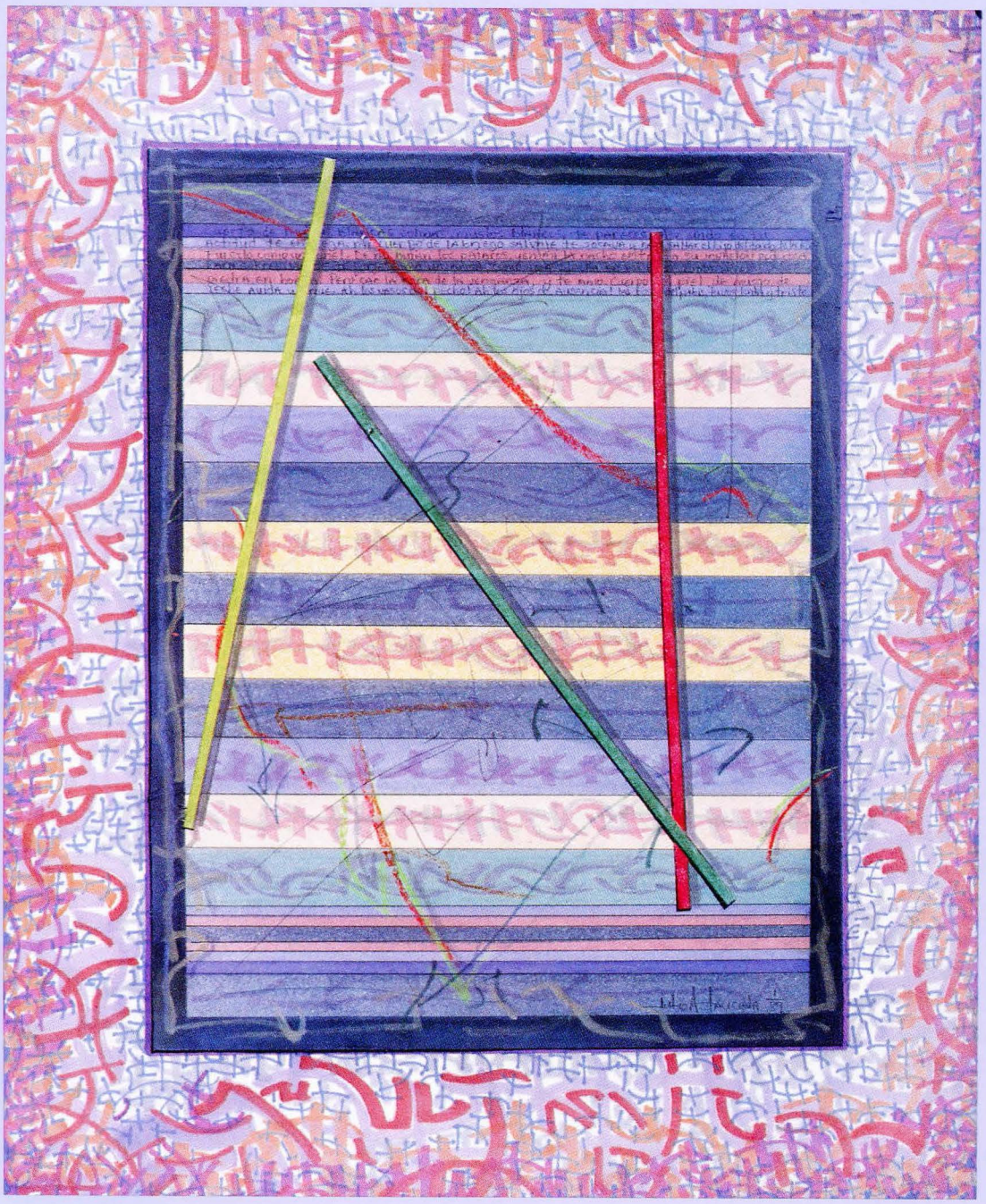
New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY *VOLUME 19 NUMBER 1/$10.00*



New Orleans Review

Spring 1992

Editors
John Biguenet
John Mosier

Managing Editor
Sarah Elizabeth Spain

Contributing Editors
Bert Cardullo
David Estes
Jacek Fuksiewicz
Alexis Gonzales, F.S.C.
Andrew Horton
Peggy McCormack
Rainer Schulte

Founding Editor
Miller Williams

The *New Orleans Review* is published by Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, United States. Copyright © 1992 by Loyola University.
Critical essays relating to film or literature of up to ten thousand words should be prepared to conform to the new MLA guidelines. All essays, fiction, poetry, photography, or related artwork should be sent to the *New Orleans Review*, together with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The address is *New Orleans Review*, Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118.
Reasonable care is taken in the handling of material, but no responsibility is assumed for the loss of unsolicited material. Accepted manuscripts are the property of the *NOR*. Rejected manuscripts without self-addressed, stamped envelopes will not be returned.
The *New Orleans Review* is published in February, May, August, and November. Annual Subscription Rates: Institutions $35.00, Individuals 30.00, All Foreign Subscribers $45.00.
Contents listed in the PMLA Bibliography and the Index of American Periodical Verse.
US ISSN 0028-6400

NEW ORLEANS REVIEW
SPRING 1992

CONTENTS

VOLUME 19 NUMBER 1

Lewis Turco

JOHN ASHBERY'S HANDBOOK FORMS

Jonathan Holden says that he admires Ashbery's work "even though Ashbery's 'use' of poetry often seems . . . too limited—an Olympian, noncommittal language-play that refuses engagement or to make value judgments, poetry that issues from a universe in which one never has to go outdoors or discipline a child or change a tire, from a universe consisting entirely of texts. Yet when I choose to amuse myself in the ludic, whimsical, lyric weathers of discourse, I read Ashbery."[1]

Others have criticized Ashbery for being exactly what one would have expected he would not be and, in fact, never has been: an academic poet. Richard Nason wrote, "The Existential poetry of William Carlos Williams, sensible enough perhaps as a reaction to the heavy metaphysical burden of the poetry of Eliot, Pound and, to a lesser degree, Yeats, has in recent decades degenerated to the grudging gibberish of Ashbery and the vacuous, verbless maundering of [A. R.] Ammons. The highly remote, almost indecipherable content of this verse has remained of interest only to those who study it so they may become initiates in the elite academia where it is taught."[2] But it is not at all certain that, as Nason says, Ashbery's poetry is "almost indecipherable"; much more likely is the possibility that it is *totally* indecipherable, as music is "indecipherable" even as it is enjoyable to listen to.

If Nason is categorical in his rejection of Ashbery, there is an ambivalence in Holden's attitude, almost as though he were abashed to like the poetry and unable to understand why he should do so against all reason. Raymond Carney wrote, "Ashbery has related a wry dialogue between himself and Kenneth Koch that is very much to the point: 'He asked me, "Does your poetry have any hidden meanings" and I said: "No." "Why Not?" "Because somebody might find out what they were and then the poems would no longer be mysterious."'"[3] Ashbery does not want to attach a "program" to his language music, as composers have done to their musical compositions from time to time. He wants to achieve in language, if he can, the mysterious pleasures of music by using abstract syntax, as it is discussed and defined in Donald Davie's *Articulate Energy* where it is called "musical syntax."[4]

It is interesting to note the use of the musical term "minor key" at the end of this passage from Carney's essay: "There is no shortcut through an Ashbery text; no possibility of skimming it for key passages. It is a wonderfully democratic verse. Just as in the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, the result of Ashbery's almost absolute renunciation of architectonic structures and rhetorical heightening is a paradoxical heightening of everything, of even the most ordinary details, in the poem. The common and mean, at moments, can become almost transcendent in Ashbery as in Bishop, who achieve their grand Romantic moments, as William Carlos Williams did, in a minor key" (14).

Echoing Archibald Macleish's poem "Ars Poetica," Marjorie Perloff wrote, "Not *what* one dreams but *how*—this is Ashbery's subject. His stories 'tell only of themselves,' presenting the reader with the challenge of what he calls 'an open field of narrative possibilities'. . . . For, like

[1]*Style and Authenticity in Postmodern Poetry* (Columbia, Mo.: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1986) 5.

[2]*The Ballad of the Dollar Hotel* (n.p.: Mountain Laurel, 1984) intro.

[3]"John Ashbery" in *American Poets Since World War II, Part 1: A-K*, ed. Donald J. Greiner (Detroit: Gale Research, 1980) 14.

[4]*Articulate Energy* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

Rimbaud's, his are not dreams 'about' such and such characters or events; the dream structure is itself the event that haunts the poet's imagination."[5]

An examination of his method of composition may explain something about how Ashbery's poems manage to gather "mystery" to themselves. In an interview with Sue Gangel, Ashbery said, "I write down phrases and ideas on pieces of paper which I then can't keep track of, I put them in a drawer, and sometimes I can't find them, and sometimes I use ones I've already used before and then I have to do something about that. I don't keep any journal. I write down things that seem suggestive to me when they occur and I think might be usable later on. Then if I can't find them, that's all right too because meanwhile I will have already started to think about something else."[6]

If Ashbery's diction is "abstract" or, as Davie wrote, "musical," and if his method of composition is at the farthest remove from the mechanical or even the rational, nevertheless one may point out that the poet's approach to versifying is neither "ludic and whimsical," as Holden suggests, nor "academic," as Nason defines it in these postdeconstructionist days, nor is it entirely without "architectonic structure," as Carney would have it. If it were so, why do some of Ashbery's poems find themselves located in the anthologies of the so-called "New Formalist" movement currently underway in the United States? Formalism might once have been considered academic, back in the 1950s, but formal approaches to poetry have been banned from American poetry since then. Right now neoformalism is considered by the academy to be either reactionary or revolutionary, depending on whether one is defending the "tradition of Whitman," as Diane Wakoski has termed it in her apologies for the status quo, or advancing the argument that form, whether traditional or experimental, is necessary to meaning, as Dana Gioia and the other New Formalists maintain.

Ashbery's description of his method of composition is perhaps rule of thumb rather than categorical, for he had something a bit different to say when he described "Variation on a Noel," with its epigraph from the Christmas carol, "when the snow lay round about, / deep and crisp and even . . . ," in David Lehman's New Formalist anthology.[7]

This poem is written in the form of a pantoum. In his comment on the poem in Lehman's book, Ashbery said, "I first came across the word *pantoum* as the title of one of the movements of Ravel's 'Trio,' and then found the term in a manual of prosody. I wrote a poem called "Pantoum" in the early '50s: it is in my book *Some Trees*. 'Variation on a Noel' is the only other time I have ever used the form. The poem was written in December of 1979."[8] This is the first stanza:

A year away from the pigpen, and look at
him.
A thirsty unit by an upending stream,
Man doctors, God supplies the necessary
medication
If elixir were to be found in the world's
dolor, where is none.

The description of the pantoum to be found in the original 1968 edition of my *The Book of Forms* reads, in part, "A Malayan form. Accentual-syllabic. Lines may be of any length in any meter."[9] This language appears throughout this edition, and, although it is accurate, it has been misread by many poets to mean "lines may be of any lengths in any meters." In *The New Book of Forms* that sentence reads, "Lines can be of any single length in any particular meter," which is less ambiguous.[10] Since the 1960s, however, there have been many poems written in strict forms with varying line-lengths and loose meters—"Variation on a Noel" is one of them.

A pantoum consists of an indefinite number of quatrain stanzas with particular restrictions: lines two and four of each stanza, in their entirety, are repetons—they become lines one

[5]*The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981) 252.

[6]"Interview with John Ashbery" in *American Poetry Observed: Poets on Their Work*, ed. Joe David Bellamy (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois, 1984) 19.

[7]*Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms* (New York: Macmillan, 1987) 5-7.

[8]*Some Trees* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1956).

[9]Lewis Turco, *The Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968) 88.

[10]Lewis Turco, *The New Book of Forms* (Hanover, N.H.: Univ. Press of New England, 1986).

and three of the following stanza, and so on. The rhyme scheme is interlocking. Stanza two of Ashbery's poem reads,

A thirsty unit by an upending stream,
Ashamed of the moon, of everything that
hides too little of her nakedness—
If elixir were to be found in the world's
dolor, where is none.
Our emancipation should be great and
steady.

"I was attracted to the form in both cases," Ashbery continued, "because of its stricture, even greater than in other hobbling forms such as the sestina or canzone. These restraints seem to have a paradoxically liberating effect, for me at least. The form has the additional advantage of providing you with twice as much poem for your effort, since every line has to be repeated twice." The observation about the paradoxically "liberating" effect of writing in forms has been made by Valéry and many other poets, but increasingly in recent years as young poets rediscover formal poetry.

Here is the penultimate stanza of "Variation on a Noel":

And I have known him cheaply.
Agree to remove all that concern, another
exodus—
A form of ignorance, you might say. Let's
leave that though.
The mere whiteness was a blessing, taking
us far.

The poem can be ended in one of two ways: either in a quatrain whose repetons are lines one and three of the first stanza in reversed order, or in a repeton couplet consisting of lines one and three of the first stanza in reversed order. Ashbery decided to end the poem his own way: lines one and three of the first stanza became lines two and four of the last stanza, in the same, rather than reversed, order:

Agree to remove all that concern, another
exodus.
A year away from the pigpen, and look at
him.
The mere whiteness was a blessing, taking
us far.
Man doctors, God supplies the necessary
medication.

Besides Lehman's collection, Ashbery's poems also appear in the New Formalist anthology *Strong Measures*, edited by Philip Dacey and David Jauss.[11] One of these, the poet's original "Pantoum" from his book *Some Trees*, is included in the text as an example of that form. Also included are "Some Trees," the title poem of that collection, which serves as an example of what the editors call "nonce couplets" and "couplet quatrains"; and "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape," a sestina, from *The Double Dream of Spring*.[12]

The poet has always been supposed to make leaps of the imagination that surprise the reader, to make associations that others perhaps would not have made. It is evident that the difficulty readers have with Ashbery and others of the so-called New York School and of its current successor, the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, is that they jump from one association to another without intervening transitions—it is a modernist technique, one that Ezra Pound emphasized in the original draft of T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" by editing out those transitions and leaving only the fragments and abstract syntax that mirror the fragmentation and technological leaps of the twentieth century. It is a technique from which Wallace Stevens forged a career of writing poetry for himself, not for readers, but that some readers loved anyway—some, not many, for modernist and contemporary poetry left the common reader behind, just as modern music has done.

David Shapiro noted that "John Ashbery once took a course of lectures in music by Henry Cowell at the New School. Ashbery recalls Cowell remarking that the intervals in music become wider as music grows more sophisticated: 'for instance, if you compare "The Volga Boatmen" and the "Love Duet" in *Tristan und Isolde* you see how vastly wide the intervals have become; and the ear seemingly becomes accustomed to unaccustomed intervals, "as time goes by"'. . . . One cannot really anticipate the next note in many serial pieces, and this suspense is a fine quality of Ashbery's own work. . . ."[13]

---

[11]*Strong Measures: Contemporary Poems in Traditional Forms* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

[12]*The Double Dream of Spring* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970).

[13]*John Ashbery: An Introduction to the Poetry* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979) 16.

It is, that is, and it isn't, depending on one's point of view . . . on whether one is Jonathan Holden, Richard Nason, David Shapiro, or someone else. One thing is certain, however: John Ashbery writes his poems in an abstract "musical syntax," and this syntax is sometimes to be found distilled and bottled in traditional lyric verse forms.□

***Lewis Turco** has won numerous awards for his publications, which include* Visions and Revisions of American Poetry *(Arkansas, 1986) and* A Family Album.

Ioanna-Veronika Warwick

WHEAT

—for the people of the village of Ponikla

Tassels flow
through my hand,
beads of grain
roll against the husk
of my palm.
Even the stiff
whiskers feel smooth.
I lean to the bright
lost fire of the weeds:
the blue flame
of cornflowers,
papery mouths of poppies.

A rooster's few
drawn-out notes.
Silence.
Now the syllables
of echo.
I stand shoulder-deep
in blond light.
The wind holds me
and lets me go.

A farmer with a cart
halts his patient horse.
"Dark head," he points
with his whip,
"—strong head.
You will never
go crazy."

My hair,
a crow's wing.

The fields of wind.

I knew love early
and let it go.

Maria Damon

JACK SPICER'S GHOST FORMS

. . . there is buried in the structurality of any structure the ghostly origin of that structure, because the origin will be structurally determined as a ghost, a palpably absent origin, by virtue of the very structurality it fathers. Every structure must begin with such an effacing, retroactive revaluation of its beginning, with such a murder of its diacritical source.

—Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire"

What I am . . . is by degrees a ghost.

—Jack Spicer

My intention to present Jack Spicer's intertextual poetics and politics on an MLA panel whose original title was "Vestigial Forms in Contemporary Poetry" seemed both appropriate and mildly transgressive. Since I intend to investigate the politics of vestigial form, and to explore why, in a particular instance, one poet with an embattled position *vis à vis* his historical circumstance used the themes, lines, and forms of older poets and poetic traditions, my project is slightly transgressive in that I will not be executing a formal analysis in which I trace the presence of a particular traditional Western poetic form in Spicer's work, though I will look closely at one poem. However, it is appropriate in the wider senses of the phrase "Vestigial Form." Spicer's preoccupation with ghostliness as a trope lends itself to the notion of vestige, whose derivation from *vestigium*—footprint—implies a negative space which asserts an absent presence, something or someone who has come and gone, leaving a trace of writing. The second word of the phrase, "form," exacerbates and overdetermines this intimation of haunting—form< shape< shade< ghost. Form is both materiality—the rock-bottom, palpable "real"—and simulacrum, the term "vestigial form" already perhaps a redundancy. It's here and it's not. It's matter and it's spirit. It's an apparition disrupting the present with news of the past. It's a hollowed out shell whose negativity tells us how to read absence, loss, nostalgia, dislocation all the more painful for retaining a trace of propriety, of location, orientation, right trajectory. "It"—the ghost, vestigial form, the evidence that has been dragged off the scene leaving its tracks and lines in the surface dirt of cultural history—is the poet, the poet's body, the poem, the generation of the poem (what we call "process"), and especially significant for a discussion of Jack Spicer in historical context, it is the body of already available poetry on which any poet's work feeds—that is, it is The Tradition or Traditions—which both exist and do not.

More than two decades after his death from alcoholism in 1965, Jack Spicer continues to be something of a cult poet shadowing the modernist canon. I propose to examine this shadowing, this spying on and blackmailing, this negative dis/embodiment of the Western poetic tradition, and to place it in the cultural context of a gay man's ambivalent attack on the homosociality of the "heads of the town," as Spicer referred to the elite club of the literary canon. His hermeneutics, an ichnology of poetry, investigates and reinscribes fossilized footprints—the tracings of dead poets. The posthumously published *Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (1977) is a compendium of campy attacks on his literary forebears and contemporaries, his oppressors, rivals, friends, and idols.[1] To give just a few specifics, the refrain of the poem

[1] *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*, ed. Robin Blaser (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1977). Henceforth references to the books within this book will appear in the text using the following codes: *After Lorca* (AL); *Admonitions* (A); *Lament for the Makers* (LM); *Heads of the Town Up to the Aether* (HT); *Book of Magazine Verse* (BMV).

"Ferlinghetti" reads "be bop de beep / they are all asleep," and the "explanatory note" as follows: "Ferlinghetti is a nonsense syllable invented by the poet" (HT 133). *The Book of Magazine Verse*, a series of satires on typical magazine poems, addresses the Beats (among others) even more sharply; in "Ten Poems for Downbeat," the self-promoting philosophy of love touted by crossover figure Allen Ginsberg comes under fire (the "100,000 students" refers to the Czech May Day celebration in which Ginsberg was crowned King of the May):

> At least we both know how s---ty the world is. You wearing a beard as mask to disguise it. I wearing my tired smile . . . I don't see how you do it. . . .
> . . . If (the police had) attacked
> The kind of love (not sex but love) you gave the one hundred thousand students I'd have been very glad. And loved the policemen . . .
>
> (BMV 267)

In this instance, it's Ginsberg's sidestepping of the social pain of his own sexuality in the name of some self-designated mythic higher love that incurs Spicer's disdain—the diffusion of a specifically gay sexuality and culture into a smarmy, vague, romanticized a- or pan-sexual oppositionality leads to the vulgarianism of which the members of the self-consciously gay "Berkeley Renaissance" accused the mostly straight Beats. *Lament for the Makers* (1961) charges certain poets, his friend Robert Duncan among them, with selling out to "the English Department in (the) skull" (110). *Heads of the Town Up to the Aether* (1961) presents poems accompanied by "explanatory notes"; one subsection is called "Homage to Creeley"; and there are swipes at Emerson (he glosses his own "Concord Hymn" with the note "'Conquered Him' is the name of a poem by Emerson" [HT 120]); Dickinson (the token female in the American canon is acknowledged by the title "Dash" [HT 146]); Ginsberg again (in a poem called "Drugs," Spicer writes, "angel-talk howls / at the edge of our beds / and all of us now / are going to hell" [HT 139]); Yeats (Spicer's "Prayer for my Daughter" [HT 142] is a minimalist deconstruction of the Lord's Prayer); Pound, whose signature poem from his imagist period is turned into eerie masturbatory emptiness, a vestigial form of itself:

> Ghosts drip
> And then they leap
> The boy sang, and the singing that I heard:
> Wet shadows on a stick.
>
> (HT 131)

However, *The Collected Books* is also a vicious self-parody in which language always has the upper hand over the struggling poet. At the same time as Spicer disembowels the fossilized literary canon, he also hollows himself out as well, so that the illusory opposition Spicer v. Canon cedes to the parasitic devourings of language itself, that virus from outer space, or, to make William Burrough's formulation more specifically Spicerian, from "Mars." (Spicer believed that he took poetic dictation from Mars.) "What I am . . . is by degrees a ghost," Spicer writes in one of a series of letters that, like Keats', constitute the most explicit articulation of his bleak poetics (HT 182). This poetics, which insists that the poet obliterate himself in order to make room for the messages that prey upon him in the process of dictation, is an extreme, agonistic take on the concept of negative capability, and, in the bitterness of the poet's self-denial, an explicit end-product of Eliot's closet-epistemologically-founded "objective correlative." "Loneliness is necessary for pure poetry" (AL 48), Spicer the aspiring dead man wrote to Lorca the dead man, his gay Andalusian forebear, and he told his admiring coterie of younger poets that "the emotions of the poem are not the emotions of the poet." Spicer's double-voiced discourse, desirous and reviling, participatory and transgressive, transforms the weighty matter of the grand canon into its negative correlative, a Grand Canyon of emptied-out space-text into which ghostly messages swarm to inhabit parasitically, as they do the poet's own body. Thus, with regard to the passage from Joel Fineman which opened this discussion, the double origin of the structure which comprises Jack Spicer's poetry is the homosexual (gay) body of Jack Spicer and the homosocial body of Western poetry; both must be killed off in a writing process which simultaneously invokes and murders them, calls them into absent presence.[2]

[2]The term "homosocial," as well as the concept of the "homosocial/homosexual" continuum, is developed by Eve Sedgewick in *Between Men* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985). See esp. the introductory chapter.

The particular language that ravaged Spicer and also served as his weapon against the canon was the language of camping, the gay vernacular whose wealth lies in a rich deployment of puns, double entendres, sexual innuendo, gender parody, and that peculiar histrionic redundancy he campily characterizes as "Negros [sic] in blackface." In his prose piece, "Excerpts from Oliver Charming's Diary," Spicer identifies camping as an ethnic style, a vernacular, a minority discourse:

> "We homosexuals are the only minority group that completely lacks any vestige of a separate cultural heritage. We have no songs, no folklore, even our customs are borrowed from our upper-middleclass mothers," he [S.] said.
> "What about camping?" I [Oliver Charming] asked. "Isn't that a cultural pattern worthy at least of Ruth Benedict's cunt?"
> "What about camping?" he asked rhetorically. "A perpetual Jewish vaudeville joke—or at the very best, a minstrel show impeccably played by Negros [sic] in blackface. "
> The trouble with S. is that he doesn't understand Martian . . .
>
> (*Collected Books* 344)

While this exchange is by no means an unambiguous endorsement of the vernacular, the debate, cast in the witty repartee that characterizes its subject, acknowledges the post-war gay male community as a burgeoning presence which might do well to define itself as an identifiable culture with specific interests. Furthermore, it suggests that camp is synonymous or at least coextensive with poetry (through Martian, the third element of the equation), thus affirming poetry as the voice of the typically silenced, though, again through the mediation of the Martian trope, agency is displaced from political human subjects to disembodied extraplanetary energy. Since Spicer's period of mature poetic productivity coincided with the years in which his home, San Francisco—a major military base where ex-soldiers could meet and fraternize—emerged as the center of gay men's culture and of alternative, anti-academic literary activity, and yet predated by several years the era of self-conscious gay activism (he died a year before the first gay community center in the country opened—in, of course, his native San Francisco), his work bears the stamp of manifesto in spite of its concerted effort at dematerialization. In fact, Stan Persky, one of the younger members of the Berkeley Renaissance coterie after it had migrated across the Bay, has described Spicer, Duncan, and Robin Blaser as having a conscious missionary sense of lineage:

> (they) "not only kept alive a public homosexual presence in their own work, but kept alive a tradition, teaching us about Rimbaud, Crane and Lorca. . . . They carried into the contemporary culture the tradition of homosexual art and were sensitive to the work of European homosexual contemporaries. There was a conscious searching out, in fraternity, of homosexual writers. Thus, in my 'training' as a poet, homoerotic novels would be recommended to me. . . . This was at a time when the English departments of the country told us that Walt Whitman wasn't gay." Because of their local stature, the three men helped to create "a social milieu in which it was possible to be gay."[3]

Camping is the primary mode of Spicer's poetry; ideally suited to his project in that it manifests through parody and negativity, its hyperreality mocks dominant cultural claims on the real. To draw the analogy to another marginalized culture, camp is the gay version of African-American signifying, exemplary of what Renato Rosaldo has termed "wit as a weapon in subaltern social analysis":

> Precisely because of their oppression, subordinate people often avoid unambiguous literal speech. They take up more oblique modes of address laced with double meanings, metaphor, irony and humor. They often hone their skills through repartee and . . . taunting banter. . . . The subversive potential and the sheer fun of speech play go hand in hand. Wit and figurative language enable not only the articulation of grievances and aspirations under represssive conditions but also the analysis of conflicts and ironies produced

[3]John D'Emilio quotes Persky in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-70* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983) 180.

by differences of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation.[4]

Rosaldo's mention of the "biting self-mockery" as a common feature of the subaltern's humorous social commentary bears relevance to camping and to Spicer's entire aesthetic as well. Supremely expressive in its indirection, irony, and humor, camping, which Fredric Jameson has termed the "hysterical sublime," is a style (not only verbal, but primarily verbal for my purposes) both modern and postmodern in that its structure both necessarily acknowledges and denies any antecedent emotional referent, nodding to its dominant cultural prototypes only in terms of the most violent deconstruction through exaggeration.[5] But violence implies emotion—the outrage of abandonment and betrayal, and is born of nostalgia and piety—the double bind of Spicer's debt to the Western tradition. The relationship of homosexuality to homosociality is not only one of uneasy and ambiguous proximity but of downright trauma. Camping up the canon is the primary strategy of Spicer's intertextual offensive, his weapon of revenge against a tradition that has betrayed him. In wielding it, he remakes the language.

Thus, paradoxically, Spicer's poetry not only *dis*embodies the great and apparently straight tradition, and also himself as an individual gay man; its very negativity positively asserts and actively *embodies* a gay community through its language; furthermore, it documents the gay subculture of the 1950s and '60s as a minority group. This positive constitution of one community/structure over another implies that this community can be read as a text allegorically commenting on its oppressive and/or closeted parent cultures; the ghostly origin buried within, and allegorically glossed, is both the straight community—the homosocial dominant culture—and also the older homoerotic poets and cultures retroactively understood as comprising a "gay tradition"—and that both of these parental figures, the straight father and the gay father—need to be ghosted—killed and ghostwritten into the service of some new poetics of community and of sexuality. I'd like to turn to one poem, "Car Song," from *Heads of the Town Up to the Aether*, which nods to and rewrites (ghostwrites) an earlier sexual rebel. The poem articulates a vexed commentary upon the parent poem; the parent poem in turn is a vestigial form imprinted on the new poem, emptying it out. Here is "Car Song":

Away we go with no moon at all
Actually we are going to hell.
We pin our puns to our backs and cross in a car
The intersection where lovers are.
The wheel and the road turn into a stair
The pun at our backs is a yellow star.
We pinned our puns on the windshield like
We crossed each crossing in hell's despite.

One of the notes meant to clarify this text reads: "'I like it better in L.A. because there're more men and they're prettier,' someone said in the Handlebar tonight" (HT 119).

The multiple puns (moon, p/buns, cross/cruise, star/stair/stare) in this spare incantation, as well as the focus on p/buns as indices of difference, point complicatedly toward a coextension of language, physical/erotic body parts, sacredness and cursedness. These puns, reified in the poem, refer to the vernacular ("vernacular": the language of the homeborn slave—the argot of the other within the state's boundaries); its elaborate wit, word-play on sexual imagery and/or reversals or exaggerations of stereotypical sex roles, broadcasts itself, like the yellow star, as insignia of otherness.[6] The yellow star is also the "buns," or "moon," the flaunting of erotic and erogenous body parts through costume and physical mannerism, which subject the wearer to the objectifying gaze, or "stare," of potential partners and also judgmental members of the dominant culture. The emphasis on "crossing" suggests the martyrdom and oppression of a gay person coming from Spicer's strict Calvinist background, but more importantly indicates gay culture as a "crossover" or liminal culture—"crossdressing," "gender-benders," crossing/cruising between two worlds—"intersections

[4]Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 190-93.

[5]Fredric Jameson, "Baudelaire as Modernist and Postmodernist," *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, eds. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell, 1986) 262.

[6]See Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984) xii.

where lovers are." The act of love is a meeting of worlds, here, an intersection—a marriage—of heaven and hell. The vestigial form invoked here is the ghost of William Blake. Spicer's poem, drenched with the loneliness of life on the borderline, finds precedence in the marginality of Blake's self-consciously childish and spiritual belief in the free expression of physical love. The ambiguous ending of "Car Song," with its Blakean phrase, "in hell's despite," as well as the rhythm of Spicer's poem echoes "The Clod and the Pebble," one of the *Songs of Experience*, which unlike other poems in the series has no complement in the *Songs of Innocence*:

"Love seeketh not Itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care;
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair."

So sang a little Clod of Clay
Trodden with the cattle's feet
But a Pebble of the brook,
Warbled out these metres meet:

"Love seeketh only Self to please,
To bind another to its delight;
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And build a Hell in Heaven's despite."[7]

These dialectically juxtaposed ways of understanding what is called love articulate exactly the ambivalence Spicer evinced not only toward the dominant heterosexist culture, but also toward his own gay community, with the self-seeking of its individual members vying with an acknowledged need for bonding and friendship if that community is to survive at all. The note also ambiguously holds the line between vapid bartalk and campily positive assertion of cultural values. L.A., of course, is Los Angeles, the city of angels: Heaven, or the Pebble's provocatively hellish rejoinder to the assertion of star-crossed love in the verse part of Spicer's poem. It is at least another reference to mixing worlds, since angels like ghosts are crossover figures who inhabit both invisible and visible worlds, who have bodies only at will, and who mediate between heaven and earth.

What is compelling about Spicer's use of Blake as the vestigial parent of a cruising poem is the simultaneous sardonic and nostalgic allegorizing of Blake's Romanticism. As the Romantic poet most occupied with spiritual realms and otherworldly prophesying, Blake espoused a "poetics of outside" similar to Spicer's—not only should the poet live outside the dominant culture and embody values in direct opposition to it, but poetry itself comes from outside the poet's willed creative powers—through dictation. Blake's preoccupation with the denizens of heaven—angels—gets rewritten into Spicer's preoccupation with the tropes of Mars as the site for poetic production, and of angels as gay men ("angel" was in fact a gay vernacular term for gay man, and a frequently recurring figure in gay literature).[8] "'I like it better in the city of angels because there're more men and they're prettier,' someone said in the Handlebar tonight." In another poem, "Orpheus in Hell," hell is a bar with a "jukebox groaning of the damned"—if the Handlebar (its name an ironic pun given the reality of police raids on bars at which gay men were subject to arrest for touching each other) is hell, the speaker is "building a Heaven in Hell's despair" by invoking L.A. and its angels, although in fact the statement smacks of an illusory, grass-is-greener desire to believe in a less oppressive environment.[9] The oppositions that Blake constructs—clod/pebble, selfless/selfish as well as self/other, soft/hard, land/water—become in Spicer's poem a dizzying series of metamorphoses—wheel and road become a stair, round and straight become spiral, horizontal becomes vertical, front becomes back. One could extend this—male and female, active and passive, nature and culture, appearance and truth, top and bottom, Heaven and Hell become relative terms insofar as they have meaning at all; they become simply indices of difference and self-difference, constant change in which they turn into something different even from their own opposites. Blake's neat rhythm becomes skewed, and rhyme becomes off-rhyme: all/hell, stair/star, like/despite. All this to suggest that the love of clod and pebble, both passive and motionless in their respective settings, takes on a series of twists and deviations—movement,

[7]William Blake, "The Clod and the Pebble," *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Orion Press, 1967) pl. 32.

[8]See "angel" in Bruce Rodgers' *The Queen's Vernacular: A Gay Lexicon* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972).

[9]Spicer, *One Night Stand & Other Poems* (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1980).

random and frantic, snatches life from the jaws of hell.

Spicer's specifically homoeroticized revision of "The Clod and the Pebble" blows the cover off the Romantic canon's dissimulation and/or displacement of such homoerotic content. In a roundabout way it touches on one of Spicer's favorite themes—Beat-baiting and, in particular, Ginsberg-baiting. Ginsberg has widely publicized his felt connection to Blake as a guiding inspiration: well-known is his anecdote of hearing the voice of Blake reciting "Ah Sunflower" when, as an undergraduate at Columbia, he lay on his dorm-room bed disconsolate. The story has the power and narrative structure of a conversion experience, a metaphysical rescue. For Ginsberg, Blake represented a vast prophetic consciousness that gave mystical meaning to his sexual loneliness and suffering—poetry dignified the taboo, spiritualized the dregs of social life. Naming otherwise unnameable "sordid realities" in religious terms redeemed them. "Howl," for instance, owes its most obvious debts to Blake and Whitman, with its longline paeans to "angel-headed hipsters searching the neon streets at dawn, burning for that ancient heavenly connection."[10] This rhapsodic cry of pain is Ginsberg's Blake, the sacralizer of the debased. Although "Howl" makes several specific references to homoerotic activity, these are enumerating along with and disappear inside a catalogue of scenarios of social outsiderhood, each of which is given equal weight: drug use, mental illness, the physical hardship of homelessnesss, visionary alcoholism transfigured into terms that suggest the search for enlightenment conducted by Ginsberg himself and his group of ambiguously straight cameradoes. Ginsberg celebrates an outlaw homosociality which includes homosexuality as an almost furtive subset.

By appropriating Ginsberg's prime Romantic legitimator and turning one of his verses into a cruising song, Spicer is localizing the grand sweep of Ginsberg's mystical claims. A "Car Song" is considerably more specific, modest, disciplined, high-tech, and culturally specific than a "howl," a bestial, indeterminate, preverbal burst of emotion. Impatient with what he considers Ginsberg's disingenuously innocent primitivism, Spicer positions Blake in his own camp of jaded and restless experience, intersection and mobility ranging over a two-dimensional post-modern surface—the intersection where lovers are—rather than the archeological metaphorizing of Ginsberg's "ancient heavenly connection." Spicer's phrase "crossed each crossing in Hell's despite" is also an oblique swipe at the Beats' most valued image—the car full of men traversing the country in search of visions. The Beat men on the road cling to their heterosexuality with such fervor that it is immediately questionable. Spicer goes for the jugular, claiming greater honesty by exposing his "puns," his yellow star.

What is the purpose of Spicer's picking on Ginsberg, a fellow-rebel in the fight for visibility against the complacently vicious 1950s and the academic canon, a fellow gay man trying to survive an historical transition from total invisibility to recognition, with all the violent backlash attendant on such a change? One affirmative answer is that a necessarily oppositional culture really comes into its own when internal differences can be acknowledged at a public level—cultural integrity is as much about difference as it is about solidarity. However, I think this question also touches on one of the uncomfortable sub-texts of this discussion: given that Spicer's work is a gay commentary on a tradition that dissimulates its own homoeroticism, and given that he is writing in an historical moment in which gay men were beginning to be perceived and to perceive themselves as a community with a culture and with political interests—but as yet had no political voice and were subject to the most degrading legal and social harassment—given this acute and poignant positioning in social and literary history, one must consider how the double-consciousness which any oppressed person experiences operates in this instance. Writing the gay community, Spicer simultaneously undermines the potential spectrum of its variety. He writes himself into and out of existence. The vestigial forms appear in his work as encomia and as bitter revilements. In charging Ginsberg with "not doing it right," Spicer articulates an internalized, pebblish homophobia, casting Ginsberg, that loveable, popular, paradigmatically cloddish would-be fool of God, as a *shande fur die goyim*: a disgrace before the straight dominant culture, a sellout to the macho Beat boys. With respect to the emergent gay culture or any self-consciously marginal culture, the pebble/clod difference

[10]Allen Ginsberg, "Howl," *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1956).

parallels that of segregation v. integration. The fight against the fathers gets displaced, according to their parental designs, onto a fight against one's siblings. We see this again and again as the dominant culture plays non-dominant groups off against each other. The ghosts still rule from their other world, their burial ground within the structure of Spicer's poetry, calling the shots from between the lines that would master them. I feel the need to come out from behind the vague term "ambivalence" and use the words "internalized self-hatred" because I find that much commentary on Spicer takes him at his word when he advocates pure loneliness, "outside," self-ghostifying, violent self-abnegation in the service of language. This tendency paradoxically feeds the construction of a personality cult, which is an interesting phenomenon but could stand some critique, and also encourages a belief that it is noble or even possible to escape into the freedom of pure language. This is problematic and ahistorical. Contorted, brilliant, electrifying, Spicer's camping instanciates clod and pebble, empowered by community and embarrassed to be taking up space. No human being should have to be a lightning rod.□

Maria Damon *teaches English and American Studies at the University of Minnesota.*

---

parallels that of segregation v. integration. The fight against the fathers gets displaced, according to their parental designs, onto a fight against one's siblings. We see this again and again as the dominant culture plays non-dominant groups off against each other. The ghosts still rule from their other world, their burial ground within the structure of Spicer's poetry, calling the shots from between the lines that would master them. I feel the need to come out from behind the vague term "ambivalence" and use the words "internalized self-hatred" because I find that much commentary on Spicer takes him at his word when he advocates pure loneliness, "outside," self-ghostifying, violent self-abnegation in the service of language. This tendency paradoxically feeds the construction o a personality cult, which is an interestin phenomenon but could stand some critique, an also encourages a belief that it is noble or eve possible to escape into the freedom of pur language. This is problematic and ahistorica Contorted, brilliant, electrifying, Spicer' camping instanciates clod and pebble empowered by community and embarrassed t be taking up space. No human being shoul have to be a lightning rod.□

Maria Damon *teaches English and American Studies at th University of Minnesota.*

David Rigsbee

HEAT

Summer. An ochre light came over
from the underside of a storm. Leaves
turned over submissively and shivered.
I saw a plane take off and turn into a crack
in the clouds. Then the crack closed over.
I sat sweating from my damp scalp,
a secret sweat like condensation on the glass
of a judge who's fallen asleep over a stack
of motions. The lightning jabbed
its emphasis in the vicinity of the levee
towers. The river, like an arm in a sleeve,
pursued its out-of-body opening.

I saw under the green canopy of the vines
the exact sag of the comptroller's jaws
signing his memo on budget cuts, the set
of the Inquisitors when they rode to meet
the Cathars at Montségur, comfortless,
without shade; the clouds saw to that:
they willed it so. There was only the seething
of insects stapled to their rafts of tree bark,
just the hot bluster of wind from the lungs
of the coming storm. Sweating like a man
about to be corrected, I considered the rust
blistering the top of the iron tubing

that once supported a clothesline, and I
considered the lost clothes hanging in waves,
whose semaphores could have spelled
an unconscious but sweeping critique
of the deepening green, the vanishing blue.
And so on, to the beasts of the grass, creaking
with armor, yet programmed for oblivion,
or slinking furtively in their xenophobia,
as well they might, mindlessness being
a plus in the jungle. Then manic thunder,
crazier than Scriabin, then furious rain,
and I could not prevent myself from sweating

even then. It did not seem an especially
thieving haze, the kind that ruins memory,
rusting the valves by slow degradation.
It was the friction of life passing other
life that the storm raised on steam legs,
and I couldn't make out their ghostly faces,
though I knew they were left over in fact
from bodies that had got on with their lives.
It was as though one had never before
been whole, but could pursue one's other
and overtaking it, retire. I, however, was
of a different persuasion, my life and body

of a piece. So I sat while the storm passed
bringing these absent ones into such curious
presence that I was afraid for them, afraid
of their necessities and dictates that had
always seemed to put them in jeopardy
and might still—their lives more fragile
than insects', who at least had the sense
to suit up skeletons last. But I sat steadfastly
in my flesh as in a soft, handed-down chair,
knowing how, sometimes on those stormy
afternoons, whole lives return, poor creatures
of mist, to its worn, familial cushion.

Paul Munn

VESTIGIAL FORM IN JOHN ASHBERY'S *A WAVE*

The poetry of John Ashbery has become a lightning rod for major critics of contemporary poetry. Harold Bloom, Marjorie Perloff, and Charles Altieri, for example, have variously emphasized Ashbery's anxious responses to poetic, especially Romantic, precursors; his indeterminacy in "the other tradition" of the French Symbolists; or his complex postmodernism in contrast to a simpler scenic mode.[1] Not wrangling directly with any of these views, I wish to defend a modest claim about three poems in his 1984 volume, *A Wave*: Ashbery's vestigial forms suggest a poet who, however anxious and indeterminate in many poems, is capable in some poems of a rhetorically comprehensible use of poetic form, however complex and ingenious.[2] In three poems, Ashbery's vestigial forms suggest three related poets: an almost comfortably conventional sonneteer, an ironic usurper of the English hymn, and a witty remaker of the Japanese haibun.[3]

A Wave is composed of forty-four poems, counting his "37 Haiku" as one. Twenty-seven of these are what most would call "free verse," what Lewis Turco, I believe, would call poetry in the mode of lineated prose. Three are prose poems, unlineated poetry. The remaining fourteen are poems written in what I have chosen to call vestigial form, poems that recall to some significant degree visual and other devices of poetic artifice with substantial conventional precedent, such as rhymed couplets, sonnets, quatrains, haiku, and haibun. I might have called the perceived form in these fourteen poems echoic form, tendentious form, threshold form, gestural form, subdued form, marginal form, or fossilized form—all these rubrics are near synonyms for vestigial form, each placing a different emphasis on how form appears to us.

The label "vestigial form," though it has perhaps the disadvantage of suggesting too strongly the organic and the nonfunctional, has the virtue of evoking connotations of genetic links with the past, a visible and rudimentary trace of a more vigorous preceding generation. Like little toes on the human foot, once very useful to our barefoot ancestors, vestigial poetic forms serve to remind us of previous purposes. But little toes are still somewhat useful: they do provide some balance, and on the beach or in the bed, they may function or entertain. Similarly, vestigial forms contribute subtly to

[1]Altieri has also identified in Ashbery and other poets what he calls "rhetoricity . . . the complex states of mind that go into self-conscious manipulation of language" (*Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984] 146). Recently, James McCorkle has explored in Ashbery and others poetic "interconnection [which] is the means of engaging the phenomenal world and implies a reinvention of the self that can engage a variety of voices, fragments, and inadvertent glimpses" (*The Still Performance: Writing, Self, and Interconnection in Five Postmodern American Poets* [Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1989] 4).

[2]*A Wave: Poems by John Ashbery* (New York: Penguin, 1984).

[3]Richard Howard observes Ashbery's career moving from conventional forms (his virtual first volume, *Some Trees*, 1956, included poems titled "Eclogue," "Canzone," "Sonnet," and "Pantoum," as well as three sestinas) through the prose poems of *Three Poems*, 1972. *Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, 1975, is representative of what Howard calls "a prosody . . . of intermittence and collage; no such conventional markings as rhyme or repetition—rather, *seamless verse*, jammed rather than enjambed, extended rather than intense; it must go on and on to keep the whole contraption from coming round again, to work upon us its deepest effect, which is a kind of snake-charming" ("John Ashbery," in *John Ashbery: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Chelsea, 1985] 45). But *Houseboat Days*, 1981, is a fifty-poem sequence, each poem four unrhymed quatrains. Ashbery's flamboyant experimentalism throughout his career often invoked conventional forms, and the concept of vestigial form often usefully applies to Ashbery's earlier work and to his *April Galleons*, 1987, which includes poems in paired lines, four-line stanzas, and five-line stanzas.

poetic meaning. Primarily, they invite us to apply the conventions of lyric poetry in general. But they may also invite us to make meaning by considering the conventions of a particular antecedent form. This is the case in three Ashbery poems in which vestiges of the sonnet, the quatrain, and the Japanese haibun appear.

"At North Farm," the first poem in *A Wave*, directly preceding another poem of fourteen lines, is a vestigial sonnet:

> Somewhere someone is traveling furiously
> toward you,
> At incredible speed, traveling day and
> night,
> Through blizzards and desert heat, across
> torrents, through narrow passes.
> But will he know where to find you,
> Recognize you when he sees you,
> Give you the thing he has for you?
>
> Hardly anything grows here,
> Yet the granaries are bursting with meal,
> The sacks of meal piled to the rafters.
> The streams run with sweetness, fattening
> fish;
> Birds darken the sky. Is it enough
> That the dish of milk is set out at night,
> That we think of him sometimes,
> Sometimes and always, with mixed feel-
> ings?

The first verse paragraph is six lines; the second is eight lines, suggesting an inverted Italian sonnet, its slightly uneven bipartite form quite conventionally suggesting "build-up" in the first part and "release" of "pressure" in the second part.[4] More resistant than traditional sonnets to translation into prose paraphrase, the poem nevertheless—like fine examples of the Italian sonnet in Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, and Auden—uses the two-part formal asymmetry to reinforce a significant shift in scene, idea, or mood. The first part creates a feeling of mysterious activity. We wonder at the nature of the errand of the unknown furious traveler. The second part creates a contrasting feeling of stasis and inexplicable fruition. From a hazardous landscape we shift to "here" (l. 7), "At North Farm," we suspect, where the landscape has been domesticated for cultivation, where the activities are habitual, not hazardous, where farmers harvest, and, customarily and superstitiously, "the dish of milk is set out at night."

In spite of the inversion of the length of the two parts and lack of rhyme, this poem is, in its intervolvement of form and theme, almost comfortably conventional. Five-stress or decasyllabic lines occur (2, 8, 10, 12), vestiges of the pentameter line of the sonnet in English.[5] Although the poem lacks end rhyme, it abounds in traditional devices of lyric poetry, contributing to the urgency of tone in the first part and the atmosphere of stasis in the second: repeated words, internal rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and consonance. It is a poem about a relationship between one person and another person or persons who perceive him as at once menacing and alluring, and its subject and tone emerge as part of the artifice of the vestigial sonnet. I say "almost" because Ashbery's pronouns create a strangely dislocated fictional utterance as we attempt to make meaning and connect the two parts of the poem. And the poem as introduction to a book of poems suggests perhaps a menacing and alluring poet who through his words travels furiously toward his readers and leaves us indeed with "mixed feelings."

The title of a later poem in *A Wave* asks a question that applies to Ashbery's work generally and to the role of form in his work: "But What Is the Reader to Make of This?" The answer to the question of the role of vestigial form in "At North Farm," I believe, emerges when one sees the similarity between the achievement of the Renaissance lyric, including the sonnet, and what Ashbery states as the goal of his poetic art. David Kalstone, writing on Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, tells us, "The movement of mind, so often praised in Donne, is already present in many of the sonnets of Sidney's sequence."[6] Ashbery, commenting on his use of what he calls "the floating pronoun," tells us, "I'm interested in the movement of the mind, how it goes from one place to the other

[4]Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, rev. ed. (New York: Random House, 1979) 116.

[5]Ashbery has said, "I don't much like sonnets" ("An Interview with John Ashbery," with John Koethe, *SubStance* 37/38 [1983]: 178-86, 183). In his interview with me, he observed that sonnets and certain other "forms . . . are really too loose to have this liberating effect that I'm looking for, especially in teaching" ("An Interview with John Ashbery," *New Orleans Review* 17.2 [Summer 1990]: 59-63, 62). But these statements do not at all preclude his writing a vestigial sonnet, a transformation of the form suited to particular ends similar to the ends of its antecedents.

and the places themselves don't matter that much. It's the movement that does" (Munn, "Interview" 62). However "indeterminate" Ashbery often appears, his words here suggest that he attempts to do what the greatest Renaissance lyricists attempted to do, to imitate human consciousness more realistically through poetic artifice, not to describe or transcribe but to render experience in language. "At North Farm" is a participant, however belated and estranged, in a formal tradition that has, since its introduction into English in the Renaissance, imitated mental movement.

"At North Farm" uses vestigial form to achieve ends similar to its antecedent form. "Just Walking Around" uses vestigial form ironically: in its use of the quatrain to express a quasi-religious vision of human love or friendship over time, it is a usurpation of the English hymnal stanza. The opening question—"What name do I have for you?"—cues us for a moment to a convention of poetic aperture in certain love poems: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" or "How do I love thee?"[7] But *name*, a vigorously biblical term, especially in a cryptic postmodern question, also cues an address to God. Quickly, without withdrawing either possibility, the tone turns casual, even mundane, as lyric-like, the title occurs in line 4, "Just walking around," and the "you" seems more and more a person known to the speaker. But the potentially religious language of *name* and *soul* becomes active in the sign-board proclamation "the end is near" and in the colloquy of "light" and "mystery" and "food" in the final stanza. Life, as in Auden's intricate sonnet "Our Bias," is a circuitous journey, here a religious pilgrimage suggested in "walking around," "wander around," "looped among islands," "traveling in a circle," and "the trip." The last two lines are a prayer to a friend or lover to validate the cliché of life as a "circle'" or to enter into the spherical "orange" of life's uncanny unity.

The use of the quatrain in conjunction with vestiges of Christian belief suggests Ashbery's usurpation of the hymnal stanza. We are invited to think of common attributes of the traditional hymn: affirmation of conventional belief; public choral performance; rhymed and metrical verse. Of course, Ashbery gives us only traces of each of these, but these traces are part of poetic meaning. For example, the humor of "secret smudge in the back of your soul," a deflation of the concept of venial sin, is compounded by the vestigial artifice of the hymn.

A clause of the poem suggests both the way of life and the way of poetry: "the longest way is the most efficient way." Humans have always "looped among islands," wandered Odysseus-like to "the end." And the end of poetic meaning also emerges by circuitous route. Marjorie Perloff's paraphrase of Ashbery "On Raymond Roussel" is essentially correct: "*Language always on the point of revealing its secret*—this pattern of opening and closing, of revelation and re-veiling, of simultaneous disclosure and concealment is the structural principle of the Ashbery poem."[8] The jet and the tank make direct trips; the poem travels by play and delay. And David Perkins' assertion that Ashbery "has used procedures which produce neither formlessness nor form but a continual expectation of form that is continually frustrated" is true in general.[9] But sometimes in Ashbery, language is not entirely secretive and expectation of form not entirely frustrating. In "Just Walking Around," form contributes to meaning, the vestige of a formal tradition conspiring with suggestive linguistic reference to make a poem in which, in a manner reminiscent of Blake and Dickinson, private vision usurps public form and language.

In the case of Ashbery's haibuns, most American readers will recognize neither traditional nor vestigial form. At a loss for clear antecedent, readers could accurately describe each of Ashbery's haibuns as a prose poem plus cryptic, one-liner without end-punctuation. They might guess that Ashbery is doing something with a form he adopted or adapted, and they would be correct. The haibun is a Japanese form mixing prose and haiku. The most famed practitioner of the form was Basho, whose

[6]"Sir Philip Sidney," *English Poetry and Prose, 1540-1674*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970) 41-59, 56. Kalstone also contributes to criticism of Ashbery: "*Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*," in *John Ashbery: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1985) 91-114.

[7]These two questions are among those on the "Great Opening Lines" Tote Bag, offered Christmas 1989 by the NCTE. This is, of course, convention run amuck.

[8]*The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981) 262.

[9]*A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987) 620.

Narrow Road to the Deep North, a travel diary in the form of haibun, is readily available in English.[10] Ashbery's page layout resembles most closely the Corman-Susumu translation of Basho, where, unlike other translations, both the Japanese text and facing-page English translation print sections of the diary on a single page, as if each were the unit Ashbery calls "haibun"; and also unlike other translations, each haiku is printed as one line.[11]

Just as one can understand "At North Farm" reasonably well without thinking about sonnets and "Just Walking Around" without concerning oneself too much with antecedent uses of the quatrain, one can understand Ashbery's haibuns without knowledge of Basho, even reading the Ashbery haibun only thematically.[12] Better than this, one can read more descriptively, observing the apparent intrinsic rules of the form. (For example, prose and haiku, it seems, must be thematically or imagistically related, but as is the case with many of Ashbery's poem titles, the relation is not always readily discerned.) But much is gained by incorporating into one's reading of the haibun the precedent of Basho, his vigorous sense of particular time and place as an instant and instance of eternity, his keen perception of the observed world as continuous with the self, his power of showing writing as part of emergent dialogue between past and present, self and other. (Basho even includes in his haibun haiku written by his servant who accompanies him on his journey.) Ashbery's haibuns do not make up a travel diary precisely, but Ashbery may recall the wanderlust of Basho's prologue in his opening phrase: "Wanting to write something. . . ." And there is something of Basho's muted enthusiasm in Ashbery's "It is a frostbitten, brittle world but once you are inside it you want to stay there always." More cryptic than Basho's, Ashbery's haiku partake of the master's power of surprising juxtaposition of imagery: "The year—not yet abandoned but a living husk, a lesson."

One effect of Ashbery's use of the haibun is potentially educative. As in certain allusions of Eliot or reworkings of non-Western traditions in Pound, we are invited to become better informed readers as we ponder the relations between a contemporary text and its possible antecedents. Basho's most famous haiku is this:

Listen! A frog
Jumping into the stillness
Of an ancient pond!

(*A Haiku Journey* 9)

When Ashbery remakes these images in his Haibun 6, humorously and colloquially, he retains Basho's evocation of simultaneous immediacy and depth, naturalness and perfection:

> To be involved in every phase of directing, acting, producing and so on must be infinitely rewarding. Just as when a large, fat, lazy frog hops off his lily pad like a spitball propelled by a rubber band and disappears into the water of the pond with an enthusiastic plop. It cannot be either changed or improved on.

Poetic forms have traditionally provided readers with a sense of order, a space of stability where utterance may unfold. Many poems of Ashbery thwart our sense of order, savagely parodying formal tradition. But Ashbery's art is various, and his vestigial forms remind us that sometimes Ashbery makes meaning not precisely by parody but by less savage imitation and allusion. It is possible to read Ashbery—sometimes—by synthesizing artifice and theme, reference and form. The image of a wave suggests one view of the Ashbery poem, not an object but a phenomenon, a motion stoppable only in concept and in the frame of a photograph. But the alternate image of the poem as urn persists, architectonic form speaking to and through the past. The Ashbery poem may partake of both images—a mimesis of unfolding meditation, fluid mental movement, and of such mimesis playing off visual and conventional form.□

[10]*A Haiku Journey: The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Selected Haiku*, trans. Dorothy Britton (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1974). Another possible source for the haibun is the classically allusive work of Yokoi Yayu (1702-1783), whose work is more gnomic than Basho's and much less easily discovered in translation. See Lawrence Rogers' "Rags and Tatters: The *Uzuragoromo* of Yokoi Yayu," *Monumenta Nipponica* 34.3: 279-91.

[11]Basho, *Back Roads to Far Towns*, trans. Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu (New York: Grossman, 1968).

[12]Veronica Forrest-Thomson would call this "Bad naturalisation," reading thematically with no regard for poetic artifice (*Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* [New York: St. Martin's, 1978]).

Paul Munn *is Associate Professor of English at Saginaw Valley State University.*

Heinz Piontek

MAN AT NINETY

Translated by Ken Fontenot

Before the morning washing up
my long sitting on the edge of the bed.
Stiff pains in the joints.

In the rotten little room
a cricket chirps.

Pale chalk marks on the blackboard
of my daydreams:

That once joyous climbing
over the mountains;
shots re-echo
in the stories of the tax-collectors—

Even my small boat,
and how I drifted downriver with the years—
Rushing water:
still the most beautiful for me.

Stayed?
On the nail the tattered bridle,
two woman's shoes in the corner,
the boat rope,
between crumbs on the table
a leather bible.

My thoughts withdraw from me,
as if they had to flee.

When I say "I,"
whom do I mean?

Reprinted with permission of the author.

Diane Wakoski

EMILY DICKINSON AND ROBERT CREELEY: MAVERICK WRITERS OF THE LATIN LYRIC

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
—"Leaves of Grass," part 52

Why has that phrase "barbaric yawp" intrigued us so? I think it is because in these two words, we stake out our right to make culture and art without the refinements and thus the effeteness of European civilization.

In this sense, it seems important to me that Whitman was born and educated a common man. He was not born to and did not learn "high culture," though he certainly was a reader, a thinker, but in a self-styled way, somewhat rude, pursuing what interested him, and certainly not trained in the manner which would have been considered "literary." Thus, for him, the greatest language model was probably The King James Version of the Bible, and the prose prosody which he created and which he labelled with that famous and charismatic phrase was vocal. Oral, with its long-breathed lines. Its big melodic chords of language, and the cadences of the Psalms:

> O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth,
> Sing unto the Lord, bless his name: shew forth his salvation from day to day
> (Psalm 96)

The translators of this beautiful text were translating from Greek and Latin, marrying these great ancient languages of Western civilization to another great period of poetic language, the Shakespearean. Whitman's ignorance and, probably, lack of interest in classical languages is part of his barbarism. However, it will always be my contention—and I am terribly aware of how anti-intellectual this can be construed—that knowing the past but not as a scholar is what creates that vigorous American voice.

The question is often asked where Emily Dickinson fits into all of this theorizing about the Whitman tradition. Since there are few students of American poetry who, if they consider Whitman our poetic father, don't also acknowledge that Emily is mother, there have to be many ingenious ways of placing her at his side, but the one I would like to offer continues the argument that American poetry marks the *rebirth* of the English language, barbaric because it does not attempt to translate the past but simply uses it in a crude form, one easily available through common speech. At this point, I might just say as a footnote, that of course there is a certain element of self irony in Whitman's phrase "the barbaric yawp," for certainly he did not view himself as some sort of Neanderthal ape man clubbing people rather than speaking to them. But his education as a common man was so crude in comparison with the European ideal of a gentlemen's or a poet's education that he had to proclaim somewhat proudly his RIGHT to be a poet. Perhaps this is why it was so important for him to claim Emerson's credential and be a poet, writing for the first time, in a truly American voice.

But Dickinson. What is it which gives her a place by Whitman's side? My argument is that her education, while upper-class or elite or however we might deem it in our so-called classless society, was a woman's education and thus it still was not a poet's education, by European standards. That she learned some Latin, we know. But it was largely the crumbs which fell to her in a household with a well educated father and brother: Latin, which was important in the study of the law and, for Dickinson, important to the study of the Bible;

but not Latin as either a lawyer or a minister would be required to know it; not formally taught; not learned systemically or with stultifying erudition. Religion was Emily's meat and drink from an early age. She wrote her poems, as has been so thoroughly documented by contemporary scholarship, using intuitively the hymn form or "common meter," as it is called, but as Whitman wrote his gallumphing iambics with Shakespeare's lines and passages from the Bible resounding in his ears, Dickinson wrote her poems as if they were hymns, co-opting the common meter to create her delicately wrought but ever so idiosyncratic metrical verses. The editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* rejected the poetry of both Dickinson and Whitman because the prosody was not sufficiently traditional, though it might look so to twentieth-century readers. Dickinson used dashes to create enjambments, cadences, and what we might think of as irregular rhythms in these poems which often could be thumped out, crudely, on a tub. Whitman used the long, too long for the page even, line which also moved in and out of an iambic beat like water which flows in a course but often runs higher or lower due to temperature or wind or other elements of variation. The vigor of the Whitman/Dickinson tradition comes from a magnification of the maverick use of traditional prosody. Such verse will always seem like free verse to traditional readers.

It should be plain to any reader that Creeley and Dickinson are similar poets with their New England voices, their epigrammatic styles, their interestingly irregular versions of traditional metrics and use of the quatrain, as well as their obsession with love: Dickinson's, a theology; Creeley's an ideology, perhaps a hermeneutics of how love and language are intertwined. Though Creeley, unlike Dickinson, has been conscious during his entire career of pursuing his own version of the search for a new measure, I think he and she share a surprised response that readers or critics or editors have not always seen how very rooted in traditional Latin lyrics their verses are. Since I am only sketching this argument, I will simply quote Creeley on the matter:

> Latin was important to me, as a language primarily. The only school prize I ever got was the Junior Latin Prize—and in Harvard, after flunking the Latin B final, the chairman, who taught it, asked me if I'd ever considered majoring in Classics. Alfred Derby Nock taught us poetry—and later (late '40s?) I translated some after a fashion, i.e. "Stomping with Catullus." (I have never really had any ability to translate anything, just that I make it my own manner, etc.)
>
> Thinking of Emily Dickinson—she was very much part of our reference, growing up in Massachusetts. I went to a Baptist church that had those charming foursquare hymns, and I'm sure they located quatrains for me forever—so that's a common root even if not the same hymnal or church. Viz, communal anonymous.
>
> (from a letter dated 24 Aug. 1989, in response to my questions)

The thrust of my argument is that Whitman and Dickinson, and then later poets identifiable in this tradition, with their self-taught forms picked up on the crudest, broadest, strongest elements of traditional Latin poetry and used them to forge the beginnings of a uniquely American version of Western poetry.

The irony is that this can't be created out of actual barbarism or refusal of the tradition. All these poets—Whitman, Dickinson, Williams, and Creeley—went to school but not the way poets were expected to. Even Creeley's so-called Harvard education didn't result in either a degree (he finally finished school at the University of New Mexico—speaking of barbaric yawps) or his even passing his Latin exam. They were all anxious to understand the past and to link their poetry with the traditions of Western civilization. Yet, because none had what would be considered a poet's education, as we might define it through Milton, perhaps, or Keats, they all produced poems whose prosody sounded, to the educated, as if it were unmetered, unmannered, and, if you will, "barbaric."

Additionally, all of these poets felt they were writing traditional poetry, even though they did not feel accepted or recognized as traditional poets. Dickinson wittily says,

> I'm nobody! who are you?
> Are you—Nobody—Too?
> Then there's a pair of us?
> Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!
>
> How dreary—to be—Somebody!
> How public—like a Frog—
> To tell one's name—the livelong June—

To an admiring Bog!

(#288)

and she reminds her readers that

She dealt her pretty words like Blades—
How glittering they shone—
And every One unbared a Nerve
Or wantoned with a Bone—

(first stanza of #479)

"The new formalism," as it is called, is in my judgment a retreat from the Whitman tradition, a refusal to understand that maverick versions of traditional metrics are its source of vigor. Pound accused Williams of "pissing his life away" in America, but Williams was listening to the Paterson falls, searching for a new measure, finding something he called "the variable foot," a concept I used to make fun of, until I understood that finally this phrase describes free verse. What Creeley has done in a lyric poem like "Kore," setting up a complicated metrics based on multiples of twos and threes, written as quatrains, which echo an enjambed version of the Sapphic line, is very like Dickinson in complexity and irregularity and, most of all, freedom.

Her hair held earth.
  Her eyes were dark.
A double flute
  made her move.

"O love,
  where are you
leading
  me now?"

Thus Creeley has found in his tight New England, Emily Dickinson inherited voice a link between Latin love poetry, Cavalier poetry, and the sounds of Americans making love, echoing hymns, jazz, and the blues without having to resort to old forms.

I would like to conclude by saying that I think poets always know what they are doing and usually are quite willful about it. What seems to be the case of poets in the Whitman tradition is that they refuse to be confined by the past. They are not necessarily badly educated, only willful users of what they have learned or taught themselves for very personal reasons. They do not consciously mis-translate their sources, but they use those sources idiosyncratically and the results are maverick, independent, different from their models. Thus, to resort to old recognizable forms seems to be a contradiction of what we wish to see as the vitality of American poetry. Often these poets are using, say, Catullus' or Pindar's metrics with more acute or innate knowledge than writers who called themselves formalists. But they have understood that traditions are never literally translatable. In conclusion, I myself am wondering if Whitman, Dickinson, Williams, Creeley, all good poets, are not "new formalists."

The catch is that if you can easily recognize the form, perhaps the poet isn't doing what the American tradition allows: sounding its barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world, "not a bit tamed," hopefully still "untranslatable."□

Diane Wakoski *is Writer in Residence at Michigan State University.*

Jean Berrett

INVESTIGATION

When I first met you Mark, you were blood on the pavement. I walked up and down that road, wondering, listening to the wave sound of traffic on the freeway overpass. I was measuring distances, taking photos and wondering. Down here, streaks of your blood made their own dry roads, following a distance that only you would know. Strangely, one quarter mile down the road in the direction of town, there were other spots, not smeared like these, but round and neat, of freshly dried blood, without even a vestige of feathers or fur, so it couldn't have been a road kill. It was late September, and a small wind lifted and let lightly fall the long leaves of corn leaning over your blood on that Michigan country road.

I was then an investigator, working for the attorneys hired by your mother. They paid me to walk that road and wonder. I don't know why, out of so many others, your case, the life you stopped living, made me turn my head to the side, close my eyes, and remember the soft irony of things beginning. Maybe it was your mother's eyes that would not cry or ask for comfort. Your high school portrait stood in a frame on a side table as we talked. She never looked at it, just said, "Something isn't right, I don't know, it's just the way it happened you know. Something isn't right." Her husband, your father, Mark, had dropped dead of a heart attack just two months before. I could see that she was telling herself, "I will not cry, I will not cry," well practiced she was in grief. She kept her hands folded in her lap the whole time that we talked. "Mark was just a kid, you see, he had no enemies, and he was never, ever drunk, he drank some but he was never drunk. How is it that he was lying there on the road in the middle of the night?" She started to turn in the direction of your picture, then caught herself and instead looked down at the floor.

The kids in the car, driving back from a night of dancing in Saginaw, told the cops they thought they had run over a box or bag of rubbish in the road. The driver felt something dragging underneath and then stopped and backed up, trying to free it. A half hour earlier, as a truck driver made his turn up onto the freeway, he had seen what he thought was a pile of clothes on the road beyond the overpass. Mark, you were a dark heap of something breathing, alive, on a narrow Michigan road.

When I talked to Lil, she said, "Such a nice kid. I don't know. Yeah, we left the bar together. I was sort of out of it." She alternately puffed her cigarette and sipped a bourbon and water. She was slender and smartly dressed in a lavender pantsuit, although her bleached hair was uncombed and she looked very tired. She had put on an old Beatles album that played while we were talking. "He was a good kid, lots of fun." Lil was more than twice your eighteen years, Mark, somebody's once very beautiful daughter. The people at Scotty's told me later she was drunk that night and all over you.

"The cops picked us up," Lil went on, "I don't know what for. Me and him were just walking across the church lawn, laughing you know and talking. Maybe it was they didn't want us to walk on church property?" She looked at me, nervous and trying to smile. "They took us to the counseling center to sleep it off. But Mark didn't stay I don't think. I don't know why. How'd it happen? I don't know." She looked across the room to where the late morning sun was falling across an old, chipped figurine, a fat Chinaman, on the window sill. Although the leaves were moving in the small maple tree outside the open window, the curtains hung motionless. The Beatles began singing, Martha my dear . . .

Your buddy David believes the cops did it, Mark. He thinks they beat you up and left you beside the road. When he told me, I thought of the clean, neat circles of blood down the road toward town. I imagined you standing and trying to walk after the butt of a pistol hit your head. David says those Maryville cops are brutal, that it was because you had long hair, because you didn't take them seriously enough. He says you were different from the rest, that you were always reading and thinking, more than ever since your father died. Just recently, you'd been reading something that made you

wonder "about religion and stuff like that," David said. You told him you didn't believe in God anymore but still you believed in something else. "I told him I didn't know what he meant by that, what could he mean by *something else*? But you see, he was different," David said, "he was always thinking and he thought what he wanted and didn't care what the others would say. Those Maryville cops just didn't like the way he was so independent, the way he would talk back." He tells me, Mark, how you called the police one night when you heard a gunshot in the yard outside your mother's house and how, when they came, they arrested you for "disturbing the peace." David says you laughed at them, said, "This doesn't make sense, man, how is it that *I'm* disturbing the peace? Wouldn't you rather just hold me down and cut off my hair? So that it doesn't disturb *your* peace?" David says you couldn't have fallen down drunk, that you didn't drink that much, that it was only since your dad had died that you started going downtown at all and then it was only once in a while. He says you were walking home that night because you had no car. He says, Mark, because you had no car, you always walked those ten miles home.

Janet at Scotty's, young like you, a curly-haired, fair-haired wisp of a girl, I could hardly believe she was old enough to be hired as a bartender, met you just that night. When we talked she was wearing overalls with a delicate blouse that was frothy with bows and ruffles. "He came in here late, about a half hour before closing. He only had one beer. He wasn't drunk. He was laughing and told me he'd been stopped by the cops and charged with indecent exposure. He said he was walking across the church lawn with Lil—she had followed him out of Scotty's. Lil's the town drunk you know, everybody knows about her—and Lil was trying to seduce him—she had grabbed his belt and was trying to unbuckle it." Janet's voice was as tiny as she was, and I found myself leaning forward to hear. "He said it was so funny, he was trying to stop her and just then the cops pulled up. He told me Lil was so drunk she could hardly stand up, said they put them both in the back of the squad car and drove them over to the drunk tank at the counseling center. But they wouldn't take Mark at the counseling center, they told the cops no, because he wasn't drunk like she was. So they had to let him go. He showed me the citation—he pulled it out of his pocket, was laughing, said look, it says indecent exposure. He was just laughing and laughing . . ."

Janet stopped talking. She frowned and then her lips quivered as if she wanted to laugh but couldn't for then she would only cry. I think she fell in love with you, Mark. She bit down on her lip and said, "I asked him if he needed a ride home, but he said no, he liked to walk, was a great walker. He said he had ten miles to walk, but that was okay, he loved to walk. He was heading out the east road down by the fairgrounds, he lived in the country, you know, said he loved it out there next to all the corn. He seemed so happy, so strong. He wasn't drunk, you know. He seemed so happy, so strong." She unclasped her hands and lifted her fingers in front of her as though to examine her unpolished nails, then brought them together as if she might pray and dropped them lightly, open, on the table between us.

The sheriff's deputy said, "We didn't handle it. We just wrote up the auto accident report. Talk to the Maryville police." But the Maryville police wouldn't talk, said wait for the Incident Report. I asked if I could talk to the officer who had done the arresting. The chief told me that none of his men could talk about it, that we should just wait for the Report. The officer at the desk behind him glanced over at me with a look both insolent and apprehensive. Mark, I wondered: was he the one? The Report wouldn't come for another three weeks and when it did, it would be written in legalese by the city attorney. It would say the Maryville police had stopped when they saw this young man on the lawn of the Presbyterian Church putting his jeans back on. It would say they had written a citation for indecent exposure. It would say the officers had later seen him walking down by the fairgrounds, on his way out of town, he told them. They picked him up and drove him a half mile out, said they thought he was a troublemaker and they wanted him out of the town.

They worked on you at the hospital, Mark, between one and six in the morning, so it wasn't til the sun was about to rise that they, and you, finally gave up. Mark, life is a dance floor with tinny music where pale, bewildered dancers sway because they cannot learn the steps. Mark, for five hours, like somebody's child, like somebody's son, you breathed. After the autopsy, the Maryville coroner said he found nothing at all inconsistent with a body having been run over and dragged by a car for 100 feet.

"No bruises? No cuts? Like maybe there'd

been a fight of some kind? Like maybe he'd been beaten up before? He was already lying in the road you know."

"Nothing at all inconsistent," he said, adding that I should please excuse him, he had some other pressing business. He ushered me to the hallway and shut his office door behind me. Down the long hallway from the morgue, a tall woman in a doctor's coat came out of another office. She asked if I were the one investigating the murder, then quickly corrected herself and said, "I mean, I mean, the auto accident death." When I nodded, she said, "I just thought, I just wonder did he mention?" She gestured down the hall to the coroner's office. "There was a head wound, peculiar you see, I was helping with the autopsy, I thought we had taken a picture of it, but now I can't find it here . . ." I followed her into her office where on the cluttered desk was a stack of autopsy photos. As she answered the phone, I picked them up. You, as a naked dead man, Mark. She hung up the phone and said, "I can't find it, but I was sure we took a picture of it . . ." I told her the coroner had said there was nothing unusual and I asked if we couldn't go down the hall and talk to him together. She said no, that she had probably just gotten it wrong. There'd been three autopsies that day because of the murders in nearby Fredricstown. She took the photos from me, scrutinized them one by one, and then quickly put them away in the desk. "I got it wrong, I got it wrong . . . it must have been one of the others." She pulled a bundle of keys from her pocket and again I was ushered into the hall. She said she had been called for an emergency in the hospital upstairs and she locked her office door and walked down the hall toward the elevators. As I drove back to the city I was remembering what Janet had told me. She said the cops had been around, asking about me.

They took me off your case, Mark. Your mother ran out of money and the firm refused to take it "pro bono"—for the public good. (Who then is the public? What then is the good?) Politely I said, "Why not?" They said they couldn't afford it. I said, "He was so young . . ."

Mark, there was no proof of it. Mark, if those spots of blood on the road are yours, if they beat you and you walked, staggering, to where you fell and began that other long fall into something else . . . Mark, behind the trying to put it together, behind the yeses and the nos, behind right and wrong and justice and truth, a weeping is always about to begin.

Listen. I, a stranger to your life, also walked alone at night. Last night I walked over by the marsh behind the high school football field. I carried a silence, I wanted a silence, the softhearted words of a Michigan night. Then suddenly, a loud clattering, the kingfisher calling from the trees by the stream that feeds the hungry marsh. Not melodious, not sweet, a dissonance. Why did I say yes to it? Why, as I walked alone, did I welcome that cacophony? Mark, it was something less than music, but even so, it was the sound of something that hadn't broken yet.□

Dennis Patrick Slattery

DEMETER-PERSEPHONE AND THE *ALIEN*(S) CULTURAL BODY

With the rapid advance of technology into our private lives, a movement that has become so persistent that it begins to collapse all boundaries between our public and private domains, as Joshua Meyrowitz has recently written, another dimension of culture would seem to have undergone a radical transformation—cultural myths themselves.[1] Joseph Campbell wrote shortly before his death that "modern knowledge of space is coming to shape our mythology," and in so doing, it reformats our perception of culture and its values.[2]

Closer to a discussion of myth's expression in film, Robert Romanyshyn's new and provocative study *Technology as Symptom and Dream* argues that "films are cultural daydreams and in each of these films our culture is inventing and dreaming new ways of remaking the body and expressing its underlying concerns about this power of creation."[3]

Such a powerful statement about the efficacy of film as a repository of cultural daydreams, which I equate with an age's prevailing mythos, is certainly found in two films, *Alien* and its sequel, *Aliens*. In both science fiction narratives, but especially in the latter, several revisionings of culture are given expression through the underlying myth of Demeter and Persephone, and through it, a reformation of the body itself. For as films like *The Natural, Field of Dreams*, and *Star Wars* retrieve and reinvent the Homeric quest of the son for the father, and *Three Sovereigns for Sarah* would appear to reimagine the tragedy of Pentheus who falls victim to the mesmerized women of Thebes in Euripedes' *Bacchae*, so does *Aliens* remember in a new way human embodiment, the underworld, repression, the monstrous mother, virgin, warrior, and nurturer in its expression of the mother's quest for her daughter.

Moreover, *Aliens* is a film about sleep and dream, both underworld activities, and about confronting excess in the form of the monstrous alien creatures themselves. It is a film dealing with the confrontation of the alien within human nature, for it is too facile to say simply that the alien in the films is the reptile-like lizard with acidic body fluid; rather, the alien may in fact be, through the filters of technology, the underworld side of ourselves that conspires to both frighten and to promise growth simultaneously. *Aliens* seeks depth, newness, a modern technological version of *Nekyia*, a night journey into the underworld and a retrieval of the child, as well as a confrontation with the origins of alienation in the form of a creature that technology has created, or that has come into being to shadow the bright promises of a technological world wherein commerce and efficiency are powerful forces of the new mythology.

To be sure, what is retrieved in the frightening void of uncharted space across which a young troop of marines traverse to explore the health of planet LB 426, a planet which earth has lost contact with, is a psychological sense of reality that pierces any literal explanation of the movie's motive. Myths, writes Nor Hall in *The Moon and the Virgin*, allow us to remember parts of our personal and collective history that elude us, leaving only traces.[4] And while Campbell speaks of transcendence as an action that myths

[1]Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985) 111.

[2]Eugene Kennedy, "Interview with Joseph Campbell on Mythology," *Forum* 1987: 4-24.

[3]Robert Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 11.

[4]Nor Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin* (New York: Harper, 1980) 47.

allow us culturally, I would prefer to speak of depth, of a deepening awareness of our plight through the dreams that this space adventure offers us. The film speaks metaphorically and therefore psychically to a level of human action that technology's shadow, the alien other, promises to remove from our experience.

Aliens prescribes such a world within the corporate greed that technology has been used to promote, signified by the young opportunist, Burke. It is a world that has become so reasonable and efficient within its structure that its pathology is missed. Modes of communication are technical and full of clanking jargon, a kind of techno-babble filled with words like "Hyperdine 2," "zenomorph," "LB 426" as a place of habitation, "brain lock," said of someone who has been too terrified to speak, and "android." Its highly technical speech dismisses most human speaking, wherein one's experience can be humanly communicated to another. The presence of Lt. Ripley and her new foundling, "Newt," retrieves some of the vegetation of language and human love missing in its technical expressions of efficiency. Their relationship within the war zone of man against beast softens both the language and the action to allow values not inherent in a competitive world to resurface.

But if the myth that gave rise to the Eleusinian mysteries in classical Greece is the central story of the separation and then re-membrance of mother and daughter, then what, we might ask, is the myth informing us of regarding the feminine, fruitfulness, the underworld, and dreaming? How does the myth of psyche through the story of Demeter and Persephone inform us of something true in our own culture? Who, to ask it another way, is Demeter and Persephone, and the alien mother, psychologically? What, finally, is alien consciousness?

I do not deny the truth of Carol Gilligan's observation that the Demeter-Persephone story critiques the feminine attitude toward power, but I would not want to stop there.[5] Demeter and Persephone may certainly be at the heart of feminine consciousness. And much of their importance lies in the fantasy of the child, who, in the image of Newt, is dangerously hurled back and forth between Ripley and the monstrous (m)other. The cult and consciousness of the child is equally important to the story, especially the place of the orphan psychologically, as well as her capture and retrieval by the mothers. And the alien is more akin to Hekate, "the negative side," as Helen Luke writes, "the dark side, the goddess of ghosts and witches and of the spells with which the unconscious binds us, or those near to us, from below."[6]

Persephone is, initially, the nameless maiden, as Jean Bolen has written of her.[7] She is the young girl who does not yet know her own identity. And yet she can serve as guide to the underworld. By contrast, Demeter is the maternal archetype (Bolen 171); "she is maternal instinct fulfilled through providing physical, psychological, or spiritual nourishment to others" (172). Not needing to be a biological mother, she reveals that maternal persistence if a child is in danger; she is stubborn, patient, and persevering. And it is the rescue of Newt in the boiling, steaming underworld of the alien mother's den that marks the crucial action of the film as well as the return to consciousness of an archetype that power issues would promise to occlude.

But not before Ripley has survived in hyper sleep for 57 years after escaping the monstrous reptiles in *Alien*. She is accidentally found by a team of salvage workers who have been foraging the arid space fields for lost or missing merchandise. Up to this point, Ripley has spent more of her life in sleep and dream than she has awake. She has lived, as Arnold Mindell calls it, "a somatic consciousness."[8] As the men complain about losing their salvage rights to this wandering ship, the cinematic fade-out is exacting; we see the sleeping face of Ripley meld into the contour of the earth's round profile for an instant. Sleeping face and blue earth become one just long enough for us to identify this Demeter figure with the entire planet. This early cinematic image serves as a controlling motif for the relation between earth, Ripley, and Newt.

At the space station, portrayed as little more than a revolving corporation, Ripley remains

[5]Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982) 48.

[6]Helen Luke, *Woman, Earth, and Spirit: The Feminine in Symbol and Myth* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 55.

[7]Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (New York: Harper, 1984) 199.

[8]Arnold Mindell, *Dreambody: The Body's Role in Revealing the Self*, eds. Sisa Sternback-Scott and Becky Goodman (Santa Monica: Sigo, 1982) 162.

angry with those who place financial gain above the lives of the families on LB 426, a stance which, as in *Dune*, becomes surprising in a power-profit arena. Despondent and depressed over the loss of her crew, she is terrified in dream by the sudden movings of the alien incubus, a monstrous foetus attempting to burst through her abdomen to continue the epidemic spread of aliens she has fought so hard to destroy or escape. What she dreams and what she experiences in waking life merge such that for a time we as audience cannot discern where to stand because reality slips between underworld dream and upperworld consciousness; what wakes her are the dream memories of the incubus birthing grotesquely through her stomach. Her awareness of the aliens grows as she refuses all offers of work.

Coaxed out of her depression by Burke, who sees in what Ripley knows an opportunity for economic gain, she accepts an offer to return to incinerate LB 426. By returning to confront the monstrous aliens in waking life, she may then free herself from them in dream; but the action of a return to destroy the planet is to become a return and retrieval of the sole survivor. And here the movement of the film is steadily down, into depth, into what is below the surface. In a pattern reminiscent of *Heart of Darkness*, Ripley's journey is from the main station, to the space station, then to LB 426, then into the series of air tunnels below the surface, and finally into the lair of the great mother alien herself. Her literal descent is to the source of the aliens; it is a double-edged journey, for the quest to destroy the monstrous threats to civilization takes on another value, the survival of the young girl who by wit and cunning has been able to elude the predators.

Rebecca Jordan's nickname is "Newt," an appropriate epithet, for it constellates both worlds, that of the alien creatures and human beings. Biologically, newts are semiaquatic salamanders, lizard-like amphibians having porous scaleless skin.[9] As such, they are not unrelated to the shapes of the aliens themselves who can inhabit both dry and aquatic realms. Newt herself has become an underworld figure, hiding below the surface, moving quickly in the shadows and thereby surviving the creature's insatiable appetite for more hosts for an endless supply of parasitic offspring. The film moves more definitively between two worlds, that of adult leader and child guide, of upper world and underworld, of land and water, of nurturing mother and devouring mother, as the presence of Newt imaginatively fills out the Demeter-Persephone-Hekate myth. Surface and depth is another way of speaking of the alien dream and the familiar world of waking life; but these boundaries continue to blur when the survival of Newt and her recovery transforms Ripley, who enters now in waking life the underworld consciousness that Newt provokes. In an important way, Newt becomes the occasion for underworld consciousness to surface.

Only after the spaceship of marines lands and the battle with the aliens begins between crew and creatures does Newt surface from beneath the metal walkways and steel grids where she has occupied a den filled with rags, clothing, pictures, and assorted remembrances of her earlier, more stable family life. And it is into this den that Ripley follows her, a den reminding us of the compactor in *Star Wars*, with its slowly compressing walls. She appears as an underworld creature, traumatized, exhausted, and shot at by the marines who mistake her for the enemy. And yet, in the way that mythic stories subvert themselves through irony, it will be Newt's wisdom as a guide in the underworld, the air vents of the colony, that allows anyone to survive.

Meeting Newt begins Ripley's transformation from angry warrior to nurturing mother. She warms quickly to the girl and focuses her attention on the exhausted child's well-being. Her bearing becomes more maternal; she softens, speaks in whispers while she washes Newt's dirty face. And it is to Ripley that the young girl softens and begins to speak. Successful in negotiating between two worlds, Newt begins to educate the crew on the labyrinth of passageways below the surface. She shows them how to negotiate between the upper world where they are most visible and vulnerable, and the lower world of ooze and hosts for the newly hatched aliens.

Below the surface, then, the clean and metallic technical world gives way to the sticky slime and brittle ooze that the creatures use to suspend their hosts so that larvae may be implanted in them to feed. The substance is membranous, translucent, and seems to harden into a brittle seal to encase the victims. The alien creatures themselves have sticky mouths and exhale ferocious hissing sounds. They are, as

[9] *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 2d ed., ed. David B. Guralnik (New York: 1968) 427.

well, extremely intelligent and seem able to outthink and outsmart the strategy of Ripley and Corporal Hicks, her male comrade and most clever strategist. Birthing, nourishment, feeding, melting are the seminal actions of the aliens. They are capable of descending and devouring entire stations with their prolific and mechanical reproductivity as they rise out of underworld habitations.

James Hillman has written that the fundamental image "of all underworlds is that of contained space, even if the limits are shrouded and undefined. Junk and garbage in dream is underworld perception."[10] Excrement, sludge, all that is discarded becomes part of its inner geography. The underworld takes us to what is discarded, what seems excremental, elemental. "Rottenness, putrefaction, decay are part of the underworld . . . in which the soul battles animals, ferocious dogs, demons, grotesque creatures."[11] Such is the place of Newt's survival, even as her neighbors in such an underworld are the powerful, sly, and quick-breeding creatures that would devour her. Into such a world Ripley and her team enter. And it is into such slime that people are placed to die slowly or be impregnated and suffer the growth of the larvae.

Furthermore, the world of space "out there" is in fact the world "in here," namely, mythically present and, through the archetype of the feminine, busy retrieving the essential action of the goddess in the underworld. The film's action works the reverse—what is inside and down under must become outside and topside. Belly, womb, earth, become underbelly; it is an underbelly world in all of this space. The underworld is the realm of the unconscious; it is psychic geography, archetypal in structure. Within such a complex, the relation of mother and daughter battles to survive and grow to become the central value of the film, a value that separates it from commerce, mercantilism, and greed. Ripley mothers and nurtures Newt, promising her early on that she will never abandon her, a promise that would seem to be in direct conflict with her pact with Hicks, who promises to kill both himself and Ripley rather than become a receptacle for the alien incubus.

Before the first attack of the aliens, Ripley puts Newt to bed in the laboratory which contains new specimens of the reptiles in their early formation. Vicious, with stinging whiplike tails and rapid speed, these early forms of alien life soon attack both Newt and Ripley. But before their assault of the two females, and possibly foreboding it, Newt is frightened at the prospect of sleeping in the open on a cot in plain view, for her survival has rested on her underground existence. Ripley reassures her and leaves, only to return to find that Newt has slipped under the cot and there is sleeping soundly. Instead of returning her to the cot, Ripley crawls under with her, and the scene then shows both sleeping as one. Together they share the dream of the monstrous and the underworld terror the beasts compel. They share as well their underworld dreams along with their upperworld fears of the monsters. The two may be viewed as dream figures, just as they will sleep free of the alien horror at the end of the film when the space shuttle transports them home. Neither, however, has yet entered the underworld den that is the source of the monster's breeding. It is as if they needed to meet first before descending, one by force and the other by love, to the inner station of the underworld.

The terror of dream and a similar reality in waking life merge as the two awaken to the sounds of a crab-like scurrying across the lab floor. Burke has disarmed Ripley and let loose the specimen in hopes that both of them will be impregnated so he can transport it back to the space station and sell it to science for a profit. But Burke's act of greed serves a higher purpose.

What is at stake in the film, I believe, is the fantasy of the child itself and its relation to the mother, for it reveals how recovering the child at the same time retrieves the mother, allowing her to surface. When the mother surfaces the child is retrieved. But in Newt's loss and eventual recovery from the underworld where she will be placed in a mucous sack as a potential host for a new alien, Ripley also confronts the "great mother," the devouring egg-laying machine that is as ferocious in her possessiveness as she is prolific in her reproductivity. The monstrous and mechanical mother, like the goddess Hekate, is as wrathful in her desire to keep Newt as Ripley is to recover this child-daughter. The narrative asks that we consider the connection between finding and rescuing Newt and discovering in the process the den of mechanical reproduction

[10]James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper, 1979) 188.

[11]James Hillman, "Abandoning the Child," *Loose Ends* (Dallas: Spring, 1985) 147.

where the alien queen lays her eggs in a startlingly rapid rhythm. What is the relationship between the daughter (Newt) and the mother (alien) that is crucial for Ripley? She cannot have one without inheriting the other. And why does she need to travel so deeply into the station's interior to retrieve the child and confront the terrible monster simultaneously? Hillman's observation illumines this passage so we might move in the right direction. He writes that Hades is a god of depths (*Dream* 27). To go deep "is to approach the true" (29). Only when Ripley can approach her own death for the life of another can she then find the origin of life of the alien other. Here she steps into the origin of the monstrous. At issue here is depth itself. For Hillman, it carries both "what we love and what we wish to destroy" at once (73); any authentic new life of the soul must be paid for by the suffering attendant upon some loss. And yet, nowhere in the film is Ripley more alone or more herself than at this juncture when she must travel, in courage and self-sacrifice, into the gaseous underworld of the station to retrieve Newt.

Her only companion as she descends with grenades, a flame thrower, and a machine gun—the powers of technology—is the soft feminine voice on a recording announcing the minutes left before LB 426 will self-destruct in a nuclear explosion. Here she enters the close spaces that typify underworld geography. Mindell writes that vaults, caves, holes in the earth, crevices, are all underworld pockets of the earth goddess. It is also the place of depression, physical illness, of sinking in the body, and of hopelessness. It is the last station before absolute death, then new life (158). The fear of fire and destruction, the fear of the monstrous other—to these she heads in a frontal assault with only one image to guide her, the only image for which she lives: Newt. But toward what else does she move? To a retrieval of her own childhood?

But perhaps we shouldn't read this descent too narrowly, for it has a wider basis: technological consciousness itself. Are the aliens, masters of mechanical reproduction with powerful and deadly battery-like acid for fluid, another mutation of technology? In this sense they are not unlike the android Bishop, whose body fluid is more the milk-white substance of ichor, that milky liquid the gods exude when wounded during the Trojan War. The aliens may be, in fact, more like us than we wish to imagine, for they may reflect our own sense of the body, as Romanyshyn has observed (19). They are created almost as a by-product of technology and reveal our dual concern culturally with a nostalgia of retrieving a not so innocent childhood, along with a simultaneous discovery of the origins of a modern alienation with the human body. *Aliens* asks us to reconsider our relationship with the body and with the underworld, for there does exist a connection, even a close identification, of the body with/as the unconscious.

The subterranean or underworld journey of Ripley is, in addition, at once an odyssey toward a retrieval of the child and a confrontation with the maker of the modern monstrous body with such innate power that the weapons of technology—short of an atomic blast ("the only way to be sure," says Corporal Hicks)—are helpless against it. I believe that the descent by Ripley into the depths of this dehumanized planet touches a powerful cultural cord the resonances of which are no less than our own planet's survival. And, that at this juncture in the narrative the participants are comprised of an all-female cast, suggests the positive and indispensable power in such a quest: what we wish to destroy and what we love are wedded here in the image of the mechanical reproductive mother and in the virgin mother, the Demeter consciousness of Ripley. At issue is childhood or Newt consciousness. The adult must return to childhood to re-find imagination, believes Hillman. "Lost childhood has meant lost imaginal power" ("Abandoning" 144). As Freud has noted in the same context, the world of the unconscious is the world of childhood, a condition governed by the archetype of the child. Newt is her child, or better said, her *as child*, her as imagination. She must retrieve the child who, without her insistence, would inevitably become the abandoned child.

Ripley descends, then, into the underworld's other dimension, timelessness. She leaves the recorded voice of time and enters the timeless lair, where, as she recovers Newt from the mucous wall where she is trapped, all becomes still except for the sucking sound of the alien mother laying pods. To leave the world of time and enter timelessness is to shift "from a material to a psychological point of view" (Hillman, *Dream* 54). It is as if Ripley and Newt enter a still point, where the threat of the station's exploding and the noise above dissolve under the presence of the mechanical laying of eggs. Together Newt and Ripley dream the

where the alien queen lays her eggs in a startlingly rapid rhythm. What is the relationship between the daughter (Newt) and the mother (alien) that is crucial for Ripley? She cannot have one without inheriting the other. And why does she need to travel so deeply into the station's interior to retrieve the child and confront the terrible monster simultaneously? Hillman's observation illumines this passage so we might move in the right direction. He writes that Hades is a god of depths (*Dream* 27). To go deep "is to approach the true" (29). Only when Ripley can approach her own death for the life of another can she then find the origin of life of the alien other. Here she steps into the origin of the monstrous. At issue here is depth itself. For Hillman, it carries both "what we love and what we wish to destroy" at once (73); any authentic new life of the soul must be paid for by the suffering attendant upon some loss. And yet, nowhere in the film is Ripley more alone or more herself than at this juncture when she must travel, in courage and self-sacrifice, into the gaseous underworld of the station to retrieve Newt.

Her only companion as she descends with grenades, a flame thrower, and a machine gun—the powers of technology—is the soft feminine voice on a recording announcing the minutes left before LB 426 will self-destruct in a nuclear explosion. Here she enters the close spaces that typify underworld geography. Mindell writes that vaults, caves, holes in the earth, crevices, are all underworld pockets of the earth goddess. It is also the place of depression, physical illness, of sinking in the body, and of hopelessness. It is the last station before absolute death, then new life (158). The fear of fire and destruction, the fear of the monstrous other—to these she heads in a frontal assault with only one image to guide her, the only image for which she lives: Newt. But toward what else does she move? To a retrieval of her own childhood?

But perhaps we shouldn't read this descent too narrowly, for it has a wider basis: technological consciousness itself. Are the aliens, masters of mechanical reproduction with powerful and deadly battery-like acid for fluid, another mutation of technology? In this sense they are not unlike the android Bishop, whose body fluid is more the milk-white substance of ichor, that milky liquid the gods exude when wounded during the Trojan War. The aliens may be, in fact, more like us than we wish to imagine, for they may reflect our own sense of the body, as Romanyshyn has observed (19). They are created almost as a by-product of technology and reveal our dual concern culturally with a nostalgia of retrieving a not so innocent childhood, along with a simultaneous discovery of the origins of a modern alienation with the human body. *Aliens* asks us to reconsider our relationship with the body and with the underworld, for there does exist a connection, even a close identification, of the body with/as the unconscious.

The subterranean or underworld journey of Ripley is, in addition, at once an odyssey toward a retrieval of the child and a confrontation with the maker of the modern monstrous body with such innate power that the weapons of technology—short of an atomic blast ("the only way to be sure," says Corporal Hicks)—are helpless against it. I believe that the descent by Ripley into the depths of this dehumanized planet touches a powerful cultural cord the resonances of which are no less than our own planet's survival. And, that at this juncture in the narrative the participants are comprised of an all-female cast, suggests the positive and indispensable power in such a quest: what we wish to destroy and what we love are wedded here in the image of the mechanical reproductive mother and in the virgin mother, the Demeter consciousness of Ripley. At issue is childhood or Newt consciousness. The adult must return to childhood to re-find imagination, believes Hillman. "Lost childhood has meant lost imaginal power" ("Abandoning" 144). As Freud has noted in the same context, the world of the unconscious is the world of childhood, a condition governed by the archetype of the child. Newt is her child, or better said, her *as child*, her as imagination. She must retrieve the child who, without her insistence, would inevitably become the abandoned child.

Ripley descends, then, into the underworld's other dimension, timelessness. She leaves the recorded voice of time and enters the timeless lair, where, as she recovers Newt from the mucous wall where she is trapped, all becomes still except for the sucking sound of the alien mother laying pods. To leave the world of time and enter timelessness is to shift "from a material to a psychological point of view" (Hillman, *Dream* 54). It is as if Ripley and Newt enter a still point, where the threat of the station's exploding and the noise above dissolve under the presence of the mechanical laying of eggs. Together Newt and Ripley dream the

monstrous into waking life; it is a quiet moment, and strangely peaceful, as Ripley, with her technical weaponry, and the alien mother assess one another.

Shortly thereafter Ripley begins a slow and methodical incineration of the den of pods as the alien detaches herself to pursue them out of the underworld. Rising out of an adjoining elevator, she is able to tuck herself into the hollow of the space vehicle as Bishop helps the two human survivors escape; together they return to the central station out of the now incinerated heart of darkness. Newt, in danger of being found under the metal gridwork of the landing dock, screams for her mother, Ripley, who performs a curious reversal of the alien role. As the alien beast threatens to recapture Newt and return her to the underworld, Ripley once again, as she had earlier, climbs into the mechanical loader which empowers her beyond mortal limits and makes possible her assault on the alien. The reversal I speak of has to do with the position of inside/outside in confronting the aliens. For as the violent and angry larvae which grow within the body of humanity punch through the skin of the stomach when approached, now an angry and violent Ripley steps into the interior of the walking loader and controls its movements from levers and knobs within the machinery. The battle is now not just of survival but for power.

Technology confronts the primitive instinctive rage of the mythical beast; Demeter and Hekate war for Newt. Ripley is now within the machine and gives it life as the embryos of the alien have inhabited the interior of individuals to take away their life. Now feminine organism confronts feminine mechanism. Both are excessive and beyond mortal limits. More significantly, she who is virginal but nurturing faces the embodiment of excessive reproduction without restraint with the child at the center of their battle.

As they contend for power, Newt once again is at risk; she begins to be pulled toward the hole in the space station that Ripley has opened in order to draw the alien into the dark void of space; but what promises a sure extinction of the monstrous feminine threatens to send them all hurling into oblivion. If the great alien mother is victorious, it would portend the destruction of human existence, for her progeny would inhabit all planets and stations that support life. In their rage for victory, however, both females risk losing what they are fighting to preserve, but for opposed reasons.

At such a crucial moment in the action, the android Bishop, even though he has been torn in two by the alien, exhibits determination in saving Newt from being pulled through the air lock into space. Seemingly human but actually synthetic as a representation of a third form of embodiment, Bishop exhibits more generosity and feeling than do most of the fully human characters. As he is synthetic, he is most human in his caring. Initially rejected by Ripley, he is the model that she becomes most like. He is wise, humble, generous, and selfless. As a synthetic android he is a god of the machine, master of computer technology and incapable of harming another. Together Ripley and Bishop destroy the alien while preserving Newt.

In its broad action, *Aliens* is a film that retrieves the myth of the mother and daughter, the archetypal great mother, while bridging the space between surface and depth, destruction and preservation, inner and outer. It is a film of hyperbole, of exaggeration. Through her fidelity to Newt, Ripley retrieves the child in herself. To retrieve the child, to move from virgin to mother, is to enact the archetype of Demeter.[12]

The film ends as it began, with the image of the dreamers sleeping through space. Alone in her dreaming when the film begins, Ripley is now with her daughter dreaming toward home in the final scene. Newt and Ripley, along with a wounded but alive Corporal Hicks, dream together with direction. They form a mother-daughter couple. Earth is protected from the ravages of the alien, but not necessarily from an alien consciousness that may appear in another form to devour and consume. What is important is that the myth has been allowed to reshape itself, to keep a dimension of the human alive by confronting an important aspect of the alien self, for the film's confrontation points back to all of us dreaming quietly together in the theater. Demeter consciousness is one which continually retrieves vegetation, life, renewal; as such, she is the ecological goddess who, with her daughter, gives back to the earth what a technological profit motive usurps. That this form of alienation has been subdued does not mean that the battle for the earth is over; it has simply been forestalled.□

[12]James Hillman, *Anima: An Anatomy of a Personified Notion* (Dallas: Spring, 1983) 29.

Dennis Patrick Slattery *teaches courses in literature, writing, and culture at Incarnate Word College, where he is English Department Coordinator.*

César Vallejo

TRILCE

Translated by Rebecca Seiferle

xxxiii.

If tonight it rains, I would withdraw
a thousand years from here.
Better a hundred, no more.
As if nothing had happened, I would imagine
I am still becoming.

Or motherless, loverless, without the insistent
kneeling to spy the innermost, pure
pulse,
on a night like this, I would be combing
the vedic fibre,
the vedic wool of my final end, devil's
thread, sign of having held
by their nostrils
time's two disconsonant clappers
in a single bell.

Taking account of my life
or accounting that I am still unborn,
will not suffice to deliver me.

What has not yet arrived will not be, but
what has come and already gone,
but what has come and already gone.

XXXV.

The meeting with the beloved,
so much of the time, is a mere detail,
almost a violet racing program
of such length it can't be easily doubled.

Lunch with her would be
setting the course that we liked yesterday
and so repeat today,
but with a little more mustard,
the fork engrossed, her radiant gifting
of a pistil in May, and her bashfulness
over a penny, at robbing me of nothing.
And the lyrical and nervous beer
that her two hopless stalks guard
and of which you shouldn't drink too much!

And the other enchantments of that table
which her nubile country embroiders
with germinal kitchen utensils
that have worked all morning,
as is clear to me, for me,
loving notary of these intimacies,
and with the ten magical wands
of her pancreatic fingers.

Woman who, without thinking any more of it,
frees the blackbird and places before us
her tender words
like serrated lettuce recently cut.

Another glass and I'll go. Yes, we'll march off,
now, yes, to work.

Meanwhile she reaches inside
the curtain and oh needle
of my torn days! fingers a seam's
edge, to stitch my side
to her side,
to sew on this shirt button
that keeps falling off. But seen by her!

Will Brantley

IN DEFENSE OF SUBJECTIVITY: THE FILM CRITICISM OF PAULINE KAEL

A predominant feature of the postmodern age is its intense reflexivity. We have become accustomed to works of literature like John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* where the process of creating the work becomes a subject of the work itself. Nor are we surprised to find critics reflecting on the "act" of their criticism in what is often a new attempt to answer old questions: for example, how does the critic's job of work—the expression is R. P. Blackmur's—differ from that of the creative artist?; what are the unifying threads in a diverse body of criticism?; or what is it that distinguishes a critic's approach to different media and to different works within the same medium? Some critics—Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, for example—seem especially drawn to analyzing their own critical processes, and on the whole I think it fair to say that the self-reflexive nature of their work derives from an impulse which prompts them to acknowledge what they are doing as they are doing it—that is, to come to terms with the full complexity and limitations of their critical performances. Pauline Kael is a different kind of critic: she has never felt much need to reflect extensively on her own critical processes, and her always assured tone (some would say too sure) leads us to suspect that while she freely acknowledges the difficulty of her task, she has no doubts that her criticism can help readers confront a film in ways that are meaningful, perhaps even useful. This is not to say that *other* critics and commentators have failed to reflect on the nature of Kael's criticism as well as her short-lived involvement with the film industry. In fact, a complete bibliography of works about Kael would turn up articles with titles not unlike the following: "Reeling from Swamp Gas: Film Critics Review Film Critics Reviewing Film Critics."[1]

Though commentators have not been reluctant to acknowledge Kael's influence over the years, and even her detractors often use her reviews as a springboard for their own ideas, there are still features of Kael's work that have not been given serious attention.[2] This essay is therefore an attempt to offer some new perspectives on Pauline Kael by exploring and bringing together some of her most provocative comments on what she perceives to be the nature of the film medium and her function as a critic. By taking a careful look at some of Kael's

[1]J. Leonard, "Reeling from Swamp Gas: Film Critics Review Film Critics Reviewing Film Critics," *More* Nov. 1976: 32-34. For a sampling of such pieces, see Nat Hentoff, "The Critics' Quadrille: Calling Pauline's Tune," *Closeup: Last Tango in Paris*, ed. Karl E. Carroll (New York: Grove Press, 1973) 167-76; Marc A. Le Sueur, "Theory Number Four: Film Criticism and the Mannerist Alternative, or Pauline and Stanley and Richard and Agnes," *Journal of Popular Film* 4.4 (1975): 326-33; Greil Marcus, "The Critics' Inquisition," *Rolling Stone* 4 Sept. 1980: 26-27; Isabel Quigley, "The American as Movie Critic: Sarris, Simon, Kael and McDonald," *Encounter* Jan. 1974: 40-47; and Wilfrid Sheed, "Kael vs. Sarris vs. Simon," *The Good Word and Other Words* (New York: Dutton, 1978) 121-26. Other reflections on Kael's work worth mentioning include Will Atkins, "The Erotics of Pauline Kael," *Christopher Street* June 1980: 60-62; Raymond Durgnant, "How Not to Enjoy Movies," *Films and Feelings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967) 152-65; Norman Mailer, "A Transit to Narcissus," *The New York Review of Books* 17 May 1973: 3-10; and Jonas Mekas, "What Pauline Kael Lost at the Movies," *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: Collier Books, 1972) 203-9.

[2]In an overview of the film industry during the seventies called "We Lost It at the Movies," film critic and historian Richard Corliss writes: "It's fair to say that, in the small circle of wary acquaintances known as the New York film-critical community, Pauline Kael's name comes up more than that of any one film, or filmmaker. You couldn't take a critic to lunch without hearing the latest on Kael's opinions, her prose style, the way she brought her power to bear on filmmakers, publishers, and fellow critics." Not only does Corliss claim that "Kael set the agenda for films and issues in the Seventies," he points to a poll where nine of fifteen New York critics named her as the critic they would most prefer to read. See *Film Comment* Jan.-Feb. 1980: 36.

best-known work (particularly her long essay on *Citizen Kane*, now in its twenty-first year) as well as her lesser known pieces, I will analyze the way she actually "works" as a critic who for thirty years has kept a close eye on the contradictions, intricate workings, and occasional pleasures of a self-serving commercialized art.

I

That commentators have often found it difficult to deal with Kael's method of analysis is incontestable. An early reviewer of *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* said, for example, that "It is easy to recognize what guides most film critics in their approaches (e.g. Andrew Sarris's sense of the auteur, Dwight McDonald's concern with culture, John Simon's dedication to art, Bosley Crowther's morality), but Pauline Kael's criticism does not come from any such commitment. In her new Book, *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*, as always, her source is herself."[3] To a degree, this is correct; it is difficult to place a name tag on Kael's critical method, but to maintain, as this reviewer does, that she "draws personal criticism because this is the natural end of her criticism" is to misunderstand her approach altogether. Critics have often failed to see that "subjectivity," "flexibility," and "eclecticism"—words which *can* be adequately applied to Kael—do not exclude a sense of commitment, nor do they imply a confusion of standards and methods (more likely, they imply a feeling for different contexts, a realization that what works in one situation might not work in another). Perhaps the best way to explain Kael's method is to cite one of her own discussions of the critic's role and to show that she has adhered to her own "pluralistic" definition. Taken from her now famous essay "Circles and Squares, Joys and Sarris," the following passage is part of a refutation of Andrew Sarris's more restrictive auteur theory of film history and criticism. After having named some of the qualities generally associated with great critics—intelligence, experience, sensitivity, perceptions, lucidity, dedication, imagination, and fervor—Kael presents her own criteria:

> The role of the critic is to help people see what is in the work, what is in it that shouldn't be, what is not in it that could be. He is a good critic if he helps people understand more about the work than they could see for themselves; he is a great critic, if by his understanding and feeling for the work, by his passion, he can excite people so that they want to experience more of the art that is there, waiting to be seized. He is not necessarily a bad critic if he makes errors in judgment. (Infallible taste is inconceivable; what could it be measured against?) He is a bad critic if he does not awaken the curiosity, enlarge the interests and understanding of his audience. The art of the critic is to transmit his knowledge of and enthusiasm for art to others.[4]

Kael *is* the central force of her writing, yet she does not lose sight of her readers, nor does she write down to them. They may not share her tastes, but she assumes they will respond to her interests.

When asked why she writes about film instead of something else, Kael responded with the following reasons: "I find that I can really take off into more things than anything else allows me to do. It works for me; it causes something to happen. I don't think that would be true for everyone. I suppose it relates to the particular kind of memory I have."[5] In a review of *Going Steady*, Richard Corliss argues that Kael's "knowledge of film history, official and *sub camera*, could be called 'encyclopedic' if it weren't so much more accurate and complete than any known film encyclopedia. . . ."[6] Yet Kael's recall of history is only one building block in her performance; it is the knowledge she brings to the subject of the moment that might justify our calling her an interdisciplinary critic even though her immediate topic is film. Stephen Farber may be correct in claiming that "One often reads her less for what she has to say

[3]F.A. Macklin, "Pauline Kael: Tangents Become Thesis," review of *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*, by Pauline Kael, *Commonweal* 28 June 1968: 444.

[4]Pauline Kael, "Circles and Squares, Joys and Sarris," *I Lost It at the Movies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965) 308.

[5]D.N. Mount, "Authors and Editors: Pauline Kael," *Publishers Weekly* 34 May 1971: 32.

[6]Richard Corliss, "Perils of Renata, Pearls of Pauline," review of *A Year in the Dark*, by Renata Adler, and *Going Steady*, by Pauline Kael, *National Review* 7 Apr. 1970: 369.

about the film than for her social and psychological insights." He adds that "her brief discussion of the transience of love in relation to *La Notte*" has stayed with him "longer than more laborious philosophical essays."[7] The same argument could be applied to Kael's brief explanation for the painful confusion of contemporary sexual attitudes in her review of the films of the French director Bertrand Blier. I have read the attempts of many commentators to deal with this problem, but few, to my mind, have been as convincing or as trenchantly expressed as is Kael's:

> The social comedy in Blier's work is essentially sexual comedy: sex screws us up, we get nicked in the groin or jumped from behind, idiots make out better than we do, and some people are so twisted that no matter what we try to do for them they wreck everything. And sex between men and women is insanely mixed up with men's infantile longings and women's maternal passions. Sexually, life is a Keystone comedy, and completely amoral—we have no control over who or what excites us.[8]

As Ernest Lindgren wrote in the late forties: "The critical attitude is an attitude to art and to living and he who adopts it embarks on an endless voyage of exploration and discovery."[9] Reviewers like Farber who have valued Pauline Kael for exactly those insights which reach beyond a given film have inadvertently underscored one of the unifying threads in her work—one of her own self-acknowledged functions: to explore the ways in which films reflect and affect our psycho-social concerns, the ways in which they affect us on both conscious and subconscious levels.

Writing on film is at a peak of popularity now (hence the need to understand even the most radical of critical approaches), yet Kael acknowledges that she is doing things in film criticism that "not too many other people are doing," and to find parallels to her method it is often necessary to look beyond her fellow film critics—both those in the academic community and in journalism (Mount 32). There are more connections between Kael and various literary and interdisciplinary critics, or even between Kael and a postmodern critic like Georges Poulet, whose approach is rooted in phenomenology, than there are between Kael and, say, Penelope Gilliat with whom she alternated six-month reviewing stints for eleven years at *The New Yorker*.

Actually, the connection between Kael and Poulet is not as slight as one might immediately suspect. Though an extended discussion of the two would entail the sort of far-fetched comparison at which Kael herself would scoff, the way both critics examine a work is not so greatly different. Poulet and "the critics of consciousness" believe that one must make a "subjective" attempt to feel and re-examine a work's basic impulse, which is essentially a motion of extreme empathy. Is this not what Kael does in any number of her pieces? Take for example this selection from the opening paragraph to her review of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*:

> *Taxi Driver* is the fevered story of an outsider in New York—a man who can't find any point of entry into human society. Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), the protagonist of Martin Scorsese's new film, from a script by Paul Schrader, can't find a life. He's an ex-Marine from the Midwest who takes a job driving a cab nights, because he can't sleep anyway, and he is surrounded by the night world of the uprooted—whores, pimps, transients. Schrader, who grew up in Michigan, in the Christian Reformed Church, a zealous Calvinist splinter (he didn't see a movie until he was seventeen), has created a protagonist who is an ascetic not by choice but out of fear. And Scorsese with his sultry moodiness and his appetite for the pulp sensationalism of forties movies, is just the director to define an American underground man's resentment. Travis wants to conform, but he can't find a group to conform to. So he sits and drives in the stupefied languor of anomie. He hates New York with a Biblical fury; it gives off the

[7]Stephen Farber, "Writing About Movies," *Partisan Review* 50 (1973): 116.

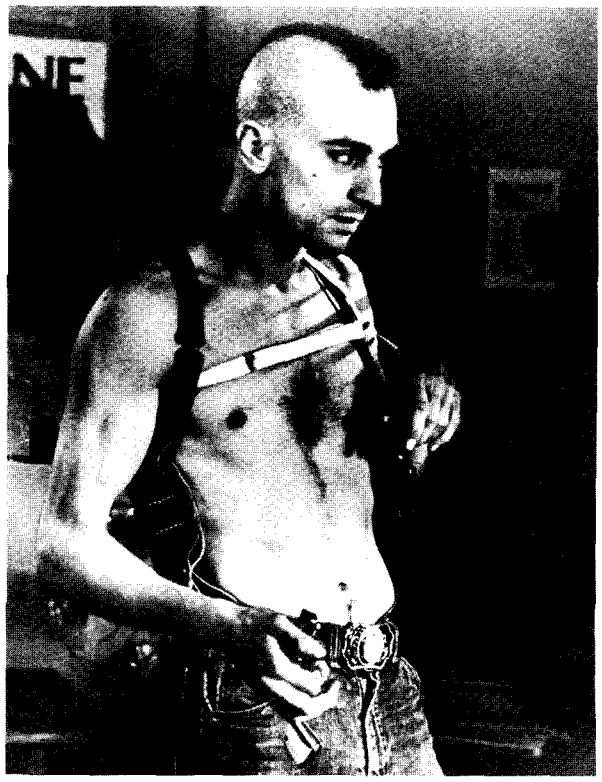
[8]Pauline Kael, "Bertrand Blier," *When the Lights Go Down* (New York: Holt, 1980) 456.

[9]Ernest Lindgren, *The Art of the Film* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948) 163.

stench of Hell, and its filth and smut obsess him.... Travis becomes sick with loneliness and frustration; and then, like a commando preparing for a raid, he purifies his body and goes into training to kill. *Taxi Driver* is a movie in heat, a raw tabloid version of *Notes from Underground*, and we stay with the protagonist's hatreds all the way.[10]

In this one paragraph Kael not only underlines the film's central impulse, she shows how and from what sources this impulse has manifested itself. The subjective intensity of her writing captures and conveys the emotional charge of the work itself.[11]

The goal of any subjective critic is not only to find associations, patterns, and connections in a work, or group of works, but to make them come alive on paper. Thus Kael relies heavily on figurative devices to convey her sense of the work. In her review of Frederick Wiseman's *High School*, for example, Kael uses an extended metaphor to recreate her experience of the film. Parallels between the school shown in this film and a military detention camp are made repeatedly so that we begin to see and understand the film through Kael's eyes; there is no pretense that we are getting an objective or neutral view. Kael refers to the "military doubletalk" of teachers who are not only "masters" ("in a superior position for the only time in their lives, probably"), but who are upholders of "bland authoritarianism" and who are "crushing and processing"—"the most insidious kind of enemy, the enemy with corrupt values who means well." The students are trapped; they "sit in oppressive monitored halls," the victims of "mediocrity and defeat."



Like the high school students of Kael's generation, the mid-thirties, they are "still serving time until graduation, still sitting in class staring out the windows or watching the crawling hands on those ugly school clocks."[12] Reading this review, one is struck by Kael's willingness to blur any existing distinction between film criticism, social commentary, and artistic creation itself.

A subjective critic is likely to lead readers into subjects and concerns they didn't expect to encounter, often leaving them with the need to reassess their initial responses to a work. Arthur Knight touched on an element related to this quality of Kael's criticism in a lecture he gave in 1976. Knight argued that Kael's "greatest forte is that she is able to take a very difficult film and explain it to the mass audience."[13] Kael is particularly strong in dealing with a film like Martin Ritt's *Hud*, where the filmmaker's initial impulses were confused (or "divided," as the title of her review of this film suggests), but

[10]Pauline Kael, "Underground Man," *When the Lights Go Down* 131.

[11]In the past few years the relationship between film studies and phenomenology has become the subject of much needed attention. In a recent representative article Dudley Andrew explores what he calls "the regency of the 'I' of phenomenology" and asks: "Who is not drawn to its claim to think with and through experience, and who is not likewise obsessed with precisely the experience of the movies?" In a remark that I believe typifies Kael's approach, Andrew says that phenomenology (like post-structuralism and hermeneutics) is "willing to entertain as necessary the priority of experience over system, or at least the vulnerability of system in confrontation with the life of private and cultural history." See "Hermeneutics and Cinema: The Issue of History," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 19.1 (1986): 21.

[12]Pauline Kael, "High School and Other Forms of Madness," *Deeper Into Movies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973) 19-24.

[13]Julian Reveles, "Knight: 'John Simon Is Useless,' Kael the Best, Ducks Rex Reed," *Variety* 26 Nov. 1976: 5.

where the audience still responded to what was good about the film—in this case, "its vital element: the nihilistic 'heel' who wants the good things of life and doesn't give a damn for the general welfare."[14] She defines *Hud*'s texture as "wisecracking naturalism," but argues that it suffers from conflicting aims at seriousness and success. Her method of analysis resides in her ability to draw from everything within her grasp, including her suspiciousness as a schoolgirl "about those who attacked American 'materialism'"; her awareness of Hollywood's vulnerability regarding prosperity; a firsthand knowledge for the "feel" of the time and place of the film; and her polemical response to other critics. By subjectively re-examining the conception of the film as well as its execution, Kael arrives at a conclusion that perhaps only a critic of consciousness or another less formalistic critic could fully accept. She writes: "By all formal theories, a work that is split cannot be a work of art, but leaving the validity of these principles aside, do they hold for lesser works—not for works of art but works of commerce and craftsmanship, sometimes fused by artistry?" Her answer is no, "that in some films the more ambivalence that comes through, the more the film may mean to us or the more fun it may be" ("*Hud*" 92-93).

As her reviews of *High School* and *Hud* indicate, Kael is not satisfied with just making

[14]Pauline Kael, "*Hud*, Deep in the Divided Heart of Hollywood," *I Lost It at the Movies* 79.

the work itself more accessible; she herself takes an equally creative role, one which helps to explain her response to a question posed at The American Film Institute: "Why don't you make films?" She is said by Mitch Tuchman to have replied: "I was talking to Bernardo [Bertolucci] the other day, and he said to me, 'What you do and what I do is the same thing.'"[15] This "criticism as art" attitude accounts for Kael's long-standing complaint against theory, which she has always regarded as preventing criticism from being a fully creative force (but more on this later), and it accounts, in part, for her need to move beyond formalism in the development of her critical method.

Curiously, formalistic criticism—the kind one associates with an academic critic like David Bordwell—requires an analytic skill which Kael as a critic possesses to a considerable degree, but which she also feels is something of a drawback to her criticism. In an interview with *Mademoiselle* Kael commented on this self-perceived shortcoming while explaining her feelings about being a woman film critic:

> Not too surprisingly, when a woman becomes a critic, the terms in which she is customarily described indicate the condescension and hostility that men seem to be unaware of. Whenever one of my books is reviewed, the same terms come up. I am described as bitchy or nervous or shrill or as impressionistic—that's a favorite term. "Impressionistic" suggests, of course, that a woman doesn't really have a good mind, but that she somehow takes off sense impressions though she can't organize them. If you think of my writing over a period of time, it's far more analytic than that of most critics, and that is probably my most serious limitation. But people think of that as a masculine trait and I don't think I've ever been described as analytic.[16]

Kael may be overguarded on this issue, though not without her reasons. Her criticism attests to the fact that formal analysis and subjective response need not subvert one another, and this is true even when her aim has been to trace the historical development of a film such as *Citizen Kane* from the time of its inception to its completion and exhibition to the public. Still, allowing for the validity of such an approach to fiction films like *Kane*, one might ask if Kael's approach is suited to another medium, that of documentary—a genre that tends to place in the foreground its formal structuring devices. While rereading Kael's documentary reviews in sequence, I wanted to see if she altered her usual approach and opted for something closer to one-hundred percent formal analysis and one-hundred percent critical intuition and subjective response. I discovered that while Kael rarely neglects the structural and formal elements of the non-fiction films she reviews (and is quick to note a structural weakness if she believes the quality of a film has been affected), she does not, finally, become more of a formalist than she is when reviewing films like *Last Tango in Paris* or *Nashville*—reviews where her subjective, descriptive approach is readily apparent and perhaps at its best. In her reviews of fiction and non-fiction films alike, Kael works on the assumption that we need not understand *how* a film gets its effect in order to appreciate the art that is there. Or as she wrote in "Trash, Art and the Movies," the "critic shouldn't need to tear a work apart to demonstrate that he knows how it was put together," that the important thing is "to convey what is new and beautiful in the work, not how it was made—which is more or less explicit."[17] Of course Kael is not the only critic to have expressed such a view. Literary and cultural critic Ihab Hassan has offered essentially the same argument, and some of his remarks seem particularly relevant to an understanding of Kael's position. Hassan claims that the critic, who must attempt to see past what is immediately accessible, must also recover "a spontaneity of judgment which reaches outward, reaches beyond itself."[18] This position leads him to argue that the formal elements of art are not always worth the emphasis critics give them. Hassan and Kael, in

[15]Mitch Tuchman, "Pauline Kael: The Desperate Critic," *Take One* Nov. 1977: 30.

[16]"Pauline Kael Talks About Violence, Sex, Eroticism and Women and Men and the Movies," Interview, *Mademoiselle* July 1972: 177-78.

[17]Pauline Kael, "Trash, Art and the Movies," *Going Steady* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970) 77.

[18]Ihab Hassan, "Beyond a Theory of Literature," *Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Gregory T. Poletta (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973) 143, 145.

their different ways, have each shown that criticism can gain new importance by examining the unstructured, nonformal elements of literature and film as well as the structured and formal ones.

Kael's review of George T. Nierenberg's *Say Amen, Somebody*, a documentary on some of the founders of gospel music, provides an excellent illustration of the dialectic between formal and nonformal concerns in her work, with the latter having the edge over the former. Kael analyzes the film's chief formal weaknesses, pointing to two problems. First, she says that the film reaches its emotional peak through its music about midway through, and that "much as we may enjoy the pioneers' reminiscences and be amused by the griping of their families, we feel let down when we get more and more talk and only snatches of song." But more important, Kael observes that the film is not structured so that we can understand how the music *produces* the singers' physical contortions that we glimpse under the film's closing titles. She has great respect for the filmmaker but concludes that "he's too genteel for his subject." Such analysis, though illuminating, is probably not what we carry away from this review (and though it concludes her discussion, it is not the focus of Kael's concern). What strikes me as truly memorable about this piece is the way Kael's precise yet always subjective descriptions *evoke* the film for us. Her description of the eighty-three-year-old Thomas A. Dorsey serves to illustrate:

A bantamweight, Dr. Dorsey flies with the beat as he conducts. . . . Waving his arms, he's in orbit, the way the great grasshopper Stravinsky used to be when he conducted *his* jazzy music. You can see the roots of gospel when Dorsey performs; his gestures are full of show-business fervor. At times, he's a bit like George Burns when Burns is deadpan and fixed in place. Among the many songs Dorsey has composed is the majestic "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," and when he sings it he gives it a simplicity that seems to go right to the wellsprings of art. This old trouper—his lower lip is loose and distended from all the years of singing gospel—is still in the midst of things. Each time a gospel song is performed, it's newly created by the antiphonal interaction

between the lead singers and the congregation. It's a call-and-response, dialogue music, and the spontaneous yea-saying interjections by the members of the unofficial chorus help to charge up the soloists. This pattern of mutual encouragement is hypnotic for all concerned; in the movie it carries over even to casual, at-home conversations. Dr. Dorsey has become so conditioned to being spurred on by black audiences that when he talks to the film crew and there's silence, he wants to bring them to life. "Say amen, somebody!" he calls out.[19]

A description such as this, chiseled and passionate, leads one to suspect that Kael would agree with Susan Sontag's assertion in *Against Interpretation* that although attention to form in criticism is always needed, equally valuable are "acts of criticism which supply a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art"—an act which the New Critics and other formalists with their emphasis on structure have led many of us to devalue, and an act which, as Sontag carefully observes, seems "even harder to do than formal analysis."[20]

Kael summed up her attitude toward the responsibilities of her craft in a brief article called "At the Movies: Function of a Critic," written in 1966 as an introductory piece for *McCalls* magazine, where Kael spent a now legendary six-month stay. Kael did not include this piece in any of her collections since she felt that much of what it says is assumed in her actual reviews and critical essays. Nonetheless, this piece, concise and to the point, provides a convenient handle for assessing her self-perceived function. Here Kael does away with what she calls the "old nonsense" of our schoolteachers, that "we judge works of art by determining what a man set out to do and then how well he accomplished it." Such judgment is impractical, if not impossible, when looking at movies, for, as she observes, "movies go through many stages, conflicting intentions, shifting points of view, power struggles, alterations, cuts." Moreover, Kael says that to try to determine how well a man accomplished his intentions is inadequate when judging bad movies; *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* "were not very good movies," she writes, "but they reverberate in our lives." And though most films fail to reverberate, they can often be interesting as symptoms of what is happening in the popular culture. Kael also refuses to limit herself to rating movies by a point system or some other equally useless code: "Codes are inadequate, because what matters is not only [a]esthetic judgment . . . but the meaning these works have in the life of our time." A movie like *Rebel Without a Cause* may be a bad movie, but as she points out—and here lies the basis for much of her criticism—"Bad movies, in all probability exert more influence over our lives than good ones, and in dealing with the mass media, we want to know how and why, what pressures they express, what needs they satisfy. Simple [a]esthetic judgments would be as isolated from the living world as needlepoint."[21]

Each of these comments underscores the sociological feature of Kael's criticism. Like her predecessor James Agee, Kael makes a point of not shying away from films which have "cultural" rather than aesthetic significance. Yet that she—again like Agee—finds it necessary to look as carefully at the bad as at the good is less a problem than the highly personal way in which she distinguishes the two. In "Function of a Critic," Kael herself acknowledges that "what is difficult about criticism is that although subjectivity and relativism of judgment are integral with the whole nature of art, we are all troubled by this subjectivity." She echoes her earlier remarks in "Circles and Squares," when she says that a good critic has to be "honestly subjective," and that what makes subjective judgment valuable is the critic's knowledge, experience, and—not to be underplayed—ability to write. Yet she goes further here than she did in "Circles and Squares," when she claims that her writing *is* all a matter of opinion and that this is "all any of us can have in the arts. There are no absolute standards; there is no final authority. There's only fallible human

[19]Pauline Kael, "Saved!" *Taking It All In* (New York: Holt, 1983) 471-73.

[20]Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, 1966) 13. Such a view is often shared by women critics. It is puzzling, therefore, that the one significant study of writing on film by women—Marsha McCreadle's *Women on Film: The Critical Eye* (New York: Praeger, 1983)—makes so little of this characteristic and its departure from the dominant modes of critical discourse in this century. See specifically her discussion of Kael and Penelope Gilliat in the chapter she titled "*New Yorker* Niceties."

[21]Pauline Kael, "At the Movies: Function of a Critic," *McCalls* Feb. 1966: 34, 38, 172.

judgment" ("Function" 34). When asked if she had ever misjudged a movie, Kael once replied that if she had, "to hell with it; it wasn't heart surgery."[22]

Needless to say, such remarks do not endear Kael to the academic film community, nor do they fail to generate controversy. To her delight, Kael has been the subject of as much controversy as perhaps any other modern American critic in any field. She has consistently provoked contention among those writers who prefer to treat film as one of the high arts, claiming boldly (almost suicidally by today's academic standards) that "the most irrelevant kind of movie criticism is the highly theoretical: you can be reasonably sure that the movie critic who talks about Aristotle or nineteenth-century aesthetics is just playing fancy games with his readers or himself . . ." ("Function" 38).[23] Yet perhaps nothing about Pauline Kael has puzzled *her* reviewers as much as her crusade against what she believes are accepted standards of good taste. In *Nine American Film Critics*, Edward Murray refers to this as Kael's "Huck Finn Complex," her obstinate refusal to adopt the civilized values of the Widow Douglas and Aunt Polly.[24]

It is true that since Kael has never been a great defender of "art films" and the avant-garde cinema as it has been championed in this country by writers like Jonas Mekas and Kenneth Anger, she has been described as a "low-brow" critic. Yet neither "low brow" nor "high brow" are suitable labels. (Despite her erudition there is none of the smugness or complacency in Kael's work that is often characteristic of writers traditionally called high-brow—of Edmund Wilson, for instance.) Kael has never dismissed the idea of an artist—director or writer—experimenting with new forms and creating works of art that are not innately commercial, as her praise of Jean-Luc Godard in the sixties, Robert Altman in the seventies, and Jonathan Demme in the eighties amply proves. She doesn't even feel it necessary that a director know exactly where he or she is going at the start of a project, that part of the excitement of movie making is in what the filmmaker discovers along the way. She does, however, defend a certain degree of rationality, and as far back as 1959—in an essay called "Movies, the Desperate Art"—Kael indicated that she was willing to face the consequences of her stand: "Object to the Hollywood film and you're an intellectual snob, object to the avant-garde film and you're a Philistine. But, while in Hollywood, one must often be a snob; in avant-garde circles one must often be a Philistine."[25]

In what appears to be an attempt to convince those readers who would dismiss her approach as solely impressionistic (or anti-art and lacking in rigor or intellectual substance), Kael proposes several basic terms for the evaluation of a film. She asks, for example, "Does the frame of meaning support the body of photographic, directorial, and acting styles; and conversely, do these styles define the frame of meaning?" "A great film," Kael asserts, "is one in which the range of meaning is so imaginatively new, compelling, or exciting that we experience a new vision of human experience (*Grande Illusion*)." On the other hand, a film might be "great because it triumphantly achieves a style (Rene Claire's *Le Million*) or because it represents a new method and approach (*Potemkin*)" ("Desperate Art" 59). Paradoxically, though she once called movies "the great bastard cross-fertilized super-art" (her original title for *Going Steady*), Kael still feels that they must be judged by the same standards as other arts and is skeptical of critics and viewers who fail to judge them this way ("Desperate Art" 65).

Of course any mention of artistic standards presents a problem, and one of the most frequent charges brought against Pauline Kael's criticism is that she has never really defined art, thus making it difficult to understand her approach. Mitch Tuchman claims that art for Kael "is a residual category. She never defines it, she invokes it" ("Desperate Critic" 31).

[22]"Pauline Kael Speaks Out on Films," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* 30 June 1979: Sec. T, p. 46, col. 3.

[23]Such remarks are characteristic of Kael's early polemics. See especially "Is There a Cure for Film Criticism? Or, Some Unhappy Thoughts on Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*," *I Lost It at the Movies* 269-92. Nowhere is Kael's impatience with highly theoretical criticism more evident than it is in this piece, and nowhere else has she more carefully presented her quarrel with the validity and usefulness of such criticism.

[24]Edward Murray, "Pauline Kael and Pluralistic, Nonaesthetic Criticism," *Nine American Film Critics: A Study in Theory and Practice* (New York: Ungar, 1975) 28-29.

[25]Pauline Kael, "Movies, the Desperate Art," *Film: An Anthology*, ed. Daniel Talbot (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1959) 71.

Concerning "Trash, Art and the Movies," Edward Murray says that "the dominant impression Kael conveys in her essay is that there is trash and pseudo-art—nothing else. What remains is an adolescent vision: an anti-intellectual, anti-art, nonaesthetic 'aesthetic'" (129). She may not have been aware of it at the time, but in "Function of a Critic" Kael defended her position against these attacks when she said that "It may help a movie critic (and I think critics in other areas, too) if his ideas about what art is are almost totally flexible, if he is interested in seeing the art in what is being done rather than in trying to make what is done fit his notions of art" (38). In "Trash, Art and the Movies" Kael argues that "Movie art is not the opposite of what we have always enjoyed in movies"; rather, "it is what we have always found good in movies only more so. It's the subversive gesture carried further, the moments of excitement sustained longer and extended to new meanings" (106). Murray quotes this passage, but rather than discuss its implications, he chooses to dismiss Kael's definition as a form of chic posturing. Yet if art were not subversive, if it failed to undermine tradition and open new terrain, why would it continue to retain our interest? Possibly Kael's most important remark concerning the nature of art is found in "Is There a Cure for Film Criticism?" where she writes: "Art is the greatest game, the supreme entertainment, because you discover the game as you play it. There is only one rule, as we learned in *Orphée*: Astonish us! In all art we look and listen for what we have not experienced quite that way before. We want to see, to feel, to understand, to respond a new way. Why should pedants be allowed to spoil the game?" (292).

Kael's unwillingness to allow herself to become entrapped by an inflexible definition of art, as well as an inflexible system or theory of film criticism and history, along with her attempts to "open up" a particular film (to show what is there, what could be there, and what should be there), recalls the critical approach of literary critic R. P. Blackmur. In an early essay called "A Burden for Critics," Blackmur contends that the critic's job "is to put us into maximum relation to the burden of our momentum," the word "burden" meaning "Something that carries us along, something we have in our possession and something that reminds us what we are." Like that of Kael, Blackmur's central concern is a humanistic one, and to this end he believes that the critic "has to run the risk of a greater degree of consciousness than his mind is fit for. . . . He is concerned with choice, not prescription, with equity not law; never with the dead hand, always with the vital purpose. . . . It is in performance that we find our relation to momentum, or put another way, *the critic brings to consciousness the means of performance* [my italics]."[26] Because so much weight and responsibility is placed upon the arts to help us understand our lives, Blackmur observes that perhaps an even greater "burden" is placed upon the critic to bring the art to "full performance." In a 1979 lecture she gave in Atlanta, Kael herself acknowledged the affinity between her goals and those outlined by Blackmur.[27] But before proceeding further, it seems necessary to explore more fully the ways in which Kael's critical method (a method including analysis, comparison, elucidation, and judgment—Blackmur's four digits of criticism) does in fact bring to consciousness the means of a film's "performance"—a performance that is always filtered through Kael's own sensibility. Since her long essay on *Citizen Kane* is in many ways Kael's *tour de force* as well as her most extended and controversial analysis of a film to date, it provides an excellent means of seeing and evaluating her approach at work.

II

Kael begins this essay, appropriately titled "Raising Kane," by providing a fresh context in which to view the film, one which instantly does away with some long held value judgments and misconceptions regarding the making of *Citizen Kane*. She acknowledges the complexity of her task and argues that "It is difficult to explain what makes any great work of art great, and particularly difficult with movies, and maybe more so with *Citizen Kane* than with other great movies, because it isn't a work of special depth or a work of subtle beauty. It is a shallow work, a *shallow* masterpiece."[28] After having shocked—or offended—many of her readers in the first

[26]R.P. Blackmur, "A Burden for Critics," *The Lion and the Honeycomb* (New York: Harcourt, 1955) 198-99.

[27]Pauline Kael, Lecture at Georgia State University, Lyceum Films and Speakers Series, Atlanta, 7 Apr. 1979.

[28]Pauline Kael, "Raising Kane," *The Citizen Kane Book* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) 4.

paragraph, Kael makes the additional claim—one that could be attributed only to her—that to use "the conventional schoolbook explanations for greatness and pretend that it's profound, is to miss what makes it such an American triumph—that it manages to make something aesthetically exciting out of the playfulness of muckraking satire" (5). What follows is something of a muckraking essay itself.

Acknowledging the film for what she believes it is, Kael then provides her readers with a history of the disproportionate scandal surrounding *Kane*; a discussion of Orson Welles' and Herman Mankiewicz's other work and its relation to their collaboration; an extensive commentary on thirties comedy, of which she contends *Citizen Kane* is the culmination; and a close analysis of the film's structural features, with emphasis on how the writer's initial intentions differed from the shape of the film's final cut. Nor does she neglect the historical importance of *Citizen Kane*'s immediate reception and what it is that distinguishes it from other works of its time—all of which result in what one reviewer called "the most sustained in-depth study of a motion picture: its background, sources, genesis, context, technique, impact, evaluation, enduring reputation and so forth."[29]

Though Kael does provide a great deal of insight into the actual making of the film, and though her essay has been cited as an exemplary piece of historical criticism (by Bernard Dick and Hollis Alpert among others), it is far more than a retracing of who did what and when.[30] Part of what makes the piece seem so alive is the occasional poetic quality of Kael's writing, her terse social analysis (particularly the discussion of American self-hatred in sections nine and ten), the unexpected connections she makes, and her commentary on how the movie now seems to sum up a very distinct era. All of this is highlighted by Kael's audacity for saying what

[29]Harry M. Geduld, "The Hollywood Hearst," *Society* Mar. 1972: 46. Surprisingly, David Bordwell claims that Pauline Kael's "discussion emphasizes *Citizen Kane* as part of the journalist-film genre and tends not to go beyond the detective story aspect." See *Film Art: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) 116. Actually, Bordwell's own essay on *Citizen Kane*, a formalist analysis that might have been written by Cleanth Brooks had he been a film critic, provides an excellent counterpoint to Kael's less formalistic concerns. Or as Bill Nichols suggests, the two works, published the same year, might be seen as supplementing one another. See *Movies and Methods: An Anthology* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976) 273-90.

others often had the "good taste" not to say. These elements, more than any amount of formal analysis, are what bring the film to performance; they are what place us in the position to feel the tug of its full momentum. Throughout the essay perspectives are announced, expanded upon, refined, and subsumed into other larger perspectives and concerns. Early on Kael notes, for example, that "There is a theme that is submerged in much of *Citizen Kane* but that comes to the surface now and then, and it's the linking life story of Hearst and of Mankiewicz and of Welles—the story of how brilliantly gifted men who seem to have everything it takes to do what they want to do are defeated. It's the story of how heroes become con artists" ("Raising Kane" 10). Later, after having outlined the careers of these three men, Kael says in a harsher mood that "There are monsters, and there are also sacred monsters; both Welles and Mankiewicz deserve places in the sacred monster category" (45). Like *Citizen Kane* itself, Kael's essay is written in a devil-may-care attitude, but it is fused throughout with a compassionate insight into the paradoxical nature of human relationships and how they have manifested themselves in *Kane*. Take for instance her comment on the power-play between men like Mankiewicz and Hearst: "When writers begin to see the power men operating in terms of available alternatives, while they have been judging them in terms of ideals, they often develop 'personal' admiration for the great bastards whom they have always condemned and still condemn. Hearst was to Mankiewicz, I suspect, what Welles was to be to him a little later—a dangerous new toy" ("Raising Kane" 33). As for Welles himself, Kael ends her work by noting that he was never able to live up to what was expected of him after *Citizen Kane*, but even this statement is carefully qualified: "No one has ever been able to do what was expected of Welles—to create a new radical theatre and to make one movie masterpiece after another—but Welles' 'figurehead' publicity had snowballed to the point where all his actual and considerable achievements looked puny by comparison to what his destiny was supposed to be" (124).

What Kael does in 90,000 words on *Kane* is what she does on a smaller scale in all of her reviews: she brings her whole knowledge of movie history and her whole range of intelligence and experience to bear upon her judgment of the film. Yet "Raising Kane" is representative of Kael's work in another important way: it has genuinely affected the way viewers, historians, and critics perceive the film. Blackmur is correct to argue that judgment is the critic's "highest recognition," but at the same time Kael seems correct in saying that the best criticism excites and even outrages us. Because one of her central concerns in "Raising Kane" is, as one writer put it, iconoclastic—"she punches a few large holes in the sacred raiment of Orson Welles" by demonstrating that Mankiewicz was more responsible for determining the shape of the film than Welles has generally allowed (Mount 32)—the essay, which has helped to define the critical discourse on *Kane*, has come under attack from many writers, and specifically from critic-director Peter Bogdanovich, who maintains that it is little more than an anti-auteurism tract:

> . . . over the years, Miss Kael has been writing against those of her fellow critics, like Sarris (and he is now in the majority), who believe that when a film aspires to the level of art, the man in charge of its making, the director, must be held responsible for the result and praised or blamed accordingly. Miss Kael would have it otherwise. By taking a great director (Welles) and seeking to prove that a great film of his (*Kane*) was actually the creation of an "old-time" screenwriter (Herman J. Mankiewicz), a member and product of the old Hollywood system, she clearly hopes to demolish this idea forever.[31]

[30]Bernard F. Dick, *Anatomy of Film* (New York: St. Martin's, 1978) 172-76; Hollis Alpert, "Raising Kael," *Saturday Review* 24 Apr. 1971: 48-49. So far, Pauline Kael has not offered her readers a definitive history of the cinema, though *5001 Nights at the Movies* comes close (New York: Holt, 1982). If this work's entries had been arranged chronologically rather than alphabetically it could be regarded as Kael's quasi-history of the movies instead of her movie encyclopedia. Perhaps no one would deny that an historical impulse has always been a fundamental part of Kael's critical performance. "Raising Kane," her most clearly historical work to date, suggests that for Kael criticism and history are inextricably connected: the criticism of this essay is rooted in historical awareness and its presentation of history is informed by Kael's critical attitude. Kael is not interested in the kind of document that would give us mere facts and chronology, if such a thing were "in fact" possible. Facts for Kael are subordinated to her consciousness as it ranges over the formal and nonformal features of the work at hand.

[31]Peter Bogdanovich, "The Kane Mutiny," *Esquire* Oct. 1972: 99-100.

While fairness is not always the predominant component in film criticism, it should be made clear that Kael has not failed to give Orson Welles his due—she does not even disparage him as a director with amazing gifts. Though she stresses the collaborative nature of movie making, working on the assumption that a work of art need not be the product of a single individual's vision or aesthetic drive, her depiction of Welles is possibly that of the ideal movie director who maintained control not because he was "the sole creative intelligence," but because by being in control he could "liberate and utilize" the talent of those who worked with him: "Welles had a vitalizing, spellbinding talent; he was the man who brought out the best in others and knew how to use it. . . . *Citizen Kane* is not a great work that suddenly burst out of a young prodigy's head. There are such works in the arts (thought few, if any, in movies) but this is not one of them. It is a superb example of collaboration; everyone connected with it seems to have had the time of his life because he was able to contribute something" ("Raising Kane" 109-10). Bogdanovich and the critics who have followed his lead in taking Kael to task for "Raising Kane" do not cite this statement. To do so would deflate their insistence that Kael had contrived to tarnish Welles and one of his great achievements.

Anyone awaiting Kael's essay in 1971 must have known that it would differ radically from the existing works on Welles and *Kane* at that time, for Kael had become well-known by serving as the American voice of opposition to the auteur theory that Bogdanovich and others so eagerly embraced. Most readers are probably familiar with "Circles and Squares," but one of Kael's uncollected pieces, a response in *Film Quarterly* to charges brought against her by the writers of *Movie*, is even more explicit in exposing the fundamental fallacy of the auteur theory as it was defined by Sarris and his followers. Appropriately enough, this piece, one of her polemics, was titled "Criticism and Kids' Games," part of which is so concise and to the point that it seems worth citing here:

> Sarris' *auteur* theory is a kid's view of life—that men are the captains of their souls, the masters of their fate, that if they've got the desire, the will, nothing's going to stop them. If this view has any meaning, it is its inspirational meaning for us—especially as adolescents—but it's not a guide for interpreting or judging the actions of others. Growing up is a process of perceiving obstacles, evaluating compromises, and discovering that no matter how much we may want to burst the bounds of experience, there is only so much we can do. We learn to accept our failures and weaknesses, our limitations, even our despair at our limitations. But the kid's view of life is still the stock-in-trade of action melodrama: the good man is the strong man who can't be licked. This transferred to cinema aesthetics, is, I am a little embarrassed to point out, Sarris' view of the *auteur*: you can't keep a good man down.[32]

If there's any doubt that the auteur theory (at least as it was defined by Sarris and subscribed to by Bogdanovich) is synonymous with the great man theory of artistic creation, one need only note the concluding statement of Bogdanovich's essay. After citing part of a letter from Welles—"Cleaning up after Miss Kael will take a lot of scrubbing"—Bogdanovich says "Yes, but every filmmaker since 1941 is, to some degree, in debt to Orson Welles, and the very least one of them can do—if he happens to have under his hands some useful facts—is to roll up his sleeves and make a start" (190).[33]

The authorship of *Citizen Kane* is a vexing issue, and I don't wish to make light of a problem that may never be fully resolved. At least this is Robert Carringer's view in what is the most detailed account of the making of the film to date. Carringer, who has had access to a vast amount of material, has come to the conclusion that Kael was not as far off base as Bogdanovich and others have maintained. In the Preface to his book, Carringer even aligns

[32]Pauline Kael, "Criticism and Kids' Games," *Film Quarterly* 17.1 (1963): 63.

[33]Edward Murray tries to show that Kael herself subscribed to a great man theory in a program note she had written earlier and included in *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*: "There she called *Citizen Kane* 'the most controversial one-man show in film history . . . staged by twenty-five-year-old writer-director-star Orson Welles.' Mankiewicz is only mentioned parenthetically." Even if Murray's charge is correct, it overlooks the fact that Kael's research led her to a radically different and more complex conclusion that is truer to the full performance of the film. See *Nine American Film Critics* 136.

himself with Kael's approach: ". . . this study attempts to show that the collaboration process provides the best framework for understanding the remarkable achievement this film represents."[34] Calling Kael's essay "a classic piece of journalistic expose," Carringer draws attention to her "two principle charges: that Welles conspired to deprive Mankiewicz of screen credit and that Mankiewicz wrote the entire script" (34). Carringer accepts the first charge but feels that the second was based too largely on "hearsay testimony from witnesses and participants who were openly sympathetic to Mankiewicz" (Rita Alexander, Mankiewicz's secretary at Victorville where much of the script was written, is singled out for her "flagrant misrepresentation"). Carringer's account of Kael's work is even-handed and avoids the nasty jabs of earlier accounts.[35] Both Edward Murray and Marsha McCreadie do little but summarize Bogdanovich's rebuttal. It is Murray's contention that Kael downplays the director "because she has always been overly fond of the literary element in film . . . and partly because—well, partly out of sheer perversity, just to provoke a general reaction" (137). In her recent biography of Orson Welles, Barbara Leaming carries Murray's argument one step further:

> If . . . Pauline Kael revived Mankiewicz's charge that Orson is a credit stealer, it was, in large part, because of her unmistakable psychic identification with Mankiewicz. For like Kael, Mankiewicz had been a staff writer on *The New Yorker*. And as Mankiewicz had done long before her, Kael had aspired to go to Hollywood to work in pictures. (When, eventually, she did, in 1979, her stay there proved abortive, and shortly thereafter, she returned to work at *The New Yorker*.) That the *writer's* pilgrimage to Hollywood will be a principle theme of her piece is suggested, early on, when Kael establishes a lineage of *New Yorker* staffers who went West. Kael needed to discover Mankiewicz onscreen because, at length, she longed to find herself there too.[36]

How does one counter such an argument, the implications of which are boggling? What ulterior motives might Carringer have had in *his* attempt to document Mankiewicz's contribution to the film?

When writers zoom in on the anti-auteurist element in Kael's work to the exclusion of its other features, it is probably because this element gives them a convenient (though reductive) handle for assessing her critical performance. Not surprisingly, critics have frequently confused Kael's anti-theory stance with anti-intellectuality. Yet it's because she *is* concerned with sound reasoning that Kael distrusts the application of a single theory, no matter how encompassing, to a work of art (or non-art for that matter). The thrust of her complaint against theory was expressed in an essay I have already cited a number of times: "Is There a Cure for Film Criticism?"—her scathing analysis of Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, published a year before her debate with Andrew Sarris. "There is, in any art," she writes, "a tendency to turn one's preferences into a monomaniacal theory; in film criticism, the more confused and single-minded and dedicated (to untenable positions) the theorist is, the more likely he is regarded as serious and important and 'deep'—in contrast to relaxed men of good sense whose pluralistic approaches can be disregarded as not fundamental enough" (271).

Though academic film and literary critics are now caught up in a sometimes alarming worship of The Great God Theory, there are those who have held out and who have presented arguments that are strikingly similar to those Kael offered in the early sixties. Murray Krieger, Director of The School of Criticism and Theory, University of California at Irvine, warns that "Literary theory is a vain discipline . . . vain in both senses: it is prideful, ever preening, in its glittering systematic displays, and it is—ultimately—fruitless. Its pride requires it to assume, not only that an outright, wholly coherent aesthetic of poetry [Krieger uses the

[34]Robert Carringer, *The Making of Citizen Kane* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985) ix.

[35]In a personal interview (Atlanta, 8 Apr. 1979), Kael told me that she never fully understood the consternation the piece had caused, noting that *The New Yorker*, where she first published the piece, has one of the most rigorous checking systems of any magazine in the country and that her sources had all been double-checked and verified by a number of different and disinterested readers.

[36]Barbara Leaming, *Orson Welles: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985) 203.

term in its largest sense] can be achieved, but that such an aesthetic can account for the awesome variety of things we honor with the name of 'poems,' by virtue of the special experience they afford us."[37] Though Kael has labeled herself anti-theory, she doesn't reject the very notion of theory; rather, she rejects the idea of a theory "that will solve all the riddles of creativity" ("Circles" 309) and that will, as Krieger puts it, close us from "radically new and valuable experiences that beckon from outside the terms of our theoretical constructs" (7-8). Ultimately, if we substitute the term "film" for "poetry," the kind of criticism Krieger advocates is the kind Kael has been practicing all along. "In the end," Krieger writes, "it seems that I am calling for a rhapsodic criticism; that is, for echoes of the poem in the Greek manner" (12).

One conclusion is clear: if art doesn't work by theory, then for Kael criticism and the history of art do not work by theory either. Kael would thus reject the notion that the empirical data uncovered by the critic or the historian must be brought under something resembling a theoretical umbrella. While she would oppose the rigorous application of any theory, be it Marxist, deconstructive, or even feminist, Kael finds the auteur/great man theory particularly facile, and her rationale is made clear in "Raising Kane": "This worship of the director is cyclical—Welles or Fellini is probably adored no more than von Stroheim or von Sternberg or DeMille was in his heyday—but such worship generally doesn't help in sorting out what went into the making of good pictures and bad pictures" (68). Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery argue that once the critic or historian has done away with the need for an auteur, he or she can then deal with questions that the auteurist usually fails to ask—questions that center on production decisions, constrictive forces within the filmmaking process, "accepted limits of aesthetic innovation at a given time within a given style," and the complex relationship between authorship and viewer response.[38] Kael touches on each of these questions in her critical history of *Citizen Kane*, an essay that emerges finally as a synthesis of the aesthetic, social, and economic approaches that Allen and Gomery isolate for emphasis in their overview of historical writing on film.

Not just "Raising Kane," but all of Kael's criticism is informed by her understanding of the economics of filmmaking—an understanding that is most explicitly embodied in "On the Future of Movies," originally published in 1974 for the "Onward and Upward with the Arts" series in *The New Yorker*, and included as the central piece in her fifth collection, *Reeling*.[39] Kael pulls out all her rhetorical stops in this essay to argue that a war exists in Hollywood between the businessmen (the movie entrepreneurs) and the artists, and that the conglomerate minded businessmen, working entirely for profits, take a perverse pleasure in watching the artist fail. In *Film: The Democratic Art*, Garth Jowett, after noting his agreement with Kael, summed up a general reaction to the piece, saying that Kael's long article caused "quite a stir in the industry, but coming as it did during a profitable period, it elicited mainly scorn, and she was accused of naivete in her lack of understanding about the workings of the film industry."[40] It was to this end that the Producers Guild of America in 1974 published an article in their journal called "Sticks, Stones, and Modern Film Critics," in which they decried the viciousness of modern film critics, singling out Pauline Kael.[41] In *American Film Now* James Monaco took a less biased view. He argued that "Kael is right to put the finger on advertising and modern merchandising techniques," and that "she is perceptive enough to see that they create their own film style," but he could not accept Kael's solution to the problem: an artists' corporation to distribute their own films. Monaco acknowledged that Kael is one of the few major critics to give significant attention to the industry, but he also argued that even if her proposed corporations were formed, they would not reshape the larger workings of the industry.[42]

The thing that is most significant about Kael's

[37]Murray Krieger, *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976) 3.

[38]Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) 88.

[39]Pauline Kael, "On the Future of Movies," *Reeling* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976) 309-31.

[40]Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976) 454.

[41]D. Gilette, "Sticks, Stones and Modern Film Critics," *Journal of the Producers Guild of America* Sept. 1974: 1-7.

piece is not her specific solution to the problem—which she seems to have abandoned anyhow—but her willingness to place responsibility on the artist to find a way to either beat or work within a system that has often stifled creativity. Consequently, her most important remarks in "On the Future of Movies" are not those concerned with the businessman and their advertisers, but those that redefine her belief in and support of the individual artist. Her position is summed up in the following statement, which may also define her own criticism: "Perhaps no work of art is possible without belief in the audience—the kind of belief that has nothing to do with facts and figures about what people actually buy or enjoy but comes out of the individual artist's absolute conviction that only the best he can do is fit to be offered to others" (327).[43]

Ultimately, what we see in Kael's writing about the industry is a divided rather than a contradictory impulse. On the one hand she has ardently defended the film artist against the constraints of the industry; at the same time she has inadvertently reified the system by her willingness to deal with films as they are. She may hope for and even expect the extraordinary from movies, but she is willing to confront works that by any existing standards are less than extraordinary. Thus if I were asked to cite one passage from Kael's work which not only distinctively bears her style, but which is also quintessential to her understanding of the history of movies as the history of a modern art form as well an often demoralizing business venture, I would choose the following passage from "It's Only a Movie," an essay written for *Film Study in Higher Education* and regrettably not included in any of her collections. Kael's suggestion to teachers of film that they bring in for discussions, screenings, and lectures the equivalent of artists-in-residence might be extended to film critics and historians who must include in their investigations an awareness of

> *Not* just the great men, the sensitive men, and the frustrated talents, but the hardened commercial hacks, the gravel-voiced producers, the ferrety agents, the sentimental self-righteous blacklisted writers, the directors who have never made a competent movie, the exploitation film makers who didn't even try, the cutters who couldn't get into the butcher's union, the dubbers and all the rest; the critics who have always panned the great ones, and the blackmailing gossip columnists, and the union bosses, and the old stars who will do anything to appear on television as celebrities. Let them show their wares and explain the whys and hows of the movie business. Invite the snotty young and not so young experimenters, not just the talented ones and honest ones, but the pretentious, arrogant little bastards with their fifty-five ways of explaining the greatness of the blur on the screen. They lie about art but they do know something about show business. Show your students the big money makers, the all-time top grossers, those huge displays of whoremongering and tastelessness and condescension that are enjoyed by people all over the world, and maybe they'll begin to understand something of what makes movies an impossible heart-breaking near-possibility. They'll learn something about motion picture business.[44]

Such advice, pertinent for teachers, historians,

[42]James Monaco, *American Film Now: The People, The Power, The Money, The Movies* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979) 43-44.

[43]As most of her readers are aware, Kael left *The New Yorker* in the Spring of 1979 to work in film production. Her immediate response to what she observed in Hollywood is the basis of an essay that should be read in conjunction with her earlier reflections on the industry: "Why Are Movies So Bad? or, The Numbers," included in *Taking It All In* (8-20). Much of what was written about Kael's departure at the time was so obviously tainted with gossip that it isn't worth mentioning here. Before she resumed her regular post, she taped a television interview with Dick Cavett (aired on 7 May 1980) in which she discussed her Hollywood venture. Kael said that she came to realize that producing, unlike writing, is a "desensitizing" process, and that in order to become effective at it she would have to devote more years than she was willing to spare at this point in her career. Therefore, she "decided to pull back and do consulting," for she claims neither to be "a fighter" nor "a boss lady." Readers interested in Kael's more recent reflections on "the state of the art"—the industry and its effect on viewers and critics alike—should see "The Economics of Film Criticism: A Debate [between] Jean-Luc Godard and Pauline Kael," *Camera Obscura* 8/9/10 (1982): 162-85. Of interest also is "My Dinner With Pauline," an interview with William R. Katovsky. See *Arrival* 1 (1987): 18-21.

[44]Pauline Kael, "It's Only a Movie," *Film Study in Higher Education*, ed. David C. Stewart (Washington: American Council on Education, 1966) 141.

and critics alike, subverts the usefulness not only of a great man theory but of the whole masterpiece tradition in film studies—an approach that, as "Raising Kane" demonstrates, is of limited use even where great men and an obvious masterpiece are involved. For Kael, a film like *Citizen Kane* is so deeply rooted in the movements and contradictions of pop culture that to treat it like an Elizabethan tragedy would be false to the way the film was made and to the way she believes it has affected most of its viewers as they have responded to its social subtexts and to the sheer pluck of its satirical drive.

Parts of "Raising Kane," like much of Kael's criticism, are autobiographical while other parts read like a detective story. In certain instances it appears that Kael's primary aim is to resurrect the mood of the not-so-distant past. Thus she says that at the time of the film's release

> The smug manner of the 'March of Time' was already a joke to many people; when I was a student at Berkeley in the late thirties, there was always laughter in the theatres when the 'March of Time' came on, with its racy neo-conservatism and its ritual pomposity—with the impersonal tone as if God above were narrating. There was an element of unconscious self-parody in the important tone of the 'March of Time,' as in all the Luce enterprises, and, in his script, Mankiewicz pushed it further. He used consciously those elements which part of the public already found funny, bringing into a mass medium what was already a subject for satire among the knowledgeable."
>
> (81)

Surely one of the distinctive features of "Raising Kane," and of Kael's writing in general, is the *ease* with which she slips in and out of various critical and interpretive modes.

Kael's criticism is not the last word on *Citizen Kane* or any other film. Kael has written that her purpose is to sensitize the reader so that he or she wants to experience more of the art that is there. Is such a process ever really completed? Reading Pauline Kael is in the end a matter of seeing a film (and, in the case of "Raising Kane," a whole era of American history) through one writer's eyes. There is no omniscient narrator; unlike the "March of Time," Kael declines to play the role of God. Her subjective pluralistic tactic is no theoretical cop-out; it is rather one viable means of confronting a fundamental epistemological problem that any critic or historian attempts to resolve, consciously or unconsciously, in one way or another.□

***Will Brantley**'s book* Self-Definitions: Women of Letters and the Southern Renaissance *will be published by the University Press of Mississippi in the Spring of 1993.*

Christopher Woods

ALWAYS IN NEED OF A TOUCH

It is the quiet hour after breakfast in the seaside hotel. Guests, done with breakfast, have returned to their rooms to rest, to prepare for a day on the beach. Only you remain in the dining room, waiting for the girl.

Soon, you know, she will pass, the same as she does every morning at this hour. In fact, you have already seen her earlier, having breakfast with her mother only two tables away. You watched them, and you wanted to go to them. You thought of inventing a reason to have a conversation with them. Then, that much accomplished, you would find yourself standing near her. Near enough to touch her hair, perhaps.

But instead, nothing of the kind transpired. You did not get up and go to them, the girl and her mother. The only conversation you had was the dreaming, one-sided affair in your head. You stayed away, watching them across the short distance of linen and silver. But there was no getting around one thing. The thought of touching her hovered in the air around you, like a gnat that evades every sweep of a hand.

In a few moments, when you return to your room, you will perhaps pretend to read. So far you have made little progress in your book, *The Significance of Mayan Culture*. You have no doubt such significance exists, but at this time, in this year, it does not in fact exist for you. Maybe another year.

You will stare blindly at the pages as you turn them. Maybe you will have a mid-morning drink. Or call for Daniel, the hotel masseur, for a session. You might do any number of things, but all that you will accomplish for certain is to watch the passing of slow minutes. And think about her, of course.

Last night you dreamed of an enormous black spider. It was the third consecutive night for the spider dream. The spider, as usual, kept busy, spinning a large web. You are still unsure why you would dream such a thing, especially three nights in a row. It bothers you, and you can't stop thinking about it. You are considering the spider, and what it might mean, when you detect movement on the other side of the glass wall in the hotel dining room. A flurry of movement there, on the other side in bright sunlight, where a tile path leads down to the beach.

* * * * *

If, in the past, you have been unhappy, then at least the reasons for this unhappiness are gone. But you also know how one kind comes and leaves, and another comes in time to take its place. For now you consider yourself basically happy, but the world has a way of seeping. The small and narrow euphoria becomes more difficult to maintain.

For now, for this moment, though, you feel happiness as you look out toward the ivory white beach. In the far distance are fishing boats floating in the wide blue bay. Everything in this place nears perfection. Except that you are waiting. You are being made to wait. You hold your napkin tightly in your fist, lost in thought. For the moment, the spider dangles between one thought and the next.

You remember walking down Reforma in the rain. You had no specific destination, no direction, only a primal kind of want for escape. And you can still remember what you were thinking in your wet clothes. It was something about the way things come tumbling down. How a man can be brought to his knees, all at once. The same can happen to a woman, or even to a city. Brought down decisively, then weakened, and in the end left abandoned like a wounded animal.

At some point during your walk in the rain you stopped. It was beneath a zebra-striped awning. You stopped to peer inside the window of a travel agency. In the dim light you studied the inviting, but somehow unreal, posters on the wall. Visually you turned the pages of colorful

brochures that sat on desks abandoned for the night.

Each brochure offered another opportunity for escape for someone like you, someone already down on his knees. You were in need of fresh chances, the kind quite beyond the lottery of prayers.

You stood there a quarter hour, the rain coming down harder, and you decided something. That done, you turned away from the window and looked in either direction on Reforma. You turned and began walking back to the apartment. You were no longer considering the fact of the rain. Instead you felt somehow jubilant. Somewhere, deep inside, you had killed a gnat with one furious blow. It was decided. You would leave the city. But first there was something you needed to see through to completion. This would involve waiting, an indeterminate amount. You would dangle a bit more, and wait for the end of Lucinda.

* * * * *

The movement is real, and you are thankful for it. The girl and her mother appear on the tile path on the other side of the glass. You forget the spider momentarily. You watch them as they pass. The girl wears a white terry cloth robe that flows all the way to the ground, leaving only her face and hands exposed to the harsh sunlight.

She is followed by her mother, and you are struck by the ways in which they resemble each other. Hair the same honey color, even the style is the same. They walk in the same way as well, taking small deliberate steps across the tile. In fact, except for the years between them, you find them totally alike.

But only to a point. You have passed them before in the hotel lobby, in the hall by the elevators. You have seen how the mother's face has small delicate wrinkles forming around the eyes. Small lines crinkle the edge of her mouth. It's time is all, you know.

It comes to you that, until now, you have not considered the fact of age enough. Those you have known have been all ages, and in the past it has been no concern to you. But since Lucinda's dying this notion of youth has taken hold. Another shade of vengeance, then, has taken control, if you are honest. You can't shake it, however it comes. Still, you are certain of one thing. It is not the image of death that brings you to this new fascination, and it is not your own aging that plays a part.

Rather, you see it in this way. Something else is disturbing you. You do not wish to live in a place, or even a state of mind, where things constantly age. Here or there, you decide it is a state of mind. It is everywhere, but not in that place where the girl in the white terry cloth robe exists.

* * * * *

You are certain that you cannot brush away the small and awesome film, the image of Lucinda as you drove home from the hospital. It was the day the diagnosis was made. She was doomed, perhaps, but it was not something either of you wished to discuss. Was doom a long-winded threat, or a full-fledged certainty? Not knowing doom well, not accustomed to its presence, this was too painful even to speak about.

She leaned against you in the car. For most of the ride, you held her hand while you steered with the other. You still remember the peace of unending silence. But what could you have said when you didn't even know what you were thinking?

If you thought anything at all, if it surfaced more than any other notion, it was that you could not live with her any longer. It was merely a sensation, nothing more definite than that. And this was not because you did not love Lucinda. It was not even the fact that she was dying. It was simply because you did not know how to deal with dying itself. Because of this, from the moment the diagnosis was made, you felt compelled to be done with it and with her, to break free.

Freedom, you decided later, was a carnivorous kind of state. You were unsure if you could live with yourself if you chose to leave her. You vacillated. One morning you would awake and tell yourself that was the day to leave. By afternoon you would be disgusted that you even considered such a thing. One day to the next, over long weeks, this continued. Nothing remained constant but Lucinda's deepening illness and your desire to become unburdened. Your marriage was being eaten from the inside out. And a strange thing happened. It had to do with the way you walked. You noticed it coming in stages, how you began to shuffle a bit. The same as her, in fact.

* * * * *

You have thought about it, and decided that it is something about their eyes. Maybe, you think, the girl and her mother possess some magical way of seeing. Their eyes are a very pale blue, but it is not so much the color that mystifies you. More likely is the way their eyes gaze. When they walk, they look far ahead. They look not where they are going but beyond, perhaps some distant destination. Not the beach, not even the wide blue bay that stretches so widely seems to matter to them.

Maybe, you have thought, they are looking at some far off eventuality. Whatever it is, you cannot see it. You see blue swells and fishing boats riding the horizon. Nothing more. But if they see so well, why is it that they do not seem to notice you? After all, you watch them so deliberately, unabashedly. But as you consider this they have moved on. They pass away into the eucalyptus grove near the beach.

You lay down your fork and wonder how you will spend the day. You have no interest in much of anything besides the girl. You would much prefer to watch the way the sunlight plays in the white folds of the girl's robe. Sunlight makes small, exquisite shadows on the rough cloth. It is the sun, you know, that creates the illusion of an aura surrounding her.

The phosphorescent light reminds you of an old religious icon you saw as a child. It rested on an altar in a sleepy cathedral, during a time of faith. That no longer the case, the image of the light alone remains. The aura of memory is that strong, the same as the light surrounding the girl.

Because of this, you feel you have discovered something new, something fresh, worthy of your fervor. You consider what a simple need this is, to be enchanted by something. At this point, for you, enchantment will do. You have no need for a faith, only the adoration. That will suffice. You follow the aura until it disappears into the eucalyptus grove.

* * * * *

In time, Lucinda slipped away from your touch. The anaesthesia carried her away. You decided you could not stay in the waiting room during the operation.

You needed a drink, badly. You would do that, drink away the time it took for doctors to locate the tumor in her brain. As it happened, they could not remove it all. They left parts behind, to remain inside the margin of safety, they explained. Other treatments would follow. All, of course, conducted well inside the margin of doom.

Survival, how it managed, was a matter of speaking. Or, quite possibly, a level of thinking. Survival, you learned, was a relative thing. For Lucinda, survival lacked any semblance to dignity. Survival was an order in and of itself, and it was wise not to attach qualifications. Simply said, Lucinda survived. For awhile.

She lived in a kind of animal dream. Her ability to speak, for example, simply disappeared. There was a hearing problem as well. You considered the notion that it might have been better for her to have died outright. Better to have drifted blissfully away in a cloud of anaesthesia during the operation, beneath lights bright enough to guide her passage from this world to the next.

This still bothers you, the guilt you feel for having entertained this thought. What helps is the knowledge that your thoughts were not entirely selfish.

* * * * *

Last night you discovered that the girl's ears are pierced, as is common custom. In her case, however, this discovery was magnified. You watched candlelight cascade in brief, brilliant arcs on the small gold loops. Even now, the thought of those arcs makes you press your hands together tightly. You notice the pale circle of skin on your finger where the wedding band was worn.

Sun, even the fierce white sun in this seaside town, has not erased the pale circle. You rub at it but it refuses to go away. In the end you decide something. You must simply spend more time outside.

As it is, you cannot follow them through the eucalyptus grove. You cannot appear to follow them so closely that the girl's mother might suspect something. You decide not to go after them, even at a distance, for now. After all, you have all the time you need, and time is something that you spend with abandon.

You gesture to Roberto, the maître d'. When he comes and is hovering around your table, you tell him to have Daniel come to your room for a session. In some ways, Daniel is another word for abandon. He will give you a massage and smother your passion. And you know he will be glad for this, as that is part of being Daniel.

To keep Daniel at bay and most emotions in check, you give him many pesos. It is pesos that define the nature of all this. Pesos keep the relationship within the arena of commerce. So it is a mindless kind of abandon, really, a way of seducing time for the best effects.

* * * * *

At some point, you are not sure just when, it occurred to you that cruelty, while universal, could be discriminate as well. Cruelty visited some houses more than others. To your house, to Lucinda, it came with a vengeance. It was as if she had been marked all along, that your house had a special sign on the door. When it finally did leave, Lucinda was little more than a reliquary for its wrath.

If death at the age of twenty-two were not sufficient evidence of this wrath, you were made to witness it, at close range. Because of your own proximity, you began to think of yourself as marked as well. You were a voyeur. More than that, you were enclosed in it. You could feel death's breath on your neck. Your turning away from this, and from Lucinda, could never change the fact of this.

Days and nights lodged between rage and regret. It began on her release from the hospital. That morning she came down the hospital corridor toward you. She was supported on either side by nurses, but still you did not go to her. Instead it was Lucinda who struggled to get to you. You remember how her fingertips clutched wildly at the air. Her wrists were still bandaged from the suicide attempt that came when she learned she would not speak again.

As she struggled down the hall, you wanted nothing but to run. In your mind, of course, you were already gone. When she finally reached the place where you stood so immobile, she put her arms around your neck. You said nothing and looked to the nurses for assistance. They, of course, knew what you were thinking. They had seen all this before. What you thought was nothing original.

* * * * *

In the early afternoon, you decide to take a walk on the beach. You find them there, mother and daughter, collecting shells. You follow them slowly, from a distance, and pretend you have not noticed them. Later, when they turn and head back to the hotel, you call to them. You ask if they will be your guests for dinner.

The woman, taken by surprise, studies your face very closely, seriously. For a moment you fear she will refuse the invitation. The girl is dropping shells, then picking them up again. She is laughing. She carries the shells down to the water to rinse them while her mother begins a small conversation with you. Yes, she says at last. Yes, she would be pleased to have dinner. She says she could enjoy some company.

Yet a small, immediate problem arises in your mind. It bothers you that the woman speaks in a singular fashion. She does not mention if her daughter will be dining with you. You do not ask. You are afraid to ask. This far along, it is too much to consider, the possibility that the girl would not be present.

You feel a small kind of rage inside. You have no desire to eat alone with the girl's mother. The woman, in your mind, is but another place-setting at the table, a minor one at that. But you smile and say you will meet her in the lobby at the appointed time. As they walk away toward the eucalyptus grove, you begin to hope.

* * * * *

Later, when Lucinda was home again, you knew that she was missing your touch. She wanted all things to be as they had before. But you could not go to her. You could not find it in yourself to offer comfort. She had become something horrible to you. And it was not lost that you had become horrible as well, in a different way and for other reasons.

One night, while standing in the kitchen, you broke an empty whiskey bottle on a counter. By then of course you were tired of most things. In particular, you were exhausted by a kind of creeping death that only seemed to tease, that appeared obliquely, that did not name itself.

Then, you picked up a long glass shard and, bleary eyed drunk, you headed for the bedroom where Lucinda slept. If death would not come to you directly, then you had no choice but to seek it out, perhaps arrange a duel. Standing in the bedroom doorway, you changed your mind. The desire remained, but the act itself was something else. The act of killing her, you realized, was out of the question.

You returned to the kitchen. You cleaned up the broken glass and washed your hands, which had several small cuts. You went out for another bottle of whiskey. A pattern came from this. Night after night, going after bottles, you

discovered something. It was the going itself, the small journeys into the city night were every bit as important as any purchase you might make. The journeys were short flights to freedom. As time passed, each flight became longer than the last.

* * * * *

The girl is not present at dinner, no matter how much you wish it were otherwise. You find it difficult to conceal your disappointment. But you believe something good will come of it. This becomes true very quickly. You learn that the girl's name is Rosalinda. Her mother's name is Laura. Over dinner you learn that Laura is divorcing Rosalinda's father. After fifteen years, she says, she has had enough.

You offer your regrets, but she waves them away. Other women, she explains, might choose to remain with their husbands for the sake of appearance. And for added misery, she says with a wry smile. She, however, is not that kind of woman. Now she and Rosalinda are on vacation, while matters are being settled between lawyers.

Listening to her, you are suddenly surprised. Laura has her own kind of enchantment, you realize. You are drawn to her. You try unsuccessfully to suppress it. Before dinner is over, you have invited her to your room. She accepts. She is in a good mood, and you believe it is because she has not really spoken to anyone in awhile.

You keep asking questions about Rosalinda. Finally Laura laughs. She says you seem more interested in her daughter than in her. You laugh and say she is being overly protective. Rosalinda is only a child, only fourteen, Laura says. She says that Rosalinda does not yet understand the world of adults, that her own world is very sheltered. All this, of course, only makes you want the girl more.

But for now, for this night, you will have her mother. It is as close as you can get for the moment, and you know that it is better than nothing at all.

* * * * *

You did not feel guilt when you first began leaving the apartment at night. You knew she would be awake, unable to sleep. You knew that she would wait for your return. Sometimes you would be away for hours. Other times, it was a matter of several nights.

For a short while you were content with neighborhood clubs in and near the Zona Rosa. Later, when you became bored with these, you began the habit of taking hotel rooms. Finally you rented a small apartment, small, really no larger than a bachelor's flat. You stocked it with fine food and liquor, and began thinking of yourself as a single man. You began spending nights there, not worrying about going home to Lucinda. Sometimes you spent afternoons there, when you felt it was a good place to hide.

In the new apartment, you could live as you wished. It depressed you to go home, so you began staying away longer and longer. You pushed yourself to the limit in several ways. Your sexual partners were varied, and sometimes you would wake up to find three or four people in your bed. One thing that surprised you was the way in which you could usually outlast them all.

You began drinking more. Two bottles of brandy a day was not unusual. In time it became routine. You told yourself you lived too much to compensate for another part of you that was dying.

Never once did you explain your absences to Lucinda. You did not apologize. But she would always be waiting, always in need of a touch that never was.

* * * * *

You talk and drink with Laura for hours. You come to like her, and agree with her when she calls her husband a brute. The man has several mistresses, you learn, and Laura is expected to wait for his return home with a smile. And, until now, Laura has always been faithful.

Something in the room seems to change as you talk with Laura. It is as though you feel a presence. You feel that Lucinda is somehow near. But the feeling passes, and you are thankful for this. Then, when both you and Laura are quite drunk and it is very late, you take her to your bed. You make love to her and neither of you says another word.

Your sweat mingling with hers, you suddenly have a picture in your mind. It is a nocturnal portrait, night along the beach the other side of the eucalyptus grove. You see her, Rosalinda, standing in the shallows between the beach and the incoming waves. She is bending over, washing sea shells.

You approach her very slowly, ever so gently,

until you are soon standing in the shallows beside her. Water moves soundlessly between your legs and hers. She recognizes you and begins to smile. You cannot see Laura anywhere, and you wonder why the girl has been left alone in the water and the moonlight. You take her by the hand and lead her to shore. You pull her down on the sand. Her eyes are questioning, but she says nothing. You position your body over hers. She offers no resistance, but you cannot help but notice how the sea shells fall from her small hands and begin washing away, wave after wave.

* * * * *

Often you would come home hoping that Lucinda had gone, had left you, had given up on you. You hated the fact that she remained, lingered. She would watch you undress when you were drunk, when you had nothing to say to her.

She would stand there in her nightgown and look at you in your nakedness. She would want to touch you, feel you in all the places that only others were allowed to touch. You would then move away from her, for better or worse, grumbling about this or that.

For a time she would attempt to speak to you in that mutilated sound that passed for her voice. You thought she sounded like a wounded bird. Later, she no longer made the effort, as she knew the very sound of her voice repelled you. So because she loved you, she remained silent, even when she was screaming inside. Without a word, you would turn out the light. You knew she remained awake, listening to you sleep.

* * * * *

Afterwards, Laura dresses and prepares to leave your room. She is very quiet. Then she asks if you are always so violent in your lovemaking. You tell her that you are always very loving, but that she has excited you greatly. You tell her that you have not been with a woman like her in a long while. She laughs at this, but you don't know why. Next time, she says, we'll take longer. There's no need to be so greedy, she adds.

You cannot sleep once you are alone again. You keep thinking about Rosalinda. You must find a way to be alone with her. You decide to take her diving at the coral reef on the end of the island. Laura, of course, will want to go, but you hope you can take Rosalinda into the water all alone.

You think of all this some more. Nothing gets settled. You get up and pour a brandy. You pour another. You sit on the side of the bed and pick up the phone. You call for Daniel. You don't want to be alone. You know that Daniel will be only too happy to come and stay awhile.

* * * * *

Lucinda's skin became a chalky white, and her body began to resemble a cadaver. Blue circles surrounded her large, empty eyes. You made a point never to look at her eyes directly, fearing that they might meet your own. You could not risk that.

She was alone most of the time except for the nurses who stayed around the clock. It was on an evening you had gone out for a bottle that Lucinda died, with a nurse there, dozing in a chair. By chance you returned home only an hour after she had died. You did not feel remorse but relief. There was no sadness in your own voice when you awoke the sleeping nurse and called an ambulance. Then, as the medical men removed the body, you stared out the window. You watched as the ambulance pulled away on the street below. Now, you were thinking, life could begin again. In earnest.

* * * * *

You sleep late. When you awake, you do not feel rested. You get up and, not bothering to dress, you walk out on your balcony. There, far below, you see Laura and Rosalinda near the pool. Perhaps they are not going to the beach, but will remain there, in chaise lounges. You watch as Laura removes the girl's white robe. Even from the tall distance, you see sparks of light playing in the folds of that robe. The sparks continue down the white cloth and across the clear surface of the water in the pool. For a moment, you wish you were the sun.

You would like to linger near her like the sun does, pore by pore, so to know her. You want to be that close, to witness her slippage from a child's world into adulthood. To have her, you know, is to say goodbye at last to Lucinda, to begin forgetting her. And, it goes without saying, to say goodbye to the kind of person you have become because of Lucinda dying.

You have tried to forget Lucinda, but you will not be free of her entirely until even her

shadows have been chased away. Shadows, you know, are always the last to go.

The light from Rosalinda will cast any shadow out. Her light is that special. Now, watching her fourteen floors below, you see sparks dancing from her every movement in the water. It is the idea of adoration that fascinates you. Everything else in the world seems to fall away. Nothing else is this important.

So you do not turn when you hear the door open and close behind you. You see another shadow, and when you turn you see that Daniel is now standing beside you. He follows your eyes to the pool below. His face darkens. His face is full of jealousy and rage, there is no doubt.

It is the same for everyone, you realize. Everyone is in need of a touch. One that never comes or, if it does, one that never lasts.

Most of the time, the touch you want and need goes somewhere else. It blesses someone else instead. Without a word between you, this all goes back and forth. Then he begins to move toward you. You push him away, roughly. He comes back at you. He pushes you against the railing. You hear the wrought iron pulling away from the stucco wall. You try to grab hold of Daniel but he has already backed away, out of your reach. You begin falling.□

Tom Whalen

THE POETRY OF NEGATION: GODARD'S *LES CARABINIERS*

The world of *Les Carabiniers* is not an easy one to enter. A travelling camera enters a darkened tunnel, whose opening and exit are both in the rectangular shape of the movie screen; just before we are about to leave the tunnel, we jump cut to another tunnel, and just before we exit this one we jump cut to a third, and just before we exit this one we jump cut to a fourth, and just before we exit this one we cut to the cold, bleak outskirts of the city where the film's main characters (Ulysse, Michel-Ange, Cleopatra, and Venus) live. At the end of the tunnel's negative space *Les Carabiniers* is projected.

War is, of course, the ultimate negation—of our life, our humanity. Godard's "objectivity" can parallel a shot of a mannequin on the ground having her hair cut for being a "collaborator" with that of Venus having hers cut for the same reason. Both the mannequin and Venus are, at bottom, images designed and controlled by the powers-that-be and both, in the universe of this film, are of equal value, equal "reality." Definition allows for individuality and emotion, neither of which is permissible here; there is a dominance of long shots and a shallow depth of field which keeps the images two-dimensional, undefined. The characters show excitement when they think they are going to be rewarded and look despondent or pouty when they think they aren't. But no emotion is ever shown when a death occurs. Michel-Ange chews the stem of a plant as he repeats affectlessly "encore" again and again while a young woman is being shot.

The universe of *Les Carabiniers* is one drained of emotion and morality. Our four characters—Ulysse and Michel-Ange, who go off to war, and Cleopatra and Venus, the women who wait at home—are really no more than amoral children. The landscape is a wasteland without depth, colorless. "I tried to film war objectively, without passion; with neither fear nor heroism, courage nor cowardice," Godard has said.[1] It is as if Godard took every war movie ever made and sucked out all their "humanity," their glorification and sentimentality. It's the war film we would see, were such a thing possible, after it had come out the other side of a black hole—the absolute negation of the war movie.

It is a world, too, that embodies all wars, all history, that shows us "what all wars are and have been, from the barbarian invasions up to Korea or Algeria [. . .] always, however, showing the tediously similar faces of war."[2] But if the faces of war are all the same, then in one sense we have no history. The handwritten title inserts, ostensibly excerpts from letters home, are in fact taken from actual soldiers' letters. By using documents not from one war, but from several ("letters by soldiers encircled at Stalingrad, from a hussar of Napoleon during the Spanish campaign, and especially from Himmler's memos to his various combat groups" [Godard 199]), Godard again emphasizes the generic nature of war.

In three instances of doubling, Godard negates time itself. We see in long shot a soldier ask a young woman he has captured, "Qui êtes vous?" and then lift off her cap. Then we hear the same question and see the cap lifted off again, this time in closeup. Ulysse, later in the film, has a medal pinned on his jacket; this, too, is shown in long shot and repeated in closeup. And finally the rifleman, who recruits Ulysse and Michel-Ange in the beginning, twice (long shot/closeup) says, "Je vais vous expliquer" to them before he explains why they can't receive

[1]Qtd. in Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970) 42.

[2]Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard*, trans. Tom Milne, eds. Jean Narbori and Tom Milne (New York: Viking, 1972) 197.

their reward from the king. "Two shots which follow one another do not necessarily follow one another," Godard has remarked (Godard 215). What occurs in long shot can be repeated, with or without variation, in closeup, because film time, as we know, is not real time, and because time in *Les Carabiniers* is war time, negated time.

Nor are the characters themselves, despite their names, conscious of time. When we avert our gaze from history, as the characters do in *Les Carabiniers*, there can only be a continuous present, a perpetual ignorance. The title insert that appears after Michel-Ange photographs the inappropriate "life" to this world. Often when it is used, it simply emphasizes the affectlessness, as in this excerpt from a letter sent home in which the two sentences cancel one another out: "We leave traces of blood and corpses behind us. We kiss you tenderly." Many of the other title inserts negate their imagery with their matter-of-factness. "Sometimes we force people to lie on the bodies of those who just preceded them, and we shoot them in this position." "We pull rings off women's fingers and we make people undress before shooting them, stark naked, at the edge of an anti-tank ditch."

Sphinx and pyramids reads: "From the base of these pyramids, we looked at forty centuries of History contemplating us." The next shot is of Cleopatra combing her hair before a handheld mirror and Venus looking at the card. Both Venus and Cleopatra face right, the same direction as the Sphinx in the previous shot. The women then exchange mirror and card, so that where the mirror was, is now the photograph of the Sphinx. This time, though, the photograph is turned toward the camera; the Sphinx, forty centuries of history, is now contemplating *us*.

Overuse of irony would give a frisson, an "Always the same words: corpses, rot, decay, death, etc."

"War isn't funny," Ulysse tells the recruiter. "Au contraire," *le carabinier* replies, and faintly smiles. The rifleman is shot in closeup as he says this, so that we see the two white crosses [‡] on his cap and two white x's [x x] on each side of his jacket collar. A fifth x or cross is formed by the barrel of his gun and a shelf behind him [+].

The frequency and variety of this visual motif underpins the theme of negation in *Les Carabiniers*. In one of the examples from the documentary footage Godard inserts, we see

missiles shooting diagonally from right to left, then cut to the missiles shooting from left to right. The unseen C formed from A and B is an implied X. Several times in the film, Venus goes to the mailbox which stands foregrounded on a pole. In the middle distance to the left is a metal tower of x's and in the background to the right is a construction girder also formed by x's. Michel-Ange's body itself is shown as an X. After he has received his medal, he stands alone in front of their ramshackle house and leaps in the air. As he does, he splays both his arms and legs [X]. And when he goes to the movies for the first time ("Yesterday we captured the tower of Santa-Cruz. Girls threw flowers. That night, I went for the first time to the movies.") and sees the Lumière-like train coming into the station, he crosses his arms over his face, x-ing himself out.

These x's are not to be confused with Godard's call for a return to zero in such films as *La Chinoise, Weekend,* or *Le Gai Savoir.* X in *Les Carabiniers* does not create a place from which we can begin again. It is not a cleansing of the soul; it's the absence of soul. States do not start wars to protect liberties; none of the soldiers are fighting for ideals. A documentary still shows us a mutilated body laid diagonally from top left to bottom right [\ ]. The next shot is another documentary still of an even more mutilated corpse in the opposite diagonal [/]. X imprints its negativity on every frame of *Les Carabiniers.* It represents not so much an absence as an act of destruction. It explodes, obliterates. X cancels out everything.

The only positive force in *Les Carabiniers* is Godard's cinematic eloquence in presenting his ideas and imagery. Consider, for example, the following two consecutive shots:

> A. Michel-Ange and Ulysse step out of their jeep; Ulysse exits frame right. On the street behind them a truck passes from left to right, then a car from right to left [X]. The camera tracks *right* with Michel-Ange who comes up on Ulysse's *right*. The camera continues its movement, this time in a pan, and moves past Ulysse's arm which is outstretched and pointing toward the gray cityscape that now fills the screen.
>
> B. The same setting. Michel-Ange appears this time on Ulysse's *left* and the camera pans *left* past Ulysse's outstretched and pointing arm to reveal a gray cityscape. In the right foreground is a metal girder with its vertical row of X's rising to the top of the frame.

The gesture is subtle and, on first viewing, perhaps only subliminally perceived, but the denotative and connotative X's produced by the conjunction of camera movements, line dynamics, and character placements in these two shots are oddly, surprisingly transcendent, as if Godard's romanticism, his love of cinema, had suddenly risen from the ashes of his film's world.

All awareness of such privileged moments is denied Michel-Ange and Ulysse. Michel-Ange, before his impending rape of a woman is interrupted by approaching gunfire, stands before a print of a Rembrandt self-portrait, salutes it, and says, "A soldier salutes an artist." But any understanding or appreciation is lacking, just as it is lacking for Ulysse who, in the same house, looks uncomprehendingly at a print of Madonna and child. (The woman whom they are threatening also has a child.) Ulysse and Michel-Ange believe in transcendence only *after* death. The last handwritten sentence, obviously not an excerpt from one of their letters since they have both been shot, reads: "Thereupon the two brothers went to sleep for eternity, believing that the brain, in decay, functions above and beyond death, and that its dreams are what make up Heaven."

The X motif of negation is all around and on them, but they never see it. They ask men beside a truck if they know where the riflemen are, but do not notice that one of the men is painting a black cross on the truck to replace the white cross, the emblem of the king's army. Nor do they notice that the rifleman, who is about to show them a "secret," that is, who is about to kill them, has replaced the white crosses on his uniform with black ones.

But despite the naiveté of these characters, their inability to understand their world, to distinguish the signifier from the signified, Godard never treats them as objects of fun. Venus smiling with the magazine ad for a bra (*Rosy à la secret des formes*) covering her torso and the childishly smiling Michel-Ange holding an underwear ad over his crotch are sorrowful figures. When Michel-Ange, Venus, and Cleopatra each look in turn at a photo of the Leaning Tower of Pisa and each tilt their heads, we do not laugh. There is nothing funny, finally, about the sign's power of manipulation, nothing

funny in observing a self's lack of autonomy.

From the criticism of Kawin and Monaco, we know *Les Carabiniers* to be a Brechtian *Lehrstück* whose lesson can be reduced to "The more the audience loses itself in the screen-as-dream-world, the more likely it is [. . .] to be seduced by directorially manipulated illusions; the more one remains aware of the director, of the theatricality of the image and of the film as sign-system, the more likely one is to be edified and instructed";[3] or "If we know the difference between an image of a woman and a woman who lives and breathes we are less likely to kill the film's principal characters as title deeds they can redeem for real objects, *Les Carabiniers* serves as a statement and warning about the relationship of self to sign.

Yet something else remains on the viewer's "field of consciousness" (Bazin's phrase) besides Godard's filmic essay in semiology. David Bordwell's attempt to release Godard criticism from the strictures of semiotics ("These films suggest much but prove nothing") leads him into a restrictive reading of seeing all of Godard's characteristic techniques as serving only to "assert the cineaste's presence."[5] "In

the latter."[4] And indeed, with its set pieces, its little *Lehrstücke*, of Michel-Ange trying to enter a movie screen wherein a woman is bathing, or Venus placing an ad for bras over her chest, or the long sequence showing picture postcards brought back from the war that are regarded by Godard's films, the [jump cut] signals one thing unequivocally: the intervention of the filmmaker at the editing stage" (Bordwell 328). But again, something else remains and overrides our awareness of "the cineaste's presence": the emotion of sadness, for one thing, in *Vivre sa vie, Les Carabiniers, Le Mépris, Alphaville, Masculin Féminin, Sauve qui peut*, which, at least for this viewer, impresses more than these films'

[3]Bruce F. Kawin, *Mindscreen* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978) 158.

[4]James Monaco, *The New Wave* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976) 133.

[5]David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 313, 327.

flagrant artifice. For beyond (or beneath) Godard's classicism, his semiology, and self-consciousness, lie the bleakness and poetry of a romantic.

We can be grateful that Godard did not entirely succeed in filming war "objectively, without passion [. . .] As Franju filmed the abattoirs in *Le Sang des Bêtes*, but even without his closeups, because a closeup is automatically emotional in its effect" (Godard, qtd. in Roud 42). The prisoner whose hat was removed twice and was asked "Qui êtes vous?" remains anonymous in long shot, but in closeup we see her face, her blonde hair, the expression in her eyes. In closeup she becomes individuated, and the voice that asks "Qui êtes vous?" is quieter, subdued, made personal. "Qui êtes vous?"

The notion of Godard as a romantic may be, as Bordwell notes, a cliché (Bordwell 311).[6] But the question remains how it is that such an analytical film as *Les Carabiniers*, Godard's "coldest film," the one most "strictly organized around its logic," can still affect us in ways rarely discussed in criticism (Monaco 131). "The power or virtue of the created image depends on the nature of its connections," Godard's voiceover says in his recent *King Lear*, "for what is great is not the image but the emotions it creates."[7] Godard's images and the emotions they produce, the poetry of his negations—these are what give substance to his lessons on war.□

[6]Bordwell's chapter "Godard and Narration," it needs to be said, concentrates on and is an excellent study of the narrative strategies and modes in Godard's films.

[7]Qtd. in Marc Robinson, "Resurrected Images: Godard's *King Lear*," *Performing Arts Journal* 31 (1988): 24.

Photos courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archives.

Tom Whalen *has published criticism on Robert Walser, Franz Kafka, Lewis Carroll, Donald Barthelme, George Garrett, and Wim Winders. He co-edited the Walser issue of* The Review of Contemporary Fiction.

Edoardo Albinati

THE DISCONCERTED PRESIDENT

Translated by John Satriano

After all, what President deserves a country riddled with factions who take advantage of his every sign of weakness to run rampant, who turn his Palace into a den of spies every time he goes off on a journey, even a short trip abroad for reasons of health, and who, simultaneously, plot his overthrow with the most explosive fringe elements of the army, and actually go so far as to impugn the dignity of his family with vicious rumors and scandals. The situation has gotten so out of hand, and lasted so many years (almost beyond counting), that there's no reason why the President shouldn't now be me.

A few days ago, at a luncheon for the ambassadors of a scruffy group of oceanic islands, I had the impression that the waiters brought me the smallest piece of meat they could find in the kitchen, putting it in front of me with obvious disgust and quickly withdrawing their fingers. I had them all fired as soon as the ambassadors were dismissed; but I can still see them milling about the drawing-rooms (with the hopelessly high ceilings) and re-arranging the furniture without being asked to, which means that my orders have not yet been carried out, and who knows if they ever will be. At any moment I expect one of them to come up to me and tap me on the shoulder with two fingers, so he can hand over the bit of change he says he found lying under a sofa.

And yet they seemed like very unctuous chaps to me in the beginning, since I was the one who personally had them hired, making sure that the families favored were the poorest in the land, the ones from the North, where fourteen or fifteen people sometimes live in a single, disgusting hovel. But favors or no favors, nothing can change the phony and deceitful nature of our race, and instead of being grateful to me those same Northerners go right on killing the guards sent into the countrysides to take the census or to put an end to the blood-feuds that decimate the populations up there, or else they disarm the new recruits, strip them naked, and, after committing outrages against their manhood—actually it's only a question of boys—abandon them in the woods. And now, strolling stiffly about in their white and blue livery, with their hair slicked back with grease to show off their low and savage brows, they are taking coconuts and cracking them open right in front of me, looking at me in such a way as to suggest that each coconut they're cleaving represents my head.

And to top it off, whenever they move about, it's secretly to the rhythm of their ancient music, which I find disgusting, and which gives them just as much joy; and, politically, the whole country seems to move to the sinuous beats of that old dance. After having elected me almost unanimously, they immediately began to cast murderous glances at me and break up into a thousand different factions, each one of which attacks me all the more violently the more meager its membership. Then, on certain rare occasions (which I'm no longer taken in by), they once more gather around me, just as they do in their dance, squeezing me in a circle of enthusiasm and, in a manner of speaking, tossing me in the air.

The first few times it happened my heart was aflutter with hope. They're all on my side, they're calling all their forces from the countrysides to nourish the heart of our little and ancient land, to make it great: two days later, an excessively heavy downpour or a ruined coconut crop, and they're ferociously unhappy again, they scatter about and dance in a most alarming way—pounding their thighs,

that is, and looking forward, just forward. At times, after a whole day of discouraging meetings with the party chiefs, I'll think I hear drums beating; I step to the window and from the palace heights see the city spread out before me, completely dotted with fires. I then enquire as to whether this is all part of some holiday celebration that I forgot to mention in my last speech, but it's nothing, I'm informed, it's just my fellow citizens getting together in the city-squares to dance. Dismal, it seems to me, that they should do such a thing without a reason.

Unfortunately, even the people who live in the capital (a lovely city of the South) are the same way, just slightly more refined than the Northerners, or maybe just more spineless. As for refinement, it has settled over their old barbarousness like a thin and splotchy layer of mold, putrefying it; so that now they are as tractable, in terms of culture, as the inhabitants of richer countries, and yet, in terms of character, they are as sordid as ever, ready to use any and every sort of guile, as they see fit: which is a carry-over from life in the jungle.

Tonight there will be a gathering of a goodly number of writers and artists in the drawing-rooms of my Palace. I've convened them in order to put their patriotism to the test. They've responded with alacrity, which doesn't mean anything, though: almost every one of them, in some way or another, receives money from the State, and so they can't really get out of it. In honor of the occasion, I decided not to take my usual dose of cheerfulness suppressant—two little yellow pills in a cup of water—which puts me in an enchanted state of lethargy; but I was immediately gasping for air, as if I was in the middle of a lethal fog; and even now, getting into my ceremonial uniform and loading my chest up with medals, I'm still having a hard time catching my breath.

I enter the largest drawing-room of the Palace and there's suddenly a violent explosion of music on my right, which is the darkest corner of the room. They've set up a fake jungle of enormous greenish leaves, all sticky- and elastic-looking, on little potted tree-trunks; and in the middle of this improvised forest is the orchestra, squawking away. In honor of the occasion it seems they've added flutes and trumpets to the standard ensemble, in order to play the national anthem, or something with a rhythm just as depraved. Everything has to conform to that music of theirs, everything has to have a luxuriant air of the tropics to it! My initiative to commission a foreigner to compose a new national anthem hasn't done one bit of good. Why, for example, do they have to highlight the tempo of the most serious and restrained pieces of music with those castanets of theirs, or clack sticks together whenever there's a pause called for in the score, and what's the point of using trumpets to imitate the nasal sound of their traditional instruments, which they don't play because they're ashamed to?

With little hops, a group of people, among whom a woman wearing a stunningly low neckline, rushes up at my arrival with the same panting breathlessness you might expect to see at a finish line. The woman wins by a neck, comes to a halt, and, touching her forehead and lips, prostrates herself almost to the ground, where she remains a while till I beg her to rise. The others do the same, and I'm forced to fend them off and feign magnanimity. I notice too that all the other women, without exception, are wearing homely, uninviting gowns, they're all ugly, and, rather than bother to dress up their hair, they've put a plain part down the middle instead, with a bunch of sad-looking strands hanging over the sides of their faces. The only blonde is the lady with the generously low neckline, who is lingering at my feet, and whom I will afterwards be sure to thank for this.

I ask myself: why all this glumness? Maybe because they think they've got a glum President? And so they're afraid of getting on his nerves by being their own natural, arrogantly cheerful selves? Still, though it's true I can't stand what is too dissimilar to myself, how depressing it is to be taken so seriously! I feel as if they're making a fool of me with their artificially melancholy looks, when it's all too plain to see their mocking good health, their skin taut as a drum's, the color on their faces which nothing in this world could ever make sad. My people only know two things: rage and nostalgia when they're in danger, or far from home or they've had an insult to their honor.

I'd prefer it if they became livid with rage, before my eyes, or joined hands and addressed the traditional prayer of the people to heaven, a sort of blackmail threat to the angels, demanding them to make their losses good, or else they'll kill themselves.

That is where I recognize my heroic people, and that is where my people thought they recognized me.

I became the "hero" of this country by striking down its enemies with rifle and sword, the

enemies who had attacked it and reduced it to slavery. Fighting in the name of universal principles I freed it from the yoke only to find myself, in the end, carrying it around my own neck: the yoke of the whole country, a suffocating weight of men. I can attest that a people set free, this people, is a weight which no universal principle can make lighter. And now these courtiers are aping my ill-humor, though their legs are already twitching for the dance despite them and they can hardly keep their hands away from the tables where liters of an iridescent liquor are swishing about in enormous crystal goblets, a few sips of which would give the more sensitive (if there are any such) a momentary release from trouble, and all the rest a feeling a sensual exaltation.

But *I was not born here*. The name of the nation I am the leader of, a name derived from a ferocious bird of prey, alarms me to no end; I would like to destroy the very seed it springs from. Addressing myself now to its highest-ranking writers, who have slowly crowded around me, sighing for no good reason and, for my benefit, putting on those dismayed looks of theirs (which will melt away as soon as they're out the door), I decide to engage them in a little conversation about culture. In comradely fashion, I take two of them under the arm, for which they are flattered, and we stroll at large about the room, coming and going, while framed in the windows a gigantic moon has risen. I speak to them about the moon and about the stars in the ancient and first language of our country's poetry, a language which cost me a considerable effort to learn, but they don't seem to be acquainted with it. As their suicidal aura disappears, replaced by a sense of apprehension, and they make obvious attempts to get away, I ask them with the most perfect ingenuity to help me translate a certain epigram, and I set off to one of the many inscribed stones that stud the Palace walls, in memory of some ancient invasion.

The two writers are now seized by a total terror; they look at each other over my shoulders, while I bend toward the wall, holding their wrists firmly the whole time. The two of them understand that a true hero and real man of culture is leading them down the path to disaster, down a truly thorny path (this specious interrogation), at the end of which their services will no longer be required by anyone. Then I return them to the flock which is grazing at the buffet tables and dismiss them with a gesture which I manage to make unequivocal. Then, I take a break myself, gasping for air on account of the bewildering scents that are coming in through the windows. The moon is again obscured by a terrible downpour, the racket from which, just for a moment, drowns out every conversation. With smiles on their faces, the waiters glide among the guests, with whom they exchange glances of perfect complicity, offering them trays of little stuffed fruits. A minister of state, ushering three ladies buttoned up to their throats, will be presenting himself before me in a moment, and I turn my back, and feel the desire to become, forever, utterly unreliable.

Could I abandon my powerful and limitless irresponsibility to its own devices, I would decide just this one night, for my people's sake, that the blonde lady will officially be my future mistress.□

John Brehm

WHAT I WOULD WISH FOR

Tonight I take the darkest path home.
Under a corridor of trees

I walk with my head tilted back.
The moon is full. I open

my mouth to swallow its cool light,
to feel it like ice along my teeth,

hold it in my lungs like smoke,
let it expand there until my skin

turns to a dull fluorescent glow.
I think of you, of how you said

the full moon drove you crazy, made
you cruel to me. I never believed

it then. I believe it now.
It makes me crazy too. I can see

you lying in bed in the white room
you said you had dreamed of for

so long looking up at it. Last
night I dreamed I was there,

in Paris, and on the ledge outside
the window I saw a bird with the face

of a beautiful woman. If I could
take my heart and hold it in

my hands I would break it, toss
the halves, like worn coins, into

the lake beside me. What would I
wish for? Nothing. Only that they

might break the stagnant reflection
of the moon, sink down, end over

end, to settle in the cold mud at
bottom. That would be better than this.

Mark Conroy

CRASHING THE PARTY IN SCORSESE'S *THE KING OF COMEDY*

The first thing to confront the spectator at the outset of Martin Scorsese's 1983 film *The King of Comedy* is a low-definition image of something called the Jerry Langford Show. It looks rather like the Tonight Show of one's memories, but something is strange about it: Ed McMahon is replaced by Ed Herlihy, Johnny Carson is Jerry Langford (played by Jerry Lewis), but above all the televised image is on the movie screen. Somehow, that blurry scene is an intruder. A movie has no framing device for a televised image; the usual laws of hospitality seem not to apply. The false familiarity that is part and parcel of the televised world is thereby estranged from the viewer. Ed Herlihy invites one to "say hello to Jerry," but unlike the studio audience, one is more inclined to wonder what brings him here in the first place. To make a film about television is a minor transgression to begin with, and this originary breach of decorum frames what follows from it. For, as Michael J. Arlen says in his fine essay, the structural requirement that "someone should always be host and someone should always be guest . . . has permeated much of American television since its beginnings."[1] And one might add, never more so than in this film.

One signal difference between the movies and television is that between aura and intimacy. There exists between the viewer and the television show, of course, a bar of separation as firm as that between the spectator and his film. But the circumstances of the film's viewing—the (relatively) hushed and respectful theater, the intimidating screen size, the fact above all that one must decide to go to the theater in the first place—all of these factors induce in the cinematic spectator a measure of awe lacking in the televisual counterpart. There is more than a little truth, to be sure, in the voyeurism Christian Metz attributes to the experience of watching a film; but even this sensation, as aggressive as it is, relies on a pre-existing distance to give it the needed edge.[2] It is, with television, a very different matter.

By contrast to film, the television personality ("star" still seems more to fit film actors than those on TV) comes into the viewer's home, and generally not larger than life but rather smaller. The viewer, if of a mind, can turn the set off, or (even more reassuring) turn to something else on another channel.[3] His cinematic equivalent can, of course, choose to leave the theater; but to go where, other than into the anonymous night with only unedited reality for entertainment?

In addition to the conditions of the medium, the specific format of the talk show, that quintessentially televisual mode, adds to the illusion of chumminess. There is, in contrast to a film or even a weekly TV series, no formal script to follow, no fictional character to inhabit, no narrative line to give closure to what occurs on the Jerry Langford Show. The show is, in a sense, just real life, or just like real life; and

[1]From "Hosts and Guests," in *The Camera Eye: Essays on Television* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981) 307-19; 309-10.

[2]Metz discusses the relation between distance and voyeurism most extensively in his "Imaginary Signifier," excerpts from which appear in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986) 244-78. Metz points out that since cinema, unlike theater, gives the scene only "in effigy, inaccessible from the outset, in a primordial *elsewhere*," in that case the "cinema's voyeurism must (of necessity) do without any very clear mark of consent on the part of the object. There is no equivalent here of the theater actors' final 'bow'" (262-64).

[3]It may be exactly this ease of leaving the party that impels those throwing it to elaborate rituals of hospitality so that the viewer not "go away." Asks Arlen: "Why all these hosts and guests? Why this constant playacting of hospitality? Why the need for rituals and control? One wonders inevitably which stranger these hosts are so afraid of. Could it be *us*?" (319). It is indeed "us," and "our" indifference is probably feared even more than "our" aggression.

Langford (whom everybody calls "Jerry") is really himself, or just like himself. The homelike interior, resembling a slightly sterile living room, simulates a private space something along the lines of the viewer's, thus completing the specular scene. Such are the *Gemütlichkeit* of the setting and the bonhomie of guest and host on display that a viewer half suspects to find himself among the guests.[4] The Langford set, which has banished that faintly regal desk by whose means Johnny Carson historically keeps his distance, affords chairs and sofas, as one would have in one's own home.

With sets that resemble a domestic interior, the talk show proceedings themselves mime a convivial get-together, a sort of party where it is Jerry's task to play host to a variety of guests—and almost as an aside, to the studio audience, who occupy a curious demilitarized zone between active performance and passive spectatorship. On the one hand, the talk show format is such that the primary drama is two-way—an "interview" between host and guest—but the audience is in the position of overhearing what is said. As Jerry's guest, the audience realizes what is expected of it: when Langford comes out to its applause, he motions obviously to keep it going. People get the joke certainly, but do keep it going.

The studio audience, then, is at once a surrogate for the spectator at home—and so an unusually active viewer—and a part of the show—and so a curiously passive performer. As the "real people" for this performance, they remind the viewer that what is on the screen is indeed show business; and by participating, oddly enough, they re-establish just enough of the aura that would otherwise be lost. The opening monologue is addressed to the audience directly, but it is in the conversations, where Jerry plays host and the other performers play guest, that the studio audience is left as it were to eavesdrop.

It should not surprise, then, that the idolatry of Langford that seizes the young Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) has its inception "when Jack Paar got sick," giving Langford his "big break": Pupkin himself was in the studio audience for this great event (or so he tells Jerry) and left as if "in a dream." To Pupkin, it must have looked as if one of their number had passed from the audience to the stage: a passage Pupkin now hopes to emulate with similar dreamlike ease.

Langford himself is thus a host on his show, but a guest in the viewer's home; ruler of his televised domain, where the studio audience are the lowliest subjects, he is still subject to the whims of the capricious viewer.[5] Gone is the proscenium arch that framed the cinematic drama: though the spectator may still look up to those on TV, talking back to them is no longer out of the question. In fact, as Jerry walks, with wary suavity, down Manhattan's streets to his office, that is exactly what people do, and not always nicely.

Pupkin also treats Langford with a certain insulting familiarity, although at first it is only in fantasy. He keeps in his basement a mock-up of the Langford Show stage set, with flanking chairs occupied by life-size cardboard cutouts of

[4]James Naremore, in his *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), devotes his final chapter to *The King of Comedy* (262-85), wherein he calls attention to "what sociologists Daniel Horton and R. Richard Wohl term 'para-social interaction,' or the tendency of television programming to coexist with personal relationships. . . . [They] point out that para-social interaction is a new phenomenon in human history: via television, the 'most remote and illustrious men are met *as if* they were in the circle of one's peers. . . . [Such encounters, though mediated by the tube, have] an especially important impact on . . . the 'socially isolated, the socially inept, the aged and invalid, the timid and rejected'" (265-66). One thinks of socially isolated Masha telling a captive Jerry Langford that when she takes a bath she will often think, "I wonder if Jerry's taking a bath right now," adding that then "I just hope, you know, that you're not drowning or something. I just get really worried about you, like something terrible's gonna happen."

[5]Such conditions of perverse equality result in the trend sketched by Richard Schickel in his book *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), whereby the older obsession with stars and their glamor has been overlaid with a spurious accessibility. Schickel comments of television that it "is the primary force in breaking down the barriers that formerly existed between the well-known and the unknown. This, of course, has something to do with the way it brings the famous folk into our living room in psychically manageable size" (9-10). One of Schickel's prime exhibits in this respect is Johnny Carson, an evident real-life inspiration for the Langford figure. In that vein, Beverle Houston's article "*King of Comedy*: A Crisis of Substitution" (*Framework* 24: 74-92) emphasizes the way television's sinister presence, which is both demonstrated and contained in Scorsese's cinematic space, connects to "Rupert's breaking down of social categories" and the fear this arouses in the cinematic spectator, a fear that causes him/her to seek security in "the auteur's enunciation," in other words, complicity with the implied storyteller against figures such as Rupert (79-80). In putting him down, she argues, the film implicitly protects itself against the challenge of the postmodern, with its pre-Oedipal wish fulfillment psychology as embodied by Pupkin.

Jerry and Liza Minnelli, with Rupert, in the flesh, grandly filling the central chair and heartily trading quips with his imaginary friends. This ensemble stages both his desire to emulate Langford and the lordly contempt with which he literally manipulates Langford's effigy. Indeed, the very fact that Langford looks so "at home" on camera, doing what seems to come naturally, itself makes his stardom seem a function not so much of talent as of personality and accident of position.

It seems to Pupkin a mere matter of chance, then, that Langford is idolized (by others and, at least at first, by him) while Pupkin is a mere messenger. (Like everyone his age in New York, though, he insists that he is really set apart for fame: "by nature a comedian," regardless of how he earns his money.) If the "host" on the television set is finally an ordinary person just like the viewer—"as human as the rest of us, if not more so," Pupkin tells Jerry, thinking to compliment him—then the secret of fame is all in the structuration of the field and where the camera is pointing. If Pupkin can only enact the power relations he lives as a fantasy in his own room—if he can only transfer that fantasy to the actual set of Langford's show—then his life will change: from passive spectator to performing guest to all-powerful host: this cursus honorum Pupkin enacts in his private scenario with a minimum of time-consuming work. He tells Langford how he has watched him, and can now emulate his manner: "I've finished the course." (In the event, his on-camera style is in almost complete contrast to Langford's, as florid and vaudevillian as Langford's is narcissistic and TV "cool.") In his eyes, that is training enough; the rest is best left to media positioning.

As Pupkin sets out to make Langford his helper figure, he combines the ruthlessness of the presidential assassin with the reverence of the autograph hound.[6] He starts out by "saving" Langford from the depradations of the crazed autograph seekers who lie in wait for him outside his studio after his televised talk show. It is Rupert's belief that Langford will, in "Androcles and the Lion" fashion, reward him for services rendered by allowing him to appear on the show; and he proceeds to make incursions into Langford's workplace and, ultimately, his country home in pursuit of that belief. Taking with him his desired *fiancée*, bartender Rita King (Diahnne Abbott), he goes there having daydreamed an invitation by Langford: a dream shattered when the unwilling host, suppurating with rage, throws them both out. Eventually, at the instigation and with the aid of his occasional partner, Masha (Sandra Bernhard), Pupkin kidnaps Langford, forcing him to allow Pupkin to present his "act" in the traditional spot reserved for Langford's opening monologue. Walter Mitty becomes Horatio Alger when Pupkin succeeds and, in a controversial closing sequence that could be a dream of his, returns from his two-year stay at Allenwood prison a star (or personality) in his own right.

Pursuant to his aim of attaining the other side of the TV looking glass with minimum effort, Rupert uses the fact that he saves Langford from the other autograph hounds as an excuse to invade Langford's life himself, getting into the limousine despite Jerry's "very strict rule about people getting in the car." Langford quickly fends off Pupkin's hopes for a welcome to his television home by emphasizing the hard work and talent, "years and years and years of honing and working," it takes before one can "walk onto a network show." Such talk, predictably, only bores Pupkin, who sees walking onto the show as the precondition for a career, not as its culmination. As he will claim in his monologue, Pupkin's favored method is starting at the top; Langford insists, to the contrary, that the bottom is "a perfect place" for Pupkin "to start."

For all its obvious self-serving force, Jerry's speech about the need for experience is just another way of pointing out that the persona that seems as if "it's just a matter of taking another breath" is itself an elaborate *rôle*, not really even another version of the self so much as another self altogether. Pupkin, more postmodern perhaps, senses another, competing truth of a generation raised by TV: that the element of chance, when the results are viewed by "a bigger audience than the greatest comedians used to play to in a whole lifetime," as Pupkin says, can sometimes do the work of years by a masterstroke. Langford's generation of performer sees the televised inner circle as something to be gained through the traditional route of show business travail before many live audiences. One must, in this model, first gain

[6]Scriptwriter for the film, Paul D. Zimmerman, claims his inspiration for the script came from "a 1970 *David Susskind Show* on autograph hunters: 'I realized that autograph hounds are just like assassins except that one carries a pen instead of a gun' [said Zimmerman]" (J. Hoberman, "King of Outsiders," *Village Voice* 15 Feb. 1983: 92).

the approval of the audiences one will then be famous enough to shun. But for Pupkin, as for his generation, the intermediate social term that is the audience has largely fallen away, leaving only the "intimate grid and the grid of two hundred million," the collective national consciousness and the individual psyche.[7]

As host-spectator, Pupkin has already let Jerry into a variety of his fantasies: first as father-protector helping the hero, as when a Langford show becomes the occasion for a "surprise" wedding planned by the host; then as an enfeebled patriarch nominating his successor, as when he begs Pupkin in one scenario to take over the show; and finally as an enemy to be vanquished in battle. The Oedipal content of these fantasies, especially in the daydreamed wedding to Rita with Langford proud in sponsorship and Dr. Joyce Brothers looking on, is of course rich. Masha, his helpmeet, also lets Langford into her fantasy world, where again he plays the father. It is a perfect crisscrossing: Langford, the houseguest who plays host, substituting for the absent father, that domestic host who when home acts more like a guest.

The ease with which such national TV images bleed into individual daydream fosters the abolition of psychic distance whereby Rupert can deem a coerced conversation in Langford's car tantamount to endorsement of his comedy career. If Langford's image is so malleable in Pupkin's hands at home, in his playroom, and in his imagination, how can the real person be any less so? "Jerry is a very nice guy," he solemnly tells Rita. "And we had a terrific meeting."

From violating the car, Pupkin proceeds to visit his offices, first by using Langford's name to get his tape heard and then by something like breaking and entering, after his "act" is rejected. Then he further transgresses the laws of hospitality by visiting Langford's country house uninvited and unannounced. Pupkin seems taken aback that Langford does not have an entourage attending a party, but instead just a table set for one. (His city apartment also has a table set for one: the luxury of not playing host in his own home certainly has its appeal for this character.)

Viewers are often ambivalent about Pupkin's pushiness through the first part of the film. After all, the talk show host (and more importantly the talk show as an institution) is really as much intruder as guest.[8] Langford, who comes into the viewer's home, but allows nobody into his home or even car except for hired help and his dog, may seem almost to have this turnabout coming. This is the same obscure revenge fed by the gossip industry, and it accounts for some of the viewer's discomfort as Pupkin actually enters Langford's house, seeming almost to have cased the joint beforehand, so knowledgeable is he about Jerry's golf game and household artifacts.[9] It is the viewer's temptation to endorse this harrying of the dour star that makes for a doubly disquieting response to the final violation of his privacy: a violation with which the spectator feels somehow complicit.

When this particular guest shot proves unavailing, Pupkin decides to reverse the rules of hospitality, and to make Jerry the all-powerful host into a captive guest. Overcoming their mutual distaste for the sake of bagging their shared obsession, Masha and Pupkin get together and kidnap Langford, keeping him taped in Masha's apartment while Pupkin uses his hostage to extort an opening monologue slot out of the show. The scene where they first abduct him, using a fake gun of course, reverses the earlier scenes where first Masha is thrown out of Jerry's limousine and then Pupkin is more politely given the bum's rush. Here, Rupert wields the fake gun and the grinning Masha, the omnivorous female of Langford's nightmares, is at the wheel.

Pupkin then uses his houseguest to become himself the guest the Langford organization once forbade him to become, forcing Langford

[7]The grids are invoked in George W. S. Trow's *Within the Context of No Context* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1981) 40.

[8]Trow discusses this in remarking of the TV talk show host that he "is honest when he implies that his aim is to *grant access*. He lies when he implies that his aim is to grant to a viewer access to a context. No context exists. There has been no intrusion. No forgiveness is necessary. The true role of the host is to grant, to a celebrated product, access to the viewer. The intrusion is intrusion on the viewer" (41). The synthetic "show biz" voice and manner of Pupkin are really the index of that intrusion, but also of that aspiration to the phoney talk show "context" of no context, which is his spiritual home.

[9]This discomfort was shared by those making the movie, for reasons not hard to imagine. David Thompson and Ian Christie's *Scorsese on Scorsese* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) has the director remark: "The scene when Rupert Pupkin turns up uninvited at Jerry's house was extremely difficult for everyone. It took two weeks and it was just so painful because the scene itself was so excruciating" (88).

to call his producer, Bert Thomas (Johnny Carson's "real life" producer, Fred de Cordova), in order to read Pupkin's threat from cue cards: a cruel reversal of power relations to be sure, but doubly imprisoning for Langford, echoing as it does those cue cards he is typically forced to read on his spontaneous show. The film rhymes this scene with the introduction Tony Randall (Tony Randall) must later read verbatim for Pupkin: the on-air equivalent of what Langford has to do off the air, and also said in a stiff, recitational tone as if to indicate the speaker's distance from his own words.

Not only Langford's words but his very voice can be easily stolen from him, since Langford himself is first assumed to be an impressionist when he calls his office. Indeed, the force of the kidnapping scene is to dramatize not only Langford's evident captivity within the apartment but also his ongoing captivity at the hands of his own organization (it takes him several tries to convince his own staff to allow him to speak to his producer) and the media machine that sends forth his persona to be emulated, caricatured, stolen. Once this host is reduced to the status of guest, the illusion of his kingship is seen to rest upon a vast Oz-like machinery, whose rules apply almost as strictly to him as to anyone else; and the fame that lets him impose his personality upon others also means that others may appropriate it for their own uses, just as his captors "appropriate" him.[10] One is reminded of the vast moat that surrounds the inner circle of seeming hospitality, and also of the vulnerability to external forces that is the reason for such paranoia.

Of course, Jerry is not exactly a guest, although he is coming into Masha's home, at her urgent invitation. This does not keep Masha, whose apartment it is, from assuming the prerogatives of the guest-host relation by altering Langford's image, and one-upping Rupert by doing it to Jerry himself and not his effigy. One way she exercises such prerogatives occurs as she is painstakingly dressing Langford almost like a Ken doll in a specially made sweater—another gesture that ironically recalls the show, where his wardrobe is also selected by others. When Rupert objects to how long it is taking, Masha explodes: "This is *my* house; Jerry's *my* guest." Whereas Rupert's goal is to "guest" on Langford and ultimately "host" on his own show—therefore to be Langford—Masha by contrast desires to have Langford.[11] In Masha's apartment, the dinner table is finally laid for two, although she soon clears its dishes away preparatory to lovemaking. She has taken her duties as hostess quite seriously, to the point of laying on special crystal goblets. Langford is here the gentleman caller of her fantasy.

But she desires him on her terms: the terms of the hostess. When she informs a taped and bound Jerry Langford, now reduced to spectatorial immobility, "I feel completely impulsive tonight, anything could happen," one recognizes a topos of real-life Langford inspiration Johnny Carson. It is her signal to Langford that she, not he, is now hosting; and he, not she, is watching. When she sings "Come Rain or Come Shine" (a song Jerry Lewis recorded, by the way), she seems less like a guest singer performing for a host than the host performing for a captive audience.[12] She never gets her wish that he make love to her—as soon as she undoes Langford's restraints he violently hits her and escapes—but had she done so, it would not have meant an omnipotent host's noblesse oblige but rather extorted approval, like an audience's response to an "applause" sign.

[10]Leo Braudy's *Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) explores just this bondage of performer to image in the section entitled "Hostages of the Eye: The Body as Commodity" (566-83). One especially telling anecdote in the light of the Langford kidnapping concerns a 'thirties brothel in Hollywood called Mae's, with prostitutes that both resembled and impersonated famous movie actresses (579).

[11]Houston speaks of the Lacanian difference between them as Rupert wishing to be the phallus and Masha desiring to possess the phallus (84). It is a useful way of distinguishing the two figures up to a point; and yet in many ways Masha does take over Jerry's "host" persona in arrogating his hosting duties to herself. Also, she errs in identifying Jerry Lewis so thoroughly with the cinema, arguing that "his career as a whole is based primarily on cinema, where he is now a famous auteur" (79). She tries to make this part and parcel of the Langford character beyond its capacity to absorb such symbolic weight in order to shore up her point that *The King of Comedy* is chiefly concerned with the threat of TV to movies; but the fact that both Dick Cavett and Johnny Carson (completely televisual figures) were first considered for the role—not to mention Langford's complete saturation by the televisual function—cast doubt on this. Her more general distinction between modernist Langford and (presumably) postmodern Pupkin may be more accurate (81). Part of the difference between Langford's narrative of slow craft perfection and Rupert's "big break" notion is indeed generational, but more this, I think, than a narrow question of classical cinema versus TV.

The glare with which Langford, pausing in flight down the street, greets the television sets in a shop window, all radiating Pupkin's visage, registers the depth of the usurpation that has occurred during his exile, his night of enforced spectatorship. Not only is Pupkin warm and atingle in the glow of audience approval, but Langford is on the outside looking in: on the far side of the protective moat, where Pupkin started out. That anonymity which is the worst nightmare of the famous, worse than all the horrors of fame itself, descends upon Langford at this moment, as he looks on from a deserted street at someone else "being" him. Fame's prisonhouse looks good from the standpoint of nameless freedom. The two sides of the looking glass have been switched at this point, and Pupkin is on the happy side, if only for a night.

Since Pupkin's very appearance on Langford's show is a violation of the hospitality rules of show business—the "ground rules" alluded to at the outset by Langford—it is hard to classify Pupkin's *rôle* once he is on the show. Is he a guest? Tony Randall calls him "my first guest," but only because Pupkin has demanded that his introduction be read verbatim. Really, since he is usurping not only Langford's place but that of his "guest host" (to use the tortured term of art for Randall's place holding function), Pupkin is more like a substitute host himself.[13] After all, his monologue opens the show just as Jerry's normally would. But he does not go on to fill Jerry's "host" *rôle* on the show: indeed, in the division of labor as indicated, it is Masha who plays host, to Jerry. Despite his dream, then, Pupkin does not appear on Langford's show either as a guest or as a host, but rather as a parasite: an unwelcome intruder, as if somebody actually did cross the footlights from the audience uninvited. It is not legitimate succession, as in Rupert's hopes, but a temporary coup, that he attains.

The monologue that is the goal of Pupkin's endeavors—and that cheats him of his Warholian allotment of fifteen minutes of fame by about half that amount—smacks of the surreal as a result. The film spectator knows that although Pupkin presents himself as a guest of the cozy Langford family, at home within the fake intimacy of the set, he is in reality an irruption from the gritty outside, the world beyond the show biz proscenium. Such knowledge, combined with the irritating personality of Pupkin, makes the monologue hard to enjoy. The film spectator is further estranged from past responses as a TV spectator, since as bad as it is, Pupkin's monologue, were one to come upon it on television itself, might not seem terribly below standard. One's own identity as a consumer of entertainment is thus estranged by the film. The studio audience cannot be the usual Greek chorus whose laughter reliably prompts one's own.

The fact that Pupkin is a usurper, then, would seem to work against his eventual success: neither host nor guest, he lacks any show biz legitimacy. This, however, would be to overlook the porousness of the TV medium, that most parasitic of cultural forms. It is here that the narrative of Horatio Alger intersects most powerfully with that of the serial murderer or the presidential assassin. This similarity is often reduced to the fact that like John Hinckley, Rupert Pupkin commits a crime in order to impress a girl; but this aspect of the similarity, though true, is not exhaustive.

For the Langford show, despite its mock-up of living room and guest-host relations, is also part of the apparatus of publicity; and as such it is part of a much larger weave than that which the confines of the show could contain. When the FBI agent backstage before the show tells Pupkin to consider himself under arrest, and Pupkin says, "Fine. I think I should get made up now," it indicates a belief that it is the very fact of his anomalous appearance, its very

[12]Naremore mentions Lewis's recording on 283. Regarding the scenes in Masha's apartment taken as a whole, it is interesting to note that the evident aggressivity of Masha's spectatorship, where Langford becomes the main course on her menu, reverses the gender polarities so central to Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975). There she describes the male viewer's desire to subjugate a potential image of castration in the female by means of the gaze, a scopophilic activity that reduces the female threat by reducing her to an object of pleasurable consumption. The situation presented in this film is clearly the reverse, at least thematically. Mulvey would no doubt suspect that Zimmerman was simply demonstrating, consciously or no, the classic dynamics of male viewership with a transvestite alibi. But Masha's attempted cannibal's feast may also nudge the insight that the true dynamics of viewership are often less gendered than Mulvey may think—more Adlerian, possibly, than Freudian. Turning the look into an instrument of aggression, in an age where fame is tightly connected to being looked at, may simply be the revenge of the powerless spectator on the (seemingly) all-powerful center of attention.

[13]Arlen notes this contortion of semantics, television's unique contribution to the annals of guest-host relations.

criminality, that ensures his fame. After all, the unprecedented has loomed large in his own daydreams about the Langford show, as in the scenario where his high-school principal, George Kapp (played in the movie by George Kapp), is announced as a "mystery guest," something that "we've never presented before." Pupkin is hoping that his violation of Langford hospitality, both by its novelty and perhaps by the way it plays upon the audience's secret desires, will serve to keep the name Pupkin (spelt right for the first time in his life) to the forefront of people's imagination.

Position really is of the essence after all. Although Randall's introduction has him say that "nothing is a sure thing in this business" because "the verdict is always in your hands," nevertheless the comparative success of the Pupkin monologue, coming as it does at the place where the audience is led to expect "the jokes," would gainsay that idea.

Pupkin's worship of Langford, then, has all along been in fact an abasement before the apparatus that affords Langford his position as host. And one of the things that makes the viewer uncomfortable in watching the Pupkin monologue, in addition to the circumstances and quality of the material, is the very nakedness of this apparatus. The movie shows one Pupkin's monologue not when he records it, but at the point in the narrative when it is aired; it is shown, as with the opening sequence with Jerry Langford, as a grainy television image; and the camera, as is typical with a televised monologue, remains utterly stationary, a pure recording device. All along, through all the hosts and guests and guest hosts, this superstructure of hospitality always needed a base of technical and economic means to get its party together. It is Rupert's cold-eyed insight that the camera's "ground rules" are the only ones he really has to respect. He understands the need to be when and where the camera is running, and in that at least he is the perfect guest: "We're always punctual," he informs Bert Thomas. The personnel are quite interchangeable, as when the writer whose time Pupkin consumes is crossed off the show's list and informed of it when he shows up *en famille*. The real party giver, finally, the only host that really matters, is the camera eye itself.[14]

In this regard, Pupkin's apotheosis, where he returns to mass acclaim, is, though clearly a *Taxi Driver*-style daydream in the mode of his past daydreams, still not beyond the range of the plausible. He appears on a studio set in a radiant red suit, soaking up mindless applause and beaming silently. Though his personal scenario, it could be prophecy as well; and its essential motor is not audience demand as such but rather the machinery of publicity. Talk of his autobiography, agentry, and movie deals, all delivered by a reportorial voice-off, leads up to the adulation at the conclusion, which seems more like the last piece of the puzzle than some starting point for fame. The apparatus has dictated certain rules of etiquette for the audience who, knowing its place, obliges by carrying them out.

Such a result must be most pleasing to Rupert, who throughout this film desires not so much to please the crowd as to compel its respect. His fascination with the Langford show may be just as much for the way it puts the audience in its place—that of the backstairs servants overhearing the after-dinner conversation of their superiors—as for what is said on it. Prominent in his playroom fantasy world is a huge mural photograph blowup of a laughing audience before which he does his act: a crowd frozen in abject laughter, each and every face dissolving in hilarity, all bent to his will. As it happens, his admiration of Langford springs from a secretly shared contempt for the audience, a shared need to tame them.

Pupkin, as played by De Niro and written by Paul D. Zimmerman, is a bundle of self-conscious show business affectations, trying to move beyond the audience by announcing his own self-fashioned persona. He is deemed "'onstage' even in his intimate encounters"

[14]If we are to believe Jean-Louis Baudry, whose "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" is in Rosen (286-98), the potential intimidation of the spectator by the omnipotent "speaking subject" of the camera eye, on which one depends for what one sees, is usually papered over by a cinematic version of "the imaginary order" that functions to fill the "gap, the split, of the subject on the order of the signifier" (294). The threat posed by the naked camera is thus obscured through the mechanism of "secondary identification," whereby one narcissistically identifies with a carrier of subjecthood, so to speak, through whom the viewer sees, both literally and figuratively, most of what occurs in the movie. Ordinarily, this "place-holder" would be Rupert Pupkin. But since *his* viewership so embodies the limitations and neuroses of the film spectator's viewership, and also since it is hard to read the achievement of his goal in the narrative as in any way honorable, one is left to gape blankly, rather as the camera does. Houston also refers to this failure of secondary identification with Pupkin for a protagonist (91).

(Naremore 279). Yet by wanting to use his success to marry his high-school crush, Rita King, Rupert obviously hopes to suture his "real life" somehow to his show business career. Above all, the desire is to overcome the interference of the crowd, those classmates who bullied him in childhood, and whom he would like to prove wrong now; those masses Pupkin would like to flee in Hollywood, where he tells Rita they will get a suite at the Sherry, "way up top so we can look down at everybody." The social world beyond his mother's house is just as frightening for Pupkin as the fans beyond his studio are for Langford.

Given the misanthropic motives it imputes for entering show business, perhaps it was inevitable that people connected with "the industry" would be made uneasy by the show. And indeed *The King of Comedy* is not much liked. Even among those who made it there were many squabbles, such as over the original ending, which was to be a re-enactment of the kidnapping on Langford's TV show.[15] But audience members and spectators—the rest of us, in short—should be made uneasy as well.

For much of the appeal of the Langford show, with its informal ambience and mutual admiration society of guests and host, arises from its specular re-enactment of the self-contained space within which television is viewed. The rules of hospitality that govern interaction between guests and host also dictate exclusion from the inner circle, that self-contained space. But the line that should separate inner circle from outer darkness, civilian from "show biz" worlds, is one the film compulsively crosses.[16]

By returning the viewer constantly to that intermediate space where TV personalities play themselves, ordinary viewers cross the footlights, and the extras look suspiciously like "real people," this film concentrates on precisely those awkward threshold areas where the "ground rules" break down, are reversed, or must be re-invented, in short, that gray realm where the world of show business must intersect with the amorphous social world beyond show business, on which it depends but which it colludes with the spectator in trying to disavow. Exactly how fragile this disvowal is becomes clear when Langford is kidnapped, and this collapse of etiquette quickly invades the seemingly placid, airtight Langford organization. In one scene, the FBI and the Langford people, ostensibly on the same side, start squabbling over strategy, with Langford's lawyer announcing his intention to "sue everybody," including his interlocutor.[17]

Setting the film in New York, that exemplary cityscape where the civic sense is all but invisible at times, delivers an especially acute agoraphobic sense. The larger world of New York in this film is a Hobbesian agon where no object, whether a spot "next to Jerry" or a public telephone in actual working order, is too mean to prompt a minor war of each against all. The profusion of sterile interiors—Lewis's white-on-white apartment and mausoleum of a country house, Pupkin's claustrophobia-inducing basement playroom, the airport-lounge feeling of the Langford "reception area" with its canned music—marks an aspiration to cleanliness, a near-universal desire to wash away the dirt of the city, just as in *Taxi Driver*. One of Pupkin's daydreams has Langford commending him for

[15]Naremore discusses this change, and for what it is worth I tend to agree with Lewis that the first ending lacked a certain logic (269). Interestingly, Lewis wanted the movie to be more overtly sacrificial as well: "the picture suffers because no one was hurt" (qtd. in Houston 89).

[16]Jerry Lewis has himself been a talk show host, and his name is similar to Langford's; De Niro and Diahnne Abbott, who plays his girlfriend, have actually had a relationship; and Dr. Joyce Brothers and Tony Randall, among others, come onscreen playing the *rôle* they have habitually played on talk shows—themselves. One might say they play themselves playing themselves. Even the autograph-hunting extras at the film's beginning are many of them famous autograph hunters in real life. Naremore discusses this Pirandellian *milieu* (262-85) with particular focus upon the street scenes between De Niro and Bernhard, where actual passersby and "extras" get confused (283-85). Their *cinéma-verité* presence is a foil to De Niro's actorish Pupkin, already prepared for liftoff beyond ordinary life, powered by his factitious persona (280-81). It may also be noteworthy that Scorsese picked Lewis in part because of the cerebral palsy telethon with which he is associated: "the thin line between reality and drama seems to be shattered constantly during this telethon" (qtd. in Thompson 90). Houston suggests, with some justice, that this constant transgressivity begins to devour the telling of the film (its "enunciation") along with the narrative, and points especially to the confused ontological status of the ending, which Lewis sees as Pupkin fantasy and Scorsese just as passionately as diegetic reality (88-91).

[17]According to Hoberman, that scene "is played entirely with nonactors. Scorsese used a real FBI agent, a real TV producer, a real lawyer, and a real agent (his own). 'And they really fought,' he remembers. 'When I yelled cut, they kept on going'" (38).

the "purity" of his act. Similarly, Masha, splendid in the isolation of her townhouse, commends her captive, Jerry, for his "simplicity" and elsewhere denounces a hostile, jeering crowd—who overhears a loud argument she has with Pupkin—as "scum" and "street crap."

Those who point to the obvious Oedipality in Rupert Pupkin's fantasy, and with a twist in Masha's, are of course right: Langford does substitute for an absent father in both cases, and Pupkin's struggle, first to win Jerry's approval and then to take over his show, is a classic instance of the use of the imaginary to enter the realm of the Symbolic, as Lacan would have it (Houston 76, 78, 80). But the reason Pupkin wants to accept the mirror and merely step into it, rather than leave the confines of his basement and "test it [his act] in live situations," as Jerry's assistant pointedly suggests in turning him down, is finally his sense that what he wants most from show business is not interaction with crowds but admiration from them. The larger social sphere beyond his four walls is represented, and not fondly, as high school: a scene of degradation he wishes only to erase, after accepting the collective apology of his cruel classmates and wedding the most beautiful cheerleader. As restricted as it is, Langford's set presents more of a social life than Pupkin ever leads; and his admiration of the star no doubt derives in part from the fact that Langford receives guests at all. But TV's circle of warmth requires excluding a larger, more menacing social world.[18] Pupkin has in a sense only taken that logic of exclusion and used it to leapfrog over the social directly into the studio itself. From the death of the social, a star is born.

The studio audience, in turn, is duly grateful for the warmth it receives. A crowd on its best behavior, the audience is of course as eager to acquit itself well as are the performers. Like them, the audience is playing itself for the duration. Once the camera's light and warmth go out, the orderly audience reverts to disorderly unpredictability: even the word "mob" is altogether too distinct, too purposeful to name this amorphous, all-encompassing fear. As Rupert is being ejected from Langford's country house, he vows to "work fifty times harder"—than what? one wonders—and "be fifty times more famous than you [Jerry]." To this Langford replies, "Then you'll have idiots like you plaguing your life." To judge by the film's ending, Langford's pronouncement rings more like malediction than prophecy: Pupkin, fantasy or no, is a happy man. But for how long?

For Pupkin's dream of "breaking into" the business entails a difficult tension. Whereas he must break the "ground rules" invoked by the old guard such as Langford, those same rules of hospitality that keep the *hoi polloi* outside the gates—everything embodied by Mr. Wirtz of Langford security, who removes Rupert from the sanctum sanctorum—must still be observed by others. The rest of the audience must stay safely on the far side of the footlights, fusing itself into a welcoming throng for the performer. But Pupkin's very example is more likely to embolden other "civilians" who are not part of the show business *milieu* to cross the very line he has crossed, just as Langford's "big break" has made it seem easier for somebody like Pupkin.

In hoping to turn the savage crowds he fears into an audience conforming to his own rules of hospitality, Pupkin dramatizes the dread of the masses that lurks within the most innocent love of show business; and in making his dream come true by violating those very rules, he demonstrates how fragile the basis for such a hope must be. For outside the numinous TV studio, it is very cold indeed. And the New York streets, as mean in their way as any in Scorsese's films, have neither hosts nor guests—only strangers, some of whom "will do anything, *anything*," to get on TV.[19]□

[18]Braudy has pointed out how the mechanics of modern fame often work to eschew the older public (or even republican) cast of traditional fame: "The modern media of communication allow . . . performance to take place in relative isolation. In effect, modern fame becomes a virtually unparalleled *fame without a city*" (554). It is this freedom from place for which the famous pay in the coin Braudy speaks of elsewhere: vulnerability to appropriation by their spectators.

[19]The citation is from Scorsese, who tells Hoberman that of the two main characters he identifies more with Langford: "There are kids who will do anything, *anything*, to get into movies" (92).

Mark Conroy *is Associate Professor at Ohio State University. He has published* Modernism and Authority, *on Flaubert and Conrad, and is currently working on a study of E.M. Forster, Ford Maddox Ford, and Wyndham Lewis.*

Stephen Gibson

MUTUAL OF OMAHA'S *WILD KINGDOM*

One minute he was with his wife and daughter, pointing out to his little girl how the bigger bear's bouncing up and down on the steel plates in the cement floor of the sunken polar bear enclosure was something that polar bears in the Arctic near the North Pole did to the ice when they hunted seals. The bears bounced up and down, up and down, like that one, using their weight to break through the ice when they knew seals were nearby. The bears could smell the seals through the ice. Sometimes the seals would try to hide under a different part of the ice, but the bears were too smart and too strong, and they could smell the seals anyway. The bears would use all of their strength and break through the ice. That was how polar bears hunted seals in the Arctic.

His daughter looked at him for a moment, then returned her attention to what the bear was doing in the compound. The polar bear pressed with all of its weight on its front paws, pushing against one plate, then the other. Then the bear moved onto both plates and raised its front end, coming down harder than before. The plates, doors to some containment area inside the cement floor, Stroud thought, bowed visibly. The bear came down on it again.

"Is that true, why they bounce like that?" his wife, Marjorie, asked.

"I think so," Stroud said.

His wife lifted her sunglasses from the bridge of her nose onto her head, then dabbed at a corner of her left eye with the tip of a tissue. The eye was still inflamed and producing yellow in the corners, cause for cancelling the beach.

"How's it feeling?" he asked.

"I'll live," his wife said. She looked at what was on the tissue, then returned the sunglasses over her eyes. "I didn't know you could smell something through ice," she said.

"Polar bears can," he answered. Stroud felt his eyebrows rise, wrinkling his forehead, an old habit whenever he felt he wasn't going to be believed. "I saw it on television once. It might have been Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*."

"Oh, that explains it." His wife laughed sarcastically and returned to looking into the compound.

The smaller polar bear emerged dripping from the wading pool where it had been slapping at a dented, shiny, stainless steel half beer keg. The bear shook itself, rump to the audience of onlookers who ringed the compound from above. That was one of the principal attractions now at the zoo after the renovations: there were fewer obstructions and everyone felt closer to the animals. Only the height of the cement wall, ringed at the top with curved bars pointing into the enclosure, and a brass guardrail separated visitor from animal. The bear shook itself more vigorously, throwing spray onto the onlookers closest to that part of the enclosure. Stroud smiled, watching the sexual play of two young girls who squealed and hid their heads under their boyfriends' tee-shirts to escape the water.

"Do you know how Eskimos used to hunt polar bears?" he asked, turning to Marjorie. His wife looked at him and slowly smiled at the question. He guessed that behind the sunglasses Marjorie was doing that thing she always did with her eyes whenever she was making fun of him. "I'm serious," he said.

"*Wild Kingdom*?" Marjorie asked.

"No, a book," Stroud answered. On the one hand his wife thought he was an intellectual snob because of his choice in reading matter—which he often was—compared to the novels and the kiss-and-tell unauthorized biographies that she was always ordering through her book club. On the other hand, she considered his taste in television childish.

His daughter leaned with both of her elbows on the guardrail, and Stroud leaned over her, closer to Marjorie. "The Eskimos were ingenious," he said. Marjorie tilted her head to one side, her smile broadening. He ignored her. "Before we ruined them with snowmobiles and

HBO, the Eskimos used to take a hunting knife and wrap it inside a piece of meat or blubber—"

"What kind of blubber?" Marjorie teased.

"Do you want to hear it or not?"

His wife covered her mouth with her fingertips in mock seriousness.

"The Eskimos," he went on quickly, "used to hide the blade of a hunting knife inside a piece of blubber—seal blubber," he said as his wife started to laugh behind her fingers, her shoulders shaking. "The Eskimos would leave the meat like a package out on the ice somewhere for some polar bear to find. When the polar bear found it, the bear, like any animal would, would begin licking the meat, and then biting into the blade."

His wife's expression changed. "That's horrible," she said.

"No, wait," he said. Sheree motioned that she wanted to be picked up, and Stroud hoisted her, adjusting her weight on his hip and arm. "Here's the beauty of it, the ingeniousness," Stroud went on. "Because it's so cold and because the blade is so sharp, the polar bear doesn't know that it's cutting its tongue, that the blood it's tasting is its own, not the meat's."

"That's horrible, Jack," his wife repeated.

"No," he said, "it's intelligent. It's human intelligence. The polar bear lacerates its own tongue because it doesn't feel it, but it keeps doing it because of the taste in its mouth. The polar bear bleeds to death. Don't you get it?" he asked. "The Eskimos get to kill the polar bear without having to face any unnecessary danger."

His wife didn't look convinced. "I still think it's horrible," she repeated.

Stroud shifted Sheree onto his other arm. "That's not horrible—what's horrible is what the Eskimos used to do with whalebone."

"I don't want to hear it." His wife turned so as not to look at him.

"The Eskimos sometimes would coil a whalebone, well, actually it was whale cartilage . . ."

"Jack, I don't want to hear it," she said.

"They'd coil the cartilage into this tight, tight loop and hide it inside a piece of meat . . ."

"Jack, I said I don't want to . . ."

". . . and then when the polar bear swallowed the meat with the cartilage inside it, the whalebone would uncoil in the bear's stomach or intestines . . ."

"That's enough. I'm serious," his wife said, turning. "I don't want to hear anymore."

Stroud stopped. He shifted his daughter back onto the first hip. "It was just something interesting I once read about Eskimos," he said.

"*Rats, Lice and History*?" Marjorie answered. She was still annoyed, ridiculing the latest book he had ordered through his own book club.

"I surrender," he said.

Marjorie turned away, staring into the polar bear enclosure. "I hate when you do that," she said without looking at him.

The larger polar bear stopped bouncing on the steel plates and went over to the edge of the wading pool. The bear slapped at the beer keg, the metal clinking against the side of the pool. The smaller polar bear went over to its end of the compound and began waving its nose back and forth in the air. At the guardrail, an enormous man in full beard was eating hot dogs, three grasped in one hand while he shovelled in a fourth. The man crumpled the wax paper as he pushed in the end of the hot dog, then tossed the paper into the compound. The smaller bear looked at the paper as it landed, but went back to sniffing the air.

"I said I surrender," Stroud apologized. It was a sore point between Marjorie and himself: he would remember something of interest he had read somewhere and his wife would make fun of him; then he would use the thing to get back at her for ridiculing him and for not having the same interest in it as he did.

"Come on," he said. Suddenly, Stroud hoisted his daughter in the air and pressed his face into her belly. "Mommy's mad at Daddy and won't talk to him," Stroud said. His daughter began kicking with laughter. "Tell Mommy to talk to Daddy or Daddy will cry." He buried his face in his daughter's pink dress, her white ankle socks and black spaghetti-strap shoes running in place. Then Stroud leaned her over the guardrail. "Oh, oh, oh, Daddy can't hold Sheree up," he cried.

Marjorie turned around. "Jack, that's enough," she said. She put her hand on his arm to restrain him. As she did, Stroud straightened up.

"Tah dah," he laughed to his daughter, "it worked. Mommy's talking to Daddy."

"Knock it off, Jack," his wife said under her breath. She motioned with her head, indicating a couple that had been next to them at the guardrail, but who had now moved farther down. The man was giving Stroud annoying looks.

"Screw him," Stroud said, "we were just

playing."

"Well, there are other people too," Marjorie answered.

"Okay, okay, let's not argue." He put Sheree down at the railing and saw Marjorie look past him over his shoulder. "Never mind them," Stroud said, "I like the bears. One more minute and then we'll get something to eat. Okay?"

His wife nodded, then took out another tissue and dabbed at her eye through the side of her sunglasses.

"The eye's bothering you? Okay, one more minute and then we'll leave." He looked down at his daughter. "One more minute with the polar bears and then we have to go," he said.

"It's just time for the drops again," Marjorie said.

"Okay," Stroud answered, then he smiled. "Just give me the name of Marlin Perkins' sidekick on Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*, and we'll go."

Stroud saw that his wife was surprised by the question. Then she grinned and shook her head.

"Eh?" he said, pleased with himself.

Marjorie smiled. "I can picture the both of them," she said.

"Not Marlin now," he answered, "his sidekick."

Marjorie tapped her fingertips against the side of her sunglasses.

"Come on," he encouraged, enjoying her difficulty at recalling the name.

"Oh God, I can see him," she said.

The smaller bear stopped waving its nose in the air and turned around, slowly padding its way up the cement hill toward two cement igloo-like dens at the rear of the compound. The larger bear, which had gone back to bouncing on the metal plates, turned and followed the smaller bear up to the dens.

"Not Marlin now, the other guy," Stroud said.

"Oh God, I can picture the both of them like they were standing in front of us," Marjorie said. "Marlin's white hair and that white mustache of his." She touched her own auburn-rinsed hair and then a spot above her lip under her nose.

"Give up?" Stroud asked. He hoisted his daughter up and adjusted her weight on his arm.

"He always wore a brown khaki outfit that looked like he went out on safari in a leisure suit," Marjorie said.

Stroud laughed at the leisure suit remark.

Suddenly, Stroud saw his wife's expression change and she pulled down on his arm.

"What?" Stroud said.

His wife pulled down hard again, but before he could ask what was wrong, voices along the guardrail cried out.

Stroud wheeled around to look, pulling his daughter closer to him.

"Jack, what's he doing?" Marjorie cried.

It was one of the teen-age boys that Stroud had seen covering his girlfriend's head with his tee-shirt when the polar bear had flung spray onto them. The boy had jumped over the guardrail and was hanging from the end of the curved bars which pointed into the enclosure. The boy's friends were screaming at him, but the boy only smiled at them and then looked down at his feet. Then the boy let himself drop. Stroud couldn't believe it. People began running over to that part of the guardrail.

Stroud watched as the boy hit the curve of the wall, his sneakers squeaking against the cement. Then the boy twisted himself in the air, landing on all fours inside the compound. Immediately, the boy was up and running toward the opposite wall.

Stroud looked quickly back to the guardrail. A second boy was on the other side, waving and hollering at his friend. A chunky blonde girl in red tank-top, whom Stroud recognized as the boy in the compound's girlfriend, was screaming and bouncing up and down, pulling at the railing. Stroud felt the guardrail's trembling as he leaned against it.

Suddenly, the cries became shrill. The head and shoulders of one of the polar bears emerged from its cement igloo. Then the second, larger polar bear emerged from the entrance to the larger igloo. More cries went up as the bear came all the way out. Instantly—and Stroud couldn't believe how quickly the bear covered the distance—the larger polar bear ran down the hill, cutting off the boy's route of escape. The smaller polar bear followed, turning at the wading pool, blocking any retreat.

"Jack! Jack!" Stroud heard Marjorie screaming.

The boy turned to flee in the direction from which he'd come, his face looking up at the guardrail. The boy was crying, and his mouth, from Stroud's vantage point, seemed contorted into a horrible, smile-like grimace. (For reasons he would never be able to explain to himself later, Stroud thought of the stone lions in front of the New York Public Library.) Immediately, there was screaming, and men scrambling onto the other side of the guardrail: the larger polar

bear, at full run, had slapped the boy from behind; in the next moment, the boy was all arms and legs, spread-eagled, flying sideways into the wading pool. The lead bear, then the smaller, plunged in on top of him.

"Jack, come away," Marjorie screamed. He felt his wife take their daughter from him, her sunglasses falling to the pavement.

In the wading pool, all that was visible was the fur of the bears' backs and the froth of the water boiling under them. The boy couldn't be seen. Then the lead bear, its head buried in the water up to its shoulders, began violently swaying its front end back and forth while shaking its head. Immediately, a horrible discoloring spread through the water.

Stroud turned to Marjorie, but she was no longer at the railing. More screams went up. When he looked back at the wading pool, the lead bear had the boy in its mouth, the other bear snapping at the side of the lead bear's face. Then the lead bear dropped its head, and with a sudden snap of its neck it flipped the boy out of the water, then plunged in on top of him. The lead bear emerged again, again with the boy in its mouth, this time the boy gripped through the neck and shoulder. The boy's limbs were limp, floppy. Then the lead bear raised its head and began shaking it violently. Spray from the boy's flopping limbs flew onto the spectators.

Stroud raised his hands, as if to protect his face from the water, and turned away from the guardrail. He found himself looking into the face of a woman who was standing behind him—the woman was screaming, staring into the compound, apparently unaware of her surroundings. When he glanced back again, the bear was shaking its head back and forth, the boy's body bouncing off the water, shooting off spray.

"No, don't look," Stroud said. He put his arm over the woman's shoulder and turned her away, edging her between other people who were now pushing to get to the railing to see what was going on inside the polar bear enclosure. Stroud recognized the excitement on their faces, especially on the faces of the young. "Don't look," he heard himself repeating.

He spotted Marjorie and Sheree rocking together on one of the zoo's green wooden benches, and guided the woman over to them. Marjorie was weeping and looked up at him without saying anything. Sheree looked confused by the excitement and didn't understand.

"Here, why don't you sit down?" Stroud said, guiding the woman onto the bench while his wife moved over.

Marjorie looked up at him again, but didn't say anything. She didn't have to. At the same moment, Stroud was thinking that the polar bear was doing to that boy what a polar bear would do to a seal in the Arctic.□

Terry Caesar

ON ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Have "Acknowledgements" in books changed in recent years? Consider *Campus Life. Undergraduate Culture from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, by Helen Lefkowitz. Her "Acknowledgements" take up four pages. Three academic communities are named, four, eleven, and then thirty groups of people thanked, the staff at nearly thirty college and university archives recorded, diverse audiences for lectures recognized, five scholars who read the first draft considered, and finally assorted family, editors, and children are praised. Lefkowitz's book was published in 1987. What date would one want to set for an earlier time when such a lengthy, elaborate presentation of one's intellectual debts would not have been judged either proper or conventional? Whom would one have to acknowledge oneself to support such a speculation? And if there is indeed substance to it, what might be at stake in the change? Could the very nature of acknowledgement itself, and not merely the kinds of people, or institutions, have changed?

That there has been a change I am going to assume. Myra Jehlen's *American Incarnation* (1986) acknowledges twenty-nine people (and two fellowships). Her earlier *Class and Character in Faulkner's South* (1976) names fourteen people (and no fellowships). Another assumption however: there is no need to discuss the obvious fact that many books continue to set out their acknowledgements in ways which have changed very little over the course of several decades. Suresh Raval's *Metacriticism* (1981), for example, mentions nine teachers and colleagues as well as a summer of lectures at a school, reserves another paragraph for two particularly significant Bombay teachers, takes a third paragraph to record two other scholars, and then concludes with an administrative grant and a wife's devotion. This is the same sort of procedure which Philip Slater employs at the end of his preface to *The Glory of Hera. Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (1968)—to go back no further—with the exception that Slater is even briefer, recognizing only one outstanding teacher and four colleagues. Both men give their acknowledgements at the conclusion of prefaces. There seems to be no special significance to this format. Evan Carton for *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (1985) has instead a separate page of Acknowledgements but the same sort of structure: the influential teacher, the colleagues, the financial assistance (Carton has both federal and local grants), and finally the family.

There may be, on the other hand, some significance to the fact that acknowledgements in the form of a compressed, sequential narrative seem to be far less frequent in the last couple decades. In *Neither Black Nor White. Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (1971), Carl Degler takes some two and a half pages to describe very specifically the role over a dozen people have had in his project, and one can see just how it took shape with each one. In contrast, even when one does read some statement about how the book originated, as Juliet Flower MacCannell gives in *Figuring Lacan. Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious* (1986), it is likely to be just that, a "statement," followed by no more a narrative than thanking the dean for time off, students for a germane course, and colleagues for kind words to other colleagues. But what significance precisely *does* one want to attach to this contrast, and, perhaps more importantly, just how many exceptions to it ought one to try to note before either there ceases to be any contrast at all or there need to be so many qualifications that there may as well be no contrast? Of such problems is any study of acknowledgements fraught. There are either going to be too many examples, or not enough. Either way, generalities are very difficult to manage.

And conventions even more difficult to stipulate. Is there any, for example, that every

book must have acknowledgements? James Twitchell's *Preposterous Violence. Fables of Aggression in Modern Culture* (1989) has none. What about the most venerable convention, that according gratitude and love to one's spouse? George Friedman in *The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School* (1981) can be read as strangely curt: "Finally, I thank my wife, Dorothy, who remained remarkably pleasant through the preparation of this book." Compare the fuller, not to say fulsome, words of Wayne Franklin in *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers. The Diligent Writers of Early America* (1979): "I reserve my final thanks for Karin Franklin and our son Nathaniel, who have traveled with me across the literal American landscape and through the long journey of this book about other travelers. They know what it is that the words always leave out, and how many other things the working with words itself leaves undone." To contrast the two is inevitably to feel that Friedman has left out so much, one wants to question what he had to begin with. Or was he merely impatient—even if the space for spousal acknowledgement abides as permitting more leisure?

The schema of an acknowledgement—ranking from general to personal, and registering the intellectual or academic before the emotional or familial—is even elastic enough to accommodate some central dismissal, as individual temperaments often enact. "I have eliminated all the acknowledgements contained in the original essays," writes Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). "Those who have helped me know that they have and how very much they have. I can only hope that by now they know that I know it too." (In his next collection of essays, *Local Knowledge* [1983], Geertz merely acknowledges where the essays were previously published.) An acknowledgement may be compared to a letter of recommendation, with three differences: 1. the acknowledgement is public, 2. it is purely dispensable from a reader's point of view to the book which alone merits attention, and 3. it is indispensable only to those acknowledged, who can in theory be trusted to be content at remaining anonymous. Or, if not anonymous exactly, then entrusted to finer discriminations than those of public naming, as in this final note by Paul Smith from *Discerning the Subject* (1988): "Not wishing to be slaughtered on the bench of history—the fate of most women who find themselves mentioned in this slot of men's books—the person who has most affected (even effected) both this book and me during the time it took to write it forbids me to mention her by name." Smith's words suggest perhaps a final difference: unlike the subject of a letter of recommendation, that of an acknowledgement can be present while remaining absent by name, if only because the power of the "slot" has a conventional force which is inescapable.

I want now to inquire into the sources of this force by citing some remarks from the conclusion of the "Foreword" to Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Moralty, and Tragedy* (1979). Cavell's acknowledgements could not be more in contrast to Geertz or Smith—and indeed, in their sheer zest, leisure, and pleasure, more in contrast to most other acknowledgements of anyone else. So spirited is Cavell that he is at one point moved, after a list of names, to perform a sort of acknowledgement of acknowledgement, within which, he finds, lie more energies than acknowledgement itself can easily either accommodate or express: "Such a list is something whose personal significance to me is quite out of proportion to its essential insignificance to strangers, and is thus at deliberate odds with the bright side of the intention to write. . . . What it suggests is that an elaboration of acknowledgement may declare a sense that complete acknowledgement is impossible, perhaps forbidden for one reason or another; and perhaps that one senses oneself for one reason or another to be insufficiently acknowledged.—If someone does not find such thoughts properly prefatory, I might offer instead the idea of a democratic equivalent of the Epistle Dedicatory, together with an aimless revival of the Epistle to the Reader." One could well think Cavell is at an end with these words. Instead, typically, he has four more paragraphs of acknowledgements.

Let me consider the first of Cavell's extremely provocative asides: what could be forbidden about the idea of complete acknowledgement? Is it implicit in the notion of any acknowledgement that it be incomplete? If my assumption is correct that today acknowledgements are more lengthy and complete, nevertheless what formal constraints continue to be operative? That there *is* form, or rather formality, ought to be of course no less obvious than it is in Epistles Dedicatories. Consider only separation from prefaces. The moment when Acknowledgements were accorded separate pagination from

Prefaces or Forewords may prove to be as decisive for the history of Acknowledgements as the moment when Epistles Dedicatories ceased to be commonly printed. Yet I don't think this separation itself constitutes form. Instead, it enables a more efficient, instrumental registration of what, beyond the merely personal need to recognize debts or express gratitude, Acknowledgements are now burdened to address: namely, the fact of disciplinary specialization, which embodies, in turn, a whole host of questions about what a profession is, how it is organized, and what sort of relation it has with society at large. The answer proposed by any acknowledgement: a *list*. Separate pagination facilitates listing, even as it permits, or indeed requires, more space for it. The result may appear relatively without style—an older narrative method, in comparison, begins to seem formal, not to say mannered—but this is only to further enable an accumulation of indebtedness that reveals how total are the demands for the publication of any book, and, most important of all, how eminently social. An acknowledgement of any completeness sketches a small society. Whatever the subject of the book, it is, in the form of its acknowledgements, not so specialized that it lacks friends and spouses, casual occasions and public funding, affection and faith.

Do acknowledgements get longer as knowledge gets more specialized? Perhaps. Acknowledgements certainly get longer, I believe, as the social utility of specialized knowledge gets more marginal, even dubious, and at least suspect. What is knowledge *for*? It is as if the very autonomy necessary to maintain a professionalized discipline—its rules for access strictly controlled, its rewards hard to understand outside the discipline—gets represented in its acknowledgements as something, on the contrary, which is implicated in the most commonplace aspects of life. There is the most highly specialized intellectual activity and there is the lowly world in which it has to be implemented—both are embraced, equally acknowledged. In Acknowledgements, the typing of the book shares space with its ideas or its organization. The "this list would not be complete" strategy includes not only the typist but proofreaders and copyreaders, and, if only for a moment, those who helped with the index as well as those who helped with the children appear to be as crucial as the former professors who made good their distinction or the present colleagues who never failed to be a source of stimulation. Everything is all of a piece and everyone fits. Acknowledgements, in sum, constitute the consolingly *democratic* gesture whereby the book, no matter how scholarly, demonstrates its accountability as a social product.

Far from dealing in the forbidden, acknowledgements are licensed to inscribe fundamental tenets of social mythology; knowledge, in its origins anyway, is collective after all, and implicitly honors itself to continue to be so in honoring those others who have helped make it what it is. Therefore, the idea of complete acknowledgement is forbidden because what would have to be recognized if the process were carried far enough would be the limits of the mythology. Books trade on their own energies. Not only are these impersonal and exclusive—perhaps finally disdainful of social purpose. The energies also arise out of conflict, some of it quite personal, or commonplace in the worst sense. If acknowledgements have gotten longer, I believe it was inevitable that someone such as Martha Banta, in *Imaging American Women. Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (1987), would be moved to write the following: "Someday it would be fun if someone would extend the scope of the literary genre of the Acknowledgements section to include the names of everyone who proved an obstacle to one's project." (Has someone? If so, most likely a biographer—more dependent upon other people in highly specific and significant ways than most other writers are. Or maybe the author of a revised dissertation, although anyone who insisted upon repudiating a wretched Ph.D. advisor must first have been someone who had an especially intricate time getting the manuscript accepted for publication.) It might be fun; it would be transgressive. The "scope" of an acknowledgement extends only so far because within its boundaries *no one* was an obstacle. The dean came through with release time as well as a grant, the typist didn't botch so much as a page. Furthermore, the application for a year at a prestigious institute was always successful, and its fellows were more stimulating than one's colleagues back home, none of whom were forgotten nonetheless.

Few are fortunate enough to be able to record the impressive story of affiliation and patronage acknowledged by E.D. Hirsch in *Cultural Literacy. What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). His project proceeds from top journals

and preeminent professional organizations through NEH support and a year at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Science to a letter from the Exxon Education Foundation. Just as happily, he has enjoyed the "greatest impetus" of a Valued Colleague; "without Professor Ravitch's original suggestions, and continuing support," Hirsch writes, "I might not have undertaken the book at all." How many readers of Hirsch's Acknowledgements read them out of experiences in which they couldn't even get the initial magazine article published? Or by which the nearest they'll get to the Exxon Corporation is a gas pump? There may be some readers who take his narrative as a bitter rebuke, others who take it as an impossible encouragement for their own textual efforts. In the terms by which I've been discussing acknowledgements, Hirsch's possess—if not offer—an affirmation almost ritualistic in their force: the project can be seen through, there will always be those who recognize that it matters, and finally the work opens out onto the highest reaches of American society. Hirsch has written a superb Acknowledgements—one of the finest, in my opinion, in recent years. Banta speaks of "genre." Hirsch best reveals that acknowledgements represent the genre of pastoral, not only in the more popularly-understood sense of mixing high and low but in William Empson's sense (just to acknowledge him) of giving complexity the form of ideal simplification. Hirsch doesn't tell us if he had any obstacles; we don't want him to tell us. In order for there to be any "fun" at all (Banta again) it is essential that some things be forbidden.

Of course one could find that in acknowledging as much as he does, Hirsch already acknowledges too completely. Knowledge in the scene of acknowledgement is ideally set within the warm glow of an intimate conversation. It is a wholly human thing. It is not a commodity. And yet there is everywhere in acknowledgements today the disclosure that it is, precisely, a commodity. The time off or the year away is each as valuable as a grant, even if the grant more explicitly provides money, or rather time in the form of money. These things are all gratefully cherished. However, the cherishing becomes a blunter thing, and itself the more obvious consequence of a capitalistic economy once large government and, worse, corporate agencies have to be mentioned, as they so increasingly must be for the book to have gotten written at all. There is a difference between the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Science and Exxon and there is a linkage. Which is it in the interests of the social mythology expressed by an acknowledgement to recognize, the difference or the linkage? We might recall that (according to the OED) a later meaning of what it meant to "acknowledge" came to be "to own as genuine, or avow in legal form." (There is an example from the *Pinkerton Guide to Administration*, 1870: "A release should be acknowledged before proper authority, and recorded in the office for recording deeds.") We might speculate that today this later meaning has come to predominate in acknowledgements—no longer only, or primarily, personal confessions or admissions and instead at least just as often legalistic testimonies or certifications.

In this legal sense, precisely what is being avowed? That you don't acquire the capital necessary to produce anything unless you are embedded in the institutions which structure intellectual work? There would seem to be nothing in the more comprehensive acknowledgements of the present to forbid neither the disclosure about being so embedded nor the gratitude about being so favored. And yet one could well wonder whether or not such disclosures push against the very constraints implicit in what Cavell calls "the bright side of the intention to write," as acknowledgements attest to it. What about, on the darker side, someone who writes in order to make money? What about in order to get promoted or get more powerful? Acknowledgements of course are not mandated to adjudicate between sides. Once questions are raised—once they have to be present because the institutional setting in which scholarship is conducted cannot very well be absent—a whole world of unequal opportunities and ideological positions comes with them, and the scene of acknowledgement threatens to be too complicated for pastoral. Reading the most lavishly endowed acknowledgements, one can be reminded of Oliver North's definition of his Iran-Contra practice: a "separate, free-standing, full service operation." Of course it was not. It was only in the interest of a more dominant government practice that it be made to appear so. Similarly, the too-completely presented acknowledgements risk the specter of a book which was ultimately produced elsewhere and an author who is not completely the master of his or her

own product.

Elsewhere: increasingly, it seems to me, the scene of acknowledgement has either shifted to somewhere else or become the result of a displacement from anxieties about authority located somewhere else. Where? It remains forbidden to say. Acknowledgements continue to present the indebtedness of a single individual, securely at the center of his or her authority, even at a time when, according to the poststructuralist or even postmodern critique, the author is either "dead" or so vitiated by various discourses as to be simply an "effect" of them. How has such a critique affected scholarly conceptions of what an author is or what sort of authority an author actually has? Is it too idle to speculate that some effect from the most sophisticated contemporary definitions is one reason why acknowledgements have grown longer—a form no longer quite sure where it begins or ends? These days we can at least certainly understand why this form traditionally or conventionally reserves the naming of parents or spouse and children for last: personal origin is thereby assured once more for a book. Perhaps it is accidental that Helen Lefkowitz, with whose book I began, begins by naming her husband first before the pages of testimony begin to mount.

Acknowledgements, as I have been discussing them, have been obliged to resolve two additional tensions which may be more strictly internal to the economy of authorship wholly within an academic setting: that between the personal and the professional, and between teaching and research. From the evidence of today's acknowledgements, the latter is the more worrisome. (The former appears as continuous as ever. Lefkowitz, for example, writes that "research assistance comes from the most unlikely sources"—and then cites her father-in-law. So it goes. In the domestic setting of an acknowledgement there is no discord. An especially elegant conciliation can be found in Bruce Kirkham's *The Building of Uncle Tom's Cabin* [1977] where he thanks his wife for permitting him to have another woman in his life.) Students are routinely thanked now, classes on the book's subject named. Of course they are all uniformly valuable; from the perspective of acknowledgements, no teaching ever dulled a subject, or used it up, even if one may suspect that such repeated certification of the continuity between teaching and research is implicated in a larger regime of institutional indebtedness. Colleagues write recommendations for students and themselves and request that recommendations be written for them. Everybody is urged to keep copies—or make duplicates—of observations, memoranda, requests. Common wisdom is that you have to "cover" yourself; someone else is certainly covering you. In the context of such interconnectedness, all remorselessly textualized, a more encompassing notion of agency may be emerging, best exemplified by how teaching has been situated in the acknowledged production of books. If publishing a book can be seen as much a bureaucratic as an intellectual activity (you have to know how—and where—to write for a grant), writing a book bids to become equally an affair of fellowships as well as solitude; you have to know how to teach the book you want to write.

Articles often disclose this last continuity better than books—and of course one notices the practice of acknowledgements accompanying articles rapidly becoming commonplace. An excellent example is provided by S.P. Mohanty at the conclusion of his long piece, "Us and Them: On the Philosophical Bases of Political Criticism," in the Spring 1989 issue of the *Yale Journal of Criticism*. Mohanty first mentions that most of the work for the article was done during the year he held a faculty fellowship at the Cornell Society for the Humanities. He thanks the Acting Director. He thanks three colleagues. Then he thanks four members of his seminar. There is another recognition: "I conceived the last section in its present form after a long discussion with Shekhar Pradhan one sunny afternoon in Oberlin, Ohio." (The generic overdetermination of pastoral may be noted here in passing. Whether or not it was in fact sunny, the "bright side" of intention admits the sun anyway.) And finally, after more thanks to four university audiences, there is this sentence: "Needless to say, all errors, excesses, eccentricities are mine own." But if it is needless, why does Mohanty write this? It is as if there might be some danger that the authority for his text is not his.

And indeed, a text such as Mohanty's chooses to pay tribute to just enough of the external conditions of its own possibility that these conditions threaten to become its most internal realization. Mohanty's author is no longer sovereign but instead crowded out of his most originary impulses, where these have been transformed into things almost untraceable

because they are the product of so many occasions. What does a writing begin? What are its origins? How many of these can be represented in the writing itself? Or need to be? We may well be reminded of another of Cavell's attentions, "perhaps that one senses oneself for one reason or another to be insufficiently acknowledged." I want now to turn to this last, only apparently paradoxical point, by way of another fully-orchestrated book-length medley of acknowledgement.

Larence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow. The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988) is an impressively acknowledged volume. Levine displays, besides release time, two years worth of a Woodrow Wilson, the Massey lectures at Harvard, lectures and seminars at fourteen institutions, the Library of Congress staff, thirty-nine friends and colleagues, seven graduate students, and some twenty-seven others (including hosts, editors, and wife) who have given various kinds of support. However, Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot. Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989) offers an Acknowledgements even longer (four pages) and more compelling both in the use she makes of it and in its fullness of detail. Hirsch gives both a junior faculty fellowship and a senior grant, a year's grant from a research center (including a seminar), another year's grant from an institute (twelve individuals are thanked), two women's groups (occasioning the recognition of eleven and eight individuals, respectively), seventeen colleagues from her home institution, another in a team taught course (students unmentioned by name although "every one of them has contributed to this book"), ten others (for "bibliographic help" as well as "inspiring examples"), five more for research, unnamed others at four day care centers and another (named) for her household help, three children, both parents, three other members of the "extended family," the man who "shares the work of parenting with me," and finally both her own mother and mother-in-law.

What to say? Hirsch's book is a representative of a species of book that reveals itself in its acknowledgements to be almost more a life than a text. Furthermore, even if the point of her Acknowledgements is that there was no choice to make (the book of her life being convertible into the life of her book), a reader may nonetheless stare in wonderment at the rich mixture of all that a book asks of an author's life and all that her life gives to a book. There will be readers of such a book who would wish, I think, that they had not been told so much, as if they had been told a forbidden excess. There will even more certainly be readers who will realize, perhaps once more, that such an acknowledgements as Hirsch's would simply be inconceivable without the theory of contemporary feminism—of course Hirsch writes as a sophisticated practitioner—and who may then wonder if such an acknowledgements as Levine's was not somehow influenced by feminist theory. Indeed, feminism may be an additional reason why acknowledgements have gotten longer. It is more discernably one reason why acknowledgements are different in nature—more intimate (at least as a conventional option) and more self-conscious (as with Smith, cited earlier). In *Sensational Designs* (1985), Jane Tompkins thanks Stanley Fish for washing the dishes.

I want to maintain that Hirsch's acknowledgements are unprecedented in their completeness, and yet, for all that, they are not complete. Of what would a complete acknowledgement consist? Not more household help named, nor more students. It would consist, I believe, in some acknowledgement of its own incompleteness, which is the one thing (maybe the only one) that Hirsch does not acknowledge. Her overwhelming record of support, affiliation, continuity, and interdependence of every kind enables the interpretation that it is nevertheless impossible to acknowledge everything completely. By this I don't mean, for example, that she mentions no obstacles. (Although someone who claims that every student contributed to a book might be said to have a sense of assistance so generous that obstacles could be difficult to recognize.) What, after all, does it mean to acknowledge something? The more completely defined the something, the more the question changes from one of testimony on behalf of others into confession about oneself; Hirsch takes on so much to acknowledge that ultimately, if she is not explicitly expressing her gratitude for her own experience, she has at least not taken such a logic into account, internal to the very structure of acknowledgements, as Cavell suggests. Consequently, her acknowledgements emerge as an alternative formal license for self-acknowledgement. What it means to acknowledge something appears partially to be that we are not sufficiently acknowledged, or

perhaps that there is so much of something else that we are temporarily in danger of losing the conviction of ourselves; writ very large, Hirsch's acknowledgements are Mohanty's but without his last sentence.

Of course this sort of problematic duplicity about authority is more familiar to us in creative rather than scholarly writing. And yet, just as with any writing, the scholarly text is about boundaries, even if this is more conventionally understood from the creative side. What is Eliot's "The Waste Land," we recall, but a text which, with its footnotes, aims to confound categories as well as extend the idea of what it means to acknowledge something—not to say an entire cultural heritage—into a mode of haunted, personal appropriation? The contemporary practice of acknowledgements I have been taken to be most fully represented by Hirsch can be set alongside the preface written by Jeffrey Cartwright, the fictional biographer of a child-genius author in Steven Millhauser's *Pale Fire*-like novel, *Edwin Mullhouse* (1972). "I have studied them carefully," writes Millhauser's Cartwright. "Those smug adult prefaces. With fat smiles of gratitude, fit thanks are given for services rendered and kindnesses bestowed. Long lists of names are given cleverly paraded in order to assure you that the author has excellent connections and a loving heart." Cartwright will have none of this. He does his own typing. Edwin's parents were no help. "And so, in conclusion, I feel that grateful thanks are due to myself, without whose kind encouragement and constant interest I could never have completed my task; to myself, for my valuable assistance in a number of points; to myself, for doing all the dirty work; and above all to myself, whose patience, understanding, and usefulness as a key-eye-witness can never be adequately repaid . . ."

So situated, I don't mean merely to suggest that Hirsch's Acknowledgements should be strictly taken as the sort of thing about which Millhauser is writing a parody. Nor, I think, would my most carefully reasoned claim be that Hirsch's Acknowledgements are actually more a parody of Millhauser, no matter how unwittingly. The most acute point that needs to be made is that both Hirsch and Millhauser are engaged in the same kind of mental activity, which each respectively presents as mutually exclusive of the other. In this each reproduces the cultural discourse about the difference between scholarly and creative writing, whereby the latter can be careless of the very social ethics about which the former must be so careful. Partly the difference between Hirsch and Millhauser is the difference of the respective conventions in which each is located. The rest of the difference is merely that Hirsch has chosen a different form of self-presentation than that of fiction—which is not to say that her text is completely free of the vanity, resentment, and arrogance that Millhauser so gleefully sports (and that Banta, for one other, might willingly play if acknowledgements could be extended in order to see the "fun").

By Hirsch's "text" I mean primarily the Acknowledgements. Yet it is a curious feature of the rest of her book that it continues next with a long introductory chapter in which the schema of the Acknowledgements is fleshed out in the form of what Hirsch refers to several times as a "narrative." Although principally in the service of her professional activities and what they reveal about how women's studies fare in the academy, this narrative has many sentences such as the following, about an earlier article: "I consider the writing of this essay a crucial moment in my thinking about mothers, daughters, and narrative." Out of context, such a statement could easily be one from an autobiography, and, as it is, the writing possess little of the self-effacing scholarly manner. In fact Hirsch's text, particularly in its introductory chapter, *is* an autobiography which reins in just enough of its most personal energies to pass as both literary criticism and psychoanalytic theory. (It is also a displaced memoir. The penultimate sentence of the introduction reads as follows: "Finally, this book is, in ways I cannot articulate directly, about my mother.") For this reason, however, its Acknowledgements are especially unsatisfying, or rather unconvincing, and it is tempting to imagine that Hirsch wrote her introduction in order to try to redeem what was self-serving in them—only to produce a longer and more elaborate textualization of the same unacknowledged selfhood. I don't mean this as a criticism of Hirsch's study. (It is never more suggestive than in the matter of which "voice"—a mother's or daughter's—a woman writes in, and much of the nature of the double voicing I have been tracing stems from the book's very subject.) I do mean her study as a sort of object lesson of what happens in a scholarly book when the thrust toward complete acknowledgement is so powerful.

What happens is hapless fiction. Acknowledgements, after all, are presumably "outside" the book, the "text proper." With Hirsch they are inside. Indeed, it is no longer clear on what basis we can tell the difference between outside and inside. It may be clearer to contemplate a book which is all acknowl-edgement (rather as *Edwin Mullhouse* is all self-acknowledgement). Or perhaps a story which is a narrative of acknowledgements, completely. (See Paul Theroux's "Acknowledgements" in *World's End and Other Stories* [1980]. Something of its tone is indicated by the following example: "To Mrs. Annabell Frampton, of the British Rail ticket office, Axminster, my sincere thanks for being so generous with a temporarily embarrassed researcher; and to Dame Marina Pensel-Cripps, casually met on the 10:24 to London, but fondly remembered.") The unspeakable moment in the Acknowledgements is already the moment of fiction—the authorial self no longer exclusively turned inside out, but (re)turned just far enough back in to consider its own devices, and then only rarely (as Cavell) to acknowledge them as such, trying to keep a balance between generosity to others and fidelity to oneself. Or would it be not more accurate to say that every moment in the acknowledgements is incipiently fictional (we recall Mohanty's sunny afternoon) and that the trick in writing them is to try to write a superior fiction?

What I mean by this can be indicated very simply by the last two sentences of Joseph Blotner's Acknowledgements at the end of the second volume of his mammoth biography, *Faulkner* (1974). Few authors are likely to have accumulated the literally *hundreds* of human debts that Blotner gives in over four closely-packed pages of reduced type. He concludes with the following statement: "My last statement of indebtedness is to those who have read this far and not found their names in the list when they should have been there. To them my apologies along with my gratitudes." Of course there may be no end of vanity behind such a statement. But the fine thing is that Blotner, overcome with the necessity for completeness, writes a space for incompleteness—and then dedicates it to unnamed others, not himself. It is as if the truth of his Acknowledgements cannot ultimately be told, and, furthermore, that it would only be false if Blotner limited himself to telling what he can in the language of fact. So instead he makes up another truth of error and omission. It is of course an apparently simple gesture. I must hope that precisely for this reason, it pointedly contrasts with the impossible completeness of more current practice which writes, then writes some more, out of an indebtedness taken to be legalistic in nature and factual in scope. Acknowledgements, however, contain more truths than legalism can contain. And their factual record can be a sanction for self-indulgence—just as potentially comic as the Academy Award winner who, in acceptance, long-windedly winds down to ". . . and my mother."

It has been a premise of this discussion that the "genre" of Acknowledgements is subject to social and cultural determinations, just as any other genre. There may be less awareness about this because the peculiar mediation among various institutional or political discourses which acknowledgements perform can only function if the pressures concerning how sovereign a project writing a book ought to be or how equal the opportunities for publishing one are not themselves acknowledged. I hope I have shown how acknowledgements are nonetheless shaped by the larger need for mediation, which is arguably more urgent now when writing is representable as a sort of management of resources or publishing as a species of disciplinary transaction. As Michel Foucault remarked in a 1980 interview, in which he chose to remain anonymous, ". . . anybody who writes exerts a disturbing power upon which one must try to place limitations." Acknowledgements are one of those limitations. Virtually all non-fictional texts of all kinds present themselves to us as *embedded* things, and it is the job of acknowledgements to sort out the systemization, scale down the extrapersonal forces, put the brightest face on the textual project, and provide each of these faces with a human interconnection as well as a name. It is especially the job of acknowledgements to accomplish all this when it has gotten more difficult to do because so many books are each the product of so many debts that they are almost unlocatable from the site of individual authorship.

Foucault's interview may be found in *Michel Foucault. Politics. Philosophy. Culture* (1988), edited by Lawrence Kritzman (who thanks, among others, two proofreaders and two foreign publishers for use of the jacket design). Foucault makes another statement in that interview: "A name makes reading too easy." Exactly. But how easy is too easy? Acknowledgements, which

normally precede the text proper, introduce a reader into a specified human narrative. These days it may be so interdependent as to be oppressive. No matter, assure acknowledgements. Everything fits. There is no book that cannot offer itself as publicly accountable for its intellectual occasions and as its own source on the basis of these occasions. It remains easy to receive such a book when the egotism that gave it rise is socially circumscribed, and when the possibly unwarranted energies that might issue from its pages have been introduced under the auspices of a human community that can be individually named.

Is writing dangerous because of its egotism or its unclassified energies? Is it less dangerous now if its egotism appears baffled or its energies too bureaucratized? A study of acknowledgements is necessarily a study in the dangers of writing—the negations it can give to social pieties, the "darker" intentions it can make prominent. How these dangers work themselves into the scene of acknowledgement, and are resolved there, is bound to remain highly speculative; if to study any writing is in part to study what it does not say, the study of acknowledgements is more hapless than most because the genre is only mandated to say a certain few things, and then in a socially proscribed way, according to conventionalized forms. This peculiar writing can be historicized; *Toynbee's Acknowledgements at the end of* volume X of *A Study of History* (1954), for example, are not an example of the same sort of impulse to completeness—even at some thirty pages (Toynbee begins with Marcus Aurelius, he has the date when he saw his first Greek play, he knows how a Japanese puppet show he saw in Osaka in November, 1929, helped him learn to write narrative, he even thanks God)—which I have been treating. Toynbee is writing his intellectual history; ours are more circumscribed and academic—which is one reason why, forty years later, Toynbee appears so monstrously and inexplicably self-assured. Yet merely because acknowledgements can be historicized does not mean that the need for names has been any less taken for granted, however one might want to explain the need in terms of any particular time.

Finally, indeed, the most enduring feature of acknowledgements could be that they must abide as something *taken for granted*. Whether we read or write ourselves, we know what to expect as well as what is expected of us, when we acknowledge. A Cavell can enact subtle discriminations with the venerable formulas. He concludes his Acknowledgements to *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (1968) in the following manner: "That I am alone liable for the opacities and the crudities which defeat what I wanted to say, is a miserably simple fact. What is problematic is the expense borne by those who have tried to correct them, and to comfort the pain of correcting them." But what is "problematic," normally precisely what we don't want to hear about, is expressed so elegantly here, and with such care, that one can only find, I think, that the expected sort of answer has only been raised to a higher, richer power; such a representation as Cavell's is a more delicate example of what I referred to earlier as the "fictional" moment in acknowledgements. It is easy to read such words as Cavell's and to feel that one realizes anew why the scene of acknowledgement is a scene of stability and transparency: a book—any book—must not have cost too much, and the human expense paid out for its imperfections must have been worth it.

When we read acknowledgements we are ultimately less interested in the author's intellectual history, much less institutional affiliation, than in his or her generational continuities. Of all the things we take for granted in acknowledgements, the most important may be that the book is more than a personal thing, and that it, like its author, takes its place in larger human rhythms which embrace both past and future. Let me give as a final example Patrick Bratlinger's concluding thanks in *Bread and Circuses. Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (1983): "I suppose I have them to thank [his three children, to whom the book is dedicated] for keeping me at work those evenings when what I wanted to watch was not what they were watching. And I can be even more thankful to them for another reason: someday they may read this book and understand why I wrote it for them." In a world of vast, politicized discourses it is consoling to consider still another book that has to find its place among them as having issued forth from a comfortable domestic economy. And it is just as consoling, when knowledge appears to accumulate like so many debts that can barely be enumerated, that in fact what is written follows like daughter from mother, or sons from father and makes the same sort of sense, which is not presumptuous, and which only has to be

acknowledged rather than justified or explained.□

Unlike Millhauser's Jeffrey Cartwright, I don't feel that grateful thanks are due to myself. My wife, Eva Bueno, helped. I discussed this paper with no one else—which is, I suppose, one reason why I wrote it, and certainly is one reason why I don't have to say that all the eccentricities of style and waywardness of speculation are mine alone.

Terry Caesar *is Professor of English at Clarion University in Pennsylvania. He has published on such subjects as parody, allusion, and travel writing.*

Igino Ugo Tarchetti

A DEAD MAN'S BONE

Translated by Lawrence Venuti

I leave to my reader the task of assessing the inexplicable incident I am about to relate.

In 1855, having taken up residence at Pavia, I devoted myself to the study of drawing at a private school in that city; and several months into my sojourn I developed a close friendship with a certain Federico M, a professor of pathology and clinical medicine who taught at the university and died of severe apoplexy a few months after I became acquainted with him. He was very fond of the sciences, and of his own in particular—he was gifted with extraordinary mental powers—except that, like all anatomists and doctors generally, he was profoundly and incurably skeptical. He was so by conviction, nor could I ever induce him to accept my beliefs, no matter how much I endeavored in the impassioned, heated discussions we had every day on this point. Nevertheless—and it pleases me to do this justice to his memory—he had always shown himself tolerant of convictions he did not hold; and I and all his acquaintances have cherished the dearest remembrance of him. A few days before his death he had persuaded me to attend his lectures on anatomy, adducing that I would derive from them not a little knowledge beneficial to my art; I consented, although with repugnance; and goaded by vanity to appear less frightened than I was, I asked him for several human bones, which he gave me and which I placed on the mantel of the fireplace in my room. At his death I ceased frequenting the anatomy course; later I discontinued my study of drawing as well. Nonetheless, I kept the bones for many years, so that the habit of seeing them made me almost indifferent. No more than a few months have passed since, seized by sudden fears, I resolved to bury them, keeping only a simple knee-cap. This smooth, spherical bone which, because of its shape and smallness, I had destined, from the first moment I possessed it, to fill the office of a paper-weight, since it alone did not conjure up any frightening ideas in me, had already rested on my desk for eleven years when I was deprived of it in the inexplicable way I am about to relate.

In Milan last spring I met a hypnotist who is well known among lovers of spiritualism, and I requested to be admitted to one of his seances. A little later I received an invitation to attend one, and I went, troubled by such grim suspicions that many times along the way I was almost on the point of turning back. The insistence of my *amour propre* spurred me on, in spite of myself. I shall not pause here to discuss the astonishing invocations I witnessed; suffice it to say that I was so amazed at the responses we heard from several spirits, and my mind was so struck by those prodigies, that overcoming every fear, I felt the desire to summon a person of my own acquaintance and address to him several questions which I had already pondered and debated in my mind. After revealing this desire, I was brought to a secluded study where I was left alone. The impatience and desire to invoke many spirits at once rendered me irresolute regarding the choice, but since it was my design to interrogate the invoked spirit on human destiny and the spirituality of our nature, I remembered Dr. Federico M, with whom, when he was alive, I had some fascinating discussions on this topic, and I decided to summon him. Having made this choice, I seated myself at a desk, arranged a sheet of paper before me, dipped the pen in ink, settled myself in a writing posture, and concentrating for as long as possible on that thought, gathering all my will-power and directing it to that end, I waited for the doctor's spirit to arrive.

I did not wait long. After several minutes' delay I noticed, from new and inexplicable sensations, that I was no longer alone in the room; I heard his presence, so to speak; and

before I could regain sufficient composure to formulate a question, my shaken, convulsed hand, moved as by a force external to my will, wrote these words of which I had no prior knowledge:

"They are addressed to you. You have called me at a moment when the most exacting invocations prevent me from coming; I can neither remain here now nor respond to the questions you intended to ask me. Nevertheless, I have obeyed your summons to please you, and because I myself am in need of you; I have long sought the means to communicate with your spirit. During my mortal life, I gave you several bones which I removed from the dissecting room in Pavia; among them was a knee-cap that belonged to the body of a former employee of the university whose name was Pietro Mariani, and whose corpse I chose at random to dissect. For eleven years now, he has tortured my spirit to recover the inconsequential little bone, and he continues to reproach me bitterly for that act, threatening me and insisting on the restitution of his knee-cap. I implore you, by the perhaps not unpleasant memory you may cherish of me, if you still have the bone, return it to him, redeem me from this tormenting debt. I shall send Mariani's spirit to you immediately. Respond."

Terrified by that revelation, I answered that I had the unfortunate knee-cap, I would be happy to restore it to its rightful owner, and since there was no other way to make the restitution, he should send Mariani to me. Having said that—or, more accurately, having thought it—I felt as if my person were unburdened, my arm freer, my hand no longer numbed as it was a short while ago, and I realized, in a word, that the doctor's spirit had departed.

Then I sat waiting another moment—my mind was in a state of exaltation impossible to describe.

In the space of a few minutes, I again experienced the same phenomena as before, although with less intensity; and my hand, drawn by the spirit's will, wrote these words:

"The spirit of Pietro Mariani, former employee of the University of Pavia, is before you, and he demands the knee-cap of his left knee which you have wrongfully held for eleven years. Respond."

This language was more concise and forceful than that of the doctor. I replied to the spirit: "I am most willing to return to Pietro Mariani the knee-cap of his left knee, and I beg him, in fact, to forgive me for the unlawful possession; I desire to know, however, how I can effect the restitution that is demanded of me."

Then my hand started to write again:

"Pietro Mariani, former employee of the University of Pavia, will come himself to recover his knee-cap."

"When?" I asked, terrified.

And the hand instantly scrawled a single word: "Tonight."

Stupefied by that response, covered with a cadaverous sweat, I hastened to exclaim, immediately changing the tone of my voice: "Please . . . I beg you . . . do not trouble yourself. . . . I will send—there are other less bothersome means—" But I had not finished the sentence when I noticed, from the return of the sensations I experienced initially, that Mariani's spirit had already withdrawn, and there was no longer any way to prevent his coming.

It is impossible for me to express verbally the anguish I was suffering at that moment. I was prey to a dreadful panic. I left that house as the clocks of the city were striking midnight: the streets were deserted, there were no lights in the windows, the flames in the street lamps were dimmed by a thick, heavy fog—everything seemed to me more sinister than usual. I walked for a piece without knowing where to direct my steps: an instinct more powerful than my will drove me away from my house. Where would I find the mettle to go there? That night I would receive a visit from a ghost—it was a ghastly idea, an expectation too terrible to bear.

Wandering down some strange street, as chance would have it, I found myself in front of a tavern where I saw the words "Domestic Wines" cut into a window hanging illuminated by an interior light, and presently I said to myself: "Let me go in here, this way is better, and it is not a cowardly remedy; I shall seek in wine that boldness which I no longer have the power to ask of my reason." And having ensconced myself in a corner of a huge cellar room, I called for a few bottles of wine, which I drank greedily, although as a rule I am disgusted by any abuse of that liquor. I obtained the effect I desired. At every glass I drank, my fear vanished appreciably, my thoughts grew lucid, my ideas seemed to reorganize themselves, albeit into a new disorder; and little by little I won back my courage to such a degree that I laughed at my terror, stood up, and resolutely set out for my house.

Having reached the room, staggering slightly

from drinking too much, I lit the lamp, stripped to the waist, hurled myself onto the bed, closed one eye, then the other, and tried to fall asleep. But it all was in vain. I felt drowsy, stiff, cataleptic, powerless to move; the blankets weighed on my back, enveloped me, fettered me as if they were cast iron: and during that drowsiness, I began to become aware that some singular phenomena were occurring around me.

The wick of the candle, which seemed to have gone out although made of pure stearic, was spewing coils of smoke so dense and black that gathering at the ceiling, they hid it and assumed the appearance of a cloak heavy as lead. The atmosphere of the room, having suddenly become stifling, was infused with an odor similar to the exhalations of burning flesh, my ears were deafened by an incessant rumbling the causes of which I could not divine, and the knee-cap, which I saw there, among my papers, seemed to move and spin on the surface of the desk, as if subject to strange, violent convulsions.

I do not know how long I remained in that attitude: I could not remove my attention from the knee-cap. My senses, faculties, ideas were all concentrated on that object; everything drew me to it. I wanted to sit up, get out of bed, leave, but it was not possible; and my distress reached such a pitch that I was almost not afraid until the smoke emanating from the candle suddenly dissipated, I saw the curtain over the door rise, and the ghost I was expecting appeared.

I did not bat an eye. Having advanced to the center of the room, it bowed courteously and said to me: "I am Pietro Mariani, and I have come to take back my knee-cap, as I have promised you."

And since my terror made me hesitant to answer him, he continued to speak in the most polite tones: "Pardon me if I must disturb you in the dead of night . . . at this hour. . . . I realize that this is not a convenient time . . . but—"

"Oh, it is nothing, nothing at all!" I interrupted, reassured by so much courtesy. "In fact, I ought to thank you for your visit. . . . I shall forever hold myself honored for having welcomed you into my home. . . ."

"I am grateful for your cordiality," said the ghost, "but I wish, in any case, to explain the insistence with which I have demanded my knee-cap, both from you and from the distinguished doctor from whom you received it: observe."

And so saying, he lifted the edge of the white sheet in which he was wrapped, and showed me that because he was missing the knee-cap of his left leg, the shin-bone was tied to the femur by a black ribbon passed two or three times through the opening of the fibula. Then he took several paces about the room in order to demonstrate how the absence of that bone prevented him from walking freely.

"Heaven forbid," I said in a mortified tone, "that the worthy former employee of the University of Pavia should be lame on my account: your knee-cap is over there, on the desk, take it, and mend your leg as best you can."

The ghost bowed for the second time in a gesture of gratitude, untied the ribbon that joined the femur to the shin, placed that make-shift remedy on the desk, and having picked up the knee-cap, began to adjust it to the leg.

"What news do you bear from the other world?" I then asked, seeing that the conversation was languishing during his task.

Instead of answering my question, however, he exclaimed with a saddened expression on his face: "This knee-cap is rather deteriorated; you have not taken good care of it."

"I do not believe I have," I said, "but can it be that your other bones are more sound?"

He fell silent again, and bowed a third time to bid me farewell. When he reached the doorway, however, he answered me as he closed the door behind himself: "Feel whether my other bones are not more sound."

After uttering these words, he stamped the floor so violently that all the walls shook; and at that noise I started and . . . woke up.

As soon as I was awake, I realized that it was the porter who was knocking on the door, saying: "It's me, get up, come and let me in."

"My God!" I exclaimed, rubbing my eyes with the back of my hands. "It was a dream, then, nothing more than a dream! How frightened I was! Thank Heaven. . . . But what nonsense! To believe in spiritualism . . . in ghosts . . ." Having hurriedly slipped into my trousers, I ran to open the door; and since the cold was counselling me to rush back to the blankets, I approached the desk to put the letter under the paper-weight.

Yet how terrified I was when I saw the knee-cap had disappeared, and in its place I found the black ribbon Pietro Mariani had left there!□

David Lanoue

SOMETHING SMALL

Bye bye Issa,
You bald cantankerous
Cold-shadowed

Poet with the crazed
Crooked hand.
My days of squinting

At your warm
Brush-dribbled Japanese
That sputters row

By wondrous row
Queer small discoveries . . .
Are done.

The Great Bronze Buddha
Sneezed and out
Popped a swallow!

Eighteen publishers
Reject my translations
Of you . . . wouldn't

Sell, try a smaller press . . .
But the presses got
Smaller and smaller

Like the dark urgent spot
Of a flea swimming
In a saké-bowl

In moonlight going nowhere.
Bye bye Issa,
Never again will I dare

Try putting to dum-dee-dum
English exquisite mornings
Muffled in mist,

Your paunch-shape fading
In clouds, chuckling
At something small.

FEATURED ARTISTS

Edoardo Albinati is one of Italy's new writers. His books include a volume of short stories, *Arabeschi della vita morale* (Longanesi, 1988), which was awarded the Premio Mondello, and a novel, *The Windshield Washer*, about Polish expatriates living in Rome.

Jean Berrett has published poetry in numerous small journals.

John Brehm's poems have appeared in *Poetry, New England Review, Poetry Northwest*, and elsewhere.

Ken Fontenot's book of poems *All My Animals and Stars* won the 1988 Austin Book Award.

Stephen Gibson's fiction has appeared in *The Georgia Review* and *Quarterly West*. The story published here is from a collection entitled "Clara Petacci's Handkerchief."

David Lanoue teaches English at Xavier University in New Orleans. His translation *Issa: Cup-of-Tea Poems* was published by Asian Humanities Press.

Heinz Piontek is one of Germany's most honored writers. Born in 1925, he has written poems, autobiographical fiction, travel literature, and in other formats.

David Rigsbee is the author of *The Hopper Light* (L'Epervier Press, 1988) and *An Answering Music: On the Poetry of Carolyn Kizer* (Ford-Brown & Co., 1990). He lives in Blacksburg, Virginia.

John Satriano's translations include Ennio Flaiano's *The Loneliness of the Satyr* and Marco Lodoli's *The Ambassador*.

Rebecca Seiferle's poetry has appeared in *Triquarterly, Calyx*, and *American Poetry Review*. She won the 1990 Writers Exchange Competition.

Igino Ugo Tarchetti (1839-69) was the first practitioner of the Gothic tale in Italian. He was a member of the Milanese movement known as the *scapigliatura*.

Julian Albert Touceda, represented by Panart Galleries in Metairie, Louisiana, has exhibited his works in New York and throughout the South.

César Vallejo is considered to be the greatest Peruvian poet. *Trilce*, the last volume of Vallejo's poetry to be published in his lifetime, was his second collection of poetry and was published at his own expense.

Lawrence Venuti is the editor of *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (Routledge).

Ioanna-Veronika Warwick has published in *Southern Poetry Review, The Beloit Journal*, and elsewhere. A native of Poland, she is currently enrolled in the MFA program at San Diego State University.

Christopher Woods has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize on several occasions. His publications include a novel, *The Dream Patch*, and numerous plays.