

The Alchemist Review

1999 Edition

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Table of Contents

David Dellinger Pancake House.....	Jason Zimmerman	1
Tomato Sauce.....	Wilson Wood	2
Into This Gray Day Staggers Silver...	Anita Stienstra	3
Yeah! Like a Diet Coke Going Down...	Anita Stienstra	4
Mary's Lamentation.....	Sandra Kuizin McKenna	5
The Archangel's Family.....	Wilson Wood	6-7
Eve Upon Seeing Abel.....	Aaron Wayne	8
Art of Late Night Conversation.....	Corrine Frisch	9
Patterns.....	Corrine Frisch	10
Dime Store Reverie.....	Corrine Frisch	11
Boxcar Sunday.....	Wilson Wood	12
Necrology.....	Wilson Wood	12
Black River Harbor.....	samBdavis	13
Hidden Under Hide.....	samBdavis	13
Cinnamon Rose.....	Sandra Kuizin McKenna	14
Golden-Blue.....	Jenna Kogen	15
Where The Road Curves.....	Jennifer Evans	16-17
EndGame.....	Sandra Kuizin McKenna	18-25
Ruby's Tattoo.....	Sandra Kuizin McKenna	26-33
Just Dropped In.....	samBdavis	34-39
Psalm of an Itch.....	samBdavis	40-41
Where I'm From.....	Willie Mitchell	42-43
Water.....	Susan Retzer	44-45
Uterine Jazz.....	Sandra Kuizin McKenna	46-47
Performance Night.....	Aisha Ansar	48-52
Watchers.....	Martha Kurtz	53
Anniversary.....	Michelle Merker	54-55

David Dellinger Pancake House

The sign it read,
David Dellinger Pancake House
and Postcard Emporium
I walked in to the sounds
of revolution percolating
only 10 cents a cup
rack upon rack of some generic
sunset somewhere in northern Nevada

I knocked that goofy cap off of Pete Seeger's head
blueberry pancakes please-short stack
kicked Jerry Rubin in the ass
decaf? this ain't some Wiccan-dance around naked-
commune with Luna mumbo-jumbo
black with sugar, thank you

I threw wadded up straw wrappers
at the ghost of Woody Guthrie
hey, somebody had to shut him up
exchanged salutes with Bobby Seale,
righteous

I walked in with breakfast and utopia on my mind
I walked out with a 4 X 6 reproduction of the Painted Desert
and blueberry stains on my shirt

Jason Zimmerman

Into This Gray Day Staggers Silver

Into this gray day staggers silver
tipped boots with beautiful sadness
and memories beating in the distance
like drum taps on wood floors.

And us, we live in the corner
of his pain now. We want to occupy
the rest, sleep one night of his
loneliness, breath gardens out of cobwebs,
dissipate the puddle that accumulates
away from the flow of others.

Life can be so annoying,
like an umbrella turning inside out
under the wind's howl, unfair in how
we have to pay for our little slice
of peace, and it comes and goes,
or goes. Can we walk closer
to you, pace the step. Can you,
will you, allow the company? And
can we swing our umbrellas
unlike swords, wave them to orchestrate
the wind and rain, see the shine
in dim metal, hear the fabric, feel.

Anita Stienstra

The Art of Late Night Conversation or Why Jackson Pollock Speaks to Me

This evening's conversation draws
chalk memory sketches
places we want to keep
the talk coming.

Tales spin each night
before the eyelids close
black boards
on which we pin our hopeful
maps of the world.
Yours placed over mine,
its cities and streets
find relief in my valleys and hills.
Transparently their intersecting
words and spaces spill
like Pollock's paint,
full and rich they overflow
because they are unfilled.

Words, distillations of air
fall from our mouths like rain.
We try to catch them on our tongues,
to fill the pail of night
before the pale of morning comes.

I brush my fingers to your lips
to still unspoken lines.
Dawn finds our conversation spent,
our destination yet unknown.
We'll take this journey many times
let's start again tomorrow night,
your map or mine?

Corrine Frisch

Patterns

(With gratitude to Amy Lowell)

The coverlet that is my life
lies tattered here and there,
threadbare squares held fast
with golden yarn and bailing wire.
I sit by the fire this night
and pull it over me.
Woven from desire and regret
I finger the patterns of places traveled
and paths as yet unmet.

In one corner rust colored stains --
drippings from grandpa's garden delights,
spilled wine the night our blood ran wild?
No?
Then traces perhaps of pureed squash
the baby spat at me, and laughed.

Silver threads crafted true
spin and sparkle in dying light,
stop at the jagged tear
you slipped through
in spite of my not wanting you to.

I rummage through my sewing box,
find my needle,
mend a patch,
linger on this memory
or that,
hunt the spool on which to wind
tomorrow.

And when the light has faded,
fold me in this blanket shrine,
feed me to the dying flames
and say
her pattern was divine.

Corrine Frisch

Dime Store Reverie

You are as new to me as the dime in my pocket
my small fingers worry,
as I walk your well worn wooden aisles.
Stocked bins brim full of wishes,
clear pressed glass dishes,
embroidery floss so beautiful i learn to covet the word color.
The perfume of candy counters countless confections
covers decades of dust dried in crevices missed
by the colored "boy" who sweeps the planked floors each night,
in hope of a kiss from his girl
(when he buys her that rhinestone pin if some white lady don't
buy it first).
There's always toilet water,
lilac, please.
Billowing bolts,
calico, kettle cloth, satin, tulle,
Yard after yard, dressmaker's delight.

Kressge and Woolworth,
shining like Gemini in my tiny firmament.

Now the stars have gone out.
The stuff that dreams are made of,
shrink-wrapped in plastic, hanging from metal hooks in steel
buildings,
hastily erected in pastures where horses used to graze.

My horse, a Palomino pony named Bucky,
stands near your front door.
I feed him my dime and he repays me with the ride of my life,
his hoofbeats my heartbeats,
pound the trail of memory and desire.

Corrine Frisch

He watched his reflection, taking in every detail. His bow tie was straight. His tux was lint-free. His hair was in place ? Oh damn! Except that one piece. God, that hair has a mind of its own. After many attempts to smooth it in place, he finally went into the bathroom and slicked it down with water. There. Much better. He was still looking in the mirror. Yes, everything was perfect.

His palms were sweating. "This is crazy," he thought, "all I do is play the damn triangle." But still, all those people. The theater would be filled. He had dropped the triangle in practice today. What if that happened tonight? What else could go wrong?

Best not to think about it. He could hear people on walkie talkies. They were discussing stage procedure. Light booth people talking to backstage people. They hardly seemed to know what was going on. He could hear someone asking when to dim the lights. And then someone asked how many songs were being played and when to bring up the lights for intermission. Didn't they practice things like this before performance night? Then they began telling jokes. These people were crazy.

"Whatever. It's nothing I have to worry about. If they screw up the lights, all the better for me. Maybe then they'll just cancel the whole damn thing." Shit, he was beginning to talk to himself. What next? Why did he ever agree to do this?

If only he had some guts. Then he would have told the conductor to go take a flying leap. The conductor was in a jam and needed someone to fill the spot. He knew that doing this would help to get him gigs later on. "But, geez, the triangle. Sure, everyone has to start at the bottom and work up, but the triangle?!"

Instrumentalists began to take their places on stage. Okay, deep breaths. Count to ten. Again. This isn't a big deal. He looked around. People with solos weren't even breaking a sweat. Here he was, the triangle player, and the pits of his tux could float a yacht.

He picked up a program. His song wasn't until last! So much for sneaking out early. "Marvelous! This is just marvelous!" he said, his sarcasm beginning to surface.

To top it all off, he had found out earlier that day that everyone else there was getting paid. How was it that he was always the sucker agreeing to do these things, just to help out the director, and he never checked first to see if he could get paid? He should

demand money or something. Yeah, he'd hold the damn triangle for ransom.

Like anyone would care.

He could hear the orchestra begin tuning. The audience was applauding.

Wonderful. And he was stuck backstage until intermission. He should just leave now.

Who would miss him? The conductor wouldn't notice until that crucial moment where nothing plays but the triangle. Then it would be too late. Yeah, he should just leave.

"Christ! This is such bullshit." He had wasted four hours already practicing with these guys. And now another two for this performance. "This is the last time I put up with shit like this."

"I'd better watch it. I might be backstage, but if I keep talking to myself like this, people are gonna hear." The announcements were made, and they started their first piece.

Suddenly he felt very stuffy, so he walked out the backstage door for some fresh air. It had been propped open to let some air circulate through the performance area.

Ohhhhh, much better. It was at least twenty degrees cooler out here. He was in the alley behind the theater. "This is so cheap. How can ritzy theaters like this look so trashy in back?" Before long he heard a noise off to his left? A scraping. He tried to see, but it was too dark. You'd think that a theater like this could afford some lights behind their building. As it was now, the only lights filtered through from a nearby bank.

He could just make out a pile of trash. A dark object moved across it. No. No, it couldn't be.

But it was. A big, fat, greasy rat. He almost had a heart attack. If there was a phobia for rats and things like that, he had it. He was getting the hell out of there.

Turning around, he hit the door. It slammed shut. Shit. He grabbed the handle and pulled, but it wouldn't budge. He whirled around. The rat was no longer in sight, but he knew it was watching him. There was more scratching. That thing had to have been at least three feet long. He had to get away. Scanning the area quickly, he decided he would go to the right and around the building then enter through the front. Looking quickly in the direction of the rat, still nothing but noise, he took off. He ran to the corner

and hardly slowed down. As he rounded it, his foot landed smack in a huge pile of dog shit. But he didn't stop. He didn't even slow down. It wasn't until he got to the well-lit main street in front of the theater that he stopped. Whew! The rat hadn't followed him.

He was okay. He was bent over gasping for breath when noticed that he had ruined his best pair of shoes. A stream of words ran through his mind, but he was still so shaken that his mouth couldn't form them.

Late-comers for the orchestra stared at him as they passed. He found a newspaper lying on the sidewalk and he began to wipe off his shoes. He wiped off most of the crap, but the smell lingered with him. As he reentered the theater, all the ticket takers stared at him. "I'm playing," he announced irritably.

They eyed him suspiciously. "Why aren't you backstage?" one woman asked.

"Long story," he grumbled and walked into the men's room. He would get some paper towels and finish cleaning his shoes. He looked around. There were no paper towels, only those damn blow dryers. So he went into one of the stalls and grabbed some toilet paper. He propped his foot on the seat and began wiping his shoe. "This has got to be the worst night. All these stupid things always happen to me." Then his foot slipped.

For the first time that night, luck was with him. The toilet had been flushed. But now his shoe was soaking wet. Well, better to be wet than full of shit. So he wiped off everything he could and held his foot under a blower to dry it as best he could. He looked in the mirror as he was walking out. His bow tie was just a little off center, but his tux was miraculously clean. The only problem was that damn piece of hair. He slicked it down once more and exited the rest room.

He then realized that he had to walk through the audience to get backstage.

Well, not really through it, but down the side aisle. He stood at the top of the aisle trying to decide what to do. Should he walk to the door during a song, or after it was over?

"Okay, I can do this." He took a step. Nobody was looking at him yet, so he kept walking. He made it all the way to the backstage door, and no one was looking at him.

He reached for the handle and suddenly the door swung open. He was knocked backwards and landed smack on his butt. Mildly stunned he just sat on the floor.

Someone grabbed his arm, pulled him up, and shoved him

backstage with the door slamming behind him.

Well it could have been worse. Shaking his head to clear it some, he walked back to a dressing room. He sat down. He wasn't going to move until he had to go on.

Intermission was five minutes later. People moved around him discussing who messed up where and what they were going to do after the performance. He sat in a daze the whole time.

Finally someone tapped him and said that it was time to go on. He collected himself and headed for the stage door. He stood beside three other percussionists. He wouldn't play until the third movement. The orchestra returned and began playing. He stood there, stock still throughout the first two movements. The puddles under his armpits were growing larger with every note. He could see eyes glittering at him in the darkness. He knew everyone would be watching him. Crazy thoughts started running through his head. He felt trapped. He wanted to run, but everyone was watching. This was crazy, he kept thinking. He had been in performances before. When did he feel like this now? He didn't know, but all he wanted to do was run. He could feel thousands of eyes on him.

Finally the third movement began and his part was quickly approaching. He raised the triangle. He had fourteen notes to play. One two three, ding two three, ding two three, ding two three, then suddenly the string holding the triangle snapped. The triangle began to fall and he whipped his hand out to grab it, but he was a little slow. All he managed to do was hit the triangle and send it spinning toward the cymbal. Ding, ding, crash, boom, BANG!

The conductor stared in his direction and a few audience members laughed, but thank God, the orchestra didn't stop playing. He could just imagine what everyone was thinking. He grabbed the triangle and looked for an extra string. There just happened to be one in the percussion case. He fixed the triangle and got ready for his big solo part.

For this part there was nothing but the triangle. He watched the conductor. He could suddenly feel that stupid piece of hair pop up from its place. He could see people in the audience and people in the orchestra staring at him.

He was ready though. He tried to block out everything. He tried to forget about his wet shoe, about his hair. He tried to forget about the audience. His palms were still sweating, but he had the

triangle string in a death grip. He followed his music. They were almost there. All this hell, for this one damn note. It was coming. The conductor checked to see if he was ready. Four more beats. One. Two. Three. Four.

Ding.

Our Contributors

Aisha Ansari is a 23-year-old student finishing an MA in Communications at UIS after having received a BA in English Writing with Honors from Knox College in June, 1997.

samBdavis claims to be "just a hillbilly with a knack for knocking silly syllables about."

Jennifer Evans is currently an English Graduate student at UIS: "Writing absorbs and energizes me, and I intend to do it until I keel over (hopefully from old age)."

Corrine Frisch is the Public Relations Officer at Lincoln Library, Springfield's Public Library. She has published two chapbooks, *Poetry's Embrace* and *New Moon* (via Daybreak Press, of which she is coeditor). She is currently working toward a Master's degree in English at UIS.

Jenna Kogen is a Senior in the English program. She writes mostly free verse, concentrating on rhythm and ideas. She plans to go on to a Graduate Program after completing her BA.

Martha Kurtz is an English Major, Senior Citizen, Widow, mother of five grown children, and a retiree from Springfield Electric Supply. She enjoys reading, needlework, writing, and traveling.

Sandra Kuizin McKenna is a writing GA at the Center for Teaching and Learning at UIS. She also works part-time as a free-lance writer and star-pilot. "Life is a banquet and more poor bastards are starving to death!"

Michelle Merker recently received a BA in Communications from UIS. "I am continuing my education in writing and the lifelong learning process."

Willie Mitchell is a Graduate Student studying Management Information Systems at UIS. "I use poetry as a means to create a picture of my thoughts and ideas, a shell enclosing my feelings. I have had several poems published in the UIS Journal and in the Common Bond. In addition to writing poetry, I enjoy performing readings, as well as acting in plays and choreodramas.

Susan Retzer is an English major planning to go on to Graduate studies in English at UIS in the Spring of 1999 after receiving her BA in December, 1998.

Anita Stienstra is working on her thesis to complete Graduate work in English at UIS. She is a board member of Springfield's Poets & Writers Literary Forum and has published several chapbooks of her own and others.

Aaron Wayne is the proud father of Aariel Yolanda Turner, his "greatest source of joy and inspiration." He was born and raised in Ford Heights, Illinois and plans to graduate with a BA in English in May, 1999. "I hope to publish my poems and short stories in the future."

Wilson Wood is a Graduate student in the Individual Option program studying Celtic and African myth and culture. He works as a Graduate Assistant in the photography lab at UIS.

Jason Zimmerman is a Graduate student in the History program at UIS.