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# ENCODINGS



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NUMBER TWO

## ENCODINGS

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"Time Shadows of Ancient Greece"  
by Sharon Stewart

**ENCODINGS**  
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This is the second issue of ENCODINGS, and the second venture of our publishing company, Liaud: A Women's Press. The establishment of Liaud and ENCODINGS derives from our recognition of the fascination for language that is so characteristic of the current period of feminism. Our purpose is to provide a forum for women's ways of knowing and speaking.

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## IN PRAISE OF YOUR BODY

### I

I would stop by its nice roadside  
a good place to pull off, and shade,  
the coolest breezes,  
and us so hot and dogtired.

### II

I look out for your body  
like the first sight of the sea,  
everybody laughing and scrambling  
to get out of their clothes and into it!

### III

I might sing a small tune about it  
like the wind in the roof vents  
turning with a hum, just going around busily  
(Do I love you? Do I, Do I)  
mindless as a gnat in spring.

IV ALYSSA

I would never make a picture of it  
because a pencil is only human and  
could accidentally erase but I might  
lie down warmly all over it like a suntan.

V

Mainly, however, in praise of your body  
I would like to say a few words  
privately in its ear if it will meet me  
somewhere later as soon as it can  
and hurry.

Carol Snyder

## GETTING MARRIED

I think I will marry you  
in a rented rowboat:  
we'll stay out all night  
until they quit looking for us;  
the stars will present themselves  
for hours, front and center;  
we'll trail our hands in the slow water.  
Eventually the stars will call it  
a night, clouds of tulle will lift,  
we'll be adrift. The bottom  
of the boat will knock as though  
sleeping dolphins were turning  
under it, pulling the grey spread.  
And just there at the fish-breaking  
edge of morning where a slight  
blue band begins low in the sky,  
miles and miles and miles from land  
I'll take your hand.

Carol Snyder

## GALVESTON

The sea is noisy; the wind blows  
in like a flag in the wind, whipping  
this way and that; four o'clock  
by the sun making everything pink,  
your skin, the sand the color  
of healthy flesh. Right in front of us,  
double time, the comic drill  
of a sandpiper, various figures --  
families, couples -- considering  
something in the sand, at sea,  
their words spun round in the spume.  
No one sees us sitting in the dunes  
behind a fringe of rubbery green.  
Digging down you find a buried shoot,  
pale green still and alive,  
its roots sent deep, its two leaves  
resilient under a close cover of powder.  
The sun goes lower and redder;  
all of this scene has the tone of my love  
for you, another meaning not anywhere  
here and to which nothing -- not the wind  
or the time or the roots of the dune weed  
can speak because they blow and pass,  
although they go deep.

Carol Snyder

**"AND IN THE WINTER EXTRA BLANKETS FOR THE COLD"**

Dearest person to me and last chance  
to grow: our garden from the bedroom  
window, will what we planted open  
before the frost? Not much of fall  
is left; the sun is weak now and falters  
on and off, the yellow cucumber star  
trailing low, the eggplant in suspense  
like a hard black grape. So how  
in this eccentric place (nothing  
much we chose to grow yet all the given  
growing) can we expect  
a late, a second gain, the flower  
without a name we thought was dill  
or weed? Still I am expecting  
purple or rose or mixed  
blessing to suit my matching  
need, to show you what can succeed  
against the odds, but guessing  
too this plot may not apply  
and I must instead myself open,  
unloosen the clenched years  
and turn to you to know  
the will to love and be whole.

Carol Snyder



"Passage in the Light" No. XXVI. Photograph.

SHARON STEWART

## WHERE WE WILL GO

I was just about to fall asleep,  
(I must have been standing up to take  
such a terrific fall)  
keel over into sleep like a dead  
drunk with crosses on my eyes  
just about to hit the ground dreaming

when the angel of the lord  
– everyone knows which one is the angel  
of the lord –  
arrived in his rainbow pterodactyl wings  
looking peevish, bumped me, "Hell!"  
I said, "That remains to be seen," said he.

He looked through me like a crystal ball.  
"Jesus," I said, but flattery was getting me  
nowhere, so I went along. We were en route  
to the temporal dump before you could  
collect your thoughts or straighten the bed.  
I guessed I was just dead

in the water and that much was true,  
but I hadn't anticipated he'd pick up you  
when there you were drowsy on darvon,  
mussed up good, looking beddish, mortal-  
sinnish and cute. Now the two  
of us were really in the soup.

"What is the soup du jour?" I asked, but I knew.  
We went along like lambs, wooly bright,  
because, as we'd said all along, this thing was right.  
The pit of hell yawned at this point, full  
of the drifting damned, hands  
over mouths, punished for earthly disordered nights.

Mt. Heaven, the other way, looked energetic  
and alert. We blinked some forty winks  
or so, and the angel, no slouch,  
bustled like a dexe-head around  
and about. God arrived, a greenback eye,  
"e pluribus unum," He said. "Ho hum" said we

in unison, then slid down slowly the incline  
praying "now we lay us down to sleep,  
the woods are lovely, dark and deep,"  
our voices dwindling, dull and meek,  
"we have an appointment we have to keep;  
wake us up in about a week..."

The angel vanished, God's eye shut;  
Satan snored, and the light went out.

Carol Snyder

## AT THE SHERATON IN DENTON, TEXAS

Joyously, I've abandoned my life:  
the cluttered desk, the piles of untyped notes,  
the dirty dishes and maids who refuse to clean them,  
the note that says my son has called the principal a dick again.

I've flown away to an ideal universe: a conference  
in a distant city. Aloof, I sit in the lobby, reviewing  
the program. I converse with bright young feminists,  
and we plot together, honing our subversive blades.

I have a queen-size bed in a room all my own  
fashionable, in rose and wedgewood, with tasteful prints  
on the walls. Atop the dresser, the TV, defunct remnant  
of barbarism, stands dark and silent for three days.

In the mornings I shower and order breakfast,  
which a handsome young man brings on a tray.  
I tip him generously. I cannot stop smiling.

Settled in my armchair, I drink coffee while butter melts  
on blueberry muffins. The eggs are done to perfection.  
The slant of the sun could not be more perfect.

At night I pull back the richly patterned coverlet;  
the sheets, lightly starched, amazingly ironed, are  
white as new snow, soft as feathers, delicate as a moth's wing.

I cannot stop smiling. My head sinks into the buoyant pillow,  
the mattress meets the arch of my spine, and I remember  
a beautiful man who loved me once. If only he could love me  
for an hour -- then go away.

Fabian Worsham

IMPERATIVES: THE MILL

for Mary Ann Coleman,  
friend and mentor

I wondered how you wrote amidst such uproar:  
poems peopled with sculpted figures --  
a bronze nude, St. Francis gesturing in silence.  
Your house was a natural disaster:  
Jeff's electric keyboards thrummed in the basement;  
Oliver hammered like Vulcan in his studio;  
Chris raced in and out, serenading his cats.  
Your desk shared space with gilt medallions,  
encrusted canvasses, a piano littered with books  
and music, a Chinese cupboard inherited from  
your mother, all crammed into the tiny livingroom,  
the whole scene impastoed with manuscripts --  
walls, floors, arms of the couch.

Here beside the mill at Barker's Creek  
in luxurious indolence I read your hasty letter.  
Your sons are married, Chris with a child of his own.  
You've taken his room for a study, leaving the livingroom  
immaculate and spare. You say you have "few years  
to do much in." Locked in that upstairs room,  
you've diverted all energy to one task  
while a millwheel, exigent, metaphorical,  
clamors below. You're quickened by that sound,  
more boisterous, more insistent, than ever was  
the howling of Jeff's electric decibels.

Fabian Worsham

## A LESSON IN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

When one lies within, buoyant,  
weightless, eyes sealed, floating  
in a tepid orb of fluid darkness,  
a nebulous and luxuriant universe,  
someone must feel the burden:  
someone's body must carry the weight;  
someone's heart must strain  
to keep all in equilibrium --  
to deliver that darkened universe  
with its naive intelligence  
into the light.

Fabian Worsham

GUERNICA: INTERIOR LANDSCAPE

This bombed-out hovel is my home,  
and I am each gaping woman.  
Here you'll find no dying horse,  
no startled bull, no wall-eyed  
corpses strewn upon the carpet.  
Yet what the jagged light reveals  
is no less devastated.  
There are no words, no colors:  
only open mouths and pointed tongues

Fabian Worsham

## EXHIBITS

Christ! Did you take that too —  
The ink from my pen?  
My marrow's not enough?  
Insatiable man!  
You'd drain an angel dry  
Then nibble off her wings  
Still smiling like a boy.

No doubt my battered heart's  
In some canopic jar,  
My stuffed head on your wall,  
My limbs and trunk all  
Pickled for your pleasure.

Well, I still have my thoughts,  
My mind is mine.

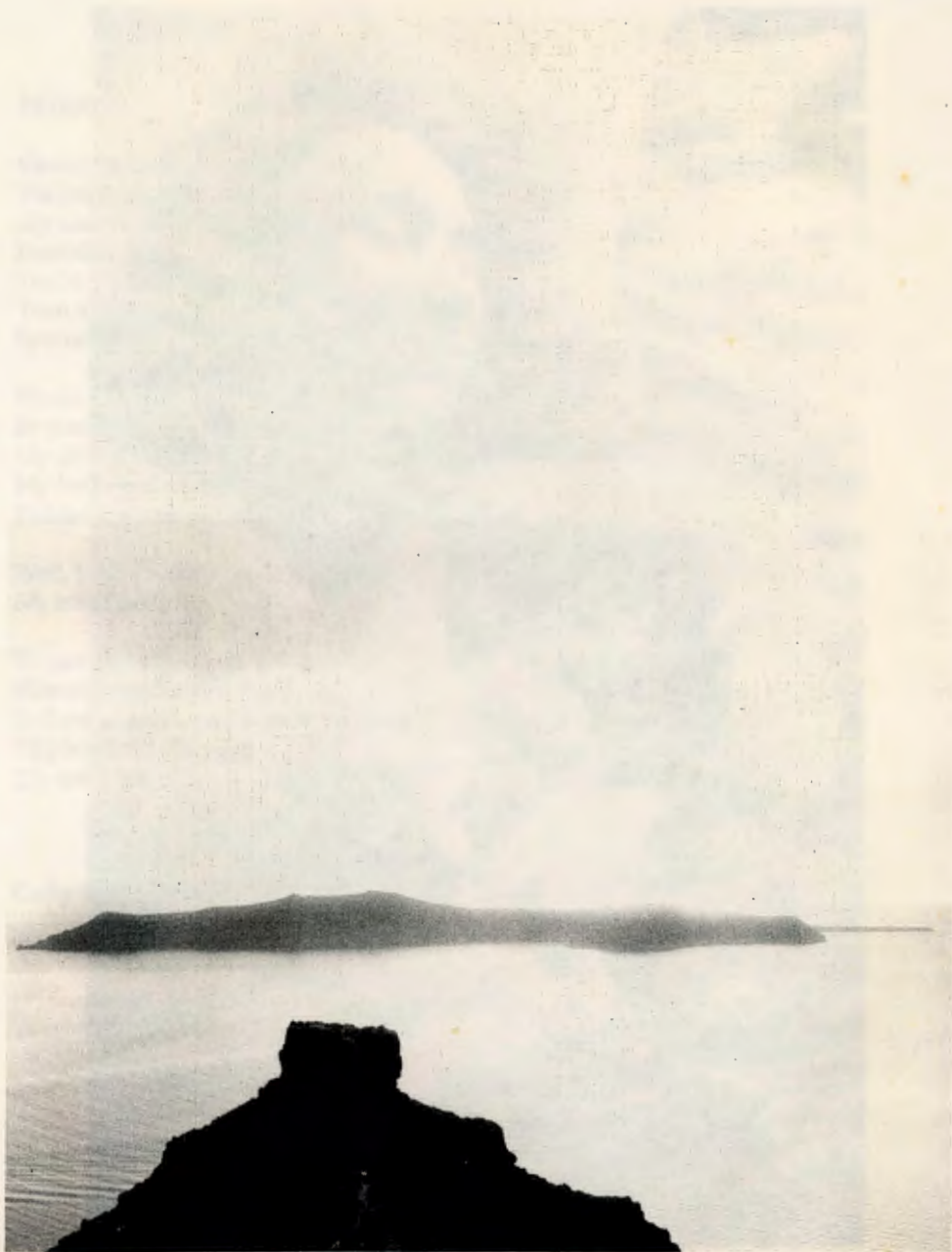
If I can find my words  
(Somewhere, here on this desk...  
In these papers... under those books...)  
I'll pin you to this page —  
My specimen.

Cathy Stern



"Passage in the Light" No. XXII. Photograph.

SHARON STEWART



"Passage in the Light" No. XXX. Photograph.

SHARON STEWART



"Passage in the Light" No. XXV. Photograph.

SHARON STEWART



"Time Shadows of Ancient Greece" No. X. Photograph.

SHARON STEWART

## UNFOLDING

1

I am an invisible woman today  
even though you think you see  
just as you did yesterday.  
Then, I was visible to all  
though blind to me  
and now I am crystal clear to none  
but myself. Poof!  
I slipped into invisibility.

I saw another woman real  
and whole. She made me breathe deep  
with love. Full body love.  
And that's what pushed me out of this world  
where whole women are never seen.

Suddenly I noticed the chatter  
between women and men,  
the incomplete noises of broken  
pieces searching out their proper places.  
No freedom sings in this visible world  
of studied dreams. None.

I went to lunch with the woman  
who turned me invisible and now  
I sing, sing, sing my freedom song  
to myself, still invisible –  
for it sounds in my head alone  
and not to her.

2

Lunch time met between us at the table.  
Three big words were bursting behind  
my nose and eyes,  
screaming to get out of my brain,  
to live on my tongue and roll out of my mouth  
into the sunlight shimmering.

Those words, so big that I must tie them down,  
are hitched to the bones of my face.  
They struggle to free themselves,  
no longer to live sleeping in the past;  
now awake but pinned down.  
Such words long to live spoken!  
Oh! If I loose them from their hitching posts  
this man's world may come tumbling down.  
My own might break. I need another one.

But my legs won't wait,  
my thighs warm with fire,  
my heart swells with song  
my brain critically evaluates  
the ropes and my eyes burn  
for the breath of women.  
Our sex between our legs is our own!  
Three words beg, "let me touch myself freely.  
Loose me on this world to relive  
the flurry of love!"

She sat beside me, whole.  
I saw her lips and hands.  
We travelled on words, in and out of our brains,  
yet I kept three words safely tied to the bones of my face.  
May I whisper, "I love women!"  
and will the wind blow my words all over the earth  
now free to be spoken and heard?

Wish on wind but do not wait...  
Magic will stop short and  
share a piece of chocolate cake  
instead.

I arrived excited,  
 my heart big with blood,  
 my mind stretched to points  
 yet undetermined  
 and proceeded to cut up  
 the vegetables while she,  
 a magic woman, fried tofu  
 in butter.

Her lines stood braced by the stove,  
 reserved with a slight smile  
 and loaded brain. She cooked  
 and waited. I floated on carrots and lettuce.  
 Each crisp, cold touch tingled in my fingers  
 as I hummed...

Move smoothly, quietly  
 into the center of a room...  
 Touch hand to hand,  
 swing silently your bodies  
 round a slow full circle  
 landing knee to floor in graceful dance...  
 One bare embrace of arms outstretched  
 and touching palm to palm  
 and ear to ear, your heads are placed  
 in silent reverie till pulled by some  
 magnetic eclipse your faces move as one,  
 now lips to lips.

I pressed a bud of cauliflower to my tongue  
 and slid into a woman's world of magic making.  
 I sit here wet with lover's hands, dinner unfolding.  
 She stands there gold with butter and tofu  
 waiting.

Monica Vaughan

THE NEW ENGLAND POEMS NO. IX

against river's massive brow  
noon directs its course.  
i am relearning the landscape,  
beneath circular bells  
of autumn's sky  
the water weaves map-like patterns  
similar to your hands.

your back towards me,  
you sit on pier's wooden edge,  
birches wave over river's  
translucent face.  
eyestroke by eyestroke,  
building earth's colours,  
my hand separates water's spiral  
surge, the landscape,  
sometimes, seems fragile  
as we speak of art and cross  
vacant overgrown fields,  
hues recognized  
azure, umber, amethyst,  
i did not learn  
until my tongue became calm.

scenes in reality seldom remain,  
laws of forest awakening.  
beneath my hands  
you moved slightly,  
opening, current,  
while i walked towards  
river's edge,  
instead of living  
with those nearby,  
hours when separated,  
i wrote you, a necessity  
differing in my moods,  
currents churning angular echoes,  
unrecorded, aligning sequences  
of river's mouth stroking sand.

i have relearned the landscape,  
amethystine of your face  
pressed close to soil  
or the dark stem of night  
i did not know i loved,  
bowing into your breasts,  
until i arrived  
the great child  
of your motherland.

leslie lopez

## FEET FIRST

compare me to a bird,  
born, eyes closed,  
hair shooting from scalp,  
metal instrument, blinding.

set me on my elbows,  
i shall learn to crawl.  
place me on my head,  
i shall do headstands.

mother, wailing,  
in a sterile room,  
white liquid caught  
in your throat  
as milk leaks into my ears,

november's seasonal blades  
surface, past years carve  
charcoal ash stories  
and place them  
in your unlocked palms.

my cheeks raw with ash,  
i have fallen  
into every footprint  
claimed as your own,  
unable to unearth  
the silent cylinder of my voice.



"Passage in the Light" No. XXVII. Photograph.

SHARON STEWART

## HOLLOW VALLEY

childless and incapable  
of bearing, we slide  
over one another, my mouth  
crosses small paths of your neck,  
your eyes locked within dream's  
masks and symbols of these rooms  
where, with lovers, you lived  
before me, now in darkness  
glossy, yellow moon  
fears loudly our movements,  
affirmation of sorrow  
for your child, dead, her hair  
falling across your mouth  
as the wind sifts soil  
from beneath garments,  
your body shooting forward  
announcing sacrifices necessary  
for the new life.

as you move from my breast,  
wet with soft tongue of moonlight,  
grief sought and sealed  
within this house,  
the dead child, safe,  
we slide into autumn,  
bodies pressed against pastures  
of clouds, ochre horizons bending,  
your body given to me  
fragile and swearing  
that no death will graze  
between the hollow valley  
of your breasts and my hands.

leslie lopez

## WHEN YOU ARE AWAY

my eyes tight within cavern  
of monotone voice,  
alone, tongue amputated, smooth  
like cooled wax,  
for once you are not in my morning  
waking early, two slim cats  
pouncing over lifeless bodies.

they have slept in light's white shadows  
listening for recurring voices,  
hearing none.  
but my right side recalls  
your language unceasing  
in movement, your hands climbing  
the naked ladder, feet below  
pegs of moon's full chest,  
the steady stream of warmth,  
your face beside mine,  
times i have left your bed  
and slept there, the same,  
for fear of loss, we have  
learned to be separate.

shall i wake in sun's voiceless throat,  
claws slashing my eyes,  
language offering itself only in forms,  
shapeless bones,  
knowing we have never existed to protect  
or discipline the weight of one  
body against another,  
never content with silence rubbed  
water thin.

in my own dark nights of solitude,  
i shall lift you in dreams,  
turn your face, mouth towards mine,  
feel leaf of your tongue  
raw with summer's fruit,  
i shall sing you to sleep  
as though you are my only sister.

leslie lopez

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**LESLIE LOPEZ** was raised in Southern Louisiana and has lived in Houston since 1980. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Louisiana State University, and has won awards for painting. She received a 1988-1989 Grant Award from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston for poetry. Her work has been published in *Focus*, *CommonWoman*, *Houston's Innerview*, *Eye Prayers*, and in the upcoming fall issue of *Conditions*.

**CAROL SNYDER** is Associate Professor of Literature and Humanities at the University of Houston Clear Lake, where she has taught for almost twelve years. She also serves as Series Editor for *Gender and Genre in Literature*, a series in feminist literary criticism published by Garland Press. She writes poetry on the sly.

**CATHY STERN** received the PEN Southwest Houston Discovery Prize for Poetry in 1985. Her work has been published in *The New Republic* and *Shenandoah*, and poems and an interview appeared in the anthology *A Wider Giving: Women Writing After A Long Silence* (Chicory Blue Press, 1988.) She teaches English and Creative Writing at The University of Houston-Downtown.

The presence of light, spirit and sacred symbology in **SHARON STEWART's** photographs reflects her continuing pursuit of self-discovery. The images from the portfolios, "Passage in the Light" and "Time Shadows of Ancient Greece," were taken on numerous journeys in the U.S., Europe, and Greece.

Sharon's photographs have been exhibited, published and collected in the U.S. and Europe, in such publications as the *British Journal of Photography*; *Professional Photographer* (Dutch); *Women See Men*, published by the Frankfort Art Museum; *Texas Art Observer*; *SPOT*, a critical publication of the Houston Center for photography; and the catalogue for the triennial of the Belgium Museum of Photography.

Her current photoessay, "Toxic Tours of Texas," addresses the power of individuals to challenge and change the harmful hazardous-waste practice of industry and government. Sharon also joyfully sings in Heartsong, the Houston Area Women's Chorus.

**MONICA VAUGHAN** grew up in north-east Houston, received her Master of Music degree from Rice University in 1986, and graduated with honors from the University of Houston Law Center in 1990. Throughout her career as a student, she has created poems, short stories, essays, and cycles made up of combinations of these literary forms. She has also set for voice and instruments a number of her own works as well as the works of other writers. She is particularly proud of the song cycle, "A Woman's Mirror," which she commissioned from composer Ann Rivers Witherspoon for soprano and instrumental ensemble and which she premiered in March, 1988. That cycle consisted of one of her own poems as well as a poem by Aphra Behn and one by Leslie Lopez.

**FABIAN WORSHAM's** poems have appeared in *Earth's Daughters*, *Kalliope: A Journal of Women's Art*, *Poet Lore*, *National Forum*, *The Florida Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Apalachee Quarterly*, *The Bellingham Review*, and numerous other journals. Her prizewinning feminist chapbook, *Aunt Erma's Country Kitchen & Bordello*, was published by Signpost Press.

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