NOTRE DAME REVIEW
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IN MEMORIAM

John Engels

1931 - 2007

Always, more than anything,
I wish to say the names:
even with my dead before me,
I say the names
into the bright, breathable air

—from "Saying the Names"
Crucifixion by Alexander Deriev
The Mandylion by Alexander Deriev
**FROM ICONONOTES**

*John Kinsella*

As I said to Alexander recently, I believe in the redemptive nature of faith, and faith for me extends into the creative. To create artworks, to create poems, is an affirmation of life. Interestingly, the Byzantine history of conflict between iconoclasts and iconodules is relevant to me only insofar as I can see problems with both positions. The offence of worshipping a false god—of betraying God by substituting paint and ink and even stone for the unseen, the invisible; the argument that the divine and human must both be represented in one, and that only the host can achieve this—is no offence to me. Neither am I convinced by the iconodule argument for the holiness of the ink the Gospels were written with (and all “created matter”), or that the veneration of icons is to do with real flesh and blood, with those who have actually lived (including Jesus—“God as flesh”). However, having said that, the smashing of anything (physically, in the case of an icon or idol) or negating alternative beliefs, is my anathema as a pacifist anarchist. I defend the right to peaceful difference, passive co-existence.

My problem is with the issue of God itself. I am neither what you call a believer nor a non-believer. I am not an atheist; I am not an agnostic. I have no judgement over what is spiritually true or untrue. I do know what I consider to be ethical, though, and I don’t mind what name people give this. For many, God is more than a word; it is an utterance of absolute undeniability. God is infallible. God, if I am going to use the properest of proper nouns, is fallible. I pray privately, I visit churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, where appropriate, because I respect the right of all to acclaim a God. I even respect their absolute definitions. But I move between them. And it’s much the same in working with artists, from my poet’s perspective. For Alexander, it seems to me that there’s a sacred process going on—for me, it’s sacred to respect this sacred process of his. Words and images are of the same materials—they are articulations and utterances, and for me, very close to prayer. They are an exchange with the Godhead, with people, with the self, maybe even with matter in general.

Working with Alexander, I have returned to the “old” stories. Rereading the Bible has brought a discovery of place as well as of self. There’s a language in those stories that morphs and translates across spaces. But rather
than impose these stories on a different landscape, a landscape very different from their origins, I place them next to each other. There’s a dialogue. The colours of the icon paintings — the reds, blues, golds, whites and so on, are bold like the colours of where I come from. They are symbolic, as the land I know is symbolic. They deserve to be read and respected, as the ancient land I come from is. Indigenous people know all this.

One of the factors that strongly attracted me to Alexander’s religious icons was the work of indigenous Australian painter Julie Dowling. Her icons of Aboriginal people meld the traditions of the West with the traditions of her people—the hybrid they create is positive, reclaiming, devastating, elegiac, celebratory, and asserting all at once. These are dramatic departures from orthodox and European angles of icon painting, but they are nonetheless in conversation with it. Alexander comes out of a Russian school, and was in fact trained by one of the masters. What he brings to a long tradition is the determination of the matter of the art. He is so deeply dedicated to his craft that he is, to me, a poet. Fascinatingly, even a minor derivation from tradition is a massive innovation. And in this sense, Alexander’s icons are both in congruence with the tradition, and also radical within it. Now, this is an approach I can appreciate and dialogue with.
Icon Painter

Writing the icon
He embellished
Love and beauty
As absorbed in
Contemplative airs,
Effusion of spirit
As clarity and boldness
Of line; eggs in one basket
Gloss, portholes
Through heaven, as fallen Byzantine
We glow in now, we degenerate
In spiritual glitz
In faith as bold and brittle
As halo, as bold and brittle
As lambs, birds, trees
Not captured in the detail
Of delicate light
Jacob’s Ladder

This icon is the arc that starting at the thin end of a V’d electrode configuratively consumes high voltage buoyed in hot plasmic urge, quenched by the distance it needs to bridge, then again, as each angel rises to God perched among leaves, or higher still on gantries embracing silos, galvanised ladders straight up to platforms, up the stress-skinned structures that might come apart, leaning back from the climb in vertigo, guard cylinder a silver strobe against the clouded blue, a dizzy combo of “tiger” cages and solids, alongside, inside, outside confined spaces of family, of prayer, of making eyes through string strung between the deftest fingers, the language of heaven a nautical dream of promise, place, and harvest, a one hundred and eighty-degree turn from ascent to descent, a legacy of stubble... the grain heavier than allowed for, a spark from kneeling sharply combusting the air, the ladders.
The Mother of God of the Sign

The blue-tongued lizard
slow among the tussocks
bears its young live—
placenta highly developed,
it crosses hot bitumen
slowly, lulled. A car
swerving to miss it, jaws
gape open wide, blue tongue
distended, intensity
beyond any blue of the sky.
It warns with an exclamation
of heaven, and the paradox
of its action is the sign.

Crucifix

Below the face, the skull.
Behind the eyes, prisms.
Angled, light feeds
the death generator:

at the right hand of...
at the left hand of...
flanked by loss or praise,
a magnetic field splits
open—as if, deserted,
we look away
unbalanced:
like new growth of eucalypts,
like shed skins and cocoons,
like slippage and splinters
of timbers, crossed
and coloured, overhead.
FROM ICONONOTES

Alexander Deriev

The icon represents a world where evil is virtually nonexistent and Light cannot be concealed by shadow. For some, the icon may be an affirmation of the future transformation of the world; for others, it may embody a mystical encounter that resolves certain mysteries. The icon’s symbolism may serve as a key to spiritual contemplation, as it did in the case of Thomas Merton. The icon is the same book, only written not in words, but in pigments. Yet the icon is not a literal illustration of the Old or New Testament, but a spiritual experience.

The icon appeared in an age—by today’s lights, a strange age—when the human spirit was on the ascent, when people knew how to sacrifice not only their qualities and habits, but also their position in their family, their society, their country—even to sacrifice their life. Over the centuries, the icon’s outward appearance was constantly improved, so that it might correspond to the teaching of the Church and the theologians, and to convey the spiritual essence of appearances. It is not surprising that the main purpose of the icon is to help a person pray. It is for this reason, too, that the images of saints in icons are filled with devout renunciation, dispassionate calm, simplicity and humility and self-restraint. Nature, in the icon, is only a supplementary medium: it does not become a focus of attention. Nor do the subordinate episodes represented on it. The icon deliberately deprives the viewer of earthly reality, in order not to draw attention away from the human being engulfed in living faith in the divine plan of salvation. Despite the fact that the modern way of thinking persistently conceives of salvation only by means of the realization of the human potential in life, the icon continues to assert that salvation amounts to a union with God, in which the human potential is realized in a supernatural fashion.

I myself became a painter in the early 1980s, in Kazakhstan, under the influence of Pavel Zaltsman (at that time, the last living disciple of Pavel Filonov). He was the first to direct my attention to icon painting, having received his own orientation toward Russian and European religious art from his teacher. Filonov, over the course of his remarkable ascetic life, painted just one, almost canonical icon, but the characteristics of Russian icon- and fresco-painting are perfectly obvious in his work. Its terse, focused im-
Jacob’s Ladder by Alexander Deriev
Mother of God “Derzhavnaya” by Alexander Deriev
ages, techniques of spatial-compositional construction, reverse perspective, themes and compositional motifs, gestures and isolated details of clothing and objects, all converged for him in the famous principle of completeness. From his lessons I understood that wrong proportions of the body do not come from not knowing anatomy, but that objects must be represented in terms of their essence, not their form. Later, finding myself in Jerusalem, I understood something else that drew me to the icon and that was represented in almost every icon. This was the symbolic nature of time in the icon, that is, the disruption of temporal sequentiality, the absence of empty space, the absence of a horizon, the absence of accidental objects. Everything in the icon harmonizes with its meaning. And of course, reverse perspective constitutes a mystical view of the life to come, where time disappears, where eternity begins, and where space ceases to be a separation and an obstacle.
ICONS

Richard Spilman

A woman embracing friends
in the narthex of the church,
black slacks and hemp blouse
stitched in the native designs

of a country foreign to me,
black hair glistering blue,
her hands transforming air
into language, and instantly

there you are, explaining again,
forty years later, why we can’t
go on. The table shifts between
us, as you then I lean to speak.

In how many coffeehouses
did we play this tete-a-tete,
over how many tottering tables?
Your hands trace wordlessly

the shape of what cannot not be
like an Indian dancer, a temple
girl, her hands a sacred liturgy,
her body any man’s trash.

How much, even now, I long
for that consubstantiation
you with your disappearing
act never meant to provide.

The image is fresh as the pain
of a cut that won’t bleed, but
deformed as the icon above her:
Jesus on the cross, not suffering
but waiting for us, once again, to deny and weep—Christ in not Christ, God in man, like this pale and reverent obscenity, this poem.
I possess, in you, a wonder-working Icon
If possessing something is to possess nothing
As she possesses me. Thus I possess her.
She was given me on the very day she ‘appeared’
At a pre-ordained time, at an appointed place
And the same Panayía is revealed again
Whenever the heart so desires. Leaning on her arm
Stands, in ceremonial robes, on an inversely
Perspectival stool, a grown-up swaddled infant
Who is the last prince of my line
I lift him away, for every attribute
Belonging to this Panayía can be lifted away
As a plunderer tears off a silver smith’s basmá
From a picture kissed so much
The hands have darkened and fallen apart
I lift the crown and the two criers of joy
From their cloud and golden ground in the upper corners
I unfasten the ornamental clasp from the Maphorion
And lift the veil from her hair and from her neck
I loosen the folds across her right breast
And carefully the folds across her left
Aching with pain. I lift like a spider’s web
The thin undergarment, which leaves the enigma
At once resolved and unresolved, and she looks at me
With brown irises in the blue white of the eyes –
Keeps looking at me … I unfasten her arms
Her brown hand with its rose, the brown breasts
The right one first, the left one carefully last
Aching with pain, and then the girdle after kissing it
I lift her forehead, her hairline and her cheeks
And finally her big eyes which look at me
Keep looking at me, even after they are gone
I lift the golden ground and the priming
Until the wood with its thick graining is bared:
A bit of an old olive plank, sawed off
A tree felled by a storm, in a time long ago
On some northern coast. There, in the tree,
Almost overgrown, appears the eye of a sprig
Broken off when the tree was still young –
You keep looking at me. Hodigítra, Phliouísa.

Translated by Lars-Håkan Svensson

Notes

On April 12, 1963, Ekelöf wrote the following to Leif Sjöberg about the icon which was in his possession: “Basically she is an old Xoanon made of olive wood, an olive plank, dead, which is the icon painted on her. She is standing here on my chest of drawers by the way, and she always has flowers near her. She is constructed in such a way as to make it possible to undress her—the child (on a stool, standing, in a Byzantine emperor’s garments), the veil, the cloak, the seven arrows of pain in her left breast, yes, the breasts and the stomach and the arms and everything until you get to the holy tree, which you could not fell in Attica with impunity.”

Xoanon: ancient wooden image in Greek temples; icon
Panayía: Greek—“Our Lady”
Basmá: a repoussé metal (usually silver) covering over some icons, allowing only the face and hands to be seen
Maphorion: a veil-like headdress covering head and shoulders of all female saints and the Virgin Mary
Hodigítra: “The Guide”; Mother of God icon
Phliouísa: “Loving Virgin”; Mother of God icon
Would you mind, my dear, trying on this gown from The seventeenth century? You see, my idea is: this dress Is rather complicated, like Lancelot’s mail:

Intricate with a lot of wires, it concatenates the big deal
Of each little part of the whole—which (as only yes-

Terday we happened to be reading) becomes

The even bigger deal of the one and the other: the glass
The dress is made of (like the familiar slides
A microscope points to)... and also pendants (like, for instance,

This bedroom chandelier); and—finally—the pale
Body (translucent, as all bodies should be)... in such a way
That bodies make the crystalline and the matte agree...

Through glassfur like this, one can catch a glimpse
Of neither skin nor shape, for it wraps around
The body—like smoke that fumes from the crackling kindling
Of the candid lower pendants: they’re sparkling now—
Despite all decent precautions!— and begin
To arc and blaze yellow and blue—but not enough to flout

The rule of white; and the sparkling colors do not conflate
This fruit of fashion with nature, even though it’s out
In nature that this fashion show occurs:

The forest—a microscope—a hunchback— scrutinizes
The glass rectangles... but under them—what’s there? Our eyes Can only guess. The eye—organ of the imagination, theorizes,

Especially in autumn, the circlets of the nipples, in aspect
Rhyming with aspen leaves: hue and form, pores and capillaries. Yet They’re not leaves, even though they tremble

And they, too, beat against glass. (But here it’s different Glass.) What sets up a boundary here is the one (but don’t forget: The one exists already on its own).

Someone might risk Asking: But what’s the dress for? Answer: Nothing! Charles The Brave of Burgundy strides into Lille and sees three lily-maidens,

Each in a glassdress—and only one red apple! A witness says in prose:
“This Judgment of Paris made the public
   go quite mad
With excitement because of the idea that
   this time not only he
But everyone was a bonafide Paris—comparing,
   after all, Hera, Athena,
And Aphrodite: yet our winner was decided
   not in advance
By Homer, but by everyone’s guessing what
   was hidden
Underneath, and each voted for his favorite!”
   In those days,

One who’s no virgin would go to the altar dressed
   in white, while
A virgin without veil would be crowned with a bridal wreath.
   But in a glassdress,
Nothing is at all transparent—Whose body is
   beautiful?—since

For the chalkwhite of the eye to guess
   through glasscloth
A body-value is in vain: chalk
   only crumbles
With such strain.... Thus, you see, I have
   dressed you exactly

The way those men undress women!
   Glass always constricts
Other people, but you—you’re as slim as the straw
   in a glass. On an axis
In someone else, and on an axis within ourselves,
   our bodies spin.
UNTITLED

Alexander Eremenko
—Translated by Reginald Gibbons and Ilya Kutik

For Heironymus Bosch, inventor of spotlights

1.

I gaze up at you from the bottom

of graves so deep, like chasms,

That my sight, before its flight

can reach you, completely

Divides in two.

You—my other you—

and I will now devise, as always, a masked farce:

Till this moment when it begins, you don’t exist,

and if not you, then, perforce, not me.

Our not yet existing befalls us

amidst the silent thronging

Of chromosomes—a great sun

or a massive white protoplasm.

Our prison guards, like monuments

on boulevards of athletes

Holding oars above the primordial bouillon—

have always accused us

Of some Nile dementia.

Now as always

you and I will try to intersect

For a while our trajectories of two bodies.

The terms of the first move:

If you will spotlight for me

this nearest stretch of the way

Then I’ll call you the feminine noun.

In all the roadside litter

To catch my eye, I of course

find only the best dramatic tension—

Which corresponds to our geometry of three.
Thus: a lonely triangle rises
To the surface of its own theorem
and there it will stick forever.
But what I still must prove is you.
I need to deck you out
In different glittering morphemes
like morphine circling
In the form of a scintillating wasp—
so that all those with bodies
Might grasp that this is you,
through all your metamorphoses.

Now my sight ranges back
to the beginning of this poem.
I look up at you from such deep chasms...
Our stage play
Goes on. My next move grows out
of me like a castle loophole.
Stop those fierce athletes!
We’re playing a farce.
Just where a mountain has been painted,
I’ve been sitting on a mountaintop.

2.

Just where a mountain has been painted,
I’ve been sitting on a mountaintop.
At my feet—if I were to
spit, I’d hit them all—
A throng of runners are straining
through the dark mud of a deep blue hell.
The numbers on their shirts
writhe like tiny maggots.

At my back I hear
the soughing of the paradis artificiel,
And at this border, an angel,
now trumpeting, now
Ringing, glides along—
or a clean, clanging-new streetcar
Like a triangulating cross-eyed boy
with a tin whistle in his mouth.

And my empty hand will rotate
an iconostasis like an antenna
And inside it the Son, finally
congruent with himself, will begin to walk—
He who had been lost like a hockey
triangoalie made of paper
Who’s spun around by the wind
in a damp sagging frame of aspens.

Who can separate
complicated language from plain,
When meaning, the height and
width and depth of it, folded
Two or three times, is spinning
inside the turbine of a theorem, too,
A triplicate horripilating
system constructed in the mind!

Here’s a sign from Heaven:
Hell is making progress.
Its cold circles are constricting me.

I look at you and my sight
Bends backwards and bites
its own tail. Then in hobnail boots
It tromps across the back of my head.

And in a scoreboard
Shouting with lights, the final days
are set; a running deer is etched
In frozen firewood—if I rippled
rings like that across the surface
Under the water’s ice-bark,
materialized they would
Knock me to my knees:
that sort of three-dimensional well
Of hell isn’t worth spitting in.
Nor Pythagoras standing in mud
Up to his knees, nor the Mongols
intersecting all this at their angle.

In this criss-crossed world there’s only
one straightforward thing—a gunshot;
But it’s no more straight than
a strait-jacket.
So really in the empty sky
a skyscraper never scrapes the heavens,
Just as a wolfhound would never
really kill some jackal.
And when my spine-bone’s finally
crammed into this put-meat-in-&-
Turn-the-handle (I’ve forgotten
the right word for that thing),
My throat will really sing!

3.

A nightingale opens and turns
In a bush. Over them both twirls a star.
In a swamp, water that’s as thick
As a transformer is also as black as tar.

The moon floats over somebody’s head
And above a weedy lot a spotlight burns;
The darkness of the moonlit field
Is brightened by a corner kick.
In the poetry of Osip Mandelshtam, Marina Tsvetaeva and Boris Pasternak in the early twentieth century, Russian poetry solidified a way of poetic thinking that seems virtually unknown in the West. The poetics of the recent poetic movement called Russian Meta-realism is the latest stage of development of this way of poetic thinking. Ilya Kutik and Alexander Eremenko are members of this poetic movement. In Kutik’s “Glass Dress,” glass stands not for transparency or simplicity but rather for complexity and the richness of translucence; translucence might be one metaphor for how a Meta-realist poem looks to the imagination. The reader’s imagination is beckoned closer not only to visual images but also to that which can only be imagined in words, even when it makes use of visual imagery to evoke that which is not entirely visual—and this makes translation especially difficult. So what we are trying to do in these translations and in others is to translate in part a way of thinking, as well as a specific poem. This way of thinking moves partly by evolving meanings out of the sounds of words, and partly by looking at what is not present (an apophatic poetics) or what cannot be seen. Like a Russian icon that invites the believer not to the surface of the image but through the image-as-aperture that is surrounded by the detail of the frame, so to some extent the Meta-realist poem invites the reader through the image while at the same time providing a rich surrounding texture. The Meta-realists also exploit the inclination of Russian as a poetic language to describe rather than name, to imply rather than to make explicit, to show ways of thinking without saying what the reader should think. (Which is why even Lenin and Stalin could not entirely change the Russian mentality despite their severe controls on language and thus their attempted control of thought.) Eremenko’s poem evokes a host of triangles—the triangle of light thrown by the spotlight (a spoof on the pre-electric Bosch, painter of one version of hell) or footlight (the “farce” or “comedy” of love) or field light (the hockey rink or the soccer field); the triangle of speaker, beloved and Bosch; the Holy Trinity; the abstract triangle of geometry; the shape of a mountain (sitting on a painted mountain is an example of what can be real to the imagination but not real to the senses); the angle at which Mongols intersect the world; the Pythagorean theorem, and so forth. In Russian the sounds of the words lead the thinking in such a way that this poem (like many others after the work of Mandelshtam, Tsvetaeva and Pasternak) unfolds surprise after surprise, yet each is justified in Russian by
the links between and metamorphoses of those sounds—which is something far more complex and more powerful, as a way of thinking, than “rhyme” conceived merely as a poetic device. (In our play on “morph-” we have tried to catch a little of this, but whereas in the original poem, the sound leads the thought, it can never do so in a translation, where, as in almost all poetry in English anyway, the sound only follows the thought and reinforces it at best.) Meanwhile in Eremenko’s untitled poem, everything except love is not paradise but rather hell—dark, deep, maggoty, littered, guarded like a prison, crowded, cross-eyed, corrupted in language, frozen, false, brutal, Boschian. The iconostasis that is like an antenna of the spirit, the light from moon or star or the brilliant corner kick—these exemplify against all that hell. Part 3 is the song that even the speaker, tormented in the meat-grinder of the contemporary world, insists on singing.
On the curve of the airfoil
yet as gloss deep in that metal
sun smear drags illumination
firmly across wrinkles, rivers,
grace of the drillers on the rigs,
of jungles pressed into black pools
by rock masses: over that hazed
and riveted convex mirror
for the sky’s face the newswoman
Politkovskaya saw nausea,
poison working in from tea
served to her on the Rostov flight,
she, called to Beslan to dicker
for Chechens who had sequestered
eleven hundred children, all
at school. The Russian Army, foiled
in dealing, wanted her away.
Her blood tests from Rostov vanished
on the flight back to Moscow, trace
elements trackless. In two years
her elevator cage became
the box into which the last test
poured red and maculate over
her spilled groceries, the emptied
pistol dropped among all the finds
she could not live without, what her
stove worked to render. For she served
only what she craved, unwrapped from
crinkly darkness or mined from want,
truth factored by no one, the thing
down the middle whole, quivering.

Berrigan and Zinn, surrogates
for those sending the planes, Zinn
a bombardier in his young youth,
soon to be hoodwinked and strong-armed
by their own missioners, flew to
Hanoi to retrieve downed fliers
and, sirens then, dove with children
into tunnels under a night’s
tall tonnage. The children: with them
at last under our bomber fleet
and asking beyond speech for shield
over child and self, Schild to Schuld
among the long-shelled with the heart’s
German of pre-prayer, the fore-Greek
of ur-Sanskrit, satyam ucur
as sunned puddle in a footprint
even in a black shaken hole,
*act of truth*. That one only thing.

Into the hand of the woman,
on the buds unroofed there in that
soft colander, as radiation
shooting beyond any half-life,
spirit descends: the aeons-long
climb-down of high fire presses in
to the levels of the oil,
uranium, cesium, down
all the lattices in the metals,
the grids and slicks of conjunction,
so that from the knit bone we can
resurrect now in body what
already it pods as seed, break
open around its inherent
vitality to be clustered
past the surrender point: just here
the bride thou art. Those carrying
Bosch’s blindfolded, severed head
in the vanguard of his parade
have them all, fore aft and both sides,
openly watch the commissioned
killings, the mountainings of loot,
for in this place visibility
is immunity, while unread
stays the long-loved misgrasped symbol
of risen body, steadily
fed by vineyards and fields, the fruits
into which fire spears without let
slowly and ever-present, keen friend
and interpreter, with its news.
The teachers have left the front of the two-story brick building, where they’d gathered to greet students and parents on the first day of classes. Only Martin Williamson—Mr. W to everyone at the Tree of Knowledge, a private elementary school—remains outside. He’s the physical education teacher, and his first class doesn’t begin until second period, at ten, but he came early today to be one of the greeters.

He turns to look up Wise Road, which deadends at the school, expecting to see nothing. Instead, as if from the mouth of a winter blizzard, from dust as white as snow, he sees a woman, running. Two steps behind her is a girl, her daughter no doubt, probably in kindergarten. The girl is wearing a yellow dress to match her yellow hair. She is shielding her eyes from the dust and is moving with the care and uncertainty, but twice the speed, of a blind person.

A minute passes before the woman, whose hair is a darker blond than her daughter’s, stops in front of him, panting. A moment later, the girl catches up. Her panting is more severe. Clutching her stomach, the girl begins to cough, and Martin is sure she’s about to throw up. He waits for the inevitable, but the inevitable doesn’t come. When the girl ceases coughing and stands straight, he says, “Let me get you some water.”

“She doesn’t need water,” says her mother with an accent he guesses is Russian or Polish. She ushers her daughter through the open green doors of the school. Martin has lost sight of the two when, from inside the dark building, as if from inside a whale, the woman calls out to him: “Thank you.”

The woman returns three minutes later, and he wishes he had retrieved a cup of water in the interim. He has nothing to offer her except conversation. “Car broke down?” he asks.

She doesn’t answer for so long that he thinks she hasn’t heard him. But at last she says, “We don’t own a car.”

“You’re taking the bus, then.”

“No, I’m flying.” She doesn’t look at him, and his inclination is to take a step back and say, “Ouch.” But she laughs, and he thinks her laughter is intended to include him.

“I’d give you a ride,” he says, “but I teach next period. Of course, if you live near here, it wouldn’t be a problem.”

She glances at him before returning her gaze to the dust swirling off the
road. “And who are you, if I could ask?”

Martin states his name and his position at the school. He wonders if he ought to give other vital statistics: his age (forty-two), his height (six-foot, three-and-a-half-inches), his weight (252 pounds). She says, “The famous Mr. W.”

He asks her name (Katarina) and her daughter’s (Mary). He is going to ask her more; he would be happy talking with her until his class begins, but Katarina looks at her watch, utters something in a language he doesn’t recognize, and starts running. As she disappears into the plumes of white dust, he can hear the grumble of a city bus as it makes its way up Deer Hill toward the stop at the intersection of Wise Road.

When the dust clears, she is gone.

\[ \text{ } \text{ } \text{ } \text{ } \]

Martin’s mother is white. His father is black, or so his mother told him when he turned thirty-three. Before this, she’d told him his father was a professor of Romance Languages at Ohio Eastern University who’d died—in a civil war, of a snakebite, in an earthquake, her story varied over the years—when, after Martin was conceived but before he was born, he returned to the country in Latin America where he was from.

Martin’s real father is named James or Jason, his mother doesn’t remember. “I thought he was the star of the basketball team, the center,” she told him. “He made me believe he was. We were at a bar, a club. We went to his car. This was before I discovered the Lord. A day or two later, I saw a picture of the basketball team in the newspaper, and I knew I’d made a mistake. But it was too late.”

His mother told him the true story when he turned thirty-three because Jesus had been thirty-three when he’d died. Martin didn’t understand the connection.

“I guess I don’t know either,” his mother confessed.

A few days later, his mother asked him if he was going to leave town.

“Why would I leave?” he asked.

She hesitated before saying, “Because you might want to find your father.”

“I wouldn’t know where to look.”

After Martin’s birth, his mother was hired as an administrative assistant in Ohio Eastern’s history department, where she’d been liked as a student. She holds the same job today, two years shy of her retirement.

In elementary school, Martin’s classmates called him “Cuba” because
of his father, although when his sixth-grade teacher, noting Martin’s complexion, wondered if his father might be from Brazil, some of his classmates began to call him “Pele,” after the soccer player.

He’d never liked his nicknames. They didn’t seem as friendly as “Sparky” or “Polar Bear” or even “Mutt.” His nicknames, he thought, implied foreignness. And his appearance already called attention to him in a town where most of the people with dark skin were the immigrants from Central America who lived in Spanishville.

After college, he had trouble finding a good job in town. And once he found one, he had trouble holding on to it. He had a tendency to become bored, to allow his mind to wander off his work. (He’d been the same in college, his C minus average proof.) Martin has been a city bus driver, the manager of the dairy section at Kroger, a bartender and bouncer at the Above and Beyond Gentlemen’s Club. He has held his current position at the Tree of Knowledge for four-and-a-half years, his longest tenure at a single job and a sign, according to his mother, of his readiness to settle down. The next step, she says, is for him to find a wife.

His relationships with women have been as fleeting as his jobs, however. The last woman he lived with, Cora, from California, was a graduate student in political science. She moved in with him two weeks after they’d met, bringing with her her three-year-old son, Malcolm. Because his shift at the Above and Beyond Club didn’t start until ten at night, Martin became Malcolm’s primary caretaker. In this role, he became reacquainted with all the public parks he’d visited as a boy. He made mountains of macaroni and cheese. He engaged in endless games of hide and seek.

Cora and Malcolm left Sherman immediately after she earned her master’s degree. She might have said goodbye, but Martin can’t remember the occasion. All he remembers is calling the boy’s name one morning, as if Malcolm were only hiding behind the couch or under the kitchen table, and realizing he was gone.

Martin is driving down Wise Road on his way to school, white dust billowing around his Toyota pickup, when he sees Katarina walking the opposite way. He slams his brakes so hard his truck skids. Katarina skitters to the side of the road like a bird. Martin hoped she would come at the same time she had yesterday. He planned to meet her at the door with a glass of water.

Without acknowledging him, she resumes her brisk walk toward the
intersection and her bus. Quickly, he rolls down the window. “Katarina!” Her name comes out of his lips flat and in two syllables. She stops and turns around. He hops out of his truck. In the floating dust around him, his throat goes dry.

When it’s clear she won’t speak first, he says, “Are you all right? I hope I didn’t scare you.” He falls into a coughing fit.

“I should ask now if it’s you who is all right,” she says when his coughing has stopped. She takes a few steps toward him.

“I’m fine,” he says.

“Would you like water?”

He tries to decline but begins another coughing spell. She jogs back to the school, which is only fifty feet from where they are, and returns a minute later with water in a paper cup. He drinks it and imagines the water rinsing the dust from the walls of his throat.

“Better?” she asks, her smile large enough to allow him to see the gaudy dentistry on her lower teeth, a discordant clash of gold and silver.

He nods, holding up the empty cup.

Her teeth are an old woman’s. But she cannot be older than thirty, he thinks.

“More?” she asks.

“No, no, I’m better,” he says, although he cannot help coughing again.

“I think I am.”

“I missed my bus,” she says, nodding toward the intersection, where her bus now sweeps past the empty stop. “You’ll give me keys to your truck because I give you water?”

Now it’s Martin who doesn’t know how to interpret a remark. Who knows how acts of kindness are repaid in Russia—or wherever she’s from. But Katarina smiles again, a quick flash of white, gold, and silver.

With satisfaction, Martin realizes she is flirting with him. He’s so pleased he misses her goodbye. She turns and resumes her march to the bus stop. “Let me drive you,” he calls to her. “I don’t teach for another forty-five, fifty minutes. Let me take you where you need to go.”

She works downtown, as a housekeeper at the Hotel Sherman, which used to be populated by graduate students and visiting professors at Ohio Eastern who rented by the month. But it was bought and refurbished by the Marriott Corporation. Now the cheapest room rents for $100 a night. Katarina works at the hotel until Mary finishes school at three. She begins her second job, at the Book and Brew, a bookstore and coffee shop a few blocks from the Hotel Sherman, at four.

When Katrina is at the bookstore, Mary must stay with a babysitter or
go to an after-school program, he thinks. But when he asks, Katarina says, “She comes with me to the bookstore. There is a children’s section.” And as if he accused her of something, she adds, “Mary is fine to play by herself.”

“How long have you lived in town?” he asks her.

“We are new here. A month.”

“And before you came here?”

“Yes, there was a before,” she says, and she gives him a flat smile.

They’ve reached the hotel, and he pulls in front, where a short, gray-haired man in a blue bellhop’s uniform greets them as if they were arriving customers. When he sees Katarina open the door of the truck, he recognizes her but is no less courteous. He takes her hand so she can step down. She is as slim as an actress.

Katarina walks toward the hotel’s entrance before turning around and stepping quickly to her door, which the bellhop has closed. The window is halfway open. “I forget the kiss on your cheek—to mean thank you.” She smacks her hand against her lips and blows him the kiss on it. “This will be all right to say thank you?”

Martin is about to answer but she is gone.

¶ ¶ ¶

Martin teaches physical education the way he drove buses for the city and the way he tended bar at the Above and Beyond Club, his body in one place, his mind often months or years into the past or future. He isn’t especially nostalgic, but he’ll find himself remembering the first time he saw a butterfly or the dresses his eighth-grade social studies teacher wore. And he isn’t a planner, but he’ll think about what he’ll buy his mother for Christmas or what kind of job he might find if he moved to Cleveland or Columbus. Minutes will slip by, and he might as well be in a trance—as he must have been when, as a city bus driver, he drove off U.S. 44 and into a fence surrounding a llama farm.

Daydreaming comes with less of a price as a phys-ed teacher. A week after the start of the school year, he leads the first graders onto the soccer field, and he makes dividing the teams easy by pitting boys against girls. It’s a fair match: The girls are quicker and have better footwork; the boys are stronger and more willing to throw their bodies around. But even if his eyes are focused on the field, he isn’t paying attention to the game. He is thinking of Katarina, as he has been since he met her. He is thinking of her bottom teeth and their delightful assortment of colors. He is thinking of how, when he drives her from the Tree of Knowledge to the Hotel Sherman, she sits
against the door, as if she might have to spring herself free at any moment. He is thinking of her accent and what she told him of her origins: She is the descendant of Lithuanian royalty. If history had stood still, she told him, she would have been sitting on a throne.

This morning, he asked her when he could see her outside of the twenty minutes they spend in his truck every morning. “You can see me tonight,” she said.

“But you work until ten.”

“Do you go to sleep at ten?”

The truth is, he often falls asleep before nine. He likes to sleep; he likes to dream and remember his dreams when he should be refereeing a softball game or teaching the second-graders how to play badminton. He often sleeps twelve hours a day. “I’m wide awake,” he said.

“All right,” she said, “meet me in front of the Book and Brew at ten.”

At the appointed hour, Katarina and Mary come out of the Book and Brew, and he helps Mary into the front of his truck. He offers the same service to Katarina, whom he thinks declines. But a moment before he steps away, she leans back onto his chest. He first feels the weight of her—a surprise, given how slight she seems, like a ballerina. Next he feels her warmth. And before she leaves his arms to spring into the cab of his truck, he smells her—like coffee beans and the fresh pages of unread books.

Katarina and Mary live in a third-floor walkup in a building across from City Hall. Like much of downtown, the building is historic, having been constructed soon after the Civil War, but risks demolition from the wrecking ball of ambitious developers.

Katarina’s apartment opens onto a small living room, which is furnished with a sofa and an easy chair, both of which must predate Katarina and Mary’s arrival here by at least a decade. The white walls are bare, and Martin sees bold cracks in the ceilings. At the far end of the living room is an open door, which Martin guesses leads to the bedroom. To the right is a surprisingly substantial kitchen, including a breakfast nook with a round table and four chairs. This is where they sit as Katarina prepares Mary’s “midnight snack” of applesauce and toast with strawberry jelly.

If Mary finds it strange to be sitting in her kitchen with her physical education teacher at ten-fifteen on a Friday night, she doesn’t indicate as much in either word or expression. She concentrates on her food and doesn’t say anything. He has heard her speak on only a few occasions. Her
English is clearer than her mother’s, but her voice is more fragile.

Mary receives a partial scholarship to the Tree of Knowledge because of how well she did on a pre-entrance test. Without the scholarship, Martin doubts Katrina would be able to afford the tuition. Martin tries to imagine Mary in an overcrowded public school classroom. He imagines her in a back corner, looking out a window.

After Mary eats her snack, Katarina takes her into the bathroom. Martin sits under the flickering bulb, wondering how long this building will stand and what will rise in its place.

Katarina isn’t long putting Mary to bed. When she returns to the kitchen, she asks Martin if he’d like something to drink. He says, “I brought wine, but I left it in my truck.”

“If you get it, we have wine,” Katarina says. “If you sit here, we have water.”

Martin rises as if having received an order, but Katarina is smiling in apparent acknowledgement of her joke. All the same, he guesses she was telling the truth. She gives him her door key and he retrieves the bottle of Merlot from his truck.

She doesn’t have a bottle opener, so Martin chips away at the cork with a knife before knocking what’s left into the wine. He pours the wine into plastic cups. Katarina says, “Please make the toast.”

Martin can’t remember the last time he made a toast. “Welcome to Sherman,” he says, and she smiles awkwardly. He senses she wanted something grander.

“Thank you, Mr. Mayor,” she replies, and they tap their plastic glasses. His wine tastes distinctly of cork.

They talk about her apartment and his house. When he tells her he lives three minutes from his mother, she tells him she lives an ocean away from her closest relative, a second cousin who lives outside of Vilnius. He asks why she left her country, and she tells him it was too small for her dreams. “I have America-size dreams,” she says, spreading her arms and smiling.

“And you and Mary moved to Sherman from Lithuania a couple of months ago?” he asks, confused about the chronology.

“Yes, I put my finger”—she holds up her right index finger—“on a map of the United States and Sherman is where it touches.” She flashes a grin.

He doesn’t know whether she’s joking. According to USA Today, Sherman is one of the 100 best small towns in the country. It isn’t impossible, Martin thinks, that word has spread to Lithuania.

“Mary is an American citizen,” Katarina says. “Red, white, and blue.” “Her father’s American?”
“Yes, a red-blooded American.”

When she doesn’t continue, Martin asks if she’s divorced. She isn’t smiling now. “I was his mail order bride. Bad to be such a bride, my friends tell me. Such a bride doesn’t know what kind of man will be her husband. He could be the devil. And this man I married, he didn’t want a wife. He wanted a slave. A slave to do his work, a slave to—.” She stops abruptly.

Martin lets the silence gather before he says, “You left him a month or so ago?”

She shakes her head. “Mary was one year old when I left.”

“Does he know where you are?”

She shrugs, and he thinks she shakes her head. She asks him whether he is divorced. He’d like to keep talking about her, but he guesses she is finished with this topic, at least for now. “I’ve never been married,” he says.

She asks if he ever wanted to leave Sherman. He says no. “As my mom says, ‘Why go a thousand miles to get what you can find around the corner?’”

“I see,” Katarina says. “So around the next corner there is Hollywood and Pacific Ocean.”

Martin laughs. “Well, we do have three movie theaters, including a multiplex at the mall. And, no, there’s no ocean, but we do have Sky Lake.”

“Yes, of course,” Katarina says, and whether her smile is genuine or sarcastic, he can’t tell. They have more wine, and she apologizes for her English, saying it is especially bad when mixed with alcohol; he tells her she speaks very well.

“I study since I was eight,” she says. “I study extra hard when I realize I have no life in my country, when I realize I need to come here. But—” She looks down.

“But what?” he asks.

She looks up at him. “It was supposed to be easy.”

He is about to say, If you do honest work, if you live within your means, it is easy—or at least it isn’t difficult. You may not be rich and famous, but you will have enough in your life to be happy. But he guesses she’s speaking about her husband and Mary. He feels like leaving his seat and crouching next to her so he can put his arm around her shoulder. But he doesn’t know how she would respond to this kind of gesture. So he takes another small sip of wine. He hasn’t finished his glass yet. He doesn’t think he should if he’ll be driving home.

“I should have invited you into the living room, but now it’s late.”

He looks at his watch. “Yes,” he agrees, “it’s late.” And thinking her comment was a signal to leave, he stands. “I enjoyed talking with you.”
“Yes, and I with you.” They move toward the front door. He opens it and takes a step into the hallway before turning around.

“You know, I could pick Mary up in the mornings and take her to school. It wouldn’t be a problem. I live nearby and I have my truck and I have to go to school anyway.”

“You don’t have to say this.”

Martin is confused. “Say what?”

“I accept. Of course. Thank you. But you don’t have to say this.”

Martin remains confused, and he wonders if the little wine he drank might have affected him more than he thought. A second later, she is in his arms, her lips against his. “This was waiting for you no matter how you said goodbye.”

Every Sunday, Martin visits his mother for lunch. Today, a month after he met Katarina, they sit in her front yard under a buckeye tree on the wooden picnic bench overlooking the cemetery to the south. Martin used to attend church with his mother on Sunday mornings, but this was before he got Mercury, an Irish setter-German shepherd mix, from the pound. He told his mother he’d have to get up too early in the morning to both walk Mercury and make it to church on time. It was a poor excuse, he knew, but she accepted it.

Although Martin and his mother see each other at least once a week and speak on the phone at least once a day, they always have a lot to talk about on Sundays. Over egg salad, beet salad, and lemonade, he talks to her about Katarina and Mary, and she seems interested, although he realizes she has heard him tell this kind of story, with the same intonations, several times. It occurs to him, as it has in the past, that while his relationships with women inevitably last longer than his mother’s with his father, they have left him no keepsakes as enduring as what his mother retains.

For dessert, she has made apple pie. Because he would like to keep his weight somewhere shy of 260 pounds, he knows he should refuse. But in order not to hurt her feelings, he agrees to have a small piece. When she drops another piece on his plate, he complains only mildly. He digs out the next two pieces for himself, quitting only when a single, small triangle of pie remains.

“Every time I leave here I’m qualified to be the fat man at the circus,” he tells his mother. It’s a frequent joke between them. So is her response: “There’s nothing wrong with honest work.”
Martin’s mother is plump and always has been. All the pictures he’s seen of her, including when she was a toddler, show her with a wide, round face and a potato-shaped body. Her short stature—she’s only a little over five feet—accentuates her plumpness. She has strawberry blond hair, untouched by gray, and she knows how attractive it is. She goes to the Main Street Beauty College at least once a month to have it either cut or styled; she goes, too, because of how the students fawn over her hair.

Their conversation continues for ten minutes, then reaches a lull. “I know I’ve asked you this,” he says, interrupting the silence, “but tell me again why you never wanted to leave Sherman?”

“Some people come from nomadic stock,” she says, as if reading a speech. “They’re comfortable flitting all over the world like migrating birds. My parents named me Rose for a reason—I was going to bloom in one place and one place only. And when I don’t bloom anymore, I’ll be in a place where people remembered me blooming.” She gestures toward the cemetery, where she long ago picked out her plot and headstone. One Sunday last spring, she brought him to the cemetery to show him what more she’d done: bought a plot and headstone for him. His name and year of birth were engraved in the gray marble. When he protested, she said there was plenty of room next to his gravesite for his future wife and children.

“It takes a lifetime for a place to get to know you,” she says, “and having lived all of my sixty-two years in Sherman, I’d be giving up someone who knew me and understood me and loved me in exchange for a dance with a stranger.” She looks at Martin across the picnic table. “No one knows you the way people do in Sherman. Outside of Sherman, they’d see you for who they thought you were.”

“They could get to know me.”

“It’s one thing to know a man from when he was an infant. It’s another to know him only when he’s a giant.”

Toward the end of his sophomore year, Martin was in danger of failing a required composition course for the second time. In fact, he’d resigned himself to failing; he didn’t think he was made to be a student. He’d graduated from high school, he thought, only because his teachers liked him—and the new math teacher in his senior year, a woman from North Dakota, was afraid of him. But his mother had found him two tutors, and one of them had written most of his final research paper.

Their gravesites are behind a pair of weeping willow trees, which he can see from his mother’s yard. He notices, as he did the last time he was here, how the cemetery grass has become overgrown and clotted with weeds.

“I’ll bring you more coffee,” she says, plucking Martin’s empty plate
from in front of him and stacking it on top of hers. “I assume you’re done with this?” she asks, gesturing toward what’s left of the apple pie. “I’ll wrap it up for you.”

“All right, Mama,” he says, vowing he’ll save it for when he next visits Katarina and Mary, although he knows he’ll finish it off tonight. He turns around on the bench and leans his back against the table. But he soon changes positions again so he can stare at the cemetery.

His mother returns, they talk and drink coffee, and the afternoon grows darker by degrees. He feels the way he usually does, the way he always has. He guesses he would call it happy.

‡ ‡ ‡

Two weeks later, Martin is sitting in the well-worn couch in Katarina’s apartment. Mary is in bed. Katarina puts a lit candle on the table in front of him and turns out the light. Lights from Main Street soften the darkness. Katarina disappears from the room.

Martin knows what she has in mind, and it is welcome, but as much as he’d like to anticipate it, to savor its newness, he is thinking about what he wants to tell her, turning it over in his mind as he searches for the right phrase, the right tone.

She comes to him with a red bow—the prefab, stick-on kind made to put on Christmas presents—and a midnight blue chemise nightgown. In the absence of a CD player, she has turned on the radio. The college station is holding a punk rock marathon. Between songs, students compete in a mock vomiting contest.

“What do you think?” She puts her hands on her hips and tilts back her head. Her bow falls out. She bends to pick it up, offering him a view of her naked behind.

He cannot hold back what he’s been thinking since the morning he met her: “I’d like you and Mary to move in with me. I’ve got two bedrooms, and if you don’t mind a dog—he’s friendly enough, I hope Mary isn’t allergic—and if—”

Katarina makes a sound somewhere between a sigh and a laugh. She stands and drops her arms to her side. “You haven’t even touched me yet,” she says. “I might be too hot and melt you like wax. I might be too cold and turn you into a snowman.”

“No,” he says, standing quickly. “You’re just—”

She grabs his hands and puts them under her chemise, on her naked waist.
“Right,” he says. “You’re just right.”

‡ ‡ ‡

On their drives to school, Mary speaks to him only if he asks her a question. And she answers in few words. If he didn’t know her reputation at school, he might mistake her intense shyness for a learning disability. Academically, he overheard her teacher tell Katarina recently, she belongs in the fourth grade.

In his physical education classes, she doesn’t stand out either for her ability or her lack of skill. What he notices is how little noise she makes during whatever game they’re playing or whatever activity they’re doing. She never smiles or gives any other sign she is enjoying herself. On the other hand, she doesn’t mope, complain, or cry.

As Thanksgiving nears, and the silence in his truck on their morning drives continues, he asks her if she likes to sing. From the booster seat he bought her after Katarina agreed to let him drive her to school, she offers him a sliver of a smile. She is as pale and slight as Katarina. Sometimes he thinks she looks like a child model. Sometimes he think she looks like a refugee. He has the radio on, a true oldies station—music from the ’50s, his favorite—but he clicks it off. “What songs do you know?” he asks.

She only shrugs. But he knows what songs they’ve been singing in Helen Carter’s music class, and he starts with “This Land is Your Land.” He isn’t used to singing, and his voice booms in the cab of the truck. He softens it as much as he can, but he has a naturally rumbling bass, like thunder in an oil drum.

He is halfway through the song when he realizes that Mary is singing too. She sings the next song with him and the next. They sing until they’ve pulled into his parking spot at the front of the Tree of Knowledge. As usual, she rushes out of his truck as if fleeing a burning building. This time, however, she turns back and opens her mouth. Because the passenger-side window is closed, he can’t hear what she’s saying. She smiles and disappears into the school.

‡ ‡ ‡

On Thanksgiving Day, Katarina has to work at the hotel, so Martin takes Mary to his mother’s house. His mother has bought a packet of markers and three princess coloring books for her. When Mary wanders over to the African violets on the kitchen windowsill, his mother tells her how she
grew them from seed under fluorescent lights in her garage. As usual, Mary is quiet to the point of muteness. Martin warned his mother to expect this.

Other guests arrive, including three of Martin's aunts, and his mother's small house is soon full of conversation. Martin keeps half an eye on Mary as he catches up with his aunts and cousins, most of whom live within ten miles of his mother’s house.

After they’ve eaten turkey and pumpkin pie, and Martin has emerged from a daydream in which he imagined his father as the captain of a ship, he realizes Mary isn’t at the table anymore. He finds her in the den, where his mother keeps her piano, although she hasn’t played it in years. “Go ahead,” Martin says, indicating the keys. She looks at him twice before placing her small fingers on the keyboard. A moment later, she is playing—at first tentatively, then with greater ease. When she finishes the short piece, she pulls her hands from the keys and stuffs them under her thighs. She looks at her feet dangling from the piano bench.

“Wonderful,” he says. “Where did you learn how to play?”

From the kitchen, Martin hears his mother shout, “I knew those lessons would pay off eventually, Martin!”

“Where did you learn?” he asks again, this time with an urgency he can’t explain.

Quickly, she answers, “Peter.”

“Is Peter your father?” he asks. But he knows he can’t be—Katarina left Mary’s father when Mary wasn’t even a year old.

“My father’s dead,” Mary says. And without pausing, she asks, “May I go color again? Please. Please?” She looks both bashful and afraid.

“Are you sure you don’t want to play anymore?” he asks. When she nods and lowers her head and nods again, he says, “Sure. Of course.” And she leaves the room.

As Martin and Mary are leaving the house, after all but one of his aunts have left, his mother thanks him for coming and for bringing “the beautiful child” with him. (He guesses his mother has forgotten Mary’s name.) As Mary walks out the door, his mother touches him on the shoulder and he backs up a step. “I remember the last child you brought here for Thanksgiving,” she says, “the darling boy with the freckles.”

“Malcolm,” he says.

“And I remember how sad you felt when they left. Tears of a father as much as a boyfriend.”

When she says, “Be careful with your heart,” he cannot say of Katarina and Mary, “They won’t leave.”

He brings Katarina to his mother’s house the Saturday before Christ-
mas. They sit in her small living room, his mother on a couch with an orange flower pattern, Katarina on the matching armchair. They talk politely about Sherman, about Lithuania. They are about as far from each other as they can be while being in the same room. Yet Martin knows that if he kneeled between them, he’d be able to touch each with his outstretched hands.

A week before Christmas, Martin, Katarina, and Mary fit a small tree into the corner of his living room. Martin and Mary decorate it, singing carols; Katarina is tired from work, so she lies on the brown leather couch and watches them. Martin thinks, with pleasure, *The tree will still be here when Katarina and Mary move in.*

The same evening, after Mary has gone to bed, Martin suggests to Katarina that she quit one of her jobs. She was heading to the kitchen for a glass of water, but she turns around to look at him. She says she isn’t the kind of woman to depend on a man’s salary. Besides, she says, “You are no king of Wall Street.”

He waits for her customary smile to undercut her comment. When she doesn’t smile, he says, “Was Peter?” He immediately regrets it.

She approaches him across his living room with narrowed eyes. Her right fist is clenched, as if it holds a knife. “Have you been playing inquisitor with my daughter?” When she is angry, her accent becomes less pronounced and sometimes even disappears.

He reaches out to stop her but she doesn’t come any closer. “I don’t know you,” he says. “Who are you?”

“I told you.”

“I don’t believe you.” She takes a step back, as if he pushed her. But if her face showed a moment’s confusion, it resumes its looks of fury.

“All right,” she says, “here is who I am. My blood isn’t royal. I am a Jew. My mother was born in a camp. She remembered nothing, but her parents remembered everything and they told her everything she had forgotten. Is this why she kills herself when she is twenty-eight and the mother of a two-year-old daughter? And who become the guardians of the baby girl? The grandparents. The grandparents who are ghosts and are running from ghosts.”

“I’m sorry,” Martin says, and he moves to embrace her. He holds her in his arms, expecting her to cry. When she looks up, he sees her eyes are dry.

“And you?” she asks. “It is my turn to ask about you.”
He hesitates, not because he hasn’t told her the truth but because he has. He carries no revelation as dramatic as hers.

She steps back and says, “But I don’t need to hear anything from you. There is nothing to hear I haven’t heard. I see how you see yourself, and I know you believe what you see.”

He doesn’t understand what she’s saying. She moves into his arms. “This is your sweetness,” she says. “Sweet like the song of the bird who doesn’t know winter is coming. Maybe if the bird keeps singing his song, winter will never come.”

Martin says, “Some birds can live through winter.”

“But their song isn’t the same.”

Before he can respond, she takes his hand and leads him to the bedroom, stripping him not hungrily but almost in sadness.

On New Year’s Day, Martin puts their two suitcases, both an anonymous black and light, too light, surely, to contain their lives, into the back of his truck. He drives Katarina and Mary to his house and they enter it without ceremony. He has put a dozen red roses in a vase on his dining room table, which is circular and made of oak and was built by his grandfather, whom he doesn’t remember. For a long time, Katarina doesn’t notice the roses. When she does, she says, “Martin, you are so sweet, so sweet.” And she makes a show of breathing them in.

At night, with Katarina in his bed, in their bed, he wraps his arms around her, knowing he’ll only move them if she makes him. Eventually, she does shake them off—gently. Approaching sleep, she scoots toward the end of the bed and faces away from him. He places his hand as close to her naked back as he can without touching it.

He thinks, This is it. This is the way life will be.

The next moment, he thinks, When will she and Mary leave?

For a month of nights, Martin wakes up every hour, checking to see if Katarina is still in his bed. He catches catnaps in the teachers’ lounge between periods. Twice, he falls asleep during one of his classes. One time it is Mary who wakes him. She says, “You were snoring and it sounded like a donkey.”

“How do you know about donkeys?” he asks.

“Steven,” she says.

Mary is less shy with him now. She talks with him about her friends at school, music, what she would like to learn before she turns six—to swim
and to ride a horse. She would also like to learn to fly, but she knows she will have to be older to do this—maybe eight or ten.

He doesn’t ask her about Steven. He knows what the repercussions would be.

For several weeks, Martin presses Katarina to allow him to look after Mary when her school day ends at three. He has good reasons why she’d be better off with him: By ten o’clock, Mary is beyond tired, and eight hours of sleep isn’t enough for a girl in kindergarten. Even Mary, who is more quiet in his house than she is in his truck, tells Katarina: “I would like it, Mother. I could play outside until dark or I could read like I do at the bookstore or I could go with Martin to play his mother’s piano.”

On a Sunday night, when Mary is asleep, Katarina relents, but she tells Martin, “If my husband comes for her when she is with you, and if you do not fight with your life to keep her by your side until I come home, I cannot forgive you ever and I will die.” Lately she has worn her dark golden hair pulled straight back over her head. It gives her the severe look of a soldier. After her speech, she marches into their bedroom and closes the door. He thinks he can hear her crying.

After Mary finishes her school day, Martin plays badminton with her in the gymnasium that used to be a barn. She likes it when he hits the birdie into the rafters. A couple of times the birdie gets stuck and he has to retrieve it by throwing a volleyball or basketball at it.

When the weather turns warmer in the beginning of March, he plays soccer with her or they sit in the grass and she tells him stories she makes up about a princess named Mary who is lost and spends her time looking out windows—of cars, of buses, of trains—and wondering whether each house she passes is her castle.

One time after Mary’s gym class, as he’s shepherding the students back to their classroom, he hears a boy in front of him say to Mary, “You’re lucky Mr. W is your dad. You get to play games all the time.”

Martin waits for her to set the boy straight about her father. But Mary says nothing.

Whenever Katarina comes home after working at the Book and Brew, she rushes to Mary’s room, ignoring Martin’s assurances that Mary is there, asleep. He learns to leave Mary’s door open a crack so it doesn’t creak when Katarina goes into her room. After Katarina sees Mary, she is always relieved and grateful, and often she’ll come sit on his lap and they’ll share a glass of wine and she’ll call him “my sweet bear.”

Martin doesn’t ask about Peter or Steven or any other man in her life; he doesn’t ask her why Mary thinks her father is dead, although he guesses
death is the clearest explanation, an explanation to end questions. His mother could speak to the usefulness of such a lie.

During the Tree of Knowledge’s spring break in April, Martin rents a two-bedroom bungalow on Sky Lake. Katarina is given only three days off from work, but during the five days of their vacation, she relaxes in a way he never would have thought her capable of. When they’re sitting together on the flowered couch, she leans so far into him it seems like they’ve been melted together like two candles. And when she is lying on the shore in her one piece, as he teaches Mary to swim in the heated pool outside their back door, he sometimes hears her laugh at the book she’s reading or at the way a pair of butterflies frolics over her body.

On their last night in the cabin, with Mary asleep, they sit on the cushioned bench next to their back steps, staring at the small pool and, beyond it, the lake. He raises, as gently as he can, the possibility of her divorcing her husband. Immediately her face turns hard and suspicious.

He says, “I’d like…after a certain time…to ask you to marry me.”

“So you think of yourself and not of me and Mary,” she says. “You do not think how my husband will throw me from this country and I will lose my daughter forever to a hateful monster.”

“We could hire a good lawyer—the best we could find. Maybe the decision about custody would be made right here in Sherman, where people know us—where they know me, anyway.”

She laughs bitterly. “Please,” she says. “What do you know about the law? You teach volleyball to five-year-old children. And what influence do you have? You are a black man.”

He strikes her across the face so quickly he wonders if the sound he heard and the sting in his palm have sources external to him—a thunderclap and an insect bite, for instance. She reaches up to touch her cheek, as if she too cannot believe what has happened and is seeking confirmation.

“I’m sorry,” Martin says, his voice heavy with remorse. “Katarina, I’m so sorry.”

She is crying now, a fury of tears, although she remains as rigid as a statue. “No, I’m sorry,” she says. “You are a gentleman from the start. A knight.” She looks up at him. “Beautiful, brown knight.”

“I never should have hit you,” he says. Tentatively he reaches to hold her. She is stone. “I’ll never forgive myself,” he says.

She cries more, and the power of her tears surprises him and makes him
afraid. But, as quickly, her crying ceases. “It’s late,” she declares.

By the time he joins her in bed, she is asleep. Or, because her eyes are closed and her breathing is slow, she appears to be asleep. But he believes she is awake, poised to leave as soon as she can be sure he won’t hear her. He can still feel the sting on his palm.

At last, he surrenders to sleep. When he wakes and finds her next to him, sunlight streaming in the east window over which they failed to close the blinds last night, he considers it a kind of pardon.

When Katarina returns to work at the Hotel Sherman, he and Mary drop her off every morning and pick her up every afternoon. She will not hear of getting a driver’s license. He doesn’t ask her why because he knows: It will be only another record of her, a trail for her husband to follow.

Martin maintains his vigil over her at night, exhausting himself with his suspicion, his fear, that she and Mary will vanish. Sometimes he’ll catch her looking at him, as if she was the one worried about him leaving. On one of these occasions, he whispers, “How do you know when your husband is in the same town you’re in?”

“Sometimes I see his car. Sometimes I am told by someone, a friend or someone who works at a shop where I go, that a man is looking for me. Sometimes I sense him.”

Another night, he whispers, “What if I killed him?”

“Who?”

“Your husband.”

She smiles. “I have thought of this.”

“And?”

“I would probably shoot wrong the gun and hit only his finger or his toe and that would give them more reason to deport me.”

“No,” Martin says, “what if I killed him?”

“You are big and strong man, much bigger and stronger than he.” She pauses. “But you are gentle, too gentle to be a killer.” She pauses again. “But I know you love me. Thank you.”

Martin pictures murdering her husband in clever, undetectable ways, removing forever Katarina’s worries, her need to run. But he thinks she will run before her husband appears, before he has the chance to prove to her the extent of his love, the profundity of his desire to make her and Mary his family. Martin knows the pattern of his life. To women he loves, he is like his town, only a quaint and welcome rest stop.
At Mary’s graduation from kindergarten, Martin sits with Katarina and listens to Mary and her classmates sing a song about bunnies wandering lost in a field. The song reminds him of a time in high school when he missed a turn on his way to a friend’s party and, five minutes later, found himself in a place he couldn’t have imagined existed so close to Sherman. With its one intersection and its Ford pickup trucks parked in front of a shack-like building on his right, it looked like a scene from the Wild West. Stepping out of his car to ask directions, he noticed what decorated the bumpers of half the pickup trucks, and he sensed he should be afraid even if his mother had told him once that most people don’t mean anything cruel by displaying the Confederate flag. The shack was a bar, full of smoke and music played by four men in jeans and cowboy hats, two with mustaches, another with a full, gray beard. In his memory, the music stopped the second after he walked in. He said thank you and goodbye to no one in particular before climbing in his truck and finding his way back to town.

Applause breaks him from his reverie. Mary and her classmates are bowing, curtseying. He wonders if the bunnies in the song ever found their way home.

On the second Monday in June, Martin hears a knock on his front door. When he opens the door, he finds a man of his age on his front stoop, and he knows who it is immediately. Katarina’s husband is at least five inches shorter than Martin, but although he is thin, his forearms, visible because he’s wearing only a black, crewneck T-shirt, are well toned, as if he lifts weights. His brown hair is cut short, a near crew cut. He has a long, thin nose and a hard chin. He looks like a villain from the live-action version of a cartoon.

“Are they inside?” he asks. His voice isn’t as deep as Martin expected.

“Who?” Martin asks.

“Come on, man,” he says. And when Martin doesn’t move, the man pulls a pistol from his khakis. “Please view this as friendly intimidation. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen my daughter and I’d prefer to cut the red tape.”

“They’re not inside,” Martin says. Although in his fantasies he anticipated the weapon, he finds himself trembling.

“Let’s check, all right?”

When Martin doesn’t move, Katarina’s husband shakes his pistol at him and says, “Turn around, buddy.” When they’re inside, he says, “I don’t care
about Kathleen or Karen or Katarina or whatever she’s calling herself these
days. You can fuck her ‘til you go blind—be my guest. But no schizophrenic
whore is going to keep dragging my daughter around the country. If I wasn’t
so tired of this chase, you and I could sit down and have a talk about what
she’s done to me and Mary. You’d see where I was coming from. But I’m out
of patience.”

When her husband is satisfied that Katarina and Mary aren’t in the
house, he orders Martin into Martin’s truck.

“Couldn’t you do this legally—contact police, lawyers?” Martin asks.

“Make it more civil?”

“I can be plenty civil,” the man snaps back. “And I have been civil, by-
the-book civil. But I told you—I’m tired of the chase. By the time I get any
law enforcement or judge to help me, that bitch has taken Mary a thousand
miles away. I’ll handle all the legal niceties once I get Mary back. And then
you can be damn sure that crazy bitch will be back selling her cunt on street
corners in Vilnius.”

In the truck, the man leans against the door the way Katarina does. He
props the gun on his left forearm. Martin sees sweat above his lips, a liquid
mustache. “You know where they are,” he tells Martin. “Drive there. If you
drive somewhere else, I’ll kill you. You can see how tired of this I am, can’t
you? So don’t think I wouldn’t kill you.”

Martin does know where Katarina and Mary are: at a birthday party at
the Grant Park pool. Mary was looking forward to showing off her swim-
mimg skills to her classmates. Ordinarily, Martin would have gone. But a
storm the previous night had blown shingles off his roof and he wanted to
replace them. Katarina and Mary had caught a ride to the pool with Faith,
one of Mary’s classmates, and Faith’s mother.

Martin drives toward Sky Lake, toward its east end and Murderers’
Cove, where in the twenties and thirties gangsters supposedly conducted
assassinations. “Mary’s school is having a picnic,” Martin says. He hopes his
voice is reasonable, matter-of-fact.

Martin leaves the two-lane road to drive down a dirt road. He goes six
hundred feet before stopping at a dead end.

“Where are the cars?” the man asks, his teeth gritted.

“The bus dropped them. It’ll be coming back to pick them up.”

“If you’re lying, you’re dead, understand? I told you: I’ve lost patience.”

He half grunts, half sighs. “All right, damn it. Let’s go.”

They exit the truck, and Martin leads him down a narrow dirt path cut
between pine trees. Martin knows Murderers’ Cove well from when he was
a teenager, when he and his friends came here to drink. A scattering of Old
Milwaukee cans proves the tradition continues.

Martin stops. Over the next short hill is the lake. When Katarina’s husband sees it, he’ll know he has been deceived. There will be no one on the shore, no one in the water. Katarina’s husband will think this a convenient, quiet place to kill him.

Katarina’s husband is two steps behind him. “Why did you stop?” he asks. His voice is agitated, suspicious, nervous, even exasperated and desperate. For a moment, Martin allows himself to believe Katarina’s husband, believe he’s a frustrated father whose unstable wife kidnapped their daughter. But Martin pictures Katarina and Mary sitting at his dining room table, passing the mashed potatoes around, talking or saying nothing.

Martin says, “I don’t want to be around when you see them. They’ll know I betrayed them.”

Katarina’s husband holds his gun on Martin. “They’ll know anyway. Keep walking.”

Suddenly, Martin bends and grabs his knees. “Ouch!” he says. He slaps his left forearm. “Oh, shit! Shit!”

“What?” Katarina’s husband says with alarm.

“What?” Katarina’s husband looks around him, a wild turn of his eyes. This is all the distraction Martin needs; he pounces on him like a lion. Katarina’s husband lands on his back and his eyes rattle. The ground isn’t as hard as Martin would like, but with his knees pinning the man’s arms to his sides, he grabs the sides of the man’s head. He lifts his head and slams it down, lifts and slams—twenty, thirty times—until he is sure Katarina’s husband is unconscious.

Still straddling him, Martin plucks the pistol from the man’s limp right hand and shoves it into his mouth. He hesitates only long enough to assure himself of the silence, of their solitude in the cove. The gunshot is less an explosion than a loud snapping of fingers. Blood pours from both sides of the man’s head.

Martin steps back from the body and contemplates it a moment, wondering if he could simply leave it here. He is suddenly tired, exhausted. And he wants to commence the joyous errand of going to the pool and telling Katarina that she and Mary don’t have to run anymore, everything is all right now. He could come back for the body tonight. How likely is it that anyone would find it before tonight?

But if the body is found, the police would identify it. They would talk to Katarina. They would talk to him. He would be taken to jail, she would be deported. She would never forgive his clumsiness, his stupidity.
He removes the man’s shirt and ties it like a bandana around his head. He pulls the body off the pool of blood and covers the blood with dirt and pine needles and other debris he finds on the side of the trail.

Martin is about to pick up the body and drag it to his truck when he hears voices from the lake. In a fury of strength, he drags the body off the trail and into the dense growth of pine trees on his left. The voices come closer. Martin turns and peers from behind a pine tree. He sees a man and woman—or a boy and girl, they can’t be older than sixteen—spreading a blanket in a modest clearing a few feet from where he covered up the blood. No doubt they came by canoe from the other side of the lake. They’re here to drink, smoke marijuana, screw.

They do all of this. Afterwards, the boy walks to within ten feet of where Martin is hiding behind a pine tree. If he looks up, Martin thinks, I’ll have to kill him. I’ll have to kill them both. But the boy, whose black hair curls like a wave over his forehead and into his eyes, is looking down, watching his stream of urine. A minute later, he returns to his girlfriend. They lounge on the red blanket, and they infuriate Martin with their talk about nothing important.

The boy and girl stay until dusk. When they fold up their blanket and stroll back to the lake, to their rowboat or canoe, he thinks again of abandoning the body. Katarina and Mary came home hours ago, Martin knows. Katarina saw her husband’s car in the driveway. Martin tries to imagine her going to the police, telling them everything. But he knows what she did, and this is a relief and a curse.

He drags the body to his truck and, with no small effort, lifts it into the bed. He covers it with a green tarp he bought with such a far-fetched possibility in mind. He drives with unusual care to his house.

He parks his truck in his driveway. He pulls the man’s car keys from his pocket and parks his Mercury in his garage. He goes inside his house, where his dog howls as if he’s a stranger, and looks in Mary’s bedroom. The drawers are empty. So are the drawers of Katarina’s bureau.

He calls Patricia Knott, the mother of the birthday girl. “Oh, they left just after we had cake at around two,” she says. In a softer voice, she asks, “Is something wrong?”

His “no” is quick and sounds so false that, to prevent her from asking anything else, he hangs up.

He calls the Greyhound Bus terminal. No one answers. He thinks to call U.S. Airways, which flies four flights a day into and out of Sherman. He knows no one would tell him whether Katarina and Mary were on a flight. If they didn’t take the bus or fly, they could have hired a van to drive them
to Cleveland or Columbus. There are two such services in town, but no one answers at either.

He peels off his clothes, which he knows he’ll have to burn or bury or dispose of in another permanent way, and shoves them into a garbage bag, which he puts in a closet. After he showers and puts on fresh clothes, Martin steps outside. He wants to begin his search now, but he knows he must deal with the body first. Martin didn’t know, until he passed his mother’s house on the way to his, how he would dispose of it. He throws a shovel next to the body in the back of his truck. Feeling feverish, he goes inside to drink water and eat something. He barely feels the food in his mouth, the water in his throat.

He knows he must wait until it’s later and darker, when the chance of being seen is smaller. At a quarter to midnight, he drives to Shadow Hill cemetery, to the spot where he is to be buried next to his mother, and digs. He finishes three hours later. He forgot to bring water, and he thinks he might faint. He throws the body in. The body lands awkwardly on its side. Martin thinks about leaving it this way, but he climbs into the grave and turns it over, so its face is up. He hears Katarina’s husband say, “I only want to see my daughter.” Martin covers the body with dirt. This takes longer than he expects, but by the time he restores the grass in front of the tombstone, the place looks little different than when he came. The darkness and the willow trees have hidden him from the few cars that passed on the road two hundred feet above him.

Martin drives home and drinks three glasses of water. He lets Mercury outside and calls him back ten minutes later. He goes into his bedroom and sets the alarm, although he knows it’s an unnecessary gesture. His sleep is shallow, and he is up two hours and forty-five minutes later, at seven.

He puts a note in his mother’s mailbox. He is waiting for Dr. Andrews at her veterinary clinic when she opens at eight. He leaves Mercury to board with her. In his truck, he drives to the Greyhound station and accosts the clerk, who is sleepy and unshaven, with pictures of Katarina and Mary. Martin used to see the clerk, whose name is Frankie, all the time at the Above and Beyond Club. He even remembers Frankie’s favorite drink: vodka and cranberry juice. And his favorite dancer: Becca Bonzer.

Now Frankie looks at Martin as if Martin has just stepped off a bus from Mars. “Never seen them,” Frankie says.

“They might have been on your three o’clock bus to Cleveland,” Martin says. “Or your four-thirty to New York. Or your five-fifty to Columbus. You were working yesterday, Frankie. I know you work both shifts here.”

Frankie isn’t looking at Martin or the photos anymore but has returned
to looking at something on his computer.

“Come on, Frankie,” Martin says, “she’s my woman, she’s the woman I’m going to marry.”

“I’m sorry,” Frankie says, tapping on his keyboard.

Martin reaches across the counter and grabs Frankie by the collar of his blue golf shirt. “Damn it, Frankie, I know there’s a very good chance they were on one of those busses.”

“If you don’t take your hand off me, I’m going to call the police,” Frankie says. “I may call them anyway.”

“Don’t you know who I am, Frankie?” Martin says, releasing his collar even as he feels like breaking his neck.

Frankie picks up the phone. “It’s obvious who you are,” Frankie says. “You’re someone who wants to hurt innocent people.”

Martin isn’t certain who he means by “people.” Katarina and Mary? Frankie and whoever might come into the station? Frankie punches a 9 on the phone and Martin leaves.

The thin woman with the salt-and-pepper hair at the check-in counter at U.S. Airways is the mother of one of his former students. Even if her name hadn’t been printed on the tag above her breast, he would have remembered it. And although she shows no indication of ever having met him, he begins his query informally, “Rhoda, how are you? How’s Cindy?”

He pauses, waiting for a response. There is none.

“I’m desperate here, Rhoda, and it would take too much explaining to tell you why, but I’d like to, I need to, know if there was a woman named Katarina or Karen or maybe…I don’t know, I guess it could be any name… and her daughter, Mary. They might have caught a flight yesterday, and if they did, I need to know where they went.”

“That information,” Rhoda says slowly, as if she is speaking to a foreigner, “is confidential.”

“I know, I know. But you know me, I was Cindy’s phys-ed teacher—I taught her how to shoot a hook shot, remember? The woman, Katarina, she’s my fiancée, but something happened—not between us but with her ex-husband.”

Rhoda has taken a step back from the counter. He has the feeling she is looking for a button to press. He begins pleading again, and in the midst of his own quick, desperate words, he hears her say, “Security.” He looks to his right. Down the hallway, a heavyset man in a blue uniform is approaching as fast as someone can without running.

It is Martin who runs. In his truck, he wonders if Frankie contacted Rhoda. He wonders if one of them might have, in fact, sold a ticket to Kata-
rina, who might have begged Frankie or Rhoda to please keep her destination a secret because of the man who was following her. He can hear her say: “He wants to kill me. We are in danger. Please.”

*But they know me,* Martin thinks. *They know I wouldn’t hurt a woman or a child. But they looked at me like I was a goddamn stranger.*

When he’s at a red light, he moves the rearview mirror so he can see his face. It stares back at him tired, desperate, and dark.

He stops at P.J.’s Rides, and even before he’s two steps into the office, P.J., whom he used to play basketball against in high school, holds up his hand in a stop signal and says, “If she wants to contact you, partner, she will.” (P.J. spent a summer in Texas when he was fourteen, and forever afterwards, when he has felt like he can get away with it, he has called men “partner” and women “cowgirl.”)

“So one of your drivers took Katarina and Mary somewhere?” Martin asks. “Will you please tell me where, P.J.?”

“You’re jumping to conclusions, partner,” says P.J., who’s standing behind a large oak desk. P.J. is barely point-guard sized, and with his goatee and his shining scalp, he looks like a Russian revolutionary from one of Martin’s high school history textbooks. “I knew you were coming, thanks to an anonymous tip—well, anonymous to you, anyway.”

Martin has never liked P.J., although he has never especially wanted to beat his face to dust. Now he rushes forward, his fist cocked. P.J. removes a black revolver from the top drawer of his desk and points it at Martin’s chest.

“Don’t think I wouldn’t mind sending your pathetic ass into eternity,” P.J. says.

Martin is still and silent.

“We always knew you had trouble in you.”

“What the hell do you mean?” Martin says.

“You couldn’t be Mama’s angel boy forever. Daddy’s black devil heart was gonna beat in you sooner or later.”

“Come on, P.J.” Martin finds himself feeling exasperated and sick to his stomach.

“Go on, partner.” P.J. shakes the gun at him. “Go put some ice on it. It’ll behave.”

Martin wants to say, I’ve already murdered one man. What’s another one?

It takes all of his fortitude to turn and walk out the door.

The other car service in town, Gonzalo’s Viajes, opened four months before and caters to residents of Sherman’s Spanishville, composed chiefly of
immigrants from Central America. The man in the office, which is decorated with tourists posters of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, says he was working yesterday but he didn’t see a blond-haired woman and her daughter.

Martin is grateful for the man’s honesty. He is deflated by his message.

At noon, Martin drives out of town in the Mercury. He decides to go west, thinking Katarina might see it as offering the most possibilities, the widest space in which to hide. At a rest stop one hundred miles out of Sherman, he stuffs the clothes he wore the previous day, sprinkled in places with blood, into a trashcan. He knows he’ll have to ditch the Mercury eventually, although he doubts anyone will be looking for Katarina’s husband; he didn’t seem the kind of man who would have relatives or a girlfriend who would care enough about him to call the police. On the other hand, he can’t be sure. And he would hate to pull into a town where Katarina and Mary were staying only to have them see the car and flee again.

At his first stop, in Columbus, he goes to the Greyhound station. At the ticket counter, he holds up the photograph of Katarina and Mary. The clerk, who is white and at least sixty, says he hasn’t seen them, but he wasn’t working yesterday. Martin asks if he knows where someone might go to stay if they were new in town and didn’t have much money. The clerk directs him to the YMCA four blocks from the station. At the Y, the woman behind the counter, whose skin is the same color as his, steps back when he holds up the photograph of Katarina and Mary.

“Have you seen them?” he asks.

She shakes her head.

“Are you sure?” he demands.

She takes another step back and looks around as if hoping to find someone to protect her.

He leans over the counter. If he wanted, he could grab the woman by her yellow blouse. “You don’t even know me,” he tells the woman. “I could be a prince, for all you know.”

“A prince in the YMCA?” she asks. She seems calmer, as if she knows help is on the way. And it is: The door to Martin’s right opens and in steps a man as tall as Martin but with darker skin, skin like ebony. His head is shaved and he has a large gold stud in his right ear.

“Is there anything I can help you with?” he asks Martin. The whites around his irises are luminous, hot.

Martin holds up his pictures and asks his question. His voice is a supplicant. He is so tired he wants to cry.

“I’m sorry,” the man says. This is all he says, and Martin cannot tell
whether he has seen Katarina and Mary and isn’t saying or whether he’s denying seeing them. He feels his blood rise. But he knows he would gain only trouble by threatening the man.

Both the man and the woman look at him without feeling. “Back home,” Martin tells them, gesturing in the general direction of Sherman. But he doesn’t complete whatever he wanted to tell them. Whatever he intended to say is no longer true. Tears flood his eyes, and he exits the YMCA before they see him cry.

In the Mercury, he looks at himself in the rearview mirror. What he sees are Katarina and Mary slipping into a dark, impossible distance.

Over the course of the summer, Martin visits small towns from Bowling Green, Ohio, to Sunrise, Arizona. He places advertisements in hundreds of newspapers—*Katarina and Mary: The problem is solved. Please call me or come back. Martin*—even though he has never seen Katarina read a newspaper.

The Mustang quits on him outside of Las Vegas.

In Santa Fe, New Mexico, the clerk at the Motel 6, a pale teenager with acne and body piercings everywhere, tells him with a shrug that his credit card isn’t being accepted. Martin calls the company and is told he will not be extended more credit. “Our records show you haven’t paid your last two bills.”

It is August 6th. His mother allows him to use her credit card to buy a bus ticket from Santa Fe (via Dallas, Birmingham, and Columbus) to Sherman. He arrives not having eaten in four days. He is a year’s salary in debt.

On the first Sunday of Martin’s return, after he and his mother have finished egg salad and three quarters of an apple pie, his mother says, “I don’t know if it was brave or foolish of you to run after her. If she left without a trace, she didn’t want to be found.”

He wants to tell her that Katrina wasn’t like the other women he’d been with, her situation was different. But as he thinks what he’ll say, the story sounds convoluted and preposterous, a scorned man’s fantasy.

“And it sure was nice of Dr. Andrews to give you a break on boarding Mercury,” she says. “Even so, you could have bought your dog a house for what you owe her.”

“I suppose,” he says. He decides to agree with everything his mother says. He is too tired for any kind of argument. Besides, winning the argument wouldn’t bring back Katarina and Mary. And he’s concerned, if only
in a place in himself he would prefer not to acknowledge, that she, too, will turn on him, will come, like others in Sherman, to look at him with suspicion, displeasure, and fear.

Sometimes Martin talks to his telephone. He commands: “Ring!” He says, “Please, ring! Please? Please?” He holds out hope that even if Katarina, paranoid, perhaps, of her husband tapping his line, would never call, Mary might. But he wonders why Mary should treat him with any more distinction than the other men who have loved her and have been left, casualties of a madness Martin no longer believes was the sole domain of Katarina’s husband.

And often he thinks: She’s with another man. I’ve ended the threat to her safety, and another man will have what I want and deserve. Another man will have what is mine—my wife, my daughter.

Often, he cannot sleep. When he does sleep, he frequently wakes up late, missing his first class and sometimes his second. One day, he sleeps until noon, and when he calls the Tree of Knowledge to say he’s on his way, the principal tells him to take the rest of the day off.

On another Sunday, over lunch, Martin agrees with his mother that while some towns have certain attractions and other towns have different attractions, Sherman offers as much, in its own way, as any of them. He agrees that people might be friendly elsewhere, but no friendlier than they are in Sherman, especially when they come to know you. Staying where you live, he agrees, saves you the headache and expense of realizing you were in the right place from the start.

And on another Sunday, Martin agrees with his mother that he has a sad tendency to fall in love with “mercurial women and their innocent offspring.”

“Not that I haven’t been guilty of some romantic foolishness myself—even after your father,” she says. She reaches across the picnic bench and puts her hand on his. “Eventually, you accept a life of smaller pleasures—a lazy late summer day, a funny TV show, handing out candy and admiring all the kids’ costumes on Halloween. Maybe they’re the real signs of God’s grace.”

As usual, Martin nods, his mind in a future he’ll never have.

Every Sunday after lunch, regardless of the weather, Martin walks down to Shadow Cemetery and stops at his gravesite. He always wonders who he buried there. When he’s fired from the Tree of Knowledge, when the owner of the Above and Beyond Gentlemen’s Club tells him he isn’t hiring despite the sign in the window, when the best job he can secure is custodial work at the Hotel Sherman, he comes to think it was himself.
ETERNITIES

Charles Simic

Discreet reader of discreet lives.
Chairs no one ever sits in.
Motes of dust, their dancing days done.
Schools of yellow fish
On the peeling wall paper
Keeping their eyes on you.
It’s late for today, late.
A small crucifix over the bed
Watches over a stopped clock.
THE END OF A PARADE

Charles Simic

The quickly-dispersing few
Who’d seen it pass down the avenue,
Were not able to tell me
What was being commemorated.

Rows of unsmiling children
Dressed in black went by listlessly
Carrying small white flags.
Then came men slumped in wheelchairs,
Followed by others on crutches.

There was a marching band, too,
That never played a note
And an old Italian selling ices
Who shrugged his shoulders
When I asked him why not?
THE FOREST THAT HEARS AND THE FIELD THAT SEES

Mary Jo Bang

It’s one half of your head, right? Or is it
The inside? Yes, I think that’s where
These earthly flourishes have taken root.
And who else is in there? Other than the raptors?

Little Fuzzy Wuzzy with his zee-features, posing
As a flattened panda left over from playtime.
And a silver streak machine-age train bearing down,
Its last-century light brightening photography’s far edge

In an O. Winston Link image of a train at night.
I hear nothing in the see-nothing night but sense motion.
The Hear-Nothing-See-Nothing Elegy
Swells the passionate ache for the owl-eyed beloved

Who is half-hidden in the tree, leaves at his feet.
Fallen leaves and lost senses. Eyes and ears
And a brain. The delicate elegant brain that dreams
Of a train that stops for nothing.

Jerome van Aken, also known as Hieronymus Bosch, The Forest That Hears and the Field That Sees, c. 1500, charcoal on paper
This is what he couldn’t see—  
The sea path, rocks smashed past vertical  
From some previous TNT force.  
He was done for. He was over.

Yet her mind ticked  
With his still presence. How does one live  
With sorrow? His hand on her shoulder  
Saying, your love

Of precision will only get you in trouble.  
Your sense of lack will too.  
She dreamed him alive and ill.  
Pieta-like. She dreamed him

At every age. Ten and less. Fourteen and taller.  
The tick ticking back and forward like the sea  
Crashing against the wet black rock  
Of clarity and circumstance.

The skating scene seen again  
And again, against the replay of a fever at four,  
The day in May when he was in withdrawal  
And a doctor said almost and dead.

Words from linear lips.  
They watched while he ate white ice cream  
With a wooden spoon. He said, My  
Doesn’t this taste good?

Leading everyone to believe he meant to live  
Forever. Now she was sickened  
By the ephemeral essence of recollection.
**TWO POEMS OF LEAVE-TAKING, AFTER CATULLUS**

*Bryan Narendorf*

Furius and Aurelius, friends, whether I go to sound the far eastern waves in India or rough it on the Black Sea or lounge with the Arabs, if I go to dart-happy Parthia or settle among the Hycanii or stand gape-mouthed at the delta of the Nile, then cross the Alps, Caesar’s monuments, and the barbarous Rhine and the English Channel to end up in Britain, wherever the gods will, you who would be my companions, take my girl this short note:

Cunt, live and prosper with your 300 fuckers. Let them caress you and know that I know you enjoy only their breaking balls against your thigh. Don’t think of me—I did love you—a flower in a far field nicked by a swerve of the passing plough.

├─────

Past everyone else, over flat waters, I come to rites with address for your mute jetsam. For nothing. Fortune has thieved you from me. Take these sheddings—the ancients gave gifts in stead—these diurnal tears, into wide night, brother, *ave atque vale.*
Poem Beginning with an Architect’s Statement of Faith

Bryan Narendorf

You struggle and maybe
an unexpected beauty happens.
A picture turns to weather;
the wall, a valley floor.

Water falls and fills
with windows, each filled
by different prospects
of the same bearded slope.

Sirius adds its extra heat
to trees that drop
their perfect fruit, knobs
free from doorish tyranny.

O, the work these need
is joyous and anyone’s guess.
FLYING THROUGH STONE

Allan Peterson

a woman’s figure picks fruit while passing

The scapegoat Eve rendered beautifully

by Giselbertus at Autun

given just enough wind in limestone for lift

and before me enough to rumple the heaven

almost close enough

to see hair like rippled sand like wavelets

in the form of a shudder for love
In the kitchen with linoleum and glass,
an enameled sink and steel
refrigerator or the other way around,
we could hear almost nothing
of Terry’s urgent rendition of St. Luke.
The ceramic platters, the stainless,
nothing to stick to, everyone talking at once,
a secular thunder loose
in the kitchen, sound bouncing like lasers
from mirrors till nothing
more could fit, not another physicist, not
the reflective evangelist, not
the spirits of the clanging and biblical dead.
All This Instead

Allan Peterson

He wanted it special so he planned on releasing
a dozen white doves sent from Connecticut
after reading the passage from Psalms
and the words especially written by his cousin
the poet composed he said as if music itself.
And the rows of oak so the sound deflected
and combined above the audience in a way
fractal like the galaxy and the same was true
above the ushers wearing gloves with a button
at the place where the palmeris longus meets
and feathers into the flexor retinaculum.
All this instead of just stepping into the garden
as it was where one *vanessa* might be nectaring a rose.
Ratifying Kyoto

Peter Robinson

In a transitory light, you see
low sun’s throwing elongated shadows
of branches, wires, telephone poles;
it’s casting them across snow remnants
or a house wall’s second storey
where your own, entangled with them,
(as if you were that shadow cast)
tells of only chill deferrals—
no end of them at a winter’s end.

It’s one of those underprivileged moments
when the protocols of snow
are pushed aside to exhaust neglect,
when, talk notwithstanding, some holes
are poked in the sky, in the sky
and in our arguments.

So you ratify Kyoto
criss-crossing the city in search of traces
where each grief and trauma
came to be expressed: you’re here
to find a future habitat, a home, or
roof above our heads at least; the space is
still sadder, no wiser and you,
you haven’t a pallid idea.
THE LAST OF HUMAN

Nathaniel Tarn

Now this is man, coming toward you, before his side is presented to you and then his back is glimpsed by you dissolving in far distance—whether it be mountain or sea, it little matters. You notice him crowned with all knowledge—proven by paper particles falling around his feet, each one inscribed not with a word alone (as in a dictionary tumbled toward his shoes) but whole ideas, concepts, theories of lives and ends, what has been called at times “theory of everything.” Before him walks, transparent to him—and more so to you—wholly invisible, the girl Sophia, breasts bare, voluminous, and nipples raining warm milk of wisdom, also to the ground. This man, coming toward you, backing away from you, he wears that smile so temperate, a peaceful countenance, noble demeanor in every gesture, informing you he has derived the keys from all philosophy, believes he’s gained his expensive “wisdom.” He marched from all his gods into mankind and now must access stone. Not only stone but frozen stone: or if you wish, the thing as such—call it accessing thingliness. Now he is leaving: there’s no doubt of it. And as he goes, his coasts crumble away, his beaches bleed, his fields and forests rot in the sun, his hills and mountains break, revealing little gold, silver or other treasure that you might have hoped for—even his skies collapse around him, without a single diamond for all those crippled stars. The landscape you might say is dissolution, nothing appearing in its wake save ice. Now a small radio in someone’s hand, some one of you, (computers have been down for a few days) announces in a joyful
voice, you feel the smile, together with appeals for you to purchase this or that product: “Be it now known to you (about that man) that all his kin and folk, widespread acquaintance in all lands, friendships with great and small, all died preceding him in the gigantic fall for which he had not thought to build museums so that some specimens might survive of this whole world.”
And you stand here watching him go, thinking you own your kin, possessions, in hologrammic order, well kept, secure, needing no record, list, photograph, no deep insurance. Look at your feet now where you are, as he goes forward of you on his way, see our last island crack under those feet, experience the water start to freeze your ankles, soles and toes. “Last chance now,” Sophia whispering—as her milk also cools on unforgiving ice.
That there should be islands. Specified by the ocean which needs a place to rest its waves. (In the great deep, you understand—not neighbors to familiar coasts). The islands should be green, not common green but devastating green. With green that, seen at sea, takes out the eyes of sailors and blinds them to all colors else. Each made up of a vastitude of trees. Edenic garden. But pyramid from the *peripleukos’s* view, as if there were a central trunk and the whole island were one tree at the heart. Tree’s base: a cave and, in the cave, a weaver. All have the divine right to that—if not divine, then human should suffice. (There’s always been a thing like human right.) As travelers approach, they deem any one of these islands—the one detected and approached—is a home once owned for aeons. For not one of these travelers totals a human: there is some wariness as to their status. What they have harbored dreams of for so long is that this should be truth of any traveling—that any island whatsoever reached (including those they journey on to later) should feature a same tree, that cave, that weaver. Where they arrive, and at that place alone, a host of strangers gathers in the entrance and pleads daily and nightly with the weaver. By definition, though, by protocol, she will refuse. She does not still await a homer. She has long lost all interest in that. It’s only that she knows every lone roamer has this dream not that he will be known but that he’s recognized. And taken by the spirit of the place. And that the spirit bears the place’s name and is his addict for that place. These hierogamies were structured long ago, struck to the very texture of all things and of the total song of thing. There’s no deletion possible.
While the oncomer takes unlikely, childish pleasure in the birds’ colors on the many trees, the weavers sing a music which he has never heard before. Yet he suspects he is familiar with that music and with the air foaming above the pyramid, floating the birds. Feel free to switch the “he” into a “she.” Some men weave too from time to time among perilous waters.

Kimbe Bay, New Britain, 08.06
Many years ago, before the sexual revolution, my former college roommate was living in sin with a married man. I envied Franny’s daring life, a far cry from my own boring existence as a graduate student in English. Franny was blessed with a wonderful temperament. Although she fell into many troubles with her lover, Franny never grew downcast or depressed. Unlike my other friends, she never complained or whined; her conflicts made wonderful stories. I was always pleased to hear about them over a cup of tea.

One day Franny suggested fixing me up with Simon’s French friend who was in town for the week. Although I’d always been dubious about Simon—he was self-absorbed, something of a bully—it was entirely possible that his friend was kind and charming. We agreed to double date at Keene’s English Chop House and gorge on mutton. Claude, an academic on his way to the University of Chicago, would pay for everything, because Simon, an unemployed actor, was broke as always, and Franny’s mother had cut off her allowance again. In the custom of the day, Claude would pay my check, too, on the off-chance I might someday become his wife.

Franny and Simon were wholly unreliable, so I wasn’t surprised when they didn’t show up at my place at the appointed hour. When Claude rang the bell, I faced him alone, and alone faced my disappointment. In one sluggish moment I saw we would not attract.

In retrospect, I see Claude Dupont as a man well ahead of his time. A heavy-set, densely bearded fellow in plaid shirt and dungarees, he made no effort to please. When I tried to engage him in conversation, he responded like a hostile witness under questioning by the D.A. He was the first man I ever met who wore hiking shoes socially. I stared in dismay as he rested these clumpy shoes on my delicate beige velvet ottoman.

While we were sitting in baffled silence, the telephone rang. It was Franny, cheerful as always.

“Where are you, Franny? Claude is here and we are running out of conversation.”

“We had to change our plans a little. We met Melinda Wyman in Central Park and she invited us to dinner. I know you’d love to meet her husband. He’s a Broadway producer.”

“Are you joking? I despise Melinda. I’ve always despised her. We’re traditional enemies.”
“Be that as it may, you’re invited to dinner. It’s a dinner party. Get over here right this minute.”

Franny was using the same tone of voice I had used to describe my horrible situation with Claude in front of Claude, so I understood that she was driving at something she didn’t want revealed to Melinda. But what on earth was it?

“Honestly, Franny, can’t you forget about this?”

“No, I can’t. Listen, Sue, take a cab, and rush to 1010 Fifth Avenue, apartment 26A, Eldorado 3-6340. We need you urgently. I am absolutely not kidding.”

With that she hung up. Claude looked over at me and yawned. I decided to dislodge Claude (whom I had begun to think of as Clod) from my ottoman, take him to Fifth Avenue and dump him.

Once moving along in the taxicab, Claude finally began to speak. He told me that he was a Marxist, didn’t like Chicago, New York, the capitalist system or American women. He was just warming to the evils of French vs. American imperialism when we reached 1010 Fifth Avenue, but he paid the cab fare without any fuss and let the pickled-looking elevator man in white gloves whisk us up to the twenty-sixth floor.

Once Claude reached the marble foyer hung with gilt-framed pictures of hunting dogs, he balked. “Pardon me. I will not stay.” He was just looming back toward the elevator when Franny thrust open the front door.

“Claude, don’t go away,” she said. “We need you.” Taking him by the elbow, she steered us inside.

I expected a bright crowded party scene. To my surprise we saw a darkened living room where we discovered Simon and Melinda sitting in depressed tableau before a small fire in an enormous fireplace.

“Well, Sue,” said Melinda in a voice that made me wish I’d stayed home.

From the kitchen her husband, Edward, appeared, carrying a little silver tray with a bowl of caviar, toast and a spoon. I couldn’t see a trace of a dinner party or the spoor of any other guest, and everyone, even the ebullient Franny, was subdued.

“Where did everyone go?”

Melinda gave me a look of contempt. “We’ve given up entertaining on a lavish scale.”

When we first met at college at a welcoming tea for incoming freshmen, Melinda wore a slinky black jersey dress and gold Cleopatra bracelets up and down one white arm. I was sure she was a thirtyish alumna sent to help us with our course selection. Melinda was a drama major with a trademark
throary voice. She was dynamic in the only role I ever saw her play, Natasha, the horrible sister-in-law in Three Sisters. Typecasting, everybody said.

After graduation Melinda snared Edward and produced an infant, whose presence was marked solely by a chocolate-brown pram parked in the entrance hall. Motherhood had changed Melinda’s shape, though not her disposition. She now had big ripe breasts, as well as, I was pleased to note, a trembly little chin.

Claude, meanwhile, seated himself in a low cushioned chair some distance from the rest of us. Simon approached Claude, bent down and whispered something. I couldn’t see Claude’s face, only the aggressive-looking black curls on the back of Simon’s neck. They both laughed.

Edward undertook his duties as host by describing the television program he’d seen the night before. He was a well-groomed man with white wings of hair at his temples, though he couldn’t have been more than a year or two out of his twenties. Because of his regular features and even milk-white teeth, Melinda referred to him as her “leading man.”

As soon as possible I followed Franny into the kitchen where she was helping herself to more caviar from the refrigerator.

“Why did you lure us here?”

“Shh.” She closed the kitchen door. “Because I needed you to rescue us. We’re in a funny situation. Melinda and Edward asked us here for a swap.”

I goggled. I had heard about such things, of course, but…. “How did it happen? Did they ask you right out?”

“They told us it was a dinner party, but as you can see . . . the fridge is empty. They kept saying they liked intimate parties. When Edward asked me if I wanted to see his map collection in the library, I stupidly said yes. When we got back, Melinda and Simon were glued together, supposedly dancing, though there wasn’t any music. I pinched Melinda and she didn’t even notice—you can see how sex-crazed she is.”

“So why not leave?”

“Well, I thought Simon might still get a part.”

I looked at her in pity. “Would you really sell him like that?”

“And worst of all, Edward isn’t a producer. He’s a mere investor.”

“Let’s leave right now.”

“Edward’s family owns two department store chains. If nothing else turns up, he can probably get Simon an executive position.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to ask your mother for some money?”

Franny was a champion evader of questions. She smiled and dumped more caviar on her spoon. “Caviar is all they serve.” She tapped her head wisely. “Aphrodisiac.”
“Why did you include me, anyway? You didn’t think that I….” I began sputtering “. . . would t-take on Edward for you?”

“No, really I had Claude in mind. Melinda is the aggressive one. She adored the idea of a visiting Frenchman.”

“You must be insane, Franny.”

“Well, I’m practical.” Franny, who had never needed to make her own way in the world, did have a knack for survival.

“I hate to tell you, Franny. Claude is not interested in American women. He’s not interested in women at all, I think. Let’s leave him here, just in case, and you can reap any benefits later on.”

We returned to the living room where old Guy Lombardo foxtrots played on the hi-fi. Franny began dancing with Simon, while I took a turn around the room with Edward. We danced cheek to cheek; it was the equivalent of a bread and butter note for me.

Edward’s grip on me was gentle, and his cheek was papery-smooth, as though he’d ironed it. Just as I’d predicted, Claude remained glued to his chair while Melinda leafed through *Vogue* by firelight.

After a while we switched partners. The way Simon began swivelling his pelvis against me, I grew sure that swapping techniques were not unknown to him. I wondered about his sudden sexual fit. When he wasn’t ignoring me, he usually treated me like his brother. Was it really the caviar? He was perspiring freely; his whole body gave off heat. Although real logs burned in the fireplace, it was a warmish October night.

I suppose you could say the party began warming up when Claude rose monumentally from his chair and from his plaid pocket produced a Marlboro box containing three puny-looking cigarettes. Silently he offered one to Simon and one to Franny.

“Holy Moly!” Simon cried. “Mary Jane!”

I had never seen marijuana before. It was not yet even the Sixties. Normally I’d be fearful of police arrest, but it’s easy to be bold when you’re twenty-six stories above Fifth Avenue. I dragged and puffed, imitating Claude’s narrow-eyed concentration, but to little effect.

“Claude, you’re welcome here day or night,” Melinda said gratefully. “Dressed any way you wish.”

In a while Franny and Simon rose and began dancing again in the shadows, rocking gently in place and humming *When the tune ends, we’re dancing in the dark.*

“Would you give up millions to live with a jerk like Simon?” Melinda asked. “How birdbrained can you get?”

Disgusted, I turned my back on her to wander through her apartment.
Bypassing the nursery, I walked through Melinda’s bedroom, stared at her kingsize bed chastely covered with a Grandmother’s Dream quilt. Behind the bed was a locked-grill bookcase filled with handsome leather volumes, which I assumed were either irreplaceable, pornographic or fake.

Soon I found myself peering into Edward’s closet, a wall-papered room with racks of jackets and ties that twirled, and shelves of tissue-papered shirts. I entered the closet, pulled the light cord, and sat down on a little step shaped like a prayer stool; it seemed a nice place to be alone and sulk.

“Here you are.” Franny poked her head in after me, then set her narrow rear down on two flat-topped boot stretchers. She still had her joint. I thought the closet a hazardous place for smoking and made ready to bolt at a moment’s notice.

“Nice here,” Franny said.

“Listen,” I complained. “I can’t stand your being nice to Melinda. She’s such a creep.”

Franny leaned closer. We were hemmed in by shoes and riding boots, our faces jammed together.

“I’m pregnant,” she said, “so Simon has to get money.”

“Oh, wonderful,” I squealed, kissing her unsmiling cheek. “Aren’t you happy?”

Franny didn’t look happy. “Mummy has already stopped paying the rent. She’ll cut me and my bastard right out of her will.”

“Why must you have a bastard? Why doesn’t Simon get a divorce?”

“Or why don’t I get an abortion?” Franny mused, as if thinking aloud. “Because we don’t have any money.” She gave me a speculative look.

I hadn’t winced when she mentioned abortion. I couldn’t imagine Simon and Franny soaking diapers in a pail with Boraxo, or remembering to stock up on formula for the Fourth of July weekend.

“Actually, if each of my friends gave me fifty dollars, I could definitely arrange it. I know a good doctor in Cuba.”

“Don’t you want a baby?”

“Of course, I do. It’s great. My breasts are starting to get big already, haven’t you noticed? But we can always have one later, when we’re more responsible.”

As Franny giggled and leaned against me, the door of the closet swung slowly closed. Suddenly there was a dramatic cloud of smoke swirling around us, as though we were in a little pocket of hell.

“According to my gynecologist I have a tipped uterus and can’t easily conceive. A one hundred to one shot, he said. You know what that means? Simon must be pretty potent.”
I suppose I didn’t look sufficiently impressed, because she hesitated a few seconds, then produced her final secret.

“To be truthful, Sue, I’ve already been in Havana once this year.” She lifted her chin proudly and dragged in more smoke. “Financed with my own nickels and dimes. I didn’t even tell Simon. Pretty potent, that one, yes?”

Suddenly the door jerked open, and Franny gave a genuine shriek of fright. It was only Edward. One couldn’t complain because Edward had opened his own closet door. Yet afterward I felt queasy, as though something from my stomach had caught in my throat. My tongue felt stuck in my own mouth. Was this a little-known effect of marijuana?

When I reentered the living room, I was astonished to find that Melinda had taken off her clothes and was lying face down on the fluffy rug in front of the fire, her smooth rear gleaming. A few inches away Edward and Simon were chatting about the films of Ingmar Bergman, as though Melinda were invisible rather than naked. Claude had his eyes closed.

Franny began dancing by herself to the stereo, waving her slender arms crazily, jerking her head. How had she grown so high in the space of one minute?

Then I noticed Simon casually nudging Melinda’s thigh with his socked foot.

I imagined forthcoming events.

Soon Simon would strip off his clothes and lie on the rug beside Melinda. Giggling, Franny would take off her clothes and fondle Simon. Edward in a very self-effacing way would take off his clothes to stroke and fondle Simon and Fanny, possibly Melinda, too. It was hard to imagine Claude disrobing, but under the circumstances wouldn’t he feel ridiculous dressed?

What about me? How would I feel?

For a moment I tried to put myself in a participatory spirit by imagining Edward’s gentle hand on my breast, his naked body against me. It would be like embracing a handful of bean sprouts.

I switched to Claude. I felt slightly titillated as I visualized a mossy, bull-like body hurtling toward me, but then I saw bearded lips flecked with spittle, drops of blood, and I grew frightened.

The only one it worked with was Simon. I could easily imagine myself and Simon.

Now I must state the truth. I went home. Sorry to disappoint, but believe me, there was no way for me to stay and watch and continue to be myself. Oddly enough, the few times I’ve repeated this story to other people, my listener always had similar stories to tell me back. (“And in the bathtub

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was this beautiful girl I’d never seen before and she smiled so invitingly and patted the edge of the tub…” The world is full of cautious, well-behaved people. Luckily, we’re in the majority.

Quickly I found my coat in the hall closet and walked out the front door. As I rode down to the lobby and waited for a cab on Fifth Avenue, I was planning my future social life, throwing frequent dinner parties, taking courses at the New School, perhaps learning to ski.

In our next telephone conversation Franny didn’t refer to Melinda or my sudden departure.

“What happened last night after I left?”

“It was a complete bore,” Franny said. “We’re taking Claude to Coney Island. Do you want to come along?”

Franny didn’t mention her abortion. I didn’t offer to give her fifty dollars, nor did she have a baby that year. She didn’t have a baby at any time.

One day soon Franny woke up to discover that Simon had used the household cash for an airline ticket to Los Angeles. He packed everything of value in the apartment except for the travel alarm.

“I’m not depressed about it,” Franny told me. “People don’t own each other. People aren’t like dry goods.”

Shortly after that, Franny left for Majorca with a man called Ira. I tried to dissuade her from going because Ira was a good deal worse than Simon, but Franny seemed annoyed by my timid words of warning. She sent me one postcard of a circling flock of birds. Then we lost touch.

Every decade when our updated alumnae directory arrives, I always look up Franny’s name first. In every volume she’s listed under the heading —“Lost Classmates.”
Variations on a Footnote
In the Manner of MacPherson†

Joe Francis Doerr

Professor G. E. Moore
Faculty of Philosophy
Cambridge University

June 21, 1956

Dear Dr. Moore,

I’d hoped to shoot my donkey today but shot yours by mistake. I mistakenly shot your donkey today; I thought it was mine. Today, thinking it was my own, I shot your donkey by mistake. It was a mistake, my shooting your donkey today; I took it for my own. My donkey, I was thinking, when I mistakenly shot yours today. After I shot your donkey today I thought: what a terrible mistake, I thought it was my own. A dreadful mistake, I remember thinking today after I’d mistaken your donkey for mine and shot it. What I thought was my own donkey, which I had intended to shoot, was mistakenly shot by yours truly today. Your donkey was shot today after I mistook it for my own donkey which I had so hoped to shoot. While hoping to shoot my own donkey today, I mistakenly shot yours. Today, quite by mistake, I shot your donkey thinking it was that which I had intended to shoot; namely, my own. I thought your donkey was mine today and shot it; I was mistaken.

Sincerely,

J. L. Austin

J. L. Austin
White’s Professor
Of Moral Philosophy
University of Oxford
Professor J. L. Austin  
Philosophy Centre  
University of Oxford  

June 21, 1956  

Dear Dr. Austin,  

I had hoped to shoot my donkey today; however, your donkey stepped in front of mine and I shot yours by accident. I accidentally shot your donkey today after it stepped in front of mine as I prepared to shoot it. Today I had intended to shoot my donkey but shot yours by accident when it stepped in front of my own. Intending to shoot my donkey today, I accidentally shot yours when it stepped in front of mine. Your donkey was accidentally shot to death by myself when it stepped in front of my donkey, which by the way, I had intended to shoot. It was an accident that I shot your donkey today after it stepped in front of the donkey I had intended to shoot; namely, my own. Accidents will happen, and such was the case today in the shooting death of your donkey which I myself shot after it had stepped in front of my own donkey, which was my intended target. I was the cause of the accidental death by shooting of your donkey today when it stepped in front of my own donkey which I had hoped to shoot. I shot your donkey, not my own which I had hoped to shoot, after yours stepped in front of mine; it was a terrible accident. The accidental shooting death of your donkey today was my doing; however, your donkey stepped in front of mine, which I had intended to shoot all along. Your donkey was shot when it stepped in front of my donkey today as I fired on the donkey belonging to me; it was a regrettable accident. As I fired at my own donkey, which I had intended to shoot, yours stepped in front of it and was shot accidentally.  

Ever Yours,  
G. E. Moore  
Professor of Philosophy  
University of Cambridge  

† Or Two Letters Found in a Volume of Ossian
DEAR PRESIDENT BUSH

Anis Shivani

We may have misread Oriental inscrutability together. In your raucous school days, past the circle of the camera eye, sullen spiders crept to the top of the jagged fence, and wavered in the wind, a subject not worthy of a poem or a coffin – so you chose only to watch, as did I. Each day for you has been a day of rumors of changing weather, but you square the spirit’s chancy legerdemain with a haughty horseman’s stance all your own (once upon a time mankind was fool enough to build gothic cathedrals). I, as usual, watch and learn, my ignorance magnified manifold as the ships come in, carrying posters of dead sailors and their worthy admiral fathers. Will you be my friend, will we serve mankind gratis?, is the eternal question aspiring poets must ask in the hours before dawn when a hesitant interwar muse, choked with blue smoke and girdled spirit, wasted from the first hour, dumb with degradation, visits and revisits the traceable (simple arboreal) lines left on blank unsigned paper. Will you be my friend, Mr. President? I am alone, and have grown tired of reading others’ tea leaves, of declaring oneness with sad mankind, always suffering from nacreous self-destructive contagion (hence pearly memoirs), always blowing its hard-earned wealth on lazy self-portraits it knows were not originals even when first found. I have grown tired of revisiting museums and brothels. We know you like to compare far-distant apples and oranges by way of signifying a return to the discipline of the gymnasium, if not outright hazing and bondage, we know you return books on time, decry therapy, and pronounce salvation on the burnt Western deserts, because to ponder our insignificance on this torn-down planet is false modesty, as all the best prophets have known in their bouts of doubt.
It is time to put the old books to bed. What have they taught us but self-hatred and guilt? When did we ever plant a happy seed in a young mother’s womb and expect it to return a payoff in similar coin—surely not since the days of the plainspoken knights in hot burning armor, refusing to see their reflection in the drying river’s unclear waters, the mean hours of their universal crusade passing them by, so that soon they would all turn into self-reflecting Montaignes (penpushers and pedophiles). Mr. President, you’ve defeated hypochondria, megalomania, paranoia, gluttony, gossip, and death, with one hard blow of your weightless persona (weightless because containing the weight of the earth), and made the work of future psychiatrists and historians passable play—you’ve made a man out of wandering Camus and his joyless mountain-lifting, you’ve made an admirer out of me (until lately a no-good fellow-traveler swift to leap onto the grooviest bandwagon), as I’ve learned to distrust the bookish mechanics of hate. Sooner or later these witches’ brews were bound to overflow. What we’ve known is that you’ve lived in our castle not as our king but as our slave, expunging the blood from the libraries of wars, and resurrecting compassion in a tangible, movable lump as ready as the next fleshy morsel in mankind’s planned dominion. You have freed all your slaves.
Sometimes they interrupt strangers in sleeping cars, pressing their own chest wounds hard to make the last of the blood ooze out, then signal to the corridor, and welcome in the tapped-out beast: the horoscope reading then takes place prior to delivering the message of hope, verse by verse a lyric flight; sometimes in beginner’s Spanish they lose track of time, return to the Inquisition’s first moment of self-questioning, and find it wasn’t adequate, it was too little, too late; sometimes at the quaint provincial airport, in Burlington or Durham, ignoring the black-suited, red-tied executives stepping off their Cessnas with zip in their step and conquistadors’ bloodful grins, they want you to argue your stance on the most healthsome cuisine, whether Mediterranean or Japanese, and decide if glaucoma is genetic, they want you to decide if any of the cards laid on the table are cards at all; sometimes they show up as cats seeking immunity, when you thought they were indifferent pets; sometimes they are the fissile in-between space cutting off nightmare from nightmare, where a white netless vacuum breaks your fall to a two-bit thud; sometimes they are the nurses with all-knowing smiles rubbing their ears as doctors pronounce verdicts based on questionable tests; sometimes they clean up your home after you so that vacation over, memories of Hawaii jinxing your work plans, you stride on clean rugs pristine as the factory product; sometimes they are the jokers on the Nielsen questions and the exit polls, the intense outliers on analyses of spending on children, the ones who buy stocks long after the collapse; sometimes they help out foreigners in long lines at the post office, making them address their letters to their own homes, asking, Have you not noticed how warm it is getting lately?; and sometimes they check in their own dead bodies at the poor people’s morgue, in the middle of the city where the railroad tracks become visible and loud, and reassure the orderlies: We mean no harm, but who can refuse the glamour of warm klieg lights, cold beer, polite television talk?
Fire everywhere, but I have a good home and ride the bus on account of its great virtue to remain among everyday people like myself in this time of great confusion. There she is. Do you want to be where she is, posing on the corner, wearing her shiny, pink plastic face? I know I would. I count the tiles on the floor and say *fiez, it's hot*, hang onto the standees’ strap, look like a side of beef on a meat hook. Atlantic Avenue. Flatbush Avenue. The Plexiglass windows scratched, cross-hatched. Now the leaves are changing to red in the parks, and the branches water the grass with their tears. I take off my coat, sit down. It’s dark now and now it’s light, and the ants march across the deck in a line.
DRIVING NEAR ROCKFORD IN LATE FALL

Dan Stryk

Stark
Against the stubblefields,
Black Angus
Graze the thin gold leaves
Of feed corn,
Stretched

(from the great insect shells
of oil tanks,
thrusting folded wingplates
to the sky;
from rust-ribbed smokestacks
coiling dusk)

Like the delicate gauze of skin before death.

Northern Illinois
... the rain beats down all day. I vaguely sense the book slip from my lap—my head, dull as a stone, follow its course—my neck, a heavy rope, hauling the darkened grey & green of day, like a giant dimlit scroll, into this very moment. My head drops. What if there’s no other time than the one I’m caught in now, lethargic, lost? I hear her voice, so far away, a brittle screech... But closer now, it softens to a whisper drawing all into the soggy earth—rain pouring all day long—as my head sinks deep in her dark womb, below my rising lawn...
Listen: I heard him enter your house, attempt to tread softly but his boots landed hard on the tile.

You courted him loosely, molded yourself in some way to humanize yourself to his liking.

You did not love anything well. You shied away from anyone’s creation of you into a solid mass. What we create quietly we live with, unrecognized.

You were loved, if perhaps not well. It was what you allowed.
i

alone on a hardwood floor a long series
of windows the door askew
that edge the cut of glass slice of blinds
wait to be joined to become more
light passing through pressing through
the oppression of it slicing to pieces
to pass you aren’t the same on the other side
however you encounter yourself
I liked the attention I followed with interest
the straight line of the pencil

ii

we played a game truth or dare
it was secret he slipped into my room
at night while parents slept
I liked the attention when he wandered
I asked for dare he wanted me
to push a pencil up inside my body
it was made for it he said

from the street below
headlights fingered through the blinds
hungered after forecast
The Persecutors

L.S. Klatt

The feathers make a point
like a paintbrush

the bill a spearhead which crucifies fish

& so the bird, in all directions, a pointillist

What you wouldn’t predict is a cougar
to eat every one of those bones

& so Audubon devoured the Sandhill Crane

which is disheartening since he himself
is now bagged & mounted

I will say it again: an artist divided against himself
cannot tranquilize

& so the painter slays the cougar

as if his Head is the object

as if, long-legged, he wades into perspective
The moon stabbed my throat alas a victim
as if soda can

hissed, the garter at my feet
a black rivulet

of B flat
The tracheotomy performed

in grass;
wrist
 tethered to the \* \\

I was dragged to Sound in a bier
as bark peeled from madronas

& sirens patrolled

the inlet;
I left

a half dollar of bliss
 for egress
I find the pale yellow roots. They leave no print. Only clearances.

All this vein and filigree run without weight to make the fleshy root I want, an unfolding that will bloom more than once.

If I had the strength, cupped hands and heft, to shoulder such deep purple, or even minimalist shadow,—
say a photograph of a haunting or blue steel wind blowing open the thick barn door:—

all this twist and turn, all this dirt and insistent snuff,
black light and torn cloud, what if,
what if the soul sticks to things? What if I pour out

into the under ground knitting self to self

like a giddy nervous clock striking the hour?
ESSAY ON LAZARUS, WHOM GOD HAS HELPED

Eva Hooker

In your eyes, what your sisters broke between them: as if an opening
or harrow
could tell where you will awake
in dust,
or what you saw, such pains
taking to untie—

(I want to know where the gasoline is buried under the porch dark
a long green snake turns inside out
two lights from an old truck up the road the young men hang
on its side shouting hard words softened to blues—

Martha she done running
hard oh she done): And sat still down

surprise writ
in red sand and fire in her face—

(I have come for you)

(lay my hand upon your forehead)

(my hair hurts from all the singing)

Martha smudges roses into her dress, drags her leg behind her,
halting:

first marking that says: in every raising, the shadow

of noisy preference,
a liking—

Then dropped her hair to her waist
and cut and cut

and cut
Let it not be said that God does not love all his children, but rather that he loves some of them just a little bit more than others.

St. Boggio was born 700 years ago in the foothills of the Maritime Alps of northwest Italy. His mother gave birth after eleven hours of labor in the midst of an unseasonable spring hailstorm. God delayed the storm’s full fury so that St. Boggio’s father could fetch the midwife, but when He finally allowed the storm to break, its pent up force struck twice as hard, dropping so much hail that the roof of St. Boggio’s house collapsed. His mother was hustled outside and the child was born in the shelter of a blanket supported by wooden poles.

From an early age, the child’s parents really did call him St. Boggio—not because they had any inkling of what was to come, they simply liked the name. In the summer, he slept with the dogs in the barn and had fleas; in the winter he slept in a heap with his eleven brothers and sisters and had bad breath and a runny nose. When he was five, bathing down at the river, he jumped in headfirst and cracked his skull on a rock. God was busy with some martyrs in Spain at the time and young St. Boggio would have surely drowned, but for the aid of the Virgin Mary, who was having trouble sleeping again. She witnessed the whole thing and intervened still wearing her nightgown, holding a lizard in one hand and a hydrangea in the other, because she that’s all she had handy. Mary laid her hands on St. Boggio and healed him. Afterwards, she had words with God, who agreed to keep a better eye on the young boy He loved so much.

When word got around that St. Boggio had been responsible for a miracle, people came from as far as Umbria and Campania to see him. These visitors were a source of constant worry for St. Boggio’s parents. Lepers pleaded with the child to kiss their wounds. Vagrants fell to their knees and asked the boy to report the will of God. Wealthier pilgrims took it for granted they would be offered lodging and a hot meal and became angry when St. Boggio’s parents tried to explain how hard it was to make ends meet with twelve children, much less feed every visitor who passed.

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1. I served as editor and personal assistant to the noted American folklorist Marvin I. Berger during the last months of his life in 2003. Marv traveled throughout Central Europe in the 1930’s collecting stories of all kinds. Today he is best known for his 1935 monograph “On the Dating and Evolution of Legends in the Ruhr Valley,” his 1945 tract “Strategic Bombing, the American Monster!” (over which he was jailed by the State Department) and his unpublished 1951 memoir Atlantis: Not Where I Thought It Was. I found the following tale among his papers shortly after his death.
through. Most of all, St. Boggio’s parents worried their son would get a big head. Each night before St. Boggio went to bed, his father tucked a blanket around the boy’s shoulder and said, “Don’t go thinking you’re better than anybody else, because you’re not. Don’t get a big head, because you’re no better than anybody else.”

Eventually, St. Boggio’s parents sent him away to a monastery where he would be out of the public eye. The monks who accepted him did so in the hope he would continue to perform miracles and convince some nobleperson to donate a new side-altar for the church. Or at least money enough to rebuild the cowshed, which was going to pieces.

St. Boggio learned the rhythms of monastic life—the bell in the predawn darkness that woke him to wash in cold water and pray until the sun rose. The large, drafty buildings heated at either end by fireplaces that belched their heat straight up the chimney. The constant itch of wool robes. The droning Latin lessons and the bite of the cane when he daydreamed or answered incorrectly. Whenever he could, St. Boggio escaped to the barn where he talked to the cows and currycombed the horses or hid under a pile of hay. After a year or two, the monks, who were neither cruel nor stupid, decided to stop beating the boy and let him tend the animals. Each man serves God in his own way, they reasoned. Besides, the elderly monk in charge of the stables had forgotten to lock the barn doors the previous winter, allowing the cows to escape in the middle of a blizzard. In later days, St. Boggio would often reflect on how fortunate he was to have fallen in with so progressive an order.

Ten years of the plainest, most ordinary sort of happiness flew by. St. Boggio became known as an uncanny farmer—his bean plants grew tallest in the garden, his grapes hung fattest on the vine, and his cows gave the most milk. The monks knew these things happened not due to divine intervention, but because St. Boggio planted his seeds with the greatest care, weeded most thoroughly, and loved animals more than people. The boy happily stained his small, dexterous hands with manure and horse saliva and the blood of calving cows. Eventually, rather than make him labor in the white wool robes of his order that he so hated (and which smelled so offensive, he could not bear to put them on)…

2. Marv had a reputation among his colleagues for fabricating the tales he collected, basing them largely on personal experience. The difficulty in editing this story, as with all of his work, is deciding to what degree there may be an actual legend similar to this one, versus to what degree Marv invented it and on what actual events it may be based.

3. According to his journal, Marv was released from prison in 1947, having served two years for a riot caused by the dissemination of his famous pamphlet. He decided to travel to Dresden to see if any of his friends (or the academic papers he had left in their care) had survived the city’s destruction. His passport had been revoked and the State Department, which had accused him of spying for the Germans in 1943, was not about to issue him a new one. This complicated his plans greatly.
rank that whoever sat next to him at evening prayers grew faint), the monks issued St. Boggio a pair of canvas breeches and a rope belt, which he wore in the fields. The surrounding farmers came to know him better in this guise than in a monk’s habit.

One day, word arrived that a new duke was to be crowned and wished representatives of all the monasteries in his realm to be present at the ceremony. The monks, who were desperately short on cash, decided every last one of them would attend to impress upon the new duke their absolute love and obedience. St. Boggio alone was to stay behind and tend the animals. The monks shuttered the windows in the refectory, barred the church door, and blew out all the candles so nothing would catch fire. While the sexton was loading up the last cart, he asked St. Boggio whether he might take a few clay tiles and patch the church roof. For if the duke sent an artist to paint new frescoes, it wouldn’t do to have water dripping down the walls and ruining the plaster the minute it dried. St. Boggio, who was fifteen and swollen with pride, answered, “Brother, may God turn me away from the gates of Heaven if the church roof is not whole when you return.”

The oath came as a surprise to God, for it ran counter to His plans. He had long intended to strike the church’s roof as a vague reproach to the monks and had preordained the bolt of lightning (because while it is possible to be everywhere at once, planning a few things in advance greatly simplifies life). The Lord couldn’t very well undo the lightning, but if the church burned down, St. Boggio’s oath would be broken and the boy damned.

The Lord realized He was in for quite a lot of work.

St. Boggio celebrated his brothers’ departure with a bout of champion loafing and did not begin repairing the church roof until the late afternoon, when the wind began to change directions. He hauled the heavy terra-cotta tiles, one in each hand, up a rickety wooden ladder to the roof. One after another, he wrestled them into place. Really, he thought, the problem was not so much the tiles as the beams underneath, which had begun to rot so badly they were damp to the touch. It would require lots of bodies and loads of money to replace them, though. The best he could do was fasten the tiles securely and hope the beams staved off their inevitable collapse a few more years. St. Boggio was concentrating so attentively on his work that he did

4. Marv snuck across the border into Mexico and made his way to the port of Vera Cruz, where he signed on as crew on a ship smuggling a load of guns to North Africa. In late 1948 he entered Italy and met up with his old friend Antonio Beppo—an art historian—who was overseeing the renovation of the papal bedchamber. Beppo had discovered a cache of papers from the short-lived pontificate of Pius III (Sept. 22-Oct. 18, 1503). One was a history of the life of “Saint Boggio”, whom Pius III had intended to canonize.
not notice the rapidly gathering clouds on the horizon.

After consulting St. Florian about some technical matters, God induced St. Boggio to come down for a minute, pick a bushel basket of unripe tomatoes and place the basket next to the ladder. As he found himself doing it, the boy decided he must have meant to make a few jars of tomato preserves to surprise the monks with when they returned. Quick as a crow hops, St. Boggio was back on the roof. He worked until he had secured the final shingle, then looked up at the sky and saw it had turned the swirled gray-black color of marble stained by candlesmoke. Very sensibly, St. Boggio reasoned he had been so intent on his work that he hadn’t heard the peals of thunder, rather than believing that God had masked his ears. The youth dashed for the ladder, his canvas pants flapping behind him in the wind.

Right on schedule, the pre-ordained bolt of lightning struck, hitting St. Boggio instead of the roof. The boy slid down the tiles and fell, landing in the basket of tomatoes. A second later a dozen threads of lightning arrowed down from the sky, igniting the church along its base. The flames licked upward until they reached the moist, rotten rafters of the roof, which smoldered but did not burn. The frame of the church collapsed, but the roof itself was held together by the new shingles and fell intact.

Farmers for miles around heard the lightning crash, they saw the flames rise from the church like a signal fire, but they dared not investigate. Only a seventeen-year-old girl went. The monks had visited her a few weeks before to offer alms and prayers when her father had suffered the worst in a series of strokes. Now, she hoped to repay their kindness. She bundled up tinctures and herbs good for burns in a piece of felt and set off for the monastery. Upon her arrival, she saw no one and wondered if all the monks had perished. She found only the body of their field hand, a handsome, deeply muscled and tanned young man, who appeared to be dead. He lay insensible to the world, covered in a viscous yellow-green slime. Upon closer inspection, she found it to be nothing more than tomato pulp and dragged the unconscious man into the barn, out of the rain. She lit a lantern and went to work wiping away the tomato paste with the square of felt. To her amazement, she found no sign of burn or bruise on his body.

Let it not be said that God is not all-powerful, only that his plan is infinitely flexible. The Lord had preserved the skin and bones of St. Boggio, but the concussion of the lightning had temporarily blinded and deafened him.

We may forgive St. Boggio, then, for mistaking the ringing in his ears

5. Marv became so excited about St. Boggio that he dropped his plans to sneak into Soviet-occupied Dresden and proceeded directly to Piedmont, where he scoured the countryside for any mention of the saint’s life. He claimed to find no less than a dozen variants among the farmers outside Turin and composited them to form this version.
for the heavenly choirs and for believing the blue-red shadows that danced like fireflies around the girl were evidence she was an angel. For no one, he reasoned, survives a blast of lightning quite like the one that had struck him. He was naked and a beautiful woman was laying hands on him. No farmhand is a novice in the act that followed, for he has witnessed the horses and understands the rough mechanics. Nor blame the girl, named Filomena, who for the only time in her life saw the look of perfect rapture on the face of another human being and could not help but become enraptured in return. It didn’t hurt that the dazzling young man was lean and hard, all his hair standing on end, crackling with electricity, and that his small, dexterous hands needed only a little guidance.

When the storm passed, Filomena took St. Boggio home with her. She explained to her father that the young man would be staying with them for a few days while he recovered. Maybe longer.

If he’d had his wits, her father would have tossed St. Boggio out on the spot—the boy was a monk, he was too young, and he had a thin, brown birthmark on the right side of his neck, a sure sign unexpected misfortune would forever dog him. But the old man had lost his powers of speech and movement during his last stroke and knew only that he had been left alone, that rain had leaked in the window soaking his blankets, and then his daughter had returned. So he merely grinned, which made Filomena even happier.

Over the next two weeks, St. Boggio fixed the leaky window and patched the roof. He weeded the garden more thoroughly than it had ever been weeded and the zucchinis doubled in size overnight. Each morning he made the long walk up to the monastery to tend the animals and gardens and in the mid-afternoon, when dust hung thickly in the air making the distant hills look yellow and parched, he returned home. He worked harder and longer and more happily than ever before. In the evenings he ate meals richer and more strongly spiced than those to which he was accustomed (for though the monks ate garlic and olives, he’d never imagined what they could do in proper combination). We need say nothing of the nights, save that he thought they were the best part of all and so did she.

Too soon, the monks returned from the coronation. Not only had the new duke proven uninterested in funding improvements, but a rival order had started rumors of irregular behavior at their monastery. The monks had spent the entire ceremony issuing vehement denials. Now they returned

6. As usual, my own attempts at verifying any of these events have met with frustration. The Vatican disavows knowledge of St. Boggio and any renovations to the Pope’s quarters in 1947. The Vatican Library did, however, called the police on March 13 and May 4, 1949 to remove a certain American scholar by the name of Marvin Berger whom they accused of attempting to steal rare books.
only to find their church in smoldering ruins with a perfectly intact roof and St. Boggio missing. A few monks dropped to their knees and prayed for the dead boy’s soul. Others dug through the pile of charred wood and masonry. Then one of the more sensible monks said, now just a moment—weeds have sprouted through the wreckage, so it’s not the event of this morning, yet the animals have been fed and the vegetable patch weeded—St. Boggio is alive, but he’s not at home.

While the monks set about watering and feeding their own horses for the first time in years, one among them went to find his missing brother. He inquired at the nearest farm for word, where he found St. Boggio and Filomena napping, intertwined like vines of ivy. Let it not be said that the monks were not good at policing their own ranks. In less time than it takes a copyist to turn a page in his exemplum, St. Boggio found himself hauled away and locked in the tiny bedroom reserved for visiting pilgrims. In the days that followed, he came to understand why it was called a cell.

The abbot and brothers made angry recriminations over who should or should not have educated St. Boggio in the ways of a man. They decided he had burned down the church to spite them, because the accounts offered by the farmers—a dozen bolts of lightning striking from all directions—were too fantastic to be believed. It was a well-known fact that God did not strike down His own house (and if the stories were true, they had certainly not brought St. Boggio aboard to perform that sort of miracle). Even so, his friends argued, there had to be a way for everyone to escape with their dignity and good names intact. Then Filomena visited to explain her situation and there wasn’t any choice at all. Though it’s not hard to make a baby disappear, the monks were neither cruel nor stupid—they knew that word got out about that sort of thing.

The monks recalled that St. Boggio didn’t dress like a monk, didn’t come to prayers regularly, couldn’t even read. He’d never taken vows that anyone admitted to remembering. Clearly he wasn’t a monk at all, but a stablehand who had returned their kindness with fornication and dishonesty. He and Filomena were married immediately and sent off to her farm. St. Boggio was devastated. To be so casually dismissed from the com-

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7. After several discussions with press officers at the United States Air Force, it seems unlikely that any aircraft would have been flying raids on the night of April 30/May 1, 1945 flying missions near Turin, as happens in the climax of this story. The German commander Col. Gen. Heinrich von Vietinghoff-Scheel had signed an instrument of unconditional surrender the previous day and hostilities had all but ceased. The press officer reiterated that the Army Air Force had leveled fortified hilltop monasteries elsewhere, most notably at Monte Cassino, after the Allies had suffered 54,000 casualties trying to take it by ground. Given his well-known feelings on aerial bombardment, the tale’s climactic crash initially seemed to be one of Marv’s pure inventions, probably based on Monte Cassino.
pany of men he had lived among for ten years, to be sneered at when he traded radishes for salt at market—unthinkable. If only he could have told himself he’d given it all up for love. But he’d had no choice in the matter.

He believed he would do anything to return to his brothers and imagined ways of winning back their favor. If the monks forced him to learn Latin, he would do it. If they wanted to flog him, he would knot the ropes himself. Perhaps, if he cut out his wife’s tongue, or if he ground up the body of his child when it was born and fed it to the pigs, his brothers would take him back.

God held his breath the whole time. Though the Lord heard himself invoked, cursed, begged and berated, St. Boggio never made the sort of proclamation that would have bound him to his word. And for that, the Lord was grateful.

A few weeks after the young lovers were married, Filomena’s father died, passing to the next world as peacefully as could be wished. St. Boggio was appalled by the cost of the new suit of clothes Filomena wanted her father buried in and by the price of a coffin. He lost a full day’s work digging the grave and laying the body to rest. At the end, when he was caked with dirt turned to mud by his sweat, his wife was still crying. Hoping to lighten her burden he said, “Ain’t you glad your papa ain’t suffering no more?”

“I had always hoped,” she replied, “that a miracle might restore his health.”

All his life, people had asked St. Boggio for miracles and never, not once, had he come through. He hated himself for it. Perhaps he intuited that restoring his father-in-law would have been as simple as asking. Not asking, really, but if he had said, “Filomena, upon my hope of entering the Kingdom of Heaven, I will find a way to cure your father,” it would have been done, sure as floods in the valley follow storms in the mountains. But St. Boggio didn’t understand. He knew only that he felt so guilty he could barely look at the woman he sometimes loved.

Once, when she moved to embrace him at the end of the day, instead of hugging her back, he took her wrists in his hands and squeezed them until she cried out. When he saw the bruises the next morning, St. Boggio (who was still young enough to worry over such things) was filled with shame. He swore a solemn, silent vow never again to touch his wife in anger. Nevertheless, the next time she bossed him at the dinner table by laying her palm against his collarbone, he sprang up and swung at her. He struck only a glancing blow, but the next morning the sight of her black eye drove him mad with regret.

That day while he cut grass with a scythe, St. Boggio said, “Hey you
there, God. Do you really favor me? Maybe it happened like people say when I was a kid—I was too young to remember—but if it’s true, how has it come to this? I’ve never raised my fist against beast or man, even when I had cause. Why do I strike out at my wife when she makes signs of affection?"

Finally the Creator, who is an infinitely better listener than talker, relented. He allowed St. Boggio a vision of what might be—he and Filomena still in love after thirty years, a pack of wild children and a superlatively well-weeded vegetable garden. For a fraction of a second, St. Boggio felt all of the joy such a life would have afforded him. This was the fate he desired above all others. He laid down his scythe, sprinted for home and burst through the door.

It’s a funny thing about visions. It’s hard to say whether God has a cruel sense of humor, or whether he showed St. Boggio exactly what he needed to see to bring about his ultimate destiny. In either case, St. Boggio approached his wife, who was sitting in a chair, and tried to pull her to her feet so that he could embrace her, cover her in kisses and whisper in rapid, incoherent sentences how they were going to spend the rest of their lives in perfect contentment.

But Filomena was in her seventh month and had begun to feel heavy and slow. The damp, punishing heat of the summer had lasted into the fall, and she was sick of it, sick too of this boy, who, flushed with sweat, wanted to wriggle into her lap and press his sweltering face against her. She pushed him away and, when he persisted in trying to curve his neck around hers, she snapped at him. He reached out a hand that stank of horse manure toward her belly, and this time she snapped louder.

She saw all the life go out of him.

To spare his wife further suffering, St. Boggio left her in the middle of the night. He slept out under the stars and hid in barns and outbuildings when it rained. An invasion by the French was imminent, so all vagrants were treated with suspicion. Men with pitchforks and packs of dogs drove St. Boggio from his hiding places. All who witnessed his escapes wondered that he was not killed outright—he ran for the hills with only a gash on the back of his neck when he ought to have been impaled or mauled. He worked the grape harvest and was cheated out of his wages. He wandered

8. But then, I was offered a second and far more elegant explanation for this tale’s plane crash ending. While on assignment in Turin in 2004, I took time out to meet with Ameriga Pappuzzi of the regional tourist authority (ATL). I told her the tale of St. Boggio and asked if any part of it sounded familiar. She had never heard of any figure resembling the saint, but assured me “Boggio” is a fairly common last name in Piedmont, though rare in other parts of Italy. “But we do have a cathedral similar to the one you are looking for,” she said. “It is just outside of town.”
into a region where everyone spoke an odd dialect and mocked him for his
accent. His bootlaces snapped and he retied them and they snapped again.
The soles of his boots cracked.

A pair of horsemen canvassing the countryside found St. Boggio and
pressed him into service as a pikeman. He walked shoulder-to-shoulder with
a hundred other farmers carrying fourteen-foot-long wooden staves with
sharpened ends. Because he did not resist, they put St. Boggio in the front
line, rightly concluding that other men had wives and children and deserved
the protection of the rear. His detachment saw hard action. It rained three
days in a row and on each day a troop of French cavalry charged them.

God worked overtime, turning arrows so they hit someone else and
playing with the design of raindrops to blur the vision of the horsemen
attacking St. Boggio. When the Lord was needed elsewhere, St. Michael
the Archangel guided the course of the battle with far greater elegance and
less bloodshed than his commander-in-chief. It was only when St. Michael
asked St. Stephen the Martyr to step in for a few minutes while he ran an
errand that things went funny. In life, Stephen had used a not entirely effect-
tive method to deal with armed mobs. He wondered if it might not work
here as well.

St. Boggio suddenly found himself filled with the Holy Spirit. He set
down his pike and began to preach to those around him about the value of
peace and turning the other cheek. He spoke so movingly that the pikemen
around him laid down their weapons and drew nearer to listen. A half-min-
ute later a cavalry charge boiled over them. A large man on horseback with
an ugly mustache was headed straight for St. Boggio, ready to crack him
over the head with a mace. Stephen the martyr said to Hell with pacifism,
and upended the horse. The mustachioed man slammed into St. Boggio,
breaking the young man’s leg.

Things move very quickly in Heaven when they need to. The call went
out for Rita of Cascia to look after for St. Boggio’s wound. When St. Ste-
phen learned that she hadn’t died yet, he got St. Aldegundis instead (a poor
choice, it was whispered, because she was French and had a conflict of in-
terests). Whatever the reason, she failed to set the bone properly. St. Boggio
limped for the rest of his life and his shins oozed clear yellow fluid whenever
it rained.

But St. Boggio, who lay mad with pain on the battlefield, was con-
cerned only that he had lost the battle for the Piedmontese and that the
French would reach his old farm and slaughter his cows. So he whispered,
“Upon my hope of seeing Heaven, if we win today I shall build a cathedral
to honor the Virgin!” Then he fell unconscious.

God suspected Mary had put the idea into St. Boggio’s head—she always loved one more church in her name—and the whole sordid mess so frustrated Him that He considered rolling out the Apocalypse immediately. What God knew that St. Boggio did not was that the Piedmontese had the battle well in hand and his oath was completely unnecessary. But the fact remains that some patterns of words are binding, even under the influence of fever and the Holy Mother. So God went to work again.

St. Boggio came to when a man with no front teeth tried to steal the boots off his feet. Though his leg throbbed like a blacksmith’s bellows, St. Boggio drew himself up and walked onward. He survived by eating grubs and slow-moving grasshoppers. Leaf stems and bits of rotten wood clung to his beard and mildew stained his bandages. Only the strong blessing laid down by St. Aldegundus prevented his wound from festering. He found a cave—nothing more, really, than an outcropping of rock—and collapsed there.

It was then the stranger appeared. Though he took pains to hide it with a false nose and smudges of charcoal on his face, the stranger was exquisitely beautiful, moreso than any man St. Boggio had ever seen. The stranger carried him to the top of a nearby mountain, where he fed him bread from a box made of snake’s fangs and wine from a bottle crusted over with barnacles. It was the finest food St. Boggio had ever tasted. He slept and woke refreshed.

“I was wondering,” said the stranger, “if you’d do me a favor. Could you ask me to help you build a cathedral to honor the Virgin?” St. Boggio wanted to return the stranger’s kindness, so he asked immediately.

The stranger was a mighty worker, fast and efficient. He seemed to fly through the air and pull blocks of stone from deep underground. St. Boggio knew there must be an explanation. He was very likely hallucinating. Perhaps the stranger had stashed the building materials beforehand. The foundation might already have been laid. The walls might be built atop the ruins of an ancient temple. But regardless, by that afternoon, when the year’s first snowflakes fell, St. Boggio found himself lying before a church where none had stood before. Stacked beside it was a pile of orange terracotta tiles for the roof. No matter how maimed his leg might be, St. Boggio’s

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9. The cathedral in question was the Basilica di Superga. In 1706, with the city of Turin threatened by the invading Spanish-French army, Duke Vittorio Amedeo II, ruler of Piedmont, climbed to the top of a 2000-foot hill outside the city to observe the advancing troops. He made a pact with the Virgin Mary that if she defended his city, he would build her a cathedral on the very spot he stood. The invaders were driven off and the duke made good on his promise.
small, dextrous hands could still work miracles of a common sort, and he finished securing the shingles moments before the winter’s snow began flying in earnest.

A fire had been lit inside and a large stock of wood and foodstuffs laid by. That winter St. Boggio ate white beans, pickled fish, risotto, cured ham and all the other foods, fancy and plain, the stranger had left. During the short, cold days he built an altar and rough wooden benches. He carved a figure of the Virgin Mary (which didn’t come out well, but if you knew who you were looking at, the resemblance was obvious).

The cathedral’s dark stone shape could be seen for miles in every direction. It attracted a handful of wayward travelers in need of lodging and a few pilgrims curious to discover how it had risen over the course of a single autumn day. But for the most part, the climb was too steep and treacherous for all but the most desperate or dedicated.

The local bishop sent a delegation of priests to investigate. Truly, they were overawed by the building’s graceful solidity, the view it commanded of the surrounding valleys, and the contrast between the richly patterned exterior and the stark simplicity of the interior. They took instantly to the lame man who was its caretaker. He told them of his childhood as a stablehand in a monastery and his desire to return to church life. The priests asked St. Boggio if he’d stay on as sexton. He agreed. In a few day’s time, the priests returned to the bishop, leaving behind one of their number, who had broken his ankle on the climb up.

The priest’s ankle healed poorly, but he was young and strong and when the springtime came, he and St. Boggio limped out into the countryside together. They visited each of the farms in the valley, staying a few days at each in turn. The priest heard confession and baptised children and taught them their letters. St. Boggio lent a hand with the animals and repaired roofs. When they completed a circuit, the two made the long climb back up the mountain to the cathedral, recovered, and set out anew.

They told one another the details of their lives, their doubts and hardships. St. Boggio confessed his murderous feelings toward his wife and child. The priest worried he made people’s lives worse by meddling. When one became sick, the other nursed him. When one told a joke, the other told the punchline. When they were caught in summer rainstorms or autumn snow-

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10. The Basilica di Superga was designed by famed architect Filippo Juvarra. Construction commenced in 1717 and it was consecrated 14 years later, though the interior had not yet been completed. The building stood 250 feet high. It was a remarkably fast construction time for such a large church, especially considering the builders had to lower the peak of the mountain by 120 feet and raze a pre-existing chapel to create enough space to build. It may have very well felt to the people in the area that the cathedral had sprung up overnight.
storms, the two huddled together for warmth. They came to like the feeling so much that they slept beside one another all the time.

Years passed with glories and tragedies. A tree fell on the cathedral, damaging the brickwork, which they never managed to restore to its original beauty. Men and women they had befriended died. Children grew up. The two men learned to cook. There was war and there was peace and suddenly war again, another French invasion, the entire countryside in an uproar. Thousands fled the French army’s advance and refugees overfilled the cathedral.

A message came from the bishop, recalling the priest. The people whispered among themselves—he was in league with the French, the missive a ruse so he could betray them. The mood turned so ugly that the priest felt compelled to read the letter publicly. Word of certain irregularities in his behavior (no secret to the local farmers) had gotten back to the bishop and he was being recalled for discipline. St. Boggio realized he was the cause of his best friend’s disgrace and despairs.

The priest was bitter, too, for it seemed to him he would serve the greater good by staying—he had a sizable congregation in need of spiritual comfort and guidance, to say nothing of abandoning his best friend. But his vows were founded on obedience, not utilitarianism or loyalty. So he said a final Mass, hefted his staff and began to limp down the mountain. St. Boggio, determined not to add further to his friend’s shame by making a scene, watched impassively. Then the priest stumbled over a tree root and went down in a heap. St. Boggio ran to him, pulled him to his feet and the two embraced, whispering to one another. The priest named his destination—the monastery where St. Boggio had spent his early years—and promised to send word as soon as he arrived. St. Boggio, with a young man’s bravado (for he was still young) said, “They’ll have to get through us to get to you. As long as this cathedral remains standing, no foreign soldier will set foot in your monastery. May eternal damnation be mine if it proves otherwise.” (God, who had developed a sixth sense about these oaths, knew it was coming, but was helpless to prevent it).

The priest smiled at his friend’s earnestness and said, “God protect you,

11. “If it were only that, the Basilica would not be so famous a church,” Ameriga told me. “But have you heard of the very famous tragedy that took place there?” I had not. On May 4, 1949 (the same day Marv was evicted from the Vatican), a plane carrying the entire Grande Torino soccer team, which had just won its fourth consecutive championship, slammed into the basilica, killing all 31 aboard. The building itself was unharmed. Much of the team was eventually interred in the church’s crypt alongside 300 years worth of dukes from the Savoy family.
my friend. God protect you, my love.” The records say nothing more of him, save that he failed to arrive at the monastery.

St. Boggio had no time to mourn. He planned earthworks, stone walls, a watchtower and detachments of civilian pikemen that, properly positioned, could delay a thousand men’s advance for days. But before he could put his plan into action, a young man tugged at his sleeve, reporting a commotion in the barn—a horse tangled in some ropes had gone wild. St. Boggio forgot all about fortifications and went to see after the animal. His fingers, in spurts and grabs, unwrapped the ropes and freed the horse. The boy who’d fetched him watched in awe. “You’re the man they call St. Boggio,” the boy said. “My mama says she never knew a soul with cleverer hands than you.”

In this way St. Boggio met his son. When St. Boggio had disappeared, Filomena had believed him dead and remarried not long after her child was born. Some years later, she had sent her son away to live with an elderly uncle who needed help on his farm; the two men had fled when word of the invasion came, but the boy’s uncle had not survived the journey. The boy was not altogether displeased, as the old man had beaten him and made him bathe more often than he would have liked.

St. Boggio wondered what he was supposed to say to that. But just then a watchman yelled that the French were marching up the valley. There was no time for defenses, no hope of resistance. The people asked St. Boggio to lead a delegation under a flag of truce to ask the French to spare the cathedral and their lives.

St. Boggio tied a white shirtsleeve to a stick. He told his son that if the peace delegation failed, he was to set fire to the cathedral rather than let the French take it. It would also signal the monastery that the cathedral had fallen and that they were in imminent danger (thus fulfilling his oath). St. Boggio wished he had some additional words of advice, but could think only of what his father told him every night as a boy: “Don’t you go thinking you’re better than anybody else, because you’re not. Don’t get a big head, because you’re no better than anybody else.” So, St. Boggio said that and left.

The delegation descended the mountain and approached the mass of troops. One of the men who spoke some French called out to them, and the French yelled back. Then there was the metallic “thwick!” of crossbows and St. Boggio found himself at the pearly gates staring at St. Peter.

“That didn’t turn out very well,” St. Boggio said.

“We had such high hopes for you, too,” said St. Peter. “You having God’s favor and all.”
“How was it I had God’s favor?” St. Boggio asked. “To be sure, some men had worse luck, but I’ve suffered more than most. Was that God’s plan?” After thirteen centuries on the job, St. Peter still couldn’t answer those questions and wished again he’d volunteered to spend eternity doing something else.

“Clearly we want you in Heaven,” said St. Peter. “But there’s the matter of that last oath. When a saint puts his salvation on the line, it’s a binding contract.”

“How was I to know I was saint?” St. Boggio demanded. The name and the miracles, St. Peter suggested. “Yes, but any of those might have been coincidences,” St. Boggio said. “Surely I wasn’t marked out from my birth to be a saint. You can’t tell me, chaotic as things are, that there’s a plan.” St. Peter admitted that God has a plan only sometimes and has to improvise to pull off that much. “But that doesn’t change the fact that while your cathedral is still standing I can’t admit you to Heaven or damn you,” said St. Peter. “What we allow under these circumstances is three brief apparitions on Earth. If you can’t fulfill your obligation with that, nothing more can be done.”

So, St. Boggio returned to Piedmont. He appeared immediately to his son and instructed him to set fire to the cathedral, so that he might be released from his oath. But during the hours St. Boggio had been gone, the Piedmontese Army had arrived and won a decisive victory over the French. The cathedral was out of danger and filled with wounded. Besides, the boy knew he wasn’t better than anyone else and didn’t deserve an apparition. It was clearly Satan appearing in the guise of the person he wanted to see most. The boy crossed himself and told the ghost to be gone.

St. Boggio could only watch as his son became the new sexton and carefully maintained the building. He watched as a new priest came to the Cathedral of Mary and drove out the refugees. St. Boggio’s son handed off the building’s care to his own child, whom he warned in great detail against apparitions.

After watching generations of his descendents keep the cathedral in

12. “Is it not a most unusual story?” Ameriga asked. “If you see the hand of God at work in the first event, are you not obliged to see it in the second as well?” I’ll admit I can’t really see why God should want to protect Turin and then kill their soccer team. Maybe he’s a fan of A.C. Milan. In which case, why allow Juventus—Grande Torino’s modern-day incarnation—to win 19 championships following the crash?

13. I made it a point to visit both the Basillica, which I had come to believe was the cathedral in Marv’s story, and the nearby monastery, which seemed a likely inspiration for the one that St. Boggio is raised in and later swears to protect.
pristine condition, St. Boggio decided there was only one man in the world wise enough to distinguish a true apparition from one by Satan. He made the long walk to Rome and appeared to Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini shortly after the marathon ceremony in which the old man was consecrated the 216th pope, Pius III. As exhausted as the frail pontiff was, he was delighted to see what he immediately recognized as a saint. Pius III questioned St. Boggio with the same intelligent scrutiny he applied to all things and recorded his story in great detail. He promised to dispatch a delegation of priests to burn down the cathedral and win salvation for St. Boggio. The ghost thanked him profusely and disappeared.

But the shock of the event caused the pope to take to his bed before giving orders. He fell into a deep coma and on the twenty-eighth day of his papacy, Pius III expired. His successor, Julius II, was too busy finding an artist to repaint the Sistine Chapel to pay heed to the deranged ramblings of his predecessor.

St. Boggio returned home to find the cathedral still standing. He watched as the plain, Romanesque building fell out of favor and was all but abandoned. Napoleon invaded and for all the churches and monasteries he seized, he ignored St. Boggio’s. Another century passed. Poets hiked past the crumbling church and were inspired. Lovers picnicked there and were equally inspired. All sorts of legends attached themselves to the old building—if a child brought a knot inside, it would untangle itself; if a man took a brick from the walls and buried it beneath his house, his roof would never collapse; if a woman slept the night in the church, the winning lottery numbers would appear in a dream.

Then came the Second World War. The cathedral and monastery were fortified in almost exactly the fashion St. Boggio had once imagined. Their thick stone walls made them excellent strongholds and their obscure location meant that they were manned by local Piedmontese soldiers, rather

14. I spent an afternoon at the Sacra di San Michele, a hilltop monastery 12 miles outside of Turin. The building is mightily impressive, carved out of the living rock of the mountainside with crypts dating back to 1000 AD. The local people claim that Umberto Eco based *The Name of the Rose* on San Michele’s history, though I’ve never found any statement by Eco to that effect.

I took the long way up, a ninety-minute hike up the mountain with the stations of the cross set in little alcoves like mile markers. (The way my legs were burning by the time I reached the top, Christ’s passion did not seem an entirely inappropriate metaphor for the climb.) The payoff was fantastic. Not just the building itself, which was completely abandoned, save for an elderly ticket-taker and a group of four vacationing priests, but the view from the mountaintop as well. From the monastery I could see all the way back to the city and, in the distance, the yellow splotch that was the Basilica di Superga.
than battle-tested German troops. The valleys lay silent for six years. St. Boggio watched unconcernedly. Wars had come and gone and this one looked no worse than the Thirty Years’ War.

On the eve of the final invasion, the Piedmontese began to aid the Allies. Each night, they lit a navigation beacon near the cathedral for the aircraft that flew through the valley to bomb the retreating Germans. On April 30th, with the Allies parked just south of Turin, the local troops abandoned their posts altogether and went into town to do a bit of looting. It would be the Allies—foreign troops—who would occupy the monastery the next morning and break St. Boggio’s oath.

On his last night as a ghost, St. Boggio made his third appearance. There was no one left at the deserted cathedral but an old beggar, who lay singing to himself in spite of the harsh mountaintop winds. “I don’t suppose you’d be willing to burn down the cathedral?” asked St. Boggio.

“I know him,” the beggar jabbered. “My cousin he is, that horsemeat eater. Slipped ice-cubes and eels down the girls’ dresses at Christmastime. He wants burning does he? I can do a fine burning. A fine one.” With that, the beggar scuttled into the cathedral and emerged rolling a barrel of heating oil. He carefully constructed a pile of twigs on the lee side of the hill, doused it with oil and lit it with a match. (For no matter how mad a beggar is, he does not grow old without learning to light fires under all manner of conditions.) Throughout the night the beggar threw the contents of the monastery onto the blaze and dumped on more oil, sending the flames surging into the sky. The beggar danced around his fire in delight. St. Boggio prayed and prayed for the flames to jump to the cathedral, but the beggar’s fire was perfectly contained. The saint prepared to meet his doom.

At the same time, a few thousand feet away aboard a low-altitude bomber, an American navigator no older than St. Boggio had been when he died was also praying. His plane’s electrical system had shorted out and he had become completely lost on a dark, overcast night. The bomb bay doors were frozen shut and the pilot dared not try a crash landing because the plane’s belly held 4,000 pounds of high explosives.

You’re on our side, the navigator prayed, or so they say. I don’t even want to kill anyone, I just want to get me and the other six guys home. Save

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15. The Basilica, by contrast, seemed much less impressive when I visited. Rather than making visitors climb to the top, it has a little funicular painted like a trolley that runs every half hour. (Before the funicular, they had donkeys to haul the pilgrims up top.) I paid my €3 and sat alone in the train car, waiting for the trip up. Just before the conductor shut the door, a young mother holding a wailing baby rushed aboard. The baby screamed the full length of the trip, pausing only to take licks of an ice cream cone that his mother held. The mother had a black eye.
Out of the darkness, he saw a great light, a fire burning below, and rejoiced—the navigation beacon! The Piedmontese soldiers must have lit it after all. He knew exactly where they were. Looking at his compass under the fading beam of his flashlight, he ordered the pilot to turn ninety degrees right.

Because the beggar had lit his fire on the opposite side of the hill from where the partisans customarily lit theirs, the pilot mis-timed his turn by a few seconds and plowed directly into the cathedral at 200 miles per hour. Two tons of bombs plus several hundred gallons of aviation fuel destroyed the cathedral in an immense explosion. The beggar was horrendously burned and died slowly and in excruciating pain over the next several hours.

At ten minutes past sunrise, the first American troops arrived at the monastery, allowed the sappers to thoroughly check it for mines, and set up an observation post. But no foreign invader had set foot in it while the cathedral still stood.

In this manner did St. Boggio perform the third and greatest of his miracles and in so doing earned admittance to the Kingdom of Heaven.

16. Upon reaching the top, I was immediately struck by the basilica’s yellowness. I had missed the sunset by a few minutes, but the sun’s afterglow tinted the towers fluorescent orange. Why build a cathedral in a spot where everyone can see it only to paint it neon lemon? I was hot, bitter and utterly unsurprised to discover that the cathedral was locked for the night, leaving me with nothing to do in the half hour before the tram returned to the city.

In his novel Emile, Rousseau calls the view from the top of the hill “le plus beau tableau don’t l’œil humain puisse etre frappe”—the most beautiful tableau human eyes have ever seen—which seemed a particularly cruel joke. The basilica has a perfect view of the factories on Turin’s south side of the city. Because it is home to Fiat and Ferrari, Turin is sometimes called the Detroit of Italy, and at that moment it seemed a perfect description.

17. Aside from a pair of bikers who had parked their motorcycles in front of the stairs leading up to the cathedral, I saw no other visitors. A man with a food truck was closing out his register, but sold me a slice of ham pizza anyway—a plastic-wrapped slab of bread and cheese that he nuked in a microwave. Worst slice of pizza I had in three months in Italy. The food truck guy asked me if I liked the view. I could understand Italian, but only spoke a handful of phrases with confidence. I stammered out that I liked it only okay. “Where are you looking?” he asked. I pointed. “No,” he said. “Wrong, wrong, wrong. Other side. Look from over there.” He pointed to the far side of the cathedral. I walked over. On the back of the basilica was a plaque commemorating the plane crash and a view of the foothills, utterly green and empty in the fading light, and, at the very limits of my vision, the Alps, snow-topped even in the summer’s heat. It was then I began to understand why Marv, or the farmers in the surrounding valleys, or even I might want to write a legend about a place like this one.
FROM THE MS OF MY KIN

Janet Holmes

1862.30 (379-382)

Sphere of

too common

perishing—

dream

the letters I can write

were

dance

Or

—like Birds—

sound,

mention

me

coming Home

to stay

I

have a way—
1862.31 (383-385)

a Pile of Mountains—
crawl between
chase

Then
Stop—

It don’t sound so terrible as it did—
I

Shift
To

new Things—
It’s shrewd

the

Next—One—
Could

mend my old One—

And mine—
the joy of feeling

high—

when I die

—how rich I go—
impeach
And banish me—
1862.32 (386-390)

the fair Ideal,

we discover

a lie—

We adored

Him—

Obedient to

command

It would never be

that sort

now

As

all the World

suddenly shrank back

They remember the

People

of Death—
how to forget

they

died

In Sacrifice

But
to

an

invention

Of
cool

Disposers—

we

occupy

another

One

not

meant

For

us

again—
1862.35 (402-403)

To hear        
sing

       a common

Crowd

“No Sir!    ”

is

Anguish

But

we could die—

The best

reason

To put this    down

And walk      away

Note

These poems are from a book-length project titled "The ms of my kin," an erasure of Emily Dickinson’s poems from 1861 and 1862, the first years of the American Civil War. (The title itself erases "The Poems of Emily Dickinson.") I began working on them as the U.S. was entering into its war with Iraq, during which time my own despair and anger threatened to shut down my creative process. Dickinson’s vocabulary of fierce spiritual love in a time of war gave me words that kept that from happening, and the first lines she wrote in 1861—”If it had no pencil / Would it try mine?”—gave me what seemed necessary permission.

My rules for the erasure were this:
–I must use at least one word from every poem.
–The words must be used in order.
–The placement of words on the page must reflect the omitted words. (Series of lines that are entirely blank from erasure have been condensed, in this publication, to one line for space reasons.)
–I would let various speakers emerge as the language dictated.

The poems take their individual titles from the year in which Dickinson wrote the originating poem(s), followed by a period and their number in my resulting sequence. The Franklin numbers of the originating poems follow, in parentheses. They could be considered collaborations.
REPORT OF THE WITNESS (II)

Jonathan Weinert

delivered at the Temple of the Skull
12.19.12.16.13, 5 Ben, 11 Kankin

Sire: I am not of your begetting.

This we know:

(Moldavia, 1810) A chilly domnișoară begat
an Astrakhan hat
which grew a fu manchu and fled
ahead of undisclosed catastrophes

into Romania. In time it hatched

a brood (a clutch, a tinder) striped with ichor,
rancor, rude
insinuations shot with stars
and screwy fruit whose root-threads clutched
the black wet sex
of Bukovina.

(The Bowery, 1910) Liquor brewed one hundred years will stink:
So did the liquor that my father’s father

(one boot planted on the neck of Ionel Brătianu,
one boot slipping on the stirrup sea)

smuggled out of Iași in his flesh.

He sluiced his fluid down the long white
throttle of America.
REPORT OF THE WITNESS (III)

Jonathan Weinert

delivered at the Patio of the Captives
12.19.12.16.15, 7 Men, 13 Kankin

I drink. I pass it on. New England, 2006: The queer guard posted here from Central Com has probed against the secret buttons of my flesh, has flensed my body like a grappled whale’s. Discovered nothing. It may be new wine pulsing from the opening of my second name, but then it’s made according to the secret family recipe. (I drink. I pass it on.) My corporals, my medics: Show me how these fasteners unclench. My leatherbacks, my indigents, who love and kill your enemies, show me how to shift my standard’s colors, America’s blood, corpse, and bruise, and I’ll show you (my coprophiles, my cossacks) how my acids rule, how history keeps repeating me, how I keep
producing the single vintage and dying
of the same disease. I am serial,

an unsolved case. I drink.
I pass it on.
REPORT OF THE WITNESS (IV)

Jonathan Weinert

delivered at the Temple of the Cross
12.19.12.17.7, 6 Manik, 5 Muan

Sire: We crossed to Egypt’s
desert edge: blasted egg-shell, ecru-and-camel camouflage,
dunes like racks of wedding cakes the Red Sea ate a shore into.
And left its rim of salt against, devouring the sweetness.

We went beyond our fear, our bare or sandaled feet working in the burning drifts,
while Pharaoh’s cavalry, all silk, chalcedony, and iron, arced the gap.

Behind them, Pithom vanished into sand.

Before us rose the wayless Sea.

The elder struck the bronze-cuffed butt-end of his staff three times against a blistered stone, which drove the waters up in two high cataracts of blood,
arrowed by a narrow path of mud.

Angelfish and moray eel gasped and foundered on the track, we crushed them, heedless, with our heels, we raced between two cliffs of lifted blood at dream-speed, deafened.
Then we found ourselves across. Amenhotep’s horsemen closed behind us, stallions stumbling in the slime and fish-slick, boot-soles slipping in the stirrups.

The elder split his staff against a stone. The curdled waters deliquesced, and rushed to meet above the tumbled heads of men and horses screaming as the breech collapsed and stove them in, horse-foam feeding sea-foam in the redder sea—then silence as the littered corpses lurched ashore.

We turned and saw the wilderness of Shur: blasted egg-shell, ecru-and-camel camouflage, bitter waters both before us and behind us

while our songs in praise of death went up to God.

We did what we were chosen for.
When Stalin’s bombs
Started raining on Berlin
All the telephones rang
At once, concussive
Blasts vibrating bedrock

* 

Hello? Let this take you
To the next place

* 

Bone-glow, pulse-tide,
Syncopated lumen of nerves,
I don’t believe I am alone
In making an enemy
Of my own body

* 

Here I have been
Knocking, Rumi says,
From the inside

* 

Votress of the spinning
Dust motes, of jade-green
Tea just poured…yes,
I understand long illness,
Pain as chanticleer

*
Tooth-edge, moon-
Shard, how to
Hover short of waking

*

Whatever hurries toward me
Trembling the ground
Light’s catenary arc, bulbs
Strung along the subway tunnel

*

Merely answer your door

*

Inexplicable tonight,
The dog—how she keeps
Crying, foxy ears
Pricked forward, eyes
Fixed on mine
SUFFICIENT WILDERNESS

John Estes

The seeds of instinct are preserved under the thick hides of cattle and horses, like seeds in the bowels of the earth, an indefinite period. Thoreau

A nickel each—
the spending
kind—time love
needed rope
or explosives to
sprout—bloom,
blossom, whatever
stage we stop
to note how bodies
wring or erupt
into colors—
and I’d be rich.

The beholder,
I know. I confess
a despotic eye,
a tyrannical initial
disposition.
Who couldn’t guess
that, though?
It’s not news,
to say the passions
ascend/descend
the throne of
every fiefdom.
News me about
the fief.

Wednesday last
I read in Walden:
“The civilized man is a more experienced and wiser savage.”
My wife and I
argued, our regularly
scheduled domestic disturbance
to fix the terms
of home
and art repair.
Not exactly Peter
robbing Paul,
but same synagogue.
The dogs
dug under
and escaped the fence.
We concluded
that like trees
our virtues, if any,
were in being
unable to be
otherwise: but
a thief, too, must
be sheltered.

That love is
a daemon or backyard
grass will
never revive, I
can easily accept.
If it resists turning
to gold, old
chemists and I
agree it’s devilish.
But wrath—as
in wrath of Woden
or Odin’s wrath,
like copper-wire
wreaths, or coils,
as a service, hired
and performed—
works only in north
countries; love
there goes for what
maims you; I skip
the God term
on purpose.
What I plant
every year, manure
but never water
never fails, as yet,
to yield.
When she wasn’t alone or with a man, she was with me. I can still see mid-August, her hay-colored mane falling down the middle of her back like a waterfall, dappled with flecks of light and heat. When the sun broke through the blinds of her back window, she rose to cut her long limbs through lanes of unbroken water, endlessly smooth in her strokes. And in the balance of dusk, she escaped once again to the backroads, the ones leading to a remote stall, where she mounted someone’s gold Palamino, a streak among reds and oranges of the horizon. That summer I learned lust, how to inspire its spears from the curious men who watched us in the bars where we stood together on nights when our own men ran off in search of other women. I remember the night she taught me how to love as a woman in the dark of my room, the breeze sneaking through open windows, shadows of leaves moving along the horseshoe shape of her breasts as I traced along the steep slope of her stomach, lulling her, whispering. I calmed her, and she let me nestle there, between her legs. When I began to lead her, she turned with the slightest pressure of my hand’s direction. I explored her evenly, as if finding my way through the hidden ranges of my own geography. Afterwards, we stretched out side by side, the moonlight a connecting path along the canyons of our bodies. Though motionless, she remained restless, fighting me as she had all the others. I knew I would not tame her. I rose and walked away. Thinking of her now, I swell like a river, filled by the wake of a sudden storm whose lightning maddens its way towards me from the horizon.
I imagine her free and fleeting,
her long hair calling her lovers from a distance,
a wild horse running beneath her.
Slipshod as raw wool
(yet tangled perfectly in ghost-matter)
the swallows come banking
across the lake’s face, above our head:
the pair that settles on the gutter’s lip
lock there and whistle to one another—
(blur our eyes and they are four)
and you are a song and I
the singing—you are a husband
but I ignore the galaxy beside you,
her attention to swallows, until
my value withers down to bitter puns,
weak lightning out over the waves—
none of this any match for my secrecy.
CONSIDERATION OF THE SAUGEYE

F. Daniel Rzicznek

Returning like fire to the match,
mosquitoes curlicue above the hummingbird’s
daytime trough by the darkened glass—

so dark our deep reflection blots
the river and its one-way waywardness

though in the waters the slender fish
(bastards of science—perfection
crossed with perfection beyond even

my lulling forever) don’t tell
(can you hear them?) which direction

their lone world veers this latest of hours

when headlights strafe the hillside, maybe
scanning a hunched form through lit panes,
but not me: I grow absent: innocent.
**Again, She Tells the First Story**

*Barbara Jane Reyes*

once, when there was no light, the wind danced with the sea, whose glassy surface became untame funnels and silver crested waves as she leapt and spun. how the wind also spun and let out a mighty roar. you have heard this one before, no? how earth convulsed as if laughing. how seafloor forced her fingertips skyward. how she freed her body from the silent, murky depths.

she who was born of the rocks fell in love with the one who was born of sea spume. there upon the rocks, they spread seeds and soil, and from these the bamboo sprouted. it rooted itself in those rocks, and some say kidlat split this bamboo open.

others say a great serpent ruled the sea, and set upon his crown, a gleaming stone upon which the skyfolk spilled dark earth. i do not know why they tried to bury the serpent, but because of this, he hissed and lashed at them. the sea was once sweet and cool as rainwater. in the north, a medicine woman told us of her people’s prayers for salt. hot winds brought to them fragrances of the dead. after the waters receded, how the shores became the color of clear crystals and blood.

hija, i bring the sea tobacco leaves and fruit, but still no stories come to me. i plead with her, *o diwata, pakitanggap po ninyo ang aking handog, ang inyong mga salita lamang ang hinihingin ko.* today as ever, she gives me but silence.
She was born with fins and fishtail,
A quick blade slicing water.

She was her father’s mermaid child,
A river demon, elders said.

She mimicked her cetaceous brothers,
Abalone diving bluest depths.

She polished smooth her brothers’ masks,
Inlaid nacre half moon eyes.

She lit oak pyres and bade the wind
A whispered requiem.

She knew the songs of tidal surge,
Of death-still moonless nights.

She veiled herself in cornflower
To soothe the ocean’s rage.

She learned the language of the loom,
Mirrored grandmother’s oak tree hands.

She spooled elk sinew pulled from bone,
Fleeting bodies, a meditation.

She carved spear tip and dagger hilt
In winter’s shadowy corners.

She sharpened blades, and fled downriver
As elders clucked their tongues.

She emerged in spring, this tribe of one,
Hybrid coyote and cool green sea.
PILGRIMAGE

William Archila

When the L. A. river rolls rapidly along the freeways, torn, thrashing waves slapping against concrete,
cold echo of the wind moving among trees, I’ll walk back to Sonsonate. When the late sun leaves palm trees sound asleep, ragged dusty branches without fruit or shade, or the full throat of a bird,
I’ll take off my shoes and walk back to Sonsonate. The night I hang these shoes over telephone wires,
swinging to the clank, pop, stop and go; rhythms and moans of the traffic, I’ll walk back.
I’ll walk back when the moon drops into Echo Park Lake, pale fingered dime making a sloppish sound,
long blades of grass rising out of freeway cracks. By the time the fall of the rain breaks into the streets, washes
the gray film of smoke,
all the gasoline of the night
down the gutter, I’ll take off my hat,
walk back to Sonsonate.

When the city falls
at my feet, its architecture
collapsing to its knees,
weight of cars cooling

in the heat, I’ll pack my bones,
head back to Sonsonate,
down a road of coffee beans,
old broken down guitars.
SATURDAY May 29th 2005: We walked around Lake Murray and had two lovely bird sightings. One, a hummingbird hovering over my right shoulder, examined me carefully then flew to its nest in an adjacent jacaranda tree. The nest no larger than my thumb and finely woven with various grasses and down feathers, the whole of the fertility labor appeared as beautiful basketry, keenly crafted reminding us of the Miwok and Yokut masterworks. Directly afterward we saw a yearling red-tailed hawk rise up from a clump of high weeds, circle over us at no more than twenty feet. It floated up to a eucalyptus branch where it preened and watched us, puffed out its chest feathers—a feast of wonders. And cleaning our yard this same weekend, weeding, trimming, we uncovered an alligator lizard, a rare species guarding her eggs under a pile of rotting palm leaves we'd months earlier cut down. The moisture and temperature of the decay obviously holding the conditions of birth. The five eggs were elliptically shaped, pink hued, about the size of a thin finger tip, and the mother refused to move from her protective hoverings and the call of her ancient heritage. She had lost her tail from some previous encounter and we, realizing our intrusion, immediately and gingerly re-covered the nest hoping somehow nothing has been overtly damaged or altered.

Miocene marine fossils have for decades been excavated in Orange County, California. This treasure of materials is the result of real estate development which has uncovered an extraordinary dimension of previous worlds, the most extensive collection of its kind revealing a record of life when Southern California lay under an ocean. One can visit the Orange County Warehouse and Historical Commission to examine these relics.

In many California prisons Criminon International has become a key player for “educational resources.” Criminon is the “secular arm” of the Church of Scientology which has been allowed into Corcoran prison. The officials of the facility have lied about their knowledge of Criminon’s presence. One of the main promoters is Gary Goddard, director of the prison’s “educational services” who sought to create an illusion that Criminon has been officially sanctioned. Goddard wrote memos to supervisors praising the group, and in a June 20th 2004 note to the Warden, A.K. Scribner, claimed Criminon “has a long history of successes in the rehabilitation of inmates on an international scale.” Here is a primary example of the collapse. Rather than “education” whatever that term had once meant, we now
have “educational directors” in the prisons using their positions to promote organizations such as Scientology and making claims of international successes which are a menace and will place more lives and communities at risk. Schemes of infiltration like this, the attempt to use prisoners’ lives as promotion is an inflaming barbarity, stealthy, netherworldly, morbidly ready to transform the brokenness into an even purer mineral. The fact of this sanction by men like Gary Goddard and organizations like Criminon indicate what may and can happen on the “outside” and bring us to an even starker threshold when one further considers U.S. District Court Judge Laurence K. Karlton who ten years ago ordered state prisons to improve their care of mentally ill inmates. He was alarmed at that time by reports of repeated failures in care at sites such as Corcoran. Judge Karlton is presiding over a 1990 class action suit challenging the quality of mental health care in the state prison system where twenty percent of the 171,000 prisoners in California are diagnosed with some form of mental illness. In one cell block, it was reported, inmates were confused, naked and without mattresses or blankets. In addition staff responses to inmates who failed to take medication was “irate” — “some renegade elements of custody staff apparently took it upon themselves to apply their own beknighthed versions of how best to handle seriously mentally disordered inmates.” Renegade guards and renegade organizations such as Criminon malignantly enshrine these lacerations on the Inside while on the Outside we watch the symptoms expand: since 9/11 the United States in the invaded countries has taken over 68,000 “suspects” into custody. The word which comes to mind, Primitivbauweise is Himmler’s vocabulary rising up as a glassy-massed crushed zone of excited states in what we have embraced. The velocity of hate greater than the velocity of light.

Qualitative temperature profiles available upon request.

TUESDAY May 31 2005: Spent a quiet day gardening, gesturing toward new works. Late afternoon took out gnarled, knotted, twisted oleander stump with my chain saw, the one used to clear our house site in Shandaken. The plant is a powerful, regenerative being. After sunset we searched the night sky; saw Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, the Dipper very prominent. North Star vivid.

A small but ugly report, Dick Cheney says he’s “offended” by Amnesty International’s critique of the Guantanamo Bay “detentions”: “Frankly I was offended by it. For Amnesty International to suggest that somehow the United States is a violator of human rights. I frankly just don’t take that seriously.” What are the unrelenting implications here? Nothing frenzied, no lunging after excuses, explanations, nor fury. But rather the stark, sterile,
guarded contempt, the mortar of vicious rottenness, impervious, closed up in its smallest volutions in order to birth the cruelties of its Virgin Babylon: “the vapours of the yawning pit” “heaps of smoking ruins” risen in the “Nights of American prosperities” and its “lulling cadences” of exculpation, turpitude, wiley depravity. Blake’s “blank in Nature” and in his geography “the cliffs of the Dead” infected with the “Science of Wrath”.

“Where can a daughter in her water breaking live?” his mother would whisper over her clothes to be washed. Food to be cooked.

MONDAY June 6th 2005: Curious weather, rain last night, intermittent clouds which expand and then in their disappearance form a shredded complex expanding and darkening light. Today is “D-Day”—sixty-one years ago the young men of my father’s and mother’s generation walked into the slaughter which has never ended.

We went to Oceanside yesterday. Walked the pier. Some of the streets. The sad prominence of “Marines”—some back from Iraq looking tense and ravaged. Others—the about-to-go who will return sickened like theses brothers who vacantly smoke, spit continuously into the spaces around them. War surpluses on every corner, hookers subtle and not so subtle on side streets and alleys, girls attached to some dilapidated version of starlet magazine beauty hoping to marry one of the many scared never again to be normal boys or to roll’em for a day, a week, a month; the girls hard, focused, edgy as the boys sit in the endless barber shops getting sheared, coffin ready spic n’span. “Armies of the Night” howling in the shadows of the prolific stupors of this Age.

This city forbidding as the old Fort, where the Indians, the French, the peltry in beaver mixed with lead laced brandy in a coma sucking at the waves of desertions rimming the about to be coldly treasured future. He didn’t know if his father had been conceived before or after the old grandfather’d got bit on the balls by that spider with its weird red hourglass to show its victims a last grain of sand spilled beyond any rescue. Was his father first generation after the visit of an eight legged girl who weaved her legends about the life of worlds and where they’d end up huge sexually for one night to be alive?

WEDNESDAY June 8th 2005: Walked around Lake Murray earlier this morning. Sightings of osprey, mallard, pelican, nesting hummingbirds, lizards. The flora so fulminous during the earlier winter rains has dried up. We also had the skirts of our palm trees cut away. The palms had become a haven for rats; so that’s done. Gail doing initial bisque firings in her electric kiln—preparing to do glaze studies and experiments.

SATURDAY June 11th 2005: Another heavy blanket of mist last night.
Today, late morning, still cool, overcast. Yesterday went to the San Diego Museum of Art. A show entitled “2000 Years of Latin American Portraiture.” The emphasis was primarily the colonial experience but the show began with small magnificent Maya and Mochica faces. The quality of the Mochica “stirrup” head pieces always astounds. Much of the European based eighteenth and nineteenth century works were stiff, deadened, clumsy but there are instances of illumined care; portraits by artists “unknown” which dug into the paint with some unhesitant discovery. Two pictures of young women were very compelling and two portraits of the dead lying in “state”—one of a child and another, a young beautiful nun. The artists in this case specialized in this form of portraiture obviously in a hurry so the brushwork has about it a freshness an airiness even before the Catholic morbidities mixing with the ancient trance intensities of Mexico. The poses Aztec-like but the Christian layers of repulsion smooth and secretive and Jesus stunk in their full, cold, savageries. There was a David Sequieros painting which Gail pointed out, was much in its handling like Alice Neel.

Benjamin Paul has died. The student of Margaret Mead’s and the founder of “Medical Anthropology.” A brave man who did much of his work in the Guatemalan highland town of San Pedro La Laguna. When the plague of “Disappearances” began once more in the late 1980s Paul cowrote with William J. Demarist “The Operation of a Death Squad in San Pedro La Laguna.” His great piece, “Health, Culture, and Community: Case Studies of Public Reactions to Health Programs” examined how traditional communities struggled to accept health innovations and suggested that international aid programs would be more effective if they considered local cultural beliefs. In San Pedro La Laguna church bells tolled after residents heard about the “curious and talkative professor with the mischievous smile.” The town’s first secondary school, named after Paul and his wife, was built on the land they donated.

Monday June 13th 2005: A crisp breeze, our wind-chimes at song. Yesterday began with an earthquake! 8:30am, the house jolted, Gail in bed reading said the bed “jumped,” as if moved by an invisible animal which seems most appropo for what that description might hold. Heard reports of swaying telephone poles, buildings rumbling (as did our house). The epicenter for the quake: Anza California on the Riverside/San Diego County borders, a 5.6 Richter Scale measurement. No injuries. We spent the afternoon planting vegetables, putting up trellises—the vegetable garden has a feeling of emergent resource, beautifully crafted as Gail designs it and makes it come true. Very exciting especially as one tries to envision “urban” gardening and spaces on a smaller scale, the renewing shapeliness of one’s
own private possibilities.

The girls. They weren’t from the beach. Their bodies weren’t primed like a backyard bullet or some missile in a silo filling its birthhole with flames, all that speed equipment pumping for the biggest inch of death. Their make-up drooping in the early summer heat, tits sweated up, smashing the mosquitoes that’d been in that air since old Queen Anne’s skeleton glimmered with furs.

Watching the insurance industry as it attempts to insure even greater war profits in Iraq. Has the blood price ever been so completely unmasked, the negating specialized malignancies of these materialisms attempting to polish an end to time. And where do Hardy’s great saddened passages from “Tess of the D’Urbervilles” possibly fit?:

Day at length broke in the sky. When it had been day aloft for some little while, it became day in the wood. Directly the assuring and prosaic light of the world’s active hours had grown strong, she crept from under her hillock of leaves and looked around boldly. Then she perceived what had been going on to disturb her. The plantation wherein she had taken shelter ran down at this spot into a peak, which ended it hitherward, outside the hedge being arable ground. Under the trees several pheasants lay about, their rich plumage dabbled with blood; some were dead, some feebly twitching a wing, some staring up at the sky, some pulsating quickly, some contorted, some stretched out - all of them writhing in agony except the fortunate ones whose tortures had ended during the night by the inability of nature to bear more. Tess guessed at once the meaning of this. The birds had been driven down into this corner the day before by some shooting party; and while those that had dropped dead under the shot or had died before nightfall had been searched for and carried off, many badly wounded birds had escaped and hidden themselves away or risen among the thick boughs, where they had maintained their position till they grew weaker with loss of blood in the night-time, when they had fallen one by one as she heard them.

The activity done by the most “civil persons” as the author places it who “...made it their purpose to destroy life ...” And for the Person, “Tess” of the novel, the first hints of the catastrophe “a new strange sound among the leaves” “a sort of gasp or gurgle” that couldn’t readily be identified. Hardy has, in this, a new concentration on the skillfully slow, withering currencies of human distraction and his questions in 1891 and their burdens extend to these early 21st century moments; the pressures of the violences appearing with such delicate strain in the novelist’s landscapes which by their merci-
lessness evoke the delectations of plutocracy that needs slaughter, the new mysticisms of our 21st century private game preserves/plantations which are the equivalent to “Space Luxuriencies” - think of this for instance in relationship to “Virgin Galactic” out of Mohave California. Virgin Galactic is already in the process of marketing 2.5 hour flights into space for $250,000.00. The company boasts it will offer “...an...experience unlike any available to mankind ... for the first time in the history of the universe...” Bookings began in 2005 and “Virgin” has five nearly space ready prototypes and will, by 2008, be ready to launch all five ships everyday from its Space Port America site in New Mexico. “Virgin’s” Space Port will feature a new “Luxury Experience” with hotel space both on planet and off. Each ship will have the capacity for five tourists apiece and once in orbit the tourist will have five minutes of luxury experience before re-entry trajectory begins. Remember, in this, 1968 when, after the first extraterrestrial touchdown by “mankind,” Pan Am booked over 100,000 tourists flights to the moon even as Vietnam had been transformed into “The Slab.”

One thinks of incorporation before these ancient numbers out of that American year, the marketing cycles and their energies of antagonism a modern personality needs spreading new fatalities and fatalism no one seems to recognize nor wants to name or the lies that personality needs to incorporate in order to live and by which the individual achieves her or his renunciation of the foundations of reality as Theodore Adorno examines the phenomena in “Minima Moralia.” But for myself as a novelist the phrasings in Hardy’s sentence “When it had been day aloft for some little while, it became day in the wood” hold the barely emergent pulses of the unruffled calms to come which are the prerequisites of the perfected horrors, the plantations of land mines planted so carefully by hand and the spells of this handwork, this enrooting. Is Hardy’s achievement, to enphrase De Kooning, a way of painting and by that reconfigure what the painter said so long ago about being “wrapped in the melodrama of vulgarity” and its condition of undistorted wanderings Hardy’s sentence awakens? The strange gurgling sounds of the civilization in these throes as if the Body Politic not only of the United States but the World has become an inchoate shadow eating, disfiguring, rising from the twisted alchemies of the Jornada del Muerto and the “Trinity”—poltergeists of the Jesus Hungers slurping the perils and agonies of World Injury, feeling nothing before their frenzies and desecrations and the sly morphologies rendering as nuisance and dead the word “Humanity” its old, charmed vindictive free meanings merely appendages cast aside for the more serious species “Zero Option” with its Aryan embrace of optimisms and leering inter-planetary utopias.
TUESDAY June 14\textsuperscript{th} 2005: still overcast with interspersed afternoon sun. Concentrating on summer chores: painting and sanding inside doors, outside porch pillars, and window frames. The Supreme Court overturned two murder convictions in Texas and California. The convictions were poisoned by prosecutorial racial biases instructing that jury selection exclude African Americans. There is a 1963 Dallas “prosecutor’s manual” that warns, “Do not take Jews, Negroes, Dagos, Mexicans, or a member of any minority race on a jury no matter how rich or well educated.” These attitudes still prevailed up to the time in 1986 when Thomas Miller-El was tried. There is evidence that prosecutors questioned potential Black jurors more aggressively and shuffled the seating of the jury pool in hopes of moving Whites to the front. The one Black juror accepted was a strong proponent of the death penalty. Justice David Souter said the jury selection process was “infected” by racial bias. He described as “trickery” the prosecution’s use of different questions for White and Black jurors and he dismissed the “incredible explanation” for why certain Black jurors were excluded (prosecutors said they excluded the potential Black jurors because they were leery of imposing a death sentence).

The U.S. Senate issued an “Apology” for its inaction on the terrible lynchings that took place in the United States from 1890 through the 1930s. This “Body” acknowledged “…that although two hundred lynching bills were introduced only three passed.” The House and seven U.S. presidents lobbied for such laws. None was ever approved by the Senate. Each time the House passed an anti-lynching bill, Southern senators filibustered them—once in a monumental battle carried out on the Senate floor for six weeks in the 1930s.

WEDNESDAY June 15\textsuperscript{th} 2005: 11:00am, overcast. Walked around Lake Murray this morning hoping the hummingbird we saw last year will come back to her nest. The lake is low but still there are egrets, red-wing black birds, jackrabbits, ground squirrels, and spectacularly beautiful flowering datura.

More revelations today. The Bush administration planned to initiate the war long before 9/11. The democracy in its present state shows not the barest spasm, barest revulsion toward these leaders, each the “Polypus” of Blake’s narrative risen from the Web of Death woven in Cathedron’s Loom. No Human Form, as that Bard says of these creaturely types, but only fibrous vegetations.

“Loud sport the dancers in the dance of death rejoicing in the carnage.”

A new state prison site has just opened: Kern Valley State Prison.

The cost for design and construction: $397 million
Annual operating costs: $136 million
Workforce: 780
Support Staff: 365
Inmate Capacity: 5,000
Total land needed: 600 acres [one square mile]

(Kern Valley is ex-governor Grey Davis’s last contribution to the Correctional Officers’ Union)

THURSDAY June 16th 2005: the Bolivian Revolution is rising up in resistance to Bechtel and Halliburton who want ownership of the Sky and the Rain: “… in what eternal, unstirring paralysis, and deadly hopeless trance …” says Melville of life insurance companies whose mining processes are similarly oriented to the modern corporation’s application of the supernatural agency of guarantee. At no time in our previous histories have we seen an attempt to claim ownership of the Sky Rain and Water as the corporate “person” begins to assume larger impersonations that have been lying in wait.

More Guantanamo ulcerations. Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama proclaimed yesterday, “This country is not abusing prisoners. We have no policy to do so. And it’s wrong to suggest that. And it puts our soldiers at risk who are in this battle because we sent them there. Some of the detainees need to be executed.” How is one to sound the pathology of this language. Are these the symptoms of parasitism and its accompanying morbidities, a fear of Biblical leprosy induced by a sermon heard in childhood and manifesting itself in this form of violent twisted speech, or is this language an exhibit of a decay process and its possible relation to “AaA”, the ancient Egyptian name for disease-causing forces and these primordially joined vowels designating the desperate mummification of certain fish? (as I re-read and edit theses passages today, July 30, 2006, the Egyptian vowels seem to enwreath and suffocatorily expand: the Bush administration will be “opening” a new state-of-the-art maximum security prison site at Guantanamo: a $30 million two storey jail built by Halliburton and, apparently, modeled on a jail facility in Lenawee County, Michigan, another rural American locality that has been able to avoid economic collapse through the prison boom.)

Did Edgar Ray Killen say the same thing to his fellow klansmen as Jeff Sessions said about “Detainees” in 1964, before Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney were beaten and shot?

Here yet another “senator” from the Deep South calling for murder out of what traditions of lynching, burning, mutilation rising up out of the Protestantisms that cannot seem to function without the grotesque brood-
ing meanness of hysterical racism no matter what its masks.

Is the most telling deformation of the war the massive food shortages plaguing the Occupied under the Spreader of Democracy?

SATURDAY June 18th 2005: 72 degrees, sunny, a beautiful wash of morning desert light, a dry breeze, and our cactus flowers variously appearing. The rulers are altering documents to favor cattle ranching on public lands. The Bush administration violated critical portions of a scientific analysis of the environmental impact of cattle on public lands before announcing Thursday (June 16th 2006) that it would relax regulations limiting grazing on these lands, according to scientists involved in these studies. A government biologist and hydrologist who both retired this year from the Bureau of Land Management said their conclusions that the proposed new rules might adversely affect water quality and wildlife, including endangered species were excised and replaced with language justifying less stringent regulations favored by cattle ranchers.

How is one to examine the hero cult of the mutilators. Coleridge in his “Lecture 6” addressed the issue of “property”:

Inequality originated in the institution of Landed Property –In the early stages of the World the right of landed Property must have been none or transient—a man was proprietor of the Land only while his Flocks were feeding on it … As Manufactures improved and the artificial Wants of Life increased, inequality of Life became more marked and enviable and the motives to mutual Injury numerous. From their undisciplined Passions as Individuals and as Communities, private vices and public Wars became frequent—and the influence of Kings and Chieftains increased with Despotism. Thus the jarring Interests of Individuals rendered Governments necessary and governments have operated like quack Medicines; they have produced new diseases, and only checked the old ones—and the evils which they check they perpetuate … Since the Revolution (The Glorious Revolution of 1688 under the reign of King James II) we have been engaged in perpetual Wars—in the course of which it has been calculated that more than ten million lives have been lost—Yet for no one of these Wars could any cause be assigned which would have justified the Monarchs and the wretched compliance of Ministers, and through them we are a bloodstained People … What, that can deprave the understanding and subvert the integrity of the People, does it (the government) not employ? It has spread among us almost an universal contagion of depravity—the Minister is bribed by his Offices, the Senator by the Minister—the corporation Elector by the Senator, and the citizen by the corporation elector—Selfishness is
planted in every bosom, and prepares us for slavery which it introduces. There is scarcely a Vice which Government does not teach us—criminal prodigality and an unholy Splendor surrounds it—disregard of solemn Promises marks its conduct—and more than half the business of Ministers is to find inducements to Perjury! Nay of late it has become the fashion to keep wicked and needy men in regular Pay, who without scruple take the most awful oaths in order to gain the confidence which it is their Trade to betray …”

The last sentence of the quote is Coleridge’s reference to the “system of Spies and Informers” his government hired to infiltrate the private world of citizens; activities which the Poet felt initiated a “deprivation of private morals” and destroyed the bonds that make any society possible, Love and Trust. The gentle Coleridge making his fierce Examination.

TUESDAY June 23rd 2005: Our friend Flame Simon took us in the morning to the Griffith Park Zoo which turned out to be very special. The animals were active and curious. The zoo was filled with kids running from one astonishing creature to another in their awed wonders. We saw a new-born tapir as well as a South American “Mane-Wolf”, a long legged rare species, graceful, curious, extremely shy. Saw a huge mandrill baboon and remembered at that moment L.S.B. Leakey’s uncovering of fossil gorilla sized baboons in the Olduvai Gorge; species which lived alongside Hominid ancestral forms. Afterwards Flame gave us a “tour” of LA’s East Side with all of its geographies of Latin America. Every neighborhood aburst with its own living sounds and dreams in this cauldron of experiments that is the Border Region.

In the afternoon we drove to Long Beach where I did a reading from Prisons: Inside the New America… The bookstore called “2000 and One Books” is owned by a Black couple who have over the last thirteen years made their store into a community and cultural nexus. We were stunned. I went for a nervous pee, came back and the place was packed. People came from all over LA and the reading turned into a “Town Meeting”; intense, moving—Black Vietnam war veterans with their wives—people frightened by what has happened to their civic world.

FRIDAY June 26th 2005: Sunny, a slight breeze. Yesterday did jury duty; sat for seven hours, not called, so I guess my name will appear in the lottery next year.

Edgar Ray Killen, the Ku Klux Klansman who incited others and planned the killing of Andrew Goodman, James E. Chaney, and Michael H. Schwerner has been given a 60 year sentence for the murders. “Justice” whatever it is, is late (41 years), but at least this man, along with Sam Bow-
ers, the “Imperial Wizard” who instructed Killen to organize the killing party, will go to a hell not even the Bible can comprehend. What do I mean by “hell”; the Keepers who are aerosol ready, sensor alert, no-spall maintained, germicidally delivered: transforms the Bible, Creation, Imagination, Art, Health, Desire, and Nature into domoic whirlpools and makes those domoic whirlpools acceptable alternatives to Being. But here the unfortunate question does rise up: are we immersed in the symptoms of a new slavery, the slavery to domoic disintegration, self made, self inflicted, born of our own civilization? And if so, what new Abolitions must we begin to Imagine?

Alberto Gonzales wants continued “flexibility” in setting more stringent prison sentences imposed by Federal judges. More cement for the grave-stones of this America conjoined to the “Product Defense Industry” which specializes in the “manufacture of doubt” “uncertainty” toward the issues of climate and planetary health, the making of the world’s continental shelves into neurotoxic puddles. The buyers? The tobacco Industry and Corporations. “For fifty years,” writes David Michaels in an editorial commentary today in the LA Times, “cigarette manufacturers employed a stable of scientists willing to assert (sometimes under oath) that there was no conclusive evidence that cigarettes cause lung cancer, or that nicotine is addictive. An official at Brown & Williamson, a cigarette maker now owned by R.J. Reynolds, once noted in a memo: ‘Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the body of facts that exists in the mind of general public …’” It is now unusual for the science behind a public health or environmental regulation not to be challenged. In recent years corporations have mounted campaigns to question studies documenting the adverse health effects of exposure to, among others, beryllium, lead, mercury, vinyl, chloride, chromium, benzene, benzidine, and nickel …” Buy a lie, a lie that mangles, disfigures, and kills torturously via cancer, slow suffocation, inch-by-inch cell-by-cell deterioration.

What exactly is the real “oil strike”? MOSS

More and more it seems the source is “Udan Adan” Blake’s “Ocean of Death Sweat” and who are the new Columbuses and crews?

I think of Artaud’s piece “On Balinese Theatre” and his phrase “under the sign of hallucination and fear …” and the uprising question at the beginning of Chapter XIX, “The Prophet” in Moby Dick having to do with who signs on to what ship and the articles of the contract: “Anything down there about your souls?”

SATURDAY June 25th 2005: The Battle of the Little Big Horn; one hundred twenty-nine years ago. Custer was another tyranos wanting and de-
manding the sacrifices of his soldiers as he strove for a possible “presidency” but ended up rotting himself under the boiling sun of that terrible American afternoon.

The people we were fighting. They knew how to shoot. Head shots that would come from nowhere and left you inside this shame for being there to see it and smell it. It couldn’t be filled up with anything. Nothing. No one could prepare you for what it felt like to see a man that way. I didn’t want to say too much about that, its perversion. The things it’d make me ask and wonder. Get me or someone else churned into a run through the fuckin procedures. He said he didn’t want me to live to come back thirsty for a surgical noose, swell my veins like so many others where we came from. And here was the ochre. If it made them come alive in the world of the dead then maybe it’d do something for me. The shadows underneath. They were filled with tunnels and boys uniformed and masked. Their steps throbbing against secret stairs. The greasy infected cement, cracking with the strain above it, its surface ready to erupt downward into this place. In one corner, a couple there is locked in a candle lit dance. The woman’s hunger.

She wants the male to unwrap himself. Show his penis. When she sees it a sound from her throat equally blood chambered rushes over the masked boys in the semidarkness wanting someone to kill. Her teeth have the sexual carnivals of her past etched into them. Her laughter animates the held scenes and the candle formed shadows on the walls behind them flutter with the growing erection, its transparency meeting the facial dangle of her tongue, the sleeve of her labia lushly flowered. On one of her teeth dawn has the jaws of water without flesh. The direction of the journey shines there.

MONDAY June 27th 2005: We worked this past weekend; sanding and stripping doors, painting and preparing our den for Jim Christiansen’s craftsmanship.

A week of political séances, Senate majority leader, Bill Frist, a medical doctor, tried to deny he made a video diagnosis of Teri Shiavo’s “state” even though the episode was recorded. No suppleness. Only flagrance, calm, steadfast in its debasements.

Dick Cheney backed away from his statement:

“The insurgency is on its last legs.”

These words a tangle of ennobled malice let loose as “politics” have now become our common writhings and mutual hostilities. Cheney’s statement may arise from the sureties of mass arrests and the pens to hold the clientele. Thus the information about the expansion of prisons in Iraq and Camp Bucca near the Kuwati border. The army is also working on the construction of a third major prison near Sulaymaniya—there is also Ft. Suse.
former Russian-built barracks near Sulaymaniya. “Part of it used to be a prison, so it should be easy to renovate,” said General William Brandenburg, the “overseer” of U.S. run prisons in Iraq. “Renovation” re-formed as a Corrections specific verb with a washfast garment horizon, a full line purity stream offering minimal chains of inconvenience. And the adverb “easy” in-framing this American general’s attitude toward the transformation of the “space” that surrounds him; “ease” dropping out of its Old French and Latin parachutes notifying ourselves yet once more how comfortably we have en-joined ourselves to the long term durability characteristics of our domestic and foreign “justice facilities”. And if the army is central deliverer of “product” there how long will it be before the Rumsfeld/Bush new army is central deliverer of “product” here?

Number of prisoners now in Iraq: 10,178
Number of prisoners awaiting “processing”: 1,630

In California the costs for keeping aged, ill prisoners has no apparent ceiling.
The number of people over the age of 55 in the system: 6,400
The number of second and third strikers who are destined to grow old and die in the system: 42,240

Hundreds of these prisoners already cost the state over $400,000 a year a piece for health care. J.P. Trembl, an aid to Correction Czar, Roderick Hickman, stated, “We believe if people commit a crime and have been tried, judged, and sentenced, they need to serve the time. Just because we’re in a budget crisis we can’t make crime and punishment decisions based on fiscal concerns.” A budgetless system of retribution—the once twice whatever it takes long-term solution mystical affordable lightweight transportable scheduled for corrections delivery on any asteroid or pre-oxygenated planet in-waiting. The diphthongs of “need” tied to the vowels of “serve” whether from Middle English, the Latin, or Etruscan origins the pop-up noun is still “slave”. Fanny Howe says in “The Wedding Dress”: “The prison system manipulates the people it incarcerates in order to see if they can be deformed and become something unrecognizable.” But if the experiment has become a “Criminal Justice Studio” of design principles, service provisions, and nationwide office locations providing assistance to local associate firms then the “something unrecognizable” is part of the new, more helpful arsenal to meet increased demands for service.

Sex mummy come to bathe everyone in something huger than any Egypt ever was or could be, say Charlton Heston, climbing down from that phosphorous-laced weed like a miracle-mile Moses with those petroglyphs, says the ostrich feather, says.
Wednesday June 29th 2005: The great historian, Shelby Foote, has died. He wrote his pieces on the Civil War under a picture of Marcel Proust, working from nine to five on what he considered personally homely labors.

The Bush administration, in the midst of this war, has produced a billion dollar shortfall for funds to cover the health care of veterans. Along with this shortfall senate republicans have consistently voted down all proposals to enlarge VA healthcare programs.

Are the maimed and violated to be considered too cost heavy, and, if they are still useful, fodder for the prisons either on planet or off?

Some got it from spiders, arms swelling like stuffed inner tubes; human extremity become a raw flange, the mind connected to it wondering about its own body’s combination, and whether after the ten thousand choices of antigens it might try to stop the arachnid proteins with, it’d quit, say fuck it, you can have this one I’m riding. Let those packages of DNA go squirt their goddammed ways into the future on my own indifferent venom time sway with a vindictiveness that could kiss you back to the Eocene when these death touchers with fangs and poisons to put the brain down or rot the blood appear along with the giant horse-gulping birds that wandered the savannahs of North and South America for nearly fifty million years and you can finally walk real slow figuring someone’s business is really older than yours no matter what war hole you crawl down and get jaw fatigue from what you eat there which includes that deep freeze delirium sending you a paycheck burst from the sniperman.

Friday July 1st 2005: Foggy and cool earlier when we went for our six mile walk around Lake Murray with “Iris” who has become a fine dog. Saw two blue herons. They seemed to be in some sort of combat; fierce cries and squawks, poses, and then a chase along the watery edges.

Judge Thelton Henderson has placed California’s prison health-care system under federal receivership. The judge said that he was especially alarmed by the uncontested statistic provided by a court appointed expert “that a prisoner needlessly dies once a week” due to a collapse of basic care in the system. An attorney for the inmate plaintiffs claimed in a 2001 class action lawsuit that the prison health care system of California amounted to unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment. The court experts found few signs of progress toward any improvement and provided chilling examples illustrating filthy conditions, ill-trained and neglectful doctors and a pattern of preventable deaths that one expert called “macabre” and unlike anything he had ever seen before. The “expert” in this case is Dr. Michael Puisis, author of “Clinical Practice in Correctional Medicine”: Correctional Medicine across the nation is a contract for profit bonanza led
by such companies as “Prison Health” and “Correctional Medical Services.” The specialty of these contractors: lethal cost cuts and the hiring of doctors and nurses with questionable credentials for a treasure of billions. Does such neglect amount to a culture of execution without sanction and designating what hemorrhage at the hidden unadmitted core of our lives? This American version of the SS, killing by novel non-invasive mutilation pathologies, or, call it “A note on Dispeopling First Interplanetary Settlements: Concerning Earlier Defects of Organization”.

Bernie Ebbers wants out. Though he stole eleven billion dollars, he desires to surrender his remaining fortune of forty-five million for the court’s mercy and to avoid dying in prison. No one has been able to re-define the depth of these “white collar” criminals and their crimes which are violent, compulsive acts of savagery and permanent mutilation that force us all into realms of heartless shadow play.

SATURDAY July 2nd 2005: The U.S. Senate has agreed to revive the “Bunker Buster Program.” Linton Brooks, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, and Donald Rumsfeld insist “the country needs to develop a nuclear warhead that would be capable of destroying deeply buried targets.” Such a weapon “could cause from several thousand to one million casualties, depending on its yield and location,” Brooks acknowledged, and further stated, “There is no way to avoid significant fallout of radioactive debris from such use…”

If you walked out into the forests surrounding the City on the Straits anytime from its foundation to the early 1840s before those primeval stands had had their bark circled one tree at a time over millions of acres you could have found under that canopy raspberries, whortleberries, cranberries and strawberries, the ancient abundance nearly as lovely a gift as the shade and dappled light which had called it to unfold as soon as the ice of another world had gone stagnant.

There were so many different kinds of shade to choose from that the undecided pilgrim could dance herself helpless for at least three lifetimes over a hesitation about which maples to sit under, what walnuts to pick. Getting too comfortable under your favorite oak might be a hazard because down the meadow directly there’d be either a plum or wild apple tree and the urge for one or the other before that snooze set in could destroy the science of laziness you were about to truly degrade yourself with in front of the sky loads of feather borne meat come to flit over your dreaming body and then go roost for free in the butternut and elm. With your reveries taking place on a rise above Lake St. Claire you’d have been able to look down on that water and the huge shadows its schools of fish made. Pike, Bass, Stur-
geon, Pickeral, Bullhead, Perch, White Fish, Trout migrated from one fresh water sea to another forming underwater clouds that would have seemed to contain no end. Moose, Bear, Buffalo, Elk, Deer, those shoals of fresh water ocean fish, and storms of Passenger Pigeons were the meat supply for at least a thousand generations.

TUESDAY July 5th 2005: Worked on our house; painting, sanding, peeling old paint off with a heat gun—projects that have been waiting. Last night went to the Rothenberg’s for a 4th of July banquet which warmed our hearts—we even sang “America the Beautiful” reclaiming our country from “California to the New York Island”.

The LA Times had an editorial this morning focused on the Bush administration’s re-writing, editing, deletions of vital scientific and environmental studies some of which amount to more than criminal violation. The White House, for instance, in 2002 barred the release of a report that found levels of mercury in women of child bearing age are high enough to damage unborn children. The report was finally released after an Environmental Protection Agency official leaked it. The spokespersons for “The Rights of the Unborn” revealed in their truest labors of protecting the Poisoners of the Unborn as an acceptable rate of statistical birth deformity in order to insure continued prosperity. How can one ever resolve one’s feelings toward a civilization that would use such sickness to service its own gains and call to this ghost horde as the source of fevered moralities while at the same time covertly allowing brain death to drip into the wombs of its female populations. The function here is to poison both women and children and to enslave them in moral intoxications to Molech’s delight. Both Blake and Ginsberg with their lovely and tender intelligences have made this into one of the central themes of their poetry exposing that form of extremity where all other joys in becoming so distant and displaced that the only delight left is cruelty. And is this realm “a veil of soul making” as Keats declared in the fullness and generosity of his humanity?

WEDNESDAY July 6th 2005: A cool wind and so far a cool summer. We’re at our labors, restoring doors, tiling, tarring roofs.

Read a Paul Krugman editorial in the New York Times about the “Center for Consumer Freedoms” website. This advocacy outfit for Coca Cola, Tyson Foods, and, among many others, Wendy’s, states: “Far too few Americans remember that the Founding Fathers, authors of modern liberty, greatly enjoyed food and drink … Now it seems that food liberty—just one of the many areas of personal choice fought for by original American patriots—is constantly under attack …”

“Food Liberty”? 
What could this bizarre “liberty” be and are we discussing the “right” to be obese and has the whole thing collapsed into what Lawrence called “our eunuch civilization” with its “sneaking, sterilizing cruelty”?

THURSDAY July 7th 2005: Awful news from London. Four separate bombings. People killed and injured. Daily life sunk in horror and pain. The bombings took place in the King’s Cross section of central London exactly where we lived and walked and took the Tube.

MONDAY July 11th 2005: We’ve written friends in the UK. Everyone thankfully OK but weary, worried.

Beans climbed their cornstalks, pumpkin and squash strung as far as the eye could gauge. A chaotic, random planting meant reduced soil loss and more work for insects who, because of that, couldn’t destroy a human concentration on one yield only. Prolonged rigorous apprenticeship equally awaited the hunter who had to know down to the most obscure detail the behavior of the animals and himself. His stamina, eyesight, threshold of pain, the physical and mental condition of the hunted, size, age, the insects that came to bite them, season, lay of the land and who else out in the nothingness was also hungry, human and non-human, pursuit, butchery, preservation of meat demanded the total resources of body and mind. You could do everything perfect and still end up blinking over how a last kernel of corn might get fifteen men, women, and children over that six weeks hump before the bursts of new life appeared.

TUESDAY July 12th 2005: Robert Scheer wrote an op-ed piece today—Karl Rove and the Valerie Plame scandal. Mr. Scheer, at least, is finally using a vocabulary which visits the facts. In the end, though, what Rove’s leak (we know now in April of 2006 that it is Bush’s leak) and Novak’s column really exposed was the depravity of the administration’s use of a false WMD threat and its willingness to go after anyone willing to express the most woefully shrunken truth.

WEDNESDAY July 13th 2005: Summer seems to have arrived except for the late afternoon fog banks similar to those of Marin County.

A Terrible Day

Four Al Qaeda operatives have escaped from the Bagram prison in Afghanistan. This facility a major segment of the Bagram Air Base head-quarters for US military operations in this now even more tragic country. The blending of our power and stupidity seems the nearly perfect mixture by which to sink into these seething ancient canny worlds we have invaded and which have already swallowed us without our knowing exactly in what ways we have been devoured.

What about her lovers? The ones she allowed at the edges of her femi-
ninity to make her labia swell, hold their breasts and nipples to the breakages of hot breath between her upper and lower teeth set to bite the equally womanly flesh above or below her? Her own womanhood erect splitting the protective shield of lips folded in the precisions of flesh to be slipped.

The last of a series of Pentagon inquiries into the “detainee abuse” begun after the Abu Ghraib revelations is now officially “closed.” The “conclusion” of this final investigation “closes the book on the Pentagon’s examination of detainee abuse worldwide.” In the instance of this inquiry “Military investigators recommended that the former commander of the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Major General Jeffrey D. Miller... be reprimanded for his role in detainee mistreatment at the facility, but a top Army general rejected the conclusion...” The reprimand was rejected by Army General Bantz J. Craddock, Chief of the US Southern Command in Miami, which also oversees operations at this prison site in Cuba. The investigators determined that the interrogation techniques used on Mohammed Al-Qahtani, a “high value” prisoner (the “20th highjacker”) did not “rise to the level of inhumane treatment,” though the techniques used were degrading and abusive.” Craddock rejected these findings of Lieutenant General Randall N. Schmidt and Brigadier General John T. Furlow “on the grounds that Miller did not violate US Law or policy.”

Our rulers have finalized the legitimacy of the “quaint” in relationship to the Geneva Convention. The conjunction of our domestic prison industry and our world-wide dentention/renditions represent the certainties of disintegration merging with a new generation of plutonium two hundred thirty-eight. Is there a difference between this “production” and the final set of “inquiries” into “detainee abuse” on a world-wide basis from Guantanan- mo to the secret pens on our warships to the Black Sites of Eastern Europe, the Middle East or the other on-planet asteroidal destinations? This is where senator John Warner’s 2004 vow to fully reveal the truths of Abu Ghraib dribble away and become a part of the fantastic paradoxes only Goyas’s “Tooth Hunting” might explain in Los Caprichos.


Amidst the tragedy of yesterday’s information about the official shut-down of inquiries into our world-wide prison industrial complex and the abuse of detainees come the findings of a report entitled “The State of Black Los Angeles” by the Urban League and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles.

This report appears forty years after the horrifying Watts Riots, the urban conflagration which initiated the complex, bitter racial horrors of
the 1960s. The data is its own macabre sorrow indicating that though some high income Black households have increased, that a high of Black children have health insurance (ninety-four percent), and sixty-three percent of Black children attend pre-school along with the fact that African Americans have increased representation among the City’s top elected officials, the majority live in the words of the “Report” in “sickness.”

1. Blacks are twice as likely as other groups to be the victims of violent crimes.
2. Death rates from homicide and HIV/AIDS are more than three times higher than other racial groups.
3. More Blacks receive public assistance and more Blacks live in poverty.
4. Blacks have arrest rates far higher than other groups.
5. The LAPD searches Black and Latino drivers four times more often than Whites or Asians but only thirty-eight percent of Blacks are found to be carrying illegal firearms compared with fifty-five percent of Whites, sixty-five percent of Latinos, and fifty-four percent of Asians.

But the most damaging problems remain unchanged over the past forty-year period.

Blacks have the lowest median household income: $31,905.00
Latinos: $33,820.00
Asians: $47,631.00
Whites: $53,978.00

Blacks, though ten percent of the population, make up thirty percent of the homeless.
Fifty-six percent of the hate crimes are committed against Blacks.
Forty-four percent of Black high school students fail to graduate within the required four-year period.

Home Loans: Five percent for Blacks. Whites, who make up thirty-one percent of the population, are given seventy-two percent of all such loans.

The premature death rate among Blacks in 40.6 per 100,000. This number far exceeds the rate for Latins at 11 per 100,000. For Whites: 4.5 per 100,000. For Asians: 3.8 per 100,000.

The premature death rate for Black teenagers is 131.4 per 100,000, a number that astonished even those who compiled the materials for this report.

In 2004 19.8% of Black drivers were stopped by the police.

Whites: 12.6%
Latinos: 11.2%
Asians: 10.1%
The national average for Blacks is 12.3 percent, yet law enforcement officials deny they practice “racial profiling.”

Thirty-two percent of Black males born in Los Angeles in the year 2001 are likely to go to prison in their lifetime. For Latinos the number is seventeen percent. For Whites the number is six percent.

These numbers have a chilling similarity to the findings compiled in 2004 which I cited in Prisons: Inside the New America from Vernooykill Creek to Abu Ghraib: A Black male born in America in the year 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of being imprisoned in his lifetime. Can such statistics be included in the smoking ruins of the World Trade Towers and the collapse into the fathomless morbid drift of our barbaric remove? The number which may more accurately evoke the sordidness of that remove defines the expansion of nuclear blast wave, equally our own invention, and what happens to the air we breath when subject to the equation:

\[
Pr = 2p \quad 7po + 4
\]

Who is to say, given these statistics, who is living in “sickness”?

THURSDAY July 21st 2005: The monsoons are upon us with remarkable variation. Yesterday at 2:30 pm the temperature gauge registered 103 degrees. We thought the beach for a late afternoon would be a remedy but the immediate coast-line was covered in dark thick storm clouds and at least a 35 degree reduction in temperature along with rain showers and soaking winds pushed far inland.

New reports from London about three attempted bombings which thankfully in this case were not successful but horribly frightening and sad. This information juxtaposed with a report on mid-western “water parks,” indoor recreation facilities which are open all year round (90 to 100,000 square feet). The piece was accompanied by an interview with a developer who used these adjectives to describe one of the “parks”:

- Huge
- Wonderful
- Monstrous

SATURDAY July 23rd 68 degrees at 9:00 a.m. a 35-degree drop from yesterday’s temperatures. For the last two days the weather has been summer-like—clear skies, hot, windless. Now it’s overcast and last night a heavy sky churning thunder passed over this coastal desert city.

He’d go down to the fall runs then alone, do the curls none but the best
surfers would try who watched him from those beaches as they waxed their boards and thought three or four times about heading out into those waters that could take a body the way the topmost skies of an earth take noiseless meteors. The hours spent making his body into that knife slicing the whole weight of planetary ocean, seeming to strip it back letter by letter to a namelessness again, and maybe learn how to live there not going forward backward but invent what could be braced out of the half shreds in the final letter.

**TUESDAY July 27th 2005:** Hot summer in full. Jim Christiansen came yesterday to install the last of our new energy saving windows. “Military dog handlers at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison engaged in a competition to see which one could make inmates defecate and urinate on themselves.”

A riot took place at the US compound in Bagram, Afghanistan. Eight people were taken from a village and “detained.” The crowd protesting the arrests shouted “Die America.” And what would happen to us if a billion people were to concentrate on this phrase in mass unison, calmly begin to shout these words and not stop shouting these words?

And if the ancient forest still inhabited the unmoved core of this world whether a city had been erected there or not then you could go down any of its alleys or broken streets wavering in their ends where the fingers of the dead dance on the palms of the living where women in their hunger for fish become snakes and disappear forever into the dream instructions their men cannot ever hear where the crows cry, “How did I come to be alive?” “Why am I in this world?” “Where am I going?” and then eat the youngest children of mankind first where the sister lurks who fixes deer-shit soups where spit from the cannibal brother can bring back the disappeared twin of the body where ancient grandmothers can drink whole lakes where bowls wait filled with magical vomit where a woman’s flayed skin hangs unbearably singing where the chestnut roots and the seven sisters murder beneath it near the edges of the rising sun where moles swallow men into their journeys where the big as a cloud butterfly brings dying and sicknesses every other day where the uncle has eyelids hanging to his cheeks where moccasins wait made of a woman’s labia where dice made of the owl’s eyes burst with their seeing.

Ginsberg on O’Hara: “He was at the center of an extraordinary poetic era…which gives his poetry its sense of historic monumentality…. And he integrated purely personal life into the high art of composition, marking the return of all authority back to the person. His style is actually in line with Thoreau and...
Whitman here composed in metropolitan space age architecture environment. He taught me to really see New York for the first time, by making the giant style of Midtown his intimate cocktail environment. It’s like having Catullus change your view of the Forum in Rome….”

SATURDAY July 30th 2005: Spent the afternoon yesterday body surfing and watching our young friend, a professional surfer, catch his waves. He is a spectacular craftsman who sets himself into a motion of body control unlike anyone we’ve seen. Not a frenetic surfing style biting into the waves with the choppy motions of a one winged wasp which can be a fascinating frenzy, but a kind of pelican grace, gliding in solitary man-weight as his ancient counterparts glide in their bird-weight an inch above the peculiar immense indifferent face of sea rhythms at this shore.

Today we heard something we could have never anticipated—the radio roars of the planet Saturn as recorded by the Casini Probe. A planetary sound so startling one is left in the wonders over one’s own breath before the vibratory darkesses of these melodies and the conjuction of this “contact” with all that presently envelops the fate of our own Planet/Life as one regards the sickened Saturnian violences which now accompany our daily life and these leaders as Saturnine monstrocities sullen cold steady in their compulsion their spite and what Frank O’Hara would have seen as the signs indicating that these people totally regret life and would force the rest of us into the reign of that regret and its images—a “Not of this World” as the older stories might place it. A reign where there are only corpses left and a single dwarf who offers to show the emperor of these results the life-less world which has come to pass. I am also reminded of Robert Creeley’s projection of a time when there will be only ourselves as saddest company having at some increasingly now comprehensible point erased every other creature. And are we in some sterilized upsurging conjunction with the first landings of the “Pilgrims” who found whole villages curiously intact except for the piles of skeletons where those people in their last moments of stunned anguish clung to each other as flies from offshore European ships orbited and dropped their payloads?

Oh Excellent Demon bring your new tumors mutilations your car bombs cereals fence monitors ova of ancient parasites your stand up to daily life abuse-proof laminates your air-born mercury floating over Vegas your more advanced surface bursts

Saturn Giver of the Measures of the Cosmos
Babylonian Star of Law and Justice
Egyptian Star of Nemisis Ruler of Necessity and Retribution
Star of Amnesties
Renewer of Health lessening the hold of Revenge and Brutality—the Golden Age of that Time when one knew neither war nor bloody sacrifices. And Dinosaurs. The oldest embryos so far discovered were found in 1978 underneath the 183 million year old Drakenberg lava outburst in South Africa. The eggs had to wait for the present technologies (miniature jack hammers and drills for use under more powerful electron microscopes) to remove surrounding rock. The findings reveal the possibility that the newly hatched infants were surprisingly helpless and required intense care from parents.

She knew some of the stories too from the Indian women she’d loved. There were ashes of females somewhere still in those forests that could give birth to the men no bigger than the hole in your tooth but none of those lovers ever told her how old they got to be and whether in their growing they end up in the farthest regions of the sunsets calling to the Who’s Around to Hear. Those women told her what not to do at night, the noises and whistles riding unsuspectedly underbreath which attracted ghosts or even the Facelessness of the World calling all of the missing parts of Itself in to a sudden ruptured completeness. They’d whisper about exiles in Florida swamps or the marches of the starving, touch her breasts with certain feathers they’d never name and in the morning knead pan-fried bread for her with honey because she’d been their lover for one night. She couldn’t reconcile the way a word and the breath made out of it seemed to split apart when most men spoke and how women heard and felt the actual dissection, knew the unaccountable weddings between the unreal and the word towers it attracted larger than any life’s preparation, or at least the life she held. “Maenadic” she’d heard of that. Women among themselves, yearning, their concentration spoiling the wives for men who would increase the rule of labyrinth, every portion of it tied in Hera’s knots. Herakleotic Knots her lovers told her about, the epidemic of rape agony and its arrival on the land and how the daughters in some now unreachable time sold themselves off into madness because of a mass suicide of the mothers. These incomplete maps of a haunted persecution. Women in bars, the ones just traveling through who stayed in hidden valleys of northern Greece or Turkey, whispered in bed to her. Their hatred of labyrinth and narrative the map of retributions against those who eat the savior scorn the genesis of souls stained with the necessity to tame the danger in women. The story choked at either end. Sons and husbands forcing their ravishments down the generations—mothers daughters mistresses of the labyrinth and the Age of Honey darkened by their flight from the feminine sphere punishable by death. The girls would swing from trees to honors the mothers’ suicides the
fullness of women among themselves the hanged and their epidemic. The persecution of women for their rage and in the background the nurses of a new mind a new world executed en mass for their attentions. A blood bath. A sea of women’s blood marking the agents and their catastrophe. Thetis in her water breaking as the voices of the story gather. Realm of the dead opening for what is most alive. Thyiades, the mature women. Their pilgrimage to renew existence their voices and frenzied dances enter no literature no art. Yet they swarmed in their trances over winter deadened mountains frost bite licking at the protective seal of ecstasy. Their “white feet” their menace awakening sorrow no distance can keep enacting the whole community of Life stolen. Mere women’s actions and lives dissolved, the ripeness of males entrusted to them for endless birth. Who would not fear it?

2003NB3R3: A new planet discovered in the Kuiper Belt larger than Pluto.

70% Rock
30% Water Ice

Minus 400 degrees Fahrenheit even as the US Department of Justice released its first statistical report on prison rape and abuse acknowledging that much of the sexual violence in prisons was (is?) probably never reported. This “Other” planet and the report which accompanies its warning that there is and never was any reliable estimation of the unreported sexual victimization of its population. The 2004 estimates for incidents of rape of the persons on this sphere are 8,210 (is this number similar to the Number 30 in relationship to the Iraq War; all civilian casualties up to the number 30 in any bombing or combat incident do not need scrutiny or report—anything above the number 30 as estimate needs to be signed off by an “official”—the further question: where did this number come from before the acknowledged underestimates of over 100,000 civilian deaths?) in a national jail system that holds over two million people. This is the adult statistic. In the state run juvenile facilities on a nation-wide basis allegations of staff sexual misconduct ran proportionally almost ten times higher than for adult facilities. No one any longer knows whether 2003NB3R3 or Earth is the colder planet as America “spreads”.

Begin with an examination of strawberries then expand into the ancient forest gardens on the shores of the fresh water seas where women specializing in baked corn dumplings, fried grasshoppers, walked every inch of huge peach orchards, their botany and its scale producing over a million bushels of corn a year, fields hoed and weeded for miles outside a village and the interspersed adjacent woods reserved for beans squash and the griefs that could send a captured enemy into a roasted shred murmuring over the Rim
Being at the end of worlds and the Begging Heads come to visit and take final possession of the lost before another garden poised at that moment in 1725 when in Paris there appeared men and a female to be exact: an Osage, a single Chicago Chief, the ambassador from the Metchegamais, one Oto, and one girl from the Missouris. It is reported they were beautifully formed, their bodies enhanced by scars, tattoos, sweat gleamed paint to make the air of that Paris seethe with a curled recklessness of the wild glamour, their headdresses and robes a ceremony for the hottest dreams to accompany the marriage festivals for the King, Louis XV, and were they like quail slipping through some other grass, an ocean of it conspiring exotically to be these suggestions hovering at the roots of a Detroit or a San Bernardino with its mission graveyards the names there left out of the real estate mythologies and what is a mythology now other than a service provider to sell MacMansions or MacPrisons sprung instantly onto any land or seascape anywhere?

An interview with a Space Shuttle female crew member speaking with George Bush: “We believe in getting off the planet”—A new dimension of “faith” in planetary abandonment for whom? And are these final more fantastic depravations such as the American mining operations of Freeport-McMoRan in New Guinea and the Canadian Goldstrike Mine in Elko Nevada, two of the largest gold mining sites on the planet, profound examples of the hurry up method of total environmental disintegration designed to enhance such off-planet beliefs with a presence of collapse so final, so splendidly malevolent that either mourning or sorrow become the merest costumes before this statement of joy and its release from what these trace elements of futurity already see as a worn-out world to be picked apart in these last centuries of patient refined savagery.

Get me a chopper with the money. If I lived. I didn’t feel like I knew where I was until I saw the blimp hangers and sugar beet fields above Costa Mesa. Lead tinged smogs mixed with the smells of burnt sage eucalyptus wild live oak a little whistful taste of burnt fibre glass roof shingles. Those smokes serving me up a platter I’d just left; shit and napalm boiled landscapes. One segment of a planet and the poor bastards on it flying in compound reverse toward the Galactic Lords of Intestines to be digested outside the reach of any humanity.

“WE BELIEVE IN GETTING OFF THE PLANET” Are the reservoirs of Mesopotamian fossil oceans the haruspicies of a planetary abandonment propaganda? asks the haruspex pouring oil on water. Bird Keeper who watches the severed wind pipes of eagles and the God voices held there. No “e n” priests alive now to read the old omen collections with any helpful precision. A question for the God who burrows and curls in the still fresh
raptor viscera:

Does the Iraq War have anything to do with the state of Bush’s liver?
Answer: Yes

Question: Should we look to malformations of the Sea?
Question: What malformations?

Problem posed: Would the mortal answer break the heart of the ancient being?

Of the Next Query:
Look to the Summa a lu

Question: What group of omens?
Answer: As to the Flight of Whales: Tablets 57 through 63
Question: And if they have turned to dust?
Answer: Refer to the Death of Frogs in the Older Sequences of the Malformed

Question: Are you referring to the lost names of Demons?
No Answer:

Question: And where will there be well-being when women and men and their children at last learn to scorn it. And if the dreams, the old dreams of lion-headed eagles return, what then?
Answer: Look yonder to a sky of wolf eating sparrows.

Question: And the Death Pit at Ur. Did the Girls sing themselves to death there and has their song at last reached us?
Answer: Never and twice.

End of Query of the Eagle’s Windpipe

The accumulation at La Brea began about thirty-six thousand years ago. But teeth will tell a story almost no other part of the body or perhaps even the mind itself can bear given the implications of strangeness that may have started there and then leaked out all over everything. What narrative the extinct can tell might only attend shadows but shadows glow too with the mistrusts of a dispossessed blankness. The jaws of the fossil predators trapped in these asphalt seeps may contain a signature with a long, unwelcome endurance. This colonial Rancho unlike most sites is a house of carnivore teeth where at least ten meat eaters were called to their ends by each stuck and sinking herbivore. Smilodons, coyotes, dire wolves, and American lions suffered a frequency of broken teeth on these shores nearly five times the rate of their modern carnivore cousins. The majority who lost their lives here approximately ten thousand years ago exhibited only slight tooth wear and were young adults in their prime, not the injured or worn out. I want to ask some ifs working on me; if their broken teeth are a ripple bound to our unnamed hungers carried from the coasts of these miniature Pleistocene
death oceans? If the map of their wreckage was swelling and who’d be the poor son-of-a-bitch to hear its nearnesses before anyone else? I remember when I started asking these things. Went to Laos as a volunteer murderer all the way to the Plain of Jars and stared into those giant two thousand and more year old urns. Nobody still knows who carved out that sandstone or why they left them there from horizon to horizon on the Xiankhoang Plateau. Maybe those people left them to hold the true invisible spillage of what they knew to be the time to come, saw a residual glint of the unappeared future and not knowing anything else to do with that clairvoyance, went to work on these vessels. May be too they were womb corridors and from there the severed heads of my ancestor Olmecs flew in a sky to the jungles of another world daring all the human noise that ever was or will be with their immovable sexy lips. Staring into the opening of one of those jars finally became not much different than staring at the popped eyes of a “bird stone” the faraway Red Ochre People made on the coasts where Lake Michigan in its southern bulge juts into the tributaries of the Falcon Dancers who carried their severed heads from the plains of Illinois to the meadows of farthest Alabama.

Friday August 5\textsuperscript{th} 2005: Two pieces today about the prisons. Steve Kruse, warden at the Stockton Youth Correctional Facility site, on May 27\textsuperscript{th} of this year used unreasonable force against a juvenile ward handcuffed but struggling. Kruse grabbed the 19 year old by the hair and jaw and slammed the ward’s head into a wall. The further aggravation: neither Kruse nor any of the prison staff who were present reported the incident, thus maintaining the absolute code of silence which drowns all detail in this abyss. A violent out of control warden in a state operated juvenile facility demonstrating the fact that handcuffed shackled children are still the easiest pickups.

The other: Maribel Cuevas of Fresno; an eleven-year-old girl who, after being baited and taunted by a boy with water balloons and rocks, picked up a stone herself and threw it at her tormentor. The result: a head gash. Two children in an ugly tussle which should never have reached a further level of response except the local police and district attorney’s office created a cause and attempted to make an example of this girl. The police arrested her on suspicion of felony assault. She spent five days in Juvenile Hall, then was placed under house arrest and forced to wear a monitoring anklet for thirty days. The young girl was deeply frightened and traumatized, but the police and mayor stood by their official behaviors and stance. Fortunately there were responses from around the world which led to her probation. Maribel Cuevas was very lucky. The two incidents exemplify how far we’ve journeyed toward the butcher’s hook manufactured by William Bennett and
John J. Dilulio’s Jr.’s claim that we are endangered by a horde of supercriminal children. Here is an American community frozen in terror over an 11-year-old girl ready to impose either its Biblical Wrath or Expert Violation under the cover of policy and the use of reasonable force.

SATURDAY August 6th 2005: The Bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki sixty years ago.

TUESDAY August 9th through August 29th: Visited Clay and Sarah in New York. Saw Gail’s mother for the last time in final stages of Alzheimer’s disease. Ora, rather than becoming paranoid, bitter, and twistedly angered which could certainly have happened, became angelically quiet and watchful and floated in a decreasing set of responses as if her mind were a pond under a sun shrinking in its circle; no rain, no shade sitting out her days and nights her lovely greeting smiles bearing no form of recognition. Her whole person come to some distant, fragile, bewildering kindness as dear Gail searched for spoons her mother could more easily hold growing as she did less and less able to find her mouth in the act of simple eating.

TUESDAY August 30th 2005: 8:50am, 87 degrees. Watered the front yard and shopped for basics. Coming home to our small pleasures; the vegetables and fruit trees are ripening. Our salads are delicious. Gail’s concentration on direct foods without the deluge of carbohydrates is beautifully satisfying as we return to these delights and waitings.

John Bolton has introduced a major sabotage of the UN’s studies and negotiations calling for extensive reform and “world action against injustice, poverty, and environmental catastrophe” as the LA Times editorial states. “His most odious change was to delete all references to the Millennium Development Goals which commit the advanced industrialized nations to cut world poverty in half by 2015.” The “Have countries, would, under the terms of this agreement, eventually have contributed 0.7% of their gross national product to foreign aid” as a recognition that all people have the right to be free from misery, starvation, and preventable disease and that those able to pay have some responsibility to alleviate needless suffering. Rimbaud’s country gentleman of a bleak land dedicated to torment and the “certain convivialities” of dread.

WEDNESDAY August 31st 2005: The media is filled with terrible images of Hurricane Katrina which seems to draw at least one-third of the Caribbean into its maelstrom and which has now devastated most of the “Deep South.” New Orleans eighty percent flooded. The Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama coasts ripped to shreds in the largest “natural disaster” ever to plague the nation.
I’m not too aware of him—he’s that shy
and it’s easy for me to miss the sounds
and smells of his past:
the click of beads on an abacus
counting bushels of corn;
the cool swell of a glass doorknob
on a classroom door.

Or his hand is warm from working the projector,
his ears alive with the tick of the film strip rising
notch by notch, his alertness torn
between dust motes dancing above the fan
and the emulsion embossing the walls
with pictures of Mexico and Japan.

On such a night,
I can hear him cranking the mimeograph drum,
mixing its violet smell
with the odor of oil in the rails of a slide rule—
an aroma as metallic as a brake in a machine shop,
where the boys bent els and smoothed their edges.

Drowsing off he leaves me and, deeper asleep
even the clatter of typing with real type is gone:
the lunge of the carriage rising for a capital
and the little fists striking my words into place.
EUPHORIA

Michael Saleman

The world is round. From forty miles away only the topmasts of ships appear headed to the Bay Bridge, their hulls buried beneath the curvature of gray water hugging a short segment of latitude. If you find the angle at which something shrinks to nothing, you get the distance: a cross of wood, a length of twine and soon enough the equator of existence becomes a number as real as the belly of an apple, a thing in the mind. At sea you never doubt their rapture—Archimedes predicting Newton, Michelson his Einstein—their excitement transparent without the fog of drug or spectacle. And how big would a forest have to be if each tree stood for a single neuron in such a brain? A field as large as Manhattan or Rhode Island, or all of Montana? We calculate such vastness, we do not measure. Here is the child’s answer, stretching his arms beyond his parents’ grasp: this big. His body says. No really, how big? This big. No. Bigger.
**5 Danses Macabres**

*Jay Rogoff*

**Death’s Comfort**

I’m comforted Death’s flat-out impotence
can never stimulate the limp to rise,
tempting and cold, level as wilderness,
unleavened as wafer-bread. Who wants
dead darlings to suffer resurrections?
Elbow grease could not stop Lazarus
from stinking, nor desire help Orpheus
from flinging Eurydice a backward glance.
All art aims to flesh out how we reject
the dead. Yet here Death stands, flush with gangrene
and lust, his skin dripping in putrefaction.
He has designs, enough to dance erect
behind her, to seal her purification
with his John Hancock on her ghost-white skin.

**Death’s Sentence**

Even the guard whistling *Für Elyse*
bears him a kind of grudging admiration
and, passing, stops dopplerling his baton
down the cellrow’s ribs, where the great prince, Death, lies
in prison, lies on his bunk dreaming, lies
to homeboys, gangbangers, to anyone
who’ll listen how women, men, pretty children
requited his love, how they swapped their lives
for meaningful abstraction, how they adored
his extremities’ probing, his profound love-play
stopping ears, mouths, throats, and orifices
more occult, how he’ll sweet-talk the Board, news
to scream through the neighborhood when he’s off
Death Row and on parole, good as his word.
Death’s Door

His entrance freeze-dries everything. Tears harden to pearls, streaming hair to marble sculpture, a fleeing woman to a salty pillar, and hysterical, flailing limbs to a bone china-white swastika. Old Death has gone quite stiff himself; he finds it’s gotten harder to tussle schoolgirls surprised on the stair and keep those assignations in the garden. It’s such a rigorous, demanding schedule he’ll make his ribs a door and keep it locked on his stiff heart, two peepholes in his skull. Then salesmen, wives, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Girl Scouts offering their timid cookies can let him taste their wares and buy direct.

Death Sings Lieder

For Tom Denny

He’s a poet, Death’s a goddamn poet, Romantic but nobody’s fool, a tear-jerking good read, sucker of sap, extruder of juice. The young maid fears she’s going to get it. Oh where, oh where’s his heart? She sees right through it, she screams Don’t do it, she wails Oy vey is mir! Reading her fevered lips, he translates fear into Darling, crooned in High Ultraviolet. Singing her delicate and beautiful, Death gets under her skin, where he’ll tease out what shines in her. His hand will stroke, not slap: he’ll make her purr, not prey, tame as any cat. By the time he rings his final rhyme, she’ll sleep soundlessly, head hard on his clavicle.
Death and the Maiden

He’s struck up a lively tarantella to unlock the darkened mirror from her hand and dance to smithereens the skull that grinned back baldfaced in longing and rude reflection. The *moto perpetuo* of his machine is oiled. His dance will mire her in the mud, variations winding her round and round and at last conducting her in a straight line downward. Now his music moves her to waltz stiffly, till her prim self-consciousness melts and she’s a virgin dancing like a flame, then snuffed to nothing as all movement dwindles to his elemental theme. Not wine, not candles, not his stirring climax can make her warm.
It shall be called 'Bottom’s Dream’, because it hath no bottom...

I was a weaver, and I wove
The moody fabric of my dream.
By day I laboured at the loom
And glimpsed the image of a love
I now know bottomless.

We were young men. We played our parts.
We schooled ourselves in the quiet wood.
By night the moon, who draws the flood,
Tugged at the rhythms of our hearts
And they were bottomless.

I loved a girl who was a boy;
I took my stand and beat my breast.
Yet what was I but fool and beast,
Who did not so much speak as bray
In bombast bottomless?

I trusted I had mastery
Until one night, being left alone,
I snorted at the wandering moon
In terror of the mystery,
Which seemed quite bottomless,

And out of that she spoke, who had
No voice, although she stirred my sense,
Who touched me, though she had no hands,
And led me where you cannot lead
Since it is bottomless.
I tried to speak: again I brayed.
I pinched and scratched my face: coarse hairs
Were crisping over cheeks and ears.
And when she drew me in, she made
The whole world bottomless.

Nothing possessed me. So she said
Do not desire to leave this wood.
Among the mossy clefts I hid
With petals where she pressed my head,
    Desire being bottomless.

A most rare vision, such a thing
As who should say what such things be:
My terror turned to ecstasy,
The one much like the other, being
    Both of them bottomless.

And then the change. The sun came up
Brash as a brassy hunting-horn.
I woke and, yes, I was a man.
Was I myself though? Self, like sleep,
    May well be bottomless.

New moon tonight. Another dream
To act. They laugh at our dismay.
Oh but it’s nothing. Only play.
Except we just don’t feel the same,
    For play is bottomless.

And so the story ends. My eyes
Are sore with weeping, but I laugh
(I who was seen to take my life),
For, having been an ass, I’m wise
    And bottomless. Bottomless.
In his address at the memorial event for Thom Gunn on August 29, 2005, in Berkeley, California, Clive Wilmer talked about showing his poems to Gunn when he was still a Cambridge student. (‘Remembering Thom Gunn,’ *PN Review*, January / February 2006). The two met at Gunn’s flat in Talbot Road in London, and then, over beers, Wilmer showed Gunn some of his attempts. The older poet quickly performed ‘an instant act of surgery on the only one worth keeping’.

There was something characteristic in the anecdote: a blend of modesty and dedication to the art. Such commitment comes across in Wilmer’s interviews with other poets, in his editing of Gunn and Donald Davie, and in his introductory essays to John Ruskin and William Morris. But readers who know Wilmer only from that work are missing out. From my geographic remove, it seems very clear: Clive Wilmer is one of the best poets now writing in English. To follow his poetry, beginning with *The Dwelling-Place* (1977) and reaching its latest incarnation in his new volume, *The Mystery of Things* (2006), is to watch the growth of a genuine artist.

I met Clive the evening after the Gunn memorial, at a reading he gave at Mrs Dalloway’s bookstore. During our talk that evening and in several conversations during the following months, he elaborated on his sense of how his poetry has changed, and on the concerns and preoccupations that inform *The Mystery of Things*.

*I’m curious about how your poems developed in the space between that meeting with Thom Gunn and the completion of The Dwelling-Place. What happened in that interval?*

*The Dwelling-Place* is, in a way, a Selected Early Poems. It was published in 1977 and the earliest poem in it was written in 1965, a year after I met Thom and began internalising his criticisms. A lot happened between those dates, as you can imagine. The opening poem, ‘The Dedication’, and the second section of the book were all written in the 1970s—just before the book was accepted. The others are a selection from what I’d written before. The 1965 poem is called ‘The Ruined Abbey’, and another poem, ‘The North Legion’, was written around then too. I think I was probably very hit-or-miss in my 20s, and as a poet I matured slowly. I got the right tone by accident every now and then, but I think a lot of the time I relied
too much on volition and not enough on instinct. I’ve done it all the wrong way round. Now that I’m 60, I trust much more to inspiration, passion and contingency. It’s taken me 40 years to write like an adolescent!

Did you consciously work to establish a free verse measure? I wonder especially about what changed between your first book and, say, the ‘Air and Earth’ series in your second?

That earliest poem, ‘The Ruined Abbey’, is in free verse, though I think it foxes people because it has something of the tone of Wordsworth’s blank verse. But it’s in an accentually based free verse which derives from Eliot and perhaps Ted Hughes and probably R.S. Thomas. The poetry I wrote before coming to Cambridge was mostly accentual, and it was in my first term at Cambridge that I began working in iambics. I never think of good free verse as being looser than metrical verse. Free verse is certainly more difficult to write and I can only write it when I feel there to be external demands I have to conform to. Interestingly, when I was an undergraduate, the student poetry scene at Cambridge—a very lively one—was dominated by the American avant-garde. William Carlos Williams had recently been discovered or rediscovered, as had that honorary American Basil Bunting, and Black Mountain was all the rage. I didn’t go for much of it at that time, preferring to learn iambic metre and rational syntax, but under the influence of friends I did experiment a bit and wrote several Williamsesque imagist poems. So that sort of open-ended free verse was part of my tool-kit from early on. I found you could do much more with the standard metres than you can with free verse—I still think that actually—and that’s why The Dwelling-Place is mostly metrical, but I’ve never been against free verse and have always thought its invention a wonderful extension of the poet’s range. I’d actually like to write more in free verse than I do, but it very often happens that, as soon as my grasp of the subject starts to deepen, the old patterns emerge involuntarily. One reason why they’re so ingrained—apart from the obvious fact that, if you spend a lifetime reading English poetry, you internalise the entire potential of the iambic paradigm—one historical reason is that early on I discovered the work of Yvor Winters. I still regard Winters as one of the great poets of the 20th century—though he’s nowhere near so central to my pantheon as he once was—and I now feel the main value of his work as a critic to be in the account he gives of English prosody. I learnt hugely from that.

Were there other Cambridge poets at this time with whom you shared these
tastes?

The taste for Winters? Yes. I shared it with two Cambridge contemporaries, Robert Wells and Dick Davis, to both of whom I am still very close. The three of us published a book together in 1970, *Shade Mariners*, and we all felt to a greater or lesser extent—certainly Dick and I did, I’m not so sure about Rob—that, like Winters, we were engaged in an anti-Modernist project, though one (I suppose) that had learnt from Modernism. I no longer take that view—I’m far too indebted to Pound, for instance, to go on feeling that. What’s more, the fact that I was experimenting at all with Williamsesque free verse suggests that I saw more in Modernism than I quite admitted to myself. But I *am* glad that I taught myself to write nothing I hadn’t rationally explored and that I made sure I had understood and mastered the basic metres. I think any experimentalism in verse is bound to benefit from those disciplines. For one thing, knowledge of a craft is essential, in my view, to artistic honesty, and to the sense that in writing a poem you’re doing something more than ‘expressing yourself’—how I hate that phrase—that you’re recognising things independent of your feelings and independent of language. Oddly enough, it was Winters who led me back to free verse, a very disciplined kind of free verse: the sequence you mention, ‘Air and Earth,’ is written largely according to his system and was influenced by his early imagist poems. I was also conscious of Williams and Gunn, of course—they belong to the same free-verse family—but subsequently my master has been Pound, above all, and Bunting perhaps, with touches of Eliot, though much of Eliot’s versification now seems to me rather dull. But this naming of influences is rather pointless: anything you notice as successful you are likely to absorb and use. The best free-verse writers we have today are probably August Kleinzahler and John Peck—though I find it hard to characterize Peck’s verse as simply free, and it often isn’t anyway. But I read and re-read both of them and am baffled by what they do: their rhythms are so beautiful and so hard to account for. I can think of more famous poets whose rhythms are simply dead by comparison.

*I’ve heard you discuss this kind of verse movement as ‘Neo-modernist’. Could you explain that term?*

Well, Peter, as it happens, I think you touch on exactly what I’m trying to say in a review you wrote for *Poetry* of John Peck’s *Collected Poems*, though you don’t use my term ‘Neo-modernist’. The fact that you come so close to my definition suggests to me that I may be on to something—that
both of us may be on to something. It’s when you’re talking about how Peck develops on from Modernism. You say that he’s indebted to the Modernists in his desire to write the ‘poem including history’—poems like ‘March Elegies’. And then you say that he departs from those masters, first, in allowing the sort of ‘discursive register’ they discouraged. As you say, Donald Davie’s important here—as a Poundian who criticised Pound’s reliance on asyntactical fragmentation, as poet and critic, and as the man who supervised Peck’s thesis on Pound. Peck’s second departure, as you put it, is in what you call the ‘organic or irrational element’ in the poems, which you characterise as his ‘willingness to follow dream paths, the belief that consciousness itself journeys toward archetypal or heroic achievements’. To enlarge on those points from my own point of view, the fundamental thing for me is a willingness to combine the fragmentary, ideogrammic, juxtapositional, elliptical, discontinuous aspects of Modernism with rational syntax, abstract language etc. Also, as Eliot does in *Four Quartets*, to use both standard metre and free verse, often in the same poem. What you say about history and about the unconscious also seems to me fundamental: this is not an ‘I’ kind of poetry—‘I’ may figure in it but it inhabits a larger universe than that. There’s usually an interest, as in High Modernism, in foreign cultures and languages. Most of the poems of this kind that I’ve written turn on some kind of analogy between a personal or imaginary experience, on the one hand, and a large cultural issue or phenomenon on the other. I’m tired of the merely personal. I want my poems to be gateways through to larger concerns and therefore I favour the kind of poem where personal experience finds some sort of analogy in art or history or religion or, as you suggest, where the self of the poem melts into the collective unconscious (to use a phrase I don’t wholly understand). The poems that exemplify this in my case are ‘The Holy of Holies’, ‘A Vision’, ‘The Falls’, ‘The Ladder’, ‘In the Beginning’ and ‘The Ruin’. All of these are very dependent on analogy and in really good analogies the dissimilarities are as illuminating as the similarities. The Modernists—and I’m thinking of David Jones and Bunting, as much as of Pound and Eliot—achieve a lot by loosening up analogy, removing the hierarchy of tenor and vehicle. [* See footnote. *Ed.*] The trickiest aspect of Neo-modernism, as I use the expression, is that it seems to be engaged by a religious view of the world, by which I don’t mean anything doctrinaire or sectarian and certainly not anything fundamentalist, since much of what I am talking about is usually syncretic or even pagan. I think of Pound as a religious writer in that sense. I’d want to contrast the ludic outlook of Post-modernism with the implicit solemnity of a religious one: an outlook that is sure there’s a world outside the self and beyond the
human.

Which poets are you thinking of?

Outstandingly, Peck, the English poet Stephen Romer (who lives in France)—especially in his lovely and sadly little-known book *Tribute*—the Israeli poet Gabriel Levin (who writes in English), and probably, in your country, Jim Powell and B.H. Fairchild. I’m not talking about a movement—most of these poets probably don’t read one another—but I do think there’s a historical shift going on. There are anticipations of the Neo-modernist in Gunn, in Geoffrey Hill and in the late poetry of Edgar Bowers—*To Louis Pasteur*.

I’m interested in your religious poems. But of course, Clive, you have a wholesome streak of saltiness as well. I think, for instance, that in the dual structure of ‘Ghostliness’ [*First published in The London Magazine, October / November 2005*] these two urges balance against each other. I wonder how your sense of the religious aspect of your poems has changed.

Ah, the juiciest of topics: sex and religion! You’re quite right that I’m preoccupied with that, especially in such recent poems as ‘Ghostliness’. First of all, I want to say how good and necessary a thing the sexual revolution has been, though I think we now run the risk of failing to notice how powerful sex is and, being powerful, how destructive it can be. But we incur that risk, in my view, largely because of the reaction—in the west—to two thousand years of Christian teaching on sex, which seems to me one of the great disasters of human history. Christianity itself I hugely value. Those who dislike Christianity often fail to see what little foundation there is for hatred of sex or for misogyny in the teachings of Jesus himself. So one of the things I have been trying to do is find a point of reconciliation between western religion and sexual experience.

*Inluminatio coitu?*

It seems to me that sexual ecstasy is the one experience open to all (or most) of us, in which we experience annihilation of self. I would not wish it to be confused with mystical union, but as those of us who are literary know, it provides the most recurrent of metaphors for mystical union and transcendent love. I think I depart from the tradition in that I touch on the transgressive—though I should add, it’s not necessarily a case of
'transgressive = evil’. On the contrary, in some instances. You could talk of Baudelaire in this context, but though he’s religious in many ways, I’m thinking of devotional poetry and Baudelaire is not a devotional writer. When I talk of those sexual metaphors, I’m thinking of the erotic analogy as it occurs in the Song of Songs, in Persian, Indian and Jewish poetry, in mainstream European devotional poets like St John of the Cross and John Donne, and so on and so forth. It’s even there, by implication, in Dante. It has been for centuries a cultural undercurrent in the Christian world, hardly ever openly acknowledged, but always there, and it implies (I think) a rejection of the dominant Pauline/Augustinian pronouncements. It is one of the secret meanings of our culture. It implies that, directly or indirectly, sex can lead us to the divine or to absolute wholeness. That—to go a long way round—is why my devotional lyrics—if I may use that expression—are so deeply enmeshed with sex. One of the main clues for me—I mean clue in the sense of a winding continuous route, quite difficult to follow—one of the main clues has been the importance of the word ‘nothing’. I’ve written a poem about it called ‘Much Ado about Nothing’. Shakespeare, of course, is conscious of this, obsessive about it even. My friend the scholar John Kerrigan calls nothing ‘that very Shakespearean quantity’—a lovely phrase. Shakespeare is constantly playing on the word as meaning either ‘naught-ing’ (i.e. having sex) or ‘no thing’ (i.e. no cock, therefore cunt—and ‘naught’ also meant cunt). But ‘nothing’ also has other significances for him. It is, after all, Cordelia’s response to her father’s request for a quantification of love, and as we all know, Cordelia’s nothing turns out to be everything. Shakespeare must have been aware that ‘nothing’ is a key word in the traditions of mystical writing, especially the via negativa as it descends from Neo-platonist thought—from Pseudo-Dionysius through Meister Eckhart to certain of the Renaissance Neo-platonists. What Shakespeare knew of all this, in terms of his reading, I’ve no idea, and I’m no Shakespeare scholar, but the word is so insistent that it’s not to be avoided. Sonnet 109:

For nothing this wide universe I call
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.

Or as he says in Hamlet, ‘And all for nothing’. And of course it also connects up with eastern religion, especially with Buddhism—and all of that plays into my new sequence ‘Stigmata’ [First published in The London Magazine, February / March 2005].

The poems in that sequence are not only religious but devotional.
As a poet, I’ve been more affected by devotional lyric than almost anything else—from Herbert through Vaughan to Christina Rossetti and Hopkins—and I called my second book *Devotions* for that reason, though ‘devotions’ there means ‘people and things one is devoted to’ as much as anything specifically religious. I wished to suggest, of course, that the two meanings are related. Ruskin is fond of quoting Wordsworth’s line: ‘We live in admiration, hope and love.’ And admiration there, which is a sort of Romantic substitute for ‘faith’, is the virtue I’m appealing to with the word ‘devotions’. Very often it’s admiration for physical things. I find the reputation of Christianity as a religion of ‘spirituality’ very odd. To me, it’s full of carnality. In 1973, when I was staying with Dick Davis and Robert Wells in Iran, we went to the city of Isfahan, which contains many gorgeous mosques and other ancient buildings, all decorated with the floral or abstract patterns characteristic of Islamic art. I remember crossing the river to the Armenian quarter, Julfa—a quarter built to house the Armenian workmen who, around 1600, constructed the great mosques of Shah Abbas. Now the Armenians, the people who executed these intrinsically Islamic buildings, were in fact Christians, and they were given leave to build churches in their district. So you find these buildings in Julfa that are not dissimilar to the mosques in some of their techniques, though they’re only modest structures by comparison, but as soon as you go inside you are struck by a crucial difference. These buildings are full of images: the familiar Christian iconography—pictures of humans and the surroundings of human life. And it strikes you how preoccupied Christianity is with the physical facts of existence: the birth of a baby, the execution and death of a young man, pregnancy, childhood, old age, and then animals—sheep, goats, camels, donkeys and so on and so forth. I connect all this with my sexual theme. You mention ‘Ghostliness’. What that deals with is an experience that must have been very common over the centuries but which, because of prudery or the fear of blasphemy, has rarely been articulated—intense communion between lovers in bed followed by their shared experience of Holy Communion, a second fulfilment. The woman that poem addresses, who is also the person ‘Stigmata’ is concerned with—she and I disliked the word ‘spirituality’ with its implications of a life removed from the life of the body. So in conversation we used the word ‘ghostliness’, which is the medieval word—you find it in the 14th century mystics, for instance—a word which seems to imply a connection of the spirit with the body. A ghost is the spiritual residue of a body. It implies the existence of a body in its absence, whether through death or through absorption in interiority.
The Mystery of Things begins with ‘Bottom’s Dream’. It’s a playful poem, though one that manages to pull the rug out from under the reader even as it entertains. You spoke at the reading in Berkeley of consciously starting to get comedy into your poems...

Yes. ‘Bottom’s Dream’ is one of the poems in which I lighten up a bit. I’d started to dislike the fact that I always seemed so solemn in my poems. It’s also a good example of the relation of sex to mysticism—A Midsummer Night’s Dream is profoundly Neo-platonic, as I read it—and humour, too, is also entangled with sex. When I was about 19, I acted in a production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream and it became almost my favourite work of literature. Only Lear means more to me, and certainly Bottom is my favourite fictional character. But my histrionic skills were not up to Bottom, so I played Quince. Because we were all teenagers, the director had the brilliant idea that the rude mechanicals are all young men—and of course Flute tells us his voice is just breaking, so they could all be about the same age. I played Quince as a little older than the others, like a very young curate or schoolteacher more than a carpenter: a sort of earnest do-gooder. Anyway, as you know, in Bottom’s great soliloquy after the dream he says: ‘I will get Peter Quince to write me a ballad of this dream. It shall be called “Bottom’s Dream”, because it hath no bottom.’ And I remember thinking every night that Quince never does write the ballad and that I, as someone trying to be a poet, ought to be doing it for him. I think I may have made some notes for such a poem, which included a refrain that played on the name Bottom, but I never wrote it. Then a couple of years ago, a guy called Nicholas Robins, who works at the restored Globe Theatre in London and edits their subscribers’ magazine, asked me if I’d write a poem for them—something to do with Shakespeare, he said. Almost immediately, this long-buried ambition came back to me and I wrote the poem, incorporating into it the idea that they’re young men, starting out in the play of life and, of course, discovering sex. In Bottom’s case, the discovery of sex is also an encounter with the divine, if we take Titania as half Aphrodite, half Persephone. So there’s more inluminatio coitu for you. It also provided an opportunity to be, if not uproariously funny, a little playful—which, as your question suggests, I’d begun trying to be. There’s a kind of irony in this, though, because of course Bottom is a hilariously funny character in the play—perhaps the funniest figure in all of Shakespeare, which is saying something. My poem, in a way, does him the honour of taking his emotions seriously, which the aristocratic figures never do. So I ended up playing down the humour, if anything.
What about your epistolary poems? There’s humour in them too, and there’s also that dual sense of absence and presence we were talking of earlier. That does seem a constant in your work.

Yes, those two poems—‘To Thom Gunn on his 60th Birthday’ and ‘Letter to J.A. Cuddon’—were the first poems in which I let myself fool around. I had always written funny poems as something I shared with friends. Then one day I tried to write a less private one, a joke against myself called ‘Two Journals’, but that turned into something serious. If you look at it closely, though, you can detect some jokiness surviving in the tone. Anyway, in 1989, I wanted to write something for Thom’s sixtieth. I’d written many such poems over the years, most of them frivolous, so I embarked on the poem in that spirit. As I did so, I realized that a letter is always a composite of styles and tones and registers anyway and that a verse epistle is really no different. I had already allowed this to happen to some extent in ‘Two Journals’, so I allowed it to take over in my birthday letter and, of course, I wanted something a bit more than frivolous for such a significant birthday. J.A. (‘Charles’) Cuddon was someone who taught me at school and became an important friend. He was a marvellous writer. He wrote that great Dictionary of Literary Terms that Penguin published and two marvellous travel books. Anyway, when he retired, I wanted to pay him a similar tribute—and I wanted to make him laugh as well as filling him with pride at his achievement, so I repeated the sort of thing I’d done for Thom. Having written those two, I then used the same form and manner for an elegy, ‘In Memory of Graham Davies, Psychotherapist’, which is also sort of epistolary in manner, dependent on shifts in tone. It is, of course, a uniformly grave poem, but I do allow some jokey expressions to creep in here and there. For example—to someone who was a shrink—‘Remember how I called you my old whore’.

‘In Memory of Graham Davies’ and ‘Stigmata’ are such different poems, in their tones and structures, but they seem to touch on some of your core concerns.

As you get older, it gets easier to expand poetically—or so I have found. In my 20s I wrote one longish poem, ‘The Invalid Storyteller’, which is in my first book, but which I don’t much care for now. I do remember writing it with pleasure, though. I remember the sheer joy of knowing day after day that there was something more to write. On those occasions you feel the generosity of the imagination and the power of creative work to console. The two poems you mention, though, were something else to write. I never
imagined that my imagination had such treats in store for me! And the joy 
was the more marked in that both poems, especially ‘Stigmata’, had their 
origin in personal distress. I’ve never had much time for theories of art as 
therapy, but ‘Stigmata’ was hugely therapeutic and kept me sane at an aw-
ful time. For some years I had been going back to the Odes of Horace and 
thinking how Horace stays the flow of time: how the power of poetry to re-
sist change and decay is real both in the writing and the reading. So that the 
loss of a person through death or the failure of a love affair can become the 
occasion for preserving them, re-visiting them, drawing vitality and inspira-
tion from them, over and over again. ‘Stigmata’ came out last October as a 
pamphlet, a very beautiful one, published by my friends Peter and Amanda 
Carpenter, who run the Worple Press. I had finished writing it over a year 
before its publication. It’s now February 2006, so something like seventeen 
months have passed and it’s only just beginning to lose its power to console 
and restore me. The poem for Graham Davies came about when Graham 
died—very unexpectedly. He was only 56 and perfectly healthy. He had 
been my therapist and I’d stopped seeing him a couple of years before he 
died, but I always knew I could renew our contact if ever I needed to. When 
he died I felt I had lost a great friend, though in a sense he wasn’t a friend 
at all—he was, indeed, as I say, a paid whore! I almost felt I’d lost part of 
myself. So this became an almost unavoidable occasion for elegy, including 
those consoling aspects of elegy that are so fundamental to the genre. He 
also, in ways I can’t explain, confirmed to me that I have a religious con-
sciousness—and that aspect of mind presents itself, from time to time, as 
something I can almost systematically tap when I need to, as I did on this 
ocasion with the elegy. I did the same thing when the love affair I reflect 
on in ‘Stigmata’ fell apart. This was a relatively short relationship in which I 
experienced great happiness and then suffered equally great anguish. I won’t 
go into the details, but I was more deeply in love, in my late 50s, than I had 
ever been before—and my previous experience was not insignificant. Here, 
too, religious consciousness was fundamental. The woman I loved is a con-
templative who lives in an atmosphere of deep and moving tranquillity. I 
suppose I thought I could share in that and it turned out that I couldn’t: the 
attempt to do so led to rejection. But in the process certain life-long needs 
and preoccupations came together: obviously, to revert to what we were 
saying earlier, divine love and erotic love, sex and religion; a conviction that 
pain and fear are fundamental to the valuation of life, and therefore that 
anguish and happiness are not mutually exclusive (I think especially here of 
the pain of childbirth); and then there was the fact that both the friendship 
and the poem led me back to mystical and contemplative literature—to
George Herbert and the Song of Songs, to Meister Eckhart and The Cloud of Unknowing, to St Francis of Assisi and certain Buddhist texts. It began as a huge struggle. But eventually it turned into a kind of creative ecstasy. That, to me, is the wonder of writing: its intimacy with one’s own life fully lived and its power to draw—without conscious volition on the writer’s part—on past literature and, in a sense, on the living resources of one’s own language, its antique resonances and its quotidian usefulness. That, I suppose, is a characteristic of poetry per se, but in my own experience it’s especially true of what I call Neo-modernist writing, which deliberately, even wilfully, draws together these disparate aspects of experience, knowledge, consciousness, dream and, sometimes quite independently of ego, language.

* Footnote. In The Philosophy of Rhetoric, I.A. Richards designated the two parts of a metaphor by the terms tenor and vehicle. A metaphor is a comparison; one part is the tenor, the other is the vehicle. When Macbeth says, “Life’s but a walking shadow”, the word life is the tenor of the metaphor and walking shadow is the vehicle.’ A.F. Scott, Current Literary Terms, Macmillan, 1979 edition.
Amorok sat with his arms outstretched on his knees, palms up. He smiled when he saw Sheryl looking at him. His eyes were bright.

Amorok wore a blue flannel shirt and blue jeans. He had on heavy gray woolen socks with red toes and heels, and red trim at the calves. On the floor next to his feet lay a small round driftwood log and a tightly wrapped bundle tied with leather string. His jeans were tucked into his socks, although the left pant leg was starting to pull out of the top of the sock, making that leg look longer than the other. A full moustache and bushy eyebrows were the only facial hair on his round smooth face. His long straight black hair had been tied into a ponytail. Wisps of graying hair were tucked behind his ears.

“Many of you know that the elders asked me to teach the white people our ways.” Amorok looked at each person, but continued to talk to the whole group. It was as if he could have a private moment with each individual yet still create a sense of public communion. Amorok knew what occurred in every corner of the room, in every cell of each person’s body. Sheryl understood this, but did not know how.

Sheryl felt the inside of herself become very quiet and very still. She thought momentarily of how she had come to sit in a circle of people, in a place called the White Center, in Anchorage, Alaska. To study with Amorok, she had traveled north. The only person she knew was Kay Munson, her mother’s oldest friend and the workshop’s organizer, who sat next to her. Kay called herself a spiritual warrior. It was 1985. Kay was a New Age warrior.

“We are here to work with Mother Earth,” Amorok continued. “The forgotten one needs our attention. The elders tell me to speak directly; usually we speak in the language of stories.”

As Amorok spoke, Sheryl studied the five men and fifteen women in the room. The ages ranged from herself, who was twenty, to a man wearing a purple and white pinstriped bow tie who looked over seventy. Most participants sat with straight backs, but were inclined slightly forward, as if eager to try anything. A woman who wore dark green sweats had moved her metal folding chair aside. She lay on the floor with a pillow under her knees.

Sheryl tried not to look at the woman on the floor, but she couldn’t help it. Merely the sense of the woman, her physical pain, was enough to make Sheryl’s hands hot.
Kay Munson, on Sheryl’s left, sat with her legs crossed underneath her. Her knitted brown, wool scarf was still wrapped around her neck. Rebecca Hooper, introduced as Amorok’s assistant, sat on Amorok’s right. Her hips spilled over the sides of the chair. She wore a small leather medicine bag pouch around her neck. Rebecca did not take her eyes off Amorok even though she had to tilt her head at an awkward angle to stare at him.

“We don’t always know why we are in certain places. Why are we all here today? We think to join this healing circle. Perhaps it is to take a look at me—this medicine man from the land of ice and snow.” Amorok laughed. At least, he seemed to be laughing, but he made a throaty, guttural sound that Sheryl didn’t recognize.

Gradually, Sheryl became aware that she was looking at a sun-yellow glow encircling Amorok. Golden and smooth, the color vibrated as he continued to speak. No striation in the quality of the color showed. There was no fuzziness at the edges.

Although Sheryl had always seen colors around people, she saw the phenomenon with a new clarity somehow not possible before. She felt strange, as if something were wrong in the room but also as if something were right.

Amorok continued speaking, “What is important is that we invite the land into ourselves. Do not think. Allow yourself to hear the earth.”

Sheryl closed her eyes. What she pictured was not the land, but Amorok right in front of her. He touched her shirt lightly, but she felt the pressure directly on her shoulder bone. It hurt.

When her eyes were closed, she saw no color. When they were open, she saw nothing but color. Nothing but yellow surrounding Amorok.

Throughout the one-day workshop, Amorok increasingly made eye contact with Sheryl, so much so that by the afternoon break her cheeks felt flushed. Sheryl went to the bathroom to collect herself.

She sat in the white tiled bathroom on top of the toilet seat. Sheryl’s muscles were equally balanced with her bones, neither system overshadowed the other. Her body’s stockiness had been a source of disturbance to Sheryl’s younger, developing self, but lately Sheryl had started to like her body’s sturdy functionality. Her bones would not break easily; her muscles were strong. Her physicality was so strong that it projected her inner emotional life up out of her body and out through her eyes.

Sheryl’s hazel eyes revealed everything about her. Every muscle in her body revealed a young woman who, like her muscles, was strong, pliable and firm.

She believed her eyes—and the projection of herself out of them—must have been what attracted so much of Amorok’s attention during the day.
Amorok-the-Shaman saw the depth of the emotional waves that circled inside Sheryl. Perhaps he could tell that Sheryl wanted desperately to drink always from the water of life, but that she believed it too cold, too stormy, too near death if one did not wear a survival suit.

Though she hadn’t used the toilet, she flushed it anyway. She washed her hands and momentarily touched herself by placing her clean left palm on its mirror image. She tossed the white paper towel into the garbage cylinder.

Amorok looked at her immediately as she walked back into the seminar room. Sheryl did not cast her eyes down and away. She took her seat across the circle from Amorok.

“We will begin our final session for today,” announced Amorok as participants returned from the break. “Remember, in nature a new beginning is always possible.”

Amorok had a distinctly nasal enunciation of the word “nature,” and the word came out not as two syllables but as one whole word, one whole concept.

Sheryl shifted in her chair and looked around at her fellow participants. Most once again held their hands relaxed in their laps. But Rebecca, Amorok’s assistant, now looked completely spaced-out. Her face was expressionless—blank—as if someone had emptied her body of her soul. As if someone had taken it. A man, thought Sheryl.

Amorok lifted a tightly rolled blanket onto his lap. He pulled two carved wooden sticks out of the leather laces that tied the blanket bundle together. Standing, he placed the sticks and the round driftwood log behind him on his vacated folding chair. His black, bushy brows were furrowed. He did not look up at the group as he worked.

Placing the bundle in the middle of the circle, Amorok first unrolled the blanket. He then opened four folded squares so that the entire blanket lay flat.

Out of the center of the blanket he ran his palm over a collection of rocks and picked out four the size of his fists. Bending easily at the waist, he placed one in each of the four corners of the blanket. He held his palm over the remaining rocks before placing them in various locations around the blanket in some order and design known only to him. He picked up a stalk of braided grass, which had been bent into a circle and tied, and placed it at the bottom of the blanket. Finally, at the top of the blanket, he placed a large gray fur pelt.

“North,” said Amorok, gesturing to the blanket and looking up at the group, “the place of the elders. This is where we place the wolf. He watches
over those who travel to the center of the earth. South: renewal. This is where we place the sweet grass. East and West are open—we do not place items here. One must find his own beginning, his own reflection. The four corners are grounded with rocks that have told me where to place them. These rocks, this blanket, have traveled with me since the time of my grandfather.”

The light brown blanket with red and orange stripes lay in the center of the circle, in the center of the room. Amorok walked around the blanket. He stood in front of Sheryl.

“The elders have asked me to take you to meet your animal guides,” he said. He pointed. “Lie with your head to the North.”

Sheryl rose from her seat and followed Amorok’s instructions. As she passed him, Amorok briefly touched her shoulder. Sheryl felt the warmth of his hand as if he touched her bare skin directly and not only her light blue cashmere sweater. His touch hurt her.

Sheryl took a deep breath and lay down in the center of the room. She closed her eyes and felt the blanket envelop her body. There was only one spot at the back of her skull that felt hard against the floor, and she wished for a pillow to cushion her head. Amorok used two sticks and began drumming on top of the log.

Sheryl’s breath came easily and evenly. It surprised her how relaxed she felt and how she could follow the immensity of the pathways through her memory. She walked on a path in the woods similar to one she had walked as a girl with her mother. Skunk cabbage slopped over the trail. Sheryl stepped around it.

She could feel the blanket beneath her, yet she was both in the room and outside of it. The drumming continued. But it wasn’t a deep, resonant drumming. It was just a clack, clack, clacking against driftwood. Amorok’s voice shifted through the layers of her thoughts, which gradually became no thoughts. The world of no now, Sheryl thought. She could not make sense of the words, nor did she try. It was to be accepted as a New Age warrior concept. Not understood. And by the time the sound of his voice reached her, the meaning of the words had dissolved.

The intensity of the drumming sharpened. Others had joined Amorok’s drumming—the clack, clacking—she was sure, even though she did not look at them. Her eyes remained closed. She was unable to open them.

This is a different place I am entering, thought Sheryl.

Sheryl looked at wide unblinking eyes. The large black eyes saw all of her. She felt completely naked. Completely exposed. Sheryl stood in front of an immense gray wolf.
“My name,” the wolf said out loud, “is Amorok.”

The animal reached into her and took hold of her senses. For a moment, she felt no response to being taken over by another. Suspended from herself, held in the gaze of this animal, she felt utterly calm. But then her breath came in short gasps. She felt she might not breathe again.

The wolf began to circle her. She imagined that she felt and heard each paw strike the ground. The animal no longer stared into her eyes. The purposefulness of his walk exuded raw power.

Sheryl immediately found a new place in herself, as if the wolf had delivered her to a landscape unrecognizable or unmatchable to prior experience. When the wolf came and sat in front of her, facing away, she accepted that this man Amorok would enter her soul. Possess her. The wolf was close enough so she could place her hand on his broad, flat head. With the wolf as her guide, and Amorok as her leader, she entered the place of Amorok’s people. She learned what the colors she saw around people meant. She realized what to do with the heat that burned out of her hands.

While the beat of the drum continued, she walked forward, out of the boreal forest and into the edge zone, near a meadow. At the other side, Amorok waited for her. Five elderly men stood next to him. As Sheryl started to walk across the meadow, the elders watched her closely. Their expressions were stern.

Amorok called to her. This time his voice was very clear. “We have been waiting for you.”

“I’m here,” Sheryl answered.

Sheryl felt a touch on her forehead. Her entire body jumped. Then she stiffened. Amorok the human sat beside the blanket.

The drumming stopped. The meadow was gone.

“Gently,” said Amorok. He whispered in her ear.

While completely aware of him, she felt unable to acknowledge his presence. She did not yet open her eyes. Her skin felt exposed. Amorok continued to touch her forehead between and above her eyes. The tip of his finger pushed a gentle breeze into her, generating a warmth on her cheeks that traveled down her spinal cord and out to the rest of her body. Her body stopped shivering. She did not want Amorok to stop touching her. Suddenly what had previously felt spiritual now felt sexual.

“It is good,” Amorok said.

Sheryl opened her eyes. Amorok did not look away. The group encircled them, creating a space like the disappeared meadow.

Amorok took her hand and helped her off the blanket. With an open palm, he helped her stand.
“We dance now,” said Amorok standing, “around the blanket.”

He handed Rebecca the log and drumming stick, and barely lifting her bottom, Rebecca slid over to fill Amorok’s chair. She began to bang out a beat. It was slightly irregular, a thump just before and off the beat rather than on it, as if her arm could not follow the rhythm expected by everyone else but only the rhythm she heard in her mind. The sound was not meditative in the way Amorok’s drumming had been.

“We dance to this?” asked the man wearing a purple and white pin-striped bow tie.

Amorok started to move, but it looked like a shuffle: step left foot open, step together; step left foot open, step together. In between each movement there was a subtle shaking, a little jiggle, in his body. He established a regular rhythm, ignoring Rebecca’s awkward beat. Except for the woman in the green sweats who still lay on her back off to the side of the room, soon the entire group clasped hands and moved in unison around the blanket.

No one smiled. It was serious work. Spiritual work.

“Become ready,” Amorok said to the group as the circle dance came to an end. “In dreams you will find a way.”

The mood in the room lightened immediately. Amidst people standing and stretching and talking, Amorok placed the rocks, the sweet grass, and the wolf pelt inside the center of the blanket. He folded the blanket and rolled it, tying the bundle tightly with the leather laces. Into the top of the bundle he slid the two carved wooden sticks. Then he placed the blanket alongside the drumming log next to his chair.

To Sheryl, the meticulousness of his actions made him appear angry. She wondered if the group’s lack of attention to the refolding of the blanket bothered him, if it signified disrespect to the traditions of his people. She was the only one watching.

Amorok’s assistant Rebecca stood a little behind Amorok’s chair hugging participants and saying goodbye. Sheryl saw Rebecca look sharply at Amorok as he crossed the center of the room. Rebecca had not helped Amorok fold the blanket and complete the ceremony.

Sheryl watched the way Amorok placed each foot carefully on the floor. He looked like an animal stepping on unfamiliar territory. She waited as he stopped to help the woman in green sweats stand up.

All the while, Sheryl felt rooted to her spot—she would not move away from his progression toward her. She saw Amorok standing with her in a clearing, in the moonlight. They faced each other. They held hands.

Sheryl looked up and saw through the roof of the White Center. The sky was streaked with a veil of iridescent silver light. Beyond the snap of the
northern lights, toward the darkness of space, she saw five elderly men looking down at her and nodding their heads. Sheryl looked at Amorok, who was watching her. They stood at eye level. Her imagination was transparent to him.

Amorok and Sheryl hugged.

“Touch is good,” Amorok said, whispering in Sheryl’s ear.

His lips touched her ear. He placed one palm on her lower back.

It began snowing and then kept snowing. As if from the effect of a blizzard, the days drifted into one. As Sheryl began to train with Amorok, each day repeated the day before until a series of days blurred into one and time itself became irrelevant. Sheryl found herself sinking deeper and deeper into an ageless place beyond that transcended time. Although there was some crack in her consciousness that told her this was impossible, the days, instead of getting lighter and lighter, grew darker and darker.

Sheryl continued to live with her mother’s friend Kay and spent as much time with Amorok as he allowed. Kay approved of all the time Sheryl spent with Amorok. She said Amorok would purify Sheryl. Make her a spiritual woman.

Amorok let Sheryl place her hands on his temples, telling her the heat cured his headaches. Sheryl had replaced Rebecca Hooper at Amorok’s side for his workshops. Just like the meadow, Rebecca had disappeared. Amorok frequently asked Sheryl to walk with him at night, after he finished visiting old people from his village who now lived in the Pioneer Home in Anchorage.

This night, Sheryl and Amorok walked in the moonlight on a snow-packed trail in the Chugach Mountains, which bordered the eastern edge of Anchorage. A few miles outside of the city, it was possible to enter wilderness and the beginnings of the boreal forest. It was possible to walk as an equal with Amorok, a man as old as Sheryl’s grandfather.

Amorok crunched along on the snow in front of her. Sheryl still yearned for his touch. He had not touched her since the first workshop.

Just recently he had carved an ivory amulet for her. It was part of the training. Kay said that meant Sheryl was next in line, after Rebecca. Amorok had sent Rebecca to Point Barrow to train with the elders. He said
Sheryl would go next.

The amulet was in the shape of a wolf, the wolf she had met when he drummed her to the center of the earth. She had never told Amorok about meeting the animal, but here it was in form. The leather string around her neck was long enough that she could hold the amulet and look at it. Amorok had carved the wolf with his teeth bared and his hair raised.

“Protection,” he said when he placed it around her neck.

*The yoke of spiritual bondage,* she thought, inexplicably, when Amorok placed it around her neck.

Sheryl had smelled something, too, a combination of carrion and wind, but had not paid attention to her imagination. She knew her thoughts were transparent to Amorok. He would not let harm come to her.

Being with Amorok had alerted her senses. Often Amorok’s whole body seemed as if he still danced the circle, and she found herself reacting in the same way, taking a step and pausing, taking another step. Or she could stand next to him and feel a pulse run through her body. It was more than the circulation of blood. No longer held captive by her own identity, Sheryl felt part of a greater purpose than her own self could provide.

It was a sense of being interdependent and connected, of breathing the same air and being a part of the same sky.

Amorok turned around. Stared. “You’d hear me in that brain of yours if you were quiet.”

*I feel you in my heart,* Sheryl wanted to say.

Amorok smiled. He opened his arms to the sky. The flat, gray sky, which somehow they had entered and now lived inside together. Sheryl had decided that theirs would be a life of no boundaries. Already, they continuously joined and rejoined each other.

Sheryl opened her arms to mimic him, and started to laugh. Really, she wanted to cry. Suddenly she felt sad, not herself.

Amorok’s eyes lit up. He walked closer to her. He leaned forward and kissed her directly on the lips. The touch of his lips felt exactly like the touch of his finger on her forehead when he first drummed her to the center of the earth. She felt his moustache hairs on her upper lip, and it sparked a flash of heat on her tailbone, right at the base of her spine.

Sheryl put her hands on Amorok’s cheeks and held his lips to her. She opened her mouth and felt his tongue. The base of her spine burned. Through her parka, she felt the heat from Amorok’s hands on her back, holding her tightly. He would never release her.

The sky parted, and Amorok and Sheryl fell out. As she fell, Sheryl felt an intense heat throughout her entire body. The sensation of burning flesh
made her wake up. The acrid smell made her feel sick. Her head hit the snow first, and then her body.

Sheryl ended up supine with Amorok standing over her. She started laughing and heard the sound of her cackle, the pitch of hysteria in the noise coming from her throat.

“Now you understand,” said Amorok. “Sometimes it must work this way. To free the student.”

Amorok turned and started walking again. He crunched along, on top of the snow. His boots did not sink in.

_He walks on top of water_, thought Sheryl.

“Yes, I do,” yelled Amorok over his shoulder.

Sheryl scrambled to her feet. The snow had melted around her. She ran to follow Amorok. He turned down a smaller trail, and they entered a meadow of snow encircled by alder trees. Sheryl took Amorok’s hand.

_Maybe tonight we will spend the night together_, thought Sheryl.

“It is time,” Amorok said out loud, “You are ready.”

Amorok said everything happened at once, or nothing happened at all. And right now, _a time of no now_, under that flat expanse of sky, made flatter by the brightness of the moon, Sheryl did not want to be anywhere else. Life was good. Walking at midnight, at whatever time, was good.

_There are many ways to the center of the earth_, thought Sheryl. _Many ways to be taken there._
COPERNICAN TWISTS
—(after Saint-John Perse)

Tom O’Connor

1.

Calling each beast by its proper name, words become a game: mother, crouch

with joy when you hear my voice. Maids, as I nap, wait in the corner. Endless

sewing! Unkept promises! Only my forehead is laurelled with phosphorescent bees.

Today, go your own ways, you gates and lawns. The sun rises and sets—when I command.

For everyone else, all this: abandoned for odors of the tomb. So I stray far from

the war drums, in an endless summer valley— heavy with opiates and dim milt.
2.

Legend has it that Hipposus made his discovery of irrational numbers at sea and was thrown overboard by fanatic Pythagoreans.

The 55th floor glares across a blinding bay—swallowing the sunset. Blacksuits in conference gather along a sheen of mahogany, reflecting the chairman’s mouth. It opens like a dog’s nostrils: *with our confidentiality sworn on pain of death, there will be no Copernican twists. No contradictions. This Brotherhood is never put under.*

*So remember our oath to one another. Stay relaxed among your maids and gardeners,*

*but if you oppose us, if you’re Hipposus,*

*we’ll drag you to the shore & hold you under as the sun drives nails of light through your eyes.*
A Ghost’s Origins

Sofia M. Starnes

You guessed the house would wince, the wind would ride, and swift, around the corner, a blue chant, would mistify the mortar: the ridges of our stubborn continent. Once more, the world’s personified; I know. I do this all the time—so come; let’s find ourselves in it. Perhaps the storm, eager to battle home-ward through the roof, will miss your rubber boots, my shawls.

I have a habit: to transpose and see our density on a sill, where a young woman fills a stoneware dish with pie crust.

And, though she’s so forgettable, she’ll have her mother’s chance, a sturdy bearded man behind her hips, kissing her shoulder.

She’ll pull—so wifelike, that we’ll look away; he will, of course, relish the skit and hour, a summer under shingles, calling storms.

Yes, all at once their rainfall is our fall; I’m sure the house that winces rides our storm. Forget the moon. Our room is full, is equally beholden.
A Way with Words

Sofia M. Starnes

Not the attic light, but the bricks that left us asking where the house was,

and the widow-walk;
not the porch lamps, but the blueprint of a sunroom

and a window stripped to bone. Chanticleer.
By early dawn, the swindle of a cockcrow flew apart.

So, did death stop speaking too?
All our ladders have become: ribcage, bruise

appraisal, crackers in a can, dry root—
which is to say, a basement full of words made tangible—

music
in large cages and small rooms.

And so I turn to voice as sling; to call as latticework of tongues

(gossips in a loft),
that breaks our fall through ink and mockingbird,

those nights we test our hand on spring, incur a rustle—
brush before abandon.
A heart worth knowing is a heart
to fear: a boy, bunched up in the porch, biting
off his nails. He’s shaved his head—a ripe
zuccone, bald as Donatello’s prophet. *Non finito.*

Under clouds, his column leans imperiled,
in between tank-top and tunic,
on the wind of furious artists—
I see him here, like the old
inmates of stone, vein-cages taunting and near,
while no one touched them.

I think how beautiful the boys are, freed
from their quarry,
and the fathers who raise them, heads
borne on strong shoulders, beneath temperate
lamps.
But now, there’s this boy, shivering in the rain,
a tree-frog on his lap, ghostly.
Above the eaves, a sudden storm wakens,
whitens the porch. Light rivets the roof,
sends him up, sparkling, while his frog leaps.

He starts at thunder: at fulfillment.
Oh, it comes easy
for the cloud and the sky’s smock, the green beast
and its retina, the stone garnering a face.

*Work me into non finito.*

It comes hard, hardest for the boy, who

knows that a squash sweetens, while the soil reeks,
that the heads lie, spoiling,

that his heart must sculpt into branches.
If extremist vegans were to
demonize Venus’ flytraps
I would contemplate consistency
of vision, and not think
hypoglycemia the root cause
of their passion.

Fashions of guilt will
level out the tilt of centuries
or decades. The stomach is a bubble.
St. Francis had his songbirds, and a cave,
The peasants had their poppy bread, and plague.
They stuffed themselves with visions, thus
religion kneaded pane and pain.

What tilts the world of vegans so
they treat themselves, retreat, to nuts
and lettuce every day comes to look like
too much umbrage, or borage, in a lack
of wilderness. Plain ecstasy erodes
to vitamin-controlled devotion.

St. Francis thinned
his body to evoke his soul,
but what followed were the flaws
of an awful philosophical economy:
his monks preserved his woods so well
no nursing logs or fires diversify their floor today.
They are senescent. The forest dies
from excess sense and sentiment.
THE LETTERS AND THE LIONS

Brian Swann

Tighter than shadows, the grooves where words were shine.

Above them, the lions hold their stance, gray. The words were sutures over stone, holding it together. Over everything, the flutter of lightning makes for something almost erotic, certainly erratic, from yellow to blue, sheets and forks that hurt, or their weight does, always the same, so even if I turn back or change direction it is still there, a kind of celestial scrawl, making noises, each an emotion, like words you say again and again to go beyond meaning or be the pure sound they were before, and that changing too until their echo’s heaven’s palimpsest. Then the sky blurs, goes quiet. The lions settle into the dark though you can still sense their muscled outlines squatting over the words as if they’d
just brought them down. Fingers
have traced each letter smooth, or deep, or flat

as if they were loved, or they just couldn’t
believe what they said, or were just

slow spellers. In any case, following,
they obliterated. What does that say?

And what did the words say? Ozymandias
had no trouble making himself understood.

But these letters are absence, smooth as
indifference, though sometimes when the light

is right shadows fill the void. What
we’re left with are lions, not themselves

enigmatic but in effect sphinxes. They don’t
seem to appreciate the irony. It’s a stretch,

but you could say that flexed they only seem
to be fixed, and could be struggling to

be free from the rock like Michelangelo’s
prisoners. Doubtless, the fact they are lions says

something. Horses wouldn’t cut it (even the
horses of instruction) nor even the human

form divine. They sit atop the text like weather.
You feel that if they put their minds to it

they could fill the grooves with roars, every rift
with ore, leap lacunae. So it’s not too much of a
leap to say you could too, with a bit of luck, punctuated here and there with your own plausible roar and a playful swat of your playful paw.
BIG BEACH

Keith Tuma

Out here where the land is terribly thin
seagulls circle the really tall houses
with their little pools and all the girls
are too young, too old, or too fat.
Here’s one in a pink skirt with a cooler,
another in a brown bikini and shades.
Lebanon is indoor entertainment;
this guy’s carrying a towel in his teeth,
safari hat tied under his chin—
everybody wants to get off, slowly.
Here comes a black lab on a red leash,
though it’s more of a strap she has
about half the width of her swimsuit,
her runway strut at edge of ocean
cooking every shrimp on the beach,
eyes popping like Jimmy Carter.
An older woman’s floating her daughters,
her tubby husband doesn’t give a damn
under an umbrella reading something.
America, give me back my suntan lotion,
who wouldn’t want to dive like a dolphin,
take it out of the water like pelicans.
Pressed yellow bermudas on this white-haired gent
signal a sea change, we won’t get old,
little crabs out of big water into big sand,
sideways and jerking toward the sand hole—
catch one maybe, pull out its eyes
as surf boys come up out of the foam,
disappear into sea oats over the dunes.
“Blank as a bone on the beach when the tide’s run out”
John Wieners mopes back at the house
“Fulfill us /as the sea / fulfills the shore/
and ask no more”—or buy some rockets.
A lot of cheese, not a pickle in the house,
one seagull attempts to unseat another
hovering above the pole rebuffed.
Curiously few like the beach in the morning after the rain quits in this persistent easy to get used to sipping life, the water as blue as Bombay gin, this full-faced wash of early sunbright managing to push up swollen sentiments, some get the drift and some don’t, skin opening in air to burn. Jesus.
Get a load of these women coming in Wal-Mart jumpers dragging crosses past the bait shop on Highway 12. Be ye a fisher of men the sign says “You catch ‘em. He cleans ‘em.”
America, give me saboteurs and the rest of it, uranium stipulations, big pig sanctions at polis.gif and obedient.gif, your distorted facts and guidebook freakery deserve a week at the beach right now, salt of the sea in e pluribus lungs beyond this big blue house on stilts. You want me to dig a foxhole instead. Ground and brewed coffee minimally processed meat it’s over soon, your mother and father not long for the world, sucked under without a splash.
All the way from Salvo to Rodanthe I still move pretty well across this sand even without my new tank treads America, stop dumping carcasses in the landfills of Texas. Some asshole somewhere’s shoving a cellphone down his girlfriend’s throat trying to get the number she’s calling. It’s enough to give a person sleeping sickness; alcohol dries up water in the ears. Thousands of foreheads marked with blue we want to amputate the sixth toe of Iran. Hello hedge funds. Hello Argentina, I’m not at all sure this is the right number. Some young dude’s got a stingray on his line flapping like a giant bat it pulls him
through gathering crowds of tourists
wishing him best of luck. They’ve stood up
now that their boredom’s lifting with the heat
and pleasure boats drift off in the haze.
O come on liars of every nation and race
I’m roasting the better part of my egghead,
there’s little wind and a few stringy clouds,
beaches aren’t barbequed in sludge or bombed
for fewer targets than targets here
in America. This is the life this life
as a renter. There’s not an owner in sight.
Meiot

D. E. Steward

The flaring pitch of accipiters dashing in and out of shade patches in gusty spring winds over hardwoods full of songbirds on their migration to the taiga

Dropping from the Lepontine Alps to Luino on the Laggo Maggiore

The Mombello-Intra ferry on the way out of Lombardia up to Domodosola and the Simplon to Brig in the Valais, then down the Rhone to Geneva

Back and forth across the Alps

Above and behind the Italian lakes

As in Innerferrera, 1486m, late October, freezing at dusk, alpine red on the Piz la Mutalla as a customs officer comes home from higher up and sits down to type reports

Three boys play hockey in the narrow square into the night, beer crate goals on packed snow ice

Barley soup made with Bündnerfleisch, up at two with no dreams to match the place, walk the village carefully then move out beyond the light

The river’s roar and gorge is absolute as death itself, no moon

The galaxy arcs across the peaks

Dead deep-frost calm until a wind drafts from the tunnel on approach

Timelock of gravel footfalls scanty fluorescent glow, out the tunnel’s far end the ravine goes up forever into firs and snow

The Pleiades are closer the wind stops there is nothing

Innerferrera gone behind and all the way to turning back the road is a dangerous longitude of cambered ice
Short and careful steps in starlight, all star lit nights, all time, all mountain nights

In the Lower Engadine snow patches south-facing slope melt, dead grass-flattened banks strong slanted sun, Austrian and Italian frontier ridges

Clear sky everywhere, shirt off, Scuol, 1244m, to Ftan up 400m, two hours across the Silvretta’s lower reach above the Clüs, deep pit of the Graubünden

Meet a farmer in his church clothes carrying down a fence-transformer pack, three nutcrackers pass on corvid course

Grasshoppers, berries, rosehips, butterflies, larches on the shoulders of the ravines shed golden needles on the snow so that even it is colored sun

As though kedging across this long belvedere, throw out one leg carefully and pull to it on the steep incline without a rope, crossing this fragment of the earth’s orogeny laid out wide before the winter as though newly opened and freshy set

Lurch wildly in wondrous vertigo sending peaks and planets spinning, then coming down again the rush of the October early dusk

The other side always here far side air river, light or shade grass or spruce snow or stone

From Mürren through over across as a lake partition glass, Wengen to Kleine Scheidegg’s plunge to Trümmelbach delimited from the bank of Jungfrau ice and rock

These three particular zones of experience laterally isolate Lauterbrunnen’s familiar reaches sitting on the breakoff point out behind the waterfalls

All that over there as across the void from here, Yokohama-Tokyo from the Bay, Manhattan from Weehawken or Brooklyn Heights, Paris from Montmartre

Equalities of perspective help remove recurring doubts about the reality and splendor of such a glacial gash
Until among fussing batteries of siskins off the trail, and spruce-top psittacine crossbills down in a gorge, the whole remains abstract dead silence of the air between here and there across facing such ideals, pure scenery of Eiger-flanking glacial gloss

First of all the necessity to walk ahead and prove respect of site worship of the vast and stratiform

We teem from the middlelands toward great mountains as though drawn to huge ships from outer space

Clamber up the high valleys into their stillness anticipating hushed remission, benisoning of thin air’s grace

On the Poganggen, an apparent pre-Germanic boulder strewn arena alp, substance of the deep past hidden among the rocks where Ursprache of the Chlyni Nadla could be grunting yelps since the Gamchi is something other than a German language spot

While most roam over on the Eiger side, freeing this peculiar and spacious western-facing place to which probably no Roman soldier ever climbed except to scout beyond the reach of conventional Swiss polyglot

Move up past a chamois on the cliff behind the caves out front, watch the wheatears black white tan alertly flock

Mürren’s vertical breadth a kind of midway of the Alps

Above the trees the high alpine world shares common banks of open sky and blazing threat of weather closing in, ravens croak, a lost footing fall would force the hazard of an unsheltered sub-zero twelve-hour night

And to live so high means familiarity with crags and cascade weather plots

Distance becomes time awareness, soars in homing loops lifting always to the far before fixing close

Verbs become the crucial pattern of approach, the climb, the view, the next decisions calculated rapidly, then checked, and checked again
How far there’s time to go within depends on how much energy and sun is left

Half moon under to imagine music full enough to fill the whole dark silver Lauterbrunnental

Vibrating the massive strikes of the Mürrenflue as purfling or some fine long sounding board

Twenty-five hundred feet by six thousand meters by its gaping width, this space, the Jungfrau guardian valley moat

To stare up the gashes of shrunken glaciers’ troughs is as dropping to the ground to gawk toward the zenith

Close out with no regress of gap the views of flat big sky blocked quiet by only the rose snow stone, sunset light, and cold blue ice gleam dawns, with all the regularities inherent to flatness disappeared

Just before, a golden eagle’s draft that soared tipped dipped out far past gone below the hesitant plateau’s high lip

Across the Pletschenalp toward the Marchegg dry dust gold grass rare red raspberries trace wander from it course blazes back the empty steep

Look down on a single sleek black salamander that gleams remarkably, as astonishing as the presence of a crossbill flock topping a Gimmela black spruce copse

Eyes black, no yellow spots or orange-black, a herald warning to soon glance up so as not to miss an eagle’s slip behind a mountain ridge

At the corner Marchegg top, through a screen with clouds backed up deep over the hind ridges, the Saustal

Death in the ice far along deep inside the Saustal with the sunlight tone, before the inner valley its front ridge bathed in warm humming light

Lean back against live rock to keep from plunging out, walk it one foot, then the next salamander style, line of descending awareness above the lower interlock
For all who live one high mountain valley to the next, furrows in our brains, fears of looking back across, losing orientation here always serious, no sun snow wind avalanche abandonment, and no dangerous slips, no falls

Move even farther away from familiar regularities, violate arbitraries like being back down to tree line before dark

Up high a matter of pampering your feet, ingesting enough to offset the loss, and using catnaps to obviate the difficulties from tentative edgy tiredness

Pushing outer limits, venturing places from which it is not easy to return

Unprepared for anything more interesting than getting back, no wish at all to fall or break a leg and spend a frostbite night

Take care of feet and sustenance and let the mountains’ highness-lift flush through the brain’s rational concerns

Not a matter of meters climbed but of the infused clarity and strength of the Matterhorn itself through days of perfect sun

Scale of self to peaks and slopes is remarkable and the cumulative gain of continuing is considerable

Tens of thousands of late summer migrant swifts clinging to a cliff above Zermatt waiting for the dawn to warm

Deer browse behind the larches’ screen, a marmot’s whistle under the shadow of a hurtling sperber

Bleached sandstone crunch foot grind dry

The Monte Rosa glacierscape the topmost downshoot trough far back up there, finished now stepping lightly upon the first shoals of beech forest black humus earth

Into the cultivated valley dropping to the Rhone
Boulder bedded upper Rhone rush flat sunny orchards with renewables that endure having only scant recognition of what’s done or said, so try to keep from glancing down, look back and up as the day extends

Rilke, d. 1926, is buried in Raron’s churchyard where the Rhone begins to spread and open to the West

He came to the Rhone downriver at Sierre where he remained after the long warm sun’s extrusion from the high-inner deutschsprachig Valais

Down toward Sion Montreux Vevey to valley-French opening the Rilke barricade part way, a gossamer language curtain of his necrophilic fame

What he saw when he scouted for his grave site is gone and visions of rose-thorn images soon became late-nineteenth century cant

Whatever homage is paid perpetuates a nonchalance, the glaciers and the peaks just behind and back inside, intricate space polished and intact within the rearing mountain stone
Lily woke up slowly, her body unhappy, as if she had binged on syrup. The sunlight on the windowpane was too rich a yellow, and she remembered, briefly and vaguely, that an eclipse was occurring sometime soon, maybe today. Whether it was solar or lunar, she couldn’t recall, nor the time, but she thought its approach might explain the odd color of the sunlight and the heavy sweet lethargy she herself was experiencing.

After rising, her first act was to flick on the computer and let the impersonal star-studded black fill the screen. She liked floating stars, fake or not. Then she opened a blank document and was rewarded with the immediate, lively appearance of the little paper-clip icon. “You are adorable,” she said, and as if hearing her, he leaned forward. His thick black brows raised expectantly, pleasantly, repeatedly. “Yes madam?” the movement suggested. “Yes madam? Anything.” She blew him a kiss. He was ever ready to please. “I bet in your off time,” she said, “you hang around with pliers.” The brows lifted—her timing had been perfect. She was delighted with herself.

From the back porch area came the thumpy rustling of her three dogs. “When I’m ready,” she called. One of them whined.

She fed them scrambled eggs with dry dog food and shooed them from deck to yard. But they wanted her. “I have to work,” she said. “I earn our living. Remember?”

She delayed a few more moments, stealing onto the front porch so her creatures would not hear her. She sat down, pressed feet into grass. A person could ache to death from this intensity. From where in heaven did the feeling come?

In an upstairs apartment across the street, one house down from the elementary school, William Lee Harper slept shallowly, groaning and flailing in the heat. Very tall, slim, with heavy bones, he was almost homely: his nose was too large, his hair coarse and long, cut unevenly. But he had a firm jaw and well-defined lips. And his eyes, opening now to stare at the ceiling of an attic apartment, were a beautiful deep blue, soft, intelligent, inquisitive.

He didn’t move because he was trying to recall a dream and he didn’t
want to disturb that part of his mind. But the dream fled, or dissolved—whatever dreams did. All he remembered was that a noise, a roar, actually, had taken him by the hand. His hand now missed that contact. He sat up, jotted the brief memory into his notebook, then stood and stretched his arms out sideways. There was no room to raise them in a proper stretch, because the ceiling of his room was shaped like an A and he could stand erect only at its deepest pitch.

In three steps he was at his kitchen table, reaching for the pack of cigarettes near the saltcellar, and looking down at the house across the street. There she was. Miss Friendly. Miss Pollyanna. Miss Salt of the Earth. The kind of young woman who probably grew up on a farm, with money and history and health behind her. He placed the cigarette in his lips, struck a match, and remembered: he was trying not to smoke. Even the hot sulfur of the match smelled good, made his throat itch for that first deep inhalation of tobacco. He shook the match out, sat down before the window, and balanced the cigarette on its filter.

He liked watching his neighbor. Though she was sometimes indoors for long periods, she obviously relaxed by puttering around outside. Small, incomplete actions seemed to please her. She would water part of the yard, stop, weed a patch of lawn, hose her bare feet, smoke a cigarette, water again. Once she had attempted to capture something in a small jar and had crawled around for almost an hour, occasionally slapping the jar down, then tilting it carefully.

Now she had gone back inside and he surveyed the rest of the visible neighborhood, the houses all blues or whites, with high elms and oaks, the leaves multi-green, wires piercing them, squirrels commuting among them all.

He knocked over his cigarette tower, picked it up, breathed that wonderful aroma deep, then inserted the cigarette back in the pack. Sometimes it was good simply to crave.

He gathered his towel and clean clothing. Already sweat ran down the center of his chest. It was going to be a blistering day. Would he ever have air conditioning? Was his lot poverty? Did he really care? Maybe he was just a bum. Cosmic bum. He went down the folding ladder to the shower on the next floor.

Miles away, zooming directly toward the sunrise, was Dutch van Dyne. Though he had already unloaded his truck and was, in fact, driving only the
cab, he was burning to get somewhere. He rolled down both windows of his truck and the air rushed in like water. He opened his mouth to gulp it in. He yelled, halloooood. The damned air smelled female. The earth itself was turning beneath him. He grabbed his CB mike.

“This here’s the Dutchman and I’m here to tell you this is one of God’s great days, a most wonderful day, a day for joy and love and praise.” A moment later, a voice cracked over the CB: “Boobs headed west on I 70. Blue Lincoln.”

Dutch was miles from I 70 but the notice reminded him of the other side of his nature: He who lived, lusted. He unfolded his hand-lettered sign “show me your beauties” and, driving with one hand, taped the sign along the bottom of the windshield. Just knowing it was there made him feel inches from a woman and adventure. He blew a thick-lipped, heart-felt kiss toward the sky itself. “Love you, babe,” he said, winking and tilting his head. “Love you to death.”

In just a few moments, his religious bent reasserted itself, and he took down the sign. He beamed a gap-toothed smile at his reflection. “This here’s a Christian man,” he said. “If my part offend me, I’ll cut it off.” He both felt brave for saying it and regretted saying it. What if he was called upon to honor his word? Nah. God didn’t work that way. Still, he uttered aloud “I didn’t mean that.”

He was thirty-two years old, a master at jobs taken and failed, longed to be a minister, but acknowledged that a large gap lay between that goal and his nature.

‡ ‡ ‡

On Lily’s computer screen, lists of files dropped down like silver ladders. She opened one, and sub-files descended, silver with blue trim, like so many ladies in the same gown and jewels. A wedding party? A sampling of angels? Having every intention of either working on her thesis or updating her web page—where she sold essays, letters or other word-smithing products—she instead opened a blank document so she could study the paperclip guy. Her eyes never got tired of him. How many pixels were behind the little dope? How many frames? She could right-click and have options about his wiry little being, but she didn’t. She wanted the mystery. Don Quixote. Cyrano. Yakov. Jean bel Jean. Paperclip. Cutey.

From the back porch came a sharp bark and a powerful whimper. “Later!”

‡ ‡ ‡
On the other side of the block, where college kids tried on personalities and behavior, an adopted dog, now neglected, dug deeply enough under the gate to uncover one edge of malshaped concrete mass wedged there by her latest owner. Delilah, as she was now named, began steadily, rather obsessively, worrying at that exposed edge. An hour later, hot but free, she trotted down the alley, panting, powerful, and wanting to play.

\[\text{\textbackslash \textbackslash \textbackslash}\]

After his shower, William Lee Harper dressed in black jeans and black tee shirt, black socks and black Concord tennis shoes, and walked to the bookstore three blocks away. He was drawn to the comic section, but he didn’t give in to that craving. Instead, he remained in the non-fiction section for some time, reading a paragraph or two in a number of books. By this painless approach, he had in high school read more fiction than any students in his peer group, and had now a beginning familiarity with the works of Jay Gould, Carl Sagan, Lewis Thomas, and Freeman Dyson. Surprising himself, he carried a Dyson book to the register.

Outside again, a book in hand—a real cash investment in shaping himself—William felt as if he had committed to something important. Maybe practicing a virtue had actually helped him to acquire it? He even felt healthier, capable of breathing more deeply. And the air had cooled, he thought. He examined the sky. It was an odd rosy yellow, like a fertilized egg. William cut through an alley, and went to the campus library, fourth floor, green sofa by the west window, read Dyson’s fine thoughts till coolness and contentedness led him to sleep. He dreamed about taking action and being quite satisfied about it.

\[\text{\textbackslash \textbackslash \textbackslash}\]

Dutch kept the semi at just enough speed to enter the truck stop safely but forcefully, pleased with the image of his “Jesus Loves You” sign barreling into the pit of sinners, sinners like himself, of course—he was not self-righteous. Swinging down from the cab, he felt already the familiar onslaught of appetites when he neared food and companionship. He liked the prostitutes, too, adored them, actually; but he didn’t really consort with them, not on the level they offered. One was smiling at him now.

“Hey, Ruthy,” he said. “Quit aiming those things at me.”

Her chortle was warm and melodic. “Keep hoping to knock you low one of these nights.”
In bed, she’d probably be a chorus of joy. He would resist the temptation of her as long as he could.

Inside the restaurant door, he paused and scanned the room, smiling for everyone the same. His sharp gaze, though, was identifying the men he knew but hadn’t yet hit-up for anything, because Dutch, though a man of massive appetites, and right now twenty-eight-hours hungry, had no money and no credit. At two friendly responses, he gave a quick, flat-hand half-wave, knowing exactly how that looked. He had meaty arms, really strong, and that impressed both men and women. Too wily to head directly toward potential donors, he headed for the showers, returning moments later still damp, hair slicked but curling anyhow, and his mouth fresh from toothpaste and warm from a genuine smile. He himself would share anything with someone needy, and he saw no harm in expecting the rest of the world to do the same.

He strode up to a booth where two truckers were halfway through their meal. “How’s it going?” he said, slap-gripping a handshake with each man. “Where you headed?” He scooted next to the thinnest trucker.

“Michigan,” from one.

“Illinois” from the other.

“Missouri,” Dutch nodded. “I’m bobcatting. Gonna swing by some friends’ places, visit a day or so.” He glanced at the plates, quickly up, toward the waitress headed that way. “Steak looks good, but it’s more’n I want right now. I’m more sleepy than hungry.”

The men had ordered their steaks rare, and with each cut, a red juice seeped and discolored the edge of gravy and mashed potatoes. The man to his left, Morty somethingorother, obviously didn’t like bread crust. Dutch picked up a discarded strip, munched it while he winked at the waitress. “Just coffee now, Sugar. Give me a few minutes.”

Dutch didn’t miss the look exchanged between the two men. They knew exactly his situation. He had intended them to—as he intended them to pretend obliviousness as he was doing. “Food lays heavy when you got a long drive and no time to sleep. I want to get home tonight. I got a personal load and a dock waiting.”

The men grinned, not as much as they would have earlier, but enough. It was all going to be okay. He munched the rest of the bread crust while they talked about the boobs-on-seventy call.

“I’m not going to risk my schedule just for a look, not even at a whole naked woman,” one said.

“Me neither, but they sure can spice up a dull route. Wish they’d line up across that Texas panhandle.”
“Give’em a reason to,” Dutch said, looking outside where trucks were crossing over and under the intersection. It made him almost remember something that could be important. “Most people will respond to a genuine desire.”

The trucker named Morty took out a worn wallet stuffed with bills. He extracted a five, showed it to his buddy.

“I’ll add a couple bills. She kept an eye on us.”

“Never mind. I got it.”

“Well, God be with you, gents,” he said, and stood so the man next to him could exit the booth. Then he sat back down, but sideways, as if waiting for the girl to come clear the table.

“Some other time,” Morty said. The two walked away.

Dutch shifted himself to sit properly, but he didn’t touch anything. He ran his fingers along the table trim on either side of the plates. When Morty came back, scooped up the bills and said, “We’ll just give these to her on our way out,” Dutch was offended, not ashamed. “Your money was safe here,” he returned. There were rules. In Dutch’s opinion, the real transgressor was Morty, who had distrusted an honest man.

† † †

Delilah trotted first down the alley, nosing into driveways and trash-cans, urinating in the sight of other dogs. Occasionally she nosed the ground fervidly and then thrashed around on the spot, as if coating herself with special odors. Sleek black, large, muscular and graceful, she wove through the neighborhood, lapping from lawn water overflow, testing trash paper and scraps. Not one can was disturbed, though, as if thus far the urge to eat was secondary to the urge to investigate wildly. Coming to the end of the alley, she turned north, then back west, eyeing tricycles, children, lawn-mower, cats, squirrels. Now, she trotted a bit sideways, fluid and precise, like a show animal.

† † †

William, still in the cool library, read and watched people. He admired almost everyone he saw, even people his own age, whether nerds, Goths, mainstream, overachievers, black, white, male or female. Each person was a character and was writing for himself a story and any story was worth reading by someone, William figured, even his own. But with only one life allotted, he was rather duty bound to choose one with some fire, passion,
drama—if, that is, choice entered anywhere. Left to chance, he’d probably marry an ordinary woman, much like himself—respectful and goodhearted, with desires to be or to experience something beautiful. But with choice?

For a while he practiced shifting from the perception of an intellectual to the perception of a dunce and to various other perceptions, some rather tasteless. The latter did not please him, and as he left the campus, he noted that the roles he had assumed had affected the very air around him. Certainly it had changed, as had the lighting. One’s mind was nothing to toy with: Think on the highest level or be condemned to live on the lowest. He moved slowly, feeling as if he had stepped into a warp and must be careful.

Lily leashed up the three dogs, became twice entangled in the strips of leather until she screamed “Sit” and the three obeyed, quivering completely, but trying to keep buttocks to the floor. She extricated herself, put the tiniest dog, who insisted on being the leader, in the center, allowed it a 12-inch extension beyond the others, and struck off down the sidewalk.

“You guys aren’t enough,” she said. “You’re wonderful one and all, but you just aren’t enough.” Now the dapple light she always enjoyed, the bright sun through moving, many-leafed branches, seemed sad and almost ominous, not at all steady or warm. Why did gardens cool? Though past lunchtime, Lily still felt as if the world were changing, as if dawn were only now occurring.

An unease shuddered through Lily. Nothing about her had been normal since she arose. Maybe this wariness was a premonition. Maybe this was second sight! What was first sight? She stumbled along, pulled like a sled over rough terrain. She adored her pets, adored all animals. Not only was she guilty of being healthy and bored while most of the world suffered hunger, violence, pestilence, and struggles she didn’t even know existed, but she also fed hamburgers and grilled cheese sandwiches to domesticated wolves. Okay. To dogs. And cats. And she grieved over abused gorillas, chimps, orangutans—whatever save-the-creature cause was displayed on television or spammed on computer. There was no discretion to her compassion, no moral hierarchy. She should help humans! She was ashamed of herself.

“Quit dragging me around,” she panted to her companions who were now nose to the ground, straining and wheezing to force her speedily up the incline.

Maybe she was losing natural feeling because of her obsessive time on computers. But the whole world was on computers now, on screens. Com-
mercials were fast blips of multi-pictures and sounds. Infants danced, sang. Dogs talked, conspired. Cartoons and humans had merged!

Didn’t she love her paperclip buddy? A cyberspace wire! She had actually hesitated to exit her computer sometimes because he might feel hurt. Absurd! Absurd! What could a paperclip feel? Much less a representation of a paperclip, nothing but pixels, each boring by itself. Unless, that is, each pixel was a star in another universe? When one emptied a computer’s trash, where did all the information go? What if that trash had substance, matter, and everyone on the planet was dumping trashed ideas into the future. Humans would suffocate in their own refuse, litter the mind of God himself.

“Goddamn!” she said aloud, jerking back on the leashes so that all three animals took warning and sat still for a command. “Slow down,” she said, and the recognized gentleness in her voice urged them on, though they didn’t quite pick up their earlier speed. She had frightened herself into almost immobility. Now the color and texture of the air were changing again and even shadows seemed odd, like they were subtly mutating. She thought home might be the best place for her and hers. Home right away! “Let’s go, fellows,” she said, though two of the dogs were female. “We’ve had it.” Now she was the one with the rapid pace and they strung out beside and behind her.

Dutch, leaving the restaurant, his body fortified with a little food and free coffee, had given a ride to a skinny cowboy who surprised him, at the next major town, with a twenty dollar bill along with a drawled “thanks.” Everything about the day thus far had suggested to Dutch that a portentous event was imminent. The air was rich and heavy, though no clouds marked the expanse of solid, lowering, oddly pink sky. Maybe God was talking to him. Dutch had begun driving exactly in the direction of the sun, barreling right into his destiny with all good faith. He was a pioneer, a cowboy, a saint.

William was at the intersection near his attractive neighbor’s house, waiting on the pedestrian “walk” sign. He was simultaneously watching, though, activity almost a block beyond which seemed to be the lovely neighbor walking her dogs. They made a ragged troop, and she kept looking over her shoulder as if someone or something were annoying her. William rushed the light a little and reached the other side just as a red semi, with frame but no trailer, cut the turn short and seemed near to jackknifing. “Jesus,” William said. “Run me over.”
It kept traveling, pulled into the grade-school lot across the street, and
stopped. Across the front blazoned “Jesus Loves You.” Out the door came a
thickset, muscular dude with a mass of tousled blonde hair. He rubbed his
palms over his hair and ran, quite gracefully, toward the woman’s two-story
blue house and rang the doorbell. Waiting, he half turned to grin and wave
at William, as though he knew him.

“She’s out walking her dogs,” William said, indicating with a nod the
direction from which she was approaching. “She’ll be back pretty soon.”

“I got all the time in the world.”

William didn’t know about this. The stranger’s confidence was too
much, the presence too solid, like the guy would get in the house and never
leave. He didn’t even question William’s knowledge about her whereabouts.
There was a dissipation about the man, too, as if he’d gone to the extremes
of himself and might burst or something. William felt uneasy—for the
woman, and for himself. After all, he dare not interfere. Nothing was hap-
pening. Yet. If it did, this guy could kill him in short order, could rip raw
meat from bones just with his teeth, probably smiling all the while. This guy
was evolution in retrograde. William decided to speed up a little and inter-
cept the woman’s return with a little forewarning. Now everything seemed
to be edgy, dangerous. He could swear the light and shade had altered
imperceptibly.

A quick repeated yelping turned his attention back to his neighbor,
and William identified the problem. Another dog was following the young
woman and her own creatures. It was a tall, dark, and very lean dog, maybe
a Doberman mix? Wide head. Rottweiler mix? Pit bull. Damn. The woman
was slowing her walk, reining her animals in closer. The little one, though,
the yelper, the crazy friendly and bossy tiny bitch, was trying to go back-
wards. She wanted some of that big dog. Let her at him. Good for her, Wil-
liam thought. The woman should get that tiny brave animal home fast. Save
the critter. Too late. The small dog had broken loose, was running pell-mell
toward the big one. Behind William, footsteps could be no other than the
blonde stranger, so William ran, too, from what followed and toward what
waited. Just when the woman screamed, and the dogs barked, and the small
dog yipped high and long and painful, William and the other man arrived.

The big dog had the tiny squirming one by the throat, had it down on
the sidewalk, was keeping it totally immobile, and was doing this without
apparent effort or concern. It was impassive, steady strength.

“Is that blood?” from Lily. “It’s blood.”

“Get a hammer,” said Dutch, lunging forward just as William did.
William was already bending over the brute. One hand gripped skin
and muscle at the shoulders, the other at the rise of hips, and he jerked up, up, up, and up. At the last, the dog was above him, feet extended toward the sky, and amazingly balanced. “Get the pup in the house,” William screamed. “I can’t hold this thing.”

“I got it,” Dutch said. “Just let it go. I’m right here.”

Lily was sitting on the ground now, the pup on her lap looking simultaneously wild-eyed and dazed. “There’s blood,” Lily said. She pushed back the hair along the dog’s throat. “But not much. Not much. Maybe…”

“It’s coming down,” William said. “Get out of the way.”

With the pup under one arm, Lily scrambled up and ran a few feet away. Dutch raised his arms to help guide the descent of the brute, but he could do nothing. Once William’s arms were shuddering, the creature upheld began struggling and came down at once, not smoothly, fell thump on its side, sprang up, and now focused on this street, sauntered off as if she were no dog’s enemy.

Lily still had the pup, who wanted down, down. “I am so glad,” Lily said, “that you guys came along. I don’t know what would have happened.”

“Actually,” Dutch said, “I didn’t do anything. The kid did.” He realized the word choice wasn’t right. “I mean this guy here. Your friend. He…had the situation well in hand.” Dutch smiled.

William was now appreciative of this crazy trucker. “Not totally. It came down sooner than I wanted.”

“But didn’t hang around to test you.”

“No,” William nodded. “And good thing, too, right? For both of us.”

The men were happy with each other, which pleased Lily. She didn’t know why, except that male camaraderie had its own mystique and she loved romance. “Look at this,” she said, gripping more tightly her squirming dog. “She wants down again. Can you believe it? She almost gets killed and…”

“Put her in the house,” William said, as if he had the right to make the suggestion and might even be familiar with the house. “I’ll get the others.”

Lily almost didn’t comply, because who in the hell was this odd bird anyhow? Who the hell was either one of them?

“I am grateful,” she said.

“You live in that blue house?” from the trucker.

“I do.”

“I knew a gal lived there a few years back.”

Lily could have said “lucky gal” but she didn’t because she was observing the tall, younger man now jog after the other dogs. He had an easy grace. He was so lean. And his hair, jet black and thick. Rich hair.
“That your fellow?” Dutch said.
Lily made a noncommittal sound, like a clipped hum. “You’re a preacher?” she asked, indicating the wide proclamation across Dutch’s cab.
“Great sign, isn’t it? People see me coming.”
“I’m certainly glad you came.”
They both watched the group approaching, William in the front, Lily’s other two dogs on either side of him, as if flanking the attack. And in the rear, some yards behind, Delilah. Now part of the gang.
“My God,” Lily breathed. “He’s bringing back that killer.”
“He doesn’t even know it,” Dutch said. “Better warn him.”
Lily ran to her house, thrust the now yelping mass of tiny, indignant dog into the living room, slammed the door shut and, turning, saw William telling the strange dog to go. William had one arm out, one finger pointing, and his command was evident. He strode firmly toward the creature, and it side-ran a few feet. It obviously did not fear him. Lily’s two had circled back to re-identify, in their special way, the outcast.
“Come,” William ordered those two and walked toward Lily’s with no more backward glances. She was at the screen door and opened it for him and the two travelers. The little one tried to push out but William scooped it up. Across the street, the odd trucker was standing, one foot in the truck, one on the guard, one hand on the mirror. He could have been a pilot or a captain. He waved goodbye and blew a kiss.
Both Lily and William felt warm at that gesture though neither mentioned it.
The strange dog was, foolishly, inexplicably, worrying at the door. It wanted in.
Lily locked the screen door.
“Dogs can’t open screen doors,” William said.
“Who knows for sure,” Lily responded.
While Lily washed her hands and fixed coffee, William carefully checked the brave dog for injuries. The other two helped until he opened the back door and shooed them into the fenced yard. Then he tore off a strip of paper-towel, moistened it with warm water, and wiped down the cuts. “If that stray had wanted to take her out,” he said, “it could have. It was just establishing dominance.”
“Damned scary way of doing it,” Lily said, though she had thought of that herself.
“They have to be scary. Otherwise, it doesn’t work.”
Just then the little dog ran from the kitchen, scrabbled across the wooden floor of the dining room, barking mightily at the screen door.
Both William and Lily followed. Dutch’s truck was turning onto this street again, its neon sign glowing fiercely orange instead of red. With an immense whooshing sound, the truck stopped. Dutch came striding around the cab, opened the passenger door and whistled loud and bell clear.

Delilah bounded from the porch, bounded toward him, and bounded into the front seat.

Dutch waved again as if this had been a designated time and place for this particular event. Then he hurried around the cab, released the brakes like a heavy sigh, and eased the truck away. “You hungry, kiddo?” Dutch said. “I’ll see what I can round up.” He and his dog, Delilah, each felt, in totally individual ways, that this was a most wonderful moment, full of hope like a door into every possibility.

William and Lily felt the same. He was taken with the light touch of red in her hair, the tilt of her nose. Somewhere in his memory was a description of a beloved heroine who was exactly like Lily, or what Lily would be to him. Lily found herself smiling at his quaint being. He had a gentle expression, good humor certainly underlying it. He winked at her when she said something witty, and she gasped at the familiar response. It couldn’t be. No way. Icons were icons and men were men.

The sun was setting and its rays fell focused right down that street, a street lined with old houses, odd shaped yards, creatures making adjustments for wires and vehicles and neighbors and rare occurrences.
Exact as Horror


Peter Robinson

In a letter to John Taylor on 27 February 1818 Keats offered the axiom that “if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all.” Elizabeth Bishop saw it differently. “Writing poetry is an unnatural act,” she wrote in a prose fragment printed here, and “It takes great skill to make it seem natural…. Most of the poet’s energies are really directed towards this goal: to convince himself.” One sadness clinging to Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-box, this invaluable gathering of unpublished materials, is not so much in the story it shadows of her difficult life, its lost relatives, friends, and lovers (“the art of losing isn’t hard to master”), but in the record it presents of her various failures to convince herself that the work underway, at whatever stage, the candidate poem, “is really an inevitable, only natural way of behaving under the circumstances.” Despite her lifelong devotion to the art of poetry, both Bishop’s authorized oeuvre and her other writings would suggest that she was by no means easily convinced. An aphoristic note dated c. 1937 finds her describing poetry as “air transportation (in its present state)” and concludes: “Some poems ascend for a period of time, then come down again; we have a great many stranded planes.” Alice Quinn’s labor of love, with its fascinatingly detailed notes, appendix, and facsimile reproductions is a long exemplification of the lines from William Empson’s villanelle “Missing Dates” about how “It is the poems you have lost, the ills / From missing dates, at which the heart expires.”

That “you” appearing for the first time at line 16 in Empson’s poem appears to be echoed in Dylan Thomas’s equally famous villanelle with the same irrupting pronoun: “And you, my father.” Bishop had written to May Swenson on 4 November 1956: “I’ve tried for years to do a villanelle, I like them so much, but without much luck—like Thomas’s—‘Do not go gentle into that good night.’” Twenty years later, she does the very same thing at the same line in “One Art” with “Even losing you I shan’t have lied.” These three villanelles variously focus down, by means of that new pronominal note, on personal issues of breaking or broken relationship as they approach a completing close. Bishop’s parenthetical “(Write it!)” draws attention to the poem’s completion as a resolving achievement of emotional equilibrium, of attachment and detachment—absorbing into the texture of her poem.
an implication that “the art of losing” would inevitably include the poems you couldn’t get, or get right. Bishop’s villanelle is then also about the risk of “losing” poems because the crisis feeling out of which they grow swamps the will required to complete them. The circumstances in which the poem might be made to seem the only natural thing overwhelm the poet’s energies in their efforts to achieve a workable balance between the evocation of crisis and its purposeful shaping—emblematized in this case by the completion of the villanelle form itself.

“One Art” is not an uncollected poem; but Quinn most helpfully reproduces the sixteen preserved draft sheets in her appendix. Reading these prompts the thought that composing a poem requires the writer to establish a relationship (one of trusting possibility, of purpose and potential) with the words being shaped; and it’s this sense of potential relationship which releases the ability to add, subtract, rephrase, reorder, develop and curtail that may be involved in completing the work. Equally, completing a poem means establishing and settling that sense of possibility, that potential for action, change, growth, and development, as a trustworthy structure that readers can use to activate such relationship-building skills in and for themselves. Notwithstanding the overwhelming evidence of the poet’s need to nurture and sustain relationships through writing in Robert Giroux’s edition of Bishop’s One Art: Selected Letters, Quinn’s book evidences the poet’s faltering and at best partial success to establish them in these writings and in the endlessly difficult processes of poetic and literary composition. A fragmentary passage towards the close of “Homesickness,” which never got beyond a handwritten sketch of materials with a couple of indicated rhymes, might stand as an epigraph for many of these painfully thwarted pieces: “It was too late—for what, she did not know.—/ already—, remote, / irreparable (rhyme) irreparable.” If the experience approached here proved too remote for reparation (the draft is subtitled “1900”), only too soon the candidate poem would prove so as well.

One of Bishop’s gifts lay in being able economically to describe the look of things. Quinn opens her introduction by noting some of the stray materials contained in the Vassar archive from which she has drawn the texts collected here: “Begonias ghostly in a galvanized bucket” is one. Yet this only goes to show that creative writing, and poetry especially, is not exactly or accurately described as descriptive or description. Such stabs at vivid notation as that phrase about the begonias in a bucket have to be activated, turned into purposeful evocations, by means of an occasioning difficulty. One of Bishop’s best poems, “The Bight,” a piece that gets along by means of some seaboard scene-painting in which, enviably perhaps, “birds soar /
on impalpable drafts,” has to work into that stalking-horse procedure signs of an urgent stock-taking purpose—one signaled by its subtitle “[On my birthday].” The poet herself was only too skeptically aware of her descriptive abilities and to what they could lead: whether calling herself “a minor female Wordsworth”, denigrating “our beautiful old silver’ school of female writing”, or noting the boredom of nothing to do but “registering their flora / their fauna, their geography” in the “infinities / of islands” nightmare from “Crusoe in England.” She knew what it was like to have sets of descriptive fragments in the notebooks, but nothing resembling a verb to join those bits together.

The frontispiece to Quinn’s book shows a hand-written completed draft of the title poem. Though its first sentence is promisingly confident (“Easily through the darkened room / the juke-box burns; the music falls”), the rest of the first stanza sidles to a close without the satisfaction of a main verb:

Starlight, La Conga, all the dance-halls
in the block of honkey-tonks,
cavities in our waning moon,
strung with bottles and blue lights
and silvered coconuts and conches.

Alongside this stanza Bishop has written “blue as gas, / blue as the pupil / of a blind man’s eye.” Are these words for use in a subsequent but never-written draft? Quinn notes a link between this blind man’s eye and that of the narrator’s neighbor in Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.” She doesn’t connect them to the lines in “The Bight” where “the water…doesn’t wet anything, / the color of the gas flame turned as low as possible. / One can smell it turning to gas; if one were Baudelaire / one could probably hear it turning to marimba music.” Could “The Bight” be a poem that sublimates, intimating without dwelling on, some of the bitter matter that “Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box” too directly tries to address? The associations of water, gas, Baudelaire and marimba music might hint that this hangover-like poem has some such material behind its “awful but cheerful” seaside clutter.

In the frontispiece facsimile “Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box” has been firmly struck through with a heavy diagonal line. The reasons why poets put lines through apparently completed work are many and various, ranging from momentary pique, through temporary self-doubt or creative depression, exhausted self-disgust, all the way to definitive critical rejection of the draft from further consideration. I’m going to explore the idea that Bishop deleted the poem because she came to view its concluding speculations as tentatively forced and muddled:
Poe said that poetry was exact.
But pleasures are mechanical
and know beforehand what they want
and know exactly what they want.
Do they obtain that single effect
that can be calculated like alcohol
or like the response to the nickel?
— how long does the music burn?
like poetry, or all your horror
half as exact as horror here?

This is a troubled and troubling attempt to address the relations between poetry, alcohol, and sexual compulsion. It appears to want at least partially to contradict Poe, but only obliquely questions him. This concluding verse may well be responding to the passage in “The Philosophy of Composition” where Poe describes his writing of “The Raven”—an attempt to show that “not one point in its composition is referrible either to accident or intuition” and that “the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.” Thomas Hardy, a cunning poet himself, described Poe’s account as “a fiction,” and Fernando Pessoa, who imitated and translated the author, thought Poe deluded. Quinn’s extensive and somewhat rambling note does mention “The Philosophy of Composition” in passing, but not the notorious account of “The Raven”—though she does cite a passage by Baudelaire on Poe’s obsession with “the adjustment of means to effect.” When the inventor of the detective story describes poetry as exact, by reflecting on such calculated causal links, he makes the poet an equivalent of his own Auguste Dupin, whose imaginative leaps of association are presented to readers as analytical deductions. Poetry is not “exact” in this way, however attuned its parts, because the effects of a work of art can never be exactly correlated to its means. There is no strictly causal relationship between the promptings embedded in the work and anyone’s possible responses to them at any time.

Nor are pleasures “mechanical.” You can’t know in advance, for sure, what will give you pleasure. You can only assume and hope. The mechanical causal relationship between the nickel being put in the juke-box and the music selected being played—though that word “selected” interrupts any strictly mechanical link—is by no means the same as the even more associative relationship between the music and the selector’s variably unpredictable pleasure in hearing it (“the appetite may sicken,” as Shakespeare noted), to say nothing of the varieties of possible responses by other listeners to the same song. The effects of alcohol can be predicted, with varying degrees of skill and capacity to act on the self-perceived evidence, but they can’t be cal-
culated exactly, as can be commonly noticed when we stand up from a table or go outside and find ourselves more tipsy than we thought. Bishop is not likely to have been good at such calculations either, given her documented problems with lost weekends.

“Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box” takes place in one of those honky-tonks, where people are drinking hard, playing music, and then engaging in some casual sexual groping which the poem doesn’t detail. Quinn’s note does, however, refer us to manuscript materials that mention “the full and final degradation of our love.” Those appear to be its exact horrors, far more specific (though not specified) than Poe’s pseudo-scientific creations of mystery and imagination—as, for example, in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” where the horrific events aren’t murders, or even crimes, since the Ourang-Outang that is revealed to have killed the victims can’t be attributed with legal intent. Bishop’s poem evades its subject, questions but fails to address its theme, and appears unable either to reflect on, or benefit from analysis, of the relationships, or lack of them, between its suggestively associated materials. Her need to understand and also detach herself from the poem’s subjects is only too clear, but so too is her apparent failure to do either. That’s why I think she may have put a line through it.

What is the difference between the sadness sticking to many of these poems and drafts, and Bishop’s authorized poems? Urges, drives, and compulsions are what may motivate the writing of poetry, and may be made into its subject-matter; but her completed poems manifest ways in which these energies are transformed into objects pleasingly useful to others. Sexual compulsion, alcoholism, grief, loss, depression or despair may seem to occasion art, but they are as likely to be its dispersers too. Bishop’s uncompleted poems have the air of works in which the compulsive will, afflicted by what it seeks to represent, cannot extricate itself to the point at which it may be able to observe itself in art as a form of life. The world, which includes others’ representations of it, can thus only too easily overwhelm the will in poets’ efforts to achieve a workable balance between circumstantial description and purposive shaping. The poet is prompted to acknowledge the mass of surrounding objects, the “silvered coconuts and conches,” but then to resist them or to put them in their place by the action of verbs and the agencies not only of inanimate subjects but human pronouns—sentient presences implied by exclamatory, or vocative, verbal behavior. Bishop’s poems that either don’t wholly work or don’t get finished show ways in which what Coleridge called the “shaping spirit of imagination” may be differently stymied by situations that are also crises of description, or collapses in the face of the overwhelmingly quotidian, or the burdens of maintaining
control without defenses and supports. Bishop’s attempt at an “Aubade and Elegy” for her friend Lota de Macedo Soares, who had committed suicide in New York in 1967, is the most painful example of such collapses: “No coffee can wake you no coffee can wake you no coffee / No revolution can catch your attention / You are bored with us all. It is true we were [“were” deleted] boring.”

Quite a number of the pieces presented in this collection have human relationships, or their failures, as themes or occasioning subjects. One of the most successful, “It is marvellous to wake up together…,” has been in circulation since Lorrie Goldensohn published it in 1992. This was the poem that led me to hope that Bishop’s uncollected verse would be the equivalent of a new book by an over-scrupulous poet who, it now seems, proved only rarely self-deceived about her own writings. Here is the middle verse of three:

An electrical storm is coming or moving away;
It is the prickling air that wakes us up.
If lightning struck the house now, it would run
From the four blue china balls on top
Down the roof and down the rods all around us,
And we imagine dreamily
How the whole house caught in a bird-cage of lightning
Would be quite delightful rather than frightening;

Bishop’s reasons for not publishing this completed, though untitled, poem are also not known. Did the poem depend too much on a personal relationship? It cannot have been held back because she feared the exposure of her sexuality; the gender of the bedmate is not revealed in the first-person plural pronoun. Perhaps she came to think the association between the electrical storm, and the electrocuting-electrifying power of love to transform the world risked the charge of sentimentality? Is there whimsical falsity in the poem’s central metaphorical relationship? Whatever it was, the unpublished poem remained carefully preserved—and, strictly speaking, so it remains.

Quinn, or her publisher, made the decision to present some of the material included in this volume as facsimile only. The contents inform us that “It is marvellous to wake up together…” is on page 44. However, the book designer seems to have added the style-feature that facsimile pages don’t have page numbers. The only way of finding page 44 is to realize that it must be the “illustration” between pages 43 and 45. This is a particularly bad decision for “In a Room,” a poem covering two facing pages in facsimile, and one that has no orientating page numbers in sight when you
attempt to decipher the holograph-annotated but un-transcribed text. This also leaves students or critics who would like to quote the facsimile-only poems with the task of editing a text (in the verse cited above I have not transcribed the first use of the word as “lightening”—with the “e” deleted by hand). Still chasing “It is marvellous to wake up together…,” you look across to read the transcribed text, the poem published from the surviving typescript—and feel justified in doing so because this is the policy elsewhere (with “The Traveller to Rome” on pages 74 and 75 for example). But on page 45 the text is a different one called “Florida Deserta.” Where is “It is marvellous to wake up together…?” By the time you’ve worked out that the low-resolution reproduction of the creased typescript is all you are going to get, a degree of trust in the relationship sustained by the book has evaporated.

Something similar is true if you try to track the note to the same poem. Quinn’s annotations are keyed by a marginal page number and a title in quotation marks, but not picked out in italics or capitals or larger type. If the notes go on for more than two facing pages, as they often fascinatingly do, then readers must flick about to orient themselves with more of their time and attention lost. Continuous running heads signaling which poem or page is being annotated would have been more helpful. The effect of this decision is to strand the notes in their own evident absorption with Bishop, her life, contacts, and writings. Once found, the note on “It is marvellous to wake up together…” begins with four brief paragraphs listing its two extant copies, noting the minor variants between them, reporting on Goldensohn’s finding and printing the poem, then giving some biographical context: was it written at Key West or earlier? Is the other person Marjorie Stevens or Louise Crane? (It’s probably the former). Then follow two pages of interesting, but loosely associated, researches that inform us, for instance, how “Bishop has numerous entries in her notebooks about rain (see the note for ‘After the Rain’).” Here the editor’s weakly focused associations of topics underlines the triviality of description without occasion. Her book contains no index of titles. So you head back to the contents pages and run your finger down until you find “After the Rain” on page 55. Then you do more flicking to locate the note, then read more associative citations of descriptions of rain. Later in the note you come across: “In Bishop’s poem ‘Rain Towards Morning,’ the conjunction of birdcage and bedroom occurs, too, along with ‘an unexpected kiss.’” That’s all. There’s no page reference for this work; so, momentarily at a loss, you head back to Quinn’s contents page—where you don’t find it. Is the title a variant of some other draft? No, it’s one of her published works, the subtitled second of “Four Poems,” and can be found
on page 77 of *The Complete Poems 1927-1979*. That fact might have graced Quinn's text. Sadly, her annotations frequently unravel into not so much notes for the poems, as, rather, typeset collections of loosely associated material accumulated while working in the archives.

*Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-box* is thus an important but slightly bungled hotchpotch. Quinn's appendix with the unpublished prose materials and the manuscripts of “One Art” also contains two pieces of verse. The fragmentary “Ungracious Poem” is placed there because the editor admits in a footnote that she “could not determine where to place it chronologically in the volume proper.” The completed “Verdigris” is “included with reference to the prose fragment ‘Villanelle’ because it is a villanelle.” No explanation is given for why it is not in the volume proper, besides the reported fact that “Bishop did not consider it successful.” Yet she also sent it to *The New Yorker*, and had it rejected in January 1950 on a split decision. Given the other works that Bishop neither thought successful nor completed enough to send out, the relegation of this poem to the appendix is a puzzle.

One question addressed by a number of the volume’s reviewers was whether publication of these texts would harm Bishop's reputation. That seems a dated anxiety, because the mere existence of the book implies a reputation that can sustain the interest in these occasionally trifling and often painfully aborted works. The question might have been whether the moment was right for the presentation of this work, and whether a commercial publisher could cope with what this publication abundantly reveals was required. *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-box* is a partial assemblage of some five separable items. One of them is a poetry collection, perfectly suited for inclusion as an appendix of a future *Complete Poems*, of works both uncollected and unpublished (perhaps the book's subtitle is not quite correct in opting for the former term). It would include the Edgar Allan Poe title poem, “It is marvellous to wake up together….,” and a fairly large number of others, some of them featured in newspapers and journals to advertise the existence of the book, such as “Syllables” and “Apartment in Leme.” This collection of more or less completed poems would have been valuable and enjoyable as a book in its own right. As a collection, it might have better suited a title like the one chosen, not wholly inexplicably, for this more various and apparently authoritative gathering. These completed poems, though ones not thoroughly convincing to their author, form the most satisfying part of Quinn’s volume.

Then there is a specialist publication, containing more than Quinn includes, of Bishop’s definitely uncompleted drafts, fragments, false starts and tailings off, her notes for unwritten poems, and related matter. I have
attended a Power Point illustrated lecture by Barbara Page of Vassar College that included material not published here. This work might prove so complex and tangled as to require a database publication. Then, as sampled by the “One Art” drafts in facsimile, there is the equivalent of a Cornell Bishop in which her various authorial collections, plus the unpublished or uncollected but completed poems, receive the honor accorded to William Wordsworth and W. B. Yeats—fully transcribed texts of manuscript materials with complete editorial apparatus. Further, there are the uncollected review essay and memoir drafts gathered in the ragbag appendix, which could form some of the materials for an enlarged complete prose. Finally, there are Quinn’s annotations, which constitute both a useful draft of core matter for editorial work on the above volumes—as well as the extensive, but under-organized raw material for Quinn’s own as yet unwritten, but broadly sketched, book on the poet at work.

Do Bishop’s writings have sufficient standing to sustain such industry? There’s room for disagreement here. A commercial publisher would likely only contemplate undertaking a definitive Complete Poems and a companion prose volume. Very probably Elizabeth Bishop’s reputation is here to stay; but the decisions and work required to present the full corpus of completed poems, both authorized and not, in variorum, as well as unraveling the mass of drafts and fragments, will require many more years yet. In the meantime, Alice Quinn’s Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-box must surely provide hours of incalculable pleasure through which her readers, like the John Ashbery on the jacket for whom “there can never be enough of her writing,” may work on their own relationships with more of her—second- and third-best, maybe, but nonetheless fascinating—words.
TONE, DEPTH, AND PAIDEIA FROM AN UNSPLINTERED MIND


John Peck

Guy Davenport is this country’s most singular literary stylist and painter to date. His passing at seventy-seven in January 2005 made The Death of Picasso his last trade book. It selects twenty pieces from nine earlier books and seven pieces from magazines (“The Owl of Minerva,” “The Playing Field,” “Ruskin,” “Wide as the Waters Be” [review of a book on biblical translation], “Dinner at the Bank of England,” “Horace and Walt in Camden” [another review essay], and “The Anthropology of Table Manners”). In the same year a limited edition of “Wo es war, soll Ich werden” in its longer, first version was still in production from David Eisenman’s Finial Press in Champaign, Illinois. Erik Reece, a poet who studied with Davenport and recently the author of Lost Mountain, a report on Big Coal’s obliteration of eastern Kentucky, writes very well indeed about his teacher’s dovetailing masteries of the sister arts, in an amply illustrated volume.

The nature of their sisterhood changed in the past century, for reasons that Davenport has been among the keenest to sense. They strolled into the forest of forms and lopped back lean and trim. Architectonic style, in his phrase, decisively altered rendering in both painting and writing; in writing, inventive narrative has been absorbed by that style, leaving the next step to the management of tone (I paraphrase his argument in the essay “On Narrative Tone and Form” in Geography of the Imagination). Davenport reproves critics in the prose “Circumspectus” to the Eisenman “Wo es war” for reading around his architectonics and “subverting my best efforts to transmute content into style. Style is not ornament; it is the mind of narrative structure.” In a Beckett-esque dramatic sketch selected here—“We Often Think of Lenin at the Clothespin Factory”—the style is transparently mind in a grimly comic reductio; Notch and Polden, the first an old woman who claims she is Mandelstam’s widow but does so only, like Polden, as a dissociated reflecting surface for bits of color, figure, and the culture swept off by the Revolution, remarks: “Events happen again / In memory, knowing, or narrative. / Time rolls it up as it goes along, bringing / The past with
it. Nothing is left behind.” It is architectonic style numbly communing with itself after catastrophe. It is affecting in inverse ratio to any show of feeling. This piece occurs far on in the selection, however. With three Danish schoolboy pieces at the outset—“The Owl of Minerva,” “The Playing Field,” and “Gunnar and Nikolai,” which extend the method of the van Hovendaal stories focused on Dutch teenagers in a Fourierist frame—a reader faces a long stretch of material cut chiefly to the gauge of style. These three wager tedium, over the chatter of pubes, against Whistleresque appreciations of pattern. Looking back at the book’s cover, one sees silver ruler markings up its black buckram shoulder and the contour lines on a maritime chart of the Dutch offshore islands: one is promised navigation and measure, yet odds are that many will shrug and pass. Our author has calibrated that likelihood.

Because he saw that Paul Metcalf’s 1965 *Genoa*, a major late architectonic narrative, preserved 20th-century tone, and since he admired Mandelstam’s prose as “a change in tone,” Davenport bet the store on advancing in that direction. *Prose ideogram, serial collage*—his own terms for the architectonics of his storytelling—leave us with questions, then, about how he articulated the units of his stories, what their caesuras midwife, and how he shifted the prevailing tone of architectonic style. As we know, depth in painting either was flattened or was achieved differently; in narrative depth’s traditional dimensions, often associated with conventions of feeling refined by late Realism and the *mot juste*, yielded to alternative ones or tended to disperse. As for painting versus writing, both engaged him equally. Davenport assesses all these matters vigorously in both the “Tone and Form” essay and his apologia, “Ernst Machs Max Ernst,” in ways that I leave my readers to find (they cannot be improved upon by summary). What I offer here are a few probes into his style after the reviewer’s customary debriefing report.

To my probes into tone and depth I add the Greek term for teaching, *paideia*, which comes closer to the German *Bildung* or formation from a cultural basis, or *paideuma* in Frobenius’s term. Davenport’s major form, a long train of serial collage narratives, is about *paideia* at the adolescent fulcrum phase, singly and communally. Utopian they are not, if I rightly take his hint that Fourier himself was not utopian. These stories feature his “puppets,” juicily unrepressed, mostly Dutch teenagers usually under the benevolent eye of a Sokratic, sometimes randy teacher, the sophisticated philosopher-and-painter Adriaan van Hovendaal (“gardener” in Dutch). They absorbed Davenport’s main efforts toward a new tone for architectonic style. They are his main role of the dice. Four are selected here: “The Death of Picasso” (a sequel to the novella *Apples and Pears*), “The Bicycle
Rider,” “Wo es war, soll Ich werden,” and “The Ringdove Sign.” He risked a great deal, not so much in investing them with his double in Hovendaal as in rehearsing to the point of tedium the sexual and relational doings of his Dutch ephebes. He must have calculated that effect, to some degree, to make us look less at content and more at shape, tonal rhymes, and ligature.

Item by way of interlude: Reece reproduces on facing pages two large acrylics that parallel the major prose forms. The 1990 “War is the Health of the State” lodges a grid or graph in the upper left quadrant which floats a Greek coin, a moth, and a ripe pear; the lower left quadrant shows the hunchbacked Randolph Bourne, while eight rectangles in two columns up the right side show an array of Fourieristic “essences:” a shamanic phallic figure and a young boy’s head atop, a Warhol-style Nietzsche and a Brancusi bust below, with the central four rectangles showing a naked boy with pear-like sex standing partly athwart a capital A (Zukofsky’s long architectonic poem?) and the hexagonal cells of a honeycomb with bee. Start with Bourne and rotate counter-clockwise, and you follow a progression not quite that of the Fibonacci sequence that ends with the Pythagorean grid that encodes generative cosmic order in several late Davenport paintings. The Brancusi essence-rectangle just next to Bourne startlingly resembles the shape of his head and body, and both evoke the ripe pear and phallus of the youth. Bourne, honeycomb, “A”, and grid converge at the geometric center; there, “A” may distill, 60 years after Bourne’s death, the essence of Bourne’s lonely resistance to American statism, an aspect of Nietzschean teaching, in another form. Opposite in Reece’s arrangement, “Orpheus Preaching to the Animals” spreads a blizzard of overlapping animal and human forms in bright monotones, “HOMMAGE À FOURIER” written through them along with Fourier’s key formulation of series, harmony, proportion, and destiny. The geometric center falls near the base of the throat of a large yellow Chanticleer. If you stretch a diagonal from the open lips of the large adolescent teacher Orpheus through the rooster’s open beak, it ends in the right foot of the single other human, again a naked male youth. Only one straight line enters the composition, a low horizon marker cutting across the base through that right foot at the juncture with our invisible diagonal. From 1979 to 1990, then, precision and the Pythagorean grid balance natural forms and arrays and frame several modes of rendering. The Dutch teenager/van Hovendaal stories span the same decade and write an analogous architectonic style. And that is for starters.

It is remarkable to turn sideways, in this collection, from these Dutch paideia tales to the narratives “about” Kafka and Stanley Spencer—“The Messengers” and “Christ Preaching at the Henley Regatta.” One sees much
the same style being developed around materials that appeal to feelings more sturdily ordinary (Kafka and Spencer, ordinary?!). Such appeals are muted by the advancing style. A number of Davenport’s selections here, then, are really paintings slipping from Balthus over into abstraction, wrapped in a cover calculated to promise guidance by way of an internal Global Positioning System. And the patience with ourselves that Davenport recommends—with our desire for more conventional appeals to feeling—is actually modeled for us by Kafka in another wicked, earlier piece here, “The Chair,” which studies the young Czech lawyer’s “ox-like patience” in trailing after the movements of a self-importantly vacuous rabbi at Marienbad in 1916. Thus the architectonic intelligence can outwait, and outlast, the conventional “plump pace” of an outgrown, vacuous paideia. Teachers! they psych you out. A cautionary anecdote about Joseph Cornell, “Pergolesi’s Dog,” is also here to catalog insistent, hilarious errors of perception, even by Chaucer and Keats. So boredom with GD may turn out to be a joke that’s on us.

In van Hovendaal he developed, within a pastoral Fourier frame (he actually questions the use of “utopian” for Fourier) an ample template of his own traits: erudite polymath, writer and painter, and attentive, precise, provocative teacher. It is no surprise that the lecture notes sketched while walking to class, in “Every Force Evolves a Form,” unfold in the same architectonic style as his narratives. Pound, Olson, and Winters also taught ceaselessly; our windswept day, its air filled with chaff and the cries of shills and zealots, has brought out this educative function in force. Davenport shaped that role as performance, part of his style.

But one that also left him wondering. Herewith a scrap from the oral tradition: to John Matthias on the telephone during his last year Davenport said, “People will not read my work in the future, because they have forgotten how to walk, to talk, and to read.” Neither irony or morbidity, that, but a settled conviction, for he had written in “Ernst Machs Max Ernst” circa 1980 that the writing and drawing he pursues (he reminds us that the Greek verb graphein means both to draw and to write), in a zone like Max Ernst’s “which is always of verifiably real things that are not, however where they are supposed to be,” instills “a skill of reading that has been abandoned for so long that we can’t accept it.”

In the rest of this notice let me swiftly scope the main drift of Davenport’s style as I read it, then offer one response by way of that unavoidable sister-arts metaphor, depth.

If seeing means at root both writing and drawing, and walking and talking must be relearned (because things get displaced and one must move to get to them, and file a report with the mapping office), then matters of
the tribal archaic, of childhood and youth, and of species evolution indeed converge. Seeing anew, already Joseph Conrad’s dictum in 1900, turns toward the grid of mapping because art must teach it to us, by voyage or on foot (in the same “Circumspectus:” “An author must keep making a map of the geography he’s leading us across, making familiar and congenial the just seen”). Viktor Shklovsky’s estrangement effect, like Ernst’s removal effect in alienating the familiar, dictates the next step, a change of tone that would make the strange more familiar. The Fourier stories became Davenport’s lab, floating a sequence of unrepres.

sation and peculiar lightness that sponsors three intuitions: (1) First, this thing is organized in ways I cannot perceive right off; it is meant to teach me as well as these spunky pubes. (2) Fourier’s elaborate harmonics of desire and affinity, his schedules of relationship, work, and play, seem juvenile only at times; their stimulating-slash-tedious atmosphere, the replete vocabularies of sex and keen perception, bend things as water seems to bend a straw, across a boundary into total regeneration. But (3) if this learning is also anamnesis, the Platonic-Sokratic recovery of functions inborn but silted over (as it is already by way of Thoreau, Men-cius, and a note on “inborn nature” in the haunting “A Concord Sonata” collected here), then unfettered development is a jig danced by both Freud and Sokrates among the phalanges of proto-socialist Charles Fourier, and my own learning mixes anamnesis and developmental completion with constructivist freedom, as a compensation to the spirit of this time. Catch-up ball invigorated as discovery. Which changes the hard-work tone of a catch-up game to rebirth’s second adolescence and even a higher innocence.

This new tone bids to lighten the burden pressed speculatively onto history by philosophy in our time, Marx’s dialectic, which Frederic Jameson’s Singular Modernity rephrases: “an ontology of the present demands not prophecies of the past but archaeologies of the future.” Can this slight thing, an elfin game of shifted tonalities, really do that? Indeed it may not, yet that is its thrust in Davenport’s hands. In fact, archaeology lies buried in plain sight throughout “Wo es war, soll Ich werden,” as bardic nested form or Homeric ring composition (that story alludes to its own concentric “nested order,” and in both versions of it a reader can dig up the symmetrical details of this subliminally organizing factor, one of them a blind folksinger who is up to no good). The same nested order can be dug up in some of the other stories. Jameson’s own study of Fourier in Archaeologies of the Future, and Barthes’s in Sade Fourier Loyola, do not encompass or explain what Davenport is up to with this arch, frank, provocative, second-innocence tone. His bardic insert of nested order, however, parallels Jameson’s own category-flipping recourse to the Taoist wu-wei in Brecht and Method, where Marxist
praxis, stymied everywhere by neoliberal stasis, needs to revive “the older precapitalist sense of time itself, of the change or flowing of all things.” That is, Davenport rests and nests his architectonics for shifting our learning upon the latent powers and patterns that will actually support movement.

Fourier’s Harmony ideology inspired American experiments more than any other program (Rexroth’s book on communalism tallies with GD here), but only a handful of these experiments lasted more than a few weeks. Davenport’s long novella _Apples and Pears_ of 1981, and its coda “The Death of Picasso” (its notebook entries spiked to Fourier’s calendar), draw the process out; it _has got to take time_. Even so, extension comes to mean morphing, not staying put. Van Hovendaal writes in his notebook: “Does Fourier’s uncluttered imagination belong to philosophy or art? I see him surviving in the verve and color of Roger de la Fresnaye, Delaunay, Lurçat. Was he a philosopher at all? Braque is the better epistemologist.” Surviving, that is, not in communal arrangements but in Cubist paintings that rework perception and teach energy transfer. Again, the lecture-notes in “Every Force Evolves a Form” track birds and the ancient winged _daimon_ swooping through Darwin and English and American poetry as “modulations in a long tradition, a dance of forms to a perennial spiritual force.” _Tradition_ alive cleans house and garden, vacating a philosophical system to inhabit painting. And Fourier survives in these Dutch stories of adolescent fledging as an energy transfer, social-visual-verbal, or not at all.

In Jung’s language, Davenport constantly skirts the archetype of transformation, his subject even in the sterling exegesis of Olson’s “The Kingfishers” in 1974. Let me review two of Fourier’s tenets which van Hovendaal adapts to his gardening, and then look briefly at the 1980 “Death of Picasso.”

First, children in Fourier are neuters who serve as “the principal source of links,” including saving affection across classes; and each father in the _phalange_, because he performs many kinds of work, takes keen interest in protégés, especially poor kids, who better his own son. Second, we are deluded in thinking that each of us has an integral soul. It takes 810 passional types to comprise the soul, their combinations going into the thousands, and the _phalanges_ related them through a calendrical and festival gearing that fulfills human totality. No disastrous suburban isolation, no urban squalor, no anomie. The archetype of the anthropos, whether in Greek thought or the canonical gospels (“My house has many rooms”), in Fourier finds its social incarnation under Louis Napoleon in the decades of _Spleen idéale_ and Wordsworth’s maturity. It speaks to GD in the decades of James Howard Kunstler’s books on sprawl and social entropy. “The phalanstery
is a whole village in a building as big as the Louvre: Corbusier’s inspiration for his Marseilles apartment house” (*Apples and Pears*). Jung, whose work on collective psychology pivots on his analysis of the *anthropos* archetype, would say that Fourier projected that archetype of primal man onto a fantastically differentiated social screen. Davenport somewhat concurs, in *Apples and Pears*, having Adriaan van Hovendaal teach Jan that Fourier’s harmonic series of attractions elaborate what Levi-Strauss studies in tribes. “Society as poetry rather than the newspaper prose of history. Practically all that’s tacit in civilization is concerned discourse in the primitive.” Jung replies: —But while going native is unavoidable, the modern person must get his return ticket as soon as the regression is no longer restorative. Davenport: —Machines both moral and cranked have killed off too much for too long for us to get through this in a hurry. “Science and poetry from the Renaissance forward have been trying to discover what is alive and what isn’t. In science the discovery spanned three centuries, from Gassendi to Niels Bohr, and the answer is that everything is alive” (the essay on Olson’s “Kingfishers”). Jung: —I know, Nobelist Pauli and I have met at a depth of 1,000 meters in the Alchemy/Quantum Café to work it out acausally: the depth aspect of so-called dead matter, we find, is life.

To make out what depth is in Davenport’s Fourier-backed stories, experimentally I tallied themes and details from two weeks of journal entries, or prose ideograms, from 17 to 30 Germinal in van Hovendaal’s sketchbook in “The Death of Picasso.” Radio reports of the death reach the island where Adriaan has taken wild-child Sander from Amsterdam (and from rolling naked in the snow in Paris) to recover from trauma and abandonment, teaching him mapping, drawing, and natural sexual freedom, and recalling his work with another boy, Bruno, at Sounion in Greece. Philosopher-painter Adriaan writes lucidly on Picasso, while Sander, we come to see, is like the great Spaniard, “between urban sophistication and benign savagery.” The Defoe and Rousseau precedents for what they are doing come up—Adriaan cites them to Sander to lend depth to his recuperation. Depth in these entries begins to percolate every which way: Picasso’s sensing of deep time through still life and tableau rivals the best work in classics, prehistory, and anthropology; deep time and evolution play across the island-scape as transparencies, “gulls squawking Joyce” and wheeling as subatomic quanta. Painting, in Adriaan’s notes, becomes European drama’s guide-rail for several hundred years, and Fourier survives in Delaunay and Braque. Depth even reverses field in *paideia*, the teacher finding new depth for himself in his ward’s innocence. Recollection, curative forgetting of trauma, and regenerative recovery all take on depth within the caesura of luminous death. The
final depth is civilization’s filmy play, foraging yet idle, across the abyssal world. “Nature has no destiny for us…. We perish, however, the instant we take our eyes off nature.” Erotic foraging among the bawdy latent integrals in our development takes that depth as its scrim. Thus this story caps *Apples and Pears*: it recasts Sokrates, Butler and Fourier, Freud’s best followers, and our own experimental *Bildung* programs as patterns sophisticated and primal, so that depth arises from active *foraging*—a key term throughout Davenport—carried by a tone in which the strange (to civilization) grows gently familiar.

What does this tone accomplish? It presides over this very morphing of the whole enterprise of Fourier’s social *paideia* into new art. That recursion twists the main key, for without it Davenport would stick with the elegiac “A Concord Sonata,” an acme architectonic achievement about our “in-born nature” but one left suspended in the definitional longings of Thoreau and Mencius for a misplaced human quid. Mencius’s philosophy was its recovery, but the “Sonata” can only proclaim it through juxtaposition with Thoreau. Whereas the Plato dialogue *dramatized* such recovery. Davenport shoots for a comparable form now, which includes the arts Plato chose to zone out, and the horseplay to which he barely alluded. In it, walking, talking, and reading/seeing make up one old-new, strange-*natural* business. Recursion miniaturizes an advance: the systematic projection of the anthropos archetype by Fourier gets taken back into Adriaan’s form-thinking and a pocket social lab-therapy setting for the whole tribe.

So I ask myself: is this tone, with its deeply stimulating effect, its bounteously nourishing and authentic materials, a new step for architectonic narrative? And I reply, No, not quite, not yet.

Why not? Probably because we all still chew on the bone thrown out by Nietzsche in his *Zarathustra* mystery play of *paideia*, where Plato’s dialogue inflects from the abortively social into daimonic rhapsody. In the Prologue his inflationary mouthpiece, haranguing a crowd as a teacher whose voice thins out because he gets past himself, out of his depth with what grips him, tumbles into a *paideia* he cannot master. What makes this text prophetic is its possessional quality; it remains representative, its process collective to this day. Zarathustra insists that the head is only the bowels of the heart, the heart causing us to go down in order to achieve a genuine progression or over-going—which the fatal rope-dancer episode seems to announce, but which autonomously brings up for Nietzsche, as it does for his mouthpiece, the consequences of symbol-death for one image of God—*symbol-death* as art historians talk it, but as Nietzsche the involuntary prophet came to know it. It is sobering to go into this text, read the best philosophical commentar-
ies on Nietzsche by Stanley Rosen and others, and discover, with Jung’s help from his Nietzsche seminars of the mid to late 1930s, that philosophy still fails to read the psychological revelation in this teaching which both the imagined audience and imagined teacher—and the philosopher imagining both—witness helplessly, the heart of the greater unconscious indeed asking that we carefully keep our eyes on it in this open-air classroom or perish.

“We have invented happiness!” roars the crowd. Yet Nietzsche the writer has not invented everything in this episode. I tread delicate ground here, for both literary and philosophical folk are used to taking command of what the psyche brings it. The altered depth of architectonic writing and visual work, that entire achievement itself, has been moved into place by this heart, the unconscious psyche, which makes the brightest heads its digestive tract. The depth behind such depth is what spoke through, not only as, Nietzsche in the Prologue, already showing the consequence of transformation that comes to us over our heads, from our “inborn nature.” The dialogue between these two depths is what I miss in the subtly dramatized teaching tone of the van Hovendaal stories, where the invisible stream of spiritual force, pawky and invigorating in its Fourierist expansion, often a rounded joy, none the less smooths out the intake from the bathysphere. Item: Davenport includes as ideograms in *Apples and Pears* his fine translations (as Adriaan’s) of Rilke’s First and Fifth *Duino Elegies* on the angels and the acrobats, where they lend deeper ground to both Fourier and the actively growing children of the novella. Yet their chief companion poems in the story are Shaker hymns, mighty things indeed but cleanly planed in the Light. And the interpretation offered to Rilke on “6 Fructidor”—the angels as “the quiring that Fourier saw as a destiny of attractions…messengers in that the composite knows how to appropriate the random” (memories of apples, longing in our eyes)—has no Rilkean terror in’t. Item: the same sort of smoothing is administered to Herakleitos’s crucial fragment on development, vis-à-vis Fourier, on pages 200 and 286. First, “The series distributes the harmonies. The attractions are proportionate to our destinies. Character is fate,” and then, with Fourier’s Harmony meant not as utopia “but as human advantages being successful, after a history of confusion and defeat. The severity of the defeat keeps us from seeing what he meant. Character, for instance.” Analysis of class history and the Spenglerian diagnosis comes down to this: “Character is the ground of the harmony, as it was for Shakers, Mennonites, and other pioneer harmonian communities…. Duty and loyalties are structures inside affection.” Hooray, this acknowledges the spine which these overlooked communities in fact have. But it also steps around the response to our severe defeat which the heart, the greater unconscious
psyche in Nietzsche’s Prologue, speaks over his head and past the mass audience blinking its eyes and roaring its preferences. O Rare Guy Davenport, either I have misread your lucid intricacies or you have laid them out on tables deliberately set apart from the sulphur-riven ground.

Depth indeed comes out onto the surface in architectonic narrative. A contemporary whose name I have lost has said that depth is that aspect of form which appears on the surface. Fourier’s projection of the anthropos likewise socially exfoliates what civilization deforms, bringing human advantage into a spacious busy light, a Bucky Fuller dome for all of Gauguin’s children. Depth is manageable there because it is visible. Its workings do not end history, capital enterprise, or class tensions, but reorganize them to serve our original advantage. Yet Nietzsche’s katabasis, his program of down-going which is no invention of his own, at its pivotal moment of inwardness stands troubled and speechless before collective programs of fulfillment. Davenport’s paideia and Nietzsche’s talk past each other, as genuine complementarities, quantum and wave. The depth of architectonic transparency, moved to awareness by tragic losses, is not an alpine valley’s hyper-clear depth overlaid by incoming cloud. Davenport’s anthropology is not to be faulted in this perspective, but only seen accurately. Its fullest degree of consciousness remains unsplintered; Picasso goes with Balthus and Burchfield, the best of Freud with his antagonist Pound. In “A Field of Snow on a Slope of the Rosenberg” in Da Vinci’s Bicycle of 1979, Robert Walser, in an asylum up one of those Swiss valleys, discourses to Doktors Hassenfuss and Vogel beneath their portraits of Freud and Jung: “It says in the pages of Mach that the mind is nothing but a continuity of consciousness. It is not itself a thing, it is its contents, like an eye and what it sees, a hand and what it holds. Mach’s continuity, like Heraklit’s river, defines itself by its flow…. It is so obvious…, once you have seen it. The mind is what it knows! It is nothing else at all, at all.”
Kevin Ducey

A porcupine
is crossing the road. Suddenly headlights
shatter in it. Ball-lightning scuttles
into the dark and out the other side,
becoming part of newly numinous night.
(“The Porcupine in Porcignano,” Autumn Road)

Walking out of the pharmacy onto the crowded city street, I ran into G. whom I hadn’t seen in eight years. I didn’t immediately recognize him; we’d both changed, but in that moment, before I put a name to the face, when I recognized first his walk and then the peculiar tilt of his head, I experienced that sensation of knowing without the hindrances and crutches of naming. Naming comes after. First there is that apprehension of what the other animal does. Can we eat it? Will it eat us? No, it’s only G. after all: “How’s it going? Have you et yet?” as the Chinese say. Brian Swann’s two new collections of poems are full of such dis-, or re-locations of the things and persons we think we’ve tucked safely away under their proper nouns. Swann pays close attention to what the world does. It’s the sort of nature poetry that Nature Poets never write. Swann’s method and interest are of a piece with the writing, not a measure of vanity.

In these two collections, Swann works an unusual, almost forgotten corner of the field. The poems are not observations of nature (or people) as abstraction; his ambition is to introduce the poems as living things into the world, without resort to genetic engineering. In Swann’s 1976 introduction to his collection of Native American translations, he quotes Simon Ortiz on the function of the hunting song, remarking that the song is “expression and perception, an active relationship with the hunting act. ‘The purpose of the song is first of all to do things well, the way they’re supposed to be done, part of it being the singing and performing of the song.’”

If we take the hunting act here described as a statement of poetics, you have Swann’s work.
I take the poem down, lay it on the stream
now in full spate at the front of my desk, float it
off like a leaf or curled bark, and we all see it flash and
turn and dive in bright water stained with run-off
from the parking lot and the last dairy farm left,
heading for the river…

(“Pedagogical,” Snow House)

I quote this poem, not as one of the high points of the book, but as an indication of where this poet likes to go. The poems that scramble off under the house, or dive into the brook, are only the flashier moments the poet pulls from his hat, reminiscent of the attempt to sell meditation by levitating a few inches above one’s cushion. Do we even want poems escaping from the schools into the nation’s waterways? The poems are more successful when they’re not so directly about themselves. Those that register an attention to the numinous that still eludes the poet seem more essential to this kind of hunting. The poem released in “Pedagogical” to his students’ delight was small-fry in comparison.

“I have said what I have to say / in so many roundabout ways I’m dizzy
/ I keep saying it because nobody listens…” (“Metaphor,” Snow House). We should take Brian Swann at his word. Back in his 1976 essay, he quoted Kenneth Rexroth summoning the numinous (which is what people used to do in 1976): “poetry or song does not only play a vatic role in the society, but is itself a numinous thing.” The numen here in Swann’s work moves by a metaphysical conceit, the technique which Dr. Johnson found so distressing. Dr. Johnson would have kept the poem from escaping upstream; he would have taken it home and fixed it upon the rotisserie.

It’s refreshing to see the numen surviving into the new millennium, surviving not only Dr. Johnson’s tongue clucking of the 18th century, but Dr. Hunter S. Thompson’s trips to Las Vegas in the 20th as well. The numerous numinous books that proliferated in the 1970s began to appear po-faced and ridiculous following the bad Doctor’s self-administered delirium tremens numinous. Drugs may have nothing at all to do with the divine—in fact, that they may be taken simply for entertainment was a revelation to those seeking to grow tentacles of light from their bellies. But the numen has stuck around—troublesome as a Tamias Striatus—as numens tend to.

The discovery of “occult resemblances in things apparently unlike,” per Dr. Johnson’s pronouncement, strikes one as the likely result of a close attention to the life of things. The comfortable names that we presume to apply to things are static and the world is ever changing—not something a lexicographer could get behind. The poems that spring from that discovery
of occult resemblance also tend to be rather vital—and much more interesting even than sprouting those powerful tentacles of light and flying over tall buildings (however much you may once have enjoyed such experiences).

I give him words to tell me who he is.
He gives them back, begins a visual discourse
on invisibility, gunning by me a film in snippets &

jump shots, starring him. Light flashes everywhere.
But you can still make out frames that form a sequence,
though there are deep lacunae only he can leap

as a kind of semiotic stuntman—I guess it’s him, though
it could be a series of doubles (impossible to know),
There—in that shot he’s signifying a signified, so

in what follows he’s multiple as the seeds he collects
like mnemonics. There off he goes again, but now in a
series of silent sequences subtitled: “The Vital Nothing,”

“The Plump Filling,” “The Cake of Soap,” “The Full Stop,”
& dramatically, “Tamias Striatus Meets Pale Ramon.”…
(“Tamias Striatus Poetics,” Snow House)

The occult resemblance between things becomes only more vital when applied to personal history. In Autumn Road, winner of The Ohio State University Press’ (The) Journal Award, Swann recounts the Orwellian joys of an English childhood. Although the book gives us poems about grandparents, aunts and uncles, it focuses mainly on his unhappy experiences with his father. Autobiography will only carry a book so far. What makes this collection work so well is the approach the author takes toward his material. Autumn Road traces the twin tale of two possessions: childhood and love. The first section of the book, titled “The Lost Boy,” recounts the heavy influence of an abusive parent. The second section, “Ars Amoratis,” is a series of Ovidean possession poems where the characters’ actions seem to lie beyond their control. Indeed, the experiences of childhood and of love are occult to the actors in the poems. These are mothers and fathers, aunts and children visited by Apollo and Persephone, Hermes and Athena—though they (and we) may call them bloody-mindedness, or lust, or rage. But these words don’t serve us well in the event after all, and one may as well drag in evolutionary conditioning: the father is this way because he has 50,000 years of evolutionary wiring modifying his responses, such that our 4,000 years of literate culture is barely able to name what animal has come into the
room, much less restrain it. It’s a wonder the boy isn’t eaten alive—or maybe he is. I don’t mean to give anything away.

Another quote from Rexroth may be apropos: “All true and proper songs, especially in the past, originate in contacts with supernatural beings.” In “The Skull,” a poem from the first section of _Autumn Road_, the poet describes his experience as a young boy when he discovered the skull of an ancient fen-dweller, unearthed from the fields. The description of the young boy and his skull is rather touching in a book that is not especially interested in touching. The boy and his skull are inseparable—that is, the artifact of the bone of “an Anglo-Saxon boy about our age” represents an imaginary friend, or someone the young boy, now author, imagines he may have been 1,000 years before. This is a recognition that the boy’s father seconds, slapping the living son:

> “You can’t do anything. You’ll end up as a dustman. You’ll end up on the streets.”
> I tried to say that history’s useful too. _Shut up_, he said. _Like talking to a brick wall. Numbskull._
> And he hit me on the head…
> He [the skull] could have been an ancestor of mine, sort of.

(“The Skull,” _Autumn Road_)

In this act of naming, the father is almost a poet in Swann’s own image…

> This is my story, but there’s a limit to what I can say, and the time to say it.
> I hold up my face in front of me, and lay it down. It blows away, vapid as a mud flat. It cries out for someone to take a hammer to it and yell Liar, Fake.

(“Temporal,” _Autumn Road_)

Not to psychoanalyze this poet by the book—actually the author takes care of that himself in due course—but as I read this I found myself asking, what “someone”? There’s little humor in this book, and the only laugh I had was when, after the various sordid descriptions of the casual brutalities of an English childhood, the narrator admits, “we were not a close family.” The father is generous with his naming, “cunt, cissy, crippen…” until, after the father’s death, the child is left waiting for someone to come along and put the lie to the child’s own words. Now that the father is gone, who will perform this smashing of the face that the parent had once done so well?
Following a visit to the father in the hospital, the poet reports:

... I found I meant
the opposite of what I said. I said nothing,
I had a code where each prayer was
a curse, each thought a scream,
and nothing was symbolic.

(“The Code,” Autumn Road)

The second section of the book is titled ‘Ars Amatoria’ and with that clue I could tell you how these poems are about the symbolic work of metamorphosis and the workings of what people once called the gods. The poems are more than that though: the relationship of a person to the unspoken (and unspeakable) things that move him are only hinted at by those old notions of the Greek gods. Swann drops a couple of bread crumbs about Blake, Jung, and the Golden Bough, but it is also the case that the poems aren’t trying to explain themselves in terms of another system, in fact, the terrors of the old gods may seem pale compared to daily life.

I catch a glimpse of me
in the bathroom mirror, & it’s
not me. My father looks out as he has, really,
each day of my life.
...I am falling
into his mouth. He pats me like a dog.
No part of my body he doesn’t know
as I lie on my back, pink belly exposed,
tail wagging, squirming. And he orders me
to do unspeakable things, unspeakable,
in the literal sense: you cannot speak them...

(“Quasar,” Autumn Road)

Here is an encounter with one of Rexroth’s “supernatural” beings, an encounter that will shape a life. At the funeral, the aunt says, “I bet you’re glad he’s gone,” but as the title of the third section of the book, “Eschatology,” implies, there are always last things to ponder.

Of the two books, I preferred Autumn Road to Snow House. But the books make an excellent pair. Snow House shows us how to pay attention to what the world does, and the poems sing along and might just take off on their own feet into the loess if the reader were to drop them. In the case of Autumn Road, however, you wouldn’t want to let the book get the better of you. The social animal that we call so easily by the name of “family” isn’t always as friendly as the natural world hunted in Snow House. Returning
to Simon Ortiz’ conceit of the hunting song, Swann’s poems are songs of a long and dangerous pursuit, beautifully sung.
Neil Shepard’s *This Far From the Source* is a rare mix of tight lyric immersion and expansive narrative splendor; a blend of edgy meditation and shifting plot points, an acknowledgement of natural endings and of things that don’t end yet. Steeped in elemental Vermont, this book is most refreshing for its refusal to offer easy declarations, affirmations or glib assessments of the natural world. Wonder, for example, is undercut by the mortal freight of human passage. Beauty is contained within its own temporary boundaries. Hope is put aside for the luck of harrowing confrontation. Solitude may not lead to salvation, but the poet is bound to the promise of such a quest.

Shepard’s style is free verse eloquence and economy that often feels blank verse formal. There’s very little that’s casual or colloquial about his voice. He aims to win the reader over, not with post-modern non-sequiturs and elliptical diffusion, but rather with pre-modern compression and images wedded to the evidence found in place. As keenly articulate as Shepard is, this poet is drawn to those remote and raw places where language fails to measure, analyze, rearrange or otherwise divide landscape into human parcels. In “Waterfall at Journey’s End,” the opening poem, he guides us to a time when time is stripped of its power to steer our hunger toward acquisitions:

“This is the place of pre-delight, before the light

blinded on in our fore-brains and pained us with fore-knowing. No, this place

delivers a hiss, a wordless
rush through gray clefts,
the high chattering scream

The book’s underlying argument is how, as a species, we have radically drifted from any sense of humility and grace toward the planet we inhabit. The price for such evolutionary drift is a exclusionary consciousness, a con-
tinual dis-ease, a sense that, as much as we have failed to shelter the remote places, we’ve also failed to contact the remote and sustaining places within ourselves. In “My Thesis if Nature’s Progress,” the poet laments:

“that Rousseau wept and painted
scenes of savage greenery,
while science praised the progress
of our opposable thumb,
its blueprints and hammered nails

and humans felt afresh the home
they’d lost, the one they’d carried

on their backs, wherever they wandered,
always, everywhere, at home.

People certainly inhabit This Far From the Source, but it’s the landscape itself that provides the most submerging sense of spiritual renewal and endurance. Not limited to Vermont, Shepard takes us to New Mexico, the Great Plains, Baton Rouge, the Greek islands, Florida, France, Maine and elsewhere. As he gets under the skin of multiple locations, (not as a tourist, but as someone broken from the tour) he offers pleasant echoes of Frost, Whitman and another New England poet, Hayden Carruth. The entire volume is laced with land-based narratives like “Oil Trust,” “Sunflower Sutra,” and “French Lesson” that make you want to travel, see more, and, while seeing, pry beneath the surface of what we assume to be true.

As an essentially romantic, existential witness to places near and far, Shepard often introduces death just as we might want the sensual adventure of a place to continue. This introduction creates both inward and outward movement in the reader and expands the psychic dimension of several poems including “From the Bridge at Taos,” “Corfu,” “Teenager:19,” and “The Secret Lives of Birds.”

“Every Morning” is one of the spacious gems in this collection because it offers a death story that plays like a movie scene with all the elements of suspense, looming danger and unexpected plot twist. The poem gains its startling momentum from a common human collision: A garbage man parks his vehicle beside the poet’s north pasture where he cranks the radio. The poet knocks on the cab and tells the driver to turn down his raucous music. Shepard draws down close:
“Well, the guy startled—he was young and dark—deeply tanned, black shock of hair, well-muscled, and violent in his face, his gruff “Excuse me for livin’!” before he choked the ignition, stomped the gas, and spun his tires in a spray of gravel and dust. I felt bad but I felt right, too. I wasn’t denying him his view but was limiting his pleasure, the old compromise between one nature and another, between a human song and the wind’s.”

By coincidence or some design the poet can’t discern, the young garbage man is found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The poet is left examining the hole left in the early morning by the boy’s death:

“...He lived and died in a dark apartment shaded by a fire escape, but he liked the open air, his father told the local news, he liked every morning rising early, to take the morning air.

Shepard might have indulged guilt or grief which would have overwhelmed the tenuous circumstances, but instead he gives the boy’s death something of a benediction by anchoring the death in the insufficient joy that the boy gathered in, then let go.

Divided into six sections, This Far from the Source might strike some readers as a bit long and indeed, some of the poems could have been pruned. The two weakest sections are three and five. In section three, Shepard travels back over family material that can feel cobbled from old photos, arguments and unchallenged nostalgia. In section five, entitled “Birth Announcements,” the poet runs the risk of writing too many poems about his daughter; poems without enough psychic push and pull to sharpen the edge of something new. Tightly wrought to a poem, they still don’t throw off enough drama to make the reader feel either dislocated or found, cast off or reeled in. When Shepard returns to the land with his daughter in it, as he does “In Fog,” the results are revelatory:

Out there, where two currents become one, where bonita and redfish merge with cod and haddock,
where warm infusions of plankton meet the green ice of glaciers,
I still hear the foghorn’s moan of separation, hear it now
touching every lost boat, every misguided spirit at the edge
of the fogbank where light dissolves and gives nothing back…

Shepard saves his best work for the book’s last section. All nine poems are marked by a lyric intensity and narrative frisson that captures the scope of his obsessions: the ever-threatened sweep of the land’s pure curve, the vivid reminder that death is a major trump card, the fleeting and often frightened nature of the “human song,” the endurance of old stones, the quiet fury of elemental forces. Looking always for that place before time and roads and human measurement took hold, Shepard wins our trust with fever-dream sorties that feel as old and true as Vermont granite itself:

how after walking through chokecherry blossom
you come to a mossed stone wall. Where there’s a gap
in stones you think “gate and cobbled roadway,”
and take it back further into forest

Losing the road in dusk, you pocket compass
and survey map, go by the land’s pure curve –
back between those younger trees where pasture
was carved, stumps plowed under, and one
small-farmer lived after his own way.

“Trusting the Land’s Pure Curve”

Neil Shepard is an accomplished poet of place, and some of his most stunning poems such as “Hayden’s Writer’s Shack’s Latest Occupant” are set in Vermont, but he’s also a refreshing globalist, at home in the world, seeking everywhere to reduce the distance between the source of the land’s original clarity and our experience of it. When Shepard lets the land speak fully through him, then we enter a consequential world where the elements themselves become the characters who dictate the terms of our human drama.

In Sinners Welcome, Mary Karr skids between the role of the hard-luck pugilist nursing a three-day bender and the recalcitrant believer who has mended her ways before the lights go out. The difficulty with this dual-faced mythic persona is, on the one hand, an over-reaching sympathy with her own wayward past, and on the other, a secret wish to tidy up loose ends
when just the opposite serves her best. Karr should have started this mixed collection with the uncompromising sizzler, “Waiting for God:

The winter Mother’s ashes came in a Ziploc bag,
all skin was scorched from me, and my skull
was a hard helmet I wore to pray
with my middle finger bone aimed at the light fixture—Come out,
You fuck, I’d say, then wait for God to finish me…

The mother who appears regularly in her poems, the ones in this collection and elsewhere, is a cross between a vampish cyclone and a besotted Artemis with the power to goad, seduce, shame, hunt and destroy the poet. In “Waiting for God,” the mother suffers through a drunken washout to reach the threshold of transfiguration and so too does the poet gain higher ground in recognition that such a conversion is finally possible in one who seemed beyond repair. The edgy, unexpected punch of the Ziploc bag and the thrust middle finger make this journey toward mother-daughter redemption both credible and memorable.

In “Pathetic Fallacy,” the opening poem, Karr again summons the dead mother as her muse, but this time the antiphonal response goes (ugh) flat long before it reaches the banal, closing lines:

your features sometimes press toward me
all silvery from the afterlife, woven in wind,
to whisper a caution. Or your hand on my back

shoves me into my life.

This lame closing is a one step remove from the tepid applause accorded one’s first Girl Scout badge. When Karr allows her self-directed chaos to forgo the easy reach of order, her poems sing with a torrential sexual bravado as in the title poem “Sinners Welcome,” “Reference for Ex-Man’s Next,” and “Miss Flame” and with a hard-fought spiritual toughness and splendor found in “Descending Theology,” “Orders from the Invisible” and “Disgraceland.” It’s hard, for example, not to inch forward in your seat as you enter the dangerous first stanza of “Disgraceland.”

Before my first communion at 40, I clung
to doubt as Satan spider-like stalled
the orb of dark surrounding Eden
for a wormhole into Paradise.
Most poetry books that linger in memory are jazzed with at least one set of internal arguments. In *Sinners Welcome*, Karr is torn between skepticism and belief, between the scream and the prayer, between the kneel and the hell-bent sprint. She manages to throw sparks from primary Psalm-based argument—*God is the stronghold in a time of trouble*—about half the time. Her clunkers all aim for message, uplift, forced epiphany or predictable longing. In “Delinquent Missive,” she reaches for a feel-good conclusion about a character who seems destined to become “the zillionth winner of the Texas Death Penalty sweepstakes.” In “A Major,” she turns a dread-locked pianist into a saint with the power to free the audience from death. In “Requiem: Professor Walt Mink (1927-1996),” she settles for an idle worry and wish:

> And I worry the form I’ll finally take (death lesson) and whether I can be made to leave on anyone some mark worth bearing.

By contrast, in “The Choice,” Karr creates a compelling, coming-of-age poet’s tale in a sprawling set of quatrains that highlight her gifts for combining vernacular observation with eloquent insight. Re-telling the story of visiting William Wordworth’s house, she weaves failed love, failed attempts at writing and failed recognition from her teachers with her soul’s decision to make sense of the “intricate world” through poetry. With its staccato, Bishop-like flourishes including pub drunks, scarlet lipstick, and Euclidean solitude, “The Choice” is a poem Karr might use to fuel her ambitions in the narrative vein. Having said that, Karr is at her best when the ghost of a narrative, rather than linear plotting, inhabits her lyric drive. Here’s what she can do in “Descending Theology: The Resurrection” when she interrupts story and simply jumps in:

> From the far star points of his pinned extremities, cold inched in—black ice and blood ink—till the hung flesh was empty.

When Karr abandons the scaffolding of the beginning, middle and end, the dislocation forces the reader to enter into the nerve-tingling smack of her verbs rather than track the shambling flow of her routinely home-movie based stories. There’s no throat-clearing, no waiting for the engine to rev in “Orphanage” which would have been the best closing poem for this collection:

> Now you’ve joined the mist specters we once
peer into the night waves
to make out—the sparks from driftwood fire
whooshing up the black sky.

The long essay, “Facing Alters: Poetry and Prayer,” that concludes Sin-
ners Welcome is a richly anecdotal ramble that may trump even some of the
stronger poems. It’s become her signature to include an afterword, but the
essay begs the question: Why not make of this material more deep plunging
poetic explorations? Why not rough up her new spiritual view with a dozen
other nuanced contentions besides human fragility and godly strength? Why
not break the lyric/narrative mold now and then with some form she hasn’t
yet attempted? Why not take us into the belly of New York where she lives
and introduce us to sinners who refuse to be saved?

There are many qualities to admire in Mary Karr’s latest book, not the
least are her many raw collisions of skin and spirit which may appeal equally
to male and female readers. She has demonstrated enough nimble talent
with her obsessions to suggest the staying power of a major voice, but this
reader would like to see her push harder to create poems that live well out-
side the boundaries of predictable spirit/flesh duality and in so doing earn
their tough and tender conclusions with even greater originality.

George Held

Co-winner of the 2005 McGovern Prize, *A Secret Room in Fall*, Maria Terrone’s second volume of poems, fulfills the promise of her first, *The Bodies We Were Loaned* (2002). Because she works outside the classroom—she is assistant vice president for communications at Queens College—her life recalls that of other poets, like Wallace Stevens, who were employed in professions other than teaching. Indeed, her photograph on the cover of this book shows a well-coiffed and made-up woman in a dark suit, the model of a corporate executive. All the more refreshing, then, to find that her poems reveal a mind with a strangely original take on life.

*A Secret Room in Fall* is divided into four parts of from 12 to 21 pages, each part thematically distinct. The first, “Distant Signals,” mostly contains poems in the voice of a woman, often a persona. Thus the initial poem in the book, “The Egyptian Queen Gives Death the Slip,” allows the queen to address those who have “seen my ‘death mask’ in the museum’s Nile / wing,” attesting to her strong will and keeping her alive in the present: “Let Death play solitaire, / . . . I’m everywhere / and nowhere, which is why you found my casket bare.” As the terminal alexandrine and those rhymes, internal and terminal, suggest, Terrone can exploit formal prosody, and this poem is one of two sonnets in the book. But she uses slant rhyme and runover lines so that her rhymes will delight those who recognize them and won’t dismay those readers partial to free verse, in which most of these poems are written.

Among the other women’s stories riffed on in *A Secret Room in Fall* are those of Alice (Wonderland), a slain lighthouse-keeper’s wife, and Rapunzel, but the most memorable poems reflect the poet’s own curious point of view. “Seaside Stonehenge” offers an example of the way Terrone sees the facts of the world and gives ironical voice to them. Written in her usual spare style, this poem shows a rare imagination at work. The poet speaks to herself as “you,” as she does often in this collection, while she considers a newspaper photograph of “t.v. sets that washed ashore,” given the “clever headline” of the title. “Compelled / to take them seriously,” unlike the reader who smiles at the allusion or blanks on it and moves on, “you see yourself alone at dusk / walking through” signs of the shipwreck that brought this television Stone-
henge ashore:

The screens face one another
or stare east across the ocean
from where they came,
antenna folded—as if betrayed
by evolution, encased
in a plastic carapace
like bugs too big to crawl away
that once held the world
in a single glassy eye.

The cascading imagery here calls up the stone figures on Easter Island,
Darwin, large sea turtles, and then incapacitated beetles. At her best Terrone
revises the detritus of our material culture and transforms it into something
rich and strange.

“Seaside Stonehenge” appears near the end of “Part Three: Eyes Sealed
Open,” the strongest, and longest, section of the book. The section begins
with a shaped poem, “String Theory,” in which she discounts “the String
Theorists” and offers “My theory: the world’s a giant spool of string / un-
raveling since Day One.” The poem’s layout on the page suggests a spool,
another example of Terrone’s wit, both formal and contextual. In “Resurrec-
tion in an Initial ‘R,’” Terrone bases her poem on an illuminated manuscript
from fifteenth-century Venice depicting the Resurrection of Easter. The
poem itself resembles a Renaissance emblem poem, though the text lacks a
reproduction of the illuminated “R”; nevertheless, the poem elaborates on
the idea of resurrection as it pertains to the speaker: “I rise daily, a miracle,”
it begins. The speaker then recounts dreaming of her own death, awaking
to “unwind myself / from a tourniquet of sheets,” a troubling image that
conveys both her struggle with that dream and its sanguinary subject, “that
bloody resurrection,” as the last line calls it.

A related poem in Part Three, “The Hunger of the Dead,” depicts “their
eternal hunger / for all that’s left behind.” They are the ones with eyes sealed
open, leaving them restive in death. In the previous poem, “Crisscrossed
Shadows,” Terrone speaks of her “oblique / rendering of nightly dreams / from
The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.” This poem, addressed to her love, makes
a request that he won’t “try to straighten // what’s askew // in me. . . .”
Setting “what’s askew” apart in the middle of the poem as its only one-line
stanza underscores her desire for freedom from “craving for symmetry” and
“prizing, above all, / the balanced exchange”; rather, like G. M. Hopkins in
“Pied Beauty,” she prizes what’s crisscrossed, oblique, and askew. To the de-
gree that these words describe her idiosyncratic view of the world, this poem is her ars poetica. Grateful readers wouldn’t have her exceptional poems any other way.

**Jeremy Hooker**

Surprise marked my first reading of Jude Nutter’s poems. Twenty-five years ago, in a creative writing workshop which I organized at Winchester School of Art, in England, the poems I read by the young art student were remarkably different from the generality of English poetry being produced at that time. With their fluency and vital imagination, the poems of Jude Nutter reminded me rather of an expansive American poetry, somewhat in the spirit of Walt Whitman. Leaving Winchester in 1982, I heard nothing more of Jude Nutter until I read some poems by her in *Notre Dame Review*, and subsequently acquired her first book, *Pictures of the Afterlife* (2002), followed by *The Curator of Silence*, winner of the Ernest Sandeen Prize in Poetry in 2007. It was the confident fluency of the early poems that made me reach for an American comparison. After a quarter of a century, during at least part of which Jude Nutter has been living in North America, it seems to me that I was right about her American affinities.

In her subject matter, however, she often draws on family life in England. There is something about her work—not just references to Rilke—that is distinctively European. This, I think, is the ‘darkness’, the preoccupation with death. She could be described, lazily, as a ‘confessional’ poet. I have read little poetry that conveys such a sense of intimate, painful personal exposure. A lot of poetry does of course deal with the subject of painful experience, after the fashion established by Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. But I have read little that communicates the feeling, as distinct from displaying the experience, or offering it as a spectacle. Consider the first poem in *The Curator of Silence*, “To the Reader”:

> Out here, in darkness, rain knocks
> against the earth, unlocking tiny doors
> in the dirt of the garden. You
> have spent your whole life so far
> trying to bear your body as a blessing.
> and now you are waiting with your empty
> suitcase between your father’s
> toolshed and the high, rough fence
> of the neighbours’ garden, and whatever
it is the rain sets free from the soil it tastes
like the vacancy of the grave, it tastes
like the hunger you discovered
when you entered this world—released
from the grip of your mother's body and passed,
fully condemned, into the slack cage
of your father's arms: the brand-new loneliness
of the body you'd been given.

Initially a reader might pull away from the ‘you’—a form of address Jude Nutter frequently employs—resenting what seems an assumption of intimacy. However, this is not what is being assumed. The voice is personal and intimate, but it also simultaneously gives and withholds. The withholding is a form of recognition: that loneliness is the common condition of poet and reader, and therefore, paradoxically, intimacy is strictly limited. As Jude Nutter writes in “Epitaph on Interstate 80, Nevada”: ‘the loneliness of the world begins in the body./And the body earns its dirt, and all its delight, in this world only.’ It is the mystery of being that is being shared.

The lines from “To the Reader” introduce both the spirit of the poetry and its principal themes: the body as blessing and burden; death and desire; primary relationships. The setting, ‘between your father's/toolshed and the high, rough fence’, at once situates the speaker within the life of the generations, and is liminal. It places Jude Nutter as a metaphysical poet, one whose language remembers an old religious dispensation, and who hungers for what is perhaps an impossible release from life's physical conditions, except in death.

The cover of Pictures of the Afterlife shows Louis Schiavonetti's etching after William Blake's The Soul Exploring the Recesses of the Grave, which is also the subject of a poem in the book. Death and the soul are a recurring theme in The Curator of Silence, too. “Meditations: Tyne Cot Cemetery, Ypres” begins: ‘We shall never, as Emerson reminds us,/steer our feet clear of the grave’. The poet’s concern is with the dead: ‘Don’t ever tell me there are too many poems about the dead: the dead,/among whose ranks we shall one day number, outnumber/us all and should be given their due’. Jude Nutter speaks of Emerson, but her subject is Ypres. Her handling of death is not like the transcendalist’s. It is more like Donne’s and that of European poets and artists. She treats the theme as in ‘Crow’, modernizing the medieval figure:

Death, is it not true
you are everyone's lover; the ultimate
philanderer and our one, true heritage, packed
at birth into the suitcase of every cell.

Her death-haunted poetry is intensely physical, earthy and corporeal, and
electric with spiritual energy. Because it is so mortal, her world is vividly
alive.

While I last saw Jude Nutter in the quiet environs of a cathedral city
in the south of England, I learn from her books that she has subsequently
‘homesteaded on Wrangell Island in Alaska for ten years, working the land,
watching birds, listening to snow, and writing poems’ (back cover of Pictures
of the Afterlife), and lived for two months in the Antarctic. Extreme situ-
tions evidently suit her spirit. The loneliness of and from which she writes
is not only a modern existential experience, but grounded in the conditions
of life on earth. Thus, in “Aurelia aurita”, she describes the ocean abode of
the jellyfish as ‘the loneliness of our first home from whose/dark, unwalled
room we are forever exiled’. Her poem “The Hermit Thrush” won the
2001 Robinson Jeffers Tor House Prize. “The Falcon” has a Jeffers epigraph
(‘Justice and mercy/Are human dreams’). Like Robinson Jeffers, Jude Nutter
has ‘stood at the edge/of a continent’, and rejected ‘the comfort of meta-
phor’; she too has found beauty in the merciless universe. If the exposure
of extreme personal experience in her poetry is reminiscent of confessional
verse, it is this refusal of illusions, together with her recognition of common
loneliness, that obviates self-pity and self-absorption. Her poetry is pervaded
by the knowledge expressed in “Wheatfield. With Crows” from Pictures of
the Afterlife: ‘the world the heart inherits is its own’.

The epigraph to “The Poet in Reflection” quotes R. S. Thomas, another
sea-watching poet with a passion for the elemental universe. The poem
begins with a self-portrait, in a liminal situation:

I discover myself at last: a woman reflected
in a picture window, bent over
her work in a circle of light, unarmed, struggling
to place one lasting thing at the threshold
of her vanishing.

It was as an art student that I first met Judith Nutter, and it is no surprise to
find that she writes about art and artists. More than this, making art is what
her life is about. As she writes in “The Fourth Man”:

The body is not the only
terror out of which we fashion salvation, but it is
the one loneliness about which we know nothing.
It’s why we make love, and dream
in pictures; it’s why we make art, ravenous

for prayers in our own likeness.

Making is what the poet or artist does. But the ‘lessons’ of which the poet speaks in the title poem of her new book are: ‘that life/is not artifact, but aperture—a stepping into//and a falling away; that to sing is to rise/from the grave of the body. And still/say less than nothing.’ The greatest subject, paradoxically, is what cannot be said or shown. There is thus a quality of silence about real art that is like nothing else on earth. It was an intimation of this, in verse ambitious to reach into darkness and silence, yet to taste fully of life, that surprised and impressed me in Jude Nutter’s work twenty-five years ago. In her subsequent poetry, culminating in The Curator of Silence, she has learned to speak eloquently of that which cannot be put into words.
A SUBTERRANEAN MEMOIR


Renée E. D’Aoust

In Frantic Transmissions to and from Los Angeles, Kate Braverman writes a memoir of subterranean Los Angeles—a place where, Braverman states, “It is of utmost importance that you do not lose pieces of yourself before your vanishing is complete. You must avoid gratuitous acts of unborn geography. I know this for a fact.” The gloss of Los Angeles is not a part of Braverman’s coming-of-age, but the fast-pace and surrealistic traffic and riots surely are a part of her adult world. “Wasn’t Los Angeles always a sort of massive studio set, a clever assemblage of facades…?" She stands apart from celluloid creations of Hollywood, except in a fabulist interview with Marilyn Monroe, which she includes in the memoir, yet even in that interview and throughout the book, she writes in a voice distanced from herself. As the reader, I too am kept from the superficial L.A. and come to know—through Braverman’s expert hand—the L.A. of immigrants and drug addicts and mothers who long to leave. “We were the offspring of disaster…. And we came to Los Angeles for the great American promise of a second chance.”

This voice is consistent throughout the work, as if Braverman knows herself as an author of four novels, two collections of short fiction, and four books of poetry, but also sees this body of writing as something separate from the geography of her own body: “I know a woman, she was a writer, yes. I admit this. A poet from Los Angeles.”

A stream-of-consciousness memoir that connects location to identity, Frantic Transmissions is in no way linear. Braverman provides little in the way of dates, instead focusing on “[v]anished women [who] do not require specific love. They are never lonely.” Unique observations are part of Braverman’s text—why wouldn’t “vanished women” be lonely? This focus means the memoir reads as particularly feminist, however, that label suggests a narrow vision—an exclusion—and this memoir is at its base inclusive, in many ways because of the lack of linearity or specificity of time. Some readers might wish for more specifics of sequential development; however, I thought it was one of the strengths of the text, and there are cultural references that place it in time. Do we remember a life as certain development or as dream memory leading somewhere or nowhere at all? The somewhere Braverman’s life leads is to New York’s Allegheny Mountains where her husband takes
a position teaching. There is abundant geographic detail, both about the place she leaves and the place she enters. Braverman’s very identity seems to change when she is finally able to leave Los Angeles. Earlier her uncle had warned her, “You feel that lucky, kid? Think you can just walk out the door into another life?” Says Uncle Irving, ruefully, the painter “Chagall left my people out of his paintings.” It is the same way American immigrants were left out of the mainstream films that came straight out of glitzy L.A.

Braverman’s fast-paced life slows when she lives in the mountains. She comes to know her daughter: “If you knew my family, you’d understand why people have been, for me, an acquired taste.” I come to know Los Angeles and the Allegheny Mountains, but I’d like to know her family better. This is one deficit of the memoir—the reader is let into the topography of place and identity, but could have been further let into the geography of family intimacy. “But then again,” writes Braverman, “falling in love with landscapes is what L.A. women do.”

In New York, resettled, Braverman tells us: “That summer, I watched deer three feet from where I stood, memorizing the orchard turning yellow then red, while fields of sweet corn went to straw.” Her view of nature, of her neighbors, remains urban and cosmopolitan. It is as if Los Angeles has so deeply formed her view of the world, of herself, that even though she leaves it, the place does not leave her. Braverman is aware of this: “Los Angeles and I came of age together. To actually claim Los Angeles as your city of birth or choice is a brazen admission. It puts you on the defensive, immediately and permanently.”

Braverman’s life is made visible through lyric prose much like “accidental prayers made visible” in the second essay of the book, “Escaping Los Angeles: Incantations and Magic.” The excellence of her writing will be familiar to her many readers; in addition, the clever crafting and structure of Frantic Transmissions to and from Los Angeles shows wonderful experimentation and possibilities within the nonfiction memoir form. It is deserving of Graywolf Press’s first annual nonfiction prize, which was judged by Robert Polito, who wrote the informative introduction to the book.
AN EPISTOLARY MEMOIR


Heather Treseler

Personal letters, as the ligatures—and written artifacts—of relationships, structure Michael Harper’s memoir of his late father, Walter Warren Harper (1915-2004), whose life’s story provides a portal into nearly a century of African American social history. W. Warren Harper’s biography also provides the familial background of a premier American poet, as Michael Harper has written some of his most poignant and popularly anthologized poems on domestic themes. In Harper’s poetry, the family is often a metonymic structure, a gathering of parables for the larger body politic. Hence, in the tales of a neighborhood, in the “psychographs” of a family, readers encounter miniature mythologies that begin in the particular, the personal and the local, and arc towards history’s annals and the Greek theater of timeless themes. Consider these lines from “My Father’s Face.”

at this late date
in the March snow,
how much the past costs;
how much the health
of one’s nation
as neighborhood,
is stored in the family,
the archives,
the handwriting
of our saints & sinners,
and the forgiveness
of sin’s remembering. (from Honorable Amendments, 1995)

In describing the cultural work of poetry, Harper refers to Ralph Ellison’s adage that a poem is fundamentally “shorthand.” His poems typically fulfill this definition, showing how complex, entangling circumstances can be caught up—and distilled—in the weir of the lyric form. The poet’s original hand, or handwriting, can enact “the forgiveness/ of sin’s remembering,” turning a personal remembrance, apercu or confession into literary art.

I Do Believe in People, as a collaborative, sui generis memoir of Harper’s late father, W. Warren Harper, operates in the redemptive, commemorative economy that governs so many of his poems. In this case, epistolary correspondence is a particularly fitting conceit, since Warren Harper served
for over thirty-six years as a supervisor for the United States Postal Service and was indeed the originator of overnight mail. The letters of this volume carry the pressure of “special delivery” in the twinned urgencies of grief and gratitude that can attend a death. With a multiplicity of perspectives rarely afforded by memoir, I Do Believe in People includes letters from Warren’s children and grandchildren; remembrances from visitors who lucked into the Harpers’ legendary hospitality on Orange Drive; notes of tribute from a British architect, Turkish intellectuals, literary critics Robert Stepto and Ronald Sharp; poems from well-known novelists Gayl Jones and Rachel Harper (a granddaughter); accolades from a Boston lawyer and a university president; and a law degree from St. John’s University, where Warren took night courses.

Collectively, these recollections séance Warren Harper for the reader. We meet the self-taught intellectual; the protective father and loyal husband; the dedicated, nurturing grandfather; and the genial, lively host. By all accounts, guests who were invited to the Harpers’ dinner table dined on both Katherine’s cuisine and on a lively discourse of politics, literature, history, and music. In his somewhat elliptical, densely valanced prose style, Michael Harper writes of his parents: “…they raised others as well at their table, white, black, all aspects of the rainbow. They did this by an accomplished belief in custom and ceremony with a heartfelt stamp of their own as the best currency. For many: it took” (ixx).

What fairly sings from the pages of this book, from the assembled letters, vintage photographs and poems, is Warren Harper’s human legacy: how many lives were guided, deepened, or set right by one individual. By including Warren’s own letters, I Do Believe in People also reveals the inscape of its subject: the tenderness that seems to have fueled a rather exceptional regard for others. He writes feelingly to his late son, Jonathan, and to his late wife, Katherine. With the latter, he shares the new loneliness of living alone, of reading the Sunday Times without any contest for his favorite sections of the newspaper. In the habituated idioms of a long marriage, Warren tells Katherine of his unchanged habits; the unflinching ache of her absence; and the look of the house, the flowers, and of a backyard jacaranda tree.

When you discovered that lilacs would not grow in Southern California, you planted the Jacaranda tree… Then I watched you talking to your tree because you swore that your voice would get through to the tree and it would respond… I ended up believing that your voice was responsible. This year, somehow, it does not appear to be prospering, the blooms are sparse and the foliage does not seem as healthy looking. Can it be that even your tree misses you? (159-160)
Letters, now a dying technology, have a long history of supplementing intimacy or recreating it when distance intervenes. Here the testing distance is death, the “Universal Transition,” and the defiant vitality of the letters enact a community, a contrived occasion of speech between the deceased and the living (192). Saskia Hamilton notes in her introduction to Robert Lowell’s collected letters, “… [Letters] carry the particular voice of the social person in relation to a specific other” (ix). The intelligence of an epistolary biography, whatever its lacunae, is that it evinces the individual in a variety of roles, which together limn the dimensions of a personality. Hence, while Warren’s letters do the real work of recording family history and seeking posthumous reconciliations, they also tell jokes and secrets; they kiss and reprimand. In the tonal shifts of Warren’s letters and those written to him, as a final farewell, he is shown as the enduring caretaker of an extended family tree.

To its credit, I Do Believe in People does not avoid the broken boughs. Some of the more heart-breaking materials include Rachel Harper’s poem about the divorce of her parents, “The Myth of Music”; Michael Harper’s poems about a train ticket sent by a lost love interest named “Millicent” and the legendary punch of his Irish great-grandmother in “Homage to Maimie Owens.” The collection also contains Warren’s letter to his late son Jonathan, who was only thirty-six when he died after a motorcycle accident not far from his parents’ home. Warren describes a parent’s most harrowing moment.

I was the first one to see you, I was the one who told the doctor that you would not want to live as a vegetable, helpless, lifeless, not recognizing your surroundings—a battery of machines, not you. I held your remains at eye level, such a small jar, my son, my son—it was bearable, only because your mother said, “Warren, he wanted to leave, he was tired of the life he was leading.” (62)

I Do Believe in People does not shirk from describing the great struggles that Warren Harper encountered as a father, as a husband, or as an educated African-American man in twentieth century America, a country his son diagnoses as “still stalled in the aftermath of the Civil War” (xxi). Indeed, the story of Warren’s success includes the nightmare of its beginning, a tale that begins in Catskill, New York, in his family’s home on the western side of the Catskill River, when a white mob inspired by the film “Birth of a Nation” tried to burn down the Harpers’ home. Joseph Harper, Warren’s father and a storeowner in Catskill, was able to talk the rioters away from their murderous intentions. Although I Do Believe in People does not record the eloquence that saved Joseph Harper and his family, it is a framing incident
for Warren Harper’s canny survival in an overwhelmingly white town in upper state New York. In his poem, “My Father at 75,” Harper syncopates these defining years:

He was born in a small town
and is still uncomfortable
with his people;
discomforture hones standards.
He refuses to budge. (121)

As a young boy, Warren worked alongside his father, using his free time to read every newspaper and magazine sold in his father’s cigar shop. When he graduated from high school in 1934, a distinguished scholar-athlete, Warren dismissed the prospect of a scholarship to Syracuse University in order to help support his family. He found work first in Virginia, in a segregated branch of the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) and two years later at a haberdashery shop in New York, where he met his future wife, Katherine Louise Johnson. The couple was married in St. John’s Catholic Church in August of 1937. In 1951, Warren took a position with the U. S. Postal Services in Los Angeles, hoping to find a stable neighborhood in which to raise his three children: Michael, Jonathan, and Katherine.

The secondary—but quite audible—biographic thread of this memoir is how Warren sought to overcome the limiting forces of racism in his career and in raising his family. Literary critic John S. Wright writes about Warren’s profession with the Postal Service, a career path his own father and many other educated African Americans took in the 1950s.

[Warren Harper and Boyd Anderson Wright were both]… young black men who would defy the odds and win their way to college and through the war, yet find their professional prospects in the world at large ultimately circumscribed to the civil service confines of the U. S. Post Office by an unseeing, unyielding field of social force… Like my father, I could sense, Warren harbored a deep, justifiable anger over this unearned fate; and for him and their generation, a special brand of reticence and reserve became necessary… (49)

Facing external limits to his professional ambitions, Warren Harper redoubled his commitment to his family. Years later, when the promotion board at the Los Angeles Post Office asked him what he was most proud of, he put this motivation on public record.

My son, Michael, who is now a Professor of English at Brown University […] who worked as a part-time clerk at the Los Angeles Terminal Annex in order
to pay his expenses. He always said that working with and talking to so many colored clerks, talented, yet denied the opportunity to fulfill their dreams, urged him to stay in school… (104)

I Do Believe in People commemorates the upward climb of the Harper family in the Pax Americana, an imperial nation fused in its contradictions. In telling Warren’s story and, to some extent, the tale of the Harper family, this volume enriches the narrative of American social history, a legacy that began, as William Carlos Williams once wrote, “with murder and enslavement, not with discovery.”

Like other epistolary collections, I Do Believe in People evinces the hybrid nature of the letter as an extended address akin to a dramatic monologue; a miniature casting of one’s life narrative; and a conversation of ultimate privacy. In the variety of its interlocutors, I Do Believe in People might best be described as “an evolving and passionate miscellany,” a phrase John Matthias coined to describe the rich heterogeneity of John Berryman’s Freedom of the Poet. Like Berryman’s collection, I Do Believe in People reveals its subject by degrees. Framed by a dedicatory festschrift of poems from Michael Harper, the memoir’s coordinating muse, it intimates the lessons of service, self-education, and dedicated ambition that a father bequeathed to his son.
Editors Select

Francisco Aragón, editor, *The Wind Shifts: New Latino Poetry*, University of Arizona Press, 2007. Francisco Aragón has edited an extremely strong and informative anthology. With substantial selections by twenty-five poets, the book provides enough work by each for the reader to get to know the characteristic styles and concerns of all contributors. Some of them—Emmy Perez, Sheryl Luna, Richard Blanco—have appeared in *NDR*. Juan Felipe Herrera contributes a Foreword, and Aragón writes an illuminating introduction. Contributors, aside from the three named and the editor himself, are Rosa Alcalá, Naomi Ayala, Brenda Cárdenas, Albino Carrillo, Steven Cordova, Eduardo C. Corral, David Dominguez, John Olivares Espinoza, Gina Franco, Venessa Maria Engel-Fuentes, Kevin A. González, David Hernandez, Scott Inguito, Carl Marcum, Maria Meléndez, Carolina Monsivais, Adela Najarro, Urayoán Noel, Deborah Parédez, Paul Martínez Pompa and Linda Torres. There is also a bibliography for further reading.

Some books from Ars Interpres. Ars Interpres is edited from Stockholm, Sweden by icon painter Alexander Deriev, four of whose icons appear in this issue. *Locks and Keys* is the current issue of the Ars Interpres international journal of poetry, translation and visual art (No 6/7), which is available in both print and on line versions. Recent bilingual books include Daniel Weissbort’s *The Name’s Progress* (English/Russian) and Ewa Lipska’s *The Holy Order of Tourists* (English/Polish). Ars Interpres is even experimenting with trilingual books in John Kinsella’s *America, or Glow* (English/Swedish/Russian). Print versions of the journal and books are distributed from Stockholm, Moscow, and New York. The journal, along with reproductions of Alexander Deriev’s icons, can be found at http://arsint.com.

Peg Boyers, *Honey with Tobacco*, University of Chicago Press, 2007. “Sacra Conversazione” and “Judgment Day,” two of the strongest poems in this volume, appeared in *NDR 23*. George Steiner says that “Boyers’s poems have a rare power: they match the private to the public, the intimate to the political.”

Mark Halperin, *Falling Through the Music*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Halperin’s poems have appeared regularly in *NDR* over the past several years, and we have mentioned earlier books of his in this column. *Falling Through the Music* is perhaps his best book yet, rightly called by David Wojahn both “autumnal and elegic” and “surprisingly bracing.”

Michael Heller, *Earth and Cave*, Dos
Madres, 2007. Heller publishes here a collage of verse and prose recalling a period in the 1960s spent in Nerja, Spain, in the late years of the Franco regime. An extremely vivid evocation of the landscape, indigenous population, and the pre-historic caves of the area.

Reginald Shepherd, *Fata Morgana*, University of Pittsburgh, 2007. Shepherd’s new book combines personal experiences with an original treatment of figures like Persephone, Ophelia, Eve, and Echo. His fine ear and intelligence are as impressive as ever. Bin Ramke says “this book feels like the culmination of a major project.”

Mary Biddinger, *Prairie Fever*, Steel Toe Books, 2007. Robert Archambeau describes Biddinger’s first book as “a Sally Mann photograph in deftly chiseled verses. Or think of the poems as out-takes from a small-town gothic movie Jim Jarmusch should have made. It’s as if Biddinger re-spliced them into a dreamy collage starring a cross between *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s Scout Finch and Nabokov’s *Lolita*. You get the idea: delicate, bruised, a little wayward.”

*NDR* contributor and Notre Dame MFA Tom O’Connor has published a critical and theoretical volume called *Poetic Acts and New Media*, University Press of America, 2007. In it he discusses work by such poets as *NDR* contributors David Wojahn and John Kinsella, along with films like David Lynch’s *Mullholand Drive* and Spike Jonze’s *Being John Malkovich*. He has much to say about the distinction he finds between Language Poetry and what he calls Media Poetry.

Donald Platt, *My Father Says Grace*, University of Arkansas Press, 2007. The remarkable title poem of this book deals with the stroke Platt’s father suffered in the middle of saying grace, “and stood over the warmed up leftover meatloaf. // When he spoke the holy words, nothing / but the jangled / syllables of aphasia came from the God-struck tongue…” What follows, in this poem and others, is God-struck in several senses, leading Eavan Boland to praise “the exuberance of language, the sheer eloquence” of the writing.

the horrible bully “Dog-Star Freddy” in “Vengeance” got his name.

David Ray Vance, *Vitreous*, Del Sol Press. *Vitreous* was chosen by *NDR* contributor Mary Jo Bang for the 2005 Del Sol Press Poetry Prize. She calls the book “part rewritten medical text, part Keatsian reflection,” and finds it a “long-awaited meeting of science and art; a marriage of equals where each half maintains its primary allegiance: the poetic to the common lyrical language of emotion and memory, the medical to its narrowly appropriated lexicon.”

Paige Ackerson-Kiely, *In No One’s Land*, Ahsahta Press, 2007. D.A. Powell chose this book for the Sawtooth Poetry Prize, saying that it “stakes a claim on wilderness and, most assuredly, manages to homestead there. These are not poems borne of quiet contemplation; they are edgy and lurid, painfully administering to the world of convenience stores, diners, one-night stands. From the starkness of glaciers to the empty refrigerator, these poems rise from the most barren landscapes and manage to make of them fabled islands, joyful things.”

Julianna Baggot, *Compulsions of Silkworms & Bees*, Pleiades Press, 2007. Chosen by Linda Bierds for the 2006 Lena-Miles Wever Todd Poetry Series, Baggot’s book is simultaneously a send-up and celebration of those questions and answers about writing and writers, with titles like “How is it that some poems just fail?” “Do you write about real stuff or do you make it all up?” “Where do you get your ideas?” This is a book that might shame any workshop contingent into both seriousness and good humor. The answers are better than the questions, and often very funny.


Katie Peterson, *This One Tree*, New Issues Press, 2006. New Issues Poetry Prize judge William Olsen celebrates the commitment in this book to “the genius of the place, the scribe, and the scribble—or language itself. And with what visual command sponsored by what insistent powers of hearing?”

Jeffrey Harrison, *Incomplete Knowledge*, Four Way Books, 2007. Harrison re-tunes an informal idiom and relaxed conversational voice that at first might seem best suited to lighter subjects to write extended elegy at the end of this volume. A former student of Kenneth Koch’s,
Harrison writes an elegy for his teacher such as Koch himself might have written for a friend or mentor. Among Koch’s poems, I most often thought of “Mariana” while reading Incomplete Knowledge. The focus, in the end, is on the suicide of the author’s brother and its aftermath. A cycle in various forms, the piece includes one of the best Villanelles of recent years. The book also contains a wonderful poem about coincidence, which happens to deal with the fact that Janet Holmes’s The Green Tuxedo turned out to be among the effects of his non-poetry reading brother. (It is also a coincidence that The Green Tuxedo won the Ernest Sandeen Poetry prize at Notre Dame before Harrison’s brother could read it, and that the judge of the contest was the son of a judge who heard Sam Shepherd’s appeal for the murder conviction about which Janet Holmes’s father wrote as a journalist.)

David Kirby, The House on Boulevard St, LSU Press, 2007. If Harrison’s poems are often conversational, Kirby’s are loquacious to the point of being the glib musings and associations of someone high on something. Kirby, too, invokes Kenneth Koch at one point, but in his case one thinks more of a poem by Koch like “Taking a Walk With You” than “Mariana.” Quoting a critic of his own work in the introductory poem to what is, in fact, a new and selected volume, Kirby writes that “Judith Kitchen / refers to ‘David Kirby’s hilarious roundabout forays / into his own mind,’ and I figure, That’s about right, / because, like the chorus in a Greek play, / for the most part I watch the action and comment / on it without being drawn into it—what I do / is think about it instead—though occasionally // I put on my toga and step out into the footlights / and do a turn or two.”

Susan Ludvigson, Escaping the House of Certainty, LSU Press, 2007. Escaping The House of Certainty deals with uncertainty in the same way that Simon Schama meant us to think about it when he called his own famous book Dead Certainties. The ambiguities arise again and again in poems that, as Margaret Gibson says, “resist rigid definition, category, concept…in order to embrace fluidity, shimmer, and delight.”

Arturo Vivante, Truelove Knot, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Two reasons to rejoice: having this late career novel by the renowned writer Arturo Vivante, winner of ND’s 2004 Sullivan Prize for his collection, Solitude and other stories, and to note that the Notre Dame Press is now open to publishing novels, not just short story volumes. Novelist and short story writer Corinne Demas calls Truelove Knot "a vivid record of a part of World
War II which has rarely been documented. It’s a novel of suspense and surprises, but it is also a hauntingly beautiful tribute to the enduring power of love.” And to Vivante’s enduring gifts as a writer.

Susan Muaddi Darraj, *The Inheritance of Exile*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Beyond the Sullivan Prize, the ND Press is now publishing volumes of short stories, their number increasing each year. *The Inheritance of Exile* chronicles the lives of four Arab-American women, daughters of Palestinian immigrants, and their stories of cultural adaption in South Philadelphia. A timely volume, as well as one written, as the author Laila Lalami says, “with care and intelligence, and...compassion for her flawed and complex characters.”

Tony D’Souza’s novel, *Whiteman*, won the American Academy of Arts and Letters Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction of 2006. The novel’s first chapter, "Africa Unchained," in slightly different form, was published in *NDR#14* (Summer 2002). D’Souza’s novel was also a finalist for the 2007 PEN/Robert Bingham Fellowship for Writers.
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