Alembic
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The Alembic — literally, the term denotes a medieval mechanical apparatus used in distillation. For 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.

DEDICATION

This issue of the Alembic is proudly and affectionately dedicated to the Very Reverend Thomas R. Peterson, O.P., as he retires from his position as President of Providence College.
CONTRIBUTORS

POEM MADE ON THOMAS McGLYNN'S STATUE OF ST. DOMINIC de GUZMAN
Leonard Cochran, O.P.

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Paul DaPonte

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Alysia K. Harpootian

PHOTOGRAPH
Charlotte Stasiuk

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CEMETARY, PROVIDENCE COLLEGE
                                            Leonard Cochran, O.P.
PHOTOGRAPH: FORBIDDEN TERRITORY        Elizabeth Larkin
Air parts perpetually to make room for your step.  
Poised out of balance with the world,  
You lunge forward, forever falling, never fallen.  

It must have been like that in Fanjeaux  
Those nights when you saw all your life as one,  
The shattered dream whose picked-up pieces  
Are the highroad for this captured stride.

Leonard Cochran, O.P.
INFATUATION

The see-saw stops.
Good riddance to the ride
that whirled my pleasure into pain.
Summer ceases. Even the summer of Indian sun when dull earthly
foliage shines in luster like amber,
topaz, ruby and jade.

I leave this playground.

It is still and stark
with air clear in a sky white
with winter-watch-warning. I see grey in everything.
Grey earth, grey trees turning black
against grey skeletal shrubbery.

I have become November-numb.

Paul DaPonte
TO BARBARA FOR BEING DOLLS TOGETHER

Baptized in bathtub water I dragged you by silk strands of corn
how pure you were
motionless listening to my every command
not crying when I chopped your blonde hair
(I thought it would grow back and wondered why it did not)
so you agreed to wear a bonnet to cover that patch of dead grass.
I told mother your head was cold.

Now you sit on a closet shelf,
leaving me to pick the flowers, swig wine,
and dance that midnight ball beneath
the crystal earring pierced in the sky.

Oh, to drink tap water from tiny china cups, again.

Alysia K. Harpootian
THE MOONLIGHT FEAST OF THE AFRICAN WATER LILY

Dare to touch my petals, purple beneath your cellophane wings so soft I am
alluring pollen threads waiting for you to dine upon
do not swim in my fountain of poison
it will not renew youth
my walls seal as you choke
gasping, drowning
until my hunger dies
I am a floral tomb closed at nightfall innocently
unfolding with the sun to taste another victim's fall.

Alysia K. Harpootian
OCTOBER THOUGHTS

Exhausted tomato vines still feed, barely, smallish green fruit first born in September. Reddish sugar-maple leaves lie still on the yet green leaves of the vine, fooling the searcher for ripened red fruit into thinking that the sun was yet able to make its magic work in October as it worked in August. Autumn splashes color amid forest green that clothed the trees since April's zephyrs exploded buds. Yellows, reds, cinnamons betray the truth that cold has slowed the tide of life in living plants, and they decline towards dormancy, and timely, temporary, seeming death.

The color gray, the balding pate, the bowed, arthritic legs, tremorous arms, and failing sight betray colorless aging. Hardly plashy like nature's autumn. Yet human autumn is not, like nature's, past fruiting and harvest. Ripe human fruit can grow until the end. And then, before the fall, God rips us up, roots and all, to take us home. There is but one spring for humans. Harvest comes at any time. Winter fruit can be the sweetest of all the seasons of human living.

Thomas L. Fallon
EXPERIENCE

For Mrs. Claire Greene

A day slips slimy as a raw egg
When you clutch too hard for morning.
Clenching fingers d
r
i

p
sunshine too much to hold . . .

Paint fragile blues
On the ivory chips of shattered shells,
Take an azure sliver of now,
Wrap it in a minute of cotton,
Wear it as a treasure
Tomorrow.

David W. B. Llewellyn
A BACKWARD GLANCE AT BAPTISM

Of water we were never sure. Old boats and sailors pushing waves to distant shores far from the beaches in our brains. Cold muscles, how can we wait, we wait for proof that life has begun some sign arthritic fingers can touch. All

is distorted: Yesterday's an old shoe, patched, resoled, worn out from constant rubbing. It's soon replaced without one final wearing. When You were young you had

a flask of water from the River Jordan hanging like a stone around your neck. Sister, you were never
like the nuns I met at school.
You danced
for rain—
your voice, an incantation to devil-gods, low
and moaning, bent
in drunken pain. You sprinkled water on my
forehead like
some Persian Priestess, forgiving me for sins
of the heart or mind
or breath. (Older, we must get Older)

Each morning I
squirter grapefruit at the shaft of
light that blasts the shadow
from your chair . . . Do the Purple rainbows
bruise your distant forehead?

There is no sign
when the drops absorb
the pain.

*Vivika R. Hansen*
waiting for the sunday

burning through the smoke you
light your eyes into
flames as we tour
   melted ice and ashes
along the floor you
pick dust and cat hair watching my
wrinkles grow like creases in some
magazine turning

almost falling you bend and
lace the knot my muscles
ache in knowing of our
dream of turning
old

Michael Wood
OUTSIDE THE CRADLE
INSIDE THE MIND

Remembering the fall, the feelings of self-pity and disgust came back and her face strained like an old woman's with fallen cataract eyes that only glazed back at her in the mirror. Sliding onto the bed she felt the sheets give way under her weight and the dizzying sense of a room that was both her hell and her sanctuary. It was cool and the day's fading light reflected upon her lenses, increasing their pull, drawing her eyes inward at herself. Why did this room become smaller and smaller while her body filled every inch and corner of the floor and walls? The pain in her ankle climbed past her knee as she watched recurring images of broken glass and outstretched hands and spilled liquor. Smoke filled her mouth, growing in her lungs while her finger played with the burn hole of the black gown, tearing away the crusted edge, gently pushing and pulling away more and more material. It was the cloud of smoke she had hoped for; she had felt this before. Even in a room full of people she was alone: hiding in her glass, covering herself with the ringlets of smoke, slipping inside them, and tracing them in their circles.

The house was empty now, and she sat alone on her bed, enjoying but hating the solitude that surrounded her. But it was more than solitude. It was herself in her mind in her body, and all she could do was hold on waiting for it to slow down enough to understand. All she felt and all she thought were knotted in her mind like a twisted rope that seemed to have no ends and no beginnings. Where do you start to undo this mess but maybe a razor would help but no that cuts and then it bleeds slowly and the twine frazzles lost in tiny strands that fall away floating down until they bury themselves in the tile and you can't see them.

She pulled her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them, embracing the growing purple and black lump of flesh on her ankle and thinking tomorrow would be different, tomorrow I will leave this room and see things clearly and know it was only an accident, only too tired. But they will see the dark circles surrounding my eyes and think that maybe a room between the geriatrics and the psychopaths
might be the right place for me. But it was bad it was bad and it was wrong wrong to let their unspoken words lock her inside herself. It was only Jesus who could judge and those pious bastards had no right to call her sinful. She pulled tighter and the ashtray slipped to the floor, broken and smoldering, black against the shiny wood.

Her eyes cut through the walls like a scythe cutting down grain, and she focused on the lonely clown, sitting, laughing at her from inside the crib. He looked at her as she let down the side of the crib and smiled when she picked him up and held him against her breasts. As she stroked his head, tears welled in her eyes and she remembered standing here, only months ago, or maybe years, and she watched the clown’s head burst as he smashed against the blue sailboat wallpaper. He continued laughing louder and louder as her foot dug deep into his face until the eyes rolled out from inside the head, and then the laughing finally stopped.

She ran his white insides through her hands and smothered his flesh with kisses and heard footsteps on the stairs and red lights flashing loud red color into the house. She turned to face the blood dripping in smiles on the floor where her son lie, caught between the rungs of the playpen, growing larger and smiling in the broken pieces in which she’d left him.

*Michael Wood*

*1984 - 85 Contest Winner*
THE INSOMNIAC’S APPLE
For Fr. Paul van K. Thomson

Clear as false dawn you stretch from sleep. Dogs in
the back yard howling their heads off
snarl you into thinking
what a petty mind you have
that has to be exercised in the teal
fog of such a subterranean hour.

Downstairs you go like a miner gathering
the dust all around you. A dry
cough punctuating your dull search for something
illuminating, even the kitchen light for an hour to read by.
So we all find ourselves bandaged in black gauze, hoping to
strip it
off and see with a good eye an unbruised apple
poised on a clay plate. Someone has washed and polished it
believing at that moment that hands make a difference. And
apples.
That the gems are there, if you dig them out.
But others seem to die in sleep
able to give themselves away to the dark
pit in a pure suffocation
never striking the mind’s pick ax
delirious to crack open a vein of light.

Should you envy them rock-like in their beds?
They will not stand in dense exhaustion tomorrow morning
like you and actually fry an egg greeting the apple’s gleam
from across
the stove like a head of state bowing toward the monarch’s
crown jewels. So this coming to light must mean

something. Watching it your insomniac’s heart is steadied by
bird-calls. It is for this play of light you wake. Why sleep
when you can watch the apple ignite?
Quit the blackout, quite.

Jane Lunin Perel
PAINTING THE NUDE

You sit naked as a primitive cave woman
stern triangular face, detached.
Flesh so raw stamped in blue ink throughout
the tatoood eagle spreads on your back but
are you free?

Withering creature, your bloated
stomach is round like the moon.
Lovers’ initials carved on your thighs
far from the heart.
yet with delicate strokes of peach and pink should
we transform you into a
Petrarchan woman?

Alysia K. Harpootian
IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
Helen Hayes on Beauty

Should mousy hair mourn to meet its graying end?
Skin, freckled from summer's to winter's fading
long for the snow it never knew?
Cheeks for roses that never grew?
If two blues saw youth-years
then yes, tears,
but brown like these in me miss less.
Wrinkles remember another time —
but "losing my beauty was like losing a dime."

Paul DaPonte

1984 - 85 Contest Winner
THE ARRANGEMENT

The three of us, like the fresh-cut flowers, need to be arranged. The apartment, like the wicker basket of carefully knotted strands,
with its wide open mouth and curled lip, waits.
To be filled with lemony daffodils,
and rich marigolds, with their solid masses of bloom,
some carefully placed moonpenny daisies, with their simple gold and white flowers, and a few stately tulips,
glowing with a dusky sheen, all laced with a profusion of baby’s breath,
and fronds of spiderfern.

Until some red hot pokers and dragon heads are thrust into the basket,
making the marigolds glitter, and the daisies and daffodils cower against the fern. Then the tulips stand guard.

It will take a long time to arrange these flowers.

Anne D’Andrea
JUNGLES OF JUPITER

The Jungles of Jupiter
Naked plant on naked flesh
Wild essence in wild minds
Cool dark caverns where bodies creep.

Blistered confusion in crystal caves
Shattered lights
Blow one’s hair in a trillion waves
The gauntlet of gold, chariots of flames
The misty mountain lane.

A sunken city, composed of ice
Wingless angels in soundless flight
Draw their swords and lacerate the night.
In the labyrinth the fairy sleeps
Swallowed by the shadows of foaming white horses.

Michael Capper
ENCORE

Waiting, for the play to be over
and the set to be cleared,
for the janitor to come with his dry broom
and spin the bare lightbulb,
Waiting in the heavy overcoat of darkness
laced with weary, lost perfume.
I am too warm now, but as he opens the door,
the faint icicle of light pierces
the blackness, and suddenly I am
swirling in a sea of air, a dazzling diamond
dustmote, waltzing with the
silver cobweb come out of the corner,
gliding above the gaping red-velvet chairs.

Betsy Beaulieu
FOR MARY, WHO HATES RED HAIR

This tree, this chameleon clothes horse, a
Fifth Avenue window in
mid autumn
is on fire and wants
peace,

Wants to be  dressed
like firs, deep
in green  spearing
the snow with
finger-negles.

Wants more than neon clouds hovering
over the crest of her spine.
The bitter splash
of fire against
her back burns to a
crimson bone.

Consider in winter,
as cold glass shavings  linger
on your autumn hair,
the fir, ever
  green,
and know:

It is a blessing to be a maple.

Vivika R. Hansen
REMEMBER WE

Remember we
burned up the dollar,
inhaled the karma,
and walked barefoot
through Copley Square.
The Saturday shoppers
were afraid
of two little girls
smoking cloves
on a bench,
as if we threatened their idea
of humanity.

Jeannie Connerney
FLAME

A candle flickers at me,
Crying wax, crying
Put out the fire before I
Lose myself, my shape, my -- --
A cowering wick withers, crackle screams
   No relief
   No relief
No.
I let it stay.
This candle is not meant for show, and
Warm and pain are same:
If I move too near
I am burned too:
Warm and pain are same.

David W. B. Llewellyn
Hey, I hear you're leaving
to search for an obscure
freedom
or Nirvana,
an inner peace
somewhere in the depths of America.
I stand in the wet city darkness
and watch you walk slowly
across the highway bridge.
Your tattered knapsack— stuffed
with T-shirts and some books,
slung across one shoulder,
and wearing your army jacket,
jeans, and secondhand sneakers.
One pair of those headlights
will surely pity a simple,
peace-loving man,
and give him a ride
to the home he never had.

My friend, wherever you are,
I hope you've found the answers.
At least you had the courage to search.

Jeannie Connerney
then and now, now

this place where even the cat fears
waking and walking
floors where Mona Lisa
hangs grinning at lines drawn or
just watching bulldogs
shooting pool
I'll bet she never thought she'd hang
with silent telephones ringing at squinting
eyes red and aching at dawn,
or noon, or dusk, and people
God knows people whoever they are in beds on
floors or clinging to couches
and chairs

some kind of sexual masquerade party
for strangers not sure of
where they are

maybe the only time this could happen
again is sixty years or so from now when gray skies
knock leaves from weathered branches and you
fall deeper and deeper into memory
being swallowed by it as you roll by in
your wheelchair

Michael Wood
SOLDIER

Underneath the blanket — there were no legs.
Underneath his eyes — there were dark rings
    like the tar football players wipe on
    to protect their eyes from the sun.
Underneath his jacket pocket — there were
    bronze, silver, and gold medallions —
    shining like lost coins on the sidewalk.
Underneath that soldier's stern disciplined stare —
    there were traces of sorrow and hate.

Underneath the balcony hung the American cloth —
    sewn stitches giving license to kill.
Underneath that balcony there were hundreds —
    of hungry young soldiers not noticing
    the little man on stage. Not caring.
Underneath their expressed feelings of concern —
    for the American Vet — and
Underneath their smirky eighteen year old smiles —
    their only concern was to miss their English class.
    After all this assembly was Period Four.

Underneath the bright yellow light that stabbed his eyes —
    like that of an Army sergeant prosecuting and questioning
    his prisoner of war — He began.
Underneath his eyes — there were tears as he spoke —
    like morning dripping down a window.
Underneath his nose — there were sweat droplets beading
    like wax at the bottom of a burning candle.
Underneath his Army greens — his dog tags stuck
    to his beating chest —
    like leaves sticking to a headstone on a rainy day.
Underneath the blanket — his stubs lay still.

Underneath the balcony it was not quiet — they were not intent
    on what this stranger had to say.
    They did not care.

Underneath his breath —
    This Soldier cursed America.

Jeanne Kauffman
BEFORE THE AWAKENING

I walk
I talk
I bend and break

Stumble,
Crumble,
The world
A car
Lost city of fire

Pyramids shake
Apartment blocks
The Smith’s back yard

But I am alone
On this lost city of Mars . . .
I have grown alone
Amongst broken glass and stolen cars.

The pylons hum
Mondos run
Conveyer belts rumble
Stars tumble
To the foot
Of the temple.
The doors
The ice,
A million
Glass eyes
On a trillion
Wheeling cogs
The dust,
The rust.

Corridors and pavements
Conveyer belts
And streams.
Cosmetic operations
For all countries in need.
Pods and peas, muscle fatigue,
Me mum with the soda syphon,
Clockwork mice and twelve foot pythons
Shakespeare, Shakespeare, Today
THE EXAM. ............

I'm Awake!

Michael Capper
ON TAPESTRY #7 —
THE UNICORN IN CAPTIVITY

They cannot tame his spirit.
Although the huntsmen and hounds have seized him
and the maiden soothed him,
he makes a covenant with the delicate
gold necklace that binds him.
Lying docile, only his tail twitches from
the chase just past, guarding his circle.
His eye gleams, the night’s first star.
His chin whiskers curl like soft cedar shavings.
The jewelled harness cannot match his naked splendor
but instead mocks his magnificence.
Only his horn remains free, arching triumphant
past a sea of vines and blossoms like a chip of comet
toward the sky.

Besty Beaulieu
DAMASCUS

And when the voice was through
it threw me deep into dark incandescence.
I fell on rock hard. Its triune point
pierced me — a puncture to pride (now pardoned).
An illumination: words of warning spoke of
truth misbegotten, a love-light forgotten.
And though dazzled and drained,
I was renewed and renamed
and bid to begin that city unseen.

Paul DePonte
FEAST

You are October.
Your companions are loud leaves
and dark Indian corn.
But the midnight ice-tipped knife will soon scar
your mottled orange hide and you will be taken

Inside. As the fire sparks your nerves stand
up to that other knife that will
probe your plumpness. You have
no choice whether you will host
a candle and chrysanthemums or leer
at frightened children. And also your flesh
may be ground into bread, your seeds roasted.

Betsy Beaulieu
END OF AUTUMN, DOMINICAN CEMETERY
PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

Now, the time
when windmet
colors whirl
in the onset
of winter's
monochromes.

Finale nears.
Leaves fall
like rain,
like tears.

Leonard Cochran, O.P.