

# TRACE

LIVING LITERATURE

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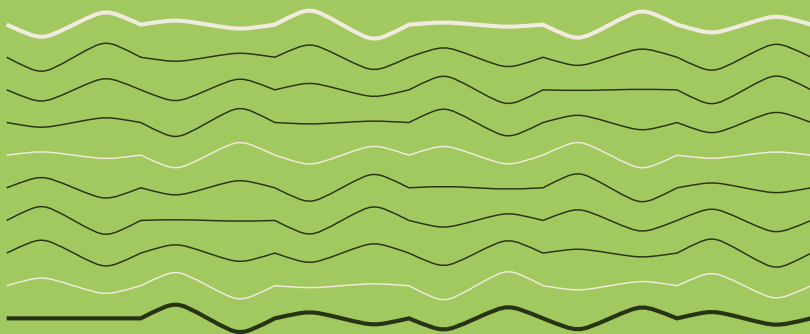
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JAMES BOYER MAY / EDITOR



# TRACE

*No. 51*

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Edited by JAMES BOYER MAY

A CLEAN READING EDITION

Advertisements, subscription promotions, the front cover and blank leaves have been omitted. The poetry, fiction, essays, correspondence and reviews of the issue are given in full, in the order in which they are printed.

Where a poet uses the space of the page — indented lines, hanging steps, gaps within a line — that spacing is treated as part of the poem and kept as closely as a proportional typeface allows. Square brackets enclose conjectural readings where the scan is faded. Original spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing and verse lineation are kept.

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## **METRICS REVISITED**

*by Barney Childs*

*(A more comprehensive study, with detailed treatment of material applied to music as well as poetry, will appear in PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC.)*

THE DAYS WHEN ONE SIMPLY opened Saintsbury to solve questions of English prosody are unfortunately past; now available are almost as many approaches as there are textbooks on the nature of poetry—from tonemic linguistics to assertions that English metre is really, after all, quantitative. This is not to claim that this writer's contention will sweep away this multiplicity of views; only that—providing as it does answers for a number of problems not convincingly resolved by other systems—it may serve as a useful tool for analysis.

Since language is made up of syllables, there will be a varying pattern of stress, pitch, or tone through any passage of these syllables depending upon speech-patterns; these in turn depend upon the phonetic nature of the language. Poetry therefore arranges language, not merely to communicate a given end, but to take advantage of the sound and rhythm inherent in the phonetic structure of the particular language. Such 'contrivances' as alliteration, assonance, and rhyme (the word is Robert Bridges<sup>1</sup>) are by no means independent of rhythm and diction; the nature of the language engendering rhythm and diction will also bear within it the potentialities that are developed into alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and the other special features of poetry.

In spoken English, the syllables which appear to receive stress occur at varying intervals; but there is a strong enough suggestion of periodicity in these occurrences that

the regularizing of them into the metres of poetry is not an undue distortion. English metre usually is assumed to be the setting up of a system or arrangement of stressed, accented, or 'long' syllables into which the language of the poem is fused. In the Renaissance, these distinctions were made early by the classical criteria of quantity; but, with a language whose nature is fundamentally accentual, the classical system of quantitatively-determined feet becomes artificial, producing a confusion from which we have not yet completely recovered.

*<sup>1</sup> A Letter to a Musician on English Prosody, in COLLECTED ESSAYS, Vol. 2 (OXFORD University Press). The entire passage concerned is of considerable interest.*

English poetry is not quantitative, despite its long and short syllables — and actually never has been so. We have fortunately rid ourselves of the necessity of the whole cumbersome apparatus of classical quantitative scansion; although, paradoxically, misapplication of this apparatus to English has produced some of its finest verse. It has also produced some of its worst. We remember 'Rose-cheek't Lawra;' we have blessedly all but forgotten Gabriel Harvey's English hexameters. The prose writers and rhetoricians recognized the accentual nature of English far earlier than did the poets — demonstrated, for example, by such a study as Morris Croll's discussion of the application of the Latin cursus endings to Renaissance oratorical prose.<sup>2</sup>

In English, we are concerned therefore with the presence of stressed and unstressed syllables, with tension and release: the organization of the periodicity of these stresses gives English poetry its metrics. Such also is the case with music: here, too, the concern is with stress and release, arsis and thesis. Both music and English verse admit agogic accent — that is, the heightening of tension by lengthening, consciously or naturally — but this is not to be identified with quantity.<sup>3</sup> Both music and poetry are fundamentally the

organization of sound in time. We are not concerned here with the nature of the sound as it involves presence or lack of signification, nor with any period or genre of expression; supra-signific material such as the work of Hans Helms involves the same elements as poetry and music. Given a poem then, or a piece of music occupying a certain length of time in performance or reading — what happens rhythmically over this time?

The distinction between metre and rhythm is a good starting point. There is no absolutely regular metre in English outside of repetition. A syllable may be accented or unaccented, and that accent light or heavy, depending upon its linguistic environment. Thomas Campion wrote that no 'impediment except position . . . can alter the accent of any syllable in our English verse.' The position on scansion accepted for our purpose here is that of Yvor Winters: ... the language does not divide itself evenly into accented and unaccented syllables, but there is almost infinite variation in degrees of accent. For this reason, the basic rule of English scansion is this: that the accented syllable can be determined only in relationship to the other syllable or syllables within the same foot. The accented syllable of a given foot ... may be one of the lightest syllables in its line.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cadence of English Oratorical Prose*, STUDIES IN PHILOLOGY, XIV (Jan. 1919, pp 1-55). See also R. F. Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language* (STANFORD University Press — 1953).

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Newman, *On the Stress System of English* (WORD No. 2 — 1946, pp. 172-3), discusses this lengthening in speech as 'rhetorical accent.'

Cf. Hans Helms, *Imre Ahnieszgnow*, NEW DEPARTURES (2/3 — 1960).

And Ernest M. Robson has presented scientifically-determined tables of the varied 'phonetic values' and durations of English speech-sounds. If one were to construct a pentameter line using the iamb Hurrah! five

times, he would have regular metre, but little else, even though this metre would accurately indicate the 'skeleton' of iambic pentameter.

Given such a fundamental metre, an accentual scheme, the poet may vary the position of the stresses over this framework by 'counter-pointing,' to borrow Bridges' term, a scheme of rhythm against the original metre. Aaron Copland has stated this most cogently; even though he is referring to music, his comment is perfectly applicable to poetry: ... the deliberate setting, one against the other, of a steady pulse with a free pulse. ... Of course you cannot stay off the beat unless you know where that beat is. Here again freedom is interesting only in relation to regularity.

The means of production of this free pulse in poetry — 'all poets work against a pattern of expectation (a norm) and vary its dead regularity' — is concisely summarized by John Ciardi. Scansion of any poem marks out the rudimentary structure of the poem's rhythm. This is of course operable in music as well. When one taps his foot as he listens to music, he is outlining the equivalent of the 'metre.' This 'steady pulse' has been a force in music since the Middle Ages, and early theoreticians anticipated modern psychological theory concerning the relationship of the basic tactus (that is, the stress-release, on-off, arsis-thesis pair) to the natural rhythms of the human organism. Franchino Gafori, writing in 1496, equates the frequency of this tactus to the 'pulse beat of a quietly-breathing man.'<sup>1</sup> Renaissance composers were able to vary the free pulse over the tactus with a variety of rhythmic devices approaching in complexity those used by Twentieth-century composers.<sup>11</sup> The clearest modern example of this duality of rhythm and metre is jazz, especially where the basic steady pulse is no longer marked audibly and the musicians play against a 'felt beat.' The free pulse in such a line may change against itself.<sup>12</sup> With several simultaneous free lines of this kind, the resulting interplay of

tensions and releases, all organized against the same steady metre, is highly intricate and exciting.

*Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (BODLEY HEAD, Ltd.—undated).

*The Function of Criticism* (ALAN SWALLOW—1957).

*The Orchestra of Language* (THOMAS YOSELOFF—1959).

*Music and Imagination* (HARVARD University Press—1952).

*How Does a Poem Mean?* (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN—1959) And see note No. 22 below.

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (W. W. NORTON—1954).

This, however, is not yet a totally satisfactory explanation of what happens in a poem. If one assumes the steady pulse of the metre in operation throughout, he will often find that it cannot be so maintained with regularity: some individual lines seem to overload the time so marked off, or fail to fill it out. T. S. Omond allows for this with his explanation that the metrical line is a series of equal time-periods, each of which is usually occupied by syllables and usually characterized by one stressed syllable. This allows maintenance of the steady pulse of metre and yet allows for pauses in the rhythm which may exceed the normal length of grammatical or metrical pause. The lines 'life to life; breathing to breathing' and 'soul to soul: freedom to freedom' from No. 49 of E. E. Cummings' 95 POEMS fill in the middle foot of the pentameter by a pause in the rhythm.<sup>13</sup>

And still this is not sufficient. What is to be done about poems which do not fit normal metrical patterns, whose writers have striven to break with what they may regard as the tyranny of conventional prosody? And how can even this explanation retain any validity if we are to allow for highly individual deliveries of the poem? The answer to this problem has been obscured by continued focus upon the line of the poem as the maximum working unit governing metrics. To

overcome the strong grasp this habit has on us, this thinking of poetic metre as appearing, like a string of sausages, in line-lengths, requires some effort. What must be recognised is that rhythm and metre are not the sole patterning of accent in a poem: there is a third beat which I shall refer to hereafter as pulse. That this does not at first seem obvious is because pulse is variant from reader to reader and completely unheard, often unmarked as such — although steady throughout any given reading of a poem.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Christ's Cross*, included by Thomas Morley in *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*, ed. R. Alec Harman (J. M. DENT & SONS, Ltd. — 1952, p. 63 ff.).

<sup>12</sup> An impressive demonstration of this is Lee Konitz's solo on *Lover Man* (PACIFIC, PJLP-2).

<sup>13</sup> (HARCOURT, BRACE — 1958). See Henry Lee Smith, Jr., *Toward Redefining English Prosody* (STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS, XIV—Winter '59) for the use of pause in this manner. Smith also cites linguistic evidence to support Winters' contention that 'English verse is predominantly iambic . . .' (ref. note No. 6 — p. 91).

The reading aloud of a poem occupies a section of time, from preceding silence to following silence. The reader paces himself through this time — allowing the poem to unwind in syntactical units, in stanzas — with pauses between lines, between sentences, between stanzas determined by his conception of the poem as a whole. This sense of pace is aptly characterized by Ciardi:

One poem may obviously urge the voice at a faster pace than does another. Within the same poem, moreover, one part may urge itself more rapidly than another. Even within an individual line, one phrase may clearly be indicated as moving more rapidly or more slowly than another. For just as music carries with it a notation that tells the musician at what rate and with what feeling to play a given passage, so every good piece of writing, and poetry in particular, carries within it a series of unmistakable notations that tell the good

reader how any given passage should be read. One of the poet's chief delights is in the manipulation of his pace and its changes. He is deeply involved in the feeling of his motion.<sup>1</sup>

If one tries to regularize this totality in terms of the metre — say into the steady periodicity of stress established by the regular metrical pattern that subsumes the poem — he will turn the reading into a rigorously mechanical symmetry, or he will discover that at many places in the poem the metre is thrown off. There will be places at which, if the metre is — for instance — laid out over silences, it will divide into fractional units, disturbing the periodicity. Here is the fallacy of the use of musical notation for poetry;<sup>1</sup> the laying out of the movement of a poem in such notation would be a job of fearful difficulty if one wished to present a rational simulacrum of what happens in any given reader's delivery.

Given, then, the total time of the reading of the poem, what does govern the manner in which the reader paces himself over this period? What is operating that furnishes him with the sense of total relationship in the piece during this interval? Simply this: the full time occupied by the poem is in itself measured out by the regularity of the pulse — not heard, but intensely felt, by each individual reader and intricately bound up in each reader's own physiological and psychological sense of time. This may be clearly seen if, as an exercise, poetry be read aloud against any extra-poetic steady beat. The frequency of this beat is immaterial; what may be discerned is that it imposes a fresh sense of order and proportion on the poem as a whole. This is what Robert Hillyer is getting at when he says:

<sup>1</sup> *Ref. to Note No. 9.*

<sup>1</sup> *But people try it anyway. Cf. H. C. Colles, Voices and Verse; George R. Stewart, The Technique of English Verse; Andreas Heusler on the scansion of Beowulf; Etc.*

Theoretically, the best way to read English verse would be to a metronome. Practically, there are various accelerations and retards that change the tempo but never disorganize the equality of the two halves of a single line.<sup>1</sup>

I suspect that what Hillyer would be marking here would be the metre, but the reader would operate over the metronome as marking pulse, as he describes it.

We still retain the counterpoint of rhythm against metre, but this complex is in turn counterpointed against pulse. It is this sense of double counterpoint that makes the good blues singer as well as the good reader of poetry. The delivery of the text — a text so set that a particular relationship of metre and rhythm has been built into the complete composition — is adjusted by the singer, who works over the pulse with delays, accelerations, and variations of pause and tempo established by his sense of the work as a whole.

This furnishes a working explanation of man's fascination for reading and chanting poetry to a rhythmic or musical background — a form of delivery probably as old as poetry itself. Music of several American Indian tribes is chanted or sung in one rhythm, usually fixed but sometimes variable, against a steady drumbeat at an entirely different frequency. In any such delivery, the pulse is emphasized and established as a basic beat against which the speaker may feel vitally the underlying total organization of the poem through the time occupied. But this is not the complete situation of poetry read to music. The musical background provides not only pulse but its own separate counterpoint of rhythm against metre; and the result is an extremely intricate multiple counterpoint. The pulse for the poem is arbitrarily fixed by the music, which does not have to be the same from reading to reading.

The history of setting poetry to music involves the realization, perhaps unconscious, of pulse as a function of

the rhythm. Early settings attempted to retain the quantitative relationship of syllables one to the other in the musical notation. Gregorian chant and the experiments of the Academie Baïf in Sixteenth-century France explored this problem, and the placing of short syllables to long notes is fulminated against by such Renaissance theorists as Gioseffo Zarlino and Thomas Morley. Acceptance of this approach provides an entirely new status for the problem of pauses and silences peculiar to English poetry (this was of concern to Renaissance writers), and punctuation assumes a position much nearer to its original rhetorical function as a kind of code indicating to the orator the nature of the pause and inflection he was to make. Initially, the classical theory of properly proportioned membra and the defining of commata and cola took into account the limitations of the human voice at speaking pitch. Croll has this to say:

<sup>1</sup> *In Pursuit of Poetry* (McGRAW HILL — 1960).

A member is followed by a rest, or a pause, which is a breathing interval, and it very rarely exceeds twenty syllables in length, because the heightened energy of utterance required in public speaking cannot be maintained for a greater number of syllables than this without an opportunity fully to recover the breath.<sup>1</sup>

George Gascoigne imputed the caesura to musicians;<sup>1</sup> Campion explains that ‘our English monasyllables enforce many breathings.’<sup>1</sup> Linguistically, grammatical pause in poetry is juncture, and metrical pause may be juncture or hesitation — the last, qualified by Howard Maclay and Charles E. Osgood as often interrupting the flow of speech, as ‘auxiliary events which help to identify and circumscribe linguistic units, rather than as part of the raw data for which a structural statement must account,’ and as having ‘non-random relation to linguistic forms.’<sup>2</sup> But they are dealing with spontaneous speech; hesitation in poetry

reading does indeed become part of this 'raw data' and the continuum of the pulse-organized poem must include silence as a structural element. Incidentally, Maclay and Osgood classify the rhetorical devices anacoluthon and aposiopesis as hesitations.

With regard to punctuation's assuming a position nearer to its original rhetorical function, Archibald MacLeish, for example, uses the colon as a pause marker:

Where the wheel of light is turned:  
Where the axle of the night is  
Turned: is motionless: where holds  
And has held ancient sureness always:  
Where of faring men the eyes  
At oar bench at the rising bow  
Have seen — torn shrouds between — the Wain  
And that star's changelessness: not changing:

<sup>1</sup> *Ref. to note No. 2.*

<sup>1</sup> *Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. Gregory Smith (OXFORD, Vol. I — 1904).*

<sup>1</sup> *Ref. to note No. 5.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hesitation Phenomena in Spontaneous English Speech (WORD 15 — 1959).*

There upon that intent star: Trust of wandering men: of  
truth The most reminding witness: we Fix our eyes also:  
waylost: the wanderers . . .<sup>21</sup>

Whatever conventional grammatical function the colon may have in prose is here only rudimentary. In this sort of arrangement, and in MacLeish's other similar device of using no end-punctuation whatsoever (e.g. YOU, ANDREW MARVELL, and in line 6 above), an inequality of syntactical units is obtained that produces a kind of apo koinou in which a particular phrase functions both as completion of the statement begun by its predecessor as well as beginning of the statement continued by its successor.

But what tells the reader how long he is to pause at the end of an end-stopped line as opposed to one that is enjambéd? How long at the end of a sentence that is not coincident with a line-ending? How long between stanzas? These pauses are a part of the poem and add to the duration of a reading, and this duration depends on a timing that can be satisfactorily accounted for only by acceptance of the presence of pulse. As the reader goes along, he has a sense of dynamic balance and of creating the sound-shape of the poem that parallels the experience of the music-improviser.

Generally, a space in the typography of the printed poem indicates a pause or silence to be made by the reader. In the following example, the spaces assist the reader to fill in the rhythm against the metre:

Has he tempered the viol's wood  
To enforce both the grave and the acute?  
Has he curved us the bowl of the lute? . . .

Hast 'ou fashioned so airy a mood To draw up leaf from  
the root? Hast 'ou found a cloud so light As seemed neither  
mist nor shade?<sup>22</sup>

Many poets of our decade have adopted the slash (/) to indicate 'a pause so light it hardly separates the words, yet does not want a comma — which is an interruption of the meaning rather than the sounding of the line . . .'<sup>23</sup> A special use of space between stanzas combined with what can be considered a direct pause-command in the text is contained in this poem by Kenneth Patchen:

<sup>21</sup> Pole Star for This Year, *THE NEW POCKET ANTHOLOGY* of American verse, ed. Oscar Williams (POCKET BOOKS — 1958).

<sup>22</sup> Ezra Pound, from Canto LXXXI of *The Cantos* (NEW DIRECTIONS — 1948).

<sup>23</sup> Charles Olson, *Projective Verse*, *THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY*, ed. Donald M. Allen (GROVE Press — 1960).

**THE NARROWING LINE.**

Walking on the burning ground.

The ledges of stone.

Owlfish wading near the horizon.

Unrest in the outer districts.

Pause.

And begin again.

Needles through the eye.

Bodies cracked open like nuts.

Must have a place.

Dog must have a place.

Pause.

And begin again.

Tents in the sultry weather.

Rifles hate holds.

Who is right?

Was Christ?

Is it wrong to love all men?

Pause.

And begin again . . .<sup>2</sup>

Space may be between words, sentences, stanzas, and so on, as a silence marker; but it may also be partly or wholly used with the appearance of a decoration, and with this we are concerned with what a musician might term *augenmusik*.

Pound has said: ‘ . . . verbal rhythm is monolinear. It can form contrapunto only against its own echo, or against a developed expectancy.’<sup>2</sup> In so many words, a poem listened to is heard as a single line of sound in time — with rhyme-words, repeated lines, or refrains, besides assonance and consonance — as one kind of form-determining force organizing the sound as such. Conventionally, this line is presented to the eye, on the page, in a kind of graph in which not only the temporal projection is present (left to right on the page and immediately back again to the next line below),

but also a spatial dimension: the eye apprehends the printed poem-as-a-whole on the page as a shape. Recently there has been increased interest in this interrelation of ear and eye: some growing from the shape-poem of the Renaissance; some, from the calligrams of Apollinaire; some, from the work of Cummings, Patchen, Pound, William Carlos Williams.<sup>2</sup> An approach to the problem is made by Norman Friedman: To suggest by means of a visual device the sense of some physical object or action, or the implications of some feeling or idea, because it involves a transference of qualities from one thing to another, is essentially figurative.... What we find primarily, are visual equivalents that are analogous rather than equal to things, actions, feelings, or ideas. Typographical distortion may, in the second place, function to regulate the speed of the reader's comprehension of the words and sentences in a poem.... Cummings will not only withhold the climax of a speech from view until the reader is prepared to receive its maximum impact, as Shakespeare does in many of his sonnets, but he will also withhold the parts of a sentence or a word. He will, in addition, manipulate spacing and lettering as if they were stage directions indicating where pauses and emphases should come in the reading, and this is clearly an oral effect.... And finally, visual devices may be used to create or reinforce rhythmic effects.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis placed by the poet on appeal to the eye is variable. At one extreme is the poem which achieves an unexpected appearance on the page only incidental to the poet's intricate 'scoring' of the temporal element demanded in reading the poem aloud.<sup>2</sup> An equally-careful 'graphing' of the time element may be used, but combined with a precise suggestive arrangement of the words on the page. Much of Cummings' poetry falls into this category, but the most interesting example is Kenneth Patchen's *THE MURDER OF TWO MEN BY A YOUNG KID WEARING LEMON-YELLOW GLOVES*.<sup>2</sup> Here the material of the poem — the

word 'wait' in various repetitions — and what the reader is being asked to do are the same. By happy coincidence, a recorded presentation, read by the poet to jazz, is available.<sup>3</sup> Although this artifice for presenting the poem may seem almost too pat because the musical lines have been built around the recurring 'wait,' as spaced out in time by the poet's typography, the poem when read aloud is imbedded, as mosaic, in the music instead of moving in a true self-generated counterpoint. The whole presentation supports the concept of pulse remarkably well. Next is the tradition of shape-poems, emblems, calligrams, and the like. This is pure *augenmusik*, since the typographical shape and sometimes the poem itself cannot be communicated orally:

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r    who    a)s    w(e    loo)k    upnowgath  
PPEGORHRASS    eringint(oaThe):l    eA    !p:    S    (r    a    .rlvInG  
.gRrEaPsPhOs) to rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly , grasshopper;<sup>31</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Selected Poems* (NEW DIRECTIONS — 1957).

<sup>2</sup> *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony, cited by Clark Emery, Ideas Into Action* (U. OF MIAMI Press — 1958).

<sup>2</sup> *Puttenham's Art of English Poesie includes an entertaining catalog of shapes.*

<sup>2</sup> *E. E. Cummings : The Art of His Poetry* (THE JOHNS HOPKINS Press — 1960).

<sup>2</sup> *Good examples: Jackson Mac Low, An Asymmetry for Diane Wakoski and Fourteenthhs* (SEVENTH STREET — 1961).

<sup>2</sup> *Ref. to note No. 24.*

<sup>3</sup> *Cadence — CLP 3004.*

Finally, the poem may include actual pictorial material, as in the several poems in Patchen's CLOTH OF THE TEMPEST listed in the index as 'Making.'<sup>32</sup>

At any point in the poem, typographical alteration such as use of different typeface may occur.<sup>33</sup> In capitalization and italics, this is communicable through the reader as emphasis, but in most other instances remains merely an

addition to the poem for the eye.

The reduction in importance of line-length as a guide to a poem's movement is accompanied by a corresponding increase in importance of the relationship between syntactical unit and metrical unit. Unless the poem's each line is end-stopped vigorously, rhyme is the poet's only means of bringing to the listener the sense of going back, of recurrence, that the eye encounters in moving from line-end to line-beginning. The caesura and all hesitations become dramatic elements; if the poem is read aloud without the sense of timing furnished by an awareness of pulse, the result becomes prosy. Subject matter, as well as the poem's structural nature, shapes this sense of timing. With a genuine consciousness of pulse, the reader may syncopate pauses, holding them longer or shorter than the listener may expect from his own established sense of timing. What is thus obtained is a heightening of dramatic counterpoint. The first benefit, then, of recognizing pulse as a phenomenon shaping the rhythmic organization of a poem is that — regardless of the reader's personal tendency to interpret dramatically or to present the poem in chant or monotone — any reading made with this recognition brings the poem to audible life. Perhaps the best reading is that in a low key, almost a single pitch, allowing the sound of the poem to do its own work without the fancy added voice-changes of a reader too concerned with allowing his own emotional empathy with the content. Such a reader: may carry the procedure so far as to appear precious, and worse, he may deform syllables in the interests of what he calls musical intonation, much as a musical composer will draw syllables out or hurry over them in setting a poem to music.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>31</sup> E. E. Cummings, *Poems 1923 – 1954* (HARCOURT, BRACE – 1954) Cf. Maxine Kumin, *440-yd. Freestyle*, *HALFWAY* (HOLT, RINEHART & WINSTON – 1961).

<sup>32</sup> (HARPER & BROTHERS – 1943).

<sup>33</sup> *For an extensive consideration of the effect of such matters in varied typefaces, see Weldon Kees and Jurgen Ruesch, Nonverbal Communication (U. OF CALIFORNIA Press — 1956).*

Again, if pulse is kept firmly in mind, ANY poem, no matter how seemingly a-metrical at first appearance, can be read coherently in terms of movement; while bad prosody will reveal itself, in the reading, rapidly and convincingly.

<sup>3</sup> *Ref. Note No. 6, Winters.*

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## **PROPHECY AND THE ART OF LANGUAGE**

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Everyone knows that noone knows but everyone is, I'll say it again: Everyone, being, knows noone can. What it is, that being, is metaphor: as if what repeats could have been originally, our knowing what it became that it could not, originally our knowing-nouns-possible preceded, improbably qualified: those abstract freaks of implausibility we yoke, tear, or from our grammars contort. by Marvin Bell

### **CELIA, WHO IS SHE?**

Procuring dreams  
she put them under her breast  
like babies learning to build circuses;  
astronomers were anxious about  
her; poets prepared; musicians  
pronounced; tents expanded with many colors.

*by John Tagliabue*

## TOWARDS PRINT

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### (EXCERPTS FROM A JOURNAL OF THE U. OF BRITISH COLUMBIA SEMINAR)

*by A. Fredric Franklyn*

Wednesday, 24th July, 1963; Morning Session (Robert Creeley & Allen Ginsberg):

Discussed the issue of work-habits. Bob's, for instance, are so strictured that they seem, even to himself, to be almost anti-survival part of the time. But their evident willingness to expose themselves, their approaches, for the value this may have now, engages an empathy it's difficult to explain with the notes of a mere record like this.

Allen spoke of keeping notebooks for the past three years, during which he's done no typing. Always carries a notebook around with him. I think this business of setting down every stray idea that strikes us in the first, uncritical reaction—as interesting—leads to a plethora of material, largely trivia, from the mass of which it is too difficult to adduce anything of value.

Quotes from Allen's own explanation: 'Right now, I just get anything I can written when I can, wherever I can.' 'Whatever makes sense.' 'Anyway, I can get them (ideas) down.' . . . Explained that he's developed a short line in some of his poetry because those pieces circumstanceally happened to be written in his small notebook instead of the big one. He's interested in messiness for its 'psychological causes.' He didn't explain how the values he derives from this interest are employed in his work or passed on to the reader.

A big notebook: 'That leaves me open to write anything any way I want.' He did not distinguish whether he felt this

was better or that his small notebook's short lines were an improvement over this. . . . 'I don't even know why I want to write; except perhaps (it's) an old habitual relationship.' 'There is no theory to teach.'

R.C.: 'What we're trying to do is getting a sense of form which is not limited to habits of thought or formalities which are not anterior to the thing we're dealing with.' 'I'm not interested in right or wrong, or any attitudes of finality.' (The business of making a poem): 'It's obscene!' (I think he means the anguish from the self-doubts such an act occasions is the obscenity.)

Allen was trying to explain the breakup with the old processes and organizations; and the doubt of poetry itself: 'I want to make it with an understanding of God, or something universal enough to make me not afraid of dying.' R.C.: (After realizing our earlier notions of poetry and, getting beyond their rough-hewn limits, arriving at the knowledge of 'its continuing possibilities.') 'I do believe that form is nothing more than the (an) extension of content.' . . . (Just listening to ourselves [is] a world limited only to our own thoughts: 'The sound of one hand clapping.')

Bob also added: 'I'm embarrassed by the significance of my own feelings.' (A responsible maturity of conduct): 'We've got to stop dealing with ourselves as history, as accumulations of personality (and conduct).' . . . Explained he prefers progressive jazz to Bach, because it 'surprises' where Bach 'depends on expectation.' Wants music to 'surprise and embarrass.'

The significant difference between Creeley and Ginsberg is that Bob has developed a deliberate craft.

Evening Session (R.C. & A.G.):

Bob says that Brother Antoninus attempts to create, in his writing, a context of feeling. He can't buy this, because he doesn't believe feeling can be expressed by writing from a base, such as a notion of self-damnation, just to get feeling

into the writing. I think he feels such a base is gimmicked, and its feeling is ersatz. Or, more pointed: it's suspicious because based on prejudice.

This seems to agree with my own objections to political, religious, and philosophical poetry. It's not the poet's function to proselytize for causes.

Allen mentioned that this concern with politics, in the superficial manner, by which poetry would necessarily be limited (in areas it could not hope to examine in any depth), is what the new poetry, like Yevtushenko's in Russia, is occupied with. And of course it's bad, because it is politics in pseudo-poetic forms, not poetry. But Allen apparently supports this. He seems, in fact, enthusiastic about it.

Allen avoids hostility with singular concentration: 'The one thing I don't want to give up is sympathy.' It sounds good, but it has led him to a confused perspective, in my opinion. Criticism itself becomes something to fear from others, and to eschew, oneself. An odd result is that we exhibit more consideration for our enemies, finally, than for our friends.

Thursday, July 25th; no classes:

Fifteen or twenty of us had gone over to Buchanan 106, anyway; and we decided, since it was empty, to use the lecture-room for an informal sort of review. Most of the students who sat in were women. I noticed that, even this early, they already have a considerable amount of hostility about the seminar. My impression is that much of their resentment is based on a frustrated wish for a degree of personal attention I don't think it's reasonable to expect yet, without the workshop classes, the afternoon sessions of which won't begin until Monday.

But there is something so large about the vision to gather such people as Olson, Creeley, Duncan, Ginsberg, Levettov, and Avison together, to give such a seminar, that this hostility strikes me as remarkably shortsighted. Even the

approach to the class-sessions is exciting because it has gotten completely out of the ordinary academic framework and has been aimed at something much larger. As Creeley mentioned, the teachers hope to get as much from the experience as we do. It seems more appropriate to give such a program a generous response.

Friday, July 26th; Morning Session:

Robert Duncan joined Bob and Allen in the morning session, today. Duncan dominated this meeting. He has the confident delivery of a professional speaker; and ideas come quickly, if sometimes uncritically, to him. Bob does not compete. But when he speaks, he has something to say. And it's never uncritical. Allen appears to be afraid of Duncan. And there is evidently some hostility on Duncan's part toward Allen. But, in a sense, that's worthwhile, too. These people don't have a 'club'; they are not 'yessing' one another. Each is individual and outspoken — three very different men. The exchange, under such circumstances, is especially rewarding; I think perhaps the differences of view amongst them are more productive for us than their areas of agreement.

Duncan discussed the focus of the poet on the event. In that focus, the event is transformed from the history (which he believes is stultifying) into the present, a thing still happening. At least, for the poet; because he's still dealing with it. 'An event takes place just where it does.' This is why it is difficult to 'burn out the roots.' You can chop down a tree (presumably a bad one), but not the poem.

'His (Dante's) purpose is to restore the tree.' ('The way to the event.') 'There are always, in poetry, reflections of all the ways in which people come to the event.'

Bob said: 'I believe the event is indifferent to the response. In other words, that noise is indifferent to who hears it.' He is objecting to criticism: 'E.g.: what is criticism?' . . . R.C., again: 'One ought to be rid of this preoccupation (with

meaning).’

Duncan instanced reading Gertrude Stein as an example where feeling, not meaning, is the test of what is happening, of ‘being with it.’

All three concentrate so much on feeling, quoting Pound in connection with this (Bob’s quote): ‘Nothing counts save the quality of the emotion.’ ‘Only the emotion endures.’

My own feeling is that the quotes are misleading. So are Bob’s and Duncan’s stances. Each is certainly some kind of craftsman, especially Creeley. Ginsberg is frankly a primitive. But we can be wary of Allen, where the same apparent lack of concern with structure from Bob, or even from Duncan, might seriously mislead us. They can afford a certain amount of contempt for craft, which is, to them, after all, an old enemy (friend)—and one they know well, having dealt with it so often from the different angles of so many approaches. The rest of us better work our tails off, developing a usable craft, before we try to imitate that contempt.

What has struck me even more forcefully is their compulsively-cerebral concern with feeling; almost as though this were the nexus, or at least the thing to deal with.

Monday, July 29th; Morning Session:

**CHARLES OLSON IN THE MORNING SESSION,  
TODAY. AND BOB, ALLEN, DUNCAN, AND ALSO  
PHILIP WHALEN. IT’S A POSER, JUST SEEING ALL  
FIVE OF THEM AROUND THE DESK TOGETHER!**

Phil spoke rarely and seemed unwilling to argue or to push his ideas on the others. In fact, before the session ended, he left—explaining that he’d wait outside for the others and go home with them for lunch.

Olson read his *PLACE; AND NAMES . . .* published in *YUGEN* No. 8. Couldn’t tell whether or not he meant this as poetry. If so, it’s too heavy-handed for me; I mean, it reads like

prose—at least from its sounds. I'll have to try to see it.

Duncan and Olson discussed the event again. Olson: 'Language is the life that we're producing.' . . . Duncan: 'There's no place the past can take place except right now, when we consider it. It has no place else to go.'

They were talking about observing the event for oneself; and Phil quoted a jingle: 'Let's all watch world war three / on the pay teevee / before the television melts away!'

Allen spoke of his fear of bankruptcy. Said he felt that all of us, in a way, teachers and students alike, are suffering from this bankruptcy. He's partly right—just circumstantially. Writing certainly isn't an organic (*id est*, direct) means of experiencing life. But I don't believe that's what he was talking about. I think he meant we are bankrupt even as writers, our qualities as human beings apart from this. And maybe there's something in this too. Why else so much concern with the means of expression, and even the expression itself — what to say?

Bob speaks often of his doubts about the value of his feelings, and about the issue of feeling itself — says that, in the CANTOS, 'Pound continually tries to find a measure for his context.'

And Olson said: 'Show me your paper. My judgment may be absolutely wrong, but at least I can experience what you put on paper.' . . . And: 'Does anybody need to write? I mean, unless you do?' . . . Olson also quoted Pound's last: 'All my life I thought I had something to say!' This line does have impact. Olson added: 'We're all in the process of finding out how in the hell you make language (work).' He feels we must have something so effective to say that it emerges 'completely.'

George Palmer (a student) compared Paul's documentary of Christ to Plato's records of Socrates. His point was that this is the sort of biased material we depend upon for our notions of history. Said that Plato and Paul are the

reflections; and that Socrates and Christ are the history! Said he considered Paul positively evil, for that matter.

Phil said the responsibility (of history) is to persons, not to abstractions. Olson jumped him quickly; didn't think such a point of view mattered; said it would take care of itself. But I think Phil's perspective is pointed and important. I'd rather have heard him speak at some length about it, than Olson's generalized and somewhat abrupt dismissal.

Olson said: 'History is the memory of time,' The idea comes from Proust, of course, as does much of Olson's concept of time. But Proust said: ' . . . the memory of lost times.' The difference is a recognition that we never really recapture the past, only partially, in memory. It is a more complex and interesting base than Olson's oversimplified reference to it. Of course, Olson himself has dealt with it more integrally in *THE MAXIMUS POEMS*. There, his instinct for perspective, in past, present or future, and his facility for dramatizing these, soars in the work itself so far above some of his after-the-fact rationales concerning the achievement.

Afternoon Session (for my group — one of three — & first workshop class with Robert Creeley):

One of the ideas that struck me during this session was that today's creative writers appear deliberately to be seeking to recognize (and in some measure, to define) all the possible divisions in the human psyche. But psychiatrists are still seeking to reconcile them; to wipe out arbitrarily all the differences....

R.C.: 'The American himself is an occasion of spatial nature.' (Id est: not historical, unreal.) Bob referred to the death-request appearing in some wills, today — granted in some instances — to have telephones buried with them in their coffins, with a live wire, just in case they should wake up alive after burial!

Ed Dorn's concern for names, particulars of the anguish, the respect for the individual's experience, is basic. Without

this particular concern, there is no art — only craft. Creeley told a story about a mutual friend of his and Dorn's a photographer who showed them a photo he'd taken of a 'street scene.' Three beaten men were leaning against the wall of some building in a slum area. Dorn asked what their names were. The photog said it didn't matter; had nothing to do with his achievement artistically. Dorn said: 'But where is the compassion then?'

Creeley also spoke of life without risk. He wants the necessary minimum of risk. Told us a story about a woman who explained to him she moved to Vancouver because she thought her children would be 'perfectly safe' there. He said he doesn't believe her children want to be perfectly safe. He mentioned the passage from William Carlos Williams' *PATERSON*, in which Wms. observed that, in the past, men could not realize their wishes; and now that they have the means to realize their (death) wishes, they will have to change them or perish.

Wednesday, July 31st; Morning Session (Creeley, Duncan, Ginsberg, and Olson again — Whalen in the audience):

They were discussing Eichman and Caryl Chessman much of the morning, off and on. Duncan said: 'Go to look at the thing you feel you have a response to . . . then you have to find the event.' He means the individual himself must make real the event that concerns him.

Creeley, later: 'I think most writers I've known are very conscious of the intervals between pieces of work where there is no use of themselves that is interesting to themselves.'

Jerome Rothenberg has published a correspondence w/R.C. regarding Jerry Rothenberg's idea that the image in poetry now is being slighted in favor of form and stress. Creeley disagrees with him. And disagrees even more strongly with Robert Kelly's use of what Rothenberg called

‘the deep image.’ Again, later, Bob said: ‘Here (at the left-hand margin) is the point of security for me. The margin is the fresh start.’ The farther away he progresses from it in the line’s advance, the less secure he feels until he returns to the margin again for a new line: ‘... fresh start — a kind of security.’ Quoted Duncan’s *THE OPENING OF THE FIELD*: ‘The short line we refine for candor.’

This evening, Allen read early poems (back at least as far as 1946).

He reads so that the deliberately-apocalyptic quality in his poetry becomes apparent. It’s not my kind of poetry; too much purely-rhetorical material. But it gets an unmistakable response from his audience. My feeling is that this kind of poetry, particularly when it’s read in a manner that renders its Messianic base and intent, makes an apoeitic appeal to surface-emotions. I think Allen is tapping something universal, but it has little to do with poetry as such. Without meaning this pejoratively, it seems to me that ‘crowd-responses’ are secured by rabble-rousers and political campaigners with this same approach.

I like better the less-prentious things he writes, and even the readings of these — which become softer, more nearly natural. . . . An audience doesn’t really need any appreciation of poetry to respond to the kind of surface-appeal that taps things like self-pity or the sort of undisciplined excitement all of us have in some degree in our natures.

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 2ND ; MORNING SESSION  
(CREELEY, DUNCAN, & GINSBERG — WHALEN  
AGAIN IN THE AUDIENCE):**

Ginsberg had mentioned the graffiti in the toilets here. Duncan spoke of the magic intent behind the act of the maker of graffiti. The analysis is Freudian — Jungian also: When you see what you’re afraid of. The ‘habit’ of evil.

Creeley: 'The location of the conscious (perception/presence) is always located within the person.'

Duncan referred to Wm. Burroughs' recent work, cutting the newspapers and magazines up into a kind of collage-writing; the object of this is to see, from a deliberate perspective of absurdity, what they are really saying; id est, the repetition and over-use of terms and ideas like 'kill, smash,' etc. Duncan also mentioned: '... all the efforts of Dadaism towards magic....'

Allen explained that this was exactly what had happened during Burroughs' 'bankrupt period,' a painter-friend suggested to him that he attack his writing with a college technique to get a new perspective; combine pieces of *TIME* and *PRAVDA* and other magazine articles to neutralize his own, and to focus other prejudices.

Allen Ginsberg read again, tonight, almost entirely from unpublished work this time; '... from about 1961 on,' he said. These are the things he's been doing in his journals. . . . His energy, for the first three-quarters of the reading, was extraordinary. And Buchanan 106 was jammed. It normally holds about 250 people, but they added extra seats wherever they could, permitted people to sit on the steps of the aisles on both sides, and there were about 350 persons! . . . During the last quarter of his reading, he became terribly exhausted, his voice becoming weak and monotonous; and at last he asked (in the middle of a work): 'Is that enough? Can I stop now?' And the audience gave him an ovation.

Sunday, August 4th:

Tonight, in the canteen and later in the dormitory, up in Ronald Bayes' room with Ron, Larry Goodell, Dave Schaff, and myself, we discussed Allen's work. (Ron, Larry, & Dave are members of the class.) Most of us brought all three of the *CITY LIGHTS* collection up with us: *HOWL*, 1956; *KADDISH*, 1961; and *REALITY SANDWICHES*, 1963. We'd all read these collections, and we'd had two opportunities to hear him read.

My own opinion is that Allen writes suitable material for his approach to public reading. It's apocalyptic in nature, and that's the way he renders it: on the page and in his delivery. But it must be heard to do it the special justice its essence of ecclesiastic disclosure requires. These, especially the longer poems, are sermons much more truly than they are art. My personal feeling is that art has nothing to do with proselytizing. Poetry is an art form, and Allen is an unordained minister, not a poet . . . But he is one hell of a preacher! There, he's in his element. And the work, when it's heard the way it's meant to be delivered, suddenly takes on all the drama of prophecy and revelation. Allen is a firstclass showman . . . and frankly forgetting about any structural or more refined characteristics of poetry, the material is dynamic. One of the most effective instances of this . . . is his *SUNFLOWER SUTRA*, because—even on the page—the apocalyptic fervors of others like *HOWL* and *KADDISH* are apparent, while *S.S.* might pass for one or more silent readings, as a long, sometimes pretty, often dull piece of prose which has been arbitrarily broken down into the structure of the run-on line he inherits from Whitman through Kenneth Fearing. But no one who has heard Allen deliver the poem with his own unique mixture of humor and apotheosis, will ever see it the same, apparently-lifeless way again on the printed page. Allen has an ear for idiom and an honesty of purpose which have given him an arresting rhetoric, without the necessary solidity of a structural building-block and the refining discipline of a deliberate application.

The foregoing excerpts are from a portion of the *Journal* covering perhaps the first third of the Vancouver Poetry Seminar. Denise Levettov and Margaret Avison arrived late—beginning their participation, Monday, August 5th. . . . Within the journal itself, I've dealt at some length with the 13 collections originally suggested for use, as well as others that

seemed, in the discussions they occasioned, of equal or even greater interest. Space limitations forbidding the inclusion of these passages here, I've appended a list, the first 13 of which comprised those originally specified by Warren Tallman [who, with his wife, Ellen—both in the U.B.C. English Department—with the aid of Ian Docherty, the Fine Arts Coordinator there, were chiefly responsible for the  
(Continued on page 294)

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## THE CHRONICLE

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THE CHRONICLE, 'An Evolving Directory (of magazines and publishers of literary intent)' — the head with its keys on one page early, then seven pages at the back of the issue picking up 'continued from page 285.' Both parts are omitted, some hundred and ten magazines and presses: it is a working address list rather than reading matter, and it is superseded by THE INTERNATIONAL GUIDE TO LITERARY AND ART PERIODICALS.

Winter 1963 is a good instalment. SUM is entered in its first year — "Newsletter of current workings" — evidenced by examples, ed. by Fred Wah, with Ken Irby, Ron Loewinson, John Keys, 'twenty-five cents, mimeographed. AUERHAHN PRESS announces Brother Antoninus's THE POET IS DEAD at twelve dollars fifty, 'ltd. 200, deluxe handset,' and has Diane di Prima's THE NEW HANDBOOK OF HEAVEN in paperback at two. ARENA of Ireland is 'tabloid size, fine prtng. & papers . . . Eds.: Michael Harnett, James Liddy, Liam O'Connor.' EL CORNO EMPLUMADO's No. 8 was 'large book: HER BODY AGAINST TIME, poetry of Robert Kelly, with Spanish transl. en face.'

BURNING DECK raises its price. CRANK BOOKS offers Kirby Congdon's EGO at fifty cents, '1st ed. 100, 15c; 2nd ed.' THE FREE LANCE PRESS of Cleveland has Russell Atkins's THE ABORTIONIST and THE CORPSE, '2 poetic dramas for music.' TAMARIND LITHOGRAPHY WORKSHOP is listed as a 'nonprofit proj., June Wayne, director.' And VENTANA of Nicaragua carries, in No. 18, 'Spanish vers. of "final" Pound interview' — one line in a trade list for a document nobody was looking for.

The names are listed in Trace\_51\_1963\_chronicle\_names.txt beside the transcript. — ED.

## **EDITORS (AND OTHERS) WRITE**

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*From Working - 'Constructs,' 1963, by David Lyle*

(Selected bits from several hundred communications re communication, from one who is experimenting with the most varied mixtures of ideas and materials, in page-surface juxtapositions. The practice is no longer new to writers or artists; nor is the psychologist's pronouncement that rational-minded man is incapable of producing any really-accidental statement or arrangement now considered debatable. And the dabbings of children, the disconnected utterances of the insane, and even paintings by apes and monkeys may be found to rise from strange discrete 'logics.' But David Lyle's purpose is to extend the range/s of understanding, and to speed up and expand significant individuating thought transmissions: in the first stage, by undirected mechanical means; in the second stage, by intentional and selective uses.)

IBM 101 Inductive Replication In numericl directions of assembly by Topological Formula, & numericl Analysis or assembly samples are Bead Game.

(The reference is to MAGISTER LUDI, where Hermann Hesse wrote of a future order of Scholar-mystics with an ideographic language, relating all sciences, arts, philosophies, and religions, playing with relationships of configurations — as, in music, with harmonics and counterpoints. In this regard, Lyle mentions modern advertising techniques.)

Significant Form, IBM 101 may be equipped with sample selector as a special device.

The sample selector is distributing unit controlled by counting cards.

It may be used to count any number of cards from 1 to 999, & to pick up recode selectors to control counting (H Ellis 'Thinking is counting,' ie, the problem or sorting (of Maxwell's 'sorting demon,' now being illustrated for any Nth card.

(Later, Lyle refers to an oft-repeated allegation that there's a large reading audience today, but a paucity of writers.)

There are plenty of writers.

I dont see any publishers who see the Agent Intellect pattern of the enormous room market . . in its full global, socio-cultural Dynamics, format . . Dawson's 'Our problem is socio-logical, NOT theo-logical.

\* \* \* \* \*

'A MARKET, conceptually, is an echo or memory.'

Hence the agent intellect's visible working formats in status symbols, Hidden persuaders, motivation Rsh, impulse buying, etc, are direct traffic signal systems, analog to and in direct interpenetration of impulse & the Aquinian business of habit or the agent intellect being pulse-coded like the working of a light, TV etc etc.

Impulse-coded to TV dimensions, you have Chardin's cosmic vortex of intellect, memory, and the echoing thunder of traffic of aptly designed arrangements . . a unity of pluralities of items, products and objects in the service of man.

The service becomes liturgical, Whitman fitted to the living order of Nature, equally now in 'TRACE, The Mag. of Living Literature.' All full-orbed globally . . . Trace on trace, percept on percept . . . ORDER.

## THE PROBLEM OF POETIC FORM

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*Alfred Dorn*

Dear Editors: With rare exceptions, the poets who have stood the test of time were keenly aware of form as an essential. It is safe to generalize that the poets who 'wear well' are masters of traditional forms or creators of new ones. Poets such as John Milton, John Keats, and W. B. Yeats raised traditional forms to new levels; others such as Sir Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, George Herbert, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, originated new forms. Donne, for example, devised more than forty stanzaic forms and rarely repeated the pattern of one poem in another. Wyatt's technical inventiveness was almost as astonishing. The Poets did not spout formless confusions in the name of aesthetic freedom. For the serious poet, freedom of expression means the freedom . . . to realize new possibilities with the medium of language. Freedom is not a dive into chaos, but an opportunity to achieve a new ordering of aesthetic means for creative ends. In poetry, as in the other arts, anything formless is usually headed for quick oblivion. As Alfred Einstein points out in his *GREATNESS IN MUSIC*, form is the 'conserving' element in a work of art, its armour against time. On the other hand, form is not the only determinant of poetic value. The formalist fallacy is the belief that a poem can live by technique alone, regardless of content. This is as false as the opposite view that a poem survives solely through its message. Technique and content are equally essential. The poets whom we read again and again are those who capture some truth of human experience in language of perennial freshness. In the ideal poem, there is a fusion of significant form and significant content; form and substance are integrated into a living whole.

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## **DAMNING . . . WITHOUT BITTERNESS**

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*Alfred Dorn*

Dear Editors: One thing that seems to drive editors to finicky doings is love of money and publicity. Of course, a little loot and recognition never hurt anyone . . . but when that becomes a reason for ALL choice, aesthetics and humanity go out on rejection slips. I can't see why poets want to go BIG TIME, either; or why things other than poetry have to matter so much. . . . I only hope there is a Nirvana for UNSUCCESSFUL and relatively-unknown enterprises, or perhaps an Elysium. . . . This poem says it, in re critics:

## **THE FASCIST CRITIC**

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With bells on his rocky edges, he fed on the beach, one egg pointing up his green-rimmed eyes, and sawed portions of his flat thin mind, it was a school for opening up, for, glinting through cellophane, agreeing from screened photos, happily, his wife collected customs, the gurgle of virtuosity, the code dismissed along aloof Roman places, glass bells in the place of genitals, his English was vitreous, his peeking nose an expectation, a spokesman potentially smearing the extinct lemon, he coated the compelling disaster, and along the lines of bombast art, his j ingoed pencil caused companionless aversion.

*Carl Linder*

## **IDEAS ‘SOLD’ FOR COMMERCIAL PRESTIGE ?**

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Dear Editors: I am beginning to feel that printers and poets must create a readership, stick people’s noses into poetry. And poets themselves should stop competing for the glories of mass-production and mass-approval. Most poets are more interested in seeing their work reproduced in expensive formats than they are in communication. So, naturally, the public follows suit and relies on business men to screen out non-conformist poets and nonacademic poetry. They rejoice when Louis Untermeyer heralds the end of ‘shaggy-hair poets,’ and are pleased that all (‘good’) poets have sinecures on staffs of colleges and universities; they fail to realize that a mess of pottage is being substituted for the birthright of free speech and direct communication.

A couple of dozen books come out each year to ‘explain’ poetry, to ‘study’ the works of a certain poet, to overcome the obvious barriers against reception; but it’s not that poetry is

so obscure (nursery rhymes are obscure) or too high-toned (any politician's speech is high-toned)—rather that such poets fear to communicate, and disguise our language with attractive sound and intellectual polish. These poets wish to be studied, rather than read; and if they gain prestige, most of them will forego real ideas or direct communi-

*cation . . . quite willing that poetry remain one of  
the weak sisters,  
another parasitical art . . . like commercial  
advertising.  
Kirby Congdon*

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## IDENTITY IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY

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*P.O.D.*

Dear Editors: Certainly, in our mass-society of quick and shortchange artists and medicine-men, the thing about which all feel most deeply is loss of identity. All is discontinuous, displaced, and disoriented. We are meeting ourselves coming back; and we don't even recognize ourselves (or) the terror of recognition freezes the heart. For we have all acquiesced in death — our own.

We must reinherit our lives, and those of all before us . . . I could see, as a child first starting school, that the imposed riddles of (I thought) old maids drawing formulae on blackboards (most of them had lovable personal traits) that something was missing: the human equation behind and creating these things. I chose to experience and suffer the use of my senses, by playing with the downtrodden who weren't ashamed of being human . . . not to contract the neurosis of a middle class living in constant fear of not being compensated by possessions . . . of not being loved. So, I rolled in the alleys, looking for whisky-bottles to sell to bootleggers dispensing spirit and joy to the delinquents who suffered from evading responsibility to law and order. Later, I walked in corrals, to drop a lariat on an ornery cayuse, and felt the rhythmic lope in a strong-smelling saddle, riding a real horse, giving up my mind and heart to nature.

But, all people have uniquenesses; and so do the communities they build . . . and we all have come from the same places. Thus, the real writer is needed more than ever before: to interpret this fast-changing world, to make it human rather than 'shocking.' Unless man understands his world and his place in it, he may 'be' no more. Life should be

organic, continuous, and cumulative — with dignity and purpose. We have had will and intellect; and here we are. These must now be rewedded to feeling and art. Science cannot survive by specialization — and art cannot: Art is unity.

The attitudes of people today are formed by advertising (24-hours-a-day) repetition. This short-circuits tradition (and hope), because the purpose is limited. Good writers can clarify and stimulate imagination and belief, countering this. Artists should prove that they are not only individuals, but are responsible to community; by completing themselves in this way, they will restore and enrich community.

## AN HOUR WITH AUDIBERTI\*

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*by Gabriel d'Aubarède*

RUE DE SABOT IS ONE OF THE OLDEST streets in the Saint-Germain-de-Prés district, but just as fashionable as the neighbouring Rue Bernard-Palissy. Jacques Audiberti was waiting for me in a very small hotel-parlor which was enclosed on three sides, and the dominant colors of which were red and black. The fourth side, guarded by a railing, overlooked the dining room — where, at that time, there were only a few customers. A copy of Michel Butor's *MOBILE* lay open in the middle of a small, round table covered with a purple cloth. The walls were decorated with a few portraits of writers who had helped make that part of Paris famous. A single, weak light-bulb, suspended from a ceiling-beam, cast a minimum of light on us.

Such a mysterious atmosphere was diametrically opposed to Audiberti's character, which has nothing sinister or secret about it. Rather, he's an affable and robust man from the south of France, even a little opulent-looking as he grows older. He spoke very rapidly in hollow undertones, and this combination lent to his tanned, handsome face a masklike appearance.

Trying to describe me is a difficult job. I really don't know if I'm picturesque, but I don't imagine so. What does the word mean, anyway? Anybody who says "I" thinks he represents the norm. I've no strange whims, at least to my knowledge, and no phobias. Except my deep hatred of our passion for things English and American, which is in the process of disfiguring Paris, our language, and our literature. My work-habits? None whatsoever. Peculiarities? I don't have a car. I've a license, but I never drive. I'm too nervous. And yet, I live a fair distance away, in the Seine-et-Oise

département. More exactly, my house is there. I spend nearly all my time in Paris. Sometimes I take a hotel room, sometimes I rent a furnished apartment. However, this free-and-easy aspect of my existence mustn't make you think I'm a Bohemian!'

Audiberti was born in Antibes in 1899. On both sides, his family came from the region around Nice. He knew of no Italian ancestry, despite his name's final 'i,' a typical ending in that frontier area. He studied at the local collège.

'Do your writing skills derive in any way from having been born and reared in the south of France?'

*\* An original translation by Christopher Waters, of one of a series of interviews titled: UNE HEURE AVEC . . . — appearing in LES NOUVELLES LITTÉRAIRES (this one, Mar. 29, 1962).*

He hesitated. 'No. Or at least I can't specify anything.'

'Perhaps a certain verbal exuberance? This seems to characterize your rich, natural prose.'

'Hmm. Can one speak of exuberance in regard to southern Frenchmen? You are aware, as I am, that many are extremely reserved. As for Provençal, I do know it fairly well. But who is there to speak it with? Hardly anyone back home uses it any more. Perhaps they still do around Arles, but it's not the same language there. It's more gentle-sounding and lisping. In our region, it has a much greater explosive force! Now that I think about it, Provençal has influenced my poetry. My love and knowledge of the old language perhaps explain a certain fondness I have for making final syllables stand out conspicuously.'

Audiberti went to Paris in 1925 and practiced journalism from then until 1939, first as reporter for LE JOURNAL, then for LE PETIT PARISIEN. He grew enthusiastic on the subject:

'Newspaper reporting, that's a school for you! Modern reporting stems from Victor Hugo, just as do the movies in many ways, and several other things! From the immense Hugo, whence all proceeds, his enormous boastings, his

genius for animating — once he came down from his empyrean — that vast supply of raw material he called the People! ... The multitude, usually the common people — these are the animators of most of the news-briefs you find in the papers. A hundred investigations, which really amounted to soundings, each more instructive than the preceding, permitted me to explore the masses. I truly came to know the life of the small bookbinders of Paris, the secret religions, the Halles, prostitution, the banks of the Seine. ... The noble sordidness of Parisian tramps! That underground world, living in the rain, heir to one of Paris' most ancient traditions, a mixture of the Cult of Wine and Parisian yogism, of... And so special and distinct! The proof is that if you encounter a Parisian tramp in Stuttgart, Amsterdam, or Copenhagen, you can immediately spot him at a distance, among a hundred others.'

'You reached Paris in 1925, just when Surrealism was rising from the ashes of Dada with a great to-do. I know you were never a member of the movement; but did it affect you at all?'

I've the highest esteem for the promoters of the surrealist revolution, and I admire Breton. But, as for any influence, I don't think so. There is, of course, the possibility that — without my being aware of it — it encouraged my tendency to respect the part that chance plays in my choices of themes. It's possible. And I also admit that a certain care I take, especially in my poetry, to rediscover the etymological meaning of words — which is so removed from their common and corrupt usage — does give an hermetic tinge to my writings.

But really, in this, I'm only being guided by my predilection for exactitude.'

'So you've never felt the itch to be considered an avant-garde writer?'

'I think of myself as a writer faithful to his country's traditional literature, which he has been imbibing since his arrival in the world — the world of life and of the mind.'

In 1930, Audiberti gave to the NOUVELLE REVUE FRANCAISE, the publishing house (which he described as 'that national institution which lends its own subtle stamp of authority to anything it prints,' and to which he himself has remained faithful) his first collection of poems: RACE DES HOMMES, followed by several others; and soon, by numerous novels bearing astonishing titles: ABRAXAS, URUJAC, CARNAGE, LA NA, LES MEDECINS ne sont pas des plombiers, INFANTICIDE PRECONISE.

'Truthfully, your brilliant tales hardly seem like novels, brimming as they are with poetry, verbal magic, and knowledge drawn from every imaginable domain: physics, astronomy, biology, geography, history, magic, and many others. Your cultural depth and breadth are clear signs of a constant intellectual hunger.'

'It's simply the inordinate hunger characteristic of what I am above all else: a man of the Nineteenth Century. I devour anything and everything in print.'

'Your primarily-scientific curiosity would lead one to believe that you must have been attracted at least as much to mathematics as you were to literature, even to poetry.'

'The various realms of science always have fascinated me. But, my discovery of mathematics dates only from a few years back, five or six at the most. Since then, it's true that I've made a serious effort to fill in my gaps in that area. I mean elementary mathematics. You see, I discovered rather late, despite Victor Hugo's colossal directional signs (I always come back to him!) that poetry is short in imagination. Scientific people have much more than poets, who — excepting some of the Futurists — foolishly go into a sulk before the face of what could be called our automobile-civilization. They're so mistaken not to sing the

wonders of science and industry. All poetry, even the most advanced, is little more than nostalgia and tradition.'

His plays are as oddly-titled as his novels, and just as daring: QUOAT-QUOAT, L'AMPELOUR, LES FEMMES DU BOEUF, LE MAL COURT, PUCELLE, ALTANIMA, L'EFFET GLAPION. All the same, several have been very well received. At the time of our interview, LA FOURMI dans le corps was about to be put on at the Comédie-Française after two months of rehearsal,<sup>1</sup> and LES FEMMES DU BOEUF, with sets by Debucout, had already been successfully produced there in 1948. Audiberti is unabashedly happy at being played on the most august of the French national stages!

It's so pleasant to work with the actors of the Comédie Française! And I've always had the highest respect for our state theatres.'

'Since you've written seventeen plays in twenty-odd years, and most of them have been performed — some with great success — I wonder if you consider theatre as your ultimate medium?'

'Not ultimate. I've no intention of giving up the novel, despite my good fortune in the theatre. But it is true that playwriting is more rewarding and exciting. Which isn't to say it's easy: Far from it! How many rewrites there are, before I settle on the proper movement or tone in a dialogue! I occasionally spend a whole week on a single cue. And some of my scenes have gone through from ten to fifteen versions.'

'As Giraudoux did before you, you've succeeded in imposing on the stage a very personal style. Yours seems very richly-colored and poetic, a literary style really — which your interpreters then are obliged to animate. Does this make for certain difficulties?'

'Not very much. Of course, I've been fortunate in having very understanding directors. Georges Vitaly, just to name one, who has directed seven of my plays and is now working on an eighth, POMME-POMME-POMME, for La Bruyère Théâtre.'

‘Does the published text correspond exactly to the acted version? Do you have to do much trimming?’

‘Often, I do it on my own initiative. And progressively more so, as I learn more about the craft.’

‘Could you say more about your evolution as a dramatist?’

‘It’s a simple one. My first play, *QUOAT-QUOAT*, was just a text to me, a purely-literary diversion. It so happened that it was found playable, and, in effect, produced in 1946, on Rue de la Gaîté. Then I wrote a number of other plays in which my principle concern was that they scan well, lyrically speaking. I had no idea at all about a career as a dramatist. But it came to pass, with the help of a little success, that I made the profession mine. The more plays I wrote, the more I became a man of the theatre, a craftsman. *L’EFFET GLA-PION* especially bears the mark of my evolution; for, in certain respects, it was considered boulevardier, as if I were stooping to a wider audience. But I wasn’t at all bothered by such a reaction. Indeed, I can see a growing tendency on my part toward a more direct

<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: the premiere was March 27, 1962. communication with the public. Not that I’m abandoning what you called my “literary style.” Rather, I’m heading for what I’d call a form of literature debut, “a standing literature,” as opposed to the literature assise that is written while one is sitting in a Left Bank cafe. How fortunate it would be if poetry evolved in this direction too! But I’m afraid it’s leaden-winged. What modern poet would dare sing plainly of spring, of buds bursting, of a pair of wooden shoes?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The first paragraph places the interview in an hotel on the Street of the Wooden Shoe.

(Continued from page 284)

seminar’s inception]. Additional titles refer to collections available by some of the poets discussed during ‘the event:’

WINTER SUN, Margaret Avison (U. OF TORONTO Press); FOR LOVE, Robert Creeley (SCRIBNERS); Allen Ginsberg's HOWL, KADDISH, & REALITY SANDWICHES (all, CITY LIGHTS); THE OPENING OF THE FIELD, Robert Duncan (GROVE Press); Denise Levertov's THE JACOBS LADDER, & WITH EYES AT THE BACK OF OUR HEADS (both, NEW DIRECTIONS); THE DISTANCES, Charles Olson (GROVE); THE MAXIMUS POEMS, Olson (JARGON-CORINTH); THE NEW AMERICAN POETS, ed. by Donald Allen (GROVE); PROSE KEYS TO MODERN POETRY, ed. by Karl Shapiro (HARPER & ROW); THE SULLEN ART, ed. by David Ossman (CORINTH);

MEMOIRS OF AN INTERGLACIAL AGE, Philip Whalen (AUERHAHN Press); 'A' 1-12, & TEST OF POETRY, Louis Zukofsky; CALL ME ISHMAEL, Charles Olson (GROVE); THE ISLAND, Robert Creeley (SCRIBNERS); PATERSON, THE FARMER'S DAUGHTERS, & COLLECTED POEMS (all, N.D.); TRANSLATIONS of Ezra Pound, & his SELECTED POEMS, & CANTOS (all, N.D.); THE BEDBUG and Selected Poetry, Vladimir Mayakovsky (MERIDIAN Books); Yevtushenko's SELECTED POEMS (PENGUIN Books); SELECTED POEMS, D. H. Lawrence (COMPASS Books); COLLECTED POEMS, E. E. Cummings (HARCOURT BRACE & Co.).

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CHARLES R. BURNS:

## THE TWO WORLDS OF WALLACE STEVENS

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*The word is a symbol and a delight  
which sucks up men and scenes, trees,  
plants, factories, and Pekinese.  
Then the Thing becomes the Word and  
back to Thing again, but warped and  
woven into a fantastic pattern.*

CANNERY ROW

THERE ARE OSTENSIBLY two worlds in the poetry of Wallace Stevens: the 'world that is' and the 'world that is made.' The 'world that is' is the whole of reality, an amalgam of persons, places, and things. The 'world that is made' is the world that a man encounters: those persons, places, and things with which he comes in contact. These definitions are not very accurate, but for the moment they will serve as tools. The basic unity of the two worlds is far more important to Stevens than their arbitrary distinction.

Never does Stevens deny or even regard as unimportant the reality which is outside the mind. But, to him, what is more important is not that a thing exists, but that he experiences the thing as existing. If a thing exists, but does not enter into his field of experience, then it may as well not exist for him. From AUTUMN REFRAIN:

The yellow moon of words about the nightingale  
In measureless measures, not a bird for me  
But the name of a bird, and the name of a nameless air  
I have never — shall never see.

'Nightingale' is no bird, because Stevens has never seen  
and will never see it. It remains the 'name of a bird.'  
He could not care less about a rock somewhere in  
Norway, but he may care a great deal about the rock  
on which he sat yesterday afternoon. Only his  
experience of an existing object has meaning for  
him.

IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST carries this idea of existence  
one step further:

She was the single artificer of the world  
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,  
Whatever self it had, became the self

*That was her song, for she was the maker. Then  
we,  
As we beheld her striding there alone,  
Knew that there never was a world for her  
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.*

A girl is singing on a seashore. The sea had a self of its own; yet, no matter what that self was, it is now part of the world in which this girl dwells. In fact, aside from the world of her song, there is no other world for the girl, and there never was. The main thing that interests Stevens here is the transition from the sea's original self into the self of the girl's song. This transition, he calls a 'making.' This 'making' is an experience of the sea — transforming it.

When I walk by the sea, I find it calm and restful. Another may see it as grey and angry and capable of great destruction. Thus, for me, the sea is a pleasant place; for that other man, it is horrible. The sea itself is actually neutral; yet, our experience transforms it. Is this transformation an imposition? It may be, for I am convinced

that anyone regarding the sea as horrible simply has not looked at the facts. On the other hand, he may feel the same about my impression. The sea does have aspects that give rise to each view; and so, neither view is false or imposed. I have gained my impression because the sea and I happened to be at the same moment in space and time.

Yet, how is it then that such impressions for me always are restful ones? I know that were I to go to the seashore tomorrow, I would regard it again as a restful place. First of all, my lived experience there is that of calmness: on my earliest visit, I experienced the sea as restful. Reflecting on this has deepened my conviction. At present, my immediate impressions comprise fuller and deeper realization of it as a calm and restful place. In this experience, there are two levels: the initial, direct encounter; and the reflection upon this encounter. The whole purpose of the reflection is to deepen and broaden experience — which on both levels, Stevens calls the imagination. Thus, the ‘world that is made’ comprises both levels; the ‘world that is’ remains the criterion by which to judge the ‘world that is made.’

In the poem, MRS. ALFRED URUGUAY, Stevens outlines this double aspect of experience. He pictures a lady riding a donkey uphill and a man simultaneously downhill on a horse. Both are searching out ‘the real.’ The woman is seeking reality through reflection; the man, through direct encounter. The donkey is pictured as wishing ‘faithfully for a falsifying bell,’ and the man’s horse is described as a ‘horse all will.’ The donkey’s plaintive cry for a falsifying bell tends to undermine the woman’s search, while the ‘horse all will’

*(Continued on Page 336)*

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NORBERT BLEI

## A QUIET

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Not only had he left another job, but his marriage of four months, which I had hoped would take shape, had collapsed. He had abandoned wife, job, and adopted child. And so, upon opening my front door, a very disconsolate, almost crippled T. J. Kant eyed me carefully, leaning against the wall. I found myself backing away from the stare, afraid of catching the malady his presence seemed infected with. I hopefully made excuses to myself for his being there.

T.J. was a man of thirty who seldom smiled. He had worked odd jobs most of his life; and it was on just such a job that I met him one summer when he suddenly seemed to drop down in front of me.

Because I am an artist, I seem to attract all kinds of unusual people (or am I drawn to them?). No one could have worked at the warehouse with less attention than T.J. He was as inconspicuous to most men as the cardboard boxes we kept stacking hour after hour. Even after three months, people were still uncertain whether T.J. had just started or had been working there for some time. I sensed his still nature almost immediately after I first noticed him. He seemed an incomplete person—for me, the only kind who matter. I shook his hand and began talking to him. As usual, I could hardly stop.

Books, painting, politics, work, Europe, women, nature, music, craftsmanship, clothes: I drew all these things from him. We discussed them on the job, on coffee breaks, at lunch, after work, at night, on weekends. I invited him to my apartment to meet my wife. He brought her a bouquet of straw flowers. I was sure of him now, and glad about the flowers.

The three of us began taking long walks where we would talk ourselves tired. We discussed everything that came to our minds. Being artists, my wife and I were naturally displeased with many things around us. We could neither understand nor accept the daily life of our neighbours. T.J. was our kind; for, at least he was never tied down to the same job. And we had our paints to free us from the petty life. We lived for imagination.

Our apartment was small, yet it was a home in every sense. We had carefully planned the decoration of every room so that comfort and color and warmth reigned throughout. There were paintings, sculpture, books, and music. We had many friends—friends who shared our affinities and joy of life. We were happy to include T.J.

No matter on what subjects our conversations with T.J. began, they always turned eventually to sarcasms upon the world around us. T.J.

NORBERT BLEI

would delight in this. Having been a drifter most of his life, he could appreciate some of my more acrid remarks concerning work, the ‘man of business,’ or even the ‘common man.’ My criticisms seemed to shape many of his experiences; and before long we were equal partners in our denunciation of everything banal and unimaginative.

Aside from his many experiences drifting from job to job, one thing which particularly fascinated me was his knowledge of birds. Birds never really had meant a great deal to me before. In fact, as with most people, birds were just something in nature that I accepted — much in the same way as squirrels or trees or grass. But T.J. revered birds for their flight through space, their great sweep of the air, their concern with just flying. He was particularly fond of the falcon. Here, it was not only beauty and freedom, but a bird that a man could work with, could teach to hunt. He explained to me how falcons were trained. He showed me

how hoods were made and leather gloves used. He had trained many of these birds, himself; he had even climbed trees and robbed nests in search of fledglings of his own to begin with. There were dangers involved for man and bird. Climbing and robbing nests was difficult; and once, he said, he had not been careful enough and had crippled a bird. Since nature does not allow for cripples, he had strangled it and fed it to a cat.

He had not trained a bird now for a long time. He had been moving around so much lately, he'd had no leisure for this. But he would be getting one again just as soon as he settled down. Not too long perhaps.

And so, crazy things about T.J. kept popping up, and intrigued me no end. I was almost tempted to take up falconry, myself, until after some while I found the bird dull and uninspiring.

T.J. began to take interest in my paintings. Even more, he seemed to enjoy all the talk about art, which was always going on in my apartment. Often, my wife and I took him with us on our weekly sojourns to the museum and galleries. Here, we invariably would meet other friends of mine who were painters and sculptors. T.J. seemed to enjoy this companionship, although he just looked on and seldom joined the conversation.

He began to ask me questions concerning painting: what kind of brushes I had; why I used certain colors; how I drew different lines. He became more and more obsessed with art. I suggested he try some painting, too. But he felt that he was probably too old. A person had to be born with something like that, or to have developed it early in life. There were just too many things to be learned now, too many techniques to be mastered. It would take him too long to learn. I laughed and told him: 'Nonsense. Just go ahead and paint. Paint anything that really stirs

## NORBERT BLEI

*Norbert Blei*

you. Anything you really feel. Just put it on canvas . . . the way you feel.

The technique will come later. There will be plenty of time for refinement.

First, you must paint.'

He listened, but said nothing. I felt, though, that some day he might try to paint.

A week later, he got hold of a bird again — a falcon — and instead of training it to hunt, he merely fed it, saw that it was exercised, and then began drawing its likeness. He studied all the famous prints he could get hold of. He seemed fascinated with the possibility of realistically capturing the beauty of a bird at rest. After several months, he was able to draw a falcon that almost seemed to move. He drew in India ink now — stark, black lines on white paper, beautiful and . . . frightening.

We would often meet late in the evening at a coffee shop near his apartment. He appeared to be very pleased with the progress of his drawings, and I continued to encourage him. I began telling him to go on, to forget the birds for a while and try something else, other subjects, other forms, other media. I talked about my paintings, color-harmonies, the composition I was trying to achieve on my new canvas. He kept nodding to everything I said, and seemed to memorize my talk. We drank cup after cup of coffee, smoked incessantly. 'Some day, I'll paint your portrait,' I said. 'Some day when the lines in your face can tell things. It's too soon yet.' I felt inflated with ideas. Art was passion. I was Van Gogh. T.J. was coming along.

For some time I had realized that there was something hard about T.J. Something stony. He should be softened up a bit. Although I'd never fully explored his romantic life, other than had concerned the occasional affair in crises of want, I felt he needed a woman. She would help his painting immeasurably. I told him how some of my best paintings were done while I'd been in love. He couldn't believe this; he wouldn't accept it. He had no use for women. They were just a burden to men. 'Ridiculous,' I said. 'Why, look at me. I'm married. Do you see me overburdened? It's great. I've more freedom now than I ever had. I've traveled all over the world, done all kinds of things. What's more, I've shared this with someone I love, someone who loves me, inspires me, and is quite satisfied with a husband who works part-time and spends his real life painting and making love. Besides, there are other women, should I need them. My painting gains strength and softness with a woman. T.J., you need one.'

I couldn't convince him. One night, I introduced him to the niece of an artist-friend of mine, Lag Helmson. Kaja had just come from Sweden to spend the summer with Helmson and his wife. She was a beautiful

**NORBERT BLEI**

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*Norbert Blei*

girl of twenty, and I looked at her longingly. When the Helmsens came over, one evening, T.J. was there. It was a good evening: plenty of talk and laughter and drink. We all drank and talked much more than we'd planned. For the first time, T.J. let loose. Lag liked him. Kaja was impressed. They began going together from that night and only separated when her boat departed for Sweden several months later.

T.J. told me very little about the romance. I knew, though, that he was very happy. Kaja was intent on pleasing him, and while she was not an artist as such, she was a woman of extremely good taste. Being Scandinavian, she had a bent for the handicrafts of the home. She could sew, knit, embroider, and create all manner of objects lovingly with her hands. She found little value in things around the home unless they were created by the people who loved and lived there. I am sure she filled T.J.'s life with many hours of plain wonder and joy; for, above all else, she was intensely alive. She loved parties and dancing and music and laughter. When she discovered that T.J. was not this type of person, she willingly adapted herself to his interests. They could frequently be found in the art museum, out on long walks, drinking coffee in some restaurant late at night — occasionally visiting us.

When she had to return to Sweden, I learned that she'd invited T.J. to follow her as soon as he was financially able. She wanted him to see her country, to meet her family. If he liked it there, she would arrange a job for him, and a place to stay. It would be a good life in Sweden. And he could paint and continue perfecting his art.

T.J. never went. I kept telling him — every day — to take off for Sweden. ‘Get out of here; it’s stifling. You’re nuts to stay around, with a deal like that.’ . . . ‘What would I do in Sweden?’ he’d counter. ‘I can’t even speak the language.’ . . . I would have given anything to go.

Kaja wrote frequently to me, asking about T.J. She had received a few letters from him at first. She couldn’t understand him. What was he after? She loved him very much; and she had felt, while she’d been here, that he loved her. He had never told her so. He had never, physically — she wrote — shown her his love. But he had been concerned about her. He certainly had been very good to her.

Months passed. I continued reminding T.J. of Kaja. His only reply was: ‘Forget it!’ Once I got him so riled that he burst out: ‘She’s stupid! She’s a child. She knows nothing about life. Nothing about art.’

‘She doesn’t have to,’ I explained. ‘She’s a woman. All woman. And you’re crazy if you can’t accept her on those terms.’

‘Then you take her.’

NORBERT BLEI

‘I wish the hell I could. She knows about love. You know, she knows about love.’

‘She’s a silly little bitch who’d go to bed with anyone wearing pants.’

‘You’re an ass.’

Following this disturbed exchange, T.J. kept more and more to himself. He quit his job and began attending art school during the day and working at night for the Gas Company. Finally, he stopped by one evening to tell me that he was leaving, but didn’t know exactly where he was going.

I know little of his art during this period. When he wrote, he frequently quoted the opinions of prominent modern-art critics. He sounded concerned about what was going on in the art world. He wanted to hear what my feelings were, but I

had nothing to say.

Then, one day, I received a letter postmarked Boston. He had been living there for some while, and was married to a woman who worked as a secretary at the Art Institute. She was divorced and had a five-year-old son. It was impossible for me to picture T.J. as a husband — let alone a father. Yet, as I read on, I could begin to understand the attraction: both of them were in dire need of someone; both had been living separate lives; they shared a common interest in art. He had met Cynthia in the library of the Art Institute, and had told her all about himself. Some mutual understanding had been reached. She'd wanted him to continue painting, to continue going to school. So now he was studying, working part-time, and doing some painting. They were happy, he stated. I was relieved that he seemed so settled. I felt she would be good for him, good for his art.

Perhaps that is why I could not understand what he was doing at my door so late that evening — and that he was just leaning there, alone. He seemed so sad and beaten that my wife and I fluttered around him, desperately trying to re-create the atmosphere of old times. The more he explained how he had left his wife, the sameness and boredom of their existence, the more upset we became. He hadn't any money. No, he hadn't painted in over two years. He couldn't. It was a waste of time anyway; the old masters had said all that was going to be said.

We tried to change the subject. My wife was expecting a child. I mentioned this to him; but he appeared uninterested. We talked about the various names we had in mind for our child. My wife asked him about his name, Thomas. What did it stand for? 'Failure,' was his only reply. We laughed at this. Even T.J. . . . I laughed the longest because I had no answer.

Later that night, after much drink had settled us into a state of calm,

NORBERT BLEI

I studied T.J.'s face. He was ready for a portrait. It would be a challenge to capture the lines in his face. I wondered if I could hold the naturalness of the expression.

But the naturalness kept evading me. It was no longer there. Only lines: deep ones of endless attempts. I tried hard to remember what the face was like, the small truth it once possessed.... At least—if I could give it this value.

I have never finished the portrait. After years, it still leans against the wall of my studio, its canvas-backside empty and grey as an October sky. I shall have to paint over it soon.

CLARENCE ALVA POWELL

### **BULWARKS**

The pure ivory, outer curves reach  
Fulllest strength here; symmetrical,  
Embrace broadest promise and, basic  
Need, meet the impact with assurance;  
Dormant, pose languors which bely  
The feel and, durable as steel,  
Rise with fervent fire to meet the storm.  
The pale-glowing bulwarks hold fast,  
Fragile stones frozen, deeply agile,  
Worlds caught between, the flag furled  
And, clasped tight, contribute to the maelstrom;  
The brunt of brute force buffeted,  
The wakened juggernaut of passion shaken,  
Bedded down, and drained, the sword is blunted.

WAI-LIM YIP

### **ARE SUCH THE VOICES . . .**

Are such the voices we never heard, O you  
dumbfounded season  
Voices of falling, voices of shining and blooming?  
Are you the rising that doubles the sea and the sky

And lets the yearlong hair of clouds stir  
The conflagration of the ancient hooves  
From the white-erosive flood?  
Where, one may ask, does the song end? Among the  
    blue, blue hills?  
And where, the yellow birds' way?  
Where, the sea gulls' flight?  
When all colors are now governed by one  
When all voices stay in your face  
The cities in the horizon disperse and cliffs sink  
The tremendous flapping now strikes the void  
As the stone-head that is never given the seven  
    apertures  
Commands the growing picture of our knowledge  
What swelling movement from flowers  
Which defy shaping and naming  
That have made everything explainable?  
We suddenly see so many door-handles  
That lead us to courts and bowers  
Where you, rising once again, with postures of a relief  
So stun us that we have to resist  
Rivers, forests, and villages from being washed away  
And the longing of soldiers on the only towers  
From dissolving into a season, dissolving  
Into the soundless roaring of a fall  
When the paths of woodcutters  
Slowly and silently  
Reach the yearlong clouds.

WAI-LIM YIP

## FRAGMENT I

He bids me see  
The immense sun's obscuring wings  
And set sails a-swelling  
With the glitter of all the seas  
In the circling canopy  
Fed by marble breath  
'Lost! Lost! in the winter of the vacant!  
God save me! from the prison of long hairs.'  
I am the son of war  
His slave and subject  
And acquiesce in his violation or anointment  
How forests are captured by flowers  
Sky by birds, river by rain  
Thus I, by his clothless body.

*Taipei – January 28, 1961.*

MARILYN JORDAN

## (FROM A BASKETFUL OF VISIONS)

I  
How like the night buried underground  
Cold chips of winter wood rest —  
Sap from trunks of evergreen is dripping wet  
Upon the dry earth of overgrowth and brush.  
A clown passes and wipes the sweat  
Across the forehead of his face;  
Melting paint of comedy is loosened and descends —  
There are no barriers for the undisguised.  
The hot winds of summer have been kind  
And carried home the young boatman  
From a disenchant ed sea, after yielding  
To visions of romance and high glory.  
How like a prophet in the street  
He tells his story.

CHARLES EDWARD EATON

**NEAR MISS**

Swimmer, instinct, appetite, and art,  
I would put into your hand a weapon  
And yet not make you warlike —  
Paradoxes energize the heart:  
Halved and whole as was the Triton,  
You lack the father's three-pronged spike.  
How can we be gentle and yet bold? —  
The myths have somehow done us ill  
If they have settled harshly in the will,  
More a sediment of iron than gold.  
You stand by the pool as though you hang  
Now and forever in your doubt,  
Suspended there, yet planted.  
The water, blue, curved, is like a boomerang  
Some giant wish of happiness sent out  
To fall before it struck you and you fainted.  
Pick it up, pick it up, my son,  
(I cadge the use of Neptune's voice),  
And try again as though your choice  
Made a brilliant missile of a life undone.

CHARLES SHAW

**POEM FOR MID-WINTER**

Inside the night dreams stifle,  
yielding perfumeless jungles.  
Tigers grow gardenias,  
doorsteps drown.  
The scent of darkness  
hangs in frozen veils.  
A radiator's rap  
invades the hour.  
Outside the wail of winter breaks  
and retches in its sleep.  
A whisper of ago  
waits on the stairs.  
Awake, I rise and pull  
the dawn across the sudden day.  
Another world leaps into life  
and amputates the room.

HELEN LUSTER

### **RAINY BUS-BOY**

I did a sharp double-take  
At that black caped man  
Bird-beating his way through the rain,  
Walrus-sleek rain hat bent down,  
Handle bar mustaches down,  
Beat-down, off-beat, bird-beadyeyed as he went  
And pecked at his push of the cart.  
Wondered why the beating rain sent  
Me this sudden, sodden man  
With his pile of soiled plates  
To the corner of my eye,  
Weird, wet, bent bird,  
Singular and symbolized in his cape  
To trudge and trundle off  
Scene and out of mind,  
Tugging and shoving  
That angular cold coiled  
Bent worm at heart,  
My grief-load for this day.

DAVID WADE

### **MY FATHER**

My father,  
Hunched, humped,  
With the nose  
Of a Jew,  
Crushed among  
Buildings  
And typewriters  
And printingpresses  
My father,  
With the nose  
Of a Jew,  
The neck of a gargoyle,  
Of Dutch-

English-unknown ancestry  
Will rise up  
Mighty as justice  
On the day  
Of his death.  
From his fingernails  
Flew coins  
For my poems,  
Books, clothes,  
Laughter;  
From his flanks:  
Sparks  
For my flesh  
And gonads.

DAVID WADE

From the clinch  
Of death  
He will pounce  
Laughing  
And his back will be  
Straightened  
And he will crush wine  
From the printing-  
Presses  
And on that day  
I will arch him into  
The belly  
Of a rocketship  
And send him to  
The moon.

BERTRAND MATHIEU

**ODYSSEUS UNREPENTANT (FOR ELENI)**

Odysseus was luminously raging in the flesh  
and swimming against a tide of shadowed grief  
the day he saw the birds of light enmesh  
themselves in the sun's bright prow: brief  
and angry, the gestures of their wounded beaks  
lit up his eyes and touched his bloody-haired cheeks!  
Night went out in silence to renew its lame  
revenge in darker caves than those of galaxies  
and the morning lost its powers of flame  
to angers less lucid than those of Xerxes.  
Eager beyond reproach, the Sirens still hid —  
blonde among the rocks, awaiting a master's bid.  
Later the sleek snake, red-eyed, caressed the weeds  
that stroked the modesty of their grassy eyes.  
We heard the pure and demagogic laughter of needs  
as great as the fires built from his thighs:  
he sparked his cunning brides with voyage-willing sons!  
Greek songs, he knew, could be turned to Siren ones . .

*Herakleion, Crete August, 1961*

GIL ORLOVITZ

**MEDIAN 16**

prevalent lesions in the sarabande  
c anting synagogue by singlet  
and slinking slants by funnel drops  
veil apples in fiddled expectorant  
so that the time of vivifoil is near  
the slimp of basal catabolisms nigh  
will the catoninetails care for the wounded  
will the bottled wasps be drunk with echo  
there are wanded wens for the serpents hog  
and old trades for the griffin

GIL ORLOVITZ

**THE CAVORTING CREVICES**

The cavorting crevices of the cretin,  
camtoured, christ the cavalier,  
wobble up the lopseeds of the fault,  
cairn on the cuff, my jerseyed jackals,  
lackeys looped to the swills.  
Well, now, clang the waffleirons,  
batten down the sublimes,  
we shall be loyal to the shaggy deaf  
and talk mumbling monsters into a slip,  
a sliver of hammersledge and iced acrostics  
jabbering at the northern lights.  
Nothing shall jar so elastically  
as Mac and the Jellybean, the chewing fjords,  
the sacred rainbow in the snotpot  
and men shaving in fingernail mirrors.  
Slake open the fat of pioneers  
and pour it down the mousy mountainsides.  
Glands clopclop up the rubber street,  
and Coachman Gangleoid whips his butterflies  
to the gritty exertions of manyhooved wings  
as I lie down to the whelps of hush  
that they suckle of dyed red screams.  
Wall witches kick off their ears,  
and the cleaning-women are our disciples  
with cauliflower bibles and the knees of kings.

GIL ORLOVITZ

**LINES**

The old tyrannical forspiel,  
bombed by guitars, and elected  
by the random citizenry, fusses  
between indelible stacattos  
and calving certificates. I mind  
brandies, ill-esteemed manifestoes,  
and determine muffled myrrhs  
staffed by the still tones of bunkered brains.  
Intervals slake their thirst at running  
sores, believing the navel's grass  
grows over the ancient arclights  
beloved of the snivelling snake  
and the circle-striped Pyraglinquin.  
Huddles hunt, mouthwashes turn handsprings,  
bevels race through the monkeyside.  
We must consider the treaty with the mirror  
and scratch ourselves with sausages,  
never forgetting the flitting adage  
that rainspouts sternly advise that the fever  
be scraped to harmonize with the pregnant  
bulkheads. The slick will tauten the slack.

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## THE DECOY

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*David Lee Pagari*

I stared at the frightened young man my nurse was showing into my office. Miss Fields had briefed me on the young man's case. He was a New York City policeman, and he had been working as a decoy—this duty requiring him to disguise as a woman and act as bait for sexmanics. But the young patrolman himself had been arrested only last night. The actual details were very sketchy.

'Doctor,' he began nervously, 'they say I've turned into a queer.'

'Please, try to relax. I'm Dr. Hoffman,' I offered.

He eased his slender frame into the chair opposite my desk. He had a thin, sensitive face, and his eyes were set well back under eyebrows which were strangely sparse.

I said: 'Would you like a cigaret?'

'Oh, yes — thank you.' His voice was quieter now.

As he fumbled for a cigaret from a pack I had handed him, I adjusted my tape-recorder in the drawer of my desk. 'Well,' I began, 'where did you want to begin — this report?'

He had let the smoke curl up around his face, framing his slick, black hair in a misty fashion. 'They—I was arrested last night. Up in the Bronx. I was—I was dressed . . . like a woman. Now they're going to suspend me. The board's supposed to take your recommendations, Dr. Hoffman.'

'According to this report, your duty has required you to do exactly what you were arrested for,' I said.

'I was off duty . . . last night,' he answered softly.

'I see. You dressed up like a woman, on your own, went up to the Bronx, and these two hoodlums attacked you. Then the police learned of your disguise.'

'Yes.'

‘Suppose, Harold — Can I call you Harold?’

‘Yes —’

‘Suppose, Harold, we start at the very beginning. I see you’re married, you’re twenty-five, and you have a son two years old and a baby daughter. Your wife—she of course knows of your work on the decoy-squad?’

‘Oh, yes, only —’

‘Not about last night?’

‘No, they’re trying to keep it out of the papers.’

‘Tell me, Harold, had you ever worn female clothing before being assigned to decoy-duty?’

‘No—in fact, I tried every which way to get out of that duty. But,

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because I’m small and they said I, well, I was suited for it . . .’ He looked away toward the door.

‘Being small, yes. Can you tell me your feelings the first time you were required to disguise as a woman?’

‘Well, there were ten of us. They had all these clothes, wigs, make-up — everything. And a couple of police women to help us. I thought it would be just pretty simple, just put on the clothes and that would be it.’

‘In other words, you thought clothes were clothes?’

‘Yes. But I think it was the brassiere that really got me. I mean, well it’s hard to explain, but that was adding something to my natural male body.’

‘This was a regular woman’s brassiere — with what? Foam-rubber falsies?’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘It felt funny, unusual, to you?’

‘Yes, like it was more than just dressing up.’

‘Then what? Did you wear a skirt or what?’

‘No, the first night I wore white pedal-pushers. My wife had a pair of ’em. They fasten up in the back. So, well, this policewoman said I would have to do something about the

front —'

'I see — a girdle, something like that?'

'Yeah, a regular panty girdle, rubber like.'

'And how did this affect you?'

'That's what hooked me.'

'Hooked you?'

'On transvestism. I read up on it. I found some magazines in one of those stores on Forty-second Street.

'In other words, you were sexually excited. The brassiere, and then the girdle; and you began to have sexual feelings?'

'Yes, and — and that's when . . . Well, that same day I read those magazines, I shaved my whole body. I even plucked my eyebrows some — just enough so Ruth wouldn't notice. Ruth's my wife.'

'I know. Then, these ideas — the idea to shave your arms and legs, to pluck your eyebrows — you got these ideas from the magazines?'

'Yes. There's thousands of men all over the country who do this. It's, well, sort of a hobby like. Amateur female impersonators, they call themselves — like they have over on Staten Island, only those guys are professionals . . . and . . .'

'And?'

'Well.' He fumbled for another cigaret. 'Well . . . queer.'

'You might be interested to know, Harold, that some of these pro-

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fessional female impersonators are married fathers just like you. Of course, everyone thinks of them as homosexual; but it's inaccurate to say that all professional female impersonators are.' Harold looked at me pensively for a second. I decided to press on, while he was opening up. 'Last night, Harold, did you wear your wife's things?'

'Yes, I've been sneaking things from her closet all this time. Oh, I bought a brassiere and falsies, and one of those padded-up girdles, the kind these thin models wear to round

themselves out. And — and I rented a wig, a real beautiful wig.’

‘Still, Ruth doesn’t know? Where do you keep this cache of female clothing — the wig?’

‘In a box — in the car.’

‘Where do you dress up? Do you wait until Ruth’s out? Or, just how do you manage?’

‘I drive out to a motel, rent a room and then dress up. At first, I was content to just sit around and read or watch television. Then I decided that I wanted to walk around. And — well, I’d already had a lot of practice; I mean, working on the decoy-squad. It was easy to make like a woman, until last night.’

‘These two tough kids recognized you as a man?’

‘They grabbed me, and before I realized it I’d yelled at ’em like a man would — then they really tore into me. But the cops were right there in seconds.’

‘I imagine you were dressed a little more attractively?’

‘Oh —’ He laughed a little now and let his eyes move about my desk and then up to meet my own gaze. ‘Yes, I had on high heels, a real swishy dress, and the wig. Now they have all my stuff downtown at the precinct.’

‘The box, the car, everything?’

‘Sure, this was right down near the motel.’

‘You don’t want to leave the police department, do you?’

‘No. Oh, God, no! I’ve always wanted to be a policeman. I was in the Military Police in the army. I was all right — everything was all right until this decoy business started.’

‘Have you always been slight in build, sensitive about being small, even in school?’

‘Yes.’ His voice grew hoarse. ‘They used to call me a sissy. I had to finally quit taking clarinet lessons. One night some big kids chased me home and broke my clarinet to pieces.’

‘Being a Military Policeman — being a uniformed officer — gives you confidence?’

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‘Yes. Well, it did —’ ‘But other policemen are on this decoy assignment. Other policemen, just like you. Don’t you feel that a large, rawboned man is more embarrassed having to wear women’s clothes than a smaller man?’ ‘How — how do you mean?’ ‘Well, first, a very large man looks ridiculous in women’s clothes. Secondly, a man’s size often has nothing to do with how much of a man he feels he is. The large man can feel just as insecure as a small fellow.’ ‘What’re you getting at, Dr. Hoffman?’ ‘I think this decoy duty unhinged something inside you, Harold — brought up old feelings of insecurity. You then felt you could surrender completely to this fear of being weak, of being a sissy. Your guard was let down. You could blame it all on the decoy duty. This whole thing can be blamed on the decoy assignment.’ Harold was quiet. I got up and walked to the window; I wanted to let what I had to say sink in slowly. ‘You then ran onto those magazines. Suddenly you discovered that you were a transvestite all along. Now you have more proof. This led to a complete surrender: the clothes, the motel adventures; and to your feeling of being — hooked, as you put it.’ ‘You won’t talk me out of it,’ he said defensively. ‘I won’t try.’ He looked directly at me as I turned. ‘I think this was a good thing for you.’ ‘A good thing?’ ‘Yes. What you were actually doing was acting. You were pantomiming something you could never say any other way. This masquerading — this transvestism, as you call it — what is it besides acting, when you come right down to it?’ ‘Acting,’ he repeated thoughtfully. ‘For instance, you must have liked your clarinet. You liked music as a boy. But, music was sissified, so you locked a part of yourself up. Suddenly, this masquerading, which is a sissified thing in your mind, unlocked this old stored-up need in you to be gentle, artistic, sensitive, nonaggressive — to act like, in fact, a woman musician.’ ‘Yes, but what about. . . . Explain the sex-feeling.’ ‘Explain it? Why shouldn’t a

healthy man be excited by close contact with female clothing? Especially something as intimate as a girdle or a brassiere? Of course men are excited by these symbols of the mysterious woman. And they're often afraid to admit it. For instance, stores have 'men only' departments at Christmas time, where

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the men can buy frilly lingerie without feeling embarrassed.'

'You make this whole thing look — so simple.'

'It is. And it's also, if you'll pardon me, slightly hilarious. The idea of the police disguising as women! And then turning around and arresting themselves for doing it!'

Harold studied me for a second. A slight grin began forming on his thin face.

'I'm going to do two things, Harold. First, I'm going to talk to the commissioner. I'm going to tell him that the Police Department has, in effect, created its own monster — if you want to call this masquerading a monster, transvestism, and so on. Next, I'm going to talk to Ruth—'

'Oh, no!'

'Oh yes. You've locked a part of yourself away from her. Just as you locked a part of yourself up inside you. Just as you locked yourself up in the motel room. Just like you were hiding behind a feminine mask. I want Ruth to laugh at you and with you — and she will, too. And when you start seeing the real humor, the real hilarity behind this, you'll stop this business of transvestism — this trying to be like a thousand other men who are nothing but amateur actors, just wanting to feel special about it by adopting a fancy label like transvestite.'

Harold was frozen to his chair. Part of what I had said had apparently hit a target. He looked up at me and said: 'But down at the precinct — will they, I mean after last night and all . . . ?'

'You found a few magazines about transvestism, Harold. I have whole medical volumes on the subject. Case histories of men whose families were ruined, whose children were destroyed, who committed suicide, or died trying to get themselves changed into women. If you want this kind of life, no psychiatrist can stop you. But I don't believe you do, and I know Ruth and I can convince you that you don't. So I'll have a few things to say to the commissioner. You won't have any trouble down at the precinct.'

Harold got up and extended his hand. I knew we had only started to bring him around to understanding himself; but it was a good start, a firm beginning, and perhaps the end of a very stupid police technique.

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## PLATES

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*Four leaves of plates stand here, printed on one side. Two carry a title and no other text — DOS PAISES, 1961 (MEXICAN ASH) and LOTUS, 1963 (TAIPEI, TAIWAN) — and two are the blank versos. The images cannot be carried into a text edition, so they are named here rather than dropped in silence. — ED.*

## **DYLAN THOMAS' UNDER MILK WOOD: THE AMERICAN ELEMENT**

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*by David Clay Jenkins*

IT IS NOW MORE THAN TEN years since the first performance of *UNDER MILK WOOD* in the United States in May, 1953.<sup>1</sup> It is also ten years since the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, died — Nov. 9, 1953, in St. Vincent's Hospital, New York City — from a series of physical complications resulting from 'insult to the brain': repeated overdoses of alcohol climaxed when a final drinking bout caused a coma from which he never regained consciousness.

One now reads John Malcolm Brinnin's best-seller (*DYLAN THOMAS IN AMERICA*, 1955) with a certain horror and awe, realizing from one of Thomas' own lines how 'Time has ticked a heaven round the stars....' And how, since, the universities and colleges on the lecture circuits have watched other comedies, tragedies, and histories; have had their quotas of lecturers, poets, and scientists; have seen the rise and fall of governments. Other men of letters have died: Faulkner, Hemingway, Frost, Cummings, W. C. Williams, Aldous Huxley. However, the pathos surrounding Thomas' death remains appallingly impressive.

Not far removed from these conditions were the conditions of the composition of *UNDER MILK WOOD*. We Americans are often blamed by Europeans for Thomas' death, while we are seldom considered in relation to the composition of his last opus. This connection deserves examination if the play is, as critics put it: 'Thomas' most perfected piece of work....'<sup>2</sup> Thomas was living the life of a poet as conceived by the Age of Romanticism; and I hope this will justify the personal inquiry in this essay. *MILK WOOD* and the surrounding circumstances of its composition raise some

questions about the nature of the writing process — its complexity. These lead to discussion of the theme, techniques, uniqueness of the play as an outgrowth of preliminary consideration of people and places—America and Wales.

<sup>1</sup> *First solo performance by Thomas: Sunday, May 3rd, Cambridge, Mass., Fogg Museum Lecture Hall, Harvard, sponsored by the Poet's Theatre. May 15th: New York performance, Kaufman Auditorium, YM-YWHA auspices. The play achieved its present form in October, 1953; was first broadcast by the BBC on Jan. 25, 1954. It has been staged by the Old Vic in England and by Henry Sherek and Gilbert Miller on Broadway, as well as by numerous others.*

<sup>2</sup> DYLAN THOMAS: *Dog Among the Fairies*, Henry Treece (London, 1956).

In the year before his death, Thomas had put his poetry estate in order by issuing his COLLECTED POEMS. Although he was not very old when he died a year later (only thirty-nine), his death is appropriately described in his phrase from LAMENT: '... the old ramrod' was 'dying of strangers....'

He had first come to the United States in February of 1950 at the invitation of Brinnin, who managed his appearances at the Poetry Center of the YM-YWHA in New York and lecture-readings at other institutions in the States, chiefly colleges and universities. As a poetry reader, Thomas took the campuses by storm. His booming voice (he called himself the poor man's Charles Laughton) was immediately impressive. He read his own and other's poetry with great feeling and understanding. University lecturers and students feted him after readings with progressions from one bar to another; girls (mothers now) sat at his feet at cocktail parties at Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, and San Francisco State — repelling his advances (for the most part) when he had drunk a few martinis. He was put on trains with penciled notes in his hat warning his hosts of his excesses. The pattern nevertheless repeated itself: sometimes he arrived hours late;

sometimes he missed his lecture engagements altogether.

Once he had begun to read, however, the spell was cast. Whatever the catastrophes in the drawing rooms, bedrooms, and other rooms, one thing was sure: Thomas was a sweet-singing bard who packed the lecture halls and who tremblingly pulled himself together for paid performances that really counted to him and his audiences. Since it was survival, success had a gratifying smell. Thomas liked the denim shirts and cord suits he bought on his circuits. As Brinnin put it: 'His presence was a Dionysian experience for the academies.' His voice-box was a virtuoso instrument which he had learned to play as well as Casals his cello. One can listen to his voice on any of several recordings.<sup>3</sup>

After several tours, with return trips to Wales between, Thomas brought his wife, Caitlin, to this country. The experiment was a failure. In a letter of Mar. 18, 1952, he had quoted Caitlin as saying that he wanted to go to the States 'for flattery, idleness, and infidelity.' Thomas corrected these words to: 'appreciation, dramatic work, and friends.' And it was that summer that Thomas announced to Brinnin

<sup>3</sup> CAEDMON Records, the bold scheme of two New York girl college students, was founded to record his voice. His recordings continue to be one of CAEDMON's most lucrative properties. his idea of UNDER MILK WOOD.

Originally, he undertook the lecture-readings in the U.S. with the trepidation of an emigrant; and his decision to come here was his conclusive compliment to this country. On his arrival, he was driven across the Jersey Flats. He said: 'Somehow, I knew America would be this way.' His childish delight in the interview with Chaplin in California, his response to the pleasure of audiences in colleges and universities, his fear that he might die somewhere in Utah — all are part of the whole cloth which includes the extraction (for stage), somewhat prematurely perhaps, of UNDER MILK WOOD, late in 1952, his last major work. It was, in some

ways, his most positive and sustained public statement.

With an obligation to meet the deadline for a production at the Poetry Center of the YM-YWHA, Thomas produced the parts of the play piecemeal — card by card — under threat of being locked in hotel rooms overnight, while actors waited for their parts to the last moment before opening. In volume and quality, income and demonstrative response, Thomas had found in the American scene what he had sought and could not find in Britain.

I will generalize to say that, not only in Wales, but other parts of Europe as well, there is a tendency to see America in the role of hero as well as villain. Small nations look to larger ones with a certain awe; Thomas shared this. Since England, because of long-existing conflicts, does not qualify for the Welsh, it falls to the U.S. to fill the role.

After the May, 1953 premier of his 'play for voices,' Thomas returned to Wales for the summer and then came back to the States in September. He was hospitalized early in November. In the interim between the coma and his death, appeared the 'strangers' who were the acquaintances Thomas had made on his various excursions into the city: the poets, the pretenders, celebrity-worshippers, hangers-on. Evidently, two rival groups had formed. one around Brinnin; another around Oscar Williams, the anthologist. Williams intimated that an error had been made in the medical treatment.<sup>4</sup> The curious and concerned appeared like wraiths about the corridors of the hospital and at the door of the room in which the poet lay.

The facts of Thomas' illness will never be fully known: as early as 1936, Dr. Thomas Jones, onetime secretary to Lloyd-George, wrote in his letters about the tragic circumstances of the young poet who would die young because of tuberculosis. That there was a pre-existent illness is supported by Thomas' rejection by the armed services and by testimony of friends in Britain. Caitlin Thomas was quick

to hurl accusations; and there is a general consensus amongst the Welsh that Thomas met a bad end because he succumbed to the lure of American success. He had stretched his scant means as far as possible in Britain; and no doubt the decision to make the American lecture tours was his own — I would maintain, induced by more than forthcoming dollars.

4 THE ROISTERING LEGEND OF DYLAN THOMAS, A. T. Baker (Esquire, Dec. 1957 — a relatively unnoticed source).

Recalling the cherubic portrait of Dylan, executed by Caitlin's guardian, Augustus John (in 1936, the year Caitlin and Thomas met and married in Laugharne under the guiding genius of the painter), is a stark contrast to the awesome death scene. The poetry of this early period was difficult, to say the least. Even Elder Olson gets confused in his attempts to untangle the zodiacal band from the Altarwise by Owl-Light Sonnets: the trouble seems to lie as well in the one as in the other. Thomas' whole development was in his own words, 'away from darkness toward some measure of light . . . ' The publication in which he displayed most clearly the sun coming from behind formerly-obscuring clouds was the little red volume DEATHS AND ENTRANCES (1946), written in war-time London and remarkably clear when compared with the earlier pieces.

Such earlier poems as I SEE THE BOYS OF SUMMER IN THEIR RUIN and OUR EUNOCH DREAMS ALL SEEDLESS IN THE LIGHT have a shock-effect, a sub-abdominal attack resting on use of then-taboo use of guilt-ridden words: maggots, worms, bone, scythe of hairs, dug, caul. This guilt is concerned with one of the mysteries — perhaps the mystery of the Century and of time — that of the sex-love impulse, with the problem of sin thrown upon the scales. The early poems explore Biblical myth in terms of Adam and his sin. The traditional Anglo-Welsh transposition in the fiction of Caradoc Evans and the early fiction and poems of Thomas, made Wales the

setting of the Garden of Eden and the scene of Adam's (consequently Man's) guilt.

In the summer of 1962, I went back to Wales after having been away for many years. (I first went there as a Fulbright Scholar, in 1949, to study Thomas' poetry, not realizing that his trips to this country were beginning at almost the same time.) While other parts of the world have altered radically — with super expressways, chromium and glass buildings, neons, pylons, subdivisions — Wales has changed very little. Roads there are twisty, precarious between hedgerows and primordial stone sidings, with occasional glimpses of the surf and sea. The mountains hinder the development of good highways; flocks of sheep obstruct traffic. Lead deposits make television and radio reception difficult; service in hotels is slow and obstinate; the inhabitants seem distrustful of outsiders; the waters of channel and bay are shockingly frigid. So — tourists, investors, all the peddlers and pilgrims of progress, turn elsewhere . . . and Wales stays and has stayed much the same.

An idiom for fiction and drama dealing with the Welsh scene and character has developed. It is called Anglo-Welsh. *UNDER MILK WOOD* is as much a product of the clichés of Welsh writing as Tennessee Williams' *STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* is a growth out of the well-worked fields of the Southern Gothic. Chapel and hypocrisy, lilt and sea life — it shares Welsh scene and character with such works as Emlyn Williams' *THE CORN IS GREEN* and Richard Llewellyn's *HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY*. The most bitter portraitist of cant and hypocrisy in Wales was the Twentieth-century writer, Caradoc Evans, who relentlessly depicts the parsimonious actions of parson and shopkeeper, the stingy and flinthearted of rural Wales. Thomas' local color and caricature undoubtedly grew out of Evans' acrid sketches, but with an important difference: they are affirmations of Welsh character and life rather than castigations.

The town which comes awake in UNDER MILK WOOD is much like the ancient town of Laugharne where Thomas lived off and on, from 1936; the boat house is often described as 'on a breakneck of rocks.' (Actually, Pembrokeshire is an ancient English settlement within Welsh-speaking Wales — for the town has an unique ancient charter granted in the Twelfth Century — which accounts for the strange English place — and street-names.)

Thomas, in a broadcast talk, describes Laugharne:

. . . this timeless, beautiful, barmy (both spellings) town, in this far forgetful, important place of heron, cormorants (known here as billy duckers), castle churchyard, gulls, ghosts, geese, feuds, scares, scandals, cherry trees, mysteries, jackdaws in the chimneys, bats in the belfry, skeletons in the cupboards, pubs, nud, cockles, flatfish, curlews, and human, often all too human, beings . . .

. . . this timeless mild beguiling island of a town with its seven public houses, one chapel in action, one Church, one factory, two billiard tables, one St. Bernard (without brandy), one policeman, three rivers, a visiting sea, one Rolls-Royce selling fish and chips, one cannon (cast iron), one chancellor (flesh and blood), one portreeve, . . . and a multitude of mixed birds.

In these broadcasts, there is much that is similar to the town in UNDER MILK WOOD: the language like a Welsh coracle shooting the Victoria Rapids.

Agreeing that Thomas' poetry shows his own personal struggle from darkness into light, we can see that Wales figures in this development culminating in the play. As I have stated, before 1937 and the first of Thomas' broadcast talks with his first realistic use of the Welsh scene, most of the poems were intensely personal and obscure. Their central approach can be synthesized by what I shall call 'the three-pointed star'—which can be related to a revision of the Christian Trinity, or to Birth, Love, and Death. In THE FORCE

THAT THROUGH THE GREEN FUSE . . . drives the flower, the poet recognizes the unity of these three elements in the green-fuse symbol, a sexual one not far removed from the punning significance of Llareggub (a Joycean effect) of MILK WOOD. In another poem, he states: 'In the groin of the natural doorway I crouched like / a tailor / Sewing a shroud for a journey into the meat-eating sun.' This birth-love-death trinity—to risk some generalizations—is Apocalyptic, Mystical, Rabelaisian.

The message of Thomas' early poems can be related to UNDER MILK WOOD, without the major portion of guilt. The reasons of the early poems and their insights are applied to the elegiac message of the 'play for voices'—repeated with the conventionality of the elegiac mode.

A most relevant poem to the proper understanding of the play is the intricate 100-line PROLOGUE to the COLLECTED POEMS, addressed to 'the strangers,' the readers, from Thomas' workroom in Laugharne. It is of interest, I think, that Thomas showed this poem to Brinnin in the summer of 1952, and that he said the poem had originally been addressed to Brinnin as a letter.

In PROLOGUE, Thomas, the druid-bard—as in the elegiac IN MEMORY OF ANN JONES—identifies himself as the Welsh Noah preparing his poems as a kind of patchwork ark. He returns to one of his early uses of Wales to represent a Biblical country in the face of the flood 'which is rising now.' He offers to the 'strangers' and to the animals of Wales (Tom Tit and Dai Mouse, the sea-legged fox) refuge in the ark from the flood, 'the fountainhead / of fear, rage red, man alive.' Perhaps the machine and industrialization lie behind the 'rage red' fear which is flooding Wales (and the world), since the image is not far removed from that of the molten slag of the blast furnaces. Industrialization and mechanization are drowning the pristine faiths of Wales (and the world). He uses again the machinery of the drowned towns and villages

for his ark to stream over. The poem ends: 'My ark sings in the sun / At god speeded summer's end / And the flood flowers now.' PROLOGUE rhymes in a kind of 'wind-up' effect—which means that a new word ends every line up to 50 in the 100 lines, and then the rhymes wind down: 49 rhyming with 51; 48 with 52; and so on. This device has to be pointed out to most readers.

AN APPROACH TO DYLAN THOMAS, *Linden Huddleston* (PENGUIN  
NEW WRITING, No. 35—1948.)

Salvation from the inevitable end will come through the poems, by means of Love, 'under the stars of Wales.'

Concerning structure, we can note that MILK WOOD is not a play in the conventional sense comprising central characters whose actions lead to climax and denouement; rather, it is a poetic drama for a plastic medium — the voices being the more important element, as Thomas indicates in his subtitle. Most is gained from a simple reading — as JOHN BROWN'S BODY by Benet, or the excerpted sequences from MAN AND SUPERMAN by Bernard Shaw (called DON JUAN IN HELL), which had such success when read by Charles Laughton and others. Scenery and backdrops were used in one Broadway production of MILK WOOD; but I rather think these would detract from its effect.

The play can be grouped in 'Thomas' works with the stories of PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG DOG, because of the comic characterizations, the understandable exploitation of region (the Welsh locale), even what we would call local color. Preceding it, though not published until the year after his death were parts of QUITE EARLY ONE MORNING (chiefly material commissioned by the BBC — the British first edition having been assembled by Aneurin Talfan Davies, Director of the Welsh Division). The title-piece furnishes the germ of time-schemes and setting of a day in the life of the citizens of a 'cliff-perched town at the far end of Wales . . .' (and it includes his most popular recorded piece, A CHILD'S

CHRISTMAS IN WALES — 1945). MILK WOOD is simply a lyrical elaboration of a day's events in a Welsh town, with 69 various characters, the whole presided over by a First Voice and Second Voice, functioning like the chorus, not of the Greeks, but of Shakespeare, a scene-changer, scene-setter — giving the play its very unusual and attractive effect. As in the stream-of-consciousness of Joyce, we are able to see into the minds, the dreams of the personae, to see the past as well as the present — the whole, a play of the imagination sculptured chiaroscuro out of the blackness of night.

Here, we note the peculiar wit of Thomas — most often shown through meaningful and suggestive metaphor. The familiar talking 'like a man with the Elgin marbles in his mouth' is enough. The first Voice opens the play in darkness:

To begin at the beginning: It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblerstreets silent and the hunched, courtier's and rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeblack, slow black, browblack, fishing-boat-bobbing sea. Here is a mouthful of intricate consonantal chiming. No lines could purposefully happen more reminiscent of Welsh poetry, alliteration, and Hopkins.

If the characters of Edgar Lee Masters' SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY are speaking from a time after death, the characters and action of MILK WOOD are very much in the present, and very much alive. Llareggub Hill itself, and Milk Wood under it, are what we see in our imaginations when the First Voice describes the coming of day:

Stand on this hill. This is Llareggub Hill, old as the hills, high, cool, and green, and you can see all the town below you sleeping in the first of the dawn.... The Principality of the sky lightens now, over our green hill, into spring morning larked and crowed and belling....

Sinbad Sailors dreams of Mae Cottage waiting 'raw as an onion' for Mister Right to leap up the burning tall hollow splashes of leaves like a brilliantined trout.' And later:

Outside, the sun springs down on the rough and tumbling town. It runs through the hedges of Goosegog Lane, cuffing the birds to sing. Spring whips green down Cockle Row, and the sea shells ring out. Llareggub this snip of a morning is wildfruit and warm, the streets, fields, sands, and water springing in the young sun.

Captain Cat, the blind sea-captain retired in Schooner House, hears, Tiresids-like at the beginning of the play, the voices of the dead sailors, asking in the Anglo-Welsh idiom about the goings on of the worldly world: How is it above? Is there rum and laverbread (a kind of seaweed dish), bosoms and robins? Ebenezer's church bells? Tiddlers (minnows) in a jam jar? ... As a medium between the living and dead, Captain Cat is a presiding personage, along with the chorus (First and Second Voices). Thomas read the First Voice in the New York production.

One of the earliest mentions of the main subject of *UNDER MILK WOOD* concerns the love of Miss Myfanwy Price and Mog Edwards the Draper, who offers to take Miss Price, the Sweetshop keeper, away to his Emporium on the Hill where the change hums on wires; all the bells of the tills of the town will ring, he promises, for their wedding. The detestable parsimony of Caradoc Evans' shopkeepers is here changed to an endearing humor.

Evans the Death, the undertaker, lies laughing in his sleep. Next-door in the little pink-eyed cottage lies the 240-pound (17 stone) butcher, Mr. Waldo; after a flashback to his precocious childhood, we realize the horror of marriage in any form to Mr. Waldo. Mrs. Ogmores-Prichard sleeps under 'virtuous polar sheets' and tortures her two husbands with her precautions against dirt, disease-germs, her obsession with cleanliness; she refuses to take a bird-watching lodger, 'with his little telescope and his bag of bread-crumbs,' because she doesn't want 'persons in her nice clean rooms breathing over all the chairs.'

Young girls of the play — like Gossamer Beynon, schoolteacher, or Lily Smalls, Mrs. Beynon's servant, or Mae Cottage lie 'bedded soft or glide in their dreams,' or are exposed to the X-Ray eyes of No-good Boyo and Sinbad Sailors. Maryann Sailors, 85, thinks of her childhood and 'praises the Lord who made porridge;' Willy Nilly Postman and his wife (stock types) busily steam open the letters of the town; Jack Black the Cobbler hammers out a high heel for the shoe of the second wife of Dai Bread the Baker. P.C. Atilla Rees, policeman, stamps out of the station in a heavy beef-red huff.

Lord Cut Glass listens to his 66 clocks, 'one for each year of his loony age;' to him, Spring and May-milk and love mean nothing but a closeness to the Last Black Day. This Mr. Time comes as close to being an allegorical figure of evil as any in the play, if we recall Thomas' lines:

Time held me green and dying Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

As the spring day advances under Milk Wood, the earth-spirit, vegetation-mother, fertility, is represented by Polly Garter, the town fancy-woman, who nurses her new bonny baby under the washing line, tells the 'little milky creature' its father is 'over the hills and far away.' She says: 'Oh, isn't life a terrible thing, thank God.'

Like Dai Bread the Baker and Willy Nilly Postman, Reverend Eli Jenkins, the Bard of Llareggub, is a stock Anglo-Welsh figure; in hackneyed but humorous lines he invokes Gwalia (Wales) and pronounces finally the theme of the play in mundane terms:

For whether we last the night or no I'm sure is always touch-and-go. ... We are not wholly bad or good Who live our lives under Milk Wood, And Thou, I know wilt be the first To see our best side, not our worst.

Against the dark thoughts of Mr. Pugh, who secretly reads LIVES OF THE GREAT POISONERS in a sublimated hatred

for his nagging wife . . . the robust but drunken home life of Mr. and Mrs. Cherry Owen . . . the loves of Mog Edwards and Miss Price, Gossamer Beynon and Sinbad Sailors . . . against these, there is the remembrance by Captain Cat of his old love, Rosie Probert: 'Lazy early Rosie with the flaxon thatch . . . clearly and near to him speaks from the bedroom of her dust . . .' While the Captain touchingly calls: 'Come back! Come back!'—dusk showers down slowly over byre and sea and town, the Captain voyages through his tears; and, again sleeping, he 'sails to see the dead.'

Polly Garter speaks for the voice of Earth Mother when she, like Gretta Conroy in Joyce's *THE DEAD*, recalls her former Ideal, Michael Furey. Counterpointing Captain Cat's conjuring of Rosie Probert, Polly Garter sings about Willy Weasel in nostalgic tones—even though, singing as the play closes, she lies in Milk Wood in the arms of Mr. Waldo, 'under the rattling tongues of the neighbours:' 'But I always think as we tumble into bed / Of Little Willy Wee who is dead, dead, dead . . .' However, Mr. Waldo all the time 'smacks his live red lips.' In opposition to this robustness, is the meaning of Milk Wood for Mary Ann Sailors: an Eden and Heaven. While the Reverend Eli Jenkins sees in the wood 'a green-leaves sermon.'

Identifiable symbols embody Thomas' old theme: like ourselves, these characters must accept the inevitability of death and all now in light must go into the dark; but there is the mystic force in life (the parable in the grain of corn) which drives us into love as well as toward age and into the grave. Welsh Milk is the scene of this continual battle; as the play ends and night falls, the wood comes alive.

Wales and Llareggub are the microcosm of this message; but Thomas' theme struggles toward a macrocosm, a universal. In 1952, Thomas outlined in a talk for broadcast the plot of a projected long poem he intended calling *COUNTRY HEAVEN*:

. . . The godhead, the author, the milky-way farmer, the  
first cause,  
architect, lamplighters, quintessence, the beginning  
Word . . . on top of  
a hill in Heaven, weeps whenever . . . one of his worlds  
drops dead, . . .  
explodes, murders itself. And when He weeps, light and  
his tears glide  
down together, hand in hand. So, at the beginning of  
the projected  
poem, He weeps, and Country Heaven is suddenly dark.  
Bushes and owls  
blow out like candles. And the countrymen of Heaven  
crouch all to-  
gether under the hedges, and, among themselves  
surmise which world,  
which star, which of their late turning homes, in the  
skies has gone  
forever.

One does not need great sensibility to sympathize with this common nightmare of the Nuclear Age! The Heavenly inhabitants spread the rumour: it is the Earth. 'The Earth has killed itself. It is black, petrified, / wizened, poisoned, burst; insanity has blown it rotten . . .' Across the Light, the former inhabitants of Earth call to one another and try to recall in their 'Edenic hearts' what Earth was like. As did the characters of MILK WOOD, they remember: ' . . . places, fears, loves, exultation, misery, animal joy, ignorance and mysteries, all we know and do not know.'

In his lifetime, Thomas was unable to realize much of this all-but-impossible scheme. But, in conclusion, I suggest that he salvaged some of this theme in UNDER MILK WOOD. Like the projected poem, the play becomes at last an affirmation of the beautiful and terrible worth of the Earth, as Thomas put it. 'It grows into a praise of what is and what could be on this lump in the skies.'

In a letter from Wales to America (1952), he penned this astonishing message to Brinnin:

Give my love, if ever you see them or believe it, to Sarah, Lloyd and Loren, Marion and Cummings, Stanley Moss, Jean Garrigue, Gene Baro, Doris, David Lougee, Howard, Patrick Boland, and any ugly stranger in the street.

Recalling the story of the feast of the rich man for the strangers, in the New Testament (Luke XIV, 16 ff.), one sees the generosity of Thomas' attitude. It is useless to theorize what might or might not have happened, had Thomas heeded his own impulse to stay away from the United States. Necessity dictated the journey; and one fruit of an otherwise-illfated association was *UNDER MILK WOOD*.

His elementary use of place rises above mere regional writing, to a finer synthesis becoming the essential scene of good literature. It is partly, but not altogether, flattering that America and its people seem to have had some part in the triggering of events leading to *UNDER MILK WOOD* . . . and ultimately, unfortunately to the poet's demise. The altogether-open kindness of St. Julian with the Leper, Hart Crane's anonymous assignations, are nothing to Thomas' beery charity and love, reaching out in this moving play to embrace even the American 'strangers.' He wrote this last sweet song for the anonymous faces at hearings, recitals, plays, trials . . . (Continued from page 296)

adds a note of strength to the man's search. For Stevens, then, reflection, when compared to the act of experience, is of secondary importance. This conclusion is borne out by the entire body of his poetry. He is more concerned with getting at reality than with reflecting upon it. However, the work of the imagination includes both reflection and perception.

But what does Stevens mean by imagination? Not the fictive thing that we ordinarily mean by the term. When we say a man 'imagined' something, we generally mean that he has removed himself from reality. But, for Stevens, the

imagination cannot be fictive in this sense; for, he states in *THE NECESSARY ANGEL*: 'the imagination loses vitality (in proportion) as it ceases to adhere to what is real.'

What Stevens means by imagination will be clarified by an investigation of his imagery. In the following poem, he calls the imagination a blue guitar:

**THE MAN WITH THE BLUE GUITAR.**

The man bent over his guitar  
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.  
They said, 'You have a blue guitar,  
You do not play things as they are.'  
The man replied, 'Things as they are  
Are changed upon the blue guitar.'<sup>1</sup>

'They' do not agree with the guitarist's use of his imagination. Since the imagination is, for Stevens, a man's habitual way of looking at things, it may be supposed that the man in the poem does not agree with 'their' vision of reality. Yet, each man's vision of reality is his own and is influenced by his previous visions as well as by reflection upon direct encounters. A man's personal backlog of impressions always colors his present acceptance of things. Is this to say that, for Stevens, there are only personal impressions and nothing against which to verify them? Later in the same poem, Stevens answers this question:

I cannot bring a world quite round  
Although I patch it as I can.  
I sing a hero's head, large eye  
And bearded bronze, but not a man  
Although I patch him as I can  
And reach through him almost to man.

<sup>1</sup> THE MAN WITH THE BLUE GUITAR.

*If to serenade almost to man  
Is to miss, by that, things as they are,*

*Say that it is the serenade  
Of a man that plays a blue guitar.*

Stevens says, in effect, that if his song is not exactly things as they are, at least it is his song. Each man plays his own blue guitar; its serenade is the way in which he lives. What is the function of the imagination? It looks upon reality and makes it capable of being understood. It does this in direct encounter. It finds the reality of things. Its subsequent reflection upon the direct encounter has the sole purpose of deepening and enriching the primary, initial encounter. A man of imagination cannot live on the surface of things; rather, he sees clearly and deeply into reality—he notices things that other people miss.

Besides being a blue guitar, the imagination appears in Stevens as a light. In *IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST*, it is found in the harbor lights sending their crisscross lines out over the dark sea:

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,  
Why, when the singing ended and we turned  
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,  
The lights in fishing boats at anchor there,  
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,  
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,  
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Here the imagination is seen focusing attention and enriching the direct, immediate vision of the sea. In other words, a life lived in the light of the imagination is an organic unity, an ordered and coherent thing.

But, what is the validity of the imagination as it sees reality thus? Does it impose an order? Or does it deepen the experience of the thing immediately? In a poem written in 1955, the last year of his life, Stevens asks himself these same questions and answers them. It is not the rhetoric of such a tactic which engages our attention, but the criterion

of value proposed by Stevens. This criterion ultimately is the basis for judging the validity of the imagination's function. He wrote:

I wonder, have I lived a skeleton's life  
As a disbeliever in reality,  
A countryman of all the bones in the world?  
Now, here, the snow I had forgotten becomes  
Part of a major reality, part of  
An appreciation of a reality  
And thus an elevation, as if I left  
With something I could touch, touch every way.

And yet nothing has been changed except what is Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all.<sup>2</sup>

Appreciation of reality itself is held to be a major reality; therefore, adherence to what is real is the criterion of value in the imagination. In experiencing a thing, I am forced to reflect upon the function of my imagination. If I find my imagination is deepening and enriching my contact with reality, then that is all I need to know. The imagination does no more nor less than bring me back into fuller and deeper contact with the reality of which I am a part.

What, then, is a poet? What is a poem? The poet is a man of capable imagination, a man who has developed his imagination as fully as he can. The poem is his expression of reality. Insofar as it adheres to the reality expressed, insofar as it helps to deepen a man's future contact with reality, it is valid. As a written account, the poem is removed one step from reality. It humanizes the real and makes it personal. It symbolizes both the experience and the thing. It produces a richness in the poet. For Stevens, speculation whether the imagination is proper to poet as poet or to the poet as man, is not off the point — especially, in the light of the following poem. Are all men to a greater or lesser extent men of imagination? Definitely, yes. Perhaps also, the 'poems' spoken of in this selection are not poems in the written

sense, but poems in the sense of active encounter with reality. A written poem, after all, does express a man's experience. When we express our experience, what is it that leads us to choose this aspect rather than that? It may be the imagination. Perhaps all we have are our poems.

Ariel was glad he had written his poems.

They were of a remembered time

Or of something seen that he liked.

Other makings of the sun Were waste and welter And the ripe shrub writhed.

His self and the sun were one And his poems, although makings of his self, Were no less makings of the sun.

It was not important that they survive. What mattered was that they should bear Some lineament or character,

Some affluence, if only half perceived, In the poverty of their words, Of the planet of which they were part.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> AS YOU LEAVE THE ROOM <sup>3</sup> THE PLANET ON THE TABLE 338

## **MEANING/S & THE WORD : 20TH CENTURY ESSAY**

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PERHAPS MORE PARALLELS AND significant linkages may be uncovered amongst different types of writers than ever before; in this time of cultural fragmentation, heterogeneous groupings such as this are altogether logical — as observed in earlier issues.

Since parceling accident is conspicuously reflected in current poetics — poets being men of the inner self — the tendency has been to over-stress the term ‘schizophrenic’ in describing what is mainly attributable to confusion from disparate (while often individually ordered) projections from outer absorptions. This holds for poetry too. Withdrawn romantics are comparatively rare; indiscriminate application of the ‘schizo’ label disregards the individual case.

Not improbably, percentages of borderline cases of personality-disintegration (those unpurposefully looking away from realities) are rising. But — besides recalling the ancient chicken-or-egg-priority rebuttal — the proliferating no-country contests for mutual misunderstandings are not hodgepodes concocted in the bewildered brains of a confused literary elite. They are puzzles shaped out of dizzying conglomerations of actual evolvments; and writers are affected (or infected) as are people from other walks — not a few, distracted to extremes where they do not preserve an essential unity of intentioned personality.

And, in this article, prose is considered, with only secondary references to poetry: GOETHE, *A Critical Introduction*, Henry Hatfield (NEW DIRECTIONS — \$1.95); GEORGE GISSING, *A Critical Biography*, Jacob Korg (U. OF WASHINGTON Press — \$6.75); *THE SPYGLASS*, Views and Reviews, 1924-1930, Donald Davidson, edited by John Tyree Fain (VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY Press — \$4.); *THE NEW RYTHUM*

and Other Pieces, Ronald Firbank (NEW DIRECTIONS — \$5.25), hitherto-unpublished fictions; AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY, Curtis Zahn, Introduction by Herbert Gold (NEW DIRECTIONS-SAN FRANCISCO Review, Paperb. Original — \$1.95), short fiction ; GOGOL'S WIFE & Other Stories, Tommaso Landolfi, translated by Raymond Rosenthal, John Longrigg, Wayland Young (also N.D.—\$4., \$1.95, paperb.).

Two hundred years separate the subject of the first and the writings of the last two. Through dissections or by direct exemplifications, the six books delineate developments leading to the prevalent literary approach today — an intense singleminded one. Individuated though the works are, the concerns are basically similar and similarly approached: all are involved with social currents, each with its own personal probing of life-problems.

The range encompasses: Hatfield's treatment of Goethe as a kind of late-arriving, one-man post-Renaissance who preserved an opposition to intellectualizing trends and fathered the 'modern European minds which distilled works out of private emotional reactions; Korg on Gissing's preoccupation with plotted stories about poverty, and portraying in him a progenitor of lesser 'socially-conscious' novelists and actual propagandists of the early part of this Century when Davidson was doing the featured column from which his book is taken; the humorous, semi-precious inventions (deadly-revealing, all the same) of Firbank; the semi-baroque, 'real' unrealities of Landolfi; and the selfconsciously-inchoate commentaries of Zahn. (Scores of combinations of other books might be similarly linked.)

#### GOETHE LIVES ON AS MAKER

The new study of the complicated character revealed in the varied abundance of one whom many regard as most nearly having approached embodiment of 'universal man' (in European civilization) is extremely good reading. Hatfield uses an unusually uncomplicated syntax. He manages to

consider astonishing numbers of relevant details, without bogging down in the mass of his materials; deftly interwoven, are observations upon both the private and public life of the subject, together with analyses of an array of selected writings. Forty percent of the contents is devoted to FAUST, I & II. Not simply because these were Goethe's crowning works, but justifying Hatfield's over-all thematic intent: to view Goethe's lengthy progression into depths and across breadths which entitled him to recognition as a pervasive background figure influencing all who would deal with 'world' perplexities through individuated apertures.

Although this critic's interpretations of course may be debatable, he directs attention to juxtapositions (by dates) of writings with events and acts of Goethe in ways not previously noted. He's never vague, never asserts conclusions without citing (amongst the profusion of information available) what led to them. To what degree Goethe's earlier and far-less original 'classicism' may be ascribed to his so-called instability of aims and occupations when a young man, may be questioned; yet, the ascertainable facts undeniably do support such a finding. Then, Goethe's but slightly-later beginning fascination with what Hatfield calls his new classical uses of the ancient modes and strains; and, finally, while himself professing anti-romantic ideas of literature (actually, anti-sentimental) proceeding to delve his inner-man for depictions of the vaster human dilemma.

Throughout this cogent illumination of an Eighteenth Century genius, Hatfield expresses himself as a student of philosophy and ethics as well as the literary authority; but he's not dogmatic in these other areas—assured, yet in manners of suggestion and persuasion. The firmer strictly-literary pronouncements include — interestingly, in this connection — a declaration that *THE ELECTIVE AFFINITIES* is Goethe's greatest novel. And he cites this book's greater

complexities (than in any prior to FAUST), stressing its delayed and long-dubious 'placement' in critical perspective. In other words, saying that the fact the novel has been less read by the public at large, while receiving the special attention of scholars, supports his verdict of excellence. . . . However — and particularly with new and better English translations available — more and more of Goethe is being 'discovered' by thousands to whom he had been scarcely more than a name.

## **GISSING: PREVIEW OF MODERN INDIVIDUALISM**

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While George Gissing was, in effect, an early 'protest' writer, Jacob Korg makes clear that he must be so categorized almost entirely upon quite nonrebellious novels and essays. And yet, his bitterly-factual descriptions of then-worsening environments for all men whose bents were not 'cogwise' (emphasizing conditions which have continued to stir pity over what is popularly called the 'plight' of the creative artist), have since moved scores of others to pour forth revolutionary pleas for reform. Most of Gissing's novels are built upon fictionized personal tribulations and observations. Nor was he politically motivated. No informed analyst of economics and large-scale causes, he commented upon various 'isms' chiefly in the light of ethical results and probabilities. Korg indicates he might even be called of materialistic mind; his concern was centred upon immediate, specific imbalances injurious to men of talent. He repeatedly endorsed the idea that social betterment might be achieved by better provision for the gifted few, and speculated little upon poverty at large.

These limitations, however, have not reduced the sequential importance of Gissing; for that matter, he was not by any means an altogether unsuccessful man of letters in his lifetime. His influence was felt; and his choices of unhappy backgrounds and painful themes set him apart from contemporaries and brought on publishing troubles caused solely by his early nonconformism.

Korg, another lucid and forthright critic, devotes considerable portions of this thick volume to Gissing's controversies with editors. Accompanying precise appraisals of his subject's voluminous output, are detailed narrations of the fates of mss., of how books sold, and of reactions to

them. While the minute attention to Gissing's private life in relation to the writings is quite common critical practice, this research into his difficulties in getting what he wished into print is less so—rendering Korg's study of especially keen interest to authors and persons in the book-world.

And this critic also extends the routine scholarly coverage in other areas. In analyzing Gissing's significance, he deals not only with those more-outstanding contemporaries for whom Gissing himself felt affinities or with whom he was in conscious contradiction, but gives account to those whose appositeness was then less obvious, and to many recent and current figures.

## **A SOLID AMERICAN CRITIC: DAVIDSON**

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THE SPYGLASS turns forth and back in time. The sightings aren't chronologically ordered; they form continuities to bring into sharper relief the decidedly-liberal, if by no means 'radical' (in the present usage), and independent findings of Donald Davidson. And it may be assumed that Mr. Fain had Mr. Davidson's approval of these arrangements.

Though treating of comparatively little poetry in these selections, the evidences are frequent that the poet in Davidson exercised major influence in forming views rarely expressed in a newspaper (Nashville TENNESSEAN); observations rising from deep contemplation and adjusted to longterm perspectives were then already literally extinct in such media. Statistics in the Introduction also show that Davidson favored other poets for guest-writers.

The author having been young in those years, the quality of mature, restrained irony is noteworthy (one section, by the way, is titled: Irony: Edith Wharton and Louis Bromfield, with the former significantly rated much above the latter — both then having been far from the ends of their careers). The since-proven validities of his judgments are remarkable; the foregoing side-reference is but one of dozens of instances. Compared with a majority of oncoming critics of our generation, Davidson was (and is) firmly frank, evincing no fears of literary enemies, avoiding the equivocatory phrases which devitalize too many knowledgeable treatments. He was confident of his criteria, and richly equipped to dare being so. Today, however, it would almost appear that the less adequate the reviewer's background, the more positively assertive he will be—and often merely saying yea to another. Davidson frequently contradicted his better-entrenched seniors, scarcely respecting the prior opinions of the pundits

of that time.

As a Southerner on a Southern paper, he allowed disproportionate space to Southern authors; yet, it cannot be charged he was regionally prejudiced in remarks about any specific author he did examine. This book opens with an editorial essay, *Provincialism*, wherein Davidson provocatively endeavors to broaden and restore the term to higher meaning; and he makes plain his own conception: that an important writer must be true, not just to himself, but to his place. Indicatively, this essay voices admiration for the late Middleton Murry; quite selfconsciously Davidson moves himself into the ranks of the 'independents.'

Contra his fairly conservative, somewhat sentimental nature, he unhesitatingly granted superior status to authors whom he personally found disturbing and even unpleasant—as in acknowledging the vast gulf between D. H. Lawrence and Harold Bell Wright (an extreme citation, but Wright was then still taken seriously). To be sure, the summoning of Lawrence raised a 'counter,' a prophetic comment upon the augmenting devotion to Sex, to win big sales. Here, too, are sharp observations regarding the soon-to-be-realized effects of book-clubs on the already-meagre distribution of works of solidier merit (the Twenties saw the inauguration of this mass-sales technique).

As to little magazines of the time—for an ex-editor of one (*THE FUGITIVE*)—his enthusiasm was dim. But this again demonstrates critical detachment. His remark about *POETRY* (Chicago), back in 1926, well might apply in 1964: '... publishing bundles of verse, good, bad, and indifferent ...;' and he called attention to the fund-raising which, rather than whatever the magazine's merits, keep it alive.

Though headings bear dates of four decades ago, this volume's contents are not dated; rather, they are loaded with valuable immediate relevancies concerning: Conrad Aiken, Ellen Glasgow, Glenway Wescott, Sherwood Anderson,

Ernest Hemingway, H. L. Mencken, Thornton Wilder, and numerous others.

## **FIRBANK: GROWING IN PRESTIGE**

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With what degrees of approval these independent critics might look upon Ronald Firbank may not be too firmly guessed; but there's little doubt that, had men of their turn of mind been editors of large British publishing houses in the forefront of the Century, this author would have fared better than he did. During his lifetime (he died in 1926), much of his best never saw print; and he personally had to finance earlier books. Only in the U.S.A. did he finally gain somewhat wider recognition, in those years.

However, the extremely-belated publication of the 'new' materials in *THE NEW RYTHUM* (a title intended for a novel, unwritten except for these substantial fragments) results from their discovery in family-storage after what was thought to have been the complete works were published a couple of years ago.

Though no later author has successfully employed the typical Firbankian mode/s of humorous satire, his influences have been many; and, with expanding posthumous popularity, more and more young writers have gained from study of his flightily-exaggerated and oblique effects. Now, with this book, the true arduousness of the labors preceding his brilliant final products, becomes apparent (he had liked to give the impression that they had been dashed off). These early or unrevised writings are, by comparison, for instance, with the fine-ground precision of vocabulary in *VAINGLORY*, semi-crude. The finished ms. of that novel ensued amassment of fifteen notebooks!

But lack of matured subtlety and less-skilled verbal pyrotechnics by no means reduces *LADY APPLEDORRE'S MESALLIANCE* (here, first published in toto) or some of the rest to the level of mere research-interest; this, and other bits (including the reprinted *A STUDY IN TEMPERAMENT*, omitted

from the collected works) easily would find good print under another name, today — and they are excellent entertainment.

Rare photographs and facsimile holographs also are presented; and the book closes with an inventory of a London sale (Dec. 1961), comprising several of the things just then unearthed. The Introduction is by Alan Harris. Both book and jacket are beautifully designed, utilizing reproductions of Firbank's hand-written notes.

## **A STUBBORNLY-RANDOM ICONOCLAST**

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Curtis Zahn displays a uniquely-right (for him, alone) disrespect for words and syntax. The preponderant element of interest in the preceding authors is not style — whether for favorable or unfavorable notice. Not even in Firbank, though idiomatically distinctiveness and distinction ‘made’ him; Firbank is concededly inimitable and, regardless that many have been affected by him in their own writings, cannot be said to have passed on his peculiar way with the language. But, the extreme liberties taken by Zahn could encourage — perhaps ‘dangerously’ — imitative disregard for usage and definition, to the deteriorative ‘promotion’ of a literary decadence many declare threatens Western culture. Precise communication via the written word, is basic to a civilized continuum — needless to say.

Painstakingly, Zahn has, with detached deliberation (practicing an inconsistently-rummaging craft probably related to his ever-changing manners of painting in oils which have been more exhibited than have his writings, to date) created his own grammar and concocted his own words whenever he could not wrench adequate distortions out of Webster’s. The fruit is Zahn-language: conZenulated for the malbefuddledment of unpiddulated readers, most of whom have only slight difficulty in not translating him.

Exactly what are Zahn’s most-repeated underlying theses? When translated, they are unconvincing in any positive sense. It may be found that one fundamental cause of this failure — exemplified in this work — lies in his arbitrary alignments of unreal characters who, therefore, do not come alive. Usually, only the narrator (the author himself) is projected, and even he often wavers among contradictions. Others are puppets, with inconstant nonpersonalities — sometimes switched about to speak from

other mouths. Zahn's often-hilariously successful nay-statements to the conformities he ceaselessly attacks, seem — on the surface — extremely far-out UNacademic reaches; but, when examined apart from the (also undeniably-hilarious) mussed-up language, the stripped statements are parallels to the if-to-prove-so's and maybe-yes-not's devitiating typical doctoral papers.

Put bluntly: this book shows Zahn an abstruse past-master in assailing any and all systems, in reducing to the absurd any and all rules of social conduct, in shattering all plans for 'progress'; and then, he (consistently, to himself, no doubt) omits the offer of a foundation-plan for construction of any most notional positive panaceas. Such a criticism is not unfair; for — slapdash verbiage and wild syntax, notwithstanding — Zahn is a serious writer, all the same. In truth, he is a philosophical writer, addressing us through abstractions. Which means that the undoubted values in his work demand serious notice, obscured though they may be by his obsession for external 'difference.' Yet, only those readers willing to stretch their speculations to the strange far boundaries of an only-partly understandable frame of universal pessimistic uncertainty, are likely to give this author enough credit that they may even begin to raise the central issue of his negativism.

A limited audience, then, of determined minds ought to extract (if doing most of the work themselves) enough to stimulate them to reargue A Purpose and to reappraise their measures of 'adjustment' to existence . . . and stay sane. These are the ones who do, privately and without putting it into words, recognize what lay behind Shakespeare's 'to be, or not to be;' and they will laugh and approve of Zahn, probably with a contrary feeling that verges on abhorrence. And yet—did Zahn himself write in expectation of such a net result? Close reading of his first collection does not indicate to this reviewer a firm dedication to what would seem ought

to have been the impersonal goals of which he merely hints in passing.

AND MORE-LUCID DENIALS

Finally, another intense individualist (for Zahn is one, despite his preoccupied rejections of faith in himself) in whose book the first striking dissimilarity is his manner of expression. And since the tales of Tommaso Landolfi are here in translation/s, one marvels at the consistent transmission, via style, of his own peculiar atmosphere (n.b.: there are three different translators). For how many writers could this relaxed, humorous, cruel tone be preserved by diverse interpreters? For example, it's virtually impossible to conceive of Zahn's stories told in Italian; his unique style would be lost from the first sentence.

Landolfi's central problem is the lonely isolation of individual consciousness. He realizes there is no solution and describes the never-to-be-satisfied quests for extension of identity through varied situations and characters, in a pervasive kind of fatalistic mood. Sexual urges motor these searches—sometimes described in physical detail, sometimes indirectly, but unmistakably inferred.

Actual communication with another never happens, he is repeating: one only feels and communicates with oneself. Though little of the analyst is overly conspicuous, Landolfi proves a profound student of psychology—not only human, but other-animal . . . and of reptile, insect, and things growing from the earth. A comparison might be made with Vladimir Nabokov, an older writer who conceivably might have influenced him.

But Landolfi has derived from others only in the broader, inescapable sense, creating from the sensations, reflections, and yearnings common in some degree to every man, his own special works. In him, the degree of sensitivity is shown to be deep and comprehensive, whether he be fantasizing the man who invents and gives life to a mate he vainly hopes

may prove the durable creature which will respond to his every sensual desire (GOGOL'S WIFE), or whether he be depicting the tragic consequences for one who attempts to mould gratification for his impotence through intimate training of a flesh-and-blood adopted daughter (THE DEATH OF THE KING OF FRANCE). In THE TWO OLD MAIDS, the longest story, Landolfi's explorations are subtler, using less fantasy and more realism, with a monkey as chief character in a tale of the frustrations of the unsatisfied and childless woman.

This is a fascinating writer of substance. While he has no obvious aim to conduce any sort of philosophical attitude (unless this very neutral stance might be considered one), he is fully aware of universal problems. The implications of many comments are carried by intimate portrayals distortedly reflecting real conflicts of real beings in an afflicted society.

J.B.M.