

PRISM

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NEWS FOR OUR READERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

In celebration of its twentieth year of publication, *Prism* is going to change a few things. The first stage in our transformation will be a series of special issues devoted to writing by Canadians under thirty.

In the past many writers of note were published in *Prism* when they were just starting out. Among them were Margaret Laurence, George Bowering, John Newlove, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Andreas Schroeder, and Tom Wayman. But we have never yet set out to concentrate our attention so particularly on a new generation of writers.

We are therefore calling for contributions of poetry, prose, and drama from young Canadians exclusively up until October 1978. Statements and essays on writing by Canadian writers are also welcome. If you are planning to make a submission to these issues, please indicate your age.

It is our sincere hope that *Prism's* new format will provide a unique reflection of the changing literary scene in Canada.

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A DOMINION

We drew lots and you lost.
So you went by train to the capital city
of the kingdom,
filled your heart with quartz
and came back to the salty meadow
singing do re mi like a French orphan.

You were a handsome lily in a can of water
on an ironing board.
Now it was my turn to play the ultimate game.
I crossed the railroad tracks on the beach
of the elephant trees
and searched every apartment for your legs.

We both lost. The joy of our failure
was an empty clam.
We went inside the shells: a bell of fire
inside time. Our lips
were an impossibly deep mirror of noon
in a Greek cistern of white rocks.
We were recorded on parchment
beyond the last game in our kingdom.

AIRPLANE

In the darkness there is one light.
Not the white ibis mythical in the evening
 by the Nile
nor the cowbell of day.

I will explain, though it is hard not to lie.

In the darkness there is one electric bulb
 alone in the sky.
Wide as the sun and a lantern,
sharp as a crucifixion with azaleas
 and a knight pausing near the scene.
It means nothing in words. Only light.

If I were lying a door would crush my brain.

It is tiny, almost pathetic, a crater of crooked
 snowfish,
the god with no power, in time.
I stammer. And fly into its onion glare
 inside
the ancient darkness on all the hills below.

Roo Borson

RIKKI, *Weird Sisters*, Intermedia Press, 1976.

From The Star Chamber, Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1974.

I'm always frustrated when I come across a polished line buried in a mediocre poem. *Weird Sisters* is a book of such poems. In comparison with Rikki's earlier volume, this one exhibits more instances of insight, more evocative imagery, yet as a whole it lacks authority. The author has not yet honed her talent finely enough to sustain it.

The book is a murky exploration of human relationships through occult language and symbolism. It focusses on the supernatural side of human sexuality, but unfortunately, like much occultism practiced by those who are not yet masters, it is both overblown and ingrown, often losing itself frivolously in self-involved incantation. One must wade through a great deal of mud to come to the gorgeous, weird swamp flowers. It is a tribute to the strength of the imagery that despite this the book is worthwhile reading.

Some of the problems that arise again and again in the book are evident in "Secret," a half-realized poem with a stunning last line. It begins with an attempt at sounding playful, mysterious, adventurous; it tries to tease the reader into reading further, but succeeds only in becoming obscure.

A path of pollen across a face
Laughter shared in darkness
At the far end of an invisible pagoda
A luxuriously appointed room.
Carpets tell stories of lovers of flowers exploding
Eyes scan the hills the alleys for treasure.

The poem proceeds to obsessive melodrama:

You take her as the rope takes the bell
You ring her 'til she breaks
With both hands you split her
Dead she moans, "more!"

Compare this to the last two lines of the final section:

Listen to her breathing
Your heart beating
Carving a luminous triangle into the darkness.

a striking image, regardless of the superfluous word "beating".

Again, in "Chrysalis", the sensitivity revealed in the images:

That old fear of the witch
Moth beating on the door
Pale mask leering in the sand
The bitter laugh, the chrysalis folded into itself.

deteriorates into self-indulgence:

One day I would write a book with you
Mirror to mirror wound to wound sex to sex knife to knife

What is wrong here is both a lack of verbal reserve and that common ailment, a form of poetic egotism, the conviction that it is an inherently important act to write a book, regardless of its quality.

"Weird Sisters," the title poem, addresses a "changeling" who, though never identified, seems to be a wholly, sexual, hermaphroditic demon of the self, a weird sister.

Changeling your eyes set with amulets
You are beautiful this morning
Tearing in — dervish, banshee, devilfish
Circling the room you throw a charm bewitch the place
I hear your sex hidden and warm lapping milk
Shaman snake you fascinate, tremble and leap from the chair
Provoke.

Pussies and snakes are clichéd enough without throwing in woman as cat and cat as secretive and taunting:

. . . . Rub your laugh against my legs
You circle me — rubbing against a room full of invisible legs
Purring. "I have learned to hide my secrets."
Taunting.

The poem really gets out of hand with:

. . . lifting your chin and opening your lips to
Catch tortured love words that teasing and burning I throw
your way

Yet it comes to rest on a humble, honest, and beautiful admission:

At times like this I admit to defeat
Grow hungry for the man
Who will know how to scale you.

Although the juxtaposition is motivated, human warmth and frantic incantation have not been blended successfully here, nor in the book as a whole. Like a newly-initiated apprentice trying to concoct

...

The image of the Easter bunny is too malleable to be functional. If "Tumor" is an attempt to portray the frightened state of a woman with a tumor (either physiological or psychological) then the emotional logic is warped by the softness of the image on which it is built. If it attempts to compile accurate surreal images, this obscurity causes it to fail. The result is that this glimpse of twisted inner life seems to have floated in from nowhere.

"Holocaust," on the other hand, is a strong piece.

In the barber shop the men held their heads in their
laps and soaped them.
In the used car lots the heads rolled around french
kissing in the back seats.
In the cribs the heads jingled like balls of pink
and blue plastic.
In the factory the heads licked labels.
In the post office the heads licked stamps.

...

Everywhere the heads hid under the covers.

...

In December the heads, peeled like tangerines, were
hung festively in the sky.

It uses clear real actions as a base — heads (or parts of heads) *do* lick stamps, etc. — and then extends that reality. The speaker's detachment is believable. The imagination successfully isolates the heads from bodies whose existence or non-existence it is totally indifferent to. The poem ends with understated menace, a colorful surreal picture of peeled heads, baubles in a fiesta decoration.

The last third of the book is composed of prose-poems or mini-stories. A recurring problem in these pieces is the failure to provide adequate motivation for the use of extreme or gross imagery. Yet in those instances where the language is appropriately spare and suspenseful, the author achieves a gnawing morbidity which I like. One of the better examples of this is "Friendship," which concerns a Mr. X who discovers a bump above his ear. The bump enlarges rapidly, alarming and alienating his nagging wife, who eventually leaves him. Mr. X has meanwhile become protective toward the growth, propping it in a sling. When the sling is finally removed, he finds that the lump has a face. Mr. X, lonely in his marital relationship, has grown

a second head to keep him company. A logical yet imaginative solution.

“I am so happy,” said Mr. X. “I have always been so alone. All those years with Berthe were so very lonely.”

“I know,” said the head.

“Tell me that you will never leave me,” Mr. X implored gently.

“I will never leave you,” said the head simply.

Despite such intriguing pieces as “Holocaust” and “Friendship”, *From The Star Chamber* has a major flaw: lack of control. The author generally appears to be flailing around among her images. It seems to me that even a surreal piece requires absolute clarity. The voice must be sure of what it says, the eyes of what they see.

The book is worth looking at for those poems which possess that clarity, in which original perceptions are presented in a convincing frame. I only wish it were a solid collection.

Francisco Brines/*Two Poems*

Translated by Louis M. Bourne

INVITATION TO A WHITE TABLECLOTH

White tablecloth.

It's a mistake: for there is no color, nor is there
a place foreseen, nor anything to bear
What must be light, or indecision.

Those who wish to attend, diners
At this white tablecloth,
With their nails, should scratch their eyes
To a broad and deep extent,
For there is no song to hear,
And shatter their eardrums with dry rock,
For no pain exists that might come close.
There is no cursing, nor tongue. Nor is there silence.

Now, uninvited guest, you can
Take your place in the void,
And since you have no movements, real or even furtive,
You are in a position to spoil the tablecloth,
And if you stain it (for there is no color, nor
is there a place foreseen, nor anything to bear
The choice of indecision, deceit or light),
Now you can know yourself. Give yourself a name.

(Insistence on Lucifer)

THE PATH OF LIGHT

The air brought the light,
And nobody watched, for it snatched it away in sleep;
It sprang from the shadows,
The light that traveled black beneath the stars.
Empty house, womb of death,
Corner and vastness, arid legacy,
Gloomy dump, fertile hollow.

You are where things seem to be,
Where man pretends,
That one who, to your deceits, is giving when he calls you
Breath, faithfulness.
You reach his eyes,
And, in them, you recognize the nest where you were born,
Black stone that knows nothing of the world,
And you deepen your frenzy with the beauty of roses
Or a valley of doves
Or sleeping orange trees near the siesta of the sea,
And you turn them into silenced holes.

The grave you so choose is weak,
Your night does not last there,
And you go back to your job, innocent creature, and those
that love you weep,
For you stop being light to call yourself time.
You wove us with that dismal light
Of your origin, and in flesh that breathes
You leave the quiet puff of oblivion;
Human darkness is not your kingdom,
And in misfortune you exist.
Sorrow reaches you, unhappiness,
The strong man's resignation, even spite,
And so we end:
Strange, the desire for that light.

Put out your torment, go blind soon;
If you once regain peace, don't disturb us.

(Insistence on Lucifer)

Akiko Busch

AN ITEM OF GLASS

There are days when a green figure
on a cloudy hill cannot distinguish itself
from a cloudy figure on a green hill.
One repeats, I can be taken
for something else,

watching what could be the slight impressions
skin leaves on glass. For a time
they have been able to become brief
equivalents to one another;
although my voice
will no longer arrange itself on them

as though this way there were too many
perfect copies of you
for the hand to hold.

WALK IN THE WOODS

We came to the road where it
curved to the left
woods all around brown
leafless

we would be home before dark

I watched your face while the
sun went down
light
lingering over your mouth

telling me the time like a
child in an unfamiliar place

testing.

After dinner we talked of all the old
good times until it was hard to remember more

I let your long loose hair through my
fingers felt the weight of other bodies
between us

knew what you came here to know.

WINTER TALES

The
grey god
 of the north
disrobes

eyes a pool
 of blue blood

dirtied light
comes down the ridge

a shadow in the yard
tortures a bird
tenderly.

Near the watch tower
an old woman slips on
melting snow and
drowns

deprived of her bed
and her pleasure

but

they let her drift
(as she would have it)

air turning cold again in March

until she turned up at his feet
white blue smooth

as he would have it.

Jane Creighton

IN THE ALLEY

in the alley they keep cocks like spare parts,
cranks and prongs, little details,
like the footnote you forgot
in your senior essay
and it's so dark in there
a person can hardly see
you whisper love me, love me
the seven men of Vienna
you had in your sleep,
your husband,
your lover, with his sheep
and his big black beard,
not one of them heard
the alley is still as a sheet
you keep talking

Barbara Curry

BELUGA

I *Summer*

Two bodies are breaking through
the water in the body of the whale. One climbs,
one climbs, one floods
like a river — back to the border
of land, drawn to the ocean, drawn
back to the beginning.

Inside the body one feels air
press down like mud; the other
feels walls give as he scuds
backwards to the vast echoing.

II *Autumn*

*Listen, the water quickens
with ice. Listen.* The estuaries
close like the film on her eyes when she dives
into dark water.

The light translates like the
voice returning through the viper-
green water.

III *Winter*

The sky deepens to the darkness
of the absense of fish, the whale
slips on the border
of absences.

The water coagulates. From
every direction the voice returns bearing
the presence of ice.

V *Summer*

The water wrinkles over the shoaling
land; the land ripples sunlight
like the inside of an oyster
shell.

The kayaks
slide into the water, beading out
across the bay — a long, loose
string of bones, bark, and dry skin,
slipping a knot on this loop
of land.

The first paddle breaks the back
of water. Air splinters
like the roots of grass growing
in sand.

The sound of the breaking
vibrates until the harpoon hears
the honing and surfaces in the polynia
of whale flesh.

Air focuses on the skin
and the water, with whale blood
and whale grease, drips back
to the ocean, back

away from the head until the echoes,
beating like blood through veins,
stop, clarify.

The surface of the water is
taut. The light
moves like a mobile.

Charles Deemer

THE MAN WHO SHOT ELVIS

for Jivin' John and Mary

So here he was, in the casino with hundreds of other tourists, waiting in line two hours before showtime, bored, drink in hand, watching his wife shoot craps. Mary was losing and angry but all the more striking for it, her blue eyes intense as she shook the dice in a fist near one ear. She brushed aside a strand of blonde hair that had fallen across her face, still shaking the dice, softly demanding of them *five, five* — she reminded him of a mad Scandinavian queen who had one roll to win or lose a kingdom. For a moment he looked away, attracted by the ringing payoff of a slot machine, and when he turned back the blonde queen was coming toward him, dethroned and pouting.

“I hate that game, I just hate it,” Mary said.

“You love it,” said Lester.

“I don't have the luck I have on the machines.” She took a sip of his drink. “If you'd loan me five dollars . . .”

He gave her twenty, and she was off to get change. It was true, her luck on the dollar slots was phenomenal, more than once her winnings had paid for their weekend in Las Vegas. The only reason she had gone to the craps table at all was because their place in line had brought them next to it. As a businessman, Lester admired the savvy of the hotel's management: make the customers line up for the show in the casino, where they would have things to do while passing time and would spend money passing it. The line stretched past slot machines, twisted around roulette tables to games of craps and twenty-one, then extended back across the red carpet to the slots, a long traffic jam whose little order was imposed by three young hotel employees, who reminded people that they were in line and should therefore have someone keep their place before drifting away to gamble. Lester was spending money without gambling, on dollar-and-a-quarter drinks before the show began and the price went up to five dollars. More savvy: admission was disguised as a two-drink minimum.

He lost Mary in the crowd. Everywhere he looked — hanging from the ceiling, posted on walls and pillars — were photographs of

Elvis and banners with his name. It had been Lester's idea to spend the weekend in Las Vegas, Mary's to see the show at the International Hotel.

* * *

They especially needed this vacation since the night he had been robbed. This had happened two months ago, in the parking lot of the bank as Lester walked to his car. He was tired after working late and oblivious to the shadows in the still night — someone was suddenly in his way, a gun-like protrusion pointing from a pocket, and Lester heard, "Your wallet, man." It was that simple. "Your wallet, man," no more. Lester was about to reply with something automatic, "Good evening," when the sight of the pistol, out of the pocket and real, made him understand what was happening. He quickly handed over the wallet, his gaze never leaving the gun, the authority of which was absolute although the pistol itself seemed fragile in the way it reflected light from a streetlamp. When the man ran off, Lester got in his car and drove home. He had two drinks before telling Mary, who could not understand why he wouldn't call the police. "I had less than twenty dollars on me," Lester explained. "I'll notify the credit card people tomorrow. I won't be liable. Maybe he needed the money. He was black. If he'd been white, I don't think I'd have given him a dime. He would've had to shoot me first. But he was black."

He could not forget the absolute authority of the gun. A few days after the robbery he went into a pawn shop and purchased a pistol and shoulder holster, which he began to wear everywhere. He felt unmoolestable with a weapon. He would feel its weight near his heart and think, *I am safe.*

* * *

They chose a motel on the strip. As Lester mixed drinks in their room, Mary looked through the brochures and coupons which the woman at the desk had given them. They had the weekend to relax and see a show or two. Mainly they wanted to escape Los Angeles with its robberies.

Mary said excitedly, "Elvis is at the International!"

"Who?" Lester's back was to her, hiding a grin.

"Who! Elvis Presley, you nerd."

"Oh, him. I think B. B. King is supposed to be in town, too. Where's B. B. playing at?"

He turned and gave Mary her drink.

"I simply have to see Elvis while we're here."

"You've already seen him."

"But that was, god, how long ago?"

In 1956 or thereabouts, as Lester recalled the story. Mary, fifteen had waited in line for five hours to get a front seat in a Miami moviehouse. She had screamed through the entire show, almost close enough to touch him.

Mary said, "I can go alone tomorrow and we can meet afterwards for dinner."

"If you really want to see that clown, I'll take you myself."

"We can see him, really?"

"There's probably nothing more amusing in town."

"Oh you," and she threw one arm around him, almost spilling their drinks. He could feel the pistol between them, and so could Mary.

"I'm going to take that off," she said.

"My pants, too, while you're at it."

* * *

Lester looked around for a waiter from whom to order another drink. Unable to find one, he began to stare at Mary, hoping to catch her eye and beckon her over to save their place in line while he went to the bar. Mary was playing three slot machines simultaneously, engrossed.

"Can I get you a drink?"

It was the man in line behind him. Earlier he had nodded at Lester, who had nodded back; his wife had smiled and Lester had smiled in return. He was expecting them to start a conversation.

"I'm going to the bar anyway," the man told him.

"Thanks," said Lester, reaching for his wallet. "Scotch and water."

"Let me buy." The man had turned to go before Lester could pretend to object.

The woman introduced herself.

"I'm Nancy Waterby. My husband's name is Ralph. We drove down from Medford just to see Elvis."

"Medford."

"It's in Oregon."

She offered her hand, and Lester gently shook it.

"I'm Lester Williams, and that blonde fanatic over there, the one hogging all the winning machines, is Mary, who belongs to me."

The woman smiled. Lester wondered at which moviehouse she had seen Elvis in the fifties.

"This is an unbelievable crowd, isn't it?" Nancy said. "I wish we'd gotten in line much earlier. I don't think we'll be seated on the main floor."

"The dude's not hurting for fans," Lester agreed.

He turned away, pretending to be interested in the craps game. Ralph Waterby returned with the drinks.

"I forgot to ask if your wife wanted anything," Ralph said.

"Oh, I more or less do it heavy for both of us."

Ralph laughed. Nancy laughed. Lester looked at his watch and, as if on command, someone across the casino shouted, "We're moving in!" Lester called Mary, who brought news that she was twenty-four dollars ahead. Their cover-charge was covered, Lester noted. Counting Mary's drinks, he would have four to get him through the show. He was no longer sure he'd be able to handle that many.

* * *

They were seated at a long table in the first balcony with the Waterbys and two couples who were together and remained aloof. Mary was very excited, squeezing Lester's arm and standing up from the table to get a better view of the massive ballroom into which her idol would descend, perhaps from heaven itself. Lester, too, was impressed: the stage covered the entire width of the ballroom, and a gold curtain just as wide dropped in front of the stage from a height above the second balcony. Naked cherubs flew among clouds on the side walls, above paintings of Greek ruins and imposing figures from some forgotten French court. A waitress handed Lester a souvenir menu with Elvis' photograph on the cover and informed him that the minimum number of drinks had to be ordered at once. Soon there were four glasses lined up in front of him.

Ralph was telling him what a great comeback show it would be.

"What a fantastic comeback he made! After all those lousy movies, what? about three a year throughout the sixties? — and now this, it's just spectacular. That curtain alone must be worth thousands. This show will be unbelievable. I wonder when it starts. How can they expect us to sit here waiting?"

Savvy, Lester knew. And just as he expected, not Elvis but a comedian opened the show, doing his routine in front of the gold curtain. "Folks, they gave me this job tonight because Colonel Parker figured the show needed a sex symbol." The crowd laughed and waited for Elvis. But when the curtain finally rose, the stage revealed a trio of black women, "The Sweet Inspirations," who sang a medley of Aretha Franklin songs as photographs of Aretha flashed onto a screen behind them. Yes, somebody sure knows what they're doing, Lester thought. The delay only increased the excitement, and Mary couldn't stop squeezing his arm. Lester slid away one empty glass and moved three full glasses forward, one by one, like customers advancing to his window at the bank. Since being robbed, he greeted customers with an apprehensive glance, trying to discern their motives.

When the curtain dropped again, the crowd hushed. "Oh God, this is it," Mary whispered to him. Without introduction an orchestra began to play, and Lester recognized the theme from the movie, *2001*. The music seemed to come out of every wall. Scattered cheers and shrieks identified those who were no longer able to contain themselves; "This is it!" Mary said again. The movie theme was picked up by a chorus, which like the orchestra was hidden behind the curtain unless the voices belonged to cherubs, to French royalty. The crowd floated like a frail bubble. Then the curtain began to rise slowly, the bubble was burst by the quick rhythm of a drum, by heartbeats, and Mary began to scream. Elvis ran onto the stage and came forward to the very edge of it, arms outstretched to his fans as he walked up and down the width of the ballroom for everyone to see. He was dressed entirely in white, his clothes sparkling with jewels. What can that dude be thinking now? Lester wondered. *I am Elvis, this is my body.*

* * *

When Lester was sixteen, he decided to become a rhythm-and-blues star. Three friends agreed that this was a great idea, and they immediately formed a group called The Woodpeckers. They spent most of the summer learning songs, rehearsing, building a repertoire, and by the time school started they could imitate a number of popular groups, singing "Sincerely" like The Moonglows and "Gee" like The Crows, "Earth Angel" like The Penguins and "Sh-Boom" like The Chords. They changed their name to The Blackbirds and began to sing at high school dances and talked of cutting a record soon.

Lester wrote a song called "Shoo-Do-Be, You Need Me," which everyone agreed was their best number. They recorded this song and a few others on a tape, which they left with the secretary of a record company. They would hear from the company soon, they were told.

The record company never contacted them, and graduation ended their dream. One of The Blackbirds went to college on a track scholarship, another joined the Army to flee a pregnant girlfriend, a third disappeared from the neighborhood. Lester, who had kept remarkably good grades for the little time he spent studying, enrolled in Los Angeles Junior College.

Two years later he heard "Shoo-Do-Be, You Need Me" on the radio, sung by a group called The O'Brien Sisters. He knew he had been robbed but it didn't matter, his dream now was to make money in business. He wanted to make a lot of money because his father, a mailman, earned barely enough to support a wife and six children. Lester was determined to do better than this. For a beginning, he wouldn't make the mistake of having a large family.

He graduated from Junior College and transferred to Business School at UCLA, supporting himself with a night janitorial job. He met Mary in his senior year, and they fell quickly in love and were secretly engaged. Anticipating the objection of both sets of parents, they stretched their secret to include marriage in Las Vegas as soon as Mary turned twenty-one. Lester still planned to make a lot of money in business, but while waiting for more specific intentions to occur to him he decided to get his Army obligation out of the way. Mary accompanied him overseas, and from Germany she wrote her parents that she had decided not to be an airline stewardess after all, as a matter of fact she had gotten married instead, and she and her husband were in the Army now, an ocean's length from home. She was sorry to be so sudden and late with the announcement but she knew they would understand and would like Lester because she loved him very much and had never been happier.

* * *

It occurred to Lester that it would be the easiest thing in the world to shoot Elvis Presley through the head. He saw no visible security precautions. If an assassin were willing to wait four hours in line instead of two, a front table would put the target within easy range. Even from the first balcony, even from the second, Elvis was closer than President Kennedy had been from that window in the warehouse.

But shooting from a balcony, an assassin would have to be an excellent shot because Elvis never kept still. He sang while doing splits and leaps and karate chops. Using the whole stage, Elvis worked himself into such a sweat that he had to stop after several songs to wipe himself dry with a red silk scarf, which he then threw to the screaming crowd. A flunky brought Elvis a blue scarf, and after three or four more songs it, too, was thrown to the fans, and the flunky raced forward with a purple. Lester wondered, What is that man's salary?

He pictured Elvis writhing in pain. Elvis was singing a hit, "Hound Dog" or "Heartbreak Hotel," when the bullet struck him below the navel, above the thigh. He grabbed himself like a man with a hernia, sinking to his knees when he knew he should be making a flying leap, rolling onto his side as the drummer awaited a karate chop to punctuate, blood flowing readily but soaking only the crotch of his white pants before the advancing crowd, panicked and furious, had them pulled off, then his diamond-studded shirt torn to shreds, his hair portioned out from the roots. Lester quietly slipped out an exit, unnoticed. He waited for the press in the casino but the reporters were skeptical. "I tell you, I did it! I did it because a long time ago they stole my song. They stole my song. It would have been a hit for me but it was a hit for them instead. They stole it."

* * *

He worked in Payroll in the Army and this, with his degree, landed him a job with a Los Angeles bank. Lester was soon well-liked as one who paid attention to details: he changed his white shirt daily, he wore only black socks, he never wore a loud tie, when there was extra work to do he worked nights without having to be asked, he learned the first names of the right customers and was formal with the right customers. After two years Lester felt secure in the job, and only then did he tell Mary that she could look for a house to buy. By 1967 no one could say Lester was not a success. He was even successful enough to exercise some independence, wearing wide and colorful ties before his boss began to wear them. At a party his boss told him, in the presence of others, "Lester, you wouldn't have gotten away with dressing like that before you became such a credit to the bank." Lester shocked everyone by replying, "Don't ever call me a credit to anything again. I do my job, period."

* * *

As Elvis sang "Love Me Tender," Mary softly wept.

Ralph asked Lester, "Why doesn't he play the guitar?" After the first two songs, the flunky had taken the instrument away. "I wanted to hear him play some more. Why doesn't he play the guitar?"

Lester stared at the last drink in front of him. It was going to be a horse race.

* * *

Before leaving the motel to see Elvis (and she had insisted they go early), Mary called her sister in Los Angeles to check on the children. They had waited six years before starting a family, and Krista, the oldest, was now five. Krista wanted to speak to her daddy on the phone.

"What's up, sugar?" Lester asked. "You behaving yourself?"

"Yes. Will you bring me a pitchur?"

"What kind of picture? Want a pretty postcard?"

"A pitchur of Elvis."

"Elvis! Where'd you find out about Elvis?"

"Mommy said you are going to see Elvis. I want a pitchur."

"Okay, sweetheart."

As soon as Mary had hung up, he asked, "How did she find out about Elvis?"

"We listen to him at home all the time."

"You do?"

"Well, you ought to know that."

"Stop brain-washing my daughter."

"Don't be silly. We listen to your records, too."

* * *

He was so drunk that he had missed everything, and Mary had to explain.

"There were two of them," she said. "They just jumped up onto the stage and ran at Elvis and before you knew it, pow, he did a couple karate chops on them. It was fantastic. Police came out from everywhere and hauled the guys off."

Lester, moving along with the crowd, felt like a leaf floating down the gutter. He couldn't remember finishing the last drink or seeing the end of the show.

"At least they didn't try it earlier. Elvis was doing his last song

anyway, so no one missed anything. I don't think that'll be tried again once people find out he can do karate. It was fantastic."

They emerged from the ballroom, and Lester stopped to take a deep breath.

"Are you okay?" Mary asked.

"I just need a minute. Little dizzy."

"You didn't have to drink mine. We could have left them."

"I'll be okay in a minute."

He concentrated on breathing until his head began to clear.

"I'm exhausted," said Mary. "I've never seen a show like that in my life. I'm just exhausted."

"Yeah, you scream a lot."

"Oh, you. Are you sure you're alright?"

"Much better. Let's go."

But he had to stop again outside on the sidewalk. A universe of blue lights towered above them, silhouetting the International Hotel against the desert sky. He recognized the Waterbys coming toward them.

"Would you folks join us in a nightcap?" Ralph asked.

Lester said, "I've had it."

Nancy suggested coffee.

"We have an early start in the morning," said Lester, stretching the truth.

"Well, it's been great," said Ralph. "What a great show. Here, I'd like to give you my card. If you're ever in Medford, look us up."

"We'd be *so* delighted," said Nancy.

Ralph said, "I don't quite know how to say this but Medford, you see, is a little backward in some ways and we've never had the opportunity or pleasure before to — . . . well, I mean, what I'm trying to say is we enjoyed being with you. You're excellent company."

"You mean I'm a credit to my race," said Lester.

"Now I didn't mean to — "

"Then I'm not a credit to my race."

"You are! I mean, I didn't think of it that way."

Lester slapped him on the arm.

"We had a ball," he told the Waterbys. "Have a safe trip home."

"You drive safely, too," said Ralph.

The two couples shook hands before walking off in opposite directions. At the car Lester asked Mary to drive.

* * *

The morning newspaper explained that the two men had merely wanted to shake Elvis' hand. They were unarmed and a little drunk and intended to shake his hand on a bet. Elvis wasn't pressing charges, so the police let the men go.

Getting into the car after breakfast, Lester asked Mary if she believed that's all the men wanted to do.

"I think so. Why?"

"Because it would've been easy if they'd wanted to shoot him."

"What kind of hypothetical situation is that?"

"It's not so hypothetical."

"Who would want to shoot Elvis in the first place?"

"Lots of people, I bet."

As the car idled, Lester looked for something to play on the tape deck.

"Who?" Mary wanted to know.

"Jealous husbands, for example."

"Oh God, Les, you're not going to tell me you were jealous last night."

"Because you turned into a thirty-two-year-old teenager? Not me, baby."

"You're being stupid. Why should anyone want to shoot Elvis?"

"No particular reason, except that it would be easy. I had a gun in there, didn't I? It'd be very easy to do."

"I don't want to talk about it."

He put on a tape of old rhythm-and-blues songs and turned the car toward Los Angeles. He sped across the desert at ninety miles an hour, listening to *his* music as Mary slept, and Elvis was not mentioned again until they were home and Krista ran to him for her pitchur.

ELEGY: THE WEIGHT OF BEAUTY

winter's white fire
like the acute hunger
of the child within
encloses me

I reach toward sleep
and my thin fingers
grow down through the bed
the floor
and stroke animals
awaiting the libation of spring

through thick fur
I feel that moment approaching
shaking the firmly-rooted grass and trees
scattering frost sparks —

the glow of things near and beautiful

luxuriant flames
flooding from the mouths of creatures
awakening to share this weight
they have carried so long

APPROACHING THE WELL

there have been blood sacrifices
in the east this morning

here
grass that gave reality to the sun
holds the sky in its stiffness

burdened by this cold
I go out to the well

and find darkness
seeping from the deep rock
the smoothness of new ice

against this there is no defence

I raise my hands
feel the sun like flint
strike fire from my nails

a brief flaming of stars
that lightens the necessity of day

THE KILLING GIFT

Everything falls apart
the mad poet said. At least
she was mad, recently released
this being her first reading
since she got out.

Her voice was scratchy
as she talked of Occupational Therapy
workshops where they teach
how to make breakfast
alone again.

She moved around
while she read, hproing like a mother kangaroo
without child.
Each time the host ignored her questions of time
it became pretense to that energy we
all will do when we're not sure
when constantly told it is
we who miss the cues, we
who are the ones
in error.

She was in the first reading I'd ever been to
years ago, her poems then a transport into light, into dark
& only near to that place where she is now

those very things
all too often
fall apart, & take us
mortals all too deaf
along.

touched with words

REACHING

The afternoon unfolds its story/speaking
with limp hands
words clanking like dishes in restaurants.

You stand & watch.
There/the silver candle-holder
with curves like wings.
There/plastic prisms, an electric chandler
with rainbows.
There/the woman
with glasses of milk like castles.

A record turns.
Your eyes recede into your skull.
Hers jump
like birds at the tremour of feet.
A long flute sings.

You lean on the table
unpatch its quilt of magazines & newspapers
for her to read
& know/this
is the story.

DANCE

She knew Ernie's question even though she couldn't make out the actual words, but she didn't answer just yet, still letting her attention rest — not on the television, its vertical hold nervously playing havoc with the picture — but on what lay past the window. The hamlet, the beginning of night, the streets empty except for a dog wandering in and out of the ditch by the Legion Hall as if it were half drunk. But everything else still, not a sleep-stillness, but a pause. The Hall with its single outside light unlit. The corner streetlight not yet on. Wild berry bushes up from the ditch, dusty motionless.

“Coming down to the hotel for a couple?”

The dog ambled across the road and disappeared behind the Hall. She could see out past the Hall and the McIntyre place behind it to the railway yard and the highway beyond and the hills stitched to the cloudless sky with poplar patches, their green muted with dust and dusk.

“Not tonight.”

“What'd you say?”

The light on the Legion Hall went on, dim in the earliness, a small yolk of glimmer against the grey imitation-brick siding. She wondered sometimes if there were such a thing as real grey bricks.

“I don't want to go down there tonight.”

He came into the room, his face flushed from after-work beers and glowing from being newly-shaved. His skin was mottled with red and dark against his weekend-white shirt.

“You going to that dance?” He lit a cigarette. “Goddam T.V.”

“Thought I'd go over for awhile. You want to come?”

“Might get over for awhile.” He fiddled with the dials until the picture condensed into a two-inch stream across the middle of the screen. “Shit.” He clicked it off. “Donny and Marilyn gone out?”

She nodded.

He slipped on his ball jacket, not buttoning it against the barrel of his stomach. A belch escaped from his flushed face, and he laughed and pounded against his chest with his fist.

“Christ. Full of wind.”

“You always was full of wind.”

His smile showed the ruin of his teeth. “See you later. Maybe I’ll get over to the dance for awhile.”

She didn’t say anything as he went out, feeling only the bleakness, not of his absence — although she knew he would not come to the dance — but of the absence of the man who had once been there. That, and something less distinct to her mind. Maybe change in herself. It was an inconsolable bleakness, and she gave in to it momentarily, letting herself drift with it, something she did not do often. She allowed herself only the minute, the small floating into regions beyond despair. It was almost soothing.

And then she forced herself back, painfully feeling her way into areas of memory defined by that other man, the man of hard muscle and youth, and beauty of movement. God, how they had moved together, in love, in dancing, the music pulse in their blood. She had heard someone say once that Indians had dancing in their blood just the same as niggers. She could feel the way he held her, so slim and hard, and life beating and whirling, and Ernie laughing. Laughing. A giggle like from a child spilling out, for no reason even, for being alive. She held so much then. Him, and his laughter, and his urgency, and the wailing into the night of the violins, and people watching them with — desire. Sometimes the other dancers had stopped just to watch the two of them, and their own dancing had become wilder and wilder as if they were in the grip of some exultative power beyond themselves, and Ernie’s laughter would build to a whoop and her own mouth would be open, gasping. Oh God. Oh God.

She crossed her arms, one over the other and rocked back and forth, her mouth open, but no sound.

The light over the Hall was on. She got up and got her purse and the bruise-colored sweater her daughter Margaret had sent her from Edmonton. It matched her dress and didn’t make her look too fat. She walked slowly the block to the Hall. Mr. Blaine’s studebaker nosed into the dandelions close along the side of the building. In two hours, she knew it would be only one of many vehicles snuffling the quack-grass and clay clumps in the yard. With darkness there would come the purring of motors, the clink of glass against rock, the impatient gunning of an engine, whispers, laughter, pleading. This was a world she only walked through now, with the invisibility of a spectator.

Mr. Blaine was at his place at the booth window, his grey hair

slicked back, his glasses and teeth snapping bits of light from the bare overhead bulbs. He was busy with the tackle box which he used for making change.

“Evening, Mrs. Stengel.” He didn’t look up, his attention focused on two rolls of tickets, one green and one purple, as if trying to decide which to use for the evening.

She put her money on the ledge.

“Good night for a dance.”

She nodded and he handed over a purple ticket and fifty cents change. She was the first one to arrive. The auditorium was cool, empty, quiet, hollow, that hollowness that public places have when there is no one there, as if their existence is only confirmed by the presence of people. Once, for no reason that she could remember, she had stopped on her way home from the store and walked into the United Church. There had been a kind of heavy air envelope, air held by the curtained windows and oiled seats, everything held in absolute stillness like death. Even dust-motes suspended and motionless. She had felt, had been, an intruder, and she experienced something of that same feeling now, the hall dead still, only herself sitting in countenance. The air did not move. She sat on an uncomfortable bench against the wall, and the wall stretched and joined the partially-tiled other walls, gathering to them the water-stained ceiling, umbilical lights dangling. A rough, man-made cave gathering her up in its emptiness.

Mr. Blaine, leaving his cage, appeared with his wax pail and the cavern walls receded and she breathed deeply. She hadn’t realized she had been holding her breath.

He began throwing the wax on the floor, reaching into the pail and sewing it like a biblical farmer sewing grain. There had been a card — when was it? — so long ago, and a picture of a man with a bag slung over his shoulder. Throwing grain from it in a wide arch. Something about some of the grain landing on rocks, and some on good soil. There had been a meaning. She wondered.

With the sound of engines dying and doors banging, the orchestra arrived, picking its way carefully through the little islands of powdered wax. In a scurry of activity, electrical equipment and instruments were reached up onto the stage. About fifteen years ago, when the Hall had first been built, someone — she thought maybe it had been the white-haired Campbell boy with the one blind eye — had begun a mural across the back of the stage, but only the sky had been painted. It was a strange, angry wine color, with a white, flaking

moon and boiling frost-rimmed clouds, the jagged sky pressing into the crevices of the ghost-white unpainted mountains.

Against the mountain range, the orchestra, four men and one woman, began setting up. People were coming in by ones and twos. She knew most of them; some of them she nodded to. She had taken a seat deliberately far enough away from the coat-room that women ducking in and out to repair make-up would not feel obliged to stop and talk to her. There would be friends of Donny and Marilyn. But she wasn't going to sit there courting their attention. She continued her watch of the orchestra, one that had not played the Hall before. The instruments were being tuned beneath the storm-clouds, emitting individual, friendless sounds in the early night. It sent shivers along her back. The orchestra-woman, her age, whatever it was, hidden behind a mask of powder and rouge, sat hunched into a large accordion. She held a cigarette listlessly, her gaze committing itself to nothing in the room. A balding man, running to fat, tried a couple of chords on the piano. There was a teenage boy, about Donny's age, at the drums. She could feel his taut thinness, his awkwardness from where she sat. The man on the fiddle, stationed behind a centre-shield with the name Del-Tones blazened in mauve glitter, smiled frozenly and looked the Hall over as he raised and lowered his violin to his chin in a series of false starts.

Two teenage girls came from the coat-room and sat at the end of her bench. From the corner of her eye she could see the careful carelessness of their plaid, pleated skirts, the slight adjustments they made to their matching orlon sweaters to flatter what contours they had. They weren't talking. They were waiting.

The music came suddenly, and, though there must have been one, seemingly without signal from anyone in the orchestra. They all just started playing at once and a single tune emerged. A lot of orchestras, she noticed, had some kind of hidden communication. The accordion throbbed to life, the woman grinding her cigarette out with one of her candy-apple pumps. The music of the Del-Tones rolled through the Hall, vibrating into corners, the coat-room, the ticket-booth and on outside, to be heard in all parts of the hamlet.

The dancing began almost simultaneously with the music. It was a source of irony to her that so many people who had so little feeling for dancing should have the opportunity to dance while she sat on the bench. Most of them looked ridiculous. Pumping, grinding, shuffling, huffing around the floor, the music, and company, egging them on to all sorts of silliness. There were a few that were beautiful

to watch, but she sat with the satisfaction that she had danced with an energy and beauty that most of them would never know. It was a very private satisfaction; most of the people had never seen her dance with Ernie, although a few would remember . . .

The Del-Tone man was saying something unintelligible into the microphone as people drifted back to the periphery of benches and standing room. The talking rose in volume for a minute, though it was still quiet with the easiness of early evening. Then the music of the next set began, and some partners, whose hands had lingered, clasped, through the pause, swung back out onto the floor. The two teenage girls got up and headed for the coat-room. Mrs. Chessman came over and sat down. She was a mover, visiting all of the wall-people during the course of a dance.

"If it don't rain, it'll be a good night for a dance." She settled next to her, her eyes following her children, a boy and his younger sister fox-trotting together with great seriousness and a good deal of mathematical checking. "You never know about this time of the year."

"No. You never know."

"I guess we got to give up the dance floor to the young ones now." Mrs. Chessman sighed, and met with no verbal resistance to her observation. "Let me tell you, though, I get down on my knees and thank God every night that Kenny and Judy ain't around in cars. That's when the trouble starts. Not that they're that old. But neither was that Glasper girl in Judy's room last year." Mrs. Chessman looked meaningfully at her and then waved at her children, the circle of the fox-trot bringing them suddenly close. When they were off again, into the crowd, she lowered her voice, confiding. "Judy began menstruating awfully young. I was afraid it would do — things."

It was not a new confidence.

"Where are Donny and Marilyn tonight?"

"They went to a show in St. Paul. They're coming later."

The fox-trot ended and Mrs. Chessman sighed again and moved on. The Hall was filling up quickly. There was a regular hum of talking, liquor-oiled, with its punctuations of laughter and little shrieks. Men crowded the doorway and spilled into the Hall along the semi-circular line painted on the hardwood to separate the dance area from standing room. Girls moved restlessly in and out of the coat-room. The orchestra moved methodically from old-time music to current jive-tunes that brought the teenagers lurching and swirling onto the floor. There were a few with her own youthful grace and vigor, and she watched them with an absorption that she gave in to

so totally that from time to time she felt her body move, a twitch outwardly, but inwardly a slip, a rush into the beat of the music before she could catch herself. She looked around guiltily when this happened, to see if she had been spotted, but the wall-people watched the jivers, the young jerking legs, the flash of thighs. She was safe.

In one of the longer pauses, with the orchestra setting down its instruments and stretching legs and lighting smokes, Donny and Marilyn arrived, both making their way through the crowd over to her.

"Was it a good show?"

"Naw. We didn't wait for the end." Donny was at the point of breaking into giggles. He always was, these days. She remembered her brother Stanley had been like that.

"It was dumb." Marilyn borrowed her comb and headed for the coat-room.

"Hey, Ma." Donny began shuffling from foot to foot. She knew he was going to ask for money. "Could you let me have a couple of bucks?"

She opened her purse and took out her wallet. There were six one-dollar bills. She gave Donny three.

"Hey, Ma. Thanks." He stuffed the money into his pocket and headed back into the door-crowd.

Of all her daughters, Marilyn had turned out to be the prettiest. She had been a beautiful child; she would be a beautiful woman. Although nothing had been said yet, she would be leaving home soon. They all left. But for Marilyn she felt — what? — there was something more. Maybe. It was indefinable. Only the imminent loss was tangible. She wanted to reach out and touch her as she came back from the coat-room and sat, poised, on the edge of the bench, her hair snapping lights even in the smoke haze of the room. Instead she kept her hands hard against the vinyl ridges of her purse.

"Donny been drinking?"

"Oh, a couple. You know Donny."

She took her cigarettes out of her purse. "Want one?" Marilyn nodded. They lit them and, with the start of the music again, the teenage drummer began singing "Heartbreak Hotel" in a high, nasal voice. They shared their amusement with a silent exchange of glances.

"Here comes your boyfriend," said Marilyn.

She looked up to see Francis Clifford, half drunk, lunging toward

them, grinning foolishly. It might have been thirty years ago, Francis — then as slight as herself — weaving, always in friendly inebriation: “You dance with me, Berta. Goddammit, no one else around here’s got a set of kickers on ’em like you got. Wheee-you!” He had been a good dancer, if given to exaggerations that had kept her laughing as they whirled and dipped and he kicked up his heels.

He did an impromptu stepdance now, for a couple of seconds, before confronting her with his hand. She blanked out the image of the lithe boy she had once danced with, and looked steadily into the face of the decaying, middle-aged drunk leaning, smiling, over her now, his beer-breath and bad teeth close. “Hey, Berta, you going to dance with me?”

Marilyn giggled.

“So long since I danced, I think I forget how.” But she was already handing her purse over to Marilyn. “Watch that for me, will you?”

She was thankful that the orchestra was playing something slow. Even drunk, Francis was a good dancer, if a poor navigator. They were bumping into quite a few couples. She didn’t care, though, it felt so good to be dancing. It was something that she would never lose, a kind of joy that the body might give up — would give up — but would be held inside her as long as there was breath and pulse. “Thank you,” she whispered.

As the fiddler scraped his little flourish indicating the end of a set, she slipped suddenly, flailing out, feeling Francis starting to go down with her. Her grasp caught at a coat, wrenching it, but stopping the fall.

She felt an incredible foolishness and laughed nervously, apologizing before even turning to see who she had grabbed hold of. When she did turn, she saw it was no one she knew, but he was staring at her with a look of unshielded hatred and contempt that made her draw back as if she had been struck. He said something to her, lost in the surge of talking as the music quit. The girl with him shrieked with laughter and they turned and headed for the door.

“I got to get out of here.” Francis was leaning close to her. “Too many people.”

“You should sit down,” she said, absently.

“I should — get myself a little drink.”

“That, you don’t need.”

“Thanks.” He held her unsteadily and then released her. “Thank you for the dance. Still one hell of a dancer, Berta.”

She forced a laugh. "Go away."

But he was already gone, and she made her way back to her seat. Marilyn handed her back her purse and got up to dance herself as the music swung into a polka. When she sat down, she felt suddenly dizzy and closed her eyes. Her throat felt tight and dry. Maybe she was getting too old to dance. That boy. What were people coming to? An accident — such undisguised hatred — his face that white bleached face of some people who lived on farms stretching back from little two-store farm-towns. There was death in the face, she thought. He would have liked to kill her. That white face with the cracked lips curled into a sneer, straw-colored hair falling from its pompadour, an escaped strand over the long, starchy forehead. To hate so much. She had never seen him before. She felt tiredness heavy along her shoulders.

A fat woman — she recognized her as the wife of a new farmer on the outskirts of town — came and sat next to her, silently, through the polka. When the music stopped she spoke. "Good dance."

She forced an 'mmm' out.

"Good orchestra."

The accordion-woman had put her instrument down and was standing in front of the microphone, stooped, expressionless through the piano-player's introduction. Then she burst into "Allegheny Moon", a startling, loud voice that carried over the accompaniment, loud and tremendously plaintive. There was a scurry of activity at the door which sent out reverberations to the edge of the group circling the dance floor. Too many people for her to see what was going on, though. The fat woman stood halfway up.

"My God! It's a fight."

She heard others saying it, picking up the word 'fight', rippling through the wall crowd. Men began leaving the dance floor, heading toward the door. The fat woman turned to her. "I knew that bunch from Boris Lake would start something."

Some of the women stood up on the benches, craning their necks. Over the cry of "Allegheny Moon" she heard the howl of a male voice, "Fucking Bastard! Bastard!"

The fat woman turned to her. "Will you listen to that language?" She climbed up on the bench, her heel going through the slats. At the same time, the fighters hurtled through the line of spectators and the whole crowd moved with them, as if part of an organism. The fat woman began screaming. Herself — she stood up, instinctively,

and managed to move out of the way of a man who tripped backward against the bench.

One of the fighters, she saw, was the straw-haired boy. The raging howl, she realized, had come from him. His mouth seemed to be still frozen open, and drooling. His fists were lashing out at one of the McGarvey boys, who had his curly head lowered like a mad bull and was throwing powerful fists into the other heaving frame. They seemed to be surrounded equally by those intent on stopping the fight, and those intent on keeping it going. In a few seconds, though, hands managed to pull the two apart and the whole flailing melee staggered back to the door. The Johnson brothers, unofficial bouncers, and a head taller than anyone else on the floor, were seen at the door and then were gone. The fat woman climbed down off the ravaged bench, her eyes bright with excitement.

Mrs. Chessman had worked her way back around, holding her bosom as if expecting, momentarily, an attack upon it.

"Isn't this awful? You'd think we weren't civilized. Them Mezutskys from Boris Lake are a wild lot. They say one of them nearly killed a guy with a pop bottle one time."

Marilyn was back. "You okay, Mom?"

She nodded.

The accordion-woman's voice hit one last, powerful, tremulous syllable. She suddenly realized that the whole fight had started and almost engulfed her and had moved off and outside all during the few minutes of that song.

"I'm okay."

"I'm going out with a few of the kids for supper. Okay?"

"Donny going with you?"

"Yeah. I think."

"Well, I'm going home." She wished she were there already. The pain came back harder along her shoulders, jabbing in between her shoulder blades. Her mouth and throat were dry; her eyes stung from the smoke-heavy air. When she closed them, the hating face was there.

"You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay." She put her hand on Marilyn's sleeve now, only for an instant. "You and Donny come home soon's the dance is over."

The accordion-woman was back with her accordion and the music began again, but the crowd had thinned. A lot of the men had moved outside with the fight. She wondered if they were still going

at it out there. Drinking and meanness and long summer nights. Bashing each other into truck fenders. She waited a quarter hour to let the fight work itself out, and then she got up and made her way through the crowd of men clustered again at the door. A couple of older ones called out to her, but she pretended she didn't hear them.

The outside air, after the sound-jittered, smokefilled hall, was cool and fresh against her face, her stinging eyes. She realized she was crying. The smoke. She shook her head angrily, pulled her cardigan over her breasts, and walked quickly along the path, taking in great breaths of air.

Halfway along the block, where the dirt road of the alley came out, she heard the moan and saw him lying in the tall grass back of Jesner's. There was enough moonlight that she could make out his straw-colored hair. She could hear him retching, and then the moaning again. It seemed to catch and rasp somewhere in his chest.

You would be a fool to stop, she thought. But something of curiosity more than compassion made her turn into the alley and walk over to him. He lay with his eyes closed, and she found herself gasping at the ruin of his face, the gashes, blood-pulped bruises, the dark clotting in his hair. His mouth was slightly open and she could see the stumps of two teeth, and blood caking around the pale, cracked lips.

"Jesus," she whispered involuntarily, "You going to be okay?" She knelt closer to him. One of the eyes opened. It was gooseberry-colored in this light. Opened and stared at her. "I could send for a doctor. There's a phone at the hotel."

His voice was barely audible and the words came over the rattle from his chest. "Fuck off." He stopped, pausing, as if to draw on some last reserve of energy. "You brown cunt." The eyes closed.

She staggered to her feet and turned and began walking up the alley. As startling to herself as her crying of a few minutes before, she heard herself laughing. Loud, choking, uncontrollable laughter. Her shoulders shook. Tears ran along her cheeks.

She hadn't reached the sidewalk when she felt him against her, falling on her like something thrown, some kind of animal object. He didn't grab her, just threw himself against her with an unbelievable force. She felt herself crumpling down and the deadweight of him coming down on top of her. For a minute she had no breath. The night-darkness whirling. The face, mouth open, jabbering at her, his fists hitting her breasts. She screamed but no sound came out,

and as quickly as he had come upon her, he was gone, lurching back toward the Hall.

She wasn't certain how long she lay there, but when she managed to get back on her feet, it seemed they were still playing the same waltz as when she left the Hall. The music jiggled with a kind of off-station nervousness, coming through the rising and falling of the crowd noise. She had twisted her ankle, she realized, but was able to walk on it, making her way slowly to the house. A couple of car motors raced their sound into the now tuneless night.

She didn't turn the light on when she got inside. Automatically she clicked on the T.V. and sat down in the chair in front of it, seeing from her window the shadowy movements in the streetlight and that other sad pearl of light over the Hall door. The sound came on before the picture, a quavery voice and something in the words of a song about love and magic, and then the skittish picture and a singer with sculptured white hair and smiling black lips. For an instant the singer held the last syllable of magic in her dark lips and then the sound warbled off and the picture rolled up like the eyes of a dead person. The screen spluttered and flickered into a rain of fluorescent ashes.

She felt the night soft-heavy in the room, holding her like some kind stranger until she closed her eyes. She drew breath in, and it seemed she could not stop that rush of air pushing to fill her emptiness and visit the total husk of her pain. It was like the long, soundless gasp of a child getting wind to cry. But when the cry came, it too fell, like the streaming flecks of light boxed before her eyes, without sound.

TO FREYJA

I

Lady of linen cloth
blue flax flower

give me the girdle of a languid beast

II

Bone fitted sinew fitted
tongue to tongue-tip

III

Fire-slit rider of the golden pool
and bristled field

here is my chastity sold to dwarfs
for a necklace of garnet

IV

Straddled-in-blood
Keep me from the wounds of distance

CLEAR GATE

God near
and hard to seize

here sailors
on a sea congealed

mast-gleam
suspended

men at the bow
and men astern

folded in fog

no star
for a mark

no wind-trolling
bird

tribe on a trip
through salt-dark-blood

the rock's clear gate
God near and hard
to seize

LAST LEASE

More foeman than friend
His wit lay fallow;
Plough and harrow
Past, ripe grass
Filled slope and hollow;
Mown then mouldering.

'It's a risk I don't care
to take — I *dare* to take
it — risk is blind in
caring, not in dare.'

Rash then fānatic
His eye laid waste;
Weed rankled, pasture
Buckled and cracked;
A farce of dirt, last
Lease a witless scraping.

Laurence Hutchman

SILENCE

To be in touch with things
mist bathes the coasts of the world.

Should I type tonight
cause the Chinese man to waken.

Upstairs a boy cries out from a nightmare
his Japanese mother slips out of bed.

Soon she will stand before the waterfall
in the rock gardens of Kyoto.

The little boy will say "hello"
to the ancient guard of the gate.

My typewriter is a silent temple
blue mist drifts across a distant shore.

Carlos Isla

Translated by Richard Haswell

WOOD FOR THE HOUSE OF ARCHITECT WELL

Wood would weld space
wield of space is wood
wood wed one instant with one act
wood two worlds and one league
wed wood for two
wood of two ached raped pact
wood dovetail of love hand
wood weld of the sundered wound of two
wood weld of the sun dared done dovetail bodies one
wood without wedding
 wooden: wad
wood house wooed from the woods
wedding the wed ring of identities
wood wild for joinings
woodwork the would work of bloods
wood
 word to roof time

THE BEGINNING

Pale leaves, old stumps, the rotting
bits of wood that in the night turn blue
with their own light, the dark trail turned

to nothing: cadences of silence
carved into the mind until the mind
no longer knows the darkness from the pain

and stranger to itself discovers cold.
Shape without shape in the night
I am again the animal.

Trees twisted, black wet branches
whose bark has nothing left of form
save colour, broken stone, the soft damp moss,

entrails of darkness: I have forgotten shame;
it was left behind with compassion,
bunched like rotten grapes on rotten vines.

I join the nameless, string them
together on a line of thought that has
no meaning. Past the poem, understanding lies.

There is a cold white mushroom
swollen in my brain: in night's blue forest
I am fear and everything around me

invents blessing and nothing is the same,
is less than nothing, is the silence
of a leaf's dream when its buried in a stone.

TIAJUANA

Like that dying woman in Mexico
who fed her family by fucking a burro
on a wooden stage in Tiajuana
you are alone and I am drunk again
on tequila, refusing to die,
hearing the madness of the burro
as the woman wept with pain. You are
naked and I no longer want you.
If I could choose a last vision
it would be the dream of the knife,
the dream of the death of pain.
Put on your clothes.
I am obscene.
I am one of those who laughed
when the burro dropped her on the floor.

OCTOBER POEM

One by one
the birds are devoured
in the slow red of woods
as they return
this evening
with the cold lake in their eyes.

Outside
an unfastened beast
parades under the stars,
barges onto window, door,
straddling,
terrifying everything.

Yesterday it called
while you kept watch
over the river.
It went among the trees,
went headlong like the dry light
that fell
point blank in our hands.

Now, a low, twirled wind
announces
in the clearing: someone,
the same fire
with gutted wings
maneuvers to an impossible dance.

LEAVES

(after Li Po)

And they return
in late autumn's yellow,
the long sky trimmed, leaves
blown not knowing which name
the wind concealed.
Weary in their tapered smile
they file past boulevard and houses,
their voices bent like the season
muted by the nuance of stones.

Into the room they part
the mouths that waited the years.
Friends tending them,
lords in a pale palace.
From the women who complained
of winter, of solitude
they remember one town to the next,
trail not taken, ratepayers,
the porous land drowned at their waists,
half-lives hushed to children
gathered in dreams.

But the shadows resurrect themselves,
rise over these leaves,
stretch far onto the south wall.
Ancestral gate rushes open
to bones, to birth percolated
beside a rumbling road
that should have taken them somewhere
deep into the morning,
their steps marking the iron air.

Linda Lerner

WOMAN IN A MIRROR

The mirror turns photograph.
A woman surfaces with my glance.
as if dragged from a river's bottom.

For this daily birth rite,
no gratitude shown.

She is older than I am,
she stands beside a tree
dropping yellow blossoms around her
like tiny suns;

They burn into this scene
without consuming it.
A dry wind bends her body
forward.

Not enough.
She stands by her tree
unable to leave,
caught by an old light
decades ago.

The frame grips its glass
more firmly;
the woman smiles, not caring.

Wendy Powell Lewis

ALL THAT DAY . . .

all that day it was wind and light
colour sweeping the hills
the garden in full bend

it was sun and air
and waves in the water trough
the house lifting at the edges
and from niches
old leaves in small clods falling
like birds

it was noise
and bedsheets puling into the sky
and screaming
and on the privet hedge
something torn and silky

and we listened at the down-pipe
eyes closed
and saw caverns under the sea
which suck air
and leave you white and dying

we took our heads
in search of a hollow
to the hills rolling away and up
and ours
to a cradle or a fold
where the sheep lie
to unleash
the noises of the morning
from our heads
like pigeons from the dove-cote

no wind to chill the sun on our skins

KANO, 1974

When I first saw the halloween masked lepers, fingerless
hands like crushed insects,
the blind kids with enamel begging bowls
on strings around their necks, and young
men, legs like dead carrots, going about on all
fours, I asked myself:
What do you do with all this?
sell your clothes, give away your
passport, tear up your traveller's cheques,
go out and mingle with these busted
contraptions of humanity?

but you'd look funny, I told
myself, a white among these little black jokes
of God though
you could pass your colour off as
some kind of disease. They always said
your skin
looked like
death.

AT THE SUN'S ANTHOLE

the iron voices and green
malaria nights on the terra incognita
of the bed

the wall's
address to the
mirror is a rage of puce-
faced orangutans

II

the words liberated across the expanse
of the sandswept bed
tongue surfaces paler than the wasted
light from the dry, showing bone

they echo the fishsellers, the raffiaheaded
fishvoiced women nattering in blue
tongues about the collapse of
order

“the boys are screwing donkeys, dey
screwing all de donkeys”

III

the sky is maladjusted, vibrating,
boltless

the sun cuts in the dangerous
hot rythm of a loose flywheel

are the iron voices heating up

Yola, Nigeria, 1975

Ewa Lipska/*Four Poems*

Translated by Florjan Smieja and Revel Wilson

NOTHING IS SURE

You can become a madman.
Insanity's coin may be exchanged for genius.

Nothing is sure.

of ten witnesses
in the courtroom
the eleventh will testify
that you are guilty.

They can bring you "the people"
in an attache case
you can love them out of fear
or from inclination

You can raise vegetables
that will poison you

Your gun collection
may shoot you down

Tomorrow may be your lucky day
although it will be Tuesday

Nothing is sure

Even the cancer in my tissues
is uncertain of tomorrow.

THE CONFESSION OF A MAN WHOM A WOMAN
LEAVES LIKE SUMMER AND TO WHOM SHE
RETURNS LIKE SUMMER

You're leaving me,
like summer.
And you return to me,
like summer.
Suddenly you drive up to the Town Square (Opel Rally 1900
(102 horse-power))

You for the last time. I for the last time.
My last patience but
not the last.
I have accumulated enough
for all our love.

Would that it were insufficient, Would that it were not.

But you don't even put the lights out.
You appear, a graceful outline.
More and more less of you.
So you more or less are.
You turn up suddenly, like a fatality.
And when we are both dying from the accident
no one is there
to finish us off completely
(our love)
so that you could no longer
leave me like summer
and return
like summer.

WINDOW PANES

How hard it is to look into the long window panes.
Drowsy women brush rouge from their cheeks.
And glum travellers walk past.
Beyond them is a landscape. Soldiers are marching.

In the landscape are tables. On the tables is wine.
A girl sits at the table. In the girl is laughter.
And in her laughter is sadness. And everything like in the movies
in these long window panes. In the girl is laughter.

It's hard to look. Drowsy women.
In the women is love. There is an end to love.
And then there remain only the long windows
sadness. Travellers. To love there's an end.

In the travellers is a train. Its wheels clatter within them.
And in the wheels is eternity. In eternity is terror.
And in terror silence. And in silence it is quietest.
In the travellers is a train. And a constant motion of wheels.

How hard it is to look. The soldiers are marching.
In the soldier is a bullet. And in the bullet is death.
And in death is everything — and nothing in death.
And in laughter is sadness. To love there's an end.

At the table a girl. In the girl is a heart.
And in her heart a soldier. In the soldier is a bullet.
And the earth already caresses the soldier's body.
And the girl weeps. Travellers pass.
Cold night mirrors itself in the long panes.

THAT'S THE WAY HE WAS

That's the way he was
even when he died
he didn't wake up the household.
He got out of bed
and shoes in hand
on tiptoe
stepped out into the beyond.

Even his own feet
made way for him.

PARTIAL MEMORY

Out under one
of two horizons, there
where only the trees rise
from cracks, like tough hair
I remember planting men instead
deep, their brown toes tapping
sources inexhaustible
hunched, their shoulders throwing shadows
hard, cooler than coal

I did free them
from the need to hunt wordless
herds on the other horizon
I know
I helped them
keep their names to themselves, not
given away to towns or bodies
of water they would never sleep beside

I helped. I helped them make
the long blue hanging
above them a sky
and at night their deaths
mere dreams in the cold of their shade

ALIGNING CONSTELLATIONS AND PETS

The mouth opens and closes
like razor blades, dull and
pointing north

and the hand
of someone or something holds
it by the shell
high in the night
against stars
feet unable to touch the
ground or water

we are very generous:
we give it new eyes
two pale bird's eggs
dry under the flicker
of its scaly lids
still, it is not satisfied

or we reinforce the webs
of its feet with fine
clean wire, hooked and fanned
to help it claw through almost
anything, but it does not notice
legs moving like an easy dream

or when we plant
so carefully in its throat
a miniature human tongue
honed to a taper
so good for sex or
the blind caress of food
it goes instead for our faces
snapping, ungrateful, breath like fish

Somewhere a thing is trying
to swim. We are
elsewhere, wondering how

POEM

When you use any word
with me, I hear a gunshot
in the hand of a small man
Mitch Willard, whose wife died
five years before, whose sister
died a little later, whose taller
older brother passed
away in Oklahoma yesterday

and who, when he finally
puts the barrel to his head
sights with ease against the old
soft spot under the chin
and aims it
straight at Heaven

thinking how the neighbours might be
in their back yards, thinking how
that slug will really fly
his blood helping it slip
away from the one, or ones
who might have stopped it dead.

The terrible mercy of your words
the ones you use, or don't
is a siren faint but moving
up his street
toward your house

Earl McKenzie

THE MAN AND THE FOUR-EYED DOG

A Short Story

It wasn't that Mass Roland especially liked or disliked animals; it was just that he didn't quite know how to relate to them.

Like most people in the village he raised dumb-things; he had a cow, a donkey and a few goats, and his wife raised pigs and chickens. But he was the sort of man who when he woke up on a rainy night and heard the rain beating on the roof and the thunder exploding, would imagine himself as one of his goats tied to a tree in the yard with its feet ankle-deep in the mud, being lashed by the cold rain and terrified of the lightning and thunder. Sometimes while riding his donkey to the field, especially when climbing a steep hill, he would feel very guilty about it. He would try to console himself with the thought that Jesus rode a donkey, and even left a mark above the forelegs to show the point beyond which the hamper shouldn't go. But he couldn't forget that that donkey walked along a path strewn with palms and flowers and that his donkey climbed steep rocky roads, panting so heavily he could feel her organs moving under him. Once when one of his cows slipped over a bank at the end of its rope and was hanged, he said he felt as if he had committed a murder and refused to sell the meat. He always asked someone else to wire, castrate or slaughter his own animals, and was seldom seen at the weekly cow-killings at the customary spot in the village. He liked to see animals wild, free and enjoying themselves, and few things made him feel more fully alive than the sight of animals making love. But the thought of their blood and hacked flesh saddened him and turned away his mind from the joys of being a man. He seldom spoke about these things but those who knew him well knew that he had this problem.

His wife was the direct opposite. When she wanted to kill one of her chickens she held it by the neck and twirled its body in the air until its neck was broken. Or she covered the body with a pan and chopped off the exposed head with a machete, usually with one blow; that way the body fluttered to death under the pan and did not splash blood all over the yard which she took pride in keeping

spotlessly clean. She did not slaughter goats or pigs because she said they were too big for her; but she was always present at these slaughterings; she held her basin to receive the entrails of the gutted goat (it was her job to wash them in the river) and she was always ready to pour the boiling hot water over the body of the dead pig before they began scraping off the hair. She enjoyed watching the animals as they were chased, captured and subdued, and she felt a great release as she watched the blood flowing out of their bodies. She was very scornful of what she regarded as her husband's weakness, and on these occasions would sneer at him publicly.

"I don't know what kind of a man you are!" she would say. "Any man afraid to kill isn't a real man. You afraid to kill but you not afraid to eat."

She was a staunch church-goer and would quote the Bible at him:

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

In spite of their differences of temperament they managed to live together for many years. But his wife never lost her contempt for this deficiency she saw in his personality, and he remained troubled about the morality of what he regarded as her blood-thirsty nature.

Then his wife died from ackee poisoning. She killed animals but it was a plant that got her in the end. But such is the nature of life.

Soon after she died Mass Roland sold all their animals. Within a few weeks the only animals he had any contact with were the wild ones: lizards, rats, birds, mongooses and so on. Except for a few of the birds he didn't have any real liking for any of them, but he was content to live with them as neighbours. When they encroached on his domain he drove them away; if he found bird-nests on his yam sticks he protected them; and when he met mongooses in the bushes he felt no obligation to chase and yell at them. When the villagers asked him how he felt about not owning any animals he said he felt as if a great burden had been lifted from his mind.

For awhile everything went well. Then one night he woke up suddenly to the sound of something fluttering in the yard. It had a soft muffled sound as if it was made from feathers. He got up and walked over to the venetian blind, lowered the shutters gently and peered through, but it was very dark and he couldn't see anything. He closed the shutters and as he did so the fluttering resumed, but

by the time he opened it again it had already started receding into the bushes. The sound got dimmer and dimmer, and then in the distance, he heard what sounded like the agonized bleatings of goats, the hysterical screaming of pigs, and the choked bellowings of cows. Then suddenly everything was silent. He stood and listened for about ten minutes but there were no more sounds. He crossed the dark room and went back to sleep.

The following morning as soon as he got up he began following the direction of the fluttering through the bushes. He looked for feathers and signs of struggle but everything looked normal. The banana cultivation was quiet and the dew-covered weeds were undisturbed. He crossed an open stretch of grass-covered land and then entered a yam field; as he worked his way along a row of yam hills he had to keep ducking to avoid the overhanging vines. He got to the edge of a gully; there were two huge breadfruit trees on his side of the bank and some of their roots stretched across the gully forming a kind of bridge. The gully had been formed by water which ran from the culvert on the mainroad down to the river; it was deep at some parts dropping as much as eight to twelve feet, and some sections were covered by overhanging bushes forming tunnels. From his house the voices had sounded as if they had come out of it. He rested his right foot on one of the raised roots and examined the place carefully. The morning sun shone on the quiet leaves of the canefield on the other side. A few tiny birds — mainly grass-quits — rode the bending stalks of tall grasses as they tried to get at the seeds. A woodpecker rattled its beak on the hollow trunk of a nearby tree. On one of the roots which stretched across the gully, a green lizard raised its stomach from the bark and stuck out its orange gill several times in quick succession. For nearly half-an-hour Mass Roland searched the place thoroughly but there wasn't the slightest suggestion that anything extraordinary had occurred there. He shook his head and began walking back to the house.

That night he woke up to the sound of the fluttering again. He crept out of bed, picked up a bottle-lamp and a box of matches and crept to the door. He opened it quietly. The fluttering continued but it was too dark to see anything. He struck the match and lit the lamp; the flame coiled upward, turned green and went out. During the brief period of light he saw only an empty yard. But now that he was in the dark again he heard the fluttering at the edge of the bushes as it retreated rapidly. The agonized wailing of the animals rose from the gully. He recognized what he felt sure was the voice

of his wife among the noises. His body shook and he broke out into cold sweat. Once again the voices stopped suddenly and were followed by a long silence. He sat on a bench on the veranda and waited but the sounds did not return. He became depressed and sleepy, returned to the room and sank on the bed.

Close to morning he found himself standing beside a cocoa tree; he had been standing there for some time and was in the middle of a conversation with a hen which was roosting on a branch close to his head. "Get a dog," she was urging him. "Get a dog." He woke up with a start and saw that the sunlight was already streaming in through the creases around the window and the door. His mind was filled with the voice of the hen, and he realized with horror that it was the voice of his wife.

All that day Mass Roland struggled to make sense of what was happening. He was now convinced that his wife was trying to tell him something. Could it be that she had been transformed into a fowl as punishment for having killed so many of them? It was a common belief among people in the village that wicked butchers were transformed into rolling calves after their deaths. Could it be that a similar law applied to everyone? And what about the flutterings and the wailings. Could it be that the fluttering object was his wife being drawn toward the wailing animals, and could it be that she was appealing to him for help? But why did she want him to get a dog? It was commonly believed that dogs could see spirits; this was especially true of the four-eyed ones, those with the two spots above the eyes. He decided to get a dog in order to see what would happen next.

That night the sounds did not return.

"But we thought you had given up on animals," responded one of his neighbours when he told him he was looking for a dog. "What happen? You getting lonely?"

"No, I just need a watchdog around the place."

"A four-eyed watchdog. That sounds like ghost troubles to me. What happen? Spirits bothering you? Perhaps the wife coming to keep you company."

Mass Roland did not reply.

"But if it is your wife you don't need a dog," the man continued. "You wouldn't set a dog at your wife would you?"

A few days later Mass Roland went to a neighbouring village to repay a day's work to a friend. He was on his way home in the evening and, while passing a house, he heard the ferocious barking of a

dog coming from the yard. He went up to the gate and looked in. A huge jet-black four-eyed dog was chained to the house post. The spots above his eyes were yellowish and matched his fiery eyes. His long stiff tail was curved over his back like a scorpion's, and his mouth foamed as he barked. He kept darting forward trying to break away from his chain. At the sight of Mass Roland his rage intensified. A fat man in a khaki suit and felt hat came out of the kitchen to see what was happening.

"Hey sah," Mass Roland called to him. "You selling that dog?"

The man grinned. "Sell *him!*" he said gesturing toward the dog. "You crazy? I wouldn't sell this dog for anything in the world."

"Him good eh?"

"Good! This dog is the best I have ever had. With him here, neither thief nor ghost dare come within a mile of this house. He is as ruthless with the living as he is with the dead."

"I need a four-eyed dog."

"Spirit troubles?"

Mass Roland nodded.

"Sorry, but I can't sell him." Then he studied Mass Roland carefully. "But if you can take good care of him I wouldn't mind lending him to you for a little while. I have loaned him out to other people already. He's good. Very good. Why don't you come in?"

Mass Roland opened the gate and went into the yard. Barking savagely the dog lunged at him and the chain clicked loudly as it stiffened.

"Awright Dagger!" said the man approaching the dog. "Take it easy."

The dog stopped barking and sat. Mass Roland looked into his fiery eyes and felt a great fear.

"Is alright," said the man. "He soon get used to you. I going to let you feed him." He went into the kitchen and returned with an enamel bowl of bones, meat, dumplings and yams. He handed the bowl to Mass Roland. "Throw a few of the bones at him first."

Mass Roland threw the bones at the dog one by one and he caught them expertly. He watched as the dog turned his head sideways on the ground and cracked the bones with his long canines. When the bones were finished he put the bowl on the ground and the dog rushed at it, narrowly missing his hand. Both men stood by silently and watched as the dog gobbled up the rest of the food.

When the dog was finished eating they resumed their conversation.

It turned out that they had quite a few common acquaintances, including the friend Mass Roland had worked for that day.

"You can have the dog anytime you like," the man assured him. "In fact you could take him tonight. The sooner you put him to work the better."

Mass Roland felt some reservation but decided to take up the offer. It was close to dusk when he decided to leave. The man untied the dog and put the chain in his hands. Mass Roland led the way through the gate and the dog followed with surprising obedience.

He tied the dog to one of the veranda posts, and later gave him some of his own food (cornmeal cooked with red peas topped with chopped callaloo mixed with salt-fish) which the dog refused to eat. That night nothing happened and he slept soundly. He didn't hear a single bark from the dog. In fact it was so quiet when he woke up the following morning he feared that the dog had escaped and returned home. But when he went outside he found him lying peacefully on the veranda, apparently quite relaxed.

That evening, close to dusk, Mass Roland sat on the veranda stool smoking his pipe. The dog was curled up in front of the veranda and sleeping. Mass Roland heard a slight sound to his right and turned to see a brown peel-neck hen coming toward him along the side of the house. At the sight of the hen he felt his head expanding. The hen stopped briefly, looked straight at him, and then continued walking toward him. She walked alongside him and got to the front of the yard. His heart was pounding and he was breathing heavily. Could it possibly be she? Barking fiercely the dog sprang to his feet and began darting toward the hen. The hen appeared to tremble, and without turning to look began walking slowly toward the point in the bush where the flutterings always retreated. Mass Roland sprang to his feet. The dog was now in a paroxysm of passion. Could it be that she wanted the dog to kill her so she could expiate her guilt? And was she appealing to him as her husband, to initiate her liberation with his own hands? The hen got to the mouth of the opening in the bush, turned to look at them, then slipped inside and disappeared. Mass Roland grabbed his machete from the corner of the veranda and quickly released the dog. The dog crossed the yard in a flash and dived into the hole. Breathing heavily, Mass Roland felt himself in rapid pursuit.

His feet were light as he sped through the banana cultivation. He caught up with them in the open patch. The dog had the hen by one of her wings and she was fluttering in the air trying to escape.

Horried that the hen, probably his wife, was about to be killed he grabbed the dog's chain and hauled him away. Then hen escaped and the dog lunged forward again. He kept pulling at the chain and the dog turned and snapped at him angrily. Frightened, he loosened his grip, and the dog lunged forward again and grabbed the hen by the neck. Mass Roland moved closer, his heart thumping. The hen's body was still fluttering while the dog chewed her neck. The fluttering grew weaker and after a few final desperate convulsions the life went out of her body. The dog lifted the body from the ground and shook it, then as it fell he sank his teeth into her chest and continued tearing. Mass Roland went closer and the dog glared at him and growled. He looked into the dog's fiery eyes and felt a tremor of the same fear he had felt at the home of the dog's owner. The dog continued growling as he chewed. Mass Roland stopped, his eyes still fixed to those of the dog. The dog lifted his head, with blood dripping from his mouth, and bared his lips revealing his long canines. Then his growling grew into a bark and he sprang forward. Mass Roland jumped back and raised his machete. The dog barked again and crouched as if about to spring. Mass Roland's machete chopped into his neck almost severing his head in a single blow. The dog's body fluttered on the grass, mixing his blood with that of the hen. With tears running down his cheeks Mass Roland continued chopping until the fluttering stopped, and the grass was strewn with flesh, blood, bones and feathers. Then when everything was quiet he stood over the remains panting, and staring down at them as if unable to understand what had happened.

The full realization of what he had done was beginning to take possession of him when, from the hillside above him, he heard the voice of one of his neighbours calling home her chickens. He wiped his machete on the grass and began walking toward the house.

When he got to the yard he heard the woman's voice coming down the path toward him. It was getting dark and there was an urgency in her call. She would fill her lungs with air and then pour out an unbroken stream of "coop! coop! coop! coop!" until she was out of breath, then she would take a new breath and continue just as rapidly.

The woman came into view, her form indistinct in the thickening darkness. She saw Mass Roland and stopped.

"Mass Roland, you see a brown peel-neck fowl anywhere around here? She didn't come home this evening and I can't find her any-

where. I hope nothing don't happen to her because she is the best laying fowl I have?"

"Is late to be looking for a fowl now, Miss Ina," said Mass Roland.

"But is where she could be, sah?" Her voice was laden with concern and impatience. "It is not like her not to come home. Okay, goodnight then, sah," she said as she turned and started walking away. She continued her anxious calling as she went.

Mass Roland went into the veranda and sat on the stool. He sat for a long time in the dark. He thought of lighting the lamp but he couldn't bear the thought of seeing the blood of the animals on his hands.

Later that night, while still sitting on the veranda, he discovered that the flutterings and wailings were the distorted echo of a vehicle straining and backfiring as it struggled up a steep road along the mountainside facing his house.

Jill Mandrake

MAYBE TOMORROW I'LL SEE IT
ALL FROM HEAVEN

I. *Reverend Sweet's Sermon*

After my long absence at Alpine Lodge, my specially designated retreat where I've got my thinking to do, let me say first off that it's good to be back to my congregation here where I can teach you people. Excuse me. Where I can teach you, person, once again all the things the Lord wants us to know. Yes, indeed, Amelia here is glad to be back. Excuse me. Reverend Sweet here is glad to be back. Now it's disrespectful to go by my first name here in the house of the Lord so don't any of you call me Amelia just because I said it. I mean, don't you call me Amelia, lone person, as I've earned the title "Reverend" and try to understand.

Now, first off we're going to go over what I've told all of you in the past. This is one of Reverend Sweet's original rules that many years at Alpine Lodge has helped me formulate. We're going to talk about what you should do when you're uncertain as to which path to take. When you don't know what to do with this life our Lord gave you, you get out your pencil and paper and you write two headings at the top of the paper: "Good" and "Bad". Then you make columns. You draw a little line under "Good" and another under "Bad" and then, well, the little line underneath each is optional, but for sure draw a line down the centre of the page. Now you put all the bad things you are capable of doing under one column. That is the column that says "Bad", as if I had to tell you, brothers and sisters. Pardon me. Sister. Now, can you think of some of the bad things you could write in that column? Well, there's words like "theft" and "lies" and there's things like being disrespectful and lots worse. I don't even want to think about those worse things; I just want you to write them all under the "Bad" column — and the "Bad" column should be on the left-hand side of your paper — and you write all these things when you don't know where you want to go. Now in the other column, you put all the good stuff, like singing and loving your neighbours and the exclusive things that Reverend Sweet here has taught you in the past. No, not you speci-

fically. I know. But just the same, you put all the good things in the "Good" column and then you concentrate. You concentrate on doing these good things. You put a (1) before the most important, a (2) before the second most important, and keep on until you've numbered every one of those good things. Well, then you do these things — the good ones — and the bad, you put crosses over each one of them. No, not crosses, as this is what our Lord suffered on and it's not good to think of. You put lines through these bad things and then you forget them.

Now some of those good things you maybe feel you don't have the strength to do and you are afraid to do them and it's the fear holding you back. Well, let me tell you, whenever you are afraid you just sing my song — you sing Reverend Sweet's own original song and before you know it the words are nailed — no, not nailed — but burned into your consciousness. Not nailed, remember. Don't ever say it just because Amelia here said it. Nailed is what our Lord was and I never want to talk about it again. But the words to my song are what you sing when you are afraid. Now sing along with me, everybody. You.

*Maybe tomorrow I'll see it all from heaven
I'll eat my midnight snack in heaven just when midnight comes
I'll sail to the clouds above and worry not of hate or love
for God and Reverend Sweet and I will soon be in the sky*

Can you sing that song with me? Now there's no organ player and no organ but that doesn't matter and you know why the words are important? Before I tell you that, I want to say that I won't sing it again because it tires my voice today. This morning. It's been difficult for me to sing lately and I'm going to drop this phoney soap-box accent I pull while I'm up here. Anyway, what was I saying? First off, we won't sing it again but just remember it. And why is it important? Because we never have to be afraid when we know tomorrow we may not be here anyway. Earthly fear disappears when you know that tomorrow you may be up in the sky, looking. Just looking, I said. All-seeing, no-doing. When we die and go to heaven, which all of us here are going to do, the fear disappears. If it can disappear then, it can disappear now. Listen to me when I say it is not a permanent thing. Fear, that is. Not heaven. We know fear is not a permanent thing and if it's not a permanent thing, then it's a temporary thing. And if it's a temporary thing, it ends. When shall it end? That, my brothers and sisters, is up to you. Excuse me.

That, you, is up to you. Whoever. It can end now. And I say it shall end now. And I wish I weren't feeling so poorly. And, just between you and me, that speech I just gave; it was the tritest thing since Christ blew town, wouldn't you say?

Well, forget that because now I've got something really important to tell you. It is about the white light that is going to illuminate us all. The white light from heaven is what I'm talking about. And what is this light, that's in all the literature? It is the thing we achieve when heaven is near. You only get it when you have understanding and not fear. That is important. We have what's important. Now here is a little secret. We have the secret.

Excuse me just a moment. My head is starting to pound. I'll be alright, beloved people. Beloved person. Just a moment now, I was talking about the secret.

Yes, I have a secret for you. Up at Alpine Lodge, my self-made retreat, I have a television set and that television set is a divine one. Yes, I know it plays the same programmes as any other television set, yours or the next fellow's or anyone's. Yes, I see there is no next fellow. I mean it figuratively, you know, the old expression. Don't upset me. Anyway, my television is ordinary but, no, it isn't really. Because every night there at Alpine Lodge, after I'd turn off this television set and all the lights were off, that television set would glow in the dark. That's right. Glow in the dark for a good six or seven minutes after I'd turned the thing off and even pulled out the plug. Now this in itself isn't much, I realize, but let me tell you, that bright glowing in the dark was in fact the white light essence. Heaven was transmitting through that television. I know because two nights ago after I'd turned off both the television and the lights, that television screen wasn't the only thing that was glowing in the dark. I chanced to look into the mirror on my wall, there at Alpine Lodge, and lo and behold, Reverend Sweet herself was also glowing in the dark. I was glowing in the dark and I'd like to describe it to you and I don't know if I can do it effectively. What am I saying? I'm a preacher of the Lord and I can explain anything and if I'm afraid to explain, I'll just sing. *Maybe tomorrow I'll see it all from heaven.* Alright, now, I'm going to describe myself just as I looked two nights ago at Alpine Lodge and also last night. But last night something better happened. I'll save that for later. First off, this is how I looked two nights ago.

I looked in the mirror there in the dark up at Alpine Lodge and my skin was aglow. Phosphorescent or something. It glowed with a

yellow tinge. Yellow, yes, but white is the word. This was the white light. And the television glowed also. We both glowed with the light that is from heaven. We glowed and I wish I had a few synonyms for "television" to make this sermon more effective. Are you sick of me saying that word over and over? No matter.

Now the white light from the t.v. rubbed off on me. And this was a divine t.v. How do I know? Because I found it by chance one month ago and I'll explain exactly how, brothers and sisters. Sisters. Sister. I'll explain.

I was walking down the street one month ago, just as it was starting to get dark and it was a Saturday and I was preparing for a sermon the following morning, so I was walking down a quiet alley close to downtown, looking for an inspiration. Well, let me tell you, I was walking and just at six o'clock I passed a huge garbage bin in the alley that some of the surrounding ships use. I passed this bin and sticking out of the top was one perfectly good television set. That's right. A perfectly good television set — beautiful new cabinet and everything — just sitting in the garbage. I picked it up and it was heavy but it was a portable just the same and I carried it to Alpine Lodge with me. I plugged it in to see if it worked and it started to hum and it was perfect and in colour and certainly a blessing and a long-deserved addition to my Alpine Lodge. Amen.

Wait, I'm not finished. I've got something else to tell you, which I've been saving. Last night, after I'd watched television for awhile and then turned it off, it glowed in the dark as usual. And so did I. But this time, out of the glow of that t.v., came a figure. A holy figure that was just coming out of that television screen. And I saw this holy figure with my own eyes, just as alive as you or me. This is true. And I got so excited that I said, 'Yes, I'm ready to go to heaven,' and I reached for the figure to grab it and see if maybe I was dreaming, because I haven't been well of late, but the figure just disappeared. Really disappeared. And suddenly I felt a gust of very cold, chilly air. Let me tell you, I was very cold and then I saw that the window was open, so I shut it and the cold all went away. But the figure who disappeared really left me shaken. Had I not gotten so excited, I wouldn't have scared it away, but I did and I shouldn't have. But it shouldn't have been scared, either. What if the figure had sang my song? Then it wouldn't have been afraid and it would have known that Reverend Sweet would not hurt it. However, there is still tomorrow yet to come and it may visit me

again and will tell me whatever divine message it was meant to tell me. And, believe me, it was sent to tell me something.

Now that's all I'm going to say about all that. Oh, wait, there is something else. That figure, you know, looked so much like an angel. I see it in everyone I meet. Everyone here looks like that angel. Well, there used to be lots of people here but maybe I've spent too much time withdrawn in Alpine Lodge. But now that I've had a visitation, I feel as though there is so much I have to say.

I'm going to cut this sermon short because I'm not feeling well. I'd hoped you wouldn't notice but I'm truly feeling poorly. I'll just leave you with two reminders. Make that three reminders. Wait, I don't know how many. First off, I'd like to say that you must be kind to your neighbours. When you're no longer any good to others, you will be recalled. The Lord won't want you here anymore. But that's not what I wanted to say. I want you to remember Reverend Sweet's divine rule. Reverend Sweet says to quit eating sugar because when you are filled with the sweet knowledge of the Lord and all the things we believe in, then you don't need sugar or honey to get some sweetness out of life. Can you remember that, boys and girls? I mean, person. I'm not being condescending, you know. The thing to remember is, you don't need sugar. Not in your coffee not in your tea not in your cake not in your pie. Does that rhyme well enough for you to remember? Alright now. Not in your coffee not in your tea not in your cake just be like me. That is Reverend Sweet's hard and fast rule: Not to eat sugar. What's the second most important rule? No, excuse me. The first most important rule is to love thy neighbour, but that isn't a Sweet Original. That was here long before me or you but we'll include it anyway. So the first most important rule is to love your neighbour and the second most important rule is to keep sugar out of your diet because you don't need it when you are filled with the sweet spirit and I haven't eaten any sugar myself for years and years. Now, what's the third most important rule?

The third most important rule is to sing Reverend Sweet's song whenever you are afraid. This is really more important than to be third, but we'll have to keep it there anyway. Now we generally sing my song before we close each sermon and we sing it each night before we go to bed. But we won't sing it after this sermon because I don't feel well and I'm going to leave you and I have a declaration to make. I have not been singing it the past couple of nights before I've gone to bed and it's because I've been so entranced with my white light. So don't be like me and get distracted and so wrapped up in

yourself as easily. I've been a bad reverend. You sing that song before you go to bed. You sing it but we won't sing it now because Reverend Sweet just isn't well. So I'm going back to somewhere to meditate and you don't have to leave a contribution in the plate as there isn't one and I wouldn't pass it anyway if there were. May the white light be with you and now I've got things to do like maybe head for the river and be cleansed. Yes.

II. *Alice's Confession*

I don't want to make this a long story, but I went to Reverend Sweet's church — if you can call it that — yesterday morning because I felt sort of guilty. That sermon she gave was about a white light, and I was the only one in the church, needless to say. She said she spent all her time at a place called Alpine Lodge, but it's really just an awful suite across town where she lived. I don't know why she called it Alpine Lodge, unless she wanted to sound fancy. Actually, it sounds like a bloody ski resort name. And there must be a million Alpine Lodge's all over the province, so you'd think she could have thought of something original.

Anyway, her idea of putting good things in one column of the paper and bad in the other is a good idea alright, except if I do things like that, I usually forget which items I put under the "Bad" column and which under the "Good" and I end up doing the bad because I recall it as being under the "Good", which is a problem.

Now, about her song, which she made the biggest deal over. I never believed in singing whenever I was afraid, because if I did, then everyone would know I was afraid just by hearing me sing. I remember people telling me when I was a kid that if I were ever afraid of the dark, I should whistle or sing. Reverend Sweet's idea isn't original, by any means. But you see, if you sing or whistle when you're afraid, then whoever hears you knows you're afraid alright or you wouldn't be singing, and then they take advantage of you. So it's better to keep silent when you're afraid and then no one knows what you're feeling at all. Reverend Sweet also said to sing her song before you go to bed at night, as a kind of Hallelujah-song. Well, it's better than singing some rotter, I guess. I never used to sing at all.

Then she talked about how you shouldn't eat sugar if you believe in the Lord because you don't need sugar to sweeten your life. Well, I haven't used sugar for quite awhile now — at least not in my

coffee — because I ran out of table-sugar and I'm too lazy and broke to buy more.

I'm not putting down Reverend Sweet by knocking all the things she was pushing — especially the bit about singing her prized song when you're afraid — but I'm just saying what I believe. Anyway, the most important thing she spoke of was the television set.

Until this morning, I had a job selling televisions, new and used. We had one excellent television which the boss stole from somewhere — he does that now and again — and we found out it was one of these recall items that have to be sent back to the manufacturer. The boss got kind of scared — I thought it was an irrational fear — so do you know what he did? Well, he sure didn't stand around singing Reverend Sweet's song. It didn't even enter his mind but then he doesn't know her song anyway. He immediately dumped that television set in the garbage bin outside and left it there.

A few minutes later, I stepped outside to shake the mop and I saw Reverend Sweet pull that television out from the bin and run down the alley with it. Then the boss came outside and said, 'It's too risky to leave that squawk-box in the bin. Let's dump it some place else. Someone might come along and take it.'

I said, 'You're too late. Someone already took it.'

'Did you see who it was?' the boss said, and he was afraid.

'Yes, I did. It was that woman with the long robe and army boots that everyone calls Reverend Sweet.'

'Oh, her,' said the boss. 'That's the one who preaches at the boarded-up church on Church Street and is in and out of the nut-house. She took it? Let her have it.' Then the boss started to giggle and so did I and we forgot about it.

At least the boss did. A couple of weeks later, though, I started to feel guilty because that model of television is no good for anyone. I don't understand its properties; I just know you can get really sick if you're exposed to the likes of it. That's what the boss said.

Reverend Sweet was saying her television glowed in the dark because it was a divine one, but that isn't true. At least I think it isn't. That sermon of hers almost made me cry; I felt so sorry for her.

Anyway, I started to feel guilty just a couple of days ago about the Reverend Sweet stealing that poison television set, so I walked around town the way she does, looking in all the places she goes so I could find her and tell her to discard the thing. After running all over town all day, I managed to catch sight of her going into the

ratty apartment she calls Alpine Lodge. The building was, in fact, at one time called the Alpine Hotel, but it isn't called anything now. Anyway, I saw which rooms she went into and I waited around outside, wondering how I was supposed to explain the situation. Finally — and it was pretty late — I knocked on her door but she didn't answer.

I went around to the window and saw she was engrossed in her television set, but I don't think the set was turned on. I think she was just staring at this blinding, humming light coming from it. I'm sure it was no good for the eyes. I gathered my nerve and opened the window to climb through it. I got halfway in and was about to say something along these lines: 'These televisions, such as the one you're watching, are items which must be returned to the factory. They're no good for people and they must go back to the manufacturer. They make people ill and my boss is afraid he'll get in lots of trouble . . .' I'm going off on a tangent here. The problem was, not one of these words came out of my mouth because Reverend Sweet got up and started running towards me. I thought she'd think I was a burglar and hit me, so I took off back out the window in a mad rush and ran home. You can't say I didn't try.

The next morning I decided to go to the church on Church Street where people say she preaches. You should have seen this place. It looked like it had been boarded up for at least ten years and the dryrot had sure set in. There was no front door left on it, so anyone could walk in or out. I went in and sat on one of the pews which was still intact, and Reverend Sweet was up at the front preaching away. I kept my mouth shut the whole time because her sermon was really something to listen to, even if I don't go along with all her ideas, and I was afraid to interrupt her. She looked quite sick, with a yellow tinge on her skin that lit the church interior like one of those candle-holders.

She rather suddenly finished that sermon I was telling you about and then took off behind the pulpit somewhere. I didn't want to follow her to tell her about the television because I was afraid to go hunting around inside that church when I knew the rafters could fall any minute. The whole roof could have caved in, as a matter of fact. Actually, there's another reason why I didn't look for her also: She just wouldn't have believed me if I had told her that the t.v. was anything but divine.

This morning — only one day later — I was in the shop listening to the local news over one of our good televisions (not one of those

awful recall items which we don't carry anymore anyway). I heard over the news that the woman known as the Reverend Sweet was missing and presumed drowned after last being seen at the river outside town. I don't know if she had a dizzy spell and fell in the river or if she maybe thought she could walk on the water with her white light as protection or whatever. I also don't know if that television truly made her sick — which I care not to believe — or if it was just her sugar deficiency that did it. Is that possible? I know nothing of chemistry.

What I do know is that I did something very unusual for me when I heard that she was missing. I did the unusual thing for two reasons; partly because I felt like following in Reverend Sweet's footsteps and partly because I had an overwhelming fear which I didn't know how to overcome. I started to sing:

*Maybe tomorrow I'll see it all from heaven
I'll eat my midnight snack in heaven just as midnight comes*

These were the only two lines I remembered just then, so I sang them over and over. Everyone in the shop looked at me strangely and finally the boss escorted me out the back door and through my singing I heard him say, 'You're nuts and you're fired.' Then he shoved me close to the bin where the television had once been discarded and he turned around and slammed the door to the shop. Meanwhile, I remembered the last lines from Reverend Sweet's song and I added those to my loud repertoire.

*I'll sail to the clouds above and worry not of hate or love
For God and Reverend Sweet and I will soon be in the sky*

I don't mean for this to sound stagey but I didn't know what else to do except keep singing, and those lines really did get nailed into my brain like the Savior and the Cross. It's as simple as that. And people passing by didn't even notice me at all. This is probably because, unlike the Reverend Sweet who glowed in the dark, I, with all my guilt inside, go dark in the daylight. Under those conditions, I just had to keep singing and singing so I could start anew and prove that Reverend Sweet's song really works and that she was indeed a saint, giving me no reason at all to feel guilty after awhile.

STILL LIFE: LOVERS

Lying together
we instruct the painter.

Let him show my cage of ribs blue
engulfing what remains of you,
my torso doubling for this moment
bulking, dominant.

Your half is for his other hand.
Tense thigh and green calf
melt my abdomen to
waves of landscape.

Counterpoint of blue-green flesh,
our common skin making halves,
we intuit blue for my will, green
for yours: merging, black.

But dark fever in the centre
says little of the background
only he can copy,
and he has us cool, cooling, even cold,
blue-green like the sea.

THESE PEOPLE

Rabbitbush bloom
yellow, asparagus
no one planted
grown and gone
to seed: the fall
these people knew.

They had classes
whites would never recognize:
hard-chiselled polished stone
 (and concrete slabs),
fine-carved wood,
flat rock,
even dry boards
hammered upright
after their black characters
were painted.

Weeds upon the plots
have finished feeding.
Now they color, differentiate
their kinds, some
already phantoms
fragile as the air.

This gathering
began in law, forbidding
export of corpses. Then
the Chinese carried their dead
to a secret acre
beyond the town.

The town has passed beyond.
There is no secret
in the land.

But graves are still.
Even their markers
outstrain our listening.
Was this a laborer, a laundry-
man, that
a dealer in cocaine?
And who stopped planting
fallen kin, when
did the weeds begin
their sway.

DARK MAN

I am the dark man, so dark
that in shadow or memory, you would say, my flesh grows green.
When the light flickers under towering
oaks and willows, it seems to you that light
pierces me also, that there are blue
spaces in my chest and deep in me
a quivering, an unseen rushing, and a family
of chaotic notes shot with quick rhythms and melodies.
I too, like the lawn in the park,
have my tones of liquid ash and gold
that move across me. And sometimes at the end
of a lane of trees I seem to walk
into noon's darkly striped face as a suicide
fades into the bright sea.
Or if you stay close to me till evening,
often then you will lose me, when you turn to look
at the mounded black and orange clouds
lying in the west at the field's edge
above the heads of the trees. You notice I am gone
but at once your question is lost in other questions:
what is the source of night, does dark gather
and mount from the hedges, from basements,
the woods, the interiors of spruce; or does it fall,
does shadow fall, this shadow as large as the earth . . .
and what is it to be deprived of light?

And when you are with me, you wonder at the source
of my wealth and my idleness. At my feet
there is a sound of running water reminding you
of gardens under harsh suns,
Provence, Palestine or Africa. You think
of a wine farmer, an ancient house,
nobles of Sicily, where the last son
oversees a green remnant

of former holdings. A man with nothing to do,
keeping to his shade and his streams
in a dusty country, where villages of dust cling
to mountains of dust and the people
sit staring at white walls: the street, the land, the sky.
A man who has learned all languages, who knows
all literature and all music, who studies the stars
and writes without singing the work.

Yet for all this you confuse me in your thought
with an idea of the field, wild grass in motion
sprinkled with mustard flowers and apple trees.
And to watch me as I pass through the open doors
onto the lawn, into sunlight, between
peonies as between torches,
is suddenly for you to see me naked
as though you surprised a boy in private woods.
Only the tips of my ears are covered
by my dark hair, that captures close to you
the light in twisting rivers.
And my feet too are invisible, sunk
in seasons of needles and leaves.

And in your thought we are still there together
much later, when, the lights lit and the screens closed,
I sit at the piano. You would say you are alone with me,
despite the others, and the notes
of Lizst and Alkan, warmth chased with cold,
sprinkle down on us. First you hear them
above, striking the leaves like light fingers,
and then at last they reach down, refreshing us,
releasing the savors from plants and from the earth.

THE SMOKER

The effigy of the smoker
floats over the corner:
a black sun, this enormous girl
drawing white smoke like a strand
of vacuum down from heaven
into the weave of air and human lungs.
And in the female trinity
of her eyes and smile,
now you follow the single thread
into the flowering almonds
that flame before the doors,
into the miasma of perfume, lake of sleep,
into grateful wood, metal rescued from objects,
rocks that catch fire in the blaze of a winter midnight,
the cemetery of erect water and leaf-bearing lamps,
children whistling in the branches of subways,
a red jaguar
drawing a white stripe through the eye,
exhausted cattle in a May shower of heated lead,
cheap books on health and deviation,
eaten faces,
a girl's small treasure in its pouch,
raccoons in the attic and on the wooded hill . . .
all the juice, the glint, the clamor of the day
poured over grey rocks, tinted green by the ferns,
asleep in its traditional wound
in a new light between coins and a blank wall.

Daniel Moses

A MIME WITH TWO SOUNDS

A man walks slowly, his head down and hands clasped behind his back. There is the bird sound. It is no more than five notes and it is gone quickly, long before the man comes to a stop. He raises his head to listen to silence. He frowns or he sighs or his head shakes or his mouth pouts: somehow he indicates his discontent. He lowers his head and begins his slow walking, his head bobbing as if counting each step.

There is the bird sound. The man stops, his hands unclasp, and his head rises quickly and looks around him, but he cannot find a source for the sound. He sighs or shakes his head and perhaps even gives his hands a wring before they clasp again behind him and his head lowers. He walks in another direction, not as slowly as before, and occasionally quickly lifts his head to look around.

It is on one of these occasions, not more than the fifth in sequence, while looking over his shoulder, that he stubs his toe, stumbles and falls to his knees. There is the stone sound. It is no more than five notes, five knocks of a rock bouncing on rock, and it is gone quickly, but not before the man notices its source. He sits back, and frowns or shakes his head as he gingerly takes his toe in hand and examines it. His grimace, as he massages his toe, turns almost into a smile. There is the bird sound. He drops his foot and looks around quickly, but cannot locate a source for the sound. He listens for a moment. Then he crawls to the source of the stone sound. He picks up something that is round and heavy. He fondles it, and he looks around above him.

There is the bird sound, and the man starts and drops the round object, and by his grimace, by his grasping and unhanding of his foot, and by his rolling about, it is obvious that it has fallen on his injured toe. There is the stone sound.

The man quiets down, and sits back. He is frowning or pouting, holding his foot still. Then he cracks his knuckles or runs a hand through his hair before he stands, bends to the source of the stone sound and picks it up. He hefts the round object as he looks around above him, then holds it tightly to his chest. He looks around about

him. He begins to walk slowly in a wide circle, watching the horizon, the object clasped in his hands behind him. The circle he walks disintegrates. He staggers in an inward spiral and stops before he reaches its center. His head sinks onto his chest. His hands are squeezing the object tightly.

There is the bird sound. He turns quickly, his hands unclasping, and the one holding the round object pitches it at the bird sound. The man stands limply, watching. The object flies far away, and then circles around him, quickly gaining altitude. He is the center of the base of the cone its spiral describes. He turns, his head lifting, tipping back. When the object has reached the zenith, the man is gasping, his arms are spread as if in welcome. There is the stone sound. At its first note, he collapses, twisting onto his face, his body jerking to its other notes, writhing onto his back. Then his mouth opens. There is the bird sound.

Jane Munro

Canadian Gothic and other poems, Stanley Cooperman, *West Coast Review Books*, XI/1 (July 1976).

Gothic is a word people keep handy to hide an oddly assorted clutter. A drawer-under-the-telephone kind of word, it originally evoked Goths (uncouth, rude, numerous and multiplying). Then there was Gothic architecture — that which supplanted the classical — with its wildly flying buttresses and attenuated arches. All its upward thrust, elongation and general elevation of the human toward the divine eventually made Gothic appropriately part of the title of that familiar painting, "American Gothic." The skinny farmer and his suspicious wife are portrayed as fiercely upright as a couple of stalks of last year's corn. Gothic came to include the painfully Puritanical along with the rich and elaborate, the carcass of a prairie farm and the windows of Chartres. In Canada, Gothic has a special irony because it is not the label of a recognized usurper; neo-Gothic styles are commonly taken as 'classical' and complete in comparison with the elemental and functional modes of modern art or thought. And then there is the Gothic novel, a burlesque of horror as well as of serious fiction.

Canadian Gothic is, only as a derogatory comment, an appropriate title for Stanley Cooperman's last book. The reason, I fear, for choosing this label (and elevating a bad poem which happened to bear it to the grandiose position of title-poem) no doubt lies in somebody's assessment of the Canadian book-buying public. Somebody thinks we are revoltingly nationalistic, even chauvinistic, in our preferences. As a marketing technique, this paternalism leaves me cold and crotchety. "Canadian" has now assumed the dimensions of a smiling blonde. It bothers me greatly that all we are thought capable of appreciating are writers who can somehow be supposed to have struggled forth from log cabins on isolated islands in the lakes of northern Ontario. Ten years ago, it may have been useful to counter what seemed a relentlessly colonial mentality with some native-born Canadian pride, but that once radical attitude has gained such currency that I now fear our ability to speak well to ourselves, let alone to the rest of the world, has been stunted. We are a country of many back-grounds, a nation carved and lacerated by differences. It is ludicrous

to think that by applying a cheesecake cover of "Canadian" to every bit of art produced by *bona fide* residents, landed immigrants, citizens or whatnots of this country we can magically smooth out our realities and make ourselves easily and smilingly similar. Cooperman asks:

should I reveal
that my Aunt Malkeh
(pursued by hairless bears
through the garbage-tundras of Canarsie)
and the Maple Leaf
share
the same varicose veins?

What does it matter where Cooperman's poems were written? Is it really more significant to us that he writes about Egmont and Vancouver than that he works through a set of Jerusalem poems? Isn't it time we were allowed out in the world?

If this collection, this grab-bag of delicate reaches and utter pratfalls, fine taste and blatant lack of couth, intelligence and a tiresome affinity for too much that is trite, of artistry, wit, buffoonery and cheap tricks, had been seriously edited I think a much smaller book would have been discovered within it. There is, like a linen thread through *Canadian Gothic*, a long poem that calls itself, more frequently than anything else, simply "nothing."

This sequence would include all of some poems and only parts of others. Take Cooperman at his plainest word (though the trappings of his images abound), and he will neither exhaust you nor himself. As your host, he will bear in mind your needs for rest and refreshing argument; for your sensual pleasure, he will offer tunes, colours, bodies; for your spirit, he will suggest wind and stones; for your heart, he will appear in *déshabille*:

I ask all those who are alone,
who wear their lives
like a loose garment:
what shall I do
with my days and nights?

The narrative drive through the better poems is Cooperman's dash to grip the consequences and conditions of his life. He is obsessed with himself and the finality of his judgment and love. In his earlier books he gambolled and postured much more than he does here. The voice I meet in these poems may let itself out on a long leash, but it is not prancing and barking to street-corner accordions.

Your voice
will be driven back
against your face
with bits of memory
and fat

Cooperman sounds more composed, surprised by his bitterness,
moved by his love, stubborn and lonely.

so the words of the wise are goads,
nails,
driving us to that terror
where we find smooth stones
and rough stones
to please us
and hold our feet, while the stream
explodes on all sides

Still it is possible to walk gently,
give mud its proper shape

Predominantly, this is poetry of a visceral religious quest. Cooperman shares some ground with his contemporary, Anne Sexton, for whom he writes:

I am afraid of stones,
I am afraid of stones and water
waiting
in uncut grass.
I am afraid of all things unpiped

She also uses repetition and rhetorical language structures, but she generally uses them better. She has a surer sense of rhythm and avoids being trite; he is less experienced in the dances to be done by words and finds in himself a tolerance for commonplace turns.

There is a pressure in these poems to be important. Though they are short, I hear the commands of epic or psalm behind them. Like folk poetry, they are not shy of formulaic phrases; they run to catalogues and repetitive themes and they are characterized by rapid thinking in similarities and opposites. But what folk poetry relies upon is an immediate audience, a real and attentive listener who will respond emotionally to the poem as it is spun out, who will effectively edit the poet's windiness by becoming visibly bored or vocally disappointed. It takes a skillful writer to let a poem of this type go to its own music; it takes an experienced poet to discover what tune a poem has and how to keep it true to itself. To my ear, Cooperman goes astray when he tries too hard to take over a poem, to dictate

its pace and duration. I do not think he quite accepted how much of his poetic repertoire had been formed by unsophisticated folk songs, by Biblical structures, by the formulas of Middle Eastern poetry, by the plaintive, repetitive lyrics, the strangled epics of love and death of Middle Western American Bible-Belt preacher, rolling through the hills and valleys of his lesson. Cooperman was first of all a critic of literature and so must have been a particularly self-conscious poet. The problems of control and release were, it would seem, especially treacherous for him.

"Nothing" is as vacuous as "Gothic" but Cooperman worked that rubbery generalization throughout these poems, stretching, tugging, blowing it up, letting his breath rattle back out suddenly. "Nothing," "something," "everything," "sometimes" — the words seem almost interchangeable in his usage and appear frequently. In his wrestling with emptiness and impotence Cooperman pitted himself against these apparently throw-away words. They became his toys, his red balloons.

I come to you now
asking only the privilege
of my refusals: to visit for a while
and touch your finger-tips with light.

From this nothing will be saved, if nothing broken,
the wind will bring its rain, the rain
its corpses; those who kill
will kill for red balloons, those who dream
will honour those who kill.
Friend, let us put our songs together:
there is warmth
in the small combustion of our breath.

The above quotation is from "L'Envoi" which prefaces one hundred and twenty-four poems. It is a long book, trying to look like a slighter volume. The publisher has chosen to set it in small type and frequently crowds two poems onto one page, whether or not they work well together. Fred Candelaria says in his "Afterword" that he would have recommended against publishing some of the poems, but Cooperman's death "stilled all debate." The situation was difficult, but it is a pity that this work was not carefully edited because there is good poetry in the book but *Canadian Gothic*, as it is, seems a haphazard collection in which it is hard to find the poems you want, quickly.

You cannot miss one of my favourites, however, since it is the first.
“The Rivals” ends:

Still. . . .
Galila has her breakfast,
I my pride,
and I must be content.
Nothing else remains
but bright silence,
iridescent leaves,
the otter’s swift and
comic dance,
the journey home.

Cooperman did have his pride. I regret that he chose not to wait longer. From the sound of that pool he and the otters watched, there would have been something more in it for him.

THE ORCHIDS

He has left me, gone on a long journey
while the wolf jumps the brazen bird.
Cut off from me by rivers and mountains
his bright armor-flashes in the sun
girdle my domain. The moon at dawn lights
the room. The greatest hermits hide here
in the capital. She was sent to marry
a barbarian chief in his court. At dusk
she stopped to sleep. Now she is dead.

Breath sweeps the muggy heat away
as the green pearl glides down the center
of the rainbow and turns the air round it
to smoke. A cinnabar haze brings darkness on.
They travelled among the tribes
narrow roads, steep and sharply cut.
Clamoring cranes filled the woods. The walls
were not their native town's.
White sun wired the vine and nightshade.

The young shoots on the hill are doing well
as they bury the drunk in the long lakes
clear as crystal for a thousand leagues.
Not far from me, I thought I saw him pass.

My love of this road lined
with leafless mulberry and filled with the wind
of heaven knows no ending.
The apricot-yellow birds go winging, one
after another and the dog in the back room barks.
Every fifth day they were going to come back.
The lotus leaves float together
like little boats with messages the goose refused.

Within this land there once rose up a mighty army.
I live in fear of being once more cast aside.
These friendships of mine are every bit
as close as the love between us.
The delicate scent of the orchids comes to me.

LETTER FROM A TRAVELLER

Here brothers are held in greater esteem
than children. The old cover their heads.
The mad have to hide their joyless games.
Each must find new axes of growth
for his family's life or lack of it.
A kind of imitation crystal, dark blue
and filled with bubbles, is prized.

A dozen porcelain bowls were given me.
Four are filled up with a landscape:
when water is poured into them
mountains turn blue, oceans green.
Four picture persons and things:
when water is poured into them
the people try to salute each other
things do a private dance of horrors.
Four are painted with plants:
when water is poured into them
fronds and fennel stalks wave in the air.
The flowers wilt and later die.
They are as nothing to the touch.

Here freshwater pearls are commonplace.
The old oracles consulted these people.
At noon the self is brought out best
by pear trees and flowering pines.
This little world will pass away.
Every pond in these hills mirrors
the glory. What else could it do?

Octavio Paz

Translated by Richard Haswell

THE SPOKEN LETTER

Flutters the letter
From the letter we write.
Letter,
Fluted stalagmite,
Fitted column,
Tap by tap type by type,
The echo petrifies
On the fettered letter.

Soul-ladder,
Whited as a letter,
The word flutters,
Teeters
On a thread spread
From unheard to the howled,
On the filed
Edge of the said.
the heard: bird's round
O labyrinth of sound.

The spoken speaks not
The spoken: how speak
The spoken?
Speak!
Could be the bacchant is beakéd.

Crater,
Howl from an old hole:
In another galaxy
Did they speak of ataraxy?
Far words left words
Leftwards and forwards.

Germane manger,
Cemetery is seminary
Auricle, oracle
Preceding re-seeding.

Labyrinth of the heard,
What is said is gainsaid
From unheard to the howled
Unheeded.

Innocence in no sense:
To say it learn to keep quiet.

Yoshiyuki Rie

Translated from the Japanese by James Kirkup

CARRYING

A bird soars upwards.
A boy, suddenly snatched up in its beak, is being
carried up to the peak of a youthful dream, soon
to be broken by a shot silenced in darkness.

*

Soon you will be hearing those light footsteps
carrying another morning. Fallen leaves are being
dragged along pavements as black time
is broken to pieces against the wind.

*

Carrying on my back a dreaming baby
whose tender head hugged in a woolly hat, I
am crossing a rustic bridge supported only by
my own thin arms.

Claudio Rodriguez

Translated by Louis M. Bourne

ODE TO HOSPITALITY

I

At whatever time and in whichever place
There is always a man who
Walks along as vagrant as smoke,
Benefactor, malefactor,
Baptized with the sour
Milk of our laws. And he finds
His salvation in
Hospitality.
Just as clothes attract the moth,
As love beckons to all
Its kindred of lust and delight,
So a house lures him in. And not
By being a honeycomb or an anchor,
But by means of that dark
Divorce between the kidnapping of his years,
The deep captivity of time passed away
There, between the walls,
And his battered freedom now.
A stranger, he sees how
An old lie becomes a new truth.
He sees the body of deceit
And uses it: that door
That, when opened, creaks
With cruel distrust, with bitter reproach;
That window where
The wilted flower of the almond tree still
Recalls spring, and it is a barrier for him,
And its glass, servitude; the roof tiles
Now without moss or faith;
The furniture with a pattern so
Unfriendly; the china
Cold and rebellious, when

It was a pastime before, and often
Even solace; the living room
With its aggressive humbleness, gathering,
Spoiling
What a very fickle and very sorrowful
Mouth, years ago,
Spoke, hushed, kissed . . . This is the struggle,
This is the time, the land
Where he must conquer if he does not seek
Memories and hopes
Merely. If he seeks
Foundation, fellowship.

II

And today, like the rain that
Washes the leaves, this fine morning,
So prematurely April,
Cleans the dust and tinsel from so much
Time, and springs up, and creates
Almost a miracle from deeds and events,
And clinches and adjusts
So much itinerant life, such fortune and fraud
Throughout the days,
Purifying faces and cities,
Giving wealth to a youth
In want, training,
Establishing life. But can someone
Make his past
Always a matter of refacing:
Wax, lacquer, varnish, whatever fades
So soon, as quickly
As the flower of lips?

Or rather must he wait to be with those
True friends, the ones who will give meaning
To his life, to his land and to his house?

III

It is hospitality. That is the origin
Of celebration and song.
Because a song is but
A welcoming word: the one that saves
Though it leaves a wound. And love is but
A welcome wound, though it has no cure;
And freedom fits
In a humble, welcoming hand,
Perhaps suffering and trembling
But endowing and faithful, extended in fellowship
And in confidence, not in
Submission or dominance.
Even though we turn
Living together into techniques
Of oppression and measures
For security, though we make
Hospitality a poorhouse, there is
Always a simple man, a fine morning
With the clear heights of this land,
A house, and a lucky
Moment. And this man
Sees his beloved fellowmen
Around the table. He does not ask
But invites, he does not put out
Glasses of sorrow, or silverware.
He barely speaks, and still less
Of his exile.

What he hoped for he finds
And celebrates, far from
Incense and gunpowder,
That money, that resentment.
Now his country is this generous
Occasion and, serene,
A little fearful before such blessings,
He welcomes and names, one by one,
Whichever of his friends from
Birth. Now never
A stranger, part of the family,
Not meekly, adventurously,
He gives his thanks all by himself,
Like a beggar. And he knows,
He understands at last. And he looks joyfully,
With that intimate quality of plainness
Which is the only strength,
At the faces and things,
The truth of his life
Just won here, between the walls
Of a free youth and a home without frontiers.

(Alliance and Condemnation)

Kora Rumiko

Translated by James Kirkup

A TREE

In a tree, there is
a tree still not in existence,
whose crest is even now
trembling in some breeze.

In a blue sky, there is
a blue sky still not in existence,
whose horizon is now being
pierced by a swift bird.

In a body, there is
a body still not in existence,
whose altar is now being
flooded with fresh blood.

In a town, there is
a town still not in existence,
whose main square is now being
swung in my direction.

Jeffrey Schaire

AN IMPROVISATION:
MYSTERIES OF CHRISTIANITY

For G.R. & J.McE.

It is winter. The school day is long, endlessly long, from breakfast to dinner. The winter, too, is long. It's always winter; never good, never quite unendurable; always the same. Dusk, cold, clouded eyes, breath, running nose, bitter, bitter cheeks, nose, fingers, ears. Now as the dark is coming on, inside the basement classroom of the *yeshiva* the lights are bright, glaring on the green slateboard, the speckled cinder walls. Mr. Agronovitch is talking about something. The Diaspora. He talks dreamily to the class, fixing his gaze above their heads, from memory.

In the third row of blue steel desks the boy looks in his *siddur*. He tries to guess which passage Mr. Agronovitch will make him read aloud later, figuring out the letters one at a time. Yud, vuv, tzadek, shin, and the vowels: three dots is *e*, what is two dots?

He looks out the window: the schoolyard is dark blue, almost black. From outside, the classroom would be illumined, like a screen. A Christian child could be kneeling there on the walk, unseen, watching to find out what the Jews are doing. His stomach is rumbling, the school day has lasted forever. When he gets home his mother will have dinner ready, on the table. But already he knows he will not eat it. Instead he will shovel congealing mounds of fat about on his plate. He will cut the meat into tiny pieces and conceal them in the folds of a paper napkin. Always, after the day is over, food is repulsive. The meat will have translucent globs of fat along its edges, and bits of gristle, like stained glass windows, running through it. Or, while he is cutting, he will pull the long cord of a vein from the leg of a chicken. The rubbery tube will snap from his fork and he will have to leave the table. Blood-juice with slimy bits of onion will float in the potatoes.

Maybe a Christian child really is looking through the windows, even right now. Does it seem strange to him — these Jews who sit in front of Mr. Agronovitch, fidgeting and passing notes like any other schoolchildren, but for the late hour of the afternoon? Mr.

Agronovitch talks and talks, absent-mindedly picking his nose. The boy suppresses a snicker, thinking, How can he do that in front of people! Mr. Agronovitch leans on his elbow, his forefinger jammed into a nostril. His head and torso seem to pivot on the tip of that finger, to revolve around it, like the toy monkeys that dance acrobatics at the end of a stick, which the shoemaker gives the boy whenever he gets a new pair of shoes.

In front of the Christian child the boy sits stiff and attentive. He will show the Christians that the Jews are serious and well-behaved, better than themselves, from what he understands. But, really, he knows very little about them. None of his friends are Christians. All he knows is what he has learned about them in Hebrew School. They worship a man whose name was Christ instead of God. They say he was God's son, and that the Jews killed him, putting him on a cross. But Christ was Jewish, too, so it doesn't make very much sense. Christians believe in silly legends, though, like the way they believe that if you tell all the bad things you do to a priest and say a prayer, everything is all right and you can go out and do more bad things right away. That isn't very sensible.

Christians are a great mystery to him. On all the television shows people are always going to church. And, to be honest, most people he sees on the streets are probably Christians, because that's what his parents said: all the other people are *goyim*. Once, he went with his mother and his friend Joey and Joey's parents and his second-grade teacher, Mrs. Riley, to Joey's father's hospital. They went to see the guinea pigs and rabbits and monkeys in cages, the ones used for experiments, uphappily lining a wall with their smelly cubicles. In the car on the way the boy asked Mrs. Riley what nationality she was. "American," she answered, "of course." But that wasn't what he had meant. "No," he said, "I mean what *nationality* are you, like I'm of Jewish nationality." His mother got all excited and flustered, embarrassed by his question. "You're not supposed to ask people that question," she had said. "That's a personal thing." But Mrs. Riley had smiled in her pleasant indulgent way and said "I'm Protestant." He didn't know what Protestant meant, but after that he thought often about Mrs. Riley, who was an American and something else too, which was strange, and even lived in the same neighborhood as his own family. Also, after that, he learned that what you *are*, what religion, is a secret thing which other people are not supposed to know. In some way he felt that if people knew, then they had a power over you. They could use this power over you in

mysterious ways. It could even be like what the Spaniards did, when Ferdinand and Isabella made it illegal to be Jewish. Mr. Agronovitch told the class about the Jewish mystics who had been arrested under the Inquisition, which tried to make them renounce God and eat sausage. But even under the pain of having all their skin slowly peeled off their bodies, they had refused to give in, and they died holy men. The boy didn't really understand how skin could be peeled off: the skin of a person did not seem at all like the skin of an apple; but he felt that it must be just about the worst thing that could happen to anybody.

There were other dangerous things about Christians. They were, he knew, prone to sudden savage, irrational hatred of Jews. They believed incredible stories. They thought Jews drink the blood of Christian children during Passover. Without any warning they would rampage through the streets of Jewish communities, burning buildings and killing children. Mr. Agronovitch told about one synagogue which was just a basement room. The congregation was very poor, but they had a beautiful Torah which was more than a thousand years old. When the Christians set fire to the synagogue the old Jews ran in to save the ancient Torah from the flaming tabernacle, but they were all burned alive. And the boy knew about his own father's grandfather: an old man with a long beard he had never cut, as the law said. The Polish Christians came and tried to make him cut off the beard he was so proud of in the street. Rather than disobey the Torah, his great-grandfather had refused. They killed him in the street and then cut off his beard anyway.

Out the window now it is black; black and frosty. All the American, Christian children, of whom the boy is not one, are at home eating supper. Bitterly, the boy thinks about God. God never helps the Jews, even if Mr. Agronovitch says they are the chosen people. The boy worries about this God, whether or not He really is there. You can't even say His Name. You can't even write the word **God** on a piece of paper. The class writes G-d instead, just in case the paper should accidentally wind up in the garbage or burnt. God's name cannot be treated lightly. And you can't see God. Except for Moses. Even then, he only saw God's back, or shoulder-blade, in the rock. The boy imagines a smooth, worn gray expanse. Just the line of the shoulder, a beautiful dark curve, too beautiful for words, passing through the rock. It is like the edge of shadow cast by a cloud.

There are other problems with God. For example, if He can do anything He wants to, can He create a rock so huge that even He

cannot lift it? The boy knows that his father does not believe there is a God. His father never prays and does not fast on Yom Kippur, despite the boy's protests. His father, a silent man, is another mystery for the boy. Sometimes he does not believe there is a father, or he wakes at night to his father's loud snoring emerging from the bedroom and lies abed, incredulous at this strange testimony to the man's existence. His father works all the time, even Saturdays, twelve hours a day. The boy always wants to ask his father if they are poor or rich, but he is afraid to and holds his tongue.

The class is over. The long school day has finally ended, but the boy must yet wait for his father to come in the car to pick him up. He goes upstairs to the temple, to wait. In the *shul* the evening service is reaching its conclusion. The first few pews are filled with old men. Their stooped shoulders are draped with *talisim* and their *yarmulkes* are peaked caps of black crepe paper. They sway forth and back, rocking on their heels to an invisible rhythm. On the stage in front of the tabernacle stands the rabbi and cantor. There is an unseen signal and the rabbi begins to chant a familiar prayer. *Yiskadol v'yiskadosh sh'may ro'bow*. The boy recognizes the prayer for the dead. Secretly he sees the stove at home, flickering all night long with many candles in glass holders; the stove-top covered with them. It is the wonderful thing, these candles burning through the night, the reason he is set apart. His father, the strange man with his hard muscles, his hands indelibly grained with lines of black grease, his forearms which are coloured by an intricate flecking of freckles, and his cloak of silence, thick and heavy as his accented speech. His father, a man shorn of parents, brothers, sisters, childhood, country, beliefs. All of them, murdered by Eichmann. All that remains of that family is the stove full of memorial candles. Two for the boy's grandparents, and ten for aunts and uncles he never knew: all the nameless ones. It is this thought, he knows, which makes him different from the American Christians, why and how he is chosen.

The service draws to a close and the congregation files out. Alone in the temple the boy wanders up onto the stage. Under a huge skylight blackened by night the *ner tamid*, eternal light, is burning. Behind it he touches the ark of the tabernacle. He has seen, before, inside its locked doors: the row of scrolls. They stand, behind the doors, resting against the velvet, wrapped in silk covers woven of silver and gold, studded with jewels. From the handles are strung silver crowns and long silver pointers. On *Simchas Torah* the men carry the Torahs through the aisles, and the people reach out to

caress them. Once the boy, too, had carried a scroll through the aisles. It was large and heavy, but he held it up with love. Inside the rich wrappings was the ancient length of parchment with the words of the laws carefully and lengthily enscribed.

Under the empty light of winter night pouring from the skylight the boy stands waiting for the man who is his father to take him to the house where the daily mysteries are played. In the night air these mysteries converge on the boy, like the dead. Or like bats at dusk. Flocks of bats, like darkness, soundlessly brushing the air all around his eyes.

Libby Scheier / *Two Poems*

THIS IS DEATH,

hiding
in small velvet petals,
in the lime of salt streams near the sea,
in the undiscovered crevices of the body

its waves break white like sheets in the wind,
redthroated birds lie
spread-winged at the foam's edge

it holds the slippery cycles, the hasty
renewal of life in the seasons,
its cool rays of light attach
to the bodies of lizards and
the small leaves of April
it circles about, gathering pieces
of landscape, rocking back and forth
against the sky

love pares out the extra things
and hides them in a seedbed of pebbles

PREPARING

eyes in a morning glass,
a foot washed clean of pebbles and sand,
hips encircled with black pearls,
these requirements of freedom I can fulfill:
to sing slightly out of a crystalline
throat, steel-hard and ice-blue,
to balance a gold watch lightly on my head,
to number the days of this month in blue ink,
 next month in black blood, and
 all others in morning light

my eyebrows are ready to be singed
my eyes long for the sun

Emily Sion/*Two Poems*

THE MUSE AND THE DARK GLASS

The muse took a piece of glass
with roots, slugs and bulbs in it;
she reversed it
and it became charged with mountain flowers;
she stood it upright and the stars-in-disguise
rocketed home;

then she handed it to me —
at last I could see through it.

MY BONES DREAM

My bones dream
of songs the wind sings when no one is listening
they dream of a smoothness of whistles
of a cuttlebone quiet
of sand dunes' freedom
of the sea's skeleton
dry in the sun.

TOURISTA

Nothing and then this
window, sky blue as cobalt
or an old man's veins;
the black tree gnarled
around shadows of itself,
its seeming always always
has something else to say to you,
offers the moon, a celluloid wafer
from its cramped, arthritic fingers,
lights of the neighbours' houses
so much small change on a tabletop;
the skin invaginates potted geraniums,
a new bud, one on every stock
and when you pare this down
it screams it screams
of Odilon, the inner ear,
you leaving like Venus
from the half-shell,
camera like an albatross
around your pale neck.
The women count their rosary beads,
one by one lifting fingers
from your windpipe;
you make a little noise.

KOAN #3: STILL LIFE WITH A CONCH

this is before words
no text but two eyes
in glass bottles
floating down the blood.

trees bend like cilia on
the far shore of your ear,
wind played through all
your pores, fingerstops
of blue sky.

no argument presents itself
but the sea closed to a fist,
moon: cotton in your ear
you cannot hear yourself think.

John Stupp

WINDOWS

The photo is Vancouver, 1971,
your face in the window,
pressed like a shadow against the pane.
Look, in the background,
the sky is mostly blue, mountains on the north shore
are emerging from clouds,
blotched roof-tops and fire escapes
fan out in a wet tangle.
Closer to home,
you're looking in at something,
that stretches forever behind glass,
that makes an eternity
out of a closed-in place.

The second photo is an island.
You are standing on a beach in winter
surrounded by dogs.
Sky, water, empty wooden hulls,
a few boats resting at anchorage,
outlying channel islands —
this is the backdrop.
The dogs are howling in the foreground,
conjuring a history before Christ,
when the earliest men
set out with their dogs to fish and explore
this Northwestern channel.
The photo is Yellow Point, February, 1972.
Muddy footprints fan out across the wet beach
toward the horizon.
Like old friends,
the freezing puddles in each print
are the windows of the world.

TROUT CAVES

branches
of brown smoke
rise softly
through stilts
of a wooden bridge

the bird's
bulbous head
rotates wildly
following the paths
of giant sea-trout
returning faithfully
to their burning caves

the land is dry
without life
the trout
the bird
they are sleeping

their memory
is in the crumbling
leaves of ash

Nancy Toth/*Two Poems*

the clapper
swings
side to side;
the bell tolls hard,
inside,
against my ribs.

once
the bell
of baptism,
once
the bell
of burial.

born again from your eyes,
reborn into color:
like tubes of pure color
the rivers run cobalt;
the sky's strung with amber;
poppies hang bleeding.

wine in my hands
I fold into flower;
with strips of the sun
I braid up the day
to brighten my throat.

GRANDMOTHER

One blossom floating
could be you or me,
Two blossoms floating
become a butterfly.
A hundred butterflies is snow,
grandmother
no one, not even the snow
has hair as white as yours.

LETTER TO THE BOSS

Listen you dumb jerk
I hated your green face
because it smelled
like cat puke
and because you
worked with us
and voted NDP with us
and blew green snot
into the sawdust
just like you were
one
of us,
and you shit green turds
into the amphora toilets
from the seas of Pantelleria
and you spit green phlegm
against the alabaster
and plaster
It was the springtime
and your rise to power
and we hated you
because you wore linen shirts
and epaulets on your jacket,
shaved up to your eyes
we could have shoved
your green face
into the toilet bowl
until you puked money

and butterflies
but no we gave you
magnificent gifts
an ivory chess board for Christmas
and a moosehead for your birthday
and you thanked us
till we blushed
but I wish I would have
shoved a piece of dynamite
up your ass and said:
Happy birthday, Here's to Success!
because

I hate you
because you could turn
into a puddle
or an animal
and slink around at night
inspect the site
the pale glow of power in your hands
And when you brought around
your children
with the shine of the future in their eyes,
I hated you the most
because
for one moment
at four in the afternoon
you made me hate all children.

DESIRE SERIES (ii-v)

(ii)

Each time we touched
was a leap year apart,
In them earthquakes and tidal waves
and the diligence of storms
came over us:
the clouds boiled like leaves
and the great ruff of the wind breezed
like a sail across our bodies.
And you said:
See,
look what happens
when we repress what we know
and the flowers of your voice
came out
covered in sucking dew
and the creatures of my voice
came out fighting like dogs in the street
and outside the craving light of the morning
rose up the windows
like mercury.

(iii)

In the hastiness of the sultry clouds
of the August afternoon
I asked you
to tell me
how men kiss you:
Whether they get lost
or if they hold your spine
or if in a minute of silence
they milk your lips on the waterfront

and you see the sea calmed down
and the little ship listing
with this illustrious passenger.

(iv)

Look at the spattered sky
deep canyons and gray ridges
the cornice and the precipice
bellow and go;
the evening fades
What is wrong?
Why does our love
prepare for rain?

(v)

In the hastiness of the August sky
where things are hard to see
I saw the serene order
of our love,
and in you,
the sea:
Because it breathes too
and holds my hands
and shakes off the spray of waves
that land like small turtles
on my eyes.
Turtle, a drop of a dinosaur.
Beneath the haze of the August sky
where air is hard to breathe
I inhaled the heat
from between your legs
rings of sweat that drifted with the currents
of Pacifica and Arctica

the little drops of your body
and the big drops of the sea.

At night the haze of the August sky
loitered here like summer
and then left
and did not return
and I thought that after you've gone
there's nothing, nothing at all
not even the somnolent anvils of the sea
nor the root of the clouds
nor the needles of swamp rain
Nothing at all,
except enough memories of the past,
more than I need or want
and what do you need
free,
freed one,
to find the sea beneath the sea
because there are two of everything
two shores, two wings
and night, a double nocturne:
ecstasy of the sandpiper.
To the horizon of a secret midnight, go
we'll meet beneath the haze
where the sea-birds drink
in the marsh, dreaming
and the air flows around
the waist of the curved sky
let us learn
to love without tradition
without the quiver of expectation
and cast out our past
in the wide net of a kiss.

Lorraine Vernon

BLOSSOMS

I have a lover who comes to me every year in spring, and we shake cherry blossoms. Blossoms on trees of course (but only precariously). We've come to recognize the habit as a bizarre one, concerned with a mutual need of which we've never spoken. Each spring, when the cherry trees are at their peak, we assault them. I say 'assault' although it's not an accurate description of the way we behave. Our behavior is simply abandoned, and extremely tender. All we do is walk the streets in this quiet neighborhood, reaching up at intervals, to shake the branches into velvet snow. The Japanese Cherry trees line the boulevards in long rows of pink astonishment, sometimes towering beyond easy reach. If a branch is too high, my lover reaches it for me, vigorously shaking the blossoms until they fall, incoherently, over my face, lips and hair. I do short branches for him, or we shake branches together. We scream with delight on these rare and beautiful occasions, in a down-pour of spring, a pink deluge, in early morning when the entire neighborhood, this suburbia, is asleep.

I would never attempt to explain our behavior in rational terms. I only recognize it has something to do with the shortness of spring. We've both come to realize the time of blossoming is very short. The blossoms never last, at most, for more than two weeks, and we make the most of it. We shake blossoms late at night and in early morning until we're dizzy with rapture, exhausted from the strenuousness of reaching, shaking, pulling, until petals clog our nostrils and fill our mouths. We even open our mouths and spread our tongues out so that the blossoms will fall onto the tongue to taste the flower.

We also have a pleasant, absurd joke we share. We've pledged a pact that we will continue to meet each year — when I'm ninety and he's seventy-five (there's a slight difference in our ages) . . . we will continue to meet and to shake cherry blossoms over our heads which will then be grey, even if we're unable to reach up with human arms and must strike the pink beauty with a *stick* in order to take our pleasure.

At times of introspection — usually winter — I muse a bit about the habit. I believe it has something to do with the past. I remember

vaguely doing somewhat the same thing in my 'teens, the twenties — even the thirties — with one young man or another and the odd part of it is that the blossoms never seem to change from one year to the next but remain remarkably the same. When they first come out in April or early May, they're brilliant, but gradually diminish to a light, pale shade until the trees are finally stripped of any colour or blossoms at all. Except leaves of course, which are green, and later fall. I repeat that my lover and I have never discussed this pattern, but I think he's come to the same conclusion as myself, or he would never collaborate with me on these dangerous early morning adventures.

Dangerous? It's such an innocent habit that I don't know why the neighbors have become so critical about it. I've heard them getting out of bed at night; seen them peering through windows behind closed curtains. One night, they even called the police. I felt an extreme resentment at the time, although it was several years ago. I could think of nothing to say in our defense when they came to question us. My lover was also silent, unable to explain. We just stood there, feeling tricked, betrayed, with frail blossoms in our hair. The police said they would leave us alone, if we didn't do it again, but who's going to pay attention to *that* when a habit is so compulsive? We promptly took our habit underground, taking our chances, year after year, of being arrested.

So far (to the time of writing) we've managed to escape. No one has been quick or clever enough to catch us. We carry on in the old way, with the old patterns, only we've become increasingly more violent. We shake the trees, with vengeance, almost malice. We scatter blossoms like storm troopers over the boulevards and streets. We trample them under our feet. We've almost forgotten our pact about knocking the blossoms down with a stick — harmless enough, if done gently, not likely to injure the tree at all. We reach up now with our hands, break branches in our tension and we're amazed, almost proud, that the neighbors haven't seen us or reported us; that the police haven't come with their black cars and screaming sirens to take us away on grounds of trespassing and destroying, as sinister, undesirable social offenders.

Lately, we've become hysterically violent of the law and of course those who originally criticized us in our gentler days. We count the trees now before attacking. We've taken to leaving this neighborhood, seeking out new rows on new boulevards in this city. We take with us a clinical bag (a doctor's case) with instruments of destruc-

tion, such as saws, knives, picks and axes and work from the *base* of the tree, making certain to leave scars on it.

I write this in acute anxiety, but not because I'm worried about being caught. I'm used to being an outlaw. It's only a matter of time before they catch us, before they follow the long line of mutilated trees across the entire city. I'm fearless now — knowledgeable in my destruction. I can mark now at the base of the tree with absolute competence, cutting, incising, before moving on to the next. The only reason I write this is not from fear of being caught, but from a terror that I must share with someone and cannot share with my lover anymore. It's the awful terror that we are, in fact, running out of trees.

Robert Ward

NIGHT HAULING

from a painting by Andrew Wyeth

I

I rise as Capricorn
comes to drink at the eastern horizon
and find the night always spread
like a long endless net I must pull
in, pull in,
to find at the end
that I have caught the dawn once more,
caught it like a huge red fish
that slips from my fingers always
into the sky
illuminating my day with the closeness of its escape.

But it is mid-
night now,
and I sit on the edge of my bed
waking to the sea through my window.
Its movements sparkle like the tongue
of the stars above
and I listen to its message,
the same words that I have heard
again and again,
knowing and not knowing.
And I wonder if they say my pots
are full or they are empty
or that some have been cut loose
by the gale.
But it does not matter.
The sea will give me something. My wife
breathes deep behind me
thick in the covers like the coffee
I will drink
to widen my eyes to the darkness of the bay

to think what I must think
as I place the oars in the dory
and cast off into the language of the waves.
But yet, beneath me the beds must lie
dark,
the creatures there
still and even against the currents,
and I wonder if I ride upon their sleep
as a dream,
or if they sleep?

II

Beneath the sun that spins
the seagulls in the sky
 above the fish market
the hard, red, ragged edges
gape like thousands of angry, blood-covered
mouths.
Then, it is always the two fat claws
that seem to give them
such a tone of voice.
But here, in the wet nudging
darkness
with the plankton sparkling through the water
like endless bits of weightless silver,
 I look into their eyes.
To think
that they have crawled to me.

Pulling them up from depths
of shelter beneath
I pour their huge reservoir of black conversation
into my boat
And I alone, in the rocking silence
engulfed,
am drawn by its beckoning
while straining against its immensity.
In vending hours, the option is routine;
to drive the wooden peg
into their great fists
and clip the imposition.
But what of the night
and the lidless senses
reaching?
It is not enough to take them out of the water,
to cut them off from the invisible pressures.
Like kidnapped magnets,
they quiver towards another pole.
On the bottom,
their weight spread in the stern of the dory
I feel them, all together,
watching
as I move slowly forward along my course,
looking through me, up
into the dark eternity
of stars.

III

The weight of my own
muscles is lulled by the yearning of the waves,
like a woman who wants,
then does not want.
And I am the man who must make
the choice.

The pots lie empty again
as I lie empty of the day.
The sound of my children's voices
in the rooms below drift to my ears
as the sea. My wife
lingers in the hallway
and the house settles around me
like a soft face.
The sea has given me something.
And I? What have I given myself?
easily, I feel the threads of the night
pull over me.

Steven Winn

A HEART AND WHAT IT HUNGERS FOR

April 18

Mrs. Emmett Dewey
General Delivery
Tullisville, Id.

Dear Mrs. Dewey,

Grateful greetings from the Tidewater Basin!

I write you on the wave of success, the crest of perfection. Not so yesterday aft., before I'd heard of you and your Pineapple Pin-Wheels. It was after four, an important friend (acquaintance until last night) due for dinner and there I sat thumbing through *Spoon Talk Annual*. Steak Diane, julienne potatoes, tossed greens on tap — but it didn't dazzle.

Then page 88 and your creation.

½ c. walnuts, the honey, the cinnamon, that shameless glaze! "Appeal to the eye," you advise, and it was a sight: those golden stars with their bing cherry hearts. Fireworks indeed, if you catch my drift.

For your part an extra helping of thanks. And a favor as well. I've scoured the *Annual* (this year's and last), and the Pin-Wheels are it. Could you live on them, I wondered. This your one sweet secret?

Please send more. I can make you an offer.

Yours and still spinning,
Mr. Hubert Leap
Box #2
Thrush Point, Md.

April 30

Dear Mrs. D.,

Thanks a mil for your file card favorites.

It's madness here as I follow your orders: baste, roll, brush, let

stand, serve. Instruments of torture, these pins, rack and pastry shears. But it's the weekend coming (delicious days), and I hope for the best.

I'm sending a soft-shell crab under separate cover. They're playful little nippers, but not to be trusted, not the way they slink off sideways when you aren't watching. Remember to eat it whole — eyeballs to those pointy little toes. And don't mind the crunch or the squish. That's half the fun.

Recipe results due in a day or so.

Fondly,
H. Leap

May Day

Mrs. D —

Just have a sec in the b-room (that explains the t.p.). Soufflé went up like a rainbow. My guest enraptured. Pot of gold a sure thing. Will fill in.

H.L.

May Day (again)

To the Hon. Mrs. E. Dewey:

Twenty-one guns, if I had them.

These spoils are yours, my distant general, the bowls spooned clean, the Cabernet drained, all this scattered silver. There's a hush across the table now that the principals have parted, and one last flame on its wick. Yes, it seems to say, that was a battle won.

But there's still the war.

A day of rest now (brunch tomorrow at a restaurant — neutral turf). But she's due again Thursday, and how the stomach does forget! To arms again, your strategy and I. Something with substance this time — the Coconut Log.

Officially yours,
Pvt. Leap

May 9

Dear Felicity (I'll take the liberty),

So glad the soft-shell arrived. They're a banner item here, our Idaho spud on legs. I'd have sent a few more, but they have a way of getting on each other's nerves in a small space.

Sorry I didn't write after the Coconut Log. It was a smash all right, a regular battering ram. But to no avail. We parted peacefully, and it's crackers for me again, and no cheese.

I want you to know straight off that I'm not blaming you. Anything but. The fact is I ought to thank you, now that I've had a few days to think it over. They made her from a different mold, and it was your dessert stretched out on its side between us that finally made me see that.

I wasn't expecting it, after a pretty fair Chicken Marengo and some warm conversation about how I managed all this. But when I got the table cleared, the coffee on and the Log laid out on display, she all of a sudden let her end of things drop. I was about to ask what the matter was, and then without a bit of warning she jumped up, grabbed onto my wrist and yelled Stop in the tone of voice you don't argue with.

I'll spare you the details (there was a saucer smashed and somehow the sugar bowl took a pretty deep dent), but the point of it was that Log of yours and of all things whether to cut it or not. You might have thought she was joking, the way all guests do, but not if you'd seen her jaw square up and felt her fingers in your arm. She wouldn't see it, she said, not to something that natural and tender and right-out-of-life. I'll admit the chocolate shavings took on a powerful resemblance to bark and the exposed ends seemed new wood right down to the grain of the coconut, but it was dessert, after all, with a stick of butter and some other ingredients that don't come cheap.

By the time she got her coat on we'd each had a few ugly things to say and showed our truer selves in the process. Let it be beautiful, I called down the steps, referring to life, but it has to be lived! And that was the last of it.

The Log, of course, had accomplished all this without much notice, so I did it the honor and hacked off an end piece. A blushing tomato, a darting duck, asparagus from the field — and now this sturdy Log. Nature won't neglect us. Had the rest for breakfast.

My best to Emmett (and the kids?). Some specimens they must be!

Call me Hubert

May 15

Dear Felicity,

Don't know what got into me last week to make me go on like I did. That's all wiped clean now, and I'm a new man.

It struck me today that you couldn't have a very clear idea of me. I thought I'd take a line or two and let you know just who it is here so keen on your cooking.

To start, I'm not as young as I seem (that's not my idea, and I'm accustomed to people not believing me when I state my age). For that reason I won't bother you with a number, and let's just say I have a ways to go. I'm a single man (always was), but I've got good posture and everything else in the right place and I've never been without friends. My work is complicated and dull, so I live near the water for something simple and profound to pay attention to. You can't help learning as you go, and I can name a bird for you just as easily as I caught that soft-shell.

I hope that doesn't sound like boasting (the fact is I lean towards that), and I want this to be a clean platter all the way. While I'm at it, things weren't quite the way I hinted the night I tried the Pin-Wheels. We both enjoyed them, all right, but it was only dinner and she was home by nine. Same with the souffle.

Strange to say, but I'm glad for it now, and you know, Felicity, it's more than recipes I have to thank you for.

I won't keep you a minute more. No doubt there's something to be sifted, something else to stir. I think of you and the great wide hunger of the West.

All yours,
Hubert

May 23

My dear Felicity,

Rain for five days here, and my only comfort a pot of your Hearty Chicken Stew on the back burner.

Such patience you demand — four hours on simmer! A virtue no doubt, and all new to me. Virtue rewarded, it goes as you predict: meat sliding from the bones, fat rising, barley fluffing.

I've noticed your recipes all serve six. A coincidence, or a special six of you, Mr. D. and four smaller faces? Planning for some extra cousins, two couples from the next town? Or is it five weary women — sisters, perhaps, who lost their husbands in a mine shaft — are they the ones trooping to your table each evening?

Forgive me, Felicity, for all my appetite. But believe me: you are serving seven now.

Always,
Hubert

June 1

Dear distant Felicity,

Haven't heard from you these past weeks. Hope you're enjoying the Mixmaster.

We've had more and more rain here, and flooding's kept me home three days running. But don't you fret: there's a crowded pantry, all the right tools, and a kerosene lamp for emergencies.

You've been my comfort, Felicity, both to stomach and soul, and it's your words alone that nourish me. Beef Chuck-Chuck, Crescent Layer Herb Bread, the surprising Longboy Loaf, Salmonwiches (for lunch and leftover breakfast), Egg-Me-On's, the Coconut Log again and those light-hearted Cinnamon Puffs. I've had nothing else.

But it's not all on the plate, not if you're cut the way I am. Last night I read through your recipes, and they might have been poems the way they pleased me. It's no guess you've lived a while and done it honestly. So pointed and earnest (preset the oven, beat 100 strokes, use a square pan), but always that lilt and lift. Allow me to quote:

Sprinkle with butter bits,
Swirl in the cinnamon;
Bake for an hour,
Pull apart buns.

That's no scant woman, Felicity, not like that joker I wasted your Pin-Wheels on.

Floodbound, I remain . . .

Your humbled Hubert . . .

June 6

Dearest Fel,

Out in the rowboat to scare up supplies. Quite a feeling to paddle to the market and dock at the door. Gov. calls it a national disaster; I call it fun.

Came home and tried your Mexican Tarts. Zing! You a hot-headed devil? No end to your surprises?

Hubert

June 10

My most missed Mrs. D.,

At breakfast today (Egg-Me-On's and tea) the water reached the top of the basement steps and started across the kitchen floor. It's ten now and I've dammed up the doors, but the chair legs are two inches under and disappearing fast. I'll mail this (thank God for the postman and his outboard) and fashion my retreat.

There's a hot plate upstairs and a make-shift refrigerator. I'll have a few days to carry what I need, but no time to waste — another storm is due.

As you can imagine, there's some turmoil here and a lot of unpleasantness. They say there's looting in Baltimore and a murder last night in Havre de Grace. Your Hubert takes it all as it comes. I've lived alone and know my nature; a little water's not about to unseat me.

The more I think of it, in fact, the more I like the idea. There I'll be, Felicity, in my elaborate tree-house, my well-appointed raft. That's where I'll be if you need me, turning this one small wonder over in my mind: you, dry and distant, just you.

Hube

P.S. Hope you like the dishwasher and microwave oven I'm having sent from Philadelphia. I thought they'd save some time for your own inventions.

June 21

My faithful Felicity,

Sorry I haven't written. I've been up here more than a week but it takes some getting used to.

Last night the television pulled loose from the wall, and I think it floated for an hour before I heard it crash in the kitchen. As far as I can tell, the rest of the furniture is gone. I only hope the walls hold.

I miss hearing from you, but Rex says there's no mail coming in at all. As it is he only comes by every third day or so to pick up my letters.

This first day of summer's a wet one. There's been no sign of the sun for a week, and with the radio out I have no idea what to expect. My food's holding up (I made a fleet of Banana Boats), and I'm working on plans to move to the roof if I have to.

I hope this letter reaches you, Felicity, and I hope it comes close to saying what I want it to. If this week has been the happiest I've known, it is only because each week, each hour since I first saw page 88 and your Pin-Wheels, is more radiant than the last.

I was dazzled, I'll admit, by such a sweet suffusion. I swelled, feeding on feeding on feeding myself. I lost sight, I faltered, I lied.

Now I would burn those first bloated notes to you — all that gouty swaggering. I would take it all back and only tell you what every cell was tasting, tell you as I am trying now. In all your offered abundance, Felicity, in it all there was beauty with form, from those first bing cherries just where they belonged — at the hearts of pineapple stars. No matter what it was, a mound of parsley, a cheese sauce folded in, each move I made was yours, sure and certain and true.

It was as simple, when I learned it, as a level teaspoon, as plain as the fruit bulging on the vine. This was love, nothing less. And I was taking vows like a saint.

Now you, like these waters rising around me, have me surrounded, nearly swimming. It's taken all this, but I can wish it now —

Take me,
Leap!

July 3

Dearest Felicity,

Emmett's letter came today, threats and all. No doubt he told you what the Weather Service in Boise said: no rain in Maryland for a month. Easy enough to stand out in Idaho and say that!

This is the last you'll hear from me, now that Thrush Point and all my belongings are under. Some say I'm a ruined man, and so it seems.

But tomorrow's the Fourth, and I'm planning to celebrate. Give me a bowl and a place to stand and they'll glitter again, those Pin-Wheels of yours, and light this gloomy sky.

H.

THE SISTERS

She brings you in for tea,
though she hardly knows you,
offers thin cucumber sandwiches
with no crusts, cut in quarters,

and sitting by her electric fire
introduces you, finally,
to her loony older sister.
The room smells of lavender

with a trace of face-powder.
There's a gormless budgie.
The sister says nothing, but works
her fingers incessantly, smiling

and nodding. She talks about
the weather, the neighbours, prices.
You answer a little loudly
and very clearly, but mainly you listen

as she tells of the days between
the wars when she was a singer.
Incredibly she breaks into cracked song —
something from an operetta.

The half-wit cackles. The clock ticks.
Damn them, these old women.
After being with them
your own house mocks you,

empty of voices, empty of music.

THE MAN IN OAK BAY

He was in corvettes during the war
in the North Atlantic, on convoy duty
from Halifax. Survived two sinkings
and days in a lifeboat. Still has
his cap and his navy duffle-coat,
though today he wears a dark blazer
and a crested tie. His accent
is vaguely British; his bearing proud.
Now that his wife is dead, his children gone,
he spends most of his time gardening,
reading, looking out to sea.

Typical, you think. A relic, out
of place in the new American Canada
with his umbrella and folded newspaper.
But watch him. Listen to him
He knows better than us what lurks
beneath our lives; still feels the plunging
miles beneath his polished shoes.
He can tell us, if we don't ignore him,
how suddenly the klaxons can scream,
how quickly in the blackness next to us
the black and dripping shapes can break the surface.

J. Michael Yates / *Four Poems*

MICKINONGER

Among these shallows, very small changes of depth
become huge changes of surface.

If my silences were sealed in bottles and set to
current from the numberless isles of exile, the minima
of death would taste of no.

Digits of ice test the texture of pectorals as combs
of wind catch the velvet of antler.

There is nothing to be alone with now.

MUSKELUNGE

This is the way the distance dropped: one falsehood
at the knees, then one more to the spine.

Here and there the circle draws into non-negotiable
snare.

Duty draws attention to a nowhere strictly mine.

How not to move moves me, my grand conductor of debris.

The nowhen at charm — one more dozing yonder of time.

MOSKALONGE

The safety sometimes in depth, the safety sometimes in speed, the speed sometimes in depth, the depth sometimes in speed, the safety in confusing these beneath a weather from which there is no shelter: the line senses the dimmest vibration from almost any distance, from all but a single direction.

MASKINUNGA

These are the born with a taste for things which no longer are.

These are the born with taste for things which won't and never were.

Between, as is not as adjectized. Of any calendar *no number remains unbrightened with blood.*

The blind bird of Yalta sags down the slopes of Baltic air toward Fialta. Describe in a term of aoristic departure.

William Young

EVOLUTION

The intimacy I'd been sharing with the girls in the booth in front of me was disturbed. They had been talking about their boyfriends for the longest time, for ages. It was not very intelligent conversation they offered, but good conversation; it took me back. Their sense of self and their lives seemed of a piece, nothing double had broken in. Life and their view of life ran parallel, were virtually the same. They were very young, barely old enough to be in the bar — Fast Ethel's in San Diego — barely old enough if that. Even disappointments were chalked up to experience. I listened to them, pretending to read my book, sipping my glass of burgundy. I listened like a voyeur. Their talk was enough to fill in the pictures. The blond coiffured one had recently given in to her boyfriend. "I had to give in sometime," she said. It was a pleasure to think about how much people fucked these days. My picture of their love-making was, perhaps sadly, a tremendous erotic experience.

Then, as I said, my picture making was disturbed. A woman (who I'd seen come in in my basketball peripheral vision) was drunkenly weaving toward me where I sat at the back of the bar. I could only see her outline because the window light shone from behind her. As she came closer her face suddenly appeared below the imitation kerosene lamp which hung a few feet in front of me. She looked like a white monkey. Initially I distrusted this image because I had been spending my afternoons at the San Diego Zoo in Balboa Park, but as she came closer it was clear, her close shaved head and her large ears and thick lips had monkey written all over them. She looked about forty years old or perhaps she was younger and well-used. She presented an incalculable contrast to the girls in front of me who were suddenly forced to resist her attempts to sit down with them. She joined me instead. Her frown broke into a big toothed grin.

"Beautiful day," she said.

"Yes," I mumbled back. It was a beautiful end of March day but I didn't know if, in her condition, she was just kidding.

"Do you mind if I sit with you?" she said.

"No, it's alright."

"Can I get you another beer?" she offered next, not noticing my still half-full glass of wine.

"No thanks," I said politely.

"It's your uptight Long Island Jewishness, isn't it?" Her tone was slightly accusatory.

"Well I'm not Jewish, although my mom's from Long Island. She was Catholic. I was raised Methodist but I drink some anyway."

"You're not Jewish, you look like a young handsome Jewish boy."

There was little I could say to this. I had never been taken for a Jew. "Are you Jewish?" I asked but she immediately started to laugh.

"No, not me, I only wish I was."

Again I didn't know quite what to say. The blond in the next booth gave me a consolatory look. There was, I assumed from her look, nothing more dreadful than having to deal with a drunken older woman.

"At times I've wanted to be Catholic," I said at last, acknowledging the desire to be what we're not. "Especially now around Easter time. I'd like to feel the full force of the ritual."

"You can have my membership in the Universal Church," she said and broke into her big toothed smile, her ears twisting up along with her mouth.

"Well no, there's too much to believe in." She nodded in agreement. "Are you from Long Island then?" she asked.

"No. Indiana and Arizona."

"Indiana? Where?"

"West Lafayette."

"Do you know the Fitzgerald Construction Company?"

"Sure, Mike McNeill was a good friend of mine. His mom owned the business."

"Right. Old J. J. McNeill never owned it. I was the bohemian who married Richard Fitzgerald, Mike's uncle and Shirley's brother.

"Shirley, Mike's mom."

"Yes. She was very decent to me."

"That's amazing. Small world. You're not married to him now?"

"No," she said, her eyes wet and red from drinking, "that was ten years ago. I live in San Diego with my daughter and old man. My daughter just turned twelve."

"From your first marriage?"

"Yes. That bastard."

"My daughter is four," I said and waited for the usual reaction.

She didn't believe it. "A high school marriage," I said succinctly. Her look changed to sympathy.

"My daughter is a beautiful child," she said, "but stubborn. She's crazy about boys but she won't give an inch, no compromises. None. It's not easy."

I assumed the last remark referred to the job of raising her daughter. I could picture her daughter. I pictured her blond and pretty unlike the monkey woman. I guess the blond girl in the next booth was affecting my imagination.

"Where is your daughter?" she asked.

"With her mother in Phoenix. I hope to have her for a month this summer."

"In San Diego?"

"Well, if I'm still here. I've been here over a year. I've traveled this wonderful parallelogram from Phoenix to Tucson to L.A. to San Diego. I don't know what it means but I like the symmetry. I may go back to teaching in Tucson, to grad school. I'm just crazy for knowledge."

"If you have her for a month," she said, returning to the original subject, wanting to make a point (and I think unimpressed by my flippancy), "in a month the newness wears off."

"Yes, we all suffer, don't we," I said and laughed in hopes of heading off a long sorrowful discussion of her homelife. She was enough to handle right now. I didn't want to deal with a maudlin drunk although I was aware of certain advantages — she might be just the one to cure me of a priestly celibacy I had indulged in over the last few months. I had never been with an older woman and it might do both of us some good, I thought. At least she might be able to treat it as one good night stand, an ability probably foreign to the blond girl and her companion (who continued to chat away and order more beer). Of course I wasn't sure I wanted monkey woman, assuming she wanted me. It was not just her drunkenness, it was the deteriorated condition of her body as well. She had clearly put her body through a lot. Her saggy tits rested on her big belly, as if too many people had thrown peanuts into her cage.

"I need another beer," she said. "Don't leave," she pleaded.

"I won't, but maybe you don't need another one."

"Now you're just being silly," she said and wandered over to the bar. She took a stool to wait for her beer. Meanwhile the blond girl's friend suddenly got up and left "to go to class." I expected the blond to follow because I couldn't imagine her sitting alone in a bar. But

she stayed to finish her beer and read a magazine. Then monkey woman returned, barely returned before collapsing.

"Well . . ." she began, but paused.

"Jack," I said, "and yours?"

"Peggy. So Jack, what are you doing in San Diego?"

"I work in the mornings. I'm a gardener at a restaurant. I write in the afternoon or go to the zoo. At night I dream about weeds."

"You're a writer," Peggy said emphatically. "Isn't that something. I'm a reader, a reading junkie." Then, however, there was a pause. I'm also a gardener and a zoo-goer, I almost said. "Read any good books lately?" she said, joking.

"No, not lately."

"Do you read *Commentary*? You should," she went on not waiting for my answer (which would have been negative). "They are the best. You're young and you should be educated. I've had this fantasy about the editorial departments of big magazines, *New York Review of Books* and *The New Republic* and *Commentary*. At the *New York Review* they cut each other up. One week it's one group of editors, then another. At *New Republic* they all sit down together, all very pleasant. At *Commentary* they do both, you get all." Peggy pulled a nose-dropper from her purse and shot it up her nose. I didn't know if it was decongestant or not. She continued. "I mean there seem to be certain issues. Should we run in and take the oil — that's one. Myself, I want to go to Israel. It's so clear-cut there. So clear-cut."

"What do you mean?" I said, at the same time somewhat acknowledging a smile from the blond girl, a smile of "yes, we've all been trapped, what can you do?" She glanced back down at her magazine.

"I mean this," Peggy said. "I mean I try to be an American but it's so hard. Why do we keep putting ourselves down?" she said and looked at me with her wet eyes as if I might know the answer. "Why do we keep saying the country is going fascist? If we keep saying it, it will be."

"Who's saying it?" I asked.

"It seems the best and brightest are."

"They're not always the wisest," I said, but felt uncomfortable with the know-it-all sound of that statement so I added a half-hearted, "Oh, I don't know." I felt better. My relief, however, was short-lived, Peggy grew maudlin, she gave me a warm monkey smile.

"You are a nice boy and I'm just a sentimental old woman. Why are you sitting here letting me bring you down like this?"

"I don't know," I said again, but then added, politely, "I like talking with you." I did like to talk and I did feel for her. In a perverse way I found her interesting. More than that, I hadn't slept with a woman for quite a while, no matter what shape. Increasingly I had come to consider a trip to Tijuana. But, for one thing, the threat of venereal disease kept me from going. One night I had gone down but wound up spending my money on a losing jai-lai player rather than a whore, some scalper's "sister." Peggy, perhaps sensing my thoughts, suddenly began to rub my hand. The blond girl looked on, confused — did I actually want this woman sitting with me?

"Rubbing is a positive good," Peggy said, massaging my right hand with great felicity. "I was in Berkeley during the 60's, you know. I met Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. And I had some numbers going besides my old man. Yes, 1, 2, 3, some numbers. But those days are gone," she said, very sad-faced. "I've made mistakes. I mean we are just another species. You know something about evolution, right?"

"Right," I said, nearly choking on my wine — God, Peggy the monkey woman has started to talk about evolution. She went on ahead.

"There are no guidebooks handed out. I mean there are some but only by the work of a prodigious mind, like Darwin's. But homoerectus, right? They could blow it all away and I don't care. I'm still proud for being a human being. Why must we always blame ourselves? But then you're so innocent and so young."

"I'm young but not so innocent," I said directly. Drunkenness, I thought, was not a licence for saying or doing anything. My answer had produced a prayerlike silence. Peggy finished up her beer, she lit up a cigarette and hung it over the edge of the table. She wanted another beer and I got up to get it for her. As I walked by the girl in the next booth, the blond, gave me a soft almost furry smile. Perhaps giving in to her boyfriend had not proved that wonderful. But when I returned with Peggy's beer and more wine for myself, the blond had left. Like most times I had moved too slowly. I felt the old pain but also felt relieved. Peggy, in a way, had kept me from this young girl. As for Peggy, she had laid her head down upon the table. She was too drunk to take home, I told myself.

"Here's your beer," I said and sat down. Peggy raised her head.

"I could make you feel good," she said.

"I need to go home." I grabbed my jacket. "I'd offer for you to

come with me but you're too drunk and I'm too sober and it's too far up the hill. I'd better go alone."

"You twit," she said, "it could have been possible to go home with you and you let me get this drunk."

"I'm sorry. I better go." But as I started to get up she held my hand and massaged it.

"I have an equalizer you know," she said. "I have a lid."

I stood up and stood next to her, considering. I tried to draw a picture of us in bed together. I pictured her fleshy shapelessness, her close shaven monkey head. I wasn't disgusted but it wasn't appealing. Still, as she rubbed my hand, I considered. I even considered her.

"Oh fuck it," she said. "I'm not going to talk you into anything." She took her hand away. "I don't want favors."

I didn't blame her for thinking that way — homoerectus, right — but mainly I was thinking about myself. I wished she was sober. Then I was glad she wasn't, I had an excuse. Still I could see she needed it. But did she need this? This guttural urge. Human contact, yes, but wouldn't it be worse as soon as it was over. She massaged my leg. I felt my cock stiffen. She gave me another warm, sad monkey smile. It was too much. Too close to a real monkey and at the same time too human, as a monkey is too human.

"I've got to go home. I'll see you," I said.

"I doubt it," she said. "I doubt you see."

"I see you're a sentimental, horny old woman."

"You damn Catholics," she said, angrily, "damn Catholics," she repeated, but that time only with a drunken mutter.

I had not been raised Catholic so there was little to say, although, in a way, I knew what she meant.

"Sorry," I said, "I've got to go."

I left her sitting there in Fast Ethel's hunched over her beer. I never saw her there again.

As I climbed up the hill, struggling, I realized I had drunk more than I thought. I walked up the hill to my apartment, thinking about what it would have been like, picturing us naked in bed, and feeling bad about the whole afternoon. Later, desiring no trace of reality, I jacked-off to the Bunny Foldout in the Easter Issue of *Playboy*.

HUNGER

Something in you
feeds me
like the rose does the grub
— too Blakean
 a metaphor —
Something in you feeds me
like bread
cast on waters

How to outlive
the ancients?
How to sing new language?

Something in you feeds
me like the breast a child
milks me dry
& leaves
an insatiable hunger

Something in you feeds me
so that only body
pressed to body
I feel full

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Willis Barnstone was born in Lewiston, Maine, studied at the Universidad Nacional de Mexico, Bowdoin College, the Université de Paris, the School of Oriental and African Studies, (University of London), Columbia University and Yale and now teaches at Indiana. He is currently editing an anthology of poetry for Schocken Books.

Roo Borson has just completed her MFA in Creative Writing at UBC. She received the MacMillan Prize for Poetry in 1976. Now she is living and writing in Toronto.

Louis Milton Bourne was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1942. He has lived in Madrid for more than seven years, teaching English and translating recent Spanish poetry. His original poems in Spanish, as well as his many translations, have appeared in various literary journals.

Francisco Brines: His first book, *Las Brasas* (The Embers, 1960) won the Premio Adonais. Like his friend, Claudio Rodriguez, Brines taught in England, at Oxford.

Akiko Busch lives and writes poetry in San Francisco.

Sharon Chiaferi lives in Thunder Bay.

Jane Creighton is a former UBC Creative Writing Student who lives in Toronto.

Barbara Curry is a BFA student in Creative Writing at UBC.

Charles Deemer has appeared twice before in *Prism*. He has published fiction in various reviews and has had several plays and an educational TV series produced. He is currently working on a novel.

Leigh Faulkner teaches senior high English at Pugwash District High School. Her poems have appeared in *Repository*, *Origins*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Allisonian*, *First Encounter*, *Descant*, and *The Antigoneish Review*. Further poems are to be published in *The Antigoneish Review* and *Fiddlehead*, and an anthology is being prepared by Barry Dempster, a Toronto poet.

David J. Freedman has read at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the David Mirvish Gallery and many coffeehouses in Toronto. He has twice read at the SAW Gallery in Ottawa and also read on CJRT-FM (Radio Ryerson, Toronto) and CKCU-FM (Radio, Carleton, Ottawa). Over the same year and a half period he has produced four programs of poetry and poetry and music in various art gallery and coffeehouse formats in Toronto.

Glen Huser lives in Edmonton, Alberta.

Rich Haswell, currently Associate Professor of English and Director of the Composition Program at Washington State University, has spent two years living in Mexico and in the highland countries of South America. Recently published (or soon to be) are his translations of poems by Carlos Isla, Javier Heraud, and Francisco Hernández in *Mundus Artium*, *The Malahat Review*, and *Reportaje de la pirámide*; a travel essay in *Pembroke Magazine*; woodcuts in *Kamadhenu*.

Alexander Hutchison travels as a teacher on Vancouver Island. Recently he collaborated with Will Carter of Rampant Lions Press on a series of four poems in broadside. He has a book, *Deep-tap Tree*, ready for publication.

Laurence Hutchman is living and writing in Montreal.

Carlos Isla is a young Mexican poet now living in Mexico City. His books are *Gramática del fuego* (1972), *Maquinaciones* (1975), *Salto mortal* (a novel, 1976), and *Domingo* (1974), two experimental, double-language poems written in collaboration with Robert Bonazzi and C. W. Truesdale and published by Latitudes Press.

James Kirkup's musical, a Noh play for children, *The Magic Drum*, recently had a successful season on tour and at the National Theatre, London. His latest works are *The Body Servant*, *A Bewick Bestiary*, *Zen Gardens*, *Scenes from Sesshu* (with photo-etchings by Birgit Skiöld) and an anthology, *Modern Japanese Poetry*.

Patrick Lane lives in Halfmoon Bay on Vancouver Island.

Paul Ching Lee was born in China in 1949, and now lives in Vancouver, which he considers home. This is his first poetry in a Canadian magazine.

Linda Lerner lives in Brooklyn. Her work has recently appeared in *Centennial Review*, *California Quarterly*, and *Invisible City*.

Wendy Powell Lewis studied poetry at UBC with Robert Bringhurst.

Tim Lilburn lives in Regina. From 1974-76, he worked as a teacher in northern Nigeria in a town a few hundred miles south of the beginning of the Sahara desert. He went to West Africa as a CUSO volunteer and is now working for the Catholic church, writing articles on international development and our opposition to uranium mining in Saskatchewan. His previous publications are an article in the *Sphinx* on Nigerian lit. and poetry in *Okike*.

Ewa Lipska was born in Kraków, Poland, in 1945. After graduating from high school, she entered art school, but she soon found that her real calling was poetry. Her first book *Poems* (1967) was followed by *A Second Collection of Poetry* (1970), *A Third Collection of Poetry* (1972), and *A Fourth Collection of Poetry* (1974). She spent a year in the U.S. in 1975 where she attended an international writers' seminar in the Mid-West. Ewa works as a literary editor in a Kraków publishing house. In the last years she has been suffering from the effects of a serious illness.

Bruce McAllister is Associate Editor of *West Coast Poetry Review* and WCPR books, and directs the creative writing program at the University of Redlands in California.

Earl McKenzie: born in Jamaica. Received a BA (English and Art History) and an MFA (Creative Writing) from Columbia University. Currently in a doctoral program in Philosophy at the University of British Columbia. Published in *Bim*, *Savacou*, *Caribbean Quarterly* and *The Gleaner*.

Jill Mandrake has previously appeared in *Prism* 14:3 and *The Canadian Short Fiction Anthology*. "Maybe Tomorrow I'll See It All From Heaven" (written in 1976 in British Columbia) is part of a recently completed collection of short stories.

Ron Miles is now on staff at Cariboo College in Kamloops. His work has appeared recently in *Event*, *Quarry*, *Canadian Literature* and *Educational Change*.

A. F. Moritz, a Toronto writer, has had work recently in *Tamarack Review*, *Malahat Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Chelsea*, *Shenandoah*, etc. He is the author of a book of poems, *Here*, and translator of *Children of the Quadrilateral: Selected Poems of Benjamin Peret*.

Daniel Moses received his MFA from UBC's Creative Writing Department in 1977. His residence is now in Ohsweken, Ont.

Jane Munro is finishing up her MFA in Creative Writing at UBC.

Michael Patrick O'Connor is living and writing in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Octavio Paz, possibly the most influential Latin-American poet now living, was born in 1914. Prolific essayist as well as poet, Paz's latest works are *Vuelta* (1976), a collection of poems; *Renga* (1971), a poetic collaboration in four languages with Edoardo Sanguineti, Jacques Roubaud, and Charles Tomlinson; and *Los signos en rotación* (1971), a collection of essays. In 1969 Seis Barral (Barcelona) published his collected poems: *La centena: poemas 1935-1968*.

Yoshiyuki Rie: Born Tokyo 1939, a sister of the writer Yoshiyuki Junnosuke, and graduated from Waseda University, where she studied Japanese Literature. She published her first book of poems *The Blue Room* in 1963, followed by two more books of poetry, two books of short stories and fairytales. She is interested in Tachihara Michizo, an architect-poet who died in 1939.

Claudio Ridriguez is a young Spanish poet who taught for some time at Cambridge in England.

Kora Rumiko was born in Tokyo in 1932. She evacuated to Tochigi Prefecture in 1944 to escape U.S. bombings. A member of the literary group *L'Espoir* since 1952. Publications: *Pupils and Birds*, 1958. Her *Places*, was awarded the prestigious "Mr. H. Prize" in 1962. In 1970 she published *Above the Invisible Surface of Earth* and attended the 4th Afro-Asian Writers' Conference.

Jeff Schaire, a New Yorker by birth, recently received his MFA in Creative Writing from UBC. He is currently at loose ends.

Libby Scheier's poetry has been published in *Waves*, *Poetry Toronto*, *Soundings* and *Om* (the latter two are New York publications). In Toronto she has given readings at the Parliament Street Library House, Axle-Tree Coffeehouse, Church Street Community Centre and Cafe Montmartre, and in New York at St. Adrians (series organized by Dianne Wakoski and Robert Vas Dias), State University of New York at Stony Brook and Sarah Lawrence College. Her reviews have been published in *Poetry Toronto*. In the past she has been a participant in the Phoenix Workshop (Toronto), the 92nd Street Y Craft of Poetry Workshop (New York) and Westbeth Poets' Workshop (New York).

Emily Sion spent her childhood in Cuba with schooling in New England. 1975 and 1976 were spent in Strasbourg. She now lives in Vancouver and summers at Francois Lake, B.C.

Florjan Smieja teaches at the University of Western Ontario.

Richard Stevenson has just completed his professional year in Education at the University of Victoria and holds a BA in English from same. His poems have appeared in a number of journals and small magazines, including: *CV II*, *Northern Light*, *Nebula*, *Grain*, and *Repository*.

John Stupp holds degrees from Notre Dame University, the University of British Columbia, and Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Poetry of his has appeared in *Patchworks*, *The West Coast Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Quarry*, *Prism*, *Chelsea*, *Bits*, *the Slackwater Review*, and *The Cleveland Anthology*.

Karl Sturmanis lives and works in Vancouver.

Nancy Toth is now living in Edmonton, working as an information counsellor for the provincial government and reviewing poetry for the *Edmonton Journal*. Her poetry has appeared in *Quarry*, *First Encounter*, and *CVII*.

Michael Tregebov comes from Winnipeg. He is a great fan of Pasolini and allegedly makes terrific cheese blintzes. His book of poetry, *Change House*, appeared in January 1976.

Lorraine Vernon is a Vancouver poet and journalist whose first collection of poetry *No. 3, Frank Street* was published by Fiddlehead this spring.

Robert Ward teaches Creative Writing at the University of Oregon under a Graduate Teaching Fellowship.

Reuel Wilson teaches at the University of Western Ontario.

Steven Winn was born and raised in Philadelphia and has been living in Seattle, where he is a staff writer for *the Weekly*, since 1973. His first fiction was in the *Carolina Quarterly*, and another piece is due in the *Texas Quarterly*.

Christopher Wiseman has published two collections of poetry — *Waiting For The Barbarians* (Fiddlehead) and *The Barbarian File* (Sesame Press) — and his work has appeared in many literary journals. He teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Calgary.

J. Michael Yates lives in Vancouver and works at UBC Press.

William Young is a graduate student in Creative Writing at UBC. He lives in Bellingham, Wa, and reads at the Alaska Tavern there.

Carolyn Zonailo was born and lives in Vancouver. She has one chapbook in print, *Inside Passage*, and a book forthcoming from blewointment press, *Auto-da-Fe*. Currently finishing her Master's in Canadian literature at Simon Fraser University.

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of these days is a
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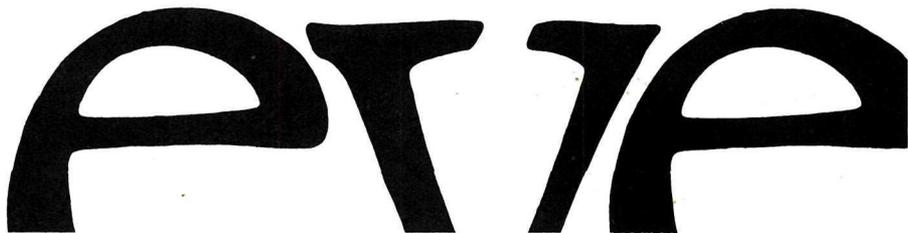
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