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contents

EDWARD HARKNESS 5  Two Poems
QUINTON DUVAL 7  Two Poems
GARY GILDNER 9  A Fire
FOUND POEM 10  I Am Driving
WILLIAM STAFFORD 11  Two Poems
MICHELE BIRCH 14  From the Attic Window
STEVE THOMAS 15  Hat, Candy, Stone
DAVID J. SWANGER 16  The Children
PATRICK TODD 17  Warm Wind
JD HAWLEY 18  The Cruise
TERRY STOKES 19  Two Poems
DELORES JOHNSON 21  Sleep
MICHAEL McCORMICK 22  That First Night Home
MICHAEL POAGE 23  Two Poems
CRAIG M. Mc丹IEL 26  Craft Interview: A Character in a Poem
DENNIS SCHMITZ 27  Two Poems
TOM CRAWFORD 29  She Has Always Lived for the New Shoots
DIANNE GLOE 30  Voyeurs from Atlantis
RAYMOND CARVER 31  Two Poems
JOHN HAY 34  Beatus Est Qui Sollicitudinem
MAGGIE CRUMLEY 35  Nostalgia
WAYNE ANDREWS 36  There Are Women in the Wind
DAVID LONG 37  Two Poems
RAY BEARD 40  There Are Two ways To Go Home
GARY THOMPSON 41  Two Keys
ELIZABETH BROWN 42  Quarantine
STANLEY PLUMLY 43  One Line of Light
DAN GRAVELEY 44  The Girl East of the Rockies
GEORGE MANNER 45  Two Poems
ROBERTA HILL
LEE NYE
MICHAEL MACDONALD

KRISTI DUCKWALL
BARRY LIPPMAN
JACK CADY
MILO MILES
DAVID LONG
GARY THOMPSON

MICHELE BIRCH
EDWARD HARKNESS

CHRIS LIPPMAN

MICHAELSATTERLY
ROBERT DICK

GROVE HULL

47 Notes for Albuquerque
49 Nudes
65 A History of Gunfighting in El Lopino
71 Pianola
77 Sorrow and Joy
91 Tattoo
103 Impious America
107 Twenty Poems by John Haines
109 Alain Bosquet: Selected Poems
111 Footprints by Denise Lervertov
115 After I Have Voted by Laura Jensen
119 Contributors
13 Drawings
25
33
39
73 Print
92 Prints
95
105 Print
LAUGHING

We should laugh at the idea of a plant or an animal inventing itself.

—Jung

We should.
But we don’t.
At night,
behind trees we walk by,
animals are inventing themselves,
inventing claws and powerful hind legs,
growing coarse fur over almost human forms.

And plants in our unweeded gardens,
altered by a sunspot,
or too intense moonlight,
suddenly develop large gazing eyes
at the end of long stalks,
while harmless vegetables
become muscular and mobile,
like carrots unearthed from the unconscious
making obscene gestures at us from our plates.

We are not liked
by plants and animals that invent themselves.
If we must laugh
it should be nervously, choked,
with a hint of dread.
Then, if they heard,
with their grotesque new ears,
they would be glad.
ALL THIS TIME

Because of the witnesses, because things of enormity.

Because voice.

A rhinoceros crosses the highway, followed by its shadow, followed by the pale children of its shadow.

High in the trees, the moon stays the way it was.

Later, more of the same, then less of the same: night falling on the sunflowers with a color emptier and sadder.

All that spelled backward.

I walk through summer wearing the only black coat.
BLACK PARROT

Rare and mean; they do not speak but understand perfectly. I wish he would come, like a devil’s tooth, and grind against me. I need a listener. It’s a strange way that we meet. And I know about those habits you have been hiding. The copper coins eaten like carrots to preserve the sight. The roll of wet bills, stuck behind the commode.

And when you touch yourself in the dark parts of the night, that hard plastic in the beak softens, and perhaps a silver tear escapes to dampen the feathers.

So black, they are green. I thank you for coming. Take my wrists firmly and slowly we rise through this ceiling; leave the tiny red drops on the pillow.
TONNAGE

I darken my little room.
So quiet now—the only sound
the air traffic above.
Groaning in the night like
a dreamer, a dreamer comes
and shakes me awake.
I am thankful. My hand
had been caught in the keys
of the typewriter and
I dreamt of being bitten
to death.

I don’t know what to do.
My weight, the weight of my body,
leaves me. The two halves of
my ass no longer pressing against
the chair. There is no chair.

The cold air licks my face
through a fistsized hole
in the window. I see a shadow:
a soul like a black baseball flies
over the fence. Out of the yard.

If I go and check, I know
it won’t be there. Anyway,
it is too cold, and too dark,
and I am afraid I will lose myself
and never come back.
A FIRE

I am building my father a fire
in the fireplace we never use
—the one for looks
in the living room.
He nods, rubbing his palms,
but doesn't speak; his cheeks
are scarlet, there's a grin
trying to surface, trying
to travel a lifetime.
Oh I know he's happy
and the room's so clean!
I lay more kindling on,
a split white pine
as smooth as skin, and licks
of flame surround the birch.
Such extravagance!
He's really grinning now
and I am too, in fact
we're clapping
—softly so that
no one knows
we're there.

Mother
is the first, I think, to see
the mouse bound out.
Still, no one speaks—
even when it lifts
a leg and pees
against the television.
But something must be done.
I have a can of insect
spray and, as in former days,
stretch and fire home
a wicked fastball
—but I miss.
The mouse curls up
beside my chair,
Father falls asleep
—he looks at peace—
and Mother joins him
with a nest of pine cones in her hair.
Found poem taken from consecutive first lines in the index of Contemporary American Poetry, ed. Donald Hall.

I AM DRIVING

I am driving; it is dusk; Minnesota.
I can support it no longer,
I come to tell you that my son is dead—
I do tricks in order to know.
I dreamed last night I dreamed, and in that sleep
I heard Andrew Jackson say, as he closed his Virgil
  “I look out at the white sleet covering the still streets.”
I must explain why it is that at night, in my own house
I see you in her bed.
I speak of that great house.
I think it is in Virginia, that place.
RAINY WHEN YOU’RE GONE

Early as rain I get up, walk into its rooms. There is a figure down by the water—merely someone, anyone.

Cold water in tracks on the ground, that figure gone, the gray horizon spun on a line to the next place—

you have joined the church of the tall curtain, the pattering steady prayer, the sky endlessly whispering to the world.
IT'S LIKE WYOMING

At sunset you have piled the empties and come to the edge, where the wind kicks up outside of town. A scatter of rain rakes the desert. All this year's weather whistles at once through the fence.

This land so wide, so gray, so still that it carries you free—no one here need bother except for their own breathing. You touch a fencepost and the world steadies onward: barbed wire, field, you, night.
FROM THE ATTIC WINDOW

That woman crossing the field.
For days I have seen nothing else.
What the wind does with her hair.
I cannot tell why she has put on black.
Why the cast on her left foot.
I have become a stranger to myself,
all these days seeing nothing else.
How the sky winds itself around the moon.
The snow ticking its heart out.
HAT, CANDY, STONE

We climbed from the car. The street was very clean, and there were flower boxes along the curb and baskets of living flowers hanging from the street lamps.

When we climbed from the car, there were two young women, in short dresses. With one of them I exchanged obvious glances.

We went into a store, and my master bought a hat.

We went out into the sun and walked along the quiet street.

There was a thin man bending over something; we could see him through a doorway. The shop was not well lit.

There was a row of wooden seats against one wall and an empty glass display case, standing by itself on the carpet.

My master said, “I want this hat blocked.”

We sat down at a small table on two white chairs where sunlight came through the front window.

The man, quite gray-haired, came from the back room with a stone. I felt pleased that we had come here to have the hat blocked by a gentleman on a warmed stone.

The man took the hat. I saw that it was precisely the stone for that hat.

My master was wearing an overcoat and watching the man.

The young woman came in. She walked over to me and put a piece of candy in my mouth. My master glanced at me and smiled slightly. The man didn’t look up from his blocking.

The young woman moved against me and I could feel her legs.

My master can appreciate the needs of a young man.

My master put the newly bought and blocked hat on his head. It was a good hat for him. We left the shop. The young woman remained inside with the man, who had never spoken.

We got into the car. We were both pleased.

My master can appreciate the needs of a young man.
(Images of burst cushions by the road disguised as corpses—
Dogs, cats, wild things inert but for tufts
Of hair drifting in the backwash of traffic.)

From the sides of the ditch roots hang like arteries.
A shovel blade bisects the kingdom of small animals.
One explodes through the wall like a lost subway,
Blinks amazed at the avalanche of sunlight,
Runs blind through an unsought world.

The children know vaguely that murder is possible;
Their edges grow hard and bright.
I shout mortality at them
But one, with a two-step jig of small shoes,
Snuffs the flame.
After four long months of snow
deep snow and
winds mainly from the north
what a pleasure to work again on the soft ground
Early this morning I split some larch
clean to the fresh honey
glow of pitch
the wood inside a dry red-orange
fresh as coffee
fresh as bright shafts of new straw
On the road to town water runs all along the cliffs
and when I stop at South End Wrecking
four boys stand over a mechanic
cleaning lifters in a big can
At first no one moves
absorbed against intruders
absorbed in a world
ancient as working the first crude wheels
or pulling dead weight of a kill
over rolling logs
Smell of gas and oil seems so old
the old tires
a big rubber hammer
and brown drums lined against the wall
In old garages
love for the slow is never lost
. . . that slow talk
The work is slow and
everything here seems dug from the ground
On the way home
purple willows lace the slough
There's miles of no one else on this single road
and that old clapboard house on the cliff
so still . . . see how quiet now
on that high salmon colored stone
THE CRUISE

You stand steady at the wheel.
Only you're not at the wheel.
So you wave.

You choose someone indistinct.
Someone here by mistake.
Someone perhaps already leaving.

To her you give your farewells,
Your grief at letting everything go

In front of you.
SONIC BOOM

The tongue melts.
Words to speak, I have halted all sighs. My breath of whispers, the glass tit dangles from the catalpa.

Oh, where have we been, oh where has anyone been?

Neither winds, nor unhappy, when it forces open the teeth.

You think among stones or fire the houses, or fill the ponds with roses.

There are no children in words. I have lived most of my life in Connecticut. I will die in the cold rain.

& the photographs walling in life will make no noticeable sense.

Give back the fans, give back the lungs, & the tongues.
GUEST ROOMS

There are still nights when I can't be reached or touched. The webbed feet of my spine go back to a dark home. No one is there. A cat almost in the cellar window, stiff, its dead eyes pour down on the elderberry jelly. A storm window shuts in my stomach. I am always being tickled, & no one will hold me. I would grow enough to leave. I gnash my teeth on the rotten furniture, the extra rooms.
SLEEP

in the kitchen it is 1940
da distant football game
filters the air
with static
a child opens his mouth
sending out the sound of a crowd

the moon hangs against the shutters
in a crooked woodcut
I am afraid the planets
will collide in this chair
where I sit holding
my life like an apple

if I drop into the canyon’s side
if I sleep
in the mustard field
my clothes will twist away
like vapors in a forest
flat with thorns
THAT FIRST NIGHT HOME

That first night Lavern called
Dorothy’s chest was filled with # ten
Art’s head stays somewhere on the wall

We fished the Betsy
I remember I hooked Black Eyed Susans
and watched a girl

burrow naked in the cold shelves
The runs were filled then
White pine grew instead of Jack

The rollway in Grant is closed
They have picnics now, listen
to the World Series

Back Home, the wind blows
in a part of this town
where a man still bowls every Thursday
IT'S BEEN A DRY JUNE

I was wrong.

Dark blood of dogs
hunted your skin.
Winter bones,
given up for dead,
circled the night.
My old-woman anger
could kill the quiet.
I was sure we were on our way.

Now there is nothing
to hide my face,
my dark wall.
THE YEAR I STAYED AROUND HOME

When I was alone
with the heat of that old house
the valley turned against me.
I tried to find you along the river.
Maybe you were playing a game,
hiding from your father
in the tall grass growing on the bank.

Then it got dark
and the moon watched this earth
like a rescue worker on water.
Grass turned the color of the brown road.
The river was going down
and I could see the rocks
buried by the hard run of spring.
CRAFT INTERVIEW: A CHARACTER IN A POEM

Q. What's going on in there?
A. Nothing much. Everything is pretty stable.

Q. You mean traditional verse form? strict attention paid to rhyme and meter?
A. I mean like it's raining outside but me and the horses are warm and dry here in the dark behind the loft.

Q. What's up in the loft?
A. Don't know.

Q. You don't know or you won't say?
A. Listen, mister, I'm just passing through these parts . . . I'm on my way out West to buy a small couplet and settle down.

Q. Okay, okay, forget it. I'll ask someone else about the loft.
A. You're wasting your time. An old geezer told me no one goes up there anymore—on account of the fire.

Q. What fire?
A. The fire that started up there during the last dance.

Q. What happened?
A. Burned the whole fuckin' poem down.
SELF-PORTRAIT

photos, survival maps to the past.
panic spooled on the brain
uncut, the negatives scaring
you with white hair or teeth blackened

with age. your bite fans
out as your image multiplies
whenever you stoop to drink

your face from the surface.
if it would only rain
the low places fill with tricky
currents to forget where boyhood ran
or what fish rose to indigenous

chum & debris you too
ate: bogus heroines forever
dead in sunk Buicks whose seats
you creased with love-maps
the eyes are the first thing fish go for
the lens inverts the life you really saw
WINTER SUN: APOLLO 17

my first Calif
  snow kills
  the succulents & first
phase tangerine which
  would have ripened
into Easter: moon-fruit.
selenium bug-spray
  diluted, froze & quarter
moon split out of her
  skin. this is the night
the whole family
viewed the pitted
lunar surface, the insulated
astronaut with a soundless
  blow of the hammer
striking the frozen
rocks. no sparks
  no light except by
intercepted sun.
“Better to hug close, wary of rubble and falling stones”
—Theodore Roethke

SHE HAS ALWAYS LIVED FOR THE NEW SHOOTS

and through the window I hear her
clipping the daisies
it will take her hours to get them
just right
she likes the back row to be tallest
and so on toward the brick
border before she puts on the black seal
of glidden
the moment when her face is darkest
and I am quick to tell her through the screen
“Sally, look behind you there’s a squirrel at the feeder”
that I built for her that winter
and I imagine it’s his love of her
that prevents him from reaching—
first the carrots
then the pellets
and finally the nuts
VOYEURS FROM ATLANTIS

The moon heavy
turned toward her lost parent.
In the distance she gave up
elegantly letting go goldfish
she kept all to one side.

The gentle goldfish fell
hard onto the earth trying to move away.
The bodies and blood fertilized
a colored path ringing the world.

Space voyeurs from Atlantis
we drift through the dark age
carve on stone
tongue a silent code.
THE COUGAR

For Keith Wilson and John Haines

I stalked a cougar once in a lost box-canyon
Off the Columbia River gorge near the town and river
Of Klickitat. We were loaded for grouse. October,
Gray sky reaching over into Oregon, and beyond,
All the way to California. None of us had been there,
To California, but we knew about that place—they had restaurants
That let you fill your plate as many times as you wanted.

I stalked a cougar that day,
If stalk is the right word, clumping and scraping along
Upwind of the cougar, smoking cigarettes too,
One after the other, a nervous, fat, sweating kid
Under the best circumstances, but that day
I stalked a cougar . . .

And then I was weaving drunk there in the living room,
Fumbling to put it into words, smacked and scattered
With the memory of it after you two had put your stories,
Black bear stories, out on the table.
Suddenly, I was back in that canyon, in that gone state.
Something I hadn't thought of for years:
How I stalked a cougar that day.

So I told it. Tried to anyway,
Haines and I pretty drunk now, Wilson listening, listening,
Then saying, You sure it wasn't a bobcat?
Which I secretly took as a put-down, he from the Southwest
And all, poet who had read that night,
And any fool able to tell a bobcat from a cougar,
Even a drunk fiction writer like me,
Years later, at the smorgasbord, in California.

Hell. And then the cougar smooth-loped out of the brush
Right in front of me—God, how big and beautiful he was—
Jumped onto a rock and turned his head
To look at me. To look at me! I looked back, forgetting to shoot.
Then he jumped again, ran clean out of my life.
YOUR DOG DIES

it gets run over by a van.  
you find it at the side of the road  
and bury it.  
you feel bad about it.  
you feel bad personally,  
but you feel bad for your daughter  
because it was her pet,  
and she loved it so.  
she used to croon to it  
and let it sleep in her bed.  
you write a poem about it.  
you call it a poem for your daughter,  
about the dog getting run over by a van  
and how you looked after the dog afterwards,  
took it out into the woods  
and buried it, deep, deep,  
and that poem turns out so good  
you're almost glad the little dog  
was run over, or else you'd never  
have written that good poem.  
then you sit down to write  
a poem about writing a poem  
about the death of that dog,  
but while you're writing you  
suddenly hear a woman scream  
your name, your first name,  
both syllables,  
and your heart stops.  
after a minute, you continue writing.  
she screams again.  
you wonder how long this can go on.
BEATUS EST QUI SOLLICITUDINEM  
(Secundum Alexandrum Pope)

Beatus est qui sollicitudinem
arvis paternis votaque terminat,
cultisque contentus solis in
suis animam recipit benignam;

cui lac recens bos et segetes cibum
laetae, cui vestes suppeditat pecus;
umbram dederunt arbores et
urere tempore ligna pinus.

Beatus est qui, corporis integer
mentisque sanus, non trepidus dies
spectat fugaces et silentes,
nocte sopore dieque gaudens

tranquillitate. Flagitiis carens
ille est cui cordi mixta bonis bona:
rus litteris, integritasque
otiolis, studium quiete.
Maggie Crumley

NOSTALGIA

(for J.E.)

Borrowed pickup to Utah in a March snowstorm. Remember? I knew I wanted out when your voice began to bore into me, and the pimples on your neck turned to neon. But the scrubbed spot on the rug screamed sin, and Daddy said no, so I went. Prom queen at seventeen, three times a mother by twenty-one, a bitch at twenty-three.

You could always get it up. My God, how I hated you. I washed and washed your seed from my self, rinsed it into the drain. Still you planted one more in me before I ran away. It grew almost three months. The night of the day Martin Luther King died I flushed it pink down the toilet, faint and shaking from his spilled blood and mine.

I heard you had another kid, a son, and this wife comes to you willingly, knees apart, breathing hard. She never wants to talk, and her tits are huge. You never understood, did you? Or was it me? Long red nights I held a good man to my barren breasts and kissed his eyes and cried Lord, because I loved him so much and my children look like you.
Wayne Andrews

THERE ARE WOMEN IN THE WIND . . .

Voices still, hair
Cutting the horizon
Like yellow stone,
They are animals
With wild eyes, sometimes
Doves
Whispering together.
Someone dies.
ODE TO THE LIFE

It is not important to have a name.
You meet the edge & break
into mist.
The land rises up as the sun passes away
& your hands
will be two bloody fish on the rocks.

You will sweat out nights with the fever
chewing the boards from under you
& in the gray slack
before morning
grab for the pulpy new thing
that carries your chest throbbing to the surface.

There will be more women.
You turn from the sun dying in milkweed
& she is there.
This doorway where a candle inside fur
stares with its one good eye.
Her dark sisters
set fire to your handful of fragile maps.
You orphan your words.

It is almost another lifetime.
Your voice
alone on the skin of a northern lake.
Beneath the oil of splicings
a spirit
scratches among grains of thirst.
Close beneath the cork
of your voice
the terrible monotone of pike running
the coldest spots on earth.

Your voice will see itself
a pale child
riding a bus through snow,
through a wilderness of afternoons,
riding with grief
smoldering in its tiny lap.
Beneath the cold sill of this life
the earth spreads wide
& small clouds of breath
rise
from the common grave
of your work. Now your fingers
are gently removed one by one
& you believe in the life.

FOR THE GIRL WHO THOUGHT SHE WAS A TREE

I won’t sing you into the soft life
we keep inside for ourselves, you
with sisters in rocky places.
Your skin was lovely even then . . .
Before the doctor talked you finally
down, you learned to bring
each day’s dying to your center
and now among us, your strength.
THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GO HOME

Under this wind that turns and turns
You can place your palm
Like a moon
Against her side and spread
Her wingfeathers over your wrist,
Your shoulder, your eye
Which never opened anyway,
And sleep the troubled
Birdsleep two days
Before the Southern haul.

Or you can wait for that light
Which is fear's own accomplice
Blinking through its gang of daybreaks
And know that rising is silly business,
That having a name does not alarm the wild,
That the clocks with their average singing
Have no special love for you
And know what the goose,
Having seen a flash in the far down grasses,
Must have known.
TWO KEYS

those who survived had hearts
that would open
easily: these two rusted keys
tell us
the early settlers shared the things
they most treasured.

the two keys are the same!
then, the locks were simple:
perhaps
anyone was welcome
and any stranger with a key could let himself in
to your life.

But I saved these rusted old keys
because I like to think
they were just thrown away
by a drunken miner
who decided the secrets of life were somewhere

right out in the open.
QUARANTINE

The girl in the asylum makes circles, and bumps the wall 3000 times a day. Otherwise she rams her forehead into shadows. The walls are light green.

For lunch the man on the forty-first floor unclosets his life-size mannequin, ties her in starched white aprons and runs his hands between her legs.

In the center of North Bay Towers in a room without chairs beneath 250 watts of clear bulb surrounded by cans, a man pastes labels on himself and peels them off.

The lady wears a black hat in front of white stone walls that look like Spain. Look closer, it's a rat and the walls scream. What kind of man has painted her?

White frames of mind. Dark birds loom behind my shoulder, feasting. This hacking away. Breath. These days I can measure the hurt in degrees.
ONE LINE OF LIGHT

for Bill Matthews

Six across. The windows give away everything. Some nights I'm the only one up in Athens, Ohio, all the lights on, the music loud enough to leak, like water, out of every seam, each soft spot. I think of my house as a ship lit up like a birthday. I walk around inside it with the page of a poem—the day's log, the night's psalm. The dark is my ocean. I know the water's rising in the next town.
THE GIRL EAST OF THE ROCKIES

On the Great Plains she wanted an ocean
not this melancholy farm anchored in wheatfields.
Ranchers who paid for her drinks
knew nothing of bonefish at mudbottom.
She danced for the sharks, waving the rescuers
back. Her silk dress ruined their crops and the mouth
of the muscular Yellowstone dammed by a swan’s wing.

Under a bridge a fat catfish pouted.
She tried to catch him with Mayflies, blue feathers,
disdain. A girl from a farm east of the Rockies
can be cold as a blizzard
but under this bridge her breasts wanted music.
GOODBYE

for L.S.

1
In the brown gruff of the throat,
blown full like a cow,
you caress yourself in a victim pose.
The head at the end of the line turns back
as if saying no, not yet.
So you go back,
pick up your body like an old pair of pants
and put it on again.

The first time you showed class: a necklace,
dry blood from a barbwire fence.
I was sure I had saved you.
You said, Hit me! Hit me! and I was mad,
sick enough to do it.

2
If the blade is really sharp
and the wound is a slash wound
there is a moment before the blood comes.
That moment is called The Breaking of Glass.

So the man walked into a canyon
which was full of rock
and picked one up the size of a head
and placed it next to his and dreamed.
THE LEFT EYE'S INSOMNIA

Heat thrives in the shaved hair. On the white towel
the dark hair curls like commas in a Bible.
The rolling cart moves it into memory
where it grows back again to buds. Time finally
to give me up. A mound blooms in the corner of a field.
Somewhere, over a field, an Indian
pronounces the final slow syllables.

Due south of Houma all roads end. The marsh is a motion,
a silence. A mouth too full of tongues.
Between some cattails a white heron stands on one leg saying,
To be a marsh guide one must have eyes in his knees
and, yes it's a good place to learn love making.
Submerged plants are the source of all dreams,
the fine silt of prophecy settles in your eyes.

The naval eye. I cover it with a finger. I can feel
the tube it used to be, how the outer part dried and crumbled,
how the inner part fell away, drifting like an anchor chain.
I have translated weather into a face
and I know you'd have trouble finding me now. But if we were body
to body, you could look into my eye and I would say,
You see, darling, it is easy.
NOTES FOR ALBUQUERQUE

“There is a screw loose
in the public machinery somewhere.”
Schoolcraft on the BIA, 1828

I.

Threads spiral toward a center,
turn on fingers of freezing children.
One boy ran, scared by routine, a glaring sun.
Hiding three days,
they found him blistered.
He fell asleep in Math, stupid.
Call him a fire-eyed coyote,
a berry in the paw of a bear.
“Cut the heat
in Arizona. It’s warm there.”

II.

Beware of wind.
Apache nights dry the morning. Why hatred
in Ronan? They watch Red Sky Sun Down
make an x. Her knowledge could protect
the bees. “We must help the boarding schools,
get water from Gila Community,
dam it in the mountains.”
No rain in three years. Phoenix thrives.

III.

A man was promoted today. Now an assistant commissioner
dreams of junior high and Shakespeare.
“Dark skinned savages with wailing songs.”
Dimples girls once teased his stutter.
He no longer listens. Children are sick
in Santa Rosa. At Salt River,
work Math on toilet paper.
IV.

Lose this hurt,
a trestle lost to canyons. Our ground
is now legend. Dew smokes along
Ska na wis. The circle of meeting trees
north of the Lawrence gives way to moss.
Children are sick in Santa Rosa.
We give away to this deepening thunder.
The sand knows lizards and coyotes.
Only owls have homes.
A valid aesthetic rendering of the nude is integrally concerned with the possibility of anatomy, rather than the reality of anatomy: that is, one must ask of the figure, "what can anatomy become, what is the body capable of, what common form remains awesome and unfamiliar?"
Juan Valdez, most people agree, was first in our town to wear the sombrero. Juan Ortega had been champion for as long as any could remember. He held his position longer than his skill merited. The stories of Ortega’s declining skill toward the end are probably only extensions of the old legends. Some talk of his taking four shots to kill one man, others of his shooting completely over a man’s head and injuring a woman sitting in her window across the street. I know as fact that he missed a charging steer that had been stung by a swarm of hornets. The steer trampled the flowers in the church garden which were to be used to decorate the altar of Our Lady on the feast of the Assumption. He drank tequila well. His challengers could hardly hold a gun after hours of settling the formalities of the duel in the cantina. Juan Valdez, a crafty and noble gunfighter, chose to fight on May 17, the day when the cantina closed early for the procession of Our Lady of the Holy Blood. Juan Ortega had no chance to fight the duel with his famous drinking ability. He had the advantage of the two o’clock blaze at his back, which he thought would carry him as always before. Juan Valdez wore his now famous sombrero with the carved lemonwood crucifix on the brim. His eyes shaded by his white sombrero from the glare of the green sun, he shot the old drinker through the heart.

Legend perhaps extends details beyond their proper perspectives. Juan Valdez was said to have killed two men by shooting them each through the left eye with the bullets blazing simultaneously from the bore of both of his famous silver pistols. I know for fact that he was indeed the noblest gunfighter of all time. He did not really need to wear the white sombrero as champion: since he had the advantage of having the blaze of the green sun at his back, he had no need to shade his eyes from the sun’s powers. People said that he wore the sombrero for luck and as a symbol of his position as champion. I know his reason for wearing it to have been that the wood of the carved lemonwood crucifix was from the garden of Our Savior’s sorrows. He was a most holy man and a servant of Christ. Each time he killed, he would pray on the grave of his mother, and he would have a mass read for all babies whose fathers had died before they were born.

Pedro Garcia should have been drowned by the toothless hag of a midwife who brought him into the world. Maria Santina, his unfortunate mother, a saintly girl who was raped on her way home from Lenten devotions, died before Pedro was yet born. He crawled out of her dead womb, and he refused to cry when the midwife slapped him
to make him breathe. The wretched Pedro Garcia challenged the champion, Juan Valdez, to a duel. He was too poor to afford his own drink, so Juan Valdez had to buy tequila for him in order to consummate the ceremonial rights of the duel. Pedro Garcia, miserable creature that he was, drank the tequila only so that he might eat the free lunch provided by the cantina. By the time Garcia had finished stuffing himself, the champion, who had been fasting in order to receive the body and blood of Our Savior in the Holy Eucharist, was overcome with drink. Garcia refused to take more than one drink himself. The sky was grey that day when Pedro Garcia killed Juan Valdez.

The rights of conquest permitted Garcia to take what he wanted belonging to the slain Juan Valdez, so he took the famous sombrero with the lemonwood crucifix. He could not even afford to buy a sombrero of his own. The white sombrero fit Garcia like the gold crown of a king on the head of an ass, pure and radiant against his dirty, ragged clothing. It was said by some who stood close to Garcia that he was able to kill Juan Valdez because his rusty pistol misfired coming out of the holster, and the wild shot struck the champion in the chest. In his next duel the black hand of Satan did not intercede in Garcia's favor as against Juan Valdez; the rusty pistol refused to fire, and Juan Sanchez shot three times at Pedro Garcia who could but stand and wait for the bullet that would kill him. Juan Sanchez claimed the famous sombrero of Juan Valdez, which had already become a symbol of the champion, and, ignorant clown that he was, he wore it on top of his own sombrero which he had bought the very morning of the duel especially for the occasion to reflect the rays of the green sun. Juan Francisco Melenez claimed the sombrero of Juan Valdez as well as Juan Sanchez' new sombrero, and he wore both on top of his grey one. Thus the tradition of passing along the sombreros of all past champions came to be. Fredrico Ortega, who inherited the sombreros of seven past champions, initiated the practice of also claiming and wearing the sombreros of each and every challenger he killed. Some say that he wore a total of 35 sombreros when he was killed by Juan Aurio. I know for fact that the number was only 29 sombreros. Carlos Renales, who inherited 74 sombreros when he killed the champion, Pepe Valachez, initiated the custom of wearing only 25 sombreros besides his own and the sombrero of Juan Valdez at the top of all. He stood only four feet three inches tall, and the weight of the sombreros was too much for him to support.

The reader may at this point in my account, over the discrepancy of statistical record, come to question the sources of my information and wonder as to my historiographic stance. As an historian, my style resembles most that of Herodotus: I give as many divergent accounts of an event as are available, allowing the reader to choose the best from among the many, in order that the history may remain ul-
timely objective. If I may at times show a preference of one version of an event over another, it is because I realize that, as Collingwood suggests, history in the final analysis exists only in the mind of the historian. History is a fiction, if you will. Since the facts in themselves reveal only that of history which is superficial and ultimately meaningless in itself, the historian must recreate the events and the characters and relive history himself. Though I have tentatively granted the reader the use of the term “fiction” as applicable to history, I must say myself that I do not regard history as a fiction. History is real in the ultimate sense of the Hegelian Idea. From the facts of history, it is true, we may not discover the whole story of history. History as a living spirit exists in the dialectic of the people. I am a native citizen of El Lopino and am more attuned to the spirit of the events of our town than would be the reader. Educated as you have no doubt discovered me to be, I am also more able than the masses of our town to make objective interpretations of the events, unaffected by the forces of myth which cloud the vision of our citizens.

Miguel Rodregues, who had an additional thumb on his right hand where his little finger should have been, accidentally shot the sombreros from the head of the champion, Rajual Oreo. Since Miguel had displaced the symbol of the champion in shooting off the sombreros, it was decided that Rajual could no longer be champion, and Miguel won claim to the sombreros. There was much argument as to what should be done with Rajual Oreo. Since he was no longer champion, he was officially dead, and many thought that he should be buried. Pepe Melene finally brought up the idea that Rajual would not have to be buried but that he was officially dead, and that he could never fight in a duel, and that he could visit the cantina only through the back door, and that he should be treated as a ghost when he was seen in the street.

The precedent set by Miguel Rodregues was established as a rule of the duel; instead of shooting the champion, the challenger shot at the sombreros on his head. By the time Jose Marques became champion, there were five holes in the sacred sombrero of Juan Valdez. It was Jose Marquez who made the ruling that a challenger could not shoot at the sombrero of Juan Valdez but must shoot at one of the lower sombreros. He was later shot through the head by Francisco Marcede whose left leg was shorter than his right.

Rodrigo Manez had dreams of getting shot in the head. When he was but a baby he had seen his father accidentally killed by a challenger who shot too low. It was Rodrigo Manez who said that sling-shots should be used instead of pistols so that the champion would not be accidentally shot in the head.
Pedro, the orphan, whose parents had been eaten from the inside out by maggots from sleeping naked among flies, wisely said that the men who were officially dead should not be permitted to sleep with their wives in case they should have a child possessed by the devil. Since the soul of the father might be in hell, the father might be an agent of the devil. Father Francisca decided that the widows of those officially dead should stay at the presbytery. Juan Miguel Veron, who was then champion, said that the champion should be responsible for the widows and see that they were protected. He wore a purple band on his wrist as a symbol of his duty.

Rio, who had lost his left arm when he was gored by a mad goat as a small boy, suggested that a challenger might throw rocks, since he was unable to hold a slingshot. Burrito, who could lift a horse and rider on his shoulders, wanted the duel to be decided by feats of strength. Since he was much too strong for anybody to conquer, his idea was not accepted.

The ghosts, who still ate and drank tequila but did not work, since they were dead, became a problem for our town. The champion, Jorge Orlando, was in many ways like the famous champion, Juan Valdez. As well as possessing great prowess in the duel, being able to hit a tin can with a rock at 30 paces, he was like the great champion in his dedication to Our Blessed Mother. Even when he was an altar boy holding the paten to prevent a fragment of the body of Our Savior from touching the floor, he would gaze into the eyes of the statue of The Virgin at the side altar and sometimes forget to genuflect after communion. Jorge Orlando suggested that he be blessed as a saint by the priest and that the souls of the dead be put under his charge. He wore a silver star on his shirt as a symbol of his position. He transformed what had become a burden on our community into a useful element. He had the ghosts work the lands which he, as champion, had assumed from all of the dead, and he put them to work in their spare time manufacturing sombreros like the famous sombrero of Juan Valdez, which he sold to tourists.

I have mentioned the name of Jorge Orlando in conjunction with the name of the champion, Juan Valdez, and compared the Christian spirit as well as the physical prowess of the two champions. You students of history will undoubtedly assume that I am an adherent to the “great man” theory of history because of my interpreting the characters of these two great champions as significant symbols in the progression of the history of our town. I must categorically deny such interpretations of my history. I regard the characters of Juan Valdez and Jorge Orlando through the objective eye of the historian, though the masses may have viewed these men through a symbolic perspective. In adhering to the great man theory, the historian reduces his account to the level of myth. My history is not of a mythical nature.
The characters of these most important champions, Juan Valdez and Jorge Orlando, are significant to history because of the exemplary nature of the lives they led. They represented the archetypal values of knighthood, combining skill in combat with the Christian values of charity and reverence to the Holy Mother. In the characters of these two champions the masses of our town find values worthy of imitation. The masses aspire to walk in the footpaths laid by Juan Valdez and Jorge Orlando. It is men such as Juan Valdez and Jorge Orlando who form the cornerstones of history, providing the ideals on which civilization is founded.

Many in our town who were complete paupers and who owned no land participated in the duel and became a burden on the champion, who got nothing from killing these men and still had to feed them. Pedro Melachez had the idea that only those with land could fight in the duel. Aurero Pele later decided that a man without land could fight if he had enough money to challenge.

Reginio Ortega, who had attended the university and who was supposed to be the smartest man in our town, said that the physical element of the duel was barbaric in this modern age, and that the champion should be decided by a debate. It was acknowledged that the duel should be fought in an intellectual manner, but everyone knew that Reginio Ortega would surely become champion since he could speak four languages and had read the Bible all the way through, which not even the priest had done. I must interject at this point an evaluation of the reasons stated by the masses for holding Regino’s argument suspect. The inarticulate nature of the masses prevents their defining their intuitive perceptions in any but symbolic terms. Reginio Ortega was in fact a charlatan. His family had made their fortune by playing on the ignorance of the town. Reginio was most accomplished in the art of sophistry of any member of his family. As is common with the uneducated, the people of our town imagined Reginio to be intelligent because they could not understand what he said. If Reginio Ortega had intelligence, I myself could never penetrate the infinity of concentric circles within his reasoning to discover it. A poker game was proposed as an alternative form of intellectual conflict to the debate proposed by Reginio Ortega. It was finally decided to determine the duel by the casting of dice. A lottery later replaced the dice. The one who drew the stick with the black dot became champion.

Those among the dead began to complain about the fact that there were many who had never participated in the duel. Families who had never fought owned vast tracts of land and were prosperous while those who would risk their lives were left among the dead, and their children became homeless paupers. Raul Gomez made it compulsory for every man with land or money to participate in the duel. The one
Michael MacDonald

whose lot was marked with the black dot became champion and the
ten who drew lots marked with a red dot joined the dead.

It was pointed out that the champion was at an unfair disadvan-
tage in the duel. He had most to lose, being in control of all the lands
and money of the dead, and he had only one chance out of the many
of winning. It was decided to sell tickets so that the champion, who
had the most money in the town, could buy as many tickets as he
liked and could have a better chance of winning.

A tourist from the north, who had visited our town several times to
observe the festivities of the duel, pointed out how the duel had de-
generated from its original purpose. The champion, he said, should
be the one who is the most powerful and most worthy of the som-
breros, the purple band and the silver star. Now even the weakest
have a chance of becoming champion, he showed us.

As I have already indicated, Hegel has had considerable influence
on my approach to history. It is for this reason that I foresaw good
times to come for our town in the words of the northern tourist. If
the dialectic is to continue, the thesis must be met with antithesis.
Our town was becoming complacent toward the duel. The criticism
from the north served to generate a new concern for the significance
of the duel among our people.

The Rock Insurance Company became champion. They had more
money than the entire town. George Glem wore the sombreros, the
purple wrist band and the silver star as field representative of the
champion. He said that the dead, even in hell, have some rights. He
decided that, if the dead in their spare time would make jewelry to be
sold to tourists, they could spend a night with their wives when they
filled their quota. The wives of the dead had by this time overflowed
the walls of the presbytery and were begging in the streets for food.
George Glem built a fine building for the wives to stay in. It was such
a fine place that tourists and traveling salesmen stayed there also
when they came to town. The children of the dead, George Glem sent
to school so that they could learn to read the notices that he nailed to
the wall of the cantina.

A man whose name nobody knew challenged George Glem to a
duel. He refused to drink tequila or even go into the cantina. George
Glem stood in the street with the green sun at his back and took out
his checkbook. The man didn’t wear a sombrero. He wore dark
glasses to shade his eyes when he faced the green sun glaring over
George Glem’s shoulder. The man didn’t reach for his checkbook. He
drew a pistol from his holster and shot George Glem through the
heart. He refused to accept the sombreros and the purple wrist band
and the silver star. He got on his motorcycle and rode out of town. I
was told by a small child that she had seen him urinating in the street
beside his motorcycle before he left.
PIANOLA

Last night when I made love, I thought of this. But she beside me did not know. I thought there is no music in the flesh without a death rattle, that Widow Skillin’s pianola had broken bellows, that it wheezed and I wheezed pumping it. Is it those parts of the past we leave out of ourselves that separate lovers?

When I was ten, the Skillins lived in town, but I had no reason to see them except these—that Mama’d told me not to mess and meddle with them—that I’d seen the old man walking to the post office in a canvas coat with pockets bulging, talking to leaves, “love, love,” while four boys and me the fifth followed him with “Bottles, oh Bottles Skillin”—and mostly that I’d once kissed the girl Mari Heather Cagwell Skillin three times on the mouth and she’d counted one for the Father and two for the Son and three for the Holy Ghost. Which was blaspheming, so I’d given her a bone awl from the Indian graves, which I said would kill her because she’d called it by its wrong name. “Bone owl,” she’d laughed, “bone owl” because she was only seven. These were my reasons which I kept to myself, for I could keep all secrets except that one about my cousin’s birthday horse. And he was only my second cousin.

When Bottles Skillin had died and Mari Heather had asked . . . does it have anything to do with bone owls . . . and I had said . . . no of course not it was cancer . . . and she had asked . . . what is cancer . . . and I had said . . . well, I heard it, well I don’t know, well he was your grandfather . . . they moved out to the farm, taking Mari Heather with them.

It was two years between then and the time when the furrows of Skillins’ southwest forty were wet and I ran—when it was March because the ridges on either side of my feet were still hard with what Mother called a hairnet of frost. Mud cracked where I smashed along with my boots. Maples were spiked for sap. I passed the bed-springs lying beside Skillins’ drive. Jump on the springs. That would make the curtains move. It was so quiet. A white tetherball hung limp on a pole. Slap and slap, I slowly tossed the ball, once so high it twisted down and hung itself. Then I coughed once and three times louder, stayed and waited for someone to come out so I could say I’d been to Skillins’—and had swung Skillins’ tetherball—and had been seen.

But when Mari Heather opened the door and walked down the path, I still did not leave. Her breath came onto the air like milkpods bursting. So I untwisted the ball and swung it at her. She let it bounce off her shoulder, and said nothing. I shrugged. “My God,
Kristi Duckwall

won’t you talk now?” I could see she had forgotten my name and
the bone owl.

But then she pushed the ball back. It hit me. “You swore, Nils
William.”

“I did not. I said Gawl.”

“So, Gawl is swearing.”

“No, it ain’t.”

“Yes.”

“God, you don’t know anything about swearing.” I snorted and
backed away from her.

She pointed at me. “Nils William Carter, Grandmother says you
will come in.”

I tossed my head, but my wool cap slid off, which made her laugh,
which I didn’t want. So I said, “No I will not. What makes you think
I want to anyway?” I twisted my toe down into the garden. “I’m
going back.”

She turned toward her house. Hair was in her mouth. “Go then.
Who cares?”

Since she left me to choose, I came with her all right but far
enough behind so she would not know. I took time to pet one cat that
had no tail. And one that did.

Skillins’ kitchen was dim and heavy with the sweet reek of last
fall’s canning. Dozens of hairy potato cuts were lined along the win­
dowsills for planting. One corner of the room ran out to a root cellar.
A spider scuttled out from the stove woodbox and up a wicker chair
where Mari said I should sit. She called up the stairs, “Grandma,
that boy is here now.” Then she went outside. I was alone.

The old woman, the widow Skillin, came down slowly, heavily, as
if her legs were wood blocks. Fat fell down her arms and when she
pulled the light chain, they were spotted blue with loose veins. I did
not put my feet on the crossbar under me. I did not ask her about her
son and daughter-in-law, the parents of Mari Heather, because it was
guessed—and thought—and some said known that those two did not
really “work” in the Moose County lunatic asylum, that they did not
even “visit” there, that they “lived” there all the time, all year round.
So I tried to talk like company. I said, “It is a fine day Mrs. Skillin
yes it is late though thank you I must go.”

She laughed with no teeth, so that she sprayed the table once and
once my face, “No you will not go. You will stay. You will play the
pianola.” When she asked if I had ever taken piano, I turned away.

I had for five years taken piano as I had once taken liver oil in a
spoon that was old-splittle-brown-silver. And I did not like one any
more than the other. “Yes,” I said.
So she told me we would go upstairs. We had to walk up arm in arm like Mother and Father in church because of her heart which caused her ankles, which hung over her shoes like rolled socks. She could not take two stairs at once. Tacked to the end of each step were strips of potato sack so she would not slip. I found I had as much time to look around as I did in school to look up river between one lesson and another, between spelling and reading. There was a cuckoo clock in the stairwell that was broken, so the bird hung out all the time. And there were ten oval, death's hair wreaths along the wall, each a little higher than the last.

After eight steps I asked, “What is cancer?” because I could not wait any longer.

She clutched my arm till it hurt. “Cancer is a sickness.”

“Can you catch it?”

“No. It just comes. It comes very slowly till you can’t eat.”

I nodded. “I know about that. Like peas. I can’t eat peas. They give me cancer. Like Vick’s Vapo Rub. Vick’s Vapo Rub on my chest gives me a fever.”

She was silent. I asked on the eleventh step, “What is a pianola?”

“It is what your husband gives you when you have arthritis in your hands.” She looked at me. We were the same height. “And when he has been unfaithful.”

“Yes, unfaithful is when you don’t pray before you go to bed.”

She touched my lips. “Unfaithful is what you will be many times.”

When we were on the landing, I could look through the round window and see Mari Heather, stooped, carrying wood buckets of maple sap back and forth to the barn. Widow Skillin said, “Move on,” and we did.

Behind the curved bubble-glass of the corner cupboard, behind stoneware as blue-veined as the old widow’s arm, was a snow scene in a ball sent by her husband when he went to Chicago, and left her home, and heard an opera, and had a woman. I had never seen it snow in a city and wanted to and asked, “Can I shake it?”

She said, “No.” Then she coughed, which I guessed was cancer. We went into the living room. A piano stood on the east wall so that light could hit the sheetmusic from the west. It was an upright. People were always trying to buy it from her. But her price went up and up because, in the first place, her husband had sold his father’s gold watch and a fine team mare for that piano. The varnish was dark, was one coat on another, was dull, cracked like the frozen furrow mud I’d smashed through down the field. It felt rough where dust had been covered over with finish again and again.

I asked, “Is this a pianola? It looks like a regular piano.”
Then pointing west to the couch I could not sit on, to a wooden chest which took up half the wall, she whispered, “If you can push this into the piano all the way so they join, so these hammers lie on those keys, you will have a pianola. And it will play itself, if you pump, if you take off your boots.” Sliding it in front of me sometimes, leaning into it with my back, shoving it with my legs, going backwards and butting it with my rump, I pushed the pianola around the braided rug and onto the piano. My eyes were wet and my face was wet and my whole body was wet. My hair steamed like after a bath. She said, “That is fine. Now take off your boots.” As if I were ready and didn’t need a rest.

After I climbed onto the wind-up stool, she turned me round and round higher and higher till I was tall enough. I was still puffing. She went to a small cabinet. I cannot remember all the names of the rolls she took out. But they were in long narrow cardboard boxes that were wine-red with a tag on each end. She would hold them up to the west window one by one, turn them around as if the names might change on her and then say, “Damn,” like a man, and then slam them back into their wooden slots in the cabinet. “Damn” and slam till my head ached, and all for maybe fifteen minutes till she had found five rolls she wanted me to play.

There was one “Nocturne” and one called “King Stephen Overture” which she dedicated special to Bottles Skillin, whom she called Beloved Stephen and who was in that tin picture above me with her on her wedding day. I said, “She was pretty,” though I knew the widow that stood beside me was the woman that stood in the frame, but I couldn’t say, “You,” because they didn’t look the same.

She said, “Pump.” I pressed the pedals one at a time, slowly because I had to stretch. Nothing came but a low, whirring sound. Then she put her hand on my shoulder and squeezed. “Pump.” When I slammed one foot and then the other over and over, music came at last, jerking along, hardly like any music I’d ever heard. It rocked my whole body or maybe I rocked my whole body playing it, but I coughed and all the time she was telling me how she had played piano for the silents down in the city called Saint Paul which was once called Pig’s Eye—that her husband had turned pages and had watched the chorus girls kicking while she played—that he met them afterward to kiss the hand of “the lovely lady of the lovely legs.” She said, “Pump.” The longer I pumped the more she coughed. And I coughed. She said the bellows were broken and that was just the hell of it. It roared and sometimes sighed but all the time the music went heaving on, jiggling the picture over my head. So I looked up because I was dizzy watching my feet and dizzy with her talking. I saw she looked like Mari Heather and I saw too, when Widow Skillin bent down, a thin moustache hung over her lip and did it come from
kissing Bottles Skillin who had a moustache up there in the picture and would Mari Heather have one? But I couldn’t ask because the widow was saying louder how he had taken one girl to Chicago to the opera and bought the pianola all on the same trip and couldn’t I play louder? She said, “Pump.” While I kept rocking and kicking at the pedals and coughing and the sweat breaking out, she told how he had got a new roll for the pianola each time he had got a new girl and “Pump.” And he had spat blood and she had put cold rags on his fever and finally I couldn’t breathe. The tears came into my eyes and I cried because I didn’t know what she was saying, because I was numb from my legs down and my side ached as if I’d run. Then when I kicked once with both feet together, the room was rolling backwards fast-but-slow, and the chair tipping, almost falling, into her arms, till she was crying, till she whispered, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” And then she set me up again.

When I stood, she asked, “Do you want to play ‘Gavotte Stephen’—if I sit on the couch—if I don’t say anything?”

“No.”

“Do you want to make it snow in Chicago?”

“No.”

“Well, will you come again—to see Mari Heather?”

Then with “Yes,” and “Yes,” and no in my mind, I went down the stairs past those ten wreaths and the clock whose bird stayed out all the time, and never never came back in.
The afternoon sky was vast; Carl squinted at the ground.

He was eating scrambled eggs. Liz burst in, drunk again, and made her way to the table where she lifted her cotton shift and displayed the tiny red heart tattooed on her ass. By accident, Carl knocked his eggs to the floor.

"Why?" he screamed. "Why this time!"

"You don't like it then get out!" Liz said, her face slipping into her vindictive smile. Her hair, the color of natural sponge, poked wildly into the air. "And you know what else?" She reached over jerkily, pulled the pen from his shirtpocket and, straining, snapped it before his face.

Carl clutched his leather briefcase tightly to his chest with both arms, like a jealous father, and scurried through the afternoon streets. Intense white daylight blinded him. The cliff behind his cottage casts early evenings across the valley . . . he will wait beside the globe-shaped rock, wait while thinking of her lips, thick and red and moist, and uselessly scrape the ground with a stick . . . unless . . .

Carl had not tried to stop her. He said nothing. Quietly, he lay on their small bed, his face to the wall. Occasionally, he dug at the plaster with his thumbnail and breathed lightly while he listened to the night breeze blowing briskly through the streets below. The blinds, with their broken slats, rustled pleasantly like the rattling of bamboo wind chimes. Later, when the night had become quiet sounds, Liz slipped into bed and pressed her warm body against his back.

"He was just a sailor. He wasn't any good. Sailors are crazy."

She lit cigarettes for them both, blew smoke out through her nose, and propped his head against her shoulder. There are times when principles count for nothing . . . all was silent, except the dull drumming of rain against the window. Gradually, the room filled with soft, gray light; upstairs, someone moved about, dropped heavy boots on the floor and flushed a toilet, but it was all in the distance, muffled and hazy, like the dim shoreline that was disappearing while Carl swam off, stroking wearily into sleep.

It had rained all night. Inside had still been dark when Carl slid from the damp-smelling sheets, dressed silently in the corner, then hurried outdoors. Puddles glinted like knifeblades. A pained, hollow feeling grew within him as if a tremendous bubble were trapped in
his chest and slowly expanded. He could barely catch his breath. Just off the curb lounged an old woman, her stretch pants pulled taut around her belly and into the lips of her crotch. Clean black shadows cut the streets into oblongs of light and dark. Carl cupped one hand over his eyes and clasped his briefcase with the other.

At last, and with a long sigh of relief, the deep undeliberate sigh of someone who has escaped a threat, safe after all, Carl climbed the wide granite steps and disappeared into the library.

II.

The aroma of brewed coffee spread throughout the apartment. Liz, her kimono open, slapped the French toast with her spatula, then flipped it over amidst a flurry of sputters, humming peacefully, wiping tiny splats of grease from her bare chest. She squeezed a fresh orange for Carl, sucked her moist fingers one by one, then checked the coffee again.

Carl sat at his writing desk, his small fingers pressed into his shaggy, rust-colored hair.

It was at a loud party. Liz sat alone in a kitchen. A half glass of Scotch shimmered by her elbow while she cracked walnuts and piled the shells in a pyramid before her. When Carl entered and closed the door behind him, the outside din hushed to a murmur, like the sound of water washing up in a cave. He had slipped there to escape. When he turned, he saw Liz; her blouse, deeply unbuttoned, exposed rich, brown skin. He said nothing; leaned his back against the door and merely watched, staring helplessly until she looked up at him, then offered him her drink. He blurted:

"Come home with me."

She did. One morning, as they lay in bed, she said, "Life is like the Panama Canal." When he gave a burst of laughter, she rolled on top of him and held her head so that her dark hair brushed his face, dangled in his mouth, became moist with his saliva.

Liz flipped the French toast onto a plate, then padded barefoot over to Carl and lay her hand lightly on his shoulder. He did not look up. Patiently, she waited, massaging his boyish shoulders with tender pinches. Her expression was soft and indefinite. Finally, she whispered in his ear:

"Come eat with me. Let's not go out today. I poured your coffee already."

Carl brushed her off. "Shhh! Not now; not now."
"But your . . ."
"Shhh! dammit, not now; not now."
Carl flipped through his translation,* always excited by the almost immediate irony in which young Hans says cheerfully:

_How glad I am to have gotten away!_

Or the way young Hans reaches out toward the moon after his meeting with the irascible Lady M—and shouts effusively:

_Never have I sat in such an enchanted garden!_

Later, Hans writes of the same garden:

_The shadowy path, lined by beechtrees and tall, prickly shrubs, ends in a dark enclosure, sad with the aura of loneliness . . ._

Carl pushed a stick of gum into his mouth and then slowly massaged his temples until the tension drained out of him. A tremendous red sunset burned out the western sky in the painting on the wall above him. Stacks of reference books, like paper walls, hived him in a niche, where his work was spread around him in a semi-circle. Things had not been going well.

A librarian with plucked eyebrows and a high, shiny forehead, beamed a twisted smile at him while she sorted books. As she bent lower from the waist, her skirt slid upward on her splayed legs. Steel blue panties locked her thighs together. Embarrassed, Carl tried to think of Hans. The air smelled of stale books, unused, putrescent; he must get outside.

A long narrow cloud glowed red across the evening sky like a scar. The ground was dark with dull shadows. Warm air flapped like a carpet hung on a clothesline and swirled the slight fragrance of ivy and geraniums around Carl as he sat in Bryant Park beneath an arcade of lush green trees. His bench felt hard beneath him; his briefcase lay across his lap. "Pleasant out here. Nice to get away," Carl thought, and casually drummed on the metal clasp of his briefcase. He yawned deeply.

At that moment, when the water cleared from his eyes, he noticed the woman for the first time; she had been sitting there all along, but now, inexplicably, she had come to life for him and he could see nothing else. Her gray streaked hair was pulled back in a tight chignon; bare, white-skinned arms, long and slender, folded in her lap where a metal case, grasped tightly, glistened in her hands. Discreetly, she pushed back a lock of hair blown loose in the breeze, then slipped her hand back to her lap with a graceful movement. There were dark rings around her deep black eyes.

* _Leiden und Freude_, Ernst Hoffman, 1774 (originally published: _Weltanschauung_). Carl's idea was to translate and render it in the present tense. "The immortal present," he called it, "where an action never dies, but _is_ and reverberates for all eternity, what a place!"
She rose and approached him.

"I would like a light," she said, sitting on the edge of his bench, holding her face toward his. Her voice was melodious, almost sing-song with affected diction of an elderly actress.

"Sure," Carl said, trying to act composed. Her words had stolen his breath. His entire hand groped inside his baggy pants pocket.

She looked directly into his face, but through it at the same time.

"If your hand would stop trembling I'll light this," she said. Her sweet perfume aroused him.

"It's just you startled me," he said, then wished he hadn't. He asked shyly, "Sit here often?"

"I'm waiting. For someone . . ."

She looked toward the street with a sidelong glance. Her face now seemed distracted; impatient. She held her cigarette between two erect fingers, but did not smoke it. Her hand nervously pushed back that lock of hair which had blown free again, then slid to the bench beside her where it stopped, her elbow straight; she seemed held there only by some secret determination.

As her lips moved to speak again, a limousine pulled to the curb opposite them, blasting its horn. She jumped up touching his knee, and said quickly, "Be good."

Carl studied her through the park's iron grating until she disappeared into the blackness of the car's back seat.

The horizontal slats of the bench pressed into his back again and he shifted his weight. It was then he noticed her silver cigarette case; he sniffed it, inhaling that sweet smell of lime perfume, and as he ran his finger over the case, as if to buff the livid sky reflected in it like a luminescent puddle, it sprang open into his lap, empty, except for her name embossed on the cloth lining.

When he rose, spitting out the gum he had kept tucked in one cheek, and walked toward home, a new energy pulsed through him, a momentary feeling of flight, and he clutched his briefcase vigorously while the transparent evening dissipated into hot, city night.

III.

He turned off into a dark neighborhood where large, foreign cars lined both sides of the streets. A taxi discharged two couples to a doorman, as imperturbable as his building, then hurtled into the night.

Carl imagined himself a trapeze artist floating nimbly above a dark void, his every step precise, calculated; a Houdini escaping the
tightest traps without mussing his hair; an... Overhead, a blueberry-colored sky expanded limitlessly; small dim clouds fled before a high turbulent wind. He walked quickly, excited by curiosity, the palms of his doll-like hands moist, and by a touch of revenge. Down the block, a sombre canopy jutted to the curb.

Carefully, Carl pressed a buzzer. The pug-faced doorman, his hands clasped smugly behind his back, stood beside a fountain in which an alabaster figure poured a stream of water from a tiny white jug, and eyed Carl suspiciously through the glass partition.

"Who is it?"
"Carl."
"Who?"
"I have your cigarette case."
"Oh... bring it up."

There was a loud, strident buzz.

She was wearing a plain housedress when she met him in the hallway, her hand extended in an eloquent gesture with which she brought him inside, touching his elbow. A grand piano, majestic and detached, loomed in the center of her living room, with a silk manilla shawl spread over it. There was a darkwood mantel over an unlit fireplace, and on it was a pair of bronzed toddlers. In the corner stood a barren clothestree. The scent of lime was everywhere; pleasant, relaxing.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you," Carl offered.

"Nonsense. Here, sit. Sit. I just couldn't imagine where I left it. Can I bring you a drink? Some cold wine, yes? Good." Her eyes shone fiercely as she moved about.

"By the way," she called from the kitchen, "please, call me 'Maggie'."

Carl had sunk into her plush sofa with the meekness of someone unable to determine his own actions. He noticed his shirt was buttoned in the wrong holes, but left it. He watched her return to the room tugging on a corkscrew until it popped. "Oh that's fine," Carl said, but then sank back into her sofa. Folds of her dress bunched around her thighs as she stacked several records on a turntable; she caught eyes with him for a moment, but turned away to look through more records.

She bent over him, folded down the one side of his collar that had been standing up, then sat beside him.

"Tell me something about you," she said.

Carl made a few guarded remarks, but later, when he said, "I see you like magazines," nodding toward the stacks in one corner, she seemed to turn on him with impatience.
"I collect them. There's a difference," she said reproachfully, but then immediately stopped herself and laughed expediently, as if excusing a private joke, acting warm and supple again with her knee touching his as she sat angled toward him, and laughed again amusedly, tossing her head back slightly.

He was aware of the slender neck exposed to him. He reached for it; no, he could not. He cupped his hand deliberately and coughed. He felt a crippling timidity; a sort of terror.

“What? Yeah... oh that's fine,” he said and tipped the wineglass immediately to his mouth.

Maggie talked aimlessly, her voice dancing with its sing-song quality, while over and over, she refilled their glasses and each time pushed the bottle back into the slush the ice had become. Carl lit a cigarette, then lit another from it. For some reason he began to think of Hans, how he had sat childlike before Lady M—, who had been coy and distant, a silk handkerchief first in one hand, then in her other, her every movement discreet and graceful. And Hans. Defying the squat fist of fate; the stand of heroes! The heavy drapes quivered from a sultry breeze. Another record plopped down.

“A toast,” Carl blurted suddenly. His exuberance gushed without context and hung awkwardly in the air. “I shall make one! To this music, my favorite. Entzückend!”

He raised his glass so enthusiastically wine splashed onto his mouth and ran down his chin in thin streamers. He clinked his glass onto the coffee table, huffed his soft cheeks and sank back into a cushion of the sofa, exhausted.

Maggie studied him with an odd, distant expression. She touched his hair; a delicate, curious stroke. With a slender finger she wiped wine from his chin in a motherly way. Carl was lying in a meadow with tall grass swaying over him, the thick loam breathing beneath his horizontal body, moist air heavy on his skin; the smell of lime, of beech. She smiled down into his pale mute face with an ethereal gaze and then, in one of those moments on the point of delirium and ecstasy, she pressed his hand to her small round breast—and he saw himself convulse with delight . . .

IV.

To escape the pandemonium he began to feel, Carl plunged into his work.

... I cannot imagine the consequences. If I have told you before of women for whom I would die, then now I have found one for whom I would live. Yet, I am torn. I cannot forget that recent gathering at which her friends... but I have
written you already about that. You see, I am helpless. At times, my hopes seem insincere. Oh, my friend, would that I may step outside this fragile form . . .

One morning toward the end of summer, Carl stayed in bed. He sat with a book unopened on his lap, his back against the wall, the single sheet tucked around his waist. The air was hot and thick. Flecks of light jostled over the bed, disappeared suddenly, then reappeared. Bathwater droned in the other room, from which seeped the sweet smell of soap. Carl thought of Maggie, of her long, graceful arms, and decided it was time for a talk with Liz.

"Can never find a goddamn thing," Liz muttered as she rifled the cabinet. She slammed the door shut impatiently two or three times. Each time, it sprang open again. She stood amphora-like, hands on her hips, and looked about the room. Her unbrushed hair, which she had recently cut, rippled in wild tufts. At last she found her roll of amber paper, but then she lingered, as if all along she'd known she wasn't really looking for the paper, and eyed Carl for a moment thoughtfully. She tossed the paper up and down, sauntered to the bed and sat beside him. Her lips were slightly pursed; playfully, she slipped her hand beneath the sheet.

"This afternoon, let's walk in the park. And we'll spend all evening together. I quit my job, y'know."

"Ummm," Carl said absently.

She walked two fingers up his leg igglety pigglety.

"And in two weeks, we're visiting my friends. In the mountains. I wrote soon as I knew. It's all settled."

Carl stared at his exposed gangly feet. The book slid from his lap while he fumbled with his thoughts.

"Just think, escape this hole awhile. Cold nights. Lots of old army blankets to snuggle under." She withdrew her hand. "But we'll have to quit smoking."

She waited for his reaction.

"Carl, damn you, you're not even listening."

He raised his leg that had fallen asleep and rubbed his knee. "All right. Liz, listen . . ."

"No, now you listen."

The sheet bunched in wavelets as she slid closer. Her face grew sober. She looped her hands tenderly around his knee, then spoke slowly. "We're going to have a baby."

Carl's back peeled from the wall like adhesive tape. He glanced at her flat stomach, then over her shoulder. What a magnificent sight the white light filtering through the blinds! He. A father! Suddenly the whole world filled with meaning. He understood the scratched and
uneven mahogany highboy standing across from him with its old
mournful air, and he understood why cigarettes had burned the arms
of the heavy wingchair, and a smile started at the corners of his
mouth, stopped like the first lurch of a train, then began again, raced
across his face, hot and flushed, and echoed throughout his body and
in that moment, all of which passed before he pulled her over and be­
gan rubbing his hand around and around on her tawny stomach,
from the dissatisfaction and confusion of his life, there precipitated
order: one, simple, illum inating, eternal order. He bit her neck and
Liz, laughing, lashed the air with her feet until she screamed
abruptly, then dashed to the bathroom. The drone of running water
ceased with a clanging of pipes, but in the next instant Carl was
vaulting into the tub, flames of water splashing out around him.
Carefully, Liz followed. And Carl, pink and radiant, began rubbing
her belly again, like Aladdin with his lamp . . .

An autumn sunset glowed from behind a high-rise while Carl
passed through a deserted courtyard.

In the wholesale meat district, greenhead flies buzzed over blood
and grease caked between cobblestones. The old El, gray and dis­
pirited, crossed between city and sky like a heavy, squalid fence be­
yond which a tugboat sounded, long and deep like a moan. Occasion­
ally, a drop of water fell from the unused tracks and resounded from
the awaiting puddle, brown with rust.

He continued walking, both hands buried deep in his pockets. He
thought of the silk manilla shawl and how once he had picked out a
tune with a single finger while Maggie had stepped out for a mo­
ment. He emerged from the corridor formed between housing proj­
ects and crossed the small circle of grass, a brown color in the sinking
light.

A beautiful girl stepped from a red MG. He followed her for a
short distance until she turned off into a doorway.

There’s just no way, he thought. It’d be pointless to even go there;
he had responsibilities now. He would just feel awkward.

Neighborhood men in bleached T-shirts intervened when a grown
man backed a young girl against a wall in a subdued struggle. Carl
passed the fringe of the commotion. The man turned out to be the
girl’s father. The fresh smell of pastries drifted from a bakery while
from a half-open window, music played, old and scratchy.

Once, she had leaned her face against the window, her long white
arms held high over her head, her bare flesh pressed flush against the
pane. the nighttime city spread before her while the blinking red
light from a police car parked below laved her frail body like a statue
in an amusement park. She had said:

“It’s odd how long ago that seems now. Pity. And every day the
world dies a tiny bit.” When she turned to Carl, her eyes focused on
some point only she could see and she mumbled something unintelligible. The room seemed dark with an aura of loneliness. For a moment, Carl had not known who they were.

In the distance, an ambulance screamed; it flared closer then passed and died away. Human forms lay like shadows on the hard concrete floor of the corner playground; it hurts to be misunderstood every second of your life. The sun dropped over the mauve horizon. Somewhere, music played from a transistor radio, distorted and tinny.

What could he even say, he thought. He really didn’t mean to be mean? Two rows of parked cars lined the street like a set of unending hyphens. In Washington Square, tourists frenetically clicked Instamatic pictures while confabs of seedy men bent over concrete chess tables. Transients sang and clapped unconcernedly on the stone coping around the dry fountain and panhandlers leaned against art nouveau lampposts. Litter lay scattered all about with the same despair as confetti the morning after a party.

Carl raised his collar against the opaque night, which had become chilly with the quiet scents of autumn, and turned toward home.

V.

Without transition, as if some magician had performed a trick, the long winter bloomed into spring; large black puddles dried into dust while a bright disc of sun straddled the city. Pointed red buds appeared on park trees and thrashed toward life in the warm, gusty breezes.

Inside, Carl huddled over papers arranged neatly before him, his head cocked on one hand, his slender legs crossed beneath his desk. His translation was nearing completion.

It has not been used in years, but there is still the smell of sulfur, and of potash. It is heavy in his hand. Peering through his window, Hans contemplates the white moon, dull against the deep black sky. “... soon. Yes, very soon ...” He taps the cold barrel against his pale cheek while imagining himself growing larger until the valley seems to recede beneath him, as under one who has been climbing, and the white huts seem like stones. There is a field beyond the ledge. But he is not yet ready.

Quickly, Carl rinsed two potatoes left on the drain, then thrust them into the oven. “Exactly 400; everything’s under control,” he said aloud, not doubting himself for an instant. “Plenty of time.” He deftly juggled more than he should have carried and sang in a mock-raspy voice while he peeled carrots and chopped onions:
Barry Lippman

"... don't want no room at the Biltmore
Ain't got no carpet on my floor
Said don't need no carpet on my floor . . ."

Occasionally, as he scuffled about, it struck him his feet seemed childlike in the purple slippers that Liz had knitted for him, but he did not dwell on it. From the copper kettle, he measured a small amount of steaming water to dissolve gelatin for a dessert. "She'd better not be late," he said while he stirred it.

The windows fogged gray against the darkening evening. Calmly, with his legs tucked beneath him, he slouched in the heavy wing-chair, which he had pushed to one spot, the hassock to another until everything fit some imagined order. The smell of baked potatoes wafted in the air. He closed his eyes restfully and tried to imagine Liz's movements through the streets, creating every step. Three times she reached the door. "It's getting late," he thought, and each time moved her back to a different beginning. He began quickening her pace through streets that had grown colder and darker until there was something frantic about her movements. On some blocks he lost sight of her completely, only to catch her again on other blocks moving jerkily past dark buildings and dead alleys palled by thick shadows where he imagined ruthless men lurking beside garbage bins. Carl lit the burner beneath a pot of fresh broccoli. "Plenty of time," he said. The oven had made the air hot and unbreathable. Carl's fingers groped for the catch, until at last, he flung open the window. Fresh, cold air rushed in against him as if he had broken a vacuum. In the distance a car screeched; the hollow sound echoed through the narrow street until a loud blast of horn pierced the emptiness like a skewer.

And then finally he spied Liz's heavy form trundling flat-footed up the walk. "Hurry!" he yelled down to her breathlessly. "Hurry up!" He slammed shut the window, which had unfogged, and anxiously lit the candle he had centered on the table, his shadow dancing tall across the wall and ceiling in a flickering circle of light. "Perfect timing," he gloated, his eyes bright with the burning candle.

Liz tossed him her bulky cardigan as she lumbered to the table. And she laughed, "Those pigeons can all go to hell."

"Well, how'd it go today?" he called from the closet, standing on a stool, folding her sweater away.

He poked his head out and waited for her answer, a lick of yellow light gleaming in his eyes.
The sun sank in a red blaze.

What a glorious day! Noonday sunlight streamed between skyscrapers and glinted off black plate glass while the streets swelled with the colorful paraders, loud and ingenuous, who merged and noisily forced themselves up the wide avenue, past knots of waving bystanders. Spirits soared; all things were possible. And that boy. When he pressed his face against the cab's half-open window, Liz squeezed Carl's hand, which she'd already clasped on the small suitcase perched before her tremendous stomach, and laughed toward Carl, her other hand to her face.

The evening shadows grew longer and broader. Proudly, Carl skipped down the smooth marble steps. They had sent him home, patting him on the back as if he were a hero, telling him not to worry. As he walked through the streets, silhouetted by the diminishing light, Carl seemed larger than he actually was. His steps were light-hearted and even, and their rhythmical beat echoed through the almost empty streets. A solitary laugh sprang from a dark stoop and its sound lingered in the air until Carl's steady pace again sounded through it.

He was drunk with himself; when he passed an old man, who scooped confetti into a pail with slow, pained movements, Carl blurted in a loud voice, "Have a cigar, friend!" and continued his walk into the night, stride unbroken, his shoulders tall and squared.

Later, Carl stood on his rooftop where the brisk, fluid night gently sucked at his clothes which flapped, quietly, like flags. He gazed down on the dark streets, his streets, where couples strolled or paused while yellow headlights streaked past. At that moment, all was his; inviolate; determined. He breathed the black air deeply, filling his lungs until they were ready to burst, then triumphantly went down to sleep, full of dreams of Liz, and of strength.

Sometime during the night, Liz's baby kicked her stomach once, unbreeched itself and strangled in its cord. Several days passed; Liz came home.

After dinner, he pulled on his slippers. The floor had felt cold and damp.

When he crossed the room, he was uninvolved with his actions, like a somnambulist, moving with a weary resignation. He leaned over his writing desk, his face half-illuminated by his single lamp, but he could not make himself lift the pen. There was a hulking silence. Liz sat propped in bed, watching nothing in particular, occasionally biting a fingernail, as if waiting; impatient. Carl's luminous shadow spread throughout the room. Later, when he clicked off the lamp, he remained by his desk, motionless in the dark, listening.
Barry Lippman

to the hum of an electric clock, and to the sporadic ‘ping’ as water dripped from the faucet into accumulating water. The room seemed vast. So this is what I have come to, he thought. Finally, he climbed into bed beside Liz, who had already fallen asleep.

When he awoke next morning, he sprang up suddenly. For some reason he felt energetic. Today he would do things! Liz lay in bed, eyes open, unspeaking. Excited, he rose, pulled on his slippers and paced about the apartment.

“You getting up today?” he asked her, scooping dirty dishes from the table and piling them into the sink. He looked at objects, noticing one then another with sharp jerks of his head, as if he had just moved in. Liz turned over restlessly and yanked the sheet, but said nothing. Carl threw cold water on his face, then, with soapy beads still dripping from his chin, set about repairing the blinds: closed, a soft dusk palled the room; open, shafts of light tore across the bed and burned into the wall.

“Goddammit! Must you do that,” Liz said.

“I thought I’d . . .”

“Well don’t!”

Disgusted, she rose from the bed, her cotton nightgown moist and clinging, and threw herself into the stuffed chair, slamming her feet down on the hassock.

For a moment he was confused and hurt. He wanted to tear the purple slippers from his feet, which he thought gawky and ludicrous. Instead, he began to wash dishes. There was a deep hollow sound when water gushed into the large aluminum pot.

“Damn you, why don’t you go to the store!” she said. She threw her unlit cigarette on the floor, looked up at the ceiling, then down at her nails. “I can’t stand you puttering around. Always puttering. Always!”

When her fingers fumbled too long for the last cigarette, she crumpled the pack and flung it at his desk.

He walked out.

Down front, the red tip of an usher’s flashlight glowed through the darkness like a hot coal. Suddenly, there were shots; a loud shot. They fired out of context; Carl’s thoughts had drifted toward Hans, toward his lush garden; toward his simple cottage; Hans, whose existence was enormous. A sun waxed warm and deep. His hand reached toward a white moon that seemed dull in an implacable sky. Someone laughed shrilly. He must finish his work. Another shot pierced the darkness; a silver sharkskin suit slumped beneath a boardwalk while surf thundered onto an intensely white beach. There was a murmur of laughter. “I’ll finish it once and for all . . .”

When Carl left the theater, nighttime had fallen; he did not expect
it, and felt uneasy. The black sky was empty and expressionless; his steps were fast, but uneven.

When he huffed onto his landing, he froze. At the end of his long hallway, a narrow rectangle of light glowed from his doorway.

In the next moment, he was pushing past the door. The room leapt at him. Two or three slats had been ripped from the blinds and dangled on one side from the ribbon. The heavy chair lay overturned; drawers hung open with clothes spilling over the sides. And there—off to the side—lay his briefcase, twisted and listless like a dead animal. For an instant, his heart stopped, then pounded again so violently that his head throbbed. A heavy pressure clamped around his chest and he could not catch his breath. Either he ran madly about the room, or he walked directly into the bathroom where he found the last two soggy scraps of manuscript still floating in the toilet.

He re-entered the apartment. Liz slouched in the wing chair wearing her pernicious smile, holding a cup of hot tea that scorched the air above it. No; he returned to the other room.

And then something odd happened. He felt a strange buoyancy; a sort of exhilaration.

He raced into the streets. Turkish music with piercing clarinets skirled from a doorway that smelled of whisky and broiled meat. Beneath a blinking movie marquee, florid faces with spangled eyes were taped to the wall. A bald man with a dome of a head peered into a pink-lit topless bar. Boldly, Carl pushed him aside.

He ran on, unaware of his breath, which came in spurts. He turned off into a dark, silent neighborhood. And then, he was scooting through a closing door. An alabaster woman, whose toga clung delicately around her hips, poured a thin trickle of water into a blue, tranquil pond. He did not hear the doorman who was yelling after him. Calmly, he climbed the stairs, his steps echoing down the narrow stairwell, then stood with his finger pressed against the bell.

The door opened a crack. A woman’s face peeked out cautiously. Her worn, lusterless eyes showed no surprise as she continued to stare.

“You look terrible,” she said at last, in a wispy, sinking voice. “Come in.”

Warily, she held open the door. He watched her face, thinking, “Her lips are moist and thick and red . . .”

Inside was warm. A fragrant breeze rustled the fringe of the silk shawl on the piano. The furniture, which seemed close and plush in the semi-light, formed a path to the open window, beside which was an upholstered rocker.

Maggie leaned against the divider and held her frail arms about herself. She clutched a tissue in one hand. “Well . . . what do you want?”
He brushed past her and sat in the rocker. Silently, he peered through the window at a flat, white moon and began to rock slowly back and forth. The chair creaked quietly and gave him a gentle and unassuming air. His muscles, which had been tense all this time, relaxed, and he felt a sudden rush of warmth.

Maggie rubbed the fingers of one hand against her cracked lips and then pensively traced a line in her cheek. “You’re shivering,” she said, but made no movement toward him.

“I’m glad to have gotten away,” he said. His breath came to him easily now. There was a soothing breeze as he leaned his forearms on the windowsill and looked into the night. He felt contented, as if the entire world had become a motionless pond over which he stood and gazed.

There was a long silence.

Finally, Maggie asked in a voice that seemed confused and slightly afraid, “Away from what?”

But he did not hear her; he imagined himself rising, rising and growing full of strength, and when he saw the iridescent glow of a distant streetlamp, he rose and stared intently at its tremulous circle of light until it seemed to recede into a long, dark void. He shivered. Maggie’s mouth contorted into a single, terrified O, but he was only vaguely aware of her as he leaned deeply out the window, an unnaturally tranquil expression on his face, and imagined himself climbing onto that high, contoured meadow, dusting himself off as if brushing the dark pall from his life, the constellations close and bright, the white huts like pebbles far below.
Today she is a good woman, and although yesterday is gone and so is she, an awful illumination hangs about her memory. It is the mute dread of unforgiven sin, and it exists like the rumor of weeping in our pecuniary and jiggling-breasted day. I walk through the strobing center of the blare and recall the silhouette of a coiffured woman, the bright gleam of a new coin, and imagine many rows of dead faces; paleness surrounded by ebony caskets with the nose-numbing perfume of mortuaries hanging like drapes. She was my aunt Edna and she was good. Everyone says that now.

I see one other thing that exists as vividly in my mind as the black Sunday coats of a dozen rural preachers. It is a small grave marker of coarse concrete, the figure of a kneeling lamb. The eyes are round and ill cast, the ears curved like dull and circular horns above configurations of molded fleece. The feet are tucked under. Altogether, a blob of cement sitting on a small slab among tall and dying weeds. In a way the lamb is the whole story. I think of pathos and the success of small hopes. I did not think of such things when my sister and I were small and vied for our aunt’s favor as she took us to movies or Sunday School.

We were not unusual children. There was no magic in the rattle and spit of electricity from trolleys that passed beneath my aunt’s window. The rain that swept the panes of the dying restaurant below her second floor apartment was cold. Always cold. I wonder if we grew too quickly in defense against the cold; leaving to find our American puritan fortunes in the clatter of roads, the quarrel of classrooms, and in the busy sales of marketable goods under dangling bulbs.

We grew in an Edward Hopper world. To this day the painting of the Nighthawks reminds me of that restaurant. There is a harmed, sharp-faced woman in that painting. There is also a hawkish man who, externally at least, sometimes reminds me of me. A second man with a washed-out face tends the counter and doubtless serves chopped-up portions of the American head on the platter of the 1930’s. Failure and the fear of failure were given us in our youth, and we have fought and will fight against failure for the rest of our lives, no matter the contradictions of success.

I grew and went about other business. My aunt continued to work. Her picture would not vary in my mind for many years. It is a childhood picture of a large woman with sedate clothing and enormous bosom who emptied treasures of gum and pennies from a black purse.
Lately the picture has changed. The sin hovers. I did not even know of the sin until I was thirty and deemed old enough to forgive. Forgive whom?

She was born in 1890, was pregnant with an illegitimate child in 1906, and in early 1907 the child died at birth. The concrete lamb has been kneeling over that child's grave ever since; and this is the 70's and the lamb has knelt for more than sixty-five years. Past the death of cousins and the disappearance of high-peaked farm houses shedding snow in the midst of eighty acres of corn-stubbled fields. My aunt left the country town after the birth and moved to a small midwestern city twenty miles away. She was not a stranger there, but in 1907 it was probably as far as a young woman could flee. The lamb remained in the family plot, the stone nameless and accusatory.

Sometimes I imagine that it rose on cracking joints at night to frolic. Sixty-five years.

Her first man and the father of the child was a medical student who was the son of the town doctor. The doctor delivered the child and it died. The son quit medical school and disappeared. Death hisses through the past, and the seeds of ancient springtimes root deep and live long.

Her second man. And now here's the tale. A mindless, vicious and tongue-wagging malcontent with arms tattooed in celebration of motherhood and tall ships. A sanctimonious ex-adventurer who stood with God and coveted virginity. My uncle Justin. In 1918 he had just returned from the war. A Navy Man, and he had sailed in a battleship around the world. A gunner's mate. It was enormous. He was grand and tattooed and muscled and he had just sailed around the world.

They were married after six months and after her confession about the lamb. Two years later, at age thirty, she bore a son who would be their only child.

Tattoos do not change. When my sister and I were young we watched the snarled anchor, the leaping panther, the pierced heart and the full rigged ship vibrate over muscles that were hard and capable. Later the muscles changed. In the depression there was no work. There was only the radio, the systematic soap opera fantasy that drained a perhaps stupid man's will. Much later, when he was old and lazy; a man pale and of no muscle, the tattoos were brilliant in red and blue, palpably etched against a canvas of pallid flesh. Only the tattoos were real. The man in every way failed to become his symbols.

Was there ever a chance? I was in awe of him when I was little because he ignored me and yelled at his wife and son, but I loved my aunt dearly.
“Buy yourself a present. You’re so big now that I don’t know what to give you.”

I was seven years old in thirty-nine. I had seen a half dollar several times, but to own one, to be given one . . . The gleam of the huge coin she passed to me made me gasp. I did not realize that the coin would buy nothing as great as its own lustre and so I bought an airplane. We carried it to the mortuary for my aunt’s twice weekly appointment with the dead.

This story is so short. She lived eighty-two years and the story is so short.

I think of it. The finally ended round of eighty-two years of days; a tiresome round that included cold lips above jaws frozen in rigor mortis, above manipulated eyelids; the work upon work that always returned her to the apartment where her unemployed ex-sailor boomed platitudes and sat by the radio among mugs emblazoned with the pictures of ships, medals for righteous conduct, souvenirs of crossing the equator. “Til death do you part.” She worked with death.

The days of torn scalps. The days of mending and knitting and patching above breaks in heads that were soon to be skulls. My aunt was a hairdresser for the dead and also ran a small beauty shop for the living. Death paid twice as much, and it was work that was available in the depression. She had a son who she hoped would finish college.

“. . . and Justin never let her forget it. If she complained about anything he always came back with nagging about that.” My mother’s eyes when she told me the story of the lamb were without judgment. Indeed, my mother knew our entire family so well that the knowledge placed her beyond the requirement to judge.

By then the depression was gone, the Second War was over, and my young world was a memory that had faded before the second American reconstruction.

“You really mean that she has lived with Justin all these years and suffers from something that happened before he knew her?”

“Right is right.”

“And wrong is wrong, but we both know better.”

“So does Justin,” my mother said, “or maybe he doesn’t.”

It was amazing, this evil perpetuated by zealous righteousness. The occasion was my first big experience with time structuring itself in my mind. I believe it is my aunt who has made me an amateur historian.

My mother told me the story and then turned away to other business. My family has always worked hard, and on this occasion my mother’s work was to help feed forty people. The year was 1962,
1928 BACK YARD
Blue Moon
the last family reunion we would have in that small town that is still as raw as new boards; a town enclosed by iced December fields which have been cleared for nearly two hundred years. I wonder at the rawness of small towns and think that nothing man-made and beautiful was ever constructed at the bottom of a mountain.

The family arrived. One of my cousins was the local Packard and Farmall dealer. A second cousin, a man of the hearty variety, announced that he was in the pig business and we all laughed. Children swirled between our legs. I took a position in a corner of the living room and knew that what I watched was the last gasp of an anachronism.

Reunion. Had there ever been union? I remembered my childhood, walking excursion with my aunt, the perfumed smell of waiting rooms where I looked at pictures in magazines while my aunt worked in a back room. In a little while Edna and Justin arrived.

Their son had driven them. When the purple and white station wagon was parked, his children joined the throng. The son came next, walking ahead of his wife. I had not seen my aunt and uncle in several years. She was helping him from the car. With the story of the lamb fresh in my mind I watched and took a small and criminally vicious pleasure in noting that my uncle limped. She supported him as he walked to the house. His hands dangled.

I glanced at the son who had taken a soft chair; graduate of a business school and a Navy destroyer, loud with assertion. He was sitting, legs crossed, and over a rumpled sock the red eye of a tattooed cat stared from above the ankle. I hurried to the door to greet her and help her with her coat.

My aunt. My dear aunt, beloved of a childhood that had contained some hope of wizardry, some belief in prestidigitation if not in magic. I talked to her for a long time that day. Saw the sagging wattles of a once full and healthy face, the drooping flesh of the upper arm, the implied immortality of a single gold-capped tooth. She smiled and was happy. I grinned like a clown performing in pain and wondered. What was this resolve that lived so long, worked so tediously, forebore joy in this world with complete confidence in a supposed next, and resulted in happiness? I judge. Frequently I judge wrong. Did she judge?

"I'm so proud of you. We all are." She spoke of my university education as I might speak of my son's report card.

Later she rambled. "... after the war... you remember the shop."

"I remember. There was a sign with the silhouette of a beautiful woman." I also remembered the machines that temporarily set hair styles that came from movies where instant orchestras appeared
on 1930's side streets. Black and silver machinery that twisted over heads to make all women into temporary Medusas.

"... after the war. The home permanents came out. I had to sell the shop. Still work some. Anderson and Hittle still call."

I shuddered. Listened. Felt the sweep of guilt and work and time.

"... gets his Navy pension ... it's really Old Folks pension but it don't hurt if he calls it Navy. We get by. Oh, look at the children. It tickles me pink to see everybody here and look so good."

We were called to dinner. Uncle Justin, by virtue of being a deacon, said grace. He properly thanked Jesus the Lamb of God and slobbered the Amen because he was hungry. A customary thing, but I excused myself as soon as possible.

I saw my aunt and uncle once more and that was two months ago. I am forty years old now and do not understand my age, only that I have it. Passing by plane from the west coast to St. Louis I rented a car and drove to spend a weekend among the streets of the clanging city where I had spent my childhood.

"You must see Edna," my mother said, "she's failing."

Failing, and I am forty. I went to see my aunt.

The apartment was hardly changed since I was a child. The picture of a battleship with curling spray from a rainbow was yellow with time. It hung over my uncle's bed. His souvenir mugs stood on a strangely feminine whatnot that had been the highschool shop project of the son. A framed good conduct medal was glassed over but was still dusty and faded. It hung beside the picture. Painted sea shells with brave mottos, bits of coral ... the man lay flat on his back, pale and thin, a neon of tattoos with breath as light as the passage of a ghost. My uncle was already a spectre, but my aunt still lived.

She made instant coffee with trembling hands. She was so thin. The enormous bosom gone. The strong hands faded, but still somehow alive, like weak light through waxed paper. She had not recognized me at first and was ashamed.

"How is he?" I stopped, silently cursing myself for the stupidest of all questions. The man was dying. Fool. Fool to ask such a question.

She was not offended. The coffee cups were dimestore ironware. Plain. The coffee was bitter because trembling hands had spilled some, added more.

"Jimmy, Jimmy." She looked at me. Proud. I, who have violated scruples she held dear. I make love to women. I detest the idea of God the puppet master. She looked at me. Then she remembered my question.
“I pray for one thing,” she said. “I never asked for much . . . no, sometimes I asked for a lot, but I pray that Justin dies first.”

I could not answer. She knew. All along she knew. For her whole life of submission she knew.

“No one . . . they would not take care of him,” she said. “He’s not the easiest man.”

She knew. Maybe she even loved him, but she was not fooled about the man. She was not fooled about the idiot chase of an ignorant’s repetitious ethic over a lifetime. She had forgiven herself. She had forgiven him.

I sat holding the cup, the bitterness of the coffee as immediate and vital as sharp words. A question rose in my mind, stood like anguish in my head because I could say nothing, could of course not ask that question.

I took both of her hands and spoke innocuously around the question which was, of course, “Dear aunt, dearest lady, what can I do for you before you die?”

Later that evening I changed my plane reservations and lost a business day. The next morning, just before dawn, I drove along country roads that were gravel when I was a child, that are now clean-surfaced macadam.

It was not easy to find. The entrance was different, and on the slightly rolling slopes the new section of the cemetery changed the perspective. I parked the car, opened the trunk, stood watching the early glow of dawn over the distant fields that years expressed vegetables and occasional wildflowers. The practical, hard-working American land.

A swarm of birds crossed the beginning day like salt superstitiously flung backward over the shoulder of the fields, and dew-heavy bushes crowded fencerows and over-grew old graves. The bottom of a ditch was mud-sodden, with occasional shallow pools of stagnant water. I walked through tall weeds, searched, found it.

The marker was smaller than I remembered, and the base was sunk in earth; the curling horn-like ears canted forward increasing the kneeling and submissive posture. I rocked the marker back and forth. It came free, the base mud-clotted.

A hundred pounds, perhaps. No more. It was possible to get it to the trunk of the car, close the trunk, and leave. There is little more to tell.

My uncle died a month ago. My aunt died yesterday, and the circle is closed. The family will erect a marker, and the family will continue its various judgments and forgiveness, its successes and errors . . . as I will continue mine.
Jack Cady

My judgment is this: I dropped the marker into a deep but muddy river that runs through tamed land and beside tight-fisted and narrow minded towns. It will never, through the rest of time, interrupt the wind that blows cold over that finally unmarked grave.
reviews
IMPIOUS AMERICA

ANOTHER ROADSIDE ATTRACTION
by Tom Robbins
Doubleday & Co. $6.95
Paperback: Ballantine Books $1.25

America, like most congregations of human beings, undergoes a wave of religious fervor from time to time; from the mass revivals of the 1840's to the Billy Graham Woodstock's of the late '50's. So Americans should accept a work of fiction which reflects upon and analyzes their religious consciousness. But can the solid foundations of the Neopuritan American Gothic Church, not to mention the Watchers of the One Way, withstand the assault of yet Another Roadside Attraction?

For example, Tom Robbins is a writer who can't resist hanging his ass out the window every other page, so to speak, and the book is filled with outrageous prose, such as tracts on Women's Dope Liberation:

"my dear Amanda," ventured her father (he was enormously fat), "while I do not subscribe to the old saw that 'a woman's place is in the kitchen,' still I think it salubrious when a young female undertakes to become expert in the culinary arts. However, it gives me little pleasure to learn that you have acquired a surprisingly wide reputation for the quality of your marijuana breads. In fact, I understand that you are sometimes called 'the Betty Crocker of the underground.' What am I to tell our relatives and friends?"

"Let them eat cake," said Amanda, gesturing benevolently.

dreadful metaphysical speculations:

"What is the function of the artist?" Amanda demanded of the talented trespasser.

"The function of the artist," the Navajo answered, "is to provide what life does not."

inexplicable natural phenomena:

"Off the coast of Africa there is a secret radio station. On a ship. A condemned freighter. Blackened by fire. Listing to starboard. Flying quarantine flags. It begins transmitting at midnight and until dawn plays the music of pre-colonial Africa, extremely rare pan-tribal recordings—if recordings they are: perhaps the sounds are live. Interspersed with this ancient music is commentary of a sort. In a totally unknown language. I mean it isn't even related to any known human tongue, existing or extinct. Some of the words are short and grunty, but others are very stretched-out and angular and sensual—like Modigliani nudes. Linguistic experts are completely stymied. They claim the "language"
does not follow logical phonetic patterns. Yet thousands of blacks listen devotedly to the broadcasts, and while they will not say that they comprehend the commentary, they do not seem baffled by it, either."

passages of radical opacity:

"In the morning there are signs of magic everywhere. Some archaeologists from the British Museum discovered a curse. The natives are restless. A maiden in a nearby village has been carried off by a rhinoceros. Unpopular pygmies gnaw at the foot of the enigma."

In short, *Another Roadside Attraction* (subtitled "An Apocalyptic Entertainment—A Metaphysical Suspense") is a circus of words and long-haired magicians who found a new religious dynasty in the wet woodlands of northwestern America—a dynasty based on love of birth, copulation, death, magic, motorcycles, and good stoned fun.

The steady center of the action is Amanda and her husband John Paul Ziller, a kind of electric Adam and Eve who personify the two primary philosophical attitudes of the book. Amanda falls into trances, lives in rollicking harmony with nature and bubbles with that good "hippy chick lust" we used to hear so much about. Ziller impresses Amanda because he has trapped the mystic roots of the Congo in his drum-thumping hands and is perpetually engaged in a return to The Source—a Don Juan from Olympia, Washington.

While Amanda and Ziller operate a fanciful hot dog stand (The Captain Kendrick Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve) in the Skagit Valley of western Washington, a close buddy of theirs named Plucky Purcell stumbles across a murderous brotherhood of Catholic monks called, naturally, the Felicitator Society. The head of this little organization is ex-nazi Father Gutstadt, a pretty heavy dude:

Christmas Eve, Father Gutstadt said a midnight mass. I haven't had much experience with such entertainments, but as far as I could tell he did a pretty good job. Except that Gutstadt's Latin was even more dense than his English. His nouns were like cannonballs and his verbs, well it would have taken two men and a boy to carry one. It must have been the heaviest mass on record, a massive mass, if you’ll excuse me.

Purcell is accepted into the Felicitator Society as a karate instructor and about that time a fellow with the unlikely pseudonym of Marx Marvelous is accepted into Amanda and Ziller's roadside zoo as a manager. Marvelous, a think-tank dropout torn between science and the irrational, is the only member of the cast straight enough to write down a history of the cosmic couple and their exploits. This history becomes the text of *Another Roadside Attraction*.

From this point onward the novel becomes increasingly oriented toward religion. The cryptic references to "the Corpse" sprinkled throughout the first two-thirds of the book become more understandable when Plucky is transferred to the Vatican on special assignment. During the Italian earthquake of 1970 he discovers the body of none other than Jesus Christ in an underground vault ripped open by
tremors. Resourceful Plucky smuggles the divine stiff back to the Captain Kendrick Memorial Etc. and the avant-garde of American consciousness sets out to decide the fate of both J.C.’s corpse and His mythos.

The main theological proposition of *Another Roadside Attraction* is that Christianity has become senile and uncool in general; therefore, the time is ripe for the rise of a religion with a different outlook. And what better outlook than the prehistoric Great Mother Worship discussed during the past few decades by such folks as C.G. Jung, Eric Neumann, Robert Graves and Anais Nin? After all, following the Great Father pushed Western society into becoming the militaristic, mechanistic, despotic mungpie it is today—or so say Amanda, Ziller and Purcell. The re-emergence of this ancient Mother religion is the Second Coming mentioned in the book, since Christ’s advent is more on the order of a First Going.

The fate of the Messianic Corpse and the members of the new consciousness is both amazing and satisfying. Robbins presents an appealing climax to his first novel, with his characters’ personalities shining as brightly as the best of his prose. Ken Kesey described such souls as “peaceful without being stupid . . . interested without being compulsive . . . happy without being hysterical.”

Dozens of novels have appeared concerning or commenting on the nature of “altered states of consciousness” but very few present any sustained imitation of such states. The only recent example with any notoriety is Rudolph Wurlitzer’s *Nog*, which reads like a highly involving but innocuous acid trip. *Another Roadside Attraction* contains long passages resembling the whimsical meditations of the slightly stoned. Though Marx Marvelous professes an underlying layer of objectivity he frequently plunges into the unpolluted streams of consciousness which surround him at the roadside zoo:

Morels are ugly in the skillet. The caps look like scrotums of leprechauns, the stems like the tusks of fetal elephants. Aromatically, the report is more positive . . . perhaps the way to a man’s tolerance is through the stomach. Would our relations with China be worse if chow mein were not so popular?

The imaginative similies, the emphasis on nature and romantic pastimes give the novel the atmosphere of a modern pastoral complete with moral message; return to the woods, capitalist pig, and return to your sources. Of course, there are flaws in such a simple message. The most aggravating aspect of *Another Roadside Attraction* is a pervasive naive optimism that Americans are noted for—specifically the kind of sunshine outlook popular during the “summer of love” period in 1967. The constant smiles and bits of philosophical fluff dished out in the book’s aphoristic passages seem covered with Karo Syrup. Evil, for the most part, is distant and impotent. Disasters occur very rarely and smooth over in a paragraph or two.
Which brings us to Tom Robbins' main failure. As America slithers further into the post-Altamont, post-Vietnam-Consciousness Seventies, *Another Roadside Attraction* less and less represents the nature or direction of anyone’s thought. Fewer freaks buy the “love & peace” rap as a solid reality than ever before. Greg Shaw called the year 1972 “the last one for hippies,” and he may be right. A genuinely sympathetic audience for this novel might not even exist as a group.

But even if the “real life” followers of the psychedelic philosophy have broken apart, Tom Robbins and his creations have not. The book argues eloquently for its viewpoint by maintaining high narrative energy and consistently entertaining expression—absolutely nothing makes John Paul Ziller mis-mumble an incantation or causes Amanda to bogart that mushroom. At worst I suppose *Another Roadside Attraction* is already nostalgia; but damnit that can be both comforting and exciting under the right circumstances. Somewhere in this country the barbaric American bumpkin lives on, popping pills and reading comic books, filled with inconsistencies and the pioneering spirit. May the Infinite Goof have mercy on his hairy soul.

*TWENTY POEMS*

by John Haines

Unicorn Press (limited edition) 1971

$6.95

In an excerpt from his notebooks, John Haines talks about night vision—a way of seeing by looking just to the side of the true subject, by sensing its mass and movement, “the characteristic gaze of a person who is . . . seeing not with his two eyes but from some point within himself.” Even more so than his previous two books (*Winter News*, 1966, and *The Stone Harp*, 1971) *Twenty Poems* demonstrates this night vision. It is a book filled with presences, with images that stir our awareness of kinship and connection in the natural world. In many ways it draws upon the particular strengths of the first two collections: the strong, simple eloquence of the frontiersman in *Winter News*; the more urgent and troubled voice in many of the poems in *The Stone Harp* that forged difficult, at times, radical images. This is a book to be read with a sense of night vision as well. The power of the poems comes at you mysteriously, at the periphery of your consciousness; and likewise, the figure of the poet is nearly invisible, standing to the side of the poems.

These are poems about shaping, or perhaps simply, discovering a life, a place in the natural world—a way of surviving on the strength
of one’s prehistoric intuitions, as in the lovely poem, “A Winter Light”:

We still go about our lives
in shadow, pouring the white cup full
with a hand half in darkness.

Paring potatoes, our heads
bent over a dream—
glazed windows through which
the long, yellow sundown looks.

By candle or firelight
your face still holds
a mystery that once
filled caves with the color
of unforgettable beasts.

If there is an ambiguity in these lines, it is not in the voice, but comes from the discrepancy between our daylight consciousness and the flow of urges that fill our dreams, those we share with the animal and vegetable world.

The values of solitude, silence, self-reliance we’ve come to associate with Haines’ poems, recur in this book, as in “The Hermitage”:

No one comes to see me,
but I hear outside
the scratching of claws,
the warm, inquisitive breath . . .

And once in a strange silence
I felt quite close
the beating of a human heart.

Or from “Woman”:

No one knows that country
who has not camped
at the foot of night’s glacier.

And like earlier poems, death is a lurking presence in these images, as close to you as your shadow—“the death-angel / with buffeting wings.”

Many of these poems reveal the urge to personify natural forces: we find the Frost King; the goshawk that speaks to its prey; and “Winter, the unfinished, the abandoned, / slumped like a mourner / between two weeping candles.” These are poems that stem from a feeling for the world’s magic and man’s capacity to create and repeat myths. As Haines says, again in the notebooks, “The original
way of thought was mythical. . . . The distinctions that developed later between man and beast, between animal and plant, flesh and rock, did not yet exist. Grass was people, and any child today knows this is still true.” “The Mushroom Grove” is a fine example of this:

Here the forest people
died of a sexual longing.

The ground trampled in their passion
healed into a cemetery,
with a few flowers
like frayed parachutes.

Their headstones are umbrellas,
black and weeping.

There is something I find genuinely satisfying about John Haines’ poems. With the exception of his few “political message” poems, they are strong and masculine, in the best sense of these words. There is nothing arbitrary or willed about their images—I never question their urgency. They are even strong enough, at times, to be small or fanciful without being trivial. They speak from the source of our common humanity, yet Haines remains individual, a man at a distance from other men, as in the final poem of the book, “Love Among The Oranges”:

In the big house
by the orange grove,
fire and drunkenness,
fierce, monotonous music.

But we were not going to go in;
there was something else
in the night, in the wind
that ruffled our fur

Gary Thompson

ALAIN BOSQUET: SELECTED POEMS
Translations by Samuel Beckett, Charles Guenther, Edouard Roditi and Ruth Whitman
New Directions’ World Poets Series
$1.00

I would like to double back a decade. In 1963 New Directions published Alain Bosquet’s Selected Poems which was the first English translation of this prolific French writer. During the past 30
years, Bosquet has written several volumes of poetry, 5 novels and several critical books and essays. This small book consists of three long poems written between 1955 and 1959. The first, "What Forgotten Kingdom?" is by far the most interesting of the three. In my opinion, it is one of the best long poems written in any language since the Second World War, and has much to teach younger poets.

Bosquet is obviously an extremely intelligent and well-educated writer. "What Forgotten Kingdom?" represents his intuitive rebellion against this ingrown intellectualism. In general, the poem yearns to push the language, poetry, and the poet back into a more primitive situation. The emphasis is placed on language because as Bosquet has often said, "The poem writes the poet." If the language can be made more responsive to the primal elements the poet will naturally follow. The basic style is almost surrealist (is that possible?) in its richness and looseness of imagery. He adroitly combines abstract thought with concrete images. The following are indicative passages taken from the poem.

Be but a being locked up in a closet between a sonnet hanging there and an unaddressed fable.
Be but a written being in a dead language, erased by a cormorant with a stroke of its wing like a spelling mistake.

* * *

Born in the wind and educated by rust, I said to the night: "You are my safest mount."
Then I struck my earth and called it an antelope in heat. As I walked by men hanged themselves and women had intercourse with mountains.

* * *

A duel was fought between words and their syllables, then the poems that were too rich were put to death. Language has been bleeding and the last vowel has surrendered. Men were already conjugating the great reptiles.

When I first read this long poem several years ago, I was intrigued by the fact that it never seemed boring. That is unusual for a poem of this length. Each stanza, each line has something interesting to offer.
It reminded me then, and still does to a lesser extent, of Lorca’s longer poems in *Poet in New York*. Bosquet’s approach or strategy is similar to that of Lorca. His choice of images is loose but never arbitrary; his language is rich, sometimes excessive; and most importantly, his control over the direction of the poem never falters. This is the key, I think, to Bosquet’s success. He allows himself the freedom to stray into new ideas and new images, but only so far. When the direction of the poem becomes endangered, he pulls it back into line. This is a marked contrast to other surrealist poets. He is like the casual hiker on a long journey. He takes time to nap in the clover, inspect closely a wild flower, and wander off into new ravines. But always in his pocket is a compass pointing West. We younger American poets can and should learn from this man. The following is the last stanza of the poem. It contains lines that have haunted me for years. I’m sure, given the chance, the poem will burrow into you also.

In every bird a mountain slept.
In every hand the sacred reptile
ate salt. In every street of the port
an old bishop questioned a tree.
The wine was quite bare, and by the river
we mourned the savannas disappeared
since their rendezvous with the snow.
Because he lacked fire, the wizard took
the burning city as a bride.

*Michele Birch*

**FOOTPRINTS**
by Denise Levertov
New Directions, 1972

Denise Levertov, in *Footprints*, gives us the comprehensive understanding of a woman who has not only published ten books of poetry, but has developed an increasingly strong voice as the impact of history has tried to find sound and shape in each successive work. Always reverent in her approach to life and people she has become increasingly believable because of her sensitivity to the violent, uncontrollable suffering that has been a part of the twentieth century, and in particular the 1960’s and 70’s and the issue of Viet Nam. She includes it all in a book of 67 poems that carries an impact not easily forgotten.
The approach to *Footprints* is across a threshold where the reader, in the first two poems is cautioned. To enter into this experience it is necessary to desire to do so, to be willing to look into the "ashpit," the "Ashpit at the center," and to wait, for at night there comes, "through the smokehole, the star." Levertov's star is the star of creativity, and it always rises no matter what the situation, to restore life and hope, though often she is concerned as to whether this star can keep rising, and how long. The way is thorny, and in "A Defeat in the Green Mountains," she admits her fear. Fear for herself and for the children. Who can follow when, "The mud the foot stirs up frightens," and there is, "No way to reach the open fields . . . ?"

There is a mellow tone to this book. Again, it is the compassionate tone of the participant/observer who has lived and suffered. In "Living with a Painting," she says, "The work ripens / within the temper of living around it." People and friends are constantly coming within the framework of this observation, and often this becomes participation in relationship. "An Old Friend's Self-Portrait," reveals this in the lines, "this face / writes itself on triple-S board / signs itself in thick / ridges of paint, / break through the mirror." Friends and their importance continue through "A New Year's Garland for My Students / MIT: 1969-70. Strong statements about a vision of a shrinking world are present, a world shrinking not in the sense of becoming smaller but more manageable. In the section entitled, "Richard," she says, "I hunger for a world / you can / live in forever." After trying to stretch across the entire world the statement changes:

The very essence
of destiny hung over this house!
(this time) "and how was he,
a membrane stretched between the
light and darkness of the world,
not to become conscious of it?"

She compromises. "I want / a world you can live in." Later, pushed to some ultimate realization, Richard, "feeling rather like a man standing on the roof / of a burning house," leads her to say, "I want / a world." Ted too, in this sequence sustains a kind of apocalyptic vision:

And an old man nearby
in a dark hut, who sits looking
into a pit of terror: hears
horror creeping upon the sea.
From the personal, Levertov moves to the urgent political issues. In, "Overheard Over South East Asia," dust from a bomb talks about itself mockingly, "My name in a whisper of sequins. Ha! / Each of them is a disk of fire, / I am the snow that burns," and in "Scenario," the whole tragic drama takes place in the meeting of Bride and Bridegroom, as follows:

Enter the Bride.
She has one breast, one eye,
half of her scalp is bald.
She hobbles toward center front.
Enter the Bridegroom,
a young soldier, thin, but without visible wounds. He sees her.
Slowly at first, then faster and faster, he begins to shudder, to shudder, to ripple with shudders. Curtain.

Bride and Bridegroom capitalized assume the level of universality carried further in "M.C.5." Levertov identifies again with the heart of the world. She says:

(World's heart keeps skipping a beat,
sweat crawls on the moon's white stony face.
Life's winding down.)

Finally in "The Malice of Innocence," a nurse who could easily be a guard at Dachau, for all her power, observes the world as though halfway through a film. Mortality in this poem is everyone's mortality and it is the mortality contained in all violence. In the hospital this vision of death is concretized through what the nurse sees, "in the folding / of white bedspreads according to rule / the starched pleats of a shroud," but for Levertov this universal shroud exists because of the knowledge of, "how black an old mouth gaping at death can look." The poet still finds her way into the final lines through her sense of the importance of naming, of recording, as the nurse at the end of her duties writes "details of agony carefully in the Night Report."

In the article, "Poetry in the Classroom," in The American Poetry Review, November/December, 1972, Levertov speaks of her political
concerns not as being more relevant to her life but as an integral part of her life as a poet. It is not she says, to use poetry as a vehicle for propaganda about which she is concerned, but rather the poet is to take, “personal and active responsibility for his words, whatever they are, and to acknowledge their potential influence on the lives of others.” And she goes on to say, “When words penetrate deep into us they change the chemistry of the soul, of the imagination. We have no right to do that to people if we don’t share the consequences.” Whatever touches on politics in *Footprints*, it is in such a large sense that no period of history, nor any oppressed people is really overlooked, even though, as she states in “Poetry in the Classroom,” we continue to eat during the five o’clock news while people are slaughtered before our eyes.

The creative process itself continues to be Levertov’s central concern. As in her other books, it is, according to her statements in “Poetry in the Classroom,” analogous to childbirth, to being a father, and to being born. In, “Under a Blue Star,” images of the creative process recur as a kind of electrically induced song. “The days / a web of wires, of energies vibrating / in chords and single long notes of song.” Even so, the precariousness of the process plays itself against the exhilaration. In “3 a.m., September 1, 1969” for Kenneth Rexroth, she says:

It could be any age,  
four hundred years ago or a time  
of post-revolutionary peace,  
the rivers clean again, birth rate and crops  
somehow in balance . . .

Further, in “The Sun Going Down upon Our Wrath,” she tries to warn:

If there is time to warn you,  
if you believed there shall be  
never again the green blade in the crevice,  
luminous eyes in rockshadow:  
if you were warned and believed the warning . . .

then what . . . “could there be a reversal,” and finally she says:

I cannot  
hoist myself high enough  
to see,  
plunge myself deep enough  
to know?
"Forest Altar, September," seems to affirm Levertov's acceptance of her own stance. There is a kind of humility in this poem as the Jewish woman prays her own unique kind of psalm. "If there is only / now to live," she says, "I'll live / the hour till doomstroke / crouched with the russet toad, / my huge human size / no more account than a bough fallen:" and the prayer that follows to the maker of "moss gardens, the deep / constellations of green, the striate / rock furred with emerald, / inscribed with gold lichen / with scarlet!", is somehow addressed to the same presence in the ashpit, the abyss. In "The Old King," she says:

And at night—
the whole night a cavern, the world
an abyss—

lit from within:

a red glow
throb\ing at the chinks.

It is the creativity of the pit, something she believes to be at the center of the world. "For God," she says in "Poetry in the Classroom," "read man and his imagination, man and his senses, man and man, man and nature—well, maybe 'god,' then, or 'the gods.' " Whatever she is about her voice has found a toughness to accompany the reverence and compassion that brings us a thoroughly believable and moving poetry.

Edward Harkness

AFTER I HAVE VOTED
by Laura Jensen
The Gemini Press, Seattle. 1972
$1.00

Laura Jensen's first volume of poems is full of the world's strangeness, its violence and disappointments. Here's a sample:

The Prairie

They had expected something placid,
a stream by a tree, leaves falling,
something old and unfamiliar as a sleigh
with the sleigh bells ringing.
They thought of the spring as sudden
and lasting, but that did not happen there.

Summer brought dark and heat
and lightning, and the days were clear.

It made the grass afraid; that was why it grew
to its tense and limited horizon.

They stood often in the meadow.
Once, when the sun had only risen,
they stood in the empty grass.

Many things in our lives, her poems reveal, cannot be explained,
or are disconnected or peculiarly related. They are too unpredictable.
In “This Is The Desert Of The Moon,” she says:

(If ‘moon’ is feel and touch,
If ‘desert’ when that dries away.)
Words that have no beauty.
Words that have no story.

Before, the things were safety.
The radiator with the scrolled design
and the greek trees with the heavy leaves
would have stayed one on each side of me.

The people would have been more gentle.

I think this is a beautiful story, about a kind of comfort human beings
can never provide, that can only come from familiar objects. And
then there is the vast world of unseen dangers:

Now the Greeks howl through the trees at night
with hands in tangles and their hair on fire,
and on their backs are rifles.

Daylight is falling from image to image.
At night the stars are lost in horror.

The rainfall buzzes in the wires.
The jets scream shaking from the sky.
I am afraid to fly.
I am afraid of winter.
I am afraid of the silent holy snow.
There is a sense to these poems that won’t leave me alone. As I read them I keep saying to myself, “Yes! Why of course! How true!” and feel as though I’ve spent my life wearing incorrectly prescribed glasses. The poems are a big help to me.

At her best, Ms. Jensen writes about frightening ordinary events, like “After I Have Voted,” the title poem, which starts:

I move the curtain back
and something has gone wrong.
I am in a smoky place,
an Algerian cafe.
They turn the spotlight toward me;
the band begins to play.
The audience stares back at me.
They polish off their glasses.
They ask the waiter, “Who is she?”

But sometimes, like now, she starts to have a little fun. The poem continues:

He holds his pen
against his heart.
He speaks behind his hand.

There are tea bags swinging
from their mouths.
Their teeth are made of brass.

The jello sighs into the candlelight.
My eyes turn into stars.
Ah—the colored spangles on my clothes,
the violet flashlights and guitars!

The speaker has become a great comedian and people applaud her with their own silly gags.

I spent a while looking for a bad poem in this collection. See for yourself. There aren’t any. I did come up with what I believe is a weak line in “To Have You Hear”:

Two big umbrella butterflies (like Haiku elephants),
which I thought was glib, a little easy. But the last line makes up for it:

It has been summer for weeks now,
and you refuse to talk about it.
The most moving poem is the last, "Paul Starkey," an elegy in which the speaker recalls an awkward childhood playmate's clumsy attempts to write. Unnoticed, the speaker watches:

Your mother was helping you make R's.
It was hard to hold the pencil.
The lines. They would not come together.
Your mouth stayed open.
You did not know that I was there.

In a way, this poem is about the pain of writing poetry, where even a single letter becomes impossible to put together. But it's also about another sort of pain, the small, simple kind that comes from the day-to-day struggle of having to sign your name.

Laura Jensen is someone to pay attention to. Her care with tone and timing, her sense of language's craziness and its odd lustres win my admiration. She has a daring and distinctive voice that comes from a mysterious place where, really, we all used to live. And she asks us to join her in crooning those ancient songs, as in the last stanza of "Talking To The Mule":

Rub your nose along the fence.
Tip back your head and bray,
for night is yours. It is never
against you. You are not its enemy.
WAYNE ANDREW S plans on returning to Hawaii as soon as he is able. RAY BEARD is driving a truck in Louisiana. He has published in The Southern Review, Jeopardy, Gulfstream, and others, and has a poem forthcoming in The Ohio Review. MICHELE BIRCH has published widely. She is currently teaching in the Poetry in the Schools Program sponsored by the Montana Council of the Arts. ELIZABETH BROWN, actress, poet and playwright, is currently at the University of Montana. JACK Cady won the Iowa Short Fiction Prize for his first book, The Burning, A Collection of Stories, published by the University of Iowa Press. RAYMOND CARVER'S latest story in Esquire, “So What Is It?” will be in the 1973 edition of the O'Henry Prize Stories. He is currently a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University while teaching full-time at the University of California, Berkeley. TOM CRAWFORD teaches at Solano Jr. College. He lives in the Suisun Valley. MAGGIE CRUMLEY is an undergraduate at the University of Montana. This is her first published poem. ROBERT DICK is from Wisconsin. KRISTI DUCKWALL lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. QUINTON DUVAL, from Sacramento, has poems coming soon in Poetry Northwest. GARY GILDNER teaches at Drake University in Des Moines. His latest book is Digging for Indians, in the Pitt Poetry Series. DIANNE GLOE is an undergraduate at the University of Montana. DAN GRAVELEY, after teaching in Spain, has returned to Montana. He has work forthcoming in Choice. EDWARD HARKNESS will soon have poems in Poetry Northwest and The American Review. He comes from Seattle and will be graduating from the University of Montana MFA Program this spring. JD HAWLEY is currently trying to get a job as a city planner. Anyone needing a city planner can get in touch with Mr. Hawley in Sherman Oaks, California. JOHN HAY is a local classicist who hates bad air. ROBERTA HILL will be teaching next year in the Minneapolis Program for Poetry in the Schools. She is soon to be featured in an American Indian Supplement to The American Poetry Review. GROVE HULL is from Colorado Springs, and is a senior at the University of Montana.
DELORES JOHNSON, from Turlock, California, cooks mean Mexican food.
BARRY LIPPMAN, from New York City, will graduate this spring from the University of Montana MFA Program.
CHRIS LIPPMAN is working on a children's book called *Six Little Ducks*.
DAVID LONG comes from Lunenburg, Massachusetts.
MICHAEL MACDONALD grew up in Whitefish, Montana. The story published here is the first he ever wrote.
GEORGE MANNER has published semi-widely. After finishing at the University of Montana he intends to return to the swamps of Louisiana for bass fishing.
MICHAEL McCORMICK comes from Fremont, Michigan. He is a former editor of *The Red Cedar Review*.
MILO MILES is an undergraduate at the University of Montana.
LEE NYE tends bar at Eddie's Club in Missoula, Montana, and is a widely exhibited photographer.
STANLEY PLUMLY, from Athens, Ohio, had his first book *In the Outer Dark* published by the LSU Press. He is the Poetry Editor of *The Ohio Review*. A new book of poems will be titled *Giraffe*.
MICHAEL POAGE is from Santa Barbara, California.
J.D. REED is suffering from agraphia in Amherst, Massachusetts.
MICHAEL SATTERLY spends his free time admiring tomato cans.
DENNIS SCHMITZ teaches at the State University of California, Sacramento. His first book, *We Weep for Our Strangeness* was published by Big Table.
TERRY STOKES is the poet-in-residence at the University of Hartford. His new book, *Crimes of Passion*, came out in February from Knopf.
DAVID J. SWANGER teaches at the University of California at Santa Cruz, College V.
STEVE THOMAS comes from a farm in southern Illinois.
GARY THOMPSON has poems forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest*, and *Madrona*. He has also published in *Quarry, Ironwood, December* and others.
PATRICK TODD lives in rural Montana.