

Photograph

Jim Vaughn

PULSE

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*Honorable Mention



Photograph

Jim Vaughn

The Eleanor Poetry Award

Rural Blight

Bleaker than any desert,
my grandfather's farm when the blight came.
After that year he died broke,
and my mother and hers went to live in El Paso
and opened a store by an alley.
My grandfather's land is fallow now,
stubbled by seasons of weeds;
he is buried there
beneath those fields with the unrising seeds
and all above him fieldmice struggle
to live in his farmhouse of vertical boards.

Jo Ann Thrash

Pulse Essay Award

EXISTENTIAL OR ESSENTIAL

There is today a considerable amount of verbiage bandied about concerning the "absurdity" of the universe. Deriving from the Existentialists in Europe -- and, according to some, a good deal further back in the literary tradition -- the assertion that the universe is ultimately absurd is a view based upon man's experience of irrational phenomena in the (objective) physical universe and in himself as well. These phenomena are designated as meaningless and those seemingly meaningful relationships which **do** appear are casually dismissed by the sweeping assumption that they are mere coincidence, chance irregularities, whose apparent orderliness is considered mere human invention. This is actually a dogmatic rejection of information, as is the rationalistic belief that all things are understandable in terms of logic and causal law.

Is this sound procedure? Can anyone who witnesses the growth patterns of the mollusk's multichambered shell; or the stages of development held common by every living rose; or, particularly, the intrinsic relationship between the intricate crystalline and molecular structures of the mineral world; etc., responsibly deny all vestige of essential, meaningful order in nature? Granting that there is no grand teleological design involved, there still remain meaningful associative and causal relationships between an innumerable number of things. Based on such relationships, there is even some limited certainty! To use an exaggerated example, I **know** that no live elephant is sitting on my head. I do not know this intuitively -- I detect it in the same manner as I detect such other relationships as I have previously discussed. Based on such relationships, I could further assert that no live elephant will ever emerge from my kitchen faucet. Furthermore, I would challenge all comers, not to argue philosophically, but by demonstration, to disprove my point. It is by detecting the relationships that allow such assertions that man's brain was able to assist him in his primitive survival. We are here as living testimony to the existence of at least a little order and meaningfulness in the primal chaos.

One might here bring up the irrational phenomenology of dream and vision, and not exactly be grasping at straws. And though we do not consciously live in that "Land of Unreason," such may serve as a type of counter example. It must be admitted that for every logical development there is an irrational, chaotic one: i.e., ineffable sub-atomic particles implied by observable effects (ex., the neutrino) and abstracted into theoretical cause, then accepted as realities and woven into the fabric of physical science to be dealt with as objective "truth". The problem of infinite regress in an infinitesimal calculus that works on non-infinitesimal reality is also a baffling one. Another difficult realization is that most apparently solid objects are

ignore the chaotic? No, they merely indicate limitation. This, however, seems to run contrary to the very nature of humanity, compelled to a preoccupation for attempting to contrive closed circuit systems of an "either, or" exclusive variety; if x, then not non-x. That is, if rational then not irrational or **vice versa**. Following this cardinal rule of logic, the rationalist opts one way, the existentialist opts the other. Either choice is purely logical and remains a cold abstraction.

Such a logical construct as a world view might be satisfactory for those whose lives are happily contained within the trivia of a rigidly systematized discipline or ideological set, which is therefore irrelevant because one can observe both the systematic and unsystematic functioning simultaneously in the **real** every-day environment. For those seeking a less sterile life experience that would encompass both contradictory elements, thereby allowing for a less inhibited human development, an entirely new type of construct becomes necessary -- one that would encompass "both and . . .": if x, then non-x. This would be a construct that allows for rational and irrational phenomena occurring together in the same situations. Logic and illogic here run concurrent, and the validity of the construct can not be measured by the principles of its partial member. If the new construct seems contradictory -- well, the better that it is so! At last we are operating with a system that is axiomatized to be more fully cognizant of the actual opposing factors of our real situation. And if inherent contradiction is beyond human powers to comprehend, perhaps many other things are as well.

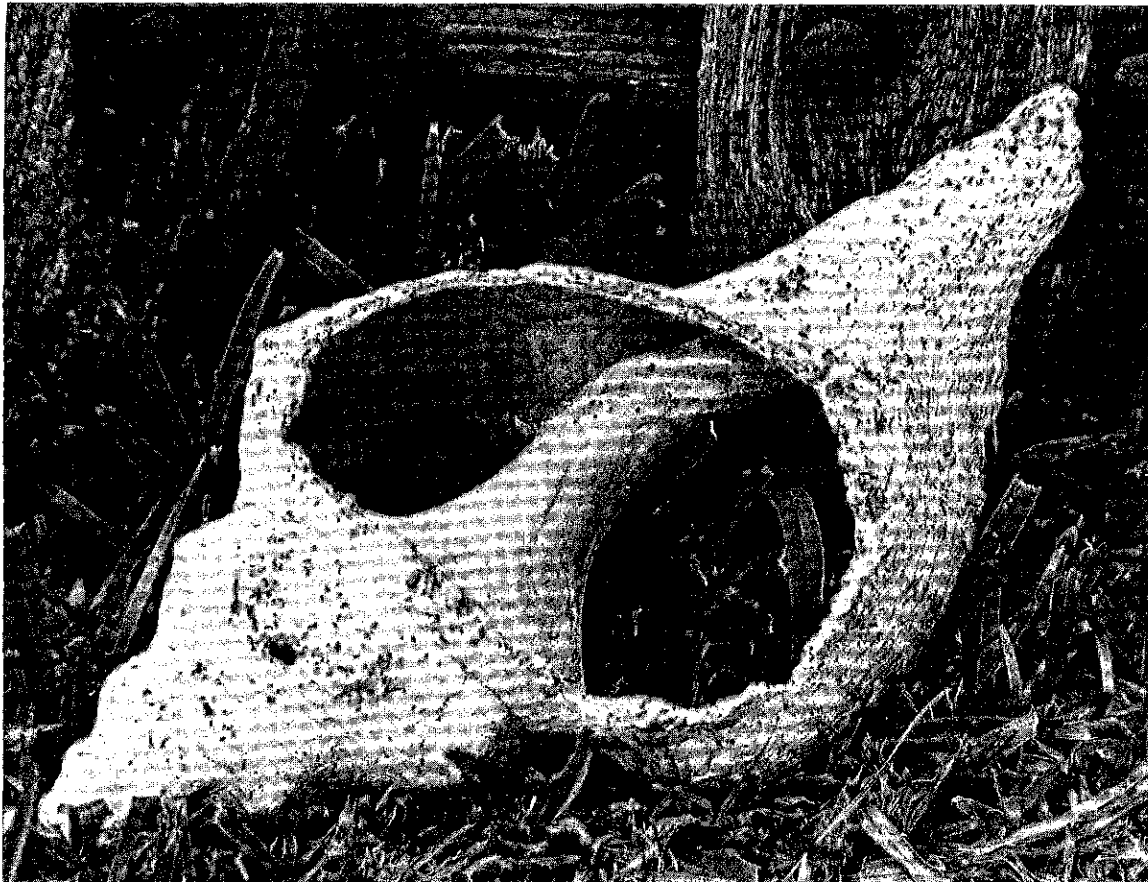
NO PARADOX! TOTAL UNDERSTANDING! Thus might ring the challenge from a rationalistic academician. It would be understandable. Such an attitude is part of the modern West's psychological pathology. It is reactionary and it is naive. In our Hebraically oriented "Christianity" we have fallen both from nature and from God. In striving madly to attain that hallowed niche in the Biblical cosmology, in this, the twentieth century, progress has replaced the goal in order of importance and we are become a culture in the neurotic grip of total identification with the myth of Faust! When the mainstream of intellectual life begins to differentiate itself from that social-psychological mythology, then, perhaps we shall all witness less of nihilism and alienation and more joy, hope and spontaneous good will as well as the realization of our own limitations and the inherent contradictions we seem to experience because of them.



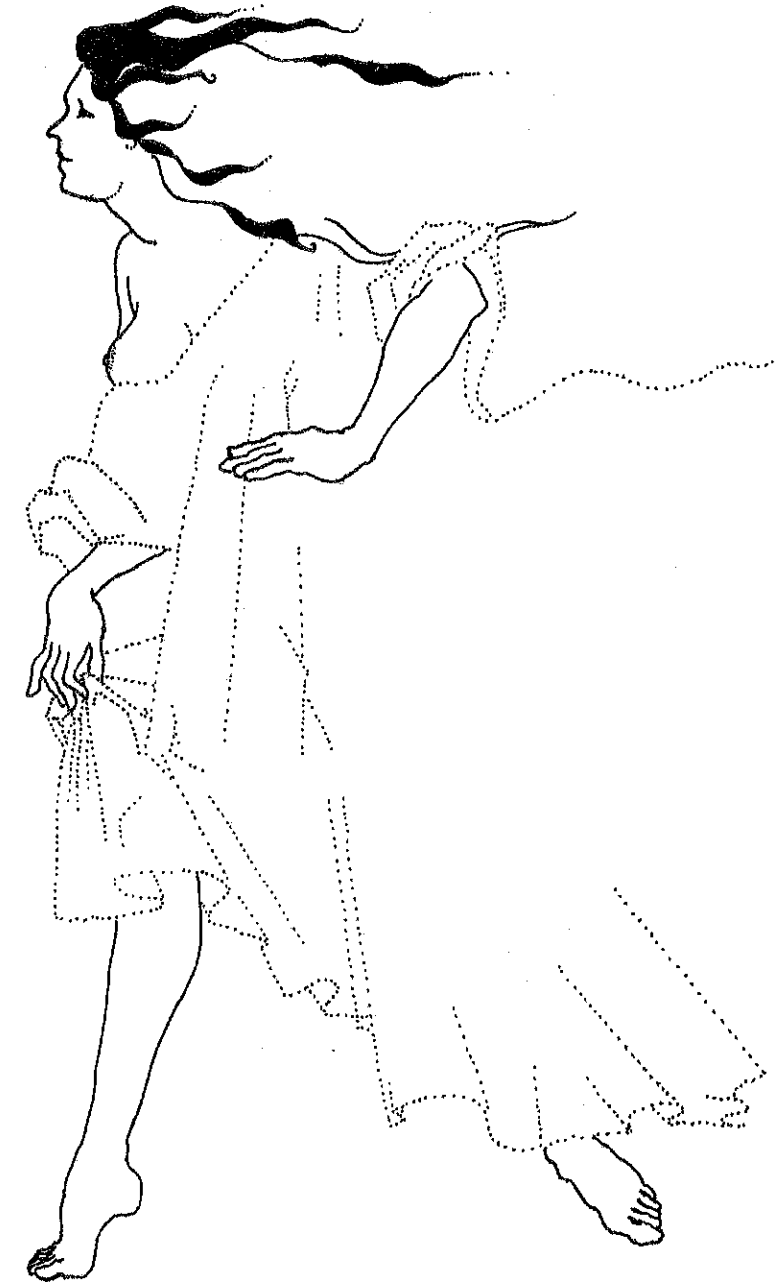
The divisory nature of man's dilemma, Existential or Essential (irrational/rational, chaotic/orderly, physical/spiritual, and so on) is ultimately, in human terms, an irresolvable one. To opt either way is irresponsible, since pertinent data must be ignored when it does not fit the conceptual scheme. Both elements are present but the emphasis remains entirely with the particular disposition of the individual entity. One can not hold the other in contempt. They are integral aspects of a united field explainable only in terms of both. Even the nature of subjective consciousness is revealed as a sort of ambiguity: on one hand the subject wills itself to meaning and on the other, derives meaning intuitively from the self. These distinctions recede rapidly into hazy semantics.

At any rate, the realization of the Whole with its contradiction and at least the possibility of a transcendent supra-meaning for man and the universe, beyond human knowledge, is one which the responsible man -- be he Existentialist or Idealist or what-have-you -- must be continually aware. The degree of influence these factors bring to bear is what determines the variety of creative individual thought and life-style that makes being human worthwhile by perpetually enhancing that condition.

Michael Cannito



Pulse Drawing Award



Pen and Ink

Ernesto Cumpian

Canvas of Black

over and over the Artist paints
the same picture using the same
colors and exactly the same strokes,
time after time on each and every of the seven days He
sells His portrait to people who don't buy it.
so the Artist buys his own Canvas of Black

and when His tired hands dropped
from the burden of what He had bought
so did his painting, all scattered shades
intertwining in a driggle upon the universal floor.

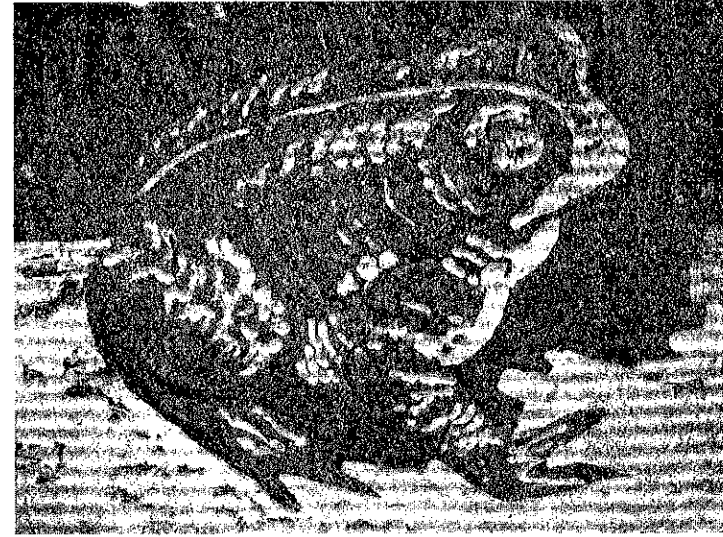
and still people come to the
grand opening of the pinebox museum
to judge His portrait. The picture
is of a mirror and still
people come, and they look
at it upsidedown.

Jo Jo Carthy

Hitchin'

Guitar, and far to go
playing highways of lonely measures,
solemn white and yellow lines between
empty spaces, I compose asphalt notes
with refraining footsteps, of songs that
never look back.

Jo Jo Carthy



Etching

R. Prescott

THE LEAP

Such pure release of motion!
And in the aftermoment
The street, the rainpuddle circuit
Dropped back into its stillness
Trembling yet a little
With that sudden, leaping joy.

And the frog squatted in its ditch
Denying its explosive loveliness.
The evening tinkled into place around it.

Derry Tutt

Woodcut



Larry Cowles

DRESDEN

My mother fondles the figurine,
respecting its fragility.
Turning Adonais' feet to top
she examines the seal in large, clean letters:
DRESDEN.

Once my father in pilot's suit
flew a plane through nervous black
and below in the mobilized city,
fire bristled.
When rescuers finally pried open
the shelters, there was only ash
and hot fetid air.

My mother is pleased,
and reaching she places the counterfeit human
gently on top of the mantle
to stand on those terribly lucid letters:
DRESDEN.

DEPARTURE

This sad, pathetic, bitter man --
What is his reason to live?
Always alone, yet not quite alone;
he has his scores and broken cane,
and half a bottle of wine.

He chose companions from the best,
and disdained better men than him.

He spits out oaths in back-stage alleys,
and flicks the tears from jaundiced eyes
with fading dexterity, from faded halls
where he performed Rachmaninoff.

Those gnarled, prophetic fingers! Those fingers
that were once so soothing
to perfect ladies' supple breasts
now clutch a cane, and soothe a face
as wrinkled as the coat he wears.

He feels despair in cold existence --
and something cooler in the wind.

He slouches into darkness
to commune with the shadows
of long-departed composers;
Then raises his head to supplement

The Pulse Short Story Award

THE LIZARDLY THING TO DO

I am a materialist, I swear it;
and I'm not going crazy, either.
But there's something wrong.

-- Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Wall*

Opening one eye, I thought I caught a faint rustling disturbing the dark silence of my bed room. I rolled across the bed and reached for the lamp at its side when a harsh voice hissed, "Muthn't touch!"

"Damned if I won't," I cursed and flicked the switch, turning toward the source of the sound. Of all the strange figures I could have imagined, the thing that met my startled gaze had to be number one: a huge lizard, some six feet long, of vaguely man-like proportions, was sitting cross-legged on my dresser, casually lighting a cigarette. Its scaly face glittered in the lamp light, an iridescent green. It seemed to resent the reflective glare and gestured at the lamp with an air of immediacy. I turned it off and the room began to glow, gradually, until all was visible in a soft and glareless light. The lizard stroked what seemed to be the saurian equivalent of a beard that dangled from the lower portion of a mouth that appeared at the same time vicious and comically expressive. It then preened the bony crest that stretched along its skull and spine, seemingly content. Closing its eyes (the two that normal lizards wear), it opened a third one in the middle of its forehead and peered at me intently.

"Good day thir," it hissed, "I hope you don't mind my thmoking."

I laughed. My sense of the ridiculous emerged unchecked and I simply quaked beneath the sheets. Goddamn! If there's anything I can't stand it's a lizard with a lisp. No, No. This is the wrong approach, I thought, gearing that sense back down to first. "This isn't real, it can't be. This sort of crap doesn't happen -- not to me, not to anybody. I must be dreaming, it's the only sensible possibility." Turning toward the lizard, "Good day my ass, it's three o'clock in the morning! What in blazes do you think you're doing here? Smoking my cigarettes, no less!" I demanded, thinking that this was

"Well, naturally I didn't bring my own. I am rather embarathed but you do have almotht a full pack."

"Forget the goddamri cigarettes."

He sent a train of smoke rings skyward. "I thought you'd underthand." Flashing an ear-to-ear grin my way, it displayed a prodigious set of long, curved fangs. No, I didn't want any nightmare with that in it. "Are you ready to come home now?" it hissed with an air of patient fatherhood talking to the wayward son.

"Home?" I asked with a sort of 'who, me?' voice.

"Yeth, of courth. Where do you think? Don't be tho naive. You can't fool me like that."

"Like what? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Oh dung! You know exactly what I'm talking about. Now get out of bed and we'll be on our way. You ought to know better than to run off. Poor little Thnaratha will be worried thick about you. Now come along and everything will be all right."

It came down from the dresser and shuffled across the room. I decided to let it ride, anything to keep this weird dream from becoming a nightmare. The sooner I got on with it, I felt, the sooner I could get some honest rest. Besides, I didn't like the looks of those teeth. Beckoning me closer and hithing (hissing, rather) violently, it traced a cabalistic symbol on the wall with a claw. In a flash, the wall shattered like glass, but silently, and fell as fine powder to the floor. I found myself facing into another room. It was long and low, illuminated by the same soft light, with a fountain at the center and large comfortable looking cushions scattered about the flagstone floor.

The lizard stepped across the breach. "Come on!" it said. I followed. Once across, the wall materialized in our wake like a movie played backward in slow motion.

"Typical dream surrealism," I muttered and made a mental note to call a psychoanalyst in the morning. This side of the wall was translucent green, with strangely carved animal motifs wrought upon it in bright gold, to the uncanny effect that they seemed to be suspended in a static, green sea. "I must really be working out my hang-ups in this fantasy," I told myself aloud.

"Thtop babbling, creature. Thnaratha will be thrilled to know you're well. Thnarathaaa..." it crooned lispingly. Two more lizards emerged from a beaded entrance way. "Look what daddy found," said my host, nudging me forward triumphantly. Nine eyes inspected me with careful discrimination: three gloatingly; the other six aghast.

"Oh daddy! That's not the one." Hissed the smaller of the new comers. This one could pronounce its S's to a gratingly uncomfortable effect.

"You bungling klutz!" snarled the other with all the vehemence of an angry cobra. "Can't you tell your own daughter's favorite pet when you see it?"

"B-but pretty scales..." straining and with much practiced effort he managed to get 'scales' out intact.

"Idiot! Imbecile!" she was not impressed.

"B-but hon --"

"But nothing. What do you expect me to do with that?" she cried, gesturing at me sarcastically.

"Well, ith not all that bad," said my three eyed friend defensively.

Then the little one attacked: "Oh daddy! What's that? Yeth, of courth."

"Baby, baby. They all look alike to me!" He called after her.

By this time I was feeling quite indignant but a little more secure in the knowledge that I was not who they were looking for. "These things have a strange capacity for working themselves out if you don't let your dream turn into a nightmare." I congratulated myself on my superior control of the situation. With this in mind I began to say a word in behalf of the poor green slob with whom I sympathized immensely.

"Silence creature! You speak when you're spoken to," the wife cut in abruptly, shaking at me with her claw as if she were scolding an overly obnoxious dog. This was not what I wanted at all, but at the sight of the sadistic gleam in her eyes and recalling those vicious fangs, I closed my mouth.

"Universal woman," I thought shakily.

"What are we going to do? We've got to get it out of here. You saw how it upset the child," she continued to her husband.

"Yeth dear, I'll run an ad in the paper."

"No. We haven't time for that. I'm already about to go beserk. I swear, if we can't find poor Goork, absolutely no more pets. Do you hear me? None!"

"Yeth dear," he said. His lisping submissiveness was beginning to get on my nerves.

"I'd better go call the pound." She turned haughtily and followed her daughter through the beads.

I approached my host. "Wait a minute, don't let that bi -- I mean, her, push you around like that. Stand up to 'er." I spoke sympathetically. I didn't like the way things were turning out. Why the devil couldn't I just wake up?

"Don't be tho ungrateful, you wicked creature. Be glad we're not turning you out in the cold."

She really had this guy pinned. We both knew it and I was becoming increasingly unnerved. "I don't like this business about the pound at all, you know," I said sharply, hoping to brow beat him in the fashion of his mate.

"I'm awfully thorry, but ith the only lizardly thing to do in thith predicament. Do try to underthand."

"Can't you bring me home?"

"Goodneth no! Don't be thilly. That wall will barely latht through one more journey and we can't potibly afford another. And poor Goork yet to find! It would be an awful wathte of time. Think of how Thnaratha would feel. Anyway, it would be motht unlizardly and none of uth would hear of it."

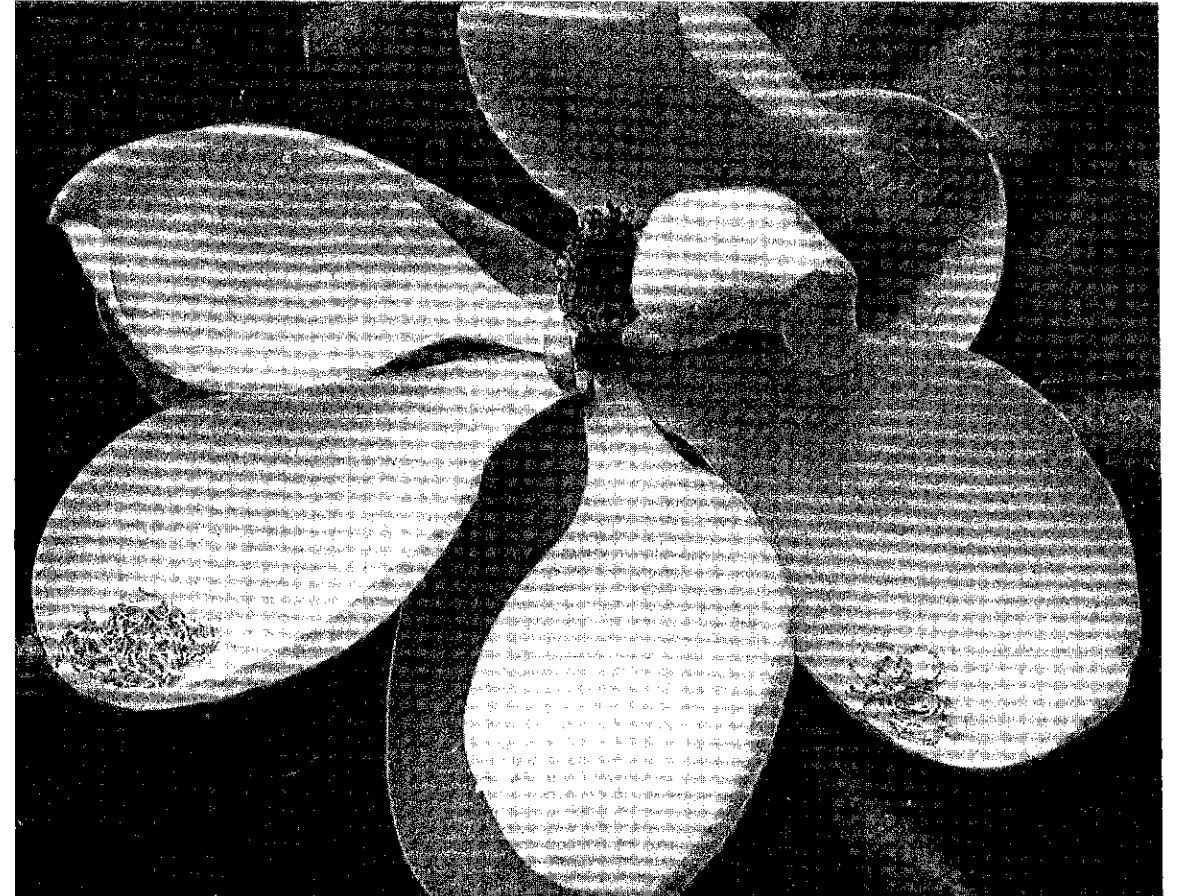
"Most unlizardly?" I was shaking, I'd had enough. "Is this some kind of joke?" Visions of asylums for paranoid schizophrenics danced in my head.

"No. No joke, dear creature -- I athure you. No joke at all. Pleathe take hold of yourthelf, you're not that important," he spoke so earnestly that I knew he wasn't kidding. His wife came in.

"I phoned the pound and the lizards are on their way over," she said, turning toward me, "Don't worry creature. They're most gentle. I did inquire for you, it only takes a moment and they say it doesn't hurt a bit. We wouldn't have it any other way. We're not heartless, you know. It will all be handled in the most lizardly manner possible."

"Thanks," the word fell flatly from my tongue. At that moment I experienced the full, dark weight of my insensible predicament and realized that this was no dream, no nightmare. I wasn't safely home in bed. These

Pulse Photography Award



Photograph

Autrey Woods

Marriage '72

What more do you want from me?
All I had to give is gone,
All blown far like dandelions
Escaping from the placid lawn.

So much of me has been poured out
There's nothing left for myself.
My soul's been packed neatly away
And laid to rest upon the shelf.

Now, now what's left?
Nothing, nothing at all.
Empty, a wilderness I stand;
Nothing, nothing at all.

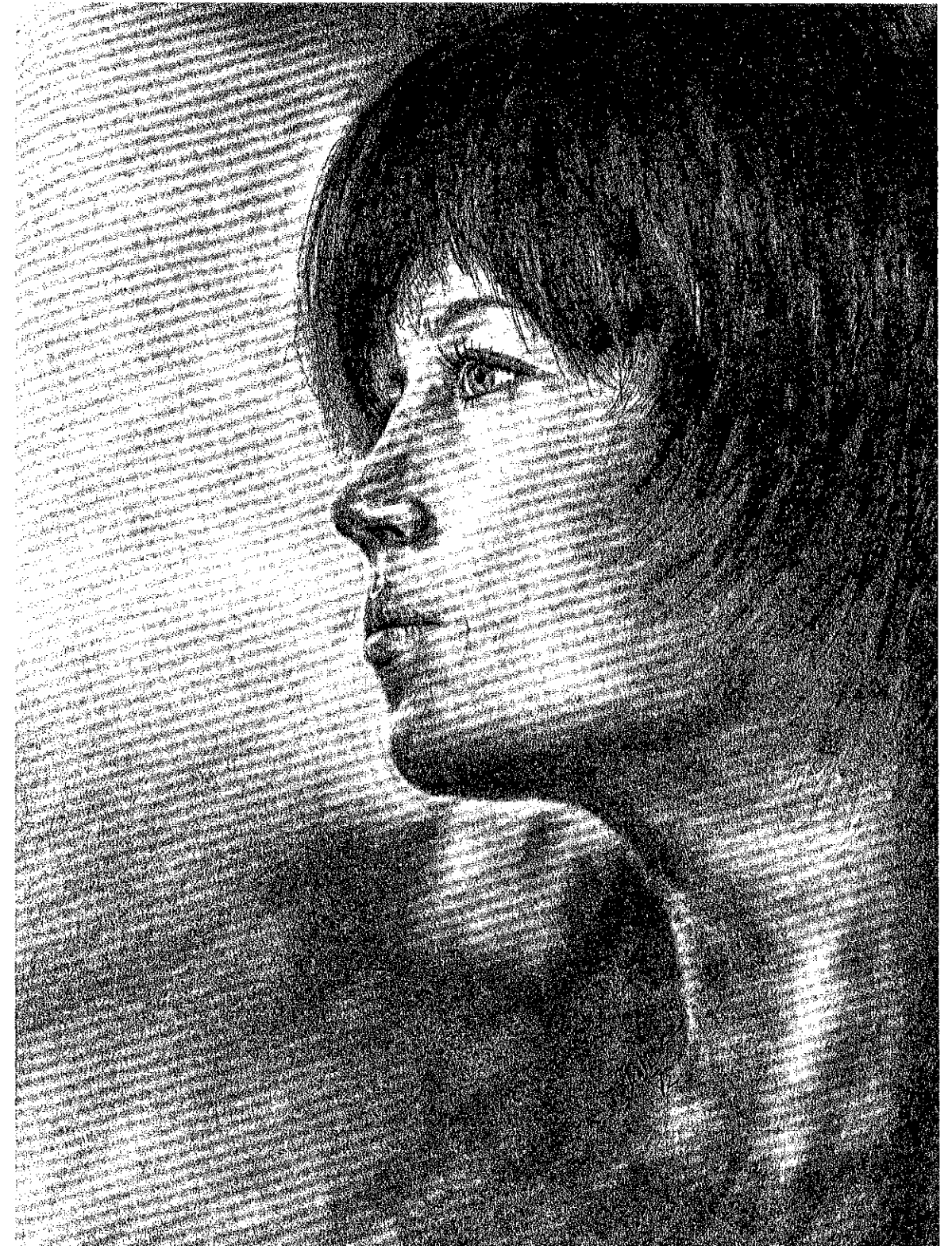
Love, you say love,
What's love, I can't remember
Or did I ever know at all?
Is it that inward Fire
That gives inspiration to every act
Or the clear calm that comes
From knowing and knowing well?

Why plague me with a hundred tasks
Which lead to your esteem and my degradation?
Sorry, but there's no known vaccination
For boredom. Yes you can take a month's vacation
From me. But what will be my destination
For a needed rest from myself?

Never mind, don't bother to reply.
It's like talking to a wall.
Shall I stand out in the hall
Or in some other Limbo?
Shall I tie an apron around my waist
And get your dinner with efficient haste?

It's waiting for the light that never gleams,
The water that never boils at all,
This, the boredom of the never-ending Dream.
If you need anything, just call.

Parma L. Jeffcoat



VEGA

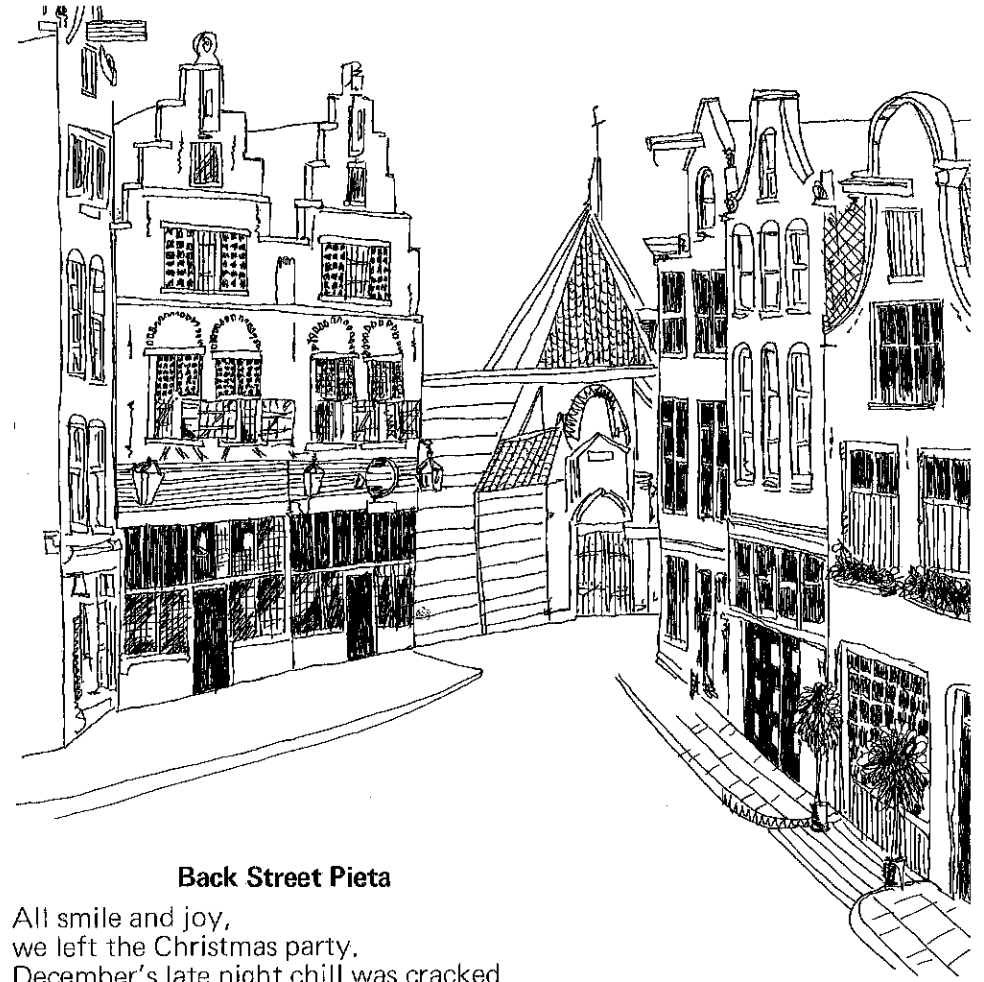
Vega,
Emerson says, will one day be the Polestar.
By then Lyra's rhomboid and triangle will be gone,
Erased by the recurrent rub of years.
Polaris will be forgotten, a dim star
Noticed only by shepherds or astronomers.

This evening, though, Polaris still
Marks the pivot of the turning night,
And Vega, slipping imperceptibly northward,
Sivers (for the moment) at the zenith.

Derry Tutt

Blue

A timbre of victory rang in the wind
as he climbed the limbs of the ancient tree;
and hoarding them all, the three unhatched,
from their roughly thatched cradle in the fork
he made the descent.
As ageless as death now,
those babies in their shells;
and what did he care if three robin ghosts
would haunt him? He took the blue coffins
from his pocket and stared.
The sky was clean above; unblemished
by real clouds it curved blue around him,
like the inside of a robin's egg.



Back Street Pieta

All smile and joy,
we left the Christmas party.
December's late night chill was cracked
by the dull stroke of collision.
Split beneath the muttering of some receding engine,
a stray bitch wailed her murder to the world - -
she tumbled from the auto track
and dragged her pain to roadside.

We screamed and ran to give our aid - -
stood frozen at such agony,
despite all our hard bought knowledge.
We touched this helpless dog,
too weak to bite,
that let herself be comforted.
Accepting final love,
two strangers' only gift,
she settled down to die.

Small and helpless in the face of death,
we children cried for that baby,
as for ourselves,
we hadn't hit the beast,

Pen and Ink
Cheryl Mackey

Pulse Graphics Award



Billy Kroy

Remember That Crazy Night Two Years Ago When * * * * *

L. S. D. FOUND TO CAUSE DAMAGE, CHILDREN BORN HOPELESSLY DEFORMED, screamed the headlines. She picked up the paper and smiled at herself in the mirror behind the counter. She ordered coffee and patted her hair back into place.

L.S.D. causes chromosome damage * * * I wonder what is keeping him? he did say 5:30 -- Chromosomes, chromosomes, oh yeah the genetic code, the message part * * * * I wish he'd hurry the waitress is looking over here. Oh he looks so nice in blue. * * * there are so many things to do before the wedding - - - L.S.D. I hope he can see me over here. Hope he remembered the flowers.

"Sorry I'm late darling, I got hung up for a few minutes."

"You look so handsome; I think I love you."

"Aren't you the romantic one. I'm going to love coming home to you at night. Do you mind if we eat here? I'm starved to death."

"No, I don't mind."

"Miss, I think we'll move to a booth; will you bring us a menu? Thanks."

"I called the florist today; orchids for the mothers and roses for you. That's what you wanted?"

"Yes, perfect; oh, that reminds me darling, they finished with the den today. It looks great. I think you'll be very pleased."

"I think I'll have the fish; what would you like? When will they be through with the rest?"

"Next week. I think I'll have the shrimp and tea."

"We'll have the shrimp, the fish, and two iced teas. Thank you. The paint smell will be gone by the time we move in. You know honey, I'll be so glad when all this mess is over with and we can be alone and normal instead of all this running and planning."

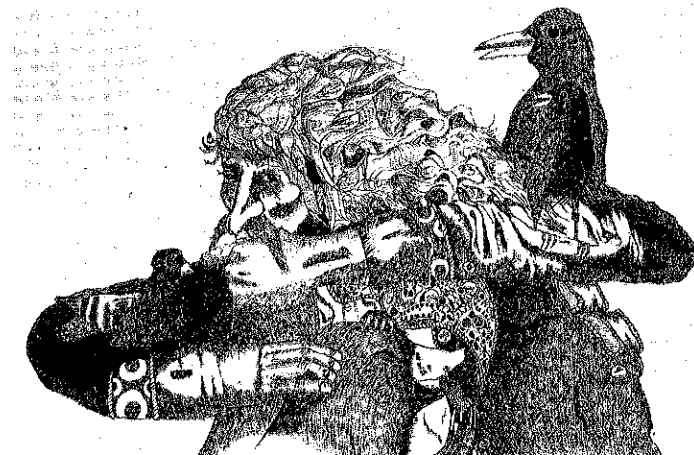
"Sometimes I wish we had eloped. Or even just started living together."

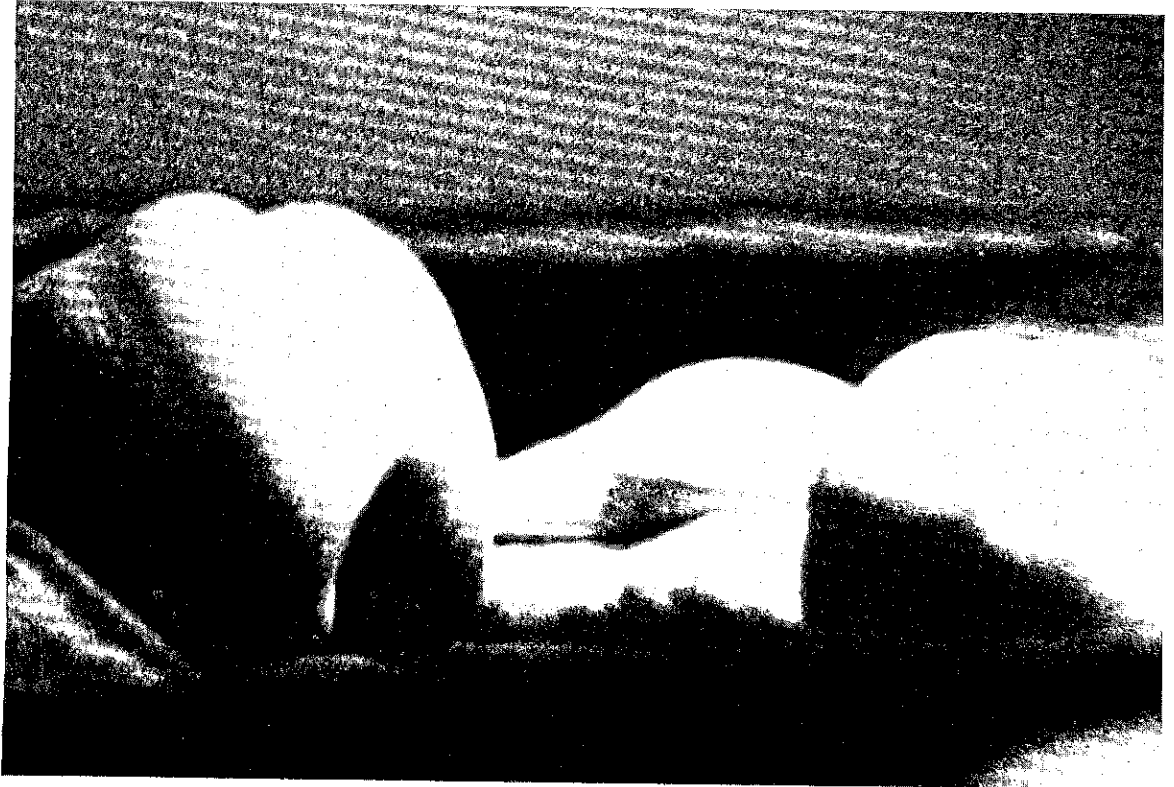
"No, it's not that bad. I'm no kid; I'm ready to settle down. Shacking-up is for teeny boppers and college kids. I'm ready for a beautiful home, a lovely wife and a house full of children."

L.S.D. CAUSES * * * * *

"Oh my God" she whispered under her breath.

Trudy Stanton





Photograph

Cheryl Mackey

