THE ALEMBIC

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Why an ALEMBIC? We have found it necessary to ask ourselves this question, and we desire to share with you our thoughts. The ALEMBIC is what one writer has termed typical of the genre known as “The Littles” (Eric Oatman, “New York Times Book Review,” August 28, 1966). The function of the ALEMBIC is essentially similar to that of these periodicals which exist as “vehicles for work either too unpolished or too experimental to appeal to great numbers of readers.” Hundreds of these periodicals are circulating in America today, and many of our best writers began to make their reputations in these magazines. Moreover, many good writers with modest ambitions and pragmatically tempered aspirations consider “the littles” ends in themselves.

However, the ALEMBIC is special; it is not just another literary magazine. The ALEMBIC, in particular, is an integral aspect of Providence College’s cultural portrait. We are the only medium for creative and critical artistic expression by the students of this college. Our central motivation is a devotion to writing and a desire to foster and participate in its growth. Our primary concern is to publish the imaginative material—stories, plays, poetry, essays—of the thinking and adventurous Providence College man.

As our name suggests, we are in part a critical review, but only in part. Certainly much of the material we receive cannot survive an astute and careful editorial reading; yet in a larger sense the success and importance of your literary magazine and its very raison d’etre rest not only on the quantity and quality of its presentations, but in the very fact of its existence—the spirit of independence and adventure that is the opportunity it offers. Ultimately,
the ALEMBIC insures the right of the student to speak and be heard—the exercise of the freedom of the artist to experiment.

Artistic freedom implies a duty, and that duty is excellence; for creative writing is as much a disciplined handling of imaginative materials as it is a means of self-expression. The creative spirits should never be the domestic servants of any ideology.

The ALEMBIC is your passport to literary adventure, and we intend to accommodate all the well-articulated rebelliousness and imaginatively expressed frustration that are inherent in such an adventure.

—The Editors

Providence College Alembic
Journal of Audabon Moonlight
Number Two

"To young upstanding men"

Hard to imagine so,
but the street was the labyrinth
    of her soul
    that faith fled through
leaving footprints of pride;
but the street was the image of my years,
and the labyrinth of her soul.

Her soul of
    black unspeaking eyes
    muted
by the shadows
in the trees
that shattered
    moonlight
in her tears.

Shadows,
    dreams lurking in my
    sleepless nights:
faith and pride
upon a pillow
that smiles or weeps
    or loves,
but hates
in the daylight of moonless times
    when I wander through chapel halls
        listening to empty echoes of footfalls on the vaulted walls;
        under the daylight that sweeps away the future and darkens the past and brings me to the noon of her soul.

Daylight seeping in through dusty, duskcoloured windows where my faith parades in the pride of the past, the tradition of forgiving, forgetting, living, begetting, under the glare of the sun — or is it god’s unholy eye?

On an unconsecrated street where the moonlight lies shattered in
the glare of her eyes
by the images of shadows
in the springkissed trees,
    I stand
on secular ground, trodding
over an unworn, newly opened path
in the seventh hell of her soul
    where god sits
on a rainbow of whitelight,
the daylight that
shadows dispers.

—Stephen S. Moody ’68

Apprehension

Would that I had your reassurance
    For my love it craves much sustenance.
Bewail the time when doubts arise
    Since but one thing can I surmise.
Suffer me no longer to whim or chance
    That I might enjoy as the moth the dance.
Torture me not with lucid lies,
    My hale heart forgets not to apprise.
Love, leave off further dalliance
    And take me out my torpid trance.
Forestall not, dally not, it cries.
    Without some sign it surely dies.

By Kevin J. Murphy ’67
The Instrument

Break not this soul on rack of learned thought, O God
These winding strains of cord that make me taught
With winch of wisdom wholly unattuned
Must ever be to composition
Frail and unsound as this

Rather soul-safe love songs Lord.

But should the harmony of Heaven
Require this tight’ning to attone
For faults performed, and this the instrument,
Record me strained concordant to your will,
Sustained soul, thought taut, not breaking by belief!

By Claude R. LaBrosse '67
Jesus Slept Here

BY BRYAN V. MAGUIRE '67

Jesus slept here
    The guide said;
Thousands come every year.
For centuries the excited pilgrims
Cross under this arch.
    Watch your head,
Sonny.
    Keep moving, please
    He said.
Donations for the Pope,
    Another cried.
Don't go beyond the rope,
    Sonny.
Postcards to your friends,
    Someone groaned.
Made by the Poor,
    The guide said.
A little boy came in the door,
    Half price he paid.
He cried
    And the guide
    Fell dead.
Jesus never sleeps
    The little Boy said.
Four Literary Portraits

By John Parrillo '69
1. THOMAS MANN
2. JOHN MILTON
3. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
4. LEO TOLSTOY
moon-blind

out at night 'til daybreak
me and joe and the rest
work 'til early morning
all night diner
great place
everyone knows everyone
less than more
usual crowd, night people
just watch out the kid don’t make your salad
one female, early thirties, late twenties
ageless, i guess
looks like an indian, dark hair
tight sweater, tight skirt, small white apron
works in a club, i guess
different guy every two-in-the-morning
popular like
(me and joe saw her once
sunday-early-evening
with light-green-chiffon-dress
and husband-kid-dog)
she can look me in the eye anytime
O.K.
i don’t want to be anyone’s conscience
one of the guys
digs al hirt, aristotle, religion
he says sometimes my soul is in my gut
he must have thought it up
he don’t read ginsberg

23
joe says at my house (cards, four a.m.)
what’s that noise?
our new dog, name of sam
funny thing, our dog’s name is sam too
sam two?
yeah, i started calling him sam the man
i couldn’t say, don’t it go . . . ?
daytime was too close
maybe a mistake in wit comes out stupidity
but social graces and morals are asleep now
let them lie
that female
not really pretty
smiles like she’s a little high
still, looks good to me
would disgust aristotle
confuses joe at sunday-early-evening.

William Bergeron, ‘67
The Congregation

By Gregory A. Smith '68

Cold concrete walls stare glazed
at the shadowed streets
of jelly filled men,
who swim in gutters of mucous and phlegm,
stuck to the candy wrapper
lies of life.
Their temples lay open, blatant to the change
clamouring in the pockets of
waiting women,
who confess today on pus colored sheets
their bodies, in cotton candy
expiation.
Down the arch-alley rides a savior on an ass
of swirling brushes and dirty water.
Through the gutter comes the disinfectant
king of the universe, while trash cans clamour
his coming.
But he leaves in a lifetime
allowing waste to wonder
if it will be swept
in a sewer until
he comes
again.
The gutters are full..............and we wait.
Three Poems

By Stephen V. Grillo '67
never now over the windswept ledge
where time rests nonexistent,
yet each step ascends, tops time.
every premise soaks in wine—
always the anguish of extradimensional stretches,
the fall from,
the reached for,
the missed for,
night-deep in syllogistic space
defined in midnight oil,
offered in time.
But there will never now be another
until
flesh and ever the hereafter comes.

in loveless times there’s never the other,
ever the anguish of extradimensional stretches,
the fall from,
the reached for,
the missed for,
night-deep in symmetrical space
defined in a radiance,
offered in time.
But there will never now be another
unless
flesh and ever the hereafter comes.
Moist flowers 'round the round of you,
color-shaped visions to daze the sight
of those who stare and dare to voice and gaze,
feign inclusion into this or that song or story.
Not for you or I,
so why for them
to buy and store
to show or keep
only by what they pay,
while we that sing do sleep,
Our eyes wide and our arms full,
Our hearts pure, our thoughts deep.
To them the tricks of light,
the private visions ours to keep,
while with love I sing and do,
moist flowers 'round the round of you.
I
The four-called sirens sing in my bedside night,
as I traditionally lie bound and four-posted.
The four-called sirens,
distant through my bedside window,
haunting the night like shrill tin whistles:
the myth sirens, loose sirens, loud sirens,
a singular siren,
four messages in the come-out-and-play-night.

II
The four-called sirens wail in the blueblack fright,
as I knowingly lie in my bedside right,
and out of necessity bound and four-posted.
The four-called girls,
distant through the horsedrawn night,
the myth sirens, loose sirens,
 loud sirens, to a singular siren,
four messages in the come-out-and-play-night.

III
The four-called sirens fade in the dawn's roll,
seen from an opened window,
heard from an empty bed,
myth sirens preach in a fool-proven square,
singsong sirens, loud-talk sirens,
 loose sirens, a singular siren,
four messages in the come-out-and-die-night.

IV
Four messages in the blast back day,
as I unknowingly die in my waking fright,
distant through the open-window-night,
haunting the day like my childhood way,
blast back to the noon siren, lunch siren,
back from the come-out-and-die-night.
Photographs
Daniel Cassidy '70
Harold Ayotte '67
Incident

(a dramatic monologue)

By Kenneth L. Valliere '67
He stopped me
Midway between the port and stern
And asked,

"... about two riddles of this ancient bark—
Two themes of light and dark.
Day shows the way
While clouds there are that—colored gray—
Are only there to hide the find
As clouds there are that dot the mind.
What of the night?
Is there a light—
To show the way—
To color gray—
To guide this bark
Throughout the dark?
Or will our night be dark
Without the moon to give it slightest light?"

I pulled away.

"Please, sir,"

My heart did stir.

"What of the night?
Will there be dark or light?"

I shrugged my shoulders,
Smiled nicely,
And answered—so very politely,
"God only knows! I don't!"
And then—as afterthought—
With pleasant grin, and comrade clasp,
I added graciously, "Good night!"
Mother's Day: 1966

1. "the East"

A birth,
    painful red against
    pale blue
tapestry hung beyond
the wall
that holds eternity away;
    still glorious
in the shadows of
tradition’s feast
    celebrating
the Risen Son.
2. "noon"

This breeze
   came up this morning
   and cooled
the shadows that melted away
into
the reality of my day;
   time will halt now
to remember the secrets
of her nightdark death,
   intimating
new love-born light.

3. "the West"

She goes
   to light an older
   new world
that waits behind the door’s
darkness
in her bed’s evening fallen dusk;
   eternity
lies there perhaps. I
pray against night’s
   fearsome silence
for sounds of love.

—Stephen S. Moody ’68
Salvatore Quasimodo (1901- ) is one of Italy’s foremost contemporary poets. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1959 for “his lyrical poetry, which with classical fire expresses the tragic experience of life in our times.” He has been a professor of literature in many Italian universities and is noted for his translations of Shakespeare and Greek poetry.
Thanatos Athanatos

E dovremo dunque negarti, Dio
dei tumori, Dio del fiore vivo,
e cominciare con un no all’oscura
pietra “io sono,” e consentire all morte
e su ogni tomba scrivere la sola
nostra certezza: “thanatos athanatos”?  
Senza un nome che ricordi i sogni
le lacrime i furori di quest’uomo
sconfitto da domande ancora aperte?
Il nostro dialogo muta; diventa
ora possibile l’assurdo. Là
oltre il fumo di nebbia, dentro gli alberi
vigila la potenza delle folgie,
vero è il fiume che preme sulle rive.
La vita non è sogno. Vero l’uomo
e il suo pianto geloso del silenzio.
Dio del silenzio, apri la solitudine.
Thanatos Athanatos

And then must we deny you,
   God of tumors,
   God of the living flower,
and start again with a "no" to the dark stone, "I am,"
and concede to death
and write on every tomb our only certainty: "thanatos
athanatos"?
Without a name to recall the dreams, tears, vehemence
   of this man defeated by questions still open?
Our dialogue changes; now the absurd becomes possible.
There beyond the smoke of mists,
   within the trees the power of the leaves keeps its vigil,
and truthful is the river that weighs upon the shores.
Life is not a reverie.
   and truthful is man and his cry jealous of the silence.
God of silence, open this solitude.
Lettera alla madre

"Mater dulcissima, ora scendon le nebbie,
il Naviglio urta confusamente sulle dighe,
gli alberi si gonfiano d'acqua, bruciano di neve;
non sono triste nel Nord: non sono
in pace con me, ma non aspetto
perdono da nessuno, molti mi devono lacrime
da uomo a uomo. So che non stai bene, che vivi
come tutte le madri dei poeti, povera
e giusta nella misura d'amore
per i figli lontani. Oggi sono io
che ti scrivo." Finalmente, dirai, due parole
di quel ragazzo che fuggi di note, con un mantello corto
e alcuni versi in tasca. Povero, così pronto di cuore,
lo uccideranno un giorno in qualche luogo.
"Certo, ricordo, fu da quel grigio scalo
di treni lenti che portavano mandorle e arance,
alla foce dell'Imera, il fiume pieno di gazze,
di sale, d'eucalyptus. Ma ora ti ringrazio,
questo voglio, dell'ironia che hai messo
sul mio labbro mite come la tua.
Quel sorriso m'ha salvato da pianti e da dolori.
È non importa se ora ho qualche lacrima per te,
per tutti quelli che come te aspettano,
e non sanno che cosa. Ah, gentile morte,
non toccare l'orologio in cucina che batte sopra il muro,
tutta la mia infanzia è passata sullo smalto
del suo quadrante, su quei fiori dipinti:
non toccare le mani, il cuore dei vecchi.
Ma forse qualcuno risponde? O morte di pietà,
morte di pudore. Addio, cara, addio, mia dulcissima mater."
Letter to My Mother

"Mater dulcissima, now the mists descend, the Naviglio thrusts vaguely against its banks, the trees swell with water, burn with snow; I am not sad in the North, I am not at peace with myself, but I expect pardon from no one, though many are the tears that are owed to me from man to man. I know you are not well, that you live like all the mothers of poets, poor and perfect in the measure of love for their sons so far away. Today it is I who writes to you." Finally, you will say, two words from that boy who fled by night, with a short cloak, and with some verses in his pocket. The poor thing, so open-hearted, they will kill him one day in some place. "Certainly I remember, it was from that grey yard of slow trains that bore almonds and oranges, to the mouth of the Imera, the river full of birds of salt and eucalyptus. But now I thank you, this I want, for the irony you placed upon my lip as mild as yours. That smile has saved me from weeping and griefs. And it does not matter if now I have some tears for you, for all those who like you are waiting, and do not know for what. Oh, kind death, do not touch the clock that ticks upon the kitchen wall, all my childhood has passed on the enamel of its face, on those painted flowers: do not touch the hands, the heart of the aged. For perhaps someone answers? Oh death of pity, death of shame. Addio, cara, addio, mia dulcissima mater."
Vento a Tindari

Tindari, mite ti so
fra larghi colli pensile sull'acque
dell'isole dolci del dio,
oggie m'assali
e ti chini in cuore.

Salgo vertici aerei precipizi,
assorto al vento dei pini,
e la brigata che lieve m'accompagna
s'allontana nell'aria,
onda di suoni e amore,
e tu mi prendi
da cui male mi trassi
e paure d'ombre e di silenzi,
rifugi di dolcezze untempo assidue
e morte d'anima.

A te ignota è la terra
ove ogni giorno affondo
e segrete sillabe nutro:
altra luce ti sfoglia sopra i vetri
nella veste notturna,
e gioia non mia riposa
sul tuo grembo.
Aspro è l’esilio,
e la ricerca che chiudevo in te
d’armonia oggi si muta
in ansia precoce di morire;
e ogni amore è schermo alla tristezza,
tacito passo nel buio
dove mi hai posto
amaro pane a rompere.

Tindari serena torna;
soave amico mi desta
che mi sporga nel cielo da una rupe
e io fingo timore a chi non sa
che vento profondo m’ha cercato.
The Wind at Tindari

Tindari, I know you are mild
among broad hills that overhang the waters
of the sweet island of the god,
today, you assail me
and bend my heart within.

I scale the peaks and airy heights
engrossed by the wind of the pines
and they that happily come with me go off into the air,
a wave of sounds and love
and you take me
from those whom I wrongly pulled myself away,
from the fears of shadows and silences,
refuges of sweetness in dearest time
and death of soul.

To you unknown is the land
where every day I descend
to feed on secret syllabry:
other lights disclose you
in nocturnal gowns upon the window panes
and a joy that is not mine
rests upon your lap.

Harsh is the exile
and my search for harmony
that sought resolve in you
becomes a dying whisper
from sudden anxiety;
and every love is a shield against sadness;
silently I pace in the darkness
where you have placed me to break this bitter bread.

Tindari turn softly unto me;
gentle friend, wake me
and I will feign my fear for those who do not know
that I might thrust myself to heaven
from a rock
what deepest wind has searched me.
Drawings

By Robert J. MacDonald '67
The Value of a Penny

By Terrence Simpson, Jr. '68

"Pardon me."

"I said they're 2 for 37."

"No ma'am, they're 19¢ apiece."

"Sign said 2 for 37."

"Are you sure?"

A glaring nod.

"Uh . . . well, I'm sorry, but I have to charge you the price marked on the can. See, it's 19¢. That's what I have to get for them."

"Well there shouldn't be a sign saying 2 for 37 then."

Jeez! She looked at me as though I'd just killed her kid, if she had one. God, she was a smirker. I didn't put the sign there. I felt like telling her to wipe that smirk off her face or I'd shove the cans and the goddamn penny down her throat. I didn't though; but boy, you should have seen that smirk. Like as though she'd caught me with my pants down or somethin. I hate a smirker. If it had been a regular person, I'd have given her the penny, but not a smirker.

"Uh . . . well, I'll have to check it ma'am."

"O.K."

"O.K.," she said! Holy makerel! I should have told her to keep the penny. She probably needed it more than Mr. First National or whatever the hell his name is. At
this point, I could have cared. It wasn't the penny that bothered me. But like I said, I can't stand a smirker. Maybe I would have even let this one go, except it was Friday night. No, sir, not on a Friday night. She probably came in on purpose because she knew I'd be busy. I mean, FRIDAY NIGHT! The customers spend about a million bucks on Friday nights, and she's worried about a penny. She'd probably been waiting all her life for an opportunity to catch someone. This was it, her chance of a lifetime. Well, I've been waiting too. This one wasn't going to get away. No, sir, not this one.

Dammit. Sign does say 2 for 37. Well, I don't care. I'm gonna get 19¢ apiece. Like I said, I hate a smirker.

"You were right ma'am, the sign does say 2 for 37. But sometimes the men forget to change the price on the shelves. The right price is usually marked on the can."

The look of victory left her face momentarily. I must have knocked her off balance. She probably hadn't expected me to hold firm. But, she soon recovered. That's the way it is with smirkers. I mean they never give up. O.K. lady, I'll play your silly game. Round two, here we go.

"Well," she said, "I don't know if I want them then."

That was a killer. By then he knew as well as I that they were 19¢ apiece. She'd have bought them if they were 29¢ apiece, but she couldn't admit being wrong. Nobody buys tomato paste unless she really needs it. Who was she trying to kid. She needed that paste, and she was going to buy it here or go someplace else to buy it. No matter what she said, I had her. I shouldn't have, but I softened-up.
"Would you like me to check it at the office, ma'am?"

"Yes, would you?"

I had about fifty customers waiting in line. It had been about five wasted minutes since I had rung up anything on my register. I mean five minutes is a long time, especially on a Friday night. Anyway, I'm telling you, you should have seen the looks on those fifty faces. They were so distorted that I don't know how the hell they got them that way. I mean, they must practice like it was vital or something. Smile you bastards! You're just jealous that it's not you giving me the hard time.

Lee was in the office. She's married and got a couple of kids. She's been working here a long time.

"What's the price on this, Lee?" I showed her the can. She looked through the books but couldn't seem to find the price. While she was looking, I told her about the smirker. When I had finished, she just looked at me in disbelief.

"Get 19¢ apiece or tell her where to go." She's really very nice. Honest she is. But like I said, she's been in this business a long time, and it was Friday night.

"Yes," I said, smiling, as I walked away.

I could see them from where I was standing then. They were like a pack of wolves, backing up their mighty leader, waiting for the kill. I was almost afraid to walk back into their den. I was right, but a lot of good that would do me. I mean I was right. But one thing drew me back to my register. I had to see what she would do next. I hadn't wasted eight or ten minutes on this beauty for nothing.
“I’m sorry ma’am, but they’re 19¢ apiece.”

You should have seen her. The wheels were really turning; she was really thinking. She hadn’t expected my affront; you could tell. This was it. She probably wouldn’t sleep at night if she didn’t save face now. It was like her whole life was at stake. She looked at me and then away. Her eyes were bottomlessly dark, and then a sparkle came — a glimmer of hope — the final word:

“Oh well, it was only a penny anyway.”
providence college