Alumbic

60 YEARS
EDITORS NOTE
This issue of the ALEMBIC marks its' 60th anniversary. Throughout the 60 years of the ALEMBICS' publication many changes have happened to both the ALEMBIC and to P.C. The ALEMBIC is PC's first publication and had originally served as newspaper, yearbook and literary magazine. With the publication of the COWL, the VERITAS and the art journal INTERFACE, The ALEMBIC'S duties have narrowed to literary concerns. Unfortunately, The ALEMBIC'S budget too has narrowed through the years. Thus financially limited, The Alembic offers the PC community a modest 60th anniversary issue. Work from the past 60 years, as well as this year's contributions have been selected as to glance at what the PC writing community has offered for six decades. Enjoy.
DEDICATION

This 60th Anniversary issue of the Alembic is dedicated to
THOMAS R. PETERSON, O.P., PRESIDENT
For his understanding and financial assistance,
without which this issue would not have been possible.
CONTRIBUTIONS

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Robert E. Laffey
Thomas L. Fallon, O.P.
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Imagination

I'd love to own a swell machine,
A nice big Packard limousine;
And swiftly travel here and there,
Just like a nifty millionaire.

Within the crowded surface car,
A prey to every jolt and jar! —
I'd rather travel more content
When I am out on business bent.

Let those who want a safer way,
Hand out their carfare every day;
But I with others of my class,
Hope some day to purchase gas.

You say that I just wish and talk,
Like you, am always doomed to walk?
Oh no, not I! I'll save and hoard,
And then, next year, I'll own a Ford.

A. Brown Bagg '24
reprinted from Alembic Vol. 1 No. 4
March 1921
They do not beat their young.
Herding, each is for the other.
No stragglers are left behind.
The band is ruled by mothers.

Life is a moving feast
From a time since past.
It has come to this:

- too many elephants
- too little land
- too many men.

Three tons of sagging flesh
Collapse under ounces of lead.
At Slater Park Zoo we feed them peanuts.
In Africa they shoot them dead.

No matter where the young calves go
They bring with them this thundering day —

Earthmother shuddered, confusion reigned
In a haunting pact
The children are saved.

Patricia Slonina Vieira '75
Pettaquamscutt: the wintered river's song to Spring

Winter holds the boats at bay,
while you, Spring, want a little boy
to fish with
   even if he uses paper-clip
   hooks and frayed kite string.
It's the spirit you're after, the song —
not so much the symbols.
While old men winter-oyster
in my blue blood waters curdling
cold, they are really thinking of your sunset
rainbow bonnet and not the grosgrain
ribbon grip I wind about
   their rubber waist.
And small houses with shuttered eyes
   are watching!
I'm telling you, waiting
   for the first day
   you flounce in
unannounced
   un
expected
overjoyed at fooling
everyone again.
Come, put on your rippled cape,
the bright one fishes follow.
I've a boat grounded since autumn,
ready to take you sailing with ice,
teased like all of us melting
   into your flowing charms
Always reluctant to promise actual arrival,
you 'pencil in' our plans,
choosing to confirm a later date
   with you salty
   greening kiss

Patricia Slonina Vieira
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 56 No. 1
1978-79
groves of academe

would they have us believe reality
is published hard-bound, numbered page by page,
with annotations, indices,
to cross-refer in lecture halls the Age
of Newton with old Adam's apple tree?

once, when I read that Alexander cried
I fumbled for the reasons of his pain,
and hoped to learn in school. with studied ease,
the prof retold the plans of his campaign,
his horse's name, and, yes, the date he died.

Terrence Doody '65
reprinted from Alembic Vol. 42 No. 2
1964-65
Ambition

Whaddayawannabee?
the oft asked question
comes while I sit sweating in the parlor
and the torturers (you have another name for them)
smile benignly

To please, I say a fireman or some such
thing that they will understand
in their officetelevisionnewspaper world

Fireman doctor lawyer
goodgoodgood
they cry, and the conversation turns to
pleasant things again, the duty done.

Someday, when they ask whaddayawannabee
I’ll say
I wannabe an IBM machine
and just sit quietly in a corner
ticking off the minutes
watchingwatchingwatching

HaHaHa, very funny they’ll say
but really, whaddayawannabe
and I’ll say doctor lawyer fireman
goodgoodgood they’ll shout

And then they’ll turn to other things
the price of beans and why they’re exHAUSTed
(from doing nothing, strenuously)
while i, IBM machine
sit quietly in the corner
ticking off the minutes
watchingwatchingwatching.

Robert E. Laffey
first poem of a series of three
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 33 No. 3
1955-56
Prayer to the Wind

Wind,
vagrant, forceful, aimless,
hobo of the flaccid air,
anachronous remnant of the void,
waif of the infinite desert,
molder of the sands of time,
symbol of life,
zephyr of love:
whirl up a storm
in the Body on the Rock.
Make your presence felt.
Shake the house where the people dwell.
Shatterer of forests,
splinter wooden changelessness.
Bringer of rain,
blow lost nomads along the oasis way,
where living waters quench the soul —
thirst.

Breath of coolness,
soothe the ardent quarrel;
disperse the chaff of discord;
gather the grains of wheat;
assault the Rock-bound Body;
vivify the Crone!
Make her young again.

Thomas L. Fallon, O.P.
WESTWARD GAZE

Shadows climbing the lonely trees,
Like darkened phantoms before an orange sea,
Where everything becomes a peaceful blur
As one light fades to many;
And fingers of a certain spectral light
Fade into the glove of a darker might.
For death upon the warrior of Sol
Comes not easy for his hated foe
With weapons of brilliant colored hues,
He fights until the reddened blood of final dues
Flows across the fading stage;
Yet no alarums will ever give the call,
For what has passed is not a sound defeat,
But one that occurs on the most common battlefield,
The one where day to night and life to death do yield.

William J. Sullivan '81
Heat's Blanket

(a collective poem written by English [ 5 ] — Advanced Composition in response to the question, 'What was it like waking up this morning?' edited by Jane Lunin)

Once I wrote on my stomach;
a slow birth, wait for the wake in a fetal position.
I can hear the poets scribbling,
rats in the woodwork.

I live alone; (no one called my name.)
Still dark dressing. Close a dream
something about talking on the phone: the operator
was a man. The last dream — radios haven't been invented.

Wake up and freeze. A hunk of meat
left over from the night before
is heavy on me most of the day.

reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 49 No. 2
1971-72
Summary

Without exercise, in fleeting martial beat
I smell a rain drying fire-escape and hear sneakered feet.
I can feel the sun as it played charades
upon the grass and tinted the houses orange
and sapped our serious cares.

In meditation, I recline on summer nights on
the roof, guardian of the silvered rapiers
and from fights eye-witness aloof
and reminiscently congratulate the heros of
the papers

Determined, I prologue my turn with a prayer
for success and send the spaulding over sewers
and my lungs against my chest.
And brave the tearing chrome, nimble before the
rasping rubber as I come in triumph home ignorant
of a mother’s shudder.

The mellow blue sheeted night belongs again to me
and I go walking away from them lowly under the
leering neon and meet myself and now even I am
not only mine.

John Olsen ’61
reprinted from Alembic Vol. 38 No. 1
1960-61
Deception

I built a wall around myself —
 without doors,
 without windows —
To protect myself from the world.

But, alas! I still could find no peace;
 No foe was there,
 Nor friend, forsooth,
To protect me from myself.

William Denis Geary '39
reprinted from Alembic Vol. 17 No. 2
1936-37
My body stiffens in fear,  
I tremble when I stand.  
There's an aura of death in the sky  
As a cry rings across the land.  
I fling the door open wide  
And gaze out across the mire.  
In flights of fancy I glimpse  
Abnormal shapes, but there is nothing here.  
Not wanting to face the truth  
I cringe in a corner and hide.  
There's no place I can go to escape  
For that screaming is me, inside.

Ann Cibulskis
The Owl

The owl rose out of bone and is a denial of moonlight seeking to give a brown and breathy throat to that which is silver.

You also imitate a conspicuous longing. You bathe and dress as if there were some place to go.

    If we would kneel and bless our very knees the gesture could save us from a beaked and haughty sleep; days hanging open like empty mouths.

Do not blame the owl for coming on so strong. It's that way with any creature who sings alone.

Jane Lunin
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 50 No. 1
1972-73
Spring in Aushwitz
for Dora Steinmetz

It was not a dream: the nazis breaking
in, scarring your face, killing
your mother, torturing your unborn child.
If only the tide would have overcome you
years before under huge cliffs with the black
roar of midnight taking you under,
then the rain would have opened its blue fists for you
kissed you full on the mouth as you rolled under
the lulling waters. It did not. Instead

you played Mozart on the viola to ease them
their routine of hangings and fumes.
You blocked out the screaming and the splat of
corpse into the giant pits. You played
and you lived. The illustrious melodies pouring from
your “borrowed” instrument; the sunlight streaming over

the mass graves. So now it’s spring in Aushwitz.
The buds flowering madly as if
the ghastly trashbin they frame in
their growing never seared or never could win.
You are finally dying in a hospital in New York.
All that music finally played out, wilted in no peaceful
repose despite the extra forty years.

I am standing in the kosher butcher shop listening to your
contemporaries haggle over fat. One named
Morris is boasting. Does he have a grandson! His grip
according to Morris is “stronger den Reggie Jackson’s”.
I am buying yahtzeit candles to burn
in my mother’s and father-in-law’s names and also some fish in
jars, the same fish you served on
crystal that was confiscated.

What can you tell me, Dora, our twelve-
week-old daughter sleeping safe at home?
What can you leave us, except the rattling drone of
your eerie viola fading, fading fast?
I hear your voice rise now in this butcher shop
like a chorus of ragtime peddlars, like
the ones from my mother’s youth yelling
"rags and bottles".
"Rags and bottles", you keep repeating,
"Play that music. Pick those flowers.
Feed that baby, while you can”.

Jane Lunin Perel
Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt darin die Augenapfel reiften. Aber sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber, in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt, sich halt und glanzt. Sonst konnte nicht der Bug der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen der Lenden konnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz unter der Schultern durchsichtigen Sturz und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

und brache nicht aus allen seinen Randern aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle, die dich nicht sieht. Du musst dein Leben andern.
archaic torso of apollo

We were not acquainted with his unheard-of head, where his actual eyes were formed. But his torso still glows like a candelabrum in which his vision, merely withdrawn inside, perdures and gleams. Otherwise the curve of the breast can't blind you, nor in the easy turn of the hips could a smile go to that center, which carried the powers of generation.

Otherwise this stone would have stood defaced and abrupt under the diaphanous drop of the shoulders and would not have shimmered so like some predatory's pelt; and would not have broken out of all its bounds like a star: for there is no part of it which doesn't see you. You must change your life.
To Saint John of the Cross

Watcher of the soul,
Who coursed the heights of darkened night
And sped the slopes of sweet despair,
Do thou to me thy heart incline,
That I may live, and living, love.
Seeker for the Truth,
Who sought through tortuous pathways dim,
Or soared on wings of sudden sight,
Direct thine ear to halting lips,
That I may know, and knowing, love.

George Hunter Cochran '51
reprinted from Alembic Vol. 25 No. 2
1947-48
LETTER TO PAUL

I write to you from the ocean's edge, near Narragansett,  
A port more westerly than Caesar or the Barque of Christ  
could carry you.  
I write with a western mind so tired of all that thought  
has brought it to.  

A man waving his son out of the surf from the seawall of  
his summer place,  
Said the boy works his day around the tidal charts,  
Which he knows as other boys know baseball scores;  
No crest will take him by surprise.  

But I've no wish to know the sea that way;  
I want no science, but only what I see.  
You could say I'm clinging to the mystery.  
Just let these unexamined waves come into me and cleanse  
the clamor of the things I read.  
The book unopened on my lap is Prayer in Paul;  
But it is no prayer.  
No theologies contain the God I need.  

Joined with creation's groaning I will groan, My God! My God!  
My Lord is on the immensity of waters;  
What care I that He wears a robe of mist?  
Brave Point Judith Light is my example;  
I see His night and He my faith's small light.  

This is no bather's beach but strand of stones where  
stranded things have died.  
We found a piece of planking, token enough to turn my mind  
to shipwreck in an ancient storm.  
Once I met a Maltese priest, who said they feel for you  
As if that winter with them had been yesterday;  
Nearly every boy in Malta is named Paul.  

I love you too, for being a survivor.  
Except for once when caught to heaven and once thrown  
to earth,  
You sailed in fog.  
From you I've learned to dwell as though departing,  
And past all christologies to cling to Christ.  

Sister Mary Anthony Barr, O.P.
WORK

stuffed in raincoat, hat
briefcase clutching his hand
criteria: the office on time
dénouement: the office on time

occupied arm chair
speaks to solemn steno
clever telephone judgement
fifty thou, mindful

pen wounding blue
now sign papers
spectacles do not notice
the name written

Michael Paul
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 47 No. 2
1969-70
A WOMAN

ooo but your ugliness
sparks a hand to it
your face soft and boned
deep I lie in curled up

    it is
your leprosy strong dirt
in my eyes leprosy
in my needed
mesa down
    down love

Michael James Paul
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 49 No. 1
1971-72
EPITAPH

Here lies the author of many balderdashes,
Though you didn't like his stories, please respect his ashes.
You marked him well while living, for all his pomp and pelf;
For look, he's made by dying, an ash out of himself.

Robert E. Doherty '49
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 24 No. 2
1947
The Sad Interrogation of Piggily Piggily

Piggily Piggily once was a poet
but always desired some day to outgrow it
now he has grown up and often leaves home
now I am curious where does he roam

Piggily Piggily where have you been
o I've been to market to save my pigskin
and how is the market it goes up and down
were it not for the suburbs Id stay there in town

Piggily Piggily why move to town
to guard my pigstock lest it ever sink down
but going to market will surely defeat you
consumers at market will buy you and eat you

and Piggily Piggily where's your pigpride
o stop with your questions I've nothing to hide
the language is worn out and what's in a name
I gave up on poetry tradings the game

Piggily Piggily I can't believe you
how could your pigself so blindly deceive you
o doves come in dovecotes and cows come in herds
this porks in his pigsty and waste comes in words

Piggily Piggily formerly poet
eaten at market and don't even know it
seems quite pighappy in pigsty so I
am no longer curious never ask why

Richard Brundage '81
Autumn
for Peg

each tree's first-fall leaf disturbed you
who wanted to mother the floating shells
so ruthlessly discharged — you would have made
their grief your own and have known why

and like all mothers, felt pain of grieving
over each son's fresh unleaving
— every image left to you distracted,
pointed to both problem and mystery

there is a book that says that from
Adam's fork fathered-forth all
fall of goldengrove and graveyard,
wane of woodland, grief of green

this gentile seeks another comfort
— are there two forces or just one?
— and is spring's earth spontaneous
in birth ... or in death?

Stephen Herald, '64
reprinted from Alembic Vol. 41 No. 1
1963-64
She was quietly distraught when she came to me, pre-occupied as though already grieving. At times she seemed so abstracted that she appeared only partially aware that she spoke to someone and was heard. She hadn’t been able to dissuade him, and he was going to do it that night. I felt both protective and disorientated, because while it was clear that we were close friends, I had no idea who she was. I didn’t say anything, and we went to find him.

At the place where he was, we found the others in the large low outer room, among the flickering dim lights. As she turned without speaking, looking for him, they watched her, and I watched them over her shoulder. I didn’t know her place among them, if she had one at all, but it was clear that she was nowhere near the level he had reached. Her shoulders fell almost imperceptibly, as she failed to find him and realized that he was probably lost already.

One or more of them told her that he’d started earlier, doing the unthinkable: he hadn’t made a god to take with him into the other room for what was done there. When we heard this, dread made it hard to breathe, but the others remained impassive, and their cold serenity hid neither pity nor malice as we moved away toward the other room.

We knew that what was inside had become aware of us, because the door was now ajar, and the darkness beyond spread out to where we were. There was a face, neither his nor anyone else’s, reflecting a steady pale light and seeing us without reaction. It was not empty, but full of nothing we could understand. She tried to speak, but the breath caught in her throat. Something had gone terribly wrong inside, and it was too late for him, if he could still be spoken of at all after what had happened there.

She stepped timidly forward as though to petition what was behind the face which waited motionlessly with something that wasn’t patience.

I realized what she was thinking. She was trying to nerve herself to enter and somehow attempt to follow him, knowing what this would mean for her. Without turning I looked at the others, who’d seen what I had. But they made no move to prevent her, nor did I.

Then she turned around, daunted and ashamed of it. All I could do for her was to follow her out.

Later I tried to make a small god with no particular purpose in mind, but all it did was to distort itself into a hateful shape and fall apart.

John Lyons ’83
return of judas viator

feet pressed to the earth:
the pain of wood,
of stone,
and of church glass
worries the cracked, marble feet
on the italian valleys.
now a ritual has belied
its own myth with a kiss:
only rain washes where tears cleansed;
glasses clutch where hair once held.
the crosiers
have become a balustrade in ruin, not even the celestial cathedral
remains.

skyles rhys
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 48 No. 2
1970-71
Run woman run, there's a reason why they're chasing you
What you've been giving them you've stopped giving
What they had been seeking they've now found
Tearing them from the inside

Hide woman hide, they're after you now
Take your sheets and pull them over your head
Sit still, don't move, cuz if you do they'll see
And rip you apart right where you hide

Cry woman cry, life has turned into agony
Everything you've lived for, everything you've tried
Now turns against you and wants you back
Only to turn you into something you're not

Scream woman scream, for here they come
It's too late now they've got you caught up
There's no running now, you're theirs now
To have and hold and hit and abuse

Die woman die, it's the only peace you'll find
This old world has proved too feeble to hold you
It was your original plan, wasn't it?
You always intended to destroy us all.

Bob Riley '83
I know you wanted to push me
to where you could not see me
or smell my boots;
wet leather. White
cat hair on my jacket,
crooked knee socks — all
these irk you
now. I was quiet before,
but now travel
against the grain of your impression.

Pamela Sterling
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 49 No. 1
1971-72
Poem: Cheers to the Only One Who Makes Me Laugh

You were a weird child
I, good God,
was worse, my mamma said,
after hearing we had beat the life
out of each other
with our dollies, no less.
We clashed like two blood types,
mixed like oil and vinegar, adhered like epoxy glue.
We were vines
tearing our clothes, our skins,
knotting our masses and masses of hair,
yours like flax and mine chocolate. I could
never run the way you did,
But I swam, and still swim, circles
round and around you.

Ana Margarita Cabrera
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 49 No. 3
1971-72
sailing in the space around our bodies
we run free in waves of hissing light
the many voices of ourselves
have the timbre of water
rushing over water
our concentric breaths
drop like smooth stones
so, so deep
the eyes
sting

Lorna Hallal
Feeding

I was a cheap grey peeping then.
You led me to a mound where the sun
seasoned your breast. But the smell
of arranged food shook me. I was
a fake, naturally, clever at starving.
You knew. You kept me alive enough.

I saw the sky all claws
now, nights running at the mouth.
But the earth was waiting where you pointed
and pointed: my face went down finally
for something of flesh, half-buried, alive . . .

The summer you helped ground my mouth.

Edward McCrorie
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 50 No. 1
1972-73
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 furiri 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.
poem written by Salvatore Quasimodo
translated by L. Bruce Porter '67

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 the 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.

reprinted from Alembic Vol. 44 No. 2
1966-67
All firm ground
has been swept up.
Gone are the stones
I used as markers.
When I place my foot now
all and nothing meets it.

This fear is different.
It is the fear of loosing;
unraveling my robe
and going blind. The fear
that grows crusty in non-action;
the fear that can let you love
your stunted growth
and swells, so even pride
cannot walk alone.

Ooh my special fear I grip you
and hang on to your bashing tail.
I cringe at the whip of you
and not the fall;
the fall and the want of the fall
is my own teeth sinking into me.

The fall is only when I think it comes.
And when I think its over
I am snapped
snapped into the enterance
of the fall; the cringe, closed-eyes
and I ride,
on and on . . .
Your heart and mine have known always there is no escape. And also knows there is nothing else.

There is no rising out of my carcass, yet my want to crack open my shell and spill out. My desire to split my chest and eat my pulse, my desire to crumble; met with my desire to soar.

I stand here naked uttering. Riding the whip, trying to fuse myself together trying to fuse my heart and head. Riding the whip and wet with sweat; Smashing shells of words against my green world.

Audrey Fontes Berry '81
You are not my mirror.
Lover come to me naked now
and you'll find such love eyes.

You cannot feed me.
Lover my breath only
breath/death only
can feed me; come to me now
and dance this.

You cannot lift me.
Only I straighten my posture.
Come to me tonight;
the frenzy has compressed to fire.

Audrey Fontes Berry '81
I
OLD MAN’S SONG

Winter freezes my heart; the winds bring only
The sound of thy rustling skirts;
Oh, mistressloved, never more shall I hear
Thy step on cobbled walks.
(Blackness, why dost thou deceive me?)
The leaves fly; all is dark; I await thee.

II
MAIDEN’S SONG

The winds announce thy dirge;
My lotus shivers in thy wake.
But I have loved; eternity is mine;
I fear thee not.
The leaves fly; all is dark; I await thee.

Donald J. Procaccini ’61
reprinted from the Alembic Vol. 35 No. 2
1957-58
in memory of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath

let's face it.
we're angels doing pantomime
into the fire.
two minstrels acting
our way into the grappling flames.

insanity shines
like a moonshadow hitting the silver
face of a clock, furiously
beating the hours toward the sun.

eyes open wide with determination
always
bleed before they see.

Debra Prevey
reprinted from Alembic Vol. 52 No. 3
1974-75