New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY VOLUME 22, NUMBER 1

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Spring 1996

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Front Cover: Dixie Beer Cup; Valmont St.
Back Cover: Sanitary Receptacles, Strewn (obverse)/ Annunciation St.
Both paintings oil on canvas, by Dick Johnson, courtesy of Hilderbrand Gallery, New Orleans.

New Orleans Review is published quarterly by Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, United States.

New Orleans Review accepts submissions of poetry, short fiction, essays, interviews and black and white art work or photography. Translations are also welcome but must be accompanied by the work in its original language. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Although reasonable care is taken, *NOR* assumes no responsibility for the loss of unsolicited material. Send submissions and individual subscriptions to:

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Contents

John's words— "the Big Banana": ALS, known as Lou Gehrig's disease. His motor neurons had been killed off— and new ones were dying every moment. In a relatively short time, 2-5 years, John would be completely paralyzed. Only his eyes would move.

Meanwhile, he still went to work at the college. We had splints made for his music-playing fingers. In August we chose a handsome oak cane, carved and polished by a neighbor. But by December of 1992, John's biggest concern was about work. Once he was on a respirator, could he still go to the library? At the time, I marvelled how he had quietly released his violin playing to the gods. I heard no complaints; he just seemed to be able to move on. He fell the next spring and hit his head, and the rescue squad needed a special device to scrape him off the floor and onto their stretcher. John never regained his sense of smell, so eating, with his now very limited motor control, became a drawn out affair with no reward in his taste buds. I again marvelled why this once burly gourmand didn't cry out against the angry gods. "What's the point of getting angry?" he'd say. "No one's to blame." Meanwhile, with the help of his wonderful library staff and his family and a new handicapped equipped van, John still went to work. At night and on the weekends, John listened to the music which touched his soul; he began to credit the disease with giving him time to make this literal "soul-searching" his major activity. Finally that last summer of his life, he began writing his "Theology."

As a rule, most people find it difficult to visit a terminally ill fellow human being. However, as John thought and listened to music, his friends kept coming— and staying far longer than I would have expected. Some would bring him new music to listen to, some a new piece of their own writing. Some would bring only their zeal to hear what new connections John's heart and mind were making. They all laughed a lot. They all heard beautiful music. The following partial essay is what John had recorded before he went to work that day in January, came home and died.

A THEOLOGY OF THE VIOLIN: NOTES ON THE UNHAPPINESS OF DYING

Joseph Szigeti playing the *Chaconne* from Bach's *D-minor Partita*: What do I, what does anybody hear? A wiry, ethereal sound projecting the multiple lines with clarity and precisely molded expressive weight, the deepest kind of emotional exploration, a spiritual journey of immense accumulative power. Eternity. Is this just metaphor? Is there anything more than an emotional and aesthetic/intellectual response to the texture, the masterful piece and its mastered realization? The raising of Lazarus was not a metaphor to those who witnessed and reported it, though it is that, at best, to most of us. Is it possible that this music, if we finally understood its power aright, would appear to us as the reawakened Lazarus originally appeared, or as the healed and revived appear in the lore of every religion? Death, after all, is not, finally, a metaphor, however we play with it, transmogrify it, run from it.

The trouble with the search for meaning beyond the material fact of the grave is the power of materiality itself. As I face the overwhelming physical fact of progressive debility and death, the claims of the physical world become ever more insistent. It has always taken discipline to separate the claims of the mind, the spirit, from those of the body. However, as my body grows weaker and more recalcitrant, it commands more and more attention from the mind, the spirit. I must pay relentless attention to my body in order to avoid physical distress, to avoid making messes, to do even simple tasks, to survive; my spirit is pulled into the body by pain, regret, self-pity, frustration, fear. And love, too, as Aristotle and Richard Wilbur remind us, calls us to things of this world.

The evidence of our senses points to the world of the senses. The mind must take up the same evidence, but it is also a world apart; it wants a world beyond. This desire has its own physical roots, obviously—the mind, the more it is a mind and not a mere extension of physical impulse, must protest its own extinction and seek its own life superior to the limits of the dying brain and body. But the desire for immortality is not evidence for it, and indeed, that desire, and certainly the desire to escape a sordid, helpless end, must be distrusted. They are motives, not signs of anything beyond them.

Thus I am warned: to find meaning beyond, or even within, my particular fate, I must confront the materialist world view which

claims me most naturally and give it its full weight, whatever the consequences to my project— which may, in the end be nothing more than the eternal project of unaccommodated man, to find a way to accept the unacceptable. But there is nothing new in my search, after all, and it will be quite enough to understand the old question, or the old unhappiness, a little better than I do.

The evidence of the senses: take the violin, undeniable in its materiality, as object, as producer of sensory phenomena.

The violin is also the medium for a good deal of what in my experience is the strongest evidence of a world beyond the material. By this I mean evidence of a paradoxical sort: physical evidence of the existence of the sacred. When I was young and full of the fresh discovery of great music, I went to a performance of the *B minor Mass* in the chapel of the University of Chicago. Beyond the haze of a twenty-year-old's egotism, wandering attention, and competitive preoccupations (I was with a group of similar young male culture vultures), I was overwhelmed by the presence of God. Now this is a terrible cliché, worthy of every distrust— Salieri says he hears the voice of God in the music of Mozart in Shaffer's *Amadeus,* and he makes us believe it. I use the phrase because that is just what I felt. At the mad, stupendous moment when the boiling contrapuntal energy of the chorus, *Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum* leads without a decent pause for breath (there being, as usual, no spoken liturgy) to the incredible outburst of the Sanctus, I felt the sacred, the Other, whatever, felt it beyond— I insist— cultural conditioning— felt it on my skin as well as in my heart, saw it in those vaulting stone walls.

Again, such events are proof of nothing. I don't claim a mystical experience, at least as I (from a distance) understand such things. But they open a roof in the mind. From Pythagoras to Helmholtz, and through a wilderness of psychologists, there are physical, psychological, mystical explanations for the effects, the properties of music, for musical talent and interest and susceptibility— I can certainly claim the last: when I was sixteen, I sobbed when I first heard the *Grosse Fuge,* a Budapest performance, I remember, from the public library. I sobbed again a few months ago at a live performance by the Mendelsohn Quartet, alternately embarrassed and consumed by my behavior. This sounds inevitably like boasting, even to me, but that first experience was private, as physical as it was anything else, and the second felt just as involuntary. This was not a matter of ego and status, personal or otherwise. Was/is it aestheticism? It is true enough that I have a tendency to burn with a hard, gemlike flame before Beauty under the right conditions.

An experience can be overwhelming, transforming, but that is no evidence of the existence of the divine. Ecstasy, orgasm, epileptic fits, drugs, many things can bring about a transcendent moment, and that moment can be traced to biochemistry. Is the experience of great art similarly reducible— and even if it is, if the whole process of reception by the senses and absorption by the brain can ultimately be mapped physiologically and neurologically, will that remove the Other from our understanding of that art?

It is probably inevitable that all the components of experience in the mind will one day be understood in terms of brain function. The brain itself will be seen as that which the artificial intelligence people already accept it is, an exquisitely complex, holistically organized computer. This does not in itself make the mystery of the relationship between the mind and the brain disappear, just as it does not itself explain the nature of the experience of consciousness. The *B-minor Mass* and the *Chaconne* can be, have been, completely analyzed in terms of harmony and counterpoint; their technical and structural felicities have been explained and celebrated without— for most of us, anyway— reducing the experience of the music to a tracing of harmony and counterpoint. The mind and the experience of the music in the mind project themselves as phenomena essentially irreducible to, or essentially apart from their material and structural components. For someone seeking the presence of the divine in that experience, this may be a necessary point, but it is hardly evidence of anything beyond the experience itself, however vivid and imbued with signals of transcendence.

What am I after, then, other than psychological and philosophical aid and comfort in the face of an intolerable material fate? Faith without a leap. Vulgar proof. Not "certum est, qua impossibile est," but certainty based on the irrefutable, the irreducible. This is an old search, especially among the dying, and many find answers that include eternity without being aware that they had made any leaps. Maybe they haven't. After all, most of the serious arguments about the divine do not place it somewhere else, some place that requires a leap.

A violin is a beautiful thing. Its fragile physical beauty, its multiple organic symmetries, grew out of an accumulation of insights, discoveries, and practical devotion to beautiful sound. Holding this thing, feeling its worn and burnished neck, fitting it into my neck, is to make a connection with that accumulated beauty. This is a physical experience; the connection, for Szigeti, for me, for anyone who makes it on whatever level, is rooted in physical sensation. What

does this say about the nearness of the Other conjured up in the sound of Szigeti's violin? One thing it says is that whatever I hear of that Other I hear through the senses— but the experience itself is more than sensual, obviously; in fact, the sensual information only makes sense because it is transformed into mental constructs, and those constructs have constructs. Even if the Bach *Chaconne* is, as Shaffer's Salieri says of Mozart, the voice of God, that voice arrives as sense data and mental constructs.

Am I building a Kantian Chinese puzzle, in an analytically sweaty attempt to screen out the detritus of the physical world? Will this make the truth appear, and death go away? Or am I looking for the transcendant metaphor that renders all metaphors transparent, a light switch to the dark heavens? Whereof one cannot speak, one must remain silent: Wittgenstein's verbal/perceptual trap is as absolute as Kant's. And as I grow weaker, fall deeper into the trap of the physical, the limits upon the word become ever more forbidding. Prayer, poetry, Eliot's raids on the inarticulate— none of it touches my inexorable falling apart. The realms are separate— except that Milton awoke every morning to dictate lines of complete verbal, musical eternality to his daughters. Mozart could hardly keep up with what he heard in his head as he raced to put the final three symphonies on paper. What compelled Bach to create his sonatas and partitas, the *Chaconne*— the North German fiddle tradition notwithstanding, there was no earthly audience, or executant, for such things until he created them. Whereof one cannot speak— but what is happening, who is speaking, when such things come forth?

What do I know? I know that the ancient wisdom is correct. I am not this body. Even if that "I" is utterly contingent upon the body and its brain, even if it flickers out of existence when they do— I am not this body. I know this even as I grieve over my weakening and increasingly helpless body. And whatever emotions, whatever adrenaline is aroused in the body by Bach, Mozart, Milton, their art speaks first to that "I."

It can also be said that Bach, Mozart, Milton, and perhaps all makers of the art we call transcendent recreate in that art the conditions of immortality. That is true even if there is no immortality. That art speaks to the "I" that is beyond the body— again, making no assumptions about actual physical or non-physical realities. In other words, there is a realm of sacred-like conditions between the "I" and that art. The communication is by way of emotion, adrenalin, intellect, associations, shared languages and cultural visions— all things of this world. Can this scrupulous, if amateur, phenomenology

encompass the whole experience of the Other? At the least, it presents the materialist challenge in its purest form.

The system of evidence is by its nature closed— evidence to the senses, of course, must come from the realm of the senses. But any inquiry after eternity must grant this and focus, not upon the material nature of the evidence, but upon the peculiarly metaphysical nature of the experience arising from that evidence. What is it that gives the taste of eternity— what are those conditions of eternity that one senses in the slow movement of the *Jupiter* symphony, or when Horatio bids the angels to sing Hamlet to his rest? Most obvious is the quality of transcendence itself: The sense that the conditions of mortality, struggle, decay, the weight of time itself, have suddenly been nullified, and supplanted by peace, serenity, a specific feeling— however vague the language to describe it— that something has been revealed that is beyond time.

It is not enough to say that this experience is subjective. It is, of course, intensely personal, even private, even when it happens collectively. But it is also a shared experience; in fact, it even has a claim to universality— *alle Menschen werden Bruder*— at least within a common cultural language. Is this the universal experience of beauty, natural as well as made by man? The specific notions of what is beautiful vary with that cultural context, but beauty itself has a place in every culture. Is there any relationship between the experience of beauty and— not the subjective sense of, but— the reality of eternity? Is that feeling of the presence of God in the *B-minor Mass* just part of the reaction of the soothed body and appeased mind in the presence of a certain level of sheer beauty?

Again, great art recreates the conditions of immortality— or great art inspires a response so complete that it transcends, or transforms, the aesthetic experience into something more complete, something which includes this sense of immortality. I know that having had this experience, whatever it means beyond my own head and heart, has expanded my sense of life and, I think, even my sense of death. I may be near death, and death may be nothing but turning to dust, but crushed as I may be by this slow dissolution, I can better face it because of that whiff of immortality, or of something greater than death. That proves nothing, of course, since any discovery of a richer meaning in life should help us face its end, unless we let that cessation overwhelm all meaning.

What, again, am I after? And again, more than the solace in the knowledge that the creative mind can somehow paint convincing pictures of immortality. I may not be this body, but the war of attrition

my body is waging against itself pulls me into itself relentlessly. That hint of the divine helps to pull in the other direction— but just where is that? Must I stop at the borders delineated by the senses? Must I remain mired in my own insistence on evidence so rigorous that it gives me direction as clear as the road in front of my house?

Let us try to be clear about motives. Motives can either drive or obstruct faith. More to the point, they can direct or obstruct vision, and my faith is indeed circumscribed by what I can see— and hear. My motives include the usual mix of the high and the low: curiosity fueled by the mystery of music's power; yearning for the deathless fueled by the death creeping through my limbs. I must be especially clear about the effects upon my inquiry of these physical conditions; to a large extent they shape the playing field of the game. My flesh is disintegrating, and I therefore seek a salvation as solid as flesh— more solid, to be sure, and just as undeniable to my battered senses. A simple-minded demand, but ancient, for all of that.

I repeat myself, but I seem to be able to proceed only by endlessly reframing the proposition. This proposition begins with the experience of something greater than our mortal, material circumstance in music. This experience is supposed to be evidence of the actual existence of a condition, a state of being, the Other, that is the objective source of this subjective and objective phenomenon. But I can't get there from here. This may be so because it is impossibe, given my narrow ground rules, or lack of faith. It is also true that I have trouble putting the question— and always question the question. So reframe: What can I assume, given that original experience? I assume the existence of a basic harmony, perhaps the basic harmony reflected in the fact that the universe plays by mathematical rules, is profoundly unchaotic, even in its chaos. Einstein was right— God does not play dice with the universe. And even dice play by the rules.

Music, of course, plays by the same rules, in the physical, Humboldt, Pythagorean sense, but can I follow Pythagoras to the music of the spheres, a harmony that embraces the cosmos in more than a physical sense? Not by leaps; I'm too earthbound, and deathbound. But again, again: I listened to the *Missa Solemnis* the other day with someone who didn't know it. Trying to convey in words something of its greatness, I ended up weeping and carrying on. Beethoven wrote in a letter somewhere that music is greater than religion and philosophy, that it is the wine of a higher existence— and he its Bacchus. Could the ecstasy he felt, and makes us feel, be connected in a concrete, physical way to that essential cosmic harmony, sounding sympathetic vibrations in corridors of the mind and body

that connect them briefly, but intimately, with the ground of being? More metaphor.

The urgency behind this kind of speculation, I must remember, comes from my narrow insistence on a materialist sense of the universe. A very material disease cries out for a material salvation— at least for a mind caught in the "irritable reaching after fact and reason." The irony here must be noted because it carries a lesson: Keats' negative capability is certainly an essential ingredient in both the making of art and the appreciation thereof. Whatever the sacred is, within or beyond art, it lies beyond the aforesaid ego-bound reaching after fact and reason; it requires vulnerability, openness, surrender to the spirit. But without denying the spirit, I must cling to a version of materialism based on the assumption that fact, reason, and spirit all pertain to the same universe. That is, there is but one reality, albeit a dynamic and multifaceted thing, the deep structure of which is yet dimly known, and even that knowledge, since the empirical confirmation of quantum physics and general relativity, does not conform to what our common sense tells us. If there is a kingdom of heaven, it exists somewhere in this reality and obeys its prevailing laws.

This is not to deny the distinction between the *res mensa* and the *res extensa:* the Beethoven in my mind inhabits a different space from that of the man born in Bonn. My desire, as the above crude attempt at a matter/energy explanation shows, is to connect a particular mental phenomenon, the transcendent experience, to the extended world, to place it in that reality. It remains possible, of course, that this experience, however vivid, however "other"-seeming, is only mental, a product of a certain pattern of synaptic stimulation and stored associations. But again, the objective quality of my experience, the irresistable impression that the *B-minor Mass* and the *Grosse Fuge* express something that comes from beyond the mind, is what drives this inquiry. Perhaps this is what passes for a leap of faith.

Thus I am faced with a possibly absurd, certainly overweening assertion: On a small planet orbiting an average yellow star perched on a spiral arm of an average galaxy containing millions of such stars, in a universe inhabited by billions of such galaxies, a man from Bonn, a small city on that planet, writes a piece of music, a fugal movement for string quartet. Not only does this music have the power to move a teenaged boy, among countless other inhabitants of that planet, to tears, but it draws this power from a connection that passes through the mind, the planet, the galaxy, to the fabric of the universe. Why such a claim— a good deal more than a leap of faith? If I remain true to the assumption that the sacred must obey the same laws as the pro-

fane, I must find a way to root the sacred, or the power of the transcendent, in this physical universe. The transcendent is, after all, the transcendent: the God made manifest in the ecstatic moments of the *B-minor Mass* is not the God of a mere planet, or a galaxy. The root must be as deep as possible, the branches all-encompassing.

Another scenario, then: space and time being inseparable, mass and energy being transmutable, the universe remains unutterably cold and vast, but it also becomes a single interrelated, permeable entity. Consider the space-time continuum as a four-dimensional membrane; consider quanta, the basic constituents of matter/energy within that continuum, to be pulses, units of time and rhythm as well as mass and energy. Could it be that the transcendent moment in music, in art, occurs when the language of the art finds alignment, concord, with a deep pattern of pulsation within that membrane? This would be more than a matter of sympathetic vibrations and resonant sounds— the cosmic tympanum here is four-, not three-dimensional; the rhythms are not in time, but of time. And this alignment occurs not in space but in the mind.

All music, and less directly, other art forms, affect the temporal sense of the mind perceiving them— great art stops time, we say— but this is a psychological phenomenon. The claim here is more radical: Great art creates in the mind the conditions for a connection to the basic patterns of time and space in the universe. It does this by embodying those patterns, by analogue, in a profound and unconscious mimicry. Thus the radical, or perhaps merely absurd point: the *res extensa* enters the *res mensa*; the external world unites directly with the internal. The design of the universe is based on a knot of space, time, energy, matter, gravity, and the human consciousness can penetrate that knot, lifted by human expression on the axis of space-time. When this happens— to resort to the most opaque of metaphors, the personification— the Other, the Eternal, steps into the room to take the hand of Beauty. A fugue becomes the voice of God; a chorus becomes, in the *"Sanctus"* of the *B-minor Mass*, the dance of God.

As a scenario, this fails on several counts, not the least of which is the abstract meaninglessness of the central images— imageless images: adding time to the three dimensions of space makes for a promising handle for manipulating the cosmos, but I cannot visualize the results. Not knowing what I am talking about does not necessarily render the exercise useless, however. If the point remains to explain how a connection between the mind and the eternal can be made, a connection not mediated by consciousness, and not the prod-

uct of interior psychology or wisdom, then all possible scenarios have to deal with the nature of the external. That nature is, at the very least, a quantum mechanical, relativistic nature.

Even if this connection cannot be made, really is absurd, there is a more vital personal point. What if the transcendent experience is, in fact, a contact with, or a glimpse of the basic pattern of the universe? Is this enough? Is it enough, that is, to define the sacred as contact, however intimate, with the harmonious unity of the whole of space-time? Is the universe as a resonant, sounding bell God enough for anyone, let alone for a debilitated, dying seeker after salvation?

A half hour before he died, while listening to a recording of Beethoven's *F-minor Quartet*, Dinu Lipatti turned to his wife and said, "You see, it is not enough to be a great composer. To write music like that you must be the chosen instrument of God." He knew whereof he spoke, being himself such a chosen instrument as an interpreter and being also a person of deep spirituality facing his own end. He made the same distinction I struggle with above: there is music, including great music— and then there is music in which one hears the voice of God. But for Lipatti there was a God and a harmonious, personal spiritual coherence connecting him to that God. All I can manage is a quantum-based, relativistic sounding bell, a cold harmony indeed. At the end of Willa Cather's "Paul's Case," the young man throws himself in front of a train and drops back into "the immense design of things." I certainly believe in the immense design, but why should that afford me any more salvation than it did Paul?

The reason may be that my experience of the transcendent was, in fact, personal. Like Lipatti, and so many others, I have felt the presence of God in Beethoven, in Bach, as an overwhelmingly personal, emotional event— all-encompassing, universal, Other, but first and most directly, a deeply human exerience. If it weren't, I would not be driven to pursue the kingdom of heaven by way of the solo violin of Bach. No abstract connection between a particular experience and the cosmic pattern, however satisfying intellectually, or amenable to sweeping metaphors, would produce this effect. Furtwangler, that most metaphysical of interpreters, considered musicians to be messengers of love. Again, this is Beethoven's message— and Schiller's, but made palpable, both intimate and transcendent, in the music: *Alle Menschen werden Bruder/Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt*. The words speak of becoming, evolution, the future, but the music is the incarnation, in the present, of that love, that universal kiss.

Is it love that I feel emanating from, say, the D-major chorale that appears as an island of serenity in the midst of the great *Chaconne*? It

is certainly a deep, affirming emotion that dissolves, at least momentarily, feelings of isolation and replaces them with a profound, if indefinable connectedness. This is not an abstract effect; it is as concrete and irresistable as the experience of transcendence from which it cannot be separated. God is love, the mighty struggle in love of the *Grosse Fuge*, the wrenching, sorrowing love as we sit down in tears at the end of the *St. Matthew Passion*, the titanic grandeur of love ablaze at the end of Bruckner's *Eighth Symphony*.

The experience of this love has enriched my life immeasurably and enriches my dying. But I do not understand it, and I cannot believe without understanding. I may not rage against the dying of my light, but neither will there be a peace which passeth understanding, at least none distinguishable from exhausted resignation. The only leap of faith of which I am capable is that the mind, having once tasted that divine love, must pursue it from Szigeti's bow to the end of the universe.

II. Benedictus

Recently I listened several times, with friends, to the *Missa Solemnis*, specifically to one performance. It is a recording, in atrocious sound, of a musical event of transfiguring power: Toscanini leading, in 1935, the New York Philharmonic, a chorus, and a quartet who live fully up to their names and their art, Rethberg, Telva, Martinelli, and— most particularly, with a sovereign richness that melts the sonic miasma of the AM broadcast— Ezio Pinza. I dwell upon one time-locked (rescued only in this fog-bound memento) realization of a timeless work because the experience reflects part of my dilemma.

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This is a statement which for me has only metaphoric, and heavily provisional, validity. The human race is littered with people who come in the name of some Lord or another in order to trample rather than share blessings— yes, an objection that for all its truth is at least as big a cliché as the doctrines it opposes.

Still, there is no vision of the Lord or a Lord-derived blessedness that is compelling to me. But when the high, serene solo violin descends to sing the infinitely consoling melody of Beethoven's "Benedictus," when it is joined by those enchanting, and surely enchanted, voices, there is blessedness. Not just beauty, not just some perfect artistic representation of a spiritual condition, not just an emotional inspiration, but blessedness itself. This is a problematic claim about an experience steeped in subjectivity and all sorts of cultural conditioning, but this whole enterprise rests on a faith in a personal phenomenology. I must constantly remind myself that my pursuit of something beyond the increasingly miserable confines of this body is based on this assumption of the clarity and validity of my struggle to understand my own experience— a narrow assumption indeed.

Granting this, and returning to that experience: certain music, under certain conditions, produces in the receptive mind a sensation of deep, complete harmony. It is complete in the sense that in its essence it transcends the personal. It is not limited to a feeling of individual well-being; its claims are all-encompassing. That is, as I sit here trapped, burdened by loss, self-pity, relentlessly encroaching helplessness, nothing is likely to fill me with a sense of well-being. When that violin soars and those voices weave and meld, it is not personal well-being that fills me; it is much more. It is an experience which lifts me beyond that sphere of personal misery into a connection with— what? Unless it is nothing more than a deceptive, if

benign, psychological phenomenon, with whatever constitutes the essential harmony of existence— all existence: there is no limit to the claim.

And with Beethoven's hymn of blessing the tears come. Not the tears of misery or self-pity, not in any direct sense tears of comfort or consolation, although they are certainly there: they are rather the tears from a heart filled with the experience of blessedness— blessedness despite my lack of knowledge or faith as to the source of the blessing. Is this the right word? For the "Benedictus," it surely is. The music expresses the state of blessedness as persuasively as words ever could. At the very least there is the palpable experience of transcendent emotional and spiritual power, that window to the Other, or the light from the Other. Whatever else this is, it is a benediction for that reason alone— the most concrete evidence, for me, of the possibility of a deep harmony transforming and enriching the meaning of materialism, the material universe itself.

"Speak to Goethe about me," said Beethoven to Bettina von Arnim in 1810. "Tell him to hear my symphonies and he will say that I am right in saying that music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend." (Thayer I, p. 497)

For him, "Music is the electrical soil in which the mind thinks, lives, feels." My friend Joe Schaaf, who has dared to lead teenaged musicians through the perils and to the triumphs of the *Grosse Fuge* and *Opus 131*, and who therefore has a deeper understanding than most of the stakes involved, tells me that the late Malcolm Frager carried that first passage folded up in his wallet. For him, for Joe, for Lipatti, for Beethoven, for all of us of great or humble gifts who find it a necessity, music has always been more than music.

It comes laden inescapably with power, with undisclosed meaning. It is a path to knowledge— it *is* knowledge— but what kind of knowledge? Beethoven's electrical metaphor is suggestive, even granting that in those pre-Maxwell days electricity was chiefly a linear energy, as in lightning and Volta's jerking froglegs. Thinking, living, feeling— there is no doubt that music, music, that is, which commands attention, does so by suffusing all the planes of life. The blessedness conjured up by Beethoven manifests itself as a flow of energy which unites thinking and feeling in a perfect consciousness of— what?— blessedness.

Words fail me yet again, but I can define elements of my puzzle. The most insistent have to do with the place of the emotions, and people, including musicians, in my vague and heavily rationalized

scheme. For its creators, for Beethoven and Mozart, and for other well-equipped score-readers, I suppose music in the mind and on the page is the equivalent, or superior, to the actual performance. Joe Schaaf is probably right in saying that Beethoven would never have penned the most daring, and sublime, parts of the *Missa* if he could actually have heard them performed. Again, if the cosmos is a sounding bell, it must be through a harmony of inner and outer space— or if this transforms physics into yet another metaphysics, the music must somehow bring inner space into alignment with the deepest patterns of outer space.

But for me, and most others, it is not the score, the "Miserere" on the page, but Pinza's wrenching cry for mercy in the sounding in the ear that reaches the heart. It is the human intelligence and expressiveness of Szigeti's playing that brings the *Chaconne* to life. And whatever blessedness is, it is a very human experience; Beethoven's lines of melody and counterpoint become perfect peace and consolation through the inspired interplay of human voices. This does not remove the focus from inner space. However vital the acoustical experience, the essential spiritual alchemy is interior. It does, however, mean that any focus limited to the relationship between music, the individual, and the Other is inadequate.

The experience of transendence, the sense that God has entered the proceedings in the *B-minor Mass*, is intensely individual. Like, I suppose, a mystical experience, it is overwhelming in its moment; it leaves no room for other emotional connections. However, even transcendent music is human in its creation, in its realization, and in its impact. The emotions that precede and arise from the most intense experience share too many qualities with all the most exalted feelings of collective humanity— again, *alle Menschen werden Bruder*— to be considered different. Blessedness is rooted not only in the connection with the origin of the blessing, but in the bonds of humanity. As one now utterly dependent upon the hard work and altruism of others, and lucky and grateful in receiving it, I know I am blessed by the capacity of our often murderous race for brother/sisterhood.

I seek transcendence, then, as a way of transforming for myself the meaning of my otherwise miserably material death. I must recognize, however, that the core of that experience is just as human as my approaching death.

But what is the relationship between the experience of transcendence and this human connection? Even granting that most aspects of the former are subsumed in the latter, and, yet again admitting that the former may be entirely explicable in psychological terms, the

essential impact of the Other is the vertical, not the horizontal connection. Schiller's words proclaim that all men will become brothers, but Beethoven's music makes an even greater claim, upward, outward, inward. Beethoven's assertion of the power of music as a vehicle of knowledge, a knowledge beyond human knowing, is confirmed in the actual experience of his music. It may be that music is also a vital pathway to brotherhood, but that is a secondary experience in the presence of transcendental art, derived, perhaps, from the realization that the art is created by a human being for human beings. The primary experience, however, is of that power, harmony, design beyond— but surely encompassing— the human.

The old paradox rears its head again: the senses, fallible, inseparable from the physical and psychological realms, are the medium of the infallible, the transcendent. I am in the throes of a disease which leads me through an odd mimicry of the ancient ascetic path, as I lose my ability to engage in the world of the senses. Without going through the discipline and mental preparation required for real self-command, I am drawn inexorably into a state of enforced denial of the senses— not their elimination, but the inability to engage with any freedom in their world. This leads to regular bouts of frustration and self-pity, but it also leads to a perspective on the senses, a focus not unlike the ascetic's concentrated gaze, the concentration that can arise from disengagement from much of what once mattered in life.

This perspective one gains from this relative disentanglement, not only from the senses and their seductions, but also from much of the ambition and hope for ego aggrandisement— or even simple fulfillment— that usually accompany full possession of one's faculties. Perhaps with the proper discipline and focus, this would lead to resolving clarity, but for me it only deepens the paradox. The art of Beethoven, and of, say, Rethberg, Martinelli, Telva, Pinza, and Toscanini recreating his art, is universal, cosmic in its reach, precisely because it is particular. The blessedness emanating from that weave of voices is fully human, speaking directly to my humanity.

But what does this nest of metaphors mean? In my debilitated, and semi-detached, state, I feel ever more clearly that this feeling of blessedness is a communication specific to human consciousness and emotions. Whatever constitutes the positive human identity, it is fully involved in this communication. How does this particularity mesh with the other essential ingredient of this communication, the experience of that which transcends the human, Beethoven's "higher world of knowledge"? Since (again) I believe that this phenomenon is not to be explained away by psychology or aesthetics, the implica-

tion is that there must be a way of connecting the human experience to the transcendent harmonies that are presumably the source of that touch of the Other. There must be a link between the human heart and the deepest mathematics. That is, there must be a genuine, non-metaphorical link, whether through perception or physics, or both.

Perception and physics do, after all, come together in sound, in the concordance between musical intervals, overtones, and Pythagorean ratios. And friend Tom Tyrrell has pointed out another, even more dramatic correspondence that began with the Greeks' belief in the harmony of numbers and nature and was confirmed in modern chaos theory. The numerical ratio derived from the dimensions of the golden rectangle turns out to be the essential resolving fraction in the Fibonacci series, the additive sequence of numbers that governs so many growth patterns in plants. This demonstration of the sovereignty of ratios and proportion is yet another affirmation that there is a design to the universe. Despite the Second Law of Thermodynamics— and the entropic dissipation of order itself proceeds by the laws of chance— catastrophe and chaos always resolve themselves into ordered patterns.

In one sense— again— this cosmic design may or may not be a source of personal meaning to life and death. That my own dissipation, the death of my motor neurons, proceeds in accordance with physical laws is not consoling, is not in itself meaningful except in the bleakest existential perspective. There are perspectives which encompass and perhaps surpass this one, surely, the smile of the Buddha, Krishna's advice to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. But however thoroughly I accept the wisdom of clear-eyed detachment, of divorcing oneself from the fruits of one's actions, I lack the discipline to enter into the necessary state of mind for that kind of acceptance. Therefore, reverting again to the search for intellectual understanding, I look for a link between individual consciousness and universal design that will reveal the meaning I seek.

Music, not all music, but that rare art which realizes the highest ambition, an ambition to illuminate the full range of the human spirit, must be one place to look for that connection. The mathematical concordance between the golden rectangle and growth patterns of plant limbs is suggestive, because human perception of harmony is an essential element. Can it be that human creativity, perfectly realized in, for instance, Beethoven's expression of the condition of blessedness, becomes just such a nexus of human and cosmic— revealed to us as mathematical— harmony? That the completeness of the emotional expression derives from some deep concordance with trans-

human design? If through the music the receptive consciousness is aligned somehow with the fundamental design that brings all order out of chaos, would this not be, in some profound, non-metaphorical way, blessedness? Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord: if union with the Lord means unity with that which is the source of harmony in all human consciousness— all men indeed become brothers via this path— is this not, for the moment of that contact, blessedness?

Once again I have wandered into a maze of vague verbal constructions in search of something clear and concrete, a physical/numerical path to salvation. The experience of the transcendent includes an awareness of one's humanity as well as of the design beyond humanity, but the essence of the phenomenon is the connection between the two. It may be that music like the *Missa Solemnis* and the *B-minor Mass* interacts in the responsive mind to close a circuit, a circuit which runs through all the deep patterns that constitute the predeliction for order over chaos in the universe. A circuit composed of what? Energy? If so, it must be a different kind, a flow which dissolves or transcends the distinctions between the inner and outer worlds, between time and space, between consciousness and consciousness.

In a reality delineated by the quantum and by relativity, time and space are folded within each other, but where does the human mind fit into this scheme? It must have something to do with the nature of that cosmic urge toward order, because it is in the act of perception, in the experience of the music, that the connection occurs, the circuit is closed. In a certain sense, the brain is hard-wired for order, just as is the universe. This is not so much an argument for circularity— if you are designed to order what you see in order to comprehend it, you will see order— as it is further confirmation of the ubiquity of order itself. Like flowers, sounds, and black holes, the mind moves by the numbers. But neither is this a scenario for determinism. The relationships between order and chaos, chance and design, fate and the will, are all too dynamic for such a reduction.

Mathematics is not the source of the harmony, but it is its most unmistakable tracery, and perhaps it holds essential clues to its nature. I am in no position to penetrate them in any case, but it is still possible to connect the harmony of numbers, however vaguely and metaphorically, to the deep concordance of mind, heart, cosmos that seems to occur in the experience of the transcendent in music. The proportions which reveal themselves in the perception of the golden rectangle, musical harmonies, myriad forms of beauty, are expres-

sions of this numerical harmony, certainly, but facing this deeper question, they are only surface clues. It is beneath this aesthetic response— however necessary it may be as a precondition— that the mystery lies. The circuit is completed. Somehow both human and divine, the blessing flows.

Sarat Kumar Mukhopadhyay

Three poems from STRESS SERIES

translated from the Bengali by
Sarat Kumar Mukhopadhyay and Robert McNamara

IN THE AIR

There's a smell of disinfectant in the air. Shankar Prasad, I hope you're alive. The monsoon was three weeks late this year, hence the drought. If it stays late, there will be floods. Not a vehicle moving on time.

The breast of the old earth is green— glutted with fertilizers, hence invigorated. Right now it is under cosmetic treatment with insecticides and germicides. The debates haven't started yet as to who'll get what share of the crop.

So the killings are temporarily suspended. Blood banks are flooded with blood. Neither the weak nor the strong has peace of mind.

Still the air smells of disinfectant. How are you, Shankar Prasad?

HISTORY

Thirty-three years have passed, Shankar Prasad, and we've gotten neither the smell of whitewash nor the smell of gunpowder. You know our school friends Shibu and Raghunath died of disease one after the other. Their children have been married off, and have children beyond number. One can't walk on the sidewalks these days.

When I sit by candlelight, tears come. The glory of history; the memory of empty tramcars. A smell of *panchforan* reminds me of my mother. A huge kitchen; a huge courtyard.

Some of the freedom fighters are still alive— hence *Bankimchandra* on the lips of the state insurance workers' demonstration. Bomb in hand— *Banday Mataram*; bullet in the chest— *Banday Mataram.* Shankar Prasad, you tell them to become monuments. We are all aging. We are growing in number. There is a lot to be done. Shouldn't we stop fooling and get down to work?

THE DOOR OF THE PALACE

The old palace was being demolished, Shankar Prasad. I wanted to get some furniture. A piece of carpet redder than blood, a pair of English playing cards hidden in the library wardrobe, the liquid eyes of a tiger guarding his skin.

I didn't succeed. Everything valuable the landlords had was already taken. Only the fear-packed attic was left, and the niche on the wall meant for dolls (out of the children's reach.) And a smell of crime covered in dust.

The old palace was being demolished. A huge door with two leaves was lying on the floor, and a man with his hat on was jumping on it. Pure Burmese teak, he said, you couldn't buy it even for a *lakh* of ruppees.

I knew that with the wood of that one door I could build all the furniture for my house. Small things for small people, you know. But then I thought, it's lying flat now. And if it stood up suddenly? I wouldn't dare go near it. Such a big door, it could never stand up again. Don't you think so, Shankar Prasad?

Gordon Lish

THE FOREIGNER AS APPRENTICE

You do not believe me. Why won't you believe me? Whose vengeance is it that keeps cursing me for my making an evermore ghastly investment in what's to be made over to me from my more and more telling all? I am neither liked nor believed— or did I just lay down a plank of past-participializing wrong-way-wise from left to right? No matter, Gordo's busted— left behind by wife and child, naught remainething for him to do for himself but to rattle around in search of gash and/or gash and romance. And so it was that I was able to form a yeasty introduction to a woman who said that she was Susan.

Or had said Susanne.

No matter— the matter was settled with dispatch— the routine considerations ensuing at all modest speed— a brief tea at a tearoom excessively dainty enough, a not unmodulated vehemence of enthusiasms passing from one to the other by telephone— and, with charming promptitude, the whole of it, concluded— to wit, that Susan or Susanne would come with herself to my place to a small supper that I would serve to her, and, if all appeared to go acceptably, not remove herself therefrom until an hour in the morning.

And so it was that I was, on a certain afternoon, making my way along the avenue to first fetch and then carry home with me a kind of stylish bread in support of my arrangements to encourage this outcome. Well, I was weeping as I went. I do often do this— weep some— chiefly— no, entirely— when I am out-of-doors and mainly in motion, as of course one is when one walks. I mean to say to you that I seem to myself to be weeping— but whether this effect results from a feeling that is unbeknownst to me seizing me or from eye tissue punished by the cruel vapors of our streets, how am I to know?

Tears occur in me.

Are an occurrence in me.

Were then occurring in me as I went making my way along the avenue for the bread— and would doubtless occur in me, be a homeward reoccurrence in me, would presently be recurring in me as I went coursing back up the avenue for home and for the woman Susan— or would it be for Susanne?

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But I was tearless when taking the loaf that I wanted from the basket where all the loaves, in invitation, were tipped all of the way up on end.

Tearless, too, when preparing myself to turn to give money to the young thing at the cash register.

Tearless, three, when I heard "Mr. Lish is it?"

I said to no face that I could see: "Sorry?"

But then there was a face, all right, and from it there issued a revision: "You're Mr. Lish, are you not?"

I had had to move the bread from one hand to the other to use my customarily favored hand to be ready with the money— and so the bread seemed to me, given the locus of the hand that held it and the less grace that hand was able to do this task with— to be rudely prodding the space that was now assembling itself between my accuser and myself.

"Please"— it was the voice again— "it's been years. But you must, you must, you must be Mr. Lish."

It was a woman.

Uninteresting eyes, sadly too interesting eye-glasses, spectacles established pugnaciously forward on a nose never meant to sustain even a light sneeze.

I wiped at my eyes.

I had the money in the hand that did it.

It did no good.

I used my knuckles to wipe at the cloudier eye harder. "I'm very sorry," I said. "You seem to know me," I said. "It's the snow," I said. "I'm just on an errand," I said. "This bread," I said, now unbearably conscious of my bearing the ficelle as if about to poke at her chest with it.

"Yes," she said. "Snow is so disconcerting, isn't it?" she said. "It's lovely when it first falls— but now look at it— just slush and dirt and wretchedness, wretchedness," she said.

"Yes," I said. "One's shoes," I said. "They get to look so awful," I said.

"Wear boots," she said. "I wear boots," she said.

"Of course," I said, and got the bread out from between us even though I did not want to take it into the hand that held the money. "Let me just pay for this," I said.

"Oh, but you don't remember me," the woman said.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Sometimes the snow," I said.

"I'm Harris Drewell's mother," the woman said.

"Yes," I said. "You are Harris Drewell's mother," I said.

"Harris Drewell," the woman said, and I could see that what she had in her arms were several loaves of a different style of bread. "A classmate of your boy's at school."

"Well, of course," I said, and the thought rushed through me that she had taken for herself a kind of bread that might better have worked my will with Susan.

Or with Susanne.

"Mr. Lish," the woman said, "I just want to say for Mr. Drewell and myself that we are all of us very sorry for your unhappiness. And for Harris, too, you understand— Harris would offer his sympathies too, you understand."

"Oh, well," I said, "this snow, you know. Can you countenance it? Can you ever?" I said, and struggled to swing myself around a little so as to, by so doing, give evidence to all concerned that the girl at the cash register could not, for one more instant, be kept waiting for her to have payment.

"He's gone with the Foreign Service, you know. It's just an internship, of course. He's just an intern, of course. But we're all of us of course very proud of him."

"As am I," I said, and gave to the girl the money and got back from her the coins that were coming to me and then made— my vision awash with confusion, confusion, avalanche, devastation— for the door.

"Oh, they'll be back, Mr. Lish— have no fear of it, have none!" I heard the woman call to me, but thought, once I had gotten myself back onto the sidewalk and again onto my course, thought no, no, I had imagined it, I must have just imagined it, that what she had instead said was, "Wear boots, you silly, for pity's sake— boots!"

It was a block or so onward that I could recall my sometimes seeing this person when I had escorted my child to school and had stood about with the fathers and mothers and more often nannies and chauffeurs in such hopeful assembly.

"My God, Harris Drewell's mother!" I called out to myself as I went.

For hadn't I once begged the gods for them to please give me Harris Drewell's mother please for me to please fuck?

I am telling you.

This is the truth that I am telling you.

Just as I am telling that I was making up my mind not for me to get out my shoe box and clean off my shoes, that I was making up my mind, had, had, just as I was turning off the avenue to go the rest of the distance for the corner and home, made up my mind not ever again for me to clean off my shoes for this Susan or for this Susanne or for anyone, but instead to get her fair share of the bread into her and of everything else spread out for her into her— food, the food!— as fast as it all could be decently gotten into her and then to get rid of her and then of— please God, please God!— of everybody else.

So there's the proof for you.

Don't you see it's only a fool who tells a story that is true?

Even the names, by Christ— the very names!— come out looking— nay, crying their equivocations aloud— like lies.

Lindsay Hill

WADERS

At the dock of hours a group of three has tightly lashed a boat
It is one of the many mysteries we are made of that they will wade
like a hand that's closed or a wire that brings a voice
The steps themselves are signals long ago
How the sizes and the weights are upside down
It is like a history balanced on a tongue
It is mysteries into mysteries how they move
On the steady shouldered earth in the quiet cold

Ron Silliman

from UNDER

for Krishna Evans

Confused, ants huddle about the box of chocolates for warmth. In an open cauldron (my skull), syntax simmers. Query this.

This town, because imagined, is both small and infinite. Jade tree wilted by the freeze. Restaurant uses old washing machine to poach its fish, while the dryer spins lettuce. One of us is real, says the mirror, but which?

Vast grid of pores needs a shave. When in the course of cumin events.

As I approach the house, a dog behind its door starts to bark. Because of resemblance, the citizens call the clock atop the factory the Polish moon. A chair is an argument about the nature of form.

Garbagemen at dawn
spill excess on the lawn. I make a song of it and then I make a fist. Blisters burst, becoming flowers. This trail of crumbs we call a line. The time is 7:26.

Old man does a box step with the memory of his wife. When children talk of fathers, I simply grow quiet. The lone lamp flickers in the shadowy room, being that it's a TV set.

Confused, artists huddle around the grants program for warmth. When fathers talk of children, I simply grow quiet.

Patios of fortune: the sun rises through the trumpetflower vines. Head and arms burrow their way through the t-shirt. Pretend to ignore refrigerator's song.

Morning staggers you. The rain is unexpected. The skin of the banana so thick you can barely burst it open. A jar of seeds, possibly edible. The

sound of small aircraft makes you hum.

Streetlamps penetrate shade. House, vulnerable through its windows. Stack of old egg cartons. Machine of the ankle gone to rust. Streetlight impersonates shape.

Bodies decomposing in a small mountain lake -- the dream is more real than I care to imagine -- but my backpack turns into a balloon pulling me up and free of these brambles, these tugging vines.

Amateur hour at the White House. We walk through a fog not of moisture, but of talcum powder, coughing and choking, blinded, led only by the smell of blood. Sand flies settle in the wound.

Birds shun the oleander. Elongated skull (Garrick Utley) grins out of the small box, sound off. The way laces wrap the shoe to the foot.

The hand is a machine for grabbing hold, the ground a vehicle for shadow. Here we organize each tribe around a football team, a baseball franchise. We make lists -- parrots learn to recite them.

View of man urinating, towering over porcelain bowl of water.

Robert Duncan, alive in my dreams! Decades of memory versus memory of decades, strung together first this way, then that. I'm walking along narrow, sloping streets (many citizens are leading burros) until I arrive at City Lights. An explosion frozen in green is served with butter. What time is it in Iraq?

The TV shows (over and over) young men loading jets, jets taking off, jets landing (unedited US pool coverage), the President at his desk hallucinating a fantasy of force and justice, or a map over which come the voices of CNN reporters in a hotel room without lights or water. It's dyin' time.

Green sky at night: bombers' delight. At the office, people stop to whisper the words "Tel Aviv." In the car, I barely remember the mechanics of driving. On the radio, some station still plays music. A crow on the White House lawn innocent of history.

Trucks a lot. Zubin Mehta inspects a crater. Acoustics of the toilet two rooms away.

Nights of anxious sleep.

A plastic bucket blows around the yard in a strong wind. As my sun sets, day begins in Australia. "Let's revisit that target-rich environment," the general says. The reporter's name is Wolf Blitzer. Bright pink, the Everready bunny beats its drum through my dream.

Stars crowd the morning sky, then dissolve in the coming light. A sea of faces, eyes, cheeks, lips parades past, men pushing strollers, women holding banners, drums and tambourines, people stare out of windows looking far into the distance, the line never ends but bends and turns, the serpent of peace weaves through the City.

The unbearable whiteness of being. In the dream, I snap the pea pod open to release a small person (waking, I recognize it as a body bag). With the first dose, the vet renders the cat unconscious and, with the second, it dies.

With the first blast, the boy becomes a vet. Some scars never heal. The man in the cape loudly enters the reading, accompanied by three aging lady Theosophists. Into each white space, listen to the count of three beats. Some cars never feel right to the driver.

A rose in a box, ready for planting. Long loaf of bread with its tip severed sits atop the cutting board. A wire basket in which to drain dishes -- its fingers hold cups, glasses aloft.

In the dream, I've rented a furnished room in San Francisco and can see the history of each site, each building, simply by staring. The man with my grandfather's build stares pensively from the mirror. Butter steams up from these spears of asparagus. The sun returns, not having learned its lesson.

The spectacle of thousands forming one flag (halftime at the Super Bowl) brings a smile to the fuhrer's face. Now a message from George and Bar,

her dress television red. Video taken from the very nose of the missile blanks out before we see the astonished whites of the bunker crew's eyes. On the wall of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, what you do not see are the names of one million-plus Vietnamese.

A gull, wings extended, remains motionless as the fog rushes by, effortless flight. A chair on which to store only unread magazines (hear that as a verb: unread magazines). In the dark dogs do bark.

The morning of the logicians. Still life with banana and wrist watch.

The sun illumines the bottom of these small clouds as it sets. In a hotel, listening to the shower in other suites. Across is a highrise that leaves its lights on all night, entire floors trashed out, unrented.

An entire day without setting foot on the ground floor, let alone the ground. Watch for the right pipe.

Dieter Weslowski

DER DUNKELHEIT

is where
I put my nose
to sniff at
the light coming
through the bottom
of the door.

SOMETIMES,
WHEN I THINK OF ALL

the words
out there,
there meaning
that place
where letters
form cliques
& cabals,
it's enough to make
me want to
abandon my hand,
for good.

Michelle Fredette

WHAT JACK DOES

What Jack does is he slips out of town. He walks out of the cool dank of the aquarium with its continuous gurgle and its fluorescent fish suspended silent and gawking in their tanks, into the blinding white Florida heat. He doesn't pause to let his eyes adjust, he walks. Past a pink bank and a lavender post office, a lime-green bar, and some t-shirt shops, until he comes to Rent-a-Pigg, where he takes out his American Express Gold Card and rents a dented 1975 Catalina convertible.

"This is a car to be reckoned with," says Joe Pigg, slapping a hand-shaped spatter of sweat onto the hood.

Jack points the car south on Route One, the mid-morning sun glancing blows like karate chops off the vast light blue of the car's hood. He hasn't driven a car this big in years but it feels good—powerful and expansive. He relaxes into the drive, drapes his right arm across the back of the passenger seat, steering lightly with his left hand. Jack is running on instinct. He cannot make a decision. A decision wants thought and Jack can't think. Because inside the aquarium, he and his wife Linda stood too long watching a pathetic old manatee lumber about its tank. The scar of an old gash halved its blunt head like quilting, giving it an expression of good-natured confusion, like someone willing to laugh at his own expense. According to a sign, it had been injured by the propeller of a motorboat, a common fate for manatees. Jack was taken with the giant manatee, so huge and sweet and deformed. It had the familiarity of an old friend, although he'd never seen a live manatee before that he could remember. He watched as it slowly circled the periphery of the tank, ransacking his memory for the possible shred of a Discovery Channel documentary. Then Linda spoke.

"Oh Hal," she said, her lips oddly pursed, "it's so sad looking." And a hysteria rose up so instantly in Jack, he mistook it for humor. He thought for just one second that he and Linda were sharing a joke. But he didn't know anyone named Hal, and he couldn't read the look on Linda's face, which was still turned toward the manatee.

"Yes," Jack said. He stood for a moment as if waiting for a cue, then wandered away. He paused to look into a shallow open pool where a swarm of nurse sharks bumped quickly up and down the length of the tank, their broad, blunt noses snorting sideways along

its rocky edge, until the momentum of the other sharks pulled them back down into the swim. They were right there, below him. Briefly, Jack dropped his hand into the tank, allowing his fingertips to graze over the cool, rough snout of a passing shark. It wasn't until the whole group of sharks converged in one roiling mass at that point—the point where his hand had entered the tank just a moment before—that Jack, with curiosity but no real alarm, perceived himself to be in danger. He drifted past the restroom door, his hands in his pockets, until here he was, still drifting but faster now, past Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Florida City.

"Left a wife and kid in Baltimore, Jack!" he sings at the top of his voice, the wind running its fingers through his gray hair, the ocean glinting at his left, beckoning. Pools of sweat form behind his knees and in the small of his back.

He and Linda have been married twenty-four years, always with the tacit understanding that Jack loves Linda more. That he adores her, while her love for him is offhand, almost a whim. Jack thinks of Linda at his desk in the office for minutes at a time, and is disappointed, more often than not, when the garage door goes up and the spot where her red Camry belongs is unoccupied. Jack is in love with Linda, and Linda can never be in love with anyone. "It's just not in my nature," she said repeatedly, years ago before the subject was permanently dropped. Jack never agreed. He was made uneasy, sometimes petulant, by her certainty and the way her words made being in love sound like a bad fashion decision: something she wouldn't be caught dead in. He was too superstitious not to see her attitude as an open challenge to God, or fate or something else that Jack only indirectly believes in. Under the right circumstances, he has always thought, Linda too would fall. Greedily, Jack has indulged himself in life with Linda despite his glum sense that by being married to him, Linda was performing a sort of beneficent service, an act of charity that could grow tiresome or be withdrawn at any time.

It has always seemed worth it because Linda is all Jack's ever wanted, yet here he is in this sky-blue behemoth, feeling exploded and calm, working his way through the coastal towns, always careful to stay on the road South, as though any move north will draw him eventually, inevitably back to Chicago and her. He concentrates on Florida: the heat, the flowering shrubs and towering palm trees, the slick, golden people. Florida is unreal. He keeps his thoughts on the driving, watches the reflection of the car and himself at the wheel slide by shop windows. He doesn't think. He becomes a moment and then another moment. He plows through Key Largo and

Tavernier, past hotels and RV parks, Tiki bars and scuba shops. Signs are everywhere: "Snorkel trips, 3 miles," "Swim with the Dolphins—five miles on left." They spur him on. It is not until the middle of Seven-Mile-Bridge, the sun setting directly ahead, the water reaching pinkly out in all directions, and only a narrow ribbon of concrete stretching out like a rubberband to support his once substantial-seeming Catalina, that Jack realizes he is going to come to an end. Sooner or later the highway is going to have to stop. He becomes anxious. Instinctively, he eases up on the gas, terrified he will be boomeranged around the streets of Key West back in the direction from which he's come. In that case, he cannot envision being able to stop before Chicago.

Jack leans forward in his seat and tugs his shirt from his sweaty back. Cars zoom by on his left, their drivers slinging looks like curses over their shoulders. Jack rubs his palms across the top of his khaki shorts, wrestles the impulse to bash through the concrete wall of the bridge and into the water below. The Catalina could do it, he's certain, and it would sink so heavily, so satisfactorily. When he sees the first sliver of land up ahead, he settles back into his seat and sighs, accelerates lightly.

Having made it over the bridge, he wants to stop, but is afraid. He's built up momentum, driving. It's given him something to do. The setting sun is soft and quiet and Jack can't see how it has any resemblance to the violence of the day's heat. He is hungry and tired and with the fatigue he senses something else slinking in like a disease, something shameful and incurable. He's unable to make a plan, but a plan is what he needs. A plan is what he always counted on when he thought he could not count on Linda, when he thought it was possible she would simply not come home one day after bridge or work or her acting class. He planned to sell the house, to be stoic, to take up photography. The last twenty-four years have consisted of anticipating this very moment, but he never saw it coming. They had danced the night before in the hotel lounge, and after too much sangria, they had fallen asleep in their clothes, curled together on top of the bed covers. They were on vacation, Jack was happy. He doesn't think of this now though, he concentrates instead on the stiffness in his back and legs, his need to pee.

The giant red letters of a Winn Dixie loom up in the distance. A Winn Dixie! Another sign welcomes him to Big Pine Key, the second largest of the Keys, home of the tiny Key Deer. "Please Drive Deerfensively," the sign asks. Jack pulls the Catalina into the grocery store lot and shuts off the engine.

Several days later Jack is still on Big Pine Key. He has installed himself in the guest house of a retired army colonel, John Raymond, referred to him by the woman running the Sea Spray Motel. The guest house is a miniature of Raymond Manor, including six wooden columns out front so thick they nearly obstruct the view from the porch. And it only has one story with four rooms, while the manor is a big buxom affair with a screened-in porch upstairs and down, and a circular drive out front. From his view of the Big House, Jack can see into the dining room, where an elaborate chandelier and a massive oak table give the house an austere countenance. It is not difficult to assume that the entire house is carpeted in rich plum, sound-buffering pile. If Jack could bring himself to have any expectations, he'd find the whole set-up of the Big House and its smaller replica vulgar and stuffy, incongruous considering the heat and the palms and the sand and sawgrass surrounding it. Like something adamant, an infliction. But Jack is still on autopilot, pleased to have a place to go that's relatively private and requires little thought.

Colonel Raymond, sitting on a foldout chair in front of Jack's mini manor, tells him the houses in the neighborhood are all reinforced with steel in the frames to combat hurricanes. The walls are extremely thick. "A hurricane comes, this baby's staying right here," the Colonel says, thumping a column. The Colonel himself looks steel-girded to Jack—squat and muscular, still loyal to his army crewcut. It would take a lot to blow away the Colonel.

"How long are you going to be around?" the Colonel asks Jack. "Maybe you'll get a chance to test this beauty out."

"I'm not exactly sure," Jack says, looking at his watch and noticing it has stopped. He wonders when that happened. "I haven't got any definite plans right now." It is not a comfortable topic for Jack and the Colonel looks displeased. He assesses Jack for the third or fourth time since they've met, reevaluating him. Jack is wearing pink and purple bermuda shorts with a turquoise tank top and rope sandals purchased from the only clothes store in town, a store meant for tourists which sells nothing like he usually wears. He doesn't mind the clothes, even though he's beginning to realize there is a drawback to looking like a tourist, to appearing temporary. The residents' eyes glaze over. Still, each time he turns his head and glimpses a sliver of pale, bare shoulder or the geometry of his shorts, the clothes remind him that he's resourceful, he's making do. The Colonel frowns, leans forward in his seat as if he's about to begin grilling Jack, but thinks better of it. Jack can't wait for him to leave. He smoothes the front of

his tank top over his slight paunch, conscious of the exposed skin of his arms. He feels fish white and soft compared to the Colonel, whose dark leathery facial skin reminds Jack of his cowhide briefcase which cracked when he pulled it open.

On his way out, after taking Jack through the house, pointing out the fuse box, the washer and dryer and the hide-a-bed in the couch, a spiel more appropriate for the vacationers who rent the house by the week in the summer, the Colonel stops and gazes at the big house thoughtfully.

"You'll see my daughter around," he says presently. "Let me know if she pesters you too much. She has a tendency to talk." He enunciates this fact by opening and closing his hand, his fingers and thumb pointing at Jack the way a person manipulates a puppethead in what Jack recognizes as the signal for garrulous. Jack watches as the Colonel makes his way across the yard to the patiently waiting manor until he is sucked into its cool, dark quiet through a side door.

Jack pursues the settling-in process with exuberance. He purchases conch shells and ceramic seagulls for his shelves, and great leafy plants with macrame hangers which he suspends from his porch ceiling. He stocks his refrigerator with breakfast, lunch and dinner foods, including long-term commitments like ketchup, mustard and mayonnaise. He likes his little house. He takes long walks through the wildlife refuge, to the beach and to the stores and bars along the highway. There are surprisingly few people around. Aside from a cluster of retired Army colonels and a few scattered families, there are mostly empty houses or houses occupied by people who Jack sees moving silently, purposefully about the Key. "Just wait until summer," the Colonel has told him. "Things really get hopping then."

Eventually Jack calls Ed Elwise, his business partner and best friend, and has him transfer funds into Jack's new pink bank.

"Are you moving Jack?" Ed asks, feigning indifference.

"I don't know," Jack says, laughing a little to keep the joke going. This is the closest he's come to making contact with Linda. He and Linda and Ed and Ed's wife Pat have vacationed together yearly in places like Madrid and Istanbul and Hong Kong: warm, exotic places bearing no resemblance to Chicago. Every year Pat bought herself a new hat, indigenous to the locale. Usually something straw. They never translated well when she got them back to the states, though, and Jack has seen all ten, forgotten and dusty, stacked in a corner of Ed and Pat's attic.

Linda had always ribbed Pat about the hats and, two years ago in the backseat of a Kenyan taxicab, she had threatened to go her sepa-

rate way if she was forced to spend another moment in the empty pursuit of yet another fucking hat. Everyone had been silent then, and Jack had felt particularly helpless. Ed and Pat were looking at him like he should smooth the group through this rough spot, but Jack couldn't apologize for Linda or admonish her, the way he knew Pat and Ed expected him to. He had looked out his window at the dusty streets of Nairobi and waited for Linda to say or do something to break the tension. Jack can't even remember what happened. The cab must have reached their destination, or they discussed the passing scenery, but he knows Linda never solicited any forgiveness—by gesture or obligatory joke—from Ed and Pat.

The following year, Pat did her hat buying in secret and group dynamics were more formal. The two couples were more polite with each other, more careful. No one spoke at the same time as any of the others, and restaurant and travel plans were discussed in serious, hushed tones which robbed each dinner, each boatride, each hotel, of any potential enjoyment it might have offered. At first Jack had attempted to cajole the others into their former humor. He was jocular, he boomed, he slapped backs and poked fun, but their jaws were set and too late Jack realized a contest had arisen, a grim arm-wrestle pitting Pat and Ed against Linda. Something that went farther back than the hat comment, the origin of which Jack couldn't identify. It occurred to him that Pat and Ed might be waging this battle with Linda on his behalf, that they sensed Linda's inability to love him all the way. The thought embarrassed him. Nevertheless, the whole rift seemed so separate from Jack, so mysterious to him he didn't even know whose side to take.

This year Pat was having a lumpectomy which had left Jack and Linda to their own devices. Talking to Ed, it occurs to Jack for the first time that things would not have happened as they did in the aquarium if Ed and Pat had been along. He flushes at the memory of how much he had looked forward to going away with just Linda for the first time in so many years, to having her to himself. He thought they would talk.

"How's Pat doing?" he asks. He's certain Ed knows about Linda's affair. Otherwise he'd be asking more questions. Jack's mind races through possible scenarios which would bring Ed to this knowledge. Linda wouldn't have told Pat; their relations are too strained. Unless there's been a Hal for years, unless Hal is the cause of the rift between the two couples. Jack is perspiring now, holding the phone to his ear, barely registering Ed's description of Pat's condition.

"Anyway, she's coming along as well as can be expected," Ed

says. "She's still very weak."

"Ed," Jack begins, but he can't bring himself to ask; he doesn't want to know yet.

"Listen, Jack," Ed says, but it's impossible for him to broach the subject without some initial sign from Jack.

"I need to get going now," Jack says. "But Ed, don't tell anyone where I am."

"Of course."

"Absolutely no one."

"Understood."

"You know nothing."

"Jack, I understand."

"Give Pat my love," Jack says and hangs up.

The doorbell rings. He stares at the door, then opens it to find the most ungainly girl he has ever seen. She appears about twelve years old. It's hard for Jack to figure; he hasn't talked to a kid for a long time. She has long frizzy brown hair that looks long past penetrable by comb. Thick, square-rimmed glasses magnify her eyes, which are a tint of blue so light, Jack finds them almost transparent. She is wearing a pair of jeans cut-off unevenly at the knees and a boy's pajama top with a pattern of baseball team insignias on it. National League. There is a line of grape juice connecting the San Diego Padres to the St. Louis Cardinals. Jack spots the Cubs nestled partly in the crook of her armpit.

"I live in the big house and I was just wondering if you have any children," she says. Her gaze is steady and direct.

"Gosh, no, I sure don't," Jack says. He is struck, as she blinks, by the sound of his voice, loud and gratuitously cheerful, adult-to-kid talk, which, he recalls, he had always hated when growing up. "I'm thinking of getting a dog, though. If the Colonel will allow it. Is he your father?"

She nods. Something in her coolness reminds him of Linda. "Father loves dogs. He collects strays," the girl says. A Colonel-type up and down inspection indicates a reference to Jack. He shudders. Her father must have told her no kids had moved in; she's here to check him out. Clearly she has gotten used to living in a place where there are few children. Mission accomplished, she turns and walks toward the big house.

"Hey wait," Jack says as she is halfway across the yard, which is mostly coral and unworldly plants which lick up sharply around her skinny legs. A yard which bears no evidence of a canine inhabitant, Jack can't help noticing. She stops and he ambles over to her, sticking

out his hand. "My name is Jack."

She shakes but doesn't answer. Jack waits.

"I'm Salome," she says.

"Salome?" Jack looks into the sky, trying to remember where he's heard that. "Salome ."

"She's the one who asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter," she says.

"Oh, yes," Jack says, then, "Oh my!"

"And she got it," says Salome, smiling coolly. "She could do the dance of the Seven Veils," she adds, removing imaginary veils from her shoulders and swooshing them through the air.

"Have you seen the alligators?" Salome asks.

"Alligators?"

"I'll show you," she says, and beckons him to follow with a wave, an imaginary veil trailing dramatically from her fingertips.

They walk the couple of blocks to the deer refuge, where Jack has looked for but never seen any deer, to a trailhead Jack hasn't entered before. Not far from the road is a small pond the size of a baseball infield. The nearby Big Pine Baptist Church once used the pond for baptisms, Salome says.

A wooden platform with benches juts out over the water and the two kneel on the benches, leaning over the railing. Salome explains that alligator-watching is a popular pasttime, so the people of Big Pine Key built the viewing platform. A sign sticking up out of the water warns, "Do not feed or harass the alligators."

The surface of the pond is glassy and undisturbed. Looking down, Jack sees a frog, some fish and two turtles under the water, but no alligators. Salome gazes so solemnly at the water, Jack is afraid to disturb her. "Where are they?" he whispers.

"They're under the water." She also whispers. "Probably in the middle. It's really deep out there. Sometimes they stay down for a long time. Hours. You have to be patient."

"Hours?" Jack says. He knows nothing about alligators.

"What are they doing down there?"

"Sleeping, I suppose." Salome shrugs as though the answer is obvious. Jack peers into the water. He really wants to see one. He taps his foot, drums his fingers on the railing. Salome slides him a look that suggests he's being uncool, and Jack stops. But he's tapped out some kind of message, because an alligator head slides into view directly beneath them, emerging from under the platform. Jack leaps to his feet and yelps, but Salome does not respond at all. Jack leans back over the railing. He can see every inch of the alligator as it pass-

es below them, its thick horny skin, its jagged dog-eared teeth and splayed toes. It has to be at least seventeen feet long.

"Holy shit," Jack says. His heart is beating furiously.

"I know," Salome says. Her eyes adore the alligator. "That's Big Fella."

"Do they ever come out of the pond?" Jack asks. He pictures chaos, dogs and children running for their homes, cars screeching to a halt, and this tremendous alligator ambling down the middle of the road.

"Nope," Salome says, looking at Jack and laughing. He laughs too and they turn back to look at Big Fella, who is floating toward the middle of the pond without seeming to move, not even a twitch of the tail. He lies suspended on the surface, his chubby legs dangling, appearing dead but for an occasional blink.

"He thinks that we think he's a log," Salome says, giggling. Jack laughs also.

"Don't worry about me," Jack says in a deep voice. "I am just a log. Just a large piece of driftwood, floating around. You fishes go on about your business, I am only a log." Jack is giddy. "How many more are there?"

"Only one. He's not nearly as big, though."

Out of the corner of his eye, Jack catches movement. A smaller alligator, only four or five feet long, emerges from some tall reeds and floats toward them. Jack realizes with a start that his right hind leg is missing.

"That's Stubby," Salome says. "Big Fella chomped off his leg last year, but now Stubby stays as far away from Big Fella as possible."

The pond isn't nearly large enough for that, Jack thinks. Big Fella rotates slowly to face them, and Stubby retreats a bit until he sees that Big Fella isn't going anywhere.

"He always has to be on guard," Jack says sadly.

"Stubby always comes up when people are around," Salome says. "He waits for Big Fella to clear out."

Jack wants to rescind the giddy awe he felt when he first saw Big Fella. He is resentful, and thinking of Big Fella lurking there below them for so long before making his grand entrance, like the main man in a blues band, Jack gets the creeps.

"Let's get out of here," Jack says.

On the way home, Salome tells Jack how alligators mate. "The female smacks the water with her tail, which sends a signal out to the males. In rivers and canals, this signal can travel for miles. When the males come, the females wrestle them. If the male wins, they mate. If

he loses, they don't."

"Harsh," Jack says.

"Survival of the fittest," says Salome. "This is why alligators have been around for a hundred million years. There's no polluting the gene pool." She is very matter of fact, but Jack finds the notion depressing. They are near the big house when Jack hears someone calling "Sylvia!" He looks up to see a deeply tanned woman dressed in a white tennis skirt and matching top standing amidst the columns of the Manor.

"I got to go," Salome says, running toward the house.

Late at night, when the sound of cars headed for the beach or the deer refuge can no longer be heard, and the moon makes knives and scissors out of the plantlife in the yard, Jack sits sipping a gin and tonic on his front porch. He thinks tentatively of Linda. Like someone easing his way into a cold lake, Jack approaches a moment in memory, lets the initial jolt work through him, then holds it until he's dulled to it. At first, the very word "aquarium" made his heart race. This evening, Jack concentrates on Linda's expression when she called him Hal. He is beginning to be sure she did it on purpose. Otherwise she would have looked at him, or slapped her hand over her mouth or tried to hold him there, to explain.

So she wanted him to know. Jack takes a sip of his drink, runs his hand down the side of his glass and gets rid of the condensation with a shake. What surprises him is that he did know, he expected this every day he lived with Linda. More surprising, though, and more painful, is that Linda conceived of and executed a plan which took a certain amount of sensitivity and insight into Jack's character. She made him leave her. As he sits on the porch of his new home, Jack feels different. He appreciates Linda in a way he never has before. He appreciates her objectively. While part of him realizes what a dupe he was, how she played him like a flute, he mainly realizes that she is not malevolent, as he always suspected, unable to see her except through a filter of disappointment. He feels like calling her, in a burst of goodwill, to congratulate her on her performance, to let her know the acting classes really did the trick. He'd tell her it was the right thing, getting rid of that guy, that other Jack who he hardly recognizes these days.

These thoughts are pleasant to Jack. He lets his mind drift along with them, sees himself beguiling Linda with his new nonchalance, getting a strong hand in the relationship, until he and Linda are at the point of remarrying, then he knows they would be doomed all over

again.

Noises from the Big House gradually penetrate Jack's reverie. There is a light on in one of the upstairs bedrooms, the one he has decided is Salome's from some zoo posters he's glimpsed on one wall. Indistinct shadows float across the blank yellow shade in that window. Intermittently the walls thump, as if furniture is being knocked about the room. A glance into the garage tells him that Salome's mother's car is gone. A little late for tennis, Jack thinks. An image of the Colonel and Salome locked in a fierce silent struggle plants itself in Jack's mind. He's starting to feel cold, to shake. She's just moving some furniture, he tells himself. A muffled cry, signalling defeat or frustration, Jack can't tell, wafts from the window. It could mean anything, Jack thinks. He sits tensed in his lawn chair, straining to hear some deciding tone, to see some definite shadow of a raised hand or slouched back before he makes a move. He can't rid himself of the image of the Colonel hanging menacingly over Salome, all arms and legs, and of Salome grappling with him. But when he considers rushing into the house, he can't picture what he would do next. Attack the Colonel? Demand that he unhand the girl? What if he had to fight the Colonel? Once Jack was sufficiently pummeled, a state which holds a certain attraction for him, Salome would be back where she started, and the Colonel would be even further incensed. He could call the police, but what would he tell them, that he heard some banging? That hardly constituted the scene he had conjured for himself.

Before Jack can think what to do, the noise stops. There are a few seconds of silence, then the light flicks off and the shade goes silver. Relieved, Jack sets his drink glass down. He slides his feet into his now-worn sandals and makes his way through the obstacle course of the yard. He's headed for the alligator pond, where he can watch the alligators in their silent stand-off, lending some support to Stubby, who dangles near the viewing platform whenever Big Fella will give him the chance, and kid himself that with these two, at least, he can make a difference.

Jack backs the Catalina out of the driveway, past the manor and onto the road which glistens with ground seashells mixed into the asphalt. He puts the car in drive and heads to the Winn Dixie, where he intends to pick up some provisions. Just as he settles into the drive, a sign reminds him that the speed limit is 10 miles per hour. Jack glances at the speedometer and finds he's doing twenty-five with only the slightest pressure on the accelerator. Next he passes a

wooden sign which depicts a small deer, hand carved and painted a light brown with a cartoon bubble extending from its mouth. The deer looks cross. Its eyebrows are knit and inside the bubble are the words "We pay Deerly for your Carelessness." Jack eases his foot off the accelerator completely, just as the blue spinning lights of a police car come into view up ahead. He glides slowly down the road, ever on the lookout for Key Deer, ready to slam on the brakes if one should run across his path. He creeps past the police car and a family in a minivan with Connecticut plates pulled off onto the shoulder of the road. The Catalina practically drives itself; all Jack has to do is keep it on course with one finger curled lightly around the steering wheel. He has never driven so slowly down an open stretch of road. He feels expectant, like the show's about to begin and he's got his own role to play in this particular drama. The Key Deer will run out onto the road, and he will stop the car. He will not hit it. It should be so easy, yet Jack grips the steering wheel with both hands now, in anticipation, afraid to fail at even this minor task. When he reaches the main road, he sees by the digital bank clock that it has taken six minutes to go a mile, a distance he could walk in only a few minutes more.

Jack crosses the highway and pulls into a spot in front of the Winn Dixie next to the Colonel's sleek white Cadillac with STINGRAY on the license plates. He doesn't bother putting the top up on the car, which he is beginning to forget he doesn't own, but unpeels his sweaty legs from the vinyl seats and goes inside the cool, brightly lit supermarket.

He selects a cart and pushes it toward the produce section where he finds the Colonel thoughtfully thumbing the nubby end of a tangelo.

"Hi," Jack says, steeling himself for the encounter.

When the Colonel faces him, it is as if he has to reel himself back in to the Winn Dixie. He doesn't see Jack right away, although Jack can see himself reflected in the light, light blue of the Colonel's eyes.

"Jack," the Colonel says. "Hello."

"Just doing a little shopping," Jack says. He chuckles nervously. He tries to read the Colonel's expression, to gain some clue into the previous night's events.

"Ah, yes," the Colonel says. He places the tangelo gingerly back into its pyramid. "Hope you weren't bothered by all the noise last night. The deer were into the garbage again. Finally I went down and shooed them away."

"No, I didn't hear the deer," Jack says. He looks directly into the

Colonel's face, feeling himself beginning to flush. "I thought I heard something else."

"I wonder what that could be," the Colonel says. His gaze is so level, Jack wonders if he's issuing a challenge.

"I'll let you get on with your shopping," the Colonel says.

Feeling dismissed, Jack tries to concentrate on groceries. He puts the tangelo the Colonel was handling into a plastic bag and places it in his cart, although he's never eaten a tangelo before and is uncertain what it is.

In the bread aisle there is another colonel comparing the ingredients of two different wheat breads. A third colonel is cross-examining the woman behind the fish counter. Several colonels are gathered in the candy aisle, as if it is the source of their concern.

Jack recognizes them by their gray crewcuts and sense of purpose. As he passes through the aisles, the colonels each stop what they're doing and say hello, making Jack feel watched. He wonders if the Colonel has him under surveillance. But for what? Reaching for a quart of milk, he catches a glimpse of light brown, curly hair, cut short and layered, in the mirror over the dairy case. Linda's hair. He leaves behind his full grocery cart, nearly trips over a cookie display, and cuts out through some swinging doors at the back of the store. His arms outstretched as though he's groping through the dark, he passes some freezers and stacks of empty fruit boxes and exits the Winn Dixie. He makes his way cautiously around the back and side of the store to the front parking lot, where he looks only at the Catalina until he safely reaches it. The ten-mile-per-hour drive home feels like forever to Jack this time. He wants only to escape into the cool, dark anonymity of his guest house.

Every day now, Jack is drawn to the alligator pond. He spends several hours at a time sitting on the platform, sometimes reading, sometimes just watching. He toys with the idea of jumping in; it is a clear, inviting pond, and the days are hot. The alligators hardly move. Stubby dangles nearby, when he can, his tail curling under him like a question mark. Jack loves him. He likes to tell Sal, who often meets him here, that he came by to make sure Stubby is all right. It is nearly mating season, and Salome says that Big Fella was frantic this time last year, bellowing constantly and so loud they had to shut the windows at her school. Big Fella is calm every day, though, perhaps even a bit smug.

Jack still hasn't seen the famous Key Deer, except in pictures. They look like regular deer to him, photographed from a high angle

to make them appear short. When he walks through the refuge, he hears an occasional rustle of bushes, the sound of something scampering away, but sees nothing. They are like ghosts. Yet the whole Key revolves around them. Outrageous fines are threatened against anyone who runs over a Key Deer, and a sign on the highway announces in large numbers how many have been killed this year, along with records from previous years. Jack imagines the infamy he'd suffer if he were to up the tally, and rarely drives. The Colonel says they like to hang around dumpsters, particularly the one behind Winn Dixie. Jack has found his garbage overturned a couple of times; knocked over and tampered with, coffee grounds and bits of paper scattered across the yard.

"That's them all right," the Colonel assures him.

The Colonel is in love with the Key Deer. He lurks around garbage bins at night, hoping for an encounter. It's all he can do to keep himself from placing speeders under citizen's arrest when they barrel past the refuge on the way to the beach. Jack is becoming increasingly disgusted with the Colonel. He's sick of his officious manner and his enthusiasm for little things. He can't believe the Colonel used the word "shoo." He is also convinced, the longer he dwells on it, that things are not all right in the Big House.

When they sit together on the viewing platform, watching the alligators, Jack examines Salome for signs of injury or distress. She is always enigmatic to him. She seems straightforward, but her talk is of factual things, alligator mating habits, Army regulations concerning personal hygiene. She never talks about herself. Jack hasn't even figured out how to ask why she has chosen to call herself Salome.

Once he tries to broach the subject of the late-night noises.

"I heard some thumping coming from the direction of your house the other night," he tells her. His attempt is awkward, designed to fail.

"Must've been the deer," Salome says, levelling him a look identical to the Colonel's.

Jack finds the ghostly non-presence of the deer oppressive.

Jack lies in bed, thinking of Linda. He feels her in his thoughts like a physical presence. He is sure he saw her that time in the Winn Dixie. Several days later, he thought he saw her in a crowded tour bus at the gas station and stayed inside asking the attendant his opinion on the Catalina's various knocks and pings until the bus pulled away. He knows he should call and leave a message with their

answering service, but he's not quite ready for that. He doesn't know what he'd say.

The doorbell rings and Jack stiffens. He pulls on a pair of shorts and wraps a robe around himself. He opens the door to a gigantic man with black hair sweat-pasted to his head. Black stubble covers the man's face and a cigarette juts out from between his lips. He has one unexpressive, overshadowing eyebrow. Jack wonders immediately: has Linda sent him? Is he one of the colonels? (He quickly discounts that possibility because this man, though broad, is not tidy enough to be a colonel.)

"Where's the Catalina?" the man asks.

Jack bows his head in relief. "Let me get the keys."

As Carl Pigg walks back to the garage, jangling a formidable ring of keys and whistling "Somewhere Out There," Jack realizes a decision has been made for him, a decision he's been putting off by keeping the car. He'll stay in Big Pine Key because it's the easiest thing to do. As he watches Carl Pigg back the Catalina out of the driveway past the Big House, Jack feels slightly relieved.

"I guess I'll be around for awhile," Jack says, taking a seat next to Salome on the viewing platform. "They reclaimed my car."

"Who's they?" Salome asks. She's sitting backward on one of the benches rimming the platform so that her feet dangle about a yard over the surface of the pond. Her elbows rest on the backrest, her chin in her hands, making her head bob slightly upward when she talks. It looks like she's gently shoving her head back with her hands. Jack swings his feet through the gap between the backrest and the bench so that his feet dangle next to Salome's, six or seven inches closer to the water. He's disappointed to see that she seems only vaguely interested in his plans. He had expected her to be glad.

"The rental agency, it was a rented car," Jack replies.

Salome's hands swivel her face toward him. "You've had a rental car this whole time. That's going to cost you a mint," she says. To Jack she appears to be struggling between a judgment of admiration and disgust over the extreme extravagance of the car rental. "Geez Jack, you hardly even drove the thing," she adds.

"I know, but now I feel sort of lost without it," Jack says. He's not interested in the money spent on the car, but how unable he is to imagine leaving Big Pine Key without it. The Catalina opened up a range of possibilities. It brought him here when he had no idea what to do with himself.

"Are you going to get a job then?" Salome asks.

"Well, no, I don't think so," Jack says. "I really haven't thought about it."

"What about your wife?" Salome asks, unhooking her hand from her chin to reach over and tap Jack's thick, gold wedding band lightly with a forefinger.

"Well, she," Jack stammers. "She's pretty much out of the picture at this point." He is startled by Salome's certainty, her presumption that his marriage is something to be considered in the present tense.

Jack looks out over the smooth, unbroken surface of the pond reflecting the cloudless blue sky like an unblinking eye. Palm fronds mirrored around the pond's periphery become lashes. Big Fella and Stubby must be submerged, Jack thinks, but a wave of despair is choking him now, making it hard for him to believe in the alligators that he can't see. He coughs, brushes his fingertips across his suddenly tearblurred eyes. He is dimly aware of Salome watching him, but for once he feels he owes her nothing.

When Carl Pigg showed up to retrieve the Catalina, Jack hadn't thought much of it. He'd made no effort to conceal the car and had assumed that the police who continually monitored the road past the deer refuge had a hand in informing the Piggs of his whereabouts. But now it is important to Jack that he automatically provided his Chicago address when he rented the car, so uncertain was he of his intentions, the duration of his time away. Carelessly he had established a link between the Piggs and Linda. He had already been aware that his credit card charges would be easily traceable, but he had felt that even if Linda knew where he was, that fact would have no immediacy in his life. It appeared that Linda, or someone representing her—a private detective perhaps—had made contact with the Raymonds, had asked, maybe, that they notify her of Jack's movement. Had enlisted their aid in watching out for Jack, as though he couldn't be counted on to do as much for himself.

Jack swings his legs around and stands shakily. He gives Salome a little wave, impatient and jerky, not altogether friendly, and shuffles away. He had found refuge in Big Pine Key but now he realizes he had escaped only for as long as Linda and the Colonel and Salome and countless others, possibly even the colonels at the Winn Dixie, had conspired to let him. Once again he is the victim of his own, self-induced naivete. Jack chuckles bitterly to himself at the prospect of all these people waiting for him to make a move, to screech out of town in a moment of passion, or go on a drunk at least.

"Must've been bored shitless," he mutters to himself. The events of the past couple of months play through Jack's mind. All the soli-

answering service, but he's not quite ready for that. He doesn't know what he'd say.

The doorbell rings and Jack stiffens. He pulls on a pair of shorts and wraps a robe around himself. He opens the door to a gigantic man with black hair sweat-pasted to his head. Black stubble covers the man's face and a cigarette juts out from between his lips. He has one unexpressive, overshadowing eyebrow. Jack wonders immediately: has Linda sent him? Is he one of the colonels? (He quickly discounts that possibility because this man, though broad, is not tidy enough to be a colonel.)

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tary times feel crowded now, the evenings spent thinking on his porch nursing a drink for the pleasure of it, walks to the alligator pond or through the deer refuge. People were watching, taking note, venturing, perhaps, their opinions on his actions. Various diagnoses. Jack pictures the colonels crowded into a booth in the Winn Dixie deli, Colonel Raymond standing over them, filling them in on latest developments, any news Salome had garnered in her trips with Jack to watch the alligators. His midshopping flight from the Winn Dixie must have been worth days of speculation. Jack winces. That is the only time he revealed himself, he thinks. He had counselled himself then, convinced himself he needed to keep it together, to not let Linda get to him. Now he sees himself through the colonels' eyes, a weak man, easily ruffled, soft. Jack enters his house, closes and, for the first time since he arrived on Big Pine Key, locks the door behind him.

For a few days, Jack holes up in his house. He waits until the cover of dark before he ventures outside to sit quietly on his porch. One night he walks to the Winn Dixie, which sits staunch and glowing, open until midnight, for food. Otherwise he keeps a low profile. He's trying to think things through, to give the Colonel and his troops as little to go on as possible, until he feels himself a clean slate, unreadable to them. Then he'll make his move, whatever that may be. Jack isn't sure yet what he'll do. He'd like to stay on Big Pine Key, but first he has to regain the sense of privacy he enjoyed when he first arrived.

Twice Jack has ignored Salome's knock on his door. He's afraid he'll shake her; he wants to take her by the arms and shake, demand to know what she thinks, that his life, his emotions are a game. He wants to shake her and tell her that her life is real, too, that the knocking around he heard that night isn't something you can ignore. That she's going to be one fucked-up kid. These thoughts embarrass him though. It would be too easy to hurt Salome.

At night he turns on his porch light so the Raymonds will know he's still there and won't come nosing around thinking that he's taken off, or worse, offed himself. He sits just outside the dim circle of light it offers, sips a drink and tries to clear his head of thought. On the third night he hears a gunshot.

In seconds, Jack is across the yard. He tries the back door and finding it locked, races around to the side kitchen door, also locked. He starts to pound. "Sylvia," he calls. "Sylvia."

He hears the sound of glass breaking, a tinkling silver sound like something has fallen to the floor upstairs. He grabs a conch shell sit-

ting on the doorstep and smashes it through a pane of glass in the door. His breath is coming in short gasps. He reaches in and opens the door from that side, scraping his wrist lightly on the broken glass. Following a shaft of light from the upstairs hallway, Jack finds the stairs and climbs. "Sylvia," he calls again.

He can hear her crying softly and the Colonel's labored breathing. When he reaches the doorway to her room, he stops. Salome is folded against the corner, sitting on her bed, a pistol lying on the rumpled bedspread before her. The Colonel, bleeding at the shoulder, is using her dresser to pull himself to his feet.

"Goddammit," he mutters through clenched teeth. His face is ashen. A hand mirror lies smashed near the right toe of his beige Rockport. Jack grabs a pillow from Salome's bed and presses it to the Colonel's shoulder. "Hold that," he says. He goes to Salome's side.

"Sylvia," he says, palming her shoulder. "Get your father's car keys, okay? We have to take him to the hospital."

Salome gets up slowly from the bed and makes her way out of the room, flattening herself against the side of her bed when she passes the Colonel. Jack wraps the gun in the bedspread delicately, careful not to jostle it. He knows nothing about guns, can't even imagine what it would feel like to fire one. He thinks they ought to take the gun to the hospital, that somehow it might be useful, that they at least shouldn't leave it behind. He tucks the bundle under his arm and takes the Colonel by his good arm. "Come on," he says.

In the hallway, Salome tucks the Cadillac keys into Jack's hand which holds the gun bundle to his chest.

"Where's your mom?" Jack asks as they make their way downstairs, the Colonel grunting with concentration.

"Out," Salome says. "Probably at the club."

"Run quickly and write her a note," Jack says. "Tell her we're at the hospital but everything's okay. We'll try to call her later." The pillow at the Colonel's shoulder is nearly soaked through, the blood seeping into the plain white pillow case like a Rorschach design. "Wait here," Jack says, guiding the Colonel's good hand to the bannister at the bottom of the staircase. He rushes into the dining room, whips the damask table cloth from beneath the chandelier he's seen from his porch, and rushes back to the Colonel. He ties the cloth across the pillow and secures it beneath the Colonel's good arm.

Jack and Salome struggle the Colonel out to the car, where he balks at the sight of his white, pristine leather backseat. "No time to dawdle," Jack says, giving him a gentle nudge in the back. He's feeling strangely lighthearted; every move is so easy, so natural. He clos-

es the door on the Colonel, then places the gun in the trunk. Salome is already in the front seat, gazing thoughtfully over the seatback at her father when Jack climbs in.

"Okay," Jack says. "Here we go." He turns the key in the ignition, pops the car into reverse and floors it down the driveway. The tires screech as he makes the backward turn onto the road, but Jack's driving is so deft, the Cadillac so smooth, his passengers are barely jostled. Jack shifts into drive and hits the gas hard, taking the car up to fifty by the time they reach the road past the deer refuge.

"Hey, take it easy will you?" the Colonel says from the backseat. Jack can see him in his rearview mirror glancing anxiously at a passing Key Deer X-ing sign. Next to him, Salome smiles slyly, clenches the armrest with her right hand. They sail over a speedbump.

Halfway down the road there is a blur in Jack's peripheral vision, a thump at the back of the car. "What was that?" the Colonel yells, bolting upright. "Stop the car."

"There's no time," Jack says, but the Colonel is trying to lean over the seat now, his good arm reaching for the key in the ignition. "Okay, okay," Jack says, slamming on the brakes so all three are thrown forward. He jams the car into reverse, drapes his arm across the top of the seat and starts backing up, taking in the Colonel surrounded by thick streaks of blood glistening on the white interior as they approach the brown lump lying at the side of the road.

"Stay put," Jack says when they reach it. He gets out of the car and goes to stand over the injured deer. Its eyes are open and it's breathing in quick huffs. Besides a gash on its left hind leg Jack can't see any visible damage, which he takes as a bad sign. Internal bleeding, he thinks. The deer is about the size of a Schnauzer. He scoops it up and carries it to the car, where the Colonel has already popped open the back door. Jack places the deer on the back seat, its head resting in the Colonel's lap. He takes the drive more slowly now, still speeding but with less urgency. The mile is a long moment, the end and the beginning for each of them, and when Jack thinks back on the shooting, on getting the Colonel to the hospital, he will always hold in his mind the image of the Colonel through the rearview mirror, his head bent over that of the deer, cooing softly in a reassuring tone. Jack reaches over and takes Salome's hand which rests limply on the seat between them. "Don't worry," he says.

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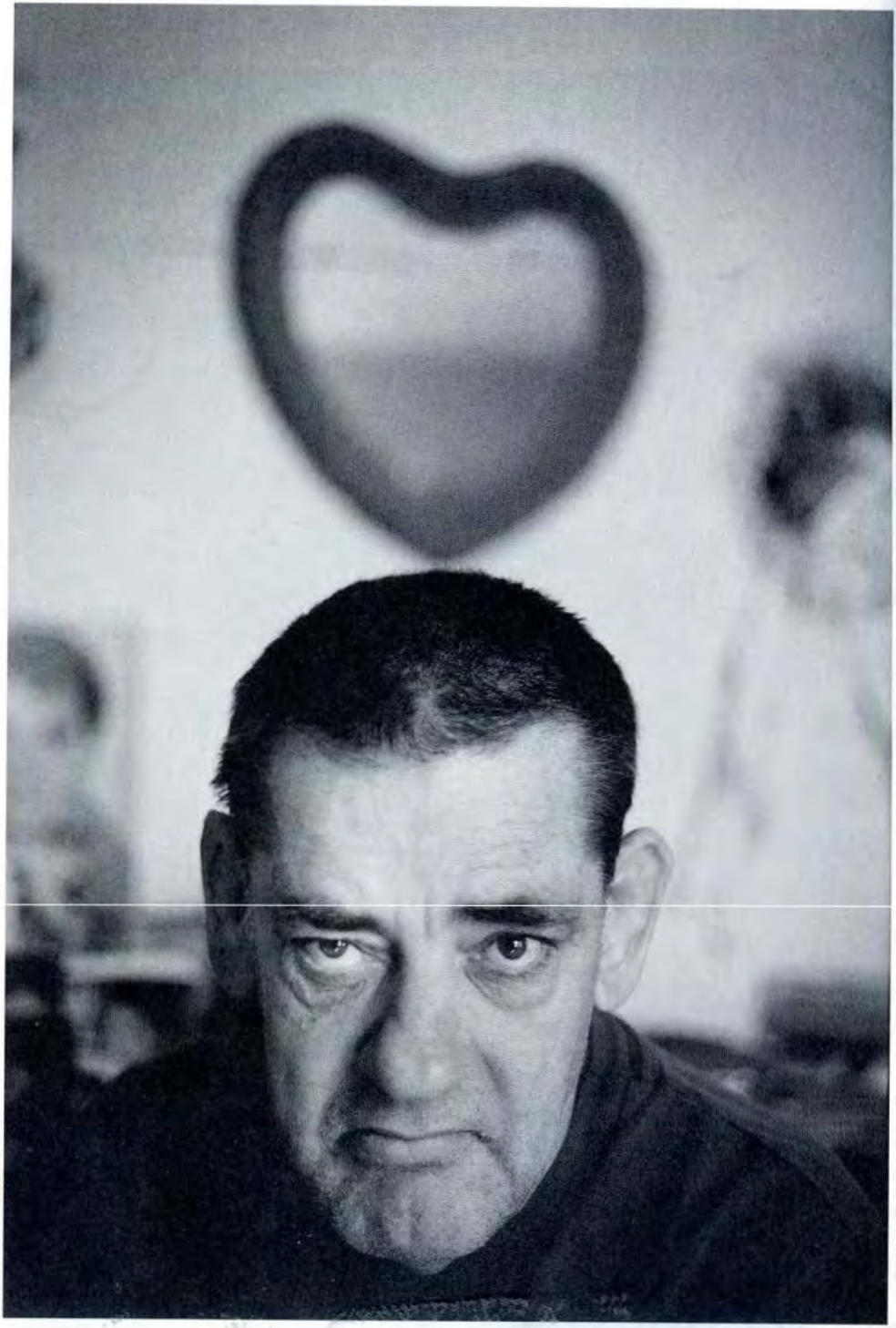
Randy Vidrine

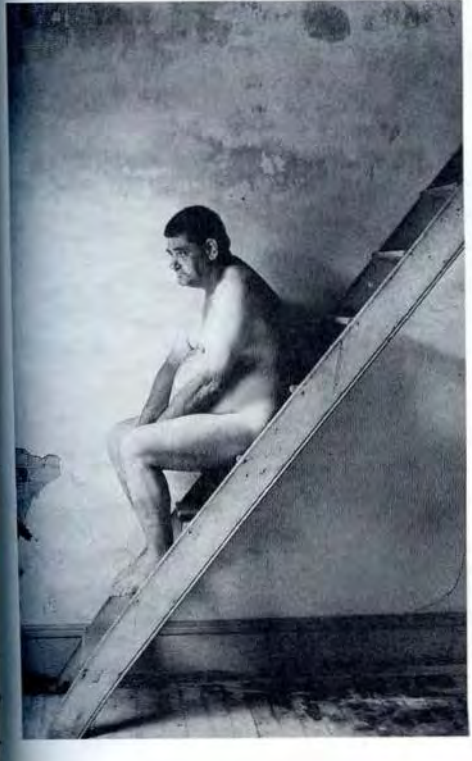
A PORTFOLIO OF PHOTOGRAPHS

On the following eight pages, the work of New Orleans photographer Randy Vidrine is presented in four diptychs by *NOR* art editor Doug MacCash.

windows/frames



eros: ascending, descending, at rest



anti-

gravity


HeAd

headed

Leon Stokesbury

FOR MY DAUGHTER

I often swore that I had never raised an arm,
but then I would recall
that night you could not quite
comprehend fractions: if sixteen pints
occupied two-thirds of one container
how many pints would be required to fill
another that was one-fourth full
with the same number of pints poured in:
and I recall the slap of the back of the hand
of the tone of my voice drenched
with impatience, how it slammed you, blam
against the wall, your eyes confused,
confused like the day you came back
but then I would recall
a half hour late from somewhere
with your little friend, and I screamed
declaring you stupid, right
on the button, and as you lay there
gasping, my realizing only then
the extra lick, that kick
to the gut of calling you stupid
in front of your little friend:
pages of illustrations: no different
really from the day seven years ago--
you were four and had wandered off
in the supermarket, looking at all
the various meats, the various vegetables,
chickens and beef and zucchini
in their glory, when I had told you to stay
right by my side, so I hid from you
on purpose, to teach you a lesson,
and when you could not find me and thought
I had abandoned you, and ran about
confused, tears streaming down that loveliness,

and then I revealed myself, all
transfiguration emerging from the breakfast foods,
and how you ran to me
in your ecstasy, what a zinger twang
to the solar plexus, what a line drive
to the old breadbasket, a sucker punch,
what an eight-ounce-glove shot straight
like a shiv to the ribs, sprinting to embrace
the very thing that caused your pain--
pages of illustrations:
and if it is true, and it is,
that I sometimes look in your eyes
and believe you to be
the most beautiful being,
and if it is true that I have acted
on many occasions in accordance with such love,
there still remain these moments
where I see now there was never any reason,
any justification, for such actions,
except my own fragility--
then allow me to state
that I see what I have done,
that I would not do it longer, that I would
offer up here, in this semi-public forum, a construct
or creation, containing this affidavit, this
testimonial entry, maxima culpa, this rendering,
dearest, this account, this expiation.

William Kloefkorn

SAYING IT ONCE AGAIN

Jesus is Lloyd— Evan Anderson
third grade

For such a long time
Evan's contention carried a lot
of weight, made almost perfect sense.
The only Lloyd in town was Lloyd Shoemaker.
At the Champlin station I'd watch him
disappear beneath the upraised hood
of Chester Black's old Packard,
emerging finally to declare the patient
cured, better than new, restored,
fit enough to race again,
and Chester, grinning, would
cross Shoemaker's palm with a crisp new bill,
and soon enough rumor of another race
would be on almost everybody's lips,
including of course my older brother's.

So with him then I'd walk to the field
to watch the Packard run against
Delbert Garlow's high-flanked sorrel. One
hundred yards, goal-line to goal-line,
Pistol Pete Miller with his pistol
to start the race,
sidelines filled with the joyful sounds
that attend a widespread
difference of opinion.

Always the sorrel with its broad
explosive haunches
won. Always, sooner or later,
Chester returned to the Champlin station,
to Lloyd with his missing teeth and

grease for fingernails
to have the Packard more finely tuned. Always
Lloyd disappeared beneath the upraised hood,
and always he arose to proclaim good news.

I meanwhile sat on a green bench
with my brother, where
in tandem we folded the evening Beacon.
One by one our strongholds were falling
to the Japanese. In another month our hamlet's first fatality
would have the memory of its body
buried beside a catalpa in the cemetery.
Shortly thereafter Lloyd Shoemaker would join him.
And on consecutive Monday mornings at recess
Evan with his harelip smile, in spite
of evidence to the contrary slowly mounting,
would say it once again.

Thomas F. Costello

FEINTS AND NEAR PASSES

My wife needed a job and signed-up
for an aptitude test
at the local community college,
which she took while I and my daughter,
along with two hundred
screaming fans, watched the women's
volleyball team play their arch rival.
I stared shamelessly
as each of these athletic,
adolescent girls compulsively,
repeatedly, slipped one then the other
index finger of either hand
up and under the elastic hem
of their leotards, snapping retracted
fabric back down around each exposed
cheek, a casual gesture I spent
hours trying to decode.
As I gawked my daughter hounded me,
begging for water, pushing me
back and forth across the gym
in search of a public water fountain.
Each time we exited, I turned
my head like a screw and when we
left for home I started whining to my wife
about money and groceries, expensive
paper products I couldn't eat. My wife
replied by sweeping the linen off
the table, casting glasses, cola,
ice cubes, and napkins to the floor
already filthy with cat hair and mud.
Three days now I have tried, and
failed, to fault her answer.
Driving into work this morning, I felt
the loneliness of metallic sky. This
place, like me and my marriage,
a confusion of prairie and stunted trees.

on the porch at Acadia Plantation
I closed my eyes. I smelled a field in rain.
I felt its loam in blisters, but with my mind.
I felt another woman's blisters burn
but with my mind.
Then in my mind I ran
toward that woman's shelter. When I opened my eyes
my real eyes—this is sounding crazy now—
I saw… Behind my husband's slow advance
I saw, on night sky, crackling, lightning-lit
a wall…

What kind of wall?
A black, wet wall.
And then I really ran.

Your trek began?
That part of most of it, that part that's mine.
I had no meaning and no mine at first.
I just meant to run. Then I dropped this,
my savings book. Or did it drop from me?
From pocket or from hand? Either way
I picked it up one of the times I fell…
in mud that's made by rain.
The moon returned
and thought and mien came back and I saw lights
on Highway 24, that modern stream.
For most of the night I followed that modern stream
the wide four-lane with its source at Bayou Lafourche
as I walked headland banks beside the cane.
By dawn I lost the current when the cane
became the subdivisions in the cane.
I kept with backyards, hopping chainlink fences.
And once a father cursed me from a window
while his wife and daughter waited curbside
for a yellow bus…

You live then in Lafourche?
In the parish, yes. The bayou, no.
The bayou's named Lafourche. The parish, too.
That's less cartography than point of view.

Near Acadia in Thibodaux?
We lived together over twenty years—
a subdivision, in this parish though,
another parish with a bayou name—
then moved away about a year ago

to Country Club, on land that used to be
plantation field.

Acadia's? How far...
For future us-es seeking real estate?
Twenty miles of cane and subdivision
from this bench beside we us-es who...

You said you joined the Club a year ago?
I said that we moved to. We're down to words.
The move came down to cheaper real estate.
But move and marriage soon got down to words.
You future yous, still getting down to that?

You said that you moved to. Moved to what?
The subdivision's named The Country Club.
Although there is a Club, with tennis courts
and 18-holes of swamp-drained golf,
we can't afford a membership. *Not yet.*
Those are my husband's words. Mine say, *we're in.*
We spoke those words about two weeks ago
at breakfast after he'd asked if we could use
the money for my daughter's college year.
"You promised " I reminded him. "Point Clear..."
That's the day that he proposed to me.
In 1947. That ago.
A day of promises, and bikes, trespass,
cold reds, golf greens, Confederate dead. That day.

And what was it he promised you that day?
He told me that he'd like to try to do
something that his father couldn't do:
a thousand dollars for a college year
for every son we'd have, a thousand each.
"Let's have tradition start with us," he said.
I made him promise something else to me.
Tradition starts with daughters, too. For them.

And you reminded him. At breakfast, when?
Two weeks ago. And I reminded him
that he had used that word tradition then—
not his favorite word but close to that—
when he'd proposed.
Then he reminded me:
He'd meant to start tradition as he'd meant.
Tradition as he'd meant it meant his sons.
And money as he'd meant, meant college-start.

He'd figured, as his father had before:
because all men must marry others' daughters
reason stood that men need college more.
He'd figured that would keep all daughters safe.
He reminded me our sons were gone, to college;
we had a daughter gone, but not to college.
He reminded me he'd also saved for her.
He'd let me open the account. Her name, mine.
He'd let me keep it, too.

The book with you?
The bank in town? A thousand in your name?
Her name. Her name is also typed on it.

Your husband wanted that for membership?
Her money that he didn't think she'd use?
What did you tell him?
Why not just say we're in?
I said the subdivision's named The Club.
So even now we could say we're in.
I said let's trespass just the way we did
that day, Point Clear, in 1947.
Let's take our hikes across the golf course now
until, white-haired, we drop beside a pond
some flowered cartway near palmetto frond.
I wish I'd said, it's all in point of view.

Why didn't you?
I sensed where that would go.
And I've been training years to get there first.

Where first?
Not yet with that. We'll get there soon.
Instead, I asked, "Who'd know?" He said he'd know.
Because a man knows words from words, he'd know.
The day that he proposed to me—Point Clear,
the grounds of the newly remodeled Grand Hotel...
he made the promise then that we'd belong.
Belong. To him that means a membership.
We left our house and moved to Thibodaux
because with every subdivision lot
there came a guarantee of membership.
The trouble was, and still the trouble is...
Should I remind those future us-es there

that in this time and in this humid state
there was a middle class for Cajun's, too;
we lived in parishes with bayou names
in subdivisions cleared of sugar cane.
For us, with every guarantee...

A fee?

The breakfast then. He mentioned membership.
And then he asked to use the savings book...
And then he used his favorite word of all—
Don't ask me yet. That too will come up soon.
And then he asked if I had read the note,
the mortgage note we'd signed a year ago.
"You see," he asked, "the date? How old I'll be?
I said that I'd belong in less than five."
I asked him if this had to do with age
his wanting to use my daughter's savings book.
If so, I said, I could understand.
He said that's what a woman understands.
And then he brought it back to promises.
Another promise had been made. To him.
Same time that he'd agreed to save for all:
He'd asked for hiking trips, just one a year
across the battlefields...

What battlefields?

Like Gettysburg and Shiloh. The Civil War.
For some the Only War. Antietam. Sharpsburg.

Same battlefield, those two. Antietam, Sharpsburg...
You know your history, I see. But she
the she beside you now, why presume
she doesn't know her history?

Does she?

Most certainly.

Go on. Tell me.
She knows—
or knew, from future us-es point of view—

some battles had, depending on the side,
a different name. She knows her point of view.

May I know more? May I know, too?

Of me?

Or she.

It's I am she. That name's the same.

This first. Those hiking trips you promised him...
You didn't go?

We couldn't make those trips.
We chose to spend for Cokes, for beachballs popped
before the end of Highway 1 was reached.

The children? Gulf and beach?

We chose for them.
He said, "I don't remember talking choice."
I said, "You're talking now."

"I'm not," he said.
Then he used his daddy's words again.
"As Daddy said, 'Now that's as true as rain.'"
Then I did something next I'd never done
not once in all my years before with him.
I turned my head away. I moved my eyes,
the way my Granny showed me how to do
whenever marriage seemed to be at stake.
As quiet as breath, below my breath, I said
"As true as any mud that's made by rain."
But I'd already slipped. I got there last.

That place you said you had to get to first?
That's when it came, like Alabama dead.
After breakfast quiet came. To us.

2

About that quiet, what is there to tell
you future us-es who aren't here today?
And of this woman, me, what's there to tell?

Her name? There's no way that she'd give you that.
If you were sitting here, this bench, today,
she'd tell you, "Watch my eyes. You see that green?
The color of the Gulf on weekend trips
down Highway 1 with children in the car,
the Gulf that's not as dark or deeply clear
as water at horizon under rigs,
but Gulf that's cleanly deeper than at shore?
The Gulf not flecked not far, that in between?"

Try seeing this: I've just made seventeen.
A house in town. No subdivisions then.
Outside a young man waits in backyard trees—
a planted grove: sassafras and fig—
the trees my mother's named the Pasha's Glen
because my Daddy keeps some rockers there
for visiting royalty: two grown sons,
an aging father, a brother, businessmen.

In my bedroom upstairs, school is in.
From the windowseat, my Granny's loosed
her abecedary of ladyhood.
She reviews how I should hold my fan
how I should always blush and then excuse
myself each time my slip, that band of white,
hangs out an inch or less below the hem.

She stops. She fidgets with a curtain hem.
She says, "Your mother, Dear, and I... We've watched.
We've listened as you sit with your young men.
You're doing the same thing that we did with them.
When they bring out what they believe to you
you comment. Worse, you bring out yours to them.
This goes and goes until the quiet comes.
And if it does, your words keep running past
almost faster than the breaths you take.
You haven't seen how hard it gets for them?"

I say, "The devil can have its and thems.
And hows and ifs. I'll have my whiles."

She smiles.
"Your mother, Dear, and I... We said that, too.

But then we learned the Grand Hypocrisy.
We don't think that you'll get this on your own:
When you sense the quiet-point's approach
you must get there first, before your men.
Unattach your tongue from your beliefs.
Before their quiet comes, just tuck your tongue.
I know it will be difficult for you.
More than the much it was for your mother and me...
A marriage goes by our ifs and hows.
If marriage stays, it stays because of us.
If marriage leaves, it leaves because of us.
Without husbands, women have no life.
For now, that is. This time and in this state.
Most of what we call our name, we lose
and most is father-given anyway.
That's why we bargain for religion's name—
and make well-sure your father bargains that—
to keep a name more than to keep a God.
And may the Lord forgive my saying that.
Perhaps your daughters, past mid-century
can redefine the state of things for us.
But you can keep those words you most believe
and in your silence find your greatest strength.
You want marriage, too."

I say, "I do.
As you just said. This time and in this state.
Of course I do."

She says, "Then know this, too...
Your books. Still keep them belted beneath the bed?
Your pencils. They're still bagged beneath the chair?
Is that your tablet, the floor beside your bed?"

"Last night," I say, "writing in my bed...
It fell... I wrote his name and fell asleep.
My finest hand, you see?"

She says, "For me,
look up four words. First these: *Hypocrisy,*
and *acquiesce, succumb.* Then cross them through.
Then find this word I'll write—my finest hand—
Here... Write this word a hundred times: *concur.*

But let your silence do this. Understand?
Don't you concur. That's your greatest strength.
Before I leave you to your books today
I'll have some other words to say.
Write them down, too. And when you leave this room
be sure to keep them with you or you'll sleep
beside your tablet last night of your life."

"In other words," I say. "No tuck. No wife?
And what words have the men been studying?
And what have they when this is what I have?"

"Say instead, my dear, *what I give.*"

"If I decide that's not a way to live?
And if I cannot learn to tuck my tongue?
Should I run choking back to mother? You?"

"There is a thing," she says, " that you can do.
Watch my eyes. A quarter arc, no more.
Turn your head. Move your eyes. Like this.
If you must speak, keep far behind your breath.
One more thing... In your mother's room...
Before you come downstairs... Her gloves, the white...
the hat she wears to town on Saturdays..."

In that hat for town and Saturday,
tablet open on mother's popcorn spread
I wrote a hundred times the word *concur*
in strokes, the slowest of my finest hand.
And then before I rose I wrote these words
Granny's last, as she stood at my door:
"Of men and marriage, you must love marriage more."

In the parlor, facing that young man—
whose name, dreamily written, my finest hand—
I have forgotten now, I fanned.

I fanned
but finding points that Granny talked about,
those quiet points, was harder than I thought.
I tucked and choked, concurring silently
with almost all beliefs that he brought out.

It took me five more years to get it right
to understand there comes that point with men
where they have let me talk what I believe
and then their talking ends. Some sat. Some left,
but after quiet.
Slower there than breath,
I've come to know, the marriage lies.

My eyes?
I have this way I move my eyes. You see?
Before my Granny left, we practiced this.
She sat on the edge of my bed.
I remember she said—
she held my shoulders, looked in my eyes and said—
"Dear Girl, it shows. You excuse yourself, like us.
You blush and bow each time that band of white
hangs lower than your hem. But in your eyes...
like fireworms in green... You'll slip. And soon."

Perhaps I slipped last night. But was it soon?
I've walked, parallel and in between,
the windrow loam of marriage thirty years.
Today those thirty years, I guess, seem soon.
But anyway, I move my eyes like this...

And I remember I showed my daughter this
nights she cried, when stories wouldn't do...
But I never got to have that talk before...
I have this way I move my eyes. You see?
You future us-es... Were you here, you'd see.
Up like this, then down around like this.
A quarter arc. No more. Up like this...
My finest strokes... To get there first... You see?

But after eyes, what is there to tell, to see
of thirty years, Pasha's Glen to here?
That I married twice, both times a sugar day?
That I lived in mind with what my Granny said?
That I learned in mind to love a marriage more
care for it more than two who married me?

That I learned the art of the Grand Hypocrisy?
That I learned how silence could concur, not I.

That I learned to turn, concur apparently,
to turn my head away that moment men
turn my belief to quiet anger, pain?

That rain is true? That mud is made by rain?
That now a little past mid-century
a woman sits on a courtsquare bench alone?
Shielding shades of her name, a woman sits...
in her pocket, a savings book, its total less
by two shoes and one membership card
the pitiful total she should have passed along
to her daughter...

And what names are her daughter's?
And where and in what state is she today?
The daughter never taught to turn away
who has two sons and lives with sons alone.
Who'd say, if she were here, "I'll do alone."
Who'd say, "With hims and ifs and hows, to hell."

If eyes say most, how much is left to tell?

Lara Stapleton

DELICIOUS

No one ever told Rebecca to be quiet in church. She fidgets when she's bored. She blows her bangs up off her face and scowls. She slaps her thighs and crosses her arms. She's a grown woman. In restaurants, she balances ashtrays on her head. Not to show off, but in the midst of conversation, the immediate answer to what to do with her hands, the time. She talks very, very loudly. Sometimes she yells for no apparent reason, or she notices that the bottom ridge of the wine carafe is slightly wider than the top of her glass, like they were meant to fit together, like South America might float into the nest of Africa. She places the carafe on top of the glass, clink, clink, clink. If you are a polite person, a person who says please and thank you and sorry to trouble you— you cringe. If you are a polite person who does not know her, you would probably very much dislike her. If you are a friend who loves her, you walk behind crouching with your arms spread, catching things, bridging the distance, between she who you love and the rest of the world. Shhhhing and explaining in glances to the waiter that you are not a party to this obliviousness.

Rebecca has a strong jaw, wild brown hair, and a long long neck. If you were falling out of love with her, the long neck would be the first thing to become absurd, but before that, it remains her most compelling feature.

Rebecca looks great with her hair tied back, bent and looking at her upcurled toes. The neck long enough to arch. When she stands, she lifts up up up on her body, a dancer about to turn. Her point of balance differs from the rest of ours.

She wears fake fur and has blunt, manly fingers.

Now, Rhonda, she's the croucher. She adores Rebecca and tries to calm her in unnoticed ways. When Rebecca starts yelling, Rhonda lowers her own voice and leans in so that her friend might instinctively follow. Sometimes this works. Rhonda is always laying her fingers on Rebecca's forearm like the calming wife— in the theater when the lights go down and Rebecca is still talking, in moments of confrontation Rhonda would rather were abandoned, when it's long past time to leave.

Rhonda, she is quite the opposite. She would never try to get free drinks from the bartender or ask a cab driver to stop in two places. After six years with the same hair stylist, Rhonda went in on a day that he was sick, and a short shrill woman took his place. She never went back for fear of having to choose between them and insulting someone. She rarely enters clothing stores because all it takes is one "may I help you?" to obligate her to major purchases. She orders food when she's not hungry because she's sure that's what the waiter wants. She would never send anything back, no matter how raw the meat or rancid the vegetables. She says thank *you* after favors she herself performs and

sorry when other people bump into her. She donates to charities over the phone.

Rhonda would follow Rebecca to the ends of the earth, cringing with fingers on forearm.

Like most best-girlfriend groupings, they look something alike— the wild brown hair, the womanly build. But Rhonda is a bit shorter and distinctively bowlegged. Her neck is nothing like another limb. She's the thicker of the two, broad-hipped, with the pointy little chin of a slimmer girl.

They first met when Rhonda was just getting over her boyfriend. Her depression no longer carried his name, but was evolving into a vague and dull ache. His name only hung in the periphery. She was learning that simple things were not as tragic as they originally seemed. She bought groceries and did her laundry more often so that it wouldn't be too heavy for one person going up the stairs. So what if her sheets weren't folded as neatly? She took the books out from where they propped up her futon, and fixed it, using a hammer for wedging and electrical tape for where the wood had chipped away. She felt very clever about that. She found these little rubber things in the hardware store that could be used, instead of a drill, to place screws. She gave her spare keys to a friend up the street, someone more organized than Rebecca.

When Rhonda met Rebecca, she had just begun to laugh without making note of its falseness. Rebecca was very much associated with the seeds of Rhonda's joy.

Rhonda did not have a nickname for twenty-eight years, and then her first six months as Rebecca's friend, she took on four. This was one place where Rebecca's attention was exacting, where she made mental notes, things to call Rhonda. She liked to make people laugh. There was 'Ramda,' because that is how it was misheard by the cab driver from Bangladesh, who said it meant, in his language "One Sharp Knife, okay?" 'One Sharp Knife' was the second name. 'Miss Thing' is what a lot of young people were calling each other at this time, and 'Euthanasia' was an extensive joke played on another foreign cab driver, perpetrated, entirely, of course, by Rebecca, while Rhonda pleaded for cessation with her eyes.

Rhonda gave names back but forgot to make them stick. She'd say it once or twice and either forget, or not consider them good enough and try something new the next time. She considered 'One Sharp Knife' her own Tribal Indian name, so she gave Rebecca 'Laughs Like Thunder' and then 'Giblets' because Rebecca ate as fast as one of those dogs they starve for TV commercials. In the end, she called her Rebb, as Becky was too commonplace to suit her.

Rebb, and of course it would be spelled with two b's.

Rebb had a thing for cab drivers because she said she wanted to try them in all flavors. She would slide in front and ask them where they were from. The drivers would generally shift in their seats and grow conscious of their wads of

money. Rebecca sat sideways, staring. Rhonda skooched down low in the back seat so she wouldn't have to watch the man's discomfort, the weirdness. Discomfort wasn't always the case. Rebecca introduced them. This is Rhonda and Rebecca, Ramda and Rebecca, Euthanasia and Rebb. Rebecca would put an elbow on the dashboard and one over the back of the seat. She'd recite the few words she had learned in Hindi or Haitian Creole or Spanish. There was an Egyptian named Raga who had only been in the city two months. This was a gypsy cab and his English was poor and they had trouble getting where they were going and the whole time, Rebecca sat on her heels with her knees toward him, like he was the altar or the sand castle. She sat facing him, her chest heaving and shaking with each bump in the road, her head wobbling on that long and slender neck. He had amazing hazel eyes and Rebecca asked him to come back later and then she took him home. This made Rhonda so nervous that she cried.

Rhonda, who of course had been a wall flower, was forced to start dancing in clubs. They would go to places where the median age was nine years younger than them and if Rhonda didn't keep up, winding through the crowds, Rebecca would simply ditch her. One night, Rhonda said "That's okay, Rebb, you go ahead," and watched her friend shimmy in through the dance floor. She stood next to a speaker, sipping her white wine, anticipating the next day's earache. She turned down a grinning young man, horrified at his youth— that anything she'd do might be illegal. Rebecca did not come back. It might have been her on stage where crowds of girls squeezed and bumped over the territory of the platform. It might have been Rebecca's red-sleeved arm rising and falling in rhythm, straight up and then dropping, noodle-like, as if all of her muscle had disappeared. Rhonda waited until the place closed, the lights went on, and then she went home alone, shaking with the pound of the bass.

After that, she danced. She held on to Rebecca's elbow and went where she went and found that it was usually dense enough with bodies to eat up her self-consciousness. One night, she arrived on the platform with dozens of much younger girls. They danced with their elbows out so that if you got too close you'd hit that extended bone. Rebecca responded by dancing with her nails out. Rhonda had had enough to drink that night, so it was okay.

Rhonda did change, of course. She wanted to. She put on lipstick. Rebecca introduced her to push-up bras. Rhonda's laugh became throatier, her blushes less frequent. One night, after a rock-n-roll show, Ramda had a thing with the twenty-year old drummer. His teeth were small and wide apart, floating white chicklets. His smile was all gums. This is most of what she remembers. She left while he slept, regretting it only for a few days.

No matter what happened, Rebecca was always wilder. If Rhonda's skirt was short, Rebecca's was transparent. If Rhonda went home with the drummer, Rebecca had her way with the rhythm guitar in the restroom of the bar.

Rhonda always had plenty of room to be the good girl.

It wasn't a complete tyranny of Rebecca's impulse. There was an argument or two. Rhonda lent Rebecca her bathing suit and didn't hear about it for a few weeks.

"Hey, um, do you still have my bathing suit?"

"Yeah, Ram. Listen, I had my period in it, pretty bad. Do you want me to buy you a new one?"

"Yes." It was the harshest word Rhonda had yet had for Rebecca, and it sounded as impotent as it was.

There was a night during the early sweet freshness of Spring, when Rhonda started dancing with a guy who was only a few years younger. He wore overalls and was really quite attractive. Although, at one moment, she took a break, and spoke to Rebecca and told her that he was too cheesie and pretty for her taste. Too much gel, and his hairline grew too far over his ears.

She kept dancing with him. She started making out with him. He had this way of kissing, which was to go at it very gently for a while, and then to grab and squeeze her suddenly and dramatically. Rhonda enjoyed this very much. They ended up on a couch in a back corner of the club, she on his lap, hands everywhere. When the lights went up, she said she had to go and he asked if she remembered his name. "Carl," she said, but it was Kevin. Rhonda laughed. "Do you remember mine?" she asked. She had told him, but he hadn't the slightest idea. She thought this was funny and told him it was nice and too perfect and that now it was time for her to go home. He asked for her number and she refused, laughing. She wouldn't even tell him her name.

She told Rebecca in the cab on the way home and Rebecca leaned back over the front seat and called her Miss Thing and slapped her five. Rhonda was hungry when she got home, and ate an enormous bowl of corn chex with bananas on top, sitting on her bed in her pj's. She giggled to herself, and thought of the young man, that the evening was a fond moment she would always have. Her eyes welled up with tenderness, her love for Rebecca, the fun. She felt very very happy. She felt it couldn't get better from here. She felt her life coming into its own.

She felt she had had her adventures and wouldn't need them so much any more. She knew what she wanted out of life, a few of the possibilities condensing and floating to the top. She was, in this moment, at peace.

Rhonda spent less and less time with Rebecca, although this made her love her all the more. It was in a different way. Rhonda knew that Rebecca had given her some of her most delicious memories. On a good, still day of reflection, the things a mind offers up as gifts, a little chuckle.

Rhonda commenced some of her own career-related projects. Had nice dinners with nice people, dated here and there.

Hours with Rebecca were passed in a state of nostalgia, a soft grin at that year, when Rebecca saved Rhonda from her own pathetic life. Some things stayed with Rhonda. She maintained the ability to introduce herself. She liked to paint her face on the weekends.

But when Rhonda went to the clubs, she let Rebb leave her on the edge of the dance floor. This was actually a relief.

Of course, there would be depression to Rebecca's mania. There would be the night in the midst of Rhonda's wildest year, a time after she stopped sniffling at Rebb's pickups, but before she herself owned any flirtations.

The first time, Rebecca buzzes Rhonda's buzzer in the wee hours of the morning. The initial jolt, Rhonda incorporates into her dream. The second wakes her. On the third, she sits, quick and upright, eyes rolled off, ears tuned for listening. On the fourth and fifth and sixth, she tightens and hopes for the end.

She answers.

"It's me." Rhonda buzzes Rebecca in, still not trusting that this isn't some elaborate scheme. Some one in a ski mask with a barrel to her friend's gut.

There is only one set of steps on the stairs. There is only the sharp clack of Rebecca's heels. Rhonda wonders if she can shake off sleep enough for whatever adventure her partner-in-crime has come to drag her to.

Rebecca hobbles in the doorway, her fake, black fur sliding off her shoulders, a jug of apple juice hooked over her finger. She is not drunk. She is not herself.

"Oh, Hi. I know you were sleeping. I'm sorry." This is the first of Rebecca's tentativeness. Instead of her usual obliviousness, she seems to be clutching at Rhonda's reactions. Rhonda's surprise makes her strained smile twitch, her voice dip. "You can go back to sleep. I'll just sit." She clacks into the bedroom and parks on the edge of Rhonda's bed.

"Are you okay? Why are you here?" Rhonda is dumbfounded, hovering.

"I'll just drink my apple juice. You go back to sleep." Rebecca unscrews her jug and swigs, half of it running down her chin. "I spilled it. I'm sorry." Rebecca checks Rhonda's face and sees that her eyebrows are scrunched, mouth slightly open. Rebecca shudders. "Oh, of course you can't sleep if I sit here."

Rebecca clacks into the bathroom and sits on the edge of the tub. Rhonda turns to watch her. Rhonda follows and stares from the open door.

"I'll just sit here and drink my apple juice." This time she doesn't spill until she removes the jug from her mouth, she douses half her coat.

Then Rebecca covers her ears with her elbows straight out, like she's trying to squash the shape of her head. She screams without sound, her mouth stretching open across her teeth, like a snake, like her pointy tongue should leap and retract. She gasps. And then she screams audibly. She sobs uncontrollably,

like a baby tiring itself for sleep, but Rebecca never tires. Like a humiliation beyond comprehension. Like a grown woman should never cry. She moans so that the neighbors knock on the walls.

Nothing Rhonda does can quiet her. Not pressing face to bosom, not slow circles on her back. Rebecca will not pause her howling to answer why. Eventually, Rhonda leads her to the bed and tucks her in, where the bellowing continues. At least it doesn't echo so much into the next apartments. When Rhonda shuts the door, to pace in the living room and think, the sound is slightly muffled.

She considers calling the hospital, the cops, but fears that tomorrow, when this has to be over, Rebecca would never forgive her.

She calls the girlfriend up the street who has her spare set of keys.

"Allison? I'm sorry. Yeah. I'm sorry. Does your roommate still have that Valium? I'll explain when I get there."

Rhonda trusts the consistency of Rebecca's crying to keep her for a quarter of an hour.

The Valium works, although it is a challenge to get the pills in her mouth and even more to get the water in, and the swallowing done. Rhonda tilts Rebecca's head back. She winds her fingers through Rebecca's hair and pulls. Rhonda grips solidly, pries Rebecca's chin down with the other hand, so that her friend's mouth hangs open to the sky.

There are second, third, and fourth times to this. Rhonda obtains a stash of Valium. Rebecca learns to take it voluntarily. The doses go up.

This is the other Rebecca. Rebb claims to have no recollections. Although, Rhonda suspects she's lying for embarrassment.

The fifth time is well into the content part of Rhonda's life. This comes on a night when Rhonda is worn out with her accomplishments of the last few days. When Rhonda has done so many things for the good of her future, that her body is throbbing with weariness, a very satisfying fatigue. She has been too busy with life to get sleep. She is so tired that all she is doing is staring at the TV, working up the strength to ready herself for bed.

Next to her on the couch is a baked potato with cheddar cheese and broccoli, only a few bites out of it. Her stomach was rumbling but it was a chore to chew, and she also saw blue in the potato. A rotten little cloud that showed up after broccoli was picked away.

She is balled up on the couch with her coat over her backwards for a blanket. She never got it to the closet. It is all she can do to keep her eyes open. She promises herself the next commercial.

She makes a mental list of what needs to be done. The radiator should be turned up, which means a clanging in the pipes for a few good hours, but she'll be so knocked out she won't notice. She needs to put the uneaten food in the

kitchen, and all the regular stuff, brush her teeth, take off her shoes etc. She must repeat a list to herself because she is tired enough to forget.

She considers that the potato wasn't rotten because she is seeing blue spots everywhere. Red spots, blue spots, she is blindingly weary. She takes a deep breath and forces herself up before she crashes right there.

She turns up the radiator and the clanging and sputtering pipe in. She enters her bedroom to kick off her shoes, and then the buzzer.

And there is Rebecca, so pale and pasty that she looks like the dead skin under a band-aid. Rhonda's coat is still on backwards, arms through the sleeves, flapped open in back. One shoe is off.

Rebecca is already blubbering. Rhonda adds her to the mental list of things to do. Put Rebecca to bed. Hang up her coat. She lays Rebecca on her bed and goes to get the Valium and a glass of water. She brushes her teeth. She goes back to the bedroom and kicks off her final shoe but feels such a rush of exhaustion that she decides to get in bed fully dressed. She makes sure Rebecca takes the Valium, then huddles herself around her sobbing friend, and falls right out into a deep, dense sleep.

If it had only been Rebecca. If there had not been the clanging of the heater, the sputtering, iron knocks. Rhonda was dead to the world.

But there she is, only a few hours later, Rebecca stretched next to her on the bed, wailing, with her eyes bugged out like a little man kicked them forward from the inside.

Rhonda is *this* far from sleep. Rhonda wants sleep more than anything. Rhonda gets two more Valium and a glass of water and hands them to Rebecca but Rebecca will not take them. Rhonda tries to open Rebecca's mouth, but, the tantrum now includes rolling her head from side to side, twisting and yanking from right to left on that unreal neck. Twisting and yanking as random and incomprehensible as the striking of the radiator. If there had been a rhythm, to the radiator, to Rebecca's snotty screaming, Rhonda could still be asleep. Rhonda would have made a song of it in her dreams.

But Rebecca won't hold her head still for the Valium. So, Rhonda gets on top of her, sits right on her stomach and pins her arms with her knees. Rhonda's backwards coat bunches between them on Rebecca's chest. Rebecca kicks, but her voice is quieted, because Rhonda has a hand over her mouth. Rhonda grabs Rebecca by the hair and pries open her jaw, which takes all of her strength, and pours water in and drops in the pill but Rebecca gurgles and spits it up. It lands in Rebecca's hair. Rhonda picks it up and tries again and Rebecca spits it up again.

And Rhonda's adrenaline has kicked in. It is not sleep that she wants more than anything. What she wants more than anything is to beat the shit out of Rebecca.

Rhonda was an athlete in high school, and it has been a very long time since she felt that anticipation and lift, that strength surging in just the right

moment before the event. That strength worked for, longed for, and given from the most surprising places and this moment is just like the moments before the events when she was twelve years younger. Her lungs are fuller than they've been in twelve years. Her senses as astute and willing. She takes Rebecca's head by the hair, like she would try to force the Valium once again, but this time, she swings with the other hand, the hand that's not gripping the hair. She slaps, and then she makes a fist.

Cynthia King

AT THE HUNTSVILLE FERTILITY CLINIC

Now into the chicken coop comes a sea
To soak the hay To float the Araucanas
down to Clifta Creek Into the skull of the buck
a face of caves swinging from a pine
Now into beetle husks inside dead trees
the trees we haven't seen in groves
for years Now into cobalt bromide bottles
slid onto the ends of stripped branches
Into the bones of pups shot and edged
over the cliff every spring and fall the bitches
bred by the smell of their heats Now
into the crossbow Into the fletched arrows
Into the Chinese assault rifle bought for 99 dollars
Huntsville spinning Now into the plastic
cup my seed Inside her ready the egg

Gerard Malanga

PICASSO'S MASK BY ANDRE MALRAUX

On page 89 I was thinking about Picasso's collection.
Not one impressionist painting,
not one painting in which light plays any part.
Not even in the admirable Cezanne,
not even in the large Renoir.
I could see in my mind's eye
the living light of stained-glass windows,
the becalmed light of Van Eyck,
the light of Venice,
the emotionally charged light of Rembrandt,
the flickering, reflected light of the Impressionists.

On page 273 I placed a strand of Asako's hair
as bookmark,
so as to not lose my place in the dark.

Jack Foley

IN THE CAR

describe
a shopping center
.

describe
"once it was the color of saying"
.

describe
a car
.

describe
a woman
.

describe
a woman "wearing nothing but a smile"
.

describe
the skull of a girl
.

describe
the eyes
.

describe
the desperate accumulation of drugs
.

describe
the desperate accumulation of days towards nothing
.

describe
shopping
.

describe
the eyes that take this in
.

describe
the hand that writes
.

describe
It was the third time in three months B- had threatened to jump. On June 9 he stood for seven hours in an elevator shaft in the St. Francis Hotel tower, 26 stories above the ground. A- said he had talked with the young man's doctor. "The doctor says he (B-) wants to die," he said. "He really does want to die. Desperately."

.

describe
object

.

describe
quenched

.

describe
alarming

.

describe
the body is slow
the mind is slow BUT THE MOUTH

.

describe
a tall handsome Dubliner, casual, black-haired, clean-shaven, sallow, with brooding eyes

.

describe
It is in your animal that you suffer, and only there. It is in your animal that you experience pain. It is in your animal that you have the toothache or the headache. I am suffering, now, greatly in my animal. I am crying out in PAIN. Oh! Who among the angelic orders will hear my cry?

.

describe
the strength you drew from your mother and father

.

describe
guileless sweetness

.

describe
A British army soldier and a small Irish boy together last week in a Catholic area of Belfast..

.

describe

we live in a culture

.

describe
to take this down

.

describe
This clear
spirit
guides me, here,
in Oakland, at this time
"white flowered wild mint"

.

describe
I have altered nothing

.

describe
I have sanctioned nothing

.

describe
"This tongueless, toothless instrument, without larynx or pharynx, dumb, voiceless matter, nevertheless utters your words, and centuries after you have crumbled to dust will repeat again and again to a generation that will never know you every idle thought, every fond fancy, every vain word that you choose to whisper against
this thin
iron
diaphragm"

.

describe
meaning
to write "indispensible" I write
"undesirable"

David Kirby

LAUGHING

My wife's girlfriend Diane is visiting from California
and so, to make an impression, I have prepared
an excellent meal of crawfish-stuffed eggplant,
rice pilaf, salad of mixed greens with Dijon dressing,
and sorbet, and the two women have gone into the den
to finish the second bottle of chardonnay

while I sit at the table and finish grading papers
for class tomorrow, and I am almost done when,
through the thin wall that separates the two rooms,
I hear Diane ask, What's it like being married to Dave?
Barbara says something I cannot hear, and then
there is a chuckle, two, a torrent of helpless laughter.

My wife and her friend are laughing so hard in the den
that it reminds me of the time Will, age eight,
asked me what an enema was, and I said, Well, you fill
this rubber bag with water, see, and then you take this hose,
and you stick it up your butt... and that was it
for Will; he lay on his side and held his stomach

with both hands, and his little matchstick legs churned
as though monsters were trying to catch hold of them,
and he screamed so loudly I thought I was going to have
to take him to the doctor, but then he calmed down,
though for two or three days after he would suddenly say,
Enema! and fall down and start screaming again.

Meanwhile this other, this woman-laughter, is loud also,
though I certainly didn't mind the two friends
having a good shout together, because that is one
of the things that Barbara and I do best, and
team laughing got us over a good number of rough patches
in the early days of our marriage when there wasn't

much money and the whole stepmother-stepchild issue
to boot. That was when we lived on Chestwood Avenue
next to this guy named Azel Pruitt, whom Barbara
called Hazel Motes after the character in *Wise Blood,*
so that sometimes I'd slip and say,
"Morning, Mr. Motes— I mean, Mr. Pruitt!"

He thought I was an idiot already because
I wasn't always trying to fix stuff the way he did,
like his central air unit, which he put a new motor
in one day, although, when he flipped the switch,
the unit went whang! and shot up sparks
because he'd put the motor in backwards,

so Mr. Motes not only burned up his central air unit
but also had to call the Sears guy anyway.
The Moteses' house was about four inches from ours,
and one summer night when we had the windows open,
Barbara and I were making out
on the couch in the den when suddenly

Mr. Motes ran out into his yard to throw up.
You all right, honey? his wife asked,
and Mr. Motes said, Yeah, I— EEERRRRCH!
He stayed out there about twenty minutes,
fetching up his chop suey, and every time
we thought he was finished, up it would come again,

and Barbara and I were laughing so hard
that we had to use our asthma inhalers,
but you're supposed to hold the albuterol mist
in your lungs for as long as you can,
so here we are holding our breaths
and BLOOORRRRCH! Mr. Motes cuts loose again.

Now whether or not the two women are laughing at me,
surely I am by myself in a room that has
less laughter in it with each passing moment.

Then again, some of the greatest laughter
has been evident more by its absence than otherwise,
as when my colleague Reed Merrill and I

were giving papers at a conference in Sydney,
and the Aussies were a little huffy
since they thought we were even more provincial
than they were, so Reed tried to placate
them by describing his paper as pearls before swine,
and naturally the audience really bristled at that,

but this didn't stop Reed, who launched into his paper,
and after he had finished, I said,
Well, that was a great paper, but why did you
say it was pearls before swine, and he said,
I didn't, I made a funny joke and said
swine before pearls, and I said, No, you didn't,

you said pearls before swine, and he said,
Oh, shit, and put his head in his hands,
and everybody had long since filed out
of the lecture hall, so the two of us
were standing there in this huge empty space,
and the whole place was filled with silent laughter.

Oh, well, at least the interior
and the exterior reality came together
for a minute there, as it had done earlier
for Barbara and me, though not for Mr. Motes,
who couldn't hear us anyway. So much for
the unifying property of laughter, which also divides,

as it is doing tonight and also in the eighth grade
when we were studying France, and Meg Holmes was giving
a report about Versailles, and she was explaining
that the Emperor liked his good times,
so when he wasn't waging war on the rest of Europe,
"Napoleon had these big balls...."

From the den of my house, there is more laughter.
Then someone turns on the radio; I hear an old song,
one of the shameless ones that says it's okay
to have no pride, it's okay to love someone
no matter how badly they treat you, and then
I hear the voices of the two women begging me

to come in and dance with them. We do the Hitchhike,
the Swim. The song stops and another starts;
Diane goes for more wine as Barbara slips into my arms
and we dip, glide, tango. I hear Diane in the kitchen now.
She is laughing to herself as Barbara and I kiss,
long and slow, and keep dancing.

CRYING

My wife says she has made up her mind
to cry really hard when her mother dies,
and I say, How can you tell how sad
you're going to be,
because sometimes death comes
as a release (Henry James
described his family as "almost happy"
following his mother's death),
and she says, I can just tell, and besides,
you don't know anything about crying,
you never cry at the movies,
and I say, I do, too,
I just don't make a big deal out of it
the way you do,

and when Roy Orbison died,
you'll recall that I cried piteously,
and not just because of the song, either.
I cried harder over Roy Orbison's death
than I have over the death of aunts, say,
though my wife is right about me
not wanting to cry in public,
because I'm not one of those
tragically-handsome weepers
you want to wrap your arms around
and to whom you say,
There, there, it'll be better soon,
you're so pretty when you're sad,
come on, give us a little kiss....

My face gets all twisted and ugly
when I cry, like I'm really unhappy
but also I have to go to the bathroom.
Yet I have learned

the one great lesson about crying
that women seem to have mastered
better than men, which is that
a good old-fashioned bawl
will make you feel better instantly,
and so from time to time
I sit down and have a nice heartfelt sob,
but only when there's no one around
and no mirror so I can't see
what a gargoyle I've become.

Too, I honor the great statesmen
of crying, the octogenarian James
Cagney who said crying comes easily
at his age as well as the defeated
presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson
who said that it hurt too much
to laugh but that he was too big to cry,
a surefire indicator that he had anyway.
Animals can't cry, and therefore I feel
sorry for them, but not so sorry
that I'm going to cry over it.
I'll probably cry when my own mother dies,
and certainly I've cried
at her condition right now:

she's ninety-two and hard of hearing
and nearly blind and so weak
she has to use a walker,
but those things don't make me cry.
What makes me cry is her pluck
and high-spiritedness in the face
of all this adversity;
why, just the other day she fell down,
and, as she lay there on the floor,
the paramedics were cackling like geese
at her retorts, jibes, and one-liners,
and you'd have to be brain-dead
not to laugh and cry simultaneously

Never have two lovers been more tender
toward each other, more beautiful
in each other's eyes, even if
our waists are thicker now, our hair gray.
Look, everyone is crying;
they can't bear to see us go!
And see how ugly they are!

Ha, ha! That's the real tragedy!
Why, they're even more hideous
than we are when we cry!
They're crying so hard they're falling down,
and for a moment we are happy
they can afford us such excellent amusement,
but suddenly a suspicious thought
crosses our minds—
what if they are crying for themselves
as we have cried for ourselves
when we seemed to be crying for others?
But no, no, it must be us
they are crying for, for this time
surely the gods themselves are dying.

Books

Reviewing Race

Jamaica Kincaid. *The Autobiography of My Mother.* New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996. 228 pp.

Hanif Kureishi. *The Black Album.* New York: Scribner, 1995. 287 pp.

Vicki Covington. *The Last Hotel for Women.* New York: Simon and Schuster 1996. 300 pp.

Ruth Rendell. *Simisola.* New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995. 311 pp.

Alice Adams. *Southern Exposure.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. 305 pp.

It is a pity that we learn so little from our ancestors. Certainly, at the end of the twentieth century, America is repeating the rather obvious mistakes of its own past and indulging in an historical blindness that blurs our own errors, past and present. How, then, can we in the United States look clearly at the history of race in our own country and at the problems that history has created and exacerbated?

If we cannot look directly at race, two books will help us look at it aslant and, perhaps, see our problems from a slightly different perspective. Both *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi and *Simisola* by Ruth Rendell offer American readers the luxury of examining racial tension from a distance. The problems of Britain with the citizens of its former colonies are sufficiently different from ours that we can, at first, deny that we have the same narrow racial vision as the British. After a first denial, however, we must ask ourselves why we persist in pretending that race issues in America are becoming less of a problem when all evidence indicates they are more and more complex and difficult to deal with. A recent cartoon reminds us that race is at the center of our dialogue about ourselves. The cartoon pictures a white man saying to a black woman: "How does it feel to know that you got your job solely on the basis of your race and sex?" Her reply, "Why don't you tell me?" reveals both our assumptions about race and the tensions those assumptions generate, and we certainly have not, with all the recent attacks on affirmative action, gone much

beyond the assumptions illustrated in the cartoon.

Hanif Kureishi, most well known in America for his screenplay, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, approaches head-on the racial tensions in Great Britain. While they are different from ours, they contain many of the same assumptions and hostilities; so, *The Black Album* might be read as a sort of parable of racial polarization. Shahid Hasan is caught between the wild license of his ex-Marxist teacher, Deedee Osgood, and the rigid Islamic conservatism of Riaz Al-Hussain, who wants to galvanize the Islamic right at the university Shahid attends. Shahid, attracted to the mix of cultures offered by London, is enchanted by "the different odors of Indian, Chinese, Italian, and Greek food wafting from open doorways" in the neighborhood of his university-assigned bed-sitter. Shahid's dream of a multicultural world that will enlarge his own narrow experience is sharply undercut by the Islamic students' burning of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in ritual fatwa. He cannot accept that narrow view; nor can he accept the vision of the world his teacher proposes because he knows that someone must take responsibility. Finally, Prince, whose Black Album inspired the title of Kureishi's book, is Shahid's icon for finding a way to integrate. "Half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too," Prince is the answer for Shahid, and possibly for Kureishi, also the child of two races and cultures. It is this duality and ambiguity that enriches Kureishi's view of the world and enlarges his discussion of race.

While Kureishi looks at the racial situation from the point of view of a minority within the Anglo culture, Ruth Rendell asks hard questions of that Anglo majority. *Simisola*, an Inspector Wexford mystery, confronts our stereotypes of race and gender in a way that both challenges and informs. Wexford, long a favorite detective of mystery readers, has, of late, become a vehicle for Rendell's examination of the way the society Wexford is charged with protecting fails to protect certain groups, in this case Nigerians in Great Britain. As the story unfolds, Rendell explores personal assumptions about race through Wexford's handling of the disappearance of the daughter of his Nigerian physician, Dr. Akande. She also examines cultural assumptions about race and visibility within a society that still accepts, at least tacitly, forms of chattel servitude for illegal immigrants from the former colonies. Rendell reminds her readers of the history of slavery when Wexford names an unidentified black woman's corpse Sojourner, after Sojourner Truth, and he is nearer to the truth in doing that than he realizes at the time.

Wexford must come to terms with his own assumptions about

race when he views that young black woman's body and assumes, without reference to any of the evidence, that the body is that of the Nigerian doctor's daughter. In a terrible interview with the doctor and his wife, the missing girl's mother accuses Wexford: "when you find a dead black girl it's got to be our girl because we're black!" Wexford, who has always seen himself as broadminded, must confront his limitations, and "the worst thing for him was that it had shown him he was wrong about himself. This error had occurred through prejudice, through racism, through making an assumption he could never have made if the missing girl were white and the body white." He understands that he looks at white people as individuals and at black people as part of a group, thus diminishing the blacks in the process.

Jamaica Kincaid picks up on that very issue in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, a chilling story of race and class in the lush but race-conflicted Caribbean where Kincaid herself grew up. Describing her father, a policeman who works for the whites, Xuela Claudette Richardson says: "his father was a Scots-man, his mother of the African people. This distinction between 'man' and 'people' was an important distinction, for one of them came off the boat as part of a horde..., each face the same as the one next to it; the other came off the boat of his own volition, seeking to fulfill a destiny." The Caribbean slaveholders dehumanized and diminished their slaves, and a century later, Inspector Wexford, a well-meaning Englishman, does the same thing. Kincaid has always rejected that diminishment, and *The Autobiography* insists on inviolate individuality in the face of subtle and corrosive colonial oppression. Brought up in Antigua but currently living in Vermont, Kincaid has a perfect perspective to bring the colonial view of slavery to the forefront in America. Her point of view looks to and challenges European customs with a particular form of American individualism, and, indeed, Xuela Claudette Richardson insists mightily on her individual worth.

Two American novelists, Alice Adams and Vicki Covington, confront the issue of race from the perspective of the American South because it is there that the very fiber and fabric of society is most deeply entangled by the "race question." Both novels are situated in the past, Adams' during the Depression and early years of World War II, and Covington's in the early sixties. Both periods were times of promise for Civil Rights, and the hopeful attitudes of many of the liberal characters seem, for the times, justified. But both novels also recognize that the failure of the movements in the forties and the sixties have led to many of the unresolved conflicts about race in America.

Pinehill, North Carolina, the setting for Adams' *Southern Exposure*, is filled with people whose "ideas on 'race' and certain other social issues were appalling." And those ideas do not change during the course of the novel. Adams, in order to comment on Southern attitudes towards race, incorporates the strategy of the outsider. The Bairds, Harry, Cynthia, and their daughter, Abigail, are fugitives from Connecticut looking for a cheap place to live during the Depression. Their views on race contrast sharply with those of the Southern whites, and it is through the rather schematic tension that arises from those differing positions that Adams tries to examine race in America.

There are two problems with this approach. The polarization is absolute. No Southerner is at all enlightened. Like Dolly Bigelow, who treats her maid Odessa much like the chattel of earlier times and who thinks that giving her an afternoon off every few weeks is gracious, much of the town makes generalized assumptions about race that diminish the individuality of blacks. Dolly's refusal to sell Odessa's quite wonderful cloth in the craft store she opens with Cynthia Baird is imbedded in attitudes about race mixing that Cynthia cannot budge. The second problem with Adams' approach is a belief that the problems of racism can be localized and then, possibly, cauterized. So, *Southern Exposure* fails in its analysis of race. Perhaps, just before World War II it was possible to define the problem as a localized one, but in the nineties it certainly isn't. Had Adams looked to the past to uncover our dreams about equality and to show us how little we have succeeded in achieving our goals, then the novel might serve as a goad to continue the struggle. Unfortunately, both the oversimplification of race relations in America and Adams' fascile discussion of race with regard to Hitler's pogram against the Jews weakens the central focus of the book. This should be a book about race that would force readers to reexamine their own attitudes; instead, it is a book about race that pretends the solution was easy and the problem could have been solved, when it has always been the most difficult and challenging issue in our society.

If Adams does not quite succeed in her analysis of the race issue, Vicki Covington, in *The Last Hotel for Women*, uses Bull Connor, the Freedom Riders of the early sixties, and Birmingham, Alabama to look squarely into the heart of racial conflict in America. Her characters agonize over the separation of the races in a Birmingham that is torn by racial conflict. Bull Connor insists "we just can't have this mingling," but Covington recognizes that the people of Birmingham, both black and white, see that the situation is not so easily solved as

Connor would have it. Pete Farley, father, foundry boss, and baseball player, has lived in Birmingham since after World War II and still cannot reconcile segregationist policy with the way people ought to live. He tells a reporter staying in his family's hotel during the Freedom Rides, "I don't think it's right— separating the races like this. I take my daughter by one of those whites-only water fountains and I think I'm going to cry, the way she looks up at me with the big question." That big question is one that parents can never answer for their children. And when the children become parents, the questions still hangs over their relationships. It is Covington's sensitivity to the way race interposes itself as guilty knowledge that gives *The Last Hotel for Women* a voice that cuts into and bares all our illusions about race.

Bull Connor, certainly now a symbol of racial hatred, is a complex and rich character in Covington's hands. She peels back the laws he hides behind to reveal his terror of race mixing. When the black and white baseball teams at the foundry decide to practice together, Connor's response is typical of men of his era: "To think that playing ball will not lead to other things like eating in the same cafes and occupying hospital rooms side by side and dating and marrying." Then Pete Farley invites the black baseball player, Nathan Stamps, and his wife, Lydia, back to the Farley hotel to have dessert at the cafe; Connor tries a desperate move to keep the races apart, but finds he cannot turn the clock back. Everyone now ignores or simply dislikes him.

What is clear from all five novels is that we have not come to terms with how race divides us, nor have we learned how to get beyond those divisions. Certainly, Kincaid and Kureishi, seeing race from the point of view of colonized and oppressed groups, view the failures of society and of individuals with less sympathy or hope than do writers such as Adams, Covington, and Rendell. But no matter what the stance, the chronicle of race relations still looms as the largest single failure in our history, and it is a failure that dogs us and defines the limits of our character.

— Reviewer *Mary McCay* is a professor of English at Loyola University.

George Seferis. *Collected Poems.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1995.

As with every translated work, the third revised edition of Greek poet George Seferis's *Collected Poems* is a collaborative effort; in this case two translators are involved. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard have been working together on Greek poetry since the emergence of their first anthology, *Six Poets of Modern Greece*, which was published in 1960 in Britain and 1961 in the United States. That volume emerged in bilingual form in 1967; next came the expanded bilingual edition in 1981, then an English-only edition (published only in Britain) in 1986, and now this English-only revised edition. One wonders why this collection has been revised so many times. The answer is two-fold: Seferis kept producing more poetry (every one of his published poems is included in this edition, with a few exceptions) and, given the nature of translation, every translated poem is missing some element of the original; revisions gave the translators a chance perhaps to do justice to the poem from another angle and update the meaning for a contemporary English-speaking audience. Keeley and Sherrard willingly admit in their notes that their versions of the poems, no matter how often revised, "compared to the originals, are little more than bones from which the flesh has disappeared," especially when it comes to the rhymed poems.

Thinking of translation optimistically, every new version gets closer to the meaning of the original poem, and thus having read all English versions, one will, ideally, be closer to the original Greek poem. This would mean reading not simply three different versions of one poem, but almost literally three different poems, for in many cases, every time Keeley and Sherrard revised, they created an entirely new poem. Indeed, as Keeley put it in an essay on the subject, Seferis once said that "any English version of his work was the translator's poetry, not his." Hence, a collaboration in three parts. In many ways, this collection is an exercise in mastery, or attempted mastery, of the art of translation, and deserves recognition simply on that account. But there is more than that for which to give it credit, for no matter how many poets involved, the poems are beautiful and serve as monuments to the sheer agony and utter joy that living is.

George Seferis, who died in 1971, is a very important figure in the literary landscape of modern Greece, along with Constantine Cavafy and Odysseus Elytis, among others. Not only was Seferis awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1963, he was also a diplomat in the Greek government from 1926-1962, even during his voluntary exile to Crete, Egypt, and south Africa from 1941-1944 during the Nazi occu-

pation. His entire life was intertwined with the life of his country, its history and politics, and it is impossible to separate Seferis and his work from that landscape. Greece, and his intimate relationship with it, floods his poetry, even though he spent much time out of the country in his duties as an ambassador and member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A consistent theme throughout Seferis's poetry is his relationship with his country and the heavy weight of its turbulent history. He enclosed the entire poem, "In the manner of G. S.," within the phrase "Wherever I travel Greece wounds me" as a first line and then first line of the last stanza: it is a fact that is impossible for his poetic voice to escape, and it pervades his entire body of work.

Since most Americans are not that familiar with Greece's history or culture, especially since the Classical period, we experience some trepidation when it comes to reading a poet of Seferis's magnitude, whose work is so entrenched in such history. There is nothing to be afraid of as an unschooled reader. Though the allusions are plentiful, it is not necessary to understand them all to gain a love or appreciation of these poems; they do not alienate those of us who are not philhellenes.

In Seferis's poetry, myth and history are consistently present, and though his poetry undoubtedly changed over time, these elements are never lost. The series of poems entitled *Mythistorema*, which in Greek contains the meanings of "myth," "history," and "story" was the equivalent of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Written between 1933 and 1935, *Mythistorema* was influenced by modernists like Pound and Eliot and marks a significant change in Seferis's style, making it less formal and introducing his use of stark imagery, creating a style that was to carve the path for his later poetry. It is also a poem that is representative of Seferis's subject matter and poetic themes. Most notably, it presents a way of dealing with Greece's torn past without running from it, but rather using it, for Seferis's poetry is acutely aware of the history that precedes it. In section 21 of *Mythistorema*, his images present a land in which the dead are still living and the living are aware of the fact that they will also die. This is an obvious cycle which is physically visible in the ancient ruins that are still present in the contemporary cities of Greece. History in such a place is tangible and, again, inescapable. In this section of the poem, Seferis's persona has an actual relationship with the dead:

> We who set out on this pilgrimage
> looked at the broken statues
> became distracted and said that life is not so easily lost
> that death has unexplored paths

gathering up the body's bitterness
so that we may escape the body's bitterness
so that roses may bloom in the blood of our wound.

George Seferis's is a poetry from the heart, gut, and mind, a poetry so full that, no matter what nationality we are, we can appreciate its elegance and honesty; the pleasure and the ache is present even through translation.

— Reviewer *Candy S. Ellison*, a recent Loyola graduate, works in publishing in Boston.

Gordon Bowker. *Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

"How much I know sometimes— how little at others," wrote Scott Fitzgerald, perhaps mulling over his tendency to splash about in public fountains when not engaged in the creative process. Such a thought might have occurred to Malcolm Lowry, author of the visionary novel *Under the Volcano*— a man who was affectionately described by a previous biographer, Douglas Day, as "a nuisance, a disgrace, a constant burden to those who cared for him." A fair, even a kindly, assessment.

With Lowry we are given the sometimes yawning disparity between the artist and the man, the grandeur of the one and the fecklessness of the other. Those who have considered, at a safe distance, the life of Malcolm Lowry may regard him as one of the most vivid modern examples of the Tormented (but somewhat cheerful withal) Genius— a man who spent the better part of his adult life in a drunken stupor, who yet managed to produce one of the "few authentic masterpieces" (Anthony Burgess) of this century. Lowry himself, nothing if not objective about his own life and work, was well aware of the impression he created; in fact he cultivated his modest legend almost from the beginning. At Cambridge University he was mostly remembered for his disheveled appearance and ubiquitous ukulele (or "taropatch," as he insisted on calling it), with which he composed a number of original jazz compositions.

So began the "sad, funny life of Malcolm Lowry," as Douglas Day would have it. But in Gordon Bowker's updated and far more comprehensive work— some ten years in the making— we are given much of the sad and little of the funny. As he somberly amasses the

evidence, Bowker manages to negate almost all the "cheerfulness" which, as Lowry put it, "was always breaking in" amid the many disasters of his life. We are thus left with an all but undiluted portrait of the artist as a self-destructive dipsomaniac: doomed at the outset by a childhood cursed with sadistic nannies and cold, uncaring parents, by portentous encounters with those who would warp and ultimately destroy his genius. Much of the same material is covered by Day, of course— but in Bowker's version, whether rightly or wrongly, it all appears in a mirror darkly, reversed and somewhat askew.

The writer Conrad Aiken, for example, is transformed from the benevolent father-figure of Day's account into a sort of parasitic Svengali, who, Bowker claims, performed sinister psychological experiments on Lowry, all the while subsisting on a stipend paid to him by Lowry's father in exchange for housing the wayward youth. Then there is the central figure in Lowry's life, his second wife and foremost caretaker, Margerie. Posterity, in the form of Gordon Bowker, has cast its fishy eye upon her and found her wanting. With the detached relish of a domestic detective, Bowker reveals the poor woman's origins as a dubious Hollywood floozie, a failed starlet who had nothing better to do than latch on to Lowry, who at least had the promise of genius and a trustfund besides. Lowry, in turn, had to put up with her because he was incapable of caring for himself. Beyond a point, however, one is left to wonder whether he would have been better off in some peaceful sanitarium. The marriage is cast as dark Strindbergian farce, a *folie à deux* as Bowker puts it; though Lowry lived for several, relatively tranquil years in a squatter's shack outside Dollarton, British Columbia— where he found the wherewithal to write most of *Under the Volcano* (Margerie's presence notwithstanding)— he would invariably go to pieces in the midst of anything resembling civilization, contriving at every opportunity to ditch his nagging wife and seek refuge in some suitably squalid saloon. The recurrent goose-chases on which he led Margerie and others form a sort of *leitmotif* in Bowker's book.

Of course it's tragic that Lowry should willfully destroy his genius, and yet one wonders how on earth things might have gone differently, and, even if they had, would a temperate, right-thinking Lowry have been capable of *Under the Volcano*?

Still, it doesn't take a Rabelais to find Lowry funny, but Rabelais himself would have been defeated by the cudgeling earnestness of this book. And speaking of cudgels— Bowker continues to drub his incessant tattoo upon the pate of Margerie Lowry, right up to the miserable end of his story. From beyond the grave we may sense her wishing she'd cooperated with this biographer while she had the

chance, before her death in 1988.

The biggest loser in this enterprise is Lowry himself, who is stripped not only of his dignity (in which he never placed much stock anyway) but more importantly of his powers to amuse. One has to wonder what attracted Bowker to this project in the first place: perhaps he begin with admiration and just got tired and peevish as the years dragged on. Finally, Bowker misses the point where Lowry is concerned. "The very sight of that old bastard makes me happy for five days," an anonymous barfly was heard to say of Lowry. Gordon Bowker might have given that some more thought.

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Close Reading

Helen Vendler. *The Given and the Made: Strategies of Poetic Redefinition.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. 139 pp.

Helen Vendler. *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Dove, Graham.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. 100 pp.

Arguably, Helen Vendler is the best close reader of poetry now working in English. Her acumen is on display in two slim volumes just published by Harvard, *The Given and the Made: Strategies of Poetic Redefinition* (the 1993 T. S. Eliot Lectures at the University of Kent), and *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Dove, Graham* (The Richard Ellmann Memorial Lectures in Modern Literature from Emory, 1994). In the seven lectures she covers six poets: Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Rita Dove, and Jorie Graham; and G. M. Hopkins, Seamus Heaney, and Graham again.

Her thesis in the earlier collection is that each poet starts out with a *donnée*—be it race, gender, social class, linguistic background, or psychological makeup—that he or she must build upon, work around, or transcend while forging a poetic *oeuvre*. In the later collection she maintains that a critical stage in each poet's development is always signalized by a definite stylistic break, either in large or small scale, either in rhythm, syntactical focus, or line length and verse form. These are unexceptionable claims, and a reader might suspect that they are simply a convenient pretext upon which to hang read-

ings of individual poems.

For it is in these "readings" that Vendler so much excels. Which is not to suggest that they are tours de force or set pieces, but simply isolable passages where the focus on a single poetic text becomes intense. They average about four pages apiece, with two to half a dozen per essay. The treatment differs, according to whether the work under consideration is a well-known anthology piece, or a lesser-known work of a well-known poet. Quotation from the poetic texts may be brief and apposite, or extensive, in the case of a very recent poem that most of her readers are likely not to know, or which may be difficult of access. Likewise, Vendler's reading techniques are various and appropriate, ranging from linguistic, grammatical and syntactic, and prosodic, to cultural, intertextual, and comparative analyses. Comparisons are most often drawn with Stevens (subject of one of Vendler's four book-length studies, *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems*), Whitman, Dickinson, Moore, and Bishop. Sometimes the readings are suspended to be continued a few pages further on, and in at least one instance, a reading is embedded in the midst of another one.

This is definitely a text-centered critic, who has admitted, "... I am a critic incorrigibly unhappy without a text to dwell on... " ("The Function of Criticism," 1982). She could be characterized as an aesthetic critic or formalist. In a credo published in the 1985 essay "Looking for Poetry in America," she declared, "... I myself think aesthetic value [as opposed to civic, ethical, mimetic, or communicative—the competing value systems espoused by other critics], properly understood, quite enough to claim for a poem. No matter how apparently mimetic it may look, a poem is an analogous not a mimetic imitation, algebraic and not photographic, allegorical and not historical. What it represents, ultimately, is its author's sensibility and temperament, rather than the 'outside world.' ... Thus, in representing a sensibility, the poem does represent a particular historical moment." She is at pains to distinguish her way from those of other current practitioners, as in this statement from the "Introduction" to the collection *The Music of What Happens* (1988): "The criticism of art should not be chiefly a matter either of interpretation(s) or of discussion of ideology. Of course, criticism may, along the way, make an interpretation or counter an ideology; but these activities (of paraphrase and polemic) are not criticism of the *art as art work*, but as statement. 'Art works,' said Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*, 'say something that differs in kind from what words say'" (emphasis added). The credo continues, "The aim of a properly aesthetic criticism ... is not primarily to reveal the *meaning* of an art work or dis-

close (or argue for or against) the ideological *values* of an art work. The main aim of an aesthetic criticism is to *describe* the work of art in such a way that it cannot be confused with any other art work (not an easy task), and to *infer* from its elements the aesthetic that might generate this unique configuration." Describing poems (if such a modest term may be accepted) and inferring their intrinsic aesthetic is what Helen Vendler is so good at.

Like her progenitors, the New Critics, then, she is strongest at the level of explicit poetic texture, and designedly so, for she insists, in "Looking for Poetry in America," "To clothe common perceptions in striking language, not to enunciate striking perceptions, is the function of poetry. Every perception, without exception, does indeed, in poetry, need to be rendered strikingly; it does not need to be rendered striking. All poetic language is language strenuously composed beyond the requirements of information, and therefore striking, perhaps most striking when most apparently 'transparent.'" Nonetheless, Vendler does exercise larger generic concerns, as manifest in the two volumes under review, as well as in the 1985 essay, where she lamented, "we have no well-developed theory of lyric poetry, chiefly because Aristotle codified his *Poetics* in the light of epic and dramatic poetry. The hard questions might be said to be: Is there anything at all useful that can be said about a lyric poem? If so, in what terms? Are the terms defined by the poem, by its own culture, by our culture, or by transcultural philosophic universals? Can a poem be taken as a sign of its culture and if so, how? How does a critic or a culture arrive at canonical preferences? Is the poem as linguistic sign different from the poem as cultural token, and if so, how? Can the word 'poetry' as a collective noun have any intelligible meaning? Is meaning confined within national and historical borders (allowing one to speak intelligibly of 'English poetry' or 'Greek poetry,' but not of 'poetry')? Is 'poetry' mimetic, a representation of an external world? If so, is it mimetic through its images, or through its internal structures, or in some other way? Is all poetry necessarily narrative, even the briefest lyric? ... Is poetry a possible object of thought? Is it legitimate to read poems as sources of, or reflections of, cultural practice? To what extent can one 'understand' a poem one reads in translation?" In a sense, it is these "hard questions" that are being addressed throughout *The Given and the Made* and *The Breaking of Style*. They are theoretical questions, per se, and Vendler is not oblivious to the demands of theory, as she indicated in her essay-review for the *New York Review of Books* in 1985, "Looking for Poetry in America," covering Dave Smith's *Local Assays*, Robert Hass's *Twentieth-Century Pleasures*, and Robert von Halberg's *American Poetry*

and Culture, 1945-1980, when she mildly took the two poets and the academic to task for ignoring that "Every act of practical criticism, as the theorists remind us, assumes positions silently taken on these questions." Clearly, Vendler is aware of her own theoretical assumptions.

Her own alignment is clear from the essay "The Function of Criticism" she wrote for the *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* in 1982, in which she identifies two critical camps, variously characterized by her as "the scientists of literature" and "the rhapsodists of literature" or "the secular critic" and "the religious critic": "These two models [approaches practiced by 'the rhapsodists of literature'] are radically incompatible. The Barthian model, centering on bliss, refuses to dispense with the signifier; the biblical model, centering on 'truth,' finds its true response in the signified. Though the second, hermeneutical, model, could not finally avoid form-criticism, it regards attention to the form chiefly as a means to a higher end. It is from the hermeneutical model, with its persistent allegorizing tendency, that the vulgar notion of there being a 'hidden meaning' in literature has arisen. The secular critic stays his eye on the surface; the religious critic chooses to pass through the surface in search of divine meaning. Both sorts of critics are always with us, though under different names. The two critical schools will always remain distrustful of each other, each finding the value of the work of art by a method repellent to the other." Vendler's alignment with "secular" criticism and possibly with the "rhapsodists" is evident from these remarks, from her practice, and from three entries in the "On Criticism" section of her 1988 collection, *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics*, where she writes with respect and admiration for Geoffrey Hartmann and Harold Bloom but with real affection for Roland Barthes.

The text-centered practice of this critic "incorrigibly unhappy without a text to dwell on" leads her to offer some forty-one specific readings of poems in the seven lecture-essays of the two books reviewed. These average about four pages in length, with the shortest identifiable "reading" one page, and the longest, of seven pages, devoted to Seamus Heaney's "The Graubolle Man" (*BS* 52-59) and "Terminus" (*BS* 60-67), and of six pages, to Jorie Graham's "At Luca Signorelli's *Resurrection of the Body*" (*GM* 99-105; briefly discussed in *BS* 76-77; and anthologized by Vendler in *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*). The number of readings per essay ranges from two in the opening piece on Lowell (a poet whose work is well known; and perhaps the one of the seven essays in which the author's thesis is most successfully integrated and carried through) to

eight in the first Graham essay, which at thirty-nine pages is the longest of the seven and may have been expanded from its original lecture presentation.

The poems for which readings are offered range from well-known anthology pieces (such as Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" and Lowell's "For the Union Dead") to lesser works of well-known poets (such as Hopkins' "Moonrise," *BS* 28-31 and Lowell's "Square of Black," a three-part poem about Lincoln, *GM* 24-26) to works of recent poets that Vendler is in the process of canonizing through her determined attention (such as Heaney's "The Graubolle Man" and "Terminus," Rita Dove's "Thomas and Beulah" sequence and Graham's "At Luca Signorelli's *Resurrection of the Body*") to works so new that Vendler herself is modestly tentative about their meaning (Dove's "Medusa," *GM* 85-88) or that had not yet even been published at the time of the lectures (Graham's "The Turning," *BS* 87-93).

In the 'fifties and 'sixties, heyday of the New Criticism, one might have felt absolved from the necessity of actually reading any poetry if one read the critics, since they quoted so frequently and extensively. Vendler is definitely in that tradition. She quotes entire fairly long poems: Graham's "The Geese" (*GM* 94-95, 33 lines), "History" (*GM* 117-120, 36 lines), and "Notes on the Reality of the Self" (*GM* 125-29, 58 lines, interspersed with passages of the critic's commentary); Dove's "Aircraft" (21 lines). Altogether she quotes in full twenty poems in the two volumes. And when it is not possible or appropriate to quote whole poems she will include representative sections (Dove's "Parsley," *GM* 72-75, 38 lines) or remarkable examples of style, such as a fifty-six-line-long single sentence from Graham's "The Turning." She is satisfied to offer short sections from a prohibitively long poem such as Hopkins' "The Wreck of *The Deutschland*" (*BS* 10-12) if it is sufficiently well known. She can reluctantly *refuse* to quote extensively or even treat a poem which is too long for inclusion, such as Graham's "Pollock and Canvas" (*GM* 105—seven sample lines are offered). She offers an effective quick survey of John Berryman's major collection, the *Dream Songs*, quoting five poems in full, two in part, and adverting to another(*GM* 45-51). Of course, brief allusions to poems of the six poets appear *passim* in the Hopkins essay when she offers an embedded reading, interrupting a discussion of "Spelt from Sybil's Leaves" (*BS* 32; 35-39) with one of "That Nature Is Like a Heraclitean Fire" (*BS* 32-35), and quoting both poems in full.

The range of this critic's reading techniques is broad, and part of her strength is definitely the choices she can make in matching her arsenal of techniques to poets and poems. At one end of the range, perhaps closest to mere *explication de texte*, is the system of "bracketed

unfoldings" used to open up Graham's "To the Reader" (*GM* 109-10), in which a line of the poem is followed by a bracketed response from the critic that unfolds the line's references and meanings ... followed by another line of the text, etc. It is as though the critic is at our elbow while we read, prompting and guiding us. The height of her linguistic approach would be in the recognition of the "nonsense language of the id" created by John Berryman as part of his cartoonish Henry persona: "It includes babytalk, childish spite-talk, Indian talk, Scottish talk, lower-class talk, drunk-talk, archaism and anachronism, megalomaniacal self-aggrandizing images, hysteria and hallucination, spell-casting, superstition, paranoid suspiciousness, slang, and primitive syncretic structures of all sorts—sentence-fragments, incorrect grammar, babble, and so on" (*GM* 41—all this richly exemplified, of course; see also the center of the commentary on Graham's style, *GM* 92).

The thesis of *The Breaking of Style*, as well as the nature of Hopkins' genius, requires Vendler to launch into some bravura analyses of this poet's syntax, such as her recognition of the "perfect verbal tautology" of the closing lines of Hopkins' "That Nature Is Like a Heraclitean Fire": "immortal diamond,/ Is immortal diamond" (*BS* 35). Similarly, the thesis of that volume requires the most minute inspection of individual poems of Heaney for significant grammatical practices—verb domination in Poem XXIV of "Settings" (*BS* 60-7), for which she provides an "adverbial scheme of simultaneity" (62) too complicated to reproduce here. Leaving aside the obvious case of the great innovator Hopkins, prosodic concerns bulk large in the discussion of the progression of Jorie Graham's career, from early breath-regulated short lines to late gaze-determined much longer lines appropriate to a "teleologically regulated order of truth" (*BS* 78, 82).

The most characteristic Vendlerian discussions of imagery come in the Rita Dove chapter of *The Given and the Made*, which succeeds in elucidating the poet's "dovetailing" patterns, later giving way to a more open-ended treatment as the poet came to see that life lacks conclusiveness and closure (*GM* 83). Also in the Dove chapter comes what is perhaps the most elaborate structural analysis of the seven lectures, which turns the "interlocking thematic snippets" of Thomas' internal monologue in "Aircraft" first into an abstract rendering (A:B:C:D:B:D:A:A:D:A/D:B:D:C:), which is then turned into a string of code for the five stanzas of the poem, whose DNA reads

1) ABCDB : 10 lines
2) DA : 7 lines
3) ADA/D: 4 lines
4) B : 2 lines

5) DC : 2 lines

Reading this out of the context of the discussion of the poem, of course you cannot follow it. I have reproduced it to show the lengths this critic will go to in taking apart a poem (*GM* 80-1). Understandably, her thematic analyses are less technical. The high points of this practice might be her declaration that for Hopkins, "the beautiful was dangerous, irregular, and binary" (*BS* 9), that he was compelled "to render accurately and fully his secondary intellectual process, as well as his primary sensuous process" (*BS* 20), and that Hopkins was a supremely ethical poet, "if the ethical responsibility of a poet lies in his achievement of emotional accuracy through his evolving imaginative, structural, and linguistic mimesis" (*BS* 40); that throughout his career Lowell worked out a "recipe for history" (*GM* 12); that the motto for Heaney's sense of the "intrinsic repellancy of intransigent position-taking" might be his own distich, "When I thought/ I would have *second* thoughts" (*BS* 63); that Graham's "deepest subject is how to represent the unboundedness and intensity of aspiration as it extends itself to fullest self-reflexivity with ample awareness of its own creative powers" (*GM* 93; cf. 110, 120, and *BS* 84).

The extent to which Vendler is also a generic critic who seeks an esthetic, a theory for lyric poetry, is evident from the nine "hard" questions she asked in "Looking for Poetry in America" (quoted above). In another plane, she has developmental concerns about each poet's shifts in subject, attitude, and style, and this comes out even in the shorter form of her reviews. In the two books under consideration here it would be specifically Hopkins and Graham in *The Breaking of Style* (although this book as a whole is presented as a series of four developmental studies) and Lowell in *The Given and the Made* who are seen this way. The most intensely intertextual reading in the two collections would have to be that of Hopkins' "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," which is interrupted by a reading of "That Nature Is Like a Heraclitean Fire": The one poem can only be understood in its relationship to the other (*BS* 32-9). The degree to which she is a comparativist is evident from the frequency of allusion to the work of the four poets to whom she has devoted full volumes—Herbert, Keats, Yeats, Stevens—as well as other mainly American moderns, such as Whitman, Dickinson, Moore, and Bishop (and in the case of Dove, black precursors such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Jay Wright, Langston Hughes, and Gwendolyn Brooks).

Vendler comes closest, perhaps, to cultural criticism in two dicta from her chapter on Dove: "Any black writer in America must confront, as an adult, the enraging truth that the inescapable social accu-

sation of blackness becomes ... a strong element of inner self-identification. A black writer thus composes both with and against racial identity" (*GM* 61), and "No black artist can avoid, as subject matter, the question of skin color, and what it entails; and probably the same is still true, if to a lesser extent, of the woman artist and the subject matter of gender. Yet if these important subject matters are not presented by a dispassionate eye and a trained hand, the result will not be art, and will not exert a gaze prompting the beholder to examine his own conscience" (*GM* 77—this is Rita Dove's "given").

What qualities, then, are to be sought from the close readings of Helen Vendler? To begin with, sheer useful information , as for instance in the brief but highly pertinent biographies she offers on her poets (e.g. Lowell, *GM* first lecture, *passim*; Berryman, *GM* 33-4; Dove, *GM* 63; Graham, *GM* 91-2). Beyond that, an introduction to new poets and new works worthy of our attention. Which is not to say that her three living poets are obscure figures, by any means, Heaney having just won the Nobel, Dove a Pulitzer, and Graham the author of five collections of poems. But they are not yet household names, even in academia, and Vendler is doing her part to domesticate them. More importantly, elucidation of the poetic texts themselves, which is what Vendler's varied reading techniques, as outlined above, are all aimed at. To some degree, confirmation of what we already know: a pleasure I had with her readings of "For the Union Dead," "Spelt from Sibyl"s Leaves," and "That Nature Is Like a Heraclitean Fire." Appreciation, naturally, is a bonus that follows from elucidation, particularly when one is in the hands of an educated enthusiast. And then a broadening of one's range, thanks to the information and introduction that she offers. The highest version of any of these payoffs could be called revelation: "This is what important poetry is now," we realize, "and this is how to read it!" Her aphorism, "Poetic language is itself so finely discriminating that it must impose a practice of discrimination and nuance and its critics as well" ("Looking for Poetry in America") is a principle that she lives up to in her own practice. In the same essay she gives her three subjects a caveat against a tone the critic had better not take: "The tone here [Dave Smith, *Local Assays*]—a very American one—is that of the lay sermon, in which the spiritual instruction of a pupil is undertaken by a spiritual initiate." The lay sermon, as she calls it, is marked by a celebratory, initiatory, and hortatory tone. Vendler herself does not write that way. She warns of two perils in trying to write well about peotry—premature closure and being co-opted by the voice of the poet: "how baffling it is to attempt to write well about poetry. Not only can one offend by too rapid movement to précis [Robert von

Halberg's hasty reading of "Hell," a war sonnet by Lowell, is beautifully set right by her—"Looking for Poetry in America," 29]; there are other perils. "One's critical language is always in danger of being usurped by or contaminated by, the metaphoric and passional language of the poet in question; and the more original and powerful the poet, the greater likelihood of such contamination." Vendler is deeply empathetic with her contemporaries, but never is she taken over by them. She is concerned that "Critical practice in America nowadays suggests that the critics are not sure of themselves or of the audience they address." This is not the case with Vendler. In "The Function of Criticism" she instances three angles of approach or predilections in criticism: "An ideal criticism would bring speculative thought, life experience, and anterior texts equally to bear on the written work, but no critic's mind can move in these three directions at once. Finally, each critic must choose a single predilection." She herself manages to strike a nearly ideal balance of the three "predilections" in her readings, although perhaps with some tendency toward bringing anterior texts to bear on the literary work.

In asking earlier whether the theses of her two collections of lectures were simply "a convenient pretext upon which to hang readings of individual poems" I meant to emphasize the excellence of the many individual readings, but not to denigrate the quality of the sets of lectures as a whole. Vendler herself has claimed, "All of us ... become most interesting when we address a question genuinely unanswered when we sit down to write" ("Looking for Poetry in America"), and that is certainly what she did with these two books. The thesis of each book is not just a pretext for hanging the readings on, or a thread or principle binding them, or a device to make them mutually illuminative, but " a question genuinely unanswered." In the "introduction" to *The Given and the Made* she announces quite plainly that her purpose will be "to discuss some personal *donnée* which the poet could not avoid treating, and to see how he or she found symbolic equivalents for it, and developed that material imaginatively over time. Lowell's primary phantasmagoria is history; Berryman's the Freudian myth of the Id; Dove's the imagination of the forms of blackness; and Graham's, the realm of the virtual or invisible and its relation to the material world. These are developments from the inescapable existential *données*: Lowell's genealogy gave him history; Berryman's uncontrollable manic-depressive illness and severe alcoholism gave him the disgraceful Id; Dove's skin color gave her blackness. In Graham's case, her trilingual education gave her a sense of multiple linguistic, and therefore virtual, realms "to square against material life" (xii). In the case of Lowell, Vendler's

overarching thesis makes possible an integrative survey of his whole career. In the case of Berryman, it leads to many powerful readings. Sometimes, how Dove handles blackness and femaleness seems a little peripheral to the readings, except in the case of certain ones, like that of "Medusa" at the end of the chapter. Perhaps in the case of the final Graham chapter, the applicability of the general thesis is least convincing, because little is made of her putative trilingualism. Yet nonetheless, a powerful sense of her individuality and development as a poet is conveyed.

In the "Introduction" to *The Breaking of Style*, Vendler announces that she will focus on three poets, working at three fields of variation: "What poets ... invent is the *style* of their epoch, which corresponds to, and records, the feelings felt in their epoch. They do this through their expressiveness... the expressiveness of prosody broken and re-formed between youth and maturity by Hopkins; the expressiveness of grammar broken and re-formed poem by poem by Heaney; and the expressiveness of lineation broken and re-formed, volume after volume, by Graham" (7). In the case of Hopkins she is able to give us a sense of his total career in just thirty-one pages. The treatment of Heaney seems almost too pointilist (if such can be held as a charge with this critic!), yet it yields many illuminating readings. The vital work of Jorie Graham seems to be still too much in progress to determine the final applicability of Vendler's approach to her (but then there is the other chapter on her in *GM*). On the whole, the book lives up to its conclusion that "The style of our own inner kinesthetic motions has, through them [the poets], been broken and remade; and ... in moments of the breaking of style it is ourselves that we remake" (95).

Part of this remaking lies in the process of canon-formation. Vendler modestly disclaims any important role for the critic in this process, instead insisting that it is primarily a function of the poets themselves: "canons are not made by governments, anthologists, publishers, editors, or professors, but by writers. The canon, in any language, is composed of the writers that other writers admire, and have admired for generations. ... And writers admire writers not because of their topics ... but because of their writing. And writers admire writing not because it keeps up some schoolmasterly 'standard' but because it is 'simple, sensuous, and passionate' (as Milton said)—strenuous, imaginative, vivid, new. The canon is always in motion. ... the evolving canon is not the creation of critics but of poets," she reiterates, deferring to an article of Hugh Kenner's in *Critical Inquiry* devoted to the question of the literary canon ("Looking for Poetry in America"; the determination is repeated in

"Introduction: Contemporary American Poetry"). Nonetheless, it is hard to believe that her own frequent reviewing of poetry for the *New York Review of Books*, *New York Times Book Review*, and *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and an Anthology*, for Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press (1996) have not had a major influence in the formation of the canon for lyric poetry, particularly American poetry and particularly that of the last half of this century. And her own disclaimer in favor of the canonizing power of the poets is compromised somewhat by her concern that "Most of the aspiring young poets in creative writing classes know no poetry by heart. It looks as if the classical and English canon may be slipping out of our grasp, to be replaced by a modern canon of unrhymed and translated pieces" ("Looking for Poetry in America").

The influence of anthology selection is not to be underrated. Vendler was early in the market with the *Harvard Book* of 1985, 440 pages, representing thirty-five poets, from Wallace Stevens through Rita Dove, arranged chronologically according to their ages (largest selections are thirty-six and twenty-nine pages, smallest are three, four, and five pages). Although the marketplace for texts in introduction to poetry courses is crowded and highly competitive, St. Martin's is challenging the redoubtable Norton company for preeminence, and Vendler's anthology may be read by tens of thousands of college students over the next couple of decades. It is unlikely that any one such collection now can enjoy the dominance of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry*, which helped to form the tastes of generations of college students from its original publication in 1938 through its Fourth Edition in 1976 (and the publishers keep it available for use by stodgy old professors whose tastes have remained with "Brooks and Warren"). Does she promote the same old chestnuts in her collections? From our six poets in the two recent sets of lectures under review, only four poems are included in both collections, Lowell's "For the Union Dead" (also in Brooks and Warren!) and "Epilogue," and Berryman's *Dream Songs* 4 and 384 (the last in the volume). The "canonicity" of the four American poets, at least by Vendler's estimation, is indicated no doubt by the frequency of their inclusion: for Lowell, twenty-seven poems (*HB* 21; *PPP* 4 in the "Introduction" section and 2 in the "Anthology" section = 6); Berryman seventeen poems (*HB* 13; *PPP* 1 + 3 = 4); Graham ten (*HB* 6; *PPP* 2 + 2 = 4); and Dove ten (*HB* 6; *PPP* 2 + 2 = 4). The two British poets do not appear in the collection of *Contemporary American Poetry*, of course; in the teaching anthology the Victorian Hopkins is represented by six poems (*PPP* 4 + 2) and the Irishman Heaney by four (*PPP* 2 + 2). Vendler has been generous and consistent in her advoca-

cy of the poets who are her living contemporaries. For instance, she calls Rita Dove "More than any other contemporary black poet... an American icon of the beautiful" (*GM* 88; this may be partly a compliment to the poet's good looks). Her devotion to Graham is evident from the serious and detailed attention she pays to her *oeuvre* in *two* of the seven recent lectures, which cannot help but promote her career.

This canon is aimed at you, reader. That is, the poems were written for you, then and now. And the canonical discriminations in her reviews, lectures, and book-length studies have been carried out by Vendler at your service and in your interest. In a sort of apologia for the practicing critic, she has warned, "No one can rise to the occasion in every encounter with a poem..." ("Introduction: Contemporary American Poetry," 1985). Helen Vendler does.

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