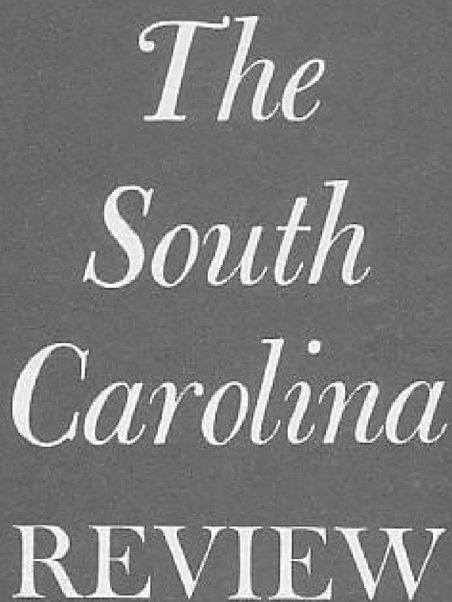

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The editors solicit literary manuscripts of all kinds: essay, fiction, poetry, criticism, opinion, social comment, scholarship, and reviews. South Carolinians, native and adopted, are especially encouraged to contribute.

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two years at kitty hawk

1968

on sands granulated
from dunes where once wrights flew
and frost walked and wrote,
we made our own discoveries:

yours — the distance
of my distraction

mine — the tears that stung
more than salt spray

1969

this year we'll retrace
as one the separate
steps imbedded in the sand
of uncovered memory.
we shall view the same barren
beauty with new vision
and share our daughter's
delight at the sight
of the sea

eugene robert platt

Editorial Note

Frustration seems to be an occupational hazard of desire. Our initial success in getting what we wanted makes the subsequent lack of it all the more irritating. When we inaugurated *The South Carolina Review*, we were fortunate in securing several essays on general cultural and intellectual topics, such as history, politics, *and* literature. We smiled complacently as the spectrum of our subject matter appeared to expand. We looked forward to a future in which we should feature articles on architecture, archeology, music, and other topics and the parts these cultural activities played in the South in general and in South Carolina in particular.

But, alas, many of the essays promised to us have not materialized, and several others submitted to us have not been suitable. As much as we want to continue to foster imaginative literature, we also want the *Review* to be a forum for airing public issues.

We therefore urgently appeal to our readers for essays on cultural topics relevant to the state and the region. The rewards of authorship, we hasten to add, are not in cash – for we have none to give – but in immortality. If you are within sound of our voice and have some special field of interest pertinent to our desires, or if you know of someone else who does, we ask you to tell us. Or, better still, we invite you to send along your contribution (accompanied by the proper return postage) and stake your claim to immortality.

F. D. and A. R.

Metamorphosis

I crawled today into
a flower: pulled the petals
after me, closed out the world
and lay serenely sweating
in perfume, in awe of nothing
but the stamen dark against trans-
lucent walls. Locked from sun
I saw day's glow disin-
tegrate; pistil disappeared,
the odor waned; I felt myself
becoming powder fine
as pollen. Complete
with blossom burned into
a parchment hull I passed
to the incessant dirges
of the wind, then woke to find
I was reborn not rock not tree
not cloud but my old self im-
prisoned in your arms.

BENNIE LEE SINCLAIR

Interview with Richard Wilbur

EDITED by WILLARD PATE[1]

Panel: Mr. Wilbur, I think we want to start with a general question pertaining to the tradition of American poetry: What do you feel is peculiarly American about American poetry? What makes it American?

Wilbur: I don't know whether I can distinguish between poetry and prose fiction in this respect. But I do think that America is different from England. That's the main distinction to be made. America is different from England in not having a long and coherent, relatively unmixed tradition. And I'm not speaking of literary tradition merely. I'm speaking of the culture as a whole. So that I think the American poet – the American artist generally – is likely to feel out on his own and very close to the wilds, if you compare him to his English or European counterpart. Wright Morris wrote a book about the American novel called *The Territory Ahead* – that's Huck Finn setting out for the territory ahead. There's always some impulse in the American writer to set out for the frontier in some sense or the other – to head for the savage, the original, the uncivilized, to stand loose from whatever cultural coherences people may try to thrust upon him. William Carlos Williams' sensibility is, it seems to me, impossible to imagine in England. I'm thinking, of course, of that poem of his that begins – that savage poem of his that begins "The pure products of America / go crazy" and ends "No one / to witness / and adjust, no one to drive the car" ("To Elsie"). That's a big part of the way America feels: "No one / to witness / and adjust, no one to drive the car."

You can pretend it's not true; you can pretend that what Brooks Adams called "the incoherence of American democracy" is not a fact. You can write for a few cultured friends down the block in Cambridge – there have been American poets who did this – but mostly I think the American writer, both with regret and with attraction, acknowledges

[1]Richard Wilbur, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for Poetry, visited the Furman University campus on February 9-10, 1970. During his visit, he appeared with a panel of students who questioned him about American poetry. These pages are a record of that session. Ralph M. (Buddy) Berry, Jr., a senior English major, served as moderator. The other panelists were Patricia B. Conway, Mary Beth Hare, James Kent, and Ulrich Sommer. Richard Wilbur teaches at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, and is one of the readers of manuscripts for books in the Wesleyan Poetry Series. His most recent collection is *Digging for China*.

the fact of a great diversity of culture, of considerable anarchy in this country, and the presence — if not in the sense of woods, in other senses — of the wilderness still amongst us.

Panel: Well, then, you lay a great deal of emphasis on the qualities of audience, the type of audience the poet has to play for. In other words, the diversity in American culture makes a difference in the reception a poet gets.

Wilbur: I suppose I don't think of a poet as deliberately addressing an audience, in the sense of giving a performance. It's rather more oblique than that. And yet you do represent other people to yourself in the process of writing. You are indirectly talking to your fellow citizens, and maybe to a few other people if you are lucky. Mostly I think what you do is talk to yourself in the presence of the language. And the American language is, if you are using it in a lively way, a pretty good reflection of the state of American life. If you use the existing live American language faithfully, you are going to have to cope with the facts of our culture.

Panel: Where do you think modern poetry in America is today, especially in terms of the tradition of American poetry?

Wilbur: I just taught a course in American poetry that started with Anne Bradstreet and collapsed in the middle of T. S. Eliot. I didn't get down to the present moment. So circumstances have not forced me to be lucid about the immediate situation. It does seem to me an extremely chaotic one. As always, the best talents are quite individual, and yet not freakishly so. And they are sitting off by themselves in some town or other, writing their poems and hoping to be read by each other.

You could distinguish a school of writers and call them professional, and there would be some truth in that. People like W. D. Snodgrass, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, the late Sylvia Plath, and others could legitimately be grouped as poets who have made a great deal out of frank autobiography. Mostly, I think these people are most justifiable, most useful to us as poets, when they are treating themselves as representative sufferers in the modern age. I don't care much for confessional poetry when it is just the sort of whining that you get at a bar from drunks. You can distinguish that tendency, and I don't know whether it is playing itself out or not. I expect that it may.

John Berryman is way off by himself carrying the rhetorical tradition in American poetry to a wonderful extreme, writing in about three dialects at once in such a way as, freakishly and wonderfully and humorously, to make an impression of a whole personality, or let's say a jarring personality which is fully articulate in all its person.

You know, Marianne Moore is still with us, though I think probably she's done the major part of her work. And a wonderful poet, Elizabeth Bishop, who started somewhat as her disciple, is still with us also. They are great descriptive and more or less overtly moralistic poets.

There *is* a group of people who lately lost one of their leaders, Charles Olson, who have been classified as the Black Mountain School; and I think that they are probably the best poets in America who *consider* themselves as constituting a school. Most American poets are ashamed to think of themselves as belonging to a gang. But these poets do – that is, they refer to each other with maximum seriousness and respect. They feel that the way they go about it is the way it should be done. I've never completely understood their aesthetics, but I think some of the results, especially in the best work of Denise Levertov, can be handsome.

There is a school – and I suppose it *is* a school – of writers called the New York School. A couple of them are very amusing, but I don't think that they are of sufficient consequence to deserve such a magnificent title as the New York School. They are a group of people who hang around the art galleries and write for art magazines. In general they feel that the live modern tradition comes down from Tristan Tzara and Lautréaumant. You know, it's surrealism and dada, and if you're not with that, you are not with the modern at all. The late Frank O'Hara was a member of this school, and he wrote one of the funniest lines that has ever been written. It won't sound funny out of context, but I'm going to say it anyway – the line goes: "Ah, Jane, is there no more frontier?" And then there is John Ashbery who isn't really very funny, but who writes in the manner of this school, attempting, I think, to accomplish something of the nature of abstract painting in poetry. And then there is Kenneth Koch, who is funny as the devil. The limitation of this school is the limitation which the dada tradition has – the inclination to silliness. And in the poetry of this school generally you find a hidden sentimentalism – they all think childhood was the best of times; there's no sadder sound in nature than the sound of a running-down nursery music box.

I haven't covered everything. I left out all those people with the guitars in their hands. But, you know, one thing about America – to refer again to Brooks Adams – Brooks Adams pointed out, in a lecture called *The Incoherence of American Democracy,* back in 1916 that if George Washington had had his way, there would have been a canal from the Potomac to the Ohio, and the produce of the west would have come into Washington, D. C., and Washington would have been a great commercial as well as governmental center, and we might have had a city like Paris. As it is, we don't have any one city that is the central city of America to which you go if you are a young man with talent in one of the arts. And that really does affect our art – that we're not in great physical proximity, we poets of America. The fact that you don't see over a period of ten years someone who lives on the west coast is going to have something to do with his power to influence you.

Panel: What do you think of the effect on poetry – anyone's poetry – of activism, political or otherwise?

Wilbur: Well, I should think that anybody's free to write about whatever is his natural subject; and it is possible to drop out of the public scene and write about nature, God, and love, and that's enough – isn't it? – for some people. But I think I should be disappointed in any very productive poet of the modern period who didn't react in some measure to some of the things that are happening about us and to us, some of the things that are being done by us. When you pick up books of poems about the Vietnam war or about the assassination of President Kennedy, that sort of thing, it's always asthetically disappointing; most of the poems are bad. What you admire is the fervor of the poems, the genuineness of their feelings; you are sorry that they are not more substantial as persuasions or as tributes. The poster poem is a special kind of art which only a few people in any culture have practiced with any distinction. I suspect Mayakovsky was a great poster poet. Mostly when we turn to poetry – it seems to me – we don't ask of it that it say "Vote Socialist" or "Get out of Vietnam" or "Kill the Cops" or anything like that. We want poetry to be as nearly as possible a miraculous precipitation of somebody's whole soul, as Coleridge said. We want it to be honest in the sense that it spills the beans totally, that it says whatever it says with all the reservations, all the qualifications which the speaker must feel. My idea of a fine political poem is William

Butler Yeats' "Easter 1916." The interesting thing about that poem is that Yeats moves you tremendously about the foolhardy, heroic men who fought at the post office in Dublin; and he persuades you that what they did has transformed the casual comedy of Dublin life into a terrible beauty, into something tragic. He says, "MacDonagh, and MacBride / And Connolly, and Pearse," and you are moved about them. At the same time, he makes it pretty clear that political fanaticism costs the heart something, that about the time he dies in the post office, or is executed for what he did there, a man has lost some portion of his personality, some of the richness of his nature, to a political fever. He says also, "For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said." In the middle of a poem celebrating Irish martyrs he says, "Bear it in mind that what they did was foolish, that it was against the general's orders, that England may keep faith, that it may have been all in vain, and that it may be that any continuation of their kind of spirit would be destructive." It is an extraordinary balancing act — Yeats's poem — and if you went around with a brush and pasted it on the hoardings of a city, it wouldn't move people to one kind of an action or another; it would move them to contemplation. And perhaps it would move them to thank God that somebody had been totally honest.

Panel: What about somebody like Auden? He is a bit more polemic, more political, wouldn't you say?

Wilbur: In his earlier poems, yes. I think that Auden and Day-Lewis and perhaps here and there Spender in the thirties assigned themselves the task of preparing what they regarded as a stuffy, played-out society for necessary social changes. They were doing a rather different kind of thing from what Yeats was doing in writing a poem about a violent situation which had just occurred. They were looking toward the future — until it came, of course, time to write about the Spanish Civil War. So much of their work — I think of Day-Lewis' wonderful, long poem "From Feathers To Iron," in which he tries to get us to feel about factories as if they were women's bodies producing children, tries to humanize the factory — is an effort to try to revolutionize the British sensibility in the direction of a new social economy. I'm not sure how much of that poetry now survives, is really still alive. "From Feathers To Iron" probably is, because it is still, for all of our sensibilities, a big issue.

Hart Crane, way back at the beginning of his career, was saying,

"The major job of contemporary poetry is to assimilate the machine." And everybody's been trying to assimilate the machine ever since. Oh, I felt so happy when I put the words *reinforced concrete* into a poem. But it's very hard to make it stick. It's very hard to change people's feelings. Here in the most advanced technology of the world, we still find an aesthetic reluctance on all hands to accept the machine as a thing of beauty, as a human instrument to be celebrated when put to the right uses. You can safely attack the city and praise the country to any poetry-reading audience nowadays, even though many of your hearers will scarcely, if ever, have left the city.

Panel: Mr. Wilbur, I'd like to return to what you said earlier about American poets always looking to the frontier. Could you relate that idea to the emphasis which I see in Walt Whitman, and works like Hart Crane's "The Bridge" – an interest in the things in the real world, in concrete things rather than in abstractions?

Wilbur: There certainly is a strong strain of that in American poetry, and different people have given it different names. I remember Kathleen Raine, the English poet – during a symposium at the YMHA about 15 years ago – calling it "materialism." And then someone jumped up and said "Empiricism!" . . . You've rendered me a little mute.

Panel: A statement of yours I read made me want to ask you that question. Talking about how you came to write "A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra," you said that when you lived in Rome you "felt reproached" by the fountain because of your "Puritanical industry." You then went on to say: "I like it when the ideas of a poem seem to be necessary aspects of things or actions which it presents – stretching away and yet always adhering, like shadows. In this case, I may have come near that desideratum" (*Poet's Choice*, ed. Paul England and Joseph Langland). I was thinking about Walt Whitman and what he contributed to imagist poetry, and then about Hart Crane – and generally in the stream of American poetry the interest in things, the things of the world.

Wilbur: It's an extremely strong strain with us. Emerson and Thoreau you think of first – their great delight, particularly in their prose, in the solid and homely and concrete words, and in his essay *Nature*, Emerson's stress on the fact that all abstract words ultimately derive from things – the word *wrong* means *crooked*, and so forth. And you think of Whitman's insistence in his homemade Indian religion on the

body and on material things – his insistence, in fact, that revelation can be achieved through bodily ecstasy. I guess there are a few Indians who think that way, but that's not a widespread conception. I suspect that Kathleen Raine's word "materialism" – though it's a bad word – has a little to do with the question. We are a great inventing and manufacturing country, and if we are going to face the facts of American life, we have to face the fact that this is a very "thingy" country, a very practical country. We have to hope, as Hart Crane rather vaguely and gaseously hoped, to unite the spiritual and the material.

Panel: How do you synthesize this strain of the concrete with contemporary language in a traditional form?

Wilbur: Well, I don't think any form in itself means anything, though I've heard people say the contrary. William Carlos Williams used to say that to write a sonnet is to make a curtsey to the court of Queen Elizabeth I. The reason he said that was because, when he rhymed, it sounded that way. He wisely forsook rhyming and other traditional artifice in favor of a kind of poetry in which he could sound like himself. But I think you only have to name a few names like Robert Frost to reflect that the pentameter, for example, doesn't in any sense render the words which it counterpoints old fashioned – or it would do so only to a very limited and prejudiced ear. The question of what is the live language is a touchy one. Beyond a certain point, you obviously can't worry yourself about what someone might misunderstand. You can't worry about the far-outness of a certain allusion, if you absolutely need it to say what you want to say. You have a sense in writing, not of what the public, whoever that is, will understand – you have a sense of what the present state of the language is and what its conversancy with the past is. So you have a sense of what kind of a risk you're taking when you refer, for example – as I did in one poem – to the river Xanthus. Not everybody is going to remember that Xanthus is another name for the river Scamander – and that you're referring to the twenty-first book of the *Iliad*. You make a decision at the moment of writing a poem; you say, "If I say Xanthus, I'm going to say a whole lot in one word." It's going to mean a lot for anybody who gets it out. But I'm running away with your subject.

Panel: I think we need to pursue the subject of form, particularly as you see it in your own poetry. Several essays I've read have referred to you as a very form-conscious poet. Speak a minute about how you

consider form in your own work and particularly with reference to the modern expressions of freedom in verse.

Wilbur: As Eliot and Pound both said, as almost any experienced poet knows, free verse is very, very difficult to write. It probably should be attempted only after a long period of exercise in the easier forms, that is to say, in the meters, in the stanzas, in the rhymes. I take no pleasure in mere form, and I've never said to myself, "I think I'll write a sonnet." I've never written a sonnet or even a rondeau except by sort of blundering into it – finding that some material that was washing around in my head wanted to take that form. If you've done a bit of dancing, you know when the band shifts into a polka, and you adjust. And you do the same thing, it seems to me, on the basis of reading and writing experience, with the material that is vaguely developing in your mind and wants to find a form. If, for instance, you have an idea in your mind that seems to want to be said in three ways and then wind up in a brief and epigrammatic manner, then a certain shape of the sonnet might be very useful to you: three quatrains and a couplet and you have it said. Mostly I don't use so-called traditional forms. I just start writing and let the lines break off where they want to break off and, if they seek to rhyme, it's they that are doing the rhyming, not I. I have the feeling that the material chooses the form. I have no quarrel at all with Emerson. He said, "not meter, but meter-making argument makes poetry," and I think that's true. I simply write a kind of free verse that ends by rhyming much of the time. If you do use the greatest strictness with yourself, not allowing the rhyme to run away with you and decide what the poem shall say, it seems to me that you end with a greater freedom, a greater power. Some of the freedom comes in the process itself. This is something I have often rambled on about. Non-rhyming poets don't know it, and so I like to say it. If you take any two words that rhyme, there operates, as Victor Hugo said, between them a kind of obligation to produce metaphor. This could be demonstrated right now with all of us. If I say *hook-book* to you, it's not the same as if I said *brush-stadium*. There's some kind of implicit, magical demand made on you by the fact that *hook* and *book* sound a bit alike, and your mind starts trying to pull them together in some way or other. Actually the movement of the mind is not like that at all – there's much more floundering to it. But all sorts of idiotic things suggest themselves. The mind is actually set loose by this search for a rhyme that will make some kind of sense. Of course, if you don't

find a rhyme that will make some kind of sense, that will say what you were going to say or will, as sometimes happens, show you what you want to say – then you have to chuck it. You mustn't let the rhyme do the job. But rhyme can be a great liberator of the unconscious. And this is something not understood very much at present; most people think of rhyme as being – oh, "structured" – as something imposed, and the next thing to hypocrisy. But it's really, properly used, a great liberator of the mind.

Panel: You have translated French poetry. In Europe, the French are famous for their rareness of form. Do you think the French have in any way influenced you?

Wilbur: Oh, I expect so. I've translated a couple of plays by Moliere, and I'm doing a third one now. I find it very hard at present to think in anything but couplets. You get obsessed by the couplet when you're translating Moliere. And I suppose there are other French poets whose use of form has taken a hold of me. Baudelaire, in particular. I think I'm fascinated by the powerful contrast between a kind of lapidary classical style and an explosive dramatic content in him. I'm not much attracted to the rondeau sort of thing – to those doilies of poems. I would only write them if I had to. I woke up in the middle of the night the other night and wrote a rondeau, but I didn't know I was doing it until I was half way through.

Panel: Mr. Wilbur, you spoke of your material's seeking its own form. Did you ever feel that it would seek its own form and expression in a play of your own?

Wilbur: Well, yes, I tried to write a play back in 1952, and it was simply awful. I was trying to write a verse play and – to be blunt about it, to be embarrassing about it – I think I simply didn't know enough about people at the time to bring convincing characters on to the stage. They were all very wooden. That's when I translated my first Moliere play. I thought I might learn something about poetic theater by translating *the master*. I've never written a novel and I doubt that I'll ever have the organizational power to do so.

Panel: On the subject of form still, I want to go back to a discussion of free verse. I remember reading Eliot's comments. He said there are three types of free verse. One that uses iambic norms, and another that imitates the rhythms of natural speech, and a third that follows Whit-

man's idea that the correct emotion will dictate the form. What do you mean when you say that free verse is the most difficult form?

Wilbur: Well, you want, if you are writing out of material that is important to you – material about which you feel passionately – to hit hard. You want, therefore, to be able to give the signals to the reader, or to give the signals in the work, which demand strong response and show strong emphasis. It's very hard to define a rhythm with a metrical paradigm underlying it in such a way that the reader can be absolutely sure of how to say it. There are some things like the Epistle to the Corinthians . . . "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels" – what a rhythm that is. That's like the rhythms which open Whitman's great poems: "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking." You know where he's going to go from there, and you know that he's going to come back and back and back to that falling rhythm – I guess you'd call it. There's something I often like to quote in connection with this. Take Milton's description of Satan's expulsion from heaven. I forget what the normal expectation for runover lines is in English, but Milton certainly exceeded it in this passage. Here goes Satan: "Him the Almighty Power / Hurled headlong flaming from the Ethereal sky / With hideous ruin and combustion, down / To bottomless perdition, there to dwell / In adamantine chains and penal fire, / Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms" (*Paradise Lost*, Book I, 44ff.) You just couldn't do that in free verse. I hate the word *formal* verse, because it sounds so lady-school, you know. But if you use verse with meters, if you use sound structures of some kind, stanza patterns of some type, you set up expectations which you can disappoint. You can make people fall a long and felt distance in formal verse – you cannot do that kind of powerful thing in free verse. This is one reason why free verse poets like William Carlos Williams are full of exclamation points. They have to keep telling you when to jump.

Panel: So in writing free verse you lose the ability to control your audience?

Wilbur: There are certain kinds of control that you can't have. Rhyme gives you certain kinds of dramatic control, too, if it's used correctly. There's an example – I hope I can quote it properly – a poem of Gerald Manley Hopkins', one of his terrible sonnets. It begins, "No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief; / More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring. / Comforter, where, where is your

comforting? / Mary, mother of us, where is thy relief?" Notice the relationship between that "wilder wring" in the second line and that "comforting" in the third. The "wring" is a very hard rhyme, and "comforting" breaks off, and it tells you to break your voice. It almost lets your voice crack at the end of the third line. There's the kind of accurate music that a fine user of rhyme can force. But there are very great free verse poems.

Panel: There is a development in modern music now, back to form, back to classical patterns. Do you think anything like that will happen with poetry — the return to classical patterns and forms?

Wilbur: Well, if I had to play prophet — and I guess I do — I think I would say that we're about to have a division amongst writers of lyric poetry. On the one hand we will have, if we're really lucky, an emergence of really good song lyrists. We haven't yet, for my taste, discovered anybody who does the rock or pop sort of thing and is, at the same time, a good poet. But it seems to me that the ground is being prepared. And somebody much better than Leonard Cohen, for example, will come along because he now exists. And then on the other hand, I suspect we will have resurgence of interest in some of the advantages of the antique discipline. But the sort of thing that the Williams-Pound school did — and that has been completed by the best practitioners of the Black Mountain school and people like A. R. Ammons — is a very genuine kind of poetry, and I should think that it would continue. We're going to have a division between the poets who carry guitars and those poets who write for the page. I should guess that there will be, if for no other reason than fashion, a recovery of interest in the possibilities of formal means.

Panel: This brings up a subject I think everyone wants to talk about: the influence of pop culture — which refers not just to pop music, but to pop art, pop literature, new radicalism, all this sort of thing — on your poetry and on modern poetry in general?

Wilbur: Well, I think at the moment the kind of stuff I write is completely divorced from the kind of graphic art and sculpture that is suggested by such names as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein and Oldenburg. I think, although there are still some wonderful painters and sculptors among us, that sculpture and graphic arts have fallen on sad days and have fallen into the hands of exploiters, fallen into the

realm of fashion, and that the American public is deserving what it gets. If they want to pay that much for a coke bottle, that's exactly what they deserve. But there's no continuity at all between poetry as I think of it, poetry as my friends write it, and that sort of thing. Lichtenstein, by blowing up a Flash Gordon panel, can make thousands and thousands of dollars. There is no way for a poet to do that. It's because we can't arrange to get corrupted in a big way that we're preserved from the fate of the other arts. It's also because it's almost impossible to empty words of their meaning. You can readily paint a painting that doesn't mean anything in a paraphrasable sense. You can surely write music which contains no emotional signatures at all. But words, as Gertrude Stein discovered, incline, no matter what you do, towards designations and evaluations.

Panel: Speaking of arranging to get corrupted, what about publishing and about public support for the arts in general and poets and poetry in particular? I know the National Foundation for the Arts has given some money to university presses and publishing poets. I just wondered if you would comment generally on the poet as he relates to publishing and to the presses.

Wilbur: At the moment it is very easy to get published. There are lots and lots and lots of literary magazines — many of them quite horrible, but at any rate if you want to be published by somebody you have a very good chance. There are, I suppose, many more books of poems published by commercial and university presses annually than there used to be. We at Wesleyan publish about seven volumes per annun, which is more than Harcourt Brace does. Our volumes, although they don't make our poets rich, are now selling — I wish I could give you exact figures. But a quite unknown poet, if he gets published in this series, is likely to be carried and guaranteed a bit by such prestige as the series has, and he will sell 3,000 or 4,000 books. Now a few years ago a sale of 500 volumes was extremely predictable — not good, but predictable. And so the public is larger for books of poems. Now, what else?

Panel: What influence do you think the publishing business has on who gets read, that is, on the direction of American poetry? How do particular things like the Yale Series of Younger Poets encourage the selection of a certain poetry against a certain other?

Wilbur: Yale always has some nameless person doing the first reading and eliminating lots of manuscripts, and then the finalists were sub-

mitted to Mr. Auden, to Mr. Fitts — the late Dudley Fitts — or, as at present, Stanley Kunitz. One man's taste prevails there. At Wesleyan we have a board of four who are of very different tastes. We've published poetry, I should think, of every possible, distinguishable school in America, and we're not in the least interested in excluding any kind of poetry. I guess we would all vote against pop poetry, so-called, and I can't imagine any volume of found poetry — that is to say, rearranged advertisement copy — that we would publish.

Panel: Well, what about government sponsorship and foundation sponsorship?

Wilbur: I think that Roger Stevens' outfit, which was dispensing a certain amount of money under Mr. Johnson's administration, has collapsed now — that the money isn't there anymore. In general, the dispensers of big money to the arts like to give the money to ballet companies, theaters, and groups — same way in scholarship. If you can get seventeen social scientists together or a batch of physicists who need some terribly expensive machine, you stand a better chance than if there is just one of you who wants to look at butterflies. There are certain foundations, like the Guggenheim, who continue to be very good to poets. The Ford Foundation has interested itself in poets only — I may be wrong here — but I think only or chiefly in connection with a program for the encouragement of the drama. They gave fellowships to poets on the understanding that the poets would go and hang around theaters, in one or another part of the world, and get themselves more dramatically inclined. Most poets teach school, at present, and the virtues and disadvantages of that are obvious. It would be churlish not to say that there are good things about it; and I think that it depends somewhat on the kind of poet you are, how much harm it's going to do you to be a teacher. If you're the kind of poet who spins his poetry out of his own, private, emotional life, then all this classroom stuff is going to be not to the point and perhaps a little adulterating of the consciousness. But if you're the sort of poet who likes to refer to the river Xanthus, it doesn't do you too much harm.

Panel: Do you feel that, because of poetry's inability to be corrupted, this artificial environment of maintaining poetry by university presses and this encouragement that poets give each other is deemphasizing poetry on a public scale?

Wilbur: A couple of years ago, I reviewed a nice biography of

Longfellow by Newton Arvin, and it had a last chapter in it which was very pertinent to what you just said. Arvin distinguished various kinds of popular poetry, and right now I can't recall the names he gave to his several categories. There would be a folk poetry which was pre-literate, or non-literate, and then there would be a newspaper verse classification to which a poet like James Metcalf or Edgar Guest or Rod McKuen would belong. And then there would be a classification which he called high demotic, and to that the really fine poets — people like Longfellow, Whittier, or some other of the so-called fireside poets — might belong. There's a letter of Longfellow's that I came across a while back, and it was simply fascinating. He was writing to somebody saying, "America has instituted a system of universal education; we're going to have universal literacy; people whose parents didn't read are able to read, and they're excited about it. And I'm going to write them some poems." He was very breezy about it too. He said, "I think I'll have them printed up as broadsides and hawk them on the street." And this led to poems like "Paul Revere's Ride," which is a very good poem, really. The fact that it doesn't give us any trouble to read doesn't mean that it isn't good, and it led to things like Whittier's fine poem "Abraham Davenport." Now the people of my father's generation and of his father's generation grew up knowing the poetry of these beloved fireside poets who sold enormously, who were honored everywhere; after all, Longfellow is honored in Westminster Abbey. There have been no poets like that since. Leslie Fiedler is about to come to Wesleyan, and he told me that he was going to give a lecture called "The New Longfellows." What he's talking about is the guitar-playing poets, and it is true that these are the most popular poets, in some sense or other, to exist in America since the fireside poets in the nineteenth century. But the difference is enormous. Longfellow didn't hesitate in his poetry to refer, for example, to the *Aeneid*. Also newly literate people knew the *Aeneid* only through Longfellow's references to it. Without being a bore, he was a conscious cultural uplifter and a transmitter of the literature of other times and places. It was really, if you compare Longfellow to contemporary pop standards, altogether highbrow.

Panel: We keep coming back to pop, and I have another question I want to ask. I suppose one of the most controversial questions about the status of poetry in relation to pop music is how you judge pop music. There seem to be two perspectives. One seems to be that pop music, in order to be accepted as a legitimate art form, must measure

up to standards of literature or poetry. The other perspective tries to judge it as an art form which sets its own standards and has to work as an artistic unit in itself. How do you judge it — which way?

Wilbur: I think the thing to do, given the material that we have, is to make a sharp distinction, as either Simon or Garfunkel did the other day, between the Wallace Stevens sort of thing, as he said, and the pop lyric. Which is the lyricist — Simon or Garfunkel?

Panel: Simon.

Wilbur: He said, "I happen to like pop lyrics better than poetry, but I know what I write is not the same thing as what Wallace Stevens wrote." I've written some show lyrics for Broadway, and although I'm not very musical, I have been interested in writing lyrics. And so I have a certain hope that a new Thomas Campion will come along in time — someone who really is a good poet and who is at the same time a good musician. Meanwhile I think the sensible thing to do is not to bother to assess Bob Dylan as a poet, because he isn't satisfactory as a writer, but to enjoy him, insofar as one can, as a performer and as a pop musician and lyricist. I've not listened to very much of him; people whose tastes I admire tell me there are some quite fine songs, taken as songs, and as performed by him. But when you read him on the page, he doesn't come to very much.

Panel: This is the question that always comes up. Do you feel that it has primarily to meet standards on the page written, or is it a medium that has to be assessed as a new form?

Wilbur: I think it only has to meet such standards if somebody says it does. I gather that Dylan has sometimes referred to himself as a poet; I suppose someone else in the same category might be more modest.

Panel: He doesn't refer to his songs as poetry, though. He writes poetry, but it's not his songs he calls poetry.

Wilbur: I prefer Edgar Guest — I'm quite serious — because he was an honest, simple man. Robert Frost met him one time in Detroit. The only immodest thing Guest said to Frost was to ask him what kind of car he drove. It turned out that Guest had a Cadillac or something like that. But he was very modest about his art. Frost said, "What do you do when you get an idea for a poem?" And Guest said, "Well,

if I'm out on the golf course, I say to that idea, 'Report to my office at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning!' "

Panel: By extension from pop music – you said you'd tried writing a verse play. What about poetry and the theater? How do you think that the two interact?

Wilbur:. I think potentially verse theater might do very well with us, because we have a lot of people who come out of Carnegie Tech, and various other places, who know how to deliver a line of verse. The two translations of Moliere which I did – *The Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe* – played all over the country and in Ontario and London. People just sat there and put up with rhymed couplets, 1800 lines of rhymed couplets. I think that's quite a test.

Panel: But that was Moliere.

Wilbur: Yes, that was Moliere. Well, you obviously need good playwrights, but I don't see any reason why good playwrights shouldn't use poetic forms successfully. Of course, as I say, we do have a corps of actors to do it, though they sometimes miscast the people. I saw a Chicago production of my *Misanthrope* translation, and there was just the most charming sort of Marilyn Monroe girl – I won't mention her name – who was cast in the part of Celimene. I went around to say 'hello to her and the rest of the cast after opening night, and she said, "Boy, I just don't get this new stuff!"

Panel: I'd like you to comment on the possibility that some "good poet" would come along and use the form of the guitar. Do you think this would have a great effect on poetry as it is accepted or read or enjoyed or listened to?

Wilbur: Well, I think it would. We'd still have a sharp distinction between the kind of poetry which is at leisure to be full of nuances and reservations – to use the word "but" liberally – and the song lyric, which is always simple. A song lyric has always got to be simple and repetitive, can be only so subtle, can render only so complete an account of anybody's sensibility. But if the quality of the pop lyric in America were greatly elevated, then it would have a considerable effect on the writing of serious poetry, I think. I guess the main point of Ezra Pound's wonderful book *The ABC of Reading* is that in the seventeenth century, the poet, whether or not he was writing for music, thought of the tones

of words as bearing some relation to musical sound. That's something which has been greatly lost in subsequent centuries. I know when I first started writing I had no feeling at all for sound. And it wasn't until I began going around and spouting my poems to audiences that I commenced to see how unpronounceable I was being and how inexpressive some of my noises were.

Panel: You mentioned writing the lyrics for *Candide*. Do you think that had any effect, really, on your poetry in general?

Wilbur: I can't tell about that; I'm not sure. When you are writing lyrics for a show, even when it's a very high-brow show as that one was, you are thinking about the audience; you're thinking how it will hit them. You hypothesize a man from Scarsdale out there and you write *to* him. Of course, your collaborators differ with you as to the capacities of that man from Scarsdale. And you never know who he is. But you are concerned with the audience. It seems to me that in writing poetry you are, as I said before, only obliquely, only through the language and its mirroring of the state of the culture, concerned with an audience. Although, heaven knows, if you didn't ultimately want to be read, you wouldn't write very much. It just has to be a sneaky desire.

Panel: May I return to what you said about the verse play and then the lyrics and then the poetry? Somehow the verse play seems to be somewhere in the middle between the two, in terms of the audience and its involvement in the work. Is this true?

Wilbur: Well, I think if I wrote a verse play — I don't detect any talent yet in myself for writing one — I would try to make it have a continual effect on the audience. I'd try to think of that and would try not to indulge myself in great arias. I like in general the modestly poetic character of Eliot's verse plays, although I must say that my favorite among his verse plays is *Murder in the Cathedral*, which is the most poetic of them.

Panel: Besides being a poet, you are a translator too. I wonder if there can be an adequate translation? Because of the differences in languages, structures, connotations, isn't every translation a complete new creation of a poem insofar as both form and substance go?

Wilbur: Well, it pretty well has to be. It's just a matter of degree, I think. A translator like Ezra Pound or Robert Lowell will call what

he does an adaptation, an homage, an imitation; and Pound will be so free as to take a poem of Voltaire's and reduce it to prose and throw away any material he doesn't want to use. Robert Lowell will translate a two-stanza poem of Rilke's and make Rilke a present of a third stanza of Lowell's own composition. Pound and Lowell are both fine poets, so anything they do is interesting and worth reading. But that's not my idea of translating. Obviously you can't translate anybody word for word, even in prose. I try to translate thought by thought, and not to leave out any thoughts. And then I try, insofar as I can, to reproduce the form. It's fairly easy in some cases to reproduce the form: Russian, for example. Although Russian poetry inclines to be more thumpy than ours, it has our meters and the same kind of emphatic character. And so you can duplicate a lot of the noise of a Russian poem. With the French it's obviously very much more difficult. You declare the pentameter to be the equivalent of the Alexandrine, and on the whole the material that was in the twelve syllables of the French line will sort itself out within the ten syllables of the English line. But you know that there is an initial formal infidelity there. But I try for the illusion that I've been perfectly faithful, and when I've done a job that pleases me I can tell it pleases me because I forget the original.

Panel: I'd like to ask whether, when you began, when you first decided to be a writer, did you have a vision or dream of where you were going? Or did you just step into it, and it sort of happened to you? What happened?

Wilbur: It quite happened to me; I just blundered into it. I was brought up in the house of a portrait painter. But we were not an arty household really. It was just a house in which painting, a little music, anything you might like to do in the way of any of the arts was approved of. And the guests or visitors to my house were likely to be bored with specimens of my little drawings, my first poems. I thought at the time I left college that I was going to be a journalist or perhaps a cartoonist on a newspaper. There have been many journalists in my mother's family. And then during World War II (War, as a young sailor said to me on the plane yesterday, mostly is just sitting around on your butt), I found myself writing a lot of poems. By the time the war ended, I had a drawer full of them. My wife once showed them to a French friend of ours who had some literary connections in New York. He took them home to his Cambridge apartment, and

a few hours after his departure he came bursting in through the door of our apartment, kissed me on both cheeks and said, "You're a poet!" He sent these poems to New York, to the publisher Reynal and Hitchcock, and they most improbably wrote me a letter saying they would publish them. And so I decided I must be a poet. And I began to abandon more and more of my ambition to be a scholar. I expect with most people it's just a matter of having it thrust upon you, of your being unable not to do it. A woman once said to Robert Frost, who had actually never seen any of her work, "Should I go on with my poetry?" He said, "Try and stop and see what happens," which is kind of brusque, but it's very reasonable, I think. If you don't have to do it, why do it?

Panel: Is there anything in particular you'd like to leave us with?

Wilbur: Well, you were going to ask me whether poetry had anything to do with psychedelic experience, and I was going to say that it didn't.

Panel: Well, I was going to ask you that, but it just didn't seem to fit, so I let it go. Would you like to make a comment about the effect of drugs on creativity?

Wilbur: Well, yes, I think that I wish Coleridge had never taken opium. There are people going around saying Blake took hashish. I don't know. But I deny it all about Edgar Allan Poe. I do think that actually there is nothing more dangerous to the imagination than fantasy. The drug experience is shadow boxing, and the business of the poet is to be confronting, with his imagination, these solid objects here. So I think that there is not only no good relation between drugs and art but that, as somebody told me as long ago as ten years, it's very damaging to whatever creative powers you have to develop too much of a psychic dependency, even on harmless grass.

Panel: Thank you very much, Mr. Wilbur.

By Telephone

NORMAN NATHAN

It looks like a simple convenience, good for business; you're traveling and have to make a phone call. Or, slightly delayed, you tell your wife you'll be half an hour late. Perhaps, recognizing the difficulty of getting past a secretary, you try the phone booth as the nearest approach to the man you want to reach. Or, the home phone showing no signs of being free, you step out to the corner pay station rather than wait.

But I've seen both anger and laughter through the glass walls of phone booths, the pleading hand and the smug smile. Knowing what use I've put these indispensable telephones to, I've wondered what assignations are being made, what triangles are being strengthened or broken.

Why are you, gray haired man of sixty, looking so pleased, your feet not tired after standing though it's the end of a long and wearing day? Or you, thirty-five and with a wallet full of family pictures, why does your face belie the voice you casually put into the mouthpiece, "No, it's not important, there's no message. I'll try to reach Mrs. Marshank later."

To me these glass encased bright red and gray booths are exciting friends. I remember each of several that I've used on various occasions. And now and then I note a new booth and map it in my mind for possible utility.

I was never really dependent upon public telephones until I met Marlene. We didn't care strongly enough about each other to change our status quo with the rest of the world. We were simply good friends. This may be difficult for you to believe if you always consider the opposite sex mainly in terms of sex. But the fact is that men bore me and women bore Marlene, though our reasons are not the same. It's no news that men and women think differently. When I talk to a woman I don't feel challenged to compete. My witticisms, such as they are, will be admired, and I'll feel appreciated, wanted. And if you can enjoy her company without needing to jump into bed, being with a young girl is a wonderful way to relax and keep youthful and feel far more intelligent than you actually are.

Marlene's ideas are somewhat different. "So many women never *do* anything but raise kids. They think the same thoughts. O. K., all men

aren't original either. But there's such a wide variety of types, and I'm young and I haven't met them all. And sex *has* its charms." Yet, Marlene and I wouldn't have attracted notice in many a normally respectable bistro. A kiss, a hug, a semi-carelessly placed hand lingered for a moment. Essentially we were out for fun and we kept it at that. Not once were we alone in a room.

You see, I'm about three-quarters happily married. I like a good meal, a well-kept house, and at least the usual amount of bedroom activity. Bess, the type Marlene would most despise, does her duty in every department. She loves responsibilities. All in all, she's quite a remarkable wife and I could have done a lot worse.

Still, Bess isn't fun, and I always liked fun with the girls, not the dark corners particularly, though I've had my share of that. Bess knows my weakness and often pretends. In my mind there's a recurring picture of her smiling agreeably as, in a convivial gathering, she downs a cocktail in slightly under three hours. Sexually, she even plans the fun — I'll bet she times it. Oh, well, there must be a reason why those who can afford it trade in wives like cars. I'll keep the old model, but I can admire and now and then hitch a ride with the new, for I'm neither rich nor overly venturesome.

I've never forgotten what Prof. Adams said about me when I finished freshman English, the one course in which I excelled at Fairleigh Dickenson. "Munger," he said, "you're the worst 'A' student I've ever had. You can write a splendid sentence, an excellent theme. But your thoughts, your ambitions . . . ! Why won't you achieve your potential? Every time you turn in a piece of writing, there's not one shred of deep thought."

"But you said you marked on the quality of expression, not on thought. You didn't want to penalize the lower I. Q.'s. If you'd said you wanted something thoughtful . . . . "

"I know, I know," he cut me off. "You'll always give what's wanted." He threw up his hands and his ill-proportioned body stalked away. I liked him far better than he liked me. Really fair-minded teachers stand out in a group.

I haven't changed much, and I still do the job required and little more, even in my amusement. Fun, especially, isn't worth too much

trouble or it's no longer fun. Marlene makes things easy despite the fact that she's married to a jealous husband. I gather that whenever they go out Cosgrove watches her like a cash register. Unlike me, she isn't happily married, but she'll probably stick with him. She doesn't know her own mind, or maybe she has half a dozen minds and alternates in using them.

Now I don't want to make Cosgrove jealous, I'm no hero and I don't want to hurt Bess. That's where public telephones come in. If I call from the house when she's out, my son Joey might mention I phoned somebody. Then I'd have to explain who it was and I'm a poor liar. Even if I was alone, the monthly bill would run up, and how would that look? Marlene lives in Manhattan and I'm over in West New York, New Jersey, just far enough for a toll charge. I work in New York, even some evenings, though not half as many as I tell Bess.

Fortunately, at my level of management we aren't paid for overtime or Bess might be suspicious when my take home pay remained the same every week. (She complains a bit about the spending money I allow myself, but I tell her it's part of the job.) Since I'm assistant to the chief of purchasing at Medusa Electronics, I can frequently take a few hours off during a slack day. In purchasing, we don't punch clocks, I work till I have what's needed and I'm in and out regularly. No one inquires why I'm away from the office as long as the job is done.

That's how I met Marlene. I was rushed that morning trying to locate some cadmium plated screws which we needed immediately. At last I was successful and stopped for a drink at the Statler.

"Do you have change for a quarter?" I've a quick eye, and this was no ordinary morsel who wanted a dime for a phone call.

Later Marlene insisted that she wasn't trying to pick me up and the fact that she forgot to make her phone call once we began talking proves nothing.

Strangely enough, I believe her. She often acts without any conscious calculation, which is a good thing, for she blushes easily. And she tries always, for who knows when excitement is waiting to be grabbed.

Despite our obvious differences (Marlene has almost no caution; I'm too cautious) we have something in common in addition to our liking for fun, for we're both a mixture of shyness and aggressiveness. Had we met each other on our crests, we'd have collided and bounced

apart. Our troughs meeting, we wouldn't have noticed each other. But during the initial few minutes, while I meekly changed her quarter, I saw her face redden as she recognized her aggressiveness, for a newsstand and change were only thirty feet away. Noticing the sudden shyness I became the forward one and, our crests and troughs alternating, we got to like each other while we were still on the same wave length.

"How about a drink," I said, and needing no excuse we entered the barroom. There I found out not only that she was married but why she wore no ring – at least, her spoken reason.

"When Jim's angry, he'll grab my fingers in his iron grip, if he doesn't do worse. It hurts terribly when I wear my ring. It digs into the flesh. I told him, 'Once more, and off goes that ring.' Well . . . ." she smiled triumphantly and held up the unencumbered finger.

Before we separated I gave her my phone number at work and she gave me hers at home. We agreed on precautions. If Jim answered I was to be a wrong number or perhaps a TV survey. I wouldn't try again for a day lest he recognize the voice. If I weren't at my desk when she called, she'd pretend she was sombody's secretary and leave a name with her initials. I gave her my home number, to be used with extreme caution, but she never did use it.

One thing I'll say about Marlene, self-willed, selfish, on occasion cruel, she'd never do the slightest thing to make trouble for you with someone else. There was no malice in her, which is more than you can say about most people. If she hated you, she'd forget you. Of course, I'm not too sure of all of my opinions about her. For example, she always said she kept her men friends away from her apartment. Twice when I called her at home I was answered by a male voice that wasn't Jim's, as I could tell from the rather drunken, defiant tone. Marlene said it was Jim, and I let it go. I couldn't afford to be jealous; I was like Luxembourg at a peace conference. That's partly why Marlene liked me; she liked my flair for chatter and that I made no demands – hardly even requests, I might add. "You make me feel, when we're together, that we both want the same things from each other. I'm so kind when I'm not pushed. Please, Bob, don't *ever* push me." We grabbed hands for a moment and smiled, dripping with understanding.

When does change start, when does ripeness turn to decay, when does life begin to die? I've heard a theory that we start to die the

moment we're born, but that's like saying the sun begins to set at dawn. With living matter, perhaps with a high powered microscope we could catch the exact instant when decay sets in. Human relationships are far too complex to pinpoint the moment, for there are causes both conscious and subconscious. I can't say whether our change started with something I said or something I did. Or maybe another person was making me superfluous in Marlene's world which she constantly refurnished for her own pleasure.

If I can't chart the cause of the break, I did notice, though not till afterwards, the exact hour it occurred. My birthday was on a Wednesday and naturally, I had to be home that evening with Joey and Bess. Marlene and I were to have a long lunch together. With her I most enjoyed the initial moment in every meeting when I saw her beaming at me as if she were just seventeen and I the first man in her new maturity. I'm a prompt person, but she always managed to arrive before I did. The warm world-excluding smile on her face seemed to say, "See, you told me to be here at seven, and your willing slave is waiting for you." On my birthday she was fifteen minutes late.

"Jim phoned home and I had to talk to him," she explained. "I have the cutest present for you, only I didn't have time to stop for it. But what can you expect when you associate with people like me?" About a week later I received at my office a small package containing a set of cuff links resembling miniature telephone booths disguised as little mandarin huts. You've seen the type wherever there's a group of Chinese restaurants in a neighborhood.

Marlene and I used to meet two or three times a week, never according to a schedule, for that would have taken away a sense of excitement, and we both wanted a bit of uncertainty. After my birthday the uncertainty was all on my part, and for the next month I saw her barely once a week. She seemed equally gay, charming, interested.

"Marlene, dear, I really do love you," I'd said this to her dozens of times, and her usual response was as unromantic and straightforward as, "Me too." Now she merely gave me an affectionate smile. Couldn't she have admitted the change or, afraid to hurt me or to trouble herself, just told a lie? When had she hesitated to lie if it convenienced her!

The answer may be that she never lies unless there is something to be gained by it. She always tells the truth when it doesn't matter,

never when it does; and she can sense small values to herself as a weathervane responds to the least air current. But another answer occurs to me. Marlene simply wants to leave the road clear for her to return to any attachment, and she does this best by saying nothing. You see, she never lied about her feeling for me, and therefore I'd believe her if she ever wanted to resume our relationship.

Late in February, a blustery, snowy day, she met me at five for cocktails. To my surprise she was once more there before me. "So you're going to be on time again," I said, not intelligently, and I'd like to blame it on some rectifiers I spent the whole day trying to locate.

Her smile wore thin, and I realized that for the first time I had said something critical of her and just at the moment when she might be giving us a new chance. Always I'd accepted her excuses, which at first were rare, as negotiable currency. I tried to repair the damage. "Of course, why should I complain? You don't owe me a thing." But this *was* a complaint.

Marlene turned her face into a slight frown mixed with fear, something you might see on a twelve year old, her voice midway between protestation and whine.

"I can't help myself. At times I'm just too miserable to be with anyone. If only you knew how I feel."

"Tell me."

"I can't."

"But I've got to know." I forgot that I was defenseless, that my charm for Marlene was in keeping our obligations to each other invisible.

"I can't; not now." She looked away, an instant of pathos possessing her face. "Buy me a martini. Please, Bob. I can't stay any more than ten minutes."

"Is it what I've said."

"Of course not. I'll call you when I can explain. Soon."

"When? Just tell me when." I was pushing, I'd lost my ability to have fun, I heard myself sounding like a powerless husband, a trifle like Jim Cosgrove without his muscular strength.

"Tomorrow or the next day."

That was the last I saw of Marlene. I could have waited for her in front of her apartment building on Central Park West, but all I did was try to phone her. Busy signals and unanswered ringing were frequent and I began to anticipate them as a patient in a doctor's office waiting for a shot.

She was seldom at home, no doubt busy with some new adventures. Even Cosgrove must have been off somewhere. I called frequently, Bess complaining that I took too many walks in the bad March weather. If she only knew how cold it was standing in a phone booth, my fingers growing numb as they held the receiver. And I was worried lest a neighbor, seeing me in that fish bowl, ask later if my phone were out of order — or be suspicious and say nothing. Or tell Bess that I'd been in a phone booth last Tuesday and jokingly suggest I was calling my girl friend!

Every week or so I'd catch Marlene. "I'm going out of my mind," she'd say. "Of course I want to see you — as soon as I have the strength." "Jim almost killed me the other night." "Thanks, Bob, thanks very much for calling."

Was she subtly paying me back for breaking the charm of a relationship that was all fun and no obligation? Was this her perverted idea of doing the right thing by talking sweetly over the phone, though never wasting her own energy by meeting me? Or is she just an individual that I'm incapable of figuring out?

As you can see, I'm not the brightest of men and I'm lazy, and I long for an attachment at once enjoyable and yet not threatening to my normal way of living. So I continue to play Russian Roulette with an unloaded gun. Every week or so I make another phone call. Who knows! Marlene never says she's stopped caring for me, and she's always only a phone call away.

I know the location of dozens of glass-walled phone booths. I can remember what happy or unlucky call I placed at a particular corner. Phone booths seem almost to have personalities of their own. At least, every time I see someone emoting in these not-so-sound-proof cubicles I smile to myself and make up an interesting story and wonder how right I really am.

The Gate

JOHN KINLOCH RIVERS

Mrs. Rowan was vexed. She was too old to be riding buses all over Charleston and then walking long blocks in the afternoon sun. If only she could rid herself of this feeling of having to tend the ancient flame of her family!

She squinted into the sun that had almost fallen into the end of Vanderhorst Street, and for a moment the decaying buildings along the way were blotted out and it was almost as if she were once again skipping down the street of her youth with blue serge skirts flapping against black stockinged legs.

She paused a moment and was tempted to lean against the high wall of St. Paul's churchyard. She patted her face with her handkerchief. The heat was unbearable. She should have stayed in her cool apartment at the church home, but she was drawn to the old crumbling mansion of her youth.

Her brother's daughter had returned to the house to live after her father's death, but still Mrs. Rowan felt that she must make these weekly trips. Felicia Abbott was not the type to maintain the family home as it should be.

Mrs. Rowan came to the yard with its iron fence and high iron gate with rusted lock. The fence seemed to be keeping a jungle from spreading into the street. She paused at the locked gate and looked through the lush summer greenery to the storm-worn walls of the house.

She walked to the corner and around to the side entrance. She remembered herself as a school girl and how she had hated to take those extra steps to the side entrance when the gate was there and so much closer. But that was when she was very young and before she knew Aunt Felicity's story.

Even then the lock was rusted, but the garden was lovely. People always paused to look through the fence at the wonders Felicity Abbott had wrought. "Enchanting," they would whisper, and enchanted it was. The camellias that heralded the coming spring like archangels, the azaleas that blazed until it seemed that nature would get out of hand and

burn itself and the house in a frenzy of spring and beauty, and the summer magnolias that seemed waiting with long-stored fragrance for she knew not what. In the center there had been, and was now, "Aunt Felicity's tree," a large ginkgo tree with its little green fans for leaves that turned yellow in the autumn and made Mrs. Rowan feel that she had wandered into a Japanese dream.

How long it took her to make the circuit of two sides of the garden! Behind the side gate the short marble walk and stairs were canopied by two dark magnolias that seemed held above by the ornate lamps at each side of the stairs whose griffins were ready to fly against all strangers.

She rang the bell. Presently she heard her niece coming down the stairs singing a popular love song.

"Like a love-sick girl!" Mrs. Rowan snorted.

"Hello, Aunt Helen," the younger woman said when she opened the door.

"You seem in good spirits today, Felicia," Mrs. Rowan said as she followed her niece into the dark, paneled hall, removed her hat and gloves, and patted her hair in front of a clouded mirror over a dusty table.

"I am, Aunt Helen," Felicia smiled. "I've got great news. I've thought of a way to get some money to fix up this old barn. I know you'll be delighted since you're always after me to do something to keep it from falling apart."

"I wish you wouldn't call it an old barn, Felicia. It is still one of the finest houses in Charleston, or could be with the proper care. But don't tell me you're going into your capital. You mustn't, you know. I'd hate to think of you without an assured income."

"Well, Aunt Helen, you seem at last reconciled to my being a spinster with no husband to care for me and having to worry about my income. But Abbott women don't seem to marry – except you, of course. You're so much an Abbott, too. I've often wondered how you happened to break away." She spoke still in her gay mood but bitterness laced the brightness of her words as shadows broke the sunshine filtered through the vine-covered window.

Mrs. Rowan didn't answer but walked into the drawing room. She

could have said why she broke away. It wasn't because she loved George Rowan though he was a good man. She married him to get away from this house, to be herself without feeling that her Aunt Felicity was still directing everything she did.

She could feel her presence still after all those years in the dark drawing room, but she felt victorious, for she no longer sensed the control she had felt as a young girl before she married.

Felicia hadn't bothered to take down Felicity's heavy draperies for the summer, nor had she taken up the carpet. The French clock on the mantel had run down. The lady's chair where Felicity had sat by the fire in the evenings was still there in its same place. Felicia was letting time stagnate behind the circling iron fence.

Mrs. Rowan wondered if she moved Felicity's chair to sweep. She sighed. Sloth and unbounded reverence might pass for the same thing. But reverence was something of which Felicia could not be accused, only inertia. Yet there were times when Felicia seemed so much like Felicity. She wondered if she too felt the presence, the control.

"Well, Felicia, let's hear your plan."

"I'm going to rent an apartment."

"What, and give up the house?"

"No, Aunt Helen, that wouldn't be making any money. That would be spending it. No, I'm going to fix an apartment here to rent." She looked pleased with herself and waited to be congratulated.

"You're not serious," Mrs. Rowan said.

"Yes, I am. I can close off the library and the music room and the back stairs and the sewing room upstairs and Aunt Felicity's bedroom. I'll enclose part of the back porch and make a little kitchen for them. They can share my kitchen until I get theirs finished."

Mrs. Rowan was pale and breathless as she had been as a little girl when she had run in with some exciting news and Aunt Felicity had quieted her with her eternal calm.

It wasn't Mrs. Rowan who was giving the news this time, and she was incapable of calming or being calmed. "But, Felicia, you can't have strangers in the house and make it a tenement. At least, I'm surprised that you are willing to give up the bedroom that you have occupied since you were ten years old."

"It's never really been my bedroom. It has always been Aunt Felicity's. I haven't slept in it since I've been back. I can't; when I do, I stop feeling like myself somehow." She paused and smiled shyly at her aunt. "I know it's ridiculous, but I can't stay in there." She straightened her back and lit a cigarette. "It's settled anyway. I've made arrangements with the contractor, and James Hamilton is coming to get that lock off the front gate this afternoon so the tenants can use that entrance."

"You can't," cried Mrs. Rowan. "That lock has been on that gate for a hundred years."

"Well, it's high time it came off," Felicia retorted. "This is not 1864. It was one thing to honor Aunt Felicity's loss during her life time because she had vowed to her sweetheart that the gate would remain locked until he returned. I'm not saying that it was romantic or quixotic or downright insane for her to keep the gate locked after he had been killed at Nashville in 1864. It was her gate and her business, but it's my gate now and I don't have any romantic illusions to keep alive."

The summer sun had set now and the dark drawing room furniture seemed to swell in the half light to enormous proportions. There was a flutter of wings outside and an occasional birdcall. Felicia made no move to turn on the lights.

Mrs. Rowan said, "If James Hamilton doesn't come soon, it will be too dark for him to take the lock off the gate."

"He can do it by flashlight," Felicia snapped.

Mrs. Rowan realized how angry her niece was. She must mollify her, for she was old and more in need of Felicia than Felicia was in need of her. "Felicia, dear, won't you reconsider?"

The younger woman realized that her aunt was trying to make amends, and she softened and reached out and took her hand.

Mrs. Rowan felt uneasy for some reason, and then she realized why. Her niece's hand on hers, so cool and soft, she was carried back through the years to her childhood when Aunt Felicity would take her hand in the same way to coax her to do something. It felt exactly the same, and now Felicia was speaking in a voice, coaxing, that caused Mrs. Rowan to feel the edges of panic touching her nerves.

"Aunt Helen, you've always been around a lot of people. You don't

realize how lonely it gets living in a huge house by yourself. I want to know that there are other people under the roof even though I don't see them often."

Mrs. Rowan jerked herself back to reality and answered, "You make me feel very guilty, my child, not coming to live with you, but I really feel that I'm needed at the church home. Being needed is important, too, you know."

She was displeased with herself, for she realized that she had said it in the way she would have answered Aunt Felicity.

"Yes, I know," Felicia said. "They'd never get another matron like you, Aunt Helen."

They sat in silence for several moments with only the small sounds of the ancient house to set Mrs. Rowan thinking of the swish of long skirts, the crackling of an open fire. Her uneasiness increased; she had thought she was victorious, and now Felicia had brought it all back.

The back gate creaked, and Felicia rose. "That will be James Hamilton. Come with me into the garden; it will be cool there."

The garden was not what Mrs. Rowan considered cool, but she was glad to get out of the house. She wondered even more about her niece. Did she fight the feeling, or had she given in to it?

She sat on a little iron chair under Felicity's tree while Felicia went with the workman to the gate.

For a moment they were obscured by the shrubbery, and Mrs. Rowan felt a faint foreboding. She called out, "Felicia, Felicia."

Her niece reappeared and said, "Yes, Aunt Helen, what is it?"

"Felicia, please reconsider," she called.

The younger woman disappeared again without answering, and Mrs. Rowan heard the sound of metal on metal. How she wished she could leave, and yet, what held her? She felt freer now than she had ever felt about the house. At last there seemed to be no compulsion, but she still felt apprehensive.

She heard the squeak of the gate on its rusty hinges as they tried it out. In a moment they were walking up the path.

"Well, that's done," Felicia said and came to Mrs. Rowan under the tree. The workman disappeared to the backyard.

Felicia surveyed the garden and said, "It isn't too bad. Perhaps James Hamilton can work in it some next week, but I much prefer this wild, romantic – if that's the word – look. It seems so elemental somehow, so private, so personal."

She was quite pleased with herself.

Mrs. Rowan shifted in her seat. "It's so different from what it was when I was a girl, and yet, not different at all."

The light was playing tricks. The garden was dark now except for the space where they were, and it was lit by the last rays of the dying day and the light from the lamp in the street. Here under the ginkgo tree – Aunt Felicity's tree – the garden was lit as if it were a scene in a play.

Felicia stirred under a limb with its hundreds of little green fans. "Though I do wish the marble bench were still under the oak. It added so much to the garden."

"The marble bench?" Mrs. Rowan asked uneasily.

"Yes," said Felicia. "The one that was right there and was so cold in the winter." She gave a laughing shiver.

"But, dear, you can't remember that bench," she said.

"But I can. I can still feel how cold it was even in October," she insisted. Her voice had lost its gaiety.

"You can't possibly remember it," Mrs. Rowan said angrily. "You've just heard your father speak of it. You couldn't possibly remember it," she repeated. "It was moved in 1864."

"Yes," Felicia murmured. "A limb fell and broke it the night Phillip was killed."

"Felicia, let's go into the house," Mrs. Rowan said. She knew the house and how to deal with it. Here things were getting out of control.

She rose and stood by the chair, but her niece made no move to leave.

"I wish it were back," she said, but it was not the voice of Felicia Abbott that spoke but a voice that had once been familiar to the aging woman. "I wish it were back," she repeated, "and the garden were like it was when he left me."

"Who?" Mrs. Rowan asked compulsively.

"Phillip, of course. I was standing under the tree here, and he came to me from the house. My, he was handsome. The handsomest officer in the Confederacy. I was in my yellow dress. What a picture we made! He in his grey uniform, and I in his arms.

"He said to me, 'I'll be back. I promise. You'll wait for me, won't you?'

"And I said, 'Yes.' "

She laughed a youthful laugh of pleasure.

"Then he said, 'You won't let someone else come into your heart while I'm away, will you?'

" 'No,' I answered, 'I won't even let them come through the gate. I'll keep it locked until you return.'

"He laughed, but I knew he was pleased, and he said, 'But I don't want to be kept waiting at the gate.'

"You won't mind being kept waiting for a few minutes, will you? I shall have waited so much longer . . ."

"Felicia, stop it!" Mrs. Rowan said sharply. She felt ill. She saw now what she had escaped, what she had fought as a young girl until she had married. The dark word crowded her mind: possession. Felicity, who in her own lifetime had never greeted her returning soldier, tried to find her happiness through them.

She took Felicia's arm to lead her back to the house, but Felicia refused to move. Her arm was flaming hot.

"Felicia!" she said.

Her niece seemed startled and appeared to be coming back to herself. Mrs. Rowan felt the heat leave the arm that she still held as if a fever had been drained from her niece's body.

Felicia was visibly trying to regain possession of herself. She said in a weak voice, "You were right, Aunt Helen. My idea was a mistake. Let me call James Hamilton to put the lock back if he can."

She went to the corner of the house and called the workman, but there was no response. She turned back to her aunt. "He's gone," she said in despair.

She walked back to the tree that still glowed in a strange light and wiped the perspiration from her face. "If he had come back it would have been in the winter."

There was no need to say who he was. They stood together in the comradeship of two who had escaped the same fate. Felicia seemed relieved and sank into the chair where Mrs. Rowan was standing.

"Yes," said Mrs. Rowan, feeling an infinite pity for her niece. "Yes, it would have been February, perhaps."

"It's summer now," said Felicia with a firmer voice, drawing strength from the fact that time was with her against the unknown.

"Yes," said Mrs. Rowan soothingly, but as she spoke she saw a little yellow fan-shaped leaf fall into Felicia's lap.

They both looked up, and the tree above them was like a yellow flame. Almost instantly they were involved in a confetti-like fall of yellow leaves.

Mrs. Rowan's years weighed heavily on her. She gasped and took the burning hand of her niece. "Come; we must get to the house."

Felicia pulled away from her and said in that voice that had been youthful a hundred years before, "He's coming. I hear his step on the street."

She ran toward the gate, and Mrs. Rowan could almost see long yellow skirts swishing around her legs. "Felicia!" she screamed.

Her niece stopped and turned a terrified face to her and pled in her own voice, "Aunt Helen!"

There was the sound of the gate opening, and both women turned terror-stricken faces toward the sound. Mrs. Rowan sank down on the carpet of yellow leaves as the sound of footsteps came up the path.

Her niece stood where she had stopped, and her hands rose as if someone were lifting them up around his neck. She started to speak, but her voice was cut off and her body swayed back as if she were caught up in a passionate embrace.

A cold winter wind rustled the leaves around Mrs. Rowan, and she watched her niece collapse into the summer shrubbery.

destination dublin

the empire state twinkles
and fades from flight;
the universe is dark
except for points of light
        in the heavens

upward   upward   fixed wings soar,
leaving earth and sound behind.
eastward   eastward   sweeping silently
toward celestial beacons blinking white

eastward   eastward   racing to meet
the sun by slicing the night in half.
faster   faster   making miles
minute and minutes go backwards

we trespass through lairs of bears
major and minor, then cross
a backyard of seven sisters,
a vacuum of no resistance

within, sealed from sound but not sight,
eyes widen, then linger with more love
than those of astronauts, whose view
could not fulfill more than quilted
patterns greetings pilgrims in reverse

hearts quicken as wheels screech
on the dawn of new lives;
emotions swell into poems,
and i smile, realising
i have broken   the brown bag
            of my existence

eugene robert platt

Rendezvous in the University Center

Rosalie, in the U. C., recomposes her knees.
Focus this: the table's elliptical top,
The curve of her blouse, the balance
At her wrist, a chair leg's careful slant.
There is suspense in her green shoe
About to drop. If she wiggles her toes,
It is only in response to the music.

There are hundreds of people here
Out of range of my camera.
Her cigarette smoke climbs up,
Seems to hang her from the top of the frame.
Focus her.

Now, Rosalie,
What would happen if you, suddenly,
Amid all this random gorging of sandwiches,
This talk, this rimming of coffee spoons,
Were suddenly to take all of your clothes off–

Hoo!
Then re-pose, Rosalie, in your new disguise
(While I re-adjust for hair-light, skin-shine!) –
The table will serve as your spot-light,
Your stage, the scene of your debut–
Let your knees, bright thighs
Be first to poise in your pantomime:
Your part is your birth, your first desire,
Your coming of age. Click!

Hundreds of us are watching you, Rosalie.
Yet no one knows you as I do
Grown as you are full-formed from my eye–
When the music is done
You may acknowledge the general applause.
As I will be done with you, you may die again,

You may exhale me in your climbing down,
Your putting on again of your underwear.

The pity is that you have no lover other than me
Nor will ever have in this lifetime
That just passed by.

PRICE CALDWELL

To The Chicago Poet

Sandburg is a galoot, a sandbag, a hog
butcher of verse, a stacker of rhythms.

But I am for him 100%, you can bet on that.

Yes I would rather read *Honey & Salt* than
the *Reader's Digest*, and *The People Yes*
is more relevant to my life than *Woodstock*
Nation.

Sandburg doesn't suit the critics, maybe,
or the queer poets combing their golden
hair on siren rocks of isolation, singing
to each other and luring young poets to
their doom.

But Sandburg suits the common man, the
carriers of coal and the carriers of
commuter cards; he wrote of their world
and they are for him.

So here's to you, Sandburg, and if the next
life resembles this one I hope there is a
small town in it for you, where you can lay
bricks and drive the milk wagon and play
the banjo forever as a singer of songs.

GAIL BROCKETT WHITE

Identity

Always backwards in the mirror
Or frozen solid in a snapshot
Of some unconnected moment
That is never now
We search to the east, search to the west
Scour every corner
Cross our eyes, see only nose
Conclude for the moment that
Ah, there we are.
Resigning our query
To a pore-pricked tip of flesh.

ESTA SEATON

Weeds

Yesterday I had the world on the other end
of a twelve pound test line
and could have reeled it in
like striped bass.
    There was slime
in that water, though, and today
she's the most different world
I've known. I could wish it
worse and do, because creek beds are
miserable places for making money
    or love
and she insisted on both. But when
you bait your hook for
    the biggest game of all,
you've got to know where to cast
and also when to pack up and go
                    home.

PETER D. ZIVKOVIC

Reviews

eugene robert platt. *coffee and solace. poems.* Dublin and Charleston: Commedia Publishing Division, 1970.

Shortly after we founded *The South Carolina Review* in 1968, we received an enthusiastic note from a native son living in Washington. He warmly congratulated us on our risky act of faith and shared our hope that the *Review* would enliven the literary scene in his native state. He hoped that he could play a part in the new dispensation. We printed two of his poems last year, and two others appear elsewhere in this issue. Now after a friendly correspondence, we can return the favor by congratulating eugene robert platt (as he, rather perversely we think, likes to write his name) on his first book of poems, a little work printed in Dublin, Ireland, and issued simultaneously there and in Charleston. The poems are every bit as gentle and friendly as his letters.

He says in the "Foreword" that if "the book has a theme, it is the story of a recurring search for 'coffee and solace.' " There is no mistaking either polarity. Many of the poems express greetings to friends or loved ones or recall memories of casual acquaintanceships that still evoke warm feelings. "green robe" and "dinner candles" describe a present love fulfilled. "2121 R" recalls a convivial home where Army friends lived happily and entertained joyously:

> 2121 R Street, Northwest
> a spirit as much as an address.
> envied by the other group houses
> — as well as by the loners
> who stopped by for coffee and solace

Many other poems, perhaps the majority, express the other polarity, that of loss and loneliness, the feeling of unrequited love, and the search for solace. "september poem" expresses the "futile wish / that we could have met this september / instead of last," when the speaker was less wise. "carolina sands" and "winter tree" show the speaker looking for consolation in the natural haunts of his childhood, the beach and the park. The latter poem ends gloomily:

> you have no solace to offer, winter tree
> and you can take none from lonely me

In "irish mist," which sympathizes with another person's loneliness, the facetious exaggeration defines a bond of good humor between speaker and grieving lady friend:

> after he left dublin
> you cried five days
> no wonder
> ireland's so damp

One of the more persistent expressions of grief is a series of poems dealing with the death of the poet's father. A dozen poems or so re-live such memories as father and son at the movies: afterwards the son ate ice cream "while Dad sipped a beer"; as the machinist "father, arising to die on / the job, watching his world's final / revolutions on a turning / lathe"; as the son's receiving the fateful message "while strapped in a dentist's chair / nerves (but not emotions) / numbed by novocain"; as the prayer that the father will live "until i can fly to his side / . . . and kiss his hand / and try to make him understand / that i'm not ungrateful"; as the mingled shock and outrage to see the father's coffined body done up "with excess cosmetics / . . . in its satin-lined, thousand dollar / flip top box"; and as the funeral procession, that frantic "last ride":

> it's your big day, Dad
> you'll head the procession
> as we go cadillacin'
> — with police escort, no less —
> to that little plot you bought in the country
> among the trees . . .

In this series we see best the tenderness of platt's personality, the tone of friendly humility and gratitude, the warm intensity of his feelings.

What's so good about the book is its utter unpretentiousness, its commonplace yet universal simplicity. At its best it is the record of personal encounters in simple, objective language. Sometimes this ordinary speech about ordinary people in ordinary situations is too ordinary and too flat, but only a few poems completely fail to stimulate clear emotional responses, those of cultural criticism in which platt speculates about the destiny of the human race or discusses popular causes (McCarthyism, highway safety). His forte is not pontificating but sketching personal situations, "coffee and solace," in clear images and in gentle conversa-

tional tones — writing, to adapt one of his phrases, "where no mean words / or intemperate tones are heard."

It's a pleasure to welcome this quiet, friendly voice, tinged with a sensitive nostalgia, and to wish it the solace of a friendly reception.

Alfred S. Reid

Jarrell and Reid Celebrate a Woman: A Comparative Explication

Emily Wilson

Comparing poems can be a tricky business. Usually the shadows of poets themselves fall across the critic's vision, and he begins to see the established reputations of the writers more clearly than the poems before him. When you put the name of Randall Jarrell opposite that of Alfred Reid,[1] a South Carolina poet who teaches at Furman University, the lengthened shadow of the brilliant and fearsome Jarrell virtually eclipses the unheralded poet published in small places. Even the major poets trembled a little at the name Jarrell. Jarrell, however, was a master teacher who could put his poems alongside lesser known poems in order to illuminate both. So when Alfred Reid's poem "Student Conference" evokes comparisons with Jarrell's "A Man Meets a Woman in the Street," the reader profits from trying to analyze the methods of the two artists.

Jarrell's poem celebrates a woman. No, it celebrates what a woman means to a man, the narrator of the poem. He begins with unabashed idolatry: "She walks through the air the rain has washed, a clear thing / . . . seeming to men / Miraculous." His hyperboles are eloquent: "Her hair's coarse gold / Is spun from the sunlight that it rides upon. / Women were paid to knit from sweet champagne / Her second skin." Still, the poet admits, she is not a goddess but a mortal, not perfect but almost perfect (her hair is "almost fair" and she is "almost tall"). As the poem

[1]Editors' Note: Mrs. Wilson made the juxtaposition in a review of Reid's *Lady Godiva's Lover* in the Winston-Salem *Sentinel* for February 22, 1970: "Sometimes the effort at hyperbole and heroics falls flat, as in 'Student Conference' (a poem to compare with Randall Jarrell's 'A Man Meets a Woman in the Street' to see just how much it fails)." The editors asked her to develop her point, and she has obliged with raw candor.

progresses, the reality of the woman gathers force until the relationship of the two people emerges, though she is not explicitly identified until the last of the poem (she is somehow new, somehow familiar).

The tone changes after the adoring introduction, and the poem documents a life, bringing images out of the past – the voice of Madame Schumann-Heink, the music of Strauss, the life's work of Proust. The poet interrupts his reverie, however, to recall the more recent past. Waking up at dawn, at home in the forest, he had heard the birds singing, and the message of their song returns to him: "'May this day be the same!'" But the poet had wished, as men do, "'May this day be different.'" This comparison of man and nature appears again in the poem when the speaker breaks off his musing upon the woman and her past with the same kind of "firmness, intensity, reality" as the song of the bird, ultimately sharing nature's wisdom.

When Jarrell renews his quest for the woman, he establishes the intimacy of their relationship – "someone to help or hurt, / Someone to be good to me, to be good to." He again describes the woman in the romanticized terms of the opening stanzas (the gold hair, the champagne-colored dress), and the speaker, touching her, confesses, "But I've pretended long enough . . . Because, after all it *is* my wife." As the figures merge, the images introduced earlier in the poem come together (Proust, Strauss, the forest where he waked, the sunlight where she walks). The meaning of the past and the present is then contained in his simple wish: "'May this day / Be the same day, the day of my life.'"

What a reader feels in this poem is the presence of human beings – who "first helped each other, hurt each other, years ago." The meaning of their relationship emerges naturally out of images recollected from the past, adding up at the end to – nothing less than life.

In "A Man Meets a Woman" there is a paradoxical unity of hyperbole and understatement: a woman with hair spun of gold is also a woman who is described in the most direct way – "a woman who is my type." While the poem exults in a kind of 17th century metaphysical adoration of women, there are a naturalness and a lack of artifice which characterize the best of Jarrell's work. There is a fine blending of the figurative and the literal, of details and images. At the same time Jarrell creates his own hyperboles, he can use "the language of dogs and cats": for example, he makes art out of familiar expressions like "There is no one in the world quite like you" or "'I am yours, / Be mine!'"

Marianne Moore has said that Jarrell "could invest a creature with romance which makes it seem the counterpart of a luna moth with sea-green wings that have violent crescents on them – a creature that was a worm, and that only respects compliments which respect modesty."

In Reid's poem "Student Conference" (published in *Lady Godiva's Lover* by the Drummer Press of Winston-Salem, N. C.) the woman seems artificially, ostentatiously (or mischievously) carved out of an artist's notebook. The poem, like Jarrell's, is about the feeling of a man for a woman, his wife (stated negatively in the opening line, "Sometimes I think you're not my wife"). What follows is a kaleidoscope of images, merging fantasy and reality until the poet, the reader scarcely know the wife from the lovely coeds who sit in the teacher's classes. He talks in his office, in his class, to the coed, or is she his wife? ("I forget you're my wife because your rouge matches / Your lavender blouse"). Images seem all too contemporary and stylish, like splices out of a Fellini movie (or a copy of a Fellini movie): a game of tennis is played in snow (while "Dark clouds menace us") with a barefoot girl (his wife?) in a black overcoat, with a stringless racket; there are lust and nakedness at the "Church of the Moulin Rouge"; a woman leans from an open window overlooking the Arno. Perhaps these are associations out of their past, as meaningful as the associations in Jarrell's poem, but somehow, they seem made-up; they don't add up to something coherent and revealing. The reader never *knows* the woman, the relationship, what Jarrell calls "the weight of a human being."

At the end of Reid's poem he admits that he is "Talking, talking. / Talking about my conference with you" and that in fact "You did not come, / For you were home with the children." Like Jarrell, he has "pretended long enough." But what a disappointment! When Jarrell says, "After all, it *is* my wife" we feel prepared for the confession, the affirmation. With Reid's admission at the end (You can't be young and mini-skirted and sit in my class as I saw you because you are my domesticated wife, at home with the children), the reader feels like groaning, "Well, of course. We always see wives that way in TV commercials and in *Ladies Home Journal*. This woman who makes you see the Arno, the Moulin Rouge, make us see *her*, not an image of her."

James Dickey has one of his speakers in a conversation about Jarrell criticize surrealist poetry "that uses objects as counters to whirl into and out of bizarre images, simply for the sake of the images, and the

bizarreness. Jarrell's poems are far too respectful of experience of life as it is lived by people, for that to happen. Their world is *our* world." Jarrell's advocate argues that his contribution was that "of writing about real things, rather than playing games with words."

Reid has a keen sense of fantasy which in one way is pure enjoyment, in another way is obscure and somehow "formulated." The reader senses his delight in image-making! On the other hand, sometimes he seems attracted by a kind of artful game: If I put this person in that role and I assumed this role and we turned reality upside down, that would be very interesting. This he does in two poems, "There by the Artificial Holly" and "On Reading a Scholarly Paper in a Ballroom." Reid clearly is fascinated by examining moments of indecision and need, but he leaves himself uncommitted, like a chess player who, having moved his pieces into contest, leaves them frozen on the board. Even fantasy doesn't seem to "happen"; it is "talked" about.

What Reid seems to do is to take a recognizable situation and project what might happen if the rules were changed and impulses were expressed. What Jarrell does is to take a recognizable situation and show us the possibilities (the absurdities, the pathos, the comic) within the reality of that situation.

Furthermore, Jarrell supports his images with allusions rich in associations, which prevent his fantasies from being merely subjective, esoteric, or obscure. In his poem "Woman," for example, Jarrell describes her:

> You walk mirrored: rosy-fingered, many-breasted
> As Diana of the Ephesians, strewing garments
> Before the world's eyes narrowed in desire.
> Now, naked on my doorstep, in the sun
> Gold-armed, white-breasted, pink-cheeked, and black-furred,
> You call to me, "Come"; and when I come say, "Go,"
> Smiling your soft contrary smile . . .

Readers not only respond to Jarrell's woman, but they have their own sense of Diana of the Ephesians. Reid relies too exclusively on a personal set of symbols and situations and fails to give his own experience a broader context.

In one respect the poets are almost identical: both seem fascinated by women as subjects for their poetry.

James Dickey's DELIVERANCE: Darkness Visible

Daniel B. Marin

The maze is built up on the box's top and an arrowed path snakes through it around twenty or more penny-size holes bored into the floor of its roofless passages. Two control knobs that you turn to tilt the top protrude from adjacent sides of the walnut box, which is somewhat larger than a piece of typing paper and five inches deep. The game is one of several about the James Dickey household this relaxed Sunday afternoon — "The house is booby-trapped with games," he says. The object of this one is to coax a steel marble along the path through the maze, by tilting the top one way and another, without letting it drop into any of the holes. "Go on, try it," Dickey says grinning, rocking forward on his toes, delighted and genial. Even halfway is hard. Dickey's hands indicate, "Watch," and he hunches down over the box, focuses his fingers on the knobs, and squeezes *all* the *finely* balanced *energy* of his generous mind and body through the control knobs into the marble. It moves. Stops. Moves. Moves from beginning to end; then back out again from end to beginning. The fingers unfocus and spread, and the grin relaxes back out onto his face "in pure abandon."

Concentration, release; systole, diastole.

More than any man I have known, James Dickey senses and, in the gestures of his play and work, expresses the deepest rhythms of the mortal creaturely life which men share with all animal creation — with fish, snake, seal, lizard, horse, fox, dog, wolverine, sheep, tiger, butterfly, bird:

> Heavy summer. Heavy. Companion, if we climb our mortal bodies
> High with great effort, we shall find ourselves
> Flying with the life
> Of the birds of death. We have come up
> Under buzzards they face us
>
> Slowly slowly circling and as we watch them they turn us
> Around, and you and I spin
> Slowly, slowly rounding
> Out the hill. We are level
> Exactly on this moment: exactly on the same bird-

plane with those deaths. They are the salvation of our sense
Of glorious movement. Brother, it is right for us to face
Them every which way, and *come to ourselves* and *come*
From every direction
There is. Whirl and stand fast!

Dickey touches that life truly and measures precisely its range of terrors and joys.

The terror of creaturely life is what Ed Gentry, central character and narrator of Dickey's first novel, *Deliverance*, discovers in other men and in himself, nearer the surface than the protective fat of his daily routine had let him imagine. *Deliverance* is the ferocious tale of a week-end canoe ride Ed and three other city men take down a wild and glorious stretch of the Cahulawassee, a north Georgia river which will soon be dammed up, flooded into a lake, and made over by the real estate people "into," as Lewis Medlock, leader of the expedition, puts it, "one of their havens." But the trip turns into a gauntlet of violence and death that forces Ed to find in himself a cunning beast of prey that will stalk and kill its quarry: another man.

Though sometimes the ferocity recedes, the novel's tonal range never includes the "pure abandon" that is within the broader reach of Dickey's poetry, notably in his most recent collection, *The Eye-Beaters, Blood, Victory, Madness, Buckhead and Mercy*. Ed is driven to his discovery by violence, terror, and desperation, and his tale is, therefore, *un*relaxing. Even near the end, just after the canoe, carrying the three who are still alive, thrusts over a waterfall and pitches down six feet into, at last, calm water, we are not back safe.

What is left? Probably the trickiest and most crucial thing of all: deception, plausible deception. Without facing a full investigation, and likely more, they can't tell anyone what truly happened. How can they get back to their lives in the city? Ed invents an account that will get them through if they "don't mess up on the details." "Control, baby," says Ed. "It can be controlled." Indeed, for Ed's creator, as well as for Ed, unrelaxed control and credibility are the whole game.

Dickey's strategy in *this* game is to get the story told with tense and astonishing clarity that never lets us drop into doubt. As soon as Ed begins to speak, we attend — and believe:

> It unrolled slowly, forced to show its colors, curling and snapping back whenever one of us turned loose. The whole land was very tense until we put our four steins on its corners and laid the river out to run for us through the mountains 150 miles north. Lewis' hand took a pencil and marked out a small strong X in a place where some of the green bled away and the paper changed with high ground, and began to work downstream, northeast to southwest through the printed woods. I watched the hand rather than the location, for it seemed to have power over the terrain, and when it stopped for Lewis' voice to explain something, it was as though all streams everywhere quit running, hanging silently where they were to let the point be made. The pencil turned over and pretended to sketch in with the eraser an area that must have been around fifty miles long, through which the river hooked and cramped.

First, there is the speed with which Ed gets to the central image of his tale: the river. Immediately we anticipate the trip; its direction is sharply marked out. And the map anticipates the land's and the river's energy, "curling and snapping back whenever one of us turned loose."

But there's something in the quality of Ed's voice, in his language, that pulls too: in the tensity of his phrasing ("forced to show its colors," "where the green bled away," "through which the river hooked and cramped"), in the bend toward fantasy ("it was as though all streams everywhere quit running, hanging silently where they were to let the point be made"), in the startling up-close sharpness of the focus ("I watched the hand rather than the location," "The pencil turned over and pretended to sketch"). What do you call it? A fineness? A nervous and scrupulous pressure? A something, at any rate, that presses the words down so exactly and tightly upon perception that not a breath is felt between language and thing: "forced to show its colors."

Through the eyes that Ed's voice gives us, the world suddenly appears as through fine, expensive binoculars, the kind with perfectly ground lenses coated to filter out all glare and let in only brilliantly undistorted light, or dark. Color and form turn to a foreshortened compactness more powerfully convincing than anything the naked eye feels even when it really is 7X closer. Look, as Lewis Medlock draws back some branches and we see the river the first time:

> The river opened and was there. It was gray-green, very clear and yet with a certain milkiness, too; it looked as though it would turn white and foam at rocks more easily than other water. It was about forty yards wide, and shallow, about two

> and a half or three feet deep. The bed was full of clean brown pebbles. We couldn't see very far upstream or down, but just watched the part in front of us going by and by carrying nothing, not even a twig, as it lay in the branches and leaves in Lewis' arms. He let the limbs fall; they swept in gracefully and closed the river off again.

Dickey has said, "I tried to just concentrate on the action, on trying to tell an exciting story as simply as I could." (Quoted by Walter Clemons in "James Dickey, Novelist," *The New York Times Book Review*, March 22, 1970, p. 22.) And I think *Deliverance* is a novel of place and act more than of character. Most of Dickey's creative energy is concentrated into the thorough imagining of place and act, because, I guess, those put the heaviest pressure on the reader's belief. Image after image after image, scene after scene pushes into consciousness and memory. Rereading the novel you know things are coming which you'd rather not believe again. But the narrative drives you to them and forces you to believe once more: Bobby Trippe's scream of "pain and outrage" and then of "simple and wordless pain" as held at gunpoint by one mountaineer, he is buggered by another; Ed's climb, foothold by foothold and handhold by handhold, up the side of the gorge; the center-shot mountaineer as he "melted forward and down . . . the arrow hanging down his back just below the neck." Dickey's strategy of presenting almost everything scenically with exhaustive insistence on details of immediate sense experience and of avoiding backing off into summary, except occasionally in the "Before" and "After" sections which deal with city life, could not be sounder, nor more compelling.

Characterization, on the other hand, is done quickly and deftly with straight, heavy strokes, as it should be in a novel of this kind. Dickey has a careful eye for the proper proportions here. By the end of the first chapter, the characters have been clearly and almost completely established. Thereafter, with the exception of Ed, they change very little. And in every case their actions are rigorously within the range of possibility and probability that has been defined for them. This is as crucial to the novel's credibility and sharpness of focus as is the detailing of place and act.

Ed Gentry is the most "rounded." He speaks of himself — and of the other characters — with an engaging directness akin to that of Melville's narrator in "Bartleby the Scrivener." Ed is art director and half-

owner of a modest graphics studio. His attitude toward his work is largely representative of his orientation to his life.

> For we had grooved, modestly, as a studio. I knew it and was glad of it; I had no wish to surpass our limitations, or to provide a home for geniuses on their way to the Whitney or to suicide. I knew that our luck was good and would probably hold; that our success was due mainly to the lack of graphic sophistication in the area. What we had, we could handle, and we were in a general business situation that provided for everybody pretty well, even those shading down toward incompetence, so long as they were earnest and on time. The larger agencies in the city and the local branches of the really big New York and Chicago agencies didn't give us much work. We made a halfhearted pitch for some of it, but when they were not enthusiastic we – or at least Thad and I – were happy to take up where we had been. The agencies we liked and understood best were those which were most like us – those that were not pressing, that were taking care of their people. We worked on small local accounts – banks, jewelry stores, supermarkets, radio stations, bakeries, textile mills. We would ride with these.

Ed must admit he is a part of this world, which he has done much to create. Harmony is what he likes in his work, and, we might suppose, in his personal life. In women he looks for the "absolutely personal connection," and, he tells us, when he "found a genuine form of it, small but steady," he married it. Up to a point he is, like the narrator of Melville's tale, an "eminently *safe* man."

But only up to a point. There are times when the habits and routines of his life frighten him, when he knows "that if [he] managed to get up, through the enormous weight of lassitude, [he] would still move to the water cooler or speak to Jack Waskow or Thad, with a sense of being someone else, some poor fool who lives unobserved and impotent as a ghost, going through the only motions it has." He feels imprisoned by what he has created. Hence, perhaps, the attraction of his friend Lewis' mystiques: flycasting, archery, weight lifting, spelunking, and now canoeing. In short, there is a mild, though important, ambivalence in Ed. He tells us that when he woke on the morning they were to depart and remembered he was going with Lewis, "the routine I was used to pulled at me, but something in me rose daringly above it, full of fear and feeling weak and incompetent but excited."

The other characters are less complicated, at least as they exist in Ed's mind. Each, in pure and extreme form, represents an aspect of Ed's character. Lewis Medlock is restless, obsessive, and daring in whatever he does; but his daring is often rash. On the way to the river he gets lost, plunging wildly down country roads he does not know. Bobby Trippe, on the other hand, is fearful and physically weak and incompetent, though "a pleasant surface human being." His moment of rage was "like the rage of a weak king." Drew Ballinger is a sane, quiet, steady man, loyal to the routines that heretofore have guarded his life. While Lewis drives madly along roads he doesn't know, Drew follows someone who does know them. Through "sheer devotion" Drew has learned to play the guitar and banjo, but his devotion is far from the restless obsessions of Lewis.

The point is that by reliefing the roundness of Ed against the flatness of Lewis, Bobby, and Drew, Dickey has maintained the sharp narrative focus.

The focus is on what the river and its environs do to Ed. Ed's journey, like those of Marlow in Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* and Brown in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," is into an unknown and repressed area below or out beyond that of the daytime-sunlight human consciousness. The general human sinfulness that Brown discovers in the forest so burdens his consciousness that he never really gets back into the sunlight again but becomes "a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man . . . from the night of that fearful dream." Marlow can return from the horror of Kurtz's fierce disintegration only with a lie, because truth "would have been too dark — too dark altogether." Ed, too, can get back only with a lie. And though Ed's lie is, on one level, a matter of practicality and expediency, on another it is as moral a lie as Marlow's, for an animal of savage cunning that Ed hadn't known was there has thrust up from down inside him into consciousness and memory. Something terrible was pushed out and got free in that "land of impossibility," something Ed and we would rather not believe.

The progress of its emergence is even clearer and more real than Lewis' map. We will trace its route.

At the beginning of the "September 14th" section, Ed says,

> There was something about me that usually kept me from dreaming, or maybe kept me from remembering what I had

> dreamed; I was either awake or dead, and I always came back slowly. I had the feeling that if it were perfectly quiet, if I could hear nothing, I would never wake up. Something in the world had to pull me back, for every night I went down deep, and if I had any sensation during sleep, it was of going deeper and deeper, trying to reach a point, a line or border.

He has the same feeling as they embark on the river:

> A slow force took hold of us; the bank began to go backward. I felt the complicated urgency of the current, like a thing made of many threads being pulled, and with this came the feeling I always had at the moment of losing consciousness at night, going toward something unknown that I could not avoid, but from which I would return.

Their first night out, as Ed lies in his sleeping bag thinking, we move closer to that "line or border."

> I could hear the river running at my feet, and behind my head the woods were unimaginably dense and dark; there was nothing in them that knew me. There were creatures with one forepaw lifted, not wanting yet to put the other down on a dry leaf, for fear of the sound. There were the eyes made for seeing in this blackness; I opened my eyes and saw the dark in all its original color. In it I saw Martha's back heaving and working and dissolving into the studio, where we had finally decided that the photographs we had taken were no good and had asked the model back. We had also gone ahead with the Kitts' sales manager's idea to make the ad like the Coppertone scene of the little girl and the dog. There was Wilma holding the cat and forcing its claws out of its pads and fastening them into the back of the girl's panties. There was Thad; there was I. The panties stretched, the cat pulled, trying to get its claws out of the artificial silk, and then all at once leapt and clawed the girl's buttocks. She screamed, the room erupted with panic, she slung the cat round and round, a little orange concretion of pure horror, still hanging by one paw from the girl's panties, pulling them down, clawing and spitting in the middle of the air, raking the girl's buttocks and her leg-backs. I was paralyzed. Nobody moved to do anything. The girl screamed and cavorted, reaching behind her.

Now it is Friday night. On Thursday in "the bright hardship of the lights" of the graphics studio, a very different scene was played with the model – a restrained scene. But now, in "the dark in all its original color," the elements of that first scene have erupted into paralyzing panic

and "pure horror," nor can Ed re-harmonize them. He is somewhere he has never been before, where nothing knows him.

Yet, he has just set out; he is not all the way. As he lies there the fantastic panic and horror suddenly turn real.

> Something hit the top of the tent. I thought it was part of what I had been thinking, for the studio was no dream. I put out a hand. The material was humming like a sail. Something seemed to have hold of the top of the tent; the cloth was trembling in a huge grasp . . . The canvas was punctured there, and through it came one knuckle of a deformed fist, a long curving of claws that turned on themselves. Those are called talons, I said out loud.

It is as though the little metal owl which that morning woke Ed as the wind rang it against the bronze birds out on his patio, has suddenly emerged from the blackness as a true and terrifying owl. In that blackness Ed, "seeing everything," imagines himself hunting with the real owl: "I hunted with him as well as I could, there in my weightlessness. The woods burned in my head."

The imagined hunt is the prelude of real hunts to come. First, the following morning in a dense fog, Ed takes his bow and pretends to hunt a deer, but, he tells us, "hunting and pretending to hunt had come together and I could not tell them apart." This morning, Saturday, he misses his prey. Sunday morning, farther down the river, farther than ever beyond the daytime-sunlight consciousness, where he moves "cautiously, as much as [he] could like a creature who lived in a tree," he stalks and this time kills his prey — another man, another creature. On all fours he follows his victim's blood-trail: "There was no path into the woods where I was going. It was dark there, but I could see blood, and when I couldn't see it I could feel it, and, in some cases, smell it." He has reached the border; now he has to get back. How? With the cunning of the beast that has emerged from within him.

The structure of meaning in *Deliverance* is articulated chiefly by such images as I have been tracing. However, at one point in the "September 14th" section, Dickey forsakes this rhetorical strategy and uses a less subtle and, I think, less forceful method of defining the meaning and importance of the action. That point is the novel's weakest. Lewis and Ed talk, for about fifteen pages, as they are driving toward Oree where they plan to get on the river. Lewis does most of the talking. And though what he says is in character and is focused on the trip

and the issue of survival, though what he says defines the possibilities and probabilities of the world of the hill people into which they are going, and hence prepares for and helps to make credible the subsequent action, still I think it unnecessarily slows down the pace and movement of the narrative, because these things are done more naturally and more forcefully elsewhere in the novel.

Lewis talks about how survival comes down to the fitness of the body, "the one thing you can't fake," about the quality of life up in the hills "that wasn't out of touch with everything," about the hill people and how "they'll do what they want to do, no matter what . . . they don't think a whole lot about killing people," but if "one of them likes you he'll do anything in the world for you." He illustrates his point with a story of how he and Shad Mackey were "running Blackwell Creek" when Shad decided to "take his bow and hunt rabbits downstream" and got lost and a mountaineer Lewis had meanwhile met sent his fifteen year old son out at night to find Shad and the boy went, without hesitation, found Shad where he lay with a broken leg, and brought him back. For Lewis this father-son relationship sums up the valuable qualities of life in the hills. Lewis tells other stories: about how he broke his ankle while fishing up in the hills and had to get back alone; and about old Tom McCaskill's going off into the woods to drink and holler. These last two stories foreshadow the danger and menace of the hill country and its people.

But aren't these things done better elsewhere, without diminishing the novel's characteristic narrative drive? Aren't the menace and beauty of the hill country foreshadowed in the description of the town of Oree and in the sequence with the old man and the albino boy at the garage there and in the sequence with the Griner brothers, whom the canoeists pay to drive the cars around to Aintry? Consider this description of the shed where Ed and Lewis find one of the Griner brothers.

> It was dark and iron-smelling, hot with the closed-in heat that brings the sweat out as though it had been waiting all over your body for the right signal. Anvils stood around or lay on their sides, and chains hung down, covered with coarse, deep grease. The air was full of hooks; there were sharp points everywhere — tools and nails and ripped-open rusty tin cans. Batteries stood on benches and on the floor, luminous and green, and through everything, out of the high roof, mostly, came this clanging hammering, meant to deafen and even blind. It was

> odd to be there, not yet seen, paining with the metal harshness in the half-dark.

This description, which is locked tightly into the novel's narrative current, dramatizes Ed's sense of danger and threat in the world he is entering. Furthermore, the "clanging hammering" violently contrasts with the "lovely unimpeded flowing" of the albino boy's banjo which we heard two pages earlier. And together the two auditory images realize the hill country's range of terror and beauty, its ambivalence.

Though the world of *Deliverance* is a world of terror and violence, there are moments when it is also magically beautiful. For instance, in the "sleepy and hookwormy and ugly, and most of all, inconsequential" town of Oree, at the "dusty filling station" with the old man who looks like a "hillbilly in some badly cast movie, a character actor too much in character to be believed," is the crazy-eyed, demented, albino boy who can play the banjo so that "through everything he played there was a lovely unimpeded flowing that seemed endless." In this boy, whom they meet before getting on the river, is a kind of preview of the river itself: crazy and wild, but beautiful too. We see the river's beauty, for example, during Ed's torturous climb as he pauses to look down.

> The river had spread flat and filled with moonlight. It took up the whole space under me, bearing in the center of itself a long coiling image of light, a chill, bending flame. I must have been seventy-five or a hundred feet above it, hanging poised over some kind of inescapable glory, a bright pit.

There are several such passages in *Deliverance*; enough, I think to earn for Ed, and for Dickey, the image of the river as it finally rests in Ed's memory. By then the dam has been finished, and that stretch of the river no longer really exists. It is Ed's "private possession": "In me it still is, and will be until I die, green, rocky, deep, fast, slow, and beautiful beyond reality. I had a friend there who in a way had died for me, and my enemy was there." The tone here at the end is quiet and maybe even melancholy. I am reminded of Coleridge's Wedding Guest: "A sadder and a wiser man/He rose the morrow morn," though not exactly. Is it that the note of "pure abandon" Dickey reaches so wonderfully in the poetry can never be sung here in the dark light, in the "darkness visible" of *Deliverance*? But I am free to read the poetry too:

Over and around grass banked and packed short and holding back
Water, we have been
Playing, my son, in pure abandon,
And we still are. We play, and play inside our play and play
Inside of that, where butterflies are increasing
The deeper we get

And lake-water ceases to strain. Ah, to play in a great field of light.

NOTE: All quotations from Dickey's poetry are from his most recent collection, *The Eye-Beaters, Blood, Victory, Madness, Buckhead and Mercy*, Doubleday and Company, Garden City, N. Y., 1970; all quotations from *Deliverance* are from the hard-cover edition (rather than from the *Atlantic Monthly* where part of it appeared), Houghton, Mifflin, Boston, 1970.

Alone

I met my first earthworm yesterday—
Slimy-pink skin squiggling in shower-dampened sand.
And child-curious with wonder-wakened eyes,
I oohed in round-mouth awe,
"Mommy, Daddy, come look! What is it?"

But Daddy lives in Texas
And Mommy works all day
In a South Carolina cotton mill.
And the worm wriggled away.

This morning my fifth-grade teacher talked to me.
With folded-over arms, folded-in chin, folded-down
    mouth, she pronounced my promise, and
Gave me an *A* on my report.
And, joy-beams bursting, I begged,
"Mommy, Daddy, come look! Aren't you proud of me?"

But soon the joy jumped high away.

Today he told me good-bye—
Six months of mellow-mild days, melody-mist nights
    and wet-mouth kisses melted.
As tears tumbled and tomorrow-dreams toppled,
I cried for comfort,
"Mommy, Daddy, come look! Won't you dry my eyes?"

The pain soon passed away.

Now tonight, I face tomorrow.
Unknowing, unhappy, unfeeling, I go to unlock
    the door.
Anxiety, bitterness, curiosity bruise my consciousness,
As I whisper wistfully,
"Mommy, Daddy, come look! What awaits me?"

But Daddy lives in Texas
And Mommy works all day
In a South Carolina cotton mill.
And I exist my life away.

LINDA HARVEY

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