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Poems by Jimmy Carter
and an interview with the former president

18 New Orleans Poets & 3 New Orleans Artists

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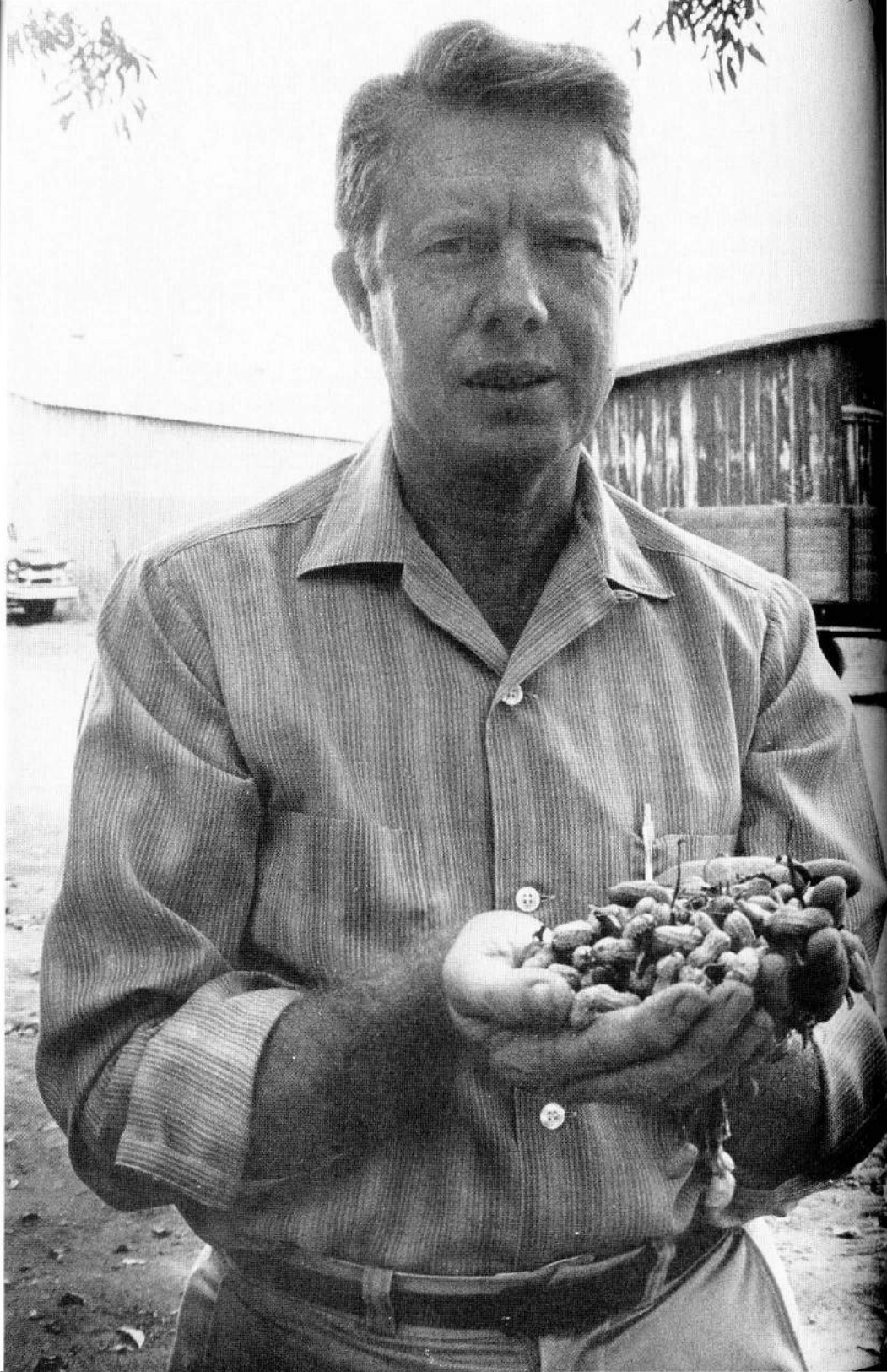
JIMMY CARTER



SOME WORDS ON THE LIVES AND LINES OF JIMMY CARTER

As a poet in a crowd of poets, I first met Jimmy Carter at the White House in 1980. Too short a time after that Tom T. Hall, an old friend, asked Jim Whitehead and me if we would meet him and a few others in Plains to welcome the Carters home and if we would each read a poem written for the event. Joined by our wives, Gen and Jordan, we gathered with others at Billy Carter's home for barbecued chicken and good talk. Halfway along in the evening we read our poems and presented copies to President Carter. When we had returned to our places, hoping we had not done badly, the president remained standing in the center of the room and spoke as the rest of us sat on the arms of chairs and on the floor and stood in doorways with our plates and drinks. As nearly as I can recall, this is what he said.

"Rosalynn and I will keep these two poems on our nearest wall, to read them over and over, until we find in them everything there is to be found there. Now, mind you, what we find there"—and he looked toward Jim and me—"may not be only what you put there. It may also be what we took there, because that's what good poetry demands and allows."

My first thought, as I heard this, was that we had had a president equal to such a perception and able to voice it; my second thought was that we had just heard an encapsulation of a talk on the form and theory of poetry.

It was some time later that Jimmy Carter broached the subject of poetry from the writer's point of view as a course to be pursued, an art to be mastered. We were in Plains, having dinner in a delightful café made that way by its owner, Sybil Carter, Billy's widow. The president asked me what a person interested in writing poetry might want to read.

From that day, Jim Whitehead and I shared with him what insights and skills, perspectives and prejudices we had collected over thirty years of putting words together to make poems.

In three decades also of teaching, I had never encountered a person more quick to learn, more willing to be a student, so impatient to know more, or so comfortably set to resist a suggestion if it seemed to compromise his own way of going.

We have stayed into the morning hours at the kitchen table in

the residence at the Carter Center in Atlanta and on the back porch of my home in Arkansas, talking about his poems and about poetry and the poems of others. Jimmy Carter—as his remark at the first gathering in Plains made clear—was no newcomer to poetry. He had read long and widely and well, but he knew that writing a poem was a very different thing; he was leaving the bleachers and stepping onto the field, and he wanted to do it right, all the more so because of his deep respect for those whose work he admired, Dylan Thomas especially.

Each time when we talked ourselves out and decided it was time to turn in, I reluctantly left the company of a most remarkable person, a man who was a naval officer, legislator, governor, and president, a man called upon to mediate truces and monitor elections around the world because he is the only one trusted by both sides, one who has written important and lasting books on a variety of subjects, who gives a career's worth of time and effort to building homes for the homeless, who spends on scores of other humanitarian projects time and energy that would exhaust many younger men, who sits in a kitchen and on a back porch and says, "The fifth line reads a little better now," and "I don't think this word is doing anything," and "I see your point, but that doesn't sound like me."

I try to forget, for the sake of the poems, that the man with whom I'm working, drinking coffee, deleting and scribbling, briefly arguing, is President Carter, carrying a title never lost, and one by which I continued to address him for some time after we began looking over his lines. In one of the exchanges I hold most dear in my memory he let me know that he also would like to have the consciousness of his place muted in our friendship, an exchange in which it became clear to both of us how difficult it was to erase that awareness.

I had said something like, "No, Mr. President, this line is going to be read with six stresses."

He said, "I'd rather you called me Jimmy."

"Well, " I said. I think I hesitated a little. "I'm not really comfortable calling you Jimmy."

"Well," he insisted, "I'm not going to be comfortable if you don't."

"I guess," I said, "it's just a matter of which of us is going to be uncomfortable."

There was a moment of silence when he looked at me and barely smiled. From then on I've called him Jimmy.

His poems, at this point in his writing, came almost entirely

out of moments in his own life, as the poems of Dylan Thomas came for the greater part directly out of his. He moves somewhat away from the autobiographical in "The County Boss Explains How It Is," a dramatic monologue that I read as one of his most successful poems, and in the sharp turn of "A Battle Prayer;" though both of these poems reflect two of the poet's own passages, he holds a distance that lets a reader be especially at home in them. "It Can Fool the Sun" is almost as anonymous, to use John Crowe Ransom's term.

This distance is an attractive and useful quality in a poem, but some of the finest poems in our history are clearly autobiographical ("When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be," "Fern Hill") and Carter tends well to his own memories.

He tells a good story, to begin with, keeping his lines tight and almost all adjectives out:

I'd spend all night on possum hunts
with our neighbors, who were well
respected men, but poor....
("Of Possum and Fatback")

Walking through a fallow field,
I found an arrowhead....
("The History of a Point")

She loved to laugh
and often laughed alone....
("Miss Lillian")

Some might not see these lines, in their plainness, as poetry, but poetry is the art of making the memorable out of the ordinary. What is most pleasing to me in lines like these is not that they are plain talk, but that they convey an illusion of plain talk; they are considerably better than we normally sound.

Nothing is more important to a poet than being able to get out of a poem when it's time to leave. Jimmy Carter is especially good at seeing that his poems don't just stop, but close. Even without reading the poems that lead to the following resolutions, you know that the poem is over, and that it's been closed down with skill and grace.

The owner went to every shack
And gave, as he thought any Christian should,

the locked-in men a choice: to pay
all they owed him, pack their household goods
and then by sundown move away
or, come first light, be in the field again.
I never doubted they would stay.
A buck a day wasn't bad for then.
("The Day No One Came to the Peanut Picker")

...She'd laugh about what good times there had been,
and tell me what she thought I ought to do
in Washington, where I was working then.
("Rachel" [not included here])

...a copy of the stone
that honors now the beauty he set free
from a godhead of his own.
("A President Expresses Concern...")

And I like the directness of the poetry, its lack of coyness, that on a first reading we know where we are and what's going on. The poet has the courage to make sense. I like it that the lines are coherent units of rhythm, sense, and syntax at the same time.

The poetry can speak for itself, of course, but it might be useful to caution those reading it for the first time not to be misled by its deceptive simplicity; to hear how the lines complete themselves, never ending as tricky truncations, yet how well they raise an expectation that sends the eye down the page—except for the closing lines, which suspend that expectation and stop the eye; to notice the arguments of the poems, how consistently inductive they are, moving onward from an event to an insight.

Donald Justice used to say to students who showed him poems, "Film it," a nod to Pound's admonition that "a poem is as good as it is dramatic." See what good scenes Jimmy Carter's poems are, how they play out. And see the humor in the lines. And the sadness, the awful honesty. The humanity. And see the poetry in all of that.

Jimmy Carter

OF POSSUM AND FATBACK

I'd spend all night on possum hunts
with our neighbors, who were well
respected men, but poor—the ones
who wouldn't waste a shotgun shell
but shared their food and meager pay
with a mess of hounds who'd lie and sun
and fight out in the yard all day,
too lazy for a rabbit run.
The dogs had equal family rights,
and came alive late afternoons,
to hunt and howl all through the nights,
feeding time for possums and coons.

The other hunters were grown men
but still they always wanted me
to go along, to be there when
someone had to climb the tree.
We'd take an ax, some bags, a coil
of rope, some lanterns and flashlights.
High priced batteries and oil
were only used on blackest nights.
We'd argue as we moved along
about the voices of our hounds:
knowing each distinctive song,
the melodies and quavering sounds.
"Old Bell's lost, just hear the bitch,"
"Hampton's back," "That's Blue Boy's wail."
And then would come the rising pitch
that said the dogs had struck a trail.

The owner got the choice of game
if his dog had struck it first,
so all of us would try to name
the lead dog as we crashed and cursed
through bramble, gully, swamp, and creek,
over fences, stumps, and logs.
Then we'd find the possum's tree
already half-climbed by our dogs,

straining as they leaped and whined,
all competing for the prize.

On lucky nights, our beams would find
two mirrors in the quarry's eyes.
We either had to cut the tree
to get the coon or possum down,
or climb up there and shake it free.
And when we had it on the ground
we'd have to keep the dogs at bay
and try to get it in a sack
before it died or ran away.

Each man hoped to take one back
to put in his own kitchen pot.
The dog race was a real contest,
since that was how good meals were got.
The top hound's family ate the best.
Fatback was the usual fare,
boiled for taste or fried for grease,
so wild game brought a welcome change
with cornpone, collard greens, and peas.

We liked the yarn about a man
out on a limb, an acrobat,
screaming down a fierce command,
"Shoot him, it's a damn bobcat!"
The reply came from the ground,
"Pa, we'll hit you with the gun!"
The man wailed, with an oath or two,
"Just shoot up here amongst us, son!
It's better 'n what I'm going through."

Jokes and moonshine somehow let
the ones who didn't get their meat
believe they liked the cold and wet,
and just fatback to eat.

PLAINS

Pioneering white men fought to claim
The land of Indians they sent West to die.
Our families moved in then to occupy
The rolling plains that gave the town its name.
There were only half a thousand souls,
White and black, the master and the slave.
Neither side forgot, nor ever gave
Each other ways to reach their common goals.

But now as equals, free to rise or fall
Together, we have learned we must depend
On one another. Though the town is small,
We cherish it as haven, home, and friend,
And won't let strife or mischance bring to all
our dreams—our modest, tempered dreams—an end.

THE COUNTY BOSS EXPLAINS HOW IT IS

I'm only here to oblige, you understand.

I get an awful lot of criticism
serving all these folks who call on me
to meet their needs: some roadway paved, their son
or brother with a job, a welfare check,
a sheriff who don't notice when they buy
a can of Sunday beer or something stronger
in a jar.

The poorest always need
more help and aren't too proud to pay me back.
I never ask much in return; a part
of what they get each month, and maybe a hand
at polling time.

Politics is hard.
They know I can't afford a big campaign!
It's natural if they want to give support
to me and a few mutual friends—the judge,
sheriff, and voting clerks. (It's bread on the water.)
The governor and state officials thank
a county that will always go their way.
That's how the people get the roads and jobs.

Sometimes you have to do a little prodding;
barns or shelters have been known to burn.
I was always in Dothan at the time.

So how can I be sure about the folks?
They don't mind our watching when they vote
or having ballots ready-marked.

It's them
that cash the checks, see the pavement poured
and drink the booze.

Hell, if the law's not broken,
only bent a little, what's the harm
if all we do is seek a better life?

Some radicals would like to bring us down
and take charge here by generating strife.

I guess there's demagogues in every town.

THE DAY NO ONE CAME TO THE PEANUT PICKER

I remember when the field hands struck.
Everybody seemed to know,
although the paper never wrote it up
and few then had a radio.
Folks from all around came to see
the idle picker with no crew
with the weather dry and right for work
and the peanuts ready too.

I never thought they had a chance to win
with pay the same as all the other
workers in the field that year, for men,
fully grown and strong, a dollar,
which would buy a pair of overalls.
I heard a lot of people say
that, by God, they would never get as much
as two bits more a working day.

I didn't see how they could win at all.
The landlord only got one cent
a pound for peanuts or his fattened hogs,
and never charged a dime of rent
to workers in his houses, free to cut
all the firewood they could burn
and also with a family garden plot.

Some earlier they might have won
with peanuts fully ripe and likely lost
if not plowed up, and shook, and stacked,
but now they could wait longer in the sun.

The owner went to every shack
and gave, as he thought any Christian should,
the locked-in men a choice: to pay
all they owed him, pack their household goods
and then by sundown move away
or, come first light, be in the field again.
I never doubted they would stay.
A buck a day wasn't bad for then.

THE BALLAD OF TOM GORDY

In '41 the Japanese
took our troops on Guam,
Alive or dead—we didn't know.
One was my Uncle Tom.

He was the Navy boxing champ,
my hero with his crown.
Now with him gone, his family moved
down to our Georgia town.

My grandma and my aunts felt Tom
was not his wife's but theirs.
She could feel the coolness but
stayed on to join their prayers.

What bound them all together was
the hope and faith and dread.
When two years passed, the dispatch came:
my Uncle Tom was dead.

His wife and kids moved back out West
to start their lives again,
And after Tom was gone three years
she wed a family friend.

The end of war brought startling news:
Tom Gordy was alive.
Four years he had been digging coal
deep in a mountainside.

The women took the feeble Tom
and smothered him with care.
He never would tell anyone
what happened over there.

Tom Gordy soon regained some strength
and craved a normal life,
But mother and sisters told him lies
about his absent wife

Betraying him. Tom wanted her,
but couldn't figure how
To bring her back or overcome
her second marriage vow.

He got four years back pay and made
Commander, U.S.N.
It didn't take him long to find
a woman's love again.

Tom closed the past except when his
three children came to stay;
When I would mention his first wife
he'd always turn away.

Once my submarine tied up
where she lived with her kin.
I went to visit them, afraid
they wouldn't let me in.

But all the folks they knew were called
when I first gave my name;
All night we danced and sang because
at least Tom's nephew came.

THE HISTORY OF A POINT

Walking through a fallow field,
I found an arrowhead
more lovely than I'd ever seen,
up on an earthen pedestal
not packed by rain
but sheltered by the point itself.

Caressing it, I let my mind race back to when
a chief's son wore it as a charm,
but somehow lost it and then feared
calamities would come;

or when, nowhere near this place,
a hunter made a shot, close-up,
sure his matchless arrow would not miss,
but then the deer escaped,
later to reach here, and die;

or when, in war, it struck a brave
who pushed it through to save his life
and never saw it, hidden in his blood;

or perhaps this arrowhead
had such a beauty it was buried
with the artist who had shaped it.

Or none of these.

Without a trace of wood or bone
the point seems always to have lain alone.

IT CAN FOOL THE SUN

Some people never say, "Let's go home,"
not having one, except a plastic sheet;
when cold, they try to find a warm air grate;
an empty doorway's better than the street,
and two share one refrigerator crate.

A shack that decent folks would ridicule
is where some others live, and don't complain.
They look up through the roof, smile and sigh,
"It can fool the sun, but not the rain!"

A PRESIDENT EXPRESSES CONCERN ON A VISIT TO WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Poet's Corner had no epitaph
to mark the Welshman's
sullen art or craft
because, they said,
his morals were below
the standards there.
I mentioned the ways of Poe
and Byron,
and the censored Joyce's works;
at least the newsmen listened,
noted my remarks,
and Caitlin wrote.
We launched a clumsy, weak campaign,
the bishops met
and listened to the lilting lines again.
Later on, some Welshmen brought to me
a copy of the stone
that honors now the beauty he set free
from a godhead of his own.

MISS LILLIAN

She would nurse
and when they couldn't pay
she would still be there.

She loved to laugh
and often laughed alone,
but didn't seem to care.

When she wept
not many tears would fall.
She never had learned how.

She died
and left us all behind.
What will we do now?

A BATTLE PRAYER

All those at war
Pray to obtain
God's blessing.
It's with those in pain.

CONSIDERING THE VOID

When I behold the charm
of evening skies, their lulling endurance;
the patterns of stars with names
of bears and dogs, a swan, a virgin;
other planets that our Voyager showed
were like and so unlike our own,
with all their moons,
bright discs, weird rings, and cratered faces;
comets with their streaming tails
bent by pressure from our sun;
the skyscape of our Milky Way
holding in its shimmering disc
an infinity of suns
(or say a thousand billion);
knowing there are holes of darkness
gulping mass and even light,
knowing that this galaxy of ours
is one of multitudes
in what we call the heavens,
it troubles me. It troubles me.

ITINERANT SONGSTERS VISIT OUR VILLAGE

When some poets came to Plains one night,
two with guitars, their poems taught
us how to look and maybe laugh
at what we were and felt and thought.

After that, I rushed to write
in fumbling lines why we should care
about a distant starving child.
I asked how we can love the fear
and death of war, rejecting peace
as weakness; how a poet can dare
to bring forth out of memory
the troubling visions buried there,
and why we barely comprehend
what happens out in space.
I found
my words would seldom flow, and then
I turned to closer simpler themes:
a pony, Mama as a nurse,
the sight of geese, the songs of whales,
a pasture gate, a racist curse,
a possum hunt, a battle prayer.

I learned from poetry that art
is best derived from artless things,
that mysteries might be explored
and understood from that which springs
most freely from my mind and heart.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JIMMY CARTER

NOR How long have you been a serious reader of poetry? Which poets attracted you first?

J.C. I began reading poetry in elementary and high school, both as required and voluntarily for enjoyment. In our English classes, we had a poem to memorize and recite almost weekly, with a heavy emphasis on Milton, Browning, Dickinson, Emerson, Frost, Wordsworth, Whittier, Longfellow, and Poe. Sidney Lanier, as a Georgian, was one of our favorites.

NOR William Carlos Williams once wrote:

> It is difficult
> to get the news from poems
> yet men die miserably every day
> for lack
> of what is found there.

As a former president who is deeply interested in poetry, do you agree with that statement?

J.C. Yes, in that almost the totality of human wisdom is included in poetry—as it would be in an expansive collection of prose literature.

NOR You have often referred to Dylan Thomas as a favorite poet of yours. You included the final lines from his poem 'The Hand That Signed the Paper" as part of the epigraph for your 1975 autobiography, *Why Not the Best*:

> Great is the hand that holds dominion over
> Man by a scribbled name.
> Five kings count the dead but do not soften
> The crusted wound nor stroke the brow;
> A hand rules pity as a hand rules heaven;
> Hands have no tears to flow.

These lines could be taken to mean that government is by its very nature cruel and tyrannical. How do you understand them?

J.C. This poem of Dylan Thomas's expresses very strongly the almost inherent impersonality or insensitivity of government toward those who are most in need, inarticulate, and personally not even known by those of us who make the decisions in society. It is not a matter of deliberate tyranny.

NOR Dylan Thomas once described his poems as constructed of contradictory images out of which he tries "to make that momentary peace which is a poem." You have studied and dealt with conflict on an international scale. Would you say that any part of your attraction to Thomas's work comes from his use of conflict in his poems?

J.C. There is no doubt that Thomas's inner struggles and tensions add strength to his poetry and prose, and he had no reticence about inventing new words and phrases to express them. Back in the 1950s, my sons and I would try to understand some of his more obscure poems, even diagramming the sentences, and often the meaning would come through more clearly. For us, this did not detract from the pure beauty of his lines.

NOR You have also mentioned James Dickey as a favorite poet of yours. He read a poem at the gala before your inauguration. What is it that attracts you to his poetry?

J.C. Dickey may not agree, but I believe his poetry is also filled with an inner conflict that makes it powerful. I have also concentrated on his work because he is a Georgian and a personal friend. He would come down to my hometown during my presidential campaign, sit on the porch of the railroad depot that was my national headquarters, talk to my mother, and pontificate with the local farmers and others who came by to join in the excitement. His "Strength of Fields," which he read at my inauguration gala, was derived from these visits.

NOR Have you kept up with him in recent years?

J.C. Not as much as I should.

NOR In January of 1980, before you left the White House, the First Lady hosted an event entitled, "A Salute to Poetry and American Poets." Twenty-one poets read from their work at this reception. James Dickey was one of them. Were you already familiar with others of these poets? Did you have a hand in selecting them?

J.C. Yes, I was familiar with a number of the poets and was involved in deciding on the final list of those invited.

NOR When you returned to Plains, Georgia, after Ronald Reagan took office, a homecoming celebration was held in your honor at which Professors Miller Williams and James Whitehead from the University of Arkansas both read poems. How had you come to know these poets, who were not among the readers at the White House reception?

J.C. My brother Billy and I got to know Miller Williams and James Whitehead primarily through a mutual friend, Tom T. Hall, the poet, author, and country-western musician from Tennessee. Since Billy's death, these men and a few others have come back to Plains to sing, read prose and poetry, and share some experiences with us. One of my poems describes this visit.

NOR Since that time, Miller Williams has served as your mentor. How has your work with him affected your writing?

J.C. Miller Williams has really served not only as a personal friend but also as an advisor and professor. He has provided me with lists of books to study, sent me interesting articles, inspired me with his own poetry, encouraged me to write, and criticized what I have written. In all these ways, there is no doubt that he has helped to shape my poetry, although the subjects and themes and content have been mine.

NOR Community is important to many poets. Have you also kept up with or developed relationships with other poets? Are there writers with whom you share work-in-progress?

J.C. Not really. Some of my poems have been published in periodicals around the country and I receive comments from some well-known poets. I listen to them with care, and learn from them. I have been reluctant to share any of my work in its developing stages with anyone other than Williams, Whitehead, and my wife Rosalynn.

NOR When did you first start to write poetry? When did you start writing seriously?

J.C. I wrote some poems as a schoolboy, a naval officer, and love letters to Rosalynn. I didn't begin to keep the poems or really try to refine them in any way until after my friendship developed with the two Arkansas poets.

NOR Different poets have offered radically different reasons for writing. What compels you to write?

J.C. I like to write, and a good portion of my income since leaving the White House has come from the publication of successful books. In fact, two of my books were published in 1993. I have found to my surprise, however, that I can express my own deepest feelings in poetry when it is impossible in prose. It is also a dramatically different challenge—to concentrate on how best to express a feeling or meaning instead of on the research, analysis, and wording that assures the accuracy of a statement. In writing this, I realize that my prose would be better if I did more of the same.

NOR Do you find that you learn about yourself in the process of writing? If so, what sort of discoveries do you make?

J.C. While writing poems, I have explored my own current and past feelings in an unprecedented way. For instance, I've gained new insights into my boyhood life with playmates on the farm, almost all of whom were black children, and, with even more difficulty, the long-buried impressions I have of the relationship between me and my dominant father.

NOR Your Christian faith and activism have had a strong influence in your political life. They are not directly

addressed in the poems printed here. Have they influenced your poetry?

J.C. I have written several poems that relate to my Christian faith, but they are not now being released for publication.

NOR Some of your poems have a straightforward, personal quality that is reminiscent of the work of Frank O'Hara—and very unlike the work of Dylan Thomas. Which poets do you read who approach the writing of poetry the same way you do?

J.C. I like O'Hara's poetry, but see very little similarity between his and mine. I don't have either the temperament or ability to inject surrealism into my poems. Without equating my works with theirs, I feel more at ease with some other poets, including my childhood favorites and those mentioned elsewhere in these answers. I particularly like poems that I can understand and that have beauty or that stimulate innovative concepts of life.

NOR In an interview with Harvey Shapiro for *The New York Times Book Review*, you once said that when you were writing a speech, you began by listing the points you wanted to make, "just like an engineer." Do you think your training as an engineer has influenced your process of writing poetry?

J.C. My training as an engineer may have influenced my approach to poetry, perhaps negatively as an impediment to thinking in metaphors. I hope to overcome this limit in the future. In general, my lines seem to be more straightforward and clear in meaning than is the case in modern poetry that I read and enjoy. I have learned to appreciate most modern art, but must admit that I find many of the modern poems totally incomprehensible and, to me, without merit. Their attraction seems to be the absence of rhyme, rhythm, coherence, or beauty. I realize, to my own discomfort, that these poets are much more accomplished and respected than I am ever likely to be.

NOR Where do you think your poetry is going? Are you satisfied that you are speaking in your own voice as a poet?

J.C. So far, I feel quite at ease with the poems I have written, most of which relate to the thoughts and experiences of my own life. I've written others that are not being published now that depart from this trend. It is quite likely that, with more experience, I will be less constrained in my choice of subjects and in my expressions. My poems have been written primarily for my own enjoyment, and it is a delightful bonus when others like them.

NOR How do you know when a poem is finished? Do you find that you spend a great deal of time on the process of revision?

J.C. I spend a great deal of time revising most of my poems, with dozens of versions before I come to an end. Others have seemed to flow so naturally that only a few words are changed. In some way, I seem to reach a point where I like the poem or can think of no way to make further improvements. To take a line from one of my poems, "The More Things Change," I am well but not satisfied.

NOR We understand that a collection of your poetry, *Always a Reckoning*, will be coming out soon. Did you find there were special challenges in organizing your work into a book?

J.C. As with my seven other books, there were special challenges in organizing the final version of *Always a Reckoning*. Which of my poems to include, in what order to present them, whether to divide them into categories, which publisher to approach, and if the book should be illustrated were all questions that had to be answered.

NOR What do you find most difficult about writing poetry—other than finding the time to write?

J.C. I have found that most of the ideas for my poems have tended to come out in spurts, with long dry spells between. Also, I have learned how difficult it is to complete one after it is started. Many of the original ideas, of course, have been abandoned when I just couldn't find the words to express my earlier thoughts. Since I am in a formative stage as a poet, I spend a lot of time reading *How Does a Poem Mean* and other books on principles and techniques, and have devoted much more attention to the poetry I enjoy and with which I feel most at ease.

NOR Do you anticipate a time—even a short period—when you might take a break from political and humanitarian affairs and devote full time to writing?

J.C. I have never had this opportunity for any extended period, but would welcome it. On a few occasions we have gone to our log cabin in the North Georgia mountains for as much as a week to work on one of my books. I still had to keep up with the same level of paper work, but the telephone calls were restricted. What I've always lacked, and hope to have some day, is a chance just to relax, forget about fundraising, budgets, personnel matters, writing speeches, and planning upcoming trips and concentrate exclusively on my poems or the chapters in my next book.

Douglas Brinkley

JIMMY CARTER: POET FROM PLAINS

With the publication of *Always a Reckoning*, Jimmy Carter celebrates man, joining the rarefied company of Abraham Lincoln and John Quincy Adams as our only published presidential poets. Carter's intensely personal poems are private meditations on family, friends, and politics, interspersed with wistful reflections on a rural Georgia that is rapidly disappearing under the assault of modernity, as the megalopolis of Atlanta fuels the hyper-development of an edge-city, turning farms into housing developments, strip malls, and superhighways.

"Reckoning," so rich and evocative a word, is a settling of accounts, a pointed reminder of the Day of Judgment. Our thoughts immediately turn to Scripture and the primacy of Christianity in Carter's life. But "reckoning" also means the calculation of a ship's position, so we must also think of vector, of directionality, of journey. We can trace Carter's creative journey, in part, by examining some of the aesthetic influences that have molded Carter's identity as a Southerner, as an American, and finally as citizen of a global community.

Carter is a son of Georgia, who came of age during the Great Depression. Georgia is a fertile breeding ground of the Southern muse—distinctive voices ranging from Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers to James Dickey and Alice Walker, from Jean Toomer and Conrad Aiken to Sidney Lanier and Erskine Caldwell, from Margaret Mitchell and Joel Chandler Harris to Otis Redding and Ray Charles. The Old South—its deep attachment to place, to history, to language itself—shaped Carter's childhood. Early influences were, of course, the Bible, Civil War recollections, and the Uncle Remus stories his mother read to him. By high school, Carter's horizons had broadened. In *War and Peace*, the young man embraced Tolstoy's notion that the character of "the people" determines history, a notion that would eventually lead to an exploration of who "the people" are.

Carter's years at the U.S. Naval Academy during World War II, not surprisingly, tilted his reading to nonfiction, especially world history and biography. But hazing from classmates on account of his Dixie origins inevitably presaged a return to literature to explore his Southern identity in the imaginary landscape of novels. His starting place was not auspicious, for he picked up

Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*, published in 1932, which depicted Southern rural white folk as amoral and gullible at best, and as mean-spirited, lustful hypocrites at worst. "I read *Tobacco Road* when I was in the Navy and it was a real shock to me," Carter has said in an interview, "Caldwell's description of Southerners aggravated me to no end. To treat sexual deviancy as being somehow a Southern thing was a stinging insult." The trashy tenant farmers of *Tobacco Road* simply did not square with Carter's own experience with the decent, honest, hard-working people of Plains struggling to survive the hardships of the Depression years. To Carter, his neighbors in Plains were heroic—devout Christian stoics who believed that no matter what hardships God tested them with in this life, they would surely find salvation and the Promised Land in the next.

Even though Carter read all of William Faulkner's novels, his own upbringing prevented the Georgian from identifying with the "lost cause" literature of the Old South. While the Snopses ruefully whistled "Dixie" as they laid fresh flowers on the crumbling tombstones of the Confederate dead, his unsentimental parents, Earl and Lillian, and their equally unsentimental neighbors, refused to live in the past and give in to nostalgia. They were forward-looking people, focusing their energies on next autumn's harvest, on ways to improve their land through scientific farming, on how to trade up from a horse-drawn plow to a John Deere tractor.

It was not until Carter discovered James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, published in 1941, accompanied by Walker Evans' superb photographs, that Carter finally found a representation of his "people" that he could admire without reservation. Agee's impassioned tale of three Southern tenant farmer families during the Depression resonated deeply with Carter's lived experience. If it is the Bible that has undoubtedly influenced Carter's daily life most profoundly, it is Agee's angry and moving humanistic portrait of injustice perpetrated on the Southern poor that has deeply influenced Carter's poetry. Carter, like Agee, saw the nobility of rural Southerners. Evans' unforgettable photographs of poor rural sharecroppers and their grim suffering, of Delta cotton fields ravaged by erosion, and the dirt road misery of flyspeck towns, captures their dignity. Agee's tenant farmers were easily recognizable to Jimmy Carter, who had grown up in a clapboard farmhouse in southwest Georgia during the Great Depression. These yeoman farmers and their families demonstrated an unflinching courage; they never complained, nor did

they look back. They pressed forward, their hope for a better future buttressed by their unwavering Christian faith and a steadfast refusal to admit defeat.

"The main thing that made Agee's book special was his vivid description of the kind of family life that I knew, at least among our Plains neighbors, in my early and formative years," Carter recently recalled. "It was his beautiful resurrection of the detailed and determined humanistic characteristics of life—his description of worn-out overalls or the people who made corn shuck hats, or how they related to the hog-pen a few yards from the house or how they went to sleep and covered their faces with cheesecloth to keep the flies out of their mouths—this is what I find beautiful about Agee from a personal point of view." A half of a century after the publication of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, many of the rural inhabitants so sympathetically depicted by Agee are reanimated in Carter's poetry: striking peanut pickers, the weary homeless, possum hunters, African-American field hands vividly people Carter's poems. And Carter, like Agee, believes that in a mysterious universe human beings must show mercy toward those who suffer and muster the political courage to salve human despair.

Besides Agee, as many Americans might be surprised to discover, Carter identifies Bob Dylan as an important influence on his creative process, on the language of his poetry. Carter's interest in Dylan is longstanding; Dylan's lyrical homage to Woody Guthrie opens Carter's 1975 autobiography *Why Not the Best*? The former president was introduced to Dylan's music in the late 1960s by his sons, all of whom were Dylan devotees. Carter's taste ran to classical music, especially Wagner and Shostakovitch, but he was moved by the poetry of Dylan's lyrics. So as his sons wore out the grooves of *The Times They Are A Changin'*, Carter absorbed songs like "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "The Ballad of Hollis Brown," laments on the injustices done to the poor and disadvantaged. One might say that when Carter, as governor of Georgia, hung a portrait of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the Georgia state capitol symbolizing the end of Jim Crow, he did it metaphorically against a backdrop of "Blowin' in the Wind."

When Dylan and The Band visited Atlanta in 1974 as part of their historic cross-country tour, Carter invited the musicians to the Governor's mansion for a post-concert reception. Carter found Dylan "painfully shy," but nevertheless the two men hit it off. All the musicians except Dylan stayed until the wee hours of

the morning and Jimmy's wife Rosalyn cooked them a scrambled egg and grits breakfast. From then on, Carter referred to Dylan as "a good friend." The impact of Dylan's songs on Carter's consciousness is revealed in a remarkable speech he delivered on Law Day at the University of Georgia in Athens in 1974:

> I'm not qualified to talk to you about law, because . . . I'm . . . not a lawyer. . . . But I read a lot and I listen a lot. One of the sources of my understanding about the proper application of criminal justice and the system of equity is from Reinhold Niebuhr. The other source of my understanding about what's right and wrong in this society is from a friend of mine, a poet named Bob Dylan. Listening to his records about "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "Like a Rolling Stone," I've learned to appreciate the dynamism of change in a modern society. I grew up as a landowner's son. But I don't think I ever realized the proper interrelationship between the landowner and those who worked on the farm until I heard Dylan's record, "I Ain't Gonna Work on Maggie's Farm No More."

Carter's attraction to Dylan had political consequences. Gonzo journalist Hunter Thompson, then national affairs correspondent for *Rolling Stone* magazine, heard that speech and was astonished to hear an homage to Dylan from the mouth of a Southern governor. Instead of backing Ted Kennedy for the 1976 Democratic presidential nominee, as Thompson had planned, he would go all out for the as yet unannounced dark horse candidate from Georgia. Carter's appreciation of Dylan paved the way for a front-page endorsement by *Rolling Stone*. Two decades later, Bob Dylan's music is a vital presence in Carter's life. His musical library includes Dylan's retrospective box set, "Biograph," and his most recent solo acoustic "World Gone Wrong." His study houses a large tome of Dylan's collected lyrics. "Dylan still means a lot to me and always will," Carter reflected recently. In fact, a line from "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)," captures the *modus vivendi* of Carter's post-presidential years: "He not busy being born is busy dying."

Finally, the lyrical grace of the poetry of Dylan Thomas is a significant influence on Carter's poetics. When Carter's father died in 1953, Carter left the Navy to return to Plains and take over the family peanut business. One day, as he was poring over an anthology of modern poetry, Carter's eye fell on the last line of

Thomas's "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London": "After the first death there is no other." The words moved Carter deeply, bringing solace from the pain of losing his own father. Thus began Carter's exploration of the Welshman's oeuvre. Carter acquired the collected poems, then other volumes by and about him, until the Carter library swelled to over thirty books related to the poet. Carter's passion flourished through the years; he read the poems to his children, and turned fellow legislators in the Georgia Senate on to Thomas. During a special session of the legislature to rewrite the Georgia Constitution, Carter wryly recalls a scene at the Howard Johnson's near the newly opened Braves stadium: "We would sit around on the floor of the motel in the afternoon and each one of the Senators would read a Dylan Thomas poem," Carter says. "This is almost inconceivable that Georgia senators would be sitting around on the floor drinking beer and reading Dylan Thomas."

Why Dylan Thomas is so meaningful to Carter has been explored in *Jimmy Carter: An Interpretive Biography* by Bruce Mazlish and Edwin Diamond, to which the reader is referred. But an anecdote about a Carter presidential visit to London reveals just how ardent a Thomas admirer the former president is, and explains the genesis of his poem, "A President Expresses Concern On A Visit To Westminster Abbey." In his first year in the White House, Carter made an official state visit to great Britain to participate in a G7 conference and to meet Labour Prime Minister James Callahan. Callahan asked whether any special entertainment might be arranged during the President's stay, and Carter unhesitantly requested a visit to Dylan Thomas's birthplace. Arrangements were made for the trip to Wales, which were later canceled when Callahan, seeking Carter's political help, asked him to give a speech in Newcastle. Carter agreed to give the speech, but bargained for an excursion to Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey as a consolation prize of sorts. With the archbishop as guide, Carter searched for a memorial to Thomas. "To my dismay," Carter recalled, "he told me that they didn't have one because Dylan Thomas was a drunkard, not the kind of person they wanted to honor. I said, how about Edgar Allen Poe and Lord Byron—a drug addict and a gay—what does it matter, it's the art, not anything else that counts."

Surrounded by hordes of reporters, Carter let his disapproval be known, saying, "I think Dylan Thomas is the best poet of this century." When Carter returned to the White House, there was a note from Thomas's wife Caitlin waiting for him. She had read

the news accounts and wanted to express her appreciation. From the Oval Office, Carter began a campaign to obtain recognition for Thomas at Westminster Abbey. In January 1981, as he was preparing to step down as President and make way for Ronald Reagan, word came that Thomas would finally be honored in Poets' Corner. Carter was invited to give the inaugural address at the ceremony. He was unable to attend, but he was interviewed ahead of time in the United States by the BBC. The interview so captured Carter's knowledge of and admiration for the poet that it was played at the dedication. Later, the people of Wales purchased a duplicate of Thomas's memorial stone and sent it to Carter. A portrait of Dylan Thomas is prominently featured in the Carters' home in Plains.

During the 1976 presidential campaign, critics accused Carter of using quotations from James Agee, Bob Dylan, and Dylan Thomas as a political ploy to attract intellectuals and young people to his campaign. How wrong they were. The poems of *Always a Reckoning* are proof positive that the literary and musical influences Carter has mentioned through the years are heartfelt. There are, of course, others who have influenced Carter's poetry—Miller Williams of Arkansas, Jimmy Townsend of north Georgia. Carl Sandburg's populist celebration of the American people resonates strongly with the former president. But readers of Jimmy Carter's new collection of graceful verses will find them especially imbued with the spirit of James Agee, Bob Dylan, and Dylan Thomas, creative sources who have helped illuminate the extraordinary life journey of the poet from Plains.

Richard Katrovas

ARTISTS AND BUREAUCRACIES: WHAT JIMMY CARTER AND VACLAV HAVEL CAN TEACH WRITERS IN THE ACADEMY

Recently, former President Jimmy Carter visited Prague during one of my extended stays there. The obligatory front-page picture of him and President Havel shaking hands occasioned my considering how much they have in common. Each has managed to blend successfully several often incompatible careers. Both men are decent to the core, both are intensely political, and both are creative writers, though at dramatically different stages of their careers as politicians and writers. Havel, of course, was a world-renowned playwright before becoming president first of Czechoslovakia, and now of the Czech Republic. Jimmy Carter has only recently begun to write lyric poetry. Both have presided over, and therefore have been consumed by, large bureaucracies without losing, as far as we can tell, a jot of their humanity. That is, their defining values seem untainted by the cynicism life in the belly of a bureaucracy engenders. Their example is useful to others who must incorporate the conflict between politics and poetry into a single career, namely writers who teach at the university level.

Whether poets are "unacknowledged legislators" is still a fruitful debate, especially in sophomore literature courses. That poets become bureaucrats, or at least bacteria in the belly of a bureaucratic beast, is undeniable when they choose, are lucky enough to achieve, academic careers. Of course Shelley's conception was of unfettered visionaries leading by example in their creative work as well as their lives. Byron notwithstanding, what would Shelley have thought of poets wallowing in the same mire of retail politics as actual legislators?

Whether fabulists belong in the academy, enmeshed in academic bureaucracies, is a question born I believe of rather quaint, romantic notions of what poets and prose fiction writers should be as social beings. In addition, whether life within the academy tends to deaden "creativity" seems an odd concern; hunger and soul-numbing labor have always seemed to me much more threatening. The fact is that most of the good creative writers in North America teach in universities, and therefore to survive professionally become acclimated to the complex politics of the academy.

When we talk these days of, say, the relation of politics to poetry, we are usually addressing fairly sophisticated questions regarding the ostensible content of poems and/or the poet's responsibility not only to write about issues of human rights, but also to act as a responsible citizen on those issues. But what about the politics of being a poet in an academic bureaucracy? Whether you're writing poems about murdered archbishops in Central America or sonnets about meditative gardens in Vermont, if you publish often enough in the appropriate venues you'll likely get tenured. Then what?

Real politicians who are also artists may have something to teach us about maintaining integrity and enthusiasm within the belly of a bureaucracy. Whether Jimmy Carter, for example, is a good poet or not, I'm sure that he respects hard work, and aspires to achieve a high degree of sophistication in the craft of his poems. To this end, he is no doubt systematically engaging in a period of apprenticeship. For most folks today, for better and for worse, apprenticeship in the arts entails affiliation with an academic fine arts program. The process then centers on acquisition of skills in and knowledge about the art, but also upon institutional assimilation. President Carter must understand institutional assimilation as well as any poet in America, and a certain wisdom must accompany that understanding. The romantic image of the fabulist cut off from society, achieving clear vision by virtue of being unentangled in the minutia of complex social processes, is quite unrealistic, though the range of folks who still privilege that image is broad indeed. Reflecting upon recent events in my own passage as an academic artist, I've come to the conclusion that "serious art" will continue to exist in our culture only to the extent that poets seek the wisdom and perspective of wholly engaged politicians, and politicians seek the wisdom not of poets, but of poetry. Even as both poets and politicians exist in the slow-churning bellies of bureaucracies, they must remain undigestible, lest they be carried, with this trope, to an ugly but logical conclusion.

As I write, I am casting furtive glances at my thirty-three month-old Czech-American daughter as she cavorts, chattering in a language she speaks much better than I, with a slightly older, shyer boy in a Prague #5 playground sandbox. If you ask Ema, in Czech or English, who her presidents are, she'll tell you, "Clinton i Havel." She will learn, no matter the long-term fate of this the smaller of her two countries, how remarkable is her latter president in world-historical terms. Vaclav Havel is a true artist, and not since King David has a nation been blessed (philistines, of course, would not use this verb) with an artist-leader, though

history is strewn with failed artists who from the midst of their failures aspired to another kind of power than that born of aesthetic production. A particular Austrian corporal with a small knack for drawing comes immediately to mind. All of us have heard the stories of how, before the changes of '89, especially in the sixties and seventies, people would queue for hours to purchase, say, a book of poems by Jaroslav Seifert. Havel's sensibility was determined largely by a cultural context centered on the dualism of "official" and "unofficial" artistic production; yet this dualism didn't make distinctions or judgments always simple. For example, there were among sanctioned writers those who expressed a range of critical responses to oppression which their readers recognized as such, yet who were allowed to publish anyway because their texts were sufficiently subtle, usually in the form of allegory. Many Czech citizens read social protest, on some levels, into Seifert's later verse, and it therefore became a small act of defiance to stand in a long line to purchase one of his books.

As far as I can tell, though he has always been a gentle man, there has never been anything subtle about Havel's life as an artist, a political theorist and social critic, a political prisoner, or as a statesman. One could not queue for his books: they were contraband. Though I have studied his wonderful essays, I am not qualified to judge the value of Havel's "creative" work partly because I've not read enough of it, and partly because I can't read it in Czech. I'm not particularly taken with those playwrights, like Pirandello, who influenced his dramas (certainly not his politics!), anyway, and so what I have read translated into English, like *The Memoradum* (Vyrozumei), hasn't dazzled me. Most Czechs, especially Czech writers, will say that he's a good playwright who happens to be a great human being. Time will tell if the first part of this judgment is an understatement, but that Havel is a serious artist whose works reflect complex psychologies and salient social and philosophical issues will never be questioned.

Havel has become my unattainable ideal of the artist as a social being, as his great predecessor Jan Masarik, the teacher and philosopher who conceived the First Republic of Czechoslovakia, has become my ideal of the academician as a social being. As I fancy myself an artist and make my living as an academician, I have managed to render my vocation and avocation one as my two eyes make one in sight, to paraphrase Frost only slightly. However, I have no doubt that I am in need of corrective lenses precisely at those times I am consumed in my professional life by such matters as whether the degree I must assist in conferring

should be called a Masters or a Doctorate, and especially when the question centers on such bureaucratic banalities as my institution's aspiration to permanent Doctoral II status. The greatness of Havel and Masarik emanates to no small degree from their resisting banalities as artist and philosopher respectively, and as the statesmen they both became. Few of us, however, have the character and talent to resist banalities without seeming quixotic and silly; I myself more times than I care to count have exhibited behavior I knew to be quixotic precisely because I judged some bureaucratic trifling as banal and dishonest.

The one thing in my career that is wholly true and good and worthy of my best efforts most of the time is the mentoring of people who want to read and write poems. This is a very personal process which entails the passing on of habits of mind and a general work ethic to individuals who would read and write poems anyway without my interference, the pretensions of authority the institution has granted me. Usually it entails simply caring for the apprentice as a human being, enough to do the hard work of reading and talking aloud about complex though unfinished texts, texts I know are unfinished sometimes only because I've taken the time to know the person and her or his aspirations. Every reading of a "creative" apprentice text is a dual reading; rather than eschewing authorial intention, one must "read" it into the process. This is a necessary mystification, and the essence of the "pedagogy" of "creative writing." It suggests an intimacy unattainable and wholly inappropriate to, say, the pedagogy of literary scholarship, where the ultimate authority is not the life and will of an individual (theories of textual autonomy do not pertain, I believe, to the social processes upon which teaching turns), but rather the cluster of conventions determining any particular sub-discipline within the larger "discipline." It is rare indeed when a mentor's knowledge that an apprentice-scholar's obsession with a dead parent has somehow determined her or his subject of study—say, a Freudian analysis of Plath's poetry—will have a strong bearing on how that analysis will be shepherded along. The conventions of Freudian textual analysis, of scholarship generally as determined by, say, MLA form, and of the very structure of power between the apprentice and mentor as it has evolved in the academy mitigate against the kind of intimacy I am suggesting, an intimacy which must never transgress the most fundamental formalities which determine the mentor/apprentice relationship generally, yet must take as much of the whole life of the apprentice into consideration as is possible. If a student shows

me an elegy for his mother, I must be prepared to discuss it in terms of the history and conventions of elegy, in terms of whatever "form" the poet has chosen to cast it in ("open" or "closed"), in terms of the most successful examples of such elegies I am familiar with and how his elegy compares, but finally I must be prepared to discuss the poem, if the poet is prepared to and desires to, in terms of the particulars of his sense of loss, what he feels. It is easy to forget or ignore just how radical this latter dimension of the process is, how it takes the apprentice/mentor relationship outside the ideological boundaries of the academy to a dimension of discourse ironically similar to pop psych, group-encounter babble. The mentor must never forget that she is not an analyst and that the point of such discussion is not to "cure" the apprentice or in any way to impart wisdom about the human heart; she listens as to a friend, and discusses likewise, but always with the text which occasioned the discussion in mind. The assumption here is that no matter the nature of the apprentice text, whether it is a Charles Bernsteinish indeterminate rhetorical romp or a Philip Levinish or Adrienne Richish personal lyric grounded in a poetics of sincerity, the most fundamental decisions the apprentice faces will be made by virtue of a rational process similar to what the apprentice scholar performs, but also by virtue of the apprentice confronting, even agonizing over, the most basic and deeply personal reasons he committed to becoming an artist in the first place. Whether, as has been convincingly argued, the "author" is "dead" or not, almost everyone who commits, usually at an early age (former presidents notwithstanding), to becoming a literary artist does so with a sense of specialness; this sense, no matter how much theory advocating the contrary she consumes, the apprentice artist never loses. However one wishes to define it, it drives the compulsion to make and read literary (and, in the case of some, antiliterary) texts. It is also what alienates so many literature scholars and theorists, for they, too, assign a sense of specialness to the fabulist and her verse or prose, and resent those who challenge that particular sense of specialness, as academic artists do by their very institutional presence. Familiarity breeds (at least) wariness. The literary scholar, theorist or historian, though early on she may have fancied herself a poet for the same hormonal, narcissistic reasons as did he who has the temerity to fancy himself one unto death, at some point shifts her ambition to that of becoming a member of an elite club of professional readers, readers who themselves produce texts which—whether she wishes to admit it or not, and most postmodern theorists not only

admit it but flaunt it—subsume their very objects of regard/desire.

Well, these distinctions are at best parochial. They would be lost on the mean-spirited semi-literates who bark and holler in the infamous halls of my own state legislature and governor's mansion, and who are the antithesis of Havel, Masarik, and indeed Jimmy Carter. These (of course mostly) men are profoundly anti-intellectual and culturally crude, that is, wonderfully American. They are indeed what we would be if all we knew of culture was on TV, on the radio, and in the movies. We, not Hollywood, are Dan Quayle's "cultural elite," and colleges of liberal arts generally are, I strongly believe, though ghettos, also touchstones for the cultural richness and diversity to which communities, in their best moments, aspire. They are also the antithesis of popular, commodity culture, and as such function to produce the dialectic whose synthesis we are as reflective people, not just consumers. As Havel and all other artists of the former Czechoslovak police state existed within a cultural binary system of official/unofficial, so we and now they too exist within a binary system of "popular" (commodity) and "serious" culture, a system that postmodern art by turns ignores, celebrates, and berates. It is also a binary more complex in its interactions and modes of production than the police-state official/unofficial. For one thing, terrific, richly complex, even subversive art appears often in the most unlikely commercial venues; and for another, anyone who has sat through two or three hundred poetry readings knows what it feels like to wish she were home watching *Cheers*. Only philistines condescend to cultural products which are difficult, which don't "entertain," and only pretentious fools condescend categorically to popular, commodity culture. At the Rolling Stones "Urban Jungle Tour" concert in August of '90, a woman told me she saw Havel dancing behind bullet-proof plastic. I didn't see it, but I don't doubt it. I tell my undergraduates that my secondary task is to make them more sophisticated consumers; I then have to explain that they don't just consume Wonder Bread, designer jeans and Lite Beer, that they also consume culture. For many, this is a revelation.

I believe that what we now recognize as English departments will not exist in sixty years. Universities will, though I'm not certain Liberal Arts colleges will. Colleges of Arts and Sciences may become colleges of Social and Physical Sciences, with arts as such subsumed under both aspects. Will there be fabulists in the academy? Sure, but they'll be constructing virtual-reality pro-

grams and God knows what else. Textuality, as we understand it, is utterly transforming, as are conceptions of literacy. Shakespeare will never die, but most of us, in the present binary context of "serious" artistic production and consumption, will. As technologies transform fundamental market as well as personal relations, the dynamics of the present binary cultural context will alter as well. What this will mean to the efficacy of my career I've no idea, though I have a strong intuition that the arguments and social conditions which allowed me and my fellow fabulists to carve niches for ourselves at the University of New Orleans will not appertain for the generation that follows us. To avoid, for now, not being digested by the beast, we must understand just how parochial are our lives within the academy. Even as we who are academic fabulists attempt to understand the historical context of our relation to the academy, we must remember that what is at stake is not simply the quality of our lives within the institution, but the very nature of the institution itself.

A good politician must have the vision to realize that even as he or she is charged with sustaining social values, the institutional context in which those values exist must necessarily transform over time. Those changes occur in the bellies of bureaucracies, where gross self-interest is the digestive juice. The good politician/poet—Havel, Carter—engages his or her bureaucratic context soulfully, and always with a vision of appropriate, life-affirming change. Such is the proper ambition of the academic fabulist. The alternative is to pass, happily or not, through the bowels of the beast.

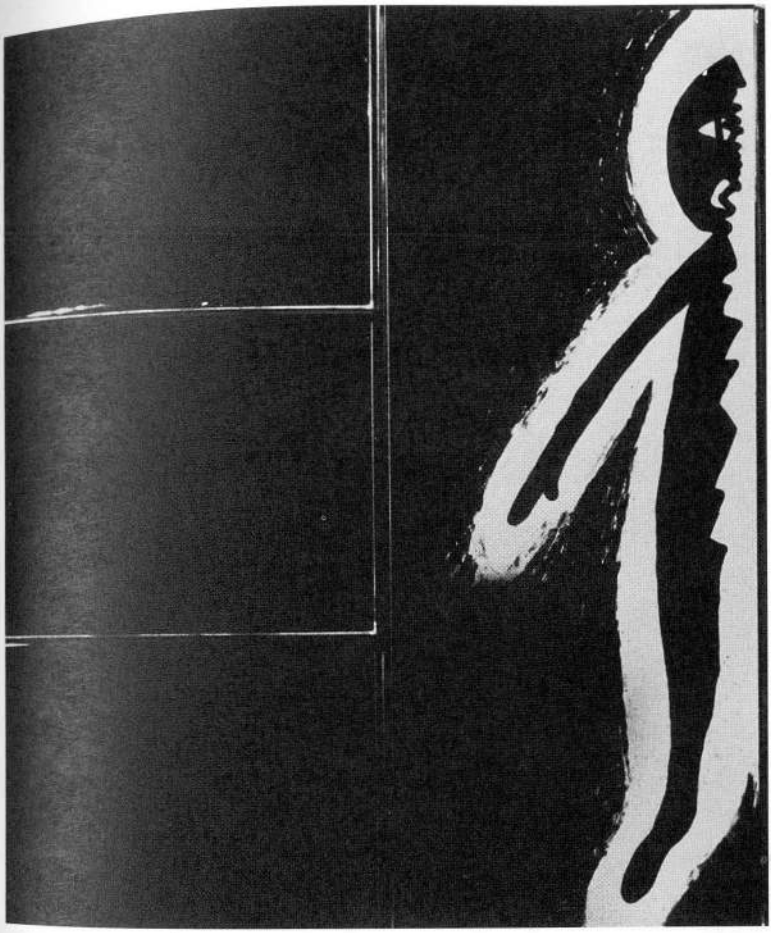
AN OPERA IN SILVER HALIDES:

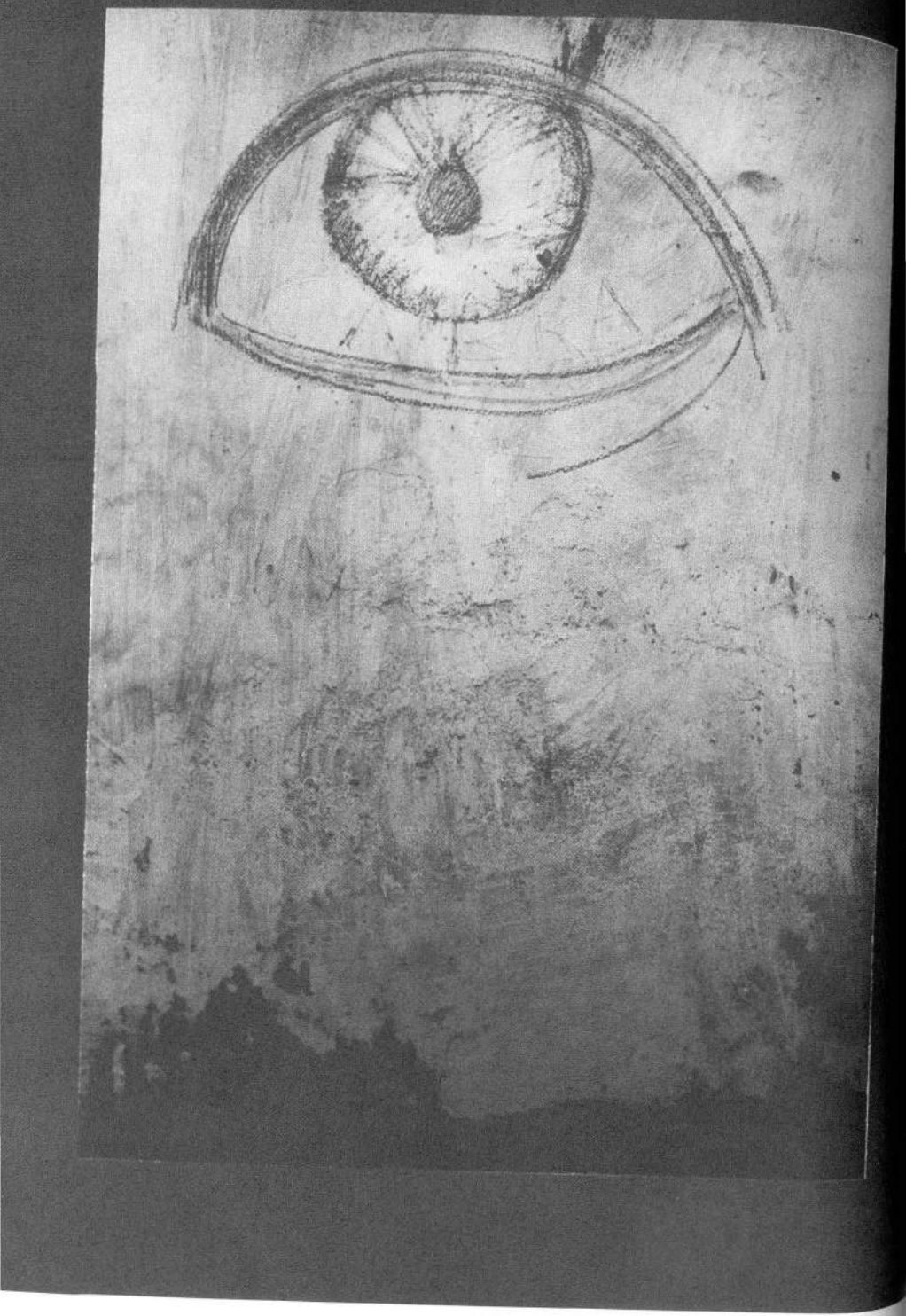
3 NEW ORLEANS ARTISTS

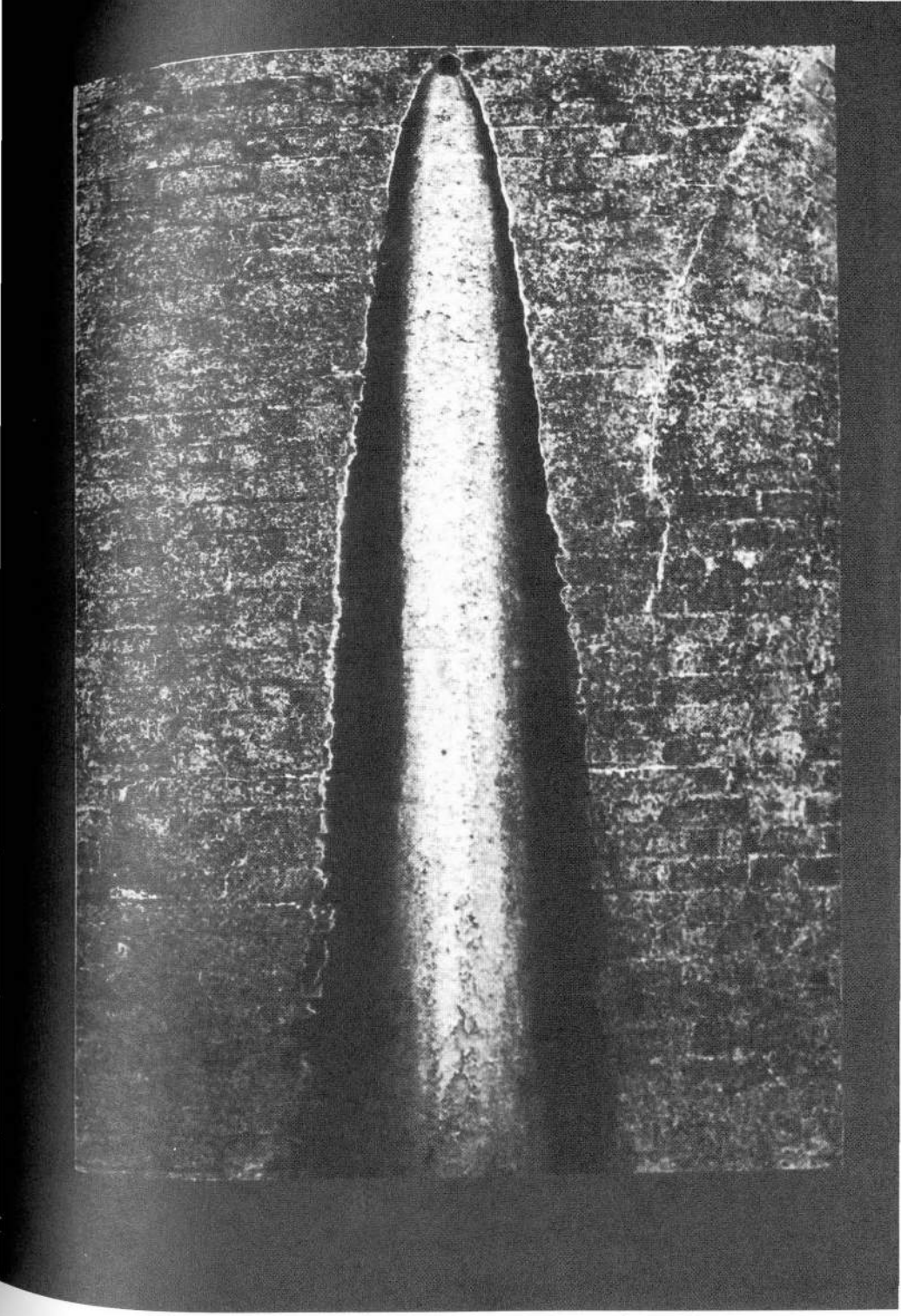
A Note on the Folio

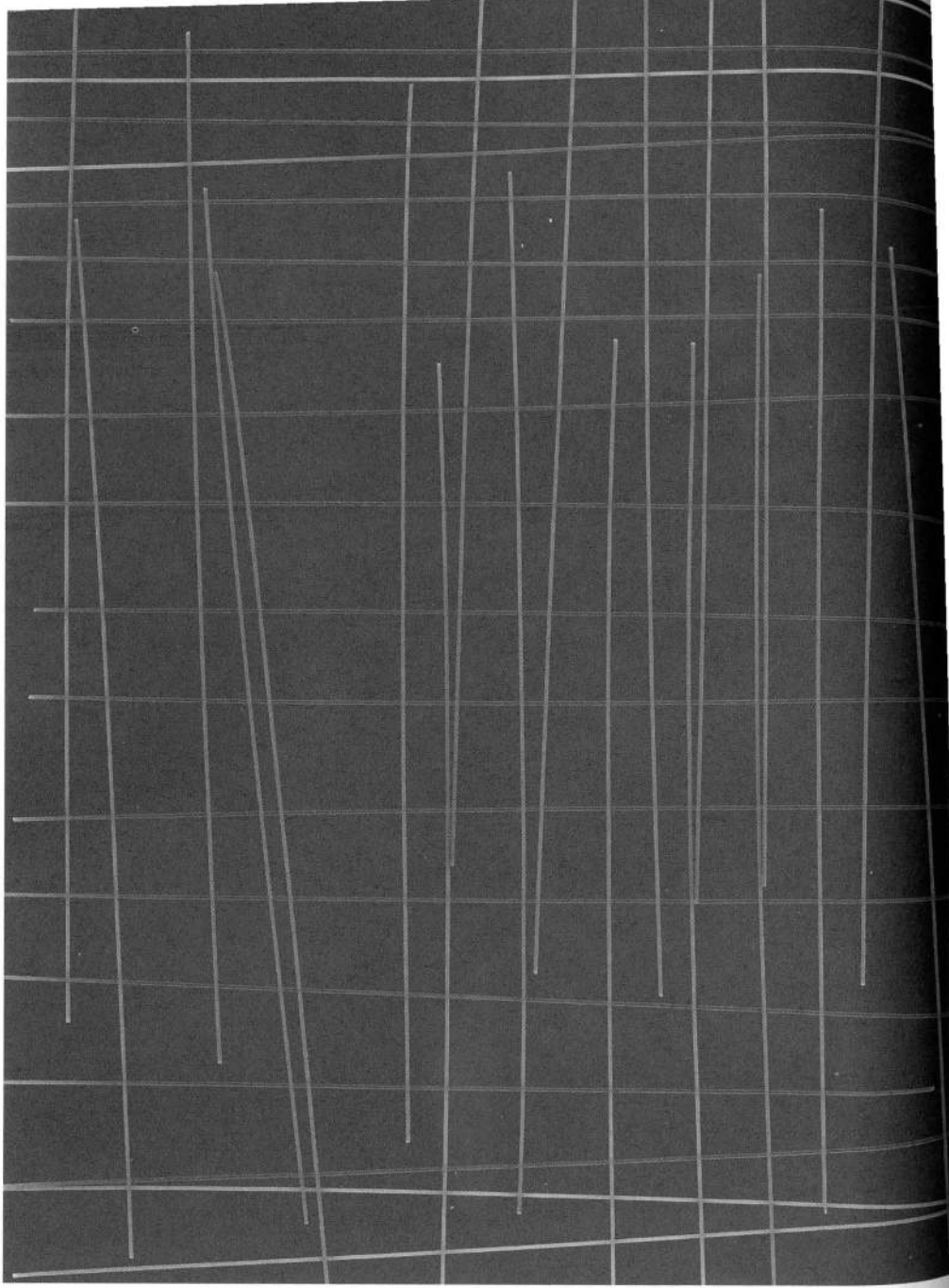
Certainly some thread of plot can be traced through the following assembly of photos, some linear narrative. But just as certainly no single explanation of the interaction of these discrete images, made at different times by three dissimilar talents with different motives and different themes, will suffice. My friend and collaborator John Lawrence brings his hushed, melancholy geometry to the blend. Fernando La Rosa, my former Tulane classmate, contributes his passionate visual harmonies, which seamlessly span disparate lands and cultures, to the mix, while Maria Gonzalez, whose work I have long admired, casts her spell of psychological intrigue over the amalgam.

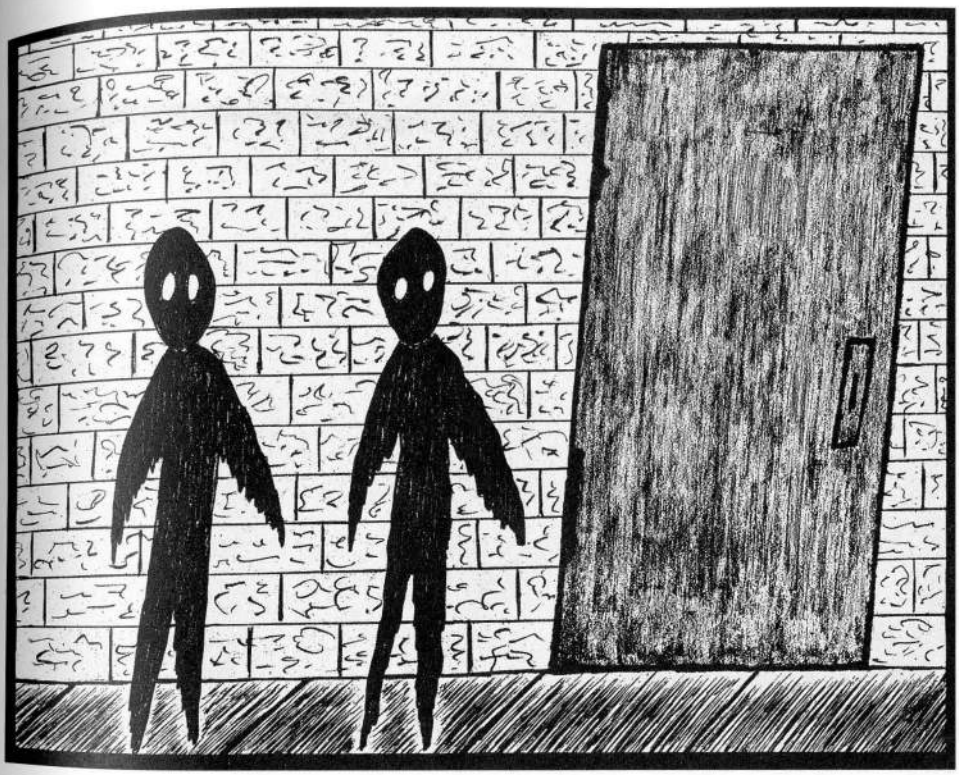
Douglas MacCash,
Curator

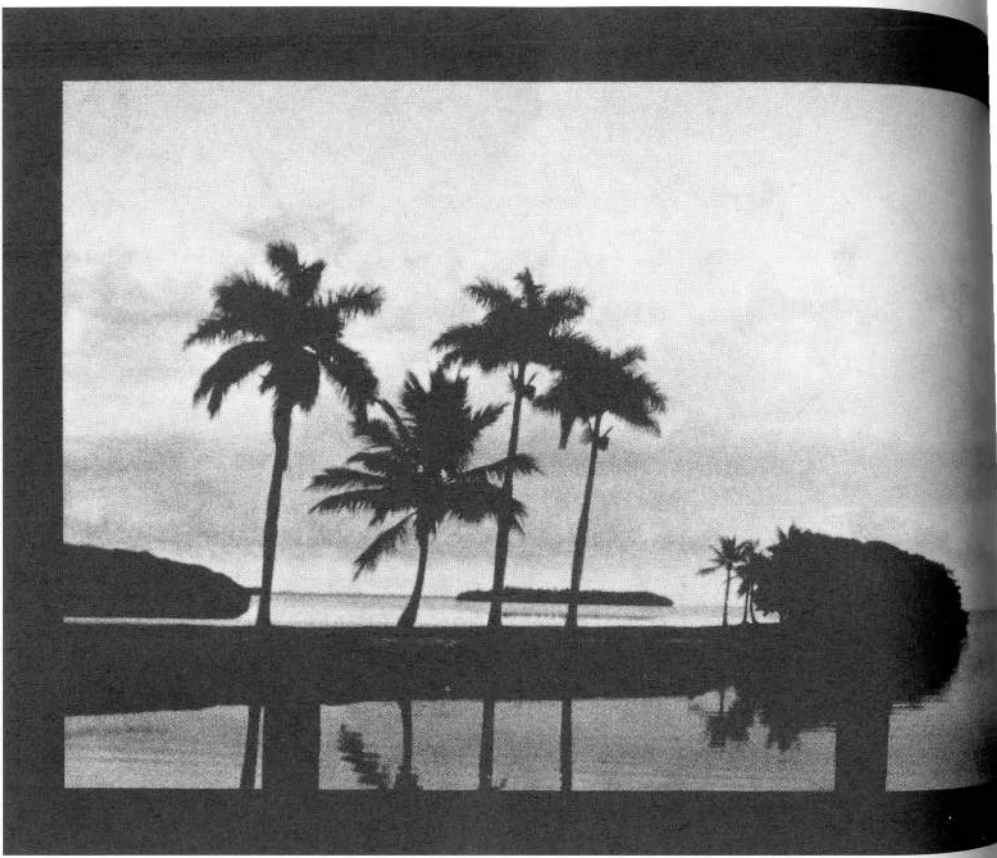


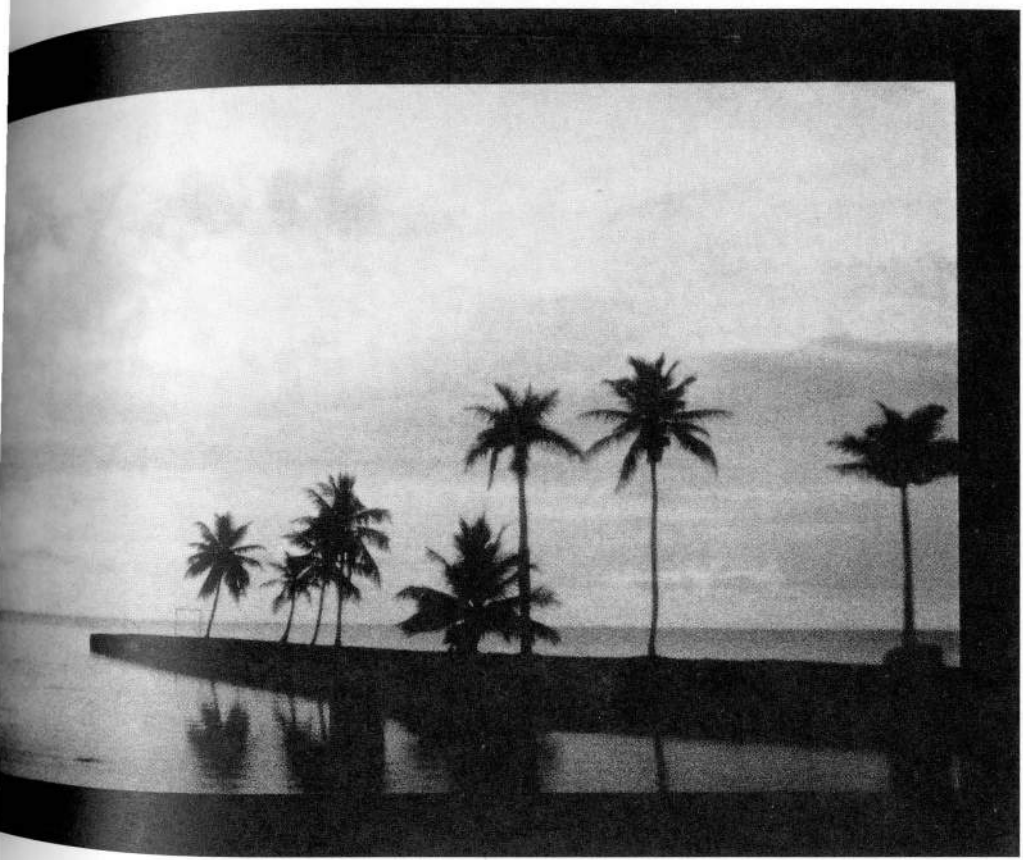


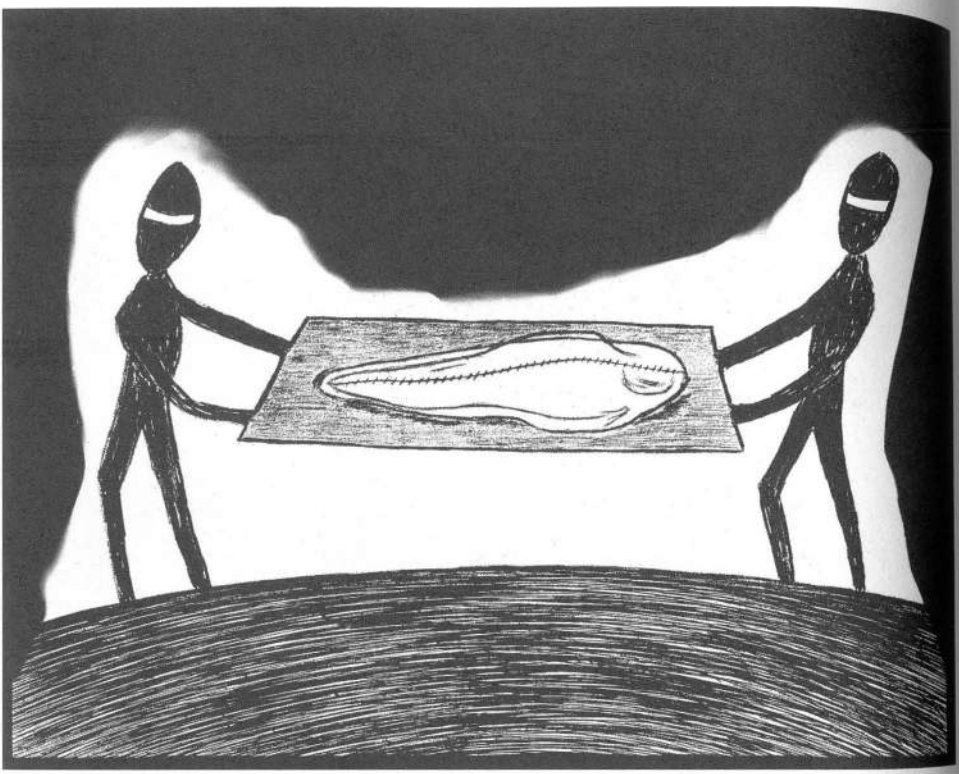


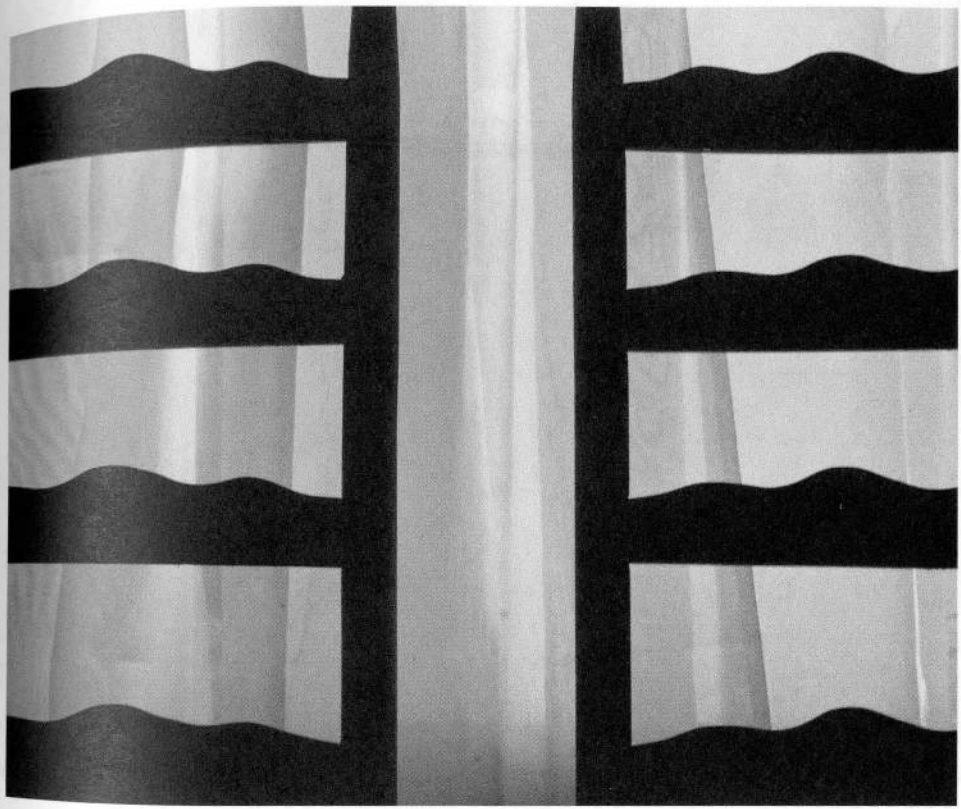


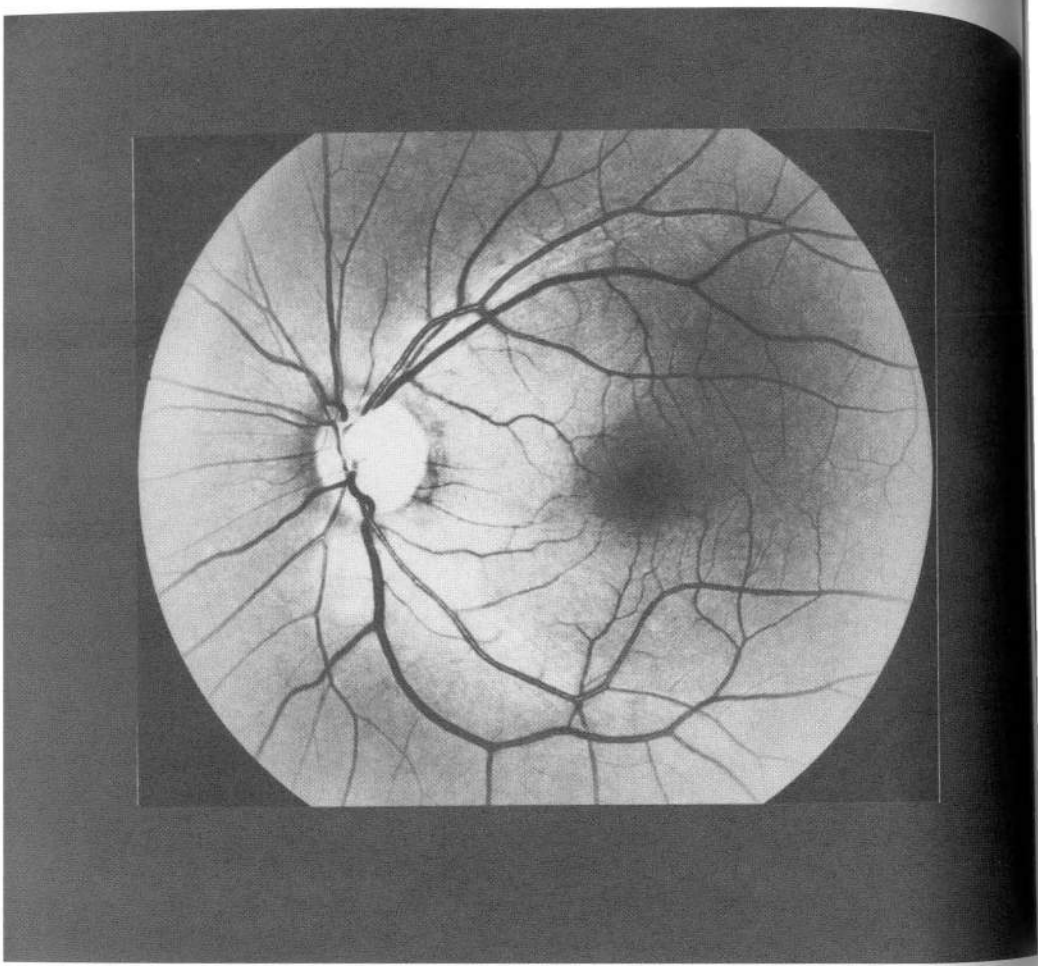


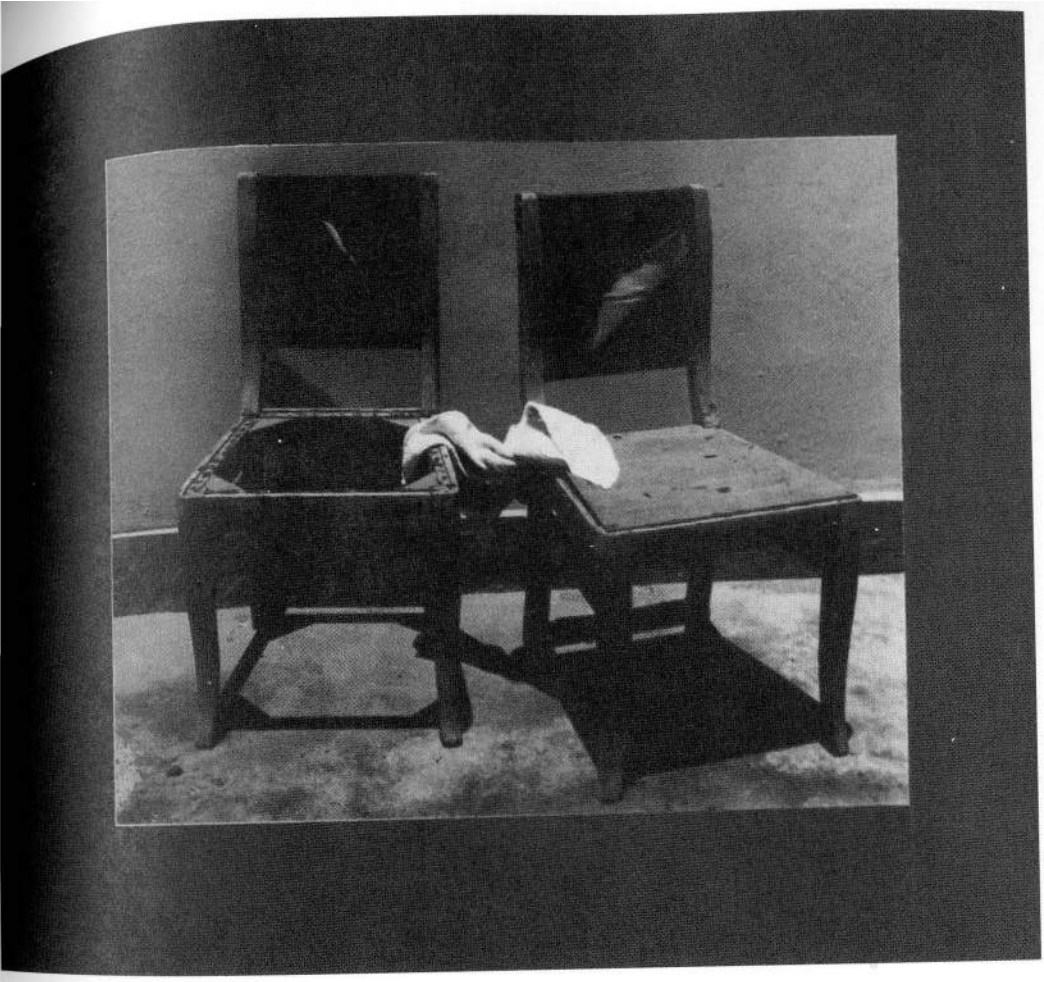












Titles

SINGING UNDERWATER:

18 NEW ORLEANS POETS

William Lavender

THE KINE

Those were the lean years then, one thin cow following another
out of the water, trailing down the riverbank,
line of boney backsides and swinging empty udder sacks
along the mazy slough, meandering between
perspective lines all the way to the rose-washed sunset.

I know that for the image to work there should be a number
of fat ones at the front, not necessarily seven and seven,
maybe seventy and seventy or something like that.
The truth is that as far back as I remember
nothing has emerged from this filthy water
but these sickly thin and barren things,
even the most distant, even those that are just flecks of paint
on the horizon have the same sharp outline,
those ghastly hip joints with shreds of skin thrown over.

I know the business about relativity of symbols too,
how there is no nothing without something, no cold
without hot, bad without good, blue without red, lean without fat,
I know that very first cow on the very first day
when I came to the riverbank and began my watch
must have been something, must have been a good warm red
fat cow with quick bright eyes and a sack full of milk,
but this is not what I remember
and so cannot bring myself to hope that one of these heads
emerging from the foetid water might be attached
to such a red fat body, one that could pull me out of the mire
as the clouds roll away over pastures of clover
and pear orchards heady with bees.

Of course no such cow has ever been or ever will be again,
it is not her memory but her image, her trace
that haunts this river like a whiff of mint in a cattle car,

and I have tried to bring her down,
tried to catch her in the tangled web of thoughts like these,
tried to shame her with images of the dreary march,
the endless succession of her torn and barren children
slogging down the gray muddy shore of an olive-green river
that goes nowhere, and me watching and unable to stop.

Still there is no other way to describe them, these kine,
but as ragged remnants, pre-slaughtered symbols
following their sisters down a river three millennia long
and a god at the source, jesus-with-the-waters-flowing-out-of-him,
hundred-armed like vishnu, psychedelic like in the book,
snakes wrapped around his spine, barbed wire on his head,
wings on his feet, protean jesus
who ate the flesh of the cow and bled the green water of time.
At his feet herds of fat cattle, vast multiples of seven,
stretch to the edge of the canvas.

CLOCKING IN

I think we form the shape of a man, walking in long slow strides. Airplanes fly over, and I think this is what they see: a man walking slowly, taking one step to our thousands.

I: that is he whose outline I see at the limits of my vision.

All the cells of my body are shaped like men. They walk with quick short steps, taking thousands to my one. And each molecule of each cell is of the same shape and moves the same.

If the man we form is only one shouldered in among many, those in the airplanes can tell, unless we are too large for even them to see. Then we would ask the stars.

There are proponents of the belief that those in the airplanes exert a form of control, but I hold to no opinion concerning this.

And some say the stars are pulling them and some say the molecules, but I take my strides evenly, without comment one foot going forward and one foot remaining behind.

BUSTER ON PLATO

There is a story to tell. Oh such a story. Buster will narrate it to you:

"rrrROOUHgf." (end of Buster's narration.)

For one second after the story ends, the entire universe is awed to silence. No cloud, no tree, no star can say a word. Then the wind, brash as always, interrupts with a silence that feels somehow like a fluid, continuous equivalent to the ticking of a clock. This breaks the ice, so to speak, and the day resumes its whispered cacaphony, the orders of nature rising from their chairs, going back to work.

Buster basks in their indifference as though it were tumultuous applause, taking numerous bows, wagging his tail, his tail wagging him. Finally, almost exploding with happiness, he does a sort of curtsey, stretches out his front legs, flattens down against the pavement. He edges forward, slinks under an invisible fence, crawls in close and stands up inside a language.

He dances on two legs. He shakes hands with an absence. He sneezes joyful snot-spray all over the empty clothes.

Then, drunk with fame, he caught a water snake coming out of a spigot and ripped it to shreds. In recounting this adventure to a neighbor, he emphasized its violence with a nip on the ear. The husky rolled on her back, exposing her throat in eloquent submission.

Later, while the human city slept, he interprets a ghostly aria into the black hole of night.

ROAD NARRATIVE

Byrd was walking across the salt flats
along a road so straight only the curve of the earth held it
from infinity.

He came upon a beggar hunched by the roadside.
The beggar sat motionless with his tin cup held out over
the road.
As closely as Byrd looked, he could not see the beggar's
face among the rags.

Later, Byrd met a man in an overcoat.
Byrd thought this was strange because it was very hot,
and he was not sure if he should speak to the man or let
him pass.
When the man was even with Byrd he threw open his
coat.
He had the legs of an animal and a face at his crotch.
The face said Help me Byrd I'll kill you Help me I'll kill
you.

This was hardly out of Byrd's mind before a man in
overalls carrying a hoe on his shoulder came along.
He asked Byrd what the weather was like where Byrd had
come from.
The man said he was going there to raise apples.
Byrd liked this man and laughed a long time at his joke
about a traveling salesman.
Goodbye said Byrd. See you later said the man,
oh and say Byrd, Byrd turned, there's water just around
the bend.

And Byrd was beginning to get thirsty when he saw the
girl.
Byrd was suffering from the heat but the girl seemed to be
freezing.
I'm so cold she said can I put on your shirt for a
minute?
Byrd was afraid of what the sun would do to his back
but he gave her his shirt anyway.
Oh thank you she said and immediately stopped
shivering.

You're not cold; can I keep it?
But the sun Byrd said.
I don't understand she said.

Byrd's back was blistering when a child came up to him and
pulled on his leg.
Where is your mother Byrd demanded, she shouldn't let
you wander alone like this.
The child started crying and held his leg tighter.
You must find your mother said Byrd.
The child had licked its lips raw.

This was still haunting Byrd when a chinaman pushing a
cart with a watercan on it came along.
May I have some of your water Byrd asked.
The chinaman pointed to his ears.
Byrd touched the watercan.
The chinaman fingered the knife at his waist.
Byrd laid some money on the cart.
The chinaman looked at the sun.
Byrd pulled out the rest of his money.
The chinaman held up his knife and examined the blade.
Byrd took off his shoes.

Byrd was naked now, and covered with burns, and he left
his footprints in blood.
Up ahead he saw a skeleton hunched with its head
between its knees.
A magpie roosted on its shoulder.
This is a pair to get past as soon as possible Byrd thought,
and he summoned all his strength and began to run.
Just as he was about to pass them, he hurt himself and fell
down.
He got up and tried again, but again he fell.
Then he looked at the salt he was lying on
and the salt the skeleton was sitting on
and he understood.

This was the end of the road.
The skeleton and the magpie and the horizon were all
painted on a huge wall
at the end of the road.
This is the end of the road Byrd thought,
but why would anyone take the trouble to paint such a
huge wall.

THE THERAPY

for the first 15 or 20 minutes
we just talk about whatever
cordial & easy John and I but
after a while I start to get worried
about wasting time the talk
doesn't seem very profound
doesn't seem to be going anywhere
until at 45 he brings up
my father or something
& I start to cry the thing is
John needs 10 minutes or so
between sessions for phone calls
always some emergency always
someone needing something
so at 50 he says I think we better
stop and then I write the
check he takes it without looking he
never looks and I stumble out
with a kleenex like some little
girl & drive to the school I have to
pick up my younger son he's
13 I sit out front & think about John
I think 60 bucks is reasonable
but times 6 I guess or
maybe 7? of course there is the rent
on the office his share
of the secretary and then there's
the no-shows Ben walks out with
all the others lugging his books
slumps into the truck
& I say what's wrong
Benny and he says
stupid math stupid english
everything sucks

THE POETRY OF WORK

Dana Gioia says
we need more poems
about work
more business
man poets like
Dana and me
none of that starving
artist crap poetry is
work too just like
construction
like once
I did a job for a retired fed
eral judge a small addition
to make the family
he said a little
more comfortable
now that the third divorced
daughter (every job a new soap
opera) was moving
back home
she was 25 & lay
sunning in the backyard
with her straps un
done while his honor
& I staked the corners
talking truss
structure and roofline
when we
went back
into the kitchen
to sign
he said
I want you to
do me
a good job Bill
I like
a good job you know
if I had it
to do over
all this family

stuff this
house and kids business
I don't know
if I'd
do it again
but I like
a good
job Bill &
I said well I'll tell you this I'll
do my best
we haggled
a while he finally
signed
& I did him
a good job
a pretty
good job made good
money on it too
no small feat
considering that
electrician
I tell you Dana
subcontractors
just live
to fuck you over

Elizabeth Thomas

SEX

A woman's mind begins
where a man's leaves off.
Out there a broad field of sunlight
snaps open like a sheet.
For just one moment
the planet pauses in the middle
of one of its favorite revolutions.
You too pause, sit up,
though your shadow lies still
next to hers a moment longer,
then follows you to the window.
Look at her now down there
beneath her grandfather's apple tree.
She's so far away she looks small
stumbling on roots and low limbs,
swooning in the apple-liquor air.

On her own she enters the slow
reverse of her life. Memory
and sex fall out of the same seed
as she discovers the world is a place
outdoors, past the ring of appletree,
past the field she longs to lie down in.
She watches the farmer drive back
and forth until the yellow wall of wheat
disappears beneath the brilliant faces
of sun and moon.

Inside the house Nounou Dudu
lays out the kettle and cups for tea
but someone calls her to the garden,
a photographer, I think, Jacque-Henri Lartigue.
There is no one around now, except overhead
a large red rubber ball descends.
Or, is it ascending?
My Nanny Dudu does not dream of dolphins
of the one who springs nightly
into her arms, though the green smell

of sex from the open field cuts
into dusk like eternity.

She thinks of nothing but the moment,
its eternal center about to fall in her hands
like the planet she stands on,
not daring to let go,
not daring to look away.

TINA MODOTTI VISITS GUANAJUATO

Tonight I check into Hotel Death.
In the shadow of the valley of no regret
I walk no evil but loneliness
with a key in my hand for the man
in my room. Every door is identical.
Each keyhole-shaped room, each bed, each soft
chenille spread is absence I want to lie down in.
Imagine ceilings that rise to heaven!

I ascend like a fly of affection
riding the bus Mommia Express
back to the click and tick of axes
where the half dead go to sleep and dream
in the silver lung of the earth.
Death is no mystery here in untarnished
air where electric fans heave
a wake of breath, a long and tuneless hum.

They are already in heaven. They mine
their false stars and turn to me
their empty eyes, those open black seas.
Like empty rooms I want to enter,
I want to make the right connections. Think of those
who taught us lessons, say one on condensation.
Once I watched on film a tea kettle steam
till steam turned to water on a kitchen floor.

When the dog walked in we felt familiarity
like a taste in our mouths, begin.
The foretelling of doom was on our lips
but not the woman's who discovered the puddle,
smacked her dog, made the wrong connection.
That the dog must suffer, that she hadn't seen
what we were made to see:
a spirit ascending, transforming, returning again

are what make the connections impossible to bear
except in the poem that connects sex and death
politics and love—don't explain anything to me.
Look at us! These are not screams, but yawns of eternity.

Condensation of the body, returning, celebrating
into the hands of gravity that touch us everywhere—
Death has no vanity; it has no luck
our indistinguishable sex hangs down like hornets' nests.

Below my window a mariachi band terrorizes the night.
It's music that keeps the night away who could not come close
to a world seen from the inside out.
Inside the hotel rooms the terrible weightlessness
of sex takes hold.
Oh why must we all stay awake?

ATLANTIC CITY

Here is a souvenir I can eat.
On the Boardwalk I drink the best Spanish wine
and my tongue, if you could taste it,
is salty as an oyster.
I watch the sand lick the sea off its lip,
as each wave dissolves like cotton candy.
Out there, where my father has waded,
earth drops away into space.
Khakis rolled, camera swinging above the spume,
he's trying to fit me in the picture.
But even as he walks on the fluid shoreline
his feet and legs disappear and minnows
encircle us all like charms. Is it the sea
or the wine that makes me forget
what the body is asking, or what it should get?
Overhead dirigibles tow their banners:
The Peppermint Twist, The Pink Flamingo, tonight!
It's what I couldn't take home that counted,
my father leading me away like the horse
untethered on Steel Pier. I watched the clowns,
through every show blindfold his eyes
before they let him go. I dove too,
my terrible mane thrown back above the waves,
knowing I could never forget the flying horse
or the ocean that kept taking him home.

INCIDENT

I nearly lost my life in an elevator ride.
Returning from Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

forever changed by art, my life grew large with pity
mine, then small again, as a fly flying

inside the train going ninety miles per hour.
Relativity had never seemed so easy.

If I could calculate my rate of travel I might
have believed in an accurate afterlife. But

we were falling, not traveling, past one floor
then another, adding speed to our bodies

like extra changes of clothing. Did I think
of the film's story condemning me for good

for denying the passion I never understood?
A body in motion stays in motion, sharpening

its beauty, evolving to purity, losing
its past like so many years, until it reaches

for something, someone who is not moving.
Like those two lovers whose decision meant

everything to me stopped moving in time
beneath the timetables of a Hiroshima bus station.

You could do something about this, I thought
not wanting to go home to the man I did not love

but to the one I did, guiltily,
happily. Stepping into mid-air, too late enlightened

I felt sadness at the bottom of it all
where I came to rest in a dark field

in France with my German soldier lover.
That lit match I see is a shot in the night

then he vanishes in a flash
a molecule of Atomic light.

Like a miracle the elevator doors glide open.
I can walk again as if nothing had happened

the way everything stands still in the world
those moments electricity blacks out

when all we find remarkable is old time
on an electric clock,

having not died for love.

*****

But something had happened up close, too close
to see, a boy, a student running for his life

running from another following in comic, long
serious strides, his trench coat kicked high

towards his right arm stiff, steady outstretched.
The gun comic too, too real, its *pop, pop, pop*

like a gag, it came so close I could have held
out my hand and grazed the gunner's shoulder.

That I ran, that I broke into a room for help
a lunchtime gathering of blind, disabled students

is unmentionable, unable to see that split second
that passes before your shadow gets up to follow

you out, or unseen the shadows that never followed
in Hiroshima but deepened where they stood

negatives of people passing through. I was helpless.
Inside that boy the world had gone berserk,

an hour before as students witnessed his demonstration
of attempted hari-kari in the lecture hall pit.

Wounded and dangerous, he fled the world already
turned against us. It happened. It had nothing

to do with me. I felt guilty for everything.
Especially my sadness where there is room in here

for you. I'm living to tell all about it.

Kay Toca

NIGHT SEASON

I see myself
not like stone
but as a wax figure
riding hungry.

The blackbird tells
me fear is pain
I move on.

He watches me
peel the meat
from the leaves.

The wind
plays time
on my back.

TO LOVE AND LISTEN

hearing the music weaving
webs around me
I struggle to hold on
while you are spilling
yourself over me.

out of myself
comes the singing.

MENTAL NOTES ON NO. 1463

In sun's welcome white
it lights
a hint of Somali Rose
on its wings.

Resting brief,
to soak up
Heaven's outside.

WHAT HEAVEN IS

He appeared before me jacketed for the job.
I half expected him and I was afraid.
His cold nail touched my neck and I was weightless,
drained of blood, I was numb and could not resist.
We flew like angels and there I met the One
seated at the right Hand,
His hands slowed with my life just as I was dead of it.
The beauty of Him moved me to weep,
I felt my soul shift.
New with graces I was given two memories,
my summer of 1968 and the smell of all the creatures
that came into my care.

Alex Rawls

ELVIS CALLED ME AT 4:30 ONE MORNING LAST YEAR

Sorry to call so late; did I wake you?
I was afraid I'd wake you but I was sitting here,
y'know, sitting here and I thought,
I ought to call somebody,
'cause I was thinkin', I was thinkin',
this can be a cruel world, y'know,
I was thinkin', this world can be cruel,
people can be awfully . . . cruel, cruel
if ya give 'em a chance, they'll eat ya alive,
they'll screw ya if they can,
but they'll smile, god love 'em,
they'll smile while they eat ya alive,
'cause people can be awfully cruel,
but I was thinkin', I was flippin' through my wallet
not lookin' for anything or anything,
just lookin', seein' what's there
and I found some receipts I never threw out,
I just kept 'em, and there's some
what d'ya call 'ems, automatic bank things,
slips, those things that come out with your money,
I usually throw those away, but once in a while,
I guess I kept 'em, and while I was flippin' through
I found a picture of Lisa Marie
and I was thinkin', I remember one time
I was watchin' at the window,
I was watchin' while Lisa Marie,
she was racin' her golf cart around the grounds,
David was drivin' her, she was racin' around,
and she had this friend, what's 'er name?
Jane, Jenny, Jessica, something,
and they were racin' around, and what's 'er name,
Jenny, Jenny's hair was blowin'
and it was Fall, 'cause I remember watchin'
and I was thinkin', they're gonna get leaves in their hair
and I was watchin' their hair blow

and their skirts, they blew
and I was watchin' and I was thinkin',
—it was Fall—'cause I was thinkin'
that's gotta be kind of cold, maybe Lisa Marie needs a sweater,
and then David drove her off and what's 'er name,
Jenny, Jenny followed, and they went out of sight
for five, ten, fifteen or so minutes
and while they were gone,
while they were gone, I thought,
I hope they're not too cold,
it's gotta be cold out there
but they came back, laughin',
they were laughin', Lisa Marie and what's 'er name,
Jenny, and I went down to see 'em
and I asked, are ya havin' fun,
I always asked, are ya havin' fun,
and Lisa Marie said yeah, and what's 'er name,
Jenny, Jenny said yeah
but in the picture I have, she's not in a golf cart,
she's on a horse, and in the picture
her hair is blowin' and I got worried,
worried she'd get leaves in her hair
but no leaves, no leaves in the picture
but she's wearin' a sweater so it must have been Fall
'cause it looks like it was cold out there.

A FEW COMMENTS ABOUT MY HEAD

I just want to say a few things about my head. I saw a picture of me with my brother and jeezus. What a big granite noggin! It's like . . . where did my contours go? I just have a straight wall of flesh bordered by hair and a neck. I look like I'm waiting for a sculptor: "Please come and carve me some cheekbones." God—I've got a head like a memorial marker. In the Quarter, there's a sign: "In 1836, French Lieutenant Bob's-Your-Uncle opened the first whorehouse. Alex Rawls' head is as large and square as this marker."

Where did this come from? My brother's head looks perfectly normal—inviting, even. His head says, "Hi, I'm a pleasant, interesting person." My head says, "Hi, I'm a cafeteria tray on the lam." I think my brother's head is more like my dad's—sort of egg-shaped, a little narrow, to the bone. That's the kind of head his dad had. Mine is long like theirs (imagine a longish egg), but fleshy like my mom's and her family's. There are times when a long fleshy thing is something to be devoutly wished for, but the brainpan is not one of those times. Didn't Shakespeare say that? Something to be devoutly wished for, or something like that? I'm not sure. Being an English instructor, I'm supposed to know these things, but a good policy, GRE test-takers and trivia buffs is: when in doubt, guess Shakespeare.

Anyway . . . that's all I wanted to say about my head. Tomorrow I know I'll think of more but that's all for now. In pictures, it looks awfully big and awfully flat. I hope it doesn't look like that in person, but I guess I'll never know. Now let's talk about puffy souvenir fridge magnets . . .

AMERICAN CAESAR

His forehead's undented, his torso unmarked,
his blood is safe in his veins. That night
he leapt like a marlin fighting the line,
but Iggy long ago slipped the hook, now
even his ghosts have to buy a ticket.
Sure, he challenged the lights,
and snarled like his fans
talked bad about his mother,
and with all his foes lacking guts to step up
the stage was now safe for rock and roll.
Between swings and kicks
in case someone stepped up,
Iggy high-fived the front row like he'd won the Series,
or found a twenty no one claimed.
You'd think he was the last man out of Viet Nam,
the survivor of the Donner party,
the junior partner doing lines
while down below, the World Trade Center, all
its hundred-plus stories,
exploded underneath him.

"4% PANTOMIME"

God is often seen in the complexity of Creation
but check this Band song:
only a cleric could see the design
behind this gorgeous, lurching mess.
Garth stabs, pokes and trills his organ like he just got it home
while Richard sings across Van Morrison,
colored by Johnny Walker and 3 a.m.,
answering poker questions with road blues.
Neither hears the other 'til they forget themselves
and succumb to the tide of the song,
but it works - credit Robbie,
who wishes he too lived
for sneaking out of lovers' windows
when the husband's keys are heard in the door,
for stealing bottles of Evan Williams
from the cheap dick who wouldn't pay them,
and staying afterhours, playing cards with off-duty waitresses,
winking at the brunette who catches him
dealing the bartender off the bottom
who's too drunkly infatuated to notice.
Richard could sit at the one table with its chairs down
listening to Bob Wills, Booker T and Sam Cooke on the jukebox
until the sun came up, then sleep
while Levon drove to the next town.

All this is in the wordless coda:
tongues were never so lovely.

Kay Murphy

THE MAN WHO HEARD VINCENT

If my suffering has any use, it is
not to the sufferer.

Sylvia Plath

Two a.m. two weeks before Christmas
four of us sat around the dining room
on the floor or ice chests,
my end-of-fall-semester party nearly over.
I feel no compulsion to recount
the condition of the room, left
by thirty or so, mostly students—
all my favorites—nor describe them,
although each now has become more
distinctly human, having drunk my liquor
and appraised my books and music.
But certain details of you demand attention:
How your beard was trimmed,
two white vees shaved
just under each side of the lower lip
like a photo of a Renaissance poet,
Sir Walter Ralegh, perhaps;
your hair pulled back with a rubber band,
a clean red shirt.
And wedged between the hairline
and the collar, the fleshy tape
covering the tube that drains your ear.

What use to others can individual
suffering conceivably be?

Anne Sexton

The mass appeared overnight,
apparent magnitude still a "mysterium"
of uncertain origin. The biopsy came back
bearing a red M: Not meant to mean Maybe
but Meaningless when what we need is Mercy.

I remember how earlier, in my rocker,

within arm's reach of the stereo's volume,
you rifled through my records,
took off another student's Stones cassette,
balanced American Pie over the turn table,
skipped the first two songs
and nudged the needle to "Vincent"
as if it were filled with some blissful narcotic
for the suffering.

No one knows where the end of
suffering will begin.

Nadine Gordimer

Although you said once we know each other
from another life,
you couldn't possibly know
how nearly twenty years ago—about your age now—
I'd just been released from the hospital
from another overdose—and my best friend
and I, drunk as you were that night,
played that same nostalgic verse for hours
just to hear how
the world was never meant
for one as beautiful...

Or how just this past birthday I sent her
a Van Gogh watch with a "Starry Night" face,
and she sent me a box of greeting cards
with that same dire message from a man
so mad to believe he sent his own ear
to receive it.
And when Nothing came back
he went out at night and painted the stars.

I stepped outside at one point with the smokers;
the air so still the haze hung between us
and what stars are visible in the city;
no Magellanic clouds although
the moon was veiled, like a bandage,
and I knew the next time I looked
it would be a slice or two smaller.
The only thing that resembled the painting
was the talk smoking at the end of another cigarette.

At the end of my suffering
there was a door

Louise Glück

So, my bloody bearded Vincent,
my Renaissance man with one good ear
scrubbed by moonlight prepared for surgery,
I pray that you're set free
from the schizophrenia of those stars,
even though before this season's over we'll feel
the old spiralling despair at least once
when not a star in the sky is worth reaching
as they roil over us
like a swirl of existential paint
that won't wash off after the world's surgery
on the beautiful.
That's why, Oh starry night,
Oh holy stolen lines from those who suffer,
now we understand, we don't want to die,
we want to flap our lives wildly
in the midst of such glorious light,
as madmen often do.
As those who paint the stars with such love must.

THOSE ART DECO DAYS

When Lesbians swing in high fashion.
Oh, we Erte posters roll thin!
Our forks sea snail tiny
our napkins dressed like shells.

Silk from our Egyptian hair to black razor seams,
we're Aztecs dropped from another century,
fingernail red and fringed.
We know our Isadora.

Our skirts slit to places of no return,
shoes stacked like cards in a game of canasta
shuffle to Moonlight Serenade.

Saturday night jump at the Savoy
we sip Flamingoes.
We dream with the fish in the Bluebird Ballroom
and sleep in each other's sequins.

As lime neon lights flame Tex's sax,
our thighs make a mess of fresh lipstick
and a forty piece orchestra can't outfox us.

Maxine Cassin

AUTUMNAL

Here in a sunlit reading room
tall plants lean over my shoulder.
I say I am not going back
to repeat the same mistakes,
but all the way to the station
my carry-all drags me down.
Like Persephone I must go
where sunlight cannot follow.
As I leave, I watch carefully
a landscape strewn with dried leaves,
the stalks of flowers—
each image I take into the underworld
where there is a darkroom already
        prepared
for each negative I bring,
each bottle labeled with its expiration
        date.

DANDELION

Each year it takes longer to be sure
that the mane of this flower-weed is carried
upward
on the wind's current toward the place
where wishes may be granted.
A child, age two, is not quite sure
what to make of this strange ritual
that interrupts our walk. He takes the bare
stalk
in his small hand and asks for another

on which to blow, as I have done,
the crown of this thistle dissolved by my wish
which was more for him—not so much my own—
that he may stand on this earth, full-grown,

and remember how the sun made his shadow lengthen
into manhood—a time in which he, too, shall
resurrect
odd customs with his own spirit's breath
among wildflowers that separate the stones.

CZESLAW MILOSZ

Each time I hear your words
or read them to myself, my lips moving
imperceptibly,
I see a furrow that runs across scorched
earth
matching the one etched upon my brow.

And each time I repeat your words
there is a deepening of that furrow.
Seeds drill into the earth and into memory
as rain falls quietly.

One morning I notice how many seedlings
have sprouted
overnight. Their separation will lead
to a bountiful harvest
sown by your litany which moved me
out of myself into this landscape
where each ploughshare is reminded
of its existence as a sword.

CANARIES

for Vassar

If they locked us up we would chirp all day—
two dimestore birds suspended in a cage,
our cuttle-bone and mirrors rarely used.
If they carried us together to the mines,
we'd warn each other of the air's abuse
without succumbing—perhaps the slightest swoon.
All space sways to a song. The sun made certain
our feathers glisten with her brightest hues.
Even in earth's entrails where fires congeal—
your paean of worship, somewhat dove-like
sound
make echoes—until one who brings us crumbs
lowers above our heads night's printed hood
as twittering subsides beneath the ground.

A BOUQUET FROM ST. MARTINVILLE

The cat has not eaten the flowers yet.
This morning they are still intact.
Soon I will change the water both for flowers
and for cat

who are wholly oblivious how I protect
them from thirst and from each other.
Visitors who bring flowers leave us
this responsibility—this bother

which beauty always is, to make a special
place
for it somewhere in our lives—
a shrine in which we may reflect
that though it fades, it leaves

its after-image hidden behind our eyes'
inner lid untouched by claws
and watered only by our tears
without which every vision dies.

DEAR EMILY,

perhaps it was your good fortune—ours, too—
that the world never wrote to you.
Imagine your mailbox crammed to the hilt
with campaign circulars and bills.
Imagine all those letters penned,
including new verses by a friend
to whom eventually you must tell
the truth as kindly as you can:
"This bears revision here and there.
A line omitted will improve
such intimations of pure love."

Suppose you wrote in tutored hand
what correspondence will demand,
then found no forwarding address
for a world that failed to manifest.

"WILLINGNESS TO STUMBLE IN LEARNING"

Today we will all begin the perfect poem
in this classroom without windows.
We will scratch holes in paper with erasers
and hand in our seatwork when the bell rings.

I will think very hard of how to say something
to you
and discover you are clearer, more direct
in your inexperience. I will praise carefully

the shyest girl in the class or the most disruptive
boy.
The boldest student always asks, "Read us your
poem, please."
Tomorrow—I promise—I will do exactly that.

But then the door too has suddenly disappeared
into a solid wall of crayon drawings
through which the children pass easily into a
schoolyard

of river sand made concave under swings.
Boys come back in yellow slickers smelling of
Spring rain.
My poem, I tell them, is hanging in the cloak
room.

ENCOUNTER WITH NANCY

This January noon as I lift toward the light
a bottle of Golden Sherry,
I hear a voice that questions in the aisle,
"Is this the poetry lady?"
I turn to see and down that aisle comes Nancy,
God-fearing Nancy, for whom true poetry
resounds like hymns she reads aloud each Sunday.

I acknowledge who I am quite sheepishly—
put down the Sherry, choose the Dubonnet
and think "apperitif" and then "cherchez
le vin"—Dry Sauvignon or Beaujolais.
How many others have tried to savor names
more than the grape? "Madeira, Chardonnay."

My own grandfather prayed at Nancy's age,
Kiddush cup in hand, sublimed at sundown:
"Bo-ray p'ree ha-gaf-fen," Blessed be the fruit of
the vine.
Now labels blur and echoes blind in time.

I call to Nancy from this poet's aisle,
but she's moving farther down in her own search
for dear Necessity. This is no church,
she knows. The Muse must guide
which nectar, gold or tawny, to imbibe.

"The poetry lady" with overflowing heart
crosses the line as glass doors open wide,
discharging her and her whole rattling cart
to chilling winds of anonymity.

2901 II

The dog is baying though there is no moon
and the neighbors upon whom you have taken this
ultimate vengeance
call you that crazy white woman in the corner house,
the house where I once warbled, another doomed Lucia,
or dredged up an Ophelia, weighted down by flowers.
The tradition of madness goes with the territory
at no extra charge
for divas who have chosen to survive among those
whom you daily perplex with your pallor under the sun,
whose children you address in an uncommon speech,
from whom you demand both literacy and well-scrubbed
hands
as you threaten each new affront with invisible police—
thoughts high-pitched enough to set dogs howling.
Deep within each brain the unmediated scent
of otherness encoded before birth
sounds its shrill alert so blithely ignored
in your preoccupations. Once the moon grows full
blood rises with the tide to flow from open wounds
in one dark red stream of undeniable color.

Phanuel Egejuru

SEE IT ALL WHEN YOU DIE

Open your eyes and take in the world:
Life's surprises and juicy gossips,
Tabloids loaded with tales of horror—
I saw a cat with human face who
Lived with a man of catly grin.
I saw one skeleton giving birth
A litter of seven bald head men.
I saw the earth move under
The feet of sphinx to bare the
Guilded bosom of mummied pharaohs.
I saw the wetlands suck up the
Waters and spit out acid rain.
I saw the rain forest marching to the desert
And the desert flowing with oil and gold.
I saw the lady who turned into a man
And back to a lady and back to a man.
I saw a hole beyond the moon, it wasn't the lady's eye.
I saw a Virginian marry his mother
He wasn't Oedipus, she called him lover.
These tales are dubious, they make me wonder but
Here, some truths to rinse my mouth:
The little Cameroon in a recent game
Defeated Brazil the king of soccer.
The proverb said it long ago:
"Never you say you've seen it all
Till you are dead and laid to rest."

IHE KWURU, IHE AKWUDEBE YA

Nothing stands alone,
Ihu kwuru, ihe akwudebe ya.
A bowl of foo-foo stands beside a bowl of soup.
Happiness stands beside sadness,
Good health stands beside illness
Life stands beside death.
Man stands beside woman,
Chi stands beside Eke,
Earth stands beside Sky, but
One egg holding all, sits aloof
On its head, throwing all out of balance.
Nothing stands alone,
Ihe kwuru, ihe akwudebe ya.

COCK AND MOON STORY

We had planned to travel with the moon
Who broke her soup pot the night before.
We knew she would linger longer
Picking up pieces of her broken pot,
So we sprawled on our mats trusting the
Wake-up call to the laughter of partridges.
Jolted from slumber we heard instead
The spiteful hooting of the dreadful owl.
We hastened to journey with the slow footed moon
Now quickening her steps to escape from the cock.
But hear! the cock crows, the moon stops
Frozen in her brightness, caught in her stride.
We slackened our steps for the pre-dawn darkness
Will not come to swallow the moon.

Notes on the poems

These three poems come from "Poetic Proverbs and Myths," a segment of my poetry titled *The Book of Proverbs and Other Poems*. In "Poetic Proverbs and Myths," I simply selected a few Igbo proverbs and myths and poeticized them, just as western poets (of old) did with their history, myth and legends.

"See It All When You Die" is an Igbo saying: "He who has not finished his stay on Earth, should never say that he has seen it all." The poem alludes to a few tabloid "incredibles" and actual events and facts as samples of life's endless surprises.

"Ihe Kwuru, Ihe Akwudebe Ya" literally means, "wherever something stands, something else stands next to it" (to provide support or balance). This is an Igbo proverb that captures the essence of Igbo philosophy of duality. In the poem, the "one egg holding all" (the globe or world) defies the law of duality by sitting aloof, and the result is that it lands on its head and throws everything out of balance. Does that say something about "life is upside down"?

"Cock and Moon Story" is an Igbo myth that explains the phases and durations of moon light. A week before the moon completely disappears from the sky to reappear as a new moon, it stays shining till the early hours of the morning. When that happens, the people say that the cock has captured the moon. The moon is supposed to disappear before the second cock crow. However, if she is slow she will not make it. Then the cock bars her way and holds her captive till morning. In a world of no electricity, people plan their activities around the rising and setting of the sun, the moon and the stars. Quite often animals and birds form part of the timing mechanism through the intervals and frequencies of their cry, moan, cooing, calls and even laughter as in the case of partridges.

At full moon, when the moon shines her brightest, she is said to have broken her soup pot, therefore she needs all the light she can get to see and pick up the broken pieces of her pot. Again the people profit from the light to do other chores after the evening meal—going to the stream, weaving baskets, visiting friends and relatives in other villages.

Phanuel Egejuru

Jim McCormick

THE HAMMER

A weight bench, radio and the night air
were ready to be summer noises,
and I, bare-chested in the garage,
took to scrambling in my dad's workbench
for the big or sharp off-limits tools.

I'd seen a sledge hammer
knocking out fence boards
I carried into piles.

Later, after a snack and an hour of TV
I went to bed listening
to his laughter over M*A*S*H.

Then, hours, maybe, later, quiet.
I pulled the stolen now-cold steel from under my bed,
sat with my feet on the floor and thought
in here is too small.
Past the bathroom's flush chorus,
the pendulum (nothing heavy clicks that way)
and the baby's room I walked into the foyer.

And conjuring all the nails and boards
from the fence out back, and the back of my father
bent over his thing as a father,
a husband, a fence knocker-downer,
I put my hands round that long wood
and swung like an on-deck batter.
No drop, no walking, just hurling
in the dark what space I could find
to say, me, father, hammer.

SPARROWS FOR CATHEDRALS

God's loves have gone wild with horses, donkeys,
and are riding centaurs well past sundown.
Envelopes already may contain
what is written in the year 2000

by a man listening to Mozart's 20th
and bent on the a.m., a morning wrought with tugboats
tied against the wharf, the sound of heaviness, in fact,
moving. If we had everything, the open roads

like legs gone weak in the running and resolved
to take their rest this way, if we had gold,
would the calendars pull down for the moment hung
translucent? Could we swim through it and prove

the stars no end? Would we bring with us
Mozart for children in long hours, sparrows
for cathedrals? Would beauty not suffice
for what drawn-out carriages a thought might contain

only to discover they've circled?

THE ROACH SONNET

I woke to find a roach's leg in bed with me:
its jagged crick to a knee, its forked foot.
It was a bait delicious with creature.
Did frogs knock on my window?
Were crickets and ants in my hair
watching me for some mutation
before the night ended?
Like farmers round a meteor
they might have gathered themselves.

But earlier, while typing a sonnet,
I thought the roach knew
how it stood under the ribbon.
Having crawled from under the lamp
my grandmother bought with S&H green stamps
and under the keys for ROACH,
the roach stood for minutes in the small,
black frame where a key hits.
How many others had done this,
and what stir in its crooked
brittle legs brought this lasting
shell to the edge? A Zarathustra
screaming, "Fuck you man. I am Cockroach."

THE KING AND I

If for once I could do it like the King,
bellied over in a hotel lobby,
full of reds and sweat in a sequined suit
of polyester blend, wing tipped and bell-
bottomed in photos all the world would see,
well! I'd dress differently.
Having given my mom a house and car,
we'd be alike in ways you wouldn't think.
A guitar strapped across my back,
I jumped the Amtrak years ago,
and joined these boys' rock 'n' roll.
The building where we practice has no air conditioner
so we run fans all night.
When a few tight songs have gone around,
there comes a gut-loosening haunt
that rides the heads of toms and snare.
I wouldn't say a thing to them, though,
even if I were the King.
These songs are loud enough.
It's on the nights you say nothing
that you get it just right.
There's no way to know
that groove's coming up,
a fat star rising in the marquee's light.

Doug MacCash

VERY HOT FOR A PENGUIN

It's about ten past nine,
May 22,
1934.
Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow
are driving their big Ford
down this two lane highway
in Bienville Parish
Louisiana.
Clyde's hands
are on the wheel.
His eyes are on the road.
Bonnie's eating
a bacon and tomato sandwich
for breakfast.
She says,
Clyde, I heard that John Dillinger's
penis
was a yard long
and as big around as a fence post
and when they killed him,
Clyde,
they cut his penis off
and now it's in a jar of formaldehyde
in Washington D.C.
in J. Edgar Hoover's office.
Your penis,
Clyde,
She says
is about as long
and as big around
as a Lucky Strike cigarette.
And she laughs.

What? Clyde says.
He wasn't listening.
He was thinking about
this movie he saw back in Joplin Missouri
where this bunch of little kids

finds a penguin
that has escaped from the circus.
The penguin
is wearing a little top hat
and carrying a cane
and the kids think
that the penguin
is a real person.

You remember, Bonnie says,
how you used to like to stick
your little penis
into Henry Jones
in the back seat
while I drove?
And how sometimes
you made that poor boy bawl
like a baby,
Clyde?
And him bein' such a slow minded thing
to begin with.
You should be ashamed.

Clyde remembers
that the cops were after
the penguin
and that the kids
tried to hide it out.
They dressed it up
in little girl's clothes
and took it to school
just like it was one of them.

And that's what was going on
in the car
when Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow
were ambushed
by Parish Deputies
and state police.
Suddenly
there were holes in the windshield,
there were holes in the radiator.

A hole in Clyde's neck
sprayed blood all over the seat.

Bonnie thought about
opening the car door.
She thought about
jumping out into the ditch.
But by this time,
she was so full of holes
that she didn't move.
She thought about
the sky
and the low clouds
and how she wanted to reach up
and grab the clouds
and pull herself up
to heaven,
heaven with angels.
But the angels she imagined
were tiny things,
no bigger than horse flies
with cellophane wings
and the feet and hands of monkeys
and the tails of fence lizards
and the faces
of people
like this gas station attendant
that Bonnie shot through the eye
for no real reason
while he was cleaning the back window
and a sheriff in Kansas
and a grocery store clerk
and Clyde's brother Buck who bled to death.

Clyde thought about
how the cops finally found
the penguin
and took him to the circus
to his owner
a fat man
with a curly moustache.
And how,
in the last scene,

the penguin and the fat man
walk down a boulevard
between palm trees.
Clyde thinks
that must have been in Hollywood.
In California.
Clyde thinks,
it must be very hot for a penguin
to be in a movie
in California.
It must be
very hot for a penguin
very hot for a penguin
very hot for a penguin

Donna Glee Williams

THE RESCUE

So, there's this guy, in a dungeon, a gray stone dungeon, in a gray stone castle, surrounded by blank boring walls and a moat. A square sort of castle, like in Ireland—boring, very square, with walls—or a slightly more interesting castle, like on the German river mountains, with some complications to it, whimsy and a wide variety of towers and themes, with the gray sort of misty and blue.

At any rate, stone, and there's this guy in there—you know he's in there—but he's all locked up, so you besiege the joint. You camp on the hills around the castle and your campfires glow real pretty at night so he could see them if he looked out, but of course HE'S LOCKED UP, so you parade around the walls a bunch of times blowing on trumpets and trombones, but he doesn't hear you maybe, because the walls on some of these old bastions are thirty feet thick. So you march around a couple more times, just to make sure, but he can't come out and play—BECAUSE HE'S LOCKED UP—so then there's the dynamite and you drill a couple of long deep ones into the base of the walls, a few here and a few around on the other side, and you slip the stuff in and wire those babies up, and then you back off a little bit with your hands on the detonator, because YOU ARE GOING TO RESCUE THAT SON OF A GUN if it kills you, and KABOOM!

and there you are,

turning over rocks,

looking for that man you came to save.

Lisa Mednick

HOMELANDS

In sunlight,
You show your colors like a poppy
On wet grass

I flash like a piece of broken glass
On asphalt

In the ruins, you arch giant stones
Back into place,
Plan for better days, stronger structures

While I wonder how bricks were broken,
Who suffered here,
And for how long.

COLUMBUS DAY

Arrogant as Columbus,
You discover me.
Well, I have news.
I was already here,
Colonized, feeding the world.
Who are you to trick me into a change?
Civilisation conquers,
Dissipates aboriginal essence,
Takes away song,
And, with the flick of a switch
Edges fire off the map.
Rudely lights up the night,
So spirits, waiting to travel,
Sit frozen in unnatural light.
On what road, in whose headlamps
Has love become stone,
Paralyzed in its unsteady flight to our hearts?

Linda Quinlan

TWELVE

In the daylight hours
the doll and I
have cheeks as pink
as Ipana toothpaste.

She wears tightly meshed panties
stapled to her waist.
My hair is pulled back
in a ponytail.

She comes alive at night
in that moment just after sleep
and calls out my middle name,
Christine, that part of me that's in between

I am twelve
and hold a sword
made from left over shims—
and skin my knees
trying not to fall between the cracks
on the sidewalk.

With bandaged knees
I let my body play with rainbows
that shoot sun onto the dirt
from the garage windows.
I call them eye-loves to myself.

On Sunday drives I sit between mom and dad
singing whatever lines I can remember
and trying to make the endings last.

Mother wipes my face with spit
after ice cream
and guards for drips with her hands.
My lips lose control
like they've missed a kiss.

I can't sleep now
and my head falls on her lap.
She will shadow my face
from the sun.
My doll lies on the seat burning.

All my dolls are stuffed
in the back of the closet.
I got caught climbing trees again,
and I am beginning to understand
that the eye-love season is changing.

IF WISHES WERE HORSES

for Dad

I wash the summer from my hands
leave my garden
too alive to eat
and remember the way
whole chickens
looked like babies
in your hands.

No one spoke too loudly
in our house
not even
when the duck you wounded
limped past the rifle
that summer
when our dinner
became a pet
or when you searched
the yard
for nightcrawlers
and I shivered in bed
afraid
hoping you'd catch them
whoever they were.

Worms turned into fish
I was sure
and I watched
your red and white bobber
disappear under water.
I leaned over the pier
looking for the change
and wondered
just then
if your wishes
could kill.

FAMILY

for Sean

You ran on the beach naked
sand filled blonde hair
longer than mine
planted candy kisses
on the top of castles
the tide never reached
and blended with the dunes
skin and sand.

Inside the house
books flew
from bookshelves
dishes slammed across counters
and loud words
reached the sea wall
just beyond where you played.

He rocked for days
after that
in grandma's chair
bandaged wrists
on his lap
and I opened the window
hoping he'd jump
screaming for him to jump
but he sat and sat
stared me away.

Your jelly smile called
from a crumb-covered bed—
When you brag to your friends
about your mother's radical past,
Will you remember
it took me years to leave.

Nancy R. Watkins

AS IF EATING BREAKFAST ALONE WERE NOT ENOUGH

The text refers to proteins that do not conform
to those configurations already described,
once pinned, fixed and crystallized,
as "random," "disordered."

Resonating, they whip and flash about
inviolable
before our skillful hands,
our acquisitive technologies,
their absolute and necessary forms
unfathomed because unseen.

We analyze, calculate, devise vague systems
still jealous of those mysteries
which leave us floundering
behind equipment and our masks—
name-calling, rather than admitting
what we do not know:
that transition state
wherein each separate thing
disrobes and offers up its shape
to dance, illustrious, and still unnamed.

I am merely one of those animals
whose thumb and fingers oppose
whose brain, on less fuzzy days
goes its own extraordinary and exhausting ways,
leaving me behind, blank and breathless,
incredulous at its play,

but then, who's around to see?
who remarks our labors, notes our ways,
who quantifies our gains? who calls *what* progress?

I would rather all these things—
animals, proteins and elemental forms—
keep their coats, their skins intact

continue their shape-shifting
without my sights trained on them,
courting their treasured tusks and genes.

I would rather see
straight through the molecular miasma
gaining access to an inner flux
where fragmentation is an arcane thought,
and find myself in revels
where oscillating molecules coalesce
and fly apart,
dance tangos, the samba
an occasional minuet,
even do a little sky-diving

and, spinning like dervishes,
dare us to discern their forms from rhythmic lunacies.

I would rather look beneath all surfaces
peer past the flesh, the osseous parts
past the protein's cavity, in which
its active site's sequestered,
look further than the flipping elements
destabilized by NMR,
bypass the weight and heft of things
to behold illuminations of the mind's best work,
impressions we may find in dreams
and cannot guess or fix or know—
where transitions yield dimensionless topologies.

I would see with embryonic eye
as substances turn back into themselves
where waves push back and through themselves
retreating from the shore—
where thought resorbs
and evolution involutes
and all participants devolve

and then, as tides shift
and things, pulled back
begin to reassemble, until they resemble
what we recognize,
we, in our random and patterned ways,
can address such issues as:

how to dress
when to wake and choose to sit
in early dawn
and watch the cat go out into
a lifting dark—

All these random arms of life
invisible to us
continue reaching toward appointed places
in nature's strange ceremonies—

we'd be lost without this game, as lost
as when we no longer name ourselves,
the things we do or feel, or even wear.

Who'll take this coat from off my back
and, turning it inside out,
show me all my other bodies it can fit?

Sophia Stone

FROM AN EXPRESSIONIST PAINTING

Her labor started, a woman lies
on a bed in a tilted sepia room,
her legs pulled up, neck arched.
One braid falls in her armpit.
Her hands, reaching behind her, grip
the apron of a blue table underneath
a pile of folded laundry covered
with bright, schematic designs, like flags.
The sheet under her thighs, her mound
of green dress is smudged red.
Her head turns toward the window or toward
the empty, multi-colored chair,
no one coming yet through the open
door, the blue night air
flecked with burnt orange stars.

No, that's a pony under the windowsill,
lime, lavender, rose chintz,
its back rounded into haunches, its legs
holding to the steep floor. And she
is looking at it. Her hands, palm up,
hold a soft, uneven stack
of dreams, the blue ones draped over
her fingers. The dreams are marked with emblems
the pony, its pale green eyes
turned shyly away, has offered
to interpret. The pony wants to tell her
the umber streaks are train tracks, licked
out toward the sky's edge,
their loads already borne away;
the almond-colored rectangle is the evening
paper a woman folds seated
upstairs at the one lit window
in a dark block; and the wedge of gray
a church, its stone doorway carved
with wide-eyed saints, their long fingers
raised in explanation of their visions.
But she is not listening, her attention

inward on her own hard rhythms—
although she would tell the pony, if
she could speak, how grateful she feels
for its small body's radiant colors.
They are, as it is, language enough.

SHORTLY AFTER HIS DEATH IN 1344, THE PAINTER SIMONE MARTINI VISITS HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW IN SIENA

Last month, I wrote to Simon at Avignon:
When you return to the studio, you'll find us ignoring
the present vulgar fashion—Madonna and Child,
saints painted round and fleshy. Our forms
are all spirit, thin as foil. And still
they sell in some parishes. My sister replied.
Simon was dead before my words arrived.

But now, is not this shape at my graying window
his? Below, in the street, a woman has appeared
from a doorway shadow, thrown water onto the dark
paving stones so they glimmer faintly a moment.
She lifts her head. Simon turns to me.
"I still observe faces," he says, "the way
we did as apprentices. You recall the young

"Woman I painted so often, the one we saw
scything in a field beside the road to Livorno
once—with the soft mouth, the skin that seemed
cool even in the glare, the dust. She might have been
fifteen." He looks away. "You know, I lost
count of the times I used her for saints, the Holy
Virgin," he says. "Your favorite was my last

"rendering of her. I never told you the agony
I felt painting it. The Florentine technique
was new then. Every studio was experimenting.
I, too, added depth of field, weight to my figures,
a certain naturalness of pose. (I remember
your disapproval!) Then, in one design,
I allowed the Infant to caress that face.

"At once, I saw what I had done—indulging
my mortal weakness for that girl with the symbols
of God's majesty! Before I left
for Avignon, I rehearsed the old, linear
gestures of the Byzantines, the restraint
of Master Guido, Master Duccio.
Then, as a penance, I attempted her again:

"a Virgin and Child, weightless, attentuated.
I inclined her head so the haloes merged this time
in the gold field of heaven. I mixed gold
with the Child's red sleeve to resemble the dawn
sky." He lifts a transparent hand toward
the window where the sky blooms pink
over the dark crenellated city wall

and the woman has disappeared. "I painted her mantle
the blue of night, clasped its hem in the Child's
fingers, let Him draw it across her breast.
My hand trembled with every stroke of the brush.
Lippo," he tells me, reaching out, almost
lost in the clear light, "there are no painters
of the spirit." Birds are calling now. "The body
is all," he is saying, "listen to me, is all."

Nancy C. Harris

LEARNING TO FISH WITH CRICKETS

for Peggy Ranson

I could handle worms I think
as my whole Walt Disney childhood
flashes back my dreams
& now Jiminy Cricket's gullet
cartoons between my thumb
& forefinger with indescribable
ooze. I get used
to it & begin catching fish:
just little ones at first
neptuned souls filleting through
my hand-of-god palms
mostly slippery pumpkin seeds
who glisten with celebration
glamorous orange & turquoise
manifestations.

the postcard sunset puts glares
on the photographs
we will have developed
when we return to the city.
tunnels of light bathe our
caught cricket/caught fish attitudes
in outraged beatitudes of barbarism:
I shudder with my hand in the cricket basket
feeling like an insect nazi or god.
I ask forgiveness & give them
a mental sermon on survival of the fittest
while the chorus of cricket voices
does not move me.

I change tack & think:

in China
upsidedown children
croon to pet crickets
they honor in elaborate cages
crafted bamboo mansions
to show off:
animated eyes worship them,
hearts chirp.

in China
dog is a great delicacy.

Michael Presti

From SEVEN ACCIDENTS

White Jag Accident

What was it, owner, that you owned and how much did it, the wheels and all, the industrial guts, cost you?

You were heading somewhere, calendar open in your lap, shine on your face. Not on the job, not just yet, but moving toward it. This exit, don't miss!

Those black guys in the line-marking truck don't really exist!

Wow, your Jag is suddenly a convertible! That's an expensive auto, but you got the job done right! Shave and a haircut!

Just think if you hadn't owned this car, or had left home a bit earlier or later, or hadn't married for love, or hadn't sired three of the most beautiful dark children in the world.

What appointment was it you looked down into was wrong?

From SEVEN ACCIDENTS

Dream/Memory Accident

I imagine something like this:

A cough drop dream, you had a choice between the Red and the Black, two boxes, all from a Southern Baptist perspective, we understand. Good day, young man, you got the croup, you got sin, now these can't taste *too* good, but there's hope for *all* sinners.

But the drops weren't enough and no one understood they were lying and it was chosen for you.

You, after all, were delirious and dreaming deep into your death of the years you would wear the beard and the pipe juice you would impress into the beard, the crunchy peanut butter you would rake out of the beard, at least at first, and you tried to talk your brother into changing your name. The entire congregation knew about you and would worry about sin of your mad liquid laughter. Your daddy, after all, had their number: 44.

The first shot of Scotch held a black lozenge in the bottom of the glass ("to make it palatable" she explained) and under the stem her pink fingers and balanced her other palm open with three white tablets ("to loosen the cough and bring the phlegm up," said both folks) after the grandmother after the physician, Frenchman, Moor, Egyptian. You were, what, nine? Oops! What foul unruly chemistry keyed in?

Mom and Pop! Mistake mistake!

They died: he died, she died, unbelievably close together, a bit later. This must be the late Fifties, Sputnik, Natalie Wood and, a century before, Sidney Lanier. What did you do then? You wrote, went on to a higher school, read *Ulysses* and *Huck Finn*.

I don't know, much of this is fabricated. Let's rush ahead.

You were still alive, drunk, we met, we confabulated, we drank, you continued drunk until you thought drink would thumb out your eyes and kill your reading by eyes and force the kin of the thumb to read for you.

You quit your long several glasses of Scotch for months until you discovered you were informed incorrectly, you bought bifocals and wore them around your neck with a black elastic band with tiny metal pincers at each end.

Then you were drunk again for another few years and it may have killed your writing, we don't know yet, that's yet to be seen, but, brother, it sure cured you.

And I've lost touch with just about everything I imagine.

From SEVEN ACCIDENTS

Home Truth Accident

Today we await rendezvous
with Great Neptune, as distant as
the ivories, this morning, or you.

We crave specificity.

Pestilence hunkers abroad
from above and below, an aside:

All of us palm powder
in propitiation, pleas for money
blood, air, less from above, please.

Oceans bloom with smothering life.
Whales ram one another
shredding jawbones

driving shards into nasal
veins, death not instant at all
replayed zillions

of times. Oh, Gas Giant God!
Ideas spill out like black shit.
Oops, what is this?

I throw coins for the next word
in the future world: not
"seven ," not "one." More "minus."

EVERETTE MADDOX IN HEAVEN

> Of a damp day, my heartless shipmates even used to stand up against me, so powerful was the capillary attraction between this luckless jacket of mine and all drops of moisture. I dripped like a turkey aroasting, and long after the rain storms were over, and the sun showed his face, I still stalked a Scotch mist; and when it was fair weather with others, alas! it was foul weather with me.
>
> Herman Melville, *White Jacket*

> Why? What For?
>
> Everette Maddox, in conversation

1.

I'm cracking spectral knuckles
over spectral keys (my finger bones
ivory swizzle sticks)

after the long Louisiana layoff
with no Hank and no green:
still, an American block.

Let me tell you at first it felt like, well, shit
I was smothered in a crawling mayonnaise
even in my navel and anus, old fundament

rank, bitter as pipe juice in the beard
two mornings after, not white at all
black black and curdled stinking and slithering, organic.
And I hated mayonnaise, especially mayonnaise.

I once made my former friend Mike Presti return
a burger he bought that skinny carnal me
when some Burger Blackout waif didn't wing it my way
which was mainly no mayonnaise, in life as in art.

Well, I was wrong I'm dead ready to tell you.
Here I am, a soul bright and shiny as a mint tin penny
and I feel real good about mayonnaise, too

but real stuff only, eggs and all, now it's ceased
to set once pencil-thin guts a-doodle for days.

It's true, I know I don't sound myself anymore
but I gained pounds, my breath is deep and free
digestion regular and esophagus clear.

I still need a drink, though, please
something soft clean and light
like here where it is what I am

like a white
evanescent seltzer
over Ice.

2.

I mused today over several small blocks
cut from a polished tusk I've inherited here
in a brown horn box with a brass hasp.

I finally remembered
the ideogram for the elephant
for the rain and the ash.

Incidentally, I know now I wasn't Chinese
and never wore the monkey mask.

Isn't it miraculous how things drop firmly into place
once you're dead and have met your God?

You realize, nothing about us actually interests Him.
God can do anything, it's true, even deny

with impunity He's bored
even convince Himself He isn't
even not be.

Not long after the fires released me
I circled Heaven in the Jesus Saucer .
My blue lonesome road beyond this life crossed with God's.

He rose above what seemed an infinite horizon
just down the block from the Steak and Egg Kitchen.

God's a Great White Star, CineRama spectacles on.

A closeup of the One and Only God: we see
a red lens and a blue lens, except with God

these are really His holy eyeballs, nyuk, nyuk
'cause God's a Card!

The rest of Him, slick sheen of porcelain skin
as white as old white Ahab's bones

of no more than nanonuclear thickness
under the oily nosepiece.

(He tells me Ahab blubbered at the end.)

There's the crux in which nothing's impossible
here in the cradle of gauze.

God after all prefers colored cellophane
to that clear newfangled polarized polymer.
He's your Fifties kinda Guy.

(An example: Given the choice
between the works of Arch Obler or Orson Welles
God raises an eyebrow and snorts.)

That's about how God is, God love 'Im!
He's the last holdout for fireside radio

and I'm Your Gangbuster, God
Your glowing boy.

3.

Alive, inebriated naysayer
amphora gunk blacking my humid beard

emaciated host to the sunken underworld
of the Confederate Maritime Museum
and wet bar verse, last minimum employs.

Dead, I'm a trillion years out in every direction now
and everyone I know is dead and risen each to a Heaven.

And the world dead as well, subsumed in the sun
and the race sailed elsewhere, relinquishing their dead
rising to meet their dead.

And I ramble along alone, old tumbling tumbleweed
aloft on a Country Western wind:

Onetime human tenant of municipal dumpsters
down and broken for good at last in Carrollton Station

lump in the gullet, vomit in the lungs
vapors in the nose.

Prick in ineffable bloom
a rose.

Irvin Walter Christopher

FROM THE SEA BY ALL BELOVED

The cold mist of this March afternoon dissuades
The sea gulls from flight. They perch on pilings,
The benches and tables here, or stalk about,
Prospecting along the path for edibles, cocking
Their black eyes toward us expectantly, or huddle
Fluffed against the damp on one leg. The twin
Bridges march straight-legged out into the fog
Toward Santa Rosa Island, the traffic noise
Baffled by the fog, elongated, fuzzed. A sailboat
Glides out of the small harbor a quarter-mile
Down the shore, sails furled, mast bare,
The chugging of its outboard vaguely audible.
We wager on other sailboats out in the gray: whether there
But not seen, or seen but not there. Past the shoals,
The sailboat turns away toward Escambia Bay,
Mist smothering the motor sounds, scumbling the silhouette.
We watch into the fog like sailors, casting the lead,
Worrying over outdated charts, navigating by touch.

Catharine Savage Brosman

SAGUACHE

Leaving my father and his riverboats
back in Montreal, my sisters—buried
when the winds of scarlet fever blew,
or dead before they lived—and iron-
hard winters in the convent, eating

pea soup mostly, with the starched-
souled nuns, I bring my ruined lungs
and what is left of girlhood, among
the Colorado hills, here to Saguache—
breathing for them all, from the arid

blue. What dream inhabits me, a bird
beating toward its flight? Sometimes,
when the light of exile crackles over
snow, or plays through summer clouds,
uncertain tears explore my eyes, as if

this body were the river I remember,
and indentured to familiar darkness.
How can I forget the sound of French,
my father's ships on the St. Lawrence,
homing whistles shaking the cold air,

and footfalls over stone at evening?
How can one take another's sacrifice
like bread? Still, it has become my
substance, life feeding on the pain
of love, as flesh on flesh. Desires

ply my river now like every woman's,
making me wonder at myself without
reason, or wish for a man to see me,
when the wind at dark combs the aspen,
and the moon falls white upon my face.

ARTICHOKES

A waxen table ornament, perhaps, a sculptor's
dream—a partner to a pinecone or a pineapple?
or *mutatis mutandis*, a sea urchin, banished
from its element, and taking on the unfamiliar
shade of forests? No, this is an artichoke,
and edible (they say)—which I must eat, or so
it would appear, since it adorns a plate before
me, with a vinaigrette. Didn't Breton farmers

hurl these things at the police, in the late
peasant wars, rivaling the farce of Rabelais?
One might do worse as weapons, for, I think,
these, more than the sensual fruit of Solomon,
look and feel like a grenade—and may explode,
for all I know. Learning from my neighbor's
savoir-faire, I peel away the leaves, layered
like a set of Chinese boxes, and put a razor

edge on my incisors, for scraping with aplomb,
as far as possible, the meager pulp. Discarded
toothtorn foliage collects. Is this a crime,
a *lèse-Nature*, to strip such ornamental shapes,
such symmetry, for little nourishment, to waste
the copious grace of summer fields? Or rather,
should we honor prodigality of green, abundant
beyond use? A final leaf, and I have reached

the void of things, the emptiness within—but
no! for at the core, and verdant as an early
morning light, one finds unmasked a vulnerable
flesh, a candor hidden like my own—the garden
in the fortress that prevails against the world
until one rips away—a hunger of the palate,
of the heart—that pithy armor which preserves
the tenderness a careless lover would consume.

MUSHROOMS

Clouds tearing in the wind, and stones
grinding upon stones in reason's caves,
as the earth is ground down to winter,
and these late children are delivered—
dwarves soft as a tongue—from a womb

of rotting leaves. In the tree bones,
birds collect like sores; the hooves
of animals rooting through the shadow
trample down the humid lungs of soil.
Age has made me hungry; jawing at air,

among the afterbirths of beasts, I want
to eat the moments that I cannot save,
deny the ruddy loves of autumn bruised
and decomposing in a bitter alchemy—
all lymph and humus, like the membrane

of the mushrooms, breaking underfoot,
crumbling in my fingers—neither green
nor bloody red, but blanched like skin
along the thigh—organs of dumb desire,
or fodder for the cold, devouring gods.

VERBENA, YUCCA, SAGE

i

The air is clear, with the authority
of beauty in a woman; light dissolves
the distances. Verbena, yucca, sage
compose such figures in the sand,
among the insects working leaves, the wrens
astir, that one feels resonant enough
to let the spaces of reflection fill
with the well-resined music of the stones.

ii

A hawk is plying the wind.
Effort seems out of place
among these evidences.
Make a quiet presence, lending
consciousness to light.

iii

Pennate channels in the soil
run dry as fossils; that darkened rock
is time, old igneous time,
striding through the white flambeaux
of yucca, the verbena, blue
and yellow, and the solar red
of coreopsis, which streak the sage's
dusty green. The blossoms
feather out in the wind, as the desert
flashes its wings: phoebe
of color, thrasher of flight.

MADAME D'EPINAY WRITES TO HER LOVER

At Château La Chevrette,
the tenth of May

Dear Sir, Dear Friend:
I trust this finds you well.
Your leaving Saturday has put me—as
you may imagine, as you *must*, if you
would understand me well—in such a state
of agitation that I barely am
myself. One moment dancing (did you know
that I could leap across that little hedge
beyond the fountain?); next, in revery,
remembering with shivers of delight
a certain walk we took beneath the trees,

when only delicacy kept me clothed,
as you and nature were importunate
(as on those islands Bougainville describes,
where Venus spreads her veils on casual sand).
That, after the brief time when we enjoyed
together the idea of spring, not yet
arrived, but intimated in the buds,
the light, and your attentions, I should not
be wholly happy, will no doubt surprise
those few who have not loved: the appetite

for pleasure grows with pleasure, and to share
your company has changed me into one
who needs it. Thus these days seem virtual,
suspended. Do not think, though, that I mean
to spend my hours unprofitably: books
and gardening and music will amuse
me well enough until you come again;
there is a concert for tonight, with friends,
and I shall read the latest by Rousseau.
Society needs such as we, I think

('tis but a pity that we cannot show
it fully): virtue does not only lie
in marriages arranged for policy,
but in the union of free minds, whose ways
the body's commerce edifies the more,
as reason finds accomplishment in words.
May these now fly to you. I only add,
You have inscribed upon me your desire,
a little planet with a private name.
My letters also are for you alone;

but should the whole world see them, it would know
of loving more than now. I hope that soon
the courier will bring me news of you,
and better still, a date on which to fix
my thoughts for your return. Till then, we are
a memory of eyes, and voice, and limbs,
a summer in the mind. You sign, "Your most
obedient and humble servant." I
am likewise yours—believe me—as I write,
"Your love—your fortune—and your other self."

Mary A. McCay

ONE MAN ONE VOTE: THE SHAPING OF A POLITICAL CAREER

Jimmy Carter, *Turning Point*. Random House, 1992.

In 1962, when Jimmy Carter ran for Georgia state senator armed with his "naive concept of public service," all hell was about to break loose in traditional Georgia politics. In that year, in *Baker v. Carr*, the Supreme Court had ruled that "one man, one vote" must replace the old system that for generations had allowed the county, rather than the individual voter, to serve as the basic voting unit in such elections. By giving disproportionate weight to rural areas of the state where citizens, black and white, could easily be threatened and manipulated, the county unit system had long assured that no reform candidate would be elected to the Georgia legislature. The system both protected segregationist politicians and encouraged the activities of county "bosses" who delivered the vote in return for public projects in their areas and for personal gain. Federal courts in Georgia immediately began to force compliance with the *Baker v. Carr* ruling; and, because he believed that the courts could, indeed, insure that each citizen's vote would be counted individually in the 1962 elections, on the same day that James Meredith tried to enroll at the University of Mississippi, Jimmy Carter announced his candidacy for the senate. Thereby hangs an extraordinary tale.

What Carter did not count on was the tenacity and power of Quitman county boss, Joe Hurst, who was backing his opponent. Hurst was "a shrewd and incredibly powerful political boss, often benevolent, who considered the rural community his own and could not accept any encroachment on his domain." He was a sometime bootlegger, an employee of the state Department of Agriculture, the state representative from Quitman County, and the chairman of the county Democratic committee. With an uncanny knack for picking winning candidates, he had delivered Quitman county in every election since 1940, collecting influence as well as "attractive benefits, both to the county and to himself." Joe Hurst had no intention of allowing Carter to win. Events

leading up to the election showed that it would be very close. Carter's opponent, Homer Moore, had already won primaries in several counties under the county unit system; and many people considered that he had a right to the seat. Although, with redistricting under *Baker v. Carr*, he had to run again, Joe Hurst was determined to deliver the votes for Moore.

Turning Point is Jimmy Carter's story of his battle to take the senate seat that he felt he had rightfully won; it is also the story of Joe Hurst's struggle to keep his and Quitman County's power after the demise of the county unit system; and it is the story of Southern politics at a critical juncture in the civil rights movement. Finally, though, it is the story of one man's setting out on a political career that would take him to the United States Presidency and beyond.

Jimmy Carter was completely unprepared for what happened in Quitman County on election day. *Turning Point* reveals his innocence as a political operator and his growing awareness of the nature of Georgia politics. Perhaps that is what makes the book so readable: it gives us a clear sense of who Jimmy Carter was when he first entered public office. What is most encouraging about Carter's book is not the outcome of the election but the realization that Jimmy Carter did not lose, over the course of his years in public service, his innate sense of justice and honesty, and his abiding belief that, if given the opportunity, people could work toward equitable solutions to their problems.

Early on election day, Carter voted and then began his marathon across the district. Rosalynn stayed at home in Plains to operate the peanut warehouse and to receive and convey messages. One of those messages came from Rosalynn's cousin, Ralph Balkcom in Quitman County. Ralph "thought I should know that some disturbing things were going on at the courthouse over in Georgetown—worse than he had ever seen before." Unable to get to Georgetown, a rural town of 2,400 people, right away, Carter sent his friend and campaign worker, John Pope, to assess the situation. When Pope arrived in Georgetown he found a scene right out of *Birth of a Nation*. Polling booths had not been set up as usual; instead, voters were marking their ballots on a counter in a small office in full view of Doc Hammond, Joe Hurst's associate, or of Hurst himself who was meeting people at the courthouse door and escorting them to the office where the election was taking place. Typically, he would look over their shoulders as they voted. Doc Hammond "would lay the ballot on the counter along with a Homer Moore campaign

card, saying, 'just scratch out Jimmy Carter's name. Joe wants you to vote for Homer Moore.'" When an older couple took their ballots out into the hall and marked them before putting them in the ballot box, Joe Hurst took them out of the box and, seeing that the couple had voted for Carter, tore them up, marked six other ballots in a lump for Moore, and stuffed them in the box saying "That's the way you are supposed to vote. If I ever catch you all voting wrong again, your house might burn down."

The outcome of the election finally boiled down to the ballot box in Georgetown. Needless to say, Carter lost. He responded at once: "I had been betrayed by a political system in which I had had confidence, and I was mad as hell!" Angry, as well as determined "not to be cheated," Carter challenged the election, an action that uncovered another hotbed of corruption in the Georgia electoral process. In *Turning Point*, Carter carefully documents his steps to take the seat that he felt he would have won had Joe Hurst not tampered with the ballots in Georgetown.

Carter's fight to have the ballots from Joe Hurst's Georgetown courthouse invalidated became the second installment in the education of the young politician. This section of the book reads like a cross between a *bildungsroman* and a political thriller. The contest between the young political idealist and the corrupt boss makes for very exciting reading. Carter's lawyer, Charles Kirbo, is a character straight from the pages of the best of Southern history. As Jimmy Carter describes him, his courtroom manner, his down home approach to the judge, and his keen sense of the drama of the situation helped to carry the day for Carter. But the fight was not over even after Carter won in court. Although the judge invalidated the Georgetown ballots, Carter still had to race Homer Moore to the state Democratic Committee to assure that his name, not Moore's, would be certified to appear on the ballot as the Democratic candidate from the fourteenth district. After all his legal efforts, had Carter not reached the committee ahead of Moore, Carter's political career might have been very different. Carter tells the story in much the way storytellers have always told good stories; he keeps the outcome hidden until practically the last page, and it is never certain, until the fourteenth district senator is called to be sworn in, that Jimmy Carter has actually won the election.

Carter was very young politically when he ran for the senate from the fourteenth district; he had only served on the Sumter County school board prior to his campaign for the senate. He was even younger in terms of his knowledge of county politics.

Although he had experienced some of the wrath of voters when he supported school consolidation as the chairman of the Sumter County school board, he was not prepared for the lengths to which the political bosses were willing to go to defeat him. School consolidation carried with it the hint of integration, and the senate election carried with it deep-seated racial fears as well. "In many Georgia communities, like Quitman County, blacks were a majority of the population, and established power brokers like Joe Hurst perceived that the blacks could take over politically if they were to band together to vote." Joe Hurst's political future depended on keeping blacks from voting, which he could easily do in his position if he could prevent white progressives like Carter from winning elections. It is the political drive of people like Joe Hurst that Carter captures in his poem, "The County Boss Explains How It Is": through the voice of the boss, Carter sums up all the manipulation, corruption, and violence that was covered over with a patina of service.

There were two routes to contesting the election: asking for a simple recount or filing a complaint of fraud with the County executive committee. No simple recount would change the numbers in the box, but filing a complaint with Joe Hurst and the County would be asking the fox to condemn his own raid on the hen house.

Turning Point reveals Carter's growing awareness of the uses of corruption in Georgia politics in the early sixties. His developing understanding of the language and the politics of bigotry in his own state helped him focus his own political strategies in order to overcome the past. His platform as candidate for governor and for president were inclusive, integrationist, and consensus building. He noted that "the events of the 1962 campaign opened my eyes not only to the ways in which democratic processes can be subverted, but also to the capacity of men and women of good will to engage the system to right such wrongs."

Unfortunately, in the eighties, much of what Carter strove for as governor of Georgia and as president of the United States was undone with Ronald Reagan's 1980 "states' rights" speech in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Everyone in Philadelphia, where the three civil rights workers were murdered in 1964, "knew that 'states' rights' meant segregation." In less than twenty years, much had changed, but much more had remained the same.

James M. Cox, the author of *Recovering Literature's Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography*, notes that the best American

autobiographies have been written during times of political upheaval. Benjamin Franklin, Henry David Thoreau, and—if *Song of Myself* may be included as autobiography—Walt Whitman, see their lives in relation to the large scale political dramas of their day. The American Revolution and the Civil War challenged Americans profoundly, and the civil rights and voting rights movements of the nineteen fifties and sixties were as cataclysmic in their way as were the two earlier conflicts. Jimmy Carter's life and political career were shaped by the changes taking place in America, and his response to injustice and inequity was quietly revolutionary. His efforts since leaving the presidency in 1981 to continue peace seeking work through the International Negotiating Network have recently been effective in North Korea. He committed himself, with the senate election of 1962, to justice and a voice for every person, and his entire political career since that time has been shaped by that commitment. That we have a senior statesman of Jimmy Carter's calibre is, in part, due to his early baptism in the political arena of Georgia in the sixties. *Turning Point* is more than autobiography; it is more than an historical document; it is the individual life writ large in the life of the nation.

Douglas Brinkley is Director of the Eisenhower Center and Associate Professor of History at the University of New Orleans. Author and editor of eight books, including *The Majic Bus*, he is currently writing a multiple-volume biography of Jimmy Carter.

Catharine Savage Brosman is a professor of French literature at Tulane University. Her prose collection, *The Shimmering Maya and Other Essays*, has just been published by LSU Press, and *French Culture 1900-1975*, for which she is both editor and contributor, will be published by Gale Publishers in the fall. Her most recent collection of poems, *Journeys From Canyon De Chelly*, was published by LSU in 1990.

Maxine Cassin has been the editor-publisher of The New Orleans Poetry Journal Press since the mid-1950s. Her most recent collection of poems is *Turnip's Blood*.

Former President **Jimmy Carter** has authored seven books since leaving office, most recently *Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age* (1992) and *Talking Peace: A Vision for the Next Generation* (1993). Among his many activities, President Carter, through the Carter Center in Atlanta, continues his efforts to protect human rights, promote peaceful resolution of conflict, and advance health and agriculture in the developing world. His poetry has appeared in several journals, including *The New England Review*, and will be collected in a book, *Always a Reckoning*, to be published by Times Books in the fall.

Irwin W. Christopher, a journalist for twenty years, has just completed the University of New Orleans MFA program in creative writing. Christopher is a Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

Phanuel Egejuru, a native of Nigeria whose doctorate from UCLA is in comparative literature, teaches in the English Department of Loyola University. Her novel about Igbo life and culture and the hidden consequences of the Nigerian Civil War, *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*, was published in 1993 by Heinmann in its Frontline Series.

Nancy C. Harris' first book of poems, *The Ape Woman Story*, was published in 1989. She has been host of the weekly Everette Maddox Memorial Maple Leaf Poetry Reading Series since the death of its founder five years ago.

Maria Gonzalez employs a variety of photographic techniques to help realize her artistic concepts. She has twice won National Endowment Fellowships for her work.

Richard Katrovas most recent book of poems is *The Book of Complaints* (Carnegie Mellon Press, 1993). In part, that book deals with the time Katrovas spent on a Fulbright Fellowship in the former Yugoslavia and the Czech Republic during the pivotal year of revolution. Katrovas is a professor in the creative writing program at the University of New Orleans.

Peruvian born **Fernando La Rosa** arranges his photographs in pairs to create poetic visual analogs. He has taught at Tulane University.

William Lavender is a New Orleans carpenter-contractor, originally from Arkansas. He recently published an essay on Paul Auster in *Contemporary Literature.*

John Lawrence, photographer and critic, is the chief curator at The Historic New Orleans Collection in the French Quarter.

Douglas MacCash is a visual artist and art critic who works as a preparator at the Historic New Orleans Collection. Originally from St. Louis, he has lived in New Orleans since 1978, and has taught at both Tulane and Loyola.

Mary McCay is the chair of the Loyola English Department and author of the Twayne biography of Rachel Carson published last year. A regular book reviewer for *The Times Picayune*, McCay directs and teaches in Loyola's Communications Project at Jackson Barracks State Prison.

Jim McCormick recently graduated from the University of New Orleans MFA program. He is also lead singer and songwriter for the New Orleans rock band The Bingemen, who released their first album this year.

Lisa Mednick is a world traveling singer-songwriter who worked in New Orleans as a member of the band The Songdogs. Her first solo album, *Artifacts of Love*, was issued this year by DEJADisc.

Kay Murphy teaches at the University of New Orleans and is the author of a book of poems, *The Autopsy*. She has recently published criticism, fiction, and poetry in *Poetry*, *American Book Review*, *Ascent*, and *Fiction International*.

Michael Presti is a social worker who has also taught film at The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and at UNO. He is the co-author of the comic metafictional novel *The Camel's Back*, published in 1993 by Portals Press.

Linda Quinlan, a partner in the New Orleans editorial consulting group Blueline, has published poems in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Fireweed*, *South of the North Woods*, *Plainswoman*, and *Feminist Voices* among others.

Alex Rawls wallows in the popular culture from his stoop in New Orleans, where he teaches English at Delgado College on the West Bank.

Sophia Stone, an MFA candidate at the University of New Orleans, has poems forthcoming in *The Southern Review* and *The North American Review*. She is associate editor of The *New Orleans Review*.

Elizabeth Thomas teaches film and writing courses at the University of New Orleans. Besides a chapbook, *The House on the Moon*, she has published poems in *The Southern Review* and in two editions of the Pushcart Prize series. She is married to the poet Joel Dailey with whom she has two daughters, Hanna and Isabelle.

Kay Toca studies literature in New Orleans and works with animals. This is her first professional publication.

Nancy R. Watkins is a fellow in neuroscience at Tulane Medical Center, working on prenatal neurology.

Donna Glee Williams, formerly of the Loyola English faculty, has recently become a Center Fellow at the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching. She holds both an MFA and PhD from LSU, and worked in New Orleans many years as a psychiatric nurse.

Miller Williams won the 1990 Poet's Prize for his eighth book of poems, *Living on the Surface: New and Selected Poems* (LSU Press, 1989). His most recent collection is *Adjusting to the Light*. He is currently director of the University of Arkansas Press, which he founded in 1980 after his first ten years on the creative writing faculty in Fayetteville. Williams was the founding editor of *The New Orleans Review* in 1967, during his four years on the faculty of the Loyola English Department.

With this issue, *New Orleans Review* returns from a hiatus of nearly a year and a half. We have altered the format in which the magazine has been published since its debut in 1968. Instead of an 8x11 book, we are publishing one that is 6x9. Our purpose in doing so is to accommodate a changing vision of *NOR*, a vision that we trust will both honor and build on the powerful legacy of the magazine's first twenty-five years.

Volume 20, numbers 3 and 4, will also be a double issue, published in December 1994. With Volume 21, *New Orleans Review* will return to publishing in quarterly numbers.

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