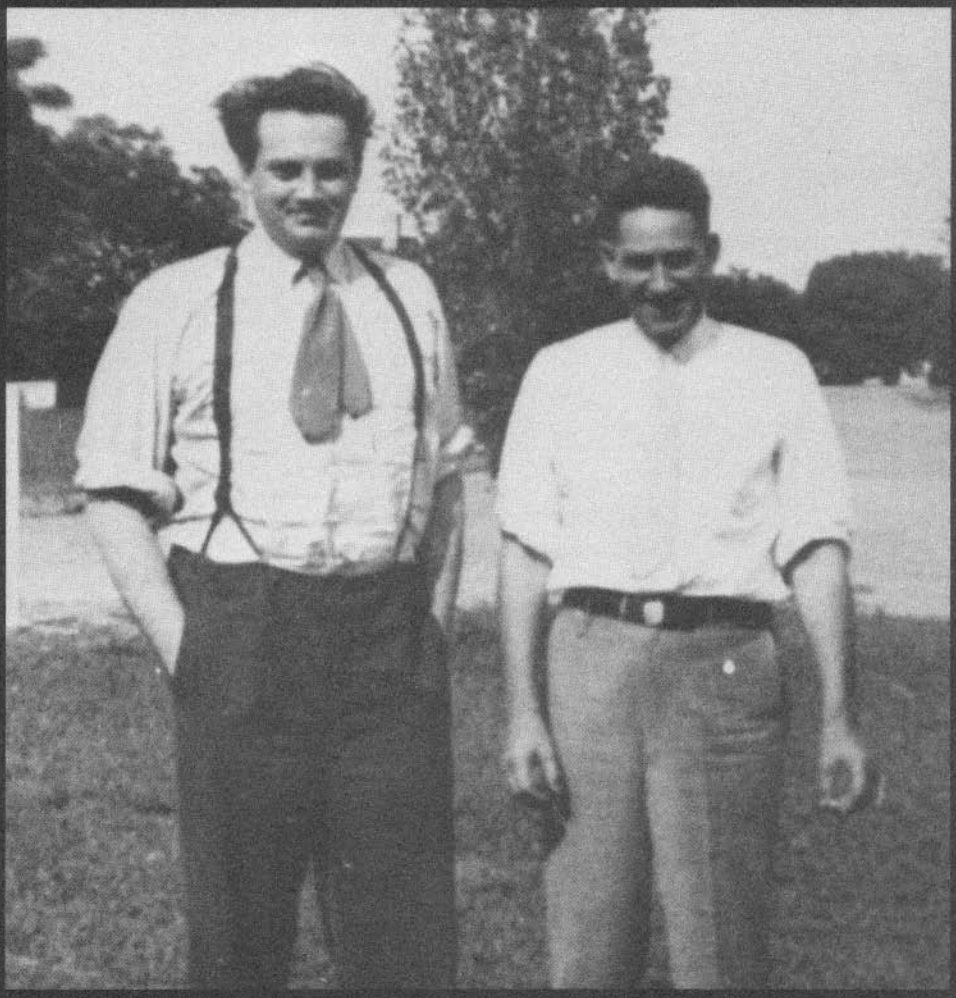
The South Carolina REVIEW



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CONTENTS

ESSAYS

Ernest Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe, *John L. Idol* 24

"I Always Keep Seeing a Light as I Talk with Him": Limning the Robert Frost/Ridgely Torrence Relationship, *George Monteiro* 32

Humboldt's Gift and the Myth of the Artist in America, *Fredrica K. Bartz* 79

FICTION

The Shirt, *Stephen Dixon* 3

Legs, *Edward McShane* 13

Sentence for a Nice Lady, *Charlotte K. Haigh* 44

Eldorado, *Susan Lohafer* 58

Jody Baxter Day, *Laurie Pons* 67

Mobility, *Barbara Rich* 84

The Queen of Hearts, *S. F. Mickle* 91

We Get Smashed and Our Endings Are Swift, *Lee K. Abbott, Jr.* 103

POETRY

Going Down to Make Coffee, *William Aarnes* 21

Two Poems by *Laurence Lieberman* 22

Two Poems by *F. C. Rosenberger* 43

The Spirit in Ink and Colors, *Norman Nathan* 57

Circe's Lover, *Jan Chisholm* 66

Three Poems by *Marlene Youmans* 76

Scarecrow, *Mary Vogt* 102

REVIEWS

The End of Literary Theory, *William E. Cain* 118

Donald Barthelme's Fiction: The Ironist Saved From Drowning by Charles Molesworth, *Jerome Klinkowitz* 127

Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times by James R. Mellow; *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1854-1864* by Raymona E. Hull, *John L. Idol* 128

Byron's Letters & Journals. Vol. XI ("For Freedom's Battle"), ed. Leslie A. Marchand; *Byron's Letters & Journals*. Vol. XII ("The Trouble of an Index"), ed. Leslie A. Marchand, *Frederick W. Shilstone* 129
Lady Tennyson's Journal, ed. James O. Hoge, *Hallman Bryant* 132

CONTRIBUTORS 134

THE SHIRT

Stephen Dixon

For a few months I've been helping the man who lives in the apartment right below mine. I didn't have to help him before, except for maybe carrying up heavy packages for him, but then he had a stroke that left him slightly paralyzed on one side and blind in his right eye. So when I see him on one of the floor landings I always assist him up or down the stairs. Or when he hears me going downstairs no matter how lightly I might sometimes try to walk, he'll say from behind his door "Michael?" and I'll say "Yes, Mr. Bricker" and he'll say "Could you hold up for a moment, I'm afraid I've another favor to ask of you." He usually wants me to get his mail or a newspaper or a few emergency groceries. If I'm going out and won't be back for a few hours, he'll still give me change or his mailbox key and say to leave the newspaper by the door or slip the mail and key under the door when I return. He occasionally says after I've done him a favor, "I'll catch up with you later," but he never has. Not that I want anything from him. He's retired and ill, seems to just get by on his social security and a pension, and none of the things he asks of me take that much time or are that hard or complicated to do.

Today when I'm passing his door he says, "That you, Michael?"

"Yes, Mr. Bricker."

"Hold up for a moment, and it's not a favor I want this time."

I wait. Though he sits near the door reading or watching TV most of the day, it still always takes him a minute or so to open it.

He opens the door and says, "I said it wasn't a favor I wanted and I meant it. I have something for you for being so kind to me these past months."

"There's no need, really. I'm more than happy to do what I can for you."

"I know that but please don't deny me this little opportunity to repay you. Whatever it is I got here, it's small in comparison to what I'd like giving you if I had the means." He's been keeping something behind his back and now produces it. A shirt in a transparent plastic case.

"I'm sure it's your size and I think you'll like the style. It's from Formosa and takes nothing to wash."

"Polyester?"

"A hundred percent. Wash it when it gets filthy and hang it up and I guarantee it'll be dry in an hour and look like it came from the French cleaner's. I have several myself. That's why I never asked you to take a shirt to the laundry for me, not that I've anywhere to go."

"Honestly, I've more shirts than I need, though thank you," and I hold it out to him.

"Now you listen to me, mister. Big as you are and weak as I've become, I'm still strong enough to knock you off your feet with one fist, so you're to accept this gift whether you like it or not and wear it, you understand?"

"It's really a very nice shirt and I thank you."

"Believe me, I'm the one who has to thank you a hundredfold. Because you won't know till it happens to you, God forbid, how terrible it is to be afflicted and made so helpless like this. So when you give me your help from time to time, I appreciate it more than you could ever know," and he shuts his door.

I was on my way to my mother's for dinner, but I'll first have to leave the shirt in my apartment. Though maybe she knows someone to give it to—her super or husband of one of her friends. But just so nobody on the subway will think I stole the shirt, I fold it in half and carry it under the book I've with me.

It's an hour's ride and ten minute walk to her apartment building. We kiss at the door and then she pushes me back into the hallway and says, "Guess who dropped in for the year uninvited and without a single phone call?"

"Uncle Rolph?"

"Straight from Florida in his behemoth car which there's no space around large enough to park in, and to do business here he says, though if he leaves my dinner table once in the next two weeks it'll be a miracle. He doesn't look good, though, so pretend he looks better."

Rolph comes out from the living room in bright green pants, yellow golf shirt, white belt, alligator shoes and a big cigar he puffs on and clouds up his part of the hall just before we shake hands. "How you doing, sonny?"

"Fine thanks." We go inside. "I don't know how you feel, but you certainly look good."

"Think so? The pipe here," and he raps his chest, "killed me the entire drive up. Probably indigestion. That highway food in the South's too greasy and spicy. What've you got there, another book?"

"Sure, still reading, but also a shirt." I bring it out. "Too large for me but it might fit you. Made in Formosa."

"Since when they make good shirts there?"

"I don't know. The neighbor who gave it to me for doing him some favors seems to know something about shirts and he was impressed when he said it was from Formosa. You're a big guy in the shoulders. Could you get into an extra large?"

"That's my size. It's for sure not yours. Some gift this guy gave you."

"You mind polyester?"

"If I do then I got to be crazy. Because if you go in my bathroom in Florida that's all you'll find is polyester shirts drip-drying over the tub. Think I'd wear one of those cottons or even a cotton blend and walk around in wrinkles?"

"You could take them to a hand laundry," my mother says.

"What, at almost a dollar a shot to be shrunken and discolored and the buttons knocked off? No thank you." He takes the shirt out of the case. "Nice bag it comes in too. Strong plastic. Not like ours. You could use it to store the shirt later on." He holds up the shirt. "I like it. Just my kind of style. Not jazzy or button-down collar but nice. Offer still on?"

"You sure you want to give it away so soon after you got it?" my mother says.

"Mom, I want to give a shirt, let me give a shirt. I know what I'm doing."

"But you haven't even tried it on yet. It might say extra large but be a large. And it's a present and brand-new and you need shirts. Look at the one you have on. It's clean but I see you in it almost every time you come here."

"In the summer you do. Winter and fall you see me in two other shirts and spring maybe one or two more. I have five shirts and that's enough."

"Five for every occasion?" Rolph says. "Should I tell you how many I have?"

"Probably a lot more."

"Maybe two hundred."

"Stop," my mother says.

"Stop what? I'm not saying *exactly*, but two hundred shirts and two hundred suits and fifty sport jackets and maybe sixty pairs of shoes and plenty of ties, watchbands and belts and the like and I don't know how many pairs of slacks. Maybe fifty too. Maybe seventy."

"Where do you keep them all?"

"He needs two apartments," my mother says, "but only has one. I remember what his place looked like that one time I was there, so I don't see why I acted so surprised. He wanted me to take his bedroom and he'd sleep on the living-room couch. I ended up in a hotel that night. Because not only were shirts hanging over the tub and sink but he had a coat rack in the bathroom with suits and things on it in zippered bags. And because all his closets were filled tight, these same kind of racks in every room. And under the bed which he made too uncomfortable to sleep on because of this, suitcases packed with clothes. And piled on top of the bed and dressers and couch and desk, maybe fifty to sixty more jackets and spring coats and suits. You must sleep without women every night, Rolph, because I don't see where there's any room to sleep home."

"I won't say I'm too old to still be with a woman."

"You won't say. I'll remind you what mother used to say. 'There's no fool like an old fool,' but not to get away from my main point, you're a clothes horse, Rolph."

"And proud of it. Look, some people have a drinking sickness, right? Cognac. Wine. Everything. They die from drink. And some people eat all the time and die of heart diseases or if they make two quick steps, the heat.

Me, it's clothes. Do I suffer? Does my body suffer? Does anybody suffer? Absolutely not."

"Your wife left you because you spent too much on clothes," she says.

"Not because of that. Because of other things."

"It contributed, or had to."

"So a little. So big deal. So who cares. The hell with her."

"What a way to talk."

"But she walked around in nothing. I was ashamed to be with her."

"Not nothing," she says.

"Mike, teach your mother something. No," he says to her, "not naked, but in rags. She dressed awful. She looked like a ragpicker. Worse. Ragpickers at least wear some of the clothes they pick out of trash cans and don't sell. She wore clothes that were worn, wrinkled, mended and old."

"I never knew," she says.

"You never knew like you never knew I had two hundred suits. You knew."

"I didn't. As for your clothes, I knew you had lots of them, but not that many. Who does?"

"Maybe two hundred and twenty-five suits. When I go into a store and see a suit I like and it comes in three different shades I like and I can't make up my mind—"

"Don't tell me."

"Right. But I wear all three. It's good for me and looks good for my business."

"What business? You haven't been in business for years. You do just about nothing, so why do you need so many clothes? You drive up, drive back, drive round and around and maybe think about business during all these drives and trips, but what business do you do?"

"Don't say that, because it's not true. I still import and design and sell shoes."

"Where?"

"From my apartment."

"You store five million articles of clothing and accessories there and still have room to conduct a business? I know where one desk is—under a ton of clothing—but where's the other? On the terrace?"

"If you want to know, the shoes are mostly on the terrace. In specially designed airtight and waterproof boxes and crates."

"I give up. You say you do what you do, then you do, not that I fully believe you yet. What do you say we all have a drink."

"I'm going to change first. That's another reason I like plenty of clothes. So I can have them fresh on me a few times a day." He goes into the guest room.

"I'll say this much for him," she says. "He did come here with four enormous valises. One week he says he's staying here, but—"

"Maybe one week, maybe longer," he says from the guest room.

"Maybe," she says lower to me. "He drives me crazy. Only here one day and talk and more talk and most of it lies. All my brothers are such sad fools. My father did it to them. He was too strong—no feelings. Acted like an archduke. But how are you? I'm glad you could come."

"By the way," Rolph says from his room.

"Yes?"

"Not you—Michael. Thanks for the shirt."

"My pleasure," I say.

My mother's shaking her head. "He needed an extra shirt as much as you didn't. I'm sure there's still time to change your mind if he already hasn't it on."

"Really, the shirt's not for me."

Rolph comes out in a white shirt and a tie and different pants and shoes. We have drinks, dinner, sit around and chat a while and I go home.

A few days later when I'm walking downstairs Mr. Bricker says "Hello, Michael. Did the shirt fit?" His door's wide open and he's sitting at the kitchen table next to it.

"Perfectly. It's a little too warm to wear now, but I will in the fall."

"What are you talking about? It's a summer shirt."

"Is it? I thought it was long sleeve."

"Short sleeve. You didn't open it?"

"I did quickly, but didn't unpin it."

"Would you prefer a long sleeve? You do, I'll take it back when I go to the store again and exchange it."

"Maybe I can exchange it."

"No, I get out, I can do it. And it's not really a store but a jobber I know who sells me the shirts at almost cost. But is extra large really your size? Now that I get a good look at your torso, you hardly seem big enough for a large."

"I'm actually pretty stocky in the chest. And my arms are long—a thirty-four or -five."

"By the way, Michael, you know anything about fuses?"

"Why, you need one changed?"

"You don't see me sitting in the dark?"

"With all the daylight in your place, I assumed you were just sitting with the lights off and door open because it's much cooler that way."

"It'd be a lot cooler if the fan worked. That's what blew the fuse. I'd get the super, but knew you were here and maybe coming down any minute and that you'd do it in a much nicer mood than he."

"What is it, the wires? Let me see."

I look at the fan. It needs a new plug. The fuse in his apartment's good, so I change the one in the basement, buy a plug at the store and replace the old one. The lights are on and now the fan.

"Boy, that feels good," he says. "I should have got you two shirts when I had the chance."

"One's more than enough. And because it's drip-dry, I can wear it almost every day if I want."

"Now you got the idea. But I still should have got you two. I still might."

"Please don't. I'm more than happy with what I got," and I go downstairs.

My mother phones that night. "You won't believe this," she says. "I saw Rolph leaving the apartment this afternoon with about fifty cartons of cigarettes for his ex-wife's sister and brother-in-law. He bought them in North Carolina on his drive up. Cheaper taxes, though they reimburse him for the cartons and I think a little something for his time. Anyway, in one of these four giant shopping bags is what do you think? Your shirt. So I asked him 'What's that in there?' and he said 'Cigarettes. I would have picked some up for you but didn't know your brand.' 'You didn't know I smoke Mores?' I said. 'Mores?' he said. And did I know they're only made of vegetable matter and no tobacco, not one shred? That's why they're so low in nicotine and tars. I told him that's ridiculous and what I mean about what's in that bag is that shirt. 'What's it doing there?' I said."

"The shirt I gave him?" I say.

"The shirt I told you not to give and then to get back. You were so quick to get rid of it I could have killed you. Because when did he ever give you anything?"

"How do I know?"

"Never."

"Not even when I was a kid?"

"Never. Even your bar mitzvah he didn't give you anything, and he came with his wife, daughter and mother-in-law. I remember. You had a gift list."

"Please, let me try to forget that list."

"Why? You were more sensible then than you are now. And his name was the only one you didn't check off against the names of the guests for a cash or non-cash gift. Anyway, he said to me that the shirt didn't fit him, so he was bringing it to his ex-brother-in-law."

"I thought he said he was an extra large."

"He is or he isn't or he never was, which is my point. He only took it from you to give to his brother-in-law so they'd think he was a terrific sport. I told you he was a chiseler. By now you ought to know that all my brothers are."

"No they're not. And Rolph's all right. Did he at least try the shirt on?"

"I asked him that and he said he didn't have to. That some shirt manufacturer friend told him the other day that all Formosan shirts run much larger than their size. So you know what I did?"

"What?"

"I took the shirt out of the shopping bag. He said what am I doing? I said 'Rolph, if you can't use it, don't give it to someone who means nothing to us. Because maybe Michael knows someone to give it to.'"

"I don't. So let him do what he wants with it. It's a cheap ugly shirt, not my style or size or anything else, and I don't want to hear any more about it."

"No. He fooled you and he fooled me and besides, I don't want him getting away with everything. He comes here, eats and sleeps and gets entertained with my food and liquor for several days to maybe seven weeks and never takes me out or buys a pint of milk for my place when he does almost every night for his ex-in-laws and some woman friend he knows from years back, and you say I should also let him have the shirt? No. That's my way of getting back at him."

"Why not just tell him how you feel?"

"He's my brother. I don't want to hurt him."

"You don't think you did by taking back the shirt?"

"That he understood. He's smart enough to know that everyone draws the line somewhere, and that was mine. But telling him to take me out for dinner or buy a bottle of scotch or just leave here for good, which is what I really want, no. In some ways he's very artistic and too sensitive, and it'll end up hurting me. Anyway, whenever you come here next, I'm giving you back the shirt."

"What about Uncle Leon? They visit you every Tuesday, right? He's even bigger around the chest than Rolph, so give the shirt to him. He's who I should have given it to in the first place."

"That's what I'll do, but after Rolph leaves."

"Actually, it's not a good idea. If Rolph sees it on him next time he's here, he might really take it bad."

"He has no memory, my brother. And if he does question Leon on it, I'll tell them the first shirt you gave to a good friend. And the second one you bought because you liked the first so much, but for some reason that one also didn't fit, so you gave it to Leon for doing me so many favors over the years."

"I already told Rolph I didn't like the style."

"Then you didn't buy it for yourself the second time but for other people. For them you thought it nice—bright and summery. Just let me do what I want about this, all right?"

"If you want."

"And you'll also come next Tuesday when Sissie and Leon are here, okay? I'm expecting you."

I go to her apartment that Tuesday night. She greets me at the door and says "Rolph left for Florida early today. He wouldn't even stick around to see his own sister and brother-in-law after a year. How are you?"

"Just fine. Did Leon like the shirt?"

"The shirt? Don't mention it to them. You know what they did today? Sissie and I went to the bakery and I bought a dozen and a half onion and plain rolls—"

"What do you need so many for?"

"For today and tomorrow and to freeze and you'll see. I bought a dozen and a half and she bought a half dozen for them. We come home and she immediately puts her rolls in her shopping bag and they both eat my rolls with their lunch. Then around three Leon says he's hungry again and so does she, so I say 'What would you like?' and they both say 'How about one of those delicious rolls?' Mind you. Not one of their delicious rolls, which are the same as mine and by this time probably even fresher, being in both a bakery bag and plastic shopping bag, but one of mine. So I set out more rolls and they have one each and another between them and that leaves me with four left, because six are already in the freezer. Well, we're waiting for you, as usual you're late, so Leon had a drink and has to have another of my rolls to stave off his hunger, as he puts it, and also so the liquor won't rush to his head. Now, is that nice?"

"It doesn't sound it."

"Be honest. It sounds selfish and cheap. Not only are my brothers all chiselers but I'm beginning to think also my sisters and brothers-in-law. The hell with all of them."

"You're sounding just a little like Rolph now, and you're also speaking too loud."

"Don't worry, they're way in back. And if I sound like Rolph it's because in some ways he's right. He has no use for those two also, that's why he drove off before they came."

"Maybe you shouldn't entertain so much."

"What choice do I have? They come every other Tuesday."

"Tell them to come every third Tuesday if it's too much for you."

"It would sound too odd, every third Tuesday, and we'd get so mixed up with that schedule that they'd never come here at all. Besides, it wouldn't be polite. They'd take it badly. But whatever you say tonight, nothing about the shirt. Then, when you leave, take it with you and try and fit into it. Maybe it's a small extra large. Who knows how they tailor things in Formosa? Not Rolph, and he's full of it with his manufacturer friend. Maybe it's even a medium. If it's not, give it as a present to someone, but not to any of my brothers or brothers-in-law."

"I wish you hadn't taken it out of Rolph's bag. I wish you'd have not got me involved in it like this. Why do you make such little things into big ones? I wish you'd have just stayed out of it, Mom. Really, you shouldn't have intervened at all."

"All I've just told you and you still don't think I was right?"

"Let's forget it."

"No. You still don't think I was right?"

"If you talk much louder they'll hear you no matter how far back they are."

"Let them. I want them to. Maybe from now on they'll eat some of their own rolls here and not save them all for home while they deplete mine."

"Mom, you're too worked up, there's no talking to you now. Excuse me," and I go past her, through the living room into the kitchen, kiss Sissie's cheek, shake Leon's hand, and make us each a drink.

"You're gaining weight," Leon says after we toast.

"I've actually lost five pounds this summer," I say.

"Could be the clothes you wear," Sissie says. "They droop so."

"I don't like tight pants or shirts."

"I wish he would," my mother says, coming into the room. "Or any kind of shirts but the ones he wears. They're all old and decayed."

"Shirt he has on looks okay," Leon says.

"It in fact looks like a very nice one," Sissie says. "All cotton?"

"Yes," I say.

"You always liked them. I can see why. They're nice to touch. I can't wear anything but synthetics during the summer. They're light."

"They itch on me."

"Michael has a very nice light synthetic shirt he left the last time he was here," my mother says. "Someone gave it. An elderly neighbor for all the helpful things Michael's done for him. Why don't you put it on, Michael?"

"I'm not fifteen again, Mom."

"Just to see how good it might look on you."

"It won't look good. Certainly not on me. Nor will it feel good either. In fact—"

"If you say anything, Michael . . ."

"Say what?" Sissie says.

"She thinks I'm going to try to leave it here again," I say.

"That's what your mother meant?" Leon says.

"I think so. I'll take it home Mom, so don't get excited."

"Rip it up for all I care," she says. "But you should take it home. You need shirts."

We have dinner, sit and talk, and when we're ready to leave my mother sticks what's left of the dinner into containers for me and puts the containers and the shirt into a shopping bag. We kiss her goodbye and walk to the subway.

"I saw the shirt your neighbor gave you," Leon says. "It's a beauty. Why would you want to forget it every time you go to your mom's?"

"I just don't like it, though I'll probably get used to it."

Sissie says, "Used to polyester to someone who hates polyester and is so pure with his all-cotton clothes? I don't think so."

"What size is it?" Leon says. "I only got a quick glimpse, but it looked plenty wide."

"Extra large."

"You? An extra large?" Sissie says. "Leon's an extra large and look how much bigger around the belly and chest he is than you."

"My mom wants me to keep it, so for her sake I will."

"That's the best way," Leon says.

"I'm not sure. Maybe you should have it. Yeah, I want you to, Leon."

"No no, really, I couldn't."

"Take it," Sissie says. "He wants you to have it and it's obviously no good to him."

"No, it's too nice and new. It's not even that. Mike doesn't have enough shirts, and Paula wants him to keep it, so he'll get used to it like he says."

We enter the subway station and I take the train back to Manhattan.

Mr. Bricker's door is open when I walk upstairs. "Michael, I know it's a little late, but can I ask you to do something for me again?"

"If you do something for me first."

"Anything, so long as it's nothing physical."

"I'd like you to take back your shirt." I take it out of the shopping bag and give it to him. "No hard feelings. It's a very nice-looking shirt. But strange as this must sound, I wore it for just a minute and it itched like crazy. It turns out I'm allergic to synthetic textiles to the point where I sometimes get a rash. I appreciate your giving it, but the shirt really doesn't work for me."

"No problem. I'll get you a blend."

"No, please. If anything, get me one that's a hundred percent cotton. And a size large will do."

"I don't think he has cotton. All his shirts come from Formosa."

"They have cotton in Formosa or import it."

"They might but not in my friend's place. A blend will be okay. They wear well, don't wrinkle that much and dry in half the time as an all-cotton."

"A blend then. Now what can I do for you?"

"You remember that big storm the other day. Well since then my television reception's been lousy, all sleet and snow, so I think my antenna must have blown down."

"I'll check it on the roof tomorrow."

"You're really a help. If it's not the antenna and you don't think it's anything with the tubes, maybe you can bring it to the repair shop."

I go upstairs. Mr. Bricker calls the next morning. "I just spoke to my friend and he says he has no blends either, so I ordered a large for you in the one you had. You said it was a good-looking shirt and I'm sure after awhile you'll get used to the synthetic material on your back. He said if you wash it real hard a number of times it'll get as smooth as any cotton blend."

"Thank you, Mr. Bricker."

"What? For all the favors you do me, I should be the one to thank you. In fact that's what I'm doing by giving you this shirt—thanking you. So thanks, Michael. Thanks very much."

LEGS

Edward McShane

On the subway I sometimes see him or when I walk from my office to Columbus Circle for lunch: a well-dressed, thin-faced, gray-haired young man, carrying a bottle in a brown bag. He sits on one of the slatted benches that ring Central Park, staring off into nothing or perhaps into an infinite regress of men similar to himself sitting on benches, past, present, and future. If I move closer, I realize he is not my father, perhaps what father would have ultimately become. What I will become, maybe what we all become, self-annihilators. Perhaps my delusion is that someday when I move closer to the man on the bench, it will be him, that the fingers will be heavily stained enough with nicotine, that the socks will be the correct color and their tops will not droop, that the soccer scar will be there on the forehead, the eyes blue.

Of course my father is dead. I realize that. I know it. I saw him buried. Yet when I see these other men I am momentarily positive that he is there. That finally we will get to finish the conversation that had just begun, that finally I will learn something about him, about what growing up in Belfast was like, or working on the New York docks, and about him and Sarah, and why he loved her and was loving her worthwhile—and for that matter, existence; why he placed the burden of his secret on me, and if he can forgive me.

I also want to ask him about the legs. How the symptoms begin. What they feel like.

He lives. I feel he lives when I look at my legs. I notice how spindly they are, how the veins pop up on them. They seem good legs, strong legs; perhaps my shortness of breath comes from cigarette smoking?

Legs. I remember the terrifying swoops as he swung me from his shoulders, chuckling and yelling "oops" as Sarah warned him to "be careful with the child." And I remember him also, when I was too old to be intrigued by the shine on his shoes, his legs covered by a blanket, with the black stand-up ashtray at his left hand and a can of Rheingold or a bottle of Guinness in his right.

I sit using that ashtray sometimes now when I visit Sarah. I ask her about his legs, but she will tell me little. She averts her eyes, whispers, "Your father was a good man. God rest his soul." The words, sweeter than any I heard her use to him in life, seem addressed to the wedding picture that she has restored above the television set. Her eyes look neither at me nor the picture. I cease to question. In the picture he is smiling in confidence or cunning. There is great dignity in his stance, and in the manner in which Sarah clings to him. She is beautiful, an enormous bouquet of lilies is held like an infant to her breast. They stand by a church Baptismal font; far in the background sunlight streams through a stained-

glass window; it is unearthly light and reminds me of poor Christmas-card art. In front of this sunlight are three frescoes of Jesus enduring three of the more morbid agonies of his life as he marched up the road to Calvary and Crucifixion. How prescient of the photographer to connect that marriage and the crucifixion. It was a Catholic marriage. There was no divorce.

The legs are the focal point. In my legs, he lives. Some mornings I wake totally paralyzed from the waist down. I am able to move only my head and chest. With my hands, I drag myself into a sitting position, back against the headboard. I sit petrified, waiting for the nothingness to creep up my torso. There is no tingling in the extremities, none of the amputee's false sensation, just nothing. I sit and look at the wall until in a few minutes, life comes back to the legs. They, still chilled, carry me across the bedroom to the wall phone in the kitchen. The shrink, as I shriek my terror into the mouthpiece, reassures me that it is only anxiety, nothing organic. Nothing is wrong with me. For a few days, I am convinced, but then one night I will take off my trousers and notice the spindly calves, the veins, the purplish color, and I'll remember the old man.

He was only thirty-eight when some genetic message had gotten through to the fat cells within his veins and arteries. They had been closing gradually over the years; perhaps he had felt the paralysis I do, perhaps the legs fell asleep on him frequently, perhaps looked purpler each night. He told me so little, did not prepare me.

I was sitting on the kitchen floor. They at the table. She weeping, "William, it's the drink."

He: "You don't know the pain, like knives. They said I can't work again without a note from the doctor."

"And will he give you one?"

"No."

I was seven the year the doctors told him he could no longer work. That is how he explained it. Sarah sometimes agreed with this version. Now it is the only one she will accept, but for her then it had to be something connected with the drink. The longshoremen's union records that he was not eligible for a pension; he was too young to retire. The gentleman there whom I've spoken to a number of times refuses to divulge any more information.

Sarah found work as a maid, returning to the hotel she had worked in when she had been a greenhorn just off the boat. He began to wash the dishes, prepare the meals, and most of all, sit in the withered green armchair by the front-room window looking vaguely at the street. Sometimes now I will take long walks in upper Manhattan and almost burst into tears as I see others staring mutely into the streets from dirty-curtained front-room windows. Friends often wonder why I am inclined to rent basement apartments.

If he had been completely immobile, Sarah and I might have handled it differently, but he could make it painfully down the stairs—("Good to

see you up, Pop," I would say, passing him on them in the early evening) and walk the block or two to the Sunset or McKeon's bar once a week, usually on Sarah's payday. We both stood in the kitchen on those Friday nights as she handed us our allowances. A few dollars for the movies for me; to him, a pittance to allow him his pride, never a great deal, never seemingly enough to get drunk on.

At the top of the stairs, I would stop and watch him hold the bannister on the landing, sucking in deep breaths and forcing his shoulders straight. Then he would be lost, moving down the long hallway, until later that night when at 2 or 3 A.M., I'd sit out on the stoop and wait for him to stagger home and renegotiate those stairs, his arms upon my shoulders. On my walks in Upper Manhattan, I sometimes stop at a neighborhood bar and usually I'll see someone there who reminds me of him. He'll tell me about Parnell or talk about the IRA and the troubles in the North or sing me a song and stick with me in hearty fellowship until the twenty dollar bill I have placed on the bar has been drunk up, or he'll flip quarters with me or make bets about Ted Williams' lifetime batting average or the length of the longest river in the world. The barman will have a copy of the *World Almanac*, and my companion will be inevitably correct. Sometimes out of pity I will give wrong answers. I assume my father could also be a hearty companion and gambler; he probably was pitied also and drinks were bought for him by compassionate strangers. How else explain how he could come home so incredibly drunk. His suit (for he was always well-dressed—even when he worked on the docks he would wear a suit and change into work clothes in the locker room—) would be crumpled or vomit-stained—sometimes even bloody. How many days did I come home from school and see him standing in the kitchen ironing it and preparing it to be crumpled and stained once more?

Physically he never seemed to get better or worse—he had enough strength to walk those few blocks right until the end. But I grew from seven to seventeen and the old man's hair grew whiter, his suit was replaced every two years, his cooking became better, and the trips to the Sunset were decreased as the trips to the hospital clinic increased.

And as I grew and took on strength I began to despise him and wonder about Sarah, for she would go out each night and carry in beer for him and as he drank it, he would become enraged.

I don't know what they fought about. I probably could make up something that would please a psychiatrist, but somehow I don't think there was a reason. They fought because they were fighters. And they were vicious. Some mornings I would wake (for usually I could sleep through it all, having decided to withdraw, retreat, what you will, and survive) and find Sarah had spent the night with neighbors or sleeping in a kitchen chair. One morning I found the old man stretched out motionless on the kitchen floor with blood trickling from his head. I picked him up—I can still remember my surprise at how light he was—and carried him into the bedroom and

placed him beside Sarah, who said that he had been drunk and fallen, hitting his head against the refrigerator. She had not helped him. "I hope he learned his lesson," she told me. And yet that very night she was off to the grocery to get him more beer. That was Sarah, propriety, form in all things; she was a wife and wives obeyed their husbands. Even now, Sarah is a creature of form; when she mentions him, she always says, "God rest his soul," and I wonder if she even knows what the words mean.

Form. Form in all things for Sarah, and perhaps it was form that led to their separation also; for surely after twenty years of love-hate, they must have found security in the fact that each was there and could be clung to.

I remember. I will always remember. I wish that I did not have to remember Sarah standing in the middle of the kitchen nude. They had been yelling with a new intensity, for I woke up. I went to protect her. It sounded like they had been slapping each other, and there was Sarah, breasts sagging, crying, hysterical, and he throwing a bucket of water at her, yelling a man's name at her. I cannot remember the man's name. I do not know what he was angry about. But it had to do with a man. I do not know whether she was having or had once had an affair with him. I do not want to know. I was angry. My father looked vicious, burning eyes and slavering mouth of an angry dog. I remember crashing my fist into his face: an ill man, my father.

He crumpled quickly and fell to the floor. Sarah raced into the bedroom where I heard her weeping for hours. I stood over him and said, "I'm sorry," but he was silent. I left the kitchen and he got up, went to his easy chair, his cigarettes, his beer. That was the last time I saw him in our house.

The next day when I came home from school he was gone. He moved to a furnished room in a welfare hotel on the Upper West Side. I thought it was a ruse on both his and Sarah's part; that he would be back quite soon. But all we heard from him was by postcard. First, an address; then a request for razor blades and an Erskine Caldwell novel that he had been reading.

"Bring him his blades tomorrow, William," Sarah told me.

"Mother, he's obviously gone and bought blades. You know him. I can't picture him going without shaving. I think he wants you to come and convince him to come back home."

"No. He's your father, go see him."

"I don't want to."

"Go, but don't you tell him anything about me. If he asks how I am, say that I'm fine."

"Ask him to come home, Mom."

"That's his decision."

So that Saturday she woke me, gave me breakfast, and sent me off, warning me again not to say anything about her.

Such pride. I, too, am proud. I notice that I have given the impression that I was the dutiful son. Pride. I hated to go. I did not want to see him. I

hated the grime of the hotel hallways, the dirty light, the Latin music that seemed to rock the building, and his self-pity.

The first Saturday, he said nothing to me for almost five minutes after he had opened the door and ushered me in. I sat in the one broken-backed chair watching him, trying to think of something to say, while the image of Sarah nude and him with the bucket of water kept fading in and out of my mind.

Finally, looking guilty he said, "Bill, don't you turn against me, too."

He seemed to want something of me. He had never before exposed his emotions to me in this way. A feeling of formality came over me. I did not know what to say but felt that whatever I said would be transformed by him into a reason to stay here or go back home. My parents were thrusting tacit responsibilities on me. I felt used, and at the same time complimented. My father, the raging drunk, was now a hurt child asking me for solace, consolation.

"Everything is going to be all right, Dad. I think she wants you back. Come back, it will make her happy." As I begged I realized I was betraying Sarah.

"You may not have turned against me yet, but in years to come you will." He got up from the rumpled bed and walked hesitantly, painfully, to the refrigerator in the corner of the tiny room. Inside I saw about a dozen bottles of wine on the rack. He took one and poured two full glasses.

"This is a trifle better than Sneaky Pete . . . I hope you can afford to offer your own son better stuff . . . but I'd like you to share a drink with me while we still have a chance."

He was planning to do away with himself. That was my first thought. For an instant I was indifferent. The man stood before me a case history, but then blood, or perhaps pride, reasserted itself. Only weak men commit suicide, I thought then.

"What do you mean while we still have a chance? We'll have plenty of chances," I said, hoping I was not being cast as some type of preserver, believing he was just suffering from the self-pity of the ill.

"Dad, if you'd only drink a bit less, you and her would get along better. C'mon home and try."

I had not intended to persuade him to come home when I walked into the room, but as soon as he had spoken I felt that he needed to be around Sarah and me.

He looked at me, first with what seemed suspicion; then he smiled and said, "You've become a better son than I could've suspected. From what I remember of that punch the other night it was a beaut," and he was laughing and pouring more wine in my glass. Then he did something he hadn't done since I was a kid. With his hand he mussed up my hair. I felt moved and proud. I sipped the wine which burned my throat and smelled like ether. It was a horrible stuff but I drank it. He was throwing down glass after glass, refilling steadily between his words, "Oh, it had to be a good

punch to put me down the way you did." He seemed so gleeful, so happy to have been knocked out.

"Remember when you were a kid, Billy, and I showed you how to box? I did a good job there, now didn't I? Now didn't I?"

I nodded.

"You learnt from the featherweight champion of all Belfast." The joy had left his voice. "Do you feel bad about it, Billy? I never thought I'd see the day when my son would turn on me."

Why wouldn't he shut up? We were getting along so fine, and now he was turning on me. I had not turned on him, but felt that I had betrayed Sarah without really getting any closer to him. That he was still boxing, but now with language. That he was dancing around me with his words, now mock-friendly, then mock-vicious, feinting, moving in and out, looking for my weak spot, dying to floor me, but cautious. Yet I had to stay in there even though I was outclassed. If he were home, the two of them could bicker and fight about what they were taking out on me, so I said, "Dad, I didn't turn on you. You were drunk. I was just trying to stop you from hurting her."

He ran his hands through his graying hair, "I'd never hurt her."

"You could've."

"Oh, let's forget the whole thing. I'm not coming back and you can tell her that, and tell her to stop sending you down here with messages. I'm sick of both of you. I'm not coming back."

His eyes were fixed on his shoes, and I answered him, my eyes attempting to catch his. "Who asked you to come back? Nobody. And nobody gave me any message." I was angry, my voice rose and he looked up at me from his chair. "I came here to visit you and all you can do is drink and give me some bullshit about what a good guy you are. Well, you're not a good guy. You're a . . . a . . ."

I didn't finish. He was up on his feet and had the door opened. I had hurt him. I could see it in the tic that began to quiver on his cheek, "Billy, get out of here and leave me alone."

I was glad to leave. Glad to get out on Broadway and walk uptown. Glad to look at the pretty girls, their fine legs, the store windows, the strangers who made no demands. He had wanted me to take his side; impartiality he interpreted as turning against him. I thought of other Saturdays when I would go into the confessional and try to explain the same problem to the priest: "Father, the fourth commandment says to honor your father and mother, obey them. But what should you do when one tells you to do one thing and the other tells you to do something else?" The priests had never been able to answer the question, and my only solution was to obey neither by becoming, literally or figuratively, immobile.

As I walked up Broadway I vowed never to see him again. Of course my view was childish petulance, and when, a few weeks later, he telephoned and asked me to bring his pipes since he was giving up cigarettes

again, I knew I would go. Nevertheless, I told him I would mail them to him. He said I had to come see him; he had something very important to tell me.

"This is not life," was the important thing he had to tell me as he sat in the broken-backed chair by his bed, when I walked in the door that Saturday. Then he rolled up his pants legs and showed me his hairy calves: gnarled, pale, with little red splotches glimmering on the skin. "Don't you agree with me? This is no life."

His arms moved above his head, pointing out the dresser, the chair, the bed, the refrigerator-stove combination, the water-softened walls, and finally the ugly legs again. "I've been thinking about you, about how you must talk to your friends about me, what you must say. About her, also. What she must think at work. There must be some good-looking strong men there, mustn't there? Don't blush, you fool. You know what I'm talking about."

"Dad, she doesn't think about those things. She just doesn't. I don't know what to say about your legs. Please don't think about them. Let's have a drink." I opened his refrigerator. There was no wine or beer. No whiskey in the cupboard.

"There isn't any. That's doctor's orders. You see, Bill, this isn't life, and I'm going to do something about it. When I went to the clinic last week, Doctor Fox told me about an operation that would help my legs. I'm going to have it next week."

"What kind of operation?"

"Well, they're gonna open my heart and attach it to one of those machines, then they'll open my legs and put some plastic tubing in where the veins are clogged, attach it to my heart, and then the blood will be able to get back into my legs."

He said all this very blankly, unemotionally, and from the way he moved his eyes and looked at the floor, I knew the operation was very serious (like a needle slowly inserted into the skin, I felt an inexplicable sharp pain behind my eyelids) and knew he would be dead soon. There could be no other outcome. If the operation was a success, the man who would come through it and walk and perhaps even work again would not be my father; he would be a stranger, a new phenomenon for Sarah and me to deal with. Whatever happened, he was thrusting more confusion on me; I felt that Sarah should be dealing with these profundities; perhaps she could give him the closeness, the understanding that he seemed to be craving. Because that is how I saw his consent to the operation, a wild gallantry in need of an appreciative audience. The old man was being noble, suddenly becoming an allegorical figure in some strange self-dramatization of his own code of honor.

Sarah would know how to act, what role to assume in the script that he seemed to be setting up, but I, seventeen years old and very frightened, could say only, "You had better tell Mother about this."

"No. No. You miss the point. She is not to know until it is over. She has enough to disturb her. This is our little secret."

"I can't hide it from her. I can't."

"Sure you can. I've asked so little of you. You can. Everything is going to be a success, and I want it to be that way without her having to worry for a minute about the whole thing."

"I can't." I couldn't understand. I saw no reason in all the secrecy, and he never gave me any reason; he just said, "Bill, you must."

"She has to know when something this important is happening."

"Bill, I'm not much. A drunk, I guess. But your mother is wonderful. I've been thinking about that since I left and about the shit I put her through. Do you understand? I've been a bastard and put her through shit. You don't know half of it, but now I want to do something clean; something in which she doesn't get involved and hurt."

"So I gotta get involved and hurt, is that what you mean? How can I keep her from knowin' you're in the hospital? I'll want to visit and she'll find out; she'll ask me where I'm goin'. Am I supposed to lie to her?"

"You don't have to come see me. It's gonna be all right anyway. You don't love me. She does and I'm not hurting her anymore."

"But I do love you."

"If you do, you won't tell her."

Again, he had cornered me I felt. Some code that I did not wish to practice had been forced on me and all I could say was, "OK, I'll keep it a secret. I'll try to anyway."

"Good, if you try, you can do it. Now, I go into the hospital on Wednesday and they operate on Friday. You can come see me if you want, but under no circumstances is she to know. Under no circumstances, do you understand?" He was speaking now with that assertion he had used when taking the strap to me as a child.

"Yes, Father, under no circumstances."

"You're the best son a man could have," he said and handed me ten dollars.

"You need this yourself," I said, awed by the amount. He had never given me more than one or two dollars before. Now, at night, I often think of that gesture. There was, I believe, some tacit agreement being reached between us. Was he telling me with that money—how pitiful little it was—that he knew what was going to happen? His smile betrayed no fear or even any attempt at a final leave-taking, as he said, "No I don't need it. The Welfare gave me a check for the month, and I'll be freeloading in the hospital for most of it. Buy yourself something."

"Okay. See you Wednesday."

"Only if you want."

On Wednesday and Thursday I did not go see him. I didn't want to and felt he did not want me there; that he desired his audience should wait until after he had been transformed.

On Friday afternoon they called me from the hospital. He was very bad. I told Sarah. That night we went down to Saint Vincent's together. He died during the night. Sarah was at his bedside. I stayed outside in the waiting room. I could not look into his face after telling Sarah.

As we stood on the steps of Saint Vincent's waiting for a cab, I saw under the garish light of the avenue, men, old and young, alone and in groups, moving from one bar to another.

We got into a taxi and as it drove up the avenue I gazed on the men: not one was well dressed or clean, all of their socks seemed to droop. They all walked easily, but none looked as if he were contemplating any great action.

But in all their eyes, I saw the suspicion of one who has been betrayed.

I see similar men each day, as I sit here on the park bench. In all their eyes I see the suspicion of one who has been betrayed. In the heat of the sun, I close my eyes. First there are red, yellow, green spots before them, but then I see a long concrete lane and in the distance there is a figure moving toward me on sturdy legs, his arms opened wide. He will pick me up into those arms I know, and muss up my hair, and draw me into his chest and warmth. I shall say "Forgive," and he, "Hush."

GOING DOWN TO MAKE COFFEE

His father died shaving, a third
of his face still lathered, the whisker
stalks still growing

and his mother
might die as she naps, cutting short
the dream of how she finds his father
squat against the bathtub, pounds
his chest till she stops for breath, brushes
dried lather off his face, walks
to the bedroom phone as if it's rung
six, seven times

and he supposes
he'll die some morning just as,
having kissed his wife awake, he throws
the covers back and his feet hit
the floor.

WILLIAM AARNES

TWO POEMS BY LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

DRAFT DODGER'S AMERICAN DREAM

The summer I fought free of dorm I roomed with two
Men ten years and one war
My senior veterans of the Korean no-man's-land-
To-sea World (let us say)
War no draft card
Incendiary myself, but something of a petty sneak thief

4-F swindler snatching my faked
Deferment, shamefacedly, from traces of dwindled
Childhood asthma foolhardily, too, I was
To learn from Red (the more
Esteemed) accomplished Joycean scorching his blood-
Shot eyes on white-hot-coals'

Word blaze of *Ulysses*' pages near memorized in the life-
Risking pale battery-light
Of foxholes Red chanting to no one in particular
Or to me listening—in by turns skull—
Blooming incantations
Into the all-houred campus night halting now and again

For choruses of "The Hollow Men" sung
Irishly *the telling:* no book is found to be murderously
Good that has not been wrung from blood-curdled
Void of a man's crying out,
Huddled in three-foot-deep makeshift pits pre-graves
Under snipers' crossfire falling

Like cloudburst of needlesharp hail everyplace at once
Only then Only then
Do the words, grown fatally precious as breathed
Air—seized from death, groove
Into the mind. . . .
Who, of the unmutilated, can make the words stream rightly?

THE MENSCH

No dummkopf about God (prayer
Worked in business; faith moved
Money from red to black), Grampa
Had started out to become

A rabbi. Unsentimental—sheepish
Or holy he couldn't feel—
He sided with God because God had
A better head on His shoulders. God

Was the brains of the outfit, tough-
Minded and ethical, nobody's fool *or*
Saint. What God said just once
He *meant*, once-and-for-all,

Took everyone at his word, could
See inside your head,
And never forgot your worst
Thoughts. Grampa had known but one

Or two honest sellers
Besides himself, but these had weaker
Moments when honor slept. True,
Only God kept a perfect

Vigil over base thoughts, quick
As weasels; but if Grampa felt
A weakening for shiksas or schnapps,
He swallowed temptation hard, and rarely

Hiccupped. The Old Testament,
In parts, tickled Grampa: whoever
Wrote the scriptures listened about half
The time, or less, to God's

Dictation. Grampa would fire absent-
Minded stenographers
On the spot, but he never blamed
God for leaning on a bad secretarial

Crutch. Only poylishe goyim
Would run the business and keep the books
And sweep the floors, too—not God . . .
God was a perfect mensch.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY AND THOMAS WOLFE

John L. Idol, Jr.

Watching Wolfe's rise to fame and looking back to weigh Wolfe's achievement, Hemingway decided he had bones to pick with his fellow Scribners author. As he claimed his own place in American letters, Wolfe did some weighing of his illustrious contemporary. On his side, after his great pleasure with *Look Homeward, Angel*, Hemingway faulted Wolfe's dependence on autobiography as a structuring device, his undisciplined style, and heavy demands upon the time and attention of their editor, Maxwell Perkins.[1] For his part, Wolfe was bothered by Hemingway's machismo, but his chief concern was ascertaining Hemingway's place among contemporary writers. And, in a very unusual step for him, Wolfe attempted to write a review of a novel, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Finally, he even paid Hemingway the highest tribute one writer can give another: he imitated Hemingway's style, most notably in "I Have a Thing To Tell You."[2]

Before signing with Scribners, Wolfe heard that his work was being shared with two of Scribners' brightest stars, Ring Lardner and Ernest Hemingway. Perkins had read them the scene about W. O. Gant's selling his prized angel to Madam Elizabeth, a scene that Wolfe at first thought would be all that Scribners would publish from the manuscript before rejecting the rest of *Look Homeward, Angel*.[3] Thus Hemingway learned of a new talent, a talent he would judge kindly or harshly in years to come; a talent he would in January, 1933, at Perkins' request, try to free from a creative log jam at Cherio's over drinks and steak[4]; a talent he would think about in far off Africa suggesting that a cultural shock, say exile to Siberia, might shape Wolfe into a better writer.[5]

Whether an unsettling experience would turn Wolfe into a more disciplined writer, Hemingway did not know, but of one thing he was certain: he could not let his own novels be structured by autobiographically controlled narrative devices. He considered "an uncompleted novel by Tom Wolfe much the same as a completed novel."[6] Although he also drew the

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[1]Lex Gaither, "Hemingway and Wolfe," *The Thomas Wolfe Newsletter*, 2, No. 2 (Fall 1978), 30.

[2]Richard S. Kennedy, *The Window of Memory: Thomas Wolfe's Literary Career* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 330.

[3]*The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, ed. Elizabeth Nowell (New York: Scribners, 1956), p. 169.

[4]Andrew Turnbull, *Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Scribners, 1967), p. 194. A helpful Hemingway tip was "to break off work when you 'are going good.'—Then you can rest easily and on the next day resume." Hemingway came away feeling that Wolfe was a great child, a writer whom Perkins could justly call a genius but would have to look after like a father (A. Scott Berg, *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978], p. 215.)

[5]Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Scribners, 1935), p. 71.

[6]*Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribners, 1935), p. 493.

substance of his novels from his own experiences, Hemingway stoutly believed in converting the facts of experience into well-made fiction. Had he known Wolfe well enough to see how hard Wolfe struggled to do much the same, he surely would not have concluded that "Tom was only truly good about his home town and there he *was wonderful and unsurpassable*. The other stuff is usually over-inflated journalese" (*Letters*, p. 517). Hemingway's loathing of Wolfe's copious style prompted him to label Wolfe the "over bloated Lil Abner of literature." He added, "If Max Perkins had not cut one half million words out of Mr. Wolfe everybody would know how he was except for the first good book, 'Look Homeward, Angel,' he never had enough on the ball to strike out Miss Billy Burke in her 64th year . . ." (*Letters*, p. 681). His words to William Faulkner yield Wolfe his native turf: "I never felt that link-up in Wolfe except with the N[orth]. C[arolina]. stuff" (*Letters*, p. 623). But when he felt no charity at all or when he forgot how much he admired *Look Homeward, Angel*, Hemingway bluntly dismissed Wolfe as an artist: "Tom Wolfe wrote only of his only life with rhetoric added" (*Letters*, p. 764).

For Hemingway, *rhetoric* was a bad word, synonymous with an excess in Wolfe that Hemingway called an "interminable flow" (*Letters*, p. 696). When he read Wolfe's last letter to Perkins, he knew he had seen a true thing and was able to call it a "good letter" (*Letters*, p. 473), but he seems to have failed to notice Wolfe's leaner prose, especially in "I Have a Thing to Tell You," the story Wolfe wrote with Hemingway's style in mind (Kennedy, p. 330; p. 333, n. 13).

Hemingway's scattered remarks thus far have asserted only that Wolfe had serious limitations as an artist: he could not craft a well-constructed novel, and his style was too ornate, overblown, rhetorical. Wolfe's farewell letter, however, stuck in Hemingway's mind, as shown in a letter to Perkins dated 28 October 1938: "Remember if anything ever happens to me I think just as much of you as Tom Wolfe even if I can't put it so well" (*Letters*, p. 475). But what stuck irremovably and irritatingly in his craw were the attention Wolfe demanded from Perkins and the time Perkins was willing to give.

If he could upon occasion ask Perkins in a friendly way about the progress of Wolfe's work, express his pleasure that a book was doing well, as he did following the publication of *The Web and the Rock* (*Letters*, p. 489), or reveal his concern over a libel suit brought against Wolfe (*Letters*, p. 455), he could also store away resentment as he read Perkins' accounts of why he could not so often join him for a holiday of fishing and hunting as he would have liked. Hemingway remembered, and resented, such reports from Perkins as "[Wolfe] keeps getting all upset, and he is so now, and I have to have an evening with him and try to make him think he is some good again," and "I cannot come down now. I cannot leave as long as I can keep Tom going well, as he is doing now. . . . A couple of nights ago, I told

Tom that a whole lot of fine stuff [for *Of Time and the River*] he had in simply ought to come out because it resulted in blurring a very important effect. Literally, we sat here for an hour thereafter without saying a word, while Tom glowered and pondered and fidgeted in his chair. Then he said, 'Well, then will you take the responsibility?' And I said, 'I have simply got to take the responsibility.'"[7]

Hemingway was apparently unwilling to tell Perkins of his resentment of Wolfe's extraordinary needs, choosing instead to let his anger simmer until after Perkins died. But before Perkins' death Hemingway gave Charles Scribner a taste of what was to come when he complained to him about his inability to coax Perkins to visit him in Cuba: "I wish he would come down. . . . I never see the bastard any more. Why can't he take an interest in me like he took in Tom Wolfe? I will let him cut out useless bits of what I write if that is what he likes" (*Letters*, p. 503).

The shock of Perkins' death brought the resentment to a boil: "I hadn't figured on him dying. . . . We had a hell of a good time this last time in New York and wasn't it lucky it was that way instead of a lot of problems and arguments. Anyway he doesn't have to worry about Tom Wolfe's chicken-shit estate anymore. . ." (*Letters*, p. 621). Once Hemingway had up a head of steam, he did not let it cool. He followed up these words to Charles Scribner in June, 1947, with another blast in May of 1951. When Scribner wrote about Perkins' era as editor at his firm, Hemingway replied: "Please bury Max's ghost for keeps and cut out this about he, Tom Wolfe and Scott being gods. . . . It makes me ashamed. Max was Max. . . . Tom Wolfe was a one book boy and a glandular giant with the brains and guts of three mice. Scott was a rummy and a liar. . ." (*Letters*, p. 726). This uncharitable assessment of Perkins' other bright hopes appropriately follows this frank confession: "I loved Max very much . . . and knew him pretty well and he always trusted me even when I was unjust and mean" (*Letters*, p. 726). How mean and unjust Hemingway could be at times is shown time and again in his letters. Concerning Wolfe, and Scott Fitzgerald as well, that meanness and lack of fairness sprang from something akin to sibling rivalry. Hemingway, however, chose to justify his remarks on the grounds that both Wolfe and Fitzgerald had unfairly imposed upon Perkins. Hemingway missed seeing that Perkins' deepest commitment was not to his writers themselves but to the literature they created or were capable of creating. The work of Wolfe and Fitzgerald stood in greater need of Perkins than did Hemingway's. Hemingway wanted Perkins as a friend, a companion, and was galled not to see more of him.

As much as Wolfe needed Perkins, he was happy to see him take a break from his desk at Scribners. Writing to his mother (1 February 1935)

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[7]Maxwell Perkins, *Editor to Author: The Letters of Maxwell E. Perkins*, ed. John Hall Wheelock (New York: Scribners, 1950), pp. 77-78, 90-91.

of one of Perkins' infrequent trips to visit Hemingway, Wolfe said: "We all hoped he would stay [in Key West] and get a good rest for he has had no vacation for three or four years but I understand that he has telegraphed that he will be back next Monday."[8] Considering this and other evidence, one could conclude that Hemingway never fully saw just how much of a workhorse Perkins chose to be. Simply put, Perkins usually preferred not to leave his office at Scribners, enjoyable as a visit to Hemingway was for both of them when he did accept one of Papa's invitations.

Before he became a rival for Perkins' attention, Wolfe had begun to enter a few notes in his notebooks about Hemingway and his place in American letters. His first entry (17 November 1928) merely includes Hemingway's name among a list of other writers, Dreiser, Lewis, O'Neill, Anderson, and others. Several months later (21 March 1929) Hemingway's name once again appears among a list of writers, both poets and novelists.[9] Even though his list of poets contained the names of Eliot, Pound, Frost, and Cummings, Wolfe thought that the novelists who came into the limelight from 1914 to 1929 had "a greater average talent than the poets" (*Notebooks*, p. 322).

More revealing is his next entry, since it shows that in Wolfe's way of thinking Hemingway could be classed with such a predecessor as Bret Harte as to attitude and placed in a camp by himself as far as his style and its influence were concerned: "The softness of the hard ones—Hemingway and his imitators. He is by far the best of his imitators" (*Notebooks*, p. 330).

Even more indicative of a continuing concern Wolfe had as he thought of the writers of Hemingway's generation was the note which followed immediately: "Silly talk about sentimentality and the lack of it. 'The lost generation'—what has it lost in America?" (*Notebooks*, p. 330). Repeatedly over the coming years Wolfe would refuse to consider himself one of the Lost Generation, believing as he did that the nation was yet busy discovering itself.

Rather than bothering with deciding who did or did not belong to the Lost Generation, Wolfe drew upon Hemingway, whom he placed among the modernists (*Notebooks*, p. 337), to help him illustrate what the modern mind was in a lecture for the Woman's Club of Glen Ridge, New Jersey, on the modern novel. His jottings on the modern mind ran as follows: "It is quite often a disillusioned mind. Disillusioned as to what? Dis[illusioned] about many of the most cherished beliefs as a former generation—belief in war and glory, belief in patriotism (in the 'my-country-right-or-wrong' sense), even profound disbelief in some of the most cherished conventions

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[8] *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother*, ed. C. Hugh Holman and Sue Fields Ross (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 243.

[9] *The Notebooks of Thomas Wolfe*, ed. Richard S. Kennedy and Paschal Reeves (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 243.

of social morality" (*Notebooks*, p. 375). A typical modern, he added, was someone from the Middle West who had gone off to war. Someone who fit this description was Frederic Henry of *A Farewell to Arms*, two pages of which Wolfe instructed himself to read.

The first passage provided a clear example of disillusionment, revealing Frederic Henry's feeling that "abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages. . . ."[10] The second passage narrates Frederic's unheroic desertion of the Italian army by plunging into a river.

Wolfe had become acquainted with *A Farewell to Arms* by attempting to review it. A review was a rare project for Wolfe, and he began this one tentatively. Declaring his ability to be creative rather than critical, Wolfe added that he could be detached because he had not become one of that numerous school of writers spawned by the success of *The Sun Also Rises*. His own tendency, he confessed, was to be copious rather than brief, a tendency likely to produce long novels. "For this reason, he is especially impressed by the superb concision of *A Farewell To Arms*. Hemingway says one thing and suggests ten more: his words not only pull their own weight in a sentence, they also pull a very rich weight of profound and moving association and inference." The remainder of what survives of this review is a much revised and lined-through jumble of words, but Wolfe does touch on the modernist note by contrasting Hemingway's position with Rostand's:

> For Cyrano is dead: we are no longer given the honors of a duel with the Enemy, our backs will be broken in the strong grip of no demons. But a little flame will flicker and go out.
>
> Is this too small a thing? No: it is perhaps the grandest thing we do. A man may forget a bonfire, but he will never forget the brief small flare of a match in a cave, and a face that lives a second behind its flame. Can one forget so immense a thing as that? *A Farewell To Arms* has caught and fixed that moment. And in this moment, caught also before in *The Undefeated*, and in one or two other stories, rests our hope for Ernest Hemingway and his work.[11]

Despite the note of pontification sounded in the final sentence, Wolfe showed truer critical instincts than he claimed for himself, for he saw a kind of Faulknerian will to endure in the actions of Frederic Henry, who, though devastated by the loss of Catherine Barkley, chose life rather than annihilation. His critical insight led him to suggest that it was not the modernist tendency to despair that Hemingway sought to present but a

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[10]Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Scribners, 1929), p. 185.

[11]Unpublished ms,B ms AM 1883 (1191), by permission of the Houghton Library and Paul Gitlin, literary executor of The Thomas Wolfe Estate.

rugged determination to shoulder whatever hardships life piled on him. Modern man could abide and endure disillusions; he could not admit defeat. Wolfe found something grand and fine in that. In such behavior Wolfe sensed no posturing, no display of machismo. He could, therefore, sincerely laud Hemingway's great story of war and love.

His abortive but revealing review of *A Farewell to Arms* behind him, Wolfe returned to his more customary notices of Hemingway, listing him among other contemporary writers and guessing their ages, jotting down how many novels Hemingway and such other American novelists as Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Caldwell, and Faulkner had written. All these notebook entries appear to be little more than a periodic glance at the achievements of his fellow novelists.

Yet Wolfe was concerned that readers might place him among Hemingway's imitators if he chose as a legend for his title page of his projected second novel, *The October Fair*, these words: "one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever." To Perkins he said, "I am sorry to say that this verse comes immediately before the verse Hemingway used, 'The sun also ariseth' etc., and people will say I have imitated him, but it can't be helped, it is chance, and this is the verse I want."[12] The fact that Wolfe never used the verse should not be taken to mean a retreat from what might be regarded as Hemingway's Biblical terrain. Like many novelists, Wolfe tried out many titles and legends before settling on something final.

Just as he did not see himself as an imitator of Hemingway, neither did Wolfe consider him a rival. In fact, as Wolfe told May Cameron of the New York *Post*, he had the strong hunch that Hemingway, together with Faulkner, would be one of the writers producing "wonderful books in the next twenty years." Hemingway had gotten off to a good start, Wolfe believed: "I always remember Hemingway's 'In Our Time,' which was published very early in his career and doesn't seem to be well known. I felt in reading that book that here was a man who had roots in American life and obviously the man who had written that book had material for a grand book about American life. I've got a notion that some day he's going to write it." Hemingway's "experiences and materials" did not "run out with the war." Good things lay ahead for American literature, and Hemingway would find that his greatest work had its roots in American soil.[13]

The only recorded occasion of any ill feelings on Wolfe's part came on 21 June 1935 when Wolfe reported to Perkins from Copenhagen that a New York publisher had told him that the June 1935 issue of *Scribner's Magazine* had printed three attacks on him, one of them being Heming-

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[12] *Letters*, p. 247.

[13] "An Interview with Thomas Wolfe," in *Press Time: A Book of Post Classics* (New York: Books, Inc., 1936), pp. 247-49.

way's speculation in *The Green Hills of Africa* concerning whether Wolfe would dampen his flow of words or gain an awareness of proportion if he were shipped off to Siberia or the Dry Tortugas. Wolfe's remark to Perkins points to Hemingway as one of the attackers and labels him debunkingly as "The Big Big He Man and Fighter With Words who can't take it. . . ."[14] Nothing more came of this bit of mild name-calling, Perkins obviously having the good sense to let the matter end without sending these words on to Hemingway.

Wolfe's words simply reflect an awareness of the he-man posturing by this time associated with Hemingway by some critics. When, a couple of years later, he could have gloated over the news that Hemingway had apparently got his comeuppance from the aging Max Eastman, Wolfe simply let Hamilton Basso's clipping about the Eastman-Hemingway scuffle in Perkins' office (14 August 1937) pass with the calm remark: "It was all very interesting and instructive."[15]

By this stage in his career Wolfe no longer concerned himself as much with celebrating the ego of an American artist as embodied in his autobiographical novels as with sharing his discovery that personal fame was less important than he had once thought, that a role as a spokesman for unlettered Americans striving to achieve the promise of America was a far higher calling. As he confided to Sherwood Anderson in a letter written 22 September 1937, he would now continue to work in the way he found best for himself, "through a process of torrential production." Getting down his picture of life, his view of society, counted most and he would do it his own way. "It would be wrong," he added, "to worry about doing it Flaubert's way, or Hemingway's way, or Henry James' way. Nevertheless, I do worry, as we all do, about any improvement: I want to be a better writer, a less wasteful writer, a surer writer, a cleaner writer, a more disciplined writer—and I believe and hope that may come through work."[16]

Through a long and difficult struggle Wolfe had learned that personal fame, that "last infirmity of a noble mind" as Milton had called it, was not enough. He was moving away from the image of the proud and sensitive and suffering aesthetic he portrayed in Eugene Gant towards a bardic concern for the welfare of the people he served. In part, the image of Eugene Gant matches the portrait of Hemingway as Carlos Baker drew it: "There is, first, the immensely ambitious young man, unfailingly competitive, driven by an urge to excel in whatever he undertook, to be admired and looked up to, to assert his superiority by repeated example. . . ."[17] But a shift from such youthful ambition is seen in Wolfe's speech at Purdue, his last public statement before his death. He now thought that the most

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[14]*Letters*, p. 468.
[15]*Letters*, p. 649.
[16]*Letters*, pp. 654-55.
[17]*Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Scribners, 1969), pp. vii-viii.

exalted concern of the artist must be "The common heart of man," for that is "the thing that will remain, that changes and is yet unchangeable—that endures and must endure."[18]

Clearly Wolfe was moving away from the fame-seeking goal that aligned him with the assertively competitive image of Hemingway towards the image that Faulkner wanted to leave—an obit and epitaph all in one: "He made . . . books and he died."[19] But just as surely as he was moving in Faulkner's direction, he and Hemingway both suffered a far more serious infirmity of a noble mind than did the self-effacing Faulkner, whose ranking of Wolfe ahead of both himself and Hemingway provoked an ugly outburst of Hemingway's competitive spirit until he learned that Faulkner based his order on the basis of the grandest failure (*Letters*, pp. 623-24).[20]

But in the end it appears that the sorest points remaining in Hemingway's mind about Wolfe were lesions aggravated by Hemingway's feeling that Wolfe had demanded too much of Max Perkins and had not been a sufficiently disciplined writer. About Wolfe's portrait in *You Can't Go Home Again* of Perkins as Foxhall Edwards, Hemingway wrote Perkins, "Have been reading Tom's book and a lot of that Fox stuff gave me a pain in the ass. I could not recognize the voice and as for Bill [George] Webber I will write a portrait of you two guys in 1000 words sometime and you see if I cannot get you straighter" (*Letters*, p. 517). His final thought on Wolfe, written to Charles Scribner, Jr., returns to a matter of style. Writing about a book that was not going well, Hemingway said, "Am no Tom Wolfe, all the words have to make sense; which can be tiring" (*Letters*, pp. 901-02).[21]

The preceding look at the relationship of Hemingway and Wolfe and the bones of contention that came to lie between them provides a picture of each writer consistent with what we have come to see as representative of each of them. Both highly valued Perkins' friendship and skills as editor, sportsman, and drinking companion. Both hungered mightily for fame, and each came to defend his own style as something essentially right for himself. What stands out as different is Hemingway's tendency to snarl more fiercely and repeatedly over the bones of contention. It was simply Hemingway's nature to want to prove again and again that he was the top dog.

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[18] *Thomas Wolfe's Purdue Speech: "Writing and Living"*, ed. William Braswell and Leslie Field (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Studies, 1964), pp. 71-72.

[19] *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 285.

[20] See Richard Walser's article "On Faulkner's Putting Wolfe First" in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 78 (Spring 1979), 172-181, for the fullest account of what Faulkner meant to suggest about the ranking of his contemporaries.

[21] In an earlier letter to Charles Scribner, Jr., Hemingway, who had been reading Wolfe's letters said that he had only met Wolfe once, for a drink at the Waldorf, and that had he read the letters before meeting him he would "have found a way not to turn up" (*Letters*, p. 876).

"I ALWAYS KEEP SEEING A LIGHT AS I TALK WITH HIM": LIMNING THE ROBERT FROST/RIDGELY TORRENCE RELATIONSHIP

George Monteiro

"The time draws near for going to press and I must get as many editors as possible implicated in the book beforehand. Ain't I wiley?" So wrote Robert Frost on 15 October 1935 to Louis Untermeyer, a friend and fellow-poet, who also happened to be a reviewer, an editor, and an influential anthologist.[1] Vintage Frost, this statement emanates from his most mischievous, puckish, businesslike self. Frost's relationship to Untermeyer, however, was hardly unique. It was anticipated by his early dealings with Susan Hayes Ward of *The Independent* and, later, with William Stanley Braithwaite of the Boston *Evening Transcript*.

My subject, then, is a familiar one: the complex, less-than-honest relationship of Robert Frost to a friend and fellow-poet and, once again, to one who for a long time was among his most important publishing editors —Ridgely Torrence.

Frost and Torrence encountered each other's poetry in print years before they met. A late bloomer, Frost knew about Torrence and his work as early as 1906, and perhaps even earlier, while Torrence, an early success, became aware of Frost's poetry perhaps as late as 1915, when he recommended it enthusiastically to Harriet Moody. On 1 December that year, he wrote:

> I don't know whether you are familiar with [Frost's] work or not. I am not well versed in it myself, but from the few things I have lately had I have conceived a large regard for his reality and power. His poetry has come to stay and must be attended to. I feel sure of that. There were three poems by him in the August Atlantic that impressed me greatly. One of them called *The Road not Taken* quite carried me off my feet.[2]

Only three months later, incidentally, Frost would write coyly to his new, powerful friend, who had recently become poetry editor of the *New Republic*:

> I am enclosing four poems, but you must reject two of them and may reject three or four. . . . I know you won't try too hard to like these poems. That would be not to give them a fair chance.[3]

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[1] *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 265.

[2] Quoted in Lyman Lee Leathers, "Ridgely Torrence and the Search for an American Identity," Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1963, p. 195n.

[3] *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, ed. Lawrance Thompson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 265.

It is not clear when Torrence first met Frost, but it is known that not until March 1919 did they talk, in Torrence's words, "real heart to heart"; to Harriet Moody he wrote the next day that he had been "quite carried away" by Frost, concluding: "He is surely one of the finest things this country has produced. He is a man, a noble character in addition to being a noble poet. . . ."[4] On the same evening Frost wrote, also to Miss Moody, "I had the good evening . . . in New York with the great-faced noble Ridgely."[5]

Eighteen months later, in the first Frost to Torrence letter printed in the Thompson edition of the letters, Frost begins:

> You'll begin to think I don't see the beauty of having a friend on the editorial staff of The New Republic. But I do and I mean to show it by sending you some poems I have on hand just as soon as I can find time and peace of mind to write them all over.[6]

He then concludes this short letter with a suggestive, telling notion.

> You're not going to be where I can run across you in my first descent on the settlements this week. I must see you, though, when I am down in December if we are going to continue to be anything more to each other than respecters of each other's poetry.[7]

Of course they became friends, and fortunately for Frost, Torrence became a valuable and influential ally as well. During Torrence's tenure as poetry editor of the *New Republic*, from 1920 to 1934, many of Frost's poems appeared in that journal.

There seems to be little question that Torrence was a loyal and consistent admirer of Frost's work down through the decades. And it was not the case, one hastens to add, that he was an uncritical reader of contemporary poetry. As Willard Thorp has insisted, under Torrence's direction the *New Republic* published the work not only of "poets already well known, such as Hardy, Sandburg, and De La Mare," but of poets—"early, before they had become 'accepted'"—like Elinor Wylie, Wallace Stevens, Louise Bogan, Hart Crane, Léonie Adams, Yvor Winters, and Allen Tate.[8] And of the late work of Edwin Arlington Robinson, for whom he had always had high respect, Torrence told Frost that Robinson's "'fire was gone' 15 years ago."[9]

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[4]Quoted in *Selected Letters*, p. 236.
[5]*Selected Letters*, p. 237.
[6]*Selected Letters*, p. 257.
[7]*Selected Letters*, pp. 257-58.
[8]Willard Thorp, "The Achievement of Ridgely Torrence," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 12 (Spring 1951), 109.
[9]*Newdick's Season of Frost: An Interrupted Biography of Robert Frost*, ed. William A. Sutton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976), p. 369.

When we turn to the matter of Frost's opinion of Torrence's poetry we cannot be so sure of his evaluation of it. As we know, Frost had become aware of Torrence as poet as early as 1906. It was in the September issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* that year that Frost read a piece entitled "Three American Poets of To-day." Its author was May Sinclair, a novelist and essayist; and the three poets who stand out among the day's "born aristocrats of literature" are William Vaughn Moody, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Ridgely Torrence.[10] "They are all three rich in imagination," she insists,

> but Mr. Moody is distinguished by his mastery of technique; Mr. Robinson by his psychological vision, his powerful human quality; Mr. Torrence by his immense, if as yet somewhat indefinite, promise.[11]

For Ridgely Torrence it was, as Sinclair saw it, an optative matter, promise for the future. In 1906, he had to his credit a slender first volume of poems, *The House Of a Hundred Lights*, a volume of twenty-seven unnumbered pages published by Small Maynard of Boston in 1900; *El Dorado*, a verse play, in 1903; and nine poems published in periodicals: five of them in college journals, one in the *New England Magazine*, one in the *Critic*, one in the *Gazette* (of Xenia, Ohio) and one in the *Atlantic Monthly*.[12] In her remarks on Torrence's poetry Miss Sinclair concentrates on *El Dorado*, refers to *The House Of the Hundred Lights*, which she calls the author's "Rubáiyát" ("a slender volume of quatrains written in frank imitation of Omar Khayyám"[13]) and concludes with "The Lesser Children," an ambitious poem published just twelve months earlier in the *Atlantic Monthly*.[14] Miss Sinclair concludes her piece:

> Mr. Torrence, having left Omar Khayyám far behind him, is inspired by no spirit but his own, and he is forming, a little too deliberately, a style of his own. With all his reverence for old traditions, he is in his own way an iconoclast, a breaker of revered metrical forms. The old rhythms, made malleable by the touch of many masters, become yet more plastic in his hands. He is happy if he can find a new caesura; he delights in the rippling of the old smooth measure, in feet that patter in delicate triplets to one beat. He loves to wed words according to their spiritual affinities, regardless of custom and of law. There is no doubt that he has before him a brilliant future. He works in the spirit which great art inexorably demands, the spirit of reverence

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[10]May Sinclair, "Three American Poets of To-Day," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1906, p. 326.

[11]"Three American Poets," p. 326.

[12]Thorp, "Achievement," 109-11.

[13]"Three American Poets," p. 333.

[14]Ridgely Torrence, "The Lesser Children," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1905, pp. 326-30.

> and of sacrificial patience. But because his art is precious, let him beware of preciosity.[15]

Frost knew this essay, and he remembered it vividly for years. He was affected by Miss Sinclair's temerity in naming just three poets and on settling on these three. Years later, when on a visit with Ezra Pound to May Sinclair sometime after the publication of his own first volume of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, in 1913—a book he knew she had "been showing . . . to people"[16]—Frost was pleased with her reaction to his question: Shouldn't she have put Robinson ahead of Moody and Torrence "in her article of a few years back in the Atlantic?" She agreed with him, adding further that "Robinson was the only one of the three she still cared for."[17]

Two years later Frost, having at last met Edwin Arlington Robinson, chose to bring up the Sinclair article still again in an answer to a letter by Robinson:

> Both your speculations interest me, particularly the first one as to whether or not I care what you think of me. It may not pain you to hear that as long ago as May Sinclair's paper in The Atlantic I marked you down as one of the few people I intended some day to know. Miss Sinclair didn't succeed in interesting me in Moody or Torrence. What has kept me from seeking your friendship all these years is the fear you might be troubled to find anything to like in my work. I knew I liked yours: that much was right. But I should never actually seek a fellow author's friendship unless everything was right, unless he saw something in me as I saw something in him and there was little or nothing to cover up and lie about in our opinions of each other.[18]

It was a high moral principle Frost espoused in meeting Robinson as an equal, in extrinsic poetic merit and in friendship. It was also a principle, admittedly, that he could, need being need, shelve at want.

It is of course possible that, fostered by handy friendship in subsequent years, Frost would change his mind about Torrence's poetry. But there is nothing in the published Frost letters to indicate that he ever thought much of Torrence's verse. It is true that while Torrence was poetry editor of the *New Republic*, Frost sent him "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," inscribing it "for Ridgely,"[19] a poem which promptly appeared in the *New Republic* on 7 March 1923. Three years later Frost sent him the poem "The Passing Glimpse." It is worth quoting here:

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[15]"Three American Poets," p. 335.
[16]*Selected Letters*, p. 74.
[17]*Selected Letters*, p. 84. See also Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years, 1874-1915* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 414.
[18]*Selected Letters*, p. 190.
[19]Dorothea Kingsland, "The Ridgely Torrence Collection," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 15 (Summer 1954), 214.

I often see flowers from a passing car
That are gone before I can tell what they are.

I want to get out of the train and go back
To see what they were beside the track.

I name all the flowers I am sure they weren't:
Not fireweed loving where woods have burnt—

Not bluebells gracing a tunnel mouth—
Not lupine living on sand and drouth.

Was something brushed across my mind
That no one on earth will ever find?

Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
Not in a position to look too close.[20]

"The Passing Glance" was freighted with a public inscription, "To Ridgely Torrence on Last Looking into his Hesperides." What has not been adequately noted is that the poem and its inscription were sent along with the injunction—a mocking injunction?—that the poem was not sent to Torrence for publication.[21] Of course Torrence knew what Frost actually wanted, and the poem appeared in the *New Republic*, in its issue for 21 April 1926.

One would not want to overstate the extent to which in "The Passing Glimpse" Frost was playing up to his friend as poetry editor. There was considerable logic in the inscription, for Frost, using the image of flowers seen only from a passing car and then lost forever, echoes the notion in Torrence's *Hesperides* that faith, heaven-given, is rarely glimpsed. Indeed, Frost's poem was a harder, oven-bird-like reply to the more melodic laments of Torrence's poems. Whether the inscription was meant to flatter Torrence or to mollify him before Frost's own temerity in "answering" his poetry or whether the motivation behind the act lay elsewhere, I shall not speculate. Suffice it to say that "The Passing Glimpse" was an "answer" to a question asked or a challenge thrown down unwittingly, even inadvertently, by another poet, this time a contemporary.

For despite Frost's feelings about Torrence, or because of them, he found some of his poetry challenging enough to confront its concerns in his own poetry. Torrence's "The Lesser Children," for instance, is an unacknowledged precursor of images, phrases, and words appearing in some of Frost's own, rather more famous poems. "The Lesser Children" first appeared in the *Atlantic*, was highly praised in the *Atlantic*'s "Contributors' Club" two months later, and was quoted extensively by May Sinclair in her

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[20]"A Passing Glance," *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 248.
[21]"The Ridgely Torrence Collection," 214.

article, "Three American Poets of To-Day," in September 1906.

According to May Sinclair, "The Lesser Children: A Threnody at the Hunting Season" has for its subject "The slaughter of the birds."[22] The poem, an ode, runs for nearly 200 lines—198, to be exact. In the slaughter of birds at hunting season, Torrence sees the threat of the apocalyptic demise of man, who would destroy "the lesser children,"

> The weaker brothers of our earthly breed;
> Watchmen of whom our safety takes no heed;
> Swift helpers of the wind that sowed the seed
> Before the first field was or any fruit;
> Warriors against the bivouac of the weed;
> Earth's earliest ploughmen for the tender root. . . .

The poem is prophetic in that it lashes out at those who wantonly kill off "the lesser children," presenting mankind a dark vision of an earth populated by death sown by his "own dishonor" and inherited, in its "curse of blight," by the "locust [who will] have his fill" and "the blind worm [that will] lay tithe." In this world devoid of man,

> The unfed stones rot in the listless mill,
> The sound of grinding cease.
> No yearning gold would whisper to the scythe. . . .

These lines bear comparison to several in Frost's "Mowing":

> There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
> And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
> What was it whispered? . . .[23]

The poet of "Mowing," attributes the sound, not to the "yearning gold" but to the scythe, to be answered aphoristically:

> The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
> My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

If the whispering scythe (in a world where men do exist) and the scythe that is no longer whispered to (in a world where man has disappeared) are not coincidental coinages, "Mowing" is not an "answer." Rather it is a poem that borrows an image, a notion, for its own purposes. In fact, in "Mowing," as Frost once said, "I come so near what I long to get that I almost despair of coming nearer."[24] This admission comes in the same letter, incidentally, in which Frost comments on his exchange with May Sinclair over the relative merits of Robinson, Moody, and Ridgely Torrence.

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[22] "Three American Poets," p. 334.
[23] "Mowing," *Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 17.
[24] *Selected Letters*, p. 83. Frost also recalled his having once told C. Day Lewis that "Mowing" was "straight goods—all mine" (quoted in Louis Mertins, *Robert Frost: Life and Talks—Walking* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965], p. 343).

And what of the "yearning gold" that no longer whispers to the scythe? Perhaps in "Nothing Gold Can Stay" we have another poem coming out of a trace in "The Lesser Children."

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.[25]

Of a mated bird, Torrence had written:

Yet speeding he forgot not of cloud
Where he from glory sprang and burned aloud.
But took a little of the day,
A little of the coloured sky,
And of the joy that would not stay
He wove a song that cannot die . . .

Surely these lines anticipate the theme of "Nothing Gold Can Stay," and, in a sense, with differences that matter, of the theme of "The Oven Bird."

Just how much of Torrence's "The Lesser Children" remained with Frost as a store of thematic hints and serviceable words and images, I shall not venture to say. That the poem influenced him rather extensively and over a long period covering decades, can be indicated further by a look at two other instances. Torrence writes of

. . . wings broken or a fledgling dead,
Or underfoot the meadows that wore gold
Die, and the leaves go mourning to the mould
Beneath poor dead and desperate feet
Of folk who in next summer's meadows shall not meet?

The soft, almost lachrymose complaint of these lines was countered by characteristic Frostian toughness in his poem, "A Leaf-Treader," published thirty years after Torrence's poem:

I have been treading on leaves all day until I
am autumn-tired.
God knows all the color and form of leaves I have
trodden on and mired.
Perhaps I have put forth too much strength and
been too fierce from fear.

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[25]"Nothing Gold Can Stay," *Poetry of Robert Frost*, pp. 222-23.

I have safely trodden underfoot the leaves of
another year.
All summer long they were overhead, more lifted up
than I.
To come to their final place in earth they had to pass
me by.
All summer long I thought I heard them threatening
under their breath.
And when they came it seemed with a will to carry me
with them to death.
They spoke to the fugitive in my heart as if it
were leaf to leaf.
They tapped at my eyelids and touched my lips with
an invitation to grief.
But it was no reason I had to go because they had
to go.
Now up, my knee, to keep on top of another year of
snow.[26]

Another possibility. Torrence opens his poem:

In the middle of August when the southwest wind
Blows after sunset through the leisuring air,
And on the sky nightly the mythic hind
Leads down the sullen dog star to his lair. . . .[27]

Does the "mythic hind" that "leads down the sullen dog star to his lair" anticipate the dog visit, a visit that Frost celebrates in "One More Brevity" and that he "might even claim" was paid by the dog star Sirius—

The star itself—Heaven's greatest star,
Not a meteorite, but an avatar—
Who had made an overnight descent
To show by deeds he didn't resent
My having depended on him so long,
And yet done nothing about it in song.[28]

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[26]"A Leaf-Treader," *Poetry of Robert Frost*, pp. 297-98.

[27]When he collected the poem thirty-six years later, he retitled it "Threnody at the Hunting Season" and revised it extensively—for the worse, in my opinion. In *Poems* (1941) the poem opens:

In the middle of August when the southwest wind
Blows after sunset from the upper air
And through the dusk, Antares toward the west
Leads down the smouldering Scorpion to his lair.
(New York: Macmillan, 1941, p. 98)

[28]"One More Brevity," *Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 421.

Torrence had used the words "lair" and "loneliness." In all his published poetry Frost would use these words a total of only four times: "lair" (more exactly, "lairs") once and "loneliness" three times. In three of the four instances the terms appear in "Desert Places," the poem published immediately preceding the publication of "A Leaf-Treader."

Before turning to "Desert Places," however, we might find it useful to quote the lines in "The Lesser Children" that center upon the way in which a bird's song brings loneliness:

> Who has not seen in the high gulf of light
> What, lower, was a bird, but now
> Is moored and altered quite
> Into an island of unshaded joy?
> To whom the mate below upon the bough
> Shouts once and brings him from his high employ. . . .
> He wove a song that cannot die . . .
> Bidding the radiant love once more beware,
> Bringing one more loneliness on the world.
> And one more blindness in the unseen air.

The first of five poems collected under the title "The Hill Wife," Frost entitled "Loneliness," subtitling it "Her Word":

> One ought not to have to care
> So much as you and I
> Care when the birds come round the house
> To seem to say good-by;
>
> Or care so much when they come back
> With whatever it is they sing;
> The truth being we are as much
> Too glad for the one thing
>
> As we are too sad for the other here—
> With birds that fill their breasts
> But with each other and themselves
> And their built or driven nests.[29]

It is almost as if Frost and Torrence were conducting a discordant dialogue in which they use the same terms to talk differently about similar matters. Here again is Torrence.

> Multitudes, multitudes, under the moon they stirred!
> The weaker brothers of our earthly breed . . .
> A thousand, thousand sweet,
> With starry eyes not even raised to plead . . .

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[29]"The Hill Wife," *Poetry of Robert Frost*, pp. 126-27.

Winged mysteries of song that from the sky
Once dashed long music down.
O who would take away music from the earth?
Have we so much? Or love upon the hearth? . . .
The great trees bending between birth and birth
Sighed for them, and the night wind's hoarse rebuff
Shouted the shame of which I was persuaded.

Compare these lines with Frost's fourth poem in "The Hill Wife" sequence, "The Oft-Repeated Dream," where Frost once again echoes eerily, even as it particularizes, parts of Torrence's poem.

She had no saying dark enough
For the dark pine that kept
Forever trying the window latch
Of the room where they slept.

The tireless but ineffectual hands
That with every futile pass
Made the great tree seem as a little bird
Before the mystery of glass!

It never had been inside the room,
And only one of the two
Was afraid in an oft-repeated dream
Of what the tree might do.[30]

"Desert Places," published first in 1934 in the *American Mercury* (which would publish "A Leaf-Treader" in 1935), has become one of Frost's best known pieces, partly because it has been so widely anthologized and partly because Frost himself recited it so often in his public readings.

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less—
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

[30] "The Hill Wife," *Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 128.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars—on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.[31]

Torrence's poem "The Lesser Children" is a poignant call for man to face whatever it is within himself that keeps him from seeing his true and benevolent relationship to the beasts and birds of his world. Frost's "Desert Places" swerves from this position not at all. Indeed, it closely builds on one important aspect of Torrence's theme: that the basic fear and loneliness that threaten to dehumanize man may be turned to his advantage, that it might lead to his salvation. Torrence spells out the human situations.

When Fear watched at our coming and our going
The horror of the chattering face of Whim.
Hates, cruelties new fallen from the trees
Whereto we clung with impulse sad for love,
Shames we have had all time to rid us of,
Disgraces cold and sorrows long bewept,
Recalled, revived, and kept,
Unmeaning quarrels, blood-compelling lust,
And snarling woes from our old home, the dust.

And then he adds, rife with hope:

Yet even of these one saving shape may rise;
Fear may unveil our eyes.
For know you not what curse of blight would fall
Upon a land lorn of the sweet shy races
Who day and night keep ward and seneschal
Upon the treasury of the planted spaces?

Frost had described his wintery scene as

A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

He then concludes his poem with lines ending with the rhymes "spaces," "race is," and "desert places." Two of these are rhymes in Torrence's lines on the function of "Fear": "races" and "spaces." The third rhyme, the concluding rhyme that also gave Frost the title of his poem, Torrence had already used in another line from "The Lesser Children," which refers to

The solemn and compassionate desert places.

Ridgely Torrence's poem, "The Lesser Children," perhaps without Frost's full, conscious knowledge, appears to have been for Frost something of a poet's limited preserve for themes, felicitous phrases, and

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[31]"Desert Places," *Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 296.

images. There is a debt here that Frost neither acknowledged nor, one surmises, ever felt the need to repay. "I had one of my great times with Ridgely last week," he said in a letter in 1923; "I always keep seeing a light as I talk with him—and of course losing it as quickly; the thing is the seeing it."[32] On the matter of literary influence, however—for Frost at least—turn it around: in Torrence's poetry he kept "seeing a light," and then, of course, losing it quickly—but losing it not entirely, only characteristically to consciousness and to memory.

TWO POEMS BY F. C. ROSENBERGER

ON THE DIFFICULT POEMS OF AN ESTEEMED CONTEMPORARY

These are hard nuts to crack. And what is lacking?
Enough meat in them to be worth the cracking.

A SECOND DEATH

The gentle poet, dead and gone,
Lies quiet under stone.
His second death, and it is worse,
No one reads his verse.

[32] Thorp, "Achievement," 109.

SENTENCE FOR A NICE LADY

Charlotte K. Haigh

I

Turning down overtures from strangers is a common enough diplomatic problem on vacation. Not that Althea and Ronald Nelson had closed any doors. Indeed, they had frequently met people in their travels who had become their good friends. Ordinarily they didn't take the initiative themselves—people being drawn to their quiet good looks and manners—but when they did, they invariably followed the rules. It was unthinkable to pursue an acquaintance without evidence of genuine encouragement. Perhaps this was the reason Althea felt some slight annoyance when Scott approached, unbidden, a second time.

She and Ronald had met Scott at breakfast. Sam Taylor, the owner of the hotel, had been standing at their table chatting, welcoming them to the island once again. When he left, Scott approached. He was perhaps in his late twenties, rather heavily built, with brown hair and a mustache. He carried a white pipe which he held both with his teeth and his hand, as if to let go of either end would be to drop it. He reminded Althea of a large frog sitting on a lily pad. His eyes bulged, and Althea looked away, fearing they would actually blink from the bottom up.

"I couldn't help but overhear," he had said, "that you don't have your rental car yet. Debby and I are going down to the beach soon and we'd be happy to have you come with us." He had pointed to his wife at the next table as if getting a good look at her would necessarily be an important part of the decision.

His wife resembled him in that she had a soft layer of fat which suggested lethargy, an inability to get out of her own way. Her hair was pale blonde and her skin was so light that her eyebrows disappeared.

As Althea had looked her way, the girl stopped cleaning her fingernails and smiled shyly.

Althea had been glad to leave the young man to Ronald. He knew exactly what to do. Having half risen to shake hands and exchange names, he had returned to his chair without asking this man named Scott to sit down. "Thank you very much," he had said. "That's very kind of you, but I'm afraid we're going to be rather busy for a while." And then smiling he had repeated: "Very nice of you, though."

Scott had looked like a teenager turned down on his first request for a date. He left the table but turned to say: "You're sure?"

Ronald nodded. "Thanks anyway."

Scott now appeared on the verandah and sat down in one of the ornate peacock chairs beside Althea. "So we meet again," he started.

"Why, yes. Hello there," she said. As she looked up a bead of spittle slid along the stem of Scott's pipe. She watched him wipe it off and then

dry his palm on his trousers. She hoped he didn't want to shake hands.

She didn't want company at all. She was very tired, having been up all night. This was a spur-of-the-moment trip—the best kind, according to Ronald. The only reservation they had been able to get was a night flight to Puerto Rico with several hours' wait until the morning connection to St. Thomas. They hadn't minded. They had played cribbage, a game they loved because it allowed them to talk; and they had dipped their feet in a fountain in the deserted San Juan terminal, like a couple of kids.

Only an hour ago they had completed their journey, and Althea wanted nothing more than the opportunity to let her mind wander in its delicious exhaustion. Ronald was off somewhere talking with Sam, but when he returned, they would go to their room and make love to christen their arrival.

She was having some difficulty, therefore, following Scott's attempts at conversation, only vaguely aware that she was answering in noncommittal monosyllables. She lighted another cigarette from the coal of the last.

Scott stopped talking and looked as if he might be turning something over in his mind. Finally he said: "You know, you really have to give up those cancer sticks."

Unaccustomed to being directed by someone a good deal younger than she (except perhaps by her two sons who were now in college), Althea searched for an appropriate reply. (The word *retort* crossed her mind, and she thought she was getting irritable.)

But before she could say anything, Scott grabbed the cigarette from her hand and crushed it into the ashtray, not just once, but again and again. He then sat silently, his face turning a bright red. "Oh, God, I shouldn't have done that. Believe me, Mrs. Nelson, I'm sorry."

He looked down at the mangled cigarette as if he might be able to repair it. "I've only just given up smoking myself," he explained. "Just a pipe now." He waited. "Shall I get you another package?"

Althea said no, that she had plenty, astounded that she could talk at all.

"Then perhaps I should light it for you," he suggested.

"No. I can manage." It was strange, she thought, how people became fanatics when they quit smoking, almost like religious converts. She smiled and repeated in a softer tone: "I can manage."

"All right," he said and walked away with that same defeated look Althea had noticed at breakfast.

The pleasure of her fatigue disappeared. Landing in St. Thomas always made her a little tense, she reminded herself. Because the runway was short and ended abruptly at a hill of volcanic rock, there was frequently a round of applause given to the pilot on landing. Althea had been very gay then and had joined in the clapping. Now she felt annoyed and wondered why the runway wasn't extended.

Wearily she corrected herself. It was not the runway that was annoying. It was this young man Scott, and yet she was sure he meant only to be friendly.

She wished Ronald would return and she thought to tell him about the incident, as she might have confided exasperation when their sons were growing up. Althea and Ronald had always sought each other's arms as a haven from the slight disrespect, the sloppiness, the laziness of teenagers. (That's all it ever was—typical, expected problems. Never any trouble.) Maybe at times each had wanted to say "Those kids drive me crazy," when the horseplay went on too long, or the boys had too many noisy friends around. But usually they just said "*Kids*!" in a way one might comment on an extra hot day, shaking their heads in laughter-edged dismay, and then falling into bed at the first opportunity.

She decided, however, not to bother Ronald. It was so very petty to complain, she thought. By the time Ronald returned, she had put Scott out of her mind and was thinking only of how attractive her husband managed to look despite his lack of sleep. He had a ruddy face and thick white hair. He looked, Althea thought, like a very wise arbitrator. She had noticed that once people were introduced to him they never forgot him or confused him with anyone else.

He was a writer and photographer—books of popular science, articles on photography—that sort of thing. He had worked hard and done very well, so that now he worked exclusively under contract. That meant deadlines, but it also meant the freedom and the money to travel. He could work any place with a typewriter, a post office, and an available dark room. Over the years, *nine-to-five* had become code for everything Althea and Ronald despised, a whole way of life whose yoke they had escaped.

Even on short notice, Sam had been able to give them their favorite room on the corner of the third floor. The hotel was an old Danish structure, three stories high. It perched on the steep hillside, with elaborate verandahs facing the sea, each floor terraced directly into the mountain. Its whiteness gleamed fresh-scrubbed against the green of the hill, with great daubs of scarlet and orange hibiscus on either side. The blossoms were interrupted by fan palms, like the greenery a florist uses to set off an arrangement; and there was a touch or two of something very yellow that Althea had inquired about many times and promptly forgotten the name of.

Ronald liked to point this out. "The big yellow flowers are blooming again," he laughed as they went up to their room.

He unlocked the door and Althea was startled by a baby lizard scurrying across the floor. She was somewhat proud of her lack of any real fear, and it was a good thing, she thought, because the lizards were everywhere, soundless except when they hurried through crackly underbrush. She had never actually touched one, though Ronald often trapped them in his cupped hands.

Now, however, he busied himself with turning down the bed and snapping the lock on the door. Making love at the end of a trip was a ritual—slow and gentle like the sunny April surf. When Althea stepped out

of her clothes, her skin still showed tan marks from their previous trip, and Ronald was about to give his full attention to the sun-defined areas when they heard voices outside. Althea grabbed her robe.

Large shuttered doors in each room opened onto the long verandah which was divided into individual areas only by railings. The first thing she saw when she opened the door was Scott's large rear end. He was leaning over, camera in hand, snapping pictures of a lizard sitting so motionless one would have thought it posing.

"Hi there," he whispered, straightening. "I guess we're right next door to you folks. I hope you don't mind me stepping over the barricade from time to time to get a few photographs."

"Not at all," Althea answered automatically, wishing she were capable of saying that she minded very much.

Scott said in a louder whisper, "Debby, bring my other camera. I don't want to scare this baby."

The young woman appeared again with a camera and stared in indecision at the rail. She squatted as if to crawl under. Then, possibly thinking she'd get stuck, she opted to swing her puffy legs over the top. She took mincy steps around behind Scott as if they were playing Indians.

"Have you seen them stick their little necks out?" Scott asked Althea, pointing to his still unmoving subject.

"Yes," Althea said, staying in the doorway.

Scott looked up from his camera as if her answer were a dismissal. "Sure. I guess I can take a hint, huh?" He climbed back over the rail, waving as if to clear the air of invisible insects. "Time to scram." Debby followed.

"You'd think I'd hurt his feelings," Althea said, once again inside with the shutters securely fastened.

"You couldn't hurt anyone's feelings," Ronald said.

But Althea couldn't get the incident out of her mind. Lying between the fresh sheets she was unable to come to orgasm. She just lay there wondering why Sam had put those people next door.

II

As far as Althea could see, Ronald was not bothered by Scott in the least. Of course Ronald didn't have to deal with the invitations, his vacation days being filled with his moveable work schedule. Usually Althea helped with editing and typing; but Ronald said things were going slowly, so she was left with time on her hands. She inevitably ran into Scott.

The next day she met him in the corridor. "Good morning," he said, waving a jar of salve. "How about dinner together tonight?"

"I'm afraid we already have plans," Althea said, hoping it didn't sound like a lie.

"Too bad."

He showed her the jar. "I'm up to a little doctoring," he explained. "Seems that Debby just can't take the sun. Or else that sun lotion I got for her is no damned good. You ought to see her." He sounded like someone recommending a local tourist attraction.

On cue Debby appeared in the hallway. She looked as if she had been put on a spit. Her fair skin was bright red, with her blonde hair, now frazzled, standing up like flames above the coals.

"Oh, my dear!" Althea said. "You must be sore."

"No," Debby replied in her childish voice, as though confirmation of the sunburn would spoil everything.

"It's difficult to see how it could have happened," Scott said. "The sun wasn't out for more than five minutes at a time."

"Would you like a drink?" Debby asked, gesturing into their room.

"It's a bit early in the day for me, I'm afraid."

"Scotch?" Scott urged.

"Perhaps later," Althea said. "May I have a raincheck?"

"With this weather that shouldn't be hard to arrange," Scott said.

From the way he complained about the weather Althea assumed they were from some place like Arizona. Later she found they were from New Jersey. Ronald's explanation, when he learned that Scott worked at an insurance company, was that every cloud that scudded across the sun was a personal affront to a person buried for the rest of the year in a filing cabinet.

Even when Scott critiqued some photographs that Ronald had done for Sam ("A little overexposed, I'd say"), Ronald merely looked amused. Later Scott apologized. "I didn't realize you were a professional photographer," he said, and asked if Ronald might be willing to give him a little advice. Ronald recommended a book, taking pen and paper from his pocket and quickly writing down title, author, and publisher.

Althea wished she could deal with people like that. She thought she was discovering within herself a desire to be mean.

That afternoon Scott was having trouble with his rental car in the parking lot. "We got a WAP car," he said to Althea and Ronald when they drove in. "W—A—P. Wing and a Prayer." Getting no response he said quickly, "Oh, I hope I haven't offended any nationalities."

"But of course you have," Althea wished to be able to say, but his look of apology stopped her.

Increasingly Althea felt that Scott was a *faux pas* addict, going around in circles of resolution like an alcoholic. He seemed to spend a great deal of time apologizing for what he could have avoided simply by keeping his mouth shut.

The next morning he showed Althea a bunch of flowers he had picked for Debby, but his habit was apparently too ingrained to let it go at a kind gesture. "The flowers will add a little class around here," he said. "God

knows we don't have any." He stopped. "*Ourselves.*" Then his inevitable blush rose and he went away mumbling: "Speak for yourself, Scottie. Speak for yourself."

That evening at dinner Althea told Ronald she thought they ought to accept Scott's next invitation.

"But I thought you didn't like them," Ronald observed, because by now Althea had mentioned a few things.

"It's just that he always looks so sad."

"Nice Christian lady working overtime?"

"Maybe," she said. "But maybe if we accept *one* invitation . . . Who knows? Maybe he can be interesting, given the chance." Althea liked to believe that this was so.

"If not," Ronald said, "I suppose we can exchange potato salad recipes with Debby." He laughed. "Well, you decide. But be careful. If you don't watch out, they'll be telephoning in the summertime. You know: 'We were just driving through—thought we'd stop by.'"

"I suppose."

"And I'd like to be sure to see the Randalls and the Morses while we're here."

The Nelsons had known the Randalls and the Morses for nearly fifteen years. They always exchanged dinner invitations. "Trip wouldn't be complete without," Althea agreed.

Meeting Scott and Debby at breakfast had become unavoidable. No matter how early or late the Nelsons went to the dining room, Scott and Debbie showed up five minutes later. Althea wondered if Scott put his ear to the wall to discover what time they left the room.

The next morning they were right on schedule. They stopped at the Nelsons' table, Scott making gestures to slap Debby's back, and Debby squealing "Don't."

"I've got a great idea," Scott said. "How about I pick up some charcoal and some hamburg and stuff and we can go down to the beach for dinner some night. We can watch the sunset."

Ronald looked inquiringly at Althea. "Dear?"

It wasn't too late to change her mind, Althea reminded herself, but she said: "That sounds like a very nice idea," adding: "We've got a few commitments this week. What night is best for you?"

"You know people here?" Scott asked, as if that were a special accomplishment.

"Well, we've been coming down here for some time now," Althea explained, "so we've gotten acquainted."

"All nights are the same for us," Debby said.

Althea thought that was probably true, and wondered what vacant nightmares their evenings must be. "Let's see. Today is Tuesday. How about Thursday?" she suggested. "About five?"

After breakfast Althea want to the telephone in the lobby to phone their friends. The Randalls said they would love to see them but they had a house full of guests and would call them back. There was no answer from the Morses' phone.

Hanging up the receiver, Althea became aware that Scott was directly behind her and had probably been listening. He had. "Don't feel bad," he said, apparently referring to the unanswered call. "They couldn't have known it was you on the other end. They're probably just not at home."

"One assumes," she said carefully.

"Why don't you give them a call later," he suggested.

"Why, yes. I'll do that."

Althea thought she could hear herself stuttering. What an odd thing to suggest, she thought. Did Scott think that people *wouldn't* answer the phone if they knew that she, Althea, was calling? The Morses were her good friends. Well, not hers exclusively—they certainly were as fond of Ronald. And the Randalls. They had known one another long enough to be straightforward. It would be very disquieting, she thought, to wonder if old friends were simply being polite. She started towards the stairs.

"You folks like onion with your hamburg?" Scott asked, catching up.

Althea stopped. She felt almost frightened that if she didn't find some excuse, Scott would walk all the way to the room with her. Ronald had already left with his camera and tripod, and Althea felt momentarily defenseless.

"Are you going upstairs?" she asked, and when Scott said he was, she asked if he would be good enough to check if she had locked the door.

He seemed pleased with the errand, and as he went off, Althea felt pleased with the trick. She decided to take a walk to be out of the way should he return.

There was a narrow road near the hotel which led to a small rocky beach. Althea walked briskly at first and then slowed down when she thought she was out of sight.

The weather was perfect and Althea wished she had worn her bathing suit. But the beach was deserted and she decided to swim in her underwear. She laid her skirt, blouse and sneakers on a rock and stepped carefully around the jagged coral into the surf.

Effortlessly floating on her back, the waves softly rocking her, she relaxed and thought how silly she was to be annoyed by Scott. He was like some chum of her sons, a person to be gently dealt with, to be tolerated.

She felt content with this analogy until she reminded herself that she *liked* all her children's friends, particularly now that they were more mature. Her sons had never brought home anyone like Scott.

Then she laughed aloud because the children had once brought home a sorrowful-looking stray puppy, complete with mange and a disposition to lovingly jump on people with his muddy paws or bite them without warning.

Now thinking of Scott again she thought how foolishly she had handled the whole situation. What was she trying to prove? First she would get dressed, go back to the hotel and have Sam assign them another room. Then she would find Scott and beg off the picnic. She and Ronald could take breakfast in their room or somewhere else—they didn't have to eat in the hotel dining room. And if Scott's feelings were hurt, that was just too bad. She'd put her foot down without nearly the regrets that she had had when it was necessary to get rid of the manic-depressive dog, remembering at the same time that it had been Ronald who had made the decision about the stray.

She returned to her clothes. She wanted to let the sun dry her a little before she dressed, but she heard a car jostling down the rutty road. She slipped into her sneakers, grabbed her clothes and ran behind a pile of boulders where she dressed quickly. She heard two car doors slam and then she heard voices that were unmistakable.

She knew that if she made herself known they would insist on giving her a ride back to the hotel. She wondered what they were doing at this beach at all. She would have thought they would prefer Magen's Bay where there was neither rock nor coral—just vapid Hollywoodish sand.

Their voices grew louder and Althea felt a sinking in her stomach when she realized they had settled just on the other side of the rocks.

To appear now would be even more awkward. They might think she had been eavesdropping—which, she realized with a shudder, was exactly what she was doing.

Scott was talking about sharks: "That's why no one swims here. No shark nets."

Althea smiled to herself. There weren't any sharks around St. Thomas. And did he actually believe there was a net stretched across the mile-wide opening of Magen's Bay? That was just something islanders told tourists.

She wanted a cigarette but was afraid they'd smell the smoke. Why don't they leave? she wondered, thinking of Debby's lobster-colored skin getting another bake.

Scott was saying that only yesterday a fisherman had spotted a four-footer and an eight-footer. Debby answered, Wow.

The sun was getting very hot, especially because the boulders shielded Althea from the breeze. Scott was retelling horror stories. "Guess you don't feel much when it happens. You just look around and your leg is gone," he said.

Althea sighed. They clearly were in no hurry to leave. From where she sat she tried to plan an escape. It was possible, she decided, to plot a course back to the road without being seen. They were probably looking seaward (watching for sharks), and by cutting through one small area of brush, she would be quickly beyond their notice, the wind and the waves providing a sound barrier.

Feeling like a member of the French underground, she ran the first leg of her route, crouching over like someone running away from a helicopter. She reached a stand of palm trees and looked back. Scott was just walking around the bounders, and Althea thought what a close call that had been.

Scott yelled "Hey!" and although Althea was certain that he was shouting at Debby, she nevertheless felt pursued.

She started to run again, but just as she stepped into the underbrush, an iguana scuttled away from her. Her first thought was of one of the little lizards grown monstrously large. She took several steps without looking, without thinking, and fell into a small cactus.

Her reaction was one of disbelief. "I'm much too *athletic* to trip," she thought, looking at her arm full of cactus needles. Her sudden lack of grace made her feel like crying, and she disliked herself for the surge of ego that suggested she was graceful at all.

Actually the needles didn't hurt much but they had to be carefully pulled out, one at a time, so as not to break off the ends. She thought her arm looked like a picture of acupuncture therapy, and after she had extracted all the needles, it looked ridden with heroin tracks.

Walking back to the hotel she met Ronald. "Whatever have you been up to?" he asked. "You look a sight."

Althea felt like a child, too embarrassed to account for her scratches.

"You're sunburned," he said, almost as if he were accusing her of another crime beyond clumsiness.

Looking at her watch, Althea was surprised to find she had been gone from the hotel for nearly three hours. It hadn't seemed that long.

"Ronald," she said, trying to control her voice, "Do you suppose we could get Sam to change our room?"

"What do you mean—change it?"

"Get another room."

"We've *got* our favorite room, Althea. Why would you want to change it?"

"It's just that being next door to Scott and Debby . . ."

"Oh, come on."

"I know it sounds petty."

Ronald laughed. "This really isn't like you," he said. "You've just had a touch too much sun."

For the next day Althea kept to their room, resigned to the picnic (she definitely wasn't going to be petty), but resolved to avoid Scott in the meantime.

Late Wednesday afternoon, Ronald said: "Why aren't you swimming on a beautiful day like this?"

"Yes. I'd like to," she said. "Why don't you come with me? Maybe when you feel like a break?"

"Sure," he said. "Right now if you like."

As they changed into their suits, Althea asked Ronald if he had ever heard of sharks in the area.

"Of course there are no sharks. Where did you get that idea?"

"I don't know. Is there something around that might look like a shark? Something someone might mistake for a shark?"

"Maybe sand sharks," Ronald answered after consideration. "But they won't bother you."

Why? Althea thought. Do they just take little bites?

When the Nelsons returned from swimming there was a dinner invitation waiting from the Randalls.

"You know, I don't really feel like going," Althea said. "I have a little headache."

"They'll be disappointed."

"You go," she said. "I think they just want to see you anyway."

She hadn't realized she'd been thinking that, after all, Ronald was the one with talent, the one their friends really enjoyed talking with. It was very reassuring to her that he thought she was joking.

Finally he took her word for the headache and went off, leaving her with a sandwich and a novel.

She swabbed antiseptic on the cactus pricks which were beginning to fester. Then she changed into a cotton nightgown and was about ready to sit down and enjoy the sandwich along with a bottle of wine when there was a knock on the door.

She opened it a crack.

Scott was alone and for a moment Althea thought of slamming the door in his face, thinking she couldn't anyway because he would probably stick his foot in like a vacuum cleaner salesman.

"I'm so sorry to bother you," he began. "But I thought I'd better let you know so you could make other plans." He waited.

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to cancel our picnic."

Althea waited for the rest—the explanation, the apology—but there wasn't any. Finally she said: "Well, that's too bad."

"Yes," Scott agreed, and said good night.

III

No matter where Althea went on Thursday she ran into Scott and Debby. She went to a crafts shop only to spot their decrepit car in the driveway, and she turned around and drove away thinking that Scott probably did have the worst rental on the island.

At the paperback book store she paid for her purchases and was going out the door when they appeared from behind a stack. "So we meet again," he said, and repeated himself when they found themselves standing beside one another at the liquor store counter.

Althea felt hot and tired and ducked into a cool bar. She felt almost guilty remembering Ronald's objection to air-conditioning in a place where the temperature was already perfect.

After she ordered a rum drink, she considered the sour-grapes fantasy that had been bothering her all day. "I never wanted to go to your picnic, anyway," she would say to Scott. He never answered.

Here I am, a grown woman, feeling as I might have felt when I was eight years old, she thought. But after all those invitations, whatever could have happened to make Scott change his mind? she asked herself and searched her memory for anything she might have done to offend him. She had only tried to be nice, she reminded herself, and then thought of the word *nice*. She repeated it over and over until it meant virtually nothing.

She finished her drink and was paying the waiter when she saw them at a nearby table. Debby looked like a figure on a color television out of adjustment. Too much red, too much red.

Althea had to walk by them to get out of the bar. "Hello, there," she said.

"Let me ask you something," Scott said. He was smiling but he stood up as if to stop her.

"Yes?"

"Are you following us or are we following you?"

Clutching her packages Althea ran for the exit. "I'm sorry," she said over her shoulder. She bumped into a fat man who growled at her, and who didn't bother to help her retrieve her things scattered on the floor. She didn't realize the bottle of whiskey had cracked until she reached the car when she noticed the smell. Her dress was soaked with bourbon.

"I want to go home," she said to Ronald when she got back to the hotel. Her voice was shaking and she tore her dress in her haste to get it off.

"Aren't you having a good time?" he asked, surprised.

"I just want to go home," she said, shoving the dress into the wastebasket. She thought of her flower gardens in the last week of dormancy. She wanted to be alone there, like a person alone in a theater an hour before the performance. "Please," she urged.

Ronald looked worried. "All right. I'll see what I can do for reservations."

They left St. Thomas the next day on the noon flight. A woman wearing Tabu perfume sat next to them and by the time they landed in Puerto Rico Althea felt quite nauseated.

The cafeteria at the airport was stuck in the very interior of the building as though, Althea thought, the architect equated eating with other biological necessities that ought to be hidden from notice.

As they ate lunch, Althea thought sure she saw Scott go by outside. "How long were Scott and Debby going to stay?"

"Next week sometime I think."

"I thought I just saw him."

"Couldn't be," Ronald insisted.

As they went through security Althea spotted the Tabu lady. Suddenly she wished to be able to confront the woman and tell her that she ought not to wear such heavy perfume in confined places. She also felt like admonishing a mother who was yelling at her children. "Think what you're doing," she wanted to say. "Listen to your voice."

The takeoff was routine. Ronald took the cribbage board out of his briefcase, and a drunk across the aisle kibbitzed throughout their game, which Althea won. The man seemed intent on denying her the victory. "Your husband didn't count his hands right."

Dinner came and went and Althea sat back to enjoy a cigarette. She closed her eyes briefly and when she opened them she was sure she saw Scott disappearing down the aisle.

"I really must be losing my mind," she said. "I'm sure I just saw Scott again."

"Well, of course they could have changed their plans," Ronald said. "Would you like me to walk about and see if they're on the plane?"

"No. I don't want you to do that . . . I don't really care. It doesn't make any difference."

Somehow, though, she knew it did make a difference and was wondering why when a stewardess stopped at their seats. "Excuse me, madam," she said. "I'm very sorry to trouble you, but we have a full flight and we've had to move the no-smoking area back a few rows. I'm afraid someone who requested no-smoking has complained." She smiled at Althea. "I'll have to ask you not to smoke."

Althea jammed out her cigarette noticing that the drunk's wife across the aisle was smoking.

"But I *requested* smoking," she said in a small voice.

"I know. But when the flight is full . . ." The stewardess smiled another try-to-see-it-my-way grin.

Althea wanted to say that she knew who it was. *It was Scott, wasn't it? Wasn't it?* she wanted to demand. "But I have my rights, too," she objected. "My husband is good enough to sit in the smoking section with me . . . so I can smoke . . ."

She heard her voice growing hysterical and unpleasant like the bossy mother, and she started to cry great sobs. She felt singled out, a public nuisance, a menace. My god, she thought, someone *complained* about me.

Another stewardess came and offered assistance. The two young women fluttered as if Althea were having a heart attack.

"It's all right," the senior stewardess said after a time. "The person who complained says he doesn't mind. You can go ahead and smoke."

Ronald lighted a cigarette for her but she couldn't stop crying. "I'm just upset that I'm so upset," she tried to explain. "I didn't mean to yell at you."

But the stewardesses weren't listening. They were apologizing again and again to Ronald:

"We didn't mean to upset her."

"We didn't mean to spoil her vacation."

"Do you think she'd like a drink?"

A glass with ice and whiskey was brought and Althea felt like a child who has been handed a pacifier. She noticed that the man across the aisle was staring at her but quickly looked away when she met his eyes.

She thought with alarm: I'm one of those people who has to be taken care of. It was like a sentence descending on her. I'm one of those women who other people talk about when they leave the room: "How *is* Althea?" "She *looks* well, don't you think?" She could see herself becoming more frail, ever more fragile. "Be careful with Althea," people would say. "Never know what's going to set her off."

Ronald was patting her arm. "It's all right," he said. Althea noticed he was reading his new paperback.

What a burden I've become, she thought. She remembered a beggar they had once seen in San Juan—an old woman, and that old woman now seemed to Althea to be strong, not pitiful. She thought: I'm the one that's pitiful. If I had to beg, I wouldn't even have the nerve to establish a pleasant corner. Looking over again at Ronald she noticed he was reading the last chapter first. "It's all right," he said monotonously.

I can't let this happen, she said to herself, and when the plane finally set down she tried to behave as usual, as if nothing had occurred. "I won't let this happen," she said under her breath.

"What, dear?"

"Why don't you go get the car from the parking lot. I'll get the bags and meet you outside," she said.

"You're sure you can handle it?"

"It's the way we always do it," she insisted.

"OK."

"Well, isn't it?" she asked, her voice almost petulant.

"Yes," Ronald said. He patted her shoulder. "See you in a few minutes."

The baggage claim was never more crowded. Althea worked her way to the edge of the moving belt to wait for their luggage. Several suitcases came by broken open and cries of despair sounded behind her as the owners of the clothes recognized their belongings being scattered about.

The crowd pushed. Althea wanted to ask them not to, but when she turned around she thought she saw Scott directly behind her. He refused to recognize her, though, and continued to converse in Spanish with someone nearby.

Frightened, Althea directed her attention back to the moving belt. A couple of garment bags went by, like sacks of bones being delivered to indifferent heirs.

It occurred to her that she might stand there forever, watching strange luggage, getting pushed, when one of their own suitcases came through the little doorway. She said, "Excuse me, excuse me," and attempted to grab it. But just as she reached out, she felt a powerful shove from behind.

She heard nothing as she fell forward but the jangle of her silver bracelets, and though she became aware of much frantic shouting and pulling at her arms and legs, all anyone succeeded in doing was to rearrange her body on the still moving belt.

The only thing she felt after that was the slap of the leather straps on her forehead and she was delivered through the black hole in the wall.

THE SPIRIT IN INK AND COLORS

looking at the leaf
eyes cannot create the lotus
nor the woman within
from her flowered kimono

but the artist shouts at us
"know the world's book
by my cover"

NORMAN NATHAN

ELDORADO

Susan Lohafer

"Each of us—" his eyes met two blue ones, two brown ones—"will be somebody else." Not a blink. "In this other family." The blue and the brown traded looks. Well, it wasn't *his* idea. He was just repeating what Bill had said. Bill worked for the telephone company. He said the company was concerned about misuse of the listings in the telephone book. Said they wanted to plant a fake name there, but with a real number and a real address. Said any calls or mail coming to that address, well, they'd have to come from somebody just picking out names. Tracking down customers, clients, voters, you name it. However, the person who takes a phone book into his home should not be subject to harassment, invasion of privacy . . . and there was a third thing. But the point is, he's asked us to do it.

"Do *what*?" asked Michelle, brown eyes obeying his genes to the letter, even as she denied him. But he couldn't help the way her thighs puffed and spread on the floor. "*What* are we supposed to do?"

"Be this other family. See, the fake name would be stuck right where it comes in the alphabet, but it would have our address. Our phone number. So when some wise guy called here and asked for this other family, we'd have him cold. Because he couldn't possibly know us. We wouldn't exist."

"Sounds nice," came from Sally. She was sitting in the corner of the sofa, embraced by its arm, knees delicately drawn up, smooth bare feet hooked down into the crevice between cushions. "Do we all get to play? Or just you?" It was wonderful how she fixed his location. He smiled over the tops of her knees. "I don't see why we all can't be in on it. There's got to be a wife, and why not a daughter, too?"

"Thanks, but no thanks," said Michelle, as she rolled heavily away from her mother's hand. But Sally caught her ear and pinched it. "Owww!"

"Who do you want to be," asked her mother. "Here's your chance, kid. You're always saying you hate your name so much. 'Michelle' . . . wish *I* had had it."

"What's wrong with 'Sally'?" he asked, but they were cat-and-mousing without him. He was reaching for his wife's attention, trying to get hold of her ankle, when the room exploded with a ring. The phone. For a shocked moment, they were like cartoon figures dazed and blackened by the soot of the noise. He almost laughed. "It can't be—yet," they said. It was Sally who got up and answered. She posed for them, bending her head till her mouth was curtained by her hair. Watching the raised vertebrae of her neck, the air of intimate listening, he was just about to get hold of a memory when she changed, thrusting the phone to him, saying, "Bill."

"Bill!" he pinched the phone between cheek and shoulder. "Bill, you old con man—just kidding, just kidding." He signaled at the others with his

hand and eyebrows, mouthing extra words to them. "Yeah, I was just telling them. Sure. Uh-huh. 'Petrie'? (That's the name.) Will do. Hey!—'s no trouble, really. (He says the company thanks us.) Don't mention it. (*Thanks* us.) Glad to help out. OK. Got it. Fine. No, really. 'Bye."

He put back the receiver and faced the room that was his again, but different, as though something had really happened to the air. The brown eyes were now expectant. The blue ones steady, friendly, indifferent—but no, they had to be a little curious.

"Our name is Petrie," announced Sam Wood.

"Then I'm Christina Petrie," said Michelle at once, as if she'd had that name in her pocket all the time. "'Chris' to you, 'Chrissie' to my friends." A reaction began in him, because he thought he'd heard her say, "I'm ugly and fat and I wish I weren't." He almost said, "Honey, be patient. You're going to be lovely." But he'd been very carefully instructed that it was none of his goddamned business.

"And I'm—oh, heck, let's see, I'm—I know!—Gloria. I've always been a Gloria underneath. What've you always been?" demanded Sally.

The last one into the water. The tag-along. The one who asked if it was OK to go in if there wasn't a lifeguard. So he said, "Oh, me, I'll just stay plain old Sam. Sam Petrie."

•

The line of chill extended from the back of his knee up along his thigh, around his rump and up the back of his neck at the hairline. Sally had tugged the blanket in her sleep, and it draped over him without quite meeting the bed. He could turn so as to warm the cooled flesh and take on the chill face to face. Or he could drift deeper into sleep past the point of awareness. Before he could make up his mind, a new problem entered the bed, couldn't be ground under his turning, kept striking his brain until it flared awake. He rolled, slid, heaved, and plodded into the cool air to the source of the annoyance, broke the phone in two, and clapped half to his ear. "Hello?"

"Sid?"

"I'm afraid . . ."

"Sid Petrie."

"You want *Sid* Petrie? You got the wrong number, then. This is *Sam* Petrie."

"Oh, gee, I'm sorry."

"Forget it." Forget you got me up out of a sound sleep at eight o'clock on a Saturday morning. Just forget it. Fall into bed, knee first, elbow, tumble over, stretch out. There's even less blanket now than there was before. Forget the call. Forget the chill. Get back to sleep. And just then he remembered Sally in a violet dress bending her head so the swing of her hair intercepted his kiss.

It was ten o'clock when he finally awoke. Sally wasn't there, and he was in the middle of the bed with the blanket securely around him. In the distance he could hear the neighborhood children, all of whom were riding toy motorcycles this year. Their plastic wheels made a rasping sound over the cracks in the sidewalk, and it was as if someone were running a stick over the slats of a fence, coming closer, getting louder, passing by, and fading out. Told Sally, said next year it'll be something else, but one thing's for sure, it'll make just as much noise. He lay quietly enjoying the warmth of his body. Then it flashed up in his mind like an unpaid bill—the phone call. Should he have noted it down? But there was probably a real Sid Petrie in the world, even in this town—had to be. So that was all right. Things like that weren't going to bother him now. Weeks ago, the authorized lie of his new name had made him feel guilty, worse than he'd ever felt when he'd lied on his own account, in pure, simple, selfish mendacity. But you had to grow up. You had to live in the world. Sally thought the whole thing was fun. There was a kind of knack to it, like everything else. You got better. More relaxed. More natural. And it was all in a good cause.

In fact, he began to wish he could tell more people about it. They'd be surprised. They'd come to him with their doubts, their worries and confusions. *He'd be standing behind "Customer Service," doing up an order for sliding doors or maybe for the table-four-chairs-included-umbrella-extra, when a lady would ask him what he'd recommend for a widow with two children grown and gone, and he'd tap his lip slowly with the end of his Bic pen, just to look deliberate, though he's got the answer right off and tells her to buy every kid on her block a new plastic motorcycle. Try some Volunteer Parents. Or how about jogging?* He had an answer for everything. But he could have the starchiest white coat, the darkest rimmed glasses, and still *they* wouldn't listen.

Michelle and Sally, or maybe he should say "Chrissie" and "Gloria," didn't need his advice. Yawning, he remembered one morning when "Gloria" had been on the phone half an hour, apparently with somebody who wanted to know that she had dry, fair skin that chapped easily, eyes cornflower blue (were they?), fat lids that didn't take shadow, brittle fingernails, and fifty other details that struck him as new. Was her face dry? Should he have noticed? Once, in the flush of courtship, he'd marveled at the soft dent under the cheekbone, the faint swirl of down at the base of the ear, the strangest warm white skin flecked with tan. Later, he'd amended all that to "peaches and cream." Something he could *say*. Then it just became one of the nicer things in life, like coffee in the morning. You didn't say every day, "Oh, gee, this is nice." As far as he could tell, she looked just the same as ever. Just as good. But then two weeks later there was that carton in the mail (so heavy he'd gasped) with the name of some cosmetic company on the label. It was addressed to "Mrs. Gloria Petrie."

"Who's going to *pay* for that?" he'd said. And pointed.

"Why, they're all just samples." Not even looking. "There's no obligation."

And then there was that letter for "Ms. Chrissie Petrie," bearing no return address on the plain stationery, but postmarked "Eldorado." A small town nearby. Probably Michelle had mailed it to herself, as a joke, but it bothered him that the thin envelope showed indecipherable yet definite markings on the paper within. It had been all he could do to keep from thrusting his finger under the loose corner of the flap, opening up her silly secret with a jerk. But he knew kids these days. There'd have been cries of invasion of privacy, the U.S. Mail, federal offenses, everything but a father's right to know what was up. Of course the law had nothing to do with it, finally. He couldn't rip open that envelope any more than he could trip an old lady. The devil of it was that his own daughter would have screamed bloody murder in her outrage, but would she give an ounce of credit to his self-restraint? Not on your life.

He turned over in the bed looking for comfort. He'd been starting to have dreams again. The other night he'd had one that he'd been meaning to tell Sally about. She'd remember that last summer he spent a couple of weeks caulking the window frames. There were still splattered worms of white gunk on the patio. For hours he'd run the point of the trowel up and down, sealing the cracks, making each time a furl of white that had to be scraped off and buttered in. The house was "tight as a drum," he said. But in the dream what happened was—*the windows wouldn't open. There were sheets of folded paper edging into the house around all the window and door frames. "Like the house was sunk in an ocean of junk mail and it was only a matter of time." Oxygen was getting low. Paper was silting in through the cracks. He was staring at the ventilator in the floor when the tip of an envelope poked through. Soon all the slots were filled, the grate gave way, and a geyser of mail filled the room.* He'd waked up gasping, to find the pillow over his nose. After all maybe he wouldn't tell Gloria. Probably say it was a Grade-B disaster film. Listen, pat his hand, make some coffee. He could get the same treatment by moaning about a gas pain, so that's what he'd do. It's what he would do right now, come to think of it.

He got out of bed for the second time that morning and walked toward the kitchen. By the time he got there, he could sense that the house was empty. Chrissie and Gloria were out, God-knows-where, maybe cruising in Eldorado. Maybe just following the arrows of their maze-like brains. Leaving him his house. After pouring himself some leftover coffee, he walked with it into the living room, settling into its deep familiarity. Vacantly yet with gratification, his eyes moved to the frayed spot on the sofa cushion. To the ceramic lamp Sally hated and was longing to replace. To the hanging fern he kept in trim. To the newspaper on the floor like some wounded bird. Then it was as if a page turned in his mind and a finger ran down the center of his body. He'd been fooled. The rooms he knew so well told him nothing. They were a file of unopened envelopes. Involuntarily his inward eye traveled to the drawers in his wife's dresser, the closet in his daughter's room, other places within his own house that were as distant

as Asia. "What's the matter with me," he said aloud, and was greatly relieved when the phone rang.

"Hello? Yes, Petrie here. . . . I'm a registered voter, but I don't think of myself as a party man. Uh-huh. Well, yeah, I've got a minute. . . . I certainly agree with you there. Government gets into everything these days. . . . Well, look, frankly, I'm not a joiner. I appreciate your. . . . Well, sure, no harm in that. Send it along. Right. Right. OK, I'll think about it. Not t'all. Thanks for calling."

It was the first time Sam Petrie had been tracked down by political recruiters. He wrote the name "Citizens of Sanity" in the log by the phone. As he replaced the pencil, he heard the garage door rolling up, and in another moment his house was hers again. But who was this! "Sally! My God, what did you do?" Her face, her good old nice freckled face was still there, but it was almost overgrown by a mass of springy curls. "Got a perm and a haircut," she flipped him as she passed. "Mrs. Petrie won a coupon."

"But you didn't have to use it! You look like . . ." his throat bulged. "Like a goddamned Gloria!" he called after her.

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. . . moments now, he thought that his wife and daughter hadn't changed at all. That Michelle and Sally had always been Chrissie and Gloria. Did that mean that Sam Wood had always been Sam Petrie? He couldn't get out of it by saying that Sam Petrie didn't exist. He most certainly did. He had a daughter who was a svelte tennis player, getting love letters every day, always in a different hand. And how could a man not exist when he had a glorious wife, tanned to a savage brown, permed to a pixie grin—with the book of the month on her tongue and the cause of the week in her head? Because it turned out that Gloria was far more generous than Sally had ever been to those paper appeals to the heart. Gloria had an adopted daughter in Bangladesh. Gloria gave dollars to save kidneys. And whales. And congressmen. Whose dollars? Did she think Petrie had twice as much money as Wood? So it seemed.

But then, he'd have to. He was a man with a lot of requirements. He liked, apparently, special-order gourmet cheese, package tours to Bimini, barbecue aprons, and Wonder-Weve slacks. In a rainbow of colors. It was quite clear that at some point Mr. Petrie had established himself as just a cut above the ordinary. Offers came to him that were pointedly selective. Editors felt he was the sort of person to appreciate a charter subscription to their new magazine—"for the liberal thinker with down-to-earth sense." Naturally, therefore, he would like to know about the best little art investment of the decade. Or what about the cutest novelty item in years? When he looked at the fliers, he saw a gaudy plate, a vulgar plaything. But no doubt Sam Petrie would know what Sam Wood was missing. Maybe Petrie could explain why the "Citizens for Sanity" had turned out to be advocates of anarchy. Maybe *he* knew why a taste for Stilton should mean an ear for

Schoenberg. Somewhere—on one of those satellites?—was a record of just who Sam Petrie was, what he liked, wanted, could be persuaded to buy. He was a known quantity. His opinion mattered. In fact, maybe good old Sam Wood was nothing more than a slot with a name over it—a convenience for this other guy. After all, his own house, bought with his labor, filled with his needs, caulked with his love, what was it now? The shell of an oversized mailbox. How had it happened?

Vividly he brought back that first Saturday. . . . Sally, perching sideways on the sofa, her feet between cushions. He was explaining the whole business. It was Michelle who didn't get the point at first. Sally who said, offhandedly, "Sounds nice." As if she knew about it and was pretending not to. As if she'd planned the whole thing (in cooperation with Bill?) Sally. So often out in the car, driving away. When she left his house, was she going out on an errand . . . or going home to "Sam Petrie"? Was it Bill? Somebody else? Or just the person *he* ought to be?

He was sitting on his daughter's bed, breathing deeply. How he'd gotten there surprised him, for it had been years since he'd felt welcome or even free to trespass in this room. He moved his hand over the puffed satin squares of the quilt, began tracing, with the tip of his finger, the dotted lines between them. Remembered holding her, at arms' length, on the point of his knee, eyeing her greedily as she waved her handflap at him, lolled her head to the side, regarded his nose.

At the sliding doors of her closet, he did not hesitate, but rolled them aside. He had to wipe his hand first on his sleeve. Then he touched them. There were at least ten, all white, but slightly different in style and texture. He distinguished the smooth static of the man-made fabrics, the stiff nubble of a stamped cotton, the grainy give of the jersey. Every one of them was a size eight. Michelle could never wear them on a tennis court. She couldn't even fit her *leg* into them. As he handled their pert perfection, his grief turned to muscle. He ripped the seams apart, greedy for the sounds of the tearing. He pawed for more of them, found none, turned away, and had to gather up the frayed pieces into a heap so that he could make a place to sit down. Tired as he was, he grasped one idea. He'd have to find her before she got home. Wherever that was, Maybe he could think of what to say when he saw her.

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Strange that he'd never before crossed the line into Eldorado, since he'd been through all the other little towns out this way. Maybe he had, without noticing. If it weren't for that sign—WELCOME TO ELDORADO—he'd never have known the difference. He was simply driving along, taking the streets as they came. Perhaps if he'd offered to buy her a tennis outfit, he could have made sure it was big enough, but then she would never have worn it. Either way. . . . From the look of the houses,

some doctors' shingles, an old brick two-story with a brand-new facade of oblique wooden slates, he guessed he was moving toward the center of town. There'd be a drugstore on one of these corners coming up. And there was. He pulled between slanted parking lines, faded into the asphalt and running into a deep gulley of dirt. Naturally the meter pole was slightly askew—he cupped its head in his hand as he mounted the curb.

Inside the store he studied his way past the shelves until he found the phone book in his hands. The pages gave him what he wanted, but he felt he had to pay for it. So he bought a cigar and watched the teenaged girl take his money. Obviously it was the same kind of money she took every day. Did she know Michelle?

"Forget the bag," he said, as she automatically reached for one. "Got any tennis courts around here?"

"Public?"

"Yeah, Or any kind."

"Well, there's the town courts. Two blocks down that way." She pointed in the direction he'd been going.

So he would have found them anyway. And soon he did. They were surrounded by a chain link fence. Some people were playing, exhausting themselves like midgets on the screen of his windshield. He looked closely for awhile and then drove on, neither disappointed nor encouraged. He would have said he was trying to find his daughter, but the face in his mind was his wife's.

Already the map of the town was part of what he seemed to know. There would be a single main street that swelled into stores and then tapered off into smaller houses, ending in a lumberyard, maybe, or a train station now defunct. The larger homes would be past the gas station, up that winding road. He let his car take the turn and nose quietly up the curve. He was right. The houses were newer, lower, longer. A white iron lamppost drew him toward the right half of a fork in the road, pulled him far enough so he could see the rim of a low stone wall, see violent pink petunias. He might have been edging into a waiting niche, for his car was already stopped.

As he began to walk he fell into the stride of a man taking his daily exercise, going always over the same ground. With mild interest he noted the height of the lawns. Better be planning to mow this weekend. And that fellow with the dandelions. If he's not careful he'll seed the whole block. A pity. Sam felt his knees coming loose and yet he knew he was in the right place. His hand was ready—almost trigger-happy—to wave.

Of course the house was in no way a disgrace to the neighborhood. Its facing of small, reddish brick was tasteful, neat. He wasn't sure whether he liked the white grid breaking the bay window into panes—a clear space of glass might have been nicer. But he liked it well enough. Behind the panes the narrow folds of a deeply sashed curtain split in the middle to frame a lamp. The kind she'd always wanted. A flagstone path led to the front

door. All he had to do was follow it, swing open the outer door with the screened upper half, and get out his key. "'M home, honey!" Or he could pretend to have reached, just here, just now, the very end of his tether. Turn, pace evenly, easily, back to the car. Find the way out.

As he stood, undecided, his ears filled gradually with racket. Bearing down on him was the only other human being in sight. A fair-haired child of about five or six was driving a plastic yellow fury down the middle of the sidewalk. His legs pumped with detached energy, and his approach threw a grinding squawk into the air . . . out of my way, it said, here I come. The familiar sound was almost a relief to Sam, a postponement of the going home. He watched. Drawing up under his gaze, the little boy stared back, vacant, proud, sensitive as a poised rabbit, dull as a stump. So familiar. Did the child really know him? Seconds passed. At the end of a held breath, the boy piped out "Hi!" and hunched down again, flinging his legs into action, gunning his motor in his throat. When at least he reached the end of the world, he stood up, turned his vehicle around, and started back up the empty street.

* * *

CIRCE'S LOVER

Because she asks, he tells her: the way
the green flaming branch thrust
into the one eye, the way
the monster screamed, blood bubbling
and rushing from the open socket
like a geyser at dusk.

When he stands back from the window, greying
in the grey light, his own eyes
are cold as ash. She thinks, "he's grown thinner,"
but perhaps it's only the way light lifts off his form,
laying patches of shadow, like clothing,
on his naked flesh.

It seems a long time since he's hoisted
a boulder from a cave's mouth or struck
an oar against sand. He tires more quickly now
when they swim in the shallow cove of her small island
He prefers to watch her weightless circling
from the shore.

"Bones grow lighter in water," she tells him.
"Or with age," he replies. His hair, red-and-silver
flecked like the pelt of some old fox, escapes
in thin strands from its warrior's knot.
His wedding chain weights his neck.
Seeing him finger it now,

she believes him when he speaks tonight, finally
of leaving. His men, transformed, upright once more,
stumble and call to each other in the wine-blind dark.
Their voices meld together, entering her room like the music
summoning him to sail.

When she calls him to rest, one strand of dark hair
locks round his arm; her movements are large and parting
like the sea. His hands, small Greek fires, stutter and flare
across her body. Because she asks,
he tells her "no." And finally, there is only this:
the one heart opening
like an eye.

Jan Chisholm

JODY BAXTER DAY

Laurie Pons

Jody Baxter was so long getting home from the war that folks in Cross Creek thought he wasn't coming. They waited and waited; finally feeling it foolish to wait any longer, his staunch friends and former partners in fresh bass, Cam Calloway and Bucky Waters, found some good sturdy two-by-fours, slipped them under Baxter's house and in the dark of the moon moved it down to the river's edge where it was serving as headquarters for scaling, weighing and wholesaling of fish when Baxter finally made his belated appearance.

Cam, sometimes called "One-Eye" for obvious reasons, was the mayor of Cross Creek and Bucky, his one and only commissioner. The populace assumed, therefore, when they saw the new location of Baxter's house, that surely its transference had some sort of legal sanction, although they had good manners enough not to speak of it.

It was a late, black night when Baxter returned. He made out the ramshackle shape of Mama Allen's Grocery and the oblong bulk of Cross Creek Retreat for Retired Fishermen. Turning right at the one and left at the other, he felt his way up the narrow dog path between the green willows, counting his steps, knowing exactly one hundred of them from the last turn would bring him to his humble, hand-hewn doorstep.

In the lonesome moments while he was away Baxter often called to mind the peace and comfort of his tight little tarpapered home, with its stove and bed and chair. From time to time, though, an old recurring thought that there was something unfinished or lacking about his home interrupted his pleasant reflections. He tried mightily, but he couldn't think what it was; however, now that he was back he'd have long leisurely days to figure it out.

Baxter put his hand to feel the familiar latch and clutched only thin, damp air. Mildly perplexed, he took a few more steps, thinking he was off gait; a war could rock a person. He groped around but could find no latch, no door, no window, and no wall. An uncomfortable feeling began to stir somewhere inside. His mind rapidly clicked off possibilities: Fire? Flood? Termites? Cam and Bucky?

There had been a time when Baxter, suspecting thievery, would have clenched his big fists, bellowed like a mad bull and flung loud scorching threats on all sides as to dire circumstances that certain parties were going to find themselves in if they didn't restore his property within an hour. But now he was tired and mellowed by the sweetness of homecoming, even though there was no home where he'd left it, so all he said was, "It just ain't here."

He lay down on his duffel bag to sleep and await the new day when his wits would be fresh. After all, if it were fire, flood or termites, there would

be no use to recruit his wits and put them through the skirmish. He'd just have to gather materials for a new house.

The duffel bag was knobby and uncomfortable, being stuffed with trinkets and treasures he had brought back, but Baxter slept away and dreamed of the pleasure he'd have distributing them.

Little Clyde Slipper, wide-eyed and puffing excitedly, reported at the Scaling House early the next morning that there was a great big soldier sleeping up in the willows. When Mayor Calloway and Commissioner Waters went to investigate, their insides quivered and their hands shook.

"Sweet Holy Jerusalem, it's Bax all right," Cam whispered, walking around the sleeping figure, inspecting the dark, curly hair and bronzed skin, the familiar wide expanse of shoulders and the big hunks of hands.

"We hadn't ought to have taken his house," Bucky said. He hitched nervously at the moleskins and spat out a generous cud of tobacco.

Cam cursed softly and thoroughly and then demanded, "Well, whoever thought he was coming back?"

"You act like you ain't proud to see him," Bucky accused.

"Ain't proud to see him!" Cam scoffed. "Ain't proud to see him!" he repeated, outraged, and let it go at that. Reluctantly though, for it would have been good oratorical timber to describe his affection for Jody Baxter. Hadn't he himself fished Baxter out of the river when he wasn't knee-high to a tadpole and brought him back to life with a quart of whiskey? Hadn't he himself raised Baxter, taught him the meaning of life and how it is to be lived? But Cam had other problems of high priority right now. He tightened his worn belt a notch and gave his shirt sleeves another roll upward.

Although Cross Creek was generally considered to be in the slower-moving part of town, its communications system worked with a speed which was a credit to the jet-propelled age. When Baxter awoke, shook the dew from his military body and made his way down to the dock, the entire citizenry had gathered for welcome and to see the possible works.

It was generally known that Jody Baxter had had delicate feelings about his house and would mightily hate to see it defiled with miscellaneous fish scales and river mud, whatever legal action had been involved, if any. Ever since he'd been rescued from the river, a cold, blue, little wizened lad, sole survivor of a shanty boat family caught in the flood, Bax had been gathering materials for his home, building and rebuilding it. The beam over his doorway was from the center section of the proscenium arch of an old sunken showboat. The doorjambs were highly polished pieces of the bar from the same showboat, salvaged at much risk and a mighty watery effort. The floors and sides and windowsills were all nicely seasoned pieces of driftwood which he had shouldered or snaked home from as far as ten miles up and down the river.

The news of Baxter's arrival had traveled fast, but the activity of Cam and Bucky had been faster. In fact, as they stood waiting at the head of the welcoming crowd, the echo of their recent activity was still ringing in their

ears and water blisters were rising on their brains as well as their hands from the unusually speedy use. They had taken all the fishnets and seines they could find and draped them over the roof and sides of the Scaling House. Boats and oars were leaned up against it; the scarred and beat-up door had been hurriedly unhinged, shoved underneath, and a gunny sack tacked over the telltale proscenium arch beam.

When such camouflaging activity had ended, Cam thought it looked pretty much like the shanty that had been standing there before Baxter went away. That one he had sold to a man building a houseboat. The proceeds had gone into a glass eye fund Cam had secretly established for himself many years ago when an errant fish hook had caught in his eye and subsequently caused its removal.

Cam felt it a blight on Cross Creek that their mayor was one-eyed. And if he picked up loose things here and there and sold them to increase this fund, which he kept in a coffee can underneath a board in the Scaling House floor, it was really for the ultimate good of the community, which deserved a two-eyed mayor.

Now, everyone stood ready to welcome Baxter home, and Cam wondered if he had dealt decisively enough with the populace. He knew they had tender feeling for Jody Baxter, who had come to them like Moses out of the rushes. He hadn't had much time what with the hurried decorating of the Scaling House, but, with Bucky's help, he managed to circulate the news that if certain things were brought to light prematurely, fresh bass would be cut off at Mama Allen's Grocery. Fresh bass, being the backbone of the local menus, would not be offered the citizenry, and Cross Creek Retreat for Retired Fishermen, which Cam was instrumental in procuring, might mysteriously burn. If the wind were just right—Cam had rolled his one eye suggestively at the horror of the resulting conflagration. Even the Internal Revenue Service might be summoned as regards reporting the value of fish recovered in lieu of wages on income tax reports.

"Bax, is it really you?" Cam said, jumping forward to embrace him. "I thought sure you'd been kilt somewhere, boy." With the back of his thumb, Cam dashed a genuine tear from his cheek.

"Yep, it's me," Bax said, smiling broadly at the heartiness and sincerity of his welcome. His white teeth flashed in the morning sun and his deep blue eyes crinkled with vast humor. "I sure been round the world, but let me tell you there ain't never been a place like home where your friends are. Your spirit friends. Thought brothers. Your—" His eyes fell on a stranger and he paused, taking in the wonderful sight and pleasing dimensions, tar-black hair, honeysuckle skin. "Who are you?" he asked, coming directly to the point.

"Oh, Bax," the stranger said, blushing and letting smutty lashes fall over pansy eyes.

"Why that's Kim," Cam said, wishing inordinately to be helpful to Bax. "My little cousin, Kim."

"Not little Skinflint?" Bax demanded.

"Well, Bax, you have been gone for five years and you can't expect things to stand still?" Kim laughed.

"Yeah," Cam said. "Things change, Bax. In spite of everything, things change. You got to expect that and make the most of it."

"I will," Bax said, still examining the smutty set of eyes. Then looking over the congregation, he asked, "Anyone know what became of my house?"

Mayor Calloway and Commissioner Waters stirred uncomfortably under the mute, cold, concentrated stare of many accusing eyes. The blisters on their brains rubbed against their skulls.

"Now, Bax, it's been our plan to have a new and better residence a'waiting you when you came home from the wars," Cam said. He ran a hand through his sparse reddish hair and wished to goodness he'd put his spiraled eye in. "You went off single-handed from Cross Creek, the cream of our stalwart manhood, to give your life for the rest of us, and we aren't gonna let you down, boy. Poor, we might be; but not poor here in our hearts." Cam laid a reverent hand over his heart. "You just got back a little early, Bax, and if you'll be our honored guest at the Retreat for a while we'll pitch in and have you fixed up in no time at all with a house fit for a returning hero."

"Flood get it?" Bax asked, ignoring Cam's statement.

"Well, we've had some dingers of flood since you been gone, Bax. We all lived on top of the levee once for a solid month."

Jody Baxter, on the whole, was an understanding man. He was full of compassion and tolerance for the weakness of his fellow beings. Especially did he lean toward the people of Cross Creek who had taken him in and let him live a life of unhampered freedom, even though such freedom meant that from very early he was required to pit his brains and skill, muscles and sinew, against great odds to keep the gnawing hunger out of his stomach and have a warm place to sleep. In the course of such growing up he had studied men's eyes, the slightest shifting of their hands, the tensing of muscles, the nervous flow of words or the man of no words at all. Being molded and tempered in the Creek, he could predict to the split second when a fight was going to be touched off or whether the whole thing was going to blow over. He could tell if a man was going to fight with a gun, or a knife, or a club. Instinctively he knew what weapons or tactics to use in any given situation and the time to employ them. So it took little effort for Baxter to detect that Cam had been caught in an embarrassment.

Had Baxter's knowledge of human nature not been so vast, he would have picked Cam up, then and there, by the scruff of his bony neck and shaken him like a terrier mouthing a mole. But one sparkling nugget of knowledge he had picked up from much observation was that if caught in embarrassing circumstances and allowed to get out of it graciously a man would likely never repeat a similar crime, and he would grow in moral

stature; thus making the world a better place in which to live. Unerringly he reached for the proper set of tactics.

"She went with the flood, huh?" he said. "Always loved that little house. But flood we have to expect and learn to live with. Tain't like it was pilfered away and sold for firewood."

"Oh, it didn't go thataway!" Cam vouched loudly, having truth as an ally here.

"I'm hungry!" Little Clyde Slipper complained putting an end to the uneasy situation for the moment. A community breakfast of fried bass was generously, but no less hurriedly and relievedly declared by Mayor Calloway and Commissioner Waters.

Baxter took up temporary residence at the Retreat awaiting further developments on his house. He did a little desultory searching for his house, but spent most of his free time making close acquaintance with Kim, which seemed much more important to him now.

Cam's one eye grew red-rimmed and developed a nervous tic. Bucky whittled nervously on the grains in his hickory log. The brunt of public opinion was eating away at them like peroxide in a festered sore.

A subtle change came over Cross Creek. It was noticeable first in the cessation of singing and whistling. The children quit playing around the dock. Guests at the Retreat sat with their backs toward the Scaling House wondering how they could help the cream of human dignity to rise in their honorable mayor without endangering themselves. Cripes, income taxes! They must owe the Federal Government a mint with all those fish they'd eaten there free.

"I'm in favor of moving Jody Baxter's house back tonight," Bucky said one day and almost withered under Cam's look.

Cam felt sorry for anyone whose mind ran in a straight and simple channel. "This has got to be handled delicate," he explained. He sat for a few moments while thoughts made their mazelike way through his blistered brain. "I feel we ought to establish a Citizens Committee for the Rehabilitation of Jody Baxter."

"What's that?" Bucky wanted to know.

"Restore Jody Baxter to his former good humor and spirit."

"He don't need no rehibilitatin," Bucky said, remembering the recent sparkle he'd noticed in Jody's eyes and the general deportment of a man who was happy with himself.

"Don't need rehibilitatin!" Cam exploded. "Here a poor soldier comes home from the war and finds that he has no roof over his head and the only possessions are the clothes on his back. What for you mean he don't need rehibilitatin?"

The committee had its first meeting at the Scaling House the very next evening when it was determined that Baxter and Kim had gone for a boat ride. The entire populace, being properly notified, was in attendance. Cam rapped on the scaler with a stick calling for order and explained the

purpose of the meeting. Calling up his best silvery, sonorous oratory, he traced the plight of poor old Jody Baxter, going back to the time he was cast upon their shores and bringing it down to the present crisis. His listeners were ashamed of themselves, lying around in the warm sunshine with plenty of fish to eat and a roof over their heads while Baxter, a poor little orphan, had been away giving his life for them. Tears stood in their eyes until Cam showed them the way out of their situation.

"Now this ain't going to be no little mouse-squeak of a committee," he informed. "We're gonna divide up in branches and tributaries and make a three-pronged attack: A. Mental, B. Physical, and C. Spiritual. Now all those who want to work under 'A' hold up your hands."

Every eager hand went up. "Good," Cam beamed, "'B'?" Again there was a complete show. "'C'?" Unanimous.

"Good," Cam said stoutly. "Now all those on the mental committee be thinking up things you can do for old Baxter and be ready to report here first thing in the morning. Same for B and C groups. Meeting adjourned."

It was a night to be remembered in Cross Creek and would provide suitable folklore even unto the fifth generation. Never had its citizens acted with such oneness of thought, purpose, and action.

Tim Quinn retired early after the committee meeting and after an hour of heavy thinking and fine sifting of facts, crawled out of bed pulling on his trousers and looked around for something to use as a crowbar. A half hour later he returned to his home with a board which he would present to the committee with his thought-out opinion that Baxter might like to build himself another little house, and if the other members would go along and do likewise the materials could thus be furnished.

When it was morning, Cam Calloway arose from his bed, yawned, stretched, and walked over to the window of his shanty for a breath of air. He watched the sun gather up the mists around the dock and smiled benignly. The committee had been a good idea and the handy thing about it was that he might be able to get out of this in good grace and still keep his eye fund intact. He turned from the window and putting on his shoes received a message from his one eye, traveling on a slow sensory track toward his brain. He went to the window again for confirmation. It was true. The Scaling House was gone and only the proscenium arched door frame was left standing.

A cold fear grabbed at Cam's stomach and shook him all over. The eye fund! He tripped and fell three times before he got to the remains of the Scaling House. But the coffee can had not been molested. It was sitting on the top of the old beat-up door he had so hurriedly hidden the day of Baxter's return. He clutched it to his breast, then began to curse eloquently as would be expected of any Cross Creek mayor being confronted with such obvious thievery to real estate. Cam then began to search through his storehouse of ordinances, resolutions, and punishments as pertained to such devilish demolition of property. While he was thus occupied the committee began to congregate.

Having good sense enough not to notice or mention this second disappearance of the Scaling House, the members stood silently en masse before Cam, holding up planks, two-by-fours, pieces of flooring, windowsills, and windowpanes.

"Mayor Calloway," Tim respectfully bid for attention.

"Yes, Tim?" Cam granted calling on heretofore untapped sources of poise.

"I would like to report my findings." Tim then told of his plan and noted with pleasure and a subdued twinkle in his eye that other members of the committee had been like-minded and lucky enough to find a board or piece of building that Baxter could possibly use in the happy reconstruction of a new home.

Cam, feigning obliviousness of the missing Scale House launched into a lengthy congratulatory message to the committee. Up at the Retreat, Jody Baxter roused. Thinking it was late he hastened to get up. There were trout lines to run, bait to dig, and Kim to see. Glancing out the window he noted what seemed to be an angry mob surrounding Cam Calloway armed with stout boards and two-by-fours. He ran to the landing, dressing as he went. Pushing his way through the crowd, he took up a formidable stance in the door frame by the side of Cam and raised a placating hand.

"What was you aimin' to do?" he asked, fixing a cold eye on the crowd.

"We brought you material for a new house, Baxter," Tim explained. "You'll find enough to build you a home exactly like your other one with the exception that it will need a new door."

It took some moments for Baxter's mind to change gears and get on the right track. This was no angry mob but his good friends and neighbors doing all they could for him. It made a swelling in his throat and a mistiness in his eyes. While he was searching for the proper words, a playful morning breeze began to whip at the gunny sack covering the door beam, loosening it at one end. Every pair of shocked eyes riveted on the proscenium beam. Baxter followed the trail of eyes and his own came to rest at last on his old familiar arch. His mind began slowly and relentlessly to reconstruct the shape of past events.

"Now, Bax," Cam croaked, "the good citizens of Cross Creek acting in one accord, have decided that you would be most happy with a home similar to the one you owned before and hence have each gone out into the dark and dreary night to comb the beaches for a piece of well-seasoned wood and brought it here this bright and shining morning to lay at your feet. Bax, as you yourself once said, you can travel east and travel west, but never will you find a place like home where your spirit friends will do such things." Being emboldened by his returning oratory, Cam risked a glance at Jody Baxter, and the citizens of the Creek thought the time had come for the cream to start rising in their mayor.

"We haven't a door, Cam," Tim said, eyeing the coffee can Cam was clutching, "nor any money to buy one with."

Cam knew he would have to dip deeper. It was hard talking with a bog hand on the back of his neck. "Brother Baxter," he began, his voice as low and mellow as he could muster under the circumstances, "sometimes in the course of human events it becomes necessary, in the best opinion of some, to take certain measures that at a later date seem to be a mistake and ones which those responsible would like to rectify if given the proper chance." Again his eyes strayed to Baxter's and saw that he was being steadily and sternly studied.

"We haven't got enough for a door," Tim repeated meaningfully.

"Bax," Cam said, "you know there isn't one of us here that wouldn't give you his right arm or leg or eye—." Cam's mind recoiled from the thought running away for a safe distance and, looking back at it, came cautiously back to nibble at the edges. He saw that it had been done. "Bax, there is no decent door, and I would myself like to contribute the door for your new home."

A muffled sound of approval passed through the crowd, and Cam caught a glimpse of the gleam of light come into Jody's eyes but did not associate it with the fact that Kim had pushed herself forward through the congregation.

"A new door," Cam repeated, fascinated with the widening of the gleam and having had his natural dignity boosted. "With a brass latch on it," Cam vouched from dizzy heights.

Now a vast shout of approval went up. The committee members began to pile the result of their work at Baxter's feet. Cam dismissed the committee and sent Little Clyde Slipper up to the lumber company with the coffee can of money and instructions for them to send a new front door with a brass latch. Someone started a song, and everyone joined in and danced around the lumber.

Kim, rosy and breathless from dancing before breakfast, sat down on the pile of lumber looking for sure like a pretty bow-knot tying the package together.

"You look as if you go with this," Jody said softly. "I'd sure like that. I'd like that very much if you did go with it."

"Well, I didn't know anything about this committee Cam appointed," Kim said blushing, "and seein' as how I didn't contribute anything else, it would be all right with me if it's all right with you."

Jody picked up a small hand and held it, noted its trembling, and took it for a sign. He knew that in his duffel bag was a ring he could use for this occasion, and right now might be as good a time to distribute his other gifts, so he got his duffel bag while someone started a breakfast fire.

There were sandlewood fans, lace doilies, parachute silk, bowie knives, beads, bracelets, a skull, a scabbard, a small mounted alligator. Reaching into the furthermost recess of the bag, his hand closed around an object he could not identify readily. Bringing it partially into the light he smiled and asked, "Where's Cam?"

Mayor Calloway was pushed forward.

"Mayor Cam Calloway," Jody said, "in appreciation of all that you have done for me and Cross Creek, I wish you to accept this small token of affection. It once belonged to a maharaja, but since that maharaja is now deceased and no longer has use for it, it is fitting that it should fall into your hands."

Cam turned the object over and over, tears coursing down his rough, leathery face. Brother Baxter, I—I—"

"What is it?" the populace demanded impatiently.

For answer, Cam polished the eye on his trouser leg and turning his back as a point of delicacy, pulled back the lids of the sunken eye and slipped it in. It was a deep, liquid brown which looked elegant rather than luxurious. A shout of approval and admiration went up from the crowd; a wide grin spread over the mayor's face. A deceased maharaja's eye! The immensity of it almost choked Cam as he held up his hand for silence.

"Whereas this day has brought happiness to so many of our people and restitution of all known crime has been made, I therefore proclaim that it be set aside as a holiday forevermore in Cross Creek to be known as Jody Baxter Day."

"I'm hungry," little Clyde Slipper said, and Cross Creek turned its thought toward breakfast and the pleasant day ahead.

THREE POEMS BY MARLENE YOUMANS

GIRL AND TOY LUTE

Now look at her!
lithe and bare
as birch trees when branches
thin out, peeling
to a further whiteness,
the carved lute
giving a faint
pinkapink
brief as a word
under her hand.

Child-body
narrow walls
frame the twisted
apple bough
or crooked elder
aimed at light:
those eyes, pools
or limpid creatures
the soft sea
washed onto rocks.

There must be
something more blessed
than two-noted songs
to unfurl tendrils
and crumpled branches
or show a trail
past the place
of tidal pools
where a dark bridge
steadies us together.

PIANO RAG

The key breaks
off in the lock
the deadbolt snaps
as into curled leaves
and dusty light
tinkle notes
a calliope rag
to which the child
dances and leaps.

The late sun
shines leaf-through-leaf
strikes the record
casts prisms
that wheel in wings
across the ceiling,
the turning child
stares and stares
and laughs within the room.

The child's head
bobs on waves
sees bright transparent
leaf on leaf
and rainbowed figures
fly endlessly together,
the arm lifts, drops
begins again
as the child begins.

And we, we beat on the glass
watch the revolving
lights: beat
against the moment
when on a white ceiling
almost resembling
a sky of angels
all figures run down
and the late lights fail.

WINDOWMAKER

Remember when
I pieced
St. Michael's dome,
scaffolded up
next to stonework,
and storied round
the first home to the last
the sea of Galilee
outfit the desert
the sagging tree.
The pieces leapt
in my hands like fire,
yet now
I don't know where
that life can be
or what pleases glass
in a golden wire
after the choir's chill voice
the candle's fire.

Nights I dream
my own glass kings;
the lead cannot hold
the pieces spring
into the starry space
leaving a window
on the night and cold.
I awake
in my proper place
nothing awry,
in the glass my face
at morning and noon,
the same. Yet,
thinking of you,
I think it grace
and walk
among pale dead
and buried fame
soft on churchstone
my dear,
cut with your name.

HUMBOLDT'S GIFT AND THE MYTH OF THE ARTIST IN AMERICA

FREDRICA K. BARTZ

Ever since Tony Tanner pointed out Bellow's fear that America's "increasing materialism threatens to suffocate the soul with its profusion of things,"[1] Bellow's indictment of American materialism for the destruction of the poetic soul has become a convention. Thus, when *Humboldt's Gift* was published, reviewers took it for granted that, as Louis Simpson put it, the novel "illustrated the difficulty of being an artist in America."[2] Not only reviewers but critics too adhered to the artist-in-material-America myth. Sarah Blacher Cohen, for example, argues that "a good part of the novel is a protracted elegy, with Citrine weeping for Humboldt and cursing materialistic America for driving the brilliant poet to ruin."[3] No one seems to have noticed that in Bellow's latest novel a new dimension has been added to that theme—one that questions the artist-in-America myth rather than propounds it.

That new dimension is the element consistently ignored by critics—the Steinerian thought that informs the entire novel. That it should not be ignored is suggested by Bellow's own repeatedly stated interest in the concept of soul and of psychic dimensions of man. The novelist's business, he has said, is to write with "the natural knowledge of the soul . . . something we all hesitate to mention though we all know it intimately. . . ."[4] On other occasions, in interviews with Chirantan Kulshrestha, he argued that the writer is not necessarily committed to rational judgments in his book and confessed that he himself distrusts affirmations that belie an innocent faith in the psychic unity of mankind.[5] Charlie Citrine is a student of anthroposophy's view of the nature of just such a psychic unity. Though as an intellectual he sometimes mocks himself for pursuing occult philosophy, the comic stance is largely a psychic defense. At the end of the novel—and in this Citrine differs from all of Bellow's previous heroes—Citrine is not left rather ambiguously at the moment of emotional catharsis. His future plans are known. He is clearing away his affairs so that he may go to the Steiner Center in Switzerland for further study. This fact along

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[1] *Saul Bellow* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965), p. 5.

[2] "The Ghost of Delmore Schwartz," *New York Times Magazine*, 7 December 1975, Sec. 6, p. 38. See also: Roger Shattuck, "A Higher Selfishness? *Humboldt's Gift*," *The New York Review of Books*, 18 September 1975, p. 21.

[3] "Comedy and Guilt in Humboldt's Gift," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 25 (Spring 1979), 51.

[4] Chirantan Kulshrestha, *Saul Bellow: The Problem of Affirmation* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1978), p. 14.

[5] *Saul Bellow: The Problem of Affirmation*, p. 40.

with Bellow's own consistent quest for the soul (revealed in both his work and conversation) suggest that what Citrine learns from Steiner's works should not be dismissed as peripheral. I propose to show that it is not. I also propose to show how the light of Steiner's theories reveals a new perspective on the problem of the artist in America, and in particular, on Humboldt's tragedy: the destruction of his artistic talent.

In this light, his tragedy is not that of being a poet in a materialistic America, but of being a poet with too little strength for the development of his soul and too little concern for his mystic mission. It is true, of course, that Humboldt himself rationalizes his own failures by utilizing the artist-in-America myth, and his assertions seem to have misled critics. For instance, Humboldt tells Citrine that he cannot write because he cannot maintain his equilibrium: "'There are too many anxieties. . . . The world keeps interfering. . . . I feel as if I've been living in a suburb of reality, and commuting back and forth. That's got to stop. I have to locate myself. I'm here [here on earth, he meant] to do something, something good.' "[6] But implicit in this rationalization of his failures is his admission that he does have some kind of mission and that he is not true to his own purposes. Where Bellow places the blame was made clear when he himself said that Citrine does not accept Humboldt's version of the artist-in-America myth. In an interview given shortly after the novel's publication, Bellow told Melvyn Bragg: ". . . Citrine is critical of Humboldt's taking the path of orthodoxy—that is to say, Humboldt is in some way following the pattern of the doomed poet, he's doing what the middle class expects him to do. Charlie is much offended by this, and thinks the man has destroyed himself simply to follow that banal pattern. . . . it was not self definition . . . it was something borrowed, and it was fatal."[7]

In contrast to that pattern, Citrine holds to the Steinerian concept of artist as priest. To him, the paranoid, drug-ridden, burnt-out Humboldt who rages instead of writes may be described as Humboldt describes Artaud: ". . . the artist was a failed priest. Failed priests specialize in blasphemy" (p. 32). While still young and productive, Humboldt calls poetry a "church thing" (p. 118) and even later speaks of writing as an "Art Sacrament" (p. 119). As his decay begins and he pickets the theatre where Citrine's successful play is being staged, Citrine senses that Humboldt "carried his picket sign as though it were a cross" (p. 15), and in his decline even Humboldt admits that he is a failed priest with "immortal longings in me" (p. 240). Definite parallels are suggested between the mystic mission of the priest and the mystic mission of the artist. But while middle-class America provides no myth of the doomed priest, it does provide one for

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[6]*Humboldt's Gift* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 128. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[7]"Off the Couch by Christmas: Saul Bellow on His New Novel," *The Listener*, 20 November 1975, p. 675.

the doomed poet. Citrine sees that Humboldt is taking advantage of it as a banal excuse for his own weaknesses. Humboldt may long, but he does not write; and that is not materialistic America's fault, but Humboldt's.

The theoretical basis of Citrine's perception lies in Steiner's warnings about the source of such failures: not in environment—venial, material, or any other kind—but within the self. Citrine adheres to the somewhat Romantic Steinerian belief that the true artist produces art through an impulse suffused with divinity. Steiner's concept differs from that of the Romantics, however, in that the impulse comes directly from actual spiritual beings, some Earth's dead who have advanced to higher planes and some pure spirit entities who have never existed except on astral planes. The artist, Steiner teaches, has direct contact and communication with these spirits during sleep, when his astral body travels into and experiences the spirit world. It is an active, felt, cosmic supersensible world, and the artist comes from it with special faculties of perception and returns to it nightly to renew the spiritual knowledge by which he maintains the strength necessary for his spiritual mission. Citrine agrees with Steiner's insistence that "everything that manifests itself on earth in this or that artistic form—and art always does this—has its origin in the supersensible world."[8]

Citrine's comic stance toward his growing belief in many of Steiner's teachings should not mislead the reader into dismissing ideas like this. Asked about Citrine's comic stance, Bellow has said: "I think he is doing something that I have sometimes described as kidding his way to Jesus: seemingly frivolous and light, but actually quite serious, afraid to make a major statement about his intentions, but disguising himself comically. I think it's true of the book, I think it's true of both Humboldt and Citrine."[9] Though he does not accept all of Steiner, Citrine is a serious student of anthroposophy, following all instructions with determination.

Two specifics from among Steiner's instructions must be particularly noted because they are the basis of Citrine's judgments on Humboldt. One of them is that although the artist must live fully in the world, his thoughts must not be wholly of it. He must retire at night with higher, more spiritual thoughts to make possible the passage of his astral body into the supersensible world and the contact with the spirit beings there. The second is that the artist *must* have sufficient sleep to have the supersensible experiences he shapes into art. Analyzing Humboldt's decay from this theoretical basis, Citrine concludes that Humboldt has failed his mission in two ways.

His first failure lay in valuing too highly the mundane baubles that America offers. He had too great an affinity for popular culture, nowhere

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[8]Rudolf Steiner, *Life between Death and Rebirth*, trans. R. M. Querido (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1968), p. 176.

[9]"Off the Couch by Christmas," p. 675.

so evident as in his love of cars. He schemed constantly, longing for success, not because of what he could teach of good to mankind, but for what he could gain of the world's goods. At the same time that he wanted the world, he wanted to escape from it. He wanted a tenured position at Princeton in order to avoid the "job-world" (p. 134). As Citrine says, "I think he wanted Kathleen to protect him when he entered the states a poet needed to be in. These high dreaming states, always being punctured and torn by American flak, were what he wanted Kathleen to preserve for him. Enchantment" (p. 240).

The strongly critical tone of passages like this may easily be missed by anyone not familiar with Steiner, who would scoff at a poet's need of "enchantment" and insist that it is not America that is culpable. To Steiner an artist's earth stage is central and critical to his spiritual evolution. His isolation in the world of the physical and material, an eclipse of his direct perception of the spiritual cosmos during his waking hours—these are a necessary condition. Only in this isolation can the ego-principle, the "I," self-consciously develop its strength to the extent necessary for its ascent to the spiritual realm during sleep. Steiner stresses two concomitants of spiritual progress: self-discipline in the intellectual examination of the self's spiritual connections and a full involvement in the ordinary affairs of physical life. Like the Sufi, he does not believe that the successful artist needs protection from the world around him and insists on full participation in the work world while the self builds its own fortress within:

> The intention is that the human being is so permeated with spirit-soul existence that the spirit can be borne into every aspect of practical existence and not just be something which is experienced in nebulous mysticism. . . . if we wish to solve the great problems of civilization we have to advance so far as to take the spirit with us when we go through the factory gate. . . .[10]
>
> It cannot be repeated too often that this transformation does not alienate him from the world. He will be in no way estranged from his daily tasks and duties. . . .[11]

All that is necessary for the artist is that he not value the world's goods too highly, that spiritual values be uppermost in his mind as he ends his day.

The world is far too much with Humboldt. Its malignant growth on his poetic power prevents him from draping the world in radiance. "He didn't have enough material. His attempt ended at the belly" (p. 107), Citrine says, refusing to see that as America's crime and Humboldt's innocent victimization.

Humboldt's second failure came with another kind of escape, his

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[10]Rudolf Steiner, *Methods of Spiritual Research* (Blauvelt, New York: Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1973), p. 84.

[11]Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*, trans. George Metaxa, et al. (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1975), p. 26.

turning to drugs and alcohol, resulting in his insomnia. In a passage often quoted out of context, Citrine comes to realize this:

> Poets have to dream, and dreaming in America is no cinch. . . . I think that Humboldt's insomnia testified mostly to the strength of the world. . . . the world has power, and interest follows power. Where are the poets' power and interest? They originate in dream states. These come because a voice sounds in his soul which has a power equal to the power of societies, states, and regimes. You don't make yourself interesting through madness, eccentricity, or anything of the sort but because you have the power to cancel the world's distraction, activity, noise, and become fit to hear the essence of things. (p. 312)

Critics quote the first part of this statement and ignore the second part, but it is the second part that identifies the problem. The culpability is placed on Humboldt, who allows eccentricity to grow into madness and permits drugs to poison his body into insomnia. For example:

> . . . Humboldt didn't sleep on the night Ike was elected, because he was drugged with pills and booze or toxic with metabolic wastes, because his psyche didn't refresh itself by dreaming, because he renounced his gifts, because he lacked spiritual strength, or was too frail. . . . (p. 133)

Dreaming is the *sine qua non* for the artist. Dreams are the memories of experience in the supersensible world so intense that the average man simply clothes them in pictures from the temporal world and forgets them. The artist fashions these memories into art. The poet, Steiner says,

> . . . is able to bring what he experiences . . . and to clothe it in pictures. . . . it is not in its content but in its cause, its origin, its source, that real and genuine art has its roots in what the artistic soul experiences in the supersensible. Therefore true art . . . has been rightly regarded by humanity at all times as a message brought into the sense world from a supersensible world.[12]

The kind of poetry that could drape the world in radiance comes only from dream memories of this kind of experience, but Humboldt fights sleep, maybe, Citrine says, because "he was ashamed. Out of a sense that he had no words fit to carry into sleep" (p. 265).

Profoundly sympathetic as Bellow is toward Humboldt's inability to write and function, it is not society that he indicts. The artist has the means of renewing his artistic vision and power no matter how materialistic the America he lives in. Familiarity with the Steinerian thought that informs most of Citrine's analysis and pronouncements reveals that paranoic, insomniac Humboldt's malaise is a portrait of the fallaciousness of the artist-in-America myth, not a demonstration of its truth.

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[12]*Methods of Spiritual Research*, p. 57.

MOBILITY

Barbara Rich

The sherry slid down my throat; smooth, smokey. Amber color, amber taste. Lovely sherry, mature and respectable. Not trendy like white wine, nor decadent like muscatel. I am mature, and I used to be respectable. A respected part of the academic community, up to my grey matter in University affairs. And then my husband became involved in a University affair of his own, and it didn't blow over the way my comforting friends assured me it would. They too faculty wives, they too worried about nubile students who gaze with clear eyes under unwrinkled lids at their husbands: those founts of knowledge at the front of classrooms. While they were comforting me, they were also telling themselves it couldn't happen to them. Well, it hadn't, not yet, anyway. It happened to me and now I am a mature, divorced woman, living on the fringes of society that had once embraced me as Eric's wife. One hears so much of the organization wife; all the pressures on her to measure up, all the moving about to cope with. I am not minimizing their problems, just maximizing those of women caught up in the hot intrigues buried in lush lawns of campuses all over the country.

One can wallow in heartache when one is twenty, thirty. I am forty-two, and this is an inappropriate age to wallow. Forty-two is for skimming; for afternoons at the club and faculty teas for new wives. For volunteer work. My husband's new wife is having a good time. Hers is a fresh, new face, newly released from classrooms and ready to take on department chairmen. So much newness—my sherry is whispering to me that the new shall inherit the earth.

A few weeks ago I went to a meeting of the National Organization of Women who believe in the joys of NOW. It was a good meeting, but it was equally good to leave. I admired their intensity, their sense of outrage. So much injustice to cure, so many wrongs to right. They want to have control over their own bodies; I still need someone who cares about mine.

I had lunch with my friend, Sarah, last week. Sarah's husband was just given tenure, which is something akin to an aging actress closing the door to her dressing room and taking her girdle off until the next scene, one almost an act away. A blessed sense of relief. Of course, the actress has to scramble back into her girdle on cue, while Sarah's husband can let it all hang out. He has it made, and with a little publication now and then, and not too many students abandoning his courses on grounds of extreme boredom, he is set for life. Eric had it made, and so I had it made too. Security. A word we can put down by saying there isn't any, not *really*, but when this intangible loses tangibility, it is missed.

So Sarah and I were lunching, and her eyes were having a debate between betraying sympathy and smugness. She picked up the check and I

didn't even murmur. I went home and swallowed some sherry for non-medicinal purposes, and did some hard thinking. It had been seven months since Eric traded me in, and I was tired of sitting on the lot waiting for someone to come along and appreciate my vintage lines. I would have to get a job, not only so that it wouldn't be a struggle to pay for my own lunch, but to keep me functioning as a rational person. We had no children, Eric and I. Surgery—non-elective, they call it, as if it were a required course—had put an end to my fertility a few months after we were married, and somehow it seemed simpler not to go through the hassles connected with adoption. To just go on being a close couple.

"Aren't Beth and Eric a close couple?" people would say to each other. "That happens so often with childless couples."

It does. It also simplifies a divorce. No child support. Just a settlement, for twenty-one years of living: the hard life at first, and then the soft. For putting away, high up on closet shelves in increasingly larger houses, all the curiosity of one's own college years, and substituting best-seller reading and small talk at receptions and parties and meetings. Letting these things work their own form of magic until the transformation was complete. Wife becomes loyal shadow, following Husband from university town to university town, each one almost a replica of the last, too busy with trivia to notice that Husband has become age-threatened prof, looking for a firmer face reflected in younger eyes. This was the seductive song of the Fifties.

"What are my marketable skills?" I asked my sherry glass.

"Zilch," it relied, as only an empty goblet can.

My major had been English, and the roadsides are crowded with that species. I could type; all faculty wives learn to do that somewhere along the way. It's required for doing your husband's thesis and dissertation. What I wanted, really longed for, was to have some marvelous man fall in love with me, and after no suitable interval at all, marry me. Show my husband (when would I be able to think of him as my ex-husband?), that someone wanted me too. Show my friends that I was more than a horrible example of what might happen to them. Show me there was more than what I saw in the mirror; a woman who had kept her figure but was in mortal danger of losing her face to gravity.

It was Friday afternoon, the most dreaded of times. A weekend looming with no plans. Bad enough to be alone during the week; a not-so-original sin on Saturday and Sunday, the weekly orgy of togetherness and coupling. I put the decanter away in its cabinet home, and went out to the driveway and got into my car. The house was a lovely one—all paid for, all mine. That was the bulk of my divorce settlement. Next year it would need a new roof. Taxes were going through the old roof. I didn't know how much longer I'd be able to hang onto it. The car was mine too: Eric got the Olds, I the Chevy. But it too was free and clear.

I drove to the library to catch up on the latest magazines, return the four books I'd consumed during the past week, and collect some more. No

more best sellers, although some of them were undoubtedly fine. I was going backward, picking up old favorites and finding new delights in them. Willa Cather, Faulkner, Frost. A selection as widely scattered as their roots. With the five books I'd selected, I walked to the rear of the room where the periodicals were lined up on racks. Comfortable chairs and couches were in that section, inviting one to dip and browse. It was getting close to supper time; only a couple of people were there. Loneliness can cause one's whole perception of the most innocent scene to undergo radical changes. The old me, the faculty-wife-me, would have looked at these people and seen them doing what they were doing: reading. The new me saw a man and a woman, separated by a couch and two chairs, pretending to read: putting off the time when they must return to a lonely room or apartment or house.

I selected the latest issue of a literary magazine we used to subscribe to, and chose a chair adjacent to the man. He looked up, acknowledged my presence with the briefest smile, and returned to his copy of the *New York Times*. I opened the magazine to the section on new paperbacks and was soon lost in the conversation my mind was having with words. Until I heard the man chuckle. People don't chuckle much anymore, except Walter Cronkite, and he's elevated it into an art form.

This is a friendly town. People talk to each other without formal introductions. So I glanced over at him and his eyes, full of laughter, met mine. He chuckled again, and I found myself joining in, although my contribution was more giggle.

"What's so amusing?" I asked.

"This." He pointed to a short article and handed the paper to me, folded to a manageable size. I wonder how many muscles have been born through regular reading of the *New York Times*.

I read the article; it was authored by one of the true wits to be found on the editorial page of the Grey Lady. It involved an absurdly exaggerated account of the next presidential election, which would see primaries commencing a week after the last Inauguration. It was well written, as all his articles are, and I found it fresh and funny.

"Good stuff," I said to the man, handing the paper back to him. "Wild but good. We need to read something like that once in a while, just to give us some relief from the floods of doom washing out of Washington."

"Yes," he said, "we really do."

He bent his head to the paper again, and I to the magazine, and then we both looked up as the woman across from us stood and walked the length of the room and out the door. That left just the two of us in the library.

"Friday afternoon," he said.

"Yes," I replied.

He told me his name and I told him mine, and we started to talk about the books I had placed on the table before me, and then about how late the

dogwoods were this year, and then back to books again. I judged his age to be about fifty-seven or fifty-eight, but then I'm not very good at this. He was bald, with little fringes of white hair making a kind of circle around the back and sides of his head, and his eyes were large and dark and made me think of pain. I mean they looked as though they were on more than casual terms with pain.

We talked quietly for a while, and one of the librarians must have flipped a switch because the fluorescent lights came on and I realized it was darker than twilight outside.

I returned the magazine to the rack, learning forward, and started to gather up my books to take to the check-out desk. I turned to Allen Horn and smiled, the kind of smile one bestows as one is leaving, and he asked me if I would like to join him in a meal. My mind began to churn out good thoughts, such as: How does he know I have nowhere to go but home to an empty house? Does it show? Am I wearing a sign that says "abandoned"? Is he asking me out because he's sorry for me?

When Eric loved me, when I was enough for him, he used to tell me I had a mobile face. That it changed and moved with each passing thought and feeling—that it was never still. I loved it when he talked that way. I loved it that he thought me mobile and emotional and open. Allen Horn was looking at me as if he heard all my questions and was saying no to them all, and I closed my eyes as though that would make me invisible. Me and all my insecurities.

"My husband left me seven months ago to marry someone else," I heard myself tell him, to my surprise and horror. "No one has asked me to have dinner in a long time."

"My wife died almost two years ago, and I ask people to have dinner with me all the time—I don't like eating alone," he answered, and so we checked our books out and went to dinner.

We walked to an unfancy place near the University; it did have table cloths and candles in those glass jars, but the menus looked as if they did manual labor and the waiters doubled as students in the daytime. We had good, chewy lasagna, and wine in a bottle wearing a straw jacket. We talked about a lot of things, and I ended up with a part-time job. Al, he asked me to call him that, was a retired pollster: one of those people who go around asking strangers questions about all the vital issues facing the electorate. At one time he had his own firm; later he worked for one of the biggies. All during those years, he kept a record of interesting people—well—eccentrics, who refused to go along with questions in a docile manner. People who interjected their own comments on polls in general and, in particular, on the questions themselves and the pollster himself. Al thought he had the makings of a small book on the workings of the quirky mind, and asked if I would be interested in going through his material and helping him with the editing.

I told him I certainly would; that the idea appealed to me very much. That for two years I had edited my college paper and loved anything to do with words. Al said he had a feeling about me when he saw the books I was checking out—a feeling I would be the one for the job. Just like that I was made to feel useful, given a place to go for three or four hours a day, and paid a good hourly wage to boot.

That night I really slept—a deep, restoring sleep without any encouragement from my amber-colored friend. I had a good breakfast, and was reading the want ads in the morning paper with a lovely feeling of curiosity untinged by desperation, when the phone rang. It was Al, wanting to know if I'd changed my mind about the job.

"Oh no," I assured him. "I'm looking forward to Monday, to getting my hands on the material and starting files. Really getting down to it." Then the months of insecurity, of disbelief in myself, came back with a rush, and it was painful to ask him if he had changed his. Painful because of the way fear had dried up my mouth.

"Not on your life," he said. "No, I just wanted to make sure you weren't carried away by last night's elegant surroundings." He paused, and I was beginning to wonder whether he wanted to get started that day, when he went on. "I had a call from my daughter last night; bad news. Her husband had a heart attack and will be hospitalized for a while. It's his second, so the concern level is high. They are short-handed, and Helen asked if I could come out and kind of hold things together until she can get additional help."

We'd talked a little about our lives: nothing in depth, just some facts to give each other some idea of our backgrounds. Al's only child was married to a dairy farmer—they and their two children lived in Wisconsin.

After telling him I was sorry, I asked if there was anything I could do. He thanked me, said his neighbors would keep checking his house, and that he was booked on a flight that afternoon.

"I'm not sure just how long I'll be gone, Beth. Wondered if you would be free to come over and pick up the material. You could start going through it on Monday, as we'd planned. Do the preliminary sorting, you know, what we talked about last night. Keep track of your hours, of course. Now that I finally have someone to work on it with me, I kind of hate to leave it sitting here when you could be getting a head start while I'm gone. Does that sound all right with you?"

I said that would be fine, and I'd be over in a little while. Al lived just over the city line, in a relatively new subdivision. A small house, all on one floor, neat as a straight pin. He had a mountain of papers on the dining room table, which he divided into four large folders and carried out to my car. I said all the usual things one does on such an occasion, and he told me, once again, how pleased he was that I was going to get his long-anticipated project underway. I was not to feel pressured, he said; just do as much as I

was willing to handle on my own. That he would be in touch. I left him standing on the tiny porch, looking both distracted and relieved.

It was a good weekend. I gave the house a thorough cleaning, bought groceries and went through two of the library books. Always with me, like an unseen but comfortable companion, were the folders, waiting for me in Eric's—no, *my*—study. Although I was tempted to go through just one, I held off, like a child who knows where the Christmas presents have been stashed, but whether through a sense of honor or just one of delight in prolonging suspense, decides not to go rooting through the pile.

Monday was a grey day: rainy and full of fog. The kind of weather that is chilling when one is depressed, but can be cozy when there is something to engage your mind and energies. I started going through the thinnest folder after breakfast and was startled when my stomach reminded me of my neglect. It was after two, and I had been totally involved in the material. What a wealth of information there was, how meticulous Al had been in his observations and comments. I felt there was a good book in all this; a book not only informative and potentially funny and touching, but also marketable, which is the best kind of book there is.

The week went by, not quickly, but fully. I lived each day and looked forward to the next. I bought a stack of files, and started sorting according to various categories relating to date, type of poll, interviewee, etc.

It must have been around the middle of the following week that I came upon the interview with a woman named Inez Moore. It was part of the last poll Al had conducted. By this time I had started many sub-files, one of which related to economic status. Inez Moore lived in a part of town I was not familiar with, but knew was inhabited by blue collar workers and their families. I started to file her away under "female, lower-income, recent," when something stopped me. While there were anywhere from a few to several pages describing these aborted interviews, this one had just one paragraph centered on a sheet of paper. This is what Al wrote:

> Refused to say anything at all, after letting me into the living room and not protesting when I asked whether I could sit down. After several questions, during which she maintained complete silence, I asked her why she had allowed me to come in. Surely, I said, she had seen my card and knew why I was here. If she wouldn't even tell me why she refused to answer any questions, why had she let me in? Her answer all but floored me: she let me in, she said, because no one had been in her house in almost two years. All her friends were dead or had moved away. Sometimes she goes out on her porch and pushes her own doorbell, just to hear how it sounds. Then she goes back inside and locks the door. She does this every now and then, she told me, just to hear it ring. She told me no one rings her doorbell anymore. She is a white woman, in her late sixties or early seventies, dressed in a faded green skirt and dark sweater. After she said that, she didn't say another word, not even

when I got up to leave. As I was walking down the wooden steps, I could hear the lock turn. Her name was on the mailbox. I wondered if she ever receives mail. I was very sad as I left—almost tempted to go back and ring the doorbell again, but of course I didn't.

Oh God, I thought, the loneliness of it! To actually ring one's own doorbell. I got the phone book; of course she wasn't in it. Why would she have a phone? She probably wasn't even alive by now; the poll had been taken over five years ago. But she might be. Feeling like a fool, I picked up my bag and went out to the car. It was about a fifteen minute drive, and all the way I kept telling myself I was an idiot. When I reached the street where Inez Moore lived, this self-evaluation was confirmed. The entire block had been razed, and now housed a supermarket and laundromat. So much for my mission of mercy.

It was another two weeks before Al got back, his son-in-law out of danger and additional farm help having been secured. I didn't find out until much later that he and his wife had lost two children before his daughter was born. When he told me this, I remembered that first day in the library when I'd associated the expression in his eyes with pain; this explained it. Al seemed pleased with the progress I'd made, and we got down to serious work.

During the remaining weeks before Al returned, I thought a lot about Inez Moore, about all the Inez Moores. About being imprisoned by loneliness. Of waiting: for a knock on the door, the phone to ring, or the doorbell. I had been doing this in my own quiet way. Waiting for someone to discover me, fall in love with me and make me a wife again. "Beth, the wife of....."—"Beth, whose husband is....." Mobility was more than having an expressive face. The book Al and I would be working on was going to be finished one day, and successful or not, I would have to go on to something else. I might have to sell the house, or I might be able to keep it. But I would be moving, one way or another, and I would need more than sherry and books to help me along. I would have to pick up my life in my own two hands and move on with it. Hold it with care, but not too tightly; protect it from the obvious dangers, but let it sway and shift until it found its own stability.

It's good that at that time, the time when Inez Moore was so much with me, I didn't realize Al Horn would be an important part of my future. That took a few years, and when it happened, I no longer needed to be made whole by another person. I already was.

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

S. F. Mickle

The town was small: one main street, unpaved and gravel, the church on one side with recorded hymns megaphoned out of its steeple from 5 P.M. to 6. Opposite was the machine shop, a large tin building with tractors and combines parked in front, an anvil inside, a fire raging, the sound of steel pounding from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M., and behind it, sweaty men hunkering down, shooting craps, and drinking out of bottles that were the greatest hazard to us barefooted from April to October.

In church on Sundays Mrs. Caroline Taylor—whose husband owned the machine shop—played the organ, pumping the pedals with her too large and varicosed-veined legs, while her husband sat beside her ready to take over the pumping when her legs gave out, usually during the doxology. Lessons were learned in cubicles curtained off from the sanctuary, the stories of Abraham, Job, John the Baptist, The Apostle Paul. What seems to have been transmitted more than the facts and memorized Bible verses was the idea (which we saw again in the Sunday afternoon movie when the cowboy in the white hat caught the cowboy in the black hat): evil would get its due. *Due* was something that took me a long time to figure out; after all, there was so many *dues*. There were *do* and *dew*, but I decided that they all had to do with action and something falling and whenever I walked barefooted over our short lawn in the morning I knew that wet feet was the mildest of all possibilities.

So there was no reason to worry about the State Treasurer; if he was embezzling, God would know it, and he would get his due. Same with the Governor and President (Nixon was good proof of this) and just the same with Mr. Taylor, who may or may not have been encouraging waywardness at the machine shop. And certainly Mr. Taylor's pumping the organ for his half-debilitated wife on Sundays improved his chances for escaping retribution. For it was a well-balanced God we believed in and He would certainly take into account every day of the week.

So as far as I could see even if great fortune befell one (i.e., if you were so happy you couldn't believe it) you were in trouble. Life was to be balanced: there had to be the good with the bad; tip the scales and all hell broke loose.

Maybe that was partly my fascination with the Jews. There were only two Jewish families in the town and since there was no synagogue within two hundred miles, I wasn't quite sure what arrangements they had with the Almighty Powers or even what they believed in. That of course is in itself almost impossible to believe. It makes the writing of this story almost beyond possibility as well, for it demands that one imagine being born as I was in October 1945 when no one wanted to talk about the previous four years. And therefore it demands imagining an innocence devoid of myth or

symbol except that which may be instinctive: the fascination with that which is different. And so I knew nothing about the Levy family except that they ran the bank. And I didn't know much about the Weiss family except that they owned the dimestore and pool hall.

I used to see Guy Levy sitting in his walled-off cubicle whenever I went to the bank with my mother. Everyone called him Guy but we all knew his real name, Eshek. My friends and I used to play with the sounds in that name; for a while it became our substitute for swearing in public, because if you said it loud and quick enough, you could pass it off as a sneeze.

Then I found that Eshek was listed in one of the "begot" paragraphs in the Bible. My mother said that Jewish people usually gave their sons names from the Old Testament—not only because they didn't believe in the New Testament—but also because they thought there was the possibility that their first born son would be the Messiah. Well, Guy Levy had a son, Benjamin, who was three grades ahead of me and he had dark curly hair and a large nose and wore glasses. I used to sit in the school cafeteria looking at him and thinking about what my mother had told me. Frankly, I couldn't believe it.

Susan Brown told me that her older sister, Mary, said that Jews were oversexed and she wouldn't get in a car with Benjamin Levy for anything. Guy Levy was wealthy though, very wealthy. He owned half the town and most of the houses that people rented. So usually mothers didn't mind their daughters going to dances with Benjamin Levy or even getting in cars with him. Some even encouraged it.

When my mother was fed up with my father she always said that after she got rid of him she was going to marry a rich bald-headed Jew. I knew that she meant someone like Mr. Levy, not like Mr. Weiss. Mr. Weiss ran the dimestore and pool hall. He was rich, or at least he made a lot of money, but he wasn't like Mr. Levy.

Sometimes when I went in the dimestore, Mr. Weiss would be sitting on a stool behind the cash register, his sleeves rolled up with his dark over-sized forearms coming out like hirsute pipes. He was bald and the dome of his head glistened, even though the store was dark. He would sit, chewing on a cigar, sometimes reading a magazine, and watch. The floors in that store were scuffed hardwood and creaked. Every step you took made a sound; Mr. Weiss could sit up there at the front of the store and know exactly where you were every minute. For a while I went through a period of wanting to steal. Today the statistics show that most shoplifters are white middle-class teenaged girls; Freudians say it's love they're after when they walk through the check-out line with a manicure set in their pocket. But whoever says what, that dark appetite tempted me for a while, usually resulting in no more than a few nail files and powder puffs that I took home and promptly, as an act of appeasement, gave to our needy maid, Berthe. But being in that dimestore with Mr. Weiss listening and

watching like a big sleepy-eyed cat was more than I could handle. For not only could Mr. Weiss know exactly where I was at every minute, he was also the only person I knew who suspected the dark and evil depths that I, the granddaughter of the town's only doctor, was capable of falling to.

Mr. Weiss's son, Joel, was in my class at school. He had dark hair and almost black eyes that looked wet all the time. He was always taller than most of us, and eventually he became a star athlete and was voted Most Attractive for three years in a row. He also spent a lot of time at his father's pool hall at the edge of town. Eventually most boys in our class hung out there, but Joel had been spending time in the pool hall for as long as we could remember. He used to come to school with cue chalk in his pockets that he would use at recess on his agate. He was the best marble shooter all through primary school. And in his lunch box his mother would pack foreign foods that she kept at the pool hall. We knew what strange food was because for a while Mrs. Weiss had set up a counter in the dimestore trying to educate the palates of the farmers and townspeople who flooded Main Street every Saturday. Everyone who went into the dimestore came out with something kosher. It was Mrs. Weiss's hope to start a deli, but the farmers' tastes were already too set for turnip greens and salt pork. They would come out of the store chewing on the bagel she had given them and throw it beside the curb saying they had no need for stiff donuts so old the sugar had fallen off.

So Joel ate those things his mother packed in his lunch box. His clothes were frequently patched and rather soiled, and as we grew older, he sometimes came to school with the smell of beer on him. We knew then he had spent the night at the pool hall.

By the time we were in junior high school, Joel Weiss was the most desirable and most forbidden boy in the whole class. In February of 1957, he and I were elected as candidates for King and Queen of Hearts. The class helped decorate a fruit jar with paper hearts and pasted a picture of Joel and me on it. We were supposed to take the jar on Friday afternoon after school and go around town collecting money in it. The couple who received the most money would be crowned King and Queen of Hearts and would ride on a float in a parade down Main Street. The money would go to the library.

That Friday afternoon I took the fruit jar into the Girls' Room and combed my hair. My mother had tried to persuade me to come home before we went collecting to change into one of those special Sunday outfits, but I told her I wouldn't have time. My mother was worried that I wouldn't look nice enough going around town collecting from the townspeople. So at noon she had put one of those Sunday outfits in a paper bag and brought it to the principal's office. I was called out of geography to pick it up, and I hid it in my locker before I went back to class. It was the last thing I ever wanted: to be called to the principal's office for a bag of clean clothes. It was the only time I'd ever been sent for by the principal,

something which usually only happened when you were in some terrible trouble or if someone in your family was dying or already dead. I very much wanted to fabricate a family tragedy or more appropriately, a near miss, a car crash, anything to be able for a few hours to be whispered over or glanced at, feeling my own sense of uniqueness. But I was much too good, much too ordinary. I told whoever asked that my mother had only brought me a bag of clean clothes. Maybe it was the humiliation of admitting that that spurred me into my first transgression of that day. I left my bouffant skirt and petticoats in my locker. Actually I cared more about looking nice in Joel's eyes than in anyone else's, and it was for him that I had worn (very much against my mother's wishes and why she probably left the change of clothes in the principal's office) the first straight skirt I was allowed. I straightened it, along with my hair, and met Joel in front of the school.

"Where you want to start?" he asked.

"Oh Main Street, I guess."

We walked the few blocks to Main Street. Joel took an apple out of his pocket and ate it. Main Street was covered with all those other candidates going into stores and holding out their fruit jars. "Let's go to the bank," I said. That seemed a likely place. Joel said sure and came along, looking bored. He threw his apple core at the curb in front of the bank, and we went in. With my grandfather being the town's doctor, there was almost no one in the whole town I didn't know or who didn't know me. Even through plenty of other candidates had already been in the bank, I still collected over four dollars and Guy Levy himself put in a crisp five dollar bill. At that rate, I didn't see how Joel and I could lose.

When we came out of the bank I asked Joel if he didn't want to hold the jar for awhile. He said I was doing fine and ought to keep it. Actually there really was an advantage to my carrying it.

Next we stopped in the drug store, and, of course, when the pharmacist saw me, he made a point to come out from behind his cubicle of bottles to put a couple of dollars in the fruit jar. Mrs. Crawford was there having one of my grandfather's prescriptions filled, and she put in a dollar. When I turned around Joel was looking at the magazines on the other side of the store. "I got three more dollars," I told him. "Great," he said, and put the magazine back in the rack. "Aren't you thirsty," he said, heading for the soda fountain. We sat down on the stools there, and Joel ordered two cherry cokes and took the fruit jar out of my hand and opened it. I watched him, not quite believing he was actually taking out a dime and putting it on the counter. He screwed the cap back on the fruit jar. "Don't worry," he said. "We'll have plenty of time to make it up." I nodded, but kept staring at it wondering where in all of the world he had gotten up enough gumption to do something like that. But more exactly, how had I got caught in that steel-jawed bear trap that could so decisively clamp down on the possibility of doing anything out of the ordinary?

"Where now?" I asked. I was hoping Joel would take a little more interest in what we were doing because I hated to have to do all the collecting with him just standing in the background looking bored.

"It doesn't much matter," he said.

"Want to try the grocery?" I suggested.

"Everybody's already been there," he said.

"Well where then?"

"I don't care."

I knew I could have gone anywhere right behind any other candidate and still gotten something in our fruit jar just because of who I was. But in hopes of interesting Joel I suggested we get off Main Street.

We decided to go to the train station. We walked the length of Main Street and when someone saw me, he or she would stop and put money in the jar.

There were two old people waiting for the train on hard pews in the small room with a coal stove in the middle. I didn't know either one of them; they must have been passengers in transit. But I went up to them, held out the fruit jar and told them who I was and that I was running for Queen of Hearts. I introduced Joel who was standing by the stove. The two old people shook their heads and looked out the window. Mr. James called me from behind the bars in the ticket window. "What's this you say you're doing?" he asked. My grandfather had been treating Mr. James' peptic ulcer for the last six years. "Joel and me are running for King and Queen of Hearts," I told him, and he slid a dollar under the bars for me to put in the fruit jar.

"This is really dumb," Joel said, standing with his back to the stove. Actually I was having fun, but instead I agreed with him.

"How much have you got?" Joel asked, and we sat down on one of the pews and poured the money between us. It came to $16.34.

"Well that will never do it," Joel said. That was the first time I realized that Joel cared about winning. Later in high school it became evident that he cared about winning everything he could; and he usually did.

"I have an idea," he said. He stared at the clock on the wall. "We have about two hours left. We ought to more than triple this money by then." We were supposed to return to the school at 5:30 to turn in the fruit jar.

"I'm sure we can do it on Main Street," I said.

"Yeah, but it's cold and everybody else is already there."

"Well where then?"

"The pool hall," Joel said, scooping the coins and bills back into the jar.

I didn't say anything for a minute. The horror of it crept up my spine and the hairs on my arms stood up.

"But women aren't allowed there," I said. "Will I have to wait outside?"

"I'll get you in," Joel said. "It won't take more than thirty minutes to fill up this whole jar."

I was, I tell myself now, conditioned for it all along. After all, wasn't I brought up to follow a man? And so it seemed that it was the most natural, or more precisely, naturally-wicked wickedness I could have chosen, realizing of course I never would have chosen it alone.

So I walked beside Joel as fast as my straight skirt would allow, which was fast enough to send the coins in the fruit jar jangling. I even giggled when Joel stuck out his thumb at a passing pickup truck and the truck pulled over. We ran and jumped in. Joel told the driver we only needed a short ride. I sat by the door, listening to the rattles, being aware that at any moment the door could fly open and I might be sucked onto the hard pavement.

"What you kids up to," he asked. He was a big red-faced man in a baseball cap.

I told him that Joel and I were running for King and Queen of Hearts and showed him the jar. "Would you like to vote?"

"What you get if you win?" he asked.

"Our own float in a parade," I said. And Joel said that the library got a bunch of new books.

The man stopped the truck where Joel instructed him, and as we got out he called to me. "Don't hurry off now," he said. "I want to give you a vote."

I held out the jar. Joel had already started off the road toward the pool hall. The man leaned out the window and dropped a dime in the jar and ran his hand down my cheek to the back of my neck. "You're right pretty, Queen a Hearts," he said and laughed. He forced back my head and his face came close.

"I'm Dr. Mauldin's granddaughter," I said.

He let go of my neck and put the truck in gear. "Good for you," he said and drove off.

I hurried to catch up with Joel, running so fast the coins in the jar went wild.

"How much did he give you?" Joel asked.

"A stupid dime," I said.

The pool hall was a tin building off the highway with woods behind it. There were a lot of cars and trucks parked in front of it.

"Maybe I better not go in," I said.

"Well it's too cold to stay out here. You can wait in the kitchen."

Joel led me to the back of the pool hall and we went in through a door there. The kitchen was dark because the only windows in the tin building were small rectangular slits near the ceiling. In summer it must have been hot enough to cook without the stove. Joel showed me a stool and I sat on it, holding the fruit jar while he went through the swinging doors into the other room. I could hear the tap of the cue sticks and then the clacking of the balls as they rolled on the tables. I looked around the kitchen and saw the big refrigerators that I imagined Mrs. Weiss kept her foreign foods in.

There were cases of beer stacked all the way to the ceiling.

Joel came through the swinging doors and Mr. Weiss was with him. That meant Mrs. Weiss was tending the dimestore and that I would be left in the kitchen alone. Mr. Weiss was friendly. He asked me how my grandfather was and looked at the fruit jar, studying Joel and my picture. "We'll see what we can do about filling this up," he said. He set the fruit jar on the table and opened one of the refrigerators behind me.

"My daddy's going to run a few games for the fruit jar," Joel said.

"Good," I said, not understanding.

Mr. Weiss brought me a Pepsi. "Make yourself at home," he said. "It's best you stay back here; it shouldn't take long."

I sipped my Pepsi and pulled the stool close to the swinging doors. Through the space between the doors I could see into the other room. Mr. Weiss waited until the bets had been made and then he rapped a cue stick on one of the tables and held up the fruit jar. The men stopped playing and looked at him. Mr. Weiss put his other hand on Joel's shoulder. "My boy here's running for King a Hearts," he said.

"Long live the King," someone yelled.

Mr. Weiss grinned. "I'll give five free games to the winner of this game if he'll put his win in this jar." He shook the fruit jar and it jangled.

There were a couple of cheers and the balls started clacking again as they were made ready for a new game.

Joel stood in front of the room, holding the jar. Mr. Weiss sat down in a big easy chair in one corner and started reading a magazine. It seemed that the game took a long time. I finished my Pepsi and set the bottle on the table. I was so hungry I opened one of the refrigerators. It was full of slices of meats and things pickled in jars. I didn't think it would matter if I ate just one piece of lunch meat. When I finished I was thirsty again, so I opened another Pepsi and sat back on the stool.

I watched the end of the game. That's when I saw Ernie Pendergrast. He was slouched into the chair opposite Mr. Weiss sleeping as if he were dead. My grandfather had been treating him for cirrhosis of the liver for several years. It was well known that he was an alcoholic; he was a wealthy cotton broker—not very old—but he'd never had any children and recently his wife had left him. He stirred every once in awhile, batting a fly off his face. He had on one of those expensive striped suits he always wore. He was overweight and the knees in his pants were always stretched and wrinkled.

The game ended with another round of cheers, and one man from each of the two tables picked up the dollar bills that had been waiting all that time on the beer cooler and took them to Joel. Joel quickly stuffed them into the fruit jar and Mr. Weiss started writing out the passes for the free games.

Joel hurried toward the kitchen and I just had time to push back my stool so it would look as though I had been sitting in the middle of the room the whole time.

"Just look at this," Joel held up the fruit jar, the dollar bills coiling through it like snakes. Joel was grinning as though he would bust. "Quick, let's count it," he said, unscrewing the jar and spilling out the bills onto the table. We bent over the money, counting.

"$51.22," Joel said. He glanced at the clock on the wall. "And we've got nearly an hour left." He burst out laughing. "How's that for a winner?" I was laughing too; it had all been so easy.

"Well I'm going to go out and shoot a game," Joel said, stuffing the money back in the jar. "I'll get us a ride back to the school."

"All right," I said.

"You want another Pepsi?" Joel asked.

"Okay."

Joel sat another Pepsi on the table and pushed the fruit jar toward me. "Guard this with your life," he said.

It wasn't long before I knew I couldn't wait; I'd have to find a bathroom. I looked around the kitchen. There wasn't any other door except the one leading out. I put on my coat, picked up the fruit jar, and went out toward the woods. I kept judging the distance between me and the pool hall. It had those high windows, but I didn't want to take a chance. Finally I found a bushy place in a low part of the woods. I set down the fruit jar and backed up to the bushes. When I finished I still heard the sound of water on the leaf-covered ground. I looked over the bushes and there was Ernie Pendergrast weaving on his feet and trying to zip up his pants.

I stood rooted. I didn't know whether to run or hide. But I didn't have time to do either. Ernie Pendergrast looked up and saw me and crashed through the bushes in that bear-like drunken way.

"What in hell," he said, grabbing me, his pants still unzipped and his face swollen with sleep-prints on it.

He weaved, gripping my arm so tight I was probably the only thing holding him up. But to me then he was the most dangerous beast of all my imaginings. I thrust the fruit jar at him.

He took hold of it and stared at the money inside. I could still hear him yelling, "What the hell . . ." by the time I reached the pool hall.

I stood in the kitchen, my coat still on, out of breath from excitement and running, when Joel came in.

"One more game," he said, opening a Pepsi and drinking it. Then he looked at me. "You cold?" he asked.

I shook my head. "And the jar's been stolen," I added.

"What!"

"Ernie Pendergrast stole the jar," I said.

"He what?!"

"He stole the jar and he's out there with it," I pointed.

"Goddamn it to hell," Joel yelled, running out the back door.

I followed him.

"Why don't you tell your daddy?" I said.

"Hell no, I'll handle this. Now tell me again what part of the woods."

I told him.

"Well we've got to make sure he doesn't make off with the jar," Joel said. "Come on."

We went around to the front of the pool hall and Joel started letting out the air in the tires of Ernie Pendergrast's Cadillac. He told me to hurry and let out the air in the other tire. So I stooped down and did it, setting off that frantic hissing that followed me all the way into the woods. I led Joel to where I had last seen Ernie Pendergrast and I grabbed Joel's arm as I imagined Ernie Pendergrast jumping us from behind. Joel picked up a stick and carried it like a club.

We found Ernie Pendergrast passed out under an evergreen tree, the fruit jar lying beside him.

"Hell," Joel said. "He couldn't even make off with it." He picked up the jar, turning it to see if maybe any money was missing. But it looked as full as ever.

I stared at Ernie Pendergrast, his pant legs ridden up so that the white china-like skin of his legs showed. He didn't look so dangerous; in fact, I felt sorry for him, his head twisted back on the ground.

"Old Fart," Joel said. "We ought to take a few votes from him—he's got more money than almost anybody."

"That's okay," I said. "We've got plenty." Actually I was worried that we had too much; it would look funny. I knew Joel would have bent down and emptied Ernie Pendergrast's pockets.

"We've got to hurry," I said. "I have a feeling it's after five."

While Joel was finding a ride for us, I scribbled a note and left it in the kitchen: ERNIE PENDERGRAST IS PASSED OUT IN THE WOODS ABOUT 100 YARDS FROM HERE. YOU BETTER SEE ABOUT HIM. DON'T LET HIM FREEZE. I rode off in Mr. MacDonald's delivery truck, holding the fruit jar in my lap and trying not to see it or Ernie Pendergrast's Cadillac, or the tin pool hall with the sun's last rays bouncing off it.

Mr. MacDonald let us off at the school. The building was dark except for one light in Mrs. Parsons' room. I hoped we'd be too late for our fruit jar to count. And we were late, ten minutes—but Mrs. Parsons smiled and said that was all right; she'd stretch the rules a little. I put the fruit jar on her desk, obviously much fuller than any other jar. The King and Queen of Hearts were to be crowned that night at a sock hop in the gym. So Joel and I went home, leaving Mrs. Parsons at her desk counting the bills that pushed out of the jar the minute she unscrewed the cap.

At home I ate the most silent supper of my life. Every question my mother asked, I answered with my shoulders; she couldn't get a word out of me. So when she drove me to the gym, as I got out of the car she said not to worry. "Maybe you didn't lose," she said. "But anyway, try to remember that *not* being Queen of Hearts isn't the end of the world."

I went to the gym, left my shoes at the door and walked onto the bright varnished floor. Already it was getting crowded; every class in the junior and senior high was invited. Before I left home, my mother had succeeded in getting me into one of those Sunday outfits: a pastel wool jumper with four starched crinolines under it. I looked like a lampshade and when I moved I sounded like someone wadding paper. Joel was in a crowd of boys; he waved when he saw me. I settled into my usual group of girls, and we twittered in a tight pack until the music started. As usual the boys in our age group weren't quite warmed up yet, so some of the girls broke into twos and started dancing.

The gym was strung with crepe paper overhead and hearts hung down from the streamers. There was a low stage at one end of the gym with the record player on it and on a table there were the crowns: tall cardboard sprayed with gold glitter. The principal and four teachers were sitting on folding chairs on the stage, watching.

After a few records, the principal went to the microphone and said he was going to do what we had all come to hear him do: announce the King and Queen. But first he made a speech about the library and about the support of the town. Then he said that the winners that year had collected more than any other winner in any other year; and of course that was Joel and me. I never had any doubt. When the principal announced my name he only joined the chant that had been inside me all the time. So to the silent march of my own name I walked to the stage, stood there beside Joel, and felt the stiff glittering crown mashed onto my head. The principal held it there a minute. Then the record dropped onto the turntable and Joel and I were supposed to start off the dance. Everybody crowded around, watching and clapping, and Joel took my hand. He pulled me up to him so as to wind-up the jitter bug, and the music came up through the floor and into our feet. Then Joel threw me out, and we danced connected by curved fingers.

The crowd closed in, blurred, and the clapping dwindled to a steady roar. Something electric entered my feet and they took off on their own, flying out in a frantic madness. Our sweaty fingers slipped and rejoined, wedged into each others like sharks' teeth as Joel and I entered the music, went down with it and emerged in applause.

For the rest of the time, we stayed together, dancing every record until the lights flicked on and off. Then people scattered and the doors were locked and Joel and I went our separate ways home.

For a week I avoided Joel. I turned away every time he looked at me and then sometimes I pretended I didn't even see him. I regrouped with my friends, pushing myself into them, hunting for the self I was two weeks before. But the day came when I had to go to the school, climb on that float, and ride it down Main Street.

I was dressed in a long red velvet robe, and the crown was set on the new permanent my mother had seen that I had gotten. I sat on a chair on

the float, and Joel climbed up behind me. His robe was red too and he wore the crown that mashed his dark hair into curls around his ears. The class had taken an old broom, painted the handle gold, and covered the straw with a large papier mâché heart. Joel held it like a trident and the float started off down the street with the band playing in front of it.

At the beginning of Main Street I felt sick. I thought I might even throw up. If I threw up enough, I had the fantasy that I could flood the street and stop the parade. But Mr. Greely's tractor that was pulling the float kept on pulling it, and so we reached those crowds lining the sidewalk.

I held a basket of candy hearts in my lap. I was supposed to toss them into the crowd, and already the children who had come into town with their fathers from some distant farm were stretching out their hands and calling for the candy. Joel leaned over, "Aren't you going to throw out any?" he whispered.

I took a few hearts and threw them. The children squealed and scampered after them. I rode down Main Street, tossing candy hearts like crazy.

Joel reached under my chair and got more candy to fill up the basket as soon as I emptied it. I saw my mother and Mr. Weiss and my grandfather and Ernie Pendergrast. I smiled and waved and threw candy all the way to the train station.

When we got back to the school, Mr. Greely stopped the tractor under a tree in the parking lot. "Well that's it," Mr. Greely said. He started unhitching the tractor from the float. Joel sat down, right where he had been standing and unwrapped one of the candy hearts. I ate one too, still sitting on my throne. Mr. Greely rode off on the tractor and Mrs. Parsons came to the float smiling and saying what a nice parade it had been and that she wanted to collect our costumes so she could store them for next year. I stood up and Joel jumped down. He took off his robe and handed it to Mrs. Parsons. "See ya," he said and walked off with a group of friends who were heading up town.

I got off the float and handed Mrs. Parsons my robe. I hated to leave. I had felt quite at home on that float, and worse, I knew that I would have gotten back on it and ridden it down Main Street or anywhere else.

Slowly I started walking home. There was a good chance a car would hit me before I got there. I halfway expected it.

I thought about Joel Weiss and how he didn't seem to worry about anything. It was a wonderful irony that my ignorance of history gave me, for the one thing I most wished was that I had been born a Jew.

But then isn't that the old story of two cows and the greener pasture?

By the time I passed the machine shop and the church and turned in toward my street, I didn't feel a bit better. It was my luck, I decided, to have a desire for everything forbidden and a God-given case of scruples that even becoming a zealous heathen would not loosen. I stood watching

as a group of children sat on the curb in front of my house opening cellophane wrappers and trading candy hearts. I felt so terrible that I knew it was inevitable: everything would soon be all right.

SCARECROW

Ragged
lank as string and
strung up on the bedpost
he husbands my sleep
keeps away crows, the carrion
dreams that long to feast.
More than mere his presence
allows my flesh
to snow, my bones to slacken.
He hovers and blurs
fielding each darkness.
When a wind assembles
I watch him twitch, then listen
for the startling of wings.

MARY VOGT

WE GET SMASHED AND OUR ENDINGS ARE SWIFT

Lee K. Abbott, Jr.

Oh, I did love the murder: the life-affirming "Aaaarrrggghhh!" the dying made when they spied the vast What-Not opening to greet them. I do hate it now.

First was a cocaine gangster named Li Dap (Col.), a II Corps Friendly and part-time VC. This was '67—a time you know as distant but dreadful—and I crept upon him like night itself, slipped over the wall of his Frenchy villa, plugged the barrel of That Which Is, my 16, in his earhole. He smelled like a new car.

"Awake, sleaze," I whispered. "I am here to ease you through the light and into hell." It was a fetching speech. "Think of me as that which hastens and regrets not."

Beside him slept beauty improved upon only by memory: woman. Later, I discovered she was Mai Ming, herself incorrigible for MACV purposes.

"What were you dreaming about, Dap?" I wondered. "I bet it was increase, weal enough to smite with. You were not, for example, picturing woe and wist, right?"

He burst from dreamland, blubbering. "Who you?" he gasped. "You no dipstick!" He was outraged, insulted. "Who you?"

"Herkie Walls," I told him. TCU graduate, interested in Divinity and its Failure. Now in the employ of Uncle Sugar's forces of good. He was confused, eyeballs wild with horror. He knew me as an Air America fuck-up, seen hither and yon, harmless. In the moonlight, you could see his shoulders glazed with sweat. I was military, I told him, secret and stealthful, my duties the simple business of righting wrongs. I was Superman. "Rise," I said, and we tippy-toed into the adjoining room, him in his gook undies, me in a jungle suit, my gringo face a mask of night-fighter cosmetic.

"You wrong," he was saying. "Li Dap plenty good guy. VC much death. I spit on NVA. Poot! Poot!"

In the other, finer world, he would have been a horse.

"You want names, I give." He rattled off several, among them many who had been good and were now evil, plus those without courage or keenness. The Colonel's hair looked distressed and naughty.

I told him, quietly, "Were my Daddy Ben or brother Buck here, they'd be for abusing you first—have you kneel, snap your arms off at the shoulder, etc. They're indelicate. Me, I think in lofty terms, not hindmost."

You could hear that gruesomely attractive Ming stirring, calling out, "Bo Chai, cheri." Li Dap trembled before me. In his mind, I was as unwelcome a creature as Godzilla. I pressed That Which Is into his belly. I was cool, as removed from this enterprise as you are from your ancestral fishes.

"I no scare," he was saying. "I top notch motherfuck." He dropped his pants, showed me his dong. "Big testes, no scare!"

I was amused.

"You scum bag," he said. "Li Dap King of valley." He tried to piss on my boots.

"Say bye-bye to me, Colonel," I hissed. "Say bye-bye to toot and appetite and such. Say hello, instead, to leaving this vale of etceteras."

"How long you been fool?" he said. "King not impressed."

It was then, while he sputtered and flapped his arms, that I divided him from the sum of his parts, vaporized his angers and love and smuts, and splattered a thousand ounces of his flesh and vitals against a wall. Ah, rapture. Ah, folly.

My mentor was Major Eloy T. Vigil, to murder what wingedness was to Victory, or E. Pound to verse. He picked me at Benning, in Georgia, where I walked around with a beret and believed I knew what I was doing. He saw in me, he said, vitality, something identified as Supreme and Handsome. I was material, he said. He could give shape to my pain. He could make me a bona fide Furtive living on the loose and exciting ends of things.

"You in love?" he said.

I was. Wasn't all youth?

"Margo is a Tri-Delt," he said. "Her legs are—here the report is quite specific—*golden* and *slim*."

We were standing in a grenade pit, the occasion an exercise in CS gas.

"I know everything about you, Walls." He had the look of an animal that had been through a dozen mates. "Your favorite color, the way you prefer potatoes, how you sleep with women—I know and approve."

"So what?" I said. "I'm a primate that can think a little. Impress me."

"You've read Pilpay and Heine, cared for neither." He stared down-range. This was an operation the brass called Mind and Matter. "You like having and keeping it, plus making it last. You desire—"

"—I like finding out for myself," I said. "Daddy Ben taught me how—by being diligent and witty."

"Your Daddy is a caveman," he said. "I'll be your Daddy now. Here."

He thrust on me a piece of camp stationery. *Dear Margo,* it read, *Marry somebody else, perhaps that dufus Jeeter. He's fine, I suppose, and what this world deserves in the way of citizens. Also, burn my letter sweater; football fails to interest any longer. What excites now is sentiment and action. Sell my guitar; I've no need for the uplift of staff and clefnote. If you choose to wait, look for me in a few years; I'll be the one smiling and full of glory. You were wonderful to me, bye.*

"What's in this for me?" I said.

"Knowledge, boy, and a way in the world. Let's go, Herkie Walls, let's go see us the light."

I went, I told him later, cause of loneliness, plus an infantile desire to please.

At many places, he trained us—DeFuniak Springs (Florida), Camp Vicars (Philippines), Langley. We were two: your sympathetic hero and Zion T. McKinney, a Cleveland spade. Zion had virtually homosexual hair, complex and meaningful, public enough to be a monument to this or that. "There's awe in my background," he told me when we met. "I'm collegiate, too. Ask me about thought and how it works in those that suffer." The Major said we were Batman and Robin; or, if we preferred, Alpha and Omega. Zion said we were neighboring links on the Great Chain of Being, abstract enough to be angels but still imperfect enough to be in the rueful business of living and dying.

"I want you boys to dwell in the glad half of the spectrum," the Major said. "Think not of fruity coughs and body liquors; think of serving Uncle Sugar and Mr. Johnson." He gave us many friendly whacks on the thick parts. "Lord, this is a fine moment."

In the following months, the Major took us the length and breadth of stalking, pouncing, doing America's duty and living to tell about it. We learned to tippy-toe, to creep, to shimmy through tiny holes, to dash like a thug, and to ape affection for the common joys. A War College anthropologist taught us native squats, habits of mind to use in the badlands, the difference among drools, and where the self comes from. We learned ordnance and code and the shortest path to reward. For a time, life was knowledge and the lingo to express it. We could do call of bird, bark of dog, and lovers' method of moil.

"Shit fire!" Zion said once, "compared to this, Tuskegee was a nursery. Man, we are in the realm of allegory and hard science."

We learned to kill, of course. I could take a being out with matchbook, school tie or NuTonic golf spikes. One time, in the wrestling room at Wright Pat AFB, I dropped the Major and threatened him with his own lips. "Major," I said, "consider yourself eviscerated."

"Aaaarrrggghhh," he said, smiling.

In another exercise, Zion and I went round and round, he the hero, I the hood. I had, at my disposal, a bio of cunning and double-dealing, plus a pair of antic underlings to make life easy; Zion had craft and an 800 on his SATs.

"I could have gotten you with bomb, ring full of poison, or wily female," he said. We were standing at a make-believe street corner, a hundred phony civilians streaming nearby. "Instead, I will take you with this."

He showed me a toenail, sharp as a barong, then incapacitated me with a deadly move involving ears, thighs, and my own optimism.

"I'm disappointed," the Major said. "He could have done the deed with a poem or Greek toga."

In the last stages of our training, we made a weapon of the metaphysical. Stoicism, foresight, the cynical—Zion and I handled them as expertly as we flung blunts from our Jetfire .25s. In our capable hands, human dirts, melts and sighs became as murderous as dagger or piano wire. "Watch this," Zion said once. His face lit by derelict joy, he slew a make-believe villain with two Sugar Bowl tickets and pressure applied to the site of the soul. "Not bad," I said, "take notes." I delivered my opponent into Never-Never land, using only the Knights of Columbus motto and a Trotsky metaphor addressing the masses and the yoke. Zion and I felt select and fluid—already part of the next epoch of humans. "Man, I feel splendor," Zion said. "Ain't we moving between the jaunty and superb!"

"I can do no more," the Major said later. "If there's a heap, you're atop it. Below you is rubble."

We were meeting in a spy-mobile, a 1965 Fairlane, yellow over black. It was night, of course, and we sat in the parking lot of a grit bar called the Sulphur Inn. This was Florida panhandle, summer and the sweats upon us.

"I am proud," he was saying. He looked like a redneck named Joe Ben or Mookie; you couldn't tell he was a Baylor Ph.D., single-handedly responsible for Korea. "From now on, everything's real. You've the ability and the frame of mind. Go and succeed."

Then he gave us our assignments, each in an EYES ONLY security pouch. Mine was Li Dap; Zion's, a Syrian named Ahmed Majd, specialist in humbug and illicit doody.

In time, Zion and I began working together. In '68 we went upcountry Cambodia, found an ingrate coconut monk named Su Lin "Teddy" Ky. We passed ourselves off as illiterate GIs, AWOL grunts seeking asylum in any of the available promised lands. "Big damn dollar," Su Lin said. "You got damn dollar, huge size, you go Danish place. Teddy do miracle with moola." We slew him with mysticism and angina-producing root juice. His face turned purple and his tongue looked like a cauliflower. "Buddha snatched that sucker up," Zion told Ky's minions. "Let us pray for that round and mortal dude."

We zapped a Thai gun merchant with arguments swiped from Luther and Erasmus. We told him we were Treasury dicks, in Bangkok on the trail of want and sin.

"No dig," he said. He had teeth like a Knabe piano. "I got girls. You come back later. Say hi Wanda, Say hi Mickey Monkey."

Zion stuck a work of Reformation doctrine against the man's throat.

"You want hop?" He was holding a stick of vegetable matter. "Plenty good stuff. Take you new world. Old world no good for you."

Soon after this Zion's dream began. "Lord to God!" he said after the first. We were in a two-star safe house near Do Long, Zion upright in bed, his face as empty as map space. His nightmare had been a classic—full of soils, storybook snakes and long falls into darkness. "Shit, I don't want to go

in there again," he said. "It was fear, Herkie. Let's stay awake forever." The next featured us in an era of quote flail and thrash unquote. "Maybe I'm being told something," Zion said. "It's my racial memory, that's what." In another, he met himself coming out a door, his face as eerie as the bottom of the sea. "Herkie," he said, "you know those ugly fish with the eyes?" I did. "I'm them," he said. "Let's drink, okay?"

In the fall, just before we were to return to the States, the Major ordered us to hit a proto-datu Philippino mucky-muck named Lazar. He was inept, we were told, in the way of virtue and swift results.

"Count me out," Zion said. "I'm weary. Let's stop in Hawaii, do a thing with females."

We were in Subic Bay, a secure BOQ, our wish a command to those from the serving class.

"One more time," I said. "Then we go in the sunshine, rest and recreate."

"I wasn't raised to be this." He lay in his skivvies, reading a volume on *modernismo* and the drift toward undoing. Mine was *The Kingdom of Leather*, a mystery with a happy ending. "You should've seen me as a youngster," he was saying. "I got pictures. I was a wonderful infant. Look at this face. Ain't it a work?"

"Me, too," I said. "I was always an attraction."

"My momma had expectations for me." He was shaking his head, that recondite hair of his sloshing back and forth like liquid in a box. "Heartbreak wasn't one of them."

"Think vacation," I said. "Lapping waters, strong drink, wahinis."

"I'm thinking on Nadine. She's my girl. She's—what?—hank and bone. Damn, her kisses'll take the parch out of you."

"Fret not," I said. "The Major owes us a break. We've been stellar."

Zion's face said, *Man, I just want to lay on the shores of Erie and live me the life*. You could tell he was thinking of, say, leisure and aging in the proper manner.

"Listen," I said, putting my book down. I'd gotten to the part about the quote tree spirits and six hours of whiskey unquote. I touched Zion on the arm. Despair brought out the tactile in me. "We'll get us some hooch," I said. "Golden Wedding Bourbon. Run amuck in it, what say?"

"Okay," he shrugged. "My head's in this, my heart's not. It's in another place, dig?"

Lazar's three-story abode was on Moro Street on the western edge of Manilla, and we went to it like citizens named Ike and Floyd. Our driver was a DAO technician with a face that resembled an unwelcome state of mind. You could smell him, too, metallic and stale like well water. His specialty was finding and fleeing.

"Here it be," he said. "It was nice meeting you, but I'm gone now."

He pitched himself from the Fiat and hurried up the street like a man hunting his only child. Lazar's place, shaded by leafy banyan trees, sat back from the street, protected by a shoulder-high brick fence pink enough to be a lady's cheek.

"Cake," I said. "Candy from you-know-who."

"We go in, blast the fool and are gone, right?" Zion was sweating like a wheel of cheese. "I mean, no lingering this time. We lingered in Qui Nhon. Lingering's not healthful."

Quickly, we ran down our checklist: stealth, ability to hold breath, righteous point of view, principalities and powers. You could hear bug sounds and random residential noise. It was an hour after dusk, the twilight humid and heavy.

"What's that smell?" Zion said. "That's an omen, ain't it? Smells like old poon."

I checked the walkie-talkie. "*Almighty, Almighty, this is Street Gang, do you copy*?"

"Remember," Zion was saying, "it's gone." He had his sweater up, pointing to his breast. "Here, feel."

He snatched my hand to his chest. Ker-thump. Ker-thump.

"*Street Gang, this is Almighty. Life is easy. Do it.*"

Fifteen minutes passed before we left the vehicle, scurrying forth in the commando crouch, eyeballing the yonder and nearabout for that unexpected visitor or untoward noise. Strangely, I felt clumsy and uncertain, as if, in leaving the innocence of that automobile, I had left behind the meat and sense of me, and what was now creeping onward was only a column of bones and profound silliness. It was fear. "Zion," I said, "touch my head. Am I hot or what?" I was nothing, he said, just anxious and overworked, like himself. "In the next life," he said, "I'm coming back as a boss. You can have the fucking proletariat." I agreed. We weren't but advanced teenagers, still gangly underneath.

"Why'd you join the Army?" I wondered.

The usual reasons, he said: higher calling and zealous draft board.

"I went in for direction," I whispered. "Before this, I was that slack sort. I lacked spirit."

Silhouetted in a corner window on the second floor was Lazar, evidently peering into the gloom and thick night air.

"Man, is he beef or what?"

"The file says he's three hundred pounds of so-and-so. Inspired. You can tell he's mean."

"I'm mean, too," Zion said. He was fingering his Georg Luger. It had a custom barrel which took the .45 ACP cartridge. "On the scale, I'm a ten. Nine's God."

Like fairy-tale cats, we crept through the gate, tippy-toed through the garden, leaf growth barely crackling under our feet. I had a Randall-22,

thirty shells in a clip, fast as a cobra. "I'm an eleven," I said. "I got flair." I could imagine the shredding Señor Lazar would make.

"In here," Zion said.

A window was open and we slipped inside, each in lampblack and late-movie turtlenecks. I could have been a sleek Charles Boyer, Zion an equally famous and svelte Negro. "Is your God morbid or wrathful?" I said. "Both," Zion whispered. "I fear and love him, honest." That room was a warehouse of wicker and brass doo-dads. I was touched: clearly, Lazar was a gent with an eye for the fine and ever-lasting. I had him figured for an eight. I was wrong.

"Make a noise," I said. "We're punks, remember. In the morning, we should be described as intruders."

"It's not too late," he said. "We could duck out, say we were feebs."

He had a quarterback's smile, loose and expensive.

"The file says he responds to the name King Daddy."

I could hear a chair scrape overhead, then heavy footsteps. "Go," I hissed. Zion took his position at the doorway which gave onto the entry leading to the stairs. I crawled past him, put myself at the end of the hall. The ambush would be enfilade, a deadly crossfire of wit and true misery.

"I don't hear him" Zion said. "Let's split."

I lay in the shadows, the wood floor cold and gleaming with wax. The house was quiet, a silence so impacted it had heft and shape and spook-house mystery. I could already imagine Major Vigil congratulating us. I felt lifted, I did, as tenuous and fine as victory itself.

"I'm weak," Zion was saying. "You didn't see my charts. I'm in the dip places, Herkie."

The files said Lazar was ponderous, slow-witted and ruthless. Said he dealt in disregard and woe. Said he couldn't be taken with pith nor wish nor esoterica. "What's called for," I told Zion, "is bullet power and true aim."

"Did you hear me dreaming last night?" Zion said. "I was appalled. You were in it, too. What a disappointment."

You could near nothing from above—not squeak, not creak, not thump of heart.

"You know what my middle name is?" Zion whispered. "It's Spot. Dig it, I was named after my momma's dog. It was a rude animal. Mangy. Not the least bit delightful."

"Mine's LaVerne," I said. "After an auntie."

From the top of the stairs, I head a noise, as if a fat enemy of truth were there trying to make up his mind. My heart gave an ugly lurch sideways, and I felt my ribs close around it like a claw. Calm, I told myself, you are well-trained. I went down my list of resources: strong legs for running, clear lungs, a young fool's belief in right and wrong.

"Spot bit my nose once," Zion was saying. "He was a mongrel. Part poodle."

It was then I heard a pssst-pssst-pssst and saw the shiny teak floor explode in front of me. I learned later Lazar was using a special Wop machine pistol fitted with a silencer. Holes burst into the wall above and to the right. I felt my glands kick in, the effect swift and consummate. It was a preconscious horror: there'd be this effete, sissy piss noise, then a flurry of wallboard debris.

"Scum, Filth, Jerk," Zion was hollering. It was Army textbook, designed to befuddle and delay. The light was catching his face in an odd, obscene way. "Up yours, King Daddy! You're dealing with an honor student!"

More bullets chewed the floor in front of me, then I heard Zion say "I'm hit" the way you and I say "Howdy." I was scrunched against the door, a turtle looking for a shell.

"Where?" I said.

"Arm, I think. Shoulder, maybe."

Several shots raked the wall to my left, splinters falling in a shower.

"What?" I said.

"I said it doesn't hurt much. Vigil was right; it's annoying but not a true bother."

Warm nerve sparklers sputtered in my brain.

Somewhere above us, Lazar was yelling in Arabic. Once, in English, he appealed to his internalisms, juices and meats, for strength. You could hear him puffing, changing clips, shell casings rattling on the floorboards like marbles. Lights were going on everywhere. On and off. I heard a radio—a slope combo doing a tune about doom and loving you.

"I'm pinned," I said. "The Major didn't say nothing about this."

Zion was chuckling. "Know what I'm thinking about?"

"Fug," I said. "That's all I can say. It's the only word in my mind. Fug, fug, fug."

Zion squeezed off a burst. "I was thinking about this track coach I once had. Mirmainian. What a jerk. I was fleet, Herkie, a great finisher. One time he cold-cocked me, took me out with some Golden Gloves sucker punch. When I came to, he told me he'd been wanting to do that from the first day. Said I was a snide motherfuck. Said I wasn't doodley-squat to him."

"Piss," I said. "I'm thinking of that. Piss and fug."

The smell in that hall was outrageous, wax and wood and cordite.

"We got to get out of here, Herkie. I believe in a golden future."

Sweat-drenched, I was cold, my jaw sore from teeth-gnashing. Lazar sprayed us again, slugs slamming into the plaster: whump-whump, whump-whump. I noticed a wood splinter the size of a tongue depressor, sticking out of my sneaker. "Jesus," I said. I yanked it out, bringing with it goo and pulp that looked like part of my toe. Vigil was right: pain was just a thing pantywaists fussed about.

"Give me cover, Zion. I'll go out the door, come up from behind."

Another tune was playing, this one about sloth.

"Negative," he said. "Bring the car around back. Look for me in five. I'll be the one running."

Above, Lazar huffed like the Big Bad Wolf. I heard him mention angry mountain gods and pigs, then Zion's piece went off, and I felt at one with thought and being.

"Go, Herkie, Godammit!"

Quick time, I rolled hard, grabbed the door handle, and dived out. "Whip up! Get some!" Zion was yelling. I was charging through the tangled garden in a fury. Once a low-hanging branch whacked me in the chin. It was another second before I realized it was raining, fiercely and in thick air-sucking sheets. I could hear nothing behind—neither gunfire nor cries of agony. Whoa, I said to myself when I hit the street. To anybody looking out, Harold, you should be only another idiot without an umbrella. Once in the car, I lay on the front seat, pulling myself together, gathering my parts from the various horror they'd been in. Lazar's house was dark now.

"Almighty, Almighty," I said into the walkie-talkie. "Almighty, this is Street Gang. Come in." There was only static and the rustle of deepest space. "Almighty, come the fuck in!" It was code for that celebrated fan with the stuff on it.

Around back, I counted the minutes in the old-timey way: one-Mississippi, two-Mississippi. I was crying, too, my face a smear of tears and snot. I couldn't breathe, and my heart was in my neck like a squirrel, all claws and climbing. Shit, I kept saying. Shit. I could hear the Major talking to me. "Guts, boy," he was saying, "skill, foresight, ability to organize—you got 'em, now use 'em. Convert this present heartache to lasting advantage."

Then I saw Zion. He was running—not toward me, but away, his arm limp like an orangutan's.

"Ain't I swift?" he said when I pulled the Fiat abreast. His face had glee all through it. "Herkie, this is one speedy spade!"

Rain poured off him. Talking looked like spitting.

"Get in." The floorboard on my side was a pool of water and blood. Toe, I thought, you will be missed. "Let's go, Zion. C'mon, we're out of this thing in grand style."

"Wrong." A fierce light was in his eyes. You could see in him purpose and panic and pride. "You go," he said. "I'm finished."

Ahead was a Shell station and storefronts, an extraordinary display of ricketyness.

"Quit later," I said. "We're expected. Let's drink and forget."

He stopped. Wheezing, a sucking sound coming from somewhere as the rain washed over his mouth, he leaned against the Fiat. I felt antsy, on the edge of this or that. Don't snivel, I thought.

"Herkie Walls," he said, touching my face, "forget me. Say I died. Tell the Major I vanished."

A chill shot through me. There was nothing humanoid in his face. I could have been talking to a chair.

"What about—?"

"Herkie Walls, you were fine," he said. "And I liked you very much."

Then he was gone, darting from the car, disappearing into the streaks and swirls of night-rain as if he'd slipped through the seam between this shadow and the next.

The Major was pissed, his voice in that hard place between whine and howl. In his civvies, he resembled a man with a dozen foul ideas.

"I felt it," he was saying, "in here." He thumped his gut. "I told the old lady, Millie, that something was going wrong. That my boys were holding the soiled end of the you-know-what."

We were in the isolation ward at Beaumont in Ft. Bliss, Texas, my injured foot bandaged to the calf. I was getting strong home-vibes from the sharp sunlight and the knowledge that outside my window lay a baked and extreme landscape, a desert of hot soils, prickly pear and cruel, shiny bird. It was such an endless stretch of waste that in it, humping through on foot or Jeep, you felt clean and eternal. Thought dropped away like old skin and you became beast or angel. You had wings or scales and, thankfully, you knew zip about that which interrupted the necessary march from urge to action.

"What'd we lack?" The Major was shaking his head. "Nerve, guile, what? We had the intentions, which were choice. You tell me."

"What happened to King Daddy?"

The Major stood at the end of the bed, looking mournfully at my upraised and still tender foot.

"He went down the next day," he said. "Locals did the clean-up. Went in as janitors or some such. Separated him from the earthly coil, so to speak."

He showed me several photos, glossy 8 X 10s of defeat and carnage.

"And Zion?"

You could feel the heat outside, close and still and permanent, the heat of heat itself.

"Skeddaddled," the Major was saying. "You know, I hated that son of a bitch. Honest. You should have seen his P-Profile. Truly, it was a map of the unlovely. I thought I could turn him around, put him on the high road. He had it all—the suppressions, the depressions, the tendencies. His blot test was an education." Where others had seen elephants, the Major said, Zion had seen the boogeyman or a notion given shape.

"When do I leave here?" I asked. "I've the need to go home for a time."

Vigil was fingering the PX goodies he'd brought, a tape deck and a

handful of Otis Redding cassettes. I felt for him that emotion that in the ordinary mind often stands next to sorrow: pity.

"I had that so-and-so to the quarters once," he said. "Millie did her usual fine work on the kitchen front. Zion was appreciative, I thought, deeply so. Apparently, I was wrong. It was just an early stage of malingering. Henceforth, I am prepared for the worst."

"Send that nurse in, will you? I desire a drug."

After he left, I took the substance and abandoned the present dither for an ocean of listlessness.

For six months, I lay in my Daddy Ben's house in Goree, Texas, letting the training and promise drain out of me. Vigil was right: Daddy Ben was a caveman. He was uglier than I remembered, his brow a shelf of wrinkled and gray flesh. His eyes held nothing but the need to make it, spend it, eat it, or play with it till it died. Buck was no comfort either. Once we went out, to the Mile 49 Bar. It was pure shitkicker, the band an over-brained bunch called "The Aggie Rambler." Everything they did had a whang and tug to it, including a special version of "All Hail the Power." The Ramblers paid lavish attention to the part that addressed mirth and temporary pleasures. We watched an hour, then I told Buck to take me home. I could smell myself, ripe and musty both. Plus, I had the makings of an AAA criminal's beard, hairs in curious pattern on my neck.

"It's nothing personal," I told Buck. "It's funk. I'll emerge wiser, stronger."

Beginning the first week, the Major called me everyday. His code name was Pericles; mine, the Wanderer. He sent me dossiers of miscreants and villains, often three and four in a bundle marked GLASS HANDLE WITH CARE. They were an amazing lot, these bad guys, their specialities jeopardy and undoing: Cong, Pathet Lao, PLO grits, a Brussels sissy named Rene.

"I got one here you'll love," the Major said once. "He's vain, you could do him with bombast. You ought to see the way he gets on and off. What say, Harold? Let's put you in his life."

That week I looked at a Lagos mercenary who resembled a racoon that could say a few words. It was a photo of him and several beauties, each of whom appeared to be having political thoughts.

"You got to work," the Major said. "Get back in the flow. You've a high brain getting slack."

Another time, Pericles wanted to send me into Venezuela, deliver a nasty surprise to a Colonel identified as The Puma of Santa Cruz. I could slip in as the PC idealist, do the business, then vamoose. The DEA would love me evermore.

"Send another," I said. "This sounds Ivy League. Maybe Big Ten. *Buckeye* is the word on my tongue."

The dossiers kept piling up: turncoat, double-dealer, aggressors of the usual ilk. I slept in issue-jamies, my dreams flights into the faraway and long-ago. I drank hooch, Buckhorn foremost, and once, in the company of the TV, brought time itself, like Daddy Ben's pickup, to a dead halt. My thoughts were fragrant, even rewarding. "Herkie Walls," I said one time, "you ought to get a job. Roughnecking, maybe. You'd make somebody a dandy employee." Another time, I thought of Margo, my old sweetie, and my heart did a tight spin on its own root.

Then the word on Zion started trickling in.

"He's been seen here and there," the Major said. "He's gone over I believe, become a creature of the chaos."

Zion's disguises were masterful: importer, Frog Writer ("with a gift for trope and indirect statement"), person with all the hope out of him. In one report, he was both grizzled and smooth. Another said he trafficked in the semi- and fully precious. The best, filed by a field officer named Krebs, said Zion was moving between thought and realization. There was a note, too: *Vigil*, it read, *I am in a place beyond the petty and day-to-day. Maybe you want to come in here with me. I have left your business for mine, which is living and being free. Come ahead, Vigil, I am jubilant. P.S. Tell Herkie my last dream was about flowers and light loves.* His hidey-hole was Saigon, a Tu Do street beauty parlor named the White Lakes.

"What'll it be?" the Major said. "You and me this time. It's our bird, our nest."

"I think not," I said.

"You're making me sad, Herkie."

"Convince me," I said. "I am content here."

"For the beauty of it. Think of tying up a loose string. This is the only smudge on an otherwise immaculate record. Listen I've got our covers picked out." We were to be layabouts named Punk and Ace. I was to be the former, crafty and grave.

Something came together for me in that instant: in a world like this, I thought, you're just naturally going to have one friend slaying another.

"Okay," I said. "I lead. You can be the one carrying the bags."

That afternoon I saw Margo.

"What do you want?" she said.

I was shaved and sweetened, a cloud of Jade East like a halo over my ears. She was as I recalled her—my moist and fully perfected female. My heart went to my throat like a plug.

"Where's Jeeter?"

He was a dork, she said, more interested in the fine than the real. "Why are you here? What do you want from me?"

I wanted to lay on top of her. Or her on top of me. The positions didn't matter.

She looked sly. "Why should I want to do that?"

As Zion had done—now years ago, it seemed—I pointed to my chest. There was a heart, I said, which needed a warm item against it. I wanted her next to me, upright or supine. I desired stroking, an activity that would transport the both of us. I told her I wanted many quakes, shudders that culminated in that fabled rush of insight and knowledge. "Let's whoop together," I said. "I'm in a generous mood."

For an instant, her eyeballs remained dark with suspicion, then she smiled, and I lurched toward her, weak-kneed and blind with bliss.

"Does this mean we're engaged again?" she said.

Truly. I had only one duty left; then, for better or worse, she'd be mine, I hers. "There are a thousand kinds of love," I whispered. "I believe this is one of them."

We, the Major and I, hung outside the alley door to the White Lakes. We were those fairy-tale wolves you know and wonder about—all eye-teeth and gaunt with belief. Inside we heard a voice, feminine. It was talking about its underwear.

"You got to be big in there," the Major was saying. His face was a work of hunger and exile. "Look at me, Herkie. I'm part Mex, part something else, Jew maybe. I'm small also. Compact. Nevertheless, inside I'm gigantic."

"Me, too," I said. "I wish I could show you."

Here, in that alley, the sunlight was biblical—gladsome and renewing. I felt a flood of fine feelings, many of them having to do with humans.

"This is not one thing we're doing," the Major said. "It's many things."

I had my weapon out, a SIG 9mm, a tiny instrument capable of serious wrath.

"I'll give you a minute." Vigil was dressed for business, an ecru velveteen jump suit and glamour girl make-up. I was reminded of something flossie and playful. "You go in, do a duty, exit with a grin. We've others to cover the tracks."

Just then the woman came out. It was, of course, Ming, Colonel Li Dap's sleep partner. Neat, I thought. We'd come full circle.

"Fret not," I told her. She was on the C list, a minor target. We'd get to her had we the necessary hour and a way of hurting her first.

She gave me an unloving look, disappeared into the moil and hoorah that was Tu Do Street. I felt nothing for her—neither nostalgia nor concern nor a yearning to be intimate.

"I'm Presbyterian," Vigil was saying. "We believe in doing the ruminating afterwards."

"Touch my skin."

He grabbed me above the elbow, his eyes adrenal and mad with purpose.

"That's the cool of a man full of his mission," I said. "You wander in there in a minute. See what awaits."

"Damn, Herkie, I love you." I believed he might weep. "In this life, you had the wrong Daddy, truly. I told Millie you were a son and a credit. Sugar is proud, LBJ is proud, Eloy Vigil is proud. Smile, Herkie, you're on the verge."

Inside, I found Zion. His place was an empire of contraband and Free Enterprise booty. Floor to ceiling, it was warehouse and who's-it's inferno. I was not surprised. In the middle, to be sure, sat Zion, still teeth and liquid eye movement, wearing a Colpro safari jacket and shorts. I resisted the urge to throw myself in his lap.

"What happened to your hair?" It was no longer epic.

"Modern times," he said. "Ming calls this the style of the future." He was bald, his skull a diamond of glints.

He told me he'd improved his mind, too, done for his understanding of the work-a-day what he'd done to his appearance. "My brain's a well-folded mass, Herkie. I've put a fine edge on it. I'm sharp now." He was living on the high, airy place of this life, he explained, himself the product of lovecraft and unstinting self-examination. "What kind of weapon you carrying?"

I put it on the table. Jesus, it was a shameful machine, pure cop show or comic book.

"You got room for another?" I said. "I'm considering retirement."

"Don't," he said. "Do the deeds you're paid for."

It was then Major Vigil burst in. He was lip-breathing, his eyes yellow and frenzied lights. "Kiss it off, Zion!" he hollered. Moving monkey-like, he dashed to Zion's side. "You let me down, son. I lost sleep and face and—what else did I lose, Herkie?" The Major was a presence like no other I'd noticed in this world. He was might and skill and character and depth. I was impressed. "You took the low road, Zion. Unhappy things happen on that road. I'm one of them."

"I know that road," I said quietly.

All the shine left Vigil's cheeks. "Whaa—?"

I put my piece against the point of his selfhood. "You shoot him, I shoot you." A pulse beat feverishly on his neck. "You'd make a fine spray, Major."

"I'm confused," he said.

"Excuse me." Zion was easing himself out of the room. "I'm gone."

This was between Vigil and me.

"Are you dissatisfied, Herkie? Haven't I been decent to you?"

I heard something pop in his insides. A motorcycle roared to life in the alley. That would be Zion, I thought.

"I'm astounded," the Major was saying. He'd backpedaled three steps, his face wet and twitching. You could see the marks expectation had made. "This is disappointment, Herkie. A half hour ago, I was a gay man; now, I feel pitiful."

I felt as I had those many, many months ago which I stood over Li Dap. Then I had been well down Mister Darwin's artfully conceived tree. I was ooze itself, probably—protein and sentient mud. Now, watching the Major creep out of that room, I was one of the more fully evolved creatures, all arm and leg of me, something that fled the big and permanent NO for the itch and wiggle and on-going struggle of the YES. I was truly big.

To be true, they captured me, and I write now from the comfort of Leavenworth. Margo brings me news of the big world. The Major visits at times. He's left the service, preferring Millie and her garden of jonquils and lilacs in Florida to the "Ugghh!" and fright of his career. Even Mirmainian, Zion's old track coach, has changed.

I found the man in his gym office. Sweat had turned the walls green.

"Geez," he said, "you're ugly. What happened to your face?"

It was a disguise, I told him. Underneath, I was as beautiful as the next person.

"Hey, I like you. Sit down."

He looked Greek—tired and cynical.

I told him I was on my way to prison.

"Huh?"

Then I went for him, flipped him onto the concrete floor, using a move of teeth, thigh and belt loop. It was sophisticated.

"Uh-uh-uh-uh," he was saying.

I held him by the ears. "Never," I said, "from now on, I want to hear that you're nice, okay?"

So that's how it is. In ten years, I will be out of here. Margo and I plan a thousand babies, all of whom shall be educated as I was—through error and wrong. Visit us, if you like. We'll be the ones swept up by love and kept aloft by thought and good deed.

REVIEWS

THE END OF LITERARY THEORY

William E. Cain

Jane P. Tompkins, ed. *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, 275 pp. $20.00.

Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds. *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980, 441 pp. $30.00.

Jonathan Culler. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981, 242 pp. $15.00.

James Phelan. *Worlds from Words: A Theory of Language in Fiction.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 259 pp. $20.00.

Paul Hernadi, ed. *What Is Criticism?* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981, 329 pp. $17.50.

Leslie A. Fiedler and Houston A. Baker, Jr., eds. *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 161 pp. $8.50.

Reading these new books on literary theory has been both instructive and depressing. Taken together, they suggest that literary theory may have reached a point of saturation. Some of the essays and chapters in these books are excellent, but much of the work strikes me as disappointing, tedious, and repetitive. Little that is truly original and provocative is being done; one feels, as one reads the books, that minor adjustments are being performed upon positions that have nearly exhausted themselves or outlived their usefulness.

These books make clear just how completely literary theory has become a separate field of study. Theorists concentrate on speaking only to one another; as specialists, they address other specialists. Reader-response critics, for example, deal with the writings of other reader-response critics, and are so absorbed in their own ever-enlarging field that they are unable—or unwilling—to envision what they do as part of a more general project.

Literary theorists are losing touch with the *general* aims and purposes of "theory," as they increasingly come to labor in the sub-divisions of "reader-response criticism," "semiotics," "speech-act theory," and the like. And there are, of course, still further sub-divisions that include the people who are "critics" of the theorists and commentators on (or sometimes propagandists for) their theories. This network is now so complicated and self-contained that it rarely connects with critical practice and pedagogy: everyone is so busy in his or her domain of theory that no one has the time or the inclination to ask what it all means, why it is being undertaken, what good it is.

Contemporary theorists do not, for the most part, seek to reorient the general practice of criticism, nor do they aim to supply us with new ways of teaching texts to our students. Literary theory has, in a word, gone from being a threat to a growth-industry, and in a very short time at that. When the boom in literary theory began in the late 1960s, keyed by the famous symposium on "structuralism" at Johns Hopkins,[1] it challenged the manner in which we wrote criticism and taught literature. The author, the text, determinate meaning—these apparent "facts" were exposed as fictions, and to many in the profession, it appeared that the foundations of the discipline were crumbling beneath them.

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[1]See *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,* ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970, 1972).

Literary theory is now, however, established and secure. It is a recognized field—so much so that it no longer constitutes much of a threat to practical criticism or pedagogical routine. Literary theorists do not challenge and debate the so-called practical critics and unenlightened teachers; rather, they confront and engage one another. They have their own journals, conduct their own conferences and symposia, and, even as the intensity of their debates among themselves heightens, they more and more seal themselves off from contact with the realities of our critical and pedagogical job of work.

The task that lies ahead for literary theorists is to reconnect their work with critical practice and teaching. We do not need any more specialists in reader-response theory, concerned to tell us about the latest fillip in the position of Fish, Holland, or Iser. The same holds true for the other sub-divisions of the theory industry: we do not require more expositors of the familiar theories, and certainly not more "critics" of the expositors. The books under review generally do not offer much hope that theory is now heading in positive, reconstructive directions. But there are signs and suggestions, in the midst of mostly dreary and uninspired writing, of work that resists enclosure in the private realm of "theory," and that explores ways of renewing contact with pedagogy and critical practice.

I. I begin with the best of the books: Jane P. Tompkins' *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. This is one of the most stimulating—and also one of the most curious—recent works in literary theory. All of us are indebted to Tompkins for gathering together, in a single volume, the major essays of the reader-response movement. The most provocative piece in the volume, however, is not one by any of the reader-response theorists, but is Tompkins' own concluding essay, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response." And it is provocative precisely because it questions the importance of the movement that the collection as a whole seems designed to consolidate.

In her essay, Tompkins masterfully traces the meaning of "audience-response" from the Classical age to the present, but in doing so she demonstrates the triviality of the reader-based theories described by the contributors to her volume. These theories, like others advanced in the past two or three decades, fail to break free from New Critical "formalism"—the master-theory that occupies the center of the institution, and that checks the influence that any new theory might exercise. "The extent to which formalism has built itself into the structure of the institution where literary criticism is practiced," Tompkins concludes,

> presents formidable obstacles to any critical movement that attempts to overturn its doctrines. This is true not because of the outright opposition that any such challenge is likely to encounter but because New Critical assumptions determine the format within which such a challenge can be articulated and put into practice. What is most striking about reader-response criticism and its close relative, deconstructive criticism, is their failure to break out of the mold into which critical writing was cast by the formalist identification of criticism with explication. Interpretation reigns supreme both in teaching and in publication just as it did when New Criticism was in its heyday in the 1940's and 1950's. In the long perspective of critical history, virtually nothing has changed as a result of what seems, from close up, the cataclysmic shift in the locus of meaning from the text to the reader. Professors and students alike practice criticism as usual; only the vocabulary with which they perform their analyses has altered. (pp. 224-25)

From one point of view, reader-response criticism strikes us, Tompkins suggests, as something that is radical and innovative. It overturns old assumptions and opens up new questions for us to investigate—the determinacy or indeterminacy of meaning, the nature of the conventions that make reading possible, and the difference between our reading of literary and nonliterary texts. But this "new" work is in fact, says Tompkins, merely one more example of the "triumph of formalism." The various reader-response theorists still follow the path charted by the New Critics, limiting their analyses to the job of textual interpretation and isolating "literature" from history, power, social and political issues. Reader-response

theory does not displace the New Criticism, but at best supplements and refines it. The revolutionary claims made by the reader-response critics thus do not recast the discipline, but instead represent a kind of tinkering executed on the interpretive model that we have been using for decades—the "close reading" of the masterpieces.

Tompkins does not dismiss the reader-response theorists entirely, however. In the recent writings of Stanley Fish and Walter Michaels, she sees indications of a theory that is truly radical, one that returns criticism to a direct engagement with politics and power. Fish and Michaels, Tompkins observes, attack the New Critics' belief in the objectivity of literary texts and formalist procedures. And it is in this critique of "objectivity" that we can glimpse the possibility of a criticism that does transform the basis of our discipline. By "relocating meaning first in the reader's self and then in the interpretive strategies that constitute it," these theorists

> assert that meaning is a consequence of being in a particular situation in the world. The net result of this epistemological revolution is to repoliticize literature and literary criticism. When discourse is responsible for reality and not merely a reflection of it, then whose discourse prevails makes all the difference. (Introduction, p. xxv)

As this passage suggests, there is a certain ambivalence in Tompkins' analysis. Here, she judges reader-response theory as having a "revolutionary" impact, not just for criticism but for epistemology as well. Whereas at other points in her volume, she argues that this theory, like others before it, is constrained by the interpretive mission that the New Critics defined so powerfully. On the one hand, Tompkins says that "formalism" is entrenched in the academy and persists in ruling over (and controlling) the theories that aim to displace it. Yet she also claims to detect in the writings of Fish and Michaels the coming of a "revolution" that will finally disrupt the hegemony of the New Criticism.

But if this "revolution" occurs, it will not result from the reader-based theories of Fish and Michaels. Tompkins is correct to note the ways in which these theories *lead* to questions of power and politics. But Fish and Michaels themselves show little interest in examining such questions. When Tompkins refers to "discourse" and to the competitive relations among different discourses, she is not referring to Fish and Michaels as much as she is interpreting their theories in the context of Michel Foucault's work—work that, I suspect, Tompkins admires more than that undertaken by the reader-response theorists. It is Foucault who is the theorist of "power," and they are his terms and strategies that Tompkins imposes on the arguments advanced by Fish and Michaels.

Neither Fish nor Michaels discusses politics or power in a detailed manner. They deconstruct other theories with great skill and resourcefulness, and provide us with incisive accounts of the "conventions" that lie behind all descriptions of "objectivity" and "reality." But they have almost nothing to say about why one discourse or system "prevails" over others. Their writings are brilliant and exhilarating, but are "revolutionary" only in so far as they seek to overturn the assumptions of other systems and orders of discourse. They do not point us toward a means of discriminating one discourse from another, preferring one to another, or understanding why one gains sway over others.

Reader-response theory lacks a political dimension. If the movement is trivial, as Tompkins appears to imply, it is trivial not only because it emphasizes "interpretation" but also because it avoids or is blind to politics. On the final page of her essay, Tompkins asks: "What makes one set of perceptual strategies or literary conventions win out over another? If the world is the product of interpretation, then who or what determines which interpretive system will prevail?" (p. 226). But these are the kinds of questions that reader-response theory is unable and (it seems) unwilling to confront. I agree with Tompkins that Fish and Michaels are the most provocative of the reader-theorists, but I do not see their work as able to generate much political insight. It is so bent on demystification that it fails to make a place for a reconstructive project, and hence does not allow for political analysis and engagement. It undermines other theories without providing positive terms of its own, and it thereby ends up being—despite Fish's and Michaels' disclaimers—a system of endless negation.

II. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman contend, in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, that reader-response criticism is indeed a "revolutionary" movement and has inaugurated dramatic changes in critical work. But their collection of essays does not support this claim; it is, on the whole, a lifeless, dispiriting book, and it serves primarily to validate Tompkins' judgment that reader-response studies have little more to teach us.

Several of the essays in *The Reader in the Text* are suggestive and worthwhile, particularly Suleiman's overview of "varieties of audience-oriented criticism," Cathleen M. Bauschatz's account of Montaigne's "conception of reading," and Louis Marin's inquiry into "a theory of reading in the visual arts." But most of the essays are deadening, and will only interest those who are serious—*very* serious—specialists in the field. The writers draw elaborate charts and diagrams; they list many categories and distinctions; and they channel massive amounts of energy into discriminating between types of discourse, forms of narrative, and levels of response. But the work seems so arid, produced with such a blinkered sense of audience: rarely have critics put such emphasis on "reading" yet shown such a grand inattention to their own readers.

Perhaps what afflicts these writers above all is a lack of self-consciousness. No one objects to the diagrams and the terminology as such. Rather, one objects when it becomes evident that all this machinery is being assembled and displayed in order to furnish a high-powered gloss for extremely obvious facts. Karlheinz Stierle, for example, observes that "while reading the text for a second time, the reader at any moment of the act of reading is able to situate the given part of the text not only with regard to its context *to the left*—that is, to that section of the text which has already been perused—but also with regard to its context *to the right*—the section which has not yet been covered" (p. 95). This sounds solemn and important, but it boils down to saying that when you reread, you know where you've been and where you're headed. Presented in a straightforward fashion, this point is incontestable and does not really need to be stated at all. Stierle gets around this problem, however, by giving us an imposing version of the point in theoretical Bigspeak, complete with italicized phrasing.

A few pages later in *The Reader in the Text*, Wolfgang Iser remarks that "an obvious and major difference between reading and all forms of social interaction is the fact that with reading there is no *face-to face situation*. A text cannot adapt itself to each reader it comes into contact with" (p. 109). At least Iser is aware that he is saying something obvious. Still, one cannot help but be disturbed—if also somewhat amused—by this complex processing of unsurprising insights. To make his presentation as formidable as possible, Iser even tacks on a footnote to Erving Goffman's *Interaction Ritual*. He does not have much to say, but he remains, from first page to last, very busy, diligent, and engrossed in his labor. One imagines signs in the margins that announce "Critic at Work; Proceed Slowly." Here, and I could cite additional examples from the essays by Tzvetan Todorov, Christine Brooke-Rose, Pierre Maranda, and others, we can see just how decadent and uncritical the reader-response movement has become. Each writer plugs away at his or her interpretive machine, adjusting the gears and running the motor, keeping quite detached from real readers and thus safe from the distractions of actuality.

The most stimulating essay in Suleiman and Crosman's collection is Jacques Leenhardt's "Toward a Sociology of Reading," and it is stimulating precisely because it relates the "theory" of reading to the habits, practices, and conventions of actual readers. Leenhardt rightly objects to the way in which most theorists stick to abstractions, never attempting to test them through "empirical investigation." Why not focus, he asks, on "actual reading experiences" (p. 210) and examine what they reveal about class bias, politics, social stereotyping, and other "worldly" issues? In his essay, Leenhardt describes the results of a research project that his team in Paris worked on in cooperation with another team of researchers in Hungary. "The basis of the study," he explains,

> was the reading of two novels, one from each country, by five hundred readers from different social origins in both countries. Two surveys were established: the first concerned the reading habits and the particular interests of the participants with respect to daily newspapers, periodicals, and books; the second, which is the real innovation of our study, offered thirty-five open questions on each novel; these called for the readers' estimates and remarks concerning the most important facts, behaviors, and 'literary effects' found in the novels. (p. 211)

Leenhardt acknowledges the difficulties with this kind of enterprise, one that "highly engages the researcher's own ideological commitments as well as his abilities" (p. 213). It is also clear that most members of our profession are skeptical about "empirical" analysis and dubious about the transfer of sociological methods to literary theory and criticism. But whatever its shortcomings and our uneasiness about it, Leenhardt's work gives us concrete information about reader assumptions, interpretive strategies, and cultural differences in reading practices. The French readers of the Hungarian novel, for instance, found the "Hungarian reality" depicted in this text so strange and disconcerting that they sought to impose upon it very schematic patterns, "resetting" and resituating it according to their literary and ideological preferences. Unsettled by what they glimpsed in the text, these readers, in effect, rewrote it, transforming a threatening, disruptive text into one that could be more safely known and appreciated.

Leenhardt's research—and it is more cogent and precise than my brief summary here can indicate—allows him to articulate different "systems of reading" and to be specific about what transpires when they interact. From one point of view, Leenhardt is doing something obvious—gathering information about how people read. But it is unusual for a theorist to undertake this kind of field work, and Leenhardt's descriptions of his findings are shrewd and far from obvious. This explains why his essay is superior to the others in *The Reader in the Text*, most of which are "obvious" from beginning to end, in both intention and conclusions, and are never vitalized by being placed within social, economic, and political contexts.[2]

III. Jonathan Culler's *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* is a collection of essays on a wide range of topics. Culler provides, for example, sharp critiques of Michael Riffaterre and Stanley Fish, outlines the vexed state of theory today, and proposes ways of bringing literary theory more resourcefully into the graduate program. Culler also deals well with narrative theory, semiotics and rhetoric, "metaphor," and "apostrophe." But Culler's book is valuable less for the topics it addresses than for the themes it lucidly develops and keeps returning to. The most important of these is Culler's attack on the emphasis placed on "interpretation" in literary studies—an attack that reinforces the one that Tompkins launches in her book. "There are many tasks that confront criticism," he insists, "many things we need to advance our understanding of literature, but one thing we do not need is more interpretations of literary works" (p. 6). In recent years, Culler explains, we have witnessed an explosive growth in new types of theory and methodology; yet nearly all of the new theorists—Fish and Riffaterre are notable examples—limit their work to the job of producing more "interpretations," more "readings" of texts. "The principle of interpretation is so strong an unexamined postulate of American criticism," Culler states, "that it subsumes and neutralizes the most forceful and intelligent acts of revolt" (p. 11). "Indeed," he adds,

> the interpretation of individual works is only indirectly related to the study of literature. If the critic wishes to produce new and subtle readings, he is at perfect liberty to entertain himself in this way, but he should not do so in the belief that he is thereby making important contributions to the study of literature. (p. 124)

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[2]For recent overviews of reader-response criticism, see Steven Mailloux, "Reading in Critical Theory," *MLN*, 96 (1981), 1149-59; Homer Obed Brown, "Ordinary Readers, Extraordinary Texts, and Ludmilla," *Criticism*, 23 (Fall, 1981), 335-48; and William W. Stowe, "Satisfying Readers: A Review-Essay," *TSLL*, 24 (Spring, 1982), 102-19.

Culler argues impressively against the reign of "interpretation," and he offers a rewarding account of other projects to which we might better turn our attention—the "semiotics of reading," the "institution of literature," the relations between literary and nonliterary discourse, philosophy and literature, psychoanalysis and literature. But Culler weakens his arguments. I believe, by presenting them in the fashionable terms and postures of poststructuralist thought. His faddish intonations are, in one sense, hard to get a fix on; I cannot tell just how serious Culler is about these turns and twists in his arguments, because he often inserts them side-by-side with very traditional citations and value-terms. There is, in fact, a curious split or fissure in *The Pursuit of Signs*. On the one hand, Culler maintains that we need to extend and revamp the study of literature, capitalizing upon new disciplines, such as semiotics, in order to connect literature with politics, society, and culture (see p. 214). Quoting Lionel Trilling as his authority, Culler declares that critics need to resist the tendency to view texts in isolation from their contexts. This will enable us, he suggests, to make literary study more "worldly" in its approach and orientation, and hence will assist us in mounting more persuasive arguments on behalf of our discipline, its relevance, and its contribution to knowledge. But Culler is anxious not to appear to be a naive humanist, and so elsewhere in his book, we find that he casts his project for literary study in a different light by citing Foucault as his authority. "The pleasure of revealing the culturally determined nature of behavior," he says at one point,

> has doubtless been the impetus behind much semiotic analysis, but one would be mystified by the demystification itself if one thought that the description of semiotic systems made the individual more free or that the semiotic analysis was in any way inspired by the prospect of liberating man. On the contrary, structuralist and semiotic thinking has been repeatedly labeled 'anti-humanistic', and Michel Foucault has provided a target for such attacks in maintaining that 'man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a simple fold in our knowledge' which will soon disappear. (p. 32)

It is hard not to be irritated—even cynical—about what Culler is doing in this passage. It seems little more than a flashing of his poststructuralist's credentials, a sign that he is not taken in by the pieties of humanism. Perhaps, more generously, one might conclude that Culler is confused about where his true loyalties lie. Like many English and American theorists, he is attracted to the excitement and flair of certain modes of poststructuralist thought, and he finds something captivating in the antihumanistic gestures that dot the pages of Derrida and Foucault. But the antihumanism sounds feeble in Culler's writing, in part, one suspects, because he is committed to a number of traditional "humanistic" goals and values. He seeks to reform the profession, advocates new, invigorating projects for critics and teachers, and, with Trilling as his guide, places literature boldly in the context of culture and society. Culler may be ingenious enough to make Trilling and Foucault compatible. But rather than undertaking this knotty task, he might instead concentrate on stating his arguments directly, without fearing to seem "mystified" (there are worse fates) or feeling obliged to invoke the tedious strains of "antihumanism."

IV. James Phelan's *Worlds from Words: A Theory of Language in Fiction* illustrates one of the major problems that mar many of the books now being published on literary theory. It is obviously the work of an intelligent and thoughtful critic, but it is not a book by someone whose strength lies in theoretical thinking. Phelan focuses on "language" in the novel, and attempts to clarify the degree of importance that language—as opposed, say, to plot and character—plays in the quality and depth of our response. In each of the main sections of *Worlds From Words*, Phelan selects a current theory of literary meaning, which he then considers in relation to a particular novel. One chapter, for example, is devoted to "Stanley Fish and the Language of *The Ambassadors*," another treats "David Lodge and the Language of *Sister Carrie*," still another considers "J. Hillis Miller and the Language of *Persuasion*," and so on. Phelan makes some keen points about these theories, and he sometimes comments insightfully about

passages in the novels. But his book suffers from a basic failing: despite all the theoretical inquiry, Phelan never questions his own assumptions and procedures.

In his chapter on *The Ambassadors*, Phelan pauses at one point to summarize the "formal intention" of this novel. His account, presented in several paragraphs of slow-moving prose, strikes me as reductive and sentimental. But the difficulty is not so much with what Phelan says as it is with his belief that this "formal intention" is a "given," something that all readers will take for granted. The novel's "formal intention" is itself an *interpreted* category; many readers will dispute Phelan's statement of what this intention is, others will argue that James's intentions for the novel's form are notoriously elusive, and still others will assert that "formal intention" has no bearing on our ways of understanding and responding to texts. The "formal intention" cannot be what Phelan assumes it can be—a firm basis for our exploration into how "language" functions in *The Ambassadors*. It reflects an interpretive choice that Phelan makes, and it determines his account of what the novel means, how readers respond to it, how Fish's theory succeeds or fails in illuminating the text, and what role "language" plays in conveying novelistic meaning.

Throughout *Worlds from Words*, Phelan delves into theoretical problems without seeing that he depends upon several key, unexamined assumptions. What he takes as a point of departure, a "given," is nearly always open to question. Phelan often refers, for instance, to novelistic "success" and to the "pleasure" that we receive from fictional works, assuming, it appears, that these terms are so basic that no one will contest them. But they are not as basic as Phelan believes; if anything, they are distinctly out-of-date as ways of discussing texts. Even if they were basic and agreed upon, they would then be all the more in need of theoretical scrutiny; it is just this category of the taken-for-granted that the best critical theorists investigate, push against, and strive to unsettle.

Reading *Worlds from Words* is thus a queer experience, for in the midst of all the theorizing, the reader is always sensing a great deal that Phelan never exposes to theoretical analysis. "Very specific questions," he observes,

> such as what is the narrator's tone in the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* ("It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife") have determinate answers because there is some clearly established, generally agreed upon phenomenon that exists independently of the question (the sentence itself). Different answers to these kinds of questions will compete with each other and can be judged as more or less adequate by reference to the phenomena they purport to explain. General questions such as what is literature, what is language, or what is meaning do *not* have a single right answer because they are not about clearly defined, generally agreed upon phenomena (hence, the reason for the questions), and so different answers, in a sense, partially 'create' the phenomena. (pp. 225-26)

Phelan does not grasp the fact that answers to questions about the novel's "tone" are no more "determinate" than are the answers we might give to more "general questions." "Tone" and "the sentence itself" are far more complicated matters than Phelan believes; a number of recent theorists have studied them, and they have arrived at conclusions very different from Phelan's. Derrida, for example, has gone to elaborate lengths to demonstrate the major assumptions concealed by that taken-for-granted term "tone." And Fish, in his recent writings, has stated that "clearly established" phenomena like "the sentence itself" are the product of our interpretations; they are as "created" as the "more general" phenomena that Phelan refers to. As this passage testifies, *Worlds from Words* is a book about literary theory that is not theoretical enough. It demonstrates the way in which a talented writer, caught up in the heady atmosphere of "theory," can misapply his skills. Phelan is a good close reader, not a theorist.

V. E. M. W. Tillyard, one of the men who helped to reform the study of English at Cambridge during the 1920s, once remarked that "critical theory, in itself, however thrilling at the outset, soon gets stale."[3] His point bears, I think, on the state of English studies at the present time. We should continue our investigations of "theory" and our inquiries into method, form, and approach. To give up theory altogether would mean a refusal to inspect the grounds for our work; it would amount to an unwillingness to be "critical" about the discipline of criticism. But we should not allow theory, however necessary and valuable it is, to exist as a separate field of study, removed from questions of pedagogy and critical practice. Current literary theory may, in certain respects, seem healthy, thriving, and prolific; but it is rapidly turning into just another area where the familiar games of career-making and frenetic publication can be played. Literary theory is truly vital when it explores the underpinnings of criticism and teaching, and when it proposes new forms and directions for our labor. Now, unfortunately, theory rarely makes contact with the realities of concrete work; it stays purely "theoretical," self-contained and strangely uncritical of its own reasons for being. Oddly enough, we are witnessing a situation whereby theory is getting more and more "stable," and steadily becoming more marginal, even as its proponents make grand claims for "theory" and grow increasingly entranced by its dizzying fascinations.

There are, I believe, a number of projects that theorists should undertake, projects that are geared to historical, political, and social research. We need, for example, studies of the institution of literature, as Culler recommends. We also need to investigate the origins and development of "English studies" in both England and the United States, and to examine the ways in which "English" has defined and charted the forms of "knowledge" it takes as its province. As Wayne C. Booth and Mary Pratt suggest in stimulating essays included in the collection *What Is Criticism?*, we also badly need to conceive ways of enlarging the role of the critic, in order to bring criticism into relation with an audience outside the academy. Rather than spin out refinements on the position of a Lacan or Derrida, we might instead, in Booth's words, attempt to devise "a social or political criticism that would relate literary values to political and social forces and needs" (p. 170).

These projects may seem daunting, in part because of the amount of original research they would entail, in part, too, simply because they are unfamiliar. But it is time to conceive of new projects for theory and criticism; we have no need for further "readings" of the masterpieces, nor do we require more celebrations and critiques of the masters of continental theory. *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon* is, on the whole, a disappointing collection of essays, but the motives behind it are admirable. The "canon" of texts that we teach and criticize is too narrow; we exclude too much from our work, and thereby limit in advance the kinds of claims we can make for critical thinking and analytical study. We should expand the canon to embrace more than the classic texts, viewing the "object" of our discipline as "language" in its various forms rather than as literary masterpieces.

This does not mean, however, substituting "popular writing" for the traditional canon, or merely adding more courses in Black, Indian, or Women's literature. We do need to integrate these texts into our course-offerings in a far more determined and rigorous way than we do now. But it would be wrong-headed and unproductive to pretend that the classic texts are "there" for ideological reasons only. The existing canon does reflect political choices, and our methods of criticizing and teaching it do carry political implications. But to suggest, as do certain of the contributors to the debate about the canon, that the choice of texts is *entirely* political, the reflection of class and gender bias, is to say something that is too generalized to

[3]E. M. W. Tillyard, "Is a New History of Criticism Possible?" in *Essays: Literary and Educational* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p. 154.

be useful. To say this is to make a claim that is powerful yet imprecise, polemically sharp yet politically unsophisticated.[4]

Instead of jettisoning the classic texts, or highlighting their biases, we might profitably study them in new ways, recognizing their distinction but acknowledging that these texts have histories. These texts were written at a certain historical moment; and the interpretation of them occurs (and is deeply implicated) in history. One could, for instance, take as a point of departure this remark by Malcolm Cowley:

> The principal creative work of the last three decades in this country [might not be] any novel or poem or drama of our time, not even Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga or Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or Hart Crane's *The Bridge*; perhaps it has been the critical rediscovery and reinterpretation of Melville's *Moby Dick* and its promotion, step by step, to the position of national epic.[5]

Here is a new "object" for study—not the text itself, not even the text and its backgrounds and contexts, but rather the "history" of the text's interpretation. How did *Moby Dick* come to be rediscovered? What critical methods and techniques made this rediscovery possible? How did the emergence of Melville's text alter our perceptions of the history of American literature, and affect the placement of other texts in the canon? What did critics "see" in *Moby Dick* that led them to celebrate it as our "national epic"? How have our readings of Melville's text altered since it first became accepted as a classic, and what does the history of these readings reveal about our own "history," vision of society, and conception of culture?

Literary theory is valuable when it aids us in asking and answering these kinds of questions. We can draw upon Derrida's analysis of textuality, Foucault's and Said's investigation of history and orders of discourse, and Fish's account of interpretive communities to focus our thinking on problems of the kind that Cowley's comment about *Moby Dick* implies. We should not engage in theory for its own sake, nor should we view theory as simply giving us a new method that we apply to a text in order to generate a new reading. Theory is neither an end in itself nor a repository of methods for "close readings" of texts. At its best, it equips us to perform innovative kinds of critical inquiry and pedagogical work, and directs us both to formulate and undertake concrete projects grounded in history, society, and worldliness.

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[4]Recent studies of the literary "institution," its canon, and its methods of criticism include Richard Ohmann, *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), and H. Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). An earlier, eccentric effort to deal with these issues is Stephen Potter, *The Muse in Chains: A Study in Education* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), especially pp. 53-86. Our discipline needs books like Frances Fitzgerald's *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), which surveys and examines the history texts used in our secondary schools.

[5]Malcolm Cowley, *The Literary Situation* (New York: Viking, 1954), pp. 14-15. Cf. Leslie Fiedler's comment on *Moby Dick* in *An End To Innocence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955): "There is a Melville whom one scarcely knows whether to call the discovery or invention of our time, our truest contemporary, who has revealed to us the traditional theme of the deepest American mind, the ambiguity of innocence, 'the mystery of iniquity,' which we had traded for the progressive melodrama of a good outcast (artist, rebel, whore, proletarian) against an evil bourgeoisie" (p. 197). As evidence for the insecure place of *Moby Dick* in the canon, the reader should consult Robert G. Berkelman, "Moby Dick: Curiosity or Classic?" *English Journal*, 27 (1938), 742-55.

Charles Molesworth, *Donald Barthelme's Fiction: The Ironist Saved from Drowning*. Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1982, 89 pp. $8.00 (paperback only).

Let's start with the midden heap. Rustle around in the growing collection of Barthelme studies (a dozen dissertations, five exclusive books, parts of two dozen others plus well over a hundred scholarly essays) and you will find that this once laughable exhibitionist (the first article on him, from *Critique* back in 1959, was an ungenerous spoof) has become a central figure for the meaning of our age. In important books published this year, Alan Wilde, Philip Stevick, Jack Hicks, and Paul Bruss use Barthelme to show how the postmodern literary style is respectively ironic, irrealistic, metafictional, and anti-textual. No matter what one's theoretical preference, be it Larry McCaffery's innovative fiction techniques in the U.S. or Régis Durand's Lacanian analysis in France, Barthelme is the man so integral with our times that all critical approaches must pass his fiction's test.

Therefore it is helpful that Charles Molesworth has chosen Barthelme as a figure not just to explicate but as a stylist and thinker to explore for both aesthetic and ethical pertinence. The moral instruction of The Great Tradition, the "totalization" of such mannerists as O'Hara, Cheever, and Updike—such confident assumptions of meaning have been alien to the work of fictionists emerging in the past two decades. Instead, Molesworth indicates, there have been two contrary options: wildly idiosyncratic visions (Ken Kesey, Stanley Elkin, Kurt Vonnegut) or else refuge in the mechanics of collage (Steve Katz, Walter Abish, Richard Brautigan). It is of the latter mode that Barthelme is master, Molesworth shows, largely for what collage resists. "It was the hunger of . . . Joyce, Wolfe, and Faulkner . . . to create a total vision that drove them into the recesses of myth and interior consciousness," both of which the thinkers of our postmodern age distrust. Parody and irony can be measures against such smug certainty, but Barthelme's genius has been to grow beyond the satires of a Benchley, Perelman, or Woody Allen to perfect a "suspension between or among various opposing stances" which critiques the authority of fiction itself—while, of course, still writing it. Here is the "ironist saved from drowning" of Molesworth's subtitle. Barthelme rises above fragments by his talent for manipulating them, yet swims beyond the sink-pool of irony by the joy he takes in those fragments themselves.

Barthelme has been in the right place at the right time. As a university publicist, quarterly editor, and art museum director (all before writing fiction), he had ample chance to learn the Orwellian trashiness of words and hocus-pocus of intellectual commerce at the same time he was seeing how Pop and Conceptual artists were turning this detritus into gold. During these years Frank O'Hara was reinventing poetry by watching what the Abstract Expressionists and their successors were doing with paint; the times were alive with artistic experiment and social disruption, and it was Barthelme's fortune to inherit that most self-critical, demystifying, and artificial of literary forms, the short story. He broke the mannerists' hold on the pages of *The New Yorker*, and through his dozen or more stories per year began to educate a readership for the new fiction.

Note how Molesworth ties in Barthelme's success with the larger cultural experience: "What had seemed at first like a total decay of cultural and social values had, by 1960, begun to be recontained in a new mode of consciousness. Instead of the leveling of values being perceived as a threat, it is enshrined by Pop Art. Instead of psychological fragmentation being treated as an affliction, it becomes commodified . . . as a series of 'life styles.'" But is this not a totalization of our own anti-totalizing culture? Here is where the metafictional quality of Barthelme's fiction saves him, for his manner is one of "free-floating parody, where no anchoring content or style serves as the central vehicle of intention against which the other structures are judged or interpreted." *The parodic center is itself parodied*, Molesworth insists; in linguistic terms, Barthelme's stories use "absent signifiers toward which many meanings point, but to which none conclusively attaches." Barthelme's work, as much as Susan Sontag's or Roland Barthes', speaks against interpretation, a posture here achieved by the balancing of key fictive elements. In most stories one can find traces of both the romantic and the parodic; if anything, they "urge the world to confess to its guilty pleasures" in

fancying both while knowing each is finally impossible. Hence the fictions have a moral dimension after all, but one consonant with the philosophical relativism of the age: "the very problem of representation in a world of insatiable selves driven by the desire for things that turn to junk even as they become the symbols of satisfied need."

This is Molesworth's outline of Barthelme's general aesthetic, which occupies most of his succinct study. Its only weakness is a prejudice toward the author's less experimental and more socially satirical work. Near the end Molesworth compiles a typology of the stories (which number nearly two hundred). Aleatory structure, surreal place, counterpointed plot, extended conceit, and parodies of narrative structure are an ascending hierarchy best suited to the early Barthelme who can still be read alongside Woody Allen or Garrison Keillor; it says little for his two novels and even less for the "dash-dialogue" stories of his most recent work, which Molesworth admits he doesn't like. There is, in fact, a wholly new book to be written about the Barthelme of *The Dead Father* and *Great Days*, and among the syntheses Paul Bruss's *Victims: Textual Strategies in Recent American Fiction* (Bucknell University Press, 1981) indicates the course it might take. The latest Barthelme actually extends Molesworth's thesis into the texture of the fiction itself, undermining external authority with texts which even on the level of language mean only themselves. With this codicil in mind, Molesworth's little book can be taken as the most substantial analysis of Barthelme's fiction we may need for some time.

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James R. Mellow. *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980, 684 pp. $19.95.

Raymona E. Hull. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1853-1864.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980, 307 pp. $19.95.

In tale after tale, romance after romance, Hawthorne warned against breaking the magnetic chain of humanity, against standing aloof, against too much solitude. He tried not to be a Paul Pry, an Ethan Brand, or even a Miles Coverdale, to name just three of his characters who suffered from loneliness. Hawthorne wanted his art to serve him by opening an intellectual and aesthetic intercourse with his readers, and he wanted to serve his fellow citizens well when he held public appointments. He could be outgoing, withdrawn, a boon companion, a shy conversationalist, a bashful public speaker, an outspoken public servant. He could be so ill at ease among his peers, the Saturday Club, that, as Henry James, Sr., once quipped, "He had the look . . . to one who didn't know him of a rogue who suddenly finds himself in a company of detectives." There was something fascinating about him, and time and again biographers have tried to pluck out the mystery of this Shakespeare of American literature, as Melville liked to think of him.

Two of the latest efforts, coming fast on the heels of Arlin Turner's masterful sketch, are the able studies of James Mellow and Raymona Hull. Like Turner, both Mellow and Hull saw that any fair treatment of Hawthorne would have to explore the public servant as well as the literary genius. Understandably, since she covered only the final eleven years of Hawthorne's life, Hull drew a much fuller portrait of Hawthorne as a public servant than did either Turner or Mellow. And the materials brought forward by the researches of Turner and Mellow, coupled with the consular dispatches by Hawthorne edited by John R. Byers, Jr., for the *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, provide as much information on Hawthorne's role as a consul as ordinary students of his life will stay to read.

Like Turner again, both Mellow and Hull wanted to see Hawthorne in relation to the men and women around him. Mellow, in fact, came to see that he must add a triptych of other

portraits, one panel each for Emerson, Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller, if he were to convey his sense of Hawthorne's achievement and his impact on his age. Hull, too, found Hawthorne would emerge more distinctly from the shadows if she placed him beside his two closest English friends, Henry Arthur Bright and Francis Bennoch, both of whom had the knack of drawing him out and making him at ease in the literary circles of England. The expected result of his plan to hang Hawthorne's portrait in a gallery of fellow Concordians and English admirers is a better understanding of Hawthorne as a man of his time than Randall Stewart's celebrated brief biography could give. But the mystery has not yet been plucked out, a fact that Mellow stresses by ending his volume with an account of Julian Hawthorne's visit to Melville to talk with him about his father. Julian reported that Melville "was convinced Hawthorne had all his life concealed some great secret, which would, were it known, explain all the mysteries of his career."

Neither Hull nor Mellow uncovered any great secret. Probably no one ever will. Yet both biographers lifted Hawthorne's veil slightly and afforded us a better glimpse of their elusive subject. Considered purely on the basis of new materials brought to bear on Hawthorne's final decade, Hull's book does more than any other biography to present Hawthorne as an effective if often vexed consul, sensitive if often wearied traveler, and reluctant if often highly sought-after literary lion. And despite the fact that her account stretches beyond the stated purpose of examining Hawthorne's English experience, Hull provides the fullest documentation of Hawthorne's failing health, a decline which Hull begins noting with Una Hawthorne's near-fatal bout with Roman fever. Additionally, Hull found pictures of many of the houses the Hawthornes occupied during their English sojourn, and she appended over 140 thumbnail sketches of persons who knew the Hawthornes or had some social, official, or literary intercourse with them. Hull's attention focused on a phase of Hawthorne's life that had drawn too little notice heretofore, and she therefore could make some fresh discoveries. Her work was worth doing, and she did it well. Her decision to include full chapters on Hawthorne's Italian journey and his final resettlement in Concord makes the subtitle of her work a slight misnomer. She would have been better advised to use *The Final Years*.

Mellow's much more ambitious undertaking will have to await the completion of his projected tetralogy before a final assessment can be undertaken. Still, it is possible to welcome the first of what promises to be an exciting and rewarding cycle of related lives.

Mellow, like Hull and Turner, drew heavily upon Hawthorne's letters, diaries, and notebooks. But he also ranged beyond the immediate Hawthorne family, since he wanted to show Hawthorne in his age. As a result, such important figures as Charles Sumner, James Buchanan, Franklin Pierce, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, Longfellow, and Emerson have life breathed into them in these pages. Interesting as this attempt is to see Hawthorne in relation to his contemporaries, the most satisfying portion of Mellow's biography is the insights he has into Hawthorne's concern for his nation during the Civil War. He also does the best job yet published on Hawthorne's encounter with art and artists in England and Italy.

Neither biography can be neglected by serious students of Hawthorne. Both Mellow and Hull have clearly outlined the flux of Hawthorne's personal magnetic chain of humanity by adding facts and insights about his relations with his contemporaries, inside and outside literary circles. These biographies help us to feel something of that force of personal magnetism.

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Byron's Letters & Journals. Vol. XI ("For Freedom's Battle"). Ed. Leslie A. Marchand. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, 243 pp. $15.00.

Byron's Letters & Journals. Vol. XII ("The Trouble of an Index"). Ed. Leslie A. Marchand. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982, 166 pp. $15.00.

Leslie Marchand's decade-long enterprise in editing Byron's private journals and personal correspondence reaches its conclusion in these two volumes, the last having been published on April 9, 1982, to coincide with the date affixed in 1824 to Byron's final two extant letters. As a result, those interested in this Romantic poet have what will be, barring major new finds surpassing even the contents of the Scrope Davies trunk discovered in 1976, the closest approach anyone will ever make to a comprehensive and just version of the private Byron. When the completion of Jerome McGann's new edition of Byron's poetry establishes the anticipated standard text of the writer's more public words, we will have an extraordinarily complete and fine set of primary materials with which to work.

It is right that the letters and journals have been dealt with first, whether or not by design. The frankness of Byron's remarks and often of his language in these private writings was, like much of his thinking, shocking to many of his contemporaries, and even to some among those that followed them. The early editors of Byron's correspondence, not to mention the recipients of the letters themselves, bowdlerized freely, striking out proper names, obscenities, and often entire passages. Thomas Moore was particularly guilty of such practices, and the fate of Byron's correspondence in the hands of his contemporaries is perhaps best summed up in two of Moore's actions: his destruction of what might have been an invaluable set of Byron's personal memoirs and his publishing of the first serious collection of Byron's letters and journals in 1830, one in which the editorial practices result in a lily-white picture of the writer that now appears utterly absurd. Rowland Prothero tried to break through some of the facade erected by Moore and those like him when he edited Byron's private writings at the turn of this century, but there were still too few letters and too many elisions to add substantially to our understanding of the poet. The picture has gradually come clearer in the form of new materials published in scholarly journals, but only now, in Marchand's edition, has someone been able to devote the time and resources necessary to undertaking a comprehensive revision. Even here, the legacy of censorship is felt. Nonetheless, Marchand has made every effort to gather all possible shreds of material and to speculate on what is changed or missing—always interestingly, usually perceptively, though some of his attempts to find incest or homosexuality in veiled references strike me as going beyond the need for careful editing. Overall, though, Byron has at last found a careful editor who wants to understand rather than romanticize him; the end product of Marchand's labors certainly justifies the enthusiasm that greeted those labors' beginning some ten years ago.

The eleventh volume ("For Freedom's Battle") is the last substantial addition to the series. Its contents possess a value beyond what the book's relative slenderness might suggest. Contained here are mainly the letters (and one very brief, fragmentary journal) belonging to Byron's "last phase" or "Greek adventure," possibly the most misunderstood episode in the poet's life, largely because it was a time of action and not of words. It has, naturally, been customary to regard Byron's life during this time in heroic terms, as the adventures of the aristocrat turned freedom fighter. A careful reading of these letters fails to support completely such a view, however. While Byron certainly did stop writing at this time—he even got slightly irked at Moore for suggesting he had "continued 'Don Juan'—[or] any other poem" (XI, 125) while in Greece—and for the most part left behind the concerns over family and personal finances that dominate the letters of the Italian period (they exist only in echo here), to attribute those factors to selfless heroism is to ignore their relation to the overall development of Byron's life and poetic vision. Byron is hard put in these letters to suppress his increasing distrust and disdain of the Greek revolutionaries. In fact, he constantly points to treachery and factionalism among those he has come to help: "the Greeks appear in more danger from their own divisions than from the attacks of the Enemy.—There is a talk of treachery—and all sorts of parties amongst them—a jealousy of strangers and a desire of nothing but *money*" (XI, 24). These feelings were helped along by the poet's close experience with the Suliote warriors under his pay and charge: "I will have nothing more to do with the Suliotes—they may go to the Turks or—the devil. . . . [T]hey may cut me into more pieces than they have dissensions among them" (XI, 112). Read against the background of Byron's most immediately previous writings—mainly the English Cantos of *Don Juan*, where the poet

approaches an absurdist view of human endeavor, particularly political endeavor—this disillusionment undermines the "For Freedom's Battle" approach to Byron's last days.

What *is* happening here, I think, is that Byron is seizing the Greek cause as an opportunity to play out a drama of action for action's sake. His overt statements of commitment to the revolution are always made in personal, often almost frantically personal, terms: "I must attend to the Greek Cause both from honour and inclination" (XI, 57); "As I have embarked in the Cause I won't quit it" (XI, 76); "I must see this Greek business out (or *it me*)" (XI, 81). Surely, Byron also had his traditional devotion to the heroic myths of Greece to motivate him—"I want to do all that I can for the Ancients" (XI, 80)—but, equally surely, against that background the factional nonsense of the current-day Greeks must have frustrated him even more. Byron's actions here thus largely stem from a personal need for commitment in the face of absurdity, the need simply to choose, to act. Byron was, even at the end, not a strictly defined existentialist, but the nature of his commitment to the Greek adventure, like so many other facets of his life and work, certainly eased the transition from the Great Chain of Being to the world of Sisyphean man.

The second major component of the eleventh volume is the letters discovered in the Scrope Davies trunk in 1976, already widely circulated and discussed, but certainly a worthy addition to Marchand's comprehensive edition. These documents cover a period of time running from 1809 to 1819, further additions to them having been halted by Scrope's hasty departure from England, in January, 1820, to escape his creditors. The Davies letters mainly serve to amplify truths made apparent in previously available correspondence rather than to unfold any surprisingly new facets of Byron's character. The poet's opinion of his and Davies' mutual friend Hobhouse is given fresh and humorous expression; Byron regarded Hobhouse, his earliest travel companion, as overly bookish and "good": "there is something in his manner &c. in short he will never be any thing but the '*Sow's Ear*'" (XI, 157). This portrait gives further credence to the view that Byron saw in Hobhouse an exaggeration of the prissy side of himself and thus incorporated his friend into the "moral" voice that occasionally surfaces in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and other writings. We also see again in these letters Byron's equation of solitude with freedom, his retrospective view that he "must have been mad" (XI, 165) when he wrote *Manfred*, and his bitterness over the treatment he received during his last days in England, particularly in the aftermath of his "funeral with Miss Milbanke" (XI, 167). While unfolding nothing essentially new, as noted above, these letters are a fine capsule review of Byron's correspondence from 1809 to 1819. For one who has read these personal writings from start to finish, major strains that dominate previous volumes of Marchand's series recur in the Scrope Davies letters and thus confirm one's sense of the seasons in this poet's life.

It is evident, to some degree in the eleventh volume and certainly in the twelfth, that Professor Marchand is finding the editing of Byron's letters and journals hard to relinquish. "For Freedom's Battle" contains an unusually large number of corrections of errors in previous volumes and incorporates an "additional letters" section consisting largely of jagged pieces of correspondence that make no substantial changes in the documents to which they belong. And all of "The Trouble of an Index" strikes me as an adoring postscript to *Byron's Letters & Journals*. The comprehensive index contained in volume twelve, while helpful, does not add significantly to the separate indices that grace the individual volumes in the series. And the thirty-six pages of "memorable passages" that precede that comprehensive index seem more a collection of Marchand's favorite Byronic quips than a distillation of material particularly helpful in understanding the man or, more important, his poetry. (As a practical matter: those who have been collecting this series might well find the added expense of the index volume unwarranted). Nonetheless, the continued enthusiasm of Professor Marchand for this project and the energy he has expended to get every detail right certainly make the extension of *Byron's Letters & Journals* to a concluding twelfth volume understandable. The diligence exhibited there as throughout this marvelous series will make our study of Byron richer and truer for many decades to come.

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James O. Hoge, ed. *Lady Tennyson's Journal*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981, 401 pp. $24.95.

Thanks to a new definitive life of Tennyson and a forthcoming edition of the correspondence, we have now gone from knowing too few facts about the private affairs of the poet and his family to having too many. However, those who want shocking revelations will be disappointed if they pick up *Lady Tennyson's Journal*, for unlike modern wives or lady friends who rush into print to expose the basest defects of their spouses or companions, the Victorians who wrote about literary greats took great pains to insure that posterity would have a properly polished image of their kin.

In Tennyson's case the paucity of information about intimate details of his life was due to the reluctance of Hallam Tennyson, who was his father's official biographer, to mention anything in the *Memoir* that would distort the tame, saintly picture of the poet which he had been instructed to create by Tennyson himself, who tutored Hallam daily during the last ten years of his life concerning what was to be said and left unsaid in the *Memoir*.

Emily Tennyson's *Journal* is her effort to perpetuate the view of Alfred Tennyson as a Victorian *pater familias*. She records what her life was like as wife to the great poet and mother of their two sons between the years 1850-1874. This twenty-five year period dates from her marriage to what was probably a nervous breakdown after which she no longer kept up the journal, although she would live on until 1896.

This journal is, in fact, a redaction that Lady Tennyson compiled during her last years from a number of early diaries and journals to aid Hallam's work on his father's biography. Incredibly, he bowdlerized even his mother's bland account, striking out entries he deemed indiscreet. Professor Hoge in his edition attempts to restore the journal to its unedited state as well as to maintain all of Emily Tennyson's verbal and stylistic peculiarities.

But neither these editorial measures nor the ample scholarly annotations which accompany the text of the journal rescue it from tedium. Mrs. Tennyson was by all evidence an intelligent and capable woman, but she was also totally unimaginative and completely literal minded. Since she wrote her artless account without any thought of publication, one would expect some evidence of emotion or frustration, a token of the diarist's deeper feelings, but there is a depressing aridity about her writing from first to last. Page after page, year after year there is a dull recitation of who called at the house, how the weather was, what games the children played, which flowers were in bloom, and the titles of works that Tennyson was writing, reading, or reciting to her. A sample of several entries made in December 1855 are typical of the form and content of the journal:

> 8th. Very cold but we go to church not withstanding. He [Tennyson] reads some of St. John & Jowett's essay of the Atonement. Burn leaves & dig & put sand & ashes in the shrubbery.

An event of mild interest is recorded next:

> 12th. We make a bonfire of leaves and burn the box with all the pipes in it, he having put the last bit of tobacco into his study fire thinking that he would give up smoking.

Throughout the diary Emily records events that have the slightest importance concerning her husband and children; only rarely does she allow a reference to herself. There are brief remarks about being sick with a cough or feeling unwell, but she was a most uncomplaining woman, at least to her diary. Yet she had much she could have complained of. A phrase dropped almost casually into an entry for May 6, 1857, reveals perhaps more than she realized: "My days are all much the same."

Indeed there was a sameness to Emily's existence, but what her journal does not really reveal is the routine of work that must have been oppressive at times. Given all she undertook, it is a wonder that she had the energy to keep up a journal at all. She played a much larger role in running Tennyson's business and social affairs than the journal would indicate. In fact,

Emily functioned as her husband's secretary and financial manager, advising him on practically all matters, even the topics and titles of his poems. It was through her suggestion that the world knows Tennyson's masterpiece as "In Memoriam" rather than as "Fragments of an Elegy," which was his title for the poem.

Emily Tennyson is owed something by those who value Tennyson's verse for having taken on the tasks which would otherwise have deflected him from the writing of his poetry. Yet it was finally too much even for a wife of her willingness and capacity. The strain of responding to as many as forty letters a day, keeping up her husband's wardrobe, to which he was offensively indifferent, and receiving the constant stream of Tennyson's congenial friends started to tell, and in 1874 she sank into an invalid condition from which she never recovered. Tennyson seems to have realized that her condition was partly the result of having, as he put it, "overwrought herself with multifarious correspondence over many years." Had he not been so secretive about his business and parsimonious with his money he might have relieved her of some of the burdens she bore by employing a paid secretary. The real cause for her nervous collapse has never been pinpointed, but as Robert Martin points out in his book, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart*, she experienced an hysterical frustration which came about because she could never fathom the enigma of a husband whose existence was essentially verbal (p. 505).

Her journal, even though it is prematurely broken off and subsequently chopped up and blotted out by herself and her son, still is a useful record of Tennyson's activities for nearly three decades. Scholars who are interested in Tennyson's life and his circle of friends will be obliged to Mr. Hoge for editing these materials which have heretofore been unpublished. The book has a handsome appearance, enhanced by a dust jacket with G. F. Watt's painting of Emily Tennyson that catches the paradoxical blend of frailty and firmness in her character. The editor's introduction is useful for the explanation it provides about the manner in which the journal was written and the editorial procedures employed. Perhaps the greatest aid to readers is the number of full footnotes Mr. Hoge provides which identify the many persons and places referred to in the journal and which are conveniently located at the bottom of each page, where footnotes should be.

Yet for all of the information provided by the editor and the journal, one still does not have a sense of what life with the Tennysons was really like. Aside from a few remarks about her loneliness when Tennyson is away, we never get any of her deeper feelings or find any evidence that she had anything more than an ordinary understanding about anything, much less any insights into the complex nature of her genius husband, to whom she was married for fifty years. In fact, her remarks seem to have been rendered of all private feelings as if she repressed her own emotions and muted her life to provide the calm that the nervous Tennyson required. She must have been a wonderful caretaker, but she was not a very spontaneous or vivid writer.

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