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## The South Carolina Review

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# The South Carolina Review

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## LAYAWAYS

STEPHEN DIXON

Mr. Toon says goodbye and goes, keeps the door open for two men who come in. Wasn't a very good sale, pair of socks, layaway for a couple of workshirts. Two men look over the suits.

"Anything I can do for you, fellas?"

"Just looking," shorter one says.

"Harry, mind if I go to the bathroom?" Edna says.

"Why ask? You ask me almost all the time and I always say yes. —You don't see anything you got in your mind you're looking for, just ask me. We got things in back or different sizes of those."

"Thank you," same man says.

"Why do I ask?" Edna says. "Because I like to ask. Because I have to ask. Because I'm a child who always has to ask her daddy if she can make."

"You're my wife, talk to me like my wife, not my child."

"You don't get anything I say. You're so unclever, unsubtle."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You don't pick things up."

"I pick up plenty. I picked you up 32 years ago, didn't I? One pickup like that, I don't need anymore."

"Well that at least is an attempt at cleverness. What I meant," she says lower, "is those two men. I don't want to leave you out here with them alone when I make."

"They're okay."

"I don't like their looks. They're too lean. No smiling. One has sneakers on."

"So they're lean and don't smile. Maybe they got good reason to be."

"They're swift, they do a lot of running, I don't like it."

"They're okay I'm telling you. You work here Saturdays, you think you know everything. But I've been in this neighborhood for how many years now, so I got a third eye for that."

"Your third eye you almost lost in the last holdup."

"Shut up. They might overhear."

"And get ideas?"

"And get scared out of here thinking we always get holdups."

"We do get holdups."

"But not always. You want to go to the bathroom, don't be afraid. You got my permission. Go."

"Call Joe out first."

"Joe's taking his break."

"Let him take his break out here."

"He's taking it in back because he wants to get away from out here. —Sure nothing I can do for you, fellas? You're looking for a suit, sport-jacket? Just what size exactly are you?"

"If we see anything, we'll tell you," shorter one says. Taller one's holding a hangered suit to his chest.

"Big one doesn't speak much. He I think we got to be especially beware."

"You're paranoid, you know what it is?"

"No."

"It means you're paranoid. You know what it is."

"I was just testing you if you do and you didn't. You couldn't define it."

"I can too. You're paranoid. *You*. That's my defining it. To every lean looking man not smiling if he has sneakers on you're paranoid."

"So what's a man with sneakers buying or looking at a suit for?"

"To buy for later. If he buys a suit from us, he'll go to Clyde's or Hazlitt's and buy a pair of shoes to match. He's in a buying mood. These guys, they get a paycheck Friday, they spend it all at once the next day and mostly on liquor and clothes. What do you think they're here for? Leave me alone with your being paranoid. One robbery this month—"

"Two."

"One. That second we didn't know was a robbery."

"That one last week? Call Joe out here and let him tell you how much a robbery it wasn't. That was a knife that man pulled out of his newspaper on Joe, big as your head."

"But he was crazy. He carries the knife and makes threats so he can feel like a big man. He does it to a lot of stores around here and they just tell him 'Sure, here's a penny, all we got, it was a slow day,' and show him the door."

"Okay, that one doesn't count. But what does? When they stick it in your heart?"

"Shush, will you? They'll hear. You're going to the bathroom, go like I said, but don't worry about bringing out Joe."

"No, I'll stay here. I don't want to leave you alone with them."

"Do what you want."

"At least say thanks."

"Why should I? I don't think you're right."

"My heart's in the right place."

"Okay, your heart. You're a dream. You saved my life. You made me live 20 years younger, oh boy am I lucky. But scare these two away

with your robbery and knife talk just before my antennas say I'm going to make a big sale with them and I'll be mad as hell at your heart because we need every cent we can get. —That one's a real good buy and a beauty. Want to try it on?"

"Yeah, that's a good idea, where can I?" shorter man says. They come over to the counter Edna's behind and where I've been talking to her and he holds out the suit to me. "How much?"

"Tag's right on the arm cuff. Sometimes they're hard to find. I'll get it for you. Size 44? This is for you? I say that because it's more of a size for him. You can't be more than a 36, and besides, this one is a long and you're a regular."

"I'm regular, 36, you're right, you really know your line," and from under the suit he's still holding he points a pistol at me. Other one opens his jacket and aims a sawed-off shotgun at Edna and cocks it. "Don't scream. Whatever you do, don't. You'll both be nice and quiet now and you call out your friend Joe. But call him out nice and quietly, don't startle him. Just say—"

"I know, I know how to say it," I say.

"Shut up. Listen to me. Just say 'Joe, could you come out and help me with this fitting for a second?' Exact words. Got them?"

"Yes."

"Repeat them."

"Joe, could you come out and help—"

"Okay, say it."

"Do as he says," Edna says.

"I will, you think I'm crazy? Joe, could you come out and help me with this fitting for a second with this gentlemen please?"

"I still got ten minutes," Joe says.

"He's a nice boy," Edna says. "He's my son. He's his son. He won't do anything. Don't touch him."

"We just want him out here, lady. Now call him too, same kind of words but harder."

"Joe, will you please come out here a second? Your father—Harry's got two customers at once and it's too much. For a fitting."

"You can't do it?"

"I don't know how like you yet."

"You don't know how. You'll never know how. I worked my butt off on stock today and want to rest. Oh hell," and he comes out holding a magazine and coffee container.

Taller one holds his shotgun behind him, other one inside the suit.

"Which one needs the fitting?" Joe says.

"Just keep it quiet, baby," shorter one says pulling out the gun and aiming it at Joe. Other one has the shotgun on me, Edna, then keeps it on me.

"Don't hurt him," Edna says about Joe.

"I won't if he does everything we say."

"Everything," Joe says to him. "Give them it all, Harry."

"You think I won't? Look, gentlemen. Come behind here and take everything, please, take it all. Edna, get out and let them in."

"No, lady, you dish it out for us in one of your stronger bags."

"As you say," she says and rings No Sale, he looks over the counter into the bill and change tray and says "Okay" and she starts putting the money into a bag. They keep their guns on us, their backs to the store windows. Joe has a gun on the shelf under the cash register but deep in back. He got a permit for it last month because of the three robberies so far this year when each time we got cleaned out. Edna drops a few change rolls and bills on the floor.

"I'll get it," Joe says.

"You'll get nothing," shorter man says. "Pick them up, lady."

"She's too nervous. She went through a robbery just last week with a guy with a knife here."

"I am very nervous," she says.

"Then you pick it up and empty the rest in the bag but make it quick."

"Just be careful, Joe, and don't do anything silly," I say.

"Like what?" shorter man says.

Man taps on the door, shorter man waves to him, holds up one finger and the man goes.

"Like not making any wrong moves which you might think suspicious," I say, "that's all. We're not armed or anything like that, I wouldn't allow it here, and no burglar alarms to the police. We'll only cooperate. Do just what they say, Joe, but nothing more."

"I know."

But I can see by his look he doesn't. "Let me get the money."

"Why you want to get it?" taller one says.

"Because Joe seems nervous too. He went through the war. He still has tropical illnesses."

"I'm not nervous. I want to give them all the money and for them to leave right away with no trouble."

"Why you two talking like you're up to something?" taller one says.

"We're not," I say.

"They're not," Edna says.

## LAYAWAYS

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"No, we're not," Joe says.

"What do you have back there?"

"Nothing," Joe says. "Come back and look."

"Pick up the money, old man," shorter one says to me. "You come away from there" to Joe. "Go into the middle of the room. You stay back there, lady."

Joe goes to the middle of the room. People pass on the street. A couple look inside as they walk and I guess don't see anything but don't hesitate or stop. Radio music from in back is still playing. I hear a dog barking nearby and from somewhere far off a fire engine siren. I bend down and pick up the money and put it in the bag and empty the rest of the tray money into the bag and lift the tray and stick the big bills under it into the bag and say "I guess you want our wallets too" and shorter one says "And her pocketbook money and your watches and rings too."

"Give it to them all," Edna says. "My purse is under the counter. Can I reach for it?"

"Go ahead."

"You want the personal checks from today too?" I say.

"Forget the checks."

We empty our wallets and watches and rings and purse into the bag and the shorter one says "Good, now go in back. The two men, right now. Lady stays here. We're not taking her so don't worry. Just want her standing here between you and us so you don't do anything stupid, now go."

We go in back. Joe looks through the tiny two-way glass to the front he had me install last month. I say "They taking her? What are they doing?" I hear the door close. Joe runs out and goes behind the counter and gets his gun and yells "Both of you, flat on the floor" and Edna shouts "Don't, let them go" and I shout "Joe, what are you doing?" when I know I should be shouting "Don't, put down the gun." The men aren't even past the store windows yet. They're out in the street flagging down a cab with that man from the window before joining them when they see Joe opening the door and turn all the way to him and shorter one fumbles for something in his belt and other in the bag and Joe's yelling "You goddamn bastards" and the two from before have their guns out and Joe's shooting the same time they're shooting or almost, I think Joe before, and our two windows break and Edna screams and blood smacks me in the face and across my clothes and the two men fall and Edna bounces against the wall behind the counter and falls and glass is sprayed all over the store and clock above me breaks and Edna's jaw looks gone and face and neck a mess and Joe's alive and the one from the window gets up from where he dived and starts running across



the avenue and Joe fires at him and runs over to the men on the ground and I yell "Joe, stop, enough" and kicks their guns to the curb and runs a few feet after the man and then back to the store and jumps through the empty window and sees his mother on the floor and screams and drops to his knees and says "Mom, mom" and I hold his shoulders and cry and mutter "Edna, Joe" and he throws my hands off and runs to the front and opens the door and shouts "You bastards" and one of the men on the ground raises his head an inch and people who have come near them now scatter every which way and Joe puts two bullets into the man who raised his head and grabs the pistol and shotgun from the curb and puts the one shotgun round left into the taller man's head he just put two bullets in and about five bullets from the pistol into the already unconscious or just dead shorter man and then he kicks their bodies and whacks the shotgun handle over the shorter man's head and throws the broken gun away and pistol-whips what's left of the taller man's head and gets on his knees and sticks the pistols in his pockets and pounds the ground with his fists and some people come over to him and the bell from the door tells me someone's coming in the store while I get a pain in my chest that shoots from it to all four limbs and sudden blackness in my head that's only broken up by lightning-like cracks and fall on Edna and feel myself going way off somewhere and in my blackness and lightning and going away I feel around for her hand and find it and hold it and then pass out from whatever, maybe the chest pain.

I ask to be in the same room with her but they say we have to stay in two different intensive care units at opposite ends of the hall, one for serious gunshot injuries and other for coronaries and strokes and the like. Joe sits by my bed for the five minutes they give him and says "I hope mom dies, it's not worth it to her or you if she lives. The bullets went—"

Nurse puts her finger over her mouth to him and I nod to Joe I understand.

"How's the store?" I say and he says "I think I better go in tomorrow. We got all those layaways for Easter. The customers will be disappointed last day before the holidays start not to get them and they won't want them after and will want their money back."

"You better go in then."

"I'm not afraid to."

"Why should you be?"

"People says those two men got friends who'll want to get revenge."

"What do the police say?"

"They say what I did will act as a deterrent against revenge and more robberies but what am I going to be a deterrent with? They took away my permit and gun."



## LAYAWAYS

"For the time being?"

"They got to investigate if I couldn't've not used it. But who knows."

"Don't go in then. I don't want you getting killed."

"But those customers. They got layaways and it's our best two days."

"Do you have to talk about business now?" nurse says to him.

"It's okay," I say. "Store talk relaxes me and I feel all right. Don't go in," I tell Joe. "Go back to college. Stay away from business. I just made up my mind for you."

"I like the business. I got my own family to support too. I want to keep the store."

"We'll get insurance from the robbery and the sale of the merchandise later on. You can have half of it. You deserve it. You have to go back into business, open a store in a quieter neighborhood."

"In a quieter neighborhood the store will die."

"Go into another business."

"What other business I know but men's clothes?"

"Once you know retailing you can open up any kind of store."

"I like men's clothes."

"I don't think your father should be discussing this now," nurse says.

"I feel much better, Miss. Anyway, it wasn't a heart attack I had."

"It was a heart attack."

"It was, dad."

"It was indigestion. It was that, doubled up with nerves. I didn't deserve them? My own wife? Him? That whole scene?"

"You'll have to go," she tells Joe.

"I'll see you later." He kisses my forehead and leaves.

"Could you call him back?" I say.

"It'd be better not to."

"I want to ask him something I never got an answer from. If I don't get that answer I'll be more worried and heartsick than if I do."

She goes outside the room and Joe comes back. "Yeah?" he says.

"You going back to the store?"

"I guess I have to."

"You really aren't afraid?"

"A friend of mine, Mac, has offered to stay with me. He's a big guy and will take care of the register and look after the door."

"Call Pedro also. He called me just a week before the accident and asked if business was going to be good enough to hire him back. Call him. His number's in the top drawer of the counter."

"I know where it is. We have money to pay him?"

"Even if you have to take it out of my pockets. The glass fixed?"

"They put it in yesterday. We had to. Cops didn't want it boarded up if we're going to still occupy it and other storeowners complained it looked bad for everybody else."

"They were right. Don't keep more than 300 dollars in cash there any one time. You get one dollar more, deposit it—it's worth the walk."

"I know."

"I still have to tell you. Two guys like those two come in, even one who looks suspicious, don't take unnecessary risks. No risks, hear me?"

"I won't."

"Give even a ten year old boy who's holding up the store whatever he wants."

"A ten year old I'm not giving in to."

"If he has a gun?"

"That's different."

"That's what I'm saying. But any older person who says this is a holdup—even if he or she doesn't show a gun, give them what they want. Remember, you're only going back to be nice to the layaways, right?"

"I'm going back because I also need the money, me and my family, you and mom, and to tell the goddamn thieves they're not shoving me out."

"They know that already. Listen to me, don't be so tough. I can tell you stories about other tough merchants. I'm not saying what you did caused your mother like she is. But if you didn't get so crazy so suddenly, not that you couldn't've helped it—well right?"

"Don't make me feel bad."

"I'm not trying to."

"Don't blame me because I got excited. Sick as you are, I'm telling you this now for all time."

"I understand you. In your own way that day, you did okay."

He waves.

"Where you going? Give your father a kiss goodbye. He needs it." He kisses my lips. He never did that before. I also never asked him to kiss me any time before. My own father asked me to kiss him hundreds of times and I always did. But only once on his lips did I kiss him and that was a few minutes after he died. I start to cry. Joe's gone. Nurse asks me what's wrong. "Got any more news on my wife?"

"You know we're not allowed to speak about her."

"What am I supposed to think then, she's dead?"

"She's not dead. Your son told you. She's holding her own."

"That isn't much, right?"

"I can't say. She also has the best equipment to help her. You can talk about it more tomorrow with her doctors when they move you to a semi-private."

I'm released three weeks later and go back to the store a month after that. Joe's had another robbery. He gave them what he had without a fuss. Pedro was there that day and later said he'd never let anyone take

anything from him again, even if it wasn't his store. Pedro got a gun. Two of the merchants on the street stood up for him for the gun permit. Because Joe's not allowed to apply for one again for two months, he told the police Pedro needed the gun to take the store receipts to the bank. Pedro keeps the gun in back. He told Joe "It's no good keeping it under the counter or in the register, for where's the first place they look? They find it, they might just kill you. I've been robbed three other times besides my twice here and in back's where they always send you or want to either tie you up or lock you in the mens-room so they can have as much time they can to get away."

Edna's in a nursing home now paralyzed from the neck down. Even if she comes out of her coma she'll be paralyzed like that for life. She'll never be able to speak and if she gets out of the coma she hardly won't be able to think. She should've died in the hospital or in the store but more in the hospital because there's more dignity to dying there. The doctors say she won't last another few months. So I go back to the store just to have something to do, though my own doctor says I shouldn't. I say hello to Pedro and he says "I'm really sorry what happened to you, Mr. Sahn."

"It was a long time ago."

"It isn't a long time for something like that and it's still happening to you with your wife, right?"

"Maybe it isn't too long ago at that. But you've been a great help, Pedro, to my son and me and if we could afford it, we'd double your hourly salary and also put you on for all six days."

"I'm glad I got what I got, so don't worry."

"But we'll give you 40 cents more an hour starting today."

"Hey pop," Joe says, "what are you trying to do, rob us? We haven't got 40 cents more to give."

"Twenty cents will be fine," Pedro says, "and I can really use it."

"Twenty then," I say.

I go to work every other day and on Saturday of that same week two men come in when Pedro and I are reading different sections of the newspaper and Joe's taking care of the one customer in the store. The men don't bother like the rest of them with looking for a suit or slacks but take out their guns before the door's even closed and the thinner one points his at Pedro and I and the heavier one at the customer and Joe and that one says "Holdup, nobody go for anything or step on alarms." The customer says "Oh my god" and Pedro says "We freeze, fellas, no worry about that, we're no dopes" and the heavier one goes to the register and starts emptying it into a briefcase and the thinner one says to me "You there, owner, hold this" and gives me another briefcase and says "Your wallet and everything else in it and get the same from the

rest" and we all dump our wallets and watches and rings in it but I don't have a ring because mine was taken the last time and for some reason never recovered though everything else in the bag outside was. The heavier one comes around the counter and runs in back and comes out and says "They got no storerooms to lock themselves in and bathroom has no door" and says to us "All right, you all go in back but way in back and don't come out for five minutes minimum or I swear one does you all die" and Pedro says "Don't worry, we've been through this before and we all go in back for ten minutes not five, I'll see to that" and we go in back and Joe goes to the two-way and says "They've left" and Pedro reaches behind a pile of shirtboxes and pulls out a gun and I drop the phone receiver and say "Pedro, don't" and he says "I'm not letting them get away with it, Mr. Sahn, I told your son" and the customer sticks all his fingers in his mouth and says through them "Oh no, oh no" and Joe says "Let me have the gun" and Pedro says "No, I'm licensed for it and get in trouble letting anyone else use it" and Joe says "But I know how to use it" and Pedro says "I know too, the police showed me one day in practice" and Joe says "One day? You crazy? Let me have it" and I say "None of you, let them go, nobody goes after them" but Joe reaches for the gun and Pedro shouts "Watch out, it's cocked" and jerks it back before Joe can get hold of it and the gun goes off and bullet into Pedro's chest and we hear shots from outside and windows breaking and duck to the floor, customer's already there bawling, and Joe yells "You goddamn bastards" and grabs the gun and runs to the front but the men had only shot out the windows because I suppose they thought they were being shot at by one of us and by the time Joe gets to the street they're in a car and gone.

I close the store and sell the entire stock. Joe goes back to pharmacy college for the next year with me paying all his bills. Pedro dies from the bullet through his lungs. Edna lives on in a coma for another month before she succumbs in her sleep the doctor says, I have another heart attack and move South into a single room by myself among a whole bunch of much older people in the same crummy hotel, living off my social security and Edna's life insurance and savings and maybe not in a better hotel till Joe graduates and can earn a salary large enough not only for his family but to begin paying back me. Then I get a phone-call from his sister-in-law who says Joe got in an argument in the park with three men who were mugging an old couple and they beat him in his kidneys and head till he was dead.

I return for the funeral and because I don't like the South much with all that sun and beach and older people having nothing to do but wait for death and me with them, I move back for good and open another store but a much smaller one for candies and greeting cards and stuff like that and in a much safer neighborhood. I ask Joe's wife

## LAYAWAYS

Nancy if she and her kids want to share an apartment with me to save money and because I'd also like to be with them more and she says "Actually, I don't want to, not that I don't like you, dad. But with us not having much money and all and the kids for the time being so small, maybe for the next four years and if I don't get remarried or move in with some guy, it's probably the best of ideas."

So we live like that, me not making much in my store in a neighborhood that only rarely has a robbery, my grandchildren asking me questions and wanting me to play with them like I'm their dad, Nancy working part-time and going out with different men and sometimes staying overnight in their apartment but not really being attracted to any of them just as I think they're not attracted to her. Some days we go to the two graves in the plot for eight I bought 30 years ago and that's the only time we all just hold one another, the kids not understanding it too much, and say some prayers from a little book the cemetery provides and cry and cry.

## IN THE SUMMER OF THE YEAR ONE

As I walk to the mailbox  
                                           my feet are prehensile  
 in the earth  
                                           matted with a weave of needles.  
 Eating blackberries on the way  
                                           every morning for a week  
 delicate blood shoots  
                                           into my mouth with each bite.  
 No mail today.  
 When I come back  
                                           I reclaim my trashcan—  
 half a foot of rainwater.  
                                           Inside, a solo frog,  
                                           almost transparent.  
 He must have hatched and grown in there.  
 In the summer, eighteen years ago,  
                                           I worked for a plumber.  
 One morning we arrived on the job  
                                           and found the pipetrench full  
                                                                                   of little hoppers.  
 The old black man I worked with told me  
 when water evaporates from the ponds and lakes  
 it takes the frogs' eggs  
                                           up into the clouds, they are so light.  
 They hatch out in the clouds  
                                           and when it rains  
                                           it rains frogs. It made sense.  
                                           I let him ride the tidal wave out.  
 Cool snails along the flagstones,  
                                           on the welcome mat.  
 On the woodpile next to the door  
                                           my salamander—  
                                           electric blue tail: "detach here"  
 pin-striped rock-and-roll suit  
 and little eyes like facets  
                                           of the blackberries  
                                                                                   I'm just digesting.  
 His gills breathing  
                                           he cocks his head  
 and looks into my love for him  
                                           but not *too* close.





You respond that you're at home  
                                           in your Gucci ghetto.  
 Out the bathroom window  
                                           I see the moon  
                                           high in the pines  
                                           reflected in your pool.  
 I find the comb and bring it to you.  
     You run it through your tangled cornsilk  
                                           as we walk out in the blowing zinnias  
                                           tidy, there, as fancy ladies.  
                                           Impatience everywhere.  
 When I try to caress you  
                                           you neigh  
                                           and whinny away from me.  
     I catch you easily.  
                                           Concealed by the colonnade, we lean  
 on the tree they planted at your birth.  
                                           Your hands, like ponds  
                                           are moving on my back.  
 As I shift my weight  
                                           you sink your dewclaws in  
                                           and set the riptides stirring.  
 You tell me when you were a child  
                                           you used to sneak into the pasture every day  
                                           and lick the saltlick.  
 I part your blouse  
                                           kiss  
                                           your right breast  
                                           the nipple rises, hard  
 as I swirl it with the tip  
                                           of my tongue.  
 You pull me down  
                                           into the dark  
                                           behind the springhouse.  
 Later, I slip from your bed and go home.  
     At three  
     Your mother, father, and brother rise  
                                           for an excursion.  
                                           The four of you go  
 to the high school football field  
                                           to watch a scheduled meteor shower—  
     share little snacks  
                                           and family jokes.

Me,  
 alone on my back  
 at the edge of my garden  
 in the long wet grass  
     looking up  
 and singing to you  
     *a capella*

KEN McCULLOUGH

### TO THE INTERIOR

After a while you get the feel of it  
 and stop jumping up and down with messages  
 that must be sent at once. After a while

it does not matter if anyone follows you  
 through the doors, only that stars are  
 most visible far off from cities—Mandelstam

was right, like salt—and that on a desert  
 the air is either hot or cold and no one  
 to say put on the cloak or not but your own skin.

Herdsmen and flocks rumble at a distance,  
 a sea of wool and horn, a wave raised.  
 The sands shine like salt and men go by

driving their flocks after the sun or moon  
 by some true reckoning we've forgot.  
 And after a while, silence again.

Djinns leap in the dangerous curves,  
 sweep the silver-crueted sheen of salt  
 clean of footprints, polish the light.

AUDREY CONARD

## THE CRIER OUTSIDE BEDLAM

GAYLE WHITTIER

On this side of the glass, me. On that side, my daughter, my successor, stands among the blades of light in the field. There, a timeless sugar-maple bleeds its old, renewing sap into a grass-green plastic bucket: I bleed my hopes into her.

For a long time now she has not felt me watching.

She stands mast-straight within her wind-snapped skirt, sifting nature for the images she wants. Then she angles her Yashica and in 1/200th of the second that just passed me by, she seizes her day. She stands, still, too young to know the camera as a thief of images; but I cannot quite redeem them from the company of the memorial wreath, the bracelet of hair, and the fly in amber.

The look between us holds steady, rapt, and mute. Each asks who the other is and gets no answer. Then she shifts the weight that once was mine and moves beyond our sightline. Harbor to harbor.

Click, I imagine. Her camera eats up spring. I sit down to relieve myself of a burden older than the stirring of the earth.

By midmorning—as it is midmorning now—light comes to take away this room. In winter, it grazes blinding off the snow to stand even where the walls have stood. And if I am working here then, it takes me too: I write in the luminous heart of the crystal, out of time.

On the far wall, a print, two centuries old, has hung long enough to pass beyond the eye, to age into an unobserved, a gentle household god. Two years ago my daughter gave it to me for Christmas, the same Christmas that I gave her her camera. An embarrassment of allegory. Reluctantly, I handed her the power to take pictures; justly, she held out a single image of the past older than us both. Now this print draws me in, shows me my spectral features in its glass.

Beyond them, another, younger woman watches these forever, her hair captive in a careful cap, eyes Enlightenment wide. Behind the inky pillar of her skirt, her thigh pretends to be a marble thigh, massive and still, in the dead idiom of Neoclassical repose. But the Age of Reason has ennobled her too falsely, and too far. She is an offal-seller. "Cat's and Dog's Meat!" is her city cry. The words, boldly blocked, set underneath her feet like ground itself. Above her head hangs "Bethlem Hospital," inscribed in the always fragile script of the same.

She pushes a cart like a child's perambulator, hooded as if it were part sedan chair, legged like a wheelbarrow. In it, amorphous meaty gobs—glands, jewel points of the living flesh, dross of the dead. Her hand—it is too noble, I see now—holds up, as if it were a lady's fan:

her knife. It beckons me to imagine the artists's model, sitting for poverty's image in the studio reeking of spoiled hearts and rotting tripes. But no. The meat would be imaginary.

"My God! That cart's full of mangled babies!" I had cried, unwrapping it. My own child, the giver, looked distressed. For I had almost overturned our careful Christmas, a recent divorcee's Christmas where Dylan Thomas stood in for Dickens ("too sentimental"), and lobster for the turkey that was now too big ("Why waste good food?"): where luxury and necessity disguised our frail renewal wrenched from out the coldness of an end.

"Oh, you don't like it!" she decided. "Here. Give it back to me. I can always get you something else."

"No, no. I love it. *Thank you.*"

"Give it back!"

"I won't!"

We struggled ridiculously, tug-of-war, over the Christmas print. I won it, but not her.

"That was a *sickening* thing to say!" she punished me. "Dead babies!" How could such a dark thought come, like herself, from me? There knifed between us the mutually distrustful glance between begetter and begotten. I am joined to her by that rope of flesh cut only at birth, and never afterwards.

"It was just my first impression," I excused.

"It must have come from somewhere," she retorted. Her bright, antagonistic eye egg-toothed into my shell. Where she touched me, my old childhood, unready even now, behind its membrane, shook: the white, the yolk. The child within me I already knew: this other one? Then, apologetically, she *said* that she had meant it as a joke, "Cat's Meat and Dog's Meat!" because the house was overrun with animals, wasn't it, dogs and cats and even a parrot who imitated us when we were not imitating him.

I guaranteed her lie—a mother's business, and a child's. But I had seen her recognize in me that black and final place, where margins thicken to withstand the page, where certainties undream into a family wound. Someday she will remember it, how she named my secret murderous self.

Now for the sake of the crier in the frame, a cluster of monster images wakens in my skull. Where usually the spinestem lifts aloft its nervous foliage like a tree, gray braincloud shadowing it, I carry prodigies. It has no term. For my childhood, which resumes, comes as a cry of madwomen. I myself have sung my broken part in their cacophony. Now in an older voice, half-hearer, half-condemned, I sing it yet.

\* \* \*

Then I was outside the glass, a listener who no more or less than felt the pulse of unclean mysteries inside. Rising, the melody of my mother's voice upheld a wordless question: \_\_\_\_\_?

A second, worded voice replied. ". . . come into some money, dear. You see?"

"No, where?" my mother, audible now.

"Right there."

"And that one over there, the one shaped like a bird?"

"That? A journey. Not necessarily over water."

They thought of journeys.

". . . death, do you?" my mother ventured.

"Oh, goodness, no! Whatever made you think of a thing like *that*?" as if death did not exist, really—or if it did, as if it had no hieroglyph. "Just a trip. A vacation. It *does* look like a bird, don't it?"

My mother dreaded birds, omens of death. Once when a sparrow mistook our kitchen windowpane for air, I found her abetting his wild audible attack with her own screams. Now here was a bird in her very teacup. To save us both, I burst in on them.

"Oh! *Annie!* You *frightened* me!" My mother lifted herself up and held her terror in with one hand at her throat, as if she were having one of her hot flashes. "You're home from school *already*? And here I haven't even started my ironing yet!"

Across from her, across the sociable tabletop debris of crumbs, smeared jelly pink as lymph, and empty teacups giving up their virgin signs, loomed Mrs. Ottling, huge and patient as a hill, her lap full of breasts, her eyes full of mirth. "Why, this *can't* be little *Annie!*" she denied. "My, my. Aren't you growing up, dear. Just how old are you?"

"Eleven," I counted out.

"Eleven! Why, she's big for her age, isn't she? Has she started . . .?" she unsaid towards my mother, a gesture that ended at sex.

"Oh no. Not yet," my mother answered. Now she was setting up the wooden ironing board, her foot pushed a basket of summer-smelling laundry under it, like a cradle wanting a child.

"She's *changed* a lot already though." Mrs. Ottling's cold clairvoyant's eye counted me. A stone eye, it would not look away. "Got a boyfriend yet, honey? No? Well, you will! You mark my words, Lizzie, she'll be starting very soon now . . ."

"Oh, I suppose so," my mother said. "It's in the cards." And joy and sorrow and knowledge mingled in their common look.

"I was twelve, myself," Mrs. Ottling said. "What about you, Lizzie?"

"I was late. I was almost sixteen," my mother said.

"I had a sister like that," Mrs. Ottling told her.

To put an end to being studied by them, I announced, "Guess who I saw on the way home? Bessie Berlin."



"No! She wasn't coming this way, was she?" My mother stopped slipping a dress over the rigorous body of the ironing board.

"No, She was up on 18th Street with her shopping bag like this . . ." (I made a false pregnancy of arms around my belly) ". . . and she was *talking to herself*."

No one was looking at me now. Mrs. Ottling silently questioned my mother, her hand made a little geometry of madness, a wandering spiral towards her own ear. My mother nodded, tried the iron's face with her wet finger. The wetness spat back at her.

"You say you *really* saw her, Annie?"

"Uh huh." I could see her still, her angled crooked walk, as if against the high relentless wind blowing inside her ravished skull: the black wing of her hat slicing the air.

"Well, I never," my mother said. "I guess she's out of the hospital, then. Buffalo State Hospital," she added. Mrs. Ottling made her eyes and mouth into an O. "I really ought to call and see how she's doing. Ask her over."

"You've got a heart of gold, Lizzie!" Mrs. Ottling beamed.

"Oh, the poor girl. Not a friend in the world."

"But she isn't dangerous, is she?"

"Oh no, no. Don't you know Bessie, yourself?"

"I've *heard*, that's all. Old Doctor Berlin's girl, ain't it? The 'funny' one?"

"That's her," my mother said. "Just *tragic*. Two Berlin girls, there was, Bessie and her sister Hulda. Hulda now, she was beautiful, just like Mary Pickford. Hulda Berlin."

"Hilda, did you say?"

"No, Hulda with a U. Had to be different, you know, the Berlins. Why, those girls got anything they wanted. Bessie wore an ermine muff and a diamond ring to school—just a chip, but real—when she was just eight. I was to school with her."

"And the other one, this Hilda or whatever: what's her married name?"

"Oh, she never married," my mother said, "she died." The iron fell heavily on the sprinkled cloth. She began to scoop out ruffles. "Died young."

"Imagine that," Mrs. Ottling said. We imagined it. "Well, but what did she die *of*?"

"Influenza. During the epidemic." Mrs. Ottling nodded to show she remembered it. "It just carried her off."

"The same as my cousin Bertie," Mrs. Ottling said. "But was she 'funny' too, like her sister? Did it run in the family?" And she signed herself again, but more casually, with the sign of the daft.

"Oh, not at all. Hulda Berlin was a *beautiful girl*."

"What a shame. The crazy one living, I mean."

"Oh yes."

"What do you think made her that way, Lizzie? Or was she always?"

"No, she was the same as you or me up until about fifteen. Then, they *say*, her *uncle* . . ." My mother caught sight of me as if for the first time; a whisper excluded me.

I caught ". . . wrapped in grocer's paper . . ." and ". . . in a garbage pail . . ."

"*You don't say!*" Mrs. Ottling's shock slid readily into a kind of interested delight, however.

"I swear to God," my mother said.

Her pity, too, stuck to itself too thickly, as she said, "Oh, the *poor little thing!*" I knew she did not mean Bessie Berlin.

"Mmm. Sometimes she goes around with an old beat-up baby buggy," my mother said. "Never got over it."

"And what did they do to the *uncle*?" Mrs. Ottling wanted to know.

"Oh, nothing. Do they *ever*? Doctor Berlin paid somebody off to keep it quiet. He moved away to St. Catherines. So now she's the only Berlin left."

"Well," Mrs. Ottling decreed, "*thank God* her poor mother's not alive to see it."

"I should say so. Did you know old Mrs. Berlin, then?"

"Oh, no, dear, it's just that it would be a real pity, that's all, *any* mother to see her child turn out like that. Was it her brother or *his*?"

"Hers."

"No! Why, I'd rather 'lose' one of mine than see that, yes I would. But you say you went to school with her, Lizzie?"

"Up to tenth grade. After *what happened* they sent her away to boarding school. Oh, they had money to *burn*, the Berlins."

"And what good did it do them?" Mrs. Ottling inquired of the order of things. "Right in their own family, too!"

"It just goes to show you," my mother nodded. What did it go to show? I wondered, watching them. "You can't trust *anybody*," my mother said. Oh, that.

"You can say that again," Mrs. Ottling vowed. But no one did.

Then the older woman collected packages, breasts, momentum, mountained herself out of the chair. She and my mother began a half-coquettish debate.

"Aw, you don't have to *go*, do you, Flora?"

"If I don't get supper on the table by five, I'll be fired from my job, ha ha."

"Just one more *little* cup of tea." Halfway between question and command, my mother was already on her way to the kettle, hand outstretched. But too energetically: you knew she would never get there.

"I won't say I'm not *tempted*." Mrs. Ottling flirted, "but I mustn't stay. Goodbye, now, Annie," she afterthought in my direction. "You're-a-sweet-little-girl-don't-ever-change."

I saw my mother reach into her purse and draw out two dollar bills, folding them into her palm like a secret. She tried to press them into Mrs. Ottling's glove.

"For the *reading*," she murmured decisively, while Mrs. Ottling bridled and pushed the money away.

"I couldn't!"

"No, no, take it, Flora, buy yourself something nice!"

"But it was nothing," Mrs. Ottling disclaimed.

"Now, Flora, I won't take No for an answer," my mother declared. She tucked the two bills into Mrs. Ottling's string shopping bag.

"You shouldn't, Lizzie!" she scolded. Then, "Take care of yourself, dear, and don't worry. Is that your iron I smell?"

"Oh!" My mother rushed to lift up the iron and show us the brown brand of its shape scorched into the cloth. As she did, I saw Mrs. Ottling delicately lift the two dollar bills out of her bag and slip them beneath my mother's saucer. She winked at me. Just before the door shut on her, Mrs. Ottling called back to us, "You can expect to come into some money *any day now*, Lizzie!"

I went upstairs to my childhood room, the one I wake up in still, on mornings when the past floods whatever I may call a present tense. There I undressed to my cotton slip and stared at myself to see if I *was* changing. "Blossoming," my mother would have said. I watched with cold zeal, like a First Communicant watching to see the Virgin's statue smile.

My mother was changing too, that year. While I was growing up, that victory, she was growing old, that fact. Each of us wanted now to know the design of all that lay ahead, though hers was surer, had its known ending as I did not know mine as yet. Soothsayers, herb doctors, women who read palms or cards or leaves: only diviners sat across from her then. I sneered as she introduced me to the neighbor whose old black "medicine stone" was said to ease arthritis, to the Polish grandma who "read" apple peelings: If you cut them off the flesh continuously, in a long ribbon, and then made a blind toss over your hopeful shoulder, you would see the initials of your true love. Next you cut the undressed meat crosswise to show its star of seeds. If all the points held perfectly, you would have good luck. But my mother was not very interested in her; she did not care about true loves anymore.

In the hint of morning, earlier even than my full consciousness, I sometimes heard her telephone her black sheep cousin, Corinna. In lowered voices they would trade the gone night's dreams to write their passport to the coming day. Dark dreams, the half I heard, my mother's half. In them, she wandered abandoned in forests where nothing but terror grew, she descended the endless spiral stairs into a watery pit. In all of them, whether forest-heart or water-womb, I lay lost and dead at the center. I was the monster in her labyrinth. Her dreams localized death in me; waking, in herself. And with a child's brute instinct for its own root life, I accused her, saw that the dreamer owns the dream, writes it as I write this now. I saw myself lost and dead, again and again. Listening, every time, to her urgent rationalization, her untangling of fact from symbol and from symbol back to fact, I knew she made my death in the night's long hour. I saw how the dreamer acts: she killed me every night, where no one could arraign her, in her sleep.

Sometimes, gasping, half-dressed, smelling of all her old, maternal flesh, she would appear by my bed. The shock of her own dreams drove her awake. She stood over me; I verified her innocence with my sustaining breath.

"Oh, thank God, thank God! You're all right!" she would cry me awake too. Suddenly we were together in a dreamless clarity. "Oh, I dreamed you were . . . lost," she would whisper, assigning me my place in the nightmare in her neighboring room. "I couldn't find you. Oh, I looked and looked." Even in her sleep, I was not free.

The readers. Of palms, of leaves, of dreams, of cards: the readers of a future less and less credible to her. Readers. The bringers of the visible sign. Even when she steadied herself, briefly, in orthodoxy, she fell in love with the noble face on the shroud of Turin. She was not at all suspicious of a Christ so tall and beautiful.

Diviners came and went. They ended on the edge between superstition and science, both of which divine from entrails. Next she placed her American trust in doctors. Her faith meant nothing next to her enactment of it: the long walks through wind and snow and rain as to a distant shrine; penitential hours counted out in the rosaries of her own blood cells; above all, the standing among other believers in the hospital, the clinic: in the common place.

It was there that she gave herself to her specific death as to a lover, a thud of artificial hormones in her aging veins. Which of her voyeuristic doctors, enchanted with the penetration of the X-ray eye, dealt her her painless deathdose of radium? We live in sleights of image here: we die from vision, that cold sense. Whether in the pattern in the teacup or upon the X-ray plate, the image waits for the eye's light kiss to wake it, to give itself to her. Still her skeleton, inside its cave of

flesh, smiled on forever, would not tell the source of all that had gone wrong: the indifferent husband; her own wild ineffectual jealousies; the distant and unfriendly child. These she would have mapped. But the answering barium cumulus of her intestines merely billowed upward, solid smoke; and the shield-shaped lung, unspotted, said, "Not here." Not everything or even much of evil will confess itself to the diagnostic eye. The image was as good as the cure. But who would not stand, understanding, there, before her parody of the lifelong question vainly asking itself within? Who has not traced with whatever exploring finger or ear or eye the cicatrice that is one's own life shape?

She paid for her hopes, at first, in the mere silver of belief and time. But at the last they demanded and they got her payment in the lower coinage of the simple flesh. One breast. Another. A voicebox. Death.

"Oh, Herb! Quick, quick!" she would sometimes cry. My father would rush to fan her with a folded newspaper, her neck going abruptly red as spilled wine. The only person on fire in the room. My mother was not, was still, was not my mother anymore, in those strange times.

A beautiful woman, she rode hard into the middle age that came to debase her. Perhaps because she had been so easily perfect in youth, she met vanity's humiliations with contempt. Not for her the urgent cosmetics, the hair-dyes, diets, exercises: not for her the will crucifying itself for the Judas flesh. No. Now she bought her dresses off the rack almost without considering them. They "wore well"; they covered her; that was enough. The mereness of a functional, animal cleanliness replaced her old artistic love for grace. Only one ritual remained to her. Nightly, she would wind her strong and silver hair into pin-curls. She formed the coils against her skull, deftly, one by one, fixed them in place with two black bobby pins, cruciform. I would watch as she gradually unframed her face—a face increasingly androgynous with the neutrality of coming age. Then, next morning, she would brush her hair open, a mock sunburst all in gray. It might have been the halo of an angel, if angels aged. Hair, dead already, cannot die. But then a hand ages first, or a breast. At last, preceded by the skin, the muscle, and the collapsing vein, the eye itself grows old. Excepting bone, bone which sits smug behind it all, the eye is the longest-lived, the coldest thing. Her dead eye still watches me.

If, even now, I need to take the measure of my mother's cold contempt for time, I have only to open the photograph album. There, dead spots appear among the smiling groups of family faces, little incisions and cavities annihilate the place her image stood. Appalled, disgusted with the self she had become, she took her nail scissors and cut herself away. Only two candid photos, "taken," I confess it, by me, remain to punish us. In one a golden blur almost rescinds her sudden flight from



me. Not quite. The second freezes her in dreaded profile, clear, startled: like a fox who has not yet had time to gnaw his paw off and leave it behind in the trap, escaping maimed but free. A blank cameo. I cannot see her face now unless I see, beyond it, my own vigorous girlhood hatred, a hatred which I have come to know is indivisible from the struggle that sets things going and that keeps them on. Then death candidly stilled her.

We spent much time convincing ourselves that we were not final, destined kin. "Stand up straight and be proud you're tall!" she urged me. But a moment later, out on the street, she would hiss at my father, "Herb, walk straighter! You look a foot shorter than I am!" As she shed her affectations and bodily prescriptions one by one, they fell on me. Her inner terrors too. "You're too introverted! You're drawing into your own shell." From her, as solitary as the night's first star. I, in my turn, disdained her unpolished nails, the hopelessly artificial 20-year-old's face painted over her older one on Sundays. I passed hours transforming myself, to shave off, erase away, or tint beyond our brute resemblance, flesh to woman's flesh.

I tried, as I saw then, say now, to outdistance her, as if the same blood did not knell in our related veins. "I am *not* you," I told myself and her in hundreds of gestures, every day. "Oh, don't be like me," she sometimes said aloud. But still she drew halfway back to girlhood, there to meet as if I were a friend. She brought armfuls of unwanted confidences with her. And unwise. In them my mother handed me the dagger, blade parentally turned back towards herself.

"I always wondered," she confessed of her parents, "if I was really *theirs*." She sat shelling peas into a bowl. "My Pa ran around all the time. Why, one woman even threatened to leave the baby on our doorstep. It was *our* baby, she told my mother. After that Mama never slept with him again. Not for years. Finally she gave in, though, and then your Uncle Joe was born. That's why there's ten years between him and your Aunt Nellie." All the time her hand pressed open the pods and her fingers amputated the unborn peas. They fell like hailstones into the bowl. Then, as they gathered, they fell more softly.

There were other times, when she ironed her summer dresses pounding and pressing wrinkle after wrinkle out of that second face. Or embroidered, perforation by perforation forcing slow thick static daisies around a dinnercloth.

"I was the only one of us girls not to have a birth certificate," she confided once. "Now what do you think of *that*."

Determined to think nothing of it, I replied, "Maybe they just forgot about it."



"They didn't 'forget' anybody else," she answered. "If you ask me, it's very *funny*."

"Why?" I faked.

"Well, I mean, maybe I was someone else's child, that's why! I'm the only one of us kids with light hair and eyes," she added, half proud, half alarmed by her singularity. "When I was your age, Annie, I still had yellow hair and cornflower-blue eyes. Yes, it's true." I stared at the anonymous gray hair, eyes blanked out by her bifocals: they verified nothing. "But when I reached sixteen, why, my hair turned auburn and my eyes went as green as grass. It's true," she repeated, sensing my disbelief. "I might *very well* be somebody else's child."

"But they had so *many* children, Mother! Why would they *adopt*?"

"Oh, you don't really understand," she said vaguely. "I didn't mean adopt."

Someone else's child. I recognized her changeling dream, the dream of the estranged, uncertain child. It was my dream too. We were too close; the silver on the mirror threatened to dissolve and merge us. I drew down the distance of the glass between our common images.

"Maybe they just *lost* your birth certificate," I rationalized.

"Wellll," she allowed. "But I wasn't even *christened*, Annie, and you know how religious Ma was. No, I was twenty-one-years old before I got a certificate or my legal name."

It was a name half of her own invention. She stripped "Elizabeth," her girlhood name, to "Lisa." It was less common, she explained once, more elegant. And of course it served to reject them, her namers, although she did not say so. That same year she married away her maidenhood and her maiden name as well, entered the double feminine incognito of a household and a husband. But you can only call down your future, not rename your past. No one ever called her anything but "Lizzie," the ugly nickname her parents had whittled out of "Elizabeth." She herself, meeting some vaguely familiar childhood face grown old, would say, "I'm Lizzie Shaw, one of the four Shaw girls on South Avenue," as if the renamed time had dropped away. Growing up, trying out names of heroines in books, or wedding my high school boyfriends by repeating their names on the inside cover of my notebook, I resented her change of loyalty. I saw an unimaginably lovely young woman (everybody said so) who would become my broken mother, walking delicately in the latched and latticed shoes of her youth's day, walking unknowingly (there is no other way to walk) into this narrative and its set denouement: my birth.

"I liked your old name better," I retaliated.

"Oh well," she answered, keeping busy. "I've wondered sometimes myself."

"You didn't want to be *their* child, did you?" I accused, understanding her betrayal because of mine, as if I had inherited it, and she therefore stood guilty alongside of me.

"Oh, but I *did* want to be theirs, Annie. I wanted to be just like the others, like my sisters," she remembered, suddenly scar tissue numb with ancient hurt. "I *wasn't*, though."

Another time, mistaking me for the friend she needed, she let me know, "I had terrible trouble with my 'nerves,' Annie, right after you were born. Oh, I don't want to go through anything like *that* again," drawing the old possibilities nearer by speaking them.

"Why? What happened?"

"Oh, I wasn't myself. I was very depressed," she said. "I just wasn't myself at all. I withdrew from everybody. Why, we even had to go live with my sister Mildred. She hated me. She was mean to me all the time, even when I felt sickest. 'You got to do your share here, same as everyone,' she'd say all the time. As if I didn't! We lived in the house on the river. You know the one."

I nodded. "What was it like, living there?"

"Oh, I don't want anything like that to happen again," she shuddered. "Every afternoon I'd take you upstairs for your nap, and I'd get as far as that landing and then . . . then I just couldn't make myself go on." Her hand paused now on the spiral of her frozen hair.

"Why not?"

"Well . . . I'd *see* things, terrible things." Even in recollection the visions shook her from the spine outward. She stood empty-eyed, remembering.

"What kind of terrible things?" I asked for her soul.

"Deranged things that I thought I'd do to you," she blurted.

I imagined the big window on the landing, the turn of the stairs, the stained glass grapes forever over them, the river beyond waiting to receive me again like those betraying waters where I swam before my birth. The river was inside her, too. This suspicion took a serpentine and final shape within my dreaming vengeful young girl's heart. It had the charm of fiction and the unearthed reek of every evil thing: I knew my mother's visions.

"But what did you imagine?" I persisted.

"Perverted, oh, things better forgotten," she bustled. "I wasn't myself, that's all." And her hand took up the skein of hair and made it shellshape, moving to keep the memory away.

Silence, long as twilight.

Then, "You were just a baby," she repented," just a little tiny thing," which made me hate her more.

I avenged myself. "Do you think you ever really got well?"

\* \* \*

One morning I wake up with dangers glued alive to my skin. Outside the motion of the morning sun stirs our hot industrial town to give off a chemistry of mingled, colored dusts. Below me, my parents' voices mingle too, in a parody of their old love and their long time together: they are quarreling. A broken stream of sound verges now on cacophony, now on a melodic line which, as I try to trace it, breaks off—resumes. All of this floats up to the surface of my hearing like a long-drowned airblown corpse atop the lake. I comfort myself with the clock; seven-five. At seven-fifteen, my father leaves for work. The blood rite cannot run its sacrificial course: these are stronger voices in the world than passion, and there are many. I relax.

The door slams.

In my imagination, I can see my father as he strides out, hat at its angriest angle, his body still stiff with unfinished rage. Imagining him, I miss him too, throw my legs over the side of the bed, fall into morning. I pull apart the floral trellis of the curtain where the window still holds back, brassy, glaring, real, the daylight world beyond.

Now I hear him warming up the car. I measure from the pulsebeat of its metal heart how his anger still flows out of him, through his foot so breakable in its metal-toed "safety" shoe, into the mechanism of the second self. Any second now he will hurtle out, the car screeching like a living thing as he slices into the red brick street, then drives away, leaving behind the spoor where the baker's or the iceman's ancient horse has dropped it, a heap of yellowish manure, quickly turning back to straw.

But no, it is my mother who streams out from the unfinished fight.

At first I do not know her. Pure wonder replaces our tangled familiarity. Who can that be? All our illusory and some of our real kinships fall away, sloughed off by morning light. I see no more than any woman, this, a dawn shape running the pale grey steps. Everything about her tells of the fugitive: and purpose. A fugitive from what? My own human guilt gives me the answer. Her white legs churn her body onward against the gravity of rosy bricks. Up the steps of the house that stares back into ours she runs, she throws her arms back and forth violently but soundlessly against its door. She has ripped the new-formed seal off our common wound. The blood pours out. She is naked.

Astonished more than shamed, I think only mechanically and too late that I ought to pull the window up and call her home, as if I were

the mother, she the child. But I am half convinced that when I do I will spill into the street myself, like eggs from an eggcase. Behind my saving glass, I do not even cry, "Oh, Mother, come back! Don't! Don't!" She is too far away, she never has been farther. Something firmer even than the air extends between us.

But my father sees her now, jumps out of the car and seizes her. All silently, they struggle. She, a captured ragdoll, beats still against him and the morning air, her naked flesh awash with movement in the gathering light. He wins her back into our sullen house. An unfair contest, that, between the naked and the dressed.

Her body. My mother's body, is the color of a shell's selfborn enamel, nacreously white, but with the promise of its blood beneath. I have seen her naked before, of course, sunk in the bubbles of the bathtub, trinitized in her three-way bedroom mirror while putting on her Sunday slip and dress. Covered, cleansed, repaired, the flesh accepts its mute and tranquil self-forgetfulness. That absent-minded nakedness, so household and so functional, shared nothing of the exhibitionistic terror and beauty of this. Alive with purpose and the accident of my onlooking eye.

Was it my eye, then, set into motion, or the morning street? Both her large breasts sway lightly, molten, half independent of the skeleton within. The hips, I notice with surprise, rise as pretty and permissible as those of nudes in Art Class. For sometimes at the peak of wonder or of horror nature iconizes itself into art. Framed by that window which permits my gaze, my mother's shame frees me from everything but the human taproot of analogy: my father's rushed removal of her kicking, naked form, "The Rape of the Sabines." Or, I imagine, "The Abduction." For a scarcely discernible moment, her foot draws its unlikely telltale line upon the air, and I come up with Fragonard. Then they pitch out of view, my father and my mother, into the tense box which is our house.

I do not wonder long. It is a brief commodity. Almost before they are inside again, the telephone rings. He answers it. I hear the tempo and the adjusted modulations of my father's voice, disgraced. He is apologizing, very lengthily, forgiveness in the balance. I know the feeling, I can feel it now. Then eventually his voice turns some inflective corner, he relaxes, walls us in again against that unknown caller. At last, delivered of all its former rage, the voice instructs her, and I draw nearer to the top of the stairs, listening for the answer there.

"Liz," he calls her, over the great space between the crazy and the sane, "Liz, if you ever do anything like that again, the Smiths will call the cops. Now, Roger Smith *just don't call or bother* his wife again. Not ever."

"I'll call whoever I please!" she talks back. I know she must have on her long plissé summer robe; she would not talk so defiantly if she still stood naked.

"They could put you away," he says. "Lizzie, do you understand that? 'Change' or no 'change.' Put you away," he repeats solemnly. His voice searches out an assured, a shaming tone, as he defends himself against his own astonished knowledge, reclassifies her madness as a child's disobedience. "Running outside naked like that . . . you ought to be ashamed!"

"I *never!* I never ran outside naked in my life. You just want have me committed, don't you? Don't you, liar, liar!"

"You know you did, Lizzie," he says very gently, wearily.

"You can't prove *one thing* against me without sworn testimony. That's a point of law," she triumphs.

"Lizzie, it can't happen again. Roger Smith says that because you haven't been too well lately, he's willing to overlook . . ."

"I am *perfectly well*. It's that slut he married who isn't 'well,' thank you very much. That whore. That . . ."

"Now leave Mrs. Smith out of this," my father commands. "There has never been a single thing between her and me, Lizzie. I swear it on my mother's soul."

"Your mother's soul," she sneers. "Why, that woman doesn't even keep her house clean. Her kids always look filthy. You might as well go screw a pig."

"I'm not screwin' anything!"

"I *know* that," she says, again with triumph.

"Liz, you gotta stop callin' her, that's all," he insists. "Otherwise there'll be trouble."

"Trouble! Don't you call *this* trouble?"

"Shut up, Lizzie, you'll wake up Ann."

"You shut up. Nobody can tell me to shut up! As if I don't have any eyes! That youngest Smith girl—if she *is* a Smith at all—she certainly doesn't resemble either one of her parents, now does she?" Then, slyly victorious a second time, "You tell *me*: who does she look like? Who?"

I have never really given Judy Smith's bland face a thought. But now I search her remembered image for the answer to these remarks. I almost find it, but at the last I back away into my childhood innocence, half outgrown.

"Oh, shit, what's the use," he says. "I'm late for work already. I'll lose an hour's pay, all because you can't control yourself. Now listen, Liz, I told you and I mean it: no more phone calls over there."

"Oh yeah, says who? Says who?" she carols against his angry and departing back.



Then I hear her softly cry the tears I cannot shed, and I am glad.

That night, too jovially, he invites me to go for a drive. "Let's get us a frozen custard!" he holds out. But even while my mouth is still full of its cold sweetness, he inflicts his dropped, sententious voice on me. Around us the countryside flattens itself out as simple as an unmasked lie.

"Annie," he tells me, "you're gettin' to be a big girl now. And you know right from wrong, don't you?"

"I guess so," I say.

"Of course you do. And you know I-love-you-and-your-mother more-than-anything-in-the-world. Don't you?"

"Sure," I offer him.

"Well, I want you to promise me somethin'."

"What is it?"

"Will you do that, promise me?"

"I don't know. What is it?"

"Well. Well, I want you to keep an eye on your mother. Tell me right away if she does anything 'funny.' You know what I mean?"

I know, but hate him for opening it to daylight, to our words. "You mean *spy* on her?"

"Of course not. Not exactly. Well, it's for her own good, Annie. Ours too. Do you understand me? *Nobody* outside our family can know about it, Annie, do you understand? Promise? No, don't just nod your head, say it." I say it. "Good," he decrees. "Your mother just can't help herself right now, that's all. She was the same way when you was born."

"Why can't she?"

"It's her, well, her 'change,' that's why," he decides, wanting to believe it.

"Change?"

"The change of life," he says. His car obeys a corner neatly, swinging to the left, then righting itself. We go along with it like a marching band, all perfect angles.

"What's a change of life?" I ask him.

"Well, Jesus, Annie, don't you . . . It's the menopause," he answers, closing.

"Oh," I say, too knowingly for what little I know.

So that is it. But what? In my mind I have already compiled a lexicon of those forbidden, half-understood words; and I know from the hush of his voice that we have touched on a mystery, a dark and almost sexual one, the way a surgeon's fingers in the sleeper's belly sense the putrid, the harder or the softer tumor announcing itself, even before the actual touch, before the knife wars against its contours.



"Menopause." It belongs with "seance," somehow, and "nerves," and the other long Grecian word, unrolling into "hysterectomy," which figures in the talk of the emptied-out and aging women of my mother's clan. Women who bear their wombs within them like the gutted rind of fruit, telling of it to take up that empty space.

"Can't she *do* anything about it?"

"Not much. She's had trouble with her nerves before," he recalls. "Christ, *that* was something."

"Well, if she's crazy, why don't you send her to a psychiatrist?"

My father moves away. "Don't disrespect your mother!" he warns. "And what could some quack do anyway? It's the change. Women are like that, that's all."

I am about to ask him more when knowledge stops me colder than my death. Silent, as I will be now all the way home, I have just remembered that I am, will be, never can escape: I am a woman too.

\* \* \*

When one draws, to scale, over a long vista, in miniature, a cruelty on the ivory of the human bone itself, the drawing hand must lift, must pause, to study the indictment of its written line. Mine pauses now. It traces out that worst of all the inhumanities, down to its bitter source: the fear of likeness, *Doppelgängerscheu*, the Germans—those namers of every cognate thing—call it. The fear of meeting one's double, of cancelling out oneself, that merest entry in the great account. The greater fear of being it.

Late in the aging summer I came home from swimming with my wet bathing suit rolled up in a towel, to find myself locked out. I settled on the back porch, waited there a lost child's endless time. I grew younger and younger there, more and more bereft of my missing mother's unwanted care.

Then a rapid crooked footfall drummed itself nearer on the walk. Expecting her, I was already up and gathering together my wet towel and suit, arranging my face into a mask of gentle complaint. I was planning to accuse her of leaving me outside for *hours* at least. Next I unrecognized her step. This one was too decisive, also too random, it fell like the unscored beginning of a heavy rain. A chord of springs and wheels went with it, measuring the blocks in the cement. I listened while Bessie Berlin rounded the flower bed that edged the house, as surprised to see me as I was to see her. She stopped, we mirrored each other briefly. A soiled deep smell descended from her to me.

For all the August sun not yet gone down, she wore a long black velvet coat. Its winter lapels, rancid, old, parted over a vintage V-necked dress. Lines of ribs, too clear, pushed apart the V. Its age marked the

very year when everything had stopped, when madness froze her outwardly and then began its swarm within. The sash knotted into a useless belly; her long rope of dime-store beads swung where the breasts should have been. She carried, as she always did, her shopping bag, one corner weighing low with an undisclosed lump. ". . . wrapped in grocer's paper . . . in a garbage pail," I could remember. Half-hidden, for that reason full of awe. Where her wrists erupted from the shiny coat cuffs, tiny sores flocked on the skim-milk, bluish arm. She wheeled the baby-carriage ahead of her, cargo of nothing.

"Where's Lizzie Shaw?" she called for my mother by her maiden, her forgotten name, the name that could undo me. "I came to see Lizzie and I *will* see Lizzie."

"My mother isn't home," I said.

"Isn't home! Lizzie Shaw isn't at home! Shall I leave my *card*?" she mocked. But she made no move to do so, none to leave.

Sweat, I saw, was darkening even the dark inner corolla of her old black hat. She wore black kid gloves, too, more as bandage than as ornament; where they came unseamed, her raw and frightened flesh confessed itself. On either crinkled cheek a blare of unblended rouge stood out like a target; she had remembered this learned female gesture, but had made it literally, satirically, turning herself into a puppet, or a doll. She waited for me to speak.

"My mother's gone to the doctor's," I said crisply.

"Oh! Oh, the *doctor's*! Then the hospital, then the parlor, then the grave. *I know*," she said, her narrow, congealed bird's eye settling on and then surpassing me.

"Well, so you see, you can't wait for her," I said. Nothing. "You ought to go home."

"Where did you hide Lizzie? What did you do to her?"

"I didn't *hide* her. She isn't here."

"If you don't tell, I'll get my father after you. He'll sue you, my father. He's richer than *yours* is," she said.

I took in the poisoned angle of her bird-small head, tilted as if listening to the things within itself, the echo in the chamber. "Why don't you leave my mother alone?" I said. "She's not herself. She's . . . sick."

"Lizzie's sick! Lizzie'll die," she nodded grandly. "Yes, she will, she'll die. *I know*." And she nodded several times, to make it so.

"You're crazy!" I yelled at her, forgetting the broken bottles and the butcher knife which legend put into her giantess's purse. "Everybody knows it! You did something awful and you're in the loony bin all the time, and when you're not you have to live on welfare! My mother says

never to come around here again! We don't want to know anybody like you, my mother says! Now get out of here! Get out!" And I shooed her as if she were a stray cat.

Luster froze in Bessie Berlin's glance, a glance so unchanged that I wondered if she had really heard me. But everyone hears cruelty, even if it merely glances off the bruise that is already there. She sifted her electroshocked but all too remembering mind, retrieved at last a gesture for the thing she meant to say. Like all her words, her movements, this lurched into its stilted shape. She raised her hand, fending off a blow that never came, that had already fallen on her in my words. Dodging me, she mocked ventriloquist: "Crazy! Crazy!" she repeated. Then she raised her head upon its oblique neck and crooned.

People liken such cries—perhaps from their surprise—to the howls and barks of animals. But that is because they will not bring the analogy in close, where it merges with the thing we call a man. They comfort themselves with a beast *below* the self. Bessie Berlin's mad cry had nothing animal in it; it rang anciently of humankind, a long ululation, or the professional mourner's Celtic strain, keened fresh above the ever-claiming earth. Mourning was in it, half-acknowledged outrage, something more: the elements that make a newborn's cry. So strangely sister-human, and so near. Then she sought in the baby-carriage, blinking me into and out of existence with her sharp eye, as if she suspected me of pilfering the thing she could not find.

"My mother never liked you," I added for good measure. "She feels *sorry* for you, that's all."

She did not have a knife in there. She was too long a victim ever to have dreamed herself into that clean retribution. Instead, she cupped a broken pocket mirror, held it away to catch her image in the silver. Light burnt off it, one half fire, other half a star. I knew that she was asking it if she still lived, lived despite me. And she did. Something clustered in her face, then a viscous collected gob of spit shot onto my arm, stayed there for a moment, began to slacken downward in a slimy trail.

My disgusted hand rubbed it away, then wiped itself on the rough white fence between us. Lacking anything to throw, I threw my desecrated hand as if to undo her, this evil spell. She disappeared more quickly than she came, her stepmother's laughter sounding fearfully behind her as she went. I felt the mixed relief and penance of a dirty victory.

"Where's Bessie? Have you seen her lately?" my mother would ask from time to time over the next weeks. And she answered herself, "Probably in the hospital again."

"Well, good riddance. I never liked havin' her around," my father

said, sopping up the mucousy white and thick yellow of his morning egg. "I'll never know why you let her come here, Liz."

"Oh, I just felt sorry for her," by mother lied, trying not to look at me.

"Feelin' sorry for her don't mean you have to make friends with every poor cuckoo son-of-a-bitch . . . !"

"For old times' sake, that's why," my mother amended.

My father turned to ally himself with me. "You know what? In that State Hospital they've got people so far gone they even dust the roses. Think of that!"

"That poor girl," my mother considered. "Did I ever tell you, Annie, we was to school together?"

"I think you did," I said.

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I write in the luminous heart of a crystal. I cannot help but see. See, colorless and spare, my mother's buried bones, the bones of my own augury. I do not think she "rests," her demons done. No, even there she must sleep as all mothers do, lightly, body ready to rise up at the first thought of her cried name in a daughter's mind. She comes and watches me, her gone face more lucid in this memory than in our once-shared strife: and will come as long as she has children lost in this great room that is our world. Her grave is shallower than I can even say. In extremities I have named her out loud, "Mama!" Sometimes she comes to save me from herself.

I cannot help but see. I see my daughter as my mother's child, so like her that she illuminates me into a shadow of a link between. Their common colors, sun and sky: my mother's legendary yellow hair, cornflower gaze, divide: ripens into the grandchild's late wheat: grays into her eyes' Atlantic blue. Darker, she is time's child, too. But is she mine?

"Likeness always skips a generation," my old aunt remarks, almost innocently dooming us to conceive our own ancestors. And once, staring out her window at my child in the world's young field, she did not even stop to speculate, but saw, and named, and wept: "Why, she looks *exactly* like Lizzie! Oh, how I miss her!" In a family the same person can get born again and again. "Who do you resemble?"

Generally, though, people lie by making likeness too exact. "Your daughter's *just like you!*" they hope or blame. Who would not prefer a photographic print to that cloud that is our blood's approximation? "Approximate": its terrors and its loves, image over image, blood in blood. We all become each other only in the end.

"Oh, that's *your* daughter, all right! I'd know her anywhere!" they still pretend. Or perhaps are taken in by the inflections, the gestures of

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our family habit. No. I could bleed myself dry for that resemblance, but it will not be. She is my mother born again, the child she was, and also the other one, the one she lost in bearing me. "I'd know her anywhere." I know her *here*, in the circle of my flesh where she burst out of me, the birth-ring, pain and fire, leaving forever there the memory of her dream-filled skull. I know her in my death.

But now the hand of the sun deserts this picture, leaves behind an aftertaste of nightmare. Nightmare runs in mother's milk. It is she who gives life, may, with mythic justice, take it back again. Madonna. And which of all mothers has not let herself recline, a moment, into some infanticidal dream, wondered what it would be like? Like this. Imagine with what almost accidental ease the pillow breaks off that chain of breaths still few enough to number on the fingers of a hand. The body swaddled in the water's timeless silver fold. With what cold tenderness the half-repenting hand arranges afterward the last blanket on the ever-sleeping child. Stand back in the guilty light of all our likenesses and see: the black and single flower; the shallow grave.

All gods ask that tribute be renewed in the gifts that they have given, in the god's own kind. The sun, the most relentless god of all, asks human sacrifice.



LAWRENCE'S "PURELY DESTRUCTIVE" ART IN  
WOMEN IN LOVE

*I like trying things and discovering I hate them.*

D. H. Lawrence

WILLIAM E. CAIN

Readers of *Women in Love* have often praised Lawrence for exposing his "philosophy" to criticism. Michael Ragussis, for example, in his excellent treatment of the novel in *The Subterfuge of Art*, describes the many ways in which Lawrence probes, tests, and criticizes his theories.<sup>1</sup> "The testing of theory," argues Ragussis, "becomes for Lawrence a never-ending process. Rather than settle with a single idea, like star-equilibrium, he must always push each idea a step further to mark precisely at what point it becomes inauthentic" (pp. 201 f.). As Ragussis explains, the exploratory technique of *Women in Love*—its sustained, even subversive analysis of its central terms and propositions—has its source in Lawrence's understanding of the relation between art and philosophy:

Lawrence makes it clear that, typically, both the tale and the artist are prisoners to a philosophy, or metaphysic: the tale is imprisoned by the philosophy of the author, and the artist himself is prisoner to a moral philosophy that in turn distorts his tale. The artist's passions go underground, and the work of art seems to declare a didactic philosophy. (p. 3)

Faced with the dangers of didacticism, the artist, as Lawrence observes in the study of Thomas Hardy and other essays, must "criticize" his philosophy. The primary act of criticism, the first interpretation of the text, is performed by the author himself; he criticizes his own text and thus saves it from didacticism. "Every work of art," Lawrence says,

adheres to some system of morality. But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres. . . . The degree to which the system of morality, or the metaphysic, of any work of art is submitted to criticism within the work of art makes the lasting value and satisfaction of that work.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Ragussis, *The Subterfuge of Art: Language and the Romantic Tradition* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> D. H. Lawrence: *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 185.



Taking their cue from Lawrence, Ragussis and others have analyzed the self-critical action of *Women in Love*.<sup>3</sup> Their discussions are acute, particularly in revealing the problematical status of Birkin, Lawrence's representative in the text and "the novel's major spokesman" (Ragussis, p. 177). Lawrence provides Birkin with an antagonist, Ursula, who mocks and ridicules his "Salvator mundi" posturing and refuses to be easily converted to the new love-ethic that he proposes. In addition, Lawrence allows Hermione to parrot (and hence parody) Birkin's ideas, showing that his words can be misunderstood and misused, appropriated not for their deep and difficult meanings but as occasions for self-deception and display. Birkin often confronts hostile and uncomprehending audiences, especially when he speaks to Ursula and Gerald; and it is to Lawrence's credit that he makes Birkin doubt himself on a number of occasions—makes him, that is, the skeptical interpreter as well as the spokesman of his philosophy. The very language of the novel, the critics also tell us, is in flux, is radically unstable; its terms—and here again Ragussis is incisive—are made deliberately complex, ambiguous, and contradictory. Lawrence's "new vocabulary" (p. 129) never settles its meanings, but instead qualifies and challenges them.

The critics are correct in describing the rich range of Lawrence's self-critical methods in *Women in Love*. But they have not, it seems to me, perceived the full significance of what they have demonstrated. They see Lawrence's acts of criticism as a sign of his narrative complexity and also his loyalty to "art-speech" (as against the didactic prisons of philosophy). But when Lawrence characterizes *Women in Love* in a letter to Waldo Frank as "purely destructive,"<sup>4</sup> he may be truer to the spirit of his text than his critics are willing to admit; and perhaps even Lawrence does not realize the deeply disturbing nature of this judgment he makes about his novel. Through his account of Gerald's and Gudrun's careers, Lawrence advises us about what we must avoid in personal relationships—willfulness, domination, the desire for mastery. And in Ursula and Birkin, he certainly indicates a kind of vital alternative, "the other way, the remaining way."<sup>5</sup> But Lawrence's often willful manner of depicting this positive relationship comes close to aligning him with the attitudes represented by Gerald and Gudrun. He

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to books or chapters in books written by H. M. Daleski, Scott Sanders, Roger Sale, Leo Bersani, and Frank Kermode. See also Taylor Stoehr, "Mentalized Sex" in D. H. Lawrence, *Novel*, 9 (winter 1975), 101-22; Garrett Stewart, "Lawrence, 'Being', and the Allotropic Style," *Novel*, 9 (spring 1976), 217-42; and Gâmini Salgâdo, "Taking a Nail for a Walk: On Reading *Women in Love*," in *The Modern English Novel: The Reader, the Writer, and the Work* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), pp. 95-112.

<sup>4</sup> Dated 27 July 1917. See *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Viking Press, 1962), vol. I, p. 519.

<sup>5</sup> *Women in Love* (New York: Viking Press, 1971 rpt.), p. 247. Further page references are given in the text.

criticizes the Birkin-Ursula relationship so intensely, exposing its flaws, incompleteness, and confusions, that his actual affirmations amount to very little. The really disturbing power of the novel lies, in fact, in its insistent attack on life-affirming possibilities; Lawrence does not merely "criticize" his philosophy of love and "freedom together," but overwhelms and destroys it.

*Women in Love* is an unnerving novel—unnerving in the severity of its critique of itself. I am not always certain that Lawrence consciously intends all the self-criticism that is evident in his text. But I am convinced that the self-subversive movements of this novel are maddeningly thorough; and I am also convinced that the critics are not as disturbed by them as they should be. Perhaps the most unsettling passage of all is one that, to my knowledge, no one has discussed. It occurs in "Ex-curse"; Ursula has just accepted ("half unwillingly") Birkin's gift of the rings, and the couple now ride along in the motor-car:

The motor-car ran on, the afternoon was soft and dim. She talked with lively interest, analysing people and their motives—Gudrun, Gerald. He answered vaguely. He was not very much interested any more in personalities and in people—people were all different, but they were all enclosed nowadays in a definite limitation, he said; there were only about two ideas, two great streams of activity remaining, with various forms of reaction, therefrom. The reactions were all varied in various people, but they followed a few great laws and intrinsically there was no difference. They acted and reacted involuntarily according to a few great laws, and once the laws, the great principles, were known, people were no longer mystically interesting. They were all essentially alike, the differences were only variations on a theme. None of them transcended the given terms. (p. 296)

The narrator's report of Birkin's words is both suggestive and infuriating. The essential "likeness" of the characters is one of the most puzzling features of *Women in Love*; as Leo Bersani and others have noted, the characters often seem to switch roles and serve as advocates for each other's positions, and all of them wrestle with similar emotional and psychic problems. From one point of view, then, Birkin's beliefs about "people" confirm what many readers sense in the novel—the characters are clearly differentiated (down to the details of their clothing) yet are remarkably alike. But the key word in this passage is "involuntarily." Birkin states that life is a series of actions and reactions that take place in us "involuntarily," out of our control. But if this is true, then the entire project of the novel is in jeopardy. To say that men and women act "involuntarily" undermines choice: how can a man and woman choose to experience "freedom together," and escape the old ideas of willfulness

and mechanical rigidity, if their actions are involuntary? If the reader takes this passage seriously, he will not be able to accept Lawrence's injunction in the Foreword that men *learn* to bring forth "the new passion, the new idea"; nor will the reader find much point in Birkin's questions to Gerald "in the train" (chapter v): "What do you live for?" "What do you think is the aim and object of your life?" (pp. 48-49). For these questions to carry real force, we would have to be free to choose the direction of our lives, and to be responsible for this choice. "Involuntarily" disallows freedom, and it explodes the dramatic interplay of life-choices in which Birkin and the others are engaged. This is self-criticism with a vengeance.

Characteristically, Lawrence begins his next paragraph by giving voice to the opposition. "Ursula," he writes,

did not agree—people were still an adventure to her—but—perhaps not so much as she tried to persuade herself. Perhaps there was something mechanical now, in her interest. Perhaps also her interest was destructive, her analysing was a real tearing to pieces. There was an under-space in her where she did not care for people and their idiosyncrasies, even to destroy them. She seemed to touch for a moment this under-silence in herself, she became still, and she turned for a moment purely to Birkin.

"Won't it be lovely to go home in the dark?" she said. "We might have tea rather late—shall we?—and have high tea? Wouldn't that be rather nice?"

"I promised to be at Shortlands for dinner," he said.  
(pp. 296-97)

And then their argument begins, triggered by Birkin's decision to visit Hermione. Like so many passages in *Women in Love*, this one is founded on disagreement and conflict. There is nearly always an argument going on; sometimes it is explicit and violent, while at other times it swirls beneath the surface of what the characters are saying or doing. No sooner has Birkin asserted that no one transcends "the given terms" than the narrator recounts that Ursula "did not agree." But once this point of disagreement is registered, the narrator then chastizes Ursula. She is less interested in people than she thinks; she, "perhaps," analyzes them in willfully mechanical and viciously "destructive" ways ("a real tearing to pieces"). The narrator then jumps to a different stage in his analysis; in fact, he states, there exists an "under-space" in Ursula where she feels no interest in people, not even enough to want to cancel and "destroy" them. For a moment, the scene is still, at peace. But then the "crisis of war" (p. 297) breaks out between the lovers, and once again the text is driven forward by violent, destructive energies.

Birkin comes off badly in this exchange about his planned visit to Hermione. He rebukes Ursula for her jealousy of Hermione, and for even caring that he is paying a final visit to a former mistress. "Ah, you fool!", he says to Ursula, righteously claiming that his visit is simply common courtesy, "a little human decency." But of course it is Birkin who regularly attacks the old forms and manners; yet now he obeys their call. He asserts that Hermione means nothing to him, but he nevertheless must grant her a final farewell—a surprisingly sentimental gesture for Birkin to indulge in. Birkin is, curiously enough, not the object of Lawrence's irony here, or in other passages in the chapter where he depicts Ursula as "the perfect womb, the bath of birth, to which all men must come" (p. 301). The language is brutal and overstated, yet hard to judge as ironic because Lawrence seems so closely aligned with his spokesman. Birkin is self-righteous and cruel, which would be less of a problem if Lawrence did not appear willing to endorse what he says. As the critics have maintained, Lawrence often undercuts Birkin. But what is even more interesting—and more revealing about the novel's true workings—are the occasions when Lawrence *ought to be* ironizing or undermining Birkin, but does not.

Lawrence's reader cannot rest in his understanding of the issues or in his judgments about the characters; the novel seems to resist the reader's efforts to come to terms with it. On the one hand, this testifies to Lawrence's creative power and intelligence: he presents people and situations in their full complexity, and does not underestimate the challenges to the success of Birkin's and Ursula's relationship. But 'complexity' does not go far enough to explain this troubling novel. In his self-critical attitude towards his own ideals, Lawrence wins our admiration. But when this critical action is expanded over the course of the entire text, one wonders whether Lawrence's own "interest" is also "destructive," a determined "tearing to pieces." I am not denying that Lawrence strives to present a positive philosophy; nor am I denying that he sets Birkin's values (however tentatively these are expressed) against those that cripple Hermione and kill Gerald. But he does, I think, criticize his own positives to the point that not much of them survives. There is in *Women in Love* a rigorous, even ruthless kind of "criticism" that cannot be described simply as part of the writer's exploratory technique; Lawrence's fascination with the destructive element is not just complex and exploratory, but compulsive, and disturbingly so. In *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*, F. R. Leavis notes the "over-emphatic explicitness" of certain passages, which "runs at times to something one can only call jargon"; but his words seem to me applicable in a much larger way to the novel as a whole:



[Lawrence] is uncertain—uncertain of the value of what he offers; uncertain of whether he really holds it—whether a valid communication has really been defined and conveyed in terms of his creative art.<sup>6</sup>

The hard truth about *Women in Love* is that Lawrence is not merely a highly self-critical artist committed to exploring the values of his philosophy, but an artist so "uncertain" that he destroys his values even as he labors to express them.

Lawrence's destructive urge is especially clear in his references to Hermione in the middle chapters of the novel. They are excessive, almost perverse, in hammering home the awful facts about her character. No new points are made about Hermione, just the same ones that were stated as early as the "Sisters" chapter; all that is different is the increased fury of the writer's rhetoric. "Poor Hermione," Lawrence says in "Woman to Woman" (chapter xxii),

it was her one possession, this aching certainty of hers, it was her only justification. She must be confident here, for God knows, she felt rejected and deficient enough elsewhere. In the life of thought, of the spirit, she was one of the elect. And she wanted to be universal. But there was a devastating cynicism at the bottom of her. She did not believe in her own universals—they were sham. She did not believe in the inner life—it was a trick, not a reality. She did not believe in the spiritual world—it was an affectation. In the last resort, she believed in Mammon, the flesh, and the devil—these at least were not sham. She was a priestess without belief, without conviction, suckled in a creed outworn, and condemned to the reiteration of mysteries that were not divine to her. Yet there was no escape. She was a leaf upon a dying tree. (p. 284)

Lawrence is responding to—and hating—Hermione's failure to "believe" in the values of the inner life; she repeats the "mysteries" without being truly committed to them. Lawrence is, I believe, at his least sympathetic here, jeering ("for God knows, she was deficient enough elsewhere") as he reveals once again Hermione's emptiness. The writing is strained and hectoring in tone, with unearned claims to a thematic grandeur ("she believed in Mammon, the flesh, and the devil"). In a most unappealing way, Lawrence asserts his superiority to his own character, and seeks to enlist his reader in a gloating triumph over Hermione and her kind. It is a brutal and gravely disturbing moment.

<sup>6</sup> F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 148.

Yet I cannot but feel that Lawrence is punishing himself as well as Hermione. Not only does he assault her psychic and emotional emptiness, but in doing so, he attempts to exorcise his own self-doubt, his own "uncertainty" (as Leavis puts it) about "what he offers," and his own lack of real conviction. But it may be self-differentiation as well as self-punishment—as though by centering weakness and life-denying attitudes in Hermione, Lawrence can free himself from them. Hermione cannot believe in what she knows, and Lawrence hopes to secure his own belief by lashing out at her. But he and his spokesman Birkin remain closer to Hermione than either of them realizes. At the beginning of "Excuse," a few pages after the savage attack on Hermione, Birkin also struggles with the problem of belief:

His own life now seemed so reduced that he hardly cared any more. At moments it seemed to him he did not care a straw whether Ursula or Hermione or anybody else existed or did not exist. Why bother! Why strive for a coherent, satisfied life? Why not drift on in a series of accidents—like a picaresque novel? Why not? Why bother about human relationships? Why take them seriously—male or female? Why form any serious connections at all? Why not be casual, drifting along, taking all for what it was worth? (p. 293 f.)

There is of course a significant difference between Birkin and Hermione: she gives up the fight and lives a lie, whereas he persists, refusing the "picaresque" style of living just as Lawrence spurns the "picaresque" style of writing. But while Lawrence means for the reader to admire Birkin's resolve, his terms are unsettling. "And yet, still," he goes on to tell us, Birkin was "damned and doomed to the old effort at serious living" (p. 294). "Serious living" is a phrase that rings with obvious authority, but "damned and doomed" may be the worst words that Lawrence could have chosen. He saves his ideals (and preserves Birkin's heroic stature) only to subvert them, undermining once more the project of the novel. "Serious living" affirms a rich and special value to Birkin's action; but "damned and doomed" implies that the person who makes such a serious commitment has no real choice in the matter. Such a person does what he does because he is "damned and doomed," and thus deprived of the right of choice and initiative. Men and women are not, it seems, what Birkin at an earlier point says that Ursula is—"a *Free* agent."

Doubt and destructiveness are evident even in scenes that celebrate Birkin's and Ursula's love. A passage from "Excuse," describing the lovers' meal together, begins wonderfully:

They were glad, and they could forget perfectly. They laughed and went to the meal provided. There was a venison pasty, of all



things, a large broad-faced cut ham, eggs and cresses and red beetroot, and medlars and apple-tart, and tea.

"What good things!" she said with pleasure. "How noble it looks!—shall I pour out the tea?" (p. 306)

With amusing solemnity, F. B. Pinion complains about the "lapse of style" in this "climactic" scene. "What signifies," he asks, "'of all things' in conjunction with a 'venison pasty' which looks 'noble' to Ursula at the height of her bliss?"<sup>7</sup> "Of all things," however, signifies not for the characters, but for Lawrence himself. The phrase marks a special bond between the writer and his creations; they have come alive for him, so much so that he shares the sense of wonder and delight they experience during their meal.

Because the moment is such a special one, it is depressing to read what follows:

She was usually nervous and uncertain at performing these public duties, such as giving tea. But today she forgot, she was at her ease, entirely forgetting to have misgivings. The tea-pot poured beautifully from a proud slender spout. Her eyes were warm with smiles as she gave him his tea. She had learned at last to be still and perfect.

It is hard to imagine a more disappointing summary of Ursula's response—"she had learned at last to be still and perfect." She has, in other words, learned her lesson ("at last"); and for all Birkin's emphasis on polarity in love, we see here that his philosophy, endorsed by Lawrence-as-narrator, means that the woman must be brought into line. Lawrence somehow feels that he can have it both ways: polarity and star-like opposition between man and woman in love, yet also the man as master and the woman as his subordinate. Whatever the domestic custom, Ursula's actions as Birkin's servant (performing the "public duties") reveal what Lawrence judges to be her real place in the relationship.

This scene suggests less an urge to 'criticize' the novel's philosophy than a basic flaw in it. Birkin says that the relationship he wants does not demand "service" (see pp. 242-43). But "service" on Ursula's part is just what Lawrence and his spokesman insist upon. Ursula, it is true, often fights back; as the critics have pointed out, she has a will of her own, and displays it in her quarrels with Birkin in "Moony," "Excuse," and elsewhere. But Lawrence gives Ursula an independent will in the arguments only to deprive her of it when it would count the most. At the "climactic" scenes, Ursula becomes the still and perfect servant.

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<sup>7</sup> F. B. Pinion, *A. D. H. Lawrence Companion: Life, Thought, and Works* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), p. 176.

Feminist critics of Lawrence have made this general point before; but it is compelling and bears repetition, because it is very much a part of the frustrations that this novel poses for its readers. When Lawrence describes Birkin's and Ursula's meal, he is not actively undercutting his characters; rather, he is singling them out for our approval. But while he clearly does not wish to doubt the value of the relationship in this scene, he succeeds in doing just that. *Women in Love* is maddening not only in its degree of intense self-criticism, but in the ambivalence, bordering on dishonesty, of Lawrence's account of Birkin's and Ursula's love for one another. This is, I recognize, a serious charge, but I see no getting around it. The evidence is all too available, and a passage from "Moony" is a notable instance:

"You think, don't you," she said slowly, "that I only want physical things? It isn't true. I want you to serve my spirit."

"I know you do. I know you don't want physical things by themselves, But, I want you to give me—to give your spirit to me—that golden light which is you—which you don't know—give it me—"

After a moment's silence she replied:

"But how can I, you don't love me! You only want your own ends. You don't want to serve *me*, and yet you want me to serve you. It is so one-sided!"

It was a great effort for him to maintain this conversation, and to press for the thing he wanted from her, the surrender of her spirit. (pp. 242-43)

Ursula states her case forcefully, and Lawrence is to be admired for giving authority to her voice. But this authority manifests itself only in local ways, in short sections of dialogue. The action of the novel as a whole advances Birkin's pre-eminence (despite his claims for polarity and "freedom together"); Ursula finally gives him what he desires—"the surrender of her spirit." She learns to "serve" him, learns to be "still and perfect," not always understanding but no longer resisting. In "Excuse," she is, in fact, as much a student as a servant, taking Birkin's instruction to heart as he tells her what to put in her letter of resignation from her job: she takes his dictation, kneeling at his feet.

When Lawrence is not being critical of the Birkin-Ursula relationship, he is presenting it in terms that make it unacceptable. After "Excuse," after all that Birkin and Ursula have been through together, Lawrence can still allow Birkin to have this exchange with Gerald:

Gerald stood still, suspended in thought.

"What *do* women want at the bottom?" he asked.

Birkin shrugged his shoulders.

"God knows," he said. "Some satisfaction in basic repulsion, it

seems to me. They seem to creep down some ghastly tunnel of darkness, and will never be satisfied till they've come to the end." (p. 418)

That Birkin can say this is one of the horrors of modern literature.

But then by the final parts of the novel, Birkin and Ursula no longer fire Lawrence's imaginative interest. "I'm thinking," says Birkin to Ursula back in "Excuse," "we'd better get out of our responsibilities as quick as we can." And so "responsibilities" are left behind, as Birkin and Ursula are cut off—from their jobs, their families, from England, and really from historical and social contexts altogether. They also seem cut off from Lawrence, who turns his attention to Gerald and Gudrun and keeps it there until the last pages of the text. What absorbs Lawrence is not the success of his married couple, but the breakdown and destruction of Gerald; like Gerald himself before the awful spectacle of his father's death, Lawrence himself seems compelled to "see it through" to the end. He must see it through, I think, because while he condemns the Industrial Magnate Gerald's will-to-power, Lawrence himself is entangled, even in complicity, with it, bound to the same willful forms and strivings. Like the Gerald that he both loves and hates, Lawrence desires mastery and domination, wishes to make "order out of confusion," and dedicates himself to the pursuit of a single ideal. As *Women in Love* drives towards its conclusion, Lawrence is more fascinated by, and involved in, Gerald's fate than in the revolutionary career of his hero Birkin.

At the very end of the novel, however, Lawrence returns to Birkin, re-affirming his faith in the enriching possibilities of a "man-to-man" relationship with someone like Gerald. "Having you," Birkin says to Ursula,

"I can live all my life without anybody else, any other sheer intimacy. But to make it complete, really happy, I wanted eternal union with a man too: another kind of love," he said.

"I don't believe it," she said. "It's an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity."

"Well—" he said.

"You can't have two kinds of love. Why should you!"

"It seems as if I can't," he said. "Yet I wanted it."

"You can't have it, because it's false, impossible," she said.

"I don't believe that," he answered.

Birkin's words reflect Lawrence's own moving act of faith: he remains drawn to what Gerald represents, to the good in him, even as he stands committed to its destruction. In its awareness of limitation, and in its tribute to its deepest desires and imaginings, we hear the significant tones and accents (to recall a phrase from early in the book) of a "passionate voice speaking."

**AFTERNOON DIFFICULTY**

Through the window screen  
(not for the first time)  
I watch my daughter  
who has been friendless at school  
collecting the outworn skins  
of cicadas from the trees—  
one, two, three, four, five  
from this tree alone.  
Already in her “skeleton sack”  
she has hundreds of the creepy things,  
with nothing in mind for them—  
it is only something to do  
toward passing the stragglers hours  
after school.  
It grieves the heart to watch her face,  
which isn't sad, however, but thoughtful:  
the look of a child who doesn't choose  
to be alone, and asks the meaning.  
I wish I believed in the easy prayer  
which would end her trial: I dread the hour  
when she looks clear through my studied unconcern  
to the pity brimming there.  
At least she knows it isn't death  
she collects,  
but what had held a stage of being,  
not that, in the web of her loose ends,  
it would matter: or that the sleigh bells  
that the fathers make, high in the leaves,  
would ring less hollow.

**JOHN HUMMA**

## CAPTIVE

Never wholly female,  
the witch grows for a thousand years  
as a red lily. Grass around her  
is drained of green.  
Birds sleep warm within her huge petals  
when trees die. People gather samples  
and philosophers name her parts  
but only believers, knowing who she is,  
pray to her to release the crops.

Mothers give her one of their children  
who are never returned in human form  
except one boy found talking to the red grass  
and shaking as though possessed.  
He speaks of a woman as tall as a tree  
and brighter than sun in snow.  
Caterpillars nibble her clothes. Moths  
cover her eyes with their wings.  
Tadpoles and orange fish swim in her hair.

She isn't seen after that until hunters  
shackle her limbs as she lies exhausted  
by a dry riverbed. For his prize,  
each hunter can own her for a year.  
They shut her in a cage with glass bars  
and, in turn, gnaw pieces of her flesh.  
Her clothes turn black. Every winter,  
she makes her jailer bear two children,  
crippled, and never knowing they have parents.

PAULINE ALLDRED

**TWO POEMS BY ROBERT WATSON***HENRY FLAGLER'S SONG*

I invented Florida when I was old.  
We lived in New York City in the cold.  
I was retired from oil, I had some wealth;  
Mary, my first wife, was in poor health.  
We rode in my private railroad car.  
Ah, the warm south surely would be her cure.  
That winter we steamed into Jacksonville  
Where I drew up Florida like my will:  
I said I would bequeath to future men  
Of wealth and station a temperate garden  
By the sea which they could reach by yacht or rail  
Where they could toast the sun with ginger ale.  
Now in my holy city of St. Augustine,  
My hotel Ponce de Leon can be seen:  
Its many courts and cool retreats with fountains,  
Water spraying from the mouths of dolphins.  
That my civilization would prevail,  
That all Florida could be coasted by rail.  
I built my roadbeds, bridges down the entire state.  
Now its length my hotels punctuate.  
My conquest is a land of orange trees,  
Palms, Bougainvillaea, and warm salt seas.  
After God, as artist, I have created most and best:  
St. Augustine, Palm Beach, Miami, Key West.  
It did not matter much that Mary died,  
In Florida I found a younger bride.



### A SIMPLE MEAL

Only the string beans are grown here.  
 The whiskey we drink comes from Scotland,  
 By ship to New York, then trucked down  
 To our town. Our glasses are Danish.

The water travels in pipes right  
 Into our house. We make the ice.  
 Our crackers from London, our cheese  
 From France. The lamb was born and butchered

Half the world away, and frozen.  
 We will eat one leg of this beast  
 From Australia. We roast the leg  
 With gas piped up from Mexico.

Only the string beans are grown here.  
 Our potatoes were dug in Idaho.  
 The wine is Italian.  
 For dessert have a Georgia peach.

\* \* \*

I see Michelangelo stroll  
 In vineyards with Florence below.  
 Robert Burns scribbles beside  
 A clear, cold brook in Scotland.

A milkmaid in France strokes a cow.  
 Mice nibble crumbs in London,  
 A kangaroo hops, smudge pots burn  
 On a frosty night, buffalo

Stampede. I'd like a sombrero  
 To wear when I see Elsinore.  
 Look, look a rabbit is eating beans  
 Outside the window. They're all gone.

The logistics of a seven course dinner  
 Is too much for me: Dover sole in flight,  
 Shrimpers drowning off Brownsville,  
 Elk plunging through forests,  
 Conchs cringing in their shells.

## THE WATCHMAN

W. D. WETHERELL

Rubenstein was an insomniac whose wife had died in his sleep. But for that one night's lapse it would have been thirty years unbroken awake come June. He remembered it was June because they had bought the house from a man who had to be in Milwaukee by July. He remembered it was thirty years because it was a little after Ellen, just before Joann. Kathy had been painting in the kitchen all day, he'd been working out in the yard . . . He remembered putting down the lawn mower to rest for a moment and hearing in the re-established quiet the sound of her cough.

They went to bed early. She was already asleep and he was lying beside her with what from the distance of time seemed the perpetual drowsy half-smile of his youth, letting the narcotic smell of the linden trees up the street cushion him effortlessly over into sleep. He had brought his hand along her slender hip to her shoulder—to the small, accepting decline below her breast where he had gotten into the habit of leaving it until morning—when it occurred to him that he might have forgotten to lock the back door.

He got up to check. As it turned out, it was open. He closed it, tested it once, then went back to sleep. Or at least tried to get back to sleep, insomnia being an injury you can catch like any other—a draft of uncertainty just once confirmed. And though insomnia is rarely tragic, Rubenstein's took a tragic turn.

In the fourteen years of its prime it had come very close to being a sort of vigil. There had been a hard, ascetic quality to it then, unblurred by any nervous rituals or pills. No tuggings at the door, no nightcaps, no Valium. Mere watching until dawn.

Check the front door, then the back. Ellen has a habit of leaving her nightlight off and tripping on the way to the bathroom; her room is next. Joann and her nightmares after this—he fixes her blankets for her, tucking them up under her long blonde hair so she feels the cool trim of silk against her cheek. If they are sick with colds he lies on the floor by their beds, reaching up to stroke their foreheads with a towel warmed over the radiator. If all is well he stands by their beds for the entire night, turning away to check the locks on their windows. Other times he will wander downstairs to check the oil burner . . . carefully, quietly, with a generous, nagging horror of keeping anyone else awake.

After that it is milk, sometimes a crossword. At dawn he is standing by the window for the sunrise, refreshed and ready.

So if he spent his nights searching for reassurance, at least in those years reassurance was not hard to find. Sometimes Kathy would wake up in the middle of the night and find him on the couch, with just the beating red tip of his cigarette there to give him away. These were their best moments together. They would go back to bed arm in arm and later, if sleep still eluded him, at least he could rest there at ease, one hand on her naked breast, the other propped beneath his head . . . a young peacetime sentry standing a dreamy last watch.

And the morning he finally fell asleep he woke to find Kathy was dead. He ran screaming into Ellen's room. She threw her arms around his head and started yelling "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" with absolutely no idea why he was crying. Joann ran in—terrified to see them clutching at each other she had started crying, too . . . All three of them bounced up and down together on Ellen's bed, screaming and trying so hard to get hold of each other that they collapsed into one big sobbing tangle on the floor.

With that he just as suddenly stopped. He quieted them down, managed some eggs, and got them off to school before they could ask any questions. He called the office to explain he wouldn't be in. After that he went into the living room and sat down. Later he got up and made coffee. He forced himself to read the newspaper cover to cover. When he finished he read it again. He sat there all day. Just before the girls were due home, he went back to the bedroom and opened the door.

That was sixteen years ago. He hadn't slept a night since. Where once he had watched over a wife and two daughters, he now went around checking the insulation on leftover extension cords. What was once a vigil was now the self-indulgent fussiness of premature old age. Room to room winding clocks, closeting himself in the living room with the comfortless TV, daring pills he swallowed one atop the other to do their job.

And every morning at half past eight Ellen called from her office in the city to ask if he had slept.

"How are you?" he would say, pretending he hadn't heard her. "How's business?"

"Did you sleep, father?"

Repetition made it sound like an accusation. He would change the subject again, but she always insisted on having an answer before letting him go.

"Yes," he would finally say, just to reassure her. "Yes, Ellen, I did sleep for a little while," and no matter how he phrased it, it always came out sounding like a confession.

But never sleep, never even drowsiness anymore. At best a fretful kind of exhaustion before the TV set when the last newscast was over about two.

The TV was the back door on a bigger scale. He watched strictly for solace and five or six years ago solace had still been there. No matter how many had died that day, no matter how many earthquakes and rapes, they always used to break for a last commercial, then end with a happy bulletin . . . prospects of record wheat, twins reunited, fair weather ahead . . . something for enough hope to fall into relaxation with. "Good night," they would say. "Good luck!"

No more. Now they finished their half hours with an attention grabber, something that by its terrible irony served as a cap to all that had come before . . . Parents tear child apart, returning war hero knifed in park, priest accidentally crucified . . . Sweet dreams children, they said, Sweet dreams and with a shrug of their shoulders signed off for the night—Rubenstein aghast on the couch.

It had gotten to the point where he would run to the screen the second they read anything offering even the slightest ground for optimism, shutting it off before they could spoil it with anything else. When even these moments became scarce he moved his chair right next to the screen and sat there with one hand resting nervously on the off-on button, waiting for reassuring words he could steal out of context—Faith, Sunshine, Peace—before slamming the set off, clapping his hands over his ears to avoid the next three words which sighed out with the afterglow before the screen went safely dark.

Some nights he read, some nights Joann and her husband came over, then eventually just Joann by herself. She would always fall asleep before the news was over and wake up instantly if he turned it off, so on those nights he had to suffer it all for her sake, for the affectionate hug she gave him when he shook her gently awake and helped her out to her car.

And now even that had changed. She had been coming over every night and staying later and later. Her hair was getting darker, the baby was starting to show. Lately they had quarreled over little things and now when she fell asleep her lips became rigid and thin.

It all came to a head one night toward spring.

"What's wrong with us, Daddy?"

"Nothing. I'm tired, that's all."

"Which kind are you taking?"

"I don't know what they're called. They taste like Valium only worse."

"You worry about too much. It's just like Ellen says. They're not your problems."

Rubenstein shrugged. The color of her hair didn't bother him as much as the bulge beneath her maternity dress. He tried to keep his eyes on the screen.

"Ellen phoned and asked me if I knew. I think she's getting afraid to ask you."

"Ellen's never been afraid of anything."

"She's talking about a specialist. Do you still try the green ones?"

"Green and white. Sometimes. I wish to hell she would let it drop. I'll survive."

"Do they work?"

"Sometimes."

It was as close as they had ever come to talking about it. The tension seemed to ease off—that night for the first time she told him it was going to be Katherine if it was a girl. Later, she fixed some warm milk for him and they sat down to watch the news. During one of the commercials she surprised him by getting up to turn off the sound.

"I got a letter from Jason today."

"Oh? How is he?"

Rubenstein could tell from the picture they were talking about something particularly horrible—they always moved in for a closeup of the broadcaster's eyes when it was really bad.

"He's changing, Daddy. He's really changing this time. I think he wants to come back."

He ran his hand along his forehead, then down over his eyes. He was tired and angry. Angry at being tired, tired from anger, tired angry, angry tired . . . the words scattered through his head where in any man his age there should have been nothing but Peace, Composure, Sleep. He felt like telling her what he really thought about Jason, but no matter what the emotion his voice always came out in the same soothing tone he had used to comfort her when she was small.

"That's good, Jo. It will all work out for the best. Z."

She nodded, then curled her legs up on the couch. They waited for each other to say something, then gradually turned toward the screen, watching a weatherman sweep his arm across a map of North America, a frown on his face, one finger jabbing at a small circle of black crayon near the eastern border of Montana. Rubenstein went over and turned up the sound.

"You'll see, princess. Everything is for the best. I promised you that to someone a long time ago."

She smiled.

"The green ones, Daddy. They're supposed to be very good," and as easily as that she went to sleep.

He watched her for fifteen minutes. When her mouth assumed the hard, thin expression he turned away with the violent gesture he used



in shutting off the TV. He turned the sound back down, then made the mechanical rounds of the house. Everything was locked, everything was quiet. The clocks were wound, the pilot lights burned with a safe, steady flame.

He went back to the living room. The shawl he had placed over her shoulders had fallen to the floor. On the TV they were showing the weather map again, with the same threatening curl of black ink closing in on South Dakota. Before he could turn up the sound to find out what it meant, the final credits came on.

Wherever he looked, whatever he listened to, there was nothing but despair. It grew and grew and when he finally felt it peak inside him he grabbed in the closet for his coat and ran outdoors for what he felt sure would be the comfort of the warm and solacing air.

Measured from the strip of broken sidewalk in front to the oil-stained edge of the garage door out back, Rubenstein's driveway was thirty-three paces long. On a good night it took him forty seconds to do it all, spinning hard on his heel at either end. A quarter mile in ten minutes, a mile in forty-two, stopping now and then to make a justifying deep knee bend for the neighbors whose homes faced his.

The back of his house faced the back of those on the next block. He knew none of his neighbors on that side. In winter they stayed indoors. Summers the blossomed trees screened everything except the aroma of charcoal lighting fluid, the smokier exhaust from their lawnmowers. This late, all their windows were dark except one about five houses down—there was a soft yellow light toward one corner that just barely managed to find its way through the broken lines of bushes to where he stood, fighting to catch his breath.

It was noise that finished him. Three killer intersections hemmed the neighborhood in, south, east and west. You couldn't be outside for long without hearing the screech of brakes in the distance followed by a jarring, mating thump . . . other times nothing but silence where the thump should have been. Minutes later the sirens would start up further off, homing in on the echo.

Over the years he had learned what each meant. Screech then thump was collision. Screech then silence was pedestrian. Siren alone was usually heart attack, sometimes fire. If the horns came first, then it was definitely fire.

Tonight they were all there—screech, siren, smoke—and it was too much for him. The night was cold, his legs were aching. When he turned for relief to the stars the noise rose with him—the sky itself seemed out of control, constellations confused with running lights of jets that seemed aimed for certain mid-air crash above his head. He

ducked instinctively and the noise of their exhaust established itself as a raspy hum in his chest, rising toward his throat where it battled for possession with the throb moving down from his temples.

By the time he counted off five collisions and three pedestrians he was shaking uncontrollably. When the count reached six and six he gave a short, angry bark of despair and started running for the yellow light.

Twice he almost stopped. Once because he lost his way in a maze of forsythia, once because he was startled by a bird flushing loose from a branch near his head. But the yellow beam seemed more inviting and soothing the closer he came—aloof from the surrounding noise in the same way a distant star can seem aloof from the night. Before he reached the yard behind the house where it came from he had convinced himself it was a candle, that it represented all that was left of calm in the entire world.

He shook his way free of the shrubbery and emerged onto the open lawn. The grass was covered with crab apples from the autumn before—they flattened under his heels like soft little sponges. There was a clothesline to get past, then a loosely coiled hose. The window was set toward one corner of a patio. When he came to where the actual brickwork began he started walking on tiptoes, drawing his head up carefully along the glass to look inside.

It was a girl of about fourteen or fifteen, brushing her hair in the light of a small lamp she had propped up sideways against a full-length mirror. She was wearing a red bathrobe. There was a loose-leaf notebook open on the carpet beside her chair—every now and then she stopped long enough to glance down and turn a page. Behind her on the bed the tops of the blankets were drawn back just far enough for him to see the soft beige color of the sheets. There was a teddy bear lying stomach down on the pillows.

The sides of the room were harder to see, but it was enough to watch the girl. Her mouth was open, she seemed to be counting. He realised now that the flickering quality to the light came from her bending her head first left, then right, interposing her long hair in between the mirror and the lamp. It was a beautiful gesture. She had a way of stopping and frowning into the mirror he found beautiful, too, and he remained kneeling by the window until she was done. She made a last stroke with the brush on either side, stretched gracefully toward the mirror and then—after hesitating for a moment like she was trying to make up her mind about something disappeared through a door off to the right.

It was enough. Rubenstein felt he had been vouchsafed something very precious. As he weaved his way back to his own yard he felt he was bearing that soothing, drowsy image with him—a charm to bring back

and nurture in what was left of the now peaceful night. Once he almost tripped, another time he found himself listening automatically for the sirens, but he somehow managed to reach his door with the vision still intact.

Joann had just woken up. He helped her on with her coat and kissed her goodbye, brushing away her questions when she noticed the scratches on his forehead.

“Shh! It’s alright, Jo.”

After she was gone he lay down on the couch. The memory of the girl seemed so fresh he had the impression he could actually place it next to him on the couch, resting it between the cushions and his hip where he could reach for it, stroke it, then reach back for it again without anything more than the effort it took to bring his hand down from over his heavy, drifting eyes.

Gentle, he thought to himself, studying with curious detachment a feeling that had started somewhere in his lower torso and was now peaking effortlessly toward his head. Gentle, gentle, gentle.

But before he could finish thinking about it he felt the new and overpowering need to yawn.

When Joann came over the following night she found him in front of the TV with dessert, laughing over the early news. (“Yes, Ellen,” he had said over the phone. “I have slept and all is well.”) They talked for a while when it was over, then played cards. Finally, about eleven, she went over to the couch. Rubenstein waited impatiently for her mouth to tighten, then hurried outside.

He had no trouble picking out the yellow light—if you stood by the garage and looked toward the corner of the yard where the hedge enveloped the telephone pole it was the first thing you saw. But this time he lost sight of it before he could determine which house it was coming from—he was mad at himself for not counting off how many yards down it was the night before. It was too early. There were too many other lights on along the block to be sure.

Just before he decided to give up he spotted a light that seemed to be the right height off the ground. He started for it, getting close enough to realize his mistake, then deciding to look in anyway for whatever solace it might bring. A step up onto a flagstone porch, a detour to avoid some lawn furniture, a last deep breath and he was there, his hand against the lower edge of the window, shading his eyes from the glare.

A man and a woman were sitting next to each other on a paisley love seat, a chessboard propped up on a cushion in the narrow interval of fabric there was between them. At first Rubenstein couldn’t see their

faces—each was bent intently over the board and he didn't want to bring his head any higher above the glass. But something decisive must have happened. They suddenly sat up straight and exchanged the briefest of kisses. The man waved a pawn in her face; the woman laughed and took off her bracelet.

Off to one corner was a fireplace with red embers. Once the man got up and stirred it with a poker. When he came back the girl held up a bishop and he took off his sweater. Later they exchanged knights and the man reached over and kissed her, just as quickly and chastely as before. They were leaning over the board again when a little boy in white pajamas ran in and forced his way up onto the couch, knocking over the rest of the pieces. They pretended to be angry—the man took him by his shoulders, the woman grabbed his feet. They had a make-believe tug-of-war, pulling back and forth until they all disappeared behind the couch, the abandoned chessmen rolling loose toward the fire.

And just as he had on the night before, Rubenstein went away from the window with an overwhelming sensation of peace and tranquility. If anything it seemed less fragile than the girl—this time he didn't hesitate risking it in aimless wanderings among the other lawns that stretched along the block. The maple trees were in leaf, the sky was still—he couldn't bring himself to go in. Two houses before his own he stopped off at another window, absolutely certain his new contentment would only be reconfirmed.

This time he saw an old lady and a dog sitting up together in a kitchen. The dog—it seemed a shepherd-collie mix—must have been suffering from a cold. The lady—who had bandages around her ankles and walked with a stoop—was wiping his nose with a handkerchief and holding the back of her hand over his forehead. When the dog wasn't looking she disguised some pills in a biscuit. A little later she rubbed something from a jar on the fur of his chest. The dog suffered it all patiently, but acted relieved when she left him alone and went over to the table. She sat down heavily, then stared off toward the window. After a while she let her head fall down onto the table. The dog had been watching her all this time. When he saw her head drop he got up gingerly and came over to the table to press his long nose against her lap.

Innocence. Domestic tranquillity. The love between man and beast. For thirty years Rubenstein had been seeking reassurance everywhere but here . . . in the row of neat houses that lined the block behind his, exactly midway between the double locks and the distant sirens. He made his rounds every night when Joann was asleep, soon learned the neighborhood shadows by heart. Narrow clothesline stripes would merge into broader chimney strokes, the slight splayed ribbons from the birch mixed with the broader crisscrossed rays from the pine, Rubenstein gliding from one to the other like an ice skater, resting for a moment

in pools of darkest black, venturing out into the relative light of broad, empty lawns, circling away up the block to the grove of hemlock bordering a busy cross street that served as his night's outer bound.

He found solace that spring just as magically as he first lost it. In the same protective way he once went around checking the radiators in the basement, he now patrolled the block, stopping between windows to right bicycles tipped carelessly across the sidewalk or rakes left prongs up on a lawn. He watched over the neighborhood until the last light was safely off—when he finally went home it was with the satisfying feeling he was taking everyone to bed with him.

As the months went by he developed a regular itinerary. The old lady's house first, then checking up on the couple who kissed so demurely over chess. After that it might be anyone—a middle-aged couple who fed each other apples, an elderly pair of twin brothers who would strip off their shirts and wrestle on the linoleum until one was pinned, a woman who always sat with her legs propped apart on the coffee table, drawing pictures of soldiers on the wall with a crayon as she watched TV, nodding toward the set in the calmest, most serene way.

And before April was over he found the girl in the red bathrobe again, still combing her hair in the soft yellow light, still making that same doubtful motion with her head before deciding to walk toward the dark door that led from her room.

The entire spring was one steady progress toward sleep. Sometimes he made his rounds with his eyes half-closed, other times his head would start nodding toward his chest. But now that he was this near he refused to rush it. For the time being he hid the new joy drowsiness had given him just as he hid the new sheets waiting in the linen closet or the alarm clock he had let himself buy one Saturday morning in full confidence of sleep's approach.

In the meantime the season went on. The dogwood blossomed, the roses came out and then the leaves on the peach tree Kathy had once planted alongside the garage. The chess players took to sitting on opposite ends of the couch, staring off in different directions. Eventually the dog died—for two nights the lady petted it just as she did before. One night he came home covered with rose petals and he had to brush them off in the kitchen before waking up Joann—Joann who stayed later and later as her time came near.

She got up and pulled the shade down over the window nearest the couch. A second later she got up again to make sure it was down all the way.

"It must be about that time," Rubenstein said, glancing toward the TV. There was still a petal caught in his jacket and he had to turn aside to brush it away. "Never seen you so nervous."

Joann giggled, then frowned.



"Peeping Toms. There was something about them on the news tonight."

For a moment it was as if he hadn't heard. The vertical slipped—the newsman's face rolled up and down the screen.

"I thought you were sleeping," he said at last, trying so hard to sound calm that it came out as a whisper.

"Who can sleep with sickos like that around?"

The newsman's face hesitated for a moment near the top of the screen . . . teetered . . . fell. Hesitated, teetered, fell.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Jo?"

"Did Mom ever have any trouble? I mean with Ellen and me."

For a moment he didn't answer. He got up to fix the TV and on the way back he stopped to look out the front window. Everything seemed as tranquil as ever—the pine tree by the sidewalk was waving slightly in the breeze, the street was empty.

"With you none. With Ellen a little. Why?"

"My . . . my stomach is worse tonight."

He came over to the couch and sat down beside her. They talked for a while, then played a listless hand of canasta. When she gave no sign of getting ready to go, he got up and stretched toward the ceiling.

"I think I'll go out for a little more fresh air. Just a little more," he added quickly, before she could say anything.

"Okay. Be careful."

"I will."

"Daddy?"

"I'll be careful, Jo. I stay in the driveway."

"I got a letter from Jason today."

"Oh? How is he?"

"The bastard!"

He started to say something, then changed his mind, slipping out the back door with his jacket unzipped over his shoulders. For some reason he started running the moment he got outside.

She was combing her hair just as she always did, fifty strokes on the right, fifty on the left, peeking down once or twice at her notebook. Everything seemed the same. But then—instead of the little hesitation toward the door—she dropped the brush and headed right for the bed against the window. Before Rubenstein could react she made a slight shrugging motion with her shoulders and her robe fell away, revealing the briefest glimpse of a beautifully small white breast.

Rubenstein instinctively threw his hand up across his eyes. He was sure she hadn't seen him. The night was still quiet, the smell of the linden overpowering—the smell dreamy and overpowering. But before he reached the back of her yard he tripped over a crooked flagstone.

Somewhere a dog started barking. In the distance a spotlight flared on. A siren started up, then a second, then a third. When he got home Joann was crying in her sleep, a dab of spittle caked on her chin.

And though he wasn't sure why— though he never could decide why—for the first time in three months he got up during the night to check the back door.

\* \* \*

### SUICIDE

To take your own life resumes  
The intensity of the neighbors'  
Infatuations. How they love us!  
As their eyes dance to the sight  
Of blood draining our wrists;  
And the squeak of rope rubbing  
The garage rafters maddens their ears'  
Affection for us. "You wouldn't try,  
You wouldn't try," they insist  
As the curtains puff in and out  
The windows in perfect earnest love  
For themselves; then the lake's water  
And the cheek-whitening gas join  
The neighbors to explicate lovingly  
Our leaving: "Ah, me," they say.

ROBERT PAWLOWSKI

## PRIVATE DISCOURSE IN THOREAU'S WALDEN

RONALD B. SHWARTZ

I have engaged over the years in something of a lover's quarrel with *Walden*: it often bores me when I'm near it, and enchants me all the rest of the time. This seems rather extraordinary, as though my infatuation—I use that word consciously, insistently—were not with *Walden* but with some “idea” of *Walden*, one step removed and recollected in tranquility. This paper may properly be regarded as a study of my boredom-love-boredom-love-boredom-love, of a stubborn residuum of appreciation. I certainly make no claim to being the first to recognize the boring quality of *Walden*. Nathaniel Hawthorne called Thoreau a bore; so did the critic Theodore Baird.<sup>1</sup> Even Thoreau called himself a bore, though he wasn't referring to Thoreau the writer of *Walden*. Stanley Cavell admitted that “It cannot, I think, be denied that *Walden* sometimes seems an enormously long and boring book.”<sup>2</sup> I consider this response sound but disagree that it reflects, as Cavell has suggested, “a boredom not of emptiness but of prolonged urgency” (p. 20). That remark strikes me as pretentious, the sort of intrepid speculation that gives literary criticism both sustenance and popular disrepute. I submit that we should respect the capacity of *Walden* to bore us without being compelled to explain it away as something else.

If *Walden* is sometimes boring, it is precisely because Thoreau indulges in and aspires to convey an ethereal experience, an ethereal attitude toward the world, to which we are unaccustomed; he seeks to saturate us with this aura, this way-of-being-in-the-world. It's easy to miss this forest for the trees in *Walden*. The profoundest, the most fragile, ineffable meaning that Thoreau can be said to have expressed in this book emerges elusively, almost by indirection. Its meaning—probably impossible to re-articulate—can best be thought of as an existential “flavor” or “texture” or “fragrance.” Comprehending it requires a deliberate blurring of the focus, so to speak; we must *drift* with Thoreau. In this connection T. S. Eliot's statement that poetry “communicates” before it is “understood” seems instructive. Like poetry, *Walden* consists in a language of meaning which is highly personal yet not utterly opaque. The test for gauging the truth of this characterization is whether the unique discourse in *Walden* can be learned, used, and shared by would-be participants in the so-called “culture of argument” which Thoreau may be said to have created. Is it enough to observe, as

<sup>1</sup> “Corn Grows in the Night,” in *Thoreau in Our Season*, J. Hicks, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1966), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *The Senses of Walden* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 20.

critics so frequently have, that Thoreau employed history, anthropology, Scripture, paradox, irony, ridicule, philological puns, and "every variety of symbolic statement";<sup>3</sup> that he employed, to put it technically, oxy-moron, alliteration, hyperbole, meiosis, synecdoche, metonymy, port-manteau words, anaphora, litotes, apostrophe, antistrophe, rhetorical questions, and climactic paragraph endings? What more does *Walden* do than simply "tell" us to simplify our affairs and to listen to our own drummer and to eschew material wealth and other superficialities and delusions, and to live what is truly life and to elevate by conscious endeavor the quality of our lives and to notice how wonderful nature is? Why are synopses of this sort grotesque and trite, and unfaithful to the text of *Walden*?

Like poetry, *Walden* moves delicately, often imperceptibly between the literal (that which we think we understand plainly) and the more conspicuously metaphorical, the allusive, the downright ambiguous.<sup>4</sup> We are apt to feel confused, out of control, uncertain about what in *Walden* is metaphorical and what is less metaphorical, what if anything is completely secure from metaphor, what metaphors are more transparently tied to a single, discrete referent; and indeed whether it really matters that we always be sure. A good verb to describe what *Walden* does is "float" between the more literal and the less, between the material and the spiritual. Thoreau is taking us strenuously to the border of the language. "Give me that sentence," he wrote, "which no intelligence can understand." We are made vaguely aware that although his language is the source, it is not the simple and direct administrator of what is "expressed." Content and form coalesce as he seeks to work the English language overtime: "The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement." If argument can proceed in this formidable discourse at all, the opposing advocates might very likely drop dead from exhaustion. For like poetry, *Walden* exhibits an extreme commitment to what language can be made to achieve. As the critic David Greene pointed out, "overwhelming evidence suggests that few writers have used words more consciously, and that few have been more aware of what exactly they were trying to do."<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, it seems to me, the language of meaning in *Walden* is

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<sup>3</sup> Sherman Paul, Introduction to *Walden* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. xxv.

<sup>4</sup> Note, as one of the most troubling examples of Thoreau's ambiguity, the famous passage from "Economy": "I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken to concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they answered to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves."

<sup>5</sup> *The Frail Duration* (San Diego: San Diego State College Press, 1966), p. 4.

designed not merely as a general prescription for life but as an aesthetic in the broadest sense, the aesthetic of putting a life in order, of being able to account for one's life, of making one's life clean and pure and simple and controlled in a way that reminds me of Hemingway (e.g. "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," "The Big, Two-Hearted River") and Robert Frost. There is something very comforting, self-sufficient and charming in this appeal. Thoreau makes life subtly lyrical. One might say that *Walden* domesticates through resonant language the irritatingly obscure word "transcendental," makes it breathe. *Walden* does not merely "describe" or "illustrate" the *Walden* experience; in a real sense the language and the experience are inseparable; the feeling and the reflection upon it merge. In this regard Thoreau spoke of a certain "doubleness" in his experience: "I am conscious of the presense and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it." It may thus appear that the *Walden* experience was very much what the language of *Walden* is.

For purposes of analysis *Walden* might be divided roughly into two categories: (1) what the writer dislikes and seeks to reject; and (2) what the writer likes and seeks to promote. Probably the most characteristic way that Thoreau engages in the predominantly "negative" discourse is by retaining the vocabulary associated with that which he rejects and modulating it through obvious, mildly playful irony for his own purposes. Putting it more graphically, what Thoreau does is deflect the language of his opposition after a fashion analogous to the practitioner of jujitsu, who uses the strength and weight of his adversary to disable him. Thus, to consider the most prominent example, Thoreau inverts the traditional language of private property ownership (in "Where I Lived") by insisting that farms can be "bought" in our minds alone, that a man who can appreciate a farm without literally buying it can, like Thoreau, be "a rich man without any damage to my poverty"; that a man is "rich" in proportion to the number of things he can "afford" to let alone. This deliberate muddling of language serves, in effect, to remove the ground from under our feet, to induce the kind of exquisite, even amusing, disorder that Socrates typically induced in his disciples: "Now, to speak the truth, I had but ten cents in the world, and it surpassed my arithmetic to tell, if I was the man who had ten cents, or who had the farm, or ten dollars, or all together." But whereas Socrates asks: "Is this what we really mean, or should mean, by so and so?", Thoreau asks the same question in a less vigorously logical, more poetic way. Both men subvert the common understanding briskly, yet both can be viewed as neglecting to furnish a specific, tangible alternative. In *Walden*, this form of discourse can thus seem evasive, bothersome, oxymoronic for its own sake. "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude," Thoreau writes. And again: "silence alone is worthy to be heard"; and



“not till we are lost . . . do we begin to find ourselves”; and “I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born.” As a discrete form of discourse, such language may seem facile; it is apparently what prompted one critic to complain that Thoreau “speaks as an exception to every rule, the judge of all the rest of the universe, droning on and on, monotonously didactic, deliberately obscure. Argument proceeding in this discourse of ironic inversions would almost necessarily be stillborn, for Thoreau is always willing to respond to an assertion by incorporating its vocabulary into his own personal schema. Thoreau, in part, is a verbal amoeba.

The risk of unintelligibility here is great. There is the passage in “Solitude,” for example where Thoreau rejects the conventional meaning of such words as “loneliness,” “space,” and “distance,” and highlights the difference between the mundane way and his own way of having and talking about experience:

Men frequently say to me, ‘I should think you would feel lonesome down there, and want to be nearer to folks, rainy and snowy days and nights especially.’ I am tempted to reply to such,—This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star . . . Why should I feel lonely? is not our planet in the Milky Way . . . What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? . . . What do we want most to dwell near to? Not to many men, surely . . . but to the perennial source of our life.’

Thoreau is not mad; rather, he is doing his best with a language which is not ordinarily employed to accommodate his experience in this world, his *Weltansicht*. It is therefore no wonder that his language seems alien or cryptic, attuned to a different frequency; that he does not feel at home with pedestrian utterances about the world. Inasmuch as Thoreau’s “negative” discourse (1) merely rejects conventional words registering conventional experience, and (2) merely replaces such words, if at all, with conclusory labels for his own idiosyncratic experience (e.g. “the universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions,” “explore your own higher latitudes,” “in eternity there is indeed something true and sublime,” “we crave only reality”), his discourse remains essentially a black box to the rest of the world; had he replied to the townsmen who thought he was lonely they would not have understood. They reside in a separate sphere.

When Thoreau writes in the so-called “positive” mode, his prose can be said to “enact,” rather than merely express “directly,” his meaning. The reason for this, of course, is that Thoreau’s meaning is, seemingly at least, too subtle to be conveyed by language-as-mere-conduit; hence

the form of the language must conspire artfully with whatever meaning his words would otherwise bear, and the result is nothing less than a prose-poem, of which *Walden* exhibits several varieties. First, in what is perhaps the quintessential passage of the book, Thoreau writes:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

Like much of Thoreau's prose the passage, if taken on its face, conveys a mere penumbra of its more penetrating meaning and could just as adequately have been expressed as: "I wanted to find out what life was about, and then live it up!" Yet if yielded to, gazed at impressionistically, the passage communicates (or if you like, "argues" for) that which resists paraphrase. The language, it may be said, radiates with a meaning that derives, not from any one particular "device," but from the confluence of its many features. These features include the cadence of the sentences, retarded by an abundance of monosyllabic words and accentuated by the repetition of "I," and the repetition of infinitive clauses (and the clause "to live," in particular). The function of simplicities in this discourse is pronounced; just as Thoreau seeks to reduce life to "its lowest terms" (whatever that may mean), he reduces language to *its* lowest terms, demanding the strictest economy of style (note the spareness of the words "went," "wished," "live," "life," "see," "learn," "came," "die," "facts," and the simple elegance of the clause "living is so dear," which is suspended breathlessly, demurely, after the longer clause which it modifies). The *mélange* of hyperactive metaphors in the latter half of the passage contrasts with the scarcity of metaphors in the former half, thus suggesting, without articulating, a meditation on the world which is at once simple yet vibrant. This singular passion for "reality" is unsusceptible to refutation, and therein lies the paradox: argument in this discourse is foreclosed because to participate in its language is perforce to concede the meaning that such language uniquely conceives. This is to say that in a language where "style of argument" and "the argument itself" are so intimate, so equivocally fused, as they are in *Walden*, argument cannot

proceed within that language, because any two persons who can be said to share such language—assuming that they could—would quite literally have nothing to argue about. To invoke a legal metaphor, the language is the natural monopoly of its meaning.

Another and especially typical way that Thoreau generates a personal language of meaning through the performance of language is by proliferating a rich “accounting” of observations. This is the aesthetic of immersing one’s soul, if you will, in the hot bath of crisp, solid, delicious facts, and the bath of words articulating these facts. That we are compelled to resort to metaphor in describing what Thoreau does is telling; we apprehend that what is most central to his language of meaning is itself wordless, hovering somehow above the language itself. It seems insufficient to say that what Thoreau values here is an aesthetic of exactness, an affection for something “solid,” something that a person can grab on to; that taking inventory on observable facts can be the pastime of a sublime maturity: “Walden,” he wrote,

is blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both. Viewed from a hill-top it reflects the color of the sky; but near at hand it is of a yellowish tint next the shore where you can see the sand, then a light green, which gradually deepens to a uniform dark green in the body of the pond. In some lights, viewed even from a hill-top it is of a vivid green next the shore. Some have referred this to the reflection of the verdure; but it is equally green there against the railroad sand-bank, and in the spring, before the leaves are expanded, and it may be simply the result of the prevailing blue mixed with the yellow of the sand. (“The Ponds”)

These are the musings of a quivering, probing, staid sensibility; this is how Thoreau tastes the world. And in taste, as it were, there is no dispute.

A third way that Thoreau seeks to capture the preciousness of his experience is through what might be called “loud” metaphors, symbols, and parables. Like all of his positive discourse, this mode demonstrates, in all its variations, that Thoreau, standing on the geographical and existential periphery of society, must correspondingly discover and make use of the periphery of the English language; that insofar as new ways of experiencing the world are not amenable to rational or scientific confirmation, they are definable only in terms of language which is unfamiliar and relatively private. This language aborts arguments, for it represents a special claim—not merely that “my way of experiencing the world is a true one,” but that it is a private and unexpressible yet somewhat sharable one. Implicit here is the claim, always available in case

the writer is controverted, that "it isn't that you disagree but rather that you don't understand." That claim is of course available in most argument but its potency in this discourse is particularly significant. Thoreau's discourse is such that his meaning cannot readily be impugned because it cannot be pinned down. He tells us, for example, that

As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows with my hoe, I disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day. They lay mingled with other natural stones, some of which bore the marks of having been burned by Indian fires, and some by the sun, and also bits of pottery and glass brought hither by the recent cultivators of the soil. When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans . . . .

Understanding what this passage means in any absolute sense is probably impossible. The metaphor must be acquiesced in, not clearly apprehended. Its ambiguity, its elusiveness, must be accepted; for Thoreau seeks to communicate what may be called intellectually rarefied feelings. When such feelings are the very stuff of a discourse, as they are in *Walden*, then would-be counterargument in that same discourse crumbles in our hands. Thoreau's discourse is thus his fortress as well; it insulates him.

In a Platonic dialogue like the *Gorgias*, in contrast to *Walden*, discourse proceeds with extreme syllogistic precision. First, the advocate (Socrates) establishes a common ground, some assertion which is manifestly true, at least to the participants. He then proceeds to show that this initial assertion necessarily implies (1) another but more controversial assertion posited by the advocate, and/or (2) the opposite of some assertion posited by the opposing advocate. The only analogue to this discourse in *Walden* consists in movement from the "common ground" of literal fact and then proceeding to introduce the more figurative. Most of the chapters in *Walden*, it is true, begin concretely; their first sentences are readily comprehensible. (See, e.g., "Economy," "Where I Lived," "The Bean-Field," "The Village," "The Ponds," "Brute Neighbors," "House-Warming," "Former Inhabitants," "Winter Animals," and "Spring.") The "turn" in the argument, however, goes unchecked in *Walden*; it lacks the distinct incremental steps and strictly logical connections of the *Gorgias* and depends instead on what may be called, for lack of a better term, the imaginative leap. Whereas the *Gorgias* discourse proceeds almost like a finely tuned machine, the *Walden*

discourse proceeds like a ballet. In both discourses the broad appeal is to truth, but whereas in the *Gorgias* this appeal is primarily to logic, the appeal in *Walden* is to something else, to a certain sympathy. The difference is fundamental. In the *Gorgias*, argument can proceed methodically: when apparent contradictions arise either the contradiction is reconciled or the self-contradictory party concedes. But in *Walden*, the only real authority, essentially, is the discourses himself, who easily becomes, for purposes of the argument at hand, omniscient. Inadvertently or not, *Walden* might be said to entail the same claim to inexorability as art or music. Both involve the same unilateral porousness, which is to say that meaning filters outward but refutation is futile, itself absurd.

In *Walden*, furthermore, private experience is not only the resource but the salient limitation of Thoreau's discourse. *Walden* might well be considered a *fictional* discourse, which is to say that it is an insufficient language for talking about the world and improving it, and that it cannot be regarded as altogether "successful" even when judged by its own stated purposes. Thoreau claims to address "mainly the mass of men who are discontented, and idly complaining of the hardness of their lot or of the times, when they might improve them." But does *Walden*, qua recommendation for living, play ostrich, so to speak; does it fail to negotiate with the so-called Real World? Granted that Thoreau does not recommend that the masses abandon their affairs and take up residence in proximity to a pond. But if not that, what? Can the simplification of life or the living of "life near the bone" really improve the quality of life? Is this a realistic pursuit for all those who lack Thoreau's mental and emotional faculties and who cannot find poignancy in the mundane? Does it necessarily follow that because we can participate in and feel that we "appreciate," more or less, the experience that the *Walden* discourse exudes, we can enjoy a comparable experience on our own, that we can emancipate ourselves into a world of incessant novelty and freshness and vivaciousness, or anything close to it? Is it enough to say, as Thoreau does, that "a man . . . must maintain himself in whatever attitude he finds himself though obedience to the laws of his being which will never be one of opposition to a just government . . ."? Are there no psychological or socioeconomic constraints on the ability of modern men to assimilate *Walden* into their lives? These questions obviously import the imponderables, but they are certainly not answered in a book which shows only that one man, Thoreau, could enjoy the kind of experience that *Walden* represents and espouses. *Walden* is plausible as a language of meaning, but as an argument for what all men can do for themselves, for their consciousnesses, it is not; as such its persuasiveness rests on our faith in the sacred text that *Walden* may inspire us to believe it is.



## TWO POEMS BY STUART FRIEBERT

### *ANOTHER ONE FOR DAD*

When I was small, I'd come to hear him talk of death,  
 he'd be sitting in the basement near his carved mallards,  
 his slippers falling off his feet, having just driven some  
 slivers up his hairy arm and the next thing I knew he was  
 in the hospital. They were treating him for blood poisoning!  
 I didn't even know what good he'd done in this world besides  
 winning all those watches for selling perfume at Liggett's.

When I grew up a little more, I came home one day to find him  
 on the couch, with rags all over his body to stop the blood  
 and mom crying it was a miracle, he'd fallen out of the car  
 turning the corner. She yelled at me for asking how the car  
 was and I vowed then to teach myself to copy him, even if  
 he were just sweeping up downstairs, gathering a little dust.

So you think I'm about to lie when I tell you I worry about him  
 all the time now? Just sitting there while the rest of us talk,  
 Ben boasting, Ruthie responding as if she were taking a husband  
 to the grave. I'll be skipping this visit the next time around, Pop.

### *ON BEING PERFECT*

My father's old and lame in one leg. He takes  
 advantage of this to attack me for his views on  
 grace, the Brewers' chances, the papal election.  
 His house, in which I lived for twenty years, is  
 painted a drunk and stupid blue. In my fear of him  
 I moved to the university when I was twenty-one, by  
 which time his complaints about how long I stayed  
 in the shower, how much paint was peeling from walls,  
 no longer made me wince. Though he'd go on and on to  
 my mother or anyone who came to visit, especially Ann  
 Horodick that the length he'd handed me had been put  
 where it was going to be of the least use. I'm twice as  
 old now, go home twice as little. When I do, I deny in all  
 truth having done anything of the sort. Which gets him  
 to try his favorite line again, "You're perfect, ain't you?"

## TWO POEMS BY THOMAS P. PICKETT

### *HUNTING THE END*

The deer stopped beside my last footprint,  
 tensed with a breeze and was gone.  
 As he ran from shade to sunlight  
 he turned broad shoulder and polished bones,  
 stepping down a dream of trails  
 that opened after.  
 He left the woods perfectly still  
 and listening.

Shall we the fire? after wind and snow  
 calling me mad on my chest,  
 after hand, breast, small ankles,  
 sweat pools, swinging on collar bones  
 and inching inching into you?  
 Or maybe we can I can  
 pool all the days and venture a gain:  
 a blur of sparrowing snow  
 a flat palm on an open plain  
 camels walking on the point of a finger  
 the bald eye of a widow sewing  
 children eating green cows  
 and playing with their dung  
 touching here and there among the born  
 and then there and here.

A thousand mile inland flight  
 reaches wings several rhythms above  
 the swamp opens its exploded mouth;  
 moonlight questions the hollow of  
 his hand.

It's hard to be humble  
 to relax with ideas or give them up  
 to stop stringing perfection  
 to stop referring and explaining  
 to write while you breathe.

But is it so easy for these thoughts?  
 Mark them. They crawl away.  
 I think not all is right.  
 Some flame is extinguishing the air,  
 some odor of burning marrow,  
 and I should be there.

So alone would I be,  
                   a rock on a mince of dirt —  
 that death would take its stare apart  
 piece by piece.

flocks circling in the dark  
 glowing mushrooms and rocks that blink  
 a deer stretching in its bed and steaming  
 stars floating away on a night stream  
 the scratch of a bat  
 owls in their crawlways    watching

Because I know so much  
                   sometimes I feel there's nothing inside to save.  
 Oh yes, I understand the tea kettle  
                   as I rise    falling    squat,  
 but what is there already,  
 or are we just too dumb?

snow    like albino horses    galloping over eyes  
 I speak, but of nothing,  
                   a wax figurine flashing melting smiles.  
 My left foot keeps pace.  
 I'm not going to rush out  
 and seed the coming storm with my brains,  
 but I would like to know. . .

flake    paws    earlobe

### *EGG POEM*

never mind the eggs  
                   or understatement,  
 no blood    not much imagination,  
                   just a smidgen of intellect;  
 because before the words must come:  
 the tiny burp of a new born,  
                   wings of wood ducks,  
                   other words.  
                   Let's relearn everything,  
 starting with how to pick a flower —  
                   only one per life,  
                   only imagine you pick it,  
                   and the beauty is in    reaching.

I'm staring into the lighted yolks of 5,000 eggs moving past.  
 I can't laugh.

**APPARENT ANGULAR DIAMETER**

But why said I to me  
Can I not see the harvest moon at midnight  
Mammoth  
Floating among stars  
As when it rose?  
Because said me to I  
You cannot lift the sky.  
Your  
Horizon's  
Twenty miles off or so,  
Your sky is  
Maybe  
Half the radius of that.  
Could you but stand with Atlas  
On the heights  
And see the Ptolemaic circle of the sky,  
Then would your moon  
Flood the lofty heavens.  
But we have always been  
Keplerites  
and elliptical.

**RUTH BERMAN**

**UPON THE DEATH OF THE  
NEIGHBORHOOD CAITIFF**

They say you died, mean man.  
You tapped your scabby tongue its last.  
You crammed your scowl its limit.

Still I hear the dark gripes  
behind your poor wife's window  
your nagging screams at barking dogs.

I see your baggy stance  
across the yards.

If you've gone and died, old guy,  
who shouts from hooked mouth  
on the dearest mornings of the year?  
Who wrecks my nicest nights?

I fear the bolts are off the box.  
You are alive until  
I hear your hoot no more.

Enjoy the moment's rouse, mean man, then  
time will rest you better.

CAROL DUNNE



## THE METAL EATER

All my life I have wanted to eat metal.  
As a child I chewed on the button legs of refrigerators  
and at the cleaned white sides of stoves.  
I was always scolded and sent to small rooms  
of cloth and wood.

In dreams I would eat the shiny pistons  
and carburetors of new engines,  
the oily crankcases of buses,  
and the nozzles of gas pumps.  
Nothing could stop me.

I would walk down streets longing for fire hydrants  
and truck fenders.  
I would beg for bobbypins and ear rings and metal clasps.  
I groaned for sweet aluminum doors and windows,  
the polished steel of vaults, the strong smell  
of I-beams in old basements.

Once

I was locked in a steel house, inches thick.  
I ate to the outside a hole big enough  
for graceful cranes and deep green tanks.  
I ran to the junkyards where I sat  
hidden inside old wrecks eating broken dashboards,  
the bent silvery knobs of radios, heaters,  
air-conditioners, turn signals;  
then the rusted wheels of flat tires, muddy axles,  
twisted floors, dented roofs, transmissions, oil pans,  
screws, bolts . . .

Until men chased me by shouting  
and throwing fistfuls of dirt  
back  
to the grassy central parks of bridal paths,  
vacant lots of ragweed, rubbers, dismembered doll bodies,  
playgrounds of chlorinated pools and abandoned trees,  
backyard gardens of sprays, sticks and stakes  
for tomatoes and peas,

hoes, rakes, shovels, wheelbarrows, knives, scissors,  
 red gloves, and sunbonnets,  
 and window shrubs stuck in redwood buckets  
 of brass trim,  
 spider plants and begonias atop file cabinets,  
 vases of red roses, daffodils, and yellow mums  
 on the night stands of hospitals.

ROBERT P. COOKE

### THE METAL RAPE

I had heard them all talking about the lamb  
 and the blood of the lamb.  
 I didn't know they were talking about me  
 That it is my blood, that I am the lamb.

I have watched people married and seen the little children  
 Whose ages I cannot recognize.

What it is to be a woman is nothing like being a flower  
 The flower opens and closes softly.  
 Women do open and close like that  
 Taking pleasure from it.  
 But there are other times  
 Women are forced open with instruments of metal — not like flowers.  
 Open me like flowers and you may call me anything you wish.

I said let me see his face first, talk to him.  
 He leaned over smiling, "How are you? Nervous, yes, I know."  
 He didn't know. Let me see his face, talk to him.  
 When the pain was over, but it is not over.  
 It is never over, when I collapsed crying  
 In the black woman's soft fat arms.  
 He walks to his desk a foot away, sits down  
 To write. He no longer says how are you.  
 It is the noise that bothers him.  
 The woman and I are making loud noises together, holding each other.  
 It is the noise that bothers him.

MELANIE GAUSE HARRIS

## A LETTER FROM JOHN BENNETT TO JAY B. HUBBELL

ERMA P. WHITTINGTON

When asked in April 1929 by the editors of the new publication *American Literature* what the probable future of Duke University was in the way of a special collection in the library, the Chairman of the Board, Jay Broadus Hubbell, replied that he hoped the library would build a strong collection of American literature with emphasis upon the literature and culture of the Southern States. The editors agreed that the proposal was a good one and at a luncheon which he gave in their honor proceeded subtly to tell President William Preston Few and Secretary-Treasurer Robert Lee Flowers about the opportunity Duke University had for building such an important collection. President Few was impressed and soon suggested one of many trips to search out valuable, available materials.<sup>1</sup> Hubbell, encouraged by Few's interest, began writing to persons who he thought might know of the locations of southern literary books and papers. Among his correspondents was John Bennett of Charleston, South Carolina.

Although a native of Chillicothe, Ohio, and editor of its *Daily News*, John Bennett (1865-1957) readily adopted Charleston as his home when he was ordered to move south for his health. In Charleston Bennett met Susan Adger Smythe. They were married in 1902 and made Charleston their permanent home. With his reporter's curiosity John Bennett ferreted out legends and tales of the city and its people and wove them into *The Treasure of Peyre Gaillard* and *Madame Margot, A Grotesque Legend of Old Charleston*.

Shortly after World War I Hervey Allen, DuBose Heyward, and John Bennett began meeting weekly at the Bennett home to read, discuss, and criticize the poems of the two younger men. Bennett's critical standards and literary tastes, though a little old-fashioned for the times, exerted a lasting and stabilizing influence on the youthful poets. Out of these Wednesday night meetings grew an enthusiasm for a literary revival in the South. To seek the mass of literary treasure that lay waiting to be discovered and to prove that the South could produce a worthy literature the three men founded the Poetry Society of South Carolina. The Society brought critics and poets of note to Charleston and sponsored contests for original works in order to stimulate writing by southern authors. Hubbell was asked to be sole judge in the Blindman contest in 1926.

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<sup>1</sup> Jay B. Hubbell, *South and Southwest* (Durham, N. C., 1965), p. 42.

Thus it was to John Bennett that he turned in 1929 when he was seeking help in locating available and interesting literary collections in that area.

The letter which is printed below with Hubbell's permission is John Bennett's reply to his request for information concerning southern materials that could be found in plantation houses, book stores, or private collections and that might be made available to Duke University in its efforts to become the leading collector of southern literature.

May 16th, 1929:

Jay B. Hubbell, Esq.,  
Duke University Press.  
Dear Mr. Hubbell:—

Your letter of April 25th has lain too long unanswered. I wished to make a few inquiries before replying. Southern literature is a wide field. My information upon it is not wide. My study of it is narrowly academic. I am not a native; this you may know; and have lived in Charleston but thirty years. I have smattered a little. What I have really worked upon has been negro music, folk-lore, dialects, and the period of Carolina history comprised by and inclusive of the dates, 1765-1795. I have not travelled in the South; nor visited many libraries, either public or private.

My greatest source of information and reference in Southern Literature has been the collections of the Charleston Library Society:—Charleston has as yet no public library.

Miss Ellen M. FitzSimons, the able librarian of this Society, is of opinion that you might find it well worth your while, at outset of your plan, to avail yourself of some early opportunity to look over the collections of the University of South Carolina, at Columbia, and of the Charleston Library Society . . . if only to check up, from their possessions, your prefatory lists of availables, desirables, essentials, and negligibles.

The Society Library is strong in history source-material. This you say is already well represented with you. They have more, review, or pre-view, of which, Miss FitzSimons thinks, might be worth your while. As to that I cannot say.

They possess some few desirable duplicates, odd numbers and broken sets of Charleston magazines, obtained from gifts and in purchasing in block to fill out their own sets by selection. They have exchanged with others . . . as the University of Virginia . . . to mutual advantage.

From such exact knowledge as I possess, which, frankly is little, there remains . . . I may be mistaken . . . little to be secured from the old plantation-houses of low-country South Carolina.

They caught hell in the late Sixties. They caught hell as early as

the American Revolution . . . when, after Prevost's Raid,<sup>2</sup> books from plantation-home libraries tributary to Charlestown were scattered like autumn leaves from Charleston to Stono, and thence through the coastal islands, southward to Savannah. Of these the old Gazettes prove that something was recovered; but not much.

I have believed that much early pamphleteering was then dispersed and lost. This again was even more true of the '60's, and the necessitous dispersal of marketable books which followed, and has continued to this day.

Even more destructive, I believe, has been the sale of plantation after plantation to Northern capitalists, and the clearance, restoration or reconstruction of the old plantation houses to meet the views of men seeking only winter homes and hunting-preserves, not places where thought might invite itself to old books. There are really very few old plantation homes left still in the possession of the historic owners; their number lessens almost daily . . . or has lessened almost daily during the heart of the real estate seasons of the past three years.

Remnant libraries thus have been dispersed among the heirs, or abandoned by them to inevitable destruction.

The burning of many plantation-houses has lessened the number which survived the war. During my memory several homes have thus gone up in smoke: Dockawn house was burned to the ground in the constant absence of a resident family; the negroes rescued nothing of a considerable library which I had seen there. Whether this represented the collections of the several branches of the Barker family,<sup>3</sup> from Mulberry, Wappoola and Dockawn<sup>4</sup> itself, I do not know.

The casting-out of boxed and barrelled remnant MSS, pamphlet,

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<sup>2</sup> In December 1778 after the British had captured Savannah, Georgia, General Augustine Prevost with 4000 choice troops flanked by Indians and loyalists marched northward to capture Charles Town. All along the way Prevost's men sacked, burned, and robbed the plantation houses and drove away the livestock. Arriving at Charles Town, Prevost sent word to General William Moultrie to surrender. Moultrie refused. When the British saw that Moultrie's men were ready to fight and heard that General Lincoln was coming with reinforcements they withdrew in boats to Beaufort.

<sup>3</sup> The Barker family lived on South Mulberry Plantation sometimes called "The Home Place." Dr. Sanford Barker, a botanist, married Christine Broughton of North Mulberry. Dr. Barker was a descendant of Col. Barker, who was defeated by the Indians at Barker's Savannah.

<sup>4</sup> *Dockon* (Dockawn) *Plantation* on the west branch of the Cooper River was originally owned by Jaques DuBose. In 1742 it became the property of Joseph and Samuel Wragg. It was later owned by Thomas Ferguson whose fifth wife was Anne Wragg. *Mulberry Plantation*, located on a bluff overlooking the Cooper River, was built in 1714 by Thomas Broughton and continued in the Broughton family for two hundred years. In 1921 it was owned by Clarence E. Chapman. It now is the home of Mrs. Marion Brawley. *Wappoola* (Wappahoola, Wappaoola, Wappacolah) *Plantation* house was built on the Wappoola Creek, a branch of the Cooper River, in 1806 by the Rev. Milward Porgson, whose wife Henrietta Wragg had inherited the land. It later became the property of Francis William Heyward.



## A LETTER FROM JOHN BENNETT

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magazine, book, and personal correspondence material at times of sale to strangers who cared nothing for the whole, has been one great source of loss and destruction.

Whether there remain, in the city, libraries and remnant libraries containing much material for you or not, I cannot say. The large and valuable library of Dr. Bellinger,<sup>5</sup> containing much that would have made your eyes run tears, after storage in boxes and barrels in unaired, damp basement rooms, where terrible damage was done by saturation and white ants . . . was dumped en masse into the ignorant hands of two negro second-hand household-goods dealers. With little means at our disposal, with definite purpose, I managed to save something from the Bellinger collection for the Museum of Charleston . . . but not in "literary" lines. There were two Northern collectors, or agents, [who] got much valuable material: the rest went God knows where.

Judge Henry A. Middleton Smith's<sup>6</sup> library was mainly composed of original local MSS. history, maps, and historical record volumes; and at his death was not dispersed, but given in block to the South Carolina Historical Society. The Wm. Hinson<sup>7</sup> library, (of James Island), with an illuminative section devoted to volumes produced in or pertinent to the South in general, but mainly made up of Southern History, and, of that, particularly material relative to the Confederate War, was put at the first disposal of the Charleston Library Society, which, I believe, has the cream of this collection; the heirs retaining the rest, which would not contain much to your purpose.

The library of J. P. Kennedy Bryan,<sup>8</sup> inheritance from old Glen Roy, the King place, had some choice things, but was not large, nor wide, and has been, I believe, broken up and dispersed among the several heirs, or sold; I do not know positively.

The largest of the private libraries hereabouts, which survived the great vicissitudes of the past least damaged by them, was the library of the late Augustine T. Smythe,<sup>9</sup> the collected libraries of Hon. Langdon

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Bellinger may have been Dr. John Bellinger, who is mentioned in v. 41, p. 71 and v. 47, p. 22 of the *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, or possibly Dr. Martin Bellinger, v. x1, p. 97, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Henry A. Middleton Smith, 1853-1924, writer and judge of the U. S. District Court.

<sup>7</sup> William Godber Hinson, b. 1838, planter on James Island.

<sup>8</sup> John P. Kennedy Bryan, b. 1852, lawyer and judge. He was a member of the Bryan and Bryan Law Firm and was married to Henrietta C. King of Charleston, S. C.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine Thomas Smythe, b. 1842, lawyer and businessman, the son of the Rev. Thomas Smyth. He married Louisa McCord, the daughter of D. J. McCord.

Cheves,<sup>10</sup> Col. D. J. McCord,<sup>11</sup> of Columbia, and Rev. Thomas Smyth,<sup>12</sup> of Charleston, much added to by Mr. Smythe and his wife, (who had been Miss McCord, granddaughter of Langdon Cheves) . . . into whose possession the accumulated libraries came. This really large collection was rich in pamphlet material, Southern magazines, and general literature. But within the past year [it] has been broken up and scattered among the many immediate and prospective inheritors by partition of the estate: each heir holds to his portion with a jealous appreciation and attachment. Only some considerable correspondence covering the full period of the Confederate war has been transcribed for the family, and the originals deposited with the South Carolina Historical Society for the use of students of that period.

There did remain considerable magazine and pamphlet material in the old library at Medway House,<sup>13</sup> on Back River, (owned by the S. G. Stoney<sup>14</sup> family, . . . Mrs. Stoney is my wife's sister), from which I assisted in rescuing some Southern magazine files and "firsts" for safer keeping than half-deserted plantation-houses afford; but this is appreciated by the family, and, I think, would inevitably be first parted with, if at all, to some South Carolina foundation, if not capable of equable division among the heirs, who are passionately devoted to all that belonged to the old age and the old place.

What there may be still in scattered homesteads of less pretentious sort I cannot even guess. James Henry Rice,<sup>15</sup> of Brick House Plantation, Chee-Haw, has a valuable library; but is himself the collector: whether, after him, his family . . . not wealthy nor widely educated, but quite admirable . . . will part with his collection remains, naturally, altogether upon the knees of the gods. Rice is in constant motion, deaf as a stone, a character, and to all appearance, horse-strong and bull-sound.

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<sup>10</sup> Langdon Cheves, 1776-1857, banker and congressman. He was known as the "Hercules of the U. S. Bank" for his work in putting the bank in order and strengthening its resources.

<sup>11</sup> David James McCord, 1797-1855, Columbia, S. C., banker, lawyer, editor, and legislator.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Smyth, 1808-1873, clergyman and philanthropist. He was minister of the Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston. He gave his library to the Columbia Theological Seminary.

<sup>13</sup> Medway House was built by Jan Van Arrsens, Seigneur de Weirnhoudt, who led a company of Dutch settlers to Carolina. His widow, Sabina de Vignon, married the first Landgrave Thomas Smith, who became governor of Carolina in 1693. Medway, the setting for John Bennett's *The Treasure of Peyre Gaillard*, was owned in 1921 by Samuel Gaillard Stoney.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Gaillard Stoney, 1853-1926, a planter and raiser of livestock. He was married to Louisa Cheves Smythe, daughter of the Rev. Thomas Smyth and the sister of Augustine T. Smythe and Susan Adger Bennett.

<sup>15</sup> James Henry Rice, 1868-1935, South Carolina naturalist, conservationist, and local historian from Wiggins, S. C.

## A LETTER FROM JOHN BENNETT

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A few years ago, roaming with Hervey Allen,<sup>16</sup> he, Heyward<sup>17</sup> and I, came upon a vacant house in deserted Legareville, and there found several bookcases full of books and papers, into which I was wild to get, but was still too honest to invade. I fetched off from a lower room, abandoned to destruction on the floor, a backless copy of Sterne's "Sentimental Journey". . . but the upper room was murky, the danger of fire made us cautious; we saw but dimly, coveted, and came away: since then the whole affair has been bodily removed by a crass islander who would not give a tinker's dam for all the books 'pon 'tap Edisto.

Loot from old homes, abandoned during, and lost after, the War, turns up from time to time in possession of negroes, and by them, or poor whites, or those reckless and reduced, is disposed of, by petty sale or gift, to the junk-department of the Star Gospel Mission<sup>18</sup> in this city, or our one second-hand book-shop . . . whose present owner knows very little of what is or is not desirable. There was, a few years ago, another shop kept by a Capt. Dixon, a strange and anomalous retired sea-captain, where Hervey Allen found quite a bit of early Edgar Poe print; but that shop is long closed and the Captain gone somewhere unknown . . . into das ewigkeit.

There was a quite descended and abased Seabrook, here, who knew and collected, for sale . . . his sole support . . . the floating material about the city, and found much, assembled much, sold no little; of him Yates Snowden,<sup>19</sup> S. C. University, had many choice items. But he is dead, and what became of his dusty and wildly-assembled stock I do not know; not even if it was looked over intelligently after his demise. Henry B. Kirk, proprietor of Hammond's old Book Shop in this city . . . the last . . . is himself a collector of sorts, and a kinsman of DuBose Seabrook, here referred to; and he may have undertaken disposal of Seabrook's remnants: I never asked, having no spare funds to put into book-collecting.

This, indeed, is all I know of the opportunities offered in this section to one in search of Southern literature for such a fine foundation as

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<sup>16</sup> Hervey Allen, 1889-1949, novelist and poet, author of *Anthony Adverse* and *Israfel*. In 1918 when he met DuBose Heyward and John Bennett he was teaching at Porter Military Academy in Charleston, S. C.

<sup>17</sup> DuBose Heyward, 1885-1940, novelist, playwright, and poet. He was born in Charleston and is best known as the author of *Porgy*.

<sup>18</sup> Star Gospel Mission was founded 24 April 1904, by the Rev. Obadiah Dugan, a reformed gambler. The purpose of the mission was to give homeless men and boys shelter, food, clothing, and religious instruction. The mission, still in operation, stays open day and night admitting everyone believed worthy of assistance. (Information provided by Louise N. Mazoral, Librarian, *News and Courier*, Charleston, S. C.)

<sup>19</sup> Yates Snowden, 1858-1933, Professor of History at the University of South Carolina and the author of *The History of South Carolina*.

you propose. One better acquainted with the old plantation families and their bare inheritances could tell you more, perhaps, than I . . . or could most certainly; but, so far as my limited knowledge of these old homes goes, my nephew, Sam G. Stoney,<sup>20</sup> of New York, knew more, in his sheer affection for such knowledge, than any other to whom I might refer. (Sam was the lad who was selected to make the permanent record of our coastal negro dialect, Gullah, for Columbia University.) My nephew, Albert Simons,<sup>21</sup> and his partner, Sam Lapham,<sup>21</sup> appreciators and architects, who have rebuilt, restored, and replaced many of the plantation-houses recently acquired by Northern capitalists, report the utter discard of all debris by the new-comers . . .

Now as to your further query, regarding Timrod<sup>22</sup> as a subject fit and worthy of a doctoral thesis. I have never considered him such; he bulks too small and too unsure of portent. But my opinion may be heresy. I don't pronounce. Think what you will; I shall not debate it. I can, however, tell you that F. A. Cummings, of the faculty of Purdue University, a native South Carolinian, from Spartanburg, is making an exhaustive study of Timrod, his antecedents, his life and his work . . . a careful workman, and most thorough. He has made very exhaustive use of all existing MSS. material . . . of which there is little attributable to Timrod himself . . . almost everything of Timrod's own has been already printed and little exists beyond it . . . and of the "commonplace book," or private "note-book" kept by Timrod's father . . . and of all Timrod material accessible in both Charleston Library and State University collections: Cummings spent several months here, a year ago, in his research.

This, together with Henry Thompson's<sup>23</sup> recent undefinitive volume of contribution, appears to me preventively to cover the ground against worth-while further essay.

I have not yet seen a copy of the new journal, *American Literature*. I debated a subscription; but have felt that, since it seems to be devoted to research, for which, at my age, I have little time, my own work imperatively crying for intensive absorption, the magazine was not for me, so poignantly concerned with pure creation rather than even desirable scholarship; so have not subscribed . . . even though I have ever felt

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Gaillard Stoney, b. 1891, writer, historian, son of S. G. Stoney in note 14, and the nephew of John Bennett.

<sup>21</sup> Albert Simons, b. 1890, and Samuel Lapham, b. 1892, are Charleston architects who formed in 1920 the architectural firm of Simons and Lapham. They have restored many plantations.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Timrod, 1828-1867.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Tazewell Thompson, b. 1859, author of *Henry Timrod, Laureate of the Confederacy*, published in 1928.

## A LETTER FROM JOHN BENNETT

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moved to lend the support of subscription to all promising and worthwhile publications in the South. I should, truly, be pleased to see a copy of the May number, should you feel disposed to send me one; there may be others here more directly related to its first interest, including the Charleston Library Society's Southern magazine department . . . which I suppose you have well circularized already.

That I have pardoned your length should be obvious from the extent of my reply; I have little time to spare to unforgiveable correspondents; but you are ever most welcome to anything I can do for you. I regret that my knowledge is less than you supposed.

I wish you all the good fortune in the world in making at Duke such a collection as is proposed . . . but as for myself, the happy acquirement of scholarship must give place to the imminency of creative efforts . . . if I am, myself, to remain in print such stuff as is to be collectible by Duke. I am hard at one effort now. I have more planned than time will permit: a murrain on life's pretty brevity. With cordial regard,

Faithfully yours:

/s/ John Bennett.



**ACT NATURAL**

The poem's as false as photographs;  
fake as the famous silver screen.

We pose for glossy images, film  
or word: aim for reality; take

only the genuine fraud, seeming-  
to-be-what-is. Pretense in lyric

gives the worst offense, making  
the greater claims. Strict cutting

out of cant, abstraction, hint  
of intelligence, studied grace,

leaves us to take from the acid tray  
fixed candor, enlarged appearances:

directness life never knows,  
true contact, and spontaneity;

brains in an absolute focus, bodies  
completely there. *Hold it!* we cry.

JOHN DITSKY

**CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE**

the mothers of sons are lonely  
women, with withered breasts, standing  
around, listening  
to the feverish chatter  
of women who bore daughters,  
snatching up crumbs of conversation,  
ready to break in with bits of their lives,  
how their sons treat them.

the broken pieces of bread thrown their way.

only this morning  
I heard myself say  
to the mother of a daughter  
as I spoke of a book my son  
lent me, "Mother," said he, "read it.  
I think you will get something out of it."

I took it in my hands  
lifted like a chalice  
to my lips and  
called myself blessed.

DOROTHY GRACEY

## POEM FROM A BASEMENT

This spring, I stayed away from the botanical gardens and missed the flowering of the cherries. You gave me cherry cokes to keep me home; chocolate cherry bonbons to keep me there.

I who should have been Angel, Coppelia or the swan's girl, must stick by you; stick out opening nights with divers cans of Almond Roca.

When I was memorizing my part, you brought me a case full; when I was getting dressed to go on, you insisted on a full carton. I who should have been Angel am snapping ginger and washing down with a cola called the Royal Crown; and my head is unadorned.

I am a basement Venus, who scratches recognition from feet which pass our apartment at eye level, but I keep my hands off the sidewalk and my fingers off the sidewalk.

This spring I stayed away from the botanical gardens and missed the flowering of the cherries. You gave me cherry cokes to keep me home; chocolate cherry bonbons to keep me there.

I who should have moved off stage on dry ice clouds, shared botanical on an elevated dais at the lake on the Swan's Lake; I who should have been Diana must stick by you, stick out opening nights with divers cans of Almond Roca.

"Robbie, will you bring me a cola . . . and uh . . . get one for yourself!" I hurry to get them, accepting caresses or just participating in a program of your choice at five o'clock, at eight o'clock and then again at ten.

Buddha-style, I sit on your cot and paint my nails. My eyes are two fiery balls of amber, so people looking in the window think that your apartment is a chapel.

I close my eyes. In a dark, empty theater, the film strips begin. Boughs of cherry blossoms are fragrant and wildly colored.

But sometimes, the film sags and breaks; and the audience (me) becomes restless. "Have a Cola!" I drink it. The film goes again. I close my eyes. But now there is a line down the middle of each pulsating bloom. I begin to cry because a rasping noise indicates that the end is near. I who should have been Coppelia, et cetera.

ROBIN MCCORQUODALE

**THE ASTER, THE WEED, AND THE GAME**

(FOR ETHAN)

Pine needles lie heavily in the garden,  
The shrew lies where the cat has dropped it,  
Only the asters survive among the weeds.  
My host adjusts the volume control  
To let the Series into autumn's salient.  
The mind divides itself between  
The transitory and the seasonal,  
The aster and the fumbled ball.  
The home run takes a curtain call.  
The aster colors the October wind.  
What we will talk of all next week,  
Childish, and slipping through our hands,  
Touches the aster less than the weed.  
The pine needles warm the azalea bushes.  
We see the salmon blossoms of azaleas  
Six months before spring blossoming.  
A game compels our shifting moods:  
Our allegiance denying us the calm  
Of the fragrant October day. The aster  
Will win, but not until our present  
Involvement is over, and we are free  
To admit the weed and the aster  
Into the center of the predictable.

ALLEN KANFER

## LOCUS

## #12

Like all dreams this could never last.  
He woke to a world rational as glass.  
Predictable as clockwork he punched in,  
settled to the task: he tracked down  
planets in their paths, greased  
a brand new axle for the sky, set right  
the flywheel of his mind, disparaged  
eccentricity, picked his brains and numbered  
all his bones. He made himself at home.

On his way to lunch he slipped on wet grass.  
The attractive earth beckoned and he sat.  
There ought to be a law, he muttered,  
and there was. He inclined himself  
toward the plain truth and spoke: I think  
I am. He marvelled at the differences this made.  
Then he geared down for the long haul  
downhill, positive that his differential  
would keep him steady on the curves.

His vocabulary was elegant and trim,  
a perfect separation from the facts.  
He catalogued his wilderness in books,  
climbed a ladder halfway up the sky,  
tamed a troop of angels to stage  
a sideshow on a pin. The weather  
was cool and sunny as a rose.  
What lovely dreams of dreams slid  
past his eye. There was nothing left to know.

But then thick fogs rolled up the shore  
and things began to rust; the grease  
so right for sunlight congealed at night.



There was friction in the works. He felt  
 the axle give. The timeclock stopped;  
 he punched out with his fist. His flywheel  
 grew eccentric and he shook. Insomnia  
 set in. His nerves were shot.  
 This is a crying shame he said and cried.

PAUL KAMEEN

## LETTER IN MARCH

(FOR C.R.)

The crocuses which part the snow today  
 will be lost loveliness before you part  
 your lips in promises. The hollow heart  
 will pump a river, as hearts are wont to do,  
 and since the core is what flows through the clay,  
 is not of clay, it might be wise to admit  
 the possibility of the mutable  
 in matters of its valved and frail dominion.  
 After all, the arbutus will be dust  
 as well by then, and we will see species  
 to dazzle the most jaded eyes, and sting  
 the nostrils. If the heart is to remain  
 faithful, it must bless all the rushing  
 drops which form the river; and so the eye  
 must caress each known or nameless blossom  
 before it can claim to be true. The gardener knows,  
 as well as we, that with a little care  
 domestic bulbs render us the same  
 beauty that wild roots give us for none.  
 Well, similar. Which is only to say,  
 we all plow down the path our feet are put on  
 shunning interchangeability,  
 the better part of muddling we can learn.

(I'm only hashing that wizard of a tale-  
 teller, Isak Dinesen, who has  
 one of her taletellers say  
 that to love God "you must love change,  
 and you must love a joke, these being  
 the true inclinations of his own  
 heart." With my love for the absurd,  
 I can see you in an ecru turban  
 ravelling your ecru gown to Wagner.)  
 Dear heart, when you are sharing violets  
 and rain, which is the best that any of us  
 can do, and your tears are bottled for a distant  
 desert day, somewhere far from here  
 I will share a wineglass with a haunted stranger  
 and drink you valveless joy, the deepest carnelian  
 that life allows, and rivers through your heart,  
 and crocuses when they come again.

Note: The Dinesen quotation is from "The Dreamers" in  
*Seven Gothic Tales*, New York, 1934, p. 355.

J. R. KANGAS

## REVIEWS

Donald Davie. *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1978, 210 pp. \$9.95.

This short but vivid and provocative book consists of the Clark Lectures given at Cambridge in 1976, with an additional thirty-odd pages of 'Notes' which amplify some of the arguments. Davie is concerned with the Dissenting tradition's contribution to English literature and culture since the late seventeenth century—a contribution which he argues is important if in some ways very limited. His aim is frankly polemical: as he puts it, "clearing the dissenting tradition of various libels that circulate about it."

He ranges widely, looking at writers as diverse as Bunyan, Mathew Green, Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, William Blake, George Eliot, 'Mark Rutherford,' and D. H. Lawrence. One of his central propositions is that there is an aesthetic specifically linked to religious Dissent. Its characteristic virtues were 'simplicity, sobriety, and measure.' Important examples are the hymns of Isaac Watts, the prose of 'Mark Rutherford,' This severely restrained poetic echoes more recent poetics such as that of the "Objectivists" in the United States: Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Lorine Niedecker, and others. Compare, for instance, Zukofsky's praise of Reznikoff's poetic economy—"a process of active literary omission"—with Davie's description of the work of Watts as "tense with all the extravagances that it has been tempted by and has denied itself." This opens up an interesting field of inquiry: the relevance of this to the Quaker Basil Bunting is obvious.

But Davie's concern is not narrowly literary. It is the broader cultural role of Dissent and its literature which is the central concern of the lectures: "since what we are concerned with is English culture, our history cannot be a history of ideas, nor a history of events, nor yet a narrowly literary history, but a history of people and the styles in which they have lived." Thus he looks carefully at such Nonconformist intellectuals as Philip Doddridge, Robert Hall, and Charles Spurgeon.

While he accepts that there was a decline into intellectual philistinism in early nineteenth-century Dissent, Davie shows that there was a good deal of internal resistance to the process. Moreover, the initial impulse had come from within the Anglican Church, notably from the anti-cultural zeal of the Evangelicals. Matthew Arnold's well-known pronouncements against the culture of Victorian Dissent are examined and shown to be only partly justifiable.

Davie never hesitates to challenge academic orthodoxies. Christopher Hill is taken to task for repeating the stale truism that the eighteenth century was a period of religious torpor and intellectual sterility: this is a corollary of romanticizing seventeenth-century puritanism. He attacks unthinking use of the terms "puritan" and "dissent." The term "puritan" is as applicable to a whole spectrum of individuals and doctrines within the Church of England as it is to Dissent. And his attention to the imagery of Watts and Wesley enables him to demonstrate that the prurience associated with Dissent as such in fact emerged only after the mid-eighteenth century, and then as much among Anglicans as among Dissenters. Similarly, the term "Dissent" does not designate some simple unity—as though it were a theological football strip—but a complex and contradictory field of beliefs and practices: "In nearly every communion including the Established Church could be found, at any given date, the full range of the theological positions from the strictest Calvinism to Arminianism and indeed beyond." This is a salient challenge to the dubious tendency

to concentrate on religious attendance and the *quantification* of religious belief, forgetting the more important *qualitative* issues of religious history. Precisely what even a doctrinally precise position *actually meant* varied from place to place and from social group to social group.

Davie's engagement with his subject is refreshing. His own concern with Dissenting culture, he tells us, stems from a dual allegiance: his Baptist upbringing and his enthusiasm for literature. This book tells us a good deal about Davie's notions of his own work. But if this personal involvement gives the lectures their vigor and movement, it has its price. At times the scope narrows and there is emotional assertion instead of reasoned argument. On the whole problem of the meaning of the word "culture," for instance, he evades the full thrust of Dissenting influence on English historical development by narrowing his flanks: he restricts culture to the literary and spiritual. The relationships between these aspects of culture and the broader social and political dimensions of culture, according to Davie, "are still, as they have always been, too subtle and intricate for our historical scholarship to draw them out with any confidence." This is an evasion.

Edward Thompson is severely dealt with for his famous passages on Wesleyanism in *The Making of the English Working Class*. Davie complains about the way Charles Wesley's hymns are handled as literary evidence: "if poets are to be judged in this way, by scraps of verses torn from their context in poems and larger contexts in iconographic and literary tradition, with a flurry of words like 'masochistic' that have no place in either literary or social history, which of all our poets will 'scape whipping?'" As far as it goes, Davie's point is fair. But this—and some scattered remarks on Wesley's judicious approval of literary culture—cannot obscure the historical role of Wesleyanism in reshaping the *everyday culture* of large sectors of English society. The main thrust of Thompson's argument about the ideological function of Methodism in the transition to industrial society is ignored completely.

For the same reasons, the whole treatment of Victorian Dissent is flimsy and narrow: its contribution to the pattern of English social and cultural life in the Victorian period—though not embodied in "great men" or major works of literature—was considerable. Of course, thinking through the interconnections between literature, religion, and the broader culture and society *does* constitute a notoriously difficult problem, but it cannot be conjured away by humpty-dumpty rhetoric about the word "culture."

At the end of his final lecture, Davie threatens that some day he may publish a larger study which will "challenge received notions about the social and political history of English Dissent over the past three centuries." I hope he does. The result will be contentious and important. But a much wider conceptual framework and an attention to the social and political role of nineteenth-century Dissent—its part in temperance movements, in anti-militarism, in the development of social work, in the growth of the Liberal party, to give a few examples of a contribution central to the whole texture of English culture and society—will be necessary if his revisions are going to be of more than personal significance.

As far as it goes, *A Gathered Church* is a challenge which initiates debate on a whole range of issues in English culture and literature—a challenge also contained in some other recent pieces by Davie. It is a challenge which is already beginning to be taken up.

JOHN SEED  
The University of Leeds

Ronald Arthur Horton. *The Unity of "The Faerie Queene,"* Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1978, 226 pp. \$15.00.

Professor Horton's disarming prefatory claims to "traverse . . . familiar territory" and to prefer the obvious to the subtle, the intended to the unconscious, may lead the reader—as they did me initially—to undervalue his book's central arguments. In truth, though the book has its faults, it is an important addition to the canon of Spenser criticism, and one I will send my students to confidant that they will be soundly instructed in the principles by which *The Faerie Queene* is organized.

The book is arranged in three parts of two, four, and four chapters respectively, preceded by an introduction arguing that the "Letter to Raleigh" offers a "useful account of the poem" and a conclusion making explicit the controlling assumption that "the price of understanding the unity of *The Faerie Queene* is to take seriously the moral allegory." Although retaining vestiges of its origin as a doctoral dissertation (chiefly in its somewhat defensive stance toward and its often overstated claims about contemporary criticism), the more common excrescences of that genre have been pruned, leaving a tightly developed, and finally convincing, argument.

The two chapters of Part I locate the "ground plan" of Spenser's poem in the concept of "nurturing," a version of Sidney's idea that "the function of poetry is to form in the reader the image of virtue that has been formed by the poet in his fictional example." Arthur's dream of Gloriana is a "vision of the possibilities of moral perfection," and his "fashioning" within the poem is a "process of perfecting," by means of a "cumulative acquisition" of the virtues represented by the individual knights; this process simultaneously "fashions" the reader. Upon completing the projected poem, the reader, like Arthur, will have become an "exemplar of magnificence," fusing the ideal with the real. The process of nurturing occurs in a place "apart from the world of ordinary life": the poem's knights are "fostered" in the artificial environment of Fairyland, the reader in the artificial realm of the poem. As a setting, Fairyland has a threefold aspect: personally, it expresses the virtue of Elizabeth in her "administration of England's affairs"; spatially, it represents the "possibility of a united, civilized England"; and temporally it is the "goodness of antiquity . . . arrayed against the powers responsible for the deterioration of the later ages." Analogously for the reader the poem is a "garden of virtue" in two allegorical senses: a "pattern to be cultivated in the . . . mind and a paradise . . . for [his] instruction in moral philosophy." Spenser's arrangement of the virtues within this "great nursery" follows a medieval, Macrobian scheme in which a central "cardinal" virtue is bounded by "related virtues," e.g., Temperance in Book II by *pudicitia* (purity) and *castitas* in I and III; Justice in Book V by *amicitia* and *humanitas* in IV and VI.

In the second part, Horton elaborates a "principle of progression" whereby the twenty-four books projected in the Letter to Raleigh would form a natural sequence of development in which "action follows and perfects through exercise the contemplation by which the virtue was originally implanted upon the mind." Within this general progression, the virtues are arranged in complementary pairs, based on a distinction between natives of earth and those of Fairyland, so as to constitute an "assimilative progression within each pair of books from a virtue that is a spiritual absolute to a virtue that is an ethical norm deriving from a human frame of reference." Thus,

holiness and temperance are intrapersonal in their moral concerns and represent the domains of revealed religion and natural ethics in the quest for personal moral integrity. Chastity and friendship are interpersonal and represent the sexual and asexual kinds of attraction between persons in



the quest for enduring relationships between individuals. Justice and Courtesy are social and represent the domains of law and manners in the pursuit of social stability and harmony (p. 63).

Within this pairing, the experiences of the titular knights are "structured according to an opposition of temptations," pride versus despair, irascibility versus concupiscibility, etc.

Part III seeks to rebut the charge that *The Faerie Queene* is "redundant" by explaining a principle of "interlacing" according to which "in the case of apparent duplications, the reader is prepared to look for degrees of realization in which the second example has been invested with the results of the intervening allegory and presents a more complete view of the emerging conception than the first." The chief vehicles for this interlacing are what Horton terms *avatars*. Since a good deal of the freshness in Horton's contribution to Spenser criticism lies in this concept, I would like to return to it in some detail after first remarking more generally on the book's family connections within contemporary Spenser studies.

The preceding summary will make *The Unity of "The Faerie Queen"* appear more like a synthesis of one major strain of twentieth-century Spenser criticism than an original piece of critical scholarship. Synthesis is in fact one of its notable achievements. Horton has profited from a careful reading of most of twentieth-century criticism, his chief debts being to Rosamund Tuve's explication of the medieval scheme of virtues and vices and of interlaced romance structure; to William Nelson's insistence on the thematic integrity of the individual books of *The Faerie Queene*; to C. S. Lewis's notion of "allegorical cores"; and to the several critics who have illuminated parallel structures within the poem. If Horton has a critical antipathy, it is to Paul Alpers' denial of macroscopic or "spatial" structures in the poem. He depends heavily on Christie Ann Lerch's unpublished 1966 Bryn Mawr dissertation, "Spenser's Ideal of Civil Life: Justice and Charity in Books V and VI of *The Faerie Queene*," and he draws some sustenance from W. Nicholas Knight's little-noted essay in *RES*, 21 (1970). The notes refer overwhelmingly to secondary sources; notably absent from a list that is otherwise inclusive are Humphrey Tonkin, Angus Fletcher, Michael Murrin, and James Nohnberg. Although primary materials are cited infrequently, Horton's use of Cicero and his followers in the "moral virtue" tradition, particularly Bryskett, is acute, apt, and helpful.

Historically, critics of *The Faerie Queene* have divided roughly into camps: those who diminish the poem's conceptual rigor while exploring or praising its narrative-symbolic richness; and those who restrain the latter in pursuit of precise understanding of the poem's ideas. Horton belongs clearly to the second camp. He believes that "the perceptual follows logically and chronologically the conceptual," and this assumption leads in turn to such terse interpretations as this: "In Artegall's enslavement by Redigund, Spenser represents the overbearing of justice by a sentimental unwillingness to apply the proper force of the law to a condition requiring correction" (117). While no doubt true, such a reading impoverishes the episode symbolically and psychologically. The example is typical, and it reflects Horton's desire to redress what he sees as a flaw in the modern reader's inability to accept the poem's didactic purposes. This aim results at times, however, in an undue restrictiveness (as above), at other times in lengthy stretches of abstract analysis unrelieved by clarifying examples (as on pp. 158-59), and generally in a lack of response to Spenser's wit and humor.

Chapter 4, "Complementary Association in Pairs," is by far the book's longest and best documented, and though it offers specific interpretations that I disagree with (especially its reading of Mercilla), it documents systematically, flexibly, and convincingly the fact that the poem's basic structures are binary. Although Horton

uses neither the term *structuralism* nor its jargon, his reading is conformable to the tenets and strategies of that movement, and I can see it provoking "structuralist" readings of various sorts.

Chapter 8, "Avatars," will probably be the book's most influential. It attempts usefully to distinguish among that term, "thematic example," and "symbolic motif." I had two problems with the concept. First, why *avatar* rather than *type*? Its definition as something that we recognize perceptually rather than conceptually and that furthers the poem's plot, the use of "antitype" to designate its opposite (an erroneous usage, I fear; See *OED*, s.v.), and the contention that Spenser's use of avatars "is in accord with what appeared to be the method of divine revelation" (p. 163), contrive to make the two terms almost indistinguishable in practice. I can comprehend a reticence to use terms already fraught with possibilities for confusion, but given Horton's insistence on Spenser's medieval inheritance, he seems here to miss a good opportunity to strengthen that connection. Second, despite Horton's insistence that we distinguish avatars from thematic examples and symbolic motifs, as he applies the concept, and particularly its "antitypes" in Chapter 9, distinctions get blurred to the point of obfuscation. What do we make of this: "The counterpointing of avatars of the revelation of concealed character and of the disappearance of appearance is particularly involved in Spenser's moral purpose to unveil the beauty of virtue and to unmask the ugliness of vice"?

A final complaint. Professor Horton has been served badly by the editorial decision to omit a bibliography. This loss, coupled with the practice of incomplete endnote citations and some arbitrariness in indexing (e.g., Lerch, McKnight, Frye), makes for an irritating expense of time wading through previous notes, some containing as many as 26 titles.

But lest I end on too sour a note, I repeat that this is an important book, one that I will re-read and urge my students to use.

JEROME S. DEES  
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Carl Dawson. *Victorian Noon: English Literature in 1850*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, 268 pp. \$16.50.

The reader of Carl Dawson's *Victorian Noon*, a study of English literary culture in 1850, discovers a densely populated world of men and ideas competing eagerly to be heard. Mid-Victorian literary debate reaches back into the Romantic past and outward to the earnest and ubiquitous contemporary discussion of the social and religious condition of man. Dawson's book reminds us that in neither direction did it have far to reach, nor indeed feel itself to be reaching at all. Wordsworth was just dead, *The Prelude* just published, and nobody had called off the Romantic movement or even fixed it securely at a distance by giving it a name. The distinctively Victorian seriousness about religion seemed to be just what it was, an inevitable extension of both the sectarian divisions of three centuries and of the enlightenment challenge to revealed religion, and a natural expression of each man's urgent concern for the fate of his own soul. What is more, the loftiest religious abstractions were assumed to be indissociable from the concrete particulars of daily life. It did not seem strange then, as it does now, that learned men and women should speak heatedly and publicly about where they did or did not attend services on Sunday morning. In the pages of *Victorian Noon* one makes or renews acquaintance with great numbers of the men and women who constituted such a vital and various community as they speak to one another and the ages on a wide range of subjects. The quality of this acquaintance, however, is at once the book's strength and its serious limitation.

"Apart from asserting the extraordinary range and quality of the literature at mid-century," writes Dawson, "*Victorian Noon* has no overriding thesis. I am dubious about reductive theses and interested, to put this positively, in doing justice to the subject" (xiii). In fulfilling the mixed promise of the first of these reasonable and generous sentences, Dawson's book puts the second in question. It is possible to defer too much to one's subjects, even when they are the lively and talkative inhabitants of *Victorian Noon*. To do them justice may require the critical energy that goes into the making of theses and judgments. Leaving such activities to the writers it discusses, *Victorian Noon* provides in small and suggestive doses the pleasure of their company, but provides too infrequently the pleasures of understanding.

The book is loosely organized into ten chapters, some announcing their subjects quite clearly—"Dramatic Elegists: Arnold, Clough, and Browning at Mid-Century"—and others frankly miscellaneous. Important subjects keep recurring, bumping into one another. It is clear, for instance, that the persistent attempts of the period to classify artistic production—as classic or romantic, expressive or mimetic, subjective or objective, creative or reflective—must have a good deal to do with one another and must tell us something further about the critical spirit of the age. Dawson offers an intriguing and intelligent account of these attempts, but the discussion of their significance or relationship to one another never gets much beyond suggestive juxtaposition. One frequent substitute for argument is the parenthetical cross-reference: "Here the recollections of a centripetal 'I' (see chapter V) equate self-discipline with plot and bend heterogeneous experiences to the autobiographical perception" (159). The reader can return to chapter V to find Francis Newman's *Phases of Faith* described in similar language, or indeed to chapter VI and its discussion of *David Copperfield* or to any of several other places. But the arguments that would make illuminating connection between such disparate phenomena are potential in the material everywhere and explicit or extended nowhere. Dawson does provide useful summaries of his findings from chapter to chapter, but these summaries finally beg to be summarized and organized and analyzed by an author willing to manage his subject.

One sympathizes with the difficulty of such a project and with Dawson's evident unwillingness to reduce his diverse materials to a set of theses. But such a reduction is not the only path to understanding, and Dawson's refusal to draw clarifying conclusions from his material bespeaks less a scrupulous objectivity than a failure of full engagement. Defending his method in the Preface, Dawson says, "My aim is firstly descriptive. I want to know how *The Prelude* was received, what relation there might be between Dickens and the Pre-Raphaelites, how contemporary reviewers spoke to new directions in fiction and poetry, or how they handled inherited assumptions." These are worthy questions, but not all of them can be answered, and perhaps none can be answered fully, by mere "description." And when Dawson goes on to say that "a description of mid-century literature raises broader, theoretical issues about the status of imagination, the uses of myth and memory, the significance of heavily used words like *nature*, the impact of religious and scientific inquiry on literary works" (xiii), he excites, but also dismays, appearing unaware of the theoretical issues raised by that word "description." We know from other recent works of criticism how methodological self-consciousness can result in a tiresome standing off from the subject. But Dawson's refusal of methodological complication can cheat his subject as well.

A good illustration occurs in his chapter on *In Memoriam*, subtitled "The Uses of Dante and Wordsworth." Dawson sets up a promising argument, matching George Gilfillan's concern for the privacy of Tennyson's poetry, in an essay of 1850, with an essay of the same year by Richard Church celebrating Dante as a poet

triumphantly private and public. "The question for Tennyson," as Dawson says, "was whether his introverted poems could achieve the voice of amplitude, the universal appeal of Dante" (42). But Dawson does not attempt an answer to this question until the last few pages of his chapter, and he begins then with this disturbing pronouncement: "To appreciate that contemporary readers of *The Prelude* and *In Memoriam* could see parallels, or that, like Kingsley, they might associate Tennyson and Wordsworth with Dante, is not to say anything about real similarities and differences." Just which sorts of similarities and differences are *real* ones? The odd confidence of that adjective seems only odder when, after a few paragraphs of superficial stylistic analysis, Dawson himself returns to the large and interesting questions raised by the association of Dante's project with Tennyson's. And only in the penultimate paragraph of his chapter does Dawson begin actually to read *In Memoriam* in order to discover "the uses of Dante and Wordsworth" announced in his sub-title. The explanation, of course, is that Dawson intends only to describe the cultural context into which the poem was received. But in separating such a task from the messy problems of interpretation and judgment, Dawson does both Tennyson and his context a disservice. *In Memoriam* cannot enter a larger discussion as a term whose value is known and measured. No more can the cultural context be fairly treated when robbed of one of its masterpieces. We can't know what English literary culture in 1850 thought about the possibilities of poetry without knowing what *In Memoriam* thought and said about them. Tennyson has his uses, too, and one of them might be to carry the discussion of poetic theory beyond all the easy dichotomies of his prose-writing contemporaries.

On numerous occasions in the book, Dawson's subjects show the way to a more judicious and analytic criticism. In a fine chapter on Francis and John Henry Newman, for instance, Dawson remarks on Arnold's curious and decided preference for the works of John Henry, even though his own religious beliefs were so much closer to those of the doubting Francis. Yet Dawson, with his critical common sense, cannot help seeing that Arnold's preference is really not curious at all and follows from a recognition of deeper sympathies and an appreciation of finer powers. The message here for the literary historian is that the mere repetition of themes and big ideas from one work to another is no proof of special affinity or influence, and that different modes and powers of representation can give vastly different life to the same abstractions. It is this truer life of literary works with which mere description can never make contact and with which *Victorian Noon* has too little to do. I think that Dawson wrote the book he intended to write, and I am grateful for the wealth of material it offers on more subjects than I have been able to mention. But his engaging critical personality is not often enough engaged. The alternative to his brand of objective scholarship is not a self-indulgent or self-assertive subjectivity—the writers he discusses can teach us this—but a commitment to the materials at hand that will not stop short of making new and compelling sense of them.

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Charles Anderson. *Person, Place, and Thing in Henry James's Novels*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1977, 308 pp. \$12.75.

Charles R. Anderson's *Person, Place, and Thing in Henry James's Novels* is the product of "a lifetime's immersion" in James's writings, and illuminating observations issuing from that immersion can be found everywhere in this careful study of James's art—most strikingly, I think, in the discussions of James's fictional use of materials drawn from his travel essays, his letters, and his studies of painting and sculpture.



Anderson's thesis is that "the symbolic relationship of person-place-thing is a basic technique in [James's] fiction" and that James's legacy to the modern novel is "scenic presentation made compact by symbolism." In developing his fiction, James used places and things "to symbolize his characters" and to dramatize a character's understanding, or misunderstanding, of his relationships to other characters. In James's maturest work, where the central concern is always the "drama of 'inward life,'" James uses symbolic places and things to mark the growth of the protagonist's feelings and awareness, and "picture" tends to fuse with scene—tends to become "scene without dialogue": "the picture elements either carry the narrative forward or are themselves to a certain extent dramatized and become scene-settings; scenes without dialogue, taking place in the mind of a character" (p. 222). The drama of inward life thus becomes the drama of the protagonist's effort to determine his or her true relationship to other characters—to do this "indirectly" (since direct communication is impossible) through places and things "that symbolize what they [the other characters] are." A glance at the techniques employed in *The Ambassadors*, says Anderson, "makes it clear that this novel offers the fullest validation" of the "person-place-thing method."

Certainly the approach is often fruitful, and not the least of its merits is that the reader is led to view symbolism always in relation to unfolding drama—to the dynamic movement of the novel—instead of abstractly, as pure *dianoia*. The symbolism must be read "horizontally," not just "vertically" (to use Northrop Frye's language); yet Anderson always keeps in mind significant parts of the vertical pattern—the structure of images or symbols lying behind particular episodes. Also, like Frye, Anderson sees that the "meaning" of the work lies finally in the structure of its images. Thus the readings of individual novels are intelligent and the conclusions generally persuasive.

Yet I have reservations about some of the conclusions. Anderson's claim that James's use of "scene, image, and symbol to reveal characters" establishes "a radical new relationship of person-place-and-thing," that it is a "revolutionary" technique which transforms the realistic novel into "the modern novel"—this claim seems overstated or, in any case, not adequately demonstrated. To argue that James uses places and things as scene, symbolically, to define a character's relationship to other characters is simply to point out that James probably made more extensive use of the symbolist technique than many (though not all) of his predecessors. In its essentials, at least, James's handling of "picture" is not different, so far as I can make out, from the techniques of Emily Bronte, Hawthorne, Melville, or Flaubert. Even Jane Austen, when she describes Darcy's lovely estate in *Pride and Prejudice*, makes that estate "symbolize" Darcy, and the "picture element" does exactly what Anderson finds in James: it carries the narrative forward and becomes a "scene without dialogue"—a scene in which Elizabeth Bennet recognizes, in viewing the "symbolic" house, Darcy's most excellent qualities. The truth is that, as Cleanth Brooks has observed, "all literature is ultimately symbolic": all places and things in a well-made work "symbolize" character in the sense that the things tell us what the characters are, or are like. I would suggest, therefore, that James's technique is new and revolutionary *not* because of the symbolic person-place-thing relationship but only because in James's novels the focus of our interest shifts (as Anderson points out) from "outward action and dialogue" to "an inner drama of images" (p. 89). In short, James's originality lies, as we have long supposed, in his making the novel subjective—"psychological." Once the central question of a novel became, "Will the protagonist make out the truth *behind* ambiguous appearances?" it was inevitable that "picture" and "scene" would fuse: the very act of observing the world becomes dramatic—an act fraught with all the dangers of misinterpretation and consequent failure. It is the subjective drama, however, and not the person-place-thing relationship, that is new.



## REVIEWS

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Anderson's readings, I repeat, are generally persuasive, and sometimes brilliant—as when he suggests that Hyacinth Robinson was conceived of as a sort of Keats, or when he traces the discovery scene in *The Ambassadors* to Monet's painting *La Seine à Vetheuil*. Yet it is a fault of this genial, leisurely book (too leisurely really: containing too much material not directly relevant to the person-place-thing relationship) that some of the interpretations repeat too many ideas established by earlier critics. The discussion of *Casamassima* might have been shortened had Anderson taken into account John L. Kimmey's fine article on the quality of bewilderment in that novel; the discussions of *Portrait* and *The Ambassadors* might have taken for granted a number of insights already arrived at by various scholars. Also some of the conclusions are, I think, very questionable. Surely the "subplot" concerning Rowland Mallet's fate or fortune is *not* just a "distraction" from the main plot of *Roderick Hudson*, and surely it is not true that "only two lines of interest," both connected with Roderick, are offered to the reader. Nor can I accept the contention that Christopher Newman is "the epitome of the free and open character" (he only seems to be free) or that *The American* is a comedy. (It's tragicomedy; if it fails, it fails as tragicomedy.) Again, I can't accept Anderson's conclusion that the discovery scene in *The Ambassadors* reveals to Strether that he might have lived a different life. (Isn't it James's point that Strether *does* learn to live, that he makes the most of the life he *has*?) More importantly, I would suggest that Anderson's person-place-thing method—particularly as employed in reading *The American* and *Casamassima*—is not pressed as far as it might be. In reading novels as carefully wrought as James's, we may assume that every detail works toward maximum "symbolic" expressiveness. To concentrate on a single element of the total pattern—e.g., the high and the low in *Casamassima*—is to ignore a host of paradoxical images and symbols that amplify James's meaning in that novel—images and symbols defining contradictions that Hyacinth encounters everywhere, even in Pinnie, even in Lady Aurora, even in Anastasius Vetch.

If I am uneasy about some of Anderson's arguments, I hasten to repeat that the richness of this study—above all, Anderson's extraordinary use of background material to give insight into the fiction—has won all of my admiration. James's symbolic waters are often rough, but students of James will be grateful for Anderson's "lifetime's immersion" in them.

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Rowland A. Sherrill. *The Prophetic Melville; Experience, Transcendence, and Tragedy*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1979, 269 pp. \$17.00.

Professor Sherrill's study covers five of Melville's novels and traces Melville's thought from his early treatment and rejection of experience in *Typee*, *Redburn*, and *White Jacket* and his growing awareness of transcendence in *Moby Dick* to his belief that in a world of anguish and especially a man-of-war world such transcendence as wonder is not acceptable.

As Sherrill points out, Tommo in *Typee* is forced to reject the Eden of man's history and in *Redburn* the title character rejects the tradition of the past. In *White Jacket* the title character attempts to rationalize the universe. Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* becomes aware of a variety of portents in a wonder-world which the other characters do not perceive. But in *Pierre*, the wonder-world is forsaken and in *Billy Budd* Captain Vere is dominated by the man-of-war world in his sentence of the transcendent Billy.

Professor Sherrill's book is not easy to read, partly because of his specialized

use of "transcendence" and "wonder-world." It is however, a persuasive description of Melville's metaphysical attitudes and an answer to what has often been called his "quarrel with God."

It is also a book which places Melville in the context of his age which he hoped at first to persuade to the transcendence and wonder of the creation, but which he at last was persuaded was not in the minds of his contemporaries a wonder-world. The title, *The Prophetic Melville*, refers to this pessimistic conviction and may be as applicable to this age as to Melville's.

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Richard Beale Davis. *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1979, 140 pp. \$9.00.

William J. Scheick. *The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979, 113 pp. \$9.75.

The American mind, like the mind of most nations, is a fascinating, complex, and perplexing subject. Wherever they ply their trade, sociologically bent historians and literary critics seek to learn something about the forces shaping the mind of a nation, or a region within a country. Frederick Jackson Turner, Perry Miller, W. J. Cash, Henry Steele Commager, and many others have explored portions of the American mind and concluded that such forces as Puritanism, the frontier, revolutionary idealism, science, anti-intellectualism, trade unionism, and agrarianism helped to form the mind of a region or the nation. Largely because of the long and fruitful studies resulting in *Intellectual Life of Jefferson's Virginia, 1790-1830* and *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*, Richard Beale Davis presently leads the ranks of expositors of the Southern mind of the Colonial and Republic eras. His *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf* is at once a distillation and expansion of Chapter 4 ("Books, Libraries, Reading and Printing") and Epilogue of his *magnum opus*, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*.

*A Colonial Southern Bookshelf*, the outgrowth of a series of lectures given at Mercer University, provides a partial catalogue of titles in libraries from Maryland to Georgia and a brief discussion of the ideas, values, customs, and models of conduct which Southern readers found in the books they bought or borrowed. The core of the book is Davis' examination of titles grouped under three headings: (1) history, politics, and law; (2) religion; (3) belles lettres. Students of American literature and history already know that such Southerners as William Byrd II and Thomas Jefferson avidly read classical historians. Davis found that almost all other Colonial Southern readers had a hearty appetite for Greek and Roman historians. English and French historians attracted an eager readership as well. Among the favored historians were Edward Hyde, Gilbert Burnet, White Kennett, Tobias Smollett, Oliver Goldsmith, David Hume, William Robertson, Charles Rollin, Voltaire, and Paul de Rapin Thoyras. Political writers, to name only a representative few, range from Machiavelli through Hobbes, Locke, Samuel von Puffendorf, Joseph Addison (whose tragedy *Cato* was in part viewed as a political statement), Thomas Gordon, John Trenchard, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke. For law, Coke was a standard, but absolutely essential were books containing the statutes of whatever colony the reader resided in. Although Tory and Whiggish writers often stood together on Southern bookshelves, most Southern readers obviously agreed with the libertarian ideas of the latter group, for, when the New England and Middle Colonies balked under the saddle of British rule, the majority of Southerners also wanted the saddle lifted.

Like their Northern neighbors, Southern Colonials built libraries around a few cherished religious books, the Bible, Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Pietie*, and Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* being the heart of most collections. Commentaries by early church fathers and sermons by scores of preachers joined such religious classics as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and hymnals by Wesley and Watts in many libraries. Davis also reveals that Calvin's *Institutes*, tracts against Quakers and deists, sermons of Colonial American writers, and arguments for many beliefs, including millennialism, spread a variety of religious views across the Colonial South.

Again like their neighbors to the north, Colonial Southerners chose for their belletristic reading classical authors, Shakespeare, Milton, Samuel Butler, Addison, Pope, Swift, Goldsmith, Thomson, Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and scores of other British and foreign authors, acquiring for their shelves essentially the same titles that their brothers and cousins back in England were buying for their libraries. Considering the traditional view that the more secular South had small use for the works of Roundhead writers, it is a surprise to find that "the so-called Cavalier poets, Herrick, Suckling, Lovelace, and Carew, are rare indeed in the . . . South" (p. 106). As a distinctive sign, however, of a taste which one day would develop into an artistic triumph for their descendants, Southern colonials showed a cultivated interest in British jest books and in foreign and native tall tales.

Whereas most of the books discussed by Davis came from the hands of English and European writers, the works examined by Scheick are by Americans, excepting the relevant works of Alexis de Tocqueville and René de Chateaubriand. Scheick's reading carried him through a fair-sized body of nineteenth-century American fiction, ranging from the Dime Novel to the novels of Simms, Cooper, and Hawthorne.

His purpose was to discover how persons of mixed blood, half Indian, half white, had been treated by American writers. He found that some writers, those from the eastern and midwestern sections, at times agreed with Tocqueville's stance that "the half-caste forms the natural link between civilization and barbarism" (p. 18) and that other authors, principally those from the South, hailed the notion recorded in Francis Parkman's anecdote in *The Oregon Trail*. Half-bloods are "a race of rather extraordinary composition, being, according to the common saying, half Indian, half white man, and half devil" (p. 18). Some few writers, he learned, were willing to entertain the idea that the half-blood could be or could become the kind of person the New World needed if Old World notions and institutions were to lose their shackling hold upon Americans. In this manifestation, the half-blood would be symbolic of the new order, combining the best of civilized and wild humanity. The one work coming closest to this sympathetic vision of wilderness intermingling with civilization is John Neal's *Rachel Dyer*, but, finally, Neal was to withhold an actual marriage of a red man and a White Quaker woman, settling instead for a kiss before his protagonists die sacrificially.

Scheick's method is to identify views concerning the half-blood by geographical areas. He then examines authors who embody those regional views in their fiction. Southerners like Simms saw good and bad traits in half-bloods but rejected them at last because of a regional fear of miscegenation. Easterners and midwesterners generally were ambivalent. Westerners sometimes thought that half-bloods were the synthetic race the frontier required, but in time, as shown by Bret Harte's writing, what came to count most was the condition of being half-blood in spirit, not in body.

The names of a great many familiar writers—Poe, Simms, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Harte—are linked to fiction depicting half-bloods. A great many less familiar authors also wrote about half-bloods: Robert Montgomery Bird, Timothy Flint,

Helen Hunt Jackson, John Neal, William Snelling, whose *Tales of the Northwest* provided, with Neal's *Rachel Dyer*, the base of Scheick's most substantial criticism.

Students of the American mind should add these richly informed volumes to their bookshelves, Davis' book both for what it captures of the Colonial Southern mind and what it reflects of the grandly stored mind of its author, Scheick's for its straightforward and concise exploration of how the nineteenth-century American mind responded to the actual and symbolic mingling of red and white blood, barbaric and civilized societies.

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Edwin M. Eigner, *The Metaphysical Novel in England and America: Dickens, Bulwer, Hawthorne, Melville*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978, 237 pp. \$14.50.

Jonathan Arac, *Commissioned Spirits: The Shaping of Social Motion in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville, and Hawthorne*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979, 200 pp. \$13.95.

It is obvious from their titles that these books might be reviewed together; in fact, they might well be read together—not because their arguments are in any respect the same, but rather because they approach similar, and in part identical, material from radically different but equally commanding perspectives. One would in this respect like to see a wedding between Arac's acute sense of larger social and political motions and Eigner's more fully meditated sense of internal literary histories. To make such a distinction is to note, in a brief and schematic way, that Eigner's book, fine though its scholarship is, remains a not unconventional argument on behalf of romance ("the metaphysical novel") as opposed to realism ("the dramatic novel"), while Arac's is a more strikingly original book, one that breaks down, and refuses to succumb to, any traditional delineation of generic boundaries.

Although his opening chapters detail an important context for the mid-nineteenth century novelist's working assumptions, Eigner's introductory definitions are not his best. Eigner finds that the metaphysical novel, as a "sub-genre" of romance, undertakes by an envisioned plan of fable or theme to present experience "first in purely materialistic or associational or positivistic terms, which are then contradicted from the idealist point of view so that experience is mystically transformed and a new reality is established." While this pattern of "conversion by contradiction" does hold for the analyses Eigner goes on to make throughout his book, it is too ephemeral a theory to be instructive. A clearer argument emerges in the chapter on "The Writer and His Audience" when Eigner, focusing on the well-known 1797 exchange of letters between Goethe and Schiller, develops the distinction between "dramatic" and "epic" art as one that parallels the difference between "realistic" and "metaphysical" fiction. Pointing to Bulwer-Lytton's publicizing of this theory in essays and prefaces, Eigner notes opposing assumptions about the novelist's technique that at once become constitutive for the authors and works he discusses but also threaten to become dangerously reductive: while the author of the dramatic novel makes "no strenuous intellectual and ethical demands" on the reader and poses no "threats to [his] ego," the metaphysical novelist "is at pains to keep us fully awake . . . perennally off-balance and unsure of ourselves." While this distinction is offered somewhat tentatively, Eigner fails seriously to challenge its limitations in the ensuing discussions; and while he persuasively examines the metaphysical novelist's use of intrusive narrators and his interest in incomplete, undeveloping, and "disappearing" characters, or fractured structures and "double plots," his reluctance to test the countering actions of dramatic realism more openly forces the assumed distinction to become itself an act of metaphysical faith.



The weight of Eigner's controlling term, the "metaphysical," is heavy indeed; and despite meticulous explications and qualifications, it constantly risks dragging his observations down to the level of schematic preordination. One index of this tendency lies in Eigner's nearly ritual citation of a distinction between the "metaphysical" and the "realistic" based on the latter's embrace (and the former's rejection) of "a Lockean empiricism and . . . an unswerving faith in a cause-and-effect universe." Inasmuch as Eigner appeals to this distinction at rhetorically climactic points in nearly every chapter, one would like to see Locke's actual thought and influence more completely spelled out. It is made to account for the metaphysical novelists' rejection of temporal progress in fiction (since "to retard the progress of a narrative was to step in between two actions and therefore to weaken any supposed causal relationships between them"); for their reluctance to depict characters as growing through continuous action (since the "belief that conversion is a matter of slow growth and gradual development is based on cause-and-effect associational psychology"); for their intention, exemplified in Hawthorne, to create an imaginative "never-land in the midst of reality" that absorbs "the outer world into the deepest recesses of the mind" (thus permitting the metaphysical novelist "to operate his story of the recognizable world by the dream logic of depth psychology rather than by the dictates of common sense and Lockean materialism"); and for their willingness to employ loose, chaotic structures (since "the new dramatic conventions which the realists had to impose for the sake of their own epistemology constituted a useless and constraining strait-jacket for the metaphysicals").

Each of these assessments, and particularly the third, may be partially true; but no single philosophical program, without fuller documentation, can be relied upon to estimate either the wealth of "metaphysical" experiments in character, structure, and voice Eigner *does* point to or the corresponding developments in "realistic" fiction he *does not* so convincingly examine. Though he quite usefully describes precursor romances and novels from earlier periods, for example, he must vigorously hedge his argument when he insists that in the metaphysical novel the reader is meant to "become a participant in the vision rather than merely a spectator," for such a strategy would in fact equally (perhaps more than equally) define the most "dramatic" of novelists—Henry James. The value of Eigner's book, then, lies not in the theory that holds it together, but rather in the many fine readings he offers, readings that enliven our sense of what these novelists attempted and what they built on historically, even if they fail to rest comfortably in a larger theoretical plan.

The opposite might be said to be the case in Arac's book, whose close readings, while they are at times quite illuminating, are less important than the more comprehensive links between literary, social, and political history he locates. The fact that his theoretical argument is much less easy to summarize is also one measure of the potential value, as well as the sporadic brilliance, of his adventurous but critically informed book. Focusing on the larger contours of the novelist's professional position in a world of political turmoil and rapid bureaucratic and industrial development, Arac finds that a "discomfort and impatience with the forms of representation available to them" led the writers he discusses to develop a "fictional technique of overview," one that manipulates narrative perspective in order to create order out of disorder and to respond to those social and political "administrative methods of centralization and inspection" that were changing the shape of urban reality in England and virtually inventing one in America. Arac moves engagingly between disciplines by noting in Dickens, for example, the subtle transformation between Gothic "atmospheres" and increasing public concern about urban epidemics, or in the case of Carlyle and Melville by breaking down the limits between political essay and fictional representations of heroism to account for both writers' response to the



conflicts between freedom and repression in revolutionary action. For Arac, Carlyle is a controlling figure, just as Bulwer is for Eigner, a figure outside our usual estimation of the great tradition of fictional enterprise but placed nonetheless convincingly at the heart of the "social motion" these major novelists found themselves both caught in and creating.

The weakness of Arac's book lies in its sometimes rapid movement through or across a cluster of ideas that are surprisingly potent but not completely articulated. In several instances this involves his insertion of a Freudian text into the fabric of his argument without fully examining its own status as a fictional hypothesis within a perhaps separate sphere of social motion. Arac's argument is also limited by its neglect of a more extensive consideration of eighteenth-century models (Defoe's thematic treatment of urbanization and epidemics, for instance) that are at least preliminarily relevant to his observations about the problematic nature of fiction as a genre and as an expression of social power in the nineteenth century. Still, his book raises crucial questions about the traditional assumptions of literary history and makes available, through its own technique of overview, more challenging configurations than most standard discussions of the novel have been capable of.

Both books assert a precarious continuity between English and American fiction that is certainly in need of serious consideration. And while some readers will argue that the most profitable transactions are to be found between eighteenth-century English fiction and nineteenth-century American fiction, the arguments of Eigner and Arac are important steps in this direction, Eigner's because of its careful meditation on a persistent problem of genre, Arac's because of its often splendid investigation of the novel as an instrument of social and ideological inquiry.

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*The "Stanze" of Angelo Poliziano*, translated by David Quint. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979, 103 pp. \$10.00.

Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494) is known in English as Politian. He was quite poor as a youth, but his scholarly genius enabled him to become one of the most distinguished of the Florentine humanists and earned him the favor of Lorenzo de' Medici. The eminence he achieved under Medici patronage led to friendships with the brilliant Florentine Neoplatonists Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Professor Quint notes that "The *Stanze* are celebrated as the literary source for several of Botticelli's most famous pictures."

The unfinished *Stanze Cominciate per la Giostra del Magnifico Giuliano de' Medici* comprises a total of 171 stanzas. Giuliano, or Iulio in the *Stanze*, was the younger brother of Lorenzo, and the *Stanze* were inspired by a jousting tournament won by Giuliano in Florence in 1475. Among those who witnessed the tournament was a lovely young woman, Simonetta Cattaneo, wife of Marco Vespucci, a cousin of the explorer Amerigo Vespucci. Her beauty was praised by Florentine poets, and she was greatly mourned at her death a year after the tournament. Giuliano apparently loved Simonetta, and the *Stanze* celebrate their story in an allusive Renaissance allegory. Poliziano abandoned his poem when Giuliano was assassinated in 1478.

Professor Quint has translated the *Stanze* into prose paragraphs and provided a concise and illuminating introduction to the classical tradition that helped shape Poliziano's poetics. The translation—a pleasure to read—and the original Italian are printed on facing pages. The typography and binding present this work in a deservedly attractive format.

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Atheneum will bring out another book of poems by ROBERT WATSON this Fall. His volume of essays, *Kipling, Auden & Co.*, is to be published by Farrar, Straus, Giroux. He lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, and had a piece about that city in last March's *Harper's*.

Previous stories by W. D. WETHERELL have appeared in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Carolina Quarterly*. He lives in Garden City, New York.

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