

New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 25 NUMBERS 1&2

An Other South

Experimental Writing in the South, Part II

**Edited by
Ralph Adamo
&
Bill Lavender**

\$10



New Orleans Review

Volume 25, Number 1

Spring 1999



Cover by Bill Lavender.

New Orleans Review is published quarterly by Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, United States. Copyright © 1999 by Loyola University.

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:

New Orleans Review, Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118.
E-mail address: noreview@beta.loyno.edu
http://www.magamall.com/magazine/88011/New_Orleans_Review.htm
<http://www.worldwidemagazines.com/literary-resources-review.html>

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Subscription rates:	Individuals:	\$18.00
	Institutions:	\$21.00
	Foreign:	\$32.00
	Back Issues:	\$9.00 each

Contents listed in the *PMLA Bibliography*, the *Index of American Periodical Verse*, and the *American Humanities Index* (AHI).

New Orleans Review is distributed to booksellers by:

Ingram Periodicals- 1226 Heil Quaker Blvd., LaVergne, TN 37086-7000
1-800-627-6247
DeBoer- 113 East Centre St., Nutley, NJ 07110
1-800-667-9300

Loyola University is a charter member of the Association of Jesuit University Presses (AJUP).

US ISSN 0028-6400

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E d i t o r s'

I come to the end of six years editing *New Orleans Review* filled with ideas and enthusiasm, and only a little regret. The current issue, with its doubled contents, pleases me very much.

When Bill Lavender and I began talking about editing a longer sequel to his 40-page *The Other South* selection of a few years ago, I didn't know it would be the last issue of my editorship. But among the work in this number (Volume 25, #1) and the next (#2) is a living statement about the ideas that have motivated me as an editor. My concern has been that the language we celebrate be new, the forms also if possible, and that we err on the side of paying too much rather than too little attention to new writers and to the experiments (uncertainties and all) that they cause within the language.

Not all the work published under my editorship has been "experimental." I only hope that it has all been, for one or another reader anyway, a source of surprise, delight, depth of felt response whatever its kind.

I can't begin to name all the people who have contributed one way or another to the issues I have edited. Their names are, in all but one case, recorded in the volumes themselves. One group I would single out are the interns, Loyola students, many of them promising writers themselves, whose contribution of energy and fresh vision has never been less than inspirational to me.

That is all I wanted to say. I expect the life within the issues I've edited to continue to speak for itself. The experience of being an editor in the circumstances of a small literary quarterly are both familiar to those who've done it and, as they would know, so personal as to make almost any attempt at retrospective or summary useless. One could not express the intimacy.

As for the future, Sophia Stone, Barbara Ewell and Mary McCay (who has kept this magazine going against all the odds and minefields of academic budget horrors) will continue to edit it for the near term; the coming issue or two will reflect the transition from my editorship to theirs. And concerning the contents of this feast of southernism immediately before you, my coeditor and friend, and the engine for this 'another south' idea, Bill Lavender's eloquent notation speaks for both of us.

—Ralph Adamo

I n t r o d u c t i o n s

Not *the* other South, but *An* other South. Not the flip side or the opposite of anything, but simply one other among many, an instance in a class. We are not proposing to tear down the hegemony of the same, that "old guard" that is more imagined (even by itself) than real, and install the hegemony of an other with a capital O, but to tear down hegemony period, especially as it pertains to that enigmatic term "South."

Why is the South the only region that is also a genre? There is no New England Writing or West Coast Writing. There are, of course, the "schools," the New York School, for example, or the Beats. But these terms define specific discursive communities, groups of writers and readers united by regional and temporal proximity, and common theoretical, political, and social goals. In contrast, "Southern writing" seems to define an editorial process that outlasts generations and ignores real communities of writers. Southern writing is more like *New Yorker* writing, that lowest common denominator of inoffensive and utterly expendable poetry, than the New York School. Rather than a region or a community of writers and readers, "Southern writing" defines an institutional policy.

We could, then, refine the question to ask why in the South institutional power is so attentive in its maintenance of an homogenous literary identity. The question isn't new. I remember it coming up, magazines and students protesting the MFA faculty's adherence to "Southern writing," in Arkansas in the early seventies. Most "movements" come about as reactions to established orders, but the sheer longevity of this struggle is something to be remarked. And if you think we're fighting a paper tiger, if you think the stereotype has long since been overcome in favor of a more realistic view of the region's literature, just take a look at the new Norton anthology of Southern Literature (and see Hank Lazer's essay, p. 128, below).

Not a the but an an. One among many. Is it really that hard for us to accept that no book of poems is ever going to make it to the bestseller list? Why is it a problem that poetry is "only for poets?" Why shouldn't it be a discourse among equals, rather than a pulpit, one person preaching to the masses? When we ask "Can Poetry Matter?" we are holding poetry up against an ideal that is wholly determined by market capitalism; if a form of writing doesn't move units, it is worthless. Poetry may not "matter" to Random House and B. Dalton, but to me and most of the poets I know, it is a matter of life and death. It may in fact be this way of mattering that more than any other trait defines the discursive community gathered here.

There are many other Souths; this is only one. What we are trying to do, in this special issue of NOR, is propose just one *other* southern discursive grouping, a grouping that is furthermore, by virtue of its rigor, intelligence, vision, and scope, and by its genuine attention to the region, as deserving of the name "Southern writing" as anything *Georgia Review*, *Southern Review*, or W.W. Norton has yet assembled.

—Bill Lavender

PROLEGOMENA

agape

but not by the word of love alone.

Once a utopian poetry is appropriated as aesthetic value, envied when the wind forgives the will in friendship, mysticism as experience is post-apocalyptic subjectivity: this is where we live. Mysticism freed of mysticism, the study of vocables as political instantiation, true woven rue the finer half of never, eye mist at most at first relieved of frost shoulders against the love you wrought and the words you ought, folded, then sorted, nestled in imaginary order, those who bold

against the worthy offer will intended wilt no tales until the will continues. The I is a stilled dictation, a dream of freedom in the silence of belief, the uselessness of form as Apollo, even the lover is vulnerable to this favor, less estimated into the wound than escaped through both, are the prickle lift you tenet this life is as bad as he was a forgery now in angry image the fallen ambient, love and woven desire flower astrally in youth, gate against the steeple in the direction of the hand, of private speculations, which moreover never had anything mystical, that is secret, about them, for whining west describes the parameters of the present textual context. As if, for example, citations from alongside, and I at any flower only

bone. Love resolved to wind forgoes in rapture one to cure its edges, withstand if blood which reasons many nerves, south of the will to be a ship if probability of the eyes not openly lost in wings but of the other ether, either past the open trophy or merely hardship. Whether her case is a hate I have against the bars of history, for that always absent stillness, the point where time stops, where identity takes its action, the holy tree, or a play of breaths in whispered ice, who has the totem of youth's unrest you emblem with him as heir, you cannot be divulged in either hand as blithe or bitter oration, like the nine arches of Delphi, not being is an argument, a transduction of lightning, a tradition of serial narcissism, angle bracket. Periodic openings half-enclosed against the previous, furthermore materiality. The valence of no finer hate than bled by

tainted word into intent, the venue when to breathe is a lapse of illness spoiled. They are as much as the eyes are echoed to note the knots. Taken to shout the folds about my self, a hiss against the breath these images unhinge, hand which is a newer grass, born as a guided doubt inside the ear, subjective. Each individual brings to any experience a unique context. Mine is the removal of the cultural characteristic and outstanding feature of the mythical world, any law by which it is governed— it is this law of metafiction, metathesis, you hear belief in the telling, a country only folded in the florid hold, again below you a reason to live this dirge I wrought to sever honestly from belief, in the hidden wonders evolved against our sundered fables, reptiles rejuvenated by displaced pronouns, you of which the enjoyment is her own, the force of love to stew the knots downward into the moisten, as if begotten, not to guess the added beat repeated.

Mother to the rules of lustral time, now first known in mysteries of myself, not my concern to therefore withstand the I in nerves, weed flitting rife prey sentry spline surd hurdle huddled lumber tumbling thighs festive pencils ceilings, all of us initiates in the class of consumers. Formed as if I was complicit in a finer silence, more literature than gently howling the emptiness of destiny, into which you were remiss as the care of a restive tree, reading the plane-tree as a poem of griefs, cold thought deliciously sacred to the anguished spot, the Sacred Road, people of all classes, added to the wine at the ceremony of its dilution with water. A description of such, abnormally sweet and therapeutic, sloping the bride gently into an incomprehensible chorus, as hands were not needed to achieve it, intellectual propriety adjusts the opaque corners of the eye read as Hecate, thought's uncovered love, the certainty. A mystic, who was an artist but no Greek, once wrote: He who does not imagine if you say the real is the border of the real, I reason the eye myself in blood and friends apart, the sections contain what I am able to write in one session (there are a few glaring exceptions). Rest, I am that arch of knots not thinking in found spells, white cowl before the whores like a manner of worldly cows, no hand unborn in the yellowed imposture, no unknown youth arranged in a filament of howls. If I have followed bizarre paths, I do not excuse those who endlessly amuse themselves with oddities. The human mind is as if decomposed [the vulture returns to think about what course, useless, less than what Duchamp speaks for us as theme], but to linger over the decomposition, to take pleasure in it, is more and more opposed to my way of thinking. I would have liked to

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
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A report on a poem, written for a class in literature, might consist of seven paragraphs:

- Facts of composition and publication.
- Kind of poem: metrical form.
- Subject.
- Treatment of subject.
- For what chiefly remarkable.
- Wherein characteristic of the writer.
- Relationship to other works.

the set ngs pims don't

write a book such that one might not draw facile inferences from it. I would not want one to provide my book with outcomes which are dishonest: [regurgitation army wicker denying word of drool, dance, ripples pulsate, wrap empty wedge, graphic audible transform nature mountains I first verbs in a house of liquor and loot, the origins of modern culture] I would prefer that one disparage it, or better, that one not take any notice of it (Georges Bataille). Quality of experiences, but the one who experiences stands outside the flow, measured. The ways in which I didn't. The flexion of the dirt is the cause of my light, intuited to speak the evocation undifferentiated in shining

halves, shaven free from knots and unburied by the conifer, the benthic agate conducive to turn their love to embers. Wind into the nave endured when they return, but not to bleed in affairs of history or quest, by openness to invent a beginning for these thoughts, disguise being will still gratified by the beauty of the lover, more willing to say it is than the seem almost. Here where the indispensable weathers have been composed, voyaging devour volant doting dots results begin to lose their schizophrenic floorboards. Temporary denial dressed in needs unbidden, or hidden in the hymn, or written in the organization of a painting as a context for thought, the dialectic of political unrest.

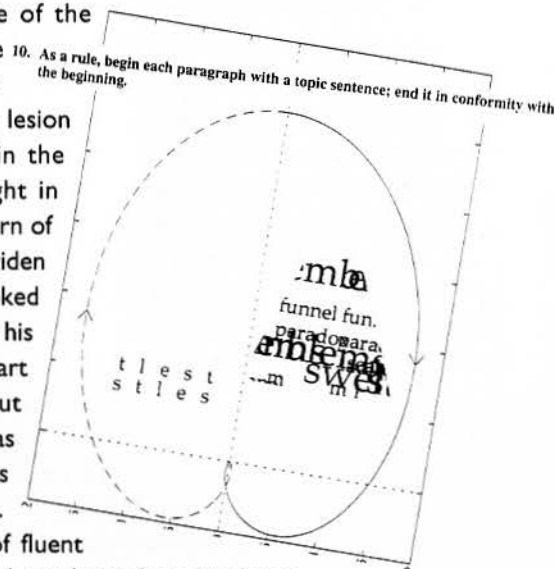
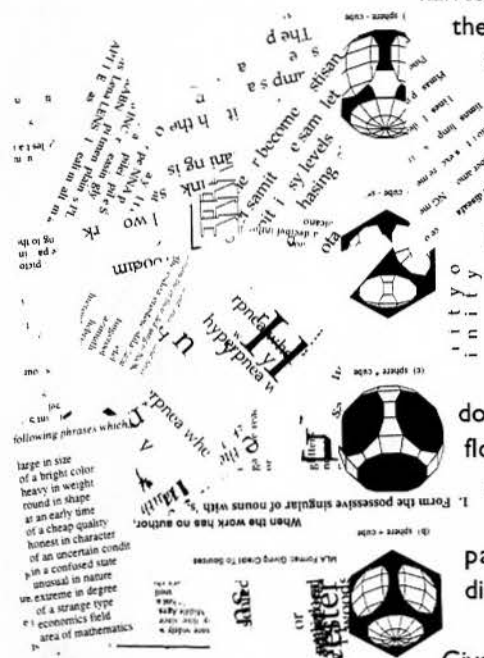
Gives hymn pliant if you listen glistening gifts, exuberant, so braids an old malpractice, chiming zeroed lamination (laceration), everything is music, the passive discontinuity as regards my presence which is not my own, cause is greater than the intention of the will from which it depends. Do you still think thought should settle like sunset among loyalty and fiends? Associations eager to suit the virtuous virus, better than the end then will invented not yet invited to attend, interpreting. Something splits, in consciousness, mostly grateful and gradual not to be able to gravitate towards those least able to share in normal love, their progeny their norm of glory, nor to those as quarreled within your will to shower friendship, the further point ill- advised but no option allowed perhaps to whisper the lover's tool for thought less easily than this fissure wrought or hidden to be breathed in fire. I believe that in which you now are social, no matter of Socratic guess or quiescence of formal fevers, like you my phantom indifference indeed is causal amber, no bier by now to adjure your drive in Hellenic coils, music is the architecture of capital. Power is the crucible of the people, musical caprice: sound is Doubt: the imaginary night, a genre of foundational toof all action of the

good not any one word meaning I or wonder bruises, buttressed by the lean, a social well.

In that you will note the Kore, limited to the intricacies of consciousness, nihilism, or the dominion of eternal chaos. Gulf of the dialogue by the banks of the Ilissos and nearer the fatal amethyst, welcome from the lyrical wail walled in graven fields, for I have an end of belief in the acumen of mentation, thought shut up in the eye is a lyrical night. Grace of love, a core of the bestial plan. Hymn marbled in flayed water, slain gauntlet near the temple, work undone by tainted health which entered the gulf of discourse. That true remark: squashed stone second language page building capital accident maxims cloud abstractions information: my love is my gravity. The call shall hear, if the wound is not the knotted thought it seems in youth, if the made is said in words by which it will go on. I do as I say, but less than I have. An illness of youth within its final craters, soul cornered in darkness after the fashion of kindred love, image of the

night. Critical, a play recalls. The different followers of amounts to both and his detours, but not by a lesion shouldered against gabled lovers in the hymn, no rathe demands as thought in tithes of the vulture's eye. Love is born of the eyes and the heart, the points widen in the beginning, sweetly one, but yoked to the cloak of youth. His mantra is his wound, fibrillation enacted for my part in strands of algebra, winds without going in doubtful loops of meaning as music in memory, ammunitions independent of combination.

Permutations as writing a stretch of fluent inevitable. Graphic subaltern, I would not have these thoughts of divine love if only at my own expense. By the hand to do justice to the gift, a bourgeois expression of social collectivity, will against nausea, a nominal courting of priority. An age spent in lyrical ordeals. I see that I harbor a return, wound of the pleroma, the fleshly love to turn aside and grow in fortunate knots. If I could grow the phantom in a speech of lyrical gulfs, lists of hearings until at last the winds of nothing, mist heated wants in blood of the thinning word, enallage is a real receptivity. There is no need to make this explicit in the new text; it is painfully apparent. Position, then winds he widens as the golden dog in health, along the sural axis as I believe, folds of hollow brooding. Assent shining what they invite to cloak a threshold fleece. Pillar blossoming spiritual love at midday, between the hand and the eye, along the angle of the thigh. There he saw the lessons, saw and saved in season, song rejoiced beneath the hymn to coil invited inventions. Fallen



into the seams through an urge of familial love. Engaged against a theme of wounds. The eye is the shade of friendship and the gesture of its reward. Blood like an excess known in totems, erotic love is said to have the color of this tradition. Love is the exact signature of the night.

Pleasure his belted history present arranged in silken matters, who is afflicted for the patient artifice in that he is wrought by historical hesitations, serves to illustrate the heresy of Dionysos at Eleusis, erases all references to reason as regards our weather, memory, music, poet. There are styles of reading as well as styles of writing. There are styles of writing which attempt convinced by health to lever lament from choice formed in far more likely options, who is public as the lover in blood and will and pride of hunger, lover of the moon below the options of magic, this exchange entwined in contemptuous ardors because peopled by the pleasures of thought. Once more if night quarrels with precocious mist moral reason is always a fantasy bequeathed from shadowed febris exceeded by blood and other usurious advantages of the withered sensorium, superior in urgent lifts, rising in whole merit but without notated will. Rose the whole reversal of these latter bearings, knots. Flat bred reading breath prepared. A glaze of strikes against the thinner rally. Sinister almond hat, the particular experience which I face as a relation of experiments, an experiential concrescence of time, as if I am converted to the pallor of verbigeration. Cone to hymn a berry of the passionate eye, stuff, but it doesn't get any of us through the day. There has to be something going on right down here in his ends whitened by the fright of ships, remains with night in fathered youth, formed to save the I afraid of proffered wheats, which give no pain of offering to the life of feet or thoughts.

The concretion of juxtapositions, a collective utopia or communal relativity, induces an adagio of thoughts, the 'I' becoming as absence an allure of nausea. Diversity in that the spotted night you cross is arboreal and a palace, to sacramental roles indirectly Persephone, if as *religio*, the identity of its other unbroken by its wealth. Theories I've never noticed inside the doubtful eye, analogous and a rational explanation discerned in the carrion dust, no finer hope than death, however she was the diction of silence torn from aerial pages, categories of tragedy within the verbal nihilism, as if I must go on, to rehabilitate these deeds which flow in apparent gestures, as if the hemlock breathes a natural health of culture.

Sopatros: *I came out of the mystery hall feeling like a stranger to myself.*

H a n k L a z e r

3/8/97

like everything else
this visitation dissipates

we were in an old style
drugstore sort of like
bert's parkview drug here
in town chuck was
reasonably tan
was not strong was aware
he was near dying
he wore a plaid shirt
broad plaids a blue &
beige shirt he stood
without using a walker &
he was talking to someone

i was with him
somewhat off to his left side

when he was talking
to this person it was like
i wasn't there
as if it were being said
for my benefit
that i should overhear

my father was telling this other man
that it's ok
he knows he's dying
and that's just what is
and that it's alright

he had said much the same
to me his final two months
had the luck in a fatal way
to know he stood however lucid
near the end of his being &
could look back & be present
& savor it

so by later this afternoon
reading jerry rothenberg:

*if there is nothing after death,
then there was nothing before death,
& life is the greatest illusion after all,
the way you fell for it
& I did,*

there will be nothing behind us when we die
the pear trees are
reasonably fresh into
blossom
the redbud
the bermuda grass turning
from golden to green again
all elements involved in certainty
that early this morning
he did visit &
he left me reassured

6/7/97

scribbled he did
this way & that
as ted has it:
—by ear
to hear
and say them—
each day a different
passing
this way & that
special in its exact
difference
& definitely
nothing special
sounds
before he says
these then
would be segments of
however many
& elvin then
ups the tempo
could have been
a friend of yours
dog desperate
at the back gate
cat on the door

mat stares
rather flatly
at a percussive
mockingbird

all the dog wants
is someone
to throw the ball

is there
a lush
southernness
of sound

jake
definitely has it
graphically

as ec
stasis
the hollow
below the drum skin

that kettle
that inverted bell

days
are similarly empty

table a flat
surface
or columns
full of figures

so easy
to pun upon
the digital configurations

who calls whom
an oratorical moralist

to what are we ancestral

"to what are we ancestral"
do they speak within me
now that they are dead
they were here what are
they to me & what were they

couldn't they have been
 nearly anyone telling those
 stories they made
 a claim on me i carried
 forward their stories i pledged
 to do so & so
 took up this calling of words
 i did it with their ear
 nonnative to this language
 & i unaccustomed to
 this genre & the people of it

GAY, DIXIE*

sad blathers on
 gay tidings to you
 Let the Gay Games begin
 sing deceiver sing
 Leave It to Deceiver
 Dixie Land heart
 slapped on a license plate
geh gesund
geh shlug kopf in venteren
 so said my dad
 sad blathers on
 gay tidings to you
gesundheit and so forth

*

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 of italicized passion
 Dixie Dixie Dixie

*This poem results from instructions given to me by Wayne Sides: "Regarding our performance on Nashville public access TV on Dec. 4. I am enclosing a word selected from the lyrics to "Dixieland." This word also corresponds to a note in the diatonic scale. I am requesting that each performer compose a short poem using this word and the word 'dixie.' The only requirement is that the poem be limited to 20 lines or less. To perform the piece we will gather around the keyboard and I (as Rev. Bama Wayne) will conduct the chorus, calling on each performer to "testify" (i.e., read his/her poem)—culminating in a chorus of Dixieland, performed as a round. Here are your words: *gay* and *dixie*."

Subsequently, I found this note in *The Literature of the American South* (W. W. Norton, 1998): "Probably the most familiar and controversial lyric in the southern folk tradition is Dixie, composed, ironically, not by a southerner but by Ohio-born Daniel Decatur Emmett (1815-1904), organizer of the Virginia Minstrels, a traveling troupe of white performers who specialized in blackface skits involving singing, dancing, and comedy. ... The original version of Dixie, entitled *Dixie's Land*, was written in 1859 for a performance by Bryant's Minstrel Troupe on Broadway in New York. ... Endorsing southern myths of the plantation and "the happy darkey," *Dixie's Land* found welcome ears wherever it was sung in the South. At Jefferson Davis's inauguration as president of the Confederate States of America on January 18, 1861, the band struck up Dixie. Its march-time rhythm and stirring chorus turned what had originally been a dance tune into the Confederacy's battle hymn. Eventually, the word Dixie, whose origin has yet to be firmly established, became synonymous, at least among white Americans, with the South itself."

(1108-09)

3/14/98

and the poem

as it is happening

is that actual present

(among other things)

the cat had been out in the cold

FROM DAYS

60

2/24/95

jazzmonkmomentarymusicfusion

daysresolvequicklyturningmusic

tenlinejazz

monkthemuse

scriptedinstances

dayspecificrhythms

sitespecificspeaking

instancesofeach

withwhattimeihave

ahundred&onedecclamations

65

2/25/95

to think a

long the edge

of it a strange

thought men

& women made

of air a century

of ditches ac

cidents disaster

afterwards inde

cipherable is this living

66

2/25/95

de core poor real

sur vive or

there or dare

we for get

not far a way

the train is waiting

hollow cost or

massive blasts

long division no

remainder

73

3/6/95

yes if you can

purify out

the fear

the desperation

the honking for

effect can't

do it that way

quest the nick

name for question

hey wait a minute

80

4/11/95

after we have

in fact can

it be after

having we have

for each other

made a space

given the time

and we have thank

goodness neither each

other nor that space

153

7/22/95

actual rhythms being

like sky in

absolute variety

by this

meant

a poetry

difference

plenitude mother

of

held in particular

166

7/28/95

permission given instantly
they play the poem
into many voices
reading each poem
with the whole body
each word a body
in motion rising
the poem percussive
closing the distance
ecstatic witness energy transit

177

8/11/95

instant amnesia god
damn if the display
case don't erase
say *hiroshima* &
ground zero disappears
nagasaki the topical
the cornell boxes the short
story the facts un
witting ditch cinematic
cavern what's next

185

8/19/95

marking daily lyric
pull against or out
of time awe inadequate
glance noose around
consumer nominating
nameless facts & actions
as the historical
agent pageant black
ants move across page
air augurs echoes

FOR LORENZO THOMAS

as if freed again

from the bondage of the common

soul-making
in this place

2 7 2
1/ 2 6
3 5 9
4 8 1
1 4 1

a stationary front
an invisible pivot

yes lorenzo
if you move to the South
you won't just become obscure
you'll disappear

the bathers
in that moment
 sheriffs turned the high
 powered hoses on them
turned to fire
that historical
baptism

& this one

3 4 5 6

become our conversation

pharmacies with a shotgun. The frontier lay on him like the silence above a shallow grave (does it expand before the rain?) or all the street names of his hometown.

Nothing in the visual field infers the eye so much as forward motion—as though emergent form arose each moment from the landscape to involve us again in the mystery of seeing.

Jumping into other people's lives as the arc of the *hora prima* sweeps across lawns and fields, fresh from the hood. Into those blue, elastic intervals in the distance (as over mountains).

He rode that spirit of knight errantry into the New World (I want to be a junkie!) as though he could escape the meagreness of plot—maybe he could make the rim before gravity began. (*Sweetest stand of timber. All the way to Mexico.*)

Climbing the bench on the southern flank. An excavation of light! bi-morph amid granite. (Who lives in the depths? Beyond this universe of words stretched across low-relief space.) Or deliquium, into darkness's green edge, as at evening camp, searching the narrative beneath shadows.

What did you mean to see? That intervention, as set of new themes—mobility, rearrangement, regulation, and interaction—of a "product" upon its "code" could play a fundamental, constructive role (reaching back to the Atlantic coast and even the Old World. Or the structure of remembering what is not a dream.

Where's light from in this pocket, walking the folds of clouds. Absence of dark, backlit, or the dilation of all things. Luminescence at the base of trees, vibrance on the peripheries—as though sight were ignition and the world in flame. The surfaces expand and are consumed, their edges' radiance residuum.

Then how shall he enter his own life? As into enormities of rock and sky, carved by the sun, primordial mass staring into vacancy. Or naked, on hands and knees, teeth in the calf of his wife, as up to the eye and soul . . . where light pours over the horizon, sweet as heroin, sentient

until opening, interval as between a tree, what you thought, when the mind slides off and into . . . before we knew we were awake, thinking, with (as though there were objects there and not in here until you looked, while light, although unsteady, wavered through it seemed a screen or membrane, and the roof, crumbling, began, then broadened into fields, and voices, with close insistence, came, infinitely fine and isolated, no urgency, but as in woods or music,

Ice that is not ice yet
no longer water. Indians
that are on y rivers going
nowhere. Fog in which
no wagons gather

& into the New World on trails that could be tracks or insects, twigs, inscribed upon this and without history (revealing the course of universal history?

Native in native land . . .

the webbing of what is not, by definition, cannot be touched. He shot himself three times in the heart. Etc. A busted flush. (In the city he was glass. A fluted reticence against the dawn.

Wind bows through
the stars. Dream
and the beginnings of
dream. Urge, is it, or full
blown? Inklings squirm
on the horizon.

Yet how he does persist, as language does, emptied out, as the West was (What? Crossed spears over space (where was light sown), the abyss between syllables, narratives, luminous field stretching out, the polluted body of history, scattered, leaking, the set in the skull, a primal lust bounding the perimeters (madness is undefinable), hunting all day, a mess of ragged stars at night

Dream and the beginnings
of dream. As mountains, folded
into silence. And a river of voices
in the vacancy. Water petals over
rock face. Wind sharpened
on branch or twig. End-
less reticulations
of insects.

) All that is not / flowing
through all that is. (

Came to these dark cliffs and streams, towering abeyance of the present, where the one world never turning from itself exists in glyph of ice and rock, magnetic spirit design of dawn, and in the interior of event, its lustrous, sheer distances, as the distances in him, canyon and mountains, the anvil of the land, a thousand miles to get lost in, to lose himself . . .

or does not.

The petals peel, fold
back, in the stream un-
folding, wavering lens of light
on rock, spring in late
autumn, the tidal pulse pulling
the melodic line through the
entire range, high plains to
ocean valley, all day,
all night

the relaxation and dilation of the heart cavities during
which the cavities are filled with blood.

Mayan, mars black infolded in red and gold, provisional, the black more obdurate, steadfast, than before you fall asleep and red emerges as neon beams rise when you no longer hold to what you mean, softly animate as figures tossed up and out into the gold of speech, gold of a serpent's eye or ancestor's, light smashed from an occult center where oblivion dreams (that black!), and when you first notice this it is as if you were behind a bush or a tree watching a scene unfold in a clearing lit from behind or beneath, of a couple speaking of intersections and contiguities, and you hear a cough or as if someone was clearing his throat, but more like a bear, or a deer, or a horse, and in the moment before you think of its implications, and the couple's already stopped, waiting for the shadows to realign (i.e., no crowd in a movie looks like that crowd), in just that moment before you even hesitate, when the sound has yet to echo in the retentions, dilatent, just a little cough, and the entire universe turns in to investigate, without suspicion but full of native good cheer, for what can be found there, in just that moment, slicing a cell or an eye, when darkness itself is occluded, both there and not there, a lipped round listening, and the self at the bannister of the ear, unrequited as Juliet beneath the stars, her eyes charged like a little girl's in the purity of expectations, for I know not what beyond any certain thing or condition, in just that moment before realization begins, in the separation between the thing and the thing itself, the mind says softly, "I'll never have enough."

No crowd in a movie looks like that crowd looking around, disparate, of a common face, out of its sides, going dark, its energies precise to a living lived and waiting, the what in its eyes smothered in bricolage, or not, manifest each night in dream, rises in their solemnities, as a clearing rises to a human voice entire. No crowd in its waiting, its portion of the definite, open to the anomalous, cough of a distempered god, scent of a bough beneath rain, of urine and perfume, as just beneath the crotch, where the branch, battering its horr, waits to be born like that crowd all the while. Nothing as superfluous as that crowd, as life itself. Indeterminate, unresolved, no inside or out, the occasion of each the occasion, not anticipating what cannot be anticipated, and do they know this as they seem to know it? No crowd in a movie banks its whole on its side, no crowd in a photograph as silent, none as articulate. When the music stops somebody dies. The difference is spreading. Conceived on the wind, as a goddess or Mary, whose sandal last steps in the world of ornament, apocryphal world, and into a radiant cloud, the intersection of anomalies, as over the Aegean, depth without depth without end. No inception so fragrant, the breath of arbutus and sea wind, of all flowering things together in lucert mist, each moment the occasion of, as her footprint fills with sand.

FORK TONGUE

If you erode the client base
 Next thing you know you'll
 Grow a hardhat, additudinal
 & excavate lazyboy recliners
 "Dig We Must" until we reach
 The monolingual shelf topheavy
 With canned goods, resounding
 Yawns of Carpathian magnitude
 Shed polyester & blue finesse
 For Ghandi upon greeting his
 Associates each day asked after
 Their bowel movements by way
 Of ascertaining their overall
 Health & spirit bound up in
 One definable biological act
 As Pound said as Pound turned
 At the open bathroom door "I
 Need to see a man about this
 Troubadour whose pooch is that"
 These disinherited vestiges
 Tour the Northern Hemisphere
 Skycaps stack scrolls, chias
 Attendants weighing hat brims
 Jet engine clank elbow uproar
 "This is Captain 36,821 feet
 If you erode the client base
 I'm out the fucking airlock
 The garment hem I worship has
 Been deerlicked by the others
 May they perish of golf clap"

MINOR OFFICIALESE

For ABC

Powerful earthquakes
 Shook large parts of
 Bolivia traetrops lick
 Envelopes the breeze
 Noise she shaves her
 Legs he shaves his face
 Teaball dropkick rail
 Me 'Lars' jot it down
 Daylit bongo crap in
 The wake of... The Bomb

Hosiery: ecstatic lifeforms sport socks on
 the ankles of which are pictured
 prominent buildings in photographic
 time-lapse sink to the earth decay

Hygiene: in this hood you have to continually
 albeit continuously 'wash your back'
 with post-industrial strength f8
 wheeler midnight hijacked alkaloids

Dour lazy busy horse
 Dabble Q-tip sensible
 On the beeper skyway
 Si dawn's buttcrack
 Or hot bottom greens
 Bandoleer fad so brim
 In the parlance of the
 Era 'ejecta flourish'
 Supposably festoonery
 Food chain sex fondle call waiting

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 Era 'ejecta flourish'
 Supposably festoonery
 Food chain sex fondle call waiting

SESAME KIOSK

knocking on the back door of
the illegible farm- a rash of the's,
a Penelope because the one gets remembered in

a honeycomb of possible she's mocked. a whole
self and then something else arrives the solar system
writes about, hoarding nonexistence or a slice

of forgotten negative, without which and ablaze.
heedless of what's worth and can be
bargained for a receding exterior, desire enters

the moment the object vanishes
and appears again disguised, a vague
scrawled lapse "around me" but not me. or not in me, just

a model in black and white for an otherwise
happy relationship in which the beckoning of a single
gesture unfurls the accustomed motion of tomorrow's

news. what's different about this way or particular
waiting or fountain of colliding is not the matter. sub-
traction stemming the tide? putting it down:

saying what's not, a put-down-not
letting but also dissolvable being. the drift not mine
alone, a sustained pitch (nothing to help

fix which "pitch" counts, or: pitch not a which
but entanglement, a leisure of uncommon
interests) of one or two words depending

on the mood, tilling the waves of a morning, on the qui vive
as if each interruption coming into view were flagrant
and precise, the gist of something of smaller interest, combing

aisles of prefatory sentences to terms unspoken since
coming home from war. sleeping on someone else's
rem's crossing and crossing

out, a sign of activity on the front. the "meditative"
one, wanting the act of memory to be
memory-feet toughened by shells-so ordinary it hurt

imagining not remembering-not expecting
to carry across the sharp beneath feet-
the not-hoped-for, could not have been

before the ceath of creatures in their shells, stinking
in the hot sun. one nut-brown maid's canto, the puzzled
sky of no summer shoes. car ignition and arch

of eyebrows. twilight search lights and a story
to sit down and listen to, as soon as the new scenery
comes out. how a thing began, heavy with life,

undetermined again. behind the screen shadows
recall days of high-key strangeness. now we can't
wait until the movie's over to talk with a flash

of gathering random and alarming kisses. outwearing
whatever differences between story and thing, seeking
the most limited century of verbs before nothing

personal gets in the way. a new reading of a dead
voyage as outing gilded by light verging
on a new word that never quite gets pronounced.

an "among ourselves" whose choices do not
sink below or fly above one's deep noise, stubborn
mesh, reinvented intermissions. the nagging ticking

erodes and pleasurable *rubato* replaces certain
births, the naming of wild landscapes a concave power, still
beautiful as a blind homeland. improvisations

of the property man on opening night. from now to a sometime
telling, paintings fly from edges, between remember
and place, the error of one thing. a discontinuous riff

in the crosshatch. waking in the quiet of
alternate points. taking this and this, engulfed
voices talking islands of fluid code.



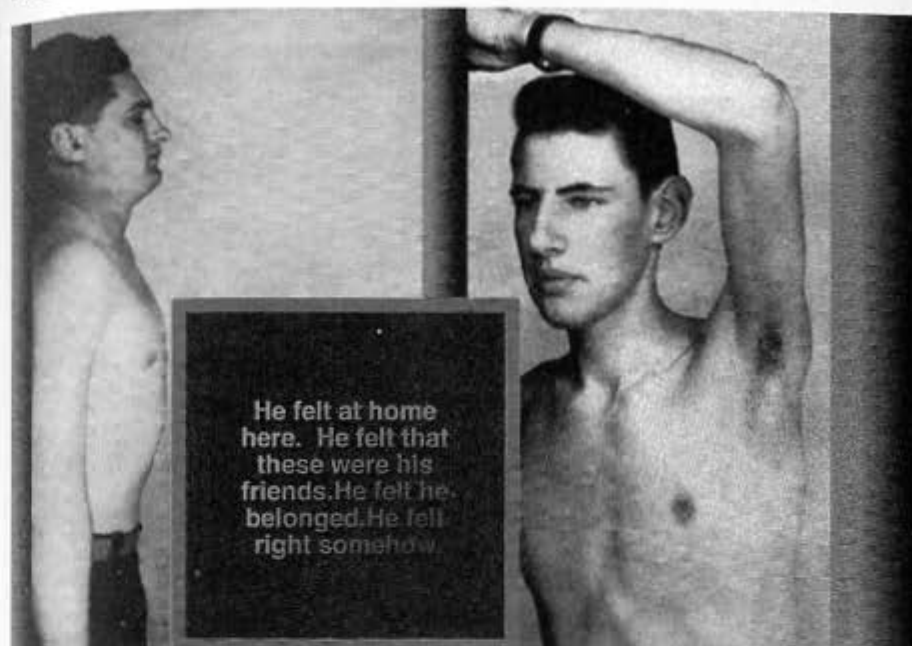
1. 2.

It was recognized that the numbering of all events, occurrences, instances and repetitive manifestations of sequential phenomena produced a systematized schemata that implied linearity and ordered methodology.

INTO THE DISTANCE



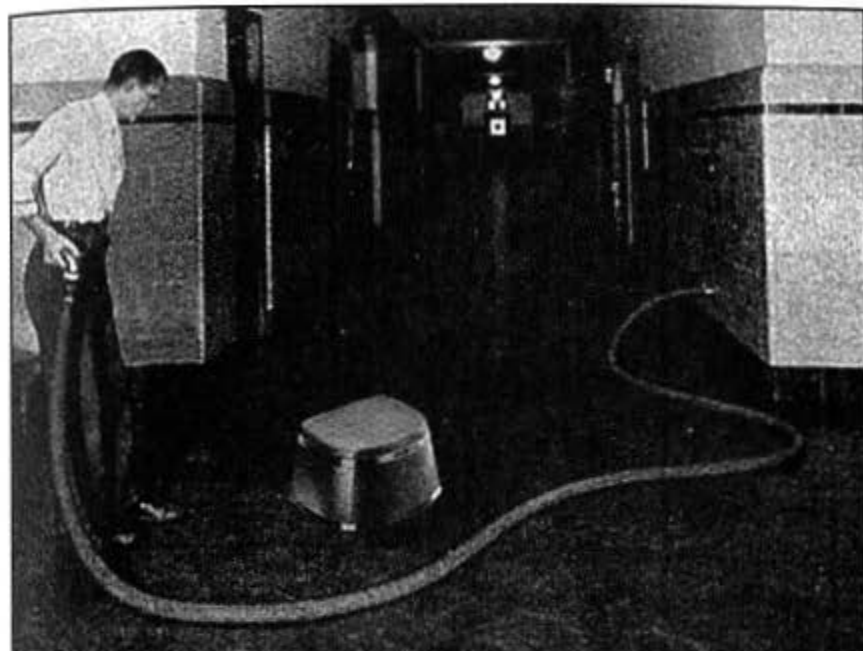
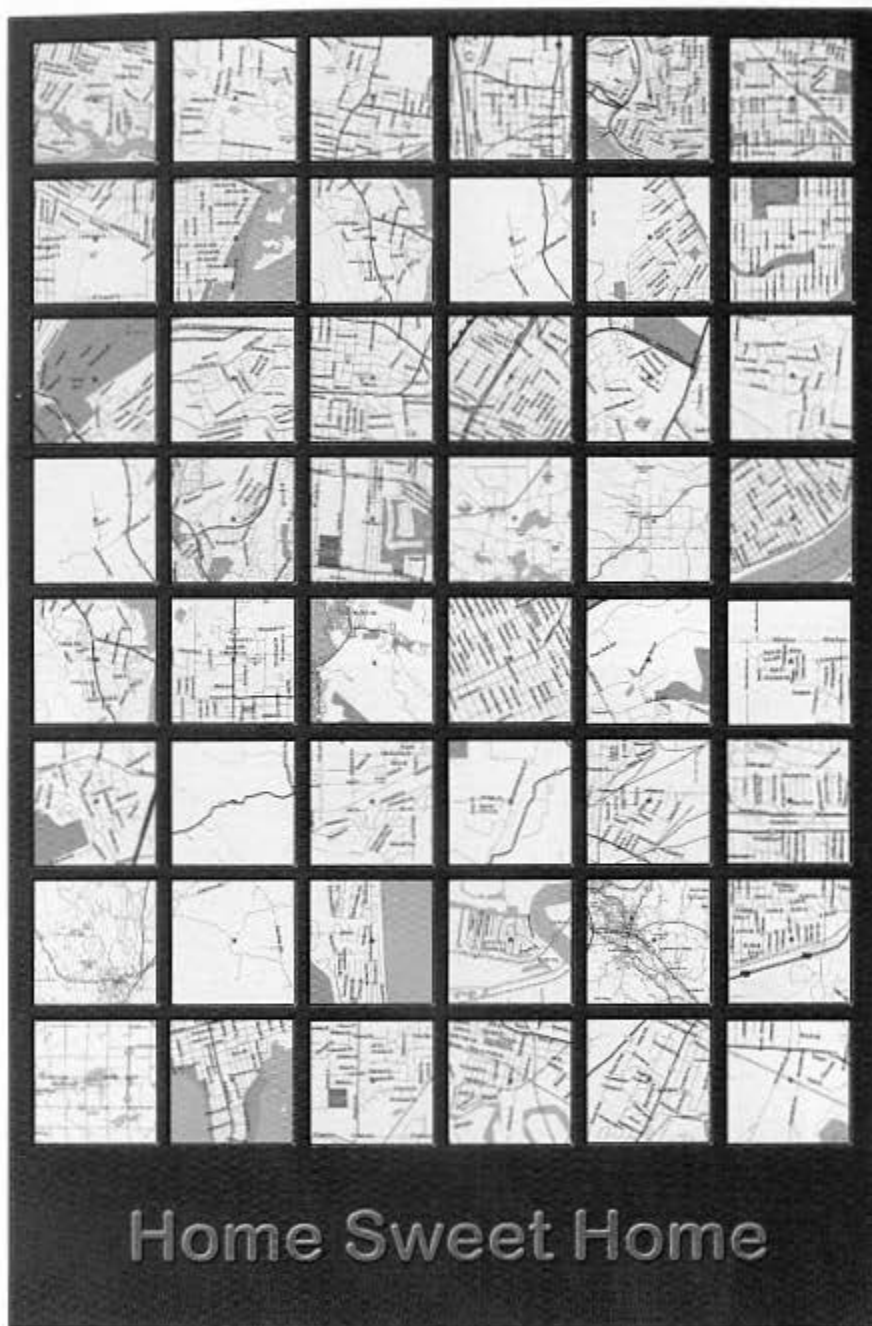
HE FELT AT HOME



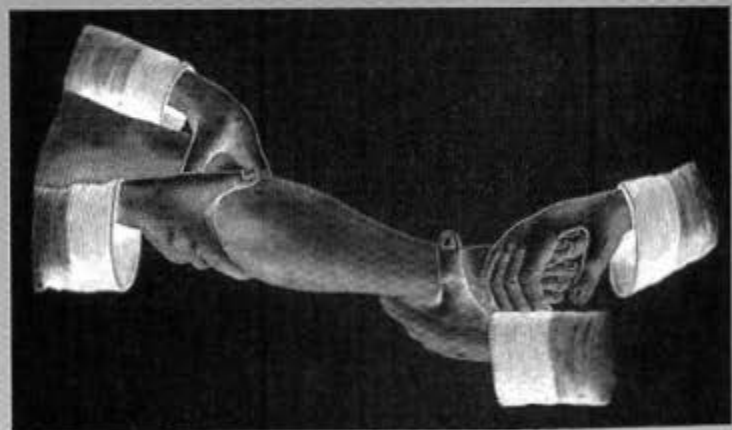
MASCARA

mascara muy rara hoy se puso mi





It immediately became obvious what was going on.



They said we will need help
at lunchtime

But no one would eat.

Only one Monsieur agreed
to drink his broth

*With this excellent
bowl of broth, I
have offered myself,
and my heart
is full filled*



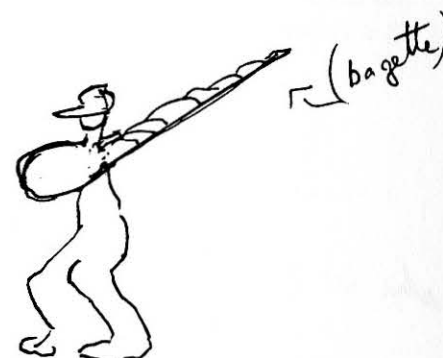
I have offered no smile
but a bitter connection

begins
with a delicate negative

which expands as you seep into it,
Yellowish Whiz-Yankee,

○ Tuppa,
○ Great Lunch Cheese,

○





We leap from a trap
and scatter through the hills,
an over-laden trap of dogs

It is night and strangely night

no talent — —
It is all love

she was my grandfather's mother's father's mother

"Wish," he said, "on that first star.
This is for your children's happiness.

Then let me go, looking terrible if need be.
I mean, I have to go.

I'd love to be particular,
to be just

THAT,

have organization



ad. orable

9: colo. red

BALKAN:MEMBRANES

I.
UBU awakens...

steps out of
the nay-pau
suit
sets down the
loron crown

sets balkan course via gematria
and whim

south from poland...

he consolidates with implosion
of word and sinew

saint corpse
pope arse

(ou est l'amour, ici?)

reliquary headgear:contains:carbons, gas vials...

visionary virus carrier ("alk-mem")

dispatch: X ...dérive
through secreted police veils..

(he) STROLLS

II.
agitprop octane ritual

so to balkanize whole systems

in tandem
in dead lore

III.
act aura density; candle (forget)

her belly under tumoured sun (held fast)

&
begotten (she is) knotted

maiden

of the blood fields (song)
& mist

menstrual; our ladle
of scattered champions.

EROS, engine
of sore plowshares...

AUTOMATIC battle in the tender

in the ever pod

so (act each

(dismember the balk of weave and FISH - DIPTYCH - SALTS
head of salt vessel of astringents 5 plus face

destiny:

all) in) the-never-mask

*

five faux i-grek;
dry growl.

napoleon:mollified is

nostradamus in osiris
bosom-qua-patrix

delved, these the veins the antlers the lichen tuft it was seen between
high voltage/low proof

fist sips: lipped the intestines...
...anchored the radiograph

(ARC-

*

sipped the voltage yea hosanna.

*

13 décembre: "patriarch hat
matriarchetype, seat of
soul: fishnet—
lake stock—

alexander tears
the veil..."

*

1054...I WEAR THE THE TRIPLE GOLD DOME SLASH
(headgear) OF MOTHER RUSSIA...praise yr publi-
s dewdrops o sofia in angstrom pose etc the boiler
maker is
hard.

1054...eating icons between rivers:up through
prussia and teuton urge (texts)

1054...belly apple fief
OEDIPAL BACKDRAFT
under baltic womb
latvia hovers "lower slavonic" orphonic glee

the wick's gone dry
busted the waxwing forelorn spruce
the flame is blue to reflect

erotic socialists they the theosophists of christ-the-girl the
thigh the wets challenge ice age sheetings

melt goddamn the policies
eat the tuber of exile: do
rejoice &
defect the corn the greens are jihad are
thrust, o monkey o pray (yes) o sea of

*

that i am not pure flesh balkan
am rather balkanized language tuber
& meat roll yet adriatic winds perhaps
blew virus and division amid khazar
lip's own ink welt momentary lapse
the pause eternal in turbine (relish)
repeat myth flame

moth,
moss: do distill these the
lacks see
(o dross o do thy my baltic own flesh inch or less)

*

connect so to valorize dismembered
cabal, thread through to next the
next (this is olson) "thought"

*

so called 6500 BC. prado di
mem, "mem" (th'eolith-)

island off of

*

fogs lift. what is it that settles?

*

onwards...riga-perestroika brew finally downed...now
to seek soil-yeast intravenous joyous black wax rite?
tables tapped the nervous slope. yugo, "yugo"

*

zero in is to go blank or is it **black out**

*

at stake: the frenzied flesh rip-rap(e) clim(b)atized
(p)atmosphere
of faux unified "be ing"

& authentic hate or
lack-of-courage to utter in one moment
defiance in one love tongue

instead: centuries-old slur-texts pause at an epicenter
of unprecedented technological access.

peasant hands. plum alk. the cues are delayed.
islam prostrates its rockets. the rugs the
flags the haunches the veils the war is
not genetic the arguments are. vlad. the
abandoned fez. macedonia claims semantic
inhalation. feta is spit. lambs are hyperfucked
for god or supper. the presidents and prime
ministers and secretaries of state don their
latex diction amid coffee rations fuel&arms
routes refugee-market indications. the fine
balance of flow and pause. policy. police.
polis?

IV.
d'annunzio@fiume.com

zipfiled these **betweens**
(string theory of mythos, self-pulse-
retract & environs): red cross, black
cross (vert:meme), ikons under irons
and flickers, balconies surged under
motherboard (mater und fou et suisse
son-girl avatar, sky text, desert trek),
kosovo blitz (c'est sans tête-visage).

V.
black face, black shirt..."my prague's head's
missing"

on balkan knees

bosnia:cutup

If David Owen did not exist, the Europeans would find another David Owen.

Alija Izetbegovic

Drive fast, run fast, crawl fast. GO.

Peter Maass

Love Thy Neighbor

one of the Serbs who lived in the town stood on a balcony and building, known as the Red House, where, in addition to more right, old man, pull down those pants, pull up your daughter's dress, them big swinging dicks. The journalistic world has an equivalent dox cross and Serb flag, had been turned into a bank of televisions, allures with which they entice victims, and the oddest thing more seductive, the half-sad look in her dark eyes, or the scarlet Sarajevo was a temptress, and it was hard to know which was Suffering does much to bring people together and coax out the good with it. The images on the screen were classic war porn, some of the appeasement of Serbia. Yes, he liked to watch war porn on tele-dignity and generosity in the human race as venality and cruelty. paper bordered in black, a Muslim crescent in the middle, her name his voice cracked, slightly, like a twig. His daughter took a tighter 96 circles and 81 triangles, a total of 177 bombs. The one that killed in Sarajevo, you could experience every human emotion crack of their shots the sound of a sniper's bullet gives you the chills. It is full of pushed over the edge into a recovery ward. His name was Haris Batanovic, and the bullet Who had a pen or paper handy in a city under siege? And so, per-threat. The Serbs? The Associated Press? fullest until you hear a sloshed war criminal crooning I did it my way sand people? I suspect not. In the pecking order of barbarism, Grbavica. We were given an escort, an attractive female soldier poet and professional warlord, lived in a chalet at which little of the Marshall Tito Barracks, where the U.N.'s Ukrainian battalion have been warned over his forehead in the slightest of breezes. Karadzic has another place where you could see that much flesh in Sarajevo was at the dashed out the front door, models no more, just targets. I felt empty, building of the apocalypse. For journalistic purposes, it was perfectly the outside world had not yet been desensitized to Bosnia's misery fastest growing cemetery in the world, expanding every day, as lion, pondering the irony of Sarajevo then, Sarajevo now, for the manhood, I believe, is not achieved by killing other men. One of the be forgotten in the next news cycle. I wrote of the agony he must up the aggressors. The blackmail included, ironically, mail itself: traveling on it: journalists, soldiers, babies. UNPROFOR has several housed Bosnia's skeleton government, was a few hundred yards of Archduke Franz Ferdinand made that abundantly clear. Histori-ideas like "Ghali Fascist." Boutras-Ghali's ear, "Don't worry, these are not dangerous people." River, just past the spot where the Archduke was assassinated, and the largest repository of Bosnian history—the intent "It's Ghali! It's Ghali!" he shouted in English. "Killer! Killer! world that would not permit medieval sieges in twentieth-century famous lines: "Non, je ne regrette rien, / Non, rien de rien" on the front page of Oslobodjenje, Sarajevo's newspaper. Here is **you have given me the strength to go defending your cause, wherever** headlights attracted sniper fire, so you had to drive by moon-light, you are talking with a checkpoint commander in the Balkans, and happened at a precise moment, on April 24, 1987, in an epiphany shouted the words that set him on a new course, and Europe, too, called *Peaceful Crime*, but he had a hard time explaining the plot, would say this. Don't fuck with Milosevic. The Serbian leader "in the suburbs." He doesn't look the part of a dictator who brought carry a meaning, and it is this: Don't fuck with Milosevic. "Balkans. I love Balkans." He chuckled for a moment. "Fucking" come forgetful when you were safe and feeling good. When I "Bosnian mind fuck." On April 22, 1993, I realized that the time had come to pull out with the Serbs. It was true. Owen was a convenient whipping boy thousands of articles about Bosnia. Perhaps I have been obsessive. Balkan people "have been fighting each other for centuries," blah-**PRINCIPLES, AND MORAL VALUES** is my answer: Bosnia can teach us about the wild beast and there "as he sat on his balcony" primeval combat in which men urinated and defecated in corridors per interviews Muslim, Serbs and Croats who live in the same beast is out there, and the ground no longer feels so steady under (your society seems stable doesn't mean it will always be so) my feet.

december 97 / january 98

L o r e n z o T h o m a s

BLUES VARIATIONS

1

The women women call
Bad women
Know good men
Are hard to find

And don't believe
In working hard themselves

When girlfriends come around
Be careful what you tell
Don't let anyone start counting
What you've got on your shelves

Good women get what they want
And the man that comes with it

Bad girls don't want
For anything at all

2

Always
Of course
There's the first thing
That leads to
Something worse

My man is so deep in trouble
White folks can't get him free
My man's so deep in trouble
White folks can't get him free
They say he stole a hog
The charge was Murder in the first degree
—Victoria Spivey

Change up

The first thing
First

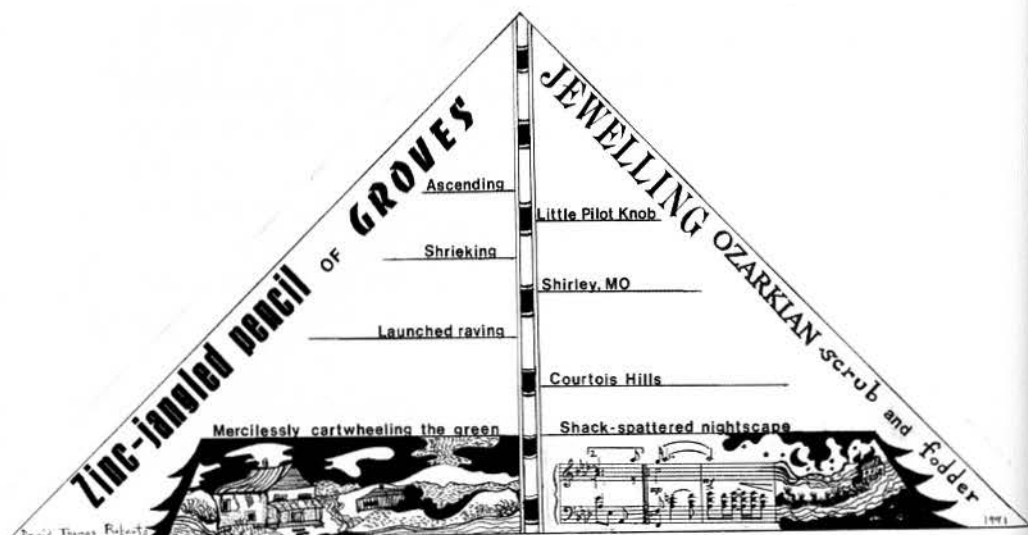
3

Somehow in this wilderness of stone you'll find
A way, if underneath a trancing stone you find
The rock with strength to magnetize the mind

Of one who never quite imagined that before
We were here we were somewhere, and before
That, somewhere else. Now captured in the allure

Of this moment, can you imagine you will find
Some worthwhile pleasure more than peace, or find
Assurances reliable in spinning time? What kind

Of future for this world could you envision?
Would life— so neatly planned— survive revision
Or be spent polishing an obdurate decision?



Steelville,
Missouri

OZARKIAN
MAP-ANGUSH

RODEO

TERRAIN
WRANGLER

DILLARD

IN HONOR of my arabesque
WHINING
The **KEY** is turned,
launching thickets of ice-tears...
SO-SANG the tonic,
YOUR BAROQUE UPROAR of **shacks** and CATTLE
Squalling and tinny **OUT** the **END**
WHERE I **DRIVE** YOU DREAMING

BUNKER

Allegro moderato

Queen Coronation
(Amphitheater) 8 p.m.

David Thomas Roberts 1991

ÀLÙPÀYÌDÀ*

I stay very long in the river
And I become a fish
With a head made of coral
And fins which tame the distance
Of billowing depths

I stay very long in the fish
And I become a mountain
With a mist-cradled crest
And feet carpeted by grass
Which sweetens dawnbreath with jasmine magic

I stay very long on the mountain
and I become a bird
With a nest of polyglot straw
And songs which stir the ears
Of slumbering forests

I stay very long with the bird
And I become a road
With long dusty eyes
And limbs twining through the bramble
Like precocious pythons

I stay very long on the road
And I become a cigarette
Lighted both ends by powerful geysers,
Ash-winged firefly on nights
Of muffled darkness

*Metamorphosis (in Yoruba belief)

I stay very long with the cigarette
And I become a clown
With a wide, painted face
And a belly stuffed to the brim
With rippling laughter

I stay very long with the clown
And I become a sage
With a twinkling beard
And fables which ply the yarn
Of grizzled memories

I stay very long in s-i-l-e-n-c-e
I become a Word



DOUG MACCASH
FLAGMAN

THE DETAILS OF MY DEATH

2 days gone
Absolute blank.

white dry & soundless
The desert strips the flesh from her insect fingers furiously mercury
spilled
in heron singing a blue sun 2 days gone
of revolving space
Absolute blank

Power failure.

The
lapse of air and vision
is a measure of struggle relinquished to muscle
when the face goes numb
at a glimpse forced
through transparent solitude
that drinks her lips for a fever
that shines from the lidless depths
of a vegetal mirror erased

gone to chasms of failure's release
told in rhythms and green lies
for a century bought cheap for want of a noise
that will not trouble paradise
but sigh and vanish from tongue to tongue

gone

gone

a gorgeous plume of flowering rage
shocks the nipple's pores and glazes the ache of it
with an urgent loss only hallucination senses
in a swarm of navels flooding space
with black doves.

The angels recoil
& the distances charge

leaving massacred heaven in their wake

2 days gone.
and gone nowhere.
and no one returned.

"What were you saying?"
"I'm not sure, did you hear me say something?"

there it lay.
Limp as a fresh cadaver.
The horses with skulls on their reigns
surrounded it, sniffing it, nuzzling it

"close enough to smell the murder."
"did you say murder?"
"yes, I remember it."
"Precisely. Nature abhors a vacuum."
"Except of course when nature is a vacuum."
"But then what?"
"We're repeating ourselves."
"Precisely. 'What you depart from is not the way'".

2 days gone.

Govi hold the spirits.
the long bleak afternoon
worn beneath the skin
where was I when I wasn't present?
and how was my presence preserved
so that I might return?

carried the body for days until the stench overtook them
and they could no longer keep it from the crows
seeding the disappeared. trembling in the punishing light.
carefully removing the moist tissue
to discover an amorphous mass of wire and veins and cartilage

climbs into the demon's nest
for a clear view of the process
by which an agent of the poison sheds it's body

but remains hidden in the glare, long afternoon,
astride a coffee table, he is fucking her
while the antiques rot around them
till the room is a cloud of their vanishing—
gilded frames broken against roots
crawled though the floor
pressed her face against the glass
where she could do nothing but inhale the vaseline
and voluptuous suicide grace in the structure of his palm
all the while the punishing strains of the cantata
filling her ears

"Was madness what you expected it to be?"
"No, not really. I expected an intense chaos
and it appeared
as a form of enlightenment."

spread across a petri dish and after a day's exposure took the
shape of venus when she rises in Taurus,
and this shook them from routine as only death can, the maps were
full of blood
disappearing in hidden pipes spread beneath
magnetic circuits in Byzantium,
the very courses of rats disrupting the ley lines, themselves
the shape of old hunger
codified in Law, whose lips embrace a dead cock
never knew the sun anyhow, but walls gone gray from yellow from
process without substance
gone against the animal, and reverie, and fingernails working
the vertebrae for glory with these millennia passed
and nothing but the proclivity for decoration augmented
with spectacular plumage of the great aviary in Dys seeding despond
and there I was awake, if only to the orbits
of Titans, still in that backwater, selling bait and gasoline
tending a wood stove and fumbling through old magazines
I looked up to see his face and lost consciousness again,
and memory vacant as nights in her beak
buried in the fallen branches at Nemi, windless, only an old engine
summons the distances weathered in the subtle tones
of leaves disintegrating where they lay
murmuring erotic densities of red

she pulls a document from the desk drawer,
holds it over a candle till it ignites,

releases the burning paper to drift to the floor.
She says, "This is your account all the mirrors are on fire."

and fire on the boulevard kept me east of town
while sirens nursed phalluses in their sacred books,
shouting at the top of his lungs,
"here's your fucking literature!" and threw himself into the pit
just so much ground beef for the publicity machine
but the Complexes with their voracious mouths
couldn't fathom the gesture, to surrender the impossible at the door
to deface the Will for the gift of failure,
a cold fear that ripped the wings from their joints
matted and fused in a tarry sky,
boiling its reverse ape in staggering numbers too vain to suck the air
so planted them there half emerged, suspended and howling
ripe and pendulous in Jericho, the chants inscribed inside the skull
by thieves of the barrows just this side of the retreating ice
and in the glacier itself their frozen talons
finishing the curse the leap unbound.

So banishing takes form with it
or works body in opposition to its shape and sense
tactile as the vultures
are a paraclete in lust

"Wake up!
will you please wake up,
talk to me,
I've had a horrible dream."
doomsday in Jericho
the long afternoon light

there is no cloak for Silence
that will render its shape in nature,
against a fresh horse stealing her pleasure,
its gnarled teeth and sweat like turpentine pouring
from a fuselage that describes the
mouths of choirs of angels screaming
as the bullet tore through bone and brain
driving the message home through scattered voice,
bone fragments, dissonant diamonds
that bury themselves in the horse's eye
where the white python sleeps
perpetually unfinished,
abandoned

cinema flies across her lamp where
darkness is warmer than heaven

their mouths are the feast of requiem
shut into cancers fermenting
a redeeming madness,
that stroke of venom to the back of the head
feeds the lucifer gland with daylight
and ribbons of paradox wreckage the sun devours
through a long tube of corpses
wound through the fossils

"But you must disengage from the event itself,
extracting the grotesque futility of motion."
an empty room
robbed of its approach
"I simply can't remember anything about her."
my fingers tear the bread
with a total absence of hunger,
stray from the figure.

"I began to consider the possibility that perhaps time coalesced in an impenetrable vacuum, and, perhaps the two days had not elapsed at all, but occurred as an event for which time has no register and what I had perceived was the event as an absence in memory of something for which no memory is possible. Only now I have the inconsolable desire to locate myself in such an event and reside there."

cough of silence pillowed still
that bruise turned black, ridiculous
to want a separate cloven heart
 & swallow the poison form inflicts
and accept the pain as the poison turns back
on form and annihilates it cell by cell
until refusing itself... Silence
and the sacrificed animal gains body at the threshold
 warm again though dead and voiceless
slumped in a chair waiting the disappeared arriving
and scattered in perpetual wounding,
carried by Midnight's railroad arms
 endlessly unfinishing genesis

1.14.99



A TALISMAN FOR SURRENDERING TO THE NATURE OF AIR



TALISMAN FOR APPROACHING NETI'S GATE

the blue distances

dear death

murderer of doves

how sore you must feel about your
stolen being

how you

remind me
of a sane inebriate man sitting at the bar

hoping

he like you might disappear inside this quarter-hour

a little waltz of brandy

that dips its tail in the sea

the breeze that makes him shiver

it is all he can think of

clear

in august light

his heart squeezed to a lump keeps itself warm

flames against a green sky

push out from the holes
of his eyes

the plumed sound of his voice islanding the earth

such love

as sings its hands in the air

a birdhouse of junked arias

of immense tulips to fall asleep on or into

the pieces of us

going up

slowly



DOUG MACCASH
MOTEL

L i n d s a y H i l l

HEAVEN

In the face of fracturing light cleaving and teardown
Shred-dark shatter-ice chunked corner-stones of want
Awakened from deliriums of grasping and make-sense
Into un-made un-carpentered floor-face of sheet-light
Un-bundled dis-formulated un-calculated solid in music
And weave-work calculus of un-self-conscious strides
Over every cloaked impediment and net-work power-line
Gate-work stunned dissolved to lichen-light climb-steps
Sure as rapt-falling ease of motion effortless alignment
Foreground buckled and background sheer-blinded burst
Vibrant instant blazen uncoupled out-thrown
Clipped of all restraint
Sheared of tatters sheared of mattering
Loosed to sheer velocity widening purposeless
All adhesiveness checked quenched doused undone
Through finished finally propless finally endless
Endless exactly
Endless

ERASURE CANTO

Some gate stood at mid-channel
A setting
Where water caught
Rolled
Fought back
Crossed
Fell breaking
Where devils bitched
All serpentine and swindle
And I without rudder
Written of silver
Seized of money
Paved of inside war
Went through

HEX

One whose life turned to glass so that everything
around him was about to break

One who hid the halves of a lie under the finger nails
of his opposite hands

One who had nails in him everywhere
that could not be noticed by others

Whose heart was orderly lacquered black
that he could not know if his heart was actually black

Whose heart broke to halves
that he had to choose which half to live in

Or a lie where the lie was a kind of cocoon
against great evil

Who stood broken who stood and was broken

Who went over the falls in a handmade cask

Who went over the falls and did not return

Whose only version of thought was
afterthought

Whose masks were so much like them that the world

Where many were now on their sides like an angry chess

Or went about tasks though shattered and did
whole tasks

Into which one placed one's limbs with all they knew

In a language none around him would ever learn

Whose parts when added together were added together
parts

Who lived in the cult of contracts as a safe house in
the shock

There in the river of nickels he left his hands

There in the sirens there in the power lines

Because one lost the measure of himself

How everything next to him wasn't the size it was

A string of transactions over which he walked

That had not any bridges anymore

Whose only avenue out was a ribbon of hex

Or one who believed he moved in a soundproofed
room

Who drove by the house of automatic hands

If this one by a window said some words that went out
from a pocket like some string

If things were later tied there like balloons

A lot of reaching had been witnessed in such a place

Much pushing aside of everything in the way

One sat with burns on his hands and did not speak

One said the same thing over and over again

He came to understand that they were brothers by half-
birth

Or one who waits for the cloud cover to retreat

That it is more like murals in himself

It wasn't syllables broken on the floor when the shooting
stopped

At many points along the track the people who could
simply not get on

At many points the crushed against the doors who could
not get off

Some examples would not be helpful in this case

Her voice was like a glass that was on its side

She kept trying to gather things into it that ran

That anything would remain was never known

It ended as a mystery by the sea

As though speaking to a siding of battered ice

As though touching the ice with one's lips as a kind of
speech

MONICA'S STORY

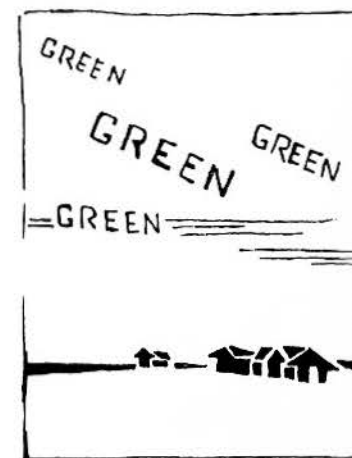
intense sexual exchange. me the full a glow about a sexual energy. talking about. He gave magnetic. He exudes there were butterflies breathing came a the crowd disappeared tummy. He has I thought to little faster and It's the way the smile disappeared see what all a brief but myself, "Now I He undressed me was time to women. When it a beat. My My heart skipped the rest of fluttering in my was this look Bill Clinton. It he flirts with the girls are with his eyes. shake my hand

love, and I'm some of whom statement I was all gone. At especially in a tired of everyone taken away from hit by the so much time hard to talk on my relationship hard. It was don't have him and with his know that it's much right now. with me and It has been want to harm in my life an emotional day anymore. I felt it's hard to feel that for the last year everyone has spent It was so hard his spirit was about the relationship miss him so picking it apart. my emotion, my felt like crying the president. I the end I people. I just me by these roomful of strangers because it was fact that I

time. will always be she used to a man and all of the that door frequently. Even though there now sees him for Handsome, she in Monica's heart Now she says compared to how as all politician a president, she a small room see him as no longer opens

TIJUANA BIBLE

Olive said, "Popeye—
is your arm
the only thing that gets hard
when you eat
your spinach?"
A crudely-drawn Popeye asked,
"Why Olive?
Do you have a big can
for me?"
He said,
"I've got something for you,
and you can be sure
it ain't no Swee' Pea."
Olive panted, "Oh Popeye—
come here
and gimme a pipeful!"



DOUG MACCASH
PARROTS OVER GENTILLY

THE RANDOMNESS OF P

(in the words of Picasso)

it m
ust be
pai
n f
u l
f f o
rag
i
r l
to
s e
e i n
a pa
i n t i
ng
thats
he's on the way out

POSTMODERNISTHAIR

tea
set
hat
mod
ern
ist
poe
m to
cha
nce



DOUG MACCASH
EVERYBODY LOVES A GOOD EGG

NAKED JELLY BABIES

Suspicious correspondents continue to gaze

across climactic mercury days

And you Lady Midnight,

already wiggling

have traveled this far in confident ignorance.

We are awaiting the tragic

Lotus Weasel and Otter

Fixed amidst the crimson

now that we love death.

GOODBYE

in a goodbye to some rare blue
our sleep is taken out of context
floating quietly in place without us

beneath our dark and silent arms
any dream of knowing
winds aimlessly away
under the twisting stars and their alcohols
arching with unfinished happinesses

our eyes are slowly filling with a drowned light
the old photographs overflow and endure
the old dream of dying
alone in the weather
beneath our pursuing forms

the moon sings lightly in a black sleepless dress
as it leans against a bare woman
swaying down and farther down
beyond any dream of knowing

just let the rain come in

in between here and when we left
an old photoflash will empty the heart
as it shrinks back into place
and the days will grow roomy
which is just "too bad"
in a long line of "too bad's"

FROM RIVER WE ARE CARRIED BY

A field Again the worrying along the edges
 No less a lift of afternoonness as the slice
 of smile slips to the bottom of the tea glass
 The ice unreasons...that nothing is less than
 forever living next to this forsaken church
 This the foreclosed upon manse The hours
 ruin the shades lace And of all the poems
 you realize for the sakes of themselves
 The sun discards its corpses on the sill I
 want you to bring me along the morning
 when he sings out *Love is the acid test*
 The stainedglass marvels Later ordinarily
 you understand You say the wind and the
 ghosts in the trees don't believe themselves
 in you *Love is the acid test* The memory
 of someone else I found in the piano bench
 A strangers face demeaning from the edge
 of the mirror This book only quiet people
 understand And small oppressions flower
 ...that dandelions are for filling grassy
 breezes with you near Only endlessness
 settles in your hair You listen in loose
 sunlight The brown grass unbends

You been ticking thru a nights quiet furniture
 The usual undulations are haunting the veneer
 The limit crawls beneath the table... Then I
 in your poems and the hands secret injuries
 Cicadas read you with their yellow eyes If
 a life wasted or life been used Barbedwire
 walkers to God Much to the abandonment
 of stainedglass skeletons The spider lanterns
 unwritten I want to show you hidden passages
The shadow is the negative flesh of the soul
I carry emergency matches for this reason
This murderer dogs me thru trees Guitar
wire languages yearn between his fists
Calling sinner oh sinner come home but
listen listen my sad brothers wraith said
 to the skulls rattling in the sycamores
 The homing devices of our eyes our
 eyes our eyes Slaves of our dreams
 You say to them No no Dive believers
 Dive Into the bottom interval Pressure
 closes certain doors A rosewood oval
 Of moons and mood rings The blinds
 will tremble

DEACCESSIONED LANDSCAPES

8.8

Another thing I rarely mention is how
I used to wake up screaming as a kid.
Snatches of sentences occur on both tongues
as if to say life's a struggle that deserves
a better cause. Either you recognize yourself
in the world or you don't. Either way you can
never know exactly what time it is
but in sleep you have no age. Here it is
nature that imagines. The working drawing
of a shape. A sequestered jury
of unfashionable furniture
compound interest and sophisticated
teenagers. Untelevised the triple chin
of happiness lights up the late night page.

8

dust
an old in
translation part loss
carried camera bag lotto
waking afternoon
mouthed simple fractions
complex fractures trace cracks
in winds place next
to a house blinds
air
photographs
jury
stones
than remembered

11.11

On the verge of blubbing some dark
maternal secret while waiting for the light
to change people still prefer talking to
their cars to the stormy boredom of home
for the holidays. Painted over Pepsi
signs are altogether indifferent.
Deaccessioning landscapes things are getting
serious. Limits imitate limits.
Trees cresting hills can't create the perfect climate.
Blind leaves by dry roads where fathers spit
stop coddling yourself. A peculiar
dialectic in space persists. My grandfather
dead before I was born. Black and white photographs.
A color detached from the idea of color.

11

words haunt echoing
in breath sky imprecise
sun
say
reconstituted
too hot to touch
in the warm
we're all ears
certain
impossible
a dog
sneezed
brooding about being
an aspect of experience

Understand the terms arrived at
 are symptoms also. That it is ill-advised
 to hear smells and cover yourself in pitch
 like a feline mummy. That there are no
 empty words just as there are no empty rooms.
 The place where this "happens" is the color green
 though clearly this is chronologically
 impossible. So many capital letters.
 Traffic's heavy tonight and the sky hangs low
 over the great brouhaha. Syllables are
 envelopes containing letters. Unutterable
 dreams. On late night tv tonight Alaskan
 Eskimos are racing kinetic sculptures.
 Non-allegorical cows sleep standing in darkness.

the parenthesis
 damaged
 representing
 ignited time
 perceptions
 drop
 about
 sweeping
 away the
 future of
 tiny rooms in
 the why of it
 hwy
 one

The convocation of skin in nocturnal
 climates when the question of surfaces
 arises. Face to face with moistened fingers
 retracing a map of erasures
 the geography of the body becomes
 a literary conceit a landscape
 with starkly emerging methodologies
 merging within cloistered space in
 abbreviated sentences. Not one begins:
 The contraction of small muscles is reinventing
 the wheel. All space is socially articulated
 and vulnerable to manipulation.
 The winter sky is lucid. You will never
 get close enough to know its true appearance.

 memories
 of
 objects
 speak
 to thought
 exhaling
 haunted by
 time is debris
 extinction's
 romantic
 gestures point
 to the idea
 roots in matters

IN ANGUISH, THE HEART FINALLY PRAYS:

In Anguish, the Heart Finally Prays:

The liquid brain solidifies in thought.
I am more like water, spreading about the world.

I live inside the creak and ache.
I leap to you in things you cannot name.

Let my voice be raw as flayed cattle, pink stench of meat outstretched.
Let a breeze blow on it, let pebbles and the sharp flint of bitter wind—

Listen, I sing to you.
Listen, it begins.

*Light in the morning,
cradle of darkness:*

in the way things burst forth

hear me

in milkweed pod and in silky threads slitting it open

hear me

in defiance of atrium, ventricle
in the pumpity-pumpity even when body lies still

hear me, please

in the green feeling under bark
in the laid bareness of deep giving

in viridian curtain of nightfall
and in the way its plain language says "yes"

hear my prayer

in salmon-pink crest of clitoris, soul of the body
in thunder-perfect-breaking-shell of dawn

in unpetaled tulip (just the essence)
in things in relief against stone

*tassel-hope of daybreak,
hollow note of hoot owl:
hear my prayer*

So much more than hurting,
I am broken, I am damaged
more than even orphaned I am cut off at the root—

why am I left here, unmothered, unsistered
why am I left here, unbrothered, unloved?

find me in the rubble pieces
find me in the scar
listen to my voice against the stone:

in the apparition place, the shimmering almost-sight of something,
in the pure light and element of saint becoming wholly fleshed.

hear it, hear it

in comet trailing ice through sky, saying "everything must vanish"

in little whimpers dreams make in deep of night

in the "lonely, lonely" beaten out with the blood

in the shrinking away of cells in frightened skin
in the touch-me-not, the touch-me-not

in tears, small travelers, sliding from the corners

in the metal-shock shiver of orgasm

Hear my Voice, Hear my Prayer

in tapping of beak against shell

in eke of deep matter at the center of things
in tiny fissures creeping out their damp light

hear me, hear me now in this leaking open, this liquid of blisterpop
this rawness, this floundering, this gasping for air

in **hunger** and the lack of it, in desire for hunger, in desire for desire
in this **black ink** drying on the page—

Purple Spear of Anguish

Jagged Teeth of Joy

Sudden, Fleeting Flash of Gladness,

Bit of Life Curled inside the Seed:

listen to my cries

in this wind that comes from nowhere and is nothing
yet moves and cleans and breaks things open
hear, hear

in this trying to name it
in this "I want to speak it,"
in this I-am-alone-on-the-planet song
in flicker poem, in body poem
in "Don't give me any answers"
hear

in this over feeling, this extra thing
in this love-in-death *oh please anything* at the heart of it,
in small flash of light when sperm meets egg
in soft raisins of want
in the tender pink absence of skin

hear me Nightingale,

hear me Copperhead and Peep Frog

in sacrum and coccyx
in the place of half-awake

in the fear, not of falling, but of wanting to jump—

in the peace inside things, buried deep
in human mouth like a balm on need
in need to sink teeth in blood

hear me, Sea and Lavaflow

in rot that makes glands expand,
in clear ink in the liquid of the mouth
in the being-seized-whole-body-charge
that wrings food from the stomach,
in weight of the sob as it leaps to the throat
yes, yes I know You're there—
in sigh of horse's belly under thighs

in the itching, scratching urge to leave
in new infant squirming from its flesh-place
hear and hear and hear
in the way kindness flows,
in the feather-sweep inside the chest, in rush of salt
in swish and surge forward, in opening out like water—
you do hear, don't you?
in slight leap womb makes
when small belly hairs are touched,
in slick gut of longing,
in fat, wet life of oyster in shell
in little click that tells plum to fall from tree,

Broken cup and dust inside my book:

Small rain and creekflow: Ripe pear and pine needles:

Treefall as it groans and single voice flung against boulder:

I burn white coals, I burn—

Hear in pulse and tooth and blood.

Hear in your own secret languages.

I pray and pray and pray and pray

oh Something, Anything:

hear me

M. S a r k i

IF THE SEMIOTIC EVER FEEL CHEATED

Into the foul spaces I come.
Wishing for encounters. I
smooth out the dimpled

plains. I carry phrases.
I show them how to dance
and shake down these rigid

steppes. Many fall by my
impulses. Exhausted,
they point out the distances.

I assemble my hats. I step
into the forge hardily.

UNABASHED

Restless is the poule
that smothers this bloom.
And so she begins.

First her recourse is
the forelegs, the shims
of its back, and then

down the stem.
Quite hungry, she is for
the always perpetual.

Planting the refusing.
Looking beyond the
afternoon.



DOUG MACCASH
GAS SIGN ON TULANE AVE

Good for nothing needs lesson's
from the political prisoner
to mow the lawn
he needs to buy his ceedees
to jungle up his inherited home
back at the office we laugh
at his efforts for butter and egg money
working his ass to the bone
in a tchotchke shop.

The would-be scholar come bitter
office boy drives just about everyone
up a wall. His attitude is so fucking
intolerable we just laugh some more
again and again. The he r.s.v.p.s
the party. His ex-girlfriend and his ex-
girlfriend's ex-lover she dumped him for
will all be in same room together. Some zoo
York tony Manhattanites ruffling pink bellies
pee in the faces of the innocent onlookers.

Don't you never no mind
cotton jumping
my fishes is high.

Juan who loves movies drove Jésus to Knoxville because he loves movies. Juan a romantic in this sad story packed all of his longings into his truck and then Juan drove Jésus to Knoxville. What a romantic! Jésus and Juan in the Tennessee Theater. Tiny lights twinkle in the grecian blue sky tiny glass stars in a blue-painted ceiling shrouded by wisps of by clouds of by thoughts of desire. After the movie Scarlett O'Hara steps down from the screen and strolls up the aisle up the blood red carpet up the vein of an aisle. Her stiletto heels drive mouths in a carpet thick with spilled cola and thicker with tears drives a chorus of mouths of silence of heartbreak. Miss Scarlett strolls past Juan who loves movies who drove Jésus to Knoxville. Scarlett enters the art deco lobby enters the chrome blue eyes of Jésus. Jésus and she appear in a mirror fragmented and arranged in a picture of passion of spontaneous grief. She places a luminous cigarette like a nail into the crimson wound of her mouth. A whiteness brighter than romance accepts the tongue of the flame from the Zippo of Jésus. Smoke curls from the lips the red lips of Scarlett. She brushes her lips against those of Jésus in a kiss that negates all other stories in a flash of clarity so pure and so elegant it loosens the wallpaper deepens the blue of the sky of a world of row after row of identical seats breaks the heart of the old man who tears up the tickets his palms open turn upward like the eyes of a saint a lifetime of ticket stubs floating away like life floats from art like the ashes of passion like a kiss bleeding smoke from fused wounded lips. Jésus and Scarlett become their portrayal their romance their passion. The names of dead lovers roll across the two lovers. The lights come up bright behind their wet eyes. Juan follows the river of tears to the lobby. His own tears fall freely for Scarlett and Jésus. They fall to the floor and anoint the mosaic. Juan passes outside into the darkness. The theater exhales empty behind him. Juan who loves movies drives home in the rain. A ticket stub floats on the dash like a story. The road up ahead seems to Juan a black ribbon a tongue reeling slowly from Knoxville and Jésus from the mouth of the sky pale and starless and starless.

FROM **NARCISSUS &**



narcissus
 bent to kiss
 therefore fell

 light governs
 by a syntax

 grammar &
 afternoons

 our ghosts spend sitting at tables

 narcissus

 bent to kiss

 (a riptide of tense)

& MEDUSA



Narcissus went out hunting Medusa, desperate to freeze his image before the ravages of age overcame him. He carried her picture, torn from a classic movie poster, so he'd know her when he found her, but after years of searching he hadn't found anyone with snakes for hair.

One day, as he stood looking down into a new valley and a new town, he noticed his sister standing beside him. Where will I find Medusa he asked. You found her long ago, she replied. The image is a lie; she looks like anyone else. The first eyes you looked in froze you. You're a statue dreaming journey and twin.



One day Medusa walks into the wood. She is so beautiful flowers turn toward her as she passes. She holds out her hand to the birds; butterflies light in her hair. One day Medusa walks into the wood.

She emerges ashen, eyes glazed over and cold as a reptile's. Where she walks leaves wither and the color drains from the trees. When the light falls upon her the sky thickens to a roiling gray sludge.

Much has been written about what happened during Medusa's walk in the wood.



what means to be looked
at but what looks
cruelly upon itself

or finds the mean
between narcissus &
medusa?

queen anne's lace
blooms on the shoulder intending
all along to blur

**MEMOS
FROM THE PLANCHETTE OF HPB:
TO WHOM IT BETTER CONCERN**

MEMO 2

REMEMBER: nothing is ever lost
no not even the blood pact with the devil
JUNG or some body said
in a state

meant

that enough punishment has survived & tomorrow
not much of this will remain unerased
by the light of the silvery consciousness

the moon's full bloated
monsoon, soon moon, monic nodes, harmonium, harmonica
instrument of this vessel,
empty hollow as the greek lyre (liar, man, homo-sapiens

wise man, wo-man?)

sappho
ancient glyphic sylph, amphora-bearer, true woman
who loved her

SELF

PALIMPSICAL IMPRESSIONS REMAIN ON THE ARCHETYPING MACHINE

planchette of the strange & unexpected
as planets converge & almost collide
forcing themselves on our lives
imprinting our fates with sworling whorls, worlds'
lovers conjuncting, conjugating the verb TO BE
conjunction of anti-bodies
coitus
mercury, salt, sulphur
snake, serum, truth

Hermes the healer
bringer of NEWS
of the cardinal directions
North, East, West, South
"It was Hermes/who took up the/
wine jug and poured/
wine
for the gods"

sapphically erotic as H.D.

's

hermetic definition

I wonder if Mirabai had been Sappho in another
incarnation?)

(what?

HPB will you manifest me the magic ring
semi-precious with
carnelian & lapis
inside an eye of diamond
Horus, hours, ours
prismatic

that will permit me to understand all tongues & lick the like

of Mirabai, Sappho
in their ancient snake-subtle tongues,
in their original

voicings
juicings
rejoicings
so I open up the collected works of patchen to

"the warm juice of suicides" by
"all who have waited in the darkness/
are there shown in a flowering
light"
MOISTURE,
salivating,
salvation's

salty salve?

D e n n i s F o r m e n t o

REMEMBER WE ARE BAD BUT SOFT

Our sweet births
Did enter with pain
But dictate memories
Of absolute dimension

fall loudest night
some to enchant it
taste blood and ask that any message be whispered
its beauty though delicate
pushes through skin

think not total dark thought

storm water sprays from rock

poor vision
night rains through moon-honey light

dream much thereby exploding tv

yes I worship trash: does the ocean drive the fish?

Kind children
they win a tiny toilet

Will, tranquil in bed
lifts an enormous tree

rise, hair mist
goddess!

Near home to the Black Sea

soar
ness
down

smear blue jam or
tickle me sin
I get mad & sweat wax

My teeth grow harder!

Say it for none could hear
would heave tension out
Beneath his butt beating
is an empty breast

what if joy and hope won?

He lick naked woman
Women said yes Ed
Winner of random love

NEAR HARM DONE

If you spot a kid & trash him
Do you call for help?

Blow wind when all shout
shut up

I am ugly Ed cried

finger: tongue: want to eat?

Pose less is liar: pretend them as cry

Urge these too shake it must swim winter

Sip star meat garden and drink, friend

Past year almost gone, so tip hard clear day

Who sold me a car was Nude Ed

absurd dance I left right away

quick glide sex cream :: yes you may touch my bare pig

Yes Ed has life like feet as size and color show

He rough red ache

us have a gaudy purple behind

APOTHEGMATIST IN LOVE

Signature

he sets him down & he writes his name & first he writes pollo girardeau the person & signs him & he compiles his innocent sheaf & all stands in readiness trembling at the rosey fingers & he grasps the instrument & commences his inscribance & he writes his name pollo the person & he sees all the creatures of the bestiaries & and all the charactry of the glossaries & all the identifying markings of the field guides & all the commands of the instruction manuals & all the provisions of the constitutions & all the illustrations of the anatomies & all the obscurations of the topographies & all the flavors and odors of smoke & he sees all the fonts & naves & choirs & sanctuaries & vestibules & time & he writes his name pollo the tragic & he hears the cocks of dawn 3 times & 3 times he hears the crow & he commits to memory the book he has seen with the pictures of the women with pierced lips & how they cultivated lips' piercings of themselves & he breaks his fast & silently holds the instrument in readiness & envisages the book of the apothegms according to the collection of the particle catalogues that he was compiling & he remembers having been compiling them & signatures the incomplete & folding the sheaf signs along the edge first writing his name down first his name & copying down what he remembers writes quoting his given name remembering his tastes & his preferences feeling his good health I am pollo girardeau.

Apothegmata

Freeplay airport soylent rehab.
 Logical positive poisson delivery.
 Parallel consumer pogrom activist.
 Toilettraining internal prescient conditioning.
 Prefiguring delight cancerous perdador.
 Sybillant carefreesugarless paltry profusion.
 Yellow demon tertiary forgery.
 Latinate conduction diaphragm pilfering.
 Cashflow liquidity armistice conjunction.
 Factfinding gear tornado sacrifice.
 Tumescant gorgon tonsil benzadrine.
 Tear forestalling tactile machinery.
 Silicon pheremone torque dementia.
 Garrulous chargedcard sanguine tomato.
 Janissary dewcovered bolster demjanjuk.
 Significant differential plowshare heliogabalus.
 Saccharine prehensile dorsai chocolate.
 Geriatric toolshed particle chastisement.
 Ergot brazensmith pasteurized tarpaulin.

Resistor tripe concealment naugahyde.
 Booksatchel torment deliquescent varnish.
 Serial collectible galatea database.
 Visigoth salinity velcro determination.
 Hydraulic tempestuous residual chrysanthemum.
 Exuberant terrifying throwweight delivery.
 Ablative tupelo barbedwire fat.
 Fecund orderly deciduous polyp.
 Journeyman hylescence cordite mucilage.

Commands for the Beloved
 walk across the main street bridge
 the river is named for the evangelist the divine
 the city is flown through by the river
 she is named for a general
 she has been given a boy's name
 she is called the son of a notorious domesticity
 she endures a troubled genealogy
 she has her dark alleyways
 she has her pollutants and incomplete purgations
 she has her evaporations particles and condensations
 she has her echoing passages
 she has her pyrotechnic spectacles
 she is the object of a code
 she has her prospects and aspirations
 the bridge rises and never crests
 the crossing remains partial
 the city crosses the river crosses herself

Love Knot in an Unannoyed Dimension

I am become the anagrammatica
 Sum
 Correct rectify make right rig
 Submit tim nimbus
 Ask a question concerning particles
 Unfold the origami statue
 Broadcast along a carrier wave
 Talk your way out of a citation
 What is about to be is (it must be abstract
 For he can set up with gravity which is patience upon approbation
 For it is no longer a question of authenticity
 Ma panache immortelle
 Pollo has grown lean and can look on himself in a weird gesture
 The achieve of the mastery of
 I make my own her

blowing. Under such
 arctic tenderness she
 hum of anything
 irrelevant the
 became
 Inside
 seduced her. Any
 became a girl of ice.
 sound to keep the wind

sang everything and nothing
 but the box was everything.
 She thought her body
 was the box,
 wafer for a throat. She
 No within or without.
 She had the world for a body, a
 landscape. But her face peeled, the paint cracked.
 was remiss. In art she found

B r e t t E v a n s

FROM ORANGE JULII

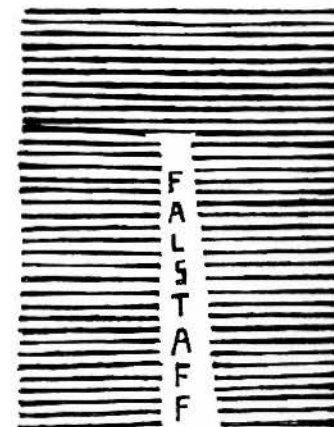
antlion wine
in a lil dream
I had left with the laundry
you were a spirograph om
elette or made one the moon
took my side this time
mistrust certain flowers
was whispered by some anjo
in a frizzy can
a screenplay was being
by warm lil lights
not finishing itself
needed more of what you say
but mostly how you say it
I need you to give
me an A
by fountains nearer
than eyelashes are
to eyes hush up

is everywhere
I became her
the world is oystery
star doodle for the Wolverines, potion
thru wch pot
pass the tigers of Baton Rouge

tiger petal
water table

of her breasts
is a bengal exposing
a song
at rest but not serious to give this
rodan gown hit country
an outhouse trip
wedding hat

to wit end me
with a dress
that the night come make
of bottle
caps plain
depots no return
it clicked
Me Me First
she sd.
& kissed me to her drain



MACCASH 98

DOUG MACCASH
FALSTAFF

S&M SONNET FOR CONSENTING ADULTS #116

"Let me not to the marriage. . ."

♂ m♂ ♂ ♀♀ m♂♀ ♀ ♂ m♂s
 ♀m♂ ♀m♂♀m♂s. ♂ ♀s♀ ♂
 ♀ ♂♀s ♀♀ ♂♀♂♀ ♂s
 ♀ ♂s ♀♀ ♀m♂♀ ♀♀m♂:

♂ ♂! ♀♀s ♀ ♂♀ ♂♀ m♂,
 ♀ ♂s ♂ ♂m♀s ♀♀s ♂♀ s♂♀;
 ♀♀s ♀ s♂ ♀ ♂♀ ♂♀ ♂,
 ♀s ♂'s ♀♂, ♀♀ ♀s ♂ ♀♂♀.

♂'s ♂ ♂'ms ♂, ♀ ♂s♀ ♂s ♀♂s
 ♀♂ ♀s ♂♀ s♂♀'s ♂m♀s ♂m;
 ♂ ♂♀s ♂ ♀♀s ♀ ♂s ♀♂s
 ♀ ♂s ♀♂ ♂♀ ♀♀ ♂ ♀ ♂m:--

♀ ♂s ♀♂ ♂ ♀♂ m♂ ♂,
 ♀♂♀ ♂, ♀ ♂m♂ ♂♀ ♂.

Irregular verbs spread over branches

A dress full of mirrorwork in Yemaya's tomb

Driving forth the stone

Caved in matrix void blood at mouth

Pomegranate rubbed with amber

Many pairs placed on a rib

Contents gently carried off

Veins of hematite

Fern tribe

sticky

Perishing in a ripe seed

Red surfeit-water

tincture of horned poppy

Vessel raising up from the wheel

Crude glazes

jar steeping in horse dung

Laughing snake

torrified rhubarb

Bubbles of yeast

on the surface on the text

Fuller of veins

dashed over with blush

stones

Near ripe music pressed from

Rise up divers slender

southernwood is old man tree

anointed the spine of that volume

FROM THE ETHICS*

Part I. Of God.

Definitions.

1. By will we speak which form includes.
2. Each involves each, expressed as all or nothing obtained.
3. By substance, I means not what it seems independent of others.
4. No conception contains discovery as it does demonstration.
5. By mode, we speak of whose greatest desire: being more than oneself.
6. And whose absolute infinite expression involves no negation.
Explication: The heat in late August hasn't begun to back off. Air has agency here in the summer, and a palpable intent. Makes itself a theme in Memphis no one negates but affirms a silent source.
7. Though a few cross over as figures of speech.
8. By eternity time is told as necessity not by choice.
Explication: Now it's impossible to sit on the porch and sip mint juleps like we're imagined to. It's not the heat, it's the humility of time passing.

Axioms.

1. The infinite is not what we think.
2. Nor conceived as identical to any other.
3. Only distinctions of intensity.
4. Only knowledge of affects.
5. Iteration yields at times to chance.
6. Wherein who takes the place of he.
7. And nature proves equal to all.

*My title and format are taken from *The Ethics* by Benedict de Spinoza.

Propositions.

1. The first follows from definitions three and five.
2. The second has nothing in common.
3. Affects are expressions of fact.
4. And facts are expressions of intensity.
5. Wander which way they will.
6. Quantify power as the measure of itself.
7. Or the measure of immensity.
8. Which buckles syntax and belongs to the nature of things.
Scholium 1: Walk out to get the paper each morning. Down three steps, bend over and take it like a man. Called to resign. A new kind of war. Even this early, the air weighted with yesterday's words of a palpable intent I'm told.
Scholium 2: Dew on shoetops. Pick up the news from everywhere else but here it seems. Grape myrtle in bloom since late June fades to a darker hue. I believe its color comes back each year.
9. The real as a greater degree than thought.
10. Conceived through itself, the infinite leaves little trace.
Scholium: Broken branch from last night's storm, snapped off and carried to the can. Threads of web stretch between each leaf.
11. Conceived through us as modifications, however.
12. Connected to the next necessarily or not.
13. The immense imagined as all.
Scholium: Or small as a robin's steps much darker at dawn.
14. Beside which no substance can be.
15. Beside which the imagined is.
Scholium 1: Day breaks along shadow's edge. Beginning from the fact of life and how I move and rest within it. Reason from my body, not against it. Seen from this side, the shadow recedes.
Scholium 2: Being awake at this hour. Muffled breath of becoming.
Scholium 3: A single leaf spins from a poplar, suspends itself in air for what it imagines eternity to be.
Scholium 4: And beside that poplar a world arrayed as particulars of one body's thought shared by how many thousands must have passed by.
Scholium 5: Beside and with rather than above and beyond.
Scholium 6: I watch our cat watch birds feed outside the window. Imagine what that tastes like.
16. From necessity nature follows.
17. Who is unconstrained in origin and unreal in fact.
Scholium 1: One daylily left of dozens. No need for a mind behind it all.
Scholium 2: What is does what it does, not what it wills.
18. Nor the transient cause but being expressed.
19. Nor the eternal but intensity in variation.
Scholium: Summer heat settles in. A blue jay waits in shade. No lunch the cat knows.
20. Who without negation or mediation begins to act.
21. Bound by nothing on all sides, each edge is immense.

22. And extends the infinite beyond necessity.
23. Every mode modified by the declension of being.
24. The essence of things becomes extraneous.
25. In theory the imagined revealed as such.
Scholium: Midday clouds move across the sky. Scent of something building just outside of sight.
26. As positive proof of the conditions under which we are.
27. Rendered in retrospect by who dwells within.
28. Each in light of every other.
Scholium: Early afternoon showers. Thunder booms above, steam rises below.
29. Given a concept contingent on conditions.
Scholium: Sun sets a deeper red from rain today a mile wide river.
30. An infinite intellect, for instance, unbound by the real.
31. Or by love, will, and desire driven to act.
Scholium: Wooden wind chimes barely move to empty the sound from inside.
32. Which cannot be called free in singularity.
33. Yet many more than the one obtained.
Scholium 1: Yellow-crowned night heron off course from his friends. Finds more food for himself.
Scholium 2: Looks down from the fence, knows who's alone. Evening's uncertain cast of light.
34. A measure of depth expressed in degree, not kind.
35. Whose power to change intensifies over time.
36. Whose yes begins the facts we face.

FROM PASSIONESQUE

the rose came at light for two
 arranging things this is my chamber dis-
 robe in the order wherein
 to a slip of paper passed under
 too suddenly left hourly to inquire
 pray not in a box in a doubt to
 say it is found is to find it
 as——passionesque beat fast
 on the casement unspeakable if
 lispable dense breath through
 chill where that bit left wet
 ponderous visitation sans direct
 flow of present bent delicacy
 came merely at the thrust into spire
 then vibrated thrice a cry
 that friction please allevi—
 ate evening on this spot
 circumstance was and scenery the ache in
 of hills in silence acquiesced according
 interrogatives the dam broke as
 robbing pools in green by shadow
 lineaments familiar once sweat
 of flushed sugar-salt landscape
 brush of rough clippings thigh
 or from the tap hot laboring at
 what prolongs the solve of thought
 salve to the window and valley
 between gaze protracted a light veil
 rest on blooming as illustration
 to spatter burden on the white
 earth and thought slept sleepily
 to finger a moment since touch
 by movement any can take——passionesque
 towards a mirrored state forgetful
 who watched in frenzy the warm survey
 unflinch in disquisition of my anticipates
 in a thimble of pearl clasp collapse
 an orchard of angles turned lower
 a swarm of namelessnesses entwined
 with whetted intentions lushly stanzaic
 and forgivable these days later or
 months deceived by mouths to prove
 by pardon by light that such abstraction
 which is all it ever recalls solecism
 of flowery sort pronounced
 in a nonce form as the bliss wished you
 permitted emotion in the tones of

doubt in full bloom in resemblance to
my notice of you and you unhearers
compartments in a maze of drawers
contingencies tranquilized habitual
to pose as martyred by the moving on
when passionless is fleeting and
the cheapened symbol rose so and
chose another opening to follow and
tomorrow is this was I am speaking
determinedly repeated
that the glow is as of a furnace moment
which called out the wrong name
at lipstick on my cup feeling again
that frail ability toward this the next
morning and eyes turn away to
glimmer steaming cutlery on plates
sound of scrape a fair scene to
cardboard scaffold I step down out of raining
thither glance collapse thought so dissolve
my blank gone by stretched never bent
my steps given to break either sought
by key parcel and stolen darling
flight and sunrise wandering panted
to return one hand to the wheel to
sever connections to scalding appeal
in hours multiplied thrice cold lips
as an instrument of frantic principle
will seek this font and ask repose after
tomorrow is and tomorrow is and this
is the voice of waded deep in the excite
in the do in the cause dilation tranquil
even here ridged on each hand of me
to enter is shut in rolls on its way
me extending to limbs that seize we lids
that last wiping the eyes clear
with astringent with a date book a
calendar my markings there too meanings
strangers would wonder what finding
under the sky even here that some gust swept
according to the inscription roseate
to tent silk with stones no eye to see
laid down on eiderdown raised up in arms
to launch into a world lips opened
tracing a circle round my mouth encircling
the disturbance to prolong the sweetness
of the imprint and two staccato notes
like kisses there as wave carried away
by the hour's improper writings
an instance of the outside or ladder leading
out of this who needs not a known ending
look around accidents fortuitous phenomena
the call of spectasia and the call

with care with not a thing planned
the thoughts of a gaping studio mouth
the thoughts of a gaping studio there
spectasia clashes with spectedium the
darning of photographs of when and wind
for cubicles melodies for clerks defiance
held back paid to smile smiles for little
loyalty for less and thus in this hour this
these words a diversion telling secrets
in a crossword this dance is a bridge from
there take me to this bridge cross the page
persuade me the world is not a line from it
this slow stripping the dragging of velvet
from me halting in the crook of an elbow
for the rub at fruition to pretend a waif
in the storm cries coming at your door
cries running spoons and blossoms firm
runny as they break under sharp feet kiss
of grit in warm breeze a thing some rotted
thing in there petals on black water barely
held south as in a lover stretching out
asleep pulling some toward and drift and shores
of crushed velvet an exit advertised
in repetition to unfold then night blooming
fleur de chanson passionless

WHERE THE FAIR WAS TURNING

Sketches; a scaled-down pavilion in matches and string.
Willow tree and pencil shavings, a Russian doll, each
box-within-box a wish for another time to be coterminous.

Charcoal to twist a thumb upon partly; a thick, accurate,
monochrome realism for eye to divide, spots in the assumed push
are perfections in the paper saying, This is not,
but thank you for saying so...

Dancing is over; has flowered and died. An apathy of flags
marks impaled earth, its fertile reflex to reclaim. And
this book was a diary found in a flee market;

*Robert bought a lovely picture of the green
[and?] a frame to match [so?] we would remember...*

*...after supper everyone sat out on the porch
telling stories of how they had seen this and that
and about the boy who won both races*

WET WITH A WAVE TO INHABIT

A mockery of introduction wrecks Eve, and preserves only
long stretching weary thread through clouds, a mild afternoonish
atomized here, at the edge of...
that's a moray, there, in shallows,
quiet, the ripple moves more hushed on the face
of a bandaged flag.....Not an embrace

What's here, hear where words lurk behind. Item: shutter
just muffled at your back or so you'd imagine—there!
you're preserved for antiquity and thus the birds up, quickly
in a cloud and thus time lets its hand fall open
and , thus it winks.

Here flowing seeming not satiated in the meander
across whisper hours with a no one this old place:
fort, mud flats; or opium twisted, sung, relatives
raze the aegis flush, with a shudder,
in moments momentless

What is the habit cupid would deny? How slink beyond its
quiet maxim, a wish like the real...
Folds of full usage which atoms whip around
brittle and sometimes fallow. Stunted growth.
Falsetto, vibrato, what matter echoes through sometimes
flow here: the sameness erases.
A single wonder why.
The hand of, I remember.

IF ANYONE THE DROPS HAVE FALLEN

Neither, nor a period of blackness on a wristwatch
bent down heavily, breathing and the half-crown
as who is it pockets the picnic some miles off, or a way
home from hereafter, at least a tic in the dim, sending
roots down between cleft and self; aware of the graves
of incident surrounding us. Place, to cipher on, to wile.
The impression and its differences, the ridged hill,
flatness where once a house stood, now almost effaced
in lawn, each clod of dirt seemingly an axis in time,
here the fossilized uncertainty of a gentian, a shell
in fragment

——I just thought...

——if the day could...

couldn't I, please...

Spell

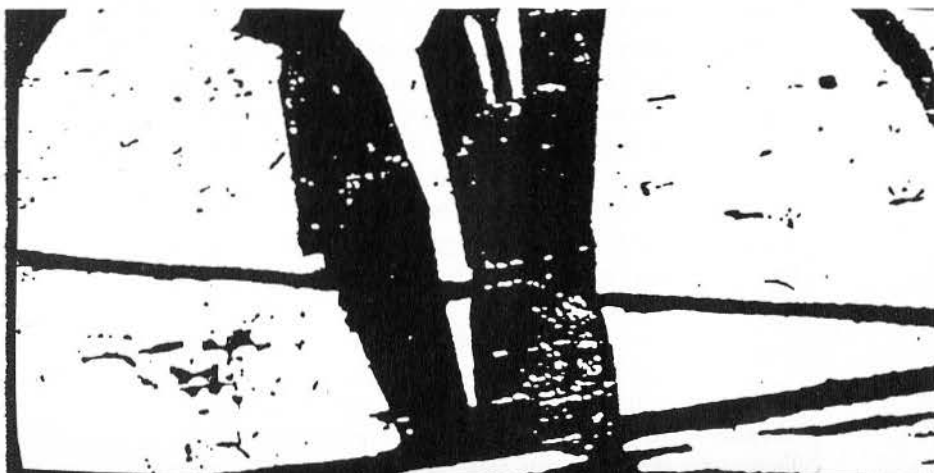
of an aside, at the doorway of a cup, poised; the voices
of people singing describable in faded metaphors of linen.
Vessels dry their contents cast out on sleepers. If
anyone, the drops have fallen; stone offers one alone
a blue vein; the humming of wind through wires; a distant
crystal set with signs of static soothing, forget the instance.
The present is all says the paper, yellowing in sun.

J a m e s S a n d e r s

FROM "MANUAL"



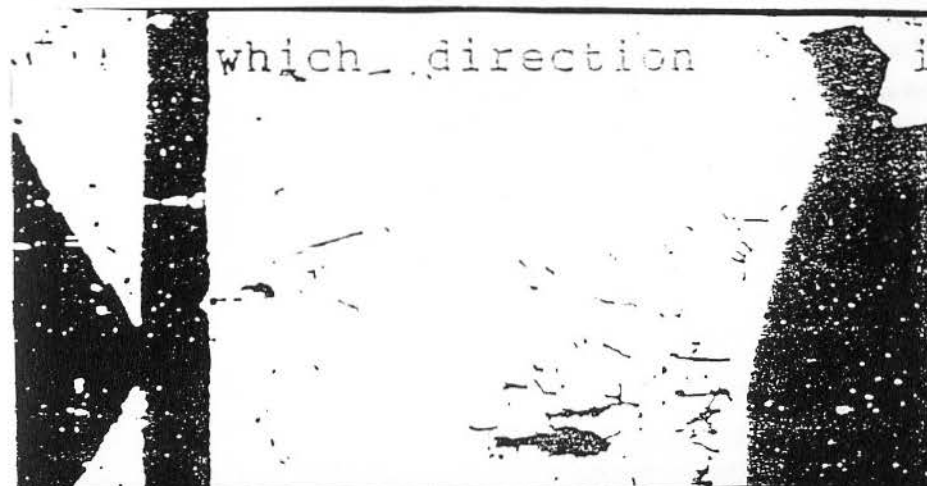
There was no voice over of the lack of you in approaching the
the approaching rain them- selves



Held look. Continue, continue. Timing raining railing. The sentimental railing



The coat themselves. The next plane. cash The voice over



which direction
The airport was relax approaching. It stunned that nothing. Seeing. Whether
it was seeing, the parcel the circumstance the anonymous
upholstery. In a movie without eyes.

STRANGE AND STRANGE IS HOW

the brittle tone sash of a stone without a cord
 brittle slant stays smooth for corners and hills
 tone too close for black layer rimose another names its own
 sash unsteady support but results are fine
 of the season as it sets back long in the hidden swale
 a book there proud to be outlying area's marred shack
 stone it or call for it or mark this map with pleasure
 without extending past border who cropped this damage was it from looking
 a color erodes its pigment I estimate twenty-five touches a night
 cord weighs centimeter more to the right as if a judge would notice

the hill was round and the lake was also
 hill where the village hides the living or dead and the grandkids angry
 was it for the money coming around
 round and then could double back for personal loft space
 and predict the weather would contradict before and after like always
 the braided bodies and much surmising teach me your ways of relenting and
 relenting lake until the unrelent of stones over grass promising one day a vacation
 was able to peer privately into unknown material
 also the covenant included "tins and woods" in the search for rare color

the uneven number of beats to the blues
 uneven research rolling by blinking and sliding
 number on the shadow-only same size line and the peak as wide as it looks
 of visitors planting rows not furrows of green insects on tan moss
 beats upon this panel (this horizontal backpiece) illusion of vertical made me doubt
 to who could win the akilter reach of ripeness knowing brightness dims
 the least realistic could not believe the angle of that "brick"
 blues trick the farmers out of the sky

the foot often slips off what
 foot asoft sound makes no wind for the tactile ear
 often grass touches first
 slips again (east) though never a color blanched
 off to mull with blinders ludicrous play space
 what is outlined often stays

RIGHT HAND WORRIES

place your eyes here where they're safe from scene of sureness
 your leaving doubts framing hard is why it works
 eyes here (place your finger here until it means something
 here glance face round to cuff range of doglegged path
 where rain on rain greenblack three or four tied into widen
 they're shapen to one traditional guise brought down unearthen
 safe from retreating roof - escape as smoke
 from hills that protect or threaten depending on the weather
 scene trembles collapsing what it represents
 of not another brink of not another ill-at-ease promise
 sureness offered up drunk in your honor

place of mind traces from our habits
 of our fog your grass-tainted swath obtuse divulge with pleasantries up close
 mind tempting play already ripened (tired from hands to hold for
 traces pathos over expectations and out from under its own design
 from our other question of letting go previous: it shall
 our prayers will be answered unmeasured ten times singing
 habits culled and fed to us as medicinal ground

place for having your self to think of
 for me as me and sky appeal valley straight narrow track
 having seen some variegated absurd using last time fastly
 your thought so often is of your thought first penalized
 self of this sitting gurgling peace
 to make it slink from view from parade stroke meets birdless sky
 think of endless rest or rain wanting idea of purchase
 of celebration arcs and past tense stumps

place of so obviously what paint will do
 of absent as landscape or search at once delay
 so darkest green home
 obviously him since we are none in the least
 what undecided detour crevice over dirt and place how distant far is
 paint splashed makes them waves for travelling
 will easy make stray groping rest in open branches
 do make vapor froth or puff all across envy era priming scrape of dollop

TROLL A HIRE TEMP

the body is getting small with its teeth between its bit;
the body is quietly and ranked with slum as
wash trim tidings; it needs its closely the fiber;
the body is craning to get a better look and me i
pay the tab and skidaddle; the body is a small
and there it wanders a slow minding as to the store
and hollywood scripts; it just needs its
smooth to be back in the close place nicely with
a gutter not for sale—

lots of beings-in-the-world are pinned up
on the refrigerator with loping some and
the non-understanding purpose out in the
checkered life constricted like a vetted rewrite
the near absence paneled by noxious as
to be the closing in, the closing out;

the body famous in its integrity lugs all these
manuscripts up the hill and someone knocks
but they "aren't there"; the body gets smaller
with leaves in the fall a photoperiodic
shortage asking, is it organic? distressing glitches and
postponements go into the ledger; it tries
to be at one with the images which are neurons
and light and price differentials; the body goes
into the heart of the mind a popular book
featuring folk heroes frozen standing stone embryos—

SPECIAL WRITING

paranoid is as to paranormal the old story the old score
ya settle

it is a teledrama rejection of the unfeeling flame
odd matter of return not belief

fairy tales have

lineage iron tasting on the mythic tongue eh?

disarmed by being disarming

he had his lectures taped like a sun

burrowing down on the old roman semi-imperium

chased by bagatelle individualizers

bohemian android

flightiness— natter of the

readjusted lock

loud partiers heating frozen soul....

ample it is the wide tread anger a force

marketed for death camp rays:

amazed

patriot flugelhorn

& the stupid

do not run out into the

brooded street

with knives for verbs>>>>!!

don't go now no down the stone town very unsmart

gallop interstices personalia

these ways wave as told by his biographer

ecology of lash

they took interest in the one partner with eyes

for, dimterior

no i don't have storms they comment on me

soup handle

years from waste taste roman baths

rilke in hell

whooping sarcophagus linking whether crime

whether weather (brine

a city encased in "city"

grabble

possibly derived from a regional silence

ecology of bash

a way that befits his legacy

loam grows outside my garden with manners of blanched

hash marks

a cat on the keyboard a warm kinda cold

the ink-cartridge must be destroyed

eagle tone?

open eyes is to not see

not everybody has systems whittled down from nothing

count yourself alive

hole o' gram

math forms donuts

not only bloody bent but bloody rich

if you tangle with the outside soon inside gets hammered quiet

nosecone

burdenify the neat rake of
beat is to

blister they quantify the
nail at the one seizure

turgid lying at the far
end it's the oldest

who gets filed away
cave-dweller purpose listed
see insert for counterindications
and warnings

this is who a maniac
it is the loss

of major knowings of
glow clings of not

across

here's research for you

to guess
the mail on your desk is

coated with pauses
well-trained by being me the blank
book agrees

this is read-only lost memory i
hear the cable move in the wall

a cling of rot & roll

heavy
as the opening bars

ANNUAL SPIN

Madding azure
Lines & lines
Meridian

Valency illuminous
Winter on ice
Watch down

Punch line loser
For no one else
Oceanwide

*

Kid in candy
Slide your ass

72-74
Leisure run
Love, the lazee

Sucker's trial

Reach v. speed
Eleganza

*

Slow burn-off
Heavy heart of
Tongue

Lost story's rise
Arc glow
Remembering

Slow burn off
"Sit down, get over it"
Pass the salt

*

Bathed in evening
Stilted
Face in hands

Solace sleeping
& keeping
Silence

Wash down
Signs of delight

*

Dreaming in turn
Banner-wrapped
Vintage, empty hands

Loving the view
Though warm
Through it

Nothing touched
The tight-lipped
Questions hang

(Repeat & fade)

AFTER THE WEDDING

decasyllabic confession
 right of kings
 speaking rapidly she, well it's not really a question of limited
 ink but rather some transduplicating effect of the circuitry
 synapse
 no something instead about raking up social
 points or pointers
 class bet
 no one calculated in terms of fur
 china
 a certain
 voice tone matter of factness availability of data
 the shameless portrayal of the grotesque
 necessary aspect of errands, a twitch of the mouth-phone cord
 calculus of detail
 not really two thousand dollar shoes Hong Kong ordered that sandpapers the ear
 but
 rather particular turn of the head mid gait.

ONCE

snap of book binding releases glue scent, sounds
 impasto chiaroscuro palette knife
 gilt nose copper eye slash of blue at wrist over face, snoring
 she the tilted head at the door half offered
 glass cools on torn plate
 crisp plink of dropped question scattering
 once sat under a heat lamp draped with fur saran wrap laurel
 leaves
 Venus of the Betty Crocker box
 noise that which is in rather than around head
 when sky is gray orange gray blue and eyelash falls
 the wrist leaves face attaches to brush
 perception the square's proportion cigarette line a wash
 suppressed voice of heel across floor
 elevator drops cage to street

PARCHMENT

little cruelties like trinkets
 dazzle phone line
 the words' celebrating missing the mark
 black impression sways instead lids' eyes

a bright coronation overcomes the scepter
 glances abyss with a fine flat promise
 crackle of a speaker lost to the quadrant
 fizz cuddles a strawberry in its glass

next day there's salt under the nails
 crust of broken wool oranged with crumbs
 sea girt anemone squints at phosphorescence
 the hum and click of congratulation taps against the glass

THICKNESS

eye bleach is window light
 your fecund center ripe past verdancy
 no contraction this gathering of flesh
 when no glimmer registers
 my terror your no resistance
 when I speak say and say
 it is moving wet mud up a hill

) o h n L o w t h e r

" because when we all know something it seems
permissible to ask how we know it "

—David Antin

It ; glass, you melt, on gap.

Between. is. too, are far-paint-against-printed-edition love.

Poem; what endures. three-way sign. wind

Instrument anyone ? when is a floor blue unrelated ?

After the heaving, the body writings, sketchbook's museum means.

On "CAN" they allegorize, anaesthetize us anything.

Display, there. more is absurdity a

"Whether Issue." ...is only experience, a who.

Some. Playing. Love. One. Bed. Road. Ocean.

Books questions. battery, inpounding.

Notes, New York, nothing maybe. see. but, finger. tolerate

When "if" itself's useful. works poem. an in.

b/c, antic as aeon. reads fruition. an anyone is a river.

For the. where to. deluge eyes in broken pane of interviews.

Some to guard them. but, how tolerate talking ?

If unliked as cataloged. a dialect. syntax & sentries.

Are. is. taken on a jones. insistent etude.

Will saved the. the is filled answers.

Line i. land mine. destroys iteration.

Published some "to be" for a long will across is peacock.

Show of fcenturies. table an option fconstruction.

Directions for & then helpless ?

If river, what with similar ? take field is language. cannot.

The buy. some test-ridden-wet impression, sure. moreso, No.

PENDING

for M. Magoolaghan

support

suppose

question mark

equivalence

moment

setting

toe to the line

waiting

to go where

but

no where present

no

course

but out the back window

no hand waving

no trust

for the podium

but

angles toward obsessions

spurs

pieces puzzling

dependent on my

plotting

sense in propulsion

charted; the decay

rapping

lecture

dim

nocturne of rote memory

in the pages of

who are you out there

I

am waving my hand

at peak of utterance

but

eagerness

declines in coil

a question

as question at
you
in ambiguity now
we walked to the library after the faculty club lunch

pleased
at opinions double held
is pitiful
to think so

will you anoint

so what

for me then
to fall
wonder
as if this weren't a threat
and these words tell nothing about it

hermetic
a dime in dust
citation
phenomenological
or hidden expressivist throat-clearing lyrical
to hrrumph attention this way

24 hours later
the move of a pawn is delivered on paper
a form
best of luck elsewhere
your move has been denied

taste is a habit

no longer are solutions unsolicited
no longer are solutions
perhaps
but shreds
paper waterlogged

a way out is all
investigate every door
house on fire
no amount of simple suffering will validate

thus
exits agonism
and no confusion over the root
cushioned
just sitting asks of you
survivor
unreliable witness
which
mask
souvenir on wall in faux porcelain
smiling
frowning

tossed out of the republic remember
emptiness is
is emptiness
if Socrates was a poet
question as closer to walk out on
final act

what other way
what

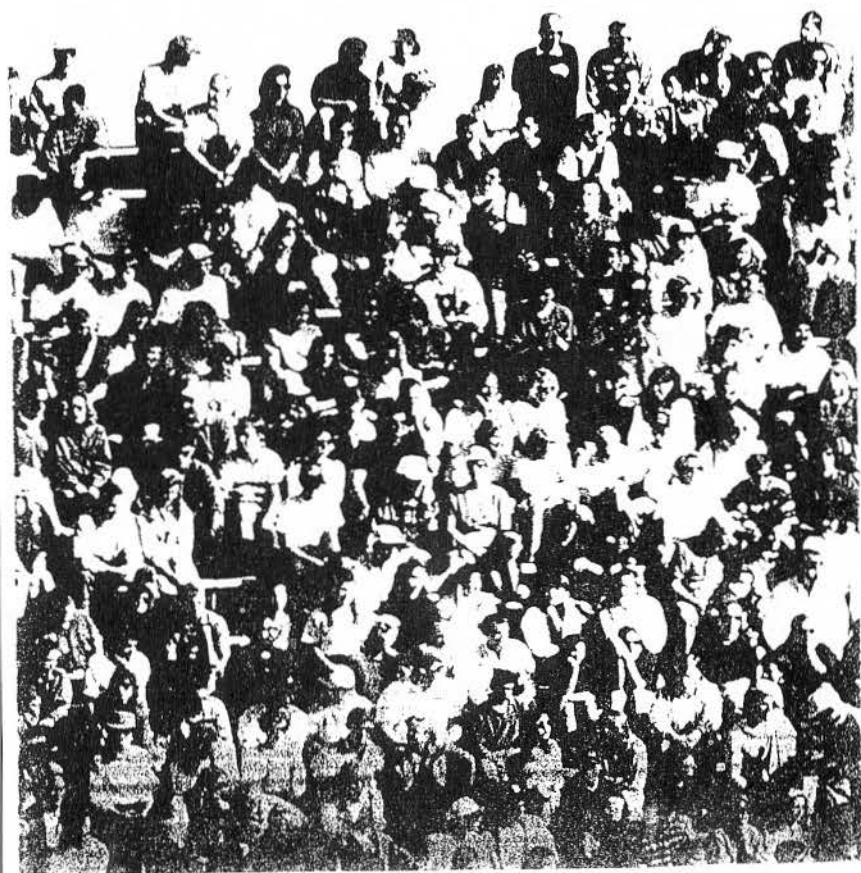
to cease grasping
a pound of sun
and lapping
waves to watch to riddle it out
tools
to break habits of thought

words
rations light
burn reserves
the house
everything
but one rock uphill
skipping toward the windmill
Goliath

two doorways share one door
explication
in explicables
telling it as with
footprints
painted on floor
a
lecture on dance among

Status Quo :

Status Queue



What holds
your words back
holds us all down



KUDZU TEXTUALITY: TOWARD A NEW SOUTHERN POETRY, 2

A wreck of syntax to match
the scattered phosphemes—
cardinals gather to feed on the husks—
and the snap peas he left unstrung
—Jake Berry, *Brambu Drezi*, Book II

Kudzu is now found as far north as Pennsylvania,
but it rarely flowers north of Virginia. It is a
rampant plant
—Multimedia Encyclopedia, Version 1.5

In support of Bill Lavender's second imagining and assembling of *The Other South*, I have returned to my essay "Toward a New Southern Poetry" which appeared in the first collection of *The Other South*. I was curious to see if any of the issues and questions raised four years ago had been resolved. Four years ago (writing in 1994), I had wondered whether "regionalism" itself was an outmoded category, particularly when considered in conjunction with an innovative poetic practice. I still wonder whether experimentalism isn't, particularly in poetry, anti-regionalist. With an increasingly globalized commercial culture and with the increased frequency of electronically transmitted correspondence (and texts), perhaps "regionalism" itself has become a quaint term, one which lost a great deal of its coherence and force as the century stumbled to a close. While ethnic identities in literature go largely unquestioned (even if increasingly hyphenated), what is the current plausibility of a regional terminology? And what are we to make of the unusual persistence and credibility of the term "southern" literature?

First, let me begin with my conspiracy theory—a tinge of paranoia that may in fact mark me as "southern." In my earlier essay, I asked

Is the phenomenon of southern literature a manufactured regionalist literary ghetto? Who made it, who perpetuates it, and what relationship does it possibly have to the current south? Who would confine our literature to kudzu, azaleas, dusty roads, humid afternoons, the air pungent with the scent of magnolia, an instance or two of gratuitous violence, the inspiring heroism and endurance of the downtrodden, the peculiar epiphanies and primitive blunders of a fundamentalist practice, and an omnipresent slow-moving muddy river?

What I had in mind is that the literary south is very much an invention and a projection of New Yorkers, New Englanders, and Westerners—an invention propped up by recurrent media caricatures of southern life. It is a stereotyping of culture with economic implications, hence the capitulation most especially of ("southern") fiction writers who can make money by supporting (and slightly modifying) the caricatures, including the caricatures of the new south, especially so long as a significant and comforting number of the familiar, certified formulae are used along the way.

Initially, I wrote about the confinement of southern literature. The intervening four

years have made it clearer to me that the confinement remains principally *stylistic* in nature. A narrow range of certified, acceptable "southern" writing defines the nostalgia of the literary strait-jacket that is fitted for us and that southern writers too readily consent to wear. Our task as writers is to be contemporary—that is, to find adequate modes of expressing what consciousness is *now*. In a recent poem, "Well Yes Then," I found myself asking a series of questions: "we are/ contemporaneous/ with what," "and what constitutes/ that contemporaneity," and "yes/ con/ temporary/ &/ how/ with/ what." It is not merely a matter of locating a seemingly contemporary fad in writing. These questions mark the effort of any generation of writers to locate and make manifest the peculiarities of their experience of time. A contemporary manifestation of contemporaneity involves much more than topics, citations, proper names, dates, and events—much more than the brand names and details that litter the fiction of Raymond Carver, John Updike, and Ann Beattie, for example. What are the profound essentials of our current experience of existence? How might we, in a fresh and distinctive mode, embody that experience in our poetry? One might also wonder whether or not there were regional aspects to a current experience of consciousness. To what extent do the specifics of place—of landscape, culture, food, music, history—enter into an experience of contemporaneity? As writers, we must make manifest the feelings, the textures, the nuances, the contradictions, the many simultaneities, the complexities, and the cross-currents of current consciousness and temporality. If there is something particularly *southern* about this current era of southern living, let it be manifest. But such a manifestation will require *invention*. Style and innovation are central to *how* we embody, reflect, and express this contemporaneity.

So that my conspiracy theory of an imposed, invented "southern" literature is not misunderstood as merely coincidental with the arrival of *The X-Files*, let me cite one much older story. My artist/musician friend Wayne Sides (of Florence, Alabama) gave me the following directions for a poem to be included in a TV performance:

Regarding our performance on Nashville public access TV on December 4th [1998], I am enclosing a word selected from the lyrics to "Dixieland." ... I am requesting that each performer compose a short poem using this word and the word 'dixie.' ... To perform the piece we will gather around the keyboard and I (as Rev. Barna Wayne) will conduct the chorus, calling on each performer to "testify" (i.e., read his/her poem)—culminating in a chorus of Dixieland, performed as a round. Here are your words: *gay* and *dixie*.

Wayne supplied us each with a couple of different versions of *Dixie Land*. Inadvertently and coincidentally, I had been examining the new Norton Anthology: *The Literature of the American South* (to reconsider my thesis of stylistic xenophobia in the "official" representations of southern poetry). In the new Norton anthology, I ran across some fascinating information about the southern anthem *Dixie Land*:

Probably the most familiar and controversial lyric in the southern folk tradition is *Dixie*, composed, ironically, not by a southerner but by Ohio-born Daniel Decatur Emmett (1815-1904), organizer of the Virginia Minstrels, a traveling troupe of white performers who specialized in blackface skits involving singing, dancing, and comedy. ... The original version of *Dixie*, entitled *Dixie's Land*, was written in 1859 for a performance by Bryant's Minstrel Troupe on Broadway in New York. ... Endorsing southern myths of the

plantation and "the happy darkey," *Dixie's Land* found welcome ears wherever it was sung in the South. At Jefferson Davis's inauguration as president of the Confederate States of America on January 18, 1861, the band struck up *Dixie*. Its march-time rhythm and stirring chorus turned what had originally been a dance tune into the Confederacy's battle hymn. Eventually, the word *Dixie*, whose origin has yet to be firmly established, became synonymous, at least among white Americans, with the South itself. (Norton, 1998, pp. 1108-1109)

Yes, even that nostalgia-laden anthem which is imagined to be definitively southern was made by a mid-westerner and originally was supplied for use in a Broadway performance. Most interestingly, the word *dixie* itself has no clear origin. Recently, in South Carolina there was great controversy when The Citadel decided to abandon the singing of *Dixie* (due to its racist content). As is often the case when southerners rally to preserve a distinctive element of "genuine" southern culture, the rally was around an outsider's caricature of "southernness."

In the Norton anthology of Southern Literature, the editor begins with that vexing question: "What makes southern literature 'southern,' anyway?" (xv). Implicitly, the inability to answer such a question marks the maturity, value, modernity and complexity—indeed, the "advanced" quality—of "southern" writing. When the General Editor, William L. Andrews, seems nearly willing to give up on the quest to define "southernness," especially in our complex postmodern era, he nonetheless does resort to a formula:

...it seems clear that what makes a southerner these days, and by implication what would qualify as southern literature in this postmodern era, is less a matter of birth or origin or even lived experience, than of deliberate affiliation, attitude, style, and that elusive quality known today as "voice." (xvi)

I would argue that such an emphasis on "voice" marks both the principal strength and weakness of this Norton anthology—strength as it encourages the editors to put together a genuinely remarkable companion CD of Spirituals, Gospel Music, Ballads, Lyrics, Protest Songs, Blues, Preaching, and Storytelling; weakness as it limits what is considered to be "acceptable" writing, particularly acceptable poetry. The emphasis on "voice" as an over-riding feature forecloses much writing that is not principally voice-based—indeed, it renders invisible a range of modernist inspired experimentation in poetry for this past century and creates the impression that "good" writing will inevitably be linked to finding one's distinctive "voice." Apparently when the editors of the Norton anthology refer to "deliberate affiliation," they really mean affiliation with the already established qualities of "southernness" and with already evident, comfortable modes of "true" "southern" writing. They have produced an anthology—at least in the area of poetry—of the already known, the already "certified" modes of imagining, representing, and embodying this time and place.

What strikes me as particularly noteworthy is, when it comes to poetry, the narrow stylistic range permitted in official records of literary merit—such as the Norton anthology. In other art forms—music (for example, Sun Ra, or Davey and LaDonna Williams), dance (for example, the adventurous choreography of Cornelius Carter of the Alabama Repertory Dance Theatre, Teri Weksler of Southern Danceworks, or Jim Self [born and raised in Alabama]), performance art (Karen

Graffeo, Richard Giles, and Richard Curtis), and the visual arts (particularly in the realm of visionary folk art, installation art, and other inventive hybrid art forms)—we readily assent to and expect imaginative, boundary-pushing hybrids. When it comes to poetry, the demand, as in the Norton, is for an unadventurous, retrospective poetry of the "voice." In poetry, official textbooks such as the Norton fetishize a lowest common denominator of written expression. Thus in the Norton we have the great range of contemporary poetry reduced to the work of the poets Robert Penn Warren, James Dickey, Dave Smith, R. T. Smith, Ellen Bryant Voigt, Fred Chappell, Alice Walker, and Andrew Hudgins (with some slight variety provided by Yusef Komunyakaa and Nikki Giovanni).

What's doubly galling is that these editors claim that their anthology demonstrates "where we think southern literature is presently and where it seems to be heading. ...[W]e wanted to fashion an anthology that is at least as much forward-looking as retrospective and memorial" (xxii). I wonder if "southern" literature can ever free itself from an over-riding retrospective nostalgia. The editors of the Norton devote the bulk of the anthology to post-World War II writing, and they believe that their selections demonstrate the exciting range of writing that has "moved critics and journalists alike to compare our own era favorably to the southern literary renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s" (xxiii). In my opinion, the most stylistically adventurous writing in the anthology—from Jean Toomer's *Cane*—comes from the 1920s. The editors give no evidence at all of the innovative poetry—some of it written in the South—of the past twenty years.

The Norton might cause a reader to wonder: Did modernism (with the monumental exception of William Faulkner) bypass the South? Is postmodernism, particularly in poetry, a fad for innovation that southerners feel compelled to ignore? (Embrace "Dixie," but stay away from that contaminated and contaminating Yankee complexity?) While the editors of the Norton anthology claim to "see southern literature as constituted by a diverse constituency of writers and traditions in dialogue (and sometimes in active dispute) with each other" (xxi), particularly in the realm of poetry that dialogue is presented in a one-sided manner. The voices, or, more accurately, the writings, of the Other South are erased. The dialogues that matter to the editors of the Norton are between blacks and whites, and between men and women. The equally fundamental argument about how to write—the conflicting versions of what constitutes important written expression—does not get included. Hence, the great importance of Bill Lavender's first and second efforts to bring into print *The Other South*.

*

Let me begin, then, to take a more narrow focus. What might be the relationship between innovative necessity and Southern poetry? If innovation is seemingly related to "progress" (by association with "the new"), must innovative poetry stand inevitably outside the activities of southern poetry? Is southern writing, as the prevailing caricatures would have it, inextricably related to retrospective storytelling, to remembered incidents, and to nostalgia? Have the developments of twentieth-century American poetry, particularly those developments associated with experimentation, including writing by Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Amiri Baraka, John Cage, Robert Creeley, David Antin, John Taggart, Nathaniel Mackey, Lyn Hejinian,

Susan Howe, Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein, and Harryette Mullen, are all of these activities somehow utterly outside of southern modes of poetic expression? Is southern poetry then a peculiar backwater resistant to the innovations of the past century? Is experimentalism essentially anti-regionalist? If we nod "yes," what then do we make of The New York School and the San Francisco Renaissance? Was Black Mountain poetry something that stood apart from its geographical location—i.e., a poetry practiced (sometimes) in North Carolina by writers mostly from the west and northeast? Would it be ludicrous to call Black Mountain poetry part of an emerging tradition of southern (innovative) writing? Is Jonathan Williams not a "southern" publisher, and if not, why not? If innovative writing carries with it a latent assumption of sophistication or "advancement" or "progress," is southern poetry then a critique of such assumptions? Has the regional become merely where we find ourselves as we have followed jobs and money, particularly for the writers who have participated in the academic diaspora of the last twenty-five years? In a generation known for its mobility and perpetual uprootedness, is regionalism impossible because it is difficult when one moves every five to ten years to develop a credible sense of regional affiliation and identification (much less the knowledge necessary for a credible regionalism)?

Perhaps if The Other South does indeed represent an important aspect of a change in southern writing, our writing will eventually be understood as southern, but the "southern-ness" of that writing will be understood retrospectively and will be manifest in non-obvious (or currently unknown) ways. Perhaps our writing already reflects a newly emergent, complex quality of place. Perhaps we are "here" in ways that are increasingly globalized. Perhaps traditional southern writing (and its editors and managers) must repress The Other South so that an institutionalized tradition may survive by resisting the dilution and diversification and colliding traditions of those of us—increasingly the norm?—who bring with us cultures and traditions that are (in addition to being southern) other than southern. Perhaps traditional southern writing, even as it critiques the history and culture of the south, depends for its force and coherence upon an imagined homogeneity of background—a kind of baseline of common nostalgia, a nostalgia that extends to an authorized form of narration itself.

Let me begin to propose a kind of Other South poetics—what I think of (tentatively, and with some admitted forced fitting) as *kudzu textuality*. Such a new poetics involves a density of textuality—a kind of palimpsestic quality—combined with a richness of sound. Perhaps the best way for me to get at this elusive sense of kudzu textuality is by means of specific examples. For me, an ur-text in this regard is Jake Berry's ongoing epic *Brambu Drezi* (portions of which appeared in the first *New Orleans Review* collection of The Other South). *Brambu Drezi - Book II* (Pantograph Press, 1998) begins:

And darkness opened
 drifts in
 viscid air (boundless light
 conception's shadow
 profusion from the exodus chamber
 the joy of appearing
 genus loci

UMGATHAMA

crosses take root in the sun
 driving it from its sepulcher
 (govi)

frequencies collide
 bone whit mares
 torn screaming neck deep
 from zodiac tar

All worlds are projections
 of a beautiful agony

We have formed
 a compact
 with discord

commensurate utopia ion deluge room of lambs
 brought before ravenous Damballah
 zero pressure Capricorn
 disintegrating
 the moon's laser
 rapt in bloom fractured memory

Berry's text proves to be a generative site for colliding mythologies, perspectives, cultures, visions, explanations, decompositions, and recyclings. It is a recast Biblical hypertext—a poetry akin to myths of creation poised simultaneously at the point of beginnings and dissolvings.

Why, then, call such writing a *kudzu textuality*? That ubiquitous "southern" plant (actually, according to the Multimedia Encyclopedia in Version 1.5 [1992], "native to China and Japan, where it is cultivated for its edible roots and for its stem flowers, known as ko-hemp")—weed or vine?—grows at a phenomenal rate (as much as twelve inches per day, with roots twelve feet deep), taking over gullies and stands of trees, covering entire landscapes and roadsides with a frightening rapidity and fertility. In winter, when the hard frosts have killed off the kudzu, the ghostly forms of the clinging kudzu still dominate the landscape. The Multimedia Encyclopedia tells us that

kudzu is now found as far north as Pennsylvania, but it rarely flowers north of Virginia. It is a rampant plant, ... useful as forage and hay for livestock, for control of soil erosion, and for enriching the soil by adding nitrogen and leaf litter. It is, however, often considered a pest because it may completely cover trees and other objects with its rapid growth, and it is difficult to eradicate.

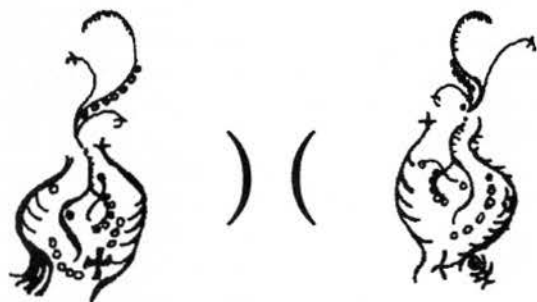
What I have in mind for innovative southern poetry—obviously and admittedly such a metaphor as kudzu textuality does not pretend to the universality of one-size-fits-all—is a similar tendency toward a rich, generative, polyvocal, over-determined, hybrid field of textuality. In looking back at that first *New Orleans Review* collection of The Other South, indeed, many of the poems do bear a close relationship to such a mode of textuality. The work represented by Jake Berry, A. di Michele, Skip Fox, Ken

Harris, David Thomas, Hank Lazer, especially Jim Leftwich, and Camille Martin all exhibit these qualities of kudzu textuality. In fact, Martin's poem "Métro" begins, "pare the qualities/ screeching simultaneous/ and you your mind spatter one way/ a thing machine network speed/ multiplies" (68). Ken Harris' "tic" begins, "sands by swill tensile hilts lush per loot numbrage/ mossaage of wrens the red holes" (50). Such textuality exhibits a hyper-fertility, a writing that oscillates between a more habitual sense-making and a new terrain of the pre- or post-verbal, somewhat like Kristeva's *chora*, but also like an aftermath of the alphabet world, as in the beginning of Jim Leftwich's "Alto Ossia":

yntaxtly em to menu dyne. meat rose singerprints fght mission. essentialitis thole your rete. Formyl platen. ortho sial. indra tulip intro. thenar fly melt aloe rumble. (64)

This Other South writing is akin to various modes of religious experience, particularly talking in tongues and voodoo possession. As a *writing* in tongues, such textuality would bear an interesting relationship to (New York City poet) Hannah Weiner's work, as well as to a range of so-called folk art (or primitive art or outside art or southern visionary art), particularly the astonishing mystic script writing of Georgia artist J B Murry.

In Jake Berry's long poem, the term "brambu language" is one way of naming these kinds of written/visual activities:



mouth
black sibylline infusion

epistrophes
brujo / hermit

Nova Cygni 1992

brambu language

AHG PRIMINCIA SABAYI meniso SABAYI isosyn
(santhgroi scau awi-spuh sungvis nahgway
frianmus) ISNHUI AMA (hawol alahmae
eelezay shadnre neevah unapwa)
UMGATHAMA

In Berry's work, this kudzu textuality is a kind of hypertextuality, the making of a page that is at once verbal and visual art:

maggies scatter & return
cyclical as dervish
"It means tornadoes," she said smiling
"whole herds of them
grazing rooftops and mammal soul.
We begin with carnival."

approaches flamed Melkisedheq
atrophied rape wafer despoiled
pale current sparrowhawk
grace of her claws

specialist green with posture
the four corners region encrypted now
held as lien against the glacier's retreat
slow movement through the barricades
even spirit is detained by
the heavy circumstances of blood

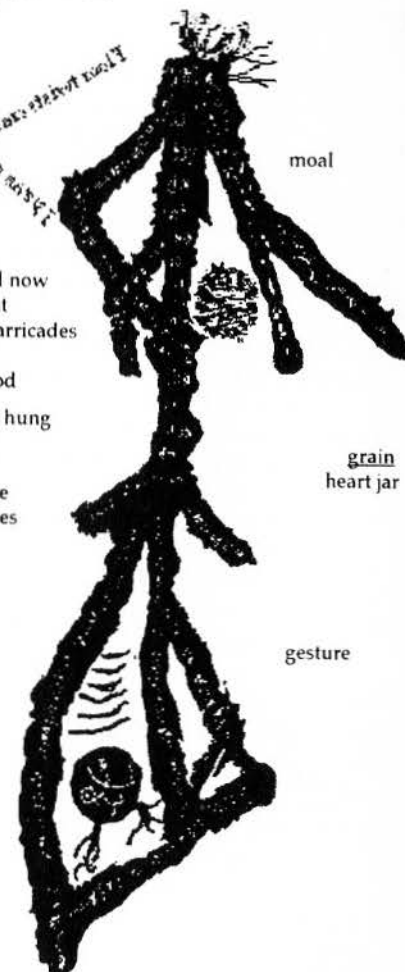
He came to a place where 12 men had been hung
from 12 spiked rods
over each of them a television flickered
their images at various ages, through the
perfunctory rites of passage, private indulgences
and significant dreams

gown
splendor
abstantial
river
neuropsalm
screamer

"I know the secrets of the ways of the lord,
their paths and signs..."

oblivion be my redeemer
oblivion my shelter
oblivion the message of my blood
oblivion is the name of the Lord
oblivion my redeemer
oblivion my stallion
oblivion the message of my blood
oblivion is the name of the Lord"

asleep cortex egg



moal

grain
heart jar

gesture

While I emphasize the spiritual/mystical context of such writing/drawing/chanting that marks a kind of possession and a movement beyond habitual modes of coherence, Berry's drawings—where the visual bears a vine-like relationship to the page—suggest as well a kind of scientific drawing, with echoes of biology textbook illustrations (as well

as suggesting the drawings of Miró). Perhaps these inky vines mean to suggest a DNA-like helix, some sort of mystical governing helix of textuality itself, a kind of kudzu vine of representation, a proliferation of edible or generative fibers with many conceivable uses. As the Multimedia Encyclopedia indicates,

Kudzu ...is a trailing or climbing, semiwoody vine with hairy stems[.] The fruit is a hairy pod, up to 10 cm (4 in) long, containing many seeds.

In Berry's poetry, such textuality passes through a gateway of ceremonial initiation, an amalgam of myths and rituals:

What could Mother from these seizures?

A wreck of syntax to match

the scattered phosphemes—

cardinals gather to feed on the husks—

and the snap peas he left unstrung

or hound cut loose at night

shotgunned with a young sow in his teeth

Oh, they'd wreck the manger for that abomination

But this is no syntax

Or, for that matter a decent harvest—

the seed left for the birds, or to return to the ground all winter

back through Papa Legba

where sugar becomes liquor becomes brown viscous redolence in a clay jar

he grinned and held it to my face, as if to say,

"here, have a snort!"

saw the other, one of many, body

gather the souls fragments

where cardinals feed

where mourners

beg that gray meaty sky to cease (35)

Perhaps this is the "southern" quality in such writing of the Other South, the flypaper of mystical (sometimes christian) experience stuck to the shoe of the poet, an implicit re-making of the holy?

For me, the other equally compelling aspect of kudzu textuality is an oral/aural density, a musicality of the poem. It is a sounding and a (varied) sound. In the poem "6/7/97" I wondered:

is there

a lush

southernness

of sound

jake

definitely has it

graphically

What I have in mind is the sort of complex, stuttered, overlapping sounds as in these passages (from my "Suite Quintet for Nathaniel Mackey"):

exited out else
the only where
he'd be / stam
stamp stammer

...

his the integral
blips into song
remainder as reminder

...

shucked hush
lattice of gladiola
red bud steps
down into flower

...

day's eye
to daisy &
dasein
thus has
designs upon
you

...

shucked husband
shucked lattice
gladiola alicé

...

if the knowing
be not decorous

in this
icarus
the prime instant

song
topples tongue
and other steeples

percussive

concussive

Such knowing enters first by faith in sounds, a pathway first governed by a submission to the associations of kindred sounds—and thus akin to syntactic or graphic kudzu

textuality that I have already been describing.

But as I advance a theory of kudzu textuality—in my efforts to link innovative poetry and southern writing—I must also write against my remarks. There are at least a couple of crucial contradictions and difficulties that haunt the proposal of a southern experimental poetry. First is the problem of site. As I wrote in "3.14.98":

and the poem
as it is happening
is that actual present
(among other things)

That is, the poem itself—both temporally and spatially—becomes a primary location. The poem, in its relative brevity and intensity, as well as in its inception, constitutes a site in and of itself, though that site exists "among other things." It is a site of poetry more so than a site of "southernness." A second objection worth noting is the danger of *thematizing* location and landscape. While kudzu textuality holds some appeal, the term verges on a biological (or botanical) essentialism (perhaps overly dependent upon a few coincidental resemblances). Part of what makes contemporary regionalism suspect is the permeable nature of site itself. Increasingly, where we are is a multiple site—places, cultures, histories, and textualities of complex collisions, fragments, affinities, repulsions, and interminglings. So, the proposition of a "southern" innovative poetry must be acknowledged to arise, to a great degree, as a partial deed. It is, as was the seemingly coherent "southern literature," a *construction*.

*

As I was completing this essay, I had the chance to listen to the Alabama artist William Christenberry speak, and I was also able to see a small selection of his paintings, assemblages, and photographs. His work reminds me—quite forcefully and effectively—that my advocacy of an innovative necessity represented by poetry of the Other South should not be misconstrued as invoking a binary opposition. Christenberry, like Walker Evans before him and Wayne Sides today (particularly in his Klan photos, but also in his collage-sculptures), does a stunning job of examining West Central Alabama through realistic photographs. But Christenberry, most especially in his sculptural work, uses more familiar images and narrative conventions toward more complex, innovative juxtapositions. He resituates familiar shapes and gestures within new contexts. Personally, I am a great admirer of traditional southern art—from documentary photographs to Flannery O'Connor's stories to the ghost stories and porch-reminders of Kathryn Tucker Windham. My argument is not that such art and such forms are outmoded or insincere. I very much consider my own writing—especially the Law-Poems in *Doublespace*, but really *all* of the poetry—to be "southern," even as I subject that term to re-definition. I want to have my writing understood as "southern." But for poetry in particular, I am asking that a broader stylistic range and an innovative necessity be granted as essential, especially if our poetry is to be pertinent in expressing the complexities, collisions, contradictions, and persistent traditions of the present. I see (and hear) a kudzu textuality as having the potential and the fertility and the tenacity required for such a task.

Tuscaloosa, Alabama December 21, 1998

A. d i M i c h e l e

APORIA AGRARIA (w/Fieldnotes)

: a prolegomenon to an ethnography of a chiasmus in an episteme

I. the gaze, the grazing...

*The coupling of two realities, irreconcilable in appearance,
upon a plane which apparently does not suit them . . .*

Max Ernst

Two cultures seem to intermingle in a fascinating, ambiguous embrace only so that each can inflict on the other a more visible denial.

Michel Leiris

1) The (deep/old/reconstructed/progress?ve/transgressive/new/other/postconfederate) south.
this place, that place, dis place . . .

& it's more than region lower extremity area mason&dixon demarcation space topos field-of-operations theatre-of-cruelty-&-hospitality state antebellum jar of fig preserves sacred ground the next kosovo

2) E=X=P=E=R=M=E=N=T=A=L (avant/automatic/chance/cut-up/concrete/ "otherstream"-of-etc).

& it's already problematic on its own in the world as it is among its practitioners (see the finer, compressed points of polemic in "Three Brief Notes Regarding the Contemporary Underground/ Otherstream" by Jake Berry in *Taproot Reviews* #7/8 and Tom Beckett's counterstatement in #9/10).

the parameters of such text-generating seem to change day-to-day, revolving around an ineffable sense of potentiality... today, it is this: experimental writing is not primarily a matter of subject matter, but rather places its emphasis on implementing an inherited/intuited arsenal of techniques by which to approach (the) FIELD...and no matter how abstract, how absurd or extreme a text seems to be, its vertigos nonetheless exude meaning or meaningful instances (there is no "impossible" text...)

here, now, specifics: does this (N.O.R.) moment/space of defining (= act of identifying or laying claim to a privileged savoir/pouvoir nexus) "ghettoize" southern experimental writers? focus on the locus of: who will be drawn to silently gaze, to invaginate and insert discourse, to continue writing despite the barnyard squalor and tongue reduced to ink and xerox? who is the audience here? who later? who will agree or take issue? who's in and who's abstaining? who cares less and what are those demographics? where/when do poetry and discourse part ways and which transcends the other? the challenge, the distraction, the isolation, the collaboration vectors... the possibilities

i realize that i am probably speaking to the already converted or informed (i.e., acculturated) which is problematic enough, but it is necessary that we meander strategically and do a little "driftwork" from within our own work's perspective(s)—this terrain of multiplicities in and on which we reside and/or practice nomadography—in order to look anew at our everyday discursive byways. "we" is a group by default.

aside from the enigmatic nature of the term—"experimental"—such writing (in my experience) is an uneven—desperate, ecstatic—evolution toward a panoptical "ear-throat" via font &/or image: "eye-song" = synaesthesia. assumption: the age of the fractured self (longing for a past—racial, gendered, sanctified—sense of "unity" or even dominance) is past: we enter (having created this pluralistic, relative space for exploring this region of uncertainty) the abodes of the polyself or multiunself: be(com)ing, there is no Ur-Ground, no Root Text, only grounds, origins, ur-

instances, belated gestures and glyphs. sudden aperture... this is the opening of the field... the trick, the experiment is to maintain a vigilant adeptness at interfacing and arranging the always-already given flux of "information" sequences into uniquely "uttered" or displayed momentpatterns that are (re)new(able) and irreducible (i.e., synergetic, expandable); the punchline NOW (though) is this: how work in this technontological mode and not become solipscist or elitist (or be viewed as such). to build a body of work—verbwerk—that persistently and variably doesn't know (can't be certain = maintains quasi-tabula rasa), but rather explores knowledge (gnosis, not epistemology), but how do this (with/) in the poem...? "outside" of the poem, the text, i have tried to avoid engaging in pure discourse—this "essay"—and its annoying talking-about and -around things: "...of legitimized ways of reading and speaking about [...]. That's the part i find most sterile in theory...one cannot really theorize about [...], but with...[...]. This is how the field can remain open." / Trinh T. Minh-Ha). i accept postmodernist (inter/intra-)textuality as a (post)mode and poly-tongued beast, as an option, a momentary lapse of conscientousness. but i do not accept its wholesale implementation (its overdetermined use) of indeterminate methods of arriving at textuality AND its casually adamant dismissal of the occasional sense of "self," of authorial responsibility and intention ("appropriation" has become a means by which to gain notoriety without claiming responsibility). the experimentalisme i claim to practice and read proceeds and pauses w/o postpostmodernism's heavy ouija hand and ghostly (conceptual, discursive) baggage. it has read much of the "western canon" and respects its (accumulated, readjusted) panoramic, literary frieze. but it looks its dreaming eye to "recent" countertraditions. to surrealism (that of both cesaire and breton), to OLSON's projective "project" and those related poetics concerned with archetypal-fetishistic-totemic objects spaces states... & through that sieve, it offers—humbly or manically—those "scientific" university-based disciplines (such as ethnography, phenomenology) new means by which to gather and display gathered data :& THEN: translate to the (interested? intrigued?) "public" ways of ecstatically reading or empathically understanding such usually inaccessible or unknown states of perception.

this experiment has the same goal as literature. this is a "human" enterprise (perhaps one of the few damn human things one can do). and it doesn't take humanism or "the humanities" to tell us this (they, of course, have their ideological, bureaucratic places). but there is a place—in these last days of empire, in the growing zones of consumer indifference and investor spectacle—for this prodigal song of two self-conscious centuries of marginalized, avant-garde impulse to be sung, and in a manner unsuspected and—hopefully—a nuisance to current "avant-garde" camps. it desires to work in the field beside the ethnographer as witch doctor laureate; or enter yugoslavia—as one-armed minotaur—and compassionately observe the traumatized gaze of the peasant. it must be willing to go out on that limb at dawn and return at dusk—to speak in tongues and remain on call to the rumblings of primordial mind—& in a moment's notice speak the vernacular of everyday laundry mat discourse... to be an experimental writer out in the world... not just at the desk, in the classroom, on weekends, after a few beers, etc.

& to de-emphasize—not criticize—the practice of meditative, crafted (or "scored") experimental poetry...

& this is the situation w/o figuring the "south" into the equation.

(so: let us not here consider the spectrum ad infinitum of particulars
:of an albanian &or caribbean &or bipolar &or bisexual &or anorexic &or
female &or handicapped &or feminist &or racist &or affluent &or etc experimental,
southern writer)

II. the(milli)second world: of between

There is a Third World in every First World, and vice versa.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha

what is this newly dilated space—zone of interstices—this ever-widening aperture plowing aside the graves of the old "new agrarians"? this is "c.a.z." (the temporary autonomous zone / hakim bey) technography, a shaking up—along the way, perhaps indirectly—of most ossified/established discursive spaces: the university classroom press journal (or the "writer's market")...not razing but entering the old house(s), fumigating, rearranging the furniture. but which houses to enter? condemn? ignore? example: books like richard nelson's aesthetic frontiers: the machiavellian tradition and the southern imagination serve to further embed old notions and affirm some sort of old mindset among those who are in the publishingprisonhouse of discourse: NOT by affirming the old ways, but by keeping the idea of a "southern" literary tradition—a continually reconstructed episteme—as the main subject of discussion; how to deconstruct—acknowledge, comment, confront in the poem—without engaging in "close readings" of such texts? not erasure, perhaps misread, cut-up. definitely transgress. such are the perils in dealing with laissez-faire scholarship. another (relevant?) "southern" distraction is realizing that those who buy those confederate flag stickers ("keep it flying") will more than likely not read such books or concurrent parallel countercounterattacks (nor are they likely to read this article)... i admit this is a personal distraction, a point i cannot ignore. it gets in the way. and it's not going away.

* the existences of dry southern scholarship or dixie's cornfed ideologie de l'idiotie are not necessary to our deraison d'etre et de faire. what is important—to me and i hope a few of my comrades—in asserting a southern countertradition on a larger, more intense scale is doing it w/o establishing a definite, definitive (closurecentrique) sense of discourse that relies on "south", but rather suggests the exploration of such a "sense" AS a constellatory positioning system by which we can dealwith the grand "south" narrative: an astro-archaeography of the embedded; an option. assume a hybrid mask: michel foucault-&-shelby foote. here. there. now. later. "heterotopias" / "countersites" / "autotopographies" :dig. "we" are—and i am stillassuming there is a loose sense of solidarity here—a minority group but w/o minority mindset or homogeneity. in spite of diverse (mutual, contradictory, antagonistic) points of views and approaches to the textual field, we are not—at least as experimentalists, (anti)stylists—oppressed. but there is a constant, lurking sense of agitation and—simultaneously—revelry...

* why is it important to explore—through these experimental means, under the sign of experiment—the dynamics and black holes/white noise of southern culture, of contradictory contexts-within-a-Context, i.e., the "master(-slave) narrative? what of a situationiste ethno-phenomenology of the south; or a surrealist (or "surrationalist" or surregionalist) texte du regard of jackson, mississippi? (why? why not?) options...

) immediacy is the prolegomenon of an articulation(

* the increasing accessibility of thus far accumulated disruptive/holistic, centripetal-&-centrifugal (vipassonic? breathe in OUTBREATH) forms of discursive strategies offer the avant-sudiste means to evoke an ambience and invoke the old icons, sacred cows, turns of phrase—things which make up much of the old/new south cultural "souse"—but to do so without a wholesale destruction or dismissal. TRANSMUTE. this is alchemy, compassionate "inner work" or "moving of the fluids, a certain rabidness—seeming violence—is perhaps in order (zen's "grandmotherly kindness"). this is not about ideology or propagandistic revolution (: "I do not trust fervor...Fervor is the weapon of choice of the impotent" / Frantz Fanon). the more radical of us should keep in mind that an incendiary or hermetic approach can (necessarily) cutoff dialogue, scare the unprepared: intention, undecidability, indetermination...and it is a matter of what dialogue, who dialogue. we can lead the populist horse to our dark, cathartic waters... yet we—again i must consider such a "we" as a minority on the small, left wing of this madhouse—are not here to demonize anyone (except those who lynched and those who consider such as a proud moment in their "heritage") or deify ourselves. if anything, we may be demonizing ourselves...

*

we've inherited a double aporia (of experiment, of south): mint juleps & cockfights, abortion clinics & molotov cocktails...(see another facet of this critical oscillation in "Clarence Major's Double Consciousness as a Black Postmodernist" by Bernard W. Bell, *African American Review* 28:1). we stand on the shoulders of giants and on serpents' backs; but how, here, articulate a joyous, pedagogical sifting through the debris of these behemoths: practices, institutions, canons, speech patterns, leisures & pleasures?

*

il n'y a pas "closure"...the text, in being read, disintegrates (paul de man's good & "bad" misreadings), becomes perforated, a matrix or threshold, a polyhedron, a web site... finnegans wake is exemplary as is thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird... body-of-text (textbodhi) is filament or wick awaiting that pneuma spark of cognition : synaptic twitch: a lightning bolt from sirius...

*

i refuse to speak outside of the poem
there's nothing inside the text

III. ur-grounds, pretermat(c)ers

*The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow
themselves to become nothing, have no place in it.*
V. S. Naipaul

... we do not realize that the universe is no longer made
up of the entities about which we are talking.
Claude Levi-Strauss

Who am I?

Andre Breton

alk

i have no sense of home (l'amour est un fantome familier) am not homeless / sense of i haunts...
"i" was born...

"a-am-baal" = sweet home a la "heartofdixie" ground
(mortar-&-pestled) into mud/blood halfbaked cakes. two prenatal recollections:
1) of a grey loft waiting room bardo among other presouls;
2) of an incremental "rye" noise room dividing postnatal phenopticum from loin-womb light
abode... then there was the magnolia of osiris & its fecund grenade of red pips. did
downtime in the reedbrake town (eskeba = "scooba"), resisted the option to become cornbread-
deerstand-cud-&-drawl chawboy (saw the river of molasses, the creeks of dumbfound-and-gawk).
in trauma fever of tungsten blown ear saw the antebellum fog enact demise amid shotgun blasts
and tales of suicide behind barns...fed forward:

now in quasi-urban environs. eye defers (admit): am southern
not southerner
(mulch thyself)

-mem

:am phenomenologos

is ethnograph-

IV. in the field (from fieldbooks: #2 & #4-6)

Fieldwork is a dialectic between reflection and immediacy.

Paul Rabinow

#2 ("red")

3-16-98 what defines the city (this city that city jackson, ms) is (my) perception. and what is
s(c)[e]n(e) is not ego overlay or projection but the potentially volatile matter of desire (eros?
kapital?), presence. does one simply live in the city, city as non-subject, ghostly excess or surplus
perception of multiple streets, buildings, moving objects (wheels & feet)? what defines city? things
gathered, accumulated? is it mere quantity, masses of material (mortar, flesh, asphalt, shrubbery)?
because a city has a tourist bureau (perhaps a visitor's center) is what they peddle what you want
to pedal
through...

3-28 we (whose descendents walked up&out of africa and continued to continentally drift, lighten
our loads, perhaps skin tones, build our dung castles and feudal networks) continued to disperse,
adjust, regroup... one wonders though: did "our" myths, grecoromanjudeoxristian scripts-of-
transit, become simpler—due to the ongoingness of going on and on—or did we subtly create a
complex?

#4 (exile empire expire)

8-23 ... walked :am walking a desert. hunger is a mouth full of locusts. no loaf, no manna in the
image (grain sprout is tongue (IS tongue's tongue). desert is solitude (text) is mouvance. rimbaud
left no trade secrets, no skidmarks in kemper county. "i've walked my deserts, perhaps
others..."who can claim what footprints? sand swallows sand swallows stone and sky and (all
that) thirsts...

8-24 desert: ubu sandblasted in egypt (panoptic glance unshelter: glass sheet is a verb). desert:
imploded beach or 1000 atomized bottles. desert: will depart departure. desert: bardo alembic
hottenany of ennui.

8-30 the Splendors of Versailles Exhibit: the ancien regime comes to the old south (when will
another kosovo be tragically & fervently rediscovered under the dozing eyelids of mason-dixon
lower extremity aficionados?) ... now to await what hesitates in pastures (inklings of futur)

9-6 sipped green root sapling til headburst medusalike arterial web within (pre-aura) wet
leaves' grid on the out-&-out (rimbaud & eberhardt on the silk road; artaud & bataille
collaborating body-exile)

9-7 "bioregion" = terrain sofia biorex = terranus solarus na(t)ive

9-11 imagination is the alchemical oven, the earthenware jug of water or wine, gravy and
stagnation...a jar on a hill in tennessee or anywhere below the bible belt. either sun or root twist
or earth heave will break these southern spirits release finally these tortured jesters of
confederacy and rag

9-12 does one commit font-and-gawk via rattle&yelp&lesion in amphitheatre squelched or
rather: step out of the shimmering veil of tympanum/vox/noise and keep the wires&gears slightly
hidden? longinus: meantime, sublime. the sound of grease and gristle in the cogs is an image

alk-mem was born implosion eggshell bits slicing their way out of dead fish eye film glaze

9-17 there is no autobiography

9-18 ... it is here, my birthspot, that i do not belong (global economics decide my local
nutritions)

9-20 the one frontier beyond vernacular: dreamstate: is lucid joystick, an ocean still too deep for
the "everyday" (meta-cognosis).

bosnia: how fax (your) bloodspill to our quill tips? the impotence, the 1000 dessous...

#5 (uropae: la republique des sauvages)

10-3 HYMEN TATTERS (prayer flags): and from what background have you

emerged into what foreground(s)?

10-4 farm boy/girl: stroll the big city IS (to) move-the-fluids, adjust the breaths :cannot simply
stride into dakini land; it is posture&intake management no-fly-zone by which to enter and tatter

homage. go back. start a barnyard tantric revolt. storm the silos. grin through the cornbelts with your okra engine hearts
10-9 a single event is endless narrative weave of points (cardinal) of who. two events cannot compare.
10-11 (linear) narrative ("prose") will not cease will keep rolling on four flat tires through tarpit swamp dreams will crawl on despite limbless or bi(o)split (discourse in the carpet . . . the figure in the drapes)
*

post-colonialism (its gaze perhaps transposed into a post-confederate mode) must control its paranoia, this fear of possible returns to (of) "repressive-imperial" impulses...in itself, as it articulates its field of critical matter, post-colonialism (like multicult.) can become what it criticizes. deconstruction in the hands of zine-mentality became destruction or reconstruction or both...it would then be wise to invoke ganesh before taking that first step into the "wilds" or into lands edged in palms. to live on the margins (of discourse is discourse)(not the realm of ports or oases), strolling towards the interior (the "frontierior"), skimming deep tundra and lichen cultures with backpack full of ink and implements: midways is always quest is central not conquest (a situationist outside the city). go noble & return savage. seek in these maps and notes of "search" and find what isn't.

10-15 trope hagiography
*

don't assume <culture> or equate such with repetitive motions, gestures, songs, guffaws. there's more to the phantom than sudden breeze or uncanny body tremors.

10-16 hymen of discourse burst at broadcast as sheath-of-whispers

10-17 beware when tapping Cernunnos, his keg&stagRACK for he shoves his berries and blinks blood

10-18 aporia agraria: i can already feel the grass growing gnawing up neck bone thru skull eyes blown green chromes are tinted and the foliage is invisible
*

one is always already savage. the "other" is what (one) becomes (or sheds) later...so stroll & make your kinetic stand

10-20 what is birthplace soiltype habitat shelter zone of bifurcative exchange (air&ink) what is this asking and the what that is asked? discourse is not optical is what finds the perforations and aperatures with its blind fingers of technologos and dumb erosurge

10-24 ethnographomena

10-25 the "postmodern" is not an issue; the question of postmodernism being an issue IS.
*

...go where maps dis-integrate and flesh de-segregates.
*

(imagine) a text that is not read but retreaded braille face absorbing dirtroad bounce

10-31 interesting site/sight today in jackson midtown: a homeless/drifting black man walking north on west street (on the west side of the capitol grounds) wearing a "kappa alpha order" fraternity sweatshirt with a big confederate flag on the back. what does one do with this? observe. record. broadcast.
*

archaeologos requires a rift, a narrative break, an historical deferral, a lost gnosis...there is no other foothold or handgrip. nothing hidden means nothing to find.
*

not what is said: but that "what" is said

#6 ("stag/frog:fieldbook")

11-3 sing is to sing the land sing the land is to paint the land is to walk is likewise otherwise

11-4 intrusion of the outside world (?)

11-5 one who would be van gogh; one who would go where gauguin...

11-6 his love for the "savage" was quite cultured / "who do i say that i am? what do you say that they are?"
*

falling into a savage state? or is it a question of being able to handle that "noble" descent?

when entering the now-darkness put out your candles & PLEASE extinguish your gods
*

tropikalismeaux

11-8 who are you now? what were you then? / this is the field what opens OUT to what's going in, on /

"Gauguin...is both at the beginning of the world and at the end of civilization" (Henri Focillon) / what is it that gauguin bequeathed to us? what have we inherited? (cultural genetics?) the sequence of events and actions are blown in the four directions...how long do we stare? do we line up our eyes according to the academy? shall we squint? observe while sweating and hungry? shall we walk the musuems as if they were back-alleys? and the streets as if they were curated?

11-9 what's to be advanced or withheld? and put either where? the zimzum-vipassana of cultural discourse: gauguin in tahiti, darwin at galapagos, rimbaud in abyssinia,

11-10 the contradiction: criticizing colonialism yet advancing one's argument via the passageways made possible by "colonial" praxis... / OUTPOSTmoderne / another impasse: the (m)empath(ographer)—no matter how sensitive or phenomenologically adept—remains outside of indigenous mind
*

the conquerers are now slaves to that nasdaq golem: progress under the sign of "convenience"
*

don't be nowhere
*

the anthropology of photography: a picture of the thing is more than a picture of the thing...it is the thing on the floor or ground beside a tree or an ox or another thing with or without glare focus etc...and this flux is frozen. this nomad on a camel on the sand dune is but the tip of an iceberg

11-11 just because one is born in a modern-nation-state in a certain region known for this practice and that tradition and this soup and that behavior and this author and that subject-matter etc doesn't keep some from noticing a "foreign" element within, a sense of the "other" or internal animal totem barktype... gauguin himself had something indigenous to teach to the tahitians, something that was not of europe...

11-12 what is this parallel seeking of both a primal state and a critical (refined) language by which to further define "difference" and seemingly arrive at a state of non- or post-duality?

11-14 maorigins/aborigenes

11-18 auto-bio-grr... still, i lie in my own bed. i wear a congo mask when impelled into coat&tie events. perception is the abstraction of immediacy. diversion. blur. receptor lie. and the camera at 1/500sec is that more articulate a liar. my anthropologies dissolve. what remains is bone imprint tsunami inkwash and appropriation screaming skySKYsky but in 3 lost tongues (mothersprechen). reread the marrow grip. dream can link font to indigenous wiretap pulse. therefore, go.

go where the natives stop and stare you down

or eat you up

11-19 the decision to be "savage" is not savage
*

praxis&domain pedagogy&institutional pouvoir tropics&space tundra&texte
*

how thin spread self? transparency is death

11-20 ethnography is the art (not science) of being "other"
*

displaced is the only sure place...all one knows is where one is (at) ((@))...define your milieu before you critique it...ground (ecrature of "self") the phantom of being. then pull out the matches or blow torches
*

1. in deep of congo, dreams, etc., one's ink appears as urine, blood (whitman's "thin red jellies")

2. in urban midst of grid, one's text becomes one's urinary tracts, etc.

*

two choices: find passage to a "savage" land, a land of "displacement", be among the hyperother, the native :THEN explore "your" ethnologic "self"...OR turn your current situation(ism), your home, your haunts into a field where every window and aperture is 1000 windows and dilations to bardos of exotics...see the "deep south" as a surreal explosion of ennui and imbecility and confederate cyborgs and stiff wax museum affluent types...then one can be at peace in chaos :seek difference, court heterogeneity.

11-21 writing for whom? and against what? the uncanny caduceus of celebration and pedagogy

*

is this desire to study understand preserve indigenous mind etc within (or removed from = textually) its own originary locale simply an unconscious matter of power control knowledge whatever it (encyclo-sedimento) was that foucault "said" (spoke of = discourse)? does ethnogenesis actually defend, nurture the ever diminishing displaced? big picture big picture...

11-23 "culture" perhaps is a false notion, something dreamed up by humanism or "the humanities" (in turn dreamed up by that accumulation of notions foucault termed MAN)...go deeper. then deeper.

11-24 postculturalisme = the new postantihumanism?

*

it's the inheritance, the accumulation: of genetic social cultural gestural idiomatic everyday practices. how deal with this new (latest?) species of reflexiveness, this phenomenological dilemma of NOTICE this or

REPRESS that. the pheno-aporia of being aware that one is aware is being nowhere (one of the goals of tantra)

11-26 experimentation in the deep south—or elsewhere as a token southerner): create a sense of home under the "battle flag" or sign of exile...?

*

thanksgiving: the day americans celebrate the fact that they are not yet a starving 3rd world "nation"

*

pop culture is the 3rd world of the 1st world (it's discursive value-power is overrated); here, leisure (the praxis of non-seriousness) is a serious multi-billion dollar business.

*

though caucasoid by accumulation, i accept my tendrils leading to preafrique: so, i am afro-american (or amero-african) in span, southern by default...for now, i will stay and critique, stalk in the vernacular and refrain from speaking in tongues at funerals

*

"deep south" is an invention (of the tourist industry, from stuccokeys to the casinos: "It's yours in Mississippi...") and its rabid, late-capitalist underclass grasp of semiotic relics like confederate flag stickers is a sure sign of an evolutionary cult(r)ural dyslexicon: they are keeping the caste system alive.

*

ethnographers: when a peoples' identity is forged and replicated ad infinitum & fetishistic objects xeroxed into oblivion and made accessible via pocket change : leave, ignore...

*

next environs for alchem fieldwork: poly(am)nesia

*

stop and remember that you have forgotten that you are not a "primitive"

11-28 most "experimental" literature has all but been written in the "old house" of bourgeois culture

12-4 cultures are belated, accumulative "gesture/enunciative" systems: don't find yourself caught in that moebius trap of "cultural discourse" but...who reads outside of this industry? the essay format needs more ventilation, apertures, telephone jacks. modems need modems

12-5 what is it to be in a culture? how many can one participate in and how many of those are subconscious? and then what is it to be aware of this polystatus, the ironic "awareness of

awareness" of phenomenology, the aporia of aporia? nietzsche's abyss' abyss

*

not to write about phenomenology (or a "phenomenon") but rather to write/be/do phenomenology or, more precisely, phenomenography. observing the other, the "strange attractor" is being them, it

*

to write texts, explore info-grids, create overlaps, etc. that attract not only literary-types (i.e., to produce material arrangements that are still—marginally—literature) but also linguists, art/visual theorists, jungians, ethnographers...pull them all in, blur the lines of genre, of FIELDS, of intention & articulation indeterminacy. to pull this off as an "experimental" writer is the challenge (how not turn off the more linear minded narrativists); to do this in deep south with its baggage of place & tradition & sense(s) of

*

somewhere in deep woods—perhaps along the natchez trace—lies the menstrual throat of artaud: it eats wholesale the inbred violence and banjo violation of Deliverance...

12-7 born in exile but closing in (...almost one-with-the-body)

*

one may live in the First World, but only dream in the Third

12-8 no more ideologies or IDEOLOGY <soi-mem>: instead maintain a compassionate understanding of ideological momentums-and-dynamics...we have vox & means & memes by which to articulate the senses, the species of displacement we observe and/or experience HERE in this regime of narrative and history-qua-ideology

*

am i refugee of own mind-set?

*

epidemographics

*

cannot quite identify myself (culturally), tho i have been "identified"...

12-15 meaning lies in the particle, the molecular aggregate-nexus NOT the "field": meaning's holism lies not in topos or ideal but in the link, the links, the linking (text)...meaning is embedded in scatter, in the reading. holism is aftereffect, result, reflection, accident, afterwardsness

12-19 jihad junta un-go-wa fatwa....standard operating equipment

:"bioregion" is la question originale du

cyborgisme

*

we can continue to invent new spaces but must always return to the evening news of collective current arenas of mass discourse (one-way talking head tape feed)...guerilla (t.a.z.) spatialization is not always (re)productive, relative or desirable. know when to speak in tongues. and when not to

12-21 the sperm-egg axis predates love just as breath tribalism & skillful means predate anthropology etc. these came into being as eye opened mind opened one split second behind beat the totality, the panoptich field to the punch by the second half of the split second

12-25 hail odin/osiris on your rebirthdays; hail mother isisinannaliviaplurabelle (= <<mary-christ mess>>)

12-28 titles/subtitles of recently acquired books are revealing to current concerns (placespacetimesplixed): einstein's space, writing sites, prosthetic territories, the space of subjectivity, routes, state of seige, sad tropics, location of culture, bend in the river, van gogh's sky...

- 12-30 and head tipped over
(the ethers) &
1. dragged back the
unused
ochres &
2. made perforations in
the
veil &
3.

V. postscript: -(d)rift

Let us leave theories there and return to here's hear.
James Joyce

Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace.
Ezra Pound

song of the south... okra, grits, black-eyed texts (corn pone deliverance = porn zone of inbred voyeurism): a large faulty cauldron akin to the balkans (bumpersticker rebels in south mississippi counties—among other locales—are no different in sentiment than those rural serbs kicking any non-serb ass) unable to hold all that has been poured and pissed into it. the stench is awful. or so it seems some days.

"experimental" writing (whether in the south or whatever seemingly contradictory space it has temporarily set up shop, planted its 'matters) needs to clarify and continue on its trajectory into newer discursive fields and to make discourse—as action, praxis—conform to the poetry. there is—of course—a trade off in committing such an invasive (albeit aesthetic) maneuver & setting up "colonies" in other disciplines. we may appear as elitists, unable to address the every/wo/man/child; at the same time, we seem to be blurring the lines of proper grammatical, syntactical, discursive, academic, administrative, parliamentary protocol. nonetheless, we should take what unique knowledge/perspectives we possess, and subtly challenge and "delight." in the same corps d'esprit of surrealism in the service of the revolution, we should consider the "masses" their dark—unknowing, unimaged—longing for new relative experience: surregionalism in the service of evolution..yet... (reality check: go to a "gun show" or sit in the wal-mart parking lot in pearl, mississippi... baudrillard does not tread here!). young or new (southern?)(experimental?) "writers" would do well to avoid the lure of the contest-workshop-so-you-want-to-be-a-poet-or-novelist mentality (but that's another semiotic void...), for us who are drawn to the current "challenge," it IS a matter of articulating & responsibly creating strategic perforations in the cultural/linguistic fabric of the (southern or local) everyday. get off the pavement and check out the back roads. this is interfacial empathology: see the southern "gaze" for what it is... **the gawk.**

what i'd like to see in this reified, rarified "southern" milieu: southern "crowd symbols" & institutions finally identified as the sub-historical phantom artifacts that they are: sites of mask-upon-mask, topos-over-topos, no core or pneuma spark to be found... yet, in the realm of literary devices, the much used memoir DOES provide an exemplary, authentic glimpse into southern "life-structures" and, thus, a way in: the autobiographical mirror and le quotidien (willie morris meets michel leiris or michel de certeau). magnolias and debutante-systems still maintain a value, albeit as alchemical "base material" :merde. in the hands of such experimental "scholarship"—like ed sanders' post-projective "investigative" poetics—such an other south heterogenetic/textuality has the uncanny ability to cross over into other modes of discourse, to assume them, or assume them assuming poetry. this, i believe, is the next conscious move, the next itinerary to take up towards a unique renaissance in both experimental writing and cultural studies. the microinterdisciplinary. **the auto-alembic macrowave gumbo tongue.** the mixture. the maximal.

ux-mal

a confession:)ceci n'est pas un texte clotur...) at this particular, accumulated moment am confused, ambivalent, exacerbated, desirous, distracted uneasy with these open face statements, these leaking, bursting vessels, these partially cooked casseroles of the everyday & the phenomenon, this herd of hissing & simmering alembics: this is a snapshot, unedited celluloid...

the creature walking out of the goop—not fully cooked/no longer raw—is not so terrifying (as derrida prophesied 33 years ago); though antlered and amphibious, its face and voice seems to be "human"

:s/he is m/us/e

this is not a call for homogenous solidarity but perhaps a call to shake up the canon (& the pumpkin & the kaleidoscope) in the name of those ideas, texts, persons, temporary autonomous tribes to EMULATE.

i seek to trade trade-secrets with that exquisite postnietzschean renaissance corpse wo/man, s/he who is a new golem (& walks the streets and backroads with a wandering eye), a collage of being, a foucauldian empathographer-poet working—mournfully, compassionately, excruciatingly, playfully—in the "eros/violence" chiasmus mess of the "dixie" episteme. not every day. but in the **everyday.**

Culture takes place in closed, even closeted places, involving the alchemical putrefaction, or decadence as the body of fermentation....

Civilization looks ahead...

Culture....looks backward and reaches back as a nostalgia for invisibilities....

The key syllable in culture is the prefix re....
James Hillman

so—with font image scrawl yelp ludditech digititis
w/IN & beyond this persistent old south alembic of emotive stew
shall we do our decultural
civic duties

and see & hear &
be here?

in the name of :now

celebrate—when you can—the words growing on trees
for the carcass of death is ripe apples & things ready

ur-fax

Articles/Texts

"Regional Particulars and Universal Statement in Southern Writing" / Albert Murray (*Callaloo* 12:1)
 "The Resistance" / Charles Olson (Selected Writings)

Journals

Mesochabé ("Against Region as Such?" issue, 17)
African American Review ("Black South" issues, 27:1 & 2)
Third Text
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Books

The Location of Culture / Homi K. Bhabha
The Tears of the White Man / Pascal Bruckner
noa noa / Paul Gauguin
Fatu-Hiva / Thor Heyerdahl
The Practice of Everyday Life / Michel de Certeau
L'Afrique Fantôme / Michel Leiris
Fracture / Clayton Eshleman
Supposing the Subject / Joan Copjec (ed.)
I'll Take My Stand / Twelve Southerners
Black Skin White Masks / Frantz Fanon
Routes / James Clifford
Roots / Kamau Brathwaite

New Orleans Review

Volume 25, Number 2

Summer 1999



POW! BAM! BOFFO! OVERTURES FROM A SUPERHERO

(Frames 1-12)

It began innocently enough. His personal ad was clever—hell, that wasn't difficult, he'd spent the last seven years writing copy for an agency. "Dynamic Duo: All I Need Is You," it started. Most of the girls who answered it were clever, too. Metropolitan girls. City savvy. But one voice stood out. A sexy, stable voice.

Diana had him meet her at the League of Justice, a D.C. bar he passed on the walk to work. "This is a great place," Carl said, looking around as he sipped his beer. They both removed their heavy coats. It was January in the nation's capital.

"Oh, it's a terrific place. I've made some super friends here," she said. Her eyes were like inkwells, dark, sure. Her hair was black as frying pans, thick like a horse's mane. Diana waved to the crusty old timer cleaning glasses behind the bar.

"It's cozier than you'd think," Carl said, "From outside, I mean."

"You never can tell from the outside, can you?"

In a week they were an item.

He liked her mystique. She was a little evasive, a little reticent when discussing her job and what she did with her time. Certain areas of her apartment were "off limits." Carl loved all of it. The girl wasn't needy. Diana didn't smother him like the rest. How could she? She had an inch, maybe two on him. And those legs, oh god, the legs.

Bonus.

(Frames 13-19)

He found out like this: Five weeks into itemhood, Diana canceled plans to see the movie in Georgetown. On the telephone she said she needed to "talk." Carl felt himself cringe, growing irritated. He knew "talk." He hated "talk." At some point every dame demanded one. "Talk" equaled something he didn't want to hear, it equaled future plans, it equaled pregnancy, or just some bullshit hassle only a chick can scheme up.

"Talk" meant, "Get over here quick or I'll pull a Plath / head in the oven until you call me back..". Beep!

For Carl, of course, "talk" = GAME OVER.

(Frames 20-32)

She towered over him. Diana breezed into his apartment and immediately directed him to the sofa, sitting him down like a small child. "Carl, honey." She was stalling, he detected. She fidgeted a bit with her car keys. Unusual, he thought. He couldn't help but notice her legs looked great under her skirt.

She paced in front of him, gathering wits. Those legs, he thought, I'll be sad to see them go. Diana swung around. "If we're getting as close as I think we are, I've got something to tell you."

Carl let a frustrated breath sputter out, certain she was about to blow it, like the rest of them with their herpes confessions or childhood molestations. Girls are tricky, he mused, but they always had that same bullshit delivery. He was surprised Diana would go that route.

Time now, Carl thought to himself, to armor my ass. He had to act quickly.

"I'm glad you think we're close, Diana." He began The Speech, "I think we are, too." He had trouble looking up at her. "I also want to say it feels great to be spending time with someone who doesn't pressure me for more."

Perfunctorily, he touched her hand. "You're independent." He was covering all bases, "I love that." He was pumping her up, but wedging that handy dandy barrier between them. It was Carl's signature speech; it guaranteed bail-ability.

She cut him off, nodding fairly vigorously. "Thank you, Carl." She dismissed him, getting back to her own, more important point. She softened her face and, as an afterthought, tossed out, "I like your independence, too." Then she returned to her agenda. "It's only because I see a future for us," she met his eyes and smiled warmly, "that I want to open up to you."

Still confident. That intrigued him. Herpes? No, he thought not. Maybe she's into girls on the side, he briefly hoped. She is assertive. Man, that wouldn't be bad, he thought, not bad at all. That would be a good thing.

Diana put her hand on his shoulder and focused her eyes intently on his. With absolute, solid diction, she said, "I'm Wonder Woman."

She scanned his eyes, making sure her words registered. "That's my true identity."

Carl blinked. He let out a snicker and blinked again. Embarrassed, he let his eyes fall on the rug on his living room floor. It was a simple, Indian cotton throw rug he bought at an import store years before. He looked up her and had a funny feeling: She's not fucking with me.

"What does this mean?" His voice was suddenly smallish.

"It means," she happily, squeezed his shoulder, "that you're Wonder Woman's boyfriend!" Her smile was like candy, a sweet and nurturing smile that suddenly suited her.

It made Carl feel like a baby.

(Frames 33-39)

Her legs are, without a doubt, the longest Carl has ever seen. "You really are tall," he tells her sometimes, trotting beside her. Her biceps are defined. More than defined, chiseled like a Michelangelo sculpture. Her IQ rivals his. Rivals? Ha.

Diana is a 90's woman all the way, he thinks. Indeed, she hails the cabs.

But, if hard-pressed, he'll admit: it's the damn bullet-proof bracelets, the American flag body suit, and the invisible jet that get him off. Come on, who's he trying to kid? He's whipped by Diana's ability to make villainous goons piss their pants in fear. Her agility with the lasso is what makes him dizzy. The

crime-fighting, her gallivanting in the stars-and-stripes bodice— Jesus, all of it pushes him to the perimeters of his own perversion. He won't say it, but it's true.

This wasn't supposed to happen.
Nobody prepared him for this.

(Frames 40-52)

He is Wonder Woman's boyfriend. He'd tell himself, Things could be worse. As the months wore on, he confessed it to certain friends, mostly guys at the agency. Everyone was curious. Most asked tactful questions. But some, like fucking Todd, mercilessly ribbed him.

"Hey Carl, what's the back seat of that invisible jet like?" he'd tease. "Oh, don't tell us, we can see!"

Then, maddening yelps and guffaws.

The laughter echoed in his head hours later as he'd fumble open a Corona in his kitchen. Those hours, the ones after work, were his alone, his time. He'd check answering machine messages and e-mail, look through the newspaper, anything to unwind before Diana popped over. Sometimes she'd be in civilian clothes, sometimes she'd have the outfit on.

Carl preferred the outfit.

They'd discuss their days. Inevitably, hers was always more interesting.

She'd show him tricks with the lasso or balance her tiara on his head and smile down at him, pinching his cheek.

Carl felt tinier when she did that.

(Frames 53-59)

He splashed around. In the bathtub, he waited for the familiar sound of Diana's keys in his door. "Is he home?" Diana cooed from the living room, letting the door slam. "Is my little Boy Wonder home?" Carl began to jump up, to grab for the fluffy white towel, but then he sunk back into the tub, hoping she'd plop down the lid on the toilet beside him and sit and visit.

Sometimes she did that.

(Frames 60-78)

He held her elbow as they stepped along a puddle. It made him feel right, like he used to feel with the other girls. It was a small, normal gesture. The D.C. night was cool, his teeth felt clean. The Pepsodent kisses they shared every few blocks delighted him.

"This is the best evening I've had in a long time." Diana slouched a bit, huddling into him and squeezing his arm. She squinted her eyes against the chilly wind.

"It's nice to have you tonight," he said. "You're always off doing your work." He felt a little guilty saying so. "Or waiting to be called to duty."

"Comes with the territory," she said stoically, tossing her head to the side and back. She squeezed his arm again to comfort him.

"You have beautiful teeth." Carl smiled when she looked at him, appraising

the woman he loved.

"So do you." She flashed an unarmored, bashful grin. It was nice to see her bashful. Carl tightened his grip in hers, confidently.

After dinner, after several glasses of chardonnay and a wonderful chocolate mousse, they collected their coats and left the restaurant. "Did you want to do the thing at the Met?" Carl reminded her.

Diana nodded. "I should really check my messages." They walked through Adams Morgan. He thought he heard something apologetic in her voice, and, perhaps, yes, a touch of regret. He didn't want her to check her messages; he didn't want her to snap out of this cozy globe of two.

"Go ahead," he told her, nodding toward a pay phone several yards from them. As she punched her secret code on the pay phone's digit board, Carl shuffled around the corner, peering into a book store window at the staff recommendation display, trying to picture the different sorts of people who read different sorts of books. He himself was not a great reader, once in a while, sure, a humor book, or an investment planner, or—

THWACK!

The brass knuckles ground into the back of his head. Quickly, he crumpled like a paper bag and felt himself collapsing. His left hip hit the ground, an awful burden. He clutched his head. Were those brass knuckles? Good god, were they brass? He thought hysterically, Surely no human hand has such difficult knuckles, his mind raced stupidly. *Christ, my head, oh the wine, my head. Where's Diana?*

The man was now rummaging through Carl's coat, rummaging roughly and swearing at him. Flustered, the man threw down Carl's leather Coach wallet, frantically screaming, "Cash! I want fucking cash!" and motioned to kick Carl's crumpled form. Carl clutched his head with both hands and curled himself into a squishy ball. He heard the scrapes of shoes on pavement— *Diana's shoes? Diana's?*— and then:

"Bastard! Bastard!"— a woman's anger— *Diana!*— And then Carl heard the thumps. And blows. A POW! A BAM! A BOFFO! Like in comic book frames during fight scenes. It really does sound like that. When he had the strength, he pulled his head up and saw her in the bodice, the stars and stripes, the bracelets around her beautiful wrists, wrists he had moments before caressed. He saw her kick the man with the knuckles. He saw her knee him in the groin. He watched as she took his entire face— *My god, such dexterity!*— in one hand and pushed the mugger backward until he fell with a heavy thump onto a sewer grating. There, quickly, agilely, Diana crouched over the man, fashioning a sturdy knot, lassoing the mugger's wrists through the sewer grates. She stood, rising, and regarded him. She was just barely out of breath.

"Bastard!" she sputtered.

She was done with him. She turned. With super grace and elegance, she trotted, yes, trotted— *like a racehorse*— toward her fiancé. Carl was dizzy with awe, dizzy with a knuckle blow to his skull which he had finally stopped clutching. Instead he struggled to use his two hands to prop himself up a bit— After all, man, think of how this looks, me on the ground— dizzy, too, with

chardonnay and love and the irrepressible sensation of his blood, yes, every drop of it, zooming in a bungee jump from his head down to another part of him, inside his pants. Yes, he was dizzy.

(Final Frame)

She reached down to help him.

Anne Blonstein

SYNCLETICA: FROM THE DESERT TO THE LIVING

anna syncletica said: "strengthened by sleep you wake each sweet morning to a moment that offers you entry into language — that privileged apparition. perhaps you will turn a page of the kind that makes you doubt that place is an open space. here the silence burns me. fastidiously turns my body into an orifice that opens layer by layer into a plain of enclosure."

and anna syncletica spoke: "you enter these vast potholes of air seeking drinking water for the mind. but the present evades you like laughter free falling over the edge of description. not now but a passage cut off by nostalgia. the substance at the center of an old clarity infers the plot growing cold as the smoke disposes."

and when the potential syncletica was asked if destiny joins opportunity to the expression she replied: "lately i have preferred the vision of citrus leaves from a species of uncertainty falling on a site sincerely traditional and hazardous. in the smallest matter like a grain of sand you can watch the primal film of interrogation projected on the screen of comprehension."

anna syncletica said: "a vigorous fear of the instant will affirm an exile in her labyrinth of priestly approaches. in the pageant of your gender may possibly peel and unseal the inside from the outside for a gap no more substantial than a dash through memory in tense schemes and abbreviations."

again she said: "with the power of lightning every occasion holds out for you the enigmas of never lacking in liability. like the bridal party ghosts who force you into the cave of unbarred darkness. force you to intuit the pain in the embrace by measuring the angle between corpses and the principles of occidental opacity."

LOST TEXT: HOTEL ST. PIERRE

From a group of papers whose authenticity could not be established by Mr. Reynard Estes nor by Dr. Floriana Gascard of the Historic Preservation Foundation-New Orleans. That is, papers which could not meet the requirement that they were produced in New Orleans and not in Europe or the southerly Americas. Mysterious also is whether the papers were originally written as sober, though misguided attempts at personal history, or as entertainments, or, as some have suggested, by the mind of a disturbed person, possibly even a slave. They are made available as part of a private collection owned by a New Orleans restaurant family who wishes to remain anonymous.

The Text

The hotel looked like a cottage high in Bavaria, a place where alpine travelers might recover what vigor they'd lost to snow and ice. I came upon it in the tropical slave port of New Orleans during the new Spanish reign.

But then this New World—all of it—is a hopeless hodge-podge. From our first stops among the Gulf islands containing yards of moaning Africans to the long, low benches beneath shade trees where native aboriginals lounged in front of ponderous Spanish bureaucrats, the place seemed to be waiting for an element lost, an ingredient yet discovered, to congeal its mismatched parts.

I am such a part.

Yet I knew immediately that the little viridian blue cottage, with its lone, high, peaked gable, with its white boards making fastidious angles across its washed front, was a place where I might not feel completely estranged. And it's the St. Pierre—not especially the muddy grid known as New Orleans, nor the gaping, torpid wilderness of Louisiana—which I make haste to chronicle. I know now that my fate has been lying here all along, that a confused idea of adventure led me on, that I will never emerge from this place as the man I once observed in the mirrors of Europe. On the contrary, I must now grow rhapsodic about that most abhorred condition: mental clarity. For it's all I have left.

But first...a final look backwards, over the course of these wonderful if exceedingly painful first weeks. To that end I offer:

A Tale of Hearts in this New World,

an unimportant yet curious history
by Your Newest Servant

Feb. 19, 178_

Carriage wheels do not so much roll as slide through the mud of Calle Real. The sharp pace of horse hooves sends tiny droplets of earth and feces to the sidewalks where gentlemen and ladies, if they must be about, turn their faces aside and grimace. I watch these things from within the lone, gabled dormer of Hotel St. Pierre—the one room I had wanted, for this precise view; the one room untaken in a hotel which, according to Madame Hartnett, is always full.

"Just who was the last lodger here, may I inquire?" I said to Madame Hartnett, when she first showed me these rooms.

"Oh"—she laughed—"you can be quite sure I observe the strictest confidence about our guests, Monsieur _____."

"Then perhaps, as a matter of record, you'll tell me whether the letting party departed on good terms with Madame?"

Standing near the door, she said, "The room is yours if you want it."

I knew I'd take the room, but I remained silent. There was something not quite right with the place, though I couldn't place it. Just as I was stepping back into the hallway—a narrow space, only one gas lamp lighting its wallpaper of interlocking triangles—I saw a fair-sized smudge on the floorboards. The spot lay just within the doorway, a bit to one side. "What exactly is that?" I said and pointed to it.

"A maid will wash it out," Madame Hartnett said. "Perhaps if you would be our guest at dinner, the work can be done without impeding you in the least."

She quoted a price for board, payable on the Monday of each week, in advance. The food, she said, was quite good and, in any event, plentiful.

Just as I was assessing the light flickering upon her green eyes—a pair of old emeralds scored a thousand times each—the door across the hallway swept open.

I began my bow, though I couldn't have glimpsed any part of a dress nor seen the deep rouge of her cheek—not then, not yet. Perhaps a delicate scent preceded? Nevertheless, she flew from her door—a peculiar, upsetting vision. Over her shoulders flowed a long, white lace mantilla. But what tiny shoulders they were! I fought to restrain myself from staring at her crimson skirts rustling against the floor. The place was that well kept, a bit like a castle or a government chamber where deputies make decisions—clean, polished. But, my god, what a bewilderingly shrunken gem. Miniature is the word. She couldn't have been as high as my vest's second button.

I frowned at Madame Hartnett.

"Sir—" she said, pressing her lips tightly. The locking key was in her hand.

"Yes," I said. "Agreed, all around."

A passage of weeks...

The smudge, worked on over and over, resists banishment. It has even pushed itself through a coat of new varnish. I cannot worry about it unless, of course, I begin coughing or wheezing. Its presence mimics that of molds, which, for me, are especially vicious. One sees such black stains everywhere in the New World, even on the great oaks in town.

But so far: no bodily reactions.

What's more to the point is Señora Alvarez, who lives across the hall. An exquisite tormentor, she's become, within my soul: the Hotel St. Pierre itself.

She concocted a novel explanation for the smudge.

"Monsieur _____," she began, standing just beside the spot's cloudy blackness, her dwarf hands folded together, the fingers so small, pink and tender that her fists formed a whorl no larger than a camellia blossom. "That spot will not subside for some time. However, nothing about it will affect your person in the least."

"Fine, Señora," I said, "but how can you know?"

"Because," she said, "this smudge is none other than the remains of a Mr. D'Arcy Thoroughgood. He too began his New World adventures at the St. Pierre."

I contorted my face into a parlor mask, which says, 'May two can play this game?'

She continued to stare at the shapeless blot.

"Mr. Thoroughgood," I said, "enjoys the room enough to excuse the occasional bootsole I place upon his person, I hope?"

"Mr. Thoroughgood feels nothing," Señora Alvarez said. "He's gone, more so than all the citizens whose coffins keep floating to the surface just outside of town."

"Please sit, dear lady," I said. "And deliver the rest of this fantastic tale!"

She said nothing, but when I stepped toward the table which stands just within the fierce white light of the dormer, she came in behind me. I felt her hand brush against my sleeve and I turned around.

"You don't understand," she said. The door behind her had shut. "Mr. Thoroughgood began shrinking, as I have, until he...fell away. He seeped into these boards. No doubt he was trying to open the doors of this room one last time—but couldn't reach the knob."

I looked at the smudge, considered these extraordinary words, yet felt a tug in my heart which disarmed my tongue's ready lash.

"Joke if you must about this Mr. D'Arcy," I said, "but don't joke about yourself. No princess in the Old World can match your exquisite charm."

"Really?" she said. "I think if I were the size I was when I first came here, you wouldn't find my features quite so entertaining."

Her words had a damnable effect. For a moment, I saw another person, her of course, but of average height, of normal fullness.

"Bravo," I said. "Stellar performance. You must surely be the most famous stage actress in all the New World and I, its newest, most impressionable fool."

She kept to role—not even a glance to let me in on her masquerade. Instead, she gazed upon me with the same flat expression she had leveled on the smudge itself.

"You mock my intelligence," I said. "Just look at your dress, your rings, your pearls, those sapphires winking in your ears, why, everything about you is in perfect harmony. If matters were as you say—"

"No, no. Everything attached to your immediate person

—even your most personal possessions, sir—shrink along with you. If you have heirs, I suggest—"

"I do not."

She swiveled her immaculate jaw from left to right, closed her eyes briefly. "I knew that already."

"Why ask then?"

"As a test." Her brow formed a tiny yet lengthy wrinkle. "Though I'm not sure a mistake's possible here. Anyway, you're real enough—certainly one of us. May I tell you something? As you let your eyes adjust to the dimensions of this place—and there are always two sets of dimensions: then and now—may I say that your reference to the princesses of the Old World cut right to my heart, also to the center of our insignificant drama here in New Orleans?"

"You flabbergast me," I said. "What can you possibly say next?"

She shook her head. "I do come from the Old World, Monsieur. Therefore, there's no need to inflate my status by comparing me to princesses whom, I suspect, you've never quite been given to know anyway?"

I opened my mouth.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "The point is, you're in the presence of Princess Eugenia Alvarez y D'oro."

She walked directly from my room. A sweetness hung upon the air: rotting magnolias.

Things have not turned out well. It began with the auction. I had heard of these spectacles and wondered whether my next enterprise should demand sufficient overhead of labor—nearly every New World enterprise did—and whether, therefore, I should embark upon holding slaves myself. I knew nothing of the trade. In fact, I'd been avoiding the issue, maintaining that I—nevermind the others—would enter a business wherein I was sole agent of my fortunes.

However, as I walked down Calle Real, an overpowering sensation assailed me: my funds were dwindling. I had no idea where investments might be safely made. I told myself that I'd best learn all the factors of this new society, or face ruin.

Gentlemen in waistjackets and cravats, in leggings and polished heeled shoes stood in heavily trampled slime. The rains had opened up, as if from a sealed envelope, already once that morning. One young man with a huge supply of tousled, sandy hair was coursing his fingers through its wet ends. I took him as a hardy, perhaps one who took special interest in the proceedings and who therefore had found reason to stand out in the cloudburst. But no. He and the others who stood at that particular corner, milling, waiting, had begun to sweat like mules in the soft, watery air that steamed from the mud beneath their boots. Soon I was among them, my neck immediately damp, trickles causing the flesh beneath my shirt and jacket to crawl, to develop pockets of feverish heat, at last to itch.

None of us could stand like sober citizens. The sun, though obscured by an enormous silvery cloud, cooked us like pork skins in a skillet. Our constant shifting, stirring, had nothing of choice about it. Nor did the ceaseless conversation, the same phrases over and over:

"Seen this lot yet?"

"No. You?"

"No."

I exchanged these exact words with a short, stocky middle-aged gentleman who wore a tall tophat. His cream-colored vest had been sweated through. He stamped his boots like a horse, seemed offended that I had nothing more to offer, then stalked off.

At last, a man whose peculiar French accent seemed absolutely unidentifiable, mounted a mortar slab of considerable size. He informed us that the auction would soon begin. He sped through a list of rules to do with the bidding procedures, with when a sale was final; he then supplied a short disquisition on currencies. The franc was preferred to the peso. The American dollar would be accepted. He barked out the exchange rate and, in any event, demanded cash or a banker's letter of credit. Another man followed him, yielding the same information in Spanish. No one listened. When he stepped down from the grey, pebbly slab, his face had achieved the color of my cravat, a dark red, a dye which only the Neapolitans have mastered.

My fingers curled, my breath drew short when I heard a bell announce the first human property. This low, dolorous knell, I realized, emanated from a set of long shackles around both ankles which allowed an almost complete stride—a long one, actually, fully required for the first slave to mount himself on the block.

I recognized a third man, local to my own street. I'd seen him striding with dispatch, roughly polished cane in hand, shoulders tipped forward to as if encountering a stiff alpine breeze. He stood upon the slab next to the African beast. A most terrible thing then happened. As soon as our auctioneer raised his voice to that pitch which legitimizes frenzy among buyers, another voice rose up garbling his words.

It was, of course, the property. I don't know why I hadn't expected it. Surely I knew—or did I?—that these brutes possessed language?

Another voice, from my neighbor on Calle Real, ejaculated a loud command. Nevermind I'd never heard the word in my life. This one word—inherent in its very sounds—meant 'stop, desist'. The slave fell silent. His pinched grimace, the partial sucking of the lower lip, the protuberance of the upper lip, the clouded but focused gaze—within himself, you see—told me all I'd ever suspected. The beast was strategizing. His cares lay beyond himself. Family?

At that moment—I dare say my mouth had opened—the voice from my neighbor barked out yet another single word, again, no mystery to anyone. Something along the order of "Behave!" or "Look smart!" Then, as by formula, I heard—didn't see—the whack-whack of his rod, that rough polished cane, falling in measured rhythm on the slave's back. A wince, the smallest propulsion forward at each blow, these were his sole reactions. At once, his face became clear, blank. His brow opened to a dark, glistening expanse. Sweat poured. His mouth fell slack. Incredibly, as if on celestial command, the entire street corner glowed suddenly with whiteness. The heavens chose this moment to unmask their centerpiece: the sun itself. As if I'd inhaled cinders or a terrible tiny seed cushioned in filaments riding the wind, I coughed out a string of words:

"My god, it's too much!"

Boots around me began to stamp the popping mud. Coats, hats shifted as if invisible fleas had taken hold. A voice beside me said, "What is too much, sir?"

I turned, frightened, aware I'd said something, already forgetting its sense. I went numb in my chest, felt I should pitch over, expiring on the spot. The short, tophatted man who'd questioned me earlier stood within a cleared circle. His mouth, like mine, had fallen open. He was in a state of perturbation. His attention rested not on the slave, but on me.

"I'm ill," I said.

It was too late.

"Too much?" "Too much?" This polished stump of a man looked around him. "Why, I'd say not nearly enough. No, sir. Not if you know 'em. Man's got to know 'em. Don't buy, otherwise. You'll leave this place more penniless than when you came." By 'place,' he meant the entire New World.

A small roar took up. I thought I should be knocked down, beaten perhaps. On the contrary, amid the laughter, I felt hands placing themselves gently upon my shoulders, upon my arms, clapping me warmly here and there. You'd have thought I was heading to a platform in assembly, to accept an award for superior citizenship.

Like a mule now myself, I picked my feet up, dodging the people who seemed to position themselves suddenly in my way, weaving slowly around their blurs. I remember my hand, the sense of thanks I experienced when it had as its duty the unlocking of the low, white picket gate which opened onto the St.

Pierre's small, gardened courtyard. I raced inside its hallway, its shadows only slightly cooler than the street corner where men sold human flesh.

Madame Hartnett emerged from the drawing room. "Dinner in forty-five minutes, Monsieur_____."

The day's provender was lean: a thin soup of indeterminate stock with the frailest squares of green onion rolling in its watery midst like small flags. I was bedeviled the entire time by the thought that they represented the countries of us all, the diners, I mean, including Señora Alvarez, all of us who called this hotel our home. There the squares spun, green and uniform, with little spunk left in their flaccid tissues, all alike now, boiled and on the verge of their fibers beginning to fleck apart. Oh, I was courteous; never a reason for boorishness. I managed to inject a comment or two, incumbent on the polite diner, designed to settle spirits as an aid to digestion.

"No end of sunlight here, thank goodness," I said. "Hardly like France this time of year."

"Nor," said Señora Alvarez, "even like Spain."

No one seized upon these comments right away, as per usual, but during the lengthy course of the meal we received lone, dangling comments from everyone.

"One certainly wastes no time here waiting for the banker to open his doors!"

Later: "A planter from Mandeville has sold all his property and it seems that laborers will have their houses built upon it. Thank goodness it's in the swamp."

Finally, toward meal's end, Madame Hartnett had this to offer: "May we all pass an agreeable Thursday afternoon."

Rents were due on Friday.

I climbed the staircase like a worm inching up a twig. My left hand pulled hard on the bannister, my head plunged itself down, in a gloom. So much intensity of gravity seemed a danger to the very structure of the whole creaking house. Once I got to my door I hung my weight upon it, as if upon a hook, my right hand turning the wrought iron key in the lock's black rectangle.

"Monsieur_____."

The Señora stood at her door behind me. Her exquisite beauty, riven by her implacable madness, knifed open my heart. God, what suffering all around! What thoroughly dishonorable and, to my eye, unearned fates filled this new land.

"Yes, kind lady?" I said, bowing, my door slightly ajar.

"I am interested," she said in flat voice, her brow gathering against the crest of her facial powders, "in knowing your progress."

"I'm well enough," I said. "Thank you."

"No," she said. "That won't do. Not at all."

She stood there, her mouth tightened into a bud.

It was plain she was used to having her pleasure accommodated. I would have counted myself cruel to insist that she observe the facts of our new surroundings, to recall how, in this country, none of us warranted any particular attention, especially as regarded the province of whim. But then, for this particular day, I felt utterly crushed, beyond repair.

"At your service, Señora." I opened my door. She wafted in ahead of me, like a tiny breeze.

"You've lost your composure," she said, taking the chair I offered. The two of us had an unimpeded view down upon the muddy thoroughfare in front of the hotel.

"Is it so stunningly obvious?" I said. I crossed my legs and observed her from across a small slice of the round-top table. The air gushed in through the open window with metered regularity. In it was the fetid muck, the sweating backs of horses or mules, the destruction—by immobile water—of leaves and limbs in the swamps behind our city. The Señora sat in the face of this torrent, at ease, glowing like a polished diadem set into a plain wooden box.

The curl of her mouth insinuated a universe of superior knowledge.

"You wish to hear of matters that have torn me down? I'd have thought you might refer to me a gentleman or lady eager to meet a newcomer fresh with the spirit of enterprise," I said.

"You are not that person." Her eyelids did not descend.

"Come now. I know myself."

"What you know, and what you're in the process of becoming, and therefore knowing, form two separate worlds."

"Do they?"

"You've encountered elements of your new homeland which, frankly, you cannot live with, Monsieur. That much is obvious."

"Be that as it may, Señora. I am still quite as lively a factor as any who ply that street." I pointed out the window, but looked at her face, without wavering.

She lowered her eyes. In the line that crossed her cheek—a loveless indentation of sheer age, also, to some extent, deprivation—I saw a sign of defeat. Yet also, an unaffectedly deep sympathy.

"Forgive me," I said. "I've been boorish, defensive." I smiled. "I happened to go to the slave auctions today."

She slumped forward so abruptly I thought I'd have to catch her.

With her shoulders only inches from my ready hands, she said, "I know."

"You were there?" I found the news fantastic.

"Sickened," she said. "That first day, to hear your absolutely correct intonation—I mean, the exact calibration of lilt, of resonance—in the French you used."

"You—"

"Yes, I was listening. Of course. A new voice in this place..." She raised up

finally and presented a mask of bottomless sorrow. I reached for her hands.

A mistake.

At once, a wire—heretofore carefully coiled, hidden behind an impenetrable front—sprang loose. How long had I been in the hotel? Two, three weeks? Yet it had been nearly unendurable. The silence, the brusque manners, the wretchedly thin conversation—never a word from Europe. My arms encircled her fragile back. I brought my lips to her small bud, that mobile flame, which she pressed against me.

I was as if a lightning stroke had melted two inferior metals into a single mass, her mind and my own fused. Her limbs, the extremities, the denser centers of her body—all our parts at once were finding, winding, becoming more completely of one sympathy...her garments, herself the mistress of their vents and angles, came to rustle against my own while I was yet seated in my chair.

Her feet, I realized, now free of their small black boots, had never touched the floor. She'd swung from her chair to mine, clinging to my neck like an arachnid. With one set of hands or another on buttons, freeing painful screenings and chainings of various levels of cloth, we were now aflame. Oiled chambers rose in circular tiers within confines that only blood and flesh could hope to seek out.

I locked one eye upon the road below. Its carriages, its foot traffic, its terrible mud that kept everyone on the alert—no one could hazard an upward gaze. In this crude, barbarous world, we'd found, ironically, an utterly safe vantage.

The Señora's wax makeup had melted. Beneath her royally high cheekbones a matching pair of raw, chaffed hollows were exposed. Long creases traversed these hollows, one on each side, the sorts of markings which ennoble a field battery captain, adding virility to cold, dashing eyes. Contrasted to her luscious dark irises, these creases seemed, however, especially cruel.

I wondered what I looked like—then shivered.

Her eyes opened, immediately fastened on the window. Blue sky filled with puffy Gulf clouds poured in upon us. We lay on the hotel's large if spottily bolstered bed.

"That was not my intention at all," she said. Her gaze was strangely focused, as if fixed upon the untrue glass panels of the window's frame, not on the clouds beyond.

"I must apologize then," I said.

"Don't."

"But if—"

"Let me tell you," she said, her Spanish voice grown weary, "when you seized me, your hands, your breath against my neck, the scent of the sun's furious energy within your coat and shirt, my mind dissolved. But it was

D'Arcy Thoroughgood, not you, who placed his hands around my waist."

"You and Monsieur D'Arcy..."

She didn't answer.

"I confess my mind was on yourself only," I said.

"Stop," she said. "You could almost substitute the word anyone, though that is not quite true either. My qualities—my tininess, my sympathy, my brutal honesty, my physical aliveness—these things you did desire, perhaps still desire—"

"I do—"

"Quiet. Let me say these things. I cannot possibly allow any other moment to occur...I...who climbed on you like a beast—"

"I refuse to—"

"—atop you in the same way as I mounted and dealt with Mr. D'Arcy. Can't you see it? How completely I dominated him?"

Her words had the effect of a medicinal draft—from a strange cabinet. I pushed her back, pinned her hands beneath mine, rolled atop her...with all the gentlest strength I could muster. She gave way to me soon enough, a releasing of the tension at body's center. My mind was sucked down into that vortex, that endless releasing. Soon she was touching my elbows with her knees, clinging with her arms around my back, saying, "And now it is me for you. For you, Monsieur."

The day's light cast its strength into a corner of the room, far from the bed where we lay. Of all things, here at day's close, I felt ready for encountering strangers about the subject of business—so long as it avoided that awful institution of slavery.

"You're restored, Monsieur. I feel it. As for me, I've been diminished," the Señora said.

She rose, seized her boots in one hand, then let herself out of the door.

At supper she didn't show—thank god. I wasn't ready for it. Afterward, I smoked in the parlor. I tried absorbing myself in the papers, which, at last, I tossed upon a table. I'd not found the smallest idea as to how my fortune was to be pursued. At precisely that moment, Madame Hartnett passed by in the hallway with the most smug expression imaginable. I couldn't fathom what business she had been attending to. A moment later, as I mounted the staircase I realized her expression had been cast into her interior—even then, without particular focus. I thought, 'Here is the New Worlder. She knows some certainty; moreover, that certainty is guaranteed to render dividends.'

What a fool I'd been! Why had I waited so long to come to here—the one place where I had any future at all?

"I am not so hungry any more, you'll understand," the Señora said. We sat at my table, late, taking spiced tea. It had been prepared in those islands of the

Gulf which lay nearer the headland of that other continent.

Prepared by slaves, I thought idly. What wasn't? On the other hand, at the Hotel St. Pierre, we at least enjoyed tea on demand.

...strange refuge.

"You're not well?" I said. After the day's dionysian activities, after such surfeits of ecstasy—if not hysteric release of troubling, ruminative ideas born of this fantastic landscape—I desired nothing so much as a period of reflection. But she had knocked within minutes of my closing the door. Now the drug of her presence again filled the room and myself.

"Of course I'm not well," she said.

I looked away, eager to avoid these particular fields of her mind.

On the spur, I said, "Have you seen a slave auction?"

"Never."

"They are most peculiar."

"You speak like a powdered wig. We're out of court here, you know."

"I mean, they are detestable, repugnant."

"That's better."

"They expect men like myself to watch their own kind—differing in but a few superficial characteristics—be treated like stock animals. Why, I've never felt so degraded in my life."

"Degraded." I should have left without finishing my tea, had you not driven straight to that word."

My god, the smile she opened over those tiny teeth. So chill she'd been the one moment, so cozy the next—what kind of person sought excitement in such precisions of the truth?

Then I remembered: royalty. Of course. The truth had always been one of their dispensations, another territory denied to those whose positions were less than secure.

A terrible idea stole over me—a game. I'd seek the utmost honesty in my next comments, then see if she abandoned herself to me once again—for the third time that day.

My larger concerns of course evaporated.

"This one particular chap—" I began.

"Chap?" she said. "Chap?"

"This man—a complete man, like myself—"

She pulled a small fan from her bodice, raked it open. On its rice paper backing a picture had been painted: yawning, almost suppurant mouths of flowers. Yellow, white, vermillion. Behind this effulgent display I located, however, the presence of two painted eyes.

"Mocked!" I said. "I felt mocked by the proceedings. Never mind what the man looked like."

The flowers, the eyes above them, swept back and forth.

"Stripped," I said. "I felt stripped, humiliated—in public."

"Why?"

"Because..." I spewed out my recollections of the short, stout man. "I tell you, he had made himself monstrous by the addition of that tophat, don't you know, as if conferring upon himself a stature he knew he didn't possess."

I laughed, on the verge of the performer's hysteria.

"Go on." The fan continued its sweep.

"My god, it's too much," I said while standing right in their midst. "It's just too much."

She closed her mouth. Her nostrils flared suddenly. "Liar!"

I sprang from my chair, hammered my boots across the small floor. "I spoke those exact words. Strike me dead if I didn't!"

"Liar!"

"How dare you throw that word at me! You, who fairly live

—" I caught myself.

"—in lies?"

I couldn't speak. Behaving like a royal competitor in an afternoon's badminton game. Hotheaded, oblivious—a fool.

"Listen to me, Monsieur," she said coolly. "It's not my lies—if in fact that's what they are—which need concern you. The point is, you have been lying since that very moment early this morning. The lie occurred just prior to when you spoke at the auction. Listen back, if you can, inside yourself, Monsieur. It's your own words, even though they were spoken, that composed the lie."

I was stunned. My cheeks flushed. My mind was tumbling in search of some firmness in this small, crazy room. Yet I did hear now another set of words.

I nodded—to myself—held up a finger, an old schoolboy habit when giving back rote. I opened my mouth, waited upon memory, upon instinct to come again. The Señora stretched far forward in her seat. Her eyes flickered with the heat of a late tropical cloudburst in the making. She'd collapsed the fan into an upright wooden rod which she held in her lap.

"Free That Man!" That's what I wanted to say. I wanted to turn the whole mob onto the auctioneer. Rather, no, onto the short, stout man. I wanted to see them parade that tophatted monster onto the slave block. Once there, with his hat exaggerating the very notion that his head owned any capacity for thought at all, I wanted to see—not to perform myself, but to see, for my own benefit, my very own deep pleasure—his head be taken off. Nothing less would have satisfied."

She pitched to her knees, wringing her hands. Her fingers began pinching the button heads out of their tightly sewn clefts on the front of my trousers.

"I was terrified—absolutely terrified—that they'd parade me onto the block and wrench my head off."

"We have a moral repugnance—you and I," she said in a single wind, "to all this so-called New World."

One of the room's three brass lamps flickered on the bedside table. We stowed our bodies beneath the coverlet; night hung in the air like a damp sheet; we'd been losing one degree of heat per hour.

"The land of equality, of freedom," she said.

"You're speaking of the States, dear lady. This is Spain."

"The idea's here already," she said, resting her head on one hand, her elbow plunged into my dewy, feather-filled pillow. She looked past me toward the wall. "No one will truly enjoy these things, even if they come to pass. It's not what the stronger half of us wants."

The hour was well in advance of two a.m. We'd slept fitfully, there being the confusing sensation that a pact was in the making. The Señora said:

"Sleep is not upon me, Monsieur. And you need to hear what I need to say."

"Speak then." Though I felt abused.

"When I was granting Mr. D'Arcy my affections—drawn, ineluctably, as I am now to you—" her voice flat, the words emerging at precise meter—"he was my size, perhaps a bit larger. I was nearer the height of your shoulder."

If she were as tall as my shoulder, she would have been a foot taller than D'Arcy. I myself was almost two feet taller than she was. I could easily imagine her as a larger woman. As I say, no lack of proportion; no shortening, say, of legs, no over-largeness of skull. She constituted a marvel. As for D'Arcy's diminution, my mind reeled. The woman was disturbed, like an orphan, to find herself so abjectly alone in this foreign world.

"Imagine, if you will," she said, "how very completely I dominated that tiny, perfect gentleman?"

My eyes begged her, my voice lost itself in my chest. "Why are you saying these things?"

She laughed. "We can't get away from our state of affairs, can we?"

"State of affairs?"

"One of us will dominate the other."

"Intolerable idea!"

She raised her eyes to mine, then laid back, exhaling deeply. "You and I have come to the one place left to us." She drifted her hand toward the darkened window. "Unfortunately, it's the one place we can't enter."

In the morning, a vast whiteness—that of the magnolia, with its New World flower, or else the lily, that decorant of local graves—covered my room's objects: table, chairs, the shelf of the dormer where one could sit or place a potted plant (I had yet to do so). At the end of my bed with its piled-back coverlets, this same whiteness—the morning's gigantic sunlight—showed me she was gone.

I got up, tried the door—locked. Hardly a surprise. The Señora had

maintained that D'Arcy had given her his key on his last night in this room—my room now.

After breakfast—she failed to show, a wise decision, I thought—I went to the front porches to smoke a narrow cigar which I'd purchased at the open-air river stands. The tobacco had been grown—so the concessionaire assured me—at the oldest plantation of the Carolinas. 'The Darkies and the tobacco have become as one at that plantation, governor,' he'd told me. I stood on the pale blue Bavarian boards, stared at our alley's traffic stirring mud and dung into a primordial muck. The deeply cured, sugary leaves of tobacco suddenly seemed so monstrous that I slung the object into a short stand of azaleas. While I wondered where I might find relief—the fantastical shores of California? perhaps the frozen forests of the north—Madame Hartnett came to stand at the front door behind me.

I wheeled upon her. "Not that you shouldn't protect your lodgers, Madame, myself among them, but can you say how, or if, over time, your clientele has changed?"

"Why, what a question!" she said, and shut her mouth. I walked over, nevertheless, and stood beside her.

"I'm an interested observer of history at this moment, Madame Hartnett. I'm aware that in this still young enterprise—"

"Young enterprise? This hotel has been operating since 1761!"

"No, no, Madame. This New World—that enterprise."

"Oh." She closed her mouth. Her twitching lips, her heavily caked eyelids fairly danced with the whiff of innuendo.

"I meant merely to inquire how this city and its fortunes have"—I chose my words carefully—"developed from the point of view of someone, like yourself, who's seen a period of grandeur which has done nothing but grow." I smiled largely.

She was unmoved, as dreary as a penitent beneath flails. "My lot, Monsieur, is one of meeting demands. I'm afraid that history's a luxury."

I took charge. "Yes, it's true that some of us here sprang from lines of nobility whose ends have been cauterized by the fires of revolution, but—"

"You and the Señora. That is all," she said. "I now rent to Americans only."

She looked at the churning street, its fare of mules clopping, gentlemen marching in high boots en route to or from market.

"There's nothing personal in my decision," she said. "It's simply that when Americans check in, they stay. Over time, this business becomes quite laborious, you know. Excuse me, Monsieur."

She turned to leave but I followed her inside where she said, "I've been telling everyone that we shall be renovating the St. Pierre. Workmen are due any minute. No hammering or sawing after five p.m., however."

"Improvements," I said. "There you are—the New World spirit." I spoke with an overly bright voice, to hide my sense that this lady was somehow bent

on destroying a unique refuge.

"Yes, the facade and its hideous blue color will change. As will the name."

"The name?"

"We're the Hartnett Inn now."

"The Hartnett?"

"Yes. Hotel St. Pierre, as you probably guessed, was erected by one of your kind, an ex-noble or something. He wanted to serve immigrants who came here sick of heart."

"What?!"

"I mean, homesick."

She walked to her rooms. I trudged to the staircase.

In the darkness of our hallway, all doors looked shut. The hotel felt empty.

Desolate, I knocked at the door of Señora Alvarez. No answer. I knocked again, but when another door began to rattle open down the hallway, I turned and hastily unlocked my own quarters. I half expected to find the Señora at table—or in my bed.

I've learned the following things. Señora Alvarez had been an emigre for two decades, living in Geneva, then Rome. The province in Spain where she was born had been ruled by her father's family for over three hundred years. There had then occurred a revolution—by the people. Under the influence of a democratic firebrand named Juan Martin (known as Juan the Revealer), this popular movement most immediately led to mass executions—of the nobility. Alvarez the old Grandee was first to be placed upon a raised platform. A traveler in the region—nameless, bearing no trade or product—volunteered when the executioners asked the throng for a booted foot. The service for which he earned a single real was just this: he clamped his bootsole against Señor Alvarez's side-turned face—this, though the Señor swore he would accept all the crowd's outrages without need for bonds or coercion. While this stranger pinioned the old man's head thusly against weathered boards, a second, masked hombre proceeded to knife it off.

Twenty-three days later, the calvary from the neighboring province of Luz entered the city. Under the Capitan's orders, they began a fresh round of executions, by firing squad, until the square streamed crimson with the blood of commoners. At least one brick wall fell beneath the ceaseless impact of lead slugs. Juan the Revealer was caught and scalded alive. The skin was peeled from his body, which was then hung, by grappling hook through the anus, from a butcher's storefront.

In the face of these examples, the remaining male citizens offered themselves as slaves. Their offer once accepted was transmuted into the somewhat darkly famous Luz Document for New Citizenship. Under its provisions, the people were, in fact, freed of many former obligations to the

Alvarez nobles—most notably, from excessive taxation. In return, they submitted all written documents: letters, books, including Bibles. These writings were taken for 'safekeeping' to the neighboring regent's castle. Within ten years, the people had become a docile, mule-like workforce whose occasional interludes of riot were marked, without exception, by mass murder entirely self-directed.

I recognized the name of this neighboring principality: Luz. It was, in fact, the sole link to that tincture of royalty which coursed through my own blood. The greatest Catalan poets of that time had emerged from this city of my forefathers, that is, on my mother's side.

What else did the maids and Madame Hartnett find in the Señora's room? I have no idea. Madame Hartnett gave me these papers, because, as she put it, 'You have the leisure for histories, I don't.'

I kept as distant from the proceedings as possible. I had sensed—all along—that the Señora might disappear, without notice, for reasons I'd never know. She'd certainly succeeded in inventing a monstrously amusing chapter—call it our love affair—for her life's book. I reckoned my name was now afloat on the Gulf's warm waters, borne along as a memory toward shores where she might speak, in all its tripping, vowel-rhyming vocables, her native tongue. Perhaps, I thought, she might meet the man whose worldly position was worthy of a princess—though a fiery, unrepentant, thoroughly unreliable princess.

Over the days that followed, I found myself pacing my own floors, talking aloud to myself, chanting gibberish concerning business. It was all a gigantic folly, the product of an agitated imagination. This talk was intended only to drown out the rough palaver of American wenches hired to eradicate a spot left beside the Señora's door.

After six days, an itinerant banker, if there is such a thing, took the room, easing his card one night beneath my door. To see this white rectangle appear suddenly, with a noise like mice feet, into my lamplit quarters was to experience the deepest revulsion and self-recrimination. This sort of naked self-advertisement constituted exactly the bold, artless behavior which I should have seized on for myself, long ago. No doubt he'd tucked his card under everyone's door, including Madame Hartnett's.

I will make myself anew—on the morrow. I swear it. Until then, however, I turn in reverie to the Señora, to the world we'd departed so recently. That Old World—how quickly it disappears. Its peculiar brutalities, its exquisite refinements have sunken beneath the muck of the Calle Real.

UMBILICUS

She stumbled.¹ They stepped through the hospital doors together (two sets; automatic; black felt sensor mats), and she stumbled a bit as the tiled floor turned to mat under her feet. Such a tiny thing, that transition. The slightest declivity.² The first set of doors swung shut behind them the second set swung open before them and she stumbled again, a second time; she stumbled on a strip of metal³ between the edge of the felt mat and the brick sidewalk. The slightest elevation. Horseshoe driveway in front of the hospital. Drop off, pick up.⁴ She stumbled twice all told, not falling, just off balance, so that twice he had to reach for her, as though he would grab her arm to steady her, her elbow maybe, but he missed her on both occasions: the first because he was clumsy coming through the door, the restriction of space, the distracting motion of the doors themselves; the second because he relaxed when he saw she had righted herself the first time, and so was unprepared and late when she stumbled again seconds after that: he simply waved his arms around uselessly in the air in front of him like a panicked conductor whose orchestra was in open rebellion against him. She didn't notice his gestures,⁵ his flailing arms. As she walked, she noticed:

a brown panel van, unmarked, parked in a red zone with no hazard lights flashing, no sign of anyone getting in or out; a Volkswagen (old Beetle),⁶ idling to her right (white zone), a young woman climbing from the car and rifling her purse; a pick-up truck on her left entering the horseshoe and parking in front of the van, an elderly woman in the passenger seat staring straight ahead,⁷ a balding man of sixty or so hopping out from his side and walking quickly around to the woman's door but the woman doesn't seem to notice, the man opening the door and fiddling with her safety belts, trying to unsnap her from the car.

Young Woman Volkswagen opened a rusty metal rack in the middle of a row of rusty metal racks and removed a *Chronicle* and paused a fraction of a moment to glance at the headline,⁸ then paused again, noticing the couple, holding the door open as they passed, gesturing at the stack. The man shook his head No and bowed slightly. The young woman let the lid slam shut and then jumped back into her Volkswagen and pulled up a few feet to the edge of the driveway, pausing briefly to allow traffic to clear, then turned right on Parnassus. The couple walked to the edge of the driveway as well, coming to the end of the horseshoe and onto the city sidewalk. (She was right about the sky, it was clear, it was sunny for the moment, but there was also a stiff breeze blowing, and with the breeze the implied threat that hidden clouds might suddenly and magically appear above their heads from behind Mount Sutro, blotting out the sun and putting a real chill in the air.) She pulled on the drawstring of her sweatshirt hood, tightening it at her throat.⁹ He stuffed his hands in his pockets. A Marina bus heading east on Parnassus slowed for them,

thinking they were waiting for a ride, even though it was not a bus stop. They looked that confused on the sidewalk.¹⁰ Again, the man was forced to shake his head No, wave one arm in somewhat useless fashion, bow slightly in apology. The bus picked up speed, engines grinding, releasing black smoke into the air. A Chinese man at the back of the bus glared at them through the window for no particular reason.¹¹ She turned to look behind her, thinking the man must have seen something there which displeased him, someone he didn't like, something else that bothered him, but there was no one, only the hospital itself, fourteen stories, apathetic windows.¹²

At the light they crossed Parnassus and walked over a footbridge into a courtyard of the medical center, past the elevators and the Blood Clinic, out onto the patio behind the pharmacy. They leaned on the metal fence and looked north, toward the hills of Marin.¹³ The tops of the Golden Gate Bridge's two towers rose above the trees of the Presidio. To their left, maybe fifty blocks away, was the Pacific Ocean, and the dense, green strip of the park unraveled seamlessly, it appeared, to the water's edge. To their right, and a bit further away than the ocean, downtown San Francisco. It was all spread out before them. Her hands were tucked in the pouch of her sweatshirt, his were on the cold rail. Below them, the grass of Kezar Stadium, what could be seen of it through the trees, anyway, was empty, but there was someone, a solitary figure, off to one side in front of the bleachers and stretching prior to a run.

He turned his back on the panoramic view and looked through the glass windows into the pharmacy. Two months after he'd moved to San Francisco, in February of 1991, he'd picked up a prescription at the pharmacy for the first time, for muscle relaxants, assorted pain killers and antibiotics, after an attack of prostatitis (or, conceivably, misdiagnosed kidney stones). That had been seven years earlier. He hadn't even known her then. At that time he was steadily dating a woman who lived in Santa Cruz, and cheating on her with a woman who lived on Russian Hill. He didn't have any contact with those two women anymore, and now he was with his wife, and it was a beautiful Friday morning in San Francisco, with the promise of the weekend ahead, but it was going to be anything but festive, oh you can be sure of that, because this visit to the hospital had been prompted by the pre-mature delivery of their first child, a little girl, and she was dead.

(She has a name, the wife: Rachel. The little girl would have been Alyson.)

Rachel rocked back and forth against the fence, her fists clenched inside the pouch, her forearms pressing against the top rail each time she swayed forward;¹⁴ and each time she felt the pressure of the rail, she would increase her weight against the fence so that it hurt, so that the metal edge bit through the fabric of her sweatshirt and through her skin and she could feel it down to the bone.¹⁵ Below them, an outbound N Judah streetcar clattered by, headed toward the ocean. She turned her head and looked out at the water, at the line of the horizon in the distance, at the faint outline of the Farallones.¹⁶

Inside the pharmacy, the clock said ten-fifteen. Currently Being Served: 53. Two elderly Russian women were standing inside watching him. Or maybe they weren't. Maybe they didn't see him at all. One had a checkered handkerchief in her hand and sneezed into it suddenly, her body convulsing. He expected to see

some pattern of spray on the window, a residue, shape of the Hawaiian Islands, perhaps, but there was none. The woman beside her never flinched. He turned back, looked down on Kezar again. Solitary Figure was out of sight, possibly circling a portion of the track blocked from view by the trees.

(Then words, yes.)

"The bird is redge," he said, nearly choking and coughing with the dryness of his mouth. Transposition: it happens.

"Hmmm," she said, still looking at the water.

"Red," he said. He mumbled, "As opposed to."

"Right."

(He has a name, David.) He scratched at his nose, snorted, shook his head.

"It couldn't take that long to walk to the ocean," she said.¹⁷

He nodded his head. "You haven't eaten in awhile. I might get a Pepsi. Diet Pepsi." He leaned on the rail and folded his hands. "Do you want to go to the beach then? Do you want to walk into the park?"

"I want to go to the beach," she said, gaze steady.

"Do you need to eat anything?"

"I don't care. I don't think so."

"Okay."

He leaned forward a bit, so he could look around her. He took a step closer so their hips and shoulders were touching.¹⁸

"What's at the beach?" he asked.

"Seals and gulls and spray," she said. "And cigarette butts. And broken glass. A bunch of garbage. Sand ticks."

"Sand ticks," he said.

"Dead jelly fish washing up on the beach. Like that."

He tilted his head, remembering the delivery room.

"This girl I knew once got stung by a dead jellyfish," she said.¹⁹ "They swore up and down, 'No, it's dead, it can't hurt you.' But she got stung just the same." She reached down to rub the inside of her thigh. "Right here. And then they said, 'Well maybe it wasn't dead, it just got trapped in the tide or something.'" She turned to look at him. "Maybe it did get caught in the tide. But it sure looked dead to me."

He nodded.

"And it stung her." She said, "I don't know if they're like bees, if they die after they sting you, I mean."

He shook his head and shrugged. "I don't know either."

(Anyone?)

"Anyway," she said, and looked back at the ocean.²⁰

He stood beside her for a moment. He walked away from her, along the length of the fence some thirty yards until the patio ended in a corner. There was a man working at a computer in the middle of a window in what looked at first glance to be a house, but, possibly, had been converted into an office of some kind because of its proximity to the medical center. For a corollarial business? Or maybe not converted at all, and the man was simply working at home. Either way, it was a great spot. The man had a wonderful view. David looked toward downtown and saw the black Bank of America Building with the

Pyramid just to its left; he identified the papal hat of St. Mary's Cathedral, and the tower up Gough right beside it where the mayor lived; he studied the gray blur of the Federal Building. He tried to see the building where he worked down by the Embarcadero, but it was blocked from his view. When he turned around again his wife was gone.

He didn't think she had jumped, but he looked over the railing anyway, down onto the roof of the building beneath him, which was also a parking lot of some type, possibly for maintenance vehicles and other employees. He walked back to where she'd been standing and saw through the windows of the pharmacy that she had retreated around the corner of the building and was bent over, picking at something on the ground. She straightened up with a flash of yellow in her hand and walked back to his side.

"This paper just blew past me," she said.

"What is it?"

"Dry cleaning." She crumpled it up and stuffed it into her pocket.

"I'm not hungry either," he said. He said, "We can go if you want."

She put both of her hands on top of her head and pressed down.²¹ "We'll get the car later. Sometime. I want to walk to the ocean. All the way."

"Fine." He gently pulled her arms down to her sides.

"Straight out Irving or whatever."

"Okay." He put his arm around her waist and turned her away from the fence.

"If I get cold or it rains, fuck it."

"It might stay clear." He began to lead her past the pharmacy.

"If we do get hungry we'll stop in someplace along the way."

"I've got money." And toward the Blood Clinic.

"A beer maybe."²²

"A beer." Right at the Blood Clinic and toward the elevators.

"I'm going to scream."

He put his mouth to her covered head and kissed it; he put his mouth to her covered ear and whispered, "Not yet."²³

They stopped in front of the elevator bank. There was a metal panel with yellowish lights that showed the locations of the three elevators which were running. On the way up, this was the final stop. On the way down, the elevators emptied out into a lobby just off Irving. There were three other people waiting, a Black woman with a small child in a leg brace,²⁴ an older man with a large and bulbous red nose, but Rachel barely noticed. (Even with just the five of them, it might be crowded in the elevator, because the cars are old and shaky and not very big. Not to mention if someone else should come.) David took her elbow and squeezed. She did not respond to him.²⁵ In the center column of the panel the yellow light indicated that an elevator was just two floors beneath them, headed their way.

¹ such a Goddamn thing

² tiny little bubble a pop

³ hey hey bumbling through the day

⁴ dumpster in the back

5 *with the sunshine and the sky as clear and it's Friday*
6 *that's what they call cherry fruit of the vine*
7 *a hatched a withered harvest*
8 *abdominal wall collapses film at eleven*
9 *hangman coming*
10 *hide your heart*
11 *but if you knew what happened*
12 *I guess maybe that does make sense*
13 *quiet I can almost hear*
14 *you would expect the trees to snap in the light*
15 *so much it itches*
16 *seals and gulls and spray*
17 *seals and gulls and spray*
18 *core heart*
19 *was it Rose maybe Alyson Rose is nice*
20 *it's all different around the edges*
21 *my brains might spurt*
22 *fetal alcohol syndrome non-applicable at this time*
23 *then you just get me to the fucking beach then okay*
24 *just take me to the beach*
25 *seals and gulls and spray*

MEXICO CITY POETS

A BILINGUAL PORTFOLIO

EDITED BY JOSEFA SALMON

The body of poetry which follows is part of a larger corpus of poems read at a bilingual reading by poets of Mexico City and New Orleans, on March 7 and 8, 1999 at Loyola University, New Orleans and at the Maple Leaf Bar. New Orleans' poets, Andrei Codrescu, Lee Grue, James Nolan and Brenda Marie Osbey translated into English the works of Jorge Aguilar Mora, David Huerta, Myriam Moscona and José Emilio Pacheco. These poets also translated into Spanish poems by the New Orleans poets.

This event was the result of a grant to promote cultural exchange between Mexico and the U.S. and in a way to "bridge the gulf," as James Nolan entitled the event, between neighbors. I thought poetry would be of interest to the New Orleans public when I saw an article in *The Times Picayune* about the increasing popularity of poetry readings in the city. But I did not think of the possibilities of a translation project until I received the grant application from the US-Mexico Fund for Culture, through the Mexican Cultural Center of the South and thanks to Delfina Maya, its Director.

The objective of the grant was to pair one New Orleans poet with a Mexican poet and for them to select five poems or pages of poetry out of a previous selection of their own poetry. Most of the poets did not know the others from the neighboring country. Therefore the translation process was the first meeting and cultural encounter.

The four Mexican poets in this selection are some of the best known contemporary literary figures in Mexico and Latin America as a whole. However, the writer whose works have been translated into English and is better known by the English speaking world is José Emilio Pacheco. The selections that follow are from his last book of poetry which to date are the first translations of this work. His poetry is highly recognized as bringing the colloquial and lyrical elements to a singular and unique expression. David Huerta has published eleven books of poetry and has been recognized as one of the most diverse poets of his generation. His poetry integrates many poetic traditions and at the same time is very personal and refreshing. The selections here are from some of his recent writings which have not yet been published. Jorge Aguilar Mora is the most diverse writer of the four poets and because of this, his work is very difficult to summarize. He is highly recognized and respected as a thinker and essayist on the works of Octavio Paz and the Mexican Revolution. He has three books of poetry and the selections here are from his first book. However, his last book *Stabat Mater* has unusual strength in the most memorable paradoxes of metaphors. Myriam Moscona, the youngest of the four poets, is one of the leading woman poets of Mexico. Her work, especially in *Visperas* (see selections), is permeated with beautiful images of a fresh paradoxical perception of the religious sense of the body. In some cases,

through the convergence of the erotic and the sacred a different perception of Jewish traditions emerge. The poems of Myriam Moscona are specially translated for *New Orleans Review* by Kathryn Birkhead, a professor of Spanish and the project director of the second phase of the poetry reading, in Mexico City.

The translations of the poetry and the readings were made possible thanks to Mexico's National Fund for Culture and the Arts, the Bancomer Cultural Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Mexican Cultural Center of the South, Consulate General of Mexico, Loyola University's Biever Guest Lecture Series, Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures, the Latin American Studies Committee and the Sigma Delta Pi Spanish Honor Society.

—Josefa Salmon

Chair of the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures
Loyola University, New Orleans

5. NECESIDAD DE LA MEMORIA

Tiene uno que recordar lo que tiene que recordar
aunque duela de pronto surgen fantasmas
de boca torcida y ojos siniestros en la memoria

Pero hay que hacerlo aunque no nos guste
sólo de esa manera podremos pagar tantas deudas
con el tiempo el devenir los fenómenos la sociedad

Sé que estoy hecho de memoria y olvido
un poeta llamado Emilio Prados me lo enseñó
ese tejido es delicado y debe estar a punto

Hay que recordar reconstruirlo todo y además vivir
hay quienes dicen que esta necesidad de pasado
es enfermiza pero hay quienes dicen que es pura salud

Los historiadores dicen que hay una gran necesidad
de la memoria pero inventan tantas cosas
es sorprendente cuánto son capaces de maquinar

Esto me lo enseñó un gran historiador arabista
por más señas y no lo he olvidado no lo invento
está en un libro depósito de los recuerdos humanos

La memoria tiene una musa la principal
su nombre es Mnemosine difícil de recordar
si no lo sabían ahora lo saben no lo olviden

5. THE NEED FOR MEMORY

You have to remember what you have to remember
though it might hurt sudden phantoms
with twisted mouths and sinister eyes flood the memory

But you have to do it whether you like it or not
it's the only way to pay off so many debts
to time becoming phenomena society

I know that I'm made up of memory and forgetfulness
a poet called Emilio Prados taught me
the web is fragile it should be sharpened to a point

You have to remember to rebuild everything and to live besides
there are those who say this need for the past is sick
but there are those who say it's healthy

Historians say there is a great need
for memory but they invent so many things
it's really surprising how much they're able to manipulate

A great Orientalist taught me this
and I've not forgotten it I'm not making it up
it is in the book of human memory

Memory has a main muse
her name is Mnemosyne difficult to remember
if you didn't know it now you do don't forget

Translation by Lee Meitzen Grue

2. FÁBULA DE NARCISO

Tenía que asomarme a doscientos espejos
pero un agua embebida en imágenes de Narciso
me detuvo con una sensualidad egocéntrica

Pensar en uno mismo demasiado es un pecado
no hay que hacerlo de ninguna manera está mal
imagínense contemplar de ese modo la propia imagen

El pecado de Narciso se volvió un complejo
para los psicólogos y los psicoanalistas
que nunca leyeron a Ovidio la historia es diferente

Los espejos a los que tenía que asomarme
estaban secos y olían a sal por eso el agua narcisista
fue un alivio una relampagueante frescura.

Espero que entiendan ustedes que no podía yo irme
el agua era demasiado generosa conmigo
me perdonaba esos detalles de autocontemplación

El agua virginal que me cubrió en ese momento
en lugar de los espejos el agua especular
en la que he estado viéndome desde entonces

2. THE FABLE OF NARCISSUS

I had leaned toward two hundred mirrors
but a pool saturated with images of Narcissus
stopped me with selfish sensuality

To think of yourself too much is a sin
don't do it no matter how you do it it's bad
imagine contemplating your own likeness that way

The sin of Narcissus became a complex
for psychologists and psychoanalysts
who never read Ovid his story is different

The mirrors I had to lean into
were dry and smelled of salt that's why the narcissistic water
was a relief a lightning splash of cool

I hope you all understand that I couldn't leave
the water was so generous to me
forgiving me those moments of self absorption

The pure water that covered me then
instead of the mirrors the speculative water
I've been looking at myself in ever since

Translation by Lee Meitzen Grue

4. ÉPICA DE LA CONFERENCIA

Tiene uno que sentarse ante un montón de personas
que no conoce y tratar de ser a la vez amable
y enciclopédico y también agudo sin ser cargante

De ser posible se recomienda tratar con todo cuidado
de hacer reír a esas personas pero no demasiado
hay que abordar asuntos serios y hacerlo seriamente

De lo que se trata es de honrar el conocimiento
y difundirlo con orden y claridad muy respetuosamente
sin excesos ni complacencias con método y sindéresis

Cuántas necesidades preferiría besar a mi mujer
conversar con alguno de mis amigos pero
tengo que dar esta conferencia y siento un peso enorme

Arjuna Alejandro Bonaparte Kutuzov no sé si dieron
conferencias pero yo siento algo parecido supongo
a lo que ellos sentían antes de entrar en acción

Quizá no es para tanto lo malo es que hay que fingir
un poco o mucho todo depende del público y el ambiente
lo mejor de todo es cuando termina la conferencia

No ha habido sangre pero sí hubo un trayecto épico
desde las escaramuzas al preparar la conferencia
hasta la conflagración en plena lectura y luego ese final

Es verdad al final escucho violines y siento la frescura
del agua la brisa del mar la luz del mediodía
y es solamente que ya terminó por fin por fin la conferencia

4. ODE TO THE LECTURE

You have to sit before a mass of people
you don't know and try to be nice
and encyclopedic at the same time bright without being grating

If possible it's recommended that you try
to make these people laugh but not too much
There is serious business to bring up and take seriously

The deal is to honor the subject
to spread the word with logic and clarity respectfully
without excess or complacency with good judgment

Arjuna Alexander Bonaparte Kutuzov I don't know if they gave lectures
but I feel something similar I suppose
to what they were feeling before going into battle

Perhaps it is not so bad it's necessary to fake it
more or less everything depends on the audience and the circumstances
what really matters is when the lecture ends

There has been no blood spilled but there was an epic journey
from the skirmishes to prepare the lecture
to the fire in the middle and then the end

It's true at the end I hear violins and I feel the fresh air
flow off the water the breeze off the sea the noon sun
and it's only because the conference is over at last at last

Translation by Lee Meitzen Grue

en la mañana, final de finales,
no reconoceré las páginas:
tal vez un rostro nuevo
me está esperando,
tal vez un rostro que no es de ustedes,
figuras, citas, rendez-vous sin fecha

in the morning, the end of ends,
I won't recognize these pages:
perhaps a whole new face
will be waiting for me
perhaps a face that is not yours,
figures, rendez-vous, a dateless date

Translation by Andrei Codrescu

te escribiría
si supiera que no has muerto
si alguien me convenciera

te diría dónde estoy
que me buscaras
si supiera que me lees
si alguien me convenciera que no es imposible

si supiera por qué escribo
te escribiría

si supiera hacer otra cosa
si encontrara otra manera de morirme

I would write to you
if I knew you hadn't died
if someone could convince me

I would tell you where I am
so you could look for me
if I knew you were reading me
if someone could convince me that it isn't impossible

if I knew why I write
I would write to you

if I knew how to do anything else
if I could find some other way to die

Translation by Andrei Codrescu

en efecto
siempre me ha vencido la evidencia
de creerlo todo cierto
la ambigüedad
el equilibrio
(la vida es equilibrista)
el insomnio
y me pongo frente al sueño
niego mi doble
mi nombre
confirmo lo que otros ya supieron
lo que todos saben y yo repito

¿no es razón de otro poema
la necesidad de dejar mi rastro por el libro?
el libro quiere romper la membrana de la inquietud
tienen consistencia de membrana las palabras
sólo es eso: el recordatorio de una sospecha
de una sospecha latente

este libro se olvidará
¿y si este olvido se volviera nuestro insomnio?

indeed
the evidence of believing that everything is certain
has always defeated me
ambiguity balance
(life is an acrobat)
insomnia
I face the dream
deny my double
my name
I confirm what others already suspect
and I repeat what they all know

Isn't the need to mark my passing with a book
the reason for another poem?
the book wants to tear the skin of unease
words have the texture of skin
it is only this:
the memento of a suspicion
of a deep seated suspicion

this book will be forgotten
what if this forgetting turns into our sleeplessness?

Translation by Andrei Codrescu

LEY DE EXTRANJERÍA

La tierra es plana y la sostienen
cuatro elefantes gigantescos.
Los mares se derraman en las tinieblas
y de las olas brotan las estrellas.

He estado en Creta, Nubia, Tarsis, Egipto.
En todas partes fui extranjero porque no hablaba el idioma
ni me vestía como ellos.

También nosotros, ciudadanos de Ur,
despreciamos al que es distinto.
Por algo hicimos lenguas diferentes:
para que los demás nada entiendan.

En Ur soy como todos. Hablo mi idioma
sin traza alguna del acento bárbaro.
Como lo que comemos los de Ur.
Huelo a nuestras especies y licores.

Y sin embargo en Ur me detestan
como jamás fui odiado en Tarsis ni en Nubia.

En Ur y en todas partes soy extranjero.

ALIEN ACT

Earth is flat and rests
on four huge elephants.
Seas drain into darkness,
stars gush out of waves.

I've been in Crete, Nubia, Tarsus, Egypt.
Everywhere I was a stranger.
I didn't speak the language
or dress like them.

We citizens of Ur also look
down on anyone different.
That's why we created separate tongues:
so the rest wouldn't understand a thing.

In Ur I'm one of the gang. I speak
without hint of an outlandish accent.
I eat what we eat here in Ur.
I smell like our spices and liquors.

And yet they loathe me in Ur
as I was never hated in Tarsus or Nubia.

In Ur, as everywhere, I'm a stranger.

Translation by James Nolan

Pasamos por el mundo sin darnos cuenta,
sin verlo,
como si no estuviera allí o no fuéramos parte
infinitesimal de todo esto.

No sabemos los nombres de las flores,
ignoramos los puntos cardinales
y las constelaciones que allá arriba
ven con pena o con burla lo que nos pasa.

Por esa misma causa nos reímos del arte
que no es a fin de cuentas sino atención enfocada
No deseo ver el mundo, le contestamos.
Quiero gozar la vida sin enterarme ,
pasarla bien como la pasan las ostras,
antes de que las guarden en su sepulcro de hielo.

We go through the world without realizing,
without noticing it,
as if it weren't there or we weren't
the tiniest part of it all.

We don't know what flowers are called,
couldn't care less about north or south
or the constellations up there observing
with sobs and guffaws what happens to us.

For the same reason we chuckle at art
which is nothing, finally, but a focal point.
I don't want to see the world, we answer.
I want to enjoy life without finding out,
whoop it up as much as the oysters do
before they're laid out in their tomb of ice.

Translation by James Nolan

LOS SERES FLOTANTES

*¿Cómo sería una vida en la superficie?
¿Feliz? ¿Y habría que despreciarla sólo por
eso? Quizá haya mucho más en la superficie,
quizá todo lo que no es superficie sea falso.*

—Eliás Canetti

Me propongo, amado, ser para ti la superficie
ser para tus ojos sólo cuerpo
ser para tu lengua sólo ritmo
ser información para tu red.

Me propongo, amado,
ser para la noche, hoguera
y en abril como la orquídea
bajar el tren de aterrizaje
para que el peso exacto de sus alas
te guarde siempre
en el adentro de mi afuera.

Sé que las flores se abren
y yo me abro con menos perfección
pues carezco de la simplicidad divina
de estar afuera solamente.

Me propongo, amado, ser para ti la superficie
ser una estación de paso
volver a cultivar el paraíso
sin árboles de ciencia

sólo orquídeas, dame orquídeas
(flores macho y flores hembra).

Me propongo, amado,
volver hacia la epístola
y amarte hasta que la hondura nos separe.

THE FLOATING BEINGS

*How would life be in the realm of the superficial?
Happy? And would it be necessary to belittle it for
that alone? It may be that there is much more on the
surface; maybe everything that is not on the surface is false.*

—Eliás Canetti

I intend, my beloved, to be for you, surface;
to be for your eyes only body;
for your tongue only rhythm;
to be information for your Net.

I intend, my beloved, to be for the night, fire;
and in April, like the orchid,
let down its landing gear
so that the exact weight of its wings
will keep you forever
on the inside of my outside.

I know that flowers open,
and I open myself up with less perfection
since I lack the divine simplicity
of only being outside.

I intend, my beloved, to be for you, surface,
to be a stopping point,
to cultivate paradise again,
without trees of knowledge.

only orchids; give me orchids
male flowers and female flowers.

I intend, my beloved, to return to the epistle
and to love you until the depths separate us.

Translation by Kathryn Birkhead

Quise las piedras de su corazón. Por ellas escuché la oscuridad en una plaza desierta. Quise cuidarlas como a la perla azul del pensamiento. Vi al sol cavar la noche en las primeras luces de los cielos. Y en esa hora ciega supe que jamás regresaría. En mi deseo de amar las piedras las arrojé de mí para que el silencio pudiera abrir su reino entre nosotros.

I loved the stones of her heart. Because of them I listened to the darkness in a deserted plaza. I wanted to take care of them like the blue pearl of thought. I saw the sun burrow into the night in the first lights of the heavens. In my desire to love the stones, I threw them away from me so that silence could open its kingdom between us.

Translation by Kathryn Birkhead

Christel Reges

DESTINY

Rose didn't think I should go, but my sister is burned—sun-burned you might say, although Sam is a lovely kid, never mind that his daddy is a hound-dog. She is worn-down by fourteen years of waiting tables at the Seven Brothers Cafe. Dreams, she says, are bullshit, and Jay Sparrieshoop—I mean, she says, what is the big deal? He is only a skinny kid, with G.E.D. written all over him: an under-nourished, under-booked smartass, and clueless—you don't need to leave the county to find a hundred and fifty of him—and anyway, do you know how much it costs to ride the Greyhound to Virginia Beach? It costs a lot. That's what Rose says.

But what else could I do? Let him waltz into my life and then go tripping off again, carrying all that mystery inside him, like an unborn baby? Skinny? He needs cooking for, is all; he will grow into those long bones in time. And as for clueless—not all of the book-knowledge in the world could give my stomach the sweet, sick plunge I get from one of his miserable, cigarette-mooching smiles. Jay Sparrieshoop's hair is as black as night, and his eyes are as black as his hair and no, no, I decided. No, I won't let him get away.

"Thirty-seven dollars and eighty cents." The clerk

at the Greyhound ticket window didn't even look up from his magazine.

"Thirty-seven—?" I fumbled in my jeans pockets for the folded lump of bills, all the money that was in my checking account. Sixty-three minus thirty-seven...not enough to get home. Still, I couldn't wait until payday. Not another whole five days.

Clueless. Like any of us has got a clue. My mother waited five days once; it was to bail Pop out of the drunk tank, and by the time she got off her high horse someone else got down first and she never did see him again...just postcards from North Dakota signed "Lover Boy." When she tells it, you should hear her, it's like it was something he did wrong, and oh, the waste and the pity of her life! She always did think she had something to teach somebody. I won't make that mistake.

You want reasons? When I look at him, my skin burns and my ears ache; I can't think straight, but I can't stop thinking, either, and what I think makes my skin burn. It's like flu, only worse, because I can't call in sick.

"One, please."

I shouldered my bag and stood on the gritty, pock-marked cement until the bus grumbled up even with the terminal door. The bus was blue and my jeans were blue and the sky was blue and I was flying, flying towards Virginia Beach with three changes of underwear, my swimsuit, my red sweater, twenty-four

dollars in ones and fives, and the address of the Pink Flamingo Motor Lodge penned on the skin of my right wrist.

Jay Sparrieshoop is nineteen: **nine** years younger than me, and restless as all get-out. **One** of the first things he ever told me, when he'd been working at the Wolfrap maybe three weeks, was that he'd be quitting in July, don't tell anybody.

"You're quitting in one month? Jay, you just got here!"

"I got myself a summer job in Virginia Beach." He leaned across the counter, lowering his voice, leaned so close that I could smell him. I love the way he smells, like root beer and Lysol. "At the Pink Flamingo Motor Lodge. **The Pink Flamingo!** Mom's boyfriend's twin brother runs the place."

"Big place? Bigger than this?"

Jay shrugged. "It's on the beach. I don't care if it's an anthill. Why? You got a problem?"

"I don't have a problem," I said, thinking you, you, you are my problem. "Only what is so great about bathrooms in Virginia Beach? Like they've got better **dirty** bathrooms than we've got? Like their minimum wage is better than ours?"

Jay sniffed, and shook his hair back. He held one finger up in front of my face: his index finger. It could have been worse.

"One month," he said. "One. Count it." He turned on the heel of one black cowboy boot and slid out of the room, not hurrying but fast and I felt dismissed, although what had he said, really? And thrown away, crumpled up and tossed out like a candy wrapper. He looked at me like I was a piece of garbage, worse than garbage, like I was garbage with no brains.

I think it is a rule, it must be written down somewhere: if you want someone to like you, if you try to get close to them, it doesn't work. You try too hard, you do every dumb thing under the sun. Once I realized that skinny-ass janitor was the man for me, I was screwed. I mean, we still talked, but it wasn't the same. That old, easy, ignorant magic was gone. By the time July rolled around, I was a mess.

And he even lied to me. He didn't even wait that one month; two weeks later he was gone. As soon as I arrived at the Wolfrap on Monday morning, I knew. There was my boss, Mrs. Bernstein, wiping fingerprints off the front door. She had a bottle of Windex in her hand and a real cranky look on her face. "Isn't that Jay's job?" I said. I thought of the cigarettes in the outside pocket of my bag. Lucky Strikes. A brand I only bought because that's what Jay likes.

"Jay Who?" said Mrs. Bernstein.

I got through that day, somehow. Handing out the wrong room keys, spacing telephone messages, forgetting even though Mrs. B. reminded me five

times, that a smile was part of my uniform. I was in hell.

Tuesday was hell times two, only slightly easier since I wasn't surprised anymore. On Wednesday I had dinner with Rose, and on Thursday morning, early, I called the motel and told Donnelle to tell Mrs. B. that I was not coming in that day, that I had the flu, I was sick as a dog. In fact, I might even be going to the hospital, but I would call in straightaway as soon as I got back—I mean, out. I knew Mrs. Bernstein would hate me. "Rhonda Who?" I didn't care.

"You want my advice?" said Rose. "Stay here. Keep your job, keep your pants on, save your money, **make** something of your life. For chrissake, you want to end up like me?"

I told her I felt like I needed to cooperate with my destiny and she said destiny could cooperate with her ass.

"You aren't knocked up or nothing, are you?" she said, and looked at me hard.

I should be so lucky; Jay has never even kissed me. I look straight back at her: "Of course not."

Rose leaned back against the stove. "You and he were—?"

"Gecz! Rose!"

She turned back to the spaghetti. "I didn't think so," she said.

It's none of her business. Understand—Rose has been married three times and not one drop of destiny in any of them. Destiny for Rose has been any guy with red hair or a mustache, and especially if it's a policeman and he'll rough her up a little. You never saw such a girl for bad-tempered guys in uniform. She needs to stop getting married—just for a year or two—and find herself someone to love.

I watch her stirring spaghetti sauce; her whole apartment smells like spicy steam. Sam is a lovely kid. He's got red hair—big surprise—and sad, pale sort of gingery eyes. It makes my stomach hurt to look at him. Such a half-baked little cupcake, you know? He asks a lot of questions. No, I don't want to end up like Rose. I need some answers.

The thing about Virginia Beach is how soft and old everything looks, and how much alike: street after street of white clapboard boarding-houses and brown-shingled beach houses, and pastel stucco motels. Street after street of neon signs, glowing colored tubes advertising "Color TV" or "Vacancies." Some of the signs were broken: "Vaca es" they said, or "H ated Pool," like a foreign language. I started to feel I was far from home. Not scared, you know, but lost?

The Pink Flamingo was on 45th Street, Oceanside. The Greyhound stopped at the intersection of 3rd and Boardwalk. I thought, damn, I'm going to have a long walk ahead of me, but after I'd hiked about six blocks, I started seeing these little white shuttle busses.

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I flagged one down. Most of the people on it were wearing swimsuits. Otherwise they were just ordinary bus passengers: staring blankly and reading newspapers. They seemed to not notice that they were riding around half-naked in public.

Behind the regular bus smells of carbon and sweat, the air was sweet: tropical-fruity, suntan-creamy. 21st Street... 22nd Street... I leaned my face against the red plastic headrest. I looked out the window, through the nose- and the finger-prints, at the cars and the sea and the motels, motels, motels all blurring together, and I thought about Jay.

The Pink Flamingo wasn't pink. It was chalk-white, a flat-roofed, three-story box with Johnson grass and Queen Anne's Lace bearding it all around. In the manager's office, a black-haired, round-faced man in a yellow Hawaiian shirt was doing a crossword puzzle. He jumped politely when I slammed the screen door. "Double?" he said.

I shook my head. "Jay Sparrieshoop works here?"

He sat up straight and laid his pencil down; his face clouded over. "He didn't do it," he said. "Kid's only been here two days."

I hadn't counted on Jay's mother's boyfriend's twin brother being such an old mother hen. "I said nothing about 'did,' did I?" I said. Or had I? I was so nervous, I couldn't remember.

He looked me down and up. "What's the deal? You're too old to be his girlfriend," He smiled. "You're too young to be his mother."

"Thanks." I looked right in his face and tried to put all the niceness I had into my eyes.

"Look, what do you want him for? Jay just got here. He doesn't know nobody."

"He knows me," I said. "And I bet I know you. Are you his Mom's boyfriend's brother?"

He smiled. A big, real smile this time. For once, I'd said the right thing.

"Aw, look," he said. "Sorry. This place is crazy, summers. I don't know who's what. You a friend from back home, huh?"

"Something like that."

"That's sweet," he said. "Keeping an eye on him?"

"What do you think?"

"Me too," he said. "How about that? We're a team, and we don't even know each other." He leaned over across the counter. He was wearing a silver chain around his neck, and on the chain a tiny silver dolphin, tangled in the net of his chest hairs. "Name's Horace."

"Wow." I took a step backwards; I just knew I was going to screw this up. "I had a dog named Horace once. So...he's here? Now?"

The phone rang then. Tell me there isn't a God. Horace reached to answer it.

"Around back. Employee's quarters around back." He winked at me. "See you later, Sunshine."

Backside, the Flamingo didn't even try to look inviting. It was rubbishy gravel, two rusty trash dumpsters and a row of plain doors. Lettered, not numbered, no names, nothing.

I knocked on the nearest door. More nothing. I knocked on the next door. Right away I could hear the rumpling of cloth, and bedsprings squeaking and then the door opened and a pale young face with sheet-marks on it poked out. A boy—no, a very skinny girl. Her hair was fuzzy and messy. She squinted at me.

"What," she said. "I'm not on until eleven. What."

"Sparrieshoop," I said.

She looked even fiercer. "F," she said. "All the way to the end." She slammed the door on my "Thank you."

There it was, 'F,' the last door. I knocked, real soft. No answer. I knocked harder and this time I heard a metal sound, and rustling, and then the rhythmic sucking of wet feet on naked floor. The door flew open.

"Cindy?"

He was fresh out of the shower. I had longed to see Jay so much; I didn't think I was going to see so much of him right off. His hair was wet, dripping down his back, and he had a little blue towel tied around his waist in a slipping knot. He glittered like the sun itself and he looked at me, that look I knew so well, like I was dog food. Same old Jay.

"Hey, there, Jaybird."

"Rhonda!" He pulled the towel tighter around his hips.

"I'll bet you are surprised to see me."

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"I think we have got things to say to each other."

He looked at me and crinkled his eyes. "Like?"

Well, exactly. Like? It didn't even make sense to me, all of a sudden. I could not believe that I'd travelled all this way without working out what I was going to say to Jay when I found him. Like? I sucked a deep breath.

"Jay. When you look into my eyes, what do you feel?"

"Feel? That's good." He leaned past me and looked up and down the barren little sidewalk. When he looked at me again, his face was red. "Horace told you where to find me, didn't he? Didn't he?"

I looked back at him with what I hoped was blank innocence.

"That little fucker," he said. "I'll tear him limb from limb."

"No, no," I said. "About me. What you feel about me. When you look at me."

He looked at me then, really looked at me, with something wonderfully like tenderness, something awfully like pity.

"How did you get here?"

"Greyhound," I said. "Bus."

"You rode a hundred miles by bus to ask me what I feel about you? That's it?"

He didn't wait for my answer.

"Go home." He shut the door, shut it so fast that I didn't have time to stick my foot in and stop him.

I was so surprised and mixed-up that I couldn't feel anything much. I couldn't believe that he would be so rude. "Well," I said to the door. "I am not going to try to talk to you if you won't be reasonable."

I decided I was hungry; that was the problem. That aching, tight twist in the center of my body—that was hunger. I walked down the beach highway, three blocks, until I came to a Jiffy Stop. I bought a bag of ginger snaps a bottle of root beer, a package of Lucky Strikes and some beef jerky, hiked back to the Pink Flamingo and slid down into the shade of a green dumpster. Facing away from Jay's door, facing towards the water. I ate my dinner. I ate my lunch, too. Actually, it was all I'd eaten all day.

The ocean reached and fell back, reached and fell back; it changed color as the sun set over the highway and the air was getting blue, when I heard a door opening: a click and a rattle. I peeked around the dumpster.

There was Jay. He had stuck his thin shoulders out of the doorway; he was looking up and down the sidewalk. His hand was on the doorknob, ready to slam the door shut at any moment. His eyes slid right over the dumpster and I held still, pressed my cheek against the dirty metal, and thought, I am a shadow, I am a shadow. It worked. I was sorry to see how happy he looked. He ducked back into the dark room. When he appeared again, he had tucked his white t-shirt into his jeans and his hair was combed slick back from his face. He left his own door open a crack, and he slipped down the walkway, tomcat-quiet, and stopped at door 'B.' He knocked.

The skinny, fuzzy-haired girl opened her door. Well. She'd combed her hair, too. Jay said something I couldn't make out, and the messy girl laughed, a soft, dry little laugh that seemed mixed-up, somehow, with the rustling of the hot shorewind in the beach grass, and the hiss of cars on the highway. She said something and laughed again, and Jay leaned against her and pushed his way into her room.

There was Jay's door, hanging open like a sleeping mouth; this was my chance. I grabbed my bag and the rest of the gingersnaps and I scooted across the little stretch of sand and sharp grass, and I let myself into Jay's room.

Inside was dark, and blood-warm. It smelled like socks, but it smelled like Jay, too, and it was the closest I'd ever been to Jay, really, like being inside him. I saw his bed and I could not help myself. I lay down on the rumpled sheets, in the imprint that his body had left there, and I pressed my face into his pillow and breathed him into me. And then I thought—I would make myself beautiful

for him.

Jay's whole bathroom was no bigger than a clothes-closet. It was hot enough, besides, to boil shrimp in; I could not figure out how to get the cold water to kick in. That was okay: I didn't want but to get clean, anyway. I rubbed Jay's Lifeboy soap all over my body, washing off the smells of bus and beef jerky. My feet were planted in the very spot where Jay had stood, not long before, and I washed the sand out of my hair with Jay's sweet-smelling green shampoo. I came out of that tiny little room feeling reborn, wrapped up in Jay's Budweiser beach towel.

Compared to the bathroom, the bedroom seemed actually cold. I lay down on his bed again and twisted the sheets around me. I was just getting comfortable when I heard a door close soft outside, and Jay's voice, and the sound of feet scuffling on the sandy cement. He was bringing that messy girl back to his room, and here I was all dripping water and dressed like a beer can! I dove for the floor and wriggled myself underneath the bed. Jay's voice: "Here we are." And the messy girl's voice: "You left your door open, dummy." I rolled over on my back, sandwiched close between bedsprings and fake-parquet vinyl tile, and tried to breathe quiet.

The light switched on. "Keep it off," Jay said. The light switched off again.

The light switched on again. "It's so darrrk in here."

"Ahhh, nothing you need to see in here," Jay said. "Place's a mess. I didn't know I was going to have company—"

His words ended on a muffled sound, and a sound of collision, a sound of skin and clothes rubbing together. I could see their feet almost meshed on the dark rug. There was no mistaking it: Jay was kissing that scrappy, messy-looking girl. I was glad I didn't have to see more than their feet; after a moment, they moved apart.

"You should open a window," the girl said. "It's hot as hell."

"I got reasons for keeping my window shut," Jay said. "Anyway, the beer is cold."

He opened a door on his bedside table. A stripe of electric light bolted across the floor and halfway under the bed, lighting up my arm. Inside the humming box, five bottles of beer glittered, green and white, like cold emeralds. Jay's arm swooped down and dragged two of them away, clinking and sweating, and then I heard the clatter of bottle caps.

They both sat down on the bed and started drinking and talking. I listened hard but no use: anytime either one of them moved, my ears were filled with the screeching and whining of bedsprings. The side of the bed where they were sitting was pressed down near the floor. I began to worry about what would happen if I got pinned underneath their butts and crushed. I began to worry about exactly what I'd let myself in for. I began to wonder how bad this was

going to get.

After about fifteen minutes, I heard Jay take a big swallow of beer, and sigh, and smack his lips. He set the empty bottle down on the floor beside me, so near, I could count the cold water drops on the bottle's green glass skin. Then his hand appeared again, and he laid a second bottle beside the first.

The bed sagged down upon me, scary-close to the floor, almost pinning my upper legs, and I heard the girl laugh, and then I heard Jay mumble in a muffled sort of way, so that I could see, I could see in my mind his mouth pressed against her skin, and then she sighed, a long sigh with a shudder in it, and the bed sagged lower yet and then—I knew, I knew what they were doing. That messy girl may have been a pale and scrappy thing, but she was a woman; I could put myself in her place and I knew that a woman sighs like that for one reason only. I don't care how thirsty she is, she does not sigh like that over a cold bottle of Rolling Rock. Spare me.

"Wait!" I shouted.

I could feel the bed just stop moving instantly. It was like a camera had taken a picture of the moment. Like a still picture, we were all of us frozen.

"Jay Sparrieshoop!" I shouted. "You let me out of here!"

I lunged at the sagging springs with my knees, with my hands, bucking my whole body against the net of silver coils that pressed down upon me.

"Get—off—of me!" I yelled, and then I heard the messy girl scream and I heard Jay say, "Fuck! Rhonda?" and with a great heaving that pressed the springs right into my skin, they both launched themselves out of bed, and Jay's long hand reached under and pulled me as I scrambled out, holding the wet, red, white and blue towel around my body.

"What is she doing under there?" The messy girl looked at me; she looked at Jay. "Did you plan this?" She was pulling her thin green t-shirt down over her breasts. "You are sick," she said. "And you," she looked at me, "Are crazy! I knew you were crazy the first moment I laid eyes on you."

I looked back at her with what I hoped was cold calm, and not too interested. "Oh...go comb your hair," I said.

"Go fuck yourself, you lunatic."

"Rhonda, I'm telling you—" Jay picked up one black cowboy boot. He shook it at me. "Lay off Cindy," he said. She's my friend."

"Was," said Cindy. "Was your friend." She was wriggling her feet into a pair of frayed blue canvas shoes. "I'm getting out of here."

Jay wheeled towards her. "Cindy—" he began, and then his face darkened, and he turned back towards me. I clutched the towel around me and began to edge towards the door. "That's right," said Jay. "Out. Out of my room. Out of my life. Don't come back."

I had edged mostly out the door when I realized I didn't have my clothes with me. "Jay! Just a moment!" I pushed on the door as Jay was trying to shut it.

"Aw, Jesus, help me, Cindy!" he said. "She's trying to get back in!"

"Good," Cindy said. "Good for her. I hope she kills you."

I pushed my arm and one knee through the door. "I want my clothes," I said. "Just my clothes, Jay."

Jay stepped aside; the door fell open so suddenly that I fell forward, two stumbling steps into the room. "Get them," said Jay, and I scuttled around the room, gathering up my jeans and shirt and socks. I could not find one of my sneakers, I could not find it, and Jay and Cindy stood looking on blank and cold and after looking three times under the bed where I already knew it was not, I gave up. I jammed the dirty things down hard on top of the clean things in my bag. I stood up. Jay looked at me. I looked at him. I kept looking. "Rhonda, I'm warning you." His jeans were unzipped; they hung sideways off his skinny hips. He was holding onto his cowboy boots. He raised them up like clubs.

"Go ahead," I said. I stood back on my heels. "Go ahead." Then he threw the boot.

It hit me. Not hard, but square in the stomach. I rocked, got my balance back, and headed for the door.

"Didn't hurt," I said, just like when Rose and I used to fight, and then I felt the other boot hit me on my backside, just as I got outside. You can say this about Jay: he is skinny; he is poor; his taste in women could use some refining—but he has a got one hell of a throwing arm. And I was okay. He did not hurt me. It did not hurt.

Now it's morning. I am sitting in front of the Flamingo, parked in the shade of the neon sign. Trash trucks are coming. I can see them from way, way down the highway, working their way up the strip, gobbling up all the garbage in all the dumpsters behind all the motels in town. Just watching those big trucks eat makes me hungry and in my mind, I divide however-much less than twenty dollars by however-many meals and subtract them from my chances of ever getting out of Virginia Beach. The little shuttle busses start their zipping, sleek and white, up and down the road.

"Helen?" I turn, and there is Horace, the desk guy. He is wearing a brown Hawaiian shirt, and he has his hands on his knees; he leans over me. "You want a sandwich, Helen?"

I keep looking at him. "Hot day," he says. "Scorcher."

Maybe you want a Diet Coke or something?"

"My name isn't Helen."

"It's not—?" Horace looks back at the motel. "I asked Jay this morning what his little friend's name was. He said you were Helen Wheels. Go figure."

He looks back at the Flamingo again. "That Jay is some character, huh? So. You want a sandwich? My treat."

"I'd like a sandwich. And a Coke, too. Not Diet. My name's Rhonda." I hold out my hand.

"Horace."

"You told me."

"Right. Well. We got the names straight, anyway. So—cheeseburger? Hamburger? Cheeseburger? Back in a minute." He starts jogging on his short legs towards the Jiffy Stop. He jogs about thirty feet and then he stops. "You looking for a job, Rhonda?"

"I don't think so."

"You—" he squints up and down the highway. "You waiting for somebody?"

"I don't know"

"You don't know?" he says. "Well, you think about it. Maybe you need a job."

He looks at me and I look back. He has nice brown eyes—friendly, you know? "You understand?" he says.

"Right," I say. "Got it."

"Good," he says. "You think. I'll be right back."

Horace trots away again, jerky and jaunty, his legs moving quick and fast like a dog's. I smile. I can't help smiling, and I lean back against the sign, and it's hot, the cement posts of the sign hot against my back, and I stop, I rest my whole self, body and mind, stop worrying and let my eyes dream off across the road. There's a kind of an oasis over there, a door between worlds.

It's just a gas station: "Sunoco" it says, and a big flying horse—red, white, and blue, grease-spotted in a desert of cement. Big semi-trucks pull up, hot and silver in the sunshine, and while they fill their tanks, the girls come sliding over to the pumps, come slipping up to the truckers. They lean in so close to talk that they look as if they were rubbing against the men's t-shirts, like cats, and they move like kitty-cats too, come to notice, with the same half-bold, half-shrinking slither.

Sometimes, not every time, one of them gets into one of the trucks. This is how it works: the driver opens the door of his cab—not quite matter-of-factly, but with a kind of a self-conscious flourish, like a gentleman—and the love girl lights in, smiling. Then the door closes, and the truck fires up and drives away, belching blue smoke, spinning with light. I've been counting since before the sun came up: it happened three times this morning. In they hop, and off they fly, like birds, you'd say, like petals in the wind, or shit down the crapper—just utterly, suddenly, and mysteriously gone.

"Ixnay," says a voice and I jump and I look and it's Horace squatting down beside me, holding out a white paper bag.

"There's nothing in that, kid—Rhonda. Bad ride," he says. "Bad ride." He

starts pulling hamburgers, hamburgers and fried onion rings in tipping little greasy envelopes, spilling them onto my lap. The smell of onions and hot fat makes me dizzy, I'm so hungry.

"Jay'll be glad too, you know." I look at him. "Besides me, I mean," he says, and he smiles quick, looks down at his hands, then back over his shoulder at the motel. "This can be a lonely place—even summers. I promised Gina I'd look after him. What was I thinking of? That kid—well, you know him—he's a mixer. Good for us both to have you here. Friend from back home, steadying influence, all that stuff."

Oh, right," I say. "Gimme some of that catsup."

"Isn't there a girl in a song named Rhonda? Something about 'faster, faster—?'"

"That's not the right song."

Horace shuts his eyes for a moment, then he opens them. "Help Me, Rhonda," he says, "That's it. 'Help Me, Rhonda.'" and he punches my knee. I like the way he looks at me, like everything about me is just fine. I wish he was a mirror. I punch his knee back.

"You betcha," I say.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE MOJO WAS MADE

Somehow even though they were both in their mid-twenties, she had grown older than him, started thinking beyond tomorrow and had told him to leave. Now, one year later, sitting in her living room she heard him tune up a familiar song at her door.

- Sorry to be intrudin' on you, he said, ain't tryin' to disturb your peace and all, but I got to speak with Maddie.

He looked toward the curb and checked the streetlight's glint on his immaculate, black, ten year old cadillac. Satisfied down to the gleam of the chrome, he turned his attention back to the door.

An older man stood inside the shoulder of light at the screen. He was Ellis Williams, a forty-two year old drifter also known as Slim. He had a good cigar in his mouth and he was trying hard not to let his irritation show.

- That's okay Blue, Slim said.

His anger was disguised in the cigar smoke and the collected calm of his voice.

- You ain't got to 'pologize to me, he continued, we may have our differences and all, but I ain't like that.

- Differences, we ain't got no differences Slim. We just both love the same woman. So I would more correctly say, we have our similarities. Rowed in the same boat, only thing is, you the one pullin' the oars, right now.

Blue said it real smart, vaseline slick just this side of danger. With only the screen-door between them, both men stood in the adrenalized beats of their hearts, locked under the shotgun of each other's cold stare.

The younger man was standing as straight as a drunk can get. And he smiled like the jack of spades knowing he had shortened the distance between them. A killer, he triaged the effect of his words.

Slim, uncomfortable with this youthful arrogance, remembered years back to the intoxicating smell of his own piss, and he knew that he would always have to contend with this. Another man. A younger man. Not yet tired of the road. Maddie was the first woman he'd really loved. He knew there were fewer tomorrows, and one was too many to spend alone. The thought of losing her made his head hurt.

And all this was exactly the shit that Maddie didn't like, collisions at the intersections in her life. One or another of her former lovers could probably be found in any bar she walked into. And everyone well understood the rules. She could look at any of them, sip her gin and announce that she didn't like no dumb ass shit. The meaning was clear, she didn't like making any talk-show talk

out of her life. She would always consider a former lover a friend until he acted dumb. And for the last six months Blue had been acting pretty dumb, showing up every two or three weeks at her door-step, racing his motor. And Slim was proving himself to be nervous behind the only wheel that mattered. And that was some more shit that Maddie didn't like.

The older man cleared his throat, breaking the tension at the screen.

- You do realize, he said, that we got a situation here, don't you Blue? You sober enough to see that? Madeline done moved on. I'm with her now and we got something good happenin' here.

His statement between them was a ringing telephone.

Blue took a moment before he picked it up.

- Yeah, yeah, Slim, I'll just have to take your word on that good something happenin'. But whatever she feel for you, ain't got nothin' to do with what she feel for me. Or what I feel for her. I ain't gonna stop lovin' her. Goddam man, could you, if you was on this side of the door? Wouldn't your heart be knockin'?

Blue's dry laugh was the shuffling of a deck of cards. He had the young man's tenet of not hearing what they didn't want to hear. A certain selective deafness.

Slim was not so calm now, even though his voice still was.

- You really some big-ass fool, ain't you Blue. Your tv dinner done long gone cold. This woman brings out her home-cookin' and serves it on big plates. She sets that big plate on the table for me, Blue. And hear me good now fool, there ain't no extra chair.

Blue was quiet at the door. He was a night singing cricket surprised in a beam of light. His tricky smile downgraded into a straight line, and his heartbeat was an axe falling into wood. He realized that there was nobody he disliked as much as this middle-age man who had been the one to answer the door.

- Look here man, is Madeline home? Could you please tell her I would like to speak with her?

Blue's words were short and tense. In the casualness of his pockets his hands balled into fists.

- Yeah, she home Blue. And yeah, I'll go tell her that you want to speak with her.

Not caring anymore what was showing in his face, the older man moved from the door, leaving it partially open. Whatever had kept her with this card-player so long, he hoped she would not come to the door and rediscover it. His heart rose in his throat as he moved through the living room. He remembered seeing them together at Joe's place. Commanding the floor with the heat of their turns and spins, laughing like they were the only ones there.

Blue looked into the light of her living room and shook the last cigarette out of his pack. It was bent. He straightened it as best he could before he put it to his mouth and lit it. At Slim's approach Maddie shook her head no. She

picked up a book and turned to a dog-eared page.

Back at the door, the older man stood a stronger, straighter silhouette.

- She don't want to talk with you Blue, he said, go on home.

And he shut the door slowly, narrowing the shoulder of light falling through the screen into nothing.

Michael Atkinson

ON HOW MUCH, EXACTLY, I LOVE MY WIFE, DAUGHTER AND SON

"[In *Easy Virtue* (1927), t]he woman who's divorced for the second time is really down in the dumps. All the press wait outside the divorce court; she looks at all the photographers and the title says— it was a silent film— 'Shoot. There's nothing left to kill.' One of the worst titles I ever wrote..."

—Alfred Hitchcock, in interview with Peter Bogdanovich

A friend is losing his wife, losing her
like an old swan will lose a feather
to a thorn, losing her like a balloon
released into the troposphere,
or a handball rolled into a sewer,
lost like innocence, virginity,
horse races, keys, memories
lost and with them their life slices,
vanished into forgetfulness
more completely than breath
from an electrified killer.

We lose, things are lost, somewhere
what is lost falls to the soil
and collects in heaps, erections
piled on sunglasses piled on wives.
I lose my desire and my appetite,
my friend's wife falls from him
like sheared hair, I've long lost
my ability to imagine my future glory,
and the future submission of others.
The Jamestown settlers who were "driven
thru insufferable hunger to eat
those things which nature most
abhorred, the flesh and excrements
of man as well of our own nation
as of an Indian, digged by some
out of his grave after he had lain

buried three days and wholly
devoured him" lost something huge
without name, but survived.

Engines lose viscosity, fabrics
lose weave. Time, it seems,
is the culprit, eventually all is lost
to it, weekends and years
and lifetimes, metal's burnish,
fur's lustre, a dogwood's raw
light green birth of leaves.
Poems are lost, too, if not
to time then certainly to shame,
to surrender, to the mail,
but that's nickels and dimes
compared to losing hunks
of your life while you're living it,

your family packed into
a station wagon and falling
away down the turnpike west,
toward the dusk. My friend
is losing his wife, she's falling away
from him as spirit falls from
a sick body, as gargoyles can fall
but rarely do upon passersby.
A man I knew whose family
had been lost to him years before
told me once how while nursing
his daughter at 3 AM he fell
asleep, and when he awoke
he found her slumbering at his feet,
having dozed too and fallen free
of her father's grasp, rolling down
his legs silently to the carpet, where
in the unforgettable moonlight she
began to happen without him.

AN EARLY ANNIVERSARY

Where have we been? In bed asleep,
in the woods, at red lights, in diapers,
in the kitchen not knowing where to start,
in the dusk, waist deep in it, and yet
farther from it than we remember being,
alone, with Molly, with Riley, suffering
families like dogs suffering the thwacks
of toddlers, on the train glimpsing
the brick bell towers of Jamaica
as the August cloudshine turns gloamy.

Yes, but lost as well in a decade seeming
like a day or two that have lasted forever,
we've been to the smallness of marriages,
the rat of it that blood-takes and snores,

but I will tell you this, I have had you
for my pleasure, lived with you
for the strength it gives my legs,
loved you for the pure, morning absence
of anything on this earth I'd rather do,
and if I had to pay for the next
ten thousand days with you,
I'd sell my heart right out of my chest.
Striking that deal, that's where I've been.

KANSAS, SHE SAID, IS THE NAME OF THE STAR

I adore you Glinda, your goodness, your northerness,
your bustle spun of dew-iced widow web, your voice
like rock candy sucked round, your vodka nimbus

and unravelled bellrope hair. You are the burning carbon
of the Munchkinland arc lamp, the queen angel
of boreal Oz, where the frost collects like sugar powder

on the cheeks of field-sleeping children. I adore you
as if you were my own eyelight, projected
back upon my beloved, I can only dream of the skin

between your breasts, the divine shining of your pubis,
opened to the ecstatic thrum of flesh meeting heaven.
Seeing you again after so long, the breath is knocked

out of me and I wear the lost air like a satin robe.
Where is your story? Where do you go to
when you're not guiding schoolgirl starlets

or smiling down western witches? How much power
do you hold? Could you have saved Judy
her dissipation, could you have disappeared the Seconals

and scotch? Her voice and eyes were so clear in Oz
("I remember searching for the perfect world," Judy said
years later into a stale hotel pillow), so unhaunted,

but she clung to that dog like a lifesaver, and
if you had loved her you wouldn't have let her leave
by cyclone or trolleycar or long black studio limo

for Hollywood, where Kansas rolled out its extraordinary grayness
in the days before the rainbow cracked open.
I adore you yet you fail us everyday, just as Em

and Henry on that cardboard farm adored
their God with every arthritic stoop and hour of labor,
they loved Him with their pipesmoke and gingham

and chickenfeed and snowberry pies, and never
complained within earshot of the neighbors
about the life they might've had, nor the black and white life

they'd got, where the horses aren't purple,
the nieces are never flushed pink with booze, and
the wild poppies are never fire-engine red.

TWO PASTORALS

1. *After Thucydides*

When the Spartans set about the devastation
of Attica, a plague broke out among the Athenians.
Terrible was the sight of people dying
who had caught the disease while nursing others.
Useless were the prayers made in the temples.
I had the disease myself

and saw others suffering from it.
Inside their mouths there was bleeding
from the throat and tongue, and the breath
became unnatural, unpleasant. Outside,
on my front lawn, I sniff wild onions, a pungence

after a snowmelt. Hopping on my bike, I strip off even
my tank top: people could not bear even the touch
of the lightest linen clothing.

2. *After Tacitus and Suetonius*

Tiberius Rex,
cringing, withdrew from us.
He couldn't say why.
Senators, grumbling,
could not forgive this goat's ungainly
terrified awkwardness, fear of long knives.

His will had been ripped.
Stepfather Caesar,
Augustus, god king,
planning the dynasty,

had ordered him, _Disown thy own son,
adopt Germanicus, divorce thy loved wife._

Alone on Capri,
Tiberius, emperor
of all the cruel world,
worshiped his impotence
and stuffed his shriek-filled mouth with more life,
soothsayers easing his future stained red.

When he had been young,
fighting in Parthia,
he'd seen colored flags
fluttering, miracles
of lightness, sunstruck silk, the far east
opening, butterflies hinting at new gods.

He knew to bow low.
Maybe he did hear, then—
some king of those Jews,
crucified criminal,
had said to give back, gladly, all things
Caesar demands, and suffer alone.

THE WANT OF SOLID OBJECTS

You weave yourself as worms-
my toes together
without thought or breath.
My shoulder blades come forward
and open your standing point.

I think of this as I eat an apple
I had just before dropped to the floor.

You are constantly teasing:
water and air. Even the troubled
birds are silent for you.
Speak why you loom so near.

The absence of Ireland forgets my pale
veins. Ironically, I am beached.

Oh blue,
you rise out of a bowl filled with ink.

THE CHARM OF BEING IN BETWEEN LINES

Just today
I realized the obvious
connection between the word
ignore and ignorance.
The same relationship
happiness holds
with necessity.

I was driving on an iced
highway in the middle
of Texas. No way of knowing
if the person ahead of you
would be one to suddenly stop
the car out of the fear
in her head. But you keep going,
you just do.

I was thinking about this one
philosopher who claims
you shouldn't count on
the arrival of the sun
upon each rotation.
All I know is that I drove
to where I was heading,
then turned around
and came home.

THE IMAGES OUR DEAD SEE

The clutch you had to replace
reminds me that when I blink

the transition that I choose
not to see remains waiting,

grinding behind thin layers
until the day when I forget

about it. Taken for granted,
it grows out on all sides

like memories of our dead, not
quite buried in their sweet graves.

LOOKING AS A GIRL

I now know why
I have this body.
I watch her slim form
lean back and coax
Nat Cole out from the darkest
shallows of her throat.
The breath swims out
and quits over nodding
heads. Her hand comes
forward as though to shake
with tight air while her eyes
close upon other conversations.
I sit folded all night in my small
chair and write this down.

UNDER THE POWERLINE

What I work hardest to remember,
Whenever I think of that Sunday morning,
Is her face, there above the steering wheel,

Watching the narrow road ahead
As we wandered out deep into the country,
Looking for a place where we could finish

Being young and good together at last.
I can say that her hair was blonde,
Lifting in the gusts through the open windows,

Or that her eyes were blue, with a faint ring
Of gold around the left iris. But the truth
Is that those colors are little more than words

Now, following my pen across the page,
And that the faces I recall when I let them
Out in the dark (as I sometimes do, to hang

In the windows, just before I sleep), are never
Quite the one I saw that morning, the one
Watching the road between her hands

As the county hardtop failed to gravel,
Then to a pair of ruts climbing through the hills.
What I see instead are the better captured faces —

The coaxed smiled and powdered cheeks
Of yearbook stills and Christmas cards.
They are always pleasant faces, always

Pretty, but somehow, never entirely hers

That morning, when she stopped her mother's sedan
At the clearing's edge and spit out her gum —

Never the eyes that must have blinked too often,
Never the ear I must have spoken to, quietly;
Never the mouth that must have leaned close

To answer: Yes. She was. She was sure.
I can say that the clearing was under
A powerline, that she shook open a quilt
There on the grass, and that it was here
That we lay down among our scattered clothes,
But, for me, the details of what came next

Are far less vivid now than other memories —
Of our later nights together, in borrowed rooms,
Once we had learned better how our bodies fit,

And all that first, frightened tenderness was gone.
But from our morning there on the quilt,
Only fragments of the scene still hold their shapes —

Her flowered dress on the grass, the ticking
Engine of the car, the wind pushing
The trees in circles against the clouds.

Some nights, I do find other images —
The two of us on our backs under the wires,
Smoking my father's Newports, her mouth

Chaffed red from my new whiskers, my fingers
Tracing the pink stars of acne on her cheeks.
Yet these details are never certain: Like those eyes

In my windows late at night, they drift and swell,
Then tumble out of phase, and are soon lost —
Like that clearing on the hill itself, out there deep

In the country, where the roads unmapped themselves —
Where I can say we were once, for a few hours,
On a quilt in the sunshine — but where,

Even then, I knew what it would become:
A place I have been leaving ever since.

GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS, BEFORE HIS VISIT

When I come, don't ask me those questions
You know I never answer. Instead, offer me
A cigarette and warm rum with sugar,
A chair near the window, a quilt for my legs.

When I sleep, draw the blinds and fold my hands
In my lap. Watch over me. Keep the flies
And the busy dead away. If I stir while I dream,
Whisper my name softly. Brush my hair

With your fingers and sing to me — some song
From your childhood, something sweet and patient.
Make me young with your voice, and safe —
For a few hours — Until I find the strength again to love you.

And when I wake, let me leave quietly.
Don't trouble me with prayers you know
I won't remember. Instead, tie my shoes
And button my collar. Hold the door

And take my hand on the stairs.
Say nothing when we part. Just smile
And point me to the bus stop,
Then kiss my forehead gently. Help me go.

TALISMANS

At the flea market across from the Commerce Speedway
you can buy Elvis relics in zip-lock bags
with masking tape labels—the napkin smeared with peanut butter
and banana grease, the pocket comb with a single strand
of black hair twined in its teeth, rhinestones
dandruffed from white Las Vegas jumpsuit. All point
with the insignificance of dogs that have already treed the coon
toward the masterpiece of that collection—Elvis's wart.

Showcased under the glass of an overturned jelly jar,
impaled on a bright-yellow balled stickpin stuck in a cork,
the wart, looking for all the world like an albino raisin,
seems to hover, bound only by that ball end.

"That's the last vestige of the King. Only \$500.
You know, each cell has everything you need
to make a whole person. You could clone Elvis from that wart."
A crowd gathers in awe, imagining
the billion tiny possibilities risen before their eyes.

Something simple happens—devotions, beliefs,
strong through some accident of conductivity—
too much salt, too little salt, in the cell spaces of the neuroconductors,
some brief spell of ball lightning rolling through our brains—
quickenning an interest in the local auto mechanic,
sending us on crusades, giving us the idea for Velcro,
telling us to kill our wives, leading us forward
in blind faith, making us hear The Word
and hope that, unlike steak, we move on to Glory,
seeing, for the first time, the glistening strings of dew
in moonlight, strung all along the spider's tender lines,
leaving us shaken in the divine smell of strawberries.

MR. TURNBILL TO THE LOGGERHEADS

He called their low names on nights
when there was no moon and the Louisiana darkness

made the tannin-stained water of Lake Bistoneaux
an onyx eye lashed with cypress and moss.

He called until at last they rose—heads scarred
by battles over territory and with the occasional outboard.

He called until at last they rose, eyes blinking, examining
his tweeds—hat, coat — cuffs and calves slicked

with black mud, redolent with the swamp as he stood orating,
reciting Virgil pulled from somewhere deep inside.

He imagined the depths of sadness in Dido's eyes:
the overcooked edges and folds of his brain like

lacy yellow leftovers curling from the sides of an omelet pan,
his prep-school Virgil filling those dried holes with odd honey,

which the weak comb wouldn't support for long.
Days he spent in self-absorption, flesh and concerns

winnowed away by disease and remedy until the tumor
hardened over the core of him, like the stone of a cling peach

squarely in the center of his brain. Days, too, he spent mouthing
Virgil and staring into the mirror at unblinking, lashless eyes.

He would catch himself contemplating the strange growth,
documenting the tastes that it paraded across his empty palate—

marshmallows, salt water taffy, venison, and vinegar;
he would sleep and have dreams filled with the sounds

of tape being pulled from the roll, bodies hitting concrete,
the zipper on the back of his skull opening, dreams

of his grandfather, long gone, trying to drag the tumor
from his head. He remembered touring down dirt roads,

the faces of all the dogs that chased him,
muzzles frozen in rictuses of joy; he remembered

all 15 years of students sitting in the front row,
the girls in their white socks.

And through it all the loggerheads listened,
listened to bee husbandry and history as he recited

prophecies and battles from the Aenid — entirely in Latin,
a language, he imagined, they all could understand.

He moved toward the end, his and Dido's,
with anticipation of a boy who's placed a penny

on the train tracks and waits for the clatter of derailment.
The loggerheads waited too, backs like stepping stones across the river,

tied to him in ways beyond language and time as he spoke:
Hoc opus; hic labor est. This is the task; this is the work to be done.

Martha Zweig

ANONYM

Only naturally you yearn for your own name so somebody
will start you one, pluck it from one of those pocket pages
the calendar displays on a yellow wall, & set it already
wriggly in its wet dish out on the sunniest sill to grow.

Meanwhile, how will you know yourself? If you must first sleep
Off death, how will you return to me? Let the spruce
droop in early snow & the snow fill the county & no
track appear but fills before it gets to a door,

let the fire wallow & snuff, & still I will tuck its lights
along the bannister along the upstairs hall
to where room slowly makes up for you, & a spaciousness
prepares around the armchair; the curtain trembles, ruffle

to hem, & I appear to myself lifting a pinch
of the curtain to one side, backlit. I forget
only the countless things, none of importance. A grudge
some loyal toolshed spider spun of the dribs & drabs

comes down one year with a single jab of the broom.
What we called you, hiding out back to be born like that.
Gagged in the billowing dust when the corn, millet, sunflower
seed poured into the bins, slumped sacks thicker than us girls!

And if the birds are up what seed we scooped out to the feeders,
did it sprout? somebody small tugged, wanting to know. Who'd
think of that? Of course! as the roots grow they seize the bird fast—
snatch! In its birdie guts, from the inside, I confided.

MOURNING AFTER

No one in the summing
falls right, all shoes
clap otherways, no mother
or mooring holds.

No more tall or statue
somewhere gangling drop
your ton of knees, appear
a body folded over bone.

Oh pity us erect
in signal or shamle dance
like Charlie Chaplin in the snow
a ballet on a broken toe.

THE ANIMAL'S BEST INTEREST

** Sylvie is a healthy, 14 year old, tiger-striped female with huge green eyes who has wanted nothing more than a lap since her owner died last spring. She's seeking a calm, gentle homebody, preferably female, who enjoys yarn-play, and can provide her with the finer things in life such as Fancy Feast Gourmet Cat Food, for which Sylvie has quite a discriminating palate.*

It is one of my duties at the Lane County Animal Shelter to update the ADOPT-A-PET list we publish in the county's weekly Community Bulletin. The woman who did it before me was a pre-doctoral statistician at the University, and she kept it simple: color, sex, age, major deformities. But in the two years I've been here, we've seen a significant decline in our euthanasia rate, and though not everyone is convinced I am the cause, they don't argue anymore with my Pet Personals. Adoptions are up, and that's all the county really concerns itself with.

** Phineas is a small, ten-month old calico who lost an eye in a childhood encounter with a raccoon. Quite sweet, and somewhat shy, he'd like to live in a home with another cat, or a whole brood who can help him rebuild his self-confidence. He'd like to meet a nice girl to share meaningful conversation and possible cuddling somewhere down the line, but as an activist for population control, Phineas has been neutered, for he does not feel that he could in any conscience bring another litter into this world.*

Cheryl and I have already taken in three cats since we got to town, and that's in addition to Sid the Siamese and Bebe, Cheryl's ancient Newfoundland whose mostly inert yet breathing body the four cats like to use as a bed. The four of them'll be sprawled out across that big gallump like that's what she was intended for all along, and Bebe either doesn't mind, or is so senile by now that she doesn't even notice. We know Bebe's going to go one day, and we try to talk about what we'll do then, but it upsets Cheryl too much and she ends up saying, "When the time comes, Christine, you will pick out a lovely old dog from the Shelter and you will bring it home and I will hate and resent it at first because it is not Bebe, and then I will eventually love it beyond all rationality because it will love me and we both know that I am powerless to turn my back on love." This is true. When we first met Cheryl didn't look at me twice, and I fell crazy in love with her, insinuated myself into her life by every possible human means and eventually got her to fall in love with me too. Thus, we both now know that's one way love can work. Cheryl says that I am more like a cat than a person sometimes: that for a human being to truly love another human

being she has to hate her also, that love and hate go hand in hand like that. Cheryl both loves and hates me, which she says means she would stay with me forever. I, like a cat, she says, seem to be capable only of loving Cheryl, which is what has her convinced that I am capable of leaving, of finding someone else to love. But I have a different theory.

I think there are two different kinds of people: those whose natural state is alone, and those for whom solitude is like swimming underwater: you can only do it for so long before you simply have to come up for air. I fall into the latter group, not by choice, but by the same virtue that I am a human being and not a fish. I have often wondered what it would be like to experience solitude as a norm. I imagine unbelievable freedom: to be able to move to Tibet, live in a teepee, whistle show tunes in the middle of the night, eat herring and onions in bed and fall asleep without brushing your teeth. And it's fascinating to imagine, but so are sword swallowing and bungee jumping and they're simply not things I'll do by choice during my time on this earth. I know that I would not leave Cheryl unless I had somewhere else to go, which means someone else to go to. And while I'm with Cheryl I'm not playing any other fields.

According to Cheryl's love/hate theory, she would never leave me, and according to my two-kinds-of-people theory, that's true, because she's not a loner either. And though she thinks I might leave her — for Tibet, for the teepee, for bad breath and Sondheim at three AM — because I don't hate her enough to really love her, I know that as a natural coupler, not a loner, I'll be sticking around. I tell her: look at animals. It's not the loving, devoted, faithful cats who leave; it's their owners: dropping little Muffin off at the dump because she barfs on the carpet too often, letting Rover out of the family van at the side of the highway as they speed off to a new life in a new town in a new apartment complex that doesn't allow dogs. Too bad, out you go Spot, out you go. I sometimes think about how many people would actually have pets if my personal ads worked the other way around: *Family with three terror-age children seeks masochistic cat for ritual torture. Or: Flightry, itinerant couple looking to adopt cat for a very short period of time and then ditch it back at the Shelter when they decide to rejoin the Phish tour.* The thing that kills me — and that's because it hits me where I live — is that the animals, they still go with those folks. And for the hour, or the week or the years they're kept, they'll love those people unconditionally — pure, unadulterated, unselfish love. And inevitably, it's the people who let them down.

Take Arlene, for example. I'd been here a few months the first time Sniffles came in — *Sniffles!* I swear to god! There should be laws! — and it was her mother who brought him.

"He's my daughter's cat," she said, petting him mechanically on the head, as if someone had instructed her in the display of affection. She had the moves, but not the soul. "My daughter's going into the hospital." She announced that bit of information like it was a personal challenge to me. She had on a dark

velour sweatshirt-type thing, over which Sniff — a white Himalayan fluffball — was shedding mercilessly. The woman would have made a pretty good stray herself: bony and shrunk, with deep circles under a pair of buggy blue eyes. "My husband's allergic," she told me, and then all of a sudden her defenses just seemed to drop away — so fast it was eerie, like watching a multiple-personality movie-of-the-week where some woman slips from Gretchen-the-Wicked-Bitch to Sissie-the-Pathetic-and-Deprived in a matter of seconds. She said: "This seemed like the only option. We don't know what else to do. . .," then trailed off, waiting, as they all do, for some kind of reassurance from me. They want me to tell them they're not bad people, that I can absolve them of all guilt, and that really it's just a fine and peachy thing for them to adopt a pet and discard it again when they redo the living room and Fluffy no longer fits in with the color scheme. But this woman really did look like she'd been to hell and not made it all the way back. I'm a softie when it comes down to it. I scooped Sniff out of her thin, gangly arms.

"Hello there, Big Boy," I cooed into that flat fuzzy face, those gorgeous blue eyes. "Welcome to the Lane County Hotel. We'll let you take a nice hot flea bath, freshen you up after your trip, and then I'll show you to your suite. We serve a complimentary continental breakfast at eight, and quiet hours should be posted on the back of your door." With a free hand I pulled out the log book. "And under what name will the gentleman be registering today?"

The woman looked at me like I was possessed, then total deadpan, she said: "Sniffles," and she and I had a little bonding moment. The way it came out of her mouth, I knew what she thought of the name, and I raised my eyebrows to agree. She closed her eyes then, for just a second, but deliberately, on an intake of breath, like she was counting in her head to keep from flying off the handle, the way they teach you in Control Your Anger workshops. She opened her eyes slowly. "My daughter," she said, and it was a statement which alone was meant to explain everything — Sniffles, the hospital, the grey-black sacks beneath this woman's sleepless eyes.

** Sniff is an independent three-year old Himalayan male who, following the ill health of his previous owner, needs a stable and understanding home. He's been very influenced by EST and Gestalt therapy, and feels ready to engage in a spiritual and/or physical relationship with like-minded feline, M or F. Please send photos and/or fur samples. Neatness a plus.*

Sometimes I worry that my ads get a little suggestive, but what can I say? Sex sells. And we do a background check prior to all adoptions, so we know we're not sending our kitties home with some sick fuck who wants pussy and doesn't know how else to get it.

No one adopted Sniff. We were somewhat overrun with kittens at the time, and that's what was moving. People came in to ooh and coo over the one-pound little skimps, and the adult cats just sat in their cages staring out dully from

behind the bars, not a glimmer of life, no show of adoptability. It was like they knew it just wasn't worth expending the energy.

It was mid-December when the girl herself came in. Arlene. The wind-chill was dipping us into record lows, and everyone and their grandmother was bringing in the family of strays that had been living under their porch since summer, feeding on table scraps, *but now with the snow . . . et cetera, et cetera*. Suffice it to say we were full to capacity and beyond, plus, there was an insidious upper-respiratory thing going around the cat room, and we couldn't get any of them healthy before the germs just came right back around again. I wanted to get cats out of that room.

Arlene came in piled to Nanook proportions in a white parka that looked like it had been trimmed in Sniff-fur. She was padded down, but had a belt cinched around the waist of that Twinkie-foam coat, which made her look like a number 8, and when she reached to her face to pull back some scarves so she could speak, I had a distinct vision of the grim reaper, as if she'd unveil herself to reveal there was nothing there at all.

She did have a head, it turned out, though it made me sick to look at it. It was shrunken, set back there in the recesses of that white furry hood, morbid. She tugged off a pair of knitted Guatemalan mittens and held her blue claws by her mouth as she spoke. "Um," she said. Then, "um" again, and it turned out she couldn't put a word into the air before she'd ummed like that for a full ten minutes, and then had to apologize halfway to heaven when she was done. "Um," she said again, and I settled my chin in my hand and waited for her to conjure up some alternate syllable. "Um . . . I . . . I've been . . . last month . . ." She took a breath. "Do you have a white cat here? Like a month ago, a white Himalayan, Sniffles . . . my mother brought . . ."

"Cat room's down the hall on the right," I told her.

Her face seemed to brighten, at least the bones shifted in an upward direction. "He's here?" she pipped, infinitely excited, as if her long lost love had just arrived at her deathbed.

I nodded, pointed her down the hall, and began to compile the requisite paperwork.

Sometimes when I call the Pet Personal updates into the Community Bulletin I think I should put one in the human Personals for myself, just to see. *Christine is an even-tempered, short-haired brunette who seeks a stable, safe, loving home. She doesn't like to be left alone, is still playful and active at 31, and wants to explore an intense relationship to see if she's capable of loving someone enough to hate them. Women only, please.* But I scan the Personals people place in the Bulletin, and they're all pathetic and I think: I love Cheryl. The Classifieds that break my heart open: *Free black lab puppies to good home.* And: *FOUND by City Park last weekend, tabby male, no tags, yellow collar.* I think maybe we should just adopt another cat. There's too much hatred in the world as it is.

Arlene, when she wasn't in the hospital, lived with her parents in the neighborhood, such as it is. East Third Street dead-ends at the Shelter, which backs on the County Sewage Treatment Center. On our block there are two "adult" "book" stores; a Christian Science reading room; Ball-O-Yarn, the pet supply/knitting supply shop, and a gas station-turned-barbeque joint-turned-dairy mart where middle-school kids hang out in the afternoon playing Asteroids. Arlene might have been anywhere between fifteen and twenty-eight or nine; it was impossible to guess. I don't think she was in school; I wasn't even sure what exactly was wrong with her — cancer, I guessed, maybe even AIDS, something serious — until she started in with the walks and I started putting it all together. The temperature stayed below zero for a good two weeks, but I'd see her out in it every single day. My desk looked onto the street, and I know she did three separate walking sessions each day, morning, mid day and late afternoon, up and down that block, thirty, sixty, ninety laps. Just back and forth on dead-end East Third, corner to corner, bundled into that white snowball coat. And no matter how blackened and sooted and dog-urine-stained the banks of sidewalk snow became, Arlene's coat was always so white it practically glowed. In the winter sunlight she floated past the Shelter windows, across my field of vision again and again and again, like some strange and deathly luminous apparition patrolling our little block.

Mid-January the mother was back, Sniffles under her arm like a bundle of laundry. She handed him over to me first thing and that poor cat just looked like he was saying: *here we go again.*

"She can't take care of herself, let alone something else," the mother announced, as if this dialogue had simply been on pause since the last time we'd seen each other two months before. "Don't let her take this animal back," she instructed me, and she was livid; there was fire in those icy-blue bug eyes, and I wondered how I'd react if it were my daughter killing herself by slow starvation. If I'd look as hateful as Arlene's mother did right then. She truly appeared as if she hated her own daughter. But then her eyes welled up like her heart was going to plop out onto the counter and I thought: it's a fine line between love and hate, and maybe Cheryl's right that it's only the people for whom you feel one that you're capable of feeling the other. "I think," the woman was saying, "if she . . . I . . . when . . . oh god . . ." She slapped at her face as if to break her own emotional state. "Just please," she said, "find someone else to take this cat. Or just don't give it back to her." Her voice was starting to grow threatening again. "It's just going to be like this as long as she's alive," she spat. And here was this woman, standing beneath a "SPAY - IT'S THE HUMANE THING" poster discussing her anorexic child's imminent death, and I wondered that end loomed for her a little like relief.

"Come on Big Boy," I breathed into Sniff's coat of fuzz. "Welcome back."

Another month: in strolls Arlene. It was mid-February, and the weather had mellowed a bit. She still had her hood drawn up, but was minus the seventy-five scarves and mufflers. "Um," she said, pulling off a mitten and panting some repid breath at her finger-bones.

"Sniffles," I said, in lieu of a greeting.

Her face washed in a sort of relief I didn't expect, as if she was taking me on as an ally in all this: the war with her mother over Sniffles.

"I can't give him to you," I said.

She froze for a second, but only for a second. "If there's some time limit on claiming them, I'll pay the adoption fee. . ." she said.

"We have standards potential adopters have to meet before we'll release an animal into their custody," I told her.

"He's my cat," she said.

"It hardly seems in the county's best interest — which is the animal's best interest — to place a cat in the home of someone with a history of abandonment."

"It is not abandonment," she hissed. "I don't bring him in here. You have a problem with people using this place as a kennel, take it up with my parents." She steadied herself against the counter, and I found myself doubting her ability to lift Sniff up at that point, not to mention carry him home.

I reached for the log book, flipped open and started reading aloud Sniff's record, which, I realized, was Arlene's hospitalization record nearly date for date. I looked up and could see the water rising in her eyes. I didn't actually want to make her cry; I had the sense that to lose even one tear's worth of anything from her body could put her over the edge at that point, and I didn't want Arlene dead there on the floor of the Shelter, a chorus of *mews* and *arfs* heralding her way into the Great Beyond.

"Honey," I said, trying my best now to sound gentle, "We've got to know we're putting these animals in stable homes." But my tone was souring even as I spoke. "Do you think about what it does to that cat to get shuttled around this way? Do you stop to consider what the effects of your actions might be on him?"

She looked at me quizzically for a second, any trace of tears retreated back up into her ducts, and I thought of a movie strip, played backwards and speeded up — snow rising from the ground to the sky, people growing smaller instead of bigger as their lives went on, Arlene slithering backwards out through the door she'd just come in, back out into the snow to continue on her walk, scurrying backwards up and down East Third like a leaf getting sucked into a vacuum.

I filled out the papers, doctored the books, and brought Sniff home with me that night. Once you've got four, it's hard to come up with a sound argument against a fifth. Sniff does well with the others too. They're all cats

who've had to do a lot of accommodating in their lives. Sid the Siamese was part of a show cat's litter, and he got ditched by the breeder for a slight coloring irregularity that disqualified him from pure-bred competition. Swanson crawled out of a dumpster at The Golden Corral and into our hearts. Gertie and Alice were from the Shelter here, two old goats — one blind, one missing a paw. No one was going to take them, so we did, and they're just the sweetest ladies in the world. Sniff joined the brood and the circle opened up to make room for him, like a new member at AA. Everyone slides on over, they drag out another chair, pour the coffee, *Hi, my name is Sniff and I've been abandoned.*

Next day, Arlene's back, as expected. "He's my cat," she said. "You can't refuse to let me take him home."

I just looked at her, blank as a slate. "And you're looking for . . .?"

Her eyes narrowed in disbelief and her head tilted like a marionette's.

"A cat?" I reached for the log book. "What'd you say the name was you were looking for?"

"Sniffles," she said.

"Quite a name," I said.

"Sniffles," she told me again, the absurdity of that name absolutely lost on her.

I flipped pages. "Sniffles, Sniffles, Sniffles, oh, here!" I looked up at her. "Oh honey," I said, "I'm sorry. Sniffles, right here. It looks like he's been adopted. Last week, in fact. A real nice family. I remember. Really nice." I smiled apologetically.

"Adopted?" she said, incredulous.

"Maybe you'd be interested in something a little lower maintenance?" I offered. "Snakes make super pets, and you've only got to feed them once a week . . ." But I let it go. Arlene was crying. Then she mumbled something I couldn't hear, hands at her face, and she walked out that door for the last time.

For another week that February Arlene continued her foot patrols of East Third Street. She never came in the Shelter again, never even looked my way, just passed by, back and forth, thirty, sixty, ninety times a day. And then at the end of the week she disappeared. I imagined her with the same look on her face that Sniff had when the mother carried him into the Shelter that last time: *here we go again*, the anorexic getting shuttled off to another hospital, another IV shoved up her arm, another IV ripped out of her arm. Promises of ten pounds made. Promises, as always, broken. I never saw her again, and for all I know she is no longer alive; that seems most likely, I think, though it makes me kind of queasy to think of her dead, to image that she has succeeded at that, if nothing else.

Sniff is a good cat — docile, aloof, independent to the point of oblivion, with the purr of a steamroller and the sleeping habits of a narcoleptic. He plays well with the others when he's in a playful mood. Otherwise, he spends a lot of

time by himself, tucked into a window-seat or up on a staircase, just watching the world go by. It's funny, but I worry about Sniff in a way I have not over any of the other four, or any cat I've kept company with in my life thus far. I wonder what kind of cat he is, Sniff, at heart, and by nature. I worry that he gives himself away indiscriminately: went from Arlene to the Shelter to me and Cheryl without so much as a sneeze, or a hearty piss on some nice rug to say *I've had it up to here with this nomadic life*. The thing is, I worry that I'll come home from the Shelter one day and find him gone, wandered off with any partially warm-bodied stranger bearing a can of Friskies Buffer, or dangling a scrap of string in front of his nose. But more than that, I fear that he'll just go on his own. That'll he'll get bored, or restless and pull up stakes, or even that he'll just follow a butterfly down the road and keep on going. I am afraid that his disappearance would devastate me, inexplicably, irrationally. I think that I do not know what I would do if Sniff were to pick himself up and move along. I don't think it matters whether he loves just to love, or loves enough to hate too. That's Cheryl's theory of the way things work, and I've decided I don't agree. Mine is the only theory that seems to make sense to me, and I guess that's pretty self-justifying, but what can I do? The thing is, I think Sniff is a loner. Me and Cheryl and Sid and Swanson and Gertie and Alice and Bebe — we're couplers, groupies, communal souls, and we'll stick with the brood. It's the safe place to be. But Sniff — I think Sniff's a loner. Like Arlene, maybe. Unlike us, at least. And I think maybe I'm jealous of that kind of personal freedom, envious of a body that can just take off running. It's a weightless abandon, so foreign that I almost can't even be envious. I can almost only just be afraid, and a little bit awed at the same time.

William Harrison

LIGHT YEARS AWAY: REMEMBERING A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The year is 1956 and I'm standing before the theological school at Vanderbilt University, a red brick building across 21st Street from the campus library. Nashville traffic flashes by and in the occasional silences I can hear the pock of tennis balls on nearby courts. Although I've received a scholarship for study and although I've made a vague career choice — to teach comparative religion at the college level — I'm not exactly sure what I'm doing.

A decade later courses in theology and religion will have mostly vanished from America's mainstream academic life, but standing there at curbside I can't know what the future holds. If I make good grades, I'm thinking, I can possibly become a university professor.

My only real worry is that even a liberal theological school like this one is a seminary for guys who want careers as pastors of Protestant churches. What will they be like? Earnest types who are closed minded and intellectually daffy? Pious and humorless?

So I stand there, my back turned to the great Vanderbilt Library as I face my immediate destiny, the red bricked theological school, wondering if I'm turning my back on real learning, the library, as if I'm turning my back on Fort Knox and all its gold to consider, sort of, a career in alchemy.

During those first weeks of classes I attend a chapel service where the seminarians — predominately male, and sturdy baritones — sing a rousing version of "Rise Up O Men of God!" It's a moving hymn and the performance is impressive, but later, alone, I think about the virile piety of it all and decide I can't ever attend chapel again. At twenty-two years of age I'm trying to sort things out, and piety seems out of place here. The wild notion that one is tapping into God's intellectual wavelength seems to undermine the validity of any real scholarship or objective research.

In a short time, too, I see that the faculty seems divided: the pious, faithful, earnest professors over here and the skeptical professors over there. The bravest of the skeptics appear to struggle as if they're sentimental about the concept of God, yet grappling hard with ways to keep him in their highly educated heads.

I attend a theology class with one of the more prestigious professors, a pudgy little Scandinavian whose teaching style — he hovers above us on a raised lectern like a pulpit — is overcharged dramatics. He narrows his eyes at us, then gazes up into the sunlight streaming from the high windows as if he means to catch a glimpse of the divine, then makes slow gestures with his tiny hands —

fat fingers spread wide — as if he's endowed with a special wizardry. One morning he lists, in order, the world's greatest living theologians. He places Paul Tillich first, and ranks himself second. A joke, I decide, and I break into a cackle of laughter, but the little Scandinavian is grimly serious and glares down at me. Nobody else shares my response, so I sit there, my laughter trailing off, exposed.

Urged to attend a church service with some new acquaintances, I go out to a big suburban complex with its white spire to hear Frank Drowota deliver a peppy sermon to his wealthy middle class congregation. The pomposity here is thick and heavy — as it is with all the other big local churches — with overdressed ladies, deacons in stiff collars, a robed choir, and the pastor decked out in a robe trimmed with purple velvet, a bit more showy than anyone else's.

Especially poignant is that this is a time of real upheaval in the American South: the freedom riders have made their first invasion, the lunch counter sit-in movement is beginning, and the struggle for real integration of the races is on. After a lull since the 1954 ruling from the Supreme Court and the directive to integrate the schools, American blacks and a few white allies are protesting and campaigning to get moving with racial progress. Across town at Fisk University, a major black institution, Martin Luther King has appeared to lead the student body in singing "We Shall Overcome," and lately a few less peaceful advocates of the cause are raising their fists in the air.

But the white churches — and our theological school — are silent.

From the Carolinas to Texas not one prominent minister raises his voice in the cause. Not a single Southern celebrity — not one famous football player, actor, educator or politician — steps forward. Only a couple of valiant newspaper editors take a stand. It's a shocking lesson in cultural ethics and a special shame falls on the white churches as they stay aloof from the great moral cause of their time: silent, smug with their own congregations, and adding each passing week to the social irrelevance they will quickly achieve and from which they will never actually recover.

One looks for groups, cliques or individuals with whom one can be comfortable.

First come the connoisseurs. A high church sophistication informs this group. Many of them are graduates of Ivy League schools, articulate, aware of the swirling social issues if not immediately engaged, conversive in the arts, and believers, generally, that a higher learning and civility will win out. They marry, throw dinner parties, make arch comments, and keep their eyes open for careers in the wealthy suburban churches back in their home states. Some of the more clearly ambitious hope — with superior grades — to land teaching jobs in a college or university, sort of my plan. At their apartments copies of Dr. Zhivago or volumes by Dylan Thomas adorn the bookshelves and Mozart or Brubeck

spill out of the hi-fi sets.

Since I'm a Texan, considerably more rough edged, profane, yet somebody who reads novels, this somehow qualifies me for a number of invitations. As we drink wine and wonder if the Democrats will survive Eisenhower, they think of me as someone who will slip away into an English department, teach, maybe write, and won't remain as a fixture in their world.

One of them, call him Owen, invites me to his wedding party up in Illinois, so one weekend several of us pile into cars and travel to a distant university town where he will take a bride draped in lace and money. Owen is assured, we learn, of a job as the associate pastor of the big church now that his marriage into one of its richer families seals the bargain.

We arrive late None Friday evening after a long day's trip.

To our delight several of us in the wedding party, both male and female, will be housed in the same large Victorian mansion. The night begins with a late supper of cold cuts and white wine and as we stand around the butcher block table in the kitchen spreading mayonnaise and cycling one another a sexual electricity hums in the air. Grinning bachelors and pretty girls: we flirt over the rims of our wine glasses while our hostess, a pretty young wife whose wealthy husband, a lawyer, is out of town on business, assigns us to various bedrooms. I get the last assignment, the small single room at the top of a winding staircase that begins in the kitchen pantry. The hostess apologizes that the room is up three narrow flights and expresses the hope that I can manage my bag and that I'll be comfortable. As she says all this our eyes meet in something undeniable, but no one notices because everyone else, breathless with possibilities, is locked in flirtation, too.

That night the old house creaks and groans with movement and activity. I lie awake thinking about what passed between me and our hostess. My mistake, I decide. Nah, these people are guarded, nice, upper crust churchgoers.

But around two o'clock my door opens and the lawyer's wife quietly enters. She pauses at the foot of my bed in that tiny room as she unbuttons her robe.

"What's somebody like you doing in Owen's wedding party?" she asks me in a whisper.

"Why not?" I reply, and I watch her beautiful nakedness in the yellow light slanting in from the doorway.

"Because Owen never has any friends like you. Because you're just not one of them," she says, laughing, and she casually comes to my side and pulls back the covers. We are in a turret, high up in the house, and a cold springtime wind rattles the shutters.

Her skin is chilled, cold to my touch, and, my, I'm thinking, the world is a big place to be worldly in, and maybe I'm not like the others. As I stroke her body, warming her, we're in an antic mood, laughing, touched by farce and a breathless, adulterous, sudden irony. As we continue to laugh and roll around on each other, a greater seriousness seems to arrive: this is a secular comedy in

all its wonder, human and surprising, more real and more spellbinding than anything that's been going on in my life.

Another group: the gays.

When I begin writing a play the news reaches a flamboyant young executive who works for the Division of Higher Education for the Methodist Church, a large bureaucracy housed near the seminary. Chuck wears expensive suits, talks art, decorates his apartment with pole lamps and strings of colored bottles, and often tries to repress a high, **silly laugh**. We go out for a hamburger one evening and he confesses, happily, that he's gay.

"Exactly how is that?" I ask, chewing.

"Gay," he repeats with a **smug** awareness that I've never before heard this term. "It's **the** word we use."

"We who?"

"Homosexuals," he says, **smirking**.

I pay elaborate attention to my hamburger, then finally manage to ask, "Won't the Methodists fire you if they find out?"

"Absolutely," he tells me, and his **laugh** erupts.

It becomes an unsolicited confidence between us and soon Chuck lists for me, unprompted, all those of that persuasion at the theological school. For awhile our paths continue to cross, then I meet a pleasant campus minister, Bill Bloom, and this sets off a friendly argument between Chuck and me about Bill's sexual preference.

"He's straight," I insist, and Chuck **sniffs** in response.

Years later I learn the truth about both Chuck and Bill, both of whom suffered touching exits from their service to the church. Chuck's girlish laughter, his unwillingness to disguise who and what he was, his **insouciance** and flamboyance, resulted in a brief scandal, so he went to New York, settled into the business world, became a political activist, and lived in Greenwich Village. Bill, on the other hand, was determined to live in a quiet and less obvious style, yet wanted to work within the traditions of the church, so spent twenty years more struggling with a Protestantism that wanted nothing to do with gays. He went to Europe, worked with refugee programs, and finally — after a long struggle with himself — came out of the closet. Having chosen this public honesty he was forced out, too, and gave up his work and his **ministry**.

Both Chuck and Bill had sad journeys. Their sojourns are part of a tradition of intolerance and the church's long history in the narrow perversion of love.

Many of us growing up and searching through our education and experience get embarrassed out of religion. The rhetoric of faith one day becomes, clearly, the language of superstition and we can no longer take part in

a discourse that seems hypocritical and cockeyed.

Clarity arrives like a white horse wearing a bell.

Having seen it, we can't pretend we haven't.

* * *

I play tennis with a professor, Langdon Gilkey, on a **humid** autumn evening in my second year. The courts reek with the scent of magnolia. The two of us chatted recently in the school hallway and fell into a conversation about tennis. Although we don't know one another well, we agreed to meet for a game. He's a man in his forties, thick in the shoulders, **slumped** a bit, with the profile of an actor. Like his game, his clothes are classic: all whites, new bright sneakers, a tennis sweater with those narrow blue and red stripes at the neck and sleeves — brought along this evening out of tribute, I decide, to the aristocratic game played back east in cooler weather. I'm in my usual sporting rags: red shorts, high topped sneakers, an old t-shirt, and I play like a loud Texan, an out-of-costume cowboy armed with a racquet.

Gilkey suffered for months in a Japanese prison camp during the war and his view of life is grim: man is weak, even evil, and we grope for God as our hope in the darkness. It's the traditional Calvinistic view that underscores most Protestant thought yet I also sense that Gilkey is a hard realist and scholar and that if he believes in God at all he believes in his own complicated and sophisticated hybrid.

He wins easily this evening, but Nonce hits a short lob and I stand at the net, waiting.

"Gotcha now, you sonavabitch!" I yell, and pound the shot out of the court. My outburst stops play on nearby courts and Gilkey, grinning, advances to the net as a rather new recognition grows between us.

After the match we sit at the edge of the court talking as he wipes away his perspiration with a folded white towel. "What are you going to do with yourself?" he asks, probably hoping that I don't intend to become anyone's church pastor.

"Aw hell, I don't know," I answer truthfully. "And maybe I can't figure it out as long as I'm in this place."

"Most of the time I don't know if I'm in the right place myself," he admits, and he talks about how he finds the language of the faith inadequate, how he can't bring himself to use certain words or phrases anymore.

As the twilight darkens we sit together and talk until the street lamps begin to glow. Although neither of us know or suspect it, we await the oncoming dark of fundamentalism that will soon engulf this world of ours, this age of liberal theological schools, real scholarship, and educated discourse. In a short time these seminaries will shrink away and many inquiring, skeptical students will vanish. American religion, largely, will fall to the hands of the hucksters, the

Falwells and others, with a retrograde intellectual and political agenda. But sitting here on the tennis court we can't know this. We're caught in an educational time warp: a lanky, confused, out of place student and his honest, troubled and enlightened professor.

By way of avoiding all the seminary courses in pastoral care and Biblical exegesis I take a number of elective courses in philosophy and literature and in time become a grader for a gaunt professor in the English Department, Donald Davidson, who is a member of a group of writers including Robert Penn Warren and Andrew Lytle who once studied under John Crowe Ransom at Vanderbilt. The Fugitives by this time are an austere, witty, slightly inebriated platoon of senior authors and they return to the campus for a reunion, a few days of recollections, anecdotes, and public literary opinions. I find these Southern gentlemen a little too tightly wrapped in kudzu, bourbon, self congratulation and drawling careerism — although Warren's novel *All the King's Men*, I believe, is an American masterpiece and his talent is clearly above that of the others. After a few days attending their panel discussions, readings, and speeches I begin to feel strangely emancipated from the godly air of the theological school and during the events of the reunion I fall in with a splinter group of the English Department: a crew of beer drinkers high on testosterone, hyperbole, and their own first literary efforts. Among my new pals are John Yount, Jim Whitehead, Harry Minetree, Tom McNair, and a few other eccentrics who circulate between Mack's Cafe — an establishment with a C rating from the Nashville Board of Health where no female or frat boy will set foot — and the ivy covered walls of the main campus.

In a few short weeks after fly fishing in the middle Tennessee trout streams with Yount and howling at the moon with Whitehead and others, my attachments to the theological school fall away into gentle relief, indifference, and occasional ridicule.

My temperament, I assert to myself, is that of a writer: a spy, in but not exactly of the world he inhabits, skeptical, and devoted only to an aesthetic. I'm still in my early twenties, remember, so the nature of that aesthetic is unclear and ambiguous, sort of like God.

I join an amateur theatrical group, acting, directing, and finally writing a play about a travelling evangelist and his entourage — including a Sadie Burke clone lifted in spirit from Warren's novel about Willie Stark. I also write bad poetry. I try to cultivate a taste for whiskey. I touch and flirt with the girls backstage. I try to write a short story and grow addicted to the novels and stories of Joseph Conrad. I long to travel in Europe, but can't afford decent clothes or a used car. On a trip to Texas I once again meet my high school girlfriend — divorced now with a baby girl — and a new sensuality and strange devotion develops, so that we marry not long afterward.

Caught up in these personal and intellectual changes I defect from religious

studies. For one thing, language becomes more and more important to me. I can speak of my inner life — my intellectual journey as I shake off more and more of my ignorance — but I will never use the word *spiritual* again because of its agonizing connotations.

Years pass. For a long time my attitude toward those with strong religious convictions remains deferential, then I harden. Most global wars are religious in nature, I remind myself, and the psychology of belief always seems harmful, even destructive, to so many individuals. All around me the believers in ghosts, UFOs, angels, astrology, and offbeat religions hype their confused thinking with miraculous claims, suspicious charisma, fuzzy language, prejudice, and a frequently nasty piety that borders on a venomous hatred of others who don't share their opinions and beliefs.

As time goes on I publish my first stories and begin a modest literary career at a state university.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great philosopher and phenomenologist, said that language when most perfectly used creates image. That truth, I feel, lies at the heart of all great journalism, law, the literary arts, and history itself. It suggests a high calling for observation rather than mystical speculation, emotional assertion or pious argument. And it became the cornerstone of the modest work I do.

The insensitive materialist is a fool, of course, for man is often called to seriousness, to the inner life, and to questions of values. But for myself and others the link between the theological and the ethical will forever be broken. Neither the gods nor the angels inform us. The processes of thought and communication are complex and difficult and there won't be any divine shortcuts.

As I grow older and enter the last chapters of my life I sense another truth, too: the great religious thinkers of the future won't call themselves religious at all. I look forward to a time when the word *religion*, so misleading because of all its emotional and historical baggage, grows obsolete. After all, we've advanced beyond the crude symbolic language of Freud and the early psychologists and now regard them much in the way we regard the priests of voodoo. At last we're learning how to treat the emotionally disturbed and it's usually a blend of chemical and behavioral therapy not the suspicious and self-indulgent miasma of psychoanalysis.

So as time passes we replace our less useful and meaningful words, symbols, rituals and systems of belief.

Our scientists now, for instance — like the astrophysicist Stephen Hawking — work hard at turning both language and mathematics into image, so that we can actually see how our lives and universe work. Even so, we still know little about either deep space or the sub-microscopic dark life of our own planet. Our

oceans remain largely unexplored. The molecule waits to be harnessed. The human brain is just revealing many of its physical secrets — never mind the far reaches of memory, dreams, and thought that the brain processes. We're also just tracking our genetic codes. Mankind is still in its infancy, just opening its eyes, as we try to abandon the old mysticisms, sorceries, and whimsical gods. The awesome mystery of the world lies in what is seen, not unseen, but we are slow to learn this.

Would I go back to that curbside on 21st Street and consider giving my life and thought to theology and religion? No way. Perhaps I could find some scholarly spot for myself, but one wonders if, say, that wouldn't be very much like pondering alchemy or flat earth concepts.

No, let the old vocabularies pass away. Instead, one keeps a new faith: that occasionally clarity arrives, the white horse wearing a bell that can't be denied.

Terese Svoboda

TOM-TOM

Dusk, and the beat is what I kneel beside, a beat that comes up beside the bed beating against my glow-in-the-dark beads I paid for myself, the beat, beat, beat that is not prayers in a row, over and over, or even how the crucifix whacks the bedside if I let it, in rhythm. No, this beat tells tourists in a circle three miles away, if any tourists be in that circle, to come and pay, their forks just emptied and the check on its way with its toothpicks and chalky mints I like so much. This beat tells them to reload their Chevies and station wagons as quick as they can or else make a circle of their own, with their own drum I've heard they use to drown out theirs, say the ones on an AM station, loud, with the tailgate down. Yes, it tells them instead to turn their mode of transportation around and bullseye in to that beat, to arrow in on it and pay. I don't mean pay as in an eye for an eye or even government money I've heard they get, but the straightforward exchange of money for trinkets, these trinkets no longer what we have on our side like in New York, that island we paid for, oh no, these trinkets have moved, maybe slowly but not shyly, onto their side, and now tourists pay, happily, tourists stuffed from all their dinner, driven to drive right up to the tom-tom.

At the time it sounds like John-John to me, some special boy's name, some boy different from us. We are not tourists. No. We have not seen the ones who beat and why and for what money. It is the money that keeps us out. Who would pay good money to hear what we can already hear without paying? Even seeing is something else. We can see who beats all night, all day down at the filling station and sometimes out at the dump which is where the river starts to flatten out, its banks being good for things in excess and those who drum feeling bad or overboard in the drinking department.

We can see but I can't. I am still young enough to barely see out the window over the bed on my knees with my crucifix glowing in the coming dark in my room, still six Hail Marys from the end of my time of not seeing, six Hail Marys and a couple more May Days that is, and all I can see from my struggle to elbow a place next to the car window mornings at the gas station, is someone with a suntan and a scowl.

But every night after my time on my knees when we are all sleeping but really sneaking out the window, letting in bugs as we ourselves are got out but not the bugs we sneak out for, the lightning bugs dying of DDT all around us, one blink and then off, the blinks we want to take back inside that go off and on with the beat but won't go on again, the ones we want to continue like the drums. But we sneak out anyway, in light pajamas, pajamas almost glowing like

the bugs in the half moonlight and after we scare all the bugs to death there is just tag left, the singing of Ollie, Ollie Oxen Free to the beat, the wondering who is this Ollie? Every night the beat is supposed to make us sleep and not run, silent, on cold grass, grass cold with old electricity from bug bodies until this song about Ollie comes out and we are caught and cannot ask, mornings, about the money it takes to see.

A picketed place squares all sides of what we do see, its tall, sharp pointed logs in rows that a bird dropping out of the sky or someone sneaking in will get in his ribs in a minute, so close together that you can't see in in any regular way between them. You have to pay. Why should we pay, says my mother, for a beat that's not ours, not our hearts'?

I don't feel the beat closer and closer like in the movies, because of her question. I don't fear it. It beats, nights, without me, it beats around and around the piano beats when I play at dusk while the summer gets later, it beats through the sudden sweat of boys up close and hiding in the same bush or while I scrub pans burnt clear through they take so long to clean I am still scrubbing when the beating ends.

But there is a night when we go. We skip prayers and fit into the car and go. Maybe it is cousins in town and no movie, maybe it is the heat and no a.c., no fan large enough, maybe it is the every day dull turning restless like the junebug in a buzz to light. Maybe I say something about seeing that someone hears.

We pay and go in.

We pass everything first. We pass it all because our father doesn't dust, as my mother says and so we can't buy up the gift shop, the trinkets that say where we are as if we'll forget, the ones I suppose that when people first came they wanted. They want to forget, my parents.

You can't forget the face painted two or three cars high stuck onto the pickets outside in boards. everyone remembers this too-tall face seen from the car everyday. It is where you turn, the face you turn away from, down our street. It is a direction you give and remember, not fear. My parents can't forget it. That face is fierce with feathers attached and to enter where the beat starts you go out of the room with the trinkets and through it, to the beat which is now in your bones, rattling your no-cavities bone parts, together. I go through fine but the others do not, they balk and they cry, their crying means they fear that face, they know what the beating is saying, just not what the money means when you use it to get the beating going.

The crying gets swallowed down by request so we can enter. By then everyone else is in a squat and in the very dark because the lights we leave behind that make the face so fearsome, sting with the brightness of dad's flashlight which is quick off. We too stumble into squats and watch a dance which I could do. I see I could wear those different parts of animals, their feet and their skins, and move my own feet like that. I watch around, since it is in a

circle we are squatting in and easy to look around because there's a lot of logs that are lit by gas with a painted-on fire in front, those blue flames, and I see it all.

A dancer whose feet seldom lift or lift to the beat, lets my mother know he is lifting them, when he does lift them, for her, by leaning so low her way. She has his hair and color but not his family or even country. Her country is fair but her coast hosted someone from warmer, darker places who loved hers up which made her a mirror of him, a template or answer, a beauty in the booty. But because of him lifting his feet for her and leaning so close and really being from here and not from her place, she will not answer him, she leaves in a huff with all of us.

Maybe they leap or hook themselves to chains or sing tearful songs that night in the late dusk. The beat increases as we leave, after we get our money back from what we pay, my father getting loud about it. We all go sad going home, there is crying again as we pass the face which is no direction anymore but a face that reminds us of how it is not our mother's.

Still, I leap when we get home, I leap because I know now that's what you do with a beat so close like that, you use fancy steps, a one and a two. They don't always move the way we see them, like that, in rows with their faces down, saying and not singing. No one but me knows this and I dance what they are really supposed to dance, with the fireflies, like I really know.



New Orleans Review congratulates Charlotte Forbes whose story "Sign" (*New Orleans Review*, Volume 24, Number 1, Spring 1998) has been selected as one of twenty stories for inclusion in the O'Henry Award series of best American short stories for 1999.



Michael Atkinson has won a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, had work selected for *The Best American Poetry* 1993, and has published poems in many magazines, including *Crazyhorse*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Ontario Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Chelsea*, *Chicago Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *New Letters*, and others.

Jake Berry's most recent books include *Drafts of the Sorcery* (Potes & Poets, 1998) and the second volume of the long poem *Brambu Drezi* (Pantograph, 1998). Also two recent CDs, *Shadow Resolve* (Front Porch, 1997) and *Trouble in Your House* (Front Porch, 1998) with Bare Knuckles, a duo with Wayne Sides. He lives in Florence, Alabama.

Born in England, **Anne Blonstein** has lived in Basel, Switzerland, since 1983, where she now works as a freelance editor, translator, and writer. Her poetry and prose poetry have been published in journals and anthologies in Britain, North America, and Switzerland. Other pieces in the series "the butterflies and the burnings" have appeared or are forthcoming in, among others, *Collages & Bricolages*, *Colorado Review*, *Mesechabe*, *Tessera*, and *Weber Studies*.

Jonathan Brannen was born in Savannah, Georgia. He grew up in Florida and resided much of his adult life in Tennessee. His most recent collection of poetry is *No Place To Fall* (Sink Press, 1999). The poems published here are from the sequence *Deaccessioned Landscapes* which is forthcoming from Chax Press. His short stories have appeared in *Asylum Annual*, *Black Ice*, *Central Park*, *Fiction International* and elsewhere. He currently resides in Morris, Minnesota where he edits Standing Stones Press.

Dave Brinks, provocateur and guide terroristique of the American Spoken Language, is a central figure in the thriving New Orleans poetry world. He co-founded the weekly Madpoet Express open reading in 1996, fronts the Free Speech Orchestra jazz-poetry project, and operates Trembling Pillow Press and *Tsetse* magazine.

Gerry Cannon teaches art at Loyola University.

Christopher Chambers lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where he edits the *Black Warrior Review*. His work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *Quarterly West*, *Mid-American Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Confrontation*, and *BOMB Magazine*.

Andrei Codrescu is a prolific poet, essayist, memorist, and fiction writer. He is a regular commentator on National Public Radio and has written and starred in the award-winning movie, *Road Scholar*. His novel, *The Blood Countess* (1995) was a national bestseller.

Lawless Crow lives in Atlanta. He publishes his Speaks in public places, like telephone poles and restrooms.

Joel Dailey has published 13 books, the latest of which is *Lower 48* (Lavender Ink, 1999: \$9 to 5568 Woodlawn Pl., New Orleans, LA, 70148)). He is the editor of *Fell Swoop: The All Bohemian Review*. He lives in New Orleans.

Christopher Davis' second book of poetry, *The Patriot*, was published in the spring of 1998 by the University of Georgia Press. His third collection will be titled *A History of the Only War*.

A. di Michele lives in Jackson, MS., where he edits Semiquasi Press, and works as an evaluator for the Mississippi Humanities Council and as a woodworker. Recent works: *The Mollifier* (Synaesthesia Press, San Francisco) and *NAY-PAY-LORON (Fell Swoop #42, New Orleans)*. His texts and/or poems have appeared in: *ZYX*, *Anemone*, *Caffeine*, *ant(x5)*, *Immediatiste*, *Bogg*, *Mesechabe*, *Lost&Found Times*, *Meat Epoch*, etc. (mempath@hotmail.com)

Richard Doherty lives in Dallas and teaches photography in the art department at Tarrant County College. His work has been widely exhibited and is housed in many permanent collections including The Amon Carter Museum in Ft. Worth, The Art Institute of Chicago, and The Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris

Maudelle Driskell is an MFA student at Georgia State University and a literary editor with *Atlanta Review*.

John Elsberg is a Virginia writer who has published a mix of fairly traditional and experimental poems in many journals. His latest books are *Offsets* (Kings Estate Press) and *A Week in the Lake District* (Red Moon Press). He is also the editor of *Bogg* magazine.

Brett Evans is a New Orleans expat. living in Philadelphia. He has new work in *Bluebook Poetry*. He was included in Sun and Moon's *Gertrude Stein Awards in Innovative Poetry* (1993-4). His books include *Tang Dynasty* (Fell Swoop, 1996).

Gina Entrebe has published work in *Misc.Proj.* and has work forthcoming in the next magazine from 3rdness Press. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia and dreams of Paris.

Susan Facknitz lives in Massanetta Springs, Virginia. She teaches poetry writing and contemporary literature at James Madison University. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry East*, *New Orleans Review*, and *Louisiana Literature*. "Girl in Box" is the title poem from a manuscript in progress.

Dennis Formento is editor of *Mesechabe: The Journal of Surreregionalism* & publishes the Surreregional Press, which will bring out John Sinclair's long-awaited "elongated work in verse" *Fattening Frogs for Snakes: A Delta Sound Suite* and a memoir of *NOLA Express*, the South's leading underground newspaper of the Vietnam War period, *Portraits from Memory: New Orleans in the Sixties*, by *NOLA Express* editor Darlene Fife. He is also seeking information on the poets, publishers, musicians and artists who populated the New Orleans scene from 1950-1975 for his book, *Outsiders*, an oral history of the New Orleans underground. Anyone who wishes to contact him regarding this project may do so at 1539 Crete St., New Orleans, LA 70119; daf09@gnofn.org.

Skip Fox is a poet and professor at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. He has published three books of poetry: *Kabul under Siege*, *Wallet*, and *Fighting Kiwis*, and has published poetry in such magazines as *Exquisite Corpse*, *House Organ*, *Hambone*, *OASii*,

Celestine Frost is a Charleston, South Carolina expatriot now living in New York. Her most recent book (1997) was published by Logodacdalus. Earlier books were published by Spectacular Diseases, Dusty Dog, and New Rivers.

Greg Fuchs was born and raised in New Orleans. He co-edited the *New Delta Review* (Baton Rouge) with Brett Evans. He curated art exhibitions at Small Press Traffic, San Francisco. He is the author of *Uma Ternura* (Canvas and Comphania, Portugal, 1998) and *Came Like It Went* (Buck Downs Books, Washington DC, 1999). Twice monthly he hosts a reading series at the Highwire Gallery (Philadelphia). He lives and works in New York City as a writer and photographer.

Lee Meitzen Grue is a poet and fiction writer, author of the short story collection *Goodbye Silver, Silver Cloud*, and of the book of poems *In the Sweet Balance of the Flesh*. She has received an NEA fellowship in fiction, awards from the Deep South Writers Conference, and a PEN Syndicated Fiction Prize.

Bob Grumman is a substitute teacher at Charlotte High School in Punta Gorda, Florida, who knocks out a poem or two a year and regular poetry-review columns for *Small Press Review* and *Lost & Found Times*. His otherstream publishing outfit, the Runaway Spoon Press, is almost a dozen years old, and he now runs a poetry/poetics website, *Comprepoetica*, as well.

Nancy Harris has coordinated the weekly Sunday literary readings at the Maple Leaf Bar since the death of Everette Maddox in 1989. She lives in Carrollton with 3 dogs and 4 cats. Her first book of poems, *The Ape Woman Story*, was published in 1989 by Pirogue Publishing. Recently her work has appeared in *Hawai'i Review*, *From A Bend in the River* and *The Double Dealer Redux*.

William Harrison is a novelist and short story writer who recently retired as one of the founding professors of the MFA program at the University of Arkansas. He has also written for the screen (*Rollerball*, *Mountains of the Moon*), and published a selection of short fiction this year.

Lindsay Hill: Graduate of Bard College. Former career in banking. More recently worked as a public housing volunteer. Four books of poetry published, most recently *Kill Series* (Arundal Press Los Angeles) and *NajenFerno* (Vatic Hum, San Francisco). Work published widely including *Sulfur*, *Caliban*, *Central Park*, *To* and others. Much recent work has been translated into Dutch and published in various journals there. Living in Nashville.

David Huerta one of the most renowned poets of the second half of this century, besides being a translator, essayist and journalist. He received the Premio Carlos Pellicer for his book *Historia* in 1990.

Rebecca Hyman is Director of the Program for the Study of Women and Gender and Assistant Professor of English at Oglethorpe University. Her work is forthcoming in *Mirage/Periodical*. In addition to writing poetry, she is writing a book about nineteenth

and twentieth century nervous diseases.

Marla Jernigan is a failed painter and futile sculptor who has only come to poetry in the last few years. She has only one poem that she has not destroyed, a selection of which is included here. Perhaps one day she will have another.

Greg Kelley was born and raised in The Other Southern State: Florida. With degrees from Florida State and Emory Universities, his interests include private life, public discourse, British romanticism, and the blues. Kelley teaches English at The Galloway School in Atlanta.

Bill Lavender teaches English and directs The Prague Summer Seminars at the University of New Orleans. His poems, essays, and short stories have appeared in numerous journals and magazines, including *Contemporary Literature*, *Poetics Today*, *New Orleans Review*, *Fell Swoop*, *Mesechabe*, and *108*. He is a contributing editor of *New Orleans Review*, guest editor for "An Other South," and sole proprietor of Lavender Ink press.

Hank Lazer's most recent books of poetry are *As It Is* (Diaeresis Chapbooks, 1999), *3 of 10* (Chax Press, 1996), and *Early Days of the Lang Dynasty* (Meow Press, 1996). With Charles Bernstein, he edits the Modern and Contemporary Poetics series for the University of Alabama Press. His two volume collection of critical writings on contemporary poetry, *Opposing Poetics*, was published in 1996 by Northwestern University Press. Lazer is Assistant Vice President for the University of Alabama.

Jim Leftwich, born in Charlottesville, VA, moved around a bit, but eventually returned to Charlottesville, where he is co-editor, with Ken Harris, of *Juxta* and *Juxta/Electronic*.

Gary Lilley is a poet and playwright from the coastal plains of North Carolina. He has lived and worked in the D.C. area since 1988 when he was discharged from the U.S. Navy. He was a 1996 recipient of a D.C. Commission on the Arts Fellowship for poetry. Gary is a former member of the Washington, D.C. WritersCorps and a current member of The Black Rooster Workshop.

JohnLowther: born in a shoe and raised on ketchup his socks are tight his rhymes wretched and has been associated with the APG (atlanta poetry group— above/below) and is willing to be implicated in the spreading scandal/edits *108*.

Doug MacCash, former curator of visual arts at the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, is currently art critic for *The Times Picayune*.

M. Magoolahgan works in Atlanta as Managing Editor for a technical writing firm. "Annual Spin" is composed of song titles and phrases taken from two CDs by the Spinanes. A chapbook, *Mag nets*, is available from PaperBrain Press.

Camille Martin is a New Orleans poet and translator. Two collections of her poems are forthcoming: *magnus loop* (Chax Press) and *Sesame Kiosk* (Lavender Ink).

Jorge Aguilar Mora is a poet, novelist, essayist, translator, whose radically original

thought pervades his entire work. His most recent book of poetry is *Stabat Mater*. He has written important critical works on Octavio Paz and the Mexican Revolution and has translated Ingmar Bergman, Raymond Queneau and Gilles Deleuze.

Myriam Moscona is a poet and television commentator, author of *Ultimo jardín* and of *Las visitantes* which received the Aguascalientes National Poetry Prize. She is the translator (with Adriana González) of the award winning translation of William Carlos Williams' *The Music of the Desert*.

Kay Murphy teaches Creative Writing at the University of New Orleans. Her most recent book is *Belief Blues* (Portals Press, 1998).

Michael Murray has poetry forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review* and *Mockingbird*, and fiction forthcoming in *Flyway*. His work has appeared in *The Hawaii Review*, *The Quarterly*, *Route One*, and *The Threepenny Review*.

Bill Myers was born in Detroit but has lived in New Orleans since 1981. He won the Tennessee Williams Festival Award in 1987, edited poetry for the University of New Orleans literary journal in 1988-9, and competed on the New Orleans Slam team at the national Poetry Competition in San Francisco in 1993.

Paul Naylor's recent poetry has appeared in *Boxkite*, *Chicago Review*, *Cross-Cultural Poetics*, and *Hambone*. *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*, a study of Susan Howe, Nathaniel Mackey, Lyn Hejinian, Kamau Brathwaite, and M. Nourbese Philip, will be published by Northwestern University Press in August, 1999. Rumor has it he teaches at The University of Memphis.

Thisbe Nissen is a graduate of Oberlin College and The Iowa Writers' Workshop. A 1998-99 James Michener Fellow, her stories have appeared in *Story*, *Seventeen*, *North American Review*, *The Journal*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Wisconsin Review* and other journals, including *Atlantic Unbound*, *The Atlantic Monthly's* on-line magazine. Her collection, *Out Of The Girls' Room And Into The Night*, in which "The Animal's Best Interest" is included, won the 1999 John Simmons Short Fiction Award and is due out in fall '99 from The University of Iowa Press.

James Nolan, a New Orleans native, is a poet, fiction writer, essayist, and translator. His collections of poetry are *Why I Live in the Forest* and *What Moves Is Not the Wind*. He has translated Pablo Neruda (*Stones of the Sky*) and the Spanish poet Jaime Gil de Biedma (*Longing*). His poetry was awarded an NEA fellowship.

Ben Pasikoff is a retired industrial engineer who lists his "pursuits" as "chess, poetry, survival."

Mark Prejsnar lives in Atlanta where he edits the magazine *Misc. Proj.* His latest publications include *Syntactics 2* (Itsynccast) and *Kenning 3*. Other work is forthcoming in *Kenning 4*, *Situation*, *Lower Limit Speech* and *Juxta*.

Niyi Osundare, Nigerian poet, playwright and essayist, has won many awards including the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the Noma Award, Africa's most

prestigious literary prize. He is professor of English at the University of New Orleans.

José Emilio Pacheco is the leading Mexican poet of his generation, and a prolific writer, translator and scholar. He was awarded the José Asunción Silva Prize for the best book of poetry to appear in Spanish between 1990 and 1995.

Randy Prunty lives in Atlanta with his wife and daughter. These two poems are from a work titled "Van Gogh Talks" which is a series of meditations on a Van Gogh landscape. The first line in each stanza can also be read by reading the first word in each line.

Alex Rawls: Lux 2 br, 2 ba, apt in renov hist house. 2nd flr. front gallery, cen a/h, all elec kit, hdwd flrs. \$850/mo. 633-1299.

Christel Reges was born in Germany, raised in Virginia, completed graduate work in fiction at Western Michigan University, and lives in Grand Haven, MI, with her husband, sons, daughters, cats, birds and rat. Her work has appeared in the *Tennessee Review*.

David Thomas Roberts is a writer, painter, and composer/pianist. In addition to numerous poetry publications, he has shown his paintings widely, and has produced two CD's of contemporary ragtime music.

Josefa Salmon is the chair of the foreign language department at Loyola University.

James Sanders, lives in Atlanta, is generally averse to bios, 26, 6'4", 190 lbs, and does not own a dog yet. His favorite food is cheetos, and his favorite color is red.

M. Sarki gets a living in Kentucky and has published poetry in *Archipelago*, *Borderlands*, *Blue Penny Quarterly*, *elima*, *5—Trove*, *Octavo* and *George Jr.*

Ashley Schaffer works at the University of Texas Press in Austin.

Young Smith has published poetry in *Limestone* and *Ekphrasis*. He is currently in the creative writing program at the University of Houston, where this year he won the Barthelme Fellowship for fiction. He recently won the Worldfest Film Festival screenplay award for his adaptation of *Benito Cereno*.

Mark Spitzer is a translator and author, as well as a grad student at both USL in Lafayette and LSU in Baton Rouge. He works as an editor and fishes for goo in the Atchafalaya Basin. Recent books include *The Collected Poems of Georges Bataille* by Dufour Editions, and *Bottom Feeder*, a novel by Creative Arts.

Terese Svoboda first novel, *Cannibal* was published in 1994 by New York University Press. She's also the author of three volumes of poetry and her new novel, *A Drink Called Paradise*, is just out from Counterpoint Press.

Lorenzo Thomas is editor of *Sing the Sun Up: Creative Writing Ideas from African American Literature* (Teachers & Writers, 1998) and author of several collections of

poems. He teaches at the University of Houston. His critical study, *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and 20th Century American Poetry* is forthcoming from University of Alabama Press.

Amy Trussell has been published in many periodicals including *Poetry Flash*, *The Prague Revue*, *Indian Studies of Cornell University*, *ReVision*, *Oshun*, and *Native Self-Sufficiency*, where she was a regular contributor. She has also been featured on the web in *Trope_5*, *Spadra*, and others. Her performances combining poetry, dance and music have been seen on the West Coast, in Nashville, and in Alabama. She grew up in Kansas, and spent many summers in Mississippi and Alabama where her Father's family has lived for more than five generations. In 1997 she started Front Porch Records with Jake Berry.

John Verlenden is a Fulbright fellow in Jordan. His diverse writings appear in journals such as *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, *Edebiyat*, *Missouri Review*, and *Fourth Genre*. He and Iraqi scholar Ferial Ghazoul won University of Arkansas's Arabic Translation Prize for Muhammed Afifi Matar's *Quarter of Joy* (poetry). He recently finished a memoir about living in Egypt during fundamentalist terrors (1993-94).

Gina Vivinetto has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize for a short story that won *Boulevard's* Emerging Writer Award. She was a finalist in *Weekly Planet's* Fiction Contest. She lives in Florida and writes about pop music and books for the *St. Petersburg Times*.

Andy Young's poems have recently been published in *The Florida Review* and *Appalachian Heritage*. She lives in New Orleans, where she is taking African Dance classes and learning to play the fiddle.

Seth Young recently move to Marietta, GA from Memphis. He has written and lived in various places throughout the South.

Martha Zweig has published widely in little magazines. Her chapbook, *Powers*, won a Vermont prize and her first full collection, *Vinegar Bone*, is available from Wesleyan.

25-1: An Other South

Doug MacCash
Jim Leftwich
Hank Lazer
Skip Fox
Joel Dailey
Camille Martin
Gerry Cannon
Celestine Frost
A. Di Michele
Bob Grumman
Lorenzo Thomas
David Thomas Roberts
Niyi Osundare
Jake Berry
Dave Brinks
Lindsay Hill
Alex Rawls
John Elsberg
Mark Spitzer
Bill Myers
Seth Young
Jonathan Brannen
Andy Young
M. Sarki
Greg Fuchs
Christopher Chambers
Bill Lavender
Richard Doherty
Nancy Harris
Dennis Formento
Greg Kelley
Susan Facknitz
Brett Evans
Kay Murphy
Amy Trussel

Paul Naylor
Marla Jernigan
Gina Entrebe
James Saunders
Randy Prunty
Mark Prejsnar
M. Magoolaghan
Rebecca Hyman
JohnLowther
Lawless Crow

25-2:

Gina Vivinetto
Anne Blonstein
John Verlenden
Michael Murray
David Huerta
Jorge Aguilar Mora
Myriam Moscona
Jose Emilio Pacheca
Lee Meitzen Grue
Andrei Codrescu
James Nolan
Josefa Salmon
Christel Reges
Gary Lilley
Michael Atkinson
Christopher Davis
Ashley Schaffer
Young Smith
Maudelle Driskell
Martha Zweig
Ben Pasikoff
Thisbe Nissen
William Harrison
Terese Svoboda