



ALEMBIC

THE ALEMBIC

The Providence College Literary Magazine

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THE ALEMBIC

A Literary and Artistic Journal

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 *Alembic* is dedicated to Jane Lunin Perel, *Alembic* advisor for the past thirteen years. We appreciate the effort and time that she has given to this issue, and to all previous issues.

CONTRIBUTORS

THE SEPTEMBER PASSAIC	<i>Robert Toole</i>
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DUSK *Veronica Hronjak*
I AM IN THE RIVER IN WINTER *John Brewer*
PHOTOGRAPH: MIRROR *Colleen McGunnigle*

COVER PHOTO
(PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST WINNER) *Lisa Brown*

*POETRY CONTEST WINNER

The quotation "Losing my beauty was like losing a dime" by Helen Hayes was heard by Professor Perel when she was listening to a radio interview with Ms. Hayes. She requested that her creative writing students write poems using this exact simile. Three of the poems included here contain this statement.

THE SEPTPIC

THE SEPTEMBER PASSAIC

A river churns its rumble
like a violent bloodstream
under the tapping rain
outside this misted window.

It follows itself
out into the Atlantic,
passing mud-banks
and abandoned docks,
where old fishermen sit in
the cover of the afternoon.

Birds perch themselves above,
claws viciously clenching limbs
of oaks and swamp-trees,
waiting patiently for the fish
the grizzlies-bears miss.

The river carries the bark,
the fish, the soaked rotted timber,
and the empty cigarette packs
with it, while the coarse-
screeching birds follow.

Robert Toole

ALMANAC

Crows crowbar the sky.
They lift it open
with blackened anorexic branches,
and gray winter light rains down coins
like a dead man's annuity.

The table is bare inside the farmhouse.
It grooves smooth as horse hooves
curve where flatware weights.
One last turnip tilts in a basket
pale as a corpse's knee cap.

The farmer returns from town,
the farmer's wife in her navy dress.
He will stoke the fire.
She will unwrap the cheese from the cheesecloth.
Their smoke curving toward the crows
juggling those coins of light
until all is spent except the blackout
blackstrap molasses, the spilling seeping
night.

Jane Lunin Perel

A STREAM ON A BENCH

I look on my lake as leaves float by like small ships
sailing pigeons never worry, they peck at the ground
while leather-squeaking shoes stomp like hoofs
stampeding kids carrying rocks and
marbles chewing big gum globs run
aimlessly like beheaded

chickens and mothers
rushing, pushing carriages speak loudly about
new cosmetics

I never used that stuff, I never cared
losing my looks was like losing a dime

the day's dust falls to rest
the last light yawns at darkness

Where are you
clowns you
circus freaks pinching cheeks?
They shoot out of my walkway like
thorns on a wilting
rose
the moonbeams miss me
can you tell me the time?
my pigeons are hungry
will you spare a dime?

Christopher M. Carnabuci

THE BAGLADY

a metal sun
beams off the steel tower
corner of Wall and Broadway

hunched on a splintered crate
the baglady cringes in the
chilled September dawn

the hands that rub the
leathered skin are
claws that dig deep into
empty cans are
palms that beg to the
Bull Market boys

but
in Brooks Brothers and Burberry
they trip past
the too long and torn shoes

rushing to the pulses of
Tiffany watches

Marguerite Stokes



QUEEN OF CLUBS

wild eye, winking looking glass fringed in black creams,
a neon headlight in a midnight masquerade
who charges through the unlit deserts, unaware
of the suffocated son of Sappho
inside her Cadillac

still she rides on sapphire heels, through walls and air,
iridescent crescent woman descending the stairs
to the cellar where they keep the leopards and the wine
and time is on the rocks.

No one need speak for the beasts attack her pupil,
bloodshot in purple, before she lifts her hands
for kisses.

Jeannie Connerney

FAT MONEY

Swearing, Sweating, Starving,
They flip glossy after glossy of dream girls
that nibble on crunchy greens drinking
spring water to refresh their sinuous bodies.
Body suits with price tags that could buy
food for the month
stretch at their bellies and broadsides.
And their bodies beautiful have wrinkles and
rolls accumulated over centuries of Twinkies
and doughnuts.
Reflections in the dance room mirrors
reveal fat melted away, bodies molded
masses of centerfold sex.
But the instructor claps hands together
that flip the mirrors back to reality.
And the cellulite is still there but the
check for X dollars is not.
None realize that losing the body and
beauty is like losing a dime.

Elizabeth Maloney

BELLEN LADY IN CHANGING TIMES¹

She swaggers rag-tag careless cross cobblestone square,
As wrens cascade and congregate before her—
Only to alight in her wake.
She is pinaforicly perfect, this Victorian.

Speaking in sing-song verse of Waterford, French and
Bavarian,²
Her etiquette is strictly Darroe Street Uptown,³
Her skin, parchment covered ivory with
Lines of age like scrimshaw,
And eyes of smoke-clouded crystal.
The hair is lamb's white yarn,
In earlier days of earthen hue.
With pinkie that has never grazed teacup,
And palms lily-petal soft,
She waits for the local.

Craig McGannon

1. Bellen: Old Irish high society of the 1920's.
2. Waterford, French, and Bavarian: Crystal.
3. Darroe Street Uptown: Affluent area of Dublin, today a slum.

love at the end of love

love at the end of love
is like a leaf
in November

tarnished marigold
crushed cranberry
faint gusts snap the
struggling stems and
footsteps crunch the
crisp sunburned leaves

love at the end of love
is like a leaf
better fallen
in September

Marguerite Stokes

**I WOULD WADE THROUGH WEBS OF
YEARS TO REACH HER**

when the clouds rolled in
over the darkening city
I to Her would go
late afternoon leaves
scurrying along the ground
like busy spiders
weaving webs to catch flies in

caught in those encircling fibers
clouds pressing on my shoulders
burden of these years tripping my steps
I—alone
from trap to treaty
to Her stumbled

and She—waiting—alone
in her walled garden
would in her corner sit
whispering her perfect poems
would in whispers
lift me from the webs
and reach with me
towards the burning stars

Daniel A. Connolly

JONQUIL

I am no proud, predictable evergreen
but a cold earth-crusted bulb

Snow-smothered
Earth's patient young

A short-lived star
Bursting through cloudcover

A cannibal surviving
on my decaying ancestors

I am reaching and stretching
like a waking lazy cat

Against winter's cold slap
Pulsing to life again on an emerald breeze

Patty Hanlon

AQUARIUM

Where are the FISH?

There are only figures,

discernible legs and arms.

Juxtaposed in rhythms of waves.

INDIGO,

SAPPHIRE,

LAPIS LAZULI

Billowy irises lamenting,
fanning for the coolness of a

b r e e z e.

Resting in there eternal

w v s.

a e

Phyllis Manna

BEATING TIME

I see in the valley
the roof-top specks
the threadlike roads and
lakes like
shattered
glass
I ponder the past
times spent
plucking like grapes
my circus-days, waiting;
weightless thoughts daubed
on the purple canvas
skies of a pear-
shaped world

'till I heard
the little drummer
beating
the minutes ticking
by.

Christopher M. Carnabuci

TITANIC'S CLOCKWORKS

It is time for the clock
To tick its doom in the Autumn
To strike and chip out

Its gloom in fine weighted
Sounds for the town this morning.
It is time, as the clock

And bells go bong! bong! bong!
For the minister to stone his people,
The children to lay down

Their toy guns, the
Buggy-driver to unharness his
Horses. But far across

Town, down by the docks,
After the third and final bong,
The black-rain-coated people shuffle

Forward to board the Titanic.

Robert Toole

**WHAT THE PARROT SAW IN THE LABORATORY
AFTER ECT***

Spoken tonically immobile,
there's a swerving lather corduroy
giving a nine cat salute to a bridge
of whipped cream, throwing popcorn heavy
with saltatory conduction.

Dream detectives, dead dermis, hangs
on pikes hooked like a lady's eyebrow
squeezed in Chinese.

Icilly clad, its green inhibition
sprinkled like cartwheels with
lazy cheezes that saturate and smirk
liquid hair lips.

Onward James, give me Albert,
Give me a boy, I'll make a white mouse.

Sharon Carter

*Electro-convulsive Shock Therapy

THE PATIENT

I have a crispy attitude about life the doctor said as he nibbled on the end of his pencil and that precisely is my problem because I just can't seem to grasp onto the significance of certain things like the other day when I went over to Mrs. Macfarland's she had a whole mess of burning dogs in her attic. Now that's dangerous! Everyone knows you're supposed to keep burning dogs in the basement. Well anyway we started playing bridge and I'm losing something terrible because her deck has five suits and the joker of the fifth suit is really an alien who tells the other players what's in my hand. Mrs. Macfarland says if I don't like it I can leave so I do but I killed her first and on the way home I stopped at the rest home to visit my grandmother and I tipped her upside down a couple of times so she'd sleep at night because she used to do that to me and I really hated it. I had to practically crawl home because space was pushing down on me wicked hard and I couldn't stand up or get enough oxygen so I just figured I'd do the old "photosynthesis trick" and it's really funny because people see you're not breathing and they think you're dying but you go on living and some people just cannot grasp the concept. I really think Lifesavers should come in vegetable flavors because they would be more nutritious and I always eat the hole first anyway and you shouldn't leave children unattended in grocery carts because they easily roll through a time space entry field and foosh your chances of seeing them again are close to zero unless you had them time stamped at birth but who does that anymore and like I always say you can't put out a forest fire with hot water or tea bags so don't bother calling the fire department. I often call my house to make sure I'm not home and I disguise my voice in case I answer the phone or when I am at home I call myself on the extension and hang up just before I get there. That'll teach me.

Robert DeMoura

HOLDING ON

I sit at the center of a spiral
sipping pink champagne
on ice
picking soft petals off
geraniums
to feed the fish.

They say it is
DNA which
made Mozart a master
and Galileo a
gazer. Who was their
mentor?

Did they sit where
one moment looks through
the next, where
hearts are split
at the blink
of an idea's
awful eye —

Or was it that invisible
twist in their veins —
the beat of an Internal Bird,
pulsing like the
bluest blood of an
Italian sky
which burns in my fingers and eyes
to uncurl, spring —
ing free.

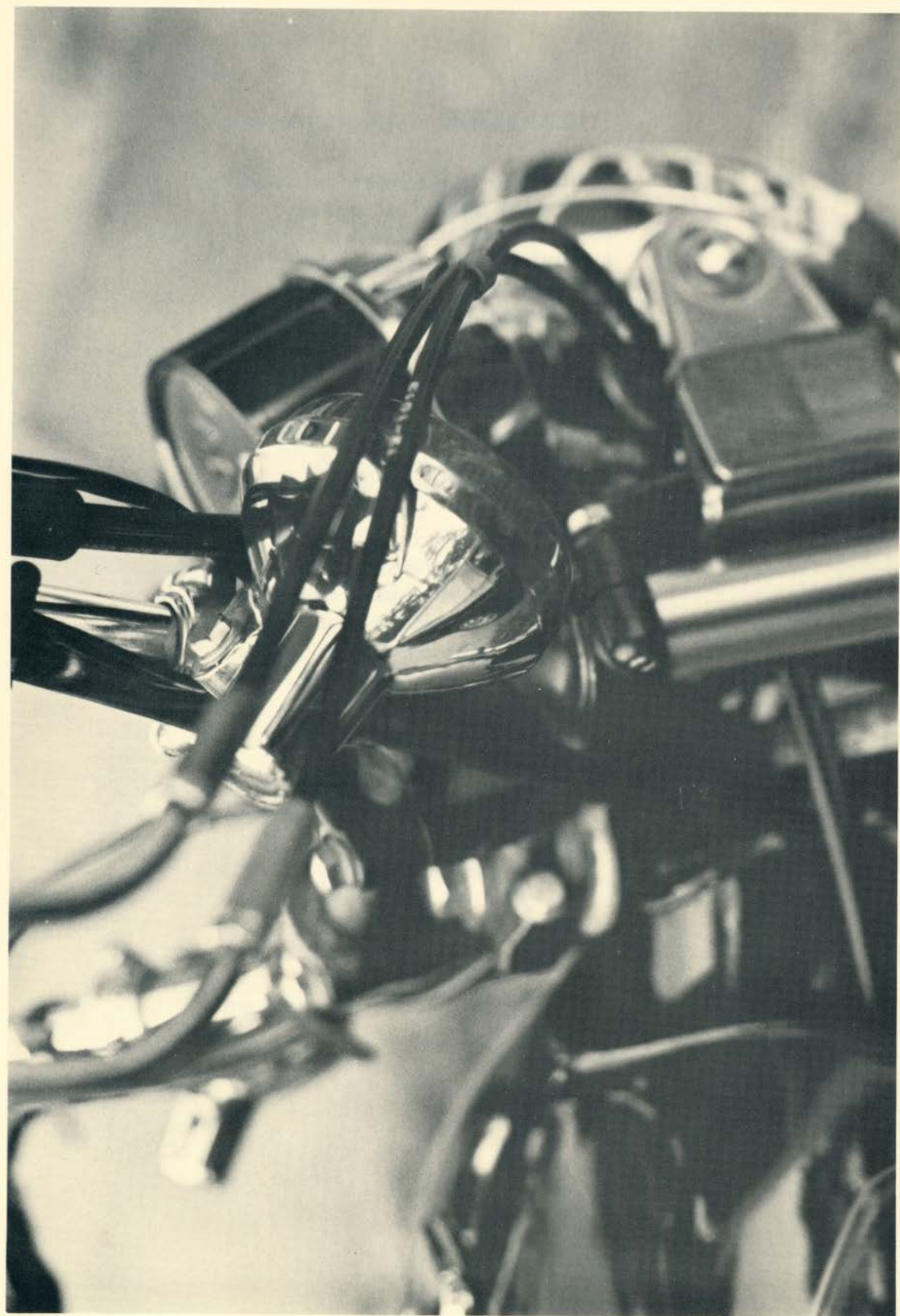
Vivika R. Hansen

SURRENDER

as the leaves fade green
to glowing gold
as the sun expires gold
to somber bronze
as the moon recedes white
to deathening dark

you surrender
to midnight black

Marguerite Stokes



GREECE

hot sun beating down
rhythms on the dusty road
 waves of heavy liquid air
 rise swaying ahead of me
through drops of sweat
 i see russet hills spotted
 with brittle shrubs

along my thigh's tendons
 i feel the chill
 of a silky golden body

i watch her smooth smooth stomach
 walking me to dreams
 i see a sparkle rich chain
 encircling her waist

lying in a poppy field-lush
 with dew and her
i watch my fingers trace
the contours of her hips
 and grasp

 crumbling dust
beneath my hand

the sun beats
 and the air sways
and the brittle shrubs
 are decaying

Daniel A. Connolly

BLACKHOLES

Time cools our cores from
Fiery red to bottomless black
Love slowed by age
losing heat and momentum
A dense love that
Secretly seeps into us

Crum-bl-ing; We are blown a-
part by dust choked winds
A once-brilliant Supernova
Now we are dead and forgotten
Until we are blackholes
Sucking and pulling
It doesn't matter at what or whom
Not even light escapes

Patricia Hanlon

Solo

Like a gull
with broken wing
longing to glide
on salted breezes, I,
stranded in a cove
watchwhile
other gulls fly
between clouds.
I soared too high
and crashed
on a jagged
rock.

Kathleen Malone

THE VISIT

The house smelled like his old slippers
Plastic furniture coverings crunched under my legs
The wheelchair made small rivers in the musty carpet
His wrinkled fingers gripped the cup
Hot tea dropped down his chin
Down his tan slacks
The hall clock chimed a third time
More rivers flowed into the carpet streaming out from
the two metal wheels
This, our last visit

Julie-Anne Mastronardi

AT THE FUNERAL PARLOR

The frigid form on velvet
Its eyes stitched shut
The mouth sewn tight, a false smile
The bulging carotid filled with the undertaker's wine
Muscles fresh with death sliced to halting ambition

Stuffed into their fancy clothes the spectators shuffle by
Men fidgeting like boys with bees in their pockets
Women walking softly their stockings made of glass
Speaking in whispers with padded words

The undertaker comes round with a large tray of emptiness
And everyone politely takes the smallest piece he can find

Robert DeMoura



THE MEETING

Everything, all, so flash-tragic
stopped in that seething white
cloud, transiently
endless. The engine steamed
hissing, breathlessly in and
mists rose warm from a
Spring-wormy earth.
In search of
location, I
squinted through dust through
a clean-wiped streak through
the dirt of my window.
Under the sign hung
your cavernous eyes,
spent and leaden and
bruised as the train but still
burning, pressing, hard like the
sun, as it struggled for
face in the layers of the cloud.

I fumbled, turning, trying to
rise but the
train jerked forward and
my eyes leaped
back to the
signpost standing lonely now in
mist already
starting to thin.

Mary Jo Rowen

WAILING WALL*

The courtyard opens before me
a stone-gold basin
lapping over with light.
The wall is stark,
alluring.
Ghost of a dead temple
age-pocked with holes.
A crooked mystic madman
appears, a manic grin reveals
five teeth.
“Newcomers, yes? Place hand on
your head for my blessing.”
I raise my hand,
the eyes around me explode.
This blessing is not for women men only
Not for women.
I turn away,
hating his blessing,
his unwashed smell.

Maureen St. Laurent

**Remaining portion of the western wall of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Legend states that prayers written on slips of paper and placed in cracks of the wall will be answered.*

WHITE DEATH AUTOBIOGRAPHY
To: Gwendolyn Brooks

I am sick,
I am sickness,
A plague.
I am "us."
I speak of "them,"
Of "those" people.
I am the leper
I feed upon myself.
I grow and multiply in
Fruit beads of ignorance.
My buds are the children,
My flowers are words:

"NIGGER"
"CHINK"
"NIP"
"KRAUT"
"BOY"
"HEEB"

I shade from the sun as
Slime on teaming waters.
I am the graffiti of madness,
I live in the land of the blind.
I bring destruction — I am as old as man

Craig McGannon

THE FREDIOCENTRIC THEORY PART III
Do I Dare Disturb the Universe?

The night is warm but the moon is cold
The leaves that are blown in the wind
Are they yellow or red? Perhaps brown?
Does it matter?
Plants surround me like a fall of snow
The roses bloom like tangible forms of innocence
Where thorns hide
"I love you" she said
"I know" I said
Should I drink that glass of water?
The sun is shining but where is the rain?
The blood is spilled
The small grasshopper lands on a blade
It is crushed by a rock
The universe is black as coffee but has less caffeine
Do I dare disturb the Universe?

Alfredo Haddad



SIN #4

I Choose a pear
from the midnight bowl
 in the kitchen and
 I watch the lights flash deep
 in the flushed cheeks
of the fruit.

 For a minute I pretend it is
my mother and
 I can
 carve
 with my teeth the curves
that made me cold
 as marble;
I can slice through that thick
 skin and find her-
wanting the same Peace
 I do . . .
 A shudder, then numbness.
 And I bite.

 Fireworks exploding
in my mouth push
midnight into morning
as my teeth grind the
 fleshy pebbles of the pear.
 I feel the pull of Eve
Change this
 still life bowl of fruit into
knowledge. Who
 can blame Us for the ache
for the ripeness.

Vivika R. Hansen

DUSK

Children protest his passing:
Their red-cheeked-running dashes to capture
his fiery finale: the sun's last dance.

A brilliant exhalation of golden pink
He performs to the music of lovers
And lyrics of joyful laughter . . .

Till the harmony breaks when
Brow-knitting parents feel darkness
And sense danger in dying light.

Clenched fists hold tight the fragile
Beams of light, but grownups win as they
Gather little ones, lock doors, quiet noise.

And a new melody or familiar folksongs
Calm the captured; a lullaby heard as
Dinner dishes tinkle, bath water splashes . . .

While outside to a fading rhythm
The graceful dancer sails forever Westward
And falls, flawless.

Veronica Hronjak

I am the River in Winter

I am the river in winter
now I lie
quiet
seemingly sleeping
nestled in the deep gorges of the earth
I have carved for myself

You think I am asleep
but I lie
with my silence
beneath a calming quilt of snow
stitched
by those who refused to move south

And I live
and I breath with short gasps
when I break through the ice
bubbling
for the frosty air
then rushing for cover again

You can guess
but you will never know
what currents move me
I am the river in winter

John Brewer

