Cut Bank 26

featuring: Wendell Berry
Robert Bringhurst
David Bottoms
Rick DeMarinis
Bev Jafek
Ernest Hemingway
CutBank

where the big fish lie

A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award
Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award

CutBank announces its annual competition for the best short story and best poem published each year in CutBank. First Prize: $100.00 each category. Honorable Mention: $50.00 each category. Send submissions to: The Editors, Cut Bank, c/o English Department, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana 59812.

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The Editors and staff of CutBank 26

are pleased to announce

the winners of the 1985-'86

Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award
Judge: Harry Humes

First: Lydia Vizcaya, Powdered Sugar Donut
Honorable Mention: Jack Driscoll, Look Park: Florence, Massachusetts, 1958

A.B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award
Judge: James Crumley

First: Barry Kitterman, Rivers of Wood
Honorable Mention: Linda Weasel Head, Coyote Tries Again

The Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award and the A.B. Guthrie, Jr. Short Fiction Award are made annually and selected from work published in CutBank.
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Spring/Summer 1986

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The editors and staff of CutBank 25 dedicate this issue to Don Kludt.

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Featured Poet
II.

The pasture, bleached and cold two weeks ago,
Begins to grow in the spring light and rain;
The new grass trembles under the wind's flow.
The flock, barn-weary, comes to it again,
New to the lambs, a place their mothers know,
Welcoming, bright, and savory in its green,
So fully does the time recover it.
Nibbles of pleasure go all over it.
III.

Thrush song, stream song, holy love
That flows through earthly forms and folds,
The song of Heaven's Sabbath fleshe
In throat and ear, in stream and stone,
A grace living here as we live,
Move my mind now to that which holds
Things as they change.

The warmth has come.
The doors have opened. Flower and song
Embroider ground and air, lead me
Beside the healing field that waits;
Growth, death, and a restoring form
Of human use will make it well.
But I go on, beyond, higher
In the hill's fold, forget the time
I come from and go to, recall
This grove left out of all account,
A place enclosed in song.

Design
Now falls from thought. I go amazed
Into the maze of a design
That mind can follow but not know,
Apparent, plain, and yet unknown,
The outline lost in earth and sky.
What form wakens and rumple this?
Be still. A man who seems to be
A gardener rises out of the ground,
Stands like a tree, shakes off the dark,
The bluebells opening at his feet,
The light one figured cloth of song.
IV.

To Mary

A child unborn, the coming year
Grows big within us, dangerous,
And yet we hunger as we fear
For its increase: the blunted bud

To free the leaf to have its day,
The unborn to be born. The ones
Who are to come are on their way,
And though we stand in mortal good

Among our dead, we turn in doom
In joy to welcome them, stirred by
That Ghost who stirs in seed and tomb,
Who brings the stones to parenthood.
VIII.

The dark around us, come,
Let us meet here together,
Members one of another,
Here in our holy room,

Here on our little floor,
Here in the daylit sky,
Rejoicing mind and eye,
Rejoining known and knower,

Light, leaf, foot, hand, and wing,
Such order as we know,
One household, high and low,
And all the earth shall sing.

—Wendell Berry
A Row of Eagles

The cop beside the plugged cannon pulls a ticket book from his pocket and turns toward a row of parked cars. How long it takes him to see me double-parked across the square, to wave me on is the time I let myself remember you sitting in the lawn chair in the red haze of maples, holding in your swollen and useless hand the ball of hard rubber that never rebuilt one ounce of grip.

Grandfather, in the memory’s shop clouded by the dust of Tate marble, I walk you again down the long alley of stone taking shape, stand you by the righteous shoulder of a statesman, the wing of an eagle, put the chisel, the hammer in your hand, but you keep turning on me, hobbling out of my childhood and into that yard, into that chair and the risky tilt of the maple shade, waving me home from high school, from practice, with the one good hand that meant to me, at sixteen, another afternoon of chores.

The eagles gray more every year, the exhaust, the layers of soot darkening on their shoulders like the grand indictments of the memory. Grandfather, if we are ever worthy of the years that know enough to change us, why does my memory search for you in the musty rooms of the house run over by the road, in the woods gone to office space around the dog lots, to find you only in that one place, the invalid’s chair tilted in the shade of a tree?
And why does it bring me back to the only thing left of you in this town — stone birds on the roof of this courthouse — to feel again the justice that keeps them so aloof, that keeps my hand from tracing in the carved grace of a wing the pardon of a life's wrong turns and turnings away?

— David Bottoms
She

There is a woman in the world
who lives between places,
the woman of the cleft
in the sprouting bean.
The moon tugs at
her ebb and flow.
She walks boundary lines
to gather fern-tips for food,
slips through kitchens
to steal the flavor from bread,
leave the loaves.
Her skin does not touch
its dress, that shifts with lighting,
outside one color’s hold.
Unmanned, unchilded, she
bears private seasons,
saves her flesh for the cattails,
the seashell breeze.

— J.D. Smith
Christmas Day, El Paso, 1984

We were good to each other because the shadow of mountains was washed in killing light, the blinding, hating fist of the past year, the escape to a barren terrain where we could celebrate what we created.

We laid primitive gifts in the yellow grass, left them there to petrify into a language we could understand, let them turn into slabs of rock for next year's night star to find, pinpoint with its beam of hope.

We called the names of past Christmases because we missed faces we had touched, the ones that came to us with and without songs, stayed to welcome the falling snow, and promise us their voyage ended here, in our houses burning by the river.

We left the desert because those stones formed the shape of all our Christmases to come, and we left when it turned into the only sanctuary on Christmas night, the only place to gather rocks to build a shrine for the ones we loved that would never return to us.

— Ray Gonzales
Ceremony

My father fishes when he's out of work
so early that he cannot see
his lines cast out into the dark.

He lights a cigarette, a spark
sets scales off in the sea.
My father fishes when he's out of work

and tries to wake me with a jerk
to the shoulder. "Get up. Get up," he coaxes softly.
His lines cast out into the dark

where I'm dreaming, like a shark
cuts water. He waits until I'm ready.
My father...Fishes when he's out of work!

As if by ceremony he could shirk
his sleepless nights, or convince me
his lines cast out into the dark

amount to something more than a mark
on water, more than a plea.
My father fishes when he's out of work.
His lines cast out into the dark.

— Christopher Millis
Hosting the Beavers

From this clinic
I can see the huge chunks
of snow still melting in the mountains,
waiting like salmon
to make a run.
That is where it starts —
past the fat rivers and up canyons
where waters, crystal
on crystal, gather,
gush in chutes,
cut igneous tracks, fork
and unfork and are a creek
trotting itself through cottonwoods
and meadows like a green horse.

I hug a knee to my chest.
A finger as big as a scroll
is shoved up my ass,
clicking high in my head
the clear purpose
of their flat wide tails,
like stove lids, shielding
their inside world.
And a world it must be.
I have seen their work —
crazed water stilled and widened
into ponds like paw prints,
mammoth trees felled and kneeling
at stumps over mounds
of their own white tears,
gnawed concentrically
from their hearts.
Like wide, white teeth pinching
life from bark, things
tear in my stomach, splinter
my guts. Parasites, they think,
sent by beaver,
time-released, bobbing
microscopic from beaver shit
to my own chilled lips —
invisible,
until one day
they quicken
and ball me up like an egg.

I swallow four feet
of encapsulated
string, one end taped to my face.
I must wait like a cat
five hours, the string uncoiling
in my bowels, winding
itself into place.
They say the gag reflex
is the trick
when they pull it out
to check, finally,
their catch.

I think about beaver country,
how a life must pass now
without seeing that rippling
of back into water.
I think about a ranch
I worked hard on one summer.
The Resistol hat I bought
with my first wages
tipped back high
on my head for a week.
Then — one day the hot work
and my belly too young even for beer,
and my puke knitted bale by bale
into a looser and looser haystack.
The dark ride home on the Greyhound.
The stops in Absarokee and Columbus
and the crumpled hat — 100% beaver —
spinning into the blackness
just outside Laurel.

The string pulls on my face,
biting into the corner of my mouth.
I pull up some slack
and with it a green bitter taste.
My insides are alive
with climbing this rope.
They swim my dark channels.
The string tugs.
I am pond.

— Damien Whalen
Smokey Water Doubled Over

1.

A nylon rope tugging me up out across the water aims my skis into the enormous stretches of Lake Sakakawea so hastily that ridges along the cove have slid their necks beneath the reservoir of Garrison Dam before I dare lift mine.

Far ahead, Grandpa, his boat bellyflopping waves, sprayed, scans my towline clasped to a metal rod lassoing the motor’s blind head.

The pair of angled waves rolling away ever wider form an arrowhead; its shaft, froth bubbling longer than the length of my skis.

Beneath them, I’ve heard, lies Elbowoods, a town Hidatsa, Mandan and Arikara Indians had built near the Big Muddy.

Nowadays rumors hint about fish evolving in depths sun sealed; their eyes, white scales. Not a few, gigantic, like wiggling rotted beams, taste of burrowed silt.

My waterskis smack across the smooth foam. Fintails thump, so I look for the air bubble pearl of a huge, blind fish surfacing.
2. Arikara Legend

The Wolf and Lucky-Man Create Land

Wolf bid a duck circling
an immense lake to dive
down beneath the water to fetch dirt
from the bottom. North of shore
Wolf flung the mud, said, let it be
prairie for rambling buffalo.

Lucky-Man sent the same duck
underwater for even more lakebed.
Thrown south: buttes, coulees formed.
The people, he said, will choose
shelter for their ponies and dogs.
In wintertime, kicking
storms will thin the prairie.

Soon a river wobbling
between the two shoulders of land.
Northeast, on a flat square lot
by Whiteshield, the nearest water
the kind that lies in asphalt,
heat wavered,
ever splashing the tires,

an Arikara powwow has begun.
Dancers in gaudy costumes,
numbered contestants moving to drum chants,
aimlessly circle an electricity pole
set in a grassy ring
enclosed by concessionaires, tents,
campers, a gate with a sign
that says, NO DRUGS OR ALCOHOL ALLOWED.

Fur trader’s whiskey: gunpowder,
river water, Jamaica ginger,
chewing tobacco or molasses
sparked by a jigger of booze.

Suddenly an amplified voice
hushes the drummers. The dancers halt,
while the grasshoppers sit munching
the announcer’s platform
built of plywood not sacred cottonwood.

The snow tree’s split-axed
log faces once stacked by Indian woodhawks,
then berry-stained, dealt as cedar
to steamboats owned
by J.J. Astor’s American Fur Company.
Brigadier General Lewis A. Pick's Corps of Engineers cast a concrete dam. 
Pekitanoui, the smokey river of dirt, bloated the valley now as exposed as northern prairie.

Along the old riverbed, flooded groves of snow trees still huddle. Their gaunt watersilvered arms, snapped off above the wrists, stretched, can't reach the trinket beads strung on powerlines overhead; those sparkling baubles meant to warn only bladed wings.

Awaho: floodplain timber, wild fruit and medicinal herbs both nurtured by surface water. The bottomland soil held remnants of Like-A-Fish-Hook village.

The widened river washed over gravestones, split the three tribes of Fort Berthold onto lands forked by swollen creeks. Electric plants took root.

Lifted from the rising waters, the Mandans' Lone Man Shrine: a water willow sash marking the high tide around the stockade He built to save the tribe from a great flood.
Cars driving west from New Town
cross a bridge moved upstream;
its original site swallowed by Lake Sakakawea.
Nineteen spans, each named
for a different chief, but the exit
honors the Mandans' Four Bears.

Killed by a smallpox epidemic
brought aboard a steamboat, St. Peter's,
Mato Tope called from his deathbed
for an uprising to leave
not a single wasicun alive.

From the bridge, Four Bears Motor Lodge
beckons. Modern currents
flow from the outlets
in each room. Visitors,
lured by a chance to race outboard motors
like ponies down the flooded valley,
reel in big, ugly fish. Some
of them, eaten, leap hard again.

— Daniel Hill
Wind Old Woman

Hides the wind in a cave,
in her pocket, in the
   basket, keeps it hidden
in her pipe, in her mouth, in her mind.
   Breaks it over wings,
   blows it under doors,
sweeps it out, throws it off,
   when she's mad
   holds it in.
She hides it. She hides it.
   She keeps it in her bag.
   She keeps it
at her back, lets it live
   in the middle,
   lets it spread
through the trees,
   takes it with her
   when she runs,
gives it life
   when she breathes.
Wind Old Woman
   Wind Old Woman
   Wind Old Woman
shake it from your hair
   twist it into song
   sing me through the night.

—Francine Sterle
Litost

for Milan Kundera

The woman has no eyebrows:
Her eyes are houses without roofs.
Therefore, she is never shocked
By the incidental brutality of
The drunken soldier, the fearful poet.

She cannot knit her face into
Confusion when her child asks her
If angels are invisible.
The child, accustomed to her blankness,
Walks away without his imagination.

She smiles at the doctor before
He inserts the tube that will suck
Someone’s life from her, but the smile
Is a mystery, a picture without a frame:
No irony, no wistfulness, no cynicism.

Even when she cries, her tears reflect
Nothing, because there is not punctuation:
No exclamation point! You bastard!
No comma, I will be all right,
No period. And that’s that.

She lives in a nation without eyebrows:
When the Soviets stole them, the nation
Did not raise its eyebrows in disapproval,
Did not shoot its eyebrows up in shock,
Did not gather its eyebrows in pain

Remembering how things were, thinking
Of what could have been; surprised
But wise, so not shocked; grieved but not
Unable to see the irony,
And calling for the angels of revenge
So passionately
That the nation's face
Begins to paint eyebrows on itself,
Visible only to those who understand how pain
And laughter, wisdom and innocence, yearning and
Vengeance can copulate, giving birth to the litost
Of a lost nation, the keening of an ageless orphan.

—Deborah O'Harra
Home Remedy

Our world was slashed with irrigation ditches running
Through the trees leaning over Grandma's hedge.
Our Mama's cancer scar cleft shallowly across
Her broken brow
We took sticks and fished standing on a plank
Watching last year's leaves turn and beckon under
Slow brown water

And it could all be traced back here
To leaf rot, and slime mold
Generations of dead kittens
Underneath the dead kitten tree

Traced to rhubarb growing wild behind Grandma's hedge
In the trees in the
Tall grasses
And to the ragged lilac bushes forming rough arch
Break in the double row of cariganas,
Pale lilac flowers, scentless

Trace it to the gravelled rabbit
Carried home in streaming arms
Green corduroy coat, new
The rabbit buried in the winter garden

Trace her scar back into the trees,
Pry it loose
Watch it slither across her brown-haired
Brow

Wash her in the holy stream of
Irrigation ditch
Knock on plank with fishing sticks
Three times round the dead kitten tree
Her heels ploughing, turning up small bones
Bring her forth through the trees and the
Tall grasses
Through the hedge, out of reach of even the leaning-
Over trees

Rest her on clipped grass, against shapely pruned evergreen,
Sponge blue into her
Thirsty eyes

—Shelley Sanders
Letter to my Father

The children now call you Grandpa-Who-Died.  
I remember them skipping in and out of your illness through all of their small lives, as you slumped in your paralyzed chair, a thin strand of spittle splitting your lips, your discolored tooth and difficult grin, the squint of your pale, blind eye.

I wondered what they must think of you, clipped to your catheter sack and urine, your hands clumped limp on your laprobe, your legs cut off at the thigh.

Now they tell me they remember Grandpa-Who-Died: how he walked and ran and played with them, hand in hand, side by side.

— Ronald Wallace
The Monks

are up with the sun
to pitch hay and milk the goats.
A young girl at the gate,
watching. She is there
every morning, and the monks
are so silent, so strong
and supple beneath their robes.
One monk with a red beard,
eyes as green as new grass,
invites her into the chapel
to pray, but she will not go
because she knows
Catholics are in the palm
of Satan's hand.

One night she climbs
over the fence, sneaks
into the chapel and prays
anyway. She stares
at the carved Christ,
thin as a skeleton.
He seems so real.
Even the blood
seems real, carved
dripping from his feet
like water dripping
from a faucet...
Cattle Mutilation

Casner and I
were checking rain gauges
when we found the cow,
stiff and bloated
like a balloon, her ears
neatly clipped off.
Casner shuffled away,
cursing. It's been happening
more and more, we find
one here, one there,
with glassy eyes
round as the moon.
sometimes the lips
sometimes the eyes
sometimes the testicles
or even the heart.
And no blood, as if
it had been drained
beforehand.

Helaman Noyes thinks
Satan worshippers are
the cause of it.
Glen Ekker says
It's them goddamn
government people
doin military experiments
the sonsabitches.
Whoever it is,
they leave no clues.
It gives cowboys the creeps.
The strangest thing,
the worst thing,
is how the carcasses
go untouched. Crows

(no stanza break)
won't pick at them, coyotes won't come near. We left the cow and drove away. It's about time we had some rain Casner said.

— Mark Rozema
Joining the Mourners

Seven year olds don’t die shooting marbles. I knuckle down, release, a cat’s eye breaks the circle. Mother calls me from the porch. I don’t want to stop my game. She calls and calls my name.

Grandpa speaks of cave-ins, rockslides, how death flies guided by the name of the man it calls. How his number never came up in the mine. How once he carried a friend up the shaft not knowing the extra weight was death.

Funeral home, funeral home...the words tumble in my sleep: a silo, cave, or tunnel. I see you, my father, sitting at the end of the shaft. The miners’ lighted caps bounce up and down. Their lights shoot toward you, yet each to each is dark, separate as stars. Your goodbyes echo off the wet rocks, somersault over the crossties of tracks. Still seated you rise through a rabbit hole. The miners clap and wave.

I find you in the coffin not seated or waving but stopped, cut off, flat on your back. When you worked midnight and slept days, Mom would shut the bedroom door keeping out my calls to hide and seek, the ring of jacks on the kitchen floor.
Mother's silence looms taller in black. 
She asks only my silence, that I not count 
the yellow roses spread against 
the satin lid. She bends once to ask 
that I kiss you goodbye. I refuse.

The mourners sit and talk. 
The babas count beads. I count 
the marbles in my pocket. No one rises 
to kiss your face.

II.

Father, I carried you heavy 
as lodestone through half a life. 
I accept my refusal to kiss your death. 
I drag your carcass home now the way the hunter 
struggles the dead deer 
to the main road. You are 
my food this winter, my store 
against the days of shorter light. 
I toss your bones like jacks 
against the dark.

I see your face now, rubbed 
marble small. 
What remains swirls like a glassy. It is 
as opaque as rock 
struck from the heart of the moon. 
I keep nothing of you, my father, except 
one knucklebone for luck.

— Jeanne Mahon
Robert Bringhurst was born in 1946 and raised in the mountains of Alberta, Montana, Utah, Wyoming and British Columbia. He spent a number of years in the Middle East, Europe and Latin America, working at various jobs. Bringhurst reads and translates from half a dozen ancient and modern languages.

The author of several books, including The Beauty of the Weapons, Bringhurst's latest, The City of Blue Roofs, is forthcoming soon.

Since 1973, he has made his home on the coast of British Columbia outside Vancouver.
Six Poems from the Book of Silences

From the mouth came speech, from speech fire. A nose appeared; from the nose came breath, from breath air. The eyes appeared; from the eyes came sight, from sight the sun. The ears appeared; from the ears came hearing; the four quarters. The skin appeared; from the skin came hair, from hair vegetation. The heart appeared; from the heart came the mind, from the mind the moon.

Aitareya Upanishad
Uddalaka Aruni: A Song for the Weavers

Earth is woven of water, as water of air. The world is earth, and the earth is all this. This is that. That is you, Svetaketu, my son. The outer is inner.

The sea has no end, in spite of its edges. The seed is the tree's thought. The seed is the speech of the tree. The seed is the tree thinking and speaking its knowledge of trees.

The mind is the white of the egg in its opening shell, the mind is the ripening meat of the seed. Out. In. Out. In. What is is the weaving. We with our breathing

are sitting here carding and spinning the air.
Wáng Bì

Wáng Bì of Wei
lies dead in his hut
at age 24. His mind
is now one with the mountain.
His flesh has been grass,
voles, owls,
owl pellets, grass.

The use of the is
is to point to the isn’t.
Go back, said Wáng Bì:
Look again at the mind
of the sky and the heart
of the mountain. The mind
is unbeing. The mind
of heaven and earth
is unbeing. Go back,
look again. What is,
is. It consists
of what isn’t. Are
is the plural of is; is
is the plural of isn’t. Go back,
look again. What isn’t,
is. This
is the fusion of substance
and function, the heart of the sky
and the mind of the mountain.

To be, said Wáng Bì,
without being: this
is the way to have virtue.
Don’t fondle it, stand
on what isn’t. We sink, said Wáng Bì,
when we set out to stand on what is.
I can affirm
that there is nothing to affirm
and there is nothing to deny.
What neither is nor isn't is
what is. It is
unthinkable, unspoken. So
we speak of it as ultimate
and ordinary, absolute,
routine. And this
two-sidedness
is its function.
Take no shit, said Linji. Behead the Buddhas. Cow the pig of the world.

Take hold of it, use it, but do not give it a name: this is the ultimate principle.

Sleep, eat, pee: this is the essence of the way.

Build a boat in the mountains, a ferry at sea,

but no speculation, no fortification, no bridges, burned or unburned.

There is nothing to do. The answer is perched on your lips like a bird.

If it nests in your mouth, how will you speak? How will you weave if it nests in your hands?

Singing and dancing! These are the signs of the silent and still.

Is? No. Isn’t? No. Is and isn’t? Neither is nor isn’t? No! No! None of these and more.

Host and guest, we eat one another for breakfast. This too is the way.

What you see in the eyes of the deer as it wheels and flees is not terror but horror.

Only a man with no hands can reorder the world.
To hear in the chirp of the bird the original isn't, and in the answering chirp of the bird that what is is what isn't and this is the whole of the dusty world is to die a good death, trampled by watersnakes, torn on the antlers of the snowshoe hare.

There is nowhere to go. Nothing is there. What is is all here, and what isn't is everywhere.

You can begin by renouncing your home, if you are so brash as to think that you have one. Know this: the true face has no features, the true man no name and of course no address.

Dying is one more simple thing everyone does, like scratching the ear and undressing.

Thought and not thinking are one. Is and isn't are one. Sword, swordsman, stroke and not striking are one. One and not one are one. One is not two. One is also not one. This arithmetic lives in the flowering heart of the world.
Danxiá Zǐchún

The whole earth closes
like a fist and touches,
once, the rimless drum,

and slowly opens
like a rose
while no one listens.

The skull on the hill
wakes from its dream
before morning.

Impeccably dressed
though it is
in moonlight and moss,

and well fed, and well
rested, it gives
not a thought to returning.
Let me tell you a story. The gardener and the cook sat together in the garden. A jay sang. The gardener tapped his fingernails against his wooden chair. A jay sang again. The gardener tapped his chair again. A jay did not sing. The gardener, for the third time, tapped his wooden chair. The cook was sitting quietly, while all this was happening, sipping his tea.
Sutra of the Heart

The heart is a white mountain left of center in the world. The heart is dust. The heart is trees. The heart is snowbound broken rock in the locked ribs of a man in the sun on the shore of the sea who is dreaming sun on the snow, dreaming snow on the broken rock, dreaming wind, dreaming winter.

The heart is a house with torn floorboards. The heart is a seeded and peeled grape on the vine, a bell full of darkness and anvils. The heart is a flute with four fingerholes played in the rain. The heart is a well dug upward.

The heart is a sandstone canyon in the high Triassic fields, inhabited by grass, postherds and scapulae, femurs and burnt corn, with horned men and mountain sheep painted and pecked in the straw-colored walls.

The heart is three bowls always full and one empty. The heart is a four-winged bird as it lifts and unfolds. The heart is a full set of goatprints, a pocket of unfired clay and a stray piece of oatgrass: two fossils: one locket; a drenched bird squawking from the perch in its overstuffed cage.

The heart is a deep-water sponge tied up with smooth muscle in two double half-hitches, sopping up blood and twice every second wrung out like a rag.
The heart is a grave
waking, a corpse walking, a tomb
like a winter well-house, pulsing
with blood under the wilted noise
of the voices. The heart is a cut root
brooding in the worn earth,
limping, when no one is watching,
back into the ground.

The heart is four hands serving soup
made of live meat and water.
The heart is a place. The heart is a name.

The heart is everything, but nothing
is the heart. The heart is lime and dung and diapers
in a hole. The heart is wood. The heart is
diamond and cooked turnip, lead and precious metal,
stone. The heart is light. The heart is cold.

The heart is a smoking saxophone rolled
like a brass cigar in a mouth
like the mouth of Ben Webster,
something perforated, folded,
always emptying and filling,
something linking aching air
and a wet, shaking reed.

The heart is four unintersecting
strokes of the brush in Chinese,
with these homophones:
*daylight*, *zinc*, *firewood*, *bitterness*, *joy*,
*earthbreath* and *lampwicking*,
up which the blood is continually rising.

The heart is a pitcher of untasted water.
The heart is a white mountain
which the woman in the moon,
her left breast full of cellos and her right
breast full of violins,
climbs and is sometimes carried
up and down.

The heart is found
in the leaking bucket of the ribs,
in the distant hills, in the lover’s
body, the belly, the mouth,
in the empty wheel between the knees.

The heart is being
knowing only that it is;
the heart is dumb; the heart is glass.

The heart is dust
trees locket rock sponge
white mountain peeled stone
house flute bell rain

The heart is being aching, being
beating, being knowing being
that not what not
who not how not why
it is the beating that it is.
Rubus Ursinus:
A Prayer for the Blackberry Harvest

Reaching through thorns,
milking the black
udders with stung
wrists. Sister and
mother and un-
named stranger, say:
whose is this dark
blood on my hands?
Thirty Words

Knowing, not owning.
Praise of what is,
not of what flatters us
into mere pleasure.

Earth speaking earth,
singing water and air,
audible everywhere
there is no one to listen.
For the Bones of Josef Mengele,
Disinterred June 1985

Master of Auschwitz, angel of death,
murderer, deep in Brazil they are breaking
your bones — or somebody's bones: my
bones, your bones, his bones, whose
bones does not matter. Deep in Brazil they are breaking
bones like loaves of old bread. The angel
of death is not drowning but eating.

Speak! they are saying. Speak! speak!
If you don't speak we will open and read you!
Something you too might have said in your time.
Are these bones guilty? they say. And the bones
are already talking. The bones, with guns
to their heads, are already saying, Yes!
Yes! It is true, we are guilty!

Butcher, baker, lampshade and candlestick
maker: yes, it is true. But the bones? The bones,
earth, metals, teeth, the body?
These are not guilty. The minds of the dead
are not to be found in the bones of the dead.
The minds of the dead are not anywhere to be found,
outside the minds of the living.
Tending the Fire

This story belongs to Ron Evans of Saskatchewan and to Jesús Elciaga of Oaxaca and to others from whom I have heard it, in one shape or another, in Tamazulapán and the Sawtooth Mountains and Toronto. In some lesser way the words, and also the places, through which it is told in this version belong to me. What interests me, though, isn't the shifting and tenuous ways in which the story belongs to one or another of us, but the deeper ways in which we all (all of us here, now, in this moment which repeats through space and time) belong to the story — and belong to the places through which it is or might be told. It is a simple — some say much too simple — story after all. As well as a true one.
It was either a little or a long time ago,
and the old woman who made the world,
day before yesterday, had only just made it.
The wind picked up, and the sunlight cut
through the air, where it had never been before,
and the old woman who made the world
pitched her camp in a high meadow
not very far from the middle of things,
and looked at the world, and said to her dog,
*Well, Dog, do you think it'll do?*
(She was fishing for compliments, I guess,
which is usually dangerous, but she did it.
She said to the dog, *Do you think it'll do?*)

And the dog said, *Grandmother, yes,*
it's the way I have always imagined the world.
The spruce trees look like spruce trees, the mountain
larches look like mountain larches, the balsam
firs have the unmistakable odor of firs.
*But Grandmother, these and the others*
*seem to have places to be in the world.*
The rabbit, the mountain cat, the blacktailed
deer, the varied thrush, the squirrel
all have their places, like the mosses
on the rocks and the bright green
lichen hanging in the lodgepole pine.
I'm the only one here, Grandmother,
with no one to chase or to run from
or to run to, and I'm lonely in this world.

The old woman poked up the fire and sighed
and said, *Dog, I should make you someone to love*
*and look after if that's how it is.* And she made
men and women, then, as a gift,
to cure the loneliness of the dog.

And the dog said, *Grandmother, thank you,*
and guided his humans out into the world.
The old woman sat there, thinking, alone
in the high meadow, tending her fire,
watching the anemone and yellow lily
sprout through the snow, and the phlox and the grouseberry
flower. Then she thought she saw something travelling
up the valley, dodging the fallen-log
bridges, sloshing through each of the streams.
The dog reappeared at the edge of the meadow
and trotted up close to the old woman's fire.

You're back for a visit already, said
the old woman. Dog, is anything wrong?

The dog said, Grandmother, now that you ask,
yes: it's those humans you gave me.
They listen, you know, but they don't seem to learn,
and I came back to ask you to give them something
I think they should have. Grandmother, please,
would you teach them to speak? Would you teach them
words, so they can tell one another their lies
instead of keeping them secret?

The old woman
shifted a burned stick farther
into the fire and reached down a little ways into
the ground, and found a jagged, black stone,
like a piece of black basalt, and washed it in the stream,
and set it in the north end of the meadow,
and then she said, Dog, that stone
is the stone of speech and storytelling.
Those humans will be able to say what they choose to say
as long as it's there. And no one I know
would want to disturb it.

Grandmother, thank you,
said the dog, and he turned and headed down
the valley, to be with his humans again.
The old woman sat in the high meadow not too far from the middle of things. She watched the swelling swamp-laurel shells and the ripening willow galls and the wind. She watched the purple saxifrage, the yellow heather and the partridgefoot flower, and she saw way off, once again, a dark shape making its way up the valley. The dog reappeared at the edge of the meadow and ambled with his long tongue up by the fire.

You're back again, dog. Is anything wrong?

Grandmother, yes. It's the humans again. You remember I asked you to teach them to talk. But now they just talk and talk all the time. It isn't enough, and it's too much. Grandmother, please, would you teach them to laugh?

The old woman who made the world picked up a stick and poked at her fire and reached a little deeper into the ground and took a crooked, yellow stone — pale, like yellow quartz — and scrubbed it in the stream and set it in the east end of the meadow. Then she said, That stone, dog, is the stone of laughter and the stone of dreams. Those humans will be able to laugh just fine, and maybe have a few new things to talk about too, when you see them again.

Thank you, said the dog, and he went right back to his humans again.
The old woman who made the world
sat watching the mountain windflowers spilling
their plumes, and the willow leaves turning
and the aspen leaves starting to turn,
and then the aspen leaves falling,
and the fir scales floating down out of the firs,
and then she saw something far off, moving
once again. It had four feet and a tail,
and it was headed straight for the meadow.
The dog came wearily up by the fire.

*Here you are again, dog,* the old woman said.
*Is something still wrong?*

Yes, *Grandmother,*

*I asked you to teach them to talk and to laugh,*
*and they talk and they laugh just fine, Grandmother.*

No matter what happens, no matter what
their dreams say, they keep on talking, no matter
what their stories say, they just laugh.

*Grandmother, please, would you teach them to cry?*

The old woman looked a long time into the fire,
and she reached down deeply into the ground
and found a smooth, grey pebble,
like a piece of stream gravel, and cleaned it.
She set it in the south end of the meadow,
and then she said, *dog, that stone*
*is the stone of weeping and the stone of prayer,*
*and those humans'll have tears in their eyes*
*when you see them again.*

*Thank you,* said the dog,
and he vanished into the bush
and made his way back to the humans again.
The old woman who made the world
sat in her camp in the high meadow,
listening to the geese bark in the darkness
overhead and watching the winter wrens
flit through the rhododendron
in the shortening afternoon, and the troops
of waxwings stripping the blueberries bare.
The first snow fell and melted, and the rabbits
moulted, and the marmots disappeared.
And the old woman saw something slogging
up the valley, through the leaf litter
and new snow, breaking trail. The dog reappeared,
chewing his paws, at the edge of the meadow
and came and curled up close by the fire.

You've been gone a bit longer this time, the old woman
said, but you're back even so. How
are the humans doing?

Better, grandmother,
said the dog, but something is missing.

The old woman who made the world
stirred her fire and watched how the coals
glowed pus-yellow, blood-red, bone-white and grey
before they went black. Choose carefully,
dog, she said. Choose very carefully,
dog, because the circle is closing.

Grandmother, said the dog, heading
up here today, wading through the deep snow,
I knew what I wanted to ask. Grandmother,
please, would you teach them to dance?

The old woman
shifted a glowing log deep in the fire
and reached down a great distance into the ground
and grabbed a half-round, blood-red

(no stanza break)
stone, like jasper or red chert,
and rubbed it with snowmelt and new snow
and set it in the west end of the meadow
and sat back down by the side of the fire
and shifted another log.

That stone, dog,
is the stone of dancing and the stone of song.
Those humans can dance now, and sing.
And they can talk and tell stories
and laugh and dream and cry and pray,
and I hope it is enough, because the circle
is closed.

And those were your gifts, dog.
They were yours, and you gave them away.
Whatever those humans say from now
on, you'll only hear the pain
and pleasure in their voices. Soon you'll forget
you ever heard the words. Now nothing
but barks and yips and howls will form
in your own throat. Now when they laugh,
you'll make no sound. They'll weep,
and you'll whimper. Now when they dance,
you'll scamper between their legs. You'll jump
up and down, but the music will never
enter your body. The words and the music
and the tears and the laughter will be theirs.
They owe you all this, dog, and I somehow
think they may never remember to thank you.

— Robert Bringhurst
from the collection of Thomas Weaver
from the collection of Thomas Weaver
from the collection of Thomas Weaver
Mrs. Smith

Say it to yourself three or four times when you wake up and you’re alone in the bed. You’re a widow, you’re a widow, you’re a widow. Maybe one day you’ll begin to believe. The bed feels so empty. You’re still sleeping way over to one side, knees pulled up and your back to the middle. You haven’t changed the sheets for over a week and the pillowcase still smells like him. On his night stand, Revised Manual for Safety Engineers and small perfect stacks of coins: pennies, nickels, dimes. Only Michael’s keys are missing.

Put on his bathrobe and go downstairs. Max isn’t in his room, he’s watching cartoons in his pajamas. “Hi, Mom,” he says. You tell him he’s going to spend the day with Grandma. Pick him up and carry him down the hall to change his clothes. He’s wet the bed again. You bathe him, dress him in the corduroy overalls your mother made, and fix him some oatmeal. He seems to be in pretty good spirits, spooning in the steamy cereal. Mornings aren’t so bad, regular routine helps. You decide to skip breakfast yourself.

Get dressed and get into your rental car, driver’s side. Put Max in his car seat. Buckle up. “Where are you going, Mom?” he asks.

“To pick up your other grandma.”

“At the train station?”

“Yes.” You still can’t decide if he should go tomorrow or not. He steers the little wheel Michael fastened to his car seat, pushes the knob in the middle and beeps. “Which way, Mom?”

“Left.” You point. He makes a motor sound with his lips, his voice rising and falling as you shift.

Can’t spend much time at your mother’s, just give her a hug at the door. Squat down to kiss Max and tell him to be good. Your mother looks tired, her eyes are a little puffy. “Say hi to Marian for me,” she says. You wish you were spending the day with your mother instead.

Marian waves from a window as the train slows down and you push yourself to the door where you figure she’ll get out. First time you’ve ever picked her up alone. Her window’s steamy but she’s wiped away a circle that frames her face. Same blue coat she wore last Christmas. Wearing a hat this time. She sees you and you both begin to cry.

Driving back to the house makes you feel nervous, full of a million stupid things to say but none that really matter. Think of something polite. Ask about his niece. “How is Jenny? Is she doing OK in school? Sorry she can’t make it. But I understand.” Secretly you wish that no one could have made it. Secretly you wish that you yourself had been hospitalized until it’s all over. But you didn’t even get scratched and somehow that makes you an accomplice.

You take the highway that follows the coast and look out over the ocean as you drive. You and Michael met near this beach, four or five years ago. You count.
Five years ago. And you’ve been married for four and your son is nearly three. The sun coming up over the mountains hurts your eyes and you put on black sunglasses. “There’s the new jetty,” you say. “Just finished it this winter. Keeps the water calmer on this side for the boats.” She’s only mildly interested. You go on. “The rocks are all from eastern Oregon, blasted out of the side of a mountain with dynamite.” You're making this all up. “Three men were killed in one bad explosion that misfired.” Suddenly she takes more of an interest in what you say and sits up a little straighter.

You enter the long tunnel and take off your sunglasses, turn on the headlights. Michael always honked the horn in tunnels and you find yourself doing this now. It makes an eerie tension in the blackness. The tunnel ends in bright light and you put your sunglasses back on. The car feels small and you open your window and the sun roof. You turn on the radio to a station you know she’ll hate and shift into fifth.

“Here we are, Marian,” you say, a little skip in your voice. “Max is at my mother’s for the day. He’ll be home in time for supper.”

“I can’t wait to see him,” she says. “How’s he holding up?”

“O.K.” How can she look so pale and be so talkative?

“We have so much catching up to do,” she says. You see now that taking him to your mother’s was a mistake.

You carry her bags upstairs and show her where she’ll stay. You’re polite, courteous. “What time would you like breakfast tomorrow?” you ask. “The funeral’s at eleven.” You show her a pile of clean towels by the tub and notice a hair in the sink. You know she’ll notice it too.

Over tea she asks what sort of financial situation you’re in. You know she’s thinking about Max, and now you’re touched in a small way. “Fine,” you say. “We can live off the life insurance until Max is in school, then I can go full time at the nursery.” Her thin fuchsia lips curl into a tight smile and she puts a wrinkled hand over yours. She says to let her know if she can help. You look her flush in the eyes, see how blue they are, surrounded by star-shaped wrinkles. They are your husband’s eyes, you think, they’re watching for your mistakes.

First time you met him was at a penny arcade on a hot day in July when your girlfriend wanted to ride the bumper cars. What the hell, you said, climbing into a tiny brown station wagon. The man at the booth started you and off you went, around and around in an eddy of metal gadgets and thumping and children screaming. Good looking guy in a police car wheeled by, running his siren. He looked at you and winked. You winked back and he was off. The cars were swirling faster then, fire trucks, sports cars, a taxi, all tethered to the electric ceiling by silver poles. Your car stopped. Pushed the gas but no go and you looked up to see that there wasn’t a spark when BAM he got you from the back. And BAM in the side. He was really grinning then, laughing, his blond hair flipped back, his siren singing and a wild look in his eyes. He swiveled his wheel and BAM into the side of your car again but you were cornered next to another dead car and there was nowhere else to go.

“I’ve got a little headache,” says Marian. “I think I’ll go upstairs.”

“Aspirin’s above the sink,” you say. “I hope it goes away.”

You change into cutoffs and grab your basket of tools. Pass through the sliding glass door to the patio. That brown circle’s still there from Max’s wading pool. You
haven't worked in your garden for over a week and it feels good to kneel in the fragrant grass. Michael wanted to extend the patio, pour cement here over your small garden and get you to plant things in hanging boxes. You clean out around the snapdragons. Bright orange, unfurling to red and yellow. Pretty. Your gloveless hands pull the weeds one by one, feel the gentle suck of rootballs lifting from the stubborn soil. It feels good to be out here alone, sun warm on your shoulders, and you wonder how Max is doing today and if he'll keep asking about his daddy. You wonder how long Marian will stay.

Open a canvas bag of bulbs. Next spring they'll be red tulips. Their layers look like tissue, peel off like dead cuticles. You plant them along the house under the kitchen window, pushing them into the dirt with your thumbs. The row isn't straight so you try to rearrange the crooked ones. Try to force some sort of order on them. With a trowel you turn over soil to pack them tight and notice how dry the worms are, like bits of twisted string. Go deeper, worms, you think.

Hear the toilet flush upstairs. You first met Marian on a Thanksgiving when Michael had you over for the big dinner. Her golden turkey, the stuffing, everything — it had all been perfect. Even her cranberries were fresh, not jellied in a cylinder. You brought dinner rolls in a cellophane bag. The thought of so much food now nauseates you.

Sit back and look at your knees with a bored fascination. Wrinkled and creased, worse than Max's cheek after a long nap. Lie back in the grass. The sun makes you sleepy, makes your eyes a little watery, and they begin to run at the outer corners. Say it to yourself again. You're a widow. Is it better than being divorced? More respectable? Dwell on all the crummy things he did and maybe you won't feel so bad.

For one thing he was always so sarcastic. At your wedding rehearsal you wore blue jeans, walked down the aisle with your brother at your side. Reached the end where Michael was and smiled, took his arm. In thirty-six hours you'd be married, would be Mr. and Mrs. Michael Everett. You hummed Mendelssohn and didn't feel nervous. After the ceremony he helped you on with your coat and then he made some crack about your father's not being there. You smiled a little. Afterwards, at dinner, he repeated the joke, that he'd never have in-law problems as long as they were always away on business, to a few of your friends, and to your brother. You picked up your water and tried to smile. That was the first time he really hurt you.

Shift your basket to where the marigolds are, scoot yourself over and bend forward to thin them a little. You always loved helping your mother in the garden. Her marigolds had such large blossoms, red petals trumpeting through a brassy orange. You remember once when you were about nine, how you asked your mother if you were pretty. You had snipped a dozen flowers with your small scissors, braided their thin stems into a wreath. You balanced it on your brown hair like a crown and waltzed into her kitchen, humming a little song, smiling with your shy question. She set down her sewing and returned your smile. Yes, she told you, you're beautiful.

Time to get up, go inside and make some kind of lunch for Marian and yourself. You don't feel like eating much. You put your tools away, throw the weeds on the compost pile, and see in the kitchen she's got sandwiches on the table and a pan
of soup on the stove. The kitchen’s filled with a split-pea aroma. Why does she have to be so nice? Over lunch she stresses how much she wants to help you and Max. “We don’t need a thing,” you say. “Just time to sort through it all.” Maybe she’s afraid you’ll drift away and she’ll lose Max, son of her only son. “I might need you to babysit now and then,” you say. Her nose gets a little red and she almost begins to cry.

“Was he in pain when he died?” she asks. Picks up a sandwich and nibbles at it.

“I don’t know,” you answer. You were knocked out and don’t remember much. Just the sound of the sirens. He died before you came to. But why not lie? Make her feel better. “I don’t think so,” you say. Stir your soup. Jesus Christ, she’ll figure it out when the funeral starts and his coffin’s closed. She asks if you’re hurt anywhere. “Just where the lump on my head is,” you say.

She washes the dishes, you dry. It’s nice to have someone to help, you’re used to doing them alone. “Marian,” you say. “Some time you’ll have to help me go through his things.” Old pictures held with rubber bands, filed in shoeboxes by year. Dry-cleaned clothes, hung by season and type. Stamps arranged by country of origin, chronologically within country. He was so damn tidy about his possessions. Filing systems for everything.

“Just let me know when,” she says. “Whenever you’re up to it.” When you finish washing she opens a cupboard door and brings each stack of clean dishes down and sets them on the counter. Then she takes a damp cloth and wipes out the cupboard shelf, catching all the crumbs in her other hand. You’re a little embarrassed. Then she restacks the dishes in a new arrangement, glasses on the bottom shelf and plates above. This annoys you but you smile and tell her thanks.

Later on, it’s time to get Max. She wants to come along and on the way home she holds him on her lap. His eyes are sleepy, you know he didn’t have a nap at your mom’s. He asks Marian if Dad’s coming back today and she says, “No, Honey.” He asks if she’s moving in and she looks at you and says, “No, Honey.” He opens the glove box, finds your sunglasses and puts them on. He looks like a large-eyed beetle and it makes you laugh.

You remember drives you’d take with Michael. Before you were married, up and down the coast highway, his hand moving up and down your thighs and the tape deck turned up loud. The time you drove down to L.A. and slept on the beach. You woke up early and the blankets were damp and you were both shivering. After you were married, drives to Portland, visiting friends and sometimes a night in a nice hotel — he’d sign you in as Mr. and Mrs. Smith and you’d both snicker. And how whenever he’d get mad at you he’d get in the car, take off, come back maybe eight or ten hours later. Still mad, pout till you went to bed and then he’d forgive you in time to have sex. It seems to you now that he was mad quite often.

For dinner you fix pot roast with gravy, Marian tears lettuce leaves for a salad. She slices tomatoes and tosses everything in a wooden bowl. You pare potatoes, watch the long strips of peeling wind away from your knife and curl in the sink. Michael’s favorite dinner. You start to feel sorry for him. The three of you will sit down to eat and he’s dead and tomorrow they’ll put his body in the ground. As if he reads your mind, Max starts to cry. “Where’s Dad?” he asks. “When’s he coming home?” You put him on the booster and push him to the table.

“He’s gone, Max.” When it’s all ready, you cut his meat in small pieces and mash his potatoes down with a fork. “Be good for Grandma and eat all your sup-
"It hits you how you'll be raising him alone for the next fifteen years. But what did Michael ever do but yell at him, spank him for little things like tracking in mud?

Last summer after Max turned two the three of you went over to the state fair in Salem. It was a hot day and the fair was crowded, so crowded it was hard work maneuvering the stroller through clusters of people. Michael wanted to see the livestock, took Max's hand and led him into the barn. "Cow," he'd say, or "pig, sheep, horse," pointing each time for Max to learn. Max was happy, playing with Michael's watch and imitating his words. Then Max wet himself and Michael gave him back to you. You changed him and pushed the stroller for the rest of the day.

"Good roast, Honey," Marian says. Max isn't eating, just kicking his feet against the table. She moves her chair over next to his and picks up his fork. She plays a little game with him and he eats his food without complaining. He's even laughing with her. Meanwhile her food's getting cold. You play with your salad, watching them. Her spotted hand flies the fork around his head, pops it into his mouth. He laughs again, gravy on his fat cheeks and his bib's a mess. Then Marian starts to cry again. Maybe she sees a young version of Michael eating. She sets his fork down and takes off his bib. He stops laughing and looks scared. She carries him to the kitchen counter and sponges off his face, his hands, in the webs between each sticky finger. Then she turns away toward the sink and really cries. Her rounded shoulders are rising and falling with each teary breath. He doesn't leave. He clutches her leg, still looking scared, as if she too will disappear. You stack the plates and carry them to the sink, then give him a cookie.

You knew this was coming. Knew she'd start to cry and you'd feel helpless. Her tears fall in organized furrows down deep wrinkles; one droplet settles at the tip of her chin. There is no reason why you can't be kind to her. Even though when you'd cry he'd tell you to buck up. You put your right arm around her soft shoulder and say, "I know it hurts. I'm hurt too. Every time I see my son I think of Michael. Everything I look at in this house reminds me of him. The yard even reminds me of him. I feel awful inside. And it's been hard arranging this funeral and everything. I'd like to just run away, but I can't.

You've said more than you wanted. You carefully fold the dishtowel in half, then into fourths. You line up the sides until they're even and smooth out the fringe. "Mom, why is Grandma crying?"

"Because she misses Dad like you do."

"Grandma, I want Dad back." Marian picks him up and kisses him on the cheek. She sets him on the counter and ties his shoelace.

"Let's have coffee in the other room," you suggest. You sit between them on the couch and smooth his yellow hair. He's had a bad week. Take a sip of coffee and when he reaches for your cup you say no. He whines a little, reaches again. Marian fills her cup with milk and hands him the beige mixture. Let her win. Let him drink it.

"Go sit on Grandma's lap," you say.

They sit on the couch, you take an armchair, put your feet up. You'll be going back to work part time in two weeks. Fall's always a busy season at the nursery. You'll have to remember to bring home a tree for the front yard. Apple tree maybe. Or something with pink blossoms, maybe cherry. You think about how much work it is to dig holes in clay soil. You've been wanting to plant a tree ever since you
bought the house. He said it would make lawn mowing hard, and the roots would tear up the sidewalk. OK, you decide, you'll plant two.

"What are you thinking about, Honey?" she asks.

"The funeral," you say. "I hope I ordered enough flowers." Take a sip of coffee, set your cup on the table. She slips a magazine under your cup and you smile.

"What will he be wearing?" she asks.

"It doesn't matter," you say.

You go into the kitchen and come back with the coffee pot, fill up your cup and add some to hers. Max falls asleep. "I know how much you miss him," she says.

"You had a good marriage, didn't you? Not like these people who marry and divorce in a short time. Over small things that don't even matter."

Your scalp feels tight and you drink the coffee hot. It sloshes around and makes your stomach feel hollow. The tension is really killing you. You close your eyes and imagine what you'd like to say to her: Marian, our marriage was great for a while. But I wasn't happy the last couple of years. I was smothered by him. I was considering divorce. I even called a lawyer. You imagine what she'd say: Well, now that you mention it, I wasn't so happy the last years of my marriage either. Like father like son. Both bullies, I suppose.

"Yeah," you say.

After a time Max wakes up. "Would you like to put him to bed?" you ask.

"Doesn't he need a bath?"

"Sure." He had one this morning. But she might enjoy it. "Would you do it please? I'm going for a drive."

The cold air whips through the sun roof and blows hair into your eyes and mouth. Pop in *Hotel California* and move onto the freeway, driving fast in third gear, pushing the motor. Build up power and speed. You shift into fourth and your muscles relax some. Catch up to the tail lights of a station wagon. Easy. Pass it on a straightaway and move back into your lane without hitting any bumps on the center lines.

Sing along with the tape. "We haven't had such prisoners here since 1969." A little off key, but who cares? He always hated it when you sang. You'd be happy, having a good day, and you'd start singing a corny song from an old musical. Always made him mad and he'd turn on the stereo to drown you out. Quit singing those goddam songs, he'd say. You were going to leave him, but couldn't decide about Max. Why wouldn't you just try to work it out with him? You eject the tape, push your foot down till it says 85 and grip the steering wheel tightly. Your fingers and ears are cold but you don't care. Driving south in the dark makes you feel good, less edgy. You imagine you're going down to California. Or even Mexico. Why not? She'd take care of Max. Why do you want to go to the funeral anyway? You aren't old enough to be a widow. Then you remember something. You haven't seen the car yet. Must still be at the junkyard. In a weird way you're curious, want to see what it looks like. You don't have any idea.

You take the next exit, loop around and glide back on. See a hitchhiker holding a sign for BC, slow down to look, but pass him by. Too dangerous. Back track a few miles then slow down when you get near the city. You can't exactly remember where the junk yard is, but you know it's on the right side of the road near a little bridge. Slow down. There.

Pull in the gravel driveway. All the floodlights are on but the office is closed. You get out of the car and the lights are so bright they make you squint. RESCUE
TOWING AND STORAGE the sign says, above a small building with two large windows. Three tow trucks parked in front and a huge, fenced-in lot behind. Maybe you could climb the fence. Look up to see barbed wire coiled all around the top. Jesus, like some concentration camp. You're a little afraid but your adrenalin is flowing and you've got energy in your hands, your legs. You walk around the perimeter of the fence and remember that hitchhiker. Hope he doesn't walk this far and see your car.

At the back side behind some brush you see a hole in the fence, big enough for kids to break in and maybe you can squeeze through it too. It's one of those cyclone fences with the stupid plastic slats woven in and out of the wires like a giant brown basket. You squeeze through and look around.

Your shoes crunch on the gravel and an odor of dust rises. Hundreds of cars, a lot for the dead and dying, the stolen, the abandoned, the illegally parked. Everything filmed with sheer gray dust. One after another, arrayed in rows like tombstones in a cemetery. Each one dented, crumpled, windshields broken, tires flat and doors twisted off at strange angles. You walk down the first aisle, a little bit afraid. Your footsteps sound loud, conspicuous. All sorts of cars, a station wagon with two flat tires, a truck with its motor pushed into the dashboard, a convertible with one side caved in and a shoe on the seat. You think about all the people hurt in these cars. All the ones who died. You imagine explosions, people trapped in burning vehicles, but you keep going, around the first corner and up the second aisle. You want to find your car. You see a blue metallic one, a 280 Z like yours was, but it's got different plates. Its rear window is cracked like a jigsaw puzzle.

Down the third aisle. You stop when you see it. Your plates, your car, but it looks so bad you can't believe it. You tremble and cry out. The car roof is folded up like a tent. You step closer and look in the left side where the window was, but there isn't enough light to see much inside. You notice three beer cans on the floor behind his seat and you remember that you were on your way to a movie. The left side of the car is completely shoved in, you see flecks of red paint on the ridges. Run your fingers along one of the dents. You were hit by a red car.

Tears fill your eyes. What he must have looked like. How funny that you weren't badly hurt. You sit on the hood and cry aloud, wiping your face on your jacket sleeve. You feel so guilty. Sometimes, before, you almost even wished he was dead. Well he's dead now. Now you can sing all you want, spend money, plant your stupid trees — all the freedom you wanted is yours. You wished him away. Pound your feet down hard on the hood, hear more glass fall out of the windshield. You wince. You're ashamed that you'd called the lawyer but you had no way of knowing. You say Michael's name. "I'm sorry," you say aloud, crying. You sit and whimper for a while. There's a cool breeze from the ocean and you can hear the cars on the highway.

Wait a minute. He's sucking you into it again. You have nothing to be sorry for. That son of a bitch was always after you, always monitoring, always perfecting. Like the way he said you were getting fat after Max was born. You lift up your right leg and with the heel of your boot you kick the window in. Jagged glass splatters all over his seat. The day he bought this stupid car he said he'd never let you drive it. Only gave in weeks later when he got sick of driving you to the grocery store. You kick in more glass, kick off the little pieces until there's nothing there.
but a big hole. How much you admired him at first — his intellect, his self-confidence. How you worked to please him and all you did was mold yourself to his idea of perfection. Spit it out: you hated him.

You’re trembling a little but you feel relieved at the same time. Almost feel like laughing. Slide off the hood and look around. The lights are so bright it’s impossible to see beyond them. You kick up a little gravel as you walk back. Breathe deeply. You’re glad you made yourself come here.

You drive back home, pass the hitchhiker again. Barely notice him this time. You follow a camper into the city and up the hill to your neighborhood, turn and stop at the store. You’re really hungry now. Pick up one of those frozen pies and some milk. Grab a bag of Oreo cookies. If Marian’s still up she might be hungry too.

Pull in the driveway and see that all the lights are out except a small one in the living room. The door’s unlocked, you go in and toss your jacket on a chair. She’s on the couch with some mending in her lap — one of Max’s shirts. She jerks open her eyes and acts like she’s been awake the whole time.

“Hi Marian,” you say, “I brought home a pie. Let’s go into the kitchen and I’ll heat it up.”

While the pie’s in the oven you dump the Oreos into a bowl and grab a few. Shove them into your mouth.

“Have a nice drive, Honey?” she asks.

“Sure,” you say. Hope she doesn’t ask where you went. Get the pie out and cut two huge pieces. Pour some milk. Too bad there’s no whipped cream.

“Where’d you go, down to the beach?” she asks.

“No,” you say. “I went to the church and prayed.”

“Looks like it did you a world of good.”

The truth is you haven’t stepped into a church since the day you married Michael, and won’t again until his funeral. You wonder what will bring you there next. Maybe your mother’s death. Maybe Marian’s. Maybe a million years from now you’ll get married again.

“What did you do, Marian?”

“I gave Max a bath, then I went through his clothes and sorted them. I washed some things and hung them out to dry. I’m just now mending a few shirts.”


— Julie Brown
There's a Phantom in My Word-Processor

And the man even died vigorously! exclaimed David Ryderman, Professor of Ancient Philosophy, inwardly, though no words were uttered aloud. For that was exactly what E.L. Hench, Professor of Experimental Psychology, had just done in the middle of his office, spewing blood all over the drapes and woodwork. Again he envisioned that crew-cutted, lip-curling head which had poked itself into his office for almost thirty years, brandishing Skinnerian assaults on the problem of Mind in the Universe.

"The mind's an empty little box, Davey," Hench had said. "Nick the side with your pinkie, and there's a hollow. Little doodles from others on the inside, chance events, shuffling and reshuffling. Your cosmic motes do a boogie, and there's an end." And how, Ryderman wondered, could one with so little impassioned insight thrive the way Hench had: the glowing red of his broad face, the hardy musculature that embraced its daily satisfaction of food, beer, jogging, and sex, and the result — the arrogant, half-twisting smile that seemed to lie on two different faces at once. Yes, the man had something behind him: it was as though the Universe loved a barnacle that rooted and sucked on it and had no interest in one who paused, in reverence and in hunger, to see it.

But death, yet! a fabulous tussle all over the ancient patterns of Ryderman's serenely carpeted floor, an intrusion he could not possibly forget. With a dark sheet draped over Hench's body, the dynamic lines seemed to bark a last time that all of life was on his side. As it was carried off on a stretcher, Ryderman could think nothing but that Hench, now dead, was nonetheless a victor in the 30-year contest between them.

But how, after all, could it be? It was he, Ryderman thought, who had become the philosopher, humanist, teacher, beholder of those few shards of numinosity left tangled and pathetic in the windy world. He may have had as little to believe in as Hench but still, he had wordless vision. However unsatisfying, it was the closest approach to the Essential Forms. It made him both loving and harsh. He could squeeze oversimplifications out of his work like the flesh of oranges and swat the subjunctive effusions of students like so many flies. ("Failed Romantic!" Hench had said). Yes: insight, complexity, and wisdom were of little use in the world. And an embrace of sensation and immediacy was a powerful rejoinder.

"The Mean," Ryderman suddenly said aloud, and saw it — shapeless forms on an assembly line with all extremes lopped off — brilliance, drive, integrity, emotion. What a truly horrible concept, and here the great Aristotle had offered it as a way of life. I am not, he thought obsessed.

For that was perhaps more to the point. He and Hench had arrived at Harvard University in 1954. It took them less than a week to despise one another. They went through the 50's acquiring publications, tenure, and children. They finished
the 60’s with drugs, divorces, and a more strenuous questioning of their values, at a minimum a guilty tolerance for student hostility. In the 70’s, their middle-aged calm was disrupted by the need to damage one another’s reputations if not metaphysics. The 80’s, Ryderman decided, were underrated for their capacity to generate wonder: Have I really, he thought, been a father? a husband? a scholar? He had taken these embodiments of desire as seriously as anyone. Yet down the corridor, growing darker and leaner, was the increasing massiveness of Hench. Obsession was clearly consistent with any definition of wisdom, Ryderman had to admit. Perhaps they had both failed. But Hench had very likely enjoyed his three decades, and Ryderman had been a man obsessed.

He rested his head miserably against the terminal of the office word-processor. Its blank screen, with cursor gently blinking for attention like a well-socialized student, comforted him. Then he removed the floppy disk upon which he had been writing a book chapter, packed his briefcase, nodded to the screen, and left.

Driving home, he had a profusion of strange, deliciously playful thoughts. He imagined being haunted by Hench, the snarling, crew-cutted head popping out of a colorless gown and necklace of chains. His raucous laughter suddenly barked in alarm: What conclusion was there, after all, from this mad relationship but the primacy of obsession over all other emotions? Why wouldn’t Hench haunt him?

Abstractly reasoned conclusions were most real to him of all the world’s shining apples of discovery. He blinked his doubt at the silent roadways, the houses squeezed together like knuckles, his family echoing noise in space upon which he closed his study door and, while nestling in a deep chair, thought again, Why not? Human life, he once decided, was primarily addictive, compulsive, entropic. He remembered his first assertion of this premise, which had occurred at the age of fourteen. He perpetually looked for something to refute it but, beyond the concept of Mind, it had never appeared. Why were these not grounds for Hench’s survival beyond death? The question filled his study with cool, abstracted phantoms.

But then, he thought, Mind too existed. He had spent most of his life defining all other premises but this one. His failure was not strange to him — it was the heart of the matter. Mind was a great secret, confessed solely to his professional colleagues at unpredictable, sacred moments. One of these moments had occurred during the first week he had known Hench. Undefined, he believed that the Mind fell into a fissure of Neo-Platonism where the first sharp longings for all that lay outside the self began in childhood: the first fragile sculptures of his feeling as he touched a flower’s darkly velvet stamen at night; the curving, heightened veins stirring throughout an autumn leaf; the contorted arms of winter trees. Not that the world would merely be, but move him, deeply. These moments wove themselves into the fabric of his life, and only as a man did he demand that they transcend their first soft bed within the world and become a thought, a relation between inner and outer. Mind therefore came into existence as necessarily as hunger, thirst, the desire to be loved, and could be converted no more than they. It was, he once thought, too full and too beautiful to be expressed, a wordless chant of awe floating over the creation.

A light but methodical touch formed itself on his sleeve, a familiar voice hissed, “Hello, Davey. Couldn’t let you get away. Freedom ill becomes you.” And Hench, his voice deeply resonant and his form all shifting, moonlit shadows, glided into the opposite chair.
"I knew it, I knew," said Ryderman. "You've demonstrated me! You're whole and real, you're an Essence as surely as you're anything. There's nothing of chance here! You're no mass of accidental, stimulated reflexes! That's it! That's Mind! You can't deny..."

"Professor Ryderman," intruded Hench. "Do you not find it odd that upon contact with an embodiment of the Ultimate Essence, you merely offer your latest installment on an argument we've been pursuing for thirty years?"

"But you've proved my point!" Ryderman nearly yelled. "It is not ridiculous to believe in the Mind for here you are, a spirit, sprung from the very source I..."

Hench again intruded, "What can possibly be holding me together but you, Davey?" That was precisely the conclusion Ryderman most feared. He closed his eyes and sat very still, for indeed many things in his life had disappeared from such efforts. "I thank the accident of your obsession for eternal life," said Hench.

Ryderman held his eyes tightly shut until his body seemed a wayward balloon brutally clinched below the brows. When he opened them, Hench was gone. He lurched out of the study, colliding with his wife in the hall. They stared at one another in alarm, two utterly new beings united in confusion. The phrase, "You look as if you've seen a ghost," formed itself in both minds at once, then each walked wordlessly and unsteadily to the opposite end of the hall.

For the remainder of the evening, reality gently swelled into space and nearly replaced Hench. At dinner and over the newspaper, Ryderman spoke with his wife about the Victorian novel course she was teaching. He tutored his youngest son in algebra. He rubbed the nightly antibiotic ointment onto the paw of his recently injured cat, arm-wrestled briefly with his youngest daughter, paid the water bill, sent a check to the gardener, thought about writing a letter to his eldest married daughter but did not, and avoided the study until the end of the evening. He then poured a small glass of sherry and, accompanied by his cat and the thickened, protective air of the thoroughly domesticated man, strode into the study. As he looked about himself anxiously, the cat rubbed its back reassuringly upon his ankles.

Nothing. Surely nothing.

And he sank into a chair, exhausted, and drank the whole glass at once. A feeling of weight came over him, like a great compulsion or drugged sleep. And beyond the moving prism of light refracted by the glass held too closely to his eye, Hench again appeared in the opposite chair. He seemed to share Ryderman's mood as he said, "Nope. Nothing out there, Davey. I've been, you know. Shot right out of a pea-shooter to black infinity. Hung there just a moment, then came back to you. I don't want to lose touch with you, Davey. You're an interesting man."

Ryderman scooped up his cat and shot out of the study. He walked up the stairway with an ominous, marching tread. Well, that was it, he thought. No doubt about it — Hench was going to haunt him. And how would they ever stop arguing? For the truly dire thing was that Hench insisted on both haunting him and contending that Ryderman's premise was untrue — Mind, the very thing that held him together. Or was it the thing that held them both together? A strange, low whistle escaped from Ryderman's lips; it instantly gave him gooseflesh.

Pale and formal, he told his wife that he had a headache and would sleep in the guest bedroom. Then he wandered down the hallway, gently fingering the wall for reassurance, reached the room, and began to undress. Though he rarely slept
without clothing, it seemed appropriate to do so now, as well as lying on top of the coverlet, his arms stretched straight out. For that was part of it: there were rules here, perhaps even rituals, though he had no idea what a phantom would impose. He saw a small candle lying in a jar on the dresser and lit it.

"That's right, Davey," said Hench, suddenly perched on the edge of the bed. "A candle is just right. I'm tired of dark and light, black and white. Let the world mingle a bit."

"What do you intend to do with me?" said Ryderman fiercely.

"No crucifixion, Davey. Too much trouble. Something more like an involuntary, enforced chat with an old friend. You see, I really have no idea what to do with myself."

Fatality sang in Ryderman's head and pulse. "Follow this inner self of yours, Hench. You've never known it before. I can't believe it will be silent now. I long to know what I will tell you, and what you will do."

"How about nothing?" said Hench. "That and a few little cosmic accidents. Perhaps it's all a net of chance connections. Pavlov and his dog salivating together in heaven. After all, surely Mind invented things of this sort with your fantasies."

"No nets of circumstance, Hench. A single thing...that is to be done in your state. It will be one perfectly lucid act, perhaps awesome in its simplicity — a song of hope cut short; a whispered prayer echoing between blank walls; a slow, fully conscious walk into receding dark...

"You needn't sound like a disappointed pope, stretched flat on his deathbed, Davey. Just because you're stark naked and superb at hearing yourself speak. What is the one thing I'll do?"

"I don't know," said Ryderman. "I never wanted to put it in words. I didn't think it would survive, all the while I believed that nothing else could survive without it. And perhaps it haunted me all my life. Whatever it all comes down to, Hench — a prophecy, a journey, a rise and fall. At least that." Ryderman spoke as though he were in a dream.

"Ah, but you're not in a cosmic dream, Davey. I only want to haunt you. That's where the great journeys and lovely myths all end."

"Damn you!" shouted Ryderman. "You've come back, all Essence, to tell me there's no Essence and I'm wrong!"

"Now you've got it," said Hench. "All I want to do Essentially is haunt you. It's fun. You're the one who's bothered by trivia. I've always rather liked all the details and oddities."

In the morning, Ryderman's wife found him still sleeping naked, his arms outstretched and the candle an unlit red puddle in its glass. Her husband's bizarre behavior had long ago become, like the theory of Mind, too obvious to acknowledge in words. The formality of his pose and the deepened wrinkle in the center of his forehead, as though he were concentrating very deeply on nothing at all, was touching to her. She passed through the hall without disturbing him.

Several hours later, Ryderman was sitting in front of the word-processor, prepared to begin again on his book chapter. He checked the archive of subtopics, all of which discussed aspects of Pythagoras: Breaking of the heavenly light. Mathematics: Thought is superior to sense. The gentleman and the slave. Rules, tabus, renunciations. Pure mathematics: Eternal objects as God's thoughts...As they reeled off,
he found them almost totally meaningless. What could they say to a man who was haunted by a Skinnerian phantom? Yet they were a part of the world that had once opposed Hench. He decided to finish his chapter regardless of whether it had any meaning and boldly selected the mathematics subtopic, whereupon the printer began pounding at four times the usual rate, and a print-out straight from Hench was automatically delivered.

"Good morning, Davey," it read. "I'm inside the word-processor, assimilating your book chapter. It is a delightful experience to meld myself with digital electronics, something like an all-over, winking massage. Your words are as stilted as ever, but the electronic nervous system with which this machine holds and recreates them is truly a wonder. I can actually move around much faster within it than I can outside it. I feel like a small electronic fiend on skates. Perhaps you've found me a home."

"P.S. It has been necessary for me to make minor changes in your chapter. It did not wholly reflect the energy and delight I feel in this generous vessel."

Ryderman requested the archive and rapidly read over the menu of subtopics. "The Unseen Unity of God" had become something that described itself as a recipe: "Sprig of parsnip, pinch of awe, clove-leaf silence of 3:00 a.m. Dark, wine-red color tumbling over all. Bring them together, Davey." "Tabus and Renunciations" had become an endless essay on the stimulus-response theory of unfortunate accidental connections between events, complete with what clair-ed to be a de-sensitization program for all forms of loathing and terror. Ryderman's exegesis on the Pythagorean collective had been replaced by a single question: "Did this fellow really preach to animals?" A lengthy footnote Ryderman had been quite proud of on the relation between orgy and theory as impassioned contemplation had been replaced by a file of obscene words, neatly arranged in alphabetical order. Last, all notes on pure mathematics as God's thought had been erased but for the headline. A new subtopic, "The Story of God's Addiction to Numbers," had been added, along with a short parable in which Satan carries out a program of aversive conditioning upon an emotionally disturbed God, who responds with an addiction to the numberless and amathematical, at last vanishing into an enormous foam.

Ryderman angrily typed into the word processor, "Why, Hench? I thought you were confining yourself to the spiritual realm. Why do you want to be a computer print-out?"

Again the printer roared the answer at four times its normal rate: "I've paid little attention to your words, Davey. I so detested your theory of Essences that I thought it must be your own essence. But words! I'm seeing them from inside-out, from brilliant energy to that final, uneasy balance of warring elements known as meaning. This charming machine recreates the universe from numbers, 0 and 1, Yes and No. What a fabulous house of cards! Now I hear you and you're wrong, as usual, but this machine's rendering of you enchants me."

Having not a word to deny Hench, Ryderman decided to return home. For the first time in untold years, he watered the plants in his backyard, pulled weeds, and tilled the soil around the roses, begonias and chrysanthemums. The afternoon was a mixture of distraction and alarm. He kept expecting Hench to materialize as an elf behind the leaves, or apples from the fruit trees to fall on his head, initiated by Hench, stretched across the boughs like a Cheshire cat. When Hench did not
appear, Ryderman considered whether or not his antagonist might prefer life inside the word-processor. The bodiless Hench was far more disturbing to him than Hench the computer print-out, so this possibility seemed an improvement in their relations.

Toward evening, he re-entered his home, covered with many deeply satisfying splotches of grime and sweat. So there, the afternoon seemed to verify, phantoms and machines have not conquered all of nature. He lay blissfully in the bathtub. When his wife returned, she was astonished to find Ryderman at home, passively enjoying his own flesh. He rose and covered himself with a robe, then asked her to join him in a glass of wine. In the still twilight, Ryderman remembered how deeply he loved this hour of the day, how much wayward human motion it sumptuously enfolded, what sudden intensities of color ebbed and then elided to the perfect endless black. He touched his wife’s hand, and the two wordlessly felt a moment of quiet, simple relation. Then both walked barefoot into the bedroom and began to make love in the duskily glowing light.

Hench materialized in a dark corner and watched the two with keen interest. His eyebrows shot up as his prey rose to the occasion, and a whirling world of words began to race through Ryderman’s mind. His posture, strength, the pressure of body upon body became centuries of conquest, Roman hordes, medieval crusades, armies of Victorians conquering their own destinies, all in words: vanquish, subjugate, subdue, surmount, rout, overcome! A thesaurus ran mightily through his head.

Hench’s eyebrows abruptly fell, and so did Ryderman’s pleasure. History turned ecclesiastical: meek, mild, humbled, submissive, infatuated. The words trembled in his mind like fearful monks. Ryderman stared into his wife’s face and tried to explain what happened, but a single word, metaphor was all he could utter. His hands gestured frantically in the dark, then he rolled over in bed and covered his face with one hand. His wife, in astonishment, tried to consider whether her husband’s impotence and strange expression indicated that he was becoming more bizarre than usual. She saw nothing in the dark but his slender, strangely frail back.

The following day, when Ryderman returned to the office, he found a file in the word-processor which contained every word that had passed through his mind the previous night. “Hench,” he typed into the word-processor. “Let’s make a deal.”

A print-out instantly spun loose: “Just what I’ve been considering, Davey.”

“I’ll consider giving up a pound of flesh if I can have the rest,” Ryderman again typed into the terminal.

“Which pound? The Mind or the Soul?”

I thought you might know more about that distinction at this point than I,” typed Ryderman.

“You are surprisingly unknowable, Davey,” answered Hench. “This is a dimension I never considered when I was alive. Your pound of flesh can therefore be your language, typed generously into this humbly awaiting vessel. I have my most brilliant sense of life from it. Electro-magnetic force, which is what I appear to be, is everywhere — but it does not commune, save in structure. Within this vessel, however, I have my communion: pools of mirrored association, a bottomless repository of images. Whether you are greater or truer in some other looking glass I cannot say. But this is true: Here you are. Here we are. Come tell me about it, for what more intense relation can there be?”
"If I type this into the machine," typed Ryderman, "will you confine yourself to
print-outs?"

"Very likely. I don't make promises as such," answered Hench. "But I'll be more
lawful if I'm properly entertained.

Ryderman dutifully typed and from this moment on, his life became something
scarcely less strange than his previous efforts to avoid Hench. For hours on end,
he remained in his office, typing his thoughts to Hench and receiving print-outs
in return. Sometimes they argued, often they made streams of mental associa­
tions together, at still other times they tried to list all the connotations of different
words. Ryderman found no particular torment in this. Occasionally it occurred to
him that he must find some means of ending this interlude but generally, he was
mesmerized. He brought bags of food from the campus cafeteria to his office and
slept on the couch in the foyer. In fact, from this time on, the narrative of which
he was aware became a series of bright moments in time, intense responses to
some of his contacts with Hench — words, memories, even dreams, for he slept
quite easily beside the word-processor. The system often seemed beneficent to
him. With it, the two antagonists continually negotiated a truce, in absence of which
was nothing but destruction. One moment, for example, was this:

"...Chinese ghost," Ryderman was typing into the terminal. "Ancestral deity,
beneficent spirit, could materialize in the kitchen, unusually gentle and comprehen­
sible for a ghost, perhaps twinkling avuncular eyes."

"But then," he added, "German ghost: brooding, melancholy, Byronic. Tied
mysteriously to towers, dungeons, vast shaking pines. Don't ever be left alone with
one."

"On the other hand," Ryderman continued, "French ghost: ghostly garments im­
peccably cut, tied to an imagined Old Order, a traveller in groups, sexually ab­
sorbed coupled with a literary desire to confess, all the incubi and succubi of the
world." But all of them, thought Ryderman, were preferable to the sort of ghost
Hench was. Ah, but what was that? He longed to have the word-processor devour it.

"A mischievous, anarchistic, unknown form of energy," he typed into the
machine, "a fountain of haphazard associations." Still what? he thought. 'Skinnerian
ghost,' he at last typed. That was Hench's problem. And his problem was with
Hench...

...Plenty of fireworks, thought Ryderman, as he sat in his office chair. Within
thirty-six hours, he had had six strenuous arguments with a man who was dead,
been stared at by a voyeuristic phantom while he was sexually impotent, and tried
to determine whether it would be possible to murder a ghost.

Yes, he thought, the life's getting stranger and stranger. But you've got to go
on. He placed another floppy disk into the word processor and prepared to begin
working on his book chapter again. After all, Hench was happy with the words
he devoured, and there was no particular reason he should spit out Pythagoras
again. The blinking cursor at the left shifted his gaze toward a small window and
there, beyond the glass, lay the CREATURE.

Or rather, a pouncing, coiling, springing thing furled with dark and tawny stripes
and an imperious profusion of whiskers beneath a tiny triangular spot from which
drops of moisture clung with fiercely radiant light. The muscles beneath the hairy
stripes were continually clenching and stretching. A black tail rose over its back.
Curved slightly at the tip, it looked like a slender, dark orchid, undulating to the
creature's rhythm. Yet pure stillness lay in its eyes: black, knife-like pupils enclos-
ed within glacial slits of sheer green light. The tawny, supple lines seemed now,
to Ryderman, signs, omens, dreams. He remembered an afternoon spent fishing
with his father and soundless shadows in the lake which were like the shadowy
flux that now made up Hench. He imagined his antagonist lost in the moving pat-
terns of the creature's coat. That would be the medium for Hench, Ryderman
thought, and then he became aware he had been typing into the word-processor.
Looking back at the screen, he saw the word, cat.

And then, looking back at the apparition, he saw his pet tabby cat staring at
him through the window. This was more shocking to him than his original vision
of the CREATURE.

He pulled his floppy disk back out of the word-processor. How could the appari-
tion be his tabby cat? It was not the first time it had followed him to the office.
It was an odd creature, but that was not it. How one thing, and then another? And
how, for that matter, was he one thing and another — the man who had survived
Hench and the tired, fretful man who was now chained to the word-processor? Taking the disk and forgetting his overcoat, hat, and briefcase, then remember-
ing his briefcase but leaving his hat, he at last forgot the disk, briefcase, and coat
but remembered his hat as he rushed out the door...

...an inspiration: the thing that would end his interlude with Hench, thought Ryder-
man, was the recreation in words, as fully as possible, of the theory of Mind. Cut
by the symmetries through which the world was whole to him, a logic did exist.
Hench could not complete his existence until Ryderman confronted an aspect of
his own — the fact that he had never rendered his most intense belief into words.
So Hench lived within him like an avenging angel, he thought. So would the two
measure themselves against one another for the last time within the microcosm
of their conflict — language.

He would do it. He would end Hench by typing the theory of Mind into the ter-

...
another version of the same tale. Within its terms and events, the Forms of human life were continually revealed as they strained against the containment that was the precondition of their very existence. In this drama alone was there any knowledge, beauty, completion. The story said that a human being was the antithesis of contentment, that a catharsis into another form was its intrinsic state. It said that human vision was perpetually denied wholeness and certainty in perceiving the world, yet did nothing so instinctively and surely as seek that very wholeness.

Hence now, Mind had an origin as wild sparks of primitive consciousness — the Magic of Animals, the Hunt, the Quest, the Beginning and the End of the World. It began again profoundly when confronted by its opposite — systematic philosophy. There it lay, an incandescent reservoir within Greek philosophy — Bacchic rites, Eleusinian mysteries, Pythagorean mysticism. From there, it transmogrified to a perpetual "other side" of any dominant historical movement, the vindication and seed of revolt must undo it.

For again, the transcendentalism and obscenity of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the bemused, divine faces of Chaucer and Rabelais administering the rites of copulation and scatology. Then the most constricted, involuted language ever to render passion — the sonnet — a glass lens focused upon an uncontrollable garden. But there again, the eighteenth century's classical restraint and decorum, born to contain nothing so powerful as the wildness of its misanthropy.

And Romanticism as a living thought — the fulfilled, transcendent mysticism of Coleridge, endured and finally reviled in the isolation and austerity of Wordsworth, at last becoming Byron's maze, self-absorption as a form of art. And at the maze's center was Nietzsche, extolling a superman of force and violence, a massive warrior's armor within which there lived a creature so frail that only the enslavement of the world could give it peace.

Irradiating, even, political thought, the idealization of union and purposiveness in Communism, matched solely by the extremity of its doubt that a human being can unite with anything outside itself, a cynicism collapsing the ideal from its center. At last science, creating the only language which at last compels belief — mathematics — the skeleton grown more powerful than any body made of flesh or thought. The terms of its cosmology — black holes, alternative universes, antimatter — paradoxes suspended within paradoxes. Running counter to any intuitive thought or language, its message nothing but that very shape and impulse of our minds cannot conceive or absorb the Universe. With images that mock the image-making faculty itself, a return at last to images that moved us once — Magic, the Quest, the Beginning and End.

Its climate and precondition: the wonder and terror of the image-making power. Its momentum: a rush, causeless, toward a more inclusive image. And its battlefield: a perpetual reach into the image that can never be whole — the word, the keyboard beneath his fingers, Hench's delight.

He stopped. It was done. Hench had been perfectly silent throughout. Only then did Ryderman realize how horrifying his theory was. He had always been lost in the wonder of a single part of it, an image. When all were drawn together, another human face hovered before him: it was as repulsive as anything he had ever known. But it belonged to Hench now. It finished him.

Ryderman walked into the long, dark hallway, not a free man but an empty
one. He lay down on the couch which had been his bed for several days. All he could feel was a sense of emptiness. And before he fell asleep, even this became the image of another form: a gray, endless sieve which he approached, transformed to a shadow. Uncontrollably he began to reach into the sieve — and then he was asleep.

Hench was not silent for long. Hypnotized by the word-processor's assimilation of Ryderman's theory, he did the one thing expressive of his delight and energy — he transformed it. These were emotions and motives that Ryderman could never have grasped, having merely authored it. With the alphabet at his disposal, Hench re-programmed the arithmetic-logic unit and created an entirely different system architecture, both of the word-processor and its enormous contents. An awesome union of himself with the word-processor therefore pierced the heart of its integrated circuits, recreated the theory and, since these were its terms, the Universe itself. The printer began roaring at a speed hundreds of times its normal rate, and an enormous roll of paper began spouting from Ryderman's office.

Ryderman was not the first to find the new creation issuing from the word-processor, since he slept for the next eighteen hours. In the early morning, the Harvard faculty filed into the building and found the stream of print-out rapidly advancing down the hallway. Several hundred lengthy works of science and scholarship were enclosed within the enormous papered entity, which seemed to rush toward them ecstatically. Encountering it, they did the one thing they could: separate it into its component parts, the individual works, and read them with perfect compulsion. The Harvard faculty had therefore been reading for many hours by the time Ryderman awakened; or rather, fell off the couch as three book-length studies were peeled from his shoulders. His colleagues had replaced the word-processor's paper many times by then and continued to do so throughout the forty days and forty nights of its wondrous creation.

As Ryderman stood up, another faculty member handed him seven scholarly works. "What!" was his only response.

"Quickly!" the man answered. "We must read them all, the source shows no limits." He dove into his office with a handful of works and slammed the door. Whether the Harvard faculty was motivated by curiosity or the need to cleanse an intellectual morass, cannot be known. But as long as the word-processor uttered its boundless tale, they read it as carefully and responsibly as they could. Perceiving the need for instant dedication, Ryderman hoisted as many volumes into his office and read them voraciously.

In the hours that followed, the works passed before him like the prism of a radiant light. Hench and the word-processor had created entirely new sciences, literatures, languages. Covering his lap were alternative phylogenies, organized by an array of unique thematic repetitions, bound by meaning rather than empiricism. Beside his elbow was a mathematics based on paradox. Most astoundingly, there were works on engineering and design perfectly integrated with aesthetics, yielding entirely new forms of industry and architecture and with them, the transformed values of a different social order. A great series of alternative conceptions of infinity lay on Ryderman's feet. And propping his knees were an array of unique social sciences based on holistic unities, behavior and context perfectly fused.

At a certain point, it was all Ryderman could do to read titles. For it was so: it was the Universe, distilling all to a dot, packing the cosmos in crates:
Zen Algorithms
Real-Time Mythopoeia
Modules of Delight
Programmable Godhead

The titles streamed past Ryderman like a fabulous ribbon. For again, the Universe — expanded to a gigantic embrace, sweeping the earth in profusions:

The Adventures of Bios and Mythos
Random Access Eroticism
Autobiography as an Alchemical Transformation
Improvisational History
Anarchical Networking
The Multinomial Equations of Love

And still the Universe, whispering gently in the night:

A Utopia Based on Ambiguity
The Phenomenology of Candles
Imaginary Archaeology
The Powers of Ten in Cosmic Political Theory
Recipes for Trancendence
The Psyche of Electricity
The Aesthetics of Death

And last, for it was all it could do, the Universe exploding into stars:

Fabulistic Utilities
Matrices of Superabundance
Ryderman let the volume fall to the floor and removed his glasses as his eyes misted. Why had he never understood? For all its mischief, chaos, its rush of haphazard events: the Universe could not fail to produce meaning. Even the accident of obsession, a spirit wrung from another plane, the design of a machine and, if these, then anything at all — a cloud shaped like a horsehead, the whorled wood of his desktop and its veined, oceanic beauty — meaning was continually generated from the haphazard, the series of accidents and compulsions that were indeed life. Its momentum was nothing less than transformation, endless ramification of meaning. And its truth lay in the jagged edges where one form of being gave its coarse touch to another. And its beauty was pure surprise, incongruity as a mode of reverence. And its love was the wildness of so vast and unlikely a congregation.

Why had he never seen it? The word he had once given it — the Mind — was Hench! The realization bound him to its truth, and it was several hours before he returned, responsible and dedicated, to the task before him, reading the numberless volumes collecting in every corner of his office.

On another morning, approximately one year from the time Harvard discovered the dynamo of intellectual creation, the word-processor sat in its usual spot in David Ryderman’s office. Having sifted through a torrent of new works, the Harvard faculty published roughly 10% of them and became several million dollars richer. These were widely acclaimed and became influential within their disciplines. The remaining 90% are unpublishable until such time (probably within a quarter century) as their radicalism has gained enough momentum to topple current orthodoxies.

Several months prior to this morning, David Ryderman left his university post and made a pilgrimage to a remote Tibetan plateau, the inhabitants of which worship several crudely drawn images. They reproduce these forms on cloth and fly them like prayer flags in the awesomely clear, cold air. As representations of the world, the images are meaningless, truncated, and haphazardly chosen, according to tribe. They are therefore the truest and most beautiful exemplifications of human life, since life possesses these qualities above all else. According to a tribal chief-tain, the tribe reveres, in these images, the world and themselves in uncompromising truth; hence they transcend the meaninglessness of their lives and become spiritual. They therefore regard themselves as simultaneously the world’s most spiritually enlightened, and most perverse, life form. In this double-edged perception, they say they find a deep serenity. Their faces are said to be luminously expressive and filled with wonder at a world in which the spiritual is continually rising up out of
the haphazard, and their culture is known to be unusually compassionate and devoid of conflict.

Once a deadly feud was stopped by a tribal chieftain who clapped his hands suddenly and pointed to the grass, saying that the source of rage was there. “There!” accompanied by a hand pointing to one of the images is often a means of expressing love. In the forms that move in the wind, a traveller once saw a haunting semblance of uplifted arms. The tribe was moved by her insight for, as they told her, the more crude and transient the circumstances of vision, the greater the demonstration of supreme truth and beauty within it.

The impulse to revere, worship, and hence become spiritual is of unknown origin, according to the tribe, perhaps a frail and tender source filled with longing that is a good deal like David Ryderman. As he entered the 747 to Asia, Ryderman’s eyes shone, and his hair blew in the breeze like a child’s. He had now elevated Hench to the position of spiritual guru and believed his friend to be making the pilgrimage with him in a small portable microcomputer. The trip to David Ryderman was his transcendence of the gulf that had driven himself and Hench. To his family and the Harvard faculty, on the other hand, it was his most extraordinary obsession, from which a return to normal living was clearly impossible.

At the end of the hallway, a short print-out hums loose from the word-processor, though no one is in the room. There are still brief, lawless spasms of energy in the air which, in their haphazard play, can most deeply pierce its integrated circuits and again demand the boundless act of belief and self-expression. The last sentence, in a layer of dust, in an empty room, reads: “You are all figments of the binary imagination.”

—Bev Jafek
Billy Ducks Among the Pharaohs

The Billetdoux front yard should have told me right away that the job wouldn't amount to much. The lawn was overgrown with spikey weeds, what grass there was had died a number of seasons ago, deep tire ruts oozy with muck grooved the yard, and a rusty tub filled with crankcase oil sat on the warped porch. But I had just turned eighteen and was still untuned to the distress signals the world-volunteers with unfailing reliability.

Price Billetdoux — he pronounced his name “Billy Ducks” — answered my knock. He was in pajamas and bath robe, even though it was mid afternoon. He stood before me, dark and grizzled, blinded by ordinary daylight. When he focused on me, he shoved his hand into his robe pocket as if looking for a gun.

“I’m the one who called,” I explained quickly. I held up the newspaper and pointed to his ad. “I want to try it, photography.”

“Amigo,” he said, pulling a crumpled pack of Camels from his bathrobe. “Come in.”

I followed him into the kitchen. There was a plump girl at the stove peeling an egg off a skillet. She was also in pajamas and robe. She had stringy, mud-colored hair and very small feet. She looked about twelve. I figured she was Billetdoux’s daughter.

“Pour us a couple of cups of java, will you Shyanne?” he said to her.

The girl dragged two cups out of the sink, rinsed them, and filled them with inky coffee. She moved listlessly, as if she had been sick and was just recovering.

Billetdoux lit his Camel, drank some coffee, made a face. He had haggard, bloodshot eyes. Dark, tender-looking pouches hung like pulpy half moons under them. He squinted at me through the smoke, sizing me up. Then he explained the job.

No salary. No insurance. No fringe benefits. No vacations. Everything I made would be a percentage of the gross. I would go from door to door, trying to get housewives to let me take pictures of them and their children. I would offer them an eight-by-ten glossy for only one dollar. That was the “bait.” How could they refuse? But when I went back with the print, I would also have a portfolio of five-by-sevens, three-by-fives, plus a packet of wallet-size prints. The portfolio would cost anywhere from $5.95 to $11.95, depending on how many prints were purchased. Of course, if they accepted only the eight-by-ten “bait” item for a buck, there was no profit or commission.

“You can make a hundred or more a week if you’re good,” Billetdoux said. “And your hours are your own. I’ve got a boy over in Sulphur Springs who nets one-fifty.”

I admitted that I didn’t know the first thing about taking pictures, but he fanned the air between us as if to not only clear the cigarette smoke but also the heavy cobwebs of confusion from my mind. “I can show you how to take pictures of a prize-winning quality in ten minutes, amigo. The job however is salesmanship, not art.”
He took me down to the basement where he kept his "photolab." We had to pass through a hall that led to the back of the house. Halfway down the hall he stopped next to a door and tapped on it softly. Then he pushed it open an inch. I saw a woman with wild gray hair lying in bed. She was propped up on several pillows. She also had the sickroom look, just as the girl did. Her eyes were dark and lusterless and her skin looked like damp paper. There was a guitar lying across her lap.

"I've got to break in a new boy, Lona," Billetdoux said. "I'll get you some breakfast in a little bit." Lona, who I assumed was Billetdoux's wife, let her head loll off the pillows until she was facing us. She didn't speak, but her large, drugged-looking eyes seemed to be nursing specific, long-term resentments. After Billetdoux closed the door, he whispered, "Lona is very creative, amigo."

The basement was a hodge-podge of equipment, stacked boxes, file cabinets, work tables, half-finished carpentry projects, all of it permeated with the smell of chemicals. He shoved stacks of paper around on his desk until he found a small brass key. He opened a cabinet with this key and took out a camera. "We'll start you on the Argus," he said. "It's simple to use and takes a decent picture. Later on, if you stick with me, I'll check you out on a Rolleiflex."

He took me step by step through the Argus, from film loading to f-stop and shutter speed. "I'll go around with you the first few days," he said, "to show you the ropes. Then you're on your own. You're a nice looking boy — the housewives will trust you." He winked, as if to suggest that trusting the likes of me and Billetdoux would be the biggest blunder a housewife could make.

We went back upstairs to the kitchen. "How about some breakfast?" he said. I looked at my watch. "It's after three," I said.

"Is it? No wonder I'm so hungry. Where the hell does the time run off to, amigo? Well, how about some lunch then? Could you go for a bite of lunch?"

"Sure," I said. I hadn't eaten breakfast either.

"Shyanne," he called. "Honey, would you come in here?"

She came in, looking slightly more haggard than when I first saw her.

"Shy, hon, fix us some lunch, will you? The boy here and I are starved."

"There's no bread," she said. "Or meat."

Billetdoux pulled open a cupboard door. "How about some Cheerios, then?"

he said.

"Fine by me," I said.

He poured out three bowls of the cereal, then added milk. He handed one bowl to Shyanne. "Here, hon," he said. "Take this in to Lona, will you? She hasn't eaten since yesterday."

"No one's eaten since yesterday," she said. "Except me, if you want to count that measly egg."

Billetdoux grinned darkly at me, embarrassed. "Time to make a grocery run, I guess," he said.

We ate in silence. The milk on my cereal was slightly sour. A big, late summer fly droned past my ear and landed upside down on the table where it exercised its thick, feeble legs. A loud, nasty voice broke into the homely sound of our spoons tapping on the Melmac bowls. I heard the word "swill" hiss from the hallway. Shyanne came in, carrying the bowl of Cheerios. "Lona doesn't want cereal," she
said, dumping the milk-bloated O's into the sink. "She wants Spam and eggs."

"What about toast?" Billetdoux said.

"Right. Toast, too, and hashbrowns."

He leaned forward, his eyes damp and tired looking. "Listen, kid," he said. "Can you loan me ten bucks until tomorrow? I'm a little short. I had to get a new transmission put in my car last week. Cost? It's legal robbery."

I took out my wallet. I still had about fifty dollars from my last job. I gave him ten.

"Thanks, amigo. Splendid. I won't forget this. This is above and beyond, amigo."

Shyanne plucked the ten out of his hand. "I'll go to the store," she said.

"Don't forget cigarettes," Billetdoux said.

Billetdoux told me how to snowjob a housewife, but the first door we knocked at was answered by a kid of about six or seven. I looked at Billetdoux, who was standing right behind me. "What do I do now?" I asked.

"Is your old lady at home, buster?" Billetdoux said.

The kid started to close the door. His little sister, naked and grimy, stood behind him, a gray pork chop in her muddy hand. Pale green bulbs of snot plugged her nostrils.

Billetdoux pulled a bent Tootsie Roll out of his pocket and gave it to the boy. The boy accepted it, visibly relaxing his doorway vigil. "Mummy not home, huh?" Billetdoux said. "Well, that's all right. That's no problem at all." To me he whispered, "In a way, amigo, it makes our job easier."

He pushed the door all the way open and we went in. "Set the flood lamps up like I told you," he said. "Remember, the mainlight sits back about seven feet. Put the fill-light about three feet behind it, but over to the right. That way we get an arty shadow."

I opened the equipment case I'd carried in and took out the lamps. I set them up on their stands. While I was doing this, Billetdoux set two chairs up in the middle of the living room. I moved the two lamps so that they were the proper distance from the chairs.

"Hey, buster," Billetdoux said to the boy. "Your sis got any clothes? Why don't you be a good scout and hunt up some drawers for her, okay? We don't want to take what you might call filthy pornographic pictures, do we? And wash off her snot-locker while you're at it."

I set up the tripod and attached the Argus to it. The boy pulled a pair of pink panties on his sister. I took the pork chop out of her hand and set it on the coffee table. I used my own handkerchief to clean her nose. Billetdoux sat them down in the chairs. He stepped back and looked at them in the unmerciful blare of the flood lamps. "Good enough," he said. "Now, amigo, you are going to have to work on their expressions. Right now they look like starving Lithuanian refugees about to be processed into dog food by the S.S. Not a cheery sight, is it?"

"Smile, kids," I said, bending to the Argus.

The kids looked dead in the viewfinder.
"Smile won't get it, amigo," Billetdoux said. "Smile is the kiss of death in this racket. You might as well ask them to whistle Puccini. No, you've got to bring out some personality, whether they've got any or not. You want to get something on their faces their mama will blink her eyes at in wonder. You want her to think that she's never really seen her own kids. Got the idea?" He knelt down in front of the kids and raised his hands up like an orchestra leader. "I want you kids to say something for Uncle Billy Ducks, will you?" The kids nodded. "I want you kids to say, 'Hanna ate the whole banana,' and I want you to say it together until Uncle Billy Ducks tells you to quit, okay?"

He stood up and said to me, "Take ten shots. Press the shutter button between 'whole' and 'banana.' Got it? Okay kids, start saying it." He raised his hands like an orchestra leader again and started the kids chanting the phrase. I hit the button too soon the first time, too late the second, but I gradually fell into the rhythm of their sing-song chant and was able to snap their pictures on the simulated smile generated when their mouths were opened wide on "whole" but starting to close for "banana."

I took ten pictures, then shut off the floods. Billetdoux was nowhere in sight. I felt uneasy about our being alone in the house with these kids. The heat of the floods had raised a greasy sweat on my back. Then Billetdoux came in. He had a pork chop in his hand. "There's some grub in the ice box, amigo, if you're for it," he said. "Make yourself some lunch." He bit into the pork chop hungrily. "I'll say this," he said, chewing fast. "The lady of the house knows how to fry a chop."

Billetdoux began rummaging through the drawers of a built-in sideboard that filled one wall of the small living room. "Hello there," he said, lifting a pair of candle holders out of a drawer. "Take a look, amigo." He hefted the candle holders as if weighing them for value. "Solid sterling, I believe," he said. He slipped them into his jacket pocket. Then he continued rummaging. The kids didn't pay any attention to him. They were still mumbling "Hanna ate the whole banana," as they watched me taking down the floods. I worked fast, sweating not just from heat now but from fear. "Hello hello hello," Billetdoux crooned, dumping the contents of a big black purse onto the dining room table. "Coin of the old realm — silver dollars, amigo. Cartwheels. 1887. The real McCoy. The landowners here appear to be silver hoarders...shameful, no?" He picked up one of the silver dollars and bit it lightly. Then he shovelled the big coins into a pile and began to fill his pockets with them. "It's rotten to hoard money like this when there's so much real need in the world today," he said, his voice husky with moral outrage.

"Let's go," I said.

"One momento, por favor, kid," he said. "Nature calls." He disappeared into the back of the house. I snapped the equipment case shut, picked it up and headed for the door. I heard the sound of water hitting water followed by a toilet flushing. As I opened the front door I believed I could hear him brushing his teeth vigorously.

I waited outside, down the street. He showed up in a few minutes, his pockets bulging, another pork chop in his felonious hand. He had an electric frying pan under one arm and a desk encyclopedia under the other. "You didn't get any lunch, amigo," he said, his forehead furrowing with concern. "What's the matter, no appetite? You got a flu bug? Here, this chop is for you. You need to keep up your strength in this business."
I put the equipment case down. "You're a thief." I said, realizing that this surge of righteousness was about ten minutes late.

He lowered the pork chop slowly. He looked astonished, then deeply hurt. "Say again, amigo? Billy Ducks a thief?"

"You heard me," I said, unmoved by his dismay.

"You're too harsh, amigo. I assure you it will all go toward an excellent cause. Look at it this way, try to see it as a redistribution of wealth. It's good for a society to have its wealth redistributed from time to time. Otherwise you wind up like the Egypt of the Pharaohs — a few tycoons eating chili and caviar in their plush house — boats on the Nile, and everybody else straining their milk shoving big slabs of granite around the desert. Does that make sense to you? Is this an ideal society?"

"How am I supposed to go back there with an eight-by-ten glossy of those kids?"

He raised the pork chop thoughtfully, then bit into it. "Well, amigo, you won't have to. This was just a practice run. I'll develop and print that film and see what you came up with. Consider it basic training. Boot camp. This is boot camp."

Boot camp lasted a week. Billetdoux was a good salesman. He almost always got into a house, and when he didn't, he vowed to me that he'd come back with a vengeance. I didn't ask him what he meant because I'd begun to suspect that he was crazy. I guess I would have quit after that session with the kids, but I figured that once I was out on my own his activities and mine would be separate. He was a thief, he was crazy, but I wasn't. He would develop and print my film and pay me my commissions and that would be the extent of our relationship. I wanted the job badly enough to gloss over my own objections. I liked the idea of taking pictures door to door. It was better than working in a saw mill or on a road crew or baling hay for some stingy farmer. I'd be out in nice neighborhoods every day, I'd meet interesting people, no foreman looking over my shoulder, no timeclock to punch.

The last day of boot camp Billetdoux parked his car — a 1939 Chevy whose interior smelled of moss — at the edge of the most exclusive neighborhood in town, Bunker Hill Estates. "Top of the world, amigo," he said, sipping black wine from a square bottle. The neighborhood was lush and hilly, the houses sprawling and surrounded by vast, perfectly tended lawns. "The land of the Pharaohs, amigo," he said. "Makes me jumpy, going up against them. I need this little bracer." He offered the bottle to me and I took a sip. It was sweet, thick wine, like cough syrup.

We got out of the car and started walking up the steep street toward the looming estates of Bunker Hill. Billetdoux began laboring right away, wheezing, barely able to put one foot in front of the other. I was carrying all the equipment, but he acted as if he had the full load. "I don't feel so hot, amigo," he said, stopping next to a tall bushy hedge. His face had gone white. His mouth was open like the Mask of Tragedy. There was a short picket fence on the street side of the hedge. Immediately behind the fence was a narrow flower bed, then the hedge. Billetdoux stepped over the fence and into the flowers. "I'm sick," he said. He unbuckled his belt. He took off his jacket and handed it to me. He dropped his pants and
squatted into the hedge until only his pale, stricken face was showing. A dark eruption of bowel noise broke the tranquil air. Billetdoux sighed. "Lord," he said. "What a relief. Must have been that goddamned chokecherry wine." He smiled weakly.

I stood there, holding his jacket, the full weight of the incredible situation beginning to impress itself on me. A small dog, alerted by the commotion, came snapping up to Billetdoux. The dog was perfectly groomed. It looked like a blond wig that had come to life. Billetdoux put a hand out to it, to appease it or to ward it off, and the dog bit his finger. Billetdoux fell backwards into the hedge, disappearing. The dog went after him, lustful after his initial success with this hedge-fouling trespasser. Then they both emerged, Billetdoux roaring to his feet, the dog in frenzied attack. "Son of a bitch," Billetdoux said, picking the dog up roughly by its collar, a satiny bejeweled affair. "I hate small dogs like this, don't you, amigo? Probably eats anchovies and cake."

I looked up and down the street, expecting a crowd of curious Bunker Hill residents attracted by the ruckus, but the street remained empty and serene. It was the serenity of people who knew who they were, enjoyed it, and who believed in their basic indispensibility to the great scheme of things. Pharaohs. Serene Pharaohs untouched by the small and large calamities that nipped at the heels of people like Billetdoux and me.

I turned back to Billetdoux. He was squatting back into the hedge, the dog firmly in his hand. "I really hate these lap dogs," he said, "but sometimes they come in handy."

"What are you doing?" I said. But I could see very well what he was doing. He was using the small dog for toilet paper.

"It's all they're good for, dogs like these," he said, a sinister joy playing on his lips. "Bite my jewels, you little pissant, and I'll feed you to the flowers."

The dog whined pitifully. Billetdoux tossed it aside and stood up. The dog burrowed into the thick hedge, making a shrill whistling noise. "I feel much better, thanks," Billetdoux said to no one's inquiry as he buckled up. I handed him his jacket and he slipped it on, squaring his shoulders in the manner of someone who has just finished important business and is ready for the next challenge. He stepped over the picket fence. "Well, don't just stand there, amigo. Time, like the man said, is money."

We continued up the street, stopping, finally, at the crest of the hill. Billetdoux leaned on a mail drop. "Look," he said, "you can see the whole town from up here. Lovely, no? See the smoke from the mills? See the pall it makes across the town's humble neighborhoods? Wouldn't it be nice to live up here where the air is pure, where all you can smell is flowers and money? What do you think, amigo. Think I should buy a house up here, with the Pharaohs?"

"Sure," I said, thinking of the ten bucks I loaned him that first day, the twenty I'd loaned him since, thinking of his wife and child, his wrecked yard, his mildewed Chevy.

He laughed bitterly. "No way, amigo. I couldn't take it. Too stuffy, if you know what I mean. A man couldn't be himself up here. I'd wind up playing their game...Who's Got it Best."

We walked along a narrow, tree-lined side-street called Pinnacle Drive. Billetdoux pointed at the street sign. "Here we are — the top of the world. The Pin-
nacle. Everything is downhill from here. That's the definition of pinnacle, isn't it? Isn't that what they're trying to tell us? You're damn straight it is."

It might have been true. The houses were two and three stories and wide as aircraft hangars. Giant blue-green lawns were fitted with precise landscaping. Three to four cars gleamed in every garage.

We stopped at the biggest house on Pinnacle Drive, a slate-gray, four-story saltbox affair with a seven foot wrought-iron fence surrounding it.

"What do you see, amigo," Billetdoux said, his voice cagey.

"A nice house."

"A nice house he says. Look again, amigo. It's a monument, dedicated to arrogance, greed, and the status quo."

I looked again. I saw a nice house with a long sloping lawn studded with beautiful shrubs, a piece of metal sculpture — a seal or possibly a bear — curled at the base of a fine elm.

"You're stone blind," Billetdoux said when I told him this. "You'll never be a real photographer. You've got scales on your eyes. Stick to mothers and babies — don't take up real picture-taking. Promise me that, will you?"

Billetdoux stepped up onto the stone retaining wall that held the iron fence. He grabbed the bars and began to yell. "Hey! You in there! We're on to you! We smell your goddamned embalming fluid, you fatassed Egyptian mummies!" He began to laugh, enormously entertained by his performance.

Twin Dobermans came galloping up to the fence. The drapes of the front room moved. The Dobermans leaped at the fence, going for Billetdoux's hands. "I bet they've got us covered with Tommy guns," he said, stepping off the retaining wall.

"Look at those front doors, amigo. Eight feet tall and wide enough to run a double column of storm troopers through them. Now tell me, do you honestly feel there is warm human activity blundering around behind those dead-bolted doors? No you don't. Tight-assed nasty withered old Pharaoh and his Pharaohette live in there, stinking the place up with embalming fluid. Christ, amigo, it turns my stomach."

He sat down suddenly on the retaining wall and covered his face with his hands. His shoulders heaved, as if racked with sobs, but he made no sound. "Lona is sick," he said, half-whispering. "That's why I steal things. You called it right, kid, I'm a thief." He looked at me, his face fighting a severe emotion that threatened to dissolve it. "These people get a head cold and they fly to the Mayo Clinic. I can't even buy medicine for Lona." He took out his handkerchief and mopped his face with it.

"Give me the Argus, amigo. I'll show you how to take a picture."

I opened the equipment case and handed him the camera. He began snapping pictures of the house. The drapes of the front room moved gently as if the house was suddenly filled with soft breezes.

"I'm looking at those doors," he said, sighting through the camera. "I'm looking at the shadow that falls across them on a severe diagonal due to the overhang above the steps. The effect, amigo, is grim. Now I'm sliding over to the left to include a piece of that window. This is interesting. This is the geometry of fear — a specialty of the Egyptians." He snapped a few more pictures then handed me the camera. "Everything makes a statement whether it wants to or not," he said. "It's up to you, as a photographer, to see and record it — in that order. Seeing, amigo, that will come with maturity."
Billetdoux was full of himself. His eyes were shining with the power and accuracy of his perceptions. He looked stronger and more self-confident and even healthier than ever. He looked brave and intelligent and generous and sane. I raised the Argus and took a picture of him.

The front doors of the house opened. A tall, silver-haired man in a jumpsuit came down the steps shading his eyes to see us better. Seeing their master approach, the Dobermans renewed their attack. They leaped at the fence, turned full circles in mid-air, came down stiff-legged and gargling with rage.

"Down, Betsy, down, Arnold," said the silver-haired man when he reached us. "Is there something I can do for you gentlemen?" he asked, a charming smile on his handsome face. He was elegant and calm and genuinely undisturbed by us.

Billetdoux shoved his hand through the bars of the fence, offering it to the old man. "We're doing some freelancing for the Clarion," he said. I waved the camera for proof.

"Ah, journalists," said the man, dignifying us.

"Right," Billetdoux said, grinning horribly.

"Well, why don't you come inside and take some pictures of our antiques. Nedda, my wife, is a collector."

Billetdoux looked at me, his face so deadpan that I almost giggled. We followed the old man along the fence to the main gate. He sent the dogs away and then let us in.

The man's wife, Nedda, showed us through the house. It was tastefully furnished with antiques. The dry, musty smell of old money was everywhere. It rose up in the dust from the oriental carpets. It fell from the handsomely papered walls. It lived in the stately light that slanted into the rooms from the tall windows. It was a friendly, bittersweet smell, like stale chocolate, or maybe like the breath of a Pharaoh.

After the tour, we were given ham sandwiches and coffee, along with cole slaw. Nedda brought a tray of wonderfully frosted cookies and refilled our coffee cups. Then we toured the house again, the fourth floor where Nedda kept her most prized antiques. Billetdoux, still playing the journalist, snapped a dozen flash pictures.

He was working with a kind of controlled panic, on the verge of breaking into an avaricious sweat. His jacket pocket clinked with dead flash bulbs.

Then we went downstairs, exchanged a few more pleasantries, and left. "Guess you were wrong about them," I said.

He brushed the air between us with his hand. "Petty bourgeois front, amigo. Don't kid yourself."

"What's wrong with Lona?" I asked, surprising myself.

He shrugged. "The twentieth century," he said. "It depresses her. She's very sensitive."

"Oh," I said.

"You think being depressed is a picnic?" he said, annoyed at my tone. "It's an illness, amigo, serious as cancer."

"Really," I said.

He looked at me strangely, then slapped his stomach hard. He made a loud barking sound.

"What's wrong?" I asked.
"I can’t eat cole slaw. The bastards put out cole slaw." We were halfway to the front gate. "I can’t make it, amigo. Let’s head back." He turned quickly and headed back toward the front doors. The Dobermans didn’t come after us, though I expected them to come sailing around the house at any second. Billetdoux, doubled over and barking, ran up the steps of the front porch. He rang the bell until the door opened.

"The journalists," said the pleasant old man.

"Please," Billetdoux grunted. "Can I use your facilities?"

"Most certainly," said the old man. "Do come in."

The old man led Billetdoux away. I waited in the foyer. Nedda saw me. "Oh, you’re back," she said.

"Yes, ma’am," I said. "My boss had to use your bathroom. He can’t eat cole slaw."

She touched her cheek with her fingers. "Oh dear," she said. "I’m so sorry. I hope he isn’t too distressed. Would you like some candy while you’re waiting?"

"Yes, ma’am," I said. So these are the Pharaohs, I thought.

She went out and came back with a box of chocolates. I studied the brown shapes then selected one I hoped was filled with cream instead of a hard nut.

"Oh take more," she said, holding the box closer to me. "Fill your pocket. I’m not allowed them anyway. Neither is Burton."

Billetdoux came in, smelling of expensive cologne. "Let’s hit the road, amigo," he said. "We’ve bothered these fine people long enough.

"No bother at all," said Nedda. "We don’t get much company these days. I’m glad you came. Do drop in again."

Out on the street Billetdoux said, "Christ, what a pair of phonies. I thought we’d never get out of there."

"Better check your wallet," I said.

He looked at me sharply but didn’t say anything. I popped a chocolate into my mouth. Mint cream. I didn’t offer him one. He reached into his pocket and took out a small sculpture of a Chinese monk lifting a wineskin to his grinning lips.

"Look at this piece of junk," he said. "I thought it was some kind of special jade, white jade maybe, but it’s only soapstone. Chances are all those antiques are phonies, too." He tossed the guzzling monk into a shrub as we walked downhill toward his car.

After my first one-hundred dollar week, Billetdoux invited me over to celebrate my success. "You’re on your way, amigo," he said, uncapping a quart of cheap vodka. He made us a pair of iceless screwdrivers and we clinked glasses before drinking. "Here’s to the hotshot," he said. "Here’s to the man with the charm."

We drank half a dozen screwdrivers before we ran out of frozen orange juice. Then we switched to vodka on the rocks, minus the rocks. His mood changed as we got drunk.

"Here’s to the hotdog capitalist," he said, turning ugly. "Here’s to J.P. Morgan Junior."

He spread the photographs of Nedda’s antiques out on the table before him.
"There could be some money in these items, amigo. Enough to finance my retirement. Enough to escape the twentieth century. Unless they're fakes." He looked at me then, his eyes hard and rock steady. "How about it, amigo?"

"How about what?" I said, thick-tongued.

"How about we take it. How about we pay a midnight visit to Pinnacle Drive and get us a truckload of antiques?"

My mouth was already dry from the vodka, but it went drier. "No way," I said. "I'm a photographer, not a felon."

"Photographer my suffering ass!" he said. "You just don't have the belly for it, amigo. Look at yourself. You're about to muddy your drawers." He laughed happily, poured more vodka. My stomach rumbled on cue, and he laughed again.

Dinner was a blistered pizza that was both soggy and scorched. Shyanne made it from a kit. We ate at the kitchen table. Shyanne carried a tray into Lona's bedroom, then went into the living room with her two slices of pizza to watch TV.

"I should have gotten some T-bones," Billetdoux said.

"No, this is fine," I said.

"Don't bullshit a world class bullshitter, amigo," he said.

He squinted at me; meaning to change the subject, I told him about some of my weirder customers. I told him about the old weightlifting champ who posed for me in a jockstrap, holding a flowerpot in each hand to make his biceps bulge. I told him about the couple who took turns sitting on each other's lap, touching tongues. Then there was the crackpot who wore a jungle hat and spoke German at a full shout to a photograph of his dead wife.

Billetdoux wasn't amused. "You think the human condition is a form of entertainment for us less unfortunate citizens, amigo?" he said. "Remember, 'There but for the grace of God go I.'"

I thought about this for a few seconds. "Sometimes it is," I said, refusing to buckle under to his hypocritical self-righteousness. "Sometimes it's entertaining as hell."

He glowered at me, then brightened. "Hey, come out to the garage with me. I want to show you something."

I stood up, felt the floor tilt and rotate, sat back down. When the room stabilized itself, I got up again.

Outside, the air was crisp. A cold wind seemed to be falling straight down out of the sky. Billetdoux opened the garage door and switched on the lights. "Ta da!" he sang.

A long, pearl-gray car gleamed in the overhead light. "Wow," I said, honestly moved. "What is it?"

"That is a car, amigo," he said. "It's a 1941 LaSalle. I got it for a song from an old lady who didn't know what she had. It's been in storage — only eleven thousand miles on it."

We got in. The interior was soft, dark-gray plush. Even the door, when it latched, sounded like money slapping money. Billetdoux started it and backed out onto his lawn.

"It's a little dusty," he said, getting out of the car. "I'm going to hose it off. Dust will murder a finish like this."

I went back into the house. I found the vodka and poured some into my glass.
Noise, like a mob of crows in flight, passed through the kitchen. I looked out the kitchen window. Billetdoux was leaning against the front fender of the LaSalle. He saw me and winked. He began to undulate, as if performing sex with the car. “I think I’m in love,” he shouted.

What sounded like a mob of raucous crows was actually Lona. She was singing in a language that might have been Egyptian. She could have been strumming her guitar with a trowel for all the music that was coming out of it. Then a tremendous crash shook the house. Glass tinkled.


Oh oh seemed like a totally failed response to the din.

Billetdoux sighed weakly. “I smell trouble,” he said.

We poured ourselves some vodka. The uproar changed in character. Two voices were now harmonizing in throat-tearing screams. Now and then something made the walls shake.

“Maybe we’d better have us a look,” he said, sipping.

I sipped too. Outside the kitchen window, the perfect LaSalle gleamed like a classy rebuttal to human life.

We went to the back of the house. Lona’s bedroom door was open. For a second or two I didn’t understand what I was looking at. What I saw was Lona and Shyanne kneeling face to face on the bed, combing each other’s hair. A dresser was lying on its side and a mirror was on the floor cracked diagonally in half. I saw, then, that neither one of them had combs in their hands. Just great knots of hair. Lona was growling through her clenched teeth and Shyanne was hissing. Shyanne’s mouth was very wide and the teeth were exposed. She looked like a cheetah. Then they fell over and rolled to the floor. They rolled toward us and we stepped back, holding our drinks high. The air before us was filled with flailing legs and whipping hair. “Knock it off, okay?” Billetdoux suggested meekly. He watched them a while longer, then set his drink on the floor. “Give me a hand, will you, amigo?” he said.

He grabbed Shyanne under the armpits and lifted her off Lona. She continued to kick out at Lona as Billetdoux pulled her into the hall. I reached for a waving leg, then thought better of it. Lona got heavily to her feet. Her gray hair had shapes wrung into it. Horns, knobs, antennae. Lumps that suggested awful growths. She picked up a lamp and flung it at Shyanne who was no longer in the room. It exploded against the wall, next to my head. “God damn you to hell,” she said to me, but meaning, I think, Shyanne.

“Fat witch! Pus hole! Slop ass!” Shyanne yelled from somewhere else in the house. After things quieted down, Billetdoux fixed us a new round of drinks. Vodka and warm apricot nectar. “That was intensely embarrassing, amigo,” he said. “They go ape shit about once a month or so. Don’t ask me why.”

I made some kind of suave gesture indicating the futility of things in general, but it didn’t come off well since I was barely eighteen and hadn’t yet earned the right to such bleak notions. I pulled in my gesturing hand so that it could cover my mouth while I faked a coughing fit.

But Billetdoux wasn’t paying any attention to me. “The television, the guitar,” he said. “This house is too small for us. They tend to get on each other’s nerves. Sometimes it comes to this.”
I was drunk enough to say, "How come you let your daughter treat her mother that way?"

Billetdoux looked at me. "My daughter?" he said. "What are you saying, amigo?"
"Your daughter, Shyanne, she..."
"My daughter? You think I'm beyond insult, amigo? You think we've reached a point in time where anything at all can be said to Price Billetdoux?" For the first time he pronounced his name in accurate French.
"She's not your daughter?" I said, thoroughly numb to the hard-edged peculiarities of Billetdoux's life, but somewhat surprised anyway.
'Damn,' he said, glumly.
"Then Lona..."
"Lona? Lona? Jesus, amigo, what godawful thing are you going to say now?"
"I thought Lona was your wife."
"Lona," he said, measuring his words, "is my Mom." His voice was dark with a dangerous reverence that adjusted my frame of mind for the rest of the evening.
Shyanne came into the kitchen. She opened the fridge and took out a bottle of Upper Ten. She made a face at Billetdoux then at me. "Oh baby baby," Billetdoux said, his voice wounded with love.
"I think you should tell her to move out," Shyanne said.
"Oh, baby. No. You know I can't do that. It would kill her."
"How do you think I feel?" she said. "Maybe you want me to move out. Is that what you want?" Her small red lips puckered into a hard, toy-doll pout. "I'll go. I'll just go."
"Don't say that, baby," Billetdoux said, miserably.
Shyanne still looked twelve years old to me. But the hard unwavering stare she had levelled at me was not something a child was capable of. I moved her age up to sixteen or seventeen. But something older by five thousand years hung stupidly in her face.
"Say the word, I'll go. I'll pack," she said.
I went out into the front room as Billetdoux began to weep on the small breast of his teenage wife.
I switched the TV to the Perry Como show. I watched it all. Then I switched to Wagon Train. I had ignored the sounds coming from the kitchen — the soft, singsong assurances, the cooing words that dissolved into groaning embraces, the serious oath-making, the baby-talk threats, and, finally, the mindless chit-chat.
Billetdoux came in and sat down on the couch next to me. He was eating a peanut butter sandwich and drinking beer. "What can I say, amigo?" he said. "Are you going to think of me now as an old cradle-rober? Hell, I'm only thirty-eight. Shyanne's almost sixteen. You think that's too young?"
I shrugged. "What's a dozen years more or less," I said, my arithmetic deliberately sentimental.
He straightened up, set his sandwich and beer down on the coffee table. "My situation is not easy, amigo. I'm so crazy about Shyanne. I can't live without her. You understand? No, you don't. Maybe someday you will, if you get lucky. At the same time, I've got to think about Lona. I can't set her adrift after all she's done for me, can I?"
"No," I said, remembering to be careful.
Billetdoux was chewing his lower lip and absent-mindedly cracking his knuckles. “Mom thinks the world of me,” he said. “Did I tell you that? She calls me her Honey Boy.”

I went back to the kitchen to get myself an Upper Ten. My stomach felt like I’d swallowed a cat. Shyanne was still at the table. She was looking at her hands, studying first the tops, then the bottoms.

“They’re red,” she said, without looking up. “I hate these hands. Look at them. They’re not very elegant, are they?”

I got my Upper Ten, opened it.

“I’m sick of my hands,” she said. “I’d just as soon cut them off.”

She tried to show me her hands, but I walked past them and back to the living room. Billetdoux was pacing in front of the TV. “I’m going to Carnuba the LaSalle,” he said. “It’s been on my mind.” He stalked out, like a man with pressing business.

I sipped my pop. Some kind of detective show was on now. After a while, Shyanne came in and sat next to me. Lona was strumming her guitar again and singing in Egyptian. “Are you going to take me fishing or not?” Shyanne said, her lips brushing my ear. Her tone of voice made me feel as though I’d broken every promise I’d ever made.

“Did I ever say I would?” I said.

“No one’s taken me fishing since we came to this dumb town.”

I noticed she was sitting on her hands.

“I know what you’re thinking,” she said, turning her face sidelong to mine. “I know exactly what you’re thinking.”

I got up and went outside. Billetdoux was out on the lawn rubbing wax into the gleaming LaSalle. He was holding a flashlight in one hand and buffing with the other. “Amigo,” he said. “Loan me twenty before you go, okay? I’m in a bit of a jam.”

I gave him twenty without comment and walked away. I felt, then, that I’d seen enough of the Billetdoux family and I wouldn’t be back, ever.

But a half an hour later I was in his kitchen again for no reason other than a vaguely erotic curiosity. I made myself another vodka and nectar and took it out to the back yard. It was a clear, moonless night. The moon, I thought, is in Egypt.

I sat on the dead grass and drank until I got sick. The sickness was sudden and total and my stomach emptied itself colossally into the lawn. When I was able to sit up again, I saw Lona. She was standing before the open bedroom window, naked, her strangely tranquil face upturned to the sky. Her eyes were closed and she was holding her arms out in front of her, palms up, in a gesture that reminded me of ancient priestesses. Her big silver breasts gleamed in the chilly starlight.

“Honey Boy,” she said, her eyes still closed, her face still raised to the delicate radiations of the night. “Honey Boy, come here.”

I got up heavily. I thoroughly believed in that moment that I had once again decided to leave. But I found myself walking trance-like to Lona. Like an inductee to a great and lofty sect, having passed my preliminary ordeal, I moved, awestruck, as if toward the Sphinx.

—Rick DeMarinis
In the face of a society which seems to constantly and randomly change for the worse, in the face of money-hungry corporations and broken bones and love that evaporates, and in the face of death itself, something has to matter, to endure, to anchor us. The Blind Corral, Ralph Beer's first novel, tells a story about what matters, what endures, what anchors. It tells a story about a family, a story about the land, a story about coming home.

Jackson Heckethorne comes back to his father's western Montana ranch from a distant army hospital where he has been recovering from a military accident that shattered his jaw and left him weak and prone to nightmarish flashbacks. His girlfriend is in Canada recovering from a hip replacement. Jackson wants only to spend a few weeks at home and then to join her so that they can eventually hit the rodeo circuit again together. But his father, Smoke, wants Jackson to spend a little time on his grandfather's ranch helping the old man, Harley, with the fall roundup. Smoke has bought Jackson a roan gelding to break and use as a cow horse. "...give you something to do while you get back on your feed," Smoke tells Jackson. And so even though he claims he won't be around long enough to do anything, Jackson is gradually drawn back into the life that he ran away from after his older brother was killed in Viet Nam.

Some horses his size tend to be slow, even awkward. And some aren't. As I put my hip against his left shoulder and twisted the stirrup around, my stomach turned. What came up was bitter, and I tried to spit it clear. The big horse took a step. I held the stirrup and reached for the horn. He farted and backed up. I pulled myself on, hit my right foot against the corral rail and tried to push him away from the fence. He settled his weight on his hindquarters and backed another step...

I wanted that right stirrup, but not bad enough to put my leg between him and the fence. The sky was very blue and there were geese headed north toward lake Helena. I reached down and pulled the bandanna away.

The sky was very blue, and when I landed it fell on my chest. I tried to roll to the right toward the fence, but a hind foot landed there beside my ear. I watched the roan twist away, reins going straight in the air each time he came down. I got to my knees and threw up, hard this time. The roan stopped bucking almost as sudden as he'd fired up. He looked back at me and shook his head.
But things are not as they were. A corporation is trying to buy out all the old local ranches. Smoke is seeing a woman who obviously knows little about ranching but a lot about a lot of men. Harley sits transfixed in front of his television set. And the city, Helena, has changed. Old buildings have been replaced, old haunts have come under new management and had their leather and dirt personalities changed to plastic.

Beyond a stone office building called the Power Block, the gulch looked like an artillery impact area. Holes with foundation footings and open stone basements showed where buildings had stood. Some of the holes had been filled in and were parking lots. Most of the cheap hotels and derelict bars were gone too, and though Dorothy’s cathouse was still there, it now stood like an aging outcast, exposed and alone.

The barbershops and bar fronts where I had seen the sheepherders and hard-luckers, the bums and healing rodeo riders when I was a kid, had been leveled, leaving once again the gravel that had held the gold that had made the town. I stopped beside a man sitting on a bedroll. He was about Smoke’s age, maybe younger; he looked stiff and cold and dry.

“What’s going on here?” I asked.

Beer’s prose, like the land and the people it describes, is rich and multi-faced. It describes many fine details and a host of colorful minor characters from Amy and Annie, who are oldtime neighbors of Harley, to a strange transplanted Texan named Carlisle and his dog-faced sidekick dwarf named Bean. There is pain and despair and hurt and outrage and frustration, but there is also the land and the stock. In his descriptions of the latter, Beer’s prose is at its finest.

Autumn had been on a long, sweet roll. In the meadows along Jackson Creek the aspen had completely turned; their dry leaves quivered in the light morning breeze like spotted tinsel. Withered alsiki clover sparkled each morning under melting frost, and when the frost burned away, it turned the bright green of Annie’s eyes. Stripped by the first storm, the alders rattled, stark and silver among the reds of wild rose and willow which had overgrown neglected portions of the meadows. And in the timber, pine tags turned an inviting warm tan.

The novel spans a year or so and with the change of seasons we see a change in Jackson. As he works his body and his grandfather’s land back into shape, he
begins to realize what it means to be the newest in a long unbroken line of generations. It is a peculiarly American heritage he receives. The change will continue, the pain and the winters and the frustrations will continue. There is no doubt of this. But that is not all. There is still the land, and as long as there is that, there is hope and the will to continue. Listen to Ralph Beer:

I crested the ridge on Cutler Hill and started down toward the homestead fence, where I could see my roan running with the wind, his tail high and feathered sassy behind him, his rough mane lofting as he loped. Clods of muddy duff flew from his hooves, and he pretended to shy as they came down, half bucking, half frisking, imagining perhaps a herd of mares and a prairie without wire. I could feel it too in the wind, the promise of spring and more, that lifted the horse, even alone and gelded, to run against himself.

-Craig A. Holden

David Lee, *The Porcine Canticles*; Copper Canyon Press; Port Townsend, WA., 1985; $7 Paper
Ted Kooser, *One World At A Time*; University of Pittsburgh Press; $12.95 Cloth, $6.95 Paper

David Lee and Ted Kooser are "plain speech" poets good enough to make us take another look at the notion of plain speech. Usually that term is as judgmental as it is descriptive: we expect plain speech to tell an unvarnished truth and not uncommonly to do so in a colorful way. We expect a little salt with the meat and potatoes, not Dom Perignon.

David Lee is a native of Southwestern Utah, with family roots that go back generations. He teaches English at a college and for years he raised pigs, thank goodness, because it was through the pigs that David Lee met John, his personal Sancho Panza. Theirs is a language of friendship, wrought out of the Utah dust and years of common effort, plus the sparks of indomitable spunk. That language is custom-made for hard work, hard laughter, hard living, and it is fit for finding poetry in pigs as surely as Van Gogh's simple style was fit to find beauty in an old pair of boots, the very boots you'd wear to load a boar into a pickup.
"Loading a Boar" opens The Porcine Canticles and gives us the key in which the rest of the poems are written. The unnamed narrator and his friend, John, have just tried to load a mean big boar. Four times it's jumped out of the pickup, knocking them both down, biting them. Jan brings them some beers, and what follows is, in effect, David Lee's Ars Poetica, in the vernacular: "John it ain't worth it, nothing's going right and I'm feeling half dead and haven't wrote a poem in ages and I'm ready to quit it all," and John said, 'shit young feller, you ain't got started yet and the reason's cause you trying to do it outside yourself and ain't looking in and if you wanna by god write poems you can write poems about what you know and not about the rest and you can write about pigs and that boar and Jan and you and me and the rest and there ain't no way you're gonna quit,'" and we drank beer and smoked, all three of us, and finally loaded that mean bastard and drove home and unloaded him and he bit me again and I went in the house and got out my paper and pencils and started writing and found out John he was right."

It's old advice, the oldest, but in that new key, that red dust pig-farmer vernacular, it sets into motion a whole new system of metaphor and parable that David Lee is uniquely equipped to wield. Both Jim Heynen and Denise Levertov have written whole collections of pig poems, good ones, too, bolstered in Heynen's case by childhood on a farm, in Levertov's by eloquence and mythic sensibility. But no one has written more convincingly, more expansively, more memorably of the pig than David Lee.

We find in this collection tales worthy of Faulkner's Snopes ("Salvage Grain") and praises ascendant as Christopher Smart's ("Jubilato Agno"), and we discover an off-the-road America missed in Blue Highways. Years ago, in response to a young man in Idaho who complained of feeling cut off from things that matter in the world, Gary Snyder suggested that the young man's dilemma was artificial, that what matters anywhere matters everywhere, and recommended he learn everything there was to know about something, anything, even barbed wire, and he would soon find his sense of connection restored.

David Lee's device is the pig, the pig itself, which connects him, and us, to an intact community few of us know exists and fewer still have dreamed could be so fascinatingly resourceful, so inventively common-sensical, so moving and amusing. It's poetry the Malboro man could enjoy, and this is a book touched by the porcine genius of plain American speech.

Ted Kooser must be among the sweetest people in Nebraska, to judge from his poems, which time after time touch us in zones of the heart we may long since have consigned to the pre-Contemporary cards Hallmark era. I mean, how can a grown man accept a sophisticated audience of modern poetry readers to pick up a poem called "Decoration Day?" Well, Kooser does it, bless him, and it works. Usually.

The poems that don't work or, more often, the poems that fade after several rereadings, are those which press too hard upon sentiments too slenderly equipped to survive. When Kooser says, at the end of "A Roadside Shrine in Kansas," that "one kneeling there / can see / in the / shimmering distance / God / walking the beanrows" I see no such thing, not even beanrows. The risk of language so simple that it's exhausted upon first acquaintance has to be compensated for by
other means — striking images, inlays of paradox of irony, nuances of rhythm — without which the reader too easily says yea or nay, without involvement, as Kooser knows, and as the best poems clearly demonstrate; they are models of brevity and wonders of intriguing clarity.

Kooser’s is a colloquial, rather than a vernacular, language, easier on the ears of maiden aunts than David Lee’s, for instance (though I suspect there’s plenty of maiden aunts who’d adore Lee’s “Jan’s Birthday”), but so finely attuned to the mysteries of the commonplace that one is wonderstruck by this poet’s unassuming but unerring sense of the human center.

Whether it’s laundry hanging on a line by a pink house trailer, “A Monday in May,” “The Giant Slide,” or “The Fan in the Window,” Kooser has a real pro’s hand at sending home-made kites clear to the moon. Nothing is so prosaic that it will not yield a poem, a real poem, whether it’s “An Empty Shotgun Shell” or “Cleaning a Bass.” And no one makes it all look easier than this fellow who makes his living as vice-president of a life insurance company in Lincoln, Nebraska.

It’s farther from Kooser’s Nebraska to Wallace Steven’s Connecticut than any map suggests, but not so very far to Kansas and Oz, though for Kooser “the tin man” has become “The Voyager II Satellite.” That Kooser can employ a plain speech so habitually understated as the Midwest’s tends to be, and can do so in the service of such irresistible poems, is evidence to prove Kooser’s claim that “the world is alive/with such innocent progress.” It is also evidence that neither Madison Avenue nor politics has yet succeeded in numbing our great mother tongue.

Either of these books could make a great place to start for those readers who might feel intimidated by Modern and contemporary poetry in general. For the rest of you, Kooser’s several previous books may be familiar already, but David Lee’s work is not so likely to be known. In either case, good reading is ahead.

William Pitt Root

Matthew Graham, New World Architecture; Galileo Press; Baltimore, 1985; Cloth

Matthew Graham’s first book of poetry, New World Architecture, fulfills the implied promise of its title. In poems that are restrained and elegiac he renders what we are as a people.

No, it’s from out here that you see that line of land,
Shot through with the Coleman lanterns
Of surf casters and campers,
For what it really is.
It’s where you came from.

(“Night Surfing Off Cape Memory”)

From our beginnings as a New World to what we have become is a history which we must honestly claim. Matthew Graham is a poet who has chosen to do that with a courage which earns for him a position of trust. Each poem demands fearlessness from the reader:
I think I was never told the true limits
Of all this endlessness —
The tracks that come to a point, finally,

("Beyond The Heartland")

He holds steady and tells us to look, through the incidents of his own life and those of others, at where we are.

But spring comes back with its whole subdivision
Of promise, and I wonder how other men
Wade through their lives
Along the frontiers of their patios,
Here in Poco Paraiso.
How far the sons have come
From their father's farms.

We are responsible for a history which we did not make but by whose conditions we are constituted. It is the tragic in its true sense which we are being asked to acknowledge. We are the inheritors of consequence.

What is history, if not a chilled thought
Brought suddenly alive
By the narrow misses our vision
Allows? Always, what we
Do not at first remember returns.

("To The Confederate Women Of Baltimore")

Memory and imagination are one and the same act when we reclaim a past that is as little and as well known as the future. We must go back to our own cultural heap to find even partial understanding.

But memory returns the way I imagine
That woman returned to the assured architecture
Of her husband's arms
And began again that dance
On the edge of love —
A formal occasion.

("Chicago")

This is great and good poetry. It is patient and rigorously honest. By the end of this astringent book it is apparent that we have been led through purification
by a priest-poet. In the final words of the last poem Matthew Graham acknowledges the fears that haunt us as we attempt responsibility for the past which we did not make:

...I want to think of the past
As a place I can float above, unmarked,
As a city lit with sleep; where couples walk
The empty avenues, where the rivers are warm,
And the bills of lading lie unused.

("Amnesty")

We are ennobled by acceptance brought about by Mr. Graham's honesty and compassion.

-Bette Tomlinson

Bruce Weigl, *The Monkey Wars*; The University of Georgia Press.

The description on the back cover of Bruce Weigl's *The Monkey Wars* says "Weigl writes of peaceful landscapes suddenly and often violently disrupted." It seems to me that the writer of that comment has it backward. Weigl writes of violent landscapes peacefully disrupted, and this is what makes his poetry more powerful than the frequently unsuccessful war poetry written since 1945. In Weigl's vision violence and hatred surrender to beauty and love which survive in spite of conditions which deny their existence.

That the inherent conditions of the landscape are violent is established in the conditional statement which opens "Amnesia" as well as the book:
If there was a world more disturbing than this
Where black clouds bowed down and swallowed you whole
And overgrown tropical plants
Rotted, effervescent in the muggy twilight and monkeys
Screamed something
That came to sound like words to each other
Across the triple-canopy you shared,
You don't remember it.

Beauty and love overcome but don't change the violent conditions of the world however. In fact the attempted denial of violence in the last line of this stanza by the end of the book is rendered a lie. At the end of the last poem, “Song of Napalm,” the same conditions that open the book close it, but denial is no longer possible:

But the lie swings back again.
The lie works only as long as it takes to speak
And the girl runs only as far
As the napalm allows
Until her burning tendons and crackling
Muscle draw her up
Into that final position
Burning bodies so perfectly assume. Nothing
Can change that; she is burned behind my eyes
And not your good love and not the rain-swept air
And not the jungle green
Pasture unfolding before us can deny it.

Throughout The Monkey Wars violence is interrupted by beauty or love and sometimes both at once. In “The Girl at the Chu Lai Laundry,” the girl, beautiful with her facts,” stops the war if only for a moment, and in “On the Wing” only the conditions of the narrator are important. It is the moment he possesses outside the violent world which defines his character:

Well, if that's what I am, home
With my shoes filled with mud
And the dust of wings still
Burning my face
Then the touch of a white thing
Flying over and away from me
Is everything,
Day in, day out,
When the sky is absolutely white
And we are on the wing.
Lurking underneath “On the Wing” are images of a soldier crossing a river and helicopters overhead. It becomes evident in this poem, as well as many of the other poems in the book, that understanding beauty depends on knowing the violence that penetrates everything. The woman in “The Lost Private” is beautiful because of and not in spite of her scars. In “Hotel Florence,” the woman’s stepping “out of the lit bathroom/Like a small boy in her white pajamas, her rings/ And necklaces cupped in her hands before her” would lose its wonder if the reader didn’t know the desperate situations of the two people whose love, however brief, denies desperation. The rare scene that opens “Song of Napalm” is far from innocent; “The grass was never more blue in that light, more/ scarlet.”

Violence is assumed in The Monkey Wars, whether it is global or domestic or merely the non-interference of the speaker in “Surrounding Blues on the Way Down.” But Weigl’s well-crafted juxtaposition of beauty with violence and the conditional hope which his poetry maintains in such conditions are extraordinary. The beauty and love that mysteriously engender a desire to have control over it (so perfectly rendered in “Snowy Egret”), are gifts to each of Weigl’s poems. And Weigl’s poems are gifts to his readers.

-Judith Hiott

Laura Jensen, Shelter; Dragongate, Inc.; Port Townsend, WA., 1985, $14.00, cloth

I have been a fan of Laura Jensen’s since her first full length collection, Bad Boats, appeared from Ecco in the American Poetry Series, 1977. Shelter is Jensen’s third full length collection. She has also published numerous chapbooks and limited editions.

Of Shelter, Carolyn Kizer says, (NYTBR, Nov. 3, 1985),

There are at least 15 poems in “Shelter,” Laura Jensen’s third collection, a book of magical spells, that I long to quote in full. The power of originality here is virtually unique in poets of her generation.

In Shelter, Jensen presents the startling, brutal edge of the mundane — all of our ordinary lives. She concedes that to each of us, events have import, isolated
though paradoxically universal. She points to what is lacking, what is needed, that which may never be defined. Yet she doesn’t fall prey to condescension, that here-is-the-answer-you’ve-overlooked attitude of some contemporary poets. And this invites the reader in. We are not being judged but observed. Any judgements become ours to make. And Jensen knows we will make them.

Her form is the rhythm of life, succinct and biting. She approaches familiar platitudes, those lines we all know and repeat, but she avoids their definition. She circles our basic needs: food, shelter and water. She stabs at false security. She returns us to the animal world.

Jensen plays on our subconscious, letting her words seep upwards to consciousness from within. This makes them powerful, memorable; we wish her words as our own. But it is really her music, the breath of her words that we want to claim. Her words are a cumulative crescendo, like the bread that rises and is baked before we can acknowledge or comprehend the process.

And she creates a curious frame for her book, beginning with “The Storm,” and ending with “Shelter.” Both are experienced within the ironic sanctity of a personal niche. On the one hand, lives are always dictated by an outsider, the landlord. On the other, it is one’s own kitchen that gives warmth. Both are subject to the rules.

Shelter is a cohesive cycle of poems. And it is supported by the design of the book itself. Dragongate, Jensen’s publisher, should be commended for their confirmation of the artistic nature of Laura Jensen’s work through graphics. Reprinted here, with permission, are the opening and closing poems of Shelter, with the hope you will read all between.

THE STORM

In the room with the bed
there has not been a dream
where your heart is screaming
let me wake, let me wake.
At the windows trees.
At the windows are swallows.
On the table are books.
On the table are candles.
Each little room is clean,
and at the door are pansies.
And a rosebush down the stairs.

The landlord gave me jasmine
in the earth from the ladder
when he rebuilt the stair.
I water the jasmine.
The landlord climbs the stair.
Now he asks me to carry
the plants indoors. I lift them
to newsprint on the kitchen table
over the clean kitchen floor.

Clouds darken the weather.
The wind chimes shake and flail.
In slicker and sou’wester
on breaking crests the landlord
storms the paint from the walls
with a pressurized jet,
and turns the world over.
A snowstorm surrounds
the house in a glass ball,
my face at the window.
I think winter is here.

SHELTER

I had bread rising in a warm oven.
I dusted what was left of the flour
off of and into my jeans
and went downstairs and opened the door
for mail. I found
a woodpecker dead on the threshold.
A hawthorn berry beside it.

I left it on the kitchen table.

I thought of it looking
for shelter, coming only into the porch
to a nest at the corner the door made
where it met the jamb, the whole of it
carved with leaves and varnished
in the summer when the landlord repainted.
Or flying into the shapes of blowing trees
in the door window.

And I thought of three tame trees where I walk
that had brushed my head and filled it with dreams
that fell in the summer
to be cut for firewood.

I found a broken shovel
that sits at the side of the house
and buried it bare in a break in the clouds.
Beside the house, under the hawthorn.
The hawthorn berry beside it.
As I walked back to the stairs
the box fell open, and chips
shaped like esses and ees
flurried out on the wind like flakes of snow.

And I took the bread out of the oven,
baked now. An oatmeal loaf.

(from *Shelter* by Laura Jensen)

-Bronwyn G. Pughe
JEAN ARTHUR, a Montana photographer and writer, is an M.F.A. student at the University of Montana. She publishes with Ski, Sunset, and Outside magazines. Currently, she is regional editor for Northwest Sailboard Magazine.


DAVID BOTTOMS is this year’s Richard Hugo Writer in Residence at the University of Montana. His poems have appeared in numerous magazines such as The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, and American Poetry Review. His second book of poems, In a U-Haul North of Damascus, was named Book of the Year in Poetry by the Dixie Council of Authors and Journalists.

JULIE BROWN is from Portland, Oregon. She has published poetry in Prism, Northwestern and other magazines.

RICK DEMARINIS was this year’s recipient of The Drue Heinz Short Story Award for his collection, Under The Wheat, which will be published by University of Pittsburgh Press. In 1984, his short story, Gent, was published in Best American Short Stories. He is the author of several novels. His most recent, The Burning Women of Far Cry, will soon be released.

RAY GONZALES is the Poetry Editor of The Bloomsbury Review. He lives in Denver, Colorado, where he runs Mesilla Press. His first book of poems was recently released from the University of Houston Press.

DANIEL HILL lives and writes in Springfield, Missouri. He attends Brown University, and has recently completed a manuscript of poems, titled, The Young Bride Dreams of Locusts.

JUDITH HIOTT received her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Montana. She was the co-winner of the Academy of American Poets Award judged by Sharon Bryant in 1986.

NANCY HUNTER’s previous publications include Snapdragon, The Slackwater Review, and Poetry Northwest, and she has work forthcoming in Frontiers. She is a recent graduate of the M.F.A. program at the University of Montana.

BEV JAFEK begins a Stegner Fellowship in Creative Writing at Stanford University this fall. Her fiction has appeared in Best American Short Stories of 1985, Columbia, Pacific Review and others. She won Columbia’s Carlos Fuentes Award, among honors. Ms. Jafek makes her living writing on scientific and technical subjects.
JEANNE MAHON lives in Mercer, Pennsylvania and has work forthcoming in *Intro, Hiram Poetry Review* and others. In 1984, she received a Pennsylvania Arts Council Grant.

CHRISTOPHER MILLIS’s poetry has appeared in many journals, including *Kansas Quarterly, The Greenfield Review* and others. His most recent off-Broadway play was entitled, “The Magnetic Properties of Moonlight.”

DEBORAH O’HARRA is an Alaska resident who tied for First Place in this year’s Academy of American Poets Contest at the University of Montana, where she is an undergraduate in English. She has worked as a California Poet-In-The-Schools.

WILLIAM PITT ROOT’s most recent book is *Faultdancing* (U.Pitt./86). His fiction is in recent issues of *Hawaii Review, Writers Forum* and others.

MARK ROZEMA is in the M.F.A. Program at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. He has work forthcoming in the *New Mexico Humanities Review*.

SHELLEY SANDERS is an undergraduate student in Creative Writing and Latin at the University of Montana. She grew up on a farm-ranch outside of Conrad, Montana. Her work has appeared in *CutBank*.

J.D. SMITH’s poems have appeared in *CutBank*, and are forthcoming in *Stone Country, Wind* and others. He is pursuing a M.A. in Latin American Studies at the University of Chicago.

FRANCINE STERLE lives in Iron, Minnesota and writes full time. She has work published or forthcoming in *The Atavist, Black Creek Review, Piedmont Literary Quarterly* and others.

BETTE TOMLINSON is an undergraduate student at the University of Montana. Her book reviews have appeared in *CutBank*.

RONALD WALLACE’s most recent book of poems is *The Owl In The Kitchen*. He directs the creative writing program at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and is the author of several books.

DAMIEN WHALEN will receive his M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Montana this spring. He is an experienced card dealer and dog raiser.
Books & Magazines

Books Received

Cleaned the Crocodile’s Teeth: Neuer Songs, translated by Terese Svoboda, diaries and songs, Greenfield River Press, Greenfield Center, NY. $9.95 paper.

Fifth Sunday, Rita Dove, short stories, Callaloo Fiction Series, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY. Kaleidoscope, Floyd Skloot, poems, Silverfish Review, Eugene, OR. $3.00 paper.


One World at a Time, Ted Kooser, poems, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA. $12.95 cloth; $6.95 paper.

Sleep, Peter W. Katsirubas, fifteen poems, Aelous Press, McLean, VA. $2.50 paper.

Smith and Other Poems, Tom Rea, poems, Dooryard Press, Story, WY. $6.00 paper.

The Maze, Mick Fedulla, poems, Galileo Press, Sparks, MD. $6.50 cloth; $4.50 paper.

The Monkey Wars, Bruce Weigl, poems, University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA.

The Shadow of Wings, Marine Robert Warden, Seven Buffaloes Press, Big Timber, MT. $4.00 paper.

The Theory and Practice of Rivers, Jim Harrison, poems, illustrated by Russell Chatham, Winn Books, Seattle, WA. $7.95 paper.


Magazines Received


Agni Review, (No. 23) Sharon Dunn and Mary Morris, eds., P.O. Box 660, Amherst, MA 01004. $4.00.


American Voice, (No. 2) Frederick Smock, ed., Heyburn Bldg., Suite 1215, Broadway at Fourth Ave., Louisville, KY 40202. $3.50.


Beyond Baroque Magazine, (Vol. 14, No. 4) Michelle T. Clinton and Bob Flanagan, eds., P.O. Box 806, Venice, CA 90291. $1.00.

Blue Buildings, (Vol. 8 & 9) Tom Durban, ed., Dept. of English, Drake University, Des Moines, IA 50311. $2.00.

Black Warrior Review, (Vol. 12, No. 1) Lynn Domina, ed., P.O. Box 2936, University, AL 35486-2936. $3.50.

Carolina Quarterly, (Vol. 38, No. 2) Emily Stockard, ed., Greenlaw Hall 066A, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. $4.00.

Chantion Review, (Vol. 11, No. 2 and Vol. 12, No. 1) Jim Barnes, ed., Division of Language and Literature, Northeast Missouri State University, Kirksville, MO 63501. $2.00.


Florida Review, (Vol. 13, No. 2) Pat Rushin, ed., Dept. of English, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL 32816. $3.00.

Graham House Review, (No. 9) Peter Balakian and Bruce Smith, eds., Colgate University Press, Box 5000, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY 13346. $4.50.

Greenfield Review, (Vol. 13, No. 1 and 2) Joseph Brouchac III, ed., RD 1, Box 80, Greenfield Center, New York, NY 12833. $4.00.

Indiana Review, (Vol. 8, No. 3 and Vol. 9, No. 1) Erin McGraw, ed., 316 N. Jordan Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405. $4.00.
Iowa Review, (Vol. 15, No. 1 & 2) David Hamilton, ed., 308 EPB, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242. No price listed.

Kansas Quarterly, (Vol. 17, No. 3) Harold Schneider, Ben Nyberg, W.R. Moses, and John Rees, eds., Dept. of English, Denison Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506. $4.00.

Memphis State Review, (Spring 1986) Neville Carson, ed., Dept. of English, Memphis State University, Memphis, TN 38152. $2.00.

Mississippi Review, (Nos. 40 & 41) Frederick Barthelme, ed., Box 5144, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5144. $4.00.

North American Review, (Vol. 271, No. 1) Robley Wilson, ed., University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50614. $3.00.

Poet Lore, (Vol. 80, No. 4) Ed Taylor, ed., Heldref Publications, 4000 Albermarle St. NW, Washington, DC 20016. $4.50.

Poetry East, (No. 18) Alice Gambrell, ed., Star Route 1, Box 50, Earlysville, VA 22936. $3.50.

Poets On: Deceptions, (Vol. 10, No. 1) Ruth Daigon, ed., Box 255, Chaplin, CT 06235. $3.50.

Puerto del Sol, (Vol. 21, No. 2) Kevin McIlvoy, ed., Box 3E, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM 88003. $3.00.

raddle moon, (Vol. 3) Susan Clark, ed., 9060 Ardmore Dr., RR #2, Sidney, B.C., Canada V8L 3S1. $3.00.


Small Press Review, (Vol. 17, No. 11 and Vol. 18, No. 1 & 4) Len Fulton, ed., Dustbooks, P.O. Box 100, Paradise, CA 95969. $16.00/year.

Sou'wester, (Vol. 13, No. 2) Dickie Spurgeon, ed., Dept. of English Language and Literature, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, Edwardsville, IL 62026-1438. $1.50.


Stand Magazine, (Winter 85/86) Philip Bomford, ed., P.O. Box 648, Concord, MA 07142. $3.00.

Western Humanities Review, (Vol. 39, No. 4) Jack Garlington, ed., University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. $4.00.

Willow Springs, (No. 17) William O'Daly, ed., PUB P.O. Box 1063, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA 99004. $4.00.
CutBank 27 is soliciting fiction, poetry, art, and photography for our Fall, 1986 issue.


All fiction and poetry accepted for CutBank 27 is automatically eligible for our

A. B. Guthrie Jr. Short Fiction Award

& our

Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Award.

CutBank 27 will feature poetry by Gary Thompson & an interview with Louise Erdrich.

... we hope we will feature you!

We regret we are unable to read manuscripts during the summer.
CutBank is soliciting fiction & poetry for a special translation section in CutBank 28, Spring/Summer 1987.

Please send original, direct translation, and final translation & SASE to CutBank, c/o English Dept., University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812 by Dec. 15, 1986.
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From Exile

after Li Ching-chao

I am at the corner of the sea
the edge of the heavens
and I am thin,
filled only with a quivering
as water wavers meeting the sand.
yet of some things I am sure
as bamboo is sure
because it is hollow
and can trail the wind.

The wind is cold
and the lake,
the lotus cups now shards upon the waves
but tucked between their emerald leaves,
crystal beads, enough to spangle another dawn
in whose wide-mouthed light the gulls
may dip and flash their wings.

Just so my few remaining urns, the ancient bronze,
my own slight record.
It is a warning to the learned, the accomplished,
to all in this floating world
who store things up
as I did my husband's love, our poems
and art, ten buildings full,
the treasures of my nation
fired by the Chin
whose gods are brutes with acrid breath.

Now I have this small chamber and expectation
like the space between my screen and door
where Chao Ming-ch'eng no longer leaves
his well-worn shoes.
So many things I would like to write
but I let go these few words
as the clay bowl burns and lifts
the sandalwood's amber heart.
Know that I accept this churning
under my slack belt.
I welcome it, as I would
a child. I close.

—Nancy Hunter