

*The 2003 Editors' Prize Contest Winners*

THE  
SPOON  
RIVER Poetry Review

*Bernard Gershenson  
Honorable Mention*

Salgado's Photos

1

You want to tell the man in the picture Don't drink  
you'll go blind, your gut will wither, you'll die  
and you know somehow that he must be dead by now  
and probably something  
besides the river  
killed him

But maybe if he'd heeded your warning, maybe if you'd  
had tablets to purify his life, he'd be here sharing  
his inhuman tale, the horror show that no one  
goes to the movies to see  
maybe if they'd allowed you to take  
more than a camera

Of course,  
if he hadn't drunk  
he'd have died of thirst

2

As kids we played Capture the Flag  
defending our turf, chasing the enemy away,  
capturing some, getting captured ourselves,  
invading, a chance to run free,  
a difficult game to win,  
sometimes there were no winners  
before we went swimming or ate lunch

How could we know  
we mocked this man running the dirt road  
east of San Isidro, running for the  
fence which he'll vault back to the safety  
of his poverty, the border patrol jeep  
kicking up dust, just as happy to let him  
get away, the thrill of the chase

He's a small figure in fading light  
but the jeep sees him, and the jeep is ahead of us by a  
grade or two, taller, faster; it doesn't occur  
to us that if we're patient we'll grow faster,  
smarter, that we'll play the game  
as if it were a drug

3

At first you see the smile because it is there for you,  
the beautiful woman in her thirties,  
the beautiful woman at the height of her power,  
the dark glow of her skin  
a heart-shaped locket around her neck,  
a multicolored blouse, sharp, costly,  
carefully fitted over a black skirt

And you wonder why she's smiling  
leaning on her crutch, one leg missing;  
what power does she have, this  
expansive pride that makes you almost  
miss the woman to her left, standing in  
profile, bent a little, her eyes deer wide  
but lifeless somehow, like you  
would look if a mine had stolen your leg  
you almost missed her in the shadow of the smile

You wonder how the woman facing the camera  
dares to be beautiful

4

These children know more about guns than you do,  
which ones jam, which are easy to carry  
and here these boys are laughing, you've caught them  
looking like children but you have no idea why  
and right now you're having trouble remembering  
what made you happy when you were ten  
maybe you made your parents proud