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CutBank 20: A Celebration of Dick Hugo
CutBank 20:
A Celebration of Dick Hugo

Spring/Summer 1983
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The following photographs appear through the courtesy of the U of M Archives, Mansfield Library, University of Montana: Steam-powered popcorn machine, Philipsburg, Montana, c. 1920; Opera House, Philipsburg, c. 1910; Granite Mine and Mill, Granite, Montana, 1893; Parade, Philipsburg, between 1893 and 1906.

The staff of *CutBank* is very grateful to Ripley Schemm Hugo for her invaluable assistance in locating manuscripts and for her generosity in allowing us to print the unpublished diary, essay, and stone poems.

Second Printing—1983
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If he had lived, you know, many a merry-go-round would play. He always bought rolls of tickets and stood by the pike laughing and crying with anyone who stopped, and giving pieces of Heaven away.

A gray bird with a gray song beat up and down all day, relentlessly trapped in a self that loved an oriole. What could Heaven be, or Hell, for a person who sang, or got sung to, in a world that strange?

A horse on a merry-go-round stares out wild-eyed all day, all night, ready to be in my dream. I keep it out by looking away from mirrors or ponds, and I never let that music find me when it is dark or anywhere near the sea.
SALT WATER STORY

Richard Hugo

He loved his cabin: there
nothing had happened. Then his friends were dead.
The new neighbors had different ways.
Days came heavy with regret.
He studied sea charts and charted
sea lanes out. He calculated times
to ride the tide rip, times to go ashore and rest.
He memorized the names of bays: those
with plenty of driftwood for fire,
those with oysters. He found a forest
he could draw back into
when the Coast Guard came looking, news
of him missing by now broadcast statewide.
He made no move. He turned out lights
and lit candles and watched his face
in the window glow red.

He dreamed a raft
and dreamed this sea lane out, past
long dormant cannons and the pale hermit
who begged to go with him. A blue heron
tailed him. A second heron trailed the first,
a third the second, and so on. Those who looked for him
checked the skies for a long blue line
of laboring wings.
The birds broke formation, and the world
of search and rescue lost track of his wake.
His face glowed red on the glass.
If found, he'd declare himself pro cloud
and pro wind and anti flat-hot days.

Then he dreamed wrong
what we owe Egypt, what we owe
sea-lanes out of the slaves to ourselves
we become one morning, nothing
for us in dawn, and nothing for us in tide.
What we owe Egypt fades
into what we owe Greece and then Rome.
What we owe Rome keeps repeating
like what we owe time—namely, our lives
and whatever laughter we find to pass on.
He knew grief repeats on its own.

One night, late, the face in the window
glowed back at him pale. He believed that face
some bum peeking in
and waved “Hi.” The old face told him,
to navigate a lasting way out
he must learn how coins gleam
one way through water, how bones of dead fish
gleam another, and he must learn both gleams
and dive deep. He learned both gleams
and learned to dive fast and come up slow
as sky every day.

And we might think someday we’ll find him
dead over his charts, the waterways out
a failed dream. Nothing like that.
His cabin stands empty and he
sails the straits. We often see him
from shore or the deck of a ferry.
We can’t tell him by craft. Some days
he passes by on a yacht, some days a tug.
He’s young and, captain or deckhand,
he is the one who waves.
Fell Water Story

The good news chain that
nothing had happened, than one friend incensed
and another how high and different songs
Davy came heavily with regret,
he started sea charts and sketched

and there went out, the calculated times
to add the time ago, times to expect one and next,
the memory of the names of Davy; the firsts
with plenty of anything from that, the
authors with regatta, he found a found
he could grow back into

when the Coast Guard came looking, rings
of dream missing lay room by room still with
he made no more, he turned out lights
and lit candles and watched this Jack
in the warm room year red.

He dreamed the one hour out of sight,
and he turned there they came and just
the long commonplace and the gate full decent
with breath to go with him. They data
standing and. So went there tracked this first
a third the second, and so on those wise look for him
check the details for a long while and

before, numbers.
the kind's dream first time
the moment heard from there, and the world
of seeds and mean I've fixed this made.
His face glows on thecheap
as if thelesh and blood
and pro-ord had anti-flair hot days.

Then it burned wrongly.
what we once thought what we once
as team and fire glowed so ourselves
we dreamed one morning; nothing
for me in three, and nothing for me in two...

What we once thought in two
within us and twice and then done.
what we once done, saying regarding
in what we our times; namely our lives
and the long, fire-stilled down.

and whatever changed and two
and whatever changed and wronged person.
As second grieve repeats on its own.

One night late, the sea in the wind
as wind and wind and wind,
the wind, that are

And the old said to me
how repeat a lasting way out

by rain and rain from coming along
and many through water, and lines of black
from another, had he must been feeling
and wind keep his heart with glistening
and learned to think and come up
so very every day.
And we might think, someday, we'll find her dead on the cliffs, in a white wrought-iron fence, a failed dream. Nothing like that.

His seat stands empty, and he can't. He sits down. He often remembers when stand on stone or ride a ferry.

Does anyone know if they're talking? Does anyone know if they're saying anything? Does anyone know anything, or just anything? He says, I'm not sure what I want. Some days I'm not sure what I want. Some days I'm not sure what I want. Some days I'm not sure what I want. Some days I'm not sure what I want. Some days I'm not sure what I want.
Since I'm willing to speak to anyone who wants to speak with me, and rarely try to avoid anyone, I think of myself as accessible. If anything, I've suffered from getting too emotionally involved in the lives and problems of others, of lacking what we call, mistakenly I think, objectivity. So I'm taken aback from time to time when I hear myself described as standoffish.

Then, on reflection I have to admit that I grew up standing off, sort of at the edge of things. From the time I can remember I was living with my grandparents, silent people who communicated little, and who left me to my own devices for hours. For long periods I seemed barely a part of their lives. They gave no work to do though they worked very hard themselves. I think it was harder for them to explain what they wanted done and how to do it than to do it themselves.

So I was at the edge of their existence. And our house was at the edge too, for my entire boyhood the only house on our side of the block, thick rich woods all around it—willows, cedars, dogwoods, alders, hazel nut trees (filberts), red hawthorne, ferns, moss, grass, salal. Our side of the block was special, our house standing alone and the woods mine alone to play in.

The woods to the north held three rain ponds. To a small boy two seemed sizable though I suspect now that they were ten feet across, if that. The third was very small but I liked it best. The pond of water collected at the bottom of a stump of what had been an enormous tree, perhaps three feet in diameter at the base. The stump had been hollowed out and the inside burned. The inner walls were charred black, and coating that black, growing from it, flared a bright green moss. The rain pooled at the bottom of the stump reflected that rich green and black. The surface glowed like obsidian and emeralds.

When I leaned over the edge of the stump and looked straight down I saw my face and behind it the sky, the white clouds moving north. Once I went there to play and found a garter snake swimming in the pond. I waited for it to leave before I sailed my bark submarines, my fern cruisers. I recall a honeysuckle growing wild is somewhat rare in the Pacific Northwest, and I assumed that something unique about my rain pond warranted honeysuckle growing there.
My late Aunt Sara told me that when I was three or four, my grandparents couldn't find me one day and they called and called. They finally found me at the rain pond “fishing.” I had cracked a long twig in the middle; the half of it hanging down, my “line,” was in the water, the other half, my “pole,” gripped hard in my fist. Since the pond was close to the house I could have heard them calling and can only assume that “fishing” had my attention’s priority. I don’t remember that, but I remember I used to drink the rain water because I believed it was “poisoned” or “diseased” and that by drinking it and not getting sick, not dying, I could successfully defy whatever in the world might threaten to destroy me. I drank water from ponds, swamps and ditches to prove my immortality but I told no one. My immortality was my secret, shared only with water. At least, that’s how I like to remember it.

Grandmother was a bit cracked, quite primitive at times such as mornings when she held prolonged conversations with herself. I’d wake up and hear her in the kitchen: who on earth can she be talking to? I’d go out and find only her, babbling away.

On the other hand, Grandfather often whistled barely audible tunes to himself but seldom spoke. He seemed to carry inside himself his own portable radio which he turned on when he pleased to avoid boredom.

Given our lean cultural holdings we grabbed at almost anything that offered escape or amusement. Each day we read the comics thoroughly. Once someone in Moon Mullins announced a stranger was coming to visit. Grandmother became excited and said that she was sure the stranger would turn out to be Daddy Warbucks. “That can’t be,” I whined in frustration. “Daddy Warbucks is in Little Orphan Annie. He can’t be in Moon Mullins, too.” But Grandmother held firm. She was convinced Daddy Warbucks was on his way. She always liked Daddy Warbucks because he showed up just when Little Orphan Annie needed him. She may well have spent much of her life wishing for a Daddy Warbucks. Her own father had hung himself in a Michigan barn when she was eight. Then her oldest brother, Fred, had taken over as head of the family. I gather he had been mean to her.

I never could determine if I wrote poems to make sure things remained where they belonged, or to free things to wander in where they were not expected but would be welcome all the same.

Our house was on the edge of Seattle, less than two blocks inside
the city limits, in a district that was then a town, isolated from the parent city by miles of woods and undeveloped land, and whose reputation for violence and wild behaviour seemed to put it at the edge of civilization. A glance at a map shows Seattle itself is practically on the edge of the nation.

Seattle was a strange city, more Scandinavian than anything else in character. Downtown, it often seemed inhabited by silent people, everywhere but in the Pike Place Market where the Italians, Greeks and Orientals hawked their produce with loud voices and colorful spiels and gestures. One story goes that President Calvin Coolidge paraded down 4th Avenue and thousands of people lining the streets to watch him made no sound. In the '30's Seattle was reputed to have a suicide rate second only to Berlin. One explanation went that suicides were people running away from themselves and their lives, and that after one reached Seattle there was no place left to run to. They had reached the edge. The Aurora Bridge was barely completed, it seemed, before people started throwing themselves from it. Certainly the repressive liquor laws and Blue Laws were characteristic of the cheerlessness of that city, though that has all changed now. Once fun seemed as out of style as a week of cloudless days. Seattle was gray, cool, windy, cloudy, moody, and oppressively quiet.

Bad things were happening in that house at the edge of the city. My grandmother’s selfish possessive love of me, and her resentment of men in general and of what she perceived as their sexual freedom and irresponsibility, as well as her sudden bursts of gratuitous cruelty, were producing a spoiled, confused, extremely neurotic young man. My grandfather’s silences seemed like a lack of support and that didn’t help matters. “There’s no worse pain in the world than childbirth,” Grandmother told me when I was too small to understand. “Does it hurt the man, too?” I asked in serious innocence. “No,” she said bitterly, “all a man gets out of it is the pleasure.” And I thought of sex as something bad a man did to a woman. If I was ever to love a woman I must never do anything that awful to her.

One day Grandmother announced that we, she and I, were going on a picnic. I was still quite small and though unable to articulate what I felt, I knew that she was doing this for me. It was one of her few attempts to relieve the boredom of a child living with relatively old people. Grandfather had the car at work so we set out on foot with our picnic basket. Time of year? It must have been July or August because the bracken was brown and crisp, and I seem to remember dust.
We walked perhaps half a mile or a bit more to the intersection of McKinnon Road and Trenton Street. Suddenly Grandmother said, “Down here. We'll have our picnic here.” “Down here” turned out to be a vacant lot that plunged below road level on the southwest corner of Trenton and McKinnon, two fairly busy streets. The lot was ugly with dry fallen small trees, summer-dried ferns and no grass, a terrible place to picnic with traffic going by just above us. I realized that Grandmother just didn't want to walk farther. We ate in silence and I couldn't help but be impressed with the pathetic attempt it was to show me a good time.

That picnic, the failure it was, never left me, and every so often in my poems there’s an allusion to a failed picnic or a picnic held in the wrong place.

Four years ago, maybe five, my wife and I were staying at a friend’s summer house on Marrowstone Island in Puget Sound. One afternoon, watching TV news from Seattle, we saw a segment about some young people called on to help weed out the thick brush that had overgrown Longfellow Creek. In an interview one young man of high school age stated that he had lived a block and a half away all his life and had never known a creek ran there. He and the reporter were at Holden Street where it crosses the creek.

It seemed impossible that a creek that had been so important to me, where I had gone again and again to fish during my boyhood years, now flowed unnoticed and unknown. And where Holden Street crossed the creek and the boy and reporter talked, more than 45 years before I had stood on a relatively crude wooden bridge, six years old, and seen Longfellow Creek for the first time. Cousin Warren, ten, had brought me, I'm sure, since the distance from my house, well over a mile, was too far for me to have come on my own at that age. Several boys were there, Warren’s chums, all four years or so older than I. Seven or eight feet down ran the creek, a steady, smooth flow of clear water, less than a foot deep, about four feet across. It flowed out of thick watercress and on the other side of the bridge vanished into more cress, tunneling its way north to the sea, though many stretches I was to find later ran open and were easy to fish, as was the stretch right below us on the bridge.
One boy lowered a fish line into the water, an earthworm on the hook. The boy controlled the line by hand, having no pole. For a short time the worm hung quietly in the water. I remember it hung there steady so the boy must have had a sinker on the line, too. Suddenly a trout appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, black along the back, perhaps six inches long, sleek, hovering, barely swinging its tail to hold firm in the pour. It stared at the worm. The moment it appeared, the boys yelled. I'd seen my first trout. The surprise of its sudden appearance, the excited cries of the boys, the beauty and gracefulness of the fish, the suspense as we waited to see if it would take the bait, I would never forget.

Many years later, arranging my first book of poems, I put the poem based on that experience at the beginning because, though it is not the earliest poem in the book, it seems to me to have grown out of the earliest experience that could rightfully be called an impulse to write.

**TROUT**

Quick and yet he moves like silt.
I envy dreams that see his curving silver in the weeds. When stiff as snags he blends with certain stones.
When evening pulls the ceiling tight across his back he leaps for bugs.

I wedged hard water to validate his skin—call it chrome, say red is on his side like apples in a fog, gold gills. Swirls always looked one way until he carved the water into many kinds of current with his nerve-edged nose.

And I have stared at steelhead teeth to know him, savage in his sea-run growth, to drug his facts, catalog his fins with wings and arms, to bleach the black back of the first I saw and frame the cries that sent him snaking to oblivions of cress.

—*A Run of Jacks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 3.
By the time I was old enough to go to dances I was too timid to
dance. I would slip to the edge of the dance floor, near the band where
I could listen to the music, and watch the others dance. Sometimes I
would see a boy whisper something into a girl’s ear and the girl smile,
her teeth dazzling in the spot lighting of the hall, and I wondered if I
would ever learn those secret words and make a girl smile. I felt most
at home at the edge of things and alone.

Say on the edge, on the bank of the Duwamish River. The last
stanza of an early poem, “Duwamish,” goes

But cold is a word. There is no word along
this river I can understand or say.
Not Greek threats to a fishless moon
nor Slavic chants. All words are Indian.
Love is Indian for water, and madness
means, to Redmen, I am going home.


On the edge of the ocean; the edge of the nation.

LA PUSH

Fish swim onto sand in error.
Birds need only the usual wind
to be fanatic, no bright orange
or strange names. Waves fall
from what had been flat water,
and a child sells herring
crudely at your door.

The store has a candy turnover
amazing to the proprietor.
He expected when he came
a Nordic rawness, serrated shore,
a broken moon, artifacts
and silence, large sales of corn.

Smelt are trapped in the river
by a summer habit, limit
of old netting rights ignored.
Who but an officed lawyer
far away has read the treaty,
his sense of rightness rounded
in a bar? The broker’s pier
is measuring the day in kings and jacks.
Your land ends at this border, 
water and stone, mobile in tide, 
diffuse in storm, but here. 
The final fist of island rock 
does not strike space away. Swim 
and you are not in your country.

—*A Run of Jacks*, p. 9.

The fear is always there. If you return home you risk madness. If you leave your country, your home, you face the unknown. Poems could start on the edge of things, on the border between home and the void. But who would write them?

Well, whoever wrote them would have to be tougher and wiser than I am. Someone who could return home and stay there long enough to find the poem and not go mad, and who wasn’t afraid of his feelings when they came.

**THE WAY A GHOST DISSOLVES**

Where she lived the close remained the best. 
The nearest music and the static cloud, 
sun and dirt were all she understood. 
She planted corn and left the rest 
to elements, convinced that God 
with giant faucets regulates the rain 
and saves the crops from frost or foreign wind.

Fate assisted her with special cures. 
Rub a half potato on your wart 
and wrap it in a damp cloth. Close 
your eyes and whirl three times and throw. 
Then bury rag and spud exactly where 
they fall. The only warts that I have now 
are memories or comic on my nose.

Up at dawn. The earth provided food 
if worked and watered, planted green 
with rye grass every fall. Or driven wild 
by snakes that kept the carrots clean, 
she butchered snakes and carrots with a hoe. 
Her screams were sea birds in the wind, 
her chopping—nothing like it now.
I will garden on the double run,
my rhythm obvious in ringing rakes,
and trust in fate to keep me poor and kind
and work until my heart is short,
then go out slowly with a feeble grin,
my fingers flexing but my eyes gone gray
from cramps and the lack of oxygen.

Forget the tone. Call the neighbor's trumpet
golden as it grates. Exalt the weeds.
Say the local animals have class
or help me say that ghost has gone to seed.
And why attempt to see the cloud again—
the screaming face it was before it cracked
in wind from Asia and a wanton rain.

—A Run of Jacks, pp. 71-72.

And someone who wasn't afraid to go the other way and risk the void.

NORTHWEST RETROSPECTIVE: MARK TOBEY

What life is better—stone and stone?
Freaks are honored in the east with shrines,
even marked and worshiped, even painted
if some color amplifies the strange.
In the market men are selling color
cheap as fruit. On canvas what faint
line extending, splits and lives,
returns and multiplies, and never ending
stiffens like a fighter's wrist, becomes
a net and traps our eyes with salmon,
or is silk and floating, or is quiet
like a map? What drums are driving
migratory ants through charming lakes,
and if beholders weep, what painter
needs their tears to mix tomorrow's oils?

That's where harmony was contraband,
and later where the loot was owned,
and later where the cirrus circled
Mars and left white trails of pain
that hung for centuries. (A line
of poetry is not a painter's line,
and in museums flight is not allowed.)

Beyond Van Allen rings, the stars
don't glitter, arrogant as moons.
When did we start? Light-years ago.
Why did we come? No matter. We
are not returning to that world
of ditch and strain, the research terms:
cryogenic fuels, free radicals,
plasma jets, coordinated fusion.
Only the last, in all this void, applies.
A universe is fusing in our eyes.

Why return to air and land, when
free from weight and the weight
of hope, we float toward that blue
that kisses man forever out of form.
Forget the earth, those images and lies.
They said there'd be no wind out here,
but something blows from star to star
to clean our eyes and touch our hair.

— A Run of Jacks, p. 61-62.

A space traveler would write the poem. An Indian. But above all, a
tough man, one who opted for reality over sentimentality. Years later
my first wife and a friend and I would go house haunting, one of our
favorite pastimes. There's nothing to it: just find an empty house and
haunt it. This day, a Sunday, the house we haunted was right in the
city, near the downtown area, on Boren Avenue, a major arterial until
the freeway was built years later.

It had been a big house, probably an expensive one for its time.
Then it had fallen to bad fortunes, and had become a boarding house,
with small rooms partitioned off, one of those places where poor
people end up alone in the bowels of our cities. Much debris had been
left for us to rummage through, old letters, sentimental small items
like dolls and pennants from some happier time. Also left was a heavy
framed etching that hung on the wall of what had been the living
room when the building had been a home, what was probably called
the sitting room after it became a boarding house. The etching, done
by a man named J. O. Anderson in New York in 1891, was a lovely
landscape with a canal, a sea beyond the canal, a sturdy stone country
home surrounded by trees and a charming road leading from the
viewer to the house. Two sailboats floated on the canal. I wanted very
much to live there. But was it real or an idealized dream of a place
Anderson wanted to find? Certainly where it hung was real enough,
the drab old frame building where the lonely and dispossessed ended
their lives. How many had been carried out to be buried by the
county, no mourners at the graveide, or a mourner who was not a
relative but only another near-derelict waiting his or her turn for the
same anonymous end?
Room on room, we poke debris for fun, chips of dolls, the union picnic flag, a valentine with a plump girl in a swing who never could grow body hair or old in all that lace (her flesh the color of a salmon egg), a black-edged scroll regretting death: "whereas—Great Architect—has seen it fit—the lesser aerie here—great aerie in the sky—deep sympathy." Someone could have hated this so much . . . he owns a million acres in Peru.

What does the picture mean, hung where it is in the best room? Peace, perhaps. The calm road leading to the house half hid by poplars, willows and the corny vines bad sketchers used around that time, the white canal in front with two innocuous boats en route, the sea suggested just beyond the bar, the world of harm behind the dormant hill.

Why could room 5 cook and 7 not? These dirty rooms were dirty even then, the toilets ancient when installed, and light was always weak and flat like now, or stark from a bare bulb. And the boarders when they spoke of this used "place" and "house," the one with photos of Alaska on his wall said "edifice." This home could be a joke on the horizon—bad proportions and the color of disease.

But the picture, where? The Netherlands perhaps. There are Netherland canals. But are they bleached by sky, or scorched pale gray by an invader's guns? It can't exist. It's just a sketcher's whim. The world has poison and the world has sperm and water looks like water, not like milk or a cotton highway. There's a chance a man who sweated years in a stale room, probably one upstairs, left the picture here on purpose, and when he moved believed that was the place he was really moving from.

—A Run of Jacks, pp. 51-52.
I call the etching a sketch because at the time I didn’t know the difference. Had I known I would have done it anyway—etching is an awkward word to use in a poem. And I lie about the etching, too. It isn’t that bad or that corny, but I’m loading the dice. Besides, I didn’t have it to study when I worked on the poem. After the poem was finished my wife stole the picture from the abandoned house, not long before the city pulled the building down and the etching would have ended on the junk heap.

Years later I would understand the poem as a struggle between the sentimental and the real. My grandparents didn’t have much going for them, a fierce peasant honesty, religion, superstition and sentimentality, the last three mostly Grandmother’s influences. And by the time I was twenty-one I was a veteran of a war, a man who sensed the world was far too hard a place for someone who had inherited the sentimental values of people born in the nineteenth century with little opportunity for formal education. Sentimentality had helped them through a harsh life that knew little other than the soil, hard work and meager returns. But it would not help me through the modern world. My attitudes were dated and I would have to change to survive.

So the ideal place in the picture represents the sentimental, that which I must discard. The boarding house represents the real, that which I must embrace. If I don’t, then I will end like the man at the end of the poem, quite mad, unable to distinguish reality from dream, believing I live in the ideal lovely stone house far out in the country, far from any possibility of harm—what could happen to you in that dear place? They wouldn’t let cancer within a hundred miles of it—and ignoring that place where I really lived, that boarding house where damaged lives played out their final years. No, I must accept reality in all its grimness. What a tough guy speaks in the poem. You wouldn’t fool with anyone who says, “The world has water and the world has sperm.” He’s right there, engaged with the real all the way.

Clever interpretation, isn’t it? A good one, too. But wait. One day I gave that interpretation in class, the poem run off and handed out, the picture propped up for the class to see. A student with a beautiful name, Tatiana Retivov, suddenly asked me, “When you finally moved from your grandparents’ house, which house did you think you were moving from?” Who first said that education is the teacher learning from the students? Right on, whoever you are. The lights turned on.
HOUSES

The house you’re moving from is not this house in the sketch, nor that one over there, your furniture on the porch and your nameplate weathered fast to the door. The picture’s too idyllic, shade trees rooted strategic and firm, roses crawling ivy crawling the walls, leaded windows that double the sadness of rain. And the real one’s too run down. The van moves off with everything, even the girl you could not find the courage to ask home.

Some say, ‘where I hang my hat.’ Some say, ‘where the heart is beating though hurt.’ Whatever you say, make sure it’s alone in a cold garage, the mechanic’s hammer banging you mute. Make sure only you hear the address. Make sure your car when fixed will not break down between the home in the sketch and the home you deny, the boy with your mouth who shouts goodbye from the roof.

Sail easy on the freeway. Your next home has never been photoed. Your next home town’s where so little goes on, the hum of your refrigerator joins the slow river leaving for home. Isn’t it familiar? Rain hitting the south window first? Dark corner where the warm light can cringe? If you go with rivers, not roads, the trip takes longer and you weave and see a lot more. When you say, ‘I live here,’ animals you hadn’t thought of for years live on your lawn. They insist you remember their names.


With all due credit to the intelligence of Miss Retivov, earlier I had tried to catch my final time in my grandparents’ house. They were long dead, Grandmother first and three years and two months later, Grandfather. The house went to my mother and her two sisters and they sold it. I’d moved out long before. Still, I had lived there about twenty-five years and I always felt it was there, and that if I could not find the social stability necessary to make it through life, for I was so maladjusted at times it seemed I might not be able to hold a job, I could always return to that house and live there alone. But now it would not be there for me. Almost all the furniture had been removed though the two wooden chairs remained in the kitchen and I sat in...
one under the bare light bulb shining overhead. Why didn't we ever have lamps like other people? The drab empty rooms, the shadows, the memories, the sudden realization that this night when I walked out I could never return again, became overwhelming. I broke out of control into violent sobbing. I couldn't stop for a long time. Years later, pre-Retivov but after "1614 Boren," I would find a poem in that final evening there, but the emotion had long gone and I would create another.

**LAST DAY THERE**

All furniture's gone. It hits me in this light I've always hated thinned the way it is by tiny panes, when I leave now the door will slam no matter how I close it and my groin will throb hungry as these rooms. Someone left the snapshot on the wall, two horses and a man, a barn dark gray against gray light I think was sky but could be eighty years of fading. Once I called that unknown farmer friend. He stared back ignorant and cold until I blushed. What denies me love today helps me hold a job.

This narrow space I slept in twenty years, a porch walled in, a room just barely added on. I own this and I know it is not mine. That day I found locked doors in Naples, streets rocked in the sea. The sea rocked in the hands of brutal sky and fish came raining from volcanoes. I see the horses swirl into the barn. I hear two shots, no groans. When I say I'm derelict the horses will return to flank the farmer. Again, the three die gray as April 7, 1892.

I'll leave believing we keep all we lose and love. Dirt roads are hard to find. I need to walk one shabby some glamorous way the movies like. I'll rest at creeks. I can't help looking deep for trout in opaque pools. I pass a farm: it's home, eviction papers posted to the door, inside a fat ghost packing wine to celebrate his fear of quarantine, once outside, pleased the road he has to take goes north without an exit ramp, not one sign giving mileage to the end.

I might note that in both “Houses” and this poem I’m much more receptive to that sentimental side of self that I rejected so disdainfully in “1614 Boren.” But I’m older and have come to accept much of what I am, and I don’t worry what others think about it.

But that wasn’t my last day there, it turned out. I would return one more time, some twenty-five years later, this time with some filmmakers doing a movie about my work and my life. We went to the house to shoot some outside footage. My late Aunt Sara and I did a scene on the front steps. Also, I walked around the house and into the backyard in another bit of the movie.

But a surprise waited. A man lived there alone. He apologized for not having cut the lawn. He obviously drank quite a bit, and was self-deprecating, constantly apologizing for something or other he hadn’t done though it was clear he might never do it—such as cut the lawn or sweep the house. I’d always entertained the idea that had I bought the house from my mother and aunts and remained there alone my writing would have been different. I fancied that I would have written less but better. My poems would have been wilder, perhaps longer. I’d carried this inside me for twenty-five years, playing the scene of what I would have been over and over. And now I saw in the last tenant with terrible clarity the man I would have become. It gave me the creeps.

I asked if we could come in and, eager to please us, the sad man said of course. I found the interior much changed. New walls up, old walls down. A few things remained. I went through the basement, too. A lot of memories came back, of course, but not much definite feeling. I was mostly moved by the diffident man who lived there now alone and who supported himself with a menial job at a shop where they made doors for houses.

DOING THE HOUSE

For Philip Levine

This will be the last time. Clearly they will tear it down, one slate shingle at a time and the man here now, last occupant, face the color of old snow will leave for the cold he is certain of, sweating more than last night’s bad wine.
He is the man I would have become.  
When he leaves he wires the door  
and padlocks the wire.  When he comes home  
he knows his is the one unkept yard  
on the block.  The weeds, he believes,  
are the weeds that will cover his grave.  
The style's so old the house does not belong,  
not even alone, the way it stood '14  
to '44, brush on three sides  
not much better, scrub hawthorne  
and salal and the dogwood threatening  
to die, huge now in some neighbor's  
backyard and blooming a white  
I don't remember like the walls  
yellow as sick eyes inside where I move  
room to room, one wall gone, another  
for no good reason put up blocking  
the kitchen from the room where we ate.  
We called it the eating room  
and my claim on this has run out.

It's nice of the last man here  
to let me come in.  I want to tell him  
he's me, menial job at the door plant,  
table set just barely for one.  I want  
to tell him I've been writing poems  
the long time I've been away and need  
to compare them with poems  
I left here, never to be written, never  
to be found in the attic where hornets  
starve and there's no flooring.  
Are they wild?  Do they ring sad and real  
as the years here would have become,  
as real and unseen as women  
would have been dreamed, curled  
in the corner where light still  
has a hard time?  And later, Lord,  
later I would have prayed  
and begged to be forgiven for the blood.

This will be the last time.  The road  
outside's been paved twenty years,  
the road no one ever came down  
long as I waited, except for a bum  
who whistled, "I'll Paint the Clouds  
with Your Sunshine."  Now the bus  
downtown's routed by, every ten minutes  
fresh diesel fumes.  Across the street
only three of the old homes remain,  
one where a sad man lived,  
a man who drank himself to the grave  
and drank his way into my poems  
at least twice. He was the first sad man  
I remember. I preferred sadness  
to anger and I preferred him  
for too long a time. My last gesture  
will be at the door, facing east.  
It will be a look at the hill  
two blocks away, that delayed dawn  
every morning and stood between me  
and a nation. I live east of that hill.  
Thanks to the man with a face the color  
of wet salt, the second true sad man  
on this block, it is not madness  
for the first time I have gone home.

—I White Center, pp. 4-6.

I remember that I told Annick Smith, the movie director, of my 25-year-old fantasy about living alone all that time in the house and what  
I felt my poems would have become given those circumstances.  
“Don’t be foolish,” she said. “If you’d stayed there you would have stopped writing years ago.”
I seldom talk about reading as an influence for a couple of reasons. One is that I remember what I see and hear far more vividly than I remember what I read. The other is that in a sense we've all been influenced by the same poets, either by the masters directly, or indirectly by poets already influenced by the masters. But a few influences from reading I don't share with others.

I remember four books in our house. The Bible which my grandmother read, moving her lips to form the words so she could comprehend them—she'd only had four years of schooling and could not read without moving her lips. She could write but used no capitals, no punctuation, and she spelled with a rudimentary crudeness that my mother and I used to laugh about, though not with cruelty, I hope.

The other books were Heidi, Zane Grey's Rainbow Trail, and a children's book called Peter Rabbit and the Big Brown Bear. Grandmother often announced that Heidi was her favorite novel. She read it over and over. I would never read it.

But I read the Zane Grey several times, and it seems I must have read the Peter Rabbit book hundreds of times. Every so often, a chapter of the Peter Rabbit book started out with a poem, a rhymed quatrain, as I recall, ABCB. I delighted in those poems and would read each aloud as I came to it, taking special pleasure in the rhyme.

Somewhere in that book, which I've not seen in decades, toward the end of a chapter, Peter Rabbit is caught in a blizzard. His situation is desperate, snow piling fast and harsh winds blowing. He must find shelter. Then he spots far across a field, a light shining, and he makes his way across the wide meadow through the swirl of snow and the driving gale, finally arriving nearly spent at the entrance of the dwelling, which is really a cave house complete with door and windows. Peter, with a final effort, throws open the door and collapses inside on the warm floor, safe at last from the elements.

The next chapter started with a poem. The owner of the cave house, who turns out to be the big brown bear, is speaking. It went something like this:

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Note—Beatrix Potter, the British author who created Peter Rabbit, may not be responsible for the offensive quatrain. Her books were not protected adequately in the United States, and were heavily pirated and plagiarized. The editors of CutBank have been unable to discover "Peter Rabbit and the Big Brown Bear" among her titles, but with the limited time available for research this lack of discovery should not be taken as proof of any kind.
What are you doing inside of my house?
You knocked all the snow off your feet with your jump.
Why don’t you knock before you come in?
I've a notion to cut off your head with a saw.

The first time I read it I felt let down. “Jump” does not rhyme with “saw,” as anyone can plainly hear. After all, the poems had always rhymed before. What right did the author have to throw up his or her hands this way? During one of my mother’s visits I called this to her attention and for several years we would recall that quatrain and laugh about it. Though it became funny, during the first few re-readings of the book I still felt betrayed by the author and his or her failure, to rhyme. After all he or she could have tried:

I've a notion to cave in your skull with a thump.
I've a notion to beat out your brains on a stump.
I've a notion to kick your rabbity rump.

Whoever wrote that book is probably dead. But to his or her spirit I say, Come on, one more try. At the time it seemed extremely important that the poet had failed his or her obligation to that poem.

A huge fleshy woman, Miss Effie Aiken, my eighth grade teacher, ran a tight ship, taking no crap from the impulsive 12- and 13-year-olds who filled her class. I was already writing, if that’s what I was doing. Well, I was putting words on paper. That’s writing, isn’t it?

One day, Miss Aiken read a poem aloud to the class, a poem by Tennyson, called “The Brook.” It was an experience that would last as long as that trout who swam out from under the Holden Street bridge in Longfellow Creek. I was truly moved, but how could I tell my fellow students how beautiful I thought that poem was? I was smart enough not to try. Poetry in those days was for girls, and I kept my feelings to myself. Hadn’t Tennyson caught the running-water rhythm of a creek with his refrain:

For men may come and men may go
but I go on forever.

And wasn’t that true? To a 12-year-old boy it seemed so. Didn’t the creeks run forever, while we lived and died? Oh, that wisdom.
That experience, hearing "The Brook" read aloud, stuck a long time. In 1968, staying in London, I took a trip to Lincolnshire and saw Tennyson's house, and also the creek (brook) that had "inspired" the poem, as we used to say.

The creek was lovely and the land it flowed through seemed to have not changed since Tennyson's time. I saw no recent houses, no roads that seemed new. It struck me how easy it must have been for Tennyson to imagine he owned the creek, possessed it utterly and forever. And though I knew it couldn't possibly be true, in some fanciful, alas probably egotistical way, I imagined for just a moment that I was the first person since Tennyson to see that creek. It was an easy delusion to come by because except for my companion I remember seeing no other people, only two cemeteries in the yards of two churches not very far apart. What a lovely world for a poet to have lived in as a child. And it remains just as it was, remote, private, to my eye ignored by the rest of the world.

Recently I found a copy of "The Brook" in a collected Tennyson. Alas, it isn't very good. It is much longer than I remember and I'm sure Miss Aiken, bless her, read only the verse refrains.

In the late forties I found a book of poems by the English poet Bernard Spencer, called *Aegean Islands and Other Poems*. First published in Great Britain in 1946, it was published by Doubleday in the United States in 1948. It is far from the best, I know, but that isn't important. It has meant more to me than many books that were better.

Spencer did it exactly the way I wanted to. He left home (though he went farther than I wanted to), and he lived near water and there he found his poems. In his case he lived in self-exile in both the Greek Islands and in Egypt, with a group of writers and scholars, George Seferis the one destined to become most famous. Spencer had a charm that can only come from a winning naiveté. What poem fell as innocently on the page as the first poem in his book?

**AEGEAN ISLANDS 1940-41**

Where white stares, smokes or breaks,
Thread white, white of plaster and of foam,
Where sea like a wall falls;
Ribbed, lionish coast,
The stony islands which blow into my mind
More often than I imagine my grassy home;
To sun one's bones beside the
Explosive, crushed-blue, nostril-opening sea
(The weaving sea, splintered with sails and foam,
Familiar of famous and deserted harbours,
Of coins with dolphins on and fallen pillars.)

To know the gear and skill of sailing,
The drenching race for home and the sail-white houses,
Stories of Turks and smoky ikons,
Cry of the bagpipe, treading
Of the peasant dancers;

The dark bread
The island wine and the sweet dishes;
All these were elements in a happiness
More distant now than any date like '40,
A.D. or B.C., ever can express.

—*Aegean Islands and Other Poems*, p. 3.

He took firm, tender and private emotional possession of a region
where he was a foreigner, an intruder perhaps, certainly a stranger
and he felt it. And he lived his invented relation with the landscape
out to some kind of poetic realization. I would like to have said "to
poetic perfection" but that would be wrong. He didn't come close to
executing most poems perfectly. But some kind of perfection lay in
his acceptance of what he was, a bewildered innocent in the face of
thousands of years of civilization and history and wisdom, what
many of us have been at least once in our time. Spencer was not afraid
to blurt out the simplest, most disarming truth:

I was looking for things which have a date,
And less of the earth's weight,
When I broke this crust.

—from "Greek Excavations," p. 14

In the boulevards of these dead you will think of violence,
Holiness and violence, violence of sea that is bluer
Than blue eyes are; violence of sun and its worship;
Of money and its worship. And it was here by the breakers
That strangers asked for the truth.

—from "Delos," p. 16

and it may be, too, we are born with some nostalgia
to make the migration of sails
and wings a crying matter

—from "Yachts On the Nile," pp. 29-30
He was not afraid of his innocence, his poetic roughness. Literature, the important stuff—Eliot, Pound, Williams—was being offered in the classrooms at the University of Washington. They belonged to everyone, but Spencer seemed to belong to me. He had no real literary ambition, I felt, though I may be wrong. His poems seem to settle for a simple, direct validation of his relations with the world, often made crudely but honestly:

**EGYPTIAN DANCER AT SHUBRA**

At first we heard the jingling of her ornaments as she delayed beyond the trap of light, and glimpsed her lingering pretence; her bare feet and the music were at difference; and then the strings grew wild and drew her in.

And she came soft as paws and danced desire at play or triumphing desire, and locked her hands stretched high, and in the dance’s sway hung like a body to be flogged; then wrenched away, or was a wave from breasts down to the knees.

And as the music built to climax and she leaned naked in her dancing skirt, and was supreme, her dance’s stormy argument had timid workday things for all environment; men’s awkward clothes and chairs her skin exclaimed against.

—Aegean Islands and Other Poems, p. 34.

I felt my chances at ever writing anything so grand as literature were slim and I decided I would be happy to settle for a poetic world as limited and innocent as that of Bernard Spencer. Once in awhile I might get lucky there and come off graceful.

**OLIVE TREES**

The dour thing in olive trees is that their trunks are stooped like never dying crones, and they camp where roads climb, and drink with dust and stones.

The pleasant thing is how in the heat their plumage brushes the sight with a bird’s-wing feeling: and perhaps the gold of their oil is mild with dreams of healing.

The cold thing is how they were there at the start of us; and one grey look surveyed the builder imagining the city, the historian with his spade.
The warm thing is that they are
first promise of the South to waking travellers:
of the peacock sea, and the islands and their boulder-lumbered spurs.

—Aegean Islands and Other Poems, p. 31.

Spencer was at the edge of things himself. To this day his
reputation as a poet remains relatively obscure. He is seldom
mentioned with the other, better-known poets of his time. He lived at
the edge of islands, even, one could say, at the edge of civilization, a
stranger whose only license to be there seemed to be his childlike love
of place.

And he based many of his poems on places. It was Spencer's poems
based on place, and a poem called "Copalis Beach" written by my
friend Kenneth Hanson, that first gave me the idea of writing place
poems, something I still do. Places were special to me, very special it
turned out. In psychoanalysis, where I tried and more or less
succeeded in overcoming the problems I'd acquired in early life, I
learned that I identified as strongly with places as I did with people.
Could that be why one night long ago I wept just as violently for the
loss of a house as I had for the loss of the two old people who had lived
there, and whom I'd lived with for about 25 years? And did it follow
that in my visual imagination I could not separate event from setting?
That I thought where something happened was just as important as
what had happened? Sometimes it seemed the place was more
important than the event since the event happened and was done
while the place remained. It often seemed that way when I wrote. If I
could find the place I could find the poem.
Sometimes I'd see the place and invent the happening.

MONTANA RANCH ABANDONED

Cracks in eight log buildings, counting sheds
and outhouse, widen and a ghost peeks out.
Nothing, tree or mountain, weakens wind
coming for the throat, even wind must work
when land gets old. The rotting wagon tongue
makes fun of girls who begged to go town.
Broken brakerods dangle in the dirt.
Alternatives were madness or a calloused moon. Wood they carved the plowblade from turned stone as nameless gray. Indifferent flies left dung intact. One boy had to leave when horses pounded night, and miles away a neighbor's daughter puked. Mother's cry to dinner changed to caw in later years.

Maybe raiding bears or eelworms made them quit, or daddy died, or when they planted wheat dead Flatheads killed the plant. That stove without a grate can't warm the ghost. Tools would still be good if cleaned, but mortar flakes and log walls sag. Even if you shored, cars would still boom by beyond the fence, no glance from drivers as you till the lunar dust.


Sometimes I'd invent the place, then "see" it clearly enough to invent the happening.

**CAPE NOTHING**

The sea designed these cliffs. Stone is cut away odd places like a joke. A suicide took aim, then flew out in the arc he thought would find the sea. He came down hearing "sucker" in the wind, heard it break at "suck-" and all the time tide was planning to ignore his bones.

Far out, the first white roll begins. What an easy journey to this shore, gliding miles of water over stars and mudshark bones that laugh through tons of green. You can time that wave and wind by tripling your memory of oars. The sea will con the gold from our remains.

Foam is white. When not, no dirtier than bones gone brown with waiting for the sea. When wind deposits spray on bone bone begins to trickle down the sand. Now the bones are gone, another shark abandoned to the sea's refractive lie. The moon takes credit for the boneless rock.
Bones don’t really laugh beneath the sea. They yawn and frown through green at time and lie in squares to kid the moon and drive stars from the water with the gleam of phosphorus gone mad. Now a diver poses on the cliff for passing cars before he flies out singing “water, I am yours”


Sometimes I’d see the place and reinvent what had actually happened there.

**BEAR PAW**

The wind is 95. It still pours from the east like armies and it drains each day of hope. From any point on the surrounding rim, below, the teepees burn. The wind is infantile and cruel. It cries “give in” “give in” and Looking Glass is dying on the hill. Pale grass shudders. Cattails beg and bow. Down the draw, the dust of anxious horses hides the horses. When it clears, a car with Indiana plates is speeding to Chinook.

That bewildering autumn, the air howled garbled information and the howl of coyotes blurred the border. Then a lull in wind. V after V of Canada geese. Silence on the highline. Only the eternal nothing of space. This is Canada and we are safe. You can study the plaques, the unique names of Indians and bland ones of the whites, or study books, or recreate from any point on the rim the action. Marked stakes tell you where they fell. Learn what you can. The wind takes all you learn away to reservation graves.

If close enough to struggle, to take blood on your hands, you turn your weeping face into the senile wind. Looking Glass is dead and will not die. The hawk that circles overhead is starved for carrion. One more historian is on the way, his cloud on the horizon. Five years from now the wind will be 100, full of Joseph’s words and dusting plaques. Pray hard to weather, that lone surviving god, that in some sudden wisdom we surrender.

—*The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir*, pp. 76-77.
However it worked, the process was based on the visual and involved a faith in the mystique of place, a notion treated disdainfully by some poets, notably Charles Olson. I would not defend it. That would be defending my poems, a tasteless and futile thing to do. I can only remark that in my case it seemed to work. At least I got a lot of poems, some of them as good as I'm capable of writing.

But do I mean reinvent, or do I sometimes simply rediscover? In the case of “Bear Paw,” the result of a visit to the Montana battlefield where the Nez Perce finally surrendered, when I first saw that site I felt nothing. It seemed a dull place with no distinguishing features when I stepped from my car and looked at it. No one else was there. Then I walked through the campsite and up the embankment on the other side. When I turned and looked back from “the rim,” the edge of the scene, the last camp of the Indians, the approach of the soldiers, the teepees burning, the fear and confusion, the cries, the soldiers dying, the Indians dying, the wails, the tears, Chief Looking Glass dying practically, if the marker could be believed, at my feet, Chief Joseph’s surrender speech, the final line of that speech, “I will fight no more forever,” came clear, all provided one sad time more by the empty land.
HUGO: REMEMBERING

We spend our lives remembering what we love, to be sure who we are.

Poets should “take a brief look at something most people ignore,” said Dick Hugo, and he must have said that partly because he felt ignored, or worthy of being ignored, not as a poet but as a man. Left with his grandparents at the age of two, sent to live with friends in Seattle at eleven and again at eighteen, he spent much of his poetic career locating and describing the dispossessed within his poetry and heart: “What endures is what we have neglected.” He wrote not so much to win his way into our hearts as to take into his own heart the other orphans on the block. Old men, old cars, bums, derelict towns, abandoned ranches — his poetry welcomed people and places born of human love, then left behind.

The reason for his looking at things “most people ignore” was not, therefore, intellectual curiosity, not the play of clever intellect around the obscure (a poetry such as Merwin was devising while Hugo worked at Boeing 1951-63), but a deeply felt need, the need of orphaned people, towns, rivers, fish to find a home:

I thought that if I could look the world square in the eye in the poem . . . that somehow I would be able to survive, and that I would be worthy of love, of affection, of owning a home. . .

(Author’s tape)

The basic subject matter of Hugo’s poetry—locating the dispossessed—was personal enough, obsessive enough to deserve a passionate style, which is what he began to develop under Theodore Roethke’s guidance at the University of Washington in 1947. Roethke was transmitting the “singing” tradition of William Butler Yeats, the rich iambic melodies and internal rhymes of impassioned verse (“We were the last Romantics,” said Yeats. Wrong. Elegiac self-centeredness will never die). Roethke’s personality as well as his
stylistic tradition suited the bearish and boorish young Hugo: Roethke was a large, outrageous, uncontrolled man, a role model for the vulgar and ungainly. Here was no upright Boston Brahmin, no slender Parisian aesthete, but a big mess of a man who could write.

He was kind of an outrageous man, and had all kinds of problems, and I was an outrageous young man, and I realized one day that as silly as this man sometimes appeared, he was able to create beautiful things. And it occurred to me that maybe there was a chance for me, too . . . maybe I can salvage something out of this absurd creature I am.

(Author's tape)

Hugo’s early work created the identity he needed, the voice of an urban orphan at camp: intense, street-wise on the river bank, never far from a bar. Although he insisted this identity was deceptive, that he was always “a softy,” the intensity must have been right, for he reinforced this tough stance with a style denser than Roethke’s. He packed lines with strong stresses and relentless energy, a pressure essentially urban and, like sixties Black verse, reflecting the constant movement and overlapping riffs of jazz:

I’m a poet of density. That is to say at least in my first two books, my syllables are all strongly accented. I achieve this through elisions, a very thick line, a heavy line. I do this through syntactical shifts. . . . the first auditory art I heard that had any value were the big swing bands on the radio: Benny Goodman, Bob Crosby, and later Artie Shaw. This swing music is where I developed the idea of getting something else going before the thing died out. Just as one series of riffs was coming to an end, something else would start.

(Trout in the Milk, p. 257.)
Such fast and toughened poetry was a distinct advantage for Hugo as a young Western writer. By beginning with extreme density and tight control, he was able to flirt more openly with sentimentality and regional subjects. That is, he had paid his dues, had commanded respect for technique, and that allowed him — as form often does — a more personal voice and a more personal subject. He could take more chances, especially the chances of carving closer and closer to the bone of feeling and place:

Bill Kittredge, my colleague . . . said once if you’re not risking sentimentality you’re not in the ballpark, and that struck me as a very wise statement.

(Author’s tape)

I had been interested in Bill Stafford’s work, in how close he was able to take a poem to the line of sentimentality without falling over it.

(Trout, p. 220)

With one book published (A Run of Jacks, 1961) and another on the way (Death of the Kapowsin Tavern, 1965), Dick went to Italy in 1963 to return to old war haunts, and he believed that the Italian openness helped him break out of his tough-guy stance into more vulnerable poems. The resulting book (Good Luck in Cracked Italian, 1969) “took the stamp of regionalist off my back for good” (Trout, p. 208). In the Italian poems the lines are less dense and the personal voice is more open, but it’s still Hugo: all environment is pressure and those nearly crushed draw his eye. In one of the poems, “Centuries Near Spinazzola,” he refers to a curious incident from the war, curious not because as a young airman, lost in a field, he had refused cigarettes to a mother and children, but because he felt so badly about it afterwards: “I think that it’s one of the real mistakes I ever made” (Trout, p. 217). Only the rich don’t give to the poor; Dick must have been shocked to realize that in that incident he’d been on the other side, the side of power, of the crushers, and that he had instantly been corrupted into behaving like them. He never forgot the scene, and to the end of his life he was embarrassed by power or responsibility. There is no tradition of proletarian poetry in English; if there were, Hugo, curiously, would be at its country core.
Dick came back from his first visit to Italy to a job at the University of Montana. He cruised his new domain, looking for the monuments of neglect that “triggered” many of his best poems, and simultaneously loving and hating the vast landscape that was replacing the ocean as his central image of emptiness, of the pressure of nihilism that surrounds each continent, ranch or home: “the remote ugly west where the space between people, like the enormous, empty land, soars finally into void. . .” (blurb for James Welch’s *Winter in the Blood*).

His personal life (divorce and feelings of inadequacy in the role of teacher), his drinking, his despair made his early years in Montana some of his worst. However, his bitter self-neglect found in the Montana landscape and ghost towns a hall of mirrors, and with the freer line and voice he had explored in the Italian poems he was ready to write the best single book of his career, *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir*. Through some alchemy his poetic resourcefulness and confidence had increased even as he sank, and when he quit drinking in 1971 “then all of a sudden I burst loose” (*Northwest Review*, p. 128). By 1973 he knew who he was, he knew how to write, his personal life was straightening out with his marriage to Ripley Schemm, and he had begun a nine year “hot streak.”

The Northwest had always had more than its share of abandonments waiting for Dick’s pen, and consequently his poetry, although intensely personal, was never merely personal. His own sense of abandonment dovetailed with the region’s history of disaster: the crushing of the Indians, the fur trade boom and bust (1820-40), the mining boom and bust (1860-1910), the homestead boom and bust (1880-1920; sixty-six per cent failed), the lumber booms and busts (to the present), the water boom and bust (in full swing now). Following his creed (“a brief look at something most people ignore”) Dick cared not for those building each boom, but for those left behind when the boom had passed:

Cracks in eight log buildings, counting sheds and outhouse, widen and a ghost peeks out. Nothing, tree or mountain, weakens wind coming for the throat. Even wind must work when land gets old. The rotting wagon tongue makes fun of girls who begged to go to town. Broken brakerods dangle in the dirt.
Alternatives were madness or a calloused moon. Wood they carved the plowblade from turned stone as nameless gray. Indifferent flies left dung intact. One boy had to leave when horses pounded night, and miles away a neighbor's daughter puked. Mother's cry to dinner changed to caw in later years.

("Montana Ranch Abandoned")

Because dispossession, abandonment, and abuse are an integral part of Western history (see Montana historians Howard, Toole, and Malone), Dick Hugo was a social and political poet, a Western poet not just in his landscape and subject but in having the point of view of the abandoned, of the guy on the bottom. Dick's stance was a region's stance:

In my land only the ignored endure, the wolverines, nameless streams the State forgot to dam. . . .

("Sailing from Naples")

Curiously, the regionality of his stance, and his historical context, tend to be overlooked by Eastern critics (including excellent ones: Martz, Vendler, Pritchard, Howard), while Western students see it at once.

The fringe colonies of Europe have always resented the centers of power. England used the New England colonies for lucrative trade and opposed trans-Alleghany settlement, fearing that the colonists would break loose. They did. Jefferson feared that the trans-Mississippi settlers would break loose from Washington's power, and he sent Lewis and Clark to Montana in 1805 partly to keep the West in the nation. He succeeded. Montana has been colonized, exploited and abandoned by the East several times, and this economic and political colonialism has its counterpart in culture: like all dominated and dispossessed peoples, Westerners often feel culturally inferior to the center of power. Twain feared his own ignorance and his disposition to boorish alcoholism exactly as Hugo did, and also feared, as did Hugo, that Western degradation was his only asset. In
“Second Chances” the bottle says to Dick: “Come back, baby. You'll find/a million poems in your destitute soul.” The West is full of false facades and crumbling “Opera Houses” proclaiming our fears: we are not grand.

So to be “Northwest” and especially to be Montanan is partly to feel intimidated by the rich and powerful back East. Hugo’s voice of personal degradation captures the political and social reality of a region’s degradation:

Overlooking Yale

Top Of The Park, Hillis. Top of the World.

... I am out of wisdom,
eating French toast cooked the year
Yale was founded, too timid to complain,
too far from home to trust my manners.
I'm sure I'm being observed
and my act is not clean. Western paranoia.
John Wayne. Three centuries short
of history. One of stability. Way ahead
in weather and rustic charm you can't trust.
With Yale below in gold light, I feel
I should have read Milton, ought to be
in the know about something, some key remark
Dryden made about Donne. Not concerned
with the way we talk to old cars,
pat their hoods and murmur “sweet hero.”
Two hundred thousand miles and only
five changes of oil and one valve grind. ...
Out west, survival is enough. ...

But we should not too long stress the negative; dispossession and despair are Hugo’s material; the given, not his product, what he gives. Above, for instance, there’s a delightful victory over Yale as Hugo uses the ruse of intellectual and class inferiority to tug on our American heartstrings. Like Huck Finn he lacks book knowledge but his common-sense phrases (“in the know”) happen to be perfect and he has a sound and generous, if road-weary heart—“old hero,” we murmur, and pat his vast Buick of a hood. So far on such bad French toast. Wouldn't you cook for this man?

If the disenfranchised, the exploited and abandoned find a way to remain, if they endure (Faulkner’s word for the victory of Southern blacks), it is often by means of strength of character, pride. By some
such formula the adolescent toughness of Hugo’s first two books (sometimes a Humphrey Bogart toughness as he said but sometimes more like an orphaned Jimmy Dean) grew in the seventies into a stronger, more mature voice (“now I’m in my Leslie Howard period.” *Trout*, p. 255), a voice for a region’s and a species’ will to endure:

I imagine them resting a moment, then grim with resolve starting down to the sea to get the next stone, and one woman thought strange but obeyed, urging them on and muttering hard at the sky a word we’ve lost. It sounded like ‘shape.’ It meant ‘world.’

(“The Standing Stones of Callanish”)

Learning through suffering is a formula for art at least as old as Aeschylus, and not only was it Dick’s formula but it lies behind the classic Western plot. Easterners—Europe, really—come west expecting paradise, opportunity, a fresh start. Then the work begins and the winter comes and the market prices fall and soon one is, as Nanny Alderson put it, “pioneering in earnest.” The process is one of illusion, disillusionment, endurance. The process as a Western process was vividly observed by Moses Austin in a Kentucky diary of 1796; his paragraph could stand at the head of Western literature:

Ask these Pilgrims what they expect when they git to Kentucky the Answer is Land. . . . can any thing be more Absurd than the Conduct of man, here is hundreds Travelling hundreds of Miles, they Know not for what Nor Whither, except its to Kentucky, passing land almost as good . . . but it will not do its not Kentucky its not the Promised land its not the goodly inheratence the Land of Milk and Honey. and when arrived at this Heaven in Idea what do they find? a goodly land I will allow but to them forbidden Land. exhausted and worn down with distress and disappointment they are at last Obliged to become hewers of wood and Drawers of water.

42 (Moore, p. 26)
The condition of hewing wood and drawing water is not necessarily bad but it isn’t paradise. The note of endurance, the seed of pride, is there. So at the end of many poems of Western disillusionment, Hugo sounds a similar note of vitality:

Fort Benton

This was the last name west on charts.
West of here the world turned that indefinite white
of blank paper and settlers faded one at a time alone.
What had been promised in St. Louis proved
little more than battering weather and resolve.

. . .

. . . This is the town to leave
for the void and come back to needing a home.
It may be the aged river or the brick hotel
on the bank, heavy as water, or the ritual
that shouldn’t be hard to start: the whole town out
shouting ‘come back’ at the breaks one day a year.

In the context of Western history, Dick’s sense of dispossession was in another way elevated from the personal to the political: not only was his dispossession regional, but his resistance to it, his resentment, was the voice of a region: the people in Fort Benton shout at the Missouri breaks; they do not speak with them. Dick was never “regionalist,” if that term refers to someone who pictures a region as delightfully “out of it” or “unusual” or “colorful,” someone who indeed values that region’s distance from power. Pastoral, sentimental and local-color authors do just that; they enjoy a region’s “dispossession.” Hugo resented it. He never wished to escape society, money or control. His impotence he hated; it was a region’s impotence, his rage their rage:

The principal supporting business now
is rage. Hatred of the various grays
the mountain sends, hatred of the mill,
The Silver Bill repeal, the best liked girls
who leave each year for Butte.

“Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg”
The primary prayer of his work is not for escape but for real towns, a real economy, real power—a home. Then one can go fishing.

Many pastoralists from Virgil to Dillard had money enough to retire from the court to the country by choice. Hugo sometimes indulged self-pity and self-hate and welcomed degradation, but it was always a degradation that he suffered, never a privileged escape. In all his work you won't find a pleasant bar. Necessary maybe to the dispossessed, but not pleasant. Forget the ferns:

Home. Home. I knew it entering.
Green cheap plaster and the stores across the street toward the river failed. One Indian depressed on Thunderbird. Another buying Thunderbird to go.

“The Only Bar in Dixon”

This is serious drinking beside the beautiful Flathead River, beside the beautiful buffalo range, near the towering Mission mountains—the land does not redeem. The ranches are serious, the sage flats and wind and winter are serious, the rivers yearn—“the Flathead goes home north northwest”—for the sea. These countryside poems are the cry of a region for something better, not the whine of the privileged to get away. Hugo was never a regionalist: he did not write of things other than power, he wrote of the absence of power. And absence implies presence: the parents, the rich, the militarily superior, the nation that has discarded this waste. If Dick lacked the grace of an aristocrat in handling power and responsibility, he also resented, on behalf of most people on earth, being denied the chance to acquire such grace.

Curiously, the Indians of Montana must have helped Dick assume responsibility; in ways they may have forced his maturation. More visible than on the northwest coast, less assimilated into the dominant culture, the Montana Indians usurped Dick's position of down and out. His claim to sympathy was challenged by a group, a nation more dispossessed and taking it just as hard:
These Indians explain away their hair
between despair and beer. Two pass out
unnoticed on the floor. One answers to a cop
for children left five hours in a car.
Whatever I came here for, engagement
with the real, tomorrow's trip to Babb,
the first words spoken 'white man'
split my tongue. I buy a round of beer
no phonier than my money is wrong.

“A Night at the Napi in Browning”

Dick again finds himself uncomfortably cast in the role of the
powerful, with money and a “real” life, and as when in Italy he refused
the woman cigarettes, he fears he will be phony and wrong. He would
rather be the underdog at Yale. His worst fear is that as a person of
responsibility he will speak with forked tongue and in this poem I’m
afraid he does, for his attempt to shift attention from the Indians’
dispossession to his own white guilt, his attempt to sink lower than
they, makes a weak end.

And I, a Mercury outside, a credit card,
a job, a faded face—what should I do?
Go off shaggy to the mountains,
a spot remote enough to stay unloved
and die in flowers, stinking like a bear?

Although the lines are well written, his petulant, willed exile from
love and his imagined death (with us, of course, tearful at his poetic
grave) should not be claiming our attention. The Indians have
usurped our sympathy, and here is Dick’s guilt crowding them out.

I say the Indians must have helped change Dick’s stance because in
those years, 1964-73, from arrival in Montana to The Lady in Kicking
Horse Reservoir, as he was growing in stature and confidence as a
poet, as he was becoming more positive in voice, more resilient, less
pitiable and ready for marriage and owning a home, at the very same
time the Indians were kicking him upstairs, forcing him into the role
of a man with something to lose. He responded to new circumstances
with new positivism, wrung at some cost from the old negations.
The formula of salvation through suffering and humility, for instance, which in the Napi poem takes a sentimental turn towards self-pity and suicide, in many poems of the period takes a turn towards humility that is as cosmic as personal. The same themes (Indian dispossession, white guilt and how to respond to both) in "Bear Paw," the scene—still an extraordinary site—of Chief Joseph's final military defeat and moral victory, lead to a fine end in which Whites and Indians are brought together, the one nation in noble defeat, the other in bad need of it:

The wind is 95. It still pours from the east like armies and it drains each day of hope. From any point on the surrounding rim, below, the teepees burn. The wind is infantile and cruel. It cries 'give in' 'give in' and Looking Glass is dying on the hill. Pale grass shudders. Cattails beg and bow. . . .

. . . Marked stakes tell you where they fell. Learn what you can. The wind takes all you learn away to reservation graves.

If close enough to struggle, to take blood on your hands, you turn your weeping face into the senile wind. Looking Glass is dead and will not die. The hawk that circles overhead is starved for carrion. One more historian is on the way, his cloud on the horizon. Five years from now the wind will be 100, ful of Joseph's words and dusting plaques. Pray hard to weather, that lone surviving god, that in some sudden wisdom we surrender.

This poem goes several lines beyond the weeping face at the Napi in Browning. It goes beyond egocentric self-destruction to chastisement—which presumes a superior force. What we and the Indians surrender to is wind pouring like armies, before which Indians literally fade into the grass while we pray for salvation by acknowledging "that lone surviving god": weather.
Hugo’s winds, weathers and landscapes are a considerable part of his poetry. Rarely backgrounds or scenes, his landscapes are more usually characters and like characters they can play many roles and have an active relation to the speaker: “Pray hard to weather.” The land always excited Dick; in the union of himself and landscape the poet was conceived:

... after I got out of the service, when I was sitting on a Seattle bus—it was at 16th SW and Holden Street—I was thinking about what east meant to me, that is to say, there were four hills east, if you walked from our house. For about a mile you would walk over four hills, and we called them by numbers: First Hill, Second Hill, Third Hill, and Fourth Hill. And then on the top of the Fourth Hill it opened up into the big Duwamish River Valley, and I was thinking about taking an imaginary journey, somehow, over these four hills, going east from the house, and somehow that this would go on forever. [I knew that the entire nation... lay on the other side of those mountains, there it was, a whole nation, and that here I was in the west.—Author’s tape] And I don’t know how this led to sudden knowledge. I never said, “You’re going to be a poet,” but I remember at that moment it suddenly came across my mind that I would spend all my life writing poems.

(Trout, p. 207.)

The huge space that was the continent became in many early poems, the space that was the sea. Dick needed that space in his poetry or just beyond, a void out of which we carve our homes and bars. When he came to Montana that sea became “Open Country”:

It is much like ocean the way it opens and rolls. Cows dot the slow climb of a field like salmon trawls dot swells, and here or there ducks climb on no definite heading.
And you come back here
where land has ways of going on
and the shadow of a cloud
crawls like a freighter, no port in mind,
no captain, and the charts dead wrong.

The "lone surviving god" of land and weather to which we pray is
not always diabolic, pouring like armies from the east. When the void
is genuinely other, out there, like Stafford's sea it saves us from self-centeredness, it offers an alien grace. As often as not, however, that
void overlaps the human world, penetrates the psyche and is
penetrated, giving birth to images of despair:

Decaying shacks, abandoned ranches, desolation,
endless spaces, plains, mountains, ghost towns:
it's ready-made for my sensibilities.

*(Trout, 258)*

In that list the landscape and the psyche are overlapped, as in "Point
No Point":

Even in July, from this point north
the sea is rough. Today the wind is treason
tearing at our flag and kicking that commercial
trawl around. We and salmon are beached
or driven down.

Dick's vast outer spaces are usually in tension with a dense inner
space and a dense poetics, so that far from being a place to relax, that
"big sky" (when merged with the psyche) is humming with the wall-
to-wall pressure that throughout his work seems essentially urban,
driving, banging, strained:

space that drives into expanse,
boredom banging in your face,
the horizon stiff with strain.

"Ocean on Monday"

Within such a horizon we all are driven to makeshift bars, and thus Dick's own orphaned search for home is lifted above the personal not
only by the regionality of the themes and by the universality of the psyche, but also by the universality of a landscape or cosmos which forces us to shelter. Sometimes his environments seem like a deep sea pressure, at three hundred or four hundred feet or wherever the margin is of unaided human endurance, and the only thing that can save us is something equally strong within pressing back:

Believe in the couple who have finished their picnic and make wet love in the grass, the wise tiny creatures cheering them on. Believe in milestones, the day you left home forever and the cold open way a world wouldn’t let you come in. Believe you and I are that couple. Believe you and I sing tiny and wise and could if we had to eat stone and go on.

(“Glen Uig”)

That last line—“could if we had to eat stone and go on”—is the heart of Hugo, for beyond the issues of content, style or historical context is the voice. Dick Hugo was a presence. His booming laugh, his outrageous Falstaffian vitality engendered in poems a tender toughness “as bear-blunt and shufflingly endearing” as the man. (Trout, p. 289) He was master of a strong, affirmative style, a compassionate voice that had to be heard. He never played around. He was never interested in the perfect image poem, the little jewel of virtuosity that no one needs. Like many older poets—Yeats, Stevens, Penn Warren—he was beginning (in 31 Letters and 13 Dreams, White Center, and The Right Madness on Skye) to use more conversational, accessible lines that don’t pressure us with the poet’s poetics so much as with his need to make us believe. “Please hear me,” these poems say, not “Be amazed.” Alas, Dick died far short of the age, 70, when those other poets were entering their final and most graceful phase.

Because of that booming voice, that resilient energy, humor and heart, Hugo’s poetry is essentially positive, and American. In spite of all the ruin, he is not Roman. He speaks of the past in order to come to the present, of despair in order to come to hope, of dispossession in order to come home. The voice is straightforward—he does “look the world square in the eye”—and his nuances of technique tend to make the voice stronger, not more complex: as the poet Dave Smith (one of Hugo’s best critics) said, in style Dick was “a meat and potatoes man” (Trout, p. 281). That’s what he wanted to be. That’s what he was sure he was.
The power of Dick’s voice was never more clear than at his memorial service in Missoula, when Dick’s presence—for it was that—gave voice to the people. In an hour of great eloquence and riotous tastefulness, the most eloquent, most tasteful and most hilarious were old friends farthest from the university: John Mitchell from Seattle and Jennie Herndon of the old Milltown Union Bar, Laundramat and Cafe. Something in Dick and his poetry gave them supreme confidence in their speech, and if poetry is “the mind in the act of finding what will suffice,” as Stevens said, they became poets that day.

I drove to Spokane last week with the Moulding daughters and my own. On the way we joked about the whorehouses in Wallace, Idaho, and wondered at the lead-poisoned wasteland around Kellogg and Smelterville. Then came the white Cataldo church high and lonely on a green hill, and the girls marvelled—what is it? how did it come to be there? The next day at lunch I read them Dick’s “Cataldo Mission”:

We come here tourist on a bad sky day, warm milk at 15,000 and the swamp across the freeway blinding white. . . .

. . .


. . .

This dry pale day, cars below crawl thirsty, 500 miles to go before the nation quits.

When I had finished, Evey Moulding, ninth grader, who had known Dick half her life and to the end of his, said (so help me God):

That’s what’s so neat about being a writer. I mean, it’s like he was right there with us.

Missoula
April 30, 1983
William W. Bevis

SOURCES

Author’s tape. Bevis–Hugo Interview from University of Montana extension course on Montana writers, 1977, produced by KUFM. Author’s possession.


I'm John Mitchell. I've known Dick about forty-five years. (We're kinda even: you don't know what I'm gonna say, and I don't either. I'm just gonna kinda take off from what the other people said.)

Hugo was so damn honest, it wasn't even right. He should have been a little flaky. But right after the war, Dick was at a party. He was taking my sister home and he ran the Model A over a railroad track. Dick never turned the wheel, he always leaned. So the car went over the railroad track and the cops came and they threw old Dick in the slammer. So we all went to the trial. There was this guy in his paints, great war record, and there was a judge—Judge DeGrief—who hated everybody. That was his name—terrible reputation—and the prosecutor, and there sits Dick. Dick's posture was not very good... he kinda rolled his shoulders over... but he had this nice uniform, great war record, and for some reason they took his side. And I remember the judge saying, "Well, you didn't have too much, did you?" And Hugo says, "Oh, yeah. Boy, was I loaded." And the prosecutor says, "Hey, son, y'know... did you have coffee? Did you try to sober up before you left?" "Hell, no," Dick says. So that's how honest he was. Too damn honest.

I knew him... oh, I probably knew him as well as anybody... This ain't easy... well, anyway, I think that if Dick wanted me to do something... would be to probably take my tie off first. You know, Dick was—and I don't mean to slight anybody when I tell this story—but Dick was raised by his grandparents. And the longest paragraph I ever heard Grandpa say was when he had his fiftieth wedding anniversary, I congratulated him, and he went on to say, "I'm gonna keep her." And that was the most I ever heard. But anyway, when Dick was eighteen, finished high school, they moved him out. Not because they didn't love him, but that's what you did. So he came and he lived with me at my house. And then he went in the war, and came back, went to school, and his education in becoming a poet reminds me of one time I used to halibut fish, and I was going down to the dock and there was a guy about a hundred-and-twelve pounds with a railroad watch and he's leaning on a boat, seventy-six foot boat, and he had painted down to the dock line. And then he needed to get the boat away and pull a camel in and then get on a platform and paint to the water line. His name was Nels Lee. And I came down to the dock and I says, "Nels, what in the hell are you doin?" And he says, "Well, I'm gonna move this boat." And he's a tough Norwegian, I'll tell ya. I
John Mitchell

says, “You ain’t gonna move that boat.” And he says, “Yes, I am. If I shove hard enough and long enough, it’ll move.” And Dick did that with his poetry and his education. He shoved hard and long, and he moved it.

Transcript from Memorial Service in Missoula
October 31, 1982
Hello, everybody. My name is Mrs. Harold Herndon. Jennie is my name, but I am a widow now. Dick Hugo spent a lot of time at our bar—The Union Bar in Milltown, which is Harold’s Club now—and I could go on and on and on and tell you several things, funny things, that happened, because when we first met Dick he was down, he was depressed, he was having one hell of a time. Richard and I, we got along real good, but there were times I would get down on him. And then that’s where I got my nickname: The Bitch. He would get irritated with me and he’d say, “Harold, she’s a bitch.”

Well, I’ll have to tell you how that all started because one Saturday afternoon I went out to the Club to check the liquor inventory. I never worked on Saturdays and Sundays. So I went out there, to check the liquor inventory, to make sure that everything was there. Richard was sitting there, and this was the time we had the laundramat there. Anyway, he’d come out there on Saturday and he’d do his laundry and, needless to say, half the time he’d have a hangover. So he would drink his beer, and talk with all the millworkers and everything—which they dearly loved him . . . very much—so this particular day, I walked in and he was sitting there, and he had this sweatshirt on. I talked to him from the side, I went around the bar and I got behind the bar, and I looked and I said—excuse my French—“Jesus Christ, Richard, you look like a pig!” He said, “Oh, you bitch.” And I . . . anyway, I said, “Lord, you’ve got more ketchup and mustard on your sweatshirt than you had on your sandwich!” And he said, “OK, I’ll take the damn thing off and take it in there and put it in the laundry.” And I said, “Oh, no, you won’t. You’re not gonna take that shirt off and sit in here like that.” And he said, “Well, what the hell am I supposed to do?” And I said, “I don’t know. You’d better figure out something, though, ’cause I don’t like the looks of it.” Well, pretty soon he got up and he went back to the restroom, and he came back . . . he’d turned his sweatshirt inside out. Anyway . . . after that anytime anybody did come in and they had something on their sweatshirt, he would say, “Ya look like a slob. Go on back and turn it inside out!”

My husband and Richard were very, very close, because at the time that Harold met Richard they were both going through some pretty hard times, and that was they were both going through . . . just past divorce. And this was the time I decided I was going to marry Harold Herndon. But they were very, very close friends, and he wrote a beautiful eulogy for my husband which was published in the Rocky Mountain Magazine and also The Passage, which I will treasure all
my life. And after my husband passed away, Richard came out to see me, different times, and also he would call. Never say, "Hi, bitch," he'd just say, "Hi, gal, how ya doin?" But anyway, I'm so happy for Ripley that she did have a part of him because he was so happy in the last few years of his life. Everything was going his way. He loved her children. He loved her very much. And I'm sure we all loved him, too.

Transcript from Memorial Service in Missoula
October 31, 1982
1. STEAMPOWERED POPCORN MACHINE, PHILIPSBURG, MONTANA, c. 1920.
   (Chauncey Woodworth)

2. OPERA HOUSE, PHILIPSBURG, c. 1910.
   (Chauncey Woodworth)

3. PARADE, PHILIPSBURG, between 1893 and 1906.

4. GRANITE MINE AND MILL, GRANITE, MONTANA, 1893.
KEEN TO LEAKY FLOWERS

To know expanse I read thin books
on spruce and buffalo, and sailed
where ice and bears are serious.
I rose when the sun broke wild
and blinding on the field, walked
to the bay made famous
by old Indians and now the sun.

Why track down unity when the diffuse
is so exacting—crocodiles give clouds
a candy meaning in the manic frame.
The world should always pour on us
like this: chaos showering,
each thing alone, dependent as a dream.

I bent with every local contour then.
A buttercup erupted. Aspen leaves
in summer on the stillest day
and hedge tips in the wind moved savagely
and strange. Geology had grace.

To turn is to go. To see a weed
from other angles, learn its name,
preserves it more, its battle
with the grass. Transpierce
a perfect diamond with the shadow of a fly.
I am keen to leaky flowers,
how they con devotion from a bee.
One tug pounds to haul an afternoon
of logs up river. The shade
of Pigeon Hill across the bulges
in the concrete crawls on reeds
in a short field, cools a pier
and the violence of young men
after cod. The crackpot chapel,
with a sign erased by rain, returned
before to calm and a mossed roof.

A dim wind blows the roses
growing where they please. Lawns
are wild and lots are undefined
as if the payment made in cash
were counted then and there.

These names on boxes will return
with salmon money in the fall,
come drunk down the cinder arrow
of a trail, past the store of Popich,
sawdust piles and the saw mill
bombing air with optimistic sparks,
blinding gravel pits and the brickyard
baking, to wives who taught themselves
the casual thirst of many summers
wet in heat and taken by the sea.

Some places are forever afternoon.
Across the road and a short field
there is the river, split and yellow
and this far down affected by the tide.
DEATH OF THE KAPOWSIN TAVERN

I can’t ridge it back again from char.
Not one board left. Only ash a cat explores
and shattered glass smoked black and strung
about from the explosion I believe
in the reports. The white school up for sale
for years, most homes abandoned to the rocks
of passing boys—the fire, helped by wind
that blew the neon out six years before,
simply ended lots of ending.

A damn shame. Now, when the night chill
of the lake gets in a troller’s bones
where can the troller go for bad wine
washed down frantically with beer?
And when wise men are in style again
will one recount the two-mile glide of cranes
from dead pines or the nameless yellow
flowers thriving in the useless logs,
or dots of light all night about the far end
of the lake, the dawn arrival of the idiot
with catfish—most of all, above the lake
the temple and our sanctuary there?

Nothing dies as slowly as a scene.
The dusty jukebox cracking through
the cackle of a beered-up crone—
wagered wine—sudden need to dance—
these remain in the black debris.
Although I know in time the lake will send
wind black enough to blow it all away.
WHAT THE BRAND NEW FREEWAY WON'T GO BY

The block is bare except for this five-story ugly brick hotel. Perhaps the bulk frightened stores and homes away. Age is clear in turrets and the milk on window sills. The new name and the outside coat of paint must have raised the rent. As you drive by the rooms seem yellow and the air inside is stale because a roomer, second floor, in underwear, unshaven, fries a meal.

To live here you should be a friend of rain, and fifty with a bad job on the freights, knowing the freeway soon will siphon the remaining world away and you can die unseen among your photos—swimmers laughing but the day remembered cold.

Rooms have gas. The place was in the papers. Police have issued statements about cancer and the case is closed, but not the jokes passing boys are drilling through the walls. Top-floor renters look down floors of sweat to traffic that might stop were they to go. Some rooms are paid for in advance with shock.

If, when the freeways open, a man afraid of speed still takes this road, the faded Under New Management sign might mean to him: we are older too—live here—we'll never treat you badly again.
MARATEA PORTO:
THE DEAR POSTMISTRESS THERE

I run up the stairs too fast every morning
and panting for mail, I stagger inside
and there she sits wagging a negative finger.
Her frown is etched in and her mouth is sour.
Niente per voi, today.

This is Odysseus. I've come a long way.
I've beaten a giant, real mean with one eye.
Even the sea. I've defeated the water.
But now I'm home, pooped. Where's Penelope?
Niente per voi, today.

My name is Joseph and this, my wife Mary.
We've had a long journey and Mary is heavy.
The facts are odd. The child could be holy
and I wonder, have you a room in your inn?
Niente per voi, today.

I'm Genghis Khan and this is my army.
We've conquered your land. Now we want women.
Bring them today at high noon to the square.
After we've had them, we'll get out of here.
Niente per voi, today.

I'm Michelangelo, here to make statues.
I've lugged this damn marble all the way from the Alps.
I'll need a large scaffold and plenty of ropes,
a chisel, a mallet and oodles of wine.
Niente per voi, today.

Oh, heroes of time, you're never a hero
until you've endured ten days with no mail.
Slaughter the stars and come home in splendor.
She'll always be there at the end of the trail.
Niente per voi, today.
CATALDO MISSION

We come here tourist on a bad sky day, warm milk at 15,000 and the swamp across the freeway blinding white. No theory to explain the lack of saint, torn tapestry. Pews seem built for pygmies, and a drunk once damned mosquitoes from the pulpit, raging red with Bible and imagined plague. Their spirits buoyed, pioneers left running for the nothing certain nowhere west. Somewhere, say where Ritzville is, they would remember these crass pillars lovely and a moving sermon they had never heard.

More's bad here than just the sky. The valley we came in on: Mullan. Wallace. Jokes about the whores. Kellogg and, without salvation, Smelterville. A stream so slate with crap the name pollutes the world. Man will die again to do this to his soul. And over the next hill he never crosses, promises: love, grass, a white cathedral, glandular revival and a new trout, three tall dorsal fins.

We exit from the mission, blind. The haze still hangs amplifying glare until two centuries of immigrants in tears seem natural as rain. The hex is on. The freeway covers arrows, and the swamp a spear with feathers meaning stop. This dry pale day, cars below crawl thirsty, 500 miles to go before the nations quits.

for Jim and Lois Welch
MISSOULA SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT

This summer, most friends out of town and no wind playing flash and dazzle in the cottonwoods, music of the Clark Fork stale, I've gone back to the old ways of defeat, the softball field, familiar dust and thud, pitcher winging drops and rises, and wives, the beautiful wives in the stands, basic, used, screeching runners home, infants unattended in the dirt. A long triple sails into right center. Two men on. Shouts from dugouts: go, Ron, go. Life is better run from. Distance to the fence, both foul lines and dead center, is displayed.

I try to steal the tricky manager's signs. Is hit-and-run the pulling of the ear? The ump gives pitchers too much low inside. Injustice? Fraud? Ancient problems focus in the heat. Bad hop on routine grounder. Close play missed by the team you want to win. Players from the first game, high on beer, ride players in the field. Their laughter falls short of the wall. Under lights, the moths are momentary stars, and wives, the beautiful wives in the stands now take the interest they once feigned, oh, long ago, their marriage just begun, years of helping husbands feel important just begun, the scrimping, the anger brought home evenings from degrading jobs. This poems goes out to them. Is steal-of-home the touching of the heart?

Last pitch. A soft fly. A can of corn the players say. Routine, like mornings, like the week. They shake hands on the mound. Nice grab on that shot to left. Good game. Good game. Dust rotates in their headlight beams. The wives, the beautiful wives are with their men.
GHOST IN A FIELD OF MINT

The old man on the prison work release gang hoeing asphalt followed us to Wilkeson and those cyrillic graves, to Carbanado and that one long empty street, Voight’s Creek and then Kapowsin and our picnic in a field of mint. Wherever we went, old haunts I wanted you to see, he hung there grim. I ruined him with theory: sodomy, infanticide. His bitter face kept saying we die broken. Our crab paté seemed bitter and the sun.

In old poems I put evil things in Carbanado where I’d never been because a word that soft and lovely must be wrong, must hide what really happened, the unreported murder in the tavern, faithless wives. Clouds were birds of prey. The cell door clangs before we know we’re doing wrong. The stern click of the calendar damned us long ago to take pain on the tongue.

One day, alone in an asylum, I will find a door left open and the open field beyond, a wife beside that road the map forgot waiting as prearranged.

She’ll say, I’m crazy too. I understand. From then on we will seek the harboring towns, towns you never find, those flowers dying certain the forlorn die wise. My sister, we have been released for the entire day.

for Sister Madeline DeFrees
FROM ALTITUDE, THE DIAMONDS

You can always spot them, even from high up, the brown bulged out trying to make a circle of a square, the green square inside the brown, inside the green the brown circle you know is mound and the big outside green rounded off by a round line you know is fence. And no one playing.

You've played on everyone. Second base somewhere on the Dallas Tucson run, New Mexico you think, where green was brown. Right field outside Chicago where the fans went silent when you tripled home the run that beat their best, their all-season undefeated home town Sox. What a game you pitched that hot day in the Bronx. You lost to that left hander, Ford, who made it big, one-nothing on a fluke. Who's to believe it now? Fat. Bald. Smoking your fear of the turbulent air you are flying, remembering the war, a worse fear, the jolting flak, the prayer.

When air settles, the white beneath you opens and far below in some unpopulated region of whatever state you are over (it can't be Idaho, that was years ago) you spot a tiny diamond, and because you've grown far sighted with age you see players moving, the center fielder running the ball down deep, two runners rounding third, the third base coach waving hard and the hitter on his own not slowing down at second, his lungs filled with the cheers of those he has loved forever, on his magnificent tiny way to an easy stand-up three.
Dear Dennice: I'm this close but the pass is tough this year. I'm stranded by this rotten winter. My car is ailing and the local mechanic doesn't know what he's doing or he does but never learned clear phrasing. It will take four hours or a week. An odd town. A friendly waitress says the main drag is the old road so I must have been here but I don't remember. It looks like several towns in Montana. Columbus, for one. Even, a little, like the edge of Billings. You know. On one side, stores, cafes, a movie theatre you feel certain no one attends. And across the street, the railroad station. Most of all, that desolate feeling you get, young hunger, on a gray Sunday afternoon, when you survive only because the desolation feeds your dying, a dream of living alone on the edge of a definite place, a desert or the final house in town with no threat of expansion, or on the edge of a canyon, coyotes prowling below and a wind that never dies. Girl, you wouldn't believe the people who live alone, preparing themselves daily for dying, planning their expenditures to the penny so just when they die their money is gone and the county must bury them, a final revenge on a world that says work is good, plan for the future. They did. And dear Dennice, bring their laughing bones no flowers. Pay them the honor of ignoring their graves, the standard bird authorities chip on stones, a magpie designed by the same man you always see in towns like this, sitting in the station, knowing the trains don't run. The soup in the cafe I was lucky enough to pick of the available three, turned out thick tomato macaroni, and the chicken salad sandwich, yum. The mechanic says my car is done. He says, if I understand, it's ready and no charge. He says, if I understand, he just wants to be friendly and it wasn't anything really wrong. Homestake grade is sanded. I may even beat this letter to your home. It's Saturday and I suppose there's a dance.
somewhere in Butte tonight. Would you please consider? Would you come? I hope it's one of those virtuoso bands, you know, songs from all the generations, jazz, swing, rock. And a big crowd. Girls in mini minis, tighter than skin over their behinds, and a friendly bar, a table where we can talk. Think about it. Say yes. Be nice. Love. Dick.
THE SMALL OIL LEFT IN THE HOUSE WE RENTED IN BOULDER

That's a place I've been. The town small across the river and compact. Two women gather salad cress. Two men chat on the far bank. No doubt May-flowers flaring, quiet river high and no doubt nothing more than the tree in bloom goes on. I didn't want to live there then. I want to live there now and not go mad. I still believe there was a time I could.

It must have been enough to see the buildings double in the river, to know that roadless world where you go nowhere ever and the old pass wisdom down, time of day for pike, time of moon for planting, time to die and float away. And since the world stops where the river bends from sight, the body must pass on to some place warm in the minds of children though they have no word for heaven and the hot wind reeks.

Orofino, Idaho, is close, but wrong. For one thing, there's a bridge, and one day moments after a child had drowned, I drove by on my way to Portland, past the frantic divers and the wailing mother, and I kept going, concentrating on the radio, the tune playing, "Adios," oh lovely, from the local station. That was May and God the river roared.
THE RIGHT MADNESS ON SKYE

Now I'm dead, load what's left on the wagon and have the oxen move on. Tell absentee landlord driver, Harry of Nothingham, slow. I want my last minutes on earth filled with this island. For a long time my days were nothing. My remarkable late surge I attribute to fanciful chefs: cloud in the salad. My dramatic reversal of fate insists on this will read aloud in this poem this day of my death. Have the oxen move on. Tell Harry of Nothingham, slow.

Take my body to Kilmuir cemetery and adorn according to instructions. Don't forget the mint. Carve any lines you want on my stone. If mine double check spelling. I'm dumb. And triple check high birds. Bring them down and make them state their names. If none says 'Rhododendron' you know they're fakes. Throw them out. Give the piper and drum five minutes and explain to them, dead, I tire fast. Have the oxen move on. Tell Harry of Nothingham, slow.

Alive, I often wounded my knee begging response. My turn to put out. I will one eye to the blind of Dunvegan. I will one ear to deaf salmon climbing the Conon. And to the mute ocean I leave this haphazard tongue. You might note on my stone in small letters: Here lies one who believed all others his betters. I didn't really, but what a fun thing to say. And it's fun to be dead with one eye open in case that stuck-up twitch in Arizona mourns my loss.

Toot, toot, lovers. Now that I'm moving ahead you eagerly line the roadside to cheer these remains. Some say, first, get rid of the body. Not me. I say let the corpse dance. Make the living lie still. I told you before, five minutes for piper and drum. I leave vivid instructions and no one, no one listens. Let's try it once more. I'm dead. I want to milk that wild for all it's worth to the crowd already turning away. Have the oxen move on. Tell Harry of Nothingham, slow.
By now you're no doubt saying, "We've got you to rights. You can't write a poem from the grave."
Remember, I'm not buried. Only cold on the slab. There's a hell of a difference between being stiff from rigor mortis and being held rigid by peat.
Harry of Nothingham knows. Don't you, Harry old chap? And oxen aren't as dumb as you think. Just because I've no religion don't say heaven can't welcome me back under the new majority quota now in effect.

Don't back up for cars. Clear the road for the dead. Cry 'Fat bag of bones coming through.' I heard that note. I told you, no trumpets. I told you, five minutes, no more for piper and drum. Who's mouthing that organ for nothing? Who's humming along and stamping the right time? That's the wrong madness for Skye, I say. Wrong for dispossessed crofters who didn't want me to die and wrong for comedians waiting for final returns.
Have the oxen move on. Tell Harry of Nothingham, slow.

It's a long road that has no break in the blacktop. It's a crock to say it. Are they really preparing a speech? He was this, he was that, lies about me over the open dirt? If so, have the oxen reverse. Bring Harry of Nothingham back. I was rotten in Denmark long before something caught the boat, and I'm still non grata in Venice. Every time I level the piper and drum drown me out.
Have the oxen move on. Tell Harry of Nothingham, slow.

If I'm allowed to digress this way, take me on tour. What the hell. The hole that's waiting can wait. I want a last look at Seattle and the way light subtracts and adds miles to the journey. And I want to ride again the road on the upper Rha. If you've got a map you think I'm skipping about. Listen. All places are near and far selves neighbors. That wouldn't set well with scholars. Don't tell Harry. Bury my wounded knee at Flodigarry.
Are we on course again? Good. Isle of Skye, right? This the day of my death. Only feigned tears, like I ordered. Make sure the flowers are plastic. Five minutes, remember, piper and drum. Tell the nearly no mourners remaining I was easy to mix up with weather. The weather goes on. Me too, but right now in a deadly stiff line. Tell the laird who tricked me into being a crofter I never worked hard in my life except on a poem. Have the oxen move on. Tell Harry of Nothingham, slow.

Tell Harry of Nothingham stop and have the oxen relax, I want off at the crossroads. That's far as I go. I was holding my breath all the time. Didn't I fool you? Come on, admit it—that blue tone I faked on my skin—these eyes I kept closed tight in this poem. Here's the right madness on Skye. Take five days for piper and drum and tell the oxen, start dancing. Mail Harry of Nothingham home to his nothing. Take my word. It's been fun.
1. THE BLACK ISLAND
2. HOUSE IN THE BEND
3. HILLS OF MORVERN
4. BICYCLE AT CAIRNBAAN
All stones have luck built in. Some a lucky line that curves a weak green back into some age prehuman. If stones could talk they’d tell us how they’ve survived. They’ve been used in beautiful fences, been weapons hurled.

The luck of a stone is part of that stone. It’s not mystical, does not exist just on the stone like a spell put there by some spirit in some awkward moment—say the picnic’s on the verge of disaster, then good wine opened and the sun suddenly out, and oh the laughter. But why am I digressing? These things have nothing to do with stone luck.

I’m speaking of real stones. You understand. Rocks. Not symbols for testicles and not some lay philosopher’s metaphysical notion of an indestructible truth. Real stones, the ones you find lining ocean floors or creek beds or lying lonely on roads. Probable colors: blue, yellow, gray, red, green, white, or brown. The luck of each is the same, but each suited to a different situation. That’s why December, told I was dying of cancer, I picked up a green stone I liked the look of and carried it in my pocket. I fondled it just before I took the plane to Seattle. I kissed it often, both sides before the plane took off, before biopsy, before major surgery. And now that surgery seems to have gotten every flake
of sick tissue, I keep it on a ledge, 
where every morning sun warms the stone.

When I'm totally recovered, another three months 
they say, I'll throw the stone back where I found it. 
I won't tell you where that is. 
The same rock would not work for you no matter 
how trivial your problem, how little 
luck you need. Please know 
I want your life to go on same as mine. 
It's just essential you find your own stone. 
It lies somewhere near you now, innocent, 
and your eye will spot it in one right moment. 
You must hold it close to your ear, and when it speaks to you, you must respond.
GOLD STONE

When you find a gold stone know it isn't gold. If you find it where you should, under flowing fresh water you'll find it pulled out and dry pale cream or maybe beige trying to look splendid. If you find it on a dry road it was probably recently painted gold as a joke though you look and look and the road stays empty, no snicker of kid behind gorse, nothing worse than a golden eagle and he has far more sullen anti-social matters in mind than fooling you miscoloring one stone. Now you hold the gold stone. Granted it doesn't look so gold, the water that made it look gold dried off and the sun gone down. Whatever color it assumes deep in your pocket or purse, give it a chance. If woman with gold stone, that stone may promise at least one more golden affair. If man and lonely, a gold stone will find you a lover, a woman you saw once in a railroad station, Berlin, that wide warm easy mouth. Never believe a gold stone forever. Just long as you can.
GRAY STONE

A gray stone does not change color wet or dry. Baked on a scorched road or shaded by cedars, underground or tossed into a bright green sky, it's always gray. It is the stone of earth, of the down-to-earth no nonsense way of knowing life does not often of its own volition provide. A gray stone will not change your luck or shorten the mortgage or make you young again. It doesn't say "now" to investments—money or love. It doesn't say "no" when you plot wrong things you are sure you must do with your life or die from the drone. Keep one gray stone in a secret place, and when those you love are broken or gone, listen with a sustained, with a horrible attention to the nothing it has always had to say.
RED STONE

If underwater and glowing, a red stone is always good luck. Fish it out, even if you must wade and wet your good shoes. It will dry flat red like a new potato. You should rub it and remember the way it sparkles underwater, like a red haired woman curving troutlike through moss.

A red stone will get you through divorce, rage, sudden attacks of poison and certain diseases like ringworm or gout. A red stone will not reverse Alzen-Heimer's disease, or get you past cancer of the colon. Use it for what it can do. When it has done its work, return it softly where you found it, and let your wet feet sting a moment in the foam's white chill.
BROWN STONE

A brown stone if brown a certain way
and held up to sun glows a healthy bronze.
Keep a brown stone in plain sight always,
on your sill, or a paperweight
on your desk. Act friendly to the stone.
Smile. Touch. Even pat its brown hand
and say "good stone, good," though of course
be alone when you do. Don't get a reputation:
"Creep with pet rock," or "Passing
around the bend and not coming back."
A brown stone is also the name of a kind
of house in the eastern U.S., built once
for the wealthy and still in high priced use.
Don't be confused. The brown stone I speak of
is a brown rock about the size of your ear.
It has a subtle magic. If you rub
and complement it it will turn you
handsome and, like the stone,
you'll want to be where you can be seen.
Get a sun tan. Swim your body hard.
A blue stone is only one piece of a huge blue stone no one can find. A blue stone is anything but a blue stone. It is a speck of sky in your hand or a tiny bit of sea. Of all stones, it contains the most magics. It can veer your life away from poverty to riches. It can grow a tree exactly where you need shade. Just rub a blue stone and make a wish. A blue stone becomes the blue marble shooter you won all those marble games with. I always act indifferent around blue stones, sort of nonchalant like I feel they're nothing special. That way they work best for me. I avoid cold faces and cruel remarks. When I sail a blue stone downwind into the long blue day, armies start marching. When I find the stone, armies stop. When I sail a blue stone into the wind that always precedes a rain in Montana and then find the stone and pick it up a bird sings blue rain. Days I can't find a blue stone no matter where I look, I know they've returned every one to the big blue stone they came from somewhere in blue mountains, a place unmapped and roadless that can't be seen from the air.
1. DICK, AGE 2½ (courtesy of Ripley Schemm Hugo).

2. THE HOUSE ON EDDY STREET, 1967
   (courtesy of Carole DeMarinis).

3. PORTRAIT (Paul VanDevelder).

4. SNAPSHOT WITH FISH (courtesy of Paul Zarzyski).
As Dick and I hoisted the featherweight, heavy-duty, polyvinyl canoe—his birthday gift from Ripley—on top the Buick, I knew right then our annual early-spring fishing run to Twin Lakes would not be the usual lawnchair, bobber, sunshine, “wonder-what-the-poor-people-are-doing-today” affair. No way could I be convinced anything this lean and light, this streamlined, was going to keep afloat Dick Hugo and his trunk-and-a-half full of fishing paraphernalia, cooler of beer, 2 cement-filled bucket anchors, and me—175 hydrophobic pounds of landlubbing Polack-Wop convulsing with a deathgrip to the gunwales. If only Dick had served in the Navy instead of as a bombardier; if only Ripley had opted for the 20-foot Mirrorcraft Ski & Troll with pontoon outriggers; if only I had built a lighter lunch.

“Did you remember the life preservers, Dick?” I quizzed in strained nonchalance as we hit the interstate.

Instead of regarding the usual stop at Joe’s Smoke Ring in Evaro for beer and discount cigs a waste of prime fishing time, this trip I relished the delay. Yet the 90-minute drive from Missoula to Twin still seemed as if it took mere seconds, and before you could say “pass the garden hackle” I found myself fulcrumed over water so dark with depth, it barely cast a reflection—Dick manning the stern and me in the bow not really manning much of anything. And I say over the water because that, literally, is where I perched. Dick, on the other hand, sat ribcage deep, the waterline an inch below the gunnel, that “inch” shrinking to some infinitesimal fraction with each cast he took. So there we were: me, the symbol of stonefright on one pan of blind Justice’s scale, out-counterpoised by Dick epitomising the forces of pride, composure, and complete confidence on the opposite pan. There we were: the ultimate “odd couple.”

And then the monsoons hit—right in the middle of both ours and the trout’s feeding frenzy. We were having Alfredo Cipolato’s famous doctored-up pastrami, triple-layered, on white with Havarti cheese and mayo, a half-pint side apiece of my mom’s antipasta, biscottis, and Schlitz 16-ouncers. The cutthroats—finicky bastards—were ordering up just one cuisine: juicy dew-worm and pink marshmallow à la Hugo. I was getting about as much respect as Rodney
Paul Zarzyski

Dangerfield himself, and kept bellyaching that I was just too damn far away from the water and if I didn’t snag something with fins, pronto, I would have to resort to the ol’ reliable Dupont Lure: dynamite. I kept griping and Dick kept tally and kept me busy netting his fish, my heart rate quadrupling instantaneously each time he set the hook and the canoe jumped. But, as I started to say, that was before the downpour began adding extra poundage to this vessel already defying 2-fold its maximum carrying capacity, before we decided we better “call it”—Dick leading 7-zip—on account of rain, and head in.

Safe on shore, closer to the water, and with my pulse and angling savvy back on course, I began my comeback—the tides turned. Or, as Dick would’ve put it, scowling comically, had our situations been reversed: “the forces of righteousness once again prevailed over the forces of evil.” Fact is, he was catching cold and I was catching fish after fish while his lead dwindled like his slack line in the wind. Finally, bottom of the ninth, I tied it up 7-all. By this time, Dick was soaked, sulking, and sluging down the second 12-pack to Blue Devils jazz in the car, heater running full-tilt and all windows steamed except for a porthole he palmed clear between spokes of the steering wheel, just above the dash. With each trout I beached, I turned and flashed him a finger count, and I swear I saw through that windshield peep sight those Buick V wakes in his forehead corrugating deeper and deeper.

“Way to go, Zarzisk,” he’d holler with a forced grin, without one fingerling of truth in his voice—the way a starting player, sidelined so the coach’s kid can play, feigns encouragement from the bench.

Then I rallied—went 2 cuts ahead and was threatening to fill my limit and start in on his. And that, in the words of Popeye The Sailor, “was all he could stands.” Next thing I know, there’s the crunch of wet gravel and I turn to witness—I swear it on my creel—Hugo coasting the Buick down the bank—no boat ramp, mind you—as if he was captaining one of those James Bond 007 amphibious crafts that at the wink of an eye converts to anything from pontoon plane to sea nymph to hot-air balloon. He set the brakes bumper-to-bumper with the lap of waves, boiled out, hurled his usual 250-foot cast (one foot for each of his pounds), calculated the 10 or so feet of slack he needed to backtrack to the driver’s seat, threaded the rod through the half-opened window, and, I shit you not, resumed catching fish. In minutes he filled his limit, then mine, then bagged one extra just for spite, bragging rights, and the risk of it.
It took us a dozen tries, at one point the front fenders barely above the surf ("Never has your Buick/ found this forward a gear") before the back treads took hold, and high ground miraculously won the tug of war with Twin Lake. By then, however, no tight squeeze could faze me. Dick had placed his lucky stone face-up on the seat between us, and I was firmly convinced that when you went fishing with Richard Hugo, the gods tagged along as mascots. I believed with fervor, the way I believed the lines of his poems, that Izaak Walton himself couldn't hold a canepole to Dick when he got serious with his magic, heavy-action, Shakespeare wand—when he became blood brother to the home of fish and got close to water via lawnchair, canoe, Muse, or his Buick Sloop.
Dick Hugo knew the power of right combinations. Years ago, in his poetry workshop at the University of Montana, I too learned the importance of associations. An object clarifies an idea or gives a person heart. Rivers go with towns. A life runs out where the last house breaks the current. A lunker trout is love that always gets away. When I left his workshops to teach seventh grade in a small Highline school—much to his disgust—I found out the worth of other associations and how they change. By spring, snowballs and paper airplanes gave way to squirt guns and water balloons. The loneliness of an old farming town fit any Hugo poem. Some things just go together. No explanation needed, as Dick would say from behind the wheel of his long yellow Buick convertible.

I'm certain Dick would link that hulk of a Buick with a young and preferably blonde co-ed sitting opposite the driver's side. And if she looked longingly at him as he drove through Missoula streets, her hair catching the sun, the combination clicked. For me, the vision was complete, even without the girl or a hitchhiker he'd picked up for company, whenever he pulled up in front of my house in Butte for lunch and a visit. Not always on Sunday, but usually on a whim, he'd stop on his way to fish the Jefferson or find a dying town to build a poem on. And what a sense of timing. I wonder if he knew how much I needed old friends and old days. Then the visits stopped. I hadn't seen him in over a year. My letters went unanswered. One June morning, I looked out the window and saw a familiar yellow car, a thinner Dick Hugo walking to my door. There were too many questions to answer at once. Where have you been? What have you been doing? How did you lose all that weight? I must have sounded hysterical.

"I lost it all in Iowa," he said. "I completely broke down and had to leave the chair. I went to Seattle for treatment. My God, I ran up two thousand dollars in phone bills. I was calling everyone I knew."

A vision returned of his kitchen at one a.m., the end of a party and a bottle of Jim Beam. Dick was trying to call Italy but couldn't remember how to say seven in Italian.
“Did I call you from Iowa?” he asked.
“No, Dick,” I said.
“Well then you and Mao Tse-tung are the only two people I didn’t call.”

The same tactful Dick. If he’d left you out, you were in noble company.

No booze and a wonderful marriage made Dick a happier man. It was good to have him back. Then his health began to fail. He had a lung removed and was facing a hard recovery. I drove to Missoula to visit him and we had lunch at the kitchen table in his house on Wylie. He looked out the window at my little yellow Mustang.

“That’s a nice car,” he said. “I’ve been driving that Comet out there. Ripley wrecked my Buick. She wasn’t hurt, thank God.”

I recognized the tone of his voice. It went with strong lines in weak poems.

“Small cars are nice,” I said.
“Yeah, but you have to steer them and everything,” he said.
“They’re not like big cars. You just whisper your destination to the engine—Great Falls—and hang on.” The spark returned to his eyes.

“Do you remember that redhead in the fall workshop, you know, the one with the heavy thighs . . . ?”

It’s spring again in Missoula and Dick would say it’s time for all old poets to come home. I’m back trying to make the right combinations but some things just aren’t the same. Big cars aren’t in style any more. They’re unpatriotic, selfish. They pay no mind to a failing ecology and posterity. They’re downright unclean. But I saw a ’62 Chevy convertible the other day, not quite as regal as a Buick. Its blue metallic finish had oxidized to flat steel gray. There was a blonde girl gazing at the young man driving. With her hand on his shoulder, he looked as if the world was his. I made a quick association—the taste of rain, love, and whiskey, with a good tailwind and time to spare. No explanation needed. Everything fit.
Dick in the classroom was a presence immediately felt. The "teaching" began to happen before he said a word. This can't be described any more than the lines of force between earth and moon can be seen. We'd all take our seats at the big table in Room 210, the seminar room, Dick would light up his first Pall Mall, and the air would become charged. Charged with a comfortable tension, a grim amiability. You had to be there.


"I've got one, Dick," says one of the more eager souls. "Good! Good!" Dick booms with the false relish of a kind man about to dig into a bowl of oatmeal at a poor friend's dinner table. "Pass it out, Ted. Jesus, it's hot in here. Anyone mind if I open a window?"

Dick starts to lift his 240 pounds out of his chair when a husky fellow in eastern tweed stops him. "I'll get it, Dick," he says. He believes, as the rest of us do, that poets should not have janitorial duties. We spelled poet with a capital *P* in those days. We were impressionable. We knew Dick had gotten drunk with Dylan Thomas, had snored in the same bed with him, and that Dylan had read Dick's poems in manuscript. And so we were eager to save him from all sorts of menial indignities. We were glad to be flunkies. Well, hell, we were apprentices, after all. Dick didn't mind a bit. He let us fetch the beer, taxi the girls, call ahead for reservations, gas the car. He, in turn of course, would read our new poems almost any time of night or day. We were his gang, his mob.

"Oh. Thanks. Christ," he says, sagging back into his chair, elbows on the table, the heels of his hands grinding at the hangover thumping in his temples. "I drank too much last night. Did you see me last night, Jim?"

Jim laughs. Several others laugh. Dick looks up, bewildered and hurt, a wonderful act.

"I know I saw *you*, Ed," he growls.

Ed growls back. They both chuckle.

"Jesus, I think I insulted Therez again," he says, dark now with false shame. "All right, never mind. She probably deserved it anyway. Now. Go ahead. Read the poem, Ted."
Ted reads his poem. It's a long poem, apparently about the rigorous rewards of living close to nature, out in the woods, in a cabin, among the bears and trees. There seems to be a ghostly woman nipping in and out of the strained images.

Ted finishes the poem. There's a dead silence filled only with Dick's breathing. You can almost hear the snowflakes crashing into the window sill. A thin woman in a cotton dress is shuddering stoically.

Dick frowns, his face darkens. He lifts his right arm high above his head and opens and closes his hand six or seven times. His eyes are bright with ominous good humor. “Comments,” he says, wagging the fingers of his raised hand as though to traffic-cop the comments forward.

“Ted knows his survival techniques,” says some wag.

Ted laughs, appreciating himself somewhat, oblivious to the harpoon in his chest.

Dick lowers his arm, his fist thumps the table. He looks at us suddenly as if he's never seen any of us before. This is the second week of the quarter. By now we've all been to his house on Eddy Street. Some of us have stayed with him through a night, drinking vodka and Fresca, listening to Dixieland jazz and swing. Some of us have eaten chicken cacciatora at his table.

“More comments,” he says, straightening himself in his chair, folding his arms across his chest like Mussolini. “Dica, che l'aquila ascolta,” he says.

We all laugh. We know what it means and the story behind it. “Speak, the eagle listens.” Mussolini's favorite poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio, the man who bombed Trieste single-handedly, used to say it. He'd receive young aspiring poets with that phrase. D'Annunzio, an exasperated romantic, wrote poems such as “To a Torpedo Boat in the Adriatic.”

“All right then you cowards,” he says. “What does this mean: ‘The gate offends my peeling love’?”

“Is it all right if I close this window a little?” asks the shivering woman in the cotton dress.

Dick lifts his head from the poem, fixes the woman with a blank gray gaze. He's not being mean, he's just a beat behind because of the hangover. “What? Oh, sure. Are you cold, honey?” He's solicitous now, eager to make a guest comfortable. “Sure, honey. Close it if you're cold. I'm sorry. I drank too much last night. Maybe I said that before.”
His lover has contracted syphilis," says a grim, bearded fellow wearing a beret.

Dick stares at him as if he's just stepped out of a flying saucer. He squints, blinded by incomprehension. Bewilderment, annoyance, and a trace of disgust twitch in his face. "Who's got syphilis? What the hell are you talking about?"

The grim bearded fellow backs down a little. "He means his girlfriend is sick," he says quietly. "She's got scabs."

Dick looks around the room, his mouth severely turned down at the corners, his eyes large with outrage. "His girlfriend is sick!" he says, mild now as Jack Benny. "He's not talking about his girlfriend, smarty! He's talking about his goddamned barn!"

"No, no," persists the bearded fellow. "It's there, in the first line. 'She dances like Egypt out of my desuetude, combing dalliance out of her hair.' You see?"

"I think I'm going insane," Dick murmurs to the lovely but very quiet blonde girl in the red sweater sitting immediately to his left. Then, to the rest of us, he announces, "Oh, by the way. I'm not going to be here next Tuesday. I've got a reading in Great Falls. I may be able to get Tony to take the class. If we can get him out of Eddy's Club, that is. You may have to take him at gunpoint."

Everyone chuckles at the idea, except Ted. "Actually, I was talking about Lily Langtry," he says, breaking the rule of silence. The writer of the poem under consideration doesn't offer a defense. It only wastes time. "You know," he continues. "Lily Langtry. The fin de siècle actress."

Dick picks up the poem and studies it closely, like a man looking for the fine print in a used-car contract. "There's no goddamned Lily Langtry in this poem! Anybody see any goddamned Lily Langtry in this poem?"

Ted turns bright red. "Well, I meant someone like Lily Langtry. Lily Langtry as, uh, prototype. It could have been Jenny Lind or Ethel Barrymore. It doesn't matter."

Dick reads aloud:

The cabin in those winters bleak
Lit again by sighing embers
Like an old theater intercepting fate
Intersticed by she who Decembers
Into dying roles, inamoratas, so to speak...
Dick interrupts himself, slamming the poem down on the table. "‘Intersticed by she who Decembers’?" he says, greatly appalled. "Since when is December a verb?" His mouth stretches back in what would be a huge grin of only the corners of it would lift. Instead, his mouth lengthens in a flat line. He looks as inscrutable as a giant bullfrog. "What about these Latinates, Ted," he says after a long moment as a bullfrog. 'In that moment, no one has been able to look at him. We are the tadpoles, small and blind. "You know, poets quit using syntactical inversions around 1901, Ted."

Ted studies his poem, or pretends to. We all study it, or pretend to. Pretend to hunt out the Latinates, the inversions, the 1901 obsolescence.

"Look," says Dick. "Don’t let yourself fall in love with those multisyllabic words, Ted. The strong words are the one- and two-syllable Anglo-Saxon words. You’re not writing a pharmaceutical prescription, for Chrissakes. You’re writing a poem. Now, what about this line, ‘The branch of light cracks across my eyes’?"

“I think it’s damned fine,” says a brooding blond fellow with heavy supraorbital ridges. He’s wearing a motorcycle jacket, black denims, boots.

“You’re right, it’s not bad,” says Dick, raising his arm again. This raising of the arm signals something. It signals something like time-out. Time-out to reconsider. Reconsider everything. Maybe his impression of the poem. Maybe his teaching job. Maybe his life. “Not too bad at all,” he says. “But compare it to, ‘She dances like Egypt out of my desuetude, combing dalliance out of her hair.’ For Chrissakes, Ted, do you say things like that to your friends? Is that a natural way for you to say things?”

Ted thinks this over for a few seconds, then says, very softly, “No, not really.”

“See,” Dick says, leaning toward Ted who seems to have shrunk perceptibly. “When you write a line like that, what you’re doing is writing ‘poetry.’”

Everyone nods. We all know better than to write “poetry.”

“You’re trying to make this into a poem by elevating your diction, see. What you’re saying to yourself is, If I can make it sound like a poem, then it must be a poem. You see?”

Ted, tadpole among the tadpoles, nods.

“Jesus Christ, I don’t even know what ‘desuetude’ means!” Dick laughs. “What an ugly goddamned word.”
Ted, in a small voice, gives us the definition.

“Thanks,” says Dick, like a man who's just been handed a dead hamster.

It's a bleak moment for Ted, but Dick never leaves someone bleeding without offering a Band-Aid or two. He tells Ted to go at it again, that his poem has a moment here and there of something he calls, “psychic rhythm.” He goes back to the line about the branch of light. He tells Ted to drop Lily Langtry, and desuetude. He tells him to trust his ear, not his head. His fine education has given him words like desuetude and inamorata and intersticed. We've already got a smart poet, he says. His name is W. H. Auden. Trust your language, Ted, he says. And by your language, I mean your language. Your private vocabulary. The words that mean more to you than any other words. If you come from a farm, then “wheat” beats the piss out of “desuetude.”

Another poem is passed around the table. The poet, Jim, reads it. “Jesus,” Dick says, pounding the table like Khrushchev. “You rotten son of a bitch,” he says. “I haven't written a poem that good all year!”

We all look at Dick, shaken, hoping that he's kidding. But no, he's serious! He means it! We're all stunned into a jealous reverence of Jim's poem.

“Nobody gets to write poems better than the teacher's,” Dick says, his voice low with Sicilian treachery. It's like a communique from Lucky Luciano in exile. Then he explodes: “Out! Out! Get out of here! You flunk! Go back to your people in shame!”

Everyone laughs, enjoying his act and what we now have come to recognize as the highest praise a poem can receive.

We discuss Jim's poem for a while, unable to fault it except for a misplaced comma or excess article. “Nit-picking,” Dick called it, a very important part of criticism. He also called it “Picking the fly shit out of the pepper.”

Finally Dick says, even though only forty minutes have passed, “I'm afraid I drank too much last night. Let's get the hell out of here.”

We move heavily out of our chairs, gripped by a reluctance we've come to expect. It's those invisible lines of force. We're still held by them, and three or four of us will be drawn along behind him to his Eddy Street house where the vodka and jazz will flow.

We're almost out the door, but Dick is still in his chair. He's staring at something ten miles away. We stop in our tracks and wait. “Look at that sky,” he says, lifting his arm, pointing at something we can't
see. There's something new in his voice, something we haven't anticipated. He heaves himself out of his chair with a magnificent groan and moves to the window. The clouds are breaking up. He leans on the sill. "Look there," he says. "Between those clouds. In that gap. Jesus, that's lovely. See, the sky in that gap is bluer than the sky on either side of those clouds. It looks too far away, like in one of those primitivist paintings, where they get the perspective screwed up. It's as though there's sky behind sky. There's blue, and then, bingo, there's final blue. Christ!" He's wearing that big, slap-happy grin a generation of students will see and be warmed by.

But does he mean it? Is he really overcome by this patch of final blue? Can anyone grin like that, like a giant baby with gold teeth, and really mean it? We don't know. This is 1965 and it's too soon to know. He's new on the job and we're the greenest poets who ever filled our lungs with syllables.
Saturday, October 5. 5:30 p.m. Boulder. Bill Matthews came by to watch the baseball playoffs. He gave me the rotten news about Anne Sexton but was uncertain of his information. I called Richard Howard and it’s true. He had just gotten a call from Howard Moss. Never knew her but exchanged a couple of letters with her over 10 years ago. She couldn’t get my address right and on one letter that had been returned to her she wrote at the top, “Damn! What IS your address.” Richard was sad and subdued on the phone. Bill and I talked about it for a while but what’s to say? Tomorrow I fly east to Syracuse where Roger Dickinson-Brown will meet me and drive me to Oswego. First reading there Monday afternoon. Though I didn’t know Sexton or even her work very well, I feel personally affected. Maybe because, like most of us, she wrote out of need — that’s obvious in her poems — and maybe that is a bond. Real as any other? Matthews is strong, witty, decent — just a good man to have around anytime and I’m especially glad he was here today. Later, the day gone dark and raw, I went out for some cigarettes. The car radio started to play a tune from my youth, “Tuxedo Junction.” Not Glen Miller but the melody was there and I stayed in the car in the parking lot until the song was finished. Ripley got a nap this afternoon and her leg felt better afterward. Damned sciatica. She has the bad habit of always working, but I’m getting her to accept leisure as a way of life. When in doubt, sit and stare moodily out of the windows.

Sunday, October 6. 11:30 a.m. Stapleton Airport. Denver. Couldn’t find a thing about Sexton in the Denver Post this morning but there was an article in the Boulder Daily Camera. Said she was a suicide or died from natural causes. Jesus. Natural causes. Are we to think she drove her car into the garage, left the motor running, got out and closed the door, got back into the car to shut the motor off and suffered instant cancer? Or that she came out and started the motor to go someplace before opening the garage doors and had a heart attack? According to the article she was found in the car, the motor running and the garage doors closed. But some people still consider suicide disrespectful — as if respectability meant a shit anymore. How very much flying I’ve done the last few years. I think
for many years I kept those old war flying fears alive with booze long after they had diminished. I still drug myself a bit. Good old triavil and good old Doctor Armstrong of Missoula, Montana who with his prescription has removed most of the remaining fear. Just took one but it will take awhile. What a subnormal looking woman across the way but I must not trust appearances. Probably nuclear physicist or Mary McCarthy. Someone else is writing in a notebook. Tall, dignified man, gray hair. I'll bet he uses the passive voice and never splits an infinitive. Got seat 21A, left side, north side. No sun in my eyes. I'm very clever these days. Chicago in two hours, three minutes. With jets we could have flown to Vienna and back in three hours and been high above the flak. I always assumed someday I'd meet Sexton. The triavil hasn't started to work.

4:50 p.m. Chicago. If you've been flying in circles for over an hour, worried about missing your connection, are hot and sweating, pissed off because you just ran seven or eight miles through the airport and now are waiting for your next flight because it's late too, where else could you be but O'Hare Field. This is not my favorite place. It's not even close. But I did see one of my favorite actors here once. Don Gordon. Saw him two nights ago on TV when he played Steve McQueen's assistant in Bullitt. Obviously better than McQueen who is not bad. I wanted to say to him that day in Chicago, "I'm a fan, Mr. Gordon. And I really like your acting." But I didn't have the nerve. I do like him. Throttle wide open actor, a sort of new school Anton Walbrook.

9:30 p.m. Oswego. Roger Dickinson-Brown picked me up in Syracuse as planned. Oswego, I gather from D-B and from what observation was possible in the dark, is absolutely unpretentious. A working man's town, Italian. Not the least bit mean or rowdy. Something touching about it. Almost forlorn. Marvelous old frame taverns. I wish I still drank. This is a town you could lose yourself to yourself in, the way you sometimes have to in poems. You could live your life out here, totally ignored. But that's a fantasy I enjoy only while it remains a fantasy. Jesus I'm so weak in two days I'd be sending letters to APR saying, I'm still here, gang. D-B seems a nice sort. He feels Stafford's more recent poems abandon the love of detail for its own sake, that Someday, Maybe is his best book but is not well received because it is too different from his other work. That's a good reason. When you love some of Bill's earlier work the way I do, you want him to go right on writing like that forever. But Bill, unlike me, is capable of growth. Let's hear it for us stagnant poets. D-B said the
A's won today and the Dodgers. Why in hell do I take these trips during the playoffs and the series, when I'm such a buff. I did that last year. Saw a playoff game between Cincinnati and the Mets in Bobbie Gafford's apartment in Birmingham, Alabama. Must call Ripley, let her know I arrived ok. American Airlines seems better than most. They don't seem to be herding people around like cattle and the employees seem to be free of that awful professional delivery when they talk to you. One nice thing about living close to Denver, it's easy to go on readings without all those damn stops and starts and starts you make out of Missoula. First reading tomorrow at 4:15. I like afternoon readings. I think that's a holdover from my drinking days when an afternoon reading left more booze time. But why make a reading an event? The best thing America ever did for her poets was ignore them. That forced us to take ourselves seriously because no one else would. That can be good for the poems, bad for the personality. No clothes hangers. No ashtrays. No phone. The bastards. Now I can't call Ripley. They'll never break me though. Man can live without coat hangers or even without calling his wife but recent findings by archaeologists show that the ashtray goes back at least 500,000 years. So it must be a necessity. D-B says he is going to submit a book. I feel for him. How hard it is to get that first book published.

**October 7. 7:00 a.m.** I slept nine hours. I never sleep nine hours. Must be a personal record. Must be the change in altitude. It can't be high here. Boulder is 5,400, maybe higher at our house. Waiting for D-B for breakfast. No ashtrays. The bastards. Still, I like being put up in guest rooms in student dorms. Reading at 4:15. I hope I read ok. I mean recite because that's mostly what I do since Northwest Airlines lost my bag on that five-day stint in Portland last spring. Oh, I moaned and gnashed my teeth but recitation is more impressive. I could have done it years ago but NW forced me to when they lost my ms. How in hell can you lose a bag between Missoula and Portland? It's hardly Singapore to Nome for Christ sakes. Anyway, I realize now that I felt I needed something between me and the audience and that something was the page, the poem. I hadn't needed that for years but only found out recently. No coffee around either.

**10:00 a.m.** A beautiful storm blew in last night. And it's still blowing. Wow. I couldn't see Lake Ontario last night in the dark but it's right here. Had breakfast with D-B and we looked out the window at the raging lake only a few feet from the cafeteria. We look north at Canada but Canada is out of sight. Nothing but rage and void and so much like the Washington coast that I am home. Oh, that wind, that
gray wild expanse. Baby. I even imagine I see salal, but that can’t be. Very humane fellow, D-B. I hope his book is good and is taken. But then I wish good luck for any poet I happen to like. The young poets are getting good these days. Looking at the lashing waters this morning I realized I don’t like poets who don’t like storms and the ocean, even if it is Lake Ontario. I must call Ripley and let her know I arrived ok. It’s a good feeling to have someone after ten years living alone, except for those few happy months with Kathy. What in hell can a poet do with happiness? Whatever it is, I’m going to find out. I am for the ocean and lots of feeling. I am for Oswego, New York. It’s only eight in Colorado. I’ll wait till Ripley gets Melissa off for school before I call. D-B shared my sadness about Sexton. We talked about Stafford, Richard Howard, Jean Valentine, Diane Wakoski. I know I’m at low altitude because the flies are slow. They are quick as mongooses in the mountains. The higher the altitude, the quicker the flies. Maybe they have superchargers. I’m on the side of ecologists but for the elimination of all flies and mosquitoes. Is that a possible position? Outside Ontario bashes the shore and the trees are frantic in the wind pouring out of the Northwest. Some trees are Stafford trees acting out whatever has happened to them. Seagulls. Oh, I am home. If I were a student here I’d just stare moodily out of the windows at the water until they flunked me out, then drink my life away in those charming taverns in town.

1:45 p.m. And still the winds hammer and the lake stays nuts. But damn it, it’s not a lake. Lakes are sane. This is the ocean. What do the natives or those stupid cartographers know? Lunch with Lewis Turco. He looks like a grocer. Your friendly neighborhood grocer, the one you loved to go to for penny candy when you were a kid, the one who, when he died, left a major hole in the neighborhood air that never filled up. “He looks too like a grocer for respect” Auden wrote characterizing the empty snobbishness of the respectable. Turco looks enough like a grocer to win your everlasting affection. What an energetic and delightful man. God, he’s published 11 books—only Robin Skelton tops that among my acquaintances—or does Wagoner have that many now? I think he does. Turco and three girls, Cheryl, Brenda and Georgia, and D-B all at lunch. Cheryl tells us that a hole in the clouds that lets the sun through just before a squall hits is called ‘a sucker hole.’ That is too good to pass up. Turco and D-B test their wits for awhile on that one to my delight. After lunch I walk down to the beach. The storm coughed up a lot of smelt and the water didn’t come back for them. They are everywhere, staring at the nothing the dead find fascinating. I pick up a pebble for Ripley. D-B
has a brother in crime and Turco's father was an Italian Baptist minister. Read in 2½ hours. Nice posters about. D-B's wife did the drawing. She's ok. D-B mentioned she's an artist. I already feel that way I always feel on tour: I want to stay here. I'll feel that way wherever I go. But where else on this trip will I find fierce wind, ocean, gulls, nervous trees. I'll sit and stare at the mean water until D-B comes. Must get Turco's book on forms.

2:45 p.m. It just struck me that the reason so many poets get oiled before they read is that without booze they don't feel worthy of their audience. Can that be right? Pretty close. God help me, I must be getting mature. I feel worthy of my audience without booze. But if I admit that, will it reduce my chances of reading well? Over-confidence is to be avoided at all costs. By the 9th reading, at Syracuse, I'll probably be as spontaneous as a morality play. Or is it that we are so hopelessly conceited that we compensate, afraid someone might see what we really are? Or is it really simple: we are weak slobs. Flash Gordon and Gary Cooper never wrote poems. Does Mao get good reviews in China?

11:30 p.m. I read badly for half the reading at least. My timing was off and to compensate I pushed and my voice got too high. Finally settled back and stopped pressing, something I've disciplined myself to do when things aren't going well. Years ago, I just pushed harder and my voice rose to a wail. Anyway, I was disappointed. Dinner with D-B, Turco, oodles of others. Cheryl, Brenda, Georgia. Nice party at Tom and Mary Lowe's. Wine for all except me. I had too much coffee. Hate to leave tomorrow, this storm, this bad assed sea. But what connections wait at Wells. Turco turns out to be an outrageous punster. Wife Jean very lovely and very warm to talk to. D-B's wife is interesting and with some depth, observant but with a warm eye. Cheryl drove me home. She was high. I think she's high without help from wine. She's a pretty girl and nutty in the right way. I am a sucker for school girl charm and even had ideas but to hell with that. At 50 I can sure as hell handle loneliness. The wind knows I've had enough practice. D-B will drive me to Wells. Maybe Turco will go along. That's good company, D-B and Turco. Host at Aurora: Bruce Bennett. Isn't that the name of the actor, the loner who tried to cut himself in in Treasure of Sierra Madre? Once was Tarzan under the name, Herman Brix? Or is that his real name? He was in Mystery Street too, an underrated flick of 20 years back. I have the feeling that Oswego serves students in the right way. D-B and Turco are good influences. People seem to know where they live here. Neither D-B
nor Turco would stand back and say, I know something, try to find out what. Lord, how many profs do that. Here the relation between students and faculty seems neither remote and formal nor sloppy. Turco told me about a man who used to inscribe his books with phrases that sounded like great flashes of wisdom: "To Lewis Turco, a man who knows the difference between vision and revision." And no one caught on for years. For inscriptions nothing beats that all time all time from your high school annual: Good luck to a swell kid. Maybe high school students are more sophisticated now.

October 8. 7:30 a.m. Six hours sleep. That's more like me. I'm already looking past Wells at Cornell. Ten years ago I read at Cornell and drew maybe ten people and for the only time since I started reading I let the smallness of the audience bother me. Why did it bother me there? I can't decide if I hate Cornell because I got a small crowd there or because I really hate myself for being so damned temperamental. Sad that Archie isn't there this year, but that dear Albert Goldbarth is and it will be good to see him. My new mother-in-law, the novelist Mildred Walker (Schemm) is coming down from Vermont for the reading at Wells. She taught there several years. Bill Matthews, now with me at Colorado, was her replacement at Wells. Ripley went there for a year before returning to Swarthmore. Nesselhoff who teaches there is godfather to Matthew, my stepson, and Ripley is godmother to Nesselhoff's daughter Sarah. And my siamese twin sister separated from me at birth by the infamous Dr. Dullscalpel, is buried on campus following the return of her body from Germany where she was executed in 1944, the greatest spy in the history of warfare. This is my first chance to visit her grave. D-B should be here soon for breakfast. The lake is just a lake this morning, well adjusted as ivy.

Aurora, 2:30 p.m. Wells College. D-B told me the sad news this morning that last night after Cheryl dropped me off she found out her aunt had died, the fourth death in her family in a short time. Lunch with D-B, Mildred and Bruce Bennett, a charming warm man, very mild, a truly gentle personality. He took along his baby to the Aurora Inn and now I'm in the Prophet's Chambers after being dropped off by Mildred. Poets stay here in this split level — no, it's actually a two floor apartment. Some impressive ghosts here. Merwin was here, but he's no ghost. Hopefully won't be for a long time, and after that, will be forever. Girls, 500 girls. In my fantasy this is paradise. Lovely lake that could be only a lake, lovely old homes, lawns, vivid fall trees and
girls. But in real life, like a lot of men, I find women in numbers oppressive. Had lunch with three women once and felt like a jockstrap too old for one more washing. It's nothing they do or try to do. It just happens. Maybe it's something I do to myself in their presence. I remember years ago at Ft. Wright, 300 girls, I just had to go into town with a couple of guys the third day and get drunk in some rundown taverns. When I told Madeline DeFrees about my feelings, how I found women in numbers oppressive, she said, "They have the same effect on me, Dick." She probably doesn't feel that way now. Dear Madeline. Who ever thought we'd end up colleagues at Montana, that she would get her whatever they call it in religion (in baseball, it's unconditional release) from the order the same day as my birthday and drive back in snowstorms so we could celebrate together. What a lot she has been through and what a brave woman she is. How can a poet that good be overlooked so long? More thanks to Richard Howard, who saves us all sooner or later. Nap soon. Maybe I'm all over finding women oppressive in clusters. I hope I read better tonight. Bennett was connected with Ploughshares and Field, two of my favorite magazines. I wonder how Madeline is getting along at Victoria. Now if only a dozen of the loveliest coeds will come to the Prophet's Chambers and play out my favorite fantasies and afterward I can go out on the dirt roads in tatters and live the rest of my life in shame and degradation. It shouldn't be hard to find snobs back here who could help me on my way to oblivion. I can hear the violins on the sound track now.

Wednesday, October 9. 12:10 a.m. Much better. Within ten minutes after I started I was grooving. Voice good. Timing good. No throw aways and what a good audience. Didn't feel oppressed, not a bit, not even afterward surrounded by coeds and answering questions. Despite the quiet subdued nature of the girls here — they are terribly polite and civilized — from what we call "good homes" I suppose — every once in awhile walking about the campus I hear a terrible shriek. I told Bruce and Connie Bennett about a movie I saw advertised a few years ago in Seattle: Tower of Screaming Virgins. Now there's a title. My kind of title. To hell with all this subtlety. Out with it, I say. Dinner tonight before the reading at Tom and Fran Helmstadters. A pleasant enough time. After the reading Mildred and I called Ripley and how great it was to hear her voice. I do miss her and the kids, more and more. Mildred in her isolation and loneliness worries and disapproves. She disapproves of my giving Ripley money for clothes before we were married. She disapproves my smoking so much. She wants me to have a hip replacement operation to cure the temporary lameness I suffer in my left leg often after sitting down for awhile. It struck me suddenly as very funny,
having her here. I can think of some who would find having their mothers-in-law show up when they are reading at a girls’ school the final blow of fate. No names please. I’m glad Mildred is here. Not to keep me in line. I’m hardly a philanderer. It’s just good to get to know her a little better. Her worry about our lives is obviously the result of loneliness. Though I’m irritated a bit I’m also touched. She remarked that now girls could have men in their rooms all night. Good, I said. I couldn’t tell how she felt, regretful, disapproving, resentful? Anyone who thinks morality changes is foolish. Only conversation changes. The world was always horny. Sex is like writing a poem. If you want it bad enough —. And most do. Met a young writer named Marianne Loyd. BB showed me some of her things in the student mag. She’s good. I’d like to have her in class some day. Maybe she’ll come west for grad work. The more good writers I get, the more undeserved credit I can take. It was good to read that well after that mediocre stint in Oswego. Despite Goldbarth and Hathaway I still look forward to Cornell with apprehension. Baxter certainly did a lot with Epoch over the years. His son Bill was a student of mine at Montana. Now teaching at LSU. Introduced me last year there, about this time. Hot and muggy and I was missing the playoff games just like now. Charming man at Cornell—Rosenberg. Edgar Rosenberg. I wonder if he’s still there. Mike McClintock at Montana spoke with such affection and admiration of him. It’s good to be old enough to admit your love of baseball and not care a damn what anyone else thinks about it. Jesus God I remember 25 years ago that artsy fartsy crowd I fell in with in Seattle—oh, that was way back. I like Oswego and Wells but fear Cornell. I must be the Paul Harvey of poetry. Sorry Archie won’t be there. What a strong decent man—makes me proud just to be in the same racket. That’s his word, ‘racket’. “Dick, did you ever get up in front of a big crowd to read your poems and say to yourself ‘How did I ever get into this fucking racket.’ ” Talked to Ripley and she said Matthew had taken a call from Howard Moss who wants to get in touch with me. That can’t be. Must be Stanley Moss. I barely know Howard, just met him once briefly. Aurora is about as removed from harm as one can get. I doubt cancer would be permitted inside the city limits. This is the world with all harm removed forever. Oswego was where the harm happened long ago and now they are living the sad aftermath. Breakfast with the Bennetts and Mildred at 9:00. I’d love to stay here forever and fish in the lake with Bruce in his back yard. By the time I hit Syracuse I should be as automatic and spiritless as a Morse code instructor. Why wasn’t Nesselhoff there tonight? Rumor is Al Poulin is very sick. Nobody mentioned Sexton today—I mean yesterday. Late. Late.
8:30 a.m. Not nearly enough sleep. It would have been a nice gesture of hospitality if one of those sweet girls had slipped into the Prophet's Chambers this morning. Where are the groupies of yesteryear? For all that publicity we get on the grapevine, in the ten years I was single I got laid only four times while on readings. Once in New York, once in Portland, twice in Binghamton. Couple of times I struck out when booze had chilled the seed. Not a bad record considering I'm fat, bald, timid, have as much charm as a badger and reek of Right Guard. Mildred is offended that I carry my laundry around in a laundry bag. Where in hell am I supposed to carry it? In my ear? This desk must be over 100 years old. I'm charmed by tradition when I come east. I even lap up the seriousness and reverence afforded poets. None of that "My wife writes a little poetry" crap we get out west. But I love the west and one reason is that unlike this room and all others from Chicago east, the rooms there are kept cool and livable. God damn it is hot in here. Even that nice new room I read in last night was too hot. Cornell in a few hours. Goldbarth will save me from the nasties. Like having Groucho Marx on your side. Bruce Bennett told me last night about Englishmen living in Florence who remark aloud that Italy is a great country because there one can still find good servants cheap. Those awful democracies ruined so much that's good and right. They needn't worry. Soon they'll find all the servants they want. Some with Ph.D's. What a nightmare is on the way. I need some breakfast. I'm getting gloomy.

12:00 Noon. Recorded a couple of poems. Met Nesselhoff briefly. Seemed older than I'd expected but the light was tricky in his office. Had a good breakfast with the Bennetts and Evan the baby. The ham at the inn is as good as they say. Aurora Inn goes back to 1833. That's only 30 years after Lewis and Clark started west. Some sense of continuum one gets here. History is so recent out west. Who believes L & C were in all those places the signs claim? Mildred will be by soon. Why do I remember Cornell as a place where one is led to feel he doesn't matter? Had a good wild day with Bob Friedman there. What a sweetheart. Hope I see him soon. Baxter, Archie, Rosenberg and—Katz, that's his name, novelist Steve Katz. I wonder if he's there still. No one there I don't like, but I still have the nagging feeling—oh, what the hell. It's just a place and I'm just a poet, so stop the bullshit. Goodbye, naive, innocent, sheltered sweet girls. Stay that way as long as you can. In 15 years I'll be grown up myself and won't be able to write a lick anymore.
3:35 p.m. Ithaca. I feel better already. Mildred drove me down and occasionally her mind strayed to trivialities like the car, the road and where the hell we were. Drove through Ithaca and came back miles and got lost a couple of more times. She gives me a sense of the past, hers and Ripley’s, that is different from the one Ripley gives, but obviously the same past is there. Immediately I ran into Goldbarth and Robert Morgan talking in the hall. No waiting. We go out to lunch. Great seeing Goldbarth again, and there’s something touching and substantive about Morgan. I’m sorry to hear Norton didn’t take his new book. The Red Owl was pretty good I thought. Morgan is a shy boy from the country. Had the best hamburger ever in the east, good enough to have been made in the west. Cornell seems much more human than I remember it. Students not so well dressed, not taking themselves so seriously—that’s a vague impression at best. Years ago, people didn’t trust others who were poorly dressed. Now we don’t trust people who are dressed too good. Did Watergate do all that? The counter-culture change our values? No. I think I’m just getting smart. If I wore a tie to a creative writing class—oh, not a very good idea. I trust people who don’t care about dress or styles and who dress as if however they are dressed is a matter of complete indifference to them. I must trust myself. I read at 8:00. I hope I’m as good as last night. No sense spooking myself. Bless them. A room at the Ramada Inn with color TV and the playoffs on. A’s 1, Orioles 0, sixth. It works perfectly and it’s an Admiral. What happened to Admiral? At lunch the waitress asked, “Aren’t you reading tonight?” How did she know? “Because,” she said pointing at Albert and Bob, “they are poets.”

Thursday, October 10. 12:20 a.m. Far far better than I could have ever imagined. Big crowd and a good one. Goldbarth introduced and was funny and I felt relaxed going on. Read well but my voice rose too high at times. Hung in there though. My timing was fine. Baxter and Sherry Hathaway were there. Big party at the Hathaways after, with many fascinating people, Diane Ackerman (glamorous and forbidden), Jack McConkey. David Walker from Field was at the reading but not at the party. And from way back in those grim days at Iowa City, Judy Epstein. She had seen me at my very worst. Now, after all these years I got a chance to talk to her, to explain that lousy time and how ashamed I felt long afterward. God, she was nice about it all. Afterward, I felt like I’d taken a bath in sweet oil. I feel free and strong. A real cutie named Marion at the party. So young and lovely. My loneliness is working. Played with all kinds of ideas involving Marion, also Diane, also Judy and in all cases room 110, Ramada
Inn. But I ended up with Mocha Chip ice cream and a late movie that bored me. God I am dull. Colgate tomorrow. A football power in the 30's. Their scores were always given on radio. And Dexter Roberts, colleague at Montana, went there. Breakfast with Bob Morgan tomorrow. Then Albert and Diane will take me to Hamilton (Colgate). Something wild about Diane but kept private.

5:00 a.m. Terrible dream. I was back working at Boeing and was being pressured to go to Mars. I had quit teaching but my salary for going to Mars was exactly the same as my salary for teaching.

7:00 a.m. Do what you can. Do what you can.
We have the results of the cardiogram.

8:00 a.m. I must get more sleep somehow, somewhere. Maybe this weekend. My God I'll bet Baxter knows Ripley and in all the confusion I forgot to ask him. Rich Jorgenson was there last night. I'd just seen him in Boulder before I left. How could I ever imagine I wouldn't like Cornell? Isn't some standardization taking place? Are students here so much different than at Montana or Colorado? Last night someone told me Milt Kessler at Binghamton has the gout. Morgan due any minute.

10:20 a.m. Fine breakfast with Bob at Noyes Lodge overlooking Beebe Lake and the spillway. I recall being there years ago with Archie. I miss home even if I am saturated with charm. Archie and Jim Wright don't read anymore. Maybe I should quit too. After next spring. Stafford still at it though. Maybe reading and my naturally infantile nature help keep me young. Down to one shirt for tomorrow. Then a washing and we start again. I find Morgan an endearing man. His country shyness and quiet ways are captivating. A man one would never tire of. Very very real, as we say. Colgate soon. Bruce Berlind will be host. I like him already because he gave Vi Gale a good review in Poetry on her first book. I wonder what the writing program will do here when Baxter retires? They'll need a strong director, someone who can hold his own with the academics. The writing programs are beginning to pose a real threat to traditional education and even in Montana I've sensed more and more that I'm getting some sort of power I don't really want. I favor the more traditional study of lit yet it's getting obvious that many of the brightest students don't want to risk trivializing their minds the way scholars often appear to do, no matter how unintentionally. Am I
a traitor because I favor the academic study, bad as I was at it? Anyone would have to admit that English departments can get along without writing programs but not without Shakespeare. The writing programs are a humanizing influence though—I really believe that. How many lit profs have I met who have given up their humanity if they ever had any. And how many act as if literature exists so they can make a living. On to Colgate.

2:40 p.m. But not really. My watch has stopped. All thanks to Bulova and the 165 dollars of mine in their grubby fists. Maybe 5:00 or later. I've been sleeping soundly upstairs at the Berlinds in Hamilton, N.Y. Had lunch with Diane Ackerman and Albert Goldbarth in village of De Ruyter, another charmer among the many towns and villages I've seen. A good lunch in a homey little cafe. Great soup, plus vegetables and polish sausage. In daylight, Diane turns out not to be the glamorous sex object she seemed last night but a good humored down to earth girl who wears too much makeup. A congenial time. Lots of funny remarks. Lots of laughter. Albert gives me a copy of January 31. I'm on the dust jacket with some raving rhetoric. What the hell. If you like a poet why not unfurl a banner or two. Seems a shame I can't spend more time with Albert and Diane. Then around 1:20 Mary Berlind greeted us in her home, which dates back to 1840, the additions to 1930 or so. A beautiful house and despite the fact I'm bushed, I can't help noticing how attractive and gracious Mary Berlind is, in a way that no young girl ever is, the kind of woman you wish you'd always been smart enough to love instead of just lately when you got old enough to know what in hell it's all about. Like Ripley, though not in personality, but the same humane lovely qualities. I just woke up from a dream. I was one of a group headed downhill to a port that looked like Maratea Porto in Italy where I lived for awhile. It was a long way to go and I was terribly anxious. A young blonde girl who seemed to be my niece or daughter (what a square dreamer) told me she knew where my car was, the one I'd forgotten I had. It was close by and she had the keys and I felt great relief. When I woke up I had to pee and had an erection. I'm as interesting and complicated as table salt.

7:00 p.m. Dinner with the Berlinds and Peter Redgrove, the English poet who is teaching here this year. Bruce seemed a bit precious at first but I've lived too long in Montana. As the dinner went on he became more and more touching. Peter shy, as are many Englishmen, and charming. I feel rested and relaxed. Fine meal. Duck. Mary turns out to be nobody's fool when she cooks. Everything was very good and the dessert was elegant. Maybe I'm too relaxed. Can I get up for the reading?
Friday, October 11. 1:00 a.m. The audience was young and attentive and the room was a medium-sized classroom. Just the reading I needed after that strange delightful room at Cornell full of people and statues, classical statues with listeners hidden between among and under them. I read very relaxed tonight. My voice was strong and low and I didn't push at all. I could have gone on easily for another hour. A few students came over afterward to the Berlinds' and we had a relaxed evening. The low keyed is just what I need tonight. My timing got sloppy a little tonight mainly because I kept losing concentration. But the get-together was perfect after that splendid crush at Baxter's last night. Bruce is very relaxed with the students and they obviously admire him very much. I think he gives students confidence the way the late Jim Hall did at Washington. Makes them think they are capable of understanding anything. That's a gift. I wish I had it. I'm afraid I give the impression that I don't understand anything and by the time we're finished neither will they. Bruce is quite high on Redgrove's work and lent me a few books. I'll try to read some poems in the morning. Somewhere along the line I thought I saw some sadness here, in the Berlinds, and it endeared them to me or me to them—I never could get that verb straight. There's something admirable about the Berlinds. Whatever this sadness, disappointment, whatever, is, they are people who would never show it overtly or let it affect the way they treat others. That is admirable. Never to take whatever bugs you out on others. I feel oddly close to them but if I said so they'd think it strange after such short acquaintance. I suppose it is. What in hell am I, some sensitive novelist?

2:35 a.m. Can't sleep. Took a triavil. Sleeping schedule is way off. I must not get dependent on triavil.

8:40 a.m. Dead tired. Turns out Redgrove is good at times, very good. But he does suffer from that inability of the English to distinguish a poem from literature—

To sate on writhing passages of scenery

And sometimes he gets completely haywire:

Seed themselves to seed the seed of seeding seeds.
Mary gave me an affectionate peck on the cheek for a goodbye and it meant more than I suppose it should. I suppose it’s just that she’s a good woman and I’m lonely and her kiss, unsexual as it was, was also reassuring. I am worthy of being loved. No matter what I say, or do.

From Redgrove I learned W. S. Graham is back writing again. God, what a good poet he was. I was in Cornwall in ’68 and went to the library in St. Ives to find out where he lived. You can find the address of any poet in England at the public library—maybe you can do that here. I didn’t go see him, the admiring American fan. Later in London I heard his drinking was advanced and he was in a pathetic state, so it was just as well. But someone should tell him how very good, how really excellent *The White Threshold* and *The Night-fishing* are. I remember that poetry conference in London when the young Englishman said how awful *The Nightfishing* was. It couldn’t be understood. It didn’t speak to ‘the people,’ and Jim Dickey whispered in my ear, “How marvelous,” meaning the book. That’s good news that he’s at it again, but I shouldn’t expect too much. If you lay off a long time it’s hard to pick up.

*Oneanta*, 11:35. John Sastri drove me down. His mother is secretary of the English Department at Colgate, and his father owns a restaurant in some nearby town, nearby to Hamilton. It struck me as we were leaving Hamilton that I’d never seen Colgate and it must be beautiful. It’s on a hill, but I don’t even know what it looks like since this morning it was in fog. Sastri majored in math with a philosophy minor at Boston College. He is very rural. He said whenever people spoke of New York they always were speaking of the city and there’s more to New York than that. He is proud of rural New York and I don’t blame him. No mention of my current book on the posters. Why not? I’m in a lobby on the third floor of the Ed building. Paul Italia, my host, should be here soon.

*4:00 p.m.* Just woke up after a nap I needed worse than teeth. Charlotte Mendez and I went to lunch on the Oneanta campus. She’s a friend of Mildred and a nice girl, quite nervous, and, like me, anxious that people like her. I’m in Lorenzo’s Motel, about seven miles east (I think) of town. Hartwick College, also in Oneanta, is having homecoming and the closer motels are packed. Lorenzo’s is run by Italians and features, according to Italia, superb Chinese cooking. Why not? The best Chinese restaurant in Portland, Oregon is run by Norwegians. Met Dick Frost briefly on campus. He and I had poems on facing pages in a *TriQuarterly* years ago. His poem is
about some photos of a tour. Mine was "Montesano Revisited," one of my favorites. I didn’t remember I’d published that poem in *Tri-Quarterly*. God damn but I am old. Ten years ago I knew where every poem had been published. Of course ten years ago I hadn’t published so many poems. Dinner with the Frosts tonight. Had a coffee with Italia before the nap. He is *un siciliano*, first generation, from the Bronx. Very energetic, extremely handsome young man, alert, receptive. Really big city: just try to take advantage of me. Had a good chat with him. We discussed poverty, how it is generated in America and why here, far more than anywhere else in the world, it becomes a sin, a source of shame. Paul thinks, rightly I suppose, that it’s closely tied to racial bigotry. Paul is a compassionate man, like a lot of bright New Yorkers I’ve met. It struck me just before I fell asleep what a tough life Charlotte Mendez has, three children, divorced eight years. I know marriage isn’t everything but damn it all, the right husband would make life easier for her. I like her because she puts out much energy for others and like me, has nothing of what could be mistaken for character. I can’t stand character. Hitler, Napoleon, Ghengis Khan all had character and what trouble they caused, the pricks. The owner of the motel knows who I am. I guess there was a picture and an article in the local paper. He is impressed. Don’t be. I wonder if I can watch the series tomorrow in Binghamton with Milt Kessler, Fred Garber, Phil Dow, Roger Stein. Dear men. It will be good to see them. One thing about being a poet, you meet so many interesting and good people. Met the acting chairman briefly, Graham Duncan. I am dead on my feet. I must concentrate hard tonight and give a good reading. I dreamed about football fields and cabbages this afternoon and it was a happy dream but I don’t recall much of it. Coming to Binghamton, Milt Kessler, you old burly Brooklyn Jew, Fred Garber, you slight Boston Jew. Remember fishing from your dock 15 years ago in Lake Washington? Oh, long ago. Juanita Dow. Marge Barger. Sonny Kessler. I must not get automatic tonight. Lorenzo, if that’s his name, is very friendly. He told me there’s a lake nearby, a part of the Susquehanna River and it has trout, perch, bass, walleye. Cooperstown is only 18 miles away and I won’t get to see it, and me a baseball nut. But I’ll get to watch the series tomorrow. Italia says the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown is done in very good taste and I trust him. "Superman" is on TV. We don’t get "Superman" in the west, those fool program directors. The acting is not the best. Here I am worried about giving a good reading and Superman is catching 16-inch shells in his bare hands in midair and exploding them before they can land on the island where his friends cringe in fear. I was never one for values.
11:55 p.m. The reading went well. Surprisingly well, considering I did it in my sleep. Hit a gold mine here in both students and faculty. Duncan is a most decent guy. Dick and Carol Frost are having me to their farm tomorrow to watch the series and stay overnight. Binghamton Sunday. Don Peterson is a huge warm man and was a great help in the audience during the question and answer session afterward. Had dinner with Dick and Carol Frost. He has a slight social eagerness I find disarming and it makes me comfortable. Behind what he says is the unstated tacit notion that we touch and help each other in small important ways. Carol is quieter, very pretty and strong looking. The reserved stuff is New England, I think. Stumbled a couple of times tonight and lost attention for a few lines—I find people don’t know when I do that, when I’m not hearing myself but thinking about Ripley or fishing. Read the new poem, “At The Cabin.” I hope Moss takes that for the New Yorker. But odds are against it. He gets so many poems.

Saturday, October 12. 8:50 a.m. Woke up way too early here in Lorenzo’s. I’ll probably be dead after lunch. Feels good to be going to a farm with two nice peole. Turns out Richard Howard has been most kind and helpful to Dick Frost too. Richard must surely be the most generous guy going on the scene today. How many people have I met that he’s befriended in some very real and helpful way. Lord, he has practically been my literary agent for years, and I’m pleased that, thanks to him. I’m well enough known now not to need his help, to need bother him anymore. I’ll never be able to repay him. That dedication in The Lady wasn’t nearly enough. I miss Ripley terribly. If some eager coed kidnapped me, I’m sure she’d understand. Where are the groupies of yesteryear? So far, I’ve detected no one trying to seduce me. But maybe some one has. I console myself with my own insensitivity to love games. If I had been the bartender on the Nile barge, I wouldn’t have noticed anything going on between Anthony and Cleopatra.

9:45 a.m. My God, Lorenzo’s doesn’t open for breakfast. For shame, Lorenzo, and the restaurant is part of the motel complex. I’ll eat nothing until after 12:00 when Carol will pick me up. Maybe that’s good. I miss the swimming pool at Colorado and can’t help but notice I’m getting blimpier and blimpier. Could I take a cab to town? Checkout time at 11:00. An hour outside on my feet in the mean east and me without my Gary Cooper six shooter. Why don’t I try hitchhiking? Why don’t I relax? I could try a poem.
Why Oswego Reminds Me of Home

Mainly because the wind and gray unite somewhere far out on Ontario and start the long roll shoreward, and because the waves crash white against the rundown carousel.

Oh, stop it for the wind's wake. No socks. No shirts. One pair of shorts. But the lovely Frosts have a washing machine and a dryer. I'll go to Binghamton clean as a trout in a high mountain lake. And, with luck, rested. How does that tireless Stafford do it?

11:50 p.m. I can't believe the developments. It turns out Dick Frost was a jazz drummer, a Dixieland jazz drummer. My God, and that's my favorite music. He has records and tapes like no one I know. He even has Kid Ory's "Creole Song." Oh, I haven't heard that since Bob Peterson played it for me years ago—where was that, Portland? And I love it. Love Peterson and Dorothy too. How are they, I wonder. For some reason, Bob always knows what I'll like. Frost has Louis Armstrong doing "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You." Teagarden doing "I've Got A Right To Sing The Blues." You sure do, Jack baby. Old tapes of the San Francisco station that plays only old tunes, the Dutch Swing College Band. Teagarden's "Blue River"—I haven't heard that in 15 years, maybe 20. Oh, oh. I can't believe it. I have really struck gold. Dick is a fine drummer and he plays a tape of the last performance he did with a German jazz band. He drummed with them for some time when he was in Germany. One of the last numbers, he sings "St. James Infirmary." He told me the Germans arranged his final gig with them so that he got all the money the club took in that night and did it in such a way he could not refuse it. When he got up to say his goodbyes after months in the band, he couldn't make the speech he prepared. He just broke down on the stage and cried. Must have been a great moment for him, one he will hoard forever. Shit, I feel like crying just thinking about it—the war and everything, how once we were killing each other—oh, let's not get silly, Dick. Dick Frost's poems are quite interesting and he showed me a beautiful one Carol published in a *Seneca Review*. Harry and Dorothy Bloom joined us for dinner tonight. The Frost children, Daniel and Joel, are delightful. Saw the series too. Oakland 3 to 2. I love the Frosts. I can't help it. I love them. I asked Dick why Rock and Roll seemed so cold to me, though I like some of it. Why it doesn't have that humane joy and sadness of Dixieland. He told me
it's because it has no syncopation. That the warmth and affecting quality of Dixieland is due in part to the syncopation. It struck me I miss that in a lot of modern poetry too, even poems I like. A lack of rhythm, which is really finally a lack of feeling. That's due in part to WCW who tried maybe too hard to find an "American rhythm" so we wouldn't be bound to English rhythm anymore. But, due to some of his misguided followers we ended up with damn near no rhythm at all. Anyway, all that literary crap gives me a pain. Jesus God, when I hear poets giving all sorts of literary reasons why they write or write the way they do, I think the world has gone nuts. That stupid idea you learn everything that's gone before and then try to do something new and different. Really different poets try to write the same as others—they just don't quite make it because they can't. How many times have I seen some profound literary statement made by a poet, followed by poems that demonstrate the most usual and predictable sensibility. I digress. It's hard to leave the Frosts. I could stay here forever in this old and charming farmhouse listening to Ory's "Creole Song." If it's the last thing I'll do I'll find that record someday—but I've only seen it on 78. Maybe it's on a 33 long play by now. The Frosts will drive me to Owego, I mean Otego, tomorrow and I'll take a bus to Binghamton.

*Sunday, October 13. 2:50 p.m. Binghamton. Colonial Inn.* Just had lunch with Fred Garber. He looks great and I'm glad to see I'm not the only one balding. God I'm tired. Four to go. All those people to meet, and that I want to meet. Heyen, Poulin, Koch, Hecht, Snodgrass, Booth. And here I have yet to see Phil and Juanita Dow, Liz Hewitt, Milt and Sonny, Marge Garber, Roger Stein. He and Joan are separated. I'm sorry to hear that. Both sweet people. Hate to see a couple bust up when they are both sympathetic. This is the motel I shacked up in years ago. What a long delicious night that was. No sleep but lots of relaxation. I think that was in room 242. This is 276. That's about right. I was 34 years younger then. Dinner tonight with Fred and Marge. Chinese food, right here, part of the motel and rumored excellent. Read tomorrow at 8:15. I'm getting dull from fatigue and meeting too many people. My conversation is as interesting as the Barretts of Wimpole Street. World Series in an hour. Color TV. I wonder if that girl is still around. I am temptable. Where are the groupies of yesteryear?
5:40 p.m. Dodgers 1, A's nothing. Fourth inning. It's good to be alone in the motel watching the series. I've not really despaired for a long time, not even alone like this. I hope I don't have to think in terms of survival anymore. What a change Ripley has made. Donald Hall was so right in his note a few months back when he said we were lucky to get a second chance at life. I remember 20 or 25 years ago in *Hudson Review*, a reviewer sneered at WCW because he said one wrote poems to be a better person. I remember how sophisticated the reviewer seemed and how I agreed with him. But *Hudson* and I were wrong and Williams was right. You have to have written poems awhile to know how right Carlos was. The difference was in those days, because of the new critics, art was looked on as the pure object untouched by human hands. Who the fuck did we think were writing poems—giraffes? But WCW was an honest man and he knew what he was talking about. Isn't that exactly what Eliot was hoping for in *Prufrock*? That if he wrote the poem he would be better than J. Alfred? I'd bet on it. I know it's true. Oh, I am the wise old poet. Anyway, I'm old. 95 today.

11:20 p.m. Dinner with Fred and Marge. Very good Chinese. Got Ripley on the phone. She sounded so damn good to me. Warm. Loving. I am very homesick. Maybe I could feign illness and fly home. Had to take another triavil last night at the Frosts. I can't do that tonight. I just can't. How can I be so tired and yet need drug myself to sleep? Maybe the late movie will be a French film. No one makes me sleep better than the French—their movies do it every time, like a big plate of fried onions. It was good to see Marge looking so well.

*Monday, October 14. 8:20 a.m.* A sound sleep. Dreamless. Woke up around seven and took no tablet last night. Milt should be here soon. I feel strong this morning, but it's 12 hours before the reading. I hope I'm not dragging by then. Fred has become big in his field, what with the book on Wordsworth and all those articles, plus two books in the making. He travels a lot now and might be in Boulder in November. I'll check with Ed Nolan when I get back. Samuel Eliot Morrison and Willie Mays are on *The Today Show* this morning. What a nice man Morrison is. I bought Dad his entire history of naval operations in WW II. Following Morrison, flamenco dancing which I loathe. Dancing should never be that serious. Every number starts as if we are about to see *King Lear*. Except for a good solo hoofer I don't care for dancing much. Off with the Spaniards.
2:50 p.m. A fine breakfast with sweet Burly Milt. Milt’s concerned his book hasn’t been reviewed. Except in a couple of places. I don’t blame him. That’s too good a book to go unnoticed. How often that happens. One of the best books in my collection, *Aegean Islands* by Bernard Spencer, went by with little notice in 1947 or whenever. Ruth Pitter in England. Milt has an interesting idea involving the denial of the normal ways of establishing manhood for Jews and how it affects their writing. No Jew could have written Kinnell’s “The Bear,” he says. I didn’t know Jews could hunt and fish only to obtain food, never for sport. While I have no affection for hunting like I do for fishing, and recognize the reason we ought to limit ourselves, not endanger species and all that, I wonder if the Jewish denial of doing something for any reason but the practical doesn’t deny a silly but essential part of the mind. I know I am never outwitting the trout since the trout has no wits and doesn’t know what in hell I’m doing, but it was fun to think so all those years. Don’t our minds convert reality in those strange ways just to make life more interesting? If I understand Milt he feels that the cultural restraints imposed on Jews limit the amount of material available for development of a stance, a poetics, whatever. I wonder if just being a minority group member and knowing you have an audience rather than a majority group member and knowing you have none, is a hindrance toward development of a poetic system? I mean a way of writing that excites only you at first and, hopefully, others later. I think maybe it has less to do with what class/race/religion you find yourself in and more to do with where you live. I think I don’t know what I’m talking about. Milt’s theory involved the Cossacks. I’m still trying to tie that down. He explained it but my mind is soggy these days. At last, Betsy Hewitt. So lovely, so classy. Do Milt and I become more aware of ‘our humble beginnings’ when around her? If we do it certainly isn’t her doing. I basked for awhile in her charm and her office. Phil Dow came by, and Roger Stein, both looking as healthy as German tourists in Rome. Juanita Dow can’t be in town for the reading. Shame. But I’ll call her and say hello. Roger and Joan ARE living apart. Double shame. But apparently without regret or bitterness. Roger reminded me he knew me in Seattle when I was sweating out getting a first book published. My Lord, has it been that long? Yes, it has. I was 37 then, when my first book came out. Stafford’s came out when he was 47. Bill must be 60. Can that be? Poets never get old. They do die however, just like mortals. Milt gave me a copy of *Clarendon*, the student writing magazine. At last the student writing is good here. A few years ago it was awful. One named Paul Corrigan
writes about fish. Ah, a fellow spirit. I must phone Juanita and say hello. A good woman. How come all villains are men—in real life I mean. Hitler, Ghengis Khan, Xerxes. Not a woman among them. Nixon. Let’s not forget him, if we can’t. My mind is slipping. I hope I read well tonight with all those dear old friends in the audience. Is every room back here overheated. I damn near died in the student center today. Lady MacBeth? But that’s art. A few female ne’er-do-well’s in Raymond Chandler. In real life, too, but they are waiting for me to return with the coke I left 30 years ago to get. Lunch with Phil and Milt. Good company always.

October 15. Tuesday. 12:20 a.m. They applauded so hard and long I wondered if the ghost of Yeats hadn’t sneaked in behind me on the stage. And a moving tribute from Milt in the introduction. I used to say I might have made it as an actor but I know now I wouldn’t have. I understand actors live on applause and, while I like it, it just doesn’t mean as much as the way I feel when I’m writing. Donald Hall said this all best in a recent APR. Couldn’t hold my concentration at first but things improved. I was best at Wells. Best voice. Best timing. Fred said I was getting professional. The word, dear Fred, is slimy. A good dinner with Milt and Sonny, Betsy, Jack and Jane Vernon. Fred and Marge. There was something familiar about Jane Vernon and it turned out she’s Barbara Frick’s sister. Barbara was in a class of mine at Iowa and she’s good—she was good before she took my class but when I see her poems published I take much credit. There’s another of MY students. They are pretty sisters, look a lot alike and also like Barbara Stafford. My jacket is soaked with sweat. I must try to sleep without triavil. Milt at 8:30 for breakfast. I’m starting to run on nerves. How do politicians stand it, town after town. How about actors? How can you play the same part eight times a week for two years? I hope Ripley babies me for a year when I get back. Jim Wright was so right in Missoula last time I saw him when he said it’s hard for a poet to find a woman who knows and understands what being a poet is like. And I found the best. I can tell how tired and punchy I’ve gotten because I make verbal noises when I have nothing to say, hoping I won’t offend someone with silence. Brockport tomorrow. Four hours on the bus to Rochester where Tony Piccione and Heyen will meet me. I hope I’ll be ok. My mind keeps wandering. I’m happy for Milt, for the good writers he’s getting. What slim pickings here a few years ago.
7:55 a.m. Dog tired. Six hours sleep. Very humid. The room is stifling. Even after the shower I feel clammy and dirty. I'm looking right past Brockport, Rochester and Syracuse to Ripley and Boulder. It must be hard for women poets to find the right husband, too. Should I quit reading, like Jim and Archie? It is killing. Where are the groupies of yesteryear?

8:20 a.m. Elizabeth Ashley is on The Today Show. Also a couple of authors of books on industrial injuries and diseases. Same old story—collusion of industry and government to avoid humane protective laws. I got tired years ago hoping man might become less depraved. Ashley is getting rave reviews for Cat On A Hot Tin Roof. I never cared for her in the movies. She was awful in Ship of Fools. One day I held the hand of a nice woman, an actress named Patti Jerome, on the plane from Salt Lake to Missoula. Jerome plays now and then on the Newhart show on TV, and was terrified of flying. I couldn't blame her. We were on one of those damned Convair 580's that Frontier runs about the Rockies. The stewardess told Jerome not to worry, that the Convair 580 was the safest plane of all because it could be landed anywhere easily. The only problem is they bounce around so much you find yourself thinking of the options all the time you are in the air. Jerome was so scared she asked me to comfort her so we held hands all the way to Missoula. Jerome was on her way to Livingston to play Sally, of Sally's, in the movie Rancho Deluxe, and she told me how much fun it is to work with Ashley and how she was looking forward to it. Sally's. I must get one of those pencils they put out for advertising: "Sally's. Where The Customer Always Comes First." Ashley is good fun on TV this morning, just like Jerome said. Now it turns out she's a good actress too. It's a good feeling when an artist you thought was lousy turns out to be good.

9:45 a.m. Milton talked about the minimum number of proper nouns in Ignatow's work. He said the city breeds so much pain that people there shut off memory. Is that the problem I have when I have students from big cities—I try to get them to name things and they don't want to?

12:55 p.m. Went well. Now I see how actors do it. They just do it. Find something more inside. Tony Piccione and Bill Heyen were waiting in the bus stop and we roared off to Bill's for lunch. What a great good woman Bill's wife is. Han. Very down to earth, warm, genuinely sweet natured. We stopped off at Al Poulin's on the way to
Tony’s. Poulin is recovering from open-heart surgery necessitated by blood clots. They tell me he never exercises, is so driven he often sits in one position for 20 hours studying and writing. Even laid up, his body covered by a form-fitting stocking under his clothes, his mind can’t stop buzzing. Reminds me a bit of John Hawkes, that same obsessive, and in the best sense, slightly mad music going on in his mind. Boo Poulin is beautiful, of Greek heritage, but very level-eyed and candid when she speaks. I doubt she has ever ‘used’ her looks the way Greek sirens do. Al seems to express a lot of opinions and I’d guess his opinions change often. Tony’s wife, Sandy, cooked lasagne for dinner. That didn’t break my heart. It was excellent. She knows how to cook. She’s Jewish, it turns out. Nearly everyone here in the east seems Jewish or Italian—I guess as groups go they are my two favorite. But then in poetry circles you meet awfully nice folks. The best people I’ve met as far as groups go are black jazz musicians, or maybe just jazz musicians. I ramble. A’s 3. Dodgers 2. I watched some of the game at Poulin’s following the reading. Logan came over from Buffalo. Oh, it was good to see John again. I ran up into the audience and embraced him as he walked in. John is fat. Looks like a man who has been seeking and getting gratification and who is also paying for it. A good audience. But then I’ve had no bad ones this trip. They really take poets and poetry seriously back here. Turns out the rumors about John’s drinking are overblown. He sticks pretty much to wine and doesn’t start the day too early. His doctor told him his liver is hanging in there. Good news. Tony and Patti Petrosky, editors of Rapport, were there at dinner and at the reading. A lot of solid young people over from Buffalo. Some came with John. John is such a good teacher. He always ends up with students who are good writers—a lot of that because of himself. Tomorrow I do a TV tape with Tony and Bill Heyen. I called Ripley. God but I miss her and the kids. I must get some sleep tonight. I’ve been signing autographs since I got here. They really take poets seriously. Now, out west . . .

Wednesday, October 16. 7:55 a.m. Not nearly enough sleep for the day ahead. TV tape at 10:30. Then Rochester. Maybe I’ll meet Hecht today. Robert Koch will pay me today. Maybe that will give me strength. Is money blood? God I heard interesting things yesterday. Turns out Han’s father was a German captain killed at Stalingrad when she was four. Houghton Mifflin is going to publish Poulin’s translations of the Duino Elegies that APR printed and that I used in the Rilke course last year. How many poets have told me about all the
ass you get on these tours. I always feel like I am the type who ends up at the chairman’s house commiserating with the Spenserian over the decline of academic standards. Academic standards. The last refuge of scoundrels. Why is it those who worry about academic standards are so often the dullest minds in the business, the most boring teachers, the pedantic drudges. I wish I had more time here. Breakfast this morning with Bill and Han. That’s good news about HM doing Poulin’s translations. They are fine, read like poems. One thing he did, he told me, was shorten the sentences, make two and three out of one of the German. A smart thing to do. I am moving in a blinding fog, grogging toward Friday and the Syracuse airport, and home to Ripley. One clean shirt left in the bag. I’ll wear this one I’ve got on at Syracuse and Rochester, then use the clean one to go home. Hello, Ripley. Here’s my dirty laundry. How about a welcome kiss?

3:00 p.m. Rochester. Tony drove me up. Breakfast with Bill, Han and Tony, then the TV thing. Bill and Tony gave me a lot of support and strength up there under the glaring lights. After the taping we watched the show. It wasn’t bad though I squinted a lot. Lord I’m old. Sagging chin, less hair than I thought. We grow old, John Logan. We grow old. We shall wear our high school annuals soiled. Where are the groupies of yesteryear? I am punchy. I’m in an ex frat house, now called the Medieval House, in a fine guest room. Where are the torture racks? The dungeons? My host, Leroy Searle, is sure a good guy. He even carried my bag all the way over here for me. Dinner tonight with the Searles, Ramseys, and a couple of writing students. Can I nap now? I need to. Why do poets complain about these readings? I’ve been treated wonderfully everywhere I’ve gone. Two to go. Tonight. Tomorrow. All done. I’ll be flying home to Ripley. It seems a year since I left.

5:20 p.m. Did I nap? I don’t think so though the time between 4 and 4:45 went fast. Searle will be here in 20 minutes. Can I do it one more time? Twice more? I’m regressing to my old habit of hearing no one, of listening to my own self inside. I hope people don’t notice. Could they understand that I did that as a child, shut out one world and listened only to my inner self to make sure I survived? That terrible necessary withdrawal. It returns now and then. I want to reach out, most of all to Ripley, to let her know how very much I love her. But I’ll probably go to my grave hearing only myself, shutting others out even with my final breath. What is this melodramatic crap. Just because I’m too tired to hold attention to what others say. Christ
sake, I'm just tired, that's all. Not hopelessly withdrawn. I hope the Dodgers win tonight so I can see at least one game at home Saturday. Jerry Ramsey tonight. Bill Matthews speaks of him with such fondness. At Brockport they told me this is a rich school but it looks a lot older than the other SUNY's. Or is it a SUNY? Take a bus tomorrow to Syracuse. Wait a minute. Koch is here. This is where I get paid. I've been years away from Boulder. Centuries from Montana. I truly think we should live in one, no more than two places all our lives. People who live a real long time, live to be 140, always seem to come from places where nothing changes and no memory is necessary. Do I know that? I think so. I think that's right. A memory isn't needed because things are just the way they always were. Is it the internationalization that Rilke speaks of, the psychic hoopla we have to go through to make sure "what thou lovest well, remains" that takes too much toll finally? We kill ourselves with changes and improvements. Stagnancy is life's ally. That's sad. That's just awfully sad.

Tuesday, October 17. 12:30 a.m. The reading went ok though I lost my timing at first, a simple failure of concentration. A nice party at Leroy and Annie Searle's. Jerry Ramsey and Dorothy were there. The dinner before the reading was nice but I was boorish—I can't help but go back to old selves when I tire. The writing students were sweet. At some point shortly after I picked up a small dish of whatever from the salad bar I realized I was eating squid, and I didn't like it. A glorious girl named Carolyn was at the reading, later at the party. What a doll. Oh, down down, you dirty old man. May I get dirtier with each passing day. What gorgeous women there are. Carolyn. What a beauty. I got into some stupid argument with a woman over nothing, like I was in grad school or something. I never argue. It's a waste of time. I am not myself anymore. Rather I am my former self and I don't like that one. It's a shame to be like that when nice people like the Searles and Ramseys are about. Bob Koch gave me the money and will pick me up at 9:30 for breakfast. Girl named Beth Jennifer Jarvey wants to be remembered to Bill Matthews. I'm so worn. So tired of meeting people though they have been wonderful to me. It just struck me that I'm losing a sense of whom I meet. And the Searles and Ramseys are interesting and good people. I sense that but I know I cannot experience them. I am out of gas. I am inside myself. A man at the reading tonight was at the reading last night in Brockport. That's flattering. I fear he got the same show. One to go. Only one. Then home. Win tomorrow, Dodgers. Save one game for home. I'm sorry Ripley but if that luscious Carolyn had just snapped
her fingers tonight—what a dreamer. I'm older than her father, I'll bet. Goddam it, I'm hard up, tired and homesick. Anthony Hecht never showed up. Sorry to have missed him. A couple of people I don't know who irritated me at the party. That's a sure sign I'm pooped, when people irritate me. I'm very edgy, and my sociability is forced. It's a shame. With good people like the Searles and the Ramseys about, and Bob Koch. Heyen and Poulin are wrong: Sealtest isn't that much worse an ice cream than Breyer's.

1:20 a.m. Damn it. Had to take a triavil. How can I be this tired and need help to sleep?

9:10 a.m. I'll say this for triavil, if you use it you are refreshed when you wake. As Satch Page would say, I've got the juices jangling. Jerry Ramsey told me Hecht's health has been bad and that's why he didn't come to the reading, probably. I'm sorry he's sick. Koch will be here soon. He just remarried too. One to go. Tomorrow, I wing home.

1:10 p.m. Syracuse. The sweethearts. I read at 4:30. And nothing is planned afterward. William Wasserstrom and I passed each other three times in the bus station. I thought he didn't look like anyone named William Wasserstrom, and he thought I didn't look like a poet. So even if the Dodgers lose, I still get to see the final game. Oh, lovely Syracuse. Snodgrass will pick me up at 4:00 but Booth is on leave. How sad to miss him. He sent me such a generous note a year or so ago. Had an interesting breakfast with Bob Koch this morning. We talked about Xerox and Kodak, how this might be a pretty good country if all corporations were as humane and civic minded as they are. But of course you can't have a civilization dependent on the benevolence of some damned business firm—not for long. And not for long is right. We talked about Watergate, too, how we understood people like Erlichman and Haldeman, how we had seen people growing up out of the depression able to distort morality through misuse of language because the plain crude talk of the poor just wasn't adequate. They had a chance to be middle class, to never return to the threat of destitution and they took it. It meant learning (or making up) a new language, and it happened to our generation. No wonder the kids found us phony when they grew up, able to misrepresent reality to insure financial stability. Of course a few of us didn't make it but that was just lack of talent. We became commercial fishermen or poets. Romantic but perhaps no more laudatory.
3:25 p.m. The bastards. The pricks. No room service though the restaurant is part of the motel. I need coffee. I must wake up after that nap. In one hour I read and then it is over. All over. Finished. No one to meet. No party to go to. They seem less hospitable here than elsewhere. When I told Wasserstrom I had to be at the airport at 6:30 tomorrow he said I'd have to get a cab—as if it were out of the question that anyone would or could take me. That's ok. It's part of the same attitude that gives me the night off, the chance to see the series. Levine was here last week. That's a tough act to follow. Such a wonderful poet AND reader. That 1933 is as beautiful a book as I've seen come out in this country. What book was ever more moving? I slobbered around the house for an hour after I'd finished it. It seems a year since I saw Ripley, Matt, Melissa. Tomorrow I'm going to relax like dead kelp on the beach. If there's ground fog, and delay here, or at O'Hare, I'll run screaming "The Wright Brothers are Mothers" through the airport. Wasserstrom gave me a pamphlet on the writing program here. I wish we had their money for assistantships, fellowships, scholarships at Montana. George P. Elliott is here. We used to publish in Accent 20 years ago. I see Booth, Snodgrass and Elliott have had Guggenheims. A novelist here, Sally Daniels, and a Donald Dike who edited Delmore Schwartz's essays. I wish I kept up, and knew who people are. But who does, except Richard Howard? Stafford maybe. I'm on soon and I'm not awake. Beautiful wind outside. Leaves gyrating. Windows rumbling like thunder over the border. And rivers moving more in dream than real must be ruffled. The Erie Canal in Brockport. Lake Ontario, where I started years ago and not far from here. Wells with all the harm removed. Sad Oswego. The wind makes my mind move everywhere.

7:45 p.m. It's over. Done. Christ what a grind. It went well too. Where does the energy come from? Maggie Gratzer had me to dinner. She's a Montana girl I met some time back. She's a good friend of Dennice Scanlon and was pleased I've been trying to help Dennice get a book published. God almighty but Dennice is good. Maggie is married to a Hungarian named Miklos. Carolyn Wright, a writing student from Seattle, was along. Snodgrass turned out to be a warm giving man. Elliott very handsome and gracious, though like many people here in the east, a bit reserved. Jay Meek was in the audience. Man named Bob Hursy, I think, a friend of Liz Libbey. Dear old Liz. There's another good poet. She and Dennice were both undergrads in my class, the same class. What two powerhouses. Someone I vaguely recall I had a beer with in Iowa City. I had a lot of beers in Iowa City.
Home tomorrow. Oh, baby. Maggie will drive me to the airport. That is sweet of her. She has to get up extra early to do it. Wasserstrom announced my title as *The Lady in Kicking River Reservoir*. That’s ok, Bill. I’m too old to be temperament al and besides that’s a damn good title. The series starts in a moment. Bless Syracuse.

11:00 p.m. The A’s again. Now I must get up at 5:30 to catch the plane. What a pleasure that will be. Ripley, my love, I’m on my way. The next entry should be in Boulder.

*Friday, October 18, 4:15 p.m.* Boulder. It was enough to make you believe in God. Out of Syracuse on time and out of O’Hare only 15 minutes late. But before we get too religious, let’s consider Stapleton Airport in Denver. Who the hell is running it, the Three Stooges? I was fuming. We sat there for minutes blocked by another plane and just off our right wing were three empty parking places we could have used but no, we had to wait for the assigned stall and we were blocked. And Ripley waiting for me inside the airport. May TWA be taken over by Infantile Airlines. May TWA and Stapleton Airport go down in history as Hitler’s favorites, as Nixon’s favorites. I was short-tempered and surly. Poor Ripley. She’s so damned understanding and it is wonderful to be back with her. I’ll be damned if I ever leave her this long again. Now I’ve had a nap and am not only nice to Ripley but I even forgive TWA and Stapleton. And what about the tour? What comes back? Certainly the waters, Lake Ontario, Lake Cayuga, Lake Beebe, the Erie Canal, the leaves flaring everywhere, the thousands of beautiful homes, the sense of a stable continuum, most of all the humane people I met everywhere. I feel vaguely that for all the fatigue, even the disorientation I felt now and then, I’ve been enriched, given the chance to think that poetry is in good hands and, because of the students I met, will be for a long time. Some things I didn’t note that come to me now. How often Lewis Turco was spoken of with admiration, not just at Oswego, but at other schools. He is a kind of leader, licensed by his energy and devotion. The sour news that started this journal is still sour. It always will be. I talked about Sexton with several people but didn’t jot any of it down. Not many theories, and plenty of sadness and distress. Along the line somewhere, someone remarked that Sexton had, by upping her reading fees, helped isolate herself from those who admired and understood her and made herself available only to crowds that regarded her as a novelty or a freak. I like to think we can keep each
other alive, some of us. But that’s naive. We know nothing about suicide, so why speculate? I only wish she could have found the reassurance I just did, the reassurance that my life is important. I always knew that, but it’s nice to have the knowledge reinforced by a lot of good people, as well as by poems. Her life was important too, because it was a life and was hers. I wish she could have felt that deep enough to still be with us. But why get foolish. She’s gone and we are left with what she did and what she was. Five minutes after I arrived home, Marilyn Thompson called and asked me if I’d like to read in Glenwood Springs. Her timing could have been worse. She could have called four minutes after I got home.

*Saturday, October 19. 9:50 a.m.* We are refusing all social invitations. I just counted my money. I am gloating like a miser.
MAKING CERTAIN IT GOES ON

At last the Big Blackfoot river
has risen high enough to again cover the stones
dry too many months. Trout return
from summer harbor deep in the waters
of the power company dam. High on the bank
where he knows the river won’t reach
the drunk fisherman tries to focus on
a possible strike, and tries to ignore
the hymn coming from the white frame church.
The stone he leans against, bleached out dull gray,
underwater looked beautiful and blue.
The young minister had hoped for a better parish,
say one with bells that sound gold
and a congregation that doesn’t stop coming
when the mill shuts down.

We love to imagine
a giant bull trout or a lunker rainbow
will grab the drunk fisherman’s bait
and shock the drunk fisherman out
of his recurrent afternoon dream and into
the world of real sky and real water.
We love to imagine the drought has ended,
the high water will stay, the excess
irrigate crops, the mill reopen, the workers
go back to work, lovers reassume plans
to be married. One lover, also the son
of the drunk fisherman, by now asleep
on the bank for no trout worth imagining
has come, will not invite his father
to the happy occasion though his father
will show up sober and properly dressed,
and the son will no longer be sure of the source
of the shame he has always rehearsed.
Next summer the river will recede,
the stones bleach out to
their dullest possible shade. The fisherman
will slide bleary down the bank
and trade in any chance he has of getting
a strike for some old durable dream,
a dream that will keep out the hymn
coming again from the church. The workers
will be back full shift. The power company
will lower the water in the dam
to make repairs, make repairs and raise rates.
The drunk fisherman will wait for the day
his son returns, divorced and bitter
and swearing revenge on what the old man
has come to believe is only water
rising and falling on climatic schedule.

That summer came and is gone. And everything
we predicted happened, including the death
of the fisherman. We didn’t mention that before,
but we knew and we don’t lie to look good.
We didn’t foresee the son would never return.

This brings us to us, and our set lines
set deep on the bottom. We’re going all out
for the big ones. A new technology
keeps the water level steady year round.
The company dam is self cleaning.
In this dreamy summer air you and I
dreamily plan a statue commemorating
the unknown fisherman. The stone will bear
no inscription and that deliberate anonymity
will start enough rumors to keep
the mill operating, big trout nosing the surface,
the church reforming white frame
into handsome blue stone, and this community
going strong another hundred years.
CONTRIBUTORS

WILLIAM BEVIS is a Professor of English at the University of Montana and is currently completing a book on Montana writers, funded by a State grant.

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MAGAZINES RECEIVED

The Agni Review (No. 17), Sharon Dunn, ed., Box 229, Cambridge, MA 02138. $3.50/copy.
Akros Review (Fall 82), Victoria Quaint, ed., English Dept., University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325. $3.50/copy.
The Beloit Poetry Journal (Winter 82-83, Spring 83), Robert H. Glauber, ed., Box 2, Beloit, WI 53511. $1.50/copy.
Bloodroot (Spring 83), Joan Eades et al, eds., P.O. Box 891, Grand Forks, ND 58206. $3.50/copy.
Carolina Quarterly (Winter 83, Spring 83), Marc Manganero, ed., Greenlaw Hall 066A, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. $4/copy.
Cedar rock (Winter 83), David C. Yates, ed., 1121 Madeline, New Braunfels, TX 78130. $1.50/copy.
The Chariton Review (Fall 82, Spring 83), Jim Barnes, ed., Northeast Missouri St. University, Kirksville, MO 63501. $2/copy.
Colorado-North Review (Fall 82, Winter 83), Laurel J. Kallenbach, ed., University Ctr., University of Northern Colorado, CO 80639. $3/copy.
The Connecticut Connection (Spring 83), 166 South Main Street, Cheshire, CT 06410. $2/copy.
Fiction International (No. 14), Joe David Bellamy, ed., Dept. of English, St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY 13617. $8/copy.
Indiana Review (Fall 82), Michael Wilkerson, ed., 316 North Jordan, Bloomington, IN 47405. $3/copy.
The Iowa Review (Winter 81), David Hamilton, ed., 308 EPB, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242. $4/copy.
Kayak 61, George Hitchcock, et al, eds., 325 Ocean View Ave., Santa Cruz, CA 95062. $2/copy.
Magazine (Winter 83), Jocelyn Fisher, ed., PO Box 806, Venice, CA 90291. $1/copy.
Mississippi Review (Winter/Spring 83), Frederick Barthelme, ed., Southern Station, Box 5144, Hattiesburg, MS 39401. $4.50/copy.
The Missouri Review (Winter 83), Speer Morgan, ed., Dept. of English, 231 Arts & Sciences, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211. $3.50/copy.
Nebraska Review (Spring 83), Margaret Hayes, ed., Southeast Community College, Fairbury, NB 68352. $2/copy.
The New Southern Literary Messenger (Winter 83, Spring 83), Charles Lohmann, ed., 302 South Laurel Street, Richmond, VA 23220. $1/copy.
North American Review (Dec. 82, March 83), Robley Wilson, Jr., ed., University of Northern Iowa, 1222 West 27th Street, Cedar Falls, IA 50614. $2.50/copy.
Pequod (No. 15), David Paradis, ed., 536 Hill Street, San Francisco, CA 94114. $4.50/copy.
Poetry Now (Issue 37), E.V. Griffith, ed., 3118 K Street, Eureka, CA 95501. $2/copy.
Quarterly West (Fall/Winter 82-83), David Baker, Robert Shapard, eds., 317 Olpin Union, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. $3.50/copy.
Santa Fe: Poetry & the Arts (Spring 83), Peggy S. Alberhasky, ed., 115 Delgado Street, Santa Fe, NM 87501.
The Small Press Review (Jan. 83-May 83), Len Fulton, ed., P.O. Box 100, Paradise, CA 95969.
Sou'wester (Fall/Winter 82-83), Dept. of English Languages & Literatures, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, Edwardsville, IL 62026. $1.50/copy.
Stand (Vol. 24, Nos. 1 & 2), Jim Kates, ed., 45 Old Peterborough Road, Jaffrey, NH 03451. $2.50/copy.
Tar River Poetry (Fall 82), Peter Makuck, ed., Dept. of English, Austin Bldg., East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27834. $2.50/copy.
Touchstone (Vol. VIII, No. 1), Eugenia Riley, ed., P.O. Box 42331, Houston, TX 77042. $1.75/copy.
Western Humanities Review (Spring 83), Jack Garlington, ed., University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. $4/copy.
Willow Springs (Fall 82), Bill O'Daly, ed., P.O. Box 1063, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA 99004. $4/copy.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Erosion, Jorie Graham, poems, Princeton, $6.95.
Express, James Reiss, poems, Pitt Poetry Series, University of Pittsburgh Press, $4.95.
Flowers from the Volcano, Claribel Alegria, poems, translated by Carolyn Forche, Pitt Poetry Series, University of Pittsburgh Press, $5.95.
Home, Jim Simmerman, poems, Dragon Gate, Inc., $6.00.
Houses and Beyond, William Kloefkorn, poems, Platte Valley Press, $4.50.
Only the World, Constance Urdang, poems, University of Pittsburgh Press, $5.95.
Orchards: A Sequence of French Poems, Rainer Maria Rilke, poems, translated by A. Poulin, Jr., Graywolf Press, $12.50.
Plums, Stones, Kisses & Hooks, Ronald Wallace, poems, University of Missouri Press, $5.95.
Sign of No Time, Maggi H. Meyer, poems, Im-Press, $5.00.
Turning Out the Stones, Marc Harshman, poems, State Street Press.
The Valley of Minor Animals, John Woods, poems, Dragon Gate, Inc., $6.00.
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Two funds have been established at the University of Montana for those wishing to contribute to a permanent memorial to Dick Hugo. Contributions may be sent to the RICHARD HUGO MEMORIAL FUND, c/o University of Montana Foundation, 600 University Avenue, Missoula, MT 59812; or to the RICHARD HUGO FUND FOR CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE, c/o Rich Ives, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812. Donations to the Foundation fund will be allowed to accrue toward the end of establishing a Richard Hugo Chair in Creative Writing at U of M.

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