ALEMBIC

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INTRODUCTION

The Alembic — literally, the term denotes a medieval mechanical apparatus used in distillation. In this magazine, the term connotes a figurative “distillation” of the collective literary and artistic talents present in the Providence College community. The medieval apparatus distilled each season’s yield of grapes, and produced a refined and tasteful mixture of wine. This literary “apparatus” also attempts to collect and distill each year’s fruitful yield of creativity, in hopes of likewise producing a palatable artistic vintage.

We integrate the theme of the 1981-82 Alembic with the Tenth Year Celebration of Women at Providence College. The myriad of subtle and evocative change so wrought by woman’s rich and timely presence, reflected through their diverse creative energies, are deservingly included in this issue.

I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart, I am, I am, I am.

—Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)
American poet

There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.

—Willa Cather (1873-1947)
American writer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the Art Club, Adrian Dabash, O.P., Mrs. Greene, Leslie Rupp, and especially Donald Grant, for their timely help, suggestions and support.
DEDICATION

We proudly dedicate this issue to Jane Lunin Perel, Advisor to the Alembic, Professor of English, and acclaimed poet. Her spiritual support, endearing inspiration, and good common sense have proved instrumental in the creation of this enterprise.
ODE TO A RADISH

juice
stinging like a
yellowjacket.
bite
thundering like the roar
of a lion.
spicy
as a devil's
ear,
red
conceals your white
anger.
with a crimson cry
you advance,
oh warrior radish,
to besiege naked
tongues and taste
victory in unguarded
mouths.

Patricia Flynn
THE DANCER

Living to dance
to push out
perfect precision with
each delicious, delicate move­
ment, a point of
a toe
teasing with a gentle swish of hips
flicking a wrist so smartly, as if
confidence is easy

Muscles like soldiers
Tight Taut
Limber Loose
Flexing
disdaining aches and sweat
Body
Twirling Swirling
Leaping
Riding Air
as if real
not vacant not
empty
movements simple as flutters of flamingos
Captivating
minds
through bodies beautiful

though twisting, contorting
punishing a body for unnatural grace
to perform without flaw
as if all balance and form
every motion
every step
is natural
like lungs breathing and
hearts pumping Blood and
Dance are
One

Diane C. Lombardi
A RECLUSE POET

It's no good
To write of nature
Or your god
Through a window;
You can't touch these things through glass.

It's no good to be
Glass;
To silently
And solemnly
Sew your unsewn dreams together
Like ragged paper patches
Let shut up
In shoe boxes to
Puzzle strangers
When you have turned to sand.

You need your Jesus
I'll not deny you that
But you need your Bacchus too.
The stars are out.
The water is still warm.
Touch me
Now.

Ed Gainor
If just once I could splash
like the round, dimpled woman
in the tangerine bathing suit
propelled off the diving board,
a soaring orange
that drops
smacking the clear
cool linoleum surface
of the water

Peggy Hogan

An old gull throws his
Head back in laughter, I am
Rowing in circles.

Katie O'Connor
SCALPEL

It’s just a tiny scissors-boat
Skimming on a fleshy sea,
And waking red behind it streams,
Unleashed in ripples, fanning free.

It darts into the bounding flesh,
And navigates the awkward rolls,
Its tiller deep into the mass
Of yielding muscle folds.

Its travel slows, the power ebbs,
Locked in a dock of gauzy webs.

Karen MacGillivray

WINTER

Fallen
To crust
You drily deaden.

What is yours
But the triumph over a faint sonata
covered to silence
Or a picture’s memory of crumbled colors
Or masses of ivory tears.

Buds will be your defeat
And birds will sing
At your grave —
The sea.

Peter Unternährer
WHAT THE WAVES SAID

Eating fish to taste the sea again.
And a bottle of wine for the flood
you meant to drown in,
but even the shadows on the glass are dry
tonight.

A perfect evening to watch
Dust settle on the lamps,
or catalogue Fear
like Joan of Arc, remembering to forget
when the flames begin, and the words
flow like blood from your pen.
But you are not the author of Death,
so why stop there?

So you stop in a bar instead,
for an ale and an ache you
remember to be real
like the barmaid’s eyes.
When the ale comes, the eyes
remain, they float
like lights in the fog
around the rim of your glass
and when you drink
the eyes enter,
they flow through your veins
and join the heart.

In the heart, the eyes
In the eyes, the flame
In the flame, the flood
In the flood, the sea

And in the waves
the words
words.

Brian Ellerbeck
ONION

You are so wrapped up in yourself!
Your bitterness
causing my tears who
gave you the right to be so smooth?

Diane Cinquegrana

THE JOYS OF A JALAPINO PEPPER

Folded pepper,
Burning yellow
  Summer-salting in
  an
  Autumn's assaulting
  R
  A
  I
  N beading onto wax, shining so
Yellow it burns
The damp grass into M.
  A
  E
  T
  S

Katie O'Connor
MY FRIEND

My friend hung
his blood flowing over my life
flowing from hands staked to a tree
as religious people mocked and jeered.

My brother nailed to my life
hung in anguished silence
his eyes bloodied with endless tears
as his friends stood helplessly by.

My lover died
as his murderers embraced with blood-stained hands
rejoicing over their sacred deed
a deed which brought life to me.

Jim Panaggio

TO THOSE WHO LAUGH
AT MY SIGHT

I'll put fire
under you and
make you burn
like a Salem witch
Your young flesh sizzling,
long hair crackling
your screams reverberate off the
hills breaking the
Silence
as you return to ashes
I hide behind an
ancient oak
Laughing!

Anthony Alix
PARTISAN

We didn’t want to go, fight, die.
How could we? They attacked us
Strangled us until our veins bulged.
First the old, then the young,
All went into the woods.
We lived like civilized animals while
The plagued ones tortured and killed
Our families. So at night,
Dead night,
We crawled, ran, fired our weapons,
Stabbed and burned out eyes.
The morning sun and field became a lake of blood.
Everything burned red.
Tears in my eyes, I screamed about freedom,
Love, family, death. They didn’t care
That I was only thirteen
They shot me anyway.
The bullet split my face,
The blood ran like water
From my nose.
They spit on me and ran off.
I lay alone, dead.
An old lady dragged my body into the woods
And buried me,
But no one forgot the youngest partisan.

Tony Kulbis
STEINWAY

*dedicated to George Gershwin*

Like a stockbroker reporting
a financial success,
you proudly resound
his musical prowess.

Notes as supple as a
swallow
fly
in
rhapsodical flocks
when his hands
caress you.

But your virginal
keys screech
in
persecution
when my hands
violate you.

I spit on you,
black whore of musicians,
for making love
to him
and leaving me
barren.

*Patricia Flynn*
STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF EGYPT IN MY MIND
WITH RAMESSES II, THE GREAT STONE FACE


Ramesses II, the Great Stone Face
tower of legs. Who do you
think you are — God?
Go ahead. Shake sand into dust.
Smash your bolderous knuckles now
Grand King, tell me, who comes running this time? No one?

This woman carved beneath you tells me she is your
woman, Ramesses. So, it is your own woman you’ve bound
in a boulder between your feet.

You would have to bend over your knees to see her face. Two hollowed eyes and a chiselled-off nose whose arms taper off into nothingness.
No backbone but a slab of stone. She is half a woman abandoned in rock.

No fancy headpiece adorning her fine fair forehead unlike your turban, a plaited lion’s mane. Is she your wife, Ramesses, or a pawn at your feet?

“Sit on my lap,” I hear you say, “If you can reach. See, see the woman beneath me, the size of my toe.”
How do you know what’s left of her Ramesses? She’s worn away.
All these years she couldn't bear it, bent with bitterness. You are one with this, her erosion. Not even her imprint, she won’t even leave you that much of her.

I see her silhouette rise like a ghost and fire itself free from rock in blue veils of flame flying into the midnight air like water. See how with this fire she blasts herself out of the boulder into which you first bound and carved her.

Listen well and you will hear her, Ramesses. It is your Queen flowing past your feet. She is the echo of your River Nile. Strain your ears. Hear her resounding. Ceaseless.

Ceaseless.

Lori Evangelos
INNER MIRROR

glass smash i heard and felt
in the “somewhere” night
mirrors lie cold
in a puddle — broken
looking for pieces to look
my shattered self
on the ground — broken
bewildered now
like a dog in traffic
looking for love
but she cast her stone
at me and you
know the rest
where to go now
a voice says “wait”
but where and why and wait
for what
“your funeral,” voice says
as i hear acid laughter
and then
everywhere laughter

Joe Sprague
TALK IN A COLLEGE LIBRARY

a man browses Our Bodies Ourselves a Book
By
and for
Women

he sits slouches
on the cushion without sinking, stiff
workboots press the floor:
stumps from a dead tree
finely groomed beard
(he says the hedges must be trimmed)
covers the little boy (blush)
in a deep voice he
announces
“Pregnancy, abortion, lesbian mothers. This book is hilarious”

his frog throat croaks
a laugh

the two women his
company
feel it like another cup of coffee nothing new
but still their guts shrink

Sandra Jeanne Deryck
SCHOLASTIC TRILOGY
(BITING THE HAND...)

invitation
On the day of St. Cecilia
Your Earthly Presence
Is requested
At the Pedants Ball.
Ten o'clock sharp
In an ivy covered hall
With a clock on top
For your Pleasure
An added treasure;
The marriage of Vanity
And Pretension.
To begin the Ball
A benediction!
King's English gloss,
Of poetic diction:
    Awake, Ye Muses Nine!
Help pull the wool
O' er the eyes of these swine.

the snake with its tail in its mouth
I read words
by one who writes words
then write words
for one who reads my words
and write more words
about those words
for me to read.

manifesto
Is a statement of political intent.
Here is my intent:
    I would take all those judges
        who call love immorality
        cold emptiness reality
    and give them eyes to see
        ears to hear
        hands to touch other hands
    give them, in short, sense.
    failing that, of course, they must be shot.
idealism has limits.

Ed Gainor
PAPER DOLLS

She’s a flimsy
Paper, cut-out doll
Discarded on
The rubbish heap.

Frayed and tattered,
Her features smudged,
Her reproachful stare — she’s
Too worn to keep.

He wanted her when
She was brightly defined
So easy to fold, just
A doll with his mind.

Now she’s rejected, been
Repeatedly jabbed.
The man with the scissors
Has a new doll to stab.

Karen MacGillivray
CAPITAL

The ME generation
Symphony

Side 1

1. EGO EGO EGO (allegro vivance)
2. Contrived Conformity (Tempo de marche)
3. Power Lust (Molto allegro)
4. Apathy-soprano solo (Largo)
5. Success-Cheap Victories (Scherzo)
0. LEAVE ME ALONE (Finale) (Largo)

T. Kulbis
WOMEN WITH WINGS WILL FLY

Dore Hall stands aloof; a massive brick building with white framed windows. Far from the main campus, it remains aligned to its character. Magnificent fibers of life weave their delicate webs within those secure walls. The window's opaqued glass softens midday.

Undisturbed, the girls dwelling within continue diligently spinning fine silken threads, the first in their cocoon of life. The delicate, yet determined, web of personhood wafts up to the high necked ceiling and drapes down over the dangling bulb into the dimly lit corridor. Silver strands spindle along the black railing, hugging the central stairwell. Some day, each tightly wadded cocoon will shed its hardened skin, and a woman will emerge with wings.

Lori Evangelos
for Henry Moore

The eye is a peep hole into

    space curving as it surrounds
the curve of the body: bowls
and shoulders of light we
drink in, filled with the inner
nectar, Bronze moons for arms we devour
whole, dazzled as in the tropics
ripe fruits steeped in rum
    slide down our throats. Divine

it is some form of Divine: the hulk of
the body turned fluid.
Gasoline rainbows seeping the prisms of
themselves down sidewalks, but wait
here nothing dissolves.
Only the fire in the metal consumes
    us, flame to
    flame. Lightening shafts
hitting the stone you lifted
    the thunder out of.

There is a black and blue throbbing
inside a gold echo of your hammering.
Also the scratches you cut in the stone
ebb on its human back like seawater.
Like Silence.
I am scribbling and swaying, scribbling
these words struck out of
me like water from a rock. You shaft
me into it. What you make swimming in this gallery
sure as whales diving and breaking
back into light. The guard
asserts I am not allowed to write here. My
gasping and swaying make him think I'm crazed; I'll
lunge at your
muscle boulders.
All he cares is rules, precautions. I do
not tell him I'm a poet and fall over the "seated
figure" rolling my eyes and sobbing.
Forgive me that lack of applause.

Instead I come home where the sun
streaming over the nearby quarry
and the stone walls of New England
ignites me with a fury
of your hauling and shaping. You
have taken out of us what we live through.
Given it back shimmering in
its weight and salt, Henry Moore.
Your only praise
is the secret of what endures.

Jane Lumin Perel
"AFTERNOON WALK II":
a painting by Catherine Galbreath Conti

Lone
pine leans
slightly to one
side, tired, like
a soldier at the end of
an evening
vigil.
And the wind whispers
in blue-cold brushstrokes
that she, too, wants to sleep.
And the sun slips by
like a scolded child
head hung
low
blushing for shame.
Now
on this December dusk
I remember that painting
while the wind
throws darts at my cheeks
and the sun falls
down magenta tears
staining the snow.

Patricia Flynn
THE LARK'S SONG

The white walls made the room seem much larger. The ceiling merged with the walls like a voice in a valley, and when the sun streamed through the picture windows, the light brightened the room like a chorus of snow. The sun has many veils, and when the room filled with veils, the furniture would disappear.

No furniture. The room no longer a room, but a valley masked in snow and sunlight. The walls appeared as trees; the ceiling with its own mask — the clouds. Only the corners of the room remained, hidden amongst the branches, where larks found them and built nests. And so the day passed.

At dusk, the veils were removed. The corners of the room spread like ashes until the trees turned black. Shadows lengthened like walls. The night appeared like a black window in a black room, and the valley hid in the mouth of a lark. And so the night passed.

When morning came, with its veils and branches, the lark had gone, taking the valley with it. So, the sun shone through the picture windows, and the walls remained, and the furniture remained, and the ceiling remained.

No valley. But it is said that whenever a lark is heard to sing, a vision of the valley appears, and sap is stirred in the barren trees.

Brian Ellerbeck
CONTRIBUTORS

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*a recluse poet
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CURVED WALL, 1956-57"
"AFTERNOON WALK II"
THE LARK’S SONG

GRAPHICS
(in order of appearance)

Ann Cibulskis
R. Newell Elkington
*Doug Haddan
*Desiree Mantarri
Christopher G. Glionna
cover drawing by Paula Sockler

*Denotes Annual Contest Award-winner
We, the people of the Alembic, are proud to announce the winners of the 1982 Creative Literary & Art Contest:

Poetry: Ed Gainor
Photography: Doug Haddon
Graphics: Desiree Mantarri

These works of art will be on exhibit at Phillips Memorial Library during the week following the Providence College Student Poetry Reading on April 21, 1982 in Aquinas Lounge.