

THE FIRST



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Volume II Issue 2

THIRST

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Editors' Note

Thirst has always dedicated itself to publishing *the best* literature and art produced by undergraduates at the University of Pittsburgh. And in many ways, it has done that extremely well in its two years of existence. However, the appearance and atmosphere of the magazine has always seemed much like that of a “zine” thrown together by a few college kids fiddling with computers. So now *Thirst* is evolving and expanding, and its new incarnation is *Three Rivers Review*.

In the long run, ideally, *Three Rivers Review* will grow into a publication with nationwide reach. We would like it to be a legitimate and respectable forum for undergraduate literary publication, one dedicated to the notion that undergraduate writers are creating art that is moving, inspirational, and worthy of attention even if it is not yet publishable in the professional world. Good fiction, poetry, and prose should not end up in a folder at the end of the semester, for that defeats the purpose of writing altogether. Instead, undergraduates need a voice that goes not only beyond the classroom setting, but also beyond campus borders. And the need for this sort of publication outlet is burning everywhere; I get chills whenever I think of the prospect of a biannual publication printing the best undergraduate literature from across the country.

One can't leap too many hurdles at once, though, so we have begun the expansion process this semester by moving from the University of Pittsburgh to Pittsburgh. We are accepting submissions of prose and poetry from undergraduates at any Pittsburgh-area colleges. We are also altering the magazine format, making it more uniform and “professional” while ceasing to publish photography and artwork in order to concentrate our energy (and our budget) more efficiently. The *Three Rivers Review* will also include a featured writer section as well as interviews and occasional essays discussing the world of language, writers' lives, or the place of literature in modern life.

This, then, is last issue of *Thirst*. Our new editorial board and enlarged staff is readying the first issue of *Three Rivers Review* for distribution in early January. Submissions to *Three Rivers Review* should be accompanied by a self-addressed and stamped envelope and sent to 3500 Cathedral of Learning; Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

—The Editors,

Three Rivers Review

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EVAN DEAN

picnic on the pretense of a palm-read

i cram your grapes the color of bruised marrow
between my cheeks, nearly biting
my finger off at the last knuckle.
i drink the sweetgum you pressed
out of willow-bark and mixed with water
in the ravine over the hill.
i can taste your lips saliva
like kiwi-lemon on this glimmering rim.
do you notice how i lean close, licking my lips?
you wrap my walnut ringlets around your
smooth, bony fingers that sometimes
brush against my stubble-soft cheek.
i lay in wait for your quiet enunciation of fate.
i lay shoulder blades digging into the sheet
of dry, crackling mauve tree-petals
as you twirl a ripped crimson oak leaf
like a mystic with a wand. you drop
it into my lap and smile, then button
my collar and laugh as i choke on a grape.
your fingers are tender on my neck.
your teeth shimmer as you smile and unbutton me.
i open my palm for you to read.
you trace the scar writhing like a tree in a whirlpool
and say: "your fate is obvious. you will
always fear female dogs.
so you will always stay close to me."
i suck the marrow out of your grape
and watch a mauve oak leaf rise in the air.
your lips are soft and taste like sweetgum.

ASHLEY DODSON

Poised on a petal
with folded wings.
Delving for nectar.
Vulnerable.

I thought to pin those wings together
with yellow and orange powder coating thumb and fingers.

Encase you in glass and screw the jar shut.

But, starving, you'd beat
your wings against
the glass

till yellow tatters
and my fingerprints

were all you had to show for flying.

I know: I've spent time with net in hand.

And I've gasped inside a jar,
mended shreds of wings.

One fluttering moment

I had you

but I watched

as your wings opened,

thumbing a ride from the wind.

THIRST

ERIK W. JOHNSON

Passionate Winter Days

The wind heaved October under the door.
The nervous trees on the hill stood speechless,
Knowing old man Winter was a comin';
his frosty scream could rape a mountain clean.

I used to stand as straight as a statue
glaring out Grandma's picture window;
at the caustic woods with its rusty trees.
Come November, there was nothing.

Sometimes I would push my cheek against
the cold thick glass,
and stick the tip of my tongue out
just to taste the weather.
My foggy breath caressed
the window while I fixed my eyes beyond.

Through the haze of frostbitten dew;
Scenes from my Grandma's backyard and such.
Trees black and violated, the ground was quiet,
kept a secret by winter's straight jacket.
The groundhog's a prophet no doubt,
And when February rolled around with its
high hopes of finally washing the salt from the roads.
His cold black other was a scourge to many, indeed.

MAUREEN MCGUIGAN

For Sara

I am sitting in my tiny apartment
nestled inconspicuously in Pittsburgh
You know, the same, my brother's Levi's
ripped sweater orange spice tea
with a dash of melancholy
rowing practice and French poetry
The winter framed in the window
like a dolor painting.
You are in New York
perhaps smoking and laughing
rehearsing Chekov
tapping your long red fingernails.
Or are you staring at the winter too?
I am rereading Faulkner's
A Rose for Miss Emily your favorite
from eleventh grade English class.
The one the others didn't understand.
Only we truly understood,
Miss Emily's fragile illusions
cried over them once
in a baseball field East Scranton midnight
drunk on spring and Yukon Jack
stolen from your parent's liqueur cabinet.
Our friendship sprung from a common
existential view of life.
Vladimir and Estragon dancing in emptiness.
Days and Weeks and Years Waiting,
until it happened.
We grew up. We left. We changed.
I no longer secretly envy cheerleaders,
while clinging to a tattered
book of Sexton poems.
You now like children and Disney movies.
and have learned to question Sartre.
Still, at the center of our characters
lives an adolescent friendship,

THIRST

It rages like a bonfire in snow.
A perpetual act of two mavericks dancing,
down high school halls and baseball fields.
For what is life
but the grasping of another's hand.

SAMUEL BATES WILLIAMSON

Watching the Flint Spark

I

Wakefulness runs the edges of existence,
waiting to break the plane
of unacknowledged panic
that settles over our lives.
And the first deep breath,
the first heart beat.
Tonight it was a sentence,
words formed and dissolved
and carried away
as particles in time . . .
on the television, even,
a sentence about youth and war,
it matters not.
But what followed
as my head finally
set off the trip wire
to my senses
and wakefulness came on,
was at first a burst of nostalgia
and then a deep sorrow
and then the dark dining room,
the weight of each cell
gently lifted, one at a time,
into the air
and reassembled before me
in the image of a boy
staring into the fire,
alternating wishes between love
and world peace,
scolding me in advance
for my complacency.

Coming home, it is impossible to miss
the shadows in one's head,
the reflections repeated
of one movement

THIRST

one arrangement of characters
one texture of light
sliding along the side
of the soft cheek of the past.
One sees--it's unavoidable--
but whether the senses awaken,
whether a hand is extended
to the boy and the fire,
or whether enough egg-nog
will close the gap in time bridged
and illumined in hospital starkness
by the coming home
is a matter of courage and stupidity
shaken until the colloid forms a compound
to awaken the senses.

The boy twirls his hat by the fire,
laughs at my nostalgia,
shudders at my growing gor-tex outer lining.
The look he gives me
from my own mind
to my own eyes,
from whom I have been
to where I am going,
lingers still,
quivering,
a beckoning to motion.

II

You landed at the podium, Yevgeny,
with your flying magic poems,
and the gentle library applause
could not contain you,
could not find the spirit
of your earthquake/tidal-pool voice
or apprehend the immensity of your words,
dense electric Russian words
which I could not translate,
but, oh, what a translation it was:
lifted high above the musty stacks
to carve their way between molecules
and search out the populace;

carried away by the tremors of air,
through the tension in the rain
between what needs to be said
and what actually squeezes its way
through the tracheas of a generation;
flying with silver wings, slicing
the night along its seam
to expose the stars;
lifted onto the rocky backs of clouds
to be rained all over the world
among those who praise flags
as well as those who burn them,
those who raise and lower them
and those who die screaming beneath them
with the cries of patriotism
and the cries of rebellion
on their tongues . . .
and the lone trumpeter, too,
playing the dirge
at sunset
into empty sea air.

*Even so,
do you think that
among Sarajevo's crumbled streets,
her hollow buildings,
she heard you?
heard your tremulous pleas?
your voice shaking its fists
in its incantations,
begging her gasp a gentle word
from tired, tear-ridden alley-ways
or unphotographed children
bleeding evidence from broken cheekbones?
How many of us
heard the ten thousand voices
gathered at the Tuzla airport
with their heads buried in tears?*

*Many light-years away,
satellites compile disks
of time-lapse images of the earth*

THIRST

*so scientists can capture
her breathing;
for generations, the study
has gone on,
but there is still no recorded movement--
only a gradual reddening of the atmosphere
and an occasional upswelling
of words in the clouds.*

And I know that at book-signings like these
it is so easy to forget the book-burnings,
so please stand on the podium
when you cry out
for the executioner
to be driven to extinction.
Along the shores of the Monongahela,
I saw the poems taking flight,
spreading their white day-time wings
against the rust of the steel city.
I saw them leaving your mouth,
jumping out of the tower
to dance down Forbes Avenue
in step with the people
who recite poetry with their lives,
moving to meet Whitman
who, still uttering "the word En-Masse,"
rises to meet you
in the 21st Century . . .

III

It is Thanksgiving,
and for the first time in two years,
I didn't go to the Soup Kitchen this morning:
sleep got the better of me.
It is only Thanksgiving,
so this is not a resolution,
but my senses have finally overtaken me
and the atoms hovering
in the shape of a boy
with young blonde hair,
young blue eyes,
and a defensive cultural shame

rushes into the present
with a reminder of hope
draped around his neck,
a scarlet banner not yet scarred:
not a blemish since it was birthed
like day in the Rocky Mountains
amid love-making and splendor.
Of the thousand thousand shadows
seeping from my head into the corners
of these rooms this compact homecoming,
it is his, standing with his youthful pride,
indignant until the dialogue
evolves from vengeance
to the level
of a frozen pine needle
teetering on a branch
one sharp December sunrise,
sleek and crystalline and militant
after the frost.
When the original mold is lost
and no one remembers
how to make war anymore,
he may then sit down.

WINNERS
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH POETRY CONTEST
COMMEMORATING THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE INTERNATIONAL POETRY FORUM

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FIRST PLACE:

MEG BUZZI

IZMEYNA (AN ECOLOGUE)

SECOND PLACE:

ANN C. GORDON

DUET

THIRD PLACE:

KIM MITCHELL

SMALL TOWN EMANCIPATIONS

THIRST

MEG BUZZI

Izmeyna-(Russian) betrayal stemming from inevitable change

IZMEYNA (AN ECOLOGUE)

I skipped your viewing.
(it would have haunted me)
I'm superstitious
but each day I work a few minutes
trying to retrieve, reconstruct
the exact circumstances
of that moment when
your life became clear to me,

daddy.

*

When I found the pink envelopes in your glove compartment, the smooth, light-colored, perfect square ones; I thought maybe they were early valentines. I thought maybe they were hidden in the very back underneath all of the roadmaps and gas receipts and paper napkins and old ketchups and repair manuals because you thought mom or I would never look there for a gift. And I didn't mean to open them, exactly. I couldn't figure out the handwriting—it wasn't mom's or grandma's. I was waiting for you in the car for so long. It was cold outside and you hadn't left the keys so I could turn on the heat. It had been almost twenty minutes, and I was bored. I had nothing else to do except read them. I had nothing else to do.

*

Binky remembers that
time when she said to me and you, "This world
is changing for the worse: everyone
is smoking dope, everyone
loves Jesus too much."

and you said, "None of that used to matter."

*

I have had so many problems with your story:

- 1.) My stay lasted two weeks, and the weather was bad.
- 2.) I had a tinge of the flu the week
I was supposed to hear the story.
- 3.) I wasn't exactly paying attention when you told me
the whole story.
- 4.) I can't help overanalyzing.
- 5.) I was purposefully skipping things while you were
dictating.
- 6.) Visitors hours were cancelled that day—
They wouldn't let me in.
- 7.) I wasn't there. I missed crucial moments.
- 8.) I've forgotten your baptismal name.
- 9.) I was the last one to see you alive (except for the nurse.)
- 10.) I can't tell her story, either.

*

the moment
we speak we
lose all of it
-the control
over each of
the words we
let go let
escape from
our mouths

*

Without any formal

THIRST

declaration, and some
-times, after you have
been away— our room
is loud and messy and
you become one man
I've sat with. My body
begins to shrink, the
moment I speak, and I
climb upwards trying
in some vain effort to
place, to reconstruct
every crucial moment:
we were reaching in-
but I'd found all these
new stories instead of
what we'd had before.
With this we are still
and full.

ANN C. GORDON

Duet

for Estelle Hartraft

always she moves
back and forth in florals
the seam of skirt polishing
a bulbed hip of piano.
I practice measures of canons
slow and broken.
her arms bend at the elbows
tread the surface of air,
a fluid line over off-chords.
when she leans for the cello
my steady wrists droop,
watch the eyes close
in the urgent birth of Verdi
between her thighs,
rising like moths from wood.

when bow touches string
I am alone in this room
and she is a mad Gypsy,
the stretch of her neck
reaching a Moscow cathedral,
the gorgeous sob of wrist
falling on tall okra,
rainy season in south Africa.
I play refrain and stop,
she is already gone,
bow a slippery gill
over slight wire ribs,
burning woman and wings
over water, other countries.

THIRST

KIM MITCHELL

Small Town Emancipaitons

In memory of Joelene Bowers (1975-1996)

1

Weekday mornings,
Six fifty-seven on the dot
The miners drove by,
Slow procession of lifted pick-ups,
Engines revving me awake
As I squirmed beneath a thick
Sheet of muggy sunrise.
I strained to hear each one
Slow and pull into the crunching gravel
Of the Robena Mine Shaft
Half a mile away.
When the engines died,
Silence ate at my mind
Like fish nibbles on
Decaying toes and fingertips.
I'd pad to the kitchen where
Skillet-size pancakes
choked and sputtered
In lard. Lunch-time,
The men gathered steel-gray pails
(Chipped ham and mayo, tastycake,
A thermos of warm Maxwell House) and
Swaggered to the grassy bank
Outside the mine.
The sty and slaughterhouse
Of cousin Jimmy's farm framed the scene.
Hovering flies sang eulogy
For noon-time services.
My grandfather always got
The first pound of fresh sausage,
Fried it up with eggs for supper.
I'd go to bed empty and innocence
Flourished white

Between pangs of hunger and temptation.

2

Weekends,
Me 'n Amy 'n Annie
Squeezed through the cyclone fence,
Dropped down into the mine
Like three Alices down a rabbit-hole.
We'd dare each other closer to the shaft
That reached down six hundred feet
To watery hell.
Piles of mildewy Hustler's chanted 'read me'
And we'd giggle at the pictures.
Walking home, we'd go slow,
Gorging on wild blackberries
Till lips and fingers
Grew as tell-tale purple
As seeds sown in soft white consciousness.
Hot summer nights
We'd grab flashlights and buckets,
Take the rowboat out froggin'.
Blowers at the mine would kick in
Quarter to twelve,
Quick and sharp as a blow in the dark,
We'd jerk in shock,
The boat swaying a wild threat
To emancipate us into lulling grey waves.
Annie would whack them
Square on their soft green heads
Swinging chunks of rock like
Sledgehammers at the county fair,
Fry up their spotted legs—
Not 'cause she liked them,
But in

3

Deliverance.
Last week, a boy took his girl,
a bottle of Jack, and a thirst
For revenge down to the shaft.
Blonde curls a-tumbling,
Another Alice went down, down

THIRST

But this one won't be coming up.
Frogs and pigs
Swim in her arms in my dreams
She stares me down and soundlessly
Whispers "help me . . ."
As the purple buds blossom.

THIRST

TERRY CHIUSANO

(poetry:

as in unraveling a taut dream

(dream's construction

seamless in dreaming

as a rill of veins

bled out

into white-desert marble

where is the edge

the end

where the vein ceases to be itself

becoming sharp again the substrate-

frozen snow of stone

(the gnawing whisper

voice of the nodding hush of gray rain

incessant paw of oceansides

shadowgashes

strung across a city in midafternoon

the bob of walking human heads

starlike reflections

of windowpanes

spattered on sidewalks and streetcorners

backalley walls

they will answer;

everywhere

edge an imposition

we hammer into our conception of marble

in order to remain sane

to move

to repeat to ourselves

as a prayer:

"there is a place

where a thing ends

and another begins

there are junctures

there are seams"

the dream's communication outside and beside itself

spark needed to vault

and carry it between people

finally demanding of the narrator:
“and then somehow . . .”

the conjunction
~~defining~~
~~enveloping~~
all poetry
we are awake only in this act
 (the communication of this life:
 our common dream
the harder we push
to connect rooms
which in dreaming bear no division
 (the finer tuned this instrument
 any device
 designed expressly to see
 what is by nature out of eyeshot
 (these words
 the two ton molten mirror
 polished insanely smooth
 of some great telescope
 the least bump
 mapped onto the earth
 not exceeding 100 feet
 the more we see
 the further: yes

but the more distorted
the more:
‘and then somehows’ snarled together
this is the pale feces of our understanding
we are forcing it through the anus of our minds

the more wakeful we are
the less and less doors
pass between these rooms
words
a half-rate magician’s trick
 (made of smoke
 and mirrors
 and lighting
serving up for our digestion

THIRST

pale imitations
the real doors
ultimately eluding
even the foxtrickery of poetry
no true divisions inhere

words
 (our wakefulness
erected divisions
representing to us
 (the word enfleshed
what must seem like doors
words
chiseling out spaces
we fill with
words
which is a waking of a kind
and a falling deeper into a trance
 (the hand of the magician
 driven
 either to stillness
 or obsessive deftness
we stand everywhere
because:
 (
 (
 (nowhere

KAREN L. D'AMICO

coloring
(after separation)

The room was cluttered
polished table candle ashtray crystal glass framing
jesus picture beige rug
I kept my gaze intent.
My crayons clutched in plastic ziploc in my fist

I fell to draw
found my book
turning through
found my page

geese ducks doves
waiting waiting
I suppose for color.

Mother, you were sudden there.
You stood
then silent
bent down folding your clothes
silent beneath you
pale gray—
some gazelle, or swan of sorts.

We chose together
I blue
you red.
I watched, transfixed.
Your careful outline, tracing,
as if the page were white.
I could never work like that.

And where were the others?
Napping? Playing
being quiet? But

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I made for the matter at hand.
My duck lie waiting.
We colored for maybe an hour
We stopped to breathe
breathed the smell of waxy purple shavings

And then you were shading
furious red perfection
the crayon was alive
it picked up speed across the page

All I could see were your fingers
long and smooth
nails clipped tight.
Glancing down I saw

my duck was dark
the blues a violet azure
everywhere

Your fingers
indented at the points,
stained a crusted brilliant red
where the crayon once lay

KAREN L. D'AMICO

Father

my father went to vietnam
I learned to wear his war like a badge

I read his book of poems
and wondered at the title
“The Madman Runs Constant”
—pretended to understand
as if anyone ever did.

I hold my tongue
check my pity at the door

Mother informed me when I was small
that your father doesn't talk about it
so neither do I

I learned to hate Jane Fonda
but I can't remember why

I watched *Platoon*
and listened to Sheen drone
in the voice of a boy like my dad
I glanced at him quick to gage
his reaction

but he was busy
playing with the dog