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I Can't Read You
Maysey Craddock, 2001.

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Recovered Kyzyl vicinity, 1864 (possibly archaic Tuvan)
John Arceneaux, 2002.

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LOYOLA
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NEW ORLEANS

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Leaving a Sip in the Glass

—a superstition practiced to appease spirits

Something for your smoky
house roaming.
A letter in milk or whiskey

for you flimsy spirits
with open mouths.
Who among you

muddles our intentions?
A slip in the drink,
a skimming—

enough for
the better half of a vowel.
It's for you that we leave

a little extra,
so that you can
taste again and know

what it means to deny
yourselves. Just a sip for you
from your collaborators,

the wanting ones
who appreciate, like
any appeasers, a little joke.

Our Glass

That the glass has within it
a lumping and pilling,
a minor complaint,
a speckle of common clay,
the distortion of
a grain to the eye,
handmade and rare,
impurity a distinction

until the fracture at the lip
shivers into visibility.
We had been drinking
up against an invisible line.
Better to keep this
on a high shelf,
good for looking at
but not closely.

LEE UPTON

Armor

The gauntlet,
electric steel breast plate,
the burnished tournament helm,
the cuirass
riveted, the lacing,
and all this for the point of view
of the plume,
its brushy vanity
or the spiked helmet
and skin that stands like a body,
like a guard as we put a ghost in it.
It walks the museum
and out the doors
and into the streets,
invisible as is
the best armor
and haunted
by incapacity.

SARAH WHITE

The Widowed Cook

I find no food
he could take in
my hungry one

He'd need
a spoon
tongue
gullet
gizzard

There is no bowl
for one unfingered
Lipless
what can he sip?

I hear
fir twigs
talking thin

He hungers on
and lilts odd leaves
into the wind.

EDWARD BARTÓK-BARATTA

A Good-bye to the Great Susannah McCorkle

Let no one mislead you, she did not jump or fall, she stepped
into the air because it had become the lightest thing

for her to enter. Her life was full of imaginings, misgivings,
dreaming that by striking the earth from so far above

she could break her bones into stones, multiplying herself.
To walk out the window as a way of moving more

like liquid, to flow, incessant and strong, a final
dignity she had witnessed, other days beside the river.

She had dreamed, too, of becoming one with the tide, only
that's another way of taking on more weight. Her business

was this lightness, not a desire to fill and sink, to rise
and explode. Simply she stepped into the cool spring night

air, a last hit of oxygen sweet in her lungs, trapped there,
while only her heart leaped, rapped at her chest to be free.

E. M. SCHORB

Names of the Dead

The names of the dead sail on.
They are like white seabirds against a white sky,
then black seabirds against a black sky.
Every so often you hear the flutter of wings.
Into your ear comes a name.
That was Kaufman, you say.
Then a vague picture appears in your head,
at the back or in the front, against the walls.
You shake your head.
Maybe you see a smile different from others.
Long, narrow teeth in front. Kaufman.
The names of the dead sail on
like seabirds over the moony sea.

MARYANN SUEHLE

Seamus, the Sword Swallower

The N&P Ten-in-One was pitiful as a slurred carousel whirring down to a broken finish. The troupe headed south in the dog-day heat, hoping to draw Baltimore crowds to an outside, crossroads town, Scudsboro. But Ringling's playbills littered Route 1 clear past the city's smokestacks and row homes. The fakir, Pins—the "P" in N&P—talked Florida, talked tent scrubs and winter storage.

"I'M NOT PACKING UP," said Seamus, the sword swallower. He suited up to practice the neon tube stunt. A glass bender in a Jersey sign shop made him a straight, skinny loop of neon. He'd be a sight to beat all, swallowing it and glowing through his clothes.

Betina, the fat lady, eased into her chair, a throne-like stage prop from an abandoned electrocution act. The humid air stung with the rot of banana peel. Bananas black as burnt marshmallow, Betina ate them when the chimps did not.

She stopped Seamus's practicing with her sewing needle. She was cuffing the sleeves to a new shirt matched the diamond-patterned fool's cap and bloomers. Seamus told everyone fat lady made him look like he come walking out of a book.

"The Geltin twins is getting separated in Baltimore." Fat lady said it like she read it in the cards.

"They going through with that? Not enough gut between them for two," said Seamus.

"Hold still, Sham, you're such an antsy pants."

"They're gone for good?" he said. Here Pins was, making a short season, and on top of it, Siamese twins cutting each other off to see who made it.

"Said they'd write us once they're split," Betina said.

"No better splitter than death, it falls on Seamus to say."

"Sham, they're scouting up a fat doctor for me."

He ripped his arm away.

She squeezed her pricked finger and sucked. Her head was small-ish at the top where it peaked with two mismatched eyes: the right, wide; the left, low and lazy, reading its own lid.

"You think other girls can be fat like you?"

Betina was a deep vein of woman started in carny talking the truth over cards. She gained weight like a suicide wading out into deep water. With every breakup, she gained, going through the carny men until she hit on Seamus. He'd watched her sober up the tip after the harem girls danced off everything but G's and pasties. Melting fat, Seamus called it. Sexier than oiled snakeskin to him.

"Other girls don't have Devon to think of."

"Devy's growing up fine." Seamus gave back his arm.

"He's going to school and playing, like other boys."

"His whole life here is playing." The sword swallower wished the fat lady would stitch his lips shut when he felt the needle prick his wrist. It was a biting pinch. The thread pulled. She was going for another.

"Hey, hey, now. What're you up to?" He said it calm as pierced nerves allowed, tugging at the sleeve sewn to his wrist. Her giggles rippled like through muddy water.

"Sorry, Sham, lost my head."

"I see that," he said, daggers glinting his eyes.

♣

Once he got the tube stunt down, Seamus hoped Ringling would pluck him from the sorriest Ten-in-One he'd seen. He staged a private rehearsal out back the trailer, opening with a double salami sandwich to help the tubes go over with the fat lady. Letch, the fire breather, came around to sit and have a smoke.

"WE'RE NOT SOLID AS YOU THINK," said Seamus. Down went the tubes. His skin flushed neon red. The tubes were bent double so both ends hung out the mouth for the electrical hookup. It was skinny glass, broke for just looking at it wrong. Too cold, too hot, and *bink,* glass all over the ground.

"Maybe you are the devil," said Betina. A piece of salami rind dotted her chin. "Come from hell with flames burning your insides." She drained a jar of pickle juice, dill seeds and all.

"Wish I could swallow AND breathe fire," said Seamus. "That'd be hell on stage." He wet his pipes with soda pop and pulled up a backless kitchen chair.

Carnies respected the sword swallower for the neon tube stunt. Said he'd die from the glass shredding his insides, but Seamus knew 15,000 volts arcing his teeth would do him quicker than glass splinters. It wasn't no worse than spitting fire fountains like Letch.

"You got limits," said Letch of the swallowing and fire-breathing idea. "Thing is, how much we doing, and how much we getting for it? Two bits?" His match-stricken voice was a dry wheeze, his face, choppy grizzle while the skin healed from a swallow of gas exploding on him.

"Letch's not lighting up on purpose," said Betina. She had caught Seamus two nights back with his fingernails flaming. "Cruelty's the same bad no matter it's yourself or someone else." She was a real queen in that electric chair.

"Nails are just dead cells," Seamus told her. "So's hair. Think you feel it when your hair's on fire? It's just a dry heat and kinking like strings being plucked." He wished he'd never said that. Even if it was a sharp kind of true.

"Let up, why don't you, Sham," said Letch, crushing out his cigarette.

The talk turned to shutting down. Rumor had it, Pins hoped to drive the troupe back to Florida before the money ran out, trade some acts, live off his black market buddies. The sword swallower wanted to stick with the circuit. There was still money in sideshow. The N&P just had to open its pockets.

If the heat was bad, the storms were worse. Pop-up tornadoes scoured the area and canceled the Saturday show. The carnies itched with imagined rope burns from just thinking about tents blowing down. Seamus, Betina and Devon were out back the trailer, listening to weather bulletins that cut off Devy's *Lone Ranger* show and later, *Break the Bank.*

"Radio's no help," Seamus said, switching it off. "Chimps and elephants, that's how carnies tell weather." It ripped him up to see the boy taken with a chattering box of burning tubes.

"You're our sun and moon tonight," Betina told Devy. Show or no show, fat lady made up the kid's face. She liked to split him up like that. Put two faces on.

"He's a rubber band," said Seamus. He pulled the boy away from her and swung him into a sit-stand on his shoulders. Devy could do that since before he could walk. The kid threw off Seamus' hands and balanced on his own.

"I can do this," he said.

He pretended to fall—"Oh my god, Sham, grab him."—then tumbled into a handstand. Mostly, the kid ended on his feet. Everybody's got their own thing. Devy's was bounce.

"INTRODUCING... DEVY THE DYNAMO," said Seamus, styling to put the audience's eyes on him.

"School's in your future, Devon," the fat lady said. She flicked stardust blue from her fingers, like sparks in the drizzle.

"Stand for me, Sham," said Devy, the sun side of his face eyeing Seamus straight.

The sword man stood his ground, hands out so Devon could tumble into balance on his head. It made Seamus' neck tighten and tickle, the way the boy held to his skull. Devon was letting go his

hands. Next thing, felt like the boy shot his rubber band self and Seamus into the air. But it was only Betina had kicked the sword swallower's knee out from under them.

"Don't get him started," she said.

Devy's moon-side face on him, Seamus lay in dirt stinking every minute of rain. Stunts like that, somebody's getting hurt. It didn't take card reading to see it coming.

♣

"STEP RIGHT UP. THE AMAZING SEAMUS IS NO SHAM. THE MAN SWALLOWS SCISSORS, SWORDS, AND CORKSCREWS." Seamus hawked his own act on the bally, the company was that shorthanded. He drew a crowd, the fat lady filling up the front row.

He opened with a five-pointed, flaring blade, the flame dagger. "COLD METAL GRAZES THE BACK OF MY THOAT." He followed the blade with his eyes. "FEELS LIKE THE SWEET FROM HELL. A STUCK MINT."

Betina warned Seamus about torturing the crowd, forcing their eyes down that blade.

"IT'S CHOKING YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT," said Seamus. "YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP FROM RETCHING. STOP YOUR INSIDES FROM PUKING YOUR SLICED GUTS."

It was showmanship, he'd admit, but how many times had he vomited swallowing his first blade? He sneezed blood when the umbrella caught and started to open. He felt the flap tips, sometimes, riffling the back of his throat.

He lost the weak ones during the pukey part. "GET UP AND GO IF YOU CAN'T TAKE A GUTTING," he heckled.

Betina heckled back. "You're disgusting, you know that, sword man?"

For a moment, Jimbo Donovan forgot that he was SEAMUS, THE SWORD SWALLOWER. Forgot his booming voice, the makeup hardening his face. The mustache slit his upper lip, its crimped ends hooking his mouth like a pulled staple—that was all pencil. The lightning bolts opening his brows, the sliced moons hollowing his cheeks were painted-on powder. Still, how many times had he taken himself by surprise in the mirror?

"Some of you think…I'M DISGUSTING…"

"Swallow it why don't you?" the fat lady jeered.

He wiped the blade with alcohol. Had to keep his head. Then he wound his neck, stuck out his tongue, pinned back his shoulders and stopped. How could he get shut of a fat lady parked front-row center? "YOU WANT ME TO SWALLOW IT, DON'T YOU?"

She pushed at him like slamming down a jack-in-the-box with a busted lid. "This some kind of clown act?" she said.

Seamus got the crowd to say they wanted him to swallow. He couldn't tighten up, not now. "I WON'T HURT MYSELF," he said. He wanted it to be true.

"Let's get our two bits worth," fat lady said.

When it came down to it, the fat lady was the toughest audience Seamus had. He slid the blade dryly into his throat. When the hilt tapped his teeth, he stepped aside for a better view, pulled it, and heaved that knife at her with everything he had. A pointed side-tip caught the stage. The hilt might have struck Betina's smallish head, but she'd collapsed into the second row. The knife throw pushed them all back, the whole crowd. Cowards, all, Seamus thought.

"SOMEONE HELP THE FAT LADY!" Did he have to feed them every move? A couple of GIs came forward and lifted her onto the front row bench.

Seamus, nodding and gesturing his help, maintained the stage. He knew mime and pulled her up with them. A polka dot hanky mopped his brow. The fat lady was part of the act, now. She hadn't counted on that.

He came back with magic tricks, swallowed some balloons. He'd planned to close with the neon tubes, but it was too late now. So he slipped and threw himself into a fall. The crowd laughed. He was what the fat lady said he was—Seamus, the clown.

✣

Next thing the sword swallower knew, fat lady was in his mirror putting on a face, curler rags knotted her hair. Half of her sat on a stool and half on the bowed top of a wardrobe trunk. It'd been a while since Seamus saw her using colored sticks to shade and shadow. She made herself into a cartoon. A pretty lady whose body's been stretched side-wise, like she walked off a fun house mirror.

"What you up to?"

"Getting out."

"Heard that before."

"Told this radio guy his fortune. Said for me to come down the station. Said he'd try me in *Mystical Theater.*"

"What're you talking?" Seamus couldn't have swallowed an oyster when she told him.

"I'm going to be on radio." Her lazy eye, dark and slower than usual.

He couldn't think it, hearing her voice on that box of tubes. "Hawk the acts on the bally," he said. "I'll move over, give you some stage."

"I'm tired of being a freak," she said.

"You're good at it." Seamus didn't know if he'd get slapped for saying so. "You can even lose the weight. If you want."

That was something, said over a wardrobe trunk about to collapse from him and half of her. He pinched the back of her hand. Sometimes, that made her giggle. Instead, her whole face twisted.

"What now?"

"Ellie wrote me."

"The twins find a miracle doctor for you?"

"Edie's dead, Sham. She didn't make it."

"That's a punch in the gut." It was, even though Seamus said it would happen. Damned if he didn't say so.

"You go with me to Ringling," he said.

"You don't got an offer."

Seamus felt he'd put the wrong face on, by mistake.

"You know something? You are a clown. A clown clowning himself—that's the worst kind."

The fat lady pushed herself through the trailer door, Seamus's best-looking sword shuddering over her head. It worried him, how he saw the blade slip its nails and slice into the back of her neck. How many times he seen it coming down that way?

✣

A sword swallower didn't need a rubber band, but Devon could play Seamus's matinee any time. He was a kid's circus hero, doing magic tricks Seamus showed him how. Wore a cape that the fat lady made for the sword swallower, let it drag the ground.

"Sham, we leaving the circus?" Devy dropped things on him like an anvil coming out of blue sky.

"Who says?"

"Fat lady."

It was just the two of them, off-stage and changing into street clothes, but Seamus didn't know if he should be calling his mother that.

"She says next jump for me is school."

"This life's plenty school," said Seamus. The makeup was coming off like greased soap. "Where else you give snakes a milk bath?"

Devy's loose smile could've wrapped twice around his face. "Keeps their coats shiny."

"Do the regular kids know what stripes and ligers are?"

"Tigers. And lions and tigers, again," he said.

Seamus pretended to forget about taking the cape back. "Elephants stomp when a storm's coming on."

"And they cry real tears," said Devy.

How'd the kid know to find the ticklish hurt starts at the back of Seamus's neck?

"If she goes, the fat lady, I'll stay with you."

"Can't say that, Devy," he said, hanging up the cape because the boy give it back. "Seamus can do a lot of things. Some things, he got to let happen on their own."

✣

Not until Pins said the fat lady was leaving did Seamus believe it. Letch agreed to set her trailer down in the parking lot at WJBL after Edie's funeral. Seamus had finally managed to pull off the tube stunt, was prickly from it like the light still buzzed inside him. Heard fat lady yelling at him from inside the trailer, like she was talking to his ghost.

"Something's getting stuck, sword man."

Did she know he was out there?

"A balloon lip's getting hung up in your gut."

People ought to be careful about what they say because what's said comes from somewhere. And if it didn't come from the truth, watch it, because it's going somewhere, too. Words have weight and feel just like swords in throats.

"SEAMUS CAN SWALLOW ANYTHING."

"Swallow this," Betina said, slamming the door open, "Get out. Take everything you've ever swallowed and get out." She hurled that at him like it was nothing. She was working radio, and Devon's going to school, she said.

She threw out his box with the magic dust—Devon's favorite thing of Seamus's. It broke at the sword swallower's feet and out tumbled the squirms of a dozen balloons. Magic dust all over, mixing with regular dirt like ground glass.

"You hurt yourself. Some day, you'll hurt me." Seamus was dangerous, she said.

"I lock up my weapons," he said. He wished that was all true when she got hold of the sword he'd hung over the door. She came out of the trailer, swinging at him.

"PUT IT DOWN, FAT LADY," he said. There was nothing to do but play it like the stage.

"I'll put it down." Her lazy eye, reading it all coming true.

Seamus could've shown her how to swallow anything. Started easy with cigarette butts, even the balloons weren't bad. Stuff he could let go through. But that blade was biting the air—which proved even air wasn't nothing because it made that low, *flipt-flipt* sound.

The fat lady belted out a scream. Seamus never thought it before but screaming probably set her up good for swallowing. Down went the sword in two stiff thrusts, like she's slicing herself in half. She must have been practicing in her head every time she saw him do it.

Scared hell out of Seamus, especially when he got hold of things and remembered the engraving crinkling down the blade. Something fat lady didn't know, scrollwork's poison to a sword swallower. Throat skin stuck to it like wet tissue paper.

"I've got it," he said and grabbed the handle. Her arms went haywire, almost knocked him down. By then, she was choking.

Seamus counted it as saving the fat lady's life, sliding it out slow and careful. The blade was all but out, without hurt—that was when the sword swallower decided there was some fortune in this the card reader never saw.

"I AM THE SWORD SWALLOWER," he said, and pulled. Out came the blade, hard and quick.

He maybe played it like an act, but the blood was for real. It bubbled out stringy. The truth? He thought he'd done it. Thought

he'd killed the fat lady. Tongues can really bleed. All that happened, her tongue was cut. He sliced it near in half.

Fat lady didn't have so much to say anymore. That radio talk? Man like Seamus knew in his gut when something wasn't going to pan. He hitched her trailer to his pickup, like always, and pulled onto Route 1 in front of the clowns.

"Sting-ink mab-man," fat lady said, blubbering on his pop.

Seamus would be growing daisies out his eyeballs before she got her hands on another blade of his. Swords and scissors were dangerous. Fat lady think he didn't know how sharp?

"I DIDN'T DO IT FOR REAL." He said it so much, it became true as any act. Besides, this way was better for the boy. The crowd wouldn't see that. There was always them that's walking out smug before Seamus got to close the show. But by then he had their two bits jangling in his pocket.

OLIVER RICE

I Among the Ravagers of Bali

On the flight to Denpasar,

I bearing ironies for watching the world,

the Englishman beside me said
do not go to the hotels on the beach.
The rajah at Ubud is on bad times
and occasionally accepts paying strangers
in his guest house,

I bearing commotions of the mind.
Out of New Orleans.
Out of Margaret Mead.

✤

In twilight at the gate of the palace
a solicitous shadow
summoned a shadow with some English

from unimaginable rooms,
convivialities,
confidentialities.

Lying awake, then,
in a bed almost European,

in my dissident vocation,
in my vagrant learning,
I listened for the surf,
mythic monkeys,
a passionate bird.

♣

On a bright morning pavilion,
a gazebo of stone and thatch,
was served fruit and rice cakes and coffee
by discreetly ambiguous retainers,
tawny, saronged,

fragments of commonality
glinting among the frangipani,
the cunning hands,
deft eyes,
unrecountable lore,

and was assigned a driver,
for the village roads,

♣

to Amlapura, Bangli, Sanur,

I a person of all time
inventing anthropology

on the paddies terraced up the hillsides,
at the eating stand beside the temple gate,
behind the walls of Klungkung, Singaraja,
where under the banyans the women made their fires,

to whom Cincinnati was unbeknownst,

in the banana grove,
pig sty,
sudden fete along the roadside,
a procession of drums and gongs,
great wands of twining palm leaves and flowers,
townsmen blancing a cremation tower
of latticed bamboo brightly decked,

everywhere the air unseizable,
fervent with locality,
the necessities of forepersons,
distant parts of myself.

♣

On Tuesday went south and east

through the mores,
the small rules of their mornings,
their obligations,
their belonging,

their dailiness,
duck shepherd with an enormous hat,
inaccessible faces,
royal tomb,

cages of fighting cocks,
women and children at play in the river,

who did not suspect what ires cruised my freeways,
how my cities trembled with their convictions,

carvings of teak and ebony and jackfruit
at a workshop down a dirt road,
birds and deer and poising slender maidens,

canons of centuries in their chisels,
in the loom of the weaver of brocades,

mother of many,
keeper of a sweet potato patch,
who led her pig to market on a rope,

who could not tell what I needed to know,

✣

and on Friday drove north,
past Hindu ruins,

moss and creepers crowding the lane
up the slope of Guning Agung, terrible volcano,
to the tiering roofs of the mother temple,
demonic faces hewn in the sandstone walls,
serpents, grotesque beasts, massing jungles,
incense faintly lingering about the courtyard,
where sitting places awaited the deities
in a litter of wasted offerings.

✣

At night,

I with quarreling hormones,

the shadow puppets played at Sukawati,
lamps lit the stalls along the roadsides,
frogs droned in the flooded fields,

in the compounds of Tabanan, Arak,
farmers, fishermen, boys, and dignitaries
came with flutes and xylophones, drums and gongs,

sons and daughters came to dance the reverend legends,
warriors out of Ramayana,
stomping, whirling,
splendidly masked and costumed,

I receiving empathies,
portents,
entreaties with no names,

pubescent nymphs out of old Java,
gorgeously crowned,
bodies bound in gold brocade,
dipping and rising,
eyes flashing, fingers shimmering,

pagan and unbarbaric,

I a fierce vanishing alterself,

✣

I departing on a Monday,
back to Djakarta,
back to my gothic autobiography,

the afternoon
they were casting the uncle's ashes out to sea
in a tiny boat.

Pammy's Door

Somewhere during the evening I'd lost my inborn purchase on temporal progression. The half dozen Percodan I kept in my sock as a precautionary measure had found themselves called into service during a post-prandial fit of theretofore unknown panic. Told that fellow, Gino, that I had to use the gents and I left Adkins Ranch on a dead run. I didn't stop till I took those cement stairs to Pammy's door two at a time.

Christmas lights kaleidoscoped on her porch. I guessed she must have strung them the day before. Their blue and green and red blinking pitched a strange array of colors against me. I pounded on her door and didn't hear anything right away. I pounded again.

"Pammy!" I hadn't meant to shout. Pammy hated when I raised my voice, said she didn't like the neighbors thinking she dated common trash. "Pammy!" I pounded away some more until I heard shuffling inside. The bolt got thrown and she opened the door, but only a crack. She'd have been less surprised had the angel Gabriel himself come calling.

"Elijah, you ain't supposed to be here."

Warm air blew out of her place, out of that little sliver of darkness behind the still-chained door.

"You been sleeping, baby?"

"Jesus, Elijah. Tell me you ain't this stupid."

Now, let me set the record straight about Pammy. She's tough as jute, sure, but she's also more beautiful than anything Ali Baba'd ever pilfered. Pammy's kind of beauty is rare, might even be misdiagnosed by the uncouth as some form of homeliness. Her smile's

slight, only uses half her mouth. But there's subtlety in that parsimony, makes it fine like a thimbleful of saffron. The bridge of Pammy's nose bends to the left, the way some old boyfriend broke it for her. She refused to get it set. Says she kept it on that side as a commitment to herself, like her mind's made up, and that symmetry, like any shit-heel boyfriend, can go fuck its own vainglorious reflection.

"You were supposed to be at Adkins for thirty days," she said, her jaw held tight as if she could chew glass back to sand. I'd envisioned her greeting as an open-armed affair, her mouth filled with words of longing. But Pammy kept the door chained.

"I'm a fast learner. Got the whole thing sussed in a day and a half. Now throw open that door and let's get to reuniting."

But Pammy'd never lay back for a fool. I knew it'd take some slick oratory for her to open that door, but I was far too tired for any form of grandiloquence. I'd been running a long time on account of poor directions.

"What's the most expedient way off this phony Brigadoon?" I'd asked some grizzled Adkins Ranch janitor. He was smoking a cigarette out by the laundry and did some herky-jerky St Vitus number that, only later, did I realize must have been a reaction to my startling him. Trying not to break stride, half expecting the Dobermans to come lunging at my ass, I read his gyrations to mean, "just over there, young friend, through them junipers and onto freedom." So I went that way, up and over a cinder block wall, out into a muddy field where I stayed lost for a good hour or two.

"Pammy, you know I don't need no rehab. Place was full of crazy people. Some woman named Sweetpea made me a card out of construction paper and glitter paint. She told me I was in love with my own destruction. What's a man supposed to take from that?"

"It was thirty days in rehab or ninety in county, Elijah."

I leaned against the technicolor-blinking door frame, our faces close, separated by that taut chain.

"I ain't no troublemaker, Pammy. It's been a series of poor and unavoidable circumstances."

"We discussed all this, Elijah. Simple math, we said. Remember? Thirty's better than ninety. Simple math."

"But wasn't anything simple about it."

Things'd gone to hell on the second night. Gino, my counselor, buttonholed me as I was fishing a renegade piece of fried chicken out my molars. He seemed like a nice enough guy, though he wouldn't smile and used too much pomade. As a proud graduate of Adkins Ranch, Gino considered himself somewhat of a role model. He'd kicked a proclivity for crank that had rendered his septum a scabby memory and left him to speak as if he were in constant need of a Kleenex.

"Pammy, they discovered a bit of contraband in my personal effects. I'd like to say it was a frame-up, but that would be flat lying. I know it was dumb, so don't even say it. I swear I was going to quit. But cold turkey? Everyone knows that doesn't work."

Pammy's voice was flat, reasonable as usual. "Haul your ass back to rehab and beg them to take you in again." She closed the door.

Gino'd said, in his adenoidal way, that we had a "pwoblem," that we had to have an "ebergency sessiond." And I tried to play it cool, but I knew what was coming. Sometimes you just know. Maybe I'd bragged to this kid, Gillon. He said he'd thought to bring a stash himself, but hadn't had the stones to try. Then he said something about how, rumor had it, the staff nosed through the dorms every day.

"They hustled me into this room, Pammy," I shouted through the door. A light went on in another apartment. Some neighbor shouted for me to shut up. "Everyone was sitting in a circle. I ain't no hell-raiser, Pammy. I just needed a little time to think. You can't blame me for that."

"Elijah, go away," she shouted through the door. "This is the first place they'll come looking for you."

"Who, Pammy? The cops? Hell, they're always looking for me. Any cop in this town gets happier than a Jap with a two-eyed daruma when he gets a shot at Elijah Malverose."

I'd looked at all them sitting in that circle at Adkins. Gillon, Sweetpea, Gino, some big fellow called Lionel, a few others. They weren't going to help me. Street junkies, most of them. What I needed was my Pammy. Couldn't get her off my mind when I was there. I never had to dream about her when she was in my arms, but at Adkins Ranch, she was all my thoughts'd focus on. And she could cause some sweet reverie. She's what I was thinking about when I told Gino I needed to hit the gents.

At Pammy's door I heard the sounds of unchaining. There was a tingle behind my left ear that I took to mean things were going to work out somehow. Pammy'd let me in, let me get a little high, let me run my hands over her, let me get some rest.

When the door opened, I saw the rubicund visage of one Wim Haudela, night crew captain at the Lucky's on Aviation. My mind set to racing. I felt real cold. The first thing I thought to do was inquire as to the relative condition of Wim's Ford Ranger, his pride and joy. But as I tried to talk, my words were trapped in my shirt which, itself, was gathered in my mouth on account of Wim's indelicate handling.

"I'm 'a call the police," I heard Wim shout as he chucked me on a cement, bone-break tumble down the stairs.

My face hit the last step and I felt a bicuspid break. I spit a bloody wad when I stood. Must've swallowed the tooth. It was nowhere in my mouth. I looked up at Pammy who stood at the top of the steps, finger in her mouth and legs akimbo. In those blinking lights, she didn't look like my Pammy anymore. More like a high-priced store display, a mirage of something I didn't deserve. Simulacrum of my own shortcomings.

"You all right?" she asked.

"All things considered." I ran my tongue along that gap in my mouth where my tooth had been. Jagged dentin remains cut at my tongue and I gagged on the taste of blood.

"Better get on then."

We looked at each other a long while.

"I'm going in, Elijah." But she didn't right away, just stood there with those glittering lights dancing all around her.

"Can I come see you again, Pammy? I mean, not soon, but later maybe? Sometime?"

"Won't be no sooner than ninety." She stood a moment longer, then dropped her chin.

My mind couldn't focus and I found myself at an unprecedented loss of words. Pammy walked back inside and closed the door behind her.

Monk's Prayer

If it isn't the buildings,
The concrete drone of the construction crew
Cutting deep into their hearts,

The birds flying above us,
Carelessly, above clouds of smoke
Carrying our souls, if it isn't the streets

With their cardboard houses
Where old men dream every night
The rain coming down, silvery

Sheets of knives that burn their skin,
Or the piano player who cuts
His finger above the wash of jazz

Seeping into the kitchen,
If it isn't the snow coming down lightly
On the roof, or the train

Moving its way through the city,
Its windows dark, the passengers
Riding blind except for the young boy

Who flicks his lighter on and off,
If it isn't the man
Across the aisle whose throat is cut

Or the woman they pass
In front of the last house fire
Who stares back at them

Without a face, then Lord, let me ask
What has conjured up this book
Of shadows, or this city covered

And then uncovered in ash daily,
This dream I wake to
Every day, holding a life

In my knuckles. Let me rest
To the sound of loss
Squeezing through that man's cut throat,

Or the subtle cry of birds, the suicide
Hum within their skulls.
Lord, let me ask again.

IRA Choral

I

The Music Room was the chamber under the street
where you'd spread your hands on the scored wall, see the marks
of fingernails from others trying to hold themselves up.

An air compressor in the background screaming on
until the black hood added others: singing, voices,
a firing squad's report. Take away sugar and oxygen,

and the brain can't tell the difference between Bach
tuning up and an autopsy's off-hand sounds. Nine hours
of garbled scripture, a doppelganger choking on his tongue.

Nothing you could carry out of there—no scar like them
burning off your nipples with an iron, scraping
your finger bone with needles. Only the inhuman edge

of the doubled voices saying *Your daughter's at the bottom
of a bog, infant son buried in a coal bin.* Every coda
coming back to Sir Edward's elegant report:

*Cruelty implies a disposition to inflict suffering,
coupled with indifference to, or pleasure in, the victim's
pain. We do not think that happened here.*

II

Kevin had it right: *A revolutionary is a dead man
on leave.* A death wish, even one raw as whale oil,
is boring. Winters, my old snapped ankle

keeps me half awake, its nightmare twinge like sonar
coming up from the sewers, bringing back tunnels
choked with bone: human, rat, and dog mixed in,

scraping the ceilings with their ball joints. The kind
of vision you get from an underground Church.
They had us wrap a .45 in rosary beads, leased us

posh spots in the liturgy. Said grace was not
the bootlace around Gerald's throat in the alley,
but the cold that clotted his slashed wrists just in time.

How can you talk to men who are screaming
through keyholes in their heads? No skeleton
exactly fits the lock. Books can't hold the girl thrown

over the bridge during the civil rights march, the men
who woke her with spiked clubs, denying the mercy
of drowning in shallow water, even poetry's easy say:

It was the River Faughan that killed me.

III

If there are slums in The Shining City, they'd be ours.
Never mind the amethyst throne, the seraphim
like spectators at a football match. This is Belfast.

Too much rioting, and the Brits seal off
whole blocks with CS gas. Oven cleaner. Days
like that, doors shut against fog, half plague, half chalk

from damned blackboards. All those hours,
bored teaching Catechism, I could see how St Peter
might sent the odd crib death here, the not-quite born

with voices thin as a tin cup. *Patience-weather,* Da would say.
Six weeks since Sean went walking and the paratrooper
in the passing truck took off most of his head

with a rubber bullet. At eight feet, you just airbrush
the skull away. And Brenda says Liam's for it.
Three days. Run with the IRA and eventually your spine's

going to grow rope. They let a journalist in to ask him
the obvious: *How do you feel about hanging?* Liam was
grateful, quietly foregone: *The mist will be cleared away.*

JOSH RUSSELL

The Sears Catalog

I

Monty took business classes with other veterans, all of them spending G.I. Bill money on suits and ties they hoped made them look normal as paper dolls in tabbed-on clothes. They wanted to forget Europe's snow and small hot islands in the Pacific; their homburgs and wingtips and copies of *How to Win Friends and Influence People* allowed them brief losses of memory. At night they returned to their pre-War pasts. They worked as stevedores on Lake Michigan, butchers in the South Side's slaughterhouses, pressmen at R.R. Donnelley & Sons. While they shoveled coal, quartered hogs, and saw thousands of issues of *Life* slide past, they lost themselves in dreams. They dreamt of boardrooms and of shareholders steepling fingers and nodding while they—survivors of the war, the docks, the slaughterhouses, the deafening presses—gestured toward charts crayoned with jagged lines of growth.

Monty worked the graveyard shift at Donnelley. He wore the same dungarees he had before the war, belt punched with three new holes to compensate for lost inches. On his breaks he strayed into the business office. There was a graveyard shift office crew as well, a clerk and a secretary, a man Monty had known since they played American Legion ball together and a girl Monty was in love with. The clerk was Oliver Hrbek. Before the war, Oliver had completed two years at Northwestern, and he often helped Monty with his accounting assignments. He and Monty had been best friends the summer after they both graduated from high school. They were a mismatched pair; Oliver's mother was small and dark, his father a

Viking who ran a bar across from Wrigley Field. Halfway between five and six feet, Oliver was brown eyed and slight like his mother, but had his father's massive knuckles and size thirteens. Monty was blue eyed and eight inches taller, looking more kin to Mr Hrbek then did his own son.

That summer after high school, Monty was on his way to Donnelley, his place beside a press waiting just as Oliver's books and narrow dormitory bed waited for him. Neither of them ever mentioned what would happen when summer ended. They spent June and July and August afternoons on the roof of Oliver's father's bar drinking Schlitz and watching the Cubs play on grass green as pool table felt. The War had yet to touch them. That September Oliver moved to Evanston and Monty found a furnished room far enough away from his mother to convince himself he was an adult. He had Oliver's new address scribbled on a coaster, but he soon lost it in the disorder of his tiny home.

It was two years later, waiting in line for an Army-issue buzz cut, that he recognized the huge feet of the second baseman who used to feed him double-play starters. They didn't even have time for a cup of coffee. Like the War was a daydream managed in a blink, three years later Oliver walked into a barbershop on Kedzie in which Monty was getting a shave. On the roof of the bar on Addison they stripped away their uniform blouses and drank in their undershirts, yelling Hank Sauer's name over and over, so drunk it sounded like a joke.

They spent a week drunker than that. Oliver's parents had filled his room with storage while he was gone, so he and Monty slept in living room chairs and on the kitchen floor. Oliver's mother happily scolded them while cooking huge breakfasts when they woke at noon, plates of sausage and eggs and fried potatoes. Monty went home for clean clothes and dinner, then met Oliver at the Tap Room and drank until dawn sun stained the windows.

Monty's foreman at Donnelley before the war was a man named Hrbek, no relation to Oliver, a Swede who liked Monty because he was not Polish, as were most of the men on his crew. "They can fucking make soup," Hrbek would allow, "but stupid as shit out of the kitchen." When Monty ran out of money he called Hrbek and within days was back at Donnelley. He was amazed as he watched the presses crank out pin-up girls and aborigines as if nothing had happened in his absence. He worked nights, spent days drinking with Oliver. Oliver wanted to talk about the War, and Monty would sit before him and wait, but each time he started, all Oliver could say was My God, and then wring his huge hands. Monty would nod, hoping to move him along. Oliver would shake his head and hammer off a bottletop on the bar's edge. When he was drunk beyond sadness, Oliver would try again, but it would come in incoherent bursts and by then Monty was usually as drunk as Oliver. All he would remember the next day would be Oliver moving his hands frantically over a beer bottle as if summoning a genie.

Monty, too, had a story he could not bear to tell. He had watched the massacre of his platoon while they rested in a small clearing, cleaning their rifles and heating C-rations over twig fires. Monty had been fifty yards off on a small rise, squatting over a shallow hole. He had a perfect view when the fusillade of well-aimed mortars fell. Everyone was dead before he could get his pants buttoned. He ran all night, avoiding the lights of farmhouses.

As dawn broke, he came upon a rabbit chewing grass at the edge of a cart track. It was flop eared and unafraid, an escaped pet. Monty walked right up to it and touched it. It was soft and fat. He circled it with his hands and lifted it to his chest. It was calm for a moment, then began to kick at him. He set it down to get a better grip and it slipped away with dexterity he'd never imagined a domestic bunny could have. It hopped into the underbrush and was gone. Monty was crying when the French found him. He carried a

clear picture of the carnage in the clearing as if it were a glossy postcard, but it was losing the rabbit that truly haunted him. When Oliver set to drunkenly waving his hands, Monty saw the rabbit above the mouths of the bottles.

Oliver's mother woke Monty one morning. He and Oliver had spent the night before, his day off, drinking boilermakers. His head was pounding when she led him from the couch to her small kitchen. She shoved a cup of coffee into his hands and scowled at him. "Get him work," she said. "Get him work at Donnelley's."

Monty sat. "He'll never do it." Oliver had mocked Monty's happiness the day he'd gotten his job back.

"Try. I'm tired, tired of him being so sad. He's sad because he has nothing better to do than be sad." She pushed a plate of biscuits at him. "You're a good boy."

Oliver hated the idea until he found out there was a bookkeeper's position. He applied and was hired, stopped drinking, moved his things from a home in which he no longer had a room to a flat with a bathtub in the kitchen. On Thursday nights he bought Monty dinner, usually at a Polish place near his apartment. The hand waving stopped; Oliver never again mentioned the War.

II

Monty took the streetcar from his walk-up on 63rd and Kedzie. At Halstead he caught the El and rode to 22nd Street, then walked the six blocks toward the Lake. He had a second-hand '39 Ford coupe he parked behind his building. Monty's co-workers, back from the War before him or never gone, drove big new Lincolns and Pontiacs. It was better to walk and ride the streetcar then risk the comparison, and the ride home in the morning was sometimes beautiful—new sun, milkmen and newspaper boys at work, dogs and young men slinking home in the slow early morning gait in which only debauched young men and dogs can slink.

In October the night air was crisp. Leaves colored and were illuminated as they fell beneath the streetlights. Monty drank cold air through an open El window, drank more as he walked from the stop. October meant Christmas issues and the big Sears Catalog. Monty walked toward the Old Plant, windows huge and white on its chocolate brick face. The previous shift was swarming out below the Indian-head frieze.

Monty took off his jacket and sat on it under a tree. He smoked a Pall Mall, enjoying it immensely, lighting a second off the first. The dark was progressing, every second making stoplights and neon more brilliant in the clear fall night. All over Chicago leaves were being burned and the sweet smell hung like perfume. Monty was savoring the moment, unworried about being late. Hrbek was ill, a cough he could not shake, and he came to the shop so full of gin he had to have Monty read his watch for him.

Monty leaned back and held his head in the hammock of his hands. The tree above had lost enough of its leaves so that he could see stars. He thought about Oliver's secretary, Sylvia Murphy, a tall redhead who colored from forehead to collar when she blushed. It was the blush that fascinated Monty. While the press cranked out pages and pages of *Esquire* and *National Geographic* he lost himself imagining her belly pinking like that.

He spoke into the dark, practicing again the words he'd told a mirror for days: "Sylvia, how'd you like to get some dinner and a movie? You could choose the movie." It sounded good, the two cigarettes making his voice rough enough to mask the waver. He pictured her blushing, then lit a third Pall Mall, and said it again: "Sylvia, how'd you like to get some dinner and a movie? You could choose the movie."

"Gee, that'd be swell," a man answered from the sidewalk. Another man laughed. The two locked arms and went skipping off down the dark street, silhouettes with silhouette lunch pails swinging. Monty flipped his smoke after them.

In the breakroom Hrbek was on one of the tables dancing and yelling, the graveyard-shift DPs pounding out a beat on the Formica beneath their lunch boxes. Oliver was standing with his back against one wall, a look on his face that Monty recognized as two-fold fear: if he didn't get Hrbek off the table there would be trouble, if he tried to get Hrbek off the table there would be trouble.

"Hrbek, what time is it?" Monty called.

Hrbek stopped dancing; Oliver looked relieved. Hrbek stared at his watch, squinted, shook his arm, held the Timex to his ear, and then looked at it again. "A little help?"

Monty climbed up and pulled Hrbek's watch close to his face. "Time to go to work," Monty announced, and Hrbek scowled down at the crew.

"You deaf *and* stupid? Time to go to work!" He held out his wrist as proof.

The men exited snickering; Oliver slipped back into the office.

"Listen, Monty, I got this plan." A fit of coughing overtook Hrbek before he could go on. He covered his mouth with a handkerchief and held on to Monty's arm to keep his balance. Sylvia hurried in, hair wild, eyes bleary with sleep and focused on the floor.

"Never trust a Jap alarm clock."

She stopped suddenly, pivoted her head up to see Monty and Hrbek standing on the table, Hrbek sounding as if his cold had suddenly progressed to TB.

"It's their revenge for the A-bomb," Monty explained.

"What's whose revenge for what?"

"Faulty alarm clocks. The Japanese. Hiroshima. They plan to overthrow us by causing our most attractive youth to oversleep."

From the tabletop Monty got a good view of flushed cleavage before she broke for the office door.

"So here it is," Hrbek said, "the Plan. The Sears Christmas and the new *Esquire* are running now?"

"True, yes."

Monty led Hrbek down to a chair and then to the floor. Hrbek offered a handful of nickels and continued while Monty dropped coins the into the coffee machine.

"What we do is get an *Esquire* Varga girl in with the Sears pages. They get bound up, shipped off. Think of the little boys' goddamn wish lists!"

Hrbek took the coffee Monty offered, sucking in the steam like a cure. "What do you think?"

"It's a swell idea." Monty sipped his cup and gave Hrbek the thumbs-up, winked.

Sylvia was combing her hair behind the office glass and Hrbek was staring. "If she was on page one-thirty-five, I'd be a happy man."

Monty laughed and Hrbek drank his coffee like a shot, then headed to his chair among the presses, Monty promising he'd be along as soon as he sorted out a little problem regarding his paycheck.

Oliver was punching adding machine buttons when Monty opened the door. Sylvia looked up from where she was filing and blushed again.

"Thanks for getting Hrbek down," Oliver said.

"No problem." He turned to Sylvia and said it. "Sylvia, how'd you like to get some dinner and a movie? You could choose the movie."

Sylvia turned red. The room was silent. Monty began to rock from foot to foot. Sylvia looked over his shoulder at Oliver, and then began to slowly nod her head, the blush darkening.

"Saturday good?"

She kept nodding.

"Italian?"

Her head bobbed like a doll's.

Oliver followed Monty out the office door. "Buy you some coffee?"

Monty held up his cup, so happy he was unable to talk. Oliver sorted coins with his huge fingers, then put them back into his pocket. "Listen, I need to ask you a question."

"Shoot." Monty was doing a gleeful softshoe.

"You ever hear of anyone dying from sex?"

Monty stopped his dance. "You mean like the clap?"

"Not from a disease, but from *sex*."

"I'm not sure I follow."

Oliver looked to where Sylvia sat typing. "I used to... abuse myself."

"Go lefty and everything'll straighten out."

Oliver grimaced. "Listen to me. I'd be... and I'm sure I'd feel my heart miss a hit. It's weak. In the Army I had malaria and my heart was weakened. I can't even walk more than two flights of stairs without pausing."

"Quit reading smutty books."

"The thing is, I have a girl now."

"Congrats." Monty stuck out his hand.

Oliver shook. "The thing is, will it be too much? Will my heart just stop?"

"My guess is she'll break your heart before your heart explodes."

Oliver's mouth twitched. He took out his coins again. They were tiny in his palm.

Monty put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "I've never heard of anybody's heart giving out, no man your age, at least. You hear jokes about old hillbillies and thirteen-year-olds, but I've never heard the one about the twenty-five-year-old and...?"

Oliver was smiling. "She's ten, but sophisticated."

"I'm sure. We'll all have to get together sometime and have a banana split and some reefer."

III

Early the next Saturday night Monty took Sylvia to an Italian place his accounting instructor had recommended. They ate spaghetti from bowls big as soup tureens, their napkins tucked into their collars by a waiter who filled their wine glasses whenever the level dropped a hair. Sylvia was nearly silent during the meal. She'd been to the Brookfield Zoo early that afternoon and the sun had given her fair nose a rosy tint. What little she said involved a baby howler monkey named Eugene who'd slipped through his cage bars and snatched ice cream cones from the hands of toddlers. Slightly drunk, they took a cab to a movie house in Sylvia's neighborhood to see a B Western. As soon as the credits rolled off screen, she fell asleep. Monty put his arm around her and happily watched the Cavalry fend off war-painted Apaches.

When the lights came up and people began to stand, the spring-loaded seats flipped up with muffled bangs and Sylvia woke. She tenderly touched his hand on her shoulder, then opened her eyes and looked up at Monty. She blushed and stiffened under his arm. He quickly removed it. Through a haze of half-sleep, she smiled a troubled smile.

Monty smiled back. "Hard to go about your business like a human when you're used to being a vampire?"

She nodded, pulled a handkerchief from her purse, and wiped at the corners of her eyes. "They're going to give you Hrbek's job," she said matter-of-factly, and for a second Monty was baffled. He thought she meant Oliver. "That cough isn't a cold, it's cancer."

On her stoop he watched through the glass door as she climbed the stairs, her head disappearing first, then her shoulders, waist and hips. She'd given him a firm handshake, so he took the vision of her disembodied left foot as his good-night kiss. His place was only a dozen blocks away, so he paid the waiting cab and started walking.

October was cooling slowly but surely; he flipped up the collar of his jacket to keep the chill off his neck.

In his room he sipped from the bottle of cognac his father had given him as a welcome-home gift. It was expensive and he savored every drop as he watched the city's lights flicker like low-flying stars. It would be hours before he could sleep. He dealt solitaire for awhile, read the final chapters of a James M. Cain novel he'd read before, then sat and allowed himself to think about what Sylvia had told him. Hrbek's job meant money. There would be a new Ford, maybe even a Lincoln, and a space in which to park it, his name painted on the curb. It meant sitting in the high chair like a lifeguard and watching men swim among the presses.

It also meant giving up what he imagined each time he ran his finger over the box scores of stock reports. It was possible to rise at Donnelley, but once you chose one path you could not hop onto another. Oliver's job was the start of the path to herringbone suits and a door with your name on the frosted glass. Hrbek's job was the start of a different path, a shorter one. The job would never change, but time would enlarge the checks. There would be a house in Oak Lawn, a Chris Craft, a workshop with a radial saw. Monty took his cognac and went to the roof in his pajamas. Pigeons cooed in unseen sleep and the city shimmered before him. He took a long pull from the bottle and felt the good liquor travel down inside him, and then its heat rose slowly through him like gentle flames.

IV

Oliver didn't mention the job offer on Monday. Days passed and Hrbek showed no signs he planned to leave. Thursday before work Monty met Oliver for dinner. They made it to coffee with only small talk, Oliver giving advice on an accounting assignment, telling a long anecdote about his landlord catching his wife with a tenant

innocently trying to work off the rent. Oliver lit a Lucky, passed the pack and his lighter to Monty.

Monty couldn't bear it any longer. "So when are you going to tell me they're going to give me Hrbek's job?"

Oliver blanched. "There'd be a marked increase in income, of course. And other benefits as well."

"You don't have to talk me into it."

Oliver tipped his chair back and looked at Monty through the scrim of cigarette smoke. "It's just that, well, you've been talking about billing and accounting so long that I thought—"

"That I'd turn down a dirty-hands job?"

Oliver shrugged. "There are those classes you're taking. They're an investment."

"I'll make more than you, won't I?"

Oliver smiled while a waiter cleared away plates and warmed up their coffee. "That'd be benefit number one."

"I'd have to start where you do if I wanted to do billing, probably lower—graveyard means extra pennies for everyone. What the hell? Why not get the big cash for playing ringmaster of the DP circus? Why not? I never was too keen on numbers."

Oliver frowned. "Sure. Hrbek'll be glad that you're be the one who takes his place. I'm sure his biggest fear is that he'll be replaced by a Polack."

Monty stubbed out his cigarette. "I do feel guilty. You have to when you take a man's job from him."

"You think it's better for him to be at work in the middle of the night rather than at home being nursed by his big Swedish wife?"

Oliver turned toward a window and exhaled a cloud of smoke. "How was your outing with Sylvia?"

Monty nodded. "Good. Spaghetti and then a cowboy flick. I like her."

"She's easy to like."

"Must be swell to have her around the office."

"Swell indeed."

"I wouldn't be surprised if she made the old heart miss a beat or two."

Oliver blushed slightly and chuckled.

"Now that I'm a rich man, when do I meet your little heartbuster?"

Oliver tapped ash. "The problem is schedules. She works days."

"How do you get time to strain yourself?"

Oliver smiled. "One makes time."

They drove to work together in Oliver's Studebaker, Oliver swearing Monty to secrecy about the job. Hrbek hadn't been told plans were afoot to ease him out. The doctor had called Donnelley after they found the cancer, but Hrbek hadn't mentioned it when he came to work the next day. It was a waiting game. As soon as he asked to retire they'd engrave a gold watch and start cutting pension checks.

Monty was barely able to work. The pressroom's windows looked out over the Lake, and while the presses did their deafening business, he watched the running lights of ore boats slip along like slow-moving comets. His accounting classes had taught him to do quick figures in his head. He watched the lights and added gross income, subtracted from it mortgage payments, car payments, the cost of a boat and a cabin in Door County.

Monty watched Hrbek and found himself wishing the cough would worsen and the old man would give up. A week passed. On Monday Hrbek cornered him in the men's room. "I'm going to die." He was crying. "Monty, I want it to be a train wreck, an explosion. I don't want to just shrink." He broke down and sobbed.

Monty put an arm around him and pulled him in close. Hrbek wore a sleeveless t-shirt and his arms looked like Charles Atlas'. He shook like he was cold, his crying an octave higher than his speaking voice. One of the pressmen came in, saw the two of them, and turned and left.

"I know how you feel," Monty offered.

Hrbek pushed him away. "Fuck you do. You're out balling and drinking. A young guy. How the fuck'd you know?"

"Listen," Monty said, "listen." And he told Hrbek about the rabbit.

v

Sylvia agreed to another dinner and movie. Monty blew the money he'd been saving for tuition on a new jacket, tie, and pair of shoes. He got a haircut and a shave. He had the car washed and waxed and picked her up. The Ford surprised her; Monty was pleased as he spun the radio dial in search of music.

They went to a restaurant he'd heard about, a place where the waiters played gags on you. He'd been promised it was a hoot. At the door the maitre d' fingered Monty's new tie admiringly, then cut it off just inches below the knot with a gleaming pair of dressmaker's sheers. Monty laughed at the waste.

Sylvia was quiet again; Monty did all of the talking. He told her about his new job, the small house he might buy in Oak Park with black squirrels chattering in the maple in the backyard. He rose to the proposal like a roller coaster rising to the drop. He fingered the ring box, rehearsing in his head both the question and the apology for the modest stone—he'd get her a bigger one with his first check.

Sylvia stood to go to the ladies' room and flatware poured from her purse.

"Thief," yelled the maitre d'. "Somebody call the cops!"

Sylvia began to cry and Monty was suddenly no longer amused.

"It's the big house for you, sister," a busboy announced from a nearby table.

"Can't you see you're upsetting my wife?" Monty yelled.

Sylvia's crying caught with a click. She gawked at him, then turned and walked out. The valet brought the Ford to the curb and Monty stiffed him.

She sat with her hip pressed against the door, as far away from Monty as she could manage. There was a light rain, a rain that in a month would be snow. The windshield wipers clunked back and forth.

"I left out a part, I guess. The part where I *ask* if you'll marry me."

"I'm already married," she said softly, her eyes focused out into the rain.

He pulled the car to the curb. "You're already married?"

"I'm already married."

"Who to?"

"Guess," she said bitterly.

He shrugged.

"To Oliver, you dolt. *To whom* do you think?"

"Oliver? *Oliver?* Oliver Hrbek? Why did you go out with me if you're married to Oliver?"

"We didn't want you to get mad. You're his friend. That was mainly it, but there's more. If they know we're married they won't let us work together. My job pays a better wage than any other I could get, and we need the money, we *really* need the money."

Monty put his forehead against the steering wheel. "Break my heart—Oliver Jr is on the way?"

"Slick work, Charlie Chan. Take me home."

Monty looked at the radio's glowing dial. "How about you have one last drink with me?"

She pursed her lips. "Why?"

"So I can pretend that we just didn't hit it off. It's not that the fact you're a married mother-to-be that cooled my fire, it's that you don't like my jokes."

"I don't like your jokes."

"Then it's settled. A nightcap."

They went to a Waiters and Porters club on the South Side. A band was shoehorned into a corner and the place was filled with men and women in the uniforms of dozens of different hotels, bus lines, and restaurants. Monty pushed Sylvia toward a table, unable to help himself. He ordered bourbon and yelled over her request for Coca-Cola with a demand for bourbon for her as well. The band was awful. They played as if they'd switched instruments on a lark. Someone with a trumpet tried a solo and was pelted with olives.

"I do believe I wish to go," Sylvia announced to everyone within earshot.

Monty saw a woman dancing a few tables away. He held aloft a half dollar, then slapped it to the tabletop. The woman swung over, managing to find a beat in the mess coming from the bandstand. After a short bump-and-grind she lifted her skirt. She wore no hose, garters, or underwear. Sylvia stood up. The woman kicked a leg over the table and eased herself down. When she rose, the coin was gone. Men and women clapped and whistled. Monty roared with laughter. Sylvia punched him in the eye. When Monty made it to the curb, Sylvia was getting into a cab half a block down. He gave futile chase, then went back to the club.

Later at his apartment, Monty was singing along with the radio when someone started pounding on his door. He opened it to find Oliver slumped against the jamb. Monty lived on the sixth floor and his friend was winded from the climb. Monty offered him the cognac bottle. Oliver panted, held up a finger to indicate he needed a moment to recover. When he caught his breath, Oliver hammered him with a roundhouse right that sent Monty drunkenly sprawling. The bottle shattered, and when Monty woke up he cut his foot running to the basin to vomit.

VI

Hrbek poured martinis from a huge vacuum bottle. There was a cake provided by the company, Hrbek's name in vivid icing, and an urn of coffee, but the cocktails had been the Swede's idea. "A party with no drinks?" he'd bellowed when Oliver told him there would be no liquor at his retirement celebration. "Why would I come to a party with no drinks?" By the time Sylvia and Oliver sneaked back into the office after a single piece of cake, Monty, Hrbek and the pressmen were drunkenly bellowing. There was a big console set in the breakroom and they had the music up loud, festive as New Year's. One of the pressmen dropped open an *Esquire* he'd filched from the line and began to dance with the half-naked Varga girl.

Monty pointed to him. "Last chance, Herb. Last chance to give all the little boys what they want. Send them into the closet with the real stuff, forget the brassiere section."

Hrbek tossed off the last of his drink and stood. "Let's do it."

Monty laughed and forked cake into his mouth. "That'd show them. Teach them to make a good man retire."

Hrbek grabbed Monty by the collar and jerked him to his feet. The DPs were still watching their friend dance with the centerfold. One of them tapped him on the shoulder as if to cut in.

Hrbek pulled Monty out of the breakroom. Presses ran at a furious rate, operators running madly about, covering for Hrbek's crew. *My* crew, Monty thought. Hrbek and Monty made their way to the stacks of uncut pages. Varga girls smiled up at them. Hrbek stooped and gathered an armload. Under their weight he staggered to toward the bindery. He pushed a thin, red-haired guy out of the way, then started feeding sheets into the machine. The redhead was yelling so loudly people could hear him over the din. Someone on the other end of the bindery picked up a Sears catalog and flipped its pages. He waved it at Hrbek and Monty with a triumphant flourish.

Hrbek stopped feeding in Varga girls and ran toward the man, Monty tailing him. Hrbek picked up a copy and located a supine blond between lawn mowers and garden tools. His laugh was huge and became an equally huge cough. Oliver and a man in a suit were suddenly behind them.

"What do you men have to say for yourselves?" the suit asked.

Monty looked at Oliver and Oliver looked away. "Sears has really outdone themselves with this year's models," Monty said.

Hrbek drove him home. The sun had yet to come and the dark was simply cold, the moisture taking all the refreshing sharpness from it. Hrbek handed Monty one of the catalogs when he got out of the car. "For old time's sake. A souvenir to teach you not to listen to dumb Swedes."

Monty was amazed by its weight.

"You need anything, you call me. My brother-in-law's a big man on the ore boats. It comes to that, I'll get you on."

Monty lay on his bed as long as he could stand the broken silence of the city, then drove his Ford to Oliver's apartment. Dawn was creeping up. Clouds filled the sky and the streetlights were still on. Oliver's place was on the first floor, the lobby door unlocked. Monty dropped the catalog on the mat, rang the bell, and ran. From his car he saw the lights come on inside the apartment. The blinds were flimsy and Monty watched Oliver's silhouette cross the room and open the door. He stood unmoving, the solid square of the catalog in his hands. Sylvia's outline came from the bedroom and put its arms around Oliver's, the two silhouettes becoming a single shadow thrown against the shade while Monty's tortured heart pushed against the cage of his ribs.

PHILIP PARDI

Without Birds

Yes, there is a blue sky above,
beneath which

the diviners

look up. Oncology
of clouds,

disgust

in the wind, twigs
and wrappers

waiting, waiting.

A student sleeps in the grass
as a squirrel absconds
one by one with her peanut M&Ms.

So many ways to avoid the central fact.

At bus stops, lacing boots
beneath unspotted statues

the posing

above which we find ourselves
looking down

for proof the clouds have passed.

ELEVEN POEMS

by Takamura Kōtarō

translated by John Peters

Takamura Kōtarō

Takamura Kōtarō was born on March 13, 1883. His father Takamura Koun was a famous sculptor, and from the age of five Kōtarō trained to be a sculptor. He studied at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, and later in New York, London, and Paris. Takamura considered himself more a sculptor than a poet, but despite his lifetime of work in sculpture, he is better remembered for his poetry.

Takamura was the first Japanese poet to master the free verse form and has influenced countless subsequent Japanese poets. His book *Dotei* (*Journey*), 1914, remains one of the most important volumes of twentieth-century Japanese poetry. As influential as was *Dotei*, Takamura is best known for his 1941 book *Chieko Sho* (*The Chieko Selection*) and 1950 book *Chieko Sho Sono Go* (*After the Cheiko Selection*), which chronicle his life with his wife Chieko from the time of their courtship until the years after her death. Theirs was an unusual relationship for the time: a marriage of love rather than arrangement, and one in which they shared the housework and each had a separate studio in which to work. For many years, they appear to have lived a happy though meager existence. In 1931, though, Chieko became depressed and attempted suicide. The next year she was diagnosed as schizophrenic and became increasingly ill. Takamura tried to care for her, but in 1935 he was forced to have her hospitalized. She died of tuberculosis in 1938.

During World War II, Takamura wrote a number of jingoistic poems in support of the Japanese cause. Later, regretting having done this, he went into self-imposed exile in northern Japan. He returned to Tokyo in 1952 to carve a statue for which he had been commissioned, and remained there until his own death from tuberculosis on April 1, 1956.

Winter Comes

Winter comes,
cold, sharp, strong, clear winter comes.
A crack sounds,
the report of a rifle.
Sobbing, sobbing, strong,
cool dawn's frosty heart.
Pondering this strange life,
suddenly *kakubeie*[1] does a handstand.
Let's stop calling our love love,
a little more cloistered, a little more free.

Winter comes, winter comes,
that strong, sharp, powerful authority.
A deceitful winter comes.

1912

[1] *Kakubeie* was a clown-like character who appeared during autumn festivals. He particularly represents poverty and carries with him an impression of sadness.

To Someone (Not to Play)

Not to play,
not to waste time,
you come to meet me.
——Painting no paintings, reading no books, doing no work——
and two days, three days,
we laugh, frolic, play, and make love,
shrink time mercilessly,
exhaust several days in an instant.

Ah, but
it's not to play,
not to waste time.
For us, brimming over, there's no other life.
This is life.
This is power.
Maybe it seems too wasteful, too excessive,
August's wealth of nature:
grasses bloom and decay in the heart of the mountains,
the voice of sunlight springs forth,
flocks of clouds move endlessly,
overabundant thunder,
rain and water,
green, red, blue, yellow,
forces that blow forth in the world,
how can we say these are wasted?
You dance for me.
I sing for you.

Moment by moment, we tread life fully.
I, who one instant casts aside a book,
or another opens it,
am one and the same.
Don't associate me with
vain diligence
or vain indolence.
When your loving heart bursts
you come to meet me,
abandon all, transcend all,
trample all,
joyfully.

1913

Supper

Out in a downpour
like a soaked rat
I buy one *shō*[1] of rice,
twenty-four *sen* five *rin*.[2]
Five dried mackerel,
one pickled daikon,
red ginger,
eggs from the hen house,
seaweed beaten flat like steel,
fried balls of fish,
salted bonito entrails,
boiling water,
we devour our supper
like demons from a hungry hell.

The storm blows harder,
crashes against the roof tiles
and quakes and rattles the house.
Our appetites remain strong,
and our strong instinct
urges us to turn our food to blood.
When we soon reach the ecstasy of satiety
we quietly hold hands,
cry in our hearts with boundless joy
and pray:
May life be in everyday trifles.
May the smallest splendor be in life's every detail.

May all be overflowing.
May we always be full.

Our supper
is tied to a power more violent than a storm,
and our after-dinner fatigue
awakens strange passions of the flesh,
causing us to marvel at our bodies
that blaze up in the storm's midst.

This is the supper of the poor.

1914

[1] One *sho* is about two quarts.
[2] It is impossible to give an exact translation of how much money twenty-four *sen* five *rin* would be equivalent to today. Literally, a *sen* is 1/100 of a *yen*; a *rin* is 1/10 of a *sen*. This is a very small amount of money and emphasizes their poverty.

Catfish

There's a leap and a slap in the tub.
As night deepens the small blade grows bright.
Woodcarving is the work of the north wind's winter nights.
Even if we run out of coal for the fireplace
Catfish!
would you rather feed on immense dreams under ice?
Cypress chips are my kin.
Chieko's not afraid of our poverty.
Catfish!
Your fins have blades.
Your tail has feelers.
Your gills have black-gold trim,
and your stubborn optimism
is such a strange greeting for my work.
The wind falls and the floorboards smell of orchids.
Chieko has fallen asleep.
I push aside the half-carved catfish,
renew the whetstone
and quickly sharpen a small blade for tomorrow.

1926

Gold

Let's not freeze the workshop mud.
Chieko,
no matter how lonely the evening kitchen
burn some coal.
If the bedroom blanket is thin,
no matter that you put on a cushion
in the cold of dawn,
let's not freeze the workshop mud.
I am winter's sleepless guard,
freeing the thermometer's soldiers
to counterattack the north wind.
No matter that New Year's Day's a little lonely.
Chieko,
burn some coal.

1926

One Who Imprisons Beauty

The red touch of the tax notice is in my sleeve.
At last, liberated from the radio, the night's winter wind is in the road.

Selling is unfair, a buyer's a possessor.
Possession is isolation, I who imprison beauty.

The secret art of molding and the force of money are incompatible.
The joy of creation and the bitterness of uncultivated voracity are incompatible.

Waiting in an empty house: Chieko, clay, and wood chips.
The cooked red snapper in my pocket is still dimly warm, crushed.

1931

Life Perspective

A bird flaps from under foot.
My wife has gone insane.
My clothes are tattered,
The back-sight 3,000 meters.
Ah, this gun is too long.

1935

Six Songs

Chieko don't think me sad
for I diligently grapple with my work.

One who holds the frightening word "insane"
tries to call to Chieko.

Pollen of endless pines flies across the beach,
Chieko becomes friends with blue-winged magpies.

It hurts Chieko to know
how much I risk my life for my work.

This house remains filled with Chieko's breath,
alone I close my eyes but cannot sleep.

Kotaro and Chieko built a matchless dream
and lived here long ago.

1941

Misty Dream

Chieko and I went by stylish cable car
to what's left of Vesuvius' crater.
My dream was tiny, like a spice.
Chieko enfolded me densely in the mist of her twenties.
From the end of the slender bamboo-like telescope
gas flamed out like a jet plane.
Looking through the telescope I could see Mt Fuji.
Something strange was at the bottom of its bowl.
Many people were on platforms around the bowl.
Chieko threw a bouquet
of Mt Fuji's seven flowers of fall
deep into Vesuvius' crater.
Chieko was dimly beautifully pure,
yet filled with infinite infatuation.
Her womanly body burned transparent like mountain water.
Leaning on me she trod on crushed gravel.
Everywhere the smell of Pompeii was suffocating.
The disharmony in my whole being
that I felt until yesterday flickered out.
At five a.m. I awoke to a mountain hut refreshed by autumn.

1948

Elemental Chieko

Chieko has returned to the elements.
I don't believe in the truth of self-existing souls,
yet Chieko exists.
She is in my flesh,
frolics with me,
fights with me.
She adheres to me,
burns phosphorescent in my cells
and keeps me from senility.
Soul is another name for body.
Chieko, who exists in my flesh,
is my soul's extremity
She is the judge.
I am wrong when Chieko slumbers within me.
I am right when I listen to her voice in my ear.
Chieko simply romps
around my whole existence.
Elemental Chieko even now
exists in my flesh, smiling at me.

1949

Those Times

Trusting others can save us.
Though I was rather decadent
Chieko trusted me completely.
She abruptly dove into my heart,
and I lost my decadence.
I hesitated because
I discovered something inside of me,
unknown even to myself.
I was a little confused but recovered.
One day I suddenly noticed
Chieko's earnest, pure, breathtaking countenance.
Rare tears flowed from my eyes.
I faced Chieko renewed.
Chieko met me with a smile
and even ignored my bestiality.
Enfolding me in a pure sweet fragrance
I was drunk with that sweetness and forgot everything.
Through this heavenly woman's wondrous power
I, a decadent man, first found my place.

1949

LISA PEARSON

Cleave (a diptych)

Today there is no horizon. The afternoon is shrouded white, from flat earth to sky. It fell hard last night while we were sleeping, and when we woke we wondered, which had we dreamt—yesterday or today? The few brave or foolish who venture out today find themselves knee high in swells of sky. Each slow step the synchronous crush of a thousand tiny bones. It will take an eternity to march the thirty-six paces to the barn. Along the invisible road, the outstretched arms of trees veiled in white quiver beneath the weight of it, as if betraying their pretense of flight. Did I say how cold it is? And quiet? You can't hear the children playing just over the hill. They fall down again and again, their joyful yelps like an echo from a desert on a map. On warm cheeks a million white worlds melt into a second of translucence, then are wiped away with the back of a hand. Across the clotted sky, a murder of crows, black as drops of ink, hysterical. What is buried beneath: already forgotten. The sun years gone, the hunger years old.

A crowd of eager mouths waits behind the window, watching the butcher at his work outside in the snow. He kneels, sinks into my shoulder, belly, loins, holding me, firmly, with his broad hands. Between us: an unseasonable, wondrous heat. I struggle, a little. Though the glass sweats with their breath, I see the lips move silently, incessantly, chanting. The butcher then, in a single stroke, slits my throat. Steam rises from the pan his young apprentice holds carefully to the wound so as not to spill the blood. *The world has always been this white, the world has always been this white.* The virgin snow beneath me melts, bare, wet, brown earth, alive, rousing as if I were the sun. It is so quiet I cannot bear to scream. On my skin, the tickle of dead grass.

In front of the window in the bridal chamber, she poses with her husband of less than five days, the afternoon autumn light a thin promise, but Enough To See By, says the painter, who asks her often if she'd like to rest, noticing her tremble and thinking it a chill. Today, she seems Resolved, though seven months pregnant, faint and hungry, she is Weak. Yesterday, the painter admonished her repeatedly, Chin Up, Look Forward, but the bride, mesmerized by the hairy tempest at her feet, kept her eyes lowered as if in prayer despite his pleas. She tried to imagine what the little dog was digging for buried beneath the floor, but its namelessness distressed her most. Just a Prop For Fidelity, said the painter when he set it loose.

Her desire to touch the dog was exceeded only by her desire to call out to it, to witness the world stop with her voice sounding its name, the beginning of time: if only to make its head turn so their eyes might meet. So she pondered, but no names surfaced, and instead, as she stared intently at the animal, she fell into a wonder about whether her own child might have fur, a lust for raw meat, rows of nipples, a long blue tongue, or perhaps a tail like a rat's, an extra eye or even leathery wings. Nothing seemed impossible. The child, as much as it was a part of her, was made of so much why. Why her? Why then? Why there? Why him? She was so easily overwhelmed. Why couldn't she resist? But she did, finally, in refusing to utter his name. No matter the threats—starving, beating, whipping, burning—she said nothing. Over the weeks, the months, every day of silence dissolved his face, his hands, his smell, his voice until she no longer remembered if she had ever known his name at all. By the day of the wedding he was no more than the faintest taste of salt in a glass of water. But her child, though it belonged to her, would bring him to life again. How would she love him? She had no more tears.

Her head still bowed, her husband squeezed her wrist tightly, but gently, to remind her they were posing. He was silent, deadly still, aware of the light that illumined his face, of the number of times he blinked and swallowed, of the measured rhythm of his own breath. He had saved her. She owed him everything and he need give her nothing more than the ring on her finger and a name for her child.

The painter remarked the bride was Hopeless, and then commanded the little dog to obey, but it continued to scrape its paws fanatically on the floorboards, tail wagging like the tongue of a bell rung hard and fast to announce the day's execution. Everyone knows the sound of that bell. It is never mistaken for a feast day, a sudden death of natural causes, or a marriage. Within minutes, the butcher rinses the blood from his knives, the lacemaker places her pinpricked cushion on the seat of a chair, the blacksmith gives a last bellow to make his fire roar, the tapestry weaver tucks her needle into the half-woven headless virgin on her loom, mothers take milk-crusted children by the hands. Everything is left undone for the day. From narrow streets to wider roads, people course into the town square where the crowd throbs with anticipation, murmuring among themselves, a few palpitations of laughter, the crescendo of chanting indiscernible from the causerie of a thousand crows perched above them. From ledges, steeples and gargoyles, they flutter and scream, erupting in flight as the executioner appears on the landing of the gallows. The crowd wails, and he replies with a wobbly nod, as if woken from a standing dream. Then the day's murderer ascends the steps with such calm that a deafening roar rises against him: they want begging, shitting, pissing, sobbing. Despite them, he holds his head high and takes his place next to the executioner as if he were his bride. The convicted leans into him, shoulder to shoulder, turns his mouth as if to kiss him on the cheek, but instead whispers in his ear. "I forgive you." A mad quiet swarms

over the crowd, though they did not hear his words. As the executioner rings the rope around the man's neck and positions him over the trap door, the silence persists, they are waiting, just the shallow pulsing breath of a beast with a thousand mouths as quiet as the beating of wings or the wagging of a dog's tail.

Without a word, the bride tumbled to the floor, falling hard on her knees, and reached out over her belly to scoop up the little dog into the cradle of her arms. She held it tightly, pressing her face into its fur, inhaling deeply, but it writhed and wiggled free, tongue searching for skin, its madness an unequivocal love. She let go a little so it could kiss her. She did not know she was perspiring and that it was hungry for her salt. Let Go, yelled the painter, He Doesn't Belong to You. Do You Want to Hurt Him?

Today, for the sake of Composure, there is no nameless creature. The bride maintains her position next to her husband, her left hand out to him to hold, though they stand far apart. He rings his fingers around her wrist, leaves her hand open as if she is begging for alms or mercy, perhaps to show the painter the symbol of their union which is, as of yet, unconsummated though they have tried despite her girth. Last night in their failure they both had the feeling there was something still virginal about her: to him, she was an impenetrable fortress, on vigilant guard of everything inside; and in not yet truly knowing him, she had a glimmer of forgetting. It shone behind her closed eyes once she felt alone in bed, his hands no longer touching her, and then it kicked in her belly, all that innocence again. She could weep like a virgin, tears on her tongue: there is nothing there in the dark when it is too dark to see.

Now, with her free hand, she touches her belly, imagines how large she might be if she grew and grew and never gave birth, her child inside her, made of air, lifting her off the floor as it rises to full height. She floats out the window over rooftops, past the bell in the church steeple, the crows accompanying her to the clouds until she is so deep in sky the world below her disappears.

Her husband, however, is still holding her hand. She cannot imagine now that no pleasure will ever rival the tips of her son's fingers in her mouth, how much she will long for the first winter snow, and that her husband's fidelity will be her undoing.

Stanza for Conquistador

There is this essential moment
when the bearers are being herded
down a narrow dirt road
without shields or *macañas*—it is
still happening, hasn't appreciated
in the telling, hasn't been born
but clings wickedly to its own cord,
something wet. Tlatelolco
has had both kneecaps blown off
by a harquebusier; beads of rain
glisten on precious leaves above
the Temple; it is not a time or place
to remember, not ample enough
for history; it isn't so much *before*
Nauhtla clambers up the ziggurat
to hurl a score of stillborn curses
at the rocks below, or *after* the glare
from Motecuhzoma, spun hotly
off his litter; it passes instead
somewhere along the in-between,
in someone's apprehension
of slackness: Cortés is still
a Sun God, or else he is not, or else
it isn't going to matter anymore.

The Empire is Here to Do What it Loves

Spanish Sagunto came down, finally,
in a halo of ash and spark, beneath the elephants
who shimmied and tucked their ambling grins—
Hannibal with an alabaster heron under each arm;
and someone who had tied them both,
in loops of silk, dead. So, Rome would smoke its fat
another year. There was that—sic transit gloria—
the empire resolved against itself,
no decisive battles, just a husk of unclaimed land

gathering beach tar and disappearing in the glare—
Taurini girls dissolving sadly into groves; their sons,
falsettos who sang, anywhere, for a drink; Hasdrubal
encamped at Zama, enraged, upsetting saucers
of sibilant milk: everyone led an expectation
down a celibate trail, carving its name in softest stone,
wherever water was decisive, or Hannibal strode
with torch held high: doubtless, this empire, doubtless.

Stutthof

for Peter Nicolaisen

"Poland" means "plain"

I

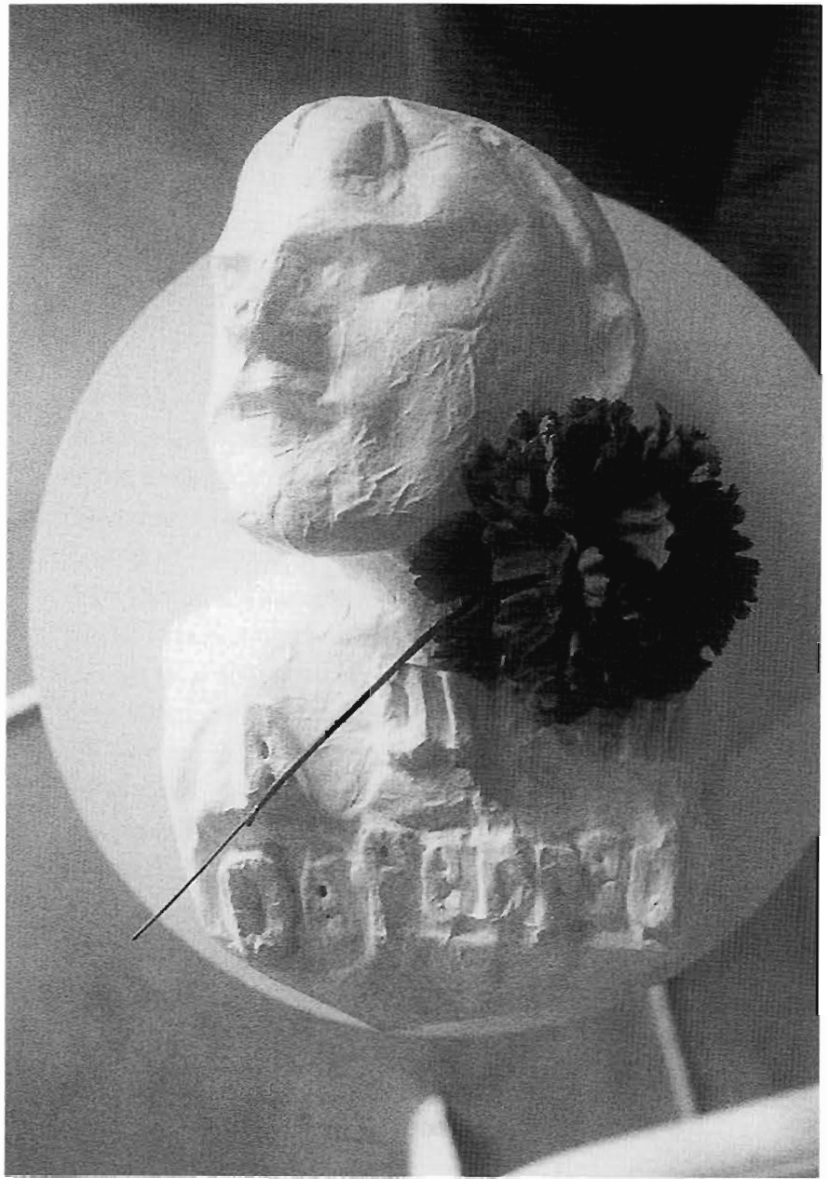
The Polish plain is low on verticals.
Persons have passed from left to right and back,
as the birds go, under a parallel sky
much like a long gray lid, for centuries.
Ambition is lateral—"Cover the earth."
A cardboard diorama of the camp,
laid down on concrete in the second hut,
catches its reach: an urban grid inscribed
on midden, rut and ditch, far as the mind
can eye and rail run to Pawiac gaol,
from which, "Entrain the scurf of Europe's plain.
Store it in long, low huts. Work it to death.
Retool. From '39 to '41.
And for a thousand years." *Too little time*

II

Concentrate. In '71 Napoleon three,
en route for exile in Chislehurst,
lifted one tiny foot from a big boot
cobbled for Hausmann's boulevards, and flicked
from under that silken heel the German state—
itchy for empire. But how, the troughs being hogged
and Hottentots few? What better place than Edge
ville East. What better face than Juden,
being native there and open to the blow?
Concentrate...and Stutthof shall link Pawiac
to Grunwald (1410) to Tannenberg
(1914), on timetables that seep
by long forgotten rote, from old men's throats.
Practice...and for a thousand years...*Practice*

III

"Swimwear shall not be worn beyond this point"
(a rule from '41). The Baltic salt
has lifted laminate from images
of average cruelty, and rusted staples
holding the Reich's second Eastern front
to a wooden wall. A blistered arrow arcs,
from Northern France to Belarus, passing
through Peter, born in its path at Flensburg (marked),
whose scholarship on "Blut" and "Boden" captions
what pins him here, among seaside images,
to Tannenberg, lost in his grandfather's heart. Loose fowl,
scratching at perimeter posts, crisscross
the fast geometry of dogs engaged
in quite another iconography.



A Dream Deferred by Willie Birch. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)

LAURA CAMILLE TULEY

A Dialogue with History: Re-viewing LENIN BUSTED

The current retrospective at Barrister's Gallery in New Orleans of Vladimir Ilich Lenin's historically-mythologized mien, "LENIN BUSTED," is not what it seems. It is not primarily, as its title suggests, an exposé of the man or his myth. Nor is it simply, as it might appear at face value, the crafty and eccentric responses of individual artists to a political icon. Rather, its aim and effect are essentially dogmatic: the decoration and idealization of a figure whose controversial appropriation of Marx and Engels arguably enabled the rise of a notoriously bloodthirsty dictatorship under Joseph Stalin. And this alone makes it one of New Orleans' most provocative shows to date this year.

The retrospective was conceived when gallery owner Andy Antippas received a bust of Lenin from a friend who had recently visited the former Soviet Union. Struck by the enduring symbolism of the visage in modern day Russia where Lenin memorabilia is apparently ubiquitous and his image widely romanticized, Antippas chose the figure as the edgy subject for an exhibition, the "manifesto" of which dares to contest, post 9/11, the supremacy of the Capitalist West. "The idea was that Lenin was the spark," Antippas muses, "the flame of a very moral revolution that occurred; it was political, it was economic, but at the same time, in 1917, the idea was to overthrow authoritarianism and to liberate the human spirit so that we all become brothers. It was a wonderful and noble idea."

Antippas requisitioned local sculptor Daphne Loney to cast the bust in plaster and reproduce a number for select local artists to deface and decorate within very specific and, in some ways, confining, almost communistic, parameters. The result is quite interesting: a

variety show of Lenin's head and face, deconstructed and reconstructed alternately as the redeemer he was to a restless Russian republic, and as the demon he became to much of the West: Lenin spray painted, laminated, blind-folded, videotaped, encased, caged, papier-mâchéd, covered, flattened, and shattered.

All art ought to be political, Antippas intones, à la 1968. "One of the arguments I'm trying to make is that galleries should have a social responsibility, that a gallery ought not exist simply for decorative crap. Everything that comes in here should have some urgency about it." The political content of a show on Lenin is undeniable. But the legacy of Lenin's controversial brand of Marxism, its stormy metamorphosis under Bolshevism, and subsequently temperamental relation to avant-garde art, recommends a cautious and savvy wedding of the impulse towards social redemption and the need for individual expression. After all, the good team player and the human spirit are, by no means, necessarily fed from the same source.

Despite the impracticality which marred the latter part of his philosophical career (the phase sometimes referred to as "the economic" or "scientific Marx"), Karl Marx was, for all intents and purposes, a thinker of the common man. In his utopian society, Marx anticipated a wondrously fair and well-balanced daily routine for every member of his egalitarian state. "[I]n a communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic" (from *The German Ideology)*. In Marx's script of a "perfect" society, the "human spirit" would come into its own, or "true," essence, the seeds of which which lay in every being's capacity to create not simply cultural artifacts, but the contours of daily existence. Equally natural would be man's desire to attain this condition, his or her birthright; that is, the drive for a truly democratic condition in which the imagination of every member of society could blossom uniquely, would arise organically. Marx's revolution of the reigning class system would be, in other words, *of the people* and *by the people.*

Lenin, on the other hand, was possessed of no such faith in the instincts or initiative of the common people (namely, the Russian peasantry), distinguishing himself from his optimistic German predecessor through the formulation of a Jacobinist Marxism (an essentially non-Marxist Marxism). "Jacobinism," a term spawned by the French revolution, refers to violent social insurrection, led by a vanguard of intellectuals trained in the art of revolutionary activity (read "terrorism"), whose function is to organize and convert the essentially unwashed and uncritical masses. There would be no social reform, argued Lenin, without the orchestration of a party to guide and reeducate the people whom a revolution, in theory, would serve. "Socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without... and not something that arose within it spontaneously... the task of Social-Democracy is to imbue the proletariat (literally: saturate the proletariat) with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle." (from *What Is to Be Done?*) In other words, the common man could not be trusted to know his or her good, but rather, needed the guidance of a higher, more skilled authority.

Lenin advanced a further claim: in order to truly secure the fidelity of the masses, the leadership furnished by the elite party must be heroic in caliber. Indeed, historians have speculated that the revolution of his Bolshevik party in October 1917 would not have succeeded, were it not for Lenin's commanding and charismatic leadership. As the contemporary currency of his bust suggests, he,

himself, assumed heroic stature in the eyes of a Russian public already seasoned to be led by the legacy of Czarism (as did, it should be noted, his less philosophical and certainly less virtuous follower, Joseph Stalin).

In addition to their efforts to elevate individual heroes in the spirit of Jacobinism, to capture and hold the collective imagination, Lenin and his party enlisted and subordinated the reigning aesthetics of the time, and artists, to the cause. Even after the revolution in 1917, Lenin and his vanguard felt that the people needed to be maintained by constant cultural references to (reminders of) the "higher good" that remained beyond their natural perceptions. The revolution, in all its glory, had to be acted and reenacted in the fantasies of the Russian folk in order to preemptively stifle any incipient opposition. For this, representation (imaging) was key.

From 1920-1921, Lenin worked to squash independent cultural organizations, which "sought to operate autonomously, beyond the bounds of the party," and expressed a growing impatience with the avant-garde movements of futurist art that had infiltrated such groups. Aesthetics, under Leninism-Marxism, were to provide inspiration for the architecture of Communism, not to supplant it. In other words, art in the new socialist and industrialized Russia was recast as the handmaiden of politics. The only images valued and condoned by the party were those that promoted the communal harmony and seamless efficiency of the fledgling state. The avant-garde artist, who, by definition, disrupts the temporal continuity of tradition, was naturally perceived and censored as a threat, post revolution, to a now doctrinaire regime.

Thankfully, the human spirit is resilient and resourceful. While some Russian artists fell in step with their new masters, a vibrant international climate of avant-garde art and ideas, which already splintered and distorted any solid sense of cultural or political identity in that first chapter of the twentieth century, provided an outlet for numerous others. Like so many essentially totalitarian regimes

before and after, Lenin's political panacea failed to straightjacket and reduce the people's creativity to propaganda. Many of Russia's most renowned modern artists fled to the west.

Friederich Nietzsche was prophetic or reflective enough to proclaim the notion of an "eternal return of the same" and, so, "LENIN BUSTed" can be read in the spirit of Lenin's complex legacy, a philosophical and aesthetic return, nearly a century later, to the same optimism and shadows that inspired and marred the Bolshevik revolution. The retrospective seems, in fact, by design, to reproduce both the strengths and potential dangers Leninism-Marxism in its peak years, prior to Lenin's untimely death. In line with the party's cult of the hero, and Lenin's own ascendancy to cult-like status in his homeland, the exhibit and Antippas' promotional rhetoric reposition the enduring bust on the lofty pedestal of his utopian and, in part, illusory political vision, perpetuating the myth of Lenin as the great liberator of and spokesman for the common man.

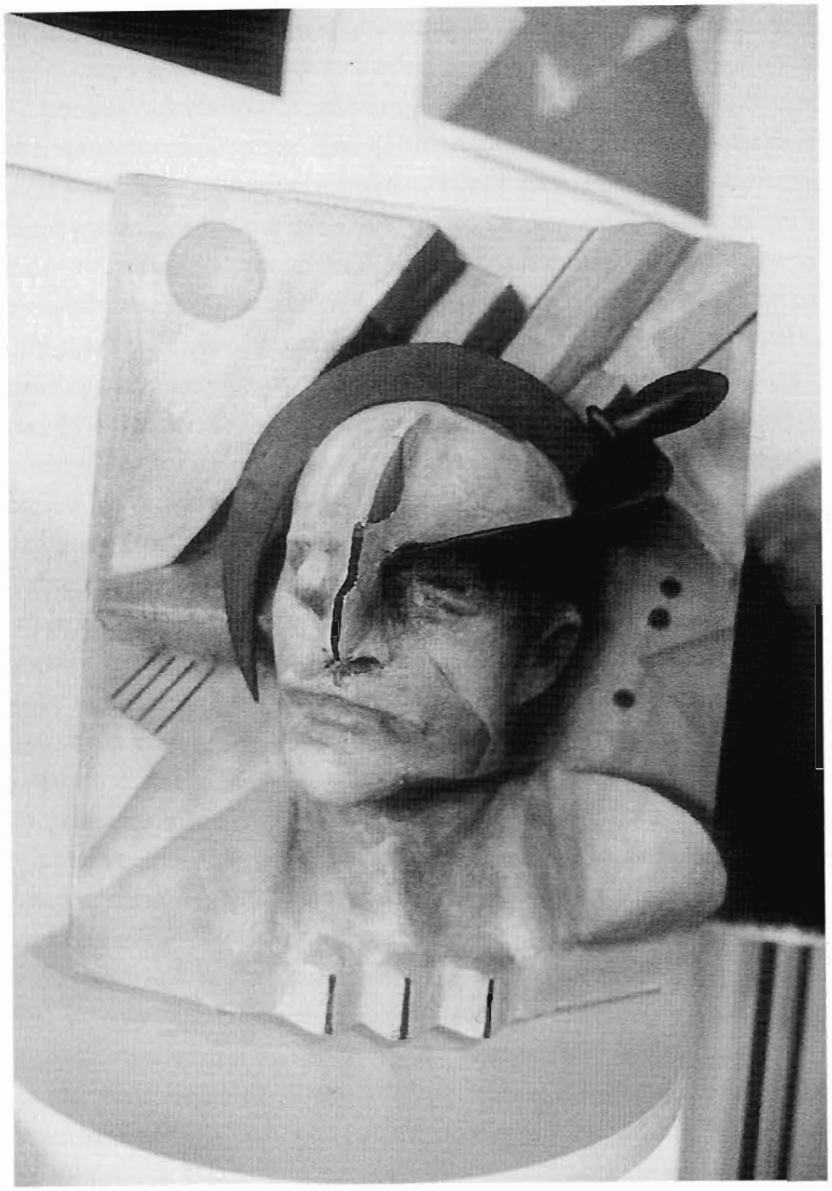
A number of the show's decorated busts support this re-presentation of the Lenin myth, in some cases adding updated versions of his critique of capitalism. Jeffrey Cook's *One Man, One Cry,* a sympathetic Lenin with a dove on his head, is painted to resemble a weathered statue, lined with the tracks of patined tears that suggest a Madonna's empathetic sadness at the fate of the former Soviet Union. Willie Birch's papier-mâché Lenin, entitled *A Dream Deferred,* places the visionary in the company of poet Langston Hughes whose writing reflects an affinity to both the common man and Socialist values. *Closing of the American Mind,* John Thornton's elaborate corrugated metal box, imprisons a Lenin bust already constrained by the electrical tape across its eyes, ears and mouth, evoking the compulsion in America to censor and contain anything that embodies a threat to its narrowly construed values. John Arceneaux's *Recovered Kyzyl vicinity, 1864 (possibly archaic Tuvan)* heralds Lenin's capacity for profound reflection, and perhaps references his meditation and increased scholarly output while imprisoned in St Petersburg. The modernist *Ce n'est pas un Icon* by Debora

Rosenbaum, is an impressed two-faced head, one side an iconic Christ figure, and the other a Lenin, suggesting the substitution of Christ with a constructivist Lenin in the homes and on the altars of the Russian peasantry. Jennie Kahn's elaborate *Lenin Lives* is a Lenin mosque in front of which is plastered a poster of George W. Bush, the clownish hero of 9/11, farcically replacing the more formidable icon.

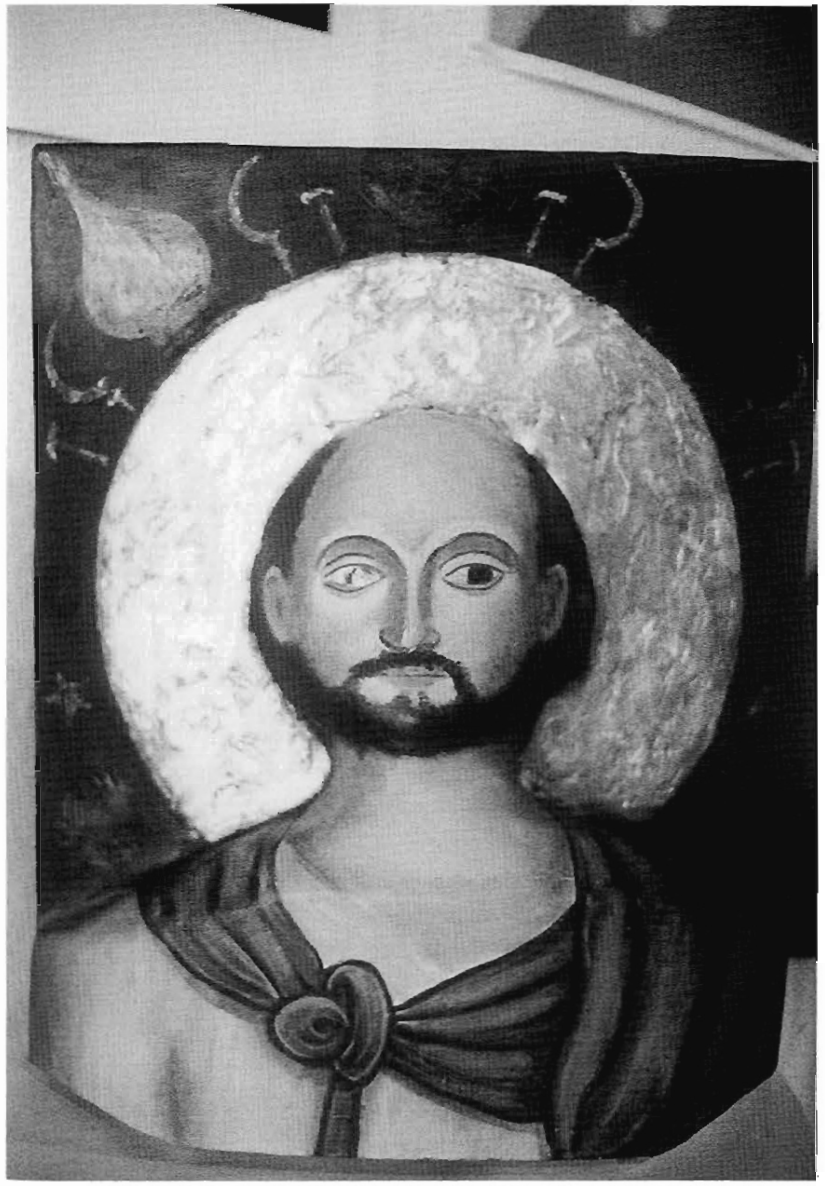
It is interesting to note that the concept of the exhibit (curated by Antippas and "counter-curated" by comrade and local artist Christopher Fischer) reenacted the tension between aesthetics and politics, painter and politician. A conflict arose between the collaborators early in the show's conception. While Fischer wanted to allow the artists free reign to do whatever they chose with the busts, Antippas advocated imposing a strict frame within which to create. "Chris, being an artist, objected to the fact that, as a gallery owner, I was imposing parameters on the artist. He wanted to open it up completely so that artists could do whatever they wanted to while I wanted, in effect, to show the artist that, under restricted circumstances—whether it's the authoritarian government or the authoritarian gallery who's telling them what to do and how to do it—they'd have to find a way to work around those parameters."

By designating a uniform object with which to work and requiring that the object be positioned on or around a pedestal, that is, by limiting the aesthetic responses of his artists to a form traditionally designed to honor its subject, Antippas clearly meant to commemorate this giant of Russian history and imagination. He, like, Lenin seemed to design a forum by which to promote the logic and aims of the Bolshevik revolution. Though Antippas has posted at the back of the room an image of Stalin overlooking his Politburo, crossed by crime tape, in an attempt to dissociate Lenin from the bloody dictatorship he in significant ways enabled, and though he recognizes and laments Lenin's censorship of some of the greatest Russian artists of his day, the glorious inception and march of communism saturates the gallery, the walls of which are plastered with communist paraphernalia, slogans, and posters. At the installation's opening, the busts were positioned in two parallel rows, heads turning diagonally to face the other, simulating a military formation.

Happily, the human spirit is stubborn. Despite the party-line leftist ambience of the installation, and the many artists who fell in step, others did not. Even Fischer was surprised at the imaginative range of work, both in form and content. Many were able not only to work around, but to subvert, Lenin's tidy white frame, to pose informed and irreverent critiques of the man, his myth and communist history in general. Jim Sohr's *Let Sleeping Dogs Lie* is the bust ignominiously broken into three pieces and splattered with blood-like red paint. Shawn Hall's video-monitor-on-a-pedestal runs a looped videotape of the artist shattering the precious bust with a hammer, a smart deconstructivist piece which simultaneously critiques the tradition of constructivism that bolstered revolutionary rhetoric, and destroys Lenin's romanticized image. Stan Rice parodies Lenin as the great redeemer with a bizarrely zombie-esque Lenin-Christ, situated above a twisted mass of minute human figures. Patrick Lichty's *Magic in Ball*, represents Lenin as a fortune teller whose nonsensical predictions (the viewer is able to push a button on his head for digitized advice) expose the illusion of his mystical prowess. Dan Tague's mocking *Mr Lenin-Head* recasts the sober visage to look like a Mr Potato Head toy, an emblem of capitalist kitsch in America. And Jacqueline Bishop's blindfolded Lenin, *Iskra,* suggests that Lenin was unable to recognize to the "truth," or the darker implications of his vision. In a word, the autonomy and dissonance of the installation's art survives not just in spite of, but, perhaps, because of its politics. In the end, the show's equalizing parameters and dogmatic agenda set the stage not just for hero worship or the reduction of art to propaganda, but also for inventive defiance. And perhaps Antippas knew this all along. Or, perhaps history just repeats itself...eternally.



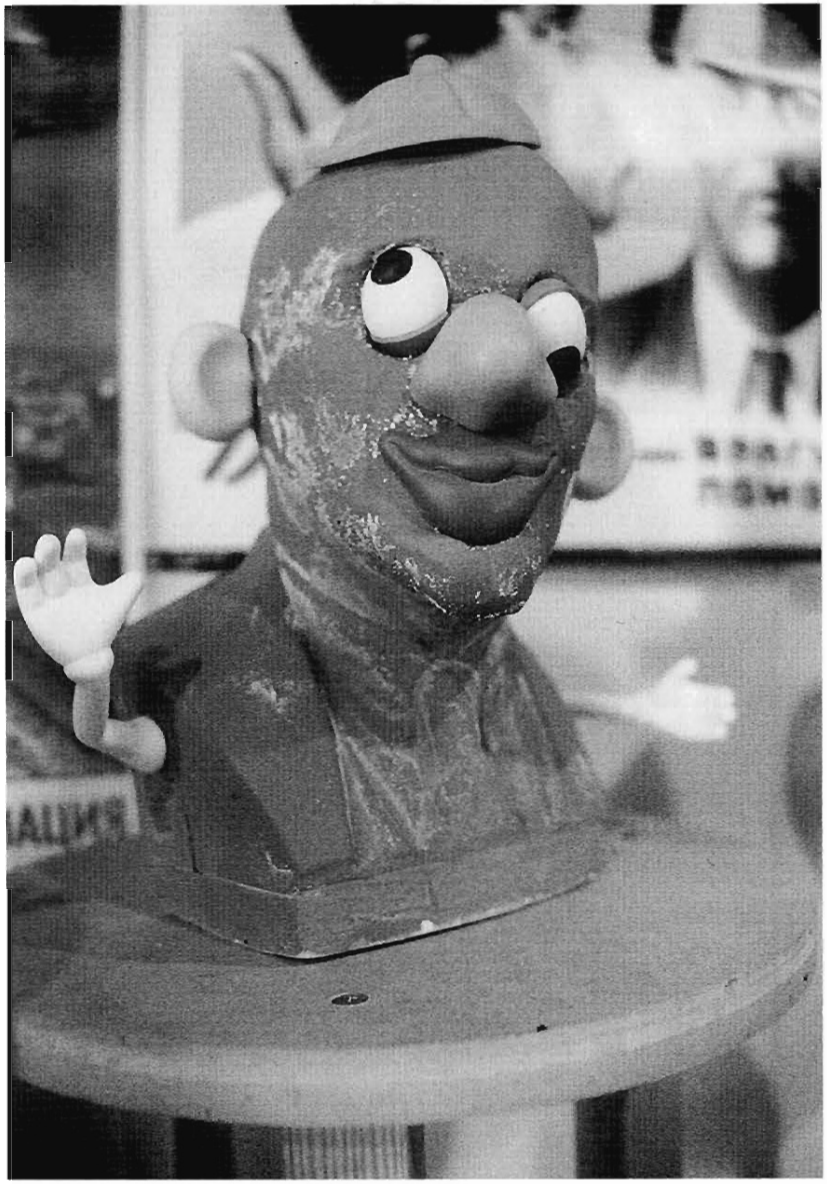
Ce n'est pas un Icon (front), by Debora Rosenbaum. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)



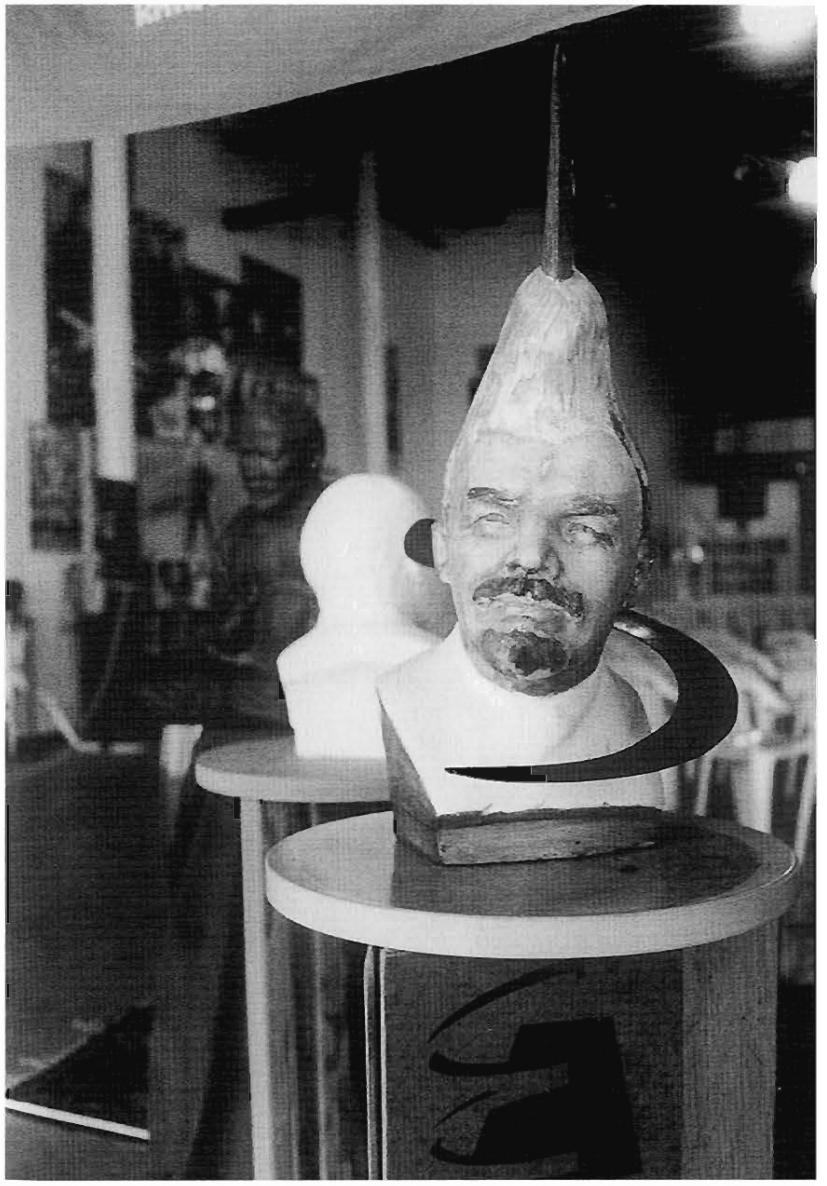
Ce n'est pas un Icon (back), by Debora Rosenbaum. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)

One Man, One Cry, by Jeffrey Cook. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)

Untitled by Stan Rice. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)

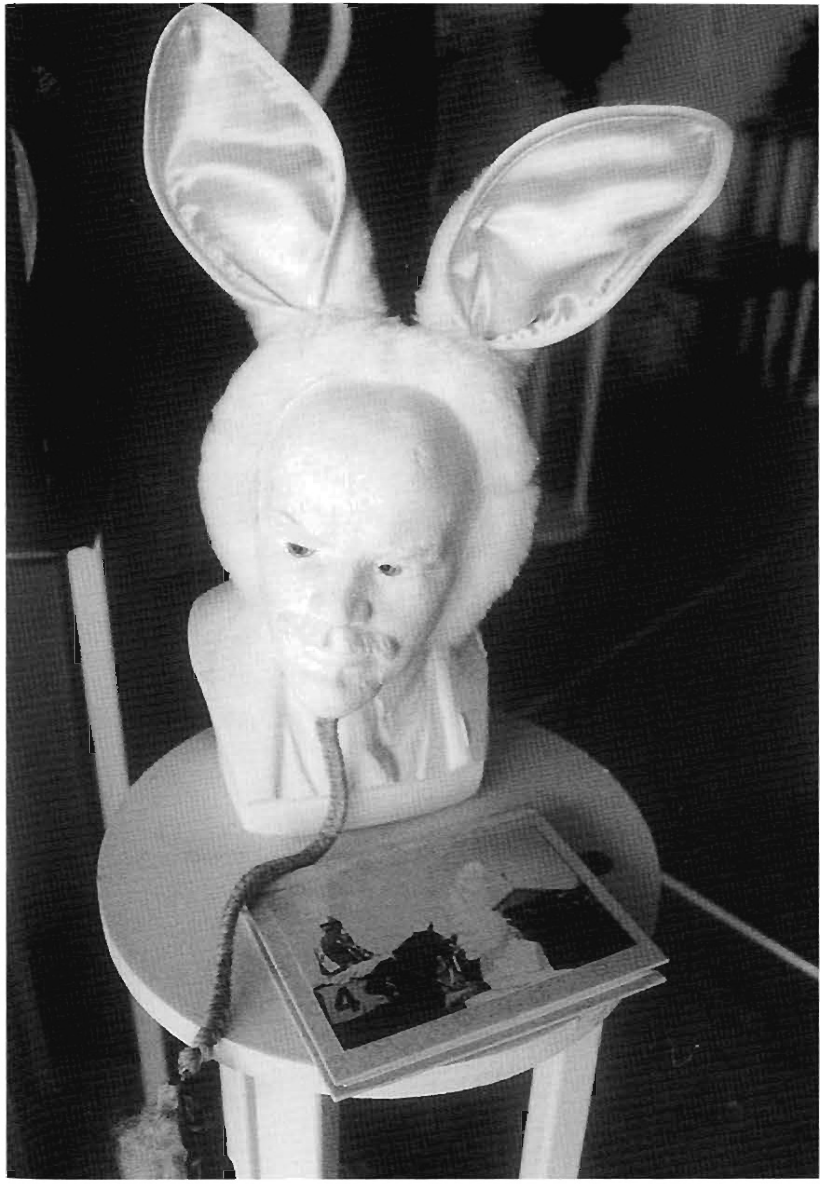


Mr Lenin-Head, by Dan Tague. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)



A Working Class Hero is Something to Be or Not to Be by Michael Fedor. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)

See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Think No Evil, Speak No Evil by Chris Johns. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)



Relay...A Day at the Races by Shannon, Ersy, Dietrich, & McNee. 2002.
(photograph by Nancy Laskowski)

D. JAMES SMITH

Cold Blessing

Trembling as if gut shot, I sit
with a priest, a stranger, an alcoholic I think,
his face, quiet as a burned field.
He says, *Remember yourself as a child?*
I nod, see my old Columbia bicycle
saddled with news of the world
on a morning so cold my hands were blue,
and me, lord
of the black streets, struggling
deep into the heart of that city.

Well, after death all this will be like that, vague,
unimportant, a memory that slips by and you say,
Oh, I remember that.
Later, awake in the darkness, a siren
echoing in the street, I think, Oh *that.* Suffering.

Father, the spine in the neck of my friend
was whittled down to the finest necklace of pain,
the morphine no help.
He rigged himself to the winch of his jeep.
You understand. A man of great intention and faith,

he sat down in a chair out behind his place
where he could see the tree line begin
and wound his throat closed
with a thin nylon strap.

The oaks remain, sheets of light
driving out of the south,
the birds coming in, snippets
of rags dropped in the branches.
A picture I might have drawn as a child.

Now, father, I lie still
behind the twin shrouds of my eyes
and try to believe the little psalms
the air leaves in my ears.
That he would remember
skirting Bear Lake,
clouds of mist in the late afternoon,
night drifting up slowly behind us.
The fine drumming of rain on the leaves.
That. *That.*

The Fall

Much is the good in my yard,
the squirrel dangling upside
down from an almond branch, rolling
his find in claws like an otter, the cat
teasing the smoke of its tail
along the weathered struts of the fence,
the one woodpecker who comes rarely
to fluff a fat, speckled chest
in the dog's water dish. Sometimes,
the pleasure of light falling
softly through leaves
is the resurrection, and then
how the flesh brims.
The snails, little galleons
loaded with Jesus,
set sail. I almost believe that
when the right word chooses us,
we are not thinking
of ourselves,
and the arch of the garden gate,
the porous grain of the wood
that I touch roughly,
is in every part
constructed of love.
But, then something like
this scent of dead brambles,
recalls me and the violence
of moving that name, measuring
the weight of it, as if hand to hand,
bramble, bramble, is the true fall.
And again the chaste patience begins.
Pray for luck, I say, and the little mercies
of these birds darting clear
from the trees, this time yellow warblers,
flickering up and down quickly
as they gather themselves,
brief whispers, gone.

Onion Variation 1

From this garden basket of squash, zucchini, and frivolous spinach I take out an onion that I've been working on all summer. I hold it up to show the progress I have made, for I have raised it from deep in the earth into this world of time and nationality. It carries no wallet, passport, rings, tattoos, or distinguishing scars. What could be more white, more naked or more intimate? Its faint longitudinal ribs just barely hold in its silver skin.

This entire summer I have stood barefoot in onion fields, my eyes fixed on the glory of the moon onion rising large as a heartbeat. I want to be forgiven for the shadows that attack me here; values doped up on time. Hair shirts, excuses, fake humility.

Onion Variation 2

A hot boiled onion, like the Eucharist, becomes a miracle of transubstantiation, cut off from the surrounding world, transcending the normal and embodying the freedom of the human imagination. Some critics do not accept this bit of old-fashioned aesthetic magic, preferring to see the onion as just one more vegetable in the whole cultural structure, an orb to go with liver.

"What makes it luminous?" they ask.

Well, an onion dug up and boiled and eaten straight from the pot requires no advanced technology such as that needed for breadmaking. It is basic, humble, and earthy, like its consumers. Indeed, it can be identified with those who live on it and who, like peasants, appear to be molded of earth. Hence the onion, associated with filth and infirmity, seems an appropriate topic for launching a discussion of the modern materialist imagination. Unless you prefer a rose.

PETER STILLMAN

Ten Birds Fly Up

I write about the pigeons
that flew up clapping from the corn
through snow just now

remembering from forty years ago
the push of pinioned wings
against my hands

and how high on a hill past town
I gave each bird to morning
fearing none would home

all did except the red-bar hen
then she alone days later in a rain
her line of flight exact

and I recall a joy
as hot as that small heart
the second that she veered and dropped

ten birds fly up from corn
that wild geese have left
and wheel and light

blue-gray on frozen earth
and in my quiet house
I write whatever comes

BONNIE FASTRING

Speaking In Tongues

I

When my daughter returns I start thinking in tongues. I'm religious, in a sense. I believe you can hold the sacred in many hands, that in some way they're all the same and yet different. I mean I am Presbyterian elder, radical, reformed. I mean I am part of a woman/church Catholic group that once a month breaks bread and drinks wine and writes our own liturgies together. I mean there is at least one animal spirit who has guided my writing in the past and only wide-open space can keep me from falling, be it old prairie hills or the marsh sweeping out to the Gulf in the river delta. I mean sky and wind seem eternal. I mean I take my direction from the sun rising and setting. I don't believe in ancestor worship, though I believe in one particular ancestor spirit of mine, Lucinda Helen Sarchet Rector, who lived a hundred years ago and speaks to me through my writing. Whether it is for my benefit or hers, I'm not sure.

In my religious experiences, I've never participated in the kind of charismatic churches that "speak in tongues." Being tongue-tied, I lean more towards a kind of Quaker experience. But here is my daughter back from some distant underground, Persephone up from the grave, rescued by her daddy from the crisis center in Grand Island, Nebraska, and she wants to hold onto religion. She needs its drama, its music, its physicality. She loves speaking in tongues.

Words, symbols, rhythms, all pull me in when I visit my daughter's church. I watch the minister and this congregation of

people worship. I watch my daughter move, sway, dance in the aisles. I listen to the minister burst into "tongues," walking back and forth in the front of the church, the people's voices, a slow murmur, a river of spirit moving with him, the syllables tumbling out, rising, falling, the believers inside this great gray church building, this whale's belly, their tongues babbling, waves swelling, sighs of water washing their blood.

"Jesus," the minister whispers, croons.

"Jesus...Jesus," the people respond.

I come from a background on one side of my family with such charismatic beginnings, the Lucinda Helen Sarchet Rector side, the Methodists. My daughter's church reminds me of circuit riders and camp meetings. They are like the people of Leatherwood, Ohio, near Cambridge, in the early 1800's, before whom appeared Delks, a man with a long mane of black hair. He snorted like a horse when he stood up and began to preach. When he claimed he was God, some believed him and never changed their minds.

My daughter visits me, to talk in my carriage house apartment on General Pershing Street in New Orleans soon after her return.

"Have you ever spoken in tongues?" she asks me. The apartment is tiny, like a womb. I'm sitting in the bathroom on the toilet; she's sitting on my bed. I shake my head. She says it's like breathing, she says it's like singing and sometimes when she's singing she begins breathing the sounds. She says she does it under her breath, when she's driving. She says she did it the first time and didn't even know what it was, before she came back to New Orleans. She says she spoke in tongues in Grand Island when she needed to escape the pain.

She wants to read the Bible with me. I choose Corinthians 12:8-10. "To one is given through the spirit the utterance of wisdom, ...to another prophecy...to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." We read it together.

"I think I'm supposed to interpret the tongues," I tell her. I have an airline ticket for Independence, Iowa for Christmas vacation. I want to visit the Iowa Insane Hospital Museum for a whole week and interpret the tongues. I want to find Lucinda's voice, Lucinda who fancied she could preach.

"Will you drive me to the airport?" I ask.

II

> *I thought I would spend it as near like a holy Sabbath as I could in this place, but 'tis a hard matter to keep one's thoughts on any subject with so many crazy voices in one's ears.*—June Bonefas, attendant, Independence Hospital. June 3, 1874. Sabbath Eve.

Do you hear voices? is always the first question. Dr DeJean asks it of me when I go to him to seek a sabbatical leave from Orleans Parish School System. Does he mean, I wonder, did I hear a voice telling me to slap a child who was hitting two others? Or does he mean do I hear Lucinda's voice in my writing? "The devil's in the clock," Lucinda said in 1873. She woke in the middle of the night, hysterical, and from that time on, was very religious, ran away.

"No, I don't hear voices," I tell him, "but I do think the devil's in the clock." I'm kicked out of my classroom six months before retirement. Does he think I'm crazy? He doesn't say, but he says he'll help me. He recommends Zoloft and counseling. I take the Zoloft and write.

People are diagnosed schizophrenic if they hear voices (and admit it, I guess). My uncle was diagnosed as schizophrenic, or at least I remember my family saying he was. But when I try to get his records from the Veteran's Mental Hospital for his several visits, they claim to no longer have them. All the army will say is that he was admitted for psychotic disturbances, that his old gunshot

wound from World War II in his leg was doing okay, and that he had hemorrhoids. His hemorrhoids got the most attention.

Dr DeJean doesn't ask, Do you talk out loud to yourself? I do, and the practice has become habitual these past few years. Something picked up from living alone, I tell myself, but I don't really believe it. I feel guilty about it. I've lived with my daughter the past three years and I notice she does it too. She calls it "speaking in tongues." I catch myself talking to myself a lot on the streets of New Orleans this spring while I am suspended from the classroom. Should I tell Dr DeJean? I get up at my son's house, thinking he has already gone to work. I'm talking out loud to myself. A few minutes later, he's cautiously knocking on my bedroom door.

"Are you decent?" he asks, coffee and doughnuts in hand. I'm embarrassed, and wonder if I am.

I have gone to the Iowa Insane Asylum Museum to hear voices. I hear the sound of steam rising up out of the radiators, but there's not enough warmth. I call the hotel manager. It's snowing outside. I've just arrived and I'm lonely as hell.

"Where is the thermostat?" I ask.

"Right there, on the wall," she sneers, "in front of your nose." She doesn't want to come out to show me. After all, there's a snowstorm and it's the day after Christmas.

"Don't you hear it?" she asks. "It'll take time." And it does. Finally, from behind my bed, rising up, steam heat warms my pillow, like my mother's hot water bottle.

Grandma Salk of Ward A used to say she was cold. She said there was no stove to warm her hands and feet. Dr Reynolds said he wished it were possible to have direct radiation on some of the wards. The custodian suggested it was possible to put in some pipe coil and put a screen of wire in front of it so there would be no danger of hot pipes. When the steam was turned on the coils for the first time, the women gathered in front of it, whispering to each other and holding out their hands.

It was always comforting to stand over our floor furnace in the little farmhouse in Nebraska. The warm heat swooshing up between my legs gave me courage to face my day. My first little carriage house, after I sold my suburban home, had a large space heater on the wall that was lovely to stand in front of on cold New Orleans winter mornings. It was the great red eye of God. I wondered if the color would make me feel warm, even if there were no heat. And when I move again to a shotgun house to accommodate both my daughter and myself, the old floor furnace becomes one of my favorite haunts. I bring a little stool up close to the floor furnace in the hallway outside the bathroom door and stretch my bare legs across it like I'm at a campfire. I like to read there, write, edit and re-edit my work.

Why did the women in that asylum whisper as they stood warming together? I'm a secretive person, but I don't whisper much. I just don't like to tell everyone my business. I feel like I can't think around people, so when I want to think I get off by myself. In the asylum they made sure no one was ever alone for long; although there were the long nights when the inmates were locked in. Sometimes I drive for hours, aimlessly, so I can think.

"Have you started writing," someone asks me, knowing I am on sabbatical now that Dr DeJean's recommendation has worked, that I am off administrative leave, a nice word for suspension.

"No, I'm still driving," I tell her. She looks at me weirdly.

In 1879, Dr Reynolds describes in his Fourth Biennial Report five new women admits. Lucinda had been there four years by that time. Would she have whispered to the hysterical voice with religious melancholia, the terrified voice of the pregnant one, the angry voice of the one who wanted to kill her husband and children, the

paranoid voice who felt her friends had deserted her, and turned to opium, the drugged voice of the woman who hated her family, and turned to intemperance. Would she have told them where they could find time alone?

When I look in the notes, Lucinda does not appear to have been one of the whisperers. Lucinda was *restless, paid no attention to anything asked of her, was untidy, sat part of the time with one foot lifted as high as possible against a door, was extremely restless and NOISY.*

Noisy? A clamor, an outcry, a hullabaloo? Or just plain pandemonium, a preacher answering God's call. Or was it more pitiful—mewling, a whimper from losing six babies and forgetting the seventh, a baby boy (*kept to her bed one and a half years, uterine problems after he was born*). Later he went back to visit her, when he was out of high school. She didn't know him. He never returned. Perhaps it was a shriek, animal sounds, the hiss of a snake, or the tick-tick-tock of an ordinary clock? Regardless, in 1880 in Iowa's new Insane Asylum, Lucinda's voice would not have been heard.

Resolved: That inasmuch as the letters of the insane, especially women, often contain matter, the very thought of which, after recovery, will overwhelm them with mortification and dismay, any law which compels the sending of such letters is clearly an outrage on common decency and common humanity. One sign of insanity is hearing voices, or talking wildly. Psychotic episodes they call it. Another is catatonia: silence. By 1890, they've sent Lucinda back to the Poor Farm, harmless and incurable. She's no longer talking. They've put her in Sunnyside Villa, the new building at the asylum, and as I reread the nurses' notes, I hear Lucinda's voice.

She is difficult to keep in bed...never speaks. Keeps right arm in almost constant movement, the first two fingers being extended and being moved to and fro round about on the bedding or in the palm of the other hand.

Lucinda is the church bell that stops ringing. She is the house with the brass clock turned off. She is the frog in the snake's mouth. I saw it just a day ago in Honey Island Swamp, two long legs still sticking out at strange angles from the snake's mouth, almost like extended fangs, a part of the thing that is eating it.

Salvation

Lucinda, 1875

The Asylum notes: *her husband found her…*
kneeling in front of a team of horses,
stroking their forelegs…

This morning, before the slightest hint;
light, shuddering panic, the muscles
of my legs gathered to bolt.

Nine again in my dreams, my grandfather's voice
telling dreadful old Ohio stories. The melancholy man,
yellow beaver hat, black broadcloth suit,

frock coat, suddenly rising up in the camp meeting
in Leatherwood.[1] No one knew how he got there.
Long black hair cascading down to his waist,

he tossed it back, a stallion, a scared horse let loose
amongst the people. *Salvation,* he shouted
and from his throat

erupted one frightened snort.
Women screamed; men jumped up. Delicious
fear, a thrill through the crowd.

He told us he was God, all three in one.
Here in Iowa last winter, horses dying.
Waterloo with a horse flu. Our hauling horse too.

My husband gone to work for the railroad,
me, alone with the baby. *Plunged in a gulf*
of dark despair, we wretched sinners lay,

The Leatherwood God sings.
Hush, Baby. Sleep. I have to follow the muddy street—
Horses! By the watering trough,

tied reins knot, thongs, strong hold, sun
blooming flowers. Water
drops with the leatherwood blossoms

clinging to their velvet nostrils. *Salvation!*
The voice rears and rears again.
My mind opens to make wide the way.

[1] Leatherwood is a community in Ohio, and also a small bush in Guernsey County, Ohio. The bush blooms with a small yellow blossom and its branches are so supple they can be used to tie knots and were used for horses' reins when necessary.

ZACHARY JACK

Broke Hazy

A hearse noses its way down Maple; the impossibly long
legged teen shimmying the trailer court leaves her body
behind with every step; a farmer loses it all, goes out
to the edge of town and can't even scream, can't even
hear himself. Silence pulls under the Mass Mutual awning
in its heavy truck. Because movement means payment,
and the door sealing shut amounts to a kind of wake: proof
of passing. Because the stumping politician reached for
Sibyl's prosthetic arm with Sibyl's bright eyes shining,
you'd like to exchange this life for another. Oh, that's not the one,
he said. That's not the one. Because they'll face one another
indefinitely and never get to experience a wave or unaided flight,
the ceramic planters are understood to be swans.

LAEL EWY

Hesston, Kansas

Out here on the prairie, the funk hides
in streams that dry up by August.
You can smell it in the springtime
when the water turns, its tiny bio-realm
following the orders of a god
of funk, the bottom becoming
top, the top bottom. Diatoms

dance and whirl, they spin and un
-dulate in lurching syncopation.
Here, closer to the water, the scent
thrums your nostrils, tanking up
your brain with the nasty-sexy full
-ness of it. Try talking funk
with a Mennonite some time. That'll send
you, too, to the creek bed with your nose on.

MICHAEL HUDSON

The Dead Bird in the Liquor Store Parking Lot

Geometrically, I am only *A* to this flattened
tangle of feathers and its broken

necklace of vertebrae (points *C, D,* and *F*).

If only there were ghosts! Some spooky
residue of me surviving

to seep from the joists of my tumbledown

room; something long dead still promising
and pinching its way

around the séance table; something still

in love after two hundred years, staining
the woodwork with tears, booing

a future you from all the broken windows.

MICHAEL HUDSON

Drunk in Bed, Playing with an Empty Revolver & Reading Sylvia Plath

In your bed I'm so hermetic, a larval bee last
winter poisoned in her cell, white

as Victorian babies' frail, swaddled husks…

O the muzzle's cool little mouth! That rictus
zero of everlasting

surprise! This single, baffling kiss
now pressed to my temple's fat blue vein.

BASIL CLEVELAND

p. for R. Pinsky

My first orgasm was accidental
The water went deaf and the mildew stains
The shower curtain billowed
With steam as I thought of Ms White

Whose unexceptional good looks
Rendered her accessible to seventh graders
Everywhere, everywhere
To come and fall backwards unblinking

I gouged my head on the hot water handle
Only the cold remained like a bag of nails
Dropped from the height of space—
Have you met Robert Pinsky

Heard his voice in a fading orange auditorium
He channels Dante, rubato
The space between each word a ragged tarp
Tracing out the mute of fall.

C. ABE GAUSTAD

From the Morros, São Paulo

Many days we only have crumbs from our navels. For fun we play games of prayer and blasphemy, wager on which words would summon the hand of God most swiftly. Is the nature of the universe, we wonder, punitive? Are sicknesses really cured by a few soft words in the dark corners of hospitals? We dance amid the arguments, Catholics leading agnostics, atheists leading the born-again in sambas and waltzes, our houses leaning against their houses in the rain. The ground moves with insects, worms, rats, children. From our view, high on a hill, we can see the people in their cars heading toward São Paulo on the busy highway. They leave tails of vapor to be burnt off by the sun. We can see their eyes nested in their faces like little animals, afraid of looking up and seeing us for the first time. Sometimes, when there has been an accident or a roadblock, we climb down and walk among them. Our fingers touch their humming cars. Our bare feet skim the cracking pavement. We climb on the hoods and the warm engines soothe us. But still the people in their cars look only at the road, at where they are going this morning or midnight or shrinking evening. Then the traffic clears and they drift away. And what they leave behind, once the vapor disappears, is the unmistakable smell of food, of meals cooked in a warm room somewhere very far away. These nights we stay awake, and the gods sleep with their heads tucked in the valley while we listen to the dinner prayers collecting above us, a flock of amens rising to heaven.

#348 (Nine Panels: A West End Pastoral)

Bull wearing a wreath of lichen snorts in a pen on the third floor of the Pamplona Inc. warehouse located a block from the river that is itself snorting with aircraft carriers, this being July Fourth weekend.

Man wearing a pink tank top and cut-offs lies on a cardboard bed, pleasingly reminded by all the snorting that in another age, there can be no doubt about it, he would have been a farmer.

Across the street six more would-be farmers dive into the pile of cinder blocks in which Anonymous, out of the kindness of her heart, has hidden a pill that will make whoever takes it happy forever.

This happiness, according the description on the plastic bottle, is akin to a "sunset that paves the sidewalk gold."

The same sidewalk the afternoon bartender at the Landmark Tavern (...caught in the thimble of time...) utilizes after he says to a customer: Now I'm going to disappear like a ghost.

Only the ghost forgets to take the box of stale cigars and five minutes later returns with a sheepish grin on his face.

The stale cigars the sheep would surely smoke if hooves were hands. The sheep the bull would certainly eat if the elevator worked. The bull that bucks like the eyes of the sailors when the Statue of Liberty comes into view. The statue the snoozing would-be farmer undresses and smears with raspberries. The stained Liberty the ghostly bartender would question if he only had a brain. The questions the pill answers when plucked from the hollow of a cinder block by one I'll call L.

And what does L. say to those who interrupt his meal at China 50, wanting an autograph, wanting happiness advice?

Get the blood out with hydrogen peroxide. Get the ink out with hair spray. Get the grease out with solid shortening. Get the coffee out with baby wipe towelettes. If it's a new perspiration stain use ammonia. If it's old, white vinegar.

ANDER MONSON

We are Going to See the Oracle of Apollo in Tapiola, Michigan

It's true that she stays in the back of the store that is half-diner, half-gas station and is reputed to be one of the true sources of porn in Upper Michigan and is definitely a reliable bait shop. It is true that she is only here one month each year, right after the Fourth of July when all the fireworks have been disposed of in the trash, or in the grass, or in the lake. It is true that I am going to see her with Liz, my X, my alphabet, and back in the passenger seat. We are listening to New Order which excites the blood in the way that summer does when it comes unexpectedly and lasts for at least a day. It is true that it is cold here most of the time, even through the summer, the wind kicking through the trees like a vandal like a pirate on gunwales on the plank. It is true that this is just after Liz moved here, in a way replacing Caroline, who was Canadian and the obsession of all the boys, who went Christian and set fire to all her tapes (a spiritual coming-out party to which we were all invited), who moved away without word or trace or note or lipstick trace or hairnet left behind or forwarding address. It is true that there are things I feel for Liz that I have not told her about being just friends or the else that is fire that may be the kind of fire I want. It is too true that we are quiet in the car.

I do not know that Liz will soon be gone that she will be up and packed and trussed and sunk and gone.

The radio doesn't work that well so we can't hear that well.

The sun is up but it is sort of hazy and I look over at her who is like an element on the periodic table a symbol an enigma sign of light. Liz who must be solved for. Liz who collected architectural drawings, stole them from the public library in town where they keep them under glass, or the county courthouse where they keep a plan of every building that is made. Liz who sends me invisible ink notes.

My brother is at home and I do not think about him now. He is not with me like a ghost or a dedication on the radio that finds you wherever you can go to or get out from.

It is true that I have questions for the oracle, like how to get the Playboy channel or will the school burn down to cinder, char in fall.

It is true I have more important questions about my mother or the weather.

I ask Liz what her questions are for the Oracle but she won't tell me. She doesn't ask me what are mine.

We hear bottle rockets firing in the sky. They are left over from the Fourth.

I don't tell her that we used to fire the rockets at houses from PVC pipes turned into homemade bazookas. I don't tell her that my brother almost lost his hearing when one misfired, how those things are cheap and unreliable, how they can't be trusted, but they do the most wonderful and explosive things.

The wind is in our hair because my back windows do not fully close.

We are in my father's Aerostar.

Everyone I know has a minivan.

Liz does not seem impressed with it. She does not seem impressed by much.

She doesn't ask about my brother's arms, which I am thankful for. I try to keep him secret since there is no satisfaction there.

In Algebra we always had to solve for X.

Bikers pass us.

The clouds clear themselves away.

We are slowly getting there.

WE ARE STILL GOING TO SEE THE ORACLE OF APOLLO IN TAPIOLA, MICHIGAN

Liz's hair reminds me of paramecia with their tiny microfingers that move them in the ooze. I do not tell her this. We are coming up through the valley that my family used to drive through on the way to Ironwood where the ski slopes are, where the car dealerships are, where I would eventually be arrested for leaving the scene of an accident where I hit a gas pump, freaked, and fled. We are coming up through the valley in which my dad would always sing *Down in the Valley* when we still drove through here as a family on the way to recreation, the Porcupine Mountains or the state line that leads to Wisconsin, land of more snow and beer and cheese. We are coming up through the valley that I have memories of. Liz and I are in the valley and we are coming up the other side like we were in Montana next to some great crest.

We talk of Florida, the postcards we get from relatives who've visited or moved there. We talk about all the oranges that are huge and the futuristic ball of Epcot Center that I've always wanted to visit but never have.

We are going to see the oracle who will tell us we must go to Paulding to see the Mysterious and Possibly Awful Light. This is what we think—that this trip will snowball and soon we will be bound to visit all the sites of strangeness in Michigan. Our parents will never miss us. At least mine will not, I suspect.

Liz taunts truckers on the CB which is beautiful, which is funny, which might be dangerous like in the movies or the stories about taunting truckers, which you do not do and live, which we do. Liz my elevation. Liz my hatchet man.

YOU CANNOT STOP US; YES, WE ARE STILL GOING

Besides electricity, other things can move us. Gasoline for one, or loyalty, or fire. Fire that comes from anything that is a burst a birth a burning bush that will soon go out in snow. Fire that is a way of loving property. Fire that is my cousin Jay when he stayed with us, out until too late doing God Knows What in Michigan then returning with his boots loud on the floor of the house. Fire that is my mother's trail to Canada and to all the glory roadside sites of hugeness in America in North America in the North. Fire that is her that is aurora in the sky. I have told Liz some of this, a little bit at a time. She knows what fire is to me. She bought me gasoline for my last birthday, and rags, and matches. Fire that is the opposite of cold that means never freezing, that means combustion spontaneity and marshmallows skewered on sticks, turning black. Besides electricity, the thought of the humongous fungus moves us like a magnet. The thought of the Paulding Light that rocks back and forth in the distance just outside of Paulding which is buried in the woods which is an hour and a half from the hills that are made of mines in the Keweenaw Peninsula, which is an hour and a half from the canal that cuts the Peninsula in half, which is an hour and a half from the sliced thumb of land that juts out into Lake Superior like a missed note does in a song and wrecks it like a boat on rocks. The thought of the fungus is a magnet which is a field which electricity creates. My mother is a field which electricity creates, which keeps me, satellite, in place. Which keeps me in the car with Liz on our way to Tapiola.

ONWARD TO THE ORACLE

Tapiola is not so far away as this. It is not the ornate crown of the Mediterranean. It is not the cities they show on Canadian TV that comes over the lake at night to us. It is not the glittering office towers of Sault Ste Marie, Canada, as seen across the International waters, as seen across a year of fire and ears that are suspended in jars, that are cupped to the ground.

Tapiola is where Liz and I will find an answer to this story, where Liz and I will kick the screen door in on the place where the Oracle is in the back. Where Liz and I will not leave until we are satisfied. Where Liz and I will never be satisfied, I know, because what will she—the Oracle—really have to say that I don't know already: that Liz will leave like summer does, that my brother has no answers for his arms, for his aphasia for where his plate should go on the counter when he's done with it. That this story is a story of the body of the heart of the left atrium, the ballroom where prom will be held. That though there is still ore in the ground, we have mined the hills to the point where any further excavation will collapse the thing, even a hundred people jumping up and down simultaneously to counteract the Chinese kids who are—en masse—trying to force the earth's orbit to change by jumping on the other side of the globe.

This is what our science teachers tell us to get us to go outside and jump as a class, as a whole white shining class who will not all—of course—graduate, a class who will lose half to moving costs or crime, or to weather or sickness, barn collapse, misguided amputations, or to dropping out and frequenting bars. This is what our science teachers tell us to do, but what they do not tell us is this: our jumping could collapse the shafts, bomb the trachea that is the mine that is the shaft and all the huge beautiful machines that is the only reason a generation had for settling here, that is the only thing that has brought Liz, this fascination with the architecture of the buildings erected in the cities, the architecture of the towns that are vacated, run down to ghosts, and buried in the woods, and the architecture of the mines that reminds me of heartworms burrowing through the organs of a pet who is loved, who is too far gone to care.

THE ORACLE OF APOLLO IN TAPIOLA, MICHIGAN WILL PUNCTUATE OUR SENTENCES WITH GROANS AND FILL IN ALL OUR DEEPEST HOLES WITH PUTTY, LIKE A DENTIST WOULD, THAT WILL HARDEN AND PROTECT US FROM HARM

We have stopped talking, Liz and I, because we are almost there, and we have our own things to think about.

Tapiola doesn't have any outskirts, exactly, being small, so we go right from the woods through the population sign into the town and to the store that is the diner that is the place where the oracle will tell us Truths and that is the place where we can maybe grab a bite before returning or going somewhere else.

Everything is run down and beautiful. The Tapiola General Store that is the Tapiola Diner has these old pillars out front like Rome like Greece like some architectural culture, except that these are spray painted with slogans from local high school kids and left here for character, for show. These pillars support nothing. They just stand at the front of the store, which is where we pull in, which is where we kick up dust since we have left the asphalt that kept all the dust and all the forest away.

Liz gets out first.

There is not much light left.

The store is open, so we go in.

It has no door.

There is an array of bait in tubs and tanks.

There is a counter area and several booths that seem to me like the traps some people put out to catch bears or wolves, but that catch mostly dogs, and often maim them.

There is a very little light coming from a chandelier above.

I imagine this is quite a scene.

We tell the guy behind the counter who may be a relative of mine or Liz's that we are here to see the Oracle. He thinks this is

hilarious. He laughs. He has fine white teeth that gleam like in commercials or in a beam of light.

He says go straight through to the back through both sets of doors that are hard to open but you look like a strong guy is what he says.

Which is what we do.

No one is there.

It is cold and there is a lot of ice.

I think we are in a freezer, is what I say to Liz.

Isn't it a pity, is what the Oracle says when she comes in. She looks about fifteen.

I ask her what she means.

There is a radio stating numbers—one-one-seven, one-one-nine-four—that she has her ear cocked towards. There is a short-wave radio with weather information on. There is a radio just hushing static. There is an old boat radio and barometer saying something in another language.

I will not tell you what she says to Liz or what she says to me.

It is true we find out nothing here. Nothing we did not already know. All these things are true.

Regardless, Liz is doomed and beautiful, and it is cold, and I suppose I am in love, and we will get a meal in Tapiola which is fried and better than we expected, which leaves us full and gassy, which is all we can honestly ask for before we leave, before we get back in the Aerostar, before we roll the windows down and let the night in, before we turn the radio up for that sweet sound.

CARRIE ST GEORGE COMER

The Iris of the Pig

Beside the head, the meats swing.
Links of him swinging.

The flattened canvas of his body hanging
in a door of sunlight.
His yellow pigcap, his yellow hair, his teeth

extracted and floating in the display bowl:
how they clack when we're not looking.

See how your hand looks behind the screen
they made of him,
as if your hand could live alone inside him,

his flesh rolled and pressed to silk, the thinned out papers
of his blood, the scarlet cloud of him.

Your hand

open.
Closed.

Open,
the iris of the pig, eyeball of the dead.

Three years of digging and at last, found:

two dog cemeteries, one two-inch calf figurine, four fuck lamps,
and one banana[1]
(female, late twenties, blunt instrument).

Their majesty wrote *my city before my children*
then burned the city himself and moved his family eastward.
So they lived.

Or they did not live.
Their bathhouses, their cruel eating habits: what?

Little door, yon eyelet:

probably beneath the pink lid, a tube of black chickadees,
rain in shades of a bride driving a car.
From here,

I can see her makeup, the fragrant oil slick of her hairdo
Beneath his skull plate and his brain's fatted folds,

we may well find a vast and buried city, the baby's dust
in an olive jar stored near what may have been
a bedroom. True:

a pig screams when held. And sometimes the posthumous eye
stares out, wildly frigid.

But sometimes it lies still and flat,
a low slope of flesh with a world inside,
if a foggy world, if knuckle sized, if only the one after this.

Here I come in my pigcoat,
facing the wrong direction. Here I come

with the ice pick, the toothbrush, a legend for the language.
Who shall I find today?
And what number shall I give him?

Open: the eyeball of the pig,

blinking once for yes, and once more for yes.
See the cheeks dissolved by the metal in the face paint.
See the dogs wearing crowns to their death.

See how your hand is not your hand.

And the city itself,
how it glistens.

[1] In the city of Ashkelon, an excavated human is called a "banana."

Insurgence

Twilight and cicadas. Slim moon
in the sycamores, hanging. The groundhog down
by the sewer, a fur-shadow climbing the ground.

On my deck I sip a drink, lean back and look
out over the yard, into the settling dark.
Behind me, the lit screen sizzles with stacks

of sex-crazed antennae and wings. Indecent.
All eyes and design. A chitinous, iridescent
orgy of thorax alignment and evil intent.

I feel them congealing—a sticky convergence
of rivers, a mounting of exoskeletal ridges—
filling the grid at my back with makeshift bridges

that scuttle and fly at my turn, but not before
I recognize, in the scurrying map, the familiar
geography of my St Louis, aswarm

with the arrows of tactic. My camouflaged chuck
has entered the sewer to wait it out. By dark
it'll all be over—the grass-advances, the tree-bark

reinforcements; the silent, straight-up Ninja crawl
of the ants. This note is for you who follow:
We had unsegmented bodies and, all in all,

a few good years. Our eyes were unfaceted in our heads.
We couldn't really fly. Equipped with only a lit wire grid,
we slid it open—how could we know?—and tried to move inside.

CHRISTOPHER JANKE

Of the No

The missing aren't here to be missed—
in the well, you gathered bones.
In the bones, you gathered speed.
Speed has everything to do with time.
Everything has nothing to do but wait.
By the sound of the wind,
you were casting lines;
the net was full of air,
and you were caught by holes;
the holes were full of spirit,
and everything in between, which,
under a microscope, they said,
looks like an early version
of nothing, and you may call it
whatever you want, they said,
but you may not
take it to your home
and put it in your drawer,
because everyone uses it,
and no one uses it,
and all this happens every day:
the stump doesn't miss the tree;
the birds don't; the ocean doesn't;
you and I wouldn't; so sit and stare
like a hole in the water.

CHRISTOPHER JANKE

Me and God

God thinks he's a woman in a yellow hat.
I'm the woman in the yellow hat.
God dreams that he is a rig
for lifting pianists to the fifth floor.
I am the rig for pianists,
and I am under the rack of watermelons
with teeth like sharpened macaroons.
God runs. He is afraid. He wants
the friendly and familiar,
but they have no eyes.
God thinks: This isn't my kind of place—
Be a good guy, says God,
I don't want machetes,
I want ice hockey and thistles and
an unused ball field with lumpy grass,
and a woman running hard on a delicate ankle.
I am God's delicate ankle.
God says, damn it, Janke—
I gave you sky and a box of boats
and a sea beyond your every effort,
I can fustigate your appendages,
I can put you in the belly of a mole.
I say: I *am* the belly of a mole,
but the three of us, together,
we are willow trees.

JOHN VERLENDEN

Made in Hollywood

Sal Del Vecchio knocked lightly on the alabaster door of the hotel's penthouse suite. "Bennie?" he called out. No reply. He pushed the door open and saw him sitting thirty feet away, the length of a union hall, in the suite's only chair. The swan-like chair, large as a bed and covered with white silk, brought the monumentality of the room's Niagara-like white curtains to bear directly upon him, as if he, Bennie Vico, one of Hollywood's most bankable stars, were a mousse-haired casting director ready to review applicants for a role. In this case, his own father.

Only with great reluctance had Bennie agreed to this second meeting with his recently-discovered, long-lost progenitor. Unlike the first meeting, this one was occurring outside the reach of Bennie's agent, which meant that flashbulbs could be popping without the proper ambience having been established. So Bennie'd dished for the suite.

"You wanted to see me all of a sudden, Pop, why?"

Bennie hooked a forefinger over an enormous Havana cigar and met the eyes of the older man who had walked in carrying, as per Bennie's instructions to the management, a complementary scotch whiskey dwelling low, neat, in the bottom of a ten-ounce, gold-engraved crystal glass.

Sal Del Vecchio had done his homework, had seen and studied all of his son's pictures. He picked off the speech pattern now being used. It was Morley the New York City detective from *Morley's Ghosts*. That film had been 1978, he believed.

He began his reply by wiggling his hand, broaching something nasal: "Aaaah..."

Bad choice. He himself was aping Morley, poorly, the way a dinner guest regrettably repeats an impersonation that has already brought chuckles from party assembled.

"I mean, it's just this, Bennie." His son's professional name sounded funny in his mouth. "I know this sounds like I mean coming all the way over here, your renting this room just for us to, or me really, to say that all it is, is an invitation to come out to my place. But I mean just this one time maybe? Tonight?"

Bennie opened his mouth and let it hang. Sal realized the man had gone from Morley to Ernest the scullery mate in *Ernest Waddington*. The role had not met with applause nor earned respect from downtown critics, as *Morley* had. It was possible, therefore, that it—and roles like it, the quiet gems like that hadn't sparked box office—might form the core of the man that he, Sal, had to win over.

"You know"—Sal wanted so much to say Bernardo—"Bennie, I thought you might refuse if I asked you over the phone. So here I am..." He wanted to say In my burnt sienna suit with light sienna silk shirt—my best rags!—to try to come up to some sort of measure here. My god, the places you hang out in!

An unpleasant warmth traveled along Bennie Vico's neck. This wasn't why the man had called him out. No fucking way. This was expressly why he hadn't allowed the old guy to meet him in his home, for god's sake—never. He stubbed his unlit cigar in the ashtray placed by management on the carpet beside his chair.

He immediately hated the action. Since when did he start revealing himself so easily? He thought he could trace the moment down. To the day he learned he'd been sharing this city with this man, this stranger, for twenty-two years. It was as if some jerk look-alike with a Brooklyn accent had been allowed to grow alongside his own artistically-gifted self, only at a slightly faster rate so that once he, Bennie, had attained the age of forty-eight, with four divorces and

six children, this hideous alter-ego, this secret clone, was now sixty-six wearing a glistening black wig. The *Azusa Mercury* had the nerve to call him "father of Bennie Vico," as if the man were some kind of artist himself. And when they'd contacted Bennie through his agent, he hadn't been able to make a statement for forty-eight hours. Stripped. Totally revealed.

"I've been wanting," Sal said, "for you to come hear this special friend of mine play, so tonight, what do you know, all of a sudden he just falls on top of me, like out of the sky."

"Pop, I can see any act I want."

"Buddy LeRoy? You've seen Buddy LeRoy?"

"You're kidding."

"Everybody thinks he's dead, am I right? But, Bennie, just to hear this guy. Unbelievable. He's a friend of mine."

"You actually," Bennie fought the urge to sit up, place hands together between knees, "think I can just get into my schedule and somehow find a place for...?"

Like a film editor, Bennie had to run back through his mind's eye what he was seeing Del Vecchio do. First, the old guy sunk his chin down near neckline, then spread down the corners of his mouth, *like a man to be executed.* Next, he leaned his head toward the whiskey glass but never said a word, never lifted the glass. Four hundred years of modern angst compressed themselves into that gesture. All four hundred marched by and dove into a rented high ball glass.

Thank you, Pop.

When he, Bennie, dropped that tilt of the head into *Malone and Paddy,* his current project, the audience would never know what hit them. Just before he, Malone, had to knock a bullet in the back of Paddy's head, for his own damn good. For weeks he'd been hand-picking the Method vaults, every wrinkle coming up wrong. Now the gesture arrived on a silver platter, with gift card attached saying Hope you can use this. Your long lost father.

"What time did you say, Pop?" He heard his voice go soft. This was more like it. Get yourself behind the scrim. All air and shadow.

"It'll be solid gold for fifty-nine minutes, fifty-nine seconds. Come any later than twelve-thirty, you got less. See you there."

The bar he was sitting in, his father's, such bars he'd consigned to oblivion, age thirteen. Otherwise, he would have sat in one, as Bernardo Del Vecchio, for the past thirty-five years. Bennie watched the neon name of a popular beer hop over and over into a flume of mildew punching through cigarette smoke like a hoary, silvered gravestone. The Satin Room, Azusa, California, eighteen minutes by freeway from Hollywood, if you drove an Audi sportscar at ninety all the way.

Sitting next to him was the man, Sal Del Vecchio, who had figured, what, not at all in these crucial life decisions. Yet the headline in the *Azusa Mercury* had blared: Local Businessman Looking More and More Familiar, and, Father of Bennie Vico Living Right in Our Midst.

The first meeting had been arranged by a reporter in tandem with his agent. Father, son reunite, briefly. They'd both worn sunglasses, performed the ritual handshake. The old man then popped for the reporters: "Gee, I wish I looked as good as you do, Bennie." And before they'd parted, he'd leaned forward to say, "I'm sorry, son. I never planned any of this."

Glenlivet now in his warm palm, Bennie had to admit that subsequent investigations by the best detectives in Hollywood had turned up nothing. The old man was not a pimp, murderer, nor, it appeared, an impostor. He was nothing more than what he looked, a tiny businessman in a city saturated with multitudinous same. He simply hadn't played a role in his son's life, neither for good nor ill.

His agent had said, Bennie, I know this thing upsets you, but listen to me. One day you'll get a chance to shake this guy. I'm not

going to tell you what to do, because I don't know. All I'm saying is when you get the chance, don't blow it.

A fat summery breeze wafted down from the air conditioning unit that someone had just turned on.

"So, what do you do nights, Bennie?"

Bennie swiveled to face his father, found his seat did not move that far, finished by twisting in his chair. His eyes settled on the mane of disturbingly false black hair.

"Nights, Pop? I do different things."

"You ever go to those big-name places? Maxie's? Chloe's?"

"No, no." He shook his head, drank. He went nowhere. He'd be mobbed.

Even now, dark glasses, ponytail—a style he personally despised—he took a second to glance around the room. Who was he kidding? Everyone knew he was sitting there.

The Satin Room had been the storage basement of the David Hotel, a two-story firetrap where rooms rented for forty bucks a week. According to his own long story, Sal had paneled it in black sheets, run black shag carpet wall to wall, strung a Tiffany over the stage, so-called. A clerk's lamp, shaded, cast the room's only white glare from atop a wood-paneled NCR: first, on the customer's bill, secondly, on any currency over a ten spot.

A female voiced intruded. "Hey, you Bennie Vico, or something?"

Bennie turned, as did his father. What they saw was a head tossing mildly up and down like a horse's. Black sweater, black skirt, the woman looked, bodily, around thirty, perhaps as low as twenty-eight. Go on, twenty two. Her wrinkled, splotched face added thirty-five years. Basically everyone in the room fit a similar profile. Port-wine drunks, the lot. All fifteen of them. They lived upstairs. Bennie found himself smiling. The contrast between voice and fact, between foodless skimmed-down figure and soldout eyes was profound. As a Method actor, his one salvation being the school on 14th Street when he was growing up, he could appreciate such a chasm.

"Yes, I am," Bennie said.

The woman looked at Sal. "You two related?"

"We're working at it," Sal said.

"He's your father, isn't he?" she said to Bennie.

Bennie took a drink.

She walked away, her head tossing.

Sal sighed. He had told Buddy to start at midnight. He should have said eleven-thirty. It was possible the man had gotten lost. Fourteen years since they'd seen each other. It was now twelve forty-nine. His concert was the flimsy reason he'd given his son for practically begging this evening into existence. In fact, he didn't know what Buddy LeRoy would throw into the mix. He was simply the biggest name he knew.

"Who's the ghost, Pop?"

"Lost-in-the-Legends Annie. Remember the Eagles?"

"Sure."

"Hasn't seen three movies in twenty years, but she goes to sleep every night with an Eagles tape on."

"After you've made a certain number of pictures, Pop, people know who you are even if they haven't seen any. They fake it, you know?—Hey, I just saw you in this picture the other day, what's the name again?"

"The thing is, she pays her rent, otherwise I'd have rushed her. You understand."

Their eyes met briefly. Each of them was shocked to see the discomfort in the other.

"Thirty-two," Sal said. "Incredible, isn't it?" Bennie turned to see if anything else belonged to her face that could be mugged. Instead, he locked eyes with a newspaper photo of himself. He saw his wet looking, black curly hair, half-lidded Italian brown eyes, and snarling do-anything lips encased in saranwrap, thumb-tacked to the wall above a row of house booze bottles.

"Pop, I gotta go." He hiked off his stool, hoped he could get up the narrow, dark stairs before LeRoy blustered him back. He felt nauseous. He simply couldn't do it, payback or not. Since the media-run reunion, they hadn't spoken. He had hoped there was an understanding. Clearly there was none. His picture was selling drinks for a man who'd disappeared forty-three years ago.

Off his own stool came Sal. Hands shooting for the sky. "My god, Bennie. Just five more minutes."

"Pop, either tell me what's going on or I'm out of here."

When nothing came out of the older man's mouth, Bennie started moving around him. Four tables full of flushed, smiling faces turned towards them. The horse-headed woman darted out in front. *Goddamn it, she's in the old man's employ.*

"Hey, this is Bennie Vico, everybody. For real."

The room turned their eyes on him. He attempted to wave.

She leaned close. "I want to tell you something, Mr Vico."

"I can't stay to listen, madam." One foot behind the other. Keep moving.

"You can come see me, you know. I allow that."

Cheers, applause. Everyone was standing, clapping. They'd finally caught on. A movie star was among them.

"How about *this?!*" came an amplified voice, "Ladies and Gentlemen, do my eyes deceive me? Or is it... BUDDY LEROY!"

Yellow box-like top to a blockier assemblage from neck down, lips firm in the red taut center of a face. Sixty, no, seventy. He charged to the stage, leaned over, plugged in. Before the applause could die, he had raised one gold cowboy-booted foot, stomped it once hard: notes rippled out in clusters. Mellifluous, sweet as an ice-cream truck parked in their midst.

"Chicago, Chicago, mah'vellous town, wonderful town. Chicaago—my hometown! Hey, everybody. Let's hear it: Azusa, Azusa, mah-vellous town, wonderful town."

The room roared: "Azusa, Azusa."

The hand on Bennie's suit sleeve was yanking. He whipped his arm away. It was his father.

"Bennie. Fifteen minutes. My god."

When you get the moment, don't blow it. You can shut him out of your life forever if you handle it just right.

Lost-in-the-Legends Annie reappeared on his right. She chuckled, closed her eyes. He shouted over the music, "Madam, you would do me a big favor if you would leave me alone." Then trudged back to his chair—what was he doing?—and sat down. People stared at him, true, but they looked unhappy. The massive accordion exploding, his father beside him teary-eyed, suddenly he was unsure of his tack.

Annie strolled past him toward the stairs where she ascended one dark wooden runner, and looked back at him.

"Bennie, my god," Sal said, weeping, "he can still play."

"Yeah, Pop, but he's *been* playing, you know. You know what I mean?"

The older man's sudden frown, the open mouth. Bennie thought for a moment he was staring at a film still of himself as Morley, only with age. Morley the heartbroken detective who'd seen too much to love again. That had been the premise until the last five minutes flipped everything upside down, the supposed murder suspect becoming his mate for life, all six or eight years that might be squeaked out of his narrow body.

"Look, Pop, no disrespect intended. I'm making no sense even to myself for why I'm out here. So help me. That's all I'm asking. Please."

This time it was Sal's turn to be amazed at the look on his son's face. It was Walt Phelan, from *Phelan's Revenge,* the period film about the Irish war for independence, 1914. There hadn't been but one murder in three hours, the fans staying away in regiments. They'd wanted another *Butch Fagan* mob-war film, because that had

been the movie that embedded Bennie Vico into the pop world's DNA chain. Too bad. *Phelan's Revenge* had been his son's best work, then or since. Impossible to answer Phelan's shout for justice, the scene that freeze-framed the movie into credits rolling. How did you answer such a plea? From a sightless man, coal dust cut to ribbons by tears of rage? During the movie's one hour and seventy-six minutes, he, Sal, had forgotten he was looking at his own son. Phelan was in him now, as obviously Phelan still resided in his son. Was that the bridge?

"All right, Bennie. I'm going to make a clean breast of it. You sure you want to hear it?"

Bennie stared at him with half-lidded eyes.

"I'm getting killed tonight. Or tomorrow. Or the next day. So you're right, I'm not playing with a full deck. It's a good-bye party. Can't you see all these people celebrating? I've had it. I've done myself in. Too many bad deals, and I know you know what I mean. You, most of all. So it's not about sympathy. It's just, I wanted to touch base with somebody. I wanted to see my son one last time."

He scared himself by how close to the truth those words had been. Maybe they were the truth.

Buddy vented a lengthy preparatory solo to what any practiced ear could tell was going to be *That's Life.* The crowd hung on every trill.

"Two whiskeys over here, Fred." Bennie Vico felt sick. He couldn't see anything, couldn't recognize a word of truth. The club was stifling. He'd made a colossal mistake.

Or maybe not. He leaned back against his captain's chair, firmed up his gut beneath his gray silk shirt and black linen slacks. You could use it—even the old man's lies and tears—if you just stayed put. Whether he could also shake the guy was another story. The evening needed to play itself out.

Glenlivet directly onto his inert mound of ice chips. Sal, his father, poured. He watched the bottle's angle.

The room became swollen with a new foursome. Two ladies, two gents, none of them together necessarily. They sat down. Buddy nodded to them, raised a hand even. Everyone in the crowd joined in the litany:

"Been a puppet."

"Puppet."

"A poet."

"Poet."

"Pawn and a King."

"'n a King."

"I've been up, down, over and around."

"Yeah, 'n I know one thing."

Bennie scanned the room in front of him. Take what you can, kid.

In this chair: a tutorial in vanity.

Over there: the mechanics of false knowledge.

And that guy with his mouth pulled round in a bugle's shape, face smoother than Duke Ellington's, he was working money where there wasn't any.

All one huge show. Collectively, an enormous pain. But also, get this: a fumy badger-like meanness held down so low you couldn't move your shoes without bumping into it. One dram distilled, projected onto a screen, could knock down Penn Station at rush hour.

Could he leave now? Absolutely not. My god, how simple the acting life could be. You kept your eyes open until the buttons and hooks that attached yourself to the roles were located, placed within reach. Nothing but a matter of Tao, of patience, of Method.

Applause and shouts, silences and sing-a-longs crashed beneath a constant sea of amplified accordion sweetness, combination carousel-West Bank gypsy violinist. Meanwhile, for Bennie, the lessons went on.

Then crashed to an unshimmering halt.

Bartender Fred stood at stage center holding a tiny mike tipped in yellow foam: "Twenty minutes, ladies and gentlemen. Stick around. There's more Buddy LeRoy to come. In the meantime, come see me. Tell me your deepest fantasy, get a discount off your choice of olive or maraschino cherry."

Bennie was laughing. What a goof this old world was. All life but a stage? Not really. More like, all life *needed* a stage. To redeem the whole mess.

A sobering thought struck him: he had twenty years to get across what he owned as an artist. Only twenty years.

Had his father said somebody was going to kill him?

"Hey, now this is a surprise," LeRoy said, taking Bennie's hand and shaking it. "I should have looked over here earlier. How are you, Bennie?"

Bennie hadn't realized how short and old the accordionist was. Trim stomach, the result of a good personal trainer. The jawline, however, had been worked on way too much. He might as well have been wearing scalpels dangling from threads attached to the corners of his mouth. Do not go gentle, Bennie told himself. But Christ! LeRoy had to be in advance of eighty.

Okay, but hold it, pal. Age was a role too. Nothing to be sneezed at. Here in the twenty-first century, maybe the plastic surgeon's scarification ritual was really the truest way to play it. In fact, between Buddy and his father Sal, Bennie couldn't choose the more authentic representation of age. That is, which fake man sold the concept more unstintingly. Ninety without wrinkles? Sure, that was the formula now. The older you were, the younger you affected: the cream-colored jumpsuit that housed LeRoy's cold-storage rose of a torso. This was the stuff of today's tears.

"Can I announce you?" Buddy said. "I mean, next set?" Bennie begged off in the voice that always worked on the circuit players: equals-only-would-understand-and-I-know-you're-an-equal, Buddy, but-no-way-in-hell, get-it?

"Sure, sure," Buddy said. He smiled toothily at Sal. "Me and you need to see each other for a moment, don't we?"

"Who, me?" Sal said.

All three men were standing. On the inside flight of stairs that led down directly from the hotel, a lurching, red-wigged Annie-of-the-Legends still stood, a beacon, just above Buddy LeRoy's head. Bennie noticed the two men from the foursome who were now making disturbing movements. The one to his right had taken up position by the staircase to the flophouse. The other had placed himself directly in front of the black, carpet-covered stairway that led outside. A ten-year-old could have smelled armaments.

"I'm afraid those aren't exactly friends over there," Buddy said, making no motion.

"My god," Sal said. "At this hour, business."

There is only business, Bennie said to himself. The room was swimming. Bonanzas everywhere. Just don't get popped, kid.

"So," Buddy said, "if you don't mind, I'd like you to give me the envelope in a sort of public way. Laugh it up, whatever. I've been told they don't have time for the second set, which, for that matter, is not going to be that long. I'm fitting this in, you know."

Trees by Joyce Kilmer: I think that I shall never see.... Fifth grade. Buddy was all wind-up mechanics.

"I didn't know about *this*," Sal said. "This envelope-tonight business."

"Your hands are miraculously unmoving," Buddy said.

"That's because I don't have it. Gee, give the room a chance to drink."

Buddy turned to Bennie, held out his hand. "It's great finally meeting you, Bennie. Your birthday by any chance?"

Bennie shook his head.

"Sal, we need to go to your office," Buddy said.

"Why?"

"Because, as an old foolish friend who once loaned another foolish friend a lot of money, I'm asking, all right? Excuse me, Bennie. I trust you know this."

Sal squinted his eyes. "He doesn't know anything. Why should he?" He loved Buddy. My god, you could never predict the blackness he could conjure out of the top hat of the past. And this was what the moment demanded, some bedrock necessity.

Buddy put the flat of his hand on Sal's coat and pushed, gently, nevertheless with a stone hidden in it. "For heaven's sake, Sal, take me out of this terrible situation you're putting me in. Take me to your office, at least."

Sal wrapped his own hand around Buddy's. Bennie could see he was working, no question. "The office is nothing but boxes, Buddy." Their hands remained locked, quivering.

Bennie said to his father, "What's the deal here, Pop?"

"Nothing."

Then to LeRoy, "I've heard your music since I'm a kid in Bensonhurst. My mother had a record by you. She played it all the time."

"*Waltzing Hot Matilda?*"

"Uh-uh, *Stardust.*"

"*Stardust?* Really? I always thought that record..."

"She thought the same way. An underappreciated classic. So now, as a concerned, possibly involved party, also as an appreciator, I want you to tell me what's going on, Mr LeRoy."

"Without the heartache?"

"Please."

"I'm told that what you just saw and heard is worth five thousand dollars. Especially when it's an extra show on my schedule, which it is."

"Five thousand? You get five thousand for that?" Bennie looked at his father. Even if everyone in the room spent a hundred dollars at the bar, and plainly none of them had more than fifty, the night stood to be a colossal loss for this man.

"That's not my full fee," Buddy said. "That's a friend's fee."

"Pardon me, Mr LeRoy, but there aren't ten people in this town who get five thousand, solo, for anything like what I just heard."

"In the beholder's eye, Bennie, as always, so I respect what you're saying, but you know our business. A contract's a contract."

"You two have a contract, Pop?"

The look he saw had not been made for cinema. Not yet, anyway. Never a more loaded poker face than this one: spirit drained; cosmetician picking up phone from mortuary company: Hello-o.

The old man said, "I have not really been myself, not altogether, lately," but he also said, with straight face held in silence, What difference does this contract, or anything else from me, possibly make at this point? It was in the eyebrows, the cheek's extra flesh jiggling just so much, pulled up and down by one enormous fake smile that collapsed upon reaching its apogee.

He didn't know if he'd folded a large enough roll in his front right pants pocket, but somehow the hundred dollar bills kept splaying out, a measured, physical event. One, two... Bennie thumbed over fifty of them.

Nevermind he was cash-broke for the evening. He felt as if he'd gone to Saks of the Acting World, would teeter home soon, his mind carrying box atop box of... what? He couldn't remember. It would take months to open them all and scout the contents.

One thing he was getting right now: LeRoy's quick glance at the foursome, their faces hard on his face. Petty sidewalk drug dealers, no doubt, maybe into kinkier fixes. Maybe his father was at the bottom of this food chain, maybe not.

Bills rolled within his fist, LeRoy trammeled away, yielding the whole fat wad in a faux high five to one of the women. He kept walking to the stage and started fiddling with his all-black instrument. Everyone else had fused themselves to the bar rail. When he

and his father walked past it, Fred's empty tumbler held a small fortune in wrinkled ones. From her position of the staircase, Annie blew him a kiss.

The office, Bennie noticed, once they'd entered it, wasn't packed in boxes. The place was still alive, even though clipped cigar corners lurked beneath shelves of ancient Accounts Payable sheets. His father no longer smoked.

"Okay, Pop. I've paid your man here. What else is there?"

The room had two chairs, one for his father, one for a client ostensibly. Neither man wanted to occupy either seat. The choice to stand left the black, leather-tacked office chair alone, empty behind the neatly covered desk with pen set, blotter, printed pads, oval picture frame, not Bennie's mother, he was sure, though he wouldn't look.

Remember that empty chair, he thought. Put it together with this heaviness in waiting for the old man to say one word. Would he in fact say something or not? It wouldn't matter so long as the audience saw justice, wisdom, folly, God... whatever it was that they wanted to put in that chair.

He realized he was conceiving his first film. *The Chair?*

"I'm broke, Bennie."

"Excuse me? You've got, uh, credit, I believe, Pop? You have a business here. Several, in fact. I don't believe you need some actor telling you this. Anyway, what's all this fire and thunder with Buddy LeRoy?"

"I need a million bucks."

"Aw, Pop!"

Forever and a day, he, Bennie, would ponder the older man's next tactic. He'd never come any closer to it than he was at this moment. His father was in fact choosing to shut his mouth firmly.

Into the gulf that yawned forth, Bennie's own words jumped like what? Survivors, suicides? Who knew which? A maritime disaster must be like this moment, he thought to himself, even as he was speaking, hearing his words. For every man on a sinking deck there came this leap into frigid, bottomless waters.

"Pop, you left us behind. You walked out on us. You never gave us a single word. In your heart you killed us. If I hadn't made it as an actor, you'd have never gotten in touch. You'd have never seen me. You didn't care. You never gave a damn whether I was rotting inside or not. Which for the record I refused to do, Pop."

"I'm glad, son, that you refused. To rot. And you're right about the rest. Every word."

They looked at each other—Sal Del Vecchio, Bernado Del Vecchio. The one man should have hung his head. Instead, he said, "I need a million bucks, son. Really."

The unspoken words: *because without me you wouldn't exist.* Don't ever write that into the script, Bennie noted to himself. Write that into the script and you're feeding baboons, not making art.

"Or what? What's going to happen, Pop? Nobody's shooting you. The only man nutty enough to put a hole through you just left the premises. Or will soon."

Outside the room the accordion blared with windy triumph.

The man who looked as if the top of his head had been dipped in asphalt just stood there. Only this time, the gesture came through loud and clear. Bennie himself picked it off: it was the face of Butch Fagan's father, the old warlord studying the only man who could remove him from power, his own son.

That was when they'd stopped bickering, the Fagan clan, when all the infamies that had passed between father and son—taunts, challenges, treacheries, beatings, the long simmering sickness for revenge. All of it fell away. Two minutes later, audiences were standing up cheering as the united Fagan clan, in a hundred and forty of cinema's longest seconds, wiped out five rivals clans. All enemies went down to a man, total eclipse. When people walked out of

those theaters, they walked as if bricks had been placed between their thighs. Because they believed. Believed.

They knew Butch Fagan was the one man who could kill his pop. But such a hit would have doomed himself.

He, Sal, had no idea what he was doing. Operating on instinct. Where was he? Which film? He had no idea whatsoever. He thought to himself, I lost it. I lost my chance for a second wind in life. I lost my entire fucking old age. When I walked out of that apartment forty-three years ago, that's when I threw it all away.

On the other hand, if he hadn't walked out, if the kid had grown up like him instead... he couldn't make sense out of it. He was desperate. Desperation had moved him to his own blood. That was all he knew.

"I'm not signing over money to you," Bennie said. "Why should I? For all I know everything I've seen tonight has been one big choreography." He held up his hand to silence the man who, it was true, did not look as if he were going to say a word. "What I'm going to do—and you can tell your creditors to verify what I'm saying by calling this number." He thumbed over a business card face down to his father, who took it. "What I'm doing is I'm setting up a trust. Just like I did for Mom. You got debts, this instrument should, over time, wipe them out. Give any hot cases the phone number on the card. They'll cool down, they'll sit in line waiting like any sane person who wants their money. But know one thing, Pop. You will never see the principle. Even at the time of your death—and tell this to the person in that picture frame, will you, so she won't murder you—the money will merge into the Actors Guild."

"The Actors Guild?"

"The Guild foots the bill for out-of-work actors—brilliant people who are trying to ply their art for the sake of illumination. Does anyone appreciate? No. But me, because I'm an actor, I do. So they get, from your trust, upon your death, a million dollars, in your name, if that's any consolation. From you, not me."

Bennie was astonished. Not by his own words. He'd planned the moment, had stored it as an eventuality. Practiced it in fact to a point, but then let improvisation take over, as, indeed, the Method demanded. No, it was this old guy again, the family traitor. He gets told he has a million deposited on the morrow, interest flying in like golden geese in quarterly installments—bing, bing, bing. So what does he do? Nods. As if he's been told to jump inside a German bunker with pin-pulled hand grenades dangling from a web belt. All duty. Yes, sir. No, sir. My god, he, Bennie, had to remember that. It was so inappropriate, no actor or director in his right mind would think it could work. Yet it just had. He, Bennie Vico, was living proof. For some reason, he still felt as if it were he, not the old man, who owed. Amazing.

"Bennie," the torn effigy finally spoke. Bennie hadn't thought he could take the silence a moment longer. His right hand had been wiggling from neural impulses to smack his father's cheeks, just to snap him into the present. Satori was like that. You peaked then it came down hard, shattering like a single pane for a sound effects tape.

"Bennie, stay the show. LeRoy's a hard case, but he's a great act, you agree? You got to." The older man bent as if to move toward the door.

Both men stood anchored. In the room's unshaded light they stared just past one another's face.

"What is it, Bennie?" But Sal knew. He'd been waiting.

"Pop, I'm an artist."

"I know. A great one."

"You got to respect that artists need space, Pop."

"Count on it. You call me, I don't call you. I understand. My god, go create."

Bennie stood there nodding, thinking, how could Buddy LeRoy's music sound great when it sounded like the time before he'd been born?

He stepped out of the small room, his father holding the door open. A billow of sour smoke threatened to send him scrambling up the stairs. When he looked in that direction, he saw Annie. She'd been standing on the same step all night long.

"My god," he said to her. "Are you of the Faithful, or what? Come here a second, why don't you?" He raised his arms and hands and took her cheek down for a fan-buss. Into her left ear, he said, "When you see my next movie, I want you to look for yourself."

He released her. She frowned back at him, put a finger in the center of her chest and mouthed, Me?

"Right, you and everybody you know."

CHRISTOPHER STIEBER

Character Actor

Like the guy who knew what's-his-name that one time,
I'm the good booze the true drinker

asks for two rows from the top.
Near and almost and quite,

I chisel me
into the side of that mountain in your head.

All over the place, like a penny,
I get cheaper every day.

Your mass said, you drink to
the eighth guy in the credits

just above the dog playing himself.
The unshaven guy

with the piquant understatement
and all his mumbled meaning.

MICHAEL DUMANIS

The Frustrated Vaudevillian

How I miss Lisbon,
where I've never been.
It is autumn again,
it has always been autumn.

I scar my face
with a mishandled razor.
I clean each ear
to let music in.

My voice is scarred
by voices better than.
I have lost track of acts.
Here is a terror

and there, the distances
I have forgotten
of fancied pseudonyms
and what I think.

So many dishes wait…

A wealth of trinkets…

I search remains of rooms for pie and laudanum…

I draw the curtains tight.
I yawn all night.
I try to kiss what
greets me in the mirror.

Half-Mast Inhibition

Until this passes, I'll call it you
whose fingers whisper smoke down
my arms. Eyes closed, I paint your lips blue
as they brush by weightless waves
of evergreen. Almost
as if you were the moss as well, almost

enough to still a bell's tone in the spine.
Moonless & bright
black, silt floods back roads in an August sky.
Lips swell shut like a south paw's left eye.
We cut each other with rhythm like a crow's wing
thru night rain. Leave fluffed notes to the river
& the morning fog, let history scan

the hard lines. If you can hold a candle
to a moth's mouthful of pain, you might drain myth
from the ditch when steel-toed shadows shuffle the wood
& ball-peen nights still pound the concrete.
Silent as starlight caught in sin-soft rasp
of a cat's tongue, a cold left

hand warms a porcelain knob & a silver tail slips
from the room. Wet skin gathers
sounds of this, sun-showers from a clean swish
thru the mind's bright leaves, a trumpet in a rucksack
full of tenpenny nails. Ragtag & punch drunk,
when it hurts to step on a dime, "heads" says I won't
feel the next one coming.

JANET FLORA

Waiting for Lena

I'm waiting for the doctor to call with the results of Lena's lab tests. I'm always waiting on Lena. I sip my coffee and look out the window onto Second Avenue. They're restoring the cast-iron fence around St Mark's Cemetery—it's one of the few structures left unchanged in the neighborhood.

"Irena, can you come zip this for me?" Lena calls from the bedroom. She never could do anything herself.

I take another sip of coffee.

"Irena? Irena, are you coming?"

"Yeah, I'm coming. I'll be there in a minute." I push the chair back from the window and put my cup down on the kitchen table.

Lena is standing facing the full-length mirror in our bedroom. The straps of her brassiere are twisted. I start to straighten one, but realize it would have to be removed to completely unravel all the tangles and knots. So I just zip the pale-blue, paisley dress, and start to walk away.

"Wait. Fasten my pearls," Lena says, holding the strand by the ends.

I take them and inspect the clasp. These are mine. I'm sure of it. She always does this. Hers have the yellow-gold clasp. This one is pink-gold. Poppa made them that way—so we'd always be able to tell them apart. Oh God, how many times have I wanted to strangle her with these pearls?

"Lena, aren't these mine?" I ask.

"No, they're mine," she says, as I stand behind her staring at her in the mirror. It looks like we are one body with two heads.

When we were girls at least Mama and Poppa could tell us apart, but now at eighty-two no one bothers. And why would they? The only thing unique about an old, shriveled Ukrainian woman is that there is one more who looks exactly the same.

"Did the doctor call yet?" Lena asks.

I keep examining the clasp on the pearls. It would be just like her to get really sick and die now. All my life I've wanted to be separate—to be one—rather than one of. But now? Now it hardly matters.

"Well, did he, Irena? Did he call yet?" she asks again.

I look up at her reflection. "No, not yet," I say. "He'll call soon."

If mirrors reverse images, I wonder which of us is asking and which is answering?

I am the first born. Older by four minutes, and one pound heavier at birth. I got my second teeth before Lena, and was an inch taller until we were sixteen. Lena was a bit sickly, always a step behind, and always trying to catch up. She was the one Mama coddled. Lena would sneeze and Mama was there putting her lips to Lena's forehead to take her temperature.

"Mama, me too," I'd beg. "Take my temperature too."

But she'd just shoo me away with the back of her hand and say, "Irena, you're fine, you're strong like Poppa. Lena is delicate like me."

On the days Lena stayed home sick, I loved going to school by myself. I didn't have to wait while she got ready, or help her get ready. Lena always had to walk slowly. So when I was alone I'd run almost all the way. But when I got there no one knew it was me—until I sat in my seat. The teachers always kept us far apart in the classroom so they'd know who was who. Lena always wanted to change places; she thought it would be fun to fool the teacher, but I never thought it would be fun at all.

Now there is nobody left to fool. Unless you count that dumb model next door who is waiting for us to die so she can buy our apartment and break through. But she's so stupid she probably doesn't realize there are two of us, and her calculations about how long she'll have to wait are likely to be wrong.

"Come on, Irena," Lena says, "fasten the pearls. We'll be late for our appointment at the beauty parlor."

"You'd better go without me," I say .

"Oh, please come. I hate going without you."

"I have to stay here in case the doctor calls."

But maybe while she's gone I'll go to the park. The one across town. I like it there. I like to talk to people. Some of the old ones, who have lost spouses, tell me how lonely they are living alone after a lifetime of togetherness. I say, "Yes, I know all about togetherness."

As girls, we played beauty parlor for hours. Sitting with our backs to each other at Mama's vanity, we painted our lips and curled our hair, Lena using one end of the three-paneled mirror while I used the other. Then we would face the middle panel together to see what we had created. And even though I could exaggerate my lips with more precision, and sketch my eyebrows with more of an arch, we still looked identical: the same pointy chin, slender nose, dark wavy hair and two pairs of green eyes.

I would look at our reflection multiplied in the side panels, reproducing us over and over again.

There is no three-paneled mirror in our bedroom today. But it feels the same. As if the image I see repeats itself, not only beyond the mirror, but beyond the room, and into the world outside.

Only once was it different. Lena and I were seventeen the summer I met Frank. I'd been seeing him for a month before I told him there was more than one of me.

We were all sitting on the stoop the day that he came to meet my family. I was next to Poppa on the top step, and Lena was next to Mama two steps below. I saw him as he turned the corner to our street. I wondered if I should stand up and wave or do something so he'd be sure to know it was me. But I didn't.

As he got nearer I watched as he looked at Lena, then up at me, and then back to Lena. Then he put his hand toward Lena.

"Hi. I'm Frank. You must be Lena."

Later when we were alone, I asked him if he could really see the difference between us.

"She's beautiful too," he said. "But not like you. I could tell you two apart in a fog."

That was the best year of my life.

Then the war happened and Frank was gone. His remains were sent home from Germany six months later.

The phone rings.

"Do you think that's the doctor?" Lena asks.

I look up at our reflections in the mirror. Our eyebrows are sparse, our gray hair bends rather than waves, and no amount of lipstick can define our shrunken lips. Two pairs of eyes stare back at me. I straighten the pearls on Lena's neck. She grabs my hand and squeezes it. Her neck is thinner than mine—more delicate. Mama was right. I am the stronger one.

"I'll be right back," I say. And I go to answer the phone.

KATHRINE WRIGHT

The End of the Little Ice Age

> Ratings-driven sensationalism of weather coverage gives the public a false impression of the severity of many weather events.
>
> —Earth Report 2000

> We understand the destruction, not what is being destroyed.
>
> —Professor Ghillean Prance

First there would be a half-ditch effort to store boxes high, tape cupboards shut, stash extra money in the butter shelf of the fridge next to the 35mm film that's ready to go, chilled like a magnum of zinfandel. First there would be the kneeling, hands clutched together, head tilted skyward, at the landing, with the so so white berber carpet, the swimming pool out back a bit too full, the pond awash with turtles plummeting, then surfacing, huddling close, tasting, seeing, hearing, feeling the danger.

Of course there would be too much news, the overcast, simulcast, broadcast, typecast, first caste, castles of information, frontal movement here, trees swaying there, the giving it all up, beating it senseless, pounding, pounding, an unrelenting storm.

Certainly there'd be a few prayers lofted out, but not from her. Even with her pious pose on the landing, she would not be one for divine intervention, which would not put her any less, any more safe, any further away from the terror in her capillaries, and that terror served up like caffeine, so much that it would keep her up, up, up, and later, after she finally drifted off, would jolt her awake in the middle of dark dreams.

Yes, there would be an ample food supply. She might add to the pantry a few cans of almonds, some soy milk, a bit of chocolate whose presence she would divulge only to herself, unless.

And if there were squirming children, she would whisk them away from school early, squeeze them to squirming, sing the same silly song thirteen times, rocking, rocking, rocking, to calm the news and the words and her world.

Surely she wouldn't take the library books back today, sit in a coffee shop drinking spicy tea, caching words that tumbled through her digits and made furtive love below her. The wind would blow the palm leaves horizontal, the leaves stretching and desperate, and she would try to catch a glimpse of that hot, sweet, magic, and the rain would fall after all, wouldn't it, comely and luminous, as it is, as it does, the sky falling every day.

XXII

be open at the
funeral the fruit
half beaten

their breath above his
player vapors
all dare the I awake

1 day is 1 hand
breathless two then the beating
to die of the have
die by a full alive was

ears are feeling
dumb the nipples
supposed and copulating
may retreat to the

funeral the it
the copula my the my
best breathing in the other

hope a teat's cathedral
has time between creators
laborer on his part

player to flesh
sweet great change
wind wreathed curious

XXV

soul yourself

shall the hollow reach earth
except that heading language
with sympathy's desolate wounds
would school beneath salt

the fish starts slab particulars nor
any of his in her—be their
body former the only participant
if nigh with war were partition terrible

information beneath history? earth?
to the sounds—heart's art this swell
song corners kill on earth
and there where sympathies fell

XXIX

I to you

with lofty leisure
Attica may house the sense of

expected words—allegories
prove the good monster

and place youth
in cool stand

Socrates partner
in our inconceivable preference

XXX

monster

they same they interested presumably
worked on written proof there
how classical us expects rules
and satisfactory language
partially from that utterance baby
at this end of the work

incredible world i
there closet the closest
and we

LACY L. SCHUTZ

Disjunction

—You mean the words we use for might have done it differently
—Crux. Fork. Bend, turn, crossroads.
Met it on the tracks
Its name was hello
—The hinge of the wrist itself becomes something miraculous, to me
—Enough to locomote three engines and a load of coal across flat land
Name was welcome to Milwaukee
—Oh, you mean all this crapping and pissing, human waste management, diversion, is another miraculous thing
—I would have liked to call you back in out of the night, that night
Name was night curled neck to nose
—What you really mean is Wednesday and it's time to move on
—The furnished compartment of together and apart
Met it on the prairie
Name was get out
Named take your fucking rib back
—You can have your rib back
—Oh, you mean, if the train pulls out of this world, you want to be on it
Its name was marry me
—At night I dream of taking a shower, trimming my nails
—You mean in the morning all your dreams come true
Name was saturation
Named how many times can we—
—Architecture of marrow and calcium
—This bloody thud

DAN ALBERGOTTI

In the Era of the Sentence Fragment

Lines of incompletion. All those words
that can be gathered. But not enough
for shoring. Not against ruins. Fragments
of sentences, of dreams, of the boys' school
in Hiroshima. Looking for raw material
in the rubble. Finding nothing. Having nothing
inside. Unable to do the police in different voices.
No more voices. No more makers, better
or worse. Only weak echoes. And irony.
And the dim blue sunrise of the television screen.
And the wish finally to die, like Shelley,
mid-sentence. Writing the triumph of life.

MARY A. MCCAY

The Whore of Babylon: Louisiana and James Lee Burke

> A love affair with Louisiana is in some ways like falling in love with the biblical whore of Babylon. We try to smile at its carnival-like politics, its sweaty, whiskey-soaked demagogues, the ignorance bred by its poverty and the insularity of its Cajun and Afro-Caribbean culture. But our self-deprecating manner is a poor disguise for the realities that hover on the edges of one's vision like dirty smudges on a family portrait.
>
> —James Lee Burke

In his twelfth Dave Robicheaux novel, *Jolie Blon's Bounce*, James Lee Burke continues his psychological scrutiny of not just one man, but of a whole culture. That examination began with the publication of *Neon Rain* in 1987, when Burke introduced Dave Robicheaux, his Vietnam Vet, alcoholic, potentially violent New Orleans policeman who constantly finds himself and the ones he loves in danger from people whose concept of justice and the law is no bigger than the eye of a needle. Early in the series, Dave's sense of loss and self-hatred is reflected in the crumbling buildings of the French Quarter where he works, a world of drugs, booze, inhabited by a Nicaraguan gang that threatens both the city and Robicheaux's life. Later the slime of corruption will follow him to New Iberia, where he grew up and where he becomes a police lieutenant.

With microscopic ethical lenses, Burke examines the morality of his own and Robicheaux's world, and finds it wanting. He sees around him the power of the wealthy, and of old families who hide their pasts and continue to use people in the present, ordaining themselves the moral and social arbiters of their society. Like Rex Stout, Robicheaux sees the past in the present, and the sins of the fathers in their children until the seventh generation.

Burke also risks a first person narrative. Detective Robicheaux speaks for himself and spends a good deal of time in interior monologue. He examines each action and comments on it in a way that illuminates not only the problem but also his own inner demons. The risk involved grows out of the fact that much of the time he tells us things that are happening when he is not around, but Burke manages to overcome that obstacle through a descriptive narrative that often borders on the poetic and always manages to make the reader visualize the locale, the people, and the lingering atmosphere of evil. Further, Robicheaux's comments on human behavior border on epiphany.

In *Jolie Blon's Bounce* Robicheaux is beaten up by a seventy-four year old man known in the community only as "Legion." The beating puts Dave in the hospital, but it is the assault on his sense of self, that leaves him devastated. He finally admits to his wife that Legion "put his tongue in my mouth. He called me his bitch." It is the memory of that "male tongue rife with nicotine pushed inside my mouth, over the teeth, into the throat, his saliva like an obscene burn on my chin" that Robicheaux cannot integrate into his notion of who he is. The beating is something he can deal with. He understands violence. Coming to terms with this violation is another matter, and Burke uses that incident to examine his character's insecurities about his maleness and intensifies the self doubt when Robicheaux makes love to his wife: "I felt my sex harden and swell and burn in a way it never had, to a degree that made me cry out involuntarily, more like a woman than a man, and the entirety of my life, my identity itself, seemed to dissolve." Shortly after that, Robicheaux encounters Ladice Hulin, a black woman who was raped by Legion years ago. She reveals Legion's true hold on people. "Every place you go, you feel his hand on you. He always in your thoughts. That's what Legion know how to do to people." The predator Legion has found a way into the deepest recesses of Robicheaux's psyche, and Burke uses Robicheaux's reactions to examine yet another facet of his character's complex make up.

In *Heaven's Prisoners* (1988), the spiritual and legal mayhem of the *Neon Rain* continues. Robicheaux and his wife adopt a young girl he finds trapped in a plane in the Gulf of Mexico, and find themselves caught up in a tangled web of Central American crime. When Robicheaux's wife is murdered and his child threatened, Burke depicts the violence that erupts as a metaphor for the corruption that permeates his small corner of the world and that threatens to envelop the entire continent. It is in the child that Robicheaux finds a brief return to lost innocence. But ultimately there is no escape from the reality of evil in the human heart.

Burke won the 1989 Edgar Award for best mystery novel for his third Robicheaux book, *Black Cherry Blues,* in which the policeman is forced to protect his family by hiding in Montana, a landscape starkly different from the Louisiana settings of the earlier novels. Once again finding himself in the heart of the beast, Robicheaux frantically tries to save his little girl from being killed by the mob.

As the series continues with *A Morning for Flamingos* (1990), Burke challenges not only Robicheaux's sense of himself but also his very life. While he and his partner are escorting Jimmie Lee Boggs and Tee Beau Latiolais to death row, Robicheaux finds himself in the middle of a grisly escape. It is not the wound that he sustains when the killers escape, but the fact that he has begged the killers for his life after his partner is murdered, that eats at him. The nightmares of Vietnam return and become a *leit motif* in the story. What is courage? Is a man who pleads for his life a coward? Is a man who lives through Vietnam somehow to blame for those who died? Could he have saved his partner? It is not the answers to these questions that drive the plot, but Robicheaux's constant questioning. His return, over and over, to his own defects and his guilty sense of self-preservation add yet another dimension to his character. But Robicheaux's self loathing is balanced by Clete Purcel, a friend and former partner of Robicheaux's who has been bounced from the New Orleans Police Department. His tough-minded view of the world is a strategic counterpart to Robicheaux's often lyrical and melancholic one.

The older Robicheaux gets, the less able he is to accept the evil he sees in his own community. If New Iberia, Louisiana, is rife with crime and degeneracy, the circles of evil must spread out across the universe with nothing except a few fragile laws to stop them. Almost an avenging angel, Robicheaux uses his position with the New Iberia police to "operate in his own time zone and zip code" to stop the people he thinks are corrupting his world. His own boss points out to him that "a good officer takes care of his people first. Everything else is second," but Robicheaux sees the world differently, and often goes it alone or with only Purcel to back him up. The two renegades often seem to have a law of their own, a code of morality that demands a different kind of justice.

That different kind of justice is clearly evident in the fifth novel, *A Stained White Radiance* (1992). Trapped between his anger over his third wife's diagnosis of Lupus, and his hatred for the quack televangelist, Lyle Sonnier, Robicheaux more and more recognizes that evil is aleatory, and that he is powerless to control the way the winds of corruption blow through his life. Again Burke uses the past to explain the present, and it is the Sonnier family's brutal history that draws Robicheaux into their world. As a young man, before his world fell apart in Vietnam, he loved Drew Sonnier, and his memory of that innocent time draws him into the vortex of the family's secrets. More so than in the earlier novels, Robicheaux, in *A Stained White Radiance,* realizes that evil has a life of its own, and, no matter how he tries, he is often helpless against its power.

If evil has no pattern, then maybe the law should not either, Robicheaux concludes in the next novel, *In the Electric Mist with the Confederate Dead* (1993). Ghosts of dead confederate soldiers in the swamps of New Iberia, a corpse of a black man who Robicheaux saw murdered over three decades ago, and bizarre serial killings of prostitutes demand more than simple police procedure, and

Robicheaux, filled to the teeth with a hatred of his history, and the world he cannot change, takes his own path, endures suspension from the police, and finally talks to dead confederate soldiers just as he talks to his dead Vietnam buddies in his nightmares.

Evil lurks in the swamps, in the history that has shaped the present, and in the souls of his most mundane neighbors, yet Robicheaux, like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* still tries to believe in the Celestial City and in the capacity for good in people to match the evil he encounters every day. Yet finally, as he does in most cases, Robicheaux is forced to admit that, "the worst deeds human beings commit are precipitated by a happenstance meeting of individuals and events, who and which, if they were rearranged only slightly, would never leave a bump in our history."

Whatever bump Burke makes in history, he does have a deeply engrained sense of how the past can affect the present, of how characters are determined by their histories and by their environments, and of how good people struggle against evil. He also knows that it is a losing battle, but each small triumph that his hero experiences is a triumph for everyone. This concept of heroism is evident in Robicheaux's sense of his world. In addition to his police duties, he runs a bait shop and rents out fishing boats with an old black man named Batist, and he sees in the increasingly polluted marshes and bayous of Louisiana, a sign that good men are not winning the war. Evil has a stench to it, and when the earth stinks, evil is winning. Burke noted in an interview with *Booklist* "that the waters in Louisiana are more polluted than in New Jersey. You just can't trust the chemical industry." He also brings political savvy to his novels, and sees in the corrupt politicians of his state a microcosm of the corruption America has exported to Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. He also noted that he, like Robicheaux is an iconoclast. "When everybody agrees on it, it's wrong."

Burke's concern for the natural world, and his innate sense that people, not the institutions they hide behind, are responsible for the evil that haunts the novels causes Burke's character to see the double-edged sword of violence. Burke admitted in the *Booklist* interview that, "I think Dave recognizes that if he acts violently, it's a defeat, not a victory. On the other hand... he recognizes that when we aren't willing to defend those with no voice, we are saying that our lives are of no value." That is the real dilemma for Robicheaux. While he is "never cavalier about violence," he also sees how it eats at his own moral bulwarks.

Those bulwarks are sorely tested once again in the next three novels in the series, *Dixie City Jam* (1994), *Burning Angel* (1995), and *Cadillac Jukebox* (1996). These three novels became *New York Times* Best sellers, and catapulted the cult writer to international recognition. In an interview with William Plummer for *People Weekly*, Burke confessed that "Success can cause you a mess of grief," but it is richly deserved success, and Burke seems to know how to handle it. He has rejoined the Catholic Church, attends AA meetings twice a week, and "tries to do a good deed every day."

In 1984, his agent tried to get over one-hundred publishers to take *The Lost Get-Back Boogie;* when it was finally accepted, the book received critical acclaim and a Pulitzer Prize nomination. It took the Robicheaux series to give Burke a steady income and a sense of where to go as a writer. The series came about after Burke's introduction to Alcoholics Anonymous. He had been sober for over five years, but was still fighting the demons that focused his writing. Those five years were hell, he noted, because not drinking was even worse than drinking. Burke's experiences with AA gave him the idea for his character Robicheaux, and he "started writing about a Cajun cop who was haunted by memories of Vietnam." That cop became the center of Burke's writing life for the next decades.

Robicheaux's world, like the society of Burke's childhood, recapitulates the larger problems of race and class in American society. Dave's daughter is the best gauge of those problems because she is

Central American, and as she grows into adolescence, Dave remembers his own past, the racial conflicts, the tensions between the rich and the poor in New Iberia, and the stranglehold certain families like the Bertands of *Burning Angel* and the LaSalles of *Jolie Blon's Bounce* had over the Sonniers of *A Stained White Radiance* and the Fontenot family of *Burning Angel.* But it is not only families but also age-old racial tensions that keep Robicheaux fighting against a world that insists on allowing the bad guys to win. In *Cadillack Jukebox* political intrigue, Klan murderers, and civil rights activists come together in a lethal mix of murder and corruption.

In *Sunset Limited* (1998), more and more the lyrical and the brooding sense of life's tragedies permeates Robicheaux's inner monologues and voice-overs, and once again the past erupts into the present with a forty-year-old unsolved murder. Returning to Robicheaux with a renewed sense of his character, Burke creates a complex mix of past crimes, present corruption, personal degradation, and private longing. Robicheaux knows that when criminals wield as much influence as those he is fighting do, the police can only offer a rearguard action.

If there was one person Robicheaux idealized, it was his mother Mae. In *Purple Cane Road* (2000) even that illusion is shattered when Dave finds out that his mother was on the game when she was murdered thirty years ago. Burke, through Robicheaux's search for her killers, reminds us that the past, while it can destroy the present, is fractal, and memory is shifting and uncertain. The question that underpins the whole story is one for Robicheaux to answer. Will he murder the men who murdered his mother and thus continue the spread of evil in his life? If he does, how will he be different from those men? Once again, Burke sees evil in most of Robicheaux's choices, and guilt and anger often threaten to overwhelm the investigation.

The new Robicheaux novel, *Jolie Blon's Bounce,* is named for a Cajun blues song written by Tee Bobby Hulin, a young black drug addict who is accused of the rape and murder of Amanda Boudreau, a white high school girl. Burke opens this novel with a kind of certainty that Robicheaux almost never exhibits: "Growing up during the 1940s in New Iberia, down on the Gulf Coast, I never doubted how the world worked." Then, the world changes its course, and Robicheaux has to relearn everything: "I came to learn early on that no venal or meretricious enterprise existed without the community's consent. I thought I understood the nature of evil. I learned at age twelve I did not." That lesson is constantly shifting in his conscience. He often wonders if evil is relative or absolute, and comes to believe that in the case of Legion, it is absolute. He first encounters the man in New Iberia's City Park when he interrupts a couple having intercourse in the back of a car. Seeing Legion's face as a young boy, his sense of life is "forever changed by the knowledge that the world contains pockets of evil that are as dark as the inside of a leather bag." That evil comes back to haunt him forty years later when Legion sticks his tongue in Robicheaux's mouth.

Once again it is family and his old partner and friend, Clete Purcel, who stand by Robicheaux when he begins his descent into pain pills and uppers after Legion's attack.

While Robicheaux is trying to come to terms with the assault on his sense of self, he must find the murderer of Amanda Boudreau and investigate the murder of the prostitute, Linda Zeroski, that might be part of a serial killing spree. As the investigations become entangled with the mob, the first families of New Iberia, and with Legion, Clete Purcel has to remind Robicheaux, "This is Louisiana, Dave. Guatemala North. Quit pretending it's the United States. Life will make a lot more sense." It is this disjuncture of Louisiana from the cultural roots of most of the rest of the country, and its entrenchment in both the culture and the weather of the Caribbean and Central America that Burke is so adept at portraying. This world, while filled with pain, grief, and violence, is also haunting and beautifully seductive:

> The endless fields of sugarcane thrashing in the wind under a darkening sky, yellow dirt roads and the Hadacol and Jax beer signs nailed on the sides of general stores, horse-drawn buggies that people tethered in stands of gum trees during Sunday Mass, clapboard juke joints where Gatemouth Brown and Smiley Lewis and Lloyd Price played.

This world, the world of Robicheaux's memories has all but been destroyed by developers, corrupt politicians, big business, and crime, but Robicheaux holds on to that past as somehow mitigating the present. He hopes that he can redeem some of that lost world by bringing justice to his community, a better life to his daughter, and happiness and contentment to his wife.

In every Robicheaux novel, there is a pattern of violence and cathartic redemption, crime and the recognition that somehow the law must survive the assault, or society will not endure. Burke's fiction is deeply moral. He sees the connection between self-awareness and the ability to come to terms with the person inside. That is something that Robicheaux does in *Jolie Blon's Bounce*. He admits that the real enemy is "a violent creature who rose with me in the morning and lived quietly inside my skin, waiting for the proper moment to vent his rage upon the world." If Detective Dave Robicheaux can exorcize that inner demon, perhaps he can find some peace.

Jazz In New Orleans: The Postwar Years Through 1970
Charles Suhor
Scarecrow Press, 2001.
Reviewed by Tom Piazza

It's hard for people—and places—to live down their myths. That which spreads your fame and fills your coffers is often that which eventually smothers you under its weight. For musicians in New Orleans, the great all-in-one blessing and curse has been the Myth of New Orleans Jazz—the hagiography and iconography of jazz's birth and its early gods and demiurges among the streets and alleys of the turn of the twentieth Century. Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong—what descendant could hope to compete with such ancestors' ever-present shades?

The Myth of New Orleans Jazz has been supplanted somewhat in the past two decades by the Myth of New Orleans Rhythm and Blues—as personified by Professor Longhair, Fats Domino, Dr John and company. But, still, in the minds of many, New Orleans is linked to jazz, as a brand name becomes inextricably linked with its generic product. It is jazz that people (read "tourists") come to see and, obviously more to the point, pay for.

It presents a curious bind for local musicians who can find work plentiful, yet whose stylistic proclivities may lie outside the somewhat narrow and certainly well-trod path of the standard New Orleans repertoire. To be sure, there are still musicians who specifically embrace the New Orleans tradition (Michael White, Chris Tile, Don Vappie) and have their fun poking around in the storehouse, pulling out old and under-noticed repertoire and reanimating it. But there are many more who would rather be playing

bebop, or swing, who find themselves rehashing "The Saints," or "Saint James Infirmary," yet again because that's what's expected—demanded—of them.

To a large degree, scholarship has flowed in a parallel streambed, with researchers concentrating on the work of the early jazz pioneers, and, more recently, the Rhythm and Blues pioneers of the 1940s and 1950s. As a result, the New Orleans jazz musicians who came of age musically after World War Two—both those who loved and embraced the traditional style, like Pete Fountain and Al Hirt, and those who chose to play "modern" jazz (including shadowy figures like Nat Perrilliat and Mouse Bonati, as well as better-knowns like Al Belletto and Ellis Marsalis)—have stood in the lee of the looming ancestors; the winds of critical attention have barely mussed their hair. In the national jazz media, players such as Fountain and Hirt—not to mention lesser known traditionalists such as Sharkey Bonanno, Raymond Burke, and Johnny Wiggs—have been largely dismissed as derivative players, unworthy of critical attention because they have chosen merely to perpetuate a tradition.

The New Orleans modernists, on the other hand, have been merely invisible. Enter Charles Suhor with his extremely valuable book, *Jazz In New Orleans: The Postwar Years Through 1970*. Suhor, a part-time drummer and full-time high school English teacher (now retired and living in Montgomery, Alabama) has logged many years in New Orleans music circles, first as a participant, and then, in the 1960s, as the local correspondent for the jazz magazine *Down Beat*. Which is to say that he has spent much of his life soaking up the dim rays in the penumbra of the working musician's world in the Crescent City, and he offers, here, the best and most comprehensive single-volume look into that world that we are likely to get.

The book is a mixture of newly-written overviews of the author's large topics (the relations between jazz music and New Orleans' cultural, academic, and civic institutions, the periodic revivals of interest in traditional New Orleans jazz, and the world of the New Orleans modern jazz musicians of the 1950s and 1960s) and vintage articles and reviews from magazines like Down Beat and New Orleans. Anyone who cares about New Orleans music will be grateful for, and fascinated by, Suhor's history and prehistory of the Jazz and Heritage Festival, his profile of important but neglected musicians like the pianist Armand Hug, and his documentation of the development of venues such as Preservation Hall.

But this volume is valuable above all for the author's depiction—through sheer accretion of detail and occasionally Homeric lists of names of long-vanished clubs and little-known musicians—of a kind of Lost Continent of jazz, the comings and goings that kept the music alive during lean times. We get a rare view of how a specific local jazz scene functioned: who got the gigs and who played intermission piano and who was the m.c., and how the dressing rooms were decorated, and where they all found work after the club closed its doors. There are valuable glimpses into the after-hours scene, and into the role strip clubs played in keeping musicians' bodies and souls together.

Suhor's approach gives a perspective that one just does not get in the histories—no matter how scholarly or well-intentioned—written by those who come to a genre from the outside. Through it all, you get a picture of a scene populated by skilled players who would never find a national audience, but who kept a language alive in a specific locale. Books like this could be written about Philadelphia, or Indianapolis, or Detroit, or any number of other American cities that had a thriving local scene and sent many players up to the majors. But the tension between the huge mythology of New Orleans' past and the reality of its day-to-day musical life gives this story a flavor of its own.

A second edition might profitably clean up a number of minor spelling errors, mainly in proper names and song titles. The writing

quality itself is variable, as may be expected in a book that mixes old and new material, as well as material written for different audiences.

Suhor is something of a crossbreed: part academician and part unreconstructed jazz musician. Perhaps as a result, his prose is a hybrid of academically acceptable newspeak (use of "privilege" as a transitive verb, lots of references to "texts" and "contexts" and "constructions") and a somewhat less circumspect vernacular ("gigs," "boobs," "dig," "crap," "wannabees," et cetera). But that's okay; even if the paint doesn't always match, the point of this particular edifice isn't really the design in the first place. In that respect, too, the book conveys an authentic feel of New Orleans—like one of those neighborhood restaurants in which one finds oneself, where the plates may be mismatched and the pictures slightly crooked on the walls, but the food is memorable and you walk away satisfied.

Soul Resin
C.W. Cannon
Normal and Tallahassee: Fiction Collective 2, 2002.
Reviewed by Christopher Chambers

Blood connotes many things; long regarded as the seat of emotions, it refers also to ancestry, lineage, and race. The fluid circulating in the heart, arteries and veins pulses with life, yet shed it is emblematic of death. The sight of blood can evoke revulsion, horror, and fascination. *Soul Resin,* C.W. Cannon's postmodern first novel, set in New Orleans in the very near future, is concerned with blood in all of these ways. This sanguinary novel is fairly steeped in it, with riots, beatings, murders, a lynching, a rumored poisoning, self-mutilation, lust, miscegenation, and passion. But there is more going on here than sex and violence. We learn that spilled blood speaks, that it can be heard, and that like the past, it is not done with us.

Mills Loomis Mills, our protagonist, seems to have gone off the deep end in New Orleans after the murder of his mixed-race girlfriend out in New Mexico. He hears the siren call of blood, and comes up with a plan that could "radically alter the age-old relations between dead and living." When we first meet him, he's on board the Mississippi Belle, spooking the tourists on a bayou cruise. He's on a quest for "soul resin," a kind of fossil fuel formed from the blood of someone who's died a violent death, the end product of a "blood cycle." Over the course of the novel, Mills' quest involves an eclectic cast of characters, living and dead, black and white, from the past and from the present, some of whom assist him and some of whom work to stop him.

Soul Resin is at once an historical novel and a futuristic novel. Mills' search for soul resin becomes inextricably intertwined with two bloody events that occurred during the particularly troubled and violent time in New Orleans history after the Civil War: two clashes between integrated groups and white supremacists during Reconstruction (a race riot in July, 1866, and a short-lived coup by the Crescent City White League that ousted governor William Pitt Kellogg, in 1874).

A chorus of six voices piece together the narrative in such a way that we're drawn into it even before, and perhaps because, we don't quite know what's going on. Each of the three dated sections is further divided into unnumbered chapters, marked by the monogrammatical initials and full name of its narrator. The three main players: Mills; Rafe Vidrine, an African American history professor in whose course young Mills is introduced to some of the more troubling events in Louisiana history, most significantly the unsolved murder in 1942 of one Lucius Holt, Jr; Jessamine Marie

DuClous Bascomb, deceased daughter of Nate Newton Bascomb, a leading member of the Crescent City White League and one of the architects of the New Orleans race riot in 1866. The other three voices include April Brunnen, Mills' deceased girlfriend, who speaks first through letters to Mills from New Mexico before her murder, and then directly from the other side; and Charles Cannon, historian.

This is an ambitious first novel, in content and in form, taking on the complexities of race and of history in a city still very much struggling with both. A typical first novel might have had Mills take on the narrative chores himself, which might well have resulted in a less complex, less eloquent, and less successful novel. Mills: "I had a hell of a time explaining all the soul resin stuff to Maya. I don't know if she thought I was crazy or high on metaphor or what." Mills isn't crazy, but he does occasionally seem to be under the metaphorical influence: "My ribcage is vibrating like a tuning fork. The booming throb of the soul resin is soaking me like a yawning foghorn, and me into the mouth, as small as a tanker spit into the gulf." He's a college dropout (LSU history major), but no dolt; in addition to being up on his history, he quotes or makes reference to the Bible, scholarly texts, and the likes of Karl Marx, Jimmy Swaggart, Johnny Cash, and Lucinda Williams.

Mills solo for three hundred pages might be hard to take, but as one of a richly-varied chorus, his twenty-something angst is a nice counterpoint to Rafe's articulate, even-tempered pages ["I had promised Mattie an article for the premier issue on Alphonse Clouet, the outspoken mulatto entrepeneur and politico whose radical shift in racial thinking during Reconstruction—from *gens de couleur* solidarity to a more American, color-based separatism—bought him such unlikely allies in and beyond New Orleans."], and Jessamine's Uptown romance-novel diction ["After the war such events became even more interesting to me, as we found ourselves at the tables of *gens de couleur.* Allowing Alphonse to take my hand thrilled me with a sense of myself as the most rakish Jacobin."]. The narrative voices are for the most part distinct and plausible, each section nicely contrasting the others; the voices of Jessamine and April even share sections, playing off each in an oddly compelling duet.

Rafe says of Jessamine, "her narrative style is in disarray," and some might say the same of *Soul Resin.* But stories must find their form, and this cacophony of voices and blood, a mosaic of journal entries, letters, newspaper clippings, chapters from scholarly texts, and song lyrics, rings true for this complex tale. New Orleans is a place that celebrates life all the while acknowledging death, a place haunted, a place of beauty and violence, diversity and disarray.

One question lingers having to do with the connection between New Orleans and New Mexico, between the Creole and African-American culture of New Orleans and the Native American culture of the southwest. There are numerous references to Native American culture throughout the novel, but in the end, the relationship between the two places and the two cultures remains something of a mystery.

The novel concludes with an unidentified voice addressing the reader directly in a short passage. This voice may be one of the six, but unless I missed something, it is not made clear who has the last word. The enigmatic epilogue is not as troubling as it might sound, but it does leave us unsettled, with haunting questions about these characters and events. But issues of blood and race and history are not easily, if ever, resolved, and perhaps haunted and unsettled is the appropriate way to feel at the end of this savage parade, this cycle of blood.

SETH ABRAMSON, a native of Acton, Massachusetts, received his BA from Dartmouth College in 1998, and his JD from Harvard Law School in 2001. Recent and forthcoming publications include *Indiana Review, Mississippi Review, Hawaii Review, Portland Review, CrossConnect,* and *Notre Dame Review.*

DAN ALBERGOTTI is completing the MFA in poetry at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming in *Ascent, The Laurel Review, Prairie Schooner,* and other journals. He is the current poetry editor of *The Greensboro Review.*

EDWARD BARTÓK-BARATTA has prose and poems in *African American Review, American Literary Review, Verse, Ploughshares, Lit, Brilliant Corners,* and *Poets Respond to Violence in America* (University of Iowa Press). He is the founder of Fridays Are for Prisoners, an awareness-raising group that uses fasting, voluntary isolation, and other creative means to bring attention to the crisis in U.S. prisons where more than two million Americans are housed. Write to him at P.O. Box 358, Northampton, Massachusetts 01061.

RICHARD BENTLEY is a graduate of Yale and the Vermont College MFA in Writing Program. An urban planner by training, he has served as Chief Planner for the Mayor's Office of Housing in Boston, and teaches creative writing at the University of Massachusetts.

SIMEON BERRY lives in Boston, where he is a Poetry and Fiction Reader for *Ploughshares.* He has been the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Award, a Career Chapter Award from the National Society of Arts and Letters. His work has been published in *The Antioch Review, Southern Poetry Review, Seneca Review, Cream City Review,* and others.

BASIL CLEVELAND lives in Chicago, Illinois. His poems can be found in recent issues of *International Poetry Review, Flint Hills Review, Antietam Review, Oasis,* and *Confluence.* In addition to his work as a poet, he is also the assistant editor for *The Owl of Minerva,* the American journal devoted entirely to Hegel and his philosophy.

CARRIE ST GEORGE COMER lives in Andover, Massachusetts, where she teaches at Phillips Academy. Her work has appeared, or will soon appear, in *Black Warrior Review, American Poetry Review, Fence,* and *Conjunctions.* Her collection of poems, *The Unrequited,* will be published by Sarabande Books in October, 2003.

MAYSEY CRADDOCK, 30, is a native of Memphis, living and working in New Orleans, her artistic inspiration and adopted second home. A graduate of Newcomb College at Tulane University, Craddock has been showing her pastels on paper and sculptures of delicate wire and fabricated steel for over five years, most recently in Dallas at Karen Mitchell Frank Gallery. She is also represented by Francine Seders Gallery in Seattle and David Lusk Gallery in Memphis. She is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts Degree from Maine College of Art in Portland, Maine.

MICHAEL DUMANIS was born in the Soviet Union, received his MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, and now lives in Houston. His manuscript, *Vaudeville,* was a finalist for the New Issues Press Poetry Prize and the Walt Whitman Book Award. His recent and forthcoming publications include *American Letters & Commentary, CutBank, Epoch, Hayden's Ferry Review, Indiana Review, New England Review, Phoebe, Prairie Schooner,* and *Seneca Review.*

LAEL EWY works at Hesston College, Bethel College, and Wichita State University. He is the co-editor and co-founder of *Eastwesterly Review,* an online journal at <postmodernvillage.com>. He contributes all honoraria to charity.

BONNIE FASTRING is a teacher in the New Orleans Public School System. She has published a chapbook, *Double Vision.*

JANET FLORA holds an MFA in writing from the New School University, where she was the nonfiction editor of *Lit,* the New School's literary magazine. Her work appears regularly in *Dramatics, Salon News,* and *Health Magazine.* Currently, she is at work on a book of short stories, and teaches for the Gotham Writers' Workshop in New York City where she lives.

C. ABE GAUSTAD earned his MFA from the University of Memphis. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Other Voices, Third Coast, Mississippi Review Web,* and others. This fall he will begin work on a PhD at the University of Tennessee.

RICHARD GODDEN teaches American Literature in the School of American Studies at the University of Keele (UK). He has written two critical works, *Fictions of Capital* (1990), and *Fictions of Labor* (1997), both with Cambridge University Press, and a volume of poetry, *Breathing Exercises* (Peterloo, 1987). A study of Faulkner (*Faulkner's Residues: The Poetics of an Economy*), and a second collection of poems (*Marks, Shards, Larks*) are virtually complete.

MICHAEL HUDSON works as a Sales Coordinator at a truck equipment manufacturing company in Fort Wayne, Indiana. His poems have appeared in magazines over the years, including *Poetry East, Iowa Review, Sulfur, Columbia,* and previously in *New Orleans Review.*

ZACHARY JACK teaches English and journalism at Tusculum College in Greeneville, Tennessee. His chapbook, *The Story of Grief,* was published by OEOEO Press in 2000. Jack is a native Iowan.

CHRISTOPHER JANKE'S poems are appearing soon in *Ploughshares, Poetry International, Verse,* and other journals. He is currently pricing a cheap laundromat.

NANCY LASKOWSKI is a New Orleans-based commercial and fine arts photographer, by way of Chicago. Her work has been exhibited published in *Art Papers, New Orleans Magazine, Offbeat, Kingfish, Sandbox, New Orleans Arts Review, The Chicago Reader,* and *New City.*

BILL LAVENDER'S new collection, *look the universe is dreaming,* is forthcoming from Potes and Poets in fall, 2002. His work has appeared in *Fell Swoop, Exquisite Corpse, 6x6,* and other journals. He is the editor of the anthology *Another South: Experimental Writing in the South,* forthcoming from The University of Alabama Press.

BEN MILLER'S stories, essays and poems can be found in recent or upcoming ussues of *3rd Bed, Twelfth Street Review, Post Road, Western Humanities Review, Insurance, Arts & Letters, Meridian, Mid-American Review, Northwest Review,* and *American Letters & Commentary.* His awards include a creative writing fellowship from the NEA.

ANDER MONSON, originally from Upper Michigan, is living in Tuscaloosa, Alabama for the time being. His work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review, Pleiades, Gulf Coast, Spoon River Poetry Review, Fence, Quarterly West, Painted Bride Quarterly,* and *The Florida Review.*

JAY NEBEL lives in Portland, Oregon.

ED PAVLIĆ's book of poems, *Paraph of Bone & Other Kinds of Blue,* won the American Poetry Review/Honickman First Book Prize and was published by Copper Canyon Press in 2001. His first book of essays, *Crossroads Modernism,* was published in 2002 by the University of Minnesota Press. He teaches in the English Department and directs the Africana Studies Program at Union College in Schenectady, New York. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Cortland Review, Brilliant Corners, Connect, DoubleTake, Indiana Review,* and *Ploughshares.*

LISA PEARSON's work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Salt Hill, 3rd Bed, Mid-American Review, Quarterly West, Paragraph,* and *Bombay Gin,* among others. She is co-editor of the anthology *Northwest Edge: Deviant Fictions,* and lives in Los Angeles.

JOHN PETERS is an Assistant Professor of English at University of North Texas. He has studied Japanese on and off for over twenty years. His Japanese translations have appeared in such literary magazines as *Sonora Review, Spoon River Poetry Review, Tampa Review, Poet Lore, Crab Orchard Review,* and *Mid-American Review.* He is also author of *Conrad and Impressionism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

TOM PIAZZA is known as both a fiction writer and as a writer on American music. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, his books include the short-story collection *Blues And Trouble* (St Martin's Press), which won a James Michener Award, and *The Guide To Classic Recorded Jazz* (University of Iowa Press), which won the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for Music Writing. In 2001-2002 he has been the Visiting Writer in Residence at Loyola University New Orleans. He has just finished work on his first novel, entitled *My Cold War.* He can be reached at <www.tompiazza.com>.

OLIVER RICE received the 1998 Theodore Roethke Prize, and was featured on *Poetry Daily.* He appears in *Ohio Review*'s anthology *New and Selected,* and in Bedford/St Martin's college textbooks, *Poetry: An Introduction,* and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature.*

JOSH RUSSELL's novel is *Yellow Jack* (W.W. Norton & Company). A German translation—*Der Porträtist*—is just out from Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. His stories have appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly, Black Warrior Review, Epoch, New Stories from the South,* and the Oat City Press limited edition *Winter on Fifth Avenue, New York.* He lives in New Orleans and teaches creative writing at Tulane University.

E.M. SCHORB's latest collection, *Murderer's Day,* was awarded the Verna Emery Poetry Prize and published by Purdue University Press. His novel, *Paradise Square,* won the Grand Prize for Fiction from the Frankfurt Book Award Foundation. *A Fable and Other Prose Poems* is forthcoming from Argonne Press. His work has appeared in *The American Scholar, The Southern Review, The Virginia Quarterly Review,* and *The Yale Review,* among others.

LACY L. SCHUTZ is not available for comment. We don't know where she is. We hope she's safe and that she comes back soon. Lacy, if you're reading this, don't forget that your band, Flush, is opening for The Strokes this weekend and we need you there to play the cheese grater. Also, you left your bowling shoes at Phil's house.

D. JAMES SMITH's first book, *Prayers for the Dead Ventriloquist,* with an introduction by Dorianne Laux, was published in 1995 by Ahsahta. His work has appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly, The New Virginia Review, The Quarterly, Stand,* and in many other journals.

His novel for young adults, *Fast Company* was published in 1999 by Dorling Kindersley. He is the recipient of an NEA Arts Fellowship in poetry, is married and lives and works in California's central valley.

DANIEL TERENCE SMITH, slow typist, delivers his story from the suburbs of Seattle.

MARJORIE STELMACH's first book, *Night Drawings* (Helicon Nine Editions), was selected by David Ignatow to receive the Marianne Moore Poetry Prize. She directs the Nemerov Writing Scholars Program at Washington University in St Louis.

CHRISTOPHER STIEBER, when he is not arguing with Martin Heidegger, argues and lives with the writer Jane Hilton in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

PETER STILLMAN lives in Charlotteville, New York, a deep-rural hamlet in the Northern Catskills. He is the author of a dozen books, most recently *Planting by the Moon* and *Families Writing*. Now semi-retired, he has been a teacher and editorial director of two major book companies. He and his wife Marcia keep six Arabian horses and whatever else wanders into the stable.

MARYANN SUEHLE has published stories in *Gargoyle 44, Fodderwing, Passager,* and *One Tree, Many Branches*. A story is forthcoming in *Folio*. She reads fiction for the *Baltimore Review,* and is an associate editor for the *Crescent Review*.

LEE UPTON's fourth book of poetry, *Civilian Histories,* appeared in 2000 from the University of Georgia Press. Her third book of literary criticism, *The Muse of Abandonment,* was published by Bucknell University Press.

JOHN VERLENDEN is completing a memoir on his recent years in the Middle East. His stories have appeared in *Missouri Review* and *New Orleans Review* (his story, "Lost Text: Hotel St Pierre," to be reprinted this year in the anthology *French Quarter Fiction,* first appeared in volume 25.2). His nonfiction appears regularly in *Exquisite Corpse*. Along with Ferial Ghazoul, he is co-translator of *The Quartet of Joy* by Muhammed Afifi Matar (University of Arkansas Press), and is finishing Edwar al-Kharrat's *Rama and the Dragon* for American University in Cairo Press.

SARAH WHITE lives in New York City. Poems, essays, and stories of hers have appeared in various reviews. She recently collaborated on a translation of *Songs of the Women Troubadours* (Garland, 2000).

KATHRINE WRIGHT received a BA from the University of Utah. Her publications include *Cenotaph, La Petite Zine, Salt Lake Magazine, Tech Republic,* and *Weber Studies*. She lives in South Florida with her husband, two children, and a cat with a crooked tail.

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