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Spring 1977

CORADDI

Spring 1977

the university of north carolina at greensboro

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Coraddi is the fine arts magazine of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

"Admission to, employment by, and promotion in the University of North Carolina and all of its constituent institutions shall be on the basis of merit, and there shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, sex, or national origin."

Submissions are now being accepted for the next issue of *Coraddi*. Students of UNC-G and members of the Greensboro community wishing to join the staff should drop by the *Coraddi* offices, Room 205 Elliott Hall UNC-G. Undergraduates not interested in working for the magazine but wishing to meet and talk with other writers may contact the Undergraduate Writers Meeting through the *Coraddi* office.

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Editor's Note: All material within the Black Arts Festival Section of this issue of Coraddi were chosen by the NeoBlack Society. Coraddi was glad to provide a place for their artistic expression and we encourage all students to submit.

As an extension of the Black Arts Festival, the NeoBlack Society in conjunction with the *Coraddi* Staff decided to publish a special collection of the poetic works of Black students. Our hope is that through the words of these individuals one will receive a more unique awareness and appreciation of our culture.

We wish to express sincere gratitude to Cynthia Crenshaw, Gary Lilley, Angie Jones, Wane McNair, Sherry Meachum, Sammy Parsons, and other individuals who devoted themselves to making this expression of art possible. We wish to thank Clarence Moore for his support of our endeavors. To Debbie Troutman and the *Coraddi* Staff, we give you a very special thanks for all your support, encouragement and guidance in making this publication a success.

Sincerely,
Michelle L. Linster



Black Arts Festival 1977

The Sexes

All your men wear English leather
or they wear nothing at all

As the World Turns the Young and the Restless
Search for Tomorrow by the Guiding Light
the things you know about love and life
you owe to CBS, ABC, or NBC, the networks
and what is the net result — shallowness.

You are so shallow, looking into your soul
is like looking into a drained pool, blue-green emptiness
what of the battle of the sexes
we read of women's lib, and changing women's roles,
but prime time never stops sending the messages
that have plagued us all since the fall from the garden

Everyone knows how a man treats a woman
but can you tell me why he treats her that way.

No, I won't neglect the other side
You don't know satisfaction
always looking for a piece of action
you expect her to be a cover girl
a Noxzema beauty, her attractions store bought
and her conversation and movements TV taught
veiled sentiments, hooded eyes, shadowed smiles
you're as real as the Six Million Dollar Man
what's the end result — you're mechanical also.

Mornings

Must I be getting old
seems romance
no longer pleases me
it only frightens me
nightly, when we love
for while we love—
exploring
relishly caressing
one another's anatomy,
our souls project
further onto infinity
fading with
the dust of dawn,
listening as birds
serenade enchantment
into our ears—
then to want your touch
in need of your love
i loom for love,
an ecstasy we knew,
a love we'd have
if only you were near.

—F. W. Smith

Lady Sweet,

*Sweet as a glass of
Chocolate milk*

*Skin so well threaded
with ole black strings of silk*

*Lady — sweet black lady
Sweet are you*

*But of course Lady
I always knew
So do you.*

—S. K. F.

I Believe

If feelings of joy and happiness are most desired by man, why is it that I, a human being, constantly torture myself with thoughts of past sadnesses and tears? It is that I believe in the past and present pain that adheres to creating that which I am. For it is truth, it is the non-hesitance of unpeeling my petals that creates within me a sense of freedom and true being. A man does not really come to appreciate the heals of life until he experiences the wounds. I can speak for no one but myself, therefore, I relate to no experience but my own.

*In attempt to be the best that I can be
My roots emerge and feign anxiety
Yet times that seemed so hard and full of woe
Make clear the lessened steps I have to go
For no one soul stays heaved with darkened strife
The sad makes silent, succumbs to sparkled life.*

One's journey through life must begin from one side of a rainbow to the other. A rainbow that is filled with raindrops together with sunshine. The appearance of the rain and sun interchanges and it is this interchange that forms the true individual.

Yes . . . I believe in pain because it has created that which I am. And that which I am . . . is me.

—Anna Renee Greene

Southern News "1977"

No more pork for me sir.
Yes—I'm gittin' tired
Of them grits too—
Along with those other
High blood-pressure chops
Spiced in gravy sops
Which you've giv'n me
Over these past—Two Hundred Years.

More steaks please sir—
Indeed that Caviar there
Looks fine. Just the way
It is—just the way
It should be.

Come on. Dammit with my
Education. I'm gittin' tired
Waiting for you.
Because you finally want
To change history—
And confess the truth.
But that's the way
It should be—sir.
Since cowboys were wrong
While Indians?

For these days—I'm too
Busy. Listening to Neeme Yarvi
Conduct the Leningrad Symphony
As you stand in dismay—asking
Who's Andrew Young? Then
Bob Dylan informs me! About
Those innocent niggers
Shot in southern towns—
Where white folks
Pulled their triggers
In the corner of dark alleys.

Yes—I am BLACK. But not
As militant as my brother
Was ten years ago before
They shot him to death.

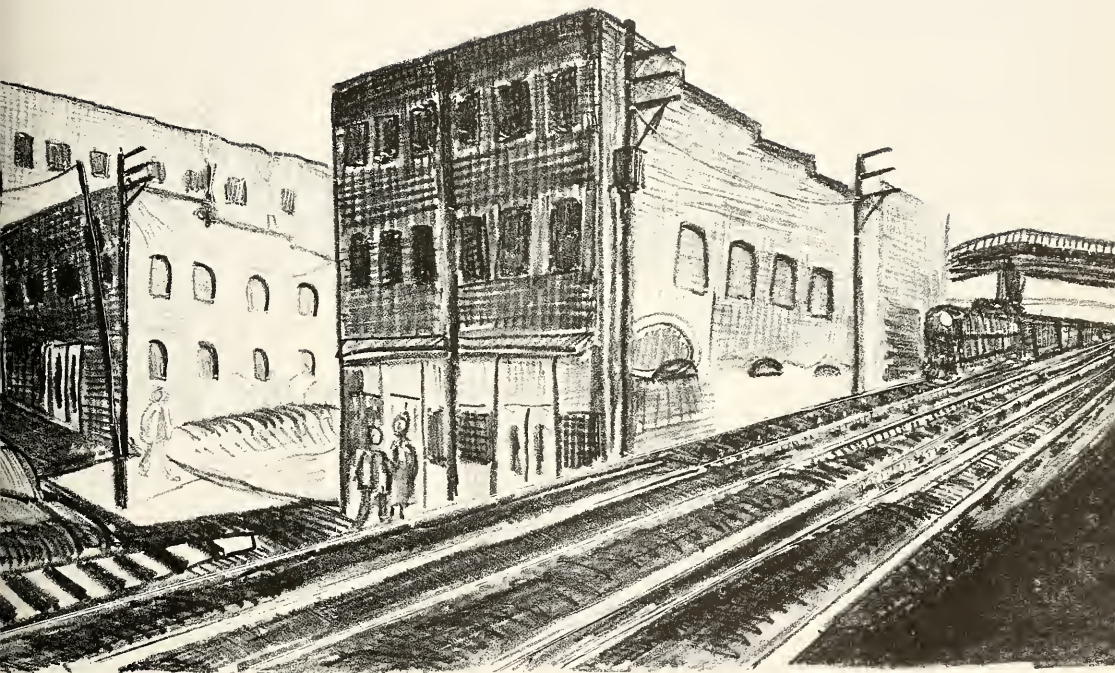
They excuse your wisdom—I
Try too. But I realize
Tomorrow it will
Still be the same.

For you smile at me
With your Davidson diploma
As you leave the restroom
In private conversation.
And I smile back. Because
My boss you are. Even though
I can't excuse your statement—
That you knew—she was
Living with a coloured man.

And I didn't know
Who she was. Nor
do I really care.

But the poor child
Won't be at work
Tomorrow Nor
Thereafter—
Since she's been
Fired by her
Equal opportunity employer.

—F. W. Smith



Take Me There

I want you to take me to that place where the air is clean
and always clear.

Where the sweet sunshine is always near

Where crystals of sugar run in rivers that flow
Where happiness is the only crop that grows

Where broken hearts are mended just like new
Where the sky above is the only thing that's blue

Where wearing a smile comes easier than wearing a frown
Where looking ahead is the thing to do instead of looking down

Where you're molded into a winner, proud, and free
Where such things as losers could never be.

You hold the key to unlock yours
Just think of all the open doors

To these never before traveled roads of chance.
Listen to the music, it's our time to dance.

There's no miracle that love can't create
And now that love has captured us why try to escape?

So take my hand and let's go to that land which is a work of
our own art
A place that we already have right inside our own hearts.

—Diane Witherspoon

Masquerade...

Hide yourself behind your thoughts.

Give only to me what seems

easy to explain

easy to believe

Give to me this.

Fool me with your false lies that
stem from your love for me

That somehow became
tangled and twisted

When you were debating in your heart

Whether or not to love

and when

and to whom

and how and why and

Give to me

Give to me...

Your love.

The only true part of yourself that
Seems special and genuine, unrehearsed
And lies secretly hidden behind your
Masquerade.

This love expresses a part of yourself.

A part that is afraid to be

touched, to be hurt, to be held,

to be kissed...

Give to me this.

—Emma Adams

Night guards settle back
Waiting for shift change
Wives' soft thighs and kissing
Their kids off to school.

A white-haired trustie,
Face furrowed by minutes
Stretching into days into years
Of forced smiles
At warden's jokes about how
He screws his wife
When she wants it,
Sings out his frayed
Good morning.

Day guard tallies
A measure of the strength
Of the bars.
The voice
Of his spit shine boots
Rings off the walls
Pulling thoughts from afar
Like a glimpse
At the knife scar
That crosses the face
Of the prison preacher.

Coffee in the kitchen
Floats through the block
Shaking long-timers
Into cold water showers.
Spry young cons
Rush to morning chow talking
About swaps of fatback for toast.

—Gary D. Lilley

Black Poem

When I sat in back
Of Miss Ninth-grade Teacher's
Suppose to be remedial class
Courting Backrow Debbie
(Who I loved more than anything)
Ole teacher wanted us
To write poems on how we loves
And feels being black.

Now I ain't ever seen
No black poem before
Because the books never say
Just what shade the thoughts were
And you never know what color
The poem-writer is
Unless they say so.

But my hand roam
All over Backrow Debbie,
Across her behind as soft
As the dandelions we picked
In the eveing Summer rains,
And I thought black
Must be something nice
To lay down in at night
And forget just how hard the day was.

—Gary D. Lilley

I Got Lost

*I used to sign my letters
with Peace Power and Liberation
At the age of twelve
I was a manchild in the promised land
Free Che free Angola free Huey P
those were the cries that freed me
My sister would call me her young warrior
I was proud, arrogant, bitter, black
I got the news from my black brothers
At a tender age,
I read Cleaver, Brown, Carmichael, Fanon
I knew who the wretched of the earth were
the devils never tricked me,
Not for one moment
I was happiest during the struggle
I cried for my sisters
I planned to die for my children
but there weren't enough of us
the bravest died at the hands of the Federal Bureau of Instigation
the sorriest lied
the youngest like me cried
and I slowly lost my revolutionary mind
I traded my liberation shirts for Nik-Niks
My 'fro has given way to a ducktail
I make my sisters suffer
and even my friends think me to be a pretty boy
at the ripe age of 22
I'm a disaffected veteran
sister I never sold out
I simply got lost
waiting for the shit to hit the fan.*

—Jeff Melvin



The Hobbyist

Marilynn Byerly

The young girl grabbed the Comet and with wild abandon doused the sink, pressing the corners with the brush she hummed an out-of-tune tune, did a behind the back shot with the water gun splattering the window above the sink, and walked from the kitchen.

This was the ordinary kitchen that the creature beheld as it stuck its head above the hole in the sink. Intelligently it raised what would roughly be called a hand and wiped the detergent from its eye. Advancing to the edge of the sink, it began walking up the slippery sides with the suckers on its feet.

The entire expanse of the room amazed the creature, and all the many wonders frightened him. He longed for something familiar, and his eyes lingered on an odd object which reminded him of his own house with its small cubicles.

"E-g-g c-a-r-t-o-n, I wonder what that means? Maybe there are others here like us on this planet." He pondered sadly when he thought of home. It had been a long journey from the planet Zane. They had hoped for colonization and

inter-marriage with these people, but until now there had been no hope. The Zanes were a dying race for all the female Zanes had suddenly died of a mysterious disease. This last scout ship had been sent to look at this planet in search of women. Zak, the Zane, sighed.

Suddenly, Zak saw the most beautiful female Zane of his entire life. She had her limbs retracted and was asleep in a basket-type thing among red boulders. Impassioned and hopeful, he ran to her, threw his arms around her curved body and kissed her fiercely. It was definitely love or frustration at first sight on his part.

Before he could waken the female, however, he heard the Earth-creature coming. Reluctantly he hid, hoping not to be seen.

The girl grabbed a knife and split the female in two squeezing her blood into a glass. She then threw the lovely orange body into a bag.

Zak of the planet Zane took one last look at the planet Earth as he scampered down the drainpipe to his ship. This planet did not seem friendly to the poor outcast Zanes.

Untitled

Rudy Martin

The shuttle slammed! into the frame.

Herman stood beside the loom staring at the pattern. Then the shuttle slammed! into the frame. A weaver in the next isle was blowing lint off his machine. The cotton floated around Herman, then settled behind him. Then it slammed! into the frame. The sweeper *ten minutes till smoke break* came by with his broom and gathered up the cotton.

"His name?" asked the insurance adjuster.

"Herman Stultz," answered the foreman.

"Let me see. 'Cause of death — accident. How old was he?"

"'bout 30."

"About 30?"

The foreman shuffled some papers in the file and answered, "33. 34 in March."

Then it slammed! into the frame *no lunch five minutes to smoke break* slammed! into the frame *she didn't fix me no lunch* shuttle slammed! into the frame *babies up all night* slammed! into the frame.

"Was he working on the machine?"

"Yea, I think so. He's been watching it all morning."

"Why," asked the man, "didn't he cut it off before he started to work on it?"

"Don't know. He never done nothing like this before. He was always a safe worker."

It slammed! into the frame *come on i need a cigarette* slammed! into the frame *jim's out of the booth i can go now* slammed! into the frame.

"Your turn, Herman," yelled Jim, trying to be heard above the machines.

"Thanks! Watch the isle for me, will ya, Jim?"

He went into the booth and shut the door closing out some of the noise. He watched the shuttle retreat to the bobbins and then speed to the other side of the loom and slam against the frame. He took out a Pall Mall and lit it. The

shuttle came back then sped away and slammed against the frame.

The fan in the small booth pulled the smoke out and gave him a little fresh air. The shuttle went down and slammed against the frame. He reached in the chest pocket of his overalls and took out his pocketbook. He held a picture of his children *emily, mary, jo, jack, sue* who were standing *randy, larry, lizanne*, in stairstep fashion *reggie and either sammy or debbie* beside his wife Gladys who was pregnant again.

"Why did he have to get down so close to the cloth, I wonder?"

"Well, sometimes if you get real close you can see if the shuttle is lop-sided. Guess he got too close."

"Yea. Made quite a mess," answered the man as he signed the claim. "I noticed a cigarette butt laying over there on that tool bench. Your men don't smoke outside that booth do they?"

"Oh no! No sir they don't! They know better."

"Well, watch and make sure."

It slammed into his frame He put the pocketbook back in his pocket. Then he spit in his hand and ground out the cigarette. It slammed! *either sammy or debbie* into the frame.

"Eighteen years on the job and then a careless mistake kills him."

He opened the door and walked straight to the work bench and laid the butt down *slammed!* Then he took off his tool belt and laid it down.

"Thing I can't figure is why he didn't have his tools. Man can't fix a shuttle without tools, can he?"

"Nope. Sure can't. Let's get back to work."

He marched to the loom.

"Thanks for watching 'em Jim."

"Sure thing."

The shuttle went back and then sped toward him and slammed into the frame. Then it repeated the same motion again. And again. Herman bent over and laid his head on the frame.



The Reason Trees

Go Down to the Ground

She looked at the sky
saw through branches, a night
three times its original length, attributable
to a god's desire.

Trees, attached as they must be, still
she saw them move,
spring at
the moon, and bruise the firmament.
They held there, roots
suspended, mute with want.

They grew longer, pushed back into the barren
earth. Not without noise and impossible
moaning, limbs released their hold. All night
they did this, as she watched, as she watched.

—Lawrence Bullock

The Visit

I got up. I walked around.
I walked through a room. I
had not wanted to write this
down but you insisted.
Color of glass, it hangs there
in the light. Are
you alright? I'll bring you something
if you tell me what it
is you want. There
are trees here, sweet gum and
crab apple. They sway ever so slightly
in the light breeze.

—Lawrence Bullock

The Secret

A branch scrapes, reiterative
in some measure, a message,
unrecognized, or

recognized. The skin
bruised, pulled back
on the hands, bluish

against the overall
pale white, white, quite.
And beside the hands

the apothecaries in
varied jars and the
fruit also bruised

in the indifferent light.
Allowing for rhythm,
a tranquil scene, seeming-

ly saying love,
and in any event live
in whatever time

there may be.

—Lawrence Bullock

Sea-walk.
Sandpiper-like I want
(walking on hot sand hot feet parched lips)
To be wet, refreshed
Lapped-against by sea water.

These waves present a problem they
Knock me to and fro forth
And back.

I must be ready for these waves.
I must watch them.
I must make splashes and
Judge by the size of the splash
(my feet like big drops of water
make impact explosion
spread of surrounding drops)

Bigger
Bigger as I get deeper.

I stop.
I face an open sea
(I become rotted piling---I
feel years of unsteadiness---years
with each wave wave wave stronger.)

If I walk side ways
(if I am always ahead of the
wave,
the force less strong
the water not deep
and lukewarm
and dead-fishy-feeling)

If I go deeper
(if I stay behind the break,
knee-deep
I must drag my feet
judge my progress by the line
my feet make in the sand)

The waves pull.

I will set my sight on those sand dunes;
Push and pull and grunt
Struggle---
Get there?
(I pull
the water
pulls---
I get nowhere.)

I stop,
Confront wave
Full force.
I de-form---I,
Undone, washed
(stringy and jellyfish
and somewhat shriveled)
Shoretoward.

Shells.
They have theirs
(ruins---
so many dead and long-dead
things even longer.)

They crumble
Ground by watery teeth
Buried undersand
Layers
(how many waves how much sand pulled
over today's shells?)

I make a lone funeral procession---
Feet chant,
Mourn a shifting grave.

Who puts them there

These waves?
(want to dance on their edges,
audacious walker,
right on their swell-breaks---
the edge, that translucence,
queasy blue shimmering.)
They foam and grind and spew,
Roll and churn and bubble-
A bumpy ride.

They take their death loudly---
Biting sand
Spitting foam
Chewing shells.

To see the wave coming,
To have it hit you
And you STILL HOLD YOUR GROUND
(not anchored,
not BURIED or
rooted...)

Do you
Watch it coming from way back there?
(anxious,
if you follow it in,
lose the one right here,
trip on small washed out washed waves.)

Do you
Go knee- or deeper,
Watch the one right here?
(know its swelling,
be that bursting—
the edge takes years.)

—Clarice Zdzanski









She Had a Dirty Advantage Over the Rest of Them

I'm not saying she taught me self-respect.
I wouldn't say that.
She was just more articulate about it than most, she
painted the picture, I bought it and I
hung it and goddamn enjoy the thing.

People have their edges, she said, I know
I've got mine, or something like that, she
said, and I'll make their life just miserable
if they make mine miserable. Don't I have enough
problems, she said, Bullock, she said don't
give me any shit. The fierce fire of the wronged one
sprang like red water from a rock in the
middle of a huge and nebulous arena.

I just do the best I can. There's love,
there's food and water, there's literature,
there are all kinds of
diversions and conversations, and love is the
hardest to get. Fall into it—bullshit—
sneak up behind it and give it a goose in the ass.

Let it know how we can be, or are.

—Lawrence Bullock

Azul

tonight i tried to write a poem for you
in spanish

to what ends will i not go to please a woman?
one woman

writing poetry in a language i can't even speak

it was to be a classic poem

using classic images

blood
the sun and sea
time

and love

i love you

is a phrase i have tried hard not to use.

—J. S.

La Belle

The canvas barren
Insinuates creation;
Likewise the frame,
Solidly empty.

—Patti Morel

Beautiful Friend

We weaved between grey/brown buildings,
Like narrow sidestreets, through cool nights
Of waving, black silk; your mesmerizing voice
Sounded velour in the supple twilights.
Your exquisite hand guided me through the daze,
In hushed cafes, I forgot my appetite,
I read your face, filled with cold fire,
Each line, contour, and sleeping desire,
We uttered away each hour,
In cars and bars and dives,
With searching eyes-never understanding.
Now moments are movies with no end,
I playback the guile and your smile-
never understanding, beautiful friend.

—Nancy Foster

awake
it is snowing
there is no piano in this house
no music to kindle the fireplace
no song to stir this desolate bed
they have taken the lock-key, they bring fresh bandages
only
no feeling
bare, even naked, dare i sing in this bed?
cling tightly to these bedsheets, cling tightly to this
blanket this
frozen, no feeling
no piano in this house
sing? no!
speak?
i beg presence of counsel, i seek witness
i hide
not even so hopeful as to
pray
no patience with screaming, i am
frozen
hear? believe?
one so glib? so certain?
seek refuge, no revelry
i cannot speak to you
cannot feel you
cannot remember you
the blood is so thick i cannot lie down to sleep for fear
of drowning
they have not come for weeks
how is there so much blood?
where is my wound?
there is blood enough for two

—Ric Marshall





*the snake charmer
stands by a green stream
at the edge of the jungle
with the echoes of drums and dreams
as persistent as a heartbeat
as the serpents shift and sway
to a snake rhythm
and a grace of water
slow and steady
the snake charmer blows the air
thru the flute
of reed
and sways with the snakes
in the warm jungle night.*

—Brian Lsing

i bought the
tiger lilies
on a market street in paris
and held them like kittens
on the streets of paris and the metro
for all to see
and for the first time
felt unleashed
stalking the afternoon
with the grace of a tiger
hunting the dream
hidden in montparnasse
reflected in a glass of pernod.

—Brian Lsing

The Wail

Old, old and forever
lamenting. Oh must
I relearn everything

today, mayn't I have
one day off, is it
so very important that

I turn on the gas turn
on the electricity learn
the new tax codes when

so glorious, glorious
is the construction in
silk across the juniper

bush?

—Lawrence Bullock

Yesterday you were near.

Today you are far away.

you cared.

I don't know.

you were gentle.

you are harsh.

you were kind.

you are cruel.

you had time for me.

you won't make the time.

you listened without impatience.

you have to check your appointments.

you wondered how I felt inside.

you don't even take the time to ask.

you were honest.

you turn away and hide.

you were full of courage.

you run in fear.

you were involved with people.

you turn away, you've grown too close.

you were happy.

you are bitter.

Yesterday is memories.

Today is yesterday.

—Anonymous

FLA/6 July, '77

Slowly I rise, tall to watch the morning burn black on the
hairline horizon,
Singing summer seagulls, ocean rolling westward,
feet trailing, indenting in the sand, chilled and wet.
Heat from within, frost fires of the night
I shake in the vibrating musical air, stumbling before I
Fall, lifting myself heavenward with passing glory;
Suddenly I see, standing still
A faceless man.

“O’ great planet of the nine-eyed night
What wonders, gasses, are in my sight?
And what does this visitor, messenger of light,
Winged feet perhaps to save him strife
Desire from me, the one that fights?”

He spoke not, or she, who knows in this sad paradise,
Bending palms, beautiful power, crashing waves unheeded unheard,
I walk on to never reach, never see, life surge lifted
I groped, powerless I wallowed in the sand, vibrating, full
of life.

—John B. Riley

Portrait

You walk like a soldier
or should I say prince?
You are your own chef d'oeuvre
painting a dark microcosm
peopled with creatures
of stone sans eyes.
I want to portray you:
beauty among ugliness
perfection in a maimed world.
You walk like a soldier,
a blonde Arian prince
in a trench coat—
the portrait I try to
capture with vain words.
I surrender my eyes
Reich says it's right
or wear dark glasses
to shut out the light for you.
Your blue/green eyes
My green/blue eyes collaborate,
but I sense your dormant hate
behind your brilliant smile—
a paradox that haunts me.

—Nancy Foster

On Learning

When one must learn of another,
let him not forget himself
for it is he who learns,
not they:
He must still be himself
if not outwardly then inwardly.
He must still lead the type of life
that was meant for him;
He must never try to lead a life
meant for those he learns by.
If he makes new friends and changes
in the process,
let him learn to live with the friends,
both old and new,
but more important, let him learn
to live without,
those friends he has lost in the process.
This is my hope,
this is my prayer.

—Don Sheffield

Elegy

My great-grandmother has died.
She was an immigrant from Poland.
She had ten children.
Six lived. Six.

She has thirty-three great-grandchildren.
I am one.
We are different from each other;
Our parents we are different from.
They are from theirs.

She prayed,
She prayed all day long.
She loved Jesus.

We, she said, should love Jesus.
She was Catholic.
She prayed the rosary.
She prayed from prayer books I could not understand.
They were Polish.



Her children know Polish;
They speak it. They have taught it to their children.
We do not know Polish —
The great-grandchildren.

The children bought her a dress to be buried in.
It was purple.
She had picked out a blue nightgown (it was old) for a shroud.
A shroud, she said, when I die.
Promised things, when I die, she said,
In a Polish accent.



When I die...
When I die...
Did she know her children and their children and
Their children
Would give her to Walter?

Walter would wash her and wax her,
Make her white.
Comb her hair and shut her eyes,
He even put her glasses on.

Alice says,
You done a good job, Walter
You done a good job.

See how small she looks in the purple gown...

She combed my hair when I was smaller.
She braided my hair and made me look Polish.

She would kiss me with mushy, old lips.
She smelled old.
I never saw my great-grandfather.
She said he was a good husband;
She said she loved him;
She said he was stern. She said he loved her.
She got lost in my hair as she braided it.
She sang.
She sang in Polish.
She sang in a voice half-gone.
She was lost in my hair as she braided it.

I thought it was funny, but I cried.
See how small she looks in the purple shroud.

Walter drives the children in a black limousine
To the graveyard we bring up the rear—
The children and their children and their children.
They put her in the mortuary,
I guess,
Because it is cold, so we didn't freeze.

We do not bury our dead.
We did not bury Anna.
My great-grandmother,
We did not bury her.

They put her in the mortuary,
I guess,
Because it was cold
Outside.

—Clarice Zdzanski



Collaboration

*We walked downstairs
into the theatre,
in Chien Andalou—
together/alone
I didn't recognize Bunuel
walking up with a razor
But you came back again
I went home alone
I have my own movies to direct
And there's a part for you—
an artistic collaboration
poetry-----painting
design-----desire
2-D-----3-D
ultra violence in red/black/white
Forget sfumato, if you like
I'll turn down the light
Snatch out my eyes—
an exhibition on your bureau
only fifty cents...
Two Expressionists at work/play
Chip away at whatever you detest
I'll be your masterstroke,
even a memento mori
in puzzle pieces.*

—Nancy Foster



Shadows

Marilynn Byerly

The room clung to a sense of emptiness which seemed fed by the fire gnawing within the belly of the fireplace. Scent of smoke and the crackle of burning logs hovered above towering dark furniture, book cases and oil paintings which covered the walls like the eyes of Argos. Light from the fire flickered in the darkened room. The flame remained constant, lapping at the profile of the woman standing before the huge stones of the fireplace framed by the massive stones and the flame which painted the room with its light. She studied an empty glass still marked by moisture in her hand. The man stood before a full-length portrait of a woman of twenty-five.

“Your mother?”

“Yes,” the woman brushed a lock of hair nervously from her face. “It was painted by Bayford—Father before she died.”

“A beautiful and compelling woman. When?”

She strove to concentrate for the accustomed answer. “Thirty-five years ago in the Tarlon Gallery fire. His best paintings burnt with her. She and his masterpieces. The other, lesser paintings remaining after the fire are here in this house. This whole place is a gallery. Ford always said, ‘What’s the use of having paintings hang in every major gallery in the world if you can’t have them in your own home?’”

“And now he’s dead too.”

“And now he’s dead too,” Mint continued, “I always thought it strange that Father could join two such disparate careers together—painting and law. ‘Beauty and the brain’ he called it.” She

laughed hollowly. “Beauty and the brain—now that would be a good mock title for you and me. His daughter and his law partner.”

“I wasn’t a law partner—just a very junior grade associate. Ford kindly offered me a spot in his law office because of my father. Father was one of the best lawyers in the country—I wished to follow in the old man’s footsteps, but he died before Massey and Massey could become a reality. Your father held great respect for my father, so he offered me a position as a junior partner. I fear Bayford always regretted that. He was a ‘great lawyer.’ A great lawyer, a great painter, a great man—a full life. All that is left is what he wished for us, and that is what we are.” Garret turned to face the fire. “I don’t believe it was an accident that sent Ford’s car off the road—mechanical or otherwise.”

“You’ve been saying that all night, but you haven’t proven anything.”

“But I feel it.”

“I’ve told you what happened. Ford sent for Alan Loewe to come her, then they drove together to town for another one of his tyrannical changes of his will.” Mint laughed, “God knows that happens enough.”

Garret smiled into the fire, his face washed out by the flames. “What an irony it would be if I were able to find out who killed him. Ford never believed that I could ever handle the detective work necessary to be a great lawyer. I know law, but I’ve never proven my skill at sleuthing. He spoke of it often enough, ‘A lawyer must be a good detective,’ he would say, ‘and frankly, my boy, you aren’t. You don’t use the brains you have. You

are like some pathetic allegorical figure—all thought and no action caught in some stupid pose. All legal jargon without the saving grace of purpose and the passion to act. Being a good detective is to feel, think, and act. I'm afraid you don't, like me, like your father—why I remember once . . .” He closed his eyes and laughed. “Perhaps I can prove him wrong in this room tonight.”

“Perhaps you can.”

He laughed, “Yes, perhaps I *can*.” He lifted his liquor glass in a salute and toast to some unknown entity. “You’ve had my life story. You’ve heard it often enough before. As fellow forgeries of the great man’s wishes we have commiserated before. Our lives have been one long commiseration in this gallery of another man’s making. ‘I’ll listen to your problems if you’ll listen to mine.’ Tonight is different, however, the “great man” is dead. Tonight our life stories can continue with our own endings if we wish. Not the endings wished upon us by another. And once again, my dear, how about your life story?”

“That is funny. Let’s see. I was born. Mother died soon after. I grew up, the daughter of a famous painter. Ford always said I was one of his minor pieces done in his younger, less talented years, ‘but what’s the use of having paintings in every major gallery in the world if you can’t have them in your home.’ I went to the schools chosen by Ford, saw the people he wished me to see and totally failed at who he wanted me to be. I met men, none my father approved of. He thought they were all after my money. But I was beautiful, then, and they loved me,” she said dreamily, “but that was a long time ago.” She touched her cheek nervously. Her own face painted by her father looked down mockingly. A plaque on the frame read, “Mint, age 21.” She pushed a stray hair from her brow and shivered, her back arching closer to the fire. “This mausoleum never gets warm. It feels like snow. Snow. I remember once we were at a ski lodge—a friend’s weekend party, I believe. I met the most charming young man, let me tell you—handsome—six feet tall, curly brown hair and green eyes . . . skiing, sleigh rides, and evenings by the fire with hot-buttered rum.” The firelight played across her face and closed eyes making her almost beautiful. “We behaved absolutely scandalously—” she laughed, “but it was such fun. Ford was quite embarrassed by that weekend.” Her forgotten glass splashed as she giggled. “Later he

made it more and more difficult for me. I no longer had as many visitors, and none stayed for long; then none came. Time passed and I began to notice men and I would say to myself, ‘There is someone I could care about. There is someone I could love.’ I’d begin to dream what it would be like to be loved by him. I could create a whole courtship. I could even tell you what we would eat on the first date. Now when I see such a man,” she gave a gentle shake of her head and smiled, “I don’t even care.” The fire spat impatience. “Don’t get me wrong. I’ve been loved. There was once a man. Handsome, talented—he was an artist, and he loved me. We met at one of Ford’s showings. He wanted to marry me. Ford was sure he just wanted my money. Said he was nothing but a golddigger, I wouldn’t believe so he decided to prove it. Changed his will so all would go to charity if I married the artist.” She refilled her glass. “He married a soap heiress. But I know it wasn’t the money that made him leave. He loved me, I know that.” Lifting her glass, Mint spoke, “To Bayford Tarrington, a great painter, my father.” After pouring a libation to the fire she gulped the rest and shattered the glass on the stonework behind the flame. She closed her eyes, lowered her head, and sighed. Her back was first defiant then slowly it bowed before the fire.

“You have a good imagination. Could you, say, create a courtship for us? At this moment.”

“I could try.” She closed her eyes and smiled. “We are in a small ballroom lighted by thousands of candles. You are handsome in a tuxedo and I am in a long ball gown.” She held out her imaginary skirts. “How do you like it?”

“You are beautiful.” He smiled mockingly.

“Now a soft Strauss waltz begins to play.”

“Would you care to dance?”

“I’d love to.”

Garret held Mint in his arms and slowly began to dance. Paintings, furniture, and fire rocked by to the waltz she hummed. The cradle of her voice held the tenor of violins. Paintings, furniture, and fire rocked by to the waltz she hummed. A scent of roses clung to the heavy air. Paintings, furniture and fire rocked into darkness to the waltz that played. The scent of wax and perfume filled their senses. Pattern after pattern of candles whirled past as they dances. Patter after pattern appeared and dissolved as he held the woman in his arms. Her eyes held his as the music slowed. Garret leaned



down to kiss his lovely partner.

Log shifted log and the fire popped angrily. He straightened.

Mint bit her lip and lowered her eyes. "You should have kissed me. But now we are ourselves again." Flames swayed silently mesmerized by its own light playing cat and mouse with a draft. "See my shadow here on the floor beside yours, that's me. What you see standing here," she touched her heart, "Isn't real, it's something to be used by the flame—the part left after a paper doll has been cut. There lying on the floor she changes only in the perspective of the fire. All our dreams and hopes can not change it. We are but shadows; images to play at, cast by flickering flames." She laughed, "I read that somewhere."

Mint walked to her mother's portrait, and gazed into the other's eyes. "We are so different. She is painted in spring shades surrounded by warm air and music and stands serenely looking into infinity with her hand on a white baby grand." Mint lifted her hand toward her own portrait above the fireplace without turning. "I am in winter shades. Dark and empty in this room standing before the fireplace." She moved her hand to trace her mother's face. "How horrible it is to be trapped like that. Unable to change the outside that someone else has created though the soul cries out against it and weeps behind the carefully tailored stance."

Garret looked at his own portrait and spoke as much to himself as to Mint, "It is terrible when someone has to look at himself and truly see what he is without the saving grace of a forgetful imagination but through the eyes of someone else. We could leave this room if we really wished to, we could live in a real world like our dreams. But it is far too simple to live in this world of another's creation—we play at the passions and beliefs projected by others—others who are strong enough to feel and think of things we, ourselves, are too cowardly to. Our shadow dreams of our shadow lives are faint within those shadows of true flame. Not caring enough to ultimately feel we are engulfed and die. I can only think, you can only feel. Neither of us have had the life it takes to consummate what we are. Even our waltz dreams have returned us to this room filled with the passion and action of another man till we are no more than the paintings on the wall—or perhaps even less—they speak the truth—we only do so

when forced by the sheer evidence of that truth. But all that is past now." He waved his hand impatiently. "Tonight is different, tonight the great man and his truths are gone. Tonight we create our ends, and if we do not, we will remain here forever."

"That is why you are so interested in the car crash that killed Ford. You want to prove that the accident was intentional. Nicely ironic, too, prove Ford wrong by finding his killer. I approve of your attempt."

"You want your freedom just as badly as I want mine. Admit it. Attempt it."

Mint smiled, "I don't know if I could find anyone I could love now. But even waltz dreams can come true. What is love anyway? Sacrifice, giving a small allowance of happiness? Maybe even I can give this."

"Maybe we both can gain what we seek tonight. All I have ever wanted is to prove that I could be something other than what Ford Tarrington believed me to be."

"You want that as much as I—to be more than a shadow cast by fire in this empty room."

"Yes."

Mint paused as log covered log extinguishing flame and the light ebbed. "I can help you. I might be a winter figure as my father imagined, but even winter hopes for spring—I can help you. I have held the answer all the time. It is really very simple. I killed him; I killed him to free myself—and you." The triumph of her eyes lit the room.

"I knew it. I knew it all the time."

"Are you happy now?"

A telephone bell rang viciously. After Mint replaced the receiver she laughed softly, "That was the police. The drunk who ran Ford's car off the road just turned himself in." The fire leaped and grew brighter.

Garret laughed as well, "At least we made an attempt even if we finally did lose."

"Do we really lose?" Mint said candlelight reflecting in her eyes. The room clung to a sense of emptiness which seemed fed by fire gnawing within the belly of the fireplace. Light from the fire flickered in the darkened room. The fire remained constant, lapping at the profile of the woman standing before the huge stones and the flame which painted the room with its light. The man stood before a full-length portrait of a woman of twenty-five.

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