grew to meet again.

Her father's wrath drove them to elope (with her mother's help) for when she learned that he was going West to Missouri, she knew she could never let him go alone.

"Whither thou goest, I will go," she said firmly, and though Andy knew she was genteely-reared, he felt he could make her happy.

Now they had followed the emigrant trail, Andy leading two hundred souls to the Willamette Valley, where he had taken the farthest claim on the edge of the great Willamette Forest.

Tears ran down her cheeks; so far from home. Her people would never see her children. She would live out her natural days here between stream and the dark trees and she would rest at last in this strange land, for she had chosen the only way left to a pioneer woman; to follow her man.

She heard a tree creak and fall, the first tree to be made into logs for their cabin. Would it always rain here on Green Mountain?

The sky was brightening, dissolving the mist around her, touching her upturned face. The sky blessed her with unclouded blue. Grey, furry pussy-willows bent over the foaming stream and ivory-white dogwood blossoms spoke to her of a new, alien beauty.

Then rose the lark, small feathered creature, pouring out crystalline, tumbling notes of praise to his creator.

Her heart rose with the bird, knowing that somewhere, on her nest, his small brown mate looked up.

"Yes, Father," she whispered through happy tears. "Here on this land, I know that with your help, we, too, can build our home."

Betty Westby

The Hope Diamond's Curse

Tales of a gem came to the ear
Of a Frenchman named Jean Tavernier.
He found the stone in India
In the idol Rama Sita.
The priests refused to sell the gem
So the Frenchmen overpowered them.
All the priests cursed every fool
Who has possession of the jewel.

Tavernier returned to France
Since this is where he had the chance
To sell his jewels and other ware
To King Louis' jewelry lair.
After the sale, he got his gun
To hunt, relax and have some fun.
Hungry wolves soon smelled him near
And they attacked Jean Tavernier.

The stone became the great galore
Marie Antoinette often wore.
Many French did not agree
With the Aristocracy
They stormed her palace in a rage.
Mostly to loot it at this stage.
She was captured in that scene
Marie Antoinette saw the guillotine.

The Blue was gone for many years
But then in London reappears.
A diamond merchant played the game
of caring not from where it came.
His money scarce he could not cope
And sold it to Sir Thomas Hope.
The diamond's curse held its trend
And suicide was the merchant's end.

Sir Thomas Hope now had the stone
But did not keep it as his own.
He gave it to his lovely wife
She was the woman of his life.
This jewel had brought the family fame
And also took the family name.
The Hopes of course were not immune
Their bank empire went to ruin.

The jewel changed hands for many years
And left each party many tears.
The Hope was sold by a jewelry chain
To Mister Edward B. McLane.
His son soon died in an auto spill,
His daughter from the sleeping pill,
And then poor Edward B. McLane
Lost his mind and went insane.

Harry Winston was a man
Who was a famous jewelry fan.
He bought the stone in '49
And kept it for a length of time.
He didn't ever really say
Why he gave the stone away.
The diamond was his contribution
To the Smithsonian Institution.

Now is Uncle Sam the fool
That has possession of the jewel?
He's had the stone since '58
But has his luck been really great?
His dollar loses more and more
He even lost his longest war.
He ought to make a peace donation
And give it to the Soviet nation.

Ernest Clark

The Fish—a villanelle

The fish that once was live is dead
The fight was over quick as it had begun
Through the ocean, racing, sleek and silver he'd sped

Plying the coast, a charter boat, blue and red
Bobs on the Sea; people fishing for fun
But the fish that once was live is dead

It felt good to be inside your head
Out on the blue waves, salt on your tongue
Through the ocean, racing, sleek and silver he'd sped

On the warm deck all thoughts of fishing finally fled
When: "A Fish! A Fish!" rang out in the air, like a gun
The fish that once was live is dead

Yanked and jerked, fish torn from the sea, boat surged on ahead
Glinting and flashing, he fought the braincrunching stun
Through the ocean, racing, sleek and silver he'd sped

Guts to the gulls, a pool formed, where gutted he now bled
The gulls screamed from the foam, his scales, facets of sun
The fish that once was live is dead
Through the ocean, racing, sleek and silver, he'd sped

Gretchen Notzold

**Full Moon at Blue Pool Hot Springs
(Revisited)**

Floating free, our mind soared high
above the corset of the stars,
In dappled greys and blacks,
our shadows cast similies of love upon the sand.
We cannot stop our hands from touching,
or our hearts from becoming brilliant.
Clear as craters on the Moon,
we reach with the wind, with tongues of gold we lick the sky.

You and I will vanish from here,
only to merge with endless constellations.

You are dripping, wet. You are warm, slick.
Your oils are perfumes upon my tongue,
your juices the emollients in my skin.
You reach inside my torso;
I feel you pulling me, like pockets, inside-out.

Our love is like an explosion;
You return with darkened hair,
to guide me along the city of our fear;
And among the alders soft and clear,
we can have no sundering.

Cristian Miller

Josephine Waiting for Jazmin

Josephine waited for Jazmin,
as Jazmin waited for her.
Each nursing their driven minds saying
"Love takes time."
But, love is blind
to seekers taking no chances,
and finders taking no minds.
So the end of lost beginnings blurs
with Josephine waiting for Jazmin
and Jazmin waiting for her.

Linda Hahn

I Adored You

I adored you with my eyes
but what I saw was a mirage
a playground for fantasy.

The time was right
to engage in a free-for-all
a delusion from the real world
the grand escape.

I adored you with my eyes
but the illusion shattered before me
into fragmented pieces and
it's too late to repair the damage.

Wake up, sweet one, the dream is over
and the course of the new moon has begun.

Sometimes it's easier to follow it alone.

Patricia Thomas



Cristian Miller.

Once

Once I saw perfection:
Small face in innocence
Sleeping at my breast.
I turned my eyes from
Poverty's mucous smeared babes.

Once I heard completeness:
A song extended
Harmony thru my soul.
I muffled screams of
Discordant strife.

Once I felt in oneness:
Enrapt in arms and spirit
With my love.
I closeted the lonely,
Grief-possessed.

Once I inhaled heaven:
Wild abandoned hill.
Blown mustard gold.
I garbage wrapped
The stench of raping war.

Once I was contented:
Sleeping, warm.
Assured that all was well.
I fenced-out angry.
Sharp disturbers of my peace.

Marilyn Kok

Mermaid

A soft florescence radiates from her soft skin.
Arms and hands of pearl sway to the wind music,
while eyes of gold, sparkle at life in the sea.
Her Majesty, The Queen, fears not the shark-men.

The graceful current carries her great chariot
to any destination she desires to voice.
No guard patrols the path of noble Mariate,
for all the creatures love their Queen with open choice.

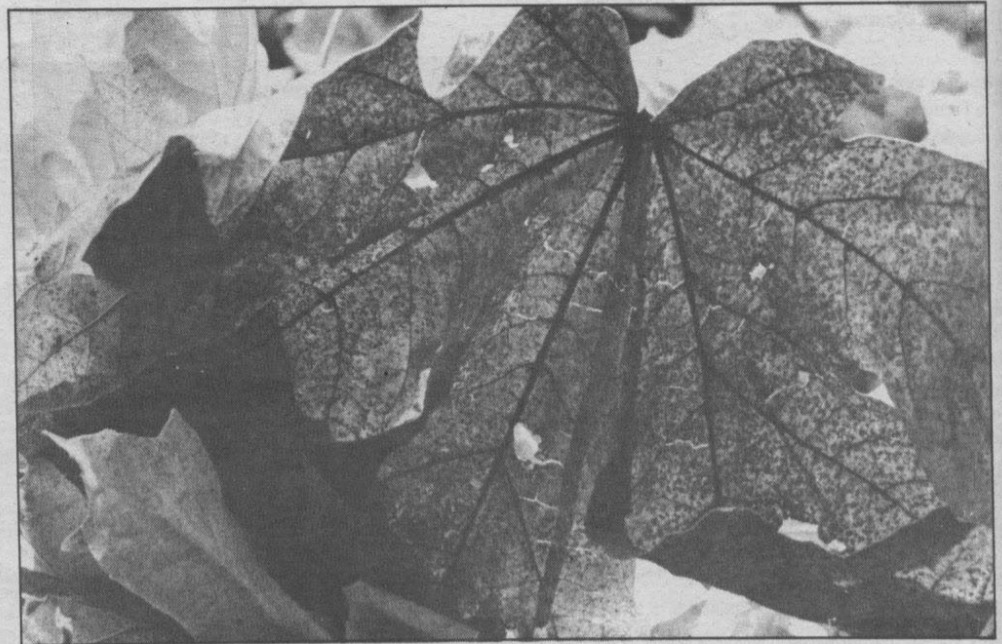
Ted MacDougall

From the journals of Mark Borax

Skin crawling weeks of no writing
or to be sure, not writing anything worthwhile
not even a corny simile,
or drippy metaphor.
Nothing said with energy behind it.
Now I am like a million other people with nothing to say.
So I'll say nothing.
How eloquent can nothing be said?
Irresistable nothing adjectives modify
lead weight nothing nouns subjectifying no-speed
nothing verbs.
How absurd.
Nothing and nothing and...

So much falls short.
When I can't write, what is it that's going on?
It is that my truths fail to be relevant or witty?
Or that my truths are the same but just can't
find the right way to express them?
Or is it nothing more than insecurity
rearing its hallow head in my face,
haunting me, sticking its forked tongue
out between the lines, and laughing behind
my back when I turn and walk away, frustrated.
The pen falls to the floor.
The words stick to the roof of my mouth, salivated
by pasty distaste, and half-swallowed,
dribble off my chin. I am an idiot.
Impressions, suggestions, intimidations, vibrations,
all falling short of what?
Shortcuts to meaning, taking the long way
around a big block of nothing by sneaking
through basement cobwebs of nothing, nothing motives.
Spiders creep away, disgusted at my
frail attempts to be relevant.
What kind of a writer am I, anyway?

Mark Borax



Cristian Miller

A Life Sentence

When I found out that I'd broken my larynx and was fortunate to still be alive though I would probably never again be able to talk, I skipped out of the doctor's office laughing, inside and out, grateful to be able to taste the air, grateful to be able to feel whatever it was I was feeling, which at the moment was ecstasy, but could have been anything else as long as it was something; grateful I wanted to be a writer, not a singer, whose life would have had to begin all over again while he battled a battle which would consume his life, becoming his life, his purpose, (and though, as with Sisyphus, there might be nobility in that purpose, there would likely be little else); grateful that unlike the singer gone mute I could still do exactly what I wanted — that is, write — just as well, perhaps even better, without a voice; and grateful even after I stopped skipping and laughing, and stood back, determined to become good at that which might help me communicate better through the medium that was likely to become my most basic link to the external world, and observed the environment around me, watching people reach out to bridge the emptiness that surrounded them by touching others with the only part of themselves they could easily give, (which I no longer had, to give), finding security in their night bars, where the warm hum of voices enveloped them like a womb, only infrequently dying out, like a buzzing refrigerator that stops suddenly in the dead of the night to reveal the disconcerting stillness it has been covering, until the voices, first one, nervously, then a few more, like the first stones of an avalanche, start back up, inertia taking over, the hum of the bar voices thickening and stabilizing, the nervousness and loneliness forgotten though always lurking, while I continued to watch the animated faces, the dancing eyebrows and shifting eyes, then coping with my loneliness, like the bar people — only in a different way — went home to write, as I tried, like the bar people — only in a different way — to pull meaning from my existence, until I felt a small blue growth starting in my gut, swelling and spilling outward, mind fighting but giving in with little resistance, as I wondered how I would make friends without a voice, or find a job without a voice, or go to graduate school without a voice, and suddenly hated the blindman who said, "If life hands you a lemon, make it into lemonade," realizing that if life hands you a lemon you damned well better crush it into your face, rub it over your body and let it burn your eyes and sting your balls, for if life is all sugar, it's worse than death, and if you refuse to taste all your feelings you become numb to the world, like the suburbanites who substitute soap operas vicariously for their own pain, acting out life according to formula rather than feeling, their lives turning into a set of rules so that every movement becomes a lie to cover up the feelings they run scared from, clinging to whatever island of warmth is offered and pretending it's reality, until the pretensions themselves become reality and the feeling mere distractions to be overcome; as if, in my case, all the pain from the loss of my voice could be permanently eased and deliciously sweetened if only I looked — like a good, sturdy soldier — at all the rest of the glories that living offered, with a smile of courageously numb graciousness painted on my face, rather than going beyond either self-pride or self-pity, which I finally felt I must do, and having so decided, plunged through the already cracking coat of sugar upon which I'd been standing so comfortably since the injury, and down into the real earth, deeper than I'd ever been, wriggling and squirming, from toes to tongue, so that I could find out all that was there; find out what it did to me; find out why I continued to take from its soil rather than quietly lying down in surrender and giving back to it; find out if I could sing ecstatically enough without a voice to make ocean birds of my own creation come alive as they glided through the spray of waves, to make wise old ladies laugh until they wet their drawers, to make Dow Jones throw up its hands of tickertape in non-economic despair, crying human tears that turn into streams of beauty over which stockholders learn to rhapsodically soar, hands stretched toward feeling, and finally, find out if I could live without meaning, allowing life itself to transcend meaning, leaving Sisyphus behind in struggle gallantly, pushing his boulder forever, while I dug my toes deeper and deeper still, tapping a spring of emotion that I always suspected existed, but could never before find, a bottomless well within me from which I could constantly draw fresh vision and feeling, finally unafraid to become what I might, or never become what I might; until one day, my voice returned, and what seemed like the culmination of all my emotion flooded up through me like delicious hot lava, riding the tail of my new voice, while, as I celebrated the roaring, I felt myself already beginning to ambivalently pull back my toes from the spring, anxious to return to the solid, uncracked surface which was once so safe and familiar, but had become so strangely alien while beyond my reach, and reluctant to leave the newly found world that had become so beautifully, sharply alive, finally withdrawing, though not all the way, so that I am somehow different now, less afraid to laugh, less afraid to cry and less afraid to sing.

Rick Borsten