

BACHY



10 **1977**



BACHY

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STAFF

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BACHY is published three times a year and is dedicated to the discovery of previously unpublished artists of worth. A major portion of our pages is reserved for relatively unknown contributors. We are interested in poetry, prose, photography and graphic art easily reproducible in black and white. Subscription: \$7.50 per year. Single copy: \$3.

A READING EDITION

Listen, Durrell, don't despair yet. If you have the guts for it, the thing to do is to go to the bitter end—in your writing, I mean. If you can possibly hold out, and I imagine you can, write only what you please. There is nothing else to do, unless you want to become famous. They will shit on you anyway, so have your say first. I'm not recommending obscenity necessarily. Each man has his own way of being himself and of saying it so ultimately that he can't be denied. Compromise is futile and unsatisfactory. You will always have a hundred readers and, if they have taste and discernment, what more can you ask? Even when you elect to be absolutely honest it is difficult. Expression seems such a natural, God-given thing—and yet it's not either. It's a lifelong struggle to find yourself. Think of Cezanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Lawrence. Think of Dostoevski, or Titian, if you will. I like the autobiographical documents: they teach you more than anything.

—Henry Miller

The poem is the dream made flesh, in a two-fold sense: as work of art, and as life itself, which is a work of art. When man becomes fully conscious of his powers, his role, his destiny, he is an artist and he ceases the struggle with reality. *He becomes a traitor to the human race.* He creates war because he has become permanently out of step with the rest of humanity. He sits on the doorstep of his mother's womb with his race memories and his incestuous longings and he refuses to budge. He lives out his dream of Paradise. He transmutes his real experience of life into spiritual equations. He scorns the ordinary alphabet which yields at most only a grammar of thought, and adopts the symbol, the metaphor,

the ideograph. *He writes Chinese.* He creates an impossible world out of an incomprehensible language, a lie that enchants and enslaves men.

—Henry Miller

to remind you what is possible between people
to remind you that the light is a force
to remind you that the light is inextinguishable
to remind you that we survive . . . despite . . .

—Deena Metzger

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

——— This is a complete reading text of the tenth issue of *Bachy*, published in 1977 by the Papa Bach Bookstore on Santa Monica Boulevard in West Los Angeles, with Leland Hickman as poetry editor and Bob Mehlman as fiction editor. It was made from a scan of the UCLA Library copy, transcribed page by page from the page images.

This issue is set differently from the five that precede it. *Bachy* 1 through 6 were digest-sized, single-column, and composed in a sans-serif; by 1977 the magazine had become a large-format quarto, roughly 8 by 10¾ inches, set in two justified columns in a serif face, with its page numbers in arabic rather than spelled out in words. This edition follows the object in size — the page is 8½ by 11 — but sets the text in a single measure with wide margins rather than in the magazine’s two columns, so that no line of verse has to wrap. Each contributor opens on a fresh page.

Where the magazine broke its own grid, so does this edition. Susan Wallace’s “Beginnings” (pages 103–106) runs to two, then four, then three narrow columns and finally scatters across the page as a constellation of free-floating blocks; those four pages are reproduced as spatial layouts rather than reflowed, and their measure is the poem.

Square brackets in the text are the magazine’s own. In the Metzger interview they carry the transcriber’s stage directions — [Barely audible], [She’s laughing.], [And she pours more wine.] — and elsewhere an editorial gloss, as when Aurora is identified as “a woman [who died of cancer] named Ruth Adams”. They are set in plain roman, like everything else that was printed. The single mark that is not the magazine’s is [?], in teal, which appears once, where the scan is illegible and no reading could responsibly be guessed. Everything else was read directly off the page.

This copy is a tight UCLA rebind, so the inner margin runs into the fold and character accuracy falls away there — on right-hand pages the inner column loses the first few characters of a line, on left-hand pages the last few. Those are the reconstructions above. **No leaf is missing.** The printed sequence runs unbroken from page 7 to page 144; two leaves (pages 134–135, Edie Pistolessi’s plates) were photographed twice and the repeats have been dropped.

The issue carries five photographic portfolios — Laura Silagi, Larry French, Marianna Diamos, Lee Romero and Edie Pistolessi — and a portrait of Deena Metzger by Ed Ikuta facing the interview. None of it is reproduced here; the list overleaf records every image and where it stood. Two of Romero’s plates were printed full-bleed and carry no page number, and his suite alone is uncaptioned.

Two errors in the magazine’s own contents are worth noting and have been left as printed: the Notes on Contributors are given as page 144 but in fact begin on 143, and the Ikuta

portrait is not listed at all.

Printed typos, eccentric spellings and compositor's errors are kept as they were set. Apart from that single query, no editorial matter of mine appears once the text begins. Set in TeX Gyre Pagella, with contributors' names in Bonum. The Bach device is the magazine's own, cut from the title page of this copy — the printed front cover, a photograph captioned *Party House, Los Angeles 1977*, was shot so far under-exposed that nothing can be recovered from it.

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THE ARTWORK

——— None of the pictures in *Bachy* 10 is reproduced here. What follows is a list of the 25 images the issue carried and where each one stood, so that this reading text can be held against the object. Page numbers are the magazine's own.

Title page	<i>A bold black-and-white woodcut bust portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach in his full curled wig, centred on the otherwise blank title page, the Papa Bach device.</i>
Frontispiece	<i>A full-page black-and-white photograph, printed sideways, of a laughing dark-haired woman leaning back against the deeply furrowed trunk of a tree, her hair blown across her face and a beaded necklace at her throat. Photograph of Deena Metzger by Ed Ikuta</i>
Page 41	<i>Full-page black-and-white photograph of a woman seen from the chest up, her face and shoulders veiled by a long sheer bridal veil that falls in vertical folds. The Bride</i>
Page 42	<i>Landscape black-and-white photograph of a woman, bare above the waist, sitting cross-legged on a patterned carpet beside a hanging checked cloth in a curtained room. Laura and Edie / Landscape black-and-white photograph of one woman standing in a patterned dress before a bright curtained window while another sits bare-shouldered on the floor in front of her. Laura and Edie</i>
Page 43	<i>Black-and-white photograph of a nude woman sitting with her arms around her knees on a patterned carpet before a window, with a second woman lying on her back in a checked dress in the foreground. Laura and Edie</i>
Page 44	<i>Black-and-white photograph of a woman in a floral dress, hands raised to her chest, her head enclosed in a dark tulle and lace hood with a pale fabric rose covering her face. Rose Mask</i>
Page 74	<i>Photograph — street fruit-sellers and boys behind heaps of grapes Captioned Calcutta 1975</i>
Page 75	<i>Photograph — camel standing before a circus tent wall Captioned Circus—Los Angeles 1977 / photograph — ostrich in sunlight beside a parked car Captioned Beverly Hills—1977</i>
Page 76	<i>Photograph — legs of costumed skaters on the ice Captioned Ice Capades—Los Angeles 1977 / photograph — child standing before framed carnival paintings at a ride entrance Captioned Carnival Ride Entrance, Los Angeles County Fair 1970</i>
Page 77	<i>Photograph — tourists at a stone wall overlooking a canyon Captioned Scenic View—Oregon 1976 / photograph — headstones, crosses and monuments in shadow Captioned Graveyard—Oregon 1976</i>
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Page 95	<i>Moving, Los Angeles 1976 / Bill and Ester, West Hollywood, 1976</i>
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Page 111	<i>Close-up of a car windscreen and bonnet punctured with bullet holes.</i>
Page 112	<i>A man speaking into a microphone in front of a large KIDNAPPED poster.</i>
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Page 114	<i>An elderly man in an academic gown holding a bound volume.</i>
Page 115	<i>A woman in a wheelchair being pushed along a city street.</i>
Page 116	<i>Full-bleed plate: a laughing man in a crowd, a hat filling the foreground.</i>
Page 134	<i>A high-contrast plate of a reclining figure.</i>
Page 135	<i>An open book with a face printed across the page. / A slatted venetian-blind abstraction.</i>

INTERVIEW

Deena Metzger

A conversation which took place on the warm night of August 24, 1977, at one end of a long dinner table in Deena Metzger's house in Studio City, California. Questioned and questioner had met only twice before, briefly, at large gatherings. The interviewer was Leland Hickman, and after the wine had been poured—:

Who are you, Deena Metzger?

DEENA METZGER: (Taken aback; laughing) Oh, come on! No, you can't say *that!* I mean—you know—what do I say to that?

No thoughts on the subject?

Oh, I mean, I could begin anywhere. I'm a writer, a political woman, a feminist, someone who believes in friendship, someone who has a lot of connection with people, some very deep connections with certain causes. I have a deep sense of the power of the creative; the healing power of the creative. Want to make the revolution; don't like the world we live in, yet I have the best of all possible lives. So I suppose there are contradictions in my work. I don't know—is that close to it?

That's a marvellous answer. Do you feel that you address yourself mostly to women in your work?

I think women respond to my work very powerfully because, I think, I really do write with a new tone. Particularly the later work is written from a woman's sensibility, really deals with a woman's experience. But it's really written for all people, because I think it's absolutely essential that that kind of experience be shared and known by everyone. And I write from that experience because that's what I know very deeply, but it's not an exclusive desire. There are a lot of things that I write that are—well, I'll give you an example: I did a reading in New York and some people who were Marxists walked out because, they said, my stuff was too feminist, and feminists walked out because, they said, the stuff was too Marxist, and so, you know, what do you do?

That's interesting—do you understand the differentiation they were trying to make, the thing they were pointing at that wasn't Marxist about feminism, not feminist about Marxism?

Well, I think feminism and Marxism come together. I think that's probably also an advanced position.

Yours is an advanced position? I wouldn't assume that that would be an advanced position. I would just assume that that was just naturally so.

No. No. I mean, as in any kind of movement, at the beginning, when movements are threatened, then people want to know what they are, in and of themselves, and if you have another alliance, they feel like it takes away from them. So feminism says that the basic trouble in the world is rooted in male-female conflict; the Marxists say that the basic trouble in the world is rooted in the economic conflict. Well, it's probably a little of both as far as I'm concerned, and what's really *more* interesting to me is that the *forms*, ideally, that come out of both feminism and Marxism are similar: they're collective and not hierarchical; they're cooperative. They care about people as individuals instead of in terms of class, money and power, etcetera, and so it really seems to me that the two systems would come together. I don't remember what the question was—oh, yes: who I write for. I think I really write for people who are willing to change, because I think there is a kind of transformational process that's implied in my work, particularly the fiction, and I write to connect to that place in human beings, too—what we can aspire to, what we can learn, how deep we can go, how far we can go.

It's a question of how far we can change ourselves. . . .

Yeah. . . .

This is a hard question:

Okay.

And it has many interpretations—I suppose you could take it anywhere: What is your assessment of your work at this point?

Well, there's a very much nicer answer to that question *now* than there would have been two years ago, because I really have very strong feelings about my work, and I think that there's just been major development. And that the last three books that I've written are really major books. And I'm ready to say that publicly. I think *Scars on the Body Politic* is a breakthrough novel. It's an entirely new form and entirely new sensibility and it's very powerful and it's hard to read. It's overwhelming; it has emotional tension that I understand gets difficult for people. They feel when they read my work that it's overwhelming and there's not enough discretion, there are not enough rhythmic breaks, that it doesn't have plot, etcetera. But that doesn't interest me, because I think there really is something else there and I think that it was a successful attempt to do something that I don't know has ever been done before. It really does show how the basic relationship between men

and women is transposed into political forms, and how certain of the ways men and women interact with each other lead to fascism and certain ways that we really can come together lead to more collective kinds of things. I think someone could look at my work and say, "Well, you know, maybe her craft isn't so terrific"—I'm not a polished kind of writer, like a Nabokov; I don't have that kind of control of language, or form. But I think there's something else there that certainly makes up for it. And I think something really important happened in that book—

Scars on the Body Politic. . . .

Yeah. I started out writing it after I'd been to Chile in '72, and it started out being a very positive book. And in the middle of the writing of the book, the coup occurred, which was then '73. I was very active at the time, and we started making a film about Chile and stuff. When I had time I still kept writing the book, but it wasn't going. And it took me about—

You were there during the coup?

I was there the year before the coup, so I was there, oh, beginning to have fears about what would happen. But in terms of looking at the system itself, I was there during the height of optimism and human possibility. I'd never seen anything like that before.

So Scars on the Body Politic is a book about the Chilean experience, as you saw it?

Yes. Yes. And, anyway, I looked back after about two months, and I looked at the stuff and I realized that it was completely fragmented. It wasn't that I suddenly didn't know how to write. It was that reality had been shattered; consequently, the book had been shattered—I mean, there's a real relationship between life and art; they're not two separate things. And so, what was I going to do? And I thought, well, I can throw the book away, or I can pretend that the coup never happened. Impossible solutions. Or, what I finally did, I absolutely stopped the book and I say to the reader, This is the place where the book was interrupted, and this is what happened and I have to tell you. And then the book alters, of course. And it's very interesting because suddenly things that I saw that I didn't know what they meant but they'd come into the fabric of the book—a swastika in a telephone booth at UCLA right before I left, which stuck in my mind—suddenly these images emerged like through a lithograph stone, and I began to see the import of them, the signs of what was coming. And I think that's really important about my work—that it really does correspond to life, deeply connected not only to my own life, my own body, my own experience, but to what's going on with women, what's going on with people, what's going on in the world, and it deals with that interaction. So that's *Scars*. After that, I wrote *The Book of Hags*.

Well, in *The Book of Hags*, you speak about a change of form that happens while you're writing. Was that resonance from the Chilean book or is it something that you picked up from that experience, as a "formal thing?"

In *Scars*, there are two voices, essentially: there's the narrative of what's going on and then there are mythic interludes. The first part of the book deals with the relationship of Adam and Eve; the second part of the book deals with Abraham and Sarah. What I tried to do was to show that we live our lives but we live them in a context. I guess I'm always interested in the relationship of the personal, historical and mythic. Those three things kind of came together. How Adam and Eve interrelate is an analogue of how the men and women traveling to Chile interrelate, is an analogue of the whole political system that develops. And part of that is there in *Hags*, where Alma is like history—*The old woman*. . . .

The old woman—is a kind of voiceless history, all-women, inarticulate and eloquent at the same time. There's the writer who's the innocent, who doesn't know what's going on; she's writing the book, she's like a—

You mean the basic writer—

Yeah—Diana, the basic writer of the novel, the character of Diana. She's a medium, more or less. She knows something's going on, she knows she's terrified, she knows she's going all the way down to her depths, but she doesn't quite understand what's happening. She writes to another woman who knows more than she does but who won't tell her anything, because you've got to experience—being told doesn't mean anything. Then there's a friend who's a kind of witness. That book ties voices together in different ways and that's what I'm really interested in; I think that's part of women's culture, we don't do it ourselves.

I was wondering if you didn't get that from some of the women "new novelists" in France.

Well, it has to come from there. I was very close to Anais Nin for the last ten years; *loved* Duras; Marguerite Young—Virginia Woolf, too—I mean, there's a tone, there's a real different tone. And what I looked for was a way to express what I was feeling, what the world looked like to me.

When were you doing this looking, searching?

Oh, I think I did it from the very beginning, from when I started writing, about 15-16 years ago. But it really is developed in *Scars on the Body Politic*—I *really* know what I'm doing there. Not while I'm doing it. I mean after the fact. Same in *The Book of Hags*, but I guess what's really powerful now in retrospect, about *The Book of Hags*, is that in addition to everything else, it's a book on cancer—where I think I

knew everything about cancer, without knowing anything. I write in that book, "This is the book I would write if I were to die in a year.

What does it mean when you say, in The Book of Hags, that the women who got cancer went mad first and then because that created such fear in the people around them, they were 'cured'—made to 'smile'—and the cancer came from being closed up. What does all that mean?

Well, I think it means just that. I think it means that women do not get a chance to say what they have to say, in part because there were, or are, no forms to say it in, and the silence explodes out of them—first in madness, then in cancer. And it is *very* hard to find the languages for saying what women need and want to say. It's like . . . you want to say "bananas" and there's no word for bananas.

For women?

Yeah.

Why is that?

That's the whole history of women's oppression. It's a major question. There's one place where I've said, "Women threaten the social order." And I think we can just start from there—I think that's a *whole* history. And what language has been developed, men have developed. Men have developed language and public institutions and public forms. Women have been enclosed in the home and kind of kept back, separated from each other without the opportunity to create their own language.

So you see your writing in the context of the development of women's language.

Yeah. But I think you will see when you read *Tree* that—well, I think it was six months after I finished *Hags* that I discovered that I had cancer.

That's incredible—you know, I always have the feeling when I'm reading your work that I'm being spoken to by some dark prophetess. . . .

Well, that was the feeling I had. And, in fact, my unconscious knew everything. I mean, not only knew, obviously, that the seeds of cancer were there, but it knew the causes. And in the most brilliant way—and I can say that, because I don't take responsibility for it. This *Voice* speaks!

I think that unless you had read The Book of Hags, what you just said wouldn't make much sense.

Yes.

Is it possible to say it without writing another poem?

You mean explain what I've just explained? Just that there's a point of writing where, I guess, the ego moves away and you move down to a very dark source, and deep source, where all the voices, dead and alive, of the culture, move through you. You're no longer the manipulator. You're just the flute that's played. If you're lucky.

I want to ask you when this experience first occurred to you—did that [first] happen in The Book of Hags?

It happened in *Scars*, too.

In Scars, before that.

A lot of my writing has been unconscious. When I was writing my second novel, I would take my kids to nursery school—this happened every single day—I'd get up to the top of the hill towards my house and feel blinding pain in my head and say, oh god, I can't write today. Then I'd say, well, you know, the kids are in nursery school for at least three hours, you'd better do it. So then I would go down there and then I would move to my study, thinking about what I was going to write that day, and when I got down there I had already written it the day before. Completely forgotten. And this happened every single day. It's something that really happens when I write; it's like a cave opens.

When you write, what do you do—lock yourself in a room for hours?

I used to have to. I don't anymore. I kind of sit down for three or four hours. I need to have that kind of time. Don't answer the phone. Try not to go to the refrigerator too often. I usually get nervous and eat a carrot or string bean or something because the noise is very distracting, and then, you know, you sit there and you write. Sometimes it doesn't come. I mean, *I've never yet learned what's very clear*—that if I have one good writing day out of three, I'm lucky. It always feels awful. Always feels to me like I'm not productive. I apparently am, but I haven't gotten it into my puritan head yet that I am.

Are you married now?

No.

Let's talk about way back when.

Okay.

When you got fired from a job. Can you tell me about that?

Sure. I was teaching English Comp, a session on censorship. I assigned several Supreme Court decisions to the class and thought that the students should have the opportunity to apply them as an exercise. I thought if I gave them a piece of

printed material, they'd already know it was "approved"—*ipso facto*, it was clear, it wouldn't be an exercise. So I gave them something which I'd written myself which was unpublished, to decide whether it was pornographic or not. And there was another important reason for doing that, because at that particular time, there was the Ralph Ginzburg decision, where the *intent* of the author was important, and I knew what the intent of the poem was. And I went through the usual stuff: "Is there anyone in the class under eighteen? If you'll be offended by strong language, I'll give you another lesson." Whatever.

Where was this?

Los Angeles Valley College. I was using a textbook which had "four-letter words." It had "fuck" in it—so it was just kind of a formality that I did that. And a twenty-five-year-old ex-Marine, divorced man with a child, turned me in, to his Mormon minister. The student and the minister were so offended by this poem that they distributed it in the *thousands* throughout the state. Literally. It was a time when the Right was making a stab to gain control of the state through the educational system. They had been going through all other areas, but they were really hitting the educational system. There was a big election to divide the Board of Education from the Junior College Board—that was the June that it was split—and they'd come together as a force to take that board over, which, in fact, they did. They elected four people out of seven. And it was 1969, so it was just the very end of student activism. The whole country was really mad at kids, long hair, this kind of stuff. And there was a lot underneath that didn't come out in the trial. I was accused of doing draft counselling; I was accused of being Jewish; I was accused of coming from New York. But, essentially, they chose a woman without a very public radical reputation, but with some kind of radical reputation, and they were really out to see if they could "get the Movement." It was the same time Angela Davis was fired; the two cases occurred at once. And it was a very long and difficult three-and-one-half-year fight to win, which we did, in the state Supreme Court. I was reinstated.

Did you go back to work there?

Oh, yeah. That seemed very important at the time to me, that—statement. I was teaching at California Institute of the Arts, but I went back to Valley, took on that job in addition half-time, just to show the bastards.

Personally it was distressing?

Oh, personally it was really hard. In retrospect, I can say I understand what the Fifties were like. I really know what it's like to be blacklisted, really can understand what that time was like for people, and that's important political history.

The experience was important educationally to you.

Oh, yeah. You make a choice about whether you can get something out of an experience. I decided I was not going to crack up, I was not going to go under, I was going to get what I could from it. And I think I came out a very strong woman. Much stronger than when I went in. That was major.

On the question of craft—do you have things to say about that? Do you teach writing?

Yes. I think craft is courage—courage of attention to the things that matter. It is really knowing what you want to say and going after it, no matter how hard it is. Somehow, craft is related to content. You're reaching for something and it's not going to be said or expressed unless it's in a certain shape. And you have to remember the farthest point of your vision and find the shape that goes for it, no matter how far out it seems. Just paying attention; being really relentless in pursuing that, and being disciplined. But it has a lot to do with courage

How do you tell a student the ways of knowing that a thing has been reached?

Well, I try to have him or her look at the whole work and what all the messages of the work are, to see if it's integrated. Often what happens in a student's work is that it just contradicts itself. They start out to write something happy and they're writing something black. They just don't see the whole thing. So I think the way you get it crafted then is through content, so that it all comes together, with only useful contradictions. I talk about listening to rhythms; have them read things out loud.

Where are you teaching now?

I teach privately, and I teach at the Woman's Building, a public center for women's culture, in downtown Los Angeles.

How long has it been in existence?

This is our fifth year. We have a two-year, intensive feminist educational program. We have an extension program. Lectures, performances, etcetera. I teach writing there, essentially.

You were also involved in a play. . . .

I wrote a play. Jeremy Blahnik directed it. We did a writing workshop with women over seventy and women under thirty, pairing older women with each of the younger women so that they could compare life histories and take them back and forth and try to create a relationship. Then we took everything that was said in the class, everything that was written and what transpired in these visits between the younger and older women, and with Jeremy and two other women, Paula Menger and Theresa De Ieso, created a script. Then we put it on. Jeremy actually

used the older women in the production, and it was very exciting. It's about relationship across generations.

[?]sis on aging and much older women, as though you're trying to imagine the experience.

I don't know where that comes from. Always surprises me to find it. But it's been there in *Scars* and in *Book of Hags*.

It's a very beautiful, very moving part of your work. What was your first novel like?

The first-written was a book called *Waterwall*. I wrote it when I was twenty-five. It's a *first* novel. You know. Should be in a drawer.

Do you see it in your later work?

I can see some kind of stylistic beginnings. Even at the beginning I didn't write a realistic novel. I knew there were moments when the inner voice begins to emerge, which is probably the most pronounced thing in my work.

Were you writing poetry all along, too?

Oh, as a kid writes poetry. You know. A kid always writes poems now and then.

You consider that you write a poem now "as a kid writes poetry?"

In the last year, I started liking my poetry, but I haven't until then. I didn't like my prose until about three years ago.

What was it that convinced you—was there any incident or was it an accumulation of things?

What convinced me was not so much the quality of the work but the sense that I really was learning to write with the inner voice rather than the outer voice.

Then it wasn't any exterior event, like acceptance or applause?

If I had had to wait for external events, I would not be writing. It's just this sense that there was something happening that was really important. I wrote a book [after *Waterwall*] called *What Rough Beast?*. Chapters of it were published. Anais Nin read it and she was very encouraging. She really helped me see what that was about. That it really is an interior novel. And a little prophetic, I suppose, about my life. It was about a tiger that got loose from Jungle Land—only it was not, as the typical novel would be, about how people responded to it; it was written from the inside of this beast, what it would be like to be loose in this kind of world that we live in. The third book was a book called *Flying with a Rock*. That comes from that section in Carlos Castaneda's book where he's about to turn into a crow and fly, and he gets scared and he says to Don Juan, "What if I tie myself to a rock?" And

Don Juan says, "Well, if you want to fly with a rock—then fly with a rock." It was about the question of madness, about how far you can go, how far we can fly, with enough rock perhaps, so that we don't go completely mad, so that we stay in some kind of balance in the world but still fly. It has a bit of the surreal; different voices. In part, it's about a woman who thinks she's pregnant with an old Indian who's been inside her for forty years, and at the end of the book, the Indian's born. You take that symbol, that image, and deal with it on perfectly realistic terms and see what happens—because we *do* walk around with those things inside of us, and those images, and we act upon them as if they're really real but we don't tell anyone outside in the world. And I wanted to show that from the inside. Then I wrote *Skin: Shadows/SILENCE* and that's the first which has been published in its entirety.

And the only one, to date. [Skin:Shadows/SILENCE: a love letter in the form of a novel. West Coast Poetry Review, 1976. 1127 Codel Way, Reno, NV 89503.] . . . What's the relationship in your writing between reality and fantasy?

What's the division in your mind between the two? You see, I don't think they're separate. I think that's an arbitrary division.

Nothing's divided in your approach. Right. I'm really obsessed with connection, relationship, fusion, togetherness. *Restoring* it. Some of *Skin* is autobiographical, clearly; some of it isn't. I'm not Héloïse, of Héloïse and Abelard, and yet when I wrote that piece, it came from as true a source as when I write a piece about something that happened when I was three years old. In a sense, it's all memory: I have to go back to that three-year-old girl and I have to go into Héloïse. Both seem simple and both are as easy to do, with as much chance of accuracy and as much chance of lying. What that book [*Skin:Shadows/SILENCE*] attempted to do was to put down what *really* happens when people make love, what *really* happens when those bodies come together, the anger, and the beauty. The disembodied meaning of it seems to me to be the true event, and the physical act is just arbitrary.

One of the most uncomfortable scenes in Skin is the office scene, the rape scene [a scene in an office on a campus in which the narrator is raped by an unknown intruder].

Yes. And it's absolutely accurate.

That's a reality?

Yeah.

Well, that's frightening. That's frightening.

It's written, in a sense, in the driest form.

It's terrible Rape is very much one of your themes, along with release and relationship. You can't really be sure, however, of the reality of the incident because of the date you give it in the margin—long after the book was even published—July 22, 1977.

I was playing with people wanting to know, Did this really, really happen?

Incredible—it worked. Because I kept asking the question. Why were you doing that?

If it didn't happen to me, it could have happened to another woman. That is what rape is like. I don't want the book read as, you know, someone saying, Oh! she was with this lover, and this is what happened to her, and so forth. I want it to be about women, women's experience. You have to give it enough concrete evidence so that it doesn't get abstract and so that you understand what happens, but *it's not important that it happened to Deena Metzger*. What I'm really trying to get at is what it is like to be a woman. So there are things that I made up—dates, biographies. And the quotes in the margins [*from such authors as Marguerite Young, Norman O. Brown, Theodor Reik, Marguerite Duras, Anais Nin, Djuna Barnes, etc.*] are there to show that there's a real relationship between private experience and the public world. That's the theme that I develop later in *Scars on the Body Politic*. What happens in our private lives is magnified to happen at large in the public world. There's a relationship between what happens between men and women and bombs that are dropped on Vietnam.

These things are in your work a lot—holocaust, concentrations camps

And we make the holocaust on each other and we don't realize that it's the Holocaust. It *is*! Little things, you don't even notice.

Is it possible to be aware of them?

Yeah, I think so. I think if you begin to live your life with real attention, begin to really value your experience, also paying attention to the moments of real connection and loving so that you know the difference And the tiny atrocities—some of them are cultural, habitual, not malicious [Little everyday slights which make you] feel so completely unknown and absolutely isolated.

Well, maybe it's morbidity, but I still have curiosity about that—event

Okay. What do you want to know?

You mention [in Skin] that the rapist could be an acquaintance or a stranger. Is that a deliberate hint?

I didn't know at the moment. I was trying to give a feeling. It turned out I didn't know the person.

There was more that happened then after he left—you did find out who it was?

Oh, yes.

What was that experience like? Can you talk about that—or do you want to?

Well, I've talked about it so much. Because I decided, in a sense, to go public with it. I wrote an article about it for the *American Journal of Psychiatry* [April 1976: "It Is Always the Woman Who Is Raped," by Deena Metzger, Ph.D.], in which I talked about what that experience meant.

[Excerpts from the article:] *"Rape is an aggressive act against women as woman. The rapist is educated to his behavior by his society, and rape is the extreme manifestation of approved activities in which one segment of society dominates another. Rape is a ritual of power.*

" Rape is the assault of a man on a woman, but it also the symbolic enactment of social and cultural attitudes. On one level, perhaps unconscious, it is a gross and extreme form of social regulation by which woman is brutally stripped of her humanity and confronted with her definition as a nonperson, a function.

" Rape asserts only combat, brutalizing the communal aspect of sexuality, destroying meaning, relationship, and person, creating a universe of emptiness and ontological terror. There is no distinction between the male social intent and the private female response. A woman who is raped understands her condition with metaphysical clarity.

"Rape is mythically asserted, artistically glorified, historically condoned, and symbolically urged in the media and in advertising"]

What was particularly horrible for me about it is that it happened in 1967, so it was before the woman's movement, and before women talked about it, before you could say you were raped without being embarrassed or mortified. We didn't know how to respond and we all went a little crazy. I felt a terrible sense of isolation and alienation for the first time in my life. I felt very separate from everyone around me. I understood, intellectually, that people really loved me, but I was unable to take it in. That was like within twenty-four hours—before that, I was really *surrounded* by loving friends, husband, family, but it is a real crime against the person. I think that's its political message, too. It's an attempt to reduce a human being to nothingness. And it works.

[*"A function is not a person. Rape is one manifestation of society's intent to depersonalize woman. It separates the woman from her humanity. Reduced instantly from person to object, property, flesh, vessel, the woman is immediately separated from anyone or anything that can comfort her. The basic experience of rape is isolation. Humanity depends*

on community, and the effect of rape is to destroy simultaneously the sense of community and the sense of person

"Because women's assertion of self conflicts with social and cultural patterns and with role and biology, the loss, after achievement, is grave. Rape is the instant proof of unalterable conditions, the erosion of years of work. Contemporary feminism has only begun to change this condition. The very unique interest of women in autobiography is a sign of the difficulty women have with identity. Where men always have asked, 'What is the meaning of my life?' women are beginning to simply ask, 'Do I have a life?' The effect of rape is the same whether the victim is a young girl, virgin, mother, or old woman. Rape is a crime against the person, not against the hymen.

"My experience and that of the women I know tells me there is no treatment for rape other than community"]

It turned out that the rapist was just released from jail. He had been in for rape. The pattern of the crime was exactly the pattern in my particular case, and the story was that his probation officer said that he was too far from the scene of the crime to have committed it. Now, I think what happened is that the school system squashed it. They didn't want it known that a faculty member was raped on a college campus. That's my interpretation of what happened.

["The rapist acts for the society, concretizing certain ideas through his behavior. He is often marginally integrated into the society, and rape is the way he affiliates himself, if not through the act, then through the attitudes. Through rape he asserts power and possession in a common violent and spontaneous action. By choosing to assert himself against woman and her body, he—like church, state, schools, advertisers, and the media—is simply asserting certain rights and prerogatives over woman, using her for his own purposes. He is translating cultural thoughts into action

"Because rape is an act of power that male society will not undermine, the woman is defiled The woman is suspect while the man is protected. Society asserts he is ill, marginal, or falsely accused. Men protect his rights and worry that the accusation may be false or the evidence contrived. The rapist is protected because he is themselves. The issue is always power. Rape, like the immaculate conception, becomes an act without an actor—the immaculate defilement

"The raped young woman goes from nonbeing to Nonbeing—to not being at all

"I was raped at gunpoint. Later, lying naked on the floor, I could only whisper over and over again, 'One doesn't treat people like this'

". . . . I decided to make this public in order to break some of the silence and isolation which reinforces the personlessness of women. The private voice in the public sphere

confirms our common experience through which we begin to assert ourselves"]

It took a while. It really took a while to recover. But I didn't *know* then. In '67, we didn't *know* the impact of these things, how long it took to recover, what we needed, to heal ourselves. But what I tried to do in [*Skin*] is not to describe it, but to try to give someone the feeling of what it's like. In this question of what's the difference between the fantasy and the reality, I will use the fantasy, so to speak, the image, in order to get at the reality And I always tell that to students. You know, when they're writing the story, they sometimes lose the whole thing, they lose the poem, they lose the story—they say, But that's how it *happened!* Fidelity to the actuality, the mundane reality, keeps them from going to the importance of something. So that very often in order to tell the truth you have to create a lie. We have this fetishistic sense of property and dates. We want to possess them as they are. I don't have that kind of attachment to concrete reality. I have a real attachment to what I think is the truth of a situation, the feelings of it.

What was the next book?

Scars on the Body Politic.

Tell me, are you getting tired?

No.

Are you having a good time?

Yes! [She's laughing.] Isn't that terrible? You learn things. You see your own history in perspective. I guess if you do it a lot, it would get awful. But I don't do it a lot, so

Scars is an unpublished book And it's very political?

Well, it's very much *in* the body, and it's also political. It's very sexual, like *Skin: Shadows* is sexual. The metaphor of *Scars on the Body Politic* is the following: That Eve is built upon a rib that belongs to someone else. She knows instantly what a relationship is. She carries within her the Other. And Adam has the hole in his side, so he is separate. And that there is a basic kind of tension between them. And that separateness, when it's allowed to exist, leads to hierarchy, leads to specialness, leads to fascism. And that if you can really develop your relationship on empathy, taking someone else *into* you, then you can develop collective societies. That metaphor is there as I go all through the Adam and Eve myth and hold God very much responsible. I think he's an absolute bastard. It's very clear, if you look at the Bible—he teaches murder immediately, right after they're kicked out of the Garden. You see what we're taught in terms of the Bible and you see what happens between men and women, and then you see how political societies

develop—it's just inevitable. All this, of course, within a story. There's a narrative which is about a trip that I actually took down the coast of Latin America through Mexico to Chile.

And that's the book that we spoke of at the beginning, which was exploded by the coup.

Yes. Yes. And I feel good about that book, because I got a letter from a friend of mine who is in exile; he was very important in Chile, a very important writer. And he said, "You really remember things that I didn't remember, things that I had forgotten. It's amazing to me that a North American who'd been there for such a short time could have seen it so well and loved it so much." And he really thanked me and said it's one of the best things that's come out of that time. Well, that moved me very deeply. I'd like the book to be out because I'd like to give it to my Chilean friends.

Is it being "looked at?"

Oh, yeah, it's being looked at in New York. You know . . . It's not commercial.

What do you feel about the current publishing policies of New York publishers, publishing not what's good but what's marketable?

I'm sure that there are thousands of wonderful novelists. I *know* that there are thousands of wonderful poets, because I know some of them myself.

Don't you think the situation has always been so, but it's worse now than it was?

It's really worse. It's really awful.

Do you think a writer should try to write so that the work is marketable?

No. I think someone could, I guess, but I don't know how you do it.

Do you think it is possible to do that and still be authentic?

I think you have to write what you want to write. I think that's just how it is. You have to write what you have to write and you have to write what needs to be written.

Isn't it a very corrupt state of affairs, in which art simply can't be born, or human beings cannot develop?

I'm not interested in having my work published just to have *my* work published. I guess you could say, Well, I wrote this novel and it's a nice novel and it got published. But so what? It seems to me that the reason you want your work out is because it's important that that work be out. Not that you wrote it, but that somehow you were fortunate enough to write something that really says something. If New York isn't going to publish it, that's a real dilemma. Because you want the work *out*; you want people to read it. That's what the point is, and if you

write something else that's not so important and it does get published, so what? Some people do get lucky. There *are* some important things that come out. I have a friend, Susan Yankowitz, who wrote a wonderful book that's come out, *Silent Witness*. Anais' books eventually got out. Marguerite Young's *Miss Mackintosh, My Darling* got out. Fifty years later, people are reading Virginia Woolf . . .

You mention only women in this context. Do you feel that as far as major New York publication, or publication anywhere, is concerned, that women have a harder problem than men do?

Yes. I think men get their work published more easily because they are writing in the mode that the establishment recognizes.

I see. Do you notice that in L.A. poetry? Do you feel that L.A. men poets are writing in a mode that a small establishment recognizes, whereas women poets are not?

Well, I don't feel a problem in L.A. because I haven't been around the writing scene, really. But beginning to know a little about it, I have met some wonderful unpublished poets.

What are their names?

There's Dennis Phillips. Another is Liza Braude . . . But who are the novelists in L.A.? Are there some novelists that we don't know?

Kate Ellen Braverman's written a book. You mean women?

Men or women. Is it possible that there are really wonderful novelists in this city that we haven't heard about?

I wouldn't know. Maybe we'll get some responses from this . . . I've only heard the Black Box tape of The Book of Hags—which is just the first third of the book [on cassette/60 tapes, No. Ten in series, published by Black Box, P.O. Box 4174, Washington, D.C. 20015] . . . What happens in the unrecorded, unpublished final two-thirds of the novel?

Madness comes in a lot. There's a young student who goes mad. There's another woman who dies of cancer. There's a lot more madness and cancer—a documentation of it, and a slow awakening. And more of Alma. You have a sense in the novel of Alma's beginning to awaken. At one point, she moves to the sea and she swims in it and she feels her body, and the sense of what it is like, the awakening.

This is the old lady, the all-women . . .

The old woman. The old woman. So she at least begins to come alive. There's a scene when she goes to bed. This is what it's like for an old woman going to bed,

how different it is, who shuts the light? who tucks her in? the sense of loneliness. Ana is writing the book because she's afraid of getting cancer, she's afraid of dying.

She's afraid of closing up; she has to stay open.

Yeah. Yeah. And she just hears these voices and she doesn't know where they come from, or what. What are these demons? who's telling her all this stuff? and she suddenly feels that she's in great danger, and unless she writes, unless she keeps the source open, that she will die. Then there's a point in the book where she has a very important dream, about an inner torturer, essentially. She dreams that dream and she understands that the torturer is not only on the outside but on the inside, and she notices that that dream happened—as, in fact, it did happen, in life—exactly a year to the point of the book being started; so that she's gone through that year and she can say, "I am a survivor."

This book is the book in which the theme of survival becomes a major one. Is it carried forward into Tree?

Tree is really about survival. "Tree" started out being an anagram of "Transformative Evolutionary Love" or "Energy" or something like that, then I threw that out. *Tree* is about my experience when I discovered I had cancer; how and why I decided to have surgery; about healing. It is about the relationship between human beings and healing, about how we heal each other, which I really felt in a very, very deep way. It's about how we have to take responsibility for our own illness at the same time that we know the society causes it; at the same time not feeling guilty but nevertheless doing what we can to cure ourselves. And there's a passage in which I see that I was taken care of in this particular moment *exactly* in the same way that I took care of friends of mine who were under fire during the coup in Chile. I really try to explore the theme that people can do it—which we're just *infants* in knowing—how we can really take care of each other with love. And I really felt that it worked. I could tell, when people came to see me, the energy that they brought and the difference it made. It's the first book I wrote with humor in it, which is amazing because it was written in the hospital.

Did you investigate that? That strange development?

Well, I think I changed a lot. I think cancer is a transformative disease and the book is about the life force.

In a sense, cancer has been sent to change societies?—by that Biblical God?

[Laughing:] Well, someone once told me about a man who had cancer and afterward he wanted to do a bumper strip that said, "Cancer Is The Answer!"

Without having read your books, I could never have understood that!

[More laughter:] *I don't recommend* cancer to change your life. I think it's time we learned how to change our life *before* we get cancer. But it is interesting. That disease does force a reckoning that I think no other disease forces. [And she pours more wine.]

I want to talk now about the blue tone.

That's a discovery, not a creation. In the sense that we discover electricity—it's always there, it's just that nobody named it before. I had the sense, after I finished *Tree*, which is about a different kind of energy, that maybe my mission in life is to discover the inner energy system. We have the blue tone and we have *Tree*, and there must be other kinds of waves of energy.

The blue tone. This is something that comes at the end of The Book of Hags. That's the first time it makes its appearance in your writing? What happened then that made that tone start being available to you and others? I think what that comes out of is my being in the movement. Three or four years before, I had written a paper on women's conversation, in which I tried to analyze how we talk to each other, which feels to me different from the way men talk to each other, different from the way men and women talk to each other, and different from the conversation people have in the public world. Women, I think, talk to each other to make a connection in what they share together, as opposed to what sets them apart. I think the basic focus of women's conversation is to create community and to take care of each other, so that when women are talking to each other, they are comforting each other. The exchange of information is often secondary. The essential thing is the creation of that community. Men are much more competitive. They make use of various ways to show off their special knowledge. Often, they say, women have trivial conversations—women talk about recipes and stuff like that. Women go down to the common denominator, because they want to come to a shared place—where's the place of empathy? where's the place of understanding? where's the place where we can come together? And that's what the blue tone is. Of course, it's dangerous to the public world, because it does threaten institutions. It threatens competition. It threatens power. It threatens hierarchy. Because it's based upon human interaction, caring and nurturance.

Which is the opposite of this society, this culture.

Yeah. And what happens is that women have been so highly isolated within the last fifty or sixty years since the family broke up, that when women get together now, particularly those women who are around the movement, and you sit down and you touch hands—you don't have to *say* any of this stuff—there's just the sense of something wonderful and magical happening. A sense of commitment, a sense

of helping each other and building something together. It can happen with a stranger; it can happen on line in a supermarket, in an airplane, in the ladies' room—there's an incredible sense of intimacy and trust. I felt it when I was in Cuba in '73. We were invited out to go with some couples to some affair that was really very formal and difficult, and we didn't want to go but we had to go. Halfway through, I got up to go to the bathroom, and lo and behold, as when I was fourteen and dating, the old tradition still held, even though in another country. The women got up to go with me. My theory is that it's because the bathroom is the only female place in a public institution. This is the women's room, the place where you can allow your body to be; little girls tell secrets in the bathroom. There was this big powder room; I sat down to comb my hair and they sat down with me. Other women came in. We must have sat there about three-quarters of an hour. It was the most intimate, honest conversation that I had in Cuba. We talked about everything. We talked about kids, politics, revolution, recipes—and that's the other thing about women's conversation: it has those multiple levels. You can talk about the most intimate or public, the most abstract or personal things, all at once.

Everything is connected to the male-female relationship?

Well, not everything, but that's a good start.

What makes you say "not everything?"

Because I think we could do an economic analysis, and I could say, instead of "patriarchy"—I could say, "capitalist society." It's probably industrial-technological society more than anything else. But it gets back to the relationship between men and women because men have always been in charge.

Well, I'm gay—at least, I've always identified with being gay. And in my work there's this urge away from a patriarchal society. Do you have any feelings about the situation of the gay in a patriarchal society?

Must be like the woman's situation.

Like it?

In terms of being outside the culture, of not seeing your own reality.

You mean, women feel like I do?

Yeah, or *you* feel like *we* do.

You mean, women actually feel that way?

[Much laughter:] No???

I'm not arguing with it; I'm just surprised. I've never heard a statement quite like that. It's incredible.

I think that's true of women, gay people, ethnics—I know, for example, in the woman's movement, lesbian women feel that their sexuality implies a culture and a whole different way of looking at the world and that they feel very much outside the forms of the culture—not only because they're women but because they're lesbian. Not because of the sexual aspect of being a lesbian, but because of the cultural aspect. They have different values. What I'm talking about is obviously not about *all* women, and it doesn't mean that *all men* are excluded. I think that's important. But if we can make these forms public, we can all share in them, in the way that I've shared in male culture, patriarchal culture. I think that woman's culture is available to other people. But I just assume, from the gay men that I know, if I can project from that, that you must walk around with a terrible sense of alienation. This is not the way I would put the world together.

It is difficult to make people understand that alienation—people who know you very well.

The very act of loving someone, whom it is considered improper to love, creates —

It is almost very difficult for gay people to love each other.

—But if one is willing to do that, if one attempts to do that, if one attempts to create a relationship, that already creates a different kind of person. Just that effort of doing it. And the loneliness of it.

I was going to ask you that question [later on], but it came up before I realized it would. But, anyway, we'll go on to something else. Unless you have more to say about that?

I don't think so.

This has been a fabulous conversation!

Really?

Really. It's been like getting to know you, in a way. About the blue tone—and this is a related question—

Do you feel—Can I ask you a question? Did you feel—hurt by it?

By the blue tone?

Did you feel left out? Did you feel angry?

As a man? Yeah, I felt like I wanted to be a part of the blue tone. That was—with women—I didn't feel like you were excluding me, rather that you were inviting me in, but As for actual, practical . . . being with other men in the blue tone With certain gay men I've had this feeling. Not always. Not often. But it's been there, and it's been a major part of my life. But with straight men, it's always compromised in some way; it's not total. Anyway, what am I telling you? You're interviewing me now.

Isn't that okay?

Sure. Yeah. The blue tone. When you got onto that subject, I was very moved by it, and I thought it was very beautiful, and that it will—when your work gets well-known, which it will be—be one of the things that will be part of the American mind, I think.

[Barely audible] Isn't that nice . . .

Related to the blue tone are these women in the book and in your life—well, let's put it this old way: Do the characters in your book have real-life counterparts?

Arda is Barbara Myerhoff, who is my oldest and dearest friend. There's a whole section in the book that's about Anais. Aurora is a woman [who died of cancer] named Ruth Adams, who is my friend Barbara's very, very dear friend, and Barbara was and is still very profoundly affected by her death. I was very affected by it, sharing it more through Barbara—I knew Ruth and I cared for her, but I shared it through my friend. Not on the tape, but in the novel, there are five women altogether, who really figure in it, and they are myself and four very, very close friends. And the book was also an attempt to write about that kind of relationship between women. Alma is fictitious, except that she really comes out of a photograph that I took in Cuba, where I just "caught" an old woman for a moment against a wall; it seems to me she was bent, like a hook. Anna and Diana—I suppose they're parts of myself. So. Now I'm going to see if there's more wine.

Okay. [When Deena returns—with white wine this time, we discuss two new, handsomely designed magazines of woman's culture, which contain some of her work. The first is Chrysalis #1, published in Los Angeles. It contains the entire "blue tone" section from The Book of Hags. The second is Heresies, published in New York City. It contains the rape scene from Skin:Shadows/SILENCE, as well as parts of her monograph on woman's culture, In Her Image.] Is there any kind of poetry that you disdain?

Works that have values that I don't agree with, a literature that I think is dangerous to the human race and to life. Sometimes it's so alienated. Sometimes it's so violent. I have raged about a lot of books, so why don't they come to mind? What come to mind immediately are the Peckinpah films. I wouldn't censor them, but I think they're hideous. Really hideous. I remember hearing a radio interview with someone who was exulting in the relationship between sex and death—that sex was really like death—and was rhapsodizing on the sexual scene in Burroughs where the guy is hanged at the same time as he climaxes. Now, that just fills me with horror and great sadness that that's how hardened and calloused people are, that that's the extent they have to go to.

Do you see any of that in modern American poetry?

Most modern American poetry bores me. I don't read a lot of it.

Why do you suppose that is? Because it's not committed to anything, not saying anything?

I think it's only committed to how well the poet writes, the manipulation of language, and to the ego. In contrast, for example, I do read someone like Robert Bly. Someone may say he's not a great poet technically. I think there's a great poet there, and it's a privilege to know him and his work. I am only interested in work which has that kind of *commitment*. I am not interested in *poetry as such*, no matter how brilliant or clever. In fact, I'm not interested in clever work—dazzling work—at all, but in that which derives its power from vision and commitment. What has meaning, what is passionate, what restores our lives to us, what makes us whole. I believe that the work that matters is written to others because we care about the others we write to. It is not to show off our tricks. When someone says, "X is a good poet," I don't know what that means. I want to know what she, the poet, sees, what he loves. Poetry is not written with the intellect, it is written with the whole heart. And there's no holding back out of fear, out of hesitancy. You have to go the entire road, no matter what the danger. Otherwise, you will never find what anguishes us or what nurtures and sustains us. The commitment can be political, spiritual, it can be to the life force, or to simply seeing the world again—fresh. The great writers manifest several of these allegiances . . . Neruda, Nazim Hikmet, Nelly Sachs, Lorca, Vallejo, Doris Lessing, Virginia Woolf, Anais Nin . . . I want to read those poets whose work is integral to them as human beings and whose work contains voices which take us to places beyond what we feel and know.

Who else would you like to go on reading?

Gary Snyder is very, very important. Adrienne Rich is really important. Audrey Lorde is important—a wonderful black woman poet from New York. It's very hard for me to separate the person from the poet. That's what's essentially important, for me. I wouldn't feel so strongly about Robert Bly's poetry if I didn't know him—if I didn't see how his poetry sits on the man. That's what that scene was about in *The Book of Hags*. I really did travel halfway across France to meet Julio Cortazar [the character of "Juan"]. He's a major Argentine writer living in France. When I read his short stories, I was electrified. I knew he knew something about the inner world and the relationship between the inner world and the outer world that almost no one knew, and I was determined to meet him. He knew several friends of mine and it seemed as though he was the center of a network. I wrote him a letter, he wrote me a long letter back, and on the basis of that—I don't do this often—I visited him. And we had a *wonderful*, perfectly *wonderful* . . . lunch. And I'm not interested in perfectly wonderful lunches! He was very cordial, and I know he had been to the

dentist, he wasn't feeling well, we didn't really share the language—nevertheless, the writer who wrote those stories was not present.

You wanted the blue tone.

I wanted the blue tone. Yes. Later on, I wrote to him about it. I said, "We really did not meet." I told him how disappointed I was and what I was looking for. He wrote back a very lovely letter saying I was right, and he sent me a little wood engraving of what's called a Moscow Ox, and it has its foot up in the air, and he wrote: "I send you this. Look how frisky he is. Ask him to dance for you." And there was a rapprochement, there was a meeting at that moment between us, and we did in fact meet, in letters. But I don't see the life in American poetry now. When I read literature, I read Latin American literature.

Who do you read?

I read Cortazar, Garcia Marquez, Asturias, José Donoso, Carlos Fuentes, Juan Rulfo. They're all wonderful, one after another. Those people *know* that there is no difference between the inner life and the outer life, between the night life and the day life. It's all one and it flows.

Do you think that there are agreed-upon prescriptions among women writers who are connected to the movement?

I find so much support from women. I know that there are often prescriptions, but my own experience is that every time something new is said, there's great support for it, and recognition. There is a real fear that prescription will create the same situation which we've always lived in, which has been very prescriptive—what the good novel is, what the good poem is. Maybe we err the other way. I'm often tired of simply the expression of feelings, literal description of experience. It's a pleasure when you see the woman's literature that has transformation in it, that really becomes literature—like Monique Wittig, a marvellous French lesbian writer. She wrote a book called *Les Guérillères*. Her language is certainly new. She brings back some very old forms—she brings the chant into the novel. She creates a new form. I would say she's writing a woman's book. A lesbian might say that it is more specific than that—that the experience is lesbian, not only woman's. I'm not prepared to talk about that, because I don't know it. A lesbian is a woman-identified woman, and in that sense, I'm willing to be called—and *desire* to be called—a lesbian, and sometimes I really feel offended when I'm "pushed out." But I understand a lesbian's right to say to me, "Our culture is different." I did have a piece in a publication on lesbian writing and I was pleased to be included.

Why do you suppose that the Los Angeles media pay so little attention to Los Angeles writers?

The Los Angeles media is about the most tasteless, and uneducated, and ignorant media anywhere. They're very commercial and very shallow. I think they have the arrogance of the ignorant and I don't think they're tuned to anything but what's financially interesting. I don't think they know anything about culture. I think we have to do what we do, better and louder and more often, with some attention to getting it publicized, but not with a lot of investment, and they'll eventually feel that there's something in it for them and come around.

Are there any other little magazines being published now, besides Heresies, Chrysalis and, I hope, Bachy, that you admire?

I think a lot of poets—and maybe this is unfair—pay attention to little magazines because they want to see where they can be published. A lot of people buy them to find a place for their work. Essentially, I read my friends' work, and if they're in a magazine then I read it. Holly's work, for example—

Holly Prado.

—Who I think is a wonderful, deep, incredible poet; a very new voice. One may not recognize how new and important it is, because it is quiet and it pays such attention to the important things that we usually don't pay attention to. I really like to read work in a context. I want to know where a work comes from, how it exists and what it really means in that life. If you have friends who are writers, after a while there isn't much more you can do but read your friends and do your own work. I don't follow the literary scene at all.

As a writer living and creating in Los Angeles, what do you feel about the kind of city Los Angeles is, the kind of intelligence it displays and uses?

I think West Coast culture is very different from East Coast culture. I think New York is really a very dangerous city, the apex of a dying society, the most beautiful, the most stunted, the most deadly. I'm very glad to live three thousand miles from the center of power. I think that what's really important about Los Angeles is that it has a lot of blue tone. There are a lot of crazies here, and space for development, and there's a lot of experiment about some very deep ideas that unfortunately get very quickly commercialized, like est, but underneath all that is a desire to know some very deep things about the human spirit. I think to a great extent who I am comes from living in this city, with the kind of people who are here and the kind of possibility that is here. Anything's possible. The woman's movement is very different here, I think, from other places. There's a sweetness that's very important.

Thanks for telling me who you are.

Thank you.

Deena Metzger

ELEMENTARY SURVIVAL DANCE

For Robert

This is not a poem of love
but a mnemonic about survival
written in the room where yesterday
the sun appeared at midnight
as over the tundra
across a house built of ice
the lights sweep the sky
just when the dark settles.
This morning the snow slides in
thick as fog
about our sleep.

Watch the elements.

In the night a knot in my breast unwound
another stone which might have been lethal
dissolved in the light
This winter the Indians danced a snowfall
which no white man could do
but we were learning yesterday,
apprentices, novitiates, students
of a dance which does not stop in a room,
which is not forgotten,
but seeps its way into the muscles.
What the body learns, it does not forget,
don't look for the dance this morning
it is hiding in the fold between your thighs
has settled in your teeth
in the calcium, sperm, bone, blood cells,
all the white places.

Watch the elements.

The dance is not for this morning
that is what the snow teaches
which comes in like a fog
but for the night
when the dark settles like a muzzle,
then the dance will edge across the sky
out of the stars in your body
the stars you thought were out
but are only hidden
as the northern lights sweep across the tundra
at the darkest moment of the year
to remind you that we danced
to remind you what is possible between people
to remind you that the light is a force
to remind you that the light is inextinguishable
to remind you that we survive . . . despite . . .
to remind you that we conquer, that we build
because we dance.

There are dances of silence
and secret dances
dances of one foot and one hand
of women alone and men practicing before a mirror
but the dance we danced
was a dance for two people
and a thousand
the ritual dance which makes a drum of the earth
because all the feet are dancing.
That is why we were learning,
we were remembering and preparing to be teachers.
I will dance that dance with you again, alone,
but also in a circle so large that it has no beginning
because someone new is always entering,
in that dance we will put all the stones
in the fire where they belong
pulling them out of our bodies
where they are lethal,
we ask them to hold the heat while we dance

and later in the night
when sleep comes in like snow
those who watch the fire
see that the stones remain warm
to remind us that we dance
to remind us what is possible between people
to remind us that the heat is a force
to remind us that the heat is inextinguishable
to remind us that we survive . . . despite . . .
to remind us that we conquer, that we build
because we dance.

January 12, 1977
New York

GRAY BIRD

Gray birds blend into the dust and cinders
look like rain or bombs or leaves falling
are inconsequential sisters to gray cats
they have the same secret flare
under the tail feathers

Gray at the temples
I wear a coat of gray feathers
only an explosion from an old pillow
When I am afraid, I practice
walking through the house
hands stuffed into my pockets
stretching an old sweater
over a torn nightdress
letting go
the way a woman does when she's alone
allowing mice to accumulate in the corners
putting out crumbs for birds, cats, old creatures

In the afternoon, I make a place in the bed
sleeping on one side then on the other
My mother has gray eyes
which are getting smaller

a button's lost
the hem is down
lint lines the nest in the eaves
even the drift of dawn over the sea
resembles fog.

THE COLD SUN

The cold sun
increases, getting red
the leaves bellow in outrage
green goes unwillingly to yellow, to brown
yet Spring doesn't come
Clouds break apart
the aging sun drops trailing
strings of light
tangling into a lighthouse
which turns us
a noose when the light winds up

The sky is falling down
stars break and scatter
into a corner like broken glass
There's a hole in the sky
where the devil's jumped through
When the dark is a candle
—blow it out.

March 20, 1977 — The Vernal Equinox

I told spring it wasn't time yet. I wasn't ready. But then the geranium bloomed pink. Nothing to be taken seriously. I ignored the apricot tree, as usual impatient. But then the entire garden announced itself. A short winter.

I prepare as I prepare for anything else, trying to take yesterday with me, something known into the unknown. The smell of my body; another egg passing through the blood. Eggs and infants and tomorrows,

ripeness follows the buds into some dark passages.

We get up at dawn, frail women against the new light watching for the stars to erase in the sky or the planets to join and pull the sea up. What is pulling on our lives? What is tugging? Where are the seeds in us? What earth has been turned.

Furrows, lines on my face, scars where the earth has been raked, sifted, shifted, battered by tractors which decide where the trees grow, where the mountains live. Everything rearranged.

Begin with little seeds, with quail eggs, tamarind pits and fruits, the centers of sweet things. Plant them in the dark, hide in the earth for hours, days, burrow like moles, go blind into the soil. I saw spring come up like a field rat through the furrows of my skin, unexpected. I laid traps for it at the end of winter but it escaped. Hedgehogs, gophers, badgers, moles, weasels, these remind me of spring. I watch for them, the small animals which venture out first. Muskrats which like water, raccoons coming down from the hills. Paws and fur.

We are not asked to be ready. We can not order the sun and moon to stop. Spring comes relentlessly as sorrow. Without preparation. We do what we can to greet it. Ready or not, the seeds are sown, ready or not the flowers announce themselves brutally in a thousand colors. The buds break out of the branches. Is it a wound first when the green explodes. Above my head the squirrels nibble the shoots and the branches bend like water. Where are the March rains, the winds, the Ides, the omens, fire storms, weather more fitting to my mood. Why this deceit of flowers and jasmine?

We rise early, to be prepared. Perhaps if we anticipate the season, gather together at the door to see it ride up brazen into the sky, we shall escape the shock of the first soft wind. I am determined to be a young girl, to shed my wisdom, to be modest again. What if I were blonde and new, all yellow like eggs, oranges on my cheeks.

We get up at dawn, before dawn in the dark. Spring is coming. I can hear the trample of her feet after the hard winter, the ground hard for the lack of rain, silent with the loss of water. Now buds break out, green which is always green breaks into flowers. The violence of birth. Eruptions of plumblossoms, nectarine blooms. Though the late apple waits, sticking a bare branch up to the wind, wondering, why wait. Everything else is on fire for fruit. Jasmine smears in the wind. Scents, sexual and impatient, invade. A circle of women. A beginning, preparation. Baptisms. As if there could be an order to things.

It is not summer which is sultry and importunate, but spring, hussy, courtesan, coquette who spreads her pelvic garland upon the grass to be plowed, to be plowed. Everything to be broken into, opened, probed. Mr. Smith died in the fall and I thought there would not be enough bees probing into the flowers, yet there are enough small creatures to bore toward pollen and come up powdered and golden with stolen meat. Everything is entered, opened stretched. The sky itself

ovals like a diaphragm and the sun bursts through an egg propelled out of the ovary.

There is a storm of petals about my head. All the stars falling from the sky dark as a hip bone. A whisper in the street; the herald blowing the pubic trumpet. Spring has come. Sure as puberty, as the soft down, the volcanic nipping, the nocturnal adolescent itch. Nothing moderate. A fury of desire and open wonder. Animal coupling, the whine of locked dogs and the brush of feather on feather in the scratchy nest.

We welcome the flood of spring, gorge ourselves on promise. Five women who stand in the direction of the wind, one with her eyes to the center. A five-pointed star. *Ochos de Dios*. The mystery of the circle. *Milagros*.

We begin quietly against the roar of spring. With little voices against the voluptuous shout of flowers, with small hands clasped against the immodest promise of fruit, the illicit squash, aubergine, avocado, date, kumquat, pear, the audacious chick, cub, kid . . .

With clasped hands, decorum, soft breath, even prayer, we take the dawn in on our tongues, absorb the assault of animal expectation, sigh, set the sun on our shoulders and quietly quietly, prepare, prepare . . .

open the green ventricles of the heart with caution, let the belly also sob with grass, slit ourselves to fruit with the first knives of this day. It is time. The sun is a broken egg across the sky, green sears the ground like the track of lightning, we leap from the grass our feet scorched. The vine hangs like a noose above our heads. Everyone carries seeds. This is the agony of blossoms. We resign ourselves.

We know the consequences of this day. Welcome Spring.

March 20, 1977

(Excerpt from a letter):

. . . . When I finished writing *Tree* . . . , a friend who is in the "movement" and is familiar with *Tree* and *Book of Hags* and also *Scars on the Body Politic* (a novel about fascism and Chile & also ((as most of my work is)) about the struggle for relationship between men and women . . . a friend said, "what shall we ask you to write for us next?" And I felt deeply in my heart suddenly that I didn't want to write a political book for a while . . . I want to write a book of love poems and I wanted them to be called ERATO for the muse of erotic poetry . . . and this is the first one.

ERATO

1

CEREMONY FOR TWO STILL DANCERS

For John

The dark vine wet the visitor invisible only the water
remaining traces of the night

how to make love a shadow on the wall light upon your
face the breath left on a pillow

softness needs to be divided crossections of fruit
the white mushroom revealed with a straight edge learning
to use a knife

find the little life guard the palms trace the indentation
of a head upon the shoulder

arrange the silence in a bowl of fruit a dove hidden under
the leaves an old woman whose life is a needle the root
pushes in and out

before the hands before the body unlearning simply
light and shadows take only the lips to the mountains dew
as evidence

the silence in the hollow of the heart bone don't speak too
soon what blooms at night once whitely

the common beat under the cheek during sleep how to make love
with breath these are the hands we begin with light
dark quiet the moon slipped into the night leaves
before dawn

Robert Edward Brown

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

write she said when you get the chance
it was an old machine
the platen almost worn out
he kept it on the desk among the urine sample bottles
the prescription pads
indecipherable writing on them
the way doctors have of making notes to an illiterate clientele
the Polish mothers/pregnant again
stretch marks their only histories
so heavy on the waiting room sofa
there would be a long pause and a sigh
between the time he would call them and they were able to rise
but he heard them *speaking*
even with his waiting room door closed
most of the way

THE INSURANCE MAN IN HARTFORD

you make a living by selling analogies
you learn to dodge the traffic on a bridge
how is the market in periwinkles today my sailor?

in the jungles of Key West there are no forms
in the conference rooms there is no blue
the drum skins are sagging / pull them tight

teach me to know the singer
it may be possible
teach me to know the song
I will do it
teach me to sing
teach me to sing time

take the window shade flapping up
sound and sight

take the old lady on the bus
with her skin like last week's fruit
connect the dappled dots between them
teach the dead to climb

MY WIFE ADDRESSES ME

I remember the day of my funeral
how one man in his baggy black suit
climbed the green spine of the hill
to where I lay sunbruised in my casket

I miss the orange of cantaloupes and pumpkins
now time holds my voice in its hands like water
there is earth in my eyes
it is dark here

do you remember Flossie Williams' face
when we showed up at the old house in Rutherford
with a yellow rose?

but I have seen your days and nights/ you
love too easily
I am the words

did you really hear my voice when Sara read my poems at the service?
there are orchards for the dead here
the dead spring slowly out of the ground like winter flowers

it is a shame you let the plants die
but I suppose they were always mine
the wind has colors you have never seen
death is your widowed face each morning

FAMILY POEM

all night it is snowing in my dream
it happens again I make love to my mother
knowing each time it keeps my father dead
needing another time
something I have done before that drifts through a room

like yesterday
the white hair grows longer down the back of my memory of my father
knowing he is a wild animal we have locked in the closet
never turning the lights on
through nights that stick to each other
my mother teaches me in the ancient theatre of my father's
most intimate sounds
afterward I use his cologne

LIVING ROOM

we have finally got the room we planned
the furniture piece by piece
detached, tactful
the whole room
an oeuvre
*
you can tell how it works/
the green bowls bought cheap in Ensenada
the Peruvian rug in earth colors
you say that cup of *pisco* sits nicely on the inlaid table
even Esther's photograph
so strangely cropped
doesn't spoil it
*

a room for the eyes and judgment
no place the mouth or fingers would enter/
if you sit over here
and I speak to you
words measured and spare
brief captions for these spaces
the sounds will come to rest
just over there
between the Chinese basket
and the sleeping cat

MOBILE/ The Desert

inside the body
a city
dense compacted

by history
where
each night
is commotion
trains pass
clatter the rails
beside unspanned oceans

each man a city
holes and bones
strung
across the valley
the San Joaquin's
hot floor
where the heat rises
from Mobil stations
while cows doze
in odorous yellow fields
never sleep

DEATH/ A Haunting

There are voices I hear in these rooms late at night after the dogs have made their round, sleep dances, when the streets flow with lamplight. Voices, names that use my body, weightless names they are, how they whisper and float, shifting, toxic, a brocade of things that will not stay in place. I can't sleep again. People have been here tonight. What they said they are still saying and their unformed speakings mingle with the others. My father, his voice the shaping edge of file, ruled and objective, thick, comforting, a street language, it quickens like playing checkers against yourself, always a question in it you can't answer. My wife's voice, calm now the death gone from it. The deep soundings of the others who were here tonight and left. Where shall I put them all? The house is full of spaces and shelves, corners and windowsills, dusty tracks above the baseboards, the luminous insides of lightbulbs like artichoke hearts with spiny hot teeth, the unseen world behind the teeth of the heating grates, cupboards where objects with paper souls stand patiently in the darkness waiting to be useful, the terrible abyss down the bathtub drain, the fitted places under chairs that cats inevitably find, the hollow stems of ambitious philodendrons creeping, adding their voices to the chorus, all the places useful once, empty bottles with ghosts around them, the vast and merciless heart of an electric clock pulsing. I feel my heart stop. The voices reclaim me. Nothing in

these rooms is silent. I have to leave here if I want quiet. Nothing lies still or is content to be dead. My heart is stopped within the thick murmur of my body.

I could be dead. There is just my voice among the others, what has no shape, never sleeps, can't be folded, stacked or lied to. So this is what it's like—to be a voice with a thousand homes like the lights of a small city in the Midwest seen on a winter night from an airplane. It is to be awake and dreaming with absolutely no plans, the shape of each container. I had not thought you went beyond the signs, the lowering of windows and the drawing of the curtains into a backstage without pauses or periods you think you can't do without. I am energy, a machine that makes roses and will not stop.

Selections from A DREAM OF NEW ZEALAND

Author's Note

When I was 16 I ran away from home. I took a friend with me—we left New York City the day after Thanksgiving, 1961 and flew to Honolulu, Hawaii. The movie The 400 Blows had actually inspired us to fly to Paris, but we were too young to get passports so we settled for Honolulu. We landed at 3 AM at the Oahu Airport. It was drizzling. I had an old suitcase filled with paperback books, a change of underwear and some essays I had written that I intended to send to the New Yorker as soon as Chuck and I were settled into the routine of island life, which we conceived of as a daily ritual of climbing the trees for cocoanuts and afternoon swims.

We didn't stay long. Wandering around an off-limits area of an Air Force base the next morning, we were picked up by a squad car and driven downtown, booked as "wayward minors," then driven to a prison for juvenile offenders. We had lunch in prison, while the prison authorities arranged with our shocked and irate parents to ship us back home again. Which they did—only this time a police officer sat with us all the way home. He wouldn't let us out of his sight, even on the hour layover in Chicago where he took us into a little room until the plane was ready to take off again. The whole misadventure was over in the space of one long weekend

—Los Angeles, 1977.

The Dream

I awake from it. Knowing where it was, that you were there even though I couldn't see your face. Thinking about it, in bed. The morning isn't ready yet. I decide to wait for it by looking up New Zealand in an old encyclopedia, the one we got at the garage sale on Hauser Boulevard, from the lady with no eyebrows and a paisley dress so worn you could see her legs through it. Now at last I am using that

encyclopedia—it must have been 3 months since I lugged it upstairs. I wipe the dust off. COLUMBIA DESK ENCYCLOPEDIA. It's too heavy for any salesman. The torn spine makes me remember the dream: New Zealand. It was a period piece, set in the forties, the women with their hair in chignons, the men with Governor Dewey moustaches, very black and pencil-thin. As we walk not facing each other, ships pass into, out of, the mouth of the harbor, out to the Tasman Sea. It is front street, or what passes for a front street in every seagoing town. Behind us the gleaming architectures like mirrors, luminous, rising as if they had *always* been there, as if no one had made them.

Everyone, I recall now, waiting for something. Passing the time (but so well-dressed, in alligator shoes, white linen suits, glistening accessories from the Sunday rotogravure).

Waiting for the sun to roll down the tallest skyscraper, to fall orange into the horizon, waiting for the restaurant managers to unlock the cashboxes, for the waitresses to drag themselves in, wearing those stockings, their clothes pressed along the wrong seams. This is like 7 o'clock in Rome—everyone pretending to window shop, waiting for the proper time to eat, waiting for the proper time to wait.

First Interpretation

I am against it.

A friend tells me about zeal—zealousness—what is newly zealous in my life that imagined New Zealand.

I have questions.

Why are there two islands, a north and a south?

Why didn't you look into my face when I wanted you to?

Why did the ocean turn white under the fog banks?

Were we in Wellington or Auckland?

Are the islands my personal geography, doubled, split, remote, obscure?

Or are they like you and me, nothing but themselves?

Did some Paleozoic earthquake split one New Zealand into two androgynous and imperfect halves that have stared moonily at each other across a few hours on the geologic clock?

Did you speak to me in the dream—or was it the sound of a strange bird whirling overhead, the only kind of thing that would feel at home there?

If the dream symbolizes new zeal, why did the ships move so slowly in the harbor?

Smell

The more I understand the dream the less I know. I tell it to another friend who says, "Go back and smell New Zealand." That is it: I have lost the dream in the head. I return. At first there is no smell at all, then there *is* something. Smoke, grease and gasoline, city smells I have always liked. They recall the Schuylkill and the Hudson, other noisy ports edged around with railroad tracks and warehouses probably full of rats (I never saw them). An odor arises from the boats, the tugboats, something slick and muscular enough to tow the huge ships, the ones that are big enough to frighten a child who sees them for the first time, a time when names like the *Queen Mary* meant nothing to him. Gasoline spreading over the dirty riverwater, bobbing in it, no less alive than the shadow of a fish or a tin can underneath it. It is the smell of the bridges with cars bearing down continuously on their spines, the odor of something burning. This dream is a sea containing every image and a room full of all the odors of all the cities of all the ports, rivers, the extreme wests and easts of downtown. And the smell of the ferryboats, the concession stand meat sizzling, the sudden opening of a beer can mixed with the sleazy saltwater halfway between whatever is behind us and Staten Island. These are the smells of New Zealand. But I still have not smelled the islands. The dream is stuck in my head, undigested, abstract, a map of the apparent, something to understand and in the understanding it loses its power and becomes a little unreal, unsubstantial, mental even. How to recover New Zealand from where it floats in the mind?

The difficult thing is to make the islands visceral, to pickle their bones and stems in the whole history of my anger, to give them your face—so white now and fading into time—to make them the twins of us.

I decide it is not enough to smell New Zealand. I have to chew it, grind my teeth against dirt and pebbles and every terrifying caution, roll up the windows of my car and scream NEW ZEALAND NEW ZEALAND NEW ZEALAND so that I come to know, so that I come violently to beach upon the understanding of what it is to have reached this place. Now.

A Few Inhabitants and Their Insomnia

Nobody living in New Zealand can remember the actual day of his arrival. There is much talk of other islands in both warmer and colder seas, the Falklands, Goa, the Canaries, Easter. The largest bookstore in Wellington does a brisk business

in travel books, especially one called *A Complete Guide to Islands: Their Locations, Histories, Uses and Futures*. There is a surprising prevalence of insomnia in New Zealand.

* * * * *

The first people were Maoris. Therefore, the only history of New Zealand is aboriginal history, unconscious history, myth, or the history of dreams. The true history of New Zealand would be the history of everyone's dreams about it.

* * * * *

I plan a trip to Auckland. I am going to write the history of the islands. I need information. Can you tell me everything you know about New Zealand, I write to a young poet who lives on Christchurch Street outside of Auckland. I get this letter back:

"Received your absolutely incredible letter. The post is slow here, so you're probably reading this a good bit after I sent it off. Things are really beginning to come alive here, but the process is slow. Yes, we do have a few small publishing houses, and a few little magazines. If you do come, forget the steamer idea. If you will allow me to say so, it seems a piece of dreamy romanticism, and more to the point, it would be an uncomfortable if not expensive trip. All right, I'm going to answer your questions one at a time. The best way to get here is Air New Zealand. From where you are it's over \$800 bucks, but as the proverbially 'rich (if not ugly) American,' I trust you could afford the jaunt a lot better than I could—although I was to the States in the latter part of the sixties. Air New Zealand flies more frequently than Pan Am or UTA French—and they have a bargain rate if you fly upside down in the dead of night in a 1942 air-surplus bomber that lands in a remote Maori village. No, there are no cannibals here—at least not among the aborigines.

When I told my friends here about your dream, some of the details astounded us with the sheer synchronicity of it all.

Yes, the climate is hot enough to support a marijuana plant.

I think your instincts about New Zealand are pretty accurate: We are a bit behind perhaps, and tend to lean on the Americans for too many themes. But some of the writing here is every bit as good as the very best of your own. I live in a cottage of sorts, down the road from a school. It's quiet, though, despite the children. If and when you do come over, you are welcomed to stay. Why not act upon fantasy if it suits you?

YOURS, DON "

The Letter

I receive a letter from a friend back East:

"I loved your letter and the dream. I'm not going to tell you I understand it, or pull one of those ridiculous interpretations on you. Island penises, island power, island vaginas, alienation, schizomadness, the contemporary-intellectual's-mind-body-duality. You'd either laugh or hate me—and I won't have either. Why don't you give up the goddamned islands? Give them up—you don't need them now. Sure, you ran away once to an island (you see how pat an interpretation I can give you? Do you hate me now? Are you laughing?).

"New Zealand is not a real island, it's a possible island. Or rather, two islands. Yes, all right, your brother ran off to Rio, so you are a frigging archetype yourself. The ancient mariner telling the rhythmic story over and over until Atlantis rises "YOU can't fool me. I know you carry the map of New Zealand in your wallet the way kids carry condoms. And I know where you got it from. You still have those tickets, don't you? You can't fool me. I know you too well. Once you ran away. Now I would bet that you're engaged in making some cockamamie travel plans again. Am I right?

"No, the ocean is hostile territory. I remember all those tidal-wave dreams you told me about—that one in Santa Barbara where the wave broke over the fiftieth floor of the office building. Everyone I've told that one to gives me a strange look and shakes their head, he's a *maniac*, My God.

"Don't worry, nothing out there is going to break over your head. Unless you continue along this peculiar path you have apparently set for yourself. But if you are determined to dream about those goddamned islands, remember that islands have borders. In fact, an island is no more important than what borders it does have, what keeps it from the sea. It is continual confrontation, dream about the Trobriands, the Coral Sea, New Caledonia, New Guinea, New Zealand.

"I understand from our mutual friend (he's actually been there, or didn't you know?) New Zealand is boring. The multi-nationals have taken it over as a place to dump zinc sulfide wastes. People go through their whole lives without saying the words NEW ZEALAND and being none the worse for it. Beach ashore at Macao or Hong Kong.

"To give up New Zealand is to surrender early island fantasy, border, definition. You have to shipwreck, flounder, gasp for air, plunge, descend downward, pass out.

"Accept it. You have to drown. I know you drowned once, twice. Well, you're going to drown again. Accept it."

The Poetics of Drowning

The experience is this: the end of the afternoon at the beach. The people have already left for their cottages and evening drinks, the sun is almost down. An eight-year-old boy, his governess sleeping on her blanket, walks out to where the waves have receded. He is hoping to make it all the way to Ireland. The water is darker than he ever remembers it being, but still quite warm. It is easy to walk slowly for he is determined and comfortable, only vaguely frightened. In a few minutes he is up to his chest, when he hears a voice very far behind his head. In another half-minute the water is up to his chin. Far behind him there is a great deal of splashing. He thinks of the dream he had the night before. In it there was a great, smooth brown horse standing by a fence. Something tells him to get underneath the horse and he does. In an instant the world goes dark and he hears voices talking about the death of a little boy, his death. They have a name for it, this kind of death underneath this beautiful horse. Something is pulling him rapidly east to Ireland.

Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean

I prepare to drive out to the ocean. It is late and you have gone to bed. I am alone in the house. I get my jacket and walk downstairs to the garage, to my car, get in, put a tape cartridge in the player, start the engine and point the auto up the exit ramp. This driving is not something I did in Boston, or when I lived in Williamsport. Los Angeles enables it. I have always liked to have an ocean nearby. I am beginning to understand why. It is so close that drowning seems easier and I begin to wonder as I roll steadily through Santa Monica whether I am going to do it this time, really drown myself. Perhaps the temptation will be too great, the sound of the waves, the blackness and the strong push of the Pacific Palisades behind me. I think about dying: It has always seemed appropriate, on airplanes, in automobiles. No matter when the risk, it has seemed appropriate to die at that time, just after just before or precisely during some significant event in my life. It is *always* making successful entrances, death. I turn the car right, onto the Pacific Coast Highway. There is one other car and it passes me on the right. The few shoreside bars and restaurants have closed down for the night. People complain sometimes about how quiet this city is after 10. Right now it is 1, though, and with my windows rolled down I can hear the ocean. A woman I know calls it "strong sister." But it has always frightened me. I get no sustenance from it. For the past few years I have gone swimming in it only occasionally, with great hesitation. I wade in it up to my shins and imagine what touches me beneath the water level is a jellyfish or an electric eel. They photograph swimsuit models against some large rocks out there. Sometimes the waves come in so strongly that the models are

pulled down and the photographers silently curse for the lost time and dry them off and wait for them to stop shivering. Usually this happens in the mornings. I cross Sunset Boulevard, where it meets the Coast Highway. A gas station on the corner is closed down, but the lights are all on anyway. It is easy to run out of gas here, easy to drive north to Canada and south to Mexico, depending on the way you turn. North only becomes north quite a while after that initial right turn. Until it is north, you have only made a right. I am trying not to think about the ocean but it shocks me every time I look over my shoulder at it. I can feel my heart. You cannot see ships. Only the parking lots where they seem to end and the beach begins. Another woman tells me the ocean bores her. She goes to the mountains for what other people like myself come here for. I realize now that the ocean means I have to make a turn, to go right or left, north or south, that it stops me, I cannot continue. I feel it always about to rise up, throw tidal waves slowly and finally over the tall cliffs over the whole city. I feel it is unsatisfied, looking for a way to reclaim the land that is wedged against it. I pass a sign that says "Malibu—½ mile" and stop at the next light, turn toward the ocean, find a parking lot and stop the car. It is quiet. I want to think a long time, how I first saw the Pacific, how it was gray instead of blue as I'd imagined. But I cannot think long. You always have to be careful when you are alone at night in places like this. It isn't the ocean here, it's still the city, with all its furious and sad people. Not New Zealand which I think is a calmer place, an island practically free of terror, green even at night, full of sheep always within reach, Maori songs in the air. I get out of the car and walk down a flight of stone steps. They are sandy. Accidentally, I kick a beer can down a few stairs, stop and listen to nothing. The strip of beach down here is thin, the lip of wet sand is dull white with the moon's dim reflection. It is cloudy, and the dark sea changes texture as the clouds float across the moon. There are ruffled shapes in the water like the squiggle a child draws to show birds in flight. Perhaps someone is stealing my car. But there is no sound, no motor turning over, no screeching of tires onto the highway. Everything, the ocean, is still inside my head. I believe it must be different in New Zealand. After all, it lies in a different sea, the Tasman. That sea is different from this ocean, more congenial, smaller, almost hospitable and not quite so dark. When you drown in the Tasman, you are remembered. When you drown here, your name is taken from you. I turn and walk quickly back toward the car. No one has stolen it. It is locked, it was needless to fear drowning. There are too many other things to be afraid of.

Return Passage

The ocean is my skin, a house for me. New Zealand my hands where they can't touch each other. The distance between the north and south tip, where a ship

might pass safely, I measure again and again but it shifts.

Touch me, nothing takes root in the mind that cannot be whispered across the brevity of this ocean distance, what you think you hear at night with the windows up, the heat from another body so close that it raises the little hairs on my wrist.

No new place. New Zealand in this new light. It is what I know and keep knowing and have to tell myself again and again. Even the insistence on it shrivels and turns brown like a plant too close to the window.

Months after the dream, I wake from another dream, and without remembering it, know immediately that I don't need islands. I need rituals and watering cans and the light that makes things grow even in the heat. I need fruit in the ice box, to replace it sometimes. I need sweet basil on my salads, fresh sheets and your skin that smells of a lavender sachet.

INTO THE WOODS

there is a silence in the woods the sound
of boot soles cracking dry leaves in October
when I leave the campfire for the danger of the trees/
we are all the same age in the forest
you can go back to the city
eat in restaurants read newspapers
I will find what the infant in me knows

* * *

Melissa Cummings

NINE POEMS FROM GLOUCESTER

painting to paint
I did some last week
in the warm
it was nearly rain
there on the porch
under a sky
children were home
from a short day
school playing out
scarcely interrupting
painting i didnt mind
talking question + answering
the long afternoon
began at eleven
six bells
by grandfathers clock
grandfather was a navy
there was i
granddaughter by marriage
painting
my little ship
on the porch
keeping time to
ships' bells
painting afternoon
5 minutes to write
while the waves rolled
straining
gils legs on his
best boat in gloucester sixty
feet of earth
tossing by the storm
coming storming passing
three days waves rolling

5 minutes must be .166667 bell

take two hours and have him in a dream
under the inevitability of
train schedule
last day of June
4 July closes in
an eminent series of explosions
I wouldnt want to be in Chicago
I wouldnt want to be driving to East Gloucester
any way but four miles off the cape
by some slow novi
or by sail
I am afraid
of Americans
4 July
violence

faces warm
on a bright morning
contain clarity
of autumn
the singing of april
this middle
july a new dog explores
a vast house
with her fingernails
in the evening
my man
leaves beer cans
on her porch
his smelling of shy
tobacco
she chases his turning from her
this (twenty)second year
of our swimming
sleek and happy
sealions shining
in dark water

isnt it a sweat I wonder if anybody would
understand
how it is at ninetwenty
on a morning thats octoberbeautiful
by the sea
when everybodys gone to school
by the sea

man left at seven
and I
missed him and I
crabbed into myself pinched
at the children hating
that he went to work
cheerily, with Bob

I fuss over the colors in my clothes
when it was good to carry our eight barrels
when it was good in the brisk winds
of the lonely morning

handling papers with intrusions
of feeling
broken
my second recorder
feeling
Joes dismay at the weather
Damons
lost seven or eight years
he sanded boards chipped cement
carried the ceiling through the
front window to the old wagon
going to sell that house
ski fresh in ten degrees
in a northwest wind
handle cold gloves
and mix feelings
write it
on a Saturday

how many friendships grew and
splintered with movement or time
recorders split
cords pull at hearts
I'd like to write it round
how its all held round within
the minute I pulled on my socks
and all that time the wind roared
and I couldnt stop the haunting to
measure it all

I dont know
to be annoyed or amazed
you come + sit in my red ass kitchen
boiling words at me until I
creep willing wanting
to clean the cellar
my friend you should
it was christmas yesterday
we've got visiting today we'll have
talking all the laughing afternoon
maybe longer know me
when the talking becomes
longer than an hourly free lance kind of time
friend
leave the morning still

fat yellow dahlia color of manshirt
overflowing the small bowl the old
green sweater at the neck where its
warm and graced with strength poetry
in streaked colors occurrences to a
flower or a dog when the energy of
the old is fired by wood splitting
building sawing colored red or pale
greening sometimes they cut geraniums
to jam into sand to fill the dead
windows of winter forgetting they
hardly leave the kitchens fire dislike

spreading by the large windows those
are for summer though the christmas
tree shall glitter fill the windows
sparkle
we wake to the mornings
square-shouldered and smooth
each with the others
deep smiling dark eyes

past our sleeping
dawns first dim scattering
moves the early air
in the closed room
moves waves to flow
over the dog
who begins her loving

I try to detach accuracy
from the dark places
in my brain

my eyes
feel the fingers
of your eyes

you wear your dark cap of wool
your navy coat of chinese down
feathered inside you drive off
smoking a pipe and waving to Lanesville

the blue car stumbles
and the dog gathers herself in a corner
she snuffles and sees. she will wait

a year ago tomorrow
we went downtown
and got married

snow

ing. FAT WITH IT
had enough I
breathing spring
want to run
with the blue
running shoes
want to breathe
strong
as yesterday
the 2d half of the 1st
run down Emerald Street
toward the pink
breathing spring

* * *

James Krusoe

LIVING ON THE MOON — *for Joseph Hansen*

To say a person's living on the moon

means they are far away, and when they talk
it's in a voice six times as loud as normal.
Moon people are tough—when Margaret planted
tulips on the moon and lilacs came up she said:
Fuck it. I guess the moon's not good for plants.
To say a person's living on the moon means
their wallpaper's hung crooked or the vinyl
by the stove is coming up and they don't mind,
or on a snowy day one will leave his house
without a hat, and the shy deer come out and stare,
then walk back across the snowy fields leaving
tracks which are soon filled with more snow.

SCOTT'S POEM

He lights the match.
He is a monster.
He wants to kill people
with the fire on his stick.

One morning he wakes up
and finds he is a boy.
He is a monster
with fire on his stick.

He looks in the mirror.
One morning he wakes up
with fire on his stick.
He wants to kill people.
He thinks he wears a mask.
Other people think that too.

He finds he is a boy

with fire on his stick.
He is a monster
with fire on his stick.

One morning he wakes up
and goes to the people
he wants to kill.
He lights the match.

FOUR

1

The saguaro contains enough
to prolong life; some plants
drown their victims; there are
rodents living in the desert that
never drink, a drop would kill them;
we sink wells in dry places, they
charge by the foot; at times tastes
of sulphur, other times a ferrous or
metallic taste, both are said
to be beneficial. Most amphibians
absorb it through their skins;
whales do not drink all which streams
through giant mouths, they strain
their food; there are several species
catfish that can walk on the land;
a man who searches with a twig is
called a dowsers; when pure
it is transparent, in large bodies
takes on a bluish tint; seawater,
rainwater, sweetwater, ground water;
an antagonist to fire; we are
one-half water; water color, water
wheel, water fall, water hole;
in death it rises first.

2

When the leading edges of the re-entry vehicle
begin to glow, white-hot, the silica cap itself,

a halo of molecules escaping from cone tip and
other forward points including a tube-like
apparatus between the legs which stiffens, waving
purposeful and slow,

"I'm out looking for fun,
driving down Hollywood Boulevard in my Chevy Nova
which means exploding star, when through the rear
view mirror I see this flashing squad car light,
so I pull to the curb and quick, mutate myself
into a padded dashboard, but he pulls along side
and talks right into my glove compartment, 'That's
the oldest trick in the world, Buddy.' "

Meanwhile,
rushing up canyons, thick smoke, at night a ring
of flame; in rented rooms and false disguises,
smouldering near lips, licking edge of yellowed papers,
from beneath the floorboards, from inside hollow tract
house doorways, wisps of smoke through locks and keyholes,
out to anyplace that has ears and will listen . . .

3

The head is smaller
than he had thought.
More like a tangerine
that rolled
between the stove
and kitchen cabinet,
and no one knew
how it stared
at lucky feet
as they stumbled
making breakfast,
stumbled,
wearing shoes,
or how it watched
the smallest pets
come and eat
and hated them.
But the head has no seeds.
The head has

none at all.

4

Clouds move across the sky as mysterious
as ashtrays in a living room.
Beneath them, flocks of sparrows
live their lives. The clouds build nests
from whatever they can find, fly well
for short distances, are heavy as a fountain pen,
and like the shopkeeper who wraps your item
and walks you to the door, of all natural phenomena
they are most optimistic.
They are also famous for activity while mating.
The Book of Western Birds says simply,
"We all have seen them."
(*Excerpt from a letter*):

" . . . I'm still holding my new work close to my chest—at least in terms of
publication, but take this chance to send you the poem that was the turning
point"

THE WOLF

He poisons the wells.
He paints the walls with poison.
He puts poison under cars in parking lots.
He keeps his closet full of frozen cattle heads.
Keeps barbed wire around his neck.
No one comes to visit.

He bites the sun which is bitter.
He bites the moon which is bitter.
He pisses on their bitterness, and,

It's like this, he says, with cows —
Once car thieves took my car
and I found it in a pasture full of cows.
The cows had made it one of them,
were huddled round and comforting.
Then I noticed how their rough thick tongues

were also nailed down.

How when they spoke they spoke about
the regret they felt from time to time.

* * *

Anna Sidak

BLUE MOON, I SAW YOU CRYING

August 6, 1977 . . . Saturday night and sultry. The moon full and round and small on a 19-inch screen: put to the uses of commerce. Put to the ultimate outrage as Wolfman Jack (I assume it is he, for I've heard the name and *the image fits*: the fangs, the nails, the shaggy locks) cavorts, no, *rocks across the face* of the moon to some oldie-but-goodie—and now he's gone, with no bow to transition, just simply gone . . . in his place is the interior of a spacecraft and the voice we all know, ploddingly Teutonic still (and we meant and meant to speak to him of that and now . . .), nags across the airwaves, coming down hard on the tricky consonants, modulated into the realm of despair; hopelessness freighted and bound . . . low-profiled . . . until the astronaut, speaking in the manner in which they all speak, with qualifications, in his American voice (the one they all use), explains how he takes a drink from his water bottle in space: how the water is filtered two ways, to remove gases and some other way, and he presses the trigger of the bottle and we see him do that: in the poorly lighted interior of his habitat, we make out that he seizes an object which floats before him, see the water in a swift, awkward arc. "And sometimes we hold it higher and drink like the Spaniards drink their wine," he says, without qualification for once, as though all Spaniards drink some certain wine some certain way, always and forever; but he isn't holding the water bottle higher and one thinks for a moment of certain infamous fountains of Europe . . . one thinks of children doomed to live within the confines of sterile, fragile tents . . . and the gray voice says, carefully and precisely—but what it said has flown the coop, has left only a dusty trail, although *for all I know it was, in essence, brilliant*, but slowed (the click of an old victrola inaudible in the background), measured and rhythmless, meted out—erased by Wolfman Jack, talons dripping blood, the intimation of blood, of Dracula, of Steppenwolf for you advanced lovers of horror . . .

August 10, 1977 . . . now, four days later, still depressed (not only by the unseemly juxtaposition of Wolfman Jack and Wernher von Braun: *I don't live in a vacuum*: it's just the usual run of long hours, frayed nerves, that plague us all), but the thought of a record company using two hours of TV time to present a NASA documentary indecently fragmented by rock commercials captures my imagination. What a marvelous idea on the face of it! What a splendid parallel!

What an other side of the coin! OUTER SPACE and *Downtown*: as in "All roads lead to Mecca." It may be profound, or perhaps it isn't anything, just bad programming.

*

The Saudi who ran things was making it difficult. "Goddard Space Center," he said through his interpreter, whose hands were as heavily laden with gold as his own. "Goddard Space Center and involved personnel."

The President sighed, although the public smile did not leave his face. It was the seventh day of negotiations and his eyes were weary. He took up the pen and signed the papers, some in English, *others in Arabic* smelling of incense. *There had been no hope from the beginning* and he had given orders aforehand for immediate conversion. The Saudis, those strange, cunning, able businessmen, would have Goddard and all good luck to them, Goddard would be nothing but a weather-tracking station by the date of takeover.

The Sheik allowed his otherworldly gaze to fall upon the signature, the dates. He rose, his robes falling decorously to the blunted toes of thousand-dollar Western boots inlaid with mother-of-pearl, with emerald, with gold, the heels wedged for sand. "I see you are behind the times," he remarked, speaking informally now, in excellent Oxford English. "Our calendar runs *half-a-moon*, a fortnight, ahead. A time warp, perhaps, that we met today." "Go with Allah!" the President responded, disconsolately.

*

"Imagine, if you will," the professor said, "that there is an immense object to be transported great distances. *Imagine, if you will*, that its transportation is mandatory. How would you then proceed?"

The students of Applied Physics were silent, waiting for Novak to ask the necessary questions. Novak, it seemed, was fearless: already his hand was raised and the professor nodding toward him.

"If you would be so kind," he began, as always, politely, "as to cut the grandstanding and furnish a considerable definition of 'immense' and also of 'great,' I will restrain my initial impulse to suggest you take your immense object and cut it into tiny pieces which you may then transport over short, accumulative distances at your leisure."

*

March 3, 1986 . . . the future, you know *I used to think of it a long time ago*. It was a dark, forbidding stretch of time, heavy and ominous. It was going to be bad and everyone knew it. Everything running out, everything in short supply. Not that it's

changed, not that those dread prophecies weren't valid! God, yes! But now there's hope! We all feel it. People I've worked with for years and all the energy we expended to not be close—that's changed. Yesterday Benson, yes, Benson, put his hand on my arm and said, "We're going to make it. There will be light again. *It was a tunnel!*" This was just after we got the good news from Washington over the PA. There were even two people at the Saudi's table in the cafeteria. Not that they spoke to him. It's expertise that keeps him alive here, that and the bodyguard provided by the company. *The Saudis own the company now. Still, were I he, I wouldn't work where I wasn't wanted.* Where I was spat upon . . . But this is a terrific day! A day of reprieve . . . *ever have that dream (I've had it regularly, right along with the actuality)?* The sentence of death, the agonizing wait, the terror, the nausea. "The Great Governor in the Blue is drafting a telegram," someone said last week. Jestng. Whistling in the dark, just last week. And today it arrived: the broadcast. Yes, we can do it. We will do it. We will be saved. *In the dream the telegram arrives too late, or is only a postponement.*

*

"There are no furry animals there," the environmentalist said, "no food-chain to be disrupted. We have conducted extensive research. We feel certain those few nocturnal creatures accustomed to forage in moonlight can and will survive under permanent conditions they now and then endure due to the influence of overcast, periodic waning and so forth. There is, on that score, little or no cause for alarm. What we have is opportunity to preserve forever the life-style of the wombat and the mole, the earthworm and the plowshare."

The audience left off its moping and applauded halfheartedly.

"But seriously," the environmentalist continued, "I'm not here, as we all know, to speak of chipmunks. I'm here to give my thoughts on ways and means, my thoughts upon the necessity for sacrifice. Many things we take for granted: the romp of seasons, storm and pestilence (to be cont'd.)

*

July 12, 1979 . . . π IN THE SKY . . . is it blueberry? What is the significance of other rations? *The jungle wet with rain* versus H₂O, for example? .900 X .400? The rules of perspective are merely a convention. Shadows cast no shadow. You cannot tell what it is that I've omitted . . .

September 14, 1988 . . . there's a general air of grief, prospect of mutilation. What can one say: *Fly Me to the Moon?* So what? I thought, let it go for the common good. And then *I saw it pale*. Saw it pale, beyond a field of pumpkin, the fence was painted white: beyond mauve and dusky foothills, low over violet mountains in a

green metallic twilight. I stay indoors now. I don't look. It's going to hurt. It's going to leave a scar. I read this somewhere years ago: "The Balance of Nature" . . . a nice thought. We will wobble. Everyone is a little frightened. Will Thor be angry? *Will Neptune take revenge?*

*

"The Great Lode will be tapped on Friday of this week. Prime viewing time for West Coast residents is between the hours of sundown and midnight when LUNA lies low over the Pacific, *its bright face toward us*. Film at eleven."

*

August 3, 1989 . . . *I watched, I had to watch*. I saw it and it was wonderful. I liked it very much; that isn't what you expected me to say, perhaps, but there it is. *It was over quickly, very quickly*: the great orange slices as neat and pretty as cheese to the wire. Although that isn't how it was done, it was done with infinitely more precision, artfully. By laser.

There were thirteen slices, twelve visible and more; many, many more, some at right angles, others dividing the slices into mere slivers and this we couldn't see, but could see the twelve major slices as they fell to left and right, simultaneously and symmetrically, and the center slice we knew to stand alone, upright, steadfast; and then it pivoted from profile to full face, smiling, and that is the thirteenth slice, that silver leaf the thickness of a hair. It, they leave to hang our poets on (it won't wane, I don't say never), as the rest slither: flat, horizontal bars as they fell, or were pushed, into position to align with the work stations. Where they will disappear, are even now disappearing, atom by atom, into the cold fire of the laserine, that misnamed model of efficiency (for it isn't a laser at all, but some negative principle). A dashed line of time against the night sky—one could think poetic thoughts of it, but I was in a fever of excitement, passive, but filled with that—like a child's glow to see the house of cards fall—I wanted to see the sun, the sun itself, and all the stars, in smeary flashing glory to the sword! But the show was over, I went inside and turned on the TV to let the unimpassioned voice of Joseph Benti tell me how it was.

The newsroom was chaos, *I caught the tail-end*, just heard the madman yell, "You've destroyed the first rung of the ladder! The only one that we could reach!" before the screen went dark.

This then, I thought, this is the bobbl—

* * *

Mark Negus

RED BOY

the story

You-boy. Didjya ketch that red boy yet? Ketch him. Be sure you ketch him tight. Some of them crawdaddies are fire mean and fight every step of the way. You ketch that red boy. Dont let him get away all the time. Fight him. He's a freak, boy, and bound to be meaner and give a good fight, but he aint got the brains you got, boy. So ketch him and come show him to me. Show me that red boy. The wrinkled bench man on the post office porch said it. He sat there every day. His chops clicked and whistled when he spit when he talked. *Get a good size piece of liver and tie it up tight on a string and a strong stick. Stick it down there in the creek easy and when you feel that red boy tug pull as hard as you can. You ketch him. Bring him to me. I want to see this red boy. You-boy, ketch him.*

The snow parachuted down through the tree limbs like the leaves did a couple months earlier and rolled across the pasture over to the dirt creek where red boy fed and slept, and lived solitary and mad. It rolled into drifts against the houses and trees. Drifts grew up wherever an obstruction was and the far creek bank was so and caught the blowing flurries, but the creek stood calm and down there keeping warm under the mud water was that great red crawdaddy, that red boy. The snow piled up on the sill against the window, clung to it like suction cups and the whorls hypnotized Nathaniel as he looked across the silent pasture to the creek.

The wind blew and sang only an inch from Nathaniel, only an inch, but the icy window separated them. It sang like a hymn and the boy could not hear it. He could hear grandma singing from her chair. The wind carried songs to the rivers and the currents carry them away to the water beasts and red boys, and grandma's song was carried up around the house.

*There let the way appear,
Steps unto heav'n;
All that Thou sendest me,
In mercy giv'n.
Angels to beckon me,
Nearer my God to Thee.*

"Hear that you red boy," Nathaniel said. "God gotta place for you. God gonna give you a new home after I ketch you. Your earth body gonna stay here though so I can show Mister Grate at the post office I caught you, and maybe sell you to the niggers so they can eat you."

The dirt creek is a branch of the Corn river which is a branch of the Missouri, and it is as brown as its big sisters and meanders a mile or so from the Corn past Nathaniel's home across the pasture. It never took a life worth mentioning and usually it is gentle water, as lazy as the summer boys fishing off its soggy banks. The dirt creek drawls as it flows over a hump of rocks like sighs and moans of ecstasy in its constant liberty.

freedom, here.

Nathaniel looked down at the carpet, at the gullies of its design and saw red boy in it, big as a man's hand spread out, with pincers large enough and jawlike, almost monstrous enough to sever a boy's hand. The crawdaddy began feeling around and snapped at the boy as the carpet became just a carpet and red boy slept in the wintry creek.

crayfish.

The library dictionary had crawdaddy listed as crayfish, and Nathaniel found it with the librarian who bent over him and smelled like a perfume bottle. She gossiped and told about her gall bladder and licked her thumb to turn the dictionary pages. Her hair looked dyed red and her face was as craggy as red boy's himself.

This library smelled like dust and soggy paper and old lady perfume. Nathaniel gagged.

tribe Astacura.

"Tribe az-ta-kyer-a," he said.

"Did it have what you wanted?" the librarian asked.

"Yes ma'am. Thank you."

"Fine." *Lazy boys and niggers catch crawdads. The lazy boys do it to pull the tails off for fish bait, or for the joy of watching crawdads suffer. Either way its all for pleasure. Its a different matter with niggers. They cook the crawdad tails. They eat them. Theres a difference between the pleasure and the need. The color of a persons skin is the difference. It is. These young boys are unnecessarily learning to apply cruelty. Thats what Emily Hopkins thinks.*

The librarian smirked as Nathaniel opened the door and the freeze blew in and disturbed the balance of odor in the librarian's mausoleum.

"Phew," he said.

He licked the falling snow.

The snow tickled his face and blew off and others came in behind them like an initiation rite. Flakes huddled on his coat and melted into cloth soggianness and he reached his hand above his head to gather the icy flowers. This was the library and back there was only the skeletal reproduction of it. Here was life, floating as if in a lily pond, denying itself to no one who sought it.

Winter was harsh to Nathaniel. It tempted and captured and sickened those unprepared to meet it. His grandma worried and kept him in the warmth of his home and away from the creek so often that to take a chance of illness he gladly would have escaped every day, except that his grandfather told him red boy was sleeping, and waiting for spring and the war the boy Nathaniel would wage with him.

youngster, i am awaiting your return. kiss this rabid winter goodnight and we will do our bit against one another. and man shall have dominance over this earth, and dominance over each other and i am a crawdaddy and mad over your conceit. you think like a damn brothel keeper. do what you will but i will snap till you crush me. you are human youngster. do what you will.

summer I

Nathaniel was at the Corn river helping the colored folks net crawdads to sell to bait stores. They paid him fifty cents for helping although they could have managed without him. He pulled in one side of the net while Isaiah Brown brought in on the opposite side. The crawdaddies hung on, or were tangled in the net and Isaiah and Nathaniel picked them off to put in the buckets.

"Do'n be fraid, boy," said Sam Brown, teasing a crawdad. "The'h pinch do'n hut." He put his finger down inside the pincer and it closed. "See." He pulled his finger out and tossed the animal into the bucket. Sam Brown looked and laughed down at Nathaniel.

"I always thought it hurt fierce sticking your finger in there," Nathaniel said.

"It does, if you stick it at the ho'n."

The horns, the tips of the pincer could insert like two needles squeezing inward towards each other. It could be a pain beheld with few others.

"Sure would hate to step in a bucket barefoot."

Sam smiled over at Isaiah whose head tilted as his eyes looked up at his father.

"She'h would," Sam said.

"Sure would."

They picked the crawdaddies off and pitched the net back out in the river. They left it there for fifteen minutes at a time.

"Do crawdaddies taste good? Mister Grate said you colored folks would have nothing else if you could always have crawdaddy," said Nathaniel.

"Tas'e like shrimp."

"Whats shrimp taste like?"

"Do'n know. Jus hea'd thah."

Crawdaddies wrestled in the buckets. Featherweights, heavyweights all rolled over in the shallow bucket pond and clamped onto opponent legs and pride. The crawdaddies were fighters. Their entire energy was directed towards fighting for food and sometimes for their freedom, but often they risked freedom hanging onto bait despite all tauntings. Crawdaddies are gutsy and stubborn and it made a boy proud to see he caught fighters.

No trespassing.

The sign was tacked to a tree at the river's edge and was mutilated with birdshot. It was strangled in a tangle of poison oak, hidden partly like it was ashamed of what it said, but it was there and everyone ignored it like it was not.

I dont think a person has the right to keep his land prisoner. Its like the river and God-knows a person cant own the river. A man can only be a trustee of the land. Land cant be owned by a single person just like God doesnt watch over a single person. Its got to be shared. Do you understand? It cant be owned spiritually. Sure we care for it while we are here. But it cant be owned. It owns us. You can never be a trespasser where God intends you to be. Grandpa's face contorted as he read to the bottom of a book page and looked back to the top and read down the page again. His finger led his eyes across the words like he was sticking it in jams and tasting them. He shook his head violently.

"I cant understand this mans books," he said. "I tangle up in him worse than I do in a sticker bush. Ive been trying to understand him for five years but dont. He must know something no one else does, or at least he pretends to."

Faulkner—grandpa knows what those books say and loves them, old faker.

"Caught us a lot of crawdaddies, grandpa," Nathaniel said.

"Did they pay you?"

"Yeah," he said. "Never seen so many crawdaddies before. Those Browns—good people."

"Coloreds are good people when theyre working, but when theyre not theyre being up to no good. There is more difference than just color. I dont care what anyone says." Grandpa pushed up his glasses. "They are all just like kids. Thats why they fish for crawdads instead of finding steady work. They dont do what they dont like."

Doin whahcha like an noh whacha do'n is yah freedom. How ken yah live fill gooh if ya do whah do'n suit ya fillins? She'h ya wehk an geh the wealf, sometime. Buh if ya know ya can n geh the money ya take the happiness of the ones ya bohn wif.

Nathaniel threw a stick with string tied to the end of it over his shoulder and put a jar with bologna crammed down it under his arm and he marched down from the house to the dirt creek. He was going to catch some crawdads of his own and put them up on the bank and just watch them.

He walked down a cowpath to the creek surrounded all around with sticker bushes and trees and biting plants, and in them, he feared, were copperheads and maybe rattlesnakes.

"Lord save my bones

Dont send them up to Mister Jones

Sing for me those mournful tones

And Lordy please, please save my bones."

The monsters in Mister Jones' taxidermy shop window haunted at the passing world. The parent-people threatened their offspring with an eternity stuffed and stuffed there if they did not behave. The dead animals, they loomed terrible and the living ones were out there in those sticker bushes somewhere.

Nathaniel got to the bank and took some bologna out to tie it with the string. He lowered it into the water and whistled to himself.

The trees were fully green leaved and all around green abounded, and on the greenery bugs rested and fed and laid eggs. The mosquitoes zipped around close to Nathaniel like the impatient buzzards they were.

Down in the dull water a something was ripping at the meat. Nathaniel felt it tug like a glutton. He reached up to see the string was tied tight to the stick and slowly he lifted the stubborn animal out of the water. It hung on with one large grimy red pincer and still ripping at the bologna with its other one. Its legs were

wiggling. The grotesque giant took the meat from the string knot and with it fell to the water's edge.

"Looky how big it is," Nathaniel said. "And red. A red freak of nature. Bigger than any of the Brownses."

The crawdaddy drew back on its legs with its pincers up high above itself and shuffled backwards into the water.

A freak of nature. Catch it. Catch it. People may want to see it.

The red crawdaddy attacked bologna bait like it was a sworn against enemy. And it always got away.

II

Winter is gone and Nathaniel cannot show the crawdaddy to Mister Grate on the post office porch or sell it to the Browns or mount it up in Joneses taxidermy shop window.

The wooly worm was black up till the time winter came and it was, indeed, a short winter. While red boy slept down below and Nathaniel lived warm in his home the forces of men and nature collided in the river currents. The sounds of the woodpecker are still there hard against the tough tree bark and the brown has turned green and the humidity squelching the liveliness out of the day is back again. Young crawdaddies are violent in the bucket ponds but the meat on the string tied to the stick does not tempt red boy any longer.

fish kill

That winter left and Nathaniel took up the implements to catch red boy and strode across the pasture to the dirt creek.

Everything dies sometime. A man will write down a thought and die, and the thought lingers a while but it will die eventually, and seasons and trees and animals and birds die. A man is no more than a temporary caretaker. Do you understand? You cant dominate when youre dominated.

The dirt creek was slick and oily. It vomited against some rocks on the bank like it was ill with the discomforts of an intruding virus.

Crawdaddy bodies and small fish hung dead against the creek bank swaying with the water and smelling dead. And red boy, different as he was from the others was just as dead and laying on a rock.

The bologna went bad with the stench of the unjustly dead, the grimy dead.

crawdaddy red boy

crawdaddy red boy

crawdaddy red boy,

In the dirt creek he died.

* * *

Shelby Stephenson

THE SMALLEST BED LIES BROKEN

How shall I sing?
It is an old theme.
The Rhine was blue.

One bear, two bears, three
And lock the door.
Golden dances the sun.

Eyes yield to heads.
I am hard in this heat.

When will the feet move this body?
Kick the afternoon up into morn,
Smooth the brow of this country.

I sweat and huff.
Over my cheeks a certain willow blows.
I shall stay until the serpent sleeps.

AN EARLY SPRING SCHOOL SONG

Between the school and backhouse
the oak erasure-tree stands white with dust.
Chapel voices float down to baseball practice
near a field bordered in honeysuckle
where a farmer ridges cornrows.

Schedules furrow the morn.
In studyhall a boy barlows a hickory stick.
Chalk hardens on the oak.
Rain slants, takes the smell of honeysuckle to the plowman.

WHEN IN THE SUN I DREAM

Blackbirds oar the horizon

dipping their wings over grainland
easy as a groomed crew.

On the tops of trees wind stirs.
Dry ninth-month grass abides no rain.
I gaze at dead limbs of pear where a mockingbird
turns tail to open air,
giving webbed twigs of black
a jackknife of feathers and blowing.
Spiders spin a white dream in new paint.
My roots spread a longing.
When I dream, the sun waters flowers.

BEGGING FOR JOY

I am not the seed I was.
I squeeze the sun from the rainbow and see sweat.
Let me lead the earth to water,
Put green in the clay,
Weep the returning ocean,
Deepen this heart.

Space, pick up your feet.
Walk outside the ring.
Look! The soil is turning, the furrows make.

GATHERING SCATTERED CORN

Burlap inked 3—9—6,
the sound of drags, trace-squeaks
in corn middles, and a man in faded overalls
bend from a pointillist brush.

He picks up nubbins, underhands them into a slide,
sacrifices from the land, blues,
spirituals of Jesus crying holy
from chariots swung down in fields
where hope is a longnecked drink from a trough,
sweat pouring out like a psalm.

A VIEW OF WOODS

Beyond the waving rye
poplars pierce the wind,
rustle the hawk on top,
centering the windowpane.

A crow strikes the sun.
I stay on the edge of my skin,
merge with black wings
yawing shoulderblades into beak,
feathers shedding the waves,
one motion giving back the other.
I am the wake and flight
of this longing.

Then the timberline, obedient
as the curtain filtering the sunset, moves,
and the trees gather skytop.

DADDY'S BOYHOOD PASTIME

I used to go lizard hunting
on old rail fences
he said.

My grandfather would make arrows
from reeds I cut in the reedmarsh.
I'd drive a nail or steel spike
into the arrow's end,
sticking it with gum
I got off a pine tree.
I'd twine all that.
I'd take feathers from Dominicker chickens
and wing the arrows.
The bow I made from scalybark hickory.

Gray lizards would run those rails and I'd hunt them.

What I call race horses—streaked lizards—would fill the hedges,
but the cats cleaned them out of this country.

Bluetailed scorpions—cats got them too.

SEEKING A CHIME

Gather the sun in a pallet.

When the time comes, a vine will climb from a blind spot.

Cheer will curl a line on a child's writing board.

Cat's whiskers will grow tails in a desert.

You shall chase them while a minstrel chords

a dipper strung with morning glories.

Lord of yards, you will tune them.

LIMBER NECK

Now, a chicken will eat a dead goat—
nastiest thing in the world.

He will eat a rotten chicken—carrion—anything.

I buried an old rooster one time,
didn't put him deep enough in the ground,
hogs rooted him up.

Our chickens ate those maggots.
Next morning
everyone of our twenty-two chickens
were sitting on the roostpoles—
dead—maggots gave them the limber neck.

Old Will Booie
helped us
sheet them,
toted them off
to Beaver Dam Woods,
threwed them out.

Anything rotten will kill anything.

We stocked ourselves up again.
Lord's willing,

guess them that's got, can.

THOUGHTS OF FISHING THE CREEK

I move to the Mouth of Buzzard Branch,
stir the earth with toes as I go,
stop in thick sand,
parchment on black dirt,
turn over a bucket for a seat,
breaking twigs,
rig a pole, line, hook
and fish quietly in the wide stream.

I dream a long northern
glides by, see the chained markings,
the reddish fins.

Gone, gone—
the mirrored eyes,
a rippled hole,
the pail sinking slowly.

THE FIELD AT HOME

Cattle low *tomorrow*.
Rain off the roof
drowns itself in coneshaped sand.
Dogs howl red songs of wanting.
Hawks wheel over rye.
Mice creep into corn.

On a cold December day
animals enter the land,
carry their softness
through a fury of patch.
I slip from stock to sight,
my look a telescope of closeness,
the land turning now to sunset
spreading like a net over the air.

Cows rise from kneeling,

walk to stableposts and rub against them,
the blood circulating,
their necks down into troughs,
the feed mixed, birds perched on bevelled rims.

A hawk breaks the circle in the sky
protecting the fieldmouse
in the earliest hour of the morning.

* * *

Stephen Kessler

TO AN ISLAND

I sit in a tavern in the capital
sipping a cognac, while you bask
mediterranean
on a seasonal coast where international
refugees retreat
and meet their missing images
on cliffs and beaches, motorbikes, the public
squares where intimacies gather.

Madrid continues
to answer my demand
for a whole world, welcome
and unfamiliar,
where poetry lives, and ghosts
of a visionary heritage
who haunt my afternoons.
At night I miss my other
presence, slow touch and flowing
rhythm of your sensual
river beside, above
and under me—

dreaming as well of my first
lost home, a huge white house
of halls and rooms,
a brother or sister I resembled,
affectionate, secret
wisdom of earliest awareness
echoing
a quarter of a century later, beyond
the possibility of use—
a common problem.

But now, tonight,

in the absence of my
self reflected in a female form,
I feel a premature sadness, traveling,
traveling alongside a source—
these visionary ghosts
of poets alive and gone
who've walked these streets
and seen with pure eyes
the same true textures—
without your other
essential parallel text.

The journey unwinds, unrolls
thru absences always—losses, long thoughts
that won't resolve,
temporary friendships and intimacies
with those whose paths
we cross,
in their homes, the common
streets, museums, trains, or tables
in rooms where we eat and speak,
together a few hours.

A few years
and our mutual history
evolves to assume
another form—interior
voices whisper formulas
whose meanings we can't make out
altho the music may be familiar.

Every rejection
of our lives
returns
to realize an equation.
When will my need for you
be renewed
and quenched in the close touch of your presence.

HOMAGE TO FEDERICO

The dark man looks intently
in the wooden mirror
seeking his image in the grain
as a large black fly spins
buzzing on its back on the green tile floor.

A pair of dark brown eyes
are carved in bread
that fails to arrive
on a table—
 early June, high snow
melting steadily
which flows coldly downhill
engraving its ballad in the riverbed.

Forty years away, nearby
on a hillside
a death waits, ticking
or pumping its memorable impulse:
the salt of olives on a temple.

Last meals, first loves
thrive in the mind of the assailed
a swift haze shrouds his vision,
 waking him, uncertain
from the dream out of which
the concierge pulled a pistol.

"It's too diffuse," he muses

fingering his incomplete works
which seem to be bound in his own skin.
"My name change hasn't come back
from the school for gifted boys,
nor the teeth I lost in that early loaf.
My love won't be a wife
no matter how embarrassed,
child of police."

Smoke curls from the bread
of the dark barrel, disappearing.

ETERNAL CURRENCY

Food & money, nervous tic
of the man eating dinner
in the cheap restaurant—
eternal currency continues, as if
the journey into the future were not
wholly unknown, unprecedented & hungry—
eager lovers hovering over a plate
or bed where sustenance resides.

Shadows expand, deep love attracts
the best of friends,
my life descends to a page
or face where sadness lives & conceives
miraculous flavors
of common reflection.

Freedom to feel & associate
is always qualified
by limits of our blind resistance,
held in a private reserve
where those who don't share
the benefits of trust
can't penetrate—

as if that nourishment
were hunger
needed to proceed
toward a deeper
darkness where vision is the only light.

IN A VAST DOMINION

for Vicente Aleixandre

The parrot moves across the hall
makes long incredible speeches in Castilian,
the master of the house wears blue pajama tops
and talks to the bird to increase its eloquence;
his round wife cooks and manages the money,
kind and candid under white hair,
and the handsome prematurely aging chambermaid
serves and cleans, while a tropical voice
absurdly calls her name—"Antonia!"

I sit at a small worktable all afternoon,
half-naked; a fine soot drifts thru the window
which gives on a little courtyard hung with laundry,
the voices of children shouting and singing,
barking dogs, mothers and television sets,
and a silent bakery which wakes at night
with men whose little rolls and crowns of bread
and salty voices rise thru my sleep
into voices of morning swallows which circle
and weave unbelievable songs
the parrot tries to repeat,
completing the circle.

I live by this window, listening to Madrid,
blurred eyes bathing in the native tongue
whose music touches me none too clearly
but reaches a place that responds, that wants
to sing back across the noise of cars,
of coffee machines, of plumbing, and the smells
of sewage and delicious foods and burnt fuel
swirling in the streets, across the clouds
of tourists spilling out of buses, and tour guides
parroting their explanations, across the squares
where infinite people seethe and children play
eternal games—to sing back across this city

with its streets named after dukes and popes
and kings and generals, and saints and poets
to a certain house in a quiet neighborhood

where an old man is going blind, I want
to place my strange lips by his ear
returning a tune he'll barely comprehend—
castanets awkwardly clattered in little hands—
music of black and white keys
touched all afternoon and evening by unsure fingers,
music of voices, transient, which lasts.

22 June 1976

* * *

Carol Lem

Bedtime

naked
anxious
a little vulnerable
books clutter the eyes

while Li Po, that old drunk
laughs over my head

i have come to this:
all the nights
distilled on a page
aging with the titles

words become golden temples
a dublin street, mellors' hut
or a head growing slightly bald,

there are no more excuses
no one followed me home
whispers on the second floor
shiny bottles and the dying rose
tell the story

i remember
other walls
more paintings
splattered behind locked doors
my self-imposed exile

from the coughs
warning of death
the air thinning through the rooms
brown bags filling with an old man's gut . . .

i see
the rough knuckled hands
the belt of his robe
dragging close to the feet
like a mummy unraveling
no more a father, less a man
in the last days of fall

talk would have been useless
was always so

breath hardens
with the rash of my birth
"how old are you now?" he'd ask

begins to rain . . .

the neighbors are home
framing their room with ancient rites
i am no longer sleepy . . .

thinking of what could be

as shades draw the night out
to the one light left
flipping the numbers over

it is late

at the end of the hall

in a bed he has known too long
the head is propped
to meet the faces
of his wife and daughter,

the arms rise like a robot
fingers fidget search
and find their home

twenty-five years for this day:

feet swollen with salt
breath retching through a tube
anchored to his throat

the lips are urgent
responsive to seasons
as if the first time

in the distance
rain beats the pavement

nurses smile and hum
over charts

in this room of remembered songs

A Day in Two Parts

I

i hear the key turn
the mailman walking off
dogs on the next block
roaring against the world

I sit read newspapers
and listen to the heater
clearing its throat
nothing much to say

even if someone were here

i shower
already twice today
follow myself in the mirror
seeing other faces
the lines
that grow into a farce

to those i will always know
your calls i never answer
your words i never remember:

forgive the fragments
my room you have not seen
in years

later i will pass your houses
like scars now
even with the new additions
the yellow stucco

you say i am always moving
but go nowhere
spread my energies across the page
fifty miles away
for visions born in closets

at work
students skin parched
by the color of their past
regret the future

they look to me
instead of god
it scares me to hear
i'm 67 not long to go
you've got to help me

the young are gone
out climbing poles
filling the streets
with images of themselves

with enough courage
i would join them
breed chickens
and people in the garden

to sell whatever's left

or make believable

and when you come by
sprinklers will hit you
in the face
children will greet you
with practiced kisses

candles lit and wine served

what is there to say
after that . . .

II

wind slams the window shut
ferns quiver at the edge

to know something is there . . .
like the vine
itching across the screen
more accurate than a clock
as it holds the eye to an image

it is not much

to watch shutters close
in the next house
to watch them open again
in shapes like dreams
back and forth
now and then

until the visitors go
or cannot remember
why they are there
or what it's all for . . .

someone is yelling upstairs

words shatter with the glass
then fall against the pipes
the instinctive rush of water
and the cry for something new

it is not easy to start again
with rooms that smell of camphor wood

or corners of broken concrete
showing the way home

i learn to move among the briar
rake the leaves into a pile
as if the act itself were important

when the ground is wet
twigs mount against the curb
and sidewalks endure the will
of the tree

but no branch says
this shouldn't be

the wind will not last forever
Sunset
(Forest Lawn)

march
and the wind
threatens rain

my mother bows her head
from the cold
crushing the flowers
against the purse

before the tarnished urn
she taps the side
half-expecting

unravels the brown bag

like a present
as if to say
look what i brought you

and whisper to me
aren't you going to say
hello?

sun nearly down
bearers of the past
take their place:
an old lady seeing her fate
for the first time
the oiled plaques
the grass forever green
the tourists
prepared with instamatics
silence becomes visible

my mother
twitches at the spectacle
wants to talk alone
leaves oranges instead
reminding him
it's chinese new year
the year of the snake

i can't see she says
my eyes tire in the afternoon
hold my hand
how many steps are there . . .

she sits on a bench
and waits
for the wind to stop

the sun drops behind the clouds

in a collage of orange and purple
briefly holding on

we drive the road out
no longer getting lost
pass the afterthoughts
of pink carnations fresh earth
the shapes that circle
wander and grow dark

and at the entrance
she gives me a lemon drop
to ease the taste
sweet she says

HIROSHIMA

i must give
the dying
water
i remember
the child
face down
in the river
under the bridge
black like an earthworm
who cannot speak
or feel pain
skin
no more than tissue paper
mouth swept away
eyes asking
in the image
of a weapon
my family, where are they?

sometimes shaving
i cut myself
i wash
the years

it stops
i say i'm lucky

my son gets nosebleeds
i worry
and don't want him
to have children

i fall in love too
but when i see
these burnt spots
in the mirror
i want to kill myself

but they tell me about
spiritual beauty
the equality of the blind
walking down the ruined streets
of your history

please do not look at me
with special eyes

Haru No Umi (Sea of Spring)

before me stands a desk
filled with unfinished poems
my new electric olympia
stumbling like the rain
the promise of wet dirt
these fingers these birds
perched sucking their wing
some warming the pavement
as in a landscape by Cezanne
watching trees at different angles
for the recurrent order
of words
only final lines are death
the sea changes color
regardless of the sun

turning in the gutter
regardless of the kelp
wrapped around my waist
writing stanzas for the sake of the moon
fertility
futility
the question of a letter

* * *

Dennis Holt

MUSIC IN CITIES BY THE WATER

that last calliope chord
is still echoing somewhere
on beyond the buildings

music in cities by the water
that organ grinder in Veracruz
the rhythm of the workman & his pick

& now here (once again still)
down on the levee sittin on a wall
just off Jackson Square
this mad calliope music
from the roof of the steamer Natchez
"Dark Town Strutters Ball"

she turns off the steam
or better reroutes it
& the big red paddle-wheel
back of the boat
slowly starts to turn

as the prow of the GOLAR SANKO
a long (I find out later)
green & red hulled
Liberian tanker
moves on up the river
the Mississippi River
New Orleans

crossing the parking lot
coming to sit on this wall
finally far enough from the tourists
to not feel the need
to hold back the tears

I realized I'd gotten myself
smack dab thick in the middle
of one of those Lew Welch poet walks
letting it all come in
& it do

& there were my tears
& there was Lew Welch
& there was my moving & seeing through the world for more than myself
& there was John Brandi in his poem in the square
& there were these train tracks behind me
& there was Ginsberg his tincan banana dock
 his box-house hills & cry
& there & here is seeing & soul
& Woodie Guthrie & Tom Joad
all of us sitting on this dockside wall
bearing a lot of reality

& all the ways those drum majorettes
jive & strut their bodies
& the tricky rhythms in the tuned drums
Krewe of Pegasus moving down Canal Street

& the little black boy on the bike
who asked the fat wigged balloon man
"Hey Mister, when the parade is?"

New Orleans

Mardi Gras 1976

NORTH OF KIRK CREEK

thinking of walking this coast
not to worry about food
semi-fasting
maybe some tea

If you were leaving to live on a desert island
what kind of tea would you take?

kelp out there
small brown patches
just below the surface of the green
brown-yellow water
closer to the cliffs
the breakers stirring up the bottom

But what would you use to heat up the water?
& the water's half salt besides.
Of course, of course
but forget all that.
What kind of tea would you take?

And what's the use of all this learning?
all this cultivated mind?
It is somehow pleasing to the senses.

Beside the ancient Buddha head on my bookshelf
the Japanese jar half full of jasmine tea.
We never drink jasmine tea.
I occasionally give it a long deep sniff.

17-III-75

MAHOGANY CAOBA PUNSUN

like one fall sappy-bark pine
so close to the trail
the trail jogs a bit up the hillside around it

a landmark:
I knew where I was on the trail passing that pine
pinching some semi-hardened drippings of sap from its trunk
sticky on fingers held up to nostrils
nothing like pine-smell

even *I* would have missed *that* tree
but most of the pines were left alone:
plenty of pines on ladino land

in Payaland they come at night
ladinos madereros
ula
(in one town they call them the "dirty-assholes"—
a bahuwrihi compound)
show up during the dark of night
while the Payas are sleeping
& take down the best of their trees & away
mahogany mostly
they've still got plenty of pine of their own

I travelled once with some dwellers in the place
to the settlement of Marañones
cashew trees
a group of the Payas themselves now call Kahā Wayka
Pueblo Nuevo
new town
& they add on Subirana :
Pueblo Nuevo Subirana
after the 19th Century Spanish priest
who was good to Honduras's Indians

walking a narrow trail from the logging road
they noticed a big mahogany tree was gone
caoba
punsun
they know the names of all the trees
& where they are or aren't
le neant
beautiful red wood tree
taken while they'd been in town
the ladinos come by from time to time
to buy sasales from the Payas
manioc tamales
only the Payas make them
& sell them cheap

it's hard to trust any ladinos
even the ones who like sasales

"Eres muy ligero para caminar" one of them told me
walking back to the logging road
suspicious smile
sawal in his bag
machete swinging from his hand

. . . .

right outside my window
some kind of bush
branches wobbling slightly in the breeze
I rarely notice it
& I've never even tried to find out its name

9,11-I-76

"MOTILE POEMS LIKE FINGERS OR ROOT TIPS"

each of us conscious each pencil or pen tip
typewriter stroke touching of brush-hairs to canvas
daub with a tea-bag
activity out at the farthest extensions of creation
this is where mankind has gotten to here

"So it's all come to this" Lew Welch suggests that we say

cat curled up in a corduroy bean-bag chair
attentive to the sound of slowly dripping water from the bathroom
ears erect tuned to each sporadic sound

the mind using matter as instrument for knowing itself

out the window across the street
palm fronds flapping in the wind
blue sky above & behind them
I bet we'll be able to see Mt. Wilson today
all those antennas on top

23-X-75

NĀMARŪPA

One late afternoon down by the river north of town
the ford where the log-trucks & cattle cross
browsing among the rocks at the edge of the water
you picked up a cream & pink one
like rocks you'd known in Alaska.

"Pegmatite," I informed you.
"Oh, why do you always haff to give names to things?"
Your same recurring complaint.

"Well then, *you* tell *me* what it is
without giving it a name."
& you laid its hard heavy coldness in my hand.

That was just outside the town of Culmí.
I never knew the name of the river.

23-X-75

PANAJACHEL

I think I can hear the rain falling
on the volcano across the lake

24-VIII-75

* * *

Ron Schreiber

dealing with your epilepsy

—for B.

1. I cannot deal with it.

I don't know how you feel. I do not think that the line between conscious & unconscious is a line at all. I think it is a circle. I think it is a merry-go-round. I am riding a wooden horse & listening to music I cannot dance to.

2. I cannot deal with it.

When Senator Kennedy wrote a liberalized immigration law to replace the old McCarren Act & Congress passed the liberal law & the President signed it, national quotas were abolished. Epileptics, who had been barred under the old law, were now admitted. Homosexuals, who had not been mentioned before, were now barred.

3. I cannot deal with it.

It's not the fits but the way you come out of them, screaming "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" & "Mama! Mama!" & staying there—at 12 or 14 or whenever the fits began, reeling around the house, stopping wherever others stop, smiling coyly, needing everyone's attention, wanting everyone to take care of you.

I cannot take care of you. Maybe somebody else, who knows you better, can take care of you. Maybe you can learn to take care of yourself.

4. I cannot deal with it.

You have lived in the house one month and now you have become the center of attention. You are our chief topic of conversation. You are the focus of our energies. We call the hospital for you.

We take you there. We learn about frontal lobe seizures.

& my own life spins out of focus till only you are clear. If I knew
you better, if I loved you, maybe I would want to help you. But I do
not love you & I do not want to know you better.

5. I cannot deal with it.

on to ithaca

—*for Dick*

i.

from Saranac Lake you write of a high school girl who has become your friend
of young people & old people who sit around you to sing songs together
songs of workers, of dries, mountain songs, your songs. you are organizing
an isolated upstate New York town to make its own music. you are
the poet & the singer & the would-be lover. you are also getting yourself together
before you move to Ithaca, before you meet the right woman & settle down with
her.

ii.

I've tried it too, starting nearly ten years ago. first Tom & four long months
of perpetual pleasurable motion until we broke apart in separate pieces.
later he talked on television about getting married & the joy of finding
his straight self. then Jamey in New York Antioch New York, & finally England
where he told me he no longer desired me. at last Nico, whom I met in an
Amsterdam bar
& lived with seven years, one year apart, & now we're back together in the same
house
no longer lovers, though we learn maybe to love all over again without roles
—decider & the one for whom decisions are made. an unpainted picture
with no live models to draw from.

iii.

you were married in the Catskills.
a sunny day. Virginia wore a white Mexican dress & you an embroidered
Ukrainian shirt white on white. John read a wedding poem & when you kissed
a single fiddler played a lively dance. your parents were there,
reunited for the first time in ten years. later we all went swimming
in our underwear in the pond on Sandra's land. a beautiful day.

Sandra & Jerry are still together acting their roles, but Virginia
has gone gay in New York & you have gone through woman after woman
in the last year. waiting to meet the right woman to share the rest of your life.
& Dick doesn't that sound familiar?

iv.

like birds we're trained to pair.
to say "my lover" or "my wife" or "my old man" & doesn't it tell you something?
turning & turning over downhill till two of us form one ball bouncing over rocks
into a stream till finally at least we're neither of us free in the couple.
haven't you heard the song & do you really want to sing the whole ballad again
verse & refrain & verse & refrain again & again until we die?

v.

I don't know the way either. Nico wonders whether he should find himself
a new husband, you wonder about another wife. I look for a way of touching,
of getting to know another body not my own. not my own,
without ownership, not my lover, my man, my woman.
there has to be a different song for us to sing. we have to write it.

houses

here is a house with 15 rooms.
four rooms are in the basement, where old things are
stored & washing is done.
four rooms are on the first floor.
those rooms are called the living room, the dining room,
the music room, & the kitchen.
four rooms are on the second floor.
they are called Jerry's room, Nico's room, Tim & Mary's room
& the sewing room.
Tim & Mary's room has a fireplace & its own bathroom.
soon, however, it will be called something other than
Tim & Mary's room.
three rooms are on the top floor.
they are called Susan's room, my room, and number 7.
my room used to be called Tom's room.
it is very big & has brown walls.
John has just moved into two of the rooms in the basement.

here is a house with 15 rooms.

there was a house with six rooms.
five of the rooms were on one floor.
they were called the living room, the dining room,
the kitchen & the bedrooms.
one of the bedrooms was my room.
the other bedroom was my parents' room.
between the two bedrooms was a bathroom.
above these five rooms was a full-sized attic, which
was called unfinished.
that meant that the attic was cold & no one lived there.
below the five rooms was a basement.
it was mostly finished because my father finished it.
it had tiled floors, a ping pong table, & a washing machine.
I believe it was called the recreation room.
I believe it was for me to give parties in except
I did not give parties.
my parents did not give parties either, but I think
they hoped that I would.
now that room would be called the family room.
there was a house with six rooms.

there is a house with nine rooms.
it does not live in the city.
it is in the country near a highway & near the ocean.
I do not live there yet.
the rooms do not have names yet.
this house is very old; it will be getting older.
until I have lived there I will not know very much about
this house except its location.
I also know what it looks like but I am not telling anybody.
there is a house with nine rooms.

I have lost my light tan papermate ballpoint pen again

I have lost my light tan papermate ballpoint pen again.

I have ripped my 20-year-old *dotera*
in the inside lining & the outside lining

& in the inner cotton stuffing so that it
all has to be taken apart & washed & reseeded.

I have mislaid my Jordan Marsh trial-credit card
& will miss the Saturday sale where nearly everything
I don't want is marked down 50 percent.

I have forgotten with whom I have a date tomorrow afternoon
& whether we have ever slept together before.

I have forgotten who it was I was in love with
last year in this season or
whether I was in love then.

I have mislaid the notes I made for the courses
I am supposed to teach next semester & I am beginning to forget
what courses I am supposed to teach.

I have lost the telephone number of the hot water heater
repair service & have forgotten the name of the woman
who sold us the heater.

I have sewed all the missing buttons onto my winter coat.

I am now ready to sit down & begin to write but
I have lost my light tan papermate ballpoint pen again.

around

a marionette, wooden &
painted in gay colors.
an intricate carving,
even the mouth opened
to laugh & sometimes speak.

sometimes to speak he used to
shout at it when no one listened
in August the strings broke
from overuse, or age, or
something that wore out.

something that wears out
exhausts him when he tries
to make it go. or angers
him when he caresses it.
in October it broke in pieces.

it broke into pieces yesterday.
the right arm still stuffs
envelopes, the left hand types.
the penis pretends to have sex.
the head piece is missing.

the head piece is missing.
even the mouth that used
to open to laugh or speak
has broken into pieces.
something wore out.

& no birthday poem this year

—for Tom

in the morning you painted Chinese
brushstroke leaves by noon you
were cleaning an apartment then
the old painter a house in Rutland
Square & home for dinner with
new dope & gifts from France

last night you were in Roxbury
tonight you call your mother in Pontiac
Randy in New York Gary is out turning
last night you were with Peter when
you get up you water plants & plan
what to do with the rest of your day

if you can't count the people you
love or sleep with even the day's
activities after they're done how can

you know what years on a calendar mean
or how you're changing who you are or
how you stay the same

two nights ago my father tried to poison me
last night the world exploded as it does
every month I wonder who you'll be
tomorrow happy birthday for all of us
whenever the world ends or we eat chocolate cake

* * *

Larry French

Calcutta 1975

Mark McCloskey

ONE'S CANNIBAL DIARY

The Fourth of July. Rockets thump up from the pier a mile to the north and pop into dazzles—chlorine, cherry, diamond. Around one, sparklers and Roman candles, sulphur and salt, idioms and howls; out in the bay, so many running-lights a new shore seems to have risen from the sea.

On one's right on the white blanket, Bubasta fusses with her luxurious black hair. On one's left, Elsworth, Bubasta's longtime lover, cracks his small knuckles. As always they seem irritated with one another. As always one is in love with Bubasta.

#

One phones Bubasta from a dark gas station.

'When can I see you?'

A whisper: 'Someone's visiting.'

'Oh?'

'A friend from the magazine. I can't do anything.'

She sneezes.

'Bless you.'

'Whew . . . my God . . .'

'There's nothing I can do then?'

'Come tomorrow.'

'Yes.'

#

One arrives at Bubasta's apartment. Fat orange chairs and tassled lamps. Mirrors. Bubasta presides in a Mexican blouse at her round table, glancing at her broad dark face in the mirrors.

Elsworth is stoned on the couch. His sandals sprawl on the rug next to the lame cat. He sees the sex and disappointment in one's eyes.

'Keep it up,' he sneers. 'One mustn't falter in the thicket of battle.'

Bubasta's chocolate eyes roll up.

One leaves. Bubasta catches up and pats one's cheek. 'I forgot he was coming over tonight,' she croons. 'Don't be mad. You've always been nice to me.'

#

The phone saves one.

'I was pretty stoned the other night,' Elsworth sighs.

One is empty: 'What do you want?'

'You know how women are,' Elsworth drags on. 'They try to order your life for you.'

'Yes?'

'*Let* her write my checks for me. O.K. *Let* her try to clean my house up. Haa haa . . . she'll never make it. But I *won't* let her move in with me. I told her that a long time ago. Now she's pushing *again*.'

One remembers the old days. Bubasta and her roommates in the House of the Witches. The horse-girl, the ex-nun, the black model. The cock sizes they compared on the kitchen wall with pencils and laundry markers.

Elsworth is moaning, 'And I *won't* let her stop me from seeing other women. It's unfair, goddammit.'

One remembers one's fat sculptor friend who brought the witches a pizza one snowy night. They teased him, sent him home. One remembers the highschool barfly Bubasta fell in love with instead of oneself in those days.

'Let's have dinner on Thursday,' Elsworth says.

#

There are mushrooms on Elsworth's lawn, and his brick cottage has a roof so steep it reminds one of a witch's hat. His stepmother left it to him, along with the dividends of a trust fund. She owned a factory that made ladies' underwear. Elsworth has let her prize sofas and drapes rot, and filled her cottage with junk—German posters from World War I, Russian posters from the Revolution, a million toys and gadgets.

When one arrives on Thursday, Bubasta is there.

'Look at this place,' she huffs.

'Oh stop being so Jewish,' Elsworth crackles.

They take Elsworth's sportscar to the Italian restaurant. Elsworth's rain-colored ponytail gushes from his beige beret into the collar of his leather coat. Bubasta is

sitting on one's lap, and when Elsworth glances at one through the side panel of his World War I aviator's goggles, the corner of his mouth is leering.

At the restaurant, though, Bubasta doesn't see Elsworth wink at Ingrid-the-Viking, the regular waitress. Bubasta is snorting at a small blonde who strains at an aria with her fingertips curled into each other. Even little Julio, the owner, takes a turn singing. Elsworth's pinkie is on Ingrid's wrist by now. The corner of Bubasta's eye knows this, but food is her passion at the moment. She tells Ingrid not to forget the hot pepper, and smiles. Elsworth delicately makes it clear that his noodles are to be drained and garnished with extra sauce. One knows that Elsworth will chew his dinner as though there were small bones in it, and that Bubasta will stuff herself until she belches.

Elsworth asks Bubasta if he can borrow her car when she visits her parents next week. She blinks at the spoon he is wagging at her, for her mouth is full of cappuccino.

Julio and the blonde are wailing a duet.

#

Elsworth takes Bubasta's car. He says he is going to interview a retired character actor for his F.M. local-color show.

So one gets to drive Bubasta to the airport. *Dancer Magazine* is letting her take a week off from proofreading and rewriting articles.

She reminisces about her first long love. One tries not to remember, but one is unable to. They grew up together, and finally he fled to an asylum, where he still lives. She wants to know if men find her terrifying.

'Unthinkable,' one sighs.

They are at the gate now and Bubasta kisses one's mouth.

Her sweet taste floats one back through the lobby.

#

One picks Elsworth up in one's car. They are going to the Stravinsky concert in the park. They buy a picnic of Greek salad, stuffed grape leaves, and champagne. Then they pick up the ballet student Elsworth met at the party the retired character actor was throwing. She is lean and her name is Stella.

The darker it becomes in the park, the colder it becomes. One has not brought a sweater. Two pink spotlight beams cross overhead to warn aircraft away, but a small plane drawls deliberately through the first movement of *The Rite of Spring*. Elsworth doesn't appear to notice these things; Stella absorbs him. One is pleased.

At the intermission Elsworth introduces one to some of his friends in the orchestra—fifth stand violin, first stand bass, the tympanist and the tuba player. One is duly impressed. After the concert one is dragged backstage because Elsworth knows Frank Zappa's hairdresser. Zappa, done up in white ruffles, is still sweating from his part in *L'Histoire du Soldat*. He still has a limp from the night in London a lorry driver threw him off the stage into the audience.

Stella is as excited as a fox in a hencoop.

One is not offered a brandy when one drives her and Elsworth to Elsworth's cottage. One is, nonetheless, ecstatic.

#

Bubasta weeps on the phone. Her parents are moving to another city, so she has to pack her childhood in boxes and look at the old house for the last time.

She is furious with Elsworth's phone machine, and will leave no message on it. Would one therefore be so kind as to inform Elsworth when to pick Bubasta up at the airport?

'You went there with him?' she snaps.

'The Stravinsky concert.'

'Who was he with?'

'I never saw her before . . .'

Oh my, one has been vulgar.

'In *my* car?' Bubasta screams. '*My* car?'

Elsworth resigns himself to the news. But he is too terrified to pick Bubasta up.

Would one mind?

#

Bubasta storms off the plane, sees that Elsworth is missing, and weeps in one's arms. She continues to blow her nose all the way to her apartment, and when she finds her car and her door locked and her keys missing, she cries that Elsworth is a callous moron and has one rush her to his cottage.

They find him in conference with his waxy producer, who watches the dust motes with one as Bubasta screams at Elsworth in the back bedroom. Issues of the heart are moments away from overwhelming the rest of the house. The producer sneaks away. One lingers. Just as Bubasta's mouth is about to enter the room, one starts for the door. One's timing is flawless. She pins one's hand to the knob and

smiles at one like Shirley Temple. Elsworth is sliding along the far wall toward the French doors.

#

Bubasta has summoned one. As one speeds toward her district, it sparkles at the end of the line of palm trees on the boulevard. At the last intersection, one grinds one's teeth at the tangle of cars jockeying for the directions their pleasures lie in. 'Patience,' one tells oneself, 'patience.'

When one arrives, Bubasta is smoking a cigarette at her round table, her hair dried and brushed, her purple burnoose interleaved over her crossed knees. One asks lightly where Elsworth is. She shrugs, flicks a Kleenex from the table, and invites one to a bathroom tissue sale at the all-night supermarket. A tissue sale? One is confused.

They take one's car because Bubasta's is low on gas and her favorite station is closed. One watches her prowl the supermarket aisles for tissue, cat food, cigarettes, cookies. Back at her apartment one watches her brew Colombian coffee and finally resettle herself at the table. One listens to her chatter about the next issue of *Dancer Magazine*, about a forthcoming Indian pow-wow in the desert, about her old roommate the horse-girl's broken finger. One listens to her joke about the resemblance between Elsworth and her lame cat. One is breathless with impatience by now.

Then Bubasta says, 'I'm having an affair with the Features Editor.'

The zings of a vibrating cymbal fill one's head.

'You had me all the way up here to tell me that?' one pants. 'You think perhaps I'm your girlfriend, not a man?'

'Who is there to *understand* me?' she moans.

'Or approve?' one shouts.

'What?' she shouts back, as though one had yanked her ear. But she continues, picturing her long fidelity to Elsworth, and insisting that if it weren't for him, this recent lapse . . . and so on.

One is speechless. Bubasta continues to exonerate herself until exhaustion floats happily from her mouth and she stretches in all the mirrors.

One crawls home.

#

The phone shrieks and shrieks. Finally one shivers in one's despair and sticks it to one's ear.

Elsworth snivels that Bubasta has thrown her affair in his face, and that he has been weeping in his cottage for a week. Bubasta huffs that Elsworth will not leave her alone, that he wails he is even willing to marry her now. 'Oh the gall!' she bubbles.

'Take my side! Take my side!' they whimper.

One hungers for freedom, one thirsts for revenge.

#

Suddenly Bubasta loses her new lover. 'How could he . . . I don't understand him . . . He's a machine,' she cries.

Elsworth says, 'Sigh.' Then, 'Now she knows what it feels like. I wish *I'd* had the guts to do it. And she *deserves* it.'

'Dissemble,' one exhorts oneself, forcing one's body to Bubasta's door, to Elsworth's door. 'Your chance will come.'

Bubasta pulls her cheeks in her mirrors and groans that she is growing old. Elsworth pulls a large-toothed comb through his hair and mutters that he has fed unwittingly on the toadstool of ingratitude.

'Now, now,' one pretends to console them.

Then Bubasta announces that her twenty-sixth birthday is imminent.

Blood seeps into the pupils of one's eyes.

#

On Bubasta's birthday, the amateur singers are performing in the Italian restaurant. One arrives first, then Bubasta, then ten minutes later Elsworth. The sight of each other turns their faces the color of rubber cement, and they glare at one, for they suspect that one has arranged this repulsive coincidence. One replies with a mindless smile, for one has indeed arranged it, and waits only the *pièce de résistance* of one's scheme, guessing that neither victim will retreat from the other beforehand.

One is right. They do not. Ingrid has left the city, and Bubasta and Elsworth distract themselves by complaining separately to one about the new waitress. One orders a liter of wine and pours for each of them until their lust for distraction has consumed it. Soon they are staring cruelly at the singer of the moment—who could be an old man or an old woman for all the wig and cape reveal.

One goes on to praise the chandelier of plastic grapes over the table to give Bubasta and Elsworth a chance to sneer at one's bad taste. They do. One tells them there is a traffic light near one's apartment so sensuously green that one could eat

it. Their eyes give one up for an imbecile, as one hoped they would. One jokes that the price has gone up on filet of mole. Again success: they groan.

Then, opening one's eyes as wide as possible and fixing them on Bubasta, one leans toward Elsworth and, shaping each syllable carefully and well above the normal range, announces: 'I suppose you know Bubasta has acquired a new lover. The Business Manager this time.'

Bubasta's eyes pop. 'Wha . . .' she squeaks as Elsworth's face jerks toward her and freezes.

'The Business Manager!' one all but shouts, as

though it were some revolting but hilarious revelation.

Elsworth begins to undergo spasms. His mouth looks like the rectum of a chicken straining to disgorge an egg.

Then Elsworth's fingertips, which are pinching the rim of the table so hard they quiver, withdraw into the interior of small, putty-colored fists. Suddenly he is punching the stunned Bubasta—arm, breast, ribs, ear. 'Julio!' the waitress yells, and Julio rushes in, furious with panic. Bubasta rolls off her chair and curls up on the floor, covering her face. Elsworth slams back into the piano, screaming, 'Bitch! Bitch!'

One rises and bends slowly over Bubasta, one's hands on one's knees, and shakes one's head. Then one straightens and, pausing before the now shocked and inarticulate Elsworth, stuffs a five dollar bill into the breast pocket of his shirt and half-whispers, 'My share of the bill. Do tell Bubasta goodbye for me. And happy birthday. Yes. Do remember that[.]'

One edges through the babble and terror. Outside, one zippers one's jacket up. One floats into the gauzy aura over the city.

#

One's clothes are lying on the beach close to the pier. A pink breathlessness has come upon the air. The lifeguard stations are empty. A bicycle with no one on it clicks along the beachwalk. A rocket sails up from the end of the pier, leaving a dim orange trail behind it, and explodes into dazzling streamers.

The phone is sobbing.

One disentangles one's body from the white blanket. One rubs one's face with cold water.

The phone stamps its foot on the kitchen table.

One's bathroom mirror is full of one's face. One touches it. One emits a warm breath.

The phone is a drop of blood. One wipes it up with a sponge.

* * *

Henry H. Roth

LOST LAUGHTER

The overall day appeared fated to be yellow-flavored, definitely this was a sallow yellow morning, save for a few blue-grey silhouettes swaying on a side of the house—raunchy, chancy colors, deflected from grimy sky and unclean clouds. Ronald (thirteen only ten days ago) aimed an imaginary camera and recorded this morning—forever. Took another picture. For many weeks now he'd lugged his imaginary camera much as the young child would tote a real teddy bear or soiled blanket or more fitting as Ronald had years before packed his own phantom six shooter. Looking up at the grey, dusty heaven, he spotted some whispering/whimpering birds and took three quick accurate snaps and was adding to his marvelous, very private and singular memory album.

Mom—would always be mom, *his mom*, she would never shift in the lava of his love—had relentlessly whirled through the gamut of Ronald's early brilliance. Breathless at his many stances, but very pleased that he tried so terribly hard to maintain equilibrium in a shaky, shaky, erupting world. From the beginning Mom had spotted and admired his bravery.

At age four, Ronald's brilliant monologue of bad dreams, terrifying nights and scary days, filled each room of the house with its soaring, purging flow. For the next three years (5-8) Ronald prowled his backyard and neighborhood with a ferocious invisible gun leveling any kid, adult, bush, tree, bee that might trouble the young man's childhood journey. Only his sister Karen and Mom were free from potential leveling. And afterward came his wonderful, moody poetry, easily the equal in quality and texture to the poets four times his age (9). Then Ronald walked and spoke with the poise and self-assurance of an actor and a captain of industry. At twelve he slumped in posture but not in classroom mettle, but he had positively not perked up again until he became an incessant photographer.

His sister, Karen, had joked nervously—oh I wish it was the gun at least *that* has a silencer and well people didn't seem to notice how strange he is. His Mom's lovely face, marred by tired, bitter lips, replied—He must act out to excess. And it was true, Ronald's blazing, simmering black eyes warned you to avoid direct eye contact, for if you looked too deeply, a clear message insisted and begged—just let me have these roles—just let me succeed in my modest ways and not go mad. Do not look at me, avoid me. His Mom always applauded his performances in the

privacy of her bedroom. But she wisely worried about the camera and all this new invisible prop entailed and symbolized. Of course she worried.

Will you write again—his mom asked Ronald.

—Yes, no more poetry, however.

—Oh, why not?

—Fiction is next for me. Stories, novellas and the Novel.

—When will you be finished taking pictures?

He kept swinging his arm back and forth as if the camera was becoming too cumbersome. The days stay yellow, mom. Once the colors change markedly I can stop.

—What do you mean?

—The mornings were always yellow but the afternoon turned tangerine and peach and orangy and twilight usually smoky blue, but now it's all lemon yellow and lousy.

—Have you noticed the color staying the same since your father called?

—Yes, yes. Why did he call?

—We'll find out soon enough.

—Two letters plus a birthday present a year for the past eight years and now he wants to see us. Karen cries at night. I hear her.

—I know, dear.

—I'm not saying she hasn't cried before but since his call she can't conceal her crying.

—Is that so good, I mean, concealing feelings?

—Keeping things under control is very important.

His mom smiled a golden old-fashioned-memory of a smile and Ronald took her picture. Good-naturedly, she posed again and again while he used up several rolls. Her last smile was shy and girlish—Ronald, if the color of each day is the same, why keep taking pictures? Why not wait for the change?

—I *am* waiting for the change. Once it comes, I have no need of the camera. Oh, you don't see, do you?

—Would you like a real camera while you wait?

He pointed in every direction—Oh, it's real, very real.

The next morning loose leaves flew against his window and banged and slid about like sparks and when they flew off, grey dust smears fingered the pane. Ronald searched the sky and land for new colors. Definitely malignant-shaped clouds. The land looked false and desolate. Everything was limp. Even the mighty trees seemed shackled and bent under the rotten August heat. Today was the day his father came. He will wear a silver blazer, a coral pink rugby shirt, ruby black flare pants and blue-grey cigar smoke will halo his face. Sparks will replace words—his mom will whimper—yellow will vanish. Karen, in an off-white peasant dress, will stand, arms akimbo, waiting for a happy ending, for a happy reunion and the son scorned and left for dead in a warm paid-off taxes, taken care of house, will measure the man, will do a monologue, will aim a long forgotten six shooter, will aim a camera, will rea[d a] poem or two, but nothing will happen, even the son will not believe the scene or action for there is no memory loitering about.

The father, dressed in wrinkled, run-of-the-mill dacron summer fluff and dry, has just arrived. Ronald gently shoves his mom and sister to the side of the gravel driveway, and taking his father's cool, unmoist hand, the boy leads the man back to the shiny new Renault. The man is sighing and leaning over slightly as if fearing a kiss or anticipating a slap instead Ronald comes up with the line known forever but just thought up. —Be off, Sir. Be off forever, Sir. There is no lost laughter between us. No chance of there ever being lost laughter. The boy begins to sob uncontrollably. His mouth feels like a hot furnace, as he dashes back to the house. The frightened father drives swiftly away and never returns. The mother and daughter walk back toward a trim house, soaked in a rainbow pudding of mod colors, and listen to the clear sound of typing and sobbing from Ronald's attic studio. His mom decides to make tea, while his sister readies the fresh mint and ice; eventually both will have to search for the pitcher and tray.

THE GUY

Walking into town, he saw this vaguely familiar guy run over to a parked Volkswagen, enter on the passenger side, and the Volks promptly took off. He thought he knew the guy from somewhere, a musician perhaps, but what gig, what party . . . and then he dismissed the problem until blocks later when the same guy, whistling now, walked right past him. Had the guy suddenly got out of the car and hiked back into town? And why was this dumb/trifling scene troubling him at all. Silly to ponder over it for a second. But wonder he did all the way home and even told his wife—who shrugged it off. It was nothing, nothing. O.K., so finally released one of life's little mysteries and latched onto petty problems—the leak in the kitchen which he swiftly repaired and a loose porch step ingeniously patched up.

He truly had the easy life. And knew it and delighted in that unassailable truth. Skilled professional in his chosen career, he had more work than any musician could fantasize. No problem with meeting any bill and no need for any cross-country tours or club anymore. Just the call from the recording studios and ad agencies for a few hours' workday, plenty of bucks for his facile time and checks in the mail—the same day.

Even in prior troubled times he had always got off easy—two busted marriages produced no children and no alimony pay-offs and only a little bitterness. Then up popped a young, adoring girl, dedicated to giving him pleasure and no trouble at all. Then stumbling over this house in a sweet sleepy town forty minutes from the big city—the owners had been truly bewildered that their ritual marriage was K.O.'d and were very desperate for quick exit and cash. So he laid out a bucket of money on the kitchen table and bought himself a bargain. Immediately discovered a reliable hippie carpenter who did superwork cheap and fast. Bitter memories of past owners now swept away, the house was ready to be shaped out anew—like the girl now his third wife and this marriage would take since he was so much wiser now and there was no chance of failure. And bad nights and sour days were over. For now he lived inwardly tranquilized and smiling, settling in for smooth days and smoother nights. And work offers from the city poured in and he fed off the easy times slowly, like it was a surprise catered feast.

But he kept seeing the guy. Kept seeing him in the supermarket, at the bakery, in the mall and in the city. Sometimes three, four, five places during the same day. He didn't tell his wife. One night, putting the garbage out for morning pickup, he saw the guy walking a dog and the guy had waved and spoke for the first time—"Hi." Saw the guy the next day walking a different dog.

Almost forgot it all when his wife became pregnant. He did over the guest bedroom and read every book on parenthood. Years before when he had taken up skiing he'd smothered himself with lessons, how-to-ski books and the finest equipment. A few months later he lost interest and cold-turkeyed skiing, just as he had cold-turkeyed drugs and booze. He got into cars literally and figuratively doing much research on the best possible car to buy—because of intensive study and the company's commercials he chose a Volvo. But cars, drugs, booze and skiing were mere preludes to preparing for a child and he read and reread all available info and statistics. He inquired about baby nurses, the cost of bedroom intercoms and watched his wife's diet like a zealous nutritionist. He and his wife rarely ventured from the snug house where they watched TV, made love and ate very wisely. The easy life possessed both of them. The house had been well insulated, courtesy the hippie carpenter, and even during the coldest winter in many years, heating bills were mere trifles. When an aunt he barely remembered

died and left him ten thousand dollars, he opened a bank account for his unborn kid. But the guy still tailed him. He spotted him in several old movies on TV and saw him in a Bob Hope special, and once, when they did go into town, to the local movie theatre, the guy came in with a stunning girl and sat in front of them. There was definitely an easy life but he was also being followed, being harassed and marred. He told no one but began talking to himself. Without warning the easy life somersaulted, stood on its head, and bad, incredibly lousy things overtook him. The roof sprung a leak, the reliable carpenter had split for work in Alaska so a pigeyed townie roofer took him to the cleaners with an extravagant repair bill. The Volvo would simply not start up and no mechanic could encourage the vehicle from its immobile depression. He hurt his hand and had to refuse several lush recording dates. His wife began bleeding. An old friend committed suicide. His wife had a miscarriage. They sat around or took long drives but both had lost the art of simple conversation with one another. He decided to go on tour again. She stayed home. He sent her cards every day, but she rarely replied and wasn't home when he called. She ran off with the carpenter and rifled the dead baby's account to pay for their flight. He rooted in the house. Went to the city and played his role and came home and reflected. And women were no problem but he was past fifty and no longer as interested or responsive.

The guy visited. The guy confessed he was a guru and his lookalike disciples were everywhere. "We promise you everything if you yield and you will no longer see me." "I never saw you on tour." "I was never there, I was here."

The carpenter left for Europe and stayed there. She returned pregnant. He made believe the baby was his. Became very mystical but still saw the guy everywhere. *You're too facile*, was the note he kept getting in the daily mail. Mail now arrived before dawn. He was up very early, and rarely slept. He suffered a mild coronary. He was O.K. now and his wife was very attentive. The baby cried a lot. He gave up the Volvo and bought a Renault. He also took up with a neighbor's wife. His wife took up with the owner of a local restaurant. They ate there a lot and the owner smirked whenever they entered the dining room.

Once again he saw the guy walking in town. And then he saw the guy running a red light. A cop nailed him and wrote out a summons. The guy shrugged and called out, "We're all human, rejoice in it." "What was I preparing for?" he shouted from across the street. "Nothing," the guy replied.

"The easy life is all easy nothing's hard go home and worry. C'mon." He went home and did worry about property taxes, school taxes, about the baby growing up, about his wife and about dying. He acted out plenty. He drank again and began doing drugs. Became less boring, less predictable. His wife fell deeply back

in love with him. Took up tennis and submerged himself with facts, lessons and joined a country club. Stood in the middle of his shorn lawn and booted the easy life off his property. As it haloed now in cloudy sky, his leg cramped up on him; he was a little out of breath and more than anxious for a drink. The baby was waving to him from a window in the house and he waved back. Next time he bumped into the guy he barely nodded.

* * *

Patricia Eakins

THE SNAP MAN

"TOMASO!" she says, as much for the hot white street as for him. She doesn't fool him with that nonsense. Her little heels go "click! click!" on the pavement, like the triggers of empty guns in movies.

She herself is tall and thin and wears a bright pink dress. She resembles a bunch of gladioli. *How do you like the private room? It's time to take our temperature, isn't it?*

He gives her his cool sultry look (lowered lids). "Glad to see me, toots?"

"Oaf," she cries, and she begins beating on his chest with her little pink fists. He catches them up in his great big strong brown ones: there's nothing he won't stoop to. *Results are the thing.* Her hands are cold.

"Look around," he says. "The hot-chestnut vendors are crying their wares, in spite of the heat of the day."

He is stroking her hair with one hand and caressing the saddle of her back with the other. These are affectionate, reassuring caresses, nothing erotic about them. There is a difference in pressure he has mastered—whether you stroke the surface of the skin or press something under the surface, nerve centers, little sensation mongers. It isn't time yet.

"There was a drunk lying with his head right in the gutter, cars going by just two feet away. And no one bothering to help but this out-and-out queer; he said, 'Baby, you have got your head in a heavy place,' and laid him up against the candy store."

"A well-deserved rest. Peace." He pats her back.

"I almost stepped in some dogshit on the way here," she chirps. "Where are we going?"

"A miss is a mile," he mutters. "I thought a little walk by the water."

"O.K. Anyway, then there was a little girl with horrid running sores on both sides of her nose. Her shoes were untied and she had holes in her socks. A button was missing from her dress—"

"It was fastened with a safety pin. Rusted."

"You've been following me!"

"It's true I'm always a little behind," he admits. He tweaks her earlobe gently, begins moving her down the street the best he can. "A little walk by the water, then

home. To my house."

She holds back. "Your one dirty room," she rejoins. "All right. Anyway, then this drunk asked me for a quarter but I didn't give it to him. He said, 'Fuck you, petootie.' "

"Never mind, I'm here now. At least I have no roommates. It was all a bad dream."

They are moving away from the busy part of the street. Warehouses loom tall and wide on every side. Ahead, the river. No one is near them now. He strokes the tips of her breasts.

They harden.

"You see?" he says. "Everything's all right."

"I picked up my unemployment check this morning," she murmurs.

"Me too," he croons, "me too."

"I didn't earn this money!" she cries.

"It's a beginning," he shrugs. He takes her arm and pulls her into a doorway. He unzips his fly.

"What are you doing?" she asks. "Someone will see." She eyes his underpants suspiciously. "Don't take it out," she begs him. "You'll be arrested. PLEASE." She wrings her hands and smiles through real tears.

"Shock therapy," he mumbles, zipping up.

"There were hundreds of people in line for the dole."

"Next week they're only giving apples."

"Oh Thomas," she sighs. "You never listen."

He takes her elbow and gestures towards the sidewalk.

"Last night I saw a cockroach as big as your thumb."

"That's big," he agrees, examining his thumb.

"I turned my back on him for two seconds—"

"Never wise."

"He began eating my dinner. I should have killed him."

"Not when they're that big. What if he called for his big brother in his dying moments? And in *his* he called for *his* big brother? It's better to humor them." "Appeasement?"

"Don't say it, please don't."

Her face contorts.

"APPEASEMENT DIDN'T STOP HITLER."

He lets a decent interval elapse.

"What kind of dinner was it?"

"Mexican TV."

"Ah!" He nods sagely. "There's something in them besides chemicals after all."

They are out on the street again. They come to the avenue and wait for the light. Trucks from the docks rumble by. An elevated train roars above them. A fly buzzes around her face. She brushes it away. It returns. She brushes it away. It returns. He snaps his hand around it. He opens his hand and the dead fly plummets.

"We've got the green," he says.

"Leah's mother has cancer. Leah goes to the hospital every day but her mother doesn't know her. Once she woke up. 'Leah, why do you bite your nails at your age?' She bleeds from the ears too. They have no insurance and Leah's father lives on a small pension."

"We've got the green."

They step into the street. A cyclist is coming against the light.

"Then there's Peter's wife. She reads all night and pulls the hairs from the crown of her head one by one. She has to wear a wig when she goes out."

He grabs her arm and pulls her back. "You have to watch out for those kids. The ones with a clip on each trouser leg are the worst. Especially if they have toe-clips on the bike pedals."

The cyclist looks back over his shoulder and shakes his head.

"He almost ran me down without my knowing it! Tomaso! He almost flattened me! Do you think he was trying to scare me?"

He thinks a minute. "Maybe he was trying to avoid a pothole."

"I don't see any potholes."

"It's hard to see things from the other person's point-of-view. Peter's wife should try a hot bath."

"They make her break out."

"She should squeeze those zits. The concentration would take her mind off her troubles. Peeling sunburn is good too."

"Oh Tom, you're so materialistic."

"I thought we could take a walk, then go back to my place. Cultivate our one-track minds."

"Doesn't anything else ever happen? Anything important?"

"There's a hot-chestnut vendor on the pier there. In spite of the heat of the day."

"You said that." She sulks.

"It was a little different. Not quite a refrain."

"Do you think I'll ever find a job."

"Sure. Your skills are very portable."

"I don't have any skills."

"You see? Look at those kites; they're transcend-ing."

"The red one is going to fall into the water."

"I wonder if the snap man will come today. He has playing cards on the spokes of his bike wheels. So he goes snap-crackle-pop all the time. You ever see him?"

"Oh Tom; that's kid stuff."

"Look at those tug boats. They're bringing in a coal barge. A white coal barge! The Torrence Al-bino. You see? Everything's fine."

"I don't see any white coal barge. There's no such thing as white coal."

"You can honestly say you never heard of albino coal?"

"Tom! I'm thirty-five. I ought to be married. I ought to be a mother instead of horsing around like a little kid."

"You want to send up a trial balloon?" He takes both her little pink hands in his big brown ones. They sit on a bench and watch the slow-moving water.

"It's no use, Tom. You'll never change."

"I mean every word."

"You'll always be broke. Going from job to job."

"A vagabond," he agrees.

"A bum."

"A gypsy."

"A ne'er-do-well."

"I could sell things. Magazines. Brushes. Bibles. Door-to-door. Or over the phone. We could have a little business."

"You wouldn't do any work. You'd just lie around while I did it. You like being unemployed."

"Now, now," he murmurs. "Trust me. My shoulders are broader than yours."

"The Joneses say slugs have invaded their garden. Japanese beetles. Weevils. The roses are gone, the turnips are gone; they're trying to save the tomatoes. The cucumbers are so deformed, the slugs won't touch them."

"You see? There's hope. Bonsai." He sniffs the air above her lap. "Are you wearing pants?"

"What if I were in an accident?"

"What color?"

"White! White! I always wear white. You know that."

"I thought maybe you changed. You never know."

"Yes you do. I'm afraid."

"You'll see. We could go by the lemon-ice place on the way back, and wait till you see what's in the fridge."

"It's no use," she sighs.

"Now look—"

"Oh, look yourself. Somebody left a paper. Oh no! Oh *no*! Listen to this: 'MOM LEADS GIRLS TO LIFE OF VICE.' "

"Where's it playing, 42nd street?"

"The two girls were bringing in an average of \$300 a week."

"And they were probably very inexperienced. Think what you could bring in. Now there's a portable skill—like a turtle's house, on your back. We could get our little sales business off to a good start. Raise our kids in style. Their own phones—"

" 'The girls are suffering from emotional problems arising out of the situation they were in.' "

"I'd do it too. Up the kinky with rich queers. I wouldn't let you do all the dirty work. We could branch out—do exhibitions. Make films. We'd be artists. Respectable taxpayers. Good citizens."

" 'The house where the alleged prostitution occurred is a neat brick house which was filthy inside. One of the girls had not attended school so far this year because she didn't have shoes. The only thing in the refrigerator—' "

"Was a cucumber."

"How did you know?" she gasps, dropping the paper from her limp hands.

He chucks her under the chin. *Life's like that.* "Let's go back now," he says. "We can get lemon ice. I have some sangria. Clean sheets. And notice how clean my hair is."

"You don't understand."

"The people who read the paper probably sent lots of shoes. Patent leather. Suede. Canvas espadrilles. And only one of the girls missed school. The other was probably an A student. Studying Latin and Greek and world history. She could put the whole thing into perspective if she were here."

"The red kite has fallen into the water!"

"Don't look. Bury your head in my chest. See the blue one? It's soaring off into the clouds. Probably going around the world."

"Tom, it's sinking. First the tail, then the kite."

"These things happen."

"The white coal barge—the barge is tipping! All that rare white coal, gone forever!"

"I take it all back. There is no coal barge. Let's go. It's time."

"Look at the gulls circling the spot where it went down." She bites her knuckles. They are white. Her lips are white. He tries to take her little white fists into his big brown hands.

"There, there."

"It's no use." She pulls away from him with a sob. She runs to the edge of the pier, clamps her nose between thumb and forefinger, and jumps. In a few seconds, there is a splash.

She'll have to come up for air. Her dress will be ruined by pollution, and it will take strong shampoo to clean her hair. Detergent. Then hot milk. Or tea. Funny. She must have had bigger bones than I thought.

"What's the trouble, kid?"

"No more bubbles, officer."

The two men squat at the edge of the pier. The water flows sluggishly, as usual.

"Just a kid, huh?"

"She was young for her age."

"Runaway?"

"She was suffering from emotional problems arising out of her situation."

"Sometimes they do that—sink like stones."

"I was going to buy her a lemon ice, and she picked up her check this morning, but she was agitated."

"A hot ticket, huh?"

"It is a warm day. Yet the hot-chestnut vendors, in spite of the heat—"

"Ain't it the truth. Look son, you run along and get that lemon ice. Tomorrow all this will seem like a bad dream."

"The snap man would have cheered her up."

"Look at that blue kite—pretty, huh?"

"Maybe I'll watch a little TV."

"You do that, son. I'll make a full report. Notify the harbor patrol. Advertise for next-of-kin. Hire divers. Do it right."

"Thanks for everything, officer."

He moves off toward the avenue. He has the green. He walks past the warehouses and into the busy part of the street. *Summer is almost over.* "TOMMYKINS!" she says, as much for the street as for him.

She doesn't fool him with that stuff. She has on a bright blue dress and her cheeks are flushed. She looks like a bunch of forget-me-nots. *Look at those robins! Why didn't we bring a picnic?*

He gives her his innocent but lusty look (lowered lids). "Glad to see me, toots?"

"What *conceit*," she snaps, turns as if to move away, but not very fast.

He has his arm around her now; he is stroking her hair with his free hand.

* * *

Dennis Cooper

A PICTURE

When I was younger I'd crawl from
my room at midnight with a pal.
We'd sneak down streets we knew
by osmosis, to look through lit windows
for boys. Once in a while we'd
catch one naked, bending for things,
buttocks parting like thunder clouds.
We'd drop to our knees, chins on the ledge,
thrash our hard cocks then squirt
in the dirt, pinwheels of spit at our mouths.
I was never caught, never talked to anyone
about it, grew used to getting sex
that way and like it even now, in the back
row of the Male Man Theatre where an old
guy's fist pumps under my lap jacket,
or in the room at the baths where men fuck
and others watch, using what they see
like strangers do their wives. And we are
happy crowded in like this, brushing
against one another at the watering hole,
sniffing each other's asses like food.
We look the way dogs do when they want to screw,
a shiny blankness to our one track eyes.
A quake hits our looks where the handsome get
ugly and the ugly monstrous. We let words
out like farts we can't control. We stink
to the lowest heavens, talk like dime novels,
and we eat from each other like cannibals,
piss snob cannibals who'll only eat caviar.

JULIAN IN PARIS, SEPTEMBER 1976

You are Pierre Clourot's life for three years,
put yourself out in the beds of older men.
The young American, French guys pay through the nose for this.

A blond head of hair, their money's worth.
But your heart's not in it.
You lean on a pale arm, eyes fixed lost.
The book of poems I left you, maybe you look through it.
Your new friend Jammes says the ballet's at the Louvre.
"Yeah," you say, "and let's hit the Jeu de Paume for the Renoir, sure."

Everyone in the metro stop watches you:
girls praising themselves about you;
artists with a place for you in history;
thugs casing the wealth of your looks.
Jammes loves you; it's clear in his jealousy.
He'd like to kiss you in front of them all, knock them out.
Kiss him, stand there, it makes no difference to you.

The Jeu is packed, the Firebird pale and tedious.
Shakespeare and Co. has the same old Reverdy.
Someone at the Café Rouge keeps singing old Beatles, which you hate.
You want to roar in New York at a popular movie,
or steady a surfboard for a wild blue wave of the Pacific.
You know no enthusiasm but are radiant, resigned.
One more chablis then it's to Jammes' for a fuck, what else?
Your idol Renoir should be alive, paint you sitting here,
so you could see that beauty doesn't die
with your teens or love, or when you get tired.

DAVID HOCKNEY DRAWS JOHN KENNEDY, JR.

John sits quietly, ankles crossed,
on the stool, in the white room.
Hockney works at the clothes and hair.
The face is done: pale, simple
and interesting. "Garbo-ish,"
David smiles through his pencil.
And John has laughed. Hockney would
like to draw the boy naked, but
John is shy, and he too shy to insist.
When they stand together over
the product, they are grinning.
John knows he is beautiful.

And now Hockney, worker, knows.
"You may have it," David says,
"I'd like to draw you again sometime."
John knows enough to reply,
"O.k., someday." The date is made.

AFTER SCHOOL, STREET FOOTBALL, EIGHTH GRADE

Their jeans sparkled, cut offs
way above the knee, and my
friends and I would watch them
from my porch, books of poems
lost in our laps, eyes wide as
tropical fish behind our glasses.

Their football flashed from hand
to hand, tennis shoes gripped
the asphalt, sweat's spotlight on
their strong backs. We would
dream of hugging them, and crouch
later in weird rooms and cum.

Once their ball fell our way
so two of them came over, hands
on their hips, asking us to
throw it to them, which Arthur did,
badly, and they chased it back.
One turned to yell "Thanks"

and we dreamed of his long
teeth in our necks. We
wanted them to wander over,
place deep wet underarms to
our lips, and then their white
asses, then those loud mouths.

One day one guy was very tired,
didn't move fast enough,
so a car hit him and he sprawled
50 feet away, sexy, but he was

dead, blood like lipstick, then
those great boys stood together

on the sidewalk and we joined them
mixing in like one big friendship
to the cops, who asked if we were,
and those boys were too sad to counter.
We'd known his name, Tim, and how
he'd turned to thank us nicely

but now he was under a sheet
powerful as God, the big boys crying,
spitting words, and we stunned
like intellectuals get, our high
voices soft as the tinkling of a
chandelier on a ceiling too high to see.

* * *

Barry Simons

Terminal Cancer

she approaches the window, the glass is clean; she has just washed it. she takes her fist and brings it to her shoulder, then pushes it thru the glass. she doesn't utter a sound. her eyes are open. there is nobody else in the room. but there is a reproduction of Monet's Cathedral in Afternoon hanging on the far wall. a poster of Dylan. a lot of various books of poetry, art books, books on how to macramé. records. there's an indian blanket across her bed.

she takes a piece of glass in her right hand, and slices it hard against the skin of her left wrist. she still doesn't utter a sound. her eyes are still open. there is nobody else in the room. but there is a reproduction of Monet's Cathedral in Afternoon hanging on the far wall, a poster of Dylan, a lot of various books of poetry, art books, books on how to macramé, records. there's a Navajo blanket across her bed.

still without ever having muttered a sound, or scream, she takes her right wrist and slashes it across an existing pane of glass. her face is red, but there are no tears, but there's a reproduction of Monet's Cathedral in Afternoon hanging on the far wall, a poster of Dylan smoking a cigarette, a lot of various sorts of poetry books including one by Paul Valéry, a book of early European painters, books on how to macramé, Beatle records. There's a blue Navajo blanket across her bed.

Fever

She was going to be in Tangier by Christmas, Morocco New Years, the Riviera Easter, the Mediterranean by summer, the Far East by fall, South America by the following Christmas, Africa the next New Year, China the next Easter, then maybe the U.S.S.R. But now she's changed her mind; she's fallen for a poet, and he's been telling her funny stories, making her laugh, and now she doesn't want to go. She doesn't want to leave him; she won't leave him. In fact, she's thrown away all her maps, her luggage, her tickets, and all her clothes. She won't even leave the house. The mailman comes to the door, knocks, wants to give her a special delivery letter. But she won't move. She stays right in that sofa, right next to him, stark naked. She won't leave him. She won't eat, or sleep; she's not hungry and she's not tired. And he just keeps spouting all these words. He's as bad as she is; he won't stop talking or writing. And talking to him is just like talking to her. He nods his head, then she nods her head. They even gave each other the same names; she calls him Robert, and he calls her Robert. He asks her a question and she says I don't know; what do

you think? And he says yes, and she says, that's exactly the way I feel. You get thru visiting, and he says it was nice talking to you, then she says it was nice talking to you. And as you leave he starts spouting more poetry. And she just cuddles up to him, with her arms around him, her eyes open wide, listening to every word coming from his mouth.

Just once I caught them: he was spouting off his poetry, and she was real close to him, and comfy, when I got right up to him and said: does this train leave at ten-fifteen? And he looked up with a big smile and said: that's right, man. And she just said, huh?

Express Train

it's this night then that you come to offer me your stove,
refrigerator an t.v. set
all night I tried to keep you out but you hammered too loudly
at the siren spinning thru my weather vane
an you wouldn't go away
you insisted on coming tonight an here you are

how different you seem dressed in your japanese beggar overalls
you have fourteen images tied around your waist and you say you want
to unload them
an the pocket watch you wear around your neck is like a lamppost
lost in a tide of onrushing streetcars that forever shine their
spoked wheels lest they go silently onward to where the buffalo
an b singer spent their last farewell

but tonight there's something so entirely new about you
i can feel it tho you've hardly said a word
i can tell in your walk an the way you presented me with my gifts
—you're mysterious tonight!
like a lumberyard you're full of cedars an oaks an walnuts
an you're wearing them too thru your ankles an legs an the bottom
of your tongue is stained in silver

an i believe in what you're wearing:
the refrigerator is open an it fits so nicely throughout your
fingers
the stove is warm an perfectly frank where you're standing
an the t.v. set enhances the hair around your belly

you're illustrious in your canadian footwear!

an i can go on about you
because i feel you have nothing more to hold

you say you've given away the store to the last stranger
i hope you're telling the truth
an the couch you've left with your mother where it belongs
an your sister shall have the sewing machine for sure!

you've gotten it all quite settled haven't you
an so that's the reason you were so insistent on coming tonight
to spread the asian carpet in its last resting place
let it be

an now the fairyland fog horn is blowing an you must leave
i know you must leave an you know you must leave
but i'll use your gifts well an join you in the first compartment
of the express train's first night.

Robert

We sat at a blue table listening to some hard rock, and the waiter busily moving from customer to customer with coffee, rolls, and occasionally a bottle of wine. It was getting near noon, maybe eleven-thirty, and Robert hadn't said a word in nearly ten minutes. But he looked around him in his beige brim hat, watching curiously the other customers. We had been here since six a.m. and coasting for a while. Robert looked beautiful, with gray overcoat, beige brim hat, brown leather boots, loose tan trousers, finally said something: what time is it? I said eleven-thirty, sank back in chair and continued watching others. Eleven-thirty, I thought to myself; I had been with this beautiful Robert for five and a half hours and wasn't the slightest tired. Yet, what else was there to do? Glorious outside, yes, glorious people on streets, yes, glorious cars rolling past, yes, glorious colors everywhere (blue buildings, orange roofs, blue, red, yellow autos, multicolored dressed folk) yes, it was all quite beautiful; momentarily beautiful, gloriously warm and seductive, and I was in love, with this Robert I could never marry, or spend the rest of my time with, but only these hours I had right now.

Where were we in this café, coffee shop, on-the-street-corner restaurant? eternal chaotic tranquility coffee-roll donating machine, with tender hands reaching, sitting, exchanging. Beautiful faces glancing, shining in the warmth, mellowness of

the skin, each and everyone beautiful with tones of red lips, blue eyes, blond, brown hair? Where were we in this conglomerate of the cosmos sitting on wooden chairs, at wrought-iron tables, with waitresses and waiters walking back and forth and this Robert sitting tranquil at a table across from me?

So now we're talking; me and Robert, and Robert is beautiful, gorgeous. Robert is wearing another hat, one with gorgeous flowers in the brim band. It's orange and the flowers are blue, and yellow. Oh, how I love Robert. Robert is wearing a heavy overcoat and has black shoes.

Now Robert wants to tell me something, but then smiles, and sips another sip from a glass of wine. It doesn't matter; I can wait, and besides I love just looking at the new colors around Robert's new hat. It's a black felt hat, with gold sequins and a red ribbon tied around the band. Robert is beautiful. Robert is gorgeous.

* * *

Susan Wallace

BEGINNINGS

The way I stroke my chin
and hold my head
and the way I laugh
and swallow deliberately
while cooking or
washing dishes

All that which came before are not me at all
and after Each mannerism
is nothing more than is an
what is imitation
so as I wonder of
Eliot about you someone
and Woolf and I've admired
even you Plath Even the way
I am silenced. I close
But I know my eyes
that what is, is when in
and this is difficulty
irrevocable I
like a story learned
continuously told from
continuously unfolding my
it will be sister
itself am
around me, wrapping me I
about nothing
it is the thing more
inescapable than
the only thing the
that matters . . . reflected
this montage
of
others?
I
would
give
my
heart
for
my
eccentricity.

As a girl	I	numbers	And
I	saw	which	they're
would sit	myself	infinitely	very
before	smaller	repeat	clever,
a	and	like	I
three-way mirror	tinier	3	know.
in my bedroom	far	makes	But
and arrange	away	it	my
the moveable	forever	seem	interest
sides	reflections	alright	goes
to	of	an	out
show	reflections	observed	to
an	It	piece	the
infinite	terrifies	of	child,
reflection	me	behavior	lost,
of myself.	doubts	I	panicked,
I	which	see	searching
wanted	grow	certain	down
badly	and	people	the
to	dawn	that	row
see	and	way	of
the	know	surgeons	reflections
last	no	butchers	for
Susan.	end	scientists	an
No	only	yes	answer.
arrangement	hopeless	it's	
of	mathematics	comforting	
mirrors	bloodless	and	
made	reduces	even	
this	this	enlightening,	
possible.	phenomenon	I'm	
	to	sure.	

Even the	Pale	Although I am twenty-eight
group of	Grey	my soul
little white	dread	leans
flowers	touches	strongly
I saw	my eyes	toward the old man
the other day	in the morning	alone
	in a dark suit	
all alone,	leaves me	who
unexpected,	shivering	watches
on the other	and	the coastline,
side of the	quietly	an unfathomable
bush	sobbing	emotion
	in the afternoon	in his eyes
needed		
a little	while the clock	
ground	tick, ticks	
all their own,		
to grow.	and clouds	
	regroup	
	and move away	
	overhead	

When I look in the mirror
 I am frightened.
 I don't know the person there
 blue eyes
 brown hair
 blue robe
 staring at me.
 Who is she?
 physical Tonight I like the hollowness
 her as I sit here of my stomach
 even I feel my own empty
 pretty in consequence only itself for company
 but out there
 who is she? its juices
 Not me But, sweet, fine
 with yet, their flavor
 my insecurities, here is nice travelling up to
 my feelings and much my mouth
 taking me simpler
 to faraway places for me to enjoy.
 my thoughts
 angers
 loves
 hates
 sadnesses
 it never ends
 no,
 no,
 that Fragments of in a sky that is
 person advice clearing, pastel blue.
 there pass thru my head
 can fleetingly and I find that
 not something new
 possibly and I realize that is ahead
 be I used to take them
 me. deeply to heart, Rocks have
 Who as indictments, given way
 is severe. to a smoother
 she? path.
 I That was before.
 wish Though it is
 she But now, lonely, and
 didn't it appears only somewhat
 look that the sun less
 so is cracking thru vulnerable.
 confused. clouds

Henry Rasof

them

across a blue-lined page
a hand shapes small crooked blue words

through long brown curly hair
a hand firmly pushes

across a hardwood floor
feet shape geometric designs

on a forehead
muscles tense

a short story made long

i'm different
i told them
i sleep upside down

they laughed
so do we
tell us more

i'm different
i told them
i sleep upside down
after dinner

they laughed
so do we
tell us more

i'm different
i told them
i sleep upside down
after dinner and have long

sensuous dreams

they laughed
so do we
tell us more

i'm different
i told them
i sleep upside down
after dinner and have long
sensuous dreams about paradise

they laughed
so do we
tell us more

i'm different
i told them
i sleep upside down
after dinner and have long
sensuous dreams about paradise
and always wake up happy

they laughed
so do we
tell us more

i'm different
i told them
i sleep upside down
after dinner and have long
sensuous dreams about paradise
and always wake up happy and very hungry

they laughed
so do we
tell us more

i'm different

i told them
i sleep upside down
after dinner and have long
sensuous dreams about paradise
and always wake up happy and very hungry
so let's have dinner

they laughed
so do we
tell us more

the meeting

the onion he held
signified my past
i in the past
he in the past was some sort of
and then
before she saw me
i saw her and showed her to her room
she came quietly
though i remember her differently
yet before i was seen
i saw him and he was taking me to it
i coming softly
though he seems the same
all this we thought
and still we also have said it
she seemed so old
and calm at first
though this and that had always
and those before and then
when even behind she had managed

i held the onion while she talked
we tried to but always
whenever she i had pulled away
that was and still is my way
so she had and finally
so here we are

ten years ago july
looking for what to say and then
i found something
i tried to grasp her arm but she laughed
and so made me feel uncomfortable

text on painting

there are different kinds of mountains:
the light
and the dark
plateaus conical peaks and lofty hills
connected ones called ranges
small but high ones called sharp peaks
low tapering ones and groups of small ones

there are triple ranges
double mountains
and massed mountains joined in unbroken chains
as well as long ones with ridges
there are mountains with slopes near the top
with glacial lakes scattered in their foothills
mountains with caves precipices and grottoes
and there are hall-shaped mountains

there are mountains shaped like screens
and small mountains that lie between large ones
but which are not connected
there are also multitudes of small rocks:
dish-like rocks
mountains of obsidian
and mountains of granite
sometimes called monoliths

there are rocks covered with earth
and earth covered with rocks
there are earth mounds slopes and high plains
buttes and humps of cooled lava

in hill and mountain ranges are hidden and exposed

Crests of quivering lights,
On the point of dissolving
Or exploding,
Become supreme in the depth of their colors.

The rhythm of the lights pulsates
Through a labyrinth of mirrors;
Their unreal presence is heightened
By the luminosity of the stage.

A falling light penetrates the scene;
From a rock,
Sprays of water fall like incandescent wires;
A jet of dazzling yellow light
Bursts from a swarm of forms.
The light carries away and transforms everything.

A blood-red light surrounds a form
And accentuates its shape;
Soft shadows and waves of light
Meet on the ground and in the sky.
The crowd,
Massed like a heap of stones,
Seems weightless
In the rhythmic anguish of lights and shadows.

In the clean, cutoff light
The figure,

Crowned with thorns
And bloodstained,
Receives the light,
Filled with mysterious shadows,
That filters through the crowd
Pressing closer
To the serene, almost fragile figure
Immersed in light.

It is this solemn face,

So simply wrought —
A stupendous face,
From another sphere —
Sad,
Neglected,
Almost forgotten,
The flesh stretched with shadows,
Where the finest locks of hair
Wave and escape under the crown of green thorns
And descend in thick masses over the shoulders;
It is this likeness of human flesh
That is history's greatest masterpiece:
A dead body that is most beautiful.

A scuffle explodes among the horses,
And a dazzling light accompanies the Lord God
Through black clouds bordered with fire,
As though attracting him by a mysterious force,
Raising him,
The clouds bending toward him,
The Light that has rent Him from within,
Rising

Poem with a Shape

The image grows blurred, the whole city behind me. Emerging from a forgotten child, coughing on the street; I am slowly succumbing to the world. There is something I want to remember. Each day it is ready to leap off my tongue: "You'll live to bury us all," said the poet, to no one in particular. It's beginning to rain again. The holocaust goes unanswered, even by the most all-embracing of us, because in truth there is no cause to anything. But alas, nothing is more than a slice, composed for the instant: as being in a real wood, by a real lake, looking at the sun; everyone will return, someday, if only for a minute. Blurred, the image grows sharp. We are young, so there will be other times to remember our treasures, to remember as treasures. I sleep: there is nothing. I wish to remember. My hands take shape in sleep; a body, rising, plods about, looking for something. Yet it is here, all of it, as it appears. Even so, to convince myself the rain is a good way to stop a holocaust, I try to remember something—dense like banana trees in twilight. Child coughing in street. Nothing comes to anything. Along the edge we slide, listening to sirens, pushing against traffic.

Search for Survivors

It is being lost in Death Valley. Too anxious to seek an explanation you step over the threshold into an abysmal chaos only to discover a white angel whose body is incredibly soft. Having waited long enough for your father, for the romance you always seem to miss, you remind me with your look of the way two hills at night sometimes seem inseparable.

There is something almost sordid about the way you love to walk in the forest from which only you know the way home. Who will know it when you are gone? Who will point to the haze that settles at dusk and acknowledge the enormous life lived among the balconies of New York?

Barbara Harrah

BETRAYAL

The plan is this: I drive my car to the library parking lot up the hill from Harper Volkswagen. Albo, my husband, follows in his car. I leave my car. Get in his car. Drive with him to his studio. Leave him. Drive back to the library. Pick up my car. Leave Albo's. Take mine to Harper. Tell them to fix the squeak. Leave it. Walk up the hill to the library. Pick up Albo's car and drive to work. That's the plan.

We get off a little late.

The wind's roaring outside the apartment. In bed, we snuggle in like spoons. My bottom against his crotch. Feeling on my bottom his smooth hairs. His beard against my neck. I love Albo's beard. His hairy body. Hair all over his chest. Some on his back, even. I don't mind. I've grown to love everything over the years about Albo. I guess because he loves me so and nobody else loves him. That's part of it. The safety of it.

He lets me delay him about five minutes past the hourly news and then he throws off our covers and I lie about two seconds, shivering, naked, on the bed. Albo looking down at me. My legs all spread and my hair wild on the pillow. Then I get up fast. "Come give me a hug," he comes after me. I skirt out of his reach and pour exactly one-half cup of wheatina in the Revere Ware pot and two cups of water. Light the gas. Put Albo's water on. Clank silver on the table. Fill his coffee cup with instant and sugar. The heat's on and the floors are warm but wind blows through the window sashes and I'm shivery blue. My skin. With goose pimples. I get dressed in the bathroom with Albo.

Above his beard his skin is white like a baby's. His eyes light light gray. His brows slim, wing-shaped and red brown. More red than brown. Almost like copper, while the hair on his beard and head is more brown than red. And his pubic hairs almost black. I love Albo because his real name is Albert and no one could love a man with a name or eyes like Albo's that follow me around. I've never had a minute's worry about Albo screwing anybody when I'm not looking. I can be sympathetic even to anybody who tries. Just last weekend at a studio party a girl, 10 years younger than I am, in her twenties, sidled up to Albo and flirted with her gold belt slipping down on her tight black dress, standing with her hip jabbed towards his. She was recently divorced. "She was flirting with you," I said to Albo, who has to work with her. He says to me he realizes that and it gets in his way.

The bathroom smells of Albo's shit but I don't mind at all. I don't even gag like I used to.

But I get in the car this morning, thinking nothing but how I wish I'd put a sweater on over my short-sleeved shirt. The coat isn't enough. The wind rushes up the sleeves. The trees are blowing like crazy. Leaves flying off them like soap bubbles into the sky. The clouds gray, dark, some of them. And some of them light as Albo's eyes. He waves to me as he walks up to his car and I'm standing by mine, unlocking it. Feeling like introducing myself to it. Because yesterday it was raining like hell and Albo asked if he could take it. I didn't really want him to. But he usually takes the turnpike. And he said, his eyes so respectful, "Do you mind if I take BeeBee?"

We name our cars like dogs.

"No," I said. In the living room. With the rain hurtling at the windows.

"It's Boo's tires are bald and the rain. The oil on the road."

"Take BeeBee," I said. "Don't explain." So generous. Thinking he'll smash it to hell.

But what would it matter, I said to myself. So long as Albo's safe.

BeeBee isn't smashed at all. She looks very clean after the rain. Sparkling in this mornings-after-the-rain sun. Her beetle back smooth and shiny. But I get in and see the ashtray open. I think, Why is the ashtray open?

Neither Albo nor I smoke.

Albo did but he stopped because I get headaches. I made him smoke in the hall at first, outside the apartment and finally I said even the smell of it in his beard made me sick so he stopped completely. He snuck some for a while til I said, "Why? Why do you do this to yourself? To me? Even if you don't care about dying of cancer, how do you think that makes me feel? That you don't love me enough to stay alive for me when I love you so much?"

We wept in each other's faces over that one. So poignant.

I think maybe he snuck one on the sly yesterday and been careless when I see it curled in there. Like a dry, white worm. Til I turn it over with my key and see the lipstick on the filter. A smear of it, greasy red with the imprint of the lines of the woman's lips.

I'm supposed to wait for Albo at the top of the driveway while he turns his car around in the lot. I gun out as soon as I see him coming around the curve. Down Callahan St. Past the Catholic Church and the old Victorian houses off of Main. The clouds billow over and the street's so clean. The white line running down the

center of Rye, New York, like a skunk's train. Leaves hurtling down it, red, brown, gold on the gray street. Floating against the sky some of them, floating, or climbing the updrafts, then falling. On to the hood of my car. A flat one smashes against the windshield.

I think, What if it'd been a rock? Instead of a leaf? Only by dumb luck do I stay alive in this stupid little car. Stupidly named. Like a child: BeeBee. Maybe Albo and I should have a child. "But I love you too much," Albo said once, "to share your time with a baby, even my own."

I think, Ha. Thinking about the cigarette in BeeBee's ashtray. The squeak in the dash grating in my ear. The wind pushing at the car. The road heaving out ahead.

Behind in the rearview mirror I see Albo coming in his blue car. Small like mine. But Japanese. Through the mirror I see him. I narrow my eyes at him. He looks to me like a kamikaze. His red brown hair black in my old mirror. He is adjusting his rearview mirror. He almost plows into me at the stop sign. I gun across Main. Past the vacant lot. Goldenrod, dying, bends in the hard wind. The car sways. I am going too fast. Hurtling down in third. The squeak getting louder. And louder. I downshift to second. Brake heavily at the turn leading to Greenwich. The road widens. The squeak stops when I brake. I think it must be connected, this squeak and this brake. Or it could be coincidental. Like I had some herb tea and the pain in my colon went away last week, but the doctor said he had to test for cancer anyway. I don't have cancer. If I did that would serve Albo right. In my imagination I see my colon unfurling, cancerous green, and in my ashtray that woman's cigarette beginning to burn.

I have to stay away from Albo.

I, who could hardly bear before I heard the results of my cancer test even to leave him to go to the grocery store, can't bear even to see him in my rearview mirror.

He is an art teacher.

Once he was only an artist.

But he likes teaching it more than doing it. Actually he does both. He doesn't make too much money at either. Up until a few minutes ago I loved him anyway. There are other teachers in the studio. They do jobs for Greenwich matrons too. Many get these jobs by fucking the women first or during the execution of a mural for their bathroom or halls, guest rooms. A good-fucking artist gets a lot of commissions. Once I asked the owner of the studio if Albo's career was hurt a little by the fact he didn't screw his way to the top, so to speak, and the owner thought a

little and said, "No, because old women wanted to protect Albo. They babied him. If he shaved off his beard he might even get more jobs.["]

I won't let him because he looks even younger than he does now without a beard. I am 15 years older than Albo. With his beard, I look younger than he. I don't eat much in order to stay young-looking and beautiful for Albo. In the rearview mirror I see I am, really, very beautiful. My skin is very tight. I feel my skin very tight under my eyes. Over my cheeks. There are no wrinkles. No sags. My face is rather flat, the cheekbones wide. My jaw line firm as a model's. In fact, I am a model for department stores and sometimes artists. But not one who goes nude. Albo won't allow that though that's how we met. I sat for him and one of his friends, nude, top and bottom, and Albo fell in love with me. Now I model for Bloomingdales in Stamford and Lord and Taylors and other places in White Plains.

Yesterday, while I was being photographed, a man came up and asked me if I'd like to have lunch with him. I thought of Albo. I told the man, No, thank you. And in a flash I wished my husband dead. Immediately I was torn with remorse. I raced home, almost getting myself killed, sliding all over the highway on his bald tires. The road slick. In the rain like black glass. Reflecting colors. No shapes. A mirror of black and yellow and gray and red from the leaves. The terrible reds and yellows, heavy with rain, full of the anticipation of winter.

My skin in the mirror was tight and slick as the road. Reflecting light, like the road. And no age. Obscene at my age to look so young. To attract men. To think such horrible thoughts. I careened into the driveway. Parked in the nearest place. Not even opening my umbrella. Splashing through the puddles, the water drenching down and up, splashing, running up the stairs. Six flights of stairs. Knocking on the door, opening it with the key. Albo there, waiting, his arms enfolding me. I kiss him all over his shirt, his shoulders, collarbone.

"Debby . . . Debby darling," he says. "What is it?"

"You're alive. Oh thank god you're alive," I say, weeping and my makeup seeping into his white shirt.

His car looms up behind me at the light. The road is going downhill and even his little Toyota looks big behind me. And he looks big in his camel haired coat and his eyebrows.

It occurs to me that yesterday when I had that thought about wishing Albo dead it was 3:30, exactly when he would be getting out of work. At that very moment he was probably in this car, my little car, with the squeak in the dash and the woman with red lipstick, wrapped up in a fur coat, perhaps, smoking her cigarette with

long, narrow-palmed hands, like an Oriental's. Saying, Albert, dahling, and letting the smoke trail out of her nose like bull's breath.

Suddenly I smell nicotine all over the car and open the window. A leaf blows in.

Albo is waving at me. I stare at him, not smiling, and then at the road. The light sways in the wind then changes and I gun away. I will tell him, I decide, when I get to the library, I don't want anyone smoking in my car, do you hear? Or maybe: If you're going to let somebody smoke in my car, will you kindly have the decency to empty the ashtray?

Of course I never talk like that to Albo.

I have to watch it though.

Being 15 years older I have a tendency. "Don't sit hunched like that," I'll say. "Or you'll get chest pains when you're older." He'll scoff and I'll say, "I speak from experience, Albo, now listen to me." It drives him nuts. "Don't treat me like a child," he says and he's right of course so I try to let him dig his own hole if he wants.

I snap the tray into the dash with its broken white dry worm and the lipstick bleeding at the end of it. I head past the shopping center into Portchester. Bumping through Portchester we go. Past the grim squat buildings. Streets almost empty at this hour. 7:45 A.M. on the bank clock. Lights reflecting in the dark windows. With red "for rent" signs. Police cars gliding through. Red and white lights on the tops flashing in a line. Reflecting in the store front windows. Without noise. Silent as snakes these cop cars. No sirens. Policemen hang in doors like manikins all down the main drag. Hands in their pockets. Their shiny dark blue jackets. The young ones smile at something. I drive on. Behind a bus. Exhaust puffs out in a fart at every light. I ease by, finally, at the next light. Now I'm behind a dump truck. His exhaust squirts out a pipe at the top of the cab and filters down in the wind.

This is a terrible town with its traffic made of buses and dump trucks and artists and manikins. At the border of Rye all the grass goes to asphalt. Green to gray. The Rye houses with lawns and trees and signs at the stone entrance gates saying Private give way to the shopping center and then to Portchester. A snaky city of curving streets. Store fronts crumbling along the way. In the glass the reflection of long pimp cars. In the upper story windows attorneys-at-law written in flaky gold letters in the shape of a crescent and under it a name, usually Italian. Lots of "O's" in it.

In 1968 the Episcopal Church at Rye organized defense emergency measures if the Blacks from Portchester attacked. They didn't. But lots of things can happen

that don't if you prepare. If you don't prepare, lots of things you don't expect to happen do.

Anything can happen here in Portchester. To the dog, for instance. On the sidewalk. Brown, with tawny tufts of hair over his eyes and his rib cage showing. If I didn't prepare for him cutting across the road

If only I'd prepared for Albo and this cigarette-smoking woman. I might have gone out for lunch with that man. I might not be driving like a loony, trying to get away from Albo. He passes me on the left.

I see him coming up behind. He will expect me to honk and wave as he passes. For a sign that I'm all right. That I love him. But I look away. At signs along the Post Road. Over the flat doors of Portchester. Mister T's Food. Thom McCann. Miller Black and White selected used furniture. They pass by these signs like ribbons unfurling slowly. Out of the corners of my long eyes I see them. Mascara lengthening my eyes. I see the dark windows. Nothing in the black windows. Over them TEXAS Grill lit up. Texas in red fluorescent tubes. When the dog crosses the street, I am prepared. I screech to a halt. Stall in front of the karate studio. KARATE written in white block letters on a black field. The sign jumps and the number 937-6550. Blue faded curtains hang behind the glass doors. The curtain waves slightly. I see in the rearview mirror, advertised at the Embassy Theatre, in horrible big letters:

SONNY CHIBA IN CHAMPION OF DEATH AND DEADLY CHINA DOLL

And I start up again. The rest of the street rolling by in my peripheral vision. Plastic Downy bottles lined in the Embassy Deli window. On wood shelves. In red on a crooked sign, letters sliding up on a diagonal, spelling CLOSED. What on earth is the matter with me, seeing all these things. Albo's the artist. I'm the model. The object, seeing nothing. Made only to be seen. Reflected on. An object. A thing of beauty. Discerning nothing. For other's discernment and pleasure. That is the whole problem: suddenly, I see much much too much. I see the light change green and in front of it as in a surrealistic dream the curled cigarette, dry, squashed, elongate, unsmoked now, in my mind's eye. Held by long fingers, manicured nails. Behind me a horn blasts and I gun ahead.

Albo is quite far in front of me now. We are almost at the library. It occurs to me it's stupid to leave BeeBee there. It's past the VW place. Originally I planned to drop BeeBee at the VW place. Then come back with Albo's car. Tell the men what's wrong with my car and have Albo's car right there to go to work in. But Albo said, "How about leaving her at the library?" I said, "Okay." He didn't say why the library and I didn't think at the time why not. But I know why not now. I'll have to

walk up that terrible hill to get the other car in the wind. An enormous rage builds up in me against this man who would put me to such unnecessary discomfort.

Whom I loved yesterday even though his love for me prevented my having lunch with a handsome man. Whom I thought had to die before I would betray him. Who caused me such remorse at the mere thought that I had a long conversation about it, with myself:

Why would you think such a thing?

You want to be free sometimes.

To do what?

Maybe screw around a little.

Well, screw around a little.

But I love my husband.

So, don't let him know. Lots of people do that.

But not us. We're different. Dead, he'd never know.

Oh the dead know everything. They can watch everything. They can see you masturbate. Alive you have a chance to fool him.

And I ran into his arms, never wanting to fool him, wet, sopping. I ran to him. Up six flights of stairs, not able even to wait for the elevator to see if I hadn't killed him with my terrible thoughts and we kissed each other all over. Like animals. Snipping at each other.

He is looking back at me in his rearview mirror now. His face is dark with worry. His hand is up in a half wave. He doesn't want to make a fool of himself. If I don't wave back he can simply move his ready-to-wave hand up to the mirror, or to slick down his hair, pull his moustache.

He is that sensitive to my moods.

At the next light I am tempted to run out and tell him not to go to the library but stop at Harpers. But I don't want contact with him now. I want to stay mad. Once I talk to him I know I will ask him about that cigarette and he will, as always, have a rational explanation. It will not be a woman who smoked it.

I can tell you that.

I can look ahead and behind. Life for me is be-coming more than one-dimensional. As I grow older. For instance, it's getting deep in the rush hour now. Cars are going very fast. Not very well behaved. Ten pass me as I stall going up the hill. I have to put on the brake. Restart the motor, gun out the gas. Disengage the clutch. Albo getting ahead. Cars are rushing in all directions. With the morning

light shining off their hoods, tops, running through yellow lights. Red lights. But I can look ahead to 10:00. 11:00. When the women will be driving. They'll do it more gently. Smoother. Women tend to obey lights and stop signs. They are better behaved, women. I am looking forward to the hour of women which will come as soon as all these violent rushing men get to work. And by then, too, I might have already worked this out with Albo. I might even have forgotten the whole thing. He will offer a plausible explanation. I will, of course, have to explore all the possible violations of my trust. But in the end, he will make it all right.

I can see ahead like this and see the failings in myself.

I am tired now of all this rustling wind and moving clouds, the infernal squeaking in my dash, and my own lack of trust in Albo.

I cannot wait to get to the library and get into Albo's car. To ask him about the cigarette. To have him tell me, oh, it must be so-and-so's, I gave her a lift yesterday. I'm sorry, darling. I'll throw out the butt. His immediate admission will wipe all my suspicions away. Only if he denies it will I have to worry. But even then, eventually, it will be all right. I even smile in the rearview mirror. The sun on my lower face. Glowing. Turning it red and young.

It is only in my peripheral vision I see it going to happen. The black car inching out into the main road. He's at a stop sign and Albo has the right-of-way. But the car comes out anyway. With a substantial but not too prosperous man at the wheel. Funny I should notice such detail. But I fully expect the man to stop before Albo gets to him but he doesn't and so maybe his gray hair and beefy face will remain in my mind forever. I see Albo swerve to the left but only a little because cars are coming in the other direction. I honk my horn at the man, but his big car, shaped like the head of a sperm whale, is already dug into Albo's little car. There is no sound but a ringing silence jabs through my ears and I see everything all at once. The gold and red leaves falling and a wall of black birds rising from the sidewalk, clattering up into the air against the red and gold leafed trees and the gray sky with the clouds moving like surf through it.

I'm out of the car, hearing again. The roar of my own ears and car engines and my red leather seats like blood.

Albo

Oh, Albo

Cars are stopping all around now and it's a whole new thing. Policemen come out of the doorways, take their hands out of their pockets. They swarm around and write notes with their freed hands on yellow paper. A train rattles across the New

Haven Rail Road Bridge with a clearance of 11 feet 8 inches. The air is filled with peppermint smell from the Lifesaver, Inc., factory.

Albo's face is a falling wall of blood.

I am screaming in my head at the man who has not come out of his car. Who will never come out of his car. Who will sit in it forever, burning mad at this delay.

My husband is bleeding from his face.

He might be dying. I don't know. He says he isn't. So I ask him, holding him in my arms, my coat sleeves full of his blood and my wrists cold with the wind and the blood. "Albo, my car reeks of cigarettes."

I wipe his face with my handkerchief. It stains red.

"There's a cigarette in the tray." I go on wiping, his blood running down Albo's white shirt. His red tie. His tie red too, bloody. Bleeding.

"Maybe some kids broke in," Albo says. His voice is fine. He must not be dying. I am dying.

"You mean you don't know who did it?" I say and he says, "NO, I'd never let anyone smoke in your car."

And I am feeling as if I will faint but then he says, "You sure it isn't the cigarette that's been in there since the last time we left the car at Harpers?"

And I feel enormous relief. The policemen stare with the doctor at my husband who is definitely not dying. The doctor has pronounced the extent of the injury a nosebleed. But he will have to take X rays for concussion if his head hurts here. He pokes at Albo's head. Albo says he thinks it hurts, he's not sure. So he is taken off in an ambulance so I will have to wait to ask the one remaining question I have which is: If that cigarette was the one that's been there since the last time the car was serviced, then why was the ashtray open?

* * *

Marine Warden

SEQUENCE AFTER THE WAR

BEYOND THE STRAITS (JAN 1946)

for Lee Hickman

it was mist before dawn in seattle
and the dock beside our ship was full
of trucks and men and gear the men filed
up our gangway groaned under heavy loads
of packs and guns like overloaded mules
i stood in fog at the head of a gangway
and checked off names some were missing
or out of order but most were really there
they were young like me and stared at my ship
their mouths dropped open their bodies dropped
below the decks into holds down the ladders
where their bunks were stacked five high
my ship was alive with noise and people
the engines throbbed the ropes arced away to the deck
and we were backed slowly away by an asthmatic tug
we turned in the bay moved around by the invisible
twist of a screw and threaded our slow way
down the bay in mist and rain by anchored battle-
grey ships which tugged gently at their steel cables
as we passed as though they would follow us too
our ship's wake was like a magnet pulled the sleeping city
the docks the bay toward the sea but no man stood
on their wet decks that day except a cook
on a navy destroyer who threw garbage and lit
a cigarette glowed where he stood and waved
he was the only one who saw us leave
out of all that city all those ships
we pick up speed pass islands green
with firs down to their shores
and little white houses

with private docks
sailboats tied
and lapping water
like thirsty dogs
their masts creak
and disappear
much later we come to the straits
named juan de fuca
against the green hills there's a white
launch just visible on the water
closer and closer toward our port ladder
our pilot climbs down
and the launch pulls away
toward the green shore i sink
while i watch the launch fade from sight
the strait opens to the wide sea
night falls
the great sea rises and groans
our ship creaks all the night long
my arm hooks to the rail of my bunk
prevents my body from flying onto cold steel decking
by morning it's certain
we're in a big storm
all hands below batten all hatches
the loudspeakers warn
we're moving in all dimensions
vertigo is a misnomer below our decks
for these motions called pitch and roll
dizzy i try to stagger below to my work room
terrible jolt experienced like striking concrete
shouts from loudspeakers
our fore deck is smashed the life rafts gone
rumors sweat down the corridors below our decks
man overboard shouts through wet steel walls
three men over
garbage chutes cut by captain's orders
tons of wooden crates and lettuce onion peels
cardboard boxes mark the spot
the captain turns our grey ship

like a savage dog with a rag in its teeth
we search back and forth over the sea of crates
head-on the sea rises
pounds the creaking ship
the paint peels away the decks are awash
parts of the sea rise higher than our bridge
below we can see nothing of this
only feel the bucking hear the speakers
later we hear that our own first mate
roped to his friends was lowered
over the side toward men in the water
threw them life rings
they were all swept away
our ship turned its back on garbage drowned men
to hawaii we headed four men lost from two thousand
not too bad for a big storm like this
our oldest engineer said
while he slurped his coffee
in the slanting mess hall
the storm went on and i went to bed
seasick for four days the ship stinks
the toilets all clog and the heavy air
is laden with vomit and piss
as two thousand men all vomit and piss on the floors
only the captain and a few others resist
at last we sail clear of that storm
pass through rainbows of gulls and shore birds
spot calm green water ahead
then palm trees and diamond head
white beaches call toward us
near a grey dock there are tanned girls who smile
months later in our ship's photo lab
next to the x-ray room of our hospital
our ship's doctor shows me an enlarged photo
he had the presence of mind to take of the sea
at the height of that terrible storm
a pale white hand beckons from the sea to us

TOKIO 1946

like the navajo legend once there were men
who changed to birds and back to men again
while they were birds they must have thought
this ancient city was an ant hill
to fire the white light
and watch the smoke curl
upward nothing can be destroyed
forever joe levine and i ride
this train from yokohama to tokio
stare at the shattered cities
we have seen only eighteen years
of life beginning over and over again
in this rubble a face in the ruins
japanese woman picking up bricks
long after the train has passed
her face stares back from our window

STRANGE HARBOR

tonight i think my friend kneels
beside the bed of a new woman
sinks deep inside her
mattress and forgets
oh great sea mother of us all
on whose breast we lived whose salt
is in our blood for ages past when first
we crawled on land breathed air oh great
sea who giveth and taketh away life
in whose arms the dead rock our friends
you folded into your arms in explosions
of thunder and fire we give thanks now
that we have at last passed safely under the gate
into the harbor where buildings rise on hills
gleam white with sun all day gleam fire all night
i remember one who did not pass the gate
today with us he was the carver of ships
in closed bottles a world contained rigging sails
his hands were weathered miracles with knives
and tools the last i saw his hands we played

a game of chess and afterwards he watched the sea
and carved while he smoked his pipe then went
below the explosion came from the engine room
where he worked our ship lay dead burned
on the sea two days someone found his hands
only hands we give back to you oh sea
great mother of us all we have sacrificed to you
prayed and now give thanks we come through your open gate
alive

THANKSGIVING DAY, 1946

today the rain falls over all our land
it falls on the ships in 'frisco bay
which rise and creak against piers in the harbor
it falls over the sea clear west of midway
it rains into the eyes of our dead at sea
who rise like ghosts on the wings of gulls
today i'm wired right into the sea
feel my old ship rising and falling away
thousands of miles from my hospital bed
where i've been lying for weeks with my face
turned to a window hear my ship creaking
and sloshing water over her bows hear the cry
of gulls look out the window at rain
slashing at columns of troops who march by
under their packs and ponchos i can't make out
their faces to remember we're not on this ward
because of wounds the war has been over more than a year
it's only pneumonia and fevers that brought us here
but now the dark haired nurse comes to the bed
next to mine and strips the sheets quickly
because the boy who was there has died
in the night and i see the rain fall
from her eyes to the sheets as she tries
to smile at me but her eyes turn to smoke
and outside the rain becomes softer again
press to the window and memorize faces of men
marching by they still don't realize
there's a generation waiting for birth

that expects them to make a new land
out of dreams they hatched across the ocean
but they only know they're glad to be home
and still the rain falls over all our land
falls and heals like a great benediction

FISHERMEN'S WHARF 1975

where my army troop ship used to dock
there's an ancient cutter now a tourists'
toy we walk the decks with children grand
shouts ring across the water wind rattles
the rigging shadow falls across a smaller dock
where we used to board the taxi launches
laughing when our ship was anchored in the bay
but now that little dock's a launching ramp
for excursions on the bay in sunlight
in moonlight
halt you drunken tourists
who've just come out of the bars
and fancy eating places
wipe the oyster crumbs off your blouses
and the saki off your faces
remember the drunken sailors
who boarded the launches here
look deep down in the water
when the light slants so just right
like pearls suspended in water
under this dock are the tears of sailors
girl friends wives and other women
friends you rode the cable
sound like an anchor roaring out
came for souvenirs and dinners
a leisure tour of 'frisco bay
halt the crowds that throng these wharves
in jeans and frocks and suits
stop the ring of cash
registers the sound beyond the gate
out in the sea a bell
cling clang cling clang

hold your ear to the water
this ring travels in circles
concentric under the sea clear out
where the ships lie on their sides in the water
rust is their only enemy now but then
i saw them just after the war was over
never participant always after viewer
at the gate of tokio bay
and in the yellow sea off china
when name plates have burned away
sunken ships belong to no one
cling clang halt you tourists
board the scenic cruiser here

* * *

Chris Petrakos

What Words

Our hearts are worlds spinning through wet, empty streets
on their way to love or sleep or cry.
The dreamers sleepwalking, a slow shuffling dance,
stumble out of twisted rooms mumbling of dead women.
We move in crazy circles through the night thinking of what we want,
a place in the world where we can talk and work, sleep and work,
and love in the same directions. Old men pinned in doorways
and hatchet-faced cowboys crawling out from under tables,
the rain painting tears on our faces, tears like a sad flag,
burning letters across our cheeks 'I need, therefore I am.'
Looking, looking even while the filthy wind blows in our faces,
looking, our eyes floating like kites out of our skulls,
eyes beating against windows. The way to each other is painfully straight
but through crazy streets where newspapers squirm along the sidewalks.
What words will hold us together, finally?
Who will speak them?

Here

All I know is that I can't sleep and I can't breathe.
When you go away I draw your face on the pillow
and lie down next to it. I need air,
there's just these two small rooms with dirty windows,
doors open on a billboard of a man pointing his gun
at your chest. Will you be my legs and my eyes,
put a tin can under the places where I'm bleeding?
In Chicago the night is never far away,
there's a slot in the sky that the sun rolls into
like a penny, the moon, that big loudspeaker,
plays all the latest hits; those aren't stars
up there, but kites being held for interrogation.
In front of broken-backed Greek restaurants little boys
lick strawberry-colored blood from their fingers.
Will you take them home, will you take me home? Trees
throw up their leaves, their kisses to us

but they land under our feet. The starling's eyes
are like two ink spots spreading, your voice hops
around from branch to branch. There's only a few
of us who can love, who have more than one pair of lips.
The days are gone when a kiss could become a birthmark.
Just tie an ambulance light to your back and run
up and down the street if you're looking for someone to care for.
Like when a flock of birds fly off the lawn
and into the trees for no reason at all, I sometimes
think we die at a hidden signal. At the beach
there're lost children clinging to popsicle sticks,
alewives lie gasping in the sand like bright
silver gashes, the tide washes up a dissecting table
which I lie down on and you peel my skin like an orange
asking What are we? We're fresh meat clawing our way
through the air. We're statues with our hands tied,
pianos trapped inside our skin. Will you carry
me away from here? Do you believe I can carry you?
We're ropes made of flesh. Give me your hand.

Touch

Endless pictures of the world.
You look at them and see
all the colors you might have turned.
From raw beginnings.
Eyes just starting to chew
on the unbelievable brightness.
Anything we can learn from is food,
is meat for possible understanding,
and fattens the hungry spirit
who shares these rooms.
Endless pictures jamming our brains.
Lovers twist rainbow flesh and softly howl.
So vivid I can't stop thinking about it.
Or that dazed boy who wanders
through the courtyard each morning
calling to himself,
calling to the morning shapes,
his heart a grey cloud.

Housewives stare for a moment,
then move on.
How can you touch somebody whose dreams
are nothing like your own?
Go to the phone,
dial the magic number and ask for God,
but it's no use because wherever God is
is only part of where He is,
and sometimes you need all of Him.
Sometimes you need at least a sign
to fall and crash your eyes,
even if later you admit
you were imagining things.
It is the force of my feelings
that keeps me moving and strong,
turn and roast under yellow skies.
We stumble on hot eyes to find a road.
Can you find it?
Can you find me, for me,
a road that leads close to the city
and its tribes,
buildings peeling flesh.
Jungle of Fast-Talkers.
What it is, that they're scared shitless
of their own wet needs.
The desperate music,
meat music vomited from horns,
bleeding through the air into busted radios.
Arms that open and close through the night.
Hold Me is a song.
Is a song everybody has to sing at least once
either quietly or out loud.
That the glaring lights
be turned down for a moment
so you can feel the softness of the planet
and a man could speak, saying
Brother,
you may lie here in my arms,
or you may lie in the grass

under those strong trees,
but either way you will be held.

* * *

Michael C. Ford

SIMPLY THE WORDS

for/ Charles Olson

Simply the words
We skip the units of breath
Our language begins the beginning
 that does not finish
But there is no bronchial interference
We are vulnerable
 as a nightingale
 on a winter-blown branch
 or an egret
 on a wave-batter'd rock

BASTILLE DAY

Renoir children
are gone in their games

in Grant Pk

I'm a foetus balloon!

when they let the air
out of my mother's belly,

like a dud firecracker
will I die in the sky?

war baby

sometime
in 1939 Poland
Hitler's modern
the king is oldfashion'd

must be bewilder'd
by "sea war"
3 years go
I crown in Illinois

join the world
& see the navy

STRATEGY

while Hirohito's army
marches
 down
this war
another rising son,
& the nurse
holds
me to her womb
with all the neutrality
of cannons
on a renovated fort,
& she wants to cry:
 "IT'S A BOY"
but it comes out *bomb!*

THE DAY MY UNCLE DIVORCED GENE TIERNEY

I mean that's the way it seem'd,
because I started going to movies
when I was 2 years old — it was
better than babysitters — so it
wasn't too surprising when I'd
begun to indemnify unreasonable
realities with a lot of infantile
identifications, & when I saw my
uncle's 2nd wife for the last time
thru a window
on the Illinois Central
she was like a 1945 *Laura*
portrait, mystery, blue hat
with veil, the way she

blink back tears on the night train,
& I waved, I think — kind of flexing
my fingers
unsteady as triggers

FUTURE

I won't be able to read
about Bataan, about Midway,
about the beach at Normandy
because I won't learn to
read even speech balloons
over *Wonder Woman*, *The Human*
Torch, *Andy Panda*, *The Blue*
Beetle, *The Blonde Phantom*
or *Hoppy The Marvel Bunny*
for at least 3 years after
putting the Chicago suburban
link-up behind me; after
Evanston, Winnetka, Glencoe,
Rogers Park & Hubbard Woods.

Right after Santa Fe Scout
starts tracking towards
California, I swear I never
pretended to be "prophet"
but my father takes camera;
later — snapshot of me in
the dining-car I hold fork
upright, look grim.

ode to the board of trade

because billowy girls
& how they're pleasantly
slickly array'd

stone bodies
on Wabash
are petrified popular
songs

my cousins used to run
like wraiths in an
oriental myth
all the way
from the Palmer House
to the Water Tower

the last time we saw
eachother — awaken'd
adjacent relatives in
midwestern private schools

nothing but delusions of
fresh air
between
St Louis & Chicago
when we stood
like secrets
watching girls billow by
in their parochial clothes

THE GREAT AMERICAN GRAB-BAG OF 1946

by the time Japan
says okay it's over

I'm on my chin
blubbering like Mickey Rooney
leaving Boys Town

up on my knees under a table
at Curry's *mile hi cone*
& a sign outside to prove it

bullets of nickels
pumpt into counter
jukebox; tubes bubble Dorothy
Shay *The Park Av Hillbilly*

imagination fries from now on
& my brain is a basquet of
susie-qs in Southern Calif

your brother goes down off the coast of laguna

for diane

incest no sock no shock melodic waves
they dash under a sea of sky darling
crash a precipice of music

nacreous daughters whose trespass our
brief crossing means nothing to do
with sexes but to finish, surely,

similitude in blood or baptism, even.

right now there is an ocean of airs
sunk off what had begun as a pantheon
of boats; they are heavenward

telling of all vagrant oceans, yet
they are clouds, fishtail'd sank
to swim around the the lowering sky;

similitude in what storms in us.

fishtail'd crawly swim around the rings
of saturn, arrest the moons of jupiter,
incarcerate the bears of the biosphere

sweeping across our combination the real
world you know the one, too the one relieved
in a sick festival of pristine rescue,

as the tide as the tide goes as the tide goes out.

on my 14th birthday

the sun is white, upright
like antique pianos
at the edge of the sky

and the music room emptied
from lessons, nicollette;
your voice cries down these
slumbering halls the way wine
is surrender'd in impressionistic
paintings.

I am as tall as toulouse-lautrec.

you are a dream sequence of
dozing sheet music on the sill
of this piano.
don't deny it; granite angels
of your childhood church
were witnesses.

your hair was, I remember, braids
else fell in a havoc of golden
ringlets catching the glint of
sunlight off a metronome's needle;
did you know that?

softly as your hair has fallen,
a firstly snow fell thru that fast
february night, putting shags of
chicago back in our dreaming eyes;
do you remember, nicollette?

and yet, when my soundless emissary
hears your voice, now, dear memory,
its crying catches the snick of a
ticking metronome in dream-like blende

with this abandon'd room

* * *

Greg Kosmicki

MOTHER, SOMEWHERE

inside of you
a wheel is turning
father the axle
and we
children the spokes

one is broken
and gone
among the stones
and the wheel
since then has never turned
smoothly

*

when I enter the city
of the elegant
dragging myself
like a square wheel
it will be to a parade
of one man

I see him now
tooting his horn
with one hand
throwing confetti with the other
and someone unnamed
unrolling ticker tapes
like a summons
to a bad joke

*

these are but parts

of the nightmare
and there is more
that shall go unnoticed
and unexplained
to anyone
but ourselves
who invented it

we were always good
at living
with excuses
for the truth
so good
the excuses are harder to find
anymore

*

mother on that wheel
the spokes have splintered
like toothpicks
trapped in teeth
of a lie
I try to live
as best I can

and the splinters
are the children's children
who will grow up
to find
parts of an old wheel
growing
in their chests

* * *

Joseph Hansen

THE THURSDAY OF THE SMALL RAINS

My phone rang in February 1969. John Harris had found a poetry workshop underway in Venice. I ought to see it. It rained that night, a small rain and intermittent. In a little storefront gallery, under paintings hung against white walls reflecting cold fluorescent light, ragged kids in floppy leather hats and patched jeans, granny dresses and second-hand serapes, sat on folding chairs, an old couch, an even older and much tougher machine-loomed oriental rug.

There were corn-chip bags, cans of beer, of soft drinks, wine bottles in crumpled paper sacks. Smoke hung in the damp air, not all of it from cigarettes—there were dreamy smiles among the beards, and eyes red not from weeping. (There was also, it turned out later, a rosy-cheeked teenage police spy nicknamed Stony, whose career came to an end before he harmed anybody at the gallery.) Dogs dozed among the bare feet, sandals, Army surplus combat boots, the leather tote bags, canvas knapsacks, petit-point reticules.

Out of these satchels came typed pages or blue-lined, handwritten notebook pages that were unfolded and read aloud from. Many of the voices were frail, and the swish of tires on the wet street outside the door that was open for air made hearing difficult. But listening was polite, and after each reading came murmurs of praise and patterings of applause. Friendliness seemed to be what mattered. But some of the verses seemed poor to John Harris and me and we said so. We had got into this habit during our time at The Bridge. Our idea was to help beginning poets make fewer mistakes. We received scowls.

An undersize blond lad in big glasses read a loud, angry manifesto. It was not clearly worded but the idea was that what came out of one's head and went down on paper was beautiful and true and maybe even holy, and certainly was not to be questioned and/or tampered with. The evening broke up in bitterness. But outside the gallery on the damp sidewalk, George Drury Smith, who ran the gallery and issued a multicolored magazine of experimental writing called *Beyond Baroque*, caught up with John and me.

Smith was a high school language teacher with advanced ideas about the future of writing that he was hoping to make manifest in his magazine. I suspect he thought more of the runty kid's statement than he did of John Harris' approach and mine to writing—what it is and how to do it. But he gave us the benefit of the doubt. Let Thursday—he dubbed the meetings "Happenstance"—belong to those

who regarded what they wrote as sacred, and let Wednesday belong to John and me and to those who wanted to get the hang of writing.

That was how the Venice Poetry Workshop started. At first, there were Wednesday nights when Harris and I had no one else to talk to or listen to. Some of those who did stray in out of the night became angry with us. We were after unity and brevity, directness, coherence, objectivity. We were after craftsmanship. This implied self-discipline, and in 1969 discipline was a dirty word. Doing your own thing, however sloppily, summarized all virtue. Children—ages fifteen to fifty—screamed at us, threw things, stormed out weeping, or simply didn't come back.

It must have been discouraging for Harris, who worked a tough administrative job in a big government social service agency from nine to five each day. With a little help from my friends, I got by, writing novels. I don't mean writing isn't hard work, but doing what you want to do doesn't frazzle you the same way. However fed up he got, Harris stuck with the Workshop and so did I. And soon we were averaging a dozen poets a night, and after a few months had passed, two dozen. Sometimes, as many as forty packed the little room.

The method we worked out was to go around the circle having people read—one, two, three poems. Then there were comments from the others; we soon learned these had to be confined to talk about the poems read and not allowed to degenerate into arguments between this faultfinder and that. When the others had finished, Harris and I said our say, and the next poet read his stuff, starting the process over again.

George Smith—swooping sideburns, curling mustaches—printed in each issue of his big, rainbow-hued magazine, a belief "that the survival of writing as an art implies a re-evaluation . . . of language per se, and of its use, significance, vision" He favored anagrams, word play, free association of ideas, surrealism, concretism, all of it a far cry from what the Workshop was aiming at. Yet in the summer of 1970 George devoted issue 701 of *Beyond Baroque* to poems by Workshop regulars, naming it *New Venice Poets*. Included were Richard Eiden, James Krusoe, Jane Newton, Anne Marie Ross, Tony Russo, Lynn Shoemaker, Frances Dean Smith, Ruth Wire and others.

Eiden was a slim youth whose nearly white hair contrasted arrestingly with brown eyes. He wrote with a tenderness that managed not to slip into sentimentality but he was a law student and after he'd passed his bar exams didn't come back to the Workshop. James Krusoe, tall, lean, soft-spoken, worked at hospitals in those days and helped Smith edit his magazine. He brought to the Workshop interesting poems for two voices, which he read with his handsome wife, Sana, a gifted potter.

Jane Newton was a buxom, pale woman, nervous and talkative, trying to shed Edna St. Vincent Millay mannerisms from her writing. Her progress was hampered from time to time when one or another of her cats relieved itself in her typewriter. She lived with a man named Andrew Salmins who, she told us, had been a famous poet in his native Latvia. It would have been hard to say. He had a thick accent and never spoke above a whisper, and she rewrote all his poems.

Anne Marie Ross was a student at Cal State Los Angeles. A slender girl with dark, silken hair and a somewhat breathless manner, she wrote verses whose interesting rhythmic patterns set them apart. She was among the most productive poets in the Workshop. A year or so later, she arranged for a group from Venice to read at her college. We arrived and found the right building and the right room. A member of the English department showed up with his wife. But no one else came. So we read to each other, laughing. Then a fat youth wheeled in a handcart heaped with film cans. A Betty Boop festival was about to begin in this room. We found a tavern. Anne Marie didn't show up in Venice again for a long time.

A.P. Russo, who had been a regular at The Bridge workshops, was now managing the large Free Press Bookstore on Fairfax Avenue—out of the score of shops that opened there in the sixties the only one to remain after the flowers withered. His visits to Venice weren't frequent but some good poems of his appear in *New Venice Poets*. Lynn Shoemaker, with a down-on-the-farm mustache, blew in one night from South Dakota, where his mother is a well-known poet. Maybe because of this, he was shopping for new forms, a new diction.

Lynn spent a lot of energy on the peace and other trendy movements but energy was something he seemed never to run short of. He and his wife had a little apartment on Ocean Front Walk and he rode a bicycle to and from the gallery. He helped George with his magazine—once there was a storm, the old building leaked, manuscripts got soaked and had to be retyped before they could be returned. He never missed a Workshop, where he lightened the load for Harris and me. He stretched his own talent and showed others how to stretch theirs. He ended up writing strong poems, most of them collected in *Coming Home* (1973), printed in Utica, New York, where he now lives, teaches, edits and writes.

"Loss Among the Honkies" is perhaps the most powerful poem in *New Venice Poets*. It was written by Frances Dean Smith (still as S.S. Veri) when The Bridge workshops were coming to an end. It was hard for Frances, lacking a car, to get to Venice, but she got there and, with her strong awareness of the value of day-to-day experience as a source for poems, helped a lot of Workshop writers find direction. Many of her poems appear in *Four Poets*, published about this time by George Smith's Bayrock Press.

Another contributor to that same book was Ruth Wire, a nurse whose compassion for the sick showed starkly through her best poems—for example, "Burnt Offering" in *New Venice Poets*. With her rimless glasses, Midwest accent, and small-town beauty-parlor hairdo, she looked an unlikely poet but her words could strike with force. She now lives in Oregon where she is trying to write novels. The three long poems by John Harris in *New Venice Poets* mark a contrast to his work in the two issues of *The Bridge* and in his book, *Where Love Is*. There are traces of the old, soft lyricism in "Deathwatch" but a muscular irony as well, and the nightmarish "Creatures," and "Final Examination," detailing an autopsy (Harris was a medic in World War II), show increasing surefootedness.

Other contributors to *New Venice Poets* were the witty Chicago professor Lee Byron Jennings, who visited the Workshop on occasion, and some local poets who never did—Jack Hirschman, S.B. Melly and John Haag, who had run a Venice cafe "for poets and other misfits" and later ran for Governor of California on the Peace and Freedom ticket. I take it back—Haag did visit the Workshop once, to pass out campaign leaflets in the form of counterfeit money.

Publication, getting words you'd written into print, was important in Venice in 1969, but so were readings. George Smith staged them in the gallery on the last Friday night of every month. Since that was when the Civil Defense people tested their street-corner sirens, he called them "Air Raid Presentations." The red wooden folding chairs, flimsy black benches, second-hand sofas, were turned to face the front of the room, where a plate-glass window stared at a junk-yard across the street, or the back, where a box-stall door was padlocked on Smith's Bayrock Press printshop and office.

There was a reading stand like a meager Methodist pulpit, and there was a bargain public address system because the low ceiling of the gallery was covered in acoustic tile and some poets don't have brave voices. Near the door, a coffee-maker rumbled like a stomach and winked a red eye. In hot weather—it was airless in that small room when bodies packed it—there might be glass jugs of apple juice and wine. People spilled onto the sidewalk at halftime in order to breathe. Sometimes there wasn't enough space indoors and late-comers spent the whole evening out there, leaning against parked cars, listening to a loudspeaker.

Jascha Kessler, a teacher at UCLA, with books to his credit, was among the first readers. He wore a suit, which jarred with the usual tatters at Beyond Baroque, but he used a form new to me, syllabic verse, and it changed how I wrote. Another reader was pudgy, amiable Sam Eisenstein, who taught at City College and had then a poet-wife named Julie, who sailed through the L.A. poetry scene like an ocean liner pursued by gulls in the form of shrill and lissom young men.

In July came Deena Metzger, who had lately read to a college class a sexually explicit poem and had lost her teaching job over it. A lot of us, then, were trying to write honestly about sex, using short, accurate words for it, and battling to get what we wrote printed. The Metzger story was in the news long before anyone much had actually seen the poem. It took even the scabrous *Free Press* some nail-biting before they finally printed it. It turned out to be not much of a poem. Still, Metzger, a small, taut woman, made a vocally abrasive martyr and probably helped us all. She later taught at California Institute of the Arts.

Venice had been the idea of a lunatic land developer of the 1920s who dreamed a travesty of the Italian Venice by the blue Pacific, complete with fake plaster *palazzi*, singing gondoliers and, of course, canals. The *palazzi* became flophouses with stairwells stinking of urine. Sick ducks have replaced the gondolas. No one sings. The stucco is scaling off the bridges that hump over the canals—greasy ditches edged by broken cement. The amusement pier is charred stumps in the surf. Ancient, bowlegged Jewish widows in babushkas hobble on canes along the ocean front walk, ignoring the hustlers, muggers, dope pushers, pimps, whores, the winos, the grimy teenagers in bib overalls jeering at them, pushing them, when they won't hand over money. Housing is bad but rents are cheap. The place belongs to the dying, the diseased, the lost and the insane. It is a twenty-four-hour-a-day nightmare by the sea.

It followed that, in the hot summer of 1970, there should take place a celebration of life called the Venice Canal Festival. Playgrounds were hung with crape paper streamers, platforms were set up, tables and stoves for the serving of hot roasted corn ears, booths for the display of pottery, weaving, handcrafted roach clips. Shag-headed adolescents strummed guitars and sang songs protesting school and having to shave under their arms—hoping record company executives were listening. There were jugglers and mimes in moth-eaten tights. There were amateur rock bands with broken amplifiers. There were, also, John Harris and me, reading poems to people seated on splintery telephone poles fallen among weeds, squinting up at us, perplexed, in the sun glare, while children squealed in the background, swimming in the bacteria of the oil-rainbowed canals.

The Friday night readings stopped at Beyond

Baroque. So did almost everything else. George Smith was having personal problems. But readings took up elsewhere—on campuses, at municipal art galleries, at a tiny black hole of a theatre in Hollywood, called the Evergreen Stage. At The Bridge, sixty men, women, children, dogs and cats, lay around on those famous fake-fur mattresses in the candle dark and incense smoke, watching Charles Bukowski get drunk in a spotlight and joke with his clique—little Neeli

Cherry spilling wine down his chin, and big John Thomas, making high-school locker-room jokes about homosexuals.

1971 found me book reviewer for KPFK, a radio station that prided itself on grubby surroundings and free speech. I reviewed a lot of poetry. When Hayden Carruth's fine, big paperback anthology, *The Voice That Is Great Within Us*, came out, John Harris and Lynn Shoemaker braved the savage mice in the ankle-deep trash of the studio to read aloud with me from the book. Later we were joined at the bandaged microphones by others from the Workshop to read from our own anthology, *Venice Thirteen*, or *Ice Thirteen*, as the cover reads—George Smith didn't have a lot of patience with printing problems at that time. Maybe he was disgusted with the cover photograph.

It came out badly because we insisted on posing for it on a foggy morning under the shadowy arcade of a deserted beach-front building where some juvenile gang member had scrawled on plywood nailed over a window a pig's head above crossbones, underwritten with the number 13. We thought it was an omen. Lynn copied it for the title page. In the photograph are, left to right, Andrew Salmins, Phil Taylor, Dennis Holt, myself, Lynn Shoemaker, his wife and baby, Barry Simons, Ed Entin, Jane Newton, John Harris and Harry Northup. We look dug out of a grave during a rainstorm.

Harry, still the lanky, soft-spoken Texan in faded Levi's and worn cowboy boots, was exploring his early years of wandering and seeking—Amarillo to New York to California—in film-sharp, quickly shifting word-images. *Cowboy Angel*, in *Beyond Baroque 711*, is a good example. Lynn Shoemaker was writing about the dailiness of a new baby, the startlement of a new father. Barry Simons, a big, slow-footed boy with a soft, inward smile, improvised poems of startling comic absurdity and forlorn bewilderment.

He drove a Santa Monica taxi. The Workshop had a crowd of taxi drivers at that time—Ed Entin, Phil Taylor, Dennis Holt, as well as Barry. All were college students. Dennis had been with the Peace Corps in Bolivia, and kept notebooks out of which he mined poems. A big, strapping fellow who affected lumberjack shirts, he was in fact scholarly, gentle and took innocent delight in puns and the simplest emotions. He collected his poems, 1962—1972, in a book called *Windings* (1973).

It was Dennis who arranged for us to read at Cal State Northridge after *Venice Thirteen* was published. The buildings seemed to me raw, and the sunlit library where we read had hundreds of books on the shelves that looked untouched by human hands. The place was full. Our outspoken language didn't seem to offend anyone. Luis Campos, a delicately made man with a shy smile and a Spanish accent, drew laughs with his mordant view of plastic America, its fast food chains

and hair spray commercials. So did John Harris' "Deuteronomy Edition," hacked from assorted sources—newspaper want ads, cooking columns, society pages, astrological forecasts, weather reports—and read by the entire crew. Luis' tape recorder had awakened us to the possibilities in multi-voice poems.

Poetry workshops had existed in Southern California long before ours started in Venice on that Thursday of the small rains. Curtis Zahn held them in his hand-built beach place in Malibu. A fleshy man called Franklin ran one in an expensive glass-walled house on top of a mountain in a canyon. Helen Luster headed a Santa Monica group. Ted Simmons' meetings were at the Westside Jewish Community Center. Stanley Kurnik held forth at the First Unitarian Church. Poets on campuses, Ann Stanford and others, had followings. So had Charles Bukowski and Clayton Eshleman.

But these pockets were mostly unaware of each other. Los Angeles sprawls. They could have remained out of touch forever. But Venice Poetry Workshop—tough and demanding as it was—drew crowds, and from all over, Watts to San Fernando Valley, Hermosa Beach to San Gabriel, people of all ages and backgrounds, willing to take bruises in order to learn to write. And slowly they began to link up the lonely little enclaves and to shape a community of poets in Los Angeles.

to be continued in BACHY 11

* * *

REVIEW

Milk Run, Kate Ellen Braverman, Momentum Press, 1977.

Art in the Court of the Blue Fag, Wanda Coleman, Black Sparrow Press, August, 1977.

My impulse to set these poets side by side in order to review their new work is in part the result of an accident. I received the two books together and I read them over and over, first one and then the other. Yet it is also true that both speak in strong, self-consciously female voices, that both are attentive to suffering, sex, drugs, anger, and power—most frequently the power of one over another, and frequently of male over female. The woman whose voice dominates many of the poems by Wanda Coleman and Kate Ellen Braverman is reckless and pushing at life. She has been knocked about and she rarely whines, surviving by willed endurance (Braverman) or by wile and a sharp tongue (Coleman).

Kate Ellen Braverman's poems in *Milk Run* seem directly based on the life of the author. Whatever the truth of the matter, I could not but believe that the people

addressed are real: the white, rubbery husband, the painter who never comes home from Washington Blvd. bars, the mother who doesn't notice. Her appeals to mother are clear, easy to identify with, and heartrending in the sense of being both somewhat trite and sharply affecting:

Mother, why do you come home
so late?
I grow hair under my arms
but you don't notice.
You are dressed for work,
black high heels and floppy hat.
I could never be as pretty as you,
even when you cry,
hurling yourself against my locked door,
shouting while the wood breaks
and beating my face
with your hairbrush.
And you never ask about boys. ("Milk Run")

The strength of this writing is that the events have keenly affected the writer, and that she is direct and almost obsessive in her perceptions about her own pain and fragmentation, the loss of love, her transformations into strange creatures. In "Survivor," the persona of the poems becomes a creature with gills, wings, and claws. In "Posing," she sits for a portrait, and although one is struck initially by the manipu[lative], blind power of the painter, it is also true that she needs putting together. She is unformed, bat[tered], and "barely breathing":

Perhaps you will give me
shoulders today.
I could use them
and arms.
And thick strips of white
for the torn places,
residues from accidents.
If you ask, I will say

I was not born
but assembled by blind men
from scraps.

Yet for all the pain and fragmentation, she con[tinues] to want the extremes of life, for they protect her from the sense of not having as much as one can grab and savor. Thus, in "Two and One-Half Years Ago," she describes being admitted to a hospital as an O.D., and goes on to embrace and assert her reck[lessness]:

They wanted to know about goals.
I've never been careful,
I told them.
I miss so much as it is.
If I were careful, God,
I would miss it all.

Braverman avoids, I think, though without much leeway, the poet's need to romanticize madness, drugs, and the bruises of life, which the woman of the poems receives often from men, who seem little better than barking dogs ("When the Dogs Bark") or silent marauders. She does this by means of style, writing simple, pared down sentences, characteris[tically] centered around the verb "to be" and ending with the end of the line: "This is a rented city." "It is warm here." "I will be still soon."

Her poems do, however, push an extreme view of life by means of startling images: unborn babies "curled on the dusty shelves/ of my belly," or "I keep a collection of rare, fine fevers," or "I am ready as burnt red leaves." The main drawback of these images is that they are overly reminiscent—as is her choice of words—of Sylvia Plath. There is no way to read "Survivor" without recalling "Lady Lazarus." Although it is no fault for one poet to echo another—in fact I would firmly oppose uniqueness for its own paltry sake—I find the frequency of such clear echoes distracting. Occasionally too, a poem loses its thrust when an already established and powerful image is dropped for a new one which does not manage to jolt the reader into a new arena or perception. One vivid poem which focuses on the quality of yellow light at "7 PM"—its restless, whorey excitement—ends with a metaphor (of men compared to empty, dry milk bottles) that for me dissipates the energy of the poem. Since Kate Ellen Braverman's strength as a poet lies in the unblinking stare and in subject matter and perceptions that reach for the daring, she is best when she maintains the gaze.

Wanda Coleman also writes of sex and poetry, drugs and pain. As a black poet she includes as well the experience of being black, not as the subject matter of her work, but as a fact of life that determines the world of her poems. What is different about her work is that the speakers, of which there are several, stand back from events and assess them, ironically, seriously, with compassion and with wit. These poems tease and play. Moreover, in this book at least, the author strongly introduces the connections between sex and selling or money and poetry. Braverman may write poetry directly out of felt experience, but Coleman acknowledges that once this is so (as it has been since the Romantic era), experiences can be falsified, packaged, dressed-up, and sold. Although in the following quotation it is another who wraps up the experience, she does not exclude herself or any of us from a possible con, either as victim or as shark:

the hyena rang the doorbell the stinking meat of our dead affair
squeezed into his attache case staining the pages of his ms: "i've
come to meet your husband. i'm going to frankfurt with a russian
whore"

Coleman is especially skilled in using the rhythms of speech, creating well both those of the speaker and those of other characters in the poems. Her work is characterized by dialogue of various sorts and the talk is black talk, often street talk, meant to be heard:

she loves me i know she loves me she spoke words i forbade with
my sexology and lust for man-flesh
she got drunk—had to get stinkin' drunk falling down
half naked on the blacktop
me standing there my black leather jacket/ the boy
he was trying
to make me believe i was
helpless/pimp-white games in watts winter night her fingernails
digging into neck of my flesh
"you mine—you always be mine
no matter what"

(**"Beyond Sisters"**)

Coleman also displays a variety of styles, tones, moods, and ideas, writing about sleeping with a man whose wife has deserted, about Aunt Ora's coffee turning black kids blacker, about police coming to her door ("i was half naked so they didn't come inside,/ figuring they'd caught me in mid-fuck"), about drug connections, about sexual connections. It is difficult to select examples because they would belittle her range and because the best of her poems are worked through ideas, narrations that need beginning, middle, and end, or processes of thought that need completion. In the title poems, for example, "Art in the Court of the Blue Fag, I, II, III," the fag is pimp, he is success, the pied piper, the connection, the king, the bored and hungry one, the public, the world traveler; and his effect is multiple. Here is about half of the poem:

dear daughter,

there is a cut of man who haunts the alleys and avenues scarfing adventure/pro
bums satisfied to spill cum into any orifice as long as it's tight; who play the game
of fame by shattering the dreams of the children they father. they read glory in
shankers, vomit, spit, mucous, tears and blood. they will shove it to you anyway
they can and a month after they've split leaving you dangling between suicide and
insanity, come back to borrow five bucks and sympathy. beware. learn the smell of
this man. it's the laughing face whose eyes never smile

gas heater glow his eyes he lights
the pipe we fall into step we are
now leaving hamlin we are now beyond
the moon stroking bold and cold no rose
has ever smelled as good as that
mammie jammie sipping coffee and
turning on to juju whip it whip it
i'm water he takes a drink
playpoets touch blooded fingers
to yawning mouths. another
tasty life appropriately spiced with
liquor, drugs and a pinch of sex
an adequate and filling meal

at the corner i stop before the flashing red lights. the blue fag
looks out over sunset boulevard and sighs
he is ruler of the realm

Although it is done with bravado, in a cool and jazzy manner, the message is no slight or easy one. The danger, I think, is lest the manner become too easy or too mechanical a one, and the poems not carefully or thoroughly enough thought through. What makes her work interesting, on the other hand, is not only the self-consciousness surrounding the presented role of poet, but also the seeming ease with which she brings it off, pulling us into difficult places with seductive and rhythmic ways.

Martha Ronk Lifson September 5, 1977

The Blue Door & Other Stories, by Lawrence P. Spingarn, Perivale Press, 1977.

These stories are works of the imagination in the most literal sense in which that time-blunted term can be used. They are not fantasies but neither are they reportage. Reality, in these pages, reaches us with the strangeness left in. In that sense, Spingarn's writing is the opposite of slick. Yet the hand of the skilled craftsman is evident in every sentence.

An original and sometimes disturbing talent is at work here. The stories range in locale from Manhattan to San Francisco, from Paris to Africa. That in the title story the central figure is a pregnant young woman and in the others males of various ages and conditions, makes it additionally remarkable that Spingarn's individuality is stamped so plainly on them all.

The Greenwich Village of "The Blue Door" never looked like this to anyone else—still, it is unmistakable, as are the characters of the story, though individuals and never merely types. The symbol of the blue door itself remains to mystify and haunt the reader long after the story is done. "The Ambassador," chosen for *Best American Short Stories*, 1968, recounts the bleak, practiced reaction of a successful diplomat to a shattering and summary personal remark by his wife when the couple visit their failed writer son in France.

In "A Good Address," a widower tries to hang onto a demanding, alcoholic young mistress as his fortunes collapse under him. Not even Isaac Singer has dealt better with the erotic obsessions of middle age. A grotesque and distasteful irony is the crux of "The Ritual Bath," about a World War II refugee Jew working for the Allies in an African jungle nation. Racism has destroyed Windholz's wife and world, yet Windholz's own racist attitude toward the blacks around him is almost too strong to stomach.

Of all these stories, "Memory and Desire" takes to its extreme Spingarn's impulse to show the nightmare side of ordinary life. An aged, retired longshoreman rents one of his two rooms on the San Francisco waterfront to a blowsy old tart with whom he falls futilely in love. It's a James T. Farrell plot but Spingarn makes it weird as an Aubrey Beardsley drawing.

The mind is a distorting mirror, but to make this evident in writing while at the same time keeping clear the actual shape of persons and events is a challenge to the writer. The success with which Lawrence Spingarn has met the challenge can be measured by the regret one feels that there are only five stories in *The Blue Door*, and not twice that number.

Joseph Hansen

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT EDWARD BROWN's poems in this issue are from his newest manuscript, *Breaking and Entering*. He is the force behind Laurel Press/openspaces, publishers of several chapbooks, including Holly Prado's *Losses*. His poems have been published in many little magazines, including *Cat and the Moon*, and *Momentum*.

DENNIS COOPER was born 1/10/53 in Pasadena, California, and currently lives in Monrovia. He has published poetry in *Poetry Now*, *Bachy 7*, *The Spirit That Moves Us*, *CQ*, *Gay Sunshine* and elsewhere. A book of his poems will be published in 1978 by Catalyst Press. He edits the poetry magazine *Little Caesar*. He lists his favorite writers as Gerard Malanga, David Johanssen and Rimbaud, and his idol is John Kennedy, Jr. He heads up the new wave rock band "The Same." He has read his poetry with Allen Ginsberg and John Rechy.

MELISSA CUMMINGS lives in Gloucester, Massachusetts, the mother of two children ages 10 and 8. Her work has been published in *Delirium 3*, *Rose Supply (broadside)*, *Phantasm*, *Images*, *Gloucester Daily Times*, *Poetry And*, *Southern Libertarian Messenger* and has been accepted for many others. This year Libra Press publishes her first chapbook, *Difficult to Sleep in the Quiet World* (c/o Jim McCurry, 1827 Elm St., Denver, CO 80220). More of her work will appear in *Bachy 12*.

MARIANNA DIAMOS was born in Hollywood. While writing press releases at KCET, she accidentally picked up a camera and has been taking pictures ever since. She is a staff photographer for the *Los Angeles Times*.

PATRICIA EAKINS has poems coming up in *Loon* and *New York Quarterly*, among others, and fiction in *Attaboy!*. Her work has appeared in *Bachy 4, 6, 8*. She recently received an MFA from the Goddard College Writing Program. She lives in New York.

MICHAEL C. FORD is "Chord Changes" columnist for the *Los Angeles Free Press* and editor of Mt. Alverno Press and *Sunset Palms Hotel*. He has worked in the Poetry in the Schools Program in Utah, Idaho and California. An experimental theatre in Oregon is producing one of his one-act plays. His most recent books are *Rounding Third* and *West Point*.

LARRY FRENCH has had his photographs in several publications, including *Bachy 8*. He also writes poetry and enjoys the combination of both mediums. He lives in Venice, California.

JOSEPH HANSEN is the author of *Fadeout* and twelve other novels. He received an NEA grant in 1974-75 to travel to England to write a novel. Past leader of the Venice Poetry Workshop, his poems have been published widely. Momentum Press is publishing a book of his poems, and his new novel, *Stranger to Himself*, is being published this Fall. Currently he teaches a Creative Writing course at UCLA. "The

Thursdays of the Small Rains" is the second in a series of reminiscences of his longtime participation in the L.A. poetry scene.

BARBARA HARRAH lives in Stamford, Connecticut, and is finishing a novel. One of her stories appeared in *Bachy* 8.

DENNIS HOLT lives in Venice, California. He is the author of *Windings* (1973). His poems have appeared in *Momentum*, *Venice* 13 and *Bachy* 7.

STEPHEN KESSLER spent part of 1976 in Spain, visiting Vicente Aleixandre, whose book *La destruccion o el amor* he had been translating. A selection of these translations entitled *Destruction or Love* was published by Green Horse Press in Santa Cruz, where he now lives. Kayak published his *Nostalgia of the Fortuneteller* in 1975. *Manroot* recently carried several of his poems in its *Voices of the Seventies* issue.

GREG KOSMICKI lives on a farm outside Crete, Nebraska, and is a graduate student at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. His poems have appeared in *Corduroy*, *Choomia*, *Alicorn*, *PAN*, *Pebble*, and he has work forthcoming in *Dacotah Territory* and *The Paris Review*.

JAMES KRUSOE, associate editor of Beyond Baroque Foundation Publications, edited the first four issues of *New Magazine*. He was Co-ordinator of Poetry In The Schools for Southern California. He has been extensively published and has been the active force behind the Venice Poetry Workshop for some time. His chapbooks include *Ju-Ju, Notes on Suicide* (Momentum Press), and *History of the World*, recently published by Bombshelter Press (1092 Loma Drive, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254, \$3.00).

CAROL LEM teaches English part-time at LACC. She is the author of a book of poems, *Grassroots*. Her work has appeared in *Bitterroot*, *Encore*, *Rufus*, *California State Poetry Quarterly*, *Seven Stars*, *Momentum* and *Bachy* 7, 8.

MARTHA LIFSON teaches at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles. Her first published poems appeared in *Bachy* 9.

MARK McCLOSKEY's recent books are *All That Mattered: Poems* and *The Secret Documents of America: Poems*. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Quarterly Review of Literature*, *Contemporary Quarterly* and other magazines. He is currently teaching at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

DEENA METZGER is the author of the novel *Skin:Shadows / Silence* (West Coast Poetry Review, 1976). Part of her novel *The Book of Hags* was adapted for Pacifica Radio by Everett Frost; also reissued on tapes by Black Box. Widely published, her work has appeared in *Chrysalis*, *Heresies*, *Tree*, *Peace News*, *Alley Cat Readings*, *Rising Tides: 20th Century American Women Poets*, *Contemporary California Women Poets*, *Sinister Wisdom*, among others. She has three novels seeking a publisher. She is Director of the Writing Program of the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, and lives in Studio City. Momentum Press will publish a volume of her poetry in 1978.

Excerpts from her novels, *The Book of Hags* and *Scars on the Body Politic*, will appear in *Bachy 11*. She is one of this year's recipients of an Individual Writer's Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

MARK NEGUS is twenty years old, and lives in Blue Springs, Missouri. "Red Boy" is his first published story. He writes: "Most of my time I have been playing around with writing style to develop an individualism for myself. The best way to do it is to fall for the prettiest and most indifferent girl in the county, and write her letters about twice a week! In that way, you see how a person reacts to what you are writing, and very likely you gain the love of your dreams, at the same time." He sends this living obituary: "He thinks he knows what he is doing: maybe so, maybe not."

CHRIS PETRAKOS is twenty-four and lives in Chicago. He has had poems in *Bachy 8*, *Iowa Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Epoch*, *Momentum*, *Dakotah Territory* and *New York Quarterly*.

EDIE PISTOLESI is an artist from New York who lives and works and shows in the Los Angeles area.

HENRY RASOF is an editor of *Junction*, the literary arts magazine from Brooklyn College, where he teaches English. He has been published by *Black Box*, *Gaullimaufry* and *Bachy 4*. He is an alumnus of the Venice Poetry Workshop.

LEE ROMERO runs the Chelsea Photo Gallery in Venice, California, and is a staff photographer for the *Los Angeles Times*.

HENRY H. ROTH's recent work has been or will be out soon in *Story Quarterly*, *Waluna*, *South Carolina Review*, *Granite*, *Seems*, *The Little Magazine*, *Sun & Moon*, and a new paperback anthology from Bantam, *Roar of the Sneakers*, a sports fiction book. His book of Cruz stories is being considered for a movie. He lives in South Nyack, New York.

RON SCHREIBER has published two books of poems, *Living Space* (Hanging Loose Press, \$2.00, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn 02117), and *Moving to a New Place* (Alice James Books, 138 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge MA 02138, \$3.00). A widely published poet, he writes, "I live in a collective. I cut my hair last summer. I'm a socialist. I teach for a living, including a gay course in Boston. I don't wish I were 21 again." He is an editor of *Hanging Loose*.

ANNA SIDAK has had stories in *Beyond Baroque's New* and in *Bachy 9*. She lives in Thousand Oaks, California.

LAURA SILAGI is an artist from New York who lives and works and shows in the Los Angeles area. All her photographs are handcolored.

BARRY SIMONS is an artist as well as a poet. He studies at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. His poems appeared in *Bachy 8* and *Venice 13*, and *Alley Cat Readings*.

SHELBY STEPHENSON grew up on a farm in the coastal plain of North Carolina—in Johnston County. His poems come out of that experience. He chairs the English Department at Campbell College, Buies Creek, North Carolina, and has had poems in several magazines, including *International Poetry Review*, *Southern Poetry Review* and an anthology, *Southern Poetry: The Seventies*. He has work forthcoming in *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Texas Quarterly*, *Poetry Now* and many others.

SUSAN WALLACE is a student who lives in Long Beach, California. She also studied with Holly Prado at the Woman's Building. This is her first publication.

MARINE WARDEN is a retired M.D. who lives in Riverside, California, with his wife and three sons. He began writing poetry seriously in 1975 at age 48. His work has appeared in *Bachy 8*, *Some Friends*, *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Mango* and a forthcoming anthology from Samisdat Publications.

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