

That's the way it is

"Hi!"
 "Hi yourself."
 "How have you been?"
 "Fine, and you?"
 "Oh, I guess I can't complain — besides it wouldn't do any good."
 "Yes, I guess that's true."
 "... "I've been thinking about you quite often lately ... Can't seem to get you off my mind."
 "Oh really?"
 "Yes, really! So what do you thing about that?"
 "I think you're sweet."
 "Oh really?"
 Now cut that out — you idiot."
 "Ha ha ... I'm sorry."
 "... "You know, you're sure a lot of fun to be with."
 "So are you."
 "... "I like you and you like me ... we need each other — We should be happy. Why can't we go for drives, to shows, and other places together and be happy like other people?"
 "... "Because I'm a Negro and you're white."
 "... "Gee, I almost forgot about that. But what difference does that make? You're still a human being with two arms, two legs and feelings, just like any other person. Why do I have to pretend I'm better than you or that you don't exist? Why?"
 "... "Because that's the way it is my darling—that's the way it is."

—by Calvin Rife

It was cold today.

The proud North Wind sarcastically weaved itself through the dark blue fabric of my heavy winter coat, then continued on it's way laughing.

—by Calvin Rife

To spring

The soil clad fingers felt your coming,
 Your breath warm as a kiss.
 I met you on knees
 And let my hair loose.
 But your promise was dead.
 Dead, dead, dead my child
 Found so late and loved so dearly.
 Dead the song, the jubilee.
 Now that death had its day,
 The ravening of pain is done,
 Grant me a flower, Life.

—by Sunita Jain

Ecology

As by a thunderbolt
 Fractured to its concrete
 Footings, three feet thick
 It stands like stone, stoic
 As monument, this wall.

Poor planning, most would say.
 Built on a modest knoll
 Between river and rails,
 No structure could last long.
 This, anyone can see.

A man who wrote of walls,
 People and mystery
 Once mused "Something there is"
 That will not let them stand.
 These days, they build them strong.

No more do walls topple.
 Wall-building is an art.
 They harden like ageing
 Concrete. Time renews them.
 They withstand hurricanes.

Can only builders rip
 A wall? Also, I think,
 Can subtle, unthought-of
 Things, subversive forces.
 These render walls useless:

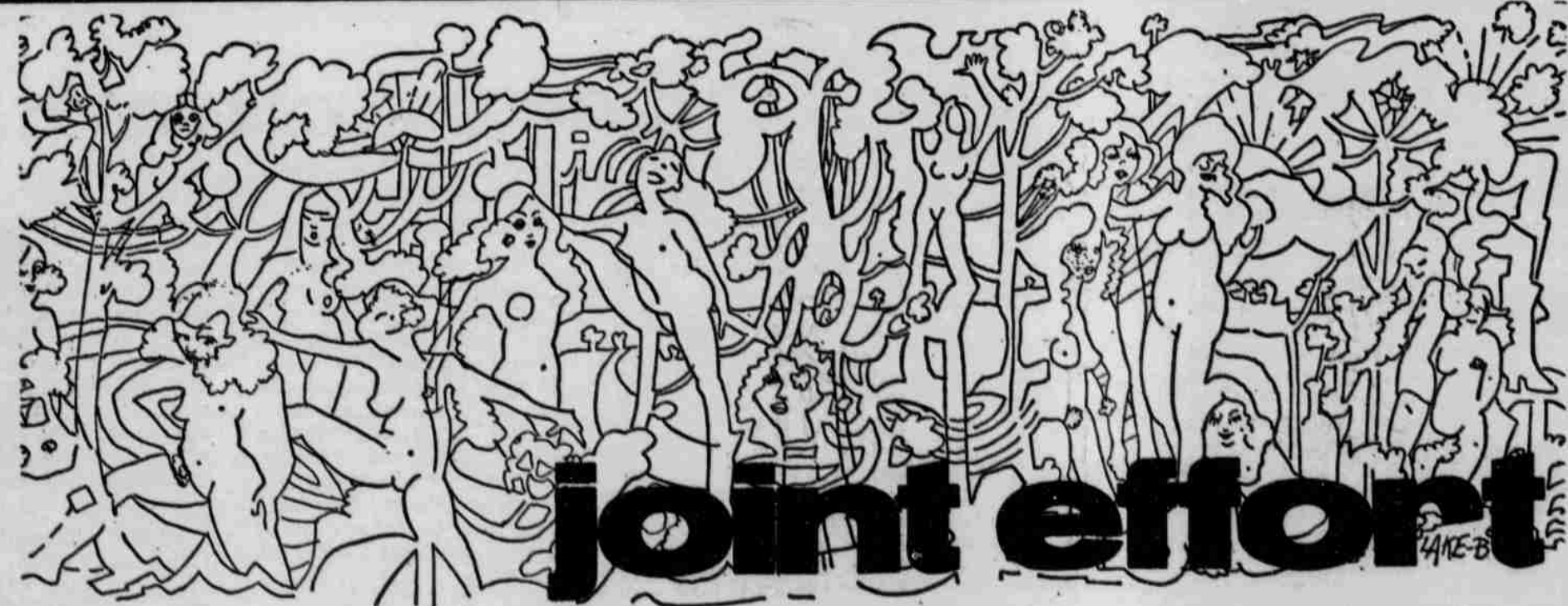
The regularity
 In the tremor of trains.
 Rumbles through the loam,
 Rail to river, vibrate
 The wall into straining.

It will take years, of course,
 And the wall will not fall,
 But stand there thunderstruck
 In proud, shivered ruin,
 A symbol of learning.

—by Murray Martz

the rag's literary review

— edited by —
 Dan Ladely
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Poem for a toilet
 A porcelain oval pool
 gazing upward.
 Darkness descends.
 Time crawls.
 The maelstrom gurgles.
 Meet, what's useless to man
 —by Howard Rosenberg

Lost in the Funhouse a book review by Indira Singh

I started reading *Lost in the Funhouse* on my way home a few days ago. Through the rattling of the bus, and the whirr of downtown noises — I continued to read — needless to say, I did miss my stop.

Lost in the Funhouse is not a collection of stories. It is certainly not a collection of short stories. John Barth is a capable author, yet unlike his contemporaries, he just cannot bring himself to write short stories. He is cunning, brilliant and is aware of it. Put pieces of ideas, mythology, biography and, of course, existentialism — glue it all together with words, incidents, experience, echoes and texture. Result? A 194 page paperback — 190 of those pages being reflective nonsense.

"Night Sea Journey" is the first piece in the book, and wisely so, as it is the only worthwhile reading in the whole book. In these ten pages Barth captures the essence of existentialism. The age-long question is presented to the swimmer; stop and think or continue to swim and sink.

According to Barth, the choices for the thoughtful swimmer are two: give up thrashing and go under for good, or embrace the absurdity. The conclusions are reflective, yet as justified as existentialism itself. If there is no shore, or if it only exists in the fancies of swimmers, Barth says, then why continue to swim. The merciful thing to do is to refuse to participate. Yet when

one realizes that the Hero, Shore and Swimmer are merged identities, and that pretended glory, rationalization, killing, inventing rules and stories and relationships are all but a part of senseless love and senseless death — then there can be no echoing reflections.

Here Barth deftly handles a bizarre subject. Yet he fails to accomplish anything worthwhile in the rest of the book. One continues to read, hoping. Hoping that perhaps the deluge of mythology and comedy will have something unique to say. That Clytemenestra and Menelaus will have some profound or prefound meanings to share. But they don't, and Barth leaves the reader dangling — concluding that Barth is too brilliant and too cunning — even for himself.