

The
South
Carolina
REVIEW

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The South Carolina Review is published by Furman University. It appears twice a year, in May and November, as part of the quarterly series, *The Furman University Bulletin*. One issue will replace a regular number of *Furman Studies*; the other will be a special issue of the *Studies-Bulletin* series.

The Review is edited by a cooperative editorial staff from three South Carolina universities.

The editors solicit literary manuscripts of all kinds: essay, fiction, poetry, criticism, opinion, social comment, scholarship, and reviews. South Carolinians, native and adopted, are especially encouraged to contribute.

Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editors, *The South Carolina Review*, Department of English, Box 28661, Furman University, Greenville, S. C. 29613, and should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Subscriptions are \$1.00 a copy; \$2.00 a year; \$3.50 for two years.

Originally printed as *Furman Studies* (*The Furman University Bulletin*, N.S. Vol. XVII, No. 4, May, 1970)

MAY, NINETEEN HUNDRED SEVENTY

THE FURMAN UNIVERSITY BULLETIN
Greenville, S. C.
(Inaugurated January 1912)

N.S. Vol. XVII, No. 4, Entered as Second Class Matter
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The South Carolina Review

Volume 2, Number 2

May, 1970

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Apple Butter

Every fall that I remember
She would sit under the pear tree
(Pears as hard as rocks and green as grass)
Making lye soap and apple butter,
Though why she made the soap we never knew —
It had been ages since she used it
And the store-bought cakes were better.
But you could not buy such apple butter.
There was magic in it.
Magic in the hand that stirred it, too.
And magic in the black stone kettle.

What is it, Grandmother,
Makes your apple butter taste that way?
And she not knowing either, but suspecting,
Turned proud eyes up past the ridge
Of cold grey Appalachians
Where her mother lay,
Remembering how she stood as I stand now
And watched and watched
To get it right.

RANDOLPH UMBERGER

Editorial Note

This issue of *The South Carolina Review* continues its recognition of the state's Tricentennial by focusing attention on aspects of literary South Carolina, past and present. The essay on Charleston poet Henry Timrod re-examines the reputation of another major South Carolina writer of the nineteenth century. The essay on Dubose Heyward's *Porgy and Bess* surveys with wit and good humor the circuitous journey which Porgy has taken in the opera houses of the world in the last quarter of a century before finally returning to his native Charleston for a performance this summer. In addition to these essays, the *Review* continues to emphasize imaginative writing and adds three new stories and eleven new poems to those already printed in its first three issues. The editors also renew their invitation to readers, both far and near, to lend their support by mailing in their best writing and by taking out subscriptions.

On The Charlottesville Road

I had said to myself, "This is the last time."
That was the last time. So few things end
as cleanly as we think they should.
My mouth excretes the taste of fear.

The scenery is cloying. On the way down
from Afton, ice-broken branches hang
after a winter of dejection, leaves
pushing stubbornly from the raw tears;

such needless rain has fallen now
that the road curves blind under wet sumac;
fogged-in corn huddles fence-tall,
which makes another summer mostly gone.

At Mechum's River I drive by your house,
half-hoping you will be out by the hedge,
clearing out a rotten planting
as I pass; but no, you are not there;

I will have to go find you, ghost, among
the ruins—places we burned to the ground
the junk pile where we left collapsing days,
unequal to the press of night's desires;

I will hunt you up and down the highway,
crash through the commonwealth we lost,
and see your face as I go down
in memory's undertow, and drown.

CATHARINE SAVAGE

Porgy Comes Home—At Last!

FRANK DURHAM

I have been writing and talking about DuBose Heyward and *Porgy* and *Porgy and Bess* for almost twenty years. And now, with a Charleston production of the opera scheduled for June 25 through July 8, as a part of the State's Tricentennial Celebration, I am prompted to write once again of my apparently threadbare subject. Naturally, I ask myself, "Is there anything new that I can say about Heyward and *Porgy* and *Porgy and Bess*?"

Of course, I must first say something old, for a new generation has arisen, and for it I must again help to establish the beginnings of this story of Porgy and Bess, Maria and Crown, Serena and Sportin' Life and their summer of love and violence and tragedy.

Porgy was conceived in Charleston — born in the imagination of DuBose Heyward when he remembered many things and people and events his eyes had seen in the ancient city of his birth. Among the raw materials for the immortal story are Samuel Smalls, the crippled goat beggar in his soapbox chariot; a *News and Courier* clipping recounting the story of Smalls' attempted escape from the police, a clipping long cherished in Heyward's billfold; the memories of more than a year the young man spent as a cotton-checker on the Charleston waterfront, where he saw the swaggering Negro stevedores, the dope-peddler, and the violence and passion and laughter of a people whose dominant quality was, as he said, a powerful, innate rhythm, grown pale or lost entirely in the white man. Then, too, there was the city itself, with the spires of St. Michael's and St. Philip's soaring skyward above the cobbled streets and the fading mansions filled with treasured heirlooms from a bygone era of grandeur and elegance. There were also the teeming Negro tenements, vibrant with life and song and drama. These, then, were the ingredients of the deathless tale of love gained and love lost which has found its way into the hearts of the world — and which will, at long last, be enacted for the first time in the city of its nativity. An event long, long overdue.

Even before Porgy began his long journey in the pages of a book and then in the theatres and opera houses of five continents and on the cinema screens of the whole world, young DuBose Heyward had turned to the stage in his early, faltering efforts to become a writer.

Behind him, in Charleston, lay a noteworthy theatrical tradition, commencing in 1703 when poor Anthony Aston landed in the city and later wrote of his experience: "Well, we arrived in Charles-Town, full of Lice, Shame, Poverty, Nakedness and Hunger: I turned Player and Poet, and wrote one Play on the Subject of the Country." This is the first record of a professional actor and playwright in the Colonies. And in 1735 appeared an announcement of the first opera to be done in America, *Flora, or Hob in the Well*, performed in Charleston's Courtroom. (Incidentally, *Flora* will also be done as a part of the Tricentennial Celebration.) And the Theatre on Dock Street could claim the honor of being the third regular theatre built in the Colonies. In Charleston the stage flourished until the Civil War, and even during Heyward's boyhood and young manhood traveling productions and seasonal stock companies drew local audiences.

Over a decade before he wrote the novel *Porgy*, Heyward made his debut as a playwright. In 1913 his one-act comedy "An Artistic Triumph" (which it sadly isn't) was performed at the South Carolina Society Hall, with a prologue in verse spoken by Augustine Smythe, a local cast, "a witty" curtain speech by the author, and a jolly social hour or two of dancing afterward. Ten years were to elapse before he again turned to the stage, a decade in which he tried short fiction and poetry, the latter with increasing success. In 1923, on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Charleston Museum, Heyward produced a playlet entitled "1773, A Historical Interlude," dramatizing the establishment of the Museum. In it Josephine Pinckney portrayed her own ancestress; Charles Cotesworth Pinckney played Charles Cotesworth Pinckney; and Heyward, as his ancestor Thomas Heyward, made a startling entrance brandishing a very dead chicken.

This deceased fowl may be seen as prophetically symbolic, for the playlet seemed to mark the end of Heyward's local career as a dramatist. Though hereafter three of his plays were to be acted on Broadway — one of them also throughout the country and in England, and his opera was to journey all over America, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, no Charleston stage was to echo to any lines composed by her native son.

Meanwhile, Heyward was making decisions that would bring him closer to his masterwork. In 1924 he was a successful insurance man who had published two very bad short stories, many poems, and two

volumes of verse. Through his work with the Poetry Society of South Carolina, he had gained a respectable national reputation as a poet and a lecturer on poetry. But his writings brought him little in the way of income. On September 22, 1923, he had married Dorothy Kuhns, an Ohioan and a former student in George Pierce Baker's famous class in playwriting. The next year he wrote John Bennett, his mentor in Charleston, that he had decided to give up insurance and devote himself entirely to writing. And so at his cottage in North Carolina he settled in and pondered on a subject.

From his wallet he drew the crumpled clipping relating the serio-comic flight of Samuel Smalls in his goat wagon with the constabulary in hot pursuit. And suddenly it happened. As if by magic, things seemed to fall into place.

On July 28, 1924, apparently in a state of excitement, Heyward wrote Bennett: "Dorothy and I are both off: she on a new play, and your humble (very much so in this case) servant hell bent on the Negro novel." Later, possibly in November, Heyward wrote again: "John, I am almost sure that I have closed my hands about something alive in my 'PORGO.' The Spirit of God has been perched upon the studio gable for a month, and where the stuff came from else, I can't imagine." He reported that it was all done, except for the final copying and revision, and he added: "But I think the stuff's there."

It was.

The novel *Porgy* is local color at its best, and, at its appearance in 1925, it presented a distinctly fresh and different treatment of the Negro in fiction. Heyward was determined not to follow the old Negro stereotypes, mainly the comic ones, and he succeeded magnificently. As local color *Porgy* achieves a happy combination of the universal and the local, a rare blend. The local background is in reality the framework for the story, furnishing an interesting and exotic setting for the action but effectively subordinated to it. Though the story itself seems inevitably rooted in the Charleston Negro underworld, it is in reality a basic human tale. It could in its essentials be set almost anywhere and be peopled by actors of any race.

Among critics for national journals and newspapers, *Porgy* was greeted with acclaim. It was hailed as a significant achievement in the depiction of the Negro as a human being — and it did so without any propaganda or social protest.

Locally, in Charleston and in the rest of the state, the reception was mixed. Yates Snowden, distinguished South Carolina historian, was outraged at the very "brilliance" of the novel and exclaimed that Heyward should use his great talents to a better purpose: he should, said Snowden, write of "Pinopolis folk . . . WHITE . . . Don't he dare write of our WHITE FOLKS . . .?" Bennett reported that Miss Arabella Mazyck was "delighted" and that two Charleston ladies who opened the book with "apprehension and doubt" were easy converts, but a "Mrs. L . . . thinks the paper was wasted on which it was writ! Mrs. W . . . says when she laid it down she felt dirty!" Still, the consensus in Charleston and the South was that *Porgy* was a beautiful and significant book.

Dorothy Heyward, already with a Broadway play behind her, suggested a dramatic version, but Heyward was uncertain and his publishers were pressing him for a new novel to take advantage of *Porgy's* success. So he ground out *Angel*, a rather sentimental treatment of a North Carolina mountain girl, which did not win its predecessor's acclaim.

Dorothy persisted in her belief that *Porgy* would make a play and quietly wrote her own first draft of a dramatic version. When Heyward saw it, he was convinced — and thus began the collaboration which was to produce two successful plays and would lead to *Porgy and Bess*.

"As collaborators we get along very well," said Dorothy. "It helps to talk out the scenes together. I generally write them too long, DuBose cuts them down too short, and then we work up from there." Actually, it was she who roughed out the scenarios first, and then together they wrote the dialogue.

Determined to rise or fall with a Negro cast, Heyward believed that the play was closer to the truth than the novel was, for in it the Negroes were themselves interpreting their own race, not as in the book, being seen through a white man's eyes. Then, too, the play marked an important step forward for Negro performers — an early opportunity for them to appear as serious actors rather than as mere specialty performers, song-and-dance artists, or comics.

What the New York audience saw on the opening night, October 10, 1927, was something new in the American theatre. Before eyes accustomed to the regular commercial plays, there swirled color and movement, clashing, barbaric; to ears used to the "blues" of *Shuffle Along* and the

Cotton Club, there came the melody of childlike laughter, shouts of savage ecstasy, the blood-tingling beat and wail of the spiritual, the primal chant of group prayer. As a hurricane roared to its crescendo, a terrified mass of people swayed in unison, thrusting up arms and faces, chanting to a primitive God, while above them on the walls and the ceiling grotesque shadows leapt and danced. Here was primordial savagery in its essence. Here, too, was "theatre" at its most effective.

Brooks Atkinson said, "On stage, 'Porgy' is ruder, deeper, franker, coarser than it is between book covers."

Genre picture after genre picture of Negro life and love and joy and violence and sorrow follow one another. Catfish Row, filled or empty, has a seething, turbulent life of its own. The characters of Porgy and Bess and Maria and Sportin' Life and Crown emerge gigantically for endearing or exciting moments, only to be swallowed up in the stupendous sense of the group, the mass. Reinforcing this mass effect is the constant use of songs and spirituals, more numerous — and now heard — than in the novel. One critic said that the music was more than worth the price of admission, and another wished that Heyward had, instead of a play, written "an American grand opera. Is there no composer," he asked, "who will consider this?"

As a matter of fact, there was. There had been one for some time, waiting rather impatiently.

One night in 1926 George Gershwin, exhausted from rehearsals of his latest musical, had "tumbled into bed and picked up a copy of Du-Bose Heyward's novel 'Porgy' to read himself to sleep. Instead, he read himself very much awake. At 4 o'clock in the morning he was at his desk writing Mr. Heyward a letter. It all seemed very simple to Mr. Gershwin. He would make an opera of 'Porgy.' " But it was not that easy. At this time Heyward was dramatizing the novel; so the opera had to wait. Apparently the two met and made plans for the future. Gershwin said that it would take him a few years to be ready to compose an opera, and finally in 1932 he wrote Heyward that he was again interested in collaborating on the work — but not until 1933. The failure of a New York bank strained Heyward's finances, and at this point Al Jolson, of "Mammy" fame, evinced an overwhelming desire to appear in a musical version of *Porgy*. Gershwin was not enthusiastic but agreed not to stand in the way. Fortunately, the Jolson threat subsided. Now Gershwin went abroad to study in France. Then he and Heyward de-

cided that it would take them at least two years of intensive effort to complete the opera, and they set about finding ways to finance themselves during this period. Heyward went to Hollywood and had a hand in two movie scripts — that of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, shot with Paul Robeson in the jungles of New Jersey, and that of *The Good Earth*, for which he was one of several writers. Gershwin undertook a weekly radio program sponsored by Feenamint, a popular laxative — and Heyward commented, “. . . we felt that the end justified the means, and that they also served who only sat and waited.”

At last the two set to work, largely by correspondence, though Gershwin came to Folly Beach for seven weeks, attended a Negro religious meeting on James Island, joined in the “shouting,” and listened to the singing at Negro churches. For the most part, Heyward wrote both the libretto and the lyrics before Gershwin composed the music, and Heyward helped greatly in setting the tones and the rhythms for the music itself. Of the songs for which Heyward did the lyrics, only “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin’” was composed before the writing of the words. Gershwin’s brother Ira was called in to do some of the lyrics and to polish in New York some of Heyward’s lyrics mailed from Charleston.

George Gershwin was determined to write a grand opera and insisted on the use of recitative instead of spoken dialogue; and the result was indeed full-fledged opera. The collaborators hoped for a production at the Metropolitan Opera House, but the Theatre Guild, owners of the rights to play, asserted its prerogatives and became the producer of the opera.

At last New York saw the fruits of this joint effort on October 10, 1935, and drama critics as a whole praised it, but music critics were far from unanimously enthusiastic. The production ran for 124 performances, unusual for an opera but not very good for a Broadway musical, and the authors really made little or nothing from the run. A three-month national tour — not including South Carolina — seemed to mark the end of *Porgy and Bess*.

Heyward and Gershwin went their separate ways, talked of another collaboration for Ethel Waters, but both died before seeing *Porgy and Bess* really come into its own. A year after Gershwin’s death and two years before that of Heyward, there was a successful revival of the piece in Los Angeles. Soon after Heyward’s death in 1940 Cheryl Crawford radically cut the recitative and made other alterations for a production

at her summer theatre in Maplewood, New Jersey. The result was so popular that the opera was moved to New York in January, 1942. Now the music critics changed their tune: this, they said, was an American classic, a truly native folk opera. Broadway saw *Porgy and Bess* for eight months, and then it went on a tour of twenty-six cities, including Columbia, South Carolina — but not Charleston, before returning to New York for two weeks.

But this was only the beginning.

Europe quickly awoke to the virtues of *Porgy and Bess*, treating it with all the respect due a major operatic work. During the Nazi occupation of Denmark, the opera was done in Danish at the Royal Opera in Copenhagen on March 27, 1943, and became, because it was American, a symbol of the Danes' resistance to the Nazis. The performances ceased only when the Nazis threatened to bomb the opera house, but the song "It Ain't Necessarily So" became a staple of the resistance radio, its title reflecting the popular attitude toward the pronouncements of the occupation forces. In 1948, 1949, and 1952, the opera houses of Gothenburg, Stockholm, and Malmo, Sweden, did their own productions — successfully.

In 1945 the Stanislavsky Players of Moscow performed *Porgy and Bess*, and the composer Shostakovich called it "magnificent" and compared it to Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky. In the same year at Zurich a production in German was done, with the favorite aria being "Bess, du bist meine frau jetst." An all-white cast wore blue make-up and fuzzy black-and-white wigs — triumphantly. This production was revived in 1950.

Finally *Porgy and Bess* was reborn in America. In 1952 a new production, restoring the recitative and even some of the material cut from the original version, opened in Dallas and made a successful tour to the Nation's Capital. Now the State Department sent it on the first of several international good-will tours. First, it went to Vienna, where tickets were at a premium. Then on to Berlin, Paris, London. In the last city it played for almost six months, and it was returned to Paris the next season by popular demand for a ten-week engagement, the record for an American production in that city.

In 1953 *Porgy and Bess* came back to New York for an extended run and then toured nineteen cities in the United States and Canada

— but not Charleston. Again the State Department sent the company abroad, to Venice, to Paris again, to Zagreb in Yugoslavia — where Communists, from the highest to the lowest street boys, were reported to be singing the songs from the opera. Cairo, Athens, Tel Aviv, Bucharest, Casablanca, Barcelona, Naples, La Scala in Milan, Florence, Rome, Marseilles, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands — all greeted Porgy and company warmly. Next came a four-month tour of South America, then Mexico, and then the famous Russian tour so delightfully reported in a book by Truman Capote. Moscow, Warsaw, Leningrad, the Far East — everywhere in the world *Porgy and Bess* was performed and praised and loved. Everywhere, that is, but its own birthplace. Catfish Row and its inhabitants were known all over the world. Iron Curtain critics hailed it not only as opera and entertainment but as a vital means of increasing international understanding.

In New Zealand, sponsored by the New Zealand Brewing Company, *Porgy and Bess* was performed by a cast of native Maoris, aided by three American singers. It was a box-office sell-out all over New Zealand and moved on to a successful tour of Australia and selection as the chief cultural item of the Adelaide Festival of the Arts. New York saw it again recently in a new production at the City Center, and at present it is being performed once more in Germany.

The film version, with Catfish Row only a trifle smaller than Rockefeller Center, has played on screens all over the world and on national television. I saw the motion picture first in a theatre in Saigon, South Vietnam, with an English sound track and three sets of subtitles — French, Chinese, and Vietnamese — and the Oriental audience was quickly swept up into the story of Porgy and Bess and Maria and Crown.

All the world, then, has seen and heard *Porgy and Bess*.

Except Charleston. Was Porgy never again to ride his goat cart along the streets of his native city?

Let us examine the distressing story.

The novel, as we have seen, was read and, on the whole, admired in Charleston, and DuBose Heyward became one of the city's most prominent and respected native sons. But no play by him was, in his lifetime, presented in that city.

Some time in the 1930's it was proposed that the play *Porgy* be

produced in Charleston with a local cast. It was, I believe, to be a part of the annual Azalea Festival. But this project never got beyond the planning stage, and the rest seemed to be silence.

Then, in the 1940's a similar idea was proposed. The play was actually cast with local Negro actors and went into rehearsal at the Dock Street Theatre. Again there were difficulties, and the project was abandoned.

In the 1950's Jack Frucht of the Charleston Symphony Orchestra and Emmett Robinson of the Footlight Players projected a "concert" version of *Porgy and Bess* — the opera, this time — to be presented at County Hall. But now the Gershwin Estate, ignoring European precedents, refused to allow a performance of the piece by white singers. So again Porgy was denied access to his home city.

But in South Carolina's Tricentennial year Porgy is at last coming home. As a part of the celebration of the three hundredth birthday of South Carolina the Charleston Symphony Association, in co-operation with the Chamber of Commerce and other local groups, will produce the opera at the Charleston Municipal Auditorium. Opening night will be June 25, and the piece will run through July 8. Ella Gerber, who directed the New Zealand *Porgy and Bess* and several American stagings of the Heyward-Gershwin opera, has been brought in to guide a local Negro cast through the complexities of the production. So once more Catfish Row will stir with brilliant life. Once more Porgy will ride his goat cart to glory and tragedy. Sportin' Life will wryly tell us "It Ain't Necessarily So," and Crown will break in upon the mourners during the great lashing hurricane. All the color and vitality, the wild exuberance, the barbaric and touching harmonies, the age-old, world-entrancing drama of love gained and love lost — these will once more be where they have for so many years belonged — in that ancient and beautiful city which gave them birth.

Home Free!

(A mosaic about the time we won the war, forgot it, and moved on)

I

The soldiers returned
When our streets were grey with lumber
And gingerbread
And the people bathed
 When it was summer.

To get a name
Young women came
With Jesus in their lockets,
Or breasts three-deep
And shiny black-straw hats
To serve their cake at sociables

 Men, sporting arm bands
 Played in army bands
 Or firemen's bands
 Or any band to wave a flag

And somewhere, Josh
The drunk trombonist
Wondered what a Friend He Had in
 You Know who.

Rarefied gentlemen
Rocked on banistered porches
Thinking deep-Southern thoughts:
You can be sure when July comes
The Fourth is not far off!
And again they sucked their teeth:
The tasting of life is like rabbit stew
What's the sauce worth
Without a wild hare or two!

Their children thought:
 Here, in this backwater
 Rocks old Socrates
 And I should write it down
 Were it not for
 Stringing beans.

Then, long before our time was up
 We swung on clothes lines in the back yard
 Thinking, our fathers have seen Paris
 And we will do the same before we die.
 We will make our own name
 In a better war than this was over there!
 We will do greater things before we lie
 Five miles from where we started!

And over all the sky was blue as dishes
 And our thoughts went barefoot
 Like lucky Seniors
 Before school was out.

II

Morning was seven the year to come
 And the farmers wandered into town
 To air the latest Chevy:
 It'll never fly!—like my old lady,
 But . . . but . . .
 While their old ladies
 Clipped Paris patterns from their fancies
 To ride in the front seat
 Of a new convenience
 Which must be bought on credit
 And which must be waxed more
 Than a cow.

Somedays, it was sunday
 And the preacher raised his hands
 In a public place:

We must absolve the Germans
 And forgive the Jews,
 But the niggers are always with us!

Later we heard:
 Beware their women—
 They are black rivers—
 Let 'em glide!
 And we whose ancestors had died
 Mysteriously
 'Of goute while wading'
 Began to suspect the awkward truth
 Beneath our tar heels:

Baa Baa baby lamb
 Burning in the night
 Go down to the back lot shack
 And ask your mother
 Is you partly black as white.

And somewhere, Josh,
 The drug store drunk and soda jerk
 Whose mind was like a tickertape parade,
 Played Sweet and Low
 Upon some long-departed
 Friend-and-football hero's grave.

Now oh, the coat of everything!
 But everything we could not have
 Was ours to buy. And Bessie swore
 She'd never paint her legs again
 And Father swore I'd always wear
 A suit and tie, though both knew
 Silk was high
 And sheep skins higher than the sky.

But over all was a season of plate glass and plenty
 And the earth adjusted
 And our President swore in God
 As a natural citizen.

III

We got rich, but He forgave us!
We took chances, but He saved us!
We got the whole world in our hands! Yeah!
And we squeezed it
And it came out neon green and gold!

The scholars said: Here
Was a yellow wood where
Two roads met. Some took the one
Less traveled by
And ended up on the Petersburg By-Pass
And so we built a school at the forks
And at each end a pizza stand
And later an unobtrusive ferris wheel
Where consciousness might be expanded
And the pattern seen
To music and commercially.

Now we were free to love
But there was no secret place.
Now we thought we would drop in
But the neighbors put a gate across their walk.
Now we were prepared to understand
But there was no time not to talk.
No time not to talk.

Here, in this dark place,
I will hide my face,
I will destroy myself
Or maybe
Watch my autobiography
On TV.

And somewhere, Josh
The dirty old derelict
Who touched young boys
Castrated himself, and left a note
To blame it on his horn.

And over all were the songs he played that summer.
Till Uncle Eben said those clouds
Could be blown away by another war,
The war that we had sworn on
In the damp grey evening of our childhood.
And Aunt Belinda said she wished there were another war
To get him out of the house after supper.

So we sat around the table.
But still the wind burned bright.
Still our eyes carried the good news!
—And dawn came up like thunder
Out of China, cross the world.

So it began again.
But this time without joy.
For wars are like summer, someone said,
They're never over till you want another.
And over all there was the mind
Of One who did not care,
Who does not now, and will not ever care,
But who, upon some morning as we marched away,
Turned his head to listen
To the rush of waters
Flowing past the stars.

RANDOLPH UMBERGER

The Animal

JOSEPH R. MILLICHAP

The car that suddenly stopped beside his was a '65 white-and-white Impala convertible. He saw it before she did because he was more aware of the rhythmic washing of headlights and taillights across the interior of his Mustang. The passing lights punctuated their strained fumbblings. He had suffered through a dull evening at the local college bar carefully establishing this posture of affection; now he hoped it might not be shattered by the suddenly blood red of brakelights and the discordant squeal of oversized tires. His preoccupation with her thin, hard mouth ended as he twisted to observe the Impala. With a sharp clang of gears it jumped in reverse, crossing the white line as it went around them. He wondered what in hell it was backing up for, and why it circled far over into the other lane.

The lights focused on a large ball of wet, stringy fur from which extended four legs ending in almost human hands and a long, white rat's tail. It lay on its side parallel with his window, a dark shadow on the thin dusting of unusual December snow. The legs stretched toward him, the tiny hands working and the wet fur undulating as it tried to crawl toward the curb. At first glance it seemed to change shapes in the intense light like an instantly developing foetus or some fiercely metamorphosing image half remembered from a fearful dream. Fascinated by its strainings, he forgot the rising hunger the girl had started in him and separated completely from her. He broke the silence.

"This guy just hit an animal."

The other car had moved expertly back to a distance where its lights caught the animal's futile movements and reflected brightly from the red, beady eyes as its head turned questioningly toward its enemy. His attention also shifted toward the blinding lights, and, feeling an involuntary tightening of stomach and scrotum, he reached for the latch button with his elbow. As he tried to appraise the situation in a more reasonable manner, the girl leaned over him to see, her small, sharp-pointed breast boring into him.

"It's a possum. Is he going to help it?" she asked. "Somebody ought to help the poor thing."

The other car's doors opened, and three men piled out; as they

emerged into the light fear again spread sickly through him. They were three "red necks," cotton mill workers, people unknown and alien to him. Except that only two were fair, they might have been triplets. Each was short, wiry, and slightly bow-legged; and each was arrayed in a pastel nylon jacket and skin-tight pants. The colors of pants, jackets, and open-necked shirts clashed wildly; electric blue jarred with bright gold, cerise, arsenical green. Their thick, vaselined hairdos were done in the D.A. style of a decade past. One carried a tall can of Schlitz, and all three were laughing loudly. They prodded the possum with sharp-toed, tasseled loafers, hooting derision at the now motionless animal.

"Look at this son-a-bitch playin' possum."

"Shit, it ain't hurt 'tall."

"Jes' like a possum."

Then they turned their flat, tiny eyes toward them, flashing bad-toothed smiles of recognition and complicity.

"Hey, y'all want to see a possum playin' possum?" The one who had emerged from the driver's seat called to them. He hesitated, perplexed as to his strategy; if he did not answer they might be offended, if he did they might get too friendly. And they would hear his Yankee accent either way. He compromised by rolling his window down several inches and whining a nasalized, non-committal monosyllable which he hoped sounded like Carolina.

The driver looked at him strangely and continued, "There's the son-of-a-bitch, right there, playing possum!"

His stomach jumped again. Was this guy trying to start trouble? He weighed several courses of action: driving off while they were out of the car, running into the girl's house, or keeping his mouth shut and hoping for the best. The girl suddenly changed the course of his speculation; pushing her little nipple harder into his arm, she leaned toward the open window to yell at them.

"You all ran that animal over, now you all ought to help it."

The driver blinked, and the other turned from toeing the possum and stared also.

"Lady, we didn't hit this here possum; it's only playing possum. Why it ain't hurt a-tall."

She came right back at him.

“What do you know about it? That animal is hurt; I know it.” At least her accent is Southern, he thought, the driver was getting mad, but at her, not at him.

“Damn, lady, I’m telling you it ain’t hurt.”

“You ran that animal over, and you must do something with it.”

The driver turned, pointing a finger and balancing between injured defense and sullen retreat. After a long moment he grasped the possum by its white rat’s tail and twirled it about his head.

“I’ll do something with it.”

He arched it over the Mustang to the snow-covered sidewalk before her house.

“There, I done something with it. You all just stay there and commence what you were doing, and, when you finish whatever it is you were doing, it’ll be gone.”

His histrionic leer brought spasms of laughter from the twins. One threw his beer can over the car to the lawn, and they all started back toward the Impala.

The girl leaned all the way across him to yell after them. “You killed that animal, you . . . you careless driver.”

Finally he managed to say something. “Will you shut up and let them get out of here?”

She pulled off of him, back to the other bucket seat, “What did you say to me?” He ignored her to watch the others climb back into the white Impala and screech tires and gears as they continued on their original course out Spring Garden Street.

She paused also, and then continued when their taillights faded, “Did you tell me to shut up?”

“I’m sorry, but that outburst was pretty silly.”

“Why?”

“Well, there wasn’t any sense in getting killed over a stupid possum, that’s probably only playing possum anyway.”

“Getting killed.”

“By those goddamn grits over that goddamn possum.”

"They weren't killing anything, except a poor, defenseless animal—and stop talking like that."

"That's your opinion!"

"Yes, it is!"

She turned away disgustedly, peering out of her window at the black, indefinite shape on the sidewalk.

"If it isn't hurt, why doesn't it run away?"

"Damned if I know!"

She moved quickly.

"Well, I'm going to get out and see."

She opened her door and swung out. He watched her go, irritated by his wasted erotic effort. Slowly he pushed his door open and followed. The girl leaned over the animal by the time he got around the car. At first glance the only movement about it seemed to be in the thin, dark stream which ran from the corner of its mouth. The tiny claws were motionless, and the fierce, beady eyes walled sightlessly in their sockets.

"Is he alive?" she asked after a long minute's perusal.

"Damned if I know," he answered again lamely.

In defense of his ignorant posture he put his wing-tipped shoe against the animal's belly.

"Don't you kick him!"

"I'm not kicking him; I want to see if he's breathing."

"With your shoe?"

She knelt and put her hand on the animal's side. Involuntarily, he shuddered, but bent closer as though interested. He finally touched it. After a moment they both felt an almost imperceptible breathing.

"It's alive; I can feel it. We have to do something for him. He'll freeze in this snow."

"What?"

"We can take him to the veterinarian. I know Mr. Phillips, the veterinarian on Battleground Avenue, real well from when Jennifer had her eye knocked out. We could take him there."

She had turned and was looking steadily at him. The sudden image of this bloody, awful possum in his car caused him to shudder again.

"How could we get it there?"

"In your car, of course!"

"It might not be good to pick him up, and I've heard that a possum can really cut up with its claws."

He really couldn't remember if he had heard this about possums or raccoons, but he offered it as excuse anyway. She moved away from the animal.

"Well, what are we going to do?"

He hesitated, and then struck on the reasonable solution.

"We could call the police. . . . We can go in your house and call the police; they'll know what to do!"

The idea seemed acceptable to her, but she still hesitated.

"I don't want to call in the house; it'll get Mama up and that'll wake Daddy."

"Well, let's go to a pay phone."

She still hesitated.

"What about the possum?"

"We'll just have to leave him here for now. Come on."

They turned toward the car, and he held her door while she lowered herself into the bucket seat. As he rounded the front of his car looking out Spring Garden Street, he spotted a police cruiser at the next corner. Their problem was solved. He crossed the street to flag the policeman down. Standing a few feet from the curb, he waved his arms at the approaching car. It passed him with serene indifference.

"Son-of-a-bitch," he whispered. He recrossed the street and got in the Mustang.

"Did you see that cop go right past me?"

"Why did he do that?"

"How the hell should I know . . . I guess he didn't want to get involved in any trouble."

She didn't laugh.

"Well," he continued, "I know where he's going. All the cops on this side of town are in the Apple House on West Market at this time of night."

He started the car, made a U-turn (half expecting a cop to appear and ticket him), and started down town. They rode in silence. When they reached the all-night restaurant, all he said was, "Wait here, I'll be right out."

Two police cruisers sat in the parking lot; and when he entered, two heavy men in tight gray uniforms looked up from their pie and coffee. A greasy counterman, the double of the Impala's driver except for the soiled apron, also looked him over. Above his head was a large sign painted in black on a sheet of whitewashed plywood — WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO REFUSE SERVICE TO ANYONE. He walked up to the nearest cop.

"Excuse me, officer. I have a problem." The policeman's small eyes regarded him dully. He raced into a story.

"I was just out on Spring Garden Street, taking my date home, and a guy driving a white Impala ran over a possum."

The eyes still stared, uninterested.

"I mean it's hurt. Something ought to be done about it." Finally the policeman put down his forkful of pie.

"It's probably only playing possum. Just leave it there; it'll crawl away."

"I don't think it is, officer; I looked at it closely."

The other one stirred.

"You can't tell about a possum . . . It'll be gone by the time you drive back there."

He hesitated.

"Look, officers, I don't give a damn about the possum, either way, but my date does. Couldn't you just drive out there and take a look?"

"We're on our lunch," the first replied; "but I'll tell you what you do. Go over to the phone and call headquarters and tell them and get in touch with Holliman. He takes care of animals."

He did as he was told; the desk man said they would be out as soon as possible. He thanked them and left. On the way back he ex-

plained the situation to the girl, finishing as they pulled up in front of her house, "I'll be embarrassed as hell if that possum isn't there."

But it was there, still in the same position—only the small stain of blood on the snow had enlarged. They got out to look at the animal.

"Is it still breathing?" she asked.

"I think so." He bent to inspect it; he was genuinely concerned now.

They waited silently for the police; after a few minutes they were shivering slightly. She took his right hand inside her trench coat pocket and leaned her left shoulder and breast against him. Instantly he planned to get back in his car after the police removed the possum.

"When did they say they were coming?"

"They said 'presen'ly,'" he answered in put-on Carolina accent. She didn't notice.

After another few minutes she said, "Well, I wish they'd get here." He didn't reply. After another few, a black, unmarked car drove slowly past them and then pulled to a stop. Its backup lights reflected in the possum's eyes as it backed toward them. Three men got out heavily — the two policemen from the Apple House and a third man in a black raincoat.

"So this is the little critter that's causin' all this fuss," the third man said.

"Probably just playin' possum," the first policeman offered.

"No, he isn't. You come here and look," insisted the girl.

The third man bent thoughtfully over the animal.

"I believe the young lady is right, Jerry; this animal is hurt purty bad . . . Get me a billy, will you."

The second man went to the car and came back holding the heavy black club by the leather lanyard. The man in the raincoat took it, regarded the possum thoughtfully for a moment, and then smashed its skull with a short, hard blow. It jumped from the shock and made a noise like a tiny sigh.

"That takes care of that!"

He and the girl were dumbfounded. Finally, a little angry, he spoke. "But we didn't call you all the way out here to kill it."

"Wasn't anything else I could do, boy. We ain' got no possum hospitals in this here city." The third man looked slyly at his smirking companions; while he was talking he took out a handkerchief and blotted a drop of blood from his thick hand.

"Besides, this'll do somebody some good. I know lots of folks over in Niggertown that'll be glad to get it."

He picked the possum up by the tail and started back to the black car. They threw the possum in the trunk, got in, and made a U-turn to head back downtown. After they left, the girl finally spoke.

"That was awful."

"I know it, honey, but you just forget about it."

He had no desire to get back in the car. He took her hand and started up the walk to the porch, stepping carefully around the dark pool on the snow. When they reached the steps she repeated, "That was awful . . . But you tried your best."

She turned, kissed him on the cheek, and then looked up to be kissed again. He hesitated, then touched her mouth with his cool lips – reservedly – as if he knew he would taste or feel something strange there, perhaps the blood which coursed in its tiny veins beneath the fragile skin. As they kissed, she, for the first time, opened her mouth and her warm, hard tongue touched him. He pulled away, the fear again spreading in his groin. But she held him and kissed him fully, whispering something he didn't understand. Then he hurried down the walk toward a fitful winter sleep.

Immortality

In the Galleria dell'Accademia
 above the clustered, changing faces
 full of eyes that touch, admire,
 aspire, scrutinize, criticize,
 take him in stride, and apart, and to bed,
 projecting flesh into their stony lives,
 DAVID, with what ease,
 survives the gaze of centuries.

IMOGENE L. BOLLS

Henry Timrod And The South

CLAUD B. GREEN

As yet there seems to be no good reason to modify the judgment which places Henry Timrod as third — just after Poe and Lanier — in order of excellence when Southern poets of the nineteenth century are ranked. The correctness of this evaluation for Timrod, which has been the generally accepted one for the past thirty years, is not so important perhaps as the critical framework in which it immediately puts the poet and his work. Certainly it is possible to consider the merits of Edgar Allan Poe as a writer without stressing the fact that he belongs either to the South or to the nineteenth century. More so than many American authors, Poe appears to be free of the limitations of a particular place and a specific time.

To a much less extent can it be said of Sidney Lanier that his work should be considered without reference to the South and to the events which occurred there during his lifetime. Even with Lanier, however, there has been the attempt to portray him within the boundaries of a national rather than a regional literature. The presently accepted critical evaluation of Lanier would probably state that he is generally less able than the major American poets of his day but that he is not wholly unworthy to be mentioned along with them.

With Timrod the case is different. Almost any literary opinion of him as a poet and a critic will begin with the premise that Timrod's life and writings are so completely identified with the South that it is virtually impossible to evaluate the one without passing some sort of judgment on the other. It is somewhat like saying that the literary merits of Charles Egbert Craddock's stories can not be discussed without commenting on the quality of life in the mountains of East Tennessee, or that our opinion of Hamlin Garland as a writer must reflect our evaluation of economic and social conditions on the Middle Border. To the regional writer who, during his own lifetime or shortly thereafter, does not achieve a minimum national recognition, there is applied a kind of geographical fallacy which tends to deny him any chance that the future will reverse or modify the earlier regional designation.

Now more than one hundred years after his death, there is no point in pretending that Timrod was a better poet than he is. Nor is there much reason for lamenting what he might have written had not the

Civil War, poverty, illness, and early death prevented it. In the end a man must be judged by what he did write and not by what he might have written. But there is every reason to ask if the critical evaluation of Timrod's best poetry has not been less objective than it should be because the subject matter of that poetry is so definitely identified with the South and with a period in Southern history when the South was most out of favor with the rest of the nation.

There can be no doubt of Timrod's personal identification with the South and particularly with South Carolina. Born in Charleston on December 8, 1828, and dying in Columbia on October 7, 1867, Timrod spent most of his brief life in these two South Carolina cities. For less than two years, beginning in January, 1845, he was a student at the University of Georgia in Athens, and during the decade of the 1850's he held various positions as schoolmaster and tutor in the South Carolina low country. Enlisting as a Private in the Confederate Army in February, 1862, he was discharged in December because of ill health. For a three-month period during this same year, while he had a leave of absence from the Army, he served as a war correspondent on the Confederate western front. Except for his student days in Athens, this seems to have been his most extended residence outside his native state.

It was in Charleston, and not in Columbia where he lived only the last four years of his life, that Timrod found his spiritual and cultural home. To this port city his grandfather had migrated from Germany, and in it the poet's father, William Timrod, had worked as a bookbinder and had achieved a local reputation as a poet, espousing the cause of the Union during the Nullification controversy of 1832-3 by writing a poem entitled "Sons of the Union." Here in Charleston, Henry Timrod had attended the Classical School of Christopher Cotes, where he knew Basil Gildersleeve and formed the early and lasting friendship with Paul Hamilton Hayne. But above all it was Charleston that provided Timrod with the books, the friends, the encouragement, and the opportunity to become a writer. To the young man struggling to become a poet, the group engaged in publishing *Russell's Magazine* under Hayne's editorship and in discussing and planning other literary enterprises must have seemed the very fountainhead of all that he needed to achieve his ambition. There is no record that Timrod ever thought of Charleston, even momentarily, as he once did of Columbia when he began a sonnet by remarking of this second city, "Soon must I leave this tongue-envenomed town."

The publication history of Timrod's poems and essays during his lifetime tended further to identify him almost exclusively with the South. It is true that the one volume of poems published before his death was issued by Ticknor and Fields from Boston in 1859. But it is also true that much of his best work before 1860 and almost all of it after that date appeared first in the pages of a Southern periodical or newspaper. The Civil War which provided Henry Timrod with the subject matter for his best poems also limited their first and early reception to a Southern audience and has handicapped their later acceptance by readers outside the South. It is one of the ironies connected with Timrod's life that his admirers by proudly proclaiming him the laureate of the Confederacy have come perilously close to denying him the right of being considered a minor but authentic American poet.

The best and most serious students of Timrod's life and work have been Southerners or persons closely identified at one time with the South. Men such as Paul Hamilton Hayne, William Peterfield Trent, George A. Wauchope, Jay B. Hubbell, Guy A. Cardwell, Jr., Edd Winfield Parks, and others have contributed greatly to our knowledge of the South Carolina poet and to a proper evaluation of his merits. It is possibly true that no Southern writer has been more fortunate than Timrod in the quality and caliber of the scholars who have become interested enough in him to write about him. Almost uniformly, beginning with W. P. Trent and extending through Edd W. Parks, these men have been on the faculties of Southern universities and their work on Timrod has usually been published by Southern university presses. As yet there has been little significant scholarly writing on Timrod outside the South.

From first to last the critics of Timrod have been remarkably consistent in their opinion that his best poetry was inspired by events related to the Civil War. Paul Hamilton Hayne in his 1873 edition of *The Poems of Henry Timrod* wrote:

"It was in 1861 that he inaugurated that remarkable *series* of poems, suggested by the incidents of the great conflict, tragic or triumphant, in which he struck a higher and firmer note than any hitherto elicited from his lyre." (p. 36)

Writing in 1915, Professor George A. Wauchope of the University of South Carolina observed in his *Henry Timrod: Man and Poet*:

"Timrod's poems may be conveniently grouped in the order

of their importance and technical excellence as lyrics of war, of love, and of nature." (p. 19)

"Though an ardent lover of peace, he reached his highest range and poetic climacteric in his war lyrics." (p. 27)

Now, in 1970, the intelligent and objective reader of Timrod's poetry can confirm for himself what the earlier critics such as Hayne and Professor Wauchope said and what perceptive scholars and students of the poet for the past half-century have been maintaining. The uniformity of their judgment adds weight to its value. The judgment is that Timrod, before 1860, had mastered and even perfected a technique for writing poetry without having anything very significant to say. Much of his poetry up to that date seemed derivative in subject matter and form from the English models — chiefly the Romantic and Victorian poets — whom he read and admired.

With the events leading to the formation of the Confederate States of America and with those produced by the Civil War itself, Timrod found a subject matter which stirred him profoundly. His reaction was not simply that of the traditional patriot whose devotion to the South admitted no doubt or question, but rather he responded as a man who saw both the glory and the tragedy of what was happening and knew that the old and universal issues of human existence were being confronted once again within the framework of the only world he knew — the world of the Confederate South. With rare perception and skill, Timrod was able to perceive the universal emotion involved in the particular event and to give it memorable poetic expression. His mastery of poetic technique permitted him always to keep the expression of the emotion under control.

The coming of spring, an event to which man's spirit has always responded, could in a South at war bring not only the ecstasy of the season but also the knowledge that armies intensify their marching and fighting at this time of year. In his poem "Spring," Timrod noted both the wonder of the season and the imminence of bloodshed.

Spring, with that nameless pathos in the air
Which dwells with all things fair,
Spring, with her golden suns and silver rain,
Is with us once again. . . .

Ah! who could couple thoughts of war and crime
 With such a blessed time!
 Who in the west wind's aromatic breath
 Could hear the call of Death!

Yet not more surely shall the Spring awake
 The voice of wood and brake,
 Than she shall rouse, for all her tranquil charms,
 A million men to arms.

From the time of Homeric Troy until the present, poets have written of cities under siege and the reactions of their inhabitants to the stresses and strains of war. In a graceful poem which he named "Charleston," Timrod spoke of the calm assurance with which the inhabitants of his native city awaited the attack — not assurance that they would emerge victorious but a belief that they would endure with dignity.

Calm as that second summer which precedes
 The first fall of the snow,
 In the broad sunlight of heroic deeds,
 The City bides the foe. . . .

Shall the Spring dawn, and she still clad in smiles,
 And with an unscathed brow,
 Rest in the strong arms of her palm-crowned isles,
 As fair and free as now?

We know not; in the temple of the Fates
 God has inscribed her doom;
 And, all untroubled in her faith, she waits
 The triumph or the tomb.

To the question of how people at war should observe Christmas, Timrod's answer is that they should pray for peace. Not once in his poem "Christmas," which is one of his best with references to the Civil War, does he suggest that prayers should be offered for victory. Again and again he requests that the proper petition to God is for peace.

How shall we grace the day?
 With feast, and song, and dance, and
 antique sports,

And shouts of happy children in the courts,
And tales of ghost and fay? . . .

How could we bear the mirth,
While some loved reveler of a year ago
Keeps his mute Christmas now beneath the snow,
In cold Virginian earth?

How shall we grace the day?
Ah! let the thought that on this holy morn
The Prince of Peace—the Prince of Peace was born,
Employ us, while we pray!

In his book on the poet entitled *Henry Timrod* (1964), Edd Winfield Parks has said that Timrod approaches poetic greatness when he uses war as a terrifying background. Speaking specifically of "Spring," "Charleston," and "Christmas," Parks asserts:

"These are not, in the strict sense, martial poems. They are against war. They are an appeal not to arms but to peace. They represent Timrod at his best, humanly and poetically." (p. 116).

And once again Parks confirms what must be the unanimous verdict of all Timrod scholars that the Magnolia Cemetery Ode is his single best poem. Composed of only five stanzas, each with four lines, and exhibiting the same kind of polished perfection that is found in Poe's "To Helen," the Ode must eventually come to be recognized as deserving a place among the relatively few best single short poems in American literature.

Like his other War poems, this one is inspired by an event related to the conflict — the bringing of flowers by the women of Charleston to decorate the graves of the Confederate dead who are buried in Magnolia Cemetery in that city. And, as with his other good War poems, Timrod quickly transcends the particular occasion to recognize the universal and eternal verities which are exemplified by this single act in time and place. In the first stanza, the poet salutes the dead and acknowledges that as yet no war memorial has been erected to mark their graves and commemorate their bravery. In the last stanza he simply proclaims that the devotion of the women who have come to decorate the graves is the noblest monument of all.

Sleep sweetly in your humble graves,
 Sleep, martyrs of a fallen cause;
 Though yet no marble column craves
 The pilgrim here to pause. . . .

Stoop, angels, hither from the skies!
 There is no holier spot of ground
 Than where defeated valor lies,
 By mourning beauty crowned!

It is to be hoped that the time is not far distant when Timrod's poetry can be read for what it is, and that it will be judged to be neither better nor worse than it is because of the convictions of the reader regarding the historical events which form part of the subject matter of the poems.

Mate

A deeper noise he made
 Deeper than purr
 As he peeked at her
 Through the wire gate.

A scent more sweet than bird blood
 Flooded over
 Grass and clover
 With short green onions only stubs.

So both ground and air, he sprung
 Wire-tickled feet
 Landing in seeds
 Of garden plants—some green and young.

Noses touched below a window
 Almost a fight
 A growl, not quite
 And then a furry end of
 waiting.

Air Conditioning

ROBERT ALT

To Briggs the hours on the Phoenix-bound bus seemed like days. The desert heat lay around him and the land stretched out unbroken to the white, shimmering sky where the purple mountains weaved in the heat hanging on the land like a fog. He took an already damp handkerchief from his suitcoat pocket and patted the sweat off his lush upper lip. Then he folded the handkerchief and slipped it back into his pocket.

The bus had gone sixteen miles out of Nogales when there was a snapping sound towards the rear. The driver pulled the bus off the road. Muttering to himself the driver climbed out of his seat and announced there would be a short delay while he checked the engine.

Shortly he was back and said there was nothing to be afraid of, that the engine was okay. "It's just the air that's broken down," he said. His flaccid face was sweating heavily and gray hair growing on his chest crept over the top of his open-necked shirt. "The air conditioning. Don't know exactly what's wrong."

The driver went outside and tinkered some more. The sounds of his tools clinking against the engine, the shuffle of his feet on the gravel, the driver's sounds drifted dreamily into the silent coolness of the bus. Then the heat began crawling in. Thin strands of smoke from cigars and cigarettes hung in the stagnant air. There were the sweet oily smells of the living. Some of the passengers opened windows. Then it became oppressive. Briggs was startled to see ravens gliding overhead in the searing sky, their bodies black, drifting everywhere, silent and ominous against the blue. Like an omen, he thought. He began to sweat.

The driver gave up and announced something about a compressor going bad, that there'd be no air conditioning.

Some of the passengers had complained but the heat soon silenced them. That all seemed like days ago to Briggs. And now he wished he had shaved that morning. He dabbed at the tickling sweat that hung on his red whiskers. Then his neck. As he lowered his hand he felt at the Windsor knot in his black tie and then twisted his neck in an attempt to reduce the pressure of the tight collar. The heat felt as if it were crushing him.

There were several Mexicans aboard and Briggs envied their ability to doze in the heat. The children, however, remained awake and sat picking at their toenails or played peek-a-boo over the high seat backs. Their laughter grated on Briggs.

One of the Mexicans, a girl of about eighteen with a very red mouth, held a baby that cried for more than half an hour before she unbuttoned her blouse and gave the child her breast. Soon, both she and the baby slept. Briggs stared at the girl's breast, lovely and brown, the child's mouth still clinging to it.

Briggs had taken an aisle seat. After many bus trips he had learned that it was much more comfortable sitting alone than next to someone and that one could almost assure a seat alone if he took an aisle seat rather than one next to a window. Other passengers apparently disliked having to climb over someone to get into a seat. It almost always worked and Briggs felt secure in his theory. But until the bus was actually underway he worried that someone would insist on sitting next to him. He never looked directly at those boarding the bus for fear someone might interpret his look as an invitation to sit down.

But a very fat woman had struggled aboard the bus and after carefully avoiding the empty seats beside the Mexicans tried to wedge her way into the empty seat beside Briggs. Instead of standing Briggs turned his knees sideways and the woman, her great stiff buttocks moving beneath her white dress and pushing against Briggs' arms, heaved herself into the empty seat.

Now her swelling flesh extended into Briggs' seat and he crowded closer to the aisle. She moaned and Briggs kept glancing at the sweat rolling mercilessly down her face and into the folds stacked up on her neck. She reminded Briggs of a large lump of flesh defrosting under the sun.

"Pardon me," Briggs said, "but I have to go to the bathroom." The woman only waved a hand at him.

As he lurched down the aisle Briggs noticed that the other passengers looked as miserable as he felt. The observation comforted him. They lay against the shiny plastic seat covers and their bodies, doll-like and loose, jumped and flopped with every bump in the road. Dust lay on the seat backs and sifted invisibly in the air, chalky, and Briggs could feel it in his mouth and on his teeth. Everyone looked miserable except for the man and girl sitting in the last seat on the bus. The man wore

a well-pressed black dacron and cotton suit and an open-necked black shirt. A Panama hat sat jauntily on the back of his head. He wore cowboy boots, dull brown, scalloped and scarred.

The trim looking girl next to the man had on a red dress. She was looking out the window and her chestnut hair, streaked with slivers of blonde, jumped gently off her shoulders. Her skin was tight on her jaws, and her eyebrows were drawn black and very evenly. Both she and the man looked extraordinarily cool. The man in the black suit puffed slowly on a cigar and watched Briggs.

When Briggs came out of the tiny restroom the man said, "Hey, gringo, you look warm." And he laughed loudly.

Briggs ignored the man but he felt his right eye give way to a spasm of twitching. He started toward his seat.

"Hey, gringo, don't be so sensitive," the man called.

The white land and the girl eased past Briggs' eyes as he turned around. "It's hard to be amused in such weather," he said. His voice felt dull and flat.

"Of course," the man said. There was sympathy in his voice. "You're not used to such weather. Me?" and he smiled broadly, his face shattering into a thousand cracks, "I find it very relaxing. Come, sit down, there is plenty of room." Turning to the girl, he said, "That is, if the *senorita* doesn't mind moving over a little."

The girl hadn't looked at either Briggs or the man but she slid over close to the open window. Her red dress pulled up on her leg and Briggs saw the top of her stocking tight against her thigh. There were no sleeves on her dress and the peeking strap of her black bra made Briggs' stomach jerk.

The man looked at Briggs and shrugged his shoulders. "There, you see how obliging we are here in the back?"

Briggs noticed a small orange mole that barely hung on the corner of the man's hawkish nose. The mole looked as if it could be easily picked off. It was the only blemish on the man's rather pinched face. The only blemish, Briggs thought. He started to finger the two moles by his own chin but instead touched the knot in his tie.

"Sit down, sit down," the man said. "It's a very long journey and it would be nice to talk, eh? Her," he said stabbing a finger at the girl, "she won't talk to me."

Briggs looked over his shoulder at the fat woman who had insisted on sitting next to him. Her head nodded against the seat every time she took a breath. She was breathing rapidly.

"And look," the man said, "I've even got some beer."

Briggs sat down between the man and the girl.

"Thank God, I had enough sense to pack the bottles with ice before we left. Have some beer with me. I think it will taste very good and refreshing." The man took two bottles and twisted the caps off. "Here."

Briggs took the cold bottle and drank deeply letting the cold beer slide over his tongue and his teeth and gums and down his throat. It was cold and delicious. The men drank in silence and the engine roared behind them like a giant fan. Briggs could feel the beer begin to roll through his system and he found himself staring at the bottle. He hadn't eaten and it was very hot. He wasn't used to alcohol. He wondered what ravens ate at noon.

"Very good," the man said and held the bottle in front of himself. It was already three-quarters gone. "There is nothing like cold beer on a warm day, eh?"

"It's very good," Briggs said.

"But perhaps you would rather run forward and suck that woman's breasts dry," the man said pointing at the Mexican woman whose breast still hung from her open blouse. "I'll bet it would be more enjoyable to suck her breast than that bottle too."

"My Lord," Briggs whispered. He looked at the girl next to him but she was staring out the window as if she had heard nothing. Briggs fingered his tie.

"It was on your mind, wasn't it?" the man demanded loudly. He drank some beer and belched. "I saw you eyeing her hungrily."

"This is ridiculous," Briggs said.

"Am I saying something that isn't true?" The man sounded offended and waited for Briggs' answer with his bottle half raised to his mouth.

"She is a very pretty woman," Briggs said and he found his left hand gesturing. "I admire her beauty. Nothing else. Now I wish we would talk of something else."

The man laughed loudly and then finished his bottle of beer. "That is very good beer." He reached across Briggs and the girl and tossed

his empty beer bottle onto the road. It bounced once and then exploded into a thousand pieces. The girl stared at the man's arm as he brought it back in the window. Briggs noticed the man dragged his hand slowly across the girl's breasts.

"Don't be a bore," she said and looked past Briggs at the man. Her eyes had practically no lashes and the pupils were large and brilliantly black. Like snake eyes, Briggs thought. The girl kept her small hands folded on her lap. Her square finger nails were bitten to the quick.

Briggs felt nervous but the man laughed and reached into his black suit for a cigar. "Ho-ho. The little ice cube does have a temper," he said. He lit the cigar with a kitchen match that he cracked into fire with his thumb. "Finally," he muttered. His cheeks sucked in the cigar smoke. "A temper. Life."

The girl had looked away and Briggs didn't think she had heard the man. She sat very quietly.

"So what do you do, gringo?" the man asked. He pushed some ash off his pants. "Where are you from?"

Briggs fingered the two moles by his chin and then dragged the limp handkerchief from his breast pocket and again patted his forehead and neck. Personal questions were all an intrusion, he thought. He had once told one of his dark secrets to a girl he thought he loved. They were rowing on the Kalamazoo River near the fishing tugs that went into Lake Michigan every morning, the tugs' swelling aft portions ghostly rising white off the black water. She sat in the rear of the dinghy and Briggs could see only her blonde hair and slices of skin where the lights from shore touched her chin and nose. He had spoken softly. He was young. The water lapped against the dinghy and dripped off the oars he held off the water. She laughed after he had finished. Her laugh came out of the darkness and banged against the water and the fishing boats and the dunes next to the river and the shore where the people were. Briggs never took her out again, and he decided it might be best if one did not fall in love or even think that he had.

"My name is Rudolph Briggs."

"Ah ha," the man said, "a regular Valentino."

Briggs ran a finger over his lip. "That's it exactly."

"What?"

"Valentino. Rudolph Valentino Briggs. My mother had a passion—" Briggs thought of the beer and his head and his voice, his talking, far away—"for the Latin. She divorced my father so she could find herself a Latin lover. I was supposed to be swashbuckling and suave, I suppose. I've never been either. People call me either Briggs or R. V."

"Not Rudy?"

"I detest the name."

"Well," the man said and leaned over and got two more bottles of beer. "My name is Joe Mitchell and I'm from Phoenix." He twisted the caps off and they rolled into the aisle and beneath a seat. A child quickly pounced on them.

Briggs took a drink of beer and noticed the driver looking at them in the mirror over his head. The driver glanced up at them and then back at the road. He was chewing gum and the back of his shirt was black from sweat.

"I think the driver objects to our drinking," Briggs said.

"What could he do?" Mitchell said. "Ignore him."

"But . . ."

"Forget it, Rudy. He's in a box."

Mitchell tipped the bottle to his lips. Briggs stared at the thick veins that bulged through the black hairs dancing on the back of Mitchell's hand and thinning down into his fingers. Clean, very clean hands. Like a doctor's, Briggs thought. A huge turquoise ring, the green stone like a wad of discarded gum, covered almost half of Mitchell's index finger. An odd place to wear a ring, Briggs thought. Odd like the driver being in a box. A casket. He tried to analyze it but couldn't. His mind rang as the hot wind beat his face. Briggs was aware of his eyes and ears, the droning engine, the quiet girl, black birds quiet in the huge sky, silence. Only the land moving slowly by as the bus rumbled across its burning flesh dispelled the notion of suspension, of going neither forward nor backward, of being caught in some hideous, timeless zone. Briggs' head rolled. He felt detached. Strange.

"Now, my friend, tell me what you do and why you were in Nogales."

Briggs started. "I tell lies," he blurted.

Mitchell laughed.

"I mean, I sell ties," Briggs said. He said it slowly. "I sell neckties."

"Where are you from?"

"Allegan, Michigan."

"And finally," Mitchell said, "why were you in Nogales?"

"I don't know, Mitchell," Briggs said. He felt irritated. "I went because I wanted to visit a border town."

Mitchell raised his right eyebrow and his face was ready to crack. Briggs looked away. The girl's leg was resting against his. She had lovely legs. "I came to Arizona to visit a sick aunt. She suffers from asthma and arthritis. The doctors say the Arizona climate is good for such people."

"Good for their pocketbooks, you mean."

Briggs shrugged and before Mitchell could pry further he asked him how he managed to stay cool in such hot weather. "You're not even sweating," Briggs said.

Mitchell smiled. He rubbed the ring against the clean black cloth on the front of his suit. He winked at Briggs. "Be cool, amigo. Be cool."

"You don't make sense," Briggs said.

"Perhaps not. It is something one must learn. Most people never learn how to stay cool in the hot weather. That's why there are so many air conditioners."

Briggs frowned. He wanted to get the conversation onto more familiar ground. "What do you do for a living?"

"I try to live. That is a lot of work."

"No, I mean what line of work are you in?"

"It doesn't really matter, does it, Rudy? I just try to live and stay cool."

"But that's absurd. You must do something. How can you live without working? What do you do for a living?"

Mitchell just smiled and puffed on his cigar. He carefully tapped a small ash between his legs and onto the floor. The gray ash was caught in the wind and disappeared. Mitchell smiled and shook his head.

He's just going to ignore my questions, Briggs thought. He stared

at Mitchell and felt a great anger surge through his stomach. The smug, content, domineering, vulgar, crude son of a bitch. The bastard. As if I suddenly didn't exist. As if I didn't matter. Like a toy in his toy chest that he'll use only when he feels like using it. Briggs thought of getting away from Mitchell, of going back up front with the others. Be cool. The prick.

They rode on in silence and they drank and Briggs became aware again of the girl's knee next to his. Each time the bus jerked itself over a rough part in the road their knees jumped and chafed against each others'. Hard flesh, Briggs thought. She had very attractive legs. She didn't seem to notice the contact. Briggs stared at her knee.

"So did you go to Nogales to see a beautiful town, Rudy? Or to look across the border to see what America looks like to the border town Mexican?"

"How many times do I have to tell you . . ."

"To see a cock fight? Or maybe some girlie shows? The kind they don't have in Allegan, Michigan. Or maybe to screw one of those pretty little Mexican señoritas."

"Why do you insist on being so vulgar?" Briggs complained. He turned to the girl. "I hope you will excuse us, miss. My friend and I. But we've been drinking and . . ."

Mitchell laughed loudly. A couple of people turned stiffly in their seats and looked back at them. They looked like turtles, Briggs thought. Grumpy turtles. Mitchell waved to them. "How are you all?" he shouted. "Hot? Ah yes, of course, you are hot because it is hot weather. And you are all sweating so badly. Thank God for the open windows, eh?"

He continued laughing. Mitchell's eyes were drawn tight and his mouth was open, turned slightly downwards like a slice of cantaloupe. He held his arms against his sides like folded wings.

"Please, Mitchell."

"Oh, gringo, you are such a sad little man," Mitchell said and started to laugh again. "Begging forgiveness as if you had sold the señorita a poor necktie."

Briggs got up and went into the tiny bathroom. The little room seemed cooler than the cabin of the bus. His head spun from the beer and the heat. He closed his eyes, and snowflakes jumped behind them.

The tires whined beneath the bus, hot against the pavement. Singing. Sticky. He leaned against one of the walls and urinated into the funnel-like toilet. The coach jumped and he sometimes missed the bowl.

He wondered about Mitchell's box. And the turtle people. The driver had looked away and had pulled his head into his shoulders. The passengers. Turtle people. And he too had recoiled, had been embarrassed, and had shrunk before Mitchell. The turtle killer. We don't dare stray far from our shell or the turtle killer will get us. Silly, Briggs thought. Silly thoughts. Only the girl stayed secure inside her shell. And Mitchell, the turtle killer had been surprised when she had flashed out. Jesus. Briggs washed his face. Then he adjusted his tie and thought of taking it off but rejected the idea. He wished he were back in Allegan. He wished he had never come to god forsaken Arizona.

He went out of the cubicle and nearly bumped into a woman and a small boy. They were apparently waiting to use the bathroom. The child tugged at his crotch.

"Never piss while a child and his mother wait," Mitchell called. "Now sonny will probably pee on mama's hands as she undoes his fly."

The woman quickly slammed the door as Mitchell laughed. Briggs smiled but was disappointed when Mitchell slid over next to the girl.

"There you are," Mitchell said. "The cool seat." He turned to the motionless girl and said softly, "Now I will get to rub knees with the pretty senorita. And perhaps she will like it and come out of her stupor."

The girl didn't look at Mitchell but pulled her knee away and jammed it into her other leg. Mitchell moved closer. He stared at her, his eyes watering, his hands on his knees. But she ignored him. Finally Mitchell shrugged. "The senorita is probably that rarity among women today, Rudy. A cherry."

Briggs turned away but Mitchell leaned close and said, "Only the frightened fight against the unfamiliar. And the frightened are insecure, unsure of themselves. But the children and I are secure. Nothing is unfamiliar."

Mitchell's voice began to drone in Briggs' mind like a busy fly. His brain felt hot and drowsy. The bus rolled along and the dusty wind rushing in about Briggs' ears, the monotonous slap of the tires and the roaring engine made him weak and lethargic. A tumble of vague thoughts

went through his mind. Briggs wanted only for the trip to end. He wanted a cool bath, a dark room and a clean bed. And sleep. Hours and hours of sleep.

"Hey, gringo," Mitchell said and he jammed Briggs in the ribs. "Wake up. There's someone on the road."

Briggs opened his eyes only after the tingling pain in his ribs subsided. He didn't really care that someone was on the road. It was a damn silly place to be. And the sun was so bright. But he squinted against the brightness and could see the figure of a woman standing in the road. She was about a quarter of a mile away and she was black against the white land. She raised her arms in a salute and the heat shimmered around her like fire.

The driver began applying the brakes and the bus rolled to a stop on the roadside. To Briggs the silence seemed to scream and he lay back against the seat and closed his eyes. He could hear the woman's feet click on the road as she ran to the bus. The door opened with a swoosh.

"What is it?" someone asked. "Why have we stopped? There's nothing wrong with the bus, is there?"

Someone sneezed. Many passengers were asleep, and their heavy breathing and snoring was like a rolling sigh. Briggs could hear the driver speaking with the woman.

"The woman is quite upset," Mitchell said.

Briggs opened his eyes. The woman was gesturing wildly at the driver who stood with his hands on his hips. The woman looked Mexican or Indian. The driver came back aboard the bus and stood at the front and looked at the passengers. He wiped the sweat off his forehead and neck and wiped his hands on his pants. His face was puffy and red.

"Is there a doctor aboard the bus?" he asked.

"What did you say?" someone shouted.

"I asked if there's a doctor aboard. We have a woman here who says her husband's dying up at the service station. She says she needs some help."

There was a murmur among the passengers. Many were whispering. The woman had turned and gone back to the adobe service station. She disappeared inside. To Briggs it seemed very empty outside the bus.

"We're not stopping, are we?" a woman said.

The driver stood and stared at the passengers. He scratched his chest and was breathing hard. Briggs felt as if the heat and the white land were crushing in on them all, as if the bus were a tiny crate being squeezed by the land. The heat was stifling. Briggs didn't really care that a man was dying. He dreaded having to get out of the bus and into the blazing land. He looked at the distant mountains and they shook in the heat rising off the land. Strange country. The birds were still in the sky. Briggs wished the air conditioning was working.

"But a man's dying," the driver said. He looked at the passengers and then at the service station. He looked at the service station for several seconds. "What should we do?"

No one said anything. The driver looked at the station again and then down at the floor. He scratched his nose. Then he turned and sat down in his seat. The woman appeared at the door of the station and waved and shouted something. The driver began to accelerate.

"Well," Mitchell sighed, "you all had your chance."

Mitchell got up and walked to the front of the bus. The driver was engaging the gears. "Hold it, driver."

The driver turned and looked at Mitchell. "Are you going to help her?"

"I am. And you had better wait right here until I get back."

"You're going out there alone?"

Mitchell was off the bus and halfway to the station. Briggs found himself staring at Mitchell. And everyone else was watching the long black figure move across the gravel. Briggs looked at the passengers. All huddled together. Turtles. Briggs got up and started after Mitchell. Everyone looked at Briggs. He touched his black tie and walked quickly. He didn't look at anyone. Then he was off the bus and hurried across the gravel. It seemed a long way to the service station.

Briggs stopped just inside the door of the station. It was dark and cool. He stood and waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. Mitchell was talking in low tones to the woman, and running through their talk was the rasping breathing of the dying man. Briggs listened carefully to the breathing. He had never been around death but he knew that someone was dying. The air was thick with a sweet smell

like a freshly baited fly trap. Briggs felt his stomach convulse and he turned to the door and leaned out into the brilliance. He threw up the little he had in his stomach. He could see the people in the silver bus staring at him through the open windows. Their lifeless faces seemed to float in the windows. He went back inside and fumbled his way toward Mitchell's voice.

There was another room off the station office. Inside, a curtained window let in some light and there were two candles burning on a small table. Both Mitchell and the woman were standing by the bed where the dying man lay. He was a very skinny man, his mouth and eyes open, his body straight. He looked ready for a casket. His long legs were together and his thin bony hands were folded one on the other and lay flat on his stomach. Except for his labored breathing and his eyes, huge pale eyes that blinked at long intervals, the man looked already dead. He stared at Mitchell and the woman. Briggs didn't think the man saw anything. The man lay there and waited for death. And his patient waiting chilled Briggs.

"Mitchell," he said, "the man is dying."

Mitchell only nodded and the woman said, "He has been like this for more than a day." Her voice was low and heavy and very soft. Her black hair was pulled into a tight bun on the back of her head. Her face was torn with lines and very brown.

"The man has cancer and is dying," Mitchell said. His eyes never left those of the dying man. "He struggles against it."

"There is nothing to do but wait," the woman said.

"Yes, there is nothing that we can do," Mitchell said. "Why don't you sit down, Mrs. Morris." He got a high-backed wooden chair from against a white wall and put it near the bed. He took the woman's arm and led her to it. "Myself and my friend will wait in the other room. If you need us we will be there."

"You will not leave me?"

"We will be in the other room."

After the men left the room and were beyond the woman's hearing Briggs whispered, "But the driver! The bus! They're not going to wait for us. They'll leave us here. Here with this woman and the dying man. We'll be alone out here with this."

Mitchell smiled at Briggs. "Be cool, my friend. Be cool."

"But damnit, how can I be cool?"

Mitchell put his hand on Briggs' shoulder. "Don't struggle so," he said. "You're in charge now. Getting off the bus put you in charge. You're out of the box."

"But the driver . . ." Briggs looked around the room, at the brass cash register, a soda cooler, a calender. He felt confused. "Can't she call someone?"

"She doesn't have a telephone, Rudy. She's here alone with her dying husband, and, believe me, it's not good to be alone with death. It can make you feel like it's you that is dying."

Briggs listened to the old man's rattled breathing. The bus engine rumbled outside. A child laughed. Briggs knew that it was still very hot outside. Inside the shell, the bus, the people, fear, insulation, trapped. "We should do something about the bus," he said.

"Yes, you're right." Mitchell walked out of the station.

Briggs followed him. As Mitchell climbed aboard the bus the passengers turned to him, their faces eager and limp. "Everything all right in there?" the driver asked.

"Of course, it isn't," Mitchell snapped. "The woman's husband is dying and we are going to wait here to keep her company in this time of need. There's soda pop at the station for anyone who would like a cool drink."

The driver stepped on the accelerator and a cloud of diesel smoke belched into the bus. "We're not waiting here for anyone," the driver said. "We've got a schedule to meet and we're going to come as close to meeting it as possible." But Mitchell reached over the driver, turned the engine off and grabbed the keys.

The driver lunged for Mitchell's hand but Mitchell tossed the keys to Briggs and he grabbed the driver's arm. "Now, amigo," Mitchell said quietly, "as I said before, we are staying here with the woman. If you or anyone else on this bus wants to be sure and get to Phoenix by morning, I suggest you walk."

Some of the passengers screamed. "But the schedule," the driver whined. "I've never been late in my life. The highway patrol'll be out looking for us. You can't just take over a bus. You'll be arrested."

"I just took over your bus," Mitchell said.

The passengers began to shout, but no one moved and Briggs and Mitchell walked back to the station.

"We can't stay here very long," Briggs said.

"Don't worry," Mitchell said. "I've seen many deaths. They're like storms. You can smell death coming. It won't be long."

They went inside the station and sat down at a table. It wasn't long before a child appeared in the doorway. The boy peeked in and was nervous and afraid. "Meester," he called softly.

"What is it, child?" Mitchell said.

"Meester, could I have a pop and maybe two for my seester and mama?"

Mitchell got three bottles of orange soda from the cooler and gave them to the youngster. "There you go, little one. Be careful now. Don't drop them."

The child stood in the doorway a moment and clutched the wet bottles that kept slipping in his hands. He peered into the station and then turned and hurried back to the bus.

"He's curious about the death in this place," Mitchell said. "Curious, but afraid. And his mama is probably more afraid, eh? So very afraid of the strangers on the bus and the death in this house. And now the little children are becoming afraid."

"And I too," Briggs said. He looked down at his feet and then leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees.

"Of what?"

"Of the heat. Of taking over the bus. Of you."

"Me?"

"Your vulgarity. Your cockiness. I don't know, just your whole attitude. I feel like I'm one of your toys."

"Everyone is someone's toy, my friend. The secret is to learn to fly above all the toymakers, to be able to leave your familiar little nest whenever you want. Then you are living and are cool and unafraid and don't need an air conditioned burrow. Anywhere will . . ."

Just then the woman shuffled into the room. She wiped her hair back from her face. "I must take a rest," she said. "It's very hard to sit, watching and waiting for death."

"Of course, madonna," Mitchell said as he quickly got to his feet. "Here, take this chair. Death is never pleasant."

"I'll go and sit by your husband," Briggs said. He felt presumptuous, but the woman smiled and nodded her head.

Briggs went into the room and sat beside the dying man. The old man's position was the same and his breathing was very bad. The breaths were long in coming and several times, until he got used to it, Briggs thought the man had died. But then the long, struggled breath came again, long and deep, and would leave the old man's lungs in a quick, dull grunt. His expression never changed and Briggs admired the old man for waging such a strong battle. Briggs wondered why he just didn't quit the whole struggle. Was it courage, he thought, or was it fear, the fear of leaving life forever, the fear of the unknown? Insulation. Life was the insulation against the strangeness of death.

Briggs wondered about his own battles. He had recoiled from Mitchell's questions about Nogales. He couldn't admit that he had gone there to taste of the fleshpots that he had thought of many times during the long hours in Allegan, those long hours filled, as Mitchell said, with familiarity, the familiarity of one's neighborhood, the sounds, the way the tall elms and maples bent in the windstorms, the faces, yes, the faces most of all, and it was all so familiar and boring, but, most of all, so secure.

But secure from what? Briggs thought. From other people? From strange land? From himself? Yes, perhaps that was it. Secure from himself. From the dark secrets of the soul. The familiar kept him honest and productive. It kept him frightened. Even if there were easy women in Allegan, Briggs knew that he would not have the courage to visit them. He might be seen, and it was probably just as well. It was very bothersome to have to worry about a disease.

The deep breathing of the old man eased its way into Briggs' thoughts. The old man lay beneath the covers and kept living. His eyes were nearly closed and they had sunk beneath the socket bones and looked to Briggs like hard little balls that had been dropped into a cup. The old man's mouth hung open. He wasn't perspiring. Briggs put

his hand on the old man's skin and felt ashamed but was startled by the coolness of the skin, cold and very dry.

Briggs sat in the small room and watched the rectangular wedge of sunlight snake through the high, small window and gradually work its way further and further above the old man as it sank lower in the west. The sun had been just above the bed when he and Mitchell had entered the station. Now it was a few feet further up the wall.

He listened to the sounds of the children on the bus and their laughter seemed to come from a tunnel and it wasn't loud. It was full of gaiety. And he heard the low murmuring of Mitchell and the woman. Briggs thought silence would be more appropriate. After all, there was the old man dying. But then he remembered that it was the old man dying, not he. It was easy to identify with the old man. Very easy.

Briggs sat with the old man for a while longer and then the woman came in and Briggs went and sat with Mitchell. Two hours later the woman walked into the room and said the old man had died.

Briggs and Mitchell helped the woman bury her husband. The bus driver came and helped them lower the simple, handmade box into the ground, and then he hurried back to the bus.

The woman thanked Mitchell and they hugged each other and then he walked back to the bus. He took long strides and his boots crunched on the gravel.

"You aren't coming with us?" Briggs asked her.

"No," she said and smiled. "I will stay here."

"Are you coming to the city some day?"

She looked at the sky and ran her hand through her hair and she looked at the grave. The dirt formed a mound over the buried box. The old man was there. "I wouldn't dare go to the city now. Not alone. I will stay here, and then someday I will die and be buried here."

"Yes," Briggs nodded, "I understand. Well, good-by."

"Good-by. And thank you."

Briggs walked back to the bus and suddenly felt very tired. It had been a long day. There had been the heat and the beer and the death. A very long day. Briggs wondered if Mitchell were as tired but then rejected the thought. It didn't matter.

Night was coming on quickly and the sky was laced with flaming reds and oranges and thin strands of purple. The desert was very beautiful then, Briggs thought.

No one looked at Briggs when he boarded. He gave the keys to the driver and started for the back but saw that Mitchell was sitting next to the girl. Mitchell had a cigar between his teeth and he was turned toward the girl. His arms were crossed and one hand rested against her right breast. The girl ignored Mitchell. Be cool, Mitchell, Briggs thought. He sat down next to the fat woman. She was studying her itinerary and paid no attention to Briggs. He lay back and closed his eyes as the endless grind of gears began. They were on their way. Briggs thought of Allegan. He wanted to get home, and when he got there he might just grow a beard. He smiled and loosened his tie but then took it off and stuffed it in his coat pocket. He took the damp handkerchief and wiped his forehead and cheeks. Allegan. Briggs rumbled the handkerchief up and put it in the pocket with his tie. Home. The bus was warm and the heat was all around them.

At Viareggio

On the beach at Viareggio someone drowned.
No matter that the sky beamed blue,
the sun ignited beer cans
in the sand. While salty green sea
crinkled smiles, the sirens screamed,
my daughter cried, bare-backed O₂
and stretcher bearers lunged calf-deep
through sand toward tide, and, just in time,
our Deutschland neighbors, leaping towels
and gritty tents and Volks lined up
like butts along the beach, converged
all bronzed and bleached and out-of-breath,
to watch the rescue men belch brine
from the sickened smile of death.

IMOGENE L. BOLLS

To The Vector Go The Spoils

I love and I am loved
and now you come with
your young beauty, a sheet
for me to write myself on.

Where were you when
my gland-gripped need of nineteen
drove my head
into the anguished wall?

When girls with daemon eyes
looked through me
in pre-adolescent knowing
where was your young mind
which could have matched
my own knee-trembling vision
and made a fitful whole?

When love exploded in me
for even aged ones
whose tired old dugs
I yearned so to unwither
where was your young body
I could have spent
some seed on?

I love and I am loved
and now you come
your magnet-being pulling
on the filing unloved selves.

To save you in your innocence
from my burdensome projection
I cache the treasure here
behind this wall of words.

DALE ALAN BAILES

History Now And Then

RITA HORTON MCDAVID

Now that my marriage license is on microfilm at the State Department of Archives and History and a Model-T specimen that was "hot stuff" in my youth survives on display in the Charleston Museum, I feel happily enshrined in history. For a person like me, who has always been enamored of the subject, especially South Carolina history, the experience is liberating, as if I were a stage-struck youngster suddenly getting a speaking part after years of loitering around in the wings and alcoves.

"History," Edward McCrady wrote, "is but the combined stories of the actions of the leading men of a people." Perhaps. At least that is what it was in his day, and in my schooldays. Now it is something more. It is economics, and sociology, and theology, and heaven knows what else.

"Haven't you ever heard of a trend?" A college history major asked me recently, scarcely able to conceal his disdain.

I did not have the courage to answer that kind of question. I was a history minor and have been a South Carolina history buff, whatever that is, all my life, but in my day we learned nothing but facts, unadorned, uninterpreted facts.

It was interesting and romantic. There were good guys and bad guys, a wrong side and a right side, none of this confusing "chauvinism," "imperialism," "pragmatism," "motivation." We didn't have to think. We just learned.

Of course, I grew up with John C. Calhoun. His home was just a pleasant ride away from mine, and we visited there many Sunday afternoons. The house was still lived in then, by two ladies who were sisters and direct descendants. They had gone to school to my grandmother, who introduced me to them. They had known my father, too, in that long-ago time when he had been a Clemson student (he was then an old man of thirty-two or so). While the grown folks talked, I played in the old spring-house under the hill and imagined little Calhouns there with me in the welcome cool. In winter, I'd linger inside in the hall by the staircase, imagining a tall, gaunt, ghost with bushy, gray hair and burning eyes descending — and scaring me to death.

On the way home we usually stopped at the Old Stone Church. General Pickens is buried in its yard, and lots of other people, less famous but interesting, like "Poor Willie!" a little boy whose tombstone extolling his virtues (is anything ever extolled except a virtue?) is probably taller than he was when he died. It all ends, at the bottom, with "Poor Willie!"

Turner Bynum lies there, too, the newspaperman that Greenville Benjamin F. Perry shot in a duel when both were young because Perry took offense at something Bynum printed about him in his Greenville paper, *Southern Sentinel*. People said the corpse was carried there at night in a driving rain by the poor fellow's friends and buried in a hurry. They said, too, that Perry, who later became governor of the state, regretted this rash act all his life, and would never talk about it. I did not know then that Bynum's grieving parents lived in Columbia in a little house by the Presbyterian Church. When I read about them many years later I wept. They had only two children, both sons, and lost the other tragically also. Turner was a friend of my childhood.

I knew LaFayette too, and Washington, and all the Continental generals. We didn't know that was what we were doing, but my friends and I used to "identify with them" when we were little. I still have the letters we wrote each other in the summers when we went to Grandma's, or other places, on vacation, on lined juvenile note-paper, signed with the name of whatever hero the child was pretending to be.

It never occurred to us that there were children growing up in America who didn't feel that close to them. We grew up knowing, as Ben Robertson put it, "that we were older than the union in Carolina." And as for the Confederacy . . . !

Right there on the monument in the square it said: ". . . and time yet shall prove, in truth's clear, far-off light, that those who wore the gray and followed Lee were in the right."

We really knew some of those men who wore the gray, too, though by that time it was their hair and beards that were gray, not the uniforms. We were Children of the Confederacy, and once a year we helped the Daughters serve them a feast. It is difficult for me to believe that I was in college when the South Carolina veterans held their last reunion.

Often, when I was growing up, I wondered why the Yankees fought us, why they didn't just let us go. I had no idea how they felt about the union. Long after, when I read, "No particular sanctity attached to the union in the minds of the men who made it," I understood. So many of those men were Southerners.

When I graduated from high school, I did not make the honor roll, but I won a pretty gold medal for the best essay on "The Right of Secession." Oh, yes, I did! And there were other entries too. "The war" was far from forgotten in the South Carolina I grew up in.

And that wasn't the only thing we learned in a purely subjective way. There was Woodrow Wilson, for instance. We thought the whole nation idolized him, as our folks did. We were proud he was a Southerner, never dreaming his parents were late-comers from Scotland and England. The part of our history books about him and the World War was always the very last, and in those benighted days lesson planning hadn't been invented. Our teachers usually had gotten so wrapped up in the War Between The States and Reconstruction they devoted a disproportionate amount of time to that era, leaving little or none for more recent history.

It was just as well. Some of them were war widows or gold star mothers, and they got all choked up when they tried to talk about the Germans, and nerve gas, and barbed wire. Anyway, we could remember a little bit about that war. Our fathers, and our uncles and big brothers had been in it. Armistice Day had been our first school holiday. And at Christmas, 1917, we had all gotten little doughboy outfits or Red Cross nurse uniforms, depending on our sex.

Because of Woodrow Wilson, we knew there would never be another war, and we felt a little cheated. I wanted so much to be a brave young war bride, like my two pretty aunts had been, or "a Red Cross nurse, mid the war's great curse, the Rose of No Man's Land."

I knew one of those, too. She actually was very pretty, and after she got home, she used to take me with her when she went riding with her young doctor in his new automobile. I guess I was a sort of chaprone, all unaware, thinking only of how nice they were to give me a ride.

And then there was the League of Nations. Every year they had contests and gave prizes for essays on subjects connected with it. It

sent schools oodles of material. I did my first research, if you could call it that, in the small room that housed the pitiful little collection of books our school called a library, trying to win one of those prizes, or getting all hot up about South Carolina's constitutional right to secede. I did it in what they call "released time" now, and I certainly felt released. It was so much more fun than Latin or algebra.

But we didn't really learn anything about the League, why it didn't succeed, just as we didn't learn anything about the Revolution, except where the battles were fought and how South Carolina was responsible for most of the victories, or The War of 1812, or "our war," or any other war. All we learned about the Mexican War was that it was almost "South Carolina's war," and about the iron palmetto tree on the State House grounds that honored the Palmetto Regiment.

We learned about the Tarriff of Abominations and the Nullifiers, but not about Mr. Poinsett and Mr. Petigru and the Union Party. We learned about Jeffersonian democracy, but precious little about Federalism, and John Marshall, or Alexander Hamilton.

Of course, there are trends in history. Of course, events do have meaning and should be interpreted, but I'm not sorry I became a part of history before they began teaching it that way. It was so much more fun learning only one side, and being bigoted.

A Passage

Light, mute, takes fire. Stones of the garden burn.
 Peonies shine, and the moonlight advances
 On pebbles, on the brown wall, on the vines,
 On her hand hesitant as the moonlight,
 On the board windows, on the sill of wood.
 Time takes innately fire as it shines on
 The hand taking the latch and the door opening,
 The saddles gleaming monstrous, the dust stirred,
 A puff of white that was a cobweb, shining.
 She walks into a perfect well of moonlight.
 The clouds flow dark; the empty garden darkens.
 The padlock taps its rust upon the door.

PAUL RAMSEY

Cape Fear: The Weather-Witch

When the wind moves heavy on the water line
And the dark morning shows breakers on the shore,
I look out the sand-splotched pane; my eyes water
With waiting. I turn back to the empty room;
Then, into my head rush sounds like blowing sand,
Whispers of other daybreakers, less dark, less deep.

When the clouds whip low, wave-troughs are cut in deep;
When no birds will sit on the telephone line
And the paint on the house is worn down by sand,
Then, past drifting all night somewhere close offshore,
Then, through the window she blows into the room;
Dim, dank, yet her eyes burn like sunset water.

The firewood sizzles from too long in water
As I sit, facing her form from the pitch-deep,
And my eyes now drift around the empty room;
But out of the squall come whispers, and a line
Of other shapes comes winding up from the shore,
Through the northeaster, into the room like sand.

Against the window panes sizzles the blown sand
As I touch the dark woman from the water;
Around us crowd the other shapes from the shore.
Whispers of sunlit mornings move me less deep,
For the two of us now, we have cut the line
To drift away, inside the storm, in the room.

I clutch the dim figure in an empty room
And old wants whirl in my skull like sterile sand
When the wind rips hollow on the barren shore;
I gaze past her eyes to the foaming water,
Through the northeaster, down the shore to the deep
Bellying sea, unsevered cord of her line.

Into the storm I am hauled by a dark line,
 Pulled away from the whispering shapes in the room,
 To follow her dim, dank sprite into blank-deep,
 Leaving behind whipping wind and sizzling sand,
 Clutching her body in dance under water,
 Drifting with her moaning song farther from shore.

It is deep. Mornings are dark under water.
 Now my other thoughts must line the barren shore
 And whisper with the sand through my empty room.

W. D. STALLINGS

*Why He Abandoned Science In
 Order To Become A Poet*

The clear cold justice of his mind drew down
 her hair as red-brown as a leghorn's wing
 and let it fall around her throat,
 her lovely shoulders and their strength
 buttressing the column of her neck,
 or else in both his hands drew down
 the slender ribbons on her shoulders,
 gently, until her gown slid off her breasts
 and to her waist and clung there to her hips,
 and then he pressed his lips against her lips
 and deeper, sweeter than the mind can know
 (without the body's power) body told
 him mind needs body, even to be the mind.

PAUL BAKER NEWMAN

The Convert

JOSEPH H. HARRIS

In the hot July night Tessie Caldwell sat rocking on her porch, listening to the distant sounds of a trombone and xylophone echo through the surrounding pines. Her rocker creaked on the rough boards of the porch in a lazy rhythm unconsciously timed to the music. For four or five nights now she had been listening to it, and at times it sounded almost as pretty as the music she heard when J. D. took her to the talking pictures over in Tuscaloosa.

When it stopped she could hear a man's voice, high-pitched and loud, but she couldn't understand his words. She knew he was talking about people who lived in sin, and how they were going to be thrown into everlasting hell if they didn't change their ways. She had been to a tent meeting once when she was a little girl and her mother had told her what the preacher was saying. But that had been a long time ago, and since her mother had died she hadn't even been to church. Papa didn't want her to go for one thing, and she never thought much about it. He said it was her place to fix a good dinner for Sunday noon, and she reckoned it was, seeing as she was now the woman of the house.

Tessie lifted her shapely, tanned legs one at a time into the rocker and scratched the new mosquito bites. Lifting the front of her thin gingham dress, she blotted the sweat beneath her chin and the small stream that trickled between her breasts. She leaned forward and walked the rocker nearer the edge of the porch, trying to catch a breeze. But there was no breeze stirring; the tall pines were as still as death in the shadowy moonlight. She heard the whining of Tricksey, her father's shaggy bitch, under the porch. Soon the yard would be full of dogs, and she would have to chase them off so he could sleep.

The trombone and xylophone had started again and she could hear the singing, the women's voices predominating. A faint longing to be there with the people stirred in her. At least it would be better than sitting here wondering if J. D. would come by. She looked down the long sandy lane that led to the main road, and she knew he wouldn't come now. He never came this late.

Somewhere in the fields below a mocking-bird set up competition with the revivalists. Tessie leaned back in the rocker and lifted the

strands of her abundant black hair with one hand while she fanned with the other.

When the music ended she got up and went into her room. She clicked on the twenty-five watt bulb that hung from the ceiling like a twisted rope. Its dim light left the room in shadows. The once florid wallpaper was yellowed and streaked now with the leakings of many rains. On the wall facing her bed was a single picture, a picture she remembered from her earliest childhood. It was a portrait of Christ in a gaudy nimbus, with an oversized valentine heart superimposed on His breast, on which were written the crimson words: *Jesus Saves*. The old, black bureau with its large mirror, smoked and desilvered, stood in the corner. On its top, like a lone sentinel, stood a make-your-own-photo of J. D. Lassiter. Next to the photograph was a stack of *True Confessions* and movie magazines almost two feet high. Except for a massive bed with solid S-shaped head and foot piece to match, the bureau and a rickety cane-bottom chair, there was no other furniture in the room. These pieces had been her mother's pride and joy, a wedding gift from her parents.

Tessie pulled down the shade and took off her clothes. On hot summer nights she always slept naked. From the foot of the bed she took a large, purple taffeta pillow with yellow fringe which framed the gold-braided words: TO MY SWEETHEART, and in a crescent beneath, MEMORIES OF CAMP TUCKER. After placing the pillow beneath her breasts, she lay down on the rumpled bed and began to read the newest *True Confession*. Soon she was absorbed in a story about a country girl who became a typist in a big Chicago manufacturing firm, and how she rose to that exalted position through a series of necessary love affairs. When Tessie came to the part about the poor girl's seduction by her boss, she cried right along with the crying scenes of the unfortunate girl. The story had a happy ending though, for the poor girl married an evangelist and left the big city.

Just before Tessie finished the story, the dog pack arrived and started howling. She got up and put on the threadbare chenille robe J. D. had given her for her seventeenth birthday. She took a stick she kept in the corner and ran out into the yard. When the dogs saw her they began to slink away in a chorus of snarls and whimpers, while Tricksey moaned their departure. Tessie picked up a few rocks and hastened their retreat.

This nightly ordeal never failed to irritate her, especially when she was in the middle of a good story. With a sharp word to the cowering Tricksey, she tightened the sash of her robe and went back to her room to find out how many children the poor girl and the evangelist had.

A few nights later Tessie went to the tent meeting dressed in her best print dress and cramping high heels. The place was buzzing with sun-burned women and restless children. Farmers stood around in groups just outside the tent, tieless but dressed in their Sunday best, waiting for the service to begin. It was much like a Saturday market at Culver City, except that now there was a noticeable lack of smoking, tobacco-chewing and snuff dipping. The women talked and fanned and spanked an occasional childish rump that gamboled in the sawdust aisle.

Tessie took a seat near the back where the sides of the tent were rolled up. Without noticing she sat down close to an old woman who had been her Sunday School teacher many years before. It was too late now; the woman had recognized her and was sliding her bony body over the rough bench toward Tessie. A large application of powder over the sunburned wrinkles of the old woman's face gave her a kind of death pallor. She looked at Tessie sternly.

"Hello, Tessie." Her fan fluttered against her breast in short, rapid strokes unlike the broad frontal sweeps most of the women used.

Tessie smiled at her. "Hello, Mrs. Logan."

"We been missin' you at the Sunday meetin's."

Tessie twisted her handkerchief nervously and looked down at her hands. "I've been meaning to come, Mrs. Logan, but Papa says I gotta do my housework first."

"'Course, it ain't no business of mine, Tessie," Mrs. Logan said, continuing the flutter of her fan, "but it seems to me your Pa could do with some of the Lord's word, too. Brother Stark was sayin' just f'other night the judgment was comin' for them as thought the gospel was just for women."

"I don't reckon you'd ever git Papa to Church, Mrs. Logan," Tessie said shyly. "He's dead set against goin'."

"Lester was the same way twenty year ago, before he was saved. But me and Brother Stark worked day and night for his soul, and he ain't missed a meetin' since the Lord knows when." Mrs. Logan swelled

a little at the state of her own house and continued. "It's too bad your Ma died when she did. Everybody in Grovedale knowed Tessie Caldwell was a woman of God. She could've been the instrument of savin' grace for your Pa, and it's hard to understand how the Lord could take her away. But the ways of the Lord are mysterious, and ain't for us to question, Tessie."

"No, ma'm."

"Like I was tellin' Lester t'other day—"

Mrs. Logan was interrupted by the appearance of Brother Stark and his retinue, the trombone and xylophone players. The talking quieted and everyone turned to look at the big man with the Bible. The trombonist was a youth, large and blond, who carried himself with the assurance befitting a Gabriel. He was followed by the xylophonist, a bespectacled man of middle life who lacked the muscular radiance of his colleagues. On the platform Brother Stark waited while the xylophone player set up his instrument and the red-faced farmers trooped in and took their seats. Some were left standing in the back.

Brother Stark smiled broadly, showing his large, yellow teeth, and announced: "It does my heart good to look out and see every seat filled tonight. You folks standing in the back — come tomorrow night and bring somebody with you, and I promise we'll have a seat for you." He turned toward the xylophone player. "Are you ready, Brother Turner?" His voice was eager and loud.

The xylophone player nodded, and Brother Stark faced the congregation. "Turn to page 210, folks, page 210 — *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* — one of the great old hymns . . . indeed, what a friend He is to us . . . We'll just follow along while Brother Turner and Brother Wilkes play the first chorus and we'll all join in on the second. And I want to see you lift the roof right off this old tent, folks." He made a sweeping gesture with his right hand.

When the music started Tessie stood up along with the rest and was immediately given one side of the hymnal to hold by Mrs. Logan, who plunged into the hymn with ear-splitting volume. She seemed determined to storm the gates of heaven with her voice, and eyed Tessie disapprovingly between stanzas for musical meekness.

After three or four hymns in which Brother Stark pleaded for greater and greater volume, they were seated again. Then, after a long water-

drinking preliminary, his Bible draped over his left wrist like a waiter's napkin, Brother Stark burst forth:

"Folks, the Lord has moved me to preach to you about the terrible sin of lust tonight. I know and He knows there is those of you in the grip of this devil, and He asked me to bring the word of deliverance to you."

Brother Stark's mild beginning gave no evidence of the fervid frontal attack he was to make on carnal sin. He paused to summon all his energies for words great enough to express his loathing. His face flushed, his large eyes rolled, and his clenched fist punctuated the fury of his voice. "Lust!" he shouted and slapped the flapping Bible in his left hand, "lust is the boll weevil of the soul!"

His words had immediate effects and there was a choral response of "amens."

"The surest way to everlasting hell is through the gates of your own body," he continued, "and the man or woman that lusts after the flesh has already got the devil in them. And there ain't but one way to cast out the devil" — he paused and his shouting voice was lowered to a relative solemnity — "through the saving blood of the Lord Jesus."

Brother Stark stopped a moment and took a drink of water. He wiped his mouth and face with his handkerchief.

"A beautiful girl livin' in sin came to me once—" He spoke the words with a downcast look.

And from there on he related, in shouts and groans, the downfall of the beautiful girl from Virginia. In a soul-shaking tremolo he lamented the loss of her virginity and promised hell-fire to all the unchaste present. He shook his fist in the face of youth and painted vivid scenes of eternal damnation for the practitioners of petting. He relegated sex to the primeval slime and, to illustrate his theme, he threw himself on his knees. Like a corpulent Laocoon, he writhed and struggled against imaginary serpents. Sweat poured from the efforts of his simulated struggle, and his voice grew hoarse shouting at the devil.

Through it all Tessie trembled. Images of hell loomed like bad dreams in her imagination and she felt as if she wanted to run. Her body was feverish with shame. She could feel J. D.'s hands on her, taking their pleasures, and now they felt like Brother Stark's serpents encircling her. She wanted to cry out, but she was afraid.

Distantly, as if in a dream, she could hear Brother Stark calling for testimonials while the trombone and the xylophone pleaded plaintively. Her terror rose when she saw a woman jump up, weeping and screaming, to be led by two other women to the mourner's bench. She watched Brother Stark put his arm around the woman when they kneeled to pray. Then, one at a time she saw them rise and led forth with an escort of the saved to the bench: an old farmer, long overdue, dragged forth by his elated family; a woman followed by a crying child; two young girls, their hands clasped tightly, tearfully consoling one another. One after another the penitents were pulled forth and brought back shouting hosannas. A strange frenzy permeated the place and everyone was moved to some expression of it. They continued to flock to the bench while Brother Stark shouted: "Are you saved! Are you saved! Don't turn your back on Jesus! He's holding out his hands to sinners!"

Before she realized it, Tessie found herself on her feet. The impulse to flee had moved her to stand unconsciously, and she was terrified when she realized what she had done. When she started to sit down she felt a damp hand holding her up. At the same moment she heard Mrs. Logan shout, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! She's felt the power of the word! She's felt the power . . ." And Tessie felt herself being held up by the old woman and a recently-saved younger woman who rushed to her duty as escort. Together they piloted Tessie down the aisle, gleefully certain that her tearful protestations were but manifestations of the spirit. Tessie had a sense of floating in unreality, as though she were some legless disembodiment fleeing through an ugly dream. The harsh hosannas of Mrs. Logan were her only anchor to the world about her. Her ears throbbed with pain at the shouts.

Suddenly she felt needle-like prickings in her knees, and she was aware she was kneeling. When Brother Stark's arms went around her she instinctively drew back, but he held her fast while his panting prayer filled her ears. On her other side, Mrs. Logan continued her antiphonal response to Brother Stark's prayer. Dimly, in the background, she could hear the trombone and xylophone and the voices of the congregation.

When she was finally lifted from her knees again, she remembered being lifted from her bed as a child, sick and delirious, and rocked through the night. Now, strangely, she thought she was that little girl

again, and she couldn't understand who all these people were looking at her. What were they trying to say to her?

In her seat again Tessie gradually began to regain her senses. When she saw that Mrs. Logan had left her to administer to another convert, a sense of relief came that left her numb and uncaring. Everything seemed distant and far-off now, as if nothing could hurt her any more.

Half an hour later, Tessie joined the great exodus in the sawdust aisle. When she was outside the tent, she felt someone catch her arm and pull at her rather brusquely. "Don't act like you didn't see me, Tessie."

She turned and saw it was J. D. He was leaning against one of the tent ropes smoking a cigarette. His face was dark brown and faintly freckled. He wore blue denims and a soiled white shirt, open at the throat. His sandy hair was plastered down and glistened with excess oil.

Tessie looked at him without speaking and walked on slowly. J. D. stepped beside her and took her arm. He was a head taller than she was, but because of his extreme boniness looked much taller. Tessie gently withdrew her arm from his grip.

"What's ailing you, Tessie?" His voice was petulant.

Tessie didn't answer.

"I went by the house and your Papa said he reckoned you was here." He dropped the cigarette butt and ground it into the soft earth. He grinned and took her arm again. "You ain't gittin' religion, are you, Tessie?"

She withdrew her arm again. "Don't, J. D."

Never having had such a reaction from Tessie, J. D. was both puzzled and angered. He reasserted himself by taking her arm again, this time more firmly. The crowd was thinning now as they walked along the edge of a dirt road that cut across an old creek bed. They passed a bunch of men squatting beside the road passing around the whiskey bottle. They ogled Tessie but made no comment out of deference to J. D., since they considered him one of their own. He acknowledged their greetings with a fraternal gesture of his hand and a broad grin.

When they were out of sight of the men, Tessie withdrew her arm again. This put J. D. into a rage.

"Goddamit, Tessie, what's ailin' you? You sick or somethin'?" He walked on beside her, glaring at her because she wouldn't answer him. On either side of them the corn stood high in the fields, ripe and singing in the night wind. J. D. looked at her threateningly. "If'n you been seein' that Roy Tatum, I'll wallop the wax outa you, Tessie. And I ain't sayin' what I'll do to him. You been seein' him?"

Tessie was silent.

He stopped her and whirled her around to face him. His hands bruised her arms with their fierceness. "Goddamit, you answer me, Tessie! You been seein' that low-down thief!"

"Don't, J. D.! Don't!" she cried. "You're hurtin' me!"

"You ain't answered me!" He tightened his grip mercilessly.

Tessie cried out with the pain and tried to free herself, but he held her fast.

"Nol J. D., no . . . I ain't seen him."

"Don't tell me no lie!"

"Oh, I swear it, J. D. I swear it—"

He relaxed his grip but didn't let her go. She sagged in his hands as he pulled her to him to support her. She was crying now just like the first time he had loved her, and he couldn't stand seeing her cry. He shook her as gently as he knew how, and in his eyes there was bewilderment. "Then how come you treat me like I got the mange! Tell me, Tessie girl," his voice found a new softness, "what's been done to you? Tell me what's wrong, Tessie."

Her tears came quickly now as she dropped her head on his chest. "I can't see you no more, J. D. I can't see you no more," she sobbed.

"What you sayin', Tessie! What you talkin' about!" He jerked her roughly until she lifted her tear-streaked face. His voice was filled with the old mixture of bewilderment and anger. "You actin' just like a lunatic, Tessie. Goddamit, now you stop talkin' out'n your head!" He put his pliers-like grip on again to let her know he meant business this time.

"We been livin' in sin, J. D.," she cried, trying to twist herself from his hold.

He stood there trying to make sense of her words. Gradually, to his opaque mind, came the light of realization. For a long time he held

her as if she were a helpless child, unwilling to believe she meant what she said. Then, like a rolling snowball, laughter gathered in his depths and burst forth demonically into the night. He let her go and continued to laugh, repeating over and over, "You got Jesus fever, Tessie, you got—"

Seeing her opportunity, Tessie slipped off her high-heeled shoes and broke into a run. She was already quite a few yards in the lead when J. D. roused himself for the chase. The loose sand of the road slowed her, but she was determined to run all the way to her house and lock herself away from him so he couldn't make her sin. She didn't want to sin ever any more, and as she ran she sent a gasping prayer to God to protect her. Her legs were strong and swift and she felt they would last indefinitely, but her heart seemed ready to burst from her breast with every stride. She jumped a small ditch and started across a meadow to reach the house sooner.

Behind her she could hear J. D. shouting threats and curses as if they were lassoes to catch her. He was gaining on her and soon she felt something strike at her leg just above the ankle. In a moment of terror, she thought she had been bitten by a snake. Instinctively she slowed down, and at the same moment felt a lashing about her ankles that sent her falling headlong on the stubby grass. She lay there with her face buried in the prickly grass and her throat raw with her gasping breath.

Then she felt J. D.'s hands very carefully turning her over. She looked up at him as he stood above her, heaving and sweating. Very slowly, as if it required superhuman effort, he began to thread his belt through the straps of his pants. He looked down at her, unsmiling, unpitying. His chest expanded in its hunger for air, and he wiped his face with a blue polka-dot handkerchief and fastened his belt. He stood for a long time looking at her, gathering his breath, and exulting in the strange power of his position. His face broke into a broad grin. "We got to git rid of that fever, Tessie girl."

Tessie watched him, unmoving. Now she knew there was no escape, no more running. Silently and fervidly she prayed that she be forgiven just one more sin.

When she awoke J. D. was gone and she was still in the meadow. She watched the stars for a long time, wondering if when she died

she would go up there somewhere amidst their vastness. She was vaguely aware of a loss of time. Why was she here in the meadow looking at the stars?

Slowly, in patches, her dream returned. She had dreamed she was in her room and it was a river of blood flowing from the valentine heart of Christ on the wall, and she was swimming frantically, trying to escape. Then she remembered that the wounds of Christ suddenly and strangely transformed themselves, and she saw a girl, horribly disfigured, lying on an endless highway. In her memory she recognized the girl as one she had read about in a story once — a girl who had been in an automobile accident and had written the story of her life in *True Confession*. She remembered that the girl's fiancé had left her after she was disfigured.

In a way she couldn't explain to herself she was actually happy about the dream; she was filled with a sense of certainty she had never known before. It was as if she had been told what to do by some voice not of the earth.

Tessie raised herself to a sitting position and remained there until her dizziness was gone. She sat for a long time thinking about the disfigured girl. Then she got to her feet. The meadow stretched out before her like a sea of silver grass in the moonlight. She walked on, enchanted by its beauty and full of the voice within her.

At the edge of the meadow she stopped. She stood beside a shallow pit, filled with jagged rocks, and completely surrounded by a barbed-wire fence to keep cattle out. It was called The Devil's Pit. As a child she had played there many times, throwing crabapples in it just to watch them bounce on the rocks.

As if driven by some dark compulsion, Tessie crawled through two strands of the barbed-wire, tearing a wide gash in the back of her dress. She stood trembling for a moment on a large rock, and then, as if she were not doing it herself, she threw herself on the sharp rocks a few feet below. The tearing of her flesh made her weak and sick, but she did not cry out. With an unguessed strength she dragged herself across the rocks while they ripped her face and body like upturned knives.

"Oh, Jesus God, oh, Jesus God," she moaned. "Make me sin no more! Make me sin no more! . . ."

For more than a month Tessie saw nobody. And considering her scars, she took that as being reasonable. She stayed in her room most of the time reading her mother's Bible and the stories of the remade lives in *True Confession*. She continued to prepare meals for her Papa and clean the house, but he had very little to say to her now and seldom looked directly at her. Tessie didn't care much. She didn't want anybody; she liked being alone to listen to the voice. At first when she had the bandages on, lying there day after day, she had rather wished somebody would come to see her, even J. D. But he never came. During the last week though he had started creeping back. Every afternoon Tessie watched from her window until she saw him coming up the lane, and she would run out the back way and hide in the apple orchard.

Then J. D. began to come every day. Sometimes he would sit talking with her father for hours, but she would never let him see her. Jim Caldwell told her J. D. was waiting for her to get over feeling shame for her scars, that they wouldn't make no difference to him.

Every night Tessie talked to the voice about it, asking what to do about her and J. D. Then one day the voice she had heard in the meadow told her what to do.

All that afternoon she lay on her bed and watched through the window. She saw the sun sink behind the treetops. When she had just about made up her mind that he wasn't coming, she saw his bony frame turn into the lane.

Quickly she got up and put on her shoes. From under her pillow she took her father's pistol she had been hiding there all day. She held it behind her and walked slowly out of the house, as if she were going for an afternoon stroll. As she went to meet J. D., she stopped about midway down the lane beneath an old chinaberry tree. She waited for him to come the rest of the way.

Tessie saw his look of surprise as he stopped a few yards away. She knew he was taking his time to get used to the scars. She waited, her feet planted firmly apart, her hand behind her back. She watched him come closer, still uncertain what to do or say. Soon the odor of his hair oil was sharp in her nostrils. She noticed he was wearing a new pair of denims and was holding a rolled-up magazine.

He took a step forward and held out the magazine, letting it uncurl. "Hlo, Tessie," he said. "I brung you a new magazine."

She stared at him, but said nothing.

When she didn't take the magazine, J. D. moved nearer and shook it temptingly before her. He stood for a long time holding it out to her, smiling sheepishly as if trying to tell her everything was just like it used to be. "It's for you, Tessie. Don't you want—"

Almost as she brought the gun in front of her, Tessie fired. In spite of her determination her hand was shaking and the first shot was poorly aimed. It went through the magazine and pierced his hand. The magazine fell to the ground, the right cheek of the gaudy covergirl seared by the bullet. J. D. turned white and grabbed his bleeding hand. The next shot struck his shoulder and he fell to his knees, dazed and crying. With his good hand he grabbed feebly at her legs, missing them only by inches. "Goddamit, Tessie—don't. Tessie girl—for God's sake, don't."

Tessie fired the third bullet through his neck and into his chest. She watched him fall forward at her feet, his hand tearing at the top of her shoe. She waited until his clutching stopped, and she didn't fire again.

From a distance she heard her name shouted. She turned and saw her Papa running down the lane, awkwardly trying to fasten his suspenders. His old mouth was open in abject terror and his tousled gray hair hung in strands over his eyes. She watched him stop a few yards away, and she wondered why he kept staring at the smoking revolver in her hand.

Tessie looked at him standing there like a very old child. Her voice was half pleading when she spoke.

"I had to do it, Papa . . . I had to do it . . ."

Ode To Vivien Leigh

Is that what men are really like, Mrs. Tweadwell?
Mrs. Tweadwell,
Mrs. Tweadwell lisping in the mirror,
Who saw perhaps the ghost of Belle Reve?

You always did have fabulous hiccups
And it did not matter about *Elephant Walk*
Or your blood ribbons trailing in *Titus Andronicus*
Or your accent in Shakespeare which came from Roedean.
No cat ever woke more sweetly on a pillow.
You were not an ad for a shoe sole.

Oh, are you tearing down the portieres of heaven
And will you visit us in green again,
Complete with Mammy
To circumvent the wiles of Old Kay Porter
 making you be Lady Waterloo,
 that queendom she must claim alone?
And will you, who started in Darjeeling
Fool us all?
Are you singing those notes now from Parvae Stellae
In your best South Kensington?

We are looking at you with both hands clenched upon the bars
And heeding you;
And we are trying not, not to hang back with the apes.

DAPHNE ATHAS

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