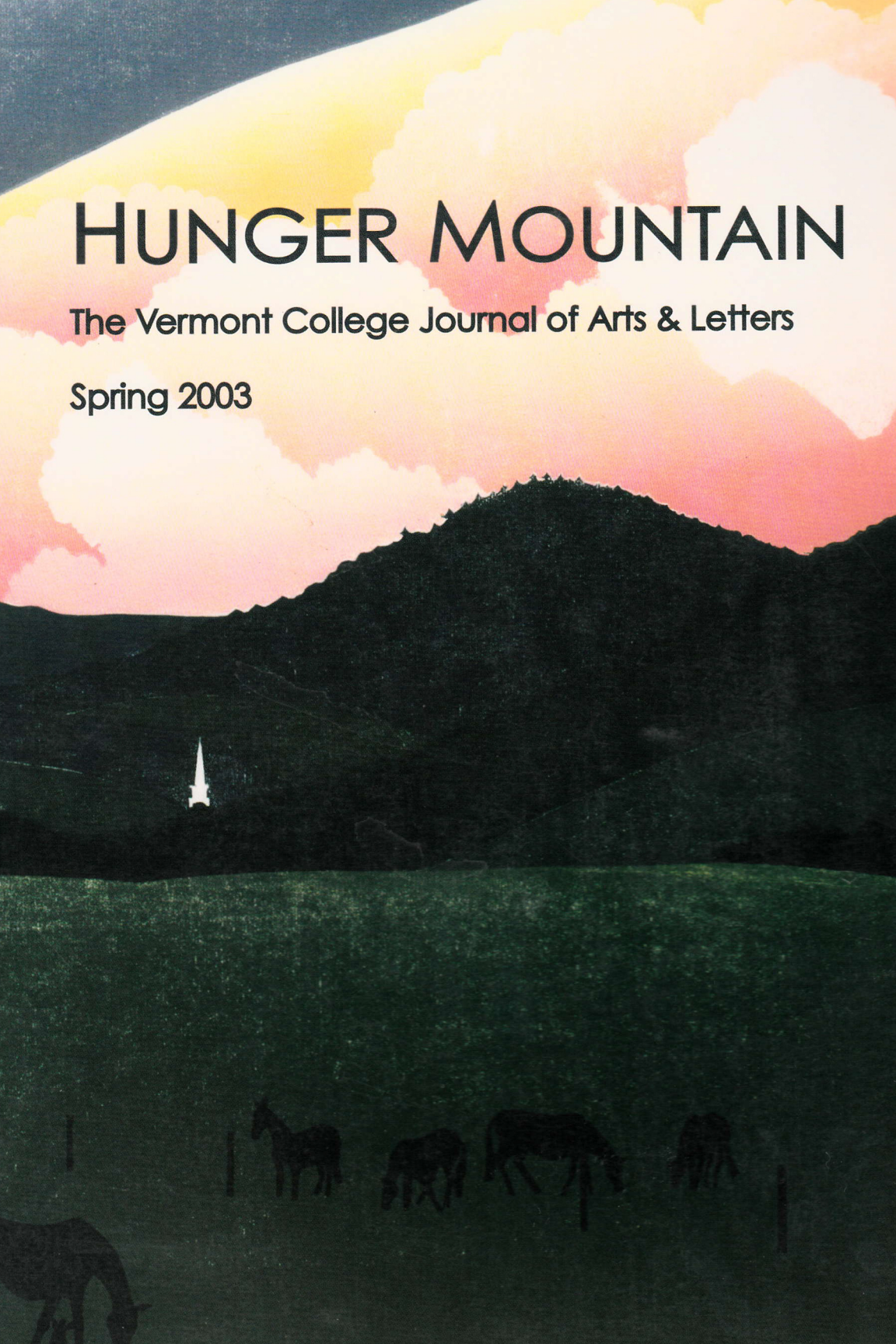


HUNGER MOUNTAIN

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Agua dulce is on fire & I'm rushing home
to save my pets, or, I'm dreaming. These mornings
I wake in what locals call June gloom--
which means I do not wake at all. I don't
know. June gloom, a fog without a fog's smoke
effect so I can still see Keenan & his wife,
their children already at volleyball camp, snap
towels at each other, their bodies cream-colored
& worn as their towels' terrycloth. These mornings
I get up & put on my three-piece suit
with hundreds of eggs attached
(yolks drained, shells intact) & go
into my backyard to feed my duckbilled platypus
scallops. What the conceptual artist
conceptualized when he designed my suit
I don't know. I just like how the eggs
cut through June gloom's warm mist
like tiny headlights, this warm mist that glazes me,
glazes everything into early afternoon
like the hangovers of strange dreams.
In between shellfish I let my platypus suckle
my pinky, cradling him so as not to break an egg,
so as not to touch the poisonous spurs
on the heels of his hind legs & get stung
further into a coma. In the realm of celestial

jokes, June gloom is a one liner, but the gods
in the corner of that billion year old bar
still cackle over the platypus. "Get this,"
one of them says, "how 'bout a spoon-billed,
beaver-tailed, web-footed, electromagnetically
sensitive mud-digging egg-laying mammal
whose spurs scientists will think
are for sexual combat." I have never
engaged in sexual combat, an all out war
with spur & shield & fur in a mud burrow
but I empathize with the jokes of minor gods. In this non-fog,
this haze between seasons, between consciousness,
I identify with the platypus & I want to reach out
to the blue starfish, most poisonous of all echinoderms,
constantly rising to the lagoon's surface, lonely in its
cloak of poison, to be held lovingly, turquoise
in my white hand. My neighbors, now drinking coffee
on their front porch, look at me
like an anomaly, monsoon season
in the desert, their faces disconcerting
as June gloom, wrinkled as horror.
I say "hello" & they look at me
as if I were wearing a suit made of eggs,
as if a chicken hawk, its beak the size of my
middle finger, circled overhead.