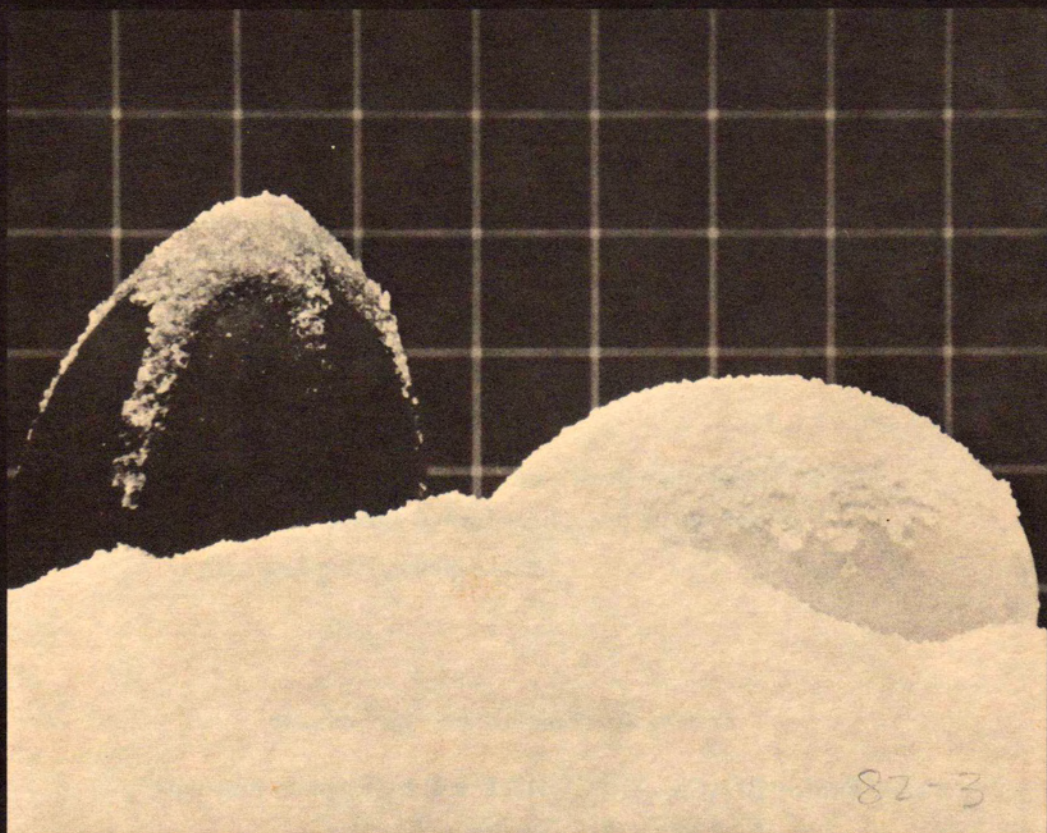


The Thing Itself



THE THING ITSELF

1982 - 83

Volume 12

Literary Editor Mary Helen Garza

Art Editor D. D. Zavala

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Our Lady of the Lake University
of San Antonio

"Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more
but such a poor, bare forked animal as thou art."

--Shakespeare, King Lear, III, iv

Printing by Crumrine, Inc., San Antonio

Cover Photo: BLACK AND WHITE #3 by Eugenio Franyutti
First Place, Art (Photograph)

DEATH BY CONVENIENCE

Patti Radle

mechanized, computerized, franchised
battery-powered, nuclear-houred
overfed, overbred
over sexed, over texted
compromising, no-risk taking
knowledge-plenty, wisdom-wanting
more and more
but
less and less:

vision-less
care-less
love-less
feel-less

less and less
but
more and more

a fear-filled,
synthesized,
pocket-sized,
cosmetologized,

boring

X - ercise of life

-- First Place, Poetry

MOVING CATACOMBS

James H. Gamble

The naked echo of the "E" train comes to a screeching arrival at the Houston Street stop.

Tokens in a slot. Doors open in habitual obedience.

Silent gazes acknowledge no one

While bold graffiti screams at you from the wall.

The train jerks into motion causing little more than an uncomfortable nod from the sleeping head down the bench on the other side.

One was wearing a woman's house coat and earrings and drank from a fifth of Vodka three times in two stops.

"Come on, brother," I said to myself, "You don't have to do that."

Lonely feet shuffling in a vacant subway hall.

Snoring from a stairwell. It's not as cold down here.

A toothless grin at a pastry stand says, "Hey, you wanna go on a vacation with me?"

Once someone tried to sell me a bar of soap.

Then I saw one of them. . . I heard about these people --

"Bag people."

Carrying everything they own around with them.

Inviting certain theft.

They die riding the subways, I suppose.

Moving catacombs. Dead bodies still breathing.

Initials for epitaphs.

E P H -- C R -- with asterisks and exclamation points.

Exclamation points. Loneliness that screams from subway walls.

Won't someone stop this agony?

Frantic eye contact in a crowded crosswalk.

Crowded tenements and elderly sprawls across icy sidewalks.

"Curb your dog and clean up after him," a street sign blandly informs.

Occasionally the pain is too much,

and three New York cops walk briskly by, thumbing holsters.

Some laughed.

Some conversed.

Some, confused, asked about the next stop.

And the train jerks into motion causing little more than an uncomfortable nod.

"You have to act crazy sometimes or else you'll go crazy,"

she was from New York.

I even heard some of them sing on the subway on New Year's Eve,

"I love . . . New York!"

BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Mary Guadalupe Peon-Carroll

My mother had never told me if she had loved my father. I figured she did not, considering that he had left her when I was two months old. (Whenever I was a disobedient child, my mother's most frequent threat was that I would turn out to be just like my father.)

At first, this threat was effective, because I did not know what my father had turned out to be like. All I knew was that he had never been around. As I grew older, though, that threat became more painful and less vague. My mother's reluctance to discuss my father led me to find other sources of information. Suddenly curtailed conversations between relatives when I walked into a room and the nasty arguments that occurred between my mother and grandfather started to arouse my curiosity. A late night phone call informing the family that a relative's throat had been slashed in a bar room fight did not seem to make much of an impact. That he was not expected to live did not matter either.

During Christmas, when I was twelve, an uncle who my family rarely saw came by to visit. None of the family cared much for him though. Uncle Paco had become very successful and would not let anyone forget that fact. On Christmas Eve all my other aunts, uncles and cousins got together at my grandparents' house. There were homemade tamales and lots of liquor. This Christmas, my successful uncle had more liquor than tamales. The more inebriated he became, the more he started putting down the rest of the family, giving them itemized descriptions of their shortcomings. When it came to my mother's turn, my uncle only said, "Are you still married to that bastard who stole that four-hundred dollars from me in forty-eight?" The look I saw on my mother's face was one of painful embarrassment as she silently went to the kitchen to help my grandmother. Paco had hurt my mother and given me a piece of the jigsaw puzzle I no longer wanted to complete. It would be two more years before I would see the truth in the flesh.

Junior high school, when you're fat and fourteen, is not very much fun. Pimple-faced boys who teased others to draw attention away from their own plight were a minor problem. I beat the shit out of three boys who had taunted me with "Fat, Fat, Water Rat." Beating up insulting boys was not fun, but seemed the necessary thing to do at the time. I would not be humiliated for free.

The world I lived in had its routine; between beating up boys, I read voraciously. My life was terribly interrupted one day when my father appeared suddenly after fourteen years, requesting to see me. I hesitantly agreed, feeling strange too, like when I punched boys in the face. Everything that I had ever heard about my father had been negative, how he was a thief, a liar, and an alcoholic. I had also heard that he had been married to two other women at the same time that he had been married to my mother (he must have thought that he was a Mormon.) When people said things about him like that, about how rotten he was, I used to not care.

I would never see him, so why should I invest any emotion on such a worthless person?? But now that I was to meet my father I was full of curiosity and a slight fear; I had come up with all sorts of images of what my father would be like. In the back of my mind, I hoped that he would not be all that bad, that maybe people had made a mistake about him. A meeting was set for a Saturday afternoon in February. I would give him the benefit of the doubt.

The man I met who was my father had a beer belly, a receding hairline and a scar from ear to ear where his throat had been slashed. He chain smoked non-filtered Camels, and would not look me in the eye when he spoke to me of his many exploits. All he did was brag about how many friends he had and how he had been a hero during World War II. Flashing a bankroll, he said if there was anything that I wanted he would buy it for me. I did not want anything except a hamburger, and besides his benefit was just about out. Finishing my hamburger, I thanked him and said that I had to be going.

He looked so sad and pitiful, a caricature of what he might have been twenty years before. After paying the bill, he walked me to the bus stop. My bus pulled up shortly, and I politely said good-bye. As I turned to leave he said, "I'm not what you expected, am I?"

"No, you're not," I said. I did not want this stranger to see me cry, and perhaps he did not want to either. My father disappeared into the crowd as my bus pulled away. On the way home I wished that I had been adopted.

--First Place, Prose



NO HOPE
Kagari Yasuda
(Photograph)



VIDEO GIRL

Eugenio Franyutti

A SUICIDE

Mary Ann Masters

The waves rinsed over the rocky shore.
They lapped at the form standing silhouetted in the moon's
frame.

A ghastly pale reflects a personal agony in the face of
this form.

The wind tugs and jostles,
as seasoned tears blend with the salt spray of the sea.

The form seems to yearn for more,
Yet for no more.

It moves with hesitance
but at the ocean's longing.
The blending is unnoticeable. . .

peaceful . . .

final . . .

The waves roll uninterrupted.

-- Second Place, Poetry

AT THE CROSSROADS

Sainey Suso

Here I stand
In the wilderness of life
Like a butterfly without wings
But admired by all
Like the night bird
Howling and shrieking
waiting to be rescued
Like a tree in winter
Waiting for the Spring
Hoping and longing
To see destiny
Before the Sun sets

*

Here I stand
In desperation I wait
For Manna from the sky
To feed my hungry thoughts
It fades and falls
But is never blown away
Emptiness remains a crime
And ignorance becomes a sin
Saints bring in wisdom,
Truth, life, and light
To show me the promised land
The land I longed to see.



FORGOTTEN NIGHT
Sergio Gonzales
Second Place, Art (Photograph)

SOMETIMES
Stephanie Counter

Sometimes things happen too fast,
Start out good,
Yet the laughter doesn't last.
Sometimes you sit and remember
Someone who held you in your past.
Sometimes you find someone who knows exactly how to touch you,
Exactly when to kiss you.
Someone you can laugh with and be with and love life with.
Someone you can sit and listen to for hours on end.
Someone you wish could be your lover,
But in the end becomes just a friend.
Sometimes we don't realize how much we touch each other's lives.
Sometimes we fall asleep in a dream
And wake up too late.
Sometimes life just goes too fast, too fast.
You wish with all your heart
That you could stop and turn back the clock.
Sometimes. . .,
I can think of nothing but you.

THE UNWRAPPED GIFT

James H. Gamble

I knocked on the flimsy screen door, but I didn't have to. The old man was already standing there, bracing himself with two walking canes worn smooth by years of dependency on them. "Are you ready to go?" I had promised my old friend we would go somewhere for breakfast this Christmas morning.

"If you had a cold like I do, you wouldn't want to go anywhere," he said as he lowered himself to a weathered once-white wooden chair outside his door. "I was just going out for a smoke." He pulled a stubby Camel from a new pack. I spied the liquor bottle partially covered on his blanket-strewn bed. Crippled in the past by someone or something, all Lloyd had this Christmas was a fifth of whiskey and a cold. His trousers were stained with urine and the repeated effect of uncontrollable bowels. The unbearable stench of his one-room apartment began to overwhelm me.

A Christmas card of the Nativity scene stood at an angle on his dresser. "I see you got a Christmas card, Lloyd."

"The only thing I want to see is someone eat that chili pepper over there," pointing with a nod of his head to the other side of his dresser. As I maneuvered to see it, I was hit again by that nauseating stench of dried urine, body odor, alcohol, and cigarette smoke -- the stable for the Christ-child probably didn't smell much better. The oppressive heat from his corner radiator staggered out the door. At least in this stable there was some heat.

Some of the other fellows who were staying at the same rooming house called him "Rip," like "Rip Van Winkle." His scraggly white beard and long white hair with fading blue eyes and tobacco stained teeth explained why.

"Tell me about your most unforgettable Christmas, Lloyd," I suddenly suggested, trying to make conversation.

"They began in 1909 . . ." and for some reason he proceeded to tell me about his "first-and-only-wife" who had divorced him after 18 years and took everything he had.

"I want to hear about your best Christmas," I gently urged.

"It was in Cleveland, Ohio," he immediately replied, searching through his pockets for some matches. "I was holding my three-year-old daughter in my arms and she asked me, 'Daddy, what is Christmas?'"

My eyes again surveyed the smudgy walls and the soiled and stained floor. I looked at his face. It too was smudgy and stained. "What did you tell her, Lloyd?"

"Christmas is a time of joy for all the peoples of the world . . .," he explained, straightening himself with surprising ease. His wit again surfaced, "Now where are my matches. . . on the floor? That's a good place for them."

He was turning his back to me while he said, "You have a good vacation," and he stiffly inched toward his matches.

"Take care of yourself, Lloyd," I said without thinking.

"I have to," he replied drily.

As I walked away I understood that the pain in this man's eyes eased because of the hope realized in the coming of the Christ-child in a stable just like Lloyd's one morning.

— Second Place, Prose (Tie)



THE ALAMO
Kagari Yasuda
(Photograph)

"WILL WE EVER LEARN?"

Rick Bernstein

Years ago during a period of aggression
the fatalities of war brought only depression
As the war came to an end
from our nation's cries for peace
began the start of a new era
giving our country a brand new lease

The symbols of war
are the Hawk and the Dove
They symbolize hate
They symbolize love

Through logic and reason
we sought peace for this nation
but through the cries of our youths
we shared their bitter frustration

Our young boys went to fight
to a land where they'd never been
to stop the evil influence
in a war we couldn't win

As young boys these soldiers fought
but as men these soldiers died
Patiently waiting to hear some word
their families sat quietly and cried

The old wars caused much sorrow
The new wars bring new grief
But the fears of an unknown tomorrow
leave us frightened and in disbelief

The time has come
for our people to learn
that our problems at home
should be our main concern

CHANGING

Mary Helen Garza

The colors of your mind like a kaleidoscope keep

changing,

always rearranging, never stay the same.

You go from black to white, and light to dark so fast,
as if to fit the background that you're in. You're always

changing,

why all the rearranging, for once let it stay the same.

I can tell it's just your way to make the others say you
make a difference in this life.

All I have to say is you don't need to color the world for me,
I'll take you just the way you come.

Leave the rearranging,

Things always stay the same.



BLITZ KIDS
Audrey Lynn Dufresne
Honorable Mention, Art
(Silkscreen)

LAS CARAS DEL MUÑECO

Perez - Franco

Hace todo lo que su amo quiere
El muñeco canta, baila y ríe;
El pobre mono de plástico,
No sabe si vive o muere.

Así como el muñeco y sin meterse en líos,
Vive mucha pero mucha gente,
Incluso
Algunos de los míos.

Con las caras de muñeco
Unos cantan, lloran, ríen.
Otros nada más sonríen.
Por dentro son un hueco.

Ese hueco del muñeco
¿Será falta de carne or corazón?
¿Será falta de razón?
¿Por qué existe ese hueco?

Sólo una palabra falta
para que el muñeco hable
Y el pobre desdichado diga:
Hombre, ya no me manejes. ¡Basta!

-- First Place, Spanish

THE MISSING PUMPKIN PIE

Teresa B. Botkin

On a muggy and cloudy November morning, Maria and Pepe, a childless couple, were checking their roses for bugs. They spent hours at a time in the garden. Maria pushed her long, jet black, wavy hair from her face. Pepe said her hair smelled better than the flowers. "I must check on the pumpkin for the pies," said Maria.

"Why don't you teach one of our nieces to make the pies, Maria, since we do not have a child to carry on the tradition?" asked Pepe.

Maria somberly said, "No." Maria was disappointed at being childless and unable to pass on her recipe.

Pepe said, "Don't get upset, we'll try another adoption agency, and you'll see, God willing, we'll get a child."

Each year Maria was elected by her family to prepare the Thanksgiving pies. Pepe took out the pumpkin from under the bed. The pumpkin was big and weighed about twenty pounds. "It is big enough to make at least ten pies, Pepe!" exclaimed Maria.

Maria cut the pumpkin in half and boiled it in sugared water. "It's done. Delicious, now I can prepare the Thanksgiving pies." She had made seven pies by the time noon came around. Pepe carried out all the pies but one which he left behind on the kitchen table.

Maria opened her big, round black eyes in dismay when she looked at the empty plate on the table. Pepe, approaching the room, heard the loud screams that were coming from Maria's direction. "What is wrong, Maria?"

"I am appalled at the behavior of the neighborhood kids, my pumpkin pie is missing!" Maria's fury kept on raging as the fog slowly crept in. Maria could only think of her missing pumpkin pie. During mid-afternoon Pepe searched high and low for the missing pie. Looking at the empty plate, Pepe tried to come up with some clue. Scratching his head, he checked the windows to see if they had been tampered with. The door did not seem to have been forced in any way. Pepe, picking up his hat, decided to search the neighborhood. "Maria, I'll return later, I am going to question the neighborhood kids and search for further clues." Pepe, a man of few words, with deep dark hair, strong chin and eyes that did not reveal any emotion at all, vowed to find the culprit.

In a corner store a lonely boy of merely ten years of age sat emotionless. Rollo, as he was known by all, was all alone in this world. His parents had perished in a freak accident. They had been living in this country illegally. There were no surviving relatives. Rollo, being worldly for his tender age, was able to survive without being caught by law officers or child welfare officials. His tightly curled hair was cut short and his eyes opened wide to reveal a lonely, hungry child. Pepe with a deep accusing voice approached Rollo and asked, "Have you seen the pumpkin pie which was on the kitchen table of our house?" Rollo, shrugging his shoulders, looked away and for a moment a thin smile came across his face. Pepe decided to use a more non-direct tactic to find the missing pie.

Nighttime was approaching. Pepe knew he must hurry or give up his search for the pie. His search was of no avail. Walking almost the entire neighborhood, asking questions, looking in trash cans and at kids' faces that did not reveal a thing, with no clues at all, Pepe was at the end of his rope. He was returning home, when alas! out of nowhere came a puppy wagging his tail. The puppy seemed to be well fed. Pepe, bending down to carry the puppy, heard Rollo scream, "Run, boy, run!" At this time Pepe observed a thick yellowish amber crust forming around the puppy's face. He knew he had found the culprit.

Rollo, the puppy and Pepe walked back to where Maria was waiting. Rollo, with tears running down his face, confessed he took the pie, but not for himself; for his puppy. Rollo cried, "I know what it is like to be cold, hungry and alone." Maria, overcome with tears, extended her arms out to the little boy and cried, "You'll never be alone or hungry again for as long as we live." She and Pepe, embracing Rollo, said, "We pledge to adopt you and you can keep your puppy."

Neither of them went hungry again. Maria baked many varieties of pies and Pepe enjoyed the company and love of a son and his dog.

--Second Place, Prose (Tie)



A WOMAN
Kagari Yasuda
(Photograph)

**ELEGY:
TO THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT**

Yvonne Hubbard

You were born out of hope;
You were conceived by generations of bondage.
Salvation was to be your purpose;
Redemption and emancipation, your goals.

No bright star heralded your birth;
No tokens or gifts of gold did you receive.
And yet, your enemies crucified you.
Still but a child, you were destroyed.

You were enemied and rejected by many.
The threat is dead, they now say.
Ah, but the faithful, they wait . . .
They wait for your second coming.

-- Honorable Mention, Poetry

MY FAVORITE THINGS

Mary Ann Masters

Some of my favorite things are worth more than gold,
and only purchased with the heart.

I love catching a fluttering leaf in the wind,
and touching novice buds on an awakening tree.

I love giggling under the colors of a rainbow,
and wiggling my toes between sand and sea.

I love the wide-eyed stare of a curious child,
and the sculptured lines of an aged face.

I love the song of a cricket at dawn,
and the glistening dew on spider's lace.

I love the cool shade of a spreading old oak,
and chomping crisp apples down to the core.

I love the crackling crunch under my feet in the snow,
and listening to the ocean lap against rocky shore.

I love feeling the rain rinse over my face,
and breathing in the fresh air of the morn.

I love cupping gentle Poppies in the curve of my hands,
and hiding in vast fields of wheat or corn.

Life holds so many treasures, it's true.
I'm glad God grants me a part in it too.



SEARCH, RACCOON
Audrey Lynn Dufresne
(Scratchboard and Ink)

IF ALL THE WORLD COULD FEIGN A CHILD

Deirdre Price

While walking home
From school one day,
I stopped to watch
Two children play.

One was black
And one was white,
But neither held
Contempt nor spite.

They shared their toys,
Crayons and tools
And the same thought
Applied when it came to rules.

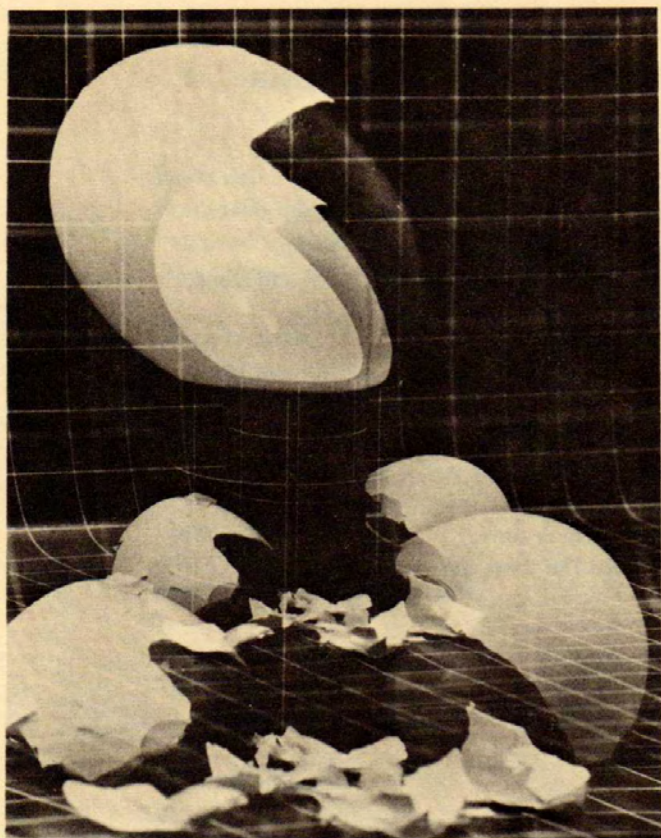
Though children now,
They will grow up
And may agree to separate cup.

If all the world
Could feign a child
Perhaps the barriers
Would be mild.

BEYOND REACH

Mary Ann Masters

I love you,
but it is like loving a neatly cemented wall.
You are there,
and the only love returned is that which
is bounced back off from my own giving.
Somehow, though, beneath each brick and stone,
I know
You are feeling,
hurting,
hiding.
I wish I could reach you,
but the strength of the wall is too great for me to penetrate.
But, you know. . .
Walls crumble in time.
I only hope I'm there to catch you.



BREAKTHROUGH
Eugenio Franyutti
(Photograph)

