

## Etching

*Randy Astle*

Writing on the subway feels like etching  
an intaglio on horseback. The train  
writhes and bucks beneath me, making

a miniature jackhammer of my pen, a seismographic  
stylus registering the imprecision of my jolting hand.  
Fingertips blanch as I bear down trying to carve

testimony into a fifty-cent notebook. Letters shake  
into ciphers instead of words, a cuneiform landscape, unknown—  
hidden, perhaps, by the Lord, to be revealed in His time.

At home I open my PowerBook and set about the task  
of translation. In quiet revision, I bury my head in my hat  
and strain to distill the spirit behind these scratchings.

On the train, we are all translators. Every few minutes we  
study out gargled declarations: *168th Street, Columbia  
Presbyterian Hospital, transfer here for the Number One*

*train on the lower level.* I turn to the notebook,  
intent on recording something worthy of posterity or  
my beloved brethren, on bestowing some small degree

of knowledge concerning us. We would write more  
if it were not for the difficulty we have in engraving.