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# LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

## Vol. 5, No. 2

## table of contents

### articles

Thomas Merton: Language and Silence/Brooke Hopkins	99
Jesus and Jujubes/Roger Gillis	127

### fiction

The Nuclear Family Man and His Earth Mother Wife Come to Grips with the Situation/Otto R. Salassi	147
The Harvesters/Martha Bennett Stiles	155
Beautiful Women and Glorious Medals/Barbara de la Cuesta	165

### interviews

Link in the Chain of Feeling/An Interview with Anais Nin	113
A Missionary of Sorts/An Interview with Rosemary Daniell	119

### photography

Portfolio/Ed Metz	139
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### poetry

Why is it that children/Brooke Hopkins	106
Definition of God/R. P. Lawry	107
The Unknown Sailor/Miller Williams	108
For Fred Carpenter Who Died in His Sleep/Miller Williams	109
There Was a Man Made Ninety Million Dollars/Miller Williams	110
For Victor Jara/Miller Williams	111
An Old Man Writing/Shelley Ehrlich	118
Poem/Everette Maddox	123
Publication/Everette Maddox	124
Tick Tock/Everette Maddox	125
Death/John Stone	134
In Praise of Even Plastic/John Stone	135
Bringing Her Home/John Stone	136
Causes/John Stone	137
For Our Fifteenth Anniversary/James Whitehead	138
Face the Nation/James Whitehead	138
Phrenology/Austin Wilson	149
Bathing/Michael Collier	150
North Mississippi/Ellen Gilchrist	151
Blind Bet/Billy Collins	151
Neighbors/Billy Collins	152
Fast Poem/Billy Collins	153
At Least/William Mills	159
A Vote for January/William Mills	160
Electric Fruit/R. P. Lawry	161
The St. James Men's Choir Meets Without Carlos/Lewis Chesser	162
Church/Lewis Chesser	162
Mourning Dove/Lewis Chesser	163
Portrait/Lewis Chesser	163
Chaim Racow/Milton Kessler	168
History/James Langdon	169
The Clock Above the Kitchen Door Says One/Alicia Ostriker	169
After the Accident/Gary Young	170
Soyuz/Mark Crispin Miller	170
Jonah/Robert Holland	171
How I Failed Signal School/Richard Cecil	172
Poem/Leon Stokesbury	173

### reviews

Books	175
Perspective/Stephen J. Whitfield	176





# Thomas Merton: Language and Silence

by Brooke Hopkins

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Lord Krishna, speaking of the thoroughly integrated man, the man of non-attachment, tells his friend and disciple Arjuna: "The action of the best men others find their rule of action/The path that a great man follows becomes a guide to the world."<sup>1</sup> If human beings have made any spiritual progress, they have done so by aspiring to live according to standards set by predecessors who have attained some measure of enlightenment. Each of the world's major religions offers models to follow: first, the lives of the founders, such as Confucius, the Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, those whose behavior is portrayed as completely exemplary; and then a host of lesser if slightly more accessible figures, bodhisattvas, saints and wise men. Even today, in our own largely secular culture, we have such models as Ghandi, Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King. One of the ways we grow as human beings is by discovering others whose lives seem worthy of imitation, because they are fulfilled in a deep way, and their words and deeds allow us to realize our own selves more fully. Thomas Merton was one of these.

Whether he was aware of this or not is a tricky question. He wished, of course, to become a saint, to attain some real measure of spiritual perfection. And there can be no question that he viewed his life as in some profound way symbolic. At least from the time of his conversion onward, he lived with the utmost seriousness and deliberation, like a prophet, whose role in the modern world, as a monk, he considered himself to have inherited. For "the prophet," he had written in the "prologue" to *The Sign of Jonas*,

is a man whose whole life is a living witness to the providential action of God in the world. Every prophet is a sign and a witness of Christ. Every monk, in whom Christ lives, and in whom therefore all the prophecies are fulfilled, is a witness and a sign of the kingdom of God. Even our mistakes are eloquent more than we can know.<sup>2</sup>

Every moment, then, has significance in the light of one's mission, which is to bear witness, through prayer and contemplation, to the reality of Christ's love, and to the ultimate goodness of the world God has created. But as he went on in the same passage, he felt that there was something even more special about his own personal calling, that he had been asked to do more:

But I feel that my own life is especially sealed with this great sign, which baptism, and monastic profession, and priestly ordination has burned into the roots of my being, because like Jonas himself I find myself travelling toward my destiny in the belly of a paradox . . . (S.J., p. 21)

The paradox was that, despite his vow of silence, his voice grew louder and louder, and that for all his desire to escape "the world," he had become more deeply involved in it than ever. Merton was a monk who had made the best-seller list, a public figure who could not make an "appearance."

Indeed, Thomas Merton has told us an enormous amount about himself, in his autobiography, his journals, his notebooks and the very personal essays and poems he wrote throughout his life. Why? Of course, there must have been a deep need to talk about himself, and to communicate his ideas, observations and feelings to others, for the community such communication involves. This need his superiors wisely realized when, much against his will, they encouraged him to continue writing during the middle and late forties. And his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, like its illustrious predecessor, Augustine's *Confessions*, was written in part as an "act of therapy,"<sup>3</sup> to put his old self behind him. Yet Merton's motives for recording his experience in so many forms obviously go much further than that. Like Augustine, he too wrote with his fellow men in mind, in order that they might come to a more complete understanding of themselves in the course of reading about his experience, a deeper understanding of God in the process. The greatest solitaires have been like that: Augustine and other fathers of the Church, Montaigne, Kierkegaard, Thoreau and Merton. It is the fruit of their solitude to be able to share their experience with others while still remaining themselves, alone, mysterious, and inaccessible to the end. It is a great gift, possibly the greatest of all, and demands enormous emotional and spiritual resources to practice.

How did Merton achieve this? One is astounded by his capacity to give without being diminished by it, the extraordinary outlook on the world he seems to have achieved by the end of his life, his almost complete sense of his own unimportance, and of the beauty of the universe around him. In a real sense Thomas Merton's life was his finest creation;

it is what, in the end, we admire most about him, and what draws us to him beyond anything else. And so we want to see if we cannot realize some of the same potential in ourselves. The first half of this life, of course, Merton himself described in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, the journey which ultimately took him to Gethsemani. It was not until he entered the monastery, however, that he really began to grow, to experience the world, himself included, in ways that would lead to his later vision; to comprehend the true nature of God's love and therefore to begin to be able to express his own; to love others the way he had begun to acknowledge that he was loved.

The aim of this essay, then, will be twofold: first, to reach a deeper understanding of the way in which Thomas Merton came to see the world as he did, by examining the journal he kept between 1946 and 1952, the years in which he underwent his most radical transformation; second, to show how Merton's experiences during those years affected his "theology," by examining the additions he made to the text of *Seeds of Contemplation* which he had originally composed in 1946.<sup>4</sup> For what makes Merton finally so compelling and so profoundly authentic is the fact that his observations and insights were all drawn from personal experience. His life and his work are essentially inseparable, "consubstantial," as it were. In this respect at least (and therefore possibly in every respect), he fits the Christian definition of a saint, one who uses his whole life, every aspect of it, in the service of God.

\* \* \*

Toward the end of his life Merton wrote and spoke a good deal about "monastic therapy," a concept he explored in "Marxism and Monastic Perspectives," his final talk in Bangkok only hours before his death on December 10, 1968. Referring to the twelfth century Cistercian, Adam of Perseigne, Merton spoke of the monk's effort to attain what he called "full realization," the total liberation from egocentricity: "The period of monastic formation is a period of cure, of convalescence. When one makes one's profession one has passed through convalescence and is ready to begin to be educated in a new way—the education of the 'new man',"<sup>5</sup> a man now truly capable of love. This, of course, describes the process Merton himself must have undergone during his first ten years at Gethsemani, the final stages of which he recorded in the journal he would later entitle *The Sign of Jonas*, once he had come to realize what those ten years had meant.

The title *The Sign of Jonas* is significant: "the sign Jesus promised to the generation that did not understand him . . . that is, the sign of his own resurrection" (S.J., p. 20). For, like Jonas, Merton believed himself to have been called to fulfill his mission in a certain place, America. And like Jonas, as he recalled of his early years at Gethsemani in the book's prologue, "I found myself with an almost uncontrollable desire to go in the opposite direction" (S.J., p. 20). In his case, it was into another, even more solitary order, the Carthusians: "God pointed one way and all my ideals pointed in another" (S.J., p. 20). The "main theme" of the book, then, as Merton stated it in the prologue, is his "own solution of this problem" (S.J., p. 20), his gradual acceptance of God's calling. This act required acceptance of himself, which ultimately led to his beginning to become that "new man," reborn "in Christ," he

had wanted to be all along. For as his life so amply and beautifully demonstrates, we must first lose ourselves in God to discover who we really are. Only then, as a result of our willingness to give ourselves up, to give our selves up, can we be said to be truly alive.

Before examining the journal, however, it would be worth reflecting upon what is perhaps the greatest paradox of Merton's career, his use of the written word to convey "wordless" experiences. Like many contemplatives, Merton craved silence, which as Kazantzakis noted, is "the voice of God." Only in the midst of silence could Merton really feel the freedom of God's presence. His most profound experiences were "wordless"—in Wordsworth's phrase, "far hidden from the reach of words." And yet, like Wordsworth, he felt compelled to try to translate the "wordless" into words, to convey some sense of the holy silence which lay beneath those words, to help others reflect upon the role of silence in their own lives. Having taken a vow of silence himself, Merton knew how misleading words could be. Used in the right way, however, they could lead others to greater self-knowledge.

We use journals when it becomes absolutely essential that we talk to ourselves about some extreme difficulty, to get us through some kind of crisis. Merton's journal is no exception. Begun on December 10, 1946, the fifth anniversary of his arrival at Gethsemani (and twenty-two years to the day before his death), the early parts of the book are a response to the severe vocational crisis he was undergoing at the time: whether to remain in the order or to leave it to join the more solitary Carthusians, presumably in Europe, but in any case as far away as possible from the incessant "noise" of the world. Of course, *The Sign of Jonas* describes much more than this crisis: day-to-day activities of the monastic life, preparations for feast days and other important events, observations of all sorts, anecdotes about members of the community. But the central theme of the first two parts of the book, "Solemn Profession" (1946-47) and "Death of an Abbot" (1947-48), and the central theme of Merton's life during those years was his deep dissatisfaction with what he considered to be the insufficient solitude of his life at Gethsemani. His dissatisfaction only intensified when his superiors virtually ordered him to continue writing, an activity he had hoped to abandon in the monastery.

Merton's painful struggle at this time is not simple or superficial. For example, despite the Father Abbot's assurances "that everything was quite all right," Merton himself feels only a month before he is to take his solemn vows that "everything seems all wrong" (S.J., p. 34), that he had made the wrong choice, and that he belonged somewhere else. What was wrong, of course, had nothing to do with the monastery. It instead lay in his attitude toward it, in what might accurately (and with no self-righteousness) be called his "pride," his sense that he had been made for something "better," a life of total solitude, of perpetual prayer. He acknowledged this in an important passage written on November 16, 1947, the ninth anniversary of his baptism:

The chief thing that has struck me today is that I still have my fingers too much in the running of my own life.

Lord, I have not lived like a monk, like a contemplative. The first essential is missing. I only say I trust You. My actions prove that the one I trust is myself—and that I am still afraid of You.

\* \* \*

If You allow people to praise me, I shall not worry. If You let them blame me, I shall worry even less, but be glad. If You send me work I shall embrace it with joy and it will be rest to me because it is Your will. And if You send me rest, I will rest in You. Only save me from myself. Save me from my own private, poisonous urge to change everything, to act without reason, to move for movement's sake, to unsettle everything You have ordained. (*S.J.*, p. 82-83)

By the middle of 1948 the original crisis seems to have passed, dying coincidentally with Merton's first Abbot, Dom Frederick. But Merton's struggle continued. He had come to stay, reconciled to life at Gethsemani; yet something was still "wrong," not with his environment but within himself. And so he continues to probe, to clarify, to strip away, using his journal to search for some level of consciousness he had not, for all his efforts, achieved, returning again and again to "the same ideas and the same experiences."

May 15, Fourth Sunday after Easter (1949)

The sun is rising. All the green trees are full of birds, and their song comes up out of the wet bowers of the orchard. Crows swear pleasantly in the distance, and in the depths of my soul sits God, and between Him, in the depths, and the thoughts on the surface, is the veil of an unresolved problem.

What shall I say this problem is? It is not a conflict of ideas. It is not a dilemma. I do not believe it is a question of choice. It is a psychological fact: any interior problem is a psychological fact. Is it a question that I can resolve?

This problem is my own personality—in which I do not intend at any time to take an unhealthy interest. But (I speak as one less wise) this problem is my personality or if you like, the development of my interior life. I am not perplexed either by what I am or what I am not, but by the mode in which I am tending to become what I really will be.

God makes us ask ourselves questions most often when He intends to resolve them. He gives us needs that He alone can satisfy, and awakens capacities that He means to fulfill. Any perplexity is liable to be a spiritual gestation, leading to a new birth and mystical regeneration. (*S.J.*, p. 186)

But the form that "mystical regeneration" would take for Merton was not yet clear. For the time being he could feel only "perplexity," and, when it became too intense, the pain. "The truth is," he wrote ten days later, in one of the journal's lowest moments,

I am far from being the monk or the cleric [he had been ordained a priest by this time] that I ought to be. My life is a great mess and tangle of half-conscious subterfuges to evade grace and duty. I have done all things badly. I have thrown away great opportunities. My infidelity to Christ, instead of making me sick with despair, drives me to throw myself all the more blindly into the arms of His mercy. (*S.J.*, p. 190-1)

And that, as he well knew from reading the great mystics, was an essential part of the ordeal he had to go through in order to achieve the tranquility he so much desired.

Merton's deeper crisis erupted during the winter of 1949-50. In the autobiographical preface to the part of *The Sign of Jonas* which covers this period, "The Whale and the Ivy," Merton describes what happened as a "sort of slow, submarine earthquake," "an abysmal testing and disintegration

of my spirit" (*S.J.*, p. 226), a massive upheaval of his whole being from which he could not possibly have emerged unchanged. And, appropriately enough, it was to the *Book of Job* that he first turned as the crisis began.

September 1 (1949)

This morning, under a cobalt blue sky, summer having abruptly ended, I am beginning the Book of Job. It is not warm enough to sit for long in the shade of the cedars. The woods are crisply outlined in the sun and the clamor of distant crows is sharp in the air that no longer sizzles with locusts.

And Job moves me deeply. This year more than ever it has a special poignancy.

I now know that all my own poems about the world's suffering have been inadequate: they have not solved anything, they have only camouflaged the problem. And it seems to me that the urge to write a real poem about suffering and sin is only another temptation because, after all, I do not really understand. (*S.J.*, p. 228)

During the next few months, however, he would gradually begin to achieve that understanding, something he seems to have realized nine days later, when he wrote simply: "Once before I read the Book of Job and got the feeling that I was going to begin living it, as well as reading it. That has happened again" (*S.J.*, p. 231).

September 21

The word "poignant" is taking a very prominent place in my vocabulary these days! That is because there is some power that keeps seizing my heart in its fist and wringing cries out of me (I mean the quiet kind that make themselves heard by twisting within you) and beating me this way and that until I am scarcely able to reel. I spend my time wrestling with emotions that seem now passion, now anguish, and now the highest religious exaltation.

\* \* \*

Yesterday afternoon, in the cornfield, I began to feel rather savage about the whole business. I suppose this irritation was the sign that the dry period was reaching its climax and was about to go over again into the awful battle with joy. My soul was cringing and doubling up and subconsciously getting ready for the next wave. At the moment all I had left in my heart was an abyss of self-hatred—waiting for the next appalling sea. (*S.J.*, p. 235)

Shortly before Christmas, however, after a struggle the intensity of which we shall never really know, since Merton made very few entries over the following three months, most of what was going on within him undoubtedly took place on a kind of preverbal level of experience, and he seems to have begun to come to terms with himself. It must have happened quite abruptly, within the space of a day or so, since the entry for December 20 is as agonized as any in the whole journal and reflects his self-hatred for the kind of teaching he was doing, what seemed to him the complete fruitlessness of the whole enterprise he was engaged in:

The terrible thing is the indignity of thinking such an endeavor is really important. The other day while the new high altar was being consecrated I found myself being stripped of one illu-

sion after another. There I stood and sat with my eyes closed and wondered why I read so much, why I write so much, why I talk so much, and why I get so excited about the things that only affect the surface of my life—I came here eight years ago and already knew better when I arrived. But for eight years I have obeyed the other law in my members and so am worn out with activity—exhausting myself with proclaiming that the thing to do is rest. *In omnibus requiem quaesivi*. . . . (S.J., p. 245-46)

A day later, however, the Feast of St. Thomas, something quite significant seems to have happened:

December 22

Yesterday, the Feast of Saint Thomas, was, I think, an important day. It was warm and overclouded and windy but tranquil. I had a kind of sense that the day was building up to some kind of deep decision. A wordless decision, a giving of the depths and substance of myself. There is a conversion of the deep will to God that cannot be effected in words—barely in a gesture or ceremony. There is a conversion of the deep will and a gift of my substance that is too mysterious for liturgy, and too private. It is something to be done in a lucid secrecy that implies first of all the denial of communication to others except perhaps as a neutral thing.

I shall remember the time and place of this liberty and this neutrality which cannot be written down. These clouds low on the horizon, the outcrops of hard yellow rock in the road, the open gate, the perspective of fence posts leading up the rise to the sky, and the big cedars tumbled and tousled in the wind. Standing on rock. Present. The reality of the present and of solitude divorced from past and future. To be collected and gathered up in clarity and silence and to belong to God and to be nobody else's business. I wish I could recover the liberty of that interior decision which was very simple and which seems to me to have been a kind of blank check and a promise. (S.J., p. 246)

What is truly fascinating in Merton's account of his "conversion" is its ineffable nature. It had been a "wordless decision," one that had taken place on a level of consciousness so profound it could not be "effected by words," and it could never "be written down." That, Merton suggests, is precisely why it had been such an overwhelming moment of pure experience, of complete solitude, of total silence, essentially incommunicable to others beyond the simple fact that it had happened. "Points have we all of us within our souls," Wordsworth said of such moments, "where all stand single." This seems certainly to have been true of this occasion in Merton's life, and he wrote in the preface to "The Whale and the Ivy":

I now began for the first time in my life to taste a happiness that was so complete and so profound that I no longer needed to reflect upon it. There was no longer any need to remind myself that I was happy—a vain expedient to prolong a transient job—for this happiness was real and permanent and even in a sense eternal. It penetrated to the depths below consciousness, and in all storms, in all fears, in the deepest darkness, it was always unchangeably there. (S.J., p. 227)

He had, in short, "come to experience" what in his final talk in Bangkok he would call "the ground of his own being"<sup>6</sup> and hence began to taste the true liberation that can only come through acts of love. On January 11, 1950, less than three weeks after his conversion, he wrote: "for the first time

in my life I am finding you, O Solitude. I can count on the fingers of one hand the few short moments of purity, of neutrality, in which I have found you" (S.J., p. 260). Few and short as they may have been, however, they enabled him the next day to define with incredible precision the nature of the solitude he had discovered, the kind of solitude that makes real contemplation possible, an opening out upon the emptiness that surrounds us:

True solitude is a participation in the solitariness of God—Who is in all things. His solitude is not a local absence, but a metaphysical transcendence. His solitude is His Being. . . . For us solitude means withdrawal from an artificial and fictional level of being which men, divided by original sin, have fabricated in order to keep peace with concupiscence and death. But by that very fact the solitary finds himself on the level of a more perfect spiritual society—the city of those who have become real enough to confess and glorify God (that is: life), in the teeth of death. (S.J., p. 262. Italics mine)

Instead of isolating him from his fellow men, however, his new solitude only served to bring him closer to them, as if the discovery and *experience* of his own solitude involved at the same time the discovery of everyone else's, the total "insignificance" of each of us "in comparison with God" (S.J., p. 266).<sup>7</sup> So the whole orientation of his life was changing as a result of that "conversion of the deep will" he had experienced, from a basically negative outlook to one that was essentially positive, from life-denying to life-affirming, from a fear of the world to an acceptance of it, all of which he summed up a year or so later in one of the journal's more remarkable passages:

March 3, 1951

Coming to the monastery has been for me exactly the right kind of withdrawal. It has given me perspective. It has taught me how to live. And now I owe everyone else in the world a share in that life. My first duty is to start, for the first time, to live as a member of the human race which is no more (and no less) ridiculous that I am myself. And my first human act is the recognition of how much I owe everybody else.

Thus God has brought me to Kentucky where the people are, for the most part, singularly without inhibitions. This is the precise place He has chosen for my sanctification. Here I must revise all my own absurd plans, and take myself as I am, Gethsemani as it is, and America as it is—atomic bomb and all. It is utterly peculiar, but none the less true, that after all, one's nationality should come to have a meaning in the light of eternity. I have lived for thirty-six years without one. Nine years ago I was proud of the fact. I thought that to be a citizen of heaven all you had to do was throw away your earthly passport. But now I have discovered a mystery: that Miss Sue and all the other ladies in the office of the Deputy Clerk of the Louisville District Court are perhaps in some accidental way empowered to see that I am definitely admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven forever. (S.J., p. 313)

So Jonas had emerged from the belly of the whale and was free at last to accomplish the task God had given him, to begin to make it possible for others to emerge as well. It is all summed up in a passage of incredible beauty and insight which follows a description of the different levels of his soul, the deepest level of which he believed opened out upon God Himself, that infinite night which surrounds us:

Receive, O monk, the holy truth concerning this thing called death. Know that there is in each man a deep will, potentially committed to freedom or captivity, ready to consent to life, born consenting to death, turned inside out, swallowed by its own self, prisoner of itself like Jonas in the whale.

This is the truth of death which, printed in the heart of every man, leads him to look for the sign of Jonas the prophet. But many have gone into hell crying out that they had expected the resurrection of the dead. Others in turn, were baptized and delivered: but their powers remained asleep in the dark and in the bosom of the depths.

Many of the men baptized in Christ have risen from the depths without troubling to find out the difference between Jonas and the whale.

It is the whale we cherish. Jonas swims abandoned in the heart of the sea. But it is the whale that must die. Jonas is immortal. If we do not remember to distinguish between them, and if we prefer the whale and do not take Jonas out of the ocean, the inevitable will come to pass. The whale and the prophet will soon come around and meet again in their wanderings, and once again the whale will swallow the prophet. Life will be swallowed again in death and its last state will be worse than the first.

We must get Jonas out of the whale and the whale must die at a time when Jonas is in the clear, busy with his orisons, clothed and in his right mind, free, holy and walking on the shore. Such is the meaning of the desire for death that comes in the same night, the peace that finds us for a moment in clarity, walking by the light of the stars, raised to God's conatural shore, dry-shot in the heavenly country, in a rare moment of intelligence. (*S.J.*, p. 329-30)

\* \* \*

Seldom has modern man documented his spiritual development more clearly than Merton did in revising *Seeds of Contemplation* during the late 1950s, over twelve years after it was originally written. Why he did it is clear from the book's new "preface." The earlier version, consisting of a set of twenty-eight loosely related meditations on the nature of the contemplative experience, "seemed to teach the reader 'How to be a Contemplative'," and was somehow too didactic in tone. In fact, Merton had judged the book even more harshly in 1949 upon receiving a burlap-bound copy of it from his publisher, James Laughlin—"Every book I write is a mirror of my character and conscience," he had written on March 6 in his journal:

I always open the final, printed job, with a faint hope of finding myself agreeable, and I never do.

There is nothing to be proud of in this one either. It is clever and difficult to follow, not so much because I am deep as because I don't know how to punctuate, and my line of thought is clumsy and tortuous. It lacks warmth and human affection. I find in myself an underlying pride that I had thought was all gone, but it is still there, as bad as ever. I don't see how the book will ever do any good. It will antagonize people, or else make them go around acting superior and stepping on everybody. (*S.J.*, p. 166)

The original version of *Seeds of Contemplation* clearly is not as bad as Merton believed, but in March, 1949, when it was released, Merton's self-esteem was at its nadir, and nothing that he might have written would have satisfied him. Nevertheless, by comparison to the enormous generosity of his later

writing, the book seems harsh. And he had obviously developed so enormously over the years since he had written it, not just as a result of his own personal experience but as a result of his experience with others, that it must have cried out for revision.

Revision is possibly the wrong word to use in this context, since it implies a rewriting of the original text. Writing for Merton, like contemplation itself, was a matter of returning again and again to the same basic ideas, each time penetrating them to a greater depth, like stripping off mask after mask to get to the core of one's reality, one's essential masklessness before God. "When something has been written," he wrote in the "Preface" to *The Merton Reader* shortly after *New Seeds* had been published,

publish it and go on to something else. You may say the same thing again someday, on a deeper level. No one need have a compulsion to be utterly and completely original in every word he writes. All that matters is that the old be recovered on a new plane and be itself, a new reality.<sup>9</sup>

What he did, then, was to radically expand the original text, adding several new chapters and elaborating more fully, in some cases much more fully, many of the others, thus exploring what he had originally written on a new level altogether. When it was over he felt it to be "in many ways a completely new book," a completely "new reality." (*N.S.*, p. ix)

In fact, that process of self-penetration that Merton actually engaged in as he wrote turns out to be the main subject of the new book. This had already been tentatively explored in the old text in the chapter named (after Gerard Manley Hopkins' idea of "inscape") "Things in Their Identity," where he had made a crucial distinction between what he called the "true" and the "false self," the former being the person we *really* are, underneath, before God, the latter the person we appear to be, before our fellow men and (for the most part) before ourselves—a distinction he would later work out in much greater detail in *No Man Is an Island*. "Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self," he wrote, and

All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my own egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered. Thus I use up my life in the desire for pleasure and the thirst for experiences, for power, honor, knowledge and love, to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real. And I wind experiences around myself and cover myself with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world, as if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface.<sup>10</sup>

Beneath this surface, however, Merton believed there was a "true self" which could only be discovered by discovering God. The task of contemplation, then, would be to recover that true self.

However, when Merton wrote the original *Seeds of Contemplation*, he had not yet fully experienced what he was talking about and was therefore unable to develop his ideas further. Not until his experience of the late forties and early fifties did he really discover what his "true self" was like and how wonderful its recovery could be. That discovery dominates his later writing, especially *New Seeds of Contempla-*



tion. From his new perspective, then, it was more than simply a matter of "true" and "false" in the somewhat moralistic sense that he had previously used those words, as his experience of God was still rather incomplete. He was now able to write about the act of contemplation from a far more generous point of view, because of the psychological discoveries he had made about himself over the past ten years. Contemplation, as he had come to view it, involved awakening what he now called that "deep transcendent self" (N.S., p. 7) that is at the core of each of us, the "atman" of Hindu theology, the "Christlikeness" of Christianity, the "being" of humanistic psychoanalysis.<sup>11</sup> What prevents our awakening is our obsession with our own individualistic ego, everything that is symbolized by the capitalized first person singular, our incredibly narrow and basically frightened conception of our selves. "We must remember," Merton wrote, "that this superficial 'I' is not our real self:

It is our "individuality" and our "empirical self" but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God. The "I" that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true "I" that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown "self" whom most of us never discover until we are dead. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. This self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney. It is utterly frail and evanescent. Contemplation is precisely the awareness that this "I" is really "not I" and the awakening of the unknown "I" that is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself. It cannot even say "I" with the assurance and the impertinence of the other one, for its very nature is to be hidden, unnamed, unidentified in the society where men talk about themselves and one another. In such a world the true "I" remains both inarticulate and invisible, because it has altogether too much to say—not one word of which is about itself. (N.S., p. 7-8)

What is Merton saying here? Again, it has to do with language—or, rather, the self-consciousness that purely social intercourse presupposes. The "true self" is somehow obscured by such intercourse, "for its very nature is to be hidden, unnamed, unidentified in the society where men talk about themselves and one another." The noise of such talk distracts men from their "true" selves. And " 'Hell,'" Merton commented in his footnote, "can be described as a perpetual alienation from our true being, our true self, which is in God," in silence. The new parts of *Seeds of Contemplation* seek to explore this view.

Perhaps the most significant changes Merton made in his original text occur in a chapter entitled "Pray for Your Own Discovery," the final version of which is nearly twice as long as the first. He did not change his previous ideas (except that several disparaging sentences about "the mystics of the Orient"<sup>12</sup> were deleted from the original text), but rather explored them still further, deepening what had originally been said. And as the chapter's title suggests, it is about self-discovery, that is to say, about the fact that it is not we who discover ourselves but, as he put it, God who "discovers himself in us" (N.S., p. 39). "God utters me like a word containing a partial thought of Himself," Merton had originally written.

A word will never be able to comprehend the voice that utters it.

But if I am true to the concept that God utters in me, if I am true to the thought of Him I was meant to embody, I shall be full of His actuality and find Him everywhere in myself, and find myself nowhere. I shall be lost in Him . . . (N.S., p. 37)

At this point the original paragraph (and presumably the idea behind it) had broken off. Rewriting it, however, Merton added a very significant clarification, referring to the possibility of his being "lost" in God: "that is, I shall find myself, I shall be 'saved' " (N.S., p. 37). For losing one's self "in God," as he had come to realize, far from involving an obliteration of one's selfhood, involved in fact precisely the opposite, *full* discovery of it, at a depth that never before could have been previously realized; in other words, salvation, a kind of personal resurrection. And it is this deepened vision of salvation that he goes on to explore in the next three paragraphs of the new essay, beginning with a protest against the almost complete debasement of the concept in modern times. "It is not only human nature that is 'saved' by the divine mercy," he concludes, "but above all the human person." (He will emphasize the word "person" throughout the book.)

The object of salvation is that which is unique, irreplaceable, incommunicable—that which is myself alone. This true inner self must be drawn up like a jewel from the bottom of the sea, rescued from confusion, from indistinction, from immersion in the common, the non-descript, the trivial, the sordid, the evanescent.

We must be saved from immersion in the sea of lies and passions which is called "the world." And we must be saved above all from the abyss of confusion and absurdity which is our own worldly self. The person must be rescued from the individual. The free son of God must be saved from the conformist slave of fantasy, passion and convention. The creative and mysterious inner self must be delivered from the wasteful, hedonistic and destructive ego that seeks only to cover itself with disguises.

To be "lost" is to be left to the arbitrariness and pretenses of the contingent ego, the smoke-self that must inevitably vanish. To be "saved" is to return to one's inviolate and eternal reality and to live in God. (N.S., p. 38)

So Merton, poet that he was, made it his ultimate business to call his reader's attention to the real meaning of his words, returning to them something of their basic significance. For as he so vividly recognized, true salvation is only possible when we begin to know for certain what we are talking about, when the language that we use, instead of perpetuating our self-illusions, actually begins to destroy them, and thus helps us to see our real selves.

Not until the middle of the book, however, does Merton get to "the heart of the matter," the reasons why men are so divided against themselves and what they can do to heal their divisions. Again, his insights into this were derived from his own deeply personal experience of self-division and reunion though the act of faith, the surrender of himself to God he had recorded in *The Sign of Jonas*.

Hatred is not a separate force at work in the world; far from being anything at all in itself, it is simply the outward and visible expression of our own deep inner sense of unworthiness and fear. Born in a condition of almost complete dependence, we soon learn to hate ourselves for it, then seek relief from

our self-hatred by hating others, producing in the end a world that is made up of nothing *but* division and alienation. "There is in every weak, lost and isolated member of the human race an agony of hatred born of his own helplessness, his own isolation," Merton added to the chapter entitled, appropriately enough, "A Body of Broken Bones."

Hatred is the sign and expression of loneliness, of unworthiness, of insufficiency. And in so far as each one of us is lonely, is unworthy, each one hates himself. Some of us are aware of this self-hatred, and because of it we reproach ourselves and punish ourselves needlessly. Punishment cannot cure the feeling that we are unworthy. There is nothing that we can do about it as long as we feel that we are isolated, insufficient, helpless, alone. Others, who are less conscious of their own self-hatred, realize it in a different form by projecting it on to others. There is a proud and self-confident hate, strong and cruel, which enjoys the pleasure of hating, for it is directed outward to the unworthiness of another. But this strong and happy hate does not realize that like all hate it destroys and consumes the self that hates, and not the object that is hated. Hate in any form is self-destructive, and even when it triumphs physically it triumphs in its own spiritual ruin. (N.S., p. 72-73)

Self-destructiveness has reached an extreme point in our own terrible century—a fact which dominated the latter half of Merton's life: the war, the concentration camps, racism, Vietnam. How can this human will to self-destruction be overcome? Not, as might be expected, through "the will to love," but through something which Merton believed to be even more basic still, the precondition of a capacity to love: "the faith that one is loved. The faith that one is loved by God. The faith that one is loved by God although unworthy—or, rather, irrespective of one's worth!" (N.S., p. 73). For as he had come so firmly to believe, it is impossible to truly accept others without first accepting oneself, and impossible to accept oneself without first believing that one is totally and unconditionally accepted by God.

So, logically, Merton turns to the subject of faith as his book progresses, what faith is and how it expresses itself, something he had learned considerably more about since first composing it. In the original text Merton's discussion of faith is for the most part empty of any *real* content; it is largely verbal and uninformed by its experience. Now, having actually lived it, he could explain in much more detail that true faith is an experience of almost total reintegration. And once more the language he uses takes us back to *The Sign of Jonas*, to the revelation of the depths of his interior life he had recorded there, the deepest level of which, as he had put it, opened out upon the "positive night" of God's love (S.J., p. 329). For that is precisely what faith gives to one who has it, what Merton now described as "a dimension of simplicity and *depth* to all our apprehension" (N.S., p. 135). He then goes on to explain his "dimension of depth" in terms that bear a striking resemblance to those used in modern "depth psychology:"

It is the incorporation of the unknown and of the unconscious into our daily life. Faith brings together the known and the unknown so that they overlap: or rather, so that we are aware of their overlapping. Actually, our whole life is a mystery of which very little comes to our conscious under-

standing. But when we accept *only what we can consciously rationalize*, our life is actually reduced to the most pitiful limitations, though we may think quite otherwise. (We have been brought up with the absurd prejudice that only what we can reduce to a rational and conscious formula is really understood and experienced in our life. When we can say *what a thing is*, or *what we are doing*, we think we fully grasp and experience it. In point of fact this verbalization—very often it is nothing more than verbalization—tends to cut us off from genuine experience and to obscure our understanding instead of increasing it.) (N.S., p. 135-6)

In Merton's view, perhaps the chief source of man's self-alienation is verbalization. When we put something into words we think we "have" it; but we only "have" its shadow, the illusion of having it. The kind of faith Merton talks about here is too mysterious for verbalization, for its whole function is to shatter the illusion of rational clarity that verbalization produces, and to lead us through the silent depth of our being to God. It is only then that the words we speak have meaning.

Faith does not simply account for the unknown, tag it with a theological tag and file it away in a safe place where we do not have to worry about it. This is a falsification of the whole idea of faith. On the contrary, faith incorporates the unknown into our everyday life in a living, dynamic and actual manner. The unknown remains unknown. It is still a mystery, for it cannot cease to be one. The function of faith is not to reduce mystery to rational clarity, but to integrate the unknown and the known together in a living whole, in which we are more and more able to transcend the limitations of our external self.

Hence the function of faith is not only to bring us into contact with the "authority of God" revealing; not only to teach us truths "about God," but even to reveal to us the unknown in our selves, in so far as our unknown and undiscovered self actually lives in God, moving and acting only under the direct light of His merciful grace. (N.S., p. 136-7)

Only through faith, then, which is to say "life," can one's "true self" be actually recovered, a recovery which is in some fundamental way inseparable from salvation.

It is well summed up in his new book's final chapter, which he called, after his vision of God's infinite and joyful creation, "The General Dance." In rewriting his book Merton must have come to some important new realizations (what else, after all, was writing for?), since in the end he does not suggest, as he may have intimated in the book's opening chapters, that we must reject our external selves completely. On the contrary, "insubstantial" and in many ways "poor" as they may be, our selves are nevertheless part of reality and have, as such, "an ineffable value" (N.S., p. 246), as long as we remain aware of what lies beneath (and around and above) them, and do not become too much associated with the role that we are playing.

It is possible to speak of the exterior self as a mask: to do so is not necessarily to reprove it. The mask that each man wears may well be a disguise not only for that man's inner self but for God, wandering as a pilgrim and exile in His own creation.

And indeed, if Christ became Man, it is because He wanted to be any man and everyman. If we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ. (N.S., p. 296)

The presence of Christ is the presence of Love, a joyful acceptance of the world's infinite creation. For that, in the end,

is what Merton had come to realize true vision consists of: to experience the world as far as possible as God must, from the perspective of His timeless condition. "For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness," he concludes, with a description of the great "cosmic dance" of creation in which we are all, whether we know it or not, participating—

The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair. But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not.

Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join the general dance. (*N.S.*, p. 297)

There is real authority in the final passage of *New Seeds of Contemplation*, the authority of a man who has experienced what he describes and who knows that unless one has experienced it there is no sense in talking at all. Above all, it is the authority of a man who has himself experienced silence, and who has learned how to speak of it so that others may hear.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*The Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Juan Mascaro (Baltimore, 1973), Chap. 3,

Verse 21, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Garden City, New York, 1956), p. 20. Hereafter cited as *S.J.* in the text.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 165.

<sup>4</sup>It should be pointed out that this approach has already been suggested by Father Aldhelm Cameron-Brown in his essay on Merton, Zen Master, which appeared in the collection of essays edited by Brother Patrick Hart, *Thomas Merton, Monk* which appeared in 1974 (Sheed and Ward) p. 166. However, he only spends a few paragraphs on the subject.

<sup>5</sup>*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, ed. Naomi Burton, Brother Patrick Hart, and James Laughlin (New York, 1973), p. 333.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* p. 333.

<sup>7</sup>The whole passage, written on Feb. 5, 1950, reads: "I think the chief reason why we have so little joy is that we take ourselves too seriously. Joy can only be real if it is based on truth, and since the fall of Adam all men's life is shot through with falsehood and illusion. That is why Saint Bernard is right in leading us back to joy by the love of truth. His starting point is the truth of our own insignificance in comparison with God. To penetrate the truth of how utterly unimportant we are is the only thing that can set us free to enjoy true happiness. This morning, before speaking, I felt very strongly the limitations imposed on me by my absurd desire to speak well as if it somehow mattered, as if something important depended on it! Instead of simply desiring to speak as best I could in order to please God."

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York, 1972), p. x. Hereafter cited as *N.S.* in the text.

<sup>9</sup>*The Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McDonnell (New York, 1962), p. x.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York, 1949) p. 12-13.

<sup>11</sup>See particularly Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations, and the Self* (New York, 1969), p. 255.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York, 1949), p. 15.

Why is it that children  
find the story of Jonah  
in the whale so exciting?

Could it be that having  
just come out of the whale  
they know what is at stake?

The problem is that we have gone  
and found other whales  
to swallow us up,

And it's so dark inside  
that it's impossible to read the story,  
much less understand its meaning.

—Brooke Hopkins

## DEFINITION OF GOD

I witness from a midnight attic window  
Spring snow like leaping elves about the sky.  
They drop in damask parachutes and go  
Down in a heap, monolithic to the eye.

Within, the matter is all Plato, wise  
Socrates, in dialogue: just who is right  
Concerning God? Confused, my mind and eyes  
Split disparate ways. My thoughts are not my sight.

Immersed in books I suddenly see dawn  
Outside where snow has gathered on the ground;  
Like Rip Van Winkle lying on the lawn  
I cannot think with thinkers too profound.

The true sage is the morning at her show  
And Plato's silence:

God is elves in snow.

—R. P. Lawry



## THE UNKNOWN SAILOR

Sits up in bed in his navy robe  
and looks at the wall or whatever moves  
between his bed and the wall and neither  
approves nor disapproves.

No one knows his name or his town  
or even his country. In forty-four  
a hospital ship in Boston harbor  
put him ashore

with the label Navy and nothing else.  
For those thin years he has never spoken.  
He smiles and blinks in a white silence  
occasionally broken

by wives and sons and daughters and friends  
of men who went to war and were lost  
and never found. They leave with another  
sailor crossed—

or soldier, merchant marine or marine—  
from a nameless list. Be grateful for that.  
Here in the ward he may have an inkling  
of where he's at.

Those lives he moved among before  
have long since filled the space and the town  
has closed the way the sea closes  
if ships go down.

—Miller Williams

**FOR FRED CARPENTER WHO DIED IN  
HIS SLEEP**

Penniless to our surprise  
at the peak of his earning power he lies:  
a man of the mean, who rarely meant  
much harm, and nearly always spent  
his money wisely; who got his views  
from *Newsweek* and *U. S. News*  
(though he only trusted the latter)  
and wondered constantly what was the matter  
with those there was something the matter with  
(some of those being his kin and kith)  
and believed what was right or discreetly done  
was right, and looked for a little fun  
when he traveled out of town  
and wished his woman would go down  
but she never would. He understood.

—*Miller Williams*

## THERE WAS A MAN MADE NINETY MILLION DOLLARS

There was a man made ninety million dollars  
had a vision of hell was afraid of the dark  
knew that he had walked in evil ways  
corrected his wife to death tortured his children  
one to the priesthood and one to the crazy place

had done things besides so unspeakably dark  
he could not honestly ask for God's forgiveness  
as he was only afraid and could never say  
*I'm sorry, Lord.* He wanted such redemption  
as wipes a life not clean but wipes it away

and knew that with all his money he could have it.  
Spent his ninety million and ninety more  
for fifteen years of the best brains to be had  
in mathematics space-time and madness  
and had him when he was eighty by God

a simple time machine which should not now  
bend any imagination out of shape  
went back seventy years to the same town  
found himself at ten delivering Grit  
stole the one car there was and ran himself down

left himself across a wooden sidewalk  
who barely lied to his mother or masturbated  
and went directly to heaven, if any can;  
could never be the man who killed the boy  
because he never lived to be the man

having died at ten delivering papers  
survived by his parents, grieved by the fifth grade,  
the first death by car in the whole county  
killed by a runaway Ford with no driver  
or if a driver, none to be found.

—Miller Williams

**FOR VICTOR JARA  
FOLK SINGER  
MULTILATED AND MURDERED  
BY OUR SIDE**

**The Soccer Stadium  
Santiago, Chile  
1973**

This is to say we remember. Not that remembering saves us.  
Not that remembering brings anything usable back.

This is to say that we never have understood how to say this.  
Into our long unbelief, what do we say to belief?

Shortened, they shortened your fingers. *Toca la bella guitarra.*  
After the death of disgrace, what do we do with your hands?

What do we do with you, singing, standing and bowing to bullets?  
Never a sound of applause. Only a scatter of guns.

Red in the Rio Mapocho sooner and darker than sunset  
made the ambassador speak softly in pity? And grief?

Not very likely. More likely what the ambassador spoke of  
knowing those things that he heard, hearing those things that he knew,

had to do more with how nicely several millions of dollars  
can (if it's properly placed), can (if it's spent on the right

bishops and bosses of workers, statesmen and good simple killers,  
figuring colonels come free) set a democracy straight.

—Miller Williams

Victor Jara, one of thousands arrested and held in Santiago's soccer stadium after the bloody military takeover of 1973, was recognized by a colonel who called him down onto the field, mutilated his hands and ordered him to perform for his audience. Jara raised his hands over his head and sang. He was cut down by machine guns along with many of those in the stadium who stood and took up the song. U.S. officials later admitted that millions of dollars had been spent in Chile to overthrow the elected government and bring about this coup. The poem is written in the elegiac distich, which seemed the only form old enough, slow enough and unyielding enough to contain what it had to.



NO  
CREDIT  
TILL TIMES  
GET  
HARD  
AGAIN

# Link in the Chain of Feeling

An Interview with Anais Nin

by Jeffrey Bailey

The following are excerpts from a conversation between Anais Nin and Jeffrey Bailey, recorded at Miss Nin's home in the Silverlake area of Los Angeles.

**NOR:** There is an interesting quote from Volume One of your Diary, in which you say, "I only regret that everyone wants to deprive me of the journal, which is the only steadfast friend I have, the only one that makes my life bearable, because my happiness with human beings is so precarious, my confining moods rare, and the least sign of non-interest is enough to silence me. In the journal, I am at ease." I think you were referring to Henry Miller and to certain other friends who didn't understand your obsession with the diary. You also say, "This diary is my kief, hashish, and opium pipe. This is my drug and my vice. Instead of writing a novel, I lie back with this book and a pen, and dream. . . . I must relive my life in the dream. The dream is my only life." How much of a conflict was there for you in expanding from the privacy of the diary into the novels which, unlike the diary, were meant for immediate public consumption?

**ANAIIS NIN:** At one moment, it seemed like a conflict. The feeling that Henry Miller had and that Otto Rank had was that the diary was a refuge and a shell, an oyster shell, and that I was going inward instead of coming out to face the world with my fiction, since I concentrated on writing something which couldn't be shown to people. The conflict doesn't exist for me anymore. I see them as being interrelated, the novels and the diary. I see that the fiction helped me to write better for the diary; it helped me to develop the diary in a more interesting way, to approach it more vibrantly than one sometimes does when you're simply making a portrait or communicating a whole series of events. I feel now that they were really nourishing each other. At one time, I seemed to be trapped in the sense that I couldn't do the outside writing, I was more comfortable not facing the world, not publishing, not facing criticism; I was hypersensitive about those things. I was more willing to incite others to write.

**NOR:** Was it intuition that attracted you to your famous friendship with Henry Miller?

**ANAIIS NIN:** Yes, it really was. Intuition, and the fact

that Henry had, and has, a great presence, a sense of himself that is quite overpowering. Essentially, I just enjoyed his company and although his work and his style differed a good deal from mine, I respected his efforts and admired his goals. But I never discount the importance of intuition. It was intuition, for example, that made me recognize Antonin Artaud as the great talent he was; much more than an eccentric, a true poet and mystic.

**NOR:** Would you say that most of your friendships with other artists came about as a result of their exposure to your work?

**ANAIIS NIN:** Well, it works both ways, of course, but a good number of them probably did. My work made it very easy for me, and I'll tell you exactly why; I'll make a confession: when I was sixteen, seventeen, really up until the time I was past twenty, I was horribly shy. I didn't talk. Henry Miller said recently that I was the best listener he'd ever had—and it's because I simply didn't talk. And that, of course, is partly why I went to the diary. I wasn't open myself, but I like others to be, and they were with me. Eventually, the shyness disappeared because other people made the first gesture. That's the wonderful privilege about being an artist, because once you've said something that means something to others, they come towards you and the shyness is no longer a problem. For instance, last year I was able to lecture extemporaneously in front of a large audience, which is something I never would have done when I was younger. I never could have even imagined it. Henry said he couldn't believe it, having known me. Sometimes it doesn't turn out so well, but you do have the feeling that you're talking directly to the people.

**NOR:** What are your daily writing habits? Is maintaining a regular routine important to the accomplishment of your writing goals?

**ANAIIS NIN:** Routine and discipline—that is, writing every day, and never erasing or crossing out—have been very important. I always write in the morning, usually between 7:30 and noon, and the afternoon I devote to correspondence and miscellaneous things. I type when I work in the mornings, and only write longhand in the diary.

**NOR:** So much of your style reflects a belief in spontaneity and continuous “flow.” What is your attitude toward revision and re-writing?

**ANAIS NIN:** Well, re-writing is a special problem because it means that something about your book is basically flawed and has to be corrected. If that’s the case, there’s no escaping it. My attitude about revision has never been enthusiastic, probably because I dislike obsessive perfectionism. I would always prefer to start another book than to concentrate on revising something I’d already done; I think when you go on to something new, you learn new things and you tend to become better. I just think that you benefit more by going forward than by backtracking.

**NOR:** I believe that you first began writing in English when your mother brought you as a girl to New York City. Did you keep writing in English after your return to France? How do you compare the two languages?

**ANAIS NIN:** I wrote the diary in French from the age of eleven to about seventeen. After that, everything was in English. I think that whatever language you master, you love; you can’t avoid being involved with it in a very intense sort of way. I fell in love with English as a second language when I studied in New York Public Schools, and my mother was very helpful. She had learned beautiful English at a New England convent. I think you’ve got to appreciate each language for its unique qualities, its particular resonance. I thought the word “you” was the most beautiful thing I had ever heard.

**NOR:** We seem now to be swept by a tide of nostalgia, a series of tides, really. How do you react to this? Are you nostalgic?

**ANAIS NIN:** No, I’m really not. I love my present life, I love the people who visit me now. I’m much more interested in experiencing new cycles than in looking back. I tend to feel negatively about nostalgia; I think we go back when we feel stunted in the present life. People who are nostalgic have known something good in the past and want to pick it up again; say, for example, the houseboat period in my own life. When I’m in Paris, I look at those boats gently tossing on the water and I recall many good things, but I really don’t have that nostalgic craving. Each cycle of my life interested me equally, but I have no desire to go back to any of them.

**NOR:** Your published *Diary* begins with a beautiful description of Louveciennes. Is your house there still standing?

**ANAIS NIN:** It’s still there, but it’s crumbling. It’s in the guidebooks and everyone who goes there sees that it’s falling down.

**NOR:** Does anyone live there?

**ANAIS NIN:** People live there in summer. The French landlords are like Balzac’s miser; they don’t want to fix anything so they let it go and rent it during the summer when it doesn’t matter if the furnace isn’t working. The place is two hundred years old, you know, and when I had it I had to fix everything myself. But Louveciennes is lovely. It’s got a wonderful atmosphere, very rustic, although it’s only twenty minutes from Paris by car. The Americans built a modern village next to it for the Army, but they fortunately didn’t touch the old village so that it’s just the way it was, with the church in the middle and the shops

around it, a typical French village. It’s quite historic, too; Renoir lived there, although I didn’t discover that until after I had left. You know, I went back there under rather strange circumstances which should show you that I’m really not nostalgic. German television wanted to do a documentary and we did a whole day’s work at Louveciennes and had many complications. For one thing, they wouldn’t let us into the house, but this was good in a way, because it allowed new things to happen; it forced us to create something out of the immediate present, out of what we are experiencing. It wasn’t any longer focusing upon the past.

**NOR:** Paris in the thirties was the place to be. What did you think of Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein and that group?

**ANAIS NIN:** The younger writers thought that they were passé, too 1920’s. We were trying to be our own writers, and we didn’t have much respect for Hemingway or Fitzgerald. We weren’t thinking about them so much as about ourselves.

I went to Gertrude Stein’s place once and found her very tyrannical. As we know now from the biographies, she didn’t like women. She thought that they were frivolous, even stupid. She much preferred the company of men, and tended to isolate the women. I felt myself that that was true. It’s very clear, from those biographies, just how poorly she regarded members of her own sex.

**NOR:** Did you have much contact with writers in New York in the 1940’s?

**ANAIS NIN:** In the forties, when I came to New York, I could have met a great many of these people; in fact, however, I only met a few. There was Richard Wright, and Theodore Dreiser, who was quite an old man then. I didn’t meet a lot of these people because I had a rather severe problem with them: they all drank so much. I liked several of those who drank: James Agee, for example, and Kerouac. They were both great talents. I remember being very keen on meeting Kerouac, but I just didn’t have that capacity for drink. So often someone would come to meet you already drunk, and I found that frustrating. I think it reflected an inner frustration on their part. I can see two people who already know each other going out and drinking together, and having a good time, but only after something has been established. It works well with some, of course. One hears, for example, about how Tennessee Williams and Carson McCullers drank and wrote together, sometimes consuming tremendous amounts and yet producing marvelous work. But this business of going off and being dead drunk is something else.

**NOR:** This is a common stereotype of the writer: someone who re-orders reality through his work and escapes from the outside world through drink or drugs. Do you think that having some sort of pervasive neurosis is simply part of the artistic personality?

**ANAIS NIN:** No, I don’t think so. But I do think that, as Americans, we have a collective neurosis. My belief is that we create better without it. There are a great many romantic notions that neuroses are necessary; that pain and sorrows are necessary for the writer. I reject this as a false romanticism. We all have problems, of course, and some of them turn into neuroses, but the object is to get rid of them. As I shed mine, you see me entering into new cycles. The minute I would shed one neurosis—I had

*"There are a great many romantic notions that neuroses are necessary; that pain and sorrows are necessary for the writer. I reject this as a false romanticism."*



Margo Moore

many of them—I would then be able to go on to another cycle. There was the cycle of obsession with the father, and I dropped that; and then there was the obsession with the mother, and I dropped that, which is the way it should be. We're none of us ever just one thing, and we shouldn't allow our growth and development to be blocked.

**NOR:** Your *Diary* is famous for its massive size as well as for its style. How do you handle the problem of editing, of deciding what to publish and what to delete?

**ANAIS NIN:** There are several problems determining what can go into the published diary, and people are sometimes hostile about what I've left out. They don't understand that you have to consider two things very carefully: one is your own ethical standard which concerns protecting the privacy of people who have confided in you, and the other deals with the publisher who demands that I receive permission before the portraits can be published. So, of course, I'm inhibited that way. The editing is really dominated by my own ethics because sometimes you can write something which doesn't seem to be destructive but which can, in fact, be harmful. For instance, we had a charming story-teller friend in the Village days. He was an alcoholic and a homosexual; we didn't think anything of that, and in the diary I just described his storytelling. And when I sent it to him he said, "Please! I'm working for the State Department!" Had I published the piece, I would have hurt him without intending to, which is why I'm glad about the permission requirement. I have to send these portraits to the people who are concerned, and sometimes they tell me to change something or it would have a bad effect upon them. I don't want to be destructive.

**NOR:** When you send these portraits to close friends or associates and they ask you to make certain changes which you'd prefer not to make, does this cause special problems?

**ANAIS NIN:** No, because we talk about them. For instance, with James Herlihy, he read everything I had referring to him and corrected one factual error, a date concerning his play, I think, and that was all.

**NOR:** A number of expatriate writers who have settled in Los Angeles have been attracted to various religious cults found here, particularly to Eastern sects. Have you ever been drawn in that direction?

**ANAIS NIN:** No, I was never attracted to Eastern religions and I'm not attracted now, even though I have great admiration for Asian culture. Nor was I ever attracted to Eastern philosophy. I love the East, but I was trapped once, and I am determined never to be trapped again.

**NOR:** How was that?

**ANAIS NIN:** In Catholicism. They say, "Once a Communist, always a Communist; once a Catholic, always a Catholic." It's very hard to come out of a dogma, to transcend it. Although I finally did, I'm very wary of dogma, and of any organized religion. I am religious; I can accept the metaphysical, but not the dogmatic. That's why I didn't have the same intimacy with writers who veered toward religion here, the closeness that I had with my friends who were primarily concerned with art. The kind of metaphysics I found here simply didn't attract me. Of course, I know that many of the young are attracted to it.

**NOR:** Why do you suppose that is?

**ANAIS NIN:** It makes for a balance in American life. It gives a space for meditation, for repose, to a way of life which doesn't have repose. If you go to Japan and sit in a restaurant, everything is so quiet, people are taking stock of themselves. Everything is done so quietly, and there is a natural meditation. You don't need to make an area of quietness; just having tea takes on that kind of quietness.

**NOR:** Can you come to the same sort of "religious" realization through art?

**ANAIS NIN:** Yes. I once read a description of satori by a Spanish author, and for the first time it was a very simple description. He said that it was a feeling of oneness with nature, a oneness with other human beings. I said, "Is that all it is? I feel that; I always have." It's not such a complex thing that you have to go through such a discipline.

**NOR:** You are known for your use of the roman fleuve concept. It seems to me that the roman fleuve requires a special way of looking at all the elements of good writing: character, motivation, personality, timing, construction. It really rejects the conventional idea of story-telling.

**ANAIS NIN:** You're quite right. I think that that comes out of a philosophy, or an attitude. My attitude was one of free association. I saw things as a chain, and felt that everything is continuous and never really ends. I had a sense of continuity and relatedness; relatedness between the past and the present and the future, between races



and between the sexes, between everything. That's an attitude that sustains me as a writer.

**NOR:** *For a long time, American publishers resisted this conception. Why do you think that was?*

**ANAIS NIN:** I think that when you are uneasy, when you are not at one with things that you tend to lose yourself in technique. Publishers are very big on technique. The technique of the novel and the short-story was that it had a beginning, a middle, and an end, and they taught you that. They taught you to make plots, to plot the novel before you wrote it. The technical part of writing became the reality, but in fact this isn't at all true to life. The people who did this claimed to be realists and that I, supposedly, was not. Actually, I know now that I was nearer the truth than they were, because we don't live our lives like a novel. We don't have these convenient denouements, these neat finishes; it just isn't so. Life goes on and on in circles; perhaps the past will tie up the future for you, but who knows? One can only guess.

**NOR:** *Do you think that the roman fleuve concept will affect the future development of the American novel? Will we grow further away from the ideas of definitive plot and tight construction?*

**ANAIS NIN:** Yes, I think so, but for the moment I can't really tell; for the moment there is this great interest in diary-writing. But then, American society is set in such a way that this interest in the diary is quite natural; it tends to reassure people about their own individuality.

It's important to let your imagination go, especially at a young age. I let mine run free when I was young. I loved to make a drama out of everything, even the weather, and I allowed this to come through in the diary. If you do see things through the eyes of imagination, you should relate it. Obviously, as far as the dramatization of experience or feelings is concerned, I was doing that when I was eighteen. Very little happened to me at that age; I blew it up and let myself go. Maybe I did that because I considered it a work that no one would see and I therefore felt free. And I have everything in there: quotations from other writers, notes on things that I hoped to do someday, ideas for stories. The story-telling element in a diary is good; it's what distinguishes it from a boring journal. A number of women send me their diaries, and many of these diaries aren't interesting because of the way they are told. But it's only the way they're telling it that's not interesting; the things themselves are always interesting. They don't know how to bring it out, mostly because the imagination is stifled.

**NOR:** *Does it ever bother you when critics say, or insinuate, that your diaries are more fiction than fact?*

**ANAIS NIN:** No, that doesn't bother me. After all, I know the facts and I know that the facts are true. I also know that I see events in a lyrical or dramatic way and I feel that this is valid. I know that the way I see Bali, for example, is not the way the travel writer for the *L.A. Times* sees Bali; he will write about the hotel prices, and the shops, and all that, which is important. But my point of view is valid, too.

**NOR:** *How do you react to the criticism—which is voiced by people who apparently have had only a cursory exposure to your work—that you are self-obsessed; they seem fond of using the term "Narcissistic"?*

**ANAIS NIN:** I try to laugh that sort of thing away, because I think they are terribly wrong. I think the reason we have felt burdened or constricted in America, why we have felt so alienated, is that we didn't have any Self, we didn't have an "I." The cultural atmosphere of France did affect me in the sense that all the writers there kept diaries, and you knew it was Gide, and you knew it was Mauriac; they were entities. That's where I got my tradition, and there is no diary without an "I." So I laugh at this criticism because I think it comes from Puritanism. I think it comes from the Puritan conception that looking inward is neurotic, that subjectivity is neurotic, that writing about yourself is immodest. I think it's terribly funny. Every now and then the narcissism charge comes up; they apparently don't know what it means. One French woman said, "If that's narcissism, it's a pretty exigent one. She's demanding an awful lot of herself." Quite obviously, to anyone who is very sensitive, the diary reflects a lack of confidence, a lack of certainty about myself, and the reason why I wrote down the compliments was because I needed to. Anyone who can read through a psychological character knows that I wasn't very pleased with myself. I was always in a struggle to achieve more in my own character. I was always involved in a confrontation with myself, which is painful. I think that's our heritage from Puritanism. It's a lack of self-understanding. Most people have an illusion about their being objective. They feel that by not talking about themselves, they are doing an honorable or virtuous thing. Again, this is from Puritanism. And I must tell you this, because I think it's interesting: the women, the ones who really went into the diary, took it very differently. They said just the opposite, that this was not my diary, but theirs. They by-passed this business of narcissism and the "I" and said, "that 'I' is me." What they wrote to me was, "I feel that way about the father. Your father was not quite like mine, but I felt the same way." They wrote that about many things, that they felt the same. My feeling was not that I was at all a special being, or an eccentric, but I was voicing things for other women, and for some men, too, because there are men who understand the diary very well. It's a falsity to say that because you have a sense of yourself it means that you are also speaking for others, but the result of the diary, for those who are really into it, is that they feel that I have helped make them aware of who they are, and where they are going, and how they want to get there.

**NOR:** *And this couldn't have been an intentional effort on your part?*

**ANAIS NIN:** No. I thought I was telling my own story, and that I was exposing my neuroses so that I could be rid of them. Simply telling the story was more important to me than any other consideration. I needed to tell it.

**NOR:** *I'd like to turn to the question of the persona, which is a subject that you've pursued in both the fiction and the diaries. Would it be accurate to describe the persona as a necessary, but transitory state, a condition which we should try to outgrow?*

**ANAIS NIN:** I think that the persona is something we create defensively. It's what we present to the world, what we think the world will accept. We all do this to a certain extent, but I don't think that we can ever really communi-

cate on the basis of persona to persona. Thus, we became lonely within the persona. I experienced a great deal of this loneliness in the early diary, when I was playing roles, pretending to be a wife, pretending to be this or that, but never fully bringing myself into anything. Only in the diary did I really exist; only in the diary could I open myself to others. When you realize something like that, you become angry at the persona because it's keeping you from contact with others. If I sit here trying to create a persona for you, everything would be ruined. And only when you outgrow that compulsion to conform to a mere image—and I think you do outgrow it, as one truly matures—it's what Jung called the "second birth"—will you really dare to be yourself and to speak out about your own experiences. In the beginning, I couldn't do that face to face with people; I could only do it through the diary. There again, you see that I was really a scared person. But I was willing to go back to the diary when I saw that it could help me destroy the persona.

**NOR:** Then, in a healthy person, the persona always dissipates entirely?

**ANAIS NIN:** I think it's one of our goals that it should dissipate because it's a defensive thing, it can imprison you. We've all known personalities—celebrities—who are imprisoned by their own public patterns. With me, recognition came too late for me to be caught by the public image. I was already mature and rid of my persona, and I wasn't going to take up one for the lectures or T.V. Fame came so late that I could really be myself, on T.V. or anywhere else. I wasn't constrained by all these things which create artificiality. But if it had happened to me at twenty, I don't know if I could have done it.

**NOR:** I was wondering about the female characters—Lillian, Djuna, and Sabina—who appear in *Cities of the Interior*. Oliver Evans described them as "archetypes," and I wondered how valid you felt that description was. Also, to what extent would you say these women were conscious extensions of your own personality?

**ANAIS NIN:** I wouldn't say that they are archetypes, except in the very broad sense that each of us is an archetype of our predominant character traits. I certainly didn't conceive of them in a rigid way that would make them literary archetypes. As far as their being conscious extensions of my own personality, I wouldn't say that at all. One can argue, of course, that every character comes out of an author's perception, and that, since perception is a major part of a writer's psyche—of his personality if you prefer—it may be said that fictional characters are therefore, in some way, representative of the author. But that argument is a bit convoluted.

**NOR:** We talked before about the mutual affinity which seems to exist among many artists. Is there also an inherent antagonism?

**ANAIS NIN:** Oh, yes, I suppose. But that's from envy and jealousy, don't you think? In France, it was less so because the stakes were not material, the writers didn't really make any money. There was none of that rivalry that I found when I came to this country where there was a great deal of envy and jealousy. Here, there is a struggle for material status among writers. I found that they were

not as collective, or communal, or fraternal, not as willing to help each other, as we were. But then, we didn't have the temptation. We weren't expecting to make \$20,000, or anything like that, so I'm aware that not having these temptations made being fraternal much easier. The American experience, to me, became obviously tied up with commercialism, with making rivalries and competitions. In France, the young writers didn't think they were going to make it; that's the truth. I can remember going with Henry Miller to the Balzac Museum and he said to me jokingly, "Do you think our manuscripts will ever be shown this way?" We really didn't think they would be. We weren't aiming at that. So it was easy enough to be fraternal and devoted, whereas the American has a terrible financial temptation.

**NOR:** We've all heard stories about famous writers who were once friends but who have come to a parting of the ways. As an extension of these rather personal antagonisms which arise between individuals, have you ever seen *Man*, the social entity, as being a natural antagonist, either to women as a group, or to you personally?

**ANAIS NIN:** Oh, yes. I think we have all suffered from that. We don't know the origins, but I certainly think that there are wars between men and women. I think that certain active Feminists are currently trying to make a war.

**NOR:** Is it a justified war?

**ANAIS NIN:** No, I don't believe in war, in any kind of war. War isn't going to solve the problems of our relationships, or affect our psychological independence, or our freedom to act, or our standard of living.

**NOR:** Historically—and psychologically, I suppose—the sexes have tended to circumvent each other, and have thereby thwarted understanding and mutual acceptance. Much of this is due to role-playing. Do you see this as inevitable? Is it bound to continue?

**ANAIS NIN:** No, I don't think so. I think it only happens when something's gone wrong. We all have causes for hostility which aren't necessarily related to sexual matters—we all get injured or get betrayed—but in proportion to how we can transcend those things, we become a different sort of human being. I didn't have any bitter feelings, for instance, after being ignored for twenty years, when the same publishers who turned me down began sending me books to comment on. I don't feel bitter about that; it's something I understand. But some people accumulate bitterness or hostility, mostly when they blame others for where they are. I think women tend to blame men for where they are when they should be spending at least an equal amount of energy looking inward to see how they got there.

**NOR:** One can't argue very much with the economic points made by the Liberation Movement, but somehow I feel that many women underestimate the more pervasive psychological power and influence which they have always had, and I don't mean merely the sexual power over men. It's something more nebulous than that.

**ANAIS NIN:** That's the kind of power women had in Europe, but women here never seemed to have that power; it's really a kind of spiritual power. Somehow the Frenchman considers the woman's opinion rather automatically

when making decisions. The Frenchwoman may not have had many legal rights or the power to earn a living, but she did have this other power. She was not simply a sexual object; she had an influence. But I think that the whole thing will mellow, it's mellowing already. You know, Americans essentially love to foster hostility. They encourage it; they love to fight. The media encourage it also. They don't encourage reconciliation, and understanding, and compassion. They never try to reconcile, they love the hostilities and the prize fights. That's one thing I find much less in Europe. Perhaps they've already worked out their aggressions through the wars, I don't know.

**NOR:** *Of the younger women writers being noticed today—Joyce Carol Oates, Erica Jong, Susan Sontag, Germaine Greer, the late Sylvia Plath—are there any about whom you're very enthusiastic? Also, when you were beginning your career, were there any writers to whom you looked for guidance or inspiration?*

**ANAIS NIN:** Well, my inspiration writers were always Lawrence and Proust. About the younger writers, I'm afraid I'm not very enthusiastic, although I do very much admire Germaine Greer. I think her efforts have been very worthwhile.

**NOR:** *Many people feel that the official recognition that you are now enjoying is long overdue. How do you react to this sort of "establishment" approval?*

**ANAIS NIN:** I react in different ways. My first impulse is to back away from organizations and official honors; but I'm also aware that recognition has an important psychological impact which affects a number of people, not just the person being recognized or honored. I'm often reminded of that by my young women friends, whom I call my "spiritual daughters." They remind me that being given a public forum also gives one an opportunity to exert a positive and constructive influence.

**NOR:** *After your long involvement in the composition of your continuous novel, Cities of the Interior, Collages seemed to mark a new phase in your approach to fiction. Do you have plans for anything similar?*

**ANAIS NIN:** Collages was a flight, really. I was so dis-

illusioned by the reception of the novels, it seemed like I had reached a dead-end. And then I suddenly began to think that maybe my major work was the diary. So now, of course, I'm involved in finishing Volume 7. When I do finish it, I plan to go through some of the childhood diaries; then, who knows? But I had the feeling that fiction, for me, was disastrous. Even though now people write quite beautifully about it and seem to understand the fiction, somehow I have become detached from it.

**NOR:** *It's hard to imagine that you could feel that way.*

**ANAIS NIN:** It could just be because the fiction led me to a wall. It led me to a sort of troubled silence, and it could be that that influenced me. But it could also be that I realized I had put much more into the diaries. And, as I said before, there are imaginative elements in the diaries, too.

**NOR:** *On the whole, would you say that your life as an artist has been as rewarding as you could have wished it to be?*

**ANAIS NIN:** Definitely, yes. There is a special kind of reward which is wonderful, and it's something which, I think, only artists enjoy. It has nothing to do with material rewards. It's the reward of finding your people, the chance to make a world, a population of your own, and that's wonderful because you find yourself as a connecting link between people who think as you do and feel as you do. And suddenly you're not alone; there is a constant exchange which you enjoy yourself and which you help to promote among others.

**NOR:** *Are you optimistic about what you see happening around us all today?*

**ANAIS NIN:** I'm optimistic only about the new consciousness of the young, that's all. I'm not optimistic about the country or about the tyranny of business all over the world. Now it's too late for revolution. We couldn't make revolution against the corporate establishment no matter how much we wanted to because it's simply too big. But I am optimistic about people's ability to develop themselves in a more meaningful and more lasting way than we've experienced in the past. I believe that the change of consciousness will have an impact for the good.

## AN OLD MAN WRITING

This letter that has  
no stamp and never  
finds an envelope  
I write each day breathing  
in and out  
in the same room  
in the same rocking chair  
as I remember my wife  
setting her teacup  
down on its saucer  
my breath drifts away  
like dust in the air.

—Shelley Ehrlich

# A Missionary of Sorts

An Interview with Rosemary Daniell

by Diane O'Donnell

This interview was conducted in Rosemary Daniell's home in Atlanta by Diane O'Donnell in September 1975, soon after publication of Daniell's first collection of poetry, *A Sexual Tour of the Deep South*.

**NOR:** I'd like to begin by asking, do you consider yourself primarily a Southern poet, a woman poet, or simply a poet?

**DANIELL:** I consider myself primarily a person, of course. In a sense, I don't even like to think of myself as a poet, because once we start thinking of ourselves as a certain kind of person, we start filtering out experiences. I feel that I am basically just a person who writes poetry. This is something that I do; this is a major commitment for me.

Beyond that commitment, I try not to think about it a great deal. I want to write poetry like I wash dishes; I want it to be a very natural, ordinary activity. And since I'm a woman, the experiences of being a woman are of great importance as a subject in my writing. I've been struggling with the conflicts of being a woman in this society for a very long time. Obviously, because I also write, those conflicts will become a part of my writing. I don't like the schizophrenic notion that literature and life are separate.

**NOR:** Since your recent book, *A Sexual Tour of the Deep South*, is concerned with growing up female in the South, could you tell me a little about your own background?

**DANIELL:** I've lived in or near Atlanta since I was born. I was brought up with the traditional female Southern fantasy: that is, of getting married, having a church wedding. When I was in the sixth grade, I wanted to marry a seventh grade boy and to have a baby blue wedding with blue net dresses and a pale blue satin gown and six bridesmaids and six children. I must have been fixated on the number six! Also I wanted to write novels while I had cakes baking in the oven. Now that was out of the ordinary, really. The whole thing about wanting to be married, having this kitchen, cooking, having kids and so on, was perfectly par for the course. But somehow or other I had already gotten the notion of becoming a writer. I imitated any books or any pieces of literature that were around, although there weren't many at our house. We had a book about first aid, so I wrote another book about first aid; we had a cookbook, so I wrote my own cookbook.

When I was in the seventh grade, I had a teacher who tried to tame me because I was very rebellious and bad. She picked it up that I liked to write and she would have me go outdoors and write poems about Spring and things like that. And I would have to come back and read them to the rest of the class. This made me furious. Somehow I felt like I was being forced to write.

But I think my ambition to become a writer came down from my mother, who's very talented and had a frustrated ambition to be a journalist. To this day, although she later wrote newspaper articles about home canning and missionaries and so on, I feel that she had a great talent that was frustrated and sublimated to her desires to be a proper Southern matron. She had a great deal of influence on me.

As far as growing up in the South, the images of the South are just incredible to me, and this is one reason it would be hard for me ever to leave the South fully. We lived next door to a Holy Roller Church at one time and we'd hear all the hymns and everything. And the gospel hymns, the rhythms, the images of the gospel hymns—the blood—mean a great deal to me. It's imbedded in my consciousness in a way that will never truly be eradicated. Actually, I was very religious as a child. In fact, when I was thirteen, I wanted to be a missionary.

**NOR:** A Baptist missionary?

**DANIELL:** Baptist or Methodist, either one would have done, and I still see myself as a missionary of sorts. I think being a poet has an element of that in it.

**NOR:** The particularly Southern male type known as "The Good Ole Boy" appears frequently in your poems. How do you feel about them?

**DANIELL:** This is one of the difficulties of living in the South. I like to be around men and have male company at times. Unfortunately, finding men in the South who are not "good ole boys" is sometimes difficult. I know many of them who are and I'm both repelled by and subject to their attention. They give women a certain kind of attention that's very sexist and reinforces one's notion of one's self as a sex object or as the cultural ideal, which is to be a sexually desired woman. However, the older I become (and hopefully the more liberated I become) the more irritated I find I am by these attitudes. I have "a lot less truck"—to use a Southern phrase—with them than I once did.



**NOR:** *A while ago, I was reading an interview with James Dickey in The Craft of Poetry and he got to talking about Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. He said, "If I have to read one more poem of Anne Sexton's about middle-aged menstruation, I'll blow my head off!" I threw the book across the room in rage. I couldn't go near any of his work for months after.*

**DANIELL:** James Dickey is a "good ole boy" who can write poetry well, and I think that comment shows how threatened he is by female sexuality. That's obvious in a lot of his poetry. I'm very fond of Dickey, partly because our similar background makes it very hard for me to say I totally reject him. I understand his type of man; they're very familiar to me.

**NOR:** *I wonder if you could tell me a bit about your education, either formal or literary.*

**DANIELL:** Well, I quit high school after the eleventh grade to get married and I didn't go to college. My life between the ages of, say, sixteen and twenty-four was like a blind time, totally visceral, it was all survival. It had nothing to do with the life of the mind, really, although I had always been a great reader. Eventually, by the time I had three children, I was living my housewife's life and going to the Garden Club, and I was really miserable. I thought if I heard just one more person talk about how to clean the toilet, I was going to go berserk. Then I took an Adult Education course at Emory University in Contemporary Poetry and I just fell in love with poetry. I knew nothing of that whole world—I had never heard of T. S. Eliot, for example. It was just an incredible thing for me. Just a great high. It was really like falling in love when I discovered poetry.

After that, I took a poetry workshop with James Dickey, just after he had come back from Italy. He was very supportive of me and encouraging. He told me he thought I had a lot of talent. He was good with me in that particular sense, but I was very hung up on his kind of poetry and his male literary establishment ideas. I would copy down his poems whole and just loved them—you know, I was in love with his poetry and his whole presence. He was the first really powerful person whom I had met in my life, and even now he is a very powerful person for me. This went on for several years.

At one point, he said to me, "A woman has never truly been known in poetry. She either says too much or too little." And when he said that to me, of course I determined I would be the first person to say what was just right about the feminine experience. But then I began to notice that when writers whom I was beginning to like a great deal, like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, came up, he would make all the conventional male comments like they're shrill, hysterical, etc. I was also going through a revolution in my own life then, which made me re-think my role in society as a woman. And so I simply said to myself, "Well, who is Dickey or any man to say what is correct about female experience?"

So from that point on I really got in touch with myself and my writing, and I started writing without thinking about pleasing anyone, particularly the male literary establishment. I started writing whatever I wanted to write.

When I was finishing *A Sexual Tour of the Deep South*

I rented a studio for the summer and I worked every day—all day—from about nine to five, which was an unusual experience for me. I never had had that much time. And I really got into myself. But while I was writing, I didn't have any awareness of the response that other people would have to my poems. Then at the end of that summer, I happened to give a poetry reading at Callanwolde. There were either all these shocked comments and faces or extremely positive and feeling responses. So then I knew that it was not just me, or something I was working out just for myself at that point.

**NOR:** *Finding that we were all in it together?*

**DANIELL:** Right.

**NOR:** *Would you discuss your work habits?*

**DANIELL:** I'm a great believer in self-discipline and regular work habits. At one time I had to have a certain ritual to get to my work. So many writers do. Now I find more and more that I can sit down directly and start writing. I think that has to do with familiarity and a certain technical facility that's developed over a certain period of time. I do think that most women tend not to take their work seriously enough. I felt that going out and renting a studio for myself was a great step in my liberation. It was really a big step, like saying, "My work is important, so I'm going to rent a studio, or buy a telephone answering device, or get just the right electric typewriter." I think these are very important steps.

**NOR:** *Previously much poetry has been a kind of elite thing, only for the "educated." Do you think your poems, and Erica Jong's and Alta's (to name just a few women poets), can be read and understood by anyone, "the Common Woman," to use Judy Grahn's phrase? How do you respond to critics like Helen Vendler who claim that banal, mundane things that happen to people in everyday life are "not the stuff of poetry" or of great art?*

**DANIELL:** Well, I think it's a bunch of bullshit, really. What about Dostoyevsky? I have no interest in poetry as just some kind of mental masturbation activity. I am interested in relationships—in other people. I think what Yeats said is very true, that there're two important subjects: sex and death. I would add one more, relationships, because it's through them that we work out those two other elements of our existence. I would have very little interest in writing if I felt it had no relationship to everyday life.

It's really giving precedence to one's self which is the hardest thing in our culture for women to do. We're brought up to be passive, unselfish, to give others the benefit of the doubt, not to be assertive, and not to do things for ourselves.

Before I wrote *A Sexual Tour* my work was much more "socially acceptable." In fact, I developed during that period a great deal of skill in writing in that particular way. My poetry was what I now think of as passive: it was mostly pastoral, lyrical. It had some hints of the violence, underlying violence, but it was all sublimated. There was a terrible feeling of resignation in the poems. When I started revolting, and revolting within, then all that erupted. I felt like saying, "Well, bullshit to all this sublimation, sublimating all my feelings." I guess that's what this book means, really; it's an active as opposed to passive response to my position in society, and as such it goes far beyond elitist poetry.

*"... there's a whole crazy notion in our culture that women are not earthy."*



Jonathan Coppelman

**NOR:** Vendler called your language "garbage." What is your response?

**DANIELL:** I had the feeling that she had not even really seriously read my book. She suggested that I had written about things that should not be written about. As far as I know, there is simply no human experience that should not be written about. There are also no words that should not be printed; words are just tools that we use to express ourselves. Many people have asked me why I use four letter words. Why should I find substitutes when they are the most authentic expression of aggression and anger in our culture?

**NOR:** And of love?

**DANIELL:** And sometimes of love, right. However, I must confess to quite a bit of anger in this book. Since I think that all true human emotions are legitimate, I don't apologize for that. I don't think that poetry is simply the language of our more refined and delicate emotions. If it is, then poetry has no meaning in terms of our lives.

It's so transparent in some reviews that it's the reviewer's own value system that he or she is defending. It's hard for me to be personally hurt by them. I think that writers who let themselves be distracted by reviews from their writing are not strongly motivated. I don't intend in any way for reviews to dominate my writing life.

**NOR:** What about the many gynecological terms used in your poems: all the female body references—what Vendler called "garbage"? Many male critics seem to get really annoyed about this. "What does that have to do with poetry?" they ask, "How does that speak to all mankind?" What's your reaction?

**DANIELL:** First, it happens to be true that we experience life, our own lives, through our senses, primarily through our bodies. Poetry relates to experience; our bodies relate to experience. And men who say that are simply confirming the acculturated position that, in some form, we women are dirty, unacceptable beings, with this gash between our legs—that there's something really awful about it, female sexuality. I just refuse to subscribe to that notion, that there's something wrong with having a vagina, with having babies. I think there's something wrong with the way those aspects of women are treated in this culture. And the only way to end this weird distortion is to bring it out into the open.

**NOR:** I want to ask you about the poem where a crucifixion takes place, but the subject is a woman. Could you talk a bit about that?

**DANIELL:** That's "Liturgy," and it is one of the few poems I have written that began with an abstract idea for which I found my images later. Usually I find my images and then realize what they mean to me. In this poem, Christ is a hermaphrodite figure who's both male and female. Well, I think that woman is crucified by her internalized, acculturated notion of herself and her position in society, and by a society that expects this acculturation.

My notion, when I began it, was that women identify with religious icons in a way that hasn't been previously thought of, especially by the male religious establishment. My notion was that women identify with the Christ figure because of his suffering—the wounds, really. And I think maybe they identify with the Christ figure perhaps more than with the figure of Mary. I always have an image of Mary—although I'm not a Catholic—as being a totally pristine, sexless person. *The Virgin*.

As I said before, there's a whole crazy notion in our culture that women are not earthy. Yet women's physiological experiences are totally earthy. They have to do with blood, pain, with menstrual cycles; giving birth is very messy. And sex, of course, is a very earthy experience. But there's that conflict, you know, because of the weird ideal in our culture that a woman should not give the least appearance of having these earthy experiences. It's as though the earthiness of women is a revolting defect, something that has to be concealed.

**NOR:** Several of your poems have to do with these sex-role surprises, switches of sexual identity. Besides "Liturgy," for instance, there's "On Bourbon Street." You seem there to be approaching an ultimate androgyny.

**DANIELL:** This is a subject that fascinates me. What is real sexuality? What is gender, anyway? It can be so easily determined culturally, but what is it really? That's the source of "On Bourbon Street." I do see a correlation, too, between the assertive woman's position in society—the woman who is between the patriarchal culture and self-love and self-development—and the twilight zone or situation of these people who are between genders. I think there is a lot of similarity, psychologically, in these two situations. Because women who are attempting to grow beyond what has been culturally set for us become unacceptable in the same way that these people are unacceptable for wearing navy blue eyeshadow and Maybelline mascara and having silicone injections.

**NOR:** So that they're both going through a stage of transformation?

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**NOR:** So that they're both going through a stage of transformation?

**DANIELL:** Right, right. We are both in a form of process and we are both outside the mainstream.

**NOR:** Do you have any least favorite poems in *A Sexual Tour*?

**DANIELL:** Well, some people have been a bit confused partly because of the chronological sequence of the book. You see, it goes from the present to the past. And the last section of the book contains the "The Angel Stud." This sounds like a reversion to a passive appreciation of men, or of relationships with men, because this is one of the few poems in the book that was written out of my passive period. It has to do with the time when I still had a male muse. But I wouldn't want anyone to be misled into thinking that the poems in the book lead up to this point. In a way it should be read backwards.

The last section of the book is very important to me. It's the section which relies most heavily on Southern rhetoric. The poems in this part are all about a composite personality who is the "me" I could have been under other circumstances, less fortunate circumstances.

The first poem, "Over Chattanooga," is based on an actual incident, about a girl at a State Fair outside Chattanooga who was killed when the chain swing in which she was riding broke and flew out over the city. This event imbedded itself in my consciousness—I had a fantasy of her as perhaps a suicide, and I related to the rising through air, flying out over the city of Chattanooga in a swing, which, of course, would not be the way it happened. Also sexual feeling is related to rides and feelings of rising. I remember as a teenager being very much under the thumb of the Bible Belt and the great sin was sex. That was the sin, you know, and I think there can be a near madness or psychosis that results in the tremendous guilt when this kind of upbringing comes in contact with sexuality, when the sexuality begins to blossom. So I wanted to use this character to express that.

**NOR:** Do specific incidents like that—which you read about in the paper or see on television—do they set off something that is already going on in your head or do they start something of their own?

**DANIELL:** For me to notice a particular news clipping or image means, I think, that there's already something inside my head that correlates with the image. If I notice an image and have a certain intensity of interest in this particular image, that is because it is symbolic of something in my unconscious. So I always make a note of images—things I see, things I hear—that make a certain kind of impression on me. I'm like a certain kind of frog I heard about that lives in South America that can only see what it can eat. In other words, a frog sitting out by a pond or something is not going to pay any attention to anything it can't use. And I think this is great because that means that as a person I can just follow my own natural inclinations, which is the best possible thing for my work as a writer.

**NOR:** What about your current work in the prisons here? What are you doing at Milledgeville?

**DANIELL:** Right now it's a one-to-one relationship between me and the individuals in my classes there, and I have a great deal of respect for them as human beings. One of the things I'm doing besides getting to know the women is trying to help them get in touch with their real

feelings and expressing those feelings in words. Now, obviously, there aren't many middle-class people in prison and these women are repositories of vast amounts of repressed and unarticulated feeling. I try to help them get in touch with whatever types of feelings they might have—anger, frustration, sadness—just the whole range of human experience they're going through.

I've found that most of the women in prison are in there because of something that had to do with their relationships with men. For instance, they were in the car during a robbery, or they did something a man asked them to, like forging a check. Or many of the women have killed their husbands or boyfriends. This seems to be the typical women's crime. And if you talk with these women, you'll find that maybe that was not such an irrational thing to do in their case. I was struck by the fact that, although they hate prison, some of the women spoke of what a relief it was to live in a world without men and without relationships with men.

Working in the prison is one of the most gratifying activities that I've conducted in some time.

**NOR:** You initiated it? It wasn't an established program?

**DANIELL:** No, it wasn't. And to my knowledge, this is the first time a poetry workshop of any kind has been done in the prisons in Georgia. I'm not sure, but I think so.

**NOR:** Getting back to *A Sexual Tour*, I'd like to ask you a little bit about technique. You use italics facing the regular print on the two opposite columns of the page or interspersed between regular printed stanzas. I was very taken with this, but then I found that when I tried to read those poems out loud, I had a hard time knowing how, and where, you would do it. I was wondering, for instance, about the poem "Lying There"—about the deer shooting and the woman during sex.

**DANIELL:** Usually, when I read these poems aloud in a reading, I only read the left side of the page, which is the non-italicized part. However, I have done an experiment where I've read the italics on tape and then had the tape played as I read the other, which is one possibility. The left side of the page can stand alone as a poem on its own.

**NOR:** How would you go about the timing when you were doing this other voice on the tape? How do the lines come in, in combination with the regular printed lines—simultaneously or alternately?

**DANIELL:** In the particular poem that I taped in this way, "Housekeeping," the italicized stanzas and the non-italicized stanzas are not going on at the same time. You can see that, on the printed page. I have not yet experimented with the poems, such as "Lying There," where the italics are side-by-side, but I think it might be an interesting idea.

The italicized stanzas simply have to do with the unconscious level and what is going on there.

**NOR:** What projects are you working on now? Any prose?

**DANIELL:** I'm currently working on three projects. One book about Southern women, sort of an exoneration and, at the same time, an examination of the pathology inherent in the cultural position of Southern women, the potential pathology which is very hard to resist, needless to say.

That book is just forming in my mind so I can't say a great deal about it now.

Over the summer, I began a novel and have written half of the first draft of this. I'm a repressed novelist, by the way. I consume novels, and most of the novels I read now are by women. I rarely read books by men anymore. I'm really obsessed at this point in my life with the specifically female experience and as a sort of process for me, a life process. I intend to follow this. Truly, I've often wondered what it would be like for a woman who was a true sex object to write of her experience. Most women who choose that route seem incapable of verbalizing it, so I thought I might try to get into that a bit in this novel. And, too, I wanted to write about a woman who is an artist and has diverged from the cultural pattern. So these are some of the things that the novel is about.

**NOR:** *Where does it take place?*

**DANIELL:** It has a great deal of Southern imagery, specific Southern imagery in it. It has two time frames, at least at this point. One is a short range time frame and it's set in New Orleans during Mardi Gras; and then there's a great deal of material, flash-back material, past material. And these are going on simultaneously. I love stream-of-consciousness literature, because I think everything does happen on a multi-linear level. We're not experiencing everything in life strictly sequentially. I'm having a great deal of pleasure in working with what is a new form for me.

I've written several short stories and I have a number of first drafts written. I plan at some future time to complete a collection, with the title *Stains on a Piece of White*

*Satin*. These, too, are stories of Southern women.

Then, of course, my on-going project is always poetry. I'm working on a new collection to be titled *Porn Film for My Sister*, which will have to do with more direct autobiographical material. Many people think the poems from *A Sexual Tour of the Deep South* are highly subjective and personal. However, I think of them as abstractions of my experience. It doesn't have a lot of concrete autobiographical material in it. It's transformed. In this book, I intend perhaps to use more autobiographical material, to talk about relations with many different kinds of women and many different kinds of men, in a concrete way. At this point, that's the direction in which I see the book moving.

**NOR:** *Do you find a lot of interplay back and forth between your poetry and your prose? Do they feed each other?*

**DANIELL:** Absolutely, no conflict. The content, or that part of the process that indicates the content (in other words, what is going on inside me, my interior processes) directs the content of these projects. They simply happen to be realized in different forms. And each of these forms interests me a great deal. Poetry seems the most natural to me at this point because I've committed a lot of time to developing some technical facility in writing it. However, I also hope to use this in writing prose. I do think poetry is the source art, the source literary art, the most difficult and intense literary art.

Writing, to me, is a continuing process and one reaches an end of a certain part of that process and then is in a transitional period and then moving into another. It's this process that's so exciting to me. It's living.

## POEM

After everything quits,  
things continue  
happening. The phone  
rings. A knock comes  
at the door. Lightning  
flashes across the bed  
where you bend, looking  
at the dictionary.  
Asleep, you keep waking  
from dreams. The surface  
of your life keeps  
being broken, less and less  
frequently, at random.  
Raindrops after a storm:  
surprise: the ghost of awe.

—Everette Maddox

## PUBLICATION

It's not what you  
expected. Little  
black ants of print  
climb up onto  
the stiff page  
of the literary mag  
and form a man.

Horrible! Ants  
arranged in the shape  
of a bent old man  
on a bench  
with a bottle of Tequila  
between his knees.

"It's all wrong! He  
should have a lard can  
on his foot," you say,  
banging your foot,  
which is stuck in a lard can  
made of ants.

Nothing on the page is true,  
only the failure.  
But that's something, so  
you decide it's probably O.K.  
some fragment of this funny Bible  
has got transcribed  
at last.

—Everette Maddox



## TICK TOCK

Go lie on a river bank  
some summer afternoon  
when little yellow leaves  
are drifting down  
hitting the green water  
one after another,  
tick, in no particular  
order or hurry. Can  
you believe in time there?

Or go inside a room  
where there's a clock, shut  
your eyes and listen:  
that's just a nervous  
tick, you'd never imagine  
it was going anywhere.

Hold on, though. Listen  
to one with a tock too,  
a tick tock: that's  
more than nerves,  
that's concern. It may be  
a man with a wooden leg  
running after you  
shouting You left me  
back there on  
the river bank, you took  
my medals, you got old.

—*Everette Maddox*



# Jesus and Jujubes

## Cinema Christology and the American Public

by Roger Gillis

*If ever there was a work that deserved to remain in its original, intensely noniconographic form, it is the New Testament, but I suspect that the first motion-picture camera and projector had no sooner been invented than some enterprising ex-glove salesman thought of giving the world a Gospel According to Saint Nickelodeon. Ever since, the Bible has been big box office.*

—Brendan Gill

The initial impersonations of Christ on the American stage and in the early cinema created significant religious controversy. In 1911 Sarah Bernhardt produced for the New York stage a version of Rostand's *La Samaritaine*, a three act treatment of the Gospel encounter of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The Divine Sarah, in bringing to the stage a play in which a visible and audible Christ is a central character, received as much derision from religious leaders as her character, the adulterous Samaritan woman, must have received from her village. The Catholic clergy protested strongly and several religious groups, seeking to ban the show, appealed to Mayor Gaynor,\* who insisted that he had no power to stop the performance.

*Current Literature* (1911) stated that, although the critics had attested to its reverential tone, this theatrical landmark pointed to a certain decline of the religious: "It must be conceded . . . that the impersonation of the figure of Christ on the secular stage indicates a decrease in the religious sentiment of the community. The moment a divine personage becomes stage property, he begins to cease to be a god. His human significance may be intensified, but it is clear that the playwright, at least, no longer feels the awe that forbade the Jews from even formulating into words the name of Jahve."<sup>1</sup>

The next year Miss Bernhardt appeared in the Film D'Art version of *Queen Elizabeth*, part of the film industry's attempt to ape the theater's treatment of serious, artistic subjects. Soon, thanks to the ground breaking of *La Samaritaine*, the Kalem film company planned a "major" version of the most serious of subjects, the life of Christ. Although there had previously been partial or disguised treatments of the Gospel events, *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912), filmed in Palestine,

was the first "super" version of the Greatest Story. Again there were protests from religious groups.

On hearing that the Kalem group had filmed the Crucifixion, the Catholic publication, *The Sacred Heart Review*, decried the film as a "desecration." Other religious journals were shocked. *The Church Times* of London saw a more subtle problem in the use of cinema for religious subjects: "The mere outer events may excite a sort of sentimental attention and interest but so far from this being the sole end of religious development it is a positive danger and often prevents the soul from probing deeper."<sup>2</sup>

The religious critics need not have worried. What was to later become a pattern proved a comfort here: when controversy is involved, the motion picture industry will usually opt for the safest ground. The makers of the film—especially Sidney Olcott, the director—were sincere in their purpose and produced, largely through the contributions of Robert Henderson-Bland, who played Christ, the first large scale example of that American popular art staple: Jesus the Nice Guy. Henderson-Bland, an English actor, was an interesting blend of mystical poet and idealistic romantic. Some critics have alleged that he actually confused himself with the character he was portraying. Sections in his autobiographies, *From the Manger to the Cross* (1922) and *Actor-Soldier-Poet* (1939), headed "The Call" and "The Preparation," tend to support this allegation. However, Christ complexes aside, the American church could not have asked for a better Jesus. Henderson-Bland brought to the portrayal of Jesus all his noblest instincts. Here was an actor who felt what he "was being enveloped by some strange power,"<sup>3</sup> who gave to his portrayal a restrained nobility, a gentle radiance that could not but ingratiate itself with the film audience. Some of this attraction is documented by Henderson-Bland himself in his description of the film making: "Huge crowds stood for hours in the blazing Syrian sun and numbers lined the walls and covered the roofs of the houses. The crowds round my carriage were so dense that police were told to keep the people back and when I left the carriage to take up my position in the scene a way was made for me, and women stepped forward and kissed my robe."<sup>4</sup>

Despite an anticipatory feeling that the film and, especially, the Henderson-Bland characterization were just right, Olcott and the Kalem leadership still worried about Church reaction,

\*A New York mayor had, in the 1880's, closed an imported Passion Play because he agreed with citizens that any impersonation of Jesus was irreverent.

so they arranged, on October 3, 1912, a special showing at the Queen's Hall London for a thousand clergy. The Nice Guy Jesus was an immediate hit. Restrained and reverent treatment (no matter how safe or compromising) had proved to be the winning combination.

Not as lucky was the large scale version of the life of Christ created by, of all people, the Greek Oriental Church of Rumania in 1914. *Current Opinion*, in its article on the conservative church's effort, criticizes its defects through the observations of Dr. H. Petri, "a German writer of note." What seems to be unacceptable to Dr. Petri and to others—objections that prove to be all too typical—is the depiction of Jesus as too much the frail human being and a casualness in certain scenes totally out of synch with popular conceptions of Gospel episodes. So it is that there is no enthusiasm for the scene showing Jesus on the way to Golgotha "in which a fanatical Jew is represented as striking Christ and soldiers as pricking him with a lance every time he breaks down, which he is represented as doing only too often." Or for the Last Supper scene in which "Christ and his disciples are represented as standing around a table, each with a filled glass in his hand while Judas has emptied his. The disciples then leave the room still chewing their food."<sup>5</sup> To assure future acceptance, film makers would, after this, be sure to show a suprahuman Christ, handled in an overly reverential manner.

Thomas Ince's *Civilisation* (1915) dealt with a Christ returned to earth for pacifistic purposes, but the next retelling of the life of Christ was by one of the greatest of all film makers. D. W. Griffith, with his Victorian views on good and evil, saw the Christ story as a classic case study of intolerance: Good Man-God at the mercy of Evil Pharisees. The All-Wise versus the Ignorant. The All-Just in conflict with the Unjust. He, of course, included it as one of the four stories that comprise *Intolerance*, that 1916 epic of injustice and related human nastiness through the ages.

Despite Griffith's perfectionism—the costumes and sets based on the Judaic expert Tissot's paintings, etc.—the Christ section of *Intolerance* is totally without impact. In fact, when the film premiered, the *New York Times*' generally favorable review suggested that it and the French Huguenot story be dropped! The shortness of the Jesus scenes seemed particularly out of balance with the rest of the film. Those who have seen *Intolerance* several times find it hard to recall that a portrayal of Jesus is even in it. This is owing to the small number of scenes and to the fact that even when one of the Judea scenes is shown, Jesus tends to get lost in the crowd. As a result, Griffith's image of Christ is, ultimately, that of Jesus the invisible man.

Howard Gaye, the actor who played Jesus in *Intolerance*, claims that the original print of the film contained thirty scenes in the Judea section but that Griffith cut the section down to six scenes when Los Angeles Jewish authorities protested the villainous portrayal of the Gospel Jews. This would make sense in light of Griffith's painful sensitivity to the racism allegations made when his earlier epic, *Birth of a Nation*, appeared. It is ironic that *Intolerance*—which was to be, in Gerald Mast's words, "his cinematic defense, his pamphlet against intellectual censorship in film form"<sup>6</sup>—should be shaped in part by the pressures of an outside group. Perhaps at this time Griffith was not capable of withstanding any widespread criticism,

with the memory still fresh of *Birth's* condemnation by the N.A.A.C.P., Jane Addams, the president of Harvard University, and several politicians.

Howard Gaye is lucky he was not working for M-G-M in 1925 when *Ben-Hur* was filmed. Only his arm and his leg would have been in the credits. However, even these safe and (after this film) clichéd ways of partially portraying Christ were originally banned. Abraham Erlanger, American impresario, had acquired the rights to General Lew Wallace's successful book and stage play. Wishing to be true to Wallace's pietistic spirit, Erlanger, in his film rights deal, originally insisted on one of Wallace's steadfast stage edicts—that the character of Christ be represented by a shaft of light.\* June Mathis of M-G-M, who finally got the rights, later persuaded Erlanger that film drama could not be sustained by a significant character in the story being portrayed by a luminous nonentity. A sort of compromise was the eventual use of the Lord's Limbs.

This 1926 *Ben-Hur* was also distinctive for its use of color. The Christ scenes were almost all in Technicolor. This marks the beginning of the industry's feeling that the greatest story needed the greatest of film techniques. In the case of *Ben-Hur*, the result was not totally a success. Kevin Brownlow, in *The Parade's Gone By*, states: "The Technicolor nativity scene, with Betty Bronson as the Madonna, is a garish example of the commercial art of the twenties . . . Miss Bronson's exquisite serenity is the sequence's saving grace—but nothing could compete with her shimmering Technicolor halo."<sup>7</sup>

In 1926 another cinema Christian got the Technicolor treatment. But this time—in the first *King of Kings*—the lady was not the Mother of God but the great sinner, Mary Magdalene. This shift in technical italics says a great deal about the style of the film's legendary director, Cecil B. DeMille. DeMille fashioned films for mass audiences. So it is that in *King of Kings* DeMille found it necessary to introduce what was to become a staple of Biblical epics, the secular subplot. Mary Magdalene, who is depicted as the richest courtesan west of the Jordan, has gone through several unsatisfactory liaisons, including one with the emotional Judas Iscariot, but has found her life unfulfilling. Her encounter with the Saviour is the turning point of her life. She renounces sin and becomes a follower of Jesus.\*\* This, of course, does not set well with the lusty Judas who betrays the Master out of jealousy.

Potboiler subplot aside, *King of Kings* did, at least, present a portrayal of Jesus that was not hazardous to intelligent

\*The device, however, was used to some effect in 1912 film, *The Illumination*, about two couples, one Jewish and one Roman, who convert to Christ. Anthony Slide writes, in *Early American Cinema*, "Christ is shown only as a light passing across the faces of the on-lookers, and the lighting effects are quite marvelous when one remembers that *The Illumination* was made before the days of pan-chromatic film." (pp. 38-40)

\*\*This bringing together of the secular and the sacred was a favorite motif of DeMille. He had once planned a film version of the life of the Blessed Virgin, entitled *Queen of Queens*, in which Mary was to encounter the sensual and conniving Salome. Due to protests from Catholic circles—notably Daniel Lord, S.J.—the film never materialized. This and previous censorial questions were responsible for the rift between Fr. Lord and DeMille, a relationship that had started favorably, Lord being one of the key advisors on *King of Kings*.

viewers and diabetics. Perhaps, because DeMille was a popularist, his Jesus—portrayed by H.B. Warner—emerges as a person with identifiable human characteristics. Although the depiction is necessarily reverent (in 1926 there were still those who would have closed Sarah Bernhardt's show if they had been mayor of New York), the DeMille version of Jesus has a human appeal that still makes it one of the most requested films. A reviewer in a 1927 issue of *Outlook* states, "It is a manly Christ that is depicted, masculine, gracious, restrained, and dignified, human and not lacking in a human sense of humor."<sup>8</sup> Anyone who has seen Kenneth Anger's use of *King of Kings* film clips in his satiric film *Scorpio Rising* can attest to these qualities, especially the last. Anger's visual representation of the disciples and Jesus scampering around Jerusalem to the tune of the 60's rock hit, *Party Lights*, seems somehow wildly appropriate.

Perhaps the feeling that DeMille's version of the life of Jesus was the definitive study accounts for the thirty-four year gap that preceded the next full blown treatment of the Gospel story. It should be noted, however, that some efforts during this period did deal with the Christ story. A French film, *Golgotha* (1932) was a portrayal of Christ's passion but did not play in America; and a church-sponsored film, *Day of Triumph* (1952), although a full treatment of Jesus' life, also did not receive mass public circulation. Also, the commercially popular American films, *The Robe* (1953) and *Ben-Hur* (1959), while treating the effect of Christ on certain followers, present Jesus in the partial way already discussed above on the filming of the first *Ben-Hur*. It was not until 1961 that American film makers dared another thorough treatment of the life of Jesus.

In 1961 all the worst elements of the previous Jesus films—the strained secular subplot, the gaudy splendors of technical packaging, and the insipid depiction of Christ—were brought together for the monumentally poor, second *King of Kings*. This was not a remake of the DeMille version. It was, however, a remake of the Bible. Here is a pretty, docile, and bewildered Jesus caught up in the politics of his day. Judas, a good friend of Barabbas (portrayed, as *Time* magazine points out, as a George Washington of the Jews), sees his hope in revolution dashed with the capture of Barabbas—but not, however, until after a bloody Jewish-Roman battle scene spectacular in both sweep and anachronism. Judas' only hope is to get Jesus arrested, a situation calculated to activate the Messiah's supernatural powers, rally the Jewish people and, eventually, create the utopian Messianic Kingdom. Readers of the Gospel know the ending.

Tom F. Driver, in his review for *Christian Century*, called this *King of Kings* a "King James Version of *Gone With the Wind*."<sup>9</sup> Certainly the attempt at wide screen splendor is there—the cast of thousands, sweeping music, Technicolor overkill, etc. But in the midst of this grandiosity is one-dimensional Jeffrey Hunter, whose Jesus is virtually a nonentity. *Time*, like most publications, excoriated the film, but singled out the portrayal of Christ as especially awful: "The imitation of Christ is little better than blasphemy. Granted that the role is impossible to cast or play; granted that the attempt may nevertheless be worth making. Whatever possessed Producer Bronston to offer the part to Jeffrey Hunter, 35, a fan mag cover boy with a flabby face, a cute little lopsided smile, baby-blue eyes and barely enough histrionic ability to play a Hollywood

marine?"<sup>10</sup> The reviewer closes by summarizing the portrayal in the words of the subtitle given it by the trade: *I Was a Teenage Jesus*.

One would think that George Stevens would have learned from the Bronston fiasco and stuck to film projects like his previous *Shane* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Instead, his attraction to the Gospel story sent him headlong into another Biblical extravaganza, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, (1965), based loosely on the book of the same title by Fulton Oursler and on the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Hollywood. One critic explained its difference from its most immediate predecessor by labeling *King of Kings* as the low brow's Jesus and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* as the middle brow Christ. Change of brows or not, Stevens' film marks little progress in artistically handling the Gospel narrative. There is still the overblown production—heavy handed score by Alfred Newman, borrowing heavily from Handel, Verdi, and Israeli folk songs; decorative sets that more than one critic labeled in the style of Hallmark cards; a cast of thousands, including the tired technique of cameos by famous players ("Yes, Shirley, that was too Shelley Winters.")—and an overblown publicity campaign: Over three years in the making! Made with the advice of the Pope, Ben-Gurion; sponsored by the President and First Lady, etc.

Yet Stevens does, at least, improve slightly on previous efforts by avoiding spicy or irrelevant subplots and by depicting a Christ (Max Von Sydow) who is not a thorough simp. Fred Myers, in *Christian Century*, points out that Von Sydow is "somewhat virile, and this goes a long way toward setting a precedent."<sup>11</sup> Still, the overlong effort is, in the final analysis, a tedious, distorted, and vacuous failure. One of the reasons Stevens fails artistically is that he, like the other film Gospel directors before him, takes too seriously the prevailing American images of Jesus. Since *King of Kings* (1927), *King of Kings* (1961), and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* were all made to conform to what audiences expected of any portrayal of Jesus, these films, as popular art, are highly illustrative of the main images attributed to the Christ by Americans.

As a preface to an examination of these film depictions of Jesus, I would hold that each participates in what might be called an American Docetism. In this context, John T. Gallo-way, Jr. has given, in his *The Gospel According to Superman*, a concise definition of this religious belief: "For two thousand years people have had a hard time grasping the notion that God would fully, totally become a man. Many in the church see Jesus as a kind of Superman, 'Strange visitor from another planet with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men,' who disguised as Jesus of Nazareth, was really not a man at all but remained God himself. This kind of heresy is called Docetism."<sup>12</sup>

Despite the intellectual acquiescence by most American Christians that Jesus is, indeed, God-made-Man and despite the orthodox views maintained by their theologians, for the most part—certainly on a general cultural level—Americans have, emotionally, created an image of a Jesus who is more God than man. He is either the God temporarily pretending to be like any other man—but, in reality, not a real mortal at all—or he is the God-Man who has risen from the apparent defeat of death: the Superman who is the Resurrected Christ. He may "walk with me and talk with me" and I may "put my hand in the hand of the Man" but it is the post-Resurrection Jesus who

walked and talked with the disciples to Emmaus, the Jesus who presented his wounded hands to the Apostle, Thomas. This backward projection of the post-Resurrection image of Jesus into the Gospel events preceding the Crucifixion permeates popular American representations of Christ.

DeMille's Jesus, for example, is basically a portrayal of a superman as Man of the Year. He is the Model Man who, in his suprahumanness, is the ideal that no one can really ever achieve. DeMille once told an interviewer: "I think the importance of contact with a Supreme Being or a Supreme Mind is well. I think Jesus of Nazareth covers it more thoroughly probably than any being—any Divine Being—that has ever visited the earth."<sup>13</sup> The Divine Being that visited earth was given top treatment by DeMille. The filming of *King of Kings* was handled with the decorum and restraint of a state reception for a foreign dignitary. Phil A. Koury, a DeMille worker and biographer, describes the film's start:

Filming started August 24, 1926. The clergy prayed for blessing—a Protestant bishop, a rabbi, a Catholic priest, a Salvation Army commanding officer, a Mohammedan teacher and a Buddhist swami.

A ten-stop organ played "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" each morning as DeMille entered the sound stage and all stood by solemnly. Spiritual mood music was piped in, strains from Handel's "Largo," Dykes' "Holy, Holy, Holy" and Strainer's "The Crucifixion."<sup>14</sup>

That DeMille envisioned Christ as a figure removed from ordinary men is evident from Koury's account of DeMille's treatment of H. B. Warner, the actor who portrayed Jesus. Warner signed a five year contract in which he agreed not to appear in any film role which would reflect poorly on his part in *King of Kings*; Warner also agreed not to go to nightclubs and to avoid, during production, secular activities such as swimming or going to baseball games. During filming Warner ate alone and spent his time when not needed on the set in his dressing room. If he went outdoors he wore a hood that concealed his face. These precautions and others—DeMille had investigators quietly prove the fraudulence of a paternity allegation against Warner—were part of DeMille's attempt to create a dignified image of the Holy One, a perfect being far above any mortal. That this image was successfully realized is illustrated by an incident during the filming of a particularly hard scene in which the despotic DeMille sarcastically criticized Warner's efforts. Warner shocked director and crew with the angry question, "Mr. DeMille, do you realize to whom you are speaking?"<sup>15</sup>

However, as it has been conceded above, DeMille's Jesus, overly dignified and pietistically portrayed as it is, remains one of the best portrayals we have. Most of the critics at the time, even those who had detested his previous works, admitted to an attractive presentation of the Gospel Jesus. Richard Watts, Jr., in his *New York Herald Tribune* review, expressed what most favorable reviews pointed to: "Avoiding with amazing skill the cognate perils of making the role too self-consciously saccharine, or, on the other hand, too much the breezily informal Hollywood leading man, he [Warner] presents his Saviour an always believable and tremendously moving combination of tenderness, quiet humor, spiritual nobility, and just the right touch of earthliness."<sup>16</sup>

Still, the Docetists grumbled. Mordaunt Hall of the *New*

*York Times* suggested that the film would have been more reverent if the camera had been moved back when filming Jesus. He is apparently uncomfortable with the human close-ups of the American looking Warner whose countenance "does not appeal to one as the general conception of Christ, gained from Bellini, daVinci, and other masters of painting."<sup>17</sup> One critic complained that DeMille had portrayed Jesus as capable of weakness—"The Agony in the Garden suggests a man who is afraid to die. . . ."<sup>18</sup> And behind several complaints that the movie lacked the spirit of the Gospels is a disappointment that the life of Jesus is presented as a story of a wonderful man, that the cinema is unable to portray the God who was man, a God of transcendent power. One review states this sense of loss and concluded: "Perhaps because they sense the omission, the very pious will find it more than ordinarily difficult to admit the propriety of a commercial Hollywood Passion Play. . . . And some there will be, privileged to support Mr. Alexander Woolcott's testimony that H. B. Warner's impersonation is at variance with the true Christ."<sup>19</sup>

If any performance is "at variance with the true Christ" or with any genuine believer's image of Jesus, it is most likely that of Jeffrey Hunter in the second *King of Kings*. The makers of this Technicolor piece of *kitsch* transport to the screen one of the most distasteful cultural images of Jesus—the Androgynous Christ. This form of Docetism robs Jesus of his humanity by robbing him of his masculinity. Not only is he not Man in the generic sense, he is not man in a genetic sense. This image was familiar to Americans long before Nicholas Ray started filming *King of Kings*. Nor has it died out. Browsing in any religious supply store today will still demonstrate the popularity of paintings in which Jesus looks like a bearded lady,\* where the general impression is of the Saviour as the girl next door.

The prevalence of this image of Jesus in the United States is attributable to several strains in our culture. Somehow, in our evolution of the model American male, politics, the military, and business became identified with the "real man"—all areas where rough activity was stressed. The supposedly passive activities of learning, culture, and religion were assigned to women or to sissified men. With this classification, Jesus wound up in the second camp. It was this stereotype that go-getter Christians like Bruce Barton and Billy Sunday warred against. Barton's best selling book *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925) creates an image of Jesus as the greatest businessman of all times. Sunday, in an attempt to win men over to Christianity, preached a Saviour who sounded more like Teddy Roosevelt than the gentle Nazarene: "[he] was no dough-faced, lick-spittle proposition. Jesus was the greatest scrapper that ever lived."<sup>20</sup>

Also contributing to the feminine image of Christ was America's concept of purity. Through a series of strange cultural formulations, purity became almost exclusively associated with women. Christ, who was perfect in all things, purity included, became linked with the structure of feminine values. Horace Bushnell, writing in 1869 against women's suffrage, makes this distinction between men and women: ". . . more is expected of women . . . there is more expectancy of truth

\*One famous French painting of Jesus as the Sacred Heart was actually painted by a man who used his wife as the model for Jesus, painting in the beard later.



and sacrifice in the *semi-christly* subject state of women than is likely to be looked for in the forward, self-asserting headship of men."<sup>21</sup> Bushnell represents that line of thought that creates a Jesus devoid of virility because an expression of Christ's manliness would compromise the notion of his perfect purity.

Hunter, in *King of Kings*, is the androgynous, passive Christ personified. His body shaved, his clothes a bleach commercial clean, he is the Lamb of God reduced to a maiden aunt's "such a lamb." Critics had a field day. *Time* questions the whole enterprise but singles out the Hunter Jesus: "And why dress the poor guy up in a glossy-curly page-boy peruke, why shave his arm pits, and powder his face till he looks like the pallid, simpering chorus-boy Christ of the religious-supply shoppes?"<sup>22</sup> His passivity, developed through his stupidly not realizing the social situation around him and his constitutive inability to get angry, is pointed out by *America's* Moira Walsh who charges that "the picture bends all its efforts . . . to keep Christ as neutral and undynamic as possible."<sup>23</sup> Billy Sunday would have been outraged.

An attempt was made to put hair on Jesus in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, but here Docetism shows itself through the image of Jesus as the bland but magic Superman—able to bend steel with his bare hands, change the course of mighty rivers, and raise friends from the dead in a single bound—all done with production elements that have a maddening lack of subtlety. Pauline Kael complained of the Lazarus scene: "... as the shrouded Lazarus shuffles out of the tomb the sound track bellows forth a deafening 'Hallelujah Chorus.' More of the 'Messiah' is heard after Christ rises on the third day, but by then it seems a sort of musical-comedy reprise, and I wouldn't have been surprised if the sound track had favored us with a stanza or two of 'Oh, What a Beautiful Morning'."<sup>24</sup> Shana Alexander sums up the film in her *Life* review by observing that "the total effect was one of sets by Hallmark, panorama by Grand Canyon Postcards, Inc. and script by ecumenical committee."<sup>25</sup>

Miss Alexander's last point—film makers' attempts not to offend anyone—is a major cause of the bland, one-dimensional portrayals of Jesus on the screen and a leading reason why most of these films are so unmoving, so sterile.\* The *Ray King of Kings* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, for example, go out of their way not to offend the Jews. The Romans are the villains in *King of Kings* and Stevens eliminates

all Semitic blame by having the devil himself, played by Donald Pleasance as the Dark Hermit, cry "Crucify him." (No wonder Ben-Gurion approved of the film!) Seeing the bend-over-backwards treatment of the Jews one has the feeling that Ray and Stevens would have been delighted if some one had proved, à la *Chariot of the Gods*, that Jesus had really been killed by atheistic Martians.

A cynic might attribute this treatment of the Gospel Jews to the fact that their descendents buy movie tickets. It wouldn't be the first time that film makers have been accused of toning down the Gospel story in order to attract customers and bolster box-office. The charge of using religion for commercial gain spans the whole history of Biblical films. In 1912 one magazine criticized movie businessmen who "seek to bring people into their net. The men and women who have rejected Christ are not the people who will supply their sixpences and threepences to see the *Agony in the Garden*."<sup>26</sup> And Moira Walsh levels this charge against the makers of the second *King of Kings*: "... it is obvious that these gentlemen have no opinion on the subject except that at the moment [Christ] is a 'hot' box office property if properly exploited."<sup>27</sup> Certainly, at its worst, this commercial impulse of producers of popular religious "art" has given us such innocuous products as the Jeffrey Hunter Jesus, Good Shepherd night lights, and Baby Jesus coloring books.

And behind all this religious *kitsch* floats the Docetic image of Jesus—an image that denies his humanity and, I somehow sense, has to do with Americans' long and uncomfortable relationship with their own bodies. Why else all the righteous objection to a physical depiction of the Lord in the early decades of film? Why else did we object so strenuously, in the sixties, to the use of *God's* name (Jesus or Christ) in such secular, purely *human* songs as the Beatles' *Ballad of John and Yoko*? (The record was banned by most radio stations because it used the name, "Christ," and made the analogy that the singers, too, had felt the hatred of those who try to "crucify.") Why else did most main line Christians denounce the emergence of the *Jesus Christ, Superstar* recording as blasphemous because it presented a Jesus who was "too human?" Perhaps, after all, the shaved and antiseptic body of Jeffrey Hunter is the best symbol of the longest lived American conception of Jesus Christ.

The traditional American concept of Jesus, however, changed with the general antitraditionalist movement of the sixties. This complex period, with its tremendous changes, has been much debated and various theories elaborated as to the cause of this decade of foment. A particularly clear and convincing treatment of the sixties effect on religion is the last chapter of Sydney E. Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People*. Simply put, Ahlstrom sees some connection between violent reaction to the belittling effects of a technological culture and the system that created it; and a very identifiable religious shift to a stress on man's importance and on the moral obligation of social action. Symbolic of this shift was the sympathetic reception given to *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, (American release, 1966), by those in this new American antitraditionalist movement.

*The Gospel According to St. Matthew* was made on a shoe-string budget by Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini. Perhaps because of his communistic beliefs, Pasolini's film is a loving

\*It is a general criticism of the Gospel films. Perceval Reiniers on DeMille's *King of Kings*: "... it was thereafter Mr. DeMille's inflexible precaution to fashion a picture so entrenched in reverence and armored in piety that it offered no weakness for its would-be detractors." (*The Independent*, May 28, 1927, p. 565). Of *King of Kings* (1961) Stanley Kaufman claims that the film is "bathed in the awed reverence of those whose main concern in making a religious picture is not to affirm faith but to avoid offending a single potential customer." (*New Republic*, Nov. 13, 1961, pp. 37-38); Tom Driver claims that the screen writer, Philip Yordan, had "removed Jesus forever from the ranks of controversy." (*Christian Century*, Nov. 1, 1961, pp. 1302-3). Of *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, *Time* points to the film's trying not "to disturb the public mind with a single fresh conception," and sums up the film as "3 hours and 41 minutes worth of impeccable boredom." (*Time*, Feb. 26, 1965, p. 96); and Shana Alexander sums up her disgust with the film's wishy-washy tone in the title of her review, "Christ Never Tried to Please Everybody." (*Life*, Feb. 26, 1965, p. 25).

tribute to that which is good in all men. His understanding close-ups of the nonprofessional troupe used to depict the Gospel characters lead *Newsweek* to conclude that his message is "that humanity is beautiful at worst and at best it is sacred."<sup>28</sup> It is certainly a Gospel film shorn of all its traditional, overblown trappings. Filming in a dusty, deserted village in southern Italy, Pasolini presents the story of Jesus in its simplest and starkest terms. The characters wear authentically tattered and dirty garments and there are flies at the Last Supper.

To a nation fighting the effects of technological belittlement of the personal, this glorification of the human in *The Gospel* was most welcome. Part of the warm reception given the film can possibly be linked with a satisfaction accompanying comparison of this treatment with its predecessors. Artistic considerations aside, knocking sentimental New Testament stereotypes was an attack on traditional religion in America, a force largely responsible for the existing technological dominance.\* Counteracting this traditional tide was an ever-increasing cultural insistence on the importance of man and a celebration of the human. Theosophical groups, who preach that man can attain the power of God, flourished. Personalism, in such forms as sensitivity training, enjoyed a renaissance. Magazine writers and other authors told Americans that the body was good. Jesus became a man again.

*The Gospel* Jesus was human, indeed. For realism, Pasolini used a non-actor, a Spanish economics student, Enrique Irazoqui, to portray the Christ. Richard Schickel, writing in *Life*, describes the Pasolini Jesus: "Jesus trudges the roads of Judea neither haloed nor clad in white but in a scratchy, dirty black robe. His beard is scraggly and much of the time he has about him the fevered air of a hungry, exhausted man driven by the knowledge that time is short and that there is much to do."<sup>29</sup> Here is a Christ with emotions, who sweats, who is frightened by death, and who cries out in horrible screams when nailed to the cross.

Another quality of the Pasolini Gospel film that is consistent with various interpretations of Jesus and the Gospel message in the sixties is Jesus' intense social conscience and his threatening intolerance of injustice. This is in stark contrast with the portrayals of Jesus in the capitalistic products which preceded *The Gospel*. Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told* has the Von Sydow Jesus answer a question on wealth by compromisingly stating that at times riches may be a burden. Gone is the righteous finger pointing at the wealthy. Jeffrey Hunter's Jesus never upsets people. As *Newsweek* points out, *King of Kings* "does not include Christ's driving the moneylenders out of the temple, possibly because the movie, like J. D. Salinger's *Franny*, couldn't bear the thought of an angry Jesus."<sup>30</sup> Not so Pasolini. If anything, Jesus is most consistently portrayed as an angry radical.

And he is most angry at the hypocrisy and moral lassitude of the age, embodied most concretely in the Scribes and

Pharisees.\* Pasolini's portrait of Jesus emphasizes the prophetic man consumed by zeal for his father's house. He challenges, antagonizes, and teaches with such purpose—even the usually placid Sermon on the Mount has a stern-jawed emphasis to it—that one can understand why Jesus was a threat to the Jewish leaders. Unlike the stories in the pseudoecumenical works of Ray and Stevens, Pasolini's film makes it clear why Christ was killed and who killed him.

It is the Social Gospel Jesus, a determined young reformer, who is clearly depicted in *The Gospel*. And there were those who found fault with the image. Alongside the nonartistic objections of Christians to a communist handling their property, there were those critics who seriously considered the work flawed by the portrayal of Jesus. In essence, these critics considered the characterization as basically monoemotional. Pasolini's Christ is one-sided—too much the stock character of the angry young man. *Time* summarizes this partial dissatisfaction with the film by observing that "Christ sheds the mantle of soulful martyr but still seems no more than a fierce embodiment of divine purpose, as stiff and one-dimensional as those who have gone before."<sup>31</sup>

The portrayal of the decisive man of heavenly purpose is not to be found in *Jesus Christ, Superstar* (1973), the film version of the successful record opera and stage spectacle. However, there are elements that it shares with *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* and with the popular sixties and early seventies image of the Jesus revival attested to most notably by the Jesus People movement. According to this image, Jesus is an antitraditionalist, an antilegalist, and a man who, despite the weaknesses of being human, tries to live according to his conscience and beliefs. He is opposed by those who are quite obviously evil—hypocritical, immoral, and self-seeking men who maintain the *status quo*. In short, the Gospel becomes an allegory of the social situations of the present.

So it is that in the film *Superstar* the portrayals of the Pharisees, Jewish leaders, and the Romans have been intensified to the point of bizarre characterizations of evil. In fact, the whole enterprise becomes so extreme (owing, it seems, to following the excesses of Tom O'Horgan's stage transformation) that the script writers and Norman Jewison, the director, found it necessary to tell the story as a modern Passion Play enacted in the Israeli desert by a roaming troupe of actors, singers, and dancers. The story, then, becomes a series of symbols, supposedly depicting Gospel truths. Thus, modern anachronisms, such as Herod's sun glasses, are to be translated into their greater meaning; in this case, decadence or vanity. A row of tanks rolling across the desert is a consolation prize to those in the audience not adept at easy symbol decoding.

As modern as the trappings are, though, the film is a throwback to DeMille. Again Mary Magdalene is subplotted as a love interest—but this time she's in love with Jesus. Judas,

\*Ahlstrom points out that "Max Weber performed a great office by turning men's attention to the ways in which the Judeo-Christian world-view in general and the Protestant Reformation in particular accelerated the rationalization of social and economic life which underlies the use of organized technology." Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, Vol. 2 (Image Books, New York, 1975), p. 611.

\*Rogopag, a quartet of film segments by four directors, contains a section, "Cottage Cheese," done by Pasolini. In this pre-Gospel effort, Pasolini develops the theme of simple generosity in the face of hypocrisy and vice by showing the death of a poor, ignorant, but good actor playing the part of the Good Thief during the filming of a life of Christ by a proud director, working with a cast who, down to Mary and the angel, are decadent, snobbish, and cruel.

like Milton's Satan, is a dominant character who, in terms of drama, is more interesting than Jesus. And just as H. B. Warner labored to give his Jesus saintliness, Ted Neeley works just as hard to make his *Superstar* Jesus human. Too hard, it could be argued, for there is a whininess and petty poutiness that creeps into his portrayal. This tendency, coupled with his American looks, voice, and manner (Neeley is from Texas), suggests a seventies Jeffrey Hunter directed by Pasolini.

The Jesus of *Godspell* (1973) is also an apt reflection of the times. His concern for morals (the *Godspell* Jesus is constantly teaching and preaching) done within a certain celebration of life is a portrayal consistent with a modern revival of moralistic concerns and a concerted search by the culture to find happiness and joy. Following this emphasis on joy, the film version, like the play, portrays Jesus' humanity through the image of the Clown Christ. There is a beguiling quality to this almost medieval morality play character comparable to the image of Peter Pan. Both are, at bottom, symbols and not people and, as is the case with most symbols, certain specifics are muddled or lost. Here it is gender and the particularity of person that are the missing factors. The Jesus of *Godspell* is not the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We know from the use, again, of the "actors putting on a show" technique that this is true. What is presented is an allegory of the good and joyful Messiah who loved people so much that he died for them. In *Godspell* the humanity of Jesus is most often translated into the show's main theme: love. In fact, never are we given any villainous characters to hate, and the audience is made to identify with the disciples who sing that all they want is to see, follow, and love the Lord, Jesus.

What, of course, differentiates these three films from their predecessors is, as already noted, a stress on the humanity of Jesus.\* In *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Pasolini has Jesus sweat and scream. The Jesus of *Jesus Christ, Superstar* is, as Mary Magdalene points out, "just a man." Also, there is a raging personal doubt accompanying Jesus' Passion, and no Resurrection. The *Godspell* Jesus sings, dances, and tells corny jokes. All three, in their different ways, mark a shift from the Docetist images that preceded them. Part of this humanizing of Jesus is attributable to the political and social strains already alluded to above; but the reemphasis on the Christ-as-Man image on the popular level can also be linked to the theological sifting down of earlier biblical studies and theories which created a new interest in the historical Jesus. As J. Robert Nelson notes in his *Christian Century* treatment of *The Gospel*: "It is doubtful that Pasolini has read Gerhard Ebeling, Ernst Fuchs, or even Rudolf Bultmann. But he has shown us more vividly than the scholars can what the 'Word-Event' means for mankind."<sup>32</sup>

By way of conclusion, a major defect should be noted in all the American film characterizations of Jesus, (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, whatever its faults, is exempt from this criticism): although about religious subjects, presumably the religious subject, none of the films raise real religious questions. Not one asks the viewer to grapple with the significant problems of the meaning of life, the mystery of death, or with the hard choices of morality. Moira Walsh, sensing

this lack of religious engagement in Ray's *King of Kings*, states "An important function of art after all is to make us see ourselves more clearly. This can be a very painful experience, so painful in fact that vast numbers of the mass audience have demonstrated that they will not support it with their ticket or grocery purchases. They prefer the kind of entertainment with the opposite but ultimately deChristianizing message: 'You are fine as you are.'"<sup>33</sup>

Andrew Greeley, in an article on "Why Hollywood Never Asks the God Question" in *The New York Times*, recently argued that there has not been a truly religious film made in America—saintly biographies, Biblical spectacles, and clergy pictures notwithstanding. He summarizes by analyzing the history of so-called religious films in America. His analysis is especially applicable to the Jesus films:

So the American filmmaker uses religion as a stage prop or a grabber. He may be a skeptic, in which case he exploits religion with a wink of the eye. Or he may even be sincere; he may think that casting out devils or routing the Philistines in massive battle formations is what religion is. After all, there's plenty of that in the Bible.

But the last thing in the world the American director does is permit his doubts and fears, hopes and ecstasy, horror and interludes of transcendence into his films. First of all, the questions involved in such experiences are regarded as not worth asking. Secondly, the director suspects that if he made people really think about them, he might scare the hell out of them, and they wouldn't come back to see his next movie.<sup>14</sup>

Fr. Greeley's remarks make Will Hays' 1927 letter to the Atheists Society ironic reading, indeed. The Society wanted equal film treatment of its views as a balance to DeMille's Judeo-Christian epics, *The Ten Commandments* and *King of Kings*. Hays, czar of the motion picture code at the time, wrote a letter to the President of the Society, piously insisting that the motion picture industry could not—and would not want to—avoid religious questions. Part of his argument was as follows:

The motion picture, I may add, is concerned with drama, and drama is concerned with whatever man does. Potentially, everything touching man—his thoughts, his ideals, ideas, aspirations, his ambitions—is motion picture material. To ask us to eliminate God and man's belief in God, therefore, is to ask us to eliminate one of the most profound urges in man—the spiritual urge. Such is unthinkable.

In fact, to ask us to eliminate God from motion pictures is equivalent to asking that sunshine be barred from the playgrounds where emaciated, ill-kept children of the tenements find a moment's respite of happiness. It is equivalent to asking us to blot the stars from the heavens because men may look at them and dare to ask themselves, as Napoleon did of his fellow voyagers into Egypt, "But who, gentlemen, made all those?"<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, the American films about Jesus have offered little more, culturally and religiously, than Hays' hypocritical sentimentalisms. Perhaps, after all, the atheists did get equal time.

## NOTES

\*The trend continues. A film company in Denmark, despite opposition, still plans a film on the sexual nature of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup>"Representations of Christ on the American Stage." *Current Literature* (Feb., 1911), p. 193.

<sup>22</sup>"The Life of Christ in Moving Pictures," *Literary Digest* (Aug. 10, 1912), p. 228.  
<sup>23</sup>Robert Henderson-Bland, *Actor-Soldier-Poet* (London, 1939), quoted by Anthony Slide, *Early American Cinema* (U.S.A., 1970), p. 55.  
<sup>24</sup>*Literary Digest* (Aug. 10, 1912), p. 227.  
<sup>25</sup>"The Life of Christ as Shown in the Movies," *Current Opinion* (Sept., 1914), p. 192.  
<sup>26</sup>Gerald Mast, *A Short History of the Movies* (U.S.A., 1971), p. 88.  
<sup>27</sup>Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (New York, 1969), p. 471.  
<sup>28</sup>"King of Kings," *Outlook* (May 18, 1927), p. 73.  
<sup>29</sup>Tom F. Driver, *Christian Century* (Nov. 1, 1961), p. 1302.  
<sup>30</sup>"Sign of the Cross," *Time* (Oct. 27, 1961), p. 55.  
<sup>31</sup>Fred Myers, *Christian Century* (April 21, 1965), p. 493.  
<sup>32</sup>John T. Galloway, Jr., *The Gospel According to Superman* (Philadelphia and New York, 1973), p. 45.  
<sup>33</sup>Phil A. Koury, *Yes, Mr. DeMille* (New York, 1959), p. 54.  
<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 120.  
<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 122.  
<sup>36</sup>"Christ on the Screen," *Literary Digest* (May 21, 1927), p. 32.  
<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.  
<sup>38</sup>Gilbert Seldes, "Christ in the Movies," *The New Republic* (May 4, 1927), p. 299.  
<sup>39</sup>Perceval Reiners, "Hollywood's Own Passion Play," *The Independent* (May 28, 1927), p. 565.  
<sup>40</sup>William McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name*, quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, p. 116.

<sup>41</sup>Horace Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage: the Reform Against Nature*, quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, p. 190.  
<sup>42</sup>"Sign of the Cross," *Time*, p. 55.  
<sup>43</sup>Moir Walsh, "Christ or Credit Card" *America* (Oct. 21, 1961), p. 137.  
<sup>44</sup>Pauline Kael, "No Miracles," *The New Yorker* (Feb. 20, 1965), p. 137.  
<sup>45</sup>Shana Alexander, "Christ Never Tried to Please Everybody," *Life* (Feb. 26, 1965), p. 25.  
<sup>46</sup>*The Church Times* (London), quoted in "Sacred Subjects in the Movies," *Literary Digest* (Nov. 30, 1912), p. 1016.  
<sup>47</sup>Moir Walsh, p. 73.  
<sup>48</sup>"The Living Word," *Newsweek* (Feb. 28, 1966), p. 91.  
<sup>49</sup>Richard Schickel, "A Stark, Astonishing Life of Jesus," *Life* (March 11, 1966), p. 10.  
<sup>50</sup>"Ungingered Bible," *Newsweek* (Oct. 30, 1961), p. 77.  
<sup>51</sup>"A Communist's Christ," *Time* (Feb. 18, 1966), p. 101.  
<sup>52</sup>J. Robert Nelson, "Pasolini's Miracle," *Christian Century* (March 16, 1966), p. 335.  
<sup>53</sup>Moir Walsh, p. 73.  
<sup>54</sup>Andrew Greeley, "Why Hollywood Never Asks the God Question," *The New York Times* (Arts and Leisure section, Jan. 18, 1976), p. 13.  
<sup>55</sup>Will Hays, "Letter to the Atheists' Society," reprinted in *Recent Events* (Dec., 1927), p. 410.

## DEATH

I have seen    come on  
 slowly as rust  
 sand

or suddenly    as when  
 someone leaving  
 a room

finds the doorknob  
 come loose in his hand

—John Stone

## IN PRAISE OF EVEN PLASTIC

*And doubt all else. But praise.*

—John Ciardi

Praise, for one thing, this flower  
that knew better than to be a flower  
and grew plastic leaves and stem.

Praise my lost tooth, now replaced  
and chewing better.  
Praise this nerveless tooth.

Praise also the dreams I remember  
good or bad.  
The counterfeiter under the naked bulb

the con man  
for what fools us where we live.  
Praise the woman

who isn't sure  
for what she is sure of.  
The music in the grooves

all perpetual motion machines  
lifetime guarantees.  
Praise the plastic then

and dacron and fiber glass  
as some hope against decay.  
Praise the falseness that is true.

Praise the lie that lasts.

—John Stone

## BRINGING HER HOME

While you were in the hospital  
the house was sick as hell.

I should have said the children  
are well. And the turtles.

The kettle was cured with singing.

But your dresses  
were breathless in the closet.  
And then the demented washer  
began to knock while spinning;  
the dryer died wet as diapers.  
And in one seizure of wind  
the hinges on the doors  
got palsy.

All last night  
I was afraid of mushrooms.

No matter now.  
The children and the turtles  
are waiting for you there.  
They are well.

But the close-mouthed keyholes and I  
have been gasping for air.

—John Stone



## CAUSES

What do they do first?  
    *They examine the body  
    to prove that death  
    was natural.*

And if not?  
    *Further tests.*

And if natural?  
    *No one is ever  
    completely sure.*

But what of the family?  
    *They know, but are  
    not talking.*

And after all are satisfied?  
    *All are never satisfied.*

And what of those who are not?  
    *They are watched closely  
    to see if their deaths  
    are natural.*

And if not?  
    *Further tests.*

—John Stone

## FOR OUR FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

I'm here for the duration, Lord,  
In a big house with seven children—  
Bless this place  
And shower sensuality upon  
The adults in it.  
We have been in love five times  
These fifteen years, a good marriage

And shower sensuality upon  
Our children as they come of age—  
Teach us to live with what they know—  
Point out right times for perfect rage—  
Sons, daughters, let them grow.

And thank you for the company of Gen,  
So calm in bed, so often fun.

—James Whitehead

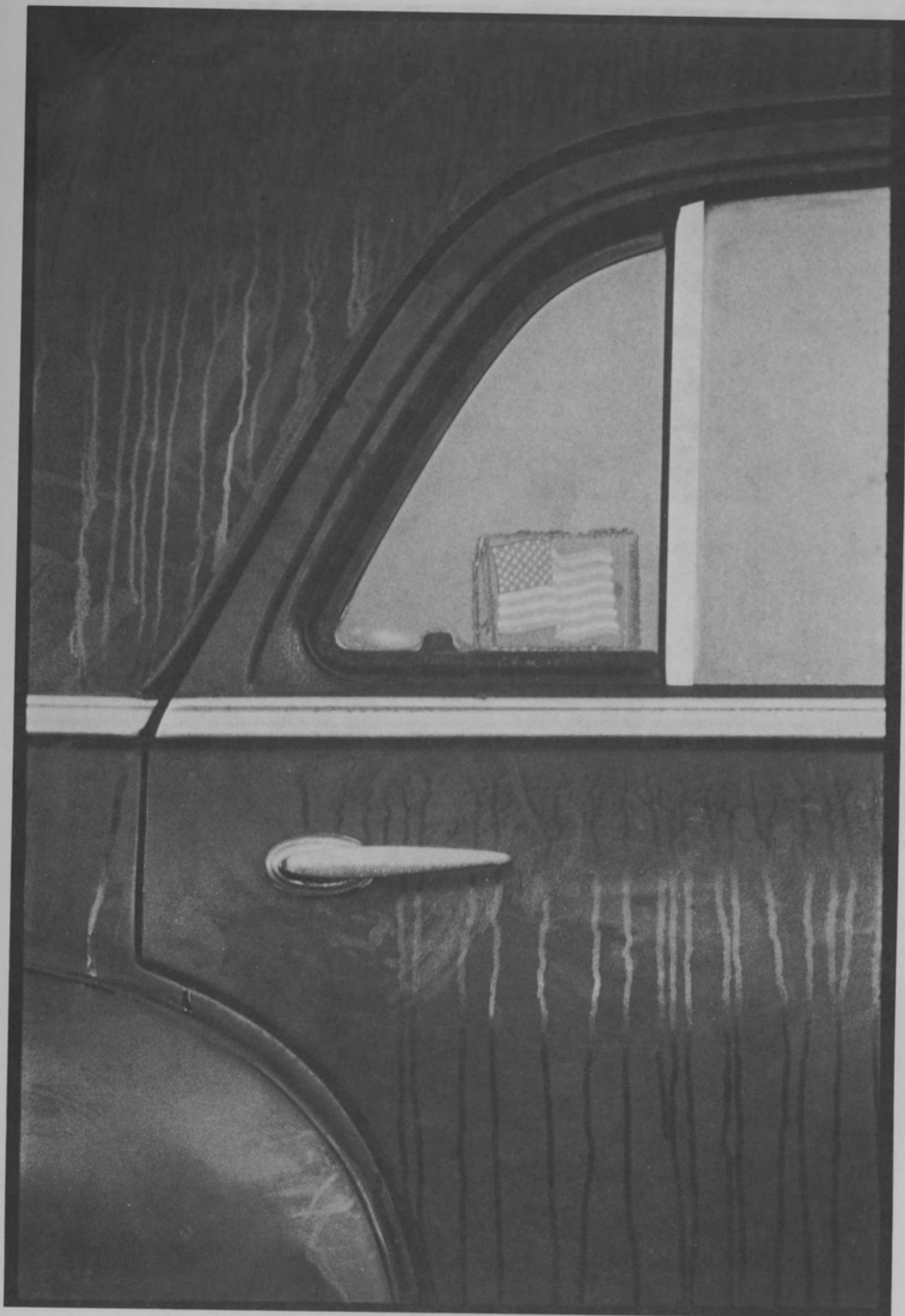
## FACE THE NATION

Secretary Rogers' face is generous—  
In fact I'll bet his Sunday drink is orange juice  
With gin in it, like mine sometimes. He's calm loose  
on the T.V. and likes the world and us.

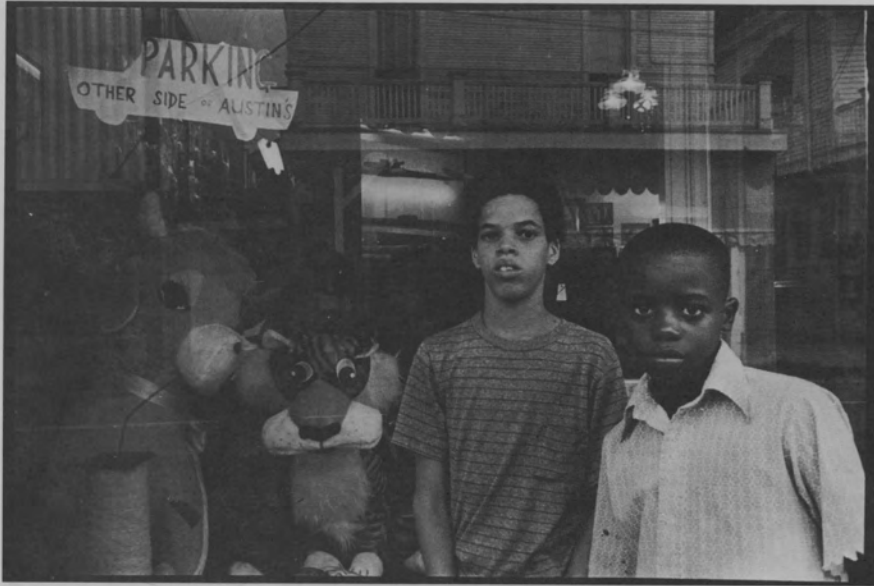
Mr. Rogers' face is not quite blessed—  
It's rather fallen like creation, a truce  
Being the best it can imagine, a fierce  
Desire for nicer foreigners for us

To deal with over orange juice and gin  
On Sunday mornings. He's not bad at all,  
Even though Republican. His peace  
Of mind cannot define a term like sin  
Or anything that's not political—  
But maybe Christ were nicer as gin and orange juice.

—James Whitehead

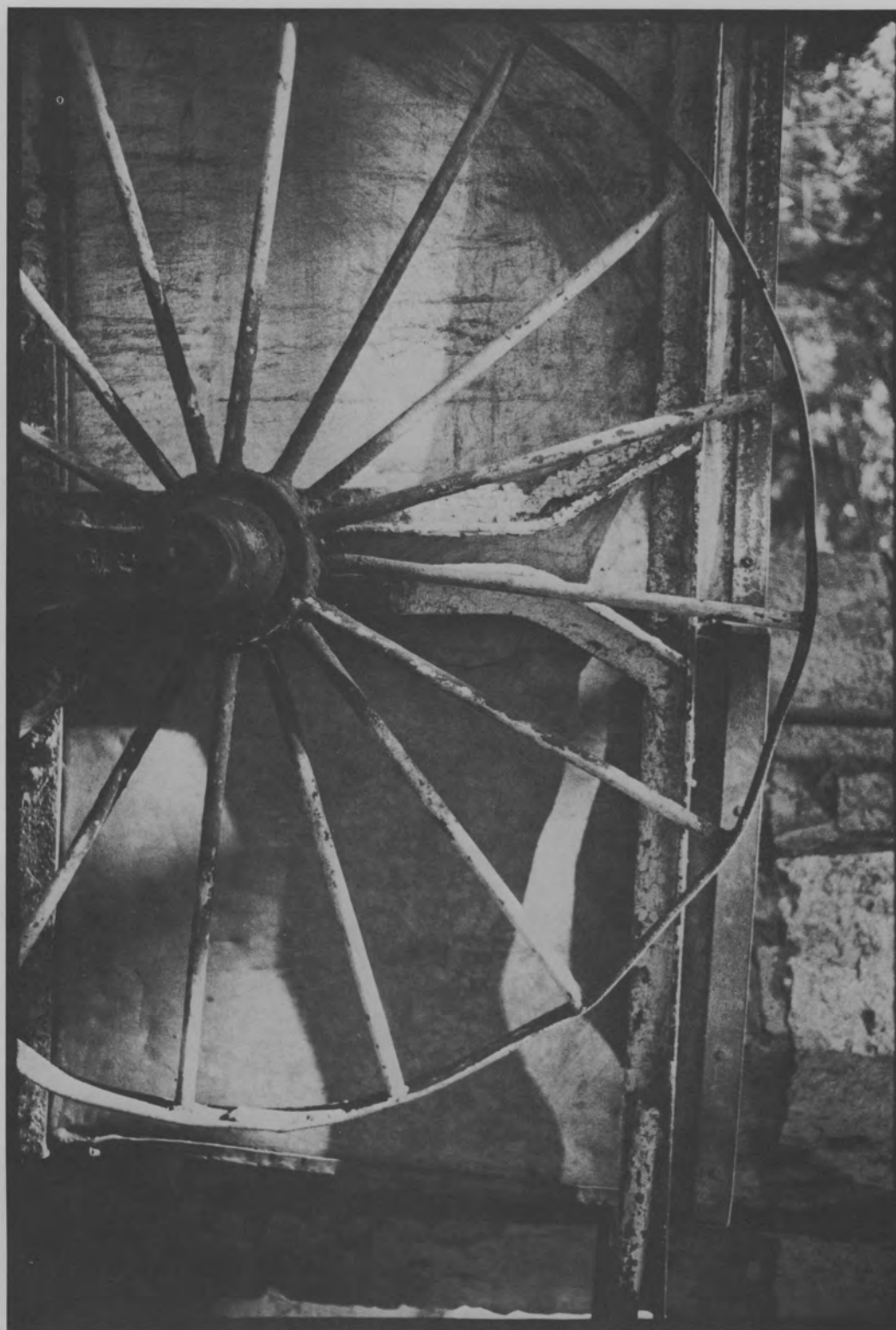


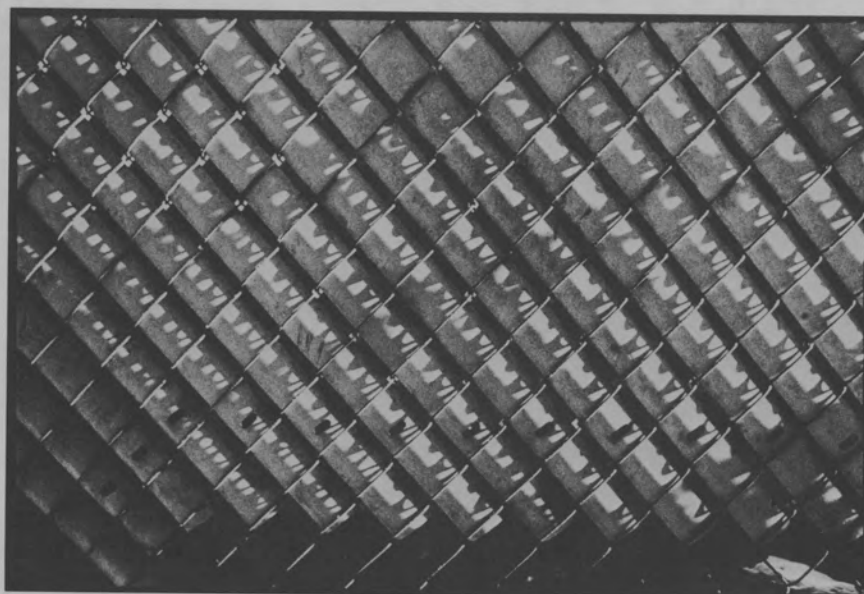
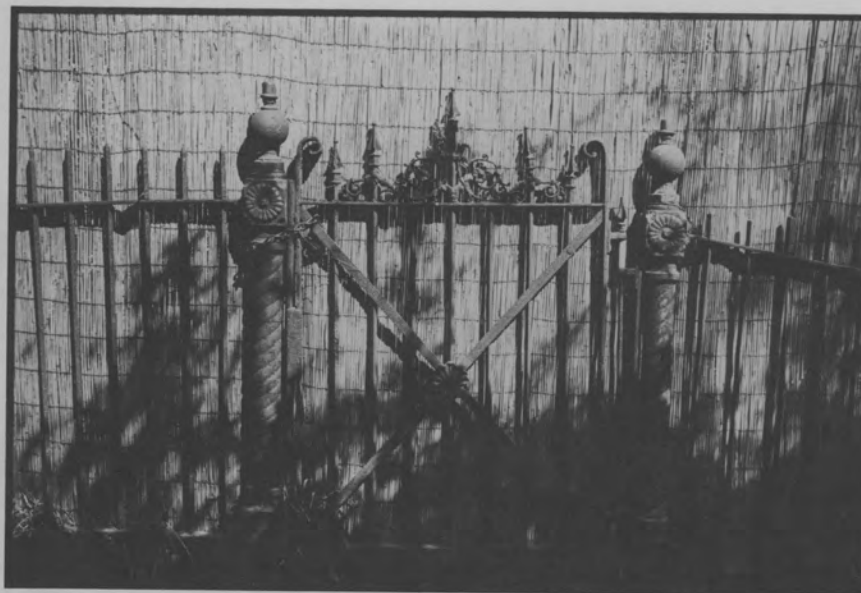
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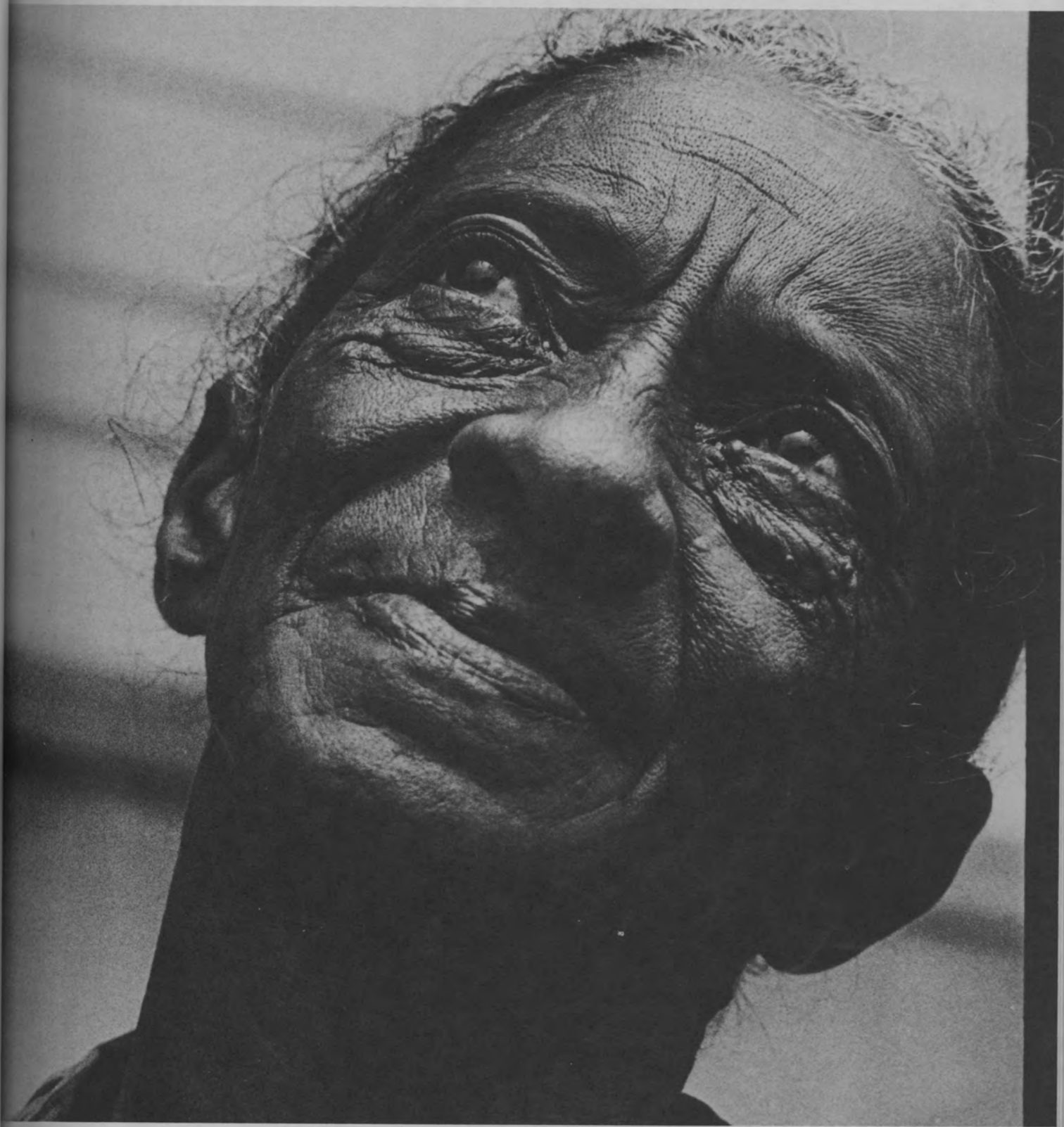


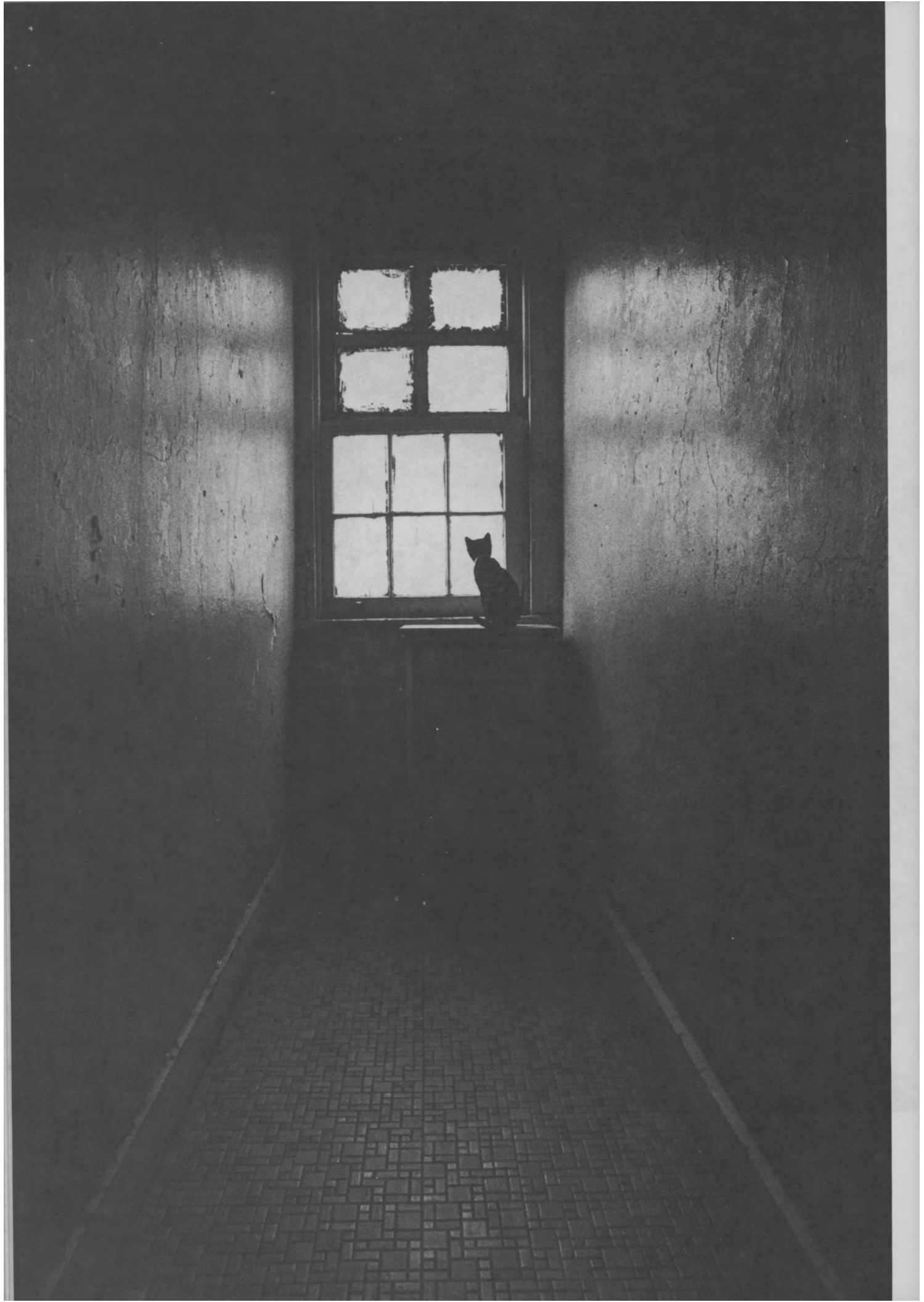












# The Nuclear Family Man and His Earth Mother Wife Come to Grips with the Situation

*by Otto R. Salassi*

It is already mid-morning when he opens his eyes; it is Sunday; it is raining, and George has a hangover. It isn't a bad hangover; he doesn't wake up feeling sick, or drunk, or terrified, or with the guilt that usually visits him on mornings after. This morning's hangover isn't in his body or mind, seems not to be part of him at all, but part of the room. As far as his mind goes, he's even logical. He reaches behind his pillow and checks the bed for water that might have blown in through the half open window above him, finds it dry, and closes the window. He had been drunk but he remembers the rain starting. He remembers the wind and being cold during the night. He remembers fighting with Cassie and coming to bed alone.

"Everything I do I do for you and the kids," he had told her. "The first time things don't go our way, you turn on me." He remembers her face, puffy, red, and ugly from the crying. "I hate you," she'd told him. She called him a bully, a drunk, and worst of all, a pig. He had left her downstairs, curled up in the yellow bedspread that she used for a couch cover, and there on the couch she must have spent the night.

The fight had been his fault. He had come home from Frenchy's drunk, started the fight on a technicality, and pressed it until she had cried. What he must do first thing, he knows, is apologize. He gets out of bed, feels with bare feet the cold linoleum floor, and wishes that it were already over and done with.

Over and done with. When he was growing up in Memphis, it was the dentist. He closes his eyes and he can still see his mother putting on her tan gabardine coat and looking down at him where he is hiding behind the sofa. "Come on George; you know it's got to be done. We might as well get this over and done with." He had grown up with the firm notion that the only reason that anybody did anything was to get it over and done with. What he knows now is that it's all pointless. You don't just get out of bed in the morning, you get it over and done with. You don't just go to work anymore, you get it over and done with. You don't just live, you put up with first one thing

and then another. You get old. You get worn out. You get tired. You die. You've got to die before it's over and done with.

You get your teeth fixed, you turn thirty-five and your knee goes out on you. You can't get under the machines anymore. You learn to get around your bad knee and you get an ulcer.

All he needs right now is an ulcer, he is thinking. Cassie is right about one thing; she's right when she says he drinks too much.

But "Bully," she'd called him: "Drunk. Pig."

You live all your life, you work, you're supposed to get some kind of benefit or reward. What ever happens to make you feel good? The last time George remembers feeling really good was two weeks ago when the word came down from Regional that Carl was fired instead of him. Both he and Carl knew something was coming. The company had been sending in new men all year, men who were fresh out of school and could fix the old line copiers like the 700's and the 900's as well as the new machines. How many times is the company going to retrain you? George had been back to Rochester three times for retraining; Carl three times. George had been transferred five times over the years; Carl four times. The new copiers are ten times as complicated to maintain as the old machines and the company knows when you can't learn anymore. You keep thinking, maybe they'll let you retrain one more time, maybe you've still got a chance. Carl gets fired instead of you and for a while you're happy. Maybe they don't know you're thirty-seven years old. Maybe they don't know you drink.

You go down to Frenchy's with Carl and you get drunk. Frenchy's is a great place for getting drunk because there aren't any kids around and you can talk about things. Arguments, discussions, whatever you call them. They had argued that afternoon about who's fault it all was. It had been Carl, George, Frenchy, and Bobo who drove a cab for the Independent. Nobody's fault. Everybody's fault. George had argued that the fault was with the system. "Say I get fired, Frenchy, which I probably will. You got plenty of money; are

you going to take me in and take care of me? How about my family: you gonna take them and let them stay with you in your big house and feed everybody?" That had been George's big point and he had made it clear. "Hell no. I'm out there by myself and I'm like Carl. When I fall, I fall all the way."

"Nuclear families," Carl had said. "It's not the system as such, it's the fact that everybody's his own nuclear family."

Bobo was drunk. "Everybody who feels sorry for Carl, raise their hands," he said and raised his hand. For a little while, they all thought about it, then, Frenchy raised his hand, George raised his hand and Carl raised his hand. It had been the last time George remembers feeling good.

Before he starts down the stairs, he tests his knee to make sure that it is going to hold him. Three months ago, he had put his weight down on it and there had been nothing there and only the handrail had saved him from breaking his neck. Teeth, knees, ulcers, heart attacks, and strokes. Nuclear families. Whatever you have, you try to hold on to it whether you want it or not. Whatever it is, it's all you've got.

Outside, the rain starts picking up. George uses the handrail and comes downstairs slowly, holding on and looking at just what it is he's got. He's got a two-story, white-frame house in Cincinnati that falls apart faster than he can pay for it. He's got a teen-age daughter stretched out on the couch and two sons lounging on the old blue, dirty, wall-to-wall carpet that he wants to get rid of and Cassie wants to have cleaned. The kids are watching cartoons but they're not smiling. He's got a living room that feels damp from the rain, a kitchen that smells like stale bacon grease, and a wife (it sounds like) who is taking a bath.

He can't get in the bathroom so he puts a pan of water on the stove for instant coffee and waits for it to boil and for her to get out. Over and done with, he's thinking, over and done with.

The bedroom is directly over the bathroom and when Cassie hears him get out of bed and start down the stairs, her first instinct is to get out of the tub, get dressed, make him coffee, and offer him breakfast. Instead, she starts the hot water going again and uses the sound of the water to drown out the sounds of the house. He could have come down fifteen minutes earlier, before she started her bath, or fifteen minutes later, when she would have been finished. What is not her fault is not her fault, she decides. Holding her hair up in the back to keep it from getting wet, she stretches out in the warm water and tries to relax.

Her breasts float in front of her and she studies them. She will start to sag in a few years and the breasts that she has always been proud of won't be hers any longer. They will belong to an old woman.

Her skin is too dry.

Everything she has comes from discount houses. Her shelf in the bathroom looks like a newspaper advertisement and smells like either cheap perfume or medicine. What she would like (what she has hinted at for her birthday) is something nice for a change, something that doesn't come in big plastic bottles with ugly pictures and gaudy flowers; something that they didn't buy her on sale.

She would like to sleep late in the morning every once in a while. She would like to have time to read again and she

would like to have friends again, friends she can talk to. She is tired of moving and tired of being depended on, of being pushed, shoved, and generally being sucked on. She is tired of wiping their asses and feeding his ego and this is what she'd told him during the fight.

"So you're going to turn on me too," he had said. Everything that is not completely for him is completely against him; that is the way he has been thinking lately; her, the kids, his job. Once he starts drinking, everything is against him. All she had said was, "Why don't you try staying home once in a while? Why don't you try doing something with the kids?" and the fight had started. When she started crying, he went into a rage and threatened to do something for her and the kids all right, "I'll throw the whole bunch of you out in the street," he had yelled. He threatened to leave and she had called him on it. "Leave. Go. Anything is better than what you're doing to us now." He had called her a "worthless bitch," and broken a glass; she had called him "pig."

She doesn't know what he will do or what she will do; what he will say or what she will say. She knows that she cannot stay in the bathtub forever, so with her toe she flips the drain-lever and lets the tub start to drain. She turns off the water which has already begun to turn cold and gets out of the tub, dries herself, and puts on her robe. Before she leaves the bathroom, she wipes the steamed mirror with the damp towel and looks at herself. She looks old. She looks tired.

When she walks out of the bathroom, she finds him sitting at the kitchen table in his underwear, studying his fingernails and brooding.

"About time," he says and goes in and closes the door behind him.

Cassie sits at the table with her own cup of coffee and for what may be the first time in her marriage, she worries. She remembers when George was taking his first training course with the company in Rochester; she waited for him with her family in Memphis. "What is it like to be married?" she had asked her mother. She remembers being nineteen and silly, "I mean, what is it really like?" They were sitting in the living room at the time, Cassie remembers that she had been looking at the catalog, her mother had been sewing and both of them had been watching a program on television. Her mother had not looked at her, but half at her sewing and half at the television, "It's lonesome," her mother had said. "I hate to tell you this, honey, but more than anything else, it's lonesome." Cassie had been painfully lonesome for George when she had asked the question. "Then why do people get married?" she had asked. Her mother had turned to her then and smiled. "People have reasons, honey. As long as they remember what those reasons are, they get along fine. When they start forgetting, they get in trouble."

Cassie's reason had been George. He came back to Memphis in November and they were married on Thanksgiving day, 1960; they had a big wedding and Thanksgiving dinner with her mother and father and his mother and father, starting a new family tradition. The company gave George his first assignment, to Santa Barbara, and she had gone with him, to California.

Santa Barbara was a beautiful city with no factories and no grime. Everything was like she imagined it would be, like a garden. They used to take long walks up on the hill where the

rich people lived and where they could see the channel islands. She was pregnant and happy. They played a game with the houses; which one was her favorite? The houses were often hard to see, the lawns and the gardens and the trees often hiding them.

Two years in Santa Barbara, three years in Phoenix, two years in Atlanta, four years in Nashville, the last three years here in Cincinnati. She had liked it in California and she had liked being in Nashville, the closest they'd ever been sent to Memphis. Each move had been with more money but the money had somehow or another turned out to be less. The houses they had lived in had not been good houses but they were tolerated because they were temporary. The cockroaches under the sinks were temporary. The washing machine that shook the house like a train was temporary. He hated it: "Why do you have to wash clothes on weekends?" he complained, "Why don't you wash clothes during the week?"

In Santa Barbara and in Phoenix and in Atlanta and in Nashville, she had made friends with people she had had to leave. For a while she would write letters and get letters from her friends, the Jacksons in California, Linda, a couple of letters a year, then, Christmas cards with little mimeographed histories in them; they've had a new baby; she's working for another doctor; Paul is in the sixth grade; and then nothing, not even form letters.

Cassie has used all of the hot water with her bath. It will be afternoon before she will have enough again to wash clothes. She hates Cincinnati and she hates the house.

People get married for reasons. She has heard enough divorce stories to know that people get divorced for reasons too. At night, when he is out drinking and she is in bed alone, she thinks about all of the houses, all of the bedrooms she has lived in, and she is afraid to go to sleep, afraid of waking up and not knowing where she is or where her children are. Like some women have the habit of hiding their thumbs in the palms of their hands for security, Cassie has the habit of twisting her ring. Late at night, alone in a room that means nothing to her, alone in a bed that is wide and empty, she hugs a pillow to herself and twists her ring. Around and around on her finger she twists it, testing it, taking it to the knuckle and almost over but never completely over, she becomes a girl again, a silly little girl again; she and George are back in Santa Barbara, they're walking up on the hill, people are coming to the windows of their houses to look at them pass and smile at them. Linda Jackson stops in for coffee. They plan another picnic at the beach.

"Hey," he shouts, startling her, "You gonna ignore me all day?" He has come out of the bathroom to find her staring into her coffee cup, playing with her ring and daydreaming. He

delivers the short speech he has prepared while brushing his teeth. "I'm sorry about last night," he says, "I was drunk and I apologize for saying whatever I said. What about you?"

Cassie is surprised at the suddenness of his apology and embarrassed at having been caught in a daydream. Her face flushes; her mind searches for the right thing to say in the situation; she knows that the wrong thing said will start the fight all over again. She cannot think of anything to say in time.

"If you're doing that for my benefit," George says, sensing his advantage and pointing at her playing with her ring, "Just keep it up. I'll walk out of here one of these days and you can flush the damned thing down the commode for all I care. I tell you I'm sorry and you don't say anything. I feel bad and you make me feel worse."

To George, the situation is obvious. You work all your life for somebody like the company and the first time they don't need you, they let you go. You come home and your wife calls you a drunk and a pig. No drinking allowed. No excuses. No getting old. The world is a big, wonderful place where everybody takes care of everybody else. Bullshit, he thinks; bullshit, bullshit, bullshit.

To Cassie, the situation is just as obvious, but not so easily put into words. She wants to tell him about some of the things she dreams; how in her dreams they're walking again and happy; the cars stop and wait for them to pass; the people in the cars smile at them and wave. She wants to be her mother and tell him what she knows; people get in trouble when they forget the reasons. Please let's not fight, she is thinking, please let us not fight.

Commercial time. The kids come in the kitchen indian file: thirteen-year-old, ten-year-old, seven-year-old; hungry; brain-washed. Tony the Tiger says, "Sugar Frosted Flakes: They're Grrrrreat!" Woodsy Owl says, "Give a hoot. Don't pollute."

Cassie gives them each a banana and sends them back out to the living room and television.

"Cute little tykes," George says, "Do you suppose they'll take care of us in our old age?"

Cassie doesn't want to think about the children at that moment. She worries that they have even less than she did, or George did, or anybody did who had a home and a place to start from. She imagines them asking her, "What's it like, Mother? What's it really like?" Will they ever ask her that or will they already know?

"It's a rotten world," she says, surprising both herself and George when she says it. "It's a dirty, rotten world."

"Correct," he says, "You are one hundred percent correct. Everybody who feels sorry for George and Cassie, raise their hands."

They look at each other, raise their hands slowly, and smile. George gets up and goes back upstairs to get dressed. Cassie tightens the belt of her robe and starts to pick up the kitchen.

## PHRENOLOGY

I know this flesh is only transitory:  
I carry in my head my own memento mori.

—Austin Wilson

## BATHING

The light in the bright yellow curtains  
turns the counter novelties garish: my  
husband's shaver, flat, electricless,  
a dead reel for casting.

I spawn myself back in the warm languid  
bath, alone, in an afternoon of backwash,  
safe from the house that holds me like my  
husband, tenderly and reasonable but dry.  
Here, I close my eyes and feel a colorless  
sheet rise to my chin and the water's turbulent  
entrance at my feet.

Wet, I dream of fishes made from shells, carved  
into the shape of scales and hinged together.  
I see them in curio shops and on the  
beach where Mexicans tempt me with them,  
limp in their hands. They are as real as any  
dead fish—a crafted death of well polished scales.

When the water drains (a ruffled sheet sucked off  
my legs) I'm beached on the porcelain, and hear  
the drain plug pop again and again  
like a lead weight plunking hook and line—  
it signals the end. I breathe rapidly.  
The cool air barbs my skin.

I dehydrate completely in a towel  
then let it fall like wet newspaper to  
my feet. On a scale, behind the door,  
I check my weight and view, full length,  
my profile: the image I bleed for. In the  
yellow light, my life as real as any death.

—Michael Collier



## **NORTH MISSISSIPPI**

The watermelon log blazed in the fireplace.  
My brownboned lover ate his way  
along my rib cage to my prejudice.

A winter picnic seemed safe enough.  
I woke with his hand sewn to my back,  
the lawn nailed down with crosses.

I woke to Montgomery.  
By the restaurant awning,  
a man with a real knife  
cut off all our fingers for a warning.

—Ellen Gilchrist

## **BLIND BET**

I take people  
on face value because

whenever I try to clock them  
they're already over the finish line

with their ulterior motives,  
dark roses around the neck

a cocky 98 lb jockey hopping down.

—Billy Collins

## NEIGHBORS

On my way out I said hello  
to my neighbor in back

and he walked over to the wall  
and told me he was killing slugs

these little orange fuckers  
that came out with all the rain.

There are two ways to do it, he said  
one, you can leave a pan of beer

at the base of the plants  
and they'll crawl in and drown

or two, you can get a box of salt  
and go around pouring it on each one.

since the salt is like an acid  
the slugs will puff up and erode into slime.

he said he preferred the salt method  
because it had the "personal touch."

I'm going to have to keep  
an eye on him.

—Billy Collins

## **FAST POEM**

This poem will not return  
upon itself like Coleridge  
walking into a mirror

it wont wear a hot plume  
or boss jacket  
it will not parade showing its ass

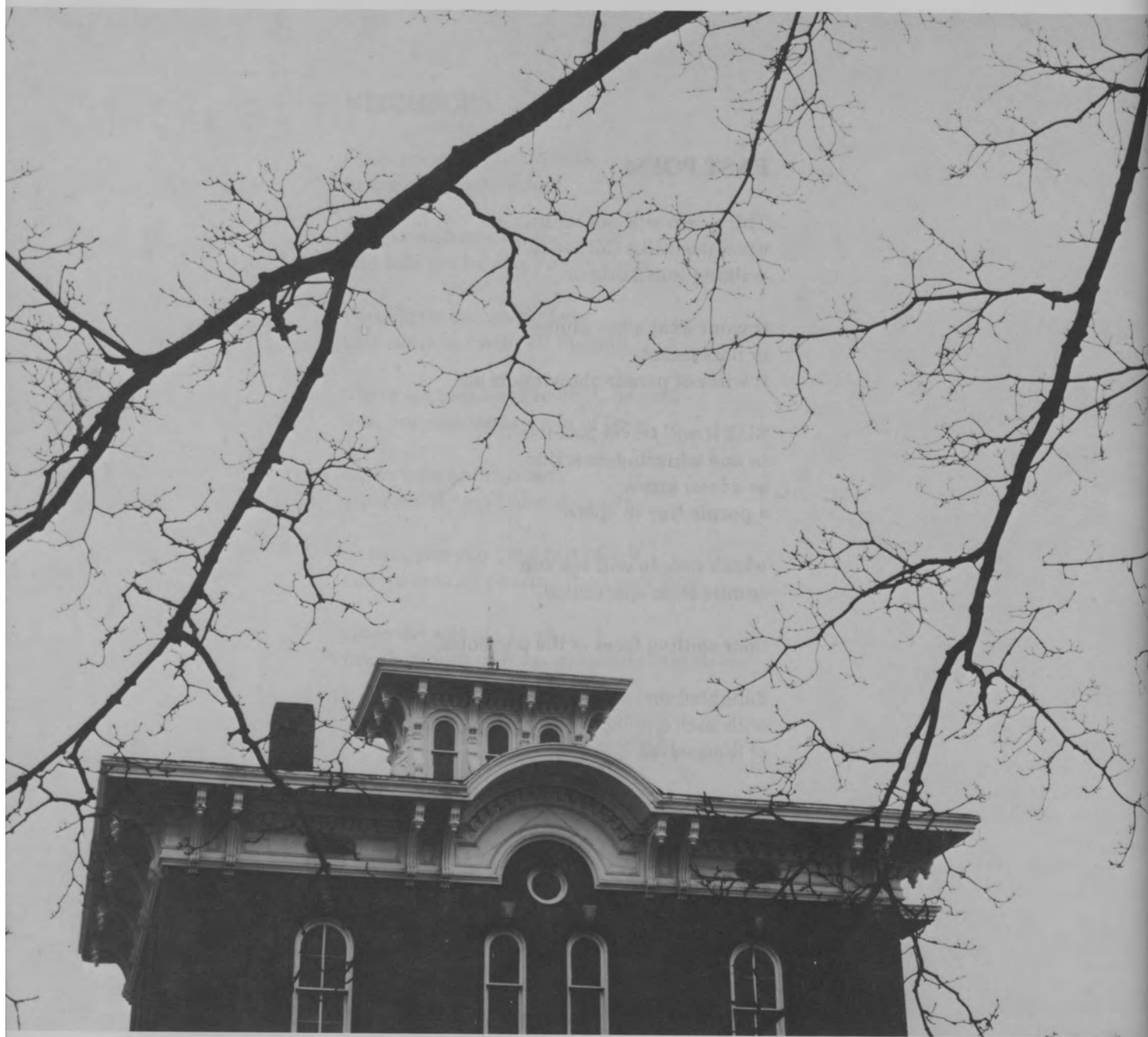
BUT it will travel past itself  
in one whizzing direction  
as a laser arrow  
a purple line in space

which people will see and  
admire from spaceships,

their smiling faces at the portholes,

delighted that a poem could end  
with such a delightful picture  
of themselves.

—*Billy Collins*



Kris Albright

# The Harvesters

by *Martha Bennett Stiles*

Mrs. Eldridge thought she might have seen a warbler in the walnut. Movement was what had caught her eye, not color: this time of year, walnut leaves and warblers were much the same greeny yellows. Shifting to binoculars disoriented her as always and she lost the bird, never found it again. It was late, left behind, a foolish lingerer.

A small red squirrel was chasing a larger fox squirrel out from under the walnut tree, although no nuts had fallen yet. Mrs. Eldridge felt guilty, since if she didn't bribe her grandsons to gather this tree's nuts, it alone would probably provide enough for every squirrel on the farm.

She remembered her first sight of this tree more clearly than she remembered meeting Sam. "Come see the sunset," Sam's father had said, and led her through the dining room onto what had been then all back porch; they had stood right where her chair was now. The sky had been tiered with great glowing clouds, and the tree had seemed as vast and billowing as any of them. As she watched, the clouds caught fire and the tree became roofed with gold like that cathedral she was to have seen in Toulouse that summer, if she hadn't married Sam. She had thought then that no cathedral could lift her soul more than this awesome tree, and she thought so now.

Tonight there were no clouds. The sky had been bright blue all week; frost weather. Mrs. Eldridge altered the focus of her binoculars. The boys had not brought in the tomatoes. "Have Merle and Worley bring them all in," she had suggested Friday, "and I'll wrap them." Frozen spots rotted fast, but stored in the cellar, wrapped tomatoes slowly ripened— "from the heat of their dreams," Sam had liked to say.

Monday, now—the boys essentially lost for the week, and Frone would see, the vines would be black before Saturday, and bushels of tomatoes wasted.

Mrs. Eldridge hadn't resented Sam's father. She had liked cooking for him, had cried the rain down for him when he was killed.

Frone might have minded living in Frank's father's house less than in Frank's mother's house.

"Nobody knows everything," Frone reminded people from time to time, "and French is one thing I don't know." Her emphases were those of one who certainly does know all the others.

Merle brought his studying to her room whenever a French test loomed. "Just take tests the way you fell trees," she advised him. "You don't *drive* the ax into the trunk, you just let it fall of its own weight where you guide it. You'll be done twice as fast and half as tired."

He thanked her politely.

She couldn't tell anybody anything.

She saw Merle's face tense as they both heard his father's step in the dining room. He was up offering his chair as his father appeared. "I've got to where I need a table," he fibbed, sidling out.

Her son looked after his son ruefully. She often wished that she and Sam had built a back door into this room.

"The boys mended that busted creep feeder today," Frank reported. "I could have carved Mt. Rushmore with a pen knife quicker."

She was proud of her younger son's looks. She was sure they would be an asset in other lines of work. ("Mother, I will be a salesman when mules breed.")

She wanted to tell him about the kitten-sized squirrel chasing the cat-sized squirrel away from the tree, but she had felt constraint about the tree as a conversational subject ever since he'd suggested selling it.

She tried, again, to feel sure that she wasn't just selfish, that her insistence that the trunk must be 90% rotten this late in its life was correct.

Frank had said no more, so she had figured he must have asked the County Agent, heard her judgement confirmed. Then Frone had started fretting about whether the tree would fall on the house, and Mrs. Eldridge worried that she might have made her case too strong.

She could not imagine May without the oriole singing in the walnut.

"I'm going to apply our spring nitrogen now," Frank said.

She looked at him sharply, then dropped her eyes at once, hooding their eagerness.

"There's going to be a fertilizer shortage next year the likes of which this country has never seen. And anyway time's shorter in the spring."

Yes. And the more future work he did in advance the freer he would be to take her advice, if he was easing himself over to it. "You're right, Frank." She forced her voice steady and

focused her eyes rigidly on her thumb. "I do think you're wise."

Sam's father had clung stubbornly to his Jerseys. He would not peddle chalkwater, he said. After his death Sam had shifted to Holsteins at once. A man too good for the world is no good to his wife and children.

Even that compromise had not been enough, and the family had given up dairying for beef. But the land could not support them, and if they didn't want to lose it, they must support the land. Frank must.

They had converted one end of the back porch into this room for Sam's father after the old man had fallen, delivering a first-calf, and broken his hip. They had thought he would never walk again.

Sam and his father had been obliged to tie bailer twine to the calf's front feet and both pull. When at last the shoulders had suddenly cleared the pelvic girdle, the old man had fallen.

He had been only seventy, and his father had lived to ninety-five; they had expected him to lie in his room for a long time. They gave it a big picture window, one of the first in the county. By the time the calf was ready for auction the old man was up and laughing at them, but the room was paying off now, because with Frank's hernia, he could just get her on and off her bed, he could never carry her up and down stairs. He couldn't even lift her into the pickup's cab. She would be trapped upstairs as she was trapped on the farm, if she and Sam hadn't built this room. Let alone current construction costs, she couldn't afford to add on anything that would up her property taxes.

The Erpses had built a porch and the paint wasn't dry before somebody tipped off the assessor. Gentry Erps swore he would burn the porch for kindling before he would pay the county for the right to rock on it, but his wife talked him around.

Sam's father hadn't made it to ninety-five after all, in spite of walking away from a broken hip, or maybe because of it. In bed, he wouldn't have been killed.

It happened in late April. The preacher called on Gus Eldridge's mourners to rejoice that their brother Augustus had been stricken with the promise of the Resurrection so fresh in his mind, but Mrs. Eldridge, watching them eat afterwards under the skinny dangling green blooms of the walnut, could think only of worms.

There would be fewer mourners at her own funeral. Not that she didn't have more neighbors now than ever, but being neighbors didn't mean what it had. Of course the subdivision didn't think of the surrounding farmers as neighbors, but the change wasn't just city people. Samjunior hadn't had his cheese factory two years before he started getting his milk by train from Wisconsin. "I can't afford Erps' prices. These little guys got to face it, the small farm is dead in this country. Maybe they still farm that way in France, but it's dead here. You can't fight progress."

She had almost saved enough for a trip to France when she had met Sam. She and her college roommate had been planning their tour together for three years.

For a while after the accident she had enjoyed the idea that she could tutor some children in French, help Frank out, but she soon found that people expected her to do it free. "It gives her something to do," they told one another as smugly as if they were sending their brats to sing Christmas carols at

the nursing home, or the jail.

Fortunately, Frank had never believed she could earn a nickel that way.

One of the biggest surprises of her marriage had been that she was an alien to the children she produced. Growing up, her sons had progressed from embarrassed irritation to amused tolerance—of her "romantic" ideas, her precise diction, her magazine subscriptions. With Samjunior the attitude was apparently permanent. With Frank, of course, things weren't so simple.

It had been Sam's pride always to pay the property tax in December, not wait for the last legal day the way she and Frank did now. Sam had died before the Erpses sold their dairy, white porch and all, to the subdividers.

"Gentry's sold." Frank had sat down before he could tell her, his face as white as if he had cut his throat. "Come over here with a wad of money big enough to burn a wet mule."

Now the three hundred acres Sam had left her were taxed as if she had sold out too.

Someone made Frank an offer for the field adjacent to the subdivision. "It would pay the taxes and more. We aren't pasturing in that field anyway."

She had stared at him; they were not pasturing in that field because they had planted it.

"Trees? They're not trees, Mother; if you could see them you wouldn't know them from bean poles. They won't be money for thirty years."

"So? I'm not ready to rob my grandchildren."

"Then what do you suggest?"

He knew what she suggested. "Your brother—"

"Hell!"

*A man who works for another man is a slave*, he had told her the first time, and the second, and the third. *Even when it's his brother. I never have, and I never will.*

He pretended not to notice how long it had been since the farm had left him any smallest choice about any smallest matter. Unable to believe he could support his land on the outside, which he feared as a refugee not young fears the new continent, he pretended still to believe that the land would support him. Meanwhile the farm was leaching his strength, as he was urging her to let taxes leach the farm. "Frank," she begged, "face facts."

"Face—Mother, do you think I want to leave my sons less than I had? But if I must, I must. I face that. The boys do too. You're the one who won't pull in your legs to fit your blanket!"

She had glanced down, at her burdensome knees, her angled feet.

"Oh, God, Mother!" He had lurched out of the room.

He had sold the car instead; that belonged to him.

Two months and they would be going through it all again. Beef prices hadn't gone up as he had gambled, they had gone down. Not in the supermarket. Friends Mrs. Eldridge talked to on the telephone told her what steak was at the A&P and congratulated her sourly, friends who knew nothing of the price of corn. Sometimes Mrs. Eldridge was glad she couldn't get to church anymore. She didn't want to try to keep a Christian tongue to such people.

She didn't want to see the new members the subdivision had brought.

The preacher, who called on her once a month, counselled patience after subdivision dogs got in among the cows a week before calving was due and ran them and ran them and ran them until—"Everything that happens is a part of the Lord's plan. You've got to believe He had His reasons; you've got to believe!"

"I believe those calves were due next week."

He had prayed for her.

Since the running of the cows, Frank was keeping a loaded rifle by his bed. Maybe she had underestimated God's planning. Maybe God wanted Frank to give up while Samjunior still had a job for him, and before somebody got shot.

Lying in the hospital after the accident Mrs. Eldridge had prayed not to linger if Sam died.

A ground floor room didn't offer the same opportunity as an upstairs room, so she had no way of knowing about herself. She daydreamed of a motordriven wheelchair, of backing it one evening to her room's east wall and running it full blast toward the sunset. Her room should be wider, as well as upstairs, so the chair could get up speed.

She gave Frone her half of the milk money, a whole mason jarful. For that Frone was happy to push her chair. She went through the window soundlessly, as if the pane had been made of gelatin all along, only waiting for her to have courage. She was glad they hadn't wasted money on a motor chair. It had been, Sam's father told her, just as easy for him.

She would always wonder if it would have happened if she had been home. She had taken Frank to the dentist that morning. Samjunior had said something to his father at ten o'clock and they had begun looking for the old man immediately. When she and Frank got home at two they were still looking; she found a one-line note on the table, and saw that both their guns were gone. She and Frank had begun their own search at once. At three o'clock, in the hay loft, they had heard a single shot.

Rabbit hunters Sam's father had run off the week before had threatened the old man. Sam had thought of this episode first, and it was almost three before he and Samjunior had worked their way to the bull's pasture.

When Sam saw the body he had dropped his gun, ordered Samjunior to stay out of the field, and rolled under the gate. Even when he had lifted the body the bull had been undecided, but at the first step to remove it, the bull had charged. Samjunior had shot him between the eyes.

What the old man could have been doing in that field they could never guess; the bull had been notorious. "Maybe," she had pled, "your father had a heart attack when he saw the bull charging. Maybe he never even knew when it got to him." The thought of her father-in-law's hands scrabbling to drag him out from under the terrifying hoofs was more than she could stand.

"He never knew fear in his life," Sam had answered grimly. "His heart won't have failed him."

She had done her best to forgive him that answer.

The walnut's trunk rose sixteen feet before it branched. Mrs. Eldridge surveyed each branch: the waiting crop looked like as good a one as ever. "A man is like a tree," Sam's father had said to her. "Comes a time to harvest him. Past that time

he don't do anything but rot from the inside out, just like a tree."

Sitting weighted to her chair watching winter come on like a bull in slow motion Mrs. Eldridge could hear his words more clearly than she had heard them at the time. That he should have made his decision in April, the long dark cold almost won through, disturbed her most.

Worley had his first pheasant already, and the season not eight hours old. He and Merle stood grinning outside Mrs. Eldridge's window, Worley holding up his bird by its scaly feet for her to throw up her hands and stretch her mouth over.

Mrs. Eldridge's vision of Merle in a subdivision, pale and puffy, with soft-soled feet and preacher's hands, was benign beside what she thought they could expect from Worley. Merle needed the farm to force him up off his bottom, Worley, to tire him down.

The grosbeaks returned in one flock. They put down first in the walnut and consulted, chirruping sociably, moving up and down among themselves from branch to bare branch like golden-robed angels ascending and descending heaven's ladder.

If Jacob had known he was to be crippled, would he have waited to live out his century and be buried in the cold dark cave, or would he have grasped the angelic ladder at once?

She knew what the men wanted as soon as she saw the winch on their truck. Frank, coming out of the smokehouse and seeing them pull up, also knew. Through her binoculars she watched his face set.

Only one man got out of the truck; he walked smiling to meet Frank. He was the square-jawed, square-shouldered, Russian poster, khakis and no tie type. He had a two-inch scar on one cheek. He offered his hand. Frank gave it one shake. The man continued to smile as he talked, but Frank's face if anything grew stonier. Mrs. Eldridge knew he thought it was expressionless.

The man with the scar gestured at the tree, where the first limb branched off above his head straight as a clothesline, and again at its top, where the moon last night had caught and hung. Frank shook his head.

There were two more men in the truck's cab, a third in back. The creature in back was twenty-something, dirty, unshaven. What his undernourished hair lacked in body it made up in length; a Tonto-band kept his eyes clear. These eyes never left Frank, and never changed expression. The man with the Lopakhin face produced a pad on which he wrote, or calculated; Mrs. Eldridge saw Frank shake his head again. She knew he would never tell them the tree wasn't his to sell. The man smiled again, tore off the page and gave it to Frank, who pocketed it without looking at it. The man stuck out his hand again. The young man in the truck bed leaned over the side and spat.

Frank watched the truck's dust settle, then strode to the back porch.

He would know she had been watching. She shoved the binoculars out of sight. As the door between porch and kitchen slammed, she took hold of both chair arms and closed her eyes.

She could hear his voice in the kitchen, rising and falling. Her stomach, which had begun to tighten when the truck had



first driven into the yard, was a walnut-sized knot. Frone's replies were inaudible.

As she heard him stamp into the dining room she turned her chair to face her door. Her back was to the tree, and she felt it giving her strength almost as if her shoulders were braced against it.

He took only two steps into the room and he left the door open behind him. She hated his family to hear these arguments. Maybe Frone would have just enough sense to clear the boys out.

"I could have our taxes in my hand!"

He did not shake his fist at her, but his arm, as he stretched it empty-handed toward her, trembled. "I should have told them go ahead, and let you sue me!"

"It's them you and I would've had to sue. Once they saw the rot inside, they wouldn't have paid a cent."

"What do you know?" he said violently. He took a deep breath and passed one hand the length of his face.

Mrs. Eldridge shrank to hear Frone's voice in the dining room. "You boys know better than to leave your mess all over this table. Worley, you know better than to leave your gun where the baby can get it. I don't want to have to speak to you two twice. Worley, can you hear me?"

Frank turned in Mrs. Eldridge's doorway like a bull when he hears the bandilleros coming to join the picadors. "Leave the boy alone!" he bellowed. "Can't you ever leave the boy alone?"

Mrs. Eldridge could hear Frone staring at him. He closed his eyes, then turned his back on her and the tree behind her. From the dining room she heard his sullen, check-reined voice telling his wife "Let's eat out tonight." She wheeled her chair back around to face her tree.

The TV table was never slid over her knees but Mrs. Eldridge had to try not to feel the humiliation of the child too old, but not too big, for the high chair. Frone, hurriedly laying out her supper, was embarrassed too, but not by that. "We might take the children to the pictures; do you want to sit up, or . . ."

Childlike, she was lifted into bed by daylight. Her son did his duty wordlessly and left the room.

She listened to the truck leave. She picked up her book. It seemed to have been printed for a near-sighted flea.

Frank's "I could have our taxes in my hand" had been, what was rare for him, more artistic than literal. This she had learned from Frone.

"There'd be some left over, a good bit. You could have your own TV, Grandmom; you could have a telephone in here by your bed. Evenings like this. . . ." What could she see on television as beautiful as what Frone wanted her to barter for the set? "They say that tree is sure to bring more than \$7000 at the mill. They estimate our share would be—"

Mrs. Eldridge hadn't waited to hear what sort of terms the crew claimed to work on. "When would they pay?" she asked with deceptive gentleness, and winced to see hope flash in Frone's eyes.

"As soon as they sell it to the mill. Grandmom, Frank—"

Frank was even more desperate than Mrs. Eldridge had guessed. Honest crews made a firm offer before the first saw whined, and paid up cash before the sawdust settled. Could anyone believe that quartet of strangers would give an honest report of what the mill paid? that they would give any report? Could anyone think that, the tree once removed, this crew

would ever get within shooting distance of the Eldridge farm again?

In the kitchen the telephone rang; too bad. It rang until to keep from shrieking Mrs. Eldridge began to count; it rang nine more times and quit.

Frone had left a pitcher of cider on the bedside table. Twisting to pour some, Mrs. Eldridge noticed a business card lying face up beside her mug.

#### MICHIGAN TREE HARVESTERS

Frone would have left that there. Frank might have wadded it up and thrown it on her floor in front of her, but he would not have slipped it onto her table for her to "come upon."

The address on the card was a Detroit post office box. As for the telephone number, tomorrow Mrs. Eldridge would dial it; dollars to doughnuts she would reach an answering service. You might just trace that crew through the truck's license number; you might, much good might it do you.

On the card's back, someone—Mrs. Eldridge assumed the square-jawed man with the evangelical smile—had penned, in exclamatory strokes, \$7000.

The estimate was high. Frank had known it was high. That would be why he hadn't mentioned any actual numbers to her.

Maybe she didn't give Frank credit. Maybe he would have got a signed contract, maybe he would have accompanied the crew to the mill. Would she have been so sure the tree was rotten if she had not been convinced that trying to make the farm pay for itself was shoveling sand against the tide?

She hoped the engine she heard pulling into the yard didn't mean Frank had decided against the movies; she thought a good show would relax them all.

Friends would know, when they saw the porch and yard-lights burning, that the family was probably gone for the evening. What would have been extravagance twenty years ago was now considered prudent, though Mrs. Eldridge did wonder why no one expected burglars to have the same deductive powers as friends.

She hoped no visitors would notice her own light. Some of her friends would be only too delighted to get after Frank and Frone for leaving her alone. She lay flat, pulled the covers up high, and put the pillow over her face.

She heard the engine cut off. Someone beat on the back door, first moderately, then hard. After a pause, a car door slammed. She waited for the engine. After a puzzling silence—surely no one would sit and wait for the family to come home?—she heard instead, muffled through her pillow, a sound that scattered her heart like a flock of sparrows.

She would have known that *mmmbrrp* for what it was had there been a mattress over her head. She sat up yelling.

There were three of them, working by her own yardlights. The fourth man would be posted somewhere near the gate to look out, God blind him. She punched her light off and on, off an on, yelling; they neither noticed the one nor heard the other. They were using a chain saw, silenced, she could guess, with an auto muffler. She picked up her mug and hurled it straight at the window.

Their backs were to the crash and they never looked up. Bending over their furtive work in the flame-blue shadows, they were like demons. She lay back, took hold of the corner of the bed, and pulled herself over its edge. As she fell she remembered that she was as old as Sam's father had been when he fractured his hip.

Her legs weighed a thousand pounds. She moved first one elbow forward, then the other, bore down on both and pulled herself forward. The saw hummed inexorably.

The skin on her elbows was old and thin. Her forearms got sticky in the path the cider had painted all the way to the window; she marveled that she could be bothered by this now. Her nightgown pulled tighter and tighter against the back of her neck as her loglike legs held it.

The saw's humming was maddening as mosquitoes in a darkened room.

A crew inexperienced enough to cut so old a tree could be counted on not to know what they were doing. She hoped they dropped the tree on top of themselves.

The dining room was not carpeted and her elbows slid when she tried to bear down on them but shifting to flattened palms she made the two yards to the table in seven drags. Offstage Lopakhin's saw hummed.

She would show them who was decadent.

She pulled Worley's hunting jacket down first. As she expected, the shell pockets were stocked with #6's, worse luck. She wished she had buckshot. She put a shell in each barrel and rested the muzzle on the floor, smacking the breech lightly to close the gun.

She had somehow to pull herself up so that she, so that the gun, could see the devils in her yard. She slid a chair between herself and her doorway. The seat was too high. She couldn't so much as chin herself, her senseless lower body was too heavy. She had to lie still a few seconds to let a funnel-shaped

dizziness swirl out of her head and away. She tipped the chair over onto its side and strained again. Hot pain stabbed her shoulder. She shoved the chair aside, panting, wasting no time on tears. Now to the original three-step procedure one more step was added: first shove the gun forward, then advance the left elbow, next the right, push down, drag. Her injured shoulder throbbed. Tomorrow she would be unable to sit up.

Near the window the stickiness on her forearms became blood, but the hole where the glass had dropped from was right where she could use it, just above the sill. She poked the gun's muzzle through. She gripped the sill with both hands and pulled herself up to where she could lay one forearm along the glass-littered ledge and rest her weight on it. Bracing the gunstock against her right shoulder she pointed the muzzle with her left hand and tried to hold it steady. In the darkness the demons danced. She squeezed the forward trigger first, then, with no pause, the rear.

There was a double roar that was one, and from the darkness a high repeated "Christ! Christ! Christ!" More shouts were lost in a rumbling then screaming crash as the grateful tree bent down and wrapped Mrs. Eldridge in its arms. The opening in the roof gave anyone lying on the floor a clear view of heaven, and Mrs. Eldridge, who had always vaguely imagined that region as an infinity of pale blue ether full of the perfume of translucent angels, was surprised to see that it was as green and corporeal as her own farm, and as the tree lifted her toward those gently rolling banks she clung to it with both arms and kicked joyously at the bright air to speed their passage.

## AT LEAST

I wish  
When it comes  
There could be  
A hazing of the eyes  
As warning  
Just so the difference  
Between is and isn't  
Might be given a quick memorial,  
Perhaps some winter oaks  
Arterial against an evening sky.

—William Mills

## A VOTE FOR JANUARY

It is very important  
To make a record  
Somewhere, someplace  
Every chance  
Like on this clear winter afternoon  
When the woods  
Are dry and  
The frogs and cicadas  
Do not seem ominous  
But voices  
That want to affront death.

Thus, being no dancer  
Or man with paints  
I go on record  
For a clear winter day,  
For a later time  
When the woods  
Turn to swamps,  
And death taunts  
Are empty threats.

—William Mills

**(for Yevgeny Yevtushenko)**

I am seed, the kitchen's total need;  
I am phosphorous, almost fission.  
I light; I feed; I dwell; I rot;  
I smell like burning—  
once I thought  
I really was a chair, made of berries  
Wired for sound.

161

## THE ST. JAMES MEN'S CHOIR MEETS WITHOUT CARLOS

They were all bellied down in gospel soul  
the night he died. Untold, they did the things  
they would have done if they had known—  
conjured him up in talk, carrying on,  
laughing for want of Carlos.

—Where he at?

—Nailing all his windows shut, I guess.  
You know that old rent house he never tore down?  
somebody stole his stool.

—Too late,

Carlos, nothing to do when a thief's that low,  
when he finds himself so down and in need  
that he'd tear into that wornout place  
and steal the toilet bowl, the last thing,  
gone, pulled up by the roots, carried clear away,  
water closet, lid, and sanitary seal.

—Lewis Chesser

## CHURCH

All this rainy morning long I've stood  
in the drip off the bell tower eaves  
trying to fix St. James' door. The wood's  
scarred and painted and scarred again. The key's

too worn down to make the tumblers fall.  
I don't see how anyone  
after the countless turns of years are done  
gets these old works to work at all.

—Lewis Chesser

## MOURNING DOVE

Go away, death—don't you bother me  
this spring—it's come to me that last year's dove  
is back. She will be busy with her old love,  
putting a new nest in the cedar tree,  
facing whatever wind. I'm certain that she  
is shaping hopes again, laying the stuff  
of life on sticks and promises, hanging tough,  
and crying me that broken-wing melody

she always cries. Neither trouble afar  
nor fear near, nor the shook world on the verge,  
nor sorrow, nor hate, nor the usual rumor of war  
has broken her resolve or scared off her urge.  
She's singing me a new heart. If you will stay  
your sentence, death, I'll give myself away.

—Lewis Chesser

## PORTRAIT

Picture him alive and moving: gentling the ox,  
teaching Sue and Alice the proper paces  
to put a mare through, laying fireplaces,  
chopping down a pine, filing his ax,

troubling the waters fishing Pigeon Creek,  
calm among the sticky bees robbing honey  
to give away—like the money  
he didn't save, the farm he didn't keep;

like his love—spendthrift all his life,  
philosopher, philanderer, a well of folk lore, he  
was never a man to tell a bad story  
or say he loved his neighbor's wife.

—Lewis Chesser



Leon Ronquillo



# Beautiful Women and Glorious Medals

by *Barbara de la Cuesta*

Wrapped in his mule blanket, Ordoñez stood in a corner of the terrace observing the Vice Consul, Mr. Plimford, dancing with his wife. They were dressed as Apaches. Mrs. Plimford, whose name it was said was Dee Dee, had good legs, showed them off with the sly sensuality of a girl child. Child-woman . . . besmirching innocence.

We entered Caracas and there were glorious medals and beautiful women and we were fired by love. . . .

From the journal of Bolivar. How fine, Ordoñez thought. The frank sexuality. He stared upward at the stars burning above the burning mountains and allowed himself to be stirred: by the Liberator's words, by the guitar of Eusebio Vargas of the inward face, who was just at that moment passing the beat of a bolero to the maraca player. "Eusebio! Que hombre!" someone cried. Eusebio Vargas did not look up.

It is literally true, he thought, one feels the worth . . . one feels the worth of certain matters somewhere . . . somewhere just above the belly. . . .

A pair dressed to represent a Charro wedding danced the bolero. They wore masks and had slim figures, but it was certain both were women. Ordoñez watched them, noting how the bride moved in ironic awareness of her pleasure, while the other, the tender groom, moved in a trance of grave concentration that tugged at him until he went across the terrace and interrupted her.

"Your friend is Felicia Cantru who knew the sculptor Pepe Anzoa?" he said in English.

"Yes," she said.

"And you?"

"Well, you must guess; it is the Feria."

"Hah! Hah!" he said. "I am here as myself, as Ordoñez. Ordoñez cannot afford costumes."

She knew him. From the Colegio.

"I feel I've seen you before," he said.

"You have." Every morning, at ten, he stepped through the border of margaritas, come to teach her children to sing "La Cucaracha."

He did not begin dancing with her, merely stood with her hand in his. "But where, where did you come from?" He meant how had it been she, who had tugged at him thus.

"Warsaw," she said.

"Warsaw?"

"Warsaw, New York."

He was bewildered.

"They named it in a fit of distraction," she said. "It's a little place."

"We have little towns," he said, "ah, that are named to great purpose, great purpose. . . . 'Reform,' they are called, or 'Purity,' ha! ha! like the cook's daughter who is called 'Purificación,' the slut. . . . Also, ha! ha! we have a town named 'Hollywood.' "

She frowned—he talked so strangely—then laughed, looking into his face. He moved her to one side of the terrace. The Plimford's house, which had once been the Italian consulate, overlooked Miraflores. He could see the length of the Avenida Roosevelt as far as the British school. "I have been in Philadelphia," he said. "Do you know Philadelphia?"

"I've never been there."

"I accompanied a priest, to a congress, at Villanova College. One should avoid travelling with priests. It was before the highway. We had to go by mule to the ship at Bermeja. The father's mule threw him off three times. So he kicked the beast down the hillside and got up behind me. 'We are going to a country without a soul,' he told me. 'You must take care when we get there. . . .'"

She moved back to find a seat on the low terrace wall. Ordoñez looked at her legs, encased in velvet; a bit heavy, peasant's legs, in contrast to the small head and slender shoulders.

"At Bermeja," he went on, "we got on a 'c' liner called *La Ciudad de Tunja*. There was a terrible storm. Padre Ilias came to my bunk. I thought he wanted to throw me overboard, like Jonah. Hah! He only wanted to give me confession. . . . I got away from him in Philadelphia."

"I'm glad of that."

"I met a woman there called Mrs. Hicks, who was secretary to the Society of Practical Yoga. She taught me to lie on the floor and concentrate my Totality on her ceiling. . . ."

"Hola!" Ricaurte's voice issued from inside a *papier-maché* mask: "Eusebio Vargas is unhappy with the punch."

"Is there aguardiente?" Ordoñez asked.

"Perhaps in the kitchen. The costumes are going to be judged

and I don't want to miss it. Then I am to sing a copla of Evaristo Gil." She knew Ricaurte. He was the other one—the other Spanish teacher.

"I'll look for the aguardiente," Ordoñez said. He turned to her: "You will come?" She nodded, followed him down a flight of stairs to the kitchen, where a hired waiter found a bottle of Ron Viejo.

"That will do," said Ordoñez. "Eusebio Vargas must have something decent to drink."

"Si, si," the waiter nodded. "There is no one like Eusebio Vargas."

Ricaurte performed in the livingroom, the consular staff in attendance. They returned upstairs with the rum, found the musicians seated around a laundry tub out on the roof.

"Now this you could call something to drink," said the maraca player, passing the glasses around.

"It is a copla of Guillermo Lara," said the guitarist Eusebio Vargas, speaking of Ricaurte's performance, which could be heard through the open windows.

"No, it is by Evaristo Gil," said Ordoñez.

"Ah, si, si . . . Guillermo Lara wrote the one . . . the one of the river. . . .

River that reached out and took the girl,  
Daughter of the tavern keeper.

"I had a friend, a taxi driver, who sang that," said the maraca player. "He could press tears from the horned one, I swear."

"The Señor, Ricaurte, does not have the good audience tonight," said Eusebio Vargas.

"True," said the maraca player. "Yet one should not waste oneself with an audience that is not ripe. My friend would never perform for such people; but for the good audience, he would sweat; I tell you he would sweat. . . . The Guillermo Lara, it is a good piece:

River that reached out and took the girl,  
Daughter of the tavern keeper. White-skinned,  
She was, and well-formed. . . .

"That is poetry. That is poetry. One Nochebuena, at my house—the christening of my sister's last chinito—he sang the Guillermo Lara, and afterwards he went out and fell in a stupor across the front seat of my brother-in-law Macario's car. We couldn't move him. Macario had to go home in a taxi and come back for the car in the morning."

"For poetry, you need aguardiente," said Eusebio Vargas. "Our friend Ricaurte, I'll bet he drinks gin like the ladies . . . or vermouth."

The maraca player had brought out a box of estrellitas, which he began lighting from a cigarette, tossing out over the terrace wall. He offered one to Ordoñez's companion: "The Señorita will try?"

"They are dangerous," Ordoñez told her. "If one is put together upside down, it explodes in your face."

"I will throw it quickly," she said. She held the little rocket over the wall, flipped it outward toward the center of the little park below. It shot sideways, returned to sputter out at their feet.

"See, they do not hurt you," said the maraca player.

"A miracle," said Ordoñez. "A miracle we are not all killed every December. Four or five years ago, the row of shacks on the Avenida Roosevelt where they sell the fireworks went up, one after another: Boom! Boom! Boom! A chain reaction like your atomic bomb. . . ."

"It is not my atomic bomb," she said.

"Yes it is," he said. "What's here is mine; what's there is yours."

The maraca player offered Ordoñez the last estrellita. He took it and handed it to her: "You would like to take another chance, Señorita, that the charge is in the right end of this little invention?"

"With pleasure," she said, lighting it and holding to its stem until the last minute before tossing it down into the street.

At one o'clock, they left the Plimfords and followed the musicians to the Obalisco Grill.

"Eusebio Vargas must be forgiven a fondness for the verses of Guillermo Lara," said Ordoñez, as they walked toward the Avenida del Rio.

"I don't understand," she said.

"They are ballads of taxi drivers, who listen all day on their car radios to *Romances de Hoy*. What nausea! Evaristo Gil and his infant white as the Child Jesus. Holy Mother! Has no one ever looked at an infant in this country?"

He stopped to drink from the bottle of Ron Viejo carried away from the Plimford's kitchen. "Do you want . . .?"

"No, thank you."

"We are a people who can intoxicate ourselves with words. It is our national vice."

The Avenida del Rio followed the dry bed of the Rio Humboldt as far as the deep canyon where the Barrio Santa Ana spilled down the sides of the hills that held the shacks of Terron Colorado aloft.

"Our nourishment flows out of us," he said. "I feel sometimes that I am dying of discussions; do you understand? When El Cacique was in the twenty-second year of his reign, we plotted to kill him. We met in Ricardo Peña's house and talked about it till morning. It lasted a year and a half, our discussion; and in the meantime, El Cacique took to his bed to die, of natural causes. Hah! I became ill, I would have died too, if I had not discovered a cure."

"What was it?" she asked.

"I took a walk. Five hundred miles, from Malaganueva to Los Chorros. In the company of my neighbor Hurtado's mule. He was a mule capable of long silences. We exchanged, the whole way, two or three comments: how the sand on the banks of the Rio Malaga is gray, while the bed of the Culebra is white. . . ."

"And you recovered?"

"Yes. That was many years ago. That was in 1938," he said. "What were you doing in 1938?"

"I suppose I was sitting on the floor piling blocks," she said. She thought he might be trying to calculate her age.

"In Warsaw, New York?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a place is that?"

"I grew up on a farm, on a dairy."

"Ah so . . .?"

"Like one of those heroines of a beast novel," she laughed.

"What is that?"

"A kind of a story we have for children who have no pets."  
"Ah, for everyone you have something. Why did you come here?"

"An ad in the *New York Times*," she said. "Teachers Abroad."

"And you wanted to come here, precisely here?"

"No . . . it was France . . . the cathedrals. I wanted to see the cathedrals."

"Ah, you ask for France and you get here. A pity."

"It hasn't mattered," she said.

He stopped her under a street lamp and lifted off her hat and then her mask. It was a neat, focused face, evenly freckled, the mouth too wide, an imp's mouth.

She said, "It's what I've wanted."

"What is that?"

"To walk out on the street in my costume."

"Hah! Like the *muchachas de servicio*. They quit their jobs just before the *Feria* and dance four nights till dawn in the Barrio Terron. Then, after *Nochebuena*, you will see them dragging their tin trunks up and down the streets of Alta Mira and Santa Rita looking for another position. So . . . you are a teacher?"

"Yes."

"I am a teacher too."

"I know."

The guitarist, Eusebio Vargas, had moved on to fill in a group in the Barrio Candelaria; only the maraca player was at the Obalisco when they arrived. Ordoñez invited him to share a plate of meat pies.

"Mr. Plimford does not keep a group long enough to count for a night's work," the maraca player said, "and he lets you go too late to find another employment. It would be more profitable, *en fin*, to play till three at the Casa del Pueblo, though they only give you ten pesos the hour. You wanted to hear another *partita*?"

Ordoñez nodded.

"Wait a bit. Macario will be back and we will give you a *merengue*."

They didn't wait, but walked up the Avenida Santa Ana and crossed the Calle Quinta bridge into the Barrio La Callada.

"My house is three blocks from here," Ordoñez said. "Shall we go there?"

She nodded. He led her past the darkened flank of the Capilla de San Judas, through the little plaza with its tired, ragged palms and chapel bell tower, and down the narrow Calle Cuatro Bis to his door, which he opened with three separate keys. Inside, he told her to wait by the entryway while he went to the kitchen to find a candle stuck on a saucer, which he lighted to avoid turning on the overhead bulb in the parlor.

"Sit there," he said, indicating one of the two leatherette chairs. "Wait, I will wipe it." He took a rag from the drawer of a table. "The street is unpaved; there is always dust. . . ."

He was quickly sober, appalled by the house as she must see it: cramped parlor with pictures cut out of "*Buenhogar*" by his sister and taped crookedly to the walls, the hens roosting on the sills, the cock in a cage on top of the refrigerator. He excused himself to go back to the kitchen for a bottle of *aguardiente* from which he swigged twice, thinking: how have I lived so long this way and never noticed?

She waited, becoming sober. He seemed gone a long time.

There were students' exercise books lying all over the floor. She picked one up, read:

Simon Bolivar, until he was six years old, ran naked as a savage. His tutor instituted a system of instruction based on Rousseau's *Emile*. To this we owe our liberation from Spain.

Ordoñez returned, handed her a glass of *aguardiente*. "My wife is dead," he said to her.

"I am sorry. . . ."

"She was my first cousin. I always preferred the women of my family to others. She left me three children. My sister Alicia cares for them."

"What are their names?" she asked.

"Lily and Rita, the girls; and Luis. He is ten. In an hour my sister will get up to go to mass."

"Shall we go in there?" she asked, pointing to the door of his bedroom, which opened off a patio.

"Do you want?"

"Mr. Ordoñez, I have not had a great number of lovers," she said, looking straight at him, "but I have had one. . . ." She broke off, laughed.

"Hush," he said, and led her into the room, where he stretched wearily on the bed. "Come, lie here beside me and tell me. Who was your lover?"

"He was a motion study consultant."

"Ah, and was he a good lover?"

"I used to imagine there might be better," she said.

"And what happened to him?"

"He went to California."

"Ah, so. . . ." Right off, he thought, she is settling the matter of whether I must go to the trouble of seducing her. It touched him, this educated woman hastening to confess a past that might belong to a kitchen maid.

"He decided he wasn't in the right line of work, that what he really wanted to be was a song writer."

"I never knew a motion study consultant," he said. "I knew once an electrical engineer who decided that what he really wanted to be was El Presidente de la Republica. He quit his job, put himself in military college, as one must—Could you take off my shoes? Ah that's a good girl—he only managed to come out a captain."

"Why was that?"

"Hah! Why, why . . .? What one becomes is a cipher in the cells."

"What happened to him?"

"He went to New Orleans, married a German girl there. She was expecting a child; he made her come back here, to have it here; so it would be native born, eligible for the presidency—if not the father, the son. The child was born dead. 'El Presidente se murió' the people said, 'The little president is dead.' Here, my shirt, unbutton my shirt."

He groaned, sat up. "It is a cipher in the cells what one may become. El Cacique was made general on the battlefield in the war with the Lopevistas. Did you know he could not read?"

"No."

"He had never been to school. We are ashamed of him now. We tumble his statues over in the grass."

"He was a tyrant," she said. She had read a book. "He put innocent people in chains."

"Hah! Villainy in a pure form one admires, as one admires a frog for its frogness. El Cacique put a thousand innocent people in chains, and I haven't the spirit even to raise my voice to Chula the washing woman. Hah! You would think," he said, turning to her and putting a hand on her breast, "that such a man as Ordoñez would not please a woman. But the truth is he has always done so. Hah! I have slept in this miserable house, in this miserable bed for seventeen years, Warsaw. I will die here doubtless. Ulloa wrote, about the poet Robledo, 'He died in want. . . .' " He lay back on the pillow.

She laughed at him. "Can you take off your blouse for me?" he asked. She obeyed. He got up to take off his shirt and pants. "There is a story told of El Cacique," he said. "He used to wear a broad Panama hat with his uniform, instead of a visor cap; and one of his lieutenants said to him once, 'Ah mi General, it is the hat, the hat that brings you luck.' 'Ah no, my man,' said El Cacique, 'it is I, I, who bring luck to the hat.' "

Ordoñez took off his shirt and pants, tossed them into a corner and lay down again. "And what will they say of Ordoñez? Hah! 'He died in want,' they will say. 'Pobre de Ordoñez he died in want.' "

There came a sudden sound over their heads, a slipping of tiles. She sat up: "What was that!"

"It is the cocks. The street lamp shines in the window and they think it is the dawn."

"No, no . . . someone running, on the roof. . . ."

"Paco, did you hear!" His sister's voice in the patio. "There is a thief!"

"Maldita!" He pulled on his pants again and opened the door.

"He was in the Villamarin's kitchen and took the Osterizer!" the sister cried.

"Where is he now?" Ordoñez shouted.

"He is on the roof!" came shouts from the street. There was a pounding on the roof above the bedroom and another pounding on the front door: "He is on your roof, Ordoñez! He must come down in your patio. You must let us in!"

"No, no!" from the street, "He will cross over by way of the Villamarin's! Maldita watchman, who is never where he can be of service. Always he is smoking in the widow Benítez's doorway! Aye, but the wretch has been at the Ochoa's also! Hideputa! He has taken a watch off the night table and Don Roque's pants off the chair!"

The watchman arrived, blowing a whistle. She went to the window, saw a figure drop from the roof above the bedroom into the street, where it was grabbed by the watchman and a man who had come out of the house opposite.

"Ah, there, for once he has served his purpose," called the woman across the way. "There, there, they have caught him. What is he? Young or old?"

"Young," called the watchman. "Un puro muchachito."

"Shame! A shame to his mother!"

"And the Osterizer, and Don Roque's pants?"

"He will have dropped them over the back wall of the Hurtados. When Don Rafa went round there, he ran this way. Look, here! He has taken the pants to one suit and the coat to another! The poor bobo; if he'd gotten away, he wouldn't have had a suit, or Don Roque either."

"The police, Madame, have the police been called?" said the watchman.

"Si, si, Alfredo has gone to Lino's to call. The second time this week. It is the second time this week. What shall we do for a night of peace. Oiga! Have you a firm hold my man?"

"Yes, yes," said the watchman. "I have him here by the wrists and by the ankle. One lifts the ankle thus, and the subject cannot. . . ." He lifted the leg higher in the air, and the boy, who had been balancing on one foot, suddenly wrenched free and vanished down the street.

Ordoñez, who had just gotten his shoes on, stumbled to the window to witness the flight.

"Aye la puta!" He sat down on the bed with his head in his hands. "Aye la puta madre! What have we got here? What have we got here? A thief who cannot steal properly, and a watchman who cannot watch properly! Aye, aye, aye . . . what can one expect in such a country!" He lay back on the bed and pulled the covers over him. It was nearly dawn. "Aye, my dear Warsaw, my dear Warsaw, you must forgive me . . . this ridiculous event . . . you must forgive me. I find myself incapacitated by this ridiculous . . . this ridiculous event. . . ."

She began to laugh. She sat at the foot of the bed and bent over his knees, laughing.

He fell asleep, moaning—"Aye, aye, aye, this ridiculous event. . . ." She slept also, curled up at the bottom of the bed. An hour later, while the sister was still at mass, she found her way out and, at the Calle Quinta bridge, took a taxi home.

## CHAIM RACOW

Grandfather, it was not for us  
to be a hunter or drunkard.  
Proud of the pain of the waterpails  
I walked beside you from the well.

—Milton Kessler

## HISTORY

Lurching stops and starts, the scrape of wheel  
on rail, the pullman bound for Veracruz  
from God's own city, Mexico. You feel  
it in the jungle air, this life you choose  
to be done with, drinking hot beer a porter  
carries between cars in a galvanized pail,  
talking with two young teachers, one the daughter  
of a minister in Scotland, the other frail  
with longing for Bermuda, ringed in bone white.  
"Americans! You have no *history*!"  
Their old world chatter flicks the yellow light  
bulbs like moths drawn to their mystery.  
No sleep this night; the window holds my head.  
Orizaba rising with the Aztec dead.

—James Langdon

## THE CLOCK ABOVE THE KITCHEN DOOR SAYS ONE

*The devil is, if you write an excellent poem  
I am glad, you know, but when your sullen, milky  
Tongue hung, last year, following me, I drank . . .  
Needed. Come back.—The new dull waitress comes  
Out of the kitchen, sets down soup, salad,  
Hamburgers, beers, she is feeding the academics,  
Her lipstick smeared, on the checkered tablecloth.  
She lacks the cockney temper of Doris, who quit.  
We lack the music mankind yearns asleep for.*

The devil is, I want you to love me  
Here in the Corner Tavern, while I tell you  
About Poetry.—We wipe our mouths with paper napkins,  
We're spitting blood, we're coughing, we're killing time,  
We're eating lunch. Keats was dead when he was your age,  
When he was my age, Mozart.

—Alicia Ostriker

## AFTER THE ACCIDENT

Horses graze in the bedroom.  
They gnaw at the grass  
sprouting in the windowsills,  
and pull moss from the blackened doorjambs.

As they wander through the dining room,  
their hooves spark against nails  
jutting out of charred floorboards  
and it begins again:  
the uninvited guest, laughter  
bursting into flame  
around the footsteps of the children.

—Gary Young

## SOYUZ

The world tunes in from surreptitious cars  
and otherwise lights up, and looks above  
for the dead cobalt to resume its hum of love  
and readmit the tardy ghosts of stars.  
Those capsules touch invisibly tonight,  
where all is night, and everyone admires  
such contact, thinking: "Hold out like those wires  
that carry heat, those pipes that carry light!"  
for the whole world is watching; and the cobalt still  
refrains from interference; and a playing  
world demands a ticket on an aeroplane,  
to break away from orbit, from the pill  
that doesn't break, from the permanent eclipse,  
and I sit like a dead lump of earth as the keeper of the ships.

—Mark Crispin Miller

## JONAH

Jonah asleep  
in the whale's belly

curled like a shrimp  
behind the slow heart

the lungs filled  
and emptied

ribs overhead  
rode through the sea.

What had frightened at first  
was now familiar

the wash of brine  
and fish flowing by

the eddies of weeds;  
the pressure of membranes;

the way things looked in the deep  
green light.

Accustomed, he hoped  
at the last to stay

and prayed to God  
to change him into a fish.

God answered  
"fish"

and the whale heaved  
and threw him up

eye open  
onto the white beach

the white air burning  
the gills the skin

Jonah awake  
in the eye of God.

—Robert Holland



## HOW I FAILED SIGNAL SCHOOL

I tuned between channels, searching for the right mix of garble and sense. Then I turned the dial past all human wavelengths. The teletype clicked, paused, and clicked. It printed definite things—the French word for banana, Portuguese for pineapple, a line of F's—but nothing worth big trouble. The sargeant explained, as he tore the sheet off, that eventually, if never relieved to eat or urinate or sleep, I'd get a big message. Perhaps my discharge, signed by a star—but in code so personal the cryptograph would choke on it. Meanwhile, a unit was moving back and forth, signalling positions, questions, and requests on a narrow band in five-letter groups to a broken strand in the Net. Men were random on the map. They weren't listening for the faint tap of the universe, goddamn different drumming, though more lost than me.—And more stupid, I said. But no. Just far enough from dinners and bunks to make them goals, and my static almost like a message, the same little faith in a different channel. Better we turned a tin ear.

—Richard Cecil

## POEM

In this print of Dürer's hanging on the wall  
The knight and horse are old but very strong;  
The lines run down his face, his body clothed  
Completely in thick armor that he loves.  
His friend, a dog, runs gladly at his heel,  
And they'll crush skulls before the day is gone.  
Behind him loom monsters and monstrosities  
That he's absorbed, or beaten, either way.

And Death arrives. His face sits on his sleeve,  
An hour glass in his hand. The knight—  
Is not afraid. No doubt he knows his way.  
And there, see, on a hill, the furthest thing  
Away, already passed, but visible, stand  
The towers of a town where peace might be.

—Leon Stokesbury

NO  
BAD LANGUAGE  
ALLOWED



# Reviews

## Books

**Poems in Persons: An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature**, by Norman N. Holland, Norton, 182 pp., \$2.95.  
**Democracy and Poetry**, by Robert Penn Warren, Harvard University Press, 102 pp., \$5.95.

The underlying assumption of Norman Holland's *Poems in Persons* is the truth of psychoanalytic thought. Thus if, like me, one views Freudian theories as less than conclusively proved—and in fact open to serious question—this initial response necessarily vitiates the effectiveness of Holland's book. This is unfortunate because Holland himself obviously possesses a supple and subtle mind: he wields his cumbersome Freudian sword with surprising grace.

In *Poems in Persons* Holland, who has been called "modern criticism's most enlightened practitioner of the psychoanalytic approach to literature," provides a provocative and polemical approach to that subject. The first chapter, in which he attempts to reveal the relation between H.D.'s (Hilda Doolittle) poetic style and total personality or identity, is the least successful part of the book. By his own admission, Holland relies almost solely on H. D.'s account of her analysis, *Tribute to Freud*, an essay which Holland calls "a unique source of insight" and "an extraordinary document." But Holland is begging the question by basing his argument on a text which itself assumes his system of explanation.

Holland calls the essay a "series of free associations," but H. D. was, after all, a highly conscious writer here—and not even especially candid or forthcoming. She omits material about her contemporary life and adult sexuality; "interestingly," (in Holland's understatement), she doesn't even mention the fact that her husband took a mistress and their marriage broke up. Holland insists nevertheless that "with a little persistence, a little reading between the lines, one can unscramble her reminiscences to give an absolutely unparalleled picture of the infantile forces that engendered a poet's life pattern, including the fact of her writing, and indeed, the very style of her writing." In other words, Holland is taking a self-conscious piece of writing and treating it like a Rorschach—but whose?

The persistence, reading between the lines, and unscrambling become increasingly disturbing. Holland's Freudian interpretations are so free, so protean, so elusive, that at one point Freud becomes H.D.'s father—and so does she! The never-ending possible combinations resulting from transference, blocking, repression, etc., eventually

affect Holland's style itself: on one page alone "perhaps" appears four times and "possibly" once. Moreover, Holland uses the theories and terminology of several psychologists, so that we have a cacophony of Freud, Erikson, Waeldner, and Lichtenstein just to begin with.

The overall result seems reductive and simplistic. The complexities of human personality and behavior are reduced to an initial organizing configuration, a single style, an identity theme "with which a person comes into the world." Likewise, the "writer's demiurge, his daimon and Muse" is reduced to a "preferred psychological solution."

The second chapter addresses a different, but related problem: the reactions of readers to a poem. Explanations of readers' responses in terms of their identity themes naturally raise the same issues as above. But even if one does not agree that people are so unified, simple, and uncontradictory, Holland's demonstration of how two readers' personalities are reflected in their grasp of a single poem will prove fascinating both for poetry readers and literature teachers. However, when he attempts to show how these individual and highly idiosyncratic readings become communal and public, the problems with his underlying assumptions are thrown into relief.

If, as Holland claims, it is impossible to be "objective" about a piece of literature (or anything else for that matter), if we must see everything through the lenses of our identity themes, then we are doomed to fall into a slough of subjectivity.

Just as Holland in effect reduces every verbal artifact into a psychological epiphenomenon, or spasm, so his suggestions for poetry readers and teachers reduce criticism to psychologizing, to a kind of winnowing of psychological generalities and peculiarities. He flatly states that "one does not read critically by resisting personal and emotional tendencies to distort." He further suggests that teachers can best come to understand their students' literary objections "by listening for the difficulties they are meeting in matching their defensive patterns" to the poem.

Holland denies that he is suggesting that literature classes become encounter groups or therapy sessions. It is difficult, nevertheless, to see how this approach to literature can avoid turning poems into ink blots, and criticism into confession. Holland throws up an unpleasant anti-elitist strawman by insisting that literature "need not be a private sanctum where mandarins and scholiasts generate statements about statements about literature, abstractions piled upon terminologies leaning on metaphors based on dicta precariously held

up by still other abstractions." The irony here is that not only will this description strike most serious students of literature and criticism as empty rhetorical flush, but Holland's own approach can quite easily be paraphrased as identity themes on identity themes on identity themes. The only advantage one might conceivably grant him is that his approach, being totally relativistic, is perforce more "democratic."

In *Democracy and Poetry*, Robert Penn Warren also addresses the problem of the "elitism" of poetry, but his defense is that poetry is itself a democratizing force that affects all of us (even non-readers) to the extent that it fosters individualism. Warren uses the word "poetry" in the broad sense of "making"—for all art, in other words.

One of Warren's principal points is that American poetry is diagnostic: it documents the dwindling of our conception of the self. In a sweeping historical survey, he demonstrates that the Jeffersonian and Emersonian dream of the responsible self, of independent selves exercising their franchise in the light of reason, had faded even by Civil War days. Of the post-Civil War writers Twain had the surest sense of the decline in faith in the individual and democracy: *Connecticut Yankee* is full of dire forebodings about democracy in general and modern industrial technological democracy in particular. In fact, Twain's final nihilistic theme was that all is illusion, nothing is real—an idea that obviously undercuts all hope for a democracy of significant selves.

Likewise, Dreiser's characters possess only fictive selves—fictive because they lack the relationship to real community necessary for a true self. Cowperwood, the egomaniacal protagonist of *The Financier* and *The Titan*, ends up the victim of illusion: having no sense of the selves of others, he destroys his own chance for genuine selfhood. As Cowperwood is the prince of dreams, so Clyde, the pathetic protagonist of *An American Tragedy*, is the slave of dreams: his whole life is the shadowy pursuit of his fictive selves.

Twentieth century American literature almost specializes in the lonely, maimed hero alienated from community and therefore unable to achieve a true self. And since World War II, we have heroes

(usually anti-heroes) drifting in a society marked by despair, aimlessness, violence, and amorality.

Happily, our poetry does more than diagnose, more than bring us the bad news that the drift of American history is toward the abolition of self. Poetry itself is a dynamic affirmation and image of the self. For Warren the value of poetry goes much deeper than the old "instruct or delight" notion—at least in the superficial sense of simple moralizing or hedonistic aestheticism. The poem or work of art stands as a model of the organized self, of the achieving self, indeed, of the ideal self. The work of art, in Warren's own moving words, "nods mysteriously at us, at the deepest personal inward sense." Because Warren considers poetry as vital, central to the human condition (both of the artist and appreciator), his comments on poetry are far from academic or even merely aesthetic. He convincingly argues that at its best technology promises us the secular millenium of redemption from the realm of necessity—but that it has no answer to what we will be free for. It is poetry that answers this "ultimate" question. By being a sovereign antidote for passivity and fragmentation, poetry wakes us up to our own life—our reality and potential.

In a period when our ex-President can observe, "The Arts, you know, they're Jews, they're left wing—in other words, stay away," Warren's plea for a reaffirmation of the value of art in our daily lives may sound as unrealistic as reasoning with a wolf. But easy despair is a sign of our times and in itself a reflection of our diminished sense of self.

Although Warren's book stresses the diagnostic as well as the politically and socially therapeutic values of art, he makes it clear at all times that these are secondary aspects. Holland seems to have stretched Pope's dictum that "the proper study of mankind is man" to mean that the proper study of poetry is the study of people. Warren tells us that whatever else poetry is or provides, its primary function is quite simply to be poetry.

Reviewed by Bonnie Lyons

## Perspective

### Civility and Its Discontents

by Stephen J. Whitfield

**The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity**, by John Murray Cuddihy, Basic Books, 263 pp., \$11.95. **The Street**, by Mordecai Richler, The New Republic Book Company, 128 pp., \$6.95. **Reading Myself and Others**, by Philip Roth, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 270 pp., \$8.95.

Driven into an exile of two millennia, prevented from owning land or from joining guilds, confined to certain streets or to certain villages, despised as Christ-killers and rendered sinister in legend and literature, murdered by mobs often organized by priests and police, deprived of the right of collective self-defense, deprived of sovereignty in a land of their own, deprived of common laws and even of a common vernacular, the Jews nevertheless refused to disappear. In Raul Hilberg's formulation, medieval Europe first told them, you cannot live among us as Jews, and tried to convert them. Then they were told, you cannot live among us, and were expelled from France, from England, from Spain and from other parts of Europe. Finally, Nazi Europe told them, you cannot live, and exterminated over a million Jewish children during the Holocaust. Yet still the Jews survived, whether by the will of God, by fidelity to an ancient faith, by the persistence of external hostility, by guile, or by luck. In a way, they even flourished: in contrast to the degradation of their surroundings, they created an interior universe so abundant in its complexity, so devoted to the unravelling of metaphysical and ethical mystery, and so committed to the interpretation of books that, even after the spell

of religion was broken, the effects were strong enough to alter the shape of modern intellectual history.

Marx and Freud were among those who freed themselves of ancestral faith; their emancipation from the ghetto has also had an impact well beyond their disciples and their exegetes. The socialist's influence has been the more prepossessing because his thought was translated into political power, and not only in the West but in the East, where the fire of his polemic and the ice of his analysis help govern the regimes of over a billion people. More than anyone who is not now alive, Marx has set the terms in which politics on a global scale has been conducted and in which it is likely to proceed for the remainder of the century. And only by comparison to him does the influence of Freud—limited as it is by geography and class—seem less compelling. But for many middle class Westerners, and especially Americans, it is now virtually impossible to make a slip of the tongue or pen, to forget a name or a face, to repeat last night's dream or read the latest novel, to quarrel with a parent or a friend, to begin or end a love affair or a marriage, without imagining, however fleetingly, how Freud would have assessed it. To make themselves legitimate, the leaders of about half the planet deny the authority of any transcendental jurisdiction over human beings and describe themselves as the heirs of Marxian socialism. In the other half, important segments have accepted what Philip Rieff has called the "triumph of the therapeutic," the end of the archetypal dominion of religious and economic man, to be replaced by psychological man. More than Darwin or Einstein, more than Weber or Keynes, Karl Marx and

Perhaps it is the very notion of truth itself that has undone us. For, however we conceive it, truth seems to stand over us, as well as over against us, dwarfing us not merely into insignificance, but even into nullity. We demand a knowledge that is certain, perfect, absolute: a knowledge in which we can feel secure. Yet such knowledge, such truth, asphyxiates our humanity; what we give up along the way is the ability to entertain ideas without succumbing to them. Surely it is a fatal sin of pride to misconstrue any idea as transcending human concerns and human limitations. Surely knowledge must remain subordinate to the moral matrix within which it is conceived. Put another way—we cannot expect to find a concept of justice which will not derive from the passion for justice that motivates the search.

It is one of the many ironies of intellectual history that the thinkers of the Enlightenment, who themselves were so concerned to “dis-establish” absolutist dogmas, should have bequeathed us other, more subtle dogmas. These are not, of course, dogmas of doctrine, but rather dogmas of assumption, of perspective. Even the idea of science (as distinct from the practice) derives much of its attractiveness from the implicit absoluteness of its *perspective*. For scientific knowledge appears to claim that if we can only be “objective” enough, if we can only strip our language of its ghostly clutter, and if we will adhere strictly to the canons of experimental verification, we will at last arrive at a knowledge that is as irrefutable as the word of God.

It is this same craving for absolute certainty and objectivity that gives force to the complex set of assumptions, also derived from the Enlightenment, that Unger calls “liberalism.” What Unger means by this term is much more than an ideology, or spray of ideologies. It is what he calls a “deep structure” of our culture, that combines a fundamental way of looking at things—the very phrasing of the questions we think it important to ask—and a *form of social existence*. So pervasive are the “liberal” assumptions that it is extremely difficult to grasp, analyze, and—this seems the right word—exorcize them.

Various aspects of liberalism have been subjected to severe criticism, but because this criticism has been partial, it has failed to uproot the deeper, largely implicit ideas. It is the task of providing a *total* criticism that Unger has set for himself.

It should be made perfectly clear that by “liberalism” Unger does not mean anything so simple or superficial as a particular political doctrine of the “left,” or “left-center.” In fact he is addressing assumptions that lie behind these terms themselves, and the Constituent Assembly of revolutionary France in which they have their origin. Liberalism is a theory of self, a theory of society, and underlying these, a theory of knowledge.

Liberal psychology asserts that knowledge is acquired through combinations of elementary sensations and analysis, and that the whole self is a function of such analytically ascertainable elements. It separates understanding and desire (reason and emotion) and assumes that desires are by definition *arbitrary* (i.e., have no sanction outside of themselves). Unger argues persuasively that no adequate theory of the self can be built upon these assumptions; that, for example, they make it impossible to account for the continuity of the self through time, for *common* humanity, or for individuality. Obviously, there is no way of justifying anything that could be called a “moral vision” with such terms.

Unger’s analysis of liberal political theory points to parallel difficulties. A sharp distinction between rules and values is assumed. Values are simply what any individual wants for himself, and rules are prescribed ways in which such an individual will be allowed to go about getting what he wants (the rule of *law*, and not of *men*). Because liberal doctrine repudiates the theory of essential values, and because of the strict dichotomy of rules and values, there is no way of arriving at a theory of societal good. Relativism reigns by default. Men are free to pursue what our constitution so evasively calls their “happiness,” but no theory of human goals is possible. In other words, the liberal idea of freedom is entirely negative—freedom from, but to what? Democracy becomes a kind of numbers game, and society, instead of having anything that could be called a path, simply follows

## Perspective . . . continued

Sigmund Freud fit the definition of genius that one critic has proposed: their readers grow up inside their work without ever realizing its circumference.

That both thinkers were born Jews is the spark of John Murray Cuddihy’s combustible book. Its method is the “sociology of knowledge,” the inquiry into the historical origins and contours of ideas, a method developed by yet another Germanic Jew, Karl Mannheim. *The Ordeal of Civility* can be summarized with almost seductive simplicity; it is, as Richard King has observed, written by an ex-Catholic about ex-Jews unable to adapt to the “Protestant Etiquette.” After the Enlightenment many Jews in Central and Eastern Europe abandoned the intricate network of personal relations that had bound them in their ghettos and *shtetlach* (the villages of Eastern Europe) to claim the rights of legal equality offered by Western bourgeois society. But after jettisoning the familiar nexus of tribe and tradition to become deracinated citizens instead of Jews, they were not accepted as social equals, no matter how law-abiding, well-educated, or wealthy. Only Gentiles could be genteel in a society which in the nineteenth century was still founded upon ascription as well as achievement, and Jews lacked the status to pass the rites of civility even when granted the rights of citizenship.

One consequential response to the modernizing force of the Enlightenment and to the exclusionary policy of the salons, Professor Cuddihy argues, was social theory. Unassimilable Jewish intellectuals not only got mad; they got even. Freud’s father once told him of an anti-Semitic insult, in which a Gentile had knocked a new cap off Jacob Freud’s head onto the street and shouted at him, “Jew! Get off the pavement!” Jacob Freud had meekly picked his cap up, and his young son contrasted such submissiveness with the Carthaginians with whom he identified, especially “the scene in which Hannibal’s father, Hamilcar Barca, made this boy swear before the household altar to take vengeance on the Romans” (*The Interpretation of Dreams*). The psychiatrist’s revenge would take the deceptive form of

therapy and of theory, and the Christendom whose citadel had been Rome would never again be the same. Central to both theory and therapy is the complex based upon the Oedipus myth, which is also triggered by a social insult on the road: the king’s actual father Laius is killed after an altercation in which, as Oedipus reports to Jocasta, “the herald in front and the old man himself/Threatened to thrust me rudely from the path . . .”

Cuddihy also emphasizes that vengeance assumed the form of solving riddles through verbal exposure, explicitly revealing what polite society tried to hide. When Freud’s teacher Jean Martin Charcot explained that in cases involving certain neurotic symptoms of female patients, the explanation was always sexual (“*toujours la chose génitale*”), Freud was “almost paralyzed with amazement and said so myself, ‘Well, but if he knows that, why does he never say so?’” (*Collected Papers*, I). Social theory was thus fashioned to enunciate what the Protestant Etiquette seemed to be deliberately disguising. Marx wanted the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith, a professor of moral philosophy, to be made visible, wanted to perforate the belief that capitalism was morally justifiable, wanted to show that the European economy of the nineteenth century masked exploitation and avarice. Freud wanted to show that beneath the surface of reason and etiquette lurked a teeming, unconscious world of passion, aggression, the death wish and the demonic secretly governing human conduct.

Cuddihy suggests that the “importunate ‘Yid,’ released from ghetto and *shtetl*, is the model . . . for Freud’s coarse, importunate ‘id.’ Both are saddled with the problem of ‘passing’ from a latent existence ‘beyond the pale’ of Western respectability into an open and manifest relationship to Gentile society *within* Gentile society, from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness.” Social theory became, in its most forceful thrusts, a criticism of hypocrisy; with the authority of “honesty,” Marx and Freud could condemn false consciousness, idealization, rationalization. Psychoanalysis in particular, Cuddihy writes, was “an ideology, a compromise strategy, for living-

a vector determined by the prevailing preponderance of arbitrary individual desires.

In all these areas liberalism has been criticized and refuted before. But because each refutation was only partial, these refutations have remained without appreciable effect upon the way liberalism is embodied in our society and its institutions, and in our habits of mind. Yet the antinomies of liberalism, as Unger views them, are not merely abstract; they are encountered in the flesh, as it were, in our society, as obstacles to growth and progress.

What then, are the alternatives to liberalism? The socialist ideologies, including Marxism, are in some ways more consistent. But all of them, because they are largely contaminated by liberal assumptions, collapse under similar antinomies. Social democracies resemble advanced cases of the disease of liberal capitalism and the welfare state. Marxist states at least have an ideal structure to aim for. But because that ideal structure itself embodies the psychology and political assumptions of liberalism, the Marxist states tend to resemble our own, with a planning office replacing the "free play of social and economic forces."

Unger's approach is to deny the validity of the distinctions, or dichotomies of liberalism. Instead, he offers a theory of "organic groups," and the theory of the "union of immanence and transcendence."

The theory of organic groups argues that values are created in time (in History) from within groups of freely associating individuals. In such groups, each individual expresses himself in freedom, and joins with others who share his desires and values. Since each individual's participation in the group will be voluntary, a result of his recognition of a harmony of interest, none will be subordinate to others. The groups so formed will in turn interrelate with other groups, associate, and form a larger consensus. It appears that a commune might be an example of the kind of group Unger has in mind, at least at the primary level.

For a value to be a value, and not simply a desire, it must partake of "transcendence." On the other hand, the imposition of a trans-

endent value upon reality, conceived as distinct, will be tyrannical. What is needed, then, is a union of transcendence and immanence: the values will emerge, or evolve out of human society, but they will be of transcendent authority.

Unger is aware that his argument leads into an antinomy of its own. What will provide the authority of transcendence to the evolving values of this organic society? What will guide individuals to discover their mutual "whither"? There is only one possible answer: God.

God is the only conceivable union of immanence and transcendence. God's existence cannot, Unger acknowledges, be proved or demonstrated. Either you see (or hear) God, or you do not, until such time as He chooses to manifest Himself unequivocally.

And so Unger's analysis of the ideas that bind, and blind us, begun in a solid framework of legal theory (Unger is a professor of law at Harvard), ends in a coy theology of the missing term. It would be most unfortunate, however, if those who expect Unger's concluding sentence—"Speak, God"—to remain as unheeded as always, refuse this work the interest and attention it deserves. Unger brings the issue—and it is a critical issue—to a sharp point. It should be obvious that the emerging global society cannot continue to make do with a legal and institutional framework based upon rusty utilitarianism, Lockean sensationalism, and *The Wealth of Nations*. And Unger is surely right when he argues that the so-called "challenge" of Marxism is primarily a revision of the same set of ideas, despite its Hegelian structure. What we need is indeed something new, and the courage to begin dismantling. The theories of organic groups and the union of transcendence and immanence are suggestive, if not entirely clear or persuasive. The *deus ex machina* of the conclusion can be safely left to each reader to do with as he pleases. It should on no account prevent a serious study of Unger's critique.

Reviewed by Grant Lyons

## Perspective . . . continued

the-Diaspora: the price of Emancipation—repression and sublimation—was to be paid, and paid in full, but consciously, and without adopting any of the illusory ideologies that the Gentile needed to console himself with for the renunciations exacted by civilized life." In their desire to undermine the pretensions of the bourgeoisie in their board rooms and bedrooms, to show that the economic order and the mental order were based upon greed and lust, Marx and Freud committed the very crime that the genteel had charged all along: Jews are guilty of bad manners and bad taste. They threatened the delicate web of civilization that Christians had fabricated and tried to strengthen against the beast within, the beast that these Jewish "scientific" intellectuals were so remorselessly describing.

This is Cuddihy's theme, followed by variations haphazardly strung out. His argument is most persuasive when it incorporates psychoanalysis; and it is interesting that Philip Roth based so much of his latest novel, *My Life as a Man*, on "the idea of the psychoanalytic session, wherein pile driving right on through the barriers of good taste and discretion is considered central to the task at hand." Cuddihy's thesis neatly coalesces in his chapter on Wilhelm Reich, barely identifiable as a Jew but an errant disciple of both Freud and Marx. It was Reich's intention to puncture the "character armor" which he claimed was responsible for both political and sexual repression, by peeling away the layers of the social animal: "On the surface he carries the artificial mask of self-control, of compulsive insincere politeness and artificial sociality. . . . The second layer is the artifact of the sex-negating culture. . . . The third and deepest [layer], representing the biological nucleus of the human structure, is unconscious and dreaded." Reich's work was to influence Norman Mailer, Paul Goodman and the impresario of encounter groups, Frederick S. Perls; its aim was to corrode that armor of "artificial sociality," to restore the primacy of the natural man and woman that the Protestant Etiquette had stifled. (It is therefore not incomprehensible that the

champions of Christian morality would sense the danger of the "Jewish science" to their announced need for restraint and tact.)

But however arresting Cuddihy's local insights are, however shrewd his account of the genesis of psychoanalysis appears, *The Ordeal of Civility* is, given the particularity of its focus, rather lopsided in its interpretive scheme. It is true that the Freudian movement was the target of anti-Semitic feeling which partly checked the influence it otherwise merited, that its founder was consciously a Jew, and that he therefore considered himself relatively free to criticize the repressiveness of Western mores because of his marginal status. But he was hardly the sort of *Ostjude* (Eastern Jew), the young man from the provinces who might have been stunned by the contrast between the *Gemeinschaft* of the village and the *Gesellschaft* of the metropolis. Freud's family moved to Vienna in 1860, when he was four. There he grew up, was educated, lived (except briefly in Paris), and practiced psychiatry until the Nazi invasion of 1938. "On these facts alone," Robert Alter has written, "not to speak of the relaxed way Freud alludes to traditional Jewish life and practices in the anecdotal material from it that he occasionally draws upon, it is hard to see how he could have been obsessed with the uncouth *shtetl* Jew, before all other intellectual or emotional considerations."

Nor is the link with Marx, whose work is given far more cursory treatment, indissolubly forged. The chapters on Freud are based upon such seminal books as *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but no equivalent effort is expended on *Capital* or *The Communist Manifesto* or the now-celebrated early manuscripts on alienation. To advance his thesis, Cuddihy has to pull some very emaciated rabbits out of his hat: the first article Marx ever published, in 1843, on Prussian censorship, plus "On the Jewish Question" (1844), an assault on the propriety of property in which the faults of capitalist Jews are attributed to capitalism itself. Cuddihy's analysis of Marx might be compared to a study of the artistry of James Joyce that cites only *Pomes Penyeach*.



**Irreverent Pilgrims. Melville, Browne and Mark Twain in the Holy Land**, by Franklin Walker, University of Washington Press, 234 pp., \$9.95.

Crusaders and pilgrims were the earliest Western travelers to the Moslem Middle East, and Franklin Walker's *Irreverent Pilgrims* shows how durable those models have been. The titles of the three books he treats give the game away: John Ross Browne's *Yusef; or, the Journey of the Frangi: A Crusade in the East* (1853); Herman Melville's *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876); and Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrim's Progress* (1869). Each of these 19th century American Protestants, of course, transposes the inherited tradition. Browne's "Crusade" is "against the Mists of Fancy." Melville's pilgrimage is undertaken by faithless pilgrims, and Twain's by decrepit, intolerant and hypocritical ones who are contrasted unfavorably with the "genuine piety" of blackguards and sinners such as himself and his cronies (p. 196). Still, the choice of subtitles is significant: the writers were associating themselves with the forms they knew their readership would instantly connect with the area. The old militant spirit died especially hard in Mark Twain. No Arab-lover anyway, Twain was excited by the Crusader Godfrey de Bouillon's sword, preserved in Jerusalem: "I can never forget old Godfrey's sword, now. I tried it on a Moslem, and clove him in twain like a doughnut" (p. 186). "In twain" is good. The point is not that the remark is intended humorously, but what Twain felt constituted a joke. It is also interesting to be reminded that the Melville family motto "Denique Coelum" ("Heaven at last!") was the cry of the crusaders.

Walker's book has four parts: an introduction, three chapters on Browne, and two each on Melville and Twain. Chapter One, "Travel in Syria in the Victorian Age," is a useful introductory sketch, though one must bear in mind that it limits itself to *American* involvement. The much older European and especially English traditions are almost beyond its ken, except for writers such as Kinglake and Lamartine who influenced the Americans. And Walker's claim that his subjects

are "the three most important literary works to result from American visits to the Holy Land during the nineteenth century" needs qualification. Browne and Melville reached a limited audience, and even Twain's popular work was outshone by William Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (1859), whose sales in 19th century America were second only to the Bible's. Thomson and Edward Robinson and William Bartlett may have been "unliterary," but they were deeply influential. "Sacred geography" remained the norm, despite the "irreverent pilgrims." The iconoclast might struggle and fret and mock, but he could not escape the idea that Palestine had been holy land for two thousand years, and would remain so for most. *The Innocents Abroad*, though widely read, was atypical, and did not divert the mainstream, while Browne and Melville were "important" only to a narrow literary community.

Mediterranean "tourism" began in the 1840's with steam packets and tours from England, and Walker establishes that his subjects were beyond question tourists, with all the limitations of perspective that term implies. The three of them together spent only about eighty days in Palestine (pp. 4-7). Twain came on the luxury cruise of the *Quaker City*, the vanguard of a post-Civil War boom in American tourism (pp. 163, 166). He was hurried, ill, scorched, irritable—today's summer tourist will recognize the syndrome—and Walker's comment on the results deserves more than the parenthesis he gives it:

... after a sick day in Damascus he pronounced the inhabitants to be "the ugliest, wickedest looking villains I have ever seen," and he lumped all Turks and Arabs together as despicable. (During his visit to the Levant, Mark Twain made little attempt to distinguish among Arabs, Turks, and Jews, much less to recognize a Druze, a Maronite, or a Bedouin. As with most visitors new to the area, he had little chance or knowledge to make such distinctions.) (p.175)

During his week in Jerusalem he could not find time to visit the Dome of the Rock, then newly opened to Christian visitors (p. 184). Walker assures us that Eastman did not introduce the Kodak until 1880, nor

## Perspective . . . continued

Nor does Cuddihy confront the problem of Marx's own remoteness from his Jewish origins, for unlike Freud, a member of the fraternal lodge of B'nai B'rith, Marx was baptized as a youth and made no effort to identify himself with the Jewish people either in its ancient grandeur or in its contemporary vulnerability. And despite its subtitle, *The Ordeal of Civility* includes only ten pages on Claude Lévi-Strauss, a rabbi's grandson but no product of a *shtetl*. Cuddihy may have originally been toying with the idea of making Brazilian Indians into Lévi-Strauss's ersatz Jews, the stick with which to beat the ethnocentric Gentiles; if so, Cuddihy fortunately dropped the idea. Perhaps the subtitle was a way of cashing in on the vogue of structural anthropology (Susan Sontag, for example, entitled her essay on its founder "the anthropologist as hero"), for the author makes no case for Lévi-Strauss's inclusion in the design of his argument.

*The Ordeal of Civility* is promised as the fragment of a larger work, and the two final sections hint at the possible direction of Cuddihy's further interests. Part III is an attempt to insert the ambiguous position of the ex-Jewish intelligentsia into the wider framework of world modernization, to include Jews among those people—normally associated with the Third World—who have passed through the crucibles of industrialization and urbanization. The history of emancipated Jewry is thus depicted as "delayed modernization." But while common elements can be found in the encounter between Jews and Gentiles and between whites and peoples of color, and while Jewish intellectuals were also often torn between the shame of "backwardness" and reverence for a dignified and consoling tradition, the peculiarities of Diaspora history are more striking. Cuddihy is forced to minimize, for example, the effects of imperialism, long the political face of modernization and still a psychological factor; there is no systematic equivalent in the history of European Jewry. Having created the faith, the book, and even the Savior from which Christianity itself emerged, Jews were necessarily less peripheral to the con-

sciousness of the West than Africans or aborigines (and thus the killing of peoples of color was both more removed and more casual). And as with Freud's actual cosmopolitanism, Cuddihy's interpretation collides with stubborn fact: even in the kingdom of Poland, which in the eighteenth century had the continent's highest percentage of rural Jewry, more Jews lived in cities than did Christians; and two-thirds of Polish Jewry were listed in the census as urban. These were not peasants whose hegira to cities signalled entry into the modern world; most Jews were already there.

Part IV brings the reader into the courtrooms of contemporary America, especially the rambunctious Chicago conspiracy trial of 1969 and the New York Black Panthers conspiracy trial the following year. Was the Bill of Rights to be construed as protecting the defendants' fullest freedom of expression, however disruptive of legal niceties? The Supreme Court's answer, as summarized by Cuddihy, turned out to be no: "Legal rights . . . are not absolute but relative to social rites of decorum; one can forfeit the former by nonperformance of the latter." Here the author slightly misinterprets the meaning of Justice Hugo Black's opinion; more accurately stated, it is for the sake of legal rights that there must be order in the court. Moreover, Cuddihy makes too much of these two politically-symbolic trials, since it was his ill luck not to have foreseen that they were apparently the last of their kind. Subsequently defendants as disparate as Angela Davis and Daniel Ellsberg in California, Philip Berrigan in Harrisburg, and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Gainesville did not cry that their rights were infringed upon if theatricality and a cultivated outrageousness did not characterize their defense; none of them, incidentally, was convicted. Also somewhat askew is the author's perception of the Chicago trial largely in terms of German Jews (Judge Julius Hoffman) vs. *Ostjuden* (Abbie Hoffman). Defendant Hoffman did taunt Judge Hoffman for being a social climber, an *allrightnik*; but even radicalism's court jester made that only one weapon in his arsenal,



American Express the travelers check until 1891, but the mental features of Tourism were already recognizable. Compared to the major English travel-writers of the century—Lane, Kinglake, Warburton, Burton, Col. Churchill, Lady Duff-Gordon, Doughty and others—the Americans appear very superficial indeed. For Europeans the Near East had been a logical extension of the Grand Tour since the early eighteenth century; for Americans it remained exotic, *outré*, irrevocably “other.” Like most of us when confronted with the new and strange, Browne, Melville and Twain reached for homely comparisons. The Black Sea reminded Melville of Lake George, as every body of water in Palestine recalled Lake Tahoe to Twain. Aeneas, Prince of Troy, setting out with his father and household gods—his cultural baggage—on his back, is no bad emblem of the traveler, especially the tourist.

Yet tourism did not suppress the individuality of these travelers. If anything it is the literary form that seems to impose itself on each writer. Nowhere in Melville’s poem (or journal) do we find the rampant philistinism of Browne and Twain, who freely employed what Walker calls “old Southwest” humor (pp. 83, 169), and what one of their own characters might label “crackerbarrel cornball frontiershit,” as a basic part of their narrative strategies. *Yusef* and *The Innocents Abroad* are attempts to preserve Palestinian wine in the bottle of American regional humor; in both books uncomplimentary epithets, wild exaggeration and burlesque hilarity substitute for real knowledge or understanding. Browne styles himself the “Honorary General of the Bobtailed Militia,” compares the Jordan to a backwoods creek in America, and blandly undertakes to promote a more liberal outlook on “the customs and prejudices of the uncivilized world” (p. 83). Twain gives Palestinian places California names, likens the Arabs to Digger Indians, and acts as spokesman for the “American Vandal,” the term which

best describes the roving, independent, free and easy character of that class of traveling Americans who are not elaborately educated, cultivated, and refined, and gilded and filigreed with the ineffable graces of the first society (p. 202).

I’ll say. Melville was a tourist, but he was not a chauvinist.

The same contrast emerges in the context of “romance vs. reality,” which Walker perceives as the common theme of the three writers. The real and the ideal constitute the commonest polarity in literature, and naturally bulk large in travel-writing about exotic or tradition-rich lands. Eliot Warburton’s *The Crescent and the Cross* (1844) is subtitled “Romance and Realities of Eastern Travel,” and I think Walker neglects his influence on the philistines. Browne writes that he is crusading “against the Mists of Fancy,” while Twain in a letter identified expectation vs. actuality as his dominant motif. Both men use earlier “romantic” writers as foils, and play off the anticipations resulting from literary distortion against the experience itself. Walker first tries to fit Melville into this scheme—he had had trouble reconciling illusion and reality” (p. 132)—but later admits that “He seems to have been bothered little if at all by disappointments over the state of the Holy Sites, having expected no more than what he found” (p. 223).

Melville, then, stands apart from the other two in important ways. He is the only one of the three whose observations have the hard edge that persuades us that we are not seeing Palestine through a veil of preconceived attitudes or literary genre, the only one who was even interested in history, the only one to resist the blandishments of “sacred geography.” Yet Walker’s treatment of him is unsatisfactory. Melville’s vision was poetic but his expressive *forte* was not, and Walker’s failure to judge *Clarel* as a poem is a sin of omission. He mentions in passing that Melville’s travel experiences “became incandescent in his verse” (p. 138), and that his “voice” there is “sometimes . . . more effective than provided by the prose of *Moby-Dick*” (p. 137), without ever coming to grips with the *quality* of the verse, which is tortuous in the extreme. Except for his use of tetrameter, Melville seems to have close affinities with those eighteenth-century didactic poets at whom Johnson and Boswell laughed. He draws our attention to the “gluey track and streaky trail / Of some small slug or torpid snail,” and invites us to “Behold how through the crucial pass / Slips unabased the humble ass.” Actually these are light mo-

## Perspective . . . continued

and none of the other seven defendants used it. They preferred to define the *Kulturkampf* in actuarial terms—youth versus age—and not through the internal politics of the American Jewish community. Nor does Cuddihy mention, since it does not help his thesis, that the trial’s most noted indecorous breach of language, the “barnyard epithet,” was uttered by David Dellinger, a non-young non-Jew.

Little in the remainder of the book seems to bear directly upon the central thesis—for example, Cuddihy’s chapter on contemporary American intellectual life. Here Jews were generally excluded from the most prestigious (as well as some of the most provincial) academic circles until well into the twentieth century, and pockets of resistance remained until the Holocaust made anti-Semitism disreputable. Four decades ago Columbia University’s Department of English hired its first Jew, Lionel Trilling, as “an experiment,” because Jews were doubted to have the innate sensitivity to understand and explicate the most serious literature. For several years Oscar Handlin was not appointed to Harvard’s Department of History for more directly patriotic reasons, and there are less famous cases of Jews being considered culturally and socially unfit as custodians of the Western academic tradition. All this is presumably relevant to Cuddihy’s purposes but goes unmentioned in his book, which fails to calibrate the changes in toleration since Marx and Freud. The New York world of publishing books and magazines reputedly places little emphasis on breeding; not even the Ivy League insists upon the forms of deference such as baptism which the salons of Berlin and Vienna and the German university system once required. “Once Jewish boys were hit over the head with rocks,” Mordecai Richler has written, “today they’re pelted with fellowships.” Nor does Cuddihy acknowledge that none of the axial principles of American society encourages the rigid definitions of gentleman (and lady) that barred Jews in Europe. The conviction of Army dermatologist Howard Levy, for example, was briefly overturned because an appeals court could not find an acceptable definition of “conduct unbecoming an

officer and a gentleman”; and last year one state legislature considered a bill that would legalize prostitution, provided the women were “of good character.”

Cuddihy’s book will satisfy readers whose taste is romantic—the writing is exuberant, flashy and personal to the point of idiosyncrasy—rather than classical—the argument lacks balance, proportion and cohesiveness. Though *The Ordeal of Civility* does not sustain its intentions, the execution of its thesis is never ponderous. The book does not pretend to be stamped with utterly disinterested and incontrovertible authority, yet it is disturbing for another reason: Cuddihy falls into the trap of reductionism. Nowhere does he assure readers that the delineation of the genesis of ideas does not in itself undermine the validity of those ideas. Once the terms are understood, two plus two equals four, even if the first human being to realize that might have been a Greek, or a neurotic, or a sports fan. Insights into capitalism or madness are of course much more imprecise and likely to be implicated in the special conditions of time and place and individual temperament, but that is why the sociologist of knowledge should address himself to the issue of whether socialism or psychoanalytic theory or structural anthropology are anything more than a Jewish response to social discrimination. In the past decade American culture has been afflicted by dogmatists who have claimed certain kinds of knowledge to be hermetic, who have scoffed at the effort to transmit or examine certain kinds of experience. “Don’t criticize what you can’t understand” (not “don’t” but “can’t”) was what Bob Dylan once sang to mothers and fathers throughout the land, and his cry was adopted by others: by some black nationalists who wanted whites, no matter how well-informed or wise, to remain mute while a presumably monolithic Afro-American community expressed its will; by political lip readers, usually on the left, who divided literature into two parts—problem or solution; and by some feminists, who would have denounced the Last Supper because it was a stag dinner and who foreclosed the hope of male empathy for the plight of women.

ments among the cumbersome echoes of Milton, Dante and Shakespeare. *Clarel*, with 18,000 lines, is longer than *Paradise Lost*, the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, and it is steadily pessimistic, hopeless, finally nihilistic. It has many interesting passages, but they seem weighted with twenty centuries of stony sleep. Query: a long poem that affirms nothing is doomed to failure.

Franklin Walker, Professor Emeritus of English at Mills College, Oakland, is a published authority on western American literature, and he not only read but traveled to prepare for this volume. He mentions Lebanon and Israel but not Syria; judging by his evident familiarity with the Jordan valley and Mar Saba monastery, he also visited the occupied West Bank of Jordan. Apart from some lapses into the mechanical academic style the text is well-written, though the return of Melville and Browne for a paragraph each at the end of the chapter on *The Innocents Abroad* is an odd closure. I found the ending—an evocation of Arab dancing to a ditty Browne played—evasive of the real importance of his study. Our modern attitudes towards the Middle East are partly conditioned by the reports of earlier visitors such as these, and most or all of the current issues are inherent in their books. *Irreverent Pilgrims* is not escapist reading.

Reviewed by Richard W. Bevis

**The Private Life of Islam**, by Ian Young, Liveright, 308 pp., \$8.95.

On an immediate level, Ian Young's book is honest, readable, disturbing. He tells of his experience in Berber Kabylia on the outskirts of Algiers where conditions are primitive and traditions are strong. Here he spent 1970 satisfying a practical requirement towards his degree in medicine as a volunteer in the maternity section of a public hospital. His memoir, written as "revenge" against an intolerable situation, and its perpetrators, is cast in ironic fury, and reveals much

of the hollowness beneath the rhetorical socialist shibboleths of a particular developing nation, Algeria. Denounced are bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption in general, the incompetence of one Bulgarian doctor he worked with and the brutality of another in particular. In the course of his narrative, Young excoriates the cruel *machismo* of Algerian men, the ignorance in which women are kept, and all this literally *ad nauseum*—some scenes of deliveries would be X-rated in any movie.

Young's exasperated wit often recalls the literary tradition of novelists—Forster, Waugh, Newton, Burgess—in which marvelous fun is made both of Third World situations and of the Western protagonists who presume to set right what is awry, usually in terms of Western liberal values. But here's the rub, because the book's message will be repudiated by the Algerians as insulting and because it will feed those who, for whatever motive, are glad to see the Third World disparaged. But to such considerations Young is properly indifferent. All that he asks is that human dignity be attended to, irrespective of ideological content.

A Westerner sympathetic to Third World aspirations for authenticity and modernization can, of course, apologize. When the French settlers with all their talents left Algeria in 1962, they left a significant void in trained personnel, administrators, doctors and the rest. Such an apologia, however, smacks of the excuses Young came to despise. Mothers are still massacred on delivery tables because of abysmal incompetence and indifference. One hopes that the day will come when this genuine account of a year of appalled dedication in a hopeless situation can be read in Algeria with concerned equanimity and also self-recognition. Then we might be able to speak of the true fruition of a revolution whose seeds were planted during eight brave and violent years. In any case, disregarding future developments as well as niceties and the etiquette of toleration, our world would be a sadder place than it now is if the Youngs did not indignantly bear witness to the truth.

Reviewed by David C. Gordon

## Perspective . . . continued

In the wake of such absolutism, it would have been valuable for a scholar who has made no secret of his Catholic upbringing to have ventilated his study of Jewish intellectuals by suggesting the wider applicability of their ideas. No historian of ideas can be expected to master the knowledge required to separate the living truths from the other components of these ideologies, but Cuddihy should have been more sensitive to the implications of describing the universal claims of social theory as merely the expression of particular Jewish interests. But since he sees only one thing (Cuddihy is the kind of scholar, to continue the Joycean analogy, who might interpret *Ulysses* as a critique of Christian-Jewish intermarriage), his reductionism limits the value of his own book.

That is a pity, for there is something to his case. Within our culture, Jews have been conspicuous members of the wild bunch that has made war, however playfully, upon puritanism; against the barriers of Cuddihy's Protestant Esthetic, the reification of taste, some Jewish writers have been willing to come across as "pushy," among them Mordecai Richler and Philip Roth. Both have written freely about *la chose génitale*, though only—as starlets tell interviewers who inquire about their availability for nude scenes—if and when it is "artistically necessary." Both have minds well-stocked with the flotsam and jetsam of popular culture, especially radio, movies and sports (hockey for Richler, baseball for Roth). Not very sophisticated formally, both are virtuosi of language. Richler prefers the epigram, the put-down, the quick stab of wit, though he can also write some marvelously lapidary paragraphs. And contrary to popular belief, Roth's most important organ is his ear, which has picked up all the bizarre varieties and nuances of American speech and set them down with stunning fidelity. His is also the more antic imagination: Roth is a go-for-broke wildcatter who can do almost everything with the language but refine it; far from depleting this national resource of the word, he leaves us all the richer. He has contrived two masterpieces of comic fiction: *Portnoy's Complaint*, which everyone has read, and *The Great Ameri-*

*can Novel*, which has been unjustly dismissed and neglected. Richler has a wider repertory of sympathies than Roth has so far demonstrated; the most abundant evidence of Richler's talent is *St. Urbain's Horseman*. Nevertheless he will probably be best remembered for an earlier novel, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, the latest in a line of books extending from Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* through Nathanael West's *A Cool Million* and Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run* that constitutes the Algeresque theme, which is also the Jewish literary theme, of making it. Both Richler and Roth are the grandsons of immigrants, grew up in working class Jewish neighborhoods (Richler in Montreal, Roth in Newark), and write most effectively about Jews. (Because both are satirists of deadly skill, because their humor is tinged with a mean streak, they have been accused, very foolishly, of hating Jews.) Both are immune to the appeals of patriotism and display a political orientation that could be characterized as residual leftism. (Of all immigrant communities, the Jews were the last to forsake the illusions of the Soviet dream, though both novelists are anti-totalitarian, with the Holocaust shadowing their work.) Both can be grisly in their ridicule, especially when nursing the wounds of Jewish history; and thus their work tends to amplify Cuddihy's studies in creativity.

The two collections under review are not especially imposing, however. Richler's is the slighter, a series of ten sketches that mix fiction and reminiscence about growing up in Montreal. His grandfather was a scholar, a translator of the *Zohar* (The Book of Splendor); his father sold scrap. Richler himself grew up with ghetto kids, some of whom became Stalinists, some of whom became Zionists, most of whom "were scruffy and spiteful, with an eye on the main chance." Nearly everyone feared the Canadian Protestants: "It was, we felt, their country, and given sufficient liquor who knew when they would make trouble?" Richler has spent most of his adulthood in London; but "no matter how long I continue to live abroad, I do feel forever rooted in Montreal's St. Urbain Street. That was my time, my place,

**The Breast of the Earth**, by Kofi Awoonor, Anchor Press, 387 pp., \$15.00.

An internationally respected Ghanaian poet and writer, Kofi Awoonor brings both erudition and common sense to the task of surveying the history, culture, and literature of Africa south of the Sahara. The survey that seeks to mediate between the old and the new in Africa is a tremendous undertaking. Instead of attempting to make an exhaustive analysis, Awoonor has wisely chosen to let his sensibility, his engaged concern, play over the vast information to be covered. It is the sensitive, human involvement with the subject matter that makes *The Breast of the Earth* a rich and rewarding book.

Awoonor has divided his survey into three parts: Africa and her external contacts, Traditional Africa, and Contemporary Africa. Part I is a succinct historical overview of sub-Saharan Africa, linking pre-colonial history with the impact of Islamic and European penetrations. Part II consists of essays on the philosophical structures underlying traditional societies, on art, music, and languages, and on dramatic, narrative, and lyric forms in oral literature. The final section covers literature in such languages as Xhosa, Hausa and Swahili, aspects of the Negritude movement in Francophone Africa, English language poetry, and the contemporary estate of drama and other art forms. Awoonor includes a brief bibliography which could introduce non-specialists to the fascinating study of African cultures and literatures.

The African continent occupies a unique position in twentieth century cultural evolution. It has a rich heritage that can be exploited in the creation of modern art, but that heritage must be rediscovered in the process of recovering from the colonial interregnum. Rediscovery cannot be a "pristine cultural journey into the past," nor can the thrust into the future be a flight fueled by European assumptions. Like its politics, the culture of Africa must be a synthesis of tradition and the knowledge gained from contacts with other sectors of global society. The continent, Awoonor tells us in his preface, "plods on, seeking . . . ways of growth and survival. And in this search, it adapts, adopts, changes, borrows, discards, and continues to build what in

essence will be its own true personality." *The Breast of the Earth* presents a brilliant, comprehensive vision of the quest for identity, a vision informed by a fine understanding of interrelations between real problems and creative potentials. Awoonor's survey should be read by anyone who wishes to enlarge his understanding of cultural change in the modern world.

Reviewed by Jerry W. Ward

**Journey to the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg, 1890-1918**, by Joseph Cohen, Basic Books, 224 pp., \$12.50.

In this age of the anti-hero, Isaac Rosenberg "speaks" to us. He perfectly fits Leo Rosten's explanation of the Yiddish terms *shlemiel* and *shlimazel*: the *shlemiel* is a man always spilling his soup—down the back of the *shlimazel*. Throughout his short life, Rosenberg was a social misfit, congenitally maladjusted, a born loser. The strength of Joseph Cohen's biography is that it manages to tell the story of Rosenberg's life with "deep and abiding feeling"—while avoiding both sentimentality and facile ironic distance.

Through artful arrangement of his material—the book begins with Rosenberg's death in the trenches in 1918 and jumps back to the life of his father Dovber (later Barnett) Rosenberg—Cohen vividly captures the ever-multiplying ironies and contrasts of Rosenberg's life. At the age of 26, Rosenberg's father fled Russia to avoid conscription into the Russian Army; at 27 Isaac Rosenberg was killed in action on the Western Front, an English Army volunteer and also a volunteer for extra duty in the action that killed him. All this volunteering would seem to indicate that Rosenberg believed in combat heroics, yet just the opposite is true. Opposed to killing, far from patriotic, the physically frail Rosenberg joined the army largely because "enlistment seemed the only consistent solution to his gloomy assessment of his predicament" as a poet, painter, and (non) wage earner. What could be more sadly

## Perspective . . . continued

and I have elected myself to get it right." Here, however modestly, the ethic of honesty resurfaces; and *The Street* is recalled without nostalgia and without sentimentality. Nevertheless these pieces are little more than a warm-up for the comic characterizations that are more fully invested in his novels.

Unlike Richler, Roth provides virtually no information about his life (private life, as it used to be called). *Reading Myself and Others* is however a self-absorbed work, the tangential essays of a writer still unsure of how to energize his formidable talent. What is conveyed is a restlessness foreign to the less erratic Richler, who is unlikely to commit the kinds of mistakes (*Our Gang*, *The Breast*) in which Roth has indulged. Having achieved early literary fame, Roth zigzagged from an esthetic of moral seriousness to writing out of "the sheer pleasure of exploring the anarchic and the unsocialized," as though William Dean Howells had suddenly decided to pledge Deke. This collection of interviews, self-interviews, replies to critics, political squibs and literary appreciations is therefore an invitation to sympathize more retrospectively with his intentions. More importantly, Roth gives us a piece of his mind; and few of the essays diminish the impression of his remarkably facile and lively intelligence. Though his well-known essays on American and on American Jewish fiction are reprinted, Roth saves his most memorable piece for the end: "'I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting'; or, Looking at Kafka." It is an exquisite reverie in which Kafka cheats lethal tuberculosis long enough to have immigrated to New Jersey and to have taught Roth in Hebrew school. The new coda would have meant that the Kafka whose manuscripts were preserved against the intentions of the dying author would not have existed, with no "Metamorphosis," no *Trial*, no *Castle* to have made K the most important letter in the alphabet of modern anxiety. There would have been no Kafka, Roth writes: "That

would be stranger even than a man turning into an insect. No one would believe it, Kafka least of all."

Also included in *Reading Myself and Others* is a New York Times op-ed article that helps illumine the ordeal of civility. In 1969 the Newark City Council refused to vote the funds necessary to keep the public library alive; the riot-devastated city had other priorities. Roth, whose "conversation, I have been told, has never been as refined as it should be," was eloquent as well as indignant: "Since my family did not own many books, or have the money for a child to buy them, it was good to know that solely by virtue of my municipal citizenship I had access to any book I wanted. . . . Why I had to care for the books I borrowed, return them unscarred and on time, was because they weren't mine alone, they were everybody's. That idea had as much to do with civilizing me as any I was ever to come upon in the books themselves." For Roth that public library "was a kind of exacting haven to which a city youngster willingly went for his lesson in restraint and his training in self-control." Roth's essay not only recalls a certain triumph, for the sake of culture and character, over environment but is a document that supports Cuddihy's version of Diaspora history as well. Compared to Europe, the transaction between Gentile and Jew over here has been far less demanding, far less fraught with suspicion, much thinner in symbolic significance. On matters of religion at least, here everyone is nicer. But the assimilation of Jews into the culture and society of North America—the stuff of Roth's and Richler's fiction—is still poignant and fascinating, still tinged with mystery. The chauvinism of Mordecai Richler's father is therefore understandable if not forgivable. Told that his son had just published a novel, the scrap dealer asked: "Is it about Jews or about ordinary people?"

Stephen J. Whitfield

predictable than his death on All Fools' Day in 1918? Even after his death, the dybbuks pursued him; his remains suffered the same absurdities he experienced while alive. Because of the intensity of the combat, his body remained unburied for several days; then it was temporarily interred with the remains of several other English soldiers; finally officially located and identified, it was reinterred in Balleul Road East Cemetery—probably in the wrong grave, under one of the crosses adjacent to his “official resting place.”

His life was no less ironic, no less absurd—tragicomic even in comparison with that of his luckless father. Dovber, born into a moderately well-established family of rabbis and scholars, enjoyed a warm family life at home, and while disappointed in his marriage and financial situation in later years, he could fall back on strengths gained in youth: deep feeling for nature and for Judaism. Isaac, in contrast, was born into a family troubled by chronic poverty and marital discord. Circumstances reached a nadir in 1899 when Isaac was nine years old. While Dovber was in the United States trying to arrange for the family to emigrate from England, Hacha, Isaac's mother, who was in the last stages of pregnancy, was told that the oldest daughter was going blind from glaucoma. Unable to leave England and probably sensing that the chance to emigrate would never come again, Hacha gave birth to a sixth and last child—alone and penniless. The poverty and emotional turmoil at home matched the squalor and clamor of the Jewish Quarter of London, which was similar to the Lower East Side of New York.

Leaving school at fourteen to work as an apprentice in a dingy engraving firm, Isaac Rosenberg nonetheless maintained his early interest in poetry and art. Seven years later, his life finally took two positive turns: he met sensitive, intellectual friends of his own age and class, and with the patronage of three Jewish women, entered Slade School of art, long his dream.

But Rosenberg's life was not so easily turned around. Both as a man and poet-artist he remained essentially solitary. Socially awkward, forgetful, bumbling—he even managed to alienate his most important patron by sending her a blotchy letter—he watched other young men from similar working class Jewish backgrounds advance socially and artistically while he remained outside the mainstream. As a painter Rosenberg fit neither the traditional, formal Royal Academy nor the self-consciously modern and revolutionary Slade School, and even today he is difficult to classify as a poet—neither Georgian nor modernist. Coming more and more to see himself as a poet rather than a painter, Rosenberg received almost no recognition for his writing and paid for the two small pamphlets of poems published during his lifetime: *Night and Day* and *Youth*.

The final irony is that at the same time that the war ended his career, it also marked the beginning of his poetic maturity. While much of his earlier poetry is marred by excesses of emotion (especially sentimentality and self-pity) and of language (particularly vague abstractions), the war poems reveal “martial” virtues: leanness, toughness, discipline.

Rosenberg will probably be remembered for a handful of late poems, such as “August 1914.” A poem like “Break of Day in the Trenches” with its tight control, bittersweet tone, and most of all, striking imagery—“queer sardonic rat” with “cosmopolitan sympathies”—underscores the loss to poetry caused by his early and absurd death: a “gifted clown,” he might well have developed into a wise fool.

Reviewed by Bonnie Lyons

**Artificial Persons: The Formation of Character in the Tragedies of Shakespeare**, by J. Leeds Barroll, University of South Carolina Press, 267 pp., \$14.95.

Whenever discussions of Shakespeare can be turned from speculations about his life and genius, or mere generalizations about his work, the focus most naturally shifts to problems of character, particularly the characters in the tragedies. Because the tragedies are the zenith of Shakespeare's art, more analysis has been directed towards them and their characters than towards any of the other plays. And since the opening decade of this century, the *locus* for discussion of the tragedies has been A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*.

Despite the disagreements most recent critics have had with Bradley's interpretations, few have gone about the task of trying to develop new and realistic alternative systems for discussing character in the plays. Most have remained content to react against Bradley. Professor Barroll, however, presents us with a magnificent work of creative criticism that is quite likely to provide a new and fruitful basis for future discussions of Shakespeare's creation of character. In fact, both the background and critical approach Barroll uses for his discussion are useful in understanding any writer of Shakespeare's age. *Artificial Persons* is not just another piece of criticism—it is a scholarly triumph that should easily prove a great resource of information and ideas for countless other critics.

In his opening section, Barroll examines those approaches to problems of character in Shakespeare that have been used over the years—particularly Freudian psychology, rhetoric, and humors theory—and rejects them all as inadequate to an understanding of what Shakespeare was trying to depict in his characters. Barroll does not discount their usefulness as forms of labeling or as methods of retrospective analysis; he does question their validity as systems whereby we might adequately account for the artistic creation of complex characters.

In place of the old systems, Barroll suggests the catechism as the one unifying factor among all levels of Shakespeare's audience that would have provided analysis of human character: “. . . the value of the catechisms lies in their implicit suggestions as to the ideal, for these concepts of personality ‘perfection’ allow us to infer elementary structures of imperfection, the youthful foundations upon which the dramatist, in his maturity, would form his own sophistications, his sense of the ‘complex character.’ ”

What the young William Shakespeare would have learned from his catechism, among other things, was an appreciation of character as the relationship of the individual with God. Barroll expands upon this idea, thus freeing himself from any charges that he might be “allegorizing” Shakespeare. Rather, he uses the orientation of any individual character to a transcendental ideal, not specifically Christian, as the central factor in discussing character. While the true ideal remains God, the shift in terminology helps him to avoid an approach which might be too narrow.

When the impulse of prelapsarian man to love God and to desire the Good represented by the divinity was corrupted in Adam's fall, mankind became subject to diversion of its affections. The Ten Commandments, according to the Renaissance understanding, were intended to reorient man towards his original transcendental ideal through the exercise of love and obedience that would restore the primal order. Each of the four basic types of tragic characters which Barroll discusses, however, has been turned aside from the pursuit of this true ideal by a form of self-love, that is, love for the body and for the things of this world rather than love of the ideal. And since the affections, or love, were seen as involved in all of man's actions, this improper orientation became a means by which Shakespeare could depict various character types.

Shakespeare's four types of tragic characters are identified as Material Men, Lovers, Tragic Actors, and Villains. Two caveats must be placed here, however. First, the labels are not exclusive to the tragedies. Many of these types can be found, as Barroll illustrates in his commentary, in the other plays as well. Secondly, the label cannot always be said to bring with it the normal connotations. No one should react violently to the suggestion that Hamlet might be a Villain before seeing exactly what Barroll means.

Shakespeare's Material Men are all sober minded individuals who see themselves as very moral. But they are more likely to be immoral, or amoral, because they recognize no ultimate judge. They hold no ideal and define themselves largely in terms of what they possess. Shylock is Barroll's chief example of a material man, though the number includes Ulysses, Prince John of Lancaster, Malvolio, Angelo, and Isabella. The Material Men are formalists, relying on strict legalism and adhering to the literal and the objective. They are dedicated to this world and to themselves. Their ideal, to the extent that they have one, is a material rather than a transcendental one and they are likely to pursue it by whatever means possible, including hypocrisy and imposture.

Romeo, Othello, Troilus, Hal, Hotspur, Hector, Macbeth, and Cassio are in the group that Barroll calls Lovers. Another, perhaps more apt

term for them is aspirers. These men are not transcendentalists—they are pseudotranscendentalists who have set up Idols to replace the Ideal of God. These idols are usually the women with whom most of the Lovers are matched. There are two traits that most of the Lovers hold in common. First is an interest in some kind of warfare. The other is another occupation by means of which Shakespeare triangulates their affections and attention. Othello, who serves Barroll as the chief example of a Lover, becomes so obsessed with Desdemona's "infidelity" that he becomes diverted from his former single-mindedness about soldierhood.

The concept of idolatry which is found in the Lovers is a staple of the love relationship that is found in the sonnet sequences and which becomes the main joke in many comedies. But in the tragedies the idolatry is more central and more serious. The Lover ties his identity of self in with the self of another whom he has elevated to the level of the Ideal. Hamlet shows most of the characteristics of the Lover, particularly in his tendency to almost deify those he loves. Yet Hamlet's greatness as a character may well be that he is not suited to such easy labeling and is later to be identified in part with the Tragic Actors and in part with the Villains.

Those characters who see themselves, in the Stoic tradition, as being self-sufficient are identified by Barroll as the Tragic Actors. Not wishing to merge with any ideal outside of the self, as those who accept the Christian-Platonic concept would, these characters show a willingness to abandon roles that are not consistent with their conception of the self. Included in this group are Julius Caesar, Richard II, Lear, Brutus, Falstaff, Hector, Lady Macbeth, and Coriolanus. Hamlet too shows Tragic Actor potential.

It will be noticed that the Tragic Actors are predominantly kings who "come on stage already equipped with the potentially unrealistic sense of self which, in other Shakespearean characters, has to be rendered to the audience by more subtle mechanical means." Tragic Actors do not aspire to anything outside of themselves. Hence, it is difficult to depict them in terms of externals that are either to be possessed, as in the case of the Material Men, or to be merged with, as with the Lovers. The Tragic Actors, whose heritage goes back to the Terentian braggart soldier and the prideful tyrants of the cycle plays, do not conceive of man's existence as a *Theatrum Mundi*. For the Tragic Actor role becomes reality, and the greater the vigor with which the role is played, the greater its reality. Similarly, the Tragic Actor insists on decorum in an attempt to fashion the world according to the way he experiences it. The Tragic Actor can thus be seen as struggling to maintain a sense of self that can be independent of the transcendental. Unlike the Material Men, however, they are unable to maintain such a posture for long.

Just as all of Shakespeare's Lovers are not fashioned from the model of Romeo, so, to call a character, in Barroll's terminology, a Villain is not necessarily to pronounce an ethical judgment. The Villains, who are more frequently marked by a sense of humor than the other types of tragic characters, are closely associated in their attitudes with the Material Men but are different in that they possess strong transcendental imaginations. "In their quests for the absolute, they seek satisfaction from someone whom they ultimately have put on the transcendental plane but who will not give them back some symbolic status to make that relationship concrete and thus real. Robbed of this feeling, they are cast adrift, seeking identity in themselves by adopting role after role." The Villains—Iago, Edmund, Cassius, Aaron the Moor, and Richard III—provide Barroll with his most perceptive and exciting analysis of motivation in the book. To some extent Hamlet and Shylock are to be counted among the Villains. With such fascinating, and at times enigmatic, characters there is little wonder that the final group should also prove the most interesting.

So erudite and useful a book is indeed rare. Barroll does not try to cover old material with the pretense of original thought. He has an exciting approach that cannot be ignored, an approach that refuses easy answers in favour of a new, more useful, more apt system of classification and analysis. I have no doubt that I shall be making constant reference to Barroll in the future. Such thought-provoking criticism can never be read only once.

Reviewed by James Swinnen

**The Darker Vision of the Renaissance: Beyond the Fields of Reason**, ed. by Robert S. Kinsman, University of California Press, 330 pp., \$14.00.

As a diversified attempt to explore the social and psychological aspects of the Renaissance—still an obscure and misunderstood era despite all of the energy and words expended on it—the nine essays of *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance* range in their attention from theology to renaissance psychology to politics to music to literature. Each of the essays is centered around an attempt to come to terms with a particular manifestation of the irrational during the Renaissance. It must be understood from the outset, however, that the irrational here generally means a rejection of the rational and scientific as means of perceiving the realities of human existence. Although much of the discussion is couched in modern psychological terms, no one should assume that these scholars have devoted themselves exclusively to a discussion of neurosis and psychosis in the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries.

As a whole these essays are aimed at specialists; the scholarly refusal to translate and the limited nature of much of the material dealt with, make the essays difficult for the generalist. However, for any reader genuinely interested in the Renaissance, the essays are accessible and worth the effort. The book is rich in suggestions and in information that can lead to new ways of understanding the mind of the Renaissance.

Lynn White's essay on "Death and the Devil" places its emphasis on the irrationality and psychosis of the Renaissance, which he calls "the most psychically disturbed era in European history." Evidence of this psychic disturbance can be found, he avers, in the development of the complex death imagery of Christianity which came about as a result of the increased death rates between 1300 and 1650, and in the attitudes towards witchcraft. The acute anxiety of the age demanded scapegoats, which were provided by the witch hunts, while causing an increased need to revolt against the established order, especially the church.

But heresy itself seems to have fed on the growing alienation, since by the early thirteenth century it was epidemic, especially in the culturally advanced areas of northern Italy and southern France. At that point Innocent III joined the mob, and the heretics were wiped out with fire, sword, and rack. Like the witch and the witch-hunter who emerged as the supply of burnable heretics dwindled, both the heretics and their executioners were coping with the same unendurable tensions.

*Contemptus mundi*, seen by most critics and historians as a natural result of the teachings of Christ regarding the things of this world, is viewed by Donald R. Howard in "Renaissance World-Alienation" as a reaction to the great vigor for life which most of us view as the greatest grace of the Renaissance. As with most of the types of irrationality discussed, *contemptus mundi* did not deny reason, nor was it a complete abandonment of the senses. Rather, it was a view of life that saw the reason as corrupted by the Fall of Man and thus not to be trusted as the sole guide to salvation.

Lauro Martines concentrates on the idea of the gentleman in renaissance Italy, especially as he is found in *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, which "lays before us not only a search for perfection but a quest for identity. What is more, its fantasies, irresolutions, and structural looseness betray a crisis of identity." The gentleman, as understood by Castiglione and his contemporaries, was isolated from society. In fact, the gentleman and the exile were opposite sides of the same political and social position. As a part of the entourage of the Prince, the gentleman was no more a part of the real society, from which he helped to isolate the Prince, than was the exile who had left that society physically. "The courtier is too mannered (he is a too perfect work of art) and the prince is too corruptible. Having no essential contact with the vital forces in Italian society, neither is able to draw from them any support or vigor."

One of the most fascinating of the essays is "Hermetism as a Renaissance World View" by John Burke. Burke disagrees with the popular view, derived chiefly from Jakob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, that Hermetism was a philosophical

anomaly. Actually, contends Burke, Hermetism, the Cabala, and the Magus represented an important philosophical trend whose influence was significant enough to elicit reactions from Luther and Aquinas. Burke's brief history of Hermetism and discussion of its relationships with renaissance thinkers is highly suggestive as to further influences of the school of Trismegistus.

Kees Bolle's study of "Structures of Renaissance Mysticism" sees Nicholas Cusanus as a pivotal figure in renaissance mysticism, just as he is in so much of renaissance thought. Mysticism is irrational only to the degree that we perceive the pursuit of union with God to be beyond rational processes. The key to mysticism is what Bolle terms "deprovincialization," by which he means the aim of the mystic to "reveal a new, universal vision and indeed break through the limits of a closed world."

Paul Sellin's "The Hidden God," a study of Reformation doctrine as it is found in various works of English literature, presents an important view of Lutheran and Calvinistic theology of God:

God is doubtless great and good and just, but from a subjective point of view it is impossible to fathom his ways. Gone forever is the psychological comfort of being able to discern with certainty the Lord's intentions, especially in particular instances.

According to such an understanding of God, *Everyman* is an anachronism, demonstrating a relationship between man and God's ways that is, in its anthropocentrism, of a much earlier age. Luther's concept of the hidden God, whose workings appear irrational to man because he is not privy to the greater scheme of which they are a part, can be found extensively in Marlowe's *Faustus* as well as in *Hamlet*, Lear, Jonson's "On My First Sonnet," and "Lycidas." Sellin also shows that Donne's Holy Sonnets 1 and 5 ("As due by many titles I resigne" and "If poisonous minerals, and if that tree") represent an essentially Lutheran-Calvinistic position, although he does not claim this as a fixed position for Donne.

An area which we do not normally consider to be one subject to the irrational is music, yet Gilbert Reaney suggests in "The Irrational and Late Medieval Music" that much of the confusion and irrationality in music in the fourteenth century, a period of great change and progress in music, was a result of the shift from triple to duple meter as the basis for musical notation. The resultant stress caused by this shift can be heard in the intricacy and beauty of the motet. But Reaney's account of the controversy and difficulties involved in the shift suggests not so much irrationality as pandemonium. The real irrationality lay in the debate over whether or not duple meter were natural, and hence rational. Unfortunately, the debate tends to get lost amid the account of written notation.

Marc Bensimon's "Modes of Perception of Reality in the Renaissance" sees the Renaissance perception of reality as essentially schizophrenic or dualistic. This holds true whether one is examining the thought of Nicholas Cusanus and its similar representation in the paintings of Bosch, or the ideas of Marsilio Ficino, whose systematic approach to reality is almost the direct opposite of Cusanus's vague continual pursuit of a hidden God. In general, Bensimon's thesis is that the search for correspondence and the emphasis on bifurcation are symptomatic of the age.

Finally, Kinsman himself presents a brief history of the Renaissance attitude towards madness and what we moderns generally understand as "irrational." Kinsman's study focuses on the changing social and medical attitudes towards madness as they are reflected in the slowly improving conditions at Bedlam, and in literary and medical accounts of irrational behaviour. Part of the shift in attitude reflects the distinction made between the fool as *stultus*—the philosophical or Christian fool as represented by Erasmus—and that of the fool as *stupidus*, or socially sub-normal. While the former gradually disappeared following the Reformation, the latter came increasingly under the observation of physicians and others who were trained in the new science. The shift also involves the growing distinction between the "harmlessly mentally defective and the dangerously ill."

If we are to free ourselves of the romantic notions about the Renaissance, more books of the calibre and direction of *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance* will be needed. From these will hopefully come a complete and mature picture of the age, one which will pre-

sent not only the glittering facade and magnificent achievements, but the dark reality and motivating fears as well. Only when we are free of exclusively pastoral and utopian attitudes towards this or any period of history can we fully understand and deal with it.

Reviewed by James Swinnen

**The Transformations of Sin: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne**, by Patrick Grant, University of Massachusetts Press, 240 pp., \$15.00.

Although no age is ever justifiably characterized by simplistic tags and monochromatic portraits, such simplicity is particularly misleading when dealing with the Renaissance. Along with the middle ages, however, the Renaissance is perhaps most frequently the object of those oversimplifications that mislead more than they enlighten. One particularly damnable example is the notion, happily dying out, that the Renaissance represents a sudden turnabout in the cultural direction of medieval Europe which propelled Western man willy-nilly into the modern age.

Using an approach to defining religious and social attitudes that he borrows from E. R. Dodd's *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Professor Grant examines the difficulty of the movement of Anglican devotional thought and poetry, a small but telling index of the intellectual climate, away from the "guilt culture" stridency of Augustinian theology to the more latitudinarian, worldly, "rational" beliefs of the Cambridge Platonists and later seventeenth century thinkers. The basic terms involved in the study which Grant borrows from Dodds are "guilt culture," which signifies a reliance upon internal moral restraint coupled with a strong sense of inherited guilt and of family duty, centering on the father; "shame culture," which signifies a dependence upon external moral restraint to control individual members of society; and "enlightenment," a term for which Grant does not offer a clear definition. At times the term appears to be interchangeable with shame culture. At any rate, Grant uses both enlightenment and shame culture as antitheses to guilt culture. However, references to shame culture disappear early in the introductory chapter and enlightenment apparently comes to mean, by the end of the chapter on Vaughan, the belief that reason, not faith, is the key to salvation by attaining "to archetypal and eternal truth by its own light."

Aside from the objection that the specific definition of one of Grant's main terms remains ambiguous for most of his study, his use of an anthropological framework to discuss metaphysical poetry results in a laudable, intelligent, carefully presented work that is particularly valuable in helping to determine the extent to which Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne do in fact represent a "school," and in defining, to the best extent possible in such a work, the theological underpinnings of each poet's work. The reliance upon anthropology does admittedly have the same assets and liabilities as would a dependence upon psychology. The categorization of actions and attitudes becomes, at times, too simple, failing to look for real, as opposed to perceived, or even convenient, causes. Thus, Lord Herbert of Cherbury's denunciation of priesthood as the seat of corruption becomes a reaction against the paternalistic nature of Catholicism's guilt culture. Such reductionism can be especially misleading to the untutored. Grant does acknowledge that his use of anthropology may at times lead to over-simplification, but the lapses are few and do not do serious harm to the overall value of his book.

Grant's organizational principles allow him to include particularly valuable discussions of the "fall theology" that informs the work of each of his four poets: Franciscan spirituality with a strongly Augustinian bias for Donne; Juan de Valdes for Herbert; Vaughan's much discussed Hermeticism; and Irenaean theology for Traherne. Additionally, Grant demonstrates two particularly laudable traits in his approach to the material. First, he resists the temptation to devote most of his attention to Donne. Although Donne is by no means snubbed or denigrated, Grant actually devotes the greatest part of his attention to Herbert. Secondly, Grant only rarely allows himself the pleasure of an explication. Most of the explication is to be found in the Chapters on Herbert and Vaughan, and even these explications are used only as necessary parts of the full discussion of the theological, philosophical, and intellectual background that establishes a com-

complexity of Michelangelo's painterly technique. Steinberg discusses a phenomenon which he terms "non-alignments," which forms the basis of the composition and heightens our appreciation of Michelangelo's technical skill with spatial and formal elements. The balance implicit in both paintings documents not only the artistic and religious concerns of Michelangelo, but seems to point to a stage of heightened development in Michelangelo's paintings, perhaps obvious to early (seventeenth century) commentators on the works, but aspects which have only been recovered in modern times.

Steinberg's narrative is easily read and his documentation alone is a valuable expansion on the subject. The figures allow us to trace pictorially and historically the developments and sources for the paintings and the sixty-four plates (twenty-four in color) cover almost every aspect of the paintings. The price of the book is \$45.00. I do feel this is too much. It is one of the sadder facts of inflation that such well done books must necessarily be out of the price range of the ordinary book buyer as well as even many libraries. Several of the works produced over the last decade are still taking up space in book shops and warehouses. *Michelangelo the Painter* by Valerio Mariani was originally \$75.00. It is possible to have Tolnay's five volumes for \$100.00. The monumental Sistine Chapel costs \$200.00. Soon it may be possible, with reduced air fares, to make the trip to Italy cheaper than buying the necessary books.

Reviewed by Van Foley

**John Trumbull: Patriot-Artist of the American Revolution**, by Irma B. Jaffe, New York Graphic Society, 346 pp., \$29.50.

Before the price (even in this heyday of inflation) fends off potential buyers, it should be noted that this is a coffee-table picture book, with 205 black-and-white illustrations and 16 superb color plates, the sort of volume one displays with some pride. It is, moreover, a major work of scholarship, worthy of the distinguished art historian who collaborated four years ago with Rudolf Wittkower to give us *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution* (reviewed here in Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 297-299).

Nor is this merely another Bicentennial affair, as though to trot out some minor figure and exploit the current market for neochauvinism. Nowhere does Dr. Jaffe suggest that Trumbull rivals his giant European contemporaries—Goya, Turner, Delacroix, Géricault, to mention only a few. Trumbull's more modest niche in art history is more comparable to that of his contemporary in music, William Billings, who hardly threatens to dethrone Beethoven, but is important.

To say this of Trumbull (or of Billings, for that matter), is not to belittle the stature of painter (or composer). The great men of the Revolution were aware of their pioneer status, but could assert patriotically, as John Adams wrote his wife Abigail: "My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, and naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children the right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain." One wonders what Adams would say today were he reincarnated in our still utilitarian society, dominated as always by commerce.

Trumbull himself belonged to no uncouth circle, nor was he the sole American painter of the generation that produced Jefferson, Franklin, Hamilton, Washington or the Adamses. John Singleton Copley was there, as were Benjamin West and Gilbert Stuart. Further, Trumbull was a Harvard graduate, and we know that he visited Copley's house and even copied Copley's portrait of The Rev. Edward Holyoke. In the Harvard library he had found and used European books on art and had, as Jaffe points out, "learned to venerate both Raphael and Rubens before he had seen a painting by either of them." He was always a systematic learner.

When the Revolutionary War broke out, in fact, Trumbull used his book learning of military tactics, rising to the rank of colonel by the age of twenty-one. His most significant contribution to the American Revolution, however, bore some relation to another art: with Thaddeus Kosciuszko he helped strengthen "the Gibraltar of America"—the fortifications associated with Ticonderoga.

In 1780 he set out for Europe, where he studied with Benjamin West, in association with Gilbert Stuart, whose friendship was to endure. Later, in fact, he would call Stuart "the greatest portrait

painter of the age and one of the greatest of all time." While in England, Trumbull painted from memory the first of his full-length portraits of George Washington. He soon returned home, but then was quick to go back to Europe. Much as he admired Europe, however, he wrote: "I think I shall return to America a better citizen with a better and a happier mind than I left it." He was neither the first nor the last American to discover his identity while abroad.

In Paris he visited Jefferson and spent a long time with him visiting the artistic and architectural sights. Their relationship, as Jaffe points out, "was warm and mutually admiring." Both viewed European society as decadent and saw civilization, "constantly moving westward, as finally having crossed the Atlantic to settle in America." In his most celebrated painting, "The Declaration of Independence," Trumbull places Jefferson tall at the center of the group presenting the document to John Hancock. This painting, often criticized for being a cliché, is, in Jaffe's words, "not grand, but it achieves grandeur. There is not another like it in the world. The very immobility of the figures and the airlessness of the room suggest the frozen instant in which had been born the new state, to be led not by the caprice or ambitions of a monarch, but by the sweet dictates of republican reason."

Jaffe's volume, as will be gathered from such scattered quotations, is far from a dry-as-dust pedestrian tract. While she has probed all sources and given us the definitive study of an important American painter, she writes with sensitivity and critical acumen, never enlarging Trumbull beyond reality nor succumbing to the whims of the debunking school of historiography. This work will surely find a place in every art library everywhere.

Reviewed by C. J. McNaspy

**Beethoven—A Documentary Study**, ed. by H. C. Robbins Landon, tr. by Richard Wadleigh and Eugene Hartzell, Collier Books, 216 pp., 121 illustrations, \$5.95.

How would you like to write a biography of Ludwig van Beethoven? This book gives you all the major documents, plus all the most important paintings and drawings of him from his period. Even if you don't want to undertake such a project, this book will interest you because it provides the basic tools of the biographer, and will enable you to come to your own estimation of the composer's character. What we know of Beethoven's life is primarily from Thayer's biography, still considered definitive in most areas. George Marek's recent study of the life is also valuable for its new theories about the identity of the "immortal beloved" and for its new analyses of the composer's neuroses. But it is useful to have available what these famous biographers had to work with, the original documents. H. C. Robbins Landon has gathered together all the major sources for a life of Beethoven—his letters, letters of his friends about him, and the diaries and records they kept of their mutual conversations and private impressions. These documents are connected with just enough editorial commentary about authors and dates to allow the reader to judge them accurately. For the general reader the most interesting aspects of these documents are the many different sides of Beethoven's character that his contemporaries describe.

A Frau von Bernhard provides one of the first descriptions we have of Beethoven soon after his initial successes in Vienna: "When he came to us, he used to stick his head in the door and make sure that there was no one there whom he disliked. He was small and plain-looking with an ugly red, pock-marked face. His hair was quite dark and hung almost shaggily around his face. His clothes were very commonplace, not differing greatly from the fashion of those days, particularly in our circles. Moreover, he spoke in a strong dialect and in a rather common manner. In general his whole being did not give the impression of any particular cultivation; in fact, he was unmannerly in both gesture and demeanour. He was very haughty." So much for the legend about the sweet-tempered, democratic Beethoven. Ferdinand Ries's description of him later in life exemplifies the nastiness he was so capable of: "Beethoven was sometimes extremely violent. One day we were dining at the Swan; the waiter brought him the wrong dish. Beethoven had scarcely said a few choice words about it, which the waiter had answered perhaps not quite so politely as he should have, when Beethoven laid hold of the



dish . . . and flung it at the waiter's head. The poor fellow still had on his arm a large number of plates containing various dishes . . . and could do nothing to help himself; the sauce ran down his face." In the glorious choral finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Schiller's "Ode to Joy" sings of the brotherhood of man and the wonder of all mankind. The composer himself seems to have loved mankind, but hated most people, especially those of the lower orders.

But the suffering, isolated Beethoven also appears in these documents. In the famous Heiligenstadt testament he bewails his deafness pathetically: "For me there can be no recreation in the society of others, no intelligent conversation, no mutual exchange of ideas; only as much as is required by the most pressing needs can I venture into society. I am obliged to live like an outcast. If I venture into the company of men, I am overcome by a burning terror, inasmuch as I fear to find myself in the danger of allowing my condition to be noticed . . . But what a humiliation when someone standing next to me could hear from the distance the sound of a flute whereas I heard nothing. Or, someone could hear the shepherd singing, and that also I did not hear. Such experiences brought me near to despair, it would have needed little for me to put an end to my life. It was *art* only which held me back." Can one connect these two Beethovens? The sources present on one hand a man yearning for simple human companionship, and on the other an arrogant boor who often loathed people and was rude to many of his friends. None of the biographers so far have adequately explained these conflicts in the composer's strange, twisted personality, although this volume presents evidence of both sides—and several possible others.

The collection ends with several moving descriptions of the composer's death, among them his personal physician's: "The fatal day drew nearer. My professional obligations as a physician, so gratifying and yet at times so grievous, demanded that I draw my suffering friend's attention to it, so that he could meet his civil and religious obligations. With the tenderest considerations, I wrote the words of admonition on a sheet of paper. . . . Beethoven read the writing with unparalleled composure, slowly and pensively, his face as though transfigured; he gave me his hand gravely and warmly, and said 'Let the priest come.' Then he became quiet and thoughtful and nodded to me kindly, 'I will see you again soon.' Shortly thereafter, Beethoven performed his devotions with meek submission and turned to the friends standing about him with the words, 'Plaudite amici, finita est comoedia!' A few hours later he lost consciousness, lapsed into a coma and the death rattle began in his throat." Thus ended the life of a great composer—and a testy misanthrope.

Reviewed by John L. DiGaetani

**Narrative Purpose in the Novella** by Judith Leibowitz, Mouton, 137 pp., \$5.50.

To American ears, the term *novella* may strike a discordant note of confusion. Everyone knows what a novel is and where to find one. Everyone has read short stories in *Playboy* or *The New Yorker* (or the *New Orleans Review*). But if you asked a friend what good novellas he had read recently, you would be met with a blank stare or startled eyes.

In *Narrative Purpose in the Novella*, Judith Leibowitz has taken a giant step toward removing the startle from those eyes and the blank from those stares.

In her introduction, she points out that the generic distinction between *romance* (Hawthorne's coveted term) and *novel* preoccupied American critics while European (especially German) genre critics concerned themselves with distinguishing among shorter fictional forms. The English term *novel* is translated *romanzo* in Italian, *roman* in French, and *Roman* in German. The English language, having no term (as yet) for the genre Leibowitz is dealing with, sometimes resorts to such terms as *short novel*, *novelette*, or *long short story*. Europeans, on the other hand, have for many years specified those fictional works by the generic term *Novelle* (German), *nouvelle* (French), and *novella* (Italian).

Leibowitz argues that the genre of the novella (an anglicization of the Italian term) can best be established by considering the "narrative purpose" of a piece of fiction. Her book attempts to distinguish the

novella from the short story on the one hand and from the novel on the other.

"My theory," she writes, "rests on the assumption that each narrative form has its own developmental methods, its own manner of developing or giving shape to its fictional material." This means, for example, that the novel's selectivity differs from the short story's because "the novel's narrative task is elaboration, whereas the short story's is limitation." The novella's techniques of selection differ from those of the novel and the short story, Leibowitz says, "because its narrative purpose is compression. . . ." The novella both limits and extends its material to produce "a generically distinct effect: the double effect of intensity and expansion." The novella's "closely associated cluster of themes" keeps the same materials constantly in focus, interrelating the themes and "permitting the novella to achieve an intensive and constant focus on the subject." The plot gives "the effect" of a limited area being explored intensively, and the action "is generally compressed by means of a repetitive structure." In this way, the author reworks and redevelops themes and situations he has already developed.

While I would prefer to see greater theoretical precision in Leibowitz's attempt to fill the gaping hole of novella criticism (most of it to date has been appallingly inadequate), I applaud her handling of the intricately structured novellas of Clemens Brentano, Gottfried Keller, Adalbert Stifter, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, Gerhard Hauptmann, Theodor Storm, Prosper Mérimée, and Herman Melville—all 19th century practitioners of the genre, some of whom were theorizers as well. In each of her discussions, Leibowitz provides a fresh insight into structure which yields a deeper understanding of the forces in conflict in these narratives.

"Theme-complexes" and "repetitive structures" of 20th century novellas occupy the attention of the final chapters of Leibowitz's book. With delicate sensitivity, she probes the structured depths of meaning in James's *The Bench of Desolation*, Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, Gide's *La Symphonie Pastorale*, Silone's *The Fox and the Camellias*, West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*, and Spark's *The Go-Away Bird*.

Despite the obviously sensitive readings of a number of works to which Leibowitz's theory has led her, I still question the validity of the theory itself. The distinction she makes between *novella* and *novel*, for instance, does not take into account the discussion of *romance* and *novel* with which she began. How, for example, does Melville's *Bartleby* (a novella) differ in narrative purpose from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, which probes and reprobes a single situation, focuses on a single set of relationships, and holds in delicate balance the impulses toward intensification and expansion.

Further Leibowitz does not take into account such genre studies as Sheldon Sacks's *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* in which some kinds of novel-length works are relabeled *apologues* and *satires* so that the term *novel* may be preserved for a more precisely defined group of fictions. Does not Sacks also use the criterion of narrative purpose to establish his distinctions?

Finally, how is one to define the "narrative purpose" of an intensive and extended story that is an integral part of a series or cycle of stories—for example, "The Dead" in *Dubliners*, "An Odor of Verbena" in *The Unvanquished*, or "Bartleby" in *The Piazza Tales*? Does its relation to other stories in the cycle alter its narrative purpose?

Groundbreaking studies will always be met by such questions. One has to wait for later architects and landscapers, for concrete pourers and bricklayers, to establish solidly the day-to-day critical usefulness of any blueprint for further discussion. I am grateful to Judith Leibowitz for breaking new ground.

Reviewed by Forrest Ingram

**On Writing Well**, by William Zinsser, Harper & Row, 151 pp., \$6.95.

Good writing makes good reading and Zinsser's excellent guide to clear writing, based on his writing course at Yale, is just that. It should be absorbed by beginning nonfiction writers; it can refresh veterans.

Reviewed by Carol Reuss, S.P.



**Who Is Angelina?**, by Al Young, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 280 pp., \$7.95.

Al Young's *Who Is Angelina?* is a remarkable novel. Young has accomplished something that is uncommon in the making of the contemporary novel. Many of our writers follow a deadly pattern; having written a very fine, even brilliant, first novel, they grind out a series of imitative, second or third rate books. Young manages to give the pattern a neat twist. His first novel *Snakes*, briefly discussed in John O'Brien's interview with Young (*New Orleans Review*, Summer 1973), was a competent experiment. His second novel *Who Is Angelina?* surpasses the first in every sense.

In the interview with O'Brien, Young, who was born in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, said: "Almost all of my writing proceeds from a tradition of the spoken word rather than the written. In my writing I strive for oral appeal." Perhaps the gift of the South to the American novel is the spoken word, an acute sensitivity to the important functions of speech in narrative. Beyond subject matter, it is the weight of language and its ability to suggest mood, character and values that capture our imaginations. Much of the appeal in *Who Is Angelina?* does come from Young's mastery of the nuances of American speech and of speech as it might be modified by exposure to foreign languages. Yet, the strength and real appeal of this novel is Young's ability to tell a good story. For he understands that story is the governing center of successful, sustained narrative.

*Who Is Angelina?* lends itself to easy summary. After college and a few years of cultural saturation in Berkeley, Angelina Green, an intelligent and sensitive woman, faces a crisis of identity. She goes to Mexico to set "foot back in the world on her own tentative terms." Terms are never wholly one's own. Angelina has a torrid affair with Sylvester Poindexter Buchanan (Watusi), a worldly wise man who is lover and mentor. He tutors Angelina in some of the ways of the world for which neither the University of Michigan nor the Berkeley scene have prepared her. The Mexican idyll is disrupted when Angelina must suddenly return to the States, to the bedside of her father who is almost murdered by robbers in Detroit. This crisis necessitates a return to roots, but as Angelina discovers roots do not constitute home. With the blessings of her father, she goes back to Berkeley and unresolved problems. She still must deal with desolation "and ignorance and fear and sadness and being alone." She achieves a partial inner peace through transcendental meditation and resumes a meaningful relationship with a former lover, Curtis Benton. Angelina finds no easy answers for questions of identity. At the end of the novel she has acquired the empirical wisdom that will enable her to continue a healthy quest.

One of the three epigraphs of the novel is taken from Robert Bly's *Sleepers Joining Hands*, and I quote it in part.

The farther a woman goes out on the end of an arm the more power she has. That power is for good and power for evil. It is also power over weather, over plant growth, and power to cause transformations. Girls in the Middle West often decide to stay at the center of the cross, where they will be safe. That strange passive quality in so many American women comes from that decision.

In *Who Is Angelina?*, Young explores what happens when a woman refuses to have her identity defined by facile assumptions about gender and race. Angelina's story is one of spiritual growth, the active realization of personhood that results from leaving the center. As hagiographers remind us time and again, the odyssey of sainthood is hellified. To be sure, Angelina is no saint, nor is it the spirituality granted by divine providence that she seeks. It is rather a balance between the mysterious forces within one's being and the confusing imperatives (historical and immediate) of society that Angelina struggles to achieve.

Al Young has accomplished a most difficult task, for he has written convincingly, without moralizing, about the plight of a contemporary black woman in American society. It is true that Angelina belongs to the so-called middle class, and her vision of postures adopted by black and white Americans and by Third World peoples is determined by class bias. The aesthetic distance Young establishes in the novel permits us to be sympathetic with Angelina's perspective even if we do not agree with her analytic premises. The novel is a powerful statement on the rights

and rites of individuality. Individuality is a necessary first condition for meaningful social functioning.

*Who Is Angelina?* is a rare novel. Here art and propaganda, superb writing and intelligent critique exist in near perfect equilibrium. Young is one of a small number of American writers who can deal adequately with questions of identity and psychology in a multi-racial society, who can handle the paradox of the twain that never meets but always manages to intersect. Al Young has created a masterpiece and a richly rewarding experience.

Reviewed by Jerry W. Ward

**how i got ovah: New and Selected Poems**, by Carolyn M. Rodgers, Doubleday, 81 pp., \$5.95.

These poems are testaments to experiences that readers who are neither poets nor staunch Christians will probably never have. One has to be touched by rare poetic insanity or possessed of very deep faith to conclude, as Carolyn Rodgers does in "Living Water,"

i think sometimes  
when i write  
God has his hand on me  
i am his little black slim ink pen.

Most of us do not image out the meaning of our lives in quite that way, but the fact Miss Rodgers does is an unsettling comment on the condition of modern sensibility. The fashionable poetry of our age swings between two poles: on the one hand, alienation from nature, from the Self, from language (a morbid yearning toward death); on the other, extreme anxiety about the possibility of human endurance, about the higher abstractions of mind and spirit, about the deep structures of existence (an unfulfilled questing for life). We have conditioned ourselves to accept, perhaps to embrace, the range between alienation and anxiety, but we are not readily prepared for poetry that finds resolution in religion and evokes feelings that have not been with us since the Sea of Faith was truly at the full. We are not quite prepared to accept such writing as poetry, but to reject it is to commit an error. For Carolyn Rodgers writes black poetry of a very high order, a poetry grounded in distributive autobiography.

A product of Chicago's famous OBAC Writer's Workshop, Carolyn Rodgers has struggled through poems in *Paper Soul* (1968) and *Songs of a Black Bird* (1969) to get over. Getting over refers either to outwitting one's opponents or to attaining a sense of spiritual fulfillment. Getting over for Carolyn Rodgers has involved the anxious quest for a language and a subject matter in which to express feelings about love, revolution, religion, and simpler acts of daily life. She has discovered the subject matter. It is her experiencing of life, her honest, black, feminine experiencing of life. Thus, her poetry is mainly narrative, flowing from the need to share bits of autobiography. The pieces of autobiography she elects to write are distributive, because the general patterns fit lives other than her own. For example, the companion poems "JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED, or It Must Be Deep (an epic pome)" and "IT IS DEEP (don't never forget the bridge that you crossed over on)" are about the generation gap between mother and daughter, but they are also about the tenacity of authentic love. "The Children of Their Sin (an exorcise)" is ostensibly about sitting next to a white man on a bus, but the poem is really a recounting of how one comes to recognize causal relations between the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressor, how one comes to realize first cause and assign ultimate responsibility. In the same poem, she has to deal with another level of human reaction. She sat next to the white man because

the brother who  
sat down beside me looked  
mean and hungry, poor and damply cold.

Here, as in most of the poems in this volume, Miss Rodgers is grappling with fundamental problems of existence; wishing to ground her poetry in what is concrete, recognizing there are human universals such as breathing and thinking and doing things with, for, and to other people, she constantly confronts the problem of saying how those

universals are given specific shapes by the racial considerations of American society. Without reaching quick conclusions about whether the kind of poetry Carolyn Rodgers writes is good or bad, one wants to note that she gives more careful attention than some of her contemporaries to the problems of *writing* about the puzzle of triple consciousness—the awareness of being female, black, American.

Miss Rodgers is quite rightly concerned about the impact a book such as *how i got ovah* will have. "When a book is finally published," she wrote in her author's note, "an author is very likely to have changed his style and his mind." And she adds in the following paragraph: "Still, a person does not wish to offer apologies for where she or he was. For certainly where one has been makes where one is more meaningful." It is clear that she has been in the front ranks of what has inaccurately been called militant poetry. It is clear that she is transforming her poetic consciousness to deal more intensely with the role of religious belief in black psychohistory and her own existence. *how i got ovah* is a fascinating documentation of what the transforming reveals about Carolyn Rodgers, about changing attitudes within the Black Experience, about changing values in American society. As necessary and as wholesome as I find this kind of revelation, as one poet reading another, I worry very much that Carolyn Rodgers flounders in her anxious quest for a language.

She has discovered the "voice" but not the language, because many of the poems in this book are far more effective as scores for performance than as poems, as pieces of writing that should be distinguishable from prose. What is the difference between the first stanza of "and when the revolution came"

and when the revolution came  
the militants said  
niggers wake up  
you got to comb yo hair  
the natural way  
and the church folks say of yeah? sho 'nuff . . .  
and they just kept on going to church  
gittin on they knees and praying  
and tithing and building and buying

and

And when the revolution came, the militants said, "Niggers wake up. You got to comb yo hair the natural way." And the church folks say, "Oh, yeah? Sho 'nuff . . ." And they just kept on going to church, gitting on they knees and praying and tithing and building and buying.

A stanza so automatically transcribable into straight prose misfires as *written* poetry. The use of "yo," "sho 'nuff," and "gittin" causes wonder that "going," "praying" or the dropping of "g" in the progressive present tense is not consistent. It is the absence of careful attention to prosodic functions that leads one to suspect Carolyn Rodgers' great strength lies in oral not written performance. It is a technical problem that she is still in the process of getting over. One hopes that in her next book she will have got over with the same depth of feeling for language that she presently has in depth of feeling for life.

Reviewed by Jerry W. Ward

## Notes on Contributors

JEFFREY BAILEY has interviewed Christopher Isherwood, James Leo Herlihy and Maya Angelou for *The Advocate*, *California Quarterly* and *Newworld*. He writes poetry and fiction, and is awaiting publication of his novel, *Lonely Watches of the Sky*.

RICHARD W. BEVIS is an associate professor of English at the University of British Columbia. His work on travel through the Middle East includes *Biblioteca Cisorientalia: Checklist of Early English Travel Books on the Middle East* and "The Strangers: Through Algeria Today" (NOR: 5,1).

RICHARD CECIL has poetry appearing and forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Ark River Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Poetry Now* and *American Poetry Review*.

LEWIS CHESSER directs the Wesley Foundation at the University of Arkansas. An M.F.A. candidate, he occasionally participates in the University's poetry writing program.

MICHAEL COLLIER is a student at Connecticut College, where he took part in the Connecticut Poetry Circuit. The *Red Fox Review*, *Jam To-day* and *Poetry* have published his work.

BILLY COLLINS edits *The Midatlantic Review* and lectures at Lehman College (CUNY). His poems have ap-

peared in numerous magazines, including *Wormwood Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Rolling Stone* and *New Voices*.

ROSEMARY DANIELL's collection of poetry, *A Sexual Tour of the Deep South*, received widespread critical interest. Her poems also appear in many periodicals and an anthology, *We Become New: Poems of Contemporary American Women*. She was the winner of the NOR Poetry Award for Vol. 3, and has been Director of the Georgia Poetry-in-the-Schools program and a National Endowment grant recipient.

BARBARA DE LA CUESTA has recently published fiction in *Texas Quarterly*, and has had a play performed by the American Theater Company in New York.

JOHN L. DIGAETANI, an instructor in English at the University of New Orleans, reviews books for the *Library Journal*. He is at work on a study of Richard Wagner.

VAN FOLEY teaches English to Vietnamese adults in New Orleans.

ELLEN GILCHRIST writes poetry and fiction, is a student in the M.F.A. program at the University of Arkansas, and serves as a contributing editor of *The Courier* in New Orleans. Her play *A Season of Dreams*, based on Eudora

Welty's short stories, has been produced on stage and educational television.

ROGER GILLIS, S.J. is currently studying theology at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, where his area major is American culture and religion. This article is part of a larger study on American film and religion.

DAVID C. GORDON is Professor of History at the American University of Beirut and the author of *Self-Determination and History in the Third World*.

BRUCE HENRICKSEN, a faculty member in the English Department at Loyola, has contributed reviews to the NOR, short stories to several little magazines, and articles to *Papers in Language and Literature* and *Renaissance Quarterly*.

BROOKE HOPKINS is an assistant professor of English at the University of Utah. His essay on Merton was first delivered as a talk at the Abbey of the Holy Trinity, Huntsville, Utah. He is working on a study of *Autobiography: Augustine, Rousseau and Wordsworth*.

FORREST INGRAM, former editor of the NOR, has recently been appointed Chairman of the Department of English at Roosevelt University in Chicago. He is the author of *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*.

MILTON KESSLER is a member of the faculty of State University of New York at Binghamton. His most recent book of poems is *Sailing Too Far*.

JAMES LANGDON works on the New Orleans Times-Picayune as a copy editor. He has contributed fiction and poetry to such diverse journals as *Pulse*, *Voices International*, *Chicago Review* and *Rip Off Review of Western Culture*. His volume of poetry, *Breeding in Captivity*, is making the rounds.

R. P. LAWRY is now an associate professor of law at Case Western Reserve University, after having practiced law in Pittsburgh. He has had poems published in several periodicals, and is looking for a publisher for a book of liturgical poems, *After Temporary Prisons*.

BONNIE LYONS teaches at Boston University, but will soon be a member of the English Department at the University of Texas. She reviews books for *Congress Monthly*, and has written articles for *American Literature*, *Contemporary Literature*, *The Explicator*, and *Studies in American Jewish Literature*. Her book on Henry Roth is forthcoming from Cooper Square Publishers.

GRANT LYONS is a freelance writer whose varied work, including essays, stories and reviews, has appeared in *Redbook*, *Northwest Review*, *Louisiana History*, the *Boston Globe* and *Congress Monthly*. He has short fiction soon to be published in the University of Missouri Press'

"Breakthrough Series," and a children's book on the Battle of New Orleans due out from Julian Messner.

EVERETTE MADDOX is Poet-in-Residence at Xavier University in New Orleans. *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Southern Poetry Review* and *Carolina Quarterly* are among the magazines which have featured his work. His poems may also be found in his recently published pamphlet, *The 13 Original Poems*.

C. J. McNASPY, former fine-arts editor of *America*, peripatetic scholar and author of several books, is currently book review editor for the NOR.

ED METZ free-lances in still photography, graphic design and film production. His work is featured at Images Gallery in New Orleans and a one-man show at Loyola University.

MARK CRISPIN MILLER is working towards his Ph.D. in English at Johns Hopkins University, while supervising the film programs there. *Film Quarterly*, *Modern Language Notes*, *Milton Studies* and *Southern Review* have published his reviews, articles and poems.

WILLIAM MILLS teaches at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. His books include *Watch for the Fox* (poetry), *I Know a Place* (fiction) and a critical study, *The Stillness in Moving Things: The World of Howard Nemerov*.

ANAIIS NIN has attained a long-delayed place of honor in contemporary letters through the impetus of her renowned diary and five-volume roman fleuve, *Cities of the Interior*. Born and reared in France, of Spanish and French-Danish parentage, her lyrical insight into the human condition has touched the emotional and intellectual lives of people around the world, people who are linked to her (and to each other) by an abiding belief in the reality of imagination and the possibility of a benevolent and evolving self.

DIANE O'DONNELL writes and teaches women's poetry at the Community Free School in Boulder, Colorado, where she is "trying to learn to adjust to living in the West after six happy years in the South." Her work may be found in *Butter and Brass* (Women's Poetry Collective, Jacksonville, Florida) and *Chomo-Uri* (University of Massachusetts, Amherst).

ALICIA OSTRICKER's poetry is featured in such journals as *Arts in Society*, *Shenandoah* and *American Poetry Review*. She is a professor in the English Department at Rutgers University and the author of *Songs and Once More Out of Darkness and Other Poems*.

CAROL REUSS, S. P., an NOR associate editor, has taught journalism at St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, the University of Iowa and Loyola University. She has edited such diverse publications as *Tooling & Production*, *Metlflax*, *Canticle* and *Iowa Journalist*, and is a member of Kappa Tau Alpha (the national journalism scholarship society), the

Association for Education in Journalism, the International Communication Association and Women in Journalism. Her wide-ranging interests, reflected in her teaching activities and many articles, include mass persuasion techniques, first amendment law, women's magazines, business and technical writing and religion. We wish her well in her new position as a journalism faculty member at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

KEVIN RODDY is a former English professor currently living in the Bay Area.

OTTO R. SALASSI participates in the M.F.A. program at the University of Arkansas. His short story "RR" appeared in *Railroad*, ed. by James Alan MacPhearson and Miller Williams.

MARTHA BENNETT STILES has published work in a variety of periodicals, including *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Esquire*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, the *New York Times* and *Stereo Review*. She has written five children's books, and is now working on a novel.

LEON STOKESBURY is a graduate assistant in the Ph.D. program at the University of Arkansas. His work may be found in numerous journals and anthologies, and his first book of poems, *Often in Different Landscapes*, will soon be published by the University of Texas Press.

JOHN STONE is a cardiologist at Emory University School of Medicine and Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta. *Borestone Mountain's Best Poems of 1974* features one of his poems; his work has been collected in a volume, *The Smell of Matches*; and publications such as *The American Scholar*, *New York Quarterly* and *Poetry Northwest* have included his poetry.

JAMES SWINNEN regularly reviews books for the NOR.

JERRY W. WARD serves as advisory editor to *Obsidian* and *Black Box*. He is completing work on his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia.

JAMES WHITEHEAD, a professor of English at the University of Arkansas, is the author of *Domains*, a book of poetry, and *Joiner*, a novel. His poems grace the pages of recent issues of *Poetry Now*, *Southern Review* and *Southern Poetry Review*.

STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD is a member of Brandeis University's American Studies Department. His work includes *Scott Nearing: Apostle of American Radicalism* and "The 1950's: The Era of No Hard Feelings" (*South Atlantic Quarterly*).

MILLER WILLIAMS has been awarded the 1976 Prix de Rome for Literature by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His most recent book is *Halfway to Hoxie: New and Selected Poems*.

Mr. Williams, now teaching creative writing at the University of Arkansas, was co-founder and original editor of the NOR. He resigned his position over a censorship issue which has been resolved. We welcome him back to our pages.

AUSTIN WILSON's poetry and fiction have been included in *Green River Review*, *Poem*, *Wind*, *Mississippi Review* and *Intro 7*. A Poet-in-Residence in South Carolina's Poets-in-the-Schools program and winner of the 1974 Academy of American Poets prize, he will soon be teaching at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi.

GARY YOUNG edits *Greenhouse Review* in Santa Cruz, California. *Choomia*, *Momentum* and *Montana Gothic* are among the magazines in which his poetry has appeared.