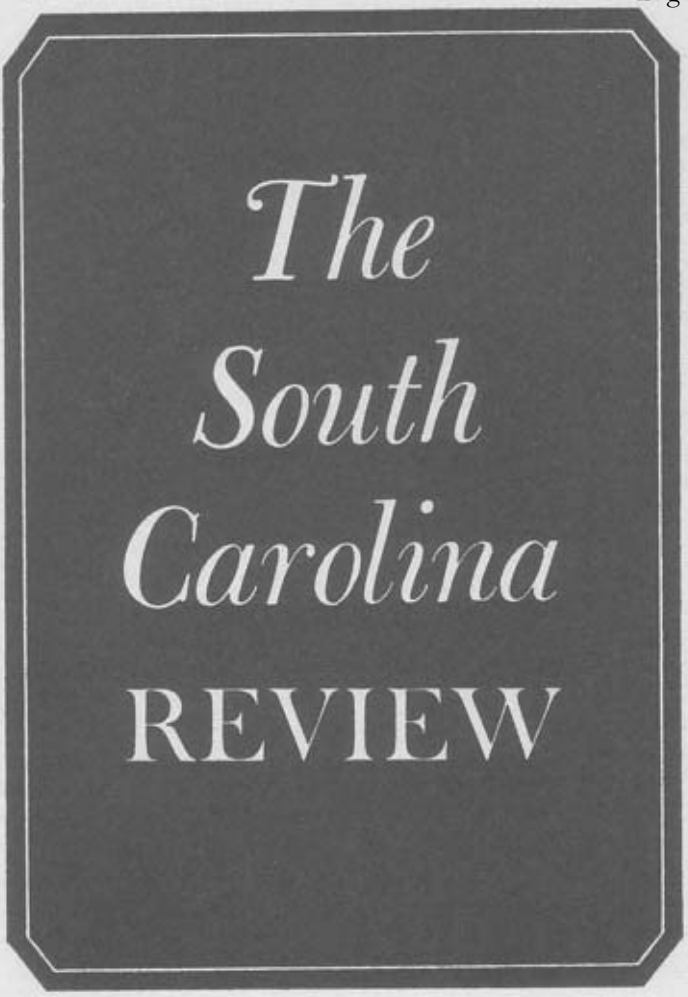

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The South Carolina Review

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THE SOUTH CAROLINA REVIEW

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The South Carolina Review

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PREFACE

South Carolina has long been noted for its literary interests, and for much of its history it has had good journals to identify and articulate these interests. *Russell's, The Southern Quarterly Review, The Southern Literary Journal,* and *The Magnolia,* to mention the most significant, brought national attention to our literary scene. These journals, of course, have ceased publication, but the literary activity remains—thus the state's need for representation. The College of Liberal Arts here at Clemson is pleased that it has the opportunity to fill this need with *THE SOUTH CAROLINA REVIEW.* It is eager to cultivate and to help define the literary inclinations of this region. Moreover, with its new project, it hopes to continue to make clear this University's concern for the liberal arts.

Therefore, I take this occasion to welcome the *REVIEW* to our campus, to thank Furman University for giving it such a fine start and for calling on us for its continuation, to thank our administration for its acceptance of the task, and to announce our intention of publishing a journal committed to literary excellence.

H. Morris Cox, Dean
College of Liberal Arts
Clemson University

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EDITORIAL: *THE SOUTH CAROLINA REVIEW* AT CLEMSON

After five years at Furman University under the editorship of Alfred S. Reid *THE SOUTH CAROLINA REVIEW* has moved to Clemson University. Professor Reid's policy of seeking the best in poems, short fiction, and literary criticism will be continued at Clemson. Our new policies will not be many, but we hope that they will give the *REVIEW* more appeal while continuing its dual role as a literary magazine and a scholarly-critical periodical. We will continue an interest in South Carolina and Southern literature, but we shall welcome even more creative work and critical essays from outside the state and region than *THE SOUTH CAROLINA REVIEW* has published in the past. We also plan to publish more critical and scholarly essays, and we will include more reviews of significant creative and scholarly works. In addition, we shall restore a feature of the older South Carolina magazines—the Editor's Column, in which we shall comment on topics of interest, mention new books, literary conferences and workshops, and announce issues of the *REVIEW* which will be devoted to special topics. Inasmuch as shorter articles and notes have all but disappeared from literary magazines, we should like to devote some space in each issue to notes, queries, or to comments on what we have published.

Our first editorial announcement is that we should like to do our part in the Frost centenary during 1974 by inviting critical articles on Robert Frost for our Fall 1974 issue. The deadline for these articles will be August 15, 1974.

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THREE POEMS BY KATHRYN STRIPLING

THE PURSUIT OF CULTURE

(A Valentine poem for my husband)

No snow yet,
except what's on the highest ridges
as we drive toward Asheville
and Rachmaninoff, the Sunday concert.
I see leghorns scrabbling in the junkyards,

many stacks of wood cut for the rest
of winter, many chimneys' smoke.
But no snow. Only light rain
that can make a highway slick,
a car go crazy. So

we take it easy—forty miles
an hour and the windshield wipers waving
like conductors' wands until
I feel resigned to anything. That is,

I hate Rachmaninoff. But never mind.
I love you, so I'll compromise.
If I can hold your hand, I'll gladly let
those legions of old ladies speak their minds

about the world and how they love
Rachmaninoff. What do we care?
We're climbing into snow at last.
A highway truck ahead rolls out a path

of salt and ghostly carlights
caravan along the mountainside behind
the two of us as good as lost
inside the same thought: what if

we should spend this Sunday night trapped
in some roadside Wayside Court
not even wanting to watch television?
Sometimes culture has its own rewards.

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LAMENT OF AN UN-HIP POET

"Poetry is Free!"

Allen Ginsberg, stoned on peyote, to Gary Snyder

After an hour of talk about what modern poetry is,
the rebellion of the young against the old,
the tyranny of that stodgy past
we must get free from to create a poem
that doesn't rhyme or scan or mean
a blessed thing beyond the literal (or so, I think,
he meant for us to understand), that hip poet
pushing freedom made me weak

with guilt for wanting to come home to sneak
a glance at Rembrandt's careful laying-on of color
uninformed by Jackson Pollock, or
at dinner hear a snatch of Mozart's quaint sonatas
over conversation. What's the matter
with me? And what's even worse
is this outmoded urge to read in bed some dead poet
trapped so needlessly by life that he could smile
back at those eyes, those ancient, glittering eyes
and play his silly games with words.

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SEEING "GONE WITH THE WIND" FOR THE FIFTH TIME

The wide screen still squelches me
into the role of a wall-flower wilting
as Scarlett herself blossoms out of the weeds on the hill
overlooking the grounds of her Hollywood mansion,

and I in a back row sip orangeade lamenting
my short hair,
my short skirt,
and a waist that could never be spanned with two hands,

though I once dreamed that I was the woman
who stumbled through briar-ridden roads
leading a mule and a sick cow,
watching with ash in my hair for the moon
to break out of the clouds and discover the house still unvanquished.

Now I know nothing would happen that way.
I'd come back to find a house lost
with no struggle, no stranger
to face on the stairs but my shadow.
(And the Yankees never marched into my part of Georgia.)

So, Scarlett, in spite of those summers
your petticoats teased the verandah I walked,
when the crepe myrtle blossoms were bouquets to gather,
the hot sun a flash-bulb to smile for,

you reel into darkness to wait for tomorrow's
next run while I take my time leaving the gloom
of this emptying theatre. Outside
where traffic lights signal my way home,
I stand at the corner, still waiting
for the scent of dead myrtle to scatter the clouds from my moon.

ELIOT AND "IL MIGLIOR FABBRO"

MARION MONTGOMERY

Footballs echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take . . .

Burnt Norton

We have lived with Eliot's public version of *The Waste Land* for fifty years, proliferating commentary and exegesis in an attempt upon its history and meaning so that we might determine whether it is a poem or sequence of poems, or a fragmentary ruin; whether a masterpiece which reorders the world's masterpieces, as Eliot instructs us to expect of the new masterpiece, or merely a chimera conjured out of our age's need to justify itself on the stage of literary history. The result has been that commentary, exegesis, and gossip have well-nigh buried the poem, so that at this point in its existence we feel safe in saying only that it (along with Pound's *Cantos*) is the most notorious poem of the century. There has hovered about *The Waste Land* from the beginning the shade of that other *Waste Land*, now materialized, the lost version from which Eliot and Pound extracted the poem we know. That the original version might turn up one day and dispel shadows—perhaps prove some combination of Dead Sea scroll and *Secret History of the Dividing Line* between the two great poets—was a constant expectation.

It was an expectation kept alive by Eliot's belated dedication of his poem to Pound, in 1925, the year Three Mountains Press published Pound's first substantial offering of the *Cantos*. The matter is still on his mind in 1938 when he remarked that

> the phrase, not only as used by Dante, but as quoted by myself, had a precise meaning. I did not mean to imply that Pound was only that [the better craftsman]: but I wished at that moment to honour the technical mastery and critical ability manifest in his own work, which had also done so much to turn The Waste Land from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem.

That dedicatory phrase, *il miglior fabbro*, is fraught with ambiguity nevertheless, and increasingly so as we reflect that Eliot's literary allusions are complexly metaphorical. Their correspondences radiate from the center of the particular words and phrases he borrows outward to

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the literary and historical context of his sources, and inward to Eliot's own poems and to his deepest life. That borrowing from Dante's XXVI Canto of the *Purgatory* must lead us to reflect that it is a favorite passage, which Eliot has gone to before, having chosen a phrase from the same lines as the title of his second collection of poems, *Ara Vos Prec.* He returns to the same sentence of that Canto for a telling phrase in "Ash-Wednesday," IV: *"Sovegna vos."* The phrases together: "Now I pray you, be mindful [in due season of my pain]." It is now perhaps that due season. Eliot knew that his dedication of the poem to Pound as *il miglior fabbro*—to one who "forged with yet greater skill his mother-speech"—is not only public gesture, but a semi-private one as well. For the phrase he chooses is not literally from Dante's text, but adapted by Eliot to the occasion; it is literally borrowed from Ezra Pound's *The Spirit of Romance,* where it stands as the chapter title of Pound's celebration of Arnaut Daniel. Given the dedication's ultimate source in Dante, near the summit of Mt. Purgatory, and remembering that Dante places the words (*"fu miglior fabbro"*) in the mouth of an admired poet of love (Guido Guinicelli) in order to praise an innovator even more devoted to love poetry (Arnaut Daniel), we must read the circumstances carefully.

As an example of the error one falls into when the context is not carefully considered, we have recently Professor David R. Rebmann's warping of the source to suit his thesis (in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement,* February 11, 1972, p. 156). Professor Rebmann accounts for Daniel's position on *Purgatory* as being "because he was a hermaphrodite," the brush he is intent on tarring Eliot with. (One presumes he means bisexual.) In point of fact, Dante is quite careful to distinguish Guinicelli (the Eliot of our dedicatory metaphor) and Daniel (the Pound) from the Sodomites who race about the seventh cornice in a direction *opposite* that of Guinicelli and Daniel, who are among those guilty of natural lust. (See lines 40-48, XXVI, *Purgatorio.*)

The exchange occurs in the region where excessive love of the world and the flesh is expiated. The ultimate source of the words is, of course, Dante, who sees himself the superior of Guinicelli and Daniel, at the point of going beyond them in his understanding of love, on to an encounter with Beatrice in the earthly paradise.

We are dealing with a poet whose working title for his poem is "He Do the Police in Several Voices," a sentence from Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend.* Eliot has a reputation as a playful mimic among his friends. (Herbert Howarth reports, in his *Notes on Some Figures Behind*

T. S. Eliot, that "it is said that, weekending with friends, he will read Dickens aloud, entering the characters with his voice," and he took special delight in imitating the Cockney maid he and Vivien employed for a time.) And so we may begin to suspect that Eliot's dedication of his poem to "a better craftsman of his mother-tongue" implies rather careful limitations. That Eliot is capable of whimsy and playfulness in the midst of his most serious concerns is the "possum" in him, which on occasion irritates Pound. "Tom" Eliot, as his friends called him, in the midst of the agonized self-inspection of his "Portrait of a Lady," at a point where he is looking into the heart to unravel its dark mysteries, could speak of his literal pulse in the ear with the playfulness of a Donne:

> Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins
> Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,
> Capricious monotone
> That is at least one definite 'false note.'

And he could also, in that more intense concern with the dark night of the soul, use his literal journey in the London subway as the term of his metaphor, in that paragraph of *Burnt Norton* beginning:

> Descend lower, descend only
> Into the world of perpetual solitude,
> World not world, but that which is not world,
> Internal darkness, deprivation
> And destitution of all property . . .

The longer one reads Eliot's poetry, the more firmly he becomes convinced of the multitude of things going on in words and phrases, in a range from the playful to the deadly serious. Nor is it easy to draw a fine line between what is intentionally present, what accidental and irrelevant, and what is present as discovery and so not appropriately included by either the intentional or the accidental. In dealing with a reflective poet, one must necessarily engage the dangers of the intentional fallacy and affective fallacy. Indeed, those are aspects of the creative process which engage Eliot again and again as he looks back upon his own poems. We are not thereby licensed for a wild goose chase after Tarot cards, and we shall certainly be foolish in pressing "round behind the gashouse" to yield a St. Louis baseball team, the old "Gashouse Gang." And yet we must, perforce, look into intention and discovery. What shall be our safeguard? Good sense, however ambiguous that phrase, and a confidence in our subject's integrity and intelligence.

We may make some justification of that attitude by looking briefly at the concern for the source of the title Eliot finally uses instead of his working title, "He Do the Police in Several Voices."

With the publication of the manuscript version, the question of the source of Eliot's title to that poem is raised again, in the letters column of the *Times Literary Supplement*, in March 3, 1972, and March 17, 1972. Is it from Jessie Weston's book, or directly from *Le Mort d'Arthur*? And was the seed of that phrase planted in his youth, perhaps from reading Sidney Lanier's popular *Boy's King Arthur*? One might suggest also Madison Cawein's "Waste Land," published by Harriet Monroe in *Poetry*, Volume I, pages 104-105, a poem which yields interesting comparisons. It is highly probable that Eliot was familiar with all of these, certain that he knew some of them. But source hunting in Eliot which does not recognize a particular genius in Eliot as poet is barren: he had a gift for the striking phrase or image or idea which reverberates in the history of his and his reader's minds, and because it touches common intellectual experience it is likely to touch sources even Eliot may not have encountered directly. If the emotion poetry is concerned to stir must be, in his phrase and with his emphasis, "*significant* emotion," its signs—its material forms—must be significant as well. That is, those materials must relate significantly to the memory and desire of the restless mind, which is not confined to any epoch. He is a reflective poet, and where there is continuing light the reflective mind continues to image forth, more largely than it may itself have consciously contained.

My argument has dangers, since it would seem to destroy precision in a poet devoted to purifying language and making it precise; it would seem to sanction any and every reading. But in fact it does not; it assumes Eliot's a true vision, not a unique one. The correspondences between such diverse minds as Augustine's (*The Confessions*), Baudelaire's (*Flowers of Evil*) and Eliot's (*The Waste Land*) are remarkable, but inevitable, since each mind is turning toward the same Light. It is the validity of that Light which is the final concern and which justifies the correspondences.

Given the serious poet, we may observe that his poem may mean more and less to him after he writes it than it seems to do at the time he writes it; Eliot says much the same of his own poetry in the *Four Quartets*. And similarly with sources. To bring the two together, consider the difference the following passage can hold for the poet of the "Preludes" and "Prufrock," engrossed in problems of phenomenology, from what it can mean to the poet of "Ash-Wednesday." How early did

Eliot read Pascal? In his student days on the continent, he was reading widely in French literature under excellent tutorage, even as he had already read Dante. It is unlikely that he was ignorant of the work of such an important mind. Number 545 of Pascals *Pensées,* the work in which Pascal is setting his own house in order, is a paradigm for the struggle Eliot's *Waste Land* discloses, but written at an elevation Eliot was to reach only with "Ash-Wednesday." The final concern, as we see in Eliot's essay on Pascal, is not whether Eliot borrowed from Pascal, but that he found Pascal true. Number 545, in A. J. Krailsheimer's translation, reads:

> 'All that is in the world is lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes or pride of life.' *Libido sentiendi, libido sciendi, libido dominandi.* [I John 2:16] Wretched is the cursed land consumed rather than watered by these three rivers of fire! Happy are those who are beside those rivers, neither immersed, nor carried away, but immovably steady beside these rivers, not standing but sitting, in a low and safe position. They will not rise thence before the light, but, after resting in peace, stretch out their hands to him who shall raise them to stand upright and steady in the porches of Jerusalem the blessed, where pride shall no more be able to fight against them and lay them low; and yet they weep, not at the sight of all the perishable things swept away by these torrents, but at the memory of their beloved home, the heavenly Jerusalem, which they constantly remember through the long years of their exile.

As we look into Pound's contribution to the final form the poem assumed for public show, we may be prepared to appreciate Eliot's relation to his collaborator. In many respects they are like-minded and their names go in tandem in the history of modern poetry in English. But there are fundamental differences which each recognized in the position of the other, differences which later led to caustic public remarks, as in Eliot's examination of Pound's Hell of the *Cantos* (in *After Strange Gods*) and in Pound's irritated references to Eliot from time to time in the *Cantos.* That they could share such intense excitement over the prospects of Eliot's manuscript and yet each maintain his independence is a tribute to the integrity of each as man and craftsman. One conclusion we may anticipate: *The Waste Land* marks a parting of the ways between them, though not a loss of friendship or esteem.

If Eliot seemed to Pound to be overly concerned with the mottoes on sun-dials, Pound may well have seemed to Eliot too much entangled by the elegance of Circe's hair. That entanglement is not one

from which Eliot himself is exempt, but here lies an important difference: Eliot could not be content until he could reconcile the weeping lost girl who troubles him in "La Figlia che Piange," the girl with "her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers," to the promises of the "Lady of silences / Calm and distressed / Torn and most whole" whom he comes to in "Ash-Wednesday," the Mother in whom the torment of "love unsatisfied" and "the greater torment / Of love satisfied" are reconciled. (It is worth noting on our way that the title of that early poem is the name of a statue recommended to Eliot's attention by a friend, a statue he failed to discover in the museum in Northern Italy he visited in quest of it about 1911.) Eliot's overriding concern from the beginning is with the unfolding "Rose of memory," and should we succeed in naming some historical Annette Vallon for such early poems as this and his "Portrait of a Lady," we will have missed the point entirely to suppose the identification answers the problem. For the problem Eliot is concerned with is to discover an enlightening response to his peering into the heart of silence. It is the concern of his dissertation on Bradley and phenomenology, as opposed to Pound's analogous work which is on the aesthetics of dealing with Circe's hair, his study of Romance literature, *The Spirit of Romance*. Eliot uses as an epigraph to "La Figlia che Piange" Aeneas's agitated interrogation of the country girl who confronts him on the shores of Carthage, who is in fact his mother Venus: "O maiden, how may I name thee." Aeneas has the veils lifted from his eyes at last, but no such revelation occurs in Eliot's poem. There is no name for the maiden in which beauty and truth are reconciled, Venus, Beatrice, Mary. One might read Eliot's poem as a version of Keats's encounter with the Grecian urn, with the difficulty added that Eliot's urn—the stone figure of a girl weeping, flowers in her arms—is present only by rumor and through the action of the disturbed "imagination" and "cogitations" that, while they "*still* amaze" (Keats's ambiguous word that Eliot dwells more and more upon in his poetry) at the same time "trouble midnight and the noon's repose."

Our recognition of a parting of the ways between Pound and Eliot, which *The Waste Land* may be taken as the center of, may help us reconcile ourselves to their literary age. We may see that we do not name it primarily Eliot's, as Russell Kirk's recent book, *Eliot and His Age*, might tempt us to do, nor primarily for Pound, as Hugh Kenner's almost simultaneous book, *The Pound Era*, inclines us to do. It seems rather more likely that we shall properly call the first half of this century, in respect to letters in English, the Age of Pound and Eliot, indicating thereby the intellectual and spiritual struggles and confusions and partial

triumphs which they so resolutely pursued, the one declaring his high calling the task of purifying the language of the tribe, the other repeatedly reminding us with the fury of an Old Testament prophet that to use the wrong word is to bear false witness.

WATERMARKS

Motorboats
herringbone the lake
with red and yellow decibels:
  Let them—
I shall lie here playing castaway
on this bobbing shipwreck of a dock
  immune
to anything beyond
the song of rusty nails to hinges.

If I move one finger
I shall break the delicate rhythms
that bind us all together:
polar bears on iceberg clouds,
gazing down at their reflections;
the sail that lifts to the wind
  like a striped kite,
dragging the horizon behind it for a tail;
the waterbugs that jerk spastically,
and the waves that ride green algae to the beach
and ring the trunks of sapling pines
  undulating in their sleep.

DOROTHY S. OSBORNE

HESTER

Warren Leamon

My name is Hester, a ridiculous name. A sort of inside joke on the family by one of my ancestors which got handed down to me. My grandfather used to say that Hester Prynne was modelled on his grandmother. But I doubt it; my family never got that far out of line.

"Solid burghers," Carrie said as she examined the enormous wall of family portraits. "They didn't come from England: they came from Holland."

Of course they did come from England, ran the Indians out, settled New England, made it what it was, and what it is, and then faded away leaving only me to answer for the mess. I'm the last of the line, thirty-five, childless and yet unhaunted.

I brought Carrie up here in the early spring several years ago. We both wanted to get out of New York—I to get away from my ex-husband, Carrie to get away from people in general. All fall she was on the verge of something—nervous, pale, sometimes almost hysterical. At first I put it down to her being a Southerner unable to adjust to the city; then I thought her sense of morality was outraged at the kind of life we led in the Village. Finally, I discovered it was all tied up with Michael. The climax came when she went to Ireland to see him. She returned and promptly had a breakdown of some kind. Ranted and raved. Even cut her wrists one night. I more or less nursed her through the winter, and when the weather began to break suggested we go to the old family place in Vermont.

She accepted and on a miserable day in April we cranked up the car and took off. Just leaving the city was a great release, a liberation from the stupid obsession with politics that was rampant that spring, centering mostly on Goldwater's bid for the presidency. Everyone was foaming at the mouth, not so much in rage against Goldwater as in rage against Johnson. Why couldn't he be Kennedy? Why Johnson? I didn't like any of them—Kennedy, Johnson, Goldwater—and neither, I was sure, did Carrie. She sat beside me, white and silent and so thin her clothes hung off of her. Perhaps she had already been seeing ghosts and was trying to get away from them.

I said I thought at one time that Carrie's sense of morality had been outraged. What I learned that fall and winter was that her sense of

morality was beyond any possibility of outrage; a set of absolutes ruled her life with an iron hand, and even when she was half-crazy and tried to kill herself, she was always polite to shopkeepers, and refused to sleep with anyone. I think that's what first attracted me to her, her complete serenity amid all the orgies, the string of deadbeats and phonies that paraded in and out of my bedroom until my ex-husband took a knife to me one night. She wrested it out of his hand—he was drunk—like a true and virtuous knight and shielded me from his wrath. You will have to excuse this digression, but Puritanism has been one of my lifelong studies; I come by it naturally, I suppose.

"Carrie," I told her, "you are supposed to be a decadent Southerner, daughter of the Cavaliers. And here you are acting like a true Roundhead New Englander."

I, of course, was acting like a Roundhead myself in what you may have identified as the rather stereotyped way I reacted against my background. Like a Spartan in the fleshpots of the East, I lost control in New York. No, not lost control. Threw it away in all kinds of imagined rebellions against the rigidity of my ancestors. Drink, sex, pornography, general dissipation. I more or less ran the whole gamut looking for what I called the one sin which would set me free.

The house in Vermont is two hundred and fifty years or three hundred years old, depending on which old maid aunt you talk to. It's a perfect rectangle two stories high, and since it's made of wood, it's been restored several times. It sits out in the middle of rolling hill country which is gradually going back to woods; the nearest town is twelve miles away. My ancestors built it for the future, when civilization would take hold of the wilderness, but the people for some reason gave up, went west, chased the Indians out once again and built their cities. All but my family who, true to the best New England tradition, hung on tenaciously to the land and pretended the rest of the world didn't exist. Once the family owned other houses—in Boston, on the coast, even a townhouse in Manhattan—but now we, or rather I, am down to one. For the rest of the world did exist and kept showing up in the form of bill collectors and bankers. But I'll be able to keep this one—there is that much money left—and go on painting in it till I die.

I thought Carrie would like the place and she did. Immensely. Especially the isolation. The first night while I sat bundled in blankets in a chair she bustled about the house lighting fires and saying over and over again, "Just think. No one for miles around. No one." She examined the furniture, which is as original as you can get in this

country, and exclaimed over each piece. Rugs from India, chairs from England, glass from Venice, tapestries from Belgium, and rough native pieces—tables and dressers.

Finally I said, "For God's sake shut up."

But she didn't. She made me explain, how, over the years as the family got moved out of house after house, it managed to reduce everything to the essentials. We sat before the roaring fire and drank tea until our eyes began to close. We took separate bedrooms upstairs and didn't bother with sheets that first night. As we started up the stairs she said, "There are ghosts, aren't there? There have to be."

"Hundreds!" I said.

The next day was glorious—cold, clear, the air like perfectly transparent ice, but shot through with the first signs of spring. Nothing you can see, but something you can smell and feel, or at least imagine you can because you know it is time for the season to break. So you feel the flowers straining to come up and you hear the ice gradually melting and cracking in the frozen streams. If you know the country, you are like a woman just after she conceives. She knows somehow that the baby is there, coming to life. A feeling I've known only once and took care of drastically. I think Carrie, even though she was a Southerner, a foreigner, could feel it too. I noticed the things that caught her eye: a stream frozen around a large rock, an old oak stump rising round and black out of the hard soil. She laughed easily, her face turned red with the cold, and the lines relaxed out of it. She was a part of the countryside, coming to life gradually, like everything else. I had come to Vermont fearing I would be bored and want to get back to the city; now as I watched Carrie and joked with her, I knew I would be content, for a while at least.

Back at the house we prepared a huge breakfast. Carrie, who in New York would sometimes go for days without food, ate eagerly, as though she had finally realized how starved she was. After breakfast we sat before the fire with our coffee and warmed our bare feet. Carrie talked about Michael.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"Someone I grew up with."

"And that's all?"

"I was in love with him."

"Was?"

"I think he's dead."

"What do you mean, think?"

She shifted about and pulled her feet up under her. "About a week ago I dreamed he was dead. Drowned."

I didn't say anything: I was sure she was putting on an act.

"I think I killed him."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Last fall. When I went to see him. Remember?"

I nodded.

"I told him I was pregnant and that I was coming to marry him. He knew it couldn't be his baby, of course. But he agreed. When I got there I told him I was having an abortion, that I was going on to Sweden. And I left. Only I came back to the States. He never knew I wasn't pregnant."

"So?"

"So I think that's why he's dead. There's some connection."

"Now wait a minute. That's all . . ." I stopped when I saw she was crying. I waited for her to calm down and when she didn't I said, "Come on, let's go for a walk."

"Michael saw a ghost once," she said, as we put on our coats. "The ghost of his grandmother. She came to him the night after she died and told him she was all right."

"Good for Michael. I've never seen one."

"That's because you don't have a place. Michael says ghosts don't exist in time, they exist in space. That's why Southerners see ghosts. And people in small towns. Hardly anybody in cities sees ghosts."

"Look around you, honey. I'm as place-ridden as anybody you'll ever meet. Your ancestors were still in prison when mine were building this house."

"That's history for you. Not a place."

I was irritated. "How did we get into this ridiculous conversation?"

"It's all right." She turned to me and smiled. It was a light easy smile. "I'm not going crazy again. I'm fine."

"That's not what I meant."

II

We spent most of the following days walking. It was warmer; the sun beat down on the rolling hills and shone brilliantly in the small lake behind the house until the ice in the lake began to thaw and break up under the stones we threw at it. Then came rain, but now the light rain of spring rather than the sleet of winter. Under the pressure of the rain the earth began to soften slightly, and the sun came out and drove the soft water into the soil. One morning we heard strange

bird calls; here and there sprouts appeared and a few trees began to swell. Then suddenly the weather turned and we were back in January. But it didn't last; such changes come often through the spring but each one is weaker than the one before. Winter is a dying man losing his grip. The stream thawed and flowed freely around the huge rock which stood in the center of it, as it had stood in the center of the ice. Carrie was fascinated by it and I tried to discern what held her attention. I stared until the crazy patterns the water made as it swirled about the rock confused my eyes. I blinked and thought I saw tiny white fairies dancing on the surface of the stream, but it was only the froth stirred up by the rock. I pulled my eyes away from the rock and up to a distant hilltop where I thought I saw something move. I sensed that we were being watched, but I couldn't be sure. My eyes were still spinning from the water.

"It's spring," Carrie said every morning. "It's unmistakably spring, even this far north. Why, back home we'd be swimming by now." She would laugh and threaten to strip off her clothes and jump into the lake.

I watched her put on weight; color returned to her skin and her hair took on a new life and sparkled, even on cloudy days. In the transformation I saw for the first time that she was actually a strong woman, sinewy and tough. The weight she put on went straight to smooth, clean muscles which rippled gracefully in her arms and legs and in her flat stomach as she dried after her baths.

We set up easels on the glassed-in back porch and pretended to paint landscapes. But our hearts were not in it. "It's too wild," said Carrie. "It needs the touch of civilization to give it order."

"Like New York?"

"No. Like a little Dutch village."

"New York was a little Dutch village once."

From time to time she talked about Michael, but without tension and frustration. She related anecdotes and laughed at her inability to "perform" for him as she put it. She talked about Miranda, her rival, and took to doing imitations of her—the way she wiggled her hips when she walked and her hilarious Southern accent. I howled with laughter.

Usually we would leave our painting before dinner and take a short walk. The days were gradually growing longer and warmer, and the late afternoon light struck the trees with delightful colors. On the way back Carrie would loosen her jacket and take off her hat and move ahead of me with enormous strides, pretending to be a lumberjack looking for work.

One night after dinner she went through the bookcase. She ticked off the names, "Emerson, Thoreau, Whittier, Longfellow. Ugh! And good old Scott, just like at home. But Hawthorne. Why no Hawthorne?" She looked at me.

"I don't know. Too much Puritan sense of evil, I suppose." I made a wicked face.

She came from the bookcase and sat down in front of the fire. "Michael loved Hawthorne. He said he had a sense of place."

A storm had blown up and wind began to beat against the window panes. Carrie moved closer to the fire and gripped her knees with her arms. Her lips glowed in the firelight and she began to hum a tune.

"What did you mean the other day?" I asked. "I mean what you said about ghosts existing in space."

"I didn't say it. Michael did."

"All right. What did *he* mean?"

"I can tell you what he said. He said, you have to have a place in order to get beyond it."

"Thanks a lot."

"I didn't understand it either. It has to do with being lost. You can't be lost unless you have some place to be lost from. And only people who are lost see ghosts."

"Fine. Only trouble is, nobody wants to be lost."

"Of course not. Nobody wants to die either but you have to die to get at whatever is beyond death. If you aren't lost, you don't have a place. And if you don't have a place you don't exist. Better to be lost than nothing."

"Is that you or Michael?"

She didn't answer.

That night I stood a long time at my window, staring out at the trees which swayed in the wind under heavy sheets of rain. I was happy, much happier than I had ever been in New York. But there was something disturbing as well, and it centered on Michael somehow. Maybe he is a ghost, I thought, watching us. Talking through Carrie. Maybe I did see someone that day by the stream. Lightning lit up the landscape and I thought I saw something move in a distant clump of trees. A vague, dark form. God, I thought, I'm making myself see things now.

III

We gave up on the landscapes. Or rather dropped the pretence. But the urge to be doing something amid all the loafing was strong, and I think it was Carrie who first suggested that I pose for her, for

an hour each day. Later we would swap places. That afternoon I settled down in a chair on the glassed-in porch.

"How's this?" I asked.

She shook her head. "No, silly. I mean nude."

"Nude? It's too damn cold."

"No, it isn't. There's plenty of heat from the fire if we keep it built up."

"All right, I'll give it a try."

So each day I sat naked under her steady eye while she painted me. At first I was self-conscious. Why, I don't know. I had been posing nude for pseudo-artists-men since I was in college. But we talked as she worked and gradually I relaxed. At times she seemed so unaware of my nakedness that, for some reason, it annoyed me. She refused to let me see the work in progress—an old fetish of hers.

"You'll have to wait till it's finished," she said. At the end of each session she carefully covered the canvas and trusted me not to look.

We rambled about the hills, wearing lighter clothes and studying the wild flowers that were struggling up. The magnificent maples and beeches came alive and the brown earth began to turn green. Our life settled into a routine: breakfast, a long walk, tea, reading, a light lunch, an hour painting, a short walk, supper, talk, bed. We took turns going into town to check the mail and buy groceries. Carrie complained from time to time about not being able to pay, but I assured her it wasn't necessary. Still, it weighed heavily on her conscience.

"You pay for what you get and you get what you pay for," she said. "I had that drummed into me the whole time my parents were breaking their backs to send me to college."

"Carrie, old girl, you'll never make it as a bohemian if you keep thinking like the middle class."

She flared up. "There's nothing wrong with paying your way."

"Oh, all right. I'll take the painting."

The idea pleased her.

Sometimes after supper she would sit before the fire while I pretended to read. Actually I watched her and wondered how long it would be before I was drawn back to New York. I had letters every week from a number of men, including my ex-husband. But the peacefulness of the house held me as it never had before. Two weeks had always been my absolute limit; now a month had slipped by without my even noticing it. The city took on a certain nightmarish quality. I told Carrie so one night.

"Perhaps we should go back," she said.

"No. I don't want to."

She smiled. "What you are experiencing is the beauty of order. And it will destroy you."

"Good God! The voice from Olympus."

"All right. Don't say I didn't warn you."

One particularly sunny morning we walked down to the stream. The water swirled between green banks now and caught haphazardly the colors of the overhanging trees. I stared at the current as it flowed about the rock and once again I thought I detected movement out of the corner of my eye. I looked up quickly and thought I saw a man striding toward us. I closed my eyes and when I opened them there was no man: I found myself staring at an outcropping of rock which must have deceived me.

"It looks like a man, doesn't it?" Carrie asked.

I turned and looked at her. She was sitting by the stream, dipping her hand in the icy water. "I've been frightened by it a couple of times," she said.

That night, after supper, she brought it up again. "If you stare at those rocks long enough, they seem to move."

"Illusion," I said.

"No, imagination."

"Same thing."

"No. If you see something move that can't move, that's illusion. But if you make it move, that's imagination."

"And that's also art. And art, as we know, is everything," I said lightly, trying to end the discussion.

"Nothing is everything."

I noticed the old familiar cold expression come to her face. Like in New York, I thought, just like in New York.

"You know who my favourite artist is?" she asked. "Pieter de Hooch. That surprises you, and there are two reasons that it does. One, you don't know anything about painting. Two, you don't know anything about art." She was furious. Her eyes snapped as she spoke. "Art is order. Art orders reality until reality becomes absolutely unbearable. Because art isn't really ordering; it's discovering the order which is already there. The unbearable order of reality. Art rubs your nose in it until you're sick of it, until you want to go out and destroy something, anything. Art, Hester, is destructive. Destructive."

I squirmed in my seat and said nothing.

She went on. "You ever wonder why armies in the Middle Ages held masses before going out to battle? Why Indians did ritual war-dances before they went after scalps? Think about it."

We fell into a silence which was thicker than the night outside the house. After a while I asked, "Then is art illusion or imagination?" though I knew I shouldn't push her.

But her mind was elsewhere. I could tell by the way her eyes kept fixing on objects in a hard stare—on one of the portraits of an ancestor, on an ivory letter opener on the desk, on an old kerosene lantern. She got up and wandered about the room fingering her collar and staring while I gathered the coffee cups, wiped off the table and turned off the lights. We groped our way up the stairs and at the door to my room she said, "Can I sleep in here tonight?"

Her voice was flat and expressionless and in the dark I couldn't see her eyes. "Is anything wrong?" I asked.

She didn't answer.

We undressed and got into the bed; the feather mattress sank beneath us and she lay on her back, her side pressed against mine, and stared up at the ceiling. Her arms lay rigidly on her breast.

"I made a fool of myself tonight," she said. "Michael would have been ashamed of me."

"Nonsense."

"No. I mean it."

I rolled over on my side so that my back was to her. "Forget about it. Go to sleep."

The room was flooded with light one moment, then dark the next, as clouds passed in front of the moon. The old seaman's chest in the corner appeared and disappeared.

"Hester?"

"Yes."

"When I see Michael's ghost is it illusion or imagination?"

"There are no such things as ghosts."

"Yes, there are. The only question is, do they exist or do we make them exist?"

"If we make them, then they don't exist." But even as I said it, I thought about her painting downstairs.

A noise came from downstairs, a thud. I felt Carrie stiffen. "He's here, Hester. In the house."

"Don't be silly. It's just the wind."

She didn't answer.

IV

Whatever happened that night, it broke up our routine. For over a week we went on picnics, stayed in the house all day, even went swimming naked in the icy lake. Carrie seemed to long for variety. But gradually I worked her round to the old schedule. Of course, I wasn't blind to the changes which had occurred within me. In New York I used to literally drag Carrie out to parties, force her on men, break up any routine she tried to establish. Now I was doing just the opposite. Hester, I told myself, you are thirty and Carrie is twenty-five. You are depriving her of her last five years of youth. No, of her last chance to get rid of the inane virginity that rides on her like a vulture. In a moment of conscience I told her as much and, surprisingly, from that time on she seemed more eager than ever to return to the old routine.

She was still painting me and every afternoon I dutifully stripped and posed for her.

"I initiated Michael into the corruption of the world," she said one afternoon while I was posing. Her hand moved steadily over the canvas. "He wanted to seduce me, but he found my virginity insurmountable." She smiled. "We live in an upside-down world, Hester."

"You know what I think?" I shifted and spoiled the pose. "I think you're like me. You're looking for the one sin—one—which will make your whole life."

"Of course I am. Everyone is. Only we live in an upside-down world. So you have to look for one virtue—just one. Now find that pose again."

I shifted about. "And you think virginity is a virtue? And when you reach menopause you'll be able to wear a big red V around your neck for the rest of your life."

A look of amazement crossed her face. She dropped her arm and stared at me. "I swear Hester, that's exactly—word for word—what Michael used to say."

"Oh, shut up and paint. You've got to finish that damn thing. Your rent is overdue."

One afternoon she went out without me. I was finishing out a nap after posing for longer than the usual hour. I walked out by myself, and, coming to the top of a hill, I saw her standing in the middle of the stream next to the rock; the water broke in crazy patterns around her. Warm sunlight flooded her, flooded the water, the grass, the flowers around her. Slowly she began to take off her clothes: she pulled off the thick sweater, the blouse, the heavy jeans and tossed

them on the bank. She unsnapped her bra, leaned forward and let it fall into her hands. She tossed it on the bank. Then slowly she stepped out of her panties and stood erect, holding them in her left hand. She stood still for a long time staring straight ahead at the outcropping of rock in the distance. She turned and walked through the water toward me. When she reached the bank, she stopped and stood very still. She was talking; I could see her chin moving and occasionally I caught a sound, but I was too far away to make out any words. Suddenly she jerked her head up and I ducked down behind the crest of the hill. When I peeped over the crest a few minutes later she was lying on her back, staring into the sun. Perhaps she was only sun-bathing.

That night I imagined she was watching me all through supper. Over coffee she asked me if I had gone out that afternoon. I told her I hadn't.

As I had done several times before, I spent a few minutes staring at the cover over the canvas, trying to guess what she had done with me. But Carrie refused to tell me anything. At first it had been a game, but as the painting drew nearer completion, she trusted me less and less. No longer did she sit across the room while I circled the easel. Now she went and stood guard over it. And she seemed less amused by the guessing game.

"You won't know till I finish," she said. "And I may not ever show it to anyone."

"You have to. It's the rent."

"Maybe I've already paid the rent."

I looked closely at her. "What do you mean by that?"

"You know what I mean."

"Do you want to go back then? To New York?" I asked, because I was afraid I did know what she meant.

"Do you?"

"No."

She was standing with her hand on the painting, clutching the top of it. "Shut up!" she hissed. "Will you please shut up?" The veins in her forehead stood out and her face went dead white. "You keep on and on. It infuriates Michael. Shut up."

I knew the attitude well. I had seen it several times in the apartment in New York. I knew it would be followed by violence. But more important—and more horrifying—was my awareness that I was pleased to see it. Pleased that, for whatever reasons, she had lost control. I approached her carefully, watching her closely. I slipped my arm around her shoulders. "All right now," I whispered. "All right."

She turned to face me and her eyes were stranger than I had ever seen them. A wild mixture of surprise and bewilderment. I braced myself.

"Oh, come on, Hester. Cut the act."

I drew my arm from her shoulders. She laughed.

"My God, did you believe it?" she asked. "I must be getting good at it."

"You mean . . . why you little bitch!"

And as we cleaned up the kitchen, something began to turn in the back of my mind. I had been convinced, it had seemed so genuine. Yet . . . all an act. I considered all those other times in New York. How genuine had all that been? Carrie hummed gaily as she washed the dishes. How genuine was *that* even? Anything?

"Carrie," I said.

"Yes."

"I was watching you this afternoon."

"So you *were* there." She spun round and tossed a handful of dishwater at me. Then she turned her back to me and fixed her eyes on the plate she was wiping. "It was an act, too," she whispered.

"An act? For who?"

"Who do you think?" She put the dish in the rack. She raised her hand and touched my cheek with the tips of her fingers. "I'm going to bed," she said. I followed her into the living room and watched her climb the stairs. At the top she looked back and smiled.

Slowly I turned out the lights. At first I was appalled that I was not appalled. But gradually I came to see that our friendship had been leading inevitably to this. And I was not surprised. It goes without saying that I felt a longing within me, a desire. But I was clear-headed as I climbed the stairs.

She was lying on her back; the covers were pulled up just over her breasts, and her naked shoulders were as white as the sheet beneath them. Her rich blonde hair was spread on the pillow. She was staring at the ceiling and she did not turn her head when I opened the door.

"Is that you, Michael?"

I laughed nervously. "No. It's not Michael. Remember?"

I walked over to the bed.

"Has Michael gone?"

"Come on, Carrie." I knew she must be as nervous as I was, but I wished she would make it a little easier for me.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But I just get furious. I shouldn't have run out that way."

"For God's sake, cut it out."

"Cut what out?" She turned her head and looked at me.

I unbuttoned my blouse and slipped it off. I unhooked my bra and let it fall to the floor in front of me. I kicked off my shoes and worked my jeans off.

"Is it time for painting?" she asked.

I laughed again. I slipped my panties down and stepped out of them.

She stared at me as though she was seeing me naked for the first time. I reached down and pulled the covers back.

She asked, "Are you going to sleep here?"

"Of course."

"No . . . no. I'd rather you slept in your room."

"What the hell do you mean? You said . . ."

"I don't care what I said. Michael wouldn't like it."

I stood naked by the bed, feeling like a perfect fool. Like Michael must have felt, I thought. More than once. "You little bitch."

"You said that before."

"I mean it this time."

"Michael wouldn't like it. He's here, you know."

Something clicked in my mind. I remembered how my ex-husband had come at me with a knife. "I know he's here," I said. "I saw him. Downstairs."

She raised up in the bed. "You didn't."

"Oh yes, I did. Or his ghost, at least."

"I don't believe you."

"I don't give a damn whether you believe me or not." Lightning flashed. "Look. There he is. By the window."

She jerked her head. "Michael," she called, her voice trembling. "Are you there?"

I turned and walked to the door. I left my clothes lying where they were.

"No. Don't leave," she cried. "Don't leave me alone."

"Bravo!" I clapped my hands. "Wonderful!"

"What are you talking about? Don't leave. Please."

I opened the door. "I'll leave you two alone now. I wonder how he died. Maybe he'll tell you."

As I closed the door she began to scream. I must have been in a trance of some kind. I was still naked but I did not notice the cold air in the hall. I went downstairs. She screamed and screamed. I stood naked in the middle of the living room, and feeling nothing, I listened to her. Her screams grew less frequent. I heard her sobbing, talking, but I couldn't make out the words. She began to call my name again

and again. I started automatically to go to her, but I stopped myself. Finally she grew quiet and there was only the sound of the rising wind.

How can I explain what went through my mind? I stood for a long time trying to put everything together, from the wild nights in New York to the long peaceful days in the hills and by the stream. But it wouldn't come out. There were too many loose ends. My eyes roamed about the room and out to the porch. Carrie's covered canvas, the chair where I sat naked every afternoon, the wall filled with my stern Puritan forebears, the fireplace where a few logs lay smoldering. I remembered the night of the storm and the figure I thought I had seen. Maybe I was close to the truth then, when I thought it was Michael's ghost, haunting us. I recalled how the man had emerged from the woods.

A noise interrupted my thoughts. A tapping. I jerked my head towards the door. Then I realized that it had started raining.

My mind was seething. I remembered how I had first met Carrie on a rainy day in the Village. She had stood bareheaded on a busy corner and told me in all seriousness that her whole life had been ruined because middle-class commercialism had triumphed over Southern chivalry. Had that been an act? And even when she was acting, how did she choose her words? Was it an act when she said she had introduced Michael to the corruption of the world? Everything dissolved into a maddening ambiguity. Why go to all that trouble to fool me to no end? It didn't make any sense. But she had told Michael she had had an abortion. That made no sense. The one sin—the sin against nature—to save us. The words leaped back at me. She had corrupted him with virtue in our upside-down world. But what virtue? Virginity. A sin against nature. But a sin against nature proves what? That we are not animals.

A gust of wind rushed through the room, swirling the curtains and rattling the pictures on the wall. I felt a chill run through my body, and suddenly I was surprised by my own nakedness.

I looked at my ancestors: I could barely make out their faces in the darkness. After all is said and done, I thought, maybe it's them. And maybe Carrie knew it all the time. My pitiful rebellion in the city, the men, the sex, the drunkenness, the violence. It all seemed so pathetic now.

There came a pounding at the door. I stood still and waited. The pounding grew louder. Someone was at the door. "Go away!" I shouted. "Go away!"

The pounding began again. I turned my head and put my hands over my ears. When I opened my eyes I found myself staring at my ancestors. The faces—the cold white faces—began to move. Eyes shifted, lips opened and closed, lines in cheeks, in foreheads relaxed, tightened. And there was a murmur, low whispers, sounds I could barely hear. I spun around. Lightning flashed again and at the top of the stairs I thought I saw Carrie, naked, staring down at me, her arms stretched out, not to me, but to something—someone—behind me. It was only an instant before the room was dark again.

"Carrie!" I called. Lightning flashed, and there was no one at the top of the stairs. The pounding started again behind me. Whatever it was she had stretched out her arms to? I thought I would go to pieces. I closed my eyes and waited. The pounding, the rain, the wind. I opened my eyes, stared straight ahead and said, "There is nothing here. Absolutely nothing. Nothing." Slowly I turned around. I saw a faceless man standing in the doorway. I stared at him and said, "He is not a man. He is not a man." I stared. Slowly his form dissolved, and I was staring at the door itself. The pounding ceased. Even the storm seemed to subside.

As I climbed the stairs to my room, my mind was calm, peaceful. I asked myself what would have happened if I had let myself go, had not done what I did? But I had no answer; I wasn't even interested in the answer.

I crawled naked into my bed and waited. The door opened. She stood there, her hair wild about her head like snakes, her face drained of all color. There were long scratch marks on her breasts and a thin trickle of blood ran over her stomach. I said nothing. She crossed the room and got into the bed.

"I saw him, Hester. I really saw him."

I turned to her and pulled her to me. I held her against my breast all night. Nothing else. Just held her. She went to sleep in my arms.

V

After breakfast she dressed, we put together a shopping list, and she took the car to the village. I spent the morning by the stream. The water broke its crazy patterns around the rock. My eyes traced the patterns and though I made nothing of them, they were pleasing, symmetrical somehow, even if I could not discern the symmetry. I raised my eyes. The outcropping of rock sat squarely in the middle of a new growth of wild flowers. I climbed to the top of the nearby hill and looked down at the little valley. The stream flowed smoothly,

the hills rose evenly on either side of it, full of the colors of leaves, flowers, grass. The sun, almost directly overhead, flooded it all with light, a gay sparkling light. Where Carrie had stood in the stream the day before, the water broke around the rock, glittering.

When I returned to the house there was a boy waiting for me with the groceries. I recognized him from the village.

"The lady—your friend—asked me to bring the car back," he said. "And give you this." He handed me a folded piece of paper.

I offered to take him back to the village, but he said his brother was coming for him. I went into the living room, sat down and unfolded the paper. It was a note from Carrie.

> This will have to be quick as the train leaves in ten minutes. I am going back to New York. I don't know why exactly. Yes, I do, but it would take too long to explain. And I think you know why. I don't expect you to come. You can send my things—if you want to, I really don't care—to the apartment. Goodbye, I love you,
>
> Carrie.
>
> P.S. You have your rent.

I went to the canvas and, trembling, I pulled the cover off. There were two women, one middle-aged, the other nineteen or twenty. The older woman was dressed in a black shirt and light red dress which was partially covered by a white apron. Her head was covered with a white cloth of some kind which was tied beneath her chin. She was seated and held a cushion in her lap. The girl, who was bending next to her, offering her something from a brass pail, was dressed in a white shirt and grey dress which was partially covered by a rust colored apron. Across her blonde hair was a black band. At their feet was a woven basket. They were in an unbelievably tidy outdoor porch. On one side was the back of the house—perfectly spaced red bricks. Behind them was a wooden fence, a small courtyard, a low wall and behind the wall, in the distance, another neat brick house. There were no shadows; all the outlines were clear and sharp as a photograph. I stared at it for a long time before I realized that it was a copy of "Mistress and Maidservant" by Pieter de Hooch. An almost exact copy. And she had painted it entirely out of her head.

VI

As I said, all this happened several years ago. I never went back to New York. I have lived up here ever since. I heard, through a mutual friend, that Carrie had some kind of breakdown in New York.

And I heard very indirectly that she went back to Atlanta finally and married a school teacher. Maybe it's true. I don't know. Just as I don't know whether or not Michael was really dead, but dead or not I'm convinced Carrie saw him.

I have hung Carrie's painting with the family portraits; I wish there was at least a possibility that some later member of the family would stand before it and wonder what in the world it was doing there. But such a possibility is out of the question. Maybe whoever buys the place after I'm dead will puzzle over it.

Meanwhile, I paint, and as you know, write. And I walk a lot. But mostly I wait for the ghosts to come. Though I know they never will.

° ° °

DRAGGING OPERATIONS BEGIN

Who sent the first flat stone skipping, bird-winged,
across the pond still orange brown from last week's rains?
Come in . . . come in . . . it's a small pond really
when a stone no bigger than a quarter makes it
to the other side in only three light smacks
against the water.
Who was first to spot the young spring peeper,
bug-eyed and bubble-throated, sunning on a leaf
just out of reach?
Come in . . . come in . . . if singing frogs are out
it must be time to toe test April's promise.
Or was it watery anchored cattails swaying
their blood brown heads that did it?
Come in . . . come in . . . what swords for waging battle,
What finely balanced spears for target practice!
But is there any warmth in asking now
whose fledgling conscience first gave in,
rolled over and played dead?
Two pairs of cut off jeans,
two tee shirts, Koolaid stained and inside out
on the high, dry bank are evidence they stripped together
to celebrate the boy-old rite of spring.
Can it matter now which one
the grappling hooks find first?

GRACE B. FREEMAN

HALF-WAY TO BYZANTIUM: *MR. SAMMLER'S PLANET* AND THE MODERN TRADITION

Stephen R. Maloney

The theme of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Saul Bellow's most recent—and most controversial—novel, might be stated: "America is no country for old men." Furthermore, the obvious similarities between Yeats's persona in "Sailing to Byzantium," his "old man," and Bellow's Mr. Sammler seem more than fortuitous, since there are several direct and indirect references to the poetry of Yeats, especially "Sailing to Byzantium," in Bellow's novel. In fact, the journey of Bellow as novelist and thinker—inseparable roles for him—is from passionate, fleshly commitment to ascetic detachment, a journey structurally similar to that portrayed in Yeats's poem. Unlike some of Bellow's earlier novels, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is not suffused with the presence of Wilhelm Reich as a brooding spirit offering healing release to constricted souls. It now appears that over a period of at least fifteen years (since the publication of *Seize the Day* in 1956) Bellow's views have been converging with those of the "middle Yeats." The result is that Bellow, whom many critics have felt to be in conflict with the modern tradition of Pound, Eliot, and Yeats, has established himself as the contemporary heir to the great tradition in modern literature.[1] The writers associated with the modern movement in literature have generally stressed the vitality and significance of several past cultures while they have bemoaned the increasing mechanization and trivialization of life in the present. As described by Lewis Simpson, the modern spirit "envisions the active destruction of the classical-Christian past by all that is sanctioned under the name of Progress. . . ."[2] When Charles Thomas Samuels says that ". . . *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is fundamentally an argument against modernism and for tradition,"[3] he is correct insofar as he takes modernism to mean not the Eliot-Pound-Yeats-Joyce movement but rather to connote liberalism, progressivism, and relativism. Bellow, at age fifty-four,

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[1] See, for instance, John Jacob Clayton, *Saul Bellow in Defense of Man* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Pres, 1968), esp. pp. 14-15.

[2] "O'Donnel's Wall," *The Southern Review*, 6 (1970), xxv. Rpt. in *The Man of Letters in New England and the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 192-200.

[3] "Bellow on Modernism," *New Republic*, Feb. 7, 1970, p. 29.

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found in the voice of seventy-four-year-old Artur Sammler a vehicle for his own sentiments; the "singing master" of the old man's soul, Bellow has set himself against some of the dominant forces of this, our post-modern age.

Although it won the 1970 National Book Award for fiction, *Mr. Sammler' Planet* has fared only moderately well with Bellow's former critical supporters, the proponents of the post-modern age, a group described by John Jacob Clayton as "contemporary American cosmopolitan intellectuals, mostly Jewish, who write for such magazines as *Partisan Review*."[4] Publications that seek to cultivate the same cosmopolitan, "liberated" audience that *PR* does, magazines such as the *New York Review of Books, Commentary, Nation, New Republic, Atlantic, Harper's,* and *Saturday Review,* have regarded the book with varying degrees of disapproval. This was to be expected for the Partisan-Reviewers and the points of view they represent are satirized in Bellow's novel through the portrait of Angela Gruner, daughter of the exemplary doctor, Arnold Elya Gruner, and niece of Mr. Sammler: "And really she was good (that was the point), she was boundlessly, achingly, hopelessly on the right side, the best side of every human question: for creativity, for the young, for the black, the poor, the oppressed, for victims, for sinners, for the hungry."[5] And, we might add, definitely for the sexual revolution. Angela, in short, is one of the new cultural phenomena: she fuses an Eleanor Rooseveltian "goodness" with promiscuity. Other "liberated" figures in the novel also receive criticism, as they have in several of Bellow's recent essays. (For example, see his castigation of "literary intellectuals" in the essay "Skepticism and the Depth of Life," where he says: "They seem to think freedom for literary intellectuals to be a kind of barbarism made possible by civilization. They hate that civilization as only its subtlest, most pampered children can hate. They appear to believe that their loyalty to the highest human standards or ideals (ideals unformulated but nevertheless pervasive) is expressed by the most radical destructiveness.")[6] Similarly, in the novel Mr. Sammler wonders "whether the worst, enemies of civilization might not prove to be its petted intellectuals who attacked it at its weakest moments . . ." (p. 37).

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[4] *Saul Bellow,* p. 43.

[5] *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (New York; Viking, 1970), p. 24. All further citations of this work will be made in parentheses in the text.

[6] *The Arts and the Public,* ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 24.

The book is set in New York City, a symbol of both arrogance and decadence for Bellow; the city has many of the same "unreal" and "fourmillante" aspects that Eliot's London does in *The Waste Land;* Irving Howe perceptively observes that Mr. Sammler's Planet continues the "Eliot line of sensibility." [7] As in the first three books of *The Waste Land,* a spiritual and intellectual desiccation, accompanied by boredom, perverse curiosity, and mechanical sexuality has come about in the world Bellow chronicles. Wallace, brilliant but dissolute son of Elya Gruner, reminds us of Eliot's desire for "roots that clutch" when he replies to a question Mr. Sammler asks about the need for roots. "No, of course not. Roots? Roots are not modern" (p. 249). In addition, the casual promiscuity of Angela and her appropriately-named boyfriend, Wharton Horricker, is reminiscent of Eliot's typist and "young man carbuncular," except that Wharton, like Angela, is physically attractive. Sammler, resembling Eliot's narrator, is obsessed with the fragmentation of modern life. Of the civilization breakers, the incendiary left, Sammler asks, ". . . can they put the fragments together again?" (p. 217). He admits regretfully that he too is a "fragment," afflicted with the disease he abhors.

Structurally, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is similar to *The Waste Land* in its movement from despair at the seeming meaninglessness of contemporary society to an equivocal affirmation that the values of humane civilization may prevail. Eliot found the possibility of "rain," of spiritual renewal in the Eastern religious tradition, specifically Hinduism and the *Upanishads.* On the other hand, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* shows an ironic reversal of the notion that spiritual vitality has moved from West to East. The protagonist of the novel, after contemplating the social wreckage of contemporary New York and noting its infertility—the city, he says, could use a "flower washer"—meets V. Govinda Lal, a brilliant Indian biophysicist, whose manuscript about extra-terrestrial colonization has been stolen by Sammler's slightly crazed daughter, Shula. Sensitive, thoughtful, and humane, Dr. Lal nevertheless cannot provide salvation for Western man; in fact, he shows us that India has been Westernized and its spiritual tradition eroded. He says, "Of course in a sense the whole world is now U. S. Inescapable . . . It's like a big crow that has snatched our future from the nest, and we, the rest, are like little finches in pursuit trying to peck it" (p. 208). Even India has been submerged by what Henry Luce called the "American Century."

Mr. Sammler's Planet has received criticism for the fragility of its final affirmation that there is a human bond of charity connecting man-

[7] Unt. rev. of *Mr. Sammler's Planet, Harper's,* Feb., 1970, p. 106.

kind, yet such equivocal consolations are perhaps the maximum possible at this time. The proposals contained in Sammler's eulogy over the body of Gruner parallel those of Eliot in "What the Thunder Said": Sammler advocates charity, sympathy, and balance; that is, one should "give, sympathize, and control." These are, in fact, the qualities that characterize both Gruner and Sammler.

Yeats and Eliot were at their most fruitful when swimming against the intellectual and political tides of the times; this seems to be the case with Bellow also. A novelist addicted to dropping names, Bellow does not mention W. B. Yeats, although he has obviously studied the poet's work carefully, since echoes of the poetry occur often in his novels. For example, in *Seize the Day*, a book about a spiritually comatose salesman and "operator," "Tommy" Adler, Bellow shows us how this character is entrapped within a perpetual present, where he is driven by sensual appetites he cannot satisfy. At one point Bellow describes Adler as "Sick with desire . . . ,"[8] a line taken directly from "Sailing to Byzantium," where the narrator is criticizing the body in favor of the soul:

> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal . . .

At the end of *Seize the Day*, Tommy Adler, who has been cheated by his business partner and forsaken by his father, wanders into a funeral home where he sees a corpse and then breaks into tears, realizing the awful truth (which is also at the heart of "Sailing to Byzantium") that man must die.

Mr. Sammler's Planet shows an intensification of Bellow's use of Yeats's poetry. For instance, speaking of Western society, Mr. Sammler echoes "The Second Coming" when he laments, ". . . it is in the air that things are falling apart . . ." (p. 308). Earlier in the novel, when he meets Dr. Lal, Sammler mentions that he had always thought of the Hindu people as resembling "a mackerel crowded sea" (p. 180), a direct quote from "Sailing." In the poem, we remember, Yeats's traveller wants to escape from the sensual world of physical supremacy, the world where things are "begotten, born, and die," so that he can enter into "the artifice of eternity," where he can sing of what is "past, and passing, and to come." Similarly, Mr. Sammler hopes to reach a state where "He should be perfectly disinterested" (p. 121). Hoping to escape from "this present shallowness" (p. 93), he wants to concentrate on "eternal being" (p. 93). Realizing that he is an old man, Sammler sees that America

[8] (New York: Viking, 1956), p. 87.

has no use for such a being, as all obey what he calls the "sovereign youth style" (p. 12).

In "Sailing to Byzantium" Yeats's spokesman yearns to be "out of nature," while in the novel we hear Sammler musing: "He wanted, with God, to be free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite. A soul released from nature, from impressions, and from everyday life" (p. 121). Nevertheless, although Mr. Sammler yearns for a Byzantium-like wholeness and disinteredness, he knows—as Yeats seemingly discovered in "Byzantium"—that the notion of a complete escape from the physical is not realizable this side of death. In an allusion to both Yeats poems, Sammler notes that in America one can go "from Byzantine luxury straight into the state of nature, the barbarous world of color erupting from beneath." In fact, "It might well be barbarous on either side of the jewelled door. Sexually, for example" (p. 11). It is difficult, in other words, even to hold in the mind the notion of a spiritual existence by which the fleshly reality might be judged. Bellow's perspective here is analogous to that of Walter Sullivan, who speaks of the dilemma of the modern author in search of spiritual coherence: "The writer finds himself bereft of a moral frame within which to develop his characters and work out his plots. There is no place to start, there are no standards by which people can be judged: in a meaningless world there is no way to develop meaning."[9] And yet, finally, Bellow does not completely share Sullivan's pessimism; *Mr. Sammler's Planet* has little plot and its characters are, given their amorality, necessarily shallow; yet the book does have one character, Mr. Sammler, who serves as moral norm.

All of Bellow's fiction has been concerned, more rather than less, with the fact that man is a "dying animal." Soon after writing *Mr. Sammler's Planet* Bellow stated, "The real problem is the problem of death".[10] What is new in this latest novel is the depth of concern with which he considers man's mortality. Elya Gruner, a dying man, is a continuing presence throughout the book. And Mr. Sammler's efforts in the course of the story are designed to keep this death from being infected with the nihilism and meaninglessness he sees around him. In a relativistic world, Sammler struggles to keep alive some necessary absolutes: "Elya was devoted to ideas of conduct which seemed discredited, which few people explicitly defended. It was not the behavior that was gone. What was gone was the old words. Forms and signs were absent.

[9] "Southern Writers in the Modern World: Death by Melancholy," *The Southern Review*, 6 (1970), 914.

[10] Jane Howard, "Mr. Bellow Considers His Planet," *Life*, April 3, 1970 p. 60.

Not honor but the word honor" (p. 264). Mr. Sammler's values are not biological and personal, like Angela's and Wallace's; he knows that an "aged man is but a paltry thing." Rather his values are rational and humanistic, products of the "unaging intellect." Hannah Arendt's theory of the "banality of evil" receives Sammler's castigation; on the contrary, he observes, "The best and purest human beings, from the beginning of time, have understood that life is sacred. . . . Banality is the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish the conscience. Is such a project trivial? Only if human life is trivial" (p. 22).

Bellow finds the trivialization of human life proceeding from a separation of mind and body, of *veritas* and *bios*. Nearly as effective as the "eye" in *The Great Gatsby* is the "Spry" sign that winks at Mr. Sammler from across the Hudson River. Intellectually and morally profound, the old man lacks the essence of contemporary personal authority: spryness. Especially as it manifests itself in sexual potency, "the young in one another's arms." And in America, circa 1969, sexuality is authority; it possesses, says Mr. Sammler, a "mysterious certitude" (p. 54), like that of the magnificent penis the Negro pickpocket shows to Mr. Sammler after Mr. Sammler has surprised the black man stealing money on a bus. In the scene where the confrontation occurs there is not a word spoken, yet the message is conveyed through visual means. As Robert Frost feared in "Sand Dunes," nature has begun to swallow up mind. Communication has become brute and pre-verbal.

A further demonstration of sexualization of authority occurs in the episode at Columbia University, where Sammler has been asked to give a lecture by a radical-chic young professor. Sammler, not knowing that the audience has come, appropriately enough, to hear a speech on Sorel's theory of violence, speaks on the liberal humanism of Wells, Orwell, and the Bloomsbury group. Midway into the speech he is interrupted by a hirsute radical who berates the old man for quoting a remark of Orwell's. The young man shouts: "'Orwell was a fink. He was a sick counter-revolutionary. It's good he died when he did. And what you are saying is shit.' Turning to the audience, extending violent arms and raising his palms like a Greek dancer, he said, 'why do you listen to this effete old shit? What has he got to tell you? His balls are dry. He's dead. He can't come'" (p. 46.).[11] Here Bellow is demonstrating

[11] Orwell's presence pervades *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. The remark by Orwell (about the English radicals being protected by the Royal Navy) that enrages the radical student appears in an essay called "Wells, Hitler, and the World State" in *Dickens Dali & Others: Studies in Popular Culture* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946), pp. 115-123.

the sexual roots of contemporary radical politics, an insight that differs from the usual position of Yeats who, in poems such as "Easter 1916" and "Politics," saw an opposition between radicalism and sexuality.

A defender of rationality and an admirer of Orwell, Bellow has a great deal in common with Sammler, as Alred Kazin observes.[12] In Bellow's last novel before *Sammler*, *Herzog*, there was also a great deal of identification between author and protagonist. In *Herzog*, Bellow alternated between the pronouns "he" and "I". However, that book, as well as its main character, was quite unstable, groping, and tentative. The unfinished (usually) and unmailed (always) letters of Moses Herzog were quite possibly representative of Bellow's own failure of articulation, of his inability to find either a suitable spokesman or a viable point of view. *Herzog* also foreshadows Bellow's increasing concern with the past and with tradition.

In a talk he gave in 1969 Bellow indicated the increasingly important role that tradition would play in his work: "Traditions, like weights, may be picked up and moved aside. But having them moved out of the way, what have we achieved? People are beginning to see that many of these old obstacles are somehow still significant. In literature we have reached such a degree of liberation that we are threatened by nudity, barrennes, weightlessness, and non-existence-in-existence."[13] Rejecting sexuality as a norm, Mr. Sammler sets against it the rational and moral tradition of the past. Bellow is reacting against the rampant individualism and subjectivity that shows man, in the words of J. Hillis Miller, "wander[ing] through the infinite nothingness of his own ego."[14] For Sammler, ". . . individualism is of no interest whatever if it does not extend truth" (p. 238). Instead of intellectual discipline and a conservation of the ideals of the past, Sammler sees around him, "limitless demand—insatiability" (p. 38). He believes the highest function of man is not to *explain* everything but rather to *distinguish* between good and evil.

In Mr. Sammler, the man of detachment who is also capable of compassion and human sympathy, Bellow has found the fictional spokesman he has been looking for over a novelistic career of three decades. At the center of *The Dangling Man* we find, in Helen Weinberg's words, a concern with "man's historical need for an ideal construction by which

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[12] "Though He Slay me," *New York Review of Books*, Dec. 3, 1970, p. 3.
[13] "Skepticism and the Depth of Life," p. 29.
[14] *Poets of Reality* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 3.

to shape his life and to live."[15] In *Henderson the Rain King* the hero instinctively fears entrapment in the linear progression of Becoming that ends in the nothingness of the grave. Henderson confesses to King Dahfu: "You are a Be-er. I've got to stop Becoming. Jesus Christ, when am I going to be."[16] *Herzog* anticipates some of the insights of the later work in its nostalgic remembrances of the cohesive family life the hero had in Montreal and in its affirmation of the power of reciprocity in love (as in the relationship between Herzog and Ramona).

Some of Bellow's earlier critics, such as Alfred Kazin, saw that the typical Bellow hero was in search of "some large spiritual world, outside the narrow circle of the hero's own desperate existence."[17] Anatole Broyard speaks rather awkwardly about Sammler's "timeless[ness]," his "postcoital perspective."[18] Bellow rejects rather than neglects the "sensual music" that keeps the young people, as well as the young country of America, from seeing the value of the intellect—and of eternity. However, Kazin seems less accurate in his description of Sammler as a purely mental creature, one with an "exclusive and excluding disposition to 'know' what is real and what is not."[19] This is partially true, perhaps more true of "Sailing to Byzantium" than of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, for it misses the novel's stress on sympathy and charity as necessary elements of the moral life. In "Sailing to Byzantium" the young "know not" the limitations of "dying animal." *Knowing* in the novel consists of recognizing the centrality of the human bond, as illustrated in Sammler's words over Gruner's body: "For that is the truth of it—that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know" (p. 316). Yeats's knowing is more dispassionate than Sammler's which is based upon a somewhat mystical faith in humanity. Oddly enough, although some critics (such as Benjamin DeMott) accuse Sammler of lacking sympathy, the other characters in the book criticize him for having this very quality. For example, when Sammler worries about Wallace after the latter's plane accident, Angela says, "You have too much sympathy for him" (p. 300). In Yeats's poem we see a man gain spiritual insight, historical perspective, and detachment. Mr. Sammler also possesses these qualities, but the time he spends "out of nature" allows him to live more fully in the world.

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[15] *The New Novel in America: The Kafkan Mode in Contemporary Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), p. 56.

[16] (New York: Viking, 1959), p. 191.

[17] "Bellow's Purgatory," *New York Review of Books*, Mar. 28, 1963, p. 32.

[18] Unt. rev. of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, New York *Times Book Review*, Feb. 1, 1970, p. 1.

[19] "Though He Slay Me," 3.

The full vision of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is more like that of the "Crazy Jane" poems than of "Sailing to Byzantium." Bellow wants both "foul" and "fair": time and eternity, flesh and spirit, man and God. True, Sammler wants to escape "from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite" and to perceive ". . . the greatness of eternity . . ." (p. 93). Using such "singing masters" as Meister Eckhart and St. Augustine, Mr. Sammler contemplates past, present, and—especially in his extended conversation with Dr. Lal—future. Sammler acknowledges the need for "sages" when he mentions that part of the superiority of the ancients lay in their "accept[ing] the inevitability of imitation . . ." (p. 153). At one point Bellow suggests that Sammler is a sage: "His friends and family had made him judge and priest" (p. 95).

Mr. Sammler's concern with God and spiritual realities may create some unease in a primarily secularist audience. However, Bellow recognizes that the rationalist humanism proclaimed by Wells and the Bloomsbury group collapsed when reason came to the end of its tether during World War II. The collapse of secular society portrayed in the novel indicates that Bellow may share at least part of the frightening insight ascribed to Joseph Conrad by J. Hillis Miller: "The human world is a lie. All human ideals . . . are lies. They are lies in the sense that they are human fabrications."[20] *Mr. Sammler's Planet* sees the perverse attractiveness of this nihilism, the source of much of the destructiveness in present-day America. During the War Sammler, living a fugitive's existence in the Polish woods, killed a young German soldier; Sammler found the experience exhilirating and tried to recapitulate it by firing another shot into the dead body. Little wonder, then, that he questions the easy assumption of the innate goodness of man. However, as his final words indicate, there is noting else to fall back upon except for a belief in a human community presided over by a Being that we denominate as God. The final powerful ethical affirmation that closes the novel is thus in the form of a prayer to God to receive the soul of Elya Gruner, an imperfect—yet basically decent—man.

Forced to consider the "derangements of the soul in the clutter of our cities," Mr. Sammler tries to put his life in order. As I have shown, the novel is very similar to—and certainly influenced by—Yeats's "*Sailing to Byzantium.*" However, although Yeats's metamorphosis is in part ironic (with the references to "nature" and "bodily form" after he has supposedly put the flesh behind him), he does suggest a strong division between body and spirit. Bellow, on the other hand, shows us

[20] *Poets of Reality*, pp. 17-18.

a man, Artur Sammler, who strives for harmony between solitude and society. Mr. Sammler, like Yeats, wants his thoughts to originate in "farewell-detachment, in earth-departure-objectivity" (p. 137). But we must remember that Sammler is not really out of this world, for as he tells us, "Though I feel sometimes quite disembodied, I have little rancor and quite a lot of sympathy" (p. 231).

Although his earlier works contain hints of the point of view he assumes in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Bellow has surprised many of his critics and outraged others by sailing half-way to Byzantium.[21] He has drawn quite heavily in new perspective on the aging monuments of twentieth century English literature, especially the works of Yeats and Eliot. In doing so, he has added his powerful individual talent to the modern literary tradition.

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[21] John Jacob Clayton, whose generally adulatory study of Bellow I have cited earlier, attacks both *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and Bellow in a caustic review called "Bellow and the Planet of our *Discontent*," *The Valley Review*, I (Dec., 1970), pp. 14-15.

THREE POEMS BY LARRY RUBIN

PASSING THROUGH FOREIGN STATIONS

Halting under a hazy sun
In an unknown land
Where talking is out of the question
I scribble in my mind
Words in my native tongue
Words that could be poems
If my pencil had a point;
Landlocked, I conjure up the sea,
Faces that were salt the day I left—
The girl lied and the sun dried
And the ocean swept the shoreline clean of bones
And I left with my broken pencils—
Now under this alien sun
I hand my pencil to a girl
Selling tickets in the station:
She sharpens every image in my mind
Till they flow like the sea within my dream—
I speak

THE BACHELOR, PANICKING

Doors open, rooms close
The nightmare pounding
In a gathering of faces

Waiting, the people wait, whispering
It is a church, a cemetery
And you who were so beautiful
Heap the dirt upon my naked face
And reach for what is mine alone

The clock is crumbling

I will never be a boy again

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THE POET, DROWNING

My name was on everyone's tongue:
Pictures appeared; they spoke
Of me in gilded swimming
Pools; the waters clung,

And my face was loved. The words
Came easily, as I swam
Through lazy swellings
Of the sea, with cords

Of silver, memories
Holding me safe. The tides
Were full of purple fish
With strings, arrowed rays

That paralyze, but ropes
Were nothing to a child.
I groped toward bluer depths,
Dreaming of sunken shapes,

Awaiting the lifeguard's hold.

INTERVIEW: GEORGE GARRETT

CHARLES ISRAEL

In 1958, when George Garrett was twenty-nine, his *King of the Mountain* (a collection of short stories) and *The Sleeping Gypsy and Other Poems* were published. His first novel, *The Finished Man*, was published in 1960. These were followed by *Abraham's Knife* (poems) and *In the Briar Patch* (stories) in 1961. Garrett's second novel, *Which ones are the Enemy?* was also published in that year. In 1962, a children's play, *Sir Slob and the Princess*, was produced. In 1964, *Cold Ground was my Bed Last Night*, another collection of stories, was published. *Do, Lord, Remember Me*, his third novel, appeared in 1965. In 1967, *For A Bitter Season: New and Selected Poems* was published in the United States, and *A Wreath for Garibaldi and Other Stories* was published in Great Britain. In 1971, *Death of the Fox* was published. His latest work, *The Magic Striptease*, a book of three novellas, will appear in the fall of 1973. Garrett is now a Professor of English and teacher of creative writing at the University of South Carolina.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think are the major problems faced by the beginning writer in our time?

GARRETT: I'll dodge that one a little. All serious writers, with a few exceptions, are in the same boat. Each book is a beginning. Look at this. Wright Morris and Philip Roth, for example, are in the position of starting a new thing everytime. The mechanics of the literary marketplace are such that a Wright Morris, who is probably our greatest living producing novelist, has done in effect a series of first novels. So all serious writers are beginners. Robert Penn Warren is an exception. And the problem is that it is sometimes more difficult for the old-timer beginner than for the first-shot-out beginner. The first shot out is on a clean slate. You don't have a track record.

But, here we go, here are two of the biggest problems facing beginning writers. First, it is extremely difficult now under any circumstances—much more difficult than ten years ago—to get published. There are large numbers of very good manuscripts bouncing around the United States, and if you're optimistic, you'll believe that those good manuscripts will find a home. But the only way for that to happen is for the writer to survive, to preserve his manuscript, to fight it through. It's analogous to the difficulty of the American poet at the time Frost was coming along. It took him twenty years to get his first book. This problem is compounded by two things: there are more good young writers around than ever, and simultaneously, there are fewer places to publish them. Right now is the only time in this century that we have had a significant backlog of good unpublished book manuscripts in this country. Second,

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most student writers have been doing poems and stories. These are what they have time to do in their kinds of lives. It is probably true, as Frost says, that a person can have his lyric voice at twenty. Many of these manuscripts by young writers are lost in the shuffle of college and graduate school. Most who persist are magazine poets, and this turns them away from producing coherent books. I do have the idea, as a parenthesis, that college literary magazines will get increasingly important—starting now—because they have the money to survive. . . .

INTERVIEWER: I read that George Garrett is a Southern writer. Does that expression—Southern writer—have any meaning for you?

GARRETT: That handle probably had meaning to writers themselves a long time ago in terms of the specific place they wrote about most times. I don't think we're quite out of that. I've seen in my lifetime at least three or four times when distinguished scholars and elder writers have announced that the Southern Renaissance is over; then out of the Southern schools come bunches of young writers who haven't heard that it's over. The region has family characteristics that prevail. They are general characteristics. In the most recent generation of Southern writers, for example, there is a certain approach to language, a certain formalism. Most Southern poets, I believe, have been formalists. Poetry has always been on the topmost rung of the Southern literary hierarchy. It was OK to be a nutty poet; it was bad to be Erskine Caldwell. A drunken poet in Macon, Georgia, was OK because he was writing poetry with a capital *P*. Because that is so, it would be impossible to conceive of a Southern William Carlos Williams playing with the colloquial and the everyday. Take James Dickey, superb poet; he's in the grand school of Southern Poetry. Poetry with a capital *P*. The poet as the Supreme Maker. So we have a different attitude toward Southern fiction. The Southern fiction writer begins with the liberated sense that he is working in a slightly inferior form. He thinks that its materials are not the great universal bones of Poetry. This means that the Southern fiction writer is open to varieties of spoken language as distinct from poetry. The prose fiction of the South has an enormous range as compared to the prose fiction of other regions of the country. Even at his most literary, the Southern fiction writer doesn't go too long on a high tone. Even Miss Eudora loves to drop into the colloquial. They love variety of speech, from public rhetoric to the rhetoric of movies and the pop culture. The Southern young writer, for example, who is using pop culture in much the same way as the urban writer—I call him an urban character sometimes because of this—is more at ease with it, less pedantic about it. Less stuffy than the urban writer.

INTERVIEWER: I'll call *Death of the Fox* a Southern Elizabethan Historical Novel of the imagination then. What about that?

GARRETT: R. H. W. Dillard *has* located a number of Southernisms, Southern locutions, in the middle of speeches in *Death of the Fox*. Let me go on a bit about the Southern writer. I've heard panels discuss the end of Southern writing, because you can't find barns with Clabber Girl signs as frequently as you did thirty years ago. They're putting TV antennas and big buildings up. We're getting in the South the same suburban problems Walter Cronkite talks about every night. Some say we have no more subject. What they fail to recognize is that the subject was created out of literature. To be a writer is still a reasonably respectable way to be poor in the South. The young writer will get as much out of tall buildings and crazy TV antennas as those older guys got out of Clabber Girl signs on barns. That's nostalgia and sentimentality on the part of those panel guys. They say, "Oh, the good old days are gone when the bib overall set stayed in their place and the Blacks stayed in their place."

There is one other thing we forget. Southern society has been fairly literate and fairly literary, yet it has always been and still is a lousy audience for the contemporary writer. In the Civil War Southerners were reading Sir Walter Scott. Now they're up to Henry James. That is, we as Southern writers don't have a built-in market, except for a small academic one. So Capote gave the Northern urban audience from the beginning the updated version of Thomas Nelson Page and he has succeeded. If he had depended on the audience in Mobile, Alabama, he would have starved to death long ago. We have an enormous number of talented Southern writers. What to do about an audience? To whom are we speaking? If we address a large urban group in the East, then we have to explain everything or distort everything to make any sense.

INTERVIEWER: When you sat down and had your idea for the three novellas coming out soon, *The Magic Striptease*, did you have an audience in mind?

GARRETT: No, just myself as audience. I couldn't have done it any other way. If I were what some one has called a "public novelist," I would have aimed at a particular audience. If you're a playwright like Tennessee Williams, though, you must think in terms of an audience every time. I am a private novelist, it seems.

INTERVIEWER: You know, don't you, that you're now considered a South Carolina writer?

GARRETT: That's all right with me. I see much more literary activity here than when I first came. There are Barry Hannah and

Mark Steadman and Bob Sorrells at Clemson, and Bill Fox is a South Carolina writer. It's funny about Clemson. They have a great gathering of writers there without having a formal writing program. Maybe all that just grew out of the red clay soil like kudzu.

INTERVIEWER: *Death of the Fox* was a long time in the making, George. What was your beginning idea about that novel?

GARRETT: It began as an idea I had about 1950. I wanted to do a biography of Walter Raleigh. At that time a solid biography was needed. Then good biographies began to show up, but my interest in Raleigh remained. Ten years were spent in trying to figure out this problem: if not a biography then what? Was there a need to do anything more than a biography? Gradually, the form evolved through trial and error. I personally needed more than a biography could tell me about Raleigh.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk about that form. Review after review of *Death of the Fox* said: here's something new under the sun.

GARRETT: It wasn't my intention to do something completely new under the sun. I haven't discovered a new fiction form in that work. But I decided that one way the story of Raleigh can work as a fiction is that his particular character is fictional. He was living in an age in which people could lead fictional lives. There is a point beyond which you cannot go in a conventional biography.

INTERVIEWER: The limits of the methodology of history study?

GARRETT: Yes. The biographers of Raleigh—half a dozen of them in the twentieth century—are superb, but they prove the limits of biography in dealing with that type of character. Raleigh is evasive. In fiction I didn't want to violate the facts, the historical outline of his life. One temptation was to see how far I could go—to see what would happen to his dimensions if the fictional were blended in with the historical facts.

INTERVIEWER: And the fiction comes into the book as the working of the imaginations of the characters?

GARRETT: Yes, how the characters imagine each other. A justification of that procedure is that those particular people at that particular time—Raleigh and his contemporaries—were very self-conscious about the power of the imagination. Imagination was one of their great themes and subjects. They liked to *imagine* history, both recent and ancient history.

INTERVIEWER: About the physical act of writing. Do you write on top of a refrigerator?

GARRETT: I'm too short for that. For screenplays and dramatic pieces, I compose on a typewriter because it's easier to tell what you're

doing and where you are in that form, but *Death of the Fox* and most of my fiction was done several times over in longhand and two or three typescripts. Look at the short paragraphs in *Death of the Fox.* They're short because I can cover a page in forty or fifty longhand words.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard for a long time about one of your works in progress, a novel titled *Life With Kim Novak Is Hell.* It's been brewing for a long time.

GARRETT: Like Florida lake fungus in somebody's ear.

INTERVIEWER: What is its status now?

GARRETT: I've about let that one go. It was an open-ended thing. I've got boxes of manuscript for it—chunks and units. Eventually I may bring it around. In the long period of time of writing the Raleigh book, I didn't give much time to Kim Novak.

INTERVIEWER: Auden says that writing is not a horse race and that writers and critics shouldn't enter into their jobs feeling that it is a horse race. Still—if you had to name the three or four most influential twentieth century writers, the most influential ones on recent American literature, who would they be?

GARRETT: I'd say the Joyce-Proust-Mann trinity, plus William Faulkner in terms of amount of work. Faulkner was a great reshaper of fiction. I think new beginnings were opened up by these pioneers. They didn't end anything. They certainly did not kill the novel. They *started* something. But the problem with the horse race is how many entries are there?

INTERVIEWER: Since you brought it up, I'll ask the question: how successful do you think a novel titled *Urban Charades* would be?

GARRETT: There's a small group eagerly awaiting that title, but I'm afraid that if the title appears in print Donald Barthelme will swipe it. Maybe we could beat him to it by writing something on Barthelme called "The Urban Charading of Donald Barthelme." It may be the title of the future—a book about an agrarian Southern situation in which a hero, say Buster Crumley, dreams of being in the big city, and it's all distorted because he has never been anywhere bigger than Greenville, South Carolina.

INTERVIEWER: This is a personal question. What do you find funny?

GARRETT: This interview for one thing. I find it very difficult not to find everything that surrounds us, including our own aches and pains, pretty funny. This new book I've finished, *The Magic Striptease,* two thirds of it was written in reaction to the sixties, and those two thirds are grotesque comedy. It's really hard to sustain any seriousness when you're writing about the sixties, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: You call this large portion of *The Magic Striptease* grotesque comedy. Is it also satiric?

GARRETT: Yes, it's possible to have satire, I believe. But satire shouldn't be so comfortable as to confirm the prevailing prejudices of the group to whom it is addressed. That's the danger of satire for our generation. As far as satire goes, we haven't advanced much from *Babbitt*. Most recent satire I read is still whipping philistines. I don't know if you're satirizing anything when you describe the building of great concrete plazas and then make a case for the tree. A more interesting form of satire might be not to make a case but to think of all the things that can be said *against* trees. You could do a good satirical piece on a corrupt Johnny Appleseed.

A part of this problem is that we have no big open debates anymore. We're warned against being divisive if we want a real debate. It's only in our generation that we've begun to say that things are unthinkable. Nothing is unthinkable. And it profits a democratic country and it profits a literary artist to start thinking the unthinkable. Without debate there is not much possibility for genuine literary satire.

May 28, 1973

TURN A NEW LEAF

Jack deBellis

Sister Anatolia. Sister Anatolia. He saw her name on the big chalkboard, swirling from the Giant S, rubbing the circuit of the A. The A. His short fingers gripped the pencil tightly as he practiced it, enclosing the space in the lines of his Jumbo Notebook, then looking back between lines of A's at the elephant on the cover, head to the ground but trunk a curling skyward S. How do you spell elephant? He noticed he had trouble again staying inside the red lines.

The A was like the tight bundle of whiteness of his nurse at home, kneeling—no, genuflecting—with a cup probably of milk for some wounded soldier or knight. That time Tear threw it out the window it didn't break, falling all that way. He put her to one side of the garage, in case. It hadn't taken long for him to convert its red pumps and green ramps into turrets and moats. This knight would try to scale the ramp but (Bamp di lang!) he gets tossed into the hot lava in the moat. And then—

"Some of us aren't very good letter-makers, children." He looked past the mound of blackness at the tender, blue, vacant eyes turned toward him. Sister Mary Magdalene. Lovely Lady Dressed in Blue, only it was black.

He flipped through his pages raggedly to find room for more S's and A's, but he ripped one. He examined the torn part and found a brown fleck chopped in two. Only it wasn't like the dead cat in the frozen puddle. It walked down the street last night quiet as the streetlights, and when he looked again it was underneath the milktruck's wheels. Tear shook him and said people die all the time, not just cats. Every minute. Each second. But he had seen the legs twitch and be still, so even when he got interested in his own crying and started to count his sobs, he couldn't quit looking at that jumbled, discoloring whiteness in the street.

He made a row of A's, carefully avoiding the crevice. And then they were doing Biology.

"Who knows what happens when you eat food?" He felt his sticky palm cool in the air over his head. The specks of salt were from the recess pretzels. She smiled. Knights, elephants. His elephant stamp from Ceylon. Was there a knight stamp? Could you send a letter to a knight and tell him everything in A's and S's?

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"You chew something and then swallow it after it's done. And when it gets in your stomach there are things which bang and pulverize it. And then you have to go to the bathroom." He wondered, hearing his strange voice, what did "pulverize" mean exactly?

She smiled and he put his hand in the inkwell and slid from side to side in his seat. Then he thumped the turtle song on his desk and pretended his tablet was his music book. How do turtles go to the bathroom? Sister Anatolia was behind him, he could feel. The turtle stuck his head in, and he fisted his hands.

"Children, everyone should have his science book, the yellow one, on his desk, and all other truck should be put away."

"Ruum. Hrum," he drove a truck across the desk. Then he was puzzled that his science wasn't there. The big English tipped onto his knees; below the short pants a corner bit him as he grabbed his science.

"Omigon," he heard sister say. Maybe it was from the mass.

Gesturing with her pointer at the window—"The moon and the planets. The Milky Way! All the stars, children. More than all the leaves of all the trees that ever bloomed in springtime. Think of it, children! All God's glory!" The cold light made her habit shine, separating her head from her body. St. Theresa.

Lucy asked Mary something, but he followed the pointer past the naked branches of the trees, down the red row of Dickinson street, down to the river where he once saw the sun come up on Christmas when he came to march in the procession. Mommy held his hand and they picked their way over the icy street. No dead cats. The wind cut his eyes to cold tears. Her face looked withdrawn, whitening, as he asked, "But why did Daddy throw the Christmas tree over the balcony?" She just stared quietly ahead, like when he asked her to look at the gold star he got for "If I Had an Airplane," the star just above the airplane. He only got a red one for "O Tannenbomb." Passing Guffanti's delicatessen and thinking how the fat old man always mussed his hair and called him "Carrot top," he asked, "Will he always be my daddy?" Mr. Guffanti talked only Italian, except for those two words he must have heard his daddy use sometime.

"What kind of a question is that? Behave." The church had smelled like Easter and his ears had burned as he pressed his fat hands together and started up the aisle, red and white. "Precious!"

Lucy had freckles like the Big Dipper on her neck. It pointed up to his hand, swaying among the little lights in the ceiling. Only he only thought it was there. Or it would be after the planetarium show. "The planets are nine: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus,

Neptune and Pluto. Mercury is the fastest and Venus the brightest, but Saturn is the best." Dr. Marshall's moustache would curl as he smiled and they'd play "When Day is Done" that Mommy liked.

He leaned against the coats and tugged his snowboots on. When the metal snaps were fastened, he pulled a piece of pretzel out and teethed it in half, sticking part in the pocket of Lucy's coat, a red one with wooden buttons. Then he jumped the stairs two at a time, Captain Marvel, flying to rescue somebody. In the dark hall of the ground floor an eighth-grade monitor called him over.

He looked sallow in the yellow light, bored his nose and flicked a piece of snot. "Where you goin, baby?"

"To piano lessons." It was dry and didn't stick to his blue coat. "And don't call me baby." He dropped the crumpled excuse on the little desk. He was a Boy Scout and a Safety and used to punch him in the ribs as he held them back at the curb at lunch. "Glamor Manor" on the radio, jelly sandwiches and cocoa.

When he picked the excuse off the floor, the safety tapped him hard on the head. "Irishers are all drunks."

"Well, Italians are too." That seemed only fair.

"You sayin somethin about my father?" His dark eyes locked his and his chin lifted.

His moist forehead went cold. "Why should I? My father's Italian too." The scarf was too tight at his neck. "Anyway, everybody's good and bad. That's what religion class says."

"aaah, baby!" he said with a push.

Dinosaur, Lizard dinosaur. And he was walking past the big clock with hands almost together, past pictures of people bending over in the grass and bowing their heads, looking at something he couldn't see. And then the statue of God, hands outstretched with a red dripping heart like a big leaf. Up at the cousins' they scooped up leaves and threw them in piles by a big tree, yelling hysterically Jack Benny's words, "Chin up, but with tears in your eyes," falling on the pile, exhausted, crying, laughing.

He wiped the moisture out of his eyes with the nailbitten pads of his fingers as he neared the convent. Cars and wagons waved the cold air toward him as they lumbered across the trolley tracks. There wasn't time to duck in church, but he still had time for a decade of Hail Marys. After an extra Our Father, "Please let Sister Anatolia like me today."

The convent bell ding-donged. The fire bell rang and he chased it to the Sinclair station, the big S curling up beside the dinosaur painted on the wall of the house next door. After the hoses it was a

palace of ice all November. He always detoured to see it. Could knights live there? The door swung back and a sister let him in, his eyes retracting in the dark. Past flowers in fragile vases, pictures of saints and then the music room, through glass doors. The virgin stared down at him, plain, intent as if expecting something of him.

"Leave your things out there, boy, by the coat rack. Don't be tracking up the floor." Her voice splintered, Cracker Jacks at the bottom of the box. She had pills for everything. A nice voice?

"It stopped snowing, Sister Anatolia," he said after leaving his boots and coat outside the piano room. He slid onto the stool and stifled an urge to spin. It hadn't snowed much, anyway, barely enough to make his tracks.

"Filthy dirt," said Sister Anatolia to the morning paper lying on her desk. She snipped out a picture of a lady in her underclothes, crenelating the paper with her pinking shears. In the back of the paper was the science page Tear clipped out on Sundays and sometimes read him. He thought about how Mars and the Sacred Heart looked alike as he opened his music book and awaited sister. Over her shoulder he could see the pictures with far-away smiles and secret looks. Sister Mary Magdalene? He thought of digestion and lunchtime.

She folded the paper carefully and put it aside, then pulled the candle in the squat red holder closer and fed the cut-outs into it. As they flared her face was lit, orange with black cracks, sunken with circuits of folded skin, and her eyes receded deeply into the skull. Her beads rattled. A purplish-brown mole stood on her chin. Seaweed. Her face tossed like a leaf in the licking light.

"Vile stuff. Devil stuff." The paper turned from the heat, the white faces suntanning, contracting, then blackening, swirling in ash. His eyes moved down the flame to her pencil fingers, then the elastic vein, pulsing. Her sharp nose pinched at the smoke and snorted when she extinguished the candle, momentarily blending the black of the ashes with her black dress. Light fell from the stained-glass window.

He squinted at his music. "Please, sister Anatolia, may I have some light?" He nodded at the chandelier overhead.

"Blatherskite," she said indifferently. "Don't you know, boy, there's a war on?" Then, "All right, now. Play, boy, but be sure to hold your fingers correctly. Like a spider, now."

He opened his book to "People Call Me Mr. Slowpoke," regarding the turtle's hard shell and sinuous neck. It was a song, but she read the

notes not the words as he played. The slick white keys were warm and smooth like pebbles.

"Stop, boy. Stop."

"Sister, I'm sorry," he began automatically. Forest and Sons, the piano said.

"That's terrible. Do you want a gold star today for that? Well, it's awful. Now control yourself and begin again." She kept time with her beating stick, lengths of glossy, slender stick as long as his hand to elbow, reddish-brown and tied with rubber bands. Snap. Snap. Snap. The turtle shell. Forest and Sons.

"No!" she said.

Quickly he tried to erase his error from her ears. Hands together he began on the wrong note.

She tapped his knuckles in an extra beat of time. From surprise he pulled his fingers away, then slowly replaced them. She kept her own time for a few moments on them, even after he began again. Then he suddenly forgot what he knew of notes.

"Play," she said, but it was meaningless to him. What did a turtle have to do with music?

The leafless stick struck. Again. He pulled his fingers back. She smeared them into the keys with a splatter of notes and hit a C# in missing his thumb.

The jangled tones receded and when they stopped he saw her large and watery through his tears. She was very displeased with him. He wiped his eyes and bit some of the quick of a nailless thumb.

"I can't play," he said, feeling fat and clumsy. The turtle slipped its neck in the shell.

"You can't is it?" she asked and her disbelief was so strong he wondered what he could have said.

"No," he said nearly crying. "No, sister."

"I'll just get the devil out of you, rapscallion." She seized a vessel of holy water from her desk and splashed it over him in driblets, rocking above him from side to side. Clenching his teeth, he flicked the round drops off, towards her black dress.

"Well, I can see you can't play today, so well has the devil got you. But I tell you one thing you had better do. You had better go to church and pray to almighty God that he forgives you and will not damn your immortal soul for such obstinance." He could see the vessel in her forehead beating time, as he looked past her eyes.

"Yes, sister," he mumbled, placing the accent in such a way that meant to hurt. Tinsel caught in the flag holder when the tree spiraled down from their apartment.

"You're a vexed little boy. And you must turn over a new leaf." She stared, solid as a frozen tree.

Snow flurries started on the way home, striking his glasses daintily, and after a block when he began to breathe harder the little flakes melted and he couldn't see too well out of his one good eye. Dr. Ragavoy had told him, staring intently, "Boy, your eyes are improved. Much improved." But he still couldn't see through a binoculars the way Tear could, not with depth or anything. Anyway, there was something about the doctor that made him think he was just telling a story, but he told his father all summer and fall just what he was told. Would Sister Anatolia or Sister Mary Magdalene tell on him about today?

Sister Mary Magdalene once told him to give himself a good talking to, and now he had to turn a new leaf. It was still a few blocks to the brown apartment and the snow made things quiet. He began to talk. "Now you've got to stop this stuff. Pulling chairs out from people at Reading and making smart aleck remarks during the Thursday movies. Just who do you think you are?" For fun he began to mimic his father. "And get this through your thick skull, you aren't the only one alive. Have some consideration and don't take so much for granted. Do as I say, not as I do. And don't be pig-headed or I'll get the strap." Sometimes he didn't mind it. What hurt more was his father bringing him ice cream later. At the hardware store he said a couple of things to his dart board, seeing God and his big red heart in the center of it, circled by yellow and blue lines. Maybe that's how the big drops of blood came out of it.

The leaf swung his eyes away, toward the ground where it hit, blown down from Mr. Guffanti's probably. He tried to decide on the color and thought of All-Bran. It almost covered his hand. A network of veins curled up from the neck. A single blister pocked its surface. Seaweed. It felt scraggily to his lips and smelled like burning newspaper.

He turned it over, and as he did, a trolley came by, noisy, grating, the trolley man facing dead ahead, down the street toward the apartment. The fading wheels said Look, and he did, as the breeze from the trolley threw gyrating flakes in his eyes. For a second the veins looked like that ancient writing on mummies' tombs, then it blurred as a snowflake melted on his lens. The center of the leaf smeared, transformed itself. Then, suddenly, a sharper focus like looking through a

telescope. It was his mother's face there on the leaf, yet he heard himself say in recognition, "Sister Anatolia." As if in answer, the noon bells thundered from Annuciation. He watched the leaf swirl away like a giant S. The tree fell.

ANATOMY OF MORNING

Often wind from the north
freezes the heart. But as often
the starting out new warms us,
even toward the pole, or deep
by the salt-fish of passion.

After the wrinkling fire is out,
when outside the alders creak
where cedars bend toward silence
and we have reached
that chilly in-between time,
your skin is white shadow.

The moon wanes.
Mist is touched by wind
lightly and a second brightness
swells above the trees. This
is another kind of longing:
we find its welling
entire in our hearts.

Keith Moul

FULANI GIRL

Romantic scene from a 1930 film
Rescreened against exotic setting,
A dusky Sheba tempting Solomon,
Salome offering to remove a veil—
    Cocoa queen, straight as palm,
  Agate-smooth between the guinea corn
    And conical mud huts,
  Knowing motion of presented cigarette:
    "Master, light me cigarette?"

DONALD A. SEARS

FOR A DAUGHTER MUSICAL, GROWING

Over rough surf
under a red-and-gold sail
you come scudding
to Handel's water music.
You steer true.
A compass in your forehead
points to the north star.
Johann Sebastian trims ship
and keeps your log
while petals fall from your violin
onto passing barges.
I think how Anthony must have stared
along the river Cydnus
as the royal progress neared
with flambeaux
and zithers.
What glissandi
in your white wrists!
You've unfurled
into a sonata.
Even the sun
leans on its elbow
to listen.

JANE AUGUSTINE

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TO ONE WHO WROTE TO ME THAT "OUR PATHS MAY CROSS"

If, dear Madam, I were sitting in my
old Volkswagen in the middle of the track
at a railroad crossing, and you were in
the lead locomotive of a crack express train
roaring along at 140 miles per hour,

and your train smashed into my VW,
and it and I were scattered in tiny little pieces
over 3/4 of a mile of track,

but (miraculously, since this is all
hypothetical anyhow) I were not killed, but
only torn up in these tiny little pieces,

with my only thought to get all the pieces
back together, and sit in the VW on the track,
so that you could roar down in your
140 m.p.h. express train and do
the same thing all over again—

if, I say, dear Madam, after all this
happened, you were to look back over your
softly rounded shoulder and say,
"Well, our paths crossed,"

then I might be able to condone
the expression in your note. But otherwise
I think you have slightly underexaggerated . . .

JACK STILLINGER

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SIMMS'S USE OF MILTON AND WORDSWORTH IN *THE YEMASSEE:* AN ASPECT OF SYMBOLISM IN THE NOVEL

THOMAS HUBERT

In his introduction to the Riverside edition of *The Yemassee,* C. Hugh Holman cites the famous chapter twenty describing Bess Matthews' encounter with the rattlesnake as an example of Simms's style degenerating "into studied rhetorical 'effect.'" [1] And indeed the style of that passage is highly artificial and inflated. But be Simms's stylistic excesses what they may, the effect produced by the writing here is quite a bit more than rhetorical. As L. Moffit Cecil has more recently pointed out, the passage is symbolic: the coiled rattlesnake represents "the displaced Indians, now thoroughly aroused and secretly determined to strike." [2] Without taking issue with this interpretation, which is valid as far as it goes, I would like to use it as a base from which to explore a more traditional and central aspect of the symbolism, one which depends in part on Simms's knowledge of Milton's *Paradise Lost,* and of Wordsworth's poetry in general. For the South Carolina oaken grove into which Bess went to meet Gabriel Harrison is clearly a conscious evocation of the Garden of Eden, and the rattlesnake is a descendant of the Miltonic serpent which seduced Eve, both of which images have far-reaching implications for the story as a whole. Moreover, both the snake and Bess's reaction to it are described in language which Simms appropriated from Wordsworth's description of the "sublime" in nature: specifically, the mingling of terror and beauty.

Since Wordworth's influence on the passage is less important than that of Milton, I shall treat it briefly before considering the latter's influence at greater length. Wordworth's presence is first and most surely indicated not by reference to the sublimity of the oaken grove but rather by Simms's allusion to "one of the greatest of modern poets" who

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[1] Introduction, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. xvii.

[2] "Symbolic Pattern in *The Yemassee,*" *American Literature,* 35 (1964), 512. Cecil continues his interpretation as follows: "The sudden flight of Occonestoga's arrow marks the climax of the pantomime, foreshadowing the climax of the novel. The Indian is depicted as his own destroyer. Immediately Simms confirms this conclusion symbolically in the action of the snake, which turns upon itself" (pp. 512-13). For a more recent and more extensive treatment of the novel's symbolism, see Charles S. Watson's "A New Approach to Simms: Imagery and Meaning in *The Yemassee,*" *Mississippi Quarterly,* 26 (1973), 155-63.

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holds, as does Bess, "that the daisy enjoyed its existence."[3] The specific reference here is to the first of Wordworth's four poems "To the Daisy" (1802, 1807):

> Fresh-smitten by the morning ray,
> When thou art up, alert and gay,
> Then, cheerful Flower! my spirits play
> With kindred gladness . . . .
>
> (11. 57-60)

The allusion to Wordsworth's daisy is not, of course, symbolic but simply contributes to an atmosphere of peaceful joy in a natural setting, an atmosphere which is presently to be disturbed.

More important are the numerous repetitions of the terms "beauty" and "terror," "terrible beauty," or synonyms of these words throughout the description of Bess's encounter with the snake. As the student of Wordsworth will recall, the dualism of beauty and fear is central to his poetry from "Descriptive Sketches" (1791-92) to *The Prelude* (pub. 1850). In the first of these, for example, Wordsworth describes now the "Strong terror [that] checks the female peasant's sighs" (1. 65) and now the eye's greeting the "open beauties" of "a blest delicious place" (11. 107-08). In one passage of "Peter Bell" (1798), "shadows of strange shape" appear in the midst of "a scene of soft and lovely hue!" (11. 166, 172). And in "Tintern Abbey" the speaker, having described "These beauteous forms" (1. 22) as they appear to him in 1798, recalls that five years earlier his response to the same scene was more like that of a man "Flying from something that he dreads, than one/ Who sought the thing he loved" (11. 70-72). And, finally, in *The Prelude* the poet recalls that he had grown up "Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (I, 302).

Now while Simms had not read *The Prelude* before he first published *The Yemassee* (1835), the following quotations from chapter twenty of

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[3] The quotation is from the Riverside edition of *The Yemassee* (p. 139), which reproduces "as exactly as practical," according to Professor Holman, the New and Revised Edition of 1853. Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent quotations are from this text. The 1835 edition, from which I quote briefly for purposes of comparison, was published in New York by Harper Brothers in two volumes.—That Simms appreciated Wordsworth's use of personification is further attested by the following comment of 1850: "And if Wordsworth has chosen to invest the sun, stars, the air and vernal woods . . . with something of a spiritual instinct, we do not see how he is to blame" ("Poetical Works of Wordsworth," *Southern Quarterly Review*, N. S., [1850], 20).

the latter go far toward suggesting tha Simms had read enough of Wordsworth's other poetry to be made aware of that dualism in nature to which the poet had frequently responded:

> She strove to move from before the beautiful but terrible presence . . . its powerful eye shot forth glances of that fatal power of fascination. . . . With a novel form of terror and beauty . . . the dreadful beauty of its eye still fastened, eagerly contemplating the victim. . . . (pp. 142, 143)

Simms's early and thoroughgoing appreciation of Wordsworth, whom he called "easily the greatest of modern poets," has been well documented by Edd Winfield Parks and W. P. Trent.[4] In September of 1850 Simms wrote a long essay on Wordsworth's verse, exclusive of *The Prelude*, and in November of the same year he wrote a brief notice of that poem.[5] While it is not possible to maintain that Simms's reading of *The Prelude* had a significant effect on his revision of *The Yemassee* for the 1853 edition, it is worth noting, nevertheless, that there are two additional references in the revised version of the snake passage to the dualism in question: "the wildest fancies, terribly beautiful" and "the dreadful beauty of its eye" (p. 143). Moreover, Simms seems to have made a conscious effort in revising the passage to intensify the frightfulness of the snake, an intensification which does not, however, greatly affect the balance of beauty and fear. Where the 1835 version described "the fearful expression of its eye" (I, 135), the 1853 edition has "horrid expression" (p. 143); where the 1835 edition refers in one sentence to the snake simply as "he" (I, 174), the revised version substitutes "the invidious reptile" (p. 143); and finally there is in the revised version one more reference to the snake's rising head and shining eye (p. 143) than appeared in the 1835 edition.

These changes aside, the significance of Wordsworth's influence in the whole chapter is quite clear. Simms was attempting to describe the

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[4] The quotation is from Professor Parks's *William Gilmore Simms as Literary Critic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1961), p. 48. W. P. Trent, in his *William Gilmore Simms* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), pp. 58 and 145, comments briefly on Wordsworth's influence on Simms's poetry. For a reference to beauty and fear in Simms's poetry see "The Edge of the Swamp" wherein he describes "the abode of thousand forms of life.—/The terrible, the beautiful, the strange,—" (11. 37-38). The tradition of the sublime as it influenced Wordsworth and earlier poets, such as Gray, is discussed in Samuel H. Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (1935; rpt. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 211-12, 227-32.

[5] Parks, p. 125. The essay is the one from the *Southern Quarterly Review* cited in note three above. The notice is found on p. 540 of the same source.

disruption of a pleasant and peaceful scene, and Wordsworth's cheerful daisy on the one hand and the language of beauty and terror on the other helped him in some small measure toward effecting that end. What particularly impressed Simms about Wordsworth's poetry was how he was able to evoke "associations, analogies & c." from the details of a natural scene. "This is associating the moral with the physical, as is done by Wordsworth, Bryant & c.," wrote Simms in a letter of 1846; and if we may read "emotional" in addition to "moral" in this comment, we may better grasp that quality of Wordsworth's poetry which Simms appropriated for his own writing here.[6]

If there is terror and beauty in the oaken grove, there is also the dualism of good and evil, one upon which *Paradise Lost* has a significant bearing in terms of both theme and imagery.[7] That the grove is meant to be Edenic is supported by the most cursory reading of the first two pages of chapter twenty. But this is not to suggest that Simms was closely imitating, say, Milton's description of the "blissful Bower" in Book Four (11. 689-708). Rather, as is the case with G. M. Hopkins' sonnet "Spring," the luxuriant natural setting is intended merely to suggest "A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning/ In Eden garden" (11. 10-11). Or as Simms more elaborately puts it:

> The rich green of the leaves—the deep crimson of the wild flower . . . all gave power to that spell of quiet, which, by divesting the mind of its associations of everyday and busy life, throws it back upon its early and unsophisticated nature—restoring that time, in the elder and better condition of humanity, when, unchanged by conventional influence, the whole business of life seems to have been the worship of high spirits, and the exercise of living, holy, and generous affections. (pp. 138-39)

And Simms's "Eve," Bess Matthews, is described as "a girl of heart, but a wild heart,—a thing of the forest, gentle as its innocentest flowers, quite as lovely . . .," a girl who "sought for an altar on which to lay all the worship of her spirit" (p. 139).

It is Bess's meeting with the rattlesnake that most obviously and most importantly evokes the second confrontation of Eve with Satan in

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[6] The quotations are from *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. Mary C. Simms Oliphant, et al. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), III, 137.

[7] If *Paradise Lost*, as Professor Parks notes, "was the touchstone by which he judged contemporary epics and religious poems" (p. 55), we may be sure that Simms knew it well enough to have used it in the manner I am indicating.

which he appears in the form of a serpent. Although the significance of the confrontation here is quite different from that in *Paradise Lost,* Simms's description of the snake's coils, the movement of his head, and the brightness of his eyes is close enough to Milton's to suggest that he was conscious of it when he wrote his own:

> There still the eye glared beautifully bright and piercing upon her own . . . and the insidious reptile slowly unwound himself from his coil, but only to gather himself up again into his muscular rings, his great flat head rising in the midst. . . . (p. 143)

In *Paradise Lost* Milton's serpent made his way toward Eve with

> Circular base of rising folds, that tow'r'd
> Fold above fold a surging maze, his Head
> Crested aloft, and Carbuncle his Eyes. . . .
> (IX, 498-500)

Yet what is most noteworthy about Simms's description is not the likelihood that he drew upon Milton's but rather the symbolic import of it for the book as a whole. Not only does the snake symbolize the Yemassee, as Professor Cecil observes, but it is also an emblem for one of the basic themes of the story: namely, man's implication in evil. Simms's snake, unlike that of Milton, is not the source of the entry of sin and death into the world. He is, however, the symbol of the existence of evil in the world. Though not primarily an explorer of the darker recesses of human nature in the vein of Hawthorne or Melville, or an orthodox Christian, Simms did, however, accept the doctrine of man's fallen nature. The note of warning which the snake's rattle carries to Bess's ear is not merely a warning of the physical danger embodied in the snake but is also suggestive of "an evil presence" (p. 142) in a more profound sense. Where precisely this evil presence resides Simms makes abundantly clear in his characterization of both individual whites and Indians—Hugh Grayson, Richard Chorley, Ishiagaska, and Chinnabee—and to some extent by way of his general commentary throughout the book.

An examination of these individual characterizations may begin with Hugh Grayson. Hugh's unrequited love for Bess—or an image of her fabricated by his own selfish desire—pushes him first to the border of madness and self-destruction and then to an attempt on Gabriel Harrison's life. But Simms does not permit us to see Hugh merely as a victim of unrequited love. The failure in his case is that of "right reason" or of some other "regulating principle" (pp. 275, 277), such as honor, adequately to check his baser passions. Because Hugh has rejected virtually

all "artificial forms" (p. 210) and restraints which society imposes upon its members for the common good, he has made himself a slave to those passions. In short, suggests Simms through his characterization, evil or a clear potential for evil exists within the person who will recognize no moral authority outside himself. "My mind is my own teacher" (p. 210), Hugh tells his Bible-reading mother. It is also his tyrant, as he comes to realize in a way that helps to mitigate our judgment of him.

Richard Chorley, like Hugh Grayson, took his own mind for teacher, and what it taught him was the law of the jungle. "The case is changed now," he tells the Reverend Matthews, who had known him as an orphan, "and if I'm no better, I'm at least an abler man; and that stands for right and morality all the world over" (p. 105). Simms takes into account the adverse conditions of Chorley's childhood, for example, his being severely flogged by the parish beadle. But he does not indulge in sentimentality about his turning to crime to make his way in the world. If, on the one hand, Simms does not insist on Chorley's full responsibility for becoming a criminal, neither does he, on the other, gloss over the fact that he incited the Indians to make war against the white settlers purely for selfish gain. And in the end, when the pirate was in the process of abducting Bess in a canoe, we are given to believe that the only thing that could have stopped him was a well-aimed piece of lead. It needs to be emphasized that Gabriel, who fires the fatal bullet, uses force only "when other means are wanting" (p. 123); the arbitrary use of force is not the basis of his ethics or behavior, as is demonstrated throughout the story.

Since, in the long view, the Indians are the victims of injustice in the story, Simms in his treatment of their involvement in evil is perhaps more sympathetic than he is with the settlers, despite the fact that he sees the Indians as inferior to the whites on the whole. The colonists and the English government were "in many respects monstrous great rascals" (p. 221), a judgment which is especially applicable to their practice of buying up Indian lands for the merest baubles. Yet the responsibility for the war does not lie entirely with the English. Although the Yemassee were "originally gentle and generous enough" (p. 20) and although they were provoked by the whites, they were capable of acting out of the basest passions, one of which was a rage for blood and revenge. It is tempting to argue that such passions would have never appeared had the Yemassee's hunting grounds not been encroached upon. But to take that line of reasoning is to beg the question, for men simply do not live amid invariably favorable circumstances.

Hence, their worst side will at times appear. The modern notion that man can and should so completely control his social and economic environment as to eradicate all present evils and prevent all future breeds from cropping up would surely have struck Simms as the merest moonshine. For to Simms the potential for evil, or for good, depends as much on what is in a man as outside him. The contrast which he makes between Sanutee and Ishiagaska is instructive on this point in that it demonstrates that two men can react to the same set of unfavorable circumstances out of contrasting motives, one of which is noble, the other ignoble. Whereas Sanutee is moved by patriotism to see war as necessary in order to rid the Yemassee nation of the English threat, the "malignant" Ishiagaska acts primarily out of a lust for murder and revenge. "They shall die—they shall all perish, and their scalp shall shrivel around the long pole in the lodge of the warrior" (p. 68), he says to his fellow chief.

This same sanguinary note is struck in a later episode (chapter 48) in which Harrison encounters Chinnabee and another warrior. Evoking the name of the Yemassee Evil Principle (see Simms's note, p. 17), the second warrior addresses himself to Harrison: "*Coosah-moray-te*,—I drink his blood, I tear his throat, I have his scalp . . . 'tis a dog for Opitchi-Manneyto!" (p. 337). Just prior to this ejaculation Harrison had addressed Chinnabee as "a cunning snake—a snake lying in the dried bush" (p. 336), a role which Chinnabee then assumes in an effort to throw his adversary off guard: "Good!—the snake is in the bush. Look! *Coosah-moray-te*—put the foot on his head" (p. 336). While the primary purpose of the snake imagery here is to characterize Chinnabee's prowess as a warrior, it also suggests not that the Yemassee are evil but that they—specifically, Ishiagaska and Chinnabee—are implicated in evil to the degree that their zeal for battle is prompted by blood-lust rather than by the noble cause which motivates Sanutee.

Simms does not flinch from the primordial passion for blood and revenge; nor does he seek to attribute it solely to the Yemassee. He is simply concerned with presenting it for what it is, a universal human trait: "Blood makes the taste for blood. . . . The philosophy which teaches this is common to experience the world over" (p. 231). And because it is universally a part of man's nature, it is something which he must soberly recognize and restrain if he is to achieve and maintain the condition of civilization.

The Yemassee is primary a romance about the conflict between the Indians and the Carolina settlers in the early part of the eighteenth

century, but to the extent that it dramatizes the utter and humiliating defeat of a great people it is also a tragedy, in the same sense that the *Aeneid*, for instance, is on a greater scale. It is, moreover, as Professor Cecil has pointed out, a fictional work which in its symbolism anticipates *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*.[8] However, I must conclude that the importance of the novel lies not so much in its technical contribution as it does in the way in which Simms uses his symbolism to convey one of the major themes of the story. As enriched by his use of Wordsworth and Milton, and especially the latter, this symbolism makes us unmistakeably aware that though tragedy and evil are not pleasant to behold, it is at least desirable that we face them with a steady eye. Simms would surely agree with his fellow Carolinian, the late Richard Weaver, who said in *Ideas Have Consequences*, "Hysterical optimism will prevail until the world again admits the existence of tragedy, and it cannot admit the existence of tragedy until it again distinguishes between good and evil."[9]

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[8] Cecil, p. 514.

[9] *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 11.

REVIEWS

Philip Roth, *The Great American Novel*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973, 382 pp. $8.95.

"Call me Smitty"—so begins Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel*. Smitty has escaped alone to tell the comic tale of the defunct Patriot Baseball League. The forgotten baseball players and their deeds of athletic glory have been erased from memory and record book through a national conspiracy. During his revelations of the suppressed history, Smitty also hopes to track down the mythical Great American Novel and with it the Great American Dream of Success and Glory. But, like Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* and Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association*, Philip Roth's story is not finally about the game of baseball, but about people, in this case, men who become moral cripples long before their bodies fail them. During World War II, greed and superpatriotism assure the demise of the Patriot League when the last-place Ruppert Mundys discover their home ball park sold to the government to be used as a troop staging area. Doomed to the hopeless predicament of playing a full season on the road, the Mundys deteriorate into a travestry of a professional baseball team, a ludicrous traveling circus filled with bizarre specimens of the American athletic hero. In *The Great American Novel*, Roth's boys of summer never stand a chance at immortality.

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Laurence Lieberman, *The Osprey Suicides*. New York: Macmillan, 1973, 84 pp. $1.95 paper.

His second book of poems, *The Osprey Suicides*, shows Laurence Lieberman to be a talented and humane poet. He is a precise observer of nature, a skillful user of language, and a bold explorer of meanings.

The book opens with nine skin-diving poems whose theme is the mystical union of divers with the life of the ocean—corals, lobsters, whelks, staghorns, and the water itself. "The Diving Ballet" begins, "No one/ Can teach us the deep-water/ Moves—we are swimming a dance to music/ We cannot hear in our heads./ We hear/ With our skins." This poem ends somewhat pompously ("In spaces between/ No-breaths, you are learning to hear the waves/ Of your pulse cross the Self-/ Abyss."), but its figure of the sea-changed new self is important to Lieberman. In "Lobsters in the Brain Coral," a diver chases a speared langouste into a "massive brain coral" colonized by lobsters—"a dance of skinless/ bones, creakless many-jointed rickety stilts/ dragging the glossy-plated bodies this way and that,/ somersaulting over and over, sagging/ without letting go, until I forget if my feet are under/ or over my head." These underwater poems frequently depict a loss of equilibrium, thus implying that it is good sometimes to shift our perspectives from familiar, orderly ways to dreamlike swims of imagination. However, like James Dickey's swimmer in "The Driver," Lieberman's lobster-hunter must surface: "Give me back/ to my jails of skin, to my soaps of blood-suds, to my glands,/ lungs and lymphs, to all those emerald birds—/ heart, liver, gall bladder and balls. Oh spheres and cubes/ of my body. . . ."

The title of the second section—"Increasing Night"—ominously introduces fourteen "people poems," but most of these are almost ingenuously affirmative in

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tone. By far the best are the warm strainless family poems—"Frozen Pipes," "Lamb and Bear: Jet Landing," "The Killing of Daddy," and "Inside the Gyroscope." Except for these, Part II of *The Osprey Suicides* suggests that Lieberman's strength is in writing about larger forms, big natural scenes which are brought into sensual intimacy with the poet.

Part III contains nine poems: four are good, and two are excellent. "The Osprey Suicides" and "The Skeletonizers" are not imaginative after the mystical fashion of the skin-diving poems, but their language—beautifully free-rhythmed—and their tangible details press the reader toward meanings which bald exposition cannot convey. The first osprey poem, "Samurai: Suicides of the South," portrays a bird that sinks his claws into a fish too large to bear and drowns; the second, "DDT: Suicides of the North," describes a pesticide-damaged male osprey that brings food to his nest but crazily devours his prey without sharing it with his mate and screeching young. "The Skeletonizers" is about a Spanish priest's being pulled by a young Oklahoman from the myriad jaws of piranha fish in South America. The old Spaniard philosophizes lengthily after his rescue, but his philosophy is concrete in the bodily wounds he has suffered.

Whereas the poems of Part I depict the union of men and nature, and Part II contains poems of wholly human, or social, contexts, Part III establishes men as the artists of the universe, the philosophers, the word-givers, the "objective" onlookers whose very lives depend upon how accurately they perceive the natural and the social worlds. Although his desire for meaning occasionally leads him into blandness ("this morning/ aches to reveal/ its wonders"), his accuracy and quality of perception in *The Osprey Suicides* promise long poetic life to Laurence Lieberman.

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CRITICAL ESSAYS ON ROBERT FROST ARE INVITED FOR THE FALL 1974 ISSUE