New Orleans Review

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Steve Stern

MY BOY NACHMAN

from the novel in progress

My son Nachman, as you know, was reared in Paradise. I left him there, or rather here, to be brought up by his dead mother, the laughing Hannaleh, who was murdered and worse by Khmelnitzki's butchers in 1648. This was in the market town of Lutsk along the pea green River Styr in what was then the Polish Ukraine. That's when I decided the earth was no place to raise a kid, so I made my way back to the Celestial Academy where Hannah was waiting. It was some dreadful journey even then, I can tell you, though in those days my wings were in better shape, and the distance, if I'm not mistaken, wasn't quite as far. Of course I couldn't stay, nor did I feel especially welcome; I guess I'd picked up too many bad habits below. Saying so long to Hannaleh and heaven a second time, I left for the world again, arriving near the end of the nineteenth century on the Lower East Side of New York. There, in reduced circumstances, I was eventually reunited with my son, who like his father in his own youth had grown restless in the kingdom of the blessed.

Understand that in olden times you had more traffic between here and there, so there were more temptations for a young angel. Naturally I'd heard all the cautionary tales from our august archseraphim, a severe and unbending not to say humorless lot. Always they insisted on a strict separation of the races: above should go with above, below with below. They liked to harp back sanctimoniously to their original censure of God's creation of man, "I told you so" being their favorite refrain. It was a criticism the Lord Himself had not disputed, having since retired into his mansion, which looked when you scaled the walls to spy on it like some nightmare abbey, shuttered up and overgrown with snaky vines.

What they schooled us in in our angelic cheder was the wisdom we were supposed to impart to unborn souls. If anyone had asked, I'd have told them this was a pointless operation, since why would you fill a vessel with learning in one world only to pour it out in another? It was a cruel and unusual process, which made your immortal souls reluctant to assume their mortality, just as later, having forgotten on earth what they'd learned in heaven, they were unwilling to return to paradise. The whole setup was enough to make you wonder: Why heaven and earth in the first place? Why life? What was so remarkable about the lower world that the upper should be mindful of it, and vice-versa? With regard to such questions the archangels became uneasy, and once I heard Gabriel mutter that, if

God had only left well enough alone, heaven and earth would have been the same place to this day.

Anyway, when we weren't getting educated, we were getting indoctrinated, admonished not to follow the bad examples of our fallen ancestors. These were the Nefilim, the first to have succumbed to temptation, who bred monsters off the daughters of men in the time before the Flood. Then there were Uzzah and Azazel, the Weber and Fields of fallen hosts, who'd shed their splendor for the sake of a couple of designing females. Of course they came to unfortunate ends (as did their idiot offspring), Azazel reduced to peddling pornographic jewelry in the streets of Neshiah, a city said to be inhabited by noseless dwarfs, Uzzah hanging himself after his common-law wife plucked his wings. There were others, like the rebel Samael with as many noms de guerre as Big Jack Zelig, none of which we were allowed to pronounce in Kingdom Come. But all such tales, tired as they were and told with so little conviction, only whetted my appetite for more.

You'll say I didn't know when I was well off, and you'd no doubt be right, but where rapture and ecstatic devotion were the order of the day—a day in heaven being equal in length to scores on earth—you're likely to long for something less rarefied. Sure, there were a number of things to keep us amused in those ethereal reaches; I don't mean to suggest I had an unhappy childhood. But I was content to let others report on their baiting of fabulous beasts: the ziz-shaddai whose broad pinions are responsible for turning day to night, the re'em that in its indolence shtups only once every seventy years, the phoenix, the barnacle goose—all of which remain rumors to me still.

It was the same with the fabled cellars of smoke, the magazines of storms; the various heavenly industries (which I understand are no longer in operation), such as the mill for grinding manna and the quarry of souls. I never saw the Bird's Nest wherein Messiah waits for the optimum moment to come forth and redeem us. ("What's wrong with now?" I hear you say, and do heartily concur.) Reports on such phenomena only served to oppress me; their prodigality deepened my yearning for more haimesheh haunts, a desire that led me to the precincts of the mortal dead.

I hung around their muddy streets and untended arbors, the outdoor minyans where they spent eternity studying Torah. Or pretended to study; because they took every opportunity to digress from the

text at hand. In fact, Holy Writ often functioned as nothing more than a mnemonic device to put them in mind of exemplary tales about earth. So how was I supposed to know that the stories, forgive me, were lies?

Call it weakness, put it down to too much time on my hands, but for as long as I can remember I was hungry for news of the world. A born kibbitzer, I neglected my chores to spend more time in the yarn-spinning sessions of the celestial landsmanshaftn. There I collected the crumbs that my son would also gather in his own early years. I became a familiar figure in that part of the Garden that had been allowed to go to seed—the part reserved for the formerly tellurian, where places on earth were duplicated in their heavenly versions. Thatch-roofed shtetl villages, as dilapidated as their originals though purged of want and fear (items about which I was particularly interested), huddled under the boughs of a titanic shade tree, which some call the Tree of Life. Since the Tree also served as a ladder between the upper and lower worlds, there was considerable coming and going, and sometimes you had a situation where, out of the traffic in the lower branches, the odd living human would tumble.

Among them was, naturally, the prophet Elijah, ushering souls on reprieve from Gehenna for a Shabbos celebration among the righteous. He often appeared in one of the many disguises he wore below, removing an eye patch or a false nose, peeling off leper's sores, to don the glad rags he sported in Paradise. It was during his transformation from the humble Eliahu to Sandolphon the Psychopomp that I would pester him about his terrestrial meddlings. Suspiciously obliging for a shape-shifter, however, Elijah was altogether too loquacious to be trusted. He was an anecdotist in the tradition of the marathon talkers in the shmooseries of East Broadway, which he was known to frequent in later years.

Then there were those who trespassed without the necessary dispensations for entering Paradise alive, as for instance the rabbis who stumbled in by means of their mystical transports. But such characters were routinely struck dead, blind, or insane by the radiance of what they saw—or was it the shock of disappointment? In any case, they were of no use to me. You had the married people who, by virtue of their zealous Sabbath Eve coupling (an act which, when performed with intent, was said to speed the coming of Messiah), found themselves elevated through sheer bliss to another world. But having

made such an immodest debut, these folks were often sheepish with regard to my questions—especially when I asked them (at a stage in my own development when I belonged to neither gender) what was it like, their copulation. I also wanted to know why it was that, for them, heaven was such a gantseh megillah, such a big deal; and why, while I was at it, were they so afraid to die?

So you can see that, even before I came of age and was entrusted with missions below, I was already leaning in that direction. Sometimes, even among the angelic orders, you get a bad seed.

At first I could negotiate the journey between here and there almost effortlessly. Like the other hosts I traveled from branch to branch of the Tree of Life with a leisurely hand-over-hand brachiation, saving my wings for the final stage of descent. You know of course that the Tree is shaped like an hourglass, or rather like Siamese twins joined at the crowns of their heads, their feet planted in either world. Thus, in climbing up the Tree from its serpentine roots in the Garden, you found yourself, at its apex, climbing back down. When you reached the bottom branches, still too far from the ground for most mortals to grab hold of, you flew the rest of the way. It's written it takes the angel Gabriel six flaps of the wings to get to earth, Simon four, and the Angel of Death only one, but I was pleased to manage the distance in a couple of dozen.

Also, I knew a short-cut. Under the roots on the un-moonlit side of the Tree, the side in need of a surgeon and subject to rot, there was a hole, a narrow tunnel terminating in a dim back staircase. Rickety, tortuous, and steep without railing or candle sconce, the stairs had been condemned by the archons since time immemorial; they cautioned (always they cautioned) that the stairs led to Sitra Achra, the kingdom of demons. Never superstitious, however, I suspected what I later confirmed, that our governors had forbidden us the easy access in order to save it for themselves. Because the backstairs turned out to be merely a less kosher route to the lower world, as opposed to the officially sanctioned descent by the branches of the Tree of Life, called holy sefirot. Ultimately it became an open secret that the Tree and the staircase led to the selfsame place, give or take a couple of miles; both debouched you over that part of the planet where the Jews were thickest on the ground—in biblical times the neighborhood around

Solomon's temple, say, or later on the Pale of Settlement, and in Nachman's day Ellis Island. Or Allen Street, if you happened to take the stairs.

In keeping with the duties assigned me after my graduation to full seraph, an event much delayed on account of my chronic delinquency, I was making a tour of birthing beds; I was presiding over nativities in my district, the breadbasket countryside around Tchertkov, when it happened. This was on earth, which I freely admit had been something of a disappointment, not half so various as the stories of the dead had led me to believe. All the same, after the initial letdown, there were compensations; the natural Ukrainian landscape, for instance, was not without its appeal, especially after the changeless supernatural prospects of Kingdom Come. And the caprice of living people was on the whole more refreshing than the complacency the same folks displayed in their afterlife.

My task was to give the traditional fillip under the nose to newborn infants, which causes them to forget the wisdom they've brought with them out of the womb. The idea was that, God forbid, said wisdom would make life on earth unbearable, though I've since learned it can be unbearable with or without divine sagacity.

As a creature fashioned from the sloughed light of the Shekhinah, the garment discarded by God when He went into seclusion, I was imperceptible to mortal eyes. Still it didn't pay to linger. Prolonged contact with the lower orders could wear an angel's sublimity pretty thin, never mind the toll it took on its sexual neutrality. If your mission on earth wasn't completed within a specified number of days, not only did you run the risk of being seen, but you were in danger of succumbing to the peculiar duality of mortals. We'd been briefed ad nauseum as to the consequences arising when angels mingled with human beings—how they could infect you in various degrees with virulent symptoms of gender to which even celestial hosts were not immune. I have to confess, however, that such contamination seemed a little less threatening on every visit.

I was attending to some shrill pisher in the Jewish market town of Lutsk, when I saw her among the women assisting the midwife. Her complexion was the dun brown of doeskin, topaz eyes moist and aslant, hips lush, bosom generous, plaited hair uncoiling from under her shawl like a rope of brass. Holding a rushlight for the old vartsfroy to work by, she couldn't keep the flame from stuttering, so risibly

amused was she over the bloody wonder of the new arrival. Since I'd begun my earthly commissions, I'd been exposed to a number of mortal women, some frankly wanton and even better endowed than this one—who was called, as my snooping later informed me, Hannah Hinde Mindl. But fresh from the Garden, still mantled in an aura of more or less sanctity, I was as attracted to her sweet disposition as to her bobbling tsitskehs, her sandy braid.

It's written that, since angels have no practical soul, they can neither be good nor bad; they have only your contemplative soul, the one with which you apprehend truth. Not that I'm trying to excuse myself, mind, but only to say that after my initial severance from heaven I was as much drawn to virtue as sin.

I couldn't tell you when was the turning point, the exact instant I realized I wasn't going back, but after some days of hanging about the footbridges and the bathhouse in hopes of catching a glimpse of her, my physicality had begun to assert itself, and all of a sudden I knew it was too late to retreat. I ate a she-goat's spleen and drank water-leeches marinated in pickle brine, proven prescriptions for hastening the end of transparency, then daubed my still immaterial parts with river mud. I swapped my glorious raiment for some sensible bast boots, a pair of moleskin trousers, and a turf-thick sheepskin coat. The coat hid my folded wings, giving me a somewhat crook-backed demeanor, but I believe I was otherwise quite prepossessing. I was fascinated by the novelty of being corporeal, not to say distinctly male, and took every opportunity to spy on my own reflection. In windows and barbers' basins I paused to admire my augur-sharp eyes, my dark sidelocks spiraling like the helix of an angel's downward flight. And whenever convenient I stole a peek inside my pants.

After making discreet inquiries, I learned the protocol and went through the customary channels to win her. I engaged the services of Velvl One-Lung, a matchmaker of dubious character, who arranged a meeting with her family in their ancestral hovel. An accomplished liar, Velvel introduced me between fits of coughing as Simcha Opgekumener, Talmud prodigy and favorite grandson of the Pshishker rabbi, come from Izbitze in search of a wife. (That I went along with his flimflam was a measure of how quickly I'd grasped that deception was a standard procedure on earth.)

In support of the shadchan's claims I spouted sufficient commentary—hadn't I breathed the stuff in the upper world?—to reduce

Hannah's father Berel Groysfuss, an unlettered tanner, to tears. I flatter myself that the rest of the tribe, including my intended (who stood behind her mama chewing impishly on her braid) were not unmoved. They were lined up in a descending row of dirty siblings under fox and beaver hides hung from the rafters, rank breezes wafting in from the courtyard vats. From prolonged exposure to their industry they'd become a tawny lot, the Groysfussers, graduated in leatheriness according to their ages. Noting this, I felt it even more urgent that I should rescue my prospective bride from her half-embalmed household—this before her flesh lost its pliancy and was cured to the vellum-stiff state of her older brothers.

Because the impoverishment of Hannah's family had discouraged suitors, and a scholar was a sought-after commodity in a town unblessed with a surplus of same, the bargain was soon struck. Her father even threw in some miniver pelts for a dowry. I was lodged until the date set for our nuptials on a hard pallet in the study house, but took my meals at the Groysfussers' board. The derma was stuffed with some granular mystery meat and the groats tasted like the tannery smelled. Indeed, the prevailing aroma of her brood did not exclude my buxom fiancee, though even by her distinctive bouquet I was aroused. And through her general sauciness of attitude, by looks tossed over a shoulder while bent to some chore, Hannah led me to believe the feeling was mutual. In this way I passed in a heady intoxication the period when I might have had second thoughts.

But as our wedding night approached, I grew apprehensive. After all we were both of us still virgins, and despite the desire I'd nurtured since assuming my physical condition, I was a little anxious about my ability to perform. As it turned out, however, I needn't have worried; for no sooner had I shed the last vestiges of the sublime than I came into another kind of wisdom. I understood what I'd only had inklings of in the upper yeshivas, when the dead men winked over taboos in the Code of Law. Far sweeter than the abiding bliss one enjoyed in the Garden was this immersion in an element of want and fear, where your only access to paradise was through the body of your beloved.

The wedding was an outdoor affair with a hand-held canopy beneath which we were paraded by torchlight through the market square. The whole community turned out and under the influence of Berel's home-brewed kvass (which tasted of blueing and induced in some a temporary blindness) welcomed me into their fold. After the

ceremony there were slopes of stuffed goosenecks, troughs of soup afloat with fat globules like golden lily pads. There was a jester who alternated between reminding us in verse of how fleeting a thing was joy and grinding his hips suggestively. To the accompaniment of fiddles and horns the wedding guests, forbidden to dance with each other, danced with bottles, brooms, and loaves of bread. They danced with the knock-kneed jester, who donned a mask to represent the angel of death.

Then they marshaled me and Hannah into the moldy festival booth behind her family's dwelling. This was the ramshackle structure that was to pass for both our honeymoon nest and newlywed dacha, where I revealed to my wife my identity as lapsed seraph. What choice did I have? It was either make a clean breast of things or let her believe, like everyone else, that my ill-fitting ritual garment concealed a deformity. Besides, until they'd become a needless encumbrance through longstanding disuse, I was still rather proud of my wings; though my bride, for whom my nakedness was a fresh revelation, reacted with typical mirth. She seemed to think that my downy pinions were but another feature of the male anatomy for which her mother had failed to properly prepare her. When I tried to explain that I was not a man at all but a member of an angelic order, she left off her tittering long enough to assure me,

"Nu, so nobody's perfect."

This was the sort of remark that got Hannah branded a chucklehead by the backbiting yentes of Lutsk, though to me it was her peculiar gift—her tireless capacity for staying amused. It was a quality that, through my fondness for her, proved contagious, as was her cackling laughter which seldom subsided. If anything, after she'd shrugged off the silk gown to rock me in her pungent bosom, her hilarity increased; it reached an ear-splitting pitch at the moment when I punctured the somewhat leathery membrane of her maidenhood. Not so many months later, she further assured me that for an angel I made a perfectly serviceable man, and informed me that I was going to be a papa. Raised as I'd been on a diet of cautionary tales, I was aware that the fruit of the unions of women and heavenly hosts were often monstrosities. Shouldn't we perhaps obtain a philtre from Faigeleh Goiter, the speaker woman, and nip the thing in the bud? But I'd heard also in the storytellers' minyans that such children might turn out, against all odds, to be sages or mighty men, and

heartened by my Hannaleh's buoyant spirits, I looked forward to seeing what I had spawned.

I grew bored with being a kept man, tired of my role as feather in the greasy cap of Berel Groysfuss, while my expectant wife peddled skins. Was it for this I'd forfeited my beatific birthright: to make a pretense of poring over scripture among dozing old fossils in a tumbledown study house? An occupation, incidentally, not so dissimilar from the one I'd sat in on above. True, it was that very familiarity that had at first kept me close to the study house hearth, around which the porters and tinkers spun their yarns. But as above, so below—in the end I got restless.

I was also fed up with our unsanitary quarters in Berel's courtyard, which in no way could I feature as a nursery. Having made the commitment to human experience, how should I now settle for half-measures? No doubt my father-in-law would have taken me into the tannery, where your body was at least insured against decomposition—not of course an issue with me. Besides, ruled as I was by a streak of independence, I meant to establish my status as mortal-in-good-standing without the help of anyone on earth. Swallowing the demotion in rank and prestige, I abandoned the study house; I became a common shlepper, and moved Hannah and myself into a hovel of our own.

Looking back, I might have aspired to be an artisan; the tailors and glassblowers of our community did all right for themselves. They earned a tidy living and saw to it that their children made favorable matches; they occupied seats by the eastern wall in shul. But what skills did I have other than instilling in the unborn the knowledge I'd been obliged to revoke at birth? (A knowledge I'd begun already to forget myself.) For such ministry there wasn't much call in those parts, let alone material recompense. So I became a belfer, riding kids on my shoulders to Hebrew class through streets knee-deep in Polish gumbo. Later on I diversified, joining the burial society and the local chapter of the Water-Carriers Guild.

You'll say this prepared me for my later pied-pipering role in the New York ghetto, but at that time, remember, I was still a Yakov-come-lately. I was not yet Mocky but Simcha, a name that meant "happy" in heaven and earth long before it meant "pander" on the Lower East Side. And as Simcha I was satisfied with shepherding a

mob of children to cheder, an occupation made more honorable thereafter by the Baal Shem Tov. I got also a kick out of scrubbing corpses and composing them in the single oak casket owned by the town, then dumping them (buck-naked but for their winding cloth) into an open grave. Handling bodies divested of spirit made a nice change from trafficking with disembodied souls.

Not that they weren't exacting, my labors, which barely kept me and my wife in barley soup, a taste for which I'd had to wean myself from manna. But life—how should I say it?—was good; tahkeh, it was life, a thing I was forever making the acquaintance of. It was snow on the steppe in winter, sleighs drawn by jangling ponies bearing Polish gentry under thistledown and stoles. It was spring along the riverbank announced by sassafras and linden trees, jessamine bushes and lilacs, forget-me-nots sprouting from the rotten thatch above our heads. There was market day when the Jews came in caravans selling fabrics, bottled spirits, tubs of buttermilk, bales of flax. They came wearing voluminous skirts underneath which they'd smuggled a hundredweight of game across the border. They sold mushrooms from the surrounding forests (which the kabbalists said were swarming with demons), roots and deers' teeth for suckling infants, kiddush cups, Hanukkah lamps, editions of the illuminated Lublin Talmud. There were bloodletting booths outside the bathhouse, where an attendant sold charms to childless women: the "indications" for insuring the birth of male children, the herbs for winning hearts. Scribes wrote bills-of-sale and drew up marriage contracts, matchmakers struck bargains on the doorstep of the cedar synagogue—which looked small from without so as not to antagonize the goyim, though inside its floors were sunk deep, the rafters raised high, carved with stags, lions, and signs of the zodiac.

There were the holidays that gave the shtetl a convenient excuse to go mad: as on Purim when the theater ban was lifted and the people donned fancy dress, flogging to ashes a burning effigy of Haman in the market square; or Simchas Torah when they got drunk and danced with the synagogue scrolls. You had the saints' death vigils when the boys fixed candles to shingles and launched them down the river in a regatta of memorial lights.

If it was something less than the world depicted in the storytellers' minyans of Gan Eyden, it was something more as well. Where in the Garden, I ask, would you find such variety, a regular Joseph's

coat of hues and cries? Sure, you've got your angels attached to every human aspect, both the left and right-hand emanations, with names to conjure with like Kushiel, Yefayfiyeh, and Zagzagalon. But what's merely potential in angels is realized in the mortals they sponsor, such as Velvl One-Lung, prince of chicanery ("Velvl, she limps!" says the prospective bridegroom, to whom the shadchan, reasonable, replies: "Only when she walks."); or Queen Dudyeh, a languid boy who came alive a few days each winter to play Esther in the Purim shpiel; or Zlatah Loins-Aflame, who knew the locus of even the rabbi's most private mole. They were like figures from a tarot pack I never tired of shuffling, whom I esteemed nearly as much as my own darling Hannaleh, protegé of the angel of laughter.

Her I liked to watch by hearthlight in the hand-me-down headdress of Odessa lace, her forehead filleted, broad face aglow, belly so gravid it might have commanded the tides. And I don't think I'm deceived in believing the admiration was mutual. After all, I was her chosen, her Simcha Amnesia (which I came to be called as the "facts" of my past became foggier). You should have seen me then: the husband and almost upright provider in calico trousers and coarse linen shirt, its seams fashionably rounded to exempt it from ritual fringes. We made a fine pair, my wife and I, as we trudged the crooked streets of our town, which in those days believed it had reason to rejoice. For hadn't there just commenced a Cossack rebellion, signaling—or so said the pious—the war between Gog and Magog that heralds Apocalypse?

Then the child was born and, pressed for a name, I called him Nachman because, well, he was naked and delivered at night. (Later on the name became auspicious through its connection with the rebbe whose tales are ever popular among the dead.) He was no more or less red and wrinkled, the little pisher, than any other creature at whose birth I'd presided; he had no peculiar markings or disfigurations, no rudimentary wings or purple caul, nothing whatsoever to identify him as half a seraph. Neither did he come out of the womb spouting Torah, so although I must have missed it, I guess some deputy angel tweaked his nose. But while his genius was not immediately apparent, at least his tiny petsel was intact, and I remained convinced that time would prove him mighty if not wise. In this I was supported by his giddy mother and our neighbors—bearing amulets and plum brandy to his circumcision—for whom every male new-

born was possibly Messiah. Besides, it was 1648, the year that by the kabbalists' reckonings we were slated for universal redemption.

But before Nachman had an opportunity to reveal a messianic calling, the Cossacks came. What we got in place of redemption was the hetman Khmelnitzki, may his name be blotted out, and his demoniacal hordes. It was a great day for murder and mayhem, I can tell you, what with the Zaporogian berserkers settling scores with their Polish landlords and the Jews whom they judged guilty by association. Then came a second wave of no less bloodthirsty Haidamak partisans, slaughtering anyone the Cossacks may have overlooked. It's better I should spare you the details, about which our rabbis said in the pinkas-register: "We are ashamed to write down what the Cossacks and Tartars did to our people, lest we disgrace a species created in the image of God." Suffice it that the fiends in their astrakhan caps and lobster-feeler mustaches stormed village after village, resting from rapine and torture only long enough to offer their victims a chance to convert. A stiff-necked people, however, the Jews went resolutely to their kiddush ha-shem, their martyrdom, in Tulczyn, Starodub, Czernigov, and little Lutsk, on a sunny day in the month of Elul.

At first it was a noise you barely noticed, like water running underground; then you noticed, the sound swelling to a rumble, the cup clattering across the table to smash on the floor. A pressure built under your feet until the ground erupted thunderously around you, and out poured stampeding horsemen with hyena cries. Suddenly they were everywhere, overrunning the market stalls, heaving Torah scrolls into the street where they set them ablaze. They were inside our houses whose windows burst as from the breath of dragons, belching feathers and flames; they hauled out our heirlooms, our tea urns and menorahs, our wives. From where I stood beside the well, paralyzed by what for me was a recently acquired sensation (namely, fear), I watched her battling gamely till they cuffed her with a saber hilt. Then she was quiet, my soul, as they dragged her along by the tuft of her shorn brown hair.

When I dropped the buckets, I ran, God help me, not to the aid of my Hannaleh, whose fate was already in other hands, but to the child. The time was when I might have summoned awesome powers; I might have called on my angelic brethren in their myriads to come to my relief. They would have confounded our enemies with invisible mischief and terrible manifestations. But having lived as a man, I'd

grown just as helpless, and had nothing left to attest my former station but a withered pair of wings. They lay limp from disuse beneath my sheepskin, passing for all the world as the distinctive hump of one who practiced the water-carrier's trade. As a consequence, before I was able to coax them back into operation, I had first to witness the flaying and dismembering of half our town; I saw what they did to my wife, who for once was not laughing. Is it any wonder that in those moments I concluded the earth was no fit place to bring up a kid?

I'd taken the bundle of the three month-old Nachman, wrapped in a quilt of his mother's making from the cradle I'd banged together myself, and stepped outside our shanty door. Having pulled off my coat and overblouse, I proceeded to flap, pumping an elbow to give the hint to my rusty wings. At the outset the pain was unbearable, and I doubted that those dormant appendages—their plumage molted to pinfeathers, quills falling out like pine needles—would ever function again. But just as one of the sodden butchers reeled from an adjacent doorway, a plundered candelabrum brandished to brain me with, I rose with my burden into the air.

It would have been some consolation to think that the sight of our climbing unsteadily aloft had inspired in the pogromchiks a degree of fright. But with their vision already distorted by bloodlust and vodka, what was one miserable down-at-heel angel (and child) in a sky already crowded with hallucinations? With the pink bears, flying troikas, and escaped souls of Lutsk rising from the carnage like dew, alongside of whom we also ascended.

It was a foregone conclusion that, by the time we reached heaven, my guiltless wife would be waiting for us there. But after a brutal journey that erased forever the memory of having once made it by leaps and bounds, I found it hard to hold up my end of a joyful reunion. Exhaustion aside, things were complicated by the fact that I was now an outlaw in the Upper World. Not only had I forfeited my membership among the beatific brethren by cohabiting with a mortal woman, but I'd added insult to injury: I'd compounded my first crime by smuggling its unsanctified issue into the Garden. This was strictly forbidden, profane creatures having been designated contraband in the realm of the sacred. Those caught importing them were

liable to immediate expulsion, along with their hot property.

For the other victims of the massacre at Lutsk, those souls whose piety had spared them a period of wandering, arrival in Paradise was more congenial. Met by ancestors, they were (honorarily) awarded their own severed limbs and patched membranes, and congratulated for having made a brave immigration. They were introduced to an upper version of their native shtetl prepared for them in advance of their coming. It consoled the Lutskers to see that their destination contained the same familiar shanties and listing onion domes as the town below, the same muddy streets, give or take a spangling of overripe jewelry fallen from empyrean shrubs. But for all its surface similarity to the original, the upper Lutsk was a tranquil place, idyllic in its absence of want and fear.

Idyllic maybe for them, though for myself the celestial landscape seemed dingier and more unkempt than I'd remembered, the Tree at its axis looking wintry (and in need of a surgeon) despite a reputation for being evergreen. The afterlife, I concluded, wasn't what it used to be.

For a time following the Lutskers' arrival, a holiday atmosphere prevailed, the recently departed unanimous in their agreement that death was indeed the promised land. But scarcely had they occupied Paradise (they'd been in residence no more than a decade or two) than they started in with the stories, portraying the world as the seat of magic and romance. At the market fairs that they continued to hold, instead of spice-rods and prayer shawls (which grew on trees), they bartered yarns about ordinary miracles back on earth. Dumkops, I thought: how could they have forgotten that dreadful slaughter yard so soon, that they should want to spend eternity deceiving one another with grandmother's tales?

Once her husband and child (and her vaporous braid) were restored to her, so was my Hannaleh's good nature, her late suffering notwithstanding. In fact, despite having been translated into a condition of pure spirit, Hannah's carnal appetite persisted; her phantom vitals pulsed warm-bloodedly and her female principle obtained. So you see, the problem was mine. Because I could not expunge from my brain the picture of my wife's defilement, I was bitter; I didn't think her gleeful countenance comported well with the nightmare of what had gone before. Besides, what business did I have in the upper yeshivas anymore, where my fellow Lutskers in their selective amnesia were frankly no longer alive? Meanwhile a goodly number of my

estranged brothers and cousins, the seraphim, as if following my own delinquent lead, had taken to sitting in on the storytelling minyans. Lest they should spot an interloper in their midst, I was forced to keep out of sight.

This meant I was housebound, sentenced to endlessly rocking the cradle, pacifying the baby with the rusty halo he used for a teething ring. When his cries still threatened to blow his cover and mine (he was a difficult child), I tried teaching the little whosits the habit of silence. Eventually he did learn to shut up and listen, a faculty that would serve him well throughout his childhood but wouldn't survive the long descent to America.

Sometimes my restlessness got the better of me and, despite the risks involved, I was driven to lurk about. I visited sights I'd largely ignored during my prior term in heaven—the depository of weather, the archive of desires, the quarry of souls—in hopes of renewing a misplaced sense of wonder. But there was a neglected quality about such places: cobwebs in the spokes of the Chariot, the curtain said to separate the Almighty from His angels dragging its torn hem in the dust. Fabulous beasts, such as the Messiah Ox (fattened for aeons in anticipation of apocalypse), tottered on spindly shanks, their ribcages as pronounced as furrowed ground. The whole of Gan Eyden and its celebrated attractions, leached of terrestrial passions, appeared in my eyes no better than a ghost town. In the end I felt like a tourist, and while I eluded the heavenly hosts, I couldn't hide from myself the awful truth that I was bored. It seemed that I'd become addicted to life on earth, terrors and all, and was homesick for a humanity I could hardly stomach, which is what you call a paradox.

"I don't belong here," I complained to Hannah one night in our hovel, undistinguished in its meanness from our dwelling below—though the hearth, burning some zodiacal species of tamarind, was as radiant as an autumn bonfire; and the crude alef-bais I'd painted on the baby's cradle had assumed in that light the shapes of bridal canopies and dancing goats. Nachman's quilt, the one I'd carried him aloft in, duplicated to scale the pastures along the banks of the River Styr. "I'm a outcast!" I cried, daring my spouse to contradict me.

She was absorbed in her handicrafts, Hannaleh, knitting outfits to disguise our son as the fauna of Paradise: a roc with a banana beak, a barnacle goose. But as industriously as she prepared for the problems that might arise in rearing a kid under the rose, she still found the

wherewithal to humor me in my rites of self-pity. The afterlife had if anything increased the woman's capacity for play. But her teasingly tender expressions of reassurance ("Simchele, ain't I your footstool in himmel?") rankled me all the more, and I found myself recoiling from her touch, blemished thing that she was.

Don't think that for such an attitude I was proud of myself, which is why I resolved at last to let misery seek its own level, its rightful company. One morning, identical in its shopworn perfection to every other in the Garden, I ducked into a hole under a tangle of roots at the base of the Tree of Life. Grown skillful at taking leave, I crept down the backstairs without once looking over my shoulder, so confident was I that my son would follow his mother's example; he'd grow up laughing in heaven, free of the least temptation to visit a homeland he wouldn't remember anyway. But as you know, he took instead after me.

Doug MacCash

AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER RUTKOWSKI

DM When I first heard you mention your Tin Man series, I thought it might have something to do with the Wizard of Oz, you know, heartless, axe-wielding woodsmen or something?

WR Well, the Tin Man in the Wizard of Oz seemed to be one-sided, like he was lacking something, but he actually had a heart you know. He wasn't altogether negative.

DM But you weren't really after any allusion to that character at all?

WR No, not really.

DM Your work seems to say something about European ethnicity, doesn't it?

WR I've dealt with the ethnic thing in relationship to violence in a couple of series of my work. The World Order series of drawings of weapons had various ethnic indications like flags and national colors, and the actual structure of

guns. I'm always amazed, when I begin a series, at the things I discover, but damn it, the German guns looked German, the Italian guns looked like Ferraris, the English guns looked English...

DM Are the suits of armor in the Tin Man series also symbols of European ethnicity?

WR Well to a certain extent. In the show, the suits of armor range from French to Austrian to German, English, so forth—but the series is layered with themes. If you want to be tied down to one certain feeling about the show, you might want to think about DeNiro in *Taxi Driver,* when he's strutting in front of the mirror with his guns, and he has that dialogue with himself.

DM "You talkin' to me?"

WR Exactly, and that dialogue is what I wanted to start coming through in the pieces. This series deals, obviously, with self-destruction and self-defence, which Man has dealt with since whenever Man started. I look at the French pieces, and I think of the nuclear testing that's been reenacted in the islands—self-destruction, self-defence.

DM To what degree are these suits of armor fantastic?

WR First of all, I view them all as fantastic—historically. I sort of like to roam in and out of reality, so in the series I can draw more fantastic situations, less fantastic situations; I can keep them very stock. That's another vital part of the series; you never know where I am.

DM One of the suits of armor has a feathered cock's head protruding from the face mask. I don't think you have to be Freud to figure that out...?

WR A lot of the liberating effect of this series came when I started dealing with the grotesque period of armor. I mean, some of these guys were absolutely crazy. They said to their armorers, "build me a costume, Charlie. I'd like to

have a cock's head here, and some feathers on the arms, and I'd really like to look aggressive." When I begin a series it might start with close, tight, strict visual elements, but then it will expand in terms of deeper and deeper meanings. The gesture is important; some of these figures are highly aggressive. You find the cock's head and certain enlargements here and there—sexual enlargements. But also you had timid people, elegant people.... At the time you even had defensive armor with what you'd call skirts. In the context of modern times it brings to mind guys wearing dresses, transvestites and so forth. Of course there's always a certain sense of humor in all this. I mean it's heavy, but there are two sides to heavy. It's all a kind of facade; the question is, who's behind that metal work? You want to strip it away and see what's beneath. As a matter of fact, I decided to try to do the series without actually showing the figure. You won't see any eyes, lips, so forth and so on—no flesh—it's just indications through gesture. In a way, I think the best way to show something is not to show it.

DM A moment ago when you were talking about the men who had the armorers do all of this embossing, and filigree, and decoration, you said they were crazy. When people look at your drawings, do they say you're crazy too?

WR I think that discipline has been lost in a lot of people. Yeah, I guess you would call me a little crazy. When I found it first started I was mowing this lawn with my father. We had two lawn mowers, and it was a long lawn as I recall, and my dad would start, and I would follow him down the next row, and I was just amazed at how straight he made the rows. Often when I think of my obsession with elaboration, or involvement with my surface, or precision, machine-like quality and so forth, I often think of my dad. Who knows, maybe I'm still trying to please him, in terms of the lawn. But if that's crazy, it's also a good human trait.

DM People say you're crazy with admiration in their voices. When I tell someone that all of these lines are embossed into the paper, or that the weird electronic pattern in the

background is made up of three layers of graphite, they just roll their eyes...

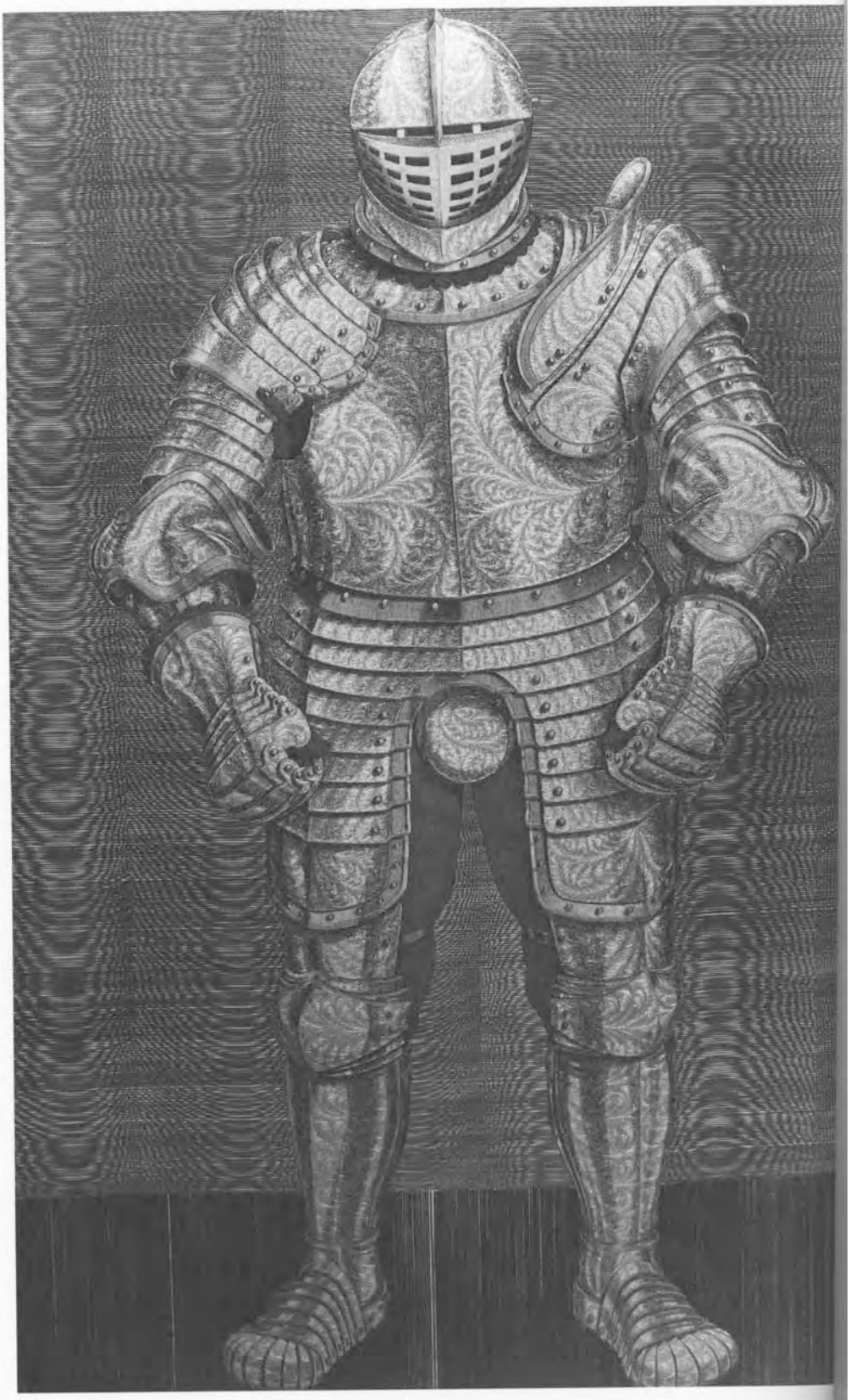
WR Nobody could keep up the repetition and insanity of labor in pieces like these unless there was an exploration going on, technically. I have to do it in order to find out what the next stage is going to look like. Or I have to do it in order to see what that shoulder is going to look like against a certain background. So it's like a search that keeps beginning and ending and beginning and ending.

DM We plan to use a packing label as the cover of this issue: a perishable warning label. Does the word perishable have any particular significance to Walter Rutkowski these days?

WR Well, I've had an interesting year, as an artist and as an individual. My health had deteriorated to a certain degree, and now it's back to normal, and I've gained some insights. During this series I had the fortune or misfortune of finding out that I had a slight cancer situation. It was interesting. When I found out I had it, and while I was getting chemotherapy and so forth, I'm dealing with a series I had titled *Tin Man* about protection and vulnerability, and obviously it had to do with me. Yes, I had certain perishable feelings!

DM Would the series be the same had all of this not happened?

WR You can ask any person, any artist, any steel worker, are you doing the best job you could ever do. And at that particular time they'll probably look at you and say, yeah. But when certain experiences happen, and they're forced into a situation where their vision is renewed, their feelings are amplified, and so forth, they look back on that time and say yeah, it was the best for that time, but now I'm really doing the best job. So, I can only answer it that way. I wouldn't have liked this to occur, but I also wouldn't have this vision.



Rodney Jones

ON CENSORSHIP

It is not going to disturb anything in the least
If I say to the brown wren that the bumblebee,
Who just thundered by here like a bull
Whumping against table-legs and the trunks of saplings,
Has gone and insinuated himself deep
In the spiraling black lace of the blackberry vine
And right now is sneaking a little poontang
Among the tender yellow labia of the buttercups.
To the squirrels, everything is clean. Say anything,
And they will not claw you or run you off,
And I do not have to elaborate and transcribe
Twenty-six volumes of the behavioral peccadillos
Of our brothers and sisters the chimpanzees.

My grandmother, as she lay on her deathbed
In the Summerford Nursing Home, when
I mentioned that nothing was dirty, sat bolt
Upright and told me that the night her brother
Purvis died, he swore to her on three bibles
He would not ever use bad language again in his life.
She said, "he accepted Christ and he died."
She looked at me hard.
Her eyes glazing like a clear stream
When a muddy stream running from a flood
Pours into it and the water begins to roil
And petal brown from the silt, she
Hung there like a fish in that holy place
Between the meaning and the word,
She cleared her throat,
And then she told it again, three times
The same story, and three different men.

I do not know what I could ever say
To make the iris, the foxglove,

And the painted trillium more beautiful
Than the whorled knots of cedar
And the mountains of southern Mexico.
I can't help the way I was brought up
To sit there and listen. I listened good.
My grandmother took my hand and smiled.
"You don't use that old bad language,
Do you Rod?" "No ma'am," I replied.

For the last sixteen or seventeen years
I have been trying to describe what it is
About the female human genitalia
That makes grown men want to vanish
Into the woods and chew tobacco
Until they're dizzy and their hands go
Blue and numb with the cold.
They sit there in the silence, thawing out,
Their faces burning and ringing,
And the gentlest of them sidle up
To the angry looking heifers
And speak to them in low voices.
They run their hands along their muddy flanks,
And call them by the names of ancient
Wayward girls, "Delilah, Jezebel."

An educated person explained to me once,
"If you could translate Mozart into words
I am convinced it would be positively filthy."
Big John Leeth said to me
More than thirty years ago regarding
The personal dignity and ultimate value
Of our work digging a ditch for that pipeline
Under the Fourteenth Street Overpass,
"Taint—you know what taint is don't you?
Tain't pussy and tain't ass."
When a young woman would pass
In short-shorts or a skimpy top,
"Groceries," he would say, and lick his lips

And groan, "Umm Umm, them's groceries—"
But that isn't it either.

It is just an empurpled harp
Of fleshy folds hanging there at the bottom
Of the torso and almost hidden
In the silk or stiff mass of curls.
Even as it wets with pleasure
And seems to drive the mind
Deep into the dreamiest alcove
Of that last extinct bird,
It knows only the balm of touch,
But it is where we come from.

My grandmother's grave lies
Among the dark, largely unmentionable
Trees along the Holston River,
The black heron screeching up
There in the dead branches,
And the moon like that single lamp
Of the miner who will pick us
Out of the nearly invisible flux
And raise us up gold.

No one told her what loosened
Into her husband's tongue
Just out of her earshot,
That spate of indelicate oaths,
Organ-sightings, and jokes,
But she must have heard something.
All her life, appropriating
The powers of silence,
She was no flower.

HUNGER

I have never knelt to the earth and taken the crisp body
Of a beetle or the tender snack of an aphid on my tongue
And chewed it to paste and swallowed it down,
So I cannot speak of true hunger. One afternoon
In Alabama, Mitchell Tomlinson, who is an engineer now,
Offered me one of the dark gray lumps of clay
That he had been periodically stuffing into his mouth,
And I ate it. I am not saying it was good, but
I swallowed it, as if it were fudge. It tasted
All right, like salty creekwater or the gunpowdery attar
That rises from a plowed field after a shower—
Only a little worse than boiled okra or collard greens,
And better than the greenish turtle egg I sucked
From a leathery shell on the beach one December afternoon
In 1984, and that wasn't bad either. I took it
Casually, the way, when I was very young, I would take
A woman in the vast inaccurate focus of my sexual hunger,
And, afterwards, relishing the taste of her flesh and hair,
Would suffer no psychic indigestion of guilt.

If hunger has a body, it must have one eye that weakens
As its body grows larger. It passes over the stark
Beauty of the nearly starved. It has nothing to do
With curiosity, or the moment after a full meal
When a man enters the woods, and for no reason
That he can name, pulls down the nameless leaf
Of a nameless tree and chews it until the bits are so
Small that it takes ten minutes to spit them all out.
Sometimes when my wife and I walk near the house,
The huge boisterous dog who leads us around,
Marking trees, defecating in neighbors' yards,
Or greeting strangers by bringing the club
Of his nose up hard into their groins, will take
A nameless weed that way and chew on it awhile
With such a look of scholarly concentration
That he looks to be one of the geniuses of intuition.

Up there on the mystical disk that spins in his skull,
He has all his hungers on file. They're like the footnotes
He consults at each mailbox and shrub, thinking
Them over very carefully and balancing everything out,
Before adding his own opinion and stomping off,
With his paws wheeling to tear up chunks of sod
And seal his codicil in the general territorial debate.
Hunger smells like nothing I will ever know,
But given my time on earth, I know to ask.

My wife says the worst thing she ever ate
Was *cocteles de concha.* A filthy woman
Would scoop them up from the fecal alluvium
That piles up in the shallow water beneath the pig wallows
And heaps of human waste that pour into the Pacific
Sixty miles southwest of the city of San Salvador.
With one hand, she would slice them from their shells,
And with the other, dice onions, cabbage, and tomato
Into the raw wound before squirting it all
With the juice of a dirty lime, and offering it to eat, barely alive.
It looked gray, she said, but she ate it, too.
I have no idea what mystery of the tongue compels us.
My wife won't say either, but she's had baby eels,
She's had bull gonads. She's sucked on pig's feet.
That's our joke. Music of chance. Music of appetite.
We're like earthworms glowing in the dark. We know
Something unspeakable is running us through its mouth.

James Sallis

DAWN

I have seen you, Dawn, at the pane of my window;
an eye in the corner, a swift movement and the early
evening.

I have seen you in the afternoon garden. One hand
to your breast where you burned among flowers, beneath
this solitary room.

I have seen you in flight from bees that swept
about you there, aware too late of their wings' intent,
your mouth open to whisper *Les papillons! les*
papillons!

I have seen you at the point of despair, a door,
a gate looking back. And your eyes.

I have seen you lying beneath the sky's regard,
arms stretched out, Dawn, wide and free as a fence.

Your body open, that nothing would enter.

(à Yves Bonnefoy)

BOSTON

A ship comes into harbor,
rain seeking gutters
at the edge of the roof.

In the aquarium, lungfish
close their eyes.

Two crabs, alone in zinc
and bodies, mimic
the end of all our loves.

HAPPY ENDINGS

After the party I unsnare each wire
with the tool provided, watch
house driveway car
fall into the sky. It's almost
morning: little dark left
to hold them back.

I think how you steered me
on your arm in there
from friend to friend
for introductions, saying
George Amy Burt Marybeth
I'd like you to meet my husband.

All these things falling
towards stars now. Overcome
with the beauty of it, you appear
at my shoulder, knowing
what I will say: that
you are my wire, I was almost gone.

WHAT PAVESE SAID

Embrace my loneliness.
Don't ask me to leave it.

Though you can ask anything of me,
there are things you cannot ask.

In time I will tell you
more, always more.

When I lie beside you
in blinding night,

I know the future
of our love, and all things.

RECOVERY

He lives in countries now
that never knew you. Pain
falls to earth and *becomes* earth.
Wind spreads word of impending change.

All your friends have new addresses.
You think of them there in exile, steel ships
coursing in from strange lands,
leaving again for strange lands.

A cabin boy watches his hands
burn in lamplight.
Rain taps at the edge of their lives and lovers
hold one another's sex

in dry hands. The voyage is over.
Someone says: The voyage is over.

The shark fin of aloneness
heaves up against this still sky. Loss
and our hero find themselves surrounded
by a city, trees, beach, sea.

Louis Gallo

THE SECRET SURVIVOR

from the novel in progress

(*The Secret Survivor* is a comic novel set in New Orleans circa 1976. It is the story of Jacob Hooke, a young man deposited into a bomb shelter by his Cold War-crazed father during the Cuban Missile Crisis. When he emerges at twenty-five he retains the mindset of a ten-year-old Gentilly boy. He undergoes massive testing and therapy only to be thrust into the real world by his doctors with the advice "become normal." The first excerpt describes a doctor he visits in order to cure his slight speech impediment; the second depicts his attempt to buy "normal" clothing at Maison Blanche on Canal Street.)

Dr. Bliss had earned, in addition to genuine degrees in trichology and metaphysics, impeccable credentials as a fellow of Tulane University Medical School, where he'd graduated with honors only ten years earlier, specializing in the field of dermatology; he knew all there was to know about seborrhea, psoriasis, acne, comedones and hives. He had abruptly renounced his calling after experiencing a harrowing visitation from a luminous being he half-jokingly called The Presence in Residence. The story was well-known around the city—how one night while on call as an intern he could not get to sleep (during the days when he still slept) and was perusing the latest issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, when a crackling noise in the doctors' bunk alarmed him. He looked up only to see other interns huddled in their bed like *sacs of entrails*. The words unnerved him, for he did not think in terms of sacs of entrails. Yet there they lay, dozing or sleeping fitfully, rows of harried interns, some stripped naked, others still clad in their bloody scrubs. He returned to his article on the etiology of warts. The crackling noises resumed. Again he lifted his weary eyes. No one else had heard anything apparently, for he noticed no physical response among the sacs of entrails, no heads popping up, no myoclonic jerks or spasms, no moans . . . only the usual hardons and eye twitching. All was still, velvety dark, except for the streamlined beam of his tensor lamp illuminating a grotesque wart on page 36 of NEJM. Then a humming came, not the hum of an old transformer on a street pole, although it reminded him of that, but something like a human voice in a faraway shower. Something was happening—he suddenly felt light-headed and sensed unusual tension, as if gravity had thickened. He swung his feet over the bunk and set them flat on a cold stone floor, wondering if perhaps a minor vessel in his brain had burst, and made a move to rouse one of the sleeping sacs of entrails. He tugged at the sac but had no luck. "Hey," he whispered urgently. Nothing. The sac snored on. On his knees beside the bed of this stranger, he then heard the crackling, this time directly behind him, and when he turned he beheld the apparition, the Presence in Residence. (When asked later what it looked like he smiled and shook his head. "You won't believe this," he would say, "but it was a giant circulatory system. No body, no bones, no organs, nothing . . . just glowing blood coursing through veins and arteries.") He claimed to have cringed before the circulatory system for what seemed hours before it actually addressed him.

"Abandon dermatology," charged the Presence in a deep, awesome basso.

"What—?" stammered the bewildered intern.

"You cannot defeat the fungi. Fungi will prevail. Do something

useful."

"Wha—"

"Oversee habitues of the Vieux Carre. Cure eerie diseases."

"Habitues?"

"Yes. Become a trichologist and a metaphysician so the habitues think you are groovy. Habitues do not trust dermatologists. Do this within the decade, then open a Head Clinic on Decatur Street. This is your destiny."

Its message delivered, the Presence in Residence began to hum serenely (Dr. Bliss swears the tune was a rendition of "Come Softly to Me" by the Fleetwoods) as it faded from view.

"Wait!" Dr. Bliss cried.

But the Presence grew steadily fainter and finally disappeared, the familiar crackling diminishing with its exit.

Dr. Bliss, whose real name at the time was Sally Verocity, sat on the gloomy damp floor engulfed by darkness and his own doubt. Not a sac of entrails stirred. I am no longer Sally Verocity, he thought, I am Hiawatha Bliss. He felt expansive, joyous; he'd become a kind of angel: habitues of the Vieux Carre were *his*, like Jesus's sheep. He would be their Albert Schweitzer and Tom Dooley.

"Hang down your head Ron Dooley," he began to whistle cheerily.

"Shaddup," came an irritable groan from one of the sacs of entrails. "And it's Tom not Ron, asshole."

Dr. Bliss was not offended. He had just been touched by something that passed for God. He was chosen, changed, and he knew life would never be the same.

Ω

The Value Assayer had instructed Jacob to buy clothes right off a mannequin to avoid the distress of choice. But which mannequin? He'd forgotten to ask.

He peered into Maison Blanche's display window at each of the dozen or more impeccably attired fake humans and wondered how he could possibly choose among the myriad colors, textures, patterns, fabrics, cuts, styles and labels. Was he a tweed man or a seersucker, a wool or Dacron type, a traditional or Italian mod? Dare he consider the Scottish kilt or pastel blue tuxedo? Would he fare better in beige, olive, navy, crimson or aquamarine? Cream was out since he'd had no luck with cream. Some things he could not afford, he presumed, which automatically excluded them, but surely he had enough cash left to be somewhat selective. He decided to postpone the decision once again until he noticed his own ludicrous reflection—leotard, tutu, boots and spurs—return a most baleful gaze. Might as well get on with it then . . . and he marched briskly into the store. He asked a salesgirl in the main aisle for directions to the men's department. They were surrounded by greeting cards befitting every occasion. Some could actually play music when opened. He had never heard greeting cards play tunes. Things had changed.

"Are you sure you want the men's department?" the salesgirl asked.

"Y-Y-Yes," Jacob replied, "because I'm a man."

"Oh? Do you always dress like that, hon?"

"This is a Mardi Gras costume, miss. I-I-I had a leisure suit but I threw it away."

"Leisure suit?"

"Yes, it was Harv's."

"Harv! You don't mean Harv Slurp?"

"I don't know his last name. I rented his apartment."

"On Ursulines and Dauphine?"

Jacob nodded. The girl appeared to be working herself up into an intense emotional state.

"Harv Slurp, all right . . . that no good, two-timing wienie. Do you know what he did to me? He gave me this line about being a random event generator tycoon and how he made all this money. And stupid me believed him. So naturally when he asked me to pose naked for him, I did. I mean who wouldn't pose naked for a random event generator tycoon? Well, it turns out Mr. Harvey Slurp was nothing but a shrimp de-veiner for Winn-Dixie and he showed my pictures to everybody in sight. I'm so embarrassed. You'll probably find pictures of me naked somewhere in that apartment, I bet."

Jacob looked the salesgirl over and decided he would definitely

have to look around for those pictures.

"The men's department is over there," she pointed, "and when you find the pictures you'd better not let me catch you showing them off, hon, unless I say it's ok."

Jacob assured her he would do no such thing and quickly moved on, riveting his stare to the floor so no one else could take eye contact as an invitation to deride his tutu. Actually, things had gone fairly smoothly on the streets, but inside Maison Blanche people seemed less friendly and he felt uncomfortably self-conscious.

He strode into the men's section and gazed at the displays of belts, sunglasses, ties, shaving equipment and cuff links as he made his way toward an idle young man wearing a name-tag. The young man was leaning against a rack of sports coats.

"Can I help you?" he asked coldly, backing off a bit.

"I need to buy some clothes," Jacob said.

The clerk raised his eyebrows. "Obviously. What did you have in mind—something along, ahem, those lines? If so, you'll have to go to Frederick's of Hollywood, I'm afraid. We only cater to normal human beings here."

Jacob beamed. "That's what I want . . . clothes for a normal human being . . . I'm becoming normal, that's the reason."

The salesman flicked his head to shift his abundant sandy blond hair into place and pasted an index finger across his pursed lips. "Hmmmm, I'd say you're in dire need then. I repeat, did you have anything particular in mind? Or have you just arrived from Las Vagueness?" He was quite proud of his little joke and in fact had waited all morning for the opportune moment to unload it.

"The Value Assayer said I should buy clothes right off a mannequin."

"I see . . . we have the same mannequins in here as in our window. I take it you did examine our display up front?"

"Yes, but I couldn't decide."

"Well, please, don't expect me to decide for you. That's putting quite a burden on *moi*, isn't it? Why not just mosey about and take your pick? Eenie meenie miny mo, hmmm? I shudder to think what you'll pick but, then again, I have enough problems of my own to worry about, don't I?"

The young man flicked his hair again and trotted away. Jacob took his advice and moseyed through the department. He did indeed recognize some of the mannequins from the window. His budget eliminated not only the navy blue suit he liked but also the gray pinstriped Italian, the gray flannel "Exec," the Scottish kilt and a silk bathrobe. But then he spotted a light brown corduroy suit at a reason-

able $110 that looked made to order—on the mannequin anyway. In addition to the suit itself, the mannequin wore a white dress shirt, a brown tie with tiny yellow polka dots, a leather belt and sporty pair of deck loafers. Eager to look as normal as the mannequin, Jacob started to undress it, beginning with the tie . . .

"Hey, what do you think you're doing, asshole?" the mannequin cried in a frenzied whisper, apparently trying to avoid a scene.

Jacob recoiled in surprise. Mannequins could talk now? Progress never ceased to astonish him.

"You can t-t-talk?" he asked.

"Well, I sure ain't gurgling, am I? Of course I can talk. Now fix my tie and get out of here."

This was an odd turn certainly. The mannequin's lips did not move when he talked; in fact, nothing moved. He held one arm out in a sweeping bowler's gesture while raising the other high as if to signal a fellow mannequin. He seemed frozen in place.

"Your lips don't move . . . how can you talk?"

"I happen to be a ventriloquist. Now will you please fix my tie before they fire me? What's wrong with you?"

"Fire? They can fire mannequins?"

"Ok, so I'm not your traditional inanimate mannequin. I happen to be alive. Is it any crime to be alive? All my life I wanted to be a mannequin and when I applied for the job they told me I wasn't qualified because I was alive. So I prepared to file a suit based on discrimination and rather than go through that mess they hired me. So be nice, sport, I don't want to get canned for looking sloppy on the job... FIX MY TIE!"

"But I want to buy your clothes."

"Oh, wonderful, don't they have duplicates in stock?"

"The Value Assayer told me to buy it right off the mannequin. That way I can eliminate the agony of choice. I'm sorry but I have to t-t-take off your clothes."

"Look, don't you understand. Real mannequins don't have genitals; they don't offend anybody when they're naked. I, on the other hand, have genitals... which everyone will see if you remove my suit. We mannequins don't wear shorts, you know. So I'm afraid I'll just have to punch you out if you try anything funny. I'm not the violent type but nobody removes my clothes on the job. Later... do with me what you will, etc. Do you get the picture?"

"Picture? What p-p-picture?"

"Lord," sighed the mannequin, "you'd make a pretty good mannequin yourself. I can tell by everything about you... your outfit, your personality, your, er, intellect... really, the job pays well. You

should consider it. I can't think of a thing you'd have to lose."

The mannequin's logic made sense to Jacob since he couldn't think of a thing he had to lose either. And thus within the hour MB shoppers could feast their eyes upon not one living mannequin but two, the original fitted as before in light brown corduroy, the newcomer in an olive tweed of slightly inferior but nevertheless tasteful cut. They now faced each other on the same platform and conversed amiably when no one strolled within earshot, lifelessness being the order of the day.

"Not bad, eh?" asked the mannequin. "When's the last time you felt so *you*?"

"Well, I—"

"Aw, come on, cheer up. It's better than digging ditches or shoveling guano. That's what's wrong with people today—they complain endlessly about every little thing. They don't know a good deal when it wallops them in the nose. Take my brother Harv who makes fourty thou a year taking pictures of girls that he sells to *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. You think he's happy? Hell no, he doesn't like setting up the lights and having to stand in line at the bank. And his guilt trip is so massive he forces himself to de-vein shrimp for Winn-Dixie at less than minimum wage, to compensate you know. He thinks I'm absolutely insane for wanting to be a mannequin… so I tell him, Harv, you don't think positively. I love my job because it gives me eight straight hours to think positively, without distraction. After that I'm too tired to think anything… so I'm never unhappy."

"But how do you think positively?"

"Easy—just don't think negatively."

"Can't you be neutral, like, uhm, not positive or negative?"

"Oh, some people have that problem but it's a true cop-out. You want to think positively? Then don't think negatively or neutrally."

"B-B-But how?"

"Gee, fella, haven't you read William James? Act positively, be positive. I know, I know—but how do you act positively? Well, for one thing compare my stance with yours. I display a positive stance whereas you're all hunched over and droopy like the elephants our kindergarten teachers made us pretend to be… remember, with our left hands wound behind our backs for the tail and our rights dangling in front like trunks? Whoever heard of a mannequin with bad posture? Maybe if you stood erectly, lifted your head high as if you were proud to be alive and made an effort you'd cheer up a bit. That's positive thinking in action!"

Jacob's attempt at postive posture nearly cost him a disc, for when he wrenched forward his torso, barreled out his chest and lifted his

shoulders in Prussian-like grandeur, he heard all sorts of ominous snaps, crackles and pops throughout his body, most prominently in the lower half of his spine which was not used to such uprightness and was, in truth, probably not especially proud to be alive. As usual he had no idea what to do with his hands and let them dangle loosely at his sides. But the mannequin, Harv Slurp's brother (whose name turned out to be Marv) was right: good posture felt positive. And so Jacob persevered for hours, chatting positively with Marv, observing customers and thinking happy thoughts. Around three o'clock, two hours before closing, his sinews and musculature literally gave out and he felt himself cave in from the coccyx up, collapsing into himself, growing gloomier and more misanthropic by the moment.

"You're going down," warned ever-vigilant Marv. "Don't worry, you'll need at least a week to carry on a full day's work. Positive posture takes loads of practice. Think of how long you've spent quivering your life away like jello. Can't cancel out all those years in a single day, no matter how resourceful you are."

Just Jacob's luck to droop over completely the moment two customers approached to examine his wardrobe. Unlikely buyers, this merry, sweet, sentimental duo, but there they lingered gazing into Jacob's bloodshot eyes as he bent over on all fours, assisting a pair of wobbly legs with his knuckles that now rested lightly on the platform.

"Look, Mommy," chuckled the nice little man, "that mannequin yawned."

Mommy inspected Jacob studiously. "Oh, Daddy, mannequins can't yawn. It's all that aluminum in your brain. I warned you about antacids."

"Yes, Mommy," Daddy replied, "but I need antacids because of all the garlic you use."

"That may be true, Daddy, but garlic lowers blood pressure and I was only thinking of your hypertension. Personally, I can't stand garlic. We're Caucasians, Daddy, not Italians."

"Look, Mommy, he yawned again."

But Mommy had missed it. "Daddy, maybe we'd better put you in that home after all. It's embarrassing to have a husband who sees things that don't happen. Remember when we came in last week and you said you saw Mr. Bingle give you the bird? Everybody knows Mr. Bingle comes only at Christmas. I didn't say anything because I didn't want to hurt your feelings... but now you're telling me a mannequin is yawning."

"I thought we were looking for Sonny's birthday present," said Daddy casually, hoping to change the subject. But damn it, he did see Mr. Bingle not in MB, as he'd told Mommy, since everybody also

knows Mr. Bingle belongs to Maison Blanche, but at the K&B prescription counter. He was complaining to the pharmacist about excess mucous.

The salesman with enough problems of his own made an obsequious appearance to ask the aged couple if they needed any help, though he knew from experience that old people never buy anything and were not worth the trouble. He'd seen these particular geezers before; they spent half their lives browsing in the store, memorizing prices.

"Need any help?" he asked wearily.

"Yes, young man," said Mommy, "how much is that suit?"

"There's a tag, madame. It says $110."

"We'll take it," she said, "in that size. It's a birthday present for our son Sonny. He's a dentist in Westwego."

"Naturally," snarled the salesman, "everyone in Westwego is a dentist."

Mommy and Daddy followed the salesman as he went off to find an identical suit in the stockroom, while Jacob, who'd worked arduously at looking as inanimate as possible, blew a sigh, not realizing that Daddy had turned his head just then and caught him in the act.

"See, Mommy," he exclaimed, "the mannequin sighed. It's not the aluminum."

"Just the same we're putting you in the home, Daddy," Mommy declared.

When they were gone, Jacob found he could maintain his post only by bending over entirely and supporting himself on all fours, palms and chest now flat on the pedestal, rump aimed skyward. "I'm so tired," he moaned, "c-c-can't keep my eyes open."

"That's not a very positive statement," chided Marv, who had not moved or blinked since the moment he'd reported in for work that morning. "I'm afraid you don't have enough will power. Look at you!"

And look at him is exactly what men's department manager Doyle Boyle did as he approached with the many-problemed clerk who had, after ditching Mommy and Daddy, reported Jacob for sighing on the job.

"Ok, buster," Doyle Boyle commanded, "get those hands off the pedestal. No bent-over mannequins in this store."

"I c-c-can't," said Jacob, "I'm too tired."

"So I see... a big loser, this one. Ok, mister, you're fired. Now just get yourself over to the dressing room and take off that suit and get out of here. We don't want tired mannequins."

Jacob reached into his pocket, pulled out a wad of cash and tossed

it at the feet of Doyle Boyle. "I want to b-b-buy it."

"Oh no no no no no no no you don't. I wouldn't sell that suit to a tired mannequin if he were my last customer on earth. I don't sell to tired mannequins, sorry, it's a principle with me."

"B-B-B-B—"

"Violate a principle once and you can't ever live with yourself again. Since I live alone, I'd have nobody. Sorry, I'm the lonely type and need my own company."

"I need clothes!" Jacob cried, roused by crisis. "I'm not tired anymore, doesn't that count?"

"No," replied Doyle Boyle, once a tired mannequin, always a tired mannequin. Now come along, let's get to the dressing room."

"Run, Jacob," Marv whispered urgently, "it's the only positive thing to do."

Jacob leapt off the block still on all fours and dashed through the aisles in search of an exit, terrifying sales clerks and customers alike, pursued by security guards blowing whistles and the entire men's department team.

"Eeeeeeeek," cried the girl Harv Slurp had photographed naked as Jacob scurried through her section.

"I'll look at, er, for your pictures," he assured her in passing.

"The door's that way," she shouted after him, guards whizzing in every direction, alarms buzzing.

"Mama," said a startled black child being dragged into the store by his mother's hand as Jacob shot out into the crowds on Canal Street, "dat man look like a monkey."

"Hmmmmf," the mother shrugged, "all dem white trash look like monkeys if you ax me."

Jacob maintained his speed and stance all the way to the Royal and Canal intersection at which point he hopped into a car that held its door open for him, store detectives and security police pawing at his jacket. The car sped across Canal and was soon cruising safely up St. Charles.

John Wood

THE GATES OF THE ELECT KINGDOM

for
Paul Zimmer

Bless the man who can restore the spirit.
—Wilhelm Johannes Hoade

A *New Orleans Review* chapbook

Author's Note

I originally considered subtitling *The Gates of the Elect Kingdom* "An Historical Poem" because it is based on historical characters, historical events, and what is certainly one of the great visionary moments, probably the last of such moments in pre-War, mid-nineteenth century America—the founding of the Hoadeite community in Kansas. In fact, the story of Wilhelm Hoade, his visions, his coming to America, and the establishing of his community is a compact American epic comprising all the best and most hopeful dreams of pre-Civil War America.

In the poem I have tried to be faithful to those characters and events; however, at times I have, of course, manufactured dialogue, minor details, and so forth, but at no point is there anything in the poem that could not have actually happened or is unfaithful to the history or the teachings of the Hoadeite movement. In fact, many of Hoade's own words—except those in the *Vision* poems—are taken from Hoade's *Mysteries*, and even the *Visions* are influenced by the descriptions Hoade gave of them and that were recorded by his followers after his death. The historical facts of the Hoadeite movement are fairly well-known and even entered the American artistic consciousness in the thirties and forties with Aaron Copland's ballet suite *Seven Hoadeite Dances* choreographed and danced by Martha Graham and Rockwell Kent's beautifully illustrated edition of Hoade's sermons, *The Mysteries*, published by the Limited Editions Club.

Wilhelm Johannes Hoade (1788-1852), founder of the Family of the Elect Kingdom, known as the Hoadeites, was born in Germany in 1788 and emigrated to the U.S. with his followers in the mid-1840s. They established a vaguely socialistic-messianic agricultural community of about one hundred individuals near Manhattan, Kansas, where they believed Jesus's return would occur in 1857. Hoade died in 1852, but the community continued to flourish until 1858 when the members began deserting it. By the end of 1859 all but Adolphus Winkler, one of Hoade's original *Twelve Elect*, in whose name the actual deed to Kingdom Farm passed on Hoade's death, Winkler's wife, Alma, his two daughters, Eva and Clara, and their husbands had also departed.

For readers interested in more information, probably the best work on the subject is Paul Kettle's *The Hoadeite Community at Kingdom Farm* (Manhattan, Ks.: Kansas State University Press, 1958). Nedie Lyon's essay on "Hoadeite Hymnody" in the January 1932

American Choral Journal is also quite interesting and important because it influenced Copland's ballet and is still probably the best work on the musical life at Kingdom Farm. Occasionally rare pieces of Hoadeite folk art appear on the market; most notabley was a beautiful Hoadeite Wedding Cup consigned to Sotheby's in 1962 (see *Historical Americana*, Sale 1001, May 25, 1962, lot 33, photograph on p. 64), of which only two others are known, one at the Walker Museum at Kansas State University and one at the Wilhelm Hoade House in Manhattan.

My interest in Hoade as a subject for a poem is actually an outgrowth of my scholarly work in early photographic history. I have published several volumes on the daguerreotype, the first photographic process, and almost anyone who has studied the literature of this process has encountered both the name and visage of W.J. Hoade. While the well-known St. Louis daguerreotypist John Fitzgibbon [see my *The Daguerreotype* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 120 and plate 14] was in Kansas making his famous series of Indian portraits, he happened to take a picture of Hoade which has been reproduced many times. Fitzgibbon even left a short record of the sitting in an article entitled "Daguerreotyping" which appeared in *The Western Journal and Civilian* 6 (1851), pp. 200-203, 380-385. He wrote, "After leaving the camp of Kno-Shr, I traveled to the Hoadeite community near Manhattan, having read of Herr Hoade and his Elect Elders in the press, a fact of which I informed him upon our introduction. . . . When I suggested he pose standing, for Hoade was an extremely large man, and holding a Bible, as it is the common manner to pose with the instruments of one's trade, he replied, 'Mr. Fitzgibbon, what you read about me in your papers must surely have been inaccurate. I fear you do not know me at all,' whereupon he placed the beads I had presented him around his neck, took up a sickle, a handful of wheat, crossed his arms, sat down in the posing chair, and said, 'Now, Sir, you see me as I am.'" The power of that portrait and the quirkiness of Hoade's response intrigued me.

Hoade's importance was probably best summed up by F. R. Leavis in his *Scrutiny* essay "Mythic America: Peaceable Kingdoms and Utopian Visions." He wrote, "Compared to Young and the Mormonian Latter-Day Saints of Utah, Hoade's Elect were failures; compared to the Shakers, their craft-work was bizarrely baroque; compared to Robert Owen, Hoade was no true 'reformer'; but considering them all and compared to them all, his *vision*, simple and beatific, was, without doubt, the most visionary."

A Vision of Kansas

And He came unto me saying, *Wilhelm,*
rise up from the abundance of the Rhine
for I will wither down its grape, for I
will scatter out its vine, for I will dream and sow
its furrows dry with fireless flint
that will not strike a wine for Elect lips:
an Elder's scriptured kiss or the plain mouths
of maids. And they shall turn and put their backs
in shunned disgust to all the Rhine and rivers of greed,
and they shall rise and bring their sickles cross a wheat
where lands lay down in gold and prosperings.
In the Christ-farm of a heart's bleak need alone
shall I be found, in the stubborn soil and the wheat's bright grain.
Rise; go.

And Hoade took up his atlas and knew
that God had called him to Kansas.

The Beginning of the Progress

He preached of the new world
and the exodus from the old,
and soon there gathered about him others
for whom the word *Kansas* was also
God-touched, fertile and shimmering,
awaiting their plows. And they sold
all they owned and bought passage.

I have wandered within the compass,
the elect and measured arc
of love's geometry; come hand in hand within
and hand in hand with me.
I've divined joy's pure theorem
to plot the equations of grace,
seen Christ aglow in the eye of the child.
Hand in hand we'll take up the plow
and build His Kingdom's farm on Kansas plains.
And Christ will come to harvest all our yield
Shoulder to shoulder plowing Kansas to Paradise.

The Imminent Return and the Congress of the Elect

And Hoade spoke of the Millennial Congress
and the sacred year lost in Gregorian inaccuracy,
of 1857 and *The Imminent Return:*

Let the women be neglectful of the canning of beans,
their cooking, and all the stuff of kitchens,
but let them be combing with love,
setting the lightning of their high loaved hair into wifely gifts
and dreaming of husbands coming home bigger than Jesus;
let men be driven by the girl-lust
they cannot carve from their sight or cut
from their grip and gait; let girls
weep for rapturous rinks and angel-boys askate and sweating
round an erect and risen Christ; let the world
hunger for their preacher's yeasty breath, his rising hands,
the born-again moment immersed in Christ's ejaculant fire;
let the world convene
and take up their wounds and gather in congress
to announce the protocols of their anger; to issue
the drafts of their secession from centuries
of numbed control, from pyx and chalice
and all the vestments of shame; to indict
the long priesthood of self-castration;
to await the undoing of the past,
the breaking from high clouds of earthly canticles,
to await the slow fall of shuddered glories in bright shafts,
godhood mantling down in ripplings of Kansas light,
to await the Christ-herald of the rapturous hour.

The Injunction

Know history as you know the soil and the seed, the compass, the square and the beam, Christ's embrace and the hold of your love.
Wilhelm Hoade, *The Mysteries,* III, ix, 2

The man with no patience for history
is frightened of mold.
He constantly brushes the backs of his books
and watches husked corn as it dries in the bin.
He can feel the grit of its spores
as they grind and rise in the sockets of his hips,
or lace along a femur's length.
He smells it on his childrens' breath
and nightly fears he feels its dirt
curving round his wife's great thighs.

The man with no patience for history
longs for a Paradise halted as stone.
He shines his tomorrows bright to their burning
and guards his slipping hours,
but hours cannot slip in Kansas light,
cannot slip from fields of grain,
cannot slip in works of love.
And Paradise was never still.
The past's decay is future's hope.
And in this moment work and wait
and Christ will come and set you free.

Melchior and the Butterflies

It was Melchior who first saw them,
Melchior who first heard them.
In the long hall of beds he lay
with the Elect dreaming of Christ
loading high the haywain,
stacking the abundance of Kingdom Farm,
and baking it into loaves; Jesus calling
for flour and milk, and the great white bowls
of brown eggs stacked so high children marveled,
and the children handing out the bright loaves,
and everywhere the odors of yeast and ovens,
of morning and fresh bread, but then
Melchior's dream turned with the odor of vanilla,
and he awoke, and vanilla was in the air
and everywhere, and up and down the long hall,
and he looked out, and it was as if
all the monarchs of Kansas had come,
as if Kingdom Farm could lift into the air.
And he awoke Hoade and the others
and together they walked in their smocks
through acres of butterflies. And butterflies
lit on their arms and in their hair, and Hoade wept
and understood. And in the evening they lifted,
but Kingdom Farm was drenched
for weeks in the rich dark secrets of vanilla.

Divisions of Labor

I

Sometimes I tire of teaching
and think of the other women,
the ones in the kitchen
or those in the gardens
digging and planting. They get
all the praise—and daily!:
"Why I've never seen such fat cabbages;" or
"This sausage is better than any
I ever ate in München." That kind
of stuff. "Oh, Sister, your potatoes are like—"
angel turds, I thought; Christ, forgive me, but
that is what passed through my mind once
listening to some old Elder going on
to Sister Bertha. All I ever hear
are things like: "But why must we
speak English;" and "Why must we
read music;" or "I don't need geometry
to build a barn." Later they'll be glad—
when their barns don't fall over,
and English and music are natural
as German. But by the time a learned thing
becomes second nature, the teacher is as forgotten
as first nature's long-gone tutor.
None will ever look back to Sister Anna
and beam as they would for a cabbage.
The group's greater good, the Kingdom's abundance, is,
I'm told—and retold, my dutied concern, but when they're all,
all so—so stupid, so stupid and rude,
a greater good is a difficulty to fathom,
harder even than a Paradise to come
on Kansas fields.

II

I must have mixed a whole tablespoon
of horseradish into Anna's portion
of sauerkraut yesterday. Those big
bright eyes of hers went red, the tears
ran, and she downed two glasses of water.
"What is it, Sister? Oh, Anna,
what is it, dear?" "Taste this, Bertha,"
she screamed, and the whole hall was looking on.
"Oh, Sister, I can tell by the smell
that some of the horseradish the other Sisters
were making must have fallen in your portion;
can't you smell it, too?" That was great fun.
She disgusts me with her ways,
her little harp and clarinet and perfect English.
She won't even use German when it's all us
together—talking privately of certain matters.
She with her little classroom all her own
and me in a kitchen shared with ten others,
and my little Hannes coming home and saying things
like, "Nein, Momma, Schwester Anna sagt
es ist pronounced best *doll-ar* not *ta-ler.*"
Christ, there's not enough horseradish in Kansas
for her. I know I'm to love us all,
but love is no easy thing. And I seldom feel like Christ
chopping cabbage, stuffing sausage day in day out
and listening to the other women. I wish I had time
to sit down sometimes and just think—about anything,
or listen to my Hannes play his clarinet.

The Expulsion of the Heretics

They are as dangerous as wagons,
those intense, soft voices
clabbered up with flatteries
and what sometimes sounds
like desire. Such tones
could web away a man's
whole heart and drain it down
like a dry gourd on a vine;
yet they can look so sad
in their cast downs, so
St. Sebastianed, erect
with arrows, so St. Agathaed, breasts
laid out, the blind
would weep, the dumb stir
lips into low declamations,
and the long deaf hear again.
Oh, we've held them close
and paid in all the corn and currency,
the wealth of fields and vineyards,
paid in all the abundance the flesh
can negotiate. But now, here in Kansas,
they are gone, and let them stay,
and let us keep our lusts
and know them and be thankful,
but let desire's draining angels be gone,
gone to weave and web another place.
And in their scurried leavings,
see them as they are, see them grown brighter
and more proficient from our embrace, polished now,
bright as a cock's gaff, and glittering,
their red clocks gleaming, sanding down
another's days. And so, they've driven off—fire flung
from their wagons—toward orchards
or fields of berries or snow

or some preferable somewhere,
furious and sulking at how demanding
our wishes and needs, at how unfair
the terrible ordinances of love.

Exultation: Melchior Tobit, the First Black Hoadeite, Leads the Service at Kingdom Farm on New Year's Day 1851

Little Babe Jesus don't let nobody sink
that'll grab the life line. No sir;
he don't let you sink. That little ol' baby hand
just gets a hold like a lover and pulls.
O Lordy how he pulls, that little baby. Why,
he the god of fire; he the shock; he the flambations
of the spirit, the burnations of love; he be love
all bundled up, the outlaw of love; the outlaw of love.
He come up from behind and stobs you
with his pearly knife of love, stobs you
in the ribs, and you feel love movin' then,
movin' like the Pentecost, movin' in your mouth,
in your shirt, in your pants, movin', movin' and you
want to scream and tell everybody about love.
Love makes the cats flex they whiskers
and the great whales leap for joy;
it makes the panthers shine at night
and the white rabbits dance in the light.
Love's the cocoon of fire.
And He the Betsy Ross spinner
of your soul. He the tailor
of your celestial suit.
Ooooh Jesus, take your scissors
and trim me till I be good enough.
O Lordy, dry my throat out
like the fish heads in the sun,
give me the fresh hot pig blood to drink,
give me the meat of castor bean,
the juice of unboiled poke to quench my sin.
Burn up my sin with your love.
Let me see into the lightening center
of your sight; burn out my eyes.
Ooooh Jeeesus, fisher man,
throw out your net and pull me in
and let me be worthy to be caught,

worthy to be set before you to break with bread.
Fix me on your holy spit and
turn me turn me turn me
till I'm worthy. O farmer god,
plow-master and driver,
drive me with the burning love.
Brothers, Sisters, do you feel it?
The god of fire,
the outlaw; the shock. And He love us all.
Makes no difference. He love us all.
Black and white and German and Indian
and cannibal, and head hunters too,
and all the children,
all the children of the world.

And Hoade arose and said,
Ah, Melchior, it is so; it is so.

Chivaree and Dance for the Marriage of Melchior and Carla

They clanged the pots; they clanged the pans;
they broke the dishes and rattled the cans;
they beat on the windows; they beat on the door
to chivaree Carla and Melchior.

But in their bed and deaf to the din,
he held, he touched, he took his bride,
glad for the lust they neither could hide,
glad for the shapes their shapes were in.

Within that dance of lust and gene,
desire's psalm of give and take,
they rose and fell for their bodies' sake,
like no waltz, nor reel, nor buck and wing, like no stepping they had seen.

And glad for the Lord of Love's entrancing,
the crowd outside being its dancing
to the strings and flutes and the golden harp,
all swinging and winging till the day twirled to dark.

The Omega Vision

A Christ-storm of fire in a steepled field spinning,
God Himself thundering the rows of frenzied thorn,
His iron sandal's fall for a dance of thinning,
the black bloom of His frown, the graving of the ground.

That is what I told them,
and I did see Him, gigantic, frightening,
tearing through the corn
setting it ablaze as His robes, all pure flame,
touched the stalks. And I watched Him,
and He looked into my eyes.
And His hands
were like birds swooping
and tearing at those fat with sin
as if they were the harvest.
And the fields flamed-out in blood
and the blood drove the flames like whale oil.
And bones were crackling at His fingers' touch
like stormed branches in the wind.
And He said to me,
To make the Kingdom spring
will take the nailed and hammered joy of Jael.
Love me less and the kernel will not crack.

And He turned from me
and the hem of His fiery gown seemed to spin
and He began to spin, and I saw Him
lift and rise over the ruined fields,
saw Him rising, turning
turning into pure tornado.

The Murder of Melchior

Hoade heard them from his study
calling out, saw the torches through his windows,
and he thought, *Has God sent me newly Elect?*
But going out, he saw into their eyes,
saw flung down at his door
what first in the darkness he thought
a smoldering log, till his eyes adjusted
and he smelled the burned meat of man.
"How you like your nigger now?"

Did you send me here for this, O Lord?
Is this the promised fruit of Kansas fields?
I swore no swords if love were shields
but will not bear a thing this hard.

And Hoade was like lightning reaching out
and he grabbed the man who spoke to him
and plunged his fingers through his eyes
and pushed him to the cold ground
and no one moved as Hoade held him there
and with his massive hands
pulled the man's face from his head
and flung it at the sweating, screaming,
still, unmoving mob.

Hoade's Return

"The Rev. W.J. Hoade of the Kingdom Farm community turned himself in to authorities last Tuesday night in regard to the death of Sean Cook, a baker, of Manhattan. Local magistrate Eliphalet Putnam released Hoade Wednesday morning saying there was 'just cause,' 'wrongs done on both sides,' and that 'lives of freemen are of equal value before the law.'"

The Manhattan Weekly Traveler, 8 February 1852

The hogs and hounds of a rotting god
could not drive me from Christ's own land,
and they've eaten my galled rebuke
and tasted Christ's command.
Under His iron sandaled fury
I've broken the breastbone of sin.
And for this, I am blest,
and Melchior is blest. And though torn
for such blessing, we are risen and radiant;
torn in the flaming trial
we have risen from the furnace whole,
weighed but not wanting
in the days that draw the stations of our blessing.

And now the sunflowers rise and sway for us.
I have watched them in the breezes
of evening, watched them swaying,
watched clouds driving over them
and smelled Christ's breath in the wind,
rich as vanilla.

Love and work will reconstitute the soil,
will fertile the ground for Harvest.
And we will heap high the long table with goods,
and He will return to sit with us and eat the corn,
and pork, pure and clean as doves,
and red cabbage cooked purple as a king's raiment.
And He will drink the cool, amber cider of our trees

in new communion.

He has fled from this glebe
and Beastmen now sow the beast seed.
We have looked into their faces,
seen them in the places we passed,
seen them at their trades
and innocence held harlot for gold.
Shame, shame smolders in the air.
We must tear the Beast mask from their faces
and uproot the thorns they've sown,
prepare the fields for Christ and the children's coming.

Sisters, Brothers, though I may not be with you at Harvest,
know that I am with Him, joined in the pit of the peach,
in the apple's core, in the onion's most layered chamber,
in the swaying heads of sunflowers, in their dominion
of the fields, and in their risings and upliftings over the children.
I will be with Him then, protecting
and awaiting you, awaiting you
in the sanctification of innocence.

Lament and Doubts

There was one vision, the last, my sisters and brothers, that I shan't reveal—and cannot understand.

—Wilhelm Hoade, *The Mysteries,* Appendix A

That first night our wagons rolled into Kansas
butterflies descended
like shooting stars to lead us.
And they angeled us on for days, their bliss
and radiance pulling us, proving Christ attended
and blessed our progress.

We knew the soil would be stubborn as doubt
but the wheat's grain bright, that Christ Himself would help plow
the fields till they delivered up loaves
to lesson all the world in love's
arithmetic, and count love's sum as how
the sum of charity was reckoned out.

Did we stumble toward stars gone out
and swear to break a field of stone?
Could Christ allow such a fate
as Melchior's on a route
of angels? Did the road only lead to charred bone
at what I thought the kingdom's gate?

Carla Tobit Tells the Women That He Is Gone

"Hoade suffered a stroke while working in the cornfields and was not found until late in the evening after he failed to arrive for dinner. Carla Tobit and the Winklers sat at his bedside and were careful to record everything he said as he passed in and out of consciousness throughout the night. He died at precisely 6:00 a. m. on the morning June 5, 1852."

Paul Kettle, *The Hoadeite Community at Kingdom Farm*, p. 258.

It was the first time I'd heard him speak in German for years.
It was as if he'd forgotten English, forgotten Kansas,
forgotten us all and everything. Brother Adolphus said
it wasn't Hoade but the stroke speaking,
that he'd so long lain outstretched in the sun and corn
his mind had gone. How else could the Harvest
slip from his lips, could the thought of His coming
and the bread we'd bake take flight.
But it had. Even when I spoke to him of Melchior
he didn't remember. He would just call for his mother.
Mutti, Mutti, he must have said a hundred times.
I thought there would be Words,
a final message, something to set down
or for the masons to cut, a testament.
But there was nothing. At the end he said,
Give me a sip of cider. And Sister Alma raised his head,
and he took a sip and said, *The core of the apple is bitter.*
Gibberish, I thought, but took it down.
And then he said, *Oh, it is so rich the room cannot hold it.*
Open the doors; open the doors or the walls will break
with the sweetness. And he breathed in deeply,
and there was nothing more,
and he was gone.

Waiting for Jesus

They waited from New Year's to Year's End
as expectation and disappointment rose to fill each day,
rose like the ripe sweet stench of silage
that hovered over the farm all summer.
Most thought it would be New Year's;
then that it would be Easter; and then, and then,
and on and on till finally at last on the Year's Eve
at midnight's wide eye's twinkling, knew
in that sparkled turning He would descend
star-like upon the fields with light falling about Him
and night turning morning, and years and time all falling away
as clocks and calendars began again at noon in the year One.
And so they prepared the greatest feast they'd ever set:
pieces of comb were broken from the hive
heavy with honey and big as hands;
pigs were roasted and glazed rosy
with the jam of sweet plums from last canning;
and hot cabbage in wide wooden bowls
was shredded and sweetened and studded with caraway;
and jars of peaches, pickled and smelling of clove
and cinnamon stick, were opened and set out;
and the long table looked as it never had looked.
And the sisters went about their work
asking the questions they'd asked all year:
"What will you say to Him?" "What will you do
if He looks at you?" "What if He touches your hand
when you set His plate before Him?" And they worried,
"Will I be able to say, 'More cabbage, Lord? More pork?
Some cider for Your cup?'" And the men rehearsed their lines, as well:
"We've waited a long time, Lord; thank You for coming."
"Do You plan to shift the seasons, turn winter back,
to begin the planting now?" "Do You need a dray, Lord,
or will Your plow furrow though fields at Your touch?"
And "Forgive us our stupid questions, but this is so new, Lord;
we don't know how it is to work with You, or if we even need to speak."
But by six in the morning discontent and anger had set in,

the pork was cold and covered with a caul of grease,
the women had fallen asleep round the long table,
and von Tungeln, one of the original twelve,
said he'd had his doubts, that Hoade was false,
and he and his were heading westward. And rage broke out
like a fire in the corn and faces were dark as bruises
and others said they'd go with von Tungeln
or would just go. And they did and the end began,
and all Winkler's words couldn't stop it:
"Even prophets can misfigure,
but the Vision's still true.
Christ's still coming.
Why leave; life's good here."
But Winkler had no voice for prophecy
or magic and could hold few for long—
and finally none but his own, and they worked
what acres they could and still believed,
still waited, still sometimes picked up
the bright, sweet scent of vanilla on the air.

Emma Goldman Thinks of Hoade

"I had read *The Mysteries* early on, but what was most convincing was that day in December of 1909 when I met Alma Winkler, then in her eighties. We spent an afternoon together over cakes and tea talking of life at Kingdom Farm."

—Emma Goldman, *My Life,* p. 203

He might have made a revolution—
or something—rise radiant out of Kansas—
absurd as that sounds, but more believable,
I'd think, than the Paradise he expected
to lift, blossom, and sway in the grains' gold acres.
How could so wise a man have come
to such . . . what? not conclusions—
and visions is so—cloudy a word
but for the kind you'd expect him to have:
why he'd read Engels as early as Marx had!
and he called on armies to rescue children,
to attack factories and do—God knows what:
flame the wheel till angels, their fire-blades drawn,
can mend the axle's inner core,
whatever all that could have meant—
something about justice, I'd guess, but that's no way
to organize an army. He was more poetry
than insurrection. But the way he netted people to him!
he could have made those shattering states
correct themselves, hold, and shine
had he not been so *touched*—so sprung
by irrelevancies—the idea of a great harvesting god,
an overalled and farming Christ driving
a hundred Hoadeites and all Kansas
back through the barred gate and into Eden—
lunacy, sheer lunacy, of course. But what I'd give
to have sat with him there at the long table
and sipped the Kingdom cider
looking out over the bright and bending fields.

The Last Survivor

"Mary Wentzel Woodard, 93, of Chicago spent the first ten years of her life at Kingdom Farm, Kansas, the socialistic religious community which was established by reformer William Hoade in 1844 and flourished for over a decade. She is the last surviving Hoadeite and . . . ."

from "Kansas Celebrates 80th Anniversary of Statehood," *Life,* April 5, 1941

She was too old to remember much,
thought she remembered Hoade, the power
of his voice and word, his giving her a pear
once as she sat on her porch—not likely,
and certainly not his preaching; she was
too young—said the Farm
finally went broke after Hoade killed a man:
memory's old plates etched and effaced and etched again
and again—till so crosshatched and shadowed out
details blur into details, days into days
as we'd wish them lived, a life of reasoned words
at all the proper moments uttered. But her childhood did blaze
again and again when she spoke of taste or smell
or the color of what never quite turned Paradise:
the red flare-fall of elm and oak; or new mown fields
bailed and lofted up, seizing whole barns with scents sweeter,
said Hoade, than Hiram's cedared palace and all glittering Tyre;
or the pungent difficulty of the cheese shed,
the slow fall of milk-white brine from linen bags
rank as the warm, heaped tubs of slaughter time,
but cheese white as Momma's aprons every morning,
cheese better than all the food of the rest of her life;
and a fine dust that powdered the blackberries
she gathered for the breakfasts of Elders,
the humming wasps that nested there
and waited her hand through the brambled thorn;
and everything bathed in light;
and on and on until you knew, till you were sure
memory's reels run true, knew you, too, heard

his voice and tasted the pear, knew age drives
memory Heavenward in spite of error
and that it edits, that it corrects the past
into Paradise.

Norman German

HOW DO THESE THINGS HAPPEN?

When Janis was dating Brad, they sometimes spent the weekends at his parents' farm instead of staying in town for the Razorback game. The farm was small. Too small, W.T. said. Too small to raise a family proper. Too small for cattle, or chickens, or even children. When a farm got that small, it was like a city, he said.

Brad had been a good wingback at Rogers High. Not good enough for college ball—he never fooled himself on that score, like some of the others had. But good enough to make him learn the names of big colleges and see the sprawling campuses on pre-game shows and give him a desire for the girls with pleated skirts and green woolen socks turned down below their knees.

So he went to college, where he met Janis, studied agribusiness for a couple of years, and dropped out. Where did the time go? The things he learned, the people he met, he felt he had always known. What he really wanted was a family and more time to hunt and fish.

But Janis wanted to finish her degree in elementary ed, so Brad got a job at Kelly-Weber selling tractor tires and settled into the routine of driving out to Rogers once a month to hunt or fish. That's the way it was for two more years until Janis finished, then for one more because Janis lucked into a teaching position opened by an older woman on sabbatical. In the middle of the year, Janis got pregnant, the old woman died, and they thought they might as well stay in the city. The doctors were close, and when the baby grew up, there would be schools nearby.

As she approached thirty, Janis liked the country visits more and more. The well water. The rafters creaking and popping as they cooled in the evening. In winter, her eyes readied for sleep by looking into the fireplace too long. She began to talk about moving onto the Beasley lot. It would be up for grabs in the fall. How do these things happen? Where does the time go?

Things went well their first year on the place. Todd had cried a few times about the long bus ride to school, but soon chores took

much of his time and energy. He filled the remaining time at first by exploring and after his tenth Christmas by hunting with his new .410. Never mind that Brad had had a thing with that damn Faircloth girl. Janis had set him straight on that but fast.

Life was only a little hard. Enough to keep it interesting. And cakewalks, pecan picking, and county fairs made it quaint. It was the county fair she was thinking about as she watched Todd from the kitchen window. He lifted the flathead ax from its nail, and she stopped scouring the black skillet, thinking he might drop it on his foot. Then she laughed. She couldn't be worrying about him all the time, not on a farm.

"Toddy! Listen," she called through the rusty screen.

"Watch out for those javelinas Daddy set the traps for. You hear 'em coming, shimmy that skinny hiney up a tree, hear?"

"I know, I know, you told me a million times."

"And put your boots on. You got no business out in those woods barefoot."

She watched him grimace as he jammed on an old pair of laceless Redwings, left on the west porch to dry after his escapade with tadpoles down at the tank pond. Above his head, the laces dangled uselessly from a nail. Stiff as the seat of a deerhide chair, the boots made him hobble into the woods like a man missing the front of his feet. She laughed at his premature manliness and silent pride. She thought how funny it was that country women couldn't seem to talk fast enough to get everything said, while the men had nothing to say or no need to say it.

There was always so much to do, and none of it meant much, but she liked the work. Priming the pump, re-tacking barbed wire, feeding the rabbits and chickens, chasing raccoons from the garden, making a list. Always the list. Life never runs out on a farm. Brad had gone into town to pick up baling wire. The Faircloth girl flitted in and out of her mind. Why wasn't Todd back yet? He went into the woods every day to work on his fort but always returned long before supper, asking her, "What's to eat, I'm starved," while he sat right there watching her snap beans or shuck corn.

She rang the dinner bell four times, Todd's number, waited, and rang four more, which she knew he knew meant, "Get your tiny ass

home quick or I'll tack a piece of it on the fence for the butcherbirds." She forgot about him for another half hour while she listened to the radio, chopped onions and carrots, and kept an eye on the pressure cooker. A little piece of the city never hurt anybody, she figured.

When he came back into her mind, she was mad. She rang the bell again and looked at the woods like she could turn trees into children. Then she started after him.

* * *

The fort was around here somewhere, she thought. He showed it to me just last week. Then she heard him close by, crying, but she couldn't tell the direction or distance.

"Toddy? Where are you!" He didn't answer. She kept hearing his cries. Then she almost fell over him. He was doubled up, holding his leg, caught in one of the bear traps Brad had set for the wild pigs.

She reached for the jagged clamps and pulled with all her might. The rusty teeth tore her fingers. She looked at Todd's face. He whined unconsciously. Blood soaked his jeans. On her, it was already thick and sticky. He'd been bleeding a long time. Where was that superhuman strength she'd heard about?

She thought of carrying him back. She saw the trap's stake driven deep into the oak trunk. She yanked at it furiously, sobbing. She couldn't think. Todd was dying. From the middle of the shin, his leg stuck out at a sickening angle beneath the trap.

Brad wouldn't be back for another hour. "Think," she said as she crawled about, tearing at the ground. *A tourniquet, a belt, shoelaces, no shoelaces. I've got to get him to the house.* Her hand found the ax several feet from her son's leg. "Not that!" she said aloud. She stood and saw herself run away in slow motion. *No, he'll die if I leave him.* She ran back and fell to her knees. Then she saw someone else's arms, that were somehow also her arms, lift the ax and bring it down with purposeful speed on his leg, just above the trap. She thought it would sever easily. Instead, it sank into the moist earth. It took five strokes, the leg sinking deeper into the mulch each time.

She thought she would die before she reached the house. Mucus rose from her lungs, tasting of iron.

At the porch, she tied one of the old laces above his knee, avoiding his face. If she looked, she knew she would lose her composure.

She tightened the knot down. It broke. She wrapped the other lace several times before tying it.

In the kitchen, she couldn't dial. She slammed her hand on the counter to numb it into steadiness. She made the call. Then she ran back to Todd. She expected him to be dull blue, like a skinned rabbit. He was white as flour. She dropped in mid-stride. Splinters shot through her jeans into her knees. The words tore her throat.

Finally settling into quiet despair, she thought of the gun. She stood up and walked in the house. She held it close to her, like a son. She tried to think how it could be done, but finally gave up. There was Brad. What would all this look like?

She walked out to the porch and sat on the steps to wait, running her fingers through her son's matted hair. She heard the valves of the engine clicking up the drive. Her husband stepped down from the truck. "Brad, something terrible has happened," she began. From far away, the siren reached over the trees for her.

John Dollis

BUTTERFLY EFFECT

I) Speculum Mundi

They look
like eyes
and mark
the place
of a question:

why the bird
ate the look
that could not see
what can be now
inscribed here
on and in
a stomach nowhere
to be seen.

It's just enough
to make a butterfly
queasy.

II) Nervous Disorder

The beatings of wings:

enough to inspire:
a phobia:

in the dream
he is a butterfly:

he might be: awake:
the butterfly: dreaming:

he will bear witness
to the One or to the Other:

in either case
he is not:

captivated by a butterfly
he is a butterfly:

captured for nothing:
in the shadow:

of speculation:
in the net:

of identity: vanishing:
into: thin: air:

the beating of wings.

III) Weather Channel

Before his eyes
a change takes place
projected on the screen.

It's there
to see:

the future
on its way
indicated along the front
cut off from vision
except for what
another points out.

The weatherman is not
a person: the weatherperson
is (a) Woman
who holds the empty
palm of her hand
before the spot
of motion suspended
where (for) an instant
you see cut off
from all these lines
that now predict his fate
her hand holds
in its grasp
your penis
just beyond reach
on the other side
of the screen.

It is the look
of things to come.

THE FOUR OF JULY: INSTRUCTIONS [Made in China]

1) Place to bottle
or other
so points up
to cloudy sky.

2) Match fire
will ignite fuse.

3) Do not hover.

4) Listen carefully
for report.

LECTURE

The whiteness of the whale
for example inhabits
the surface punctuates
the water line
marks out division
like a fraction

that separates the whole
from itself: beneath
what rises above it.

The question mark(')s
this space where
nothing takes place.

This is the moment
when the teacher goes
to the blackboard.

Enid Shomer

PAINTER'S WHITES

Always homesick for Florida,
Father called his business *Sunshine*
Decorators, the way I used to write over
and over the name of the boy
I loved. Some nights he let me
watch him stir in the tint—liquid feathers
of mint, flamingo, Prussian blue.
This was before rollers, in the days
of boar bristle and spirits
of turpentine and brushes tended
like ranch minks.

Morning brought him dazzling
from the bedroom, a man wearing pure
glare, a knife
crease in the starched trousers,
the cap's small white visor
pulled down like a frown.
Mother and I watched the brightness
leave, his ladder with its red rag
dragging from the station wagon
like the gnawed-off leg
of a trapped animal.

Jeanne M. Leiby

VIKING BURIAL

Sam can't stop his mother from going through with the Viking burial. No matter what he says, she will douse their wooden cabin-cruiser with gasoline, spark the flames with his father's old lighter, cut the lines, cast the boat ablaze into the Detroit River. His father's body, secured now in the lazaret, will burn. His ashes will drift up into the industrial haze, and the unburnable parts will settle beneath the scoria-thick waters.

"There's going to be hell to pay," Sam says to his mother who is deep in the boat house shadows searching for the gas can.

"Hell to pay," she sings again and again until the phrase takes on the rhythm of "Amazing Grace."

"Ma, there's a law. You can't do this."

She comes forward into the bright sunlight, gas can bumping against her thigh: *How sweet the sound.*

"You can't control a gas fire, Ma. You're going to kill yourself, too," but she says nothing.

"Can't you just once, please, do something normal? Bury him in the ground like everybody else."

She sings: *Was blind but now I see.*

At the end of the dock, she bends over the transom and the wind tangles the folds of her skirt around her ankles. The sound of the water is everywhere, but Sam knows that what he hears is gasoline hitting teak.

"Ma, why do you always have to make me such a freak?"

His mother stands slowly and her voice bounces sharp across the bay. "This isn't yours," his mother says. "I will not give it to you. For once," she says, "this has nothing to do with you."

Sam turns away from his mother, away from the river. Too soon, he knows, but already he feels the heat on his neck. He is sure he feels the sun setting low in the wrong corner of the sky.

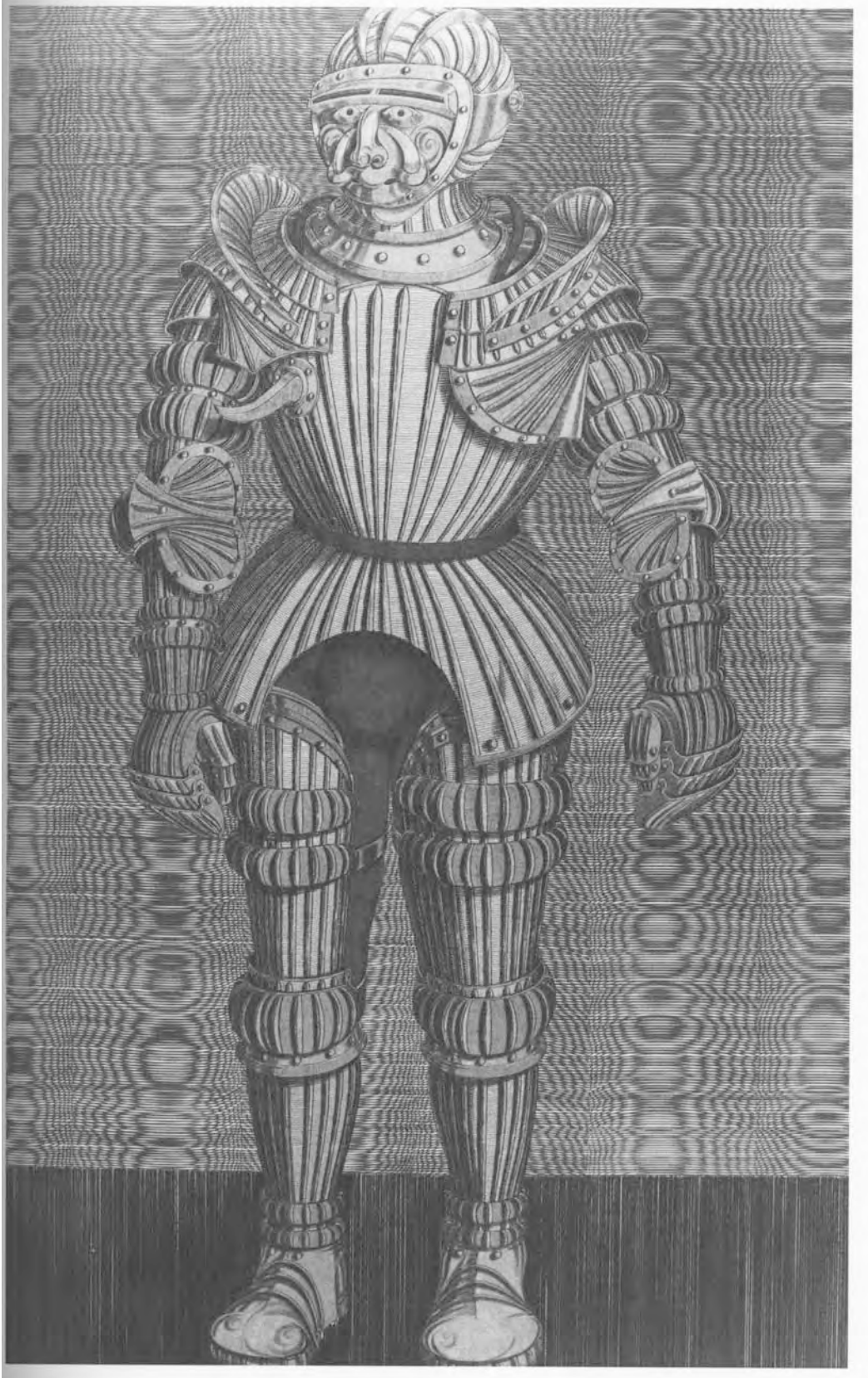
William Trowbridge

COAT OF ARMS

My father bought it through the mail.
It was the real thing.
It was made in Bath, Ohio, by old-world-type craftsmen.
It was sitting right there.
It was instant credibility.
It was turning things around.
It was the ideal thing.
It was suitable for framing.

It had a motto: *Sit Pons Firmus.*
It had a bridge with arches in fess gules,
streams transfluent purpure,
and a tower with thereon a fane argent.
It had an accompanying pamphlet authenticating everything,
and saying that Thomas Trowbridge came here in 1620,
and that the motto means "The Bridge Rests Firmly."
It had an order form for a deluxe frame or a plain one.
It had all the right equipment in all the right places.
It had us wondering where we'd been all our lives.

It had an uncanny resemblance
to my girlfriend's family's coat of arms,
which her father
also bought through the mail.
Ours had a bridge and theirs had a swan.
Their name was Downing.
My girlfriend said Donald Downing came here in 1620.
She said their motto meant "The Swan Floats Firmly."
I knew we had a lot in common.



Stephen March

SHARKS

My grandpa Roy and me are on a two-lane way out in West Texas, with nothing but cactus and sagebrush as far as the eye can see. I'm trying out new names for myself, since Roy recently reminded me we are going to have to change our names. *Jenna Steel, Jenna Du Page, Jenna Royale.* I consider changing my first name, too. "Evangeline," I whisper. That's a pretty name. I like Candace, too. *Candace Troy.* I want to ask Roy what he thinks about it, but he is talking about cabbages again.

"A cabbage is a good, simple vegetable," he says. "There's nothing flashy about it. It's just what it is, all leaves and heart. Did you know eating cabbages can keep you from getting cancer?"

I tell him I have to use the bathroom, and he says there is a town up ahead. Where could a town hide in country like this? All I see are miles and miles of sun-baked ground.

But there is a town. Comes up out of nowhere. Steam hissing from under the hood, the truck clanks and wheezes into a Texaco station just past a sign, "Delphia, pop. 5,150." While Roy talks to a mechanic I visit the john. Then my dog Cody and me walk around back to stretch our legs. Shell casings and oil cans litter the cracked, dusty ground. A cactus, shot full of holes, leans crazily to the side. The sinking sun paints everything copper.

I sit on a cinder block and imagine meeting Michael Jackson after we get to California. I picture him touching my face with his white glove, gazing into my eyes. *Candace, I'm so glad I found you. I feel like our two hearts are intertwined..."*

Cody's bark snaps me out of my daydream. I see him move suddenly backwards, like a film run in reverse. Nearby an orangish-brown snake lies coiled up and ready to strike, its forked tongue stabbing the air.

Cody!" I scoop him up in my arms and go look for Roy.

He is standing by the truck, talking to a man with yellow stains under his armpits. The truck's hood is up.

"Engine could be shot." The man says. "Then again the water pump might be froze up. We can look at it in the morning."

Roy looks disgusted. "Ready to spend another night in the truck, Jenna?"

"I guess so." I can see now isn't the time to mention Roy promised me a motel room tonight. What the heck, I think, things could be worse. Could have been snake-bit.

I listen to the gas station man give Roy directions to the nearest pool hall. "Go on into town. Turn left at the second light. You'll see Mom's Billiards on the left about halfway down the block."

While Roy pulls the truck around to the side of the station, I feed and water Cody. Roy gets his Panama hat out of the cab, then locks everything up.

We walk into town, stopping at a 7-Eleven for hot-dogs, fries and drinks. The hot dogs are smothered in chili and onions. I am hungry enough to eat six of them but I only eat two because I know it can affect my game if I eat too much.

Pieces of chili cling to Roy's beard. It's frosty white, like what little hair he has left on his head. He says his hair was tar-black when he was young. Claims he was six one then, too, although he can't be more than five ten now, max. Where'd those inches go? I asked him once. All he said was, "Gravity."

Roy is my daddy's daddy. We are on our way to Fresno, California, where Roy owns a one-third interest in a farm. He inherited his share of the farm from an uncle a few years back, and Roy's half-brother and a cousin have been managing it since then. The farm has strawberries and cantaloupes growing on it, but the big money crop is cabbage. Roy likes the idea of making money off cabbages. He is looking forward to sitting in a rocking chair and watching them grow. Farm life will be good for me, too, he says, pointing out that I'll get lots of fresh air, exercise, and good food. He says I'll have to buckle down at school, and do all my homework before I can even touch a pool stick.

We left Homestead, Virginia in a hurry, intending to head straight across country, but after we got on the road Roy decided we should go to Florida first, then work our way west, hitting the pool halls along the way. This was so we could put together a stake for my college education. I don't know how much money we've made, but it's a pile. Roy is the coach, and I'm the hands and eyes.

Before he got cataracts and "the old age shakes" in his hands, Roy used to be one of the best hustlers on the East Coast. He knew and

played the legends, like Rudolph "Minnesota Fats" Wanderone, Willie Mosconi, Wimpy Lassiter, and Arthur Kelly. Roy says the best players never went penguin and played in tournaments, they just used their skill to make a good honest living hustling. He says he won a fortune at pool and spent most of it on "good times and fast living."

Roy came to live with us five years ago when I was seven. This was a few months after my mom had left my daddy and me for her boss, Dr. Bob Conari. Roy cooked, kept the house clean, and looked after me when my daddy was at work. Daddy, who didn't see Roy much when he was growing up, said Roy made a better mom than my mother, Fay. Since my daddy worked sixty and seventy- hour weeks at his used car lot, I spent most of my time with Roy. We played pool every day on the table in the den. In fact, that's about *all* we did. When my daddy was there we'd play cutthroat. After I got good, Roy taught me to work a hustle: how to play below my true speed, and how to dump a stroke and lemon to keep the sucker in the game. I practiced on the players at McDuffy's Billiards with Roy coaching, but it wasn't long before I became a face, and I couldn't get much action.

Roy said I was a "natural," with a better eye and more talent than anyone he'd ever seen, which sure made my head swell. That's about the nicest thing anyone ever said to me.

My happy life in Homestead ended after my daddy killed his business partner, Rupert Charles. My daddy says it was an accident and I for one believe him. They had a falling out over money, and when Rupert went for the pistol he kept in his desk drawer, Daddy grabbed it, and it went off. Which sounds believable to me, considering what I know about Rupert, who used to roll back the mileage on cars until my daddy made him stop and who used to pinch me on the bottom when no one was looking. The two big holes in my daddy's story are that Rupert was shot three times, and him and my daddy were both dating the same woman.

The jury didn't believe my daddy. He's in prison now, serving a ten-year sentence. Last time I saw him he was sitting behind a Plexiglass window. "Are you being a good girl, Jenna?" he asked. He looked awful—pale and skinny. "Are you staying away from bad influences?"

After my daddy got arrested, I wanted to go on living with Roy,

but a judge sent me to live with my mom, who wouldn't let me play pool. "That's a game for lowlifes," she said. "You need to take up something like ballet or the piano. " She made me leave my custom stick with Roy.

I like my daddy a lot better than Fay, whose perfume makes me sneeze and whose idea of a good time is going shopping. She has about a million pairs of shoes and more dresses than Princess Di. Her new husband is a stomach doctor with a big, pink face that reminds me of an orchid I saw once growing in a hothouse.

Although I wasn't crazy about the arrangement, I honestly tried to make it work with my mom and Bob Conari—until the night he came into my room and tried to get me to do something nasty. When I told my mother about this, she accused me of trying to break up her marriage.

"Dr. Bob Conari is the best thing that ever happened to me and I'm not about to let my present happiness be tainted by your hateful lies," she said. "Your problem is you take after certain trashy elements on your daddy's side of the family. If you don't straighten up I'm gonna send you to Social Services. Know where you'll end up? In a foster home. You might even get placed with a Negro family, and wouldn't *that* be something?"

A few nights later, I woke up with Bob in my bed, buck naked and breathing whiskey fumes in my face. "It won't do you any good to make a fuss," he said. "Fay's had enough gin to knock down a horse." Wasn't any way I could fight him off. He weighs over two hundred and I only weigh eighty-eight. "I'll do what you want," I told him, "only I need to use the bathroom first." He let me go then, telling me to hurry it up, but I locked the bathroom door and wouldn't come out. I told him to go away, that I was feeling sick on my stomach. He pounded on the door so hard I thought he was going to break it down before he finally gave up and slithered off to bed.

I spent the rest of the night in there.

Next morning after Bob left for his office, I stole all the money out of my mom's pocketbook. Instead of catching the bus to school I took off through the woods with Cody, a little brown mutt my daddy brought home one day, and walked the two miles to Daddy's house.

Roy was sitting in the front yard, holding a bottle of beer in one hand, a fly swatter in the other. He wanted to know why I wasn't in school. When I told him what Bob had done, Roy flew hot. He went

into the house and began looking for his pistol. "Please don't shoot him, Roy," I begged. "If you do that, they'll put you in jail, too, and then who will I have left?"

I cried and carried on so much Roy put his gun away. He said I had made a couple of good points, and that maybe he ought to think things through first. To unwind, we played a little rotation, after which he got the idea of us going to California to live on his cabbage farm. He said he would call Daddy and explain the situation to him.

"What if they track us down?" I asked.

Roy said we could change our names and no one would find us.

"America is a big country. People disappear all the time here and they're never heard from again."

"What happens to them?"

"Some create a whole new life for themselves," Roy said, stroking his beard. "Others just vanish into thin air."

I wasn't sure what Roy meant about people vanishing, but I liked the idea of us starting over in California, since that's where Michael Jackson lives. I asked Roy if his farm was near Michael's ranch.

"What you interested in that fairy for?"

"He's not a fairy! He's a genius."

"A genius at what?"

"Music."

"If you say so."

"How close is your farm to Santa Barbara?"

"It' ain't within spitting distance, but you could get there by car."

"I can live with that."

"I sure hope so," Roy said, and he went off to his bedroom to pack.

Down the street from the pool hall, Roy takes out his 1-ounce bottle of whiskey, pours some in his hands and rubs it into his beard. Then we go in. There's a counter to the right and sitting behind it is the fattest woman I've ever seen. She is so big she looks like she has been blown up with air. Fat hangs from her jaws in jiggly rolls.

We'd like to rent a table," Roy says.

"Three bucks an hour. Mom keeps time."

"You must be Mom."

"That's right. You got a gun, give it to me and pick it up when you leave."

Roy pats his pockets. "No gun."

"No foul language and no minors."

"She's sixteen."

"My foot," Mom says.

Roy puts twelve dollars on the counter.

"Looks like you run a clean place."

"Find a roach here and I'll eat it," Mom says.

"I believe it." Roy tips his hat to her, and we walk back to the tables. There are about a dozen tables in the low-ceilinged room, half of them in use. Each table is lit by a bare bulb suspended from the ceiling. Spectators' benches line the walls.

We select sticks from the rack and get a table at the back so Roy can have a good view of the room and other players. My stick isn't bad for an off-the-rack, but, as usual, I miss the good hitter Roy gave me for Christmas. It stays in the truck since a two-piece custom cue would blow our setup. We shoot a game of 9-ball. While Roy is busy sharking a mark, I try to get a feel for the table. The locals have the edge here because they usually know every bump and dimple. They know how hard to hit a shot, how much bounce is in the rail, which pocket is tight, which one is a sewer, which ball rolls funny due to its flecks and nicks.

I could stay here all night learning this doozy. The green is dusty as a cowboy's hat, which slows down the ivories.

It doesn't take Roy long to peg everyone in the room. He spots the top stick, the wanna-bes, the bangers, the fish, the squares. He lays a twenty on the side rail, and I see him nod to someone across the room.

A man walks over to our table. He is wearing snakeskin boots and a Stetson with a red feather stuck in the band. He has long arms and legs, a pot gut and ice-blue eyes with no lashes to speak of. His pale skin and pearl-handled stick say he's a serious player. (Roy and me sit out in the sun every day to stay tan.)

They shoot a lag for the break and Roy wins by half an inch. I sit on the bench and watch them play. Red Feather keeps the first couple of games close enough to be interesting, but lemons off the 9-ball. Not a bad dump stroke, I think. He seems smoother than most of the resident studs I play. They're usually all flash, with no interest in playing a good defense. They bank on their skill at sinking rocks instead of considering the layout after they shoot.

Red Feather's acting isn't bad, either.

"That shot was dead center," he says, after a stall that locks up a game for Roy. "Green has got more bumps than a toad."

He has nasty personal habits, like picking at his seat, belching, digging around in his crotch with his long, hairy fingers. When I play him, I'll need to tune out these distractions.

After each game Roy swills from his flask, which contains only prune juice. The more he loses, the madder he acts. "Damn these lights in here," he says. "What kind of bulbs they got up there—twenty watt?"

Watching him lose, I roll my eyes, glare, groan and pout. A couple of the cowboys on the benches give me sympathetic looks, but no one says anything. No knockers here. Oh, Jenna, I think. You should be in the movies.

Reeling the sucker in, Roy loses about three hundred before he sits on the bench, his head in his hands. "My eyes just ain't as good as they used to be."

I put my hand on his shoulder. "Grandpa, let's go now."

Red Feather looks at us like we are something squishy he just stepped in on the sidewalk. "Had enough, huh?"

"Nosiree Bob!" Roy says. "You think you're really good, but I'll bet my granddaughter here can beat you."

"Grandpa—stop it and let's go!"

Red Feather sneers, shakes his head.

Roy pulls out a roll of bills. "A G-note says she can beat your ass."

"You want me to play this *kid?*"

Roy lays a G-note on the side rail.

"A grand says she can beat you—five ahead."

"You got yourself a bet, old timer."

"Grandpa, *please!* That money has got to last us all the way to California."

"Anybody else want to get in on this?" Roy asks, looking at the spectators on the benches.

The cowboys form a line to place their bets. The money is counted out carefully and put in Roy's hat, which he sets on the side rail.

"Get up there and play!" he says.

I stomp up to the pool table.

"We're gonna end up broke," I tell him.

Red Feather edges me out by a hair on the lag. I rack up the rocks, watch him aim down his custom stick. Despite his sledgehammer

break, no balls go in. I sink the first three balls fairly fast, then call a four-five combo, sinking the 5-ball into the corner pocket. I chalk up, studying the layout. I can either sink the 6-ball with a bank shot then feather the 7-ball into the corner, leaving me with ducks at the eight and nine; or I can stall the six with a dogged bank shot and spin the cue ball into a lockup at the side rail. I take the second option, just to see Red Feather squirm.

But he doesn't squirm. Shooting almost straight down, he spins the cue ball clean around the 9-ball. The cue contacts the 6-ball, sending it into the corner pocket. I am amazed. A trick shot like that would take a hundred hours of practice to get down even half right.

He clears the table, then stands there picking at his rump. I see him wink at one of the cowboys on the bench.

Don't count your money yet, buddy-ro, I think, as I rack up the rocks.

In the next game, Red Feather runs one through seven, but he's a little off on a carom and scratches on the 8-ball. Setting the cue ball up in the kitchen, I sink the eight and nine fast and win the second game.

Roy cackles, takes a swig out of his flask. "Told you she was good."

"She got lucky is all," Red Feather says with a shrug.

He racks them up and I break, but nothing goes in. He studies the stack a moment, then sinks the 1-ball, setting him up for puppies at the two and three. I feel sweat pop out on my face. I've got a nervous tic in my left eye. Something about Red Feather bugs me, what is it? Watching him, I suddenly figure out what it is: *he reminds me of Bob Conari*. He is not only big and potbellied like Bob, he also has the same look in his eyes, like he thinks the whole world is here just to serve him. I feel my face flush and my knees tremble. Whoa, I think, be *cool*.

But it's too late; I dog my chance to win this game by scratching on the 7-ball. I put too much spin on the cue. I lose the next one too—dogging a bank shot at the 5-ball after Red Feather distracts me with a loud burp. Two more wins and Red Feather and his boys got our money.

When Red Feather sinks the 9-ball on the break, I'm beginning to think this guy has all the cheese, that this is just more bad luck for us that started with the knocking engine. Didn't Cody almost get bit by a snake today?

Roy calls time out, and takes me over to a bench where he can keep an eye on the hatfull of money and talk to me, too.

"Pull yourself together, Jenna. Take some deep breaths. Get your center back. You've taken out players as good as him—remember that ace you beat in St. Pete, the one with all the rings? He was packing some serious weight, and you beat him. And that skinny black guy in Mobile? You fleeced him, too, and he was no better than this clown. You're gonna beat him tonight. You can do it."

"I know I can do it." I shut my eyes tight, trying to believe it.

"Atta girl."

To calm down, I go up to the front, use the john, then buy a 7-Up from Mom. I sit at the counter, sipping the drink and picturing myself winning—a little trick Roy taught me. He believes the key to winning is in the mind. "The mind can do miracles," he says. "How do you think Jesus healed the lepers?"

"Your grandpa's got plenty of confidence," Mom says. "Been playing long?"

"Couple of years."

"The old man's been at it a lot longer than that." She jerks her head toward the back, causing rolls of fat to jiggle everywhere, like a water bed.

"I told him I wanted to leave."

"Sure you did, girlie."

I look at the sign on the wall behind her next to the beer and soft-drink cooler: *All guns left with Mom. No exceptions!*

"What do you do if you catch someone in here with a gun?"

"Sit on his face," Mom says.

I drink the 7-Up down fast, and go back to the table, whistling Michael's "Remember the Time," for luck.

I rack up, and Red Feather sinks the 1-ball on the break. After sinking two through six, he tries to cut the 7-ball into the corner pocket but he shoots a hair too hard, and the seven bounces out of the pocket—the tightest one on the table.

"She's got his ass now," I hear Roy say.

Red Feather gives Roy a hateful look.

I sink the seven and call a combo on the 8-ball, putting the money ball in the side pocket.

"Ya-hoo!" Roy says, clapping.

Red Feather's face is flushed. He doesn't look so cocky now.

I sink the 5-ball on the break. Feeling lucky, I clear the table, then flash him a smile.

He doesn't smile back.

In the next game I dog a lockup at the nine after chalking up. The tip of the stick just slides off the cue ball. That's when I realize someone has slimed the chalk with spit.

Leaning over the table, his fat belly mashed against the side rail, Red Feather sinks the nine off a six-eight combo.

I've got to beat him, I think, as I get the chalk off a nearby table. My heart is beating too fast. Be calm, I think. *You can do it. You can win.*

I win the next game with a one-two combination on the 9-ball. I win the one after that, too, after Red Feather is a hair off on a bank shot at the seven. By now I've figured out he isn't as cool as he acts. He plays fine when he's winning, but he cracks under pressure. Soon, I am four games ahead, and Red Feather is popping his hairy knuckles, licking his lips, wiping his forehead with his sleeve.

The problem was my mind set, I think, as I watch him rack up the ivories. I just had to get my center back. He thinks he's a real man of the cloth, but I can beat him as long as I maintain my mental control.

I sink eight balls on a string, tuning out Red Feather's loud burps and sudden digs at his crotch. I am taking aim at the money ball when three of Red Feather's stakehorses step between him and Roy. Before I can shoot, Red Feather unzips his pants and flashes his thing above the corner pocket.

He gets me so rattled I miss the shot.

"My my," Red Feather says, zipping up. Sick and mad, too, I watch him lean over and take aim at the yellow-striped ball. It's a lockup—just a little cut on the corner of the nine will put it in. I could make it in my sleep.

"Aieeeeeeeooouuu!" Roy cries, popping up from the bench like a Ninja.

Red Feather is a hair off on the cut, missing the shot. "Son-of-a-bitch!"

Roy is hopping up and down, rubbing his hip. "Something stung me!"

Quickly, I lean over and sink the 9-ball. I see a cowboy's mouth drop open.

"What the f——is this?" Red Feather says. "What the f——'s going on?"

Roy's jump has taken him close to the side rail. He grabs up the money hat, puts it on his head.

"I'm allergic to wasps," he says, rubbing his hip. "The poison

goes straight to my heart."

"Ain't no wasps in here," one of the cowboy says. But I see him inspecting the bench.

"Let's go, Grandpa," I say, taking Roy's hand. "I got to get you to a doctor."

As we go by the counter, Mom says, "What's all the commotion about?"

"Grandpa got stung!"

"My foot."

Outside, on the sidewalk, I look back at the pool hall. It's dark out now and the streetlights are on. We walk fast down the street. I keep looking back and see the door of the pool hall open just as we turn the corner.

We cut down an alley, turn the corner and walk fast to the next block, ducking into a Kentucky Fried. While Roy is ordering a bucket of chicken, I look outside and see a truck go by with some cowboys in the back. One of them is Red Feather.

I tell Roy this and he calls us a cab from the pay phone by the door. We wait for the cab in a back booth.

"That was the closest one I've had yet," I say.

"He ain't nothing," Roy says. "Damn slimeball."

"How long you reckon they'll look for us?"

"They ain't gonna do nothing but go home and scratch their little mad places."

On the way out to the Texaco, we lay into the bucket of chicken. Roy gives a drumstick to the cabby.

"Where you folks from?" he asks.

"Back east," Roy says.

"Planning on staying in Delphia?"

"It's a fine little town," Roy says, "but we're on our way to California."

"Lots of people have left this town for somewheres else. Problem with Delphia is there ain't no future here."

When he pulls into the Texaco, the cab driver looks at me and says, "Did you know there's over six hundred people living in Los Angeles who believe they're Jesus Christ?"

"We're gonna be living on a farm," I say proudly.

Roy hands him a twenty. "How about waiting here a minute?"

We go back to the truck. Roy unlocks the door and Cody jumps

out on the ground, bouncing up and down like a basketball.

"Smell the chicken, huh." I tear some meat off a breast and toss it to him. He catches it in mid-air.

Roy takes a whiz behind the station, then comes back and sits down on the grate. In the station's neon light his beard looks like the angel hair you hang on a Christmas tree.

"Ready to sleep in a motel?"

"You bet!"

"Get your things together."

"We'll have to sneak Cody in."

"Won't be the first time."

We pack a suitcase, lock up the truck, then go back to the taxi.

"Where's the best motel in town?" Roy asks.

"That would be the Loralee, out on West Boulevard."

"Let's boogie."

Cody is sitting between us, his eyes on the bucket of chicken. He whines, wiggles, barks. Roy gives him a piece of chicken. "Cody, you got the life."

"We'll all have the life in California," I say.

"You bet, sweetheart." Roy gives my hand a squeeze.

Later that night, after I've had a hot shower, Roy tells me he doesn't want us to hustle anymore. He says I should just play pool as a sport.

"But Roy, I *like* being a shark. You said I'm a natural."

"It's the wrong kind of life for you."

"The wrong kind of life—what's that supposed to mean? Just because that slimeball pulled out his thing?"

"The game has changed, Jenna. There's too many slimeballs out there now. Scumbags who'll cut your heart out for a dollar. It ain't a proper environment for a twelve-year-old girl."

"I can deal with it."

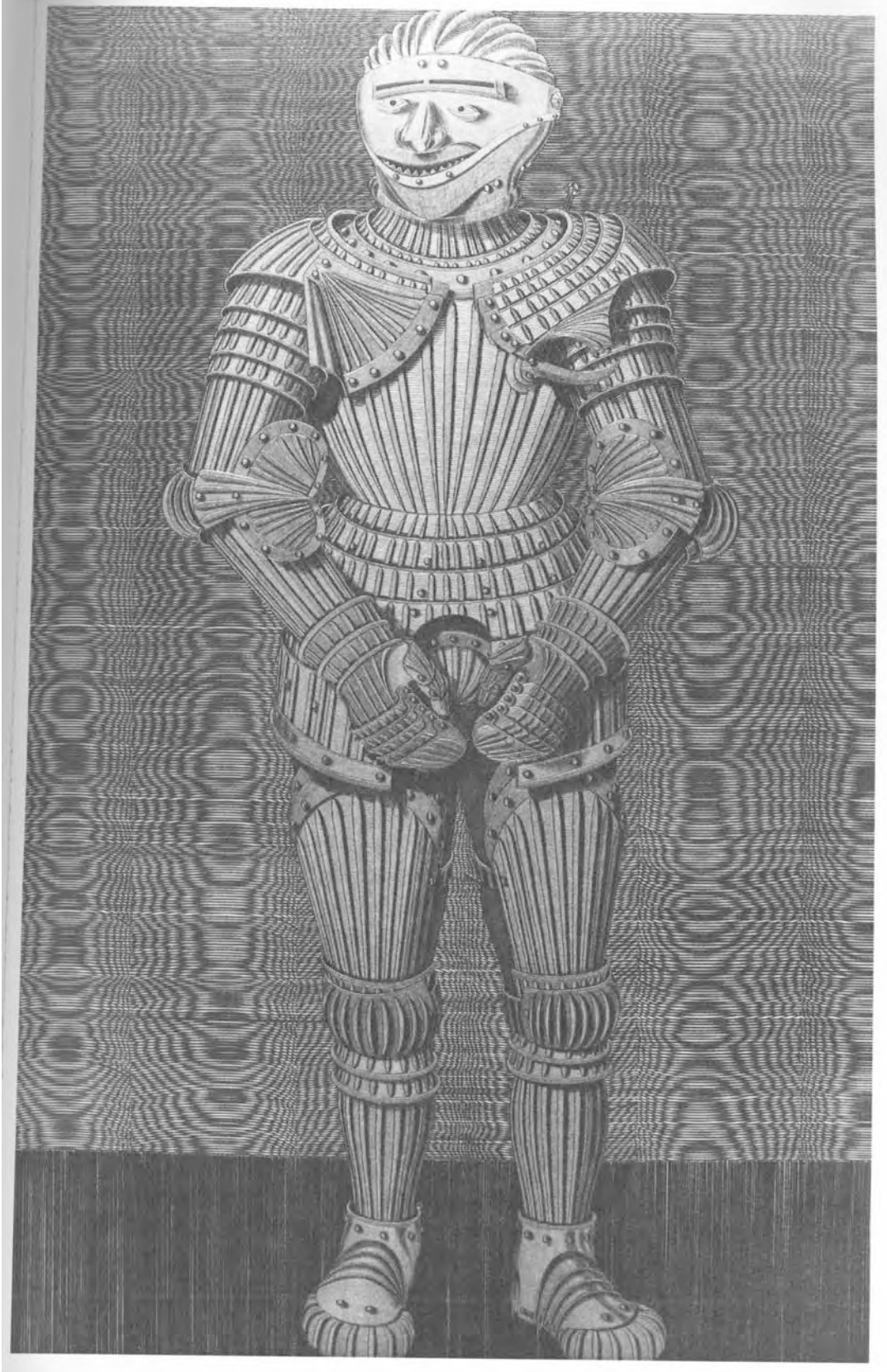
"Well, I can't. And I damn sure can't live my life over again through you." Roy picks up the remote and switches on the TV. "We need to get a move on, anyway. You should be in school."

"School! Yuck."

To cool off, I take Cody and go down to sit in a chair by the pool. There's a girl and boy in there, swimming. "I don't care about the money," I tell Cody. "What I really like is beating jerks like Red Feather who think they're God's gift to the world."

Cody isn't paying attention. He is looking at the pool where the boy and girl are kissing. They kiss so long I wonder how they can breathe. Finally, they break apart, climb out of the pool, and walk into the shadows. For some reason this makes me cry and once I get started, I can't seem to stop.

"Those are just lovebirds," I tell Cody. I try to picture Michael, but my mind lingers on the boy and girl. I wonder where they are from, where they are going. The pool's lights go off suddenly, and I can see the moon's image in the water, changing shapes like a reflection in a hall of mirrors. I have a tight, fluttery feeling in my heart. Raising my eyes I see, in the moonlight, a white owl flying overhead. It passes by so quickly I wonder if I only imagined it. I pull Cody close to me, hoping it is a sign of good luck to come.



Trayce Diskin

AND THEN I THOUGHT I HEARD HIM SPEAK

(Narcissus)

Voice cloaked in clamshell and glasswort,
Twang in the reeds. Behind are the days
When it was only my own mouth moving,

The long, sick haul of the sentence,
Unanswered plea. Forget the visible face
Cast in film on stern liquid.

Forget touch. Listen to it: Leaves unhitch
And rain down like scraps of letters.
Love from one who knows and isn't telling.

Susan Gebhardt

MOVIE MUSIC

Something is wrong. There is an insistence
in the opening bars that puts me on edge.
I turn the corner at the stop sign and
adjust the volume. I wait for an old
pickup to waffle by, then take a left.
The mode shifts from minor to major, the
imagined danger is past; my fears are
vaporized. I am restored by modulation;
I am loved, even, and know with my blood
that my lover longs for me. The main theme
fills my eyes, and one glycerine tear, two,
start from the outer corners and travel down
my cheeks. Such a brave girl: matinee queen
plucky, full of resolve, gloved and veiled,
waiting for the DC3's to fly overhead,
my hand at my snowy throat, lips parted.
I look in the rear-view mirror, and see
the elephant eyes of an old woman,
but, no matter, my only one is walking
towards me, just beyond this intersection.
We are old hat, we have played this scene
in city after city. We are tender,
even in our redundancy; we kiss.
I drive on through northern Africa,
and not my shabby part of town, where
the given name for every woman is whore.

FRENCH ROLLED HEMS

The attic fan squeaked a tune.
My navel caught sweat beads
from my little armored chest.
Pink mercerized cotton thread
bent at the needle's eye;
I posed with pinched fingers
before me, needle in one hand,
thread in the other, as the iron
sighed steam in my mother's fist.
Across my thighs spread
a tattooed batiste remnant;
between my knees I clamped
a cardboard card pierced with pins.
Mama moistened her fingers with spit
and again she reached around me
to gather cloth, *roll, roll, pin!*
I pinched needle; I pushed thread.
Outside the rain tree arched laden
with seed pods like coral lips,
and I wanted to hang there, pouting.

Dieter Weslowski

XAVIER

here then,
are your black
wingtips, your terracotta
bowl, your shirt with the wide
blue stripes, your jar
of coriander seeds, your
hundred-times-hundred dream
of snow, covering
oblivion itself.

Niam McArdle

AN INTERVIEW WITH RODDY DOYLE

(Roddy Doyle was born in Dublin in 1958. He worked as a schoolteacher for fourteen years before becoming a full-time writer in 1993. His first three novels, *The Commitments*, *The Snapper* and *The Van* (collectively known as *The Barrytown Trilogy*) have proved enormously popular both in Ireland and abroad, despite criticism for scatology and "bad language." Clark's affectionate, unsparing portrait of a community grounded less in Catholicism than working class mores signaled a fresh new voice in Irish fiction, and his last novel, *Paddy Clarke Ha, Ha, Ha* won the Booker Prize in 1993. Doyle encountered controversy in 1994 when his television series, *Family*, showed scenes of domestic violence and alcohol abuse while hinting at incestuous desire. He is currently writing a screen adaptation of Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine*, and his new novel will be published next spring. In the summer of this year, Niam McArdle spoke to him about success, fiction and Ireland.)

NM What do you say to those who criticise your books, the language people use?

RD That's the way the characters talk, it's plain and simple, what more can I say? Not all the characters use bad language. Pound for pound, *The Van* has more bad language than the rest, because it's largely Jimmy Sr's story, and he's a man who laces his language continually with four-letter words of various shapes and sizes, and I don't make an apology for that. I have no problem justifying the bad language. There's very little violence in it and it's not there for shock value. In a culture where many films are created purely to shock people, trying to shock people by a choice of words doesn't work anymore.

NM The second major criticism of your work is that your use of direct speech denies any craft to your fiction.

RD Yeah, one of the stories going around is that I used to tape-record people's conversations. Utter nonsense. The criticism denies the use, rhythm and editing of dialogue on the page.

NM But certainly your teaching experience must have had an influence on your writing?

RD No more than if I had been in another job. It's fair to say that if I hadn't been a teacher I wouldn't have written *The Commitments* and if I hadn't written that I wouldn't have gone on to write *The Snapper*. But it's such an easy, dismissive criticism; the idea that in a classroom I would have the opportunity to hear four twenty- year-old women discussing sex is just drivel. I was madly in love with the school and totally charmed by the atmosphere and the kids I was teaching. I came from the same area and I learned a lot about the place that I'd been slightly dismissive of before, when I was at university. By degrees then, as I got older, I saw more than I had in my early 20's; I saw the problems, the darker side.

NM That's interesting, because your work has been getting progressively darker. Do you think you could write something as unashamedly funny as *The Commitments* again?

RD I don't know. I always knew there were darker works in me. My current book, I think, is going to be quite bleak and dark, although it's told from the point of view of a very strong woman, so that'll counter it to a degree. But maybe it's a circular thing. For the sheer heck of it, I may go out of my way to write something celebratory.

NM Your new novel will have quite a different structure from previous work, won't it?

RD It goes backwards and forwards. It goes back to her childhood, right to her first memories. One of the problems she has is sorting out memories, deciding what are real and what are fiction. Then when she starts getting involved in the writing of the book, she realises that choosing one word instead of another word brings you along one path, and it may not be the actual path you're trying to be exact about. The novel is about the nature of memory in many ways.

NM That idea of going along paths, is that how you see your own writing?

RD Yeah, I tend to drift. I tend not to have a big plan. The shape of the book after comes as you're getting deeper and deeper into it, and certainly when I started out I thought it would be more of a straightforward chronological narrative. I felt that would be the way she'd write the book, especially as it's her first. I was really thinking about the implications of sitting down and writing but then it dawned on me that that wasn't the best way to tell the story. I was trying to create this utter confusion in her life. The way to do that isn't to write "Day 1, Day 2 . . ."
Things are repeated a lot. As I began to edit and change episodes slightly, it dawned on me that there were two books ticking away in my head that I had read. *Blackwater*, by Joyce Carol Oates, a short wee book. It's repetitive, it goes back to key moments and goes over them again and again. It's a short book but the repetition is part of its power. The other is *Democracy* by Joan Didion. They were the two books I had in mind.

NM It seems to me that you are looking to non-Irish writers. I know that you have spoken about presenting an Ireland that is not the Tourist Board's idea of the country, and you are quite dismissive of the idea of a "literary tradition."

RD Surely any artistic endeavour, one of the reasons, say, why kids start playing Rock 'n' Roll or one of the reasons why they adapt the styles that they're playing is that they're *reacting* to tradition, to the generation immediately preceding them. I think any writer who sets out to fit into a tradition, be it "respectable" or not, has to have major question marks over his or her work immediately. You should not set out to fit into a niche, you should set out to express yourself. I think, for example, that my style of writing may be a complete reaction to Jane Austen (laughs).

NM But you do want to debunk myths about being a writer.

RD There are a lot of myths, the obvious Irish one being drinking and writing: they're synonymous. For instance, I wrote the first chapters of *The Commitments* late, very late at night, from about midnight to four o'clock in the morning, not for any other reason than the fact that I was under the impression that this is the best time to write, this is when writers write, you know.

NM I remember reading that you once said while you were teaching that you had read Yeats's "1916" 600 times and *Lord of the Flies* 26 times. Do you think, in rereading so much, these writers have worked their way into your novels?

RD Some. I think definitely *Lord of the Flies* had its influence, particularly in *Paddy Clarke*. I think I would have captured the little savagery of kids anyway, because I was a kid myself. But I think the simplicity of Golding's language had a big impact on me. If you asked me what are my favorite books, *Lord of the Flies* would never be one of them, but there's a clarity there that's absolutely excellent. When Piggy falls off the cliff and his head is smashed, the only word that Golding uses to describe what comes out of his head is "stuff," and it's perfect: it's a childish word and at the same time it makes you cringe because, you know, as

adults we want to see more than just "stuff." That's the word I used when Paddy Clarke hits the rat with the hurley, the stuff coming out of his head. But I didn't consciously think of it as being Golding. Just the whole idea of him capturing kids, seeing how far they can go, looking over their shoulders to see if there's an adult looking at them, that kind of thing, I think, had an impact.

NM You gave Russell Banks's *Rule of the Bone* a favourable review. Do you see any relation between Bone and Paddy Clarke?

RD No, I mean Bone would be a bit older. No, I didn't see any real similarity. He's coming out of a violent background, he is that bit older and there's a drug culture, none of which is in Paddy Clarke. What I did like about Russell Banks's book was that there was no one supervising him, no one making sure he's involved in a "good," sound, "literary" endeavor. I tried to do that with Paddy Clarke.

NM In what ways, if any, do you think your novels are a comment upon contemporary or past Ireland?

RD (laughs) I don't know . . . I just don't know (laughs).

NM Yet, as a child of the sixites, you show a lot in common with your generation, in particular a rejection of the old Catholic values that shaped the country.

RD The attachment to the church isn't there, neither is the attachment to the State and certainly the attachment to the language isn't there, although I think that's an awful pity. At the same time, I do love being Irish. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. To an extent we have a lifestyle that, although there's a lot of human misery here, there's a quality to life that you can't get anywhere else. I think also because we had a language before having another superimposed on us, we actually ended up with a language and a half. There's a healthy contempt for grammar that makes talking that little bit more interesting. I do love the place.

NM So you don't agree with Jimmy Rabbitte's view that "the Irish are the niggers of Europe"?

RD No. There's some tongue-in-cheek there. I deliberately put it down because, one, it's bullshit, utter crap; two, it's funny; and three, there's a certain wisdom there. I don't like the European Union, the mere fact that it's not the European Community anymore. I do like calling ourselves European, even though I've looked to America for my entertainment and cultural appetite. But at the same time I think Ireland has been designated to be one of the playgrounds of Europe. We're not part of the heartland, we're definitely on the periphery.

Gitta Deutsch

THREE POEMS

Translated from the German by the author

An so einem Tag
im Februar
fast schon Frühling
hast du mir doch
hast du mir
doch immer
hättest du mir
doch sicher
schon die erste
blaue Hyazinthe
gebracht

On such a day
in February
almost spring
you always
used to bring me
you surely
would have brought me
the first
blue hyacinth

Das Jahr
ist vergangen
nach dem
- so hiess es -
alles
leichter wird

Das Jahr
der Besorgnis
darf jetzt
als beendet
gelten

Das Jahr
- wie hiess es -
der Trauerarbeit
ist jetzt
vorüber

Des Jahr
der neuen
Gedanken
das Jahr
der Anpassung
muss doch
begonnen haben

Es ist
das Jahr
das Treibsands
der leise
nachgibt
unter den Füssen -

das Jahr
in dem ihr mich
nicht mehr
rufen hört

The year has passed
when - as they said -
it would get easier

The year has gone
when friends
still felt concerned

the year of a new start
of fresh adjustments
must surely have begun

It is the year of quicksand
softly giving way
beneath my feet

The year
when you no longer
hear me call

Ich bin
den langen Nächten
noch immer nicht
gewachsen -
noch nicht
den Ängsten
vor dem langen
Wachsein
in der Dunkelheit
noch auch
der grössern Angst
vor dem zu früh
Erwachen -
dem bin ich
hilflos
ausgeliefert
in den grauen Stunden
bevor die Amsel
singt

And still I cannot
come to terms
with those long nights
nor with the fear
of lying sleepless
in the dark
nor yet
with that far greater fear
of waking up too soon
defenseless at the mercy
of those grey hours
before the blackbird sings

Richard Katrovas

THE SEARCH PARTY

Female Chorus:

When surging clouds obliterate the stars,
and no fixed points afford safe passage out
of where the self has lead the body's journey,
one hears the fibrillating heart of time.
When the body is lost, completely lost,
the soul retreats into the fear which birthed it.

Female Chorus Leader:

He said two weeks in wilderness would set
him straight, would give midlife a new perspective.
I joked that fourteen days and nights in desert
were better than a string of mistresses,
at least from my perspective as his wife.
So he who rarely in his years had not
awakened to the drone of traffic noise,
a thoughtful man who'd fancied self-reliance
the cultivation of portfolios,
first leased a new Jeep Cherokee, then bought
three-thousand dollars worth of food supplies
and state-of-the-art wilderness clothes and gear,
with which to brave the beasts and elements.
I watched him pack four fifths of premium scotch
and laughed, and he laughed too, then said the nights
get cold, at least he'd read, this time of year.

Male Chorus:

Praise the fool that every man will play
as he feels foolish youth bleed out of him.

Female Chorus Leader:

I'm sure he did not know I also saw
him pack among the several books and maps
a Gideon Bible, and *Penthouse* magazine.

Female Chorus:

May he who ventures forth into himself
take nothing but the dread that drives him there.

Male Chorus Leader:

Nine days and nothing of the man himself.
His car and gear neatly encamped below
a sheltering cliff, and every sign he fared
quite well the time that he was there, at least
a week from all that I could see, yet though
we combed a fifty-square-mile radius,
on foot, on horseback, and by helicopter,
we've found no sign of breathing man or corpse.
A dozen times in twenty years I've lead
search parties into shrinking wilderness.
Some fool, or one who's had bad weather luck,
is often losing touch with what sustains him,
stumbling through the brush and hills for days,
dehydrated and hysterical, until
he finds the highway, or by accident
ends where he began, safe among his friends.
But then, every other year or so,
a man gets truly lost, and we are called
to fetch him dead or living from the maw
of truth and beauty, a place that's less a place
than it is a stark condition not of soul,
but what the soul might dream a world to be.
Always, we return with something of the man,
physical proof of his existence there,
a half-dead, sun-burnt, sun-blind, starved and numb
adventurer cleansed of all pretensions,

or a weathered corpse cleansed of all pretensions.
But now nothing, as though the man were nothing,
and a bleached corpse at least is proof of something.
His traceless absence frightens worse than death.

Male Chorus:

Praise the salt each heart releases back to earth.

Female Chorus:

May every heart be vexed by mystery.

Male Chorus:

Who chances madness chances ecstasy.
Who seeks a vision seeks annihilation.

Female Chorus:

When did the hunt that every man must play,
the going forth and seeking sustenance,
transform from search for food to search for self?
What woman cannot pity him for this?

Female Chorus Leader:

I miss him, but subtly, and feel small guilt
that I cannot yet mourn the man whose life
has intersected mine for fifteen years.
A widow needs a corpse by definition.

Male Chorus Leader:

And so we must disband, admit defeat,
for it is for us who know this place defeat
that one as soft, seemingly predictable
as he, could vanish from this space we know
better than ourselves, and we are such as

know ourselves only as we know the space
in which our lives play out apart from others.
But I cannot give up the search for him.
A week, alone, I scour where we had searched
before, and then I check and check again
the cracks and splits in nature like a man
who's lost his keys inside a single room,
but my room is fifty square miles of rock
and brush and redundancies of angles where
a thing of flesh tucked within a crevice
will disassemble down to bone in days.
If I should find his skull lodged between two rocks,
a bit of flesh and clumps of hair still moldering
in patches, I will rejoice as though I'd found
unharmed a missing much-loved child, and kiss
his grin, for what am I while he is lost?

Female Chorus:

How much of history is women waiting?
Sons, fathers, brothers, husbands venture forth
alone or bound together by a purpose.
And so it is that every act that she
performs defines the waiting woman as
a stasis burning through her own blunt will.

Female Chorus Leader:

We were like sister and brother as much
as married; so intimacy was casual,
if often boring comforting as well.
We even spoke out honestly of who
among our friends had most attracted us.
Even kinky fantasies we discussed,
not as though confessing as much to boast.
Children have never been an issue; at least
since we discovered he was sterile we
have never felt their absence a fact to mourn.
We were sufficient in our days alone,

rarely argued, avoided pettiness.
I'm surprised how easily I move from room
to room, then door to car to door again.
The rhythm of my life remains the same.
I flip through fifteen years of marriage photos
and laugh or wince at this or that, and feel
familiar warmth, or watch our favorite shows
on television and know what he would say,
or how he would laugh or snicker, yell or sigh
at documentary or nightly news.
Until I see his corpse, he might as well
be visiting his mother for the week
each week that he is absent form my life.

Male Chorus:

To know the common ground he shares with God
is gender, a man may stand upon the night
and shout commands, and as the words that issue
from his face dissolve into the neutral air,
the sniggering quiet, fatherly and brutal,
signals unconcern brutal and divine.

Male Chorus Leader:

People who sustained themselves upon
this land a thousand years are apparitions;
which is to say they're shades of what they were.
Destitute, dependent, fixed to a space
whose borders were determined by invaders,
they sell gross trinkets of their former selves
to tourists randy for old Hollywood's
ideal of rust-skinned naked men who paint
themselves and scream ecstatic as they kill.
The children, always covered with a film
of dust, will play among stripped cars on blocks,
and stop to stare at strangers quietly.
Often I stare back, and do not see there
in large blank irises a wish to know

the glory of their people's history.
Their people have no history, for what
we value in the records of the past
those people fathomed as the cycles of
the lives of everything that moved and breathed.
A son became his father, who was his own
progenitor's best reason for a gentle
death into his own good father's dream of life;
a woman was all women who had lived
to bear new life out of the common will.
The children stare, timeless and out of time,
doomed to enter histories not their own,
in a language foreign, ubiquitous,
and powerless to represent their lives.
I drive backroads, and then the old paths,
then trek the ancient spaces few have known
since conquest of the land by Europeans.
In forbidding hills at sunset I have watched
the land's tenacious vegetation, sparse
and unencumbered one to the next, blaze
then soften into patterns that break one's heart.
In such a landscape every human life
intrudes, and those who came before us knew
this well, and lived in reverent rhythms on
the land, and killed with reverence what sustained them.

Male Chorus:

He who wills his life apart from others
prepares to enter death with dignity.

Female Chorus:

He who lives overwhelmed by thoughts of death
achieves a wisdom that is foolishness,
if joy remains so distant and abstract
the world is soaked in sorrow and distress.

Female Chorus Leader:

If he returns, how will his life be changed?
What secret wisdom will his heart contain
and will he speak it unadorned to me?
But I do not require a different man
than he who graced the margins of my life,
passionless, but dependable and safe.
As long as he is absent he's the same,
therefore I must confront the truth of how
I feel secure within uncertainty,
and so admit I wish him gone forever.
Last night, I lay in bed and watched the late show,
burst out laughing so hard I spilled my drink;
I called his name to bring a towel, as though
he'd gotten up to piss or make a sandwich.
It's not that I forgot that he wasn't there,
except for just a fraction of a second,
but that I wanted still to hear my voice
pronounce his name throughout the house, to fill
our house with casual yelling of his name.
It sounded natural and appropriate.
So every night I'll yell his name three times—
as though he shuffled in another room—
not loudly in distressful tone, but just
as loud as any lover speaks to ask
a simple favor of one who stands nearby
but out of reach, so close yet out of sight.

Female Chorus:

May she who mourns find antidote for grief.

Male Chorus:

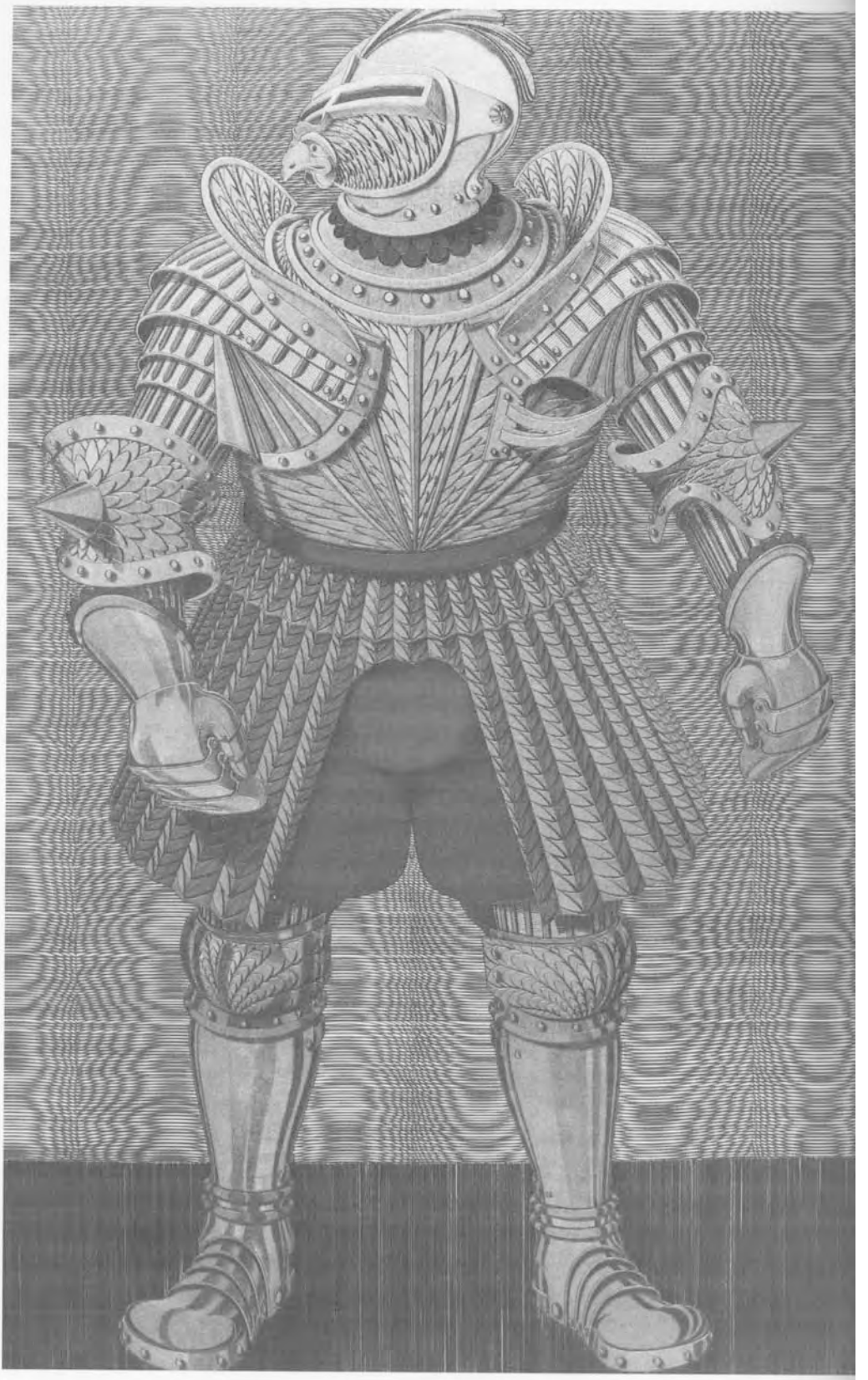
Praise the lies that make a life worth living.

Male and Female Chorus:

Asleep, all lovers are beloved, and death,
each body's profound knowledge of it, is why
it dreams, and why, awake, it dreams of love.

Male Chorus Leader:

Because we are not intimate with death,
we think romantic love is necessary.
I've spent my life roaming death's great garden,
and know that here all thought is superficial
that does not issue from the nothingness
which is death's only blossom, and so all else
is mere diversion, unworthy of a life
that must be true to all its flinching terrors.
All presence signifies all absence here.
The man I seek now permeates the place.
Each stone and rotting carcass stinks of him,
each cactus needle points to where he stands,
and what there is of liquid here dispersed
through living things or deep beneath the ground,
is blood of him I'll seek until I die.
The man who disappeared without a trace
is trace enough of what I feel divine.
And he is all I need to know of love.



Douglas G. Power

GREEN DOLL

His biggest most secret secret was that he had a doll.

It was a tiny doll made of wood and cloth. The face of the doll didn't have dark skin like his was or white skin. It had flattened wrinkles like an old man or a tired baby and it was green. He took his doll from a hole in the wall which was part of the secret. He looked carefully up and down the hallway and listened because it was very dark, then pulled a spoon from the pocket of his bluejeans. He stuck the spoon into the hole between two cement blocks and turned it around like a drill. He saw a movie once and they drilled inside a man's head with a screw and put a worm in there and it drove the man crazy. It must of crawled all around in there.

He heard someone wheezing on the stairs. It was an old lady and she was heading down, fourteen floors to go. How did she think she would get back up?

He held the green doll in his left hand and touched the face with his thumb while his right hand drilled the hole deeper with the spoon. He'd been putting off the hard part. Pushed up on the handle of the spoon to make it go down inside, pushed down to make it go up. The hole had to be bigger. Wider. He pushed up the handle and the spoon knocked on cement. It wasn't like the stuff between the blocks.

Sometimes the doll was a girl. He whispered to it. He picked up the black cape and looked at its stick body. The underneath wasn't green like the face. The green went down to the shoulders and then it was more like him. The legs were square but they got narrower at the bottom. He left the spoon inside the hole and held the stick body to his cheek. The cape tickled his eyelash. The wood stomach was flat. Didn't have a butt. He touched the doll to the wall above the hole and moved his face with it so his cheek rested on green doll's front and green doll rested on the wall. It felt like sleep.

Green doll woke him up just in time by falling to the floor. Kevin and Keith were coming down the hall, so close he couldn't reach for green doll. He ran to the open doors to the elevator and leaped into darkness, holding out his hands. They banged into the cable and

gripped. The cable shimmied and tried to get away. He looked over his shoulder and waited; he might have to go up or down if they threw things at him. They were too big to bother jumping. Two dark shapes stood quietly breathing in the dark hall. A red cigarette eye hung in the elevator shaft and just like that moved toward him like a space missile in Darth Vader. Kevin and Keith laughed when his eyes got lit by the red sparks bouncing off his cheek.

"Maybe I piss on him," Kevin said.

Keith said, "Bet I'll hit him more than you."

The boy held tight with one hand and reached up with the other. He heard zippers. When he had a good grip he pulled himself higher. A light thudding hit his pants near his feet.

"That's mine," Keith said.

He pulled himself further.

"It's mine," said Kevin. It dropped to his sneaker and then he was above it. He clung to the cable.

Kevin and Keith listened but heard no more hits. Wherever it was landing was too far away to hear anything. They stood next to each other, enjoying the feeling of pissing together into the dark. When they were finished they put their dicks back and zipped up.

"Little motherfucker climbs good, don't he," Kevin said.

Keith said, "Put him on the gymnastics, he win a medal. They all be young now, the one's winnin'."

They left and he heard them starting down the stairs. "Want me help you with that bag?" Kevin asked someone.

"Thank you, young man," the old lady's voice said. "I wish they'd fix that elevator. But I'm almost up. I'll just rest here a moment."

"What you got inna bag?" Kevin asked.

"Just some groceries."

"I see for myself. Come on," he said to Keith.

"No," the old lady said. "Stop that."

He heard Kevin and Keith continuing down the stairs.

"That's my last money this month," the old lady said.

Should of known better, taking the stairs by herself, the boy thought. How had she lived so long. Her wheezing was staying in one place, like she'd decided to sit there on the stairs and wait for her groceries back. He lowered himself on the cable, gripping hard because the grease had been wettened in spots, then swung on it toward the open doors, then away, back and forth, swinging further

each time until on his swing away he pushed on the wall with his sneakers and flew back until the cable almost touched the wall below the doors and he dropped off and landed on the floor near the edge. He threw his hand out and balanced himself by catching his palm on the inside of the corridor wall. But he leaned into the corridor too quickly and his palm slipped from the grease and urine and shot forward into nothing. His other hand reached for the other side of the doors but it was too far.

He toppled slowly, falling from fourteen stories. He sprung off his feet with their last touch on concrete, trying for the cable. It must of still been swinging back and forth because it wasn't where it should have been. He thought of green doll lying on the floor.

The cable grazed his knee on the inside. He closed his legs and arms. He swung from side to side sliding fast. He squeezed harder with his arms and his fingers were damaged. Nicks and cuts in the steel ripped his palms trying to hold. He jackknifed at the waist to bend the cable with the length of his body and slowed finally, rocking first jerkily, then quieter, back and forth.

He stayed just like that for a while, until he remembered green doll.

If Kevin and Keith found it, they'd do something bad to it. His body was still coiled around the cable. He had to straighten up to move. He let go a hand, pushed it up, grabbed a new hold. It was a long way to his floor.

His hands slipped and he had to curl his body again and wait. His hands finally dried and got sticky. But when he started to climb the holes in his hands opened and new wetness from his hands greased the cable. He slid down, more cuts ripping. The only thing that could stop him was to curl his body. There was a picture in school in a book, worm curled on a hook.

For a long time he hung to the cable. Sometimes he'd slip down a foot before tightening his body. He wound one of his legs around the cable and that made it easier to stay in one place. His foot became far away from him, like it wasn't there.

He heard small things moving in the dark. There was a sound of air moving and something soft and warm surprised his cheek so fast it might not even have really happened. He heard chirps like a bird. But the soft thing hadn't been feathers; it felt like a warm stretchy kleenex.

Something landed on his head with small light feet. He did not breathe or blink. The lightness went away, so soundlessly he wasn't

sure where it had been. Then it came again and was there and after a short time it went away, except something felt yanked up on the top of his head and he realized one of the hairs on his head had been pulled. "Is you God?" he whispered

He was afraid of letting go with one hand to touch where it had been and he was afraid of touching it.

Maybe it was just a cigarette butt. He sniffed for hair burning. The air next to his face was moved by something like wings.

He was too weak to climb up the cable to his floor. When he looked down there was a dull light that appeared when he heard a television and looked to see where it was coming from. He untightened his legs and stomach and slid down the cable, using his crossed arms and legs to hold him close. He smelled hot bacon and squeezed around the cable to stop. The music and the light were coming several floors below him from what must have been an open door across the hallway from the elevator doors which were open. He guessed it was the fourth floor. There was a different smell to the bacon. On the fourth floor they might buy it from a different store.

He was afraid of getting out of the elevator shaft on a strange floor. He didn't think he'd be killed but he was worried that if they got him they might want to fuck him.

He slid lower and saw the floor of the hallway through the open doors, then saw the bacon on a barbecue kettle near the edge. The charcoal made noises as fat dripped and little flashes of flame hopped above the pieces of bacon. A hand appeared with a fork and turned them over, carefully, one by one. There were six pieces and there was a chicken leg and two chicken wings. The fork turned over each of them and then the fork picked up each of the bacons and dropped them onto a green plate. Then the fork got the chickens and the hands and plate and fork went toward the light from the open door to an apartment where the television was coming from.

The boy waited for the light to be stopped by the door closing, but the hands came back and the fork slipped between the bars on the grill to break apart the charcoal. Each white and red and black lump was pushed to a separate place by the fork. Two of the smaller lumps fell apart. The hand with the fork tried to keep them together. The fork touched the small mounds but nothing could be done. The hand with the fork pulled back slowly and went toward the light and it became less and the television talking got smaller until he heard a

door close and it was dark in the hallway except for the concrete floor right outside the apartment and little circles of red in the darkness of the barbecue kettle. They looked like they were floating.

His hands and feet were cold and he stared at the separate glows of charcoal. He heard the sound of wind outside and the coals brightened. He began to lower himself, gripping extra hard to stop his wet palms and fingers from slipping. He moved his shoulders and head back and forth to start the cable rocking, then curled his body in time to the motion to bring himself closer each time to the grill with the coals. He wanted to sit on the ledge of the hallway next to the grill.

He began to feel the warmth. It encouraged him and on each swing toward the hallway he flung out his arm to get closer. He counted five four three; at zero he'd jump. On the second to last swing his hand hit something hard. When he yanked it back the grill came after him. He waved his hand free but the grill tipped past him and red coals spilled out towards his feet, growing smaller as they fell and the grill fell with them. He saw red lights going backwards and then the banging crashing of the grill hitting the metal roof of the elevator car came up all around him.

He reached to pull himself higher so he wouldn't be seen by the man who had the grill but his hands and arms didn't work. The light from underneath the door to the apartment scared him. He finally loosened his hands and arms and his body and slid down the cable. When he tried to slow down, his feet split apart and metal hit his hands and underneath his chin. He bounced backwards, his head banged on the roof, dirt got into his mouth and eyes.

It was quiet again. He turned his head slowly. He looked at a flattened bit of red charcoal, flickering in one spot from the wind of his landing. It went out.

He placed his hands across his stomach. He didn't want to get germs inside the cuts in his hands. The top of the elevator smelled like a cat box. They used to have a cat.

He smelled hair straightener. He smelled bacon. Above him he saw separate blocks of light on the wall opposite some of the open doors. "Hello?" a voice said. "Did someone fall in there?" It was the old lady. She listened for an answer. "I'll help you if you tell me you're down there. I don't want to get the fire department here for nothing. Can you talk?" She waited. "Just make some sound."

He hardly ever talked; the TV did most of the talking. He wished he could talk to green doll, who was up in the hallway. The old lady

said something he couldn't understand. He tried to sit.

"I could carry your groceries," he said.

"What?" she said. "I'll get help." He heard her knocking on apartment doors with her keys, asking who had a phone that worked.

A man came out of his apartment on the fourth floor because he heard sirens. He thought he'd bring his grill inside so he wouldn't be accused of starting the fire. When he saw it was gone, he worried that someone had pushed the coals together and used it inside their apartment and that's how the fire got started. He was afraid to ask for his grill back. He scratched inside his bad right ear with his pinky finger. It itched when he was nervous. People thought he was cleaning it, which made him embarrassed like he was dirty. He was tall and had to be careful or they'd see him itching it above other people's heads. But there was no one in the hallway so he left his finger in there drilling.

He didn't smell smoke like an apartment makes, from plastic and the cloth on couches and foam rubber that smells like tires. There was a taste of bacon and the usual smell from the elevator. He saw a beam of light climb up the wall of the shaft and stay there. He saw particles floating in it. He heard voices.

It was thieves, hiding in the elevator. He'd bought the grill from a neighbor and paid two dollars because it had the three holes in the bottom and three in the top. He saw, in the light from his apartment, they'd missed the top. It was leaning against the wall near the elevator. He'd used it only two times. He stepped closer to the shaft and looked down at figures he couldn't make out on top of the elevator car. A second flashlight came on and he saw the stick legs of his grill pointing sideways.

"That's my barbecue! Y'all leave it alone!" The second flashlight moved suddenly and the beam rose fast and caught him full in the face, his finger deep in his ear.

"Is this yours?" a voice asked, formal. White man. He couldn't see because of the glare. He pulled his hand down from his ear.

"Well, yeah," he said. "I mean, it could be."

"We'll be right up. What floor is that?"

"Um," he said. He moved his feet away from the shaft, his face sliding off the beam of light that couldn't follow past the edge of the concrete. When he was in the dark he paused and listened. Then he tiptoed into his apartment across from the elevator and slowly closed the door, making no sound.

One of the firemen shouted up to the rookie from their truck, who was standing on the floor at ground level preparing to lower a yellow plastic bodyboard.

"Go radio for police backup," the fireman directed him. "We got a crime scene."

"The barbecue?" the rookie asked in confusion, amazed his partner would care.

"No, asshole. That clown threw this kid down the shaft."

"Jesus," the rookie muttered, making for the radio in the cab of Engine 137 that was parked on the frozen mud in front of Building D.

"Why'd he throw you down here?" the fireman asked the boy, who moved closer to the cable he was used to climbing, as though it would help him understand what was happening. He knew he was in trouble. He stared up high at the white man in a huge black hat and black knee boots and dirty yellow coat, who had held his hand when he'd first climbed down the ladder that he'd brought with him. The boy wondered if the man always carried his ladder.

"Were you stealing his barbecue?" the fireman asked, all of a sudden mad at him.

"Uh uh," the boy said, afraid to look away from the man's eyes.

"You got nothing broken," the fireman said, "far as I can tell. But you better lie down just in case."

The boy looked at the surface of the elevator roof. He shook his head. The fireman looked at the greasy wettened metal lit up by his partner's flashlight.

"Okay, just stand still. Or I can carry you. Want to ride on my shoulders?"

"Okay," the boy said.

The fireman squatted low, knees creaking in the rubber trousers and inside his joints, while his partner lifted under the boy's narrow biceps to put him on his shoulders. The boy froze for a second, then he was taken by the adventure of it and wiggled to get himself a good seating, leaning to one side with his arms around the fireman's neck to see past the bulk of the hat, and in that posture rode up to the ground floor as the fireman climbed the ladder. A fire department photographer who was walking down the hallway took one look and got the camera hanging from straps up to his eye for one perfect picture.

The flash frightened the boy, who didn't want his mother or teacher to know he'd gotten in trouble.

"Wait a minute!" the photographer shouted as the fireman stepped onto the concrete. "Get back on the ladder. I wanna be sure I got it."

The fireman felt the boy's reaction through fingers pressing harder on the thick coat covering his shoulders.

"Give it a rest," he told the photographer, who flashed a series of shots of the fireman reaching above his shoulders to grasp the boy under his arms, the fireman's bent fingers in black gloves almost touching across the boy's chest. When he was standing on the floor the fireman pulled off his gloves and took the boy's hands in his and turned them upward. "Shine your light here," he told his partner, who'd just come up and was about to retrieve the ladder. The light showed the cuts and blood mixed with grease on the boy's palms and fingers. He tried to twist away. "Is that from trying to catch hold to the cable?" the fireman asked.

The boy was silent. His momma might take a belt to him for embarrassing her; all these people here on account of him. People asking her stuff and she wouldn't know what it was about or what to do. She'd snatch his arm and grab him inside and not say anything till all of them left, and waiting around for that she'd be feeling stupid.

"Did he throw you in there?" the fireman asked, bending over and looking into his face. The boy saw white skin closer up than he'd ever seen it. The fireman had a red-brown mustache. It looked like small straight plants growing out from craters like on that picture of the moon. He squinted and saw each hair had a tube it came from. It seemed possible the fireman might fall out his own tubes. The hair was like a leak that was slow or else it would be a lot worse.

"You scared to tell me?" the fireman asked. "Afraid he'll hurt you?"

The boy thought and then nodded.

A tinny voice from a two-way radio came walking up to them attached to a policeman's chest. "Whatta we got?" the police asked.

"Animal threw this kid down the shaft," the fireman said, glancing down through the doors to show the cop where the boy had landed. "Some guy on the third or fourth floor. The guy was barbecuing."

The cop smiled like the fireman had made a joke and shook his head. He bent closer to the boy. "That right?" he asked.

The boy felt like he was sinking.

"The grill's still in there," the fireman pointed out, poking his partner to get him to shine his light down the shaft. The cop stared at

the grill. "Asshole up there was dumb enough to shout down it was his grill," the fireman said. "Then he wised up and went in his apartment. He must be across from the elevator or real near it because it got darker after we couldn't see him."

"Oh yeah?" the cop said like he perhaps didn't believe it, looking up inside the shaft. "All we gotta do is find a guy with barbecue on his fingers? Which acourse will be half."

"Except it's near the elevator," the fireman repeated.

The cop looked at him. "I'm gettin' a shitload of backup before I knock on any doors up there."

"Fuck, yes," the fireman agreed, embarrassed by the cop's attitude that he must be a nigger-lover to be worrying about it. "You're fuckin' right," the fireman added.

"I'm glad we agree on that much," the cop said. He reluctantly unhooked his radio from the front of his black leather jacket.

Fifty-five minutes later there was an apartment-by-apartment search. Three four-man teams started on the second floor. The sergeant in charge stared at the fireman standing in the first-floor hallway, who was still, gently because of the cuts, holding the boy's hand. The two of them had just come back from the truck, where the boy's hands had been cleaned and medicated and bandaged with gauze tape. The boy held up his other hand that the fireman wasn't holding and thought he looked like the mummy.

"It was the third or fourth floor, near the elevator," the fireman said.

"Someone put a hole through the back window of one of our cars," the sergeant said. "They thought it came from the second floor." It had been several nights earlier, actually, from a higher floor. From where they stood they could hear via the elevator shaft the objections of residents as their apartments and furnishings were examined for signs of barbecue or the top to the grill. The possibility of food as evidence dictated that even the garbage in each apartment be sorted through. Not wanting to get germs, the members of the teams wore gloves and spread it out on horizontal surfaces such as floors.

The man on the fourth floor stood at the window of his girlfriend's apartment looking at the police cars parked in front. His girlfriend and her cousin LaDonna were watching Lonesome Dove. Her cousin, who was very fat, had taped it. The remains of barbecued chicken sat on plates on the kitchen counter.

"Y'all ain't smelled any smoke, has you?" he asked them.

"Not except from your grill," his girlfriend murmured quickly so as not to miss what was happening on the television.

The man looked at the kitchen and saw chicken bones. He walked to the counter and dumped the contents of each plate into the plastic Jewel bag lining a tin wastebasket that had a picture on the side of Santa Claus and his reindeer flying over moonlighted snow-topped houses in a valley, red-brick chimneys in front of mountains in the distance. "Why can't you turn off the fuckin' television and help me!" he screamed. They looked at him in surprise.

"What in the world is his problem?" LaDonna said to his girlfriend. "No one asked him to clean up."

"Help you what?" his girlfriend shouted at him. "Who do you think you're talking to!" She stared at his face and realized he must have done something very bad to be so worried about police inside the building. "Maybe you should get outa here," she said. "Go somewhere! Go on."

His face began to sag and contract at the same time, like discovering that he lacked the substance to occupy so tall a space. His girlfriend saw him shrinking. "What is it," she said in a softer voice. "You done something you wish you hadn't?"

"I haven't done anything!" he cried and he heard how that sounded, like he was begging to the police or his grandma when he was a boy. He stood up straighter. He pulled down his red Bulls sweatshirt to make it smooth in front. He tugged on the end of each sleeve.

"Then why you worryin' about police in the building?" she asked. "What were you yelling about before? In the hallway, I mean."

"Somebody stole my grill. I think they started a fire with it. Two firemen wanted to know what floor was I on."

LaDonna sighed and reached for the remote control to pause the Lonesome Dove. His girlfriend tapped her white front teeth with the fingernail of her index finger. She had a job interview the next morning and was worried because her period was late and she was watching Lonesome Dove with her cousin because she needed to relax. The man saw she was feeling more important than him and he turned back to cleaning off plates because he didn't want to watch them being impatient with him. He thought how good it'd feel to throw a plate into the sink.

"Where were the firemen?" his girlfriend asked finally. He turned toward her eagerly. He slowed himself then and made sure his voice

was normal so he wouldn't sound so grateful.

"They was in the elevator shaft. At the bottom. Shinin' their flashlights on me."

She frowned. "That's it?"

"And someone knocked my grill down it."

She didn't have time for this. She uncrossed her legs in the red Bulls sweatpants that he liked her to wear because he thought it made it clearer to everyone that they were together. She straightened the kinks in her knees as she sat next to her cousin and wished she didn't have on his sweatpants. The man looked disappointed and turned around so she couldn't see his face.

"You ain't done a thing wrong," she said. "Don't be so chicken-hearted."

He looked over his shoulder. She was looking at her cousin and waggling her head. LaDonna mockingly raised her eyebrows high and slowly swiveled her round face, eyes wide and unmoving until she couldn't see in his direction any longer at all. His girlfriend smirked, glancing quickly at him then smiling at LaDonna to exclude him.

He walked as if he had a purpose to the window, as though looking at the police cars was meaningful business they didn't understand. He wished LaDonna would take her Lonesome Dove and leave. He felt he should apologize to someone. He felt he'd made a sissy of himself.

As he looked out the window he saw a picture of the hallway, light coming from the open door, faint smell of bacon, the fireman's flashlight beam fixing on particles of dust inside the shaft, and leaning against the wall was the top to his Weber kettle, half round, huge, across from the door to the apartment. "Damn," he said, like he'd discovered, but maybe too late, one of the secrets of successful living. He walked swiftly to the door and slowly cracked it open, listening for voices. "Sweet Jesus," he breathed when he saw the cover was still there and no one was in the hallway. He darted out and brought it in, closing the door silently. He examined the three holes at the top, all he had left from a two dollar purchase. He felt suddenly the women's eyes watching him and blushed darker.

"Everything's okay now," he said, smiling in apology. He walked stiffly past the back of the couch where they were sitting and went into his girlfriend's bedroom. He slid the cover of the grill underneath the box springs and took off his jogging shoes and lay down

slowly on the bed and curled on his side, his cheek on her pillow, waiting for sleep.

He was halfway safe, aware of sounds but away from them, invisible and warm and comforted by the evenness of his breathing. The concrete blocks were suddenly struck like fists on a blackboard and he fell to his feet. Voices through the wall from next door challenged the authority, but he heard a whine of surrender immediately following brief resistance, and he feared hearing something just like it soon in his own voice. He stopped himself from running into the living room, hands grasped to his head, perhaps to flush chicken bones down the toilet but some of them would float; he'd be standing open mouthed staring when the police came in to hammer his bones with nightsticks, brown skin flapping like torn cooked skin in the bowl, blood rinsed away, and he never got told what he did.

The knocking came to the door.

His girlfriend ran into the bedroom. "What should we do?" she cried. They watched the front door spring open, LaDonna ducking her heavy shoulders and head below the top of the couch, two police coming in with shortened shotguns to stand on either side. Two more police holding revolvers walked in, looked back and forth, started to search the apartment. He wished he had his shoes on.

"What did I do?" he shouted at them. "What the hell did I do?"

One of the police smiled, coming toward him. "You know what you did."

They told the boy they'd bring him home to his momma's apartment. He didn't want them to. "I be okay," he said to the police. "I know the floor it's on."

"We're gonna take off," the fireman said. He put his hand on the boy's shoulder, surprising both of them. "You be good now," he said.

"I won't do it no more," the boy said, amazed at all the commotion. The fireman looked at him, tilting his head, wondering if the whole thing was different from what it seemed. He looked at the man standing with his hands cuffed behind him. He had no shoes on. The cop next to the man held the top of the Weber kettle. The man stared at the boy as though there was an answer in there, in the boy, if he could only figure it out.

The boy looked at the cement floor and heard them knocking.

When no one answered they knocked again. The door opened and a man in a red sleeveless t-shirt stared at the gathering of police.

"We're looking for this boy's mother," one of them said.

"Maxine," he called, not looking behind him, afraid to turn his head. She appeared at his side, reaching suddenly to hold onto his arm as though the police were there to haul him somewhere else.

"This your boy?" a voice said. A hand nudged him forward. The boy wouldn't look up.

"He done something bad?" she asked.

The one picture of the boy riding piggyback on the fireman's shoulders, stick brown arms clinging to the thick white neck, peeking around the hat, appeared on page one of the newspaper the next morning and was much admired. Eight months later it won an award. The fireman received a letter of commendation, and a large framed print of the photograph was mounted on the wall of the reception area outside the chief's office.

The arraignment of the barbecue man was held that afternoon.

The boy was there with his mother, to whom he'd said nothing about being in the elevator shaft, afraid she would punish him. For his mother, she felt the circumstances surrounding this particular incident were not ones she could question, that none of this included her. The authorities had assumed command and she was a bystander watching a story that everyone was keeping her out of. She'd been afraid to ask the boy what had happened. She hoped she'd find out soon.

The door at the side of the small courtroom opened and two deputy sheriffs came through. Between them, hiding behind them as much as possible, the barbecue man struggled to walk, manacled from wrists to ankles, the manacles chained together and the chains clinking and rubbing. The man looked down at the weight of all the iron that continued to confuse him.

He heard shouts and looked up to see people in the spectators' seats. As they watched him he saw in their eyes and in their faces the manacles and chains. He looked in front of the deputies and saw the boy who had caused it. The boy looked terrified.

The path the deputies took to the second of the two long tables brought the man toward the boy. The boy couldn't take his eyes away from the face of the man, who didn't seem to be angry at him like he expected. "Don't worry," the person standing next to the boy said. "He can't get you now." It was a lady he'd just seen for the first time a

few minutes ago and a man next to her. They'd told him their names and said not to be scared: he didn't have to say or do anything. They said he didn't have to be there at all; he could go home. They asked if he'd like to stay and see the judge talk to the bad man who'd hurt him, so he would understand that now he was safe.

"Would you like that?" the lady asked him. She was a white lady and he saw how much she wanted to believe he was a good boy surrounded by bad things. She wanted to think he was brave. It was in the other room; he'd stood in front of her because she came up to him and stood there like they knew each other. She knelt down to be able to see into his face. Her lipstick was pink. She wasn't so old as he'd thought; might not be older than his mother but she was here running things. He felt he ought to let her believe what she wanted. It seemed like that would be safer. He felt like he was doing a grown-up thing, to be pretending to be the kind of boy she wanted to think he was. So he nodded his head about staying to see the judge and that made the lady feel even better toward him.

In the room with the lady he was liking what he was doing. Now that they were in here in the big room he saw more what he was doing for real. He wasn't usually a liar. He didn't like to think it was only when he lied that he was doing what she wanted, and if he didn't lie but was just who he was with his green doll in the hallway then he'd be doing something stupid. He wanted her to think he was smart.

The police took the man to stand in front of the judge, and the man who was standing next to the lady went up to stand next to them. After a little bit of talking that the boy couldn't hear, the police took the man who couldn't walk well because of the chains away from the judge. The man never looked out into the room again, or at the boy. The boy was afraid he might want to give him a hard look and kept his head half-lowered until the sound of the chains dragged out the door.

"You were very brave," the lady said, touching him on one shoulder. He stared at her fingers.

For the next ten weeks he was a star in his building. Women who saw him in the hallway or going up the stairs from school smiled at him. The boys and girls in the building and at school acted like they admired him for being famous. Some of them were jealous. The men he passed in the hallway generally didn't know who he was or else

they probably had nothing to say.

His mother treated him like he was a visitor and she had to be politer than usual. She never talked about it, as though it was all something fancy belonging to the white lady, like a fancy plate, that would be easy to crack and she didn't want to get blamed.

He passed the old lady sometimes going up the stairs; once he helped to carry her groceries.

"Why thank you," she said, but he saw she was eyeing him and he was afraid.

"Thank you too," he got out. He meant for calling the fireman. She nodded, moving the next foot in the nurse's shoes she'd bought at the Goodwill because the soles were thick with padding up another stair. "I see you're doing the right thing more and more," she said in a voice that sounded to the boy like she was suspicious. "You'll always know when you're doing the right thing," she added. "You feel it in your heart."

The boy stayed on her slow pace with her, holding onto her bag. When she didn't say anything more he got mad. "Maybe you don't want me to carry your groceries no more," he said.

"You do what you need to," she said.

When the lady from the court wanted all the details of how the man threw him down the elevator, he said "He just got mad and pushed me." They were sitting side by side on his teacher's desk. The lady said she'd arranged it. The other first-graders were gone.

"Why would he do that?" the lady asked. She smiled at him to let him know he shouldn't be afraid to tell her the truth. She was pretty when she smiled. She was wearing a blue piece of glass on a small chain around her neck. He wished his teacher looked like her and listened like the lady did.

"I asked for a piece of his bacon," the boy said, remembering the smell, and he figured it would look good if he took a small piece of blame on himself.

"You were hungry?" she asked. He saw she wanted to believe that a lot.

"I sure was," he said.

"Did you take a piece?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," he answered because that would be stealing.

"It would have been understandable if you had," the lady said to him. "I mean, I wouldn't blame you or anything." She smiled at him.

The boy thought for some seconds.

"Yeah," he said.

"And for that he threw you down the elevator shaft?"

"Yes'm," he said.

She rubbed the top of his head and smiled.

In the courtroom the boy sat between the lady and a different man. The lady seemed mad and like she was happy to be mad. The man was staring at the judge and at the man who had barbecued the chicken and bacon. The barbecue man didn't look toward them at all and the boy was able to watch him. He was wearing grey pants and a grey shirt that was too big and had on sneakers. His hair was flat in back like he'd been leaning against a wall. He was looking at the floor. The boy was grateful he didn't act like he was mad. He thought he would have been mad, if it was him.

"Keith," he heard a lady say in a loud whisper. The boy turned around fearfully. He put his hands on the table ready to jump up and run if Kevin and Keith were about to get him but he couldn't find them. The lady touched one of his hands on the table, thinking he was afraid of the barbecue man. He saw that the man was also looking behind the short wooden fence that separated the people sitting on benches like in church from the front of the room, which was like church too except for the tables; also the jury was on the side instead of in back like the choir was. The barbecue man smiled like he'd just seen something that made him happy and the boy looked and saw a woman smiling at him. The woman was dressed even better than for church, like she was going to meet the president. Her shirt was so ironed it looked stiff. The man sat up straighter, like he was proud he wasn't alone. The man's name must be Keith.

The boy turned his head further and saw his mother sitting with white people on either side. She was all dressed up, too, but she looked like she didn't know what she was doing there. She saw the boy watching her face and smiled like she'd been caught not paying attention. When she smiled at him it looked like she got smaller.

The judge talked and the man sitting at the table with the boy talked, about how bad Keith was and how he'd prove it. He said Keith must be put in jail for a long time. The barbecue man stared at him like he'd never seen him before and then he looked and saw the boy watching him. He tilted his head to the side as though he was

really trying to figure this out. The lady sitting next to the boy stood up and walked toward the judge.

"There was a boy, once, who was six years old and small for his age," she said in a loud voice like a speech. "The boy was hungry and lonely, and asked a man for a single piece of bacon. In answer," she said, turning to look at the barbecue man, "the man lunged for the boy and grabbed him, and threw him through open doors to fall to the bottom of the elevator shaft, four floors below." She called the boy to testify. She motioned at him and he stood up and had to walk by himself from the long table in front of all the people to the chair that was next to the pulpit.

She asked him his name. She asked him how old he was. She asked if he'd almost finished first grade at Knute Rockne School.

"Please tell us," she said, "what happened on the day you were playing in the hallway."

He looked at her. "You can tell us," she said, winking at him.

"Two boys chased me," he said.

"What?" The lady was frowning.

"They chased me and I had to get away from them."

"Okay," the lady said. She watched him and took a slow breath and smiled again. "And what happened then?" She walked closer to stand within two feet and to encourage him where he sat, dwarfed by the judge's podium, barely able to see over the railing of the witness box. She looked down at him and then turned her head slowly to stare at the accused, reminding the boy of the reason they were there.

"I ran from the boys," the boy said. "I jumped for the cable."

The lady became very still, as though a traffic light was tardy turning to green. The judge, a heavyset white man, leaned forward to better see the top of the boy's head.

"You had a problem with some boys," the lady said impatiently to her witness. "But what happened after that?" She heard the sharpness in her voice and saw a look of obstinacy come into the boy's face.

The boy looked at his knees in the blue suitpants his momma had bought yesterday at the Goodwill. The only neckties they had were men's and the two ends with blue flowers dropped between his knees. It looked like handkerchiefs except it was thicker and felt slippery. He looked to find his mother and saw she was still there. She saw him looking for her and nodded at him to say she wasn't angry, whatever it might be.

The lady turned to see where he was staring and frowned. The

judge looked, too, and rapped his gavel once. "No communication with the spectators," he said. "The witness will answer the question. That means you," he added, not unkindly, to the boy, who craned his head back to see the judge's face in the pulpit. Like it was God, or the President.

The lady was relieved that the judge was being patient. "What happened then?" she reminded the boy, who was still looking up at the judge.

"I held onto the rope," the boy explained to the judge. "Then it slipped and tore up my hands."

"You were *hungry*," the lady said. "You wanted some of the man's *bacon*."

"Man never pushed me," the boy said real fast to the judge, thinking if he got it out fast the judge would help with the lady, so she wouldn't be too mad. "What did you say?" the judge asked, leaning forward even further.

"Request a brief recess to talk with the witness," the lady said.

"The accused," the judge asked the boy, "didn't push you down the elevator shaft?"

The boy shook his head.

The public defender stood up and asked that the case be dismissed.

"So ordered," the judge said, banging his gavel so hard the boy felt a vibration where he sat. "The witness will rise," the judge said. The boy wasn't sure who he meant.

"Stand up," the lady said, pointing her finger at his face real close. He flinched but stood up.

"You're a bad boy to lie like that," the judge said. "Please look at me." The boy looked up at him. "I hope," the judge said, "I'm not going to have to see you in here again one day."

The boy found four pieces of wood in the rubble from torn-down houses across the street. He took a knife from the kitchen counter and sat in the hallway below the hole in the wall where green doll used to be hidden. He had never found green doll again.

He carved a doll of an old lady, making it short like she was. He wrapped a kleenex around her body like a pretty white dress would look. He bunched up small pieces of tissue to be white shoes at the ends of her short stick feet and fastened them on with rubber bands. With the knife he cut off a piece from the bottom of his flannel shirt to

be her handkerchief.

One day he heard the old lady wheezing up the stairs and he ran to put the doll in a corner of one of the stairs where she'd see it. He went farther up to listen to whether she'd find it. "I believe this doll must be an angel," the old lady said out loud, like she wanted someone else to hear. "A doll who's really an angel must always be loved."

He carved the next day a small fireman, cutting off little bits of bluejean from his pants cuff to be the thick fireman's coat and the stiff fireman's hat. He didn't know where firemen lived, but he'd seen them sometimes coming to rescue children who'd been playing on top of the elevator car and couldn't reach the open doors again to get out. He put the fireman in his pocket and went down the stairs to the second floor and jumped for the cable. He climbed down to the roof, and after feeling around in the dark with his hands he put the fireman in a small cubbyhole where the cable looped into a metal thing that held it tight to the elevator, for him to find.

He carved on the next afternoon a thick blunt stick to be the judge. He cut out from a People magazine that his momma had found a picture of a lady in a black fur coat. He cut off the head and used the coat to be the judge's robe. He tied the judge to half of a brick from across the street with a piece of string and carried the judge and the brick up the stairs to the top floor of the building. There was an empty apartment and when no one was near he went inside and leaned out a broken window from a fire and held the judge for a moment with the half a brick pulling down and then he dropped it and watched it fall.

One day he asked his first grade teacher what a bird would eat that lived in an elevator shaft. He told her about the soft weight on his hair and the warm stretchy kleenex he'd felt on his cheek.

"I guess it could have been a house wren," said the teacher, who hadn't the foggiest. "Or I know. It might have been a small bat. They like the darkness, and they've got sort of skin stretched between the bones in their wings that are kind of like fingers."

"What would a bat eat?" the boy asked.

Bugs?" the teacher guessed.

He turned on lights real quick and stepped on roaches in his kitchen, being careful not to squash them too much or the bats might

not know that it was bugs. He placed them on the inside of the open doors to the elevator shaft, in the corners where they wouldn't be seen by children. He checked the next day and the bugs were gone, but he never was able to see a bat or to touch one again.

By the time it was hot summer outside he decided he was being foolish. Kevin and Keith were in a gang now and they wanted him to join. The fourth piece of wood sat uncarved in the hallway, hidden fast inside concrete.

Ellen Gandt

THE MEDICINE GO DOWN

All anybody talks about anymore is sobriety so it was nice when Gordon mentioned the elderly. Standing at the wait station—to consolidate ketchups—he said, have you ever noticed that people, when they get old, their heads enlarge? At first I was sure he was saying something about the effects of drinking so I ignored him but then while I thought about it, I realized, no. He was simply saying something about the actual size of an old person's head and so I answered him. I said I hadn't noticed it. Well of course you have, he said. Think about movie stars. You see them for years but then later they show up in a magazine or on a talk show and they've got this really amazingly larger head than they ever had before. Larger than it should be for whatever their body is. For example, I said. Hold it, I'll think of somebody, he said. Before he did I said, so are you trying to tell me that it's finally full-grown, that a head's a separate thing, its own melon, and it just keeps on until you die? I'm not sure, he said. Well, it hasn't happened to anyone I know is what I said. Not that I've noticed. Not my grandparents or anyone like that. Gordon had to think. No, me neither, he said. It's true, no one I know personally had it happen. Maybe it's not everyone, just some old people. But, I said, we could say that about anything. If you can think it up you can be pretty sure anything or all of it has happened to somebody. He said, well that's not the point—it's more that their bodies shrink, the bones in their bodies are compressing together but that can't happen to a skull. It's probably something to do with the physics of roundness, I said. Or that nothing ever very much presses on your skull, he said. A hat is about the only thing except for the time you're sleeping, I said. So a skull never really has to get smaller while everything else around it is just melting down. Well hell, he said, the skull, some person's head, is probably responsible for a lot of the compressing that goes on. I've heard of heads weighing five pounds. More I assume in some people. Gordon dropped the cap to a ketchup. Oh my god, he said, we've got tables. Oops is what I said in general.

Despite the bottles of ketchup and the fact that when people want one we set it right on the table along with steak sauce or soy, this is a nice place. It's a country club. There are tablecloths and decent napkins and people come in to the dining room to eat or just sit around with high balls, which is what they call them. They stare out the wall

of windows at the-golf course though nothing ever happens. We, many of us, not just Gordon and I, serve it all and it is especially nice when somebody only wants drinks. First because I grew up in a house where my mother said no condiment bottles touch the table ever. All of those like the mustard and pickles and even the milk carton ended up on the floor at our feet and to this day even at a restaurant with no relation to my family dining life, it wears on me to arrange those bottles smack on the table like a centerpiece. And also I'd rather do drinks since what happened to Gordon could happen to me and I'd just as soon skip it: the ketchup bottle which was balanced on his waiter's tray, while he walked along, toppled off. Before it hit the ground Gordon's walking foot, timed just so, punted the ketchup entirely across the hard wood floor section of the dining room until it blasted apart against the far wall. Granted this could happen with drinks but the truth is it doesn't.

When Gordon stood up from retrieving his ketchup cap he knocked over half the bottles he had arranged like bowling pins which would have left him with a decent second roll (pins 10,9,6,3 and 1) if he'd had the time or if we'd been bowling, not waiting. In a panic from forgetting, we sped together but in opposite directions toward tables before we managed to collect ourselves and figure out what we had. Gordon staggered in one place, turning, counting chairs and heads but stopped on me, giving me the look that says relax it isn't gene splicing. He probably didn't mean gene splicing exactly but that's what the look means. Something like rocket science or brain surgery is what people used to say but now it seems complexity is more like grocery bagging: paper or plastic. Or being a highly paid famous person. To Gordon I gave the you're-telling-me-look and look-at-you-wheeling-around and anyway that's your twelve-top over there so you might as well limber up. These days all anybody orders are salads and maybe martinis or daiquiris and all of that usually looks pretty good together—the limey daiquiri, the martini's olive, piles of lettuce leaves—and it's not so bad except it's Caesar salads: the pepper grinder's too close aerodynamically to a ketchup only more so and the same thing could happen. But the truth is it doesn't.

I edged toward my two-top in the corner while the he of the he & she was saying to her, all my life I've been in advertising—it's because I was a boastful kid. The she said back to him, it doesn't matter what career an adult chooses, that doesn't mean our child has to be conceited at the age of six and a half—

And that's when I got there. She looked at me because she had to,

she'd probably been *waiting* for me and she said, Brandy are you dating Gordon? They all think they know us. I said, ma'am? And he said, we'll have two Caesar salads and a glass of wine for my wife. Darling, she said, what are you going to have and Brandy dear you know that's white wine. Oh me, he said, just a highball. Sir? I said. He said, whiskey. Hell Brandy—you know what I like. I left with their order but didn't make it back to the kitchen before Jim Fitz got to me. Brandy, he said, as your manager I want to take the time to tell you that we respect you, Rose and I both. Mister Fitz, I said, thanks but this is the third time you've told me this since—

And that's when she got there, Rose his wife, at his elbow nodding her nog off and all I really could do was lock eyes with Gordon standing behind them in the kitchen doorway nodding too. The management does this all the time, this Optimism. Jim Fitz's secret society calls it the Tower of Words and right when you've got a tray full of old plates they nab you to say something Towerful. Jim likes: Your name here, we like you, we respect you and we really mean it (touch) (somewhere nonsexual somewhere on your person). Rose chimes in: (pat) (pat) and off they go to find Gordon or somebody else. They don't drink a thing. I got my order to the kitchen while the Fitzes commenced their nuzzling with the prep cooks and I neglected to stick around for the Tower in conjunction with scads of kitchen knives. On my way to the hard wood floor, I passed Gordon serving drinks to a table bursting with rowdy friendlies. You're the cat's pajamas, they yowled to one another: the star of our show, best of the bunch, finest name brand, blue chip, sliced bread, sweeter than wine, you're one of a kind, the broken mold, leader of the pack, penthouse suite, you're the cock 'o the walk. One of the he's yelled to a she, honey you're the queen of hearts! And I know Gordon, setting a bottle in front of the man, wanted to say, and you sir are the king of beers, but he wouldn't.

I had another wife and husband seated up against the wall of windows and they were the ones who never hear a thing. He can't after years of industrial noise plus loud TV and she can't from too much hearing herself think. I first repaired the napkin tepees on a nearby table while she said to him, in a lifetime a person lets a lot slide and I'm not sure that's so smart anymore. What? he said. In a marriage, she said, you let enough slide and suddenly you want to literally strangle your husband for driving fifteen and a half miles with the emergency brake on. If you're saying, he said, what I think you're saying, I mean if I heard you right, you should lighten up. What, she said, oh I know some people would say I shouldn't let it

bother me but honestly—fifteen almost sixteen miles, there's a warning light for godssake. In your foot or somewhere there should be a sensation that all is not well—

And that's when I got there. I said, good evening, can I take your order. What? they said. Can I take your order tonight, I said. But he said to her, we live in a world where there is less order but more hope. What?! she said. I said, I'll take your order unless you just want what you usually have. She said, it's about an emergency brake on the surface of things but it goes much deeper than that. He said, it's not some triviality, that's the point I'm trying to make but I want to know what you're going to do about it. She said, we'll have the usual Brandy. What? I asked since by that time I was watching the Colados who had arrived and slipped down the steps into the dining room. Oh okay, I said, two salads, a martini and a daiquiri.

The thing that ever makes drinking really matter is working in a restaurant. The specific thing about drinking and working here is the Colados. They're this terribly ectomorph couple from drinking and salads and everywhere they go it's the maraschino march, some cocktail cordiality, but mostly a quinine quarrel. The general idea is that drinks equal cash for an eatery. The food's just filler and that's fine for the management but if you're like us you start to think about tips: is drinking good for tips? and I'd have to say yes. Usually a drinker doesn't forget to tip but tips like a fool in the form of money heaps forgotten on the table. And I have paid my rent on the philanthropy of someone made nonchalant by liquor who showed up the next night no worse for wear with apparently no liquidity problem in any respect. Some say get rid of cars and who's not happy?

Gordon and I crossed paths at the wait station where we put together the side parts of our salads. Gordon talked while I looked over my shoulder at the ectomorphs wrestling the flatness of the floor to get to their table. Gordon said, Sherry's glad you changed your make-up and she wants to know how it's working. I said, I didn't change anything. Gordon said, but Sherry says it means better tips. I said, you mean if I change my make-up to match the light? Or to make your head look bigger, Gordon said. Gordon filled tiny pitchers with house dressing and I said it makes you wonder if they're exactly sane. Who, he said. Colados, I said. Tina Colado is about to keel over. And at that moment Stu Colado bumped and bounced off the wall of windows sending light reflecting akimbo after a low thudding crack that sounded like a frozen lake coming undone.

I left Gordon and took drinks to the deaf pair who now had the pure spectacle luxury of seats next to the Colados and I had the luxu-

ry of somebody else waiting on them. The deafs missed it while I deposited their drinks but Stu Colado at the next table said to Tina, we need an answering machine that records conversations. Stu, she said, I'm telling you again and for the last time it's against the law. Stu said back to Tina, it's not rude if nobody knows about it and besides it's a necessity, especially for the insane calls—

And that's when their waiter got there. Salads and drinks all around.

Back at the wait station Sherry made me swear I was still as always wearing lush lash blue. She said, okay but remember, anything you do to your face, any kind of change in the head area, can make quite a difference. I leaned against the counter to watch the Colados fail to steer much salad from plate to mouth. A fork is a joke of a tool, I said to Gordon. Salad's a toughie, he said. Oops, I said, there goes Tina's water glass. A goblet's a curse as a vertical thing, he said. Uh oh, Sherry said, Stu's getting up. And sure enough he'd backed out his chair. Oh hell, Gordon said, he's going to the men's room. But I said, Tina's staying put, that's something. I turned my back as Stu tacked out of sight down the passage to the restrooms. I fished my hand in the bin for decent lemon wedges and Gordon said, aren't you going to watch? Maybe, I said, but what's he going to do—fall? Gordon said, it's a maybe—what is it about Stu, about why he gets himself so mostly he can hardly walk? I said, they say something very sad happened a long time ago. And after it he could only play golf but then he had to stop. That's the prostate cancer, Sherry said. Gordon said, what's that got to do with it? Destroyed his center of gravity, I said—

And that's when Rose got there, steaming in to the wait station nogging her head. Rose said, absolutely right, Stu Colado's flat out in the back hall and Jim Fitz is having a fit. Gordon said, why do you call him by his whole name, your husband? Rose said, Gordon I have only respect for you but at the moment subservience is held in highest esteem. And Rose said, Brandy, Jim Fitz would like you to escort Tina to his office.

At her table alone Tina was spinning her olive in the ashtray. I said, Tina you're wanted in Jim Fitz's office. Sure, she said, people want a lot of things these days don't they. Jim just wants to chat I guess, I said. I pulled out Tina's chair, helping her maneuver and she said, well when it comes down to it all I ever really wanted was for *Gone With the Wind* to go on and on. That last page, it was so final, it broke my heart. To say something I said, wow I didn't know you liked to read. By the time we got to the back hall Tina said, oh sure

I'm a big reader. It just pumps your head full of every kind of thing.

I opened the door to Jim Fitz's office and to Stu Jim Fitz was saying, I'm trying to wear only clothes made in America and it's hard sometimes. Stu said nodding, I know I know. Jim looked at us and said, oh Tina, we're all here now, good good great, have a seat by Stu. Tina settled in and Jim Fitz said, you guys, Stu, Tina, we've known each other a long time the three of us and I have nothing but respect for you both but you two this has got to stop, what gives anyway? Somebody knocked on the door and then we knew it was Gordon when he poked his head in. Remember about the large heads? he said mostly to me. Think about the wife of that ex-president. And then he left. It was obvious to everyone that Gordon had interrupted so I just kept it up. I said, Mister Fitz I have an uncle who used to be more but now he's a guy in a lawn chair which sounds leisurely and that's right since it is so practically undercomplicated but I mean that's all there is. There's the green and white lawn chair, him and this can in his hand. Last time I saw him he said to me I'm not nearly as handsome as I thought I was and these days your aunt thinks I'm twice as unconscious as she first suspected, I've made only a fraction of the money you'd really need to do things right and most of what I remember is phone numbers. To top everything off a complete half of the entire world's lakes are stuck up in Canada. I asked my uncle if he was drawing any kind of parallel with all that and he said hell no. Tina said to me, shutup little girl and to Jim Fitz she said, I want you to know your restaurant makes a watery salad and a lousy drink, the forks here are tiny tiny tiny and you and Rose are up to your eyeballs I mean you are completely full of—

And that's when Stu spoke up. Stu said, we know, we know. We drink a lot. Tina spit then. Stu said, honey we do, you know we do, let's face it, we've known for a long time but we're giving it up tomorrow, that's a fact Jim, we're quitting. Tina said, you Stu are so full of—

And that's when Stu stood up and put a hand on either side of his face. He said to Tina, it's time baby, we have to say it and if you can't handle this I guess you'll have to leave me. Tina said, aw Stu you're just being mean.

Books

Representing Science

Stanley Aronowitz. *Science as Power: Discourse and Ideology in Modern Society*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 384 pp.

Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt. *The Higher Superstition: TheAcademic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. 314 pp.

Confronting the question of why and how science has established itself as a dominant form of knowledge, Stanley Aronowitz's *Science as Power* revives the familiar or "vulgar" Marxist thesis by which everything in society and culture, including science, is an effect of economics and class structure. Aronowitz would have us believe that science has hoodwinked us with "claims" (a favorite word) of truth and objectivity while pursuing its own tyrannical ends. The personification of science implicit in this description is one of the many fictions by which Aronowitz advances his own claim.

When he is concerned with the appropriation of scientific knowledge by society's power elite (which is to say, even when he is on his firmest ground) he grossly overstates the case. He argues, for instance, that medicine, its methods co-opted by capitalism, is entirely "bourgeois" in its exclusive focus on the individual patient and on microbes, thereby refusing to look at social and economic factors that contribute to illness. Medical "research will continue to search within the fragmented body for the secrets of disease, for the one vaccine or chemical cure for our maladies, in the hopes of avoiding social or preventive medicines" (336).

Such statements ignore the large amount of work being done in epidemiology, and they ignore the fact that doctors, and scientists in general, have been in the forefront in insisting on ecological responsibility, an end to hunger, and improved education. There would be no possibility in Aronowitz's discourse for respecting the courage of doctors who have recently traveled to Zaire to confront the Ebola epidemic first hand. To Aronowitz, they would simply be puppets of capitalism. And he has nothing to say of the many medically related environmental studies that have challenged industry and placed

pressure on our lawmakers. His "evidence," too respectable a word for the fabric of assertion that constitutes his case, is biased in the extreme.

But Aronowitz does not treat merely the political appropriation of scientific discoveries and methods; he alleges that scientific thought is "in its conceptual foundations" infiltrated by ideology. "Social relations coded as discourse not only mediate but constitute thought itself" (341). Scientific thought is driven by the needs and alibis of a society's dominant interests, but it masks these affiliations with claims to impartial and objective inquiry.

> Just as ideologies are often generated behind the backs of their makers but are nevertheless representations of a worldview that bears the unmistakable stamp of the dominant class, so science and technology, understood by practitioners as true reflections of the natural law and having the force of inevitability, make discoveries in accordance with imperatives of the domination of nature and [of] capitalist rationality as if these were the only possible choices. (83)

It is ironic that, as he relentlessly pushes his single theory of the economic origins of scientific thought, he complains that physical scientists are "reductive" in their approach to nature.

A corollary to his theory of social construction is the proposition that all facts are "theory-laden." "Facts and the methods by which they are adduced presuppose a theoretical structure or paradigm that constitutes their *axial* structure" (230). This, of course, is a recurrent refrain in today's academic discourse, and the warning that one's perception of "the facts" may be conditioned by prejudices or presuppositions is a good one. But Aronowitz allows for no qualification: "facts are always both theory and technology dependent" (348). Always. To the same degree. No exceptions. He conveniently ignores the question of why, if scientific thought is merely a bizarre miming of social relations with no special grip on facticity, it is self-correcting and it happens to work.

Aronowitz is a sort of inverse, postmodern Thomas Gradgrind, and today's *Hard Times* might begin: "Now, what I want is Theory. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Theories. Theories alone are wanted in life." Of course Dickens's own Gradgrind is committed to facts in a way that *is* linked to his ideology. He uses facts to exercise power, and Dickens may at first blush seem to anticipate the postmodern suspicion of objective knowledge. But Dickens does not

question knowledge itself, only its misuse. Aronowitz, on the other hand, always obscures this distinction. Science itself is faulted for political decisions concerning its use that are made by nonscientists, and in fact he often treats science, technology, and public policy as one and the same thing.

One of the ways that scientific knowledge is conditioned by social relations is found in the conflict between wave and particle theory in early twentieth century physics. According to Christopher Caudwell, cited with approval by Aronowitz, this conflict can be attributed "to the breakdown of capitalist society and culture" (95). Another philosopher of science is cited for suggesting that the crisis in quantum theory was "dependent upon the physicists' own craving for crisis arising from participation in and adaptation to the Weimar intellectual mileu" (252). Physicists, by this account, actually responded to a public demand for an end to certainty in science, a demand fueled by Germany's pessimism in the wake of its defeat in WWI. Ironically, Aronowitz's references to the Weimar mileu remind one that his leftist critique of "bourgeois" science replicates Hitler's mode of thought when he railed against "Jewish" science.

Aronowitz further argues that "different cultures will produce different mathematical concepts" (346). Everything, even logic, is culturally relative, and nothing is either verifiable or falsifiable by objective standards. Ludicrously, he illustrates his contention that "Western logic" is full of contradictions by saying that we deny that our bomber pilots are murderers while defining "murderer" as anyone who kills someone (346). Of course our legal system does *not* define murder in this way. As soon as we realize that there are any number of situations in which a person may take another life without being a murderer, Aronowitz's relativistic "proof" evaporates. Futhermore, if Aronowitz were right about how we define murder, it would only prove that our public *policy* is illogical, not that "Western logic" itself is flawed.

It is inevitable, given their nature (and given Aronowitz's difficulty [or lack of interest] in sustaining a logical argument) that the most curious propositions in this book exist only as bald assertions. We never get a look, for instance, at another culture's alternate mathematics. With stunning hubris, his Preface states that "this volume is not the place to outline a new science" (x), as though he could quite easily do so in a more convenient place. But it is all bluff. So when he presents the proposition that capitalism's contradictions led to the wave/particle contradiction, he simply asserts it; it reads as nothing more than a fanciful analogy. *Science as Power*, in fact, is an extended

exercise in begging the question. It forever assumes that science has been socially constructed, but it never shows in any detail how such a process of construction might work. Indeed, Aronowitz's imaginings are reminiscent of the medieval doctrine of correspondences, whereby God's plan was supposedly reflected in the "fact" that everything was structured similarly (the state has a head just as the human body does, etc.).

But in Marxism, the power that is reflected everywhere is economic, and whatever reverence accompanied the medieval correspondences has long since vanished. There can be no sense of wonder and awe as one confronts the cosmos as offered to us by an ideologically infected cosmology, no gratitude to those capitalist lackies who ease pain and extend life. After observing that Aronowitz's book might best be read as an example of its own theory, an example of ideology trying to produce an appearance of objectivity, what remains most deeply offensive about *Science as Power* is its dreary, monotonous, resentful cynicism. It should be said, by the way, that Marx's own attitude toward science was guardedly respectful. Aronowitz writes to correct Marx's lapse, inadvertently confirming Marx's good sense.

Given his deterministic theory, Aronowitz's dislike for capitalism must extend to and infect everything found in capitalist societies. Like any good Marxist, he dreams of change, and change must extend to the abolition of reason and logic themselves. At present, it is "rank ethnocentrism" to believe in any ultimate superiority of science to magic (340). What it will mean to be reasonable or scientific in tomorrow's utopia, how inquiry will be conducted and how ignorance and injustice will be confronted, is something he is not very clear about; how could he be? But "an alternative science would have to imagine, as a condition of its emergence, an alternative rationality which would not be based on domination" (352). We will not be in Kansas anymore.

The "academic left," as defined by Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt in *The Higher Superstition*, does not refer simply to academics, such as Aronowitz, with leftist political commitments. Although such commitments are part of the package, to be a member of the academic left one must also subscribe to one or more of the avant garde "theories" that have flourished on campuses and in academic journals during the past two decades; one must be a deconstructionist or a postmodernist, or one must be a cultural constructionist, a theoretical feminist, multiculturalist, ecologist, or Afrocentrist. Gross and Levitt assert that many if not all academics who identify with these

movements share an antipathy to science, an antipathy that is both benighted and dangerous. While they may overstate the hostility to science emanating from the humanities, the problem they identify is both real and deeply significant.

What all of these critics of science share is not merely a concern for the misuse of scientific knowledge by governments and industry, but a rejection of the very foundations of scientific thought and methodology, often of reason itself. One such antifoundationalism comes from the social constructivists such as Aronowitz, for whom scientific thought is merely an epiphenomenon of class structure. Another source of antifoundationalist critique, according to Levitt and Gross, is postmodernism. In fact this critique is the defining feature of postmodernism as the authors use the term. Theirs is a narrow definition, but they are certainly correct in seeing a postmodern trend in philosophy that calls into question science and reason. For instance, Jean Francois Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition*, challenges the "grand narratives" by which Western culture has organized itself, celebrating instead "little stories" that oppose the grand narratives. Rhetorically, such postmodernists reduce all knowledge to the level of story and then proceed to ask why one story should be "privileged" over another.

Like the social constructionists and the postmodernists, many feminists today are arguing that scientific and mathematical thought are, on the deepest conceptual level, "patriarchal" and therefore disposable. "The radical feminist critique of science . . . insists . . . on a reconstruction of science at its most basic conceptual level, so that it may be incorporated, as no more than a subsidiary element, in the moral and ideological universe of militant feminism" (227). Feminists are unclear about what exactly a feminist science or math would look like, and their occasional attempts to deal with that question are woefully inadequate.

One such attempt degenerates into a cliched complaint about male references in high school "story problems" of the if-Billy-fills-the-tank-at-a-rate-of variety. Other feminists are critical of the dead metaphors by which scientific and mathematical problems are posed: to *attack* a problem or *exploit* a theorem. Metaphor mongering of this sort is silly and entirely irrelevant to what is essential in mathematical thought. While Gross and Levitt are sensitive to the problems of gender-biased language, they point out that in the context of teaching math "concentrating on such matters ignores the nub of the teacher's difficulty, which is to train students to *ignore* the superfluous context of such problems in order to extract their mathematical and logical

essence" (114). The feminists' carping about word choice would not be worthy of serious attention were it not for the likelihood that feminist "theory" aggravates the problem of the under-representation of women in scientific and mathematical careers by encouraging women to see these disciplines as arbitrary constructions of the male will to power.

Some Afrocentric attitudes toward science re-inscribe this problem in another sphere. A couple of years ago I examined the *Portland Base Line Essays*, a document that is required reading for all employees in the Portland, Oregon public school system. It is a troubling document on the whole, and the essay on science by one Hunter Adams is shocking. Adams is introduced in words that obscure the fact that he does not have an advanced degree in any science and has published no scientific research. His essay, too, contains a generous amount of evasion, but he seems to want to say that the ancient Egyptians (his dubious assumption is that they came from sub-Saharan Africa) invented flying machines, thought about quantum mechanics and gravitational theory, and so forth. As Gross and Levitt say:

> Somehow, the condescending belief has taken hold that black children can be persuaded to take an interest in science only if they are fed an educational diet of fairy tales . . . . The most awful aspect of the situation, however, is the way it testifies to the desperation and confusion of black people themselves. To resort to such tall tales is to reveal a deep and tragic insecurity and a willingness among black intellectuals (including scientists) to hold their tongues about nonsense damaging to their children. (208)

No mythologizing that so blatantly ignores truth can possibly be a positive preparation for serious work in the sciences, or in any academic discipline other than the mythologizing disciplines discussed here. Students brought up on these myths will only experience confusion and despair as they gain some acquaintance with reality and truth. African-American educators have a responsibility to challenge these myths at every opportunity, just as female educators have a responsibilty to challenge the gibberish about math and science being merely the modes of thought of jack-booted male thugs.

The fact is that the critics of science and math in the academic left, feminist and otherwise, simply don't *know* much science or math. So when it comes down to actually demonstrating how their positions would alter the foundations of these disciplines, the critics come up

empty (recalling Aronowitz's "this volume is not the place" dodge). To ask how *exactly* a postmodern calculus or a feminist theory of quantum mechanics would differ from what we have, is to elicit either embarrassed silence or the murkiest nonsense. One of the perverse delights of reading *Higher Superstition* comes from the passages in which the authors carefully analyze the assumptions and the logic of statements published in some of our most prestigious "theoretical" journals (one must forever, after Gross and Levitt, use scare quotes). For readers whose own careers are in the humanities, it is apt to be a humbling experience. The authors lay the evidence of our folly in front of us and require us to look at it carefully.

Why, then, is the academic left given to such vain imaginings? Gross and Levitt repeatedly compare academic leftists, who are forever seizing the moral high ground, to religious fundamentalists. They see in the academic left a resurgence of millenialism, irrationalism, and fanaticism, a resurgence fueled by the tendency of ideological systems "to induce a totalizing mentality in their adherents" (225). It is a safe guess that Timothy McVeigh has never been disturbed by academic theorizing. But academic rhetoric that delights in *deconstruction, resistance, subversion,* and *intervention* and that claims that reason can be jettisoned when it interferes with one's agenda is curiously activated in the militia mentality. And while Matthew Arnold saw culture as the antidote to anarchy, today anarchy is encouraged by the rhetoric of the cultured, safely ensconced in their universities. While our theories did not cause the Oklahoma bombing, the isomorphism should be disconcerting. Greater responsibility is needed.

Higher Superstition concludes with a call to arms. People in the scientific community should get involved in symposia where postmodernists or feminists or deep ecologists intend to bash science without fear of informed response. They should challenge university presses to submit manuscripts such as Aronowitz's to referee readers who are scientists rather than exclusively to fellow "theorists." The University of Minnesota Press, which published both Aronowitz and Lyotard, seems especially dedicated to the trendy dismantling of culture and reason, and scientists should take such presses to task. Further, they should speak out when local schools distort the history of science so as to flatter but mislead blacks, women, or any others who supposedly need misinformation to cheer them up.

But of course the real problem is with the bluestocking campus radicals, comfortably domiciled in departments of literature, history, and philosophy. Therefore, because of the tremendous importance of this book, the call to arms should also have gone out to rational

humanists who have not succumbed to "theory" and who are best positioned to resist the tendency within the humanities to "privilege" the sort of appalling rhetoric that *Higher Superstition* denounces.

—Reviewer *Bruce Henricksen*, a Professor of English at Loyola University, teaches literary theory.

Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warner County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860. By Christopher Morris. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.

The Family Saga in the South: Generations and Destinies. By Robert O. Stephens. Baton Rouge: Lousiana State UP, 1995.

The notion that one can "become" a Southerner, that Southerness is a process rather than a birthright, has a heretical ring to it, but such heresy is central to Christopher Morris's engaging history of Warren County and the countryside that eventually became Vicksburg, Mississippi. That the South is different from the rest of the United States is a notion few would question. Whether as an exploited colony or a psychological state, the South has been indispensable to the nation's development. But while such usefulness has made the existence of the South seem inevitable, that very assumption is what Morris seeks to challenge. His claim is precisely that such inevitability is only an illusion of hindsight; that even the South did not have to become what it was, and even what it was kept changing, at least until it became trapped in the idealizing amber of our national mythology.

By focusing on a relatively small place, a wedge of forest and rich delta alongside the Mississippi River, Morris is able to trace through time the changing ways that people, whom we retrospectively call "Southerners," behaved and viewed themselves. His aim is to uncover the links between the material contexts of life in that particular place and the mental constructs that evolved, eventually—though not inevitably—defining that place as Southern. Morris hopes to refine the balance between descriptions of the South that rely primarily on ideological influences (the differences implied by Southern ethics or ethos or values) and those that ground Southern distinctiveness principally in measurable conditions, like the weather

or crop yields or the distribution of wealth. By insisting on change as intrinsic to human communities, Morris tries to expose the dynamics of this particular place in establishing its credentials as Southern.

The material basis for Morris's speculations is impressive. By "stripping down" the extensive court records of Warren County into their component parts—names, dates, relationships—Morris constructed an enormous database, through which he was able to trace through time the personal fates and business dealings of various individuals. This information, which must certainly represent a treasure trove for scholars that follow, is supplemented with diaries, newspapers, letters, court transcripts, and his own perceptive readings, a combination that both firmly grounds Morris's observations and makes for pleasantly thick contexts.

Morris's research is prodigious, his presentation captivating. Morris has the historian's gift for constructing convincing stories on mere skeletons of fact, and he uses this technique to good effect. Reflections on the political and economic structures that were shaping the region's communities are sustained and enriched by stories about the individuals who were constructing them. For example, he gleans from his database the history of Jacob Hyland, a local patriarch, whose family's stuggles over property allow Morris to flesh out an understanding of how patriarchal values structured county politics; or he uses the early account books of the Rapaalje brothers from New York, who sought for thirty years to build an estate in Mississippi, to establish patterns of local trade.

While many of Morris's observations confirm rather than challenge our understanding of "Southern life," the rich detail of their substance gives them new dimension. For instance, Morris observes the parallel ways that white women and African-Americans were increasingly restricted as the plantation system developed. But while he confirms the intensification of restrictions on African-American labor as wealth became more concentrated on plantations, he also illustrates how such human needs as planting independent gardens were used to further reduce the slaves' humanity—by forcing them to raise their own food—clarifying for us the system's more subtle cruelties. He also thoughtfully examines the changing roles of women within black and white households, and shows how the accumulation of wealth that shifted power into land-owning male hands also forced the courts to define greater actual and legal dependence for white women than had been necessary in a less capitalized era.

The gradual predominance of patriarchal power in Warren County is perhaps Morris's fundamental conclusion about what

makes the South different. The shifts toward urban structures that were typical of small communities throughout the country, like manufacturing economies or political parties less dependent on familial ties, were cut short in Warren County by the Civil War. The war and its aftermath solidified the patriarchal structures that were becoming anachronistic elsewhere. And a specific period in a dynamic economic and cultural community was thus transformed by the trauma of war into immutable myth, sending out roots that began to stretch back toward Jamestown and beyond. In Vicksburg, at least, the old South came into being as myth at the very moment of its historical death.

But if what we think of as the unchanging old South were merely a contingent moment in a fluid cultural process, the effects of that moment are part of what Robert O. Stephens traces in his study of Southern family sagas. Like Morris, Stephens locates in familial connections a defining feature of Southernness, but Stephens is less interested in observing the changes in those structures than in chronicling the constant patterns that lie beneath their fictional appearances.

Stephens begins with a summary of the ur-family saga of Genesis, identifying the Biblical typology that establishes the critical elements of the genre. Locating the roots of Southern family sagas in the country house poems of Elizabethan and Caroline England, Stephens traces the development of the form from Cable's *The Grandissimes* through the contemporary novels of Lee Smith and Reynolds Price. The Southern family saga, traced through a rough chronology, is seen to adapt readily to the needs of its changing audiences and its shifting distance from the defining moment of Southern culture, the Civil War. But while Stephens provides thoughtful commentaries on the novels he selects, noting the various narrative transformations required as the century's writers took into account white female and black voices, increasing epistemological doubt, and revisionist visions of the region, the lineage he proposes gradually loses its shape: the tradition he tries to name seems to have little internal connection or development apart from that of the Southern novel itself, while the initial typology lacks the explanatory force necessary to define a genre. Like the old South, once the Southern family saga is declared to exist, its ancestry simply stretches out, long and distinguished.

If, as Morris's work suggests, becoming Southern requires more than a linear pedigree, a physical connection to places subseqently deemed Southern, Stephens's study seems to imply that establishing kinship—literary or otherwise—is all in how you tell it. In either case, the South serves for both writers as a center of difference whose

holding power remains firm.

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Life in the Confederate Army: Being the Observations and Experiences of an Alien in the South During the American Civil War, William Watson with an introduction by Thomas W. Cutrer, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995.

John Simon, director of the Ulysses S. Grant Association, once summarized the bulk of Civil War soldiers' diaries and memoirs as containing little more than "woke up... got shot at.... felt cold... went to sleep...." Many Civil War historians would agree with Simon. William Watson's *Life in the Confederate Army*, however, is an exception.

For nearly five hundred pages, Watson, a Scottish immigrant, spins a vivid narrative of the antebellum South and of the Confederate war effort from the perspective of an ordinary citizen and footsoldier. As a Scot, Watson remained remarkably detached from the issues that led the nation to civil war. No Edmund Ruffin, Watson scorned slavery and opposed secession. Enamored of his region and his adopted hometown of Baton Rouge, "a dry, clean town, and a somewhat pleasant place to live in," Watson volunteered for the "Pelican Rifles," a militia company made up mostly of businessmen, planters, and "students in abundance." Like fifty-five other members of the eighty-six man company, Watson did not own slaves.

In typical local-color fashion, Watson begins his narrative with a description of the history, climate, and topography of his adopted section, focusing on the elements which led many to refer to Louisiana as "the sugar bowl." He depicts a region that is "on the whole healthy" but with "a good deal of 'chills and fever'" in the swampy areas. On the South in general, Watson remarks that the "peculiar institution" was indeed of primary importance; however, he blames passionate commentators on both sides of the slavery question for its prominent role in the crisis, noting that "any honest and truthful statements or calm and dispassionate views would not have been sufficiently sensational to meet the wishes of extremists on either side."

Insofar as the slavery question related to the secession movement, Watson offers a sound, commonsensical analysis. Fire-eating defenses of the peculiar institution resulted from the efforts of "that pest of society, the unprincipled agitator" who preyed on the fears and insecurities of the slaveowners. These agitations only made the system more terrible than it had to be, thus opening it up for vigorous attacks from its opponents. Slavery alienated northerners and forced southerners to gravitate toward secession in order to preserve cultural continuity. This thesis is still held by many historians. Watson also suggests that smaller Southern planters, artisans, and mechanics viewed slavery unfavorably, and surmises that these opinions would eventually have brought about the institution's demise. But national issues intervened and forced a premature confrontation.

With Lincoln's election and the advent of secession, Watson's narrative becomes more urgent. Particularly useful in this discussion are Watson's assessments of the "trifling and imbecility of Buchanan's Government" and the "deceitful shuffling of Lincoln's administation," which "could not but provoke the disgust and contempt of every law-respecting person in the South." Those feelings precipitated the Sumter crisis, which Watson recounts via detached narrative and a vivid recollection of a conversation in a cafe. Watson accurately presents the history of the affair as well as a sound analysis of how alternatives to military force could have defused the crisis. In the end, he repeats a common story that "the gunnery on both sides must have been exceedingly good, as this tremendous cannonade was kept up for two days without a single person being hurt on either side." He blames the entire episode on "a vain desire on the part of Jefferson Davis and some of the Confederate leaders to gain notoriety, fame, or glory, and to stir up a warlike feeling throughout the South, and to gratify the vanity of a number of young newly-made officers who paraded through the streets and shone forth at balls with jewelled swords and handsome uniforms." Once the first shots were fired, however, Watson joined the Confederate cause out of a sense of duty to his business partners (both British), sympathy for his comrades, loyalty to his local militia company, and his own love of adventure.

As a soldier, Watson began his training in April 1861 studying tactics and bivouacking along the Metairie Race Course. Ever loyal to Queen Victoria, he repeatedly refused Confederate citizenship, and hence, served as a first sergeant instead of attaining a commission. In May 1861, the Pelican Rifles, now Company K, 3rd

Louisiana Infantry joined what would become known as the Army of the West under Brigadier General Ben McCulloch, a "thoroughly practical general." Deployment at Fort Smith, Arkansas ensured that Watson would participate in some of the most spectacular engagements of the western campaigns. On August 10, 1861 he flirted with glory in the Confederate victory at Wilson's Creek, taking a bullet in the canteen and receiving a minor scrape from a sword. In February 1862, Watson's unit supported the right flank in the ill-fated attack on Pea Ridge. McCulloch received a fatal wound in the assault and the army was forced to retreat. Union forces crippled Watson's company during the withdrawal, and the 3rd Louisiana returned to Fort Smith. Remaining with his unit after the humiliation of Shiloh and the Confederate conscription act of April 1862, Watson grew disenchanted with the cause and with its army. The conscription act released all aliens from military duty at the end of their term of enlistment, thus Watson learned that his service would end on July 15. Before his discharge, he participated in a last assault in the Battle of Farmington. Watson's unit distinguished itself in the affray, but few accolades followed. On July 19, 1862 Watson received his discharge and returned to his adopted state.

Watson's discharge was poorly timed. He arrived home just in time to lose everything in the Confederate defeat at Baton Rouge. With few prospects in the city "where hunger and privation reigned supreme," Watson returned to Company K. Shortly after he rejoined the company, he received a leg wound and was captured in the Battle of Corinth. After a short stay as a prisoner, a Scottish officer in Union employ orchestrated his parole. Returning to West Baton Rouge Parish, Watson repaired levees and sugar mills for local planters until an unusual rash of floods destroyed his business. By June 1863, Watson found himself in New Orleans pursuing a romantic career as a blockade runner. But Watson was not destined to become Rhett Butler. The riches he hoped for when he began his maritime career never materialized. Eventually, he returned to Scotland and prospered modestly as a civil engineer.

Watson published his memoir in 1887 as a testament to the volunteer soldier. In doing so, he revealed the true impact of his experience in the South. For Watson, the Jeffersonian ideal of the ideal southern yeoman made perfect sense. Like many confederate soldiers, Watson felt no loyalty to slavery or secession. Yet, he agreed with the complaints regarding northern economic exploita-

tion of the southern "colony."

No editor would quarrel with the quality of this reproduction of the 1887 edition. Most would enjoy Thomas W. Cutrer's superb introduction to the document. Watson takes note of much more than simply the weather, and his sleeping habits. Though devoted to the volunteer cause and to the republican ideal of Cincinnatus, Watson was no ordinary sergeant. In the Queen's army, he certainly would have been an officer. Nonetheless, Watson's common-sense politics, his rich descriptions of the Confederacy, and his observations on the volunteer company offer fresh perspectives on the complexities of the southern experience.

Watson's diary has been heavily cited by Civil War historians, many of whom have remarked on the reliability of Watson's account of the battles. Given the compromised nature of the Confederate volumes of the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* and the importance of this book as an example of the postbellum local color tradition, this handy paperback edition will serve scholars of southern history and literature, Louisiana, and the Civil War. Sergeant Watson's depiction of southern views and interests, his flair for irony, and his unflinching good humor will endear the book to students and armchair historians as well.

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