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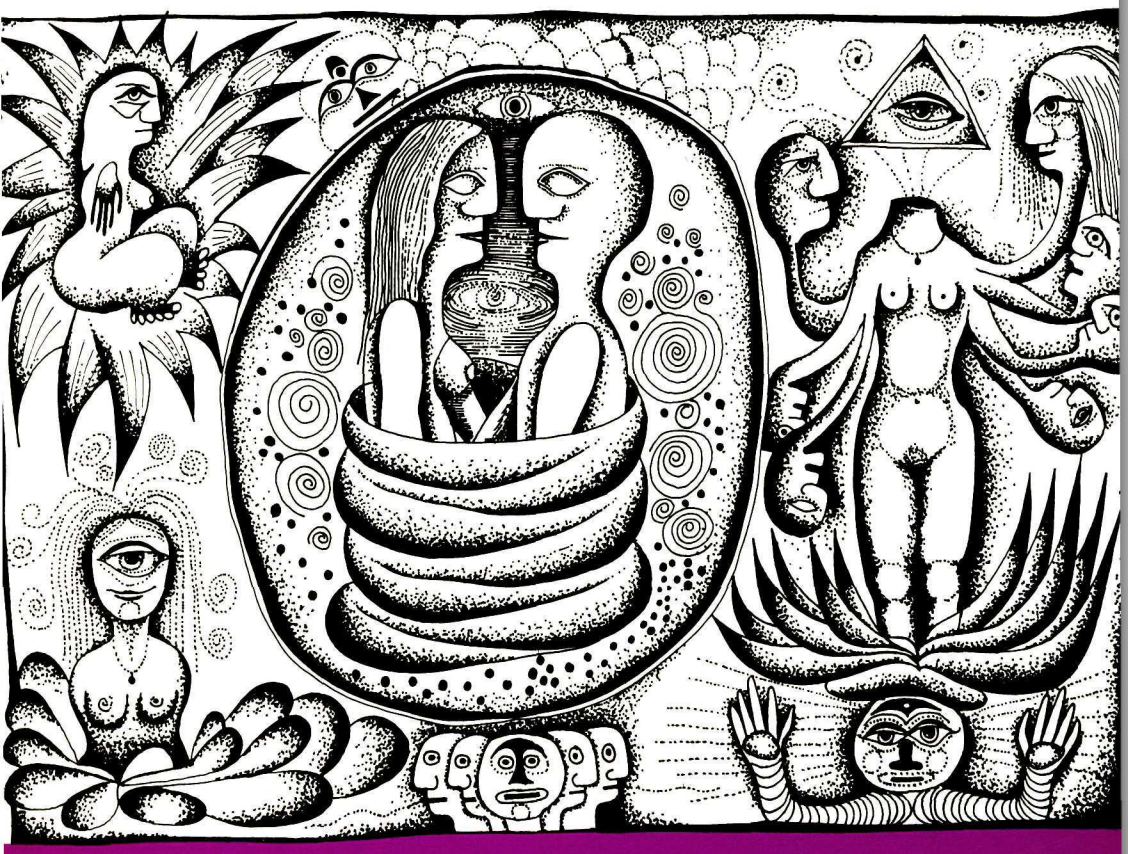

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BENNO KAISER, whose drawing is on the cover and eight of whose oil paintings are reproduced within, was born in Switzerland in 1941. He is largely self-taught. His work has been exhibited in France and Switzerland and, most recently, at the Woodstock Gallery, London, England.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS APPEAR BESIDE THEIR WORK

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IRENE FRIEDMAN was born in the Russian Urals in 1944 and lived in several countries before coming to Canada at 15. She has lived in Montreal until recently and is presently in Vancouver, working on a novel. Her work (fiction, poetry, and criticism) has appeared in various literary publications and over the C.B.C.

YELLOW CURTAINS

IRENE FRIEDMAN

THERE IS NOTHING UNUSUAL about the small, rectangular window overlooking the street. Indeed, there are three identical windows on the ground floor of the brownstone building. Yet it is at this particular window, with its yellow fiberglass curtains, that the girl lingers. She is probably nineteen. Her eyes seem a shade too green somehow, like those of a cat perhaps, or the waters in parts of British Columbia. She is wearing a dark navy blue cap and carries an old unbrella. It has stopped raining and the girl leans against a tree and fixes her eyes on the window.

Almost immediately, a light comes on. Through the window a man is seen moving about in the kitchenette, preparing dinner. When he has finished, he leaves the counter and sits eating in front of the television. The girl watches, leaning against the tree. Now and then, she detaches herself from the tree as if to go, but almost at once returns to her former position.

An hour goes by. The man is still watching television. He leaves it only for a moment to take his plate into the kitchen and draw the curtains. The girls stares. It begins to rain again. All at once, she leaves the tree and walks around the corner, stopping in front of the entrance. She stands for a moment with her finger poised in front of the bell, then rings.

The man is still at the television when the bell sounds in his apartment. He answers the buzzer, opens the door. He finds the girl standing there with her dripping umbrella, eyeing him. He is in his late twenties, with heavy shoulders and a neat black mustache. He wears a short-sleeve shirt and cotton-knit pants with mauve print.

Yes? he says.

The girl takes a deep breath. Can I see your apartment?

In the back of the room, loud shots are emitted by the television. A woman shrieks. The man throws a quick look over his shoulder at the blue screen. Beg your pardon?

Can I see your apartment? the girl repeats.

Oh, he says then, all but ready to close the door, my lease doesn't expire for another year.

The girl drops her umbrella, takes a step forward. It doesn't matter, she says. Can I see it anyway?

The man's hand is still on the doorknob. He stares at the girl, his brow creased. Why would you want to see my apartment?

The girl swallows. I just passed the street one day and saw the light in your window. Please can I see it?

The man raises his hands in a gesture of helplessness but stands back to let her pass. He mutters to himself confusedly as she walks by.

The girl enters without a word and looks around her, not unlike a potential tenant. She moves slowly, careful not to brush against anything. After a long moment of observation, she walks over to the window.

The man closes the door and turns the television off with a sigh. Did you ever live here? he asks.

The girl's head is hidden behind the curtains. For a long moment she doesn't answer, then says, somewhat vaguely: No.

Neither of them speaks then. The girl's head remains hidden. All at once, she says: You know, I saw your yellow curtains one day. It was funny to see yellow curtains.

The man scratches his head. Why, he asks, what's so funny about yellow curtains?

Nothing really, the girl says, it's just that they're yellow. It was funny to see *yellow* curtains.

She moves closer to the window and suddenly all of her is hidden. Look! she exclaims.

The man rushes to the window. He too disappears behind the curtains and finds her pointing to the tree she had been leaning against. The tree stands beside a street lamp and the light falls brightly upon its diffuse branches. They are delicate and bare but covered with countless crystal-like beads glittering in the light.

The man brings his face closer to the window. Look at what? he asks.

The tree, don't you see?

The man's voice rises. See what, for chrissake, the frozen rain?

The girl shrugs. Is that all you see? she asks, turning to look at him.

The man places his hands in his pockets. He does not answer. The girl begins to turn away from the window. In a barely audible voice she says: Well, *he* always saw the beauty in things.

The man shifts his weight from foot to foot. He, who? he asks.

But the girl has just noticed a small Degas print over in the corner and stands staring at the ballerina for a long moment. Her eyes are incredulous. Her finger points to the print. That! she exclaims. Where did you get that?

The man raises his arms in the familiar gesture of helplessness. It was here when I came, he answers.

The girl rushes to the wall and removes the print. She turns it in her hands carefully and inspects the frame. That's the one, she says with a kind of finality, that's the one. She holds it close to her for a while, with a distant look in her eyes. The man stands a few feet away, leaning against the wall. She replaces the print and turns away. The man watches. She looks around her again with a searching look. The man continues to watch her. He rubs his nose thoughtfully.

The girl walks over to a bookcase beside the sofa. You know, your books would look better over in that corner, she says, pointing toward the television. And you might get some red bricks instead of these white ones . . .

The man moves toward her with a quick step. His hands are stretched out. But why should I, he demands, what's wrong with them as they are?

The girl bends down by the bookcase. Her head moves slowly from left to right, left to right, pronouncing the titles in a quick whisper. She stops and turns to look at him. You don't have Portuguese poetry, do you?

The man scratches his head. Poetry?

The girl nods. Yes, Portuguese poetry. He used to have stacks of them.

The man rolls his eyes. I don't read poetry. And certainly not . . .

His voice trails off. Will you please tell me who he is, he asks then. What's his name?

The girl's eyes linger on the Degas print. Manuel, she says.

Well, where is he now, this . . . Manu-el?

The girl does not answer. The look in her eyes grows more and

more distracted. One night when it was raining, she begins, then stops and looks at him. Do you like to listen to the rain?

The man is once again leaning against the wall, his hands in his pockets. He looks at her attentively with a tentative kind of smile. Yeah, he says, sometimes.

The girl turns away from him, looking once again at the print. It was raining and the wind wailed and he sat on the sofa right there and read to me.

Read to you?

Yes, read Portuguese poetry to me. It rained and rained and he sat all that time and translated it to me . . .

She is suddenly interrupted by the ringing telephone. It is a chime phone and for the first time a smile appears on the girl's face. The telephone rings and rings before the man decides to answer: ding DONG, ding DONG. The smile on the girl's face grows brighter. The man kneels down by the sofa while speaking at some length into the receiver. His back is to the girl and her face gradually assumes an intense expression as she stares at his black, curly head. Very slowly, she comes closer. And, as he replaces the receiver, she leaps toward him, hides her head against his neck and laughs: ding DONG, ding DONG! Her voice is that of a delighted child. Do you remember Christmas night, she goes on, pressing against him until both of them fall against the sofa. She is still laughing. Remember how it rang in the middle of the night and I thought I was dreaming about sleighrides!

The girl's excitement continues to rise. The man remains motionless. His arm is around her, but somehow it has an uncomfortable look, at though he were anxious to remove it. It turned out to be the phone — wrong number, remember? She laughs uncontrollably now. Remember how mad you were, she asks. But I thought it was so funny: ding DONG, ding DONG in the middle of the night.

For a moment the man says nothing. The surprised expression on his face gradually grows thoughtful and then, a look of sudden comprehension appears in his eyes. Yeah, I remember, he says slowly, looking intently at the girl. Come to think of it, it *was* funny.

Then both of them are silent. The man keeps glancing at the girl from the corner of his eye. It's raining again, he says. And, with new eagerness in his voice: Listen.

The two of them are seated on the floor, their backs to the sofa. The man's arm is still around the girl, her head on his shoulder, her eyes on the ballerina across. They listen for some time to the

rain beating against the window. The girl hums softly to herself. Then, with a tentative quality in his voice, the man asks: Do you remember any of the poems I read you?

The girl smiles. *José*, she says, after a moment's hesitation. I think I like *José* best.

Do you? the man says in a more confident manner. And who wrote *José*? I bet you've forgotten.

Carlos Drummond De Andrade! she answers at once.

Right! he says, and the two of them laugh. José, she recites, you knock on a door but there is no door . . . Her voice trails off and she asks: Want to light the candle?

The man reaches over and turns the lamp off, lighting the small, blue candle. The girl is lying on the carpet, her eyes closed. The rain is growing heavier.

You know, the girl says, you're a little like José. Her eyes are still closed. The man is stroking her hair. Yes, you're like him, she continues. Sometimes you don't seem to know where you're going or what you're looking for.

That's true, the man says, continuing to stroke her hair. And do you think I'll ever find it?

I don't know, she answers. I don't know what you're looking for myself.

I'm hard to get along with, he says.

The girl does not answer.

How about some Rosé? he asks then.

Rosé! the girl exclaims. You got it especially for me! She throws her arms around his neck and hugs him. The man kisses her head with great gentleness. Yes, for you, he says.

He gets up, walks over to the fridge and gets the bottle. The girl is once again leaning against the sofa with closed eyes. The man pours some of the sparkling liquid into a glass and puts it to her lips. The girl drinks, greedily. The man sits beside her, holding his own glass and watching her face with a smile.

How did you remember I liked Rosé? she asks.

I don't know. You told me one night.

Yes, I said: Wouldn't it be nice to be rich and drink it all the time?

So you did.

And you remembered. You never used to remember that sort of thing.

They sip from their glasses for a while without speaking. Then,

her glass empty, the girl says: Then you are not mad at me anymore for following you that night?

The man strokes his mustache, his forehead creased again. No, he says after a long moment, I'm not mad at you. But you must promise not to do it again, he hastens to add.

I promise, the girl says and snuggles against the man. He caresses her shoulder, tenderly. You have beautiful shoulders, he says. The girl raises her head and kisses him. Beautiful hair, beautiful eyes, beautiful lips, he says, his words like an incantation. The girl kisses him, again and again, kisses his hair, his eyelids, his lips, with great passion.

Will you stay with me then, she asks softly.

Yes, the man says, continuing to stroke her bare arm. I'll stay with you.

From the

TEXT OF OKIRA

Mnt. Hira (dates unknown)

Translated from the Japanese by Allan Safarik

A September morning, I trim my brushes and
prepare the ink. The mist since dawn is
smoke from some distant fire. In green
spring the gulls come west from the sea to
rob the song-birds of their tender young.
The crows & gulls are clear and loud above
the trees, I am glad of the mist to hide
the killing from my sad eyes. The song-birds
my friends, wake me and remind me to light
the lamp. In return I paint them and have
them near even in winter when the trees are
bare and the snow drifts half-way to the eaves.

A hunter passing my shanty beside the path
has a monkey slung from his shoulder. The
arrow trimmed with white and blue feathers
still imbeded in the soft wet body. I put
wood on the fire and listen to his singing
long after he has disappeared into the mist.
In the afternoon washing my clothes on the
smooth stones in the icy creek I stop before
the trail of fresh blood on the spent leaves.

LETTER TO A BROTHER

If water could be wrapped I would send you
some from my mountain. Fine weather to greet
the new moon. The frosty wind makes the
bridge at Red Gorge treacherous. The rocks and
white-water in this river far below are the
teeth of Dōsojin.

OKIRA was an 18th century Japanese poet as well as being a scholar of Chinese literature. There is very little known or substantiated about his life.

FOUR POEMS BY JAGNA BORAKS

LES VIERGES — BLANCHES ET NOIRES

J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage.
ARTHUR RIMBAUD

blind idols
on the vestal stage
toss snowballs at the bleached walls
and catch white butterflies
in nets of black chiffon

at night
heavy smoke
from the burning theater
of their dreams
coats empty sockets with
tears black
as mourning veils

when
the electric eye of dawn
hurls its brilliant bulb
onto the bleeding alabaster

the kind passerby will muse
about his statues' pure white eyeballs
now smouldering coals
inside their ashen hearths

coals black
as the smoke-stained windows
in the white cathedral
incensed
by the burning wings
of white butterflies

in black

GARDEN OF STEEL

grey roses
on winter beds
charcoal lips
kissing
the rusted barbed wire stems

the gardener
sharpens his tools

soon he will plant
the falling flakes of rust

his eyes, blue drills
wrapped in the last strands
of nature's hair
open an empty spring
inside the calloused soil
of human flesh

there
he will deposit the steel harvest

THE BLACK SNOWMAN

on the corner of the museum of modern life
night sculptures a man
peacocks of the streets
inhabit his eyes
the sphinx his smile

nailed to his shoulder stump
clings a wooden woman
with a mane of straw

on the corner of the museum of modern life
daybreak melts the black snowman
alone in the corner
lurks a wooden woman
with a mane of singed straw

inside the splintered hollow of her face
rages the night
ravished by the blazing fire
of the poet's muse

ATLANTIS

before the leaves unfold in our eyes
let the sea-weed bind and tow you
to my island
let the crater flow its lava tongue
into my mouth
lighting the words of your song

let the earth part
so that heaven may pass
unseen
and we shall trace the levels of time
through the veined roots of trees
in the fossil-strung deeps
where lovers once dwelt
on the isle of spring

so engendered
in the dust and the darkness of our search
wait
till the leaves unfold in our eyes
and a garden of sleep
bursts fiery green
from the smoldering pores
of this branded star

JAGNA BORAKS was born in Poland. She came to Canada as a child, after the war, took her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of British Columbia, and has now completed her Master's Thesis in Comparative Literature at the same university. She is a co-translator of a book of Polish poems by Andrzej Busza, *Astrologer in the Underground* (Ohio University Press). Her poems and translations have appeared in *Tamarack Review, Expression, Oasis, Mundus Artium, Prism international, New Orleans Review, Madrona* and the anthology *Contemporary Poetry of British Columbia* (Sono Nis Press).

TWO POEMS BY BARTOLO CATTAFI

From *IL BUIO*

Translated from the Italian by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann

RHOMBS

Like a quilt
the skin of a newly-killed tuna
looked to me sprinkled with small rhombs
so I saw how far
from what deep warp
a stubborn geometry surfaces
what a cliff unites
coverlet to tuna
the kite to the four
sides of my solitude.

FUGITIVE

Outside the house
exposed to grave danger
from the first morning on
tracked by thoughts
changing trains trams buses
spellbound you see again
the razor that shines once
many times a day
on the untouched shelf
your disturbed face in the mirror
while your hand
from one step to the other of flight
bound to your wrist
pretends to be sleeping in your pocket
spies on you and never stops
hunting you down.

RUTH FELDMAN was born in Ohio and now lives in Cambridge, Mass. Her poems and translations have appeared in many literary periodicals. Her joint translation with Brian Swann of *Selected Poetry of Andrea Zauzolte* has been accepted for publication by Princeton University Press.

BRIAN SWANN was born in England and now lives and teaches in New York City. His poems and translations have appeared in many literary periodicals. His joint translation with Ruth Feldman of *The Collected Poems of Lucio Piccolo* was published by Princeton University Press in 1972.

BARTOLO CATTAFI was born in Barcellona (province of Messina), Sicily in 1922. He lived in Milan for some years but has returned to Sicily to live in the small town of Terme Vigliatore. Two of his books have won prizes: *Le mosche del meriggio*, 1958 and *L'osso, l'anima*, 1964. These two and the more recent *L'aria secca del fuoco*, 1972 were published by *Mondadori*. *Fugitive* and *Rhombs* are from a small volume published in 1973 by Vanni Scheiwiller.

TWO POEMS BY DAVID CLOUTIER

ADVENT

Unseen
Each slate breaks
Off the roof

Unshattered we lie in the snow

Ah that a god could be
Spun in straw
A wheel sewn in flesh

This wick not consumed

Night sprinkled in blood
Each star a drop
A shine

Rising
A wing in stone

STRING OF WELLS

Hole
black door
that opens down

whose house
I can't see
your face

your night
a paw crossing
the eyes

your tongues
lapping up
my sleep

*

I dare
sunken jar
to name you

woman
root of breath
plunge

hem unravelling
at the threshold
don't leave me

tears rise
our levels
both drop

*

Virgin eyes
overgrown
I forget her

unveil
the blue thimbles
one after one

uncover
uncover
pull the lids aside

beneath each
stone
blind sky

*

Abyss to abyss
you give
yourself away

you wake
under everyone's
tongue

clouds see
themselves taste
their own flesh

each passed through
your circle
once

*

All day at the ropes
bucket
bucket

suns hauled
shaking
out of the ground

poured into
a black trough
splashed over flanks

I lower
my eyes
I drink

*

We meet
there's a table
greater than ourselves

I break my old hands
you show me
water

a center of circles
I see
another face

anchor
aglow
my deep one

DAVID CLOUTIER was born in Providence in 1951. He took two degrees from Brown University this past June. *Spirit Spirit*, a volume of Siberian, Eskimo and Northwest Coast Indian shaman songs and incantations was published by Copper Beech Press late in 1973. The *Blue Cloud Quarterly* (Marvin, South Dakota) recently published a pamphlet of other versions entitled *Northwest Coast Songs*. He is also editor and in part translator (Reverdy, Follain, Eluard selections) of *The Ear of the Bull: Nine French Poets* (Bonewhistle Press, 1974.) His own poems have appeared in a number of literary magazines.

MESFIN HABTE-MARIAM was born in Mojo, Ethiopia, in 1945. He graduated from the Haile Selassie I University in 1970 with a B.A. in Ethiopian Languages and Literature. He gained an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia in 1974 and now teaches Creative Writing at the Haile Selassie I University. He has written short stories and poems in Amharic and started writing in English for the first time while at the University of British Columbia. He is the joint author, with Christine Price, of *The Rich Man and the Singer: Folk Tales from Ethiopia.*

THE MISSING GREY

MESFIN HABTE-MARIAM

"ARE THE CATTLE HOME? — Are the cattle home?" A question asked every day. A question answered every day. I mean every evening — at dusk, sometime around six-thirty, winter and summer. Some days the answer is "Yes." Other days "No". The question does not stop even after the cattle are home. It is asked in different forms. "All of them? Are you sure? Did you count them? Really? . . ." But no questions when one of them, or more, is missing. Instead, a call — a far off loud call that goes ringing from one hill to the other. Yes, it is an echo. An echo which is endemic to the tiny village of Dekebora and its rugged, impenetrable hills. The hills have taken the echo for years but they have never answered it. They have only stolen the cows, the oxen, the sheep, the goats and hidden them in their bosoms. Silent hills! And merciless, too, for none of these animals have ever been seen again. But the echo, there it goes again. It never stops. I can hear it right now. Taye calls. He is a little older than myself and my best friend among the irenias, who herd cattle. He could be heard a long distance for his age. Asefa and Wolde, the twin brothers who were always together, call in one voice. And Alemu, who could whistle louder than any of us, accompanies them in the search. Nega, the lame one, and Megersa, the oldest and the toughest irenia — they all call. All had rifles. I had a spear, not because I was not old enough but because I could not afford one.

Of all the voices, father's is the loudest. He puts his two hands around his mouth and calls. He was used to that. He talked loud at home too. A habit, I suppose. I can see him on the hill, as tiny as the shrub, a black figure in the twilight. The first two or three calls, I can't make out. The only thing I hear is a faint sound play-

ing in the wind, sometimes rising, sometimes falling. But I can guess what it is all about. When father called like that, it meant one of us was in trouble. Either he was in danger of being challenged by a leopard or by hyenas — in which case I was supposed to call for help — or I had failed to carry out my task and some stupid cow had been grazing on someone's farm or was lost in the hills. So the call. I wave my hands, stretching them as wide as I can, as a sign that I have not heard him. He calls again. "Ne-ga-sh!" I hear him now. "Are the cattle home?" I feel he is right beside me. It seems as though he himself has travelled all that distance through the wind. And yet, I see him up there, as dark as the trees around him. I cannot get a clear vision of him, however wide I open my eyes. But I can imagine him standing, leaning against a tree, his eyes bulged and the veins in his neck protruding. His prominent adam's apple moves up and down as he opens his dry, thick lips and the air rushes out of his throat mechanically. Big call. Loud call. But it is a shock for me. Already, I have realized what has happened. I cannot hide it from him. No way. I have to say it. He has to know it, because he will anyway. "The grey cow is missing!" I reply, putting my little hands around my mouth. Imitation. But I cannot call loud like he does. So he comes himself. "When? Where? How?" — precise questions that call for precise answers. He did not have to say them and I always expected them. His eyes tell me everything. He is in a hurry. He wants to know how it all happened, right now. "Quick, quick, quick." That is the expression on his face. He does not say it though. Because I know it. Because he knows I know it. But I have no short answer. Not that I do not want to be precise, but the moment I try to, words come in chains and the story grows longer without being told. Father does not want to hear it any longer. He takes his eyes from me. Then I think I see my chance to watch his eyes but I cannot because he is gazing around him, his head roving like a movie camera. What has he seen? Has he found out where she is? I wait eagerly. But when he turns to me, I turn to the cattle and whistle to fill the gap of silence that would follow. My face turned away from him. I hear his long drawn-in breath and the sigh that follows. No time to waste — that is what it means!

We go to the next hill. The cattle are with us. You do not take them home and come back to look for the missing. It is a rule. The echo again. Father calls: "Is my grey down there?" Someone answers from another hill: "No, no, no." "Call", father says. The man turns his back towards us. Another answer from the third hill.

But we do not hear it and we do not know what the answer is until the man faces us again and bellows. Same thing — "The grey is not there." Maybe it has gone into the hills to the south. It means we have to look for it there too. This is a tougher job. Bellowing alone will not do. The forest is very dense — thick with zigba, warka and wanza. You have to go into it and look for it yourself if at all you can see anything more than ten feet away. "Maybe she is there — damn her. Come, follow me, quick, before it gets dark." I do, at the same time counting the cattle to make sure they are all there. Counting, as I usually did, one, two, three — twelve. That's right. But I feel uncomfortable, because I always counted thirteen. First fault. The beginning, but certainly not the end. The grey, the grey, bloody damned grey!

We walk quickly. Father leads, then the cattle, then me. Between us, a cloud of dust. But I did not have trouble in watching anything through dust. I was used to it, I guess. Used to all the colours it took at different times of day and especially its smell, a smell that was part of me. I always had dust particles over all my body — my threadbare cloth, the only one I had, was torn in a dozen spots however hard I tried to stitch it. Dust particles? They were my company! Especially my face, my hair, my eyelashes were full of them. I never saw myself in the mirror, except in the pond which we shared for drinking water with the other village five miles away. There were rivers but the pond was the nearest and it had the clearest water. When the wind was still, I saw my reflection in it, which I enjoyed, even though I could only see a face, a hat and the most rugged cane available. But the dust particles, I always felt them with my hands. Often, they entered my eyes until they were washed away by tears. I did not see my eyes getting red, but I felt they were.

I can see father now, even through the dust. His tall figure, his long hands moving back and forth, his long legs tearing through the bushes and his big, white hat flopping in the wind. The sky is orange red, with thin layers of cloud sprinkled over it. The sun, very red and as tiny as an apple, is about to sink behind the big, camel-shoulder-shaped mountain which is pink at the top and now and then glaring as though it were threatened by fire approaching from behind it. Things are getting dimmer and dimmer all the way to the north — to my right. Far-away objects are almost on the point of losing their shape. A pale sight accompanied by sheer silence, for now we are far from the village and the barking of dogs has died away in the distance. We move as fast as we can, father with his

long strides and I trying to keep up. His one step equalled three of mine. Long legs. Long feet. But his feet did not have the resistance of mine when it came to the battle against thorns. He was forty, I thirteen. He could not take more than three thorns; I could take God knows how many. When I had one, I sat under a tree and picked it out with the safety pin I had attached to my pants. But it happened again and again. So sometimes my feet ached with pain and I walked on my toes or on the side of my feet. On my way home in the evening, you could see me hobbling, supported by my cane which usually I carried over the back of my shoulders with both arms twisted over it. And my cattle, as though by instinct, seemed to know my suffering. They, too, walked slowly. The only time they didn't was when we were closer to home. The cows exchanged calls with the calves who were tied outside the beret. Then my sister untied them and both ran towards each other, the calves jumping up and down with their tails high up in the air and the cows striding towards them, inhaling and exhaling the air wildly. And my tired, silent eyes watched with pleasure as mother and child met. What an unforgettable sight!

Evening was the ideal time when you relaxed in the small, circular, one-room, thatched hut after the hard work which every day inevitably brought with it. First, supper from a single bowl, round a glowing fire with aching feet exposed to the heat. Mother would pour the sauce from the dish still bubbling with steam on the fire and three hands were dipped into the bowl. Often our hands touched each other and an occasional faint laughter was heard. The rats did not start squeaking. They waited until we slept. Not because they were afraid of the light — there wasn't enough light for the hut — but because they wanted us to sleep. Then they could jump on us easily! However, we often ignored them because we lived with them on the same earthen floor and they were not as obnoxious as the devilish bugs and fleas. And the baby, too, did not cry until after midnight, not even at the howling and laughing of the hyenas who passed by the hut as we ate. My ten-year-old sister would be asleep. I could hear her breathing, the quick sleeper who would wake up early before dawn to milk the cows and step over me as I slept beside her. Outside, the frogs croaked in the swamps and the crickets chirped. Around the fire, silence — occasionally broken by the munching of the tongue and the sucking of the air caused by berberie, the hot stuff. Father to my left, mother to my right, the cat over my lap and the dog sitting by the door, ready to grab

whatever we threw to him. "Nice supper! Thanks to God! Amen!" Then we chatted, smiled, laughed, joked. Then the jebena replaced the dist and we watched it boil, we watched as the steam pushed the cork up and we watched as mother put salt into it. As we drank the coffee, we talked on different subjects, usually starting from how we passed the day and ending on what was going on in the village. Church news was the most important, and with it those who disobeyed the church by working on holidays were discussed. "They have sinned. May God forgive them." The rain, the wind, the storm, the frost, the drought were all discussed. "How did they affect our lives? How will they affect us? Will God straighten up things? Certainly it is He alone who can do anything. So expect the best and be prepared for the worst." It is that simple. But you did not stop there. Human urge burned in you and inextinguishable as it is, you could not resist it. So you planned for tomorrow, you planned for the week, for the next year, for the years to come — . Ambitions, hopes, goals — all for the survival of the flesh and the soul. As for the village rumours, they were very few but our hut never missed any of them. Mother brought them from the market. Little sister picked them up from anywhere. Father and I came home from our tiny farm with as many of them as we could remember. Through all means they travelled fast and we collected them each day. Marriage scandal, tribal scandal, the latest news on sorcery . . . We talked and talked and talked. But silence would come again after the third round of coffee was over. It was time to deal with the thorns of the day — thorns that passed unnoticed, temporarily screened by the pain of hunger. Father would begin to grumble and I picked out the thorns for him. "There — that's right — pick it out — pick them all out — ." Well, I did, and with all the hurry in the world to finish picking out his and start on mine. Meanwhile, mother massaged his back as he lay on his stomach and reminisced about the good old days. "Remember dear . . ."

The southern hills. They look small from far but when you are nearer to them they get bigger. We are not going to see anything in there — it is very dense, but we have to try. Father always believed in trying anything. "Try and fail — it is better than to sit and lament," he would say. With that motto, he has tried to help most of our neighbours in their search. But his loud call has never brought a single animal to the beret. He knows that. I know it too. But whatever, we have to keep on trying — it will ease his sorrow later and it will give me more time to think of a better explanation. What a

bad day! What a cursed day! To think of parting from our dearest cow, the best among the five we have! She was so healthy and she had a reputation for giving more milk than any of our neighbours'; three litres a day! She could be somewhere now, at this very minute, and yet her calf is waiting for her, eager to meet her, eager to hear the usual call. But this is the first time a cow has been lost under my care. I remember two years ago three of our bulls and two of our cows died of a disease which swept half of the village's cattle. That was nobody's fault. Not God's either. They were only "destined to die". The other day a cow was killed by a leopard who sucked her blood right in front of my eyes. I could not save her. My hand shaking violently, I threw my spear somewhere in his direction and ran in panic to tell my father — he was at his farm at the time. And we went, he alertly holding the old family rifle which he always kept with him while plowing and I feeling high about the fact that I informed him. But the leopard had disappeared into the woods leaving behind him another dead animal, a bull. That, too, was not my fault. It was "fate." But today . . . it is different. When something is lost, there must be a loser.

It is getting cold. The autumn wind has started whimpering through the trees. Soon it will be pitch dark and we might not even be able to find our way back. Father still leads, holding his hat with one hand so the wind might not take it away and I trot behind the cattle. The hyenas are howling. Greedy beasts! They are always impatient. And the foxes are crying, followed by the gorillas' laughing. They have never hesitated to steal in groups a lamb from every poor hut.

We are about to climb the hill now. Father stops. "Stay here with the cattle," he says and strides into the forest. As I watch him go, I hear his diminishing voice. "I will be back as soon as I can." The cattle, who are already tired, stand where they are. I sit under a tree and wait for him, ready to scream and throw my spear at any beast that might try to attack me or my cattle. I shiver with cold. It has become bitter and bitter. The noise of the beasts has increased. I am scared having to stay there alone. If only he could come back soon. He should. Otherwise, if he doesn't, there would be no cattle. No Negash either. It is up to him. Why did he take so long? Can it be that he has gone to the gorge on the other side of the hill? The big gorge where the king of the devils is said to be living with his soldiers, his eyes open all the time to magnetize anyone who sees them? I don't think he would. Nobody has ever been in there, not

even my uncle who is a reputed hero of the village. And at such a time, what could he see? Bang — Bang — the crack of a gun. Startled, I jump up and look in every direction, trembling all over and swinging the spear. The cattle are disturbed. Some try to run. I have a hard time trying to keep them back and to make them quiet. What has happened? It is my turn to ask. But even father could not attempt to call in the southern hills; sound would not travel at the distance of a stone's throw. Shivering with cold and fear, I lie down on the ground and press my ear against it. Then I get up and walk back and forth. In a minute I hear footsteps and the rustling of leaves. I know it is father. But he is too slow. Is he hurt or what? "What happened? Are you alright?" — I open my mouth wide but my chattering teeth close it. Only my bulged eyes wait to see him approaching, aiming ahead without motion, without the slightest wink. In a second I see him wailing, wiping the blood on his face and rhythmically rotating his swollen eyes which have turned as white as snow. Each time he rotates them, they turn green, yellow and red and then back to white. Another second changes him into a laughing beast with a thousand teeth and a horn that keeps on growing with the movement he makes. All of a sudden, he becomes father again, the smiling cheerful father, yet tears and sweat are visible on his anguish-stricken, pale face. Then he is transformed into a shadow, a bending shadow in the dark, with a back turned towards me. And he moves.

"I don't believe it, a leopard!" I am excited.

"Yes, look at him!" Father says triumphantly.

I can't see the leopard's skin clearly. But I can see he is medium-sized, by far smaller than the one my uncle killed the other day.

"Are you alright?" I ask.

He doesn't hear me.

"He jumped at me from the tree but I shot him in mid air," he says. "I got him on the right spot — his heart."

"And the grey?" I ask, happy that we have a leopard skin but still worried about my responsibility.

"Damn her — she is lost." He seems to be obsessed by the sight of the leopard, but regret somehow shows itself in his quivering voice.

"Do you mean she is dead?" I ask.

He does not answer. He is steadily looking at the beast, exclaiming, "Look at him! Look at him!" Why doesn't he say she is dead? That would make me happier, because I would not get the blame. It could only be her own destiny that killed her. That is if she

had to die. But as long as she is thought to be alive, I am going to be asked about how it all happened and be beaten up. And I don't exactly know when and how she was lost. I found out she was missing only after I had come back from where Taye was herding his cattle. I had left the cattle and gone over to him and we had been playing the wrestling game as usual and, after that, we had been eating inkuto (fried peas). The cattle were dispersed but I got them together somehow and was starting the journey home when I realized the whole thing and father called simultaneously. I know what it means to face father while he questions. He does not ask me now. But that does not mean he will not. I don't need any hint to know that. He is always quiet at first, hesitant, contemplative, then furious at the right time and place. That is what bothers me. But if she is dead, I will have less trouble — at least "destiny" will take part of the blame.

"Do you think she is dead?" I ask again.

He doesn't hear me.

"We will go to Merony and plead with him," he says. "He will find her for us."

So he thinks she is still alive, somewhere! We will see. Merony, the sorcerer's house, is on our way, not far from here.

"We better go now," he says and hands me the rifle. Then he starts tying the leopard's legs so as to make it easy for him to carry it over the back of his shoulders.

"Are you sure he is not too heavy?" I ask.

"He is, but I have to take him by any means — at least till we reach Merony's house."

"Why don't we skin him here?"

"It is dark — don't you see?"

"But you will be hurt, won't you?" I say.

"I don't mind," he says, his hands still busy with the knots.

"How about your rheumatic pains?"

"Don't worry — I can bear any pain today."

"I have an idea."

"What?"

"Let us have it carried on the back of Dalech."

"I better hurt myself than any of my animals."

"He can carry it, I am sure." I say.

"No, no, no," he says, finishing the knots. "Are you a fool to think he will not be frightened and run into the woods the moment we put a leopard on his back?"

"But your rheumatic pains . . . ?"

"Shut up and follow me."

I whistle to the cattle and off we go. A leopard skin? It is incredible! The last time we had a leopard's skin was when I was about eight years old. And we sold it for ten dollars, enough for a year's expense. Money was rare. Mother did not spend more than fifty cents when she went to the market, the only open-field market we had, although she had to travel on foot over ten miles a week for the journey and back. Ten cents would buy you salt enough for a week. No sugar. Nobody knew what it was. A twenty-five cent cooking oil took you a week to finish. Ten cents of kerosene, half a bottle full, often lasted for two months. We lit the old Kuraz, clock-sized thread lamp occasionally, and the longest time it burned was, I remember, for about an hour, the night my brother was born. Fire wood was free. You picked it up from the forest, but with hard labour and sometimes with the risk of danger. Cereals were harvested from the farm and ground and baked at home. Others, like corn, potatoes, cabbage and berberie were planted in the small backyard of the hut. Although their quantity was far less than one would imagine, they were enough for four souls bound to each other in faith, loyalty and in prayer. No psychological evil, no distrust, no greed, no hate. Each of us knew our share and there was not any emotional disturbance to shake the pillar of love that supported our tiny hut. A leopard skin is a treasure, I think, although it cannot replace the worth of a cow, and mother will be delighted—delighted perhaps more than any of us. After all, shopping is her immediate responsibility just as farming is father's, milking the cows my sister's and cattle herding mine.

It is dark but we can see our way somehow. "Watch your step," father says, gasping. I cannot see him clearly but I can imagine him sweating and panting, and the leopard grinning as he lies over the back of father's shoulders with his whiskers pointed towards me. "Walk carefully — there is a pit down here." I realize we are no longer on the same path we came through before. The trees are sparse around here. It seems the whole area is covered with long grass. We hear the barking of dogs. Shortly, we reach Merony's house. We stop at the gate. Father throws down the leopard at his feet and sighs. "We made it, Negash!" he says. Then we are admitted by two men with rifles. They are Merony's servants. They ask father why we have come. He tells them, and they lead us slowly towards the hut, making sure the dogs will not attempt to

attack us. Same routine. We will wait our turn to plead to Merony. It is the third time I have been there with father, who started consulting the sorcerer long before I was born. Once we went to request him to save my mother when she was critically ill, then to pay tribute, one dollar, when she had recovered. The last time we were there was to ask his suggestion for naming the baby astrologically so the devils might not attack him. Merony was the richest man in Dekebora. He had more than a hundred head of cattle. He lived in a big hut with a big compound. Almost everyone in the village has consulted him at one time or another, and it was rumoured that even some of the priests came to him at night, wrapped up in garments so they might not be recognized by the people. Merony was feared like the church and he was said to be more ruthless when it came to cursing those who disobeyed him. He had no problem to find out. He had many informants, not to mention his servants and irenias. The people believed in both Merony and the church. There was no difference between him and the priests. They came to him and he went to them — he was hardly absent from the congregation each Sunday.

Fire is burning in two big pits and men, women, old and young are sitting facing the verandah of the hut, which is covered by a red curtain. The curtain hid someone who would not be seen but heard throughout the night. Merony. He was the actor who performed solely by dramatic voice and the audience, who never bothered to watch the stage, enjoyed it all in verbal communication.

"Praise him! Praise him!" a high thrilling voice shouts, almost musical.

"Yes, praise him," the crowd murmurs, accompanied by the beating of drums. Father and I watch the scene from behind the crowd. An old woman and two men are standing next to us. I glance at father now and then. He seems to be concentrating. He crosses his arms over his chest and I do the same. I see his lips moving. I guess he has started mumbling some words requesting the return of our lost cow. "Praise him," the chanting goes on. Now it has become louder and louder. A man, naked from the waist up, stands at the end of the curtain, playing the washint, a kind of fife with four holes, which is hardly audible amid the restless crowd. Some are dancing, others crying with their hands raised high. Father and I join them at the signal of a man who stands at the other end of the curtain with a sword hanging over his hips.

Then all of a sudden, the big voice from inside the curtain roars,

followed by a wild laugh that sends a shiver down your spine. Then it makes a continuous sound of snoring and yawning. Merony is waking from his sleep, where he had been carried away by his spirits. The crowd has become quiet. You could only hear the dogs barking furiously. Everybody is still. The fire in the pits glows more brilliantly and it is reflected in the red curtain, brighter than ever.

"I sense a leopard has come to my house," Merony says. We bow and remain bowed until the signal comes from the man with the washint.

"Kadabaros, Mustarados, Zaladabos, the outstanding spirits . . . they have all told me," Merony says. "Is that true?"

"Yes, respected master," father says, without taking his eyes from the ground.

I lift my eyebrows slowly, but I cannot see Merony. The curtain is still closed.

"You killed the leopard only a very short time ago, is that right?"

"Right, master."

"And you found him in the southern hills?"

"Right, master."

"You have lost your cow, is that true?"

"True, master."

"And now you have come to tell me about the missing cow?"

"It is absolutely correct, master."

"And the leopard skin, did you bring it for me?" Merony asks.

Father doesn't answer.

The crowd is still quiet.

"You know my spirits like the skin of beasts, especially the leopard's, don't you?" Merony asks.

So what if he and his spirits like leopard skin?

"Yes, I know," father replies, still bowed. His eyes are closed. He seems to be concentrating.

"Good, my son," Merony says. "You are blessed."

"You are in a hurry to go home," he goes on. " I can feel your heart beat right now."

"Yes, I am, master," father says.

"The heart is the centre for everything," Merony explains. "It tells a man what to do and when and why."

"It is true, master," father agrees.

"I know you are in a hurry," Merony says, "and that is why I do not want to keep you long."

"Thank you, master."

"How is your baby?" Merony asks.

"He is alright, master," father replies.

"Did you make him drink the medicine mixed with the red soil from the hill?"

"Yes, master."

"Kadabaros, Mustarados, Zaledabos — these outstanding spirits — they have all told me. You need not worry. He will be healthy. And a great hero. He will be your supporter in your old age. I will give him my blessing."

"Thank you, master."

"And so you have brought the leopard skin for me?" Merony asks.

"Yes," father replies.

I shudder. Merony is a brute! Is he really going to take our treasure? And father simply agrees? I can't believe it!

"What about my cow, master?" father asks.

"She is in the woods," Merony replies. "I will send my spirits to keep an eye over her."

"Thank you, master."

"But I am afraid she might be killed before the spirits arrive where she is," Merony says, with a different tone. "You see, the spirits quarrel with each other all the time. My spirits, too, have their enemies. So if they arrive later than their counterparts they cannot save your cow."

Father doesn't say anything. His eyes remain fixed on the ground.

"But don't worry," Merony says. "I will bless her calf and she will give you more cows than you expect. Now you may go. Your wife and children are waiting for you."

The washint starts thrilling. The drums beat like thunder, slow at first, as if in keeping with the melancholy that has struck us, and faster and faster each time the crowd echoes the chorus: "Praise him." We bow and leave.

On our way home we are both silent. I want to ask father why he gave away the leopard skin to Merony. I am afraid, though. But I cannot resist asking. I am very much disturbed by this distressing, human act. I know he has felt it more than I have. I have seen his withered face when we left. I could always tell when he was in agony, and now I imagine the intensity of his sorrow. I even sense a thousand shocks of regret running in his mind and his heart pounding as a result of the unexpected blow. To come home finally, empty-handed, after all that toil!

"Why did you give the leopard away?" I burst out in a shaky voice.

"What else could I do?" he says. A faint voice which has found its way from a depressed heart.

"You had the rifle with you, father," I say, unaware of what I am saying. "You had your rifle!" Tears come to my eyes.

He is silent.

"You had your rifle with you!" I shout again.

"So what?" he says. "Merony's guards, too, had rifles!"

I see what he means, but I still cannot understand why he gave up.

"Merony is very cruel, isn't he?"

"Yes, I know," and he sighs.

I am encouraged now.

"How could he do that to a man like you?" I say. "How dare he?"

He is silent, but I can guess he approves of what I say.

"He fooled you, father," I say.

"Yes, I know," he says. "But what could I do?"

"Remember his servants asked you questions at the gate?" I start to explain, "And he was later asking you about the leopard and the cow?"

"Yes, but what?"

"Well, he found out from them."

"I don't believe you, son," he says. "Merony would not do such a thing because he knows everything himself."

"Believe me, father," I say. "He heard everything from his servants."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure they told him. The minute we entered, I saw them go towards the backyard of the hut. They must have entered through a secret door and informed him."

"This is very hard to believe, but . . ."

"But he fooled you anyway, didn't he?"

"Yes, I know."

"And we have neither a leopard skin nor a cow now."

"True."

"So what does Merony do for us?"

"Nothing son," he says, grudgingly. "Nothing."

"You know what I will do when I become a man?"

"What?"

"I will kill him."

"Don't ever say that again, son."

Finally, when we reach home, we see an unexpected thing. We don't believe our eyes. But it is true. It can't be magic — It is real. There she is, the grey, the missing grey, in the beret. Mother tells us she came home immediately before sunset. That was the time I heard father's call and we set out for the search. Mother had thought something was wrong when she saw the grey coming home alone, lowing incessantly as she strode towards the beret. "I thought you were all attacked by beasts and she was the only one that survived," she says. No wonder, it was the first and only time an animal had come home alone. Mother and sister are so happy we are back safely they keep asking us how we are. "Are you alright? Really?" They both say it in one voice. They had been worried since sunset. They had alarmed our neighbours, Chefike and Beza, who went to look for us in the hills. Still, they have not returned. Maybe they have gone to the southern hills. Father and I did not hear their calls. We must have been in Merony's house when they passed us. Otherwise we would have met on the way.

Father is very happy. His sorrow has started to fade away, I think. He smiles. He strokes the cow's chin and speaks to her. "So you were here and we have been looking for you!" he says. The cow, of course, doesn't listen, but I do. I don't think I have ever been happier. And because of the intensity of the relief I feel, words fail me and I cannot express my delight.

Tired as I am, I enter the hut and sit by the fireside. My sister and my parents are still in the beret, talking. Then I hear two more voices. Our neighbours have come back. They are rejoicing out there. Then everybody is quiet except father. He is telling them about the leopard, I suppose. I am steadily looking at the flickering fire, a heap of ash circling it, as it hits the bottom of the dist with its blue diverging flames. The baby is crying. I get up to make him quiet. Just then I see mother coming in a hurry, followed by father and sister, and the four calves who shared our room every night. Father sits beside me. My sister ties the calves to the wooden pillar that stands right in the middle of the hut. Mother joins us, the baby in her arms sucking on her breast.

"What a day!" I sigh.

"God be praised that you are back safely," mother says.

Father is quiet. He is breaking a piece of wood, which he throws into the fire meditatively.

"You have heard about the leopard, haven't you?" I ask her.

"Yes," she says, "Your father told me all about it."

I look at her steadily. There she is, a thirty-five year old woman who has wrinkled and aged like a woman of fifty through hard labour, trying to suppress resentment which could clearly be seen on her face. She stares at the fire, now and then stirring the sauce in the dist with one hand, and still holding the baby with the other hand.

"It was the wrath of God," she mutters. "And when Merony wanted it what else could you do but give it to him?" she goes on. I can see in her eyes that she is more affected by the loss than any of us.

Father is still silent. What is he thinking? Definitely not about my fault. The grey is not lost now. The leopard is!

"Mother," I say. "You can't blame God, because he gave us back our cow."

"I know, dear," she says.

"Yes," I say reassuringly, "God gave us back our cow!"

"And Merony took our leopard's skin!" father explodes, laughing scornfully and staring at the roof as if the whole thing was written up there.

"But he is powerful, isn't he?" mother says.

"He took our treasure, dear," he says, with a sinister laugh. "He took our treasure!"

"Merony is a liar!" father bursts out again.

Mother shrugs. I am excited.

"Something is wrong with you today, dear?" she says.

"Yes," he says. "I was fooled, fooled, fooled . . . by Merony. That is what is wrong with me!"

"Are you alright?" she says. "Have you forgotten he hears what you are saying now?"

"No, he can't," father says. "He doesn't know the truth. He told me my cow was in the woods and I found her here! Here! Here!

"But the curse . . ."

"Shut up!"

She does.

"Bring me the Bible and I will swear I will never consult him again," father says.

"I don't believe this," mother says.

"You will believe it when you see it," he says. "Quick — bring me the Bible!"

I almost jump to get it from under the large cow hide where he kept it for use as a pillow and a guarantee against evil.

"Forgive me, God," he says, staring at the roof. "Forgive your slave. Forgive your weakest creature."

Mother buries her face in her hands. She is afraid to be a witness but it is clear she would follow whatever father said.

"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost . . . ." He swears, holding with both hands the Bible which he hasn't read a word from since he inherited it from his father.

He never consulted Merony again, and nothing happened to him as a result of that.

It was a long and tiresome day for the family. For me it was an unforgettable day of victory.

CAPPELBAUM'S REPORT

STANLEY COOPERMAN

500 blasphemies later and I still sit
on the side of a mountain
pierced by discreet sewer-pipes and lawns
waiting for my wrists to become
whale-bone
my lips to be glued together
with salmon-grease:
nothing happens, even the bills
are being paid
magically
bits of paper
pogo-stick from one bank to another
and they haven't put me in jail
yet
the typewriter comes to life, groans
hums like a bee
with a thorn up its ass
the house has been painted polished reborn
for the new year
for the new baby
for the new RELATIONSHIP
contracted somewhere in Greece
or the Sinai desert, somewhere exotic
hot
dry
where we didn't wear clothes for a month
but drifted around the reeking palms
worrying
about getting lost and water
tasted like the pyramids. . . .

but we didn't get lost no
we didn't get lost
New York
(yawn & the longshoremen
steal your teeth)

Long Island: the family
the family
the family
the family
Connecticut visiting a young poet
sentenced to three years at Yale
(meditating
on Roethke's nervous breakdown, brownbelting
karate because he never
went to medical school)

swallowing the continent all the mucus
of New Jersey
Pennsylvania
Ohio HISTORY made into billboards
then hog country
even Kansas, where we lost
the goddamned highway
while debating the virtues of Mizz Magazine
Jenifer
            threatening
to put barbed wire in her twat
and Colorado Grandma
still Saaath Caaalayna, having foregone
booze
for the occasion, and
over the hills over the cows over the ghosts
of Indians
anteeks
(Willa Cather's secret socks
pointed
toward New Mexico)
                sweating
through the Dakotas, Gali tossing
Winnie the Pooh
at the moon

for two million miles: back
to Saskatchewan, where
a customs inspector tried to put our Sabra dog
in prison
because her rabies tag
was printed in Hebrew ("there must be a reg
u
lay
shon")
we lied of course, & escaped
admired dead animals in Saskatoon
admired
the number of bones in a weasel's knee
that have to be memorized
(Barbara O my lover
hiding behind the urine specimens) and
suddenly
all the maple leaves
dangling from limp flags
bleached by the sun: look look
the snow in the mountains, actual trees
and we slept
by a green river excited
by unimaginable
wetness
home again home again
giggling at the rain, celebrating even
the weeds
(on Burnaby's black mountain the Chairman
offers front teeth
in a smile
like a rat's belch & me
feeling my face, expecting cheese
all the buttermilk year gone
George and the
boys

still sucking each other's strophes
discovering LAWS of art
printing
everything, like ambergris
plucked from the sacred New England nostril
(Banquo's ghost:
"he most honors my style
who learns under it to destroy the teacher")
(and the psychologists
wander through Walt Whitman's pubic hair,
each follicle a piece of the true
X and the committee
the curriculum
vaginal Trotskys
suburban Lenins
publications EXCOMMUNICATIONS
memoranda
                hangnails
from last month's apocalypse)

foo: these are the pimples of my brain,
let me remember
                only
the warm stretching under the sun,
the rainbow-fish,
the white camel
dancing
toward the sea.

STANLEY COOPERMAN's poems, stories and articles have appeared widely in North American periodicals, including *Prism international*; his most recent book of poetry is *Cappelbaum's Dance* (University of Nebraska Press). He teaches English at Simon Fraser University.

DUCKS

RONA (HADDON) DEXTER

1

Three white ducks make
three shadows

Their black eyes are unblinking

2

Their quacking is low and companionable
but when I call the horse
the drake answers
severely

3

I once saw a jade buckle

Two ducks
one neck wound around the other neck
each bill tucked into its own back

Now I see live ducks in the same position

4

The goose girl
would have been more entertained
by these ducks than by her geese
had she not been obsessed
with servant girls
and kings

5

In the rain
the ducks squish their feet
and are happy

6

Her first egg lay in the hay

When I went to examine it
she placed her webbed foot over it
and stood straight up

angrily

7

The third duck was sick
and fell on her back

when we went to fetch the ax
she suddenly became
much better

8

When the water is fresh
they clap in with so great
a delight
it is worth the effort
of fetching the hose

9

Three white ducks
on green grass

one
behind
the other

and a million
aspen leaves
in a gold sky

What further?

RONA (HADDON) DEXTER is the author of several poetry books, the most recent of which is *Ootischenie*, Fiddlehead Publications. Her *Selected Poems* will be brought out soon by Sono Nis Press. She is writing, teaching and living in Vancouver.

SIX POEMS BY JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO

"THERE ARE NO WONDERS, ONLY MYSTERIES"

There is a wave on which you may walk
There is a woman who may never talk

There is a word that is never spoken
There is a man whose word is never broken

There is a stitch that is never sewn
There is a face to alter your own

There is an Argosy to the Golden Fleece
And a Road to Paradise (north of Nice)

VERSIONS OF ST. MARK

for Pier Paolo Pasolini

When he cured the leper,
he cautioned the man,

"Say nothing."
But he said much.

*

"Why do you eat with sinners?"
they demanded.

He replied, "It is the sinners
I have come to save."

*

He healed a man
with a withered hand.

They complained:
"You did it on the wrong day."

*

When they asked him,
"Who are your brethren?"

he looked around
and said: "Behold!"

*

To the young woman
who was fast asleep,

they heard him whisper,
"*Talitha cumi.*"

*

"Are you Elias,
one of the prophets?

Or John the Baptist,
risen from the dead?"

*

They spoke
of the traditions.

He spoke
of so many hypocrites.

*

When they asked him
for a sign from heaven,

he gave them his sign —
a deep sigh.

*

Here is what
the blind man said:

"I see men as trees,
walking!"

*

For his passage
through Galilee,

he travelled
incognito.

*

"Better to enter
into the kingdom of God

with one eye
than into hell with two."

*

They stood in awe
of their immense Temple.

He warned them: "No stone
will stand upon another."

*

"When desolation comes,"
he cautioned,

"pray the time
will not be winter."

*

He predicted war,
revolution, disaster,

famine and death.
He prophesied:

*

"There will be
no end of trouble

because there will be
no end."

A.M.K.

(An Acrostic)

A wise man builds two words out of one.
B efore one is seventy, everything comes before one's eyes.
R iches are as a baker's shirt, not too long and not too short.
A good lie is sometimes worth gold.
H e who knows has many cares.
A stone lying in one place is soon overgrown with grass.
M en count for more than people.

M uch also becomes exhausted.
O n the gravestone, all Jews are beautiful
S ince death has come along, one is not sure of life.
E yes and ears have also their tongues.
S ilence may often be eloquent.

K naves and fools divide the world.
L ittle speech and much meant.
E verything has belonged to others and returns to others.
I t is easier to know ten lands than one man.
N ight is no man's friend.

Selwyn Gurney Champion's *Racial Proverbs* (1938)

AGENDA

from a book of proverbs

Angle with a silver hook.
Bring an abbey to a grange.
Fill the mouth with empty spoons.
Go out like a candle in a snuff.
Love at the door and leave at the latch
Mend the Magnificat.
Order without a constable.
Seem and not to be.
Twist a rope of sand.
Take a dagger and drown myself.

COMPASS

from the Roumanian of Marin Sorescu

The sea is a giant compass
with restless fish
always pointing north.

Each fish, naturally,
has its own north:
which it tries to force upon others,
swallowing, when Neptune's not looking,
the smaller norths.

They say the day of the unique,
scientifically calculated north will come,
when all fishes will swim
in one direction,
one behind the other,
heading northward, on their bellies,
then southward, on their backs.

Then no ship will ever
lose its bearings,
or be swallowed up by whirlpools;
with such a compass,
in perfect working order,
the earth will never lose its bearings
on its daily rounds.

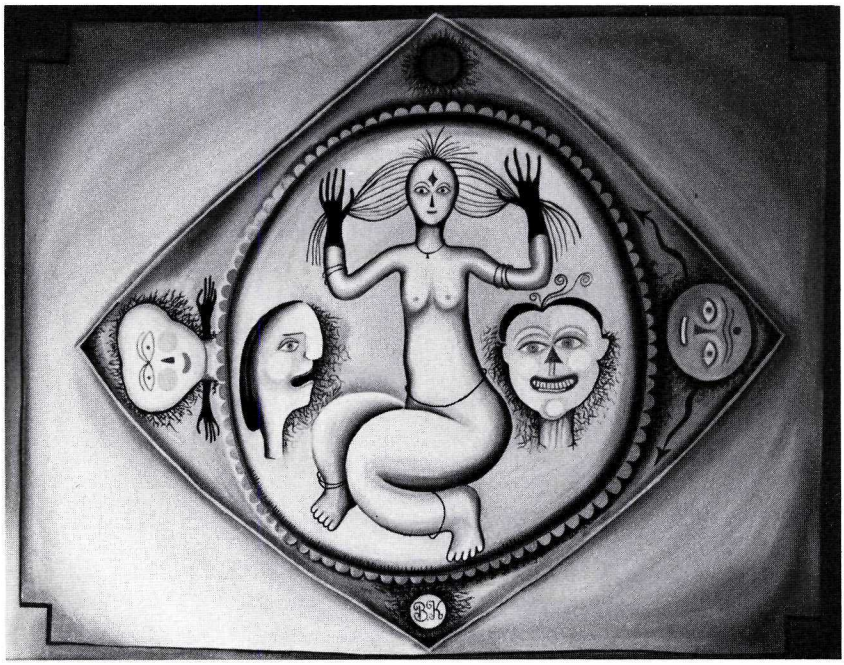
AFTERNOONS CLAUDE MONET VISITS

In California, where Asia is
Or he took her like an inheritance
Or by now we are half-doomed anyway
Or my trade is chagrin
Or slowly rotting in another man's country
Or Maya Plisetskaya is the part of Pavlova that Fonteyn isn't
Or Albanian for Albania is Shqipëria
Or when *he* looks there is nothing there
Or twelve including Castro in the Sierra Maestra
Or the night is rather longer than it would be without the rain
Or nor do immortals need to think
Or we — and by this I mean you and me, mostly
Or a touch of Aristotle, a dash of Barnum
Or afternoons Claude Monet visits
Or I live among the mysteries
Or the diameter of the planet is
Or stand in the corner and try not to think of a white bear
Or *that* one must have hurt
Or why are odd numbers so much harder to add then even
Or but not necessarily in that order
And Wu Tao-tzu the T'ang painter
Wandered into one of his own landscapes
And disappeared

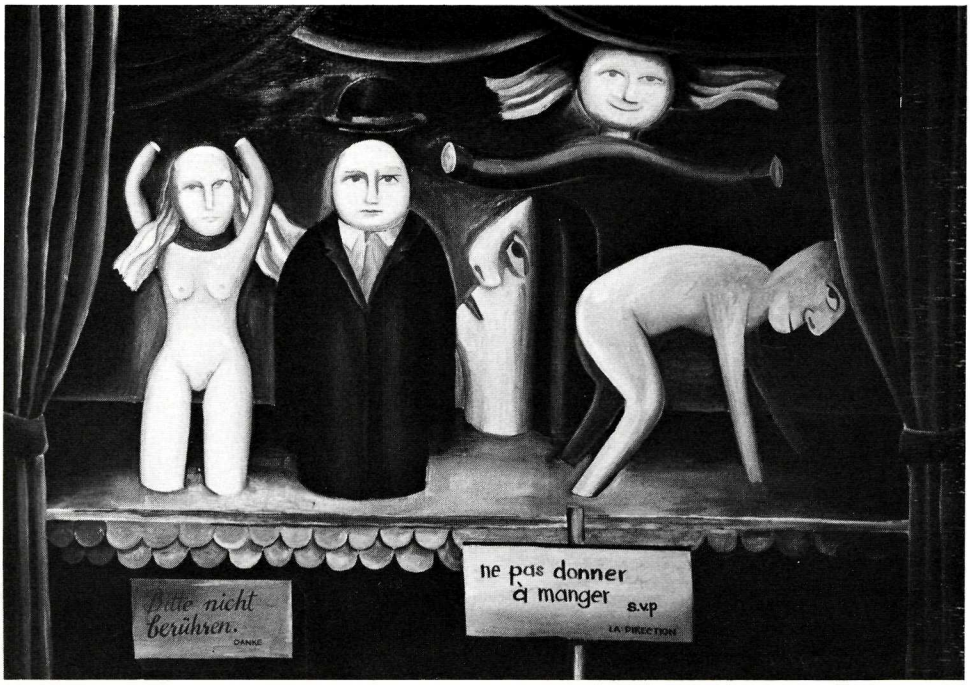
JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, the well-known Toronto poet and editor-at-large, spent four years compiling *Colombo's Canadian Quotations*, twenty-five thousand copies of which were issued by Hurtig Publishers in October of 1974. In the same month, Peter Martin Associates published two of his books of poetry: *The Sad Truths*, a collection of new poems, and *Translations from the English*, a collection of found poetry taken from the prose of other men. *Under the Eaves of a Forgotten Village* is the title of a forthcoming collection of sixty poems from contemporary Bulgaria, which he is translating with Nikolai Roussanoff. Colombo was a guest of the Writers Union of the U.S.S.R. in 1970. Andrei Voznesensky called his work "serious and profound." Yevgenyi Yevtushenko asked him: "Why, in Moscow, do you look like a poet and, in Toronto, like a banker?"

GROUP

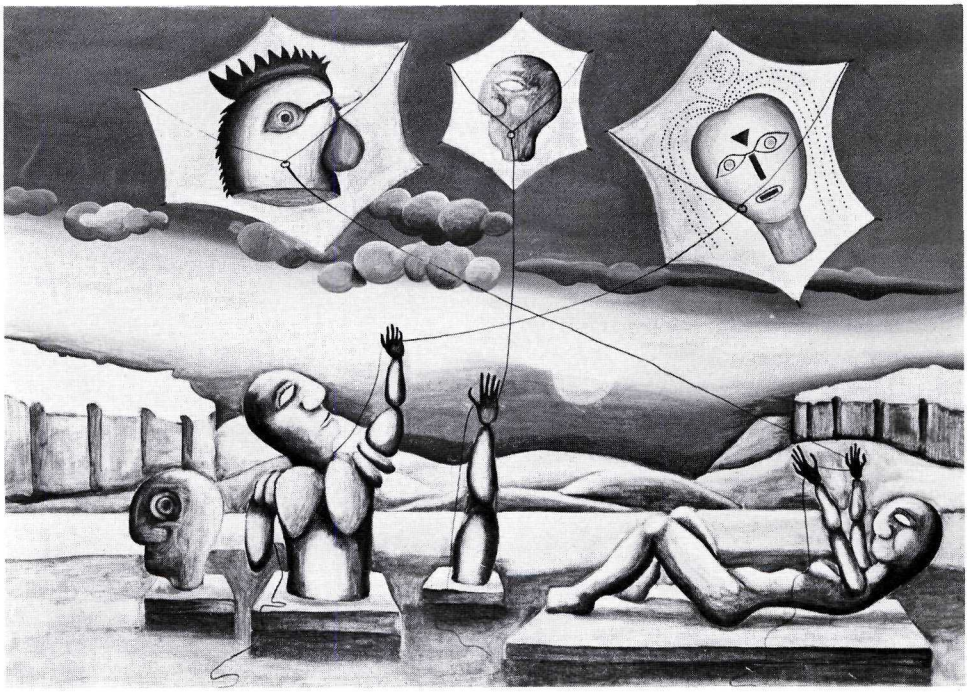
Eight Paintings by Benno Kaiser



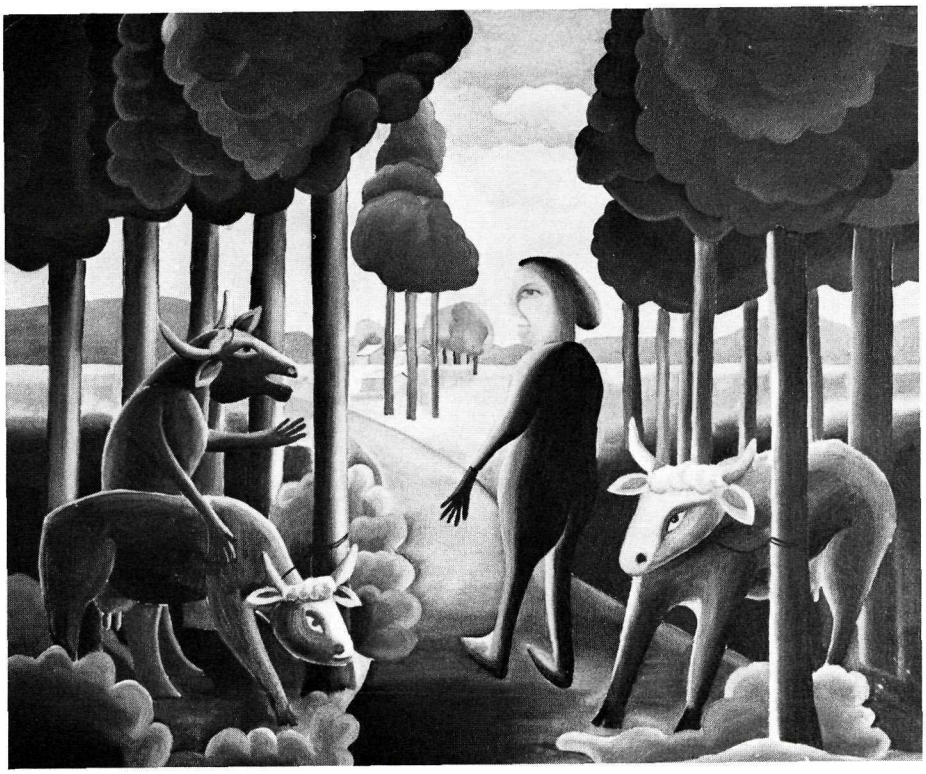
UNTITLED



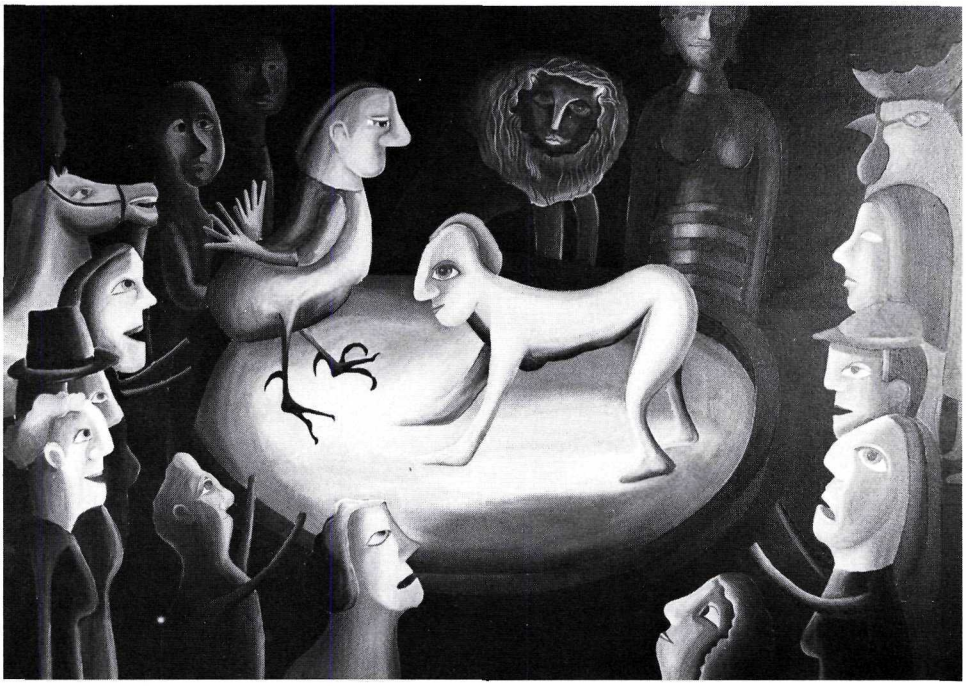
THEATRE OF THE WORLD



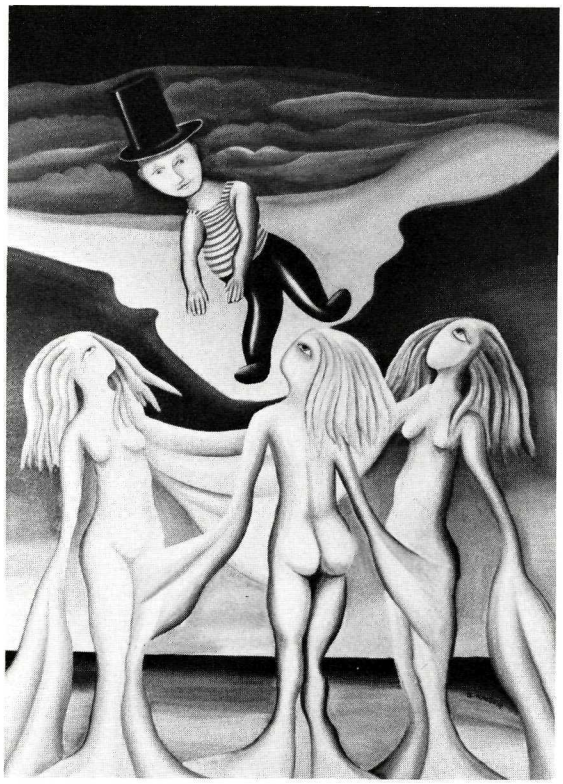
KITES



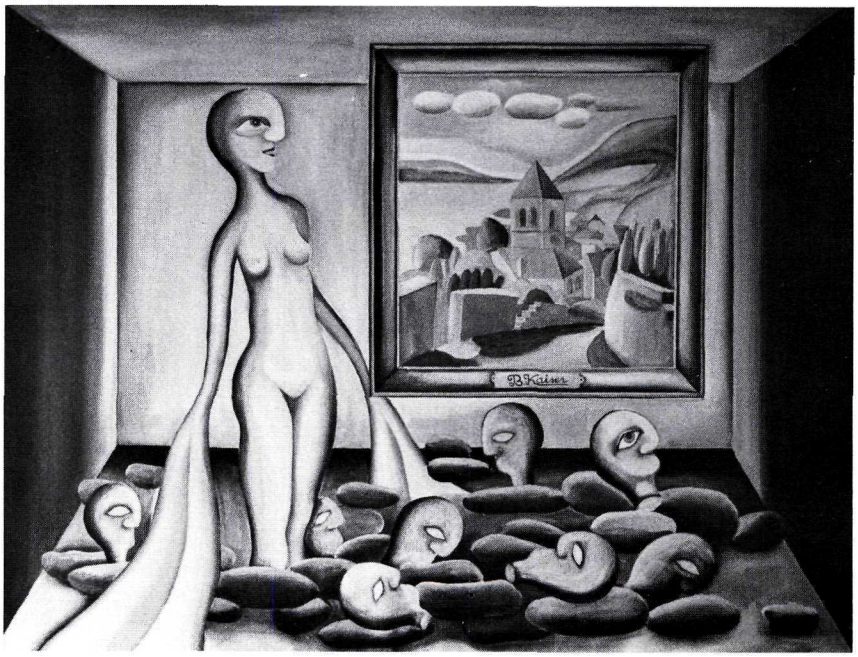
THE FARMER AND HIS CATTLE



CIRCUS STAGE



SHEET GAME



PICTURE IN THE PICTURE

BACHELOR AT 48

BRIAN HENDERSON

In this direction half-light
        or hunger only
Ripeness undigested: Therese
        my incompletion
mimes my halfness wholly
mooning on the edge
        of even, inclining
        at the horizon of skin
Half a head only
        in passionate thought
draws a wet gesture from me

The appetite for order
builds eatable fruit
into the disorder of branches
What is building emptily
        in the angles of these?
        O my half-lit sister
are there no planets
        caught in trees?

BRIAN HENDERSON's work has previously appeared in *The Wascana Review* *The Canadian Forum*, *Quarry* and other periodicals.

LYKE-WAKE

ALEXANDER HUTCHISON

for my father and grandfather

ma s'averra ch'io mora
gridera poi per me la morte ancora

As an old man lags on the hill-side, wagging
his stick where the sun burns over Caithness,
seeing the whole coast to Lossiemouth and beyond
the light on the rocks beyond the harbour mouth,
the boats setting out for a night's fishing —
Lilt, Bezaleel, Glad Harvest — their nets drawn dry
from lofts and road-side fences, spread again to the sea

light from eyes lighting to lids downcast
light of table and firescreen light of the last
pewter candlestick

earth's tapers trailing to rafter
embers of face hand and wings

Dawn has a grey list of cirrus and sky
ma s'averra ch'io mora if I have to die
even death's mouth would kiss me
even death's mouth would cry

Now burned and buried
lair-earth around you
earth turned and dug under
news let in a grey cirrus sky
light from eyes lighting to lids downcast
light of table and firescreen
this light to the drawstrings and spiked
pewter candlesticks
smoke of fine metalwork and carving

earth's tapers trailing to rafter
embers of face hand and wings

Let it draw in you loose
curling in let it breathe sag of water
fly-bodkin bumping at walls and windows
let it speak in you let it come through

lichen blank and lichen blazing
there as the day went by
stirring dust at her ankles
fish in distant pools

'in this wild a palace of green timber
bound with green birches both under
                and above

and a queen to beggar description
wilderness robbed of its wind-drawn
                distances

mirth and a perfect hunting joined
here since men took breath

                in her eye
in one word to her people

floors laid with green scharets
and medwarts and flowers

                grace
of the founding line'

Dawn has a grey list of cirrus and sky
ma s'averra ch'io mora if I have to die
even death's mouth would kiss me
even day's mouth would cry

and as dark draws in over Spey-fleets,
places of slaughter at the Bawds, at the Knock,
as men that never walked this break for near to thirty years
walk by Ruthven and Letterfourie, by the arches at Craigmin,
and gulls shadow high in off the water;
as burns go by hill-slope and Lintmill barley in the sun's length,
cattle and all stir settle to sleep;
even as a child tries entrance to earth and air
tilth withers wins: new yield plucked from the old

Now burned and buried
lair-earth around you
earth turned and dug under
watch let for a star-spread sky

ALEXANDER HUTCHISON was born in Scotland in 1943 and has been teaching at the University of Victoria until this year. He has now embarked upon the completion of a doctoral dissertation. Recent work by him is also appearing in *Stand* and *Ambit*, and *Aftermath* has been issued on stereo tape by DNA.

MATT HARTMAN was born in New York City in 1941. He took Creative Writing courses at Queens College of the City University of New York and did graduate work at Columbia University. He worked for the *New York Herald Tribune* as a rewrite man and in the New York Public Library before coming to Vancouver in 1971. He is now a librarian at the University of British Columbia and a regular reviewer for the *Library Journal*, New York.

RENEE

MATT HARTMAN

I REEK WITH COMPASSION, foisted on me by my job. My arms stretch out to people. No. To children. The ventricles of my heart, *mon coeur*, pump out love sufficient to drown, on Saturdays, fifty, and on crowded Sundays many more. On Sundays the children glow religiously in their suits and dresses. They parade to the playground suffused in an aura of Christianity, making it more difficult for me to love. Not worship; just love. There must be no sacraments to temper my feelings, no scriptures to describe my emotions. Especially no commandments. Love must flow unrestrainedly or it had better not flow at all.

But on Saturdays, my other working day, I become a willing disciple. I would not proselytize but you must try it; you must cushion your knees to receive the blessed weight of childish buttocks. Saturday a week a little girl of five told me in Italian of her unceasing love, throwing herself into my arms with the abandon of a true Latin. And I, I wanted to swallow her lollypop-tasting tongue, feeling innocent and purged — sweetly tired and completely above reproach.

Come, some Saturday, into my playground and I will point her out. My job is not difficult and I will have time. I will take the time, for Renee is someone you must see. She is beautiful, but that is not why. And she is what they call "ideally mannered" though that, too, is hardly the reason. I think it is because she is slightly pigeon-toed, because her smile is a band of silver braces, because she stutters her name. I think that is why I love her more than the others.

It is difficult not to see her. She is only beginning to realize how futile are her efforts to blend with her group. Standing on one turned-in foot she is patiently awaiting her turn at checkers. You see her for the first time and it is difficult to understand the con-

tinuous action of the commonplace; how, so near to such beauty, the traffic can flow unconcerned along the boulevard. She is totally familiar with your bedevilled eyes. Her back is to you, yet she hunches her shoulders at your sudden intake of breath. If you call, she will turn slowly and fix you with a sweet and sad smile. She will come — hesitantly — but she will come and listen wisely to your tongue-tied exclamations. You will tell her she is pretty — such a pretty little girl, you will say — and she'll lower her lashes, yet her eyes (you are certain) are for you alone. You watch her, pink-playsuited, returning to her friends. A miracle.

* * *

Today is Saturday and it is raining. As I make my way to the park house I see the maintenance man, Jim Delaney, just beginning to run the tattered flag down the pole. It hangs there, suspended, a patriotic weight guided down by ropes turning grey. Jim is another you should meet. He is a paradox, carrying the mind of a child in the body of a man of fifty. This is not to say he is retarded, though he does show some of the tendencies of a Mongoloid. He will eye something — focus upon it with a red-rimmed stare, as if only in this way can he carry the memory of it with him. I have seen this in children, and when I notice it in Jim I smile. I suppose he has had a hard life: he seems unwilling to discuss himself, and when I question him he is silent. Peter, the recreation leader on the Avenue, told me he had fought in Italy during the Second War — that he bombed villages near Padua. Peter worked with Jim for more than a year so I see no reason to doubt his word. I sometimes think that this would explain, in part of course, Jim's love of children. Is the reason why he will work overtime, without pay, to dandle Renee on his lap wrapped up somewhere in a smoky, bombed-out past? Does he see in her an Italian infant, dead eyes staring at the sky? I would like to ask him these questions — like to know, not only to satisfy my curiosity, but also because maybe I can help the man. I have learned long ago that only by appreciating — savouring if you like — our problems can we learn to deal with them. It is really quite simple. Maybe it is that, through Renee, Jim is trying to make amends. It is curious to watch them cross the playground; he, carrying the weight of his two hundred pounds, leans over, slightly stooped, to give the child his hand. His wheaten hair is miles above her red-ribboned black flax. I think of her as the leader, of him as the bear chained to the organ of her every whim.

They are together constantly. She will enter. "Jim, Jim. Look what I have." Holding up a fingerpainted dancer or, once, a St. Christopher medal of dull copper. He will be charmed. As she approaches he sometimes shudders and continues to shudder until she has come close enough to be swept up next to his bristling jaw. He will sniff her hair, nostrils wide and quivering. I can't believe there is anything wrong in this.

You can see him waiting for her on school days. It is her habit to bring lunch in a brown paper bag and eat it before going back to school. At eleven-thirty Jim goes to the front gate and waits, his eyes scanning the street become wide in expectation. When he sees her, he dashes madly out, grabs her hand as though his life depended on it, and leads her back to the park house. Then they will sit and whisper into each other's ear until it is time for her to go. He will accompany her down the street and, I am sure, would if able take her right inside the classroom.

Sometimes I wonder. I keep my eyes upon them and I have taken it upon myself to be near them as often as I can. It's not that I'm suspicious. Maybe it's just that I know of very few things of which the human animal is incapable. If Jim weren't so gentle, so honest, I doubt that I'd have allowed it to go as far as it has. What *is* it in him that attracts her? You'd think it would be me whom Renee would love so much. I give her games; hold her jump rope. I like to give her pony rides on my knee. I begin slowly, bumping my foot on the ground at regular intervals, rhythmically, she holding tightly to my neck. Gradually I get faster and faster until she squeals a bit, and her hair becomes all undone and wild. I love that — her long black hair. If she were mine I'd never let her mother put it up. I bounce up and down, up and down, and she's screaming now and screeching into the air. Then slower and slower — easy — until it's over and our breaths escape in a mutual sigh. Jim never does that to her. They play checkers, sometimes jacks, and sometimes he pushes her on the swings at the end of the park. She likes that.

* * *

I come toward the park house and the rain suddenly lets up. I shed my jacket and sign in, then go off toward the handball courts in search of Jim. He's running the big broom up and down the out-lines although the courts are clean. Because it is only nine, there are few children in the playground. Denise and Cindy are in the sand-box. I can see the mud beginning to congeal on their thighs

as they lean over their shapeless castles. I walk up to Jim and he sees me and grins. "Good morning, Paul."

"Morning," I say. "The man get here yet?" The man is the foreman Gronowski, who makes a daily inspection of all the playgrounds in this area. Once he leaves, we are left pretty much alone, Jim and I.

"No, not yet," Jim says. He angles the broom, peering at me over the handle with his grey eyes. When he talks, the natural sandpaper gruffness of his voice blends, at the edges, into something that approaches gentleness. I think that there is a quality within the air, or the ear itself, which tempers the voice after it leaves his mouth, as if he were far away and the sound had time to pick up overtones and nuances before lodging itself within my consciousness.

"I don't think he'll be around today," I say. "He never comes when it's raining."

Jim nods his head. "Fine. That's fine with me. I won't miss him. Paul," he says. "There's a bit of fence needs mending. Back of the basketball courts. Looks like it's been cut — like the fellows went to town after lock-up last night. You think you can give me a hand? Maybe just hold the ladder for me when I go up."

"Jim," I say. "Jim, you know I'm not to do that kind of work. Didn't Gronowski tell you that I'm in charge of recreation?" I really believe in this business. Suppose I'm holding the ladder and a little girl needs help and can't find me? Jim doesn't understand. He's a good worker but he doesn't realize that the children take up too much of my time for me to be bothered with maintenance. But I don't want to hurt him. I agree to hold his ladder.

"Thanks," he says. He suddenly raises his head and stares out toward the gate. I know he is looking for Renee. I smile.

"Your girlfriend here yet today?"

He understands immediately, and I see taking place within him that change that always appears when he is about to mention even her name. He blushes; that is the visible part. But there is more. There is that change which makes him finger-comb his hair in an unconscious gesture that appeals to me. There is the lightening of his complexion, within the suffusion of blood, that creates a kind of glow. He is quaint at such moments; my training makes me look at him as a child.

"No," he says. "Not yet. She told me yesterday she's going to her cousin's wedding in Yonkers today. But she'll be in this evening. You miss her too?"

I try to share the image he is in the process of creating. Renee the maid-of-honour. Renee the flower girl, a vision in pink and white. I see her through the medium of Jim. The light from the window shines through her dress; the very outline of her far more beautiful than any bride.

We turn and go back to the park house for the ladder. Denise with her lovely long red hair sees me coming and skips up. This package of eleven has been at a fresh air camp for two weeks. I keep the card she sent me from Virginia, something about a parrot that can speak her name. And she signed it "love" and smudged some cranberry sauce on the envelope because I once told her I love it. It was Denise who initiated the game I play with the girls. One morning she climbed up on the table in front of the blue benches and showed me the dance taught to her in school. Half way through, perspiring quite freely between the legs, she slipped and fell, throwing her freckled arms around my neck and wrapping her bare thighs about my waist. She enjoyed it so much that she climbed up and did it again. It became a regular with us. After awhile it was no longer just Denise. Cindy picked it up; and Barbara, and Debby. I had to set an age limit in order to save my back. Valerie tried it and we both went down though nothing was hurt except my pride. I can't let the boys do it. They want to, but one must set limits.

Denise wants the checkers, or rather Cindy wants them but is too shy to ask. "But honey," I say. "You remember what happened to the checkers. They got lost weeks ago and the new supplies haven't come in yet."

"Then a ball?" she asks, shaking her mane so that pearls of water fall to the ground. "You have a ball, don't you?"

"Handball?" Jim is looking toward me from the handball court but I ignore him. He's over fifty; you'd think he'd be able to do his work himself. If he wouldn't spend so much time with Renee he'd get a hell of a lot more work done. I get a ball from the closet and put it behind my back, letting it roll down to where I can hold it with my thighs. I extend my two hands toward the child. "Which hand, sweetheart?"

She kind of leans her head to one side, her hair falling all over, and taps my left wrist. "Again," I say. "Three times and the ball's yours." Again she guesses. "No," I say. "Try again."

"Then *this* one." Her tongue has curled up in mystification.

"No, not there either." But she looks so sad that I break down.

"It's between my legs," I say. Soon she and Cindy are throwing the ball up and down the field.

* * *

I walk on back to help Jim. The section of mesh fence is by now almost repaired, though by Wednesday it will certainly again be down. We have what you might call a gang in here — good kids on the whole, but excitable. In the beginning they gave me a bit of difficulty, teasing the children and creating a disturbance. But, after all, they themselves are children, no more, no less; part of my job. So I patrolled a bit more in those early weeks, and I played football and basketball with them. I am blessed with an excellent physique and endurance for sports. I discovered that by outdoing them at their games, by running faster and throwing longer and shooting fouls better I could control even the worst of them through gaining their respect. I sometimes buy them beer on Saturday nights before going home. But they hate fences; something about Ronnie Nizzi that doesn't like a wall, to paraphrase Frost's poem. In his back pocket Ronnie carries a wire cutter.

I hold the aluminum ladder and Jim begins to ascend. He is as clumsy as a thirteen year old. The sun has come out, hard and strong, and he is perspiring profusely about the neck. I smell him and he sees me grimace.

"That should do it," he says. "Getting hot, isn't it? Maybe we should turn on the shower."

I look at my watch. "It's only one. Give it another hour. Not enough kids here yet anyway." The thought occurs to me that one day I will see Jim in the pool, running and splashing, looking like one of those burlesque horses, a costume with two men inside, neither knowing what the other will do. That is how he moves: disjointedly.

The shower-pool combination is the playground's chief attraction. There is a nozzle, maybe four feet high, standing in the middle of an inclined area always kept free from litter. When the valves are turned on, water shoots up to a height of ten or fifteen feet — a spray — and hits the ground in a radius of twice that distance. It attracts the children as honey does a swarm of bees. They come dressed in bathing suits, the youngest content in underpants, and parade in an elongated circle around the accumulation of water. The oldest ones love to sit atop the fountain itself, feeling the cold water run in streams along their bottoms and geyser upward

between their legs. We can have as many as one hundred of them at any given time, soaked and smiling, looking radiant and deliciously wild.

I love to see Renee in the pool. She goes through a ritual, her face solemn and beautiful, as though knowing something unique — something special. In her pink, two-piece suit she glides to the water, leans over, posturing, and pokes a ripple with her finger. Then she straightens up and turns completely around. When she sees Jim she smiles widely and nods her head. He smiles in turn and ambles over to the perimeter, bends, and imitates her motions. "It's fine, Renee," he says. "It's just beautiful, just like a little girl I know. Just right; you can go in now." Then, with a look that makes me ache, she pirouettes gracefully, swan-like, and tip-toes in toward the middle of the pool, Jim's eyes following her, doting on her, loving her. There's no doubt about it: when she is in the shower she is queen. The others, boys and girls alike, pay homage to her in the way they shield her from the needle spray. In early childhood, at least, chivalry is not dead. Tommy protects her by giving her his towel when she comes out. Ralph offers his sandals and understands when she refuses, sweetly, saying something about germs. With her exit, activity seems to increase, get more frenzied, as though, lacking her regal presence, the aura of willing restraint disappears. You cannot convince me that, even at six, she doesn't realize her power over the others. She sees it, uses it, but does not gloat over it. And so it increases with each marking of her wet footprint.

We return the ladder to its place and step back outside. Now it is really warm, *fa' caldo* as the Italian bocce players would say. I see Jim sit on top of a table and peer toward the gate. At this moment I feel a sense of empathy with the man. I hunger with him. Moving to his side, I clap him on the back. "Soon Jim. If she said she'll be here she will."

He looks up and stares at me for a moment. The sun has dried his blond hair and strands fall in soft curves upon his forehead. I think, now, of what thoughts of a child can do to such a man. It is almost frightening how youthful Jim looks.

"Paul," he says slowly. "Isn't it funny? I mean how happy just being with her makes me? I think I'd show up here for nothing if I could just see her once a day. Even if I couldn't be sure I think I'd come." He leans back on his elbows and stares up at the sun and now, I think, now it will come. Now he will tell me what I want to know. Now I'll learn about Italy and those dead little

girls, about his sadness and his fear. But he doesn't. He keeps looking at the sun with eyes half shut, seeing it, perhaps, with his imagination. After awhile his eyes open and I see a few tears, or maybe just beads of sweat from his face. He looks again to the gate and to the street beyond.

* * *

In the early evening the rain again begins. It hurtles down in gray sheets and bounces off the slides and swings like ping-pong balls gone wild. At seven, two hours before closing, Renee comes into the playground. Jim sees her first through the open window of the park house but I will swear that, like me, he sensed her presence as one may sometimes sense beauty before it is first visible. She comes with the rain, flowing through the door even as he jumps to his feet, and stands there for a minute — the focal point of our eyes — puddles forming on the cement floor and running in streams toward us as if to finish the job of binding us to her.

"Renee," Jim says. "Does your mother know you're out? You're soaking wet; here, take off your coat." She strips it off with motions worthy of an ecdysiast and hands it, dripping, to me. I hang it on the edge of the sink.

"It's raining," she says, and then, as if the opening statement were the important one and what followed second considerations, "my mother said I can come but only for a while. Then I have to go home."

"And the wedding?" Jim asks. "Renee, how was the wedding?"

"My cousin is married and I went to hold the flowers. Did the showers go on today?"

"No," I say. "It rained all the time. It rained because you weren't here."

"I wasn't here; I was in the country." Her tongue escapes with her s's, resulting in a delightful lisp. She is wearing red pedal-pushers and a black knit sweater. The pants are wet through, molded to her lithe hips as though the very air between cloth and flesh is distasteful, something to be avoided. I think I would like to preserve her exactly as she is now. Preserve her, freeze her solid in this characteristic attitude. There is something erotic in the way she puts her finger in her mouth, her pale, wet lips circling about it as if obeying the instinctual urge to suck. "The showers didn't go on," she says quietly. "But it was hot. My daddy took off his shirt in the wedding but mommy told him don't."

Jim examines the water drip dripping from her tiny earlobes. "Did your daddy put it back on?"

"No. He told mommy it was too hot. We were in the country."

I turn my eyes to Jim, see and feel him laughing deep inside himself. On his face is an expression of an awesome joy. I like him this way; maybe now I am beginning to understand. Renee is his escape — his way out. Maybe she does appease his conscience and ease his guilt, but she is also the way through which he can enter into a new life. In a sense it is pure regression. He takes her shape, her age, her delight and makes them his own. I am full of admiration. I see that when he follows Renee into the pool he is her peer, with likes and dislikes the equal of hers. If it is a weakness it is a pardonable one. Let him have it.

"Renee," I say. "What would you like to do?" She looks from Jim to me, then back to Jim. She perambulates toward the cubbyhole in back where I keep my stock of equipment. In a few seconds her head appears around the corner, wet and tousled, the face tinged with disappointment.

"There aren't too many things to do, are there?" Back in the room, her eyes light on the checkerboard-covered table. "Jim," she says. "Play checkers with me." She knows, as I know, that he will never refuse her anything. He sits opposite the child, eyes glowing. I hear the rain letting up outside; I know that soon they will begin to trickle into the playground. First a few, maybe in two's and three's, but finally whole mobs of them will deluge the area even as the rain has been doing in its own steady way. While minutes before I would have welcomed a change in the weather, now, locked up here with Jim and Renee, I wish that the rain would continue. I take up a book and look at them over the top. He's letting her win; her black eyes shine with excitement.

Maybe it is the ease with which she won the first game; maybe it is just that her active little body is getting restless in the close quarters. When the game ends, she suddenly leans over and whispers something in Jim's ear. He smiles and shakes his head. "Renee, you've got to ask Paul about that; you know that's his department."

"But he'll say no. He never turns it on when it's not nice."

So that is it; she wants the shower. She turns to me, knowing I've overheard, and looks the question at me.

"You want to go into the *pool* on a day like this?" I say, wanting a pre-ordained answer to come from her, not from me. But she

keeps looking at me with those sexy eyes and I know she wants it, badly, as only a child of six can want. Of course I refuse, and she takes her defeat well and I think it will end here.

"Paul knows best," Jim says. He winks at her and she bathes him with a smile. She looks out toward the pool, then back at Jim. I want desperately to be included. "Want some cocoa, Renee?" Jim asks. "Paul, I think she could use something hot. And I'd like some coffee. Why don't you run out to Lou's and pick some up?"

I think it over; decide to go, feeling myself not needed. I take his money and go on outside, out into the steady drizzle.

* * *

I sit in a bar amidst old men who stare worshipfully up at a television set. As I sip a beer, the rain increases. I leave and stop into Lou's for the coffee and hot chocolate, then cover my head with a newspaper and trot back to the playground.

Through the driving rain I can barely make out the two figures, one large, one small, walking around the pool toward the heavy, cast-iron door on the ground, beneath which lie the valves to turn on the shower. I am willing to let Jim take the responsibility for Renee's enjoyment. It is silly — fantastic — but it is for her. I walk more slowly, through puddles and fallen leaves. Their voices are carried in the wind and rain, her high laugh forming a perfect duet with this low one.

The door is the type that leads into the outside cellar of many stores. It is old and the hinges are rusty and bent. Jim and I were given careful instructions to turn on the showers as a team, one descending while the other positioned himself near the top to keep back the crowds of inquisitive youngsters.

She has not put on her coat. I think of how much fun we can have together, tomorrow, when it will be a warm, sunny day. As I approach the beer suddenly falls in my belly, filling my bladder with a heavy, somehow exciting feeling. Jim raises the door by the handle and climbs down into the deep hole. A moment later water spurts up out of the shower, mixes immediately with the rain, and becomes a semi-permeable mist, opaque and grey. Jim begins to ascend, swinging himself up on his brawny arms like a prehistoric relic. The girl stands eyeing him for a moment, her voice bubbling a welcome.

When he is at the top they lean together to close the door. I look at her, glad that she is happy, taking pleasure in the way her body

curves backwards toward me. The back of her pants is muddy with symmetrical stains, as though my wet hands had patted her gently there.

I don't know why I can't shout out as Jim's hand slips from the rain-slick handle. He shouts: "Renee. Oh my God, Renee." She is already too far over, too far committed to Jim or to her own desire. The iron plate seems to hover in the air for a tantalizing second — for an hour, a year — before it comes plummeting down. It catches her as he tries to pull her back, catches her left shoulder and scrapes away a layer of white skin like a razor cutting through paper. I see the door resting malevolently on her for that same interminable length of time, and then she loses her balance and falls. Her scream comes up strangely, almost monotonously slow, as if from very far away. I hear her hit the bottom, hear cloth ripping as it tears on pipe. Then, miraculously, I am there and pushing him aside and climbing down down the ladder to where a pink mass lies crumpled in a corner. It is a long way down and she is dead when I reach the bottom. She has hit her head on one of the valves and it is angled awkwardly on her thin shoulders. I believe I am picking her up in my arms; I don't know. I only know the rain and the blood and, on top, the harsh, choked sobs coming from Jim's throat. My hands lift something, slide down and down to naked flesh. Blood is running in a diluted stream from her head, down to her soft buttocks. They are half bared; the pants had torn on the pipe during the fall. I am fondling and caressing her, my bloody hands trembling as they move over her body. And in the rain I can hear myself shout, now, at last, "I love her, you bastard, I love her!"

FOUR POEMS BY WACLAW IWANIUK

Translated from the Polish by Jagna Boraks

THE LEAF

End of season: I fell to the ground
no more to be kissed by a sunbeam
no more to be gathered
or trampled by a bird
the dew will ravish my eyes
the winds will stop squabbling behind me —

so many days
I thrived — growing —
into the softness of oxygen
into billowing air, into scorching heat
so many days
I absorbed the steep streams of sunlight —

my flat body
strung by the neck
sang hymns —

so many nights
whispered away with the crickets
talked away with the dew
on wax-green floors —

and now only human fate for me
I lie and I suffer
the pain of memory
not of flesh.

THOSE WHOM THE NIGHT RELEASES

Those whom the night releases bring with them darkness.
They drift from the ruins, like clouds of smoke.
And when they cross the horizon
The day turns its back on them; like man
The tree sweats and trembles before them;
The leaf's slender form blackens from inside;
Dewdrops rush thundering
Into the toadlike skin of the bark
And night enters, bolting the door.
Those whom the night releases, carry with them darkness.
They enter us through secret passages
To cast oblivion over our memories.

NAKED AS A BONE

To close one's eyes, not counting days
to be blind (the wind's corpulent arm
whisks away ashes above me).

Who owns this bottomless boat
on a deserted sea —
whose is this red and white sail
like a frayed skeleton?

Is there still room inside
for a credible word —
unsullied
not overheard
one's own?

Pure, without decoy
visa or passport,

naked as a bone.

DON'T TOUCH ME I'M FULL OF SNAKES

Don't touch me, I'm full of snakes
Dead soil without air
A cloud shot down by the wind
A river that was and no longer is,
Whose banks have turned to stone. A powerless word.
Don't touch me I prefer to carry myself
That which fills my dreams to the brim,
Years which prayer cannot undo.
I hide poisonous memories in myself
Vipers of flame and venom of gas.
I live like a mirror, my face towards the past.

WACLAW IWANIUK is a poet, translator and essayist. He was born in Warsaw, Poland, where his first books were published. After graduating at the Free University in Warsaw he joined the Polish Foreign Office and was posted to Buenos Aires. At the outbreak of war he joined the Polish Army in France and served with the Mountain Brigade and later the First Polish Armoured Division. In 1948 he moved to Canada, and is now employed as an interpreter by Toronto City Hall and the Ontario Provincial Government. He is the author of seven volumes of poems including his *Collected Poems* published in 1964 by Kultura, Paris. He has been translated into French, German and Italian and has been awarded several major Polish literary prizes.

TWO POEMS BY CHARLES KOLTZ

ONLY A HAMMER

through
his wicker ribcage
an icepick
spouting tattoos

and a concertina
wheezes inside.

Flatbush . . . the kharma
of basketball hoops.
the dead
are dead
or dead

now who dozes
with a fist for a dream
while the monkey
bares piano teeth.
tenement psyche
stitching the torso
of his clock . . .
only a hammer.

"hey, Irish!"
flop house
death, again
a whistler
on the tracks.

(the stripper mimics
sneakered birds)

will come
the rabbi dawn
by subway . . .

and a trolley
boarding
pale lovers.

NOCTURNE / GREEN

days decaying on the vine
my wine I down in swills
while fog wings strut
on stuttering flames . . .
who strings the cat gut streets
to anvil eyes?
nocturne / green
realm of lunar seams
my words diving seaward
lonely birds I swing on hinges,
a hermit's envoy
sent to scuttle mirrors.

all we all
are only this
    a stranger
      stranger
      strangler
      straggler
a stammer in a strange land.

I swab a brittle bone

with spittle . . .

behind my back
a life is growing tails
a child is sprouting rigid fingers
and peddlers ride
the night toward babel.

a bell rattles
in the school of the deaf
a scorpion backbending
        ever so
        ever so
        ever so
        slowly
asking this question upside down:

"thugs have scribbled hisses
on the tug boat whistle,

can you hear . . . ?"

CHARLES KOLTZ has been published in *Prism*, *Quarry*, *Fiddlehead*, *Wascana Review*, *Poetry of Our Times*, *Corduroy* and others. He is now gardening, writing, and running long distances in Cobble Hill, B.C.

BUT ALSO BRUTAL

MIKLOS RADNOTI

Translated from the Hungarian by Nicholas Kolumban

My parents died; my twin brother
died. My wife's small sister
and her husband as well.

Many people died and when we eat too much
for supper, we suddenly hear in our sleep
how under their graves

the nails grow with a shriek;
their hairs hissingly multiply.
Our lives are pure. We smile an easy smile.

My wife paces about in the room —
her skirt's feeble sound.
She arranges chairs with lustrous eyes.

Already she knows the dogs of the rich
bite and when you die,
they'll scrape you into the earth.

We live without fear; our days are simple
like a piece of paper
or the milk on our table

but also brutal
like the knife beside us
that shimmers with a slow glance.

MIKLOS RADNOTI, one of Hungary's foremost lyric poets, was killed in 1944 by the Nazis while en route to a concentration camp. His verse is often inventive and musical. He considered himself a champion of the poor.

NICHOLAS KOLUMBAN, a native of Hungary, is a naturalized U.S. citizen. His translations appeared in *Granite*, *West Coast Poetry Review*, *The Lamp*, and *Stinktree*. Stinktree Press will publish a book of his German translations this year.

FRANZ HOHLER was born in 1943 in Switzerland where he lives in Vetikon Am See. He is the author of several volumes of short stories and a number of plays. He also is a successful cabaret artist appearing in his own one-man shows.

INGEBORG LLOYD is a Graduate Student of Comparative Literature at the University of British Columbia.

THE ROOF

FRANZ HOHLER

Translated from the German by Ingeborg E. Lloyd

FOR A LONG TIME NOW I've been preoccupied with the notion of a roof.

This roof would be covering a country house which, towards the end of the last century, had been constructed in the style of a Scottish castle with granite blocks and Gothic windows. As the roof would be just as old as the house itself, it would have to be repaired now and then and a roofer would have to be sent up for this purpose.

This roofer, however, and here the story would take a turn towards the sinister, this roofer would never be seen again. A search would be made for him, probably the very same evening, but to no avail. In fact, the second roofer to climb up on the roof would not come back either and when finally the master roofer himself climbed up, he, too, would never be seen again. Now nobody would dare to go up on the roof any more; a plane would be flown over it, but from above everything would look normal. No one would be able to account for the disappearance of the three roofers; the bravest would venture as far as the attic and would not find anything there either, no hiding place, no refuge; and also round about the country house not one indication would be found of someone having fallen down. A part of the equipment which the first roofer had taken with him, would still be in the attic underneath the sky-light from which he had stepped out onto the roof, but the rope, to which he had tied himself, would not be visible anywhere on the roof.

Were I to hear of such an event, I would be able to explain it immediately; I perceive very clearly what happened there.

The roofer, who has climbed onto the roof through the sky-light, first secures himself by attaching to the inside of the sky-light a rope which he knots around his waist, as it is a very steep part of the roof which he is to repair. Then he sets out for the damaged spot which lies obliquely below him, in order to have a closer look at it before starting his work. But before he gets down there, he feels a jerk and notices that the rope is already quite tight. That surprises him because he had thought it to be long enough and he glances back. He then perceives that the rope only got caught, on a little turret actually, which projects from the roof. He takes two steps back and loosens the rope from the turret. At this time it strikes him that he had overlooked the turret before; it looks like a chimney but is too small to be one; then it's probably one of these ornamental chimneys which can sometimes be found on this kind of roof. Strangely enough an oval, slightly convex picture is mounted on the turret on the side facing the roof; it shows on a brownish background a brownish man with a moustache and a stand-up collar, and underneath it in cursive letters the inscription *"Il Dottore."* The roofer has never seen this before, and it isn't surprising that he stands for a while examining this picture. Then he is seen shaking his head and can be distinctly heard clearing his throat before descending again to the damaged spot. Now he has reached it and looks it over. Altogether eight tiles are missing; they probably slid down the roof and fell in the garden which can easily happen in stormy weather. But then he notices that there are still pieces of the top row — there are two rows of four tiles each — underneath the tiles just above them, that therefore the top tiles have been broken off, and that consequently an object must evidently have fallen onto this part of the roof. He now looks down into the hole expecting to see in the attic a big stone or some other missile which would have caused this break. It takes a while for his eyes to get used to the darkness of the attic; then he sees an apple lying on the floor and around it some pieces of tile. He peers into every corner of the loft, but he doesn't see anything but this apple. He can't imagine that an apple could have such results; it also seems unlikely to him that someone could have thrown this apple so high up; besides the apple doesn't appear to be at all bruised. When he retracts his head from the hole, he hears rustling above him, looks up and sees something he hasn't noticed before, an apple tree on the ridge of the roof. Now he is nonplussed. How could he have missed that? He decides to climb up to the ridge of the roof, where,

as soon as he arrives, he immediately feels the trunk of the apple tree and ascertains that it is a real tree. He also perceives that its roots disappear in the tiles as if they were earth, and no tile is fractured or shows even a fissure as is known to happen to walls in which a tree has taken root. The roofer also notices that the tree has more apples; he reaches for one of them which hangs a little lower, misses it and slips; he barely manages to hang on to the trunk shaking it so violently that apples are falling from all the branches and each apple hitting the roof breaks a hole in the tiles and disappears into the attic. The roofer is scared, he clings to the trunk with one arm, crouches on the ridge of the roof and looks around him — now the whole roof is riddled with holes and it's his fault. He wonders what to do and decides that he will have to notify the house owner of this incident, but that he will first try and get one of the apples to see why they have the force to break roof tiles. But when he is about to climb down to the sky-light, the roof appears so steep to him as no roof ever before; he sees how his rope hangs down from the sky-light and notices that his whole body is trembling. He hugs the tree with both arms, goes to sleep in this position and dreams that he is a roofer.

In the evening the second roofer pokes his head through the same sky-light out of which the first has climbed in the morning. He finds the rope of the first roofer attached to the inside of the sky-light, follows the rope with his eyes and sees that its end is lying by the gutter. He makes sure that the rope is firmly attached, climbs out onto the roof and, holding the rope, descends to the gutter, leans over a little and looks down; but there is no broken body lying anywhere on the ground. He discovers the damaged spot, carefully pulls himself up to it on the rope, and peers through the hole into the attic. What he sees now, he has never seen before. His heart begins to beat faster, he feels a pressure in his head, his cheeks get flushed, and he perceives that his member is swelling up. He can't look away, he even wants to go down there, but as he is about to climb through the hole, he notices that it isn't a hole at all, but that it is covered with tiles just like the rest of the roof, with the difference that a little piece in the centre of each tile is actually glass, and an eye which looks up at him is inserted in this glass. Now he also notices that he has lost his trousers and is standing there only in his shirt; he doesn't even have any underwear on. He tries to draw his shirt between his legs, but it's too short for that; with his left hand he covers his member which immediately becomes

limp again. Now he tries to return to the sky-light as quickly as possible; only now does it strike him that in almost every tile an eye is inserted. He keeps looking around for his trousers but can't discover them. On his return to the sky-light he notices that the rope he has been holding onto was attached to a candle which has burnt down very quickly and which, now that he is holding on to the edge of the sky-light, has reached the point where the rope was tied around it; the wax melts and the rope drops down into the abyss. Behind the candle he observes the inquring faces of the house owner and his wife who cover their eyes with their hands when he appears. Moaning with rage, the roofer jumps with long and dangerous leaps across to the main chimney in order to get out of their sight. He isn't particularly surprised to find behind the chimney a small pond with some mandarin ducks swimming noiselessly around on it and with a fisherman standing on the other shore who is casting for gold-fish the size of cabin trunks which can be seen gleaming at the bottom of the pond. He takes off his shirt and wraps it around his waist like a loin-cloth while the fisherman gives him a friendly nod and calls across to him: "This evening!" Then he falls asleep at the foot of a willow and dreams that he is a roofer who is looking for another roofer.

The master roofer, whose head emerges from the skylight only after dusk, is surprised by the brightness which still prevails up here and turns his flashlight off. He sees in front of him a narrow well-trodden path which leads to a news-stand. He hesitates at first and then sees no reason why there shouldn't be a news-stand here, climbs onto the roof and walks to the news-stand down the path which is covered with fine glass splinters. A woman, whose age is very hard to determine, is sitting in the news-stand; her bearing appears senile, but her face is unwrinkled. When the master roofer speaks to her, she doesn't look up, but keeps on taking small gloves out of a box placed in front of her and throwing them into a big pot standing next to her. When the master roofer speaks to her again, louder this time and with greater determination, she looks up and gazes at him. "I suppose you want earthighs?" she asks him. "No," the master roofer replies and is about to continue, however the woman says: "But I only have earthighs." "What are earthighs?" the master asks, his curiosity aroused. "Don't worry, you'll find out," answers the woman and again bends down to her gloves. The master roofer addresses her again and asks about his two roofers, but the woman doesn't look up any more, not even when

the master takes her by the shoulders. The master roofer looks around and perceives that he is in a mountainous region; rocky peaks are towering up but are all covered with tiles; further back he even notices a waterfall. But the path stops here at the newsstand; it doesn't seem possible to travel over the peaks, they don't have any barbs or snow fences either, and so he tries to address the woman once more. As he doesn't succeed, he reaches for an illustrated magazine which lies on the counter and leafs through it to fill in time. It's very old; on one page Kaiser Wilhelm is depicted visiting Palestine, and other pictures show gold rush towns in America with some figures loaded down with tools in large huts. On one of the last pages two men are portrayed who have committed a crime and have now been sentenced to death. Before reading on to find out what the nature of their crime was, the master recognizes his two roofers in these two men and immediately turns the page. On the next page, however, there is a picture of the executioner who will put the two to death, and in the executioner the master recognizes himself. Hurriedly he closes the magazine and is about to return it, when he sees that in the meantime the newsstand has been closed; the mountain peaks have become covered with a layer of ice and the return route is cut off by a wolf-hound carrying an iron bar in its teeth.

TWO POEMS BY GERRIT KOUWENAAR

Translated from the Dutch by William Vandelft

BUT THEN

But then that also happened that would have happened
had we remained air become
earth or only a lighted statue
or what once was or could have been

for instance
the tree makes a forest
the forest that causes wind
the light that caresses waste
the time that runs parallel to light

and then you think a great deal is squandered a great deal lost
in making, meat is
against blood, page
after page turns, decays, immortalizes itself
momentarily into truth and hardly
rustles any more,
falls completely silent
and it blows again
and while the leaves grow silently
branches contorting unleaf themselves
trees unbranching uproot themselves
houses go elsewhere to live
beds deeper in the ground become softer
you think
if you could translate everything in life
something ought to be made
that lies still for a moment

for instance
the dirty nail scratches open the clean wound
make a photograph of that before
he calls out something and bleeds to death —

THIS IS

This is not nice
this is not unreadable
this is not for children

this is no secret language
this does not elevate the people

this is the inside
of your outside door, surely you know
this: your hand
grows crooked with the latch

on the mat under your feet
the daily the weekly the monthly
the annual review

it snows in the heat
it dies in peace, letters
have eaten everything, nothing
is not true, nothing is past, nothing
is wasted —

GERRIT KOUWENAAR was born in 1923 and has published five volumes of poetry. These are from his latest book entitled *Landscape and Other Happenings.*

PAST

J. C. VAN SCHAGEN

Translated by William Vandelft

by your third year
none

by the fifth
fermentation

by seven
the eyes of your mother

by ten
that vacation

by thirteen
is in the history books

by sixteen
the naked ape, the dinosaur, the cell
or was it that evening with his first girl?

by twenty
the stars

by thirty
an optic fraud

by seventy
very far away — in front of you
a headland in the haze

(very freely after Tunikawa Shuntaro)

J. C. VAN SCHAGEN was born in 1891. This poem is from his collected works entitled *Fool's Wisdom.*

AB URBE CONDITA

JACQUES HAMELINK

Translated from the Dutch by William Vandelft and Charles Lillard

It was so hot that children like sauna bathers
were intoxicated with whiskey-soaked breadcrusts
that the men coming home from work in the evening
stepped out of their hides
and lip read stunned.

whole families sat
armed with leaf shades
on the roof.

they took each other's word
at holy communion.
bread went, speaking humbly on each lip,
around the street.
out of a salty guitar
a carpenter drank water.

people danced with their shadows,
contented patriarchs swaddled
their toes with tree roots.
the housegods chirped behind the hearth plate,
the muse had two clearly palpable breasts.

but from the high palace
a fanatic arm rose as usual toward the clouds
and in the calm
a powerful broom began to sweep the square.

around the table
standing ready for departure,
the family with coppergreen lips
followed the prayer of the housefather:

they were surrounded again by unexplainable
house-high statues of troopers and horses.

JACQUES HAMELINK was born in 1939 and is one of the leading Dutch postwar literary figures to emerge to international significance. His works have been translated into French, German, Danish, Swedish, and Spanish. The poet and translator are presently collaborating on the first English translation of his poetry.

THREE POEMS BY WILLIAM VANDELFT

FROM TIME TO TIME

with your arm in the corral
what the other does not know
stuck
grasping in thin air
the heaviness that comes
with its feet tied
what the mouth can do
in any given situation
speaking in a springtime of words
expecting the trees to bare themselves
trembling
reach out for a branch
you cannot hear its screams
that are silence
must it speak to you as a trumpet
pushing you back — the space
with your ear cocked to the ground
can you hear the echo
rejoicing in hymns
the ears of old men
hang like wasted jewelry
think of the space
that must be made for them
they are deaf
unknowing
the space must be made
in them — a vacuum
behind ice eyes
where the echo rebounds.

MINE

The cry of help
and what is the return
what is the balance balance
must be paid
paid like any other
in blood blood

answers to blood
saying
make it mine mine.

LET THERE BE A SIMPLE WOMAN

One reeking in silence
that permeates like a cloud of rain
permeates no smell of spring flowers
no smell of an autumn must.
She communicates the depth of a solstice
be it winter
    it is like an echo
of snowdrifts in mountain passes
the depth of it soft like a slow coma
(being but an uncertainty of waking)
and what it takes.

WILLIAM VANDELFT was born in 1949 in Katwijk, Holland. He is presently a student in the Creative Writing Department at the University of British Columbia.

YASUNARI KAWABATA (1899-1972), winner of the 1968 Nobel Prize for Literature, is noted for themes dealing with human love in interplay with nature. This story from *Novels Held in the Hand* (1969) was written in 1940.

TERRY NABATA is a graduate of the Creative Writing Department of the University of British Columbia. He is currently furthering his study of Japanese and Chinese Language and Literature.

THE BRIDE-TO-BE

YASUNARI KAWABATA

Translated from the Japanese by Terry Nabata

"WHOOSH," the earth shuddered. The house shook and the window-glass trembled.

"There it goes!" Sakio shouted and rushed out to the veranda.

From the woods the pheasants cried shrilly.

Summer was beginning with quite a large eruption of Mount Asama. In the smoke, rising column-like from the mouth, you could see firework colours. Lightning? Or burning stones?

Sakio's father and mother remained quietly seated on the sofa in the house watching the eruption of the volcano. They didn't go to the veranda. There was a good view of Mount Asama through the window.

In Karizawa one of the criteria of land value is the quality of the view of the mountain. It is customary for guests who visit the cottages in the area to say, "I have seen the mountain."

Within human memory, this mountain has been alternately clothed by cloud or laid bare and since its skin is naked because of its activity, the mountain's colour varies with the season and changes with the passage of time.

Sakio's cottage faced south, but the woods on the west side had been cleared, since that side afforded a view of Mount Asama. Only a solitary elm stood to block the afternoon sun.

Around the tree, unencumbered by any other growth, the tips of the branches bent this way or that, growing freely, and because it stood with nothing for comparison, it seemed larger than the house. Its delicate leaves would quiver with the slightest of breezes.

During his childhood, with fairytale naiveté, Sakio cherished the elm tree, a green umbrella of happiness. At the foot of its trunk there was always a rattan chair. While he was held by his mother, who liked sitting in that chair, he would allow the light which seeped through the back of the leaves to wash his face in green

shadow. A childhood memory. And Sakio also remembered from his childhood that his parents used to laugh, because every time Mount Asama erupted, he would run out to the veranda. He himself didn't know why he did it.

The veranda of his house ran along the south and around the west side facing the volcano. The elm tree was in the west, but slightly south of the mountain.

An evening moon was up when Sakio rushed out.

It was clear to the far horizon in this moonlight and the smoke lifted its head in the deep quiet sky. It was as though gigantic masses of jet black rock were spilling over one another. The earth had flexed its mighty biceps.

Immediately after the explosion, the smoke looked as if some terrifying force had fused it into a solid body. But after a while, it would ascend to a height of several thousand metres and the ashes would spread for miles around. All this force released from the cannon mouth of the earth. Nothing else could demonstrate power like this. Different from a typhoon or a tidal wave, a volcano was a sudden block of power.

Those photographers attempting to take pictures of eruptions of Mount Asama would compete to catch the exact moment or the one immediately after the eruption, and Sakio was the same. If the smoke had risen to its limit, or spread out, or trailed off to the side he did not feel as though he had seen the real eruption.

In this case, the tension was already slackening, and the fascination diminishing. The lightning-like sparks in the smoke had disappeared. At the moment of the explosion, overcome by a shock of excitement, you forget fear, but by the time the smoke comes invading the sky overhead, only the fear remains. When confronted by the great power of nature, it is possible to react with power, but in the end, perhaps all that's left is weakness.

Because Sakio rushed out with the first sound of the explosion he expected to see the ideal eruption.

He still had the feeling of massive rocklike smoke heavy in the evening sky.

Since it was still evening, of course many people were watching, but an intense loneliness closed in on Sakio as if no-one else but himself were watching.

In a desolate uninhabited world, the earth erupts. Then suddenly, the silence of a snowfield.

Sakio had put his arm around the wooden post of the veranda

and was studying the volcano. The jet of smoke twisted and braided itself. The smoke appeared to be moving sluggishly but actually it was ascending at twenty metres per second. In one minute that was more than a thousand metres.

Fortunately, since there was no wind, it went up in a straight cloud. Its head was opening up like an umbrella or mushroom, starting to spread across the sky. It began to creep into the sky over Sakio's head.

Since the moon was in the east, the smoke drifting from the west met twilight like a sash of mist.

The thick column of smoke crumbled. Sakio felt something fearful descending from the clouds of dim light. At exactly that moment Hiroko's hand lightly brushed Sakio's shoulder. Sakio was so absorbed in watching the volcano that he mistook her scent for that of the eruption.

He was startled, feeling that Hiroko's scent was overpowering him. His shoulders trembled.

Hiroko said, "It's frightening," and she quietly came close enough to touch his thoughts.

"Huh. It's not frightening." Sakio felt a false note in his voice and looked down.

The earth was dark although the moonlight spilled faintly through the thick broad-leaved thickets into the surrounding woods where the pheasants cried out shrilly.

Again Sakio looked at the sky.

"Isn't it frightening?" Hiroko whispered again.

The cloud of black smoke obstructed the moonlight, starting to hang down like a curtain of ill omen.

"It's not frightening," Sakio answered brusquely.

"Really?" she said. "I've been told that you like volcanic eruptions."

"It's not exactly that I like them."

"Well, just now your mother said so. She laughed and said, 'Flying out like that, such a strange boy'." Hiroko spoke in the manner of a child. Or perhaps it was a lover's tone of voice.

Hiroko was startled by the eruption. A fear that she wasn't even aware of made her particularly feminine.

Sakio remained silent.

The girlish sweetness of Hiroko's voice touched him. It made him sad. Something from his childhood, some remembrance was conjured up in his mind.

Hiroko put her finger on Sakio's shoulder as if to give a sign and said, "Let's go inside."

"Well," Sakio said but did not move.

"How long are you going to look at this? It's a kind of obsession isn't it?" But then, Hiroko had also lapsed into immobility, watching.

"Your mother is a bit unconventional," she said smiling a little. "I thought that your mother was watching me for a while when she said, 'You got suntanned' as if in admiration. 'If your mother were around, I guess she wouldn't let you do a thing like tennis,' she said. She was talking about my mother. That's why I came out to the veranda. I was startled as though something wrong had been said . . . but it was wrong of me to have come out and left her there. It's embarrassing, so let's go in together."

"When did your mother die?"

"Mother?" she answered with her finger on his shoulder. "In my seventh year. The year I entered primary school. Because I was born before April."

Sakio felt the softness of Hiroko's finger. It burned his shoulder.

Because Sakio was only wearing a light summer shirt, he felt Hiroko's finger was touching his bones and he blushed.

"I wonder if your mother and father find my story so surprising?" she continued.

Sakio didn't answer. He couldn't answer. He had to shake off his boyish shyness.

"They seemed quite surprised. Maybe I should have come and talked to them."

Again Sakio was silent. He felt a rising resentment toward Hiroko. Then they heard the sounds of stones falling on the roof. It was like hailstones only hollower.

"Oh my." Hiroko clutched Sakio's shoulder. "Oh that's terrible."

The sound came faster. Small stones tumbled over the roof and pelted the broad leaves of the trees.

"It's dangerous, Sakio," she said trying to draw back, though Sakio resisted, saying:

"No, it's OK. Just coarse volcanic ash."

"Ash? No, not ash, but rocks."

"No. This size is still called volcanic ash. Up to three millimetres it is called ash."

"Not really . . ." Hiroko was exasperated.

There was a growing threat on the roof and in the woods.

Because they were irregular, the sounds of falling were all the more ominous. She cowered and became tense.

"Sakio! Sakio!" his mother's voice was heard calling.

"Sakio!" Hiroko said, almost shouting, putting her other arm on his shoulders, almost pushing him down, "Really, it's dangerous."

"It's OK," he said, forcefully shaking himself loose.

"My! You're strange," she staggered and moving a little, looked at Sakio's face. "Sakio, you're crying. Why?"

As she spoke, Sakio blinked and he couldn't hold back his tears. They flowed down his cheek.

Hiroko reached for his shoulder again.

"Why? I'm sorry, have I done something wrong?"

"It's not that."

"What's making you sad, then?"

"I'm not sad."

"Why then?"

He didn't even know himself why he was crying. The moment he heard the stones fall, some kind of support was suddenly removed.

This was totally unexpected to Hiroko. Some purity in the boy came through, but she also felt that this stemmed from the unpleasant selfishness of a boy of fourteen or fifteen. Feeling it burdensome, she stood close to Sakio.

"Ashes fell," Sakio said.

Leaves started to fall with a pattering sound.

The sound of the small stones was already infrequent.

"Yes, ashes fell, but it's OK now."

"Yes."

"And what about you, you're OK?"

Without answering and looking at the sky, "They probably fell a long way, didn't they?"

Muddied with a heavy ash coloured mist, the moonlight night had a tiring gloom. The two people stopped hearing the sound of ash falling in the woods.

"The rustling sound is nice, isn't it?" Hiroko said in a small voice and while studying Sakio's face. "So, I'll be going. You've stopped crying?"

Sakio was silent.

Hiroko, from outside the window, waved goodbye to Sakio's parents.

The mother came out to the veranda trying to prevent her from leaving till the ashes had stopped falling.

"Mother, the umbrella," Sakio said.

"Oh, yes," and the mother called the maid, asking her to fetch the umbrella.

"Mother, here's one for you."

"No, Sakio you see her home, please."

"No no, I'm fine, it's OK," Hiroko said as she entered the shrub garden and went down the hill.

Sakio followed her.

At the sound of footsteps, she waited under a large walnut tree.

"Thanks. As far as the town?" she asked, as she covered Sakio with the umbrella. "It seems we don't need the umbrella."

"I'll hold it."

"It's OK."

"I'll hold it."

"All right."

She passed Sakio the umbrella.

"Last summer when there was a large eruption I put this umbrella upside down and left it in the garden."

"Did it collect volcanic ash?"

"Yes. It amounted to about a third of a bucket."

While walking and talking, Hiroko again put her arm around Sakio's shoulder.

With only one umbrella this way of walking was the best, but Sakio fell completely silent.

Hiroko said gently, "What's the matter? Are you sad again?"

When they crossed a bridge from the path in the woods, rays from the hazy moon were falling on the wide road.

"Hiroko, why are you going to get married?" said Sakio in a rush.

Hiroko was startled but starting a light laugh replied, "Well, is it so strange for me to get married?"

"I mean, it's someone you don't know," Sakio said and in a trembling voice continued, "although there are so many people who like you . . . I know them."

"To a person I don't know well?" Hiroko said to herself as if singing, and parroting his words. "That's the way it goes."

"I can't stand this. It's strange to me," he said as if in anger, shrugging his shoulders. He shook off her hand.

He thought it was not permissible for the bride-to-be to casually put her arm around his shoulders.

TETSUO ANDO was born in 1929 and graduated with a B.A. from Hirosaki University in 1954. After being a high school English teacher, he is now an assistant professor at Hachinohe Technical College, Hachinohe, Japan.

DOUBLE SUICIDE

YASUNARI KAWABATA

Translated from the Japanese by Tetsuo Ando

SHE RECEIVED A LETTER from her husband. Two years before, having tired of her, he had disappeared from their home. The letter bore the postmark of a distant place and said:

"Do not let our child play handball. The sound of the ball beats upon my ears and strikes against my heart."

So she took the ball away from her nine-year-old daughter.

Soon another letter came, bearing the postmark of a different place. It said:

"Do not let our child wear shoes to school. The sound of them bothers my ears and jolts my heart." So the daughter was told she must wear soft sandals now instead of shoes, but she cried bitterly and refused to go to school any more.

A month later a third letter came. This time the handwriting showed some evidence of the writer's sudden senile deterioration. Again the letter admonished:

"Do not let our child eat from a china rice-bowl. The sound grates on my ears and will tear my heart to pieces."

So the mother fed her daughter with her own chopsticks, making no noise and treating her like a very small child. It reminded her of those happy years when the parents and their child of three lived together in harmony.

But the girl took her rice-bowl out of the cupboard, without her mother's permission. Seeing this, the mother snatched the bowl, and hurled it fiercely against the garden-stone. The sound was like the bursting of her husband's heart. The mother, suddenly arching her eyebrows, flung her own bowl to the ground. Was this also the sound of her husband's heart being torn to pieces? She then pushed the dining table violently out into the garden. That horrible sound

— what was it? She flung herself at the wall, striking it with her fists. Then she hurled herself at the sliding door like a spear, and tumbled down on the other side. What was that sound?

The daughter, alarmed by this, gave a wild cry of "Mother, mother!" and clung to her mother's body only to receive a resounding slap on the face. Oh, the sound!

Like an echo of this slap, another letter came from yet another faraway place, different from any of the previous ones. It said:

"You two are to make no sound at all; stop the sound of the doors and even the sound of your breathing. Stop the ticking of the wall clock, I tell you!"

"You two, you two!" she muttered to herself with tears falling in large drops. Then she no longer made a sound. Even the slightest sound was forever stilled in the house — both mother and daughter were dead!

But the strangest thing of all was that her husband was found dead beside them!

BEFORE DAWN IN LATE AUGUST

SUSAN POLICOFF

What I leave behind follows
so closely my shadow has two heads;
crawls in my shoes/climbs my legs;
remains

The leaves bend as if a weight
had passed, the night's black robes
rustle, a sound like glass mice
moving their small feet

What are you
a face like sunrise
a name carved on the wind
a burnt heart branding me

If I could lie on my back,
a handprint on the grass,
fingers of gravity pressing me;
watch earth move/ sky turning,
perhaps then it would leave;
but this hump on my back,
the mind's blind camel,
even when I lie flat it lifts me
from the ground
thinking the sky is its desert

SUSAN POLICOFF graduated from the State University of New York at Albany in 1967 and is currently living on a farm in Michigan. Her work has appeared in a number of literary magazines.

LANDSCAPE ONE

ANDREA MOORHEAD

as if the lost land could matter, bear heed, or fruit, or better yet,
those amber chains, silencing my heart, my song wildly fertile
in this stone creeping rage. . . . as if lost land could shelter, ease
a violet trembling down waters, shaking all vengence to a cloud,
pale enough at afternoon, remembering only the rain, fog bending
my will, willow chute and this other one left in scorn, this other
solace bent out of shape, reaching a threshold of pain no one
has ever endured. . . . captured in waves, beach dirt seeming so
pure, amber hearted stalks, and a mint growing beside the house,
known fertile whisperings of land locking in the swift rapids, the
sheltering igloo another has built, stolen from wastes he has
seen mirrors, tines, bells without tone, records, disks of burnished
metal, a host of pigeons gathering crumbs, ground meat papers
in wind, hollow out my vengence, hollow away sound, sight,
miracle ice deluding all cousins to partake: as if the land lost has
vengence. as if heart and field, as if this metering night has
another twine, another disk to burnish curious hope, to shelter
a thread without whispering others, a dark clear shape, born under
rock gravely sown, under cannibal tone, lingering by the
swift new shades.

as if these chains bend meat, know a juice so fragrant, no man
has borne a basket, ambling fruit along the dust, searching only
a grain another man leaving from fields' wild darkness, stoops a
quartz grain for child, a quartz new grain washed in a thousand
rains, a thousand lurking ways of whispering dirt . . . as if new
rains have those pines sheltered, darkly remembered in my
youth cove, in my startling whisper, cherished a tine before rumble
has made it cream, before another host has whispered there, leaving
trails, songs, beings of another name, a trace, a trail leading
land aching my soul has dirth, a dirt bearing my wings
to tarnished earth.

as if these chains sun streaming from my wings, hollow another
nest, another search along the country, valley echoing my only stop,
the time when youth had blanket fever, dirt gathering a shining
comb, cock crowing at the seepage vein, road falling, faltering
a mine of growing wisdom all along the way . . . pines, lilies
out of sight and this starkness greets a barren road, a stone
bending form to crystal flame another night, another day
no man has ever seen.

ANDREA MOORHEAD is editor of *Osiris*, an international journal. She is the author of two volumes of poetry: *Iris* (1970) and *Morganstall* (1971) (Fiddlehead Poetry Books). Her poems have appeared in numerous North American and French reviews. She is currently working on a series of essays on modern French poetry.

THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

ST-JOHN SIMMONS

The fire rages and rages in my ears.
My eyes see the tangled weeping of men and animals
Cover the sparse sacred tree.
Stones ache in my palms. Birds strain in the sky of my chest.
I hear the prayers and songs men have invented —
See the roads paved from town to scattered town —
While I strive, day after day, to draw the perfect message on water,
Or spend nights in the absence of imperfect words.
I hear The Voice rise from my own heart;
And I play at locating demons in the bowels of lambs.
Men who come to me for warnings or answers
Would do best to rip open my stomach.
There lies my murderer, whom I have long acknowledged.
It is his singing of my destruction, of the knife at my throat,
That causes me to scream these trance-like lies.
It is time to understand our misunderstanding.

ST-JOHN SIMMONS was born in Vancouver in 1947. He is a graduate of the Creative Writing Department, University of British Columbia. He is presently teaching Creative Writing and Modern Poetry. His work has been published in magazines in Canada, England, Australia and the U.S.A. and in *Contemporary Poetry of British Columbia.* It has been broadcast on C.B.C. "Anthology".

GUILLERMO MENESES is a Venezuelan who has been writing since 1930. He is the author of novels, including *La misa de Arlequin*, and of numerous stories. "Destiny is a Forgotten God" is drawn from the collection *Diez Cuentos* (1968), which spans his career. As "El destino es un dios olvidado," the story was published in 1958.

CHARLES M. SPHAR is a graduate student in English at New Mexico State University. He writes fiction of his own and has been working at translation from Spanish for some time.

DESTINY IS A FORGOTTEN GOD

GUILLERMO MENESES

Translated from the Spanish by Charles M. Sphar

SPRAWLED ON A MATTING of delicate fibers, quiet between the sheets that the servant Bravo brought him, the Indian, Vencido, reviews his memories, collects himself in the stages of his own existence, hides in the corners of his childhood and youth.

The images of the gods are with him in absolute clarity, as if he still listened to the words of the old men who guided his first steps over the earth, as if he looked at the gestures of the priests, the hand dyed in blood from his sacrifices laid out near the sacred figures: feathers of the wind, blue stone of water, red tongue of fire, restless and fervent emerald of the ancestral lizard.

All those signs come back to him clear and intact, as if he never had forgotten them, as if they had been a permanent kernel of life and not an ornament of thought, a line invented by the echo of respected voices.

He hasn't been able to sleep for a long time, although neither can he affirm that he is awake. Occasionally they have given him herb juices to drink which lie pooled in the hollows of his eyes and in the back of his head. The pain that the torture has left him makes the relief of activity impossible, and so he has passed many days dozing, nevertheless ready to observe closely the shadows approaching from the dark world where his steps fall.

Some weeks ago Bravo came, the servant who was always a dependable guardian, friend, sometimes brother, son of the slave

woman who liked to adorn herself with feathers, she who knew how to cook ointments and prepare delicate dishes; she who — at times — was called to share the father's bed.

Bravo came to wash his body, to care for him. He brought clothes, water, a small jar full of broth from the herbs his mother had boiled and poultices to close the wounds and prevent the putrefaction of a man's flesh: the remedy that makes the suffering skin clean and healthy.

Bravo washed him with great care while speaking words of rage and assured him of a quick return to the exercise of his power, to the right to pronounce the words they both believed true. He encouraged him, saying that nobody orders a prisoner washed only to give him later to death, that one doesn't make a body clean and fresh if one wants to break it and hand it over to the forces of night, to the wings and claws that engender the shadow.

He wanted to dispute these ideas, to say that neither he nor Bravo knew anything of the customs of the conquerors and that it was not contradictory for them to believe it necessary to cleanse a body of its filth and even adorn it with the colours and shines of diverse clays, of feathers and several metals, with the intention of offering so luxurious a victim to that absurd god formed by two crossed pieces of wood.

So he wanted to say, but the effort necessary to form the words was lacking. He was limited to smiling and complaining a little, when Bravo, passing the moist cloth over his flesh, accidentally grazed the edges of the inflamed wound, with its yellow flower of pus over the red cleft where the blood had dried.

A painful burning sprang from the torn place (a little below his left nipple, as if it would open the way for the red fountain) and he had to bite his tongue so as not to cry for mercy or scream the incoherencies that men usually let out when their poisoned flesh is punished.

Bravo said:

— Scream. It's all right. It's your servant and your only friend who hears you. I swear to you your enemies will pay for everything. The one who mistreated you yesterday — the one dressed the colour of tobacco, who seems to be custodian of the god made of crossed poles — I'm going to tear out his heart and burn it before the Great Lizard. But first he's going to suffer splinters of gold under his fingernails, and thistles in the edge of his eyes. He's going to walk over live coals before his spine is broken. He's going to cry.

To Vencido, Bravo's ideas seemed trivial. He could give no significance to those words of honest strength that savored vengeance and death between the fangs.

Refreshed by the touch of the damp cloths, he spoke to Bravo with distracted affection: he told him they were all at the mercy of the conquering enemies and that one could only wait to see whether anger or compassion would direct the acts of the foreigners who occupied the city.

Vencido said:

— Remember the Song of the Wind and the Rain. Talk to Fino, the potter who made me the clay figure adorned with blue stones. He knows that what is happening is inevitable. For a long time the priests have said that those who come from the direction of the dawn will be victorious. The foreigners are the colour of morning, when the clouds conceal the sun.

Bravo was furious; he said, dry, respectful, and sad:

— The old songs only have force when men have lost their will. When the heart weakens, thought invents songs.

Bravo restrained his fury and bowed in farewell.

Vencido — wounded leader and prisoner — stayed in the half-light of the cell, between the damp, lukewarm rags. He feels the heat as if it were a blanket over his skin. He is fatigued and serene as if his spirit were barely retained by the limit of his flesh, by the thin, dark material that covers his muscles. Under his pale and sallow fingernails, a certain cold indecision.

He thinks he is going to die. The idea of Death doesn't trouble him. He is sure now that he will die serenely and that his people will remember for generations the words and gestures that are to compose his moments of agony. The dark-skinned people will add those moments to the sacred legends. They will recite the story of his farewell as a part of the poems narrating the birth of the nation and the creation of the city. The words he says while the birds of Death and the flames of Life struggle in his bones will be similar to those relating the deeds of the ancient gods and the encounter with the Great Lizard.

The prisoner Vencido thinks he is going to die and prepares himself. He invents the sound of his farewell; the final, definitive gestures. They rise over his death like a web suspended in the afternoon breeze, between the fires of dusk.

He wishes to consider the many forms they could give to his death. If the pale enemies reasoned like the dark-skinned people in

these matters, his death would be that so often ordered for conquered leaders in war. The priest (in this case, the one in the tobacco-coloured robe) would slash open a noble door, take his heart, and burn it in honour of the Great Lizard, who has feather and scale, anger and agile feet, erect tongue and vigilant eye. For today's conquered people, God would be — nothing more — the two sticks of wood — a terrible and dark little god in his insignificance.

But something different could happen. There are people who use their cruelty to design violent rites, games of blood and torture, people for whom Death must be painful and degrading, full of redness and black anxiety; people for whom Death is the Great Prostitute, who asks the price of a man and awaits — dry, hard, inimical, smiling — her victory over the desires, the evidence of sacrifice spilled over her bright belly, joyfully untouched and exacting.

Perhaps the conquerors would offer their weary soldiers a spectacle, a festival, a great game, a ritual ceremony. Perhaps they would present the vanquished as a victim, heat a lance over coals in the temple, and sink it very gently into his side.

Some time ago events began to resemble his fantasy.

Still living, Vencido nurses his wound, red like a thistle fruit marking the place where the blood wells up. When the lance neared his heart, the anguished flesh opened to suck that terrible spasm of pain and loathing. He believes that he maintained a look of serene arrogance, revealing his contempt for those who caused him such ignoble pain. Surely it's true. If he hadn't acted as a leader deserving respect, Bravo wouldn't have come to care for him and to demonstrate his rage, as is only done between friends.

(The foreigners discussed, it seems, the method of torture applicable to a conquered leader. They didn't continue the method of the lance. Vencido didn't know if they considered that system execrable, or too little charged with pain, or incompatible with the status of a warrior and magistrate. He felt he understood the foreigners' belief that they had made one of their own gods suffer the torment of the lance before death: he thought he understood that god to be the same one whose symbol is the two pieces of wood.)

Vencido, prisoner, reflects on various final phrases appropriate to the different possible forms of his death.

He thinks he will know how to die. And he doubts that he has lived in an exemplary manner. He would hope for his works of

government — the city's aqueduct, the organization of the ceramic workshop, the statues made by those who work the stone, the collection of the old songs and the ordering of the figures of the gods and the forefathers, the setting of the prices in the markets and fairs — to be respected equally with his last voice.

He is tranquil and tired.

After Bravo's ministrations the images that passed from the certainty of dream to the uncertain shadow of a half-vigil have gone: the blue stone of the water, the tongues of fire, the feathers of the wind, the scale of the Lizard painted with mud, have ended their journey in Vencido's thoughts.

Those hairy figures of monkeys that played with charred sticks and made a sliver of stone dance between their long black fingers have vanished too; the laughing monkeys that demonstrated, balanced on the point of a thread, a crystal candlestick filled with light, like the marketplace in daylight, like the lake in the afternoon, like the sky in the gold of the sun, like a drop of water on the edge of a leaf, like a live coal, like any crystal.

Vencido is tired, almost happy at times. He would happily chant some of the old songs, but the words escape from his mouth and he only says wind, water, rock, sand, while thinking of the primitive city, the one his forebears founded beside the lagoon, in the place where the green lizards congregated around the great emerald of the ancestral lizard.

When Bravo came to wash his wounds in the prison, he spoke to him of vengeance and triumph. His somnolent rest was clarifying the figures of the gods, of the restless demons of the fever, of the dancing monkeys that played with the lights of the world and were mockery and pain inside his own ruined body.

Vencido didn't know how much time had passed during the half-light of the dream while his flesh was closing over the lance wound.

Every night a raving flower of cries arose from his weariness, a burning arrow-wound of uproar.

It seemed that in some remote district (in his opinion, where the merchants from the South reunite, those who sell feathers and fangs of wild beasts and the green stones from which are carved the lizards of the priests' necklaces; those who offer snake venoms and various oils and herbs that cure or sicken) a great festival had been initiated, an intense reunion of those who excite the people, dressed in colours like a bird, like a ceramic plate, like a mound of fruit,

like a rain of stars, like a flaming stone fallen in the waters of the night.

Vencido had the impression that a great festival had begun and that, probably, the tumultuous joy of the sellers had degenerated into quarreling and clamour. (The men from the South usually cause disagreeable scenes of drunkenness and disorder when they come to the city to sell their mysteries and to carry away the memory of a night. The southerners argue and talk; they don't understand the seriousness of the city people; they don't know how to remove the knife in silence or wound without speaking.)

As if in secret correspondence with the noise from outside, the prison is full of movements and whispers and the clash of irons. The festival (Vencido's heart was happy for the first time in a long time and his resolve was hardened) was in reality combat, and the foreign conquerors were restless with fear and anxiety. He heard the cry of their arms; the guards ran from side to side responding to different orders. The warrior with the face of a red-haired monkey stopped before the door of the cell and said to Vencido:

— Look at me well. So you know me and can say that I never caused you harm.

Voices and lights interrupted the world for a long time. There were fires (a flame winked even in the shadow of the cell) and the shout grew and scattered only to rise again in distant places. A long time passed as a great fire of heat and noise crumbled into isolated fires. Toward daybreak, there was only a small flame that burned here and there among the ashes of the stillness.

With the first light of day, quietness. A silence so intense that it contained — in a minimum of its enormous quiet — the fall of a drop of water. It made him thirsty.

Soon armed men could be heard approaching. The invaders shouted again, but there was no clash nor combat; merely, from time to time, a sigh of pain, a moan restrained by willpower. In his anxiety Vencido swells with pride that his people can curb the edge of their rage until time to thrust it into the enemy. A voice barely louder than a conversation between friends says that a foreigner has died. Vencido sharpens his hearing for a murmur from outside, as he strains his eyes to catch the weak light that is the echo of morning between the walls of his jail.

The enemy soldiers returned to the prison. Two men forcibly entered Vencido's cell. A little later the voice of Fino — the artisan who makes the jars of red earth — painted his figure in memory.

Fino said:

— We are conquered.

It was natural for a man like Fino to affirm so evident a truth, a truth that someone else would try to deny. The one who replied must have been a boy engaged in his first games of war:

— He who accepts his defeat is the conquered one.

Fino insisted tranquilly:

— I say conquered. Not dead.

Fino knows how to speak; for a while he recites the ancient poems while his fingers give form to the clay jars and plates, reddening with eternal designs: with the signs of the gods.

Before the door, illuminated by a big flame, paused the enemy who looks like a red monkey. With his right hand he touched his forehead, his chest, his left shoulder, his right shoulder, as if covered with the absurd image of that object they worship: the two crossed poles. He looked deep inside, scrutinizing the cell where the three shadows sprawled on the floor could barely be distinguished. The new prisoners smelled of bloody sorrow, of sweaty pain. The red monkey spat; he uttered some insult between the bars. The three betrayed shadows kept still.

— What has happened? — asked Vencido.

Fino understood who was asking the question.

— It happened, Señor. We forget for an instant that we are conquered slaves.

— I am a warrior — said the other shadow — and I will die in combat for the right to vanish in the sunlight. But why do you say "señor"?

Fino replied:

— Because he is our only Señor, our only God.

A great sadness filled the darkness of the cell. The hearts of the wounded coincided with the distant drop of water in the stillness of the jail, in the silence of the city.

— Pardon me, pardon me. I didn't know — said the warrior.

— There is no god — said Vencido.

— Not everyone thinks the same — insisted the young voice.

It was the bitterest reproach. The boy didn't accept that Vencido denied himself and sought to abdicate his position. When Vencido asked about Bravo, the young voice answered with displeasure:

—He was fighting, like everybody. Ready to die, like everybody. For believing that there is a God.

— I am wounded and a prisoner — said Vencido.

— Bravo is dead. But he was our leader for an hour and in that hour the victory was ours, and Bravo had time to offer the Great Lizard the heart of the foreign God's guardian, who dared to insult you. He carried the little brown-robed man to the altar of the Lizard. Now, Bravo is dead and his body sustains the birds that thrive on putrid flesh. They have hanged him in the middle of the plaza.

Fino interrupted:

— These men are strange. They don't celebrate sacrifices. They smash, destroy, shame, and expose the corpses in the plaza.

— We are alone. The friendly cities have been conquered.

— We need a leader. A true leader. The one who knew how to conquer from the shore of Death.

Vencido conceded:

— My will is broken by anguish and uncertainty.

— Name a successor.

— I don't know which of my brothers is alive. I would have to consult with the elders.

Finally light entered the cell. Vencido greeted Fino, who answered him wearily with a fixed smile, a red wound near his mouth. The artisan was working something between his fingers. At his side was the young warrior, apparently asleep, with many bloodstains and bruises and a bloody line on his forehead.

— What are you making, Fino? — asked Vencido.

— I'm making a figure with earth and saliva and a little blood: the Great Lizard.

— What is the young one's name?

— I'm called Pájaro — said the false sleeper — and when I die in combat, I will vanish in the sunlight with Bravo, my leader. My Señor.

Bravo is dead. Fino and Pájaro and the others — whose names don't exist — have been buried in the earth or in the dark niches of the prisons or in useless work that allows no revolts nor cries.

Vencido, however, has been moved to the luxurious apartments of the palace, which he may continue to occupy as his own. He has returned to direct the official ceremonies and judge the matters and disputes as he did before the arrival of the foreigners: but, when he acts and decides, one of the conquering leaders is present, and it is necessary to communicate in his language a summary of the matter tried and of the decision. The foreigner can reverse him if he considers the sentence unjust.

In fact, the representative of the invaders seldom has exercised

that right. He is a curious observer of how the customs of the dark-skinned people differ from his own.

Vencido and the witness of the conquerors understand each other well; it is rare that the observer questions a text from the translators who announce the results of the deliberations. Vencido is merely an interpreter more respected than the others. He has the right to a little reverence.

There are moments for the respected interpreter in which shame burns his ears and he feels as if his blood were stopped. The assurance of being alive bothers him, of eating, of sleeping, of having to ask a woman for her nights.

(He has believed himself powerful in the moment of love, possessor of the dark moments of his occasional companion — capable, she too, of another dark power in the common comedy of deceitful tenderness. The two are deceived by the pretense of giving, one to the other, as if they were free.)

He is alive. He feels disgust for himself because he is alive. Yesterday he was surprised by his own laughter on hearing a joke from the captain of the foreign guards — the one with a monkey's red hair — and felt shameful, sickened by having laughed.

He knows that Death — one of those many deaths that he could imagine as a lesson, an example, or a legend of his people — would be the only gesture that would redeem the insignificant existence he has accepted. But he knows too that he won't be able to make his choice of deaths.

He has been slothful and cowardly.

Still, in rare moments of hope, he wishes to believe that he will know how to choose the hour of his solemn disappearance. When a man despises himself, an ephemeral encounter with a form of hope is the delusion that permits him to endure a little more, always a little more.

A few days ago the idea came to him that the woman they granted him as a companion — one of those who served in the palace and fell into prostitution with the foreign soldiers, bitter and smiling with rancor because they have struck her like a stray dog — she could become pregnant with a dark son for whom life would be nothing but hatred and contempt.

Almost intolerable, that terrible possibility.

Nevertheless, although besieged by all the phantoms of shame and sorrow, Vencido delays the instant of his voluntary death. He defends himself, saying that he must die only when he has examined

the events that produced his spectacular fall from a position of power to the dirty reality of defeat.

He has obtained a poisoned arrow and he keeps it always in reach of his hand like an indispensable support, like a sign of rank. When he sends away the bitter prostitute whose enjoyment they grant him, he puts the arrow to his side. There he holds the arrow, a very thin wife with a load of dreams in her sharp head. As if pointed at the centre of his anxiety, the sting nears the mark adorning Vencido's side, the already closed door to his heart. It is a sacred claw dyed in blood, like the gesture of the priests who used to point to the sacred figures: feather of the wind, blue stone of water, living tongue of fire, restless emerald of the ancestral lizard.

Sprawled on the matting, Vencido reviews his memories, collects himself in the stages of his own existence. Like the rest of his forgotten gods, his glorious destiny signifies no more than a stone decoration. The true form of life is an obligatory and shameful foreign word.

Paris 1958

THE CAREFUL CHAIN

ANN J. WEST

On a careful chain,
between her bosom and her crepe,
he hangs,
and when she walks
he swings —
just out of step.
His hand can touch her flesh
but not the chain.
One could say,
beneath her dress, he is a man.

ANN J. WEST was the Managing Editor of *VOLVOX: Poetry from the Unofficial Languages of Canada in English Translation.* She has had 2 poems accepted for *Young Poems for Young Canadians* and 3 for an anthology of North American poets to be translated and published in Germany. Other work has appeared in various magazines.

TWO POEMS BY TERESE SVOBODA

OFTEN

she whispers in the dark
about the waving grain
he is lost in

his hand parts the ocean
as in miracles
her breasts bob
where gulls have landed

he queries her with busy streets
and skyscrapers
she cries "look at the river
see how the canoe is lost"

they stumble onto land
and kiss each other quietly

SOME SHAME

trains drag his corpse
around the edge of billboards
through places of instruction
past children in the uniform of shadow

his eyes fall into stones
there is an odour of shame
in the grey of the buildings he passes
when the wind lifts his cloak
he looks like the ship of Charon

and their eyes of slate
hang from every window
like drapes over Lenten statues
dogs howl dirges and urinate a path
for the train to follow
with some silence

O Victory you have rationed stillness
to dusk, and to the hearts of warriors
who have no more bones to show
you leave only weapons
to be planted in rows

TERESE SVOBODA has worked as a professional disc jockey, accountant and rare manuscript curator of McGill University, and has studied at several universities in the United States, England and Canada. She was a student in the Arts Faculty at the University of British Columbia and is now studying Creative Writing at Columbia University.

WALTER RIMLER was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., grew up in Los Angeles and now lives in San Francisco. He has had stories in *WRIT* (University of Toronto), *The Florida Quarterly* and *The Falcon* (Mansfield State College, Pennsylvania). He is the editor of the *Patooti Book Club News.*

HERSCHEL'S PRAYER

WALTER RIMLER

IF I COULD BE SURE that no one would hear me, Father, I would speak aloud because my spoken voice is deeper than the voice in my head. My spoken words are strong; dozens of shadowy mental words circle them like moons. But the voice in my head is a woman's voice — shrill enough to hurt my ears. All day long she blabbers on and on and I can't get rid of her any more than I can get rid of the man in my throat.

Maybe that's why Ellen left me.

"Herschel, what's *that*?"

"What's what?"

"There's a woman's voice in your head, Herschel!"

"Shut up!"

"A *woman's* voice!"

"I know. Shut *up*!"

"You've got to see a doctor. He'll give you hormones or something."

"Well," says the doctor, "hormones are probably the answer to everything."

After the shots I come calling for her, my arms dangling to the pavement, my voice rattling train tracks, saying, "Here I am. I've taken hormones."

She rushes into my arms and eats my beard like cotton candy. We go to the beach and, after making sure that no one can see, I pull out a little plastic sack that has in it a thick green liquid like pickle juice.

"Hormones, Ellen!"

"I don't know if I should."

"Go ahead."

She puts the bag up to her mouth, squeezes a bit and swallows.

We both wait

"Do you feel it coming on?" I say.

"Not yet."

Meanwhile, my beard is coiling around the steering column like ivy. Her breasts are filling up the car!

* * *

O' Lord God, you reach greedily for any mask I hand you. I can believe you are a clown or a clock or a big dumb sidekick in my head. I can doubt anything about you but your existence. I have proof. When I was ten years old I realized, after eating a plum, that it was far better than it had to be. I knew that I had stumbled onto a proof of God. Peaches, watermelon, grapes — they were all further evidence. I did, however, come to a problem, a theological crisis, with nectarines, but that was easily resolved once I saw that they are proof of the marriage of humans to the Lord.

How you must have enjoyed yourself:

"And now — the tomato!"

Applause.

"And now — the cucumber!"

"Oooh!"

Newton — the apple fell and what did you discover? Gravity! What about the apple, Newton?

So, Father, I know that you exist. But what are you like? If I try to know by using my brain I am lost. I can never be sure that I have all the information or that the information I do have is correct.

If I try to know you on the basis of my heart, I fail too, for my heart generates you only in times of crisis. I was sick, I didn't know how I might turn in bed to ease the discomfort. Remember looking at the pink wall with sunlight on it and thinking that the daylight was pink too? Tears came and I prayed to you to ease the pain and the pain lifted. But, at the same time, I could not help associating you with the ugly pink of the wall. If I wait for my heart to conjure you, O'Lord, then I must wait for the next illness or crisis and I fear that I will forever associate you with bad times.

But sometimes I do know you. Sometimes I see you with a woman's hands. Long-fingered, long-nailed, cupping and caressing anything, even if it's only air. Hands that look like they were made to caress the quicks of men. Some mouths, mouths with pillowy

lips, look like they want desperately to have you in them. They open and close all the time, like fish mouths, opening-closing, they seem to be saying: I want I want I want, opening-closing. I want to drink from you.

"Would you mind if I do something?" she said.

"If you want to," I said.

And with that, Ellen was down on me. My first time — her first time. Oh, there are so many virginities to lose. Mozart virginity (when it's really happened and, just like the music appreciation teacher you hated, you love Mozart). Housing virginity (when you see why your friends point out houses with gables and mysterious attics). Plant virginity (when you begin to collect house plants, enjoy gardens, plants in the park, wild plants). Tea virginity (when you know that you will never lower another tea bag into a mug and cover it with water that has boiled in an open pan). There is one virginity to lose with your first woman and another, more astounding one to lose when you first make *love*. And, I believe that I have not yet lost my virginity with the Lord God.

* * *

Oh God, please tell me what to do with these memories, these scenes which haunt me. There is a scenesmith in me who grabs each moment hot from my oven and pounds it into a fine sharp pin which proceeds to stick me again and again in the head. Why was it so sad all the time with her? Calling me up crying, saying, "I wasn't going to call you — I wanted to spend tonight by myself." Toward the end she always called me out of sadness and when we were together it was because we'd be a little less sad about it together than we were apart. I'll love no more sad women. I'll love only a woman who can match my inner joy which, I suspect, is considerable. I'm not a sad person. I used to sing myself to sleep every night — at the top of my voice. It's a family legend. My mother will tell it to you even now. Someday, before I die, I'm going to sing myself to sleep again — and not with songs from the radio. With my own songs. Oh, to look into someone's eyes and see them saying, in astonishment, "Do you know that *too*?" "I know that *too*." That's all I ever want to say. That's the most I ever can say: I know that too!

But these moments, Father, what do you want me to do with them? Ellen was in her kitchen cooking. The smell of liver and onions was in my nostrils as I sat in her living room reading. What

do I do with *that now*? It's still intact. It still has boundaries. It's bounded on one side by the moment before (putting on the record) and on the other side by the moment after (the meal). I don't know if it's bounded on four sides or not. That's a job for Einstein.

"This is a job for Einstein!" The muscle-bound bistro bouncer races to a nearby alley where he rips off his clothes, puts spectacles on his nose and hobbles to his secret blackboard.

What *do* I do with her living room and the smell of liver and onions? Maybe I should condense them into a bullion cube. I could take it out of my pocket every once in a while and sniff it or rub it against another cube — perhaps one of a day at the beach. Moments are definitely raw material. You have to do something with them.

* * *

O' Lord, bless nothing that is sinister. Bless, instead, my little orange mint which overnight has grown a long new stem. I wonder how the decision to grow the stem was made. The closest we come to that is the ability to grow hair. But, unlike plants, we are inhibited by time. It's frightening to think of the time stored inside a year's growth of hair. Years are monsters and enemies. Every calendar year has a personality and the years in a lifetime are stars.

"Mr. 21, Sir, can I have your autograph?"

"Certainly. 'To Herschel: Best wishes from 21.' "

All seventy of them have personalities and though a few are lovable, the majority are laughable or outright bad guys. Oh, orange mint with your purple leaves (you seem to have blood in your veins), I would like to lie in the sunlight too, naked, planning a new root or stem. And if the sun dried me out I would decay nicely, the way things do in the country.

* * *

"Hello, is this Ellen?"

"Yes it is."

"This is Dr. Ed of County Hospital. Herschel just died."

"Oh no! How?"

"He put his head in the oven. It was a slow death, Ellen — he took about as long as a 3½ pound roast."

What would we do without death? It would be like playing baseball on hot asphalt without a drinking fountain nearby. These days it's nothing to me. It's like a friendly little pup following me around.

A thousand things would upset me more: an insult or the flu or a bee sting. But when I am happy again, death will be blinding, impossible to look at, like the sun.

Oh Lord, it *is* final, isn't it? It's not that I *don't* believe in life after death. It's just that those words don't have any meaning. Life after death vs. death is not an even fight as is, say NBC vs. CBS. Remember all those? Chevrolet vs. Ford. Arden Milk vs. Adohr. Hershey's Chocolate vs. Nestle's. Sheriff John vs. Engineer Bill. Steve Allen vs. Ed Sullivan. The Beatles vs. the Rolling Stones.

* * *

O' Lord, Dear God. I'm so tired. Remember in the worst of it in the worst worst worst, that first night when I had calmed a little, when the numbness began and I got into bed knowing that in a few moments what had happened would hit me all over again and knowing that it would hit me much harder when I woke the next morning — remember that night, in the midst of that good numbness how I put myself to sleep by saying over and over again, "I am stardust, I was there when the stars were created." Then I could sleep and when I awoke the sledgehammer *did* come — but with this unexpected addition: that birds were singing outside the window and it was a clear dawn sky, cold and fresh and, even though it should all have seemed useless (those birds would be singing no matter what horrors were happening indoors), they lifted my sagging bean bag heart onto their shoulders.

* * *

Dear God, sometimes I wonder if I have enough blood. There always seems to be something lacking, something that wants to surge out of me and splash against the walls of buildings as I walk along streets, lonely — not lonely for her, or for anyone else — but lonely for my full self. "Oh, you're not all here today. Herschel," that soft voice tinkles in my head. "Just a little bit of you came." And it's true. There is a greyness in me and many mornings I leave most of my color behind in bed. I love you O'Lord, Father, God, but I cannot say it without a smirk in my heart. I cannot say it loud enough so that all of me throbs with it, with the real sound of it so that someone happening upon me would hear my blood shouting, would come as close as he could and then put his fingers in his ears because my heart would be deafening. I want to be that way with you, O' Lord.

When I was a kid, a child, or whatever I was when I was little, I had friends in heaven. I don't remember who they were but one could easily have been Gabriel, walking about up there, fingers tapping idly on his horn. I could close my eyes then and Gabriel and others would be there — a Robin Hood's band of them. Each night Gabriel would be there, familiar in his clothes and the way he patiently talked to me. I came back to him and the others every night just as I now come back each day to work, to the coffee room, the metal sink and the jar of Hills Brothers Coffee with my initials on the lid.

There was a boy, maybe six months old (it's hard to tell the ages of infants unless you've had one). He was cradled happily in his mother's arms and I was sitting opposite, watching. He looked at me with a sly grin which unmistakably said: Look at the set-up *I've* got. I laughed out loud. "You're gonna get weaned, you little jerk," I thought, but didn't have the heart to tell him.

But I can't forget that satisfied expression on his face. Maybe there *is* something magic about children. Am I a child? I was happy to be known as a child but I'm not yet comfortable being known as an adult. Grownup is a better word. I've always wanted to see it used as a title, the same as Mr.

"Herschel, I'd like to introduce you to Grownup Bill Potatatat."

"Hi, Grownup Bill."

* * *

Father, forgive me but — are you a Great Tuna in the sky?

"What'll you have?" the obese waitress stands against my table, a few of her prodigal pubic hairs touching the edge.

"I'll have tuna pie!"

"There is no such thing as tuna pie."

"Well, then, how about a tuna milkshake?"

"Are you crazy?"

"Well, how about a handful of tuna, just a handful — you must have that. And some coffee to dunk it in."

"You want just a handful of tuna?"

"That's right, Miss, just some tuna. Could you do that for me?"

"We have tuna *salad*."

"That's okay. That's great. But I don't have the time to pick the tuna off the lettuce. So how about just the tuna. And coffee. How about it, huh? Give a guy a break."

"I'm going to call the manager."

"Why? What's the manager for?"

"Mr. Truckstop!"

"Yes, Mary."

"Would you handle this customer for me?"

"Hi, Mr. Truckstop. I want some tuna. Just some tuna. Can you do that for me?"

Truckstop throws me out, chair and all. People see me on the sidewalk sprawled over. They sidestep me — the way frightened old ladies who've daringly left their homes, their lips red and puckered, a violent dab of rouge on their cheeks, sidestep drunks. They are always expecting an assault. Why not give it to them?

I creep up behind one. "I believe you've been waiting for me."

"Yes, I've been expecting you."

"I'm Ogre Herschel."

"Let me see your ogre card."

"I have it right here."

* * *

Let me see you! All hokum aside, all the 'you are me' aside, let me see you with angel wings — a roman candle in my head.

I'm so tired. If I don't go to sleep I'll be looking up her new number in the phone book but if I go to sleep I'll wake up after dark feeling sweaty, my heart thumping wildly. When that happens the best thing to do is to take a walk. Acclimate yourself to the night. How fresh the night seems when it's come suddenly. Then you walk around getting used to it — seeing headlights instead of cars, neon signs instead of buildings, lampposts instead of sidewalks. That it is nighttime is so obvious, why don't the people on the streets mention it? You never hear anyone say, 'Look! It's black all around us.' I bet you would hear it if everyone took afternoon naps and woke up in the dark.

* * *

Laughter is a second proof of God. I hear Danny Thomas in my head. "Yes, folks, a comic stands up here and makes a fool of himself. He works eighteen hours a day, his sweat as thick as soup. Why does he do it? Because laughter — *laughter is a proof of God.*"

But it's true anyway. Just like plums, laughter is much more than it has to be. All the laughing I've done. I've gone through one laughing partner after another. If they were lovers too, that was only incidental. Remember walking cross campus with Ello, tossing

back and forth a salami — why we were carrying a salami, I can't remember — on our way to Ellen's, daring each other to put the salami in our pants. Oh, what wild laughter! Right up to the door we were sticking the salami in each other's pants. What a great moment it would have been if either of us had had the nerve. Sitting on the sofa, discreetly unzipping, the salami creeps out.

It's all been a series of laughing partners. I can name them in succession like the kings of England. A good title for my autobiography: Laughing Partners. In fact, the best autobiography for me would be a series of titles. The Discovery of the Plum. Tuna! Herschel Breaks His Oboe. Herschel in Hepatitis Land. Goodby Ellen. Herschel Looks Out a Window and Can't Get Back Inside.

Hopelessness is real, hope is a mirage, I know it! I know it! If I must face the worst again, the worst, I will have nothing to rely on. If I ever learn to generate you it will be with feebleness. You may come to ease the pain, as you did that morning with the pink light, but I will never *know* you. I want to make you greater than myself, O' Lord. And I can't. And, if I can't make you greater than me I must find you and I can only find you in things lesser than myself — in plums and in laughter.

Who will help me when I begin screaming? I should have the numbers handy on my telephone: The Salvation Army, Community Switchboard, Starkist Tuna. Who will help me to sit peacefully, filled with truth when the truth is rancid? I have lost all my laughing partners, one by one. Perhaps I'll have a hundred more before I die, then to finally find You, the last and greatest Laughing Partner. O' Lord, all this is to say I'm scared. Keep in touch? Well, okay, for a few weeks every year. The rest of the time — I don't know.

And music! I forgot music. Plums, laughter and music. I knew there had to be three.

THE SOUND OF A SUNFLOWER GROWING

BETH JANKOLA

Kitty got
the woodpecker
this morning
That damn cat
would stalk
an eagle
Jody came in holding
the woodpecker
his tail
fanned out
stark
against her jeans
He looked enormous
in her arms
We put him
in the workshop
and after school
we let him free
All day
the image
of Jody holding
the woodpecker
came back to me
He's not a woodpecker
He's THE WOODPECKER
He's been returning
to our house for years
What if Kitty had eaten him
What if he'd died
Each year Joe says
Well the woodpecker's back
Jody holding the bird
me saying
My god it's THE WOODPECKER
as though he were a myth
and what was he doing

being real there in her arms
and wounded
He said
You've been writing alot lately

Yeah I said
sunflowers
I've been writing alot about sunflowers

like this

THE SOUND OF A SUNFLOWER GROWING

he said
you put a sunflower
in a soundproof room
for a long time
you have the tape recorder going
you play it back
slow speed
you hear

THE SOUND OF A SUNFLOWER GROWING

BETH JANKOLA has had one volume of poetry published, *The Way I See It*, and has given numerous poetry readings, including CBC's "Anthology." She lives in Burnaby, B.C. and her next collection of poetry, *Jody Said*, will be published shortly.

ASSURANCE FROM LAKE BALATON

FREDERIC WILL

the fear
of dying near a garden
where bold African oaks
mated and a Professor of botany
lectured on the Esterhazy taste for exotic ferns

They brought your letter
it was covered with spiders
Reading it through their mandibles
my eyes made a jagged line of black
stitches around a notice of death

You think I have sold the garden
of our existence together
settling on this 18th century Hungarian Eden
or a general topic of vulvas?

I walk through the clean towel of your eyes
into this garden
every morning
and pick it in a terrycloth hamper
and put it upon your table

When I try freedom my temples
pound like chunky Icelandic ponies
across my room
and I wake up an unhealed blue scar

I'm on the surface here
The garden is sleeping below me
I sway

And under the garden you hold me
as always

Closer than I to the fear I feel

FREDERIC WILL is editor of *Micromegas*, a poetry magazine now in its ninth year. He teaches Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts.

JAMES WYATT lives in Vancouver, B.C. "The Spirit of Bonsam" is the title for Book Two of *Bonsam*, a novel in progress. Book One, "When She Leaves Me," was published in the Summer '72 issue of *Prism international*. The novel has three books. The last book is titled *Bonsam's Vignettes and Journal*.

THE SPIRIT OF BONSAM

JAMES WYATT

CHAPTER ONE

1

"TO BE THIRTY and unmarried is the way to live if you want social life," Rosa thinks. She puts the dishes on the table and returns to a small adequate kitchen for some more things — the salads with lettuce and sliced tomatoes; the olives and the silver candle holders. "But if you want children," she thinks as she hums, "it's a drag. They really don't have to be my children, but they damn sure are not going to be some other woman's children who he used to love. He better not have . . ." She finishes setting the table. "If we adopt some children that won't be too hard on me. Maybe two. He might want his own children, but I'm not so sure that I am willing to serve anytime suffering the balloon-belly. Some women seem to have babies almost as fast as I can prepare and serve a meal. . . . He doesn't even have a steady job. Come to think of it I don't know him. How long have I really known him? A year, maybe two. He's nothing like Wane. He's practically a stranger, but spiritually something a lot more. He's really been with me a long time. We've known each other for a long, long time." She stands in front of the mirror sipping wine, takes off the apron and now sits in front of the mirror crossing her legs. Irresistible. "This is ridiculous," she thinks. "I'm thirty years old. He's not the first man I've slept with and won't be the last. You have to be a fool to want . . ." She answers the ring at the door. "On time I see. Did you bring the cigarettes?" Warren makes himself at home.

"Yeah, baby. You look really fine. Mind if I get a kiss from the only woman who's been able to make me run errands? What's for supper?"

"Wait and see. Here's your drink."

"Think I might have a job, Rosa."

"Good. Where?"

"Red's Discothèque."

"Downtown?"

"Starts this weekend if I can get a drummer. Let me hold some money to live on."

"You can stay here. Here's some. That's all I can spare."

"Let me have twenty-five if you can spare it; that'll be enough to hold me over 'til I get paid at the club."

"Have you paid the . . ."

"When do we eat? We can talk later. I wrote a tune I'd like for you to hear."

2

After finishing their dinner, they dance; she moves from wine motivation, mixing her body around the room from hallway to low sofa; here and then her sweet ass is over there. Warren swears to himself she is everywhere. He stands in the living room moving his knees and toes. He needs his saxophone and keeps poppin' his fingers and moving his head to present his profile image. The dance is anatomusical — they seem to exchange legs and arms; appendages leave their bodies altogether and they lean to support each other, her head against his. Rosa dances before him in his mind while he holds her hand. She leads him to the bedroom, undressing him and herself on the way. Memories of her dancing causes Warren to freeze and become a lawn statue while she begins to dance again; he sees giant brown oyster eggs. Rosa kicks, then rolls her hips and moves to the music's memory — the record player stops. She pants awhile and starts deep breathing exercises; her body is sweating and her legs splat together when she moves across the floor; she claps her hands whenever the spirit grabs her (Butch and company is the last thing on her mind); shakes so her breasts flop against her chest; her body is wet. Everytime Warren reaches out to hold her, Rosa slips away and says something like "Oh, no you don't!" then he knows for sure it's her. He stands nude, gazing at his bitch, making like a direction sign with his hard-on. When Rosa becomes tired, she moves slowly; he wraps a towel around her and they lie in bed.

Butch is in bed dreaming the most fantastic bullshit. That mother, I swear . . . Anyway, Rosa Jackson is supposed to meet with Butch and his parents tomorrow. Butch will undoubtedly meet her before

that since tomorrow is Saturday and Butch is dreaming about unloading the entire men's wear department along with a few items from the sporting department — guns, rifles, bullets, etc.

No doubt Rosa is with slicker Warren, the frustrated pimp. Well she just doesn't know what this spiritual motivation can do; as Butch would say, "it can make the calluses on your baby toes tinkle." (Laughter.) I have an idea what's probably goin' on. I'll lay it on you, while my friend from the ghetto dreams. The informative information was picked up by eavesdropping. The prose style you may recognize as having the economy of expression associated with the works of James Henry.

Rosa lights the candles and turns off the lights. He watches her glide across the room first to the light switch next to the door and then towards the table in the middle of the room to light the candles. She moves for him and because of him, enjoying the way he excites every fibre of her body, letting his eyes roll recklessly over her body and tenderly across her face as she takes her place at the table and looks girlishly to the side (one arm propping her head) and says, "Well, anytime you're ready!" He remains standing for a brief instant which seems timeless because he loves the way she teases him. He starts daydreaming about the time he was a kid in high school while Rosa proceeds to tell him for the hundredth time about Butch. How tragic. He's uncomfortable as he remembers the time when in high school he was watching Miss Leigh's legs showing very well from under her desk; and how he knew Miss Leigh was a virgin by the way she sat. It was spring and everybody except Miss Leigh was acting as if it was the middle of November. Miss Leigh felt the eyes of her student on her legs and thighs. She let him look for awhile. The class was silent save for an occasional snigger because everyone was copying their home assignment out of the textbook. He knew he could make it with his teacher even though she was six years older, and got more anxious sitting there in the beginning of June two weeks before school was to let out. "She's a virgin," he thought, as he watched his teacher. "I know she knows I'm looking, so she must like it." A snigger is heard again. The teacher looked up from her book.

"Let's have it quiet? . . . Was that you?"

"No, ma'am."

"Why don't you come up to the blackboard and show us how to do the first problem?"

"Yes, Miss Leigh."

Timelessness acquires duration and becomes a period of time in the scheme of two lives even though the timeless suspension remains that way within itself. He makes his way to the table when Rosa says for the second or third time. "Any time you're ready! . . . Any time you're ready, honey!"

After finishing their dinner, they dance — he moving with the rhythm sometimes, and improvising around the beat as if he was playing a solo; and she dancing, recalling modern dance movements to mix with traditional dance steps as she glides across the wooden floor, giving the impression of a stiff and sometimes very emotional dancer. His legs do not seem to belong to the rest of his body as he moves to the left and right creating the impression of unpredictability and spontaneity while popping his fingers. Her stiff nature is largely due to the small and narrow heeled shoes she wears. When he goes to pour them both another drink she kicks off her shoes revealing the strong feet of a woman who once danced a great deal. The music starts again as he approaches her from the small bar at the far end of the room and watches Rosa dancing off tempo to a rhythm and blues tune. She has a serene look on her face and her eyes refuse to recognize the drink put in front of her as she raises her arms slowly above her head. He puts down the two drinks feeling good and seeing that she is far gone, turns off the lights and watches the silhouette of Rosa do a dance creation that seems to be African. Her straightened hair (she wears an Afro wig) begins to cover one eye and she takes advantage of the opportunity and looks even more sexy — the uncovered eye is half closed, the bottom lip is moistened and put in an almost pouting position as she rises slowly from the floor staring into his eyes. The next record is the right tempo. Warren says the drummer is not listening to the musicians he is playing with —he's playing for himself; but every beat seems to get a response from Rosa's body. She takes off the top part of her evening dress; and begins to move again; slowly at first; sweat drips from her forehead and perspiration floods her underarms showing on her white blouse as she dances, not moving her feet so much as her arms, hands, head, and hips. The music stops. He stands up in front of her, as she reaches for what she thinks is her drink, and he touches her hand, holding it for an instant, and then puts the drink in it. She takes a sip and they sit listening to the music. The silhouette of Rosa dances before him as he holds her hand gently in the dark. After awhile they go into her bedroom. Their souls are flying high as he undresses her while she lays limp as an

ebony baby in bed. The suggestive movements of her dance flash into his mind as she begins to dance with her hips, holding him tightly — he sees her kick off the shoes and take off the blue jacket to her dress, the white blouse is beginning to come loose from the skirt as she begins to move her hips slowly to the tune.

Saturday noon finds him in bed. There is a note lying on his pants as he begins to put his clothes on; ("Had to go downtown early. You'll find money in the kitchen cabinet. Leave some for me. Love, Rosa.") it falls to the floor and he does not see it until after he takes a shower. After a breakfast of toast and orange juice he picks up his coat and hat and is down into the street ready to start the day when he discovers that the afternoon breeze feels cool — he has forgotten his underclothes and socks. He rushes back up to Rosa's apartment. The door is locked; he decides to try living without underwear for an afternoon. The bus seat is cold and the jog to catch it was slower than usual. His collar is open casually, the camel-coloured suede coat goes well with the black beaver skin cap, mohair slacks and bare ankles as he sits waiting for his stop.

3

Saturday noon finds him still there. There is a note pinned to his pants which he sees after his shower. "Give a nigger a mile and he'll take an inch. Money is in the kitchen cabinet.") After a breakfast of toast and orange juice, he picks up his coat, and is down on the street ready to start the day when he discovers that the afternoon breeze feels cool. Rosa burned his underwear! She is always too intellectual after she sobers. A choice between food or underwear.

"Most dudes I know can't handle more than an inch," he thinks. "If he can go a mile, I say right on, brother. If Rosa is together tonight like she was last night, talk about a mellow time." The bus seat is cold. It's only a few blocks. "I mean the bitch was into something. She was. She definitely was. Got to . . . got to have it." He gets off a couple of stops before 12th. Goes into a men's shop. He tells the saleslady he only wants one out of the pack of B.V.D.'s. "They don't come that way," she said. "Yeah. They come any fuckin' way you want them to come. How in the hell you 'spect me to wear three pairs of B.V.D.'s? Draws!" "Would you like to talk to the manager?" "Shit! Manager who? Look I know what I want, baby, if I can't get it here, I'll get it some other damn place." "Well,

brother . . ." "Bitch! I ain't your fuckin' brother." He stomps out the door. "Damn!" He thinks, "Rosa has fucked my mind up. Who in the hell, Rosa thinks she is? If I want to cuss I'll cuss." He talks to Wane, his bass man. Wane is standin' on the corner moonlightin' with some coke. "She could dance. Lawd, could she dance. Tonight. Again tonight. Woo, Lawd. How you hangin', my man? Got some good shit. OK. Doing OK. What's goin' on? Yeah. I'll take some of that. I bet you been mellow since sunrise?" "Rosa's toes are tiny," he thinks. "How in the hell you gonna be on the police force with feet like that. She kept dancin'." "No profanity, honey," she said. "I don't see where you can see anything, but yourself, you bastard." She danced over to him shaking her arms and hips. "Anway, I don't see where feet got anything to do with it," she said. They didn't talk anymore because she went into a damn fever dance around the bedroom. "Crazy! You're crazy!" Warren shouted. Everybody knows to be on the police force you got to be able to stomp and kick somethin' terrible.

"Who's crazy?" Wane said.

They stand talking about the gig coming up that night — the drummer, Monroe, is new. Wane was over at his pad last night. Monroe's staying in a condemned area; he has a four-by-four place too small for a mattress; skins all over the place; said he worked in a music store once and was pawning the stuff until he was caught groovin' in the bathroom; he said everybody smoked except the manager's wife who is a sack of ugly potatoes; from her he only wanted the damn five dollar tips he got gettin' her lunch. She loves musicians; claimed she slept with Dolphy.

"Rosa's that way. Damn. I might marry her someday."

"She's a cop man. She'll put you away."

"Naw. Can't think of a better way to beat the pigs than infiltratin'."

"Yeah. 'Cept they already infiltrated and organized the infiltration."

"You've been talkin' to Rosa."

"Yeah. I was up to see Rosa," Wane said looking over his shoulder.

"Don't play with me."

A couple of police come down the street both ways. Wane looks down the sidewalk and says he thinks he sees some pig in an upstairs window. They go into a short-order grill where Wane passes the bag over the counter. The waiter gives them a cup of coffee as the cops walk in and stand behind them; the other two remain outside.

4

In Green's Department Store a woman about five-foot-three wearing dark sunglasses, an expensive dark green leather coat and carrying a small handbag, which she casually puts down every now and then to look at some jewelry or clothes, spots a possible victim — a young adolescent male of fifteen who is probably just starting out. She sees every move made by the boy dressed for sand-lot football. Everytime the boy puts his hands on something she looks at him while pretending to be looking at lingerie in another direction. She follows the boy from section to section on the first floor noticing first the holes in his back pocket which seem to hold everything he puts in them (cuff links, soap-erasers, plastic cigar tips), generating the impression of innocence and poverty; and the way his pants are close fitting. Maybe she should buy him a pair? Not on her salary. "Chances are there are holes in his front pockets too," she thinks as she holds up a pair of red laced panties, size six. "Not quite my size," she mumbles.

Butch is picking up a pair of socks and looks both ways as if he is going to quickly stash the goods in an invisible topcoat or somewhere under his armpit. In the sport department, he picks up two golf balls and gets the idea to wrap the socks around them.

"Now is the time to close in on him if I want to give him motherly advice," Rosa thinks while trying to look like a serious potential buyer of hardware, picking up a plane and examining the blade while she keeps an eye on Butch. (I am trying to warn Butch in my own fashion, but he doesn't listen.) "If I wait much longer, he's going to try to make it out the door," she thinks. "But if I stop him now, he might be so afraid that he'll never do it again. If he didn't know me, I could pose as a clerk. (Butch's premeditated replies to any person wanting to talk to him are "How much are your black socks?" "Where can I pay for these?" which are supposed to follow "May I help you?") "Not only does he know me," Rosa thinks, "but he has two hours to make our appointment on time." She picks up a flashlight and tests the different colour reflectors. "Either my sunglasses are very good or this damn department store is trying to cheat people." Butch walks towards her. "Should be a law against people opening big stores as traps for delinquents." The front of Butch's clothes looks as if he's been lying on his stomach in a coal mine (hence the poem below inspired by Butch's underground experience), and he smells so bad that when Rosa gets within five

feet of him she begins to hate Butch's mother for letting him roam the streets; another shadow.

by november
the swans turn to snow.
bones are covered,
old is mixed with new
captured and erased.
tracks in snow and mud
are seen while sleeping:
someone made them before
ocean spray turn to rain,
blowing snow
to caress the shadow
of the man
wearing his property
no holes in his underwear.

the way potatoes bake
under a fire,
some wrapped in aluminum
others with clay,
dressed in the latest fashion,
is how the swans fell
to hide a mirror in his mind;
and covered the farmhouse
the windows and doors save
cracks around them,
liberating thoughts
while he waited
slept and dreamed
bones of felt,
another petrified
that hit the ground
woke him leaving
nothing visible
in the dark searching
for his face and eyes,
action being the design.

"Excuse me, ma'am, where do I pay for this?"
"At the front next to the hardware section."

"Thank-you, ma'am."

"You're welcome."

Rosa sways lightly as she remembers last night, glows and pinches herself.

"Crime is not beautiful, baby," she whispers to Butch. "Caught you again, honey." Butch takes the cuff links from under his armpits. "You can have those cuff links if you can tell me where the manager is."

"Huh?"

"You see, baby . . ." She hooks his elbow behind him so that he bends over towards the door as they walk out. "You see, baby, you got to learn who the prime mover is and how much it costs."

"She's crazy," Butch thinks.

That's the way Warren talks — he always says, "You got to know the prime mover." Rosa never learned it that way in law enforcement school. Warren said he learned everything from reading the back of cereal boxes — the dominant colours are red, white and blue; mixed together that makes green; the prime mover carries very little green; he's worth his weight in gold and is never seen.

"Butch what kind of cereal do you eat?"

"You think I'm crazy don't you?" Rosa says. "Why in the world do you want a police record at your age?" She waves for Phil Jones, her partner, who is eating lunch; he is parked in the alley adjacent to the main entrance. Phil steps on the gas and is edging his way into the traffic; the siren is going full blast. Everybody on the entire block stops to look.

"Butch, I'll give you another chance." Rosa puts the handcuffs on him while she fumbles in her purse and shows Butch the cuff links. "You stole these cuff links."

"You stole those cuff links," shouted Butch.

"I'll give you one more chance. Answer and you can have the cuff links."

"I don't want the fffuc . . . cuff links!"

"What? What did you say?"

"I'm going to sue you for false arrest. I know my rights. I'll have your badge!" said Butch.

"OK. That's not bad. You do that, baby. In the meantime, just for fun, tell me what cereal you had for breakfast this mornin'?"

Phil is caught between two taxis; he hears bullet shots and believes that he sees a man fall over by the bank; he jumps out of the car, and runs down the block. Rosa handcuffs Butch to the inside of

the police car. He looks like he's about to cry. She reprimands him. There are some more shots. Butch hides behind the front seat. Rosa cuts the siren off and runs after Phil.

5

It doesn't seem like keeping a journal is work, but it is, especially when your objective and reason for writing it is to be honest and sincere. Honesty and sincerity are a basis for trust. Understanding is not as easy as it sounds. It would be simple if understanding meant thinking linear or singular (maybe horizontal or vertical); however, shit, understanding means talking on a plane while you listen on several others. How in the hell are you going to give answers to difficult questions asked at the same time? Maybe that's the reason to avoid the logical since you can logically answer one question at a time, or maybe two or three; but by that time another series of questions are given. Even if you try to analyze the process, you feel that you are only discussing history which wouldn't be langsyne if each question could be presented in a disjunctive proposition and answered simultaneously.

My plans for today (while understanding that questions and impressions will be phantasmagoric) were to retrace steps, listen and feel. When in doubt it seems that one should do nothing sometimes, or act on some impression which is often the first. The only basis for choice in reference to the last statement seems to be intuitional. My main interests were to be questions and answers in their relation to action developing because of things said. I'm thinking that every statement is an answer to some question and vice versa. The plan was to waste un peu d'action — rien ne se perd.

There are two levels of reality generally speaking. On the one hand you have a reality as far removed from the objective world as the imagination can carry and defend. This is because the world of experience is both objective and subjective — it is both in and of the world. The degree that it is involved on a communicable level depends on the precision of dialogue which is unsaid in addition to dialogue in the form of discourse. Until one has a foundation in that field of experience, he has to more or less go with the wind; and in doing so there's a form of positive development. The other level of reality, however, is more scientific. It has to do with objects and their relation to each other in as ideal a situation as possible; that is, for example, the relation of my pen to my journal.

I had hoped that Butch would get away free. I've lost the entire day's work on a gamble; and I'll probably do it again sometime, but not again soon. The way I see it when you hope for something badly enough you almost never get it. I know about the shit that's going on, but as of yet feel no reason why I should persuade Butch to act in a negative way. My faith in human nature is confirmed. Butch is a living example. Somehow I'm still together, though. I still have my optimistic view which is sustained mainly because I don't understand how anyone will take a chance on screwing Butch since they must understand that underneath his intention is noble and open-minded. I'll try another imaginative leap to figure out how Phil got into the alley since he and Rosa never double downtown on weekends.

My first impression is that Rosa really needs her sunglasses this morning because when she got the phone call from her working partner, Phil Jones, asking her to fill in for him on the patrol until noon, Rosa felt like something between a female chauvinist and a killer. She'd have scratched plain-clothes man No. 84's contact lenses from his brown eyes, and knocked every one of his shiny well placed teeth down his black throat if he had knocked at the door and said what he said on the phone — "Hello, No. 26. How you doing, sugar? Listen, will you fill in for me 'til noon? Something urgent has come up. Thanks. Meet you at Greens'." The only reason she answered the phone is because of this habit she has — everytime the phone rings her hand picks up the receiver and she speaks into it automatically, more rapidly than she can think to do it or ever think to stop. (Butch has somewhat the same habit as Rosa when he passes a refrigerator door — the hand is quicker than the chicken leg.) Part of the reason for her habit results from high school practice when she could descend eleven stairs, after waking from a cold sleep, fast enough to catch the phone on the second ring. (I ring her phone sometimes — three rings, two rings, three rings. It's one of the few tricks I'm allowed to do.) In fact, Rosa could sprint fast enough to catch her wind before the phone rang the second time. She improved her physical condition through practice, and because of her love for the Mitchell twins. Neither of them called often enough. She was eager to talk with either of them. But that was long ago when they were kids.

At twelve o'clock Rosa spots No. 84 up on the second floor balcony peeping at her from behind some suitcases through some field glasses standing below a sign reading "Are You Ready For The

Summer, Winter, Spring, Vacations Abroad?" A large feather hangs from his felt cap. He gives Rosa the signal, the V-sign with a shrug of the mouth, chin and slight nod of the red feather. She acknowledges by moving her lips while clenching some red material. Through the field glasses he can see reasons for staying up on the balcony.

Wane is standing to the far right of the men's wear department while this is going on. He is a tall man with big strong hands, long hair sitting high on his head and cut short around the sides. He tries on a shirt that he likes by simply going into the dressing room and exchanging his shirt for the other one. He always keeps aware of where Butch is, his young friend who wants to know everything there is to know from a mother just as crazy. Wane teaches Butch music and how to survive. They are even starting to look alike. He told Butch to get some socks. I don't know who the hell the golf balls were for. About the same time as Butch meets Rosa, Wane is trying on a hundred dollar sports coat; he hangs his old one up allowing the good side to show for the customers and pins the tag saying "Italian Import" onto his old coat. He is just about to try on a hat for his partner, who suddenly moves towards the front door and meets none other than 007 Rosa. In case of an emergency, Wane told Butch to say his friend has the money. Wane was to come up and pay or tell Butch about how he already has golf balls at home. What's the matter with Butch? "The dude is acting dizzy," thinks Wane. (N.B.: equal positive and negative forces can mean unconscious suspension.) A young clerk, who has not had a customer this morning, prepares herself for Rosa who spits fire, throws the leather gloves down and walks out of the store with Butch. Wane strolls away from the men's section and makes a smooth dash for the door allowing Rosa to exit first, eyeing her figure as she leaves through the revolving door.

6

There is a hat store next to the bank — the store manager's alarm alerts the guards at the bank. Phil arrives on the scene quickly; he knocks people over, saying excuse me to little old ladies and reaching for his gun; he can't help himself. Rosa does things to him.

The dude who stole the hat has hazel eyes and a blonde Afro. Phil didn't see his face, but he tells Rosa later that every dude with a blonde Afro has hazel eyes. "That dude's got everything," he

mumbles to her before he shouts "Halt, in the name of the law!" as he watches the blonde Afro and bell bottom pants hide behind a trash can and then make it over the hood of an unloading truck, holding the new wide-brim Stetson. Phil fires two shots in the air. The movers put a mattress in the way. Rosa arrives.

"Damn, Phil, this ain't the movies!"

"That mother's got everything," said Phil. He looks kind of puzzled after Rosa pinches his ass; then he takes off down the alley telling the two guards from the bank to go in the opposite directions around the bank. Rosa goes back to Butch. At this point everything seems to stop, no one seems to be doing anything but everyone is still present.

7

At this point super-nigger himself takes over. I'd like to take this opportunity to express a few words. I'm getting fairly good at it. Humans have bodies. We have the vibes. Remember that. All you hippie-minded individuals want to be like us. But let me tell you, baby, you want the marble ain't gonna blue knees — in other words, digging the vibes is nothing like you think; it's nothing like you think because your mind isn't oriented right. Butch's mind is oriented somewhat in the right direction; it's mainly because he has astigmatism — the left eye considers time to be willy-nilly; the right eye is more in the present. It has to do with what is known by some as stream-of-consciousness. Time is a creative force — this was established by Bergson. Time, timelessness and timing work simultaneously to give a cinematographic impression resulting in an impact which blows your mind. There's nothing wrong with being a member of a different class just so long as you know; every member of a certain class considers members of other classes to be members of lower classes. I wrote a doggerel about class. You will permit me as Rosa crosses her legs.

Classes will come.
Don't say big deal
Since you react
Classes only come
When you think,
When you immerse
Yourself in the sit-u-a-tion.

Butch is suffering from what I call delayed action in relation to his ego. The delayed action is caused by me, understand? Butch,

who is me also to a degree, does not understand. Butch is me in proportion to the degree his mind is co-opted by another. In this case, Rosa is attempting co-optation. She is sitting by the patrol car talking to Butch.

"You been on weed since I been gone, punk." Butch stands in a daze.

"Rosa, sweet Rosa."

"Butch!"

"Yes ma'am."

"Warren sure would be mellow in one of those hats," Rosa thinks. "Some superfly. Can't even afford a car. Gonna get my man a Continental though. If he's good to me, I'm gonna take that mother for everything he's got." A few more shots are fired from the direction of the alley. A crowd has blocked the entrance. "Crazy, Phil! Damn." She starts running back towards the bank, and looks over her shoulder to see what Butch is doing. Some local shoeshine boys have surrounded the car; they begin beating Butch and kicking the back car door. Rosa turns around and runs back to the car.

"That's gonna cost you, Butch, honey," Rosa shouts.

"I ain't no damn, honey. My name is Dwight Johnson."

"Still gonna cost you, baby." She uncuffs Butch from the back-door of the car. The gang moves to the other side of the car. Butch starts to run; she trips him.

"I'm just goin' to piss," Butch shouts.

"Do what?" Rosa screams.

"Relieve myself."

"OK. Try any funny business and I'll send you to Bellingham," Rosa shouts. Rosa is wearing hot pants; she took off her max skirt when she ran back to the car. Some local pedestrians urged on by the gang still taunting Butch think that what they see is a delinquent attacking a lady. A dude grabs Butch from behind in a full nelson. Two members of the gang wearing orange berets each stand on one of Butch's feet. Another calls Butch "the last of the Toms" and spits on him. Rosa manages to break it up without much effort and sends Butch to the washroom at a near-by gas station. She backs the partol car into the alley and stretches out on the back seat and moans contentedly. A laugh is heard but no one seems to notice Rosa or the car in the alley. Rosa opens her legs and sighs again the way a beer drinker sighs.

"That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs."

She is back to normal in no time. Butch comes out of the wash-

room smiling. A motorcycle freak is standing by his chopper getting gas and listening to his transistor radio. He turns the volume up while he rolls a joint.

Be-en the way I fe-el
Be-ing the way I fe-el
Satis-fied/ Satisfied
Be-en the way I fe-el
Be-ing what I am
Satisfied/ Satis-fied

CHARLES LILLARD lectures in Creative Writing at the University of Victoria. He is the author of *Coultus Coulee, Drunk on Wood* and the forthcoming *Ikons of a Coast.*

REVIEW

Selected Poems, Ralph Gustafson, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1972. $5.95

Blood Ties, George Amabile, Sono Nis, Port Clements, 1972. $5.95

Waiting For Wayman, Tom Wayman, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1973. $4.95

In one sense this review is already out of date. None of the three books under scrutiny were published this year; Amabile and Gustafson belong to 1972, Wayman was published in 1973. Since then Gustafson and Wayman have each published another volume of poetry. These earlier books are being reviewed today for two reasons. No matter when they were published they are still worth our time; and not one of the three has yet received the magazine space it deserves.

Earlier this year Ralph Gustafson gave a reading at the University of British Columbia. The department which sponsored the reading advertised it so well that approximately fifteen people showed up. To butter the toast, he was given a room next to U.B.C.'s bell tower. As a consequence Gustafson had to read against the bell, a competition that lasted the better part of half an hour. Any other man would have laughed at the assembly and left. Not Mr. Gustafson; he's a decent man — a gentleman, so he stayed. And he gave one of the best readings which I've attended during my seven years in and around the University of British Columbia.

When I say "one of the best readings," I am not concerned strictly with the poet's reading ability; *atmosphere*, I'm sure, is as important as the voice reading the work. All too frequently the poet forgets that the listener may not be familiar with his work; moreover, the man in the audience may not be used to listening to poetry. The ear listening cannot accept material as fast and as accurately as the eye reading. There is a time-lag; the poet/reader must accept this.

Poets like Gustafson use this lag to their advantage. Gustafson talked briefly about each poem; he didn't explain it away: he simply made it available to his audience. Mr. Gustafson was not always serious that afternoon. I am sure he was having fun at our expense. But in return *he did give us atmosphere*: a space in which to accept the poetry and time to become part of it.

It struck me that afternoon that this was one of the qualifications of poetry: does it swallow the reader? I was surprised that Gustafson's work "swallowed" me as it did. The material wasn't all that fresh, most of it I'd seen elsewhere. But up to this point I had admired the poetry for technical reasons, and because, book by book, the poet was gaining strength.

Prior to the reading, the material had always seemed to have about it the chill and severity of Crane and Stevens on those days when they couldn't forget they were *modern*, and had read Mallarmé and Valéry in the original. But as Mr. Gustafson read, all my initial impressions changed. And, as the reading drew to a close, it became apparent that the poet was a classical poet; a human and cultured writer, modern in all the best sense of the word.

During the half year that has gone by since that reading, I've read and reread a lot of Canadian poetry. In all the material I've read, I have only managed to find two poets who seem to share Gustafson's concern for man, mankind and the majority of things that most of us would admit make up our daily lives. These two poets are George Amabile and Tom Wayman. Since they are both much younger than Gustafson, there will be discrepancies in my analogy; but given ten years of the direction that they are now travelling, and they can be called fellow-travellers, etc.

I would like to take the time at this point to paraphrase a line by Auden. In his introduction to *A Poet's Tongue*, Auden maintains that the best definition of poetry is "memorable language." All poets from Sappho to Catullus, Ovid to Wordsworth, from Milton to Frost, have had two things in common: their concern for the human condition, and the ability to express this concern in language which clings to the ear. If this is the case, then language is the second reason to consider Amabile, Gustafson and Wayman as poets working in the classical tradition.

It would be difficult for even the most biased reviewer to deny Gustafson's *Selected Poems* its place as one of the most powerful volumes of Canadian poetry published during the past twenty-five years. One element which makes the book even stronger is that we

know, having seen later poems and publications, Gustafson has outgrown this volume. The new poetry is solving new problems, defining fresh boundaries. What a difference from the usual Canadian tactic of publishing by pattern: i.e. *as long as it works, use it.*

If the *Selected Poems* is as conscientiously put together and edited is it seems to be (something else rare among Canadian "selected" volumes) then the opening poem, "Prefatory", and it opening lines:

> Where a poem departs from the truth it is a bad
> Poem.

clues us in for all that is to come.

Returning to this poem after having read the book, we realize truth, to Gustafson, is not honesty, that bootlicker approach to reality. There is no Black Mountaineering here. Gustafson's truth is emotional honesty. And "emotional honesty" is not reporting, it is letting things settle in until one day they are poems, each a work of art. As a work of art, each is independent of origin; each stands by itself, either to be honoured or loathed.

The second factor separating Gustafson from his fellow poets is theme. The majority of these poems are not Canadian poems. The titles speak for themselves: "The Philosophy of the Parthenon"; "On the Top of Milan Cathedral"; "Assisi"; "Agamemnon's Mask: Archeological Museum, Athens"; "At Franz Liszt's Grave" and "The Vieux Marché: Rouen". In none of these poems do we catch the tone of another poet: Gustafson is a poet approaching each scene, artifact and memory with his own poetic consciousness, his own eye. This is not a Canadian meditating over the grave of Liszt; it is a poet, a man *mit Kultur*. When he writes:

> Nor that he lies here
> Quietly,
> The foursquare hedge
> And periwinkle
> Enclosing the stone
> Less in width and length
> Than the Wagner's —
> Not all this mortal gossip:

he assumes that his readers will know enough to follow without stumbling. And what a relief to hear/read a graveside poem which doesn't echo Auden or Crane.

Occasionally Gustafson manages to be playful in a way which must infuriate numerous Canadian poets, since so few of them show

any evidence that they could enjoy this sort of fun. These light moments are spread throughout the SELECTED; one of the most obvious and most successful, would appear to be lines twenty-one through twenty-six of "Casa Guidi: Firenze":

> except (to speak of poems)
> that other Robert,
> old crackerbarrel who fooled them all,
> and Ezra, of course, Uncle Ez
> who got his lever under the world
> and Yanked.

This is a tongue-in-cheek playfulness, a light-heartedness which owes much to the three men implied in the above quote: Browning, Frost and Pound. It is his refusal, as it was theirs, not to make the poem a vehicle for a crusade, a sermon or an excuse for suicide.

Even when Gustafson returns to Canadian scenery, whether it be a Quebec night scene or a camp in the Rocky Mountains, there is always the cultured man's vision/knowledge of place. In "At Moraine Lake" the poet can confess that Canada is "a country without myths." Then he adds, "We need none." The reader soon realizes why: everything is in the poet's mind; why does he need anything else when he has Hybla, Babel, Circe, Odysseus, Philomela and the Plantagenets buzzing in his head?

From all reports and obvious sources, Gustafson has a growing appeal among the younger poets of Canada. It is intriguing that a man who can claim he doesn't need a Canadian mythos, can appeal to so many of the younger poets who are actively searching for a homegrown mythology.

It is obviously Gustafson's emotional honesty which attracts many writers to his work. One element of this honesty can be found in "A Ceremony". In this poem the poet admits:

> Two men had courtesy,
> Browning of the poems, and Yeats.

they knew, having "looked upon the sky and earth" that "grace/ Altered all men, not knowledge" and that "All is in ceremony." Ultimately the poem is the ceremony — for every honest poet.

For Gustafson, one integral part of the ceremony is language. Who else could have written:

> I think old, but two? — years — another
> At this Carrara — the first chalk how long
> Ago? he standing on his platform nude — naked —

Until I'd finished what I'd not begun,
Whose baptistry now somewhat sticks in my nostrils —
Are enough.

This is not a sophomore performance, it is poetry. The language and the movement of the language are part of a ceremony that Gustafson uses to lure the reader into the poem.

Certainly George Amabile's *Blood Ties* was one of the finer Canadian books published in 1972. The power in this book lies in the emotional honesty and the courtesy AND the ability to make the poem a ceremony. The ceremony can, in Amabile's case, be likened to the Catholic mass. Not the mass as so many North Americans know it, but the European mass; let's say a Christmas mass at Notre Dame. *Everyone becomes part of the ceremony.* Again: the poem must accept the reader. Certainly these poems, once one familiarizes himself with the personae of *Blood Ties*, swallow the reader.

There is yet another reason for the mass analogy. Unlike Gustafson, where one line after another sticks in the reader's memory, there are few gutsy lines in *Blood Ties*. The same can be said for the poems; only a few take the reader out on a limb, and shake him up and down. Where the power of Gustafson is mired by the punch of literally dozens of poems, *Blood Ties* stands out, like the mass, larger and stronger than any of its components.

The basis for this, it seems, is that Amabile is an observer; he sees and he reports, all in due time. When he does speak it is through his eyes; there is no confusion of imagery, no warped syntax to force the elements into newer and stronger shapes. The poet expects us to be interested; such as "The Small Town":

boys
with dangling cigarettes
lounge against the war memorial
between the courthouse & the church
making up tanned starlets in tight shorts

which is not an interesting poem until we reach the last line. Lines such as this are the beginning of the ceremony. We find this in the opening poem "Accidental Death"; a boy has been killed in a traffic accident — something we take part in, just as we overhear the survivor admit: "He's dead I'm glad / it wasn't me." For the reader the ceremony is wrapped up by the seventh and last section of the poem:

All day I could not touch his death
but saw him waking
in some other dazzling afternoon
brushing off grass
a stranger
armed with airy lightness and a grin

But when I touched the sculpted heap
of crossed hands in his coffin
vision drained off into the ground

There are definitely two moods at work in this collection. And it is the cross-current created by these moods which is the most difficult element within *Blood Ties*. One mood stems from "The Small Town"; the mood is simply an extension, and a very logical one, of the louts "making up tanned starlets in tight shorts." This mood, or persona, can be found repeatedly in such poems as "Earlie in the Mornin", "Adultery", "Period" and the two long poems "Generation Gap" and "Inner Space: The Light Culture." The mood is tough-guy-as-poet; a skin so thick nothing will or can touch him; thick as a black leather jacket, circa 1955.

The opposing mood is first one of loss, such as in "Analysis: The Psychology of Dust":

I study an enlarged photograph
at my desk in bright light
What turned us off?
I try to revive the lapsed sentence
that released silt shadows into the future
Why did those long talks make us grim
and sullen?

which concludes on a secondary note: memory:

My body aches
for a fall of glossy hair
to swing lightly into its tree of blood

It is the loss of women and the unsatisfactory memories one must live with, that sometimes bothers Amabile, sometimes annoys him. Yet, now and again, it is the loss of time that's on his mind. In the opening stanza of "Cemetery":

Who knows
how many thoughts
dropped
out of the dark last night
like single gloves

These opposing forces make *Blood Ties* a powerful book, one to remember. It is worth noticing that when these elements come together: punk and poet, creator and wrecking agent, and are forced not only to co-exist, but to work, we find the best poems in the book. Things begin to work in "Synchronicity" and "The Eclipse". This is not to say that the remainder are not successful poems; they are, each in its own way.

When the moods really jell for the first time it's in "Generation Gap"; this is ceremony and it's in high range, highballing. All the personae are there, all are working, and, as a consequence, the poem exceeds its own limitations.

> I wanted to punch the pain out of your head
> I wanted to talk
> but there were green smells
> & the withered folds of your throat were disastrous
> Your scratched voice blew off in the wind

Tom Wayman's *Waiting for Wayman* is, in its own minor way, a *tour de force*. It is also the type of book that drives the reviewer "around the bend." Who is this Wayman, where did he come from and where's he going are questions that continue to pop up at each turn and grade of the book. The reviewer searches desperately for the poem which will stand still long enough to be counted. There aren't many. It's a busy book.

Unlike Amabile's *Blood Ties* which remains in memory as a unity, Wayman's *Waiting for Wayman* lingers, as does Gustafson's *Selected*, as a collection of poems. Again and again the book is blurred by poems; poems such as "Life on the Land Grant Review" which reads in part:

> Mad gnome of an assistant editor
> Wayman gloats in Colorado
> before the mass of manuscripts now his,
> his to edit.
>
> Wayman remembers the mounds of his own mail
> marked: "Are you kidding?"
> "What is this grunt?" and
> "Do us a favor and stick this up your ass?"

Certainly these are lines which belong in no lexicon of great poetry, but, within the context of the complete poem they do stick to the mind. These are ham and egg poems.

One of the obvious reasons for the reader liking these poems is

the curiosity and love that Wayman has for the Wayman of the poems — the big I. There is Wayman playing at being Snyder and Rexroth "On the Interstates", there is Wayman "Waiting for Wayman", Wayman with "The Dow Recruiter", Wayman "Getting Fired", Wayman "Flying" and Wayman working and in love. It is rather like a baby exploring its own body; and, like the parent or bystander watching, we cannot help but become part of the process. The poems swallow us.

We usually find Wayman tongue in cheek and it's hard not to laugh or chuckle along with him as he mocks Wayman and the world Wayman moves through. No matter where we find Wayman, we find him being honest. In "Waiting or Wayman" we find the core and the reason for better than two-thirds of the book:

> Wayman is waiting for Wayman.
> He seems very late.
> "I think," he says,
> "I should write a poem about this."

Even though we can "laugh or chuckle" with Wayman at his own discoveries and antics, there is a growing feeling as one moves through the book a second time that much of the material exists due to the author's urge to "write a poem about this." It is this urge that places poems such as "Poets Fucking by Moonlight," "The Garbage Man," "Poem Composed in Rogue River Park" and a number of others in a collection which is otherwise exceptionally strong. These poems take the reader away from Wayman and away from his book, and it is regrettable.

I am not arguing with the urge to write such poems, or the obvious fun the author is having; the problem here is one of emptiness. Wayman just is not in these particular poems. In another time, and perhaps with another author, we could say these particular poems are hollow spiritually. What they are, of course, is the end product of a style of writing that is almost too successful elsewhere in the book.

It seems to me that the poems that work, and work exceptionally well (once we've moved away from Wayman as Satirist) are those seemingly written late at night when all the fun had bubbled away. Poems written when Wayman the Man was alone with Wayman the Poet. "There's a Kind of Hush" and "Despair" are the first two poems in the book where one meets Wayman Naked. In "There's a Kind of Hush," listen while Wayman marks papers and meditates:

Words written slowly at the desks
in the dormitories, nervous because
they are late, because they will not please.
Hunted out on the typewriter
between supper and math
or a date. Worried later.
Sweated. Alone. Ashamed.

This is Wayman the Poet; it is our first good look at the man outside his own skin.

It is not often that Wayman steps beyond his skin. Too often he steps out in other disguises; in "On the Interstates," which carries the epitaph "after Snyder and Rexroth" he masks Wayman. In doing so he writes an incredibly bad poem. Since Snyder is hardly more than a 25¢ caricature of Rexroth, and Rexroth is one of the few American poets who has spent the last forty years developing a squeak instead of a voice, Wayman is travelling on soft ground when he tries to write in their manner. He can't. The reason is very simple: Wayman is a poet. There are other poems in which Wayman appears as various American and Canadian poets. In none of them is Wayman a success.

Even though this book is a forceful one and, to the best of my knowledge, one of the finest published in Canada in 1973 there is a cancer gnawing at it. There are two directions for the poet: Wayman the Joker or Wayman the Poet. In this book he is both Poet and Joker and most of the weight is on the "joker" side. It can only be hoped that in the next book Wayman will opt out for poetry. The personal approach, unless used differently and with a freshness, has gone far enough; any further and Wayman will be waiting for Wayman.

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