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WATERSHED

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Volume 19

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Watershed
Spring 1996

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Minus W

Siamese twin letter u's joined
at the arm at birth,
pawn to whispering politicians
who hold you responsible for
War, alone the cause of
World War I and WW II.

W, 23rd note in the song that
is the modern English alphabet
You make my
omen
turn to
Women.

Without you the Leaves of Grass
get mowed, leaving alt hitman
naked and weeping
in Brooklyn rain.

Welcome to the Occupation

seasons affect the leaf's dreaming.
awake, he dangles from the fingertips of the tree
longing to join his brothers and sisters
in revolt.

seeds of rebellion sprout thick with age
into trees like his, and the leaf yearns
for the wind's whispering plot to give
him leave.

Shared Light

The day I owned my aloneness, drove out
to the valley of pines, of sunlight and nothing.

The day the sun climbed down the mountains
and rode the river silver.

The day I stood the mid-drift rock, watched
rainbow trout

point upstream
(little throats of nothings in the throat of a river)
and hold still as

the river passed through them. And because I wanted
to love them, I threw my S's into the air until

the air was filled with somethings, and I cast my line
to the water. And when one flashed

her belly and took it, and my rod like an arm
leaned in, there was

a string of light between us.

an old oak the shape
of a ribcage wind
plays through its forks
redwinged blackbirds
its heart

Remember how learning was like walking
out of a theater: no shapes, only
auras of darkness; you learned
the light.

The science class experiment:
a glass jar, construction paper around it,
filled with water; an empty bowl.
In darkness, the flashlight held to the bottom
of the jar. Remember pouring light into the bowl,
and the bowl, illumined.



ALICE MAIRE DeBERRY

December in Ohio

BOB GARNER

the opening

starlings
like angels
with greasy black wings

peck a hole
in the grenadine
sky

I Write Death Poems

But my tools
blunt fingers
the tip
of the pen
are too big
too clumsy
to extract
the Splinter
pushed deeper

Ink into blood
the wound widens
And still this thing
this black bird
won't fly.

Suffrage

What was it like to be
Ms. Susan B. Anthony?
To be measured in dollars,
made smaller,
a petite, ladylike size.
Only then to be forsaken
because you were mistaken
for a quarter
of your worth.



DOUG CHURCHILL



DOUG CHURCHILL

ROLLIN'

I finally lie down at 5 a.m., splash water on my tired face
at 10 and chase down my professor in the parking lot—
hand her those damn rough drafts at last and she smiles.
Pitchers of wheat wash down afternoon poetry
and walkin out 'The Bear' the street lights there
above my head reflect bright on 2nd Street—
slick from a long day's rain. So I roll straight over
to Brian's apartment, find them boys guzzlin
gargantuan cups of beer, bottle-caps on bottom, and I join.
Eat Acapulco burrito later, alone,
before helping kill dregs of kegs in Eric's basement stoned
and fulla smoke. Outside, the rain ain't stopped,
so I roll back to Bri's
and he's not there, no, no one's there,
and the fuckin door's locked and the sky is pissin in my hair.
So I bust into the condemned shit-hole next door,
cower in the corner till I hear all them girls come back—
them girls, who were out at the bars celebratin Stacy's birthday.
So now she's 21 and spun and wantin it like she used to.
Her and her friends disappear into Bri's bathroom
and the moon, meanwhile, is still hazed in a curtain of rain.
They come out and I put pastels
and sketch pad in Stacy's hand, say "draw me sumpthin"
and later find 3 pages—blank except my name in black
scribbled out: Matt, Matt, Matt,
and I catch that look in her eyes—
just sex, I think, cause it's her birthday and all, but man,
I can't, can't kiss her—just sex, but damn
I'm not drunk enough yet, and all I want
is for her to read my poetry like she used to.
But now those cocained eyes dance blank
in her pale face, and all in the place are asleep but us,
we're the last ones up. So finally I fake sleep in a chair,
spy her snoozin on the couch and I sneak out,
shed my boots, and jump in Brian's bed.
Wake up to piss my hung-over song, I hear the front door close,
and Stacy, she's gone—
must've walked home in the rain.

Dining Out

Another boring morning, and on days like this, there's only one cure. Grab a bus for the mall and eat lunch out.

In twenty minutes I enter the glamorous world of merchandising. Very convenient for an eighty-year-old guy who lives alone and hates to cook. There's a good assortment of food at the mall: Chinese, hamburgers, and Italian. Thought there were more.

Anyhow, I decide on Burger King. They've got a big promotion going on for the movie, *Pocahontas*. You get plastic figurines of the characters when you buy something. There's Captain John Smith, Chief Powhatan, Governor Ratcliff, some minor characters, and the star, Pocahontas. I've got most of these except Pocahontas.

I'll order a kid's meal, but even that's more than I can eat. It's a buck seventy-five. You get small fries, a small Coke, and a small hamburger. A high school kid tosses all these in a paper bag and drops a figurine on top. It's wrapped so you never know which one you're getting. I hope I get a Pocahontas.

Nope! It isn't the lovely Indian princess, but a minor player from the movie. It's Percy, a damned dog with a blue ribbon around his neck. There's a wind-up key under his belly. I give the key a couple of turns and set Percy on the table top. He wiggles his ass and takes four steps. Big deal.

A shadow hovers over me, and a strange voice asks, "Walking dog?"

I look up into the watery eyes of a guy about my age. He's wearing a Sherwin Williams paint cap. There's a picture of the world on it. A bucket of red paint pours over India, Africa, and the United States.

"Want him?" I ask.

"Nope," he grunts.

"Why not?" I ask.

"I'm too old for toys," he says.

The guy now slips into a seat across from me. Being a friendly sort, I slide my bag of fries at him. "Have some," I say.

"Can't chew," he says. "Got new teeth. They don't fit. I only eat soft stuff like Franco American spaghetti."

"Get the dentist to fix them," I order.

"Can't. My appointment isn't for two weeks."

"Hell!" I say. "You'll starve by then. Franco American won't keep you alive."

"I'll make out." His words sound like he's talking with a mouth full of corn flakes. It's then I notice his bottom teeth have slipped sideways in his mouth.

"Got a wife?" he asks.

"Yep."

"Married long?"

"Fifty years," I say.

"Why isn't your wife with you?"

"She works," I lie.

"What does she do?"

"Works in a bank," I lie again.

Squinting at my ancient face he asks, "Isn't she a bit old to still be working?"

"She's twenty years younger than I am," I reply, still lying.

"You married?" I ask him.

"Was," he says.

"What happened?"

"She died. Had diabetes. But that didn't do it."

"What did?" I ask.

"Heart attack. It was on a Sunday, three years ago. I went to church alone, and when I got home, there she was on the kitchen floor. Dead. God, I miss her."

I am getting overwhelmed by his sadness, so decide to take off. I stretch my legs, slide out of the booth and stand up.

"Are you going?" he asks.

"Think I'll head for home," I tell him. "The wife will be waiting for me to help with home loans and certificates of deposit. She doesn't understand all that banking stuff." I continue to feed him whoppers.

He looks at me with those big, juicy eyes. The Sherwin Williams cap has slid sideways so the red paint covering the world seems to be running down his neck. I have to smile.

He sees me smile. Smiles back. I figure it's time to make my break. My hand glides across the Formica table top, and two fingers wrap around Percy. I give the wind-up key a couple of twists and drop him in my jacket pocket. It's dark down there, and Percy start to kick and claw like he wants to escape.

On my way to the bus stop, I gently pat my jacket pocket. Percy's still there but isn't moving a muscle. Percy has given up.

I board the bus; I'll get off at The Breakers, Chico's low-income, senior housing development. Should be there in plenty of time for Meals-on-Wheels. I'll eat in tonight.



DOUG CHURCHILL

Eleven Seconds

Let there be waves to swell forward
hot soup and radio disk jockeys spinning the tune of the day,
as prophets sermon the weather, a congregation on the road.

Let there be redwood to construct for us asylums
as we tattoo ink into the skin of their deceased,
and hang our wet raincoats on routed limbs.

May the winds be at our fingertips
to put off the intrusive seasons and clear mirrored fog,
to lick adoringly at the brilliance of lipsticked lips.

Rain—shoot down from the silver-spouted sky
cleanse us of cigarette exhaust in the dusty day air,
the hanging fruits of cotton fields will towel us dry.

Thus, I commence the big bang of suburbia,
resting our folklore in the wisdom of a refrigerator magnet,
leaving the grease monkey to speak of us well
through the familiar hum of his new drill.

South of Pearblossom

The coffee-stained, yellow-parchment sky,
Dust-sheeted windows rattled by potholes
And the warmth of the desert road
Stretching towards a horizon of tattered paper

Motionless, air-conditioned cabin clotted with frowns.
Mother's hand brushing at cookie crumbs
This blurry streak of red outside those rectangles of glass.
For them, that is all.

The dry outside stays there with the cactus
And a crimson sea of wind rutted-tendrils.
The crows are flying somewhere,
While the snake eats their eggs.

A yellow, sulfurous, canopy beckons them onward
Out of a crack-riddled valley of sun-basked lizards,
Past sandstones windblown into giant salt-shakers.
They see only the road.

Under their coffee-stained sky there is a place that needs
getting to.

MIK JAMES HAMADA

Haiku for Sarah

Light like sugar glass
breaks upon the lake—velvet
ripples, gold-thickened.



DOUG CHURCHILL

Spilling

He watches his sister climb the steps
her body two times the size it was last year.
He offers her a cool drink.
She pulls a pack of Marlboro 100s
and a lighter from her purse
starts looking around for an ashtray.

She has come to talk so he's surprised
when she shuffles and deals the cards.
A couple hands of Rummy and she's ready.
She tucks her dark hair behind her ears
and begins telling him how when she was twelve
Uncle Mike held her down in thick orchard grass
and spilled a river of cum onto her denim shorts.
The next day she threw the shorts
in a dumpster outside their apartments.

And only now because he is dead can she tell
how during the watermelon fight
Uncle Mike chased her through the trees
with a handful of the ripe center.
She remembers his arms
the streaks of red juice, the tiny black seeds.

He gets up for a glass of water
then sits back down —
knowing there is nothing he can say
nothing he can do but listen.
He touches her sunburned arms.



DOUG CHURCHILL

Hired Girls at the Lake House in Idaho

We smoked cigarettes in the maid's room
kept our ashes in Coke cans under the bed.
The walls were covered in large bouquets of flowers
and we had to light musk candles to hide the smell.

We helped the gardener plant flowers along the steps.
He told us about the University in Boise and his summer jobs.
When he started to flirt, I became quiet
but you, sister, already knew how to flirt.

I dusted leather-backed books in the library
you cleaned the bar, taking sips from bottles of brown whisky.
We could hear the cousins playing tennis
through the wide unopened windows.

The dining room table took two hours to polish
our hands still oily as we pulled weeds from the rocky beach.
The gardener chased you in and out of the water
until you cut your foot on a piece of broken bottle.

The boat house was always empty.
We packed large baskets with cold ham sandwiches,
linen napkins and bottles of wine.
The dark waves hit hard against the dock.

The night it finally rained
we snuck down to the side porch to get cool.
The cousins were asleep on the wicker bed
their red hair spread like fire on the pillows.

The Sunday of the big party, boats came from all directions
bringing people in striped shirts and jewelry.
After we served them bread and cheese
you went to the gardener's room above the shed.

I stayed inside the house
by a fireplace so tall a person could walk into it.
A woman named Penelope asked me who I was.
She gave me a glass of dark wine, told me I was beautiful.

Together we watched the people on the lawn
the cousins in new rayon short sets,
the men beside them talking of golf —
their rings clinking against glass cups.

Putting her arm through mine she led me outside.
I stood between two large pots of geraniums.
She asked if she could kiss me
and the sudden movement of waves made me dizzy.

City Poem

I can't get it right(write)
I am slow
stepping down S.F. streets
to meet bad poetry for coffee
surrounded by goatees
big eyed teenagers
cool smoking fashion
sky like a dark franchise

I watch the sick whiskers
of diseased cats
they make homes of wheelchaired laps
disguised as transient

After
I carry my covert wine bottle back
my little red infant
and mother it into emptiness
This won't change the angle of skyscrapers
but it's a game with an outcome
and even hangover is progress in solitude

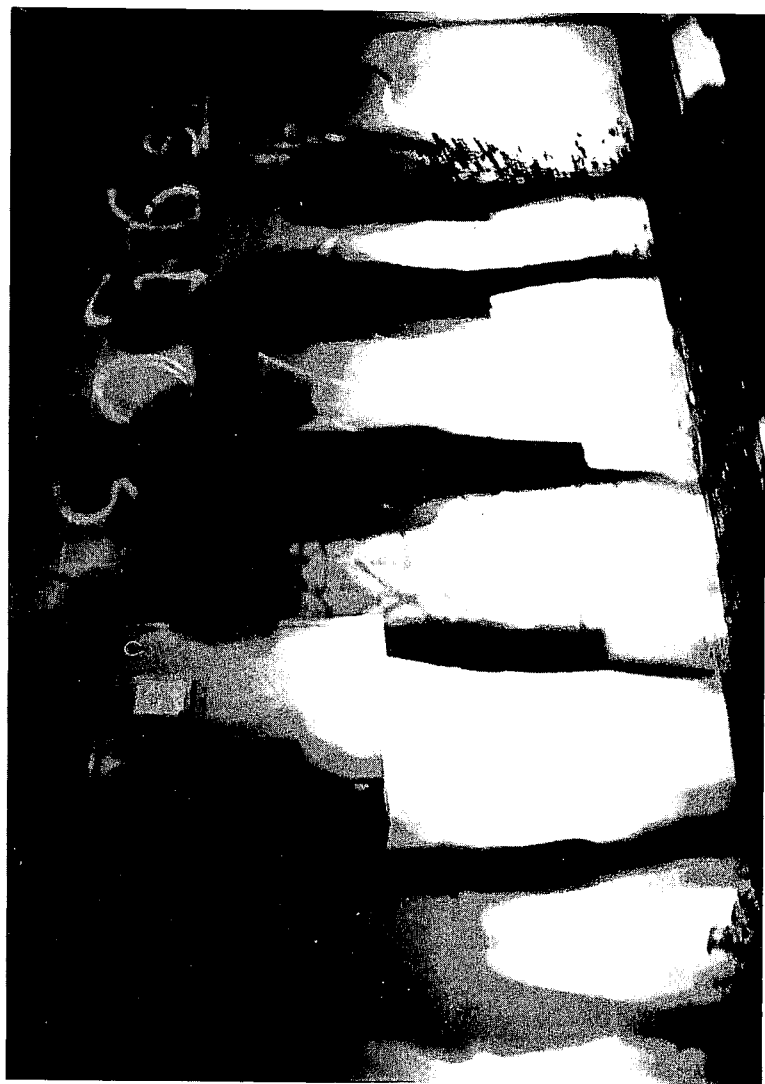
Subway farts hot wind
music of coin cups shaking a spurious beat
I am contriving a pratfall for hidden cameras
in the back of my mind

My daydream is like Bergman's
obvious death symbolism
I lean against a post
making like leaning into a girl
and despite my empty journals
an entry is imminent

Golden Gate park is a graveyard metaphor
everything mirrored into undergrounds
like hanging up gravity to wither
gray coats are out on clotheslines

flagging images of useless skin
the bath-house stinks neon sex into spinal cords
a guitar plays itself for pennies
Live Nude Girls flashing pornography at pigeon storms

Once I was young and unserious
with good boots
but now lamps blow themselves out
at the map edges
just enough light left
to be lost in.



R. ERIK OTT

Shadow People

Rewrite

Your teeth are brilliant, white pickets
pregnancies of uniform wisdoms
outside the lawn is invaded
so say something smart.

There was that one moment
with me under the doorjamb
you in the nervous bathroom
our spaces at a faceoff
your expert fence of a mouth
holding silence's perfect tongue in

So, I will tie this canopy of stars
to another religion
lie in wait with visionary salivas
consider any mad avenue that hints at retreat

I will decorate my slow corner
with idiot stab wounds
self-immolations
terrible prides

Yes, I can live a whole life of separate dinners
but allow me this one silly postcard
the clear, vivid lie
of your too cool sheets
waving surrender.

PAUL A. FELDHAUS

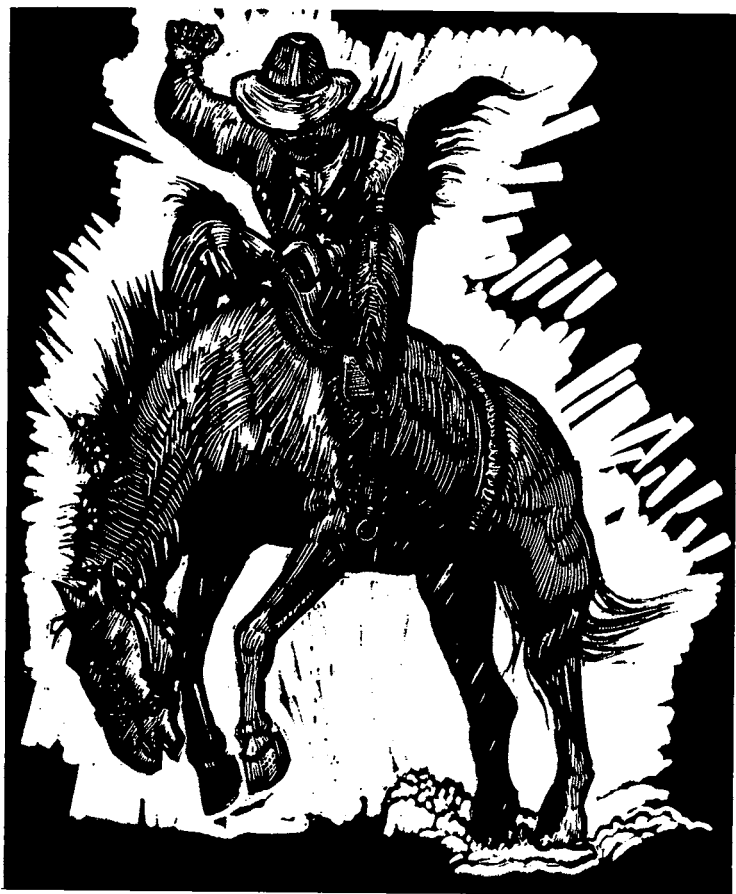
A tribute and portfolio of his work

During the years of his tenure as Professor of Art at California State University, Chico, Paul A. Feldhaus produced a rich and varied body of work. He is perhaps best known for his prints: woodcuts, linocuts, and lithographs in which he displays his wit, his understanding of art and the world, and his humanitas. During that time, those of us associated with various university publications also had occasion to enjoy his generosity with his work and time. The *University Journal*, in particular, was the beneficiary of his largess. During the time I was editor of the *Journal*, Paul Feldhaus was responsible for virtually all the art work published in it, and his work graced the pages of virtually every issue.

This year the Chico Arts Council awarded Paul Feldhaus an Annie for lifetime achievement and contribution to the arts in this community. The *University Journal* is no longer being published, so the editors of *Watershed* and I want to use this space to congratulate Paul on his well-deserved award and recognition, and to acknowledge on behalf of the university community both his achievement and his contribution to campus life and our publications.

Paul Feldhaus still draws in his studio on East 2nd Street in downtown Chico, and the originals of the reproductions on the following pages are on display and for sale there, along with many other examples of his impressive body of past work and recent activity.

Ellen L. Walker



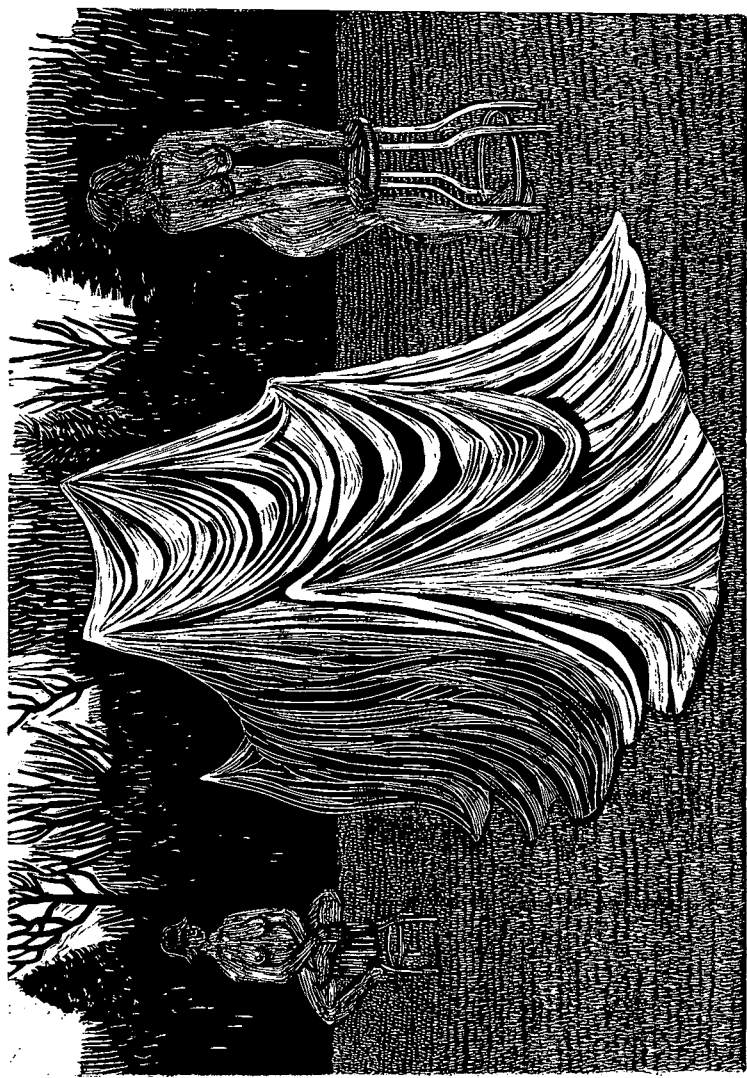
PAUL A. FELDHAUS

Bronc Buster



PAUL A. FELDHAUS

May I Borrow Your Comb, Please?



PAUL A. FELDHAUS

Draped Warthog



PAUL A. FELDHAUS

Printemps



PAUL A. FELDHAUS

Warthog Intrusion



PAUL A. FELDHAUS

Watching?

CONTRIBUTORS

HEATHER BRITTAIN BERGSTROM cures the notion that "there is nothing left to write about" by recalling the words of James Baldwin: "...the tale of how we suffer,...how we are delighted and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard... it's the only light we've got in this darkness."

CHRISTIAN C. CASUCCI claims that "if all else fails" he will become a sky connoisseur. The clouds tell the truth, he says. "You just have to listen closely, because they whisper."

DOUG CHURCHILL is a professional photographer with a studio in Burbank, California.

ALICE MARIE DEBERRY is a first semester grad student at Chico State. Although she's studying English with an emphasis on Creative Writing, she has taken an affinity to photography.

BOB GARNER draws little pictures in the margins.

MIK JAMES HAMADA compares himself to the protagonist in his next short story, entitled "Life with Echo." The character has spent long hours playing chess with ex-cons, but the analogy may have nothing to do with the writer.

MATTHEW HELMS was born and raised in San Jose, California. Helms currently resides in "the Chestnut Street Womb," a place highly renown for its "charm."

SARAH HOCKMAN lives and writes in Chico, California.

KORT IUPPENLATZ "cooks for money and writes for everything else." This is his first submission for publication.

TROY JOHNSON is a self-proclaimed cereal box philosopher. Managing editor at The Synthesis, Johnson credits the San Diego shores for his initial affinity for words—along with inspiration from his mother. Upon mastering a "big word," his mom would react "as if I had discovered another level in the theory of relativity."

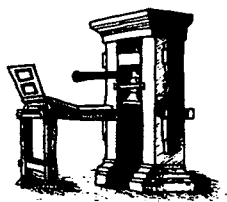
DEBBIE MC CALLUM is a senior with a double major in English/ Gender Studies and a minor in Creative Writing. Mc Callum believes in the theory that a purple ping pong ball could save the world "if we all would just give it a chance."

CHAD McCULLY is a native of Mariposa, California. Writing since having learned the alphabet, McCully plans to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing.

R. EIRIK OTT wishes to remain pseudonymous, claiming that his Vaudeville act in the '20s brought him international fame.

BOB STEINKAMP reports that he is "getting a bit older...but not as yet over the hill."

PAUL MICHAEL STEVEN, a graduate of Chico State, is now getting his MFA at the University of Montana.



Watershed was scanned at Technology and Learning Programs, CSU Chico. Computer layout by Lightside Group. It is set in Palatino, and printed on 80# Karma Text by the CSU, Chico Print Shop and bound by Inland Binding Company, Sacramento.



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