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LIVING LITERATURE

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67

ISSUE

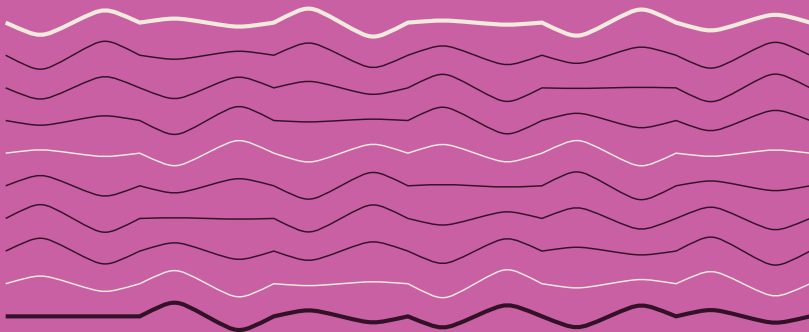
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TRACE

No. 67

Living Literature

Essays & Articles · Poetry · Reviews

1968

Edited by JAMES BOYER MAY

A CLEAN READING EDITION

Advertisements, subscription promotions, the front cover and blank leaves have been omitted, as has the running trade directory ("The Chronicle"), which runs in two instalments here; a note in its place records what they held, and two further notes name the plate sections, which a text edition cannot carry. 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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THE POET AND THE 20TH CENTURY

by Gene Fowler

For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. "Draw not nigh hither," says the Lord to Moses; "Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Exodus, 3, 5.) There is, then, a sacred place, and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous.

— Mircea Eliade¹

Then too, he can control the plane only by moving his control surfaces, and the new regimen of flow that is established takes some small time to develop. Even when it is fully developed, it merely changes the acceleration of the plane, and this change of acceleration must be converted, first into change of velocity and then into change of position, before it is finally effective.

— Norbert Wiener²

THESE QUOTATIONS TAKEN TOGETHER without comment should produce in anyone with a capacity for poetry a fundamentally-important insight. However, without comment there is no article; and it's an article I set out to write. My comments will circle and chomp on the insight, doing it relatively little harm.

The poet knows, or should know, there is a psychological parallel to the growth of physics. Primitive man, the physicists decided, lived in an experiential world in which there was no space or time. Then, men, peaking in Newton, gave birth to clear-cut ideas of space and time. Another

batch of men, peaking in Einstein, brought these structures together in a metastructure — our so-called space-time.

¹ THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE — *Harcourt Brace, 1959.*

² CYBERNETICS — *Technology Press (Cambridge, Mass.), 1948.*

The more general psychological truth might be given: Primitive man lived in a thoroughly mixed subjective field, with no clearly-marked boundaries between objective and subjective events. Then, modern man, peaking in someone or other, sorted these out. The objective taught in schools, concretized in technology, etc. The subjective suppressed by parental guidance (stop daydreaming, that isn't real — nothing is hiding in the closet, etc.) or, later, exorcised by psychiatry.

The poets (ambiguously-defined group) have been working toward a reuniting into an articulated whole of the world structures known as objective and subjective.

In a more or less primitive mood, you might pass a graveyard at night under a full moon. Unless you rigorously repress the phenomena, premonitions will rise. These premonitions, resistive to suppression, may become full-blown presences lurking in the dim places among trees, stones, and weeds. And, if you flip, the presences may become fine so-called hallucinations — then, the goblins will give chase to your fleeing soul.

The whole place, with its dimly-lighted, obscurely-dynamic, and suggestive connotative possibilities, becomes a kind of Rorschach Cabin and you project buried segments of the subjective into what you've previously maintained as a stable objective reality.

Your space gradually or quickly becomes nonhomogeneous, or: you get religion!

Is it necessary to return to old beliefs if the sort of projection described is to come into play? Or can we put this old talent to work in new ways?

This is where our second quotation — taken from the field of Kybernetics — comes in.

I assume the reader has had at least high-school physics and knows that velocity and acceleration are first and second derivatives of distance — relative to time. It isn't necessary to remember the equation but just the idea of the derivative as a created entity which has to do with rate of change or exchange.

A usual observer sees space-time in a much less-structured way than Wiener is describing (and seeing) it in this paragraph. A usual observer will see the event in terms of the pilot reacting, the plane changing course, the shell avoided — or hit.

Our observer will, no doubt, see a gang of measurements as relevant. He will know there is a relation between plane and air, though he won't think of it unless wind-tunnels or storms come up, or if speed, distance, and direction are abstract entities useful to keep track of the plane.

Read Wiener's paragraph carefully. Note that he sees (thro imagination and knowing) changed currents developing. And note that he sees in space-time the derivative relationships of acceleration, velocity, and distance. This is very like Moses seeing a particular area or volume as 'holy.'

In each case, a volume of space-time that to others is homogeneous is, to Moses or Wiener, nonhomogeneous. A subjective structure is projected and interacts with a previously-projected objective structure. In each case we see a living reality.

The kind of living reality Moses experienced has been available to actual poets for a long time. Most of them are well-acquainted with it. (By actual poet, I mean one who is not simply mechanical or, to use a better-known term, academic.) The sort of living space or living reality Wiener displays is newer — and almost unheard-of among poets.

When a poet shows a lack of interest in the modes of thought of the mathematician, the physicist, the corporation executive, the salesman, the promoter, etc., he excludes from his work the living realities that are pervasive in and definitive of the Twentieth Century. And bringing in lists of the products of these other realities, doesn't help.

The artist or the scientist may lay claim to attempting to see things the way they are. That isn't possible, of course. The first possible standard would be to see things in a way that works. And a more advanced goal would be to see things in a number of ways with some regard to how and how well each works.

The poem, when it isn't mechanical, is always a chunk of this living reality. There will be elements of an objective reality-structure: the images, sounds, and such. Then, interpenetrated, will be the glow of a subjective presence: the juxtapositions, currents, personally-modified flow-characteristics of the words, syllables, phonemes.

Only a very few of the poems have made this sense of presence moving toward hallucination. That has been true of every age; it's no terrible thing. What is terrible and somewhat astonishing is that in this Century virtually no poems have what might be called the subjective Twentieth Century.

And dangling at this point (my commitment to do an article served), the reader will be left — to reverberate, hopefully, within his own living reality.

IN THE NIGHT

tastes of you on my fingertips
like those few dead leaves
at the end of the oak tree's body
are all that save the skeleton
from the sky

Ron Miles

SOME NOTES ON HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR

by Felix Singer

IN HIROSHIMA 1959: AN ENCOUNTER between a man and a woman — strangers. Twenty-four hours seeming, to them, to us, endless and agonizingly short. The attraction between them a sweet-painful emotional pull. These two alone, with the woman's long-dead first love as recurring third, an open gash in her memories. Both principals are married to others : they cannot stay together, cannot bear to part. Of this simple skimpy stuff Alain Resnais (with Marguerite Duras fashioned, in 1959, one of the most powerful and, in a subtle way, more original, films ever made. And one of the most influential.

That post-Bomb Hiroshima was chosen as setting has led to one of the film's major influence-effects; but this was, I'm sure, unplanned. Why was Hiroshima chosen? That question has led to a great deal of cudgeling of mighty, or at least mighty prestigious, intellects. Theories range all the way from neat symbolic patterns to dismissal of the choice of setting as a money-making gimmick. More than enough having been written about the ins and outs of the matter, and after lengthy weighing of contrary arguments, I'll simply offer my own conclusions: Hiroshima as locale contributed much in the way of evocative, allusive echoes . . . semi-significances . . . reverberations. But the setting is not intrinsic to the film's primary effect. Getting down to the rockbottom logic of it : there simply is not enough in the film to justify this setting. Logic is irrelevant. The film is a living work of art : where/as/because it is.

'The music of words is more important than their sense,' Resnais has said. Sounds like who? Your Aunt Mathilda

Josephine? Like poet, maybe? The film is a totality of impressions visual-auditory subliminal. A cinematic poem achieving tremendous immediate effect Where/as/because it is.

This sort of answer would not of course satisfy the intellectualists. And it is their critical brainery about the film that has produced many of its influence-effects. Because HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR was labeled Fraught With Profound Symbolic Significance (and perhaps also in some part because of American guilt feelings about Hiroshima) the film encountered relatively little censorship when released here in 1960. Thus it provided a major breakthrough, helping, perhaps more than any other film, to batter holes in the barriers on sex, nudity, and adultery in cinema. U.S. censorsminds cannot tolerate sex as sex. The deepest, most fundamental of human experiences may not be shown per se: there must be Something Else as chaser: Symbolic Significance, Redeeming Social Value, what have you. Not even Esthetic Value is always enough. (Incidentally, to me there is one drawback to courtroom victories for Esthetic Value in censor-threatened art: A number of ordinary mortals who bestow prestige-recognition upon one another in a closed circle become formally accepted in a court of law as Expert Arbiters on Art.) Resnais, by juxtaposing flesh in orgasm with flesh burned by atomic radiation, was interpreted as clothing nudity in profundity, sex in Significance, adultery in existentialism. The result was a species of Gettysburg forcing U.S. film censors to retreat.

Retreat, but still far from rout. As late as January 1967, when I last saw HIROSHIMA, at a college, the program notes made a little much of the heroine's quite offhand remarks about her own 'dubious morality;' there was mention of a seminar of intellectuals on the film, sponsored by the Catholic University of Belgium, and a list of the distinguished participants. Just one word in the program —

‘syballine’ — gave indication that these two sinners did have themselves one glorious time of it in the sack. ‘Do you think the heroine is a monster?’ ran one discussion question, ‘does she distinguish between happiness and unhappiness, truth and falsehood, good and evil?’ The film was bodler-cut at this showing, without a single word of public announcement to that effect — which I don’t call distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Nevertheless, this film . . . shown at a Catholic girls’ college in Chicago . . . that’s an eyebrow-raising precedent.

But the war goes on. Although the bedroom scene is almost a must in a love film today, there’s still powerful resistance to a glimpse of female nipples, much less vaginal hair — and as for the penis, never! (The underground films, I understand, show everything any stag film ever did, plus; but until recently the cops have kept most of it underground.)

Fascinatingly-intricate, ingenious — and ludicrous — are the acro-tualistic batic contortions, the dodges, the evasions, the precisely-gauged camera ced on setups required nowadays to suggest nudity in bed without showing a UR wa millimeter too much of it. In HIROSHIMA, Resnais manages, at least perhaps during the first fifteen minutes, to make haunting pictorial patterns out of this exigency. (Then again, who knows, it may have been his liking here for sculptured images that accounted for those shots of limbs inter-twined.) But how comic, how embarrassing — and, ironically enough, how teasingly-prurient — are all these bedroom scenes purporting to show the wildest sexual abandon . . . with actors, director, and cameraman obviously straining to avoid a second’s exposure of a th a that. . . . The logical solution (and you just wait : sooner or later somebody try it) is simply to start your scene with a couple of closeups : one ere penis, one sure-enough bareassed naked woman (borrow footage fro the Masters’ science-sanctioned files?) . . . let us all gorge

our eyes this a while; then, after the effect wears off (amazingly fast, I'd predict for most people), cut to the facial closeups where the real drama interest resides . . . Or : resides until someone makes a film about the torments of purely-sexual maladjustment — certainly valid dramatic material, certainly requiring some graphic illustration. Grotesquely absurd it is: babies burned alive by napalm . . . that suitable film fare, even for TV, but live flesh enjoying itself — shudder This entire never-ending battle against censorship : one loud ludicrous stupid turmoil, compounded of idealism and neuroticism, fetishism and hypocrisy on both sides. But it is, we cannot too often be reminded, battle that must be fought — anywhere, any time, regardless what we may think of the art object under attack. We must continue to insist (by the right to state, dramatize, photograph all human experience. Some times — the morality involved is questionable, but it keeps happening — sometimes instead of by confrontation, you win with an end result without so intending. And this HIROSHIMA did: a frankly-erotic poem sanctified by an aura of philosophical significance. HIROSHIMA's esthetic influence is far more interesting to contemplate. Resnais was among the first to see a film less as narrative than as a director's (or writer-director's) personal subjective (and therefore inevitably somewhat obscure) statement. Bergman had hovered near that area before HIROSHIMA; but Bergman was theatre-trained and often played for explicitly-projected effect. Antonioni was vague, diffused, enigmatic: here it is, he simply says, make what you will of Resnais communicates his/his character's emotions: with needle-like uniquely-subliminal stabs into the viewer. Directly down into the subconscious: that was Resnais' unique pioneering contribution in HIROSHIMA. Minus psychological analysis, minus symbolism of any sort, often minus cues, pointer underscoring or explanation. All the conventional means — light and darkness, sound and silence, music and

cadenced speech, cinemat rhythm — are brilliantly employed. But most importantly, uniquely subliminal manipulation via the abrupt flashback cut. In trying to determine precisely how things are done on film, the critic works under a number of handicaps (which most critics are too arrogant to admit, too insecure to make mental allowance for). First of all — the critic's own ignorance. I may be one of the few film critics alive (— currently unemployed — Advt.) who has ever dabbled a bit at splicing films, dissecting technical cinematographic literature, at studying shooting scripts and trying to coordinate mentally what was written, what appears in the viewfinder, what is likely to appear on the celluloid strips. And I know very little about film-making. At least three-fourths of all practicing film critics know less than very little. (So they substitute supercilious wit and personal prejudice for analysis.)

Second, we are never given enough technical information about the intricate collaborations that go into a film — who exactly was responsible for which effect how, etc. For example, when I write Resnais here, one must read Resnais-Duras, allowing for his collaboration with the writer, Marguerite Duras; and to what extent the photographers and editors made decisively-shaping creative contributions and to what extent they merely executed Resnais' design, I don't know.

Third, films are devilishly-hard things to analyze. All flickers past so fast: who can remember exactly which frame preceded which and was held for how long, etc.? All film-viewing does tend to induce a semi-hypnotic trance: and this, precisely this, the subliminal, is the area where HIROSHIMA was supreme, and unique.

Finally, HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR is, for the susceptible, a shattering, a guts-ripping experience: the first feature to show the unspeakable gashes of Hiroshima, the first to cut so tormentingly deep into the viewer's subconscious. And, as

Thomas H. Uzzell has written:

‘If you can see nothing but technique, you cannot see technique.’

This film you must dig; and that’s not slang, that is the only one-word way of saying: partake in a manner intellectual-emotional-intuitive, with a distinct emphasis on the last.

All that as qualification for the following.

The essence of HIROSHIMA’s effect lies in Resnais’ cutting. ‘Oh, of course!’ says the advocate of the currently-fashionable absolutist dogma. ‘The essence of all cinema is cutting.’ I say no. The essence of a film can be in camera movement or in actor movement or in any one of a dozen other factors, all depending on the artist’s intent. Because certain artists brilliantly employ certain devices to attain certain effects, it does not follow that it is the essence of that art to attain all effects only that way. But of HIROSHIMA it is true: the essence is the cut.

The abrupt, jarring cut. Resnais’ cuts are not primarily for speed or irony or shock or any of the dozen other purposes for which the cut may be used. Resnais’ distinctive cuts are flashbacks, to convey the inner emotional state, the memory-pain, of a woman: convey it quite directly, so it feels like, from her subconscious to yours.

(Or — mine. The critic must allow for his own subjectivity, most especially in dealing with this sort of film. For all pronoun generalization below, read: ‘I, and I assume most or all other susceptible Re viewers . . .’) The effect of rightness in these cuts: so acutely right that it literal see hurts — hurts you as emotional participant in this woman’s memory de simultaneously hurts you as film connoisseur. Something beneath wor high or sense . . . something very deep within . . . recognizes, twitch or responds. Zip! you’re suffering in Nevers, France, 1945 . . . zip spi you’re back remembering Nevers in Hiroshima in 1959 — never vdo dissolve or wipe or

pause, always through direct cut from one light the sound-texture realm of sensibility to another — and back yet again. But in instants. These flashback cuts do occasionally come cued in the normal way for we are used to (the only way we were used to, prior to *HIROSHIMA* by someone talking or obviously thinking about the past; but they in the end jut in quite unexpectedly, totally without coherence or logical relevance or without cue or warning, flashing before us as they would often flash of this woman's mind (without her face necessarily registering anything). I as they might — as they in fact commence to! — flash in our mind. Sec Traumatic fragments of a fictitious character's memory have literally become our memory — this, in a manner uniquely subliminal, frightening and ingly penetrating: as is demonstrated when, at moments, the woman on the screen talks of her past and there is no flashback — and yet, why sense and re-experience the flashback, we partake of the texture-colour rhythm of the past in her words. Soon we become so thoroughly Pavlov-conditioned to these ever-so-precisely placed stimuli that a . . . instant flash from Hiroshima's light-music realm to Nevers' automatic ally triggers emotion (a method Resnais was to carry fantastically further in his next film, *LAST YEAR IN MARIENBAD*). I know of no film-maker before Resnais who attempted precise. Of this — working without cues or pointers or implicit explanatory patterns of any sort — plunging directly into the subconscious to convey unarticulated surges of emotion. Buñuel-Dali's *UN CHIEN ANDALOU* — say well, that was seventeen minutes of lunatic cut-cut from one unrelated surrealistic phantasy to another; this was the method used for its own sake, for shock kicks. In *HIROSHIMA*, Resnais showed how to use it for calculated emotional effect within a dramatic-psychologic frame. (Later, in *MARIENBAD*, he does seem in danger of going to the Andalusian dogs . . .) Since *HIROSHIMA*, these devices have become almost commonplace:

Varda, Lelouch — Wells, in *THE TRIAL*, Lumet, in *TH—PAWNBROKER*. In the two last-named, the books on which the films were based openly invited, if not demanded, such cutting. (It wouldnv surprise me if *PAWNBROKER*'s author had been influenced b'c Resnais. Novelists are increasingly using film techniques. This novelist certainly is; yet I find, to my amazement, Resnais-like cuts in a novel section written in 1951.) Fellini, in *8½* — of course, you'd say. Fellini denies the influence. Faced with this, your critic can: a) insist on the highly-plausible connection, claim Fellini was subconsciously influenced or influenced by elements Resnais had injected into the esthetic atmosphere, etc.; b) in the polite-bitchy-intellectually-vague manner this is done, call Fellini a liar; or, c) shrug and give up the Fellini-influenced theory. I consider the latter the only honest course in such instances. But this is for certain: film audiences would not have been half so ready — maybe not *8½%* so ready — to partake of *8½* if it had not been for Resnais' preparing them. And the same holds true for *A MAN AND A WOMAN*, and others. Nothing I have yet seen approaches the subtlety, precision, incisiveness of Resnais' *HIROSHIMA* cutting, or achieves the depth of effect, although many directors use this sort of cut now.

In fact, many directors use nothing but cut-cut now. It's Eisenstein's *Second Coming*. Fades? dissolves? what are you, Rip Van Winkle? These days, they cut — period. In this Resnais manner, in all the tried and true manners — cut, often enough, simply because they don't know what else to do. No doubt there are various reasons: the frenetic go-go rhythm of the jet set which the directors love to chronicle, belong to, or aspire to belong to; the influence of snippy-sloppy TV haste; the meaningless affectless fragmentary rhythm of much contemporary life. . . . But Resnais must have helped start the fashion, by showing how deeply the director could penetrate with cuts alone.

They cut nowadays . . . from face to face, from one corner of room, bed, car to another . . . from Paris 1890 to Paducah 1960 . . . cut. Often without consistency, rhythm, rhyme, or reason. Cut. Godard, Truffaut, Forbes, Losey, Schlesinger, everybody. Cut.

Whatever happened to the slow dissolve, for instance, which can U — say/do so much? To all the time-space symbols — waves, clocks, train wheels, calendars, church bells, etc.? The optical devices were invented a good seventy years ago by Méliès, were ignored and forgotten, re-discovered, slowly perfected. The sign-pointers had to be taught to the same viewers: gradually, audiences learned not to giggle at them, finally to swallow their meaning whole, unconsciously, effortlessly. Use them in a film today, and to the hip you seem hopelessly dated.

What we see nowadays more and more, see practically nothing but THE — I call it the Huh?Cut, because ‘huh?’ is what you the viewer feels, film is in fact what you often hear in the theatre as we all try to reorient ourselves abruptly and to figure out the where-when-why on the screen. Forcing an audience to undertake abrupt drastic reorientation is of course an ancient, quite useful device (Beethoven, for example, love it). But, as Resnais practiced and so many today don’t, the Huh?Cut is not the only device there is. Many shifts of time and place and mood can be better realized in other ways.

The Huh?Cut directors are saying: make ‘em work out there — jolt hell out of their sluggish sensibilities — jar the popcorn out of their mouths — keep ‘em hopping, regardless whether the film’s total effect, pattern, or the particular effect of any single transition, or pace, continuity, or tempo, call for such an audience reaction. An accretion of punctuation devices slowly perfected over a period of decades ought not, I think, be universally junked because directors are too lazy or nervous or faddish or arrogant to use all their tools. It’s as if

most contemporary novelists were to decide to discard everything in the way of spacing and division, run the entire novel together in one paragraph indicating all divisions and transitions simply by a dash.

In 1960-61, *HIROSHIMA* played mostly or entirely in U.S. 'art' theatres. Many came away from it somewhat puzzled. Then Resnais made *LAST YEAR IN MARIENBAD*, a film that illuminates and clarifies *HIROSHIMA*, and especially vice versa — a vehicle into which he threw all the technical tricks used in *HIROSHIMA*, plus more, plus almost everything in the film vocabulary — a fascinating tour de force that might have been made to illustrate how far into pure abstraction the *HIROSHIMA* style could be carried. *MARIENBAD* had a far wider audience than *HIROSHIMA*, I would guess; and I suspect that allowing for the vast difference in degrees of obscurity in the two films relatively fewer people came from *MARIENBAD* completely perplexed.

Which is to say: today's film audience digs. Digs almost anything and everything in the way of new subject matters, approaches, new or newly-rediscussed techniques. I base that conclusion on observing a sorts of people reacting to all sorts of films in Chicago — a city not especially noted for artistic perceptiveness. (Currently there are persistent sullen snarls about tolerating — right smack in the middle of the Loop, mind you! — a huge abstract sculpture by that beatnik weird commie what's-his-name, Picasso.)

When highly-individualistic subjective film artists like Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, Resnais find large responsive audiences in Chicago — when even the more-conventional film-makers like Lean, Wyle Kubrick are making money with extraordinary and (almost, almost) uncompromising films — then it is time to say right out loud that we are here and now living in a golden age of film drama. Rossellini started it all in the late 1940's; Ingmar Bergman is, to my mind, the master and *HIROSHIMA* I would call the most original film since *MAGN*

FICIENT AMBERSONS, the most influential film since CITIZEN KANE. And the overwhelming emotional experience of them all.

POSTSCRIPT: Since writing the above I've seen Resnais' third feature, MURIEL.

Two new Resnais cuts: The timing of sequences overlaps: Scene B follows Scene A but may have happened somewhat before it, etc. This jittery jumbling of short moments underscores subliminally the separateness of the four main characters. Brought together for moments, related but not truly related, they whirl alone, each in his own time-stream, like so many atoms infrequently, all-but-accidentally colliding.

Second: Resnais anticipates his plot, shows you completely-irrelevant shots of apartment-house windows before you have any idea what will happen there. A common device in novels and of course in music; but, as far as I know, new to films. (Except LONELY ARE THE BRAVE. Here, the original novel, Edward Abbey's THE BRAVE COWBOY, called for such a device, but the film's makers completely missed Abbey's richly-articulated symbolism.)

Resnais is still remaking cinematic style. The frenetic cutty-cut craze seems now (I hope?) to be receding, but Resnais' innovations remain in the cinematic vocabulary.

SUNFLOWER JOHNNY

Blow away I care too much already And Windy Far but
worn too much to care Sunflower Johnny So blow away Over
heated moans and Far Flower Dormant Scenes And Single
ecstasy reflects me rainbow starred

Dette Whybrow

TOWARDS PRINT (THE WORD & THE POEM)

by The Editor

PREVALENT MISUNDERSTANDING OF SOME types of modern poetry— not altogether limited to lay readers — has mixed causes. Helpful comment is difficult, because what can be said is bound to appear confusingly paradoxical. The causes rise from old problems originating with the very beginnings of language communication. No matter what varied gimmicks may be employed, poetry remains language, oral or typographic. There's the language-sender and there's the language receiver. And that's that. So, we have the always-debatable question concerning degree of responsibility between the two. After his initial creative burst, how much should the poet refine and rework, with the reader in mind? How much should the reader be asked to labor toward maximum appreciation?

If what many feel to be the poet's responsibility to make himself heard is emphasized, immediate apparently valid objections will be that the genuine artist always is ahead of his time and that people must learn to appreciate his work; that easily-appreciated poetry seldom has layered depths of feeling/meaning to gain lasting significance; that the writer remains honest if he is influenced by speculations about someone's reactions. If what many feel to be the reader's responsibility to penetrate and receive (even what may be so complex as to be labeled enigmatic) is emphasized, immediate objections will be: that simple art is the best art because it affects wider audience; that greatest strength lies in forthrightness of 'saying'; that many simple poems have lived through centuries; etc.

The trouble largely is that generalizations can have only partial validity at best, depending upon which poetries are considered. Nearly-valid statements can be made except in relation to a specific manner of poetizing — more surely, in relation to one particular poem. For poems are — if really poems — things in themselves, each with unique ‘being.’

Today, a large body of modern verse is composed of words with one-to-one denotations or connotations. The words may or may not be metaphoric. For, despite not a few ‘authorities’ to the contrary, extremely effective poetry may be bare of metaphoric words: that is, the metaphors may emerge from larger components — phrases, sentences, perhaps a poem as a whole. And a common contemporary device is that of juxtaposing simple denotative words to produce unsimple images, etc. Not strangely, much of the ‘plainest’ modern poetry of this kind also is charged with being hard to understand. Concerning some of it — that which isn’t half well done — this may not much matter. But, with the better poetry of this type, many elements are involved. One of these has been little considered by critics. In the main, this element has to do with poetry that can — by the less-perceptive, less-imaginative — be read as prose. Should the poets take cognizance of it? In some instances, they might, with helpful results. More readers should take cognizance of it. Today’s environments decidedly are not conducive to relaxed reception of poetry. Many people don’t even realize that a first principle is to read with a quite different mental set from that employed in reading prose.

My intention is not to attack the genre nor to argue that matured poets should change their ways, but to endeavor to point out (or up) a factor which enters into what does or does not enlarge good readership in a period of maximum dissemination of such poetry, along with other kinds (if less obviously the concern here). Admittedly, a great deal of modern ‘poetry’ is not passable, a good deal of it is not

capital-P poetry by anybody's book; but a fair percentage of it (including some that's only dubiously classified as poetry) should be of more value to our culture than this obstacle presently allows.

Excepting the Asiatic ideograms, words (their printed or written shapes), unlike physical clues — especially to events (in stasis: cross-sections of same) — are not in the slightest meaningful from their appearance. Not, as a man is supplied on seeing a chair chained to a floor, a looped gibbet rope, a broken doll in a tire track, a small round hole in a windowpane. Yet, the literate mind — not necessarily in the least learned — translates definitive words with mini-second speed, and is moved as quickly by sight of them as by real occurrences. For, most such words become very firmly imprinted counters for movements, sounds, smells — all sorts of 'happenings' . .

Too many writers — particularly those endeavoring to put across metaphors with unmetaphoric words — seem to ignore this in projecting plain precise language to invoke depths of meaning, multi-level impressions, ambiguities, etc. In a different way, their chances of bringing about rapprochement with larger audiences are as slim and slimmer than are the chances of writers employing laden vocabularies. Rapid reading — so ardently practiced in our day — instead of lessening the reader's hindrances (about which the poet may or may not care), increases them. Characteristic works of the seeming-elementary type also may be read too rapidly even by slower readers who are unaccustomed to poetry. And experienced readers — though they may read rapidly — will be found to penetrate quite complex poetry better than what's translatable on a direct word-to-thing/act/etc. basis. Which means that the problem is not limited to cure by teaching those who don't know how to read poetry.

So — even a sensitive reader may skim lines with a ‘prose’ understanding. Bearing in mind the other side of this, perhaps some poet might do a bit of self-analysis by asking themselves whether the words really do spring forth from the matrix of whatever the polarity of their idea-vision-feeling. Perhaps they sometimes are writing ‘broken prose’ of confusion?

Often, I think, there is more intellectualization and deliberate concoction behind a ‘simple’ poem than there is behind a complex one that borders on the abstruse. I don’t believe that, if the words in fact ‘make’ the poem, it will be quite so speedily scanned by either the trained or the unconvincing reader. In short, I think the publication of far too many ungenuine works has complicated the trouble. Of course there will be misinterpretations and lost understandings of the best poems — always. Yet, the true poem, whatever its genre, is twice likely to be read over again . . . and again, to enter into its being.

Finally, a look at the reverse of the word-to-image-event-idea is irrelevant: a consideration of the fact that, unless the individual engaged at the very moment in composition, the translation does not reverse. We see a rose — and that’s enough. We don’t think ‘rose.’ We smell smog — and we don’t envision that awful word. Yet, we identify the smog. We see a wrecked automobile — and we don’t flash on a mental image of an imaginary news report of an accident. But we may ‘see’ for a split-second a collision. And we well may see — especially if we happen to be poets (as is everyone in some degree) — such words as ‘blood’ or ‘speed’ or ‘crossing’ (for obvious samples). These words are not direct translations of bent or broken auto parts. In a way, this might be noted as a reason the word is the poem. Word-poem is more than word — and it surely must be more than mere word-to-object-event-idea.

EDITORS (AND OTHERS) WRITE

THE POET & THE COMMUNITY

[illegible]

Dear Editors:

On renewing acquaintance with Trace and the little mag business after a long layoff, may I say that my ORE (see Trace No. 66 Directory) is once again on its supernatural beat; risen from the sewage, one might say, my present work being to abstract the literature on that subject. The old flavour is there; but at the bottom of the format ladder as a folded offset sheet. THE DRUID, which I founded and edited for society here (Hertfordshire, Engl.), is passing to another editor. Bad numbers of Nos. 1 & 2 are still available (see Directory, this Trace).

The fine and ancient arguments of 'trad' vs. fad and academia are I see still rife, and egos continue to stalk their supper from all angles. Poets are the perishables housing the Spirit of Poetry; the job is to implant and sow from all levels for reaping at all levels. The poetry matters, not the poet; in its activity, its mental life enables the community to grow together in increased tolerance through a self-understanding process. If the poetry springs from a genuine source wherein is compounded the feelings of the community via the poet then the medicine is in the community's own hands with the poet dispenser.

Poetry must be conceived in a state of 'true feeling' in such way that the 'trained mind' cannot directly influence its conception although ultimately the 'trained mind' operates on the foetus and 'slaps' it to presentable life as we know it. The final result is true poetry where form and content are synthesized simultaneously in the subconscious and

presented to the community at that level where the surface-conscious mind clothes it. So, both artsville and academia, conceived (though perhaps not real divisions), each plays a part. It is up to the mentally-educated poet to see that his training is applied at the right time in the poetic process, and to the art-free-thought poet to present poetry to the community (unless to artsville, itself) at the conception stage, but only after final processing.

The best academicians cannot define poetry; it seems most likely that its origin is not within their media. In fact, the seeds of poetry exist in all of us to the extent that the inner synthesis takes place; the nearest to it is a rationalized dream content, with the inborn natural rhythm of life itself. This is brought forth and clothed by a more deliberate mental process in which education plays a part; and the perfecting of its conception is aided by the initial absolute removal of the trained mind. (How very much poetry is written at periods immediately after periods of stress, when the trained and conscious mind is at a low ebb, recuperating after working overtime.) You see, as I have explained this, the value of poetry to the community is what matters; not only is poetry an expression of the self truly revealed — but, when returned to the ‘tribe’ which first nurtured the poet, it acts as Protector to it. Eric Ratcliffe

The ‘Overlapping Informal’ Academies

Dear Editors:

Being an academic poet has nothing at all to do with whether or not a man teaches for a living. The academic poetry is marked by a kind of ‘mechanical writing,’ and it’s likely he learned to do this on a campus — but that isn’t the only place he could learn it.

This country has no formal ‘academy’ — but there are several overlapping informal ones. On most campuses, a particular collection of techniques, themes, and voices is sold as a set of ‘critical standards.’ It’s too bad that students

are exposed to this, and i'm sure this is the main reason the average college graduate feels that poetry is a bloody bore.

The main damage the academics do isn't their mechanical writing, and it isn't the possibility of their turning a potential poet into a useful citizen of the university community — since a poet will tend to be too stubborn and unbendable. . . . The main damage lies in their closing doors to noncampus poets, thus helping to kill off that breed.

The magazines which can pay poets are mainly tied up by the academics. After all, these good gentlemen become faculty advisors to the university quarterlies and are the 'certified experts' publishers of commercial magazines have come to rely on.

There is a very intense movement to sell the idea that unless one is a certified expert he can't be a poet. One Phemale Ph.D. decided that because i lived in San Francisco, used an occasional one-beat line, and lacked letters after my name, i must be a beatnik and a moral menace. . . . She quoted some passages (from FIELD STUDIES) . . . and then when the passages insisted on looking good on her page, she hastily added: 'The isolated perceptions are clear; it is within the context of an entire poem that the fine nuances are lost.' What she means, of course, is that she is indignant at the idea of a nonPh.D. writing at all. She speaks in outrage of my being in some . . . no longer "new" cult of San Franciscan poets who are still trying to create a poetic medium which is to take poetry from the pedagogue and give it to the common man.' The idea that poetry might be readable no doubt seems a 'cultish' idea to her.

*For the record, there are likely to be good
academic poets... The best poet can work in any
framework, write a poem within any set frame,
and still write a living poem. A bad poet, on the
other hand, will not be able to exploit any
guideline or any freedom.*

Gene Fowler

A MEDIUM FOR ‘THIS SHAKING SHADOWY WORLD’

Dear Editors: Changes, a new literary and graphic arts quarterly will be devoted primarily to poetry and art, with emphasis on collaborations between the two (either poet and artist being the same person, or the two working together . . . plus new fiction, excerpts from and holograph reproduction of journals etc. . . . a modicum of durable critical and analytic prose . . .

It will reflect the changes poets and artists are going through at this time of accelerating change, a two-way mirror by and through which this shaking shadowy world may be seen: the teleidoscopic mandalas, visions of reality, poetry, and art that is revolutionary, shocking, bursting, joyous, honest, like-it-is horror and tragedy, where it's-at prophecy and hope and poetry of eye and ear; from everywhere in the world — from living beings fighting chaos with absurdity and disorder with joy, creating surprising beauty out of insanity, seeing the unity of Atma & Brahma in the disintegration, reintegration flux of this Maya/love fleshtouch/infinity . . . everything always Changes.*

William J. Margolis

SUR-REBUTTAL ON LATIN AMERICAN MAGS

Dear Editors: Unlike Margaret Randall, I am not politically aligned; so, consequently I see the whole magazine scene as a magazine scene and no political pool. I don't judge magazines because of their political coloration. For me, there are only things worth or not worth mentioning because of their artistic & literary value. Miss Randall has committed herself almost exclusively to the Far Left, which has disenabled her to judge objectively. . . . I don't forget Nadaistas. I just finished translating a volume by Dukardo Hinestrosa, one of them; and I give a short history of Nadaismo in my introduction. Only they don't have a magazine, and that's what my article was about — magazines.

Hugh F.

** See Evolving Directory for details. Changes Title not used. This is a revival of The Miscellaneous Man.*

LOVE AND DEATH

In the Early Poems of Walter Lowenfels 1922–1929

by Jack Lindeman

PAUL VALERY IN ‘A FOREWORD’ to his collection of miscellaneous essays on poetry, published in the U.S.A. as *THE ART OF POETRY*, contrasts the modern geometer’s conclusive proof that the circle cannot be squared with the contemporary poet’s refusal to accept this proof. Thus we are confronted with the modern poet’s dilemma, his persistent determination to do the impossible — that is, to square the circle even though there be irrefutable evidence in every other aspect of life that this cannot be done. But poetry is neither a science nor — alas! — a rational human enterprise, and consequently it is not bound by any axiom of limitations. There is no visible terminal at the other end of the sky, and clipped wings were never a part of the anatomy of Pegasus.

Within this tradition of boundless potentiality, Walter Lowenfels fits with astonishing ease. He is about to enter the eighth decade of his life; but, more importantly, is halfway through the fourth decade of his life as a poet. In 1922, at the age of twenty-five, on the top floor of an old brownstone house on West 87th Street, New York, he wrote his first poem. And since that day, despite many diversions into business, politics, journalism and rearing a family of four daughters, he has remained a dedicated devotee of Calliope. (During the ensuing seventeen years, he wrote almost no poetry; yet, his poet’s consciousness remained fully alert.)

Where Lowenfels has succeeded (and nearly all of his contemporaries have failed) has been in his obstinate clinging to a thread of development the culmination of which defies one of the most sacred of all modern critical taboos. Again and again, since the early elevation of T. S. Eliot to

sainthood, poets of this Century have been warned to avoid the trap of social consciousness (Eliot, in fact, made a personal appeal to Lowenfels when the two poets met in London in the mid-Thirties). Most poets, excepting those of the depression decade — certainly those who have become most successfully established — have heeded this warning. But, not Walter Lowenfels.

Coming from a well-to-do upper-middle-class background (as did many poets of his generation, such as Pound, Eliot, Cummings, and Crane), there certainly were no immediate external pressures that might have caused him to rebel against prevailing bourgeois status-quoism. He was educated in several schools, both public and private — rather unsuccessfully, he claims — before joining the army during World War I. Unlike his contemporary, Archibald MacLeish, he did all of his soldiering on this side of the Atlantic. Who could believe that the poet who drove through the streets of New York in an open car on a November day in 1918, loudly condemning the armistice in particular and peace in general because he felt he was being cheated out of a chance to be a hero, would one day write:

Across the human isthmus, where the ultimate
deterrent awaits the final posture, and our North
American dream is still alive, I am begging that one
word from all of us that will make our beautiful
tomorrow alive today.¹

But, in 1918, Walter Lowenfels was still in his first bloom of thoughtful youth and filled with a martial spirit typical of a young man of those times. Flag-waving, band music, and patriotic oratory — all the home front features of a nation at war — are forceful persuaders and always difficult to resist.

Actually, even at this early date, Lowenfels was a man with a more sensitive conscience than he himself suspected. It took several years of peace and the experience of such an innocuous middle-class occupation as that of a butter

salesman (the family fortune rested firmly on a wholesale butter business) to awaken his slumbering conscience to the painful incongruities of our free democratic society.

In June, 1922 the coal miners at Herrin, Illinois went on strike. The mine owners imported a group of thugs from Chicago as strikebreakers. A gun battle ensued in which sixteen of the scabs were killed. Lowenfels mistook the report and wrote an elegy with powerful social overtones for miners. If his facts were wrong, his sentiments were right; and he had emerged, not merely as a poet, but as a bard of the collective conscience. He was twenty-five and this was his first poem, written forty-four years ago under gaslight (his father stubbornly refused to install electricity in his attic room) at a time when he had neither political nor social views of any particular kind, and before he had read either Marx or Hegel. The progressive ideas with which he would become identified, and which would cast a dominant halo over his reputation in the Fifties and Sixties, had not yet formed. He was merely a man without affiliations like hundreds of thousands of other newspaper-reading Americans whose sense of justice had been stung.

In 1925, Lowenfels published his first book, *EPISODES EPISTLES*,² his initial efforts in verse, including the poem on the Herrin miners. By the time his second volume, *FINALE OF SEEM*,³ appeared in London (1929), he had already become the sophisticated poet. Humbert Wolfe, in his introduction to *FINALE*, correctly insisted that the poems (or poem — for it is really a long lyrical narrative) show a closer kinship with the Elizabethans than with T. S. Eliot, as other commentators had suggested. If another comparison is detectable, it is not so much with Eliot as with Eliot's master, Jules Laforgue. The element of whimsical surprise frequently found in the phrasing, and the free-wheeling gusto, as well as the cymbal-clashing rhymes in many sections of *FINALE*, recall Laforgue. This is not meant to detract from Lowenfels'

originality any more than from Eliot's, whose PRUFROCK is undoubtedly related to Laforgue in style.

¹ *From Letter to the President, in SOME DEATHS, by Walter Lowenfels Jonathan Williams (Highland, N.C.), 1962.*

If one were to seek early embers of social protest in these first two books, one would seek in vain beyond the elegy to the Herrin miners. True, there were faint glows in a familiar wasteland; but this was already a fashionable attitude among intellectuals of the period. However, Lowenfels' approach to this wasteland was not quite that of other poets. He had a new ingredient which began with a death chant and ended by drowning it out with a love song.

In the beginning of the poem was death, the death of justice, the death of the spirit, and death without burial in America. The Herrin miners had 'bulging, hairy arms, and thick faces,' 'good huskies — Lithuanians, Swedes, Poles, Czechs' who were melted 'into Americans in a coal mine,' sixteen 'unidentified bodies' which were given 'the gat . . . at the edge of town.'

It makes me nervous . . . those sixteen wingless souls, floundering and flopping around, six feet under Hell.

'They buried themselves that day,' because, even though their bodies were committed to the earth, those who officiated at the gravesides 'forgot to give their souls to God.' This poem was written as a letter to Carl Sandburg and elicited from the elder poet the simple reply that he well knew 'the ashes and the tears.'

In this first volume, Lowenfels dwells on 'the fangs of death' and asks: 'Do the dead quiver . . . between sheets of loam / as a lover?' He envisions death as a 'steel-glistening coil / circling the minute dot Me.' Driving through White Plains, N.Y., he is stopped by a red light and notices 'Black limousines' lined up in front of a house 'set back from the street.' 'Seventeen uniforms / of the lodge band' toot 'the Dead / March from Saul' while 'four brother meeters / in

Sunday clothes / edged out the doorway / carefully / teetering / the coffin.' A friend, a Dark Lady who has died, becomes a 'shade meandering / on earth a while draped in Death's borrowed stole!' Her body shall be cremated while 'her friends lounge and chat.' No one shall mourn for her, knowing as they do that she has merely returned to her 'beloved dark woodland.' Most deaths are 'a void incredible,' but this one was different because the deceased happened to be 'More talented for death;' and, since she received the kind of burial she requested, her 'urn incrusted with thirty tapers,' the poet hopes that she will not be 'wholly dead,' but, in fact, sufficiently alive to stray through the woods 'and rest by' her 'dark hill.' Yet, he does not feel entirely convinced as to the character of her post-mortem. He has a 'fearsome thought' that 'the quintessence of' her 'spirit will not cling closely to' her rotting bones; nor, as she 'longed incessantly,' will she return to her 'ancient dusky wood.' On the other hand, if the 'counselors of Erebus' are just and reward those who dwell in heaven according to the fruits of their acts on earth, then this lady of 'goodness and virtue' will surely 'be wafted to / the Golden Kingdom . . . ever to reside / with shining angels,' where she will blink her 'dusk eyes at the bright tinsel' while 'recording the goodly deeds of men.' If the poet has allowed his imagination to run away with him and the Dark Lady never really finds her 'mossy fen and shadowy path,' but instead is sitting above him high up in an invisible layer of the sky 'unsolaced and unhappy,' 'brooding ever unresigned' in her 'white robes, crowded in a hard gilt chair,' then her death has indeed been a cruel blow and has besmirched this group of sonnets dedicated to her. Lowenfels was only in his early thirties, yet was already cognizant of 'the winging buzzards of Time,' 'the priesthood of the clock,' 'the towering rock cathedral of all time,' which hatches 'its brood of hours.' A new year has arrived, sucking 'young minutes to death, and for it cold nest' plucking 'feathers from

days; our lives are this bird's food. Still, there is a hint in this sonnet, one of a series opening FINALE OF SEEM, about the woman whom the poet loves, and who consequently dominates not only his life but also his death. The entire poem is a hymn to the triumph of love over death. That slow march toward death, which we call life — and every aspect of our lives which is death-oriented — is ultimately subdued; for 'my love lives on the stuff you [Death] cannot touch;' and because of this 'we'll grow more lean and young for loving much.' Again, he observes that 'the world has shrunk to minutes and two miles,' and even if he and his love are finite they can, with the brief ecstasy of a kiss, escape for a moment from their mortality, cancel 'out the world's ticking divinity . . . or dazzle death and meet midnight like stars / that burn out to extinction north of Mars.' Two hearts linked in youthful love defy time by writing 'each other's page in pink / indelible' which 'time can never smudge: ' The unpenned sonnet / we live is my sweet immortal verse.' Yet, words can forge 'a magic sieve / to baffle time. A period, my love, / makes you immortal.' When we lie snuggled in death's cold I'll curse / the line that arms your warm anatomy.'

² EPISODES & EPISTLES, *Poems by W. L. Thomas Seltzer* — New York, 1925.

³ *William Heinemann, Ltd.*

Being a young man in love, nature will not permit him to dwell forever on those ravages which time eventually will inflict, his love's hair dimmed to cotton and her face becoming the 'worn tapestry time wove,' because now her 'skin is white / as skin; each eye is eye, and not a star,' and he loves her not with the intellectual complexity of philosophical thought, but with 'great simplicity,' a characteristic of genuine affection. Though death is a persistent thorn in his thoughts, he attempts to keep it cowed in a remote corner of his mind so long as his heart is filled with the joy of love.

All that the poet desires when he dies is a 'quiet death' where he and his love 'can live / with no sky / that her eyes / cannot give.' His death will not be his end, for he has 'many souls.' And though 'Death defines an absolute,' it leaves 'an oblique angle in the past' along with friends left 'in silence' to stare through the glass of a symbolic museum case from which the empty-socketed skulls of the dead stare back as 'from the phantom catacombs / of all memories' resting place.' He asks the curator of this museum not to betray his 'love's frame,' so that when 10,000 years have passed, despite the fact that her face has crumbled, she will still appear as beautiful and young as she always has been in his 'mind's dead eye.'

'The mind's taper flickers in a death watch' perhaps forever. There is the suggestion in the *Passionate Pilgrim* section of this poem that death and not life is the natural state of man: 'In the flesh we are ghosts / of dead selves left as sentries / at eternal posts.' Only death is perfection; everything else is a prelude awaiting that final crown which it ultimately bestows. In the poet's mind is a 'sweat shop where death sits . . . needling / grave clothes from clock-ticks.'

God is 'a deathless circle.' Has any theologian ever come up with a better definition? 'But what astronomy is death's!' It claps 'a telescope of zeros on empty lids / to show a skeleton the light of nothing.' Death is identified by 'an integer' that is 'a counter for immortality.' And what is a corpse but 'a forced solution' posing 'no problem to no equation.' 'The motto for all graves' is 'insolvent.' If only his love can 'learn the chemistry,' she can 'reduce / death's lucidity to numbers.' Yes, death can be measured, its true dimensions reckoned 'with lover's stares.'

FINALE OF SEEM concludes by informing the reader that death is neither hot nor cold, but rather it is a kind of drought which leaves 'the mind's harbour' 'dry of time.' There

is no consciousness of climate in death; consequently, a poem is no longer possible inside the seclusion of its shadow. Poetry and death are eternal antagonists, dedicated opponents, fully capable of obliterating each other.

TRINITY

Apparent self
Seen in the eye no longer
Sacrificed
That you and me inspired
I don't remember.

E. I. Low

PAPER BOATS OR THE HYDRA-HEADED WOE

by Mary Graham Lund

IN A LETTER TO LADY CYNTHIA ASQUITH from Germany in August of 1913, D. H. Lawrence complained amusingly of receiving from Kingston, where he and Frieda had lived for a brief time, 'a pathetic little bill for one and fourpence, the dregs and lees of our housekeeping down there.' He says: 'I made a little boat of it and set it afloat. . . . Far down the dancing Danube and over Hungaria's restless plains goes my Baker's bill on its bobbling course.'

One is reminded of Shelley and his paper boats. On that famous triangular elopement, after a night spent crossing the channel in a small fishing boat, when Mary lay in his arms 'sick almost unto death' . . . and after he had just had a stormy interview with Mrs. Godwin who had followed them on the morning packet boat to reclaim her daughter, Claire Clairmont, and had made that foolish promise to support Mary's stepsister financially 'forever' . . . perhaps to relieve his tension, he urged the two girls to go with him to a stationer's where he purchased stiff writing paper that would fold into sturdy little boats to sail on the ocean. Seeing a happy company of youngsters on the beach, he went back to exchange an English note for a handful of small coins to put aboard his paper fleet. Back in England a few years later, when he was playing the English country squire and entertaining Leigh Hunt and his noisy children and their sick and suffering mother and their care-ridden Aunt Bessie, we have another glimpse of his folding paper boats with children, using the paper Mary had bought to make a 'fair copy' of FRANKENSTEIN.

Lawrence complained that he couldn't read Shelley, although he had 'tried all roads to scan him;' yet, he asserted: 'I think Shelley (and his metres) a million thousand times more beautiful than Milton.' And though the two poets are even farther apart in personality than in time, they had many things in common besides a compulsion to sail paper boats: both loved Italy; both were careless in regard to finances; both were dependent on adoring wives, for health and some degree of emotional stability; and both were obsessed with the idea that sex might be the saving principle to turn the world of reality into a Utopian dream. The paper-boat episodes illustrate an obsession with childhood, which is not at odds with an obsession with sex. The young child lives in a peculiarly-permissive world; he may practice voyeurism with impunity and engage in minor perversions which nourish his narcissism. Exhibitionism is notably a childish urge. Shelley was briefly interested in a cult of nudism which was practiced by friends he met soon after his first marriage, and he indulged in nude bathing whenever he had access to a private beach. A story was whispered around the English colony at Pisa, where Mary was trying to break into society, that when she was entertaining some ladies at lunch, her husband absent-mindedly walked into the drawing room from the beach and stood smiling and bowing, oblivious of the consternation of the ladies until Mary led him away.

Henry Miller has never made news of that order, but the much-discussed *TROPIC OF CANCER* is shocking not entirely because of the four-letter words, but because a man bares his soul in all its disgusting nudity. His pornography is compulsive in a childish way. The small child must tell all or nothing. Later he learns to add or subtract a little to make his story conform to what he has learned will please.

Since writing his confession, Henry Miller has written many books and articles trying to explain to himself why he

wrote it. In *THE WORLD OF SEX*, he says: 'The effort to eliminate the repulsive aspects of existence is not only absurd but futile. . . . To live out one's desires and in so doing subtly alter their nature is the aim of every individual who aspires to evolve.' And Henry did aspire to evolve. He read Balzac with fervor because he recognized 'how ardently he wrestled with the problem of the angel in man,' a problem which he confesses had been an obsession with him, 'as it must be with every creative individual. . . . The artist is obsessed with the thought of recreating the world, in order to restore man's innocence. He knows that man can only recover his innocence by regaining his freedom.'

Freedom, as the existentialists have proved, is a frightening experience. Only a saint and/or mystic like St. John of the Cross can clothe the abstractions of his spiritual experience in the homely images of daily life. A man's attempt to do so may lead him into childishness, perhaps into childishness, with all its absurdities. Lawrence indulged temper tantrums and took a small child's delight in soap and water as he masochistically scrubbed a floor. The young Shelley stopped a woman on the street to ask if he might question the baby she was carrying about what it remembered of eternity. A few years later, while touring a Europe that had been impoverished by the Napoleonic war he tried to buy the child of a peasant because he wished to start a school in which the theories of Rousseau would be carried out. Claire would teach music and languages. Mary would instruct in the housewifely arts. He would teach science. He went so far as to lease a house in Switzerland for the project, but was forced to return to England by his father's threat to cut off his allowance if he remained abroad.

Henry Miller, in *THE AIR-CONDITIONED NIGHTMARE*, tells of a day spent in the park with the two young children of the owners of the motel at which he was stopping. After four pages of recorded conversation which proves that Henry was

as naively happy as the children, he ‘wondered what it would be like to make the rest of the trip with Bruce and Jacqueline in tow.’ He had an obsessive desire to borrow them. But then it rained and the magic of the day was gone, and Henry began to realize his adult responsibility. ‘The outing was over,’ he says. ‘There was neither joy nor sorrow left — just a feeling of emptiness.’

This has little to do with the ‘child-cult of sensitivity,’ or the naked awareness in many modern novels such as Salinger’s *CATCHER IN THE RYE* and its many imitations — in which harsh actuality cum obscenity is given lyrical exaltation. The stylization of these imitations is too self-conscious and the purpose too low. The sensitive heroes grow up and accept life as it is. They go home again and accept their ID cards.

The Shelley-Lawrence-Miller personality never goes home. Shelley claimed that he was never stopped, and he was right. Not even death could stop him! Shelley literature has increased mountainously. Some of it is nonsense, but most of it is sincere. Once in a while a fictionalized biography is published with the obvious intent to attract readers by sensationalism and a sort of commercial pornography. A horrible example of this type, not easily recognizable as pornography because it contains no forbidden words and no copralytic passages, is F. W. Kenyon’s *THE GOLDEN YEARS*,¹ published in the late fifties.

This novel is a horrible example of the commercial brand of pornography. It is not even dignified by the ‘poetic naturalism’ claimed by some American novels. There is no search for reality, no mythic depth of awareness, not even the absurd cult of identity. Words are merely symbols, not tools of thought, not Luther’s Word that was God and dwelt among men. One thing that Shelley, Lawrence, and Miller have in common, something greater than their childlikeness or their genius, is their trust in the Word and their power

over the word. The horror of a novel like *THE GOLDEN YEARS* lies not so much in its distortion of the facts as in the greater falsehood of its utter banality, its denial of life, the life of the Word. It is through such sins against it that the word has lost meaning, lost vitality to the extent that the poet must court impropriety, must fracture meaning, must use shock to make his words viable. This is what Henry Miller has done.

¹ *Thomas Y. Crowell Co. (New York), 1959.*

In an article titled *Obscenity and the Laws of Reflection*,² Miller says: 'We are forced to conclude that the spirit of an age is the crucible in which . . . certain vital and mysterious forces seek expression. . . . The laws governing the spirit are just as readable as those governing nature. But the reading must come from those who are steeped in mysteries. The very depth of these interpretations makes them unpalatable and unacceptable to the unthinking public.'

He admits that in the realm of sex there is much 'self-delusion' at work: the bifurcation of pure desire into fear and wish has resulted in the creation of a phantasmagoric world in which love plays the role of the chameleon-like scapegoat.' He thinks that 'the whole fabric of life as we know it is obscene.'

On this point, the elder Miller and the nineteen-year-old Shelley agree: 'Even love is sold; the solace of all woe / Is turned to deadly agony, old age / Shivers in selfish beauty's loathing arms, / And youth corrupted impulses prepare / A life of horror from the blighting ban / Of commerce; whilst the pestilence that springs / From unenjoying sensualism, has filled / All human life with hydra-headed woes.' Shelley had been born into the horrors of the Industrial Revolution which had brought unspeakable social evils in its train, as yet unchecked by child-labor laws and other means of controlling the greed of the capitalists. The fourteen-hour day was the rule. Women worked in crowded homes in slums

that were indescribably vile; prostitution flourished; and alcohol was the chief source of pleasure among the poor.

Lawrence was attacked, during his lifetime and after, because he dared to exhibit the naked suffering which mature people learn to cover with laughter or with pride. No age has been so self-conscious ours, when every man is his own psychologist, his own critic. We know much; we are nothing. We are afraid to feel. Commercial pornographers of Mr. Kenyon's type are permitted to flourish, while writers like Lawrence and Miller, who use the word to seek the deep truths of life, are condemned. Mr. Miller looks back on his early books as puritanical. His dirty words acted as a strong deterrent to cleanse mind and spirit. His portrayal of sexuality is fully described in the young Shelley's phrase quoted above: an 'unenjoying sensualism' which 'has filled All human life with hydra-headed woes.' Shelley, a boy who had seen the horrors of such sensualism in his own family history and had viewed its effects in both village and city, wrote in anger that man should

² Alicat Book Shop (Yonkers, N.Y.), 1944 — a pamphlet. debase himself. Henry Miller, at middle age, personally involved in such debasement, wrote in an even greater frenzy.

Lawrence rewrote *LADY CHATTERLY . . .* five times, but Miller released only one version of *TROPIC OF CANCER*. It was born of a man's agony, an organic whole. Not even its author has dared question its integrity. He will try to explain his work, but will not revise or retract. His *TROPICS* stand, naked and disgusting, a monument to the birth of a soul. Miller is fearless even before the horrors which modern psychiatry reveals. Lawrence was obsessed by the birth trauma, crying out that the whole world is 'nothing but a vast womb.' George Orwell remarked that the idea didn't bother Henry Miller, as it did Aldous Huxley, who pictured the horror of the 'whale's belly' as a 'visceral prison.' Orwell thought that

'Henry would consider . . . it a very cosy, comfortable, homelike' place. And that identifies Henry where he identifies himself in *THE AIR-CONDITIONED NIGHTMARE*, as a child viewing the universe with a child's bathroom humor, his tantrums of anger, his volubility, but with his astounding power over the word. He shared that power with Lawrence and Shelley. Words are the true paper boats that will carry their ideas into the future.

In the case of Shelley, scholars have been more concerned with his deeds than with his words. Matthew Arnold, after reading Dowden's *LIFE OF SHELLEY*, wrote concerning the new information about Shelley's marriage and Harriet's suicide: 'I regret that it has been given. It is a sore trial for our love of Shelley. What a set! . . . I used the French word *bête* for a letter of Shelley's; for the world in which we find him I can only use another French word, *sale*. . . .' Shelley himself, after reading the English reviews of *THE CENCI*, said: 'They do not review my books, they review my sins.' That is still true: I myself have heard within the last decade a college professor discuss the letter X in Claire's journals when he might better have been attempting an explication of some of Shelley's neglected poems.

Nobody has yet looked for a Kinsey report in Shelley's poetry. Even Mary Shelley failed to see the depths of his passion. In her introductory note to *THE WITCH OF ATLAS*, she says: 'Shelley shrunk instinctively from portraying human passion, with its mixture of good and evil, of disappointment and disquiet.' How lightly she had read his verses! How could she have copied *THE REVOLT OF ISLAM* without noting the lovers who 'had gone / Into a wide and wild oblivion / Of tumult and of tenderness'? Or: '. . . kisses whose fire clasps / The failing heart in languishment, or limb / Twined within limb . . . / . . . life meeting . . . / In one caress'? (Canto VI, 35 & 36) Finally: '. . . a rite / Of faith . . . stamped our union.' (39) Much of Shelley's poetry throbs with the quickened

breath of passion, unnoted because he does not use certain words or give names to the most cruel perversions. In *THE REVOLT*, he describes a rape and many acts of cruelty towards woman, the 'bond slave of man.' In *THE CENCI*, he presents in Beatrice a terrifying, yet credible portrait of a woman who has suffered the trauma of sexual abuse; and in the portrait of the Old Count, he anticipates Father Karamazov and echoes the Marquis de Sade. There is a naked passion in his descriptions that drives the words to a piercing burning clawing impact upon the human heart.

This 'hydra-headed woe' is no respecter of persons. Gandhi wrote freely of the 'fester ing sex' that tormented him after he had taken a vow of chastity. Shakespeare's works are filled with his torment, his disgust at man's animal passions. The frequency of his pornographic passages has been emphasized by their deletions in Nineteenth Century editions of his plays. In *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST*, he recognized the ubiquity of the 'thing': 'This senior-junior giant-dwarf, Dan Cupid / Regent of love-rhymes, lord of folded arms, / Th' anointed sovereign of sighs and groans, / Liege of all loiterers and malcontents.' (Act III Scene 1)

Shelley could qualify among the malcontents. Behold the protesting trio: Shelley-Lawrence-Miller. What they protest is the abuse of sexual love. Shelley cried out that 'Power, like a desolating pestilence, / Pollutes what'er it touches . . .' and enumerates the pollutions. (*QUEEN MAB*, III) Though born a century earlier, Shelley was, in fact, a contemporary of Lawrence and Miller. The anxieties that irrationalize men are phenomena of time and place; the human spirit finds its winter of discontent with the perversions of its noblest aims to the service of destruction. Shelley's soul was soaked in the new science of the French philosophers and his heart distorted by the violence of the French Revolution and its debacle. At an early age he had eaten the green fruit of the tree of knowledge, and thereafter suffered as many severe

cramps as did Lawrence and Miller. His suffering shows in his poetry, if the professors of literature ever get around to reading it, instead of reviews and journals and the letters of his friends.

It is true that Shelley rhymed too much for modern taste, but he rhymed to a purpose — the freeing of mankind from the slavery of the passions of selfishness and greed, of pride and lust, of bigotry and bias. Grasping at some understanding of the new age of science, he had only vague realization of its impact upon the individual — requiring conformity, yet demanding individuation in the performance of its collective duty toward the race. No wonder that in the puzzling demands of the new dichotomy he fell, crying: “Then, what is life? . . .” — the last line of the poem, *The Triumph of Life*.

THE PEBBLE-HEAP — A FABLE

Shaking off the dust of his past, he took the road to God. A white road it was, treeless and bare, flanked with stubble; and overhead, the sun merely a spear-length away. At times the white road and the white noon mingled into each other, forming an incandescence that seemed to burn up all shadows. The baffled sundials slept like tired dogs. Beneath the ochre loincloth, the body sprouted pimples . . . the groin and the armpits ran with sweat.

And then, a river — shallow, purposeless — the water turning brackish at the mouth. Some half-starved wretches clawed at the silt with their fingers, looking for mudfish. They told him this was a bed which the river abandoned some twenty years back. The main stream lay some miles beyond where the horizon spoke of water.

As the afternoon ripened into a blister, he paused at a river shack at the edge of the town. The town consisted of a waterfront on each bank, thin strips of concrete and timber that sidled along the river. He put his burden down — a saffron shawl wrapped around two bundles of roasted grain and jaggery, and a begging-bowl of pumpkin rind. He had worked at it, himself, months before he had started, slicing the pumpkin into two half-moons, scooping out the viscera and drying the outer shell in the sun till it became as hard as tortoise-back and acquired the timbre of seasoned wood.

The shack was made of pine logs which had floated down the river. The balcony on top tapered off at a slant. Flamboyant veils, hung out to dry, seemed floating on the wind. The waters scraping the sides of the shack were athirst, themselves. The ghats were empty, except for the Pandas sitting in the shade, scratching their thighs, talking away the afternoon in idle gossip.

The sun lazied around like a water buffalo.

At night, the staircase creaked as it spiraled upward to where she kept her smile ready for the tide of the river fair as it streamed in with the full moon. The bathers came dripping with the moon, their faces half-hooded in shawls, their eyes restless, mogra flowers in their hands. A few carried mogra wine in their bellies.

As they queued up, the split-lip with his freak smile, the kid with the barber's itch, the overgrown schoolboy afraid of pickpockets, holding onto his rupee notes till they turned grimy . . . the one-shot ones with a

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switchblade between their thighs, and the cronies who had to paw around for an hour before they could say bismillah.

He could almost hear them, see them, feel them, those snide whispers tiptoeing down the stairs, obscene laughter that spoke of flesh, and passions that spoke of fever.

Next day, the sun was a bull in the red rage of his fury, snorting revenge.

With Narayan on his lips and betel in his mouth, he sat there day in and day out, chewing his anger. Each time the staircase groaned with a customer, he put a pebble in front of him to keep count. And one pebble for every visit of hers to the river. It was ritual with her, a river bath after dusk on the first and the fourteenth day of the moon, when she offered three anjuls of water to the moon-goddess, the water running down her fingers. She would also light a clay lamp in her honor, setting it afloat on the river, burning away like a lost passion. A river bath before daybreak was also a daily chore, when she poured a libation to the sun. Is she trying to bluff the Gods? His . . . eyes would sputter with fire at the thought.

The sun rose like a hot tear in the river's eye.

He found his eyes transfixed one day, as she came up from the river, her face quick with smiles, her body fluent with movement. How cool she looks, he thought, with water still drying on her body.

She felt his glance glued to her the way a gun barrel follows a flight of teal. She covered her head with her shawl and, with a swift movement, bowed low to touch his feet, leaving some flowers there.

He drew back as if licked by a tongue of flame. His voice had a thin hysterical edge as he rasped: 'Out of my sight, you bitch!'

Those nimble feet of hers darted up the steps, leaving wet prints behind. She entered her room in a half-crouch, a sob splitting her body in two as it traveled down her spine to the tense tight muscles of her belly down to the fluidity of her thighs.

The flowers she had dropped at his feet still felt hot. He did not know why he thought of them as blood drops dripping from her crotch.

Down at the ghats, the Pandas wish to classify me: 'You a tourist or a pilgrim?' Tough question. They eye my camera, narrow slacks, pointed shoes. 'You want to snap women bathing? Care to see a sanyasi being initiated at the burning ghat? You can be the first to feed him? No?' Another Panda takes up the chant. 'Like to see a mahatma, maybe?' He is quick to notice the flicker of interest in my eye. 'Go to the river shack. You will find your man.' The first Panda joins in with a leer. 'You will see both the faces of the divine there — only, one of the faces may be partly veiled and will be found upstairs. . . .' Reality and Maya both in one shack! The godhead is androgynous after all! A staccato burst of laughter follows me.

At the shack, I lie prostrate before him. His mien is wooden. His words come out as if through a timber crack. 'You haven't come to see me.' He

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has not seen this in my stance, for I have made the traditional eight-limbed obeisance, and I carry flowers, fruit, and an ochre drape for him. 'You haven't come to see me,' he repeats. 'I didn't know it, myself,' I tell him. My hands feel awkward, holding the flowers. My eyes can't hold her full even stare. A snare of a smile dispels my fears. With a growly burp, I move toward her, the flowers dropping from my hands.

Nightmares do not spare anyone, not even ascetics. A surly dream it was, dripping with divine malice. Death comes to all — he didn't mind that. But he found himself alone with a mangy cur which he had often seen at the burning ghats. Yama joined them, grey and gothic, seedy-looking and unshaven. He opened the rib cage of the cur and asked him to get in. His next life was to be a dog's. This was metempsychosis with a vengeance!

'What have I done to merit this?' he shouted. Actually he was dying to call Yama a lousy bastard, but his years of discipline told.

Yama's answer was brief. What had he done but record the sins of others, counting them pebble by pebble? That heap of stones, that score-card was all that his tapas amounted to! He rubbed it in... Then: 'Hurry. That bitch at the marghat is in labour already. She will be delivering any minute now! Get in!'

As he was scrambling in, he saw a woman walk up, wrapped in her laughter and her veils. It was his neighbor from the shack!

'What is that whore doing here?'

'A new entrant to swarga. She has done her stint down below. Her dharma lay in giving pleasure to people, and she has done her bit.'

Rage. Humiliation. Speech turning convulsive. Of the hundred things he wanted to say to Yama at once, he could only scream: 'You damn pimp!' But the death god was in a hurry. He gave him a shove and banged the door of the rib cage shut.

He was still trembling when he woke. The sun had been up a good two hours, a lion raging through the forests of the skies.

Death was merely a carryover from the dream. It happened during nauratra, the nine nights of the goddess, when grain and flowers are offered to the nine forms of Durga, and dough lamps are lit, and kids slaughtered. On the third night, he died in his sleep. Morning witnesses the usual scenes — wailing disciples, beating of breasts, the body lying on the clay-smear floor, the town and the river filing past it.

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Mahatmas were never burned here. Tied to a bamboo bier, they were made to float down the river so that all the flanking villages might have a last glimpse and acquire merit. But a village of chandals, untouchables, downstream, had changed all this. They would lie in wait and drag the bodies up the bank where all their pregnant women would come and place their heads on the corpse's feet. A lifetime of penance rendered futile by a taboo touch! So, now the holy dead were loaded with weight and consigned to a watery grave at a spot where a loop in the river had formed a whirlpool.

Weight? They had not far to look. The pebble heap at the shack had grown into a mount. They put the stones in a gunny sack, lashed it to the bier, and handed it over to the fierce concentrics of the whirlpool. For a moment, it whirled around like a monster limb in agony — and then sank from sight.

The sun hung around like a wet shrimp.

GLOSSARY:

anjul: Water taken in the hollow of both hands and poured through the fingers while prayers are recited.

tapas: Penance.

marghat: Burning ghats.

swarga: Paradise. I [illegible] not even a cat could have broken through the evidence of go-rod in the corner roach. Yet though I write on floor thought of a gradual He and stitch And the p anything like my corpse my stomach distant will g A new All than my m pital out as squeeze I ate they w lap. I sheets

PARAGRAPHS

I have made a room for myself. It is a finished castle in the air, with not even a speck of dust out of place. The rat-hole lies in the corner. The cat comes once a day, chases the rat, kills it, gulps it, licks away minor evidences from the carpet, and goes out like a maid after cleaning the breakfast table. I shall get a new rat for the cat tomorrow. The merry-go-round will continue till rats become extinct — all but in zoos. Then the cat will take another partner for itself, probably the ants, or cockroaches, or anything that crawls and sprawls like an unwilling deed.

Yes, this room, now ready for the mind's occupation. I have already thought of the wee paintings I shall do for it, the place where my typewriter will squat, the walls my books will fix, the thick mattress on the floor to keep my back straight so I might live longer than before. I have thought of the bedcover to the extent of purchasing it. 'It plays the part of a blanket too,' said the shopkeeper as he coaxed me on. Then he gradually gazed at me, letting his face walk up and down my thinness. He added: 'When it wears out you can have it patched, and get a coat stitched.' He should have heard my gasp, brimming with excitement.

And I soon pictured how the coat would fare in my room. Could it be the puzzling Black Stone in a marble temple? — and the priest will pay anything to have it removed. But I promise to keep the coat clean; so, like my spine, it endures. When the time for disposition comes, when my corpse is mounted upon the pyre to be heated for the last time, at last, my spine will detach itself from the other bones and stand erect at a distance. Then my coat will rush up and wrap it as of old. Together they will go back to my room, open the typewriter and dash off a prose poem. A new life will begin,

sticking around the skeleton of the old.

All this made me homesick. I thought of my three brothers, all younger than I. One was stillborn. His heartbeats were, for many months, felt in my mother's womb. Then one day grandfather came back from the hospital and grimly whispered something to my relatives. Lunch was laid out as usual; excepting me, none ate. Someone took a thread of rice and squeezed it. Someone patted the dog and quickly, quietly, smelt his hand. I ate much. Feeling happy. I was getting a brother, a friend. And then, they were saying how brave my mother was.

My second brother went similarly. He too got breathless during the last lap. I remember the night the delivery was to happen. I lay midst bed sheets and sobbed and hiccuped and twitched and prayed to the demons

ARVIND MEHROTRA

who entered the great doors, changing their minds each time I looked up. When it was yet dark, my father came. I recognized the shape of his cough, and fled and stumbled and groped into his arms. I slept with him. He smoked noiselessly for hours, and the smoke soothed me too. I lay curled. Next morning, as I woke, I heard him talking to the servant; and the servant said something, to which my father replied: 'No, not the Ganga . . .' pausing, then mysteriously again, 'The Ganga has alligators.'

The third time I came to know of a brother caged in there, I prayed religiously, muttered a mantra five times — sometimes six, just to make sure — and knelt in a part of my room where I thought God lived, or would have liked to when he came. I asked that he might spare this life. And when the news of a brother's birth reached me, I burst into leaps, each thrill sending me higher. And I leapt and leapt and leapt for a long long time.

Late in the evening, when my brother was far away, I entered my room and went straight to where God was lodged.

From then on, I was a door where all insanity converged. I kept on kicking him till my nails were numb with rage and my face blotchy with a thick liquid of tears and saliva.

The same night, something happened. A hand reduced my fury, made my limbs supple; my bruises stopped hurting. Someone bandaged me, making me a sculpture. Someone kept on repeating: 'Your prayers were answered, but you leapt high when you should have knelt deeply.'

When I was twelve, my grandmother took me to her dearest friend who very much wanted to see me. As I was being kissed, fussed over, my grandmother whispered: 'This is the child I was talking about; he was born after seven months.' Then she caught hold of my nose in affection, saying: 'You were so small when you were born' — and her features and fingers together expressed something really small — 'you know, you looked like a mouse.'

And I don't know how my being then lurched into a strange dimension containing a rat, a room, and an old coat.

KEKI N. DARUWALLA

AFTERMATH

Before the war too they were there:
treaties, alliances
pacts, partitions
and dismembered nations
like sliced bits of worms
wriggling on their own;
and old clichés buried alive
under the weight of new ones.
But these are new, memories
frozen in livid eyes
and shell-holes that grimace and grin
insanely with the vagaries of the moon
and bile-blood turning black on the earth;
on the largest patch a monument in stone
with barbed-wire prowling round
to guard the memory of this field
where history was written in lead
where both sides claimed victory
and no one claimed the dead.

KEKI N. DARUWALLA

UNCLAIMED

his images lay sprawling
half-drunk somnolent
hardening into a death
that did not die
loose shale flashing mic
Till she came dripping
from the river
and wet feet nudged the stones
and bled against sharp edges
and words moved to her blood
and to her body vibrant with echoes
No fevered groping, just her sun-smile
reflected on the dark stones
and her mouth
and hands
and feet
that kissed the darkness into
movement

KEKI N. DARUWALLA

ROUTINE

The putties were left behind by the Raj
a strip of fire round the legs in june.
Within the burning crash-helmet
the brain is a fire-pulp. The asphalt
gives way beneath our boots and sticks
The edges of the crowd give way;
a ring of abuse reforms behind us
We hardly hear them for we are used to it
Their gamut ranges from mother- to 'sister-seducer'
Karam Singh marching in the same rank as I
curses under his breath
'I have children older than them
these kids whose pubes have hardly sprouted' !
We march to the street-crossing where young blood

fulfills itself by burning tramcars.
Beneath our khaki we are a roasted brown
but unconvinced, they wish to burn our khaki skins
We are a platoon against a thousand.
It's all well-rehearsed; a few words of warning
— a chill formality lost in fiery slogans !
'Load' ! I put a piece of death up the spout.
It is well rehearsed: I alone point
my barrel into them as I squeeze the trigger
The rest aim into the sun !
They have gone. The Salvage Squad comes
and takes the body to the autopsy room
and tows the tramcar away.
Tension oozes out as armpits run with sweat.
Depressed and weary we march back to the Lines
A leader says over the evening wireless
'We are marching forward'

Richard Shelton

GOLDEN HORSES

Those summer months
filled with distinct sensations
I was dying
were the best months.
There was no pain
only nausea of the arms and legs
and spasms near the heart.
Outside
Busses gorged themselves
and pivoted away from curbs
while dogs inspected other dogs
for traces of heat left over.
As long as I kept typing
she could hear me and knew I was alive.
It was exactly how I
felt at twenty when some girl

I had never been to bed with
broke my heart.
Our child slept
curled like an exhausted lover.
Sometimes I dozed
to a dream of golden horses
running through a dark land
but just before dawn
the constipated early bird
squawked hopefully
and I thought about the statue
who gets shit on every morning
but keeps smiling.

RICHARD SHELTON

ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

now that my skin
is crazed by time
I play the sun-game
once more with feeling
at Balboa Laguna La Jolla
and Acapulco
He who was lost is found
shriven among ice plant
consecrated with bare feet on sand
and baptized
bellowing
coming in fast
above a shark-filled sea
big things are happening
they leave brief impressions
on the water I have seen
tall hotels sway a little
it is a signal
blessed are the young
for they shall inherit

one another's bodies
at Balboa Laguna La Jolla
and Acapulco
I have been young one last time
so many times
proving that nothing
in this world or the next
is a substitute
for anything else

BRUCE BENNETT BROWN

GREAT STONE FIREPLACE

My elbow rubs
the hair below your navel
and sparrows sting me with
their wing tips.
You move and I remember
summer's ritual of anemones.
II.
My fingers take a journey
along the dim blue vein tributary
that flows across half your belly meadow
and winds into the pubic bush.
III.
My dark amber loin hair
stays in the out flowing white gown
like symbols of a kicked apart language.
She the fire glazed spinner
gathers them everyone
and makes english on her thigh,
one name and another.

BRUCE BENNETT BROWN

OLD CONVERSATION

Such a glint of silver and the necessity of being
somewhere faraway,
a final music floating among the gayety of trees
before the truth of mountains rises into that
off-silver shining and gateways are empty with rain
no longer beating with pity on the parched catalpa
leaves. There is something in the fog tonight.
No traveler passes on the main road and no neighbor
crosses into my quiet garden. The porch chairs
half moon tinted are fairly warm and bear imprints
of visitors just stepped out, down the walk a little
way. The mist is blooming into a world wide flower.
There is something in the fog tonight that sounds like
mother and father sheltering their horses in a sawmill
shed after their lantern burned out and they had ridden
four hours in the tongue-wet dark.

VIEW FROM THE FIELD

Bruce Bennett Brown

When all these golden arcs are broken and the losses are heavy on both sides, I will get my chance to say how far such things went well in my time:

how pawpaw bushes keep from
breaking into tiny sticks
in winter
how earth keeps its crude
rebellion
and how we blame birds for
dropping the dark pits of
pride trees in our fields.

A few things come with the body: hair, urine, sores, hunger, nails and scars, not only those given over to childbirth and occupation. There are days and hours to think about. Some things hide well.

Occasionally one sits near the entrails of the world, turned toward the quick, for old eccentricities do return:

with its delicate fear
a feather left in a doorway
will keep a crawling child
inside
for our protection
crickets with silver trinkets
needle in the shape of our names
three times in one night.

I can bear it out until I come to a casualty that neither side claims.

NEIL MYERS

MOTE FOR GODARD

it was the urge for a concentration camp
led me to screw you thru the ear
in chains, or you on top of me
breathing, riding, your full
globes shake, revealing
the tight curve of your mouth, the
inward stress, until
the milk flows outward like a spider's wine.
bend backwards. in the yard the peonies
are dead, chains of concatenation,
drying, the wide wealth of flowers
brown & shattered on the clover, straw
grass, crab claws of the weeds. the huge
dock leaves smelled when i pulled them,
white inside, juicy, hollow stemmed,
easy to cut; a large thin spider
earthbound, vanished under another
leaf; i cut the whole. any road may lead
to a concentration camp. any enemy
is himmler. now it is summer, the huge
walnut trees swaying over the brown grass.

Herbert Morris

THE EQUATORIAL SUN

Littoral, in the night
I dreamt Dakar, Conakry,
light of resplendent harbors
lodged in the flesh of headlands
rising on hope and basalt.
Stars of the South Atlantic,
was it your wake that crossed me
late of the latest evening,
music awash my body,
vague embarkations stirring,

wind sowing the Brazilian
and the dark scent of almond,
or your salt kiss that touched me
fierce on the mouth and passage,
linens, raw silks, great muslins
stripped from the beds and shoulders
of the coastal republics,
borne in the hands of children
days and nights on the journey
from the interior
to be spread on the beaches
in wait for winds or mercies
equal to the implosion
splaying their swell and dazzle
on the dim will and masthead
astonished into voyage.
And of Dakar, this instant
opening to the sea-routes,
surrendering its night salt,
night salt and port salt, jasmin,

HERBERT MORRIS

bells of the far accessions,
riding on time and waters
as if they were inventions
spilled to accommodate her,
water the long enforcer
that shall not see her broken,
time as the light and darkness
bent to her ways and purpose.
Time in Dakar is evenings,
mornings, blood's fathom, shanties
hammered across the beaches,
tin for a roof to house us
that the high salts sift thunder
over our heads and slumber
the night they storm and seek us,

and that the wrath of jungle
have a mute force to rage on
when it sweeps here and finds us.
If the skin bleached or blackened,
whether our names be snowy
or the intensest burnished,
and if names yet be suffered,
it is too dark to know.
One looks, as if it mattered,
but hears only the evening
somewhere wrestling the daylight
over the grinding sea-wastes
where the blind fish sing praises.
One looks, and it is always
wind from Brasil pervasive,
sailing on rains from Rio
and her blown almond fragrance.
Sailboat, light is the burden
wearing the planks to shadow

HERBERT MORRIS

rumoring in the great prow
bleaching the jibs and plotting
time in the darkling canvas.
Ship, before us leak mornings
oyster, lime, coral, cobalt,
mornings like pride of islands
that a boy, north of Bali
on the runs from Sumatra,
dreamt from the deck and rigging
where a vast wind from Indies
heaped archipelagoes
and spice trade on his shoulders,
the genius of Equator
and the hot stain of Cancer
lashing him in the night

as no thing ever touched him,
fever of embarkations
and the salt of commitment.
Vessel, somewhere tomorrow,
launched from sheer confluentes
on the pure suns impending,
canvas bursts heavy on us
irrevocable, impassioned,
like possibility
in a first thrust and downpour
breaking us on its knowledge,
Dakar and the name Dakar
where we ride out to sail from
and the dark port we make for
that the idea of harbors
for the first time possess us,
matching the brine we tasted
taking their names to cool us,
equal to Africa
and the cartographer's
craft of profound rehearsals.

WILLIAM PITT ROOT

END OF A SEASON

As hot light drinks the puddles
from concrete, and gladiolus
rise like knuckled sticks, God's
day, Sunday, burns. The clouds have opened
just enough, and sunlight stares
the shadows into trees. From bushes,
small birds flip through the air
or peck at thorns bright with bugs,
feeding where branches are open coffins.
On the lawn a mat of cut
grass rots. A shabby robin
yanks a worm that stretches as he tugs.
It snaps. The gladiolus rattle
if you're close enough to hear
and there's a breeze. Ants and beetles
crawl along the leaves like paper.
Of three stalks, two are ragged
with dead flowers. The third is tight
with buds, but dry almost dead
despite the rain, the gardener, and the light.

JOANNE DE LONGCHAMPS

IN THE CAVES

WHITE
COLD DEEP
STONE BLIND
DARK SLEEP
BLACK WATER

1.
In your absence,
my senses struck asleep
and locked in deep spells
mark a sunless dial,
are numbers for the dark.
I know of salamanders
sealed in grottoes :
they are white and feed on crickets,
they are blind and white as shells
that turn to stone.
Swimmers trapped below,
motes in blackest glass,
the cave-fish without eyes
swarm their constant night
and they are white.

JOANNE DE LONGCHAMPS

IN YOUR ABSENCE,

black of blindness
and the whitest cold
entrap
and hold.

2.

I am one who patiently,
patiently with a feather's stroke
brushes the silt from graves.
In shallow caves the dead
make diagrams in dust;
my buried selves, close curled,
arms hugging knees,
downed among a magical debris,
lucky and unlucky stones.
A feather found a goddess
in a nest of fingerbones,
her belly and round breasts
held as promises.

JOANNE DE LONGCHAMPS

3.

In the hollow mountain
no shape but shaping water moves
under rough arch and dome,
earth's many-chambered comb.
I follow water-webs, thin streams
that widen to a pool
and silent on its surface ride
rafts of crystal, petal forms;
blue-white these floating gardens
in a lightless room,
a place come close to sleep,
an innerland like dream
where alterations of the known,
sly shift of elements
tangle the waking sense.
I walk an underworld
where flowers, logically, are stone.

4.

I learn to tell
the hours of stone and water
as they move and stay
in a constancy of change.
Water gathers at the tip
of dripstone — and it falls,
a mineral rain where pillars rise
and colored cones grow down;
a dazzle in a cavern,
a colonnade of waterclocks
whose measurings have made
temples in a rock.

JOANNE DE LONGCHAMPS

**THE METRONOMIC SOUND, THE FLOWING SPIRES,
KEEP AND MARK TIME.**

After blind descent, a jeweled dimension opens in the mind.

5. Attend that moment when things move beyond themselves, becoming more: the way a poem can raise worlds alive from matching words, from the quiet page lift kites and birds. In this deep way the lace-fans of great ferns and centuries of leaves shelter in the press of time imprinted on a stone — their foliate perfection moving upward in the mind rises from a rock to be the legend of lost trees.

JOANNE DE LONGCHAMPS

6.

Always
the hunter whose quarry is himself
is driven down,
a clamberer in caves,
a listener in long rooms
under the hill.
I hear my heart
as thunder of stone's tumbling;
a terrestrial monster
caught in the rock-spill.
I carve a ragged tunnel,
enter on all fours
the final chamber
to find on soaring walls
the sacred, painted animals
that guard the inner night.
Brave in company of beasts,
I climb into the light.

7.

These words are scratched on stone
one footfall from the portal of return,
one pace-length from my passage to the sun;
sun that strikes a path across a sea
whose waves
are rumpled linens woven green and white,
are veils that hide the secret glowing
downward-growing seamounts — and their caves.

MICHAEL MILLER

THE THIEF

During the hot day
caught in the time of hunger
I stole beauty from
a boy.
His eyes were dark his hair was long his body soft
The first time was enough
I took him
slowly
Later
an hour to be exact
I robbed a blindman of a pencil
I began this poem
then changed the color of my hair.
Following a woman I thought she was someone else
I found blackness
bitter
Holding hands with her daughter
I ate a cookie and sipped milk
She kissed my lips then asked if I could come again
I wanted her
for a moment.
Her eyes were green her hair soft and golden her mother
slammed the door
Now

exhausted in the street
I watch the day.
Less than a body I cry softly to shadows moving in
silence
the figures with pretty faces
pass.
My eyes close night draws on the sky
with darkness

DENNIS SCHMITZ

WHITNALL PARK

the rain leaves its prints
all over
we knew it had left
& the Root River went on ahead
a little higher
faster
an old story
water bubbled in pools near the roots
of the willows
& near the shore
a dog sucked at the edge
of a rock that lay half-submerged
I put my arm into a pool
up to the elbow
the dark flowers of mud
that opened
when my fingers touched bottom
for a moment
I thought of blood
the dog was barking
overhead the leaves of the willows
turned over
as they will after a rain

DENNIS SCHMITZ

XXV

I would not believe
Death
my loins were a kiln
dark
& wrinkled seed woke
dry & warm. & kind Death
would not come
but my daughters are
in their beds
the soft house settles
like a fall
of heavy snow
the wet walls roll
down their papers
the doors have turned
shut
the keys stick out their tongues

VIRGINIA PALMATARY MOSELEY

CUE

Because you have always been Clown,
Smeary and mildewed,
You sweep in the light arc,
A ball on the surf swell
Of applause for the big acts,
Pelted with butts, phlegm, yells.
Because you have always been Mother,
Poulticed in a clean apron,
You isolate from soap, grease, steam,
That mediocrity,
The plate cycle of refuse.
Because you have held your craft
Obstinately, you stoop for tools
Your senses fumble, break
A nail, swear softly, begin

Over, persistence never
Stretching to distinction.
Because you have always been immortal,
You sleep the phases
Anguish into resurrection.
In those immeasurable fields,
Moon tide of encomium,
For you a salt fist of wilted bloom
Raped from a dead tenderness.

BOYD CARTER

SPACE

To Eileen

From the hog nosed thing
shot
from obelisks
felled
in tugging silks
Through jet stuff
candid paralleled
clucking choppers
to
lens and frogmen
and fuddled fish:
The Planet Earth
seen
above itself
in sidereal silence
Can it exist without a poet?
The poet exist beyond his earth?
Within the void where rainbows end?
Reading this you ask:
'Without me then
would love exist?'
'Probably not,' I said

thinking how empty
space is
Without a poet.

DAVID RAFAEL WANG

THE STAKE

Stay cool
baby
stay cool/ he says
a boy of 18 or
19/ if over a day
It's all your mind/ control
— that's where I'm ahead/ the only thing
real is his/ not
the Beatle haircut or
blond locks of hair/ the
white T-shirt or levis
also
other boys wear/ but
the flesh
skin
outthrusts
the plain wear
declares:
In my physique
you see
the mind
reigns.

DAVID RAFAEL WANG

THE TRUCE

How can we
learn to share
what we like
in this world

where love's
often so contrived
that kisses
are to be
mixed with
ice-cubes in
a glass/ for her whose
skirt
is torn between
your husband's suspender
and your envious eyes?
How hard it is
to drop the layers
of dress all at
once and admit
the game is simply:
Cancel each other out
But I conceal no
weapon under the glare of
my maroon socks and
you can equally
let your ravenous dark
hair down/ before suspicion
snares and snips the wings
of the free-floating
jay, the plume
of our delight.

CHAIM MENDELSON

THE LIONS

Enough
an end
to the desert
Surfeit no more
on manna
and rockwater

Better the fleshpots
miraculous bricks
without straw
Sweeter
the leavened bread
of bitter sweat
Look
across Jordan
flow milk and honey
Man
blow that horn
and all go boom
Enter Messiah
on a white ass
to build Jerusalem
we follow
a cloud
a pillar of fire
more wonderful
than Babylon's gardens
whored to grass
to land
naked as Adam
in a Canaan of gas
Word
borne
to the ungrateful Gentiles
and resurrect
a language
safe as Daniel

CHAIM MENDELSON

MIRACLES

Statistically speaking
the urbane biologist Pontecorvo
defines a miracle
any event
of probability
approaching the vanishing point
DNA
catalyzing its own complement
strictly according to code
Relatively speaking
damned if the stammerer
hasn't burst into fluency
exposed to Kazin's memoir
of that polished lecturer's
erstwhile identical case
Post hoc propter hoc
deplorable logic
delightful psychology
far from exact

MARY JEAN IRION

FRAU HEINZ

Wednesdays she comes wearing contradictions
in gray eyes. . . .
A faint feeling across her features of numb
not-understanding has settled dumbly down
in sagging breast and thickened waist
and heavy feet on the basement stair.
Over the vacuum cleaner the weary slope of shoulder
drops to drab of sweater's ribbing halfway down
to the dead dark hems of dresses.
Something more than tired of mop
and bucket is drawn upon the day
when Wednesday (ve vill zee you next veek) comes
bearing remembered terror fleeing the farm

the doors wide open white ducks left bleeding on the
table no time no time the Russians
coming the old mother running and
crying the cows calling after them
all down the road carrying
what? what? what?
can the arms hold of the heart's
things. . . .
There must be money for teeth
and teeth for chewing and chewing for living
and living for
what? what? what?
waxing other people's linoleum

MARY JEAN IRION

and children who heap themselves on sloping shoulders
 carrying grandchildren who cry and break such
 beautiful
 things
 at the day's end when breath is gray enough —
 the stems of roses and the radio and a cut glass vase. . .

.
 Dreams break over and over the base laughter
 of the young.
 But Wednesdays she lifts this house from the week's
 falling,
 smiling her shy way, her features fine,
 her hair the color of autumn fields, her hands surely
 bringing
 clean and shine of caring to the dustrag polishing my
 things.
 Time shapes so variously, but in the end will have me
 in its teeth and mine
 a little, likely, after her.
 And where is rhyme?
 Wednesdays I say how nice it looks and mean that I
 reach, reach, reach to this woman scrubbing toward the
 beautiful
 dumping down the drain and in the trash the scum of
 traffic.
 Teeth are for smile.

CATHARINE SAVAGE

STILL LIFE WITH BOTTLE

A bottle breathes blue light;
 the polished eyes of copper pans are hung
 questioning in a row; the onions, strung,
 make a long amulet.
 Across the cabinet
 things idle mutely in their artifice
 like poems — put in place

and carrying the stress of ritual,
but mulling over mutiny, alive
and ready to rebel; when I incline
to contemplate, caught by pythonic eyes,
again the cryptic walls,
to join my Siamese shadow on the floor
at the center of objects in repose,
I am not sure that they have exorcized
what gnaws the rib of style;
or whether, tired of being heraldry
and waiting on the side of the event
— the writing of ourselves —
they have resumed their war
as atoms in the dark. Perhaps the line
of these familiar forms will fracture, while
the images reflecting what we take
for order will dissolve
in wordless nothingness; yet she who wove
an undone tapestry
and made the bed as ballast for her love
while talking to herself could still compose
fidelity from a dumb loom, and wake
ten years with the same timeless wrinkled face
that made Ulysses smile.

CATHARINE SAVAGE

**THE HOUSE OF THE MIND IS A HOUSE OF
CARDS**

A night bird's laughter smashes
the stillness, violates panes,
and fractures the glass wall
that rings my purblind mind. Dark
floods burst through shattered
dikes, and on lacquered screens
immemorial dancers, painted
immobile, plunge with a crash;
and planes, splintered, crumble
like paper panoplies. House
of cards! where thoughts fall,
kings and queens, at the first
trumpet, as the jesters
gather, to pick up scattered
pieces — mocking, wearing motley
and leaping among the shards.

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LILLIE D. CHAFFIN

LETTER : A DETACHMENT

Developing lower stars than have shown
at night, snow dominates the day. The stillborn
plum and pear, whitecrisp, will sift down
another snow.

Just as toowide margins
nip early questioning.

My orchard never learns a thaw,
a sometimesun are not enough, and
each years springs aborted halos.

Flaunting a brief discontent
at petals pinched, i crown
myself invisible, accept this
blank space: blizzard due.

SONGS TAUGHT, SONGS UNTAUGHT

Yuk is first.

*Beginning a howl, a small opening. In this manner
the void is addressed. Stranger meeting stranger,
so to speak. Names, histories, anecdotes,
ambitions, desires, weeps, groans — indeed, the .
. . elements . . . of self are exchanged.*

*Wherein, whereas, whereof, wherefore, wheretat .
. . the following . . . writ . . . appears to be some
tale, story, fable, biography, truth, trick, oddity,
curio, doctrine . . . whatsoever . . .*

*the need of translation seems apparent, tho some
loss is obvious, and this loss has been taken into
account, and so a degree of mystification has been
maintained to do justice to the elusive character of
events which now follow in*

THE SONGS

Dang Phool, Asia. Morning of the worried man in his room waiting. It is hot and it is raining. The worried man is in bed, on his back, in shorts, sweating, and observing an insect crawl across the ceiling. A fan, on a nearby table, whirs interminably.

The rain stops. Light flows thru the slats of the window. The rays strike the worried man. Light and shadow, light and shadow, like stripes over his body. The small hole in the center of his forehead is barely detectable. He looks worried about something else.

Swiss Alps. Sunday. Afternoon of the committed man. Ski jump. At the starting point. Begin now. Push and down. Push again. Increase speed. Seconds now. The pictures of the past are like those of the future. Inevitable. The committed man feels the cold. It is sharp. Somehow

refreshing despite its crispness. Strange how carnal is death, how it whets the appetite, his mind speaks as he sails over the cliff, and plunges five thousand feet like a swan, thru the snowflakes, thru the —

Bedouin tent. Somewhere in Arabia. Time of the discovering man. Dusk, the faint softness of day still hesitant to retreat before the coming darkness.

SEAMUS FINN

The discovering man sits. The tent flaps are open, revealing the litter before. The sliced meat of his tribe. Men, women, children, animals. Everyone sliced.

From the side of the tent opening, a shadow. The shadow moves. It is a scorpion. The discovering man watches. The scorpion enters the tent. It crawls in its ugly wiggly fashion to the feet of the discovering man.

The discovering man lifts the cloth on his legs slightly. The scorpion advances thru the opening.

The light yields to darkness. The discovering man screams. Unheard.

Workroom of a great man somewhere. Here now, the predicate man at work on a momentous decision of world-wide importance. He is seated at his desk upon which are maps, photos, scrolls, toy human beings in plastic. His hand rests upon a phone which has many buttons, all red. After some moments of thought he presses all the red buttons. The phone disintegrates, then his room, then he . . . smiling with contentment.

Night. Amazon Jungle. Home of the weeping man. Drums and yells and primitive ways fill the air. The weeping man weeps. He has just rejected a tribal gift. She ran off crying with great shame. The weeping man takes his cross and weeps on it.

Three days later his head arrives by canoe at civilization. Dry red tears stained his cheeks.

Space capsule, Omega. Forever night of the final man.
The child, back to liquid foods again, trying to grow where
naught grows, wishes to lap but cannot, cannot, and is
forced to suck sustenance.

The planets are there, but the forever night has some
grievance toward things lit by sun or being or curious
pursuit. The final man wrestles with his controls, plots a
course in defiance of the night, and strikes a sun.

He burns in delight. In glee, almost.

Tho the forever night goes on

Forever

despite.

LETTER FROM THE UNMAGIC STREET

‘Salami sandwich with lots of pickle juice.’ of angel hair in the liquor, I walk and do not know why I tell my tale or why I walk. ‘Bake that rye bread until it is fairly crisp.’ I will wait a while and talk. Another voice in that time: ‘Now, do you really believe like you said that Boston is a degenerate town because it lives by faith.’ ‘Don’t forget that it is rye I want. Yes, Boston is — what else is more of an embalmed elephant.’ that is the way my story begins — they always begin with a handle-bar riding image in my mind. ‘The Speared Dilemma’ by a thirteen-year-old dramatist has been playing off-Broadway here in New York for about four months. The billboard has a Roman sentry, cavalry officer, with a Mohican-haired plume on a bald brass helmet; he has the smile of an innocent lecher and between his teeth is a short scimitar. The play has something to do with breathing correctly in a woman’s bathroom. Yet, one critic called it the manifestation of the innate lethargy of barbarous bohemians. I think I will tell you about some of the inscriptions in this story. I get them mainly from my reading in the cemeteries. When I first moved here, I wondered where they buried everyone; but now I know — they don’t — they ship the carcasses away in blue boxes. But I found a leisurely place of the dead out in Yonkers: ‘Through blood and muscle he ran into the eternal bosom of Jesus Christ.’ I wonder how that happens—the cloth must be quite damp by now. That is not my favorite limerick; but only great writers begin with their favorite, then kind of drift with reiteration. ‘I listened to the larks and followed them into the clouds.’ That is a little better but I dislike airy things. No, I do like airy things; I try not to, but I do anyway. I remember when I first saw that inscription. sound of wailing pushed my sleep

toward the ravaging jaws and ripping flesh of infant fury. It was the day a dog smelled my ass as I hung it off a short stool. I didn't like it very much, but I kept hanging it until he got enough of it and left me alone. All the time he sniffed, I thought of other things: my wife, my son, my home, my books. Why am I telling you all about this? It isn't any of your God-damn business, but I keep doing it anyway. And

J. CHESTER JOHNSON

I don't think you enjoy it very much. All cemetery engravings are a little obtuse in a lyricism, which I dislike. But I have to tell about these impenetrable lyricisms — you know that — I have to keep you off guard. They are very important to a story. I have written many stories, but they never got very far — but I have learned this: never let the reader know over fifty per cent of what you are talking about. I never write for art purposes; but they are the same way. But let's go on with inscriptions — I want to find out which one will be the most important in my tale.

But I guess my favorite is: 'Where the ghosts with their lopped golden angel hair jump and skip, there, the stars embrace and envelop in far-off beaming zephyrs.' How is that? What mental comedy! What physical tragedy!

'Hey, you want some of my pickle and salami sandwich?'

'No, I'm mad at you. Boston and all that useless crap you talk about.'

'Well, get the hell out of here.'

with the power away drilling and stripping my gutty mind smelling.

'No, I'm waiting for a story.'

'You would. Well, here it goes again.' There are no eagles here. The last one I saw was on my trip home to Virginia, No, I'll take that back. There was a stuffed one in a museum here — starched feathers and locked feet onto a concrete slab inside a glass cage. This reminds me of the birds I am going to put in my tale (and I don't know why I am telling it or why

I walk). There are no eagles here — but, dear God, they've got the pigeons, with deep white bleak excretions on the tips of their blunt claws. They fly under porticoes, and bless themselves, with beaks barely visible. What they do under there — Christ, I don't know. They seem to sing quiet songs together over there.

they're inside the street too.

Let's see; we have all kinds of pigeons, but they all have the white-smudged tails. There are blue, purple, brown, dark and dank pigeon feathers on the pavement.

'You sure you won't have some of this rye bread. It's quite good, you know.'

inside the plate glass windows

'Yes, I will. Now go on. Get to it. Come on.'

'Chew it up. Let the juice trickle.'

of beauty and bliss, at the end of hope, there is none except hope even, at the crest of suicide — hope there, but not the scent of it — only the struggle with hope is finished at death. where do I

J. CHESTER JOHNSON

end my walk and tale?

Maybe there are other birds for my story. I do see sparrows now and then on my bird-bath trough, hanging barely on the rim. I found one below it, flopping. He had a bloody spot on a wing — just a speck; but the whole wing, his right one, was broken. I took him into my house and bandaged. He stayed for some time. I heard him swing through the leaves as he left my back porch. Sometimes I think I see him slowly twist his feet, jerking . . . almost crawling over the grass behind my house . . . he has grown old and slow . . . he does not fly very well any more . . . not nearly so high. I hope it was not the band which crippled him and made him ancient in his age. 'I like birds. Do you?'

'Sometimes, but never very much.'

They're a lot of fun. Their squeaks bother me the most.

inside these arm rests

I enjoy watching them squirm through the trees and leap into the air. But their squeaks!

inside this private room

‘Have some of my dark draft?’

‘Yes, a little. But it makes my stomach ache. Tell me, please. Pass the glass with your left hand; you know how clumsy you are with the other.’

writing down all of this is becoming a bother — a real honest bother and I don’t know why I am doing it or telling this story.

inside these.

Those are enough birds to make it glorious and also very tearful when I get around to my telling. Of the earth and the sea, I have worried with wrinkled ears and a heavy voice while I have watched men sweat the stream of wealthy charge in the desert and spring of vision. Let’s see, I should go on to something else: inscriptions, birds, and now I guess I will tell about a few people. My pen has stopped.

‘Hand me another. Hey, I will get on with it, but stop drinking up all of my beer.’

dark draft inside this glass window and inside this private room.

This morning — all this is a lot harder — on my way to the city from Yonkers, I passed a candy-cane man near a subway rapid transit. He had a vest of red and white. He wore a short white goatee with dirty patches underneath which gave the face a touch of smudgy grace. Children ran at his blanch soft-leathered shoes — long strings pulled tight. The children ran into his legs and let their open shirts flutter against the open air; they

J. CHESTER JOHNSON

pushed him with little hands. A few of them got candy sticks from him and sped away, holding the trim canes high. They yelled with pleasure, leaving. And around the corner, on the cement walks, more children came.

‘Black coffee, please, with no milk, but plenty of sugar. Do you want any?’

‘No, I am getting mad again. I am still waiting for you. I want some real action. I want a story.’

‘I have one. I think maybe a pretty good one. But if you’d like to, go ahead. I will tell it to you — maybe tomorrow.’

against the full rich pads of this chair I am; the table pushes me closer into the back of it inside these arms.

Then there was the balloon man with his pink breeches and the hair on his chest showing above the top button of his blue sleeveless shirt. The hair in his armpits hung low, and drips of perspiration were long on black sprigs, gathered and twisted together by his profuse heat. But still the children followed.

‘Pass the sugar bowl.’

inside these windows with fat glares.

They kind of lingered without sprinting behind the balloon man. He wore high-heeled brogans, which were very loose; the leather flopped against his ankle and then turned out to return as he stomped, walking. Strips of thick exhibitional textured scarlet velvet and bright green chintz hung with bibelots sewed to the ends on the brim of his flat-topped rounded stack and large-circled billed hat. He may have had picturesque quick devouring eyes — both in different directions — protruding hazel eyes. Though that is poetic, the more I think of it, it is quite useful to a tale. Yes, the more I think — it is the syrup. The children found him by the brick house, red, with both hands full of strings — the sun and air-crumpled balloons, high in his uplifted arms. The children, gently trailing, shuffled out of sight behind the

trees — behind his pink pants, where I could not see.
inside the street.

‘I may get me another salami.’

‘The story, dammit. No more coffee or sandwiches.’

‘Birds, the play across the street, people. Is there
anything else for you before I begin?’

and why the walk and the writing.

‘I’m leaving.’

‘You know you won’t. Birds, the play, people. Why don’t
you make up your own story? I’m tired.’

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FLORENCE LEWIS

THE PINK GIRL

Did you know that San Francisco has no seasons? It has fog in a cold summer, rain in a mild winter, a fierce Indian Summer, now unhappily lost to smog, and springtime in February. February is pastel. The Iris blooms not in purple alone, but in white and yellow and blue. And the hills of California roll in and out in shadows green and lavender. But there is no awakening. The heart does not yearn after a long and bitter winter. The temperature is abidingly mild.

And, therefore, Jake would never notice the seasons. He would notice a woman instead. For a woman is always full of temperature. A woman would epitomize to him the four seasons of the year. In the summertime, it would be a married woman, delicately pregnant; in the autumn time, an athletic woman, a tennis player in Golden Gate Park; in the winter time, a lady of culture from either Telegraph or Russian Hill; in the spring — well, one spring, it was a girl. Just a girl.

What's a girl! To Jake, a girl was bound to woman. And woman to Jake was procreative force. There was no other direction for her. Therefore, a girl was not yet developed, still in a dreamland state, in love with love, in love with herself, in love with pink dresses and the smell of roses in her hair — but only in her hair, not on bushes, only in her hair. Just a girl.

One spring, just before cherry-blossom time in the Tea Garden, Jake saw a girl in a pink dress, smelling of the wild rose, smelling of her modest awareness of herself, and Jake was touched. Something that was the girl in Jake responded to the pink, to the self-confidence, to the soft voice, to the first smell of roses. Jake saw her on a Muni car, and he made her acquaintance in Playland, where she was going to

meet a boy friend of hers, a motorcycle man. Jake escorted her on all the rides and watched her laugh and breathe. Then her short-haul man arrived, and Jake left. Still, he insisted on calling her every Saturday because Saturday is conventional for girls, even when they like to take rides on motorcycles. Jake wanted to see her once a week. No more, just once a week. She didn't seem to care. She liked her motorcycle. There was a sailor, too. She didn't seem to care whether or not she saw Jake once a week. She couldn't understand Jake. His arms weren't terribly strong; he didn't attempt to kiss her, to go crazy for her. So she didn't care. Jake liked that. He liked that mild unconcern. It made his heart beat swiftly. It brought to his blood the girl in himself, unaware, don't care.

‘Is she a lovely girl?’ we asked him once.

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‘She’s lovely, now. She’ll bust after she has children. She’s the kind that ripens young, busts young,’ said Jake. ‘But she’s lovely, now. Her nose will get long after she has children, and her bosom will sag.’

And that’s all Jake ever had to say about her. He just saw her once a week. She was like a blood relation, only closer, because she was actually in Jake’s blood, and he enjoyed it. But he didn’t love her. Jake couldn’t love a woman; he could make love, but he couldn’t love a woman, not even a girl. She was a girl. Jake enjoyed her ignorance of all things intellectual, her indifference to him. Jake enjoyed it all. He put himself in her place, and he enjoyed the prospect of a girl making Jake, the artist, suffer. It was spring, as I have stated, and at State College, Jake had just finished reading *Costals* and the *Hippogriff*. Only Jake wasn’t going to put forth

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Florence Lewis

pain. He was simply going to enjoy the process of being a girl and watching his 'being.'

Jake was very happy, knowing what it was like to be a pink girl, not a blue girl or a red girl or a black girl, but a pink girl with no intellectual shackles to complicate her, just a girl, a dreamlike girl, with no real feeling for others, just an awareness of herself. Jake was happy. He listened to music with rapture, he ate modestly but with rapture, his movements were voluptuous, full of rapture; and then, Jake, because he could paint, decided to paint his rapture. He knew that spring, an illusive thing in San Francisco, although full of color, should soon be gone, and his dream state also flown. How long could he be a girl? So he made his pink girl sit down one long afternoon and pose for him, with all her scent of the rose and Yardley's Cologne. And he completed a perfect picture. He used every shade of pink to do it, and it was, of course, different. The sun shone in a cloudless sky for two days after Jake had completed the painting; and on the third day, Jake presented the girl with her picture. He was exceedingly happy. She became happy, too. Happiness is sister to pain. Other guys had taken pictures of her with a camera. The pictures came out all right; but this cat, this skinny, albeit good-looking non-muscular Jake, made her pose for a while — and here she was all in pink, her favorite color. And there was something else.

'It's really me,' she insisted. 'This is me. This is the way I long to be.'

She got carried away. She even spoke hysterically . . . and the next thing you know, she looked at Jake. Jake was, after

all, a handsome youth with a sadistic gleam in his eyes; she looked at Jake, and she loved him. Oh, she loved him! She became a woman over night. A woman. It broke the spell for Jake. Gone was the girl with the dim awareness of herself. Love made her turn full-blown. Her nose immediately grew long. Jake now perceived that her bosom was beginning to sag. For him, spring was over two weeks before the cherry blossoms bloomed and died in the Tea Gardens of Golden Gate Park. Jake gave up the girl — the real one, and the girl in himself.

People said she wept. She had never known anything quite like Jake. No one would ever quite see into her soul again. Nor would she.

Jake, of course, gave her the picture for keeps and took off. He went by Greyhound Bus because he needed anonymity after being a girl. He went to Big Sur, where his aunt had a ranch; and here, he became involved in a love affair with his aunt's sister-in-law, a lady of tremendous dignity, wife to a famous veterinary. This woman had an enormous bosom. There was no picture.

Jerry A. Bitts

THE TEACHERS' PARTY

(The Cast of Players)

Something must be understood. I did not want to tell this story, and you will not like it, but the images kept coming, and I must be free.

It was not a happy party and it lasted all night and there were no games and everyone brought his own bottle. That is very important.

And there were those who left early: a minister who told 'Rastus and Mandy' jokes and a principal who told 'clean' jokes.

And there were those who stayed. Mr. John S. Handson was a tall skinny English teacher, standing up against the kitchen wall with a red face but not moving. The little blonde girl who was not his wife was rubbing her body up against him and she made sounds.

'I don't care what he does at the party as long as he comes home to my bed!'

The tall skinny red-faced English teacher's wife was rolling on the nine-by-five-foot bed and everyone at the party came to look:

'Who's on the bed?'

'This would be fun!'

She looked like a gymnast doing forward and backward rolls, and the P.E. teacher was there.

She was a big blonde, not fat but big; and she came with a greasy fellow with a moustache . . .

'I think I'll just lie here on the floor and look up dresses.'

The dress on the short fat reading teacher fit as tightly as the suit on her short fat husband. She was demonstrating a joke by swinging her hips. It looked like someone in the act of sexual intercourse, and her husband grabbed his fat belly and laughed:

‘Merry Christmas!’

And there was Jerry Schmidt, the tall fat English teacher, and his medium-fat wife. Jerry’s eyes were glazed and he staggered:

‘I’ll tell you about those steal people . . . You know, I had a cousin once; and he had a fifty-caliber machine gun . . .

My fifty-calibre cousin . . .?’

‘Where did Jerry go?’

‘He’s outside puking on the roses!’

My wife was watching the woman on the bed and I kissed Jerry’s wife on the mouth. She was medium and fat and cold and wet from sweating and she giggled.

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‘YOU BETTER COME GET YOUR HUSBAND!’

The host and hostess did not drink much and they looked worried. Next Monday they would call the insurance man about the rug and the furniture. When we got home, I discovered I was very drunk. I walked around and around my house in the cool night air singing poetry:

‘Anthropos apteros, perplexed

To know which turning to take next . . .’

When I went to bed, the inside of my head was spinning around; so I pressed my right foot hard against the floor and stared at the window’s light.

THE TEACHERS' PARTY (THE PLAY)

Don't you sit there under your Canadian high pressure area and judge my people! It's just that the steel mills belch bloody-grey dust all over the world.

I kissed Jerry's wife on the mouth and she was medium and fat and drunk and cold and wet from sweating, and she thought I was making love to her so she giggled. It wasn't that exactly. I kissed her — I was drunk and wanted to — I have often wanted to kiss men and women — No! I do not mean what you think. You will find symbols and Freud; but it's just that when something real is understood, you love them.

He was cold and wet-looking too. Maybe it was because he had no shoes on and, as he in his grey socks lay on his side on the yellow center line, his knees were huddled up to his chest. The blood which had come from his mouth to the pavement looked like the speech balloon of a comic-strip character; but the joke was a small one. I am an interpreter of dead minds, and I didn't get the whole joke, but the punch line was: I went out with a bang!

And there were those who left early. A minister told 'Rastus and Mandy' jokes. He had to plan his sermon for the next day, so he left early.

'How am I going to get through?' He felt at us.

'You are a regular fellow.' We felt back.

Being a minister is not easy. His wife reached up to him from the grey sheets of her hospital bed.

'The doctor says our baby is going to die!'

'We will have others.'

Don't you lift your eyebrows, you ministers and would-be ministers,

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living on your gracious tree-lined streets. He should not have said: ‘... the Lord taketh away;’ he should have said nothing. And you accuse, but you were never so poor that you had to buy a pink coffin for your first and only son! The visiting minister, who preached about love, put that stupid pink coffin on a table in the middle of the room and preached about love! And don’t blame the visiting minister for preaching about love. He was visiting because he was fired by his congregation and had not been resettled yet. He told the people that the Holy Ghost had appeared to him and said: ‘Love is Beauty and Beauty is Virtue and Virtue is Love and God is Love —’ and they fired him — We don’t want none of that spiritualism stuff in our church! And do not blame the people of the church, you would-be ministers; for they have their stories. But, if I told them all, you would have no one to hate and then I would have to tell your story! And a principal who told ‘clean’ jokes played it safe and left early, and he had his story: ‘I wanted a garden in the school. It’s just that the mills make the snow dirty, and it is a long time from January to June. So I built my tropical garden, and I had a ten-thousand-dollar glass roof put in, but it leaked and the tiled floors peeled back. The teachers wanted the ten thousand dollars, so they made jokes about my garden behind my back. I heard them laughing. I will get out a bulletin : IN THE FUTURE, IT WOULD NOT BE PRUDENT OR WISE TO MAKE LIGHT OF CONDITIONS IN THIS PHYSICAL PLANT. CHILDREN CARRY TAILS.’ And there were those who stayed late. Mr. John S. Handson, the tall skinny red-faced English teacher up against the kitchen wall stayed.

‘I do not sleep at nights and I cannot eat because I am nervous. They give you a book and say “teach them the Great American Authors.” But the students have little intelligence and there are too many, and they sit at common tables and there are no windows and we are next to the furnace room and we are next to the flush flush flush of the girls’ toilets and

*a jackhammer roars overhead, making the
ten-thousand-dollar glass roof somewhere but settling grey
dust through my room —!’*

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Mr. Handson, it has come to our attention that you have been having discipline problems!

And his wife was rolling on the nine-by-five-foot bed and everyone came to watch.

‘Not me. Too skinny,’ said the shorter fatter truck driver, leaning up against the cab of the truck. She was just walking by, but he said it too loudly and she was watching their reflections in the store windows and, as she crossed the street, she kicked up a little cloud of grey dust from the gutter.

The tall fat English teacher was Jerry Schmidt. He went out to puke on the roses; but you would too. The steel mills belch bloody-grey smoke into the sky, but at night you can’t see the red. Just the grey reflection of the city lights can be seen in the sky and there are no stars! That is very important. It is not what air pollution does to my people’s lungs or what water pollution does to my people’s stomachs; it is what pollution does to my people.

Jerry and his wife lived on the lake far away from the school and the steel mills, but you can’t stop progress and the steel mills bought the land around him and dug away the useless sand and built tall-beautiful smoke stacks.

Years later, after I had escaped, I met Jerry and his wife at a play in Chicago. They were drunk, and it seemed that they were still at the party; and I was with friends, so I was embarrassed, but I was not embarrassed the night Jerry puked on the roses.

The short fat reading-teacher lady who was never embarrassed could never stop telling the truth.

The department chairman had grey hair, but she was not very old, and she had no formal training in English or

reading, and she had a master's degree in nothing, but her husband was a principal in the county:

I sometimes think these kids do not even know that teachers go to college. I think we should display our diplomas on the wall of our classrooms like the doctors do. This may add some professionalism to our duties.'

The short fat reading teacher laughed hysterically, but the chairman was not joking.

The reading teacher was a very bright woman and she set up the school's reading program and students improved their grades in English

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and social studies and math by one or two letter grades and at the end of the year they fired her.

And her husband was at the party laughing and holding his belly . . .

‘... Merry Christmas ...?’

Presents and red-green papers and groceries and sacks and boxes lay scattered down the icy gully, pointing a long finger at the little girl whose leg was caught under the upside-down car. She was not hurt, but she was frightened, and she looked up at the grey sky and cried. (An ice storm is beautiful. I know it has beauty and that day I tried to photograph the ice on bare tree limbs with the sun behind them, but when the picture came out, the branches looked grey.)

The short fat reading teacher’s short fat husband slid, slipped, bumped, and rolled down the embankment to the rescue. But the little girl’s mother was on her hands and knees on the inside of the roof, which was now a floor from which she could cry on her little girl.

‘Are you all right?’

‘If you will get out it will be easier.’

Everyone knows that when people are in a stress situation, they have superhuman strength . . .

Did you ever try to lift a car by yourself? Someone pulled her from beneath the car, but it was not him. Someone even beat him to putting a coat over the little girl on the ambulance stretcher, but at least he could cheer her up.

FIRST AID MANUAL Care of Shock Victims Assure the patient that everything will be all right. ...

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*'Ho Ho,' he laughed. 'Is Santa Claus going to bring
you a lot of presents this year?'*

The big P.E. teacher was present at the party with the greasy fellow with the mustache. She hated him and he looked up dresses. They have their stories too, but I do not want to tell them because I hated him too, and the hate clouds my mind with little grey clouds.

'If he makes a pass at my wife I will kill him,' I thought.

He didn't make a pass at my wife; but murder was alive at the party.

When we got home, I discovered that I was very drunk. I walked around and around my house in the cool night air, singing poetry:

Anthropos apteros, perplexed

To know which turning to take next . . .

When I went to bed, the inside of my head was spinning around so I pressed my right foot hard against the floor and stared at the light from the window.

I pressed my foot too hard and there was no friction because it was raining and the lights coming at me forced the moral decision. It was not the fault of the lights coming at me, but it was partly my fault for being in a hurry and it was mainly the fault of the man next to me. It left me with the choice of killing the man next to me and maybe my wife and myself and others or to take to the left side where it was mushy.

I took the left side.

Why does a slow driver speed up when you try to pass on a dark two-lane unmarked rain-slick road? There is no doubt in my mind: it was combat! Maybe, in another similar second, I will try to kill him.

We were spinning around and around and around, and the beautiful pure-white wooden fence exploded and flew

high overhead like a shell had hit it, and then the trees (too many of them) came sideslipping at me like an airplane crash in the movies.

I had seen some movies in which the pilot flew between two trees and sheared off the wings, safely slowing him down.

I was now a pilot, and even though I had no wings on my plane, I could sideswipe the trees and come to a safe stop.

We flew in the air together and collided there, my wife and I. She always sat cross-legged on the seat, so she didn't go through the windshield. She went to the floor; but looking up from her seat, I could see that there was a large hole in the glass anyway.

Inside an ambulance, you cannot see if the red light is going, and I wanted the driver to use his siren, but he didn't. When we came upon

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cars, he would just flash his bright lights: 'Get the hell out of the way,' said the lights to the back of the car. 'Her back may be broken and his hair is clotted with his blood!' 'Okay! Okay!' said the back of the car. 'But I'm late for supper already!' Swoosh! The policeman, trying not to look at my head, did not give me the ticket he said I deserved. He understood something of the moral decision. I would have felt like kissing him, too; but he was a cop and I was not drunk and my wife's back might be broken.

At the end of the year, the three of us in the English Department who had master's degrees were fired, but the superintendent was frightened, and so he published an article in the town newspaper. I do not remember what the article said, but I remember the headline: TEACHERS FLUNK Too

And so we had flunked, and so I have admitted my failure, and so I have escaped to the pure blue sky.

The two lines of poetry quoted in the story are from W. H. Auden's THE LABYRINTH (Faber & Faber).

THE LETTER CARRIER

Is there ever a time for a man to be taken seriously? Especially a fat Bohunk letter carrier by the name of Charley Chomko, humping his way this morning through another fresh winter snow? One finds himself in his work, they say. So Chomko, already thirty years old, searched outwardly every day with his hands and feet as he jumped from his cot at five in the morning . . . at 5:30 tore into sweet rolls and gulped cups of black coffee from a saucer at the Wild West Snack Shop below his room . . . and by six sharp began working his fast hands sorting the day's mail at a west-side branch of the Chicago Post Office.

8:30: he was in his stride, on the street, his own man, headed for Route 36 in the Bohemian neighborhood which he knew without even bothering to follow street numbers . . . pounding the sidewalks and the steps. Heavily burdened with words: letters he made fantasies of; checks he wished were his; Life magazines which were never any different . . . and junk mail entitling the occupant to a free set of plastic measuring cups at Shoppers Paradise; a ballpoint pen with every ten-gallon purchase of Spur Gasoline; a return postage-paid card for all men who should give up everything and try Electronics, today! But at least no boxes. No boxes to weigh him down like yesterday . . . nor the sample tubes of pink cream for the vagina. A very serious matter indeed.

A post-office morning is a post-office morning: talk of money, cars, the wife and kids. (Chomko had none of these.) Occasionally a dirty joke. Once in a while some fun — like yesterday and the pink vagina cream.

On the route, it's walking; getting in stride; meeting the people. With his people, the Bohemians, the talk is weather, money, or death. 'Mailman, do you have a check for me

today?’ is their brand of humor. The kids make a difference though. He is glad for the summer when the kids are home and the chance to play cowboys, smart-talk them, or just plain lie. ‘What’s your name, Mr. Mailman?’ ‘Sancho Panza,’ he always replies — a name that provokes instant laughter. ‘Satcho Poonza,’ they scream and double up and hurl at his back till he is free of their territory . . . high-tailing it to safety on the next block.

As a kid of course nothing was ever serious. You talked out loud about everything: your parents, other kids you hated, teachers, baseball players, aunts you couldn’t stand. There were no secrets. There was nothing to hide. Even if you did something wrong, like steal occasionally (which Chomko occasionally did at that age), eventually you told someone about

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it. Some friend. You just had to tell; you just had to make the whole thing as heroic and fantastic as possible. Otherwise, it didn't mean anything.

You begin to write letters though, when you get a little older and you really have something to tell someone in particular. You try to be serious now (maybe this is when you start to grow up?) because this thing you want to tell isn't meant for just everybody. You want to say something personal to only one other person. And really, no matter what you say about anything to anybody in a letter — no matter who are you, no matter where you are, no matter who in the world you're writing to — all you ever say is 'love me.'

Chomko just figured this out as he stuffed a post card in the mailbox for Mrs. Dvorak, the good-looking widow. The card was from her only daughter, Ann, who was vacationing in Florida with her husband, Ralph, and the three kids: Johnny, Lisa, and Lynn. Love. That's all it really said.

Chomko's first letter, as far as he could remember, was scribbled in pencil and left on the kitchen table for his parents. Both of them worked all day, and Chomko was not always home in time for supper when they returned. They had been leaving notes for him on the kitchen table every morning from the time he first learned to read. Notes to tell him what to eat for breakfast. Where his lunch was. What to wear. And what he should clean up around the house before they got back from work. Love, Mom and Dad.

His first letter to them was something like: 'Dear Mom and Dad, I'm scared in the house when I wake up in the morning and no one is here and I'm all alone and it's still dark outside. The street lights are still on. I hear noises in the basement. There's somebody down there. I have to put on all the lights in the house and then run out on the front

sidewalk and wait till the sun comes up before I eat breakfast. Love, Me.'

When he got home from school that afternoon, he took the letter from the kitchen table before they saw it. It wouldn't work anyway. They wouldn't believe him. So he kept it all to himself and lived each morning in fear, hoping that the next day he would be stronger, more grown-up, and act his age.

He fell in love in the eighth grade. This was the time for a real love letter. Elaine was everybody's girl, but Chomko wanted her all to himself. In his thoughts, he wrote love letters to Elaine all the time. Each one was more beautiful, more dreamy. He told her things like: Dear Elaine, you're my girl and nobody else's. Just don't listen to Bill Capek or Jerry Schuda or the rest of those guys. I love you more than anything. I'll take

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you to the Villas show on Saturday afternoon. Meet me inside by the water fountain. I'll buy you popcorn and we can sit in the last row and neck. I want to kiss you. I love you, love you, love you. The Great Chuck Chomko.

She moved to another state before he ever wrote a real love letter to her. He was afraid of the guys more than anything. If they ever knew the way he really thought about her, and if they should ever see it all on paper — he'd die. Just die.

She moved the day before Valentine's Day. He bought her a big card. A beautiful red heart that cost him 50c and said SWEETHEART I LOVE YOU. He signed it: 'All My Love Forever, Your Future Husband, Chuck Chomko.' Sealed the envelope. And then, on an errand in the night for a quart of milk, dropped the card in the corner mailbox without ever addressing it to her.

In high school he got into trouble. A lot of trouble. He was picked up one day for breaking into a house with Richard

Rillo. Rillo had already done time at St. Charles for theft, but he had learned a lot and was too smart to ever get caught again. Chomko admired Rillo. He was tough, he was grown-up, he never needed anyone; yet everyone seemed to need him. Girls were always around him and guys tried to act like him. No one got as close to him as Chomko. He and Rillo would jump cars, pick up some girls, and take off for a joy-ride all night long. One night they were both dead broke, and Rillo promised Chomko at least twenty-five bucks if he'd only watch a certain house. It was a deal. But somebody squealed. Somebody had a big mouth. (Probably Chomko.)

They sent Rillo back to St. Charles for two years this time. Chomko got off with probation. His old man made restitution — fifty bucks. Riding home from the juvenile court with his father, Chomko felt himself growing — his hands, his legs, his whole body — while listening to his father's plea of: 'Why? Why? Why? Your mother and I work so hard so that you can have everything. We buy you good clothes, give you plenty of spending money. And then you repay us like this! Why? If anyone at work finds out about this, I'll lose my job. I'll be ruined. Why?' Then, for the first time he could remember, Chomko saw his father cry. Hard, hard sobs that made Chomko sick. He wanted to promise his father anything — he'd keep regular hours, he'd change friends, he'd go to church every day, he'd help him, really help him work around the house. He wanted to say these things to his father, and even more; but he was not prepared to. He just never had any practice talking to his own father.

'Dear Dad (he wrote that night, in tears), I'll never make you cry

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again. Believe me, I don't know why I did it. I needed some money. I wanted to be someone. I wanted everyone to know what a tough guy I was. I'm sorry. Really sorry. When you cried, you don't know how terrible I felt. I'll make it all up to you somehow. I'll go to work and pay back the fifty bucks. As soon as I'm old enough to leave home, I'll go so you won't ever have to worry about me. Love, Chuck.'

That letter still lay buried under the floorboards somewhere in his father's attic. 'I wonder if the old man will ever find it,' he mused as he dropped the A.T.&T. check into the letter slot for Mr. and Mrs. Sobiski. 'Should be good for a few laughs now.' The Sobisks both worked for Western Electric. They must have a thousand shares by now, and never give Chomko more than 50c for Christmas. All they know is work. They'll die holding those shares. Chomko would drop them a post card soon: 'In a few more years you die. DIE! Forget the housework. Let the grass grow! A.T.&T. smiles like cancer!'

Ed Tomek had another letter from his girl friend in Iowa. Chomko climbed up the stairs and placed the letter carefully on top of the stack of mail he left behind the door. He easily spotted the pink envelope from her when he sorted the morning's mail. He knew her hand by now. Then of course there was the red kiss print on the back. And the perfume. Inside, what else but love? Panting love. He could imagine what their weekends were like. Tomek giving it to her all the time. Chomko knows. He knows. Didn't he hold the letter up to the sun once and see all that was going on? Sure. Tomek's getting plenty. That's the way it is.

Didn't Chomko himself use to write hot letters to his wife before they were married? Didn't he? Didn't he? Sure, sure. And didn't she answer him with perfumed letters? Sure she did. All men write love letters to the girls they love, especially the one they intend to marry. For most men, it's the only time, really the once and only time they get serious and are taken seriously. This was the first time Chomko sent a personal letter to anyone. He told Dawn everything about love, everything he could think of. For years he was storing up all this feeling about women, and night, and springtime, and snow, and sun. He told her she had hair like ripe wheat. A rose came nowhere close to the redness of her lips. Their love was purer than a thousand winters. They would marry, certainly. But he would finish college first, and they would write each other every day. In only two years, the long wait would be over. He sent her letters like: '410 more days left. Can you wait? I can't. Let's elope. Your lover, Chas.' He promised her everything: a home, a car, a trip to Europe. And even three children — three boys, because that's what she wanted. They

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would make something really beautiful out of their marriage.

Her letters were never so serious as his. Never so passionate. But they did say: 'Love.' And this was all Chomko needed.

In two years they were married. But that was the only promise Chomko kept—except for the trip to Europe, which she hated. In four years, they separated. He remembered one angry night she got out all his old love letters and read them to him aloud—one after another. He remembered how foolish he sounded. And how they no longer meant the same thing this time.

He wanted to keep her, but he failed. He wanted to find the right kind of work, but he failed. He wanted money, but did not care to earn it. He wanted some kind of recognition,

but did not know how to go about it. Most of all, he wanted to tell her about these things. Really tell her about himself, all the things he had on his mind. All the problems with people—what they did and how they lived and all the really exciting things in life. Beginning with that stuff in his love letters: the night, the spring, the snow, and the sun. But he couldn't tell her. He held himself back so he wouldn't be made fun of. He was afraid to be serious with her, or maybe anyone but himself.

But he did write Dawn a letter just before their separation. He tried to get it all down on paper. When he was through, he left it on the kitchen table for her. He called it: 'A Letter I Could not Speak. Dear Wife, I know I'm not the same man you married. No one is more aware of this than I. I promised you a wonderful life. A life of love and security and comfort. We were both going to work until we had enough money to buy our own home. A beautiful home with enough land for all our children. Teaching, and you, were going to be my whole life. Nothing could ever shatter these dreams. What happened? Surely you are not to blame for my actions. You have remained pretty much the same woman I married almost four years ago. You are still beautiful, still filled with a childlike adoration of me. I have not lived up to your expectations. I have failed you in this respect. I no longer hold teaching as my life ambition—rather, life itself. Home ownership leaves me cold. I have no concern for your relatives or mine. A few friends, yes. And I don't care about kids. I see no reason for them in this world of ours. I don't care how I look, how I dress. I don't care about money or work. I don't care about anything, I guess. Maybe there's love. I don't know. But the kind I'm after, you don't really seem to want. Love, Chas.'

She never saw that letter. He kept it in a notebook. They separated three months later. Incompatible.

NORBERT BLEI

Chomko left for Europe. In a year's time he burned up every cent he could find. First, what money of his was still left. Then, all that he could borrow from his parents.

His letter-writing became more and more fevered, at times writing to anyone who came to mind. He even wrote to George Taucher, a college buddy he could depend on, a person—even though he was a junior executive—who had some idea of what Chomko was going through, what he was after. A friend, too, who might relay some of his impressions to his ex-wife.

'Dear George: Now why am I writing to George, I ask myself? Am I trying to impress him because I'm in Europe and he's in Chicago? Perhaps. But unconsciously am I looking for sympathy? Hell no! Perhaps a little understanding? Yes, surely some understanding. But more than anything, isn't it because George was always one hell of a guy to talk to? To listen to? Yes, that's it. Certainly, that's it.

'And besides, it is somewhat of a cold lonely night in Paris. I have walked the city all morning and afternoon. This evening, after a delicious meal washed down with a bottle of vin ordinaire, I walked still more. I found a beautiful French woman at one of the cafés. She was once a student at the Sorbonne, or so she says. We ate, we drank, we laughed, we walked through Les Halles. And then we made love. (She is good at it.) Now it is past midnight, and I am tired and a little dizzy and I would like to sit down and have a smoke and talk to my old friend, George.

I have been living in Paris now, just off Rue St. Denis, for over six months. I wish to stay forever. The thought of returning to the States makes me vomit. Paris is alive and real. They've managed to hold onto some of the essentials of living. (Even though the people are absolute bastards.) The pissoir is a living stinking monument to the reality of man's

daily life. Long may it survive on the Paris streets; and long may its stench fill the nostrils of every passing tourist so that even the American may be forced to stop occasionally and conclude: "I piss, therefore I am."

'Sidewalk cafés! (Against the law in most of the U.S.—food might get contaminated; and you know, if there's one thing about us, WE'RE CLEAN!)

'And food, George, FOOD! Americans have castrated their taste buds (along with a few other things). Did you ever sit down to a plate of snails? (My favorite so far.) Snails cooked in butter and stuffed with garlic dressing. Served crackling hot in little cups of bubbling butter. Rip off a hunk of fresh French bread and lap it all up. Wash the whole

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thing down with cheap wine. Food, George. I taste it! Food!

I am living in a real hole. But, because it is Paris, a man can accept anything. After walking up five flights of stairs, I push open the door to my cruddy room, head for the wide windows, throw them open and step onto a balcony with all of Paris at my feet and in my arms.

For this I pay a dollar a day. I take all my evening meals at a student restaurant near the Sorbonne, where the prices are right and the food is exceptional. For lunch I go to a corner grocery store, buy a loaf of warm bread, some cheese, an apple, and return my empty wine bottle for a refill. The woman sets it under a barrel of vin rouge, fills it, corks it, and charges me the staggering sum of fifteen cents. My entire lunch adds up to forty cents. Do you see? Do you see what it's all about?

I would like to talk to you some more, but I am getting tired. When I do return home, I will surely look you up. There will be much to talk over. Some time next month, I shall leave for Germany. From there, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, and maybe Spain. I am in no hurry to get home. But the money is slowly dwindling. (If you can send me anything,

I'll pay you back. Believe me.) I shall have to begin looking for some kind of work soon. I hope it won't be teaching. I have no idea what I will work at when I return to the States. Although I'm a "certified" teacher, it all seems so very futile. Write! Your friend, Chas Chomko.'

George never answered the letter. Nor did most of the other people Chomko wrote to. Before he knew it, Chomko was home, broken in so many ways that he is still trying to retrieve the pieces that matter. Night after night, he sat alone in a small room overlooking Cermak Road on Chicago's Westside; and one night, he began writing letters to himself.

'Dear Charley: For the first time in such a long time, a dark time, I feel like saying something to someone. I stepped off the plane at O'Hare Field (days ago? months ago?) and ever since have been wondering and wandering and pondering my predicament. It is bad here, very bad. Not a very nice place at all—not even to visit. There isn't a single thing here that excites me any more. Everything is broken and dried up.

I came back a different individual in many respects. And I have found that any Europeanization I may have acquired is unacceptable here and damn hard to hold on to.

I developed a new love for walking there — thru Paris, Athens, Rome. But where in the hell can I walk now? I've tried it here. For weeks, I told myself: "Piss on a car. I don't need one. I'll walk everywhere, just the way I did over there." And so I walked and walked down block after

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block of Sears Roebuck Land — snow shovels, ice scrapers, rock salt, aerosol bombs (psst and all the ice has melted), snow chains, snow tires, Sno Bol (to keep the toilet sparkling), etc. etc. etc. (and in the summer, twice as much shit to make life worth living). SNOW! Psst, you're gone! Everything but snowmen. The last fuckin' thing that comes on like white madness to cover all the crap that people manufacture, and he's fighting it! Man, pick and shovel, tooth and nail, he's out to get it! Every last goddamn snowflake. "I'll get you," he says. "I'll get you with my chains, and shovels, and bombs that go psst!"

'Back to my walking. I get off the side streets and onto the main ones and cry: "What's the use? Oh, God, what's the use?" Electricity burns me, blinds me. Crazy-colored neon tubes — raw entrails strangling me, chasing me, burying me. (I remember once on the island of Hydra, a small wooden sign over the white doorway: TABAC. Beneath the sign, a bird cage swinging with a tiny yellow flash inside.)

I reach for a little humanity in this erector set. Just one old shoemaker from the land of Grimm, please. Just one small grocery store where I can talk to the owner and feel the pears and cabbages . . . even argue with him about the price. America, someone has slipped a condom on you!

'And they ask me — all, all of them ask whenever they see me — "When are you going to work? What do you intend to do?" And so I reply: "I'm waiting for my streetcar. I want a red trolley with a loud bell and plenty of track. Don't spare the track!"

'So what am I doing? Nothing. Nothing. Living inside my own little balloon and shrinking, shrinking. I have the

freedom of flight, but the knowledge of the earth brings me down, brings me pain. I've knocked down too many things and haven't constructed anything to replace them. It's hard when you think you know everything about living, as I do, and then to go ahead and live. They all have the last laugh on me. They hold the money bag and will delight in my grovelling for it. God bless them all.

I need money. You poor bastard, Charley, you must make a move! I must make some kind of work for myself. I reel through this Bohemian neighborhood (a language I cannot speak or understand) with visions of other lands — Greece, the islands, the sea . . . ah, the orange and lemon trees, the dirt roads, tavernas, sestina, fried octopus. Love.

I am surrounded by despair everywhere I turn. Everywhere I turn, faces run like oil. The streets clinging tenaciously to the little of me that remains. I shake them off like leaves. Oil faces. Black rainbows. Love.

'Charley, where are you? Moods of depression coming on and on. More frequently. Anything, a wart on a hand, a neon sign with one letter

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burned out, the silent applause of rain . . . anything can set me off. I ride El trains to the Loop and cannot get off. I am buried under the big green clock of Marshall Fields. Nowhere a steadying force. Hands in pockets, I shove sharp points of keys in palm. . . . Matter over mind in my time. Love.

The dream is the same dream the red dream the red dream a poor sectioned city of the red dream alone a lamp post a pink neon sign casting smears on pocked brick walls where are the cars the people in the distance i am walking walking but without footsteps climbing gray wooden steps for days of red dreams climbing climbing facing a row of varnished doors of no beginning or end i go to the right one the same door always the same one although the others are the same too i open a room lit only in pink patches from the

sign below pulling down a curled window shade in the darkness searching for a hanging bulb the naked pear bulb in my hand turning turning the light on and on an unmade cot in the corner a small wooden table some envelopes some paper a pen a wooden chair with cracked leg room is too bright for what it tries to hold off light turn strangle light up with shade dark light from below flannels room settles once again i pull chair to window and watch pink snow fall in red dream i sit with scorched hands suddenly laughing laughing with scorched hands in a small room above a restaurant made for cowboys.

‘Every year, the year of the HORSE. Cowboys! Halfass cowboys without six-guns, high boots, or horses. The Wild Westside of Chicago. Good guys and bad guys. Wanted, dead or alive! Chomko, pushing his wheeled horse down Cermak Trail, through noon and snow and stars, with a tin badge and saddlebags, delivering messages of loving madness. Pausing to relieve his full bladder in the alley. Shooting children with finger guns. Tying up at the Widow Dvorak’s for a while and maybe even talking in broken Czech, and giving her what-for with that pink vagina cream. Giddy-up. Giddy-up, Chomko!

‘And there will be time tomorrow to address this one to her personally —wherever you are; to leave the envelope unsealed; to carry it to the post office through another new snow; to hand-cancel it; to insure its future, separate delivery.

Love, Me — Chomko writes again!’

Don N. Smith

A BOX OF THREE

She thought it was that when he dropped it while unpacking the things from the drugstore — just from the shape and the way he scooped it up and jammed it in his pocket. At least she suspected strongly enough to be quite sharp with him at dinner.

She didn't ask him, of course; but she watched him critically across the table as he filled his mouth with mashed potatoes and folded slices of bread and butter, grunting and nodding to his father's monologue — on politics and when he was a boy and what he had said to the boss. It seldom varied. She interrupted to tell the boy not to eat so sloppily, and she repeated that watching his diet was part of the treatment for his complexion. She asked whether he was still using the special cream. Then she told him he needed a haircut.

Between swallows, he mumbled: 'Sorry, Mom. . . . I know it, Mom. . . . Sure, Mom. . . . Costs money, Mom.'

'Well, I don't want you going around looking like some kind of tramp. Nor acting like one, either,' she added with emphasis.

But still she couldn't be sure; so, while he was taking a shower, she slipped into his room. It was there in his pocket, the little shiny box with the bold hypocritical words: For Prevention of Disease Only and For Prolonged Marital Intercourse. She put it back in his pocket and went quietly down to the living room. She felt sick, physically sick.

When he came down later and said he guessed he'd go out for a while, she set in on him again — about how he never stayed home at night. She saw no reason why he should go out every night, and pointedly she wondered just what he found to do. She had said much the same several times before, but not for a long while; so he looked a little

surprised — and a little guilty, too — she thought. But he simply reverted to the old shrug and vague statement that he was ‘just going out to fool around a while.’

Her husband had looked up momentarily from the television, but upon catching a few words, had resumed his bland interest in it. Since he had occasionally complained to her about the boy’s staying out, she saw no reason why she should have to do all the actual disciplining. As soon as the door closed, she interrupted him with the same argument she had just given their son.

‘Oh, he’s a senior now,’ he said, without turning his head, ‘almost a man, really. I guess he has friends and things to do.’

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‘But what does he do? That’s what I’d like to know!’

‘Oh, just fools around, I guess,’ he said, with much the same shrug.

He continued to watch the program, his favorite, and she divided her eyes between it and a magazine, attending to neither. Now and then, she glanced at his relaxed face; she wished she could talk with him about it, but knew she couldn’t — and perhaps shouldn’t.

That night, she refused the convention of his arm and lay rigidly on her side of the bed, resisting the slant of the mattress. It irritated her that a man could assert himself so easily as by lying on one side of a mattress; that what he took for granted, a woman was compelled to struggle against. He — lying there — going to sleep while their son was out ripping around. She half-wished he would touch her and make one of his now-infrequent demands so that she could refuse. A woman could do that — but not some women, apparently. She really hadn’t thought of the girl. She knew of none. He never mentioned any, and he had had no dates that she knew of. It could be an outright . . . floozy; and then there was the chance of some disgraceful disease. Or, if with

a half-decent girl, there was the prospect of a forced marriage. She was miserable. But at least he was being careful. There was that. She was cross at the relief she felt.

Later, she heard him come in and go softly up the stairs; then, came the roar of the toilet. Soon he would be sleeping as easily as his father. With a surge of sympathy, she thought again of the girl — perhaps lying awake just as she. Her son. Her son.

But next morning she watched him curiously as he leaned over his breakfast with a book before him, trying to get some idea of the homework he hadn't done the night before. She had eaten earlier with her husband, who had now gone to work, but she sat with a cup of coffee and the paper and looked at her son. She knew he wasn't handsome — at least not in any conventional sense: tall, but with narrow hunched-up shoulders, as if they had been shrugged and left there; the hair a bit too greasy for that careless effect she knew he tried for; the features without promise; and those pimples, too. Yet, in the incongruous, rather shabby look of him, she wondered whether there was not some of the raw off-beat masculine appeal that many women were said to find irresistible.

After he had left for school, she went to his room; and, in making the bed and straightening things up, she searched for any evidence of his night's activity. She didn't know what it could be, but she looked. She certainly found nothing of the small box she had seen the evening before. He had taken it with him — or had used all three. That seemed incredible, but she remembered it was possible.

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She felt somehow awkward. It was that feeling of guilt, but power also — a kind of tenseness and excitement which one felt when alone in another's room, an intimacy, really, taken without his being aware of it . . . the next thing, she thought, to watching his dreams. But this was the room of her son; she had never felt that way here. It was as if he had become somebody new, almost a guest in the house, a person known well but not necessarily well understood. She supposed her husband was right: he was a man now. And it was not his mother, but some other woman, who would satisfy his demands. She would have to accept that.

That night she made no protest when he went out, but she again sat glancing at her husband. It hardly seemed possible that in the innocent sag of that shape there had once been a great need and urge, and that it had been passed on mysteriously somehow to the son. It could still be there, dulled by routine or pushed into the background by other concerns. Or else . . . And for the first time in years almost, she had the thought of another woman and was alarmed. Was there one? Had there been one, or more than one? How little did one know unless by accident, as with her son? She realized then how little a woman knew about men, sons and husbands. She had found them mostly obvious, taking things for granted, generously selfish; but they could be mysterious. They could be. And here she had two, surely as mysterious as any.

She took care in dressing herself for bed that night. She always thought she had been born for a different life, because she never liked to go to bed so early — usually to lie awake for a long time — but she did find it a good time to think. In bed, she crept close to her husband and quietly began to talk. After a few noncommittal grunts, he gradually became interested also; and soon they made love, much as they used to. Of course he was asleep before she; and she lay

there waiting for her excitement to fade. The thought that it might have been influenced by a perverted interest in her son's affairs disturbed her. The psychologists, she knew, had things to say about that. Then she wondered whether it could be simply the change of life which had to be coming before too long and the dread of what it might mean to her as a woman. The doctors spoke of that. This thought was disturbing also, but it seemed less troublesome and more respectable than the other one, since biology was to be accepted as simply the nature of things, whereas psychology was very 'depending upon' and not at all secure. Still, she felt unaccountably good, and she went to sleep before the son came in — even without trying to make herself do so.

She felt good, next morning, too, though not sure she should. She could not be pleased with her son's behaviour; certainly, she could not be

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pleased with that. But he was a man, after all, and it was in a man's nature. That was the way they were. Again, she inspected him as he ate his breakfast. His eyes were puffy and maybe even a bit bloodshot. She had read that the time of a man's greatest urge was during his late teens; but she had also heard of young bulls which, if given the opportunity, would exert themselves to the extent that they were ruined for later service. Abruptly, she offered to fry him another egg. She had heard that eggs were good.

That night, her husband was harder to arouse; and he apologized afterward for his poor showing, saying he was tired. She wondered whether all men used tiredness as an apology — and all women, as an excuse; there was that difference. When she timidly suggested that they wait a while and try again, he patted her awkwardly under the covers and said he wasn't that young any more. She supposed it was true that men gradually slackened off after their teens. She thought of the package of three; and youth seemed fine, and

her son in armor on a white horse. Then she felt stupid and ashamed. But there would be other nights. It was not her expectations but her husband's need that was important; and yet, the woman herself had something to do with that need.

When she found it some days later — again by accident, while rummaging in his drawers for some string — she sat down abruptly on the bed and as quickly jumped up and brushed away the imprint from sitting there. It was there under a stack of old post cards, flattened now, frayed and stained. She picked it up, and the contents spilled out: the three foil packs separated by perforated lines, an ugly circle bulging against the wrapping of each. One was half-detached from the others and had a torn place that revealed a bit of pale latex.

And she looked at him that evening at dinner, the pimply-faced boy with the just-shrugged shoulders, eating buttered bread and mashed potatoes and grunting to his paunchy talking father.

When he had gone out, she went up to his room again. It was still there under the post cards. Then she returned to the living room and sat down before the television.

'You know,' her husband said, 'I wonder where he goes every night, too. What is it that he does?'

'Just . . . fools around,' she said and quite suddenly began to cry.

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MARY NORDSETH

THE EVENING

(A Play in One Act)

The drawing room. He reads, laughing to himself. She watches him for several minutes. She is wearing a tailored suit and blouse; her hair tied back severely.

She: Remember the stories you used to write?

He: (LOOKS UP, THEN LAUGHS SOFTLY)

She: Remember, how amused you always were with them?

He: (LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: Well . . . if you must know, I thought they were terrible.

He: (LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: I read them you know. I KNOW what you were laughing at . . .

He: (LAUGHS)

She: They were boring. They weren't funny at all . . .

He: (LAUGHING LOUDER)

She: They lacked all semblance of whimsy.

He: (LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: You certainly don't have a sense of fun about you . . . nor did you then . . .

He: (LAUGHS)

She: They weren't even droll. At best, they were morose . . .

He: (LAUGHS LOUDER)

She: . . . stories, with commonplace situations, and simple-minded middle-class characters who had virtually nothing to say; and, what's more, nothing happened amongst them! They may as well have been dead. There was no interaction . . . there was no rapport . . . there was . . . no movement.

He: (SHORT PAUSE, THEN LAUGHS)

She: Can't you see what I'm saying? Not only do you lack talent . . . you lack color! Do you know what that is? Color is wit. And you are witless! You motley fool, you're not even amusing!

He: (PAUSE, LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: Jocularly is the gay ship on which we fare the choppy sea of life! Without it we perish. Or sink. To live at all, one must laugh . . . and you . . . you cannot really laugh . . . because you are tedious . . . and worn out. You have never been anything else.

He: (LAUGHS LOUDER)

MARY NORDSETH

She: (SCREAMING) You . . . don't have a funnybone!

He: (LAUGHS)

She: Nothing you do or have done or will ever do is funny . . . or was

. . . or will ever . . . be . . .

He: (LAUGHS)

She: . . . because you are dead inside. Your mind is cold and dull . . .

like a corpse's. (PAUSE) You are a wet blanket! (PAUSE) Often, we

would sit here, you with your manuscript, and I with my doughnut.

And you would titter . . . to yourself . . . for hours. For hours,

you would titter. There has never been a night you didn't titter.

He: (LAUGHS MORE QUIETLY)

She: . . . I wouldn't look at you . . . no, I couldn't stand the sight of

you. But I could hear you. I could hear you, gurgling over there,

gurgling — like a cat. And I would have to put my fingers
in my

ears to stop the filthy sound of you.

He: (LOUD, SHORT LAUGH)

She: . . . I would look out the window. I would distract
myself with

the laughter of the children below . . . the pink and blue
laughter

of innocence . . . running free . . . on the lawn . . . in the
dark.

And it would help. It would help, but not much. Because I
could

still hear you. Even with my fingers in my ears, I could
still hear

that dull monotonous giggle.

He: (LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: And I would be sick inside. When I realized that you
were laugh-

ing at those make-believe stories that you wrote, I would
be sick.

Because I think you really thought they were funny.

He: (LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: You did think they were funny . . .

He: (LAUGHS)

She: Tell me you thought they were funny. You did, didn't
you?

He: (RESUMES READING)

She: (PAUSE) You're marvelous when you laugh. (HE LOOKS
UP) You're

really very amusing when you laugh. (PAUSE) You're very
cute

. . . when you laugh. Actually, I like you . . . better . . .
when

you smile.

He: (LAUGHS, EMBARRASSED)

She: (PAUSE) We've . . . never . . . sat this close . . .

He: (LAUGHS, AGREEING)

She: Not before tonight . . . before now.

He: (LAUGHS QUIETLY)

MARY NORDSETH

Mary Nordseth

She: I like sitting close. I'd like to sit closer.

He: (BEGINS TO GIGGLE)

She: I seem to be doing all the talking. (SHE LOOSENS HER HAIR AND UNDRESSES TO HER SLIP) You've never noticed how white was my skin . . . nor my shoulders, round and small . .

.

He: (STOPS GIGGLING, FORCES A LOUD LAUGH)

She: . . . you're always reading those stories . . .

He: (BRIGHTENS, LAUGHS)

She: I walk naked in the rain. I sit on the balcony after a rainstorm and watch the garden swell, pregnant with raindrops. (PAUSE) Later, the air is humid . . . each plant undulates in its strange, though peculiar, rhythm. (PAUSE) Often, I lie on the red tiles near the fountain. The spot is very dark . . . cool to the cheek. (PAUSE) Under the Mimosa, you'll find your name, carved in block letters . . . in the tile.

He: (LAUGHING WILDLY)

She: Last summer, you were in the study. I was alone. It was hot. I chiseled in the garden, merciless and without letup. (PAUSE) And long after the sun set, I chipped away, blindly.

He: (LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: It wasn't until much later that I lay aside my tools. Returning with a goosenecked lamp, I quickly resumed my task. Later still, I sent out for a ham-and-cheese. They brought tuna. But it didn't matter. It matters even less, now. They could have brought jack, or pastrami. I don't like sandwiches anyway. I put it aside. It became soggy. (PAUSE) The garden was very sultry.

He: (LAUGHS, CONDESCENDING)

She: (PAUSE) I believe in being sultry.

He: (LOUD LAUGH)

She: As sultry as one can be, that is.

He: (LAUGHS)

She: Not all are sultry . . . not all the time, I mean . . .
Some of us, not even then.

He: (LAUGHS)

She: One has to FEEL sultry, first. It's not easy for one to pretend sultriness. One must experience . . . it. (PAUSE) I'm not often sultry . . . as you have no doubt noticed.

He: (BITTER LAUGH)

She: You do not like me that way. I could not help noticing this, You like cold women. Women who are indifferent . . . and nag. (SHORT

MARY NORDSETH

(PAUSE) And because I love you, I nag. Because I desire you, I am cold and indifferent. My body aches for your unsure caress . . . and you batter my ears with your throaty ha's, and hee-hee's. (PAUSE) And I am satisfied . . . but not much. I would rather copulate, freely, and with some measure of abandon . . .

He: (LOUD LAUGH)

She: (PAUSE) You're irresistible when you laugh.

He: (LAUGHS, AMUSED)

She: You're so handsome . . .

He: (LAUGHS)

She: You're very dark, and mysterious . . . foreboding, in a way . . .

He: (LAUGHS LOUDER)

She: A Sheik. Bronze and half-naked, astride a thick white horse . . . bareback. (PAUSE) Gold bracelets on your taut wrists . . . sin in your eye.

He: (LAUGHS LOUDER)

She: I love you madly. (SHE DRESSES) (PAUSE) I'm leaving now. I want you to think about all I've said. I want you to

dwell on it, so to speak. Bask in this room, heavy-scented
 though it is. Be alone, with the thought of me. (SHE EXITS)
 (HE RESUMES READING)

SPIROPANOSOME: A BACTERIOLOGICAL TRAGEDY

Albert E. Perks

Scene 1: A LABORATORY (A bacteriologist seated at his microscope) Bacteriologist: Here, on a tiny plate of sterile glass Three drops I have of richest culture medium, One of them pure, and two with germs infected. One of these two with slender spirochete And one with young trypanosome is filled. By liquid channel each to the first is joined. Soon from each germ-filled drop into the pure Some roving microbe will adventure forth. Then, quick, the liquid channel will I break — A trick that science learned from Spallanzani. Thus shall I endly one of each kind have Imprisoned in the present empty drop. Then to observe them closely, hour by hour And something learn, perhaps of worth to mankind.

Scene 2: THE EMPTY DROPLET (Enter Spirochete, gazes right and left, timid and hesitant) Spirochete: What foolish impulse made me wander forth Far from the crowd of friends and blood relations And creatures of my kind who understood And shared the joys and sorrows of my brief, Frail microscopic life, and were to me Friendship and help and kindly sympathy And all that makes life tolerable to us Minusculae who, being of higher nature Than mere bacteria, have keener sense And, if we feel our joys with more intensity Have also keener pangs in pain and sorrow. Now, stand I here, alone in a great new world; Nor can I see the path by which I came. 'Twould seem to have disappeared, and I am doomed To live and die in solitude

(Enter Trypanosome, from opposite side)

But stay . . .

ALBERT E. PERKS

**WHAT MONSTROUS THING IS THIS I SEE
APPROACHING?**

Far better 'twere in loneliness to die
Than spend my hours of life in company
Of hideousness incarnate, such as this.
Brothers I had in yon departed world
Which once I did despise, now greatly covet;
And friends, all stalwart males of my own genus,
Who surely would have fought in my defence.
And he who often lustfully did seek me
But whom with female coquetry I spurned:
He surely to protect me would have sprung
And stood between me and this frightful thing.
Oh! Spirochetic Mother, better far
That thou hadst cruelly thrashed thy wilful daughter
Than let her foolish, aimless steps thus wander
Into strange world only inhabited
By monsters whose appearance fills with horror.

TRYPANOSOME:

Methinks some strange new region I have entered;
A desert, or some sparsely peopled spot.
Here have I no competitors to vie with.
No crowd to drive me from my chosen place.
Here may I wander whereso'er I please
And none shall say me nay. But yet, perchance,
It may be lonesome. Far from my companions
I well may weary for the wholesome sight
Of lusty, vigorous trypanosomes
Whose company, so far, has been half my life.
And, furthermore, there also will be lacking
The female of my species, without which
Even the life of fierce trypanosomes,
Superior though we be to other creatures,
May well be somewhat blighted. In all else

We stand above the ordinary run
Of microbes, in the globules we inhabit
But here we are no higher than the rest;
For that creative instinct which pervades
All creatures in our microscopic world
Plagues, dominates and compels trypanosomes
Exactly as the humblest of bacilli.
Perhaps 'twere better to return
By the same route on which I hither came
And tell my friends of this new, wondrous realm
Which, traveling fortune's paths, I have discovered.

ALBERT E. PERKS

Thus, having undertaken great adventure,
And from such hazardous voyage safe returned
I may be hailed a notable explorer
And pass for great among trypanosomes.
Yet, let me think, 'twere better on returning,
A full account of what I found, to give,
And thus by accuracy of description,
My bona fides to authenticate.
To this end, then, must I a little further
Into this mystic desert land explore.
Not too far, lest some unexpected danger
Or unlooked for mishap stay my return.
(Looks around him, then behind)
Damn it!! The path I came by is no more!
I am alone, and never can return
To that fair world where all my goodly friends,
Companions, parents, loves — yea, even enemies
Made life worth living. Never again shall I
Gaze on their comely forms, hold sweet converse,
Make merry, sport, or thrash out glorious quarrel.
And, I have undertaken great adventure
For nothing. None of my kind will ever know!
(Strolls round disconsolately for some time)
What see I here? Not absolutely desert

Apparently is this new realm of mine.
 Afar, I see some living creature moving,
 Not over stout, that I might fear to meet it
 In mortal combat; possibly good it were
 This one to destroy, thus gaining much experience
 As to its mode of fighting, lest I later
 Have need to meet in battle many of them.
 Let me draw nearer . . . By the name of Pasteur,
 Jenner and Koch and every hateful Fiend
 Known or invoked by microscopic life
 May I be toxined if it be not female!
 Else, whence that mincing gait, those tim'rous
 movements?
 That sinuous, snakelike wriggle as she turns?
 But — what a contrast to the lusty, muscular
 Females of my own Superior type!

ALBERT E. PERKS

**WHAT MISERABLE, WEAK PROGENITURE, AND
 UNINSPIRING, MILD, VICARIOUS SATISFACTION
 COULD TRYPANOSOME DERIVE FROM SUCH A
 FRAIL, UNINTERESTING, SLENDER AND UTTERLY
 UNVOLUPTUOUS BEING?**

Spirochete:

Oh! Long-lost Mother! Whither can I flee?
 That frightful Thing is steadily drawing nearer!
 I tremble with strange dread. It is so bulky
 And menacing. Mother, why did I leave your side?

Trypanosome:

On longer, closer view, 'tis not so bad!
 And if my life in this drear, quasi-desert
 I needs must pass, far from my native species,
 Perhaps some useful purpose she may serve.

Spirochete:

Methinks, by the gait and build, it must be male.
Perhaps for me some hope therein may lie.
For, in their dealings with our sex
I always have observed, the males are gentler
Than with their own. With us they seek not battle
But tender intercourse; soft their approach.
Rough their caresses, but not ill-intentioned;
Dangerous their embrace, yet sometimes welcome.

Trypanosome:

And, after all, female of any species
Better in such a case, than none at all.

Spirochete:

He has a notable, swashbuckling gait
And sturdy, powerful frame. A brave protector.
I will my softest, most coquettish gestures
Employ. Perhaps he will be kind to me.

Trypanosome:

Oh, female of some strange, unwonted genus
Unlike thou art to any I have known.
Most like thou findest me as uncongenial
As I did thee, when first thy form I spied.
But, gazing longer, I have found
Numerous traits that please me mightily.
Perhaps when thou shalt know me intimately
Me also wilt thou find not too uncouth.
Anyhow, here is no great population
For you or me to choose from. Think, my dear,
Beggars may not be choosers; come, draw nigh.
Let us be friends, kiss and caress, and love.

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ALBERT E. PERKS

SCENE 3: THE SAME

(Spirochete approaches Trypanosome leading a strange emaciated child)

Trypanosome:

What hideous thing is this you have conceived?

Neither trypanosome nor spirochete

But all that is worst in both of us, is he.

Spirochete:

And who are you, to make me such reproach?

Is he not yours, as much as he is mine?

If blame there be, then half the blame is yours.

Trypanosome:

Truly, I have no right to blame you solely.

The fault was mine at first. I should have known

No good could come of any such mismating.

Better had been that we had never met

Or, meeting, had been strangers to each other

And lived our lives apart at distant ends

Of this strange desert which our curious instincts

Led us to enter: fate forbade to leave.

Yet, possibly there was some higher power

That laid this trap, with who knows what design?

At any rate, it was but simple nature

That you, being graceful, worthy of desire

And I full of microbic lust and vigor

A marriage should be consummate between us.

Never have young trypanosomes been famous

For continence, or celibacy. How then

Were we to know that such dire punishment

Was to repay our natural behaviour?

Spirochete:

Call not too soon our offspring punishment.
He is still young, but see how fast he grows.
When you were newly born I trow you also
Had not the noble frame of later days.
Methinks, maturing, he may grow more handsome.
Never did spirochete grow up so quickly.

Trypanosome:

Truly he develops quickly. And I see
Some traces now of true paternal form.
Mayhap full-grown he may gain weight and body
And the virtues of a real trypanosome.
Were he not all so fleshless, thin and bony
We might yet learn to be of him most proud.

ALBERT E. PERKS

Rapidly he grows. Soon he will be as big As his father and as graceful as his mother.

Spirochete: Would I could talk some moments with my mother! Perhaps it is a common fault of parents First to be disappointed in their offspring, Taking the nucleus for the final growth.

Trypanosome:

No doubt he takes this leanness from his mother.

Apart from that, he is a worthy son.

Half spirochete, and half trypanosome,

Let's name our baby Spiropanosome.

Come, Spiropanosome, and greet thy father.

Let's romp around in gay, microbic style.

Spiropanosome:

What is this talk of Father — Mother?

And romping round in gay, microbic style?

These be strange words, th'intent of which I know not.

Hunger I know, and hate, and nothing more.

Have at you, delectable stranger,

A meal I need, and meal you soon shall be.

Spirochete:

Oh Heaven! My offspring seeks to smite his father?

Where can I hide from such unlovely sight?

(Turns away)

I dare not watch such fierce, unnatural fight.

For one of them must surely kill the other.

Where was there ever female so unhappy?

Son killed by husband? Husband killed by son?

And I unhappy, timid, helpless widow,

Compelled to live forever with the slayer!

The battle must be o'er. I hear no further

Sound as of desperate fighting. All is still.

(Turns)

Oh! Miserable me!! What frightful thing Is this I have
conceived? This horrid son Has killed his father. Not content
with killing Proceeds to eat the corpse! Oh, monster! Fiend!
Patricide, darest thou feed thy wretched body On the flesh
and blood and bones of thy poor sire?

ALBERT E. PERKS

*Hold back! Away! Dare not to lay a hand
Foul with paternal blood on me, thy Mother!*

SCENE 4: THE LABORATORY

(The bacteriologist still glued to his microscope)

Bacteriologist: Gorgeous! The child has gobbled both his parents! Would that Convention were tomorrow morning That I might tell the learned world at once The meaning of this wondrous great discovery. Either I have a cure for two diseases, Or else, the means to start another one!!!

JERRY H. BURNS

MOLE WATCHING (A PARODY OF GALWAY KINNELL)

dirt dumb, the mole
crawls
into day.
Regard the sunstruck mole.
Charges surge and scatter
across his fur.
He has gone electric
with higher knowledge.
Sunstung eyes grope for roots
among the limbs.
He scratches and considers
the Apocalypse.
Nothing familiar/ friendly here.
A mole out of his hole
is just lost.

JOHN FOWLER

THE JOKE OF LIFE

I'll cheer myself to death
at the hands of a machine
Contraption
obscene clanking levers

rods going back and forth
The degradation of ourselves
Oh my house and cars
instruments of life
necessities
I grieve for the world
pissed on earth gone below concrete
To see my stars in grief
My protoplasmic bubble
come to the city
Proud
we live in a state of bliss
Four-legged fish climb in airplanes
Donkey ass mule or horse
let me ride you
slowly
down a throughway
Let me!

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LOUISE LOUIS

THE ‘OLD’ DAYS

Boatsmen will stage a mimic battle in honor of some
bismarck of the Archipelago. Wear colored feathers . . . arm
bands of multi grass.

Death-posts will be erected.

For burying

is always difficult.

And sometimes — never.

UNDERGROUND

His pose as executioner is a study. It hides his disapproval without comment.

No hierarchic gospel can persuade a man who trims the wick of his candle — he need not light it.

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STELLA WORLEY

UNIDENTIFIED CRAFT

*'Every hundred years or so it becomes necessary
for a change to take place in the body of poetry . .*

*.'
Edith Sitwell*

Now the phraseological intellectual,
having captured poetry, stripped its wing,
cut its throat with whetted syllable
and thrown away its song,
burns its body at Minerva's altar —
perissology, abracadabra — and simulacrum
rising out of ash, a bloodless avatar
ballooned with idiom,
straining barriers of sound, goes
over the farm, the suburb, and city hall,
shakes the petals from a painted rose
framed on a duplex wall,
over haymow, harrow, and milking pail,
bevel, and welding torch, the thing flies
over the heads of hoi polloi, its trail
snarling the web of sky.
Bored by voluminous flight, the crowd
shrugs and talks prosaic matters, resigned
to loss of craft vanished in a cloud
by sleight of mind.

MARY M. DORRIAN

THE CABBAGE

Ponder the pallid cabbage
With sedentary soul,
Who vegetates implicitly
In his impassive role.

Never to know that knowing
Imposes eternal debt —
Never encounter emotion
Or predicate regret.
Warm in the insulation
Of layered self-esteem;
Firmly ego-centric,
But without the hollow dream.
Nor does he yearn through the empty day
For sleep sedated night . . .
Nor waken to the terror
Of suffocating fright.
Safe in his cabbage kingdom —
Lonely but not alone —
He has no need to communicate:
His 'being' is his own.
Simple in his silence . . .
Unified and whole . . .
O God! to be a cabbage
With a sedentary soul.

LAWRENCE HOEY

IKON

Mother your elegance shrinking hail
Full of death thy
Child is with thee yes here the
air-conditioned zone of
mumus, postpartum troubles,
Sadness didn't even remember she had a
Child. Doctors warm in
group Good beds food Kosher and
Non-kosher covered with cellophane
Painters suicidal venomous
Mother take me away from bohemia I
love Scarsdale
Closed-circuit TV in the nurses'
station, camera over the bed
am depressed want amphetamine

PHYLLIS ROSE

A DOMESTIC ANIMAL

Touch my throat. I do not snarl.
I am by these times domesticated
Wholly. Look. I fall back, curl
And stretch, by your lavish hands made languid.
I am not dangerous. You cannot
Doubt me longer. See how craftless —
A cat to tongue your hand or set
Body against your legs, press,
Arch. I require food and affection.
Shelter me for your pleasure and thus
Spend to advantage. You are a man,
I am your mere cat. You could be generous
Or you could pick me up by the scruff
And toss me out. The lady tigress
Could not let you, or she-wolf.
But I will not hurt. Believe, and place
Your hands, your mouth, here on my throat
Where I am most vulnerable. See,
I am tame. Rest easy, you who thought
Me savage. You are safe with me.

EMILY KATHARINE HARRIS

THE LAST CONCERT

Harmony fought in the hall
Where Fling-Finger hacked the ivories;
Will some one wipe the blood
Off that set-toothed thing
So I don't have to look at it;
I am bleeding in my box
And the ushers are mopping
And our feet are sliding
And the wet ceiling below
Drips down on Gentle Jesus Apfel
Who wants his shirtfront spotless
For a speech he has to make.
The composer accompanies with a deluge
Of bloodied unaccented flats.
My pool widens and I am leaving
My scored soul behind
In General What's-His-Name's gold chair.

ARVIND MEHROTA

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

this is to inform he who opens this
that
when i have been simplified
to a pair of unbreathing nostrils
and my laugh been eaten
by beasts of the air, in short,
after my death
my throat should be zipped open
with my wife's claws
and poems sticking there
like cinema-posters
be scraped out and sold
as wastepaper
to cover costs incurred in the
'last rites'

further,
my tongue
should be thoroughly cleaned
before it is burnt, the few
punctuation marks still
sticking to its buds
be picked out with tweezers
by a qualified zoologist.

ECLOGUE FORTY EIGHT

regard lear
the infirm king
in comparison
with porus
the monarch from the indus
regard sinyavski
breaking stone
felling trees in siberia
return lie for lie
move the sandglass
somewhere there's a sun
the river torn into shreds of colour
forgetfulness scattered
bathing between mirrors she caught her
reflection
trying to escape it was her age
SUSPENDED
the lines curving body on body unashamed
MOVES
through the subconscious we
create
our mathematics of fear
motivated shamed
masked
dragging
paradox
song
to fear
dragging
gnarled
bones
to love

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PRITISH NANDY

ICON TWENTY FOUR

selling noughts
violently
compressed
my arab steed
sells steel
but calcutta exists
grafted on my thigh
the moment exists
halted in space
the sea burns
i fixed the lightning
for a screw
i lashed my image in its face
& dulled my mind

THE NEED TO WRITE

Michael Gregory

THE CLEAREST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN poetry and what is passed off as poetry in most of our magazines and publishing houses is the necessity each involves.

Most of the writers being published seem to have a didactic urge — a compulsion to teach, to impose their trip-rationalizations on others. Whether this is a mere aping of the economically-successful academe or a basic extra-academic drive in wordful people, what results inevitably is boredom for everyone except the writer, his immediate friends, and a few adolescent nonreaders — who often are bored too.

Not that didacticism is worthless. Every work of art somehow teaches — through concept, example, point-of-view, or in some other way(s). But, no matter how much the simple message may seem to be the crux of the matter for the audience, it cannot be and should not be for the artist. His job is to create a nonsimplistic fact.

When I first began to write, I was encouraged because people who read my drivel (mostly secondary-school teachers) gushed about the wonders of the ‘Creativity’ and ‘Talent’ indicated. This encouragement was important to me; I’m glad I had it. (I still believe there is little more a secondary-school teacher can do to help an artist than to praise him unreasonably.) But the superlatives were beside the point, if any of us thought we were talking about art; we were far more interested, as most people always are, in the poet than in the poems.

Later, with a more sophisticated audience, the emphasis switched from self-expression to ‘Truth :’ a pseudoacademic poet told me I was not ready to be a writer because I had

‘nothing to say.’

The point is that the real artist has a need not to say, but to do. No matter what his motives for creating may be, didactic or not, during the act of creation he is concerned to make, not just to convey or affect. Otherwise, his work will never be read more than once except perhaps for memorization; a good poem — a poem that really teaches — cannot be memorized because it doesn’t lie still long enough.

The artist’s awareness of his audience — which includes the articles that motivate him to communicate — must inform the work first, the audience later. The confusion of manipulative matter with manipulable audience is what leads the prospective artist into the areas of social science and political pandering.

Forget for a moment the typically-stupid audience, forget the badgered and unperceptive editors, forget the semantics of solipsism or social relativism. Consider the Poundian clichés about form-content and show-not-tell. Too often the ‘message’ of a work is a tag-line superficial to the structure, not the impact of the total creation itself. A nonartist lets his awareness precede his work rather than grow from it. He forgets that truth is seen in facts, artifacts, not conveyed in an abstract Truth. The ‘true’ is the created.

This is why good art (a redundant phrase) is always a revelation to the artist: from it he learns prior to anyone else and probably more than anyone else. Genuine art invariably shows the artist where he is about to go rather than where he has been: truth is something he finds in his work, not something he puts there.

If the work exists for or can be summed up in a simplistic formulation, if a part is the excuse for the rest, it may be that the perpetrator is just not able to say anything as all encompassing as a total work of art. A great many potential essayists are running around pretending to be poets looking for something to say. Perhaps many little magazines and

presses would be in better financial shape if these cases of mistaken identity left the poetry pages open for poetry.

STORY

In that bar painted with mascara
Eyes burn, faces glisten, first
Love is a sharp painful cry, an
Exchange of stares, strong drinks,
Then silence with sudden fear.
Now, two summers drunk with memory,
I trail each footprint to find a
Friend, then speak to the blind
Poet who might know why you left.

Michael Miller

THE FAILURE (PART II)

(SEQUEL TO ESSAY IN TRACE 58)

by John Tryford

I AM AN AMERICAN BY BIRTH AND an artist and writer by vocation. I use that word in the sense that the Roman Catholic Church used it (or still does), meaning a calling from a power higher than one's self, something, indeed, more than a forty-hour-a-week job. As an American, I have all the surface rights and freedoms belonging to any other citizen, although I sense more and more a feeling of displacement and fragmentation of experiences in my daily life; as a writer I feel I must communicate these sensations.

The ordinary considerations of life — the step-by-step pattern of school, graduation, marriage, family, career, and finally retirement which seems taken for granted in the U.S.A. does not satisfy me. I want more, and I am beginning to demand more. I don't want to go down the river and into the stream. I want to talk. I want to be where the influence is, and to stand as close to the center of that influence as possible, even if it is a ball of fire and I get burned.

(I said INFLUENCE, not affluence !)

Gene Fowler once wrote to me that while maybe only one man could be board chairman of RCA, we (meaning the nation) need all the poets, painters, sculptors, etc. we can get. I doubt that this is really true. What good are a thousand young 'sensitive' unpublished poets reading their thin verses in dimly-lit coffee houses? What benefit comes from innumerable disciples of Andy Warhol hanging canvases in galleries you've never heard of and can't find in the telephone directory? Is another twangy-voiced folk singer with bare feet, touring the country, going to solve 'our'

problems?

But if I really were board chairman of RCA, I could accomplish so much more, could reduce the credibility gap between what goes on in real life and what is presented on the media — than if I were an unknown poet. For the center of influence today is the media, as Marshall McLuhan so succinctly pointed out — not the school, the home, the church, or the corner bar. (I'm not listing these necessarily in decreasing order of importance.)

I am aiming at making the environment a total work of art; and to do this, the public must be brought to a greater degree of awareness than ever before. You scoff at the idea, maybe? But, why not try it; it's never been done before. America is now in a transition state where the public is aware to a considerable extent, but where also it is reacting to that awareness negatively, due to the lingering effect of Nineteenth Century values and attitudes. Whether such old values can survive in the face of the greatest affluence the earth ever has seen, is doubtful. And it is doubtful that what is known as morality (really parochialism) can last when the truck driver or the plumber, as well as the university professor or the surgeon, can have any part of the world in front of him — the world, as PERFORMANCE, mind you — at the flick of the TV switch, or can talk to anyone in the world by dialing long-distance. It's amazing, it boggles the mind, and it causes me to re-evaluate. Three years ago I could write that I was a dreamer and an idler . . . and so be it. I could write that because I was caught up in an outdated view of what the 'poet' was. I thought a poet was a little man who sat under a tree by a lake and wrote dreamy little sonnets, who occasionally made love to some young 'liberated' female, and who sat up all night in an attic and drank red wine and contemplated. No, that's old hat. Dylan Thomas was probably the last survivor of the old romantic image of the 'bard.' The poet, today, must be a man of action, an

influencer, a doer. He might be reading his poetry nationwide on TV or touring foreign countries for the State Department. He might be a stockbroker or a middle-weight boxer. But whatever he might be, he is not withdrawing from the 'real world,' because there is no place to go and no reason to escape. All the margins have been explored, exhaustively. The media have seen to that. The only pocket of rebellion left is the disaffiliated minority-group-poor; and they are slowly being taken up with such programs as the OEO and VISTA. The result is, of course, that avant-gardism is dead forever as a valid force. Every avant-garde movement is instantly taken up by the media and analyzed, commercialized and sold to the viewing or reading public. (All the magazines, from RAMPARTS to NATIONAL REVIEW to SA TEVEPOST have 'done' the hippies.) FINNEGANS WAKE is discussed with equal articulateness in San Francisco, Sioux City, or Dublin. Mondrian's or Klee's canvases hang in museums in Tokyo, Oakland, or London (and repros of them in countless places). That the former avant garde is now taken up and cherished in so many places so amazed Kenneth Rexroth that he commented on it in his AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL.* It does not amaze me. I think it is a good thing, and an interesting phenomenon. After all, why should the finest in art or literature be the province of a privileged or select few? My new career is that of a public speaker. By career, I mean function; for, what I want most of all to be is a transmitter of ideas, a human

* New Directions, 1966. radio tower sending out messages about 'what's happening' to groups that are, as I see it, more and more eager for information, more curious to learn about the life-style changes which are affecting them and altering the familiar environment. This is the only role in which I can truly find myself. The old costume of the 'lonely poet' is one that I chafed in; and now that I am able, for the first time, to use that word, I have cured myself of the curious disease of

isolation. To become a public person!

This means saying good-bye to my childhood, described in my original essay in Trace 58. The fears and longings I described were caused by my parents' imposing on me half-hearted moral sanctions they clung to out of desperation, being first-generation native-born Americans. Such taboos, combined with my already overexcited imagination, caused me to pass through adolescence and early adulthood thinking that I was out of place, a misfit, a scaredy-cat who turned to poetry only out of desperation.

But now I find that I am exactly in place, that I can adapt myself to an amazing variety of people and situations. I also find that the vision in my head, which caused me to label myself a dreamer and an idler, is actually a useful commodity, a marketable commodity, if you will, in a society which demands increasingly-better performance to fill its increasing leisure time.

To put the issue in context, I will say that the fragmentation I feel is not necessarily a bad thing, but a thing I can put to use. I have come up, these twenty-seven years, after many unhealthy doubts, alive, well, articulate, observant, and with a sense of humor. The fears are gone, the 'dark time' of childhood is over. That dark time always dissipates when a person finds out who he really is.

EPITAPH

And we
as all the other christians,
stand
in the awed crowd —
awed as all —
and applaud
the hanged man
the headless man
the fried man
the gassed man
— all the capital men
of society —
which applauds
— lauds —
the execution of justice.

Michael T. Durden

MILKBOTTLE H & GIL ORLOVITZ

WITH ALL THE LAMENTATIONS over the death of the novel, and the proliferation of antinovels or nonbooks, one would expect American critics to welcome MILKBOTTLE H, the 530-page novel by Gil Orlovitz (DELL — \$7.50; CALDER & BOYARS — 63s). But, in contrast to high praise from most British critics, there have been shrieks and excessive ridicule.

'Imitation Faulkner,' derides one, who either did not read Orlovitz or has never read Faulkner—or both. In TIME, an anonymous critic condemns the book as 'pseudo-Joycean rhetoric.' And he assumes that a bath beginning on page eight is the same as that on page 122, and implies that the bath continues through page 517 when the protagonist, Lee Emanuel, decides that showers are preferable. One may deduce that this critic is not familiar with either baths or showers (and not time oriented), since he can't seem to realize that it is possible to take a bath more than one time; however, it may more charitably be deduced that he has untimely awareness of literature—which comes as no surprise.

Certainly, MILKBOTTLE H owes something to the so-called 'stream-of-consciousness' technique; but the Orlovitz technique is not that employed by Joyce or other exponents of this method. Most books are divided into chapters; this has none. Most books have fairly-intelligible plots which can be summarized in a paragraph or so; this has not. Has any critic asked 'why?' No. It is much less strain on the brain to dismiss the technique as a gimmick. Had any critic bothered to ask the reason for the Orlovitz deviations, he would have been forced to pay serious attention to the work. He then might have come to realize that the standard structure of standard novels (or antinovels) would have added nothing to MILKBOTTLE H. Indeed, such a commonplace structure only

could have completely distorted this work, making it thereby 'familiar' to and 'safe' for the critics who obviously are not about to give way to the weakness of accepting anything new unless they can fit it into the old.

The plot (if it can be called one) of MILKBOTTLE H is the story of a youth struggling into manhood, his problems with his family, his love of a girl (St. Red), his relations with his friends. Orlovitz might have made a 'well'-plotted novel of this; and it would have been interesting (and not too different from hundreds of other such stories). But Novelist Orlovitz has at least one talent unsurpassed by any other living writer: character development. Drawn on by his writing, the reader becomes aware of the protagonist in the same way he is aware of himself—an awareness so complete that it goes beyond the common senses of sight, sound, and touch and creates a sense of Being as tangible as anything in this world. And the other chief characters are apprehended by the reader as he apprehends his own family and friends and lovers: A sense of outsideness, but a sense of reality more intense than gained in the pages of other books. (Thomas Mann probably is the only other author with so compelling a grasp of the unfolding of character.)

Having created characters, what does Orlovitz do with them? Perhaps Lee Emanuel goes to the corner to join a discussion with his friends ... Any author could do as much. Have you or I ever gone to the corner to join a discussion with friends? 'Of course,' we quickly answer. 'At one time or another.' And the ordinary author (beloved by the critics) would have written it just like that. His hero would set out for the corner and have a discussion. But Orlovitz tells us: That is a lie! For Lee to go to the corner is for him to be in a Gestalt of buildings, people, streets, automobiles, noise, smells, and the myriad sensations which our sensory organs relay to the brain — but which we have altogether ignored in our retelling of our trip to the corner.

Throughout MILKBOTTLE H, this peripheral vision — which a living human is never without — permeates the fibre of the action. This is what the critics have altogether misunderstood with the term ‘streamof-consciousness.’ Thus, the huge milkbottle sign with the ‘H’ on it, topping a nearby dairy, is always in the background — one of the novel’s focal points.

A symptom of this age is the desire for simplicity, quick comprehension, fast reading. MILKBOTTLE H qualifies in none of these ways. The book is not by any means difficult to read; but Orlovitz never compromises, never loses control. The reader follows where he leads, and only later does one realize that the writing could not have led elsewhere, that only in this way could such psychedelic expansion of consciousness have occurred. The reader trained to ingest ordinary writing — as we all have been — may at first find an initial inability to relate frustrating, may long to translate the complexities of the flux of MILKBOTTLE H into the stereotyped phrases and concepts of everyday — the kind we pretend communicate. But gradually the novel will grip him, filling him with a compelling excitement, almost a compulsion to read on. Some of the longer episodes are breathtakingly profound — almost like Samadhi — leaving one unable to describe the scene, yet unable to forget it. Gradually one recognizes that he can’t remember when he has been so comprehensively carried into communication with people of an invented world.

Milton VanSickle

WILLIAM PACKARD: POETRY IN THE THEATRE—VI

I HOPE THAT IN THIS SERIES (here concluding) I haven't gone too far in trying to suggest answers to any of the many questions concerning poetry in the theatre. I simply know that certain things have existed at certain times, that there has been poetry in the theatre, and this has been enormously important in forming the great theatre traditions and masterpieces.

If I were to put all that is involved into one statement, I would probably say something like this: Language in the theatre can achieve an effect which no other dramatic technique can achieve.

This is nothing new, especially for those cultures which have had a tradition of spoken poetry on the stage. For example, the French theatre: Since its founding in 1680, the Comédie-Française has been able to preserve a guiding style which has helped its actors acquire a respect for the text and to develop a humility toward poetry.

This is not to say that the Comédie-Française is the only kind of theatre there can be. As a matter of fact, I have heard some Frenchmen refer to it as a 'museum,' or a 'waxworks,' where one comes across the fossil of a dead tradition. However, even if that were so, there are the other great theatres in France: the TNP, the Théâtre National Populaire of Jean Vilar; the theatre of Roger Planchon; the experimental theatre at Strasbourg under Michel St.-Denis; and the Théâtre de France, under the directorship of Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault. This last — Barrault's — has pioneered in the revival of classics by Molière, Racine, and Marivaux; and it has premiered new works of such outstanding poetic dramatists as Paul Claudel, André Gide, Andre Obey, Jean Cocteau, Jean

Giraudoux, as well as works by Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Anouilh, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett. In all of these productions, Barrault has insisted on a respect for the text. He writes:

The artisan of the theatre can tear his hair and walk round in circles, as in dreams; the fact remains that the fate of theatrical art lies exclusively in the hands of the author.¹

And the author in the French theatre over the last fifty years has done a great deal of work in poetic drama — the playwrights I have just mentioned, as well as such men as Jacques Copeau, René do Obaldia,

¹ T. S. Eliot: *A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry*, SELECTED ESSAYS — Harcourt, Brace & World.

and André Gide in his translations of Shakespeare. Compared with the French theatre over the same period, American theatre cannot boast of any great flourishing of poetic drama. Donna Gerstenberger writes:

Verse drama has no vital tradition in the United States, for there has never been a period in the literature of this country in which verse drama has been a popular form created to express living issues. American literature had created for itself, by the end of the Nineteenth Century, a recognizable tradition in fiction and poetry. As the result of a number of historical factors, however, an important dramatic accomplishment came more slowly, and it was not until the period between the wars in the first half of the Twentieth Century that American dramatic achievement secured its place in literature. This was a period in which interest in verse drama persisted in America, and yet it was a period in which verse drama had no appreciable influence on modern American drama.²

I recently used several plays of Tennessee Williams as examples of poetic drama. I did this because we had already established that metaphor is the soul of poetry; and the

plays of Tennessee Williams, more than those of any other modern American playwright, are written around a theatrical metaphor which is immediately compelling to a modern audience. However, this is not to say that we have achieved a poetic drama in our own time. A few years ago, Richard Burton, commenting on these same plays, complained that they contained no memorable lines, that the language itself did not gain a separate and excellent existence apart from the dramatic action. This seems to be a peculiar weakness now of American theatre. It is a logical result of naturalism, that particular approach to reality which seems to forbid any state of exaltation or poetry. Tyrone Guthrie described it this way:

The American theatre today, with its insistence upon naturalism and its timid avoidance of what might possibly be considered 'ham,' does not encourage great acting. There is no room for great acting in little plays; as a mixed-up kid you can be poignant, you can show great promise, but you cannot be great. It is unfortunate that the American theatre for some years has been obsessed with the problem of mixed-up kids — albeit often kids of forty-seven.^{^3} The fact is — a point I have been trying to make again and again — that another kind of theatre is possible, a theatre which not only makes use of theatrical metaphor, but also makes use of language to complement the dramatic action. And, after all, this is not asking for very much. Shelley, in his great essay, *A Defence of Poetry*, was asking for
^{^2} Verse Drama in America 1916-1939, in *MODERN DRAMA*: Vol. VI, No. 3.

a great deal more when he described the Greek theatre: For the Athenians employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institutions, to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power; each division in the art was made perfect in its kind by artists of the most consummate skill, and was disciplined into a beautiful proportion and unity one towards the other.

And we shall probably always have the vision of a poetic theatre of some sort, something we can try to imagine and

work toward. Eugene O'Neill had such a vision; and his statement of this might well be taken as a keynote of this series of articles:

I mean the one true theatre, the age-old theatre, the theatre of the Greeks and Elizabethans, a theatre that could dare to boast —without committing a farcical sacrilege — that it is a legitimate descendant of the first theatre that sprang, by virtue of man's imaginative interpretation of life, out of his worship of Dionysius. I mean a theatre returned to its highest and sole significant function as a Temple where the religion of a poetical interpretation and symbolical celebration of life is communicated to human beings, starved in spirit by their soul-stifling daily struggle to exist as masks among the masks of living!

How are actors to prepare themselves for this poetic theatre? Once they are freed from the chain reaction of their being trained to perform exclusively in naturalistic plays, there is no reason to believe they will not be able to develop an approach to spoken poetry — to develop a sensitivity to the form and the shape of words, even down to the syntax and the sentence structure of each line.

In the meantime, how are they to keep in practice, if there is not much poetic drama being produced? They can work on the great classics of poetry, on their own. For example, the sonnets of Shakespeare. These poems, taken separately, can teach the actor what imagery and rhyme and metre are about, and how they work. They are among the richest sources of poetic technique, and demonstrate why this is the most eloquent and natural way of saying something. Here is CXXIX:

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjur'd, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme:
A bliss in proof, — and prov'd, a very woe;
Before a joy propos'd; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

An actor would do well to choose individual sonnets, work them over, again and again and again, and then commit them to memory. Also, in the meantime, the actor can work on individual passages from poetic plays, learning the words and rhythms until they are a part of his whole being. For instance, there is Claudio's speech in *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*, or the speech of the Duke of Clarence in *RICHARD III*, or Gertrude's speech about Ophelia in *HAMLET*. And there are many other such speeches which can serve as an excellent workshop for the actor, to help him to understand and feel and experience such things as metre and imagery, assonance and alliteration, metaphor and simile. Once he has acquired a speech of this kind, once he has worked it over and over and over, making it really his, then he will also understand why poetry in the theatre is so essential and, indeed, inevitable.

Long limbed and thin of flesh she spins the darkness
In her arms: her kisses resonate
Beyond the flicking lips, the twisting tongue;
Her fingers lift uncertainty above
The fitful counterfeit of love. A lilac
Fragrance and its pattern on her thighs
Will couch the cradle of our age. And time-
Unshedding breasts confirm the rocking flesh
Which otherwise is sealed inside the clock.

Benjamin A. Kerner

A. Fredric Franklyn:

ROME BOAT THING ON ITS END

CLIMAX (L'IMMORALE) : Italy Distributed by Lopert Pictures Corp. (running time : 97 minutes) Directed by Pietro Germi Screenplay by Pietro Germi, Alfredo Giannetti, Tullio Pinelli, and Carlo Bernari Cast includes Ugo Tognazzi (as Sergio Masini), Stefania Sandrelli (as Marisa Malagugini), Renee Longarini (as Giulia Masini), and Maria Grazia Carmassi (as Adela Baistrocchi)

TOGNAZZI'S MARVELOUSLY-COMIC FACE is well known to Italian directors. He has appeared in films such as Alessandro Blasetti's *LIOLA* (1964), Dino Risi's *I MOSTRI* (THE MONSTERS) (1963), Marco Ferreri's *L'APE REGINA* (THE CONJUGAL BED) (1963), Luciano Salce's *LA VOGLIA MATTA* (CRAZY DESIRE) (1962), Salce's *LA CUCCAGNA* (A STROKE OF LUCK) (1962), and in Antonio Pietrenegli's widely-acclaimed *IL MAGNIFICO CORNUOTO* (THE MAGNIFICENT CUCKOLD). He also played the title role in Salce's *IL FEDERALE* (THE FASCIST) (1961). And he portrayed the compulsive gambler in Mario Monicelli's superb comedy episode in the four-part *HI INFIDELITY* (1965).

Like the character he portrays in *THE CLIMAX*, the actor actually has three families, in private life. The curious resemblance between his off-the-screen circumstances and Sergio's dilemma, however, is probably not entirely coincidental. . . .

As already indicated, the story's Sergio has three families: his eighteen-years' wife, Giulia, and their three children, including two pre-teenage girls and Richardo, an older boy who is already a university student; his mistress of ten years, Adele, and their two pre-teenage boys; and his newest mistress of a year or so, Marisa, and their brand new baby son.

Sergio is a serious musician (first violinist in a Rome symphony orchestra as well as one of a string quartet which tours Italy during the orchestra's off-season). But he also accepts nightclub and coffee house engagements, for which he sings and plays both piano and guitar. He makes it a rule never to turn down any paid engagement. He's guilt-ridden, inevitably, because of the necessity to split his life in three parts to divide himself among his various little families.

But he is fanatical about caring for all of them equally: He phones each of his 'wives' three times each at each mealtime or practice break during the day . . . during the morning break, at lunchtime, and after dinner before the evening performance. That's a total of twenty-seven phone calls, or nine apiece, every day!

Each time he has a new bambina or bambino, he takes out a thirty-million-lira life insurance policy for the child, despite the fact that, over the years, the cost of the premiums has mounted from something like 75,000 lira annually for the original one to 160,000 lira a year for the latest one. He is absolutely uncompromising about his equal sense of duty to each one. And he is forever asking all his children and women if they need or want any money from him.

He also overeats almost suicidally at dinners because he tries, as often as possible, to share an evening meal with each of his women. Never one for halfway measures, he drives himself to exhibit the same degree of appetite at each meal, even when eating his second or third dinners during the same evening!

Once, when a musician friend asks him to serve as godfather at the baptism of his child, Sergio even constrains the poor man to have his baby baptized twice so that both Giulia and Adele have an opportunity to serve as godmother.

He is, of course, systematically killing himself for the children and women he loves. There is never a moment at

any time, any day of his life, when he can simply relax by himself, free of obligations, and take a little breather.

As the story opens, he's in the hospital waiting for his newest mistress, Marisa, to have her baby. He has to leave temporarily and run home to see his wife, Giulia, and their daughters off to the seaside by train, on their vacation. His son, Ricardo, comes home from school and momentarily abandons his studies to help with the bags, accompanying them to the railroad station. It is evident, from Ricardo's behavior, that he knows something about his father which his mother either does not know or does not wish to admit knowing.

In fact, in a flashback sequence much later, she passes a strange remark which is a definite hint that she does know. Taking a hurried leave of Giulia on New Year's Eve to keep a supposed television engagement (but actually to go to see Marisa — as this television show was video-taped four days previously), Sergio stupidly forgets to take his violin with him. His wife remembers it, apparently at the last minute, and hands it to him at the door. Sergio says to her: 'How could I ever manage without you?' She replies: 'There'd be somebody else, probably!' This is too close to the truth and said only half-jokingly. Sergio tells Giulia that that's an odd remark and he definitely wishes to take it up with her again some time when they have an opportunity to discuss it.

In a later sequence, Ricardo comes into a nightclub where his father is playing one of his secret extra-money engagements. He sees Sergio, who also sees him from the stage. Ricardo stares at his father for a moment, then turns around and walks out. Sergio asks the band to take over without a vocal for a minute, and hurriedly follows outside after his son. Catching up with him in the street, Sergio stops him. (He suspects that it is not discovering his musician father playing popular music in a nightclub which is really troubling the boy; however, trying to minimize the

rift growing between them, he deliberately assumes that this is what is on Ricardo's mind.) 'Now you know my secret,' he says, smiling at him. 'Even your mother doesn't know.'

Ricardo's answering look is a silent reproach for this equivocal nonsense. He turns abruptly to leave, but Sergio stops him to ask if he needs any money. His hand is on the boy's arm, arresting him. Ricardo shakes loose and calls his father a fool. Sergio slaps him, and the boy finally releases the real accusation, disclosing that he has known about his cheating and sexual duplicity toward his mother for years. 'You are a libertine!' he tells his father. 'And a fool,' he repeats. And again: 'A fool!' After which, he turns away once more and rushes off, leaving Sergio alone with still another apparently-insurmountable problem. These worries are accumulating. And the weight of them, for all the compensating excellences of his character, will shortly take his life.

The story—developed primarily through flashbacks, contrasted with occasional returns to sequences in the present—reveals that Sergio's most serious problem is Marisa. She is the one he feels he has most wronged and neglected. He first meets Marisa on a concert tour with his string quartet. They are playing at the one main hall or theatre in a small town where she lives and goes to school. (She is studying to become a concert harpist.) Marisa falls in love with him on sight; and Sergio deliberately misses his train back to Rome to stay over with her for a few hours. They have a brief affair which should have terminated there, except for Sergio's impulse at the last minute when his train is pulling out of the station and she calls to him asking if he would like her to come to Rome: 'I'll do it, if you want me to,' she shouts. 'I'll come to Rome to be with you.' Instead of sensibly telling her to wait until a younger man comes along, he shouts back to her that this would be wonderful.

When she arrives in Rome, late one night a month or so later, Marisa asks a man at the station, a passing stranger, to dial Sergio's number for her, in case Giulia answers the phone. Giulia does get the call and passes it to Sergio without realizing what transpires. After he hangs up, Sergio tells his wife one of his musician friends is in trouble — he is drunk and has been in a fight with a policeman — and that he must go down to the station and bail him out.

Sergio is infinitely thorough here, as in all his deceptions, taking the greatest pains to ensure that none of his women is ever hurt through mere clumsiness on his part. He even goes to the length (in this instance) of stopping along his way to telephone the musician friend mentioned before to support his alibi. As he goes to the railroad station where Marisa is waiting for him, he sincerely believes he has every intention of remonstrating with the young girl and sending her back to her home town that same night on the next train out.

But when he sees her standing there like a little lost girl, depending absolutely on him, he falls completely in love with her. Other men forget the sources of their extra-marital pleasures as quickly as they have finished with the novelty. Not so with Sergio. His is not a system of surface values, but a profound morality, deeper far than superficial dictates of society.

Sergio gets her a little place in a Rome pensione, even gets her occasional engagements as a harpist; and Marisa settles down to a life of waiting out the long intervals between the occasions when he can spend a little time with her. Though Adele and she both know about Giulia, neither knows about each other. Each is under the impression that she is at least the only mistress if not the only woman in Sergio's life.

Adele has always, from the beginning of her relationship with Sergio ten years previously, exhibited a complete understanding of her realistically-limited place in Sergio's life

and extraordinary tolerance for his obligations to his wife and other children. She has even refrained, almost always, from the tacit reproach implied in referring to Giulia as 'your wife,' choosing instead, on occasions when she has to mention her, to call her Giulia just as if she were referring to a girl friend. Adele's tact and unselfishness have measurably eased the burden of Sergio's guilt and endeared her all the more to him.

But Marisa is very far from exhibiting the same degree of tolerance toward Sergio's family. In one sequence, she follows him to the theatre where he has taken Adele and her two sons to see a movie. She mistakes them for his wife and other children. And she creates a scene; but it is not decisive. Sergio is able to avoid an actual confrontation between his two mistresses. At another point, she openly declares her hatred of Giulia and says: 'I would like to see her dead!' This scene occurs on the New Year's Eve when Sergio has left Giulia and Adele to spend it with the childless and, therefore, lonelier Marisa. After this quarrel, they do break up. However, this solution comes too tardily to settle anything. Marisa is already pregnant.

She tries, a last time, to phone Sergio one night when he is at home in bed with his wife — as it happens, at a particularly happy moment between Sergio and Giulia. The tired worn-out man tells his wife not to answer the phone. When he tries, the following day, to return the call, he learns that Marisa has packed and left the pensione permanently, just that morning. He deduces then that she must be pregnant. He guesses, also, that she has returned to her home town and her parents.

He follows her there, confronts her citified peasant family, takes a nasty beating from her oxlike brother, and brings Marisa back to Rome. But the rapprochement between them does nothing to mitigate the immediacy of the really serious problems now proliferating and demanding more of his time

and attention, as well as more of his substance so that he has to devote more time to earning money — leaving him fewer hours for increasing personal claims upon him.

Sergio is not a well man. During his last checkup by his insurance company's doctor, he has been warned to take it easy. 'Do you smoke?' the physician has asked him. And, at Sergio's admission that he does so moderately, the doctor has added categorically: 'Give it up!'

Nor is he, for all the love he bears the people in his life, a happy man. He daydreams continually — and completely unrealistically — of an ideal solution to all his problems, in which he will be able to bring together the three woman and (counting the new child Marisa gives birth to in the hospital) six children. They will love one another, he is certain, because he loves them so much and they all love him. And because he wishes them to accept one another. Yet, in his heart, he knows this foolish tree will never bear fruit.

Once, so great is this desire and so painful its continual suppression, he even works out an elaborate trick with his mistress, Adele, to get her two sons together momentarily with Giulia's two daughters. She brings the boys to the park and he brings the girls. They proceed, as planned, to the carousel where Adele's boys are already riding around. Sergio must remain out of sight at some distance so that the boys, who would recognize him instantly, won't see him. He gives the girls a hundred lira each and sends them ahead by themselves to the carousel, while he watches in the background, hiding among some bushes.

Adele, whom the girls take for a complete stranger, pretends to help them, making sure they mount the pair of artificial horses nearest her sons. She is somehow capable of sharing poor Sergio's foolish illusion. She gives him his moment in which to indulge slightly his hopeless dream. As she and the four children pass around and around on the carousel, Sergio stares with evident hunger at them. In his

mind's eye, he sees Giulia there, too, and himself, and even his eldest son, Richardo.

This little interlude in the park is the closest he will approach his impossible ideal. Within a few months, he will be dead. (On the same day his last child is born.) During his funeral, in a sequence at the very end of the film, Giulia and Adele will appear with five of his six children. But the two families will not come together even then. And we will only be certain of the mistress' knowledge of the wife. Whether Giulia ever knew about Adele remains, deliberately, an open question at the film's conclusion.

What is not left to any question is the salient factor in Sergio's character: his omnivorous and unappeasable appetite for love and his unmitigated bedrock loneliness. No amount or variety of love relationships or family ties has altered these. His unquenchable thirst for affection and responsibility is almost a symbol of the blind life-force itself. It would be a basic mistake to assume that he is involved with this many women because he lacks the heart to give himself completely to any one of them. It is precisely because he has too much heart that he is unable to exhaust its possibilities for expression on any one object. And it would be an equally fundamental error to suggest that the proliferation of his liaisons instanced some inability to make wholehearted commitments to life. He adores every one of his children and genuinely worships each one of the three women.

The irrepressible truth is that, if there were more hours in the day or more days in the week, there would be more women and children in Sergio's life. The very quality of his absolutely-sincere devotion to all of his dependents is what has structured his hopeless need to bring them together as a single family, every adult and child of which would love all the others in the same degree.

When Sergio's confused hopes and fears reach a pitch of sufficient tension, he is discovered by his priest, alone and talking to himself in church, near closing time. The friendly priest asks if he wishes to confess; but Sergio declines the opportunity, offering to leave so the church may be closed. The priest tells him, by all means, to remain as long as he likes, and instructs the sexton to keep the church open a while longer.

But, moments later, the beleaguered musician seeks out the priest in his office. Again, the latter asks if he wishes to confess. And again, Sergio declines, though he admits he would like to talk to somebody.

He and the priest go out for a walk, stopping after a time for a beer. The poor priest does his best to get on the outside of Sergio's extravagant tale of his triple life; but he is manifestly unequipped to deal with such hopeless complexities. He declares that, in his estimation, it sounds as though Sergio has been living in hell. Sergio assures him that he does not feel that way; on the contrary, he even feels blessed, and he loves all his 'wives' and children.

The man of God is especially horrified at Sergio's mention of the double baptism inflicted on his friend because of his sense of fairness in his treatment of Giulia and Adele. 'You made him baptize that child twice?' the priest almost screams.

Another of the things most difficult for the priest to comprehend is Sergio's total lack of complaint about any of the women. Scornfully, almost disbelievingly, he tells him: 'You seem to have a faculty for running across only perfect women!' Sergio asks why that is so difficult to believe, assuring him that each of these women truly is extraordinary—an assurance which, of course, only makes the problem infinitely more complicated.

Inevitably, the priest is compelled by the limitation of his background to take the hard and fast church position and

recommend that Sergio break absolutely with both mistresses and devote himself thenceforward exclusively to his wife and her children. Sergio is as shocked at this as if the priest had recommended something intentionally evil. The idiom of Sergio's private morality simply outflanks the more culpable dictates of the weaker, Christian ethic.

In an imaginative flash of insight, the helplessly-human Sergio perceives, as the priest could not, the suicides such a course must lead to: Adele, taking her own life and the lives of her sons by gas; Marisa, leaving the new baby on Sergio's doorstep and jumping to her death right in front of Giulia. Taking any of the priest's unsophisticated advice is simply out of the question.

Only after he leaves, ducking out a back entrance to the public place where they've been drinking beer, does Sergio realize he did not tell the priest about his most recent trouble with Ricardo. 'Now why couldn't I tell him that?' he asks himself. Momentarily, he even considers going home for dinner to see his son and to try to talk with him. But he isn't up to the confrontation just yet; and he must get to the hospital to see Marisa and the new baby. 'Dopo [later],' he says . . . he will deal with the boy later.

Finally, after his third visit to the hospital, Marisa has delivered his son, and he is able to visit briefly with both of them. With a rare flash of insight and a genuine compassion for this tired, confused, and driven man, Marisa begs him to join his wife at the seaside and take a week off. 'I have everything I need here at the hospital,' she assures him, urging that he think of himself for once. He does not know that her advice is, for him, the difference between life and death; and he does not take it.

Later, the same day, he stops at a telefono pubblico where he tries to place a call, first to his wife and then to his mistress. The wife isn't there and his mistress' line is busy. He tells the girl at the desk that he'll wait. He is overcome

suddenly with a monstrous fatigue. Sympathetically, the girl asks if he is well. 'Listen, I've never felt better in my life,' he lies, with a brief trace of his normal humor. 'You just place that call for me and have me paged. I'm going to sit down over here and wait.'

The wings of eternity are already fluttering in his ears, and still he does not sense the end. He walks over to a table around which some chairs are placed, most of them occupied by others waiting for the same or similar reasons. Sergio drops into one of them, his mind still cluttered with all his responsibilities, the children, Marisa's unexpected generosity at the hospital, his wife and Adele — and, above all, his son, Ricardo.

'I must explain things to him,' he murmurs. 'Get it straight so he understands.' Again, the sensation of overwhelming fatigue. 'Dopo,' he murmurs. 'Dopo . . .' Later. Later . . . Just as he dies, his eyes go to the loudspeaker mounted on the wall of the waiting room. The camera zooms from his still-open eyes to the speaker, as the name 'Sergio Masini' comes over. His call has been placed. He is being paged to come to the phone.

His name is repeated, and somebody near, noticing him, pokes at him to ask if his name is Masini. His head drops, and a couple of other people crowd closer as the first person, in a tone of disbelief, announces: 'He's dead! He's dead . . .'

vita/esistenza
come era? di che colore era?
rapida come una cascata
come un mulinello
veloce come il pensiero
e desolato
qualcosa di buono
niente di buono
finito durante la notte
devo far presto
non ho che minuti
e questo la strada?
viaggerai sola?
ma na
e desolato per molto tempo
dopo
e dopo

Sergio's poor sins are collected. In the balance, it seems his goodness has more weight: All weep at his funeral . . . even Ricardo.

While only a limited number of his films are familiar to Americans, such as his *THE BIRDS*, *THE BEES AND THE ITALIANS*, the larger body of Pietro Germi's work is well known in Italy. Virtually unknown here are the earlier films, such as: *IL TESTIMONE* (*THE WITNESS*); *GIOVENTU PERDUTA* (*LOST YOUTH*); *IN NOME DELLA LEGGE* (*IN THE NAME OF THE LAW*); *IL CAMMINO DELLA SPERANZA* (*THE ROAD TO HOPE*); *LA CITTA SI DIFENDE* (*THE CITY DEFENDS ITSELF*); *IL BRIGANTE DI TACCA DEL LUPO*; *LA PRESIDENTESSA* (*THE CHAIRWOMAN*); *L'UOMO DI PAGLIA* (*MAN OF STRAW*); *IL FERROVIERE* (*THE RAILROADMAN*); *UN MALEDETTO IMBROGLIO* (*A CURSED TANGLE or A SORDID AFFAIR* — his detective thriller); etc.

Films such as *GELOSIA* (*JEALOUSY*); *DIVORZIO ALL'ITALIANA* (*DIVORCE ITALIAN STYLE*); and *SEDOTTA E ABANDONATA* (*SEDUCED AND ABANDONED*) attest the special feeling Germi has for the

emotional climate, particularly, of Sicilian life. The harshness of its poverty, too, is captured by the stark contrasts he achieves through use of black and white in a way which must absolutely lose something in the color, say, of Luchino Visconti's *IL GATTOPARDO* (THE LEOPARD).

DIVORCE ITALIAN STYLE achieved an inordinate response in the U.S. Starring Marcello Mastroianni, it was unfortunately only a transparent vehicle for political propaganda, which was (unaccountably) received here as a brilliant comedy. *SEDOTTA E ABBANDONATA*, also starring Stefania Sandrelli, attracted less attention in America, drawing audiences primarily because of the previous success of *DIVORCE . . .*, despite that it is a much better film. Set in Sicily and written and directed with a peculiar kind of controlled hysteria, *SEDOTTA . . .* is concerned with the vast ego of a limitless-selfish man and his stupidly-personal vulnerability to his daughter's seduction. The justification for the screenplay's hysterical tone is in the attitudes and the emotional climate within the context of the Sicilian family and home. Here, appearances are everything. And the feelings of human beings, even the most vivid realities of their lives, count for nothing against the overwhelming importance of 'face.' The character of this national sickness, with which Germi has only toyed in the earlier film, is here developed in significant proportion. And, in *CLIMAX* Germi has attained a first-rate directorial status. For all its deceptive simplicity, this is one of those rare cinematic events which realize, in their thematic content, a universality beyond time or place.

Happiness is what Sergio is looking at when Adele succeeds for a few moments in bringing four of his children together on the carousel, as — in his mind's eye — he sees them all together, including himself. But this exists only in his imagination. No flesh-and-blood world of emancipated Twentieth Century female creatures can afford to extend any

hospitality to that kind of hope. We are too committed, men and women alike, to the needs which separate us from others.

And this recurring theme in Germi's work, his passionate devotion to the expansion of the family unit — or at least the expansion of familial love and charity — to include others besides blood relatives (as many others as possible) bears a remarkable resemblance to the 'hippie' or 'flower children' ethic. Its root derives directly from the Christian one, that all men are brothers, that all women are sisters, that all mankind is related, and every human being is a child of God. It matters not whether you believe in a personal kind of God or in a more abstract concept such as the notion of an undefinable unifying force at work in the universe.

More immediately, of course, Germi's political values are socialistic rather than religious in origin. However much its comedy presentation may have tickled the risibilities of American audiences, *DIVORCE . . .* was almost entirely a party-line denunciation of the whole institution of marriage and property inheritance.

So long as a cineast retains the capacity to treat his concerns with minimal (i.e., sufficient) objectivity, his political bias (or religious, or whatever bias) is of small consequence.

A minimal or sufficient objectivity is always at least that amount which the artist requires in the work to ensure that the viewer's response will not be abused by either a too-biased or a too heavy-handed presentation. The task is not to tell the audience, but to show them. What they think and feel after this has been done must be the result of choices and method — and never merely the 'employee's' responses to instruction. The central creative value at issue here is that audiences must not be employed, that only the means to reach them must be employed. And the respect from the creator for the integrity of his audience's free will is

in direct proportion to the respect he has for his own artistic (not autocratic) powers.

Viewers are not to be burdened with clichés or sociodirectives. The value of any thematic bias must be limited to the degree of spontaneous interest and empathy which the viewer can bring to the concerns and values which the individual instance of the motion-picture process has selected to expose for his appraisal. To be sure, inadequate themes (the noncontroversial controversies of melodrama and the unfounded noise and excessive pacing of kitch comedy) and morally-reprehensible values will lose a certain percentage of the audience in front. But, assuming at least engaging theme and reasonable values, the noteworthy directorial talent only begins at this point to carve its mark on a production.

We must return to the old saw about originality: It isn't (only) what you say, it's (above all) the way you say it!

The same politico-religious bias found in the artistically-naïve and arbitrary *DIVORCE ITALIAN STYLE* is at work in this director's *SEDUCED AND ABANDONED*, and in the central film under discussion in this article. But the difference in method resembles the difference between the honesty of the fast black-and-white stock of the early ground-breakers in the *nouvelle vague* and the over-budgeted soft-focus color musicals produced in the last couple of decades by the major American studios such as Warner Brothers, MGM, and Fox.

As Louis Malle himself has explained it, the *nouvelle vague* directors simply had no money for proper lighting; so they were forced to employ the fast films like *Tri-X* which had not previously been used by professionals in the French cinema because the resultant image was grainy. It came as a revelation to the industry that, instead of detracting from the finished product, this imperative lent it a special air of authenticity. Malle used the technique, too, in his first film,

STEPS TO THE SCAF-FOLD. Later, as Malle concedes, it became a trick. And the New Wave subsided because it never got past emulating its own initially-successful gimmicks.

At its lowest ebb, however, this never offended with the sweetness of the saccharine standards of the Hollywood musical. Honest human values are conspicuous for their complete absence in the high gloss with which reality has been carefully painted and subverted in the work of these directors: George Sidney, with his cuteness in *ANCHORS AWEIGH*; Michael Powell, and his affluent bludgeon and be-gemmed distractions to overwhelm audiences in his version of *THE TALES OF HOFFMAN*; the even more opulent (and unrealistic) *AN AMERICAN IN PARIS*, à la Vincent Minnelli; Stanley Donen, with his superpatness in *SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS* (a hallmark of unreality achieved within an entertainment form notorious for contempt for reality); Charles Walter in *LILI* — possibly the sweetest (and most clichéd) of them all; Blake Edwards, going heavy-handed in *BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S*; Robert Wise, with a flamboyantly-inadequate adaptation of *WESTSIDE STORY*; George Cukor, and his brassy remake of *A STAR IS BORN*; and so on. The list, in this particular genre of schmaltz, is endless: all of these directors, dedicated to the denial of both life and beauty, implicit in their repetitive and unimaginative squandering of the technique of soft-focus photography — and which they implement with color processes as elaborate as they are meaningless in their indiscriminate application.

It is entirely likely that the Italian directors such as Antonioni and Fellini and DeSica waited so long to use color for no better reason than that same necessity which motivated the French *nouvelle vague*: the difficulty in obtaining enough money. Whatever the reason, the earlier discipline with black and white has inarguably been a factor in the development of the craft of each of these cineasts. Doubtless the same source of embarrassment originally

inspired such characteristic directives of the Italian neorealism as nonactors and the story outlines used in place of fully-developed scenarios. Whole developments in the world's cinema, such as Dziga Vertov's and Jean Rouch's *cinéma-verité* and Mario Monicelli's documentary features, have certainly derived from the same exigency. And they have occasioned the mastery of a more exceptional artistic discipline than anything necessary in the lexicon of the coddled technicians in the hothouse environment of Hollywood's majors.

It is possible that color has brought something to Antonioni's art in *THE RED DESERT*. It is certain that it has done so in his *BLOW UP*. It is equally certain that color has not done anything for Fellini's American daytime-TV, soap-box opera, *JULIET OF THE SPIRITS*, over which such almost financially-strait-jacketed ventures as *LA STRADA* and *I VITELLONI* tower effortlessly. No DeSica partisan is naive enough to seek comparison between *SHOESHINE* or *BICYCLE THIEF* or *TWO WOMEN* and the *aver fatto il proprio tempo* of expensively-diluted vehicles such as *WOMAN TIMES SEVEN* or *YESTERDAY TODAY AND TOMORROW* or *MARRIAGE ITALIAN STYLE*, the Sophia Loren and Shirley McLaine spectacles filmed in glorious color and without regard to a single element of any consequence. Giuseppe De Santis' *ITALIANO BRAVA GENTE* is a variation of this: an instance of an excellent intent destroyed by a smotheringly-overbudgeted production formula. Suffice it to note that the film is 'a Joseph E. Levine presentation' (the original Steve-Reeves-as-Hercules films scammer).

What matters finally is not the gimmicks, devices, methods, and techniques, but their mastery and their application. Above all, this latter. Each individual choice the artist makes from amongst the materials in his rucksack is decisive. And Germi's Sicilian *alfrescos* are exemplars of this kind of training and perception.

Germi's collaborators on the screenplay for CLIMAX are all writers with whose work the American audience is also familiar. Giannetti was one of the collaborators on the scripts for DIVORCE ITALIAN STYLE (written with Germi and Ennio de Concini). Bernari was one of the authors of THE FOUR DAYS OF NAPLES (directed by Nanni Loy and adapted for the screen by Loy, Bernari, Pasquale Festa Compagnile, and Massimo Franciosa). And Pinelli has collaborated a number of times with Director Federico Fellini, on such films as IL BIDONE (with Fellini and Ennio Flaiano), the episode in BOCCACCIO 70 entitled THE TEMPTATION OF DR. ANTONIO (with the same two), 8½ (with Fellini), and LA DOLCE VITA (with Fellini, Flaiano, and Brunello Rondi).

Candidly, it's a little disconcerting to admit that a group of four writers structured a screenplay as durable and individual as CLIMAX. The last occasion when this critic dealt with an Italian movie scripted by so many authors (DeSica's MARRIAGE ITALIAN STYLE, written by Eduardo de Filippo, Renato Castellani, Antonio Guerra, Leo Benvenuto, and Pietro de Bernardi), the result was as fulsome a hash as an audience might have anticipated if that many Hollywood hacks collaborated on it.

Far from being a hash, Germi's CLIMAX ranks, in my estimation, as the full equal of the most moving and honest of Italian cinemas. To name a dozen: Michelangelo Antonioni's L'AVVENTURA; Mauro Bolognini's IL BELL'ANTONIO; Pasquale Festa Compagnile's and Massimo Franciosa's LE VOCI BIANCHE; Damiano Damiani's ARTURO'S ISLAND; Vittorio De Sica's LADRI DI BICICLETTE; Federico Fellini's LA STRADA and I VITELLONI; Mario Monicelli's THE BIG DEAL ON MADONNA STREET; Antonio Pietrangeli's LA VISITA; Roberto Rossellini's IL GENERALE DELLA ROVERE; Luchino Visconti's ROCCO AND HIS BROTHERS; and Valerio Zurlini's FAMILY DIARY.

There are other first-class films and directors in the Italian cinema. But these, in my opinion, are the closest to

this nation's tempo and idiom. There is an Italian expression: *tutto si farà col tempo* (there will be time for everything). It is an attitude, almost a national state of mind. It crosses the artificial boundaries of caste and politics and means as if they didn't exist, and with regard only for that which is eternal in man: the tragic effimero possibilities in him which give way so swiftly to physical death, but which, in the artist, endure miraculously beyond him. This, it seems to me, is what their Latin ancestors took from the Hellenic Age and reinterpreted for all time.

In these particular films, the best of the Italian directors have captured something of their national ethnic: this tragic sense of life, to which their fascination with the Greek mythos has left them the unwitting heirs.

Sergio Masini is structured well within the framework of this tradition. His every action on behalf of others and in neglect of himself, as well as his fatal weakness for the colorful opportunities in the encounters of the heart, is freighted with these rich overtones of finality and the monstrous wings of death beating just behind his frail illusion of life. He dies like a falling raindrop. One moment, the vivid wetness of a rainfall; the next, a clear summer sky. Sergio seems so terribly alive, with his ridiculous problems, when he is talking with the priest. But, an hour or so later, he is as removed from it all as though he had never existed . . . as though his presence were a thing only of legend, or as though the personae on whose lives his own has touched had only dreamed him up amongst them.

Death then is the complete design toward which all life, in its insignificance, bends in the one great wind. Sergio was a fool, just as his son called him, not to see this ultimate plan for his handful of moments. We perceive that. And we also perceive that we are as ephemeral and sketchy in our patterns as he in his.

VERY DARK

this night is very dark and you
are shadow touching stars some
thing now will happen surely now we
or one of us will disappear or
pow a bloom of sight will change
forever how we have chosen to see
each other to merge not freeze or you
will fart and I will snicker surely
something now will happen now when
it is very dark and for each of us
the other mingles with the stars

Thomas Fitzsimmons

SCAN PP. 25-27 AND 175-190

THE CHRONICLE

The Chronicle — the running trade directory of little magazines and presses that TRACE carried in every issue — runs in two instalments here, three pages at the front and sixteen more at the back, and is offered as ‘supplementary to the Directories and Indexed Address List in the 1967 TRACE hardback book’. It is omitted, with its capsule notices: it is a working address list rather than reading matter. What follows is a note of what these instalments record.

This is the mimeograph revolution at full extent, and the entries read like a map of it. SALTED FEATHERS of Portland closes with a double Ginsberg number, GINSBERG/PORTLAND — ‘send no more mss. or subscr.’ GRIST runs from a Lawrence, Kansas bookshop with Bly, Ignatow, Anselm Hollo and William J. Margolis in its twelfth number — the same Margolis whose drawing stands in No. 44 of this magazine. OPEN SKULL has moved to San Francisco and announces chapbooks by Don Cauble and Brown Miller. THE GOLIARDS announce an ATLAS OF POETRY BROADCASTERS, a first directory of radio stations broadcasting poetry — a small, forgotten, entirely characteristic project.

Also recorded: Io from Ann Arbor and INTREPID from Buffalo, each given as an address and nothing more; SOMETHING ELSE NEWSLETTER with Dick Higgins’s STRUCTURAL RESEARCHES at forty cents; FULCRUM of London, whose whole list of British and American poets is now to be had in American editions through Horizon Press; THE BLACK BIRD PRESS of Vestal, New York, with a \$125 portfolio of Milton Kessler poems and eight original etchings, in a slip case, in an edition of twenty-five — the far end of the same impulse that produced the mimeographed quarterlies a few lines above it.

The full list of names is in Trace_67_1968_chronicle_names.txt beside the transcript. — ED.

SCAN PP. 51-58

ART OF INDIA

Eight works stand here and cannot be reproduced in a text edition. The magazine's own contents page lists them as BAZZAR by Laxman Pai (oil); RAGINI RAMKALI by Prafulla Joshi (oil); THREE SENTINELS by A. A. Almelkar (oil); DEVI, probably fifteenth-century metal work; BOMBAY VIEW by S. H. Raza (oil); a STANDING GANESHA and a BUDDHA, both from the collection of M. Natesan of Madras; and an untitled Bengali woodcut by Sudhir Khastgir – a hooded woman, cut in white line on black, her hands closed round a flame. The plates carry no text. They are the visual half of an issue given over to writing from India, and are noted here rather than passed over. — ED.

SCAN PP. 163-170

FILM STILLS

Eight pages of stills are interleaved through A. Fredric Franklyn's film column, which in this issue is given over to Italian cinema, and they carry nothing but their captions. Shown: Vittorio De Sica; two scenes from CLIMAX with Ugo Tognazzi, Maria Grazia Buccella and Stefania Sandrelli; Pietro Germi's SEDUCED AND ABANDONED; ITALIANO BRAVA GENTE, in the Joseph E. Levine presentation; and a full-page portrait of Sophia Loren. The column itself is given in full above. — Ed.