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THE FIRE IN THE MOUTH: REFLECTIONS ON 2002-2003 CONTEST WINNERS

David Biespiel

A writer seldom writes for laurels, or laurels alone. A writer writes to tell the truth and to achieve artistic integrity, should either be possible. It's the possibility, I suppose, that drives the writer on, poem after poem, or story after story. The Irish poet Seamus Heaney once said that a writer writes in one direction, "from delight to wisdom and not vice versa." —Things I was thinking of while reading the Fall through Summer issues of *The Promethean*.

It's a tough go for me, judging a contest like this. I didn't write in college. Certainly I kept an eye out for the bi-annual publication of my university's literary magazine, *Ex Libris*, especially the year my girlfriend was the editor. But I can't say I remember anything from those pages. Often enough the writing wanted only to tell the truth and so lacked artistic integrity (wisdom without delight, as it were) or writing that only wanted to achieve artistic integrity without telling the truth (delight without wisdom). So rare—as it always is—to find the pieces with artistic integrity that also tell the truth.

But what I do remember about *Ex Libris* is the thrill of seeing such brand new writing twice a year. I felt the same sensation while reading *The Promethean*. One could only wonder, as in a parlor game: Who among the issues would persevere & be writing great things in the future, great things that matter to readers?

But what does that matter, really, in the face of the desire to speak, that core desire of the writer to use language, to explore its mysteries and the sudden inferno of discovery? A literary contest is a crapshoot. But so is the act of writing. The sudden exciting phrase or sentence or paragraph or line or stanza I found here, throughout the magazines, reminded me of the risk of stealing fire that the name, *The Promethean*, implies. I clap for such daring and inventive risks.

First Poetry: "The Verge of Enlightenment" by Troy Sloneker
First Fiction: "Eve" by Jennifer Smith