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The *New Orleans Review* will be on sabbatical during the 1993 calendar year. No submissions will be accepted until further notice.

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Alice Guy Blaché

Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

ALICE GUY: FORGOTTEN PIONEER OF THE
NARRATIVE CINEMA

It has long been a source of wonder to me that many women have not seized upon the opportunities offered to them by the motion picture art to make their way to fame and fortune as producers of photodramas. Of all the arts there is probably none in which they can make such splendid use of talents so much more natural to a woman than to a man and so necessary to its perfection.

There is no doubt in my mind that a woman's success in many lines of endeavor is still made very difficult by a strong prejudice against one of her sex doing work that has been done only by men for hundreds of years. Of course this prejudice is fast disappearing and there are many vocations in which it has not been present for a long time. In the arts of acting, music, painting and literature, woman has long held her place among the most successful workers, and when it is considered how vitally all of these arts enter into the production of motion pictures one wonders why the names of scores of women are not found among the successful creators of photodrama offerings. (Blanché, "Woman's Place . . .")

In most cinema histories, the names of a number of male directors figure prominently in the development of the narrative cinema. Edwin S. Porter, Cecil Hepworth, D. W. Griffith, and other male filmmakers are always mentioned. Indeed, Edwin S. Porter is routinely given credit as the "father" of the narrative film for his 1902 Edison production of *A Day in the Life of an American Fireman*, which also supposedly contains the first use of a close-up (that of a hand pulling a fire alarm) to advance the film's plot. Griffith's Biograph one-and two-reel films are usually covered in most film history texts in great detail, particularly such supposed stand-outs of narrative and syntactical invention as *A Corner in Wheat* and *The Lonedale Operator*. But

there is, to date, not one mainstream film history text which even mentions the work of Alice Guy and her numerous contributions to the development of filmic narrative and syntax. Her work is covered in Ephraim Katz's *Film Encyclopedia*, it is true, and more extensively in Louise Heck-Rabi's recent *Women Directors: The Critical Reception*, as well as Anthony Slide's text, *Pioneer Women Directors*. Alice Guy's *Memoirs*, translated by Roberta and Simone Blaché, and edited by Anthony Slide, were finally published in this country only in 1986.

But most widely circulated classroom texts, such as Mast's *A Short History of The Movies*, ignore Alice Guy's life and works completely. This is, I think, a major oversight. Guy is, according to Katz, "the world's first woman director, and possibly the first director of either sex to bring a story film to the screen" (Katz 519-20). The latter claim is based on her production of *La Fee Aux Choux* (1896), a one-reel version of a French fairy tale in which children are "born" in a cabbage patch, much in the manner of the "stork delivering babies." Guy's work was registered with the French copyright office as a Gaumont production, which indeed it was, and stills of the film still survive today. I have seen production stills of the film being shot, showing Ms. Guy standing between two of her young "stars" of the film, one of whom is Yvonne-Mugnier Serand. Thus, with this 1896 film, Ms. Guy becomes the first narrative director in motion picture history. Indeed, her film predates Porter's *Fireman* by more than six years.¹

Alice Guy was born to a bourgeois family, on July 1, 1875. Her father was a bookseller, while her mother tended the home. She was one of four daughters, and the youngest. At the age of 16, she became a stenographer and typist for various firms, following the death of her father, and in 1896 she went to work for Leon Gaumont's film company. In that same year, Gaumont shifted his operations from

the production of film equipment to the production of films themselves, and Ms. Guy became one of Gaumont's first directors. It is said that she was only allowed to direct films on the condition that she do the film during "off hours," and that this work must not interfere with her "proper" duties as a typist and stenographer. In any event, Leon Gaumont judged her early directorial efforts a distinct success, and although he continued to insist that she work in his office as a secretary, he allowed her to continue to direct as well, backing a number of one-reel shorts which Guy directed throughout 1896.

In an interview with Francis Lacassin (151-4), shortly before her death, Ms. Guy claimed that she began making films before the pioneer French cinema artist, Georges Melies. Inasmuch as Melies' own records of his productions during this period are open to a good deal of interpretation, this places Alice Guy at the very beginning of the cinema industry, along with Melies and the Lumiere Brothers, and in view of the zeal with which she began producing films after her debut as

¹It is only fair to note that a great deal of controversy surrounds the date of this production. Francis Lacassin, in an article in *Sight and Sound* ("Out of Oblivion: Alice Guy Blaché" (Summer 97): 151-4) states that the film must have been produced in 1897 or 1898, although he notes that Gaumont had been producing 60mm cinema cameras as early as 1896. More recently, in *The Memoirs of Alice Guy Blaché*, Lacassin dates the film as being produced in 1900 (on pg. 136 of the *Memoirs*), despite the vehement objections of Alice Guy's daughter, Simone Blaché, and the detailed recollection of Ms. Guy herself, as she notes on pgs. 25-26 of the *Memoirs*.

Having reviewed the evidence here, it seems to me that Lacassin is mistaken and has been misled by an arbitrary cataloging system instituted by Gaumont, which was created after-the-fact to catalogue its films. The detail and accuracy of Ms. Guy's account of the production of the film, as well as the documented veracity of her other claims in her *Memoirs*, lead me to believe that *La Fee Aux Choux* was indeed produced in 1896, as she insists. However, if a copy of this film has been preserved in the Cinematheque Francais, as she indicates, it has since been either lost or misfiled.

There is also no copy of *La Fee Aux Choux* in the Gaumont Archives in Joinville-le-Pont, France. According to Assistant Curator Manuela Padona, Gaumont does possess copies of the March, 1906 version of *La Vie Du Christ* (Length: 600 meters; a remake of Guy's 1898 or 1899 production of the same name [length of the original film, 220 meters]), *Sur La Barricade* (also known as *L'Enfant de la Barricade* [88 meters]), and three other titles. None of these films are currently available for rental. This information was provided to me by Dr. Dana Polan; I am grateful for his assistance in the preparation of this article.

a director, her relative historical anonymity seems quite undeserved.

Alice Guy's first films used non-professional actors and actresses; now, she began to use those professionals who would consent to appear in the new, untried medium. The only performers who would risk their careers and reputations by working in the cinema were jugglers, acrobats, and vaudeville performers, such as Henri Gallet or Roulet-Plessis. Whomever she was able to induce to appear in her films, Ms. Guy went ahead, using what facilities were placed at her disposal, making films which cut across all generic limitations. Comedies, dramas, Gothic melodramas, religious spectacles: all of these areas were grist for her fertile imagination. A brief sampling of the films she made from 1896-1906 includes such titles as *Faust and Mephisto*, *La Legende de Saint-Nicolas*, *La Fee Printemps*, *Charmant Froufrou*, and *Le Noel de Pierrot*.

By all accounts, Alice Guy worked very quickly on the set, and urged her protagonist and extras to "BE NATURAL" (indeed, when she founded her own production company, Solax, a number of years later, Alice Guy had a large sign made up with this admonition, and had it posted prominently above all the sets she worked on as a director), as she strove to help her performers to break away from artificial stage mannerisms and adapt to the more intimate staging requirements of the cinema.² (As we will see, she was not entirely successful in eliciting "natural" performances from her stage-trained stock company, but the performances in Ms. Guy's films were always relaxed and enthusiastic.) Not content with the standard staging practices of the day, Ms. Guy began experimenting with close-ups early on, and by 1904, she was composing entire films in terms of close-ups, such as her production of *La Premiere Cigarette* (August 1904). This film shows, in a medium close-up, the reactions of a young boy who is smoking his first cigarette; it has often been mis-attributed to Emile Cohl, as Lacassin points out (152).

From these early, modest projects, Ms. Guy advanced to more ambitious productions. She began turning out one-reel comedies at a pro-

²Letter from Frank Leon Smith, *Films in Review* (April, 1964): 254-5.

digious rate, often two a week, and up to 1905, according to Ms. Guy herself, all of the Gaumont films can be correctly attributed to her direction (Lacassin 152). (There are a few exceptions during this period, which were directed by Ferdinand Zecca, a familiar name to film historians. It is interesting to note here that Ferdinand Zecca got his job at Gaumont through the kindness of Ms. Guy. Once the star director of the Pathe film, Zecca had fallen on extremely hard times, even working as a door-to-door salesman of household wares, when Ms. Guy rescued him with the offer of a job directing at Gaumont (Lacassin 152).) Zecca directed a number of short films for Gaumont during his tenure there, including *Les Mefaits d'une Tete de Veau*, which was a considerable success for the firm, but his importance in the career of Alice Guy can best be summed up by the fact that working with him, Ms. Guy realized that she needed an assistant to help her turn out her films.

Public demand for her shorts had become enormous; there was simply no way she could satisfy the demand by herself. Thus, by becoming the "Executive" and "Line Producer," in effect, for Gaumont's films, Alice Guy became the first director to realize that there was a need for something of a "factory system" in the production of films for the commercial marketplace, thus predating the assembly line procedures of Thomas Ince by more than a decade. As she tackled such ambitious projects as *La Vie Du Christ* (1906), which used hundreds of extras, many lavish sets, and ran some 40 minutes in length, Alice Guy hired an assistant director, Victorien Jasset, to assist her in handling the extras. As a result of this, many years later, Jasset would be credited with the direction and production of the film, when in fact he functioned solely as Ms. Guy's assistant (Lacassin 152). It was also in 1906 that she directed *Le Fee Printemps* in an early Gaumont color process (Wanamaker 12).

In 1906 (and through 1907), Gaumont put Ms. Guy in charge of producing films for his new Chronophone process, which used wax cylinders to reproduce sound that was roughly synchronized to the projected image on the screen. Sensing the enormous possibilities of the talking picture, Ms. Guy plunged into directing shorts for the Chronophone process, completing more than 100 short films

in one year, all of which she personally directed (Blaché, *Memoirs* 30, 43-6). It was also in 1906 that Ms. Guy met and fell in love with Herbert Blaché-Bolton, an English cameraman who worked for Gaumont. They were married after a whirlwind courtship, and in late 1907, Leon Gaumont placed Herbert Blaché (the "Bolton" was dropped when the couple came to the United States) in charge of Gaumont's New York office. In 1908, Alice Guy's only daughter, Simone, was born in Flushing, New York (Wanamaker 12). The couple also had a son, Reginald, born in 1912 (Blaché, *Memoirs* 76).

Going against her nature, Ms. Guy decided to give up the production and direction of motion pictures to accompany her husband to the United States, and from 1907-10, she spent her time at home. But Alice Guy soon became bored and restless with her self-imposed domesticity. On September 7, 1910, Alice Guy formed her own film company in Flushing, New York, called the Solax Company, of which she was the President and Chief Operating Officer. The company had business offices in New York City at 147 Fourth Avenue, in Manhattan, but all the shooting for the films was done in and around Flushing (Lacassin 153). Members of the Solax "stock company" of actors included Blanche Cornwall, Marion Swayne, and Gladdon James. Marc Wanamaker notes that "eight year old actress Magda Foy was billed as the Solax Kid" (12). The first film under the Solax banner went into production on October 21, 1910 (Lacassin 153) (*A Child's Sacrifice*, starring Magda Foy, and personally directed by Alice Guy) and from then until June, 1914, Solax produced 325 films of varying lengths which were directed by Ms. Guy, or else by Edward Warren or Harry Schenk, who would follow Ms. Guy's scenarios faithfully (again in the manner of Thomas Ince, who would blueprint his productions down to the last detail and then order the films to be shot as he had specifically described). It is certain that Alice Guy directed at least 35 of these films herself (Wanamaker 12; Lacassin 153). It is also sad to note that both Leon Gaumont and Herbert Blaché refused to support Alice Guy's new company financially; presented with the opportunity to invest in Solax, both men refused to do so (Wanamaker 12).

The Solax films mirrored Ms. Guy's earlier

work for Gaumont, in that they encompassed thrillers, horror melodramas, comedies, romances, and even operatic subjects, which she filmed in lavishly mounted three-reel productions using a process similar to Gaumont's Chronophone. Such films as *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1913), *The Shadows of the Moulin Rouge* (1913), *Mickey's Pal* (1912), and many, many others established Ms. Guy's second undeservedly ignored contribution to the history of the cinema. During the same time that Griffith was making films for Biograph, Ms. Guy was making similarly ambitious narratives, and in many of them, she used the naturalistic techniques which Griffith is often credited as first introducing to the medium. A few examples of this include her penchant for shooting exterior shots on location whenever possible (although she would revert to the studio for historical spectacles), her demand for more "natural" performances from her actors, a love of authentic action (Wanamaker notes that for her 1912 film *The Sewer*, Alice Guy used real sewer rats to attack the film's hero on cue (13)), and a desire to surprise and amuse her audience in all she attempted. For her three-reel production of *Dick Wittington And His Cat*, released March 1, 1913, Alice Guy spent \$35,000 to produce the film, and used "a cast of 200, an army of rats, and 26 sets of period England" (Wanamaker 13). To all of this, only Herbert Blaché offered any real opposition, forbidding Alice Guy to use dynamite in one of her films, and directing scenes of *The Yellow Traffic* which he thought too perilous for his wife to handle (Lacassin 154).

Although only a handful of Ms. Guy's films survive, in those films that do still exist, we can see Alice Guy exploring a number of interesting visual and syntactical strategies. As will be later noted in this paper, precise directorial attribution of the Solax films is often difficult. We do not know for certain that Alice Guy personally directed any of the surviving Solax films, and they may have been the work of either Edward Warren or Harry Schenk (Lacassin 153). Nevertheless, as the guiding force behind the Solax Company, Alice Guy's directorial vision must certainly be said to have informed, to some degree, the construction of all Solax films.

His Double, a tale of romance and mistaken identity, is typical of the surviving Solax films.

Grace Burleston, a young woman, wishes to marry the man she truly loves, but is temporarily thwarted in this ambition by her father, who wishes her to marry "Count Laking Coyne" ("lacking coin"). However, the Count's moustache makes him easy to impersonate, and Grace's true love, Jack, does exactly this. No split-screen work of any kind is used to carry off this "duplication of identity"; two actors with similar features are employed to stage the scenes. The highlight of the film is a pantomime sequence in the hallway of the Burleston home, as Jack, standing in for a conveniently missing mirror, copies the Count's actions perfectly. At the conclusion of the film, Jack, in disguise as the Count, is married to Grace. Immediately after the wedding ceremony, Grace's father discovers the deception, and is furious. The minister, however, admonishes him, and points to the "Eleventh Commandment" in a Bible he has used to conduct the ceremony: "thou shalt not swear when thou are outwitted." At length, the father relents, and agrees to the duplicitous marriage. Most of the action in *His Double* is staged in a single set, the living room of the Burleston home. A wide angle lens is used, and close-ups are almost nonexistent, except in the mirror sequence discussed above. Exteriors are photographed with natural light; interiors are obvious stage sets. In these strategies, Alice Guy mirrors the work of her contemporaries, particularly D. W. Griffith, who intercut obvious studio sets with near neo-realist exteriors in many of his early films.

In *A House Divided*, the best known of the Solax films, similar visual strategies are employed, with the only significant difference being the number of sets that are used. In the latter film, there are at least four major sets that are intercut to tell the story, that of a young couple who, due to a series of misunderstandings, refuse to speak to each other except through notes. The film also offers a caustic commentary on the place of attorneys in the marital contract, as the couple's jointly-shared lawyer enthusiastically approves of this domestic rupture, as long as he is paid to draw up the documents to enforce it. There are a few more close-ups used in the film, but on the whole, the direction is straightforward and unadorned. The camera stays approximately 12 feet from the subjects, photograph-

ing them head on in a conventional master-shot.

However, even within the confines of such traditional visual choreography, Solax films often display a flair for deep-focus staging and the use of simultaneous planes of action. In *The Girl in the Arm Chair*, which has been preserved in its original color tints (these tints were accomplished by a machine process, and not by hand), the main set of the film is the drawing room of a well-to-do suburban home. Much of the action of the film takes place in the foreground of the shot, but exits, entrances, and instances of eavesdropping are often confined to a staircase which dominates the rear of the set. This main set is seen for more than two-thirds of the completed film; in view of this strategy, it is a tribute to the ingenuity of the director that the film still holds audience interest.

In *The Girl in the Arm Chair*, Frank, a young man who is betrothed to Peggy Wilson, is "forced into stealing \$500 from his father-in-law-to-be's safe. Frank's descent from respectability begins when he falls in with a group of card sharps, who swindle him during a crooked game. The direction here is particularly astute, as the card sharps (in the foreground, left) contemplate Frank, their victim (to the right of the shot), while a sleazy bartender (in the extreme rear of the set) chuckles with obvious amusement at Frank's naivete. These dubious companions then induce Frank to borrow money from a loan shark to cover his losses. When the loan shark's note falls due, "at 500% interest," Frank, in desperation, steals the money. As he does so, Peggy watches him, unobserved, from the "armchair" mentioned in the film's title, to the extreme right of the frame. In the wake of his crime, Frank endures a horrible nightmare, effectively suggested with blue tints and swirling superimposed cards which hover over his bed. The next morning, Peggy covers for him, but Frank makes a clean breast of it and is forgiven. In the final red-tinted scene, Peggy and Frank contemplate matrimony, as Peggy's parents look on approvingly.

The performances in *The Girl in the Arm Chair* are rather exaggerated, a trait paradoxically typical of Alice Guy's films. While she strove to get "natural" performances out of her actors, Alice Guy often let them play

scenes in the broadest possible manner, with the result that some sections of Guy's shorts have much in common with episodes of the television series *I Love Lucy*, or other contemporary situation comedies. The subject matter in *The Girl in the Arm Chair* is much more serious, however, and as a consequence, the film verges on the melodramatic. The loan shark, in particular, is a caricature rather than a genuine creation, rubbing his hands together in glee at the amount of money he will realize on his short-term loan, and conducting his business dealings in the manner of a conventional 19th century stage "villain." Of all of the surviving Solax shorts, *The Girl in the Arm Chair* is easily the most stagebound, using the minimum number of camera set-ups possible to realize the narrative, with most of its action confined to a single set, and one camera set-up. Still, with the added enhancement of the color tints, the film effectively captures our imagination, and for a project realized in one or two days of shooting, it is certainly an admirable effort.

Other surviving Solax productions such as *Officer Henderson* (a comedy involving two undercover cops who dress in women's clothing to catch purse-snatchers), *Burstup Homes' Murder Case* (a parody of the Sherlock Holmes stories), *Matrimony's Speed Limit* (in which a young man must marry by noon of a certain day in order to gain an inheritance) *The Detective's Dog* (in which the detective himself is tied to a log in a saw-mill for the film's climax, thus neatly inverting the generic requirements of conventional melodrama), *A House Divided*, and *Canned Harmony* (a young man pretends to play the violin, with the aid of a hidden phonograph, to win the hand of the girl he loves over the objections of her father) display an engaging sense of relaxed character development, and an air of cheerful haste in their often improvised construction.

Nevertheless, in these brief films, Guy demonstrates a level of daring and sophistication absent from other American shorts of the period. In *Officer Henderson*, the cross-dressing policemen adapt easily to their roles as "women": after arresting several criminals, the two men return to the police station, where they amuse their comrades with demonstrations of "womanly" hand gesture, bearing, and manner. The other policemen laugh uproariously, but the scene is still a sharply

observed comment upon the role of dress and presentation in the creation of one's sexual identity. It is one of the structural conceits of the film that when the two policemen wear wigs and skirts, their true gender is effectively concealed; even though their faces are clearly masculine, the other characters refuse to recognize them as men, so long as they wear traditional "feminine" clothing.

One of the policemen is married; Guy inserts a sub-plot in which the detective's wife, sure that her husband is being unfaithful, returns home to her mother with some of the clothing her husband is using to realize his disguise. The other policeman spends time in an up-scale restaurant, attracting the attentions of a Fatty Arbuckle-like admirer, with whom he makes a date for a rendezvous for the following day. Both of these situations are developed in an innocent fashion, neatly skirting any serious issues of gender-identification and sexual placement the two sub-plots might have raised. Yet one still gets the feeling that Alice Guy knew precisely what she was exploring in *Officer Henderson*, even if she chose not to develop her material in more serious directions. Solax films were primarily popular entertainments, and Guy and her co-directors strove to satisfy the American appetite for primitive comedy; this does not mean, however, that Ms. Guy was any less adventurous in her choice of the material for these films.

Matrimony is a persistent theme in the surviving Solax films; often, the heroine must overcome the objections of either her husband-to-be, or a doltish patriarch, to effect the requisite happy ending. In *Canned Harmony* and *His Double*, it is the father who objects to the proposed match; in both cases, the woman refuses to marry anyone but the desired object of her affection. Through a combination of aural and visual deception (the wig and moustache in *Double*; the same disguise, with the addition of a prop violin and the aid of an off-screen phonograph, in *Harmony*), the woman is at last able to marry the man of her choice. In *Matrimony's Speed Limit* it is the husband-to-be who objects to the match, but only because of his comparative poverty. Realizing this, the young woman concocts a flimsy ruse, inventing a mysterious relative who will leave the young man a fortune, but only if he marries by noon of that

day.

Much of *Matrimony's Speed Limit* is taken up with the man's desperate search for a mate, any mate, in order to beat the twelve o'clock deadline. (There is one unfortunate racist "joke" used here: one of the women the young man accosts is heavily veiled. When she removes her hat, we see that she is black. The young man reacts with horror, and runs away. The "joke" is all the more distressing because of its inclusion in a film created under the supervision of a woman who knew first-hand of the deleterious effects of sexism.) Predictably, the man meets his true beloved in time, and the two are married just before the stroke of noon. The new bride then reveals her deception and is immediately "forgiven" by her new husband. One of the titles in *His Double* assures the viewer that "everything is fair in love and war"; this theme is repeated again and again in the Solax comedies. This preoccupation with marriage is all the more ironic when one considers that in her own affairs of the heart, Alice Guy did not experience the satisfaction and sense of fulfillment she grants to the protagonists of her films.

Yet in many respects, the heroines of Solax films are far more individual than those offered by Griffith during the same period, and Solax films seem in every way more modern in their values than Biograph films. No doubt this was due in large measure to Alice Guy's energy and vitality as a filmmaker, and as a woman who refused to be left in the background, at least at this point in her career.

For her own part, Ms. Guy never played up the fact that she was a "woman director" in an otherwise male-dominated industry. When the trade publications found out about her "unique" position, they rushed in to exploit her as some sort of curiosity, and Ms. Guy went along with the publicity pragmatically, understanding that it was good for selling the films at the box office. She even went so far as to allow herself to be photographed in the electric chair at Sing Sing (Lacassin 154), while she was visiting the prison to gather background material for an upcoming production, and she treated the press with what I might best describe as a sort of cheerful detachment. She recognized that all of the "ballyhoo" would help sell Solax films, and it did; with her husband, Herbert, serving as chief marketer for Solax product, while still

working for Gaumont as well, Solax had several very profitable years. It was during this period as well that Herbert Blaché also became involved in the fight against the Edison Trust Companies, which sought to obtain a monopolistic stranglehold on the film production, distribution, and exhibition business. To aid in this, he founded his own distribution exchange, the Film Supply Company, which helped to distribute Solax Films, and which eventually merged with the Mutual Company in 1914 (Lacassin 154).

However, in October, 1913, Herbert Blaché formed another new company, Blaché Features, Inc., which almost immediately supplanted Solax. Blaché Features product was much more narrowly defined. It did not produce nearly as many films as Solax did, although for awhile after its inception, Blaché Features distributed films originally made under the Solax banner, but as yet unreleased. All Blaché Features films were a minimum of four reels long. In all, the company made 14 films from November 1913 to November 1914, nine of which were directed by Alice Guy herself (Lacassin 154).

Reading between the lines, it seems obvious to me that Herbert Blaché was somewhat jealous of his wife's success. Although an astute businessman, Herbert Blaché was by no means as adventurous artistically as Alice Guy was. When Blaché Features folded in November, 1914, Herbert set up a new company, The U.S. Amusement Corporation, founded in April, 1914 with a \$500,000 line of credit (Lacassin 154). This company produced what were then known as "art films," staged dramas filmed in an unimaginative "proscenium arch" manner. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1914) and *The Chimes* (1914) were simply "canned theater," and represented a gigantic step backwards in the development of cinema as a visual medium with its own syntactical language. These films were mostly directed by Herbert Blaché, and they represented a tragic corruption of the vitality and imagination of Alice Guy's own work. During this period, Alice directed a number of five-reel films for The Popular Players and Plays Company, also adapted from stage productions, on which her husband served as producer, but these films added little of importance to her career. They show, rather that she had allowed herself to

become subjugated to her husband's whims and that in the name of continuing their relationship, she had sacrificed her own vision of the cinema. It is significant that in the structure of this new company, Alice Guy was listed simply as "vice president" (Lacassin 154). As Ms. Guy herself noted of this period, "I had become his [her husband's] assistant" (Blaché, *Memoirs* 93).

In 1915, Alice directed a number of features for her husband that were ultimately distributed through Metro Pictures, which would later, of course, metamorphosize into Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. In the summer of 1917, she lectured on film at Columbia University (Slide 28), but unhappily, her career was about to be cut short. In 1920 she directed her last film, *Tarnished Reputations*, starring Dolores Cassinell (Slide 29) while her husband continued to direct such films as *The Untamed* (1923), *The Wild Party* (1923), *High Speed* (1924), *Secrets of the Night* (1925), and his last film as director, *Burning the Wind* (1929), co-directed with Henry MacRae (Katz 123-4).

But by then, the couple had long since given up any hope of continuing their relationship; they were divorced in 1922. Around this time, Alice Guy was offered the direction of *Tarzan of the Apes*, on the condition that she advance \$50,000 to help fund the picture. Although Ms. Guy was not attracted to the project, it might have revitalized her career, but as she put it, "happily, it was out of the question. I didn't have fifty thousand dollars" (Blaché, *Memoirs* 95). Alice Guy returned to France with her two children, but she was never again allowed to direct a film, major or minor, short or feature-length. This is not because she did not make numerous attempts to do so; she had many projects in mind, and certainly, with her credentials, one would think that she would have found work fairly easily. But, no, she "retired" to a series of humdrum jobs, and it was not until 1953 that the French Government suddenly remembered her contributions to the beginnings of cinema, and awarded her the Legion of Honor (Katz 519). She was 80 at the time. Subsequently, she returned to the United States in 1964 to live with her daughter, Simone, in the latter's home in Mahwah, New Jersey. She died there on March 24, 1968, at the age of 95 (Blaché, *Memoirs* 99).

In sum, what can one say of the career of

Alice Guy? It is clear that she is an inescapably major figure in the development of cinema as both a commercial and artistic art form, but it is equally clear that posterity has not been kind, or even just, to her many accomplishments. Because she was relatively modest concerning her work she received little notoriety even in her heyday. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, general survey texts on the history of film ignore her work completely. Making matters worse, most of her early films (more than 90% of her work) are lost, destroyed or decomposed (shot, as they were, on early cellulose nitrate film). The Library of Congress has *some* Solax prints including a copy of *The Detective's Dog* that does not seem available elsewhere. In 1973, the First Los Angeles International Woman's Film Festival, sponsored by the group Cinewomen, organized a centennial screening of Alice Guy's films. In 1985, the Museum of Modern Art ran a program of her surviving films. Writing in *The New Republic*, critic Stanley Kauffman commented:

I saw four of her short films in the museum's program—my first view of Guy-Blaché's work . . . she was certainly well up to the level of her contemporaries. She had wit, a sense of pace, a good eye for casting, and she did some experimenting. (One of the films uses a split screen with two people on the telephone and a view of the landscape between them.) But in the historical view, the quality of her work is not the prime point. She may or may not have been the very first maker of fiction film, as some have contended; but no one has yet disproved that she was the first woman director. And her oddly, sadly truncated career only makes her claim on our memory more pressing (Kauffman 26).

More recently The American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, New York, ran a retrospective of Solax films. However, precise attribution of Solax films to individual directors is, in many cases, impossible. As Cecile Starr of the Women's Independent Film Exchange noted on the program notes for the AMMI screenings, the films that have survived may or may not be directed by Ms. Guy

herself; what records attended the shooting of these films have long since been lost or destroyed. The Museum of Modern Art in New York has at least one Solax film in their collection, *A House Divided* (1913), but again, this may or may not be directed by Alice Guy herself. Prints of Alice Guy's Solax productions *Officer Henderson*, *Canned Harmony*, *His Double*, *A House Divided*, *Burstup Homes' Murder Case*, and *The Girl in the Arm Chair* (this last with color tinting) are available from Em Gee Films in Reseda, California.³ Certainly, these excellent and historically invaluable films should be a regular part of most film courses. It is surely not too much to ask that Ms. Guy's work should be shown in conjunction with the work of her more celebrated contemporary, D. W. Griffith, as an alternative to Griffith's inescapably male-centrist vision. It is only through the twin exigencies of inadequate preservation and the patriarchal instinct inherent in current film history that Ms. Guy's work is not more widely shown, and recognized as the work of a master filmmaker.

The bulk of Ms. Guy's work seems to have been irretrievably lost. There *may* be additional films deposited and mis-attributed in The National Archives. There *may* be other films by Alice Guy available in private collections that we don't know about. But for the most part, unless and until Alice Guy's major films can be found, we will have to content ourselves with second-hand accounts of her major works, and surviving production stills from long-lost films. This does not detract in any way, however, from the fact that the beginnings of cinema history must now be rewritten. Alice Guy was there, and arguably there first, and it is long overdue for us to acknowledge her considerable contributions to the art, and the history of motion pictures.⁴

□

³Em Gee Films, 6924 Canby Avenue, Suite 103, Reseda, California 91335. Telephone: (818) 981-5506.

⁴Portions of this article were presented in earlier versions at the Conference on Gender, Tallahassee, Florida, 1986; the Midwest Modern Language Association Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois, 1986; and at the Society for Cinema Studies Annual Conference, Iowa City, Iowa, 1989.

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Barry Spacks

ALBA

O love
we've been here
many times
but not before
so early
in the morning

Daniel Bourne

STILL LIFE

No one in the room. No hot tea
on the counter. Only the broken spring
of the couch. The sharp vengeful tongue
of a plant on the sideboard.

No more fires in the stove.
No more crumbs on the table.
The chairs all face the wall.
Rugs abandoned in a heap.

The calendar not turned forward.
The clock with rusted hands.
The stain from the dripping faucet
draws a map in the blue enamel.

The pictures stare at each other.
The wallpaper dark from the leak upstairs.
A newspaper flung in all directions.
The date on all its pages.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, SUNDAY EVENING

Upstairs, in her room, my daughter writes poetry, hoping for publication in the school paper. I hear the keys of her typewriter tentatively slap the page, one timid letter at a time. Earlier they came in cascades and I imagined the words tumbling down. I expect they will spill out more generously again, for I have recognized a rhythm.

We are alone, my daughter and I. It is early afternoon, beautiful and autumnal. I have opened the French doors leading out onto the patio where we attempted to eat breakfast together. It was too cold then, the blue sky belied cold weather. A brisk wind blew the napkins about and drove us inside. Now, hours later, it is still brisk, but not so windy that the doors can't be left open. These doors stand at the end of the library and the library opens beyond the living room where I now sit. I can see over the paper through the series of rooms out the door to the garden and the great outcropping of granite on which the house is founded and in which my wife planted all sorts of attractive bulbs last summer, plants whose names I do not know, but whose beauty I nonetheless appreciate. There is a fault which runs down the center of this outcropping which, no doubt, follows the course of its form into the ground and under the foundation. Above ground, my wife packed the fault with earth so that every spring the most beautiful vines and flowers would sprout from it. My daughter has begun typing again and, as I look out through the series of rooms to my wife's handiwork outside I can, by the exercise of a little imagination, experience contentment. More than the smart jackets and wool skirts which hang on the right side of the closet and still bear her fragrance, these plants remind me of my wife and convince me of her continuing presence. I can, without difficulty, imagine that she is out there now, unseen in a section of the garden not visible from my position on the couch, stooping to transfer a shoot which she nurtured on a sill, into the earth.

My wife would have approved of my daughter's poetic efforts. I like to think that poetry and gardening share a common spirit of patience. On any other Sunday my daughter would be working on her college applications, but this weekend is an exception. She offered to read me the work she has amassed these past two days later, at dinner, but I reminded her that tonight I will be having a guest.

"Dr. Kagon," I said. "Dr. Kagon will be here. Remember?"

Dr. Kagon is a woman. A psychiatrist. It is ironic that my daughter has forgotten since the dinner has come about only as a result of her relentless prodding. A modern girl, she is convinced that since my wife passed away I should begin "dating" (her word). The dinner will be my third "date" with Dr. Kagon, but the preceding "dates" were tennis/lunch dates and I'm not sure they count in my daughter's estimation.

Dr. Kagon belongs to the tennis club my wife and I joined five years ago. I estimate her age at thirty-seven. She is easily lobbed and has a weak serve. The tennis club is filled with single women in their mid to late thirties and, like most of them, Dr. Kagon's principal interest seems to be aerobics, not tennis. My wife, one of the few women I've ever known with a really hard top spin forehand, used to make fun of these aerobically-minded women and in particular, the metallic, skintight lycra body suits that some would wear. I myself never expressed an opinion.

My wife and I played mixed doubles with Dr. Kagon on two or three occasions. I cannot remember Dr. Kagon's partners, but there were several, which is not surprising since the games were very occasional, separated by months. In any case, I had not spoken to the doctor for over a year until I met her again at a club-sponsored cocktail party. I had been standing alone at a side table when Dr. Kagon approached and, after a long conversation which lasted almost the entire evening, gave

me her card and suggested I call. For all that talk I cannot remember any specifics, I can only remember topics. We talked about the ozone, the greenhouse effect, AIDS, and ultimately, my wife's death. It was a conversation devoted entirely to disaster, public and personal. I was, I remember, surprised when she gave me her card. When I told my daughter about it she wouldn't let up.

"Why don't you call her?"

"Now?"

"That's what she gave you the card for, Dad."

So I called her for singles the following Sunday and, after an unvigorous and lopsided sixty minutes, we had lunch at the club cafe. Dr. Kagon offered bland apologies for her uneven game, and I sensed that she regarded the tennis as a somewhat unnecessary pretext for having lunch together. Such elaborate arrangements in order to flirt are the instinct of a married man, and must have seemed quaint and clumsy to a veteran of single life like Dr. Kagon who, as far as I know, has never been married. In my mind there are two kinds of married couples: those like my wife and I who get married very young and those who get married late. If Dr. Kagon were to marry she would, of course, fall into this latter category. I have observed that couples like my wife and I who marry young so affect the way the other matures that they become inseparable by the simple force of long-term mutual accommodation. Couples who marry late often seem more like business partners. These late-marriage types are accustomed to independent action; they consult one another out of considered deference rather than as a natural instinct. Perhaps that is an obvious observation, but what would a couple be like if you mixed the two halves? What would happen if you matched an early-marriage type like myself with an independent, late-marriage type like, say, Dr. Kagon?

My daughter stops typing and I hear her on the stairs, a confusion of pounding feet, which sounds like she is falling, rather than walking. She arrives safely nonetheless, standing before me, apparently satisfied with this morning's effort.

"I got to a natural stopping point so I thought I'd go to the football game," she says. "Charles and the others are going to be

there and I said I might show up."

"What football game?"

"Come on, Dad, can't you hear it?"

I listen. In the rustling of the leaves, in the lull between gusts of wind, I hear the sound of distant drums. Three-quarters of a mile of woods separate our house from the municipal field where the high school home games are played, yet in the right wind, the beat of drums and blare of martial brass make their way over the treetops bearing fragments of "Hey, Big Spender."

"You want to take the Toyota?" I ask, digging for the keys in my pocket. The Toyota was my wife's car and now, for reasons not entirely clear to me, I get pleasure from my daughter's use of it.

"Actually, I thought I'd ride my bike. Unless you want me to pick something up on my way back. Are you sure you have everything you need for the dinner?"

"I'm all set."

She leaves through the library and out the open doors onto the patio, a sudden breeze lifting her hair from her shoulders, a patch of sunlight catching it as it blows apart. She disappears beyond the vista framed by the French doors into those unseen regions of the garden where I imagine my wife tending her flowers or simply enjoying the day.

I have never been one of those who enjoy cooking as a past-time, and therefore I know few "fancy" dishes beyond the ordinary fare my daughter and I make for each other. After I extended the invitation to Dr. Kagon I realized I should have suggested a restaurant instead. In this particular context a restaurant would have made more sense, seemed more natural. But my wife and I almost never invited our friends to meet us at restaurants. We had them to dinner, or they had us to dinner, and so a restaurant simply did not occur to me. Of course, Dr. Kagon and I have already had lunch together at the club cafe, but that was different, that was an adjunct to tennis.

My few fancy dishes include a chicken dish, a lamb dish, and a beef dish. I have decided to make the chicken dish since it is the easiest. There was some cutting and marinating which I accomplished after my daughter left for her football game and now all the components

are ready to be put in the oven and I am free to brood over Dr. Kagon's arrival. I wipe my hands and return to the living room where I attempt to read the remaining sections of the newspaper, but I find I am distracted. Curiously, I am not distracted by the impending date, but by the weekend project I have not been able to begin. Six weeks ago I resolved to clean out my wife's possessions for storage, beginning with the clothes in the master bedroom closet. The resolution coincided with the club cocktail party and my new social campaign. Six weekends have passed and still I have not begun. I put down the newspaper, go upstairs, and peer into the closet as if to confirm for myself that nothing has changed. The skirts, dresses, blouses, and shoes remain, as always. Perhaps I will begin the project later.

I turn and undress, replacing the authentically casual clothes I have worn all weekend with pleated trousers and a cashmere sweater. I am not accustomed to dressing for dates, and I selected this particular combination of trousers and sweater in consultation with my daughter. As I examine the effect in the wall mirror, I hear her at the door downstairs. I wash my face and shave and by the time I return to the living room, I find her sitting on the back of the couch, looking out the picture window to the street.

"We won," she says.

I ask the score, but she doesn't know.

"We don't ever really follow the game," she says. "We mainly sit in the stands and eat hot dogs and goof off."

I notice that she has changed clothes too, exchanging her ordinary bicycle-riding jeans for designer corduroys with zippers at the ankles. Her hair is pulled back with a comb and she wears the long, silver earrings her mother bought for her on our trip to Spain.

"I guess you don't need the Toyota."

"No, Charles is picking me up. Thanks anyway."

I remind her that tonight is a school night and not to stay out too late.

"Oh, Dad," she rolls her eyes, "when do I ever go out on a Sunday night? I'm going out tonight so you and the doctor can have a little privacy."

"Thanks."

"Of course, I would like to meet this doctor. What is she like?"

"She has a terrible serve."

"Come on, Dad."

What *is* she like? It's a hard question to answer. I don't know her very well after all. She strikes me as one of those people who's always monitoring their own feelings. Someone quick to defend themselves with the emotional jujitsu of Assertiveness Training.

"She's medium-small, about five-five. Short brown hair sort of brown dry. About like this." I hold my hands out around my head to approximate the volume of space occupied by Dr. Kagon's hair.

My daughter struggles to draw an impression. After a moment of concentration she says, "I was tempted to tell Charles to pick me up a little later so I could meet her, but I figured you wouldn't want me around."

"Very considerate."

I have a secret problem with Dr. Kagon, a problem which has nothing to do with the woman who is intelligent and attractive. Her name is also the name of an industrial cleanser I remember from college days when I worked as a janitor. The associations are distracting. When the doorbell rings I am fooled into thinking that Dr. Kagon is early.

"That's Charles," says my daughter. Sure enough, his second-hand station wagon is in the drive. My daughter answers the door. I hear them murmuring to one another across the threshold. She is probably saying things like, "Oh come on in and say hello to Dad for just two seconds, it won't kill you." And he is probably reluctant, understandably hoping for a quick getaway. They emerge from the vestibule so that Charles may shake my hand, smiling, deferential, putting on his best manners for his girlfriend's father. Charles is a likeable kid, I'm sure, though I'll never know what he's really like because he's always so self-consciously presentable when I meet him. He's tall and a little thin, sandy haired and freckled, a member of the soccer team, but not what you would call a jock. In truth, my daughter strikes me as much more of woman than Charles is a man. Made up with her hair in a comb, her silver earrings and jean jacket, she has an air of youthful sophistication while Charles looks a bit goofy and awkward by comparison. They have been seeing each other since the middle of their junior years and now they are seniors. Among their friends they are thought of as a couple. If I wish to

torture myself, I can speculate on the extent of their sexual activities, an exercise which, like touching a sore tooth, is hard to resist. I am especially leery of Charles' station wagon and the blanket which is folded over the tool box in the back. Sometimes I catch myself looking for evidence of sexual activity although I'm not sure what I'm looking for. It comes out in undignified ways, like an urge to check on the snow tires which are stored in a back closet off the den when they are down there late on a Friday night watching television. My wife used to suggest I call the "sex police" whenever I got into one of these antsy, protective moods. It was our private joke. The "sex police" would tap the phone, examine the garbage for sexual debris, seize prophylactics and other sexual paraphernalia, slip saltpeter into Charles' cheeseburgers.

"So where are you two off to?" I ask, my voice infused with good cheer. I note, with chagrin, that I am as artificial as Charles.

"We thought we'd see a movie," he says, his voice in equal parts friendly, polite, and deferential.

He names a movie I cannot identify. I scan my mental database for review information. Newspapers, Siskel and Ebert, radio critic. . . I'm stumped. I have nothing to offer in the way of conversation.

"What time are you going to be back?" I ask.

"What time do you want me back, Dad?" my daughter replies, her grin full of mischievous intent. She exchanges a glance with Charles, prompting him to speak.

"I hear you have a date tonight, too . . .," he says. The line, guilelessly conceived, provokes embarrassment in us both. Only my daughter seems undisturbed.

"Not just a date. A first date," she says.

"That's not true. I had lunch with her twice. And don't forget those tennis games." I am smiling, but I am uncomfortable with this banter. I walk them to the door and wave them off. Charles goes on to the station wagon while my daughter stops halfway down the front steps to run up again and give me a kiss on the cheek.

"Don't wait up for me Dad," she whispers. "Good luck."

Back inside, I set the table and make the final preparations until, at last, the doorbell rings. I pause, adjust a plate, count to ten, and

reflect that on any other night I could be lying on the couch, reading a book.

The window panel of the front door is so high that I can see only the top of Dr. Kagon's head. I fiddle with the lock and open the door with a jerk, admitting a gust of dry leaves. Dr. Kagon stands on the welcome mat wearing a stylish leather jacket, her lips red with lipstick and stretched across a broad smile. She bears a bottle-shaped package in wrapping paper which she waves.

"Hel-lo, hel-lo!" she exclaims. I usher her in with one hand on her shoulder, but the physical contact makes me uncomfortable, and I allow her to move on into the living room, out of my reach.

"What a beautiful house you have. I had a hard time finding it. Of course I missed the last turn where the road forked. But look at it, it's gorgeous."

"We've made a lot of improvements," I say. The word "we" comes automatically, referring to years of domestic partnership in household labor. Every window had at least one cracked pane when we bought it. The grass stood knee high. The foundation sill plate had succumbed to carpenter ants. My forte was rough carpentry and some plumbing. My wife took the lead in painting, window puttying, paper hanging, and, of course, gardening.

We go to the living room where I prepare cocktails. Dr. Kagon has drawn one leg up underneath the other in an attitude which suggests girlish athleticism and Eastern philosophy. As we chat she dangles one pump from the end of a foot. It is easy to imagine her in a metallic, lycra aerobics outfit. By the merest flexing of my imagination, I can envision her doing leg lifts on the Persian rug.

We talk about the house. It is a subject which does not require a great deal of my attention. I can recite the litany of improvements by rote, expand to detail the process necessary to replace a window or a toilet, the hardships encountered on the way. It is a subject which leaves my mind free to explore the curious relationship between clothes and corporal substance, particularly in connection with Dr. Kagon. It is easy to tell, however, that the house talk is just formality; Dr. Kagon has no real interest in the subject of home improvement, and I suspect her mental discourse follows a separate track. Perhaps it

is running parallel to my own.

"Exactly where do you live?" I ask, turning the conversation in new directions.

She names the street. It is not far, maybe three miles.

"An apartment house, one-bedroom, but it's big and it's rent-controlled," she says. "It's good for now," she adds apologetically.

We discuss the cleaning service she hires once a week, an extravagance, I think, for someone living in a one-bedroom apartment, but I do not share this with Dr. Kagon.

"Forty dollars a visit, but it's really worth it," she says.

I myself have never considered hiring a cleaning service. The possibility has never occurred to me. My daughter and I divide chores in the same democratic fashion that we divided chores when my wife was alive except that now we don't seem to use as much of the house as before. Last week my daughter suggested I sell and move into an apartment. After all, she reasoned, next year she will be in college. When she said it the idea struck me like a blow, a betrayal, but she was only trying to be helpful.

"A professional cleaning service . . . ," I repeat.

"I usually get home late from work," says Dr. Kagon, "and I'm just too exhausted to do anything but watch television. The job's really stressful," she adds, shaking her head.

I take the cue and ask about the job. Her specialty is substance abuse counseling. Most of her clients are alcoholic, married to alcoholics, or have alcoholic parents. They all have her home phone number and call in their frequent times of crisis. She spends her day receiving and diffusing the psychic burden of dozens of troubled people and naturally, the pressure takes its toll. The club is a release, of course. Aerobics, twenty vigorous flights on the Stairmaster, a half a mile in the pool . . . tension is shed in sweat, but still you can't get rid of it all, she admits. I pour her another drink.

She tells the war stories of her work, tales of misguided passion, incest, beatings, hospitalization. Through them all there runs a common theme of injustice borne beyond reason: the wife who stays with the abusive husband, the father's sexual harassment of a daughter. The tales of misery are fascinating, but the chicken is ready so we withdraw to the din-

ing room where I light the candles, sheepish and apologetic as I dim the lights, embarrassed at the romantic trappings.

"It makes the food look better," I say.

I eat slowly, listening to Dr. Kagon discuss her Club Med vacation last spring. It was, she said, a terrific release from the tension she had built up at work. She tells stories of turquoise water and 13 volleyball nets, tennis courts and aggressive single men. The place was idyllic, the sports challenging, but the people . . . she describes them with disdain, and yet I sense that she did not find them half so objectionable as she now claims.

We discuss her own counselor, a wonderful sympathetic woman from the South Shore. Every psychologist doing this kind of work goes to some kind of therapy, she says. I envision legions of psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts, each pouring their psycho-burdens out to a professional counselor who in turn imparts those burdens to another counselor and so on, an infinite chain of psychic unloading . . .

We discuss her next vacation, an Austrian ski trip. She plans to go with another woman from the club, an excellent skier. The only problem is that this other woman suddenly wants to bring her new lover, also a member of the club. I recognize the name. He is an "A" tennis player, a man with an accent who wears his collars up. This man, says Dr. Kagon, is a typical European with a macho need to score with every attractive woman he meets, his accent ever thick with sexual innuendo. If she insists on bringing him, says Dr. Kagon, she will ski with her parents in Chamonix instead. Her father, she says, was in an elite mountain corps during the war. It is always fun, she says, to ski with him. The problem with this arrangement is her mother. Her mother is afraid on skis and her father will be reluctant to leave her on the easy trails. He will ski beside her all day long and if Dr. Kagon tempts him away her mother will become cranky and difficult. It is always the same behavior, even when they are not skiing. Her mother demands constant attention from her father and Dr. Kagon finds herself competing for his time. We discuss Dr. Kagon's mother . . .

But now we are back in the living room, sitting on the couch. The dishes are in the sink and a single cushion separates us. Dr.

Kagon inclines toward me. I am dizzy after following her through the headlong rush of topics. Her shoulders tilt forward, her head is cocked upright, she rests her arm along the back of the couch, fingers extend in my direction.

"How long were you married?" she asks.

My head clears; I am suddenly sober.

"Twenty-one years," I say.

"That is such a long time to be with someone that I can hardly imagine it."

"I can hardly imagine anything else."

Dr. Kagon's hair is unnaturally stiff as we bridge the cushion between us and I hold the back of her head in my hand. Her lips, slippery with lip gloss, impart a peculiar and unwelcome waxiness to my mouth. Her free hand come across and rests on my shoulder. One of her shoes drops to the floor with a bump. The embrace feels as unnatural as if I were kissing a department store manikin.

"My daughter will be home soon," I say.

Dr. Kagon suggests I see the excellent job the cleaning service has done with her one-bedroom apartment. When I decline she says she can understand my difficulty after twenty-one years. We talk a little more, we kiss a little more, but my mind is absent. The talking and kissing are polite formalities. At last we rise together and I see her to the door.

"You know, I imagine your wife wasn't so much older than I am now when she died,"

says Dr. Kagon, "and yet she had twenty-one years of marriage and a daughter and a house."

"... And a garden."

"Yes. A garden. Those are all things I assumed I would have one day and yet they haven't arrived. It's like I've always been waiting for my 'real' life to arrive . . ."

I pause, expecting Dr. Kagon to continue, but she doesn't. Abruptly, she says, "Call me," and walks down the steps, into the night, towards her car.

Upstairs I push the door to the big closet off the master bedroom and let it swing into the cedar space. I breathe the fragrance that still mingles with my own, the two sets of clothes hanging on either side as they have, in various closets, for twenty-one years. From the high shelf I stretch to pull down a large suitcase and remove a single silk blouse from its hanger. I recognize this blouse. I lay it on the bed, fold it carefully, and place it in the suitcase. I zipper the suitcase shut, and return it to the closet. That is enough for now, enough for a beginning. □

M.E. Liu has been published in several literary and political magazines including Commentary, Crazyhorse and the Crescent Review. He is presently at work on a crime adventure novel. M.E. Liu makes his living as an architect in Boston.

SEVEN CZECHOSLOVAKIAN POETS

Translated by Dominika Winterová and Richard Katrovas

Jan Rejžek

MIDNIGHT

Outside the winebar on the Lesser Town Square
two men totter on the brink of falling.
Fullthroatedly they sing about nothing.
Then snow appears.
No way can it snow in September!
In a half-opened window above them,
planted, it seems, among the fuchsia,
they spy a little girl in a nightgown,
such a one as is so impatient for
miracles, she creates them herself,
issuing bubbles onto the night.
They puff through the Square like argosies
into Levanta; they wander with the
indeterminacy of a failed
expedition to the Pole; they stray
like mailmen on strange, new routes;
and the largest of them reflects, obliquely,
the quiet men,
and the clock with its hands clasped onto midnight,
when the bubble girl greets good evening.

Světлана Burianová

IF I COULD

I 'd move my ass,
grab my backpack by the neck
and ride it
out of this coughing
Prague,
out of this pub where bodies keep sitting
even after the beer is gone.
I'd pinch my nose
and follow it out
just to see
the sun
diminish like a kid's sucker,
that I might be diminished down
to the sweet stick
and stand a while,
before returning
on the dawn train.

Zdena Bratršovská

THE SWANS OF PRAGUE

They gave notice to the ponds of Bohemia,
for what is *Love* or *Leap* or *Bird Moors* to them?
Their little brains on snake-long necks
finally comprehended that the bare sky
would toss no bread.
So joyfully they multiply
in the hollows of Prague spillways,
slowly turning gray
from the ash of Prague chimneys,
and do not teach their young to fly,
but to pester people under bridges.

I imagine I draw my hands over their greasy bodies,
feeling my life to be such as theirs.
I gave notice to the flooded quarries of home
in which cramps I thought meant love afflicted me,
and to the random caverns of Černá Nisa
where from time to time one discovered
human bones gnawed to the marrow.
In daylight I examine the base of my life,
sprinkling the superstructural crumbs
of verses and hopes into the winds over Botic,
such matters being too ingenious for experts
and too starkly honest even for the curious . . .

Josef Šimon

PRAGUE FISHERMAN

Have you ever observed Prague fisherman,
those reticent inquisitors of water,
those censors of dampness and rheumatism;
have you observed them pitch their bait
into the dirty waters of the present?
They
hook the worm,
which wriggles passionately like the truth,
and tie the line to leaden prospects for the future,
then toss out between Prague bridges
and
wait
for
the line to tremble in their fingers,
while around the red-and-white bobbing floats,
wild ducks cavort,
and bloated rats spin in the currents
like miscarried thoughts
flushed out through the sewers.
And
they wait
for the darkness to tremble in their hands,
before slowly packing up
to leave . . .

Karel Sýs

TROJA AT EIGHT IN THE EVENING

The pigeons still languish
on the pillars of the bridge
which is slated for destruction in a year.
The citizen of Greater Prague,
who tomorrow will twitch in the throes of a heart attack,
today is purchasing imperishable foods.
And you, who don't accept that poems will die
from the molecular crumbling of the crystalin structure of paper,
are writing this poem.

Jiří Žáček

NIGHT AT THE SINGLES DORM

How may I leap from this boxing ring
onto the floating gardens of poesy
when behind the wall a strange woman sings
her passion like a dying animal,
and that which I know but do not see
pounds blood through the convolutions of my ears.

Viciously,
she moans into my solitude
as I gaze upon the slow, post-coital
cuddling of my shoes.

Ivan Wernisch

A WALK AROUND THE BREWERY

Along the wall and to the left
Along the wall and to the left along the wall
and to the left along the wall and to the left

The smell of grain is diminishing
The dust is rising
The smell of grain is diminishing

There's still some time before dark
To the left along the wall and to the left
along the wall

along the wall
along the wall

As far as that house there
the hidden gardens

Robert Hildt

LEARNING FRENCH

You strike a deal with Martine. When you are alone together, you will speak only English. When you are with her French friends, you will speak only French. You tell her you would have to do this anyway. Yes, she smiles. Her English is good. Your French is improving.

Martine talks to you in mock American. She calls it movie American. "So what brings you to these parts, eh, kid?" Her accent makes the corn fresh.

You are both awake. The apartment is cold and you put off getting out of bed. Last night, Martine told you she hates Germans more than Americans, but not much. This morning, you say, "If you hate Americans, why am I waking up next to you?"

"Because I didn't dust you off during the night."

When you and Martine go shopping, you stay on the island. She does the talking and the merchants give better prices. There are no supermarkets on the Ile St. Louis. You shop in hole-in-the-wall stores tucked in along the rue St. Louis en L'Ile. You go into the compact *cremerie*. The walls are clean white tile. White enamel shelves stand stocked with regional cheeses. The aroma, contained inside the small space, is rich. You pick fresh, warm eggs out of a stone crock. The eggs are layered in yellow straw. You buy milk in graceful green bottles, with the heavy cream on top. At the *charcuterie*, you pick up some black, oily Moroccan olives wrapped in waxpaper. When the net carrying bags are filled, you stop at the corner *bar-tabac* for a cold beer.

"I visit my family this weekend," Martine says. "I told you this."

"I know."

"Will you behave?"

"Maybe I'll look for someone else."

"Maybe you'll find someone else."

"Do you have to go home?"

"It's a dirty job, mister, but somebody's got to do it."

You leave some change on the zinc counter and haul your groceries down the quai.

The concierge.

You court Madame Graf. You give her potted plants for her courtyard: geraniums and spring bulbs. You stop to chat about her health and make jokes about your bad French. When you come back from Mont St. Michel, you will bring her a souvenir cushion. In return, Madame Graf does not declare war on the American. She likes Martine.

Madame Graf is a small woman. She is strong and direct. Her eyes do not evade. She has seen hurt and stupidity and has no patience for these things. Her husband was killed a long time ago, in the Resistance. She tells you they were two children.

Madame Graf's cat, black with a white snout, is named Gaspard. Gaspard is fat and spends his life snoozing in the courtyard. Your courtship of Madame Graf includes a present for Gaspard, a small plastic ball with a bell inside. He bats it a couple of times with his paw, then pads back to his nap.

Madame Graf tells you Marc Chagall used to live on the third floor, his stopping spot in Paris. She tells you *le maitre* was a kind man. She still offers prayers for his safekeeping in the arms of the Lord. Heading upstairs, you greet Chagall's door. "Hi, how's it going?" When you go out, you tell the door "Be right back" or "Take care." Martine says this is dangerously dumb.

"I'm being neighborly."

"His work is overrated."

A letter from your brother in the fifth form at Choate.

He is applying to Dartmouth, Brown and Chapel Hill, and wants Chapel Hill. He is on the squash team. He is dating Pam, a Rosemary Hall girl. Pam posed for a shampoo ad last year. He is playing drums in a rock band, The Driving Stupid.

He signs off: The Voice of America.

You find Cabano the way you would find a coin on the sidewalk. You have walked past Cabano often, not knowing it was there. One night, walking through the dark block, you hear the music and voices inside. Curtains are pulled across the front window. There is no sign, only a dim light over the front door. You watch from across the street, a stakeout. Some people come out and go off towards the river. While the door is open, you see more people inside, lamplight, a bar. You decide to go in.

The barman is built like a wrestler. He nods. You have come into his bar, he has never seen you before, he pours you a drink. A jug lamp with a parchment shade gives low light to your end of the bar. The place is crowded, voices compete. Music comes out of a room in back. The back room looks like the inside of a thatched hut. Kids pack the low tables, some dance crammed onto a tiny dance floor. The barman comes back, refills your glass, then moves on down the bar.

After a while, the crowd thins out. When you ask for your tab, the bar is almost empty. The kids in the back room have gone home. You pay, start for the door. One of your legs has gone to sleep. The voice, a deep bark, surprises you. "*Monsieur.*" You turn. The barman reaches across the bar, shakes hands. "Jean-Paul," he says. "*A demain.*" He is not expecting you. He is only saying you are welcome back tomorrow, if you like.

You will go back to Cabano often. You will become friends with Jean-Paul and Pierre, the brothers who own and work the bar. Pierre says they are "the bosses of the bar." When Jean-Paul and Pierre were younger, they were paratroopers in Algeria. Now they are married, with their own families. Their father also works in the bar. Like his sons, the old man is big, and not to be crossed. He handles the money. Every night, papa sits plumped

on a tall chair, like a frog on his pad, grinning dimly at his cash register. During the time you have left on the island, Cabano will become your hangout and occasional escape hatch.

You have been invited to a dinner party in Neuilly, friends of Martine. Aperitifs are served in the living room. The room is soft and warm, cushioned with brocade the yellow of young daffodils. Elizabeth, your hostess, is also American. Elizabeth is married to Max Roth-le-Gentil, a member of the French financial establishment. Max has two children from an earlier marriage, a seat on the Bourse, and a hunting lodge in Normandy. Martine has alerted you that you and she will be invited out to Normandy for *la chasse*, unless you behave rudely at table or do not go along when Elizabeth flirts with you. Martine rides with Elizabeth twice a week in the Bois. She tells you Elizabeth is having an affair with one of the stable boys. In the living room, Elizabeth talks to you about America, Sondheim, the Mets, Cambridge, people you might both know. She introduces you to her friends as *mon copain*. You are seated next to Elizabeth at dinner and she rests her hand on your leg during the fish course. Across the table, Martine is radiant in the candlelight and you are proud. From the head of the table, Max brings you into his conversation. Does he know his wife's left hand is moving up the inside of your right leg? Max asks, "*Tu joue au golf?*"

One night, coming back late, you stop at Chagall's door. You say what you like and what you do not like about his work. You say goodnight and continue upstairs. You are glad you cleared the air.

The Voice of America.

He is going to bum around the Cape this summer with some of the guys from school, crash where they can, get odd jobs if they have to, hack around. Dartmouth and Chapel Hill look good. Is it true what they say about French girls?

What do they say about French girls? You do not know. You write back, a postcard lifted

from Lipp. Of course it's true. Do you want Polaroids?

La chasse.

Following the hunt in a car is easy, Martine tells you. Just listen for the dogs, track the sound, you will meet up with the hunters. It makes sense. It doesn't work. You get lost. Martine becomes confused. Every time you hear the hounds, they are somewhere else and farther away. You follow miles of single-track dirt roads through brittle winter woods. You don't catch up with the hunt until the end of the day when you drive back to the house. The horses have been stabled and the hunters are belting back Calvados.

Dinner in the timber-beamed dining room is a loud and extended affair. Max is one of the masters of the hunt. His house is filled with friends. He glistens with the pace and release of the event. Elizabeth tells you the house is always cold. She says it's the goddamn stones.

Dinner lasts late. After midnight, you tell Elizabeth your day playing hound-and-hare in the woods has wiped you out. Would she excuse you? Elizabeth clucks your chin. "*Bien sur, mon copain.*" She busses Martine, asks when Martine is leaving for Grasse. Martine tells her two weeks. Upstairs, you ask Martine what Grasse was about. She tells you her grandparents have a house in Grasse. She visits them every year. It is not important. "*C'est pas grave.*" She meant to tell you.

You and Martine leave the house after breakfast and drive out to the coast.

Mont St. Michel is a sequence of slides.

You head across the straight strip of road that connects the mainland to the island. The place approaches, a jumbled pile on top of a sandbar. You are disappointed. It looks like the pictures in school books and travel brochures. You had expected more.

After dinner, Martine says she wants to climb the fortress.

"Now?"

"Our night to howl."

Near the top, you discover a cloistered garden snuggled into a corner of one of the ramparts. In the white light of a full moon, you can follow the coast of France for miles.

Martine points a slow sweep of the horizon. "Someday, my boy, this will all be yours."

A chill comes up off the water. You hold each other, sharing warmth. Even together, you feel alone and insignificant inside the immense peace of where you are.

In the morning, you check out of the inn early. You go to Mere Poularde for Sunday omelets and oversize cups of scalding coffee. Going back down the steep cobbled street, you shop for souvenirs. Back at sea level, you get the car and return to the mainland. The tide is out and gulls pick their way across the wet sandbar.

You stop for lunch in a small farm village. The cafe faces a dusty square, across from the church. You take a table outside in the shade of an old plane tree. The flat spring leaves shuffle softly in a light breeze. Bikes and mopeds lean against the mottled trunks of the trees. On the far side of the square, people linger in front of the dark stone church. The little girls look delicate in their Sunday dresses. The farmboys look scrubbed, starched, and restless. You spend almost two hours over a plate of local cheeses, a bowl of fresh fruit, warm bread with good tough crust, and two carafes of red country wine. When you walk across to the car, the families have gone home to their Sunday dinners and the square is empty.

On the road back to Paris, Martine tells you she is making out her Christmas list. "I want you to give me a Norman farmboy."

"I'll be back in the States."

"I keep forgetting," she says. "*Tant pis.*"

"Comment?"

"Tough shit, sweetheart."

Martine is running errands, getting ready for Grasse. You go shopping alone. You are ripped off, the street stinks, the *bar-tabac* is closed because of a death in the family, the groceries are heavy. Gaspard watches you come in. He snorts. Before starting upstairs, you tell him to chill out or you will kick his hairy ass across the river and into the *Marais*. He emits a quick sneeze, turns and trots back to the courtyard.

You and Martine are tired. You have night-caps before turning in. Martine takes her glass out to the pantry. You excuse yourself, come back a few minutes later. Martine asks, "What was that?"

"Something I forgot to tell Chagall on the way up."

"What?"

"I forgot to say goodnight."

Martine says she is worried about you and Chagall.

You tell her not to concern herself. "What we have is between us."

"I wish I felt more sure about you."

"Me, too."

While Martine is in Grasse, you come down with the flu. A cold snap has hit the city and the wind off the river numbs. Madame Graf tells you to stay inside until your fever breaks. Each day, she climbs the five flights to bring you a small tureen of hot soup. When you feel better, you buy her a bunch of spring flowers and a glazed clay vase.

The famous American novelist has become a Cabano regular. He comes in alone, leans forward on the bar like a boxer in his corner, drinks Scotch. Pierre tells you he expatriated to Paris a couple of years ago and lives down the block on Quai Bethune. One night, late, you talk to him. He is not unfriendly, you are an American. He asks about you, but will not talk about himself or his work. He does talk about his wife, also American, tells you she has a drinking problem. He talks about women and men as abstractions. As the rounds go down, he becomes the Hemingway joke, macho, vulnerable. Behind the tough stance, he seems fragile and frightened. Drunkenly avuncular, he tells you to get it down before you lose it and stay clear of the fucking sharks. When Pierre cuts him off, he pays up and goes out. You imagine him turning up his collar and walking home in the rain.

It is an impeccable spring day. Paris is postcard perfect. You stop at Flore and luck into a table outside. While you are adjusting your chair, you look in through the window. There

is one couple inside, facing away from you. The man is well-tended, with salt-and-pepper gray hair. The woman is Martine. It is not Martine, of course. Martine is in Grasse. She called night before last to tell you she will be back next week. This has happened to you before. You recognize somebody from the back, you call, they turn, you apologize to a stranger. You order a beer and watch the people going past on the sidewalk. Late afternoon sunlight filters through the new leaves. The women look wonderful, so assured and contained, like gentle mysteries. You do not notice the couple when they come outside onto the terrace. When you look up, they are out at the curb. The man gives the woman a quick kiss, then ducks into a taxi. As the cab pulls away from the curb, Martine waves.

Cabano.

Jean-Paul asks when Martine gets back. You tell him next week. You feel you are stuck in a bad boulevard farce, popular in France, a bomb in the States. You sit at the far end of the bar. *Le pere* is perched behind you, studying his ancient cash register.

It is after hours, the clubs are closed. The kids in the back room are getting ready to go home. They come up front, settle their tab with Papa and go out, chattering like morning birds. You hear them outside in the street, laughing, then they are gone.

Cabano is empty. The old man says goodnight. The frog lids have almost closed down over his bulbous eyes. He shuffles out. Jean-Paul goes around shutting off the lights. He leaves the dirty glasses and crumpled napkins where they are. Pierre will clean up when he comes in this afternoon. Jean-Paul takes a bottle of the house red from behind the bar, puts some paper cups in his jacket pocket, says, "*Allons-y.*"

Rue le Regratier is still in shadow but it is starting to get light out. At the end of the block, you and Jean-Paul cross the quai and walk down the ramp to river level. You settle onto the old stones. Soon the sun will come up behind you and burn the mist off the water. Now there is only the gray softness and the quiet.

Jean-Paul pours two cups of wine. You talk

about what you have been doing. Jean-Paul asks questions about America. You ask about France, the French, and he tells you things you do not know. You tell Jean-Paul you lied, that Martine is in Paris, you saw her in Flore with an older man. Jean-Paul says he guessed. He pours you a refill. He reminds you that you will be going back to America soon. Martine will be staying here. He speaks as a friend. He says you have finished college, now maybe you will start to learn. You are lucky. You are young and you have the advantage. Also, you are a big jerk. He tells you not to worry about something you do not know. He shrugs. He says he is embarrassed to talk like a guru, *un savant*. Martine will be back from Grasse when she gets back.

The mist is lifting. Across the channel, a dust gray cat watches you from the embankment of Ile de la Cite. Jean-Paul looks back and growls softly, a low warning growl. You wait for him to start barking. Instead, he sticks out his tongue. The cat cocks its head. Jean-Paul tells you Paris is a city of cats. You tell Jean-Paul you think cats suck.

"Vraiment?"

Le clochard.

He looks like Victor Hugo on the skids. He is very old, but there is accumulated strength in his face. He has a white beard, like Hugo, but it is knotted and matted with particles and crumbs. His skin is like rubbed oak, deep-baked by the sun and dark with ground-in grime. You realize he was a young man once, trim and fresh-scrubbed. Now he is worn, like the stones, and old as the river. You have seen him before. Last week, you and Jean-Paul came down for a morning snort and the old man shambled over from the base of the footbridge to cadge a wake-up cup. He recognizes you and is back. Jean-Paul pours out some wine. Hugo nods, moves a few feet away and sits at the edge of the river, facing across the water at the hind end of the cathedral.

Jean-Paul says he wants to get home before his little girl leaves for school. You have achieved a significant wine buzz and are ready to turn in. Jean-Paul gives what is left of the wine to the *clochard*. You walk Jean-Paul back to his car, say good morning, and start across the island.

You stop at the *bar-tabac* for coffee with warm milk. You are surrounded by a confusion of morning voices, arguing, laughing, swapping stories about last night. Beyond the lace half-curtains, steam condenses and runs in long trickles down the glass. You remember leaving the windows open in the apartment. The place will be cold when you get back. You finish your coffee, push through the crowd, go out.

The island is awake now. People pass, moving in the direction of the bridges, headed off to work in the city. You start down Quai d'Anjou, walking on the river side. First sun warms the fronts of the houses. The river is calm, like dull slate. On the far bank, moored barges are coming to life. A burly woman heaves up out of a cabin, hauls out a flat of potted geraniums and sets the plants on deck in the sun. A couple of kids play tag in the cramped stern. A mutt is curled up, asleep on top of the cabin.

Gaspard stretches in the back shadows and comes across the stone walk to greet you. He has decided to be friendly, a new tactic. He rubs against your leg and you can feel the rattle of his purr. Inside, you hear Madame Graf singing as she bangs the pots and china in her kitchen, making breakfast.

"Hey go, Marc, how's it hanging?"

You let yourself into the sweet freshness of the apartment. The front room is filled with sunlight. There is a note on the hall table, next to the mail. You recognize Madame Graf's handwriting, the careful, angular script of French schoolgirls. She greets you, trusts you are well, asks when you will be leaving. The owner has telephoned and would like to know when you decide. There is no hurry, of course. She, Madame Graf, would be happy if you stayed. Would you do her the kindness to reply at your convenience. She thanks you and, once again, trusts you are well.

You go hollow inside. Lines are being cut. You will be going home soon. When Jean-Paul said you would be going back to America, you resented the idea, the fact that he and the others would still be here after you left. You

have achieved squatter's rights, staked claims. You take the mail into the front room. It is not cold. You notice the windows have been closed. Either Madame Graf closed them or you did not open them. You take off your clothes and leave them in a pile on the church chair. You sit naked in a slab of sunlight and go through the mail. A note from Elizabeth invites you to Neuilly for a quiet evening to celebrate Martine's return from Grasse. Letters from the States ask when you are coming back. The Voice of America wants to know why you don't stay. The squash team beat Kent and they have disbanded The Driving Stupid.

You go back to the bedroom. The old floor feels good under your bare feet. The window in the bedroom is open wide. Martine is back. She is sprawled across the bed, asleep in a tangle of sheets. You settle carefully onto the

bed, lean back. She does not wake up. Her easy breathing lulls, reassures. You take in her familiar, delicate fragrance. Reaching across, you give her shoulder a soft kiss, then turn on your side, your back to her. You face the window, look out at the rooftops. Somebody is arguing down in the courtyard. Martine shifts in her sleep behind you. Her breathing shifts, too. You listen while she stretches awake. "Howdy, stranger," she says, a sleepy drawl. "Where y'all been?" You tell her, "Cabano." Martine rests against your back, brings her arm around your chest. She whispers at the back of your neck. "I brought you a present from Grasse." □

Robert Hildt's short fiction has appeared in Chelsea, Fiction, North Atlantic Review, and Other Voices. He lives in New York City.

Stanley H. Barkan

UNDER THE WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE

(for Menke Katz and Yussel Greenspan)

"People died not so much from
hunger as from despair."
—*About the Great Depression*

Barging under
the Williamsburg Bridge
—over the river of forgetfulness—
the stacks of bodies
of the faceless dead
on the way to potter's field.

Who knows them—
these strugglers against
days without work
nights without hope?

Even the masters
of the sky-pricking towers
are stretched out
nameless
picked from the waters
of Babylon.

We sit and wonder
under the Williamsburg Bridge,
hatless, coatless,
shivering in the wind and spray,
mouth agape for apples
and hard rolls purchased
five for a nickel.

Between bites
of bread and apple,
we shout out poems
for these passing piles
laid out like heaps for dumps.

After the slashed-white wake,
we startle at our selves
reflected in the glass-black waves.

Claudio Rodríguez

SUNFLOWER

Translated by Elizabeth Gamble Miller

This pretty face,
this lap that was a flower and is so soon
pregnant and I love it and now
I pull it to me and its simple
luminous revolution,
its dance, that is a harvest,
for the soul's sake comes into me
this September afternoon,
to my good fortune,
because now, you, brave sunflower,
with so blind a gaze,
you were what I badly needed
with your posture of pardon, after that
sunny campaign of pride,
head bowed to earth, conquered
by so much grain, such a mad endeavor.

Robert Clark Young

ARMENTROUT

Armentrout stood on the terrace, sixteen floors up, his hands on the rail, and looked out over the lights of Alexandria. His gaze moved along a million red and yellow Arabian lanterns, up and down the brilliant arc of the Mediterranean, across the silver streaks of light in the harbor, over the blue diamond of Fort Keyt Bey, down the golden lights of Avenue Horreya, and onto the faint pearly lights of the Nile delta—a fist in the sea, twenty miles away. All of it pleased him, pleased him down to his hands on the rail, pleased him in a way that filled his chest.

He was at the Sheraton-Montazah Hotel—had just returned a group of Australian tourists to their rooms—had decided to go up, afterwards, to the observation patio on the sixteenth floor. The best view of the city.

He felt eyes on his back. Crazy: His happiness fell out of his chest and tumbled down the side of the building, and he thought he could hear it bounce off a moving taxi and die under another's tires. It was only the sounds of the city—he knew that—just as he knew he would turn and find nothing, no one behind him. But he believed it was there! He felt the thing, and for a long, paralyzed moment he was terrified. It was a creeping horror from an Egyptian cave.

* * *

He had been living in Alexandria, with Nancy, for seven weeks. For fifty dollars a week, they rented the top floor of a three-story house on consular row. Ten rooms were theirs, done in French-diplomat, with mahogany desks and gilded chairs and heavy chandeliers and baroque couches and a sagging, canary-yellow, canopy bed. For twelve dollars a week a huge Arab woman, Mrs. Habeel, cooked their meals and did the laundry. For another five her nephew, Ekram, came in on Thursdays to dust all ten rooms, beat all nine rugs on one of three balconies,

wash all twenty-seven windows, and mop all ten floors on his knees with a bucket and rag.

They lived on the best avenue of the city, a street called Kafer Abdu, which, despite its palatial consulates flying European flags, was still Egypt, was still piled with garbage and roamed by goats and horse-drawn carts and yellow starving dogs. Across the street, two doors down, stood one of Alexandria's ten thousand mosques. It was a small, neighborhood version, no minarets—except for the stained glass, it could have been a post office. The Kafer Abdu Mosque possessed, however, one of ten thousand loudspeakers, and five times a day the nasally amplified call to prayer came exploding through the windows, open or shut.

There was another Alexandria, one which interested Armentrout and his clients more than the Arab city. This more-interesting city was altogether different—no mosques or goats or peeling British mansions—the city of interest had been dead for fifteen hundred years, was Greek, with columned avenues and Platonic scholars and a famous library. He could stand at the corner of Nebi Danyel and Horreya and cross the centuries in his mind. These streets, intersecting for 2300 years, had formed the Times Square of western history, culture and thought, had bordered the famous Mouseion and its library. Armentrout had stood—how many times?—at that corner, blocking out the hundred racing black-and-orange taxis, their horns, the masses of white-robed men and black-robed women, the concrete and the asphalt, the rusty semaphore nobody heeded. He would concentrate on the rise of Nebi Danyel as it went north: No one had ever excavated here, but there was a definite rise, there was something there, under a million ignorant feet. Was it the ruins of the library? Or the lost tomb of Alexander the Great?

Armentrout would close his eyes, cover his ears, and listen for the footsteps and quiet

talk of Apollonius of Rhodes, Callimachus and Theocritus, Eratosthenes and Archimedes. They were dust, and their lost manuscripts were dust, under the asphalt of a congested third-world boulevard.

But he enjoyed standing there. It had become, over seven weeks, more and more interesting than any spot in his forgotten Ohio. It didn't matter what anyone thought of him here; he could be the generic American, twenty-five years old, standing on a street corner. If someone were to ask him, in tentative, awkward English, why he was standing there, he could give an answer, and no one would call him any of those words he had been called in high school, or even college, no one would make him feel stunted, unnatural, too bright.

He had always been Armentrout, never Steve. They had addressed him by his last name for so long that he, for years now, had thought of himself as Armentrout.

Armentrout. It was better than anything else they had called him. And now they were half a life and half a world away. He had finally found a place where he would never have to think of them again. He was a guide—Nancy was, too—for Hercules Tours International, and the clients listened carefully to, were seriously interested in, the little portions of history and literature and philosophy he spoke to them among Egyptian ruins.

He liked the tourists; wealthy, well-educated Europeans, mostly. They would never call him a nerd.

* * *

One night, in the canopy bed, Nancy had clutched him so fiercely he awoke in an instant.

"What's wrong?"

She was trembling against him. "I had a nightmare."

"It's okay," he said sleepily, and stroked her hair. He began to drift back to sleep as she told the dream, but then she came to a point that jolted him awake again, jolted him harder than her arms had a minute ago.

"He had a body and shoulders like a man, and a head like a dog—he was eight feet tall and he was coming for me—I woke up."

Talking about it calmed her, and she fell asleep in his arms while Armentrout, more

frightened now than she had been, lay awake for an hour.

When he was five and six and seven, Steve Armentrout used to dream of a creature with a man's body and a dog's head. The dream was always the same. Hound Man would come to him, arms extended, dog's head as lacquered as a black stone. Stevie was curious, strangely not afraid, expectantly numb. Hound Man would pick him up and throw him in the air, up, up, up, and Stevie would not come down—he would continue going up until he woke up—sitting up.

After a few months there was nothing startling or frightening about it . . . an odd but routine experience . . . he would go back to sleep without effort.

One day he mentioned the dream to a group of neighborhood children.

"Yes, yes," said a nine-year-old girl, "that's Hound Man."

"Who's Hound Man?"

"Everybody dreams about Hound Man. He throws you up high, over the clouds. It's fun."

The dreams stopped before he was ten. One afternoon, at the age of twelve, he was sitting in a seventh-grade history class, turning a page in the fat textbook. There, in color, was a gold statue of Hound Man. The caption read "ANUBIS—EGYPTIAN GOD OF THE DEAD."

He experienced a bone-knocking terror: his jaw felt as though it had locked, and his knees banged up loudly on the underside of the desk.

He knew then. The next time he dreamt of Hound Man—Anubis—he would not wake up.

He never told Nancy that he had had dreams similar to the one she'd told him about; it would frighten her, he was sure. After a few days he forgot her nightmare. A month went by. And then, this afternoon—on the day he had finished by going up to the sixteenth floor of the Sheraton-Montazah to look at the city lights, to try to forget, only to feel it on his back again—it had all come back with a terrifying intensity.

Hercules had added a new stop on its Alexandrine Tour. These were the catacombs at Kam-el-Shuqqafa. To prepare himself, he had read E. M. Forster's description of the famous caves, and made a preliminary visit

with an Arab guide. He felt ready. He went down with a group of Australians; he showed them the banquet cavern, where the Romans had stretched out on pillows to enjoy their funereal feasts; he showed them the empty crypts, the three rooms with long cool hollows in the walls, long ago robbed clean; he showed them the small hole in the ceiling, where the wheel of a donkey cart had broken through in 1915, bringing the catacombs into the twentieth century; he showed them the great pile of bones the Egyptian government had put behind glass, bones of Romans mixed hopelessly with bones of North African horses—men and stallions had been buried together—no one knew why; he led his tourists further down, until they were walking on sagging planks, for the floor was covered with water.

And then he had brought them to the centerpiece, a huge, alabaster-colored sarcophagus. It lay in its own crypt, a room exquisitely carved from the rock, with hieroglyphic friezes on the walls, Romanized pharaohs—in togas—carved into the entablature, and classical pillars to either side of the entrance.

"Two hundred A.D.," he explained, his voice echoing against the rock walls, and gave them the details of the chamber's composition, inscriptions, and ritual use. The Australians nodded soberly, perhaps beginning to feel the squall of their Egyptian lunches, and turned for the next cavern.

He was the last out, and that was when he had come nose-to-nose with it—he had missed it in Forster, had missed it with the Arab guide—it stood against the far side of a pillar—it was a three-dimensional carving of Anubis, Hound Man, the horror from dreams, jutting from the stone with square human shoulders and a life-size jackal's head, a dog-gish nightmare deep down in an ancient catacomb, one large eye looking directly into his.

He had run up the 247 hand-carved steps, forgetting the Australians, up into sunlight, the circle of tenements like black warehouses, multi-colored laundry flapping from the concrete balconies . . . the braying loudspeakers of a mosque . . . the late afternoon moon like a skull with grey sockets. He thought his heart would erupt from his chest and fall to the rocky ground, a red hopping frog. He stood with his hands on his knees as he caught his breath and thought shudderingly of the

thing in the cave. Twenty minutes later, when the Australians came to find him, he was walking in an anxious circle, kicking at stones, his heart still pounding stupidly.

That night, when Nancy called from Cairo—she was with a group of Belgians—he said nothing about Anubis. The ten-room apartment felt twice as big without her. After heating the chicken and potatoes Mrs. Habeel had left, after eating at the head of the table in the formal dining room, in the semi-dark with candles, he had gone to the French parlor, at the far end of the house, with the Mid-East edition of *Newsweek*.

An apartment this large had its creaks, its false footsteps, but before tonight they had never bothered him. Tonight there were gremlins up in every corner, armies of sprites in the kitchen—annoyed at his anxiety, he shut the double doors of the parlor. One of them was crookedly set, and it—slowly, silently opened as he read. He watched it peripherally, disturbed, disgusted with himself. Finally he rose to shut it again.

He paused in the doorway, looking across the apartment, which was dark. He could see about eighty feet to the opposite end, into Nancy's dressing room. The mirror over her vanity was reflecting the light from the French parlor—the mirror appeared to be floating in the dark, a smoky baroque shape, ghostly silver. It appeared, almost, to be emitting the light, rather than reflecting it. This upset Armentrout.

He turned, then stopped. It was with him. Its eyes and heat were there in the dark, behind him. He could hear it breathing. It was living in his house—had always lived in his house, always would, but now it had materialized—he was afraid to look. He knew it was an eight-foot man with immense shoulders and the black pointed face of a dog. He felt fear on his skin like a moving scarab. At the same time, he was almost hysterically angry—at the insolence of the monster, its creeping invasion, its stupid childish hiding. Of course when he finally turned there was nothing there, nothing but a lit mirror floating in the dark.

His mind was useless. He felt as lost and confused as the boy Alexander, who had struggled to comprehend Aristotle. The questions of life, of existence, seemed infinitely more mysterious, to Armentrout now, than

any treatise of the Greek School.

Why, for instance, after majoring in philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, had he gone to work in a travel agency? Why had he stayed at the job until he was twenty-five, suffering four enervating years behind a phone bank and a computer? Why, when the agency had finally offered him the opportunity to travel, had they sent him all of seventy-two miles, to a tour-marketing seminar in Dayton? Why, while there, had he met and fallen in love with Nancy, why had he taken her back to Cincinnati and why, only a month later, had they accepted jobs with Hercules Tours International, and gone to live in Alexandria, Egypt?

And then he thought, senselessly and frightfully, I've come here to die.

* * *

On a Saturday morning, the gold French telephone rang in the apartment, and Armentrout picked up the receiver. It was Nancy, calling from the police station. A German tourist had been mugged in an ocean of people in Saad Zaghloul Square; the man had lost his wallet and passport. Could Armentrout look in her spiral notebook—she believed it was sitting on her vanity—and find the name and home number of the German ambassador? She had scrawled them hurriedly in a margin, she said, two weeks ago at a party at the Uruguayan Consulate.

"Hang on," he said and went to look. Her vanity was a mess—bras, perfume bottles, hotel brochures, any number of tattered spiral notebooks. He smiled at one of their differences: he had a large office next to the French parlor, with two immaculate mahogany desks and—after only seven weeks—109 file folders alphabetized in three drawers. He grabbed the first notebook he saw and quickly began to flip through it.

It was her diary. He hadn't known she kept one. Here were their lives, set down in blue ink on lined paper. His eyes fell like magnets on the words, and he read quickly here and there, ashamed of himself and aware of her waiting on the phone in the other room.

He was reading about the weekend he had gone to Minneapolis for the Winter Vacation Seminar. Nancy had driven up to Cleveland—he was learning this only now—to see Dennis

Northwood—where had he heard the name? Hadn't Northwood been at the Dayton seminar? Wasn't he an angular and officious-looking travel agent with gold glasses and a gold tie clip? Didn't he actually wear gold cufflinks and have an office in Shaker Heights, and send wealthy Ohioans on tours to Scandinavia and the Bahamas? And when Armentrout had been in Minneapolis, trudging through an ice storm on his way to workshops—"Ice Fishing for Large Groups" and "Is Your Convention too Conventional?"—Nancy had flown to Bermuda, for the weekend, with Dennis Northwood. She had gone there and she—

When he could read no further, he lay the notebook carefully on the pile of underwear and brochures. He felt as though an animal had been rooting fiercely in his stomach, had left him aching and hollow.

He walked dazedly back to the telephone. He took up the receiver and looked at it for a moment. Then he laid it gently in its cradle.

* * *

He went for an aimless walk, and in the streets of Alexandria his feelings came back to him. He felt lost, bewildered. His life had been obliterated, had been revealed as a sum of zero. All the things he had enjoyed—the luxurious apartment, the parties at the American Consulate, the cocktails with fellow expatriates at the Windsor Palace Hotel, Nancy stretching smoothly toward him in the dark, pressing her hot mouth and body on top of him—now it was nothing. He walked along the crooked streets, past tin-roof shops with naked sheep hanging on hooks, past wooden stands proffering amoebic lettuce or fish dried to the consistency of bark, past the tiled symmetry and pointed minaret of a great mosque, past men in dirty white robes and women in head-to-toe black. He felt followed. He turned, but saw only a meter-square portrait of President Mubarek. Again he felt followed, turned and found only a grey, urinating dog. Once more he felt followed, but was afraid to turn: he had the idea that the dog was standing on its hind legs, shoulders square, face pointed and serious—walking behind him like a man.

* * *

There were many lonely pillars and col-

umns in Alexandria. He had seen them standing singly, inexplicably, in the yards of French colonial mansions, or lying like immense forgotten bones between the tenements, or slanting out of yellow earth which had been, ten centuries ago, moving mud. It was as though the hands of God had descended upon the classical city, gathered up the columns of its palaces and temples and pillared avenues, shaken the columns as though they were the urim and thummim, then sent them scattering across the ruins of the old metropolis.

He was riding with Unter Leichtenstiener, a Swiss tourist, in the back seat of a taxi, on the way to Pompey's Pillar. Unter claimed to have brain cancer, but he was tall and strong and blond—he did not look ill.

"The Arabs is stupid people," Unter had said at their first meeting. "They find a piece of papyrus, they wrap a fish in it. Ja, is so."

It was unfair to resent the Arabs, Armentrout thought as he and Unter rode wordlessly in the taxi. The Arabs had conquered the rubble of Alexandria in 642 A.D., had changed the name to El Iskandrea, had built mosques over the ruins of the library, had treated the stray columns as though they were meaningless stones. But hadn't the French and British been worse? They had carted pillars, statues, mummies and gold to Paris and London. At least the Arabs had left everything intact, under the ground—they had failed to molest, in thirteen hundred years, the dozens of columns which lay along the ancient streets.

The most famous pillar in Alexandria was the only one which had been erected to stand alone. Armentrout reviewed, for the fiftieth time, the tour monologue for Pompey's Pillar. Third century A. D. Not built by Pompey at all, but by Diocletian. Commemorating—

"We will go," said Unter, "to Kam-el-Shuqqafa?"

Armentrout's stomach tightened. He could not force himself to say, *No way, there's a dog-headed man waiting down there in that crypt for me.* Armentrout found himself saying, stupidly, "I'm the tour guide."

"Ja, but I am der client!"

"Kam-el-Shuqqafa," said Armentrout, "has been closed for repairs."

* * *

Pompey's Pillar. It was the color of card-

board, carved from ancient rock, surrounded by a chain-link fence, by brown tenements, but it was still imposing on its knob of a hill—a seventeen-hundred-year-old shaft going straight up, ending in the sky. If you could climb to its flat-corniced top, you would see the whole city.

"Is tall," said Unter, looking too hot in his three-piece suit, getting his shoes dusty as he strode around the immense blocks of the pillar's base. "The man who builds this is a—is a Genie—Genie—" He looked up and down the pillar for the English equivalent.

"A jinni? You mean, like from Aladdin's lamp?"

"Nein, nein. Not Aladdin. A Genie. How do you say in English? A man like me. A man who is more intelligent than others."

"What, a genius?"

"Ja, ja, a yeenius."

Armentrout walked away a short distance, foregoing the tour monologue. He did not approve of self-appointed geniuses; he would keep the pillar's history to himself. He looked back at Unter, who was angling his squat-potato nose in the air as he appraised the ancient column. He was looking at it, Armentrout thought, as though history had recorded that Unter Leichtenstiener had built Pompey's Pillar, Unter Leichtenstiener in a different life, when he was an Egyptian engineer.

Armentrout reached down and picked up a toe-sized piece of clay. The red-brown fragments were tangled everywhere in the short knotty grass; he always liked to pick up, when here, one or two pieces to play with; sometimes they would be half-buried in the earth and he would have to pry them out. Who knew what they were pieces of? The grass was thick with them, and there were probably thousands more in five feet of dirt, all the scattered pieces of Roman and Greek and Egyptian pots, bricks, tiles—the rubbish of centuries. Occasionally he would find a white or blue fragment with part of a painted design on it, red or black or yellow shapes, corners of color, rounded edges of a floral pattern, straight lines suggesting a grand, forgotten symmetry. He would walk for a while with the thing in his hand, in his pocket, then take it out and look at it again, one last time, before throwing it as far as he could up the hill.

Two millennia of daily life lay buried in that hill, he knew—and under the city—an immense life which had been so thoroughly ground, mixed, and scattered by time that a thousand archeologists, working with a thousand tweezers and a thousand bottles of glue for a thousand years, would never be able to put together more than a few daisies from a clay jug.

He looked at the small triangular piece he had just picked up. It was flat, thin, curved, as though it had been shaped on the craftsman's knee—the method for roof tiles in the classical world. He held the piece on his flat open palm; he wondered at the two-thousand-year-old hand which had molded it. The fragment was the color of mummy-wrap, papyrus, the worn earthen steps leading down to the catacombs at Kam-el-Shuqqafa. Everything in Egypt was a dusty brown, from the interior of the oldest burial chamber to the exterior of the newest concrete-block tenement.

The long artery of the land, which had snaked four thousand miles for forty million years, the Nile, was brown.

The paper money, etched with tombs and monuments, was brown.

The desert road to Cairo opened a flat world of merciless brown.

Everything looked ready to collapse into brown dirt, yet everything was as sturdy as the hard edge of clay he held in his palm. He pressed the curved underside of the tile against his cheek. It was remarkably cool, almost cold—at the touch, something moved in his stomach. He felt an unexplainable revulsion. Shivering, he fought back a spasm of diarrhea. The clay fragment—he could not understand why—was suddenly the most odious thing he had ever seen or touched, a thing which had died in agony twenty centuries ago, but which still carried the germs, the disease which had killed it—he had rubbed it on his face!—he threw it as far as he could up the hill, toward the pillar of Pompey.

The clay landed on hard bare ground, ten feet from Unter. He turned around. "Alexandria," he said, "is very beautiful. It is a good place for a man to die, for the reincarnation. This pillar is very nice. You will show me other things?"

Odd movements continued in Armentrout's stomach. He felt as though a worm slithered

inside him, a worm as brown as Egypt, and large enough to bend his intestines to its worming will. An enormous earthworm, the slow muddy Nile, was moving through him, pressing on his bowels. What had he had for lunch?

"Yes. There's one more thing on this hill to show you."

Walking back up toward the pillar, he felt light-headed, almost dizzy. He had eaten the stuffed grape leaves Mrs. Habeel had left in the refrigerator. There was a blue liquid poison with which she was supposed to wash all the vegetables; there were times, he feared, when she forgot. Even older than Egyptian monuments were Egyptian germs, bacteria which had survived six thousand years of civilization, and which could often survive six hours of cooking.

"Also on this site," he said, speaking through a rising veil of nausea, "are the basement ruins of the last library of Alexandria. Not the large, famous one, but the smaller one which was set up here, above the city, after the first one burned."

"Ja, I read books about this. Let us see!"

He led Unter around the side of the hill. Armentrout felt, all at once, solid as a horse. Since his arrival, he could never tell about his stomach—he might be sick for a day, an hour, or only a few moments.

It was a large, square hole in the ground, with a stairway, carved out of rock, leading down. "Hyapatia," he said as they went down, "was the priestess who presided over this last intellectual community. The manuscripts which had survived the fire at the first library were brought here, were kept in these nooks in the rock." He lay his hand in one of the nooks—there were a dozen square holes in the wall. "Of course, this was just the basement; there was space for hundreds of papyrus rolls in the building which stood above us."

Unter lay his hand in a nook. "Who has destroyed this place?"

"In 415 A.D., Hyapatia was taken by a mob. They destroyed the library and led her through the streets, accusing her of paganism. Finally they killed her—by stripping her skin off with sea shells."

"The Muslims do this?"

"No, the Christians."

Unter clasped his hands. "Be always aware

of das christlich people," he told Armentrout. "They have destroyed the Zivilisation in many places. They have cut all the heads from the statues in Egypt, in Griechenland—"

"Greece."

"—and many other countries. They make war against the intellectualism. It is also true in America. I have wrote many books about this subject, I will give them to you."

Armentrout frowned. Nancy was a Christian, an Episcopalian. He couldn't understand how someone who called herself a Christian, who claimed to love him, could have been this cruel and calculating, could have gone to Bermuda with Dennis Northwood, something which she must have known would wound him terribly if he found out.

A hot-and-sour nausea rose from his stomach, making his head warm and dizzy, his hands and feet tingly, then he was on his knees. "Oh Jesus," he said, fighting the waves from below, but they ripped up through him, and he sat there vomiting with his hands on his thighs. In horror, he imagined he must be splattering Unter's trousers. Two, three, four waves.

"Mein Gott!"

"Oh my God," said Armentrout. "I'm sorry." Vomiting had not relieved him; he felt as though a serpent lay bunched in his stomach, stretching and writhing, wanting a way out.

"You have been drinking?" said Unter.

"I have been eating."

"Ah, you are sick. You have the sickness of Egypt."

"Yes."

"We will go to Kam-el-Shuqqafa," said Unter, "one other day."

* * *

He was propelled, slammed, rocked, carried gracefully, sometimes lulled in slow traffic by the taxis, the dusty black-and-yellow Fiats, which took him from one appointment to the next. The next, today, was with the bed on the third floor of the apartment house on Kafer Abdu Street, a target seven crooked miles from Pompey's Pillar. His legs and arms were tingly and weak, his forehead wet, as Unter helped him into the cab.

On other days, Armentrout had ridden as a hurried well-dressed man with the interna-

tional edition of *Time* under an arm, as a protective male with an arm around Nancy in the back seat, as an impatient American with an arm hanging out the window. Now he rode with his arms crossed over his stomach, his head lolling. In his nausea, he wondered that he could be so many people.

"Your stomach is not so strong," said Unter. "You have never lived in Egypt? Before?"

"Course not."

"My stomach is very strong—in past lives, I have lived in Egypt many times. My cancer is in the head, not the stomach. My head is not so strong. You are the opposite. The head is strong, but the stomach ist schwach—schwach—" He looked out the side window, out the front window, for the word.

"You are schwach," Unter said finally.

"I feel schwach. That's the perfect word."

The pain stuck to his stomach like a bloated tapeworm, an aching weight too large to pass from below, too spongy to erupt from above. He thought he would carry it forever; he thought his face and forehead and eyes would burn forever; he thought the cab would rock and slam and skitter forever. Out its greasy windows, a world of crumbling European towers fluttered and swayed, the colonial world collapsing onto the heap of the Roman world, which had collapsed upon the heap of the Hellenic, which had collapsed upon all the forgotten worlds preceding it. The world was falling; he was falling. Only the drone of the mosques, beginning now across the city, mixed with the whirling-dervish music of the taxi's radio, spoke an ancient living tongue. He thought he would throw up again, and placed an unsure hand on the window crank. He was sure the world was spinning a hundred times faster than normal, that he was dying.

"You are white," said Unter, "like paper." Unter filled a lot of space in the back seat, legs out, an arm out the window and another on the back rest, shoulders and hips bulging in the three-piece suit—even his face seemed wider than usual, all eyes and nose and teeth, a great smile.

Armentrout said, "I'm glad you're entertained."

"I have never become sick in other countries. I am strong! I have strongness from my many lifetimes."

He was hating Unter like a wounded lion

hates the man stalking it. "Would you like some stuffed grape leaves? The ones that made me sick? We have a few at home."

"I will eat them all!"

The weight in his head was growing heavier than the one in his stomach. He shivered; his head was a hot balloon, light and expanding, making the rest of him feel cold and insubstantial. He twisted his fists into his eye sockets. The world was black and red, black and red, empty of all but a feverish head and a lumbering stomach, the music, the car horns, the lurching. Would they never arrive! He said nothing the rest of the way.

The taxi glided into the shade at #32, Kafer Abdu. Armentrout opened his eyes, relieved to see the twin date trees standing beside the iron-rod door of the walled garden. He reached into his pocket, but Unter was already handing the driver a twenty-pound note.

"That's twenty times too much," Armentrout said. "You'll never get change."

"It is okay. Come, I will help you."

"No need," he said, though he doubted he could crawl out of the cab. "I'm not like you, I'm not dying. He popped the door open, stepped out, went around the back of the cab with his hands on the trunk. He was dizzy with fever. Before Unter could suggest anything, Armentrout reached the driver's open window and told him, "El ragel—Hotel Cecil—alatoool!" For a moment he was aware of Unter's protesting face, a grey skull behind glass, sputtering helpless German as the taxi clattered away.

Trembling, he found the key in his pocket, unlocked the iron door, and passed quickly through the cool, green garden with its round foot-stones, into the doorless foyer, up the stairs. He was sure he would faint, crack his head on the steps. His sudden activity, coming after fifteen sedentary minutes in the taxi, had dislodged pools, lakes, oceans of rebellion in his stomach, and a storm of nausea exploded upward, hot and numbing and beyond control. He ran up the stairs vomiting into his hands; he tripped, landing on his elbows.

"Nancy!" he called from the second-floor landing. But no—she had taken a group of Swedes to the Roman Amphitheater, would not be home till late afternoon. He was afraid the Echegarays, the Spanish couple who had

the second floor, would come running out to find him kneeling in his vomit, so he picked himself up with shaking arms and legs and continued up the stairs, a desperate grip on the handrail.

At last—the square mahogany door which signaled wealth—imported from Brazil to treeless Egypt—

He found the other key, threw the door open, ran through seven rooms to the bathroom, where he fell before the toilet, releasing the weight he had carried from Pompey's Pillar.

* * *

The seas continued to toss in his stomach, but the expanse of the canopy bed was a larger sea, a welcoming ocean of lace and satin, with many warm eddies into which he could stretch his shivering limbs. Crawling into bed, he shut his burning eyes, cooled his forehead against the pillow, and disappeared beneath the firestorm of fever blazing through his mind.

He slept a long while.

In the darkness, in the void of time, cool hands came toward him. They moved over his chest and down his side. He awoke, turning in their direction.

"Nancy."

"Mmm," she said.

"What time is it?" The room was dark and cool . . . a window was open . . . soft Arabic voices from the apartments across the alley . . .

"Eleven-thirty. I went to the reception at the Swedish Consulate. Odvarssen invited me. They wanted you, too, but I called and there was no answer. I think there's something wrong with this goddam Egyptian phone again. This morning, we were cut off."

Odvarssen . . . ah yes, the Swedes. Had there been a telephone ringing in his limbo?

"Were you out late," she said, "with your German?"

"He's not German—he's Swiss." Armentrout was fully back in the world again, and feeling, again, the hot storm in his head, the painful weight in his stomach. "I got sick and came home early."

"Sick? What kind of sick?" She moved away, an arm coming up between them, covering her face. She had a fear of contagion,

would keep him beyond the sneeze-range whenever he had a cold.

"Did Mrs. Habeel disinfect the grape leaves?"

Moving close again: "I had a whole plateful. I didn't get sick."

"Well, it must be something else. Or you're stronger than me."

She moved a hand across his chest. "Poor Steve." She embraced him and he shivered from fever. Her arms felt strong. "I wonder what you ate."

"Nothing dangerous."

"I wonder what's the matter, then."

"I'm dying, that's the matter."

She moved away again. "Don't exaggerate." Even in the dark, he could make out the straight edges of annoyance on her round face.

They lay there, on their backs, silent, for a few sullen moments. His stomach was an aching ball, his head hot coal, his tongue a dry wad of paper. In his pain, in the dark, in his odd loneliness, he thought of her as a stranger, and he was awed. It was impossible that the Nancy lying next to him could be the same woman with brown hair, blue sweater, soft round hips in a scotch skirt, whom he loved. That was another person, a woman he had invented, a woman he had seen a long time ago—no, not that long ago, but a long time all the same—at a tourism convention in Dayton, Ohio. What did he know about her? What she looked like, what her passport said, the feel of her hands on him in bed. Now, as he lay there, even these superficial certainties disappeared, and she could have been anyone lying beside him in the dark, another woman, perhaps a man, someone he could not know or trust, who might reach out for him—yes—but with what intent?

"I'm sorry," she said, "that you're sick," and snuggled against him again, an arm across his chest, a thigh across his legs.

* * *

The four a.m. call to prayer woke him. "Waaallah, waaadahaa, waadfut!" Across the city, the loudspeakers, including the unit down the street, began the familiar chant,

duplicated and echoed dozens of times. Nancy had learned to sleep through it; the voices always woke him. He did not know what the words meant, but recognized the five daily intrusions as a powerful manifestation of God—the idea of God—of people's common condition, their plight, their mortality. He felt this especially at four in the morning; he felt it especially now, with his guts in a tangle and his head no more rested, after twelve hours of sleep, than a cabbage which had been kicked to pieces, then left in a summer field to burn and rot.

He no longer thought of, no longer blamed, the grape leaves—pain had no logic—the amplified voices were meant for him, were talking to him, were coming for him—he could believe this at four in the morning.

There were other things he could believe: there was something moving in the house, in the faraway kitchen, in the dark rooms surrounding him, in the large blackness between the French parlor and the bedroom door, which was open. The thing moved without footsteps. It glided through the seamless night, opening, he imagined, a cold path through the air. In the kitchen, where the thing moved among the poisonous pots, it had a devil's tail which clacked and pinged against the metal; wafting through the dining room, the thing had a demon's reptilian wings; walking on air into the black square of the bedroom door, it was upright, tall, silent, with eyes which would have glowed a dog-gish yellow, he was certain, if he were to look there too long. Fear was stronger than sickness—in his stomach, a rising yellow panic overwhelmed the purple knot of pain, and he shut his eyes, furrowed beneath the blankets, and inched across the bed, which was suddenly huge, toward the long, unknown, sleeping shape of a woman whose presence reassured him only in daylight. □

Robert Clark Young was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His work has appeared in Black Warrior Review, AWP Chronicle, Buffalo Press, Onionhead, San Diego Review, San Diego Magazine, and the Houston Post. He lives in Athens, Ohio.

Phyllis Sanchez Gussler

LACUNA

There are places in the river
where one can touch its thick tongue
where one can feel the spread of its blood.

If you found yourself on this river
in a small boat
at night in winter
you might pause
at the way the water streams
like tissue over the prow.
At how the river, pushing
its restraining walls,
opens its warm mouth to you.

But the water which looks black
is a deception
caused by dwindling light.

When you lift your eyes from the river
it is the snow slanting across a pane
of light in a hotel window which seizes you.

Slowly, a man waltzes
round his room,
nude torso, hair combed back
exposing his brow.
His mouth moves without sound.
Each gesture is light as a dried moth.
You think: A world of perfect sensation.

He floats in and out of soft light, youthful,
but as he turns from the shadows
you see lines chained to the corners of his eyes.
Turning again, you see the skin giving itself
over to the skeleton,
the song overspending its movements.

You turn away,
you see yourself watching
snow fall on the water.
The river rises to receive it,
crying like two knives.

You know one day you will lower your body
into the current. Your hair will swirl
until your mouth fills with the river
and your limbs descend, spent.

Somewhere on the bank
there is music, then a pause.
Somewhere on the bottom
a body matching yours exactly
stirs the mud,
extends its arms.

Mark SaFranko

THE FOLLOWER

I

My name is Victor Jenson. I am a follower. Not in the conventional sense—that of one who pursues fads or succumbs to the pressures of a peer group but *literally*. Put most simply, for there is no other way to put it, I follow people. It is my true destiny in life, this furtive obsession, and I indulge it whenever possible.

It is never difficult to find an object for my attention since I live in the city. As soon as I set foot on the street, any street—Broadway, Amsterdam, Houston—I have a veritable horde of diverse specimens to choose from. At times I've been nearly paralyzed by the vast range of possibilities, while at others I know at once—a peculiar gait may catch my eye, or extraordinary beauty, or, perhaps, the unmistakable look of desperation.

When I'm not engaged in this, my real vocation, I work for a large life insurance company. My office is on the East Side, not far from the river. All day long, from eight until five, five days a week, fifty weeks out of the year, I sit behind a desk in a cubicle and calculate the risks and rates of Grand Eastern Insurance Company policy-holders. I perform my duties well, if I might put aside modesty for the moment, though it's not the most stimulating work. Rarely am I reprimanded by Mitchell, my superior, for rarely do I commit an error. They do occur, I admit—when you're responsible for three hundred and fifty. Moriarty's," for instance, something is bound to go wrong on occasion. But I'm still here, and after fifteen years, retain my good standing—and not once have I not deserved my cost of living increment.

* * *

At first it was only a mild diversion: after being cooped up for eight or ten hours and hardly speaking with anyone, it was a relief to stretch my cramped legs on Third. Avenue, pick out an interesting face, and trail

behind for a few blocks. How could I be blamed for needing amusement? My job had long ago gone stale. Moreover, Mitchell demanded—and continues to demand—a stifling conformity: clean suits, pressed shirts, shined shoes. As far as he's concerned, we're all representatives of the Grand Eastern Insurance Company when we're on the premises. He doesn't approve of socializing and shenanigans during working hours, either. Such frivolities, in his eyes, are for that part of the day when the company is not paying our salaries. Philosophically, I'm compelled to go along with him on these points, and I covet my job because it allows me to support myself in this most callously expensive of cities, thus avoiding the fate of the army of beggars on the streets. Yes, I elect to play by the rules, suffocating though they are . . .

And there's something else. When I get home in the evenings, my apartment is very quiet, that is, devoid of a human voice, and instead all I have are the sounds of bleating car horns, and the ubiquitous police and ambulance sirens. So that's how it all began, you see, as a nexus to life . . .

* * *

My wife—Karen was her name—left a long time ago, thirteen years to be exact. We weren't married for very long, only one year. She was leaving, she told me near the end, because I was "showing peculiar signs." I never understood what she meant by that, but she let slip that she saw what was coming—"a dull existence, or something worse"—and she wanted more, she believed that something better was possible for her.

I don't know what became of her. She took everything she owned, which was most of the furnishings in our apartment, and moved out before I returned home from the office one rainy autumn evening. Only her attorney showed up for the court proceedings.

That's when it really started in earnest. I had to find something to do in order to fill the void. At first I tried other things that I hoped might turn the trick. I saw films. I read books. Occasionally I visited a museum. But I discovered that such diversions were not fulfilling, not fulfilling at all. In fact, they seemed only to fuel the desire to be elsewhere. If I took in an exhibit of Zuni Indian artifacts, I longed for the Southwest. If I saw a film set against the backdrop of Africa, I wanted Africa, and so on. It got so that I could hardly concentrate on my work at the office. At times I still want to be somewhere else, but not with the agony I once endured. I have only to wish now, and I am where I want to be—Algeria, Japan, Sweden—right here in Manhattan. The fissure between reality and what exists solely in my mind has closed.

My imagination has won out, you see . . .

Parenthetically, I must add that this strange syndrome was the result of a deep-seated ambivalence towards this, my native city. It was always so easy to abhor it, especially on an unbearably hot summer day when I boarded the 6 train for home. Just walking down those grimy steel and concrete steps to the platform in my saturated clothes was tantamount to descending into Hades. Watching a homeless woman vomit on a Ninth Avenue sidewalk put murder into my heart. A tank-like rat propelling itself across Delancey Street in the early morning hours was enough to—

Need I say more? Such are the actualities of this metropolis. Even now I make infrequent, quixotic vows to myself—that one day I'll follow in Karen's footsteps, that I'll pack up and move to another part of the country, maybe even to Mexico—but it's just then that I come upon someone wonderful to follow, and I realize anew that the city does indeed offer its own singular rewards. . . .

* * *

In the early days, things happened, especially when I followed women. With any luck, I would be noticed and invited into their homes, which were mostly on the Upper East Side. Something of a carnal nature might or might not occur, but all that is by the by now since I've forsworn sex altogether. I had the pleasure of some beautiful creatures in those

days. We came together insouciantly and parted in the same fashion, with—scarcely a thought for consequences.

It all came to an end with Simone, however. I picked up her scent on Forty-fourth Street one spring afternoon after I left the office, and by the time we reached Columbus Avenue we'd struck up a conversation. At her place, which was somewhere in the West Sixties, we mauled each other, falling to the floor in the process. I admit to being completely taken with her aggressiveness, her fearlessness with my body, her raw desire. I'd never had anyone like her before.

But afterwards—afterwards when I had no strength for anything but leaving—she metamorphosed into another being altogether. Her black eyes were terrifying in the ugly depths of their anger. Froth sprayed from her mouth. Her tongue shot out like a venomous serpent's.

"Now that you got what you wanted, you think you're just going to walk away? No, I'm afraid not, Buster. Oh, I know your type, and you're not going to have it your way with me. I'll hound you until you can't take it anymore, I'll blackmail you, I'll have your manhood, that lousy, stinking little cock of yours. . . ."

I ran for my life . . . through the hall, down the stairs, out to the street—sweating, gasping for breath, with Simone in hot pursuit, threatening, imprecating me, commanding me to stop, begging for attention, until I lost her somewhere in the Times Square hurly-burly. . . .

It turned out that I was right to have given her a false name. Even so, for a long time afterward I kept my eyes peeled for her, fearful that she might single me out in a public place when I least expected it. But I was lucky. And also smart. I learned my lesson.

* * *

. . . I can't recall when I last touched someone. Women look at me still, men too, but I don't respond. I'm content in my self-constructed cocoon. There are fewer complications this way: no risk of entanglement, no threat of the dreaded diseases. I am free, free to recede into the shadows, into precious anonymity. I am at liberty to partake in other people's lives without their knowing so much

as my name. . . .

* * *

Scene: Summer. The rapid-fire flapping of pigeons' wings . . . the screams of children at afternoon street-play . . . a sickish, putrescent breeze wafting through the heavy atmosphere

An elegant pin-striped suit, a swarthy man, about forty, inside it, his head lowered in an attitude of determination, hurrying along First Avenue. Appears to be of Semitic extraction. He dabs at his forehead with a handkerchief. I fall quickly into step behind him, and the chase is on

It's an instinct, really, my method of selection, the most pristine intuition, and of course I haven't the faintest notion where the subject will lead me.

In the above case, my pursuit terminated abruptly and without incident at the man's automobile, a white BMW with diplomatic tags, which was parked in a lot on Fortieth Street, and I was left as usual to fill in the details on my own

Moroccan, most likely. Longs for the Sahara, the blue Mediterranean, the luculent magic of Tangier. Despises America from the bottom of his heart, its vulgarities, its demonic compulsion to buy and sell, but is committed to the execution of his official duties. Left his wife and young children in Africa, and has succumbed only twice to illicit affairs in the year he's been billeted in New York. Can't wait to be recalled to a post closer to home

But then again, maybe I'm way off the mark. Maybe what I've got here is a Soviet double agent, a man whose life is suspended above the edge of a razor, whose every movement is a lie, who would betray his own mother in order to reach the desired end

It will take some time for me to decide.

* * *

In most cases the photographs help.

For the first few years I used a Nikon EM, the smallest and most compact of the line, but even that became entirely too cumbersome and obtrusive. I always aimed discreetly, of course, but on occasion I was found out, chastised—in one case, near the Hungarian Consulate on East Seventy-Fifth Street, even

chased. I escaped my irate pursuer, a large, hirsute man in a dark suit, by dashing into Central Park at Seventy-second Street and running helter-skelter through the brush until I shook him off

Shortly thereafter I switched to a miniature Pentax Sport model—much less conspicuous. On certain auspicious days, when I'm not noticed at all, I can shoot up to two or three rolls and take the seconds necessary to empty the instrument and reload. I've become remarkably adept at it, if I do say so myself. . . .

What I've come to call the deeper process begins after the film is developed. I spread the snapshots over my work table and study them painstakingly through the magnifying glass. Those numbers which bear closer scrutiny I order blown up, sometimes to as many as five times their original dimensions, and I then fasten them to the cork board which hangs on my bedroom wall. It's remarkable, what's discovered when the evidence is inspected more closely—the scar on the wrist, the incipient bald spot, the telltale tear in the sleeve. All these fine details contribute in some way to our relationship, to our strengthening bond. It's vital to the process, you see

Of course, as in the case of the Moroccan, most of my forays lead into dead-ends. The quarry does nothing, say, but shop for hours in Macy's, or sit at the bar and drink himself into a stupor, or some other such prosaic thing, so that very little of interest is revealed. But sometimes, when a peculiar ether suffuses the air, what happens can be momentous.

Let me relate one or two such occasions. . . .

* * *

One magnificent October day not very long ago I settled on a well-dressed, good-looking, fiftyish woman as she left an office building in Wall Street and walked in the direction of the Brooklyn Bridge. Call it a hunch, but I knew I was onto something out of the ordinary from the patrician but world-weary manner in which she moved. I kept waiting for her to take a cab or meet a friend, but no, she made for the great span, and as she did so my pulse quickened—I believed I could read the exceptional intent evident in her every step. Halfway across the walk she stopped

and looked with wistful longing towards the southern horizon. In my excitement and shock, I was unable to prevent her from slipping quietly and without hesitation over the cables into the abyss. A prize photograph of mine, that poor soul in mid-flight. Naturally, I never said a word to the police about what I'd witnessed. It didn't surprise me in the least to learn from the newspapers when her body was finally retrieved that she was the wife of a senior partner in one of the city's most prestigious law firms. Hers must have been a horribly barren existence . . .

More recently, in the spring of last year, I fell in love at first sight. I found her on Forty-second Street, leaving Grand Central Terminal, having just disembarked, probably, from a Connecticut train. She walked briskly, allowing me to photograph her secretly for fifteen blocks, until she ducked into an unmarked building on Twenty-seventh Street.

She must have been in her mid-to-late twenties, although she possessed a natural sophistication which made her appear to be somewhat older. I don't know why I say this, because I never saw her again, never spoke with her to get the facts. (Although I tried. I went back to that building again and again to find her, at all times of day and night, but without success. Was it her one and only visit to that location?) She was in the full bloom of her beauty: tall, blonde, with strong, perfect legs showing beneath a lightweight violet outfit, and a statuesque—almost cold—bearing. *Ah yes*, I repeated to myself, she has the right to such painful aloofness . . .

I hung all the pictures I took of her, every last one. I'd caught her in mid-stride, her ring-less left hand thrust out before her as if she were reaching for something—and stopped at the curb, waiting for the light to change, the man beside her staring at her face with scarcely-concealed desire—and my favorite, when she paused to peer into the window of a shop which specialized in exotic rugs. There was something about the beauty of her face in profile . . . I could not stop looking at that one—indeed I carried it with me everywhere—for months afterward.

I surmised, it goes without saying, the particulars of her entire history: Greenwich . . . her father a stockbroker . . . her mother deceased, a former dancer in the ballet, toured the world in her early years. Astarte—the

name I ascribed to her—never wanted for a solitary thing in the material sense, but is assailed periodically by fits of black despair, which even her French fiancé, Jean-Pierre, is powerless to palliate. And, of course, so much more, secrets which I am constrained not to reveal . . .

I loved her for a long time, until I could no longer. I knew there was no hope, and she understood that too. But I was part of her life for at least a short while, and she was part of mine. And that was enough. It is always best to maintain one's distance, even during the course of such a feast of intimacy.

I was part of all their lives, even if they were not aware of it. If one partner is unconscious of merging, does it follow that the merging hasn't taken place? No, I think not, even if some cynical tongue calls it rape. So, you see, it can't be said that I was unsatisfied, no, it can't be said at all . . .

Call me insane if you like. I know better.

II

But the great enemy Time gnaws its way through the entrails of contentment like a starving jackal, and one day a man awakens with the thought that what once brought him happiness does no longer. Upon closer examination, this idea is an illusion. The truth is that it's taken years for a certain morbid attrition to become manifest, and only an instant for lightning to strike and show it up.

Yes, something was missing after all; I am able to concede that now. At any rate, a new hunger had lurched into existence inside me, and it was not simply a craving for what I understood I would never have—nor want. If I were obliged to put it into words, I would say that it was something . . . beyond the ken of everyday life, something *ultimate*, that I was after. The voyage into outer space, the drug rush, the dive from the vaults of the sky—that's what I needed. This isn't to say that I actively searched for such an experience, because the thought never crossed my mind. But the kernel was there just the same, skulking beneath the surface, undiscovered, like a tumor about to erupt into savage malignancy.

Because, as the years wore on, I had become

so empty

I know that my explication is feeble, that it falls short of the mark. Words are inadequate until a need is perceived for what it is in its purest essence, until the floodgates of the soul are thrown open.

Until the great transformation is experienced in all of its glory

And that, finally, is what happened to me

* * *

The miracle began as nothing, less than nothing. (Of course the most profoundly significant events often begin in such fashion, quietly and without fanfare.)

I was strolling on Seventh Avenue, downtown, on a warm evening near the end of this past June

I don't remember what I was thinking about. Nothing, probably, my mind is often a complete blank. Then I had the idea of following a body, but as I looked around, I saw no one remarkable enough to focus my attention on: the boulevard was filled with people I'd already followed and known. Old men, young women, the freaks and outcasts—all of them seemed familiar, exhausted. I was about to call it quits and turn for home when suddenly I had an inspiration. Rather than rebel against circumstance, I would simply let my gaze wander where it might—preferably to the most common type—and lapse easily into step behind him or her

He was about ninety feet away, leaning on the outdoor sill of a pizza stand, wiping his mouth with a napkin, a man in his mid-forties, dressed in a blue velour, half-sleeve shirt and gray slacks. His slate-colored hair was spotted with white, and there was spare weight around his peasant-like trunk. On his feet were new track shoes.

Certainly I would not have picked him out under my standard routine. But there was a quality in his posture, an easy lack of immediate purpose which stood out upon tighter scrutiny. When I pulled up next to him, I caught the otherworldliness in his hazel eyes, a condition that as far as I could tell did not seem to be drug-induced.

I fell back a good ten paces. Surreptitiously I pulled the camera from my inside breast pocket and began to shoot, click, click, click,

click, click

He led me all over the Village, up Jones Street, down Cornelia, never stopping for anything other than auto traffic. He kept up such a steady pace in his meandering that I hesitated to stop for anything, even so much as a drink at a bodega, for fear I'd lose him. Eventually I forgot that it was past my usual time for dinner.

Along the way I had the opportunity to study him more closely. His clothes were clean and fairly new, and his hair was neatly cut and styled, so I discounted him as one of the city's legion of hard-core bums. In the main, he seemed to not take notice of the stream of humanity which flowed continually around him, but on the other hand paused with curiosity whenever he encountered a small child. At such times, he would turn his head after the tyke, who was usually in the presence of a parent, or at least someone older, and stare, as if he were looking for someone in particular. When the child passed out of sight, he would continue on his way, as if nothing were out of the ordinary

He noticed me for the first time in SoHo, on Greene Street, after I'd followed him for more than two hours and the sun had shifted far to the west, behind the tall buildings uptown. Nothing more than a glance, mind you, but his head came to a twitching stop—an almost imperceptible stop, granted—but I knew then that *he* knew.

I sensed that his step quickened ever-so-slightly, and that perhaps he was trying now to shake me off. Nevertheless, after all this wandering up and down the twilight streets, past art galleries, antique shops, chic restaurants, he ducked into a pub on Prince Street, stood at the long, uncrowded bar, and ordered a beer from the tap.

I sat a few stools away and did the same, being careful not to stare at him too overtly.

Was he throwing a challenge into my face?

I evaluated him obliquely. The intelligent eyes were tinged with melancholy—even despair. The finely-chiseled nose and full lips were somehow incongruous beneath the heavy black brows, but lent a regal quality to the total effect of his bearing.

He paid up. I tossed a few bills onto the bar and followed him out into the street. He stopped on the pavement and looked swiftly in either direction.

He checked for me over his left shoulder, then headed northwest, back towards the Village. He moved even faster now, and I had to strain in order to keep up

The madness of the hunt, the excitement of the city—with its smells of rot and ludicrous sights and discordant sounds—was on me in all its fury. The camera thumped against my ribs, out of rhythm with my pounding heart, recalling itself to me, but it was far too dark for pictures now. All at once, night had dropped its foggy shroud

We arrived at the historic district of Greenwich Village, near the Hudson, where I rarely ventured. Suddenly I felt the moorings slip. The buildings all looked the same, and I wasn't familiar with the names on the street signs.

He turned a corner sharply . . . the blue fluorescent tube lights of a Caribbean eatery sliced into the shadows . . . a toothless bum hissed at me, demanded money, called me a foul name . . . I jogged along, sucking for air, and tracked my man down another street which terminated at the silent black river. He passed beneath the ancient, corroded elevated trestle, his head tilted toward the pavement, his shoulders squared as if he were battling a storm. There were even fewer lights here, and in the deepening obscurity I stumbled over a broken slab of concrete

I was stricken for the first time with a powerful sense of dread. What if he never stopped walking? I'd been following him for hours, after all. I didn't honestly know at this point how long I could keep up. Was he trying to simply wear me out? Did he have some idea of what I wanted?

And then, all at once—it was over. He halted at the foot of a walk-up in the meat-packing district, in the spray of light cast out from a street lamp.

He looked up at the building and pondered, anxiously trying to make up his mind about something.

He peered frantically up and down the street. Then he walked up the steps and stopped again. He pulled the sleeve of his shirt across his forehead. He looked over his shoulder at me, smiled faintly, and nodded.

He indicated with a slight movement of his head that I should follow. After producing a ring of keys from his pocket, he threw open a series of locks.

He twisted the knob and pushed the heavy

door into the blackness. I waited, with my breath throttled in my windpipe. His figure evaporated, and when I stepped forward I saw that he'd left the door open for me.

I was suddenly afraid, but I suppressed the thought that came next. Because I understood that this moment was the culmination of all that had come before, of the totality of my life—that I must gather whatever courage I possessed in order to follow through before the opportunity passed.

I took the steps one at a time, slowly, cautiously, refusing to countenance the weariness in my bones. As soon as I passed into the vestibule, I saw, shining like a beacon, a light at the crest of the long staircase.

He was standing up there, waiting, his arms motionless at his sides.

"Come up," he intoned softly, then he turned and disappeared again.

I obeyed. Reaching the apex, I looked to my right. He was seated on a burgundy sofa in a small parlor whose contents—bookcase, television, coffee table, knick-knacks, Tiffany lamp reflecting warmly off the window facing the street—suggested an existence lived normally, predictably, comfortably. I let out an involuntary sigh of relief.

"Sit," he whispered when I entered the room.

The door fell shut behind me. I took an easy chair and faced him. His arms rested flaccidly on his knees, his fingers interlocked in a fleshy web. He looked at the floor when he opened his mouth to speak.

"I always knew that one day someone would catch up with me. It was only a matter of time. Working alone as I have, in secret, the strain has been too much. It was bound to happen."

He searched my eyes and shook his head with admiration.

"What mistake did I make? How did you know?"

I could not answer, and he repeated the second question, rhetorically.

"You must be very good, the best there is," he stated matter-of-factly, all the while watching me with fascination.

"I don't know," I said at last, truthfully. "I just did it, that's all."

He nodded with resignation. For what seemed to be a long time, neither of us spoke.

"I suppose I should show you," he said at

length. He got up and retreated into a room at the rear of the flat.

Perspiration brimmed out of the pores of my scalp and rolled down the sides of my skull. My teeth began to chatter. Before I could make up my mind to leave, his bulky form reappeared.

At first I could not comprehend what it was he held in his hands, and as my brain went rapidly through its various calculations of possibility, my impulse was to laugh.

But when he came closer . . . my hair stood straight up on end.

The tiny polo shirt . . . the little cap . . . the toddler's shorts . . .

I understood.

I wagged my head like an idiot, then struggled to my feet. Something rose up in my stomach in feeble protest.

He dropped the items of clothing onto the coffee table and touched my forearm.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I—don't—know . . ."

"You won't go to the police?"

I choked on something I tried to say.

"I would give you a reason," he pleaded, "but I don't have one. It's something I have to do. I've been like this for so long. *It must be, that's all . . .*"

The longer I stood immobilized before him, the more confidence he seemed to gain: he was beginning to understand that my intention had not been to put him into harm's way.

"You know, there was something about you . . . I thought I could trust you," he went on. "Sometimes . . . sometimes I need help disposing of things . . ."

At that I broke away and groped for the door. I ripped it open and started down the stairs.

From over my shoulder I heard him calling out:

"You'll come back? You'll come back, won't you? . . ."

Days passed. I was unable to sleep, completely unable to work, for the first time in my life. I tried to force myself back into my routine, but the hard tactic was ineffective. I could not even bring myself to develop the roll of Fujicolor in my camera . . .

I didn't know what to do. I was petrified

that he'd followed me back to my apartment, that he knew where I lived. I couldn't forget, and I couldn't bring myself to notify the authorities. I was in a state of impotence, feelinglessness, half-deadness.

I had no inclination, not the slightest urge, to follow anyone. In the street I saw nobody who attracted me, and, truthfully, I could hardly look. What, after all, had following done for me but lead me to the border of madness, the far reaches of sanity?

The days stretched into weeks. My nerves tightened to the breaking point, even though there was nothing, a complete void in my life—even less than before.

I thought it out over and over, and came to no conclusion, except for the nagging, unadmitted certitude that no one I might ever follow in the days to come—for the rest of my life—could bring me what the middle-aged man in the blue velour shirt and gray slacks had brought me on that balmy night at the end of June . . .

After work one day at the beginning of autumn I set out walking because of the exceptional fineness of the weather. There seemed to be a new life in the people around me after the torpor of the long summer, and somehow I, too, was infected with it.

I thought neither about what I was doing nor where I was going, but I found myself ambulating in the direction of the Hudson, and gaining momentum as I went . . .

Then I was close, only a few blocks away. I got dizzy. My knees went weak. I tried to stop myself, propel myself in the opposite direction, but my legs would only go back in time to that one, supreme moment.

I recognized the buildings now in the expiring daylight. There was the Tiffany lamp in the second-floor window, beneath a half-lowered shade, just as it was the first time . . .

I climbed the steps and pushed the buzzer. Tingling with exhilaration now in every cell of my being, I waited. Then, like some holy gong, I heard the heavy footsteps on the stairs . . .

The door opened slowly. One icy eye peeked out, and it gleamed with the victory of recognition.

He pulled the door in all the way, a broad

smile creasing his coarse, handsome features. He opened his arms to me in a gesture of paternal fealty.

"My friend," he said. "I knew you'd be back . . ."

He was right. The sky, the moon, the stars, the world—everything was as it should be.

I'd waited a long time for this moment. □

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Lucinda Roy

CARACOLE

In my garden, by the planted vegetables,
the snail's back carries the curve of the world;
the patterns on babies' head; Yeats' causal

stairway; a million other claims for what we see. . . .
She knows, this snail—her worm body inside
secrets, signs, all appropriated—how she is, most utterly, a snail.

Yet I have learned there's no significance in DNA
fingerprints, that a thing is as far removed from its symbol
as a snail's inedible shell is from its tender succulence.

In my garden, the snails dance snotty networks
across the crazy paving. On a good day, I twirl with them
up and over, round and up, into the buried stars.

We have spent our centuries looking for the door at the top
of the stairway, imposing manifestation on the simple things we see,
making our words reverse back onto themselves with deeper meaning.

We have made the snail's dance. Really, she is sluggish.
Underneath the broad leaves of tomatoes, by heady cucumbers,
ghastly squash, in slower motion, she squats and squats and squats.

Years ago, my mother's tortoise, Albert, was bombed
in London's Blitz. Shrapnel in his shell, the old campaigner
inched along through peace without complaint. My mother's eyes well

when she speaks of this absurdity. Before I knew
the fragility of all shells, I used to laugh.
A shell-shocked tortoise! A thing of little worth.

Now it seems to me (and please don't laugh)
as though the hump of his tiny paving stones
pitted with fragments of war is a part of that crazy dance

of other shells. Not that, in some way, we are all Albert,
pitted and crawling back into the earth, victims
of other people's wars. No. Too crude.

But finding the whorls of snails around the things we eat,
remembering the backs of tortoises in the slabs
of stones which lead me from my house down to the street

there is a sense of how abstraction limits itself to symbol
if we let it. And all I can offer now is resistance
to created myth, and sign, and metaphor. All I can do

is join the spiralling dance to nowhere,
step on things which break as easily as we allow them to,
in yards where all extraordinary drama is played
out in half turns to the right and to the left, then lost.

Rita Signorelli-Pappas

MANZONI'S DEAD DAUGHTERS

She was unlucky, that daughter.
Nowhere, nowhere could he hide
from the wild, delicate bells
of her sleeping sighs. Wherever
he turned, he still saw
her mute palomino eyes,
the chin poised quick
to rear, the silvery mists
of her bones shifting
like lost messages. Then
her fear flung so faithfully
here under his door, the grief
neatly folded, neatly pressed
into the frail, muffled shriek
of those hopelessly pink letters.

They were all unlucky, those daughters.
All his thin, pale darlings
falling one by one. And each
time the same cold request:
that old necessity for words.
Though it was rage—rage
not love—that wrote those
wry, bloodless epitaphs.
Then suddenly he could write
no more. Behind the shut door
of his study he would sometimes
pray for them. Dawn still
amazed him. He had thought
the ghostly, stuttering sun
was only another dead thing.

Katherine Soniat

BALBOA IN SPRING

These are the flashing green days
when clouds rush with March,

and the man over the back fence
shouts happily in Spanish
like Balboa on his peak.

He breathes the same air
the flowering fields dance with.

It's summed up by the sleepy dog,
rolling in the sun, measuring
out his lazy whine

over the new spring mint,
motioning *yes*
in all but Spanish.

NIGHTS

"He get up again last night?" Aaron stared at the flowers on the kitchen wallpaper, their stems intertwining in circles he didn't remember noticing before. His mother's French toast crackled in the skillet. It took him a moment to realize she'd asked a question. "Hm?"

She turned from the stove, pulling the collar of her pink robe up across her neck. "He kept you up again."

Annoyed at her volume, Aaron glanced through the doorway at his grandfather's blanketed feet and whispered, hoping she would take the hint. "Not really. An hour or so."

"Why does he do that? If he'd get up during the day, maybe he'd sleep through." She raised the pan, flipping the toast with her spatula, and dropped it back onto the burner.

"He's trying to sleep, Mom."

"We shouldn't let him. Then he wouldn't keep you up all night."

His cereal was becoming mush. Aaron scooped at it in brief crescents. "What happens when I go off to school?"

"That's two months away," she said over her pink shoulder, guiding the toast down the sloping pan to a plate.

"But what's going to happen?"

"We'll handle it. Aunt Lucy will help me." She pushed Aaron's cereal box aside to make room on the table, and sat, gesturing at the French toast.

"I told you. I don't want any."

"I can't eat all four."

He exhaled, pushed his bowl aside and forked the top two pieces onto his plate. "I thought the reason you needed me here was Aunt Luce couldn't help enough."

"Aaron, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. It may not turn out to be an issue, okay?"

"Oh, great." He'd spoken louder than he intended, and looked at Papa, then back. "Let's just hope he dies soon, so we don't

have to worry about it, huh?"

"Okay, fine." She dropped her fork onto her plate. "What do you think we should do?"

"Can you keep your voice down, here?"

She glared, but answered quietly. "Well, what should we do?"

He wiggled his fork into the French toast, cutting a dry double-layered square. "I could take a semester off school." He looked at his plate and shoved the bread into his mouth.

"I knew this was coming."

The soft toast momentarily caught at the back of his throat as he swallowed too quickly. "What?"

"Copping out again."

"Copping out? How?"

"A year off to work, now a year off for Papa, and then another and another. And in the meantime, what?"

He shrugged, trying to look as though he hadn't thought about it. "Larry'll keep me on." She raised her eyebrows and he added, "If I ask him."

"Wonderful. Selling tropical fish. Great career."

"Can you please talk quietly?"

"This is your life," she said, leaning toward him. She looked down, watching her fork poke and nudge a slice of yellow toast. "Papa already had his."

Aaron slammed his hand down on the table and just stopped himself from shouting. "He can hear you."

He sat up in the cot and looked at his grandfather, uncertain whether he'd heard the old man move. Papa had tipped slightly to one side on the pillow, the hospital bed in a low reclining position. His arms lay flat against his sides, on top of the blanket, and his features looked thoughtful. Aaron imagined him deep in thought, bleakly contemplating the life that was nearing its end. Night

thoughts, the visiting nurse had called them; no one around, everything dark and quiet. Better to have him up during the day: human contact, distraction, a reason to keep living. "Papa?" Aaron considered asking softly, but in the darkness, he couldn't be sure that Papa's eyes were open, and didn't want to risk waking him. He lay back down, trying not to let the cot creak too loudly, and stared at the still blades of the ceiling fan, listening.

He'd made himself sick once, looking up at this fan, a week after his father had walked out. Seven-year-old Aaron and his mother spent most of that week, and several weeks to follow, here with his grandparents. (This was before Gram died, before Papa sold the brownstone duplex to Mom.) Harassed by Gram and Mom's complaints of the heat, Papa had relented and installed the fan, and Aaron, that very afternoon, staring up from the floor where he lay, tried to separate the blades within the rocking, humming circle until nausea rose in his chest.

Now he opened his eyes to the definite squeak of bedsprings and propped himself on an elbow. Papa sat hunched on the side of the bed, his back to Aaron, steadying himself with two palms pressed to the mattress. Aaron stood, flipping his blanket onto the floor.

"Morning, Papa."

The old man turned to look at him, his white hair standing up in back.

"I'm going to turn on the light, here. Okay?"

Papa shrugged, then caught himself on the bed. When the overhead came on, he grimaced, squinting.

Aaron patted the blue plastic lid of the portable toilet in the corner. "Need this?"

Papa shook his head and lifted his cane from against the wall.

"Where you going?"

"Take a bath." He set the rubber tip of the cane on the carpet and focused an effort on the handle, raising himself to his feet. His pajama top had come unbuttoned to below his chest. Taking a moment to establish his balance, he switched the cane to the other hand and leaned on it, shuffling to pivot toward the main section of the living room. Aaron reached out for his arm, recoiling a bit at its fragility, a bone loosely wrapped in skin and pajama sleeve.

"A bath? Papa, the stairs." When Aaron first moved back in, Papa had been able to

handle the stairs, had done so daily to lie in a bath so hot it left every surface in the bathroom sopping with condensation. But a week had passed. The cancer had moved into Papa's throat; he was not eating.

Steadying the handle against his hip, Papa swung the cane forward. To keep from toppling him, Aaron let go of the elbow. He looped his arms around Papa's waist, feeling the pressure of Papa's ribs straining forward, then looked down at the tangled white hair and chuckled uncomfortably. "Papa, it's late, huh? Go back to bed, here? I'll give you a bath tomorrow. Okay?"

Papa relaxed his arms. "Tomorrow?"

"Promise."

"You work."

Aaron noticed that Papa needed a shave. Two startling black hairs stood out among the sparse white stubble. "After work."

Papa pivoted again, to the other side. Aaron held him lightly beneath the arm, relieved that he was heading back to bed, but he poked the cane forward before working his way around far enough for that.

"Where you going now?"

"Kitchen."

"What do you want?" Aaron pinched the bridge of his nose, thinking of sleep. "Peaches? I can get them."

Papa swung the cane ahead again. In a few deliberate steps, he made it to the threshold of the kitchen, where Aaron had to stand behind him, his hand still cupped under the arm. Papa passed the cane across his body and gave the light switch a knock. The fluorescent bulb flickered and popped on. Not until the old man had worked his way around the oven was there enough room for Aaron to get beside him again. "You're doing pretty good."

Papa pulled open the cupboard above the oven and took out a loaf of whole wheat bread.

"What do you want? A sandwich?"

"Toast."

"I'll make it. Sit down." Aaron tried to take the bread, but Papa stepped away from him, to the toaster, leaving the cupboard door open. He leaned his cane against the counter, balancing his hips at its edge, and twisted the red tie sealing the bag. After several slow turns, he started twisting the other direction, then pushed the bag along the counter to

Aaron, who fussed at it with quicker turns, yawned, finally twisted the tie off. Papa took the bag back. Hand trembling, he dropped two slices into the toaster, then depressed the black handle and stared down as the coils reddened.

"Think the Brewers'll catch the Jays?" Aaron asked.

"Ah." Papa twisted his mouth and waved a palm at him.

"Hey, they clobbered the Sox tonight."

"No pitching." He was still looking down into the toaster. A small gray globule hung in the corner of his eye, a splinter of blood breaking the white above the iris.

"Higuera pitched a hell of a game."

"Get shelled next time."

The toast shot up and Papa, with Aaron sticking beside him, carried it on a plate to the kitchen table. He raised a butter knife and pointed at the refrigerator, his shirt now skewed, exposing a deep crevice between his collar bone and neck. "Oleo," he said. Aaron took it out and placed it in front of him. Papa scraped the knife across the top, then pressed the margarine into the light toast. When he had smoothed it as evenly as he could, he pulled the other slice from under and buttered it in the same thorough manner. Then, with slow apparent purpose, he bit into a piece, put it down, chewing slowly, lifted the plate to his chest, and let a ball of mush fall from his mouth.

"No good?"

"Don't taste right." He pushed the plate into a corner of the table.

"Want some peaches instead?"

Papa shook his head minutely, his eyes focused on the table.

"Mom says you got to eat more. Let me get you some peaches." While he spooned the peaches into a shallow china bowl, Papa raised himself to tilt the toast into the garbage bag. Aaron brought him the bowl and a spoon. Papa stirred the cubes around, then set the spoon face down against the bowl.

"What you thinking about?"

Papa shrugged. They both stared at the peaches, which Papa had pushed into a small pile. Bubbles of nectar adhered to the smooth round edge of the largest chunk at the top.

"Try one, Papa. You got to eat."

Papa spooned a peach cube into his mouth and swallowed.

"How is it?"

He nodded and lifted another cube, resting his elbow for a moment on the table.

"There you go. Taste good?"

He brought the second cube to his mouth, sliding the spoon from between closed lips. A drop of clear nectar clung to the whiskers on his chin.

Then Papa's elbow was in the peaches, his hand at the tissue box. He pulled a balled tissue to his mouth and made a pair of strained coughing sounds, clenching his eyes with each cough.

"You okay, Papa?"

The old man convulsed, all the energy in his body focused on his neck and hunched shoulders. With a guttural hack, he vomited clear liquid beneath the tissue onto his chest.

"Shit. You okay?"

Papa hacked again, turning his head, spewing this time on the shoulder of his blue pajamas and on the base of his own shoulder. The water pooled in the depression above his collarbone with two mashed but whole cubes of pale fruit.

Aaron unbuttoned Papa's top, wiping his chest with a dishtowel. "I shouldn't have made you eat that stuff. I'm sorry. You better now?"

"Water," Papa rasped, quietly.

"What? Glass of water?"

"Water."

Aaron drew a glass from the tap. The old man looked down at the table, his head quivering back and forth.

"Here you go." As Papa gulped the water, Aaron ran the towel across his shoulder, but drying Papa's belly, he saw that there was still liquid behind the collarbone. Papa set the water glass, nearly full, on the table. "Better?"

Papa nodded.

"Let me get this off of you, here." He pushed the damp pajama top off his grandfather's shoulders and helped him lift his arms from the sleeves. He wiped the corner of the dishtowel twice more into the gap, but Papa was already lifting himself from the chair when he tried to wipe again.

"You getting enough sleep?"

"I don't know." Aaron sliced the duct tape across the top of the box with an accelerating

cardboard zip. "Why?"

Crouching, clipboard on his knee, Larry waved his pencil at boxes of fish food on a lower shelf. A reflection of the bare back-room bulb shone on his bald spot. He flipped the board around and made a notation. "You look tired."

"I was up a little with my grandfather." Aaron cut into the tape at one edge.

"Your grandfather. Yeah. How's he doing?"

"The same. He gets around pretty well at night." He bent the flaps back and squeezed his fingers in around the aquarium, lifted it a few inches and jiggled until the box slid down so he could adjust his grip.

Larry bounced the eraser end of his pencil on the clipboard. "So listen. What's the deal? You really want to stick around here after summer?"

"I told you: I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen."

"Yeah. But see, I got to know. Do I hire somebody or not?"

"Now?" He balanced the aquarium on his knee, scooting the box and styrofoam against the shelves. "You got two months."

"Okay, so not right away. But you got to make a decision."

"I will." Aaron stood to carry the tank into the shop, but Larry's voice stopped him.

"Look, Aaron. Don't jerk me around, huh? You're going to college. So go."

"I'm going, Larry. There isn't any rush."

"Yeah. But see, there is. I mean, the classes, sure, you could do that bit when you're sixty if you want to. But that's just the half of it. Not even. The dorms, the parties. You got to go when you're young."

"I'm not sixty. Somebody's got to take care of Papa."

"Yeah. For how long? I got an uncle's had cancer five years now. Still hanging on. Some people are fighters."

Aaron pulled the aquarium tight against his chest. "Papa's a fighter."

"So good. Let him fight. You put your life on hold, you're betting against him. Or against you."

"Okay, Papa." Aaron set the plastic wash basin on the t.v. tray by the head of the bed. "Bath time."

Papa pushed the covers down to his knees. Already it was nearly dark outside, a light drizzle on the windows as a bald weatherman described the storm front moving in from the lake. Mom was reading up in her room to give Papa some illusion of privacy. Aaron draped the towel across the tray and soaped the large, coarse hospital sponge. Papa twisted his legs out from under the covers.

"Where you going?"

"Bath." He leaned for the bathrobe at the foot of the bed and poked an arm into it, searching for the sleeve.

"No, Papa. Sponge bath. There's still the stairs."

Papa continued to fuss with the robe.

"Papa, I'm going to give you the bath right here. Like the nurse did. Remember?"

Papa shoved his arm through the sleeve. Aaron ran around the bed to in front of him. "The water's nice and hot. Let me help you before it gets cold."

Papa jerked the other arm through the robe, avoiding Aaron's eyes. He lifted his cane, but Aaron grabbed it before he could get the base to the ground. "Don't do this, huh? How are you going to get up the stairs?"

Papa glared, the lines in his forehead deepening, and let go of the cane, leaving Aaron holding it like a vaudeville performer.

That night, Aaron dreamt of Papa getting out of bed. He walked without his cane toward the stairway and Aaron dove from the cot to support him. Together they glided upward, Papa determined, unconcerned, Aaron nervously willing them safety. What if they fell? What if Mom woke up? The bathroom door loomed closer and closer, their ascent effortless but teasingly slow. As they reached the top step with a reassuring squeal of bed-springs, Aaron relaxed; Papa was safe and would have his bath. But before they could open the door, fear seeped through him again. Somehow, they would have to get back down.

The bedsprings sounded again, and Aaron awoke. Papa was perched on the edge of the bed, looking back at him.

"Kitchen again?"

"Yep." Papa lifted the cane and was on his feet by the time Aaron untangled himself from the covers.

Aaron rubbed his eyes. "You okay on your

own?"

Papa nodded and took a step forward.

"Give a holler if you need anything."

"Yep."

He rearranged the covers and settled back onto the cot. He could watch Papa from where he was.

Papa worked his way through the kitchen doorway and shuffled around the corner of the oven. Aaron listened, but couldn't hear Papa's footsteps. The kitchen light pulsed. A car horn whined in the distance. The long silence from the kitchen worried Aaron. He would hear it if Papa fell, but what was the old guy doing?

Aaron was about to get up when the pantry door creaked open. A moment later, the front of the dish cabinet wobbled on its rollers and Papa took out a plate with a long sliding scrape. He traveled the long way around the table, establishing a balance at each new resting point, and sat angled away from the doorway. Not until he raised a cookie to his mouth could Aaron tell what he had fixed himself. Good, Aaron thought, he's eating something. But after the first bite, the cookie sat untouched. Papa stared expressionlessly at the kitchen wall. Occasionally Aaron rested his eyelids.

Now and then Papa glanced over his shoulder to look at him in the cot and Aaron would smile. Once, uncertain whether his smile could be seen in the darkness, he slid his arm from under the covers and waved.

The next night Papa was in the kitchen doorway before Aaron woke up. Steadying himself on the door frame, he turned to look at the cot. Too sleepy to think clearly, Aaron closed his eyes.

He listened for the sound of Papa's progress, wondering vaguely if Papa would try to sneak past him toward the stairs and a bath; all he could hear was the soothing buzz of the dining room clock. He knew he should sit up, let Papa know he was awake, but he didn't want to shake the soft half-sleep. He cracked one eyelid, trying not to wake completely. Papa slid his way toward the kitchen table, hooked the cane onto it and lowered himself into a chair, both hands on the table top. He turned

and looked at Aaron, and again Aaron feigned sleep.

Holding the tube end of the siphon low over the bucket, Aaron scooped its cylinder full in the aquarium and raised it to start the water flowing. He clamped his thumb over the opening and the tube sucked at a circle of his skin. Plunking his arm into the water, he dug the cylinder into the gravel, then let go with his thumb. Pebbles of turquoise and green swirled within the clear plastic column. The pale, bottom-heavy cichlid puckered and unpuckered its mouth at the intrusion, its tiny pectoral fins fluttering to maintain its stillness at the bottom of the tank.

Aaron shifted his back toward Larry, at the counter, and rested his eyes. He'd spent forty-five minutes long distance that morning so some nasal voice could read to him that no fees would be refunded if he postponed his enrollment.

"I told you," his mother said. "You're just shitting away that college fund."

"See? I should have stuck with UWM. Then it'd be *my* money and my plans could change if they had to."

Aaron bumped something with the siphon and opened his eyes. The cichlid hurried to the far corner of the tank. He raised the siphon and let the water drain into the bucket.

The pounding rain made even the clock's buzz inaudible. Aaron squirmed in the cot, dreaming of himself squirming in the cot. His dream self strained for sounds of Papa rising from bed, cracked eyelids to watch him eating a sandwich in the kitchen, only to recognize that he was dreaming and listen again. In a corner of his mind he cursed the cycle, convinced that it was robbing him of sound sleep. Twice, to shake the dream, he threw the covers off and sat up, but found that this action, too, was only dreamt. Rain thrummed against the windows. Bedsprings see-sawed a brief rhythm. A hunched form moved past him in the darkness. □

Max Gutmann lives and works in San Francisco. His stories have appeared in Ascent, The Fiction Review, The Maryland Review, and elsewhere.

Peter Cooley

"LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT HAPPINESS"

Quick, let me have it, I need the word.
But mine, not yours you soaked in honeysuckle,
then delivered to the front door this morning
where, unsuspecting, I answered in pajamas
to catch you unaware: shining, baby-blue gabardine suit,
blue tie, a little blue book in your hands,
the shiny gold letters promising secrets within
for those who admitted you. I didn't, of course.
But after I slammed the door I squinted
through the curtains to take in the '65 Ford,
its back seat a swarm of kids swaddled in blue
you would have let loose on my own and on my wife
had I given an inch. And her beside you,
a blue snood streaming with fuchsia ribbons,
shot me her index finger three times
(I thought of Him three times raising the Cross
before He ascended) and stuck her tongue out thrice.
And so began another Sunday in our funny kingdom.

Christopher Merrill

LINES ON THE WINTER SOLSTICE

A day of creaks and croaking! Ice in the skylight,
Three ravens in the apple tree the migrants missed,
Lengths of seasoned aspen crackling in the stove
—So much has changed. The irises were never planted,
And squirrels ate the poppy seeds saved for the border.
Mice feed on the wires; rows of onions buckle under
Another foot of snow; next spring the frozen garden
Hoses, unwound, will crack A raven flaps away,
The branches shake, and a half-eaten apple plops
Into the kindling pile: if only you were here.

OUT OF THE PAST: THE PRIVATE EYE AS TRAGIC HERO

For many (among whom the present writer includes himself) Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* is the masterpiece of *film noir*. It includes all the classic elements of the genre: a convoluted but not entirely impenetrable plot, atmospheric night scenes, a wise-cracking private detective as protagonist, an extremely seductive and totally devious *belle dame sans merci*, and various stock supporting characters (thugs, a secondary *femme fatale*, a good girl to contrast the evil ones, and a sidekick for the hero). *Out of the Past* also contributes some interestingly novel elements: the classic nocturnal city and interior scenes are contrasted by brightly lit exteriors in ruggedly beautiful mountainous areas; the hero's chief sidekick is a deaf-mute—who employs a highly unusual method to dispose of a gunman menacing the protagonist (pulling him off a cliff with a cast fishing line). But the chief merits of the film reside in its conceptions of its male protagonist and his female antagonist.

It is perhaps only my personal tastes that lead me to conclude that Jane Greer is most attractive female lead of all the *noir* films of the forties (at age 66 she still looked good to me when she appeared on *Twin Peaks* late in 1990); but certainly the character she plays in this film, Kathie Moffett, is a more plausible deceiver of men than earlier fatal females such as Phyllis Dietrichson (*Double Indemnity*) or Helen Grayle (*Murder, My Sweet*). While it is difficult to imagine any man with reasonable intelligence and a survival instinct being taken in by the hard, obviously experienced, dyed blondes, Phyllis and Helen, it is much easier to believe that an otherwise intelligent private detective like Jeff Markham would accept the word of a soft, young, natural brunette like Kathie. Although early in the film she admits to having shot her former lover and only attempts to justify the act by saying, "I hate him," it is relatively easy for both Jeff and the viewer to think that Whit

must have done something to deserve both her hatred and his wounding. This conclusion is still possible at the end of the film when Whit lies dead on his living room floor after having been shot by Kathie a second time, but by then it is clear that the woman kills purely out of self-interest and does not require any other emotional incentive.

Tom Flinn has pointed out that the hero of *Out of the Past*, Jeff Bailey (the surname taken by Markham after the ending of his initial involvement with Kathie), occupies "a niche somewhere between Philip Marlowe and Walter Neff (*Double Indemnity*)."¹ The connection with the screen portrayals of Marlowe is more obvious because screenwriter Geoffrey Homes (Daniel Mainwaring) apparently "tailored [the part of Jeff Bailey] to fit the screen personality of Humphrey Bogart"; and when Bogart was unavailable for the film, RKO first assigned the role to Dick Powell before finally giving it to Robert Mitchum.² Like Marlowe, Bailey is a private detective who at the beginning of his flashback has the reputation of being "smart" and "honest," but like Walter Neff he succumbs to the temptation to betray the ethics of his profession because of his attraction to a woman. However, Markham/Bailey does not fall morally to nearly the same degree as Neff. Walter commits murder for Phyllis Dietrichson in an attempt to defraud his insurance company; Jeff merely fails to fulfill his contract with Whit Sterling to return Kathie to him. Although he is later hunted by the police as a murderer, he never actually kills anyone in the course of the film. He was a mere bystander when Kathie shot his former partner, Jack Fisher—and even when the deaf

¹Tom Flinn, "Out of the Past," *Velvet Light Trap* 10 (1973): 43.

²George Turner, "Out of the Past," *American Cinematographer* 65 (1984): 33.

and dumb boy pulled the thug Stefanos off the cliff. Jeff therefore seems far less deserving of being shot to death by Kathie (as he is at the end of the film) than Walter Neff did to be fatally wounded by Phyllis. Because Jeff's fate is obviously not poetically just, we should consider whether it might not in some sense deserve to be regarded as tragic.

Although Jeff Markham/Bailey is not the sort of prosperous and renowned individual Aristotle considered suitable to tragedy, he does quite well fit the Greek philosopher's description of the moral character of the tragic hero: he is neither "a perfectly good man" nor an "utter villain"; instead he is a "character between these two extremes—... a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty."³ In this respect Bailey/Markham probably seems more "tragic" to contemporary viewers of *Out of the Past* than he would have to many members of the original 1947 audience, who were conditioned to judge his out-of-wedlock relationship with Kathie as a manifestation of depravity or vice. But in an era of less stringent sexual ethics Markham's sin seems to reside more in his deceiving of his employer than in the affair with Kathie, which is less a moral error than an error in judgment issuing from his faulty perception of her character. It is of course Jeff's error in becoming involved with Kathie that ultimately dooms him. Like many tragic heroes, though, Jeff Bailey struggles against his fate until the very end; and this struggle, though it does not save him, gives him a dignity almost completely lacking in a defeated *noir* protagonist like Walter Neff.

The opening of the film chiefly does two things: establish a vague sort of threat to Jeff Bailey's current existence and indicate what he values in that life—the things he will later struggle to avoid losing. The credit sequence opens with shots of mountain scenery, then an aerial view of a cultivated valley, a ground level shot of road signs, a dark car passing a sign reading "Bridgeport," and finally—with the camera apparently mounted above the back of the car—a man in dark overcoat and

hat driving a convertible with top down into the town. Although we do not immediately learn his name, the dark intruder is Joe Stefanos, seeking out Jeff Bailey (Markham) on behalf of the gambler, Whit Sterling. Stefanos learns from the deaf-mute boy at the gas station that Bailey is somewhere outside of town, and we and he learn from gossip at the local restaurant that Jeff has gone fishing with a girl named Ann, object also of the romantic interest of the young game warden, Jim.

When we first see Jeff Bailey he is walking along the shore of a rippling lake, a fishing rod in his hand, mildly complaining to Ann, "They're just not feeding today." This is just the first of a series of increasingly severe frustrations Jeff will experience in the course of the film as he fails to achieve the exact goals he has set out to accomplish. Ann envies Jeff's experience of the world and says to him, "You've been a lot of places, haven't you?" (She seems to be probing in an attempt to find out something about his background.) His reply—"One too many"—indicates there is one particular thing in his past that he regrets. He offers no further comment on his previous experiences but tells Ann of his desire to build a house on the lake and live there with her. This aspiration, like his decisions to live in this remote part of the country and to have a relationship with an innocent girl like Ann, reveals Bailey's pursuit of sanctuary—his impulse to take refuge from a world, from other people that have proved too difficult for him to deal with. (Ann displays her complete subservience to Jeff in almost everything she says, but perhaps most notably in her action of lighting his cigarette for him as they are leaving the lake. She apparently doesn't smoke herself but carries matches for him.) At this moment the arrival of the deaf-mute with the news of Stefanos's arrival demonstrates just how futile such a desire is for Jeff.

Jeff's interview with Stefanos that follows at the gas station is full of unspoken menace. Stefanos makes clear to the audience that Jeff is living under an assumed name ("Of course, there's a different name up on the [gas station] sign") and says that his employer, Whit, wishes to see him. Stefanos's words depict Whit as a generous, thoughtful, forgiving individual but of course imply the exact oppo-

³Aristotle, *Poetics*, XIII, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed., trans. S. N. Butcher (London: MacMillan, 1907): 45.

site: "Whit never steered you to anything bad, did he? Why he never even squawked when you blew the best thing he ever gave you." Seeming to acknowledge that he did blow something and that he owes Whit as a result, Jeff agrees to drive up to Tahoe to talk with the man.

In the next scene Jeff is clad differently—in a hat and trench coat—where in the earlier scenes he was bareheaded and wore a short jacket. As Tom Flinn remarks, the change in apparel is "an important iconographic clue that [Jeff] is about to resume his former profession" of private investigator (39). He drives up to Ann's house and honks for her. As she runs out to the car, her mother's voice can be heard complaining about "a man who won't even come to the door," and Ann then feels she must reassure Jeff not to "worry about" her parents. But the mere fact that Jeff does not go to the front door and have a friendly conversation with her parents before going off with Ann shows that in some sense he believes that he is not respectable enough for them—and perhaps for her. His behavior of driving up and honking for her is that of a teenager from the wrong side of the tracks dating a girl he knows to be out of his class, not that of the mature man Jeff should be at his present age. His immature attitude suggests that his struggle in the latter part of the film is not merely for survival, but for maturity—to prove he is man enough to control his own destiny.

In the car Jeff tells Ann the story of the experience he had alluded to earlier in his "one too many" comment. In Jeff's account, Whit Sterling hires him to find and bring back to him a woman, Kathie Moffett, who had shot and wounded the gambler as well as stealing \$40,000 of his money. In his own eyes Jeff probably begins compromising his moral values when he first accepts the offer of \$10,000 from Whit to undertake the search for Kathie. Markham must realize that he may be taking part in a vendetta. If he finds the girl and brings her back, "What happens to her?" he asks Whit. "I won't touch her," Whit claims, having already told an altogether convincing story about how he lost \$40,000 on a race horse that finished dead last, then purchased the horse and put it out to pasture where it lived happily ever after. Can Jeff have any reasonable confidence that a profes-

sional gambler, an "operator" (Jeff's word) would treat a woman who shot him and stole from him with similar mercy? Even before he meets and falls in love with Kathie, Markham must have qualms about completing this assignment from Sterling.

But as soon as he does meet her, any impulse to satisfy his professional obligation simply melts away. He first sees Kathie—wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a light dress—as she enters a cafe (*La Mar Azul*) in Acapulco. She passes from the bright sunlight outside into the dark shadow under the arched doorway and back into the light as she sits at a table next to Jeff's. His comment on her appearance—"And then I saw her . . . coming out of the sun"—invests her with an otherworldly, almost transcendent quality (as does his description of her second entrance: "And then she walked in out of the moonlight—smiling"). He will later say—after their affair has continued for some time—"There was still that something about her that got me—a kind of magic or whatever it was." Only after she shoots Fisher, does Jeff perceive the magic is black rather than white—and her otherworldly quality demonic rather than divine.

To an extent Jeff is not deceived by Kathie even at the outset of their relationship. When she recommends a little bar to him he knows she won't show up on the first night he goes there. But he goes anyway and remarks of himself, "I knew where I was and what I was doing—I just thought what a sucker I was." Knowledge of how she has manipulated him doesn't make him any less manipulable. When she admits that she shot Whit but claims she didn't steal the money from him and cries out to Jeff, "Don't you believe me?"—he offers no opinion on her honesty or lack thereof, but merely says, "Baby, I don't care," and embraces her passionately. This is perhaps the definitive moment of his fall: when he decides that such things as truth, justice, innocence, or guilt are much less important to him than his passion for Kathie.

The setting in which Jeff decides to embrace Kathie rather than his principles is also highly significant. They are sitting together on a moonlit beach next to a group of hanging fishing nets. Jeff has presumably come to Mexico to capture or net Kathie for Whit, but he has actually become ensnared in her web.

In a later scene Kathie and Jeff are driven back to her cottage by a gathering rain storm. Inside, she picks up a towel, tosses it to him, and then goes over to dry his hair (roughly) with it. After she puts on a record, he takes the towel and starts to dry her hair in the same manner, but winds up flinging away the towel and knocking a lamp to the floor as he kisses her. The wind from the storm blows the front door open, and the camera tracks toward the opening. There is a cut to the outside with the camera tracking and panning a bit to watch the rain, then a cut to the inside with Jeff walking over to close the door. Although the viewer is entitled to believe there is no significant time gap between Jeff's flinging of the towel and his rising to close the door (the shots are connected by straight cuts without any fades or other standard indicators of passage of time), it is also easy to imagine an elided scene of violent love-making upon the couch or floor in which the participants were so swept away by their emotions that they neglected to observe the open door (and fallen lamp) until their passions were spent. In any case, the storm clearly symbolizes the violence of passion and the blown open door the loss of defenses against it. Jeff's shutting of the door comes too late, for as the scene proceeds he asks Kathie to run off with him, undeterred by her warning that Whit "won't forget."

After a suspenseful interlude in which Whit and Joe Stefanos turn up in Acapulco right as Jeff and Kathie are about to leave together (but just miss seeing her and therefore go off believing she has taken a ship to South America), the couple move up to California, where they hide out successfully until by chance Jeff is seen by his former partner, Jack Fisher, at a race track. Jeff and Kathie split up, and Jeff endeavors—effectively, he thinks—to shake Fisher from his tail; but Fisher has followed Kathie instead. This is merely one of many instances in the film in which Jeff takes skillful evasive action, which nevertheless does not accomplish the goal he sought.

In a cabin out in the woods Jeff and his former partner slug it out (their stature as combatants heightened by a low camera angle) as Kathie looks on. In her reaction shots, the shadows of the fighting men flit across Kathie's face, and her upper right arm

moves slightly as if she were groping for something in her purse down below the bottom edge of the frame. But the camera is on the two men when a shot rings out and Fisher collapses to the floor. On first viewing, the audience is probably as surprised as Jeff (in his slackjawed close-up) to see Kathie standing calmly, holding a smoking automatic at waist level. When he is able to speak, Jeff expresses dismay: "You didn't have to kill him." But Kathie coolly explains, "Yes, I did. You wouldn't have killed him. You would have beaten him up and thrown him out. . . . You wouldn't have killed him." She has perceived Jeff's flaw as her protector against Whit: the detective is not ruthless enough. It is undoubtedly this realization rather than any revulsion against the murder she has committed that determines Kathie to flee the scene at this moment (carelessly leaving behind her bankbook recording the \$40,000 deposit that informs Jeff she indeed did steal Whit's money).

The murder of Fisher and the discovery of the bankbook completely disillusion Jeff about Kathie so that he treats her with ironic contempt when he next meets her at Whit's house at Lake Tahoe. He characterizes her as "a leaf that the wind blows from one gutter to another," and responds to her protestations of helplessness with the comment, "You can't help anything you do—even murder." Although she claims to him that she has told no one about the death of Fisher, he knows he has no reason to believe she is telling the truth about this.

Jeff also knows he has no reason to trust Whit. When they meet at Tahoe, Whit says, "I always remember what any man did for me." Jeff says, "Or didn't." Whit says, "Perhaps." The exchange indicates that both Whit and Jeff know the detective betrayed his employer in the matter of the pursuit of Kathie. Why then does Jeff accept a job from Whit, knowing the gambler has ample reason to desire vengeance on him? Perhaps the primary reason was expressed by Jeff to Ann as they drove up to the gate of Whit's estate: "I've got to. I'm tired of running." Possibly he can square things with the gambler by doing what the man asks him to. Possibly, by vigilance he can foil any scheme to double-cross or frame him. Possibly neither will Whit be trustworthy nor will he, Jeff, be wary enough to insu-

late himself from betrayal; in that case he will probably die—but then, too, he will no longer have to run.

The job Jeff accepts—stealing incriminating tax papers of Whit from his former lawyer, Leonard Eels—is not one that an honest private detective would take. But once he is on the job in San Francisco, it becomes apparent that Jeff like Spade and Marlowe before him is merely pretending to cooperate with the criminals in order to mislead them. He attempts to warn Eels that his secretary, Meta Carson, is part of a plot involving both him and Jeff (“It could be that I’m the patsy, and you’re on the spot”); but when he returns to the lawyer’s apartment to explain the situation more fully, he finds the man dead. He then hides the body next door in an apartment that is being redecorated and sets about trying to scotch what he now perceives as a plot to frame him for murder.

In her willingness to set up for murder a man who loves her and to steal Whit’s tax papers from her employer’s office, Meta Carson is obviously a sort of double for Kathie. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jeff encounters Kathie in Meta’s apartment and overhears her call up Eels’ apartment house and identify herself as the lawyer’s secretary. Kathie explains to Jeff the foundation for the frame: in a safe in Eels’ office is a document, written by her, charging him with the murder of Fisher (“They made me sign it,” she asserts). Jeff is not deeply impressed by Kathie’s helpfulness (“You’re wonderful. You’re magnificent. You can change sides so smoothly.”), but he uses the information she has given him to steal the tax papers from the gambling club where Meta has deposited them and informs Whit’s underlings that he will trade them for the letter in Eels’ office accusing him of murder. Unfortunately, just before Meta and Kathie arrive together to pick up the letter at the office, the police drive up with the superintendent of Eels’ apartment house—a consequence of the discovery of the body. On the other hand, given the amply demonstrated unreliability of Kathie and Meta, neither Jeff nor the audience could have complete confidence the result would have been better for him if the women had got to the letter first.

Because of the discovery of the letter by the police, Jeff Bailey is publicly proclaimed the

murderer of both Fisher and Eels, and he must devise a new strategy to avoid prison and the gas chamber. The deal he finally strikes with Whit involves the exchange of the gambler’s tax papers for his incrimination of the recently deceased Stefanos for the murder of Eels, and Kathie for the killing of Fisher, plus \$50,000 getaway money for Jeff. He also succeeds in utterly disillusioning Whit about Kathie—to the point where the gambler tells her that if she doesn’t “take the rap and play along,” he will personally kill her and make sure her death is extremely slow and exceedingly painful.

But when Jeff returns the following night, he finds Whit lying face up, dead on his living room floor. Kathie then enters from the back to say, “You can’t make deals with a dead man, Jeff.” For this simple reason, his plan to save himself has failed. He now has no one to back up his contention that Kathie killed Fisher or Stefanos killed Eels. Should he go to the police, it would merely be his word against Kathie’s, and he knows she was probably correct in her earlier contention: “They’ll believe me.” Although they have jockeyed for power all through the second half of the film, Jeff is forced to acknowledge that Kathie is “running the show now.”

Kathie’s exact attitude toward Jeff in the latter part of the movie is probably difficult for both him and the viewer to gauge. She seems quite content to frame Jeff for the murders of Fisher and Eels until he starts mounting an effective resistance to the scheme. Even after she has aided her former lover to the extent of telling him where he could find Whit’s papers, she sends Stefanos after the deaf-mute, packing a .45 to shoot Jeff when the boy joins him. (This incident later inspires a typical exchange: Kathie [half hurt, half indignant]: “You think I sent Joe?” Jeff [ironic]: “Oh, you’re wonderful, Kathie.”) But even though she is willing to have Jeff either sent to prison or murdered, Kathie also seems still to be in love with him. When they meet in Meta’s apartment, she tells him, “We can go back to Acapulco and start all over as though nothing had happened.” It is easy in the context of the scene to think that she is merely trying to con him, to deflect his anger at her betrayal of him. But even after she has killed Whit, she still expresses the dream of returning to the love she and Jeff once shared: “I

want to go back to Mexico. I want to walk out of the sun again and find you waiting." She is *willing to acknowledge that their earlier love was flawed*, but says that was because Jeff failed to perceive her realistically: "I never told you I was anything but what I am. You just wanted to imagine I was. That's why I left you." Despite her villainy Kathie shares the dream of most normal women (and men): she wants to be loved for what she truly is.

If Jeff finds that hard to do, she'll give him further incentive by threatening that if he doesn't go off with her, she'll pin all of the murders on him (including that of Whit): "Someone has to take the blame," she observes. But her clinching argument, the one he yields to in the end is this: "You're no good for anyone but me. You're no good, and neither am I. . . . We deserve each other." Although he doesn't initially respond to this argument, a minute or two later when she says they "deserve a break," he acknowledges, "We deserve each other."

He is willing to accede to her opinion in this matter because it echoes one he has heard earlier that evening. Jim, Ann's other suitor, has told him, "I don't know whether I'm good enough for her, but I know you aren't." At that time he parried Jim's criticism by saying, "That's one difference. The other is that she loves me." But this rejoinder is not so effective if Jim is actually right and Jeff is unworthy of Ann—something he must have begun to suspect in their final tryst, if not before then. The blond Ann is the diametric opposite of the brunette Kathie in numerous significant ways other than hair color. Where Kathie is sly, manipulative, deceitful, Ann is the epitome of honesty and trust. On the last occasion Jeff meets her, he at one point says to her (with near incredulity), "You believe everything I say, don't you?" To which Ann replies with a perfectly straight face and shining eyes, "Everything you say to me I believe." A moment later he mutters, "I don't know why I do this." The reference of the "this" is obscure, but Jeff could very well be wondering why he is striving to maintain a relationship with a woman so totally unlike not merely his previous lover, Kathie, but himself as well.

For any viewer of the film with some experience and a measure of common sense Ann seems far too good to be true. But if we ignore

the possibility—as the film seems to want us to—of her being a hypocrite, pretending to Jeff and perhaps herself as well to be far more innocent than a woman in her early twenties has any right to be, we have to view her as essentially childlike in her naivete. Jeff's relationship with her seems, therefore, more like that of father and daughter than that of man and mate. Certainly his relationship with the deaf-mute boy seems more nearly one between equals than that with Ann. Jeff was probably attracted to Ann by her stark contrast with Kathie; but her stark contrast with him as well probably would eventually have doomed the relationship, even if Kathie had not polished it off more quickly.

Ann's virtue is so extreme she even defends her rival, Kathie: "She can't be all bad. No one is." Jeff replies, "Well, she comes the closest." But Kathie's badness is only an extension of Jeff's own badness. He is shocked to discover she has killed Fisher and then Whit, but he certainly didn't like either of these men himself. He clearly derived satisfaction both from beating up Fisher and from blackmailing Whit. In each case his hostility toward the other man was largely based on fear—fear that Fisher would report his and Kathie's whereabouts to Whit, fear that the gambler would exact dreadful revenge. But the physical beating of Fisher and the successful blackmailing of Whit were at best only temporary solutions, offering immediate emotional satisfaction but no long-term relief. Beaten up and thrown out, Fisher would merely stagger off to a telephone and call Whit. Once he got hold of his tax papers, Whit would have no reason not to send other agents forth to track down and destroy Jeff. Kathie's solutions to her similar problems—killing both Fisher and Whit—were considerably more effective albeit ruthless. She at least got these enemies off her back once and for all. What she has done in both cases is what Jeff secretly desires but is prevented from doing by his moral censor. His recognition of this fact is probably what makes him admit to Kathie in the end that "We deserve each other."

Jeff's goals in the second half of the film undergo a progressive modification. His original goal when he arrives at Tahoe is to square things with Whit by doing a job for him. He knows there will be risks involved, but is willing to take them because he is "tired of

running." After he meets Kathie at Whit's house and knows she has told the gambler about their relationship, he also knows the job he has been given must in some way be a booby trap for him. His goal at that point is the one he expresses to Meta Carson: "Just remember, I'm coming out of this in one piece, Miss Carson." After he finds Eels' body, he realizes his chances of coming out of the whole affair intact are not good, so he revises his goal. When Kathie tells him, "I don't want to die," he replies, "Neither do I, Baby; but if I have to, I'm gonna die last." But in the end he is not successful in achieving even this limited goal, for Kathie shoots him at the road-block before the state trooper machine-guns her.

We are to assume that Jeff has set up the road-block because he is previously seen going over to the downstairs phone and picking it up as Kathie goes upstairs to complete her packing, even if we do not actually hear him making the call. He could obviously have performed other actions that would have proved less immediately fatal to him (e.g., knocking out Kathie, tying her up, and then calling the police to collect them both at Tahoe—she might ultimately have succeeded in framing him for the murders, but he would seem to have a better chance with the legal system than at the road-block). One must conclude, therefore, that Jeff quite deliberately chooses the method of stopping Kathie that is most likely to prove fatal to both of them. This seems to him an inappropriate fate because not only has Kathie become to him the embodiment of evil, she has also become

the embodiment of the evil he now recognizes within himself.

The film ends with a brief coda. Screenwriter Geoffrey Homes (Daniel Mainwaring) has said in an interview that he had intended the movie to end with the deaths of Jeff and Kathie, but the studio protested: "Well, the front office said, 'Jesus you can't end with them dead there. You've got to put something on it.'"⁴ This ending—in which the deaf-mute boy nods "yes" when Ann asks if Jeff was going away with Kathie and then salutes Jeff's name over the gas station as Ann drives away with Jim—is obviously a sentimental touch, but in a way it is perfectly appropriate to the rest of the film. When Jeff betrayed his principles to go off with Kathie that first time down in Acapulco, he in effect condemned himself to go with her all the way. He shows resilience and ingenuity in the second half of the film as he struggles to extract himself from the net Kathie and Whit have cast upon him; but his efforts, although heroic, are futile. The only way he can ultimately be free of Kathie and her influence upon him is by truly going with her all the way—to death. Jeff's ultimate heroism is his willingness to accept this fate. □

⁴Daniel Mainwaring, "Screenwriter Daniel Mainwaring Discusses *OUT OF THE PAST*," *Velvet Light Trap* 10 (1973): 45.

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Sandra Nelson

FISHING THE BLACK BRANCH

Pinch its five hearts and it comes
loose. Its saw-edged tail rakes
wet newspaper pulling up
friends, family, lovers. Its cold
body dents the hills deep
within your warm fist. In the dark
it noses between two fingers as if
you were nothing
but roots in the earth. You juggle
and giggle to hold the flesh
ringing your finger still
while you push your hook
through. A living knot
unties and ties
curling up to feel
itself feeling
the air—the light, the light
air, swaying in it.
The blue sky and hard
cattails skate like a photograph behind
the tiny worm. Up
through heaven it draws an arc
down, punches through the chipped surface—silencing
the scraping leaves and effervescent sizzle
of rain on the pool. Cool
and late the water turns to molten
gold and silver held within
the black reed fence, boats buzz above
our heads. Our eyes print black
dots of bobbers inside
bright red lids. I take the cool
oars and row.

George Angel

CARL'S WORLD

The amazing thing is that light can be pushed. It can exist in a substance, and that substance can be touched and prodded. It can be maneuvered in shapes to come around the head of a girl, to lay the sunlight there upon her forehead and face. A coat of light.

And yet light is a living moving thing. It tilts over the place where I stand like a slow pendulum. There are sources of light there and there and then everything is reflection. Light moves.

Here I stand in the garden. My name is Carl. My feet are in black rubber boots. My face is any face that is a man's face. It is a bright day. My hands hang at my sides as I look around me. My back aches and so I have stopped for a moment. I bend down again. The wheelbarrow is almost full with rocks. The garden is coming along.

It is not a big garden by any means, stretching as it does between the house and the garage. Its flower bushes are up and through the white fence that encloses it. The fence is not a picket fence. It runs along the inner edge of the sidewalk, from the house to the garage. There is another fence behind where I am standing to whoever has the next yard, but it is indiscriminate and high and things end there. The garden is roughly square and has rose and other flower bushes rising up on little mounds along its perimeter. In its middle I make straight rows and try different vegetables, gotten sometimes from friends and others from a gardening store nearby. This garden gets plenty of sun, being back here where it is, open and on display almost.

The house where we live is on a corner. It wouldn't mean anything to anybody if I were to name the streets. Just some corner, that's how I think of it. We live in the back half of the house and our landlord who is older and keeps to himself lives in the front. Our doorway faces the side of the garage. The garage empties out onto the side street. This is where everything is.

The house has all kinds of windows but still is dark somehow. I try to stay out in the open. To me, the house is too full of things. I like the garden because the garden breathes. In the house every counter and drawer seem like a place to sleep.

The garage is not ours to use. I park my car on the sidestreet. The landlord parks his car in the garage. He lets me keep my tools there. There are steps up to the top part of the garage that has been made into a loft.

My wife left me. She sat at the table and looked across the room. She is a very nervous woman and I worried about her as she packed the car. She cries often and needs to move. People say, "Carl, oh yes Carl, Carl is a good guy." She calls me at times now and we laugh talking. She is a fine woman and still lives in town somewhere.

There is a young woman, a kid really, who rents the loft in the garage. She doesn't live there, she just visits there. Sometimes you can see the light on at all hours. I wonder sometimes what it is she does up there. She parks her car right behind mine. I don't talk to her because I figure it's none of my business. It's not as if I don't have things to attend to.

Light is fastening to things. Catching on the surface of objects in its path. It is a current that renders everything stationary by contrast. Coming to the tall bushes and fastening itself there for a moment touching before slipping off and continuing. Continuing out. The grey street pales and the bushes grow dusty. The shake roof on the garage seems to glisten. Light is not a heaviness or a lightness so much as a polish. Whether turned heavy or light by that touch, everything beneath the light is reordered. The light holds and holds still, a falling bandage. Bathing the small me beating here within it stationary. Light ornaments these shapes with its slip-falling. I toss another rock in the wheelbarrow and feel myself unbending in light again. As if I float in this movement that is just the

slow get-ting used to it. I move slowly over the floor of the garden. I make a space away from the light, beneath me as I go. With the hours I feel the light on my back paling the shirt there, wearing with passage. The red patch of curtain in the kitchen window, I watch it out of the corner of my eye as I work. I watch it stay there, staying red and staying bright too. It touches the light back. I maneuver as I move so that it remains flashing in the corner of everything and the light is pollinating.

I am a janitor. I work at the hospital. I am not a custodian. I know what I do. Other people notice the clean halls sparkling where I notice the dull surface immobile drawing a human film to it. I ride the bus to work, and most of the time I get a ride home. It's not far. I walk it sometimes, deciding whether it is better to have a system or not. I have one when it occurs to me to think about it. I try not to hold my breath when I'm at work. Each job and the order they are to be done. The hospital is a territory I discover even though I pass over it every night. Palaces.

The child is dying. In the dark of the house, where he is the only thing living. I pass my hand over his forehead and he looks at me. Nothing the hospital can do. I stay in the house for him. He lies on the pink sofa, humming tunes to pass the time. He always has enough blankets. The furniture in the house gathers around him. I hover in the house and his voice. My wife, Peggy, won't speak about him over the phone and I don't ask her to. The child has small hands. He can't sleep unless I've got a fire going. The sofa is across the room from the fireplace. Otherwise he remains awake. We talk to each other as if something is going to happen soon.

I'm in the garage putting things away. I look at the stairs to the loft. She is not up there because her car isn't on the street and the garage is silent. I finish hanging things up on their pegs. I am at the stairs and walking up them. I flip open the door in the floor of the loft and pause to listen at nothing before poking my head through.

I put my head through and am underwater. The light came apart. I came up the rest of the steps. It is warm here. The light rises on panels and substance comes apart. It pressed on everything of me in that tank. I say some word and then I close my eyes. I was still

there and the smell of the paint brings the light within my face and brain there too. My eyes are either opened or closed but my sight moves about the tank of light. Then I tried to think. I ran my fingers over the surfaces. Thinking; think. I become smaller, and nothing here but paint on something where light comes off of it. I became smaller and was outside in the yard without believing I am here or in outside still standing and about to enter the house and the child's supper and his dying.

You take the big logs first because those are the important ones. Two or three only. It's there that you guess the rough shape. Usually pyramided up into the corner since this is easier and works better than a tepee or a box. Then you begin to figure the path. A series of spaces for the kindling to burn out of and the air to chase itself through. Even with the kindling all in, there has to be enough space to get it going. The smaller logs should break in around the big one like ribs around a spine. The child looks over. The flame takes right away and needs no nursing this time because you have just cleaned the fireplace the night before. I sit in a chair watching the child sleep. This is the only time I like being in the house. The flame uses the ladder I have made for it.

Peggy sits at the kitchen table looking across the room. Her arm rests on the surface of the table from her elbow to her wrist. Her face is turned away from the cup of coffee before her as if she has forgotten it. She is motionless. Most of all her eyes. When she is about to move or when she has stopped for good it is always in her eyes first. Her eyes are heavy and not pointing at anything. She sits at the table almost touched by morning and I am already walking, humming to myself a few blocks away.

I rise up to the studio again. The paintings press against my sense of something happening. I would say blue and green because these are words that mean undersea, though the paintings are not these colors but more often shades of yellow, white, and brown. I return up the steps again. I go into the garage and up to the loft. It is a small room with two windows feeding, or off of, light. The walls on two sides slide open and contain dark storage places. The paintings are stacked against all four walls, so the smell. I leave the

garden and enter the garage, begin up the stairs and put my hand on the trap door that flips up into the studio. There are jars and tubes and the high rectangles where the contents have flattened out almost, carrying things. Small ridges touching half a color with another and topography of blindness and no more directions. The lowest step on the stairs to the loft is broken nearly in half and gives a little too much when I step on it. I open the side door to the garage knowing she isn't up there before I enter. The stain that is there begins to open up red in my throat and hounds my head.

Here, the outside has come here and opened up its belly. Now the outside is gone and I am the only moving thing here in the world. The panels of color have closed behind me and the dingy rugs have become counterweights to vibrancy. I am still standing and not suspended because of the dust rising from them. The cans full of pencils and brushes are anemones and there is nowhere to go, having come up these stairs there is nothing left to do. This makes now dangerous. Cutting myself away from this density again and again with less success each time I move and displace light. The dust rising shows me how solid the light between its flecks remains. Pigment can become warmth and the smell of alcohol. I can't make a list of colors, I can't find an order to them just lipping up to each other. Yellow finds an avenue, a crack or river. Yellow, the color at the center that has split itself open where green and brown, though with less force, converge on it. Yellow opening like a shell around its white gut. One instance that has commandeered the other walls of light as if they were mirrors. The wick of yellow reflected to the center of the room. Removing my spine from it where it has left its imprint. My movement brings about others and the balance of color changes and everything is overgrown with vines covering the walls as snakes around light and darkening the ceiling where red has begun to burn the green, changing it. There is nowhere to go and no way to watch. Light destroys me as it always comes down and out. The immobility is becoming complete. There is no hiding a statue when the world turns new. Describe any shape and I am in trouble without trying to describe it I cut it out of the light reducing me. There is nowhere to go.

Light begins to move in and my hand glows orange up to it, my eyelids, my mouth.

The sound of her car and the engine turning off. The sound of her opening the side door to the garage. Her feet on the steps.

I have crawled into a storage area and closed the sliding door behind me. I sit in the darkness of the small space listening to her moving about in the studio. She is humming to herself, moving things around. I keep my breathing even and quiet. I don't move. At first the darkness is like a bee or a mask, just something hovering close to my face, getting in the way. Then it begins to move out over the plane of my face, a dark stone slate deepening, revealing the small lint lines of light still upon my eyes. Silent, I sit with my face pressed up into the dark. My slight movements I can only guess at. Sitting within a cool smooth jug, my inhaling slowly pulling shapes into my mouth. I am not in the bottom of something, I am in the crown of a building. I am pressing at the inside of the top of its skull. I am only guessing at where I am. Maybe somewhere in the dark of the child's breathing filled with unseen forks and spoons. I can only guess at my shape. I am not sleepy. There is dust and some smells here somewhere. Trying to remember the look of the paintings, but I can't, like trying to make up old bones. I listen for her and hear something miles away. When will I know if she's gone. I won't. The dark is an arrow suggesting itself. Keep the breathing quiet and slip into the muscles relaxing into the bottom of a sack. My face is upturned but remains untouched. I don't feel anxious but more like powder in water. I open my eyes and close them. There is slightly more light when they are closed. My face is upturned as if I am sunning myself with darkness. I feel hollow and imagine my arms filling with dark water. My heart bends in the out somewhere in my imagined chest. A wreath of something hovers around my ears, making them ring. I brush up against things I don't know anything about. I sit inside my head and think briefly about spiders. I tingle in the dark along my legs and neck like a bag of spiders. My eyes remain closed. My head is in my hands. There is a large round object in my hands. I am turning it over, feeling the soft contours on the tips of my fingers. I am the light in the veins softly pulsing from some heart of things

in the dark, bent in then out in the dark, pushing light away from itself and into the eyelids and legs growing out from it like slow rivers of mud. I am caking out more of myself, stuck and then after a moment slipping further out to where. To fill all the dark in the sock and the face and this here where the only sounds are muffled. Then I become solid as a brick with nothing around it. A single piece of stone propped up cold. Holding there without breath. Stuck and without insides. At the center of everything imagined out around it. Without waiting or sound. In the middle of something that could be anywhere because it will never crack open. Still. And then becoming flesh again. First a hum, and then a feverishness making the floor feel and the air full of things. Sitting there without place single for how long. Opening my eyes to find lines of light describing the edges of the door. Lines of light cutting straight across nothing until nothing begins to fill in with dark shapes around me. Shapes that with only outline seem like places to go. These shapes huddle around me. I could easily fall into one of them. I look again at the lines like the shape of some doorway fooling me into another darkness. I listen and the dark around me inhales. I listen and the shapes crowd around me humming, touching my arms. I listen and make up what I hear. I listen and the floor begins to fall away beneath me. I put my fingers into the line of light, the crack in the door. I pull it across and everything comes in or out at once and I can't see and I listen and hope.

I ran down the stairs and out into the garden. Moving the painting leaning against the door I looked around the studio and quietly slipped out from behind the door. I didn't see a thing and suddenly I was outside. Looking one way and then the other I left the studio

that looked exactly as when I came. What she had touched was back where it was before. I tripped and fell over something before flipping the trap door up and scrambling down the stairs. I couldn't see a thing, not the rugs, not the paintings and I made my way by touch. Feeling each stair with one foot first. I was scared she might still be in the garage beneath me and I stood without moving in the middle of the studio, listening. I broke the bottom stair as I came down without thinking putting all my weight on it not feeling anything as it snapped. Here I stand in the garden.

Carl stands still in the garden. Frozen there rumbled. He has been filling the wheelbarrow with rocks and he stops for a moment. The moment holds as the baggy man stands still for a moment in the garden. He is calm and graceful. Not somebody running holding his head full of bees in his hands as he runs. He is trapped by his grace into one moment. His feet are in black rubber boots. His jeans and shirt have been paled by wear and sunlight. The house's color presses up against his outline. Up to about his knees can be seen the brown of the dirt behind him. It is taken over by the pale green of last year's garden further up. Where the green meets the brown it has been flattened out so that the perspective is lost in favor of texture. The color used for his face and arms is unspeakable. Upon the simple lined face there is an area touched by light. Here it is impossible to tell whether the artist has abandoned realism or not. The side of the face where the light touches it seems perhaps a bit too humble beneath the baseball cap. □

George Angel lives in San Francisco. His stories have appeared in several magazines.

Yves Bonnefoy

THE VOICE, RESUMED

Translated by Lisa Sapinkopf

"Have you come out of need
For this deserted place, this ravine, this door set up
Above sunrise and sunset
Like the passing of a boat from another world,
Enter, I'll allow you a brief rest.

"Have you come to be, if only once,
The threshold's master, to push the weight
Of the door nailed on its sleeping hinge,
To trouble this dream - though you know
Every threshold to be a dream, and this iron
To indeed be the sign, but without promise,
I'll allow you the key to the heavy door.

"Have you come to hear the hammers
Echoing beneath the archways, though you've already
Moved on, your color fading, seeing
No light now but that in dreams, lowering
Your tear-filled eyes toward the sky
That used to welcome you from terrace to terrace
Among the almond trees and bright oaks,
Look, I'll lift up again, I'll give you
This newborn earth, for it is nothing less."

Yves Bonnefoy

ON SNOW-LADEN BRANCHES

Translated by Lisa Sapinkopf

I

From one snow-covered branch to the next, from those years
That passed without any wind frightening their leaves,
Scatterings of light will appear
Now and then, as we walk on in the silence.

And the powder as it falls is only infinite,
We can no longer tell if a world still exists
Or if, in our damp hands, we've gathered
A perfect crystal of the purest reality.

Colors denser with the cold, blues and purple
That call to us from further off than the fruit,
Are you our dream so persistent
That you become our prescience, our path?

It's the sky itself that has those clouds
Whose evidence is child of the snow,
And if we turn toward the white road
The light, the peace will be the same.

II

Except, it's true, that all images in this world
Are like the flowers that pierce
The March snow before spilling, adorned,
Into our daydreamt festival.

And may one bend down there, to carry
Armfuls of their joy into our lives,
They'll be dead soon—less in
Their faded colors' shadows than in our hearts.

Beauty is arduous, an enigma almost,
Ever rebeginning the apprenticeship
Of its true meaning on the flowering meadow's flank,
Covered here and there by patches of snow.

MaryEllen Beveridge

ITALY OR FLORIDA

Her young Italian man took the change Lena placed on the counter and massaged it in his broad palm. His stained white apron emphasized his small waist and the muscled arms crossed over his chest. He would not speak English to her and he would not meet her eyes. But he had her order ready as she walked into the pizza stand: a slice steaming on waxed paper and a Coke without ice, even on the cusp of summer. When she turned to find a seat he pressured paying customers out of a booth with a few overbearing gestures of a dirty Handi Wipes. Lena knew that if she tried to talk to him she would break some centuries-old Mediterranean code of conduct and she would be in danger. So she said Thank you and he nodded to her without looking at her and she was very careful.

She took a bite of the best pizza in lower Manhattan. The room was warm and yeasty. The oven door slammed and the ceiling fan whirled and Lena, mesmerized, sipped her uniced Coke and closed her eyes. She concentrated on the place behind her eyelids, orange as opium poppies, while the noise and movement of the pizza stand surged by her like black dots in her vision.

A shift in the light in the room; Lena opened her eyes. Two men stood near her, an unbroken silhouette. An arm was draped over the back of her booth; a hand, with a dull metal ring on one finger, held a cup of Coke. The men breathed her air, waiting. She looked up into two pairs of eyes, green, green-blue, at a faint curl at the turn of a mouth. "What do you want," she said, not knowing whether she said it out loud or said it to herself: What do you want. The heat made her lightheaded; the small booth became even smaller. The muscles in her back tightened. One of the men moved to flank her and she stood, defending her booth against them, defending herself against them. "We didn't see you," he said, one of them said. "Sorry," he said, and

they turned away, the light shifted back, the space around her was neutral again, calm.

Lena sat down and exhaled. She looked quickly at her young Italian man, guiding a widening circle of dough on one straight finger. The two men sat at the counter now, their Coke cups in their hands. Lena rolled the waxed paper into her empty cup and threw it in the trash on her way out the door. Her young Italian man avoided her eyes as she left.

It was a long trip uptown; Lena could never understand how four miles took forty-five minutes. The air outside was no relief from the tunnel air of the subway. She walked farther east, almost to the river, but she was dressed for it, sneakers and cotton socks, good for a sprint if that became necessary. A T-shirt and a pair of loose pants, dark, so the subway soot wouldn't show, or the places where strangers had touched her.

She rang a buzzer and climbed five flights of stairs in an even-tempered brownstone which had been converted to apartments, two to every floor. Ivy grew up the facades of all the buildings on the block, except the high-rises on each corner, a reminder of how the city was going. Before she knocked on the door she lifted her hair from the nape of her neck and pulled her clothes from her body where they had stuck to it. Then she smoothed everything down again.

The man who answered was brown, like Lena: brown hair, brown eyes, brown joint hanging between his lips. It was unlit. He kept one there most of the time, except when he was smoking cigarettes or eating or making love. Lena had come to believe it was his talisman against all he had found himself among lately, as a fur coat (with a moth-eaten sweater worn underneath) or late-night movies on TV were to others. He was just a few inches taller than Lena, so they fit together nicely, while he still claimed the masculine advantage of size. He took her face in his

hands and kissed her, as if she had delivered herself to him, a present. He did not forget to remove the half-burned joint from his lips.

Craig's body had gone somewhat to softness around the chest but it was good to lean into, unlike the slantboard chest of exaggerated health. He was a mostly out-of-work carpenter. He had thick wrists and forearms, not from pounding nails and hauling lumber but because his family was big-boned. Even though his life was falling down around him and he did nothing that she could see to remedy it, she felt from him a protectiveness that came from an unlimited decency toward her, or a decency whose limits she had not yet pushed.

Craig traced a line at Lena's temple with his fingertips, and gave her a beer, already sweating, from the refrigerator. "We have a half hour to ourselves," he said. "How are you?"

"Hot. Dirty. Summer in the city. How are you?"

"Good. Good to see you."

What startled Lena was that she was quite capable of forgetting this man for weeks at a time, then coming to when he called her. On Friday he had whispered roughly into the mouthpiece of his telephone at the other end of the line. "I've been drinking Glenlivet Scotch today," he said. "Quite good. Unblended. Will I see you tomorrow?"

They sat close together on Craig's feather couch with their beers. Lena settled her shoulders against his chest and was empty of everything but warmth and calm. He put his hand around hers. "The trouble is," he said, "I'm lonely without them, and I can't do a damned thing with them. Cut off till they're back with their mother."

Lena tried to see him when his children weren't visiting. His children terrified her. Not one person she knew in New York had children, except Craig. Working at jobs the agencies found for her under lights that hurt her eyes, she stood in front of the office Xerox machine and sterilized herself. Hips pressed against it, discreetly, not suggestively. Every time the light flashed one of her woman cells (oh curse, oh joy), like a purey marble, rolled away.

Craig wanted her to see his plants and she was glad because she was tired of thinking about children. When she thought too much about children she began to think she might

have children of her own somewhere, say in Italy or Florida or some other place where she had left any number of troublesome desires. Craig filled buckets with water and fertilizing compound and they walked the length of the apartment to the living room.

The once beautiful rooms had gone to ruin. Craig bought the apartment when the building went co-op, and with the pride of ownership he tore it apart, installing, removing, widening, lengthening. Now nothing was finished. The kitchen cabinets had no doors and were stuffed with odds and ends that didn't belong in kitchen cabinets, and with small round paper bags from the health food store marked "raisins" and "whole wheat pancake mix." The stainless-steel sink worked, but the butcher-block counter ended abruptly, and dirty baking pans, frying pans, dishes, cups, and utensil crowded off it in an ingenious arrangement which had assured, so far, that they didn't fall to the floor.

The pile of clean laundry on Craig's bed sagged toward the pile of dirty laundry on the floor. Enlarged closet spaces, Sheetrocked and taped, were abandoned without paint or doors. The bathroom sink was missing. The surfaces of the furniture were littered, and drawers were half-opened and bulging with papers, string, store coupons, T-shirts, safety pins. Among all this a pot of beans simmered on the stove.

In the living room heavy black cloth covered the windows, secured to the molding by two-penny nails. Scores of thriving marijuana plants, set into portable wooden frames, were nurtured by frequent waterings and eight-foot fluorescent light bulbs suspended from the ceiling by a maze of wires, more of Craig's handiwork. Lena bent over the plants and admired the brush-stroke, oriental quality of the leaves; Craig caressed them as if they were already the wad of hundred-dollar bills they would become.

"After they get this tall," he measured the air, "I transplant them to an estate in New Jersey. Nobody will find the land I cleared. The woods go on and on." Craig's eyes went dark, as if he were thinking of another kind of woods altogether. "I have to walk about a mile through the brush to get there. If I work steady through the night, I'm on the highway again by dawn."

He lifted a bucket and wet the dark soil.

"When I got back and couldn't find work," he said, "a buddy of mine hired me to harvest his plants. It's the most dangerous time. You're red-handed if you're caught. He paid me five-hundred dollars a day. I bought a box of rubber bands and snapped one around every hundred-dollar bill I earned. By the time the harvest was in, I'd used up the whole box."

He trusted her now with this. Down payment for a co-op. Craig was one of the elect whose service in Vietnam had later given him an almost regular source of income. He surveyed his healthy green living room and sighed. "The Garden State doesn't do too badly by those seeds from Nam," he said.

Craig finished watering the plants while Lena went to the refrigerator and tried to decide between beer and orange juice, its only contents. They took fresh beers to the couch. Craig switched on a fan at their feet and cleared a space at the table. Lena threw newspapers and crumpled cigarette packs to the floor and lay in luxury on the couch. Craig's chaos was inviting and so pervasive all she could do was give in to it, maybe coax it along. His chaos had overwhelmed him to inertia, although he said he had stopped working on the co-op only until the divorce settlement; there was a chance it would go to his wife, and then she could have it, he said, the whole damned thing.

Lena moved her legs and the fan ruffled her pants. Craig pulled around a bulging trash bag full of shake and rummaged through it. "There are some buds in here, I know it," he said into the trash bag. The crop in the living room was his hope for the future.

He crumpled the buds into cigarette papers while Lena laid down a row of neatly rolled joints. They smoked the first joint and he told her how many plants would flower, how tall they would grow, what they would be worth. He puffed tenderly on the joint, then looked at the room abstractedly. "Most of it will probably go to my lawyer, though," he said.

The buzzer rang; he stood heavily and buzzed back. They heard high, excited voices on the stairs, two of them, and a third, a man's, saying, "Come on, Abby, come on, Roseann." Craig gave Lena a split-focus look, the pride of a father and the regrets of a lover, and opened the door. The man on the other side of it was taller than Craig, leaner; he

wore white trousers and a yellow sports shirt and exuded an oppressive health. He looked at Lena from the doorway with detached curiosity. She went back to her beer as Craig exchanged a few words with him, took Roseann in his arms, and rested his hand on Abby's glorious yellow hair. Suddenly all the other objects among the chaos claimed Lena's vision—dolls, blocks, coloring books, pick-up sticks, children's clothes, the smell of baby powder.

Craig smiled at his children through the joint in his mouth as if they, not it, had drugged him. The man said something to Craig and stepped around the clutter to the kitchen sink, where he washed his hands of everything, and left.

Craig took his children to Lena. He filled Roseann's bottle with orange juice, and they all sat on the couch in a row. He said, "Abby, Roseann, you remember Lena, don't you?"

Roseann attended to her bottle; Abby smiled at Lena openly, guilelessly. Lena smiled back.

Abby shifted her weight closer to her father while Lena told her how they had met. "I took your daddy's phone number from a notice on a bulletin board. He brought his tools to my apartment—"

"His hammer?"

"Yes. And his tape measure, and level, and paint. Do you know what he did then? He tore down a wall, so I'd have more room to pace." This was lost on Abby. She shifted her weight again and Lena sensed danger, but it was Abby who was threatened, who did not want to hear that the man she was so erratically dependent upon lived in ways that excluded her. Abby said, "I'm hot, Daddy, I'm hungry."

Lena said to her, "Would you like me to help you find another dress?"

"No."

Craig took his children to their room. Lena went to the stove and stirred the beans, checked the hydrator and sliced a carrot into the pot. The steam made her face sweat. Tendrils of hair stuck to her skin. She wound her hair in her hands, a nervous gesture justified by the heat. She trailed down the hallway and asked Abby if she could borrow a few barrettes. Craig was buttoning her into another dress. Abby smiled at Lena again, a feminine complicity. Lena stood patiently while Abby paired all of her barrettes and finally handed

over the red ones.

Lena sat on the bed while Abby tried to fasten them to her hair. Lena took a strand from each temple to hold the rest back and showed Abby how to fasten them. Abby smoothed Lena's hair, patting it. It was full of snarls, long and full of snarls; Lena just washed it and let it go.

She waited in front of the fan until Craig was ready. The children followed him everywhere, breathless little shadows in collision with each other. He disappeared down the hallway in search of his keys, returned to the table, brushed stray marijuana into the trash bag, and ripped the paper off the top of a pack of Camels to insert the joints into the pack. Abby was at his heels, calling "Daddy, Daddy," and Roseann lagged behind, coming upon the last maneuver just as the next was about to begin.

Craig shut the flame under the pot of beans. With silent apologies to Lena, he lifted his children into his arms and carried them out the door, quiet now, content. Lena shut the door and followed them downstairs.

Craig set Abby down on the sidewalk. She tried to force his attention with a rush of words, high and insistent. A flywheel came loose in Lena's brain. Abby suddenly abandoned the argument she was trying to have with her father, leaving them in a low-pressure zone absent of sound. Craig said, "Abby, take my hand." She took the hand he had put around Lena's waist, and they all straggled up the street.

Lena swept her hair meditatively over one shoulder. The noise of the traffic became another layer of heat. Yellow taxi cabs rolled down Second Avenue, distorted by the wave of heat rising from the asphalt. Enough of the cabs were empty. If she walked to the curb and raised her arm, one would stop for her. If Craig had blond hair, their foursome might look more authentic. Or if she had blond hair. Or if one of the children had brown hair. Craig finished another joint. But no one was looking at them. Lena was protected by these children and this man, isolated by them. For a while she was safe.

The movie house vibrated with the noise of children, a thick hum that trebled down when the lights began to dim. In the lobby Craig balanced tickets, popcorn, candies, soda, children. Lena's arms were empty, a burden. The

adults walked down the carpeted aisles, some with five or six children in tow. Other adults somewhere in the neighborhood were relieved for the afternoon; it would be their turn next. There were single men, single women with a child or two or three, a few bona fide sets of parents (Lena checked eyes, hair, thickness of bones), some like Craig and Lena. Lena felt unseen, flattened out.

Craig was on the aisle seat with Roseann on his lap, and Lena sat between Craig and Abby.

"Catherine," Abby said, "may I trade places with you?"

"Her name is Lena, Abby," Craig said. "You know that."

"No," Lena said, on principle, quite clearly through her mouthful of popcorn. Who was Catherine?

"Catherine!"

Now Lena was having an argument with a five-year-old. Abby let go with a beautifully modulated whine, punctuated by little sobs. It is like a song, Lena thought; musical despair. Abby spilled Coke on Lena's pants. Craig and Lena moved over one seat, and Abby sat triumphantly next to her father. Lena took his hand, fearing she would lose herself in the tiny urgencies of the children who surrounded them, but he was off in a haze of marijuana. He wrapped his hand around hers. Roseann settled against his chest, dreamily sucking her bottle.

Abby paid close attention to Snow White. Lena frowned into her popcorn. Craig said nothing. If one woman had divided his family, surely he wouldn't allow it again. Abby knew this, instinctively.

Lena came to Craig from the cool extravagance of her neighborhood, where she had a lover who was quite glamorous in the source of his income, the vintage of his drinks, the cut of his clothing. He was unaware of how well he entertained her. He was expert at arranging dinner, hailing a cab, buying a newspaper and folding it under his arm, all at a half-run, just so. He was quite upset at the look of her apartment. How could she possibly entertain? he asked her in his meticulously cultivated Eastern voice. He wagged certain ancestral bones at her, like the barrel of a rifle. He was often disappointed in her.

Lena eased her hand from Craig's and drifted into the lobby. A sizable ebb and flow of little bodies, sometimes accompanied by

bigger ones, giggled and fretted there. She had seen enough of the film—betrayal, flight, rescue, revenge, salvation. A room full of unendings watched the happy ending. The Prince kissed Snow White and as she gazed into his eyes an infant screamed in the front row.

They straggled into the afternoon heat and a low, humid sky. Lena bumped along next to Craig, slow to regain her equilibrium. He said, "You have Coke on your pants," and grinned at his children. He started acting dopey and shy, like Dopey, and caught each of them in his big arms, planting Bronx cheers on the soft skin of their necks. Their voices pierced Lena's eardrums as they struggled away from him and returned for more.

"Kiss me, Daddy," Abby said. "Kiss me like the Prince kissed Snow White." Her arms wrapped possessively around his thighs. Her smile was more enchanting than Lena imagined hers could ever be.

"Abby, Abby," Craig said, helpless. He didn't seem to have the strength to take her arms away. Lena was afraid Abby would bury her face in his loins. "Ish, ish," Roseann breathed, catching her fingers in Craig's pants leg.

Lena stood back, pretending she was just passing by. Craig picked up Roseann and kissed her cheek, brushing her delicate skin with his rough face. Then he kissed Abby, who no longer clung to his legs. Craig pulled Lena to him and kissed her. Impulsively, Abby drew Lena's face to hers. Lena kissed her in return. She leaned against Craig, comforted by the texture of his hair and skin, then gathered herself together and wandered down the avenue with Craig and his children, blessed for the moment, if not saved.

They went to the courtyard behind Craig's apartment building, where he had built, a swing set and a sandbox among the weed trees that thrived in all the untended corners of the city. The children fanned out through stunted shrubbery and wilted hollyhocks to play on the swings. Roseann couldn't climb onto a swing by herself so she walked instead with giant baby steps to the sandbox. Abby paid her no mind. Craig led Lena to a bench under unclipped hedges and kissed her hands, her mouth. With a child's prescience Abby called through the hedges to her father, Daddy, Daddy. As Craig and Lena moved

apart, their T-shirts clung together, then fell back.

"When do your children sleep?" Lena said. "It's only afternoon."

They must take naps? Young bodies tire quickly, I understand. Just go and go and then practically drop to the floor." Softly she was pulling the hair at the nape of his neck.

"First they get cranky," he said, standing up. "I'll be right there, Abby. They'll know when they're tired."

Craig did underdogs with Abby, pushing her swing hard and running under it on the upswing. She shrieked convulsively. Lena sat at the edge of the sandbox. Sand glued by sweat streaked Roseann's face and arms. She walked unsteadily to Lena, a toy shovel in her hand, and said, "Mama," but it was not Lena. "Yes, I know," Lena told her.

Upstairs the fan barely moved the air. Lena set the beans on simmer again, found an onion in a doorless cabinet and sliced it into the pot. She settled again on the feather couch.

The beans were done, and all was quiet downstairs. Maybe, Lena thought, they have dropped to the ground in the heat, circled around each other. She drew a bath and lay in front of the fan while the tub filled.

Abby found Lena in her room, pinning her hair with Abby's barrettes. She looked at Lena with her beatific smile and said, "Are you a friend of my daddy's?"

Lena thought for a moment. "Yes," she said. She could say that. Until she found herself knocking up against his stoned, peaceful silences and he said, Come in, and she did, and there was nothing. Nothing but his guerrilla farming and beer, and Glenlivet Scotch the day before the children arrived. But for now it was all right. "Yes," she said again. "I'm a friend of your daddy's." She finished pinning her hair.

They had dinner in front of the fan. Beans stuck to the couch, the children's skin. Craig took Lena's bath for the children. He helped Roseann out of her clothes; Abby undressed fluidly and flitted about the room, her long hair falling to her sturdy golden bottom. Roseann wriggled from Craig's lap and ran with Abby, looking seductively back at him while her mouth pulled at her bottle. Abby flirted with her father, rocking her body in front of him and running off when he tried to take her arm, a nymph with perfect, un-

back to his room to rummage through the clean-dirty laundry for a fresh T-shirt and a pair of pants. He walked her to a cab, an untranslatable silence between them.

The cabs were abundant, fast-moving. Lena wondered suddenly what she must look like. Craig touched her face as a cab braked for them. "Your hair looks nice," he said, and shut the door of the cab securely for her.

Downtown she asked the driver to stop at the cross street just below the pizza stand. Her young Italian man was there; when did he sleep, play? He flourished his wooden spatula and slammed the oven door behind him. The ceiling fan whirled slowly. He lay a steaming pie on the counter and artfully cut it into pieces. Then he slipped a slice onto a piece of waxed paper, filled a cup with Coke. It fizzed over the lip of the cup. Lena reached for them and he stepped back, folding his

arms across his chest. She lay a handful of change on the counter and said, "Grazie." He nodded to her and said, "Niente."

"Pensare, I come here to do that."

"Si, pensare, I know." She saw his shoulders relax.

She took what he had given her to her booth. She sipped her uniced Coke and thought. She thought she would go back to her rooms now, she would think about Italy or Florida and keep all her lights burning until they blazed out, like ash in a cold fire. Then stoke it once again. □

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THE HIDDEN STRUCTURE OF WISE BLOOD

Labeling Flannery O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), as a philosophical Bildungsroman means that its narrative follows some traditional genre patterns which become of practical importance for the thematic structures, the development of the protagonist's ideology and character, the organization of the plot, and for the ending of the novel as well.

Let me begin with the beginning of the story, and not with that of the discourse. By means of the flashback technique the narrator interrupts the progress of events on the story's level of the present to describe some episodes that both give the reader some necessary impressions of Haze's childhood and extend the temporal duration of the story approximately fifteen to twenty years. This happens twice.¹

The two flashbacks depict Haze's first anchorage in life as a bleak and gloomy place. The boy is socialized into a stern Protestant fundamentalism, where happiness only breathes with difficulty. Being a circuit preacher, Haze's grandfather, during his inflammatory sermons, misuses his young descendant as a demonstration object, "even for that boy there [he used to shout from the nose of his Ford automobile to those few who were actually listening] for that mean sinful unthinking boy standing there with his dirty hands clenching and unclenching at his sides, Jesus would die ten millions deaths before He would let him lose his soul." It is obvious that Jesus is used as a disciplinary means to cause fear. And Haze's most important and "black" experience was, accordingly, that it was necessary to avoid Jesus in order to avoid sin.

Previously he had already learnt from his mother what sin was. It happened on the day he returned from the traveling circus, having

for the first time in his life seen a naked woman. At a long distance Haze's mother immediately discovered that her son had tasted the forbidden fruit. "What you seen?" she asked him three times, rhetorically, before she hit him with her stick, telling him that Jesus died to redeem him. Haze was only ten years old then, but he was already filled with a strong sense of guilt and a consciousness of sin. He felt himself unclean and mean, and he chose the woods behind the house as the ground for his conscientious penance. Terrorized, he felt that Jesus was too big a burden for his soul to carry. Jesus is "so soul-hungry," the grandfather told him, and he'll get you in the end.

About ten years later Haze got an opportunity to neutralize that unChristian thread. He was in a boot camp on the other side of the earth. Some of his buddies wanted him to join them on a visit to the local whorehouse. Haze, as one might expect, declined, and looking through his mother's fundamentalistic glasses, he added that he did not want anybody to "tamper with his soul." When his friends left him for the lust of the flesh, they carelessly asked him if he was sure he had one at all. That remark caused Haze to a brief, but extremely important, sequence of thoughts, which signifies a metamorphosis of the protagonist's consciousness. This pivotal moment is so momentous that it must be seen as a point of determination in the novel:

He took a long time to believe them because he wanted to believe them. All he wanted was to believe them and get rid of it once and for all, and he saw the opportunity here to get rid of it without corruption, to be converted to nothing instead of to evil. (*Wise Blood* 12)

Haze's calculation is captivatingly logical: if one can protect oneself against Jesus by avoiding the world of sin, it must be possible to get totally rid of sin by exchanging the soul

¹Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*, *Collected Works*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: The Library of America, 1988) 9-11, 34-36.

which gives it shelter, and the morality which gives it name. So, like Faust, Haze swaps his soul for nothingness. He is fully aware that he simultaneously loses the contact with evil, ie. with his sense of guilt, fear of Jesus, consciousness of sin, etc.—in one word, *religion*.

Having deliberately waved good-bye to his religious education means on a philosophical and ethical level that Haze in one stroke has turned into an atheist without any moral orientation, but with a noticeable desire for blasphemous behavior. This is the reason why Haze, coming to Taulkinham, is able to lie down in "the friendliest bed in town" on top of Mrs. Leora Watts, doing what he could not do in the army under any circumstances.

When Haze fornicates he only sets foot on a de-tabooed area, where sex has nothing to do with the existence of sin or the world of God either. On the contrary, sex is not a sinful "evil" anymore, it is just "nothing." Haze can go in for sex, precisely because he has bartered his soul away, so that both Jesus and sin to Haze are words without any deeper meaning, representing something without real existence.

But having *only* "'reasoned' himself out of his faith," as Kathleen Feeley puts it, Haze's transformation has not yet been artistically depicted in any convincingly visualized way.²

So, wanting to make her poetry more concrete, O'Connor rewrites her hero's metamorphosis. Haze, falling asleep in a narrow berth on the train, is a victim of a deep dream about himself, being with his dead mother inside her enclosed coffin on the day of her burial. It is a terrifying nightmare, in which Haze experiences a genuine psychic regression to the prenatal life in his mother's womb. In the same movement the reader can witness how the protagonist is reborn, when he wakes up with a start and wedges "his head and shoulders through it" ["it" being the "crack"].

On the literal level the "crack," of course, is nothing but the opening between the ceiling of the train and the curtain of the berth. And Haze's final cry only stresses his claustrophobia.

On a symbolic level the word "crack" can be interpreted as the mother's vulva and,

accordingly, the whole dream as a re-birth. After his conscious metamorphosis, Haze's unconsciousness has to be sworn in, too. His transformation, one understands, is a change that also affects the deepest parts of his soul. And regarding Haze's future behavior, it is possible to take a further step in this direction, claiming that Haze has been re-born as his own shadow (in the precise sense of the term that C. G. Jung gives it).³

Seen from a psychological and ethical point of view the first part of the dream demonstrates how strong Haze's mother fixation has been. Whereas the rebirth part of it confirms and verifies that it is his consciousness that Haze trades away. This enables him to experience his own subconsciousness for the first time in his life.

It is, from this essay's point of view, more important to emphasize the incestuous and Oedipal contents of the dream-sequence than to point out its necrophilous implications, which mean nothing in the context.

These radical alterations naturally affect the protagonist's moral profile, too. Haze could have answered his friends in the boot camp, "What do I need with a hooker? I have Jesus." Could have. But he did not. Now, having been changed, he says to himself, "What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts." In the wake of his transformation Haze has become selfish, arrogant, conceited, egocentric, self-righteous, and, moreover, on the novel's *literal level* (cf. Thomas Aquinas⁴) a murderer and a self-mutilator.

It is possible on the analogical level of *Wise Blood* (cf., once more, Thomas Aquinas) to interpret Haze's rebirth in the train as the Devil's entrance into the novel. This is not crucial, however, but serves to expose what has been called "an added dimension."

The fact remains that Haze as a human being has undergone his formative years' first but most important transformation. That is the main thing. The protagonist's decisive metamorphosis is artistically well documented in chapter one, but it does not take place until the break between chapter one

³C. G. Jung, "Der Schatten," *Aion. Untersuchungen zur Symbolgeschichte* (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1951) 15-22.

⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945) 1: 16-17.

²Kathleen Feeley, S.S.N.D., *Voice of the Peacock* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982) 59.

rejections of the existence of all that which transcends the empirical world. He winds up his lecture in this way:

"Your conscience is a trick . . . it don't exist though you may think it does, and if you think it does, you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you." (*Wise Blood* 93-94)

This is literature and philosophy of religion together, and O'Connor now has to show the concrete consequences of Haze's transformation from an atheist to a value-nihilist and an apostate with a strong Camus-like sense of the meaninglessness of human life and with a desperately profane disbelief in the divinely sacred universe.

So the plot, carefully prepared for it, explodes in a display of fireworks which on the literal level of the story is both violent and surprising, so that it may be seen as grotesque. On the symbolic level, however, it is loaded with that kind of precise artistic signs that furnish the novel with a vast potential of meaning which increases the significance of the story and affects the readers strongly, whether they see these signs or not.⁵

The first thing Haze does is to make love with Sabbath, the "ugly child dressed up in woman's clothes." Formerly he had decided to seduce her for strictly non-sexual reasons, but, ironically, as it turns out, it is the erotically experienced Sabbath who has the upper hand and therefore seduces Haze, teaching him "how to like it."

The next thing that happens is Enoch's theft of the mummy from the MVSEVM in the City Forest Park. To him "the shrunken man" represents *the new Jesus* Haze needs so badly. To Haze the mummy is nothing but a heap of dust or a piece of trash. To Sabbath the dry, ugly scarecrow turns out to be an object she can use in practicing her parental instincts. Having just received him from Enoch, she accordingly begins to rock him in her arms asking, "Who is your momma and daddy?"

Besides all these noticeable significations

the small body must, additionally, be seen as the novel's gigantic symbol of the archetype of a false god, who, nevertheless, plays an important part in the story by linking together the characters, by accelerating the speed of the narrative, and by being a crucial component of the elements which push Haze toward the brink of a precipice.

Although Haze has come to a zero point in Taulkingham he is still "charged with energy." During the night he decides to move to another city to continue his nihilistic activities in a new place. He starts packing, and while he is rummaging about in his room, he finds his mother's glasses. He puts them on and looks at himself in the mirror on the wall:

He saw his mother's face in his, looking at the face in the mirror. He moved back quickly and raised his hand to take off the glasses but the door opened and two more faces floated into his line of vision; one of them said, "Call me Momma now." (*Wise Blood* 106)

The already once quoted "commandment" from Haze's nihilistic sermon can serve as a useful clue to the understanding of these strange sentences. The non-existing "conscience," Haze emphatically declared, is no more than "your face in the mirror" and deserves nothing but to be hunted down and killed.

Only by means of the improved vision provided by his mother's glasses Haze is capable of experiencing how his repressed conscience, which now begins to stir, personifies itself to appear before him face to face in the shape of his own mother.

The tableau demonstrates how black Haze's shadow has become, and how both oedipally and morally attached to his mother he still is, but also how little he has succeeded in nullifying from his personality, in spite of his violent exertions. Last, but not least, the experience makes plain *how well-founded Haze's religious past with its guilt-creating consciousness of sin was, and still is*. With his own eyes wide open Haze has not been able to realize all this. Only his mother's fundamentalistic glasses, not used since that day in the boot camp, are able to focus on the lies and failures (which could be related to several distinctive levels of the interpreta-

⁵Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, eds. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984) 72.

tion of the novel).

This analysis is verified and its ideological significance supported by the next (quite analogous) very dramatic episode. I am thinking of the scene in which Haze kills Solace Layfield, his own Doppelgänger, who resembles him so much in everything that a woman earlier asked Haze, "Him and you twins?" Haze, partly repeating his own words, indicates what is under way by answering, "If you don't hunt it down and kill it, it'll hunt you down and kill you" (*Wise Blood* 95, cf. 93).

It is noteworthy that Haze, by using the word "it" instead of the expected "him", depersonifies the question. The point is that by correlating the twice mentioned word "it" with the name Solace Layfield, and with the notion of "conscience," and, finally, with the idea of a "shadow," O'Connor makes the four terms equivalent to the reader.

Since Haze has already been reborn once as his own shadow, the expression "the shadow behind him," meaning the shadow behind the shadow or the shadow's shadow, must, consequently, be seen as an indication that Solace Layfield on the symbolic level of the story is a personification of the protagonist's not yet completely eradicated consciousness.

But now the time has come. So Haze, once and for all, kills the part of himself which he calls "it" and which represents what is still left of his *conscience*, i.e. of his consciousness and religious past. He passes the sentence of death by, suitably, saying, "You ain't true . . . You believe in Jesus."

Considering O'Connor's talent for wry and reversed logic this means on the literal level that the poor Layfield (by being a Christian) to Haze stands for the false prophet par excellence.

On the novel's literal level, only, the murder of Solace Layfield is a criminal, brutal, and culpable massacre that in addition has been written in such a way that one is really thrilled while reading the passage. But the realistic description needs an interpretation, unless the reader contents himself by denouncing Haze as a pathological case.

Haze reacts violently to all these developments. After having broken the dried up new Jesus, so that "the trash inside sprayed out in a little cloud of dust," he throws him out of the window. He then, equally symbolically,

throws his mother's glasses out of the door. After that he breaks off the connection with Sabbath, slaughters Mr. Layfield in a puddle of blood, tries to escape, and has his car destroyed with the aid of an extremely officious cop. This last events show how skillfully—efficiently and humorously—Flannery O'Connor understands to close all doors and to tighten the rope around her protagonist's neck to bring the narrative toward an end. Finally Haze walks home, buys himself "a tin bucket and a sack of quicklime," goes into his house, and blinds himself.

This final act is the protagonist's last, deliberately accomplished, metamorphosis, which for the third time takes place between two chapters.

Considering the relations between the fictional characters Haze and Hawks, the blinding stands for Haze's final triumph over his competitor. Hawks could not do what Haze did. Though this point is not very important is has to be mentioned.

Seen from a psychic point of view Haze's blinding of himself signifies that he is going to prevent his strong mother fixation, with its threatening memento of his suppressed life, from reappearing in another mirror.

On the thematic and symbolic level the blinding—aesthetically so well prepared—must, accordingly, be interpreted as Haze's final attempt to eliminate his "conscience" and his troublesome and importunate past with its burden of religious "evil." The act equals the destruction of the mummy, the glasses, the prophet Layfield, and the Essex.

But at the same time, having seen too much of the profane world Haze also mutilates his eyes to be able to really *see*—to see, understand, and recognize—the greater, sacred world.

Having bartered his soul away, with its content of religiously colored "evil," and sold it for "nothing," Haze could but witness how nothingness slowly became. emptiness, and how emptiness let evil reenter his mind and behavior through the backdoor. In the mirror Haze must have realized how close he was to an end. It is the old story about the unclean spirit who returns to his house just to find it "empty, swept, and garnished." "Then goeth he [*The Bible* says] and taketh" seven other spirits tougher and more wicked than him-

self. They return, and "the last state of that man is worse than the first" (*St. Matt.*, 12: 44-45).

Haze, who all through the novel has repeatedly declared himself "clean", now begins to lead a very piously atoning life, saying for the first time "I'm not clean," and, like Sophokles' Oedipus, after *he* had blinded himself between two acts, also saying, "I can see now." This means that both of them, the Greek and the Southern Oedipus alike, now, in their state of physical blindness, finally have become religiously seeing. And having removed their arrogance and self-righteousness, they have placed themselves in a situation, where in the end they are able to *see* the existence of the sacred world and recognize God's divine order of the universe.

The contrast between *the profane* and *the sacred* constitutes the fundamental contrast in *Wise Blood*. Both the narrative course of events and the thematic structure of the novel are based on it.

Haze's religious point of departure is explicitly shown by means of the two flashbacks in the beginning of the novel, and it is implicitly, artistically very impressively, indicated by his difficulties in, or rather by his inability to lead a non-religious life.

Having negated his Christian belief in the Faustian soul swapping, and during his coffin dream in the train, Haze enters on his atheistic (blasphemous) phase. He lives like a fly inside a cheese-dish cover, and O'Connor's gift for creating wry, funny, and capsizing situations achieves great triumphs in this part of *Wise Blood*.

Haze reaches his goal, "nothingness," by the aid of a logical positivistic and existentialist skepticism. But the nihilistic view, whose actual emptiness could not prevent violence and moral disorientation from invading his thoughts and behavior, turns out to be the beginning of the end.

Haze's final stage is his non-confessional, pious Christian life on Mrs. Flood's quiet front porch "past the railroad yards." His introverted piousness only now and then alternates with his dramatic and sanguinary processes of purification, whose medieval exaggerations give a hint of repentance—to put it mildly.

Both deliberately made transformations, the

bartering of the soul and the blinding, are characterized by the protagonist's negation of his previous stage. The transformation between atheism and nihilism, however, tells us a lot about O'Connor's poetic practice. The change of a person from being a non-believer to becoming a ruthless nihilist is common in her works, because the latter is seen as implied in the former. To O'Connor atheism leads inevitably to nihilism, the connection is always seen as a relation of implication.

In Flannery O'Connor's handling of precisely this relation, or in plain words, of the destiny of a (temporary) non-religious person, her metaphysical rhetoric is really hard at work—and the result of it is often predictable (both Rayber and Francis Marion Tarwater from *The Violent Bear It Away*, Hulga from "Good Country People," and Sheppard from "The Lame Shall Enter First" are all good examples of what I mean).

As a Scandinavian it is, furthermore, interesting to note that Flannery O'Connor has never created a fictional character whose place would have been in the space of doubt between the sacred and the nihilistic world. She was, obviously, never able to show the slightest interest in such lukewarm agnostics.

Her fictional characters, all of them, belong seriously to the religious world, and they are, without exception, fiery souls. All the tension, the thrill, and the humor in O'Connor's works depend upon the uncompromising discrepancy between the sacred (rural) world, and that of the profane (urban). And when a character like Haze transgresses the ideological borderline between the two he really gets more than he bargained for.

Every reader of *Wise Blood* knows that Haze is the object of one more change. It is his transformation from being alive to being dead. And the ultimate question, whether Haze is redeemed or not, can be answered only on the background of an interpretation of the novel's very last word.

Mrs. Flood, who generally is an unreliable narrator, tells us with a high degree of reliability that Haze, after he died, changed to a "pin point of light." What does this mean? The last word "light" makes in any case the end of the novel's ending an open affair.

It cannot, of course, be proved in the math-

ematical sense of the word that Haze receives the redeeming grace when he dies. The "light" might mean, as has been proposed, that it is Mrs. Flood who is enlightened in the end. But it can also mean that somebody passed by and turned on the electric light, or that the moon had just risen. Not being a religious propagandist, O'Connor, fortunately, has not furnished the ending with either non-fictional or quasi-fictional commentaries.

Anyhow, the word "light" refers to the novel's frequent use of the idea of a "shadow." Having first killed the "shadow behind" him by slaughtering the false prophet Solace Layfield (he who believed in God) and then pushed back his own *shadow* (that which was born in the birth episode) by the blinding, Haze has made room for the light to reenter his hag-ridden psyche. From this structural, narrative, and psychic point of view, "light," then, means conscience and consciousness, signifying that Haze has ended his journey by returning to the divine world—a reading that gives relief to Mrs. Flood's words, "Well, Mr. Motes . . . I see you've come home!"

But Flannery O'Connor would not have been O'Connor if she had not elaborated her

symbols to a standard of readability on several levels of meaning. So considering Haze's complete philosophical pilgrimage I have no doubt myself that on the analogical level of the story the last word "light" means that Haze has been redeemed. Nor have I any doubt that this understanding corresponds with Flannery O'Connor's intentions. The lame shall enter first, it has been said somewhere else.

Finally, in the same way as atheism implies nihilism, leading the sort of pious life Haze did in chapter fourteen makes possible another kind of life. To the dead protagonist that cannot mean anything else than eternal life. Thus, it seems to me that structural criticism leads naturally to an interpretation in which the protagonist is in fact redeemed—whether one is a Christian or not, and whether one likes it or not. □

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THE POET AS WOMAN

John Crowe Ransom's 1938 collection, *The World's Body*, is considered one of the seminal documents in the formation of American New Criticism.¹ In a seldom-noted chapter, a review essay on Edna St. Vincent Millay reprinted from *The Southern Review* where it had appeared the year before, the author records an apparently autobiographical perspective on "The Poet as Woman," that strange creature who "fascinates the male reviewer but at the same time horrifies him a little too."² His ambivalence is startling, as is the mechanistic response to a figure who makes him "oscillate between attachment and antipathy, the same attitudes perhaps as are provoked in him by generic woman in the flesh, as well as by the literary remains of Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Barrett, Christina Rossetti, and doubtless, if we only had enough of her, Sappho herself." By equating woman poets in general with the sublimatory masterwork of "generic woman in the flesh," Ransom inscribes for posterity his profound anxiety in the presence of Emily Dickinson and her sisters.

An array of moments of gender-triggered instability far less obscure than this example make up Karl Keller's "Notes on Sleeping with Emily Dickinson," which documents several generations of male critics' attempts to "use" Dickinson for their own, presumably ideological purposes.³ Keller argues that Dickinson's anticipation of just this male readership "nears anxiety. She performs; they

analyze. When they perform the poetry, they near anxiety. She then becomes *their* critic" (69). With this ghostly presence hovering in the background, Ransom declares that, with respect to "The Poet as Woman," "I shall simulate perfect assurance," a construction pointing up the very lack of which he must *simulate*. His simulation seeks to represent an empirical reality in which "a woman lives for love, if we will but project that term to cover all her tender fixations upon natural objects of sense, some of them more innocent and far less reciprocal than men" (WB 77). From the play of gender difference emerges this didactic conclusion: "Her devotion to ['natural objects of sense'] is more than gallant, it is fierce and importunate, and cannot but be exemplary to the hardened male observer." Here then, in a state of mimetic tumescence, the critic stretches for a consummation that, as between any reader and any text, can only transpire *off* the page.

On the page, however, where the "critic" is confined, his phallic presence signifies what a Lacanian feminist might describe as the "loss and lack" of the "maternal body."⁴ In the presence of the phallus, writes Toril Moi, the subject's desire for his mother "must be repressed," and this "primary repression opens up the unconscious." Only one of innumerable variations on the primal Fall, this transformative moment is, as Lacan would argue, the birth of language and the subject's entry into the symbolic order. Of *his* particular prelinguistic paradise, Ransom owns to a set of "recollections of early childhood," which he has unfortunately "lapsed from" (WB 77). A more famous chapter from *The World's Body*, "Poetry: A Note on Ontology," makes this lapse explicit: art, for which poetry is the paradigm in Ransom's cosmology, is "second love, not first love. In it we make

¹On this, see Alexander Karanakis, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966) 193; also, Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988) 39.

²*The World's Body* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938) 77.

³"Notes on Sleeping with Emily Dickinson," in *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*, ed. Suzanne Juhasz (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983) 67.

⁴Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985) 99.

a return to something which we had willfully alienated" (116). This "return," however repressed in its symbolic prison-house, nonetheless reveals the drive investments of the author's unconscious as they struggle to evade those horrors of "generic woman in the flesh" they have for so long "willfully alienated." Hence, "The Poet as Woman"'s Apollonian tableau in which Ransom allows how "he would much prefer if it is possible to find poetry in his study, or even in his office, and not have to sit under the syringa bush" (78). The syringa's dangling bulbs and tall stalks, not incidentally the source of the panpipe reed, suggest the true vector of Ransom's anxiety. They fail, however, to prepare readers for his conclusion that "man, at best, is an intellectualized woman," an assertion in which Ransom becomes, as it were, a *daughter* of Emily Dickinson. Only by the lapse, or fall, the self-conscious process of intellectualization signified by the application of words to page, the critical *act*, can Ransom escape the seductive yet terrifying female corpus, an escape that leads tautologically from "the world of the simple senses" to the abstract sensibilities of words like "integrity," "business," and of course, "art."

Ransom was not the only major critic of the 1930's to invoke Dickinson's gender. R. P. Blackmur and Yvor Winters both figure prominently in Keller's schema. Blackmur wrote that Dickinson was "neither a professional poet nor an amateur; she was a private poet who wrote indefatigably as other women cook or knit. Her gift for words and the cultural predicament of her time drove her to poetry instead of antimacassars."⁵ In a related vein, Winters confesses to an ambiguity in one's feeling about her" that is "profoundly disturbing," but proceeds to assert that Dickinson is "one of the greatest lyric poets of all time."⁶ In spite of their anxious accounts of her gender, then, Blackmur and Winters both valorize Dickinson by including her at all in their versions of literary history, as well as by flashes of genuine ap-

proval. The canonization of Miss Dickinson, as the early New Critics were prone to address her, even as they sought to lure her into their intellectual boudoirs, was an anxiety-laden process of mutual adaptation. In the statements of this nascent school, the poet as woman comes to occupy a key nexus in American literature *and* in the effort to reshape the American academy on an institutional level by redefining the study of literature on a theoretical level. Throughout this lengthy process, arguably the major event in literary studies in this century, Emily Dickinson returns to haunt her male readership as both muse and medusa.⁷

The earliest and most important New Critical response to Dickinson is Allen Tate's famous essay, described by Keller as "probably the most influential" as well as "one of the most blatantly chauvinistic" (76). In the original version, published in *The Outlook* in 1928, Tate invokes Eliot to overlook, Tiresias-style, the 29-year old Fugitive's tryst with his poetic precursor. "If Miss Dickinson has not been understood," writes Tate, "it is because we lack a critical tradition, a body of assumptions, passed on from generation to generation, which alters as the spirit of literature alters yet, in its comprehension of the past with the present, remains clear and fundamentally the same."⁸ And again, Eliot lurks behind Tate's analysis of Dickinson's extinction of personality: her unified sensibility is that of a poet who "could not reason at all. She *sees*" (622). Dickinson's critics, notes Tate, are "perplexed" by her, plagued by an "uncertainty of judgment"; nonetheless, "her influence on American poetry has been gradual, insidious, and profound" (623). Tate's polemic opposes the prevailing biographical tendency in academic scholarship of the era, and leads him away from the "facts" and toward the "meaning of her seclusion," Dickinson's "only way of acting out her part in the history of her culture" and "the fulfillment of her life." And, although Tate insists that "the poet is the poetry," he seems princi-

⁵"Emily Dickinson: Notes on Prejudice and Fact," *The Southern Review* 3 (Autumn 1937): 346.

⁶*Maule's Curse: Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1938) 150, 165.

⁷The New Critical genealogy sketched here, it should be noted, is limited for reasons of both space and focus to North American texts and theorists.

⁸"Emily Dickinson," *The Outlook* 149 (15 August 1928): 621.

pally concerned with removing her physical corpus out of the way: "when she went upstairs and closed the door she mastered life by rejecting it" (622). By maneuvering the woman poet upstairs, Tate cancels both his own anxiety and a backlog of biographical and historical inquiry that has obscured, to that point, the poems. These questions which until now have virtually fetishized Dickinson's (heterosexual) love-life, "may be the problem" he concludes, "yet the poetry, its immediate quality, is no problem at all. It is there. It is this that creates all problems; prompts speculation; gives to all our discussion form" (623).

Between this first version of Tate's essay and its revision, published four years later, the author assimilated as critical touchstones Donne and the metaphysicals, reflecting Eliot's enormous influence. Tate's "Notes on Donne" appeared in *The New Republic* the same month in 1932 that "New England Culture and Emily Dickinson" appeared in *Symposium*, and both return in *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (1936). Donne the poet, writes Tate in the former essay, is "not a searcher after a universally valid truth," but more like "a lawyer choosing the fittest arguments for the case at hand."⁹ This is the key to Donne's "modernism" and also to our own, our recognition of the contingency of truth and language in "the frustration of historical relativity." In his new opening paragraph on Dickinson that same year, Tate now compares her with Donne, emphasizing the "remarkable ties" between them: "as in Donne, we may detect a singularly morbid concern, not for religious truth, but for personal revelation" (RE 17). Thus, Dickinson's "modern word," contingent, persuasive, and free-floating, "is self-exploitation." Although this contingency represents "egoism grown irresponsible" and "decadent in morals," for Tate it also represents "the perfect literary situation." What he is hinting at here is made clearer by Ransom's "Poetry: A Note on Ontology," which proclaims that "there is a miraculism or supernaturalism in a metaphorical assertion" (WB 139). These positions anticipate contemporary views of the history of language as the history of meta-

phor, in which redescription serves not to increase the truth-value of reality as such, but to realign our understanding of reality by creating more useful metaphors to describe it, that more closely approximate the way we think. For a philosopher like Richard Rorty, for instance, the proper "use" of language is to sketch utopias and to demystify each others' differences; for Tate and Ransom, the contingency of language becomes an opportunity to sketch another kind of utopia and to institute a radical, though not a liberal, cultural agenda.

Published precisely between the two versions of Tate's essay on Dickinson was his and Ransom's manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), in which they sought to redescribe Southern tradition and inspire into being a Southerner who was, in Ransom's phrase, "reconstructed but unregenerate."¹⁰ In this context, Tate rethought and began to redescribe his own roots, a process mirrored in the revisions to "Emily Dickinson." The early essay appeared simultaneously with Tate's biographies of *Stonewall Jackson* (1928) and *Jefferson Davis* (1929); an early reference to the "Civil War" in the 1928 essay becomes in 1932 "the War between the States" (RE 5). By manipulating the signifier, the signified content slides, for this "War between the States" denies the very "civil"-ness of the Union, thus re-opening the conflict and hinting at an alternate outcome. Literary history is the new battlefield on which Tate re-fights the war, likening Dickinson to those expatriates in Henry James for whom "honor became a sort of forlorn hope struggling against the forces of 'pure fact' that had got loose in the middle of the century. Honor alone is a poor weapon against nature, being too personal, finical, and proud, and James achieved a victory by refusing to engage the whole force of the enemy" (RE 11). Similarly, Tate's Dickinson rehearses this conflict on a "vaster field," her enemy "Nature" or "Death," her struggle to create, a "clash of powerful opposites" (RE 12). Against the "pure facts" of industrialism which had not so long ago crushed Southern tradition beneath the boots, hooves, and wheels of the North's modern armies, Tate arrays the fragile disciplines of

⁹*Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936) 67.

¹⁰*Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930) 1.

literature and criticism. When the South in his account refuses to "engage" the superior forces of the Union, foregoing the attrition warfare that prevailed in 1865, the critic's new metaphysical "victory" is directly analogous to Dickinson's act of retiring to her upstairs room in defiance of culture and in defense of her mind: both critic and poet are now equally "purified by the triumphant withdrawal from nature, by their power to recover from Nature." Only a few years later, Ransom would specify that "the critic should regard the poem as nothing short of a desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre," and that, in what might stand as an anticipatory epigraph to the whole of the New Critics' achievement, "the poet wishes to defend his [sic] object's existence against its enemies, and the critic wishes to know what he is doing, and how" (WB 347-48).

Tate's restaging of the Civil War "upstairs" in literary history and the general polemic against culture his project entails resonate with Shira Wolosky's recent characterization of Dickinson's poetry as a "voice of war." In fact, over half of Dickinson's poems date between 1861 and 1865, and many directly address the war through "martial imagery" and "backdrop."¹¹ And while only Whitman among Northern writers became directly involved in the war's events, Wolosky notes, only Dickinson, in mastering her life by rejecting it, "entirely refused to emerge from her own home" (33). Because she questioned the divine plan behind the war, Dickinson was torn by radical misgivings about the divine order. Wolosky writes that she is "furious with the God without whom she is unable to conceive her universe, but who, if responsible for a universe so incomprehensible, claims her enmity. Her poetry becomes the field of combat with and against God" (xx). And Dickinson's "pervasive poetic mode" is "blasphemy" (99). In Kristevan terms, this blasphemy might be figured by the "semiotic *chora*," the symbolic representation of the voice of instinct, the death drive that "shatters" signification.¹² Kristeva's semiotic *chora*

is rejective, and the death drive with its cycle of negation and renewal, when it appears in poetic language, as blasphemous to culture as to life. Poetry, according to the Kristevan model, "is the *chora's* guerilla war against culture" (Bedient 809). By comparison, Dickinson's poetry, in Tate's words, is "blasphemous" and "almost obscene" (RE 25); "Only by violence" wrote Tate, notoriously, in *I'll Take My Stand*, might the Southerner "take hold of his tradition" (174).

Despite the outcry it aroused then and since, Tate's "violence" slides easily from militarism to metaphysics. He links Dickinson's New England theocracy to Priam's Troy (RE 7), and this association becomes in turn Tate's magnificent act of redescription in "Aeneas at Washington" (1933) of

a time when civilization
Run by the few fell to the many . . .

*

Stuck in the wet mire
Four thousand leagues from the ninth
buried city
I thought of Troy, what we had built her
for.¹³

The buried city, a classic Freudian metaphor for the unconscious, becomes for Lacan the "censored chapter," the "tradition" which must "transport" the history of the subject, the "stock of words and acceptations" of a "particular vocabulary," and the body, "the hysterical nucleus of the neurosis where the hysterical symptom reveals the structure of a Language."¹⁴ Dickinson's world has also, for Tate, "something of the fascination of a buried city" (RE 21), and in his essay Lacan's diagnostic discourses converge through Dickinson's poetic corpus: tradition, redescription or "self-exploitation," and the persistent anxiety over the "hysterical nucleus," the ever-about-to-return corpus of the poet as woman. It is worth recalling of course that the "ninth buried city" was herself brought to ruin by the great price of one pearl, Helen, in

¹¹Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984) 37.

¹²See Calvin Bedient, "Kristeva and Poetry as Shattered Signification," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Summer 1990): 807.

¹³Collected Poems 1919-1976 (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977) 166-67.

¹⁴Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis, transl. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986) 21.

the flesh. Tate concludes that his intellectual predecessor Cotton Mather, with his unified Puritan anxiety, would have clearly perceived the subversive potential of the female corpus and the semiotic *chora*, and "would have burnt [Dickinson] for a witch" (RE 25). The civilized critic, on the other hand, will seek to displace his rather less acute (because dissociated) anxiety away from the poet and onto the poetry itself. This interpretive "violence" then, becomes theoretically central to American New Criticism.

Tate's displaced anxiety returns in the "subtly interfused erotic motive" he finds in "Because I could not stop for death," which he calls in pre-Johnson variorum style, "The Chariot" (RE 14). He begins by quoting the entire poem (minus a Johnson-restored fourth stanza that seems to account for most if not all of the "erotic motive" apparent to a modern reader)¹⁵, and proceeds to the first recognizably New Critical reading of Emily Dickinson. This is, Tate proclaims, "one of the perfect poems in English" (RE 17), and "flawless to the last detail" (RE 14), but the terms are what make his argument radical: the poem is "a construction of the human will" put, through the medium of poetic language, "to the concrete test of experience" (RE 15). The images, he insists, are "not merely beautiful, but inextricably fused with the central idea," as if a heightened order of perception, expressed by the "concrete test" of quasi-scientific inquiry, the "fusing" and "interfusing" of linguistic materials and the "cold vitality" of abstraction, had superseded the "merely beautiful" aesthetic realm. Never was poetry so systematically dissected. Here, in Tate's strong reading, the desire to direct attention away from the poet and the node of anxiety her corpus marks and onto the poems themselves leads to poetry redescribed in the newly-useful language of science that would have been anathema to the Agrarian ideologues only a year or two before.

From an institutional perspective then,

¹⁵Tate's version, quoted from Martha Dickinson Bianchi's 1924 edition of the *Collected Poems*, has the rather gallant effect of averting its gaze from the lady's corpus, which seems to be only barely dressed. Johnson restores the *deshabille*:

The Dews grew quivering and chill—
For only Gossamer, my Gown—
My Tippet—only Tulle—(P712)

Tate's rhetoric charts the turn from Agrarian to New Critic. A few years later in *The World's Body* Ransom would make the famous statement that "criticism must become more scientific, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons—which means that its proper seat is in the universities" (329). The political failure of Agrarianism had become apparent by the later 1930's when, as one historian of the movement writes, Ransom and Tate "abandoned the sectional demand for a 'restoration' in favor of a more specific literary crusade—to win over criticism, the teaching of English, and American literature itself, to the New Criticism" (Karanakis 135). If Tate's "Emily Dickinson" marked the earliest New Critical reading on Agrarian ground, and *The World's Body* the principal theoretical turn, then from a practical standpoint Brooks' and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938) had without a doubt the widest impact, "the first time in literary history that a textbook has also been a potent force in criticism" (Karanakis 193). *Understanding Poetry* was first a mass-scale defense of poetry in the long tradition of that polemic so recently evoked by Ransom's "desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre," and second a codification of the new super-science that stressed "how much of our experience eludes the statements science can make," arguing that we need look no further than "the fact that this wide domain of human interests exists to find a justification for poetry."¹⁶

Brooks and Warren foreground Dickinson in their prefatory "Letter to the Teacher" as an example of a poet who is chronically misread (vi). As cure, they explicate "After great pain a formal feeling comes," a poem whose title reflects with precision their own cultural position: after the "great pain" of Southern defeat, of Reconstruction, of financial panic and rural devaluation, of the Great War, the disillusion of the 1920's, and finally the Crash, comes a desire to reunify a shattered sensibility by formalizing experience:

After great pain a formal feeling comes—
The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs;
The stiff Heart questions—was it He that bore?
And yesterday—or centuries before?

¹⁶*Understanding Poetry* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1938) 24.

The feet mechanical go round
A wooden way
Of ground or air or Ought,
Regardless grown,
A quartz contentment like a stone.

This is the hour of lead
Remembered if outlived
As freezing persons recollect
The snow—
First chill, then stupor, then
The letting go. (UP 468)

The first stanza questions Christ—"He"—outright; the second stamps out endless impressions of industrial modernity with its "feet mechanical"; the critics conclude that the "quartz contentment" resulting is "crystallized . . . out of the pain" (470). Thus, they inscribe their own "quartz contentment," an image that is "ironical," for the "contentment arising after the shock of great pain is a contentment because of the inability to respond any longer, rather than the ability to respond satisfactorily." Finally, they sum up the poem's formality and numbness as "an attempt to hold in, the fight of the mind against letting go," and call it "a defense of the mind" (471).¹⁷

The precise moment of "letting go" that closes "After great pain" is, as Brooks and Warren stop short of implying, more than the relaxation of giving up; it also signifies the release into timelessness that underwrites the New Critical defense of the mind, and of poetry as a pragmatic counter-universe to the seemingly interminable shocks of culture. A correlative Dickinsonian moment is noted in Ransom's preface to the book that named the movement, *The New Criticism* (1941):

Renunciation?
Is a piercing virtue,
The letting go
A presence for an expectation—
Not now

This quotation appears as part of a large block

¹⁷Brooks and Warren are unique among their peers for the lack of anxiety with which they confront the poet as woman. "After great pain" becomes, in their reading, a trope of consciousness, and elements of *Understanding Poetry's* explication of this poem resurface as a motif in Warren's *All the King's Men*. On this, see Joseph N. Satterwhite, "Robert Penn Warren and Emily Dickinson," *Modern Language Notes* 71 (May 1956): 347-49.

of Blackmur's 1937 essay on Dickinson, quoted in turn by Ransom, who declares that "critical writing like this is done in our time."¹⁸ What transpires is in fact a striking technical advance on previous analyses of poetic language: Blackmur argues that in the passage "only one word, *piercing*, is directly physical; something that if it happens cannot be ignored but always shocks us into reaction. It is the shock of this word that transforms the phrase from a mere grammatical tautology into a metaphorical tautology which establishes as well as asserts identity" (ix). This is the same stunning, numbing, *shocking* moment that Brooks and Warren found in "After great pain"; Blackmur's virtuosity is in his redescription of the moment in scientific metaphor: "Some function of the word *pierce* precipitates a living intrinsic relation between renunciation and virtue; it is what makes the phrase incandesce"; and it is this "stress or shock" the very word creates that "is carried forward into and makes specific the general notion—physical but vague—of letting go." The notion, first broached here, of motion "carried forward," of "letting go," works to shatter signification, and allows Blackmur to conclude that "the physical elements in the word *pierce* and the participial phrase *letting go* . . . make the other words available to feeling," an effect that is a "continuing process" that "takes time, it may be infinite time, before the renounced presence transpires in expectation in the 'Not now'. . . ." (x).

When he praises Blackmur's essay as critical writing for "our time," Ransom means that Blackmur is up-to-date and modern, but the latter's use of "time" and "infinite time" point to a semiotic dimension Kristeva has called "women's time," which opposes "time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding" and subverts the time of "language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb)."¹⁹ Blackmur's essay, like the balance of New Critical work, shares at this juncture an oppositional polemic against the relentless march of progress, modernity, and alienation, and a common language with not only Emily Dickinson the poet,

¹⁸*The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941) viii, x.

¹⁹"Women's Time," *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 17.

but especially, if unexpectedly, with contemporary feminist readers of her poems.²⁰ As Ransom writes in "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," "it is my feeling that we have in poetry a revolutionary departure from the convention of logical discourse" (NC 280). And this particular revolutionary departure can be traced to his figure of "the poet as woman" and the assertion that "man, at best, is an intellectualized woman," a sort of governor, in the mechanical sense, who oscillates between the utopian projection of "women's time" signified by the semiotic *chora*, and the culture shock of a dystopia where the *chora* is degraded as blasphemy. "The dense and brilliant yet obscure world of the modern poets," Ransom explains, returning to "The Poet as Woman"'s dialectic of attachment and antipathy, "resists mastery, is more mysterious than intelligible, perhaps is more evil than good. . . . as if they had knocked the bottom out of history and language" (NC 335).

The program of an aesthetic order bounded by and within self-contained, organically complete literary texts is, as Tate hinted as early as 1928, a nearly precise doubling of Dickinson's rejection of and mastery over her own culture, the retreat into her own counter-universe. The last stanza of "Renunciation," omitted from Blackmur's discussion and hence from Ransom's as well, contains the purest expression of this movement:

Renunciation—is the Choosing
Against itself—
Itself to justify—
Unto itself
When larger function—
Make that appear—
Smaller—that Covered Vision—Here—²¹

²⁰Contemporary critics, especially feminist, commonly array their evidence against the received wisdom of the New Critics, a practice that fails to recognize and exploit a shared oppositional stance. Alongside Eliot and the Agrarians' "Sacred Wood," one might usefully juxtapose Suzanne Juhasz on Dickinson's "retreat" to a space where she could "select, apportion, focus, examine, explore, satiate herself exactly as she wished and needed to do, such that poetry could result" (*Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson* 8), or Paula Bennett on Dickinson's "land of power, glory, and dominion," in *My Life a Loaded Gun: Female Creativity and Feminist Poetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) 94.

²¹The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960) 366.

An initial act of rejection, the methodical probing of the "formal feeling" that follows, and the final, favorable comparison of interior and exterior landscapes, all work to evoke a "Covered Vision" that metonymizes the secret domain of poetry, the tiny circumference that is ultimately significant only *beyond* the words on the page, beyond even language itself.

Science and art then, are subsumed into the "ontology" repeatedly invoked by Ransom: "the differentiation of poetry as discourse is an ontological one. It treats an order of existence, a grade of objectivity, which cannot be treated in scientific discourse" (NC 281). Poetic language produces a "value density" that is "unknown to scientific understanding" (NC 293), in which the poem's "ontological density . . . proves itself by logical obscurity" (NC 335). Emily Dickinson's centrality to this metaphysic is evident by her most frequently used words: only "I," "as," and "my" recur more often throughout her corpus than the ontological "be," with 719 usages. And her ontological "bee," one of the strongest bridges between mind and nature, recurs 121 times. Dickinson's "willed Paradise"²² is in fact closely related to that of Ransom's idealized Agrarian of 1930, who "identifies himself with a spot of ground, and this ground carries a good deal of meaning; it defines itself for him as nature. He would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature; and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmic consciousness" (*I'll Take My Stand* 20). Upon, or within this metaphysical pastoral, the New Critics erected their own, institutional "Sacred Wood."

Reading a poem like "Renunciation" alongside the cultural critique implicit in the writings of seminal New Critics like Ransom, Tate, and Blackmur should be more than enough to convince that, as one historian has recently shown, the conventional image of formalist close-reading as the "purely aesthetic and rhetorical interpretation of texts" is in fact "misleading" (Leitch 32). The recognition and canonization of Emily Dickinson

²²So called by Louise Simons in "Emily Dickinson's Willed Paradise," *American Imago* 42.2 (Summer 1985): 165.

is intimately related to the institutional mission of the New Critics who rescued her from the biographical curiosity-shop and did more than anyone else with the power to do so to place her at the center of American literary history. Michael Zimmerman, meditating on literary revivalism, notes that Americans tend to "lose sight" of our greatest writers, to "shy away from extremes of thought and emotion" and lapse into a "middlebrow criticism" that simply fails to recognize the "most characteristic course of our literary imagination."²³ This charge has, perhaps fairly, been levelled at the later decadent flowerings of New Criticism, but fails to account for the boldness of the early statements. What makes for the proper revival of an aesthetically radical writer, Zimmerman argues, is the "extremism, flexibility, and polemical intransigence of aesthetically radical critics" whose "wide ranges of experience" equip them "to deal successfully with a literary imagination that was often extreme, disruptive and fragmentary" (85). Dickinson's corpus, in its multiple incarnations, thus represents the critique and subversion of not only the great New England Puritan theocracy, but also, in her appropriation by this group of "insurgent critics" seeking to capture the strategic high ground of the academy, a highly politicized institutional position instrumental to the formation of the discipline we inhabit today.

As New Critical methods solidified inside the academy however, the world outside was changing rapidly. In 1937, Ransom jumped from Vanderbilt, the birthplace of the Fugitives, to Kenyon College in Ohio where, in 1948, the prestigious school of English was established by a generous grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. By the early 1950's, Brooks had left Louisiana State University for Yale, and Tate was teaching at Minnesota; as the Southern Agrarians decamped and dispersed northward, their reactionary ideology was increasingly subsidized by huge industrial fortunes. These years were notable for the New Critics', and eventually Emily Dickinson's, conscription into what has been called, perceptively, the "cultural cold war."

²³"Literary Revivalism in America: Some Notes Toward a Hypothesis," *American Quarterly* 19 (Spring 1967): 73.

At one point Brooks, Blackmur, Ransom, Tate, and Warren, along with a host of multidisciplinary luminaries, sat on the advisory board for *Perspectives U.S.A.*, an arts quarterly aimed at the export market that ran for four years on a lavish, so-called "terminal grant" from the Ford Foundation. This coincidence of funding placed the secessionist critics, at least tangentially, on the same team as the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, also heavily subsidized by Ford at the time.²⁴

In the pages of *Perspectives U.S.A.*, in its final year, Ransom at last engages Emily Dickinson again, after nearly two decades of silence between them. His occasion is a review of Johnson's newly-arrived variorum edition in which he writes that "the restoration just now of an old poet" is "the principal literary event of these last twenty years."²⁵ In these same years, and not at all incidentally, the Agrarian movement collapsed, the New Deal hardened into place, World War II came, was fought, and remained, residually, in the permanent war economy of which the great foundations now represented the public face. The sheer complexity of post-war American life virtually demanded its subjects be able and willing to countenance unprecedented doses of ambiguity. Johnson's variorum edition of Dickinson responded to a somehow related situation, according to Ransom, in which "the public critic was very bold if he cared to offer much comment on the published verse when he could not know if the lines as they were printed were the lines as they had been written" (6). Celebrating the act of faith implicit in Johnson's achievement

²⁴See Edward H. Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1983) 143, 156, 177. Over time, writes Berman, the Foundations "perfected methods whereby their educational and cultural programs would complement the cruder and more overt forms of economic and military imperialism that are so easily identifiable" (3). For an account of how, in typically interventionist fashion, *Perspectives U.S.A.* was pushed overseas at well below cost, thus undercutting its competition in the open market and causing, like so many American exports, more friction than understanding, see Dwight MacDonald, *The Ford Foundation: The Men and the Millions* (New York: Reynal and Co., 1956) 86-87.

²⁵"Emily Dickinson: A Poet Restored," *Perspectives U.S.A.* 15 (Spring 1956): 5.

of textual certainty, Ransom xerprints in full no less than ten poems, though with little New Critical analysis recognizable as such. Perhaps none is called for. The essay's concern is not with interpretation *per se*, but with the problem of establishing the texts at all, and into this discussion intrudes, once again, so many years later, Dickinson's anxiety-provoking corpus.

Presenting the poems, Ransom constantly invokes the poet's gender, calling her a "little home-keeping person" (7) and a "shy spinster" (8), an epithet he repeats four times on a single page (17). He also notes, reiterating the argument of his early review of Millay, that "it is common belief among readers (among men readers at least) that the woman poet as a type . . . makes flights into nature rather too easily and upon errands which do not have metaphysical importance enough to justify so radical a strategy" (10). And he all but asserts outright that Dickinson's gender makes her too naive to be trusted in establishing her own texts. Thus, the editor, "honorable" and "professional," will respect such "flaws" as her "cryptic dashes" and capricious capitalizations "even while he is removing them," although he does this "reluctantly, because he will know that the poet expected the sharp phrases to fall into their logical places for any reader who might be really capable of the quick intuitional processes of verse" (7). If we accept the conclusions of most contemporary scholars that Dickinson's unique punctuation is in fact essential to her "meaning" as a poet, as Ransom himself seems even to believe here, then the alterations he advocates are even more startling, subjecting the poetic corpus, "in order that my reader and I may have exactly the same poet before us," to an unwarranted and systematizing discipline it is ill-served by. "I give the poems," the critic declares loftily, "not quite as they were written, but altered with all possible forbearance." The result is a daring, even brazen act of cultural oversight that comes to represent, metonymically, not only the New Critic's successful coup from within the literary academy, but also the ultimate objective of *Perspectives U.S.A.*, as a cultural arbiter for those not fortunate enough to be born American, and on an even wider scale, foundation efforts to shape foreign policy, and the entire range of the "cultural

cold war." In this final stage of appropriation, the critic as (intellectualized) woman merges with the poet as (absent, hence defenseless) woman into an emblem of imperialist self-construction. And this composite is truly, as Dickinson once wrote, "Ransom in a Voice" (CP 548).

But where there is Ransom in a Voice, there also remains a Voice in Ransom, for Dickinson, however denatured by repeated characterization as a "spinster," signifies a node of anxiety even in this late essay. For although the critic has seemingly capitulated to the antithetical forces of foundation-sponsored internationalism, his is still an oppositional voice responsible for installing inside the institutional discourse a radically rejective counter-universe that negates, to some extent and on its own terms, the progressive hegemonic claims of the institution it speaks out of. In the prototypical New Critical strategy, Ransom "uses" Dickinson to defend not only poetry, but his own institutional position; as Tate sought an alternative to the misfortunes of the Civil War, so Ransom now seeks an alternative to those of the Cold War: to create with poetry and criticism a space where the numbing shocks of contemporary consciousness, what Wallace Stevens called the "pressure of reality," cannot intrude. Thus, just as Ransom's voice privileges Dickinson's poems, detaching her literary from her physical corpus in order to deflect the "blasphemy" of this specific woman in the flesh, so Dickinson's voice marks the re-naturing of an institutional, masculinist realm. And so she returns, medusa and muse. In this, their last engagement, Ransom finds Dickinson's poems to be "autobiographical in the special sense of being true to an imagined experience" (15), her triumph as an artist her claim to an "heroic history which exhibited first a great passion, then renunciation and honor, and a passage into the high experiences of a purified Soul" (17). And here, finally, is Ransom's answer to the questions Tate had posed thirty years before about the "meaning" of Dickinson's seclusion: the Soul, he announces on behalf of Dickinson, the New Critics, and all those who toe the tortuous line of poetic woman-hood, must learn "how to do with a little of the world, and make the most of it; how to concentrate, and focus, and come remorseless and speedy

to the point. That is a kind of renunciation; all good poets are familiar with it. And critics, too, I believe. Do we not all profess a faith in the kind of art which looks coolly upon the turgid deliverance of sensibility and disci-

plines it into beauty?" (20). Indeed, we do, all of us. □

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Milos Crnjanski

PARTING AT KALEMEGDAN

Translated by David Sanders and Dubravka Juraga

We broke up

then went down to the village.

Like two tears rolling down a wrinkled face

side by side.

Boats waited for us on the river.

Yours sailed first.

Mine disappeared around the islands.

I sat black and bent in silence,

forlorn,

like a shadow on the moon.

A BINTEL BRIEF

Mrs. Wolf wore a red windbreaker to protect against drafts. Her tapered face looked out like a periscope.

She drew *Forverts* closer. It was all failing health, memory, light, Yiddish. Even *Forverts* itself, once a proud daily. Not that Mrs. Wolf was complaining. It took her the week to get through the paper. With its Hebrew letters, learned well only by the boys, written Yiddish had always given her trouble.

On this night, yes, different from each other night, Mrs. Wolf could not concentrate on the news stories. She was distracted by a question. Could she submit to the tyranny of her daughter's taste? For example, just last week Bea had criticized Mrs. Wolf's couch.

"All leafy green and blue," Bea had argued, "it's like you're squatting on a lily pad."

Mrs. Wolf had countered in a tired voice, "You were almost named Lily." Hearing this, Bea had slipped out of Mrs. Wolf's line of sight, into a box of shadows. If she decided to move into her daughter's, would Mrs. Wolf's every comment mottle Bea's features so?

She pushed the hot reading lamp away. *Forverts* no longer carried *Bintel Briefs*, but these were what Mrs. Wolf wanted to read. She still remembered many of the raw letters from immigrants asking advice. When she thought of them now, her memory corrected the grammar.

I have recently arrived here from three years in Ravensbruck, to find my daughter, who I helped escape from Galicia, taken up with thugs in the garment district. They spotted her sewing a dress and have corrupted her. What should I do? . . .

*My one son is an anarchist. Last week, he was just a socialist, so it wasn't so much trouble for us. We were our own little group. Now he won't eat meals at a regular time. He must eat, he says, when it strikes him to eat. And with work it is the same! Though he is often struck with a desire for chicken livers or kugelach, he seems never to have this feeling for work. You at *Forverts* are socialists, do you think you could bring him back into the fold?*

Always in *Bintel Briefs* crisis. Only Mrs. Wolf realized this wasn't true. Often the *Briefs* told of reunions or newfound love, but the desperate ones had stayed with her. During each of Bea's feints at conversion, Mrs. Wolf had begun a letter to *Forverts*. She had never been able to get one sent off while the conversion remained a threat.

Mrs. Wolf thought of the letter she might write this evening. She whispered to herself in a deliberate American accent:

I have not suffered the trials so many of your letter-writers have, but I must make a decision and turn to you. Before I relate my story, I need to ask: how could you cancel Bintel Briefs? Everybody's so successful noone needs help anymore?

Nine months ago, my husband, a faithful reader of your newspaper, died of stomach cancer. So painful. I live alone in an apartment which was too big for two. I have a daughter and so does she. I am ashamed to say I do not know my daughter, Bea, very well. After many years of what she called religious experiment, with Catholicism no less, she has become a university professor. "Those who can, pray," she tells me. "Anthropology is for those who can't."

Last summer, we traveled to Europe, even to Germany, and on this trip my daughter offered me a room in her brownstone. My daughter is blunt. Her daughter is like this too, by nature, but also because she is a teenager.

I am capable but lonely. I was once a character actress in the smaller Yiddish and American theatres and like to have life around me. My character was the lady of the house. Yet I am old and find my daughter very hard. To say nothing of what it is like to talk to my granddaughter, although I cannot stand not to. Do you have any advice for me?

P.S. I angered my daughter by disliking her attempt at a husband, but she has forgiven me now that she has divorced him.

To help herself think what she should do, Mrs. Wolf rehearsed the stages of her life. Superstitious, she did not want the remem-

bering to finish her off.

She thought only of Bea. Bea was a kite Mrs. Wolf often lost to the wind. She stood on shore trying to reel her daughter in. Bea cartwheeled uncertainly over the waves.

Was it failing memory or the thinness of life together which made the number of Mrs. Wolf's images of her daughter small?

*

Ten-year-old Bea was close by her side. The midday sun parched Mrs. Wolf's throat. She began to cough. Her coughing attracted the attention of the tourists and worshippers who climbed the marble steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Bea looked up at her mother. Mrs. Wolf yelled, "No. Don't be embarrassed. The Catholics would think it was a sin for someone to cough near a church, but God knows we are no Mrs. Wolf such thing!"

Mrs. Wolf began to cough again and though her pride would not have it, she was forced to look for a drink of water in St. Patrick's. "They must have more than they need, Bea, since every time you see a priest he's drenching himself in holy water or drowning babies in a pool." Bea did not comprehend, but Mrs. Wolf was pleased with the joke.

Her thirst gave way in the cool, damp church. She rasped out a cough to keep Bea from noticing. On the far wall hung shining Christ. Mrs. Wolf's urge to shield her daughter's eyes came and went. They did not stay very long. It was dank. Her cough was cured. Nothing amazed.

How was it then her daughter had fallen, if only in spasms, for this same church? Had she caught a bug there which showed itself later? Mrs. Wolf wondered if her glancing involvement with the theatre had cursed her daughter to a life of role-playing. Or had it been Bea who threw a shield in front of her mother's eyes as she took the streaming light of Jesus through the stained glass into her heart?

*

Mrs. Wolf felt her head lifting out of her body, she was so enraged. Rich!, is what it was. Her husband gone off on his warship,

her daughter in league with nuns. Everyone on the ferry could sense her bad luck. They were daughterless. They had sired a thousand sons.

The spit and whorl of the river over the edge of the boat threatened Mrs. Wolf. Mr. Wolf's rare letters, packed with dramatic tales of lifesaving culled from the Navy's *Pacific Horizon*, always seemed bloated to her, as if they'd been submerged in water for part of the trip home. She saw her husband sinking down. The sound of hostile voices screaming incomprehensibly cracked the air as the Japanese strangled him. Once the American ship sank, there were no more boats, only soldiers. These Nips could walk on water.

The swelling and crashing of the waves seemed generational to Mrs. Wolf. The movement of the water imitated the movement of time. Long dead relatives, their faces made of white foam, splashed against the prow, in and out of her mind. Before the war, Mrs. Wolf's family had visited her in dreams. In the first months after death, they were jerky and silent, a celluloid reel from the teens. A quiet year would go by; but then unveiling released them from the spell of dumbness. They had crammed Mrs. Wolf's night full of prediction and commentary. Triumphantly they had warned her of Mr. Wolf's posting in Asia. Yet they gave no hint of Bea's conversion. Following Hitler's invasion of Poland, they reverted to silence. Mrs. Wolf assumed they served relatives far more troubled than she.

Mrs. Wolf could just make out her lanky daughter. The ferry moored abruptly. There Bea was on the dock, an open narrow black car behind her in the middle distance. Who drove her? The sun, low in autumn, dropped over Bea's head to the right. She wore simple clothes Mrs. Wolf had bought her. No uniform yet.

Bea sagged forward a bit, as if she felt her mother's pursuit like a weight on her back. Even crimped this way, she looked younger, standing in the wild air at the edge of the island. Perhaps they should flee to the suburbs and escape the bombs if New York became London. Mrs. Wolf ran to her daughter past the half-unhooked chain.

"Oh Ma, oh Ma, oh Ma," Bea said. She settled her arms around her mother's neck and shoulders. "I didn't mean it."

"Didn't mean running away? It's not like you *said* something wrong."

"I just couldn't stand to be with you, OK?"
"Bea!"

"I didn't mean that either. But you hover over me like, like I don't know what. Leave it to you to find me in a convent."

"I didn't. They called me. If you'd run away to join the circus instead of the Catholics, I might never have heard from you again."

"Oh, I should tell them you're here," Bea said. She spun a semicircle on her heels.

"I'm sure they can see us," Mrs. Wolf said, too late. Bea skipped toward the car. Mrs. Wolf felt the wet air against her neck. She pushed off her toes to gain an inch and watched her daughter's every movement. She wanted to know why Bea was at once giddy and pliant. Was she still taken with the joy of flight? Mrs. Wolf thought she might ask the figure in the car, but a foghorn tooted and refocused her attention. She turned to see the ferry launch. This left one returning.

"Bea!" called Mrs. Wolf. "We have to go. The blackout."

Bea stood in the street, the car gone, facing away from her mother. Staten Island was before her. "Don't insult me, Bea. Come back here. I'm only calm because you're alive." When Bea faced her an eye twitched.

"Have you slept? What possessed you? Are you crazy? Do you have any idea?" Then, like the fire inching forward on a fuse: "What a trek! You couldn't hide out in St. Patrick's? You had to take a ferry? How can I punish you? Did you learn anything from them I could use?"

"Stop laughing. Stop twitching. Bea! You don't look like you're listening. I know the lights are going out in Manhattan behind me. If you don't listen to me, you—your father's not going to think this is funny, in Honolulu or Shanghai, wherever he hears about it he's not going to be laughing.

"Why are you treating me like this? Noone's here to help me. At your age your grandmother was married, out of her mother's hair. Gott in Himmel the ferry!"

Mrs. Wolf caught her trembling daughter by the neck and pulled with all her might. Bea resisted, gave in. They scampered down the dock tugging at each other, moving forward two steps for every one lost to their lack

of balance, as in a picnic game. They kept it up until they reached the Manhattan side of the ferry.

What they saw yanked them apart. Manhattan was unlit. Blackout curtains hung everywhere. Up and down its blocks and curves, the city was draped in darkness. There were a few lamps and towers still blazing, but these reinforced the effect, like the moon in the night sky.

"I'm going to try to explain."

"Did I ask?"

The dock lights clicked off behind them.

"When we get home I'm going to stay converted."

"Later, Bea."

"But what we're seeing is so beautiful it's got to be made by God."

"Not God, Hitler."

"Ma. A few weeks ago in *shul*, we were talking about Eve. What did she really want out of biting the apple? To get out into the world, to see what it was like."

"That rabbi is such a red."

"You're the one who doesn't listen."

"A theological discussion I have to have in the dark? Are we Yeshiva boys?"

"That's just it, Ma, in the convent I'd get to talk about these things seriously."

"What do you care about them? What you don't know is a bible in itself."

Mrs. Wolf could hardly see her daughter, but felt her turn away.

"You don't want to know why I need to be a Christian?"

"I was just thinking I should never have been an actress. Or told you about it anyway. You're too much like me, a push here, a pull there, all gesture. Even in the midst of a war."

"But living in America as a Jew is a kind of circumcision. They chop off the natural ending of your name, just the way grandpa became Wolf from Vogelmann."

"I hear that rabbi in your voice again. Still, he does have a point. You can't see Ellis Island now, sweetie. We were lucky. Others became Small, Polsky if they were from Poland, Shiner if they hadn't cleaned their noses. You know the rabbi won't like your running away any better than I do."

"You're talking to yourself," Bea said.

"I know you've heard all this. I want to make a point out of it. God counteracts His

gifts of freedom, Bea. Doesn't the rabbi ever say this? For every Jew here, another one's there. More are there. I have you, I don't have a son. It's pitch black. It's a few blocks home. I do have you."

The captain cut the engine to land the boat. Mrs. Wolf and her daughter swayed and rocked. The ferry was a cradle.

*

Dredl, dredl, dredl, I made it out of clay, and when it's good and ready, oh dredl we shall play! Hey! The English words to the song did not fit the Yiddish music. The melody roused Mrs. Wolf. Not from sleep: she had closed her eyes to see her youth. Odd that at this distance there were two youths to picture. What difference did it make that one woman she had been and one made?

If tomorrow Mrs. Wolf carried herself through Bea's door, looking side to side like a runway model, would it mean the end of her independence? Would it be all right to entertain an overnight visitor or two? Would Evelyn think her grandmother carried on shamelessly?

Of one thing Mrs. Wolf was sure. She hated her neighborhood. It had long since emptied of anyone she knew well. After her husband died, she felt stronger drafts of wind. It was as if she had begun as the owner of a store stuffed with merchandise and then watched as every day a new item was taken out by someone else she knew, until the store was a hollow rectangle.

These reflections tired Mrs. Wolf. Surely they made it clear she should join her daughter. Yet she remained uneasy. Going to her daughter's would be like entering a home for the mentally frivolous. To give herself pause, Mrs. Wolf merely had to remember Bea's ex-husband. Bea had been as capricious in her choice of a husband as she had been during her many near-conversions. Several years had passed since Mrs. Wolf had seen Bea's wet, goofy dog of a man. She recalled her son-in-trouble-with-the-law dimly. That Bea had loved a Baptist con artist, was this enough to keep Mrs. Wolf at home?

Mrs. Wolf did not like her own haphazard way of taking such an important decision. Of

what value was this cascade of untrusted memory? Could episodes lifted from a life-line tell her what was right? Speak to her as the dead could? Mrs. Wolf felt herself falling asleep, but only far enough to see a waking dream.

The dream had first appeared to her the night of Bea's engagement. Her daughter had deserted her for the Moor.

Mrs. Wolf had been a great Yiddish Desdemona. "I am one, sir, that comes to tell you, your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs." Mrs. Wolf remembered that the Iago speaking these lines, a greenhorn unfamiliar with *modern* English, had made a grotesque construction of them in Yiddish. The players never saw a translation.

Her dream began with the fat knobs of an old radio, unable to delicately tune to an old show, *For The People*. Bea's note lay open in Mrs. Wolf's hand, written in letters large enough to be read from the sky. *I have run away with Him*. Mrs. Wolf listened for the call-in number.

Founded by Jeffersonians to help citizens negotiate the minutiae of governmental bureaucracy, *For The People* had turned into a question and answer show concerning the trivia of everyday existence. A touch of the old anti-Federalism remained, but it often sounded like the crude racism Mrs. Wolf did not favor.

Mrs. Wolf had turned to *For The People* when the dictionary failed her. She had been surprised to find Webster's useless for matching the appropriate word to a nameless but well defined feeling. The show's host sniffled. Or was that the poor quality of her reception? Dialing the number, she tried to listen for the radio. She heard ringing everywhere. The man screening calls did not let her on the air. Mrs. Wolf heard her voice doubled, though, and his, on the phone and on the radio. He listened politely when she said she could see the whiteness draining out of the faces of her grandchildren. He told her the word she was looking for was miscegenation.

The Moor lived in a cave on Staten Island, though her daughter had gone to California. Mrs. Wolf traveled on a burning ferry, destination Cyprus. The other women on the trip

had long coiled hair, red like Medusa. Like the whore Bianca, in whose part Mrs. Wolf had once been miscast.

Clues! clues! clues! Expecting at worst to find a souvenir of her daughter's overnight trip floating unattended in the water, Mrs. Wolf was shocked to see a black man emerge from the frothy wake of the ferry. A scout for the Moor? He did not catch fire. He was not bloated or wrinkled. He appeared to be very old nonetheless. From the limited point of view available to Mrs. Wolf at the back of the bottom deck of the ferry, no blond or brunette protector showed herself among the women. It was a redhead's world.

"My name is Curtis, but my better friends call me Courteous."

"Stay back," Mrs. Wolf yelled. A wave of Curtis's hand unvoiced her.

"I see no one will call you any such thing."

Mrs. Wolf's face turned so white it felt bleached. She noticed a few strands of hair hanging in front of her face too, colored an autumnal red, not quite so loud as her windbreaker.

"It's simple enough if you'll let me explain. Don't be afraid. This is my job, Mrs. Vogelman. They even showed me you, younger, singing in a Sunday night revue on Stanton Street. We're not the only ones with soul. You see, I'm a fairy."

Mrs. Wolf wasn't sure how to take that either. "Go on," she said, hoarse. "They wouldn't waste a fairy on me."

"You want credentials?" Curtis asked. He sounded each word out as though he were reading it from a cue card. "I was killed building one of the tunnels. I drowned in the East River and went uncollected. Gradually, painfully, the water nurtured me back to health. As repayment for the medicine, I advise people, women mainly, who cross the river in anxious states of mind. For you I was called out by the younger generation."

Curtis's familiarity appalled Mrs. Wolf. She was a Jew; no hocus-pocus devotions for her. No friendly strangers. And he had been a construction worker! Nearing the edge of the boat lost in thought, Mrs. Wolf felt a lick of flame wash over her like spray. Even in a dream, it seemed supernatural.

"I don't want your charity, you goddam Christian. That's what you are, no matter what you look like." Curtis's spell control-

ling the volume of her voice was broken, which wasn't necessarily a good thing. Mrs. Wolf felt a crowd gathering above her. "Adam and Eve lived in a closed community. You would not have been allowed inside the forts of Venice. Military leader! They wouldn't have let you be the Merchant!"

"When you scream Christian at me what you want to be saying is nigger!" Curtis shouted.

Thin and sharp, the bodies hanging over the railing above were no longer women but knives.

"No," Mrs. Wolf said. "No. It's the Christianity. What else were you baptized in the river for?"

"You think I'm here to satisfy a need out of my past life? It's you I'm here for. You are not prepared to face your daughter."

Mrs. Wolf lunged at the ghost. He was very old. Under pressure he might vanish as quickly as he had emerged. The cave-like hull of the ferry offered very little room for Curtis and Mrs. Wolf to fight. Water threatened from every direction save the upper deck. Curtis and Mrs. Wolf might topple over the edge of the boat. The groundlings rained noise in distinct voices, each its own radio channel. They rooted for Curtis. Staten Island neared.

As she and Curtis flung each other around the yellow and black shell, Mrs. Wolf could see that he did not want to hurt her. She let go when he shoved her toward the chain fence which protects passengers while the ferry is in motion. The rusty chain ripped her red windbreaker.

From the steel deck, Mrs. Wolf begged: "You have taken my daughter and thrown me to the ground! What blessing do you have to offer in exchange?"

"Curtis! Curtis! Where are you?" Mrs. Wolf could hear her own words, barely. "You were right to leave me. This is not my territory either. But they could make a very nice voyage of the damned out of this ferry, Curtis, if they wanted to. Look at the fiery island, the sun rising! If they want to expand the operation, they could do it out there. The Staten Island ghetto, just like in Venice. I should not have come this far this late without my husband. I will go back and try to reach my daughter by telephone. Now I am terrified to move."

Frenzied by the thought that it was adulterous for her to address such pregnant words to another man, Mrs. Wolf had to open her eyes to remember her husband was dead. Always going to Bea and for what? Mrs. Wolf remembered that she had caught the first plane to California when her daughter eloped, only to turn around and catch the redeye back. Cold, she pulled the hood of the red windbreaker over her head.

The telephone rang.

"Were you calling me?"

"On the phone? No."

"It was busy. Evelyn and a friend were yapping. Evelyn's grounded. Are you sleeping?"

"I was dreaming."

"I'm sorry I called so late. But I needed to know, are you coming tomorrow or not?"

"It's not that late. We already agreed. I'm going. I'm coming."

"You said you had to think about it more, remember? You weren't sure. Not that the life you're leading leaves much of a choice."

"Bea!"

"It's true. If you don't come I'm assuming it's because you don't love your own granddaughter. So she stays on the phone too long. I'll order you your own line."

"Why are you angry with me?"

"I'm sorry, Ma. I can't stand the wavering. I made you this offer six months ago. I could've been collecting rent."

"I told you already I'd pay for the time I took deciding."

"I thought that meant you were taking it."

"I don't particularly want to go anywhere. Do you still have your collection of shrines?"

"You're not senile, Ma. You know I mainly have plants now."

"At least you didn't ever somehow manage to have a Catholic wedding. *That* your late husband wouldn't have gone in for."

"Very funny, but you didn't think he was funny then. I can still see Dad, may he rest in peace, dressed in solemn brown, sitting with his new son-in-law. They talked to us it was so hard for them to talk to each other."

"How your father hated him!"

"We were crying, Ma. Our arms around each other were like a circle. They hung over us, Dad and—"

"Like birds. With moronic jokes they tried

to nettle us. They weren't reasonable. Now I try to think reasonably and am interrupted by fears."

"What?"

"It's old age. I'm half free, half a slave. I miss your father, Bea."

"Steel yourself. Come live with me."

"You remember when I volunteered as a secretary for the NAACP, it must be twenty five years ago. I did it to please you, Bea. I did it because I had a dream. I was on the ferry searching for you. I had to decide whether to get off and hunt for you like I'd planned or stay on the boat and go home. I just got through replaying it."

"Not your black ghost dream."

"That's the one. He said, stay together, even if you can't understand each other. The part you don't know is that I was in California the night you left. I did not feel like I could speak to you, speak nicely anyway, so I went home. There were moments from *Othello*, too, but I'm sure you remember that much."

"Evelyn was so excited to hear you had played Desdemona. You were her show-and-tell in drama class. Whatever old costumes we had over here, she took in."

"Costumes? The Yiddish theatre had no costumes which would keep. I want to know Evelyn better than I know you."

"Goodnight, Ma. For once I'll be patient. Sweeter dreams. I'll call you in the morning for your final decision."

"Yes."

*

Three months after her father's death Bea had waited long enough. She sprung the idea loose: would her mother wish to join her on a working tour of the cathedrals and synagogues of Europe? Evelyn had been Bea's unwilling companion the summer before and would spend this one with her father.

Mrs. Wolf had hesitated. She knew from city-to-city train tours with the Yiddish theatre what working and traveling were like combined. The vehicles may have changed, but the crass frenzy of the traveler would not. Yet Florida was an old-age home and New York without her husband an empty vessel. Could she refuse to see her daughter's ges-

ture?

Bea had given up her husband for graduate school at Berkeley studying comparative religion. She had made her reputation on the essay "Against Subtlety." She argued that scholars should focus not on the doctrines which separated religions but on what was common in their rituals. "I want to know," she joked, "not just why they kneel, but where and how."

Traveling through the world, she had come to feel movement was a cure for grief. To the small child in a car, it brought sleep. It would calm her mother. So: London, back and forth through France, Granada, Madrid, every grotto in Italy—plus an extra week traipsing along Venetian canals, up through Austria onto German soil, which Bea and Mrs. Wolf intended to use as a foothold for the East.

Europe was familiar. American-born Mrs. Wolf knew it from every angle. In childhood her parents' tales made Germany seem the center of the universe, the promised land of culture. Even after the war they continued to speak about the language this way. Yiddish was cheap and guttural, German fine, extending, like piano lessons. Knowing that she spoke German with a Jewish accent not an American one made Mrs. Wolf feel distant from herself. Bea seemed happy when her mother told her this. What kind of daughter had Mrs. Wolf raised, who saw her mother's vulnerability as a green light? Always going somewhere! Staten Island, California, Europe every year. Perhaps it was not odd of Bea to drag Mrs. Wolf to the center of the Nazi empire to ask for her love. Mrs. Wolf thought she understood her daughter: one must keep moving to see the earth in its true state. It was as if Bea were a physicist.

Bea's idea of a rest from the churches, cathedrals and synagogues was a visit to an obsolete Jewish cemetery in East Berlin. It was Saturday so Mrs. Wolf and Bea had to bribe the cemetery's caretaker to let them in. In a rush, why have religious scruples? Anyone who might care had moved on to one of three fates: death, America, Israel, in that order of likelihood.

"That was kind," Bea said.

"What, kind? He just wanted me to take care of him."

The cemetery was dark and woodsy. Mrs. Wolf and her daughter had traveled from a

city where graveyards were stuffed like the holds of immigrant ships. In the corner another man recorded the sights with a video camera. He panned across the cemetery in loops. Mrs. Wolf and Bea followed the movement of the camera. They saw charred tombstones piled grotesquely. What did he intend to do with such a film? Mother and daughter could tell that the gravestones had been ripped from the earth in a fury, whether of German prejudice or Allied bombing they did not know. The ground itself was covered with black ash. A few tombstones stood upright. Neither Mrs. Wolf nor Bea could read the Hebrew written on them. Mrs. Wolf thought the cameraman might be able to. He could be a member of a memorial project, sent through *Mitteleuropa* much like Bea to recover what was left of a religion and its people.

"I hope he makes it silent," Mrs. Wolf said.

"It would be awful with words."

"Of course if it's silent we'll never know if he's German."

"We'll never know in any event. What does it matter?"

"I can't distinguish between Germans."

"Ma."

"We cannot forgive."

"That's not why I'm saying, Ma. I want to ask you a question."

Mrs. Wolf walked closer to the slanting headstones. "If we were more observant, we could read these," she said.

"Do you want to live with me?"

"This is a time to ask me?"

"And with Evelyn."

"Certainly I want to go back to New York. Forget Europe. I have had enough of these people. That man is filming us now. Does he think we're survivors? We don't look it, we look American. Does the camera hear what we're saying? I've never felt so much like I was on a stage."

"Nonsense."

The cemetery might grow darker and darker in counterpoint to the glowing light of Mrs. Wolf's apartment. It might grow. What use was memory if she could toss and turn it on a dime?

Mrs. Wolf lost herself to blank sleep. She awoke to a mixed first light. The sun outside

and the lamp inside lit one another up, like decoding solutions for invisible ink.

Mrs. Wolf was hot. She wore all yesterday's clothes. The material of the couch had creased her face. She felt her forehead for fever.

Mrs. Wolf recalled a question she had asked her daughter in an earlier conversation about her plans. "If my memory gets worse and worse, how can I let my sense of family, and yours, and Evelyn's, depend on it?" Bea had informed her, "Who cares if you remember exactly what happened? It's what you think about it that matters. Like in Wittgenstein. The words I use to describe my memory are my reaction to the memory."

How it thrilled Mrs. Wolf to hear Bea speak like a professor! Her daughter was the son she never had.

Mrs. Wolf undressed quickly and took a bath. She stepped out while the water was still hot. She wanted to be gone from the house when her daughter called. She would present herself at Bea's door, earlier than newspaper delivery. Bea, half-asleep, would look softer and younger. This would reflect well on Mrs. Wolf. And Evelyn, oh Evelyn. Who could blame her if when she took her grandmother's ratty red windbreaker from her grandmother's rattling hand, she lowered her eyes and wondered: where should I hang this rag? □

Aaron Retica lives in San Francisco, but grew up in New York City. "A Bintel Brief" is his first published short story.

Michael Spence

WATERSONG

In your hand
You can hold me, though I slip
Over the side
Of your palm, though I escape
Between your fingers
To the earth where you stand.

When released,
Like your anger I will seek
The lowest depths.
I fall from the sky to wake
The rivers underground,
Bursting levees, tearing loose

Any bridge
You lay over me. For I
Am your bridge: I hold you
To life, give the dust you are—dry
As your touch—the power
To move. Did you feel my rage

When the light
Lured you up, out of my oceans?
Only one way
You could leave: in your veins,
In your flesh and muscle,
You carry me. I lie in wait

For the day
Something leaves you that you hold
Close, as you left me.
I will fill your eyes till the world
You once knew
Blurs and melts away.

THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY:
AN EAST-WEST DIALECTIC

"... The power of wonder moves all things—puppets in a play of shadows—whirling them onwards in the stream of time" (*Bhagavad Gita* XVII.61)

Peter Weir's *The Year of Living Dangerously* captures to an extraordinary degree the nuances and ambiguities of the collision between Asian and Western values and lifestyles in Sukarno's Indonesia. The film's title comes from an Independence Day address of the same name given by Sukarno on August 17, 1964, when he predicted that the coming year would be "the year of living dangerously," perhaps because he foresaw the looming showdown with the Communist forces trying to overthrow his government. Indeed, this greater cataclysm in Indonesia's life plays a key role in the film, forming the backdrop and stage for the personal crises within the lives of the Westerners who are the central focus of the film. Our discussion of the film will focus on Weir's concerns as an artist, as expressed through his use of symbolism from the Javanese puppet theatre (*wayang kulit*¹), Western operatic music, and the image of the *gamin*.

Weir's dramatic interests

Why did Weir choose this particular subject matter? According to an interview after the Cannes Film Festival debut in 1983, the director stated: "In film you can penetrate

[false] dividing lines . . . In the West we live in the midst of artificial dividing lines between right and left, good and evil."² It is as if Weir saw in C. J. Koch's novel (of the same name) a worthy attempt to describe what happens when Westerners are compelled to interact with a culture and political system designed along lines radically unlike their own. In such a context, some Westerners must confront, perhaps for the first time, their internal contradictions in a way they never would or could at home. The dramatic impact of such personal moments of self-discovery is what forms the essence of this superbly crafted film.

Weir loses no time getting this theme before the audience. No sooner has Guy Hamilton (Mel Gibson), the new ABS reporter, arrived and had a drink, than he goes for a walk in Jakarta's slums with photographer Billy Kwan (Linda Hunt) in order to "experience the real Indonesia." On this initiatory walk, however, Weir introduces a second fundamental theme. As we watch Guy's mouth drop open in shocked disbelief at the desperate Asian poverty he is seeing for the first time in his life, Billy's voice comes over in the background: "Most of us become children again when we enter the slums of Asia. I watched you walk backward into childhood, with all of its opposite intensities: laughter and misery, the crazy and the grim, toy town and the city of fear . . ."

Weir described this idea at Cannes in these terms: "In film, you can penetrate [all sorts of false] dividing lines . . . In the West, we live in the midst of artificial dividing lines between right and left, good and evil . . . You must become like a child [*gamin*]! That's exciting and refreshing!" (*Cinematographe* 27). Weir's suggestion is that it is the spirit of a young

¹*Wayang kulit*, a theatrical form that dates back to at least the ninth century, is a play of light and darkness where shadows predominate. With the puppeteer (*dalang*) seated behind a screen (*kelir*) lit by an oil lamp, a mixture of historical and epic tales are enacted continuously from after sunset to just before dawn.

The pace of Weir's film mirrors the pace of the *wayang*, which is traditionally divided into three parts without breaks.

²E. Decaux and B. Villien, "Entretien avec Peter Weir," *Cinematographe* 91 (July/August 1983): 27.

child—*gamin* suggests the sense of “street urchin,” a playful, amoral child of six or seven—which is the true antidote for the all-too-serious, deadly, adult world, East or West.

The director intertwines these twin themes throughout the movie in a striking way, bringing the audience into the action by turning the movie itself into Javanese shadow theatre (*wayang kulit*). From the very beginning of the film when the credits scroll by a barely discernible “tree of life” (*kayon* or *gunungan*) puppet³, we go back into childhood ourselves, watching a *wayang* performance to the accompaniment of traditional Javanese *gamelon*⁴ music, and other musical scores.

In the film, the *gamelon* provides the musical motif of the scenes in the slums of Jakarta, the “markets of the poor,” filled with those seemingly endless throngs of people whose lives spill out onto the streets. This serves as a counterpoint to the bursts of Western music that punctuate the film’s narrative: rock music at the house party, bagpipes at the British ambassador’s party, and above all, the aria from Richard Strauss’ *Vier Letzte Lieder* that appears at two key junctures in the film’s action. These musical themes—the flowing, cyclical notes of the *gamelon* and the “vertically” ascending notes of the Strauss aria—express two very different desires: a detached act of succumbing to the cosmic order, and an impassioned will to transcend this order. We shall comment on this aria later.

Weir reinforces the *wayang* sense of the movie by giving to his central character, Billy Kwan, the role of the master puppeteer (*dalang*).⁵ The *dalang* both causes the action and interprets the hidden motives of the play’s

main characters to the audience. Throughout the first half of the film we hear Billy Kwan’s voice in the background or see him hammering out file entries on his typewriter which explains the various characters’ actions and, as if he were omniscient, exposing their most deeply hidden natures. Billy’s role as a photographer contributes to his false sense of omniscience; the person who holds the camera looks out at others and is rarely the one who appears in the picture. At times it almost seems as if we are watching not a typical Western film, but a true *wayang* drama, following its own mythological rules and traditions. As Billy says early in the film:

“Here on the quiet page, I am master, just as I am master in the darkroom. I shuffle like cards the lives I deal with. Their faces stare out at me. People who will become other people. People who will become old.”

(The camera pans over the montage of photos on Billy’s wall until it comes to rest directly on a photo of Guy next to one of Jill Bryant, a young member of the British Embassy staff.) “They will become ghosts, betray their dreams . . .”

As the director/*dalang* creating the entire film, Weir quickly introduces the supporting cast—a wonderfully malicious characterization of Western stereotypes found in Asian cities, including the jaded, fat, homosexual Englishman and the loud, sex-crazed “Ugly American.” After the opening airport scene, the new Aussie reporter is introduced to Billy Kwan and these two journalists. They are to be his colleagues in the elusive pursuit of truth in Sukarno’s Indonesia, and they all gather at the end of each day in the significantly named “Wayang Bar” in the Hotel Indonesia.

In the role of *dalang*, Weir has Billy give the audience critical information for the better understanding of the main characters and also to point in the direction from which the unexpected moment of crisis and danger will come to each one.⁶ The audience begins to

³This puppet is also used to mark the end of scenes, or is used as a symbolic object, such as a forest, palace, gate or mountain. As the puppeteer causes the *kayon* to tremble, rotating it on its axis, the audience is reminded by the paintings on the puppet of both the nurturing and the destructive aspects of the cosmos.

⁴The *gamelon* is an ensemble of two sets of instruments made of bronze, brass or iron, and tuned to different scales. *Gamelon* music is cyclic and there is no break between repetitions or between melodies.

⁵In the *wayang*, the *dalang* can be compared to a god, as he sits cross-legged before the screen which symbolizes Heaven. He is at once storyteller, conductor of the *gamelon*, master of puppet movement techniques and (according to some sources) shaman and exorcist.

⁶In the Javanese *wayang*, spoken dialogue (*ginem*) occupies a secondary role to the *dalang*’s narration—a pattern which is carried over in Weir’s film.

wonder, however, just who this pretentious yet mysterious Billy Kwan himself is, and what will happen to him.

In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Weir is, in essence, presenting us with a *wayang* performance. The key feature of the early *wayang* scene in Billy's bungalow is to link explicitly the two courtly Javanese deities Arjuna and Srikandi with Guy and Jill, while Billy himself is linked with Semar, the dwarf-god. The names "Guy" and "Jill" are, in an Australian context, stereotypic names meaning "male" and "female," thus reinforcing the sense that the unfolding drama transcends the smaller, individual conflicts of specific characters during a specific historical period. As Gary Hentzi notes, one of Weir's favorite themes is "the persistence of primitive forces beneath the surface of a repressively rationalized modern existence."⁷

Guy / Arjuna

The connection between Guy Hamilton and Arjuna is made explicitly during an important scene in Billy's bungalow early in the film when Billy explains to Guy his collection of sacred *wayang kulit* puppets. Holding up the puppet of Arjuna, Billy states:

This is Prince Arjuna. He's a hero but he can also be fickle and selfish. Krishna says to him, "All is clouded by desire, Arjuna, as fire by smoke, as a mirror by dust. These blind the soul." (*Bhagavad Gita* 3.37-39 [van Buitenen ed., pp. 84-85])⁸

Crosscuts between Guy's face and the puppet of Arjuna in Billy's hand leave little doubt that Billy sees in the journalist an embodiment of this third Pandawa brother, known in Java for his elegance, heroism, sexual attractiveness and fickleness. Later in the film, after Guy has betrayed Jill's trust, the connection is suggested explicitly. As Billy leafs through his file, we see cutouts of Guy and of

Arjuna in his file together while Billy says, "You are capable of betrayal. Is it possible I was wrong about you? . . . Why can't you learn to love?" Later, as Guy leans over the dying Billy, the young man's usual proud gaze assumes the profile with lowered gaze of the refined (*alus*⁹) Arjuna, the god who has now learned humility as well as inner strength.

Jill/Srikandi

The connection between Jill Bryant and the Princess Srikandi is also explicitly made in the bungalow scene. After Billy finishes explaining about Arjuna, he picks up the puppet of Princess Srikandi and says, "She is noble and proud and yet headstrong . . . Arjuna will fall in love with her . . ." During this speech the camera moves away from Billy's face to drift over to a photo of Jill which is attached, along with a collage of photos of faces of Indonesia, on Billy's wall. Although Billy does not explain further, it would be obvious to a viewer knowledgeable about the *wayang* that Srikandi must be viewed in contrast to Sumbadra, the model of the reserved, elegant woman who is loyal to her husband and is "seen but not heard."

Later in the movie we learn more about Jill/Srikandi. Billy is typing additional material into her file after he has successfully maneuvered Guy and Jill together at the Embassy party. Like children about to indulge in some mischievous act, Guy and Jill dash away in Guy's car, braving the road guards' gunfire on their way back to Billy's bungalow. Later we hear Billy's voice uttering, in a strikingly omniscient manner, "Bryant, Juliet Edith. Nationality: British. Born 1938. Occupation: attaché, British embassy. Little religious feeling. Yet has a reverence for life. This is a spirit like a wavering flame that only needs care to burn high. If this does not happen (the camera pans to a moody, sideways pouting photo of Jill), she could lapse into the promiscuity and bitterness of the failed romantic."

The gamin motif

As noted earlier, Weir emphasized in his

⁷Gary Hentzi, "Peter Weir and New Age Humanism," *Film Quarterly* 44.2 (Winter 1990-91): 4.

⁸Our appreciation to Professor James Fitzgerald's (Department of Religious Studies, University of Tennessee/Knoxville) for his explanations of these passages from the *Bhagavad Gita*.

⁹*Wayang kulit* characters are traditionally divided into the *alus* (refined, delicate, subdued) and the *kasar* (rough, large and loud). This distinction also extends to members of Javanese society in general, and, by extension, to all people.

interview about the film that he especially wanted to find a way past the sterile and superficial Western dichotomies by going back to the amoral, prerational mind of the child (*gamin*). There are a number of occasions where Guy and Jill suddenly find themselves spontaneously acting like boisterous children, beginning with the race at the Embassy pool. Then there is the scene showing Guy and Billy delightedly filming while precisely in the midst of the rebel PKI demonstration in front of the U. S. Embassy. (Note that Weir stages the demonstration itself as a bewildering medley of beauty, danger and excitement—a microcosmic view of his portrayal of Asia.)

Another example of this *gamin* theme is the hilarious downpour scene at the harbor, where Guy and Jill drink "green stuff" and get soaking wet. Finally, there is the wild, impulsive dash through a hail of gunfire after they suddenly bolt away from the party at the British Embassy, laughing like boisterous children all the way back to Billy's bungalow. (In Weir's script notes, he writes: "Their laughter is crazy, intoxicating.") At these moments, Guy and Jill seem to be rising into a kind of fearless playfulness, ready to do anything. The viewer is drawn into these magic moments through our longing to be like our heroes. Our wonder is aroused; could we do anything so outrageous and fun? If only we could! Perhaps this sense of longing is the "refreshing" quality of children that Weir stated he wanted to convey through this film.

Billy/Semar

After Billy has explained the first two puppets, Arjuna and Srikandi, Guy suddenly kneels and holds up a third puppet. It is the dwarf Semar. Still kneeling so that he must look up at Billy, Guy asks the identity of the puppet. For once Billy is taller than Guy. A special moment of eye contact takes place between Guy and Billy as Billy says, "This is Semar . . . he serves the Prince."

Semar, the dwarf servant of the five Pandawa brothers, is in actuality the most powerful of the indigenous Javanese gods, Ismaja. His outward appearance does not reflect his true nature. In Javanese mythology, Semar receives his ugly, stunted shape as punishment for a past wrong-doing. In

popular *wayang* performances, however, Semar is a clown character (*punakawan*), yet he is also known for his wisdom. Unlike Arjuna, who is of the more elevated *satrya* class, Semar is a man of the people and is beloved of the people. Indeed, *wayang kulit* is basically an egalitarian art and *wayang* performances often mark major events in the lives of the common people—birth, circumcision, marriage; or major communal events such as planting and harvest. Both in stature and in temperament, Billy Kwan resembles this central *wayang* character.

Billy/Semar's Crisis and Enlightenment

Billy/Semar's transition from omniscient *dalang* to vulnerable participant is triggered when Guy writes a story about the secret shipment of arms for the rebel PKI group which Jill (in her concern for her lover's safety) has revealed to him. Billy is shocked by Guy's betrayal of Jill in order to enhance his own career.

After this, Billy and Guy part ways. Billy is learning of other problems: In the role of *dalang*/shaman, Billy hopes to help exorcise Indonesia of its plethora of problems, assisting the master *dalang*, Sukarno. Billy's efforts consist not of political actions of a grand scale, but of more personal acts of kindness to needy individuals, like the poor woman Ibu (literally "woman") and her baby, who serve as a microcosmic example of all of that nation's poor. On a visit to this adopted Indonesian family, Billy learns that Ibu's infant boy has just died. Shocked with a second grief, Billy staggers back to his bungalow past enormous posters of Sukarno. As Billy realizes that Sukarno is not the neutral *dalang* but rather the evil and monstrous puppet figure (*rakshasa*) who manipulates others, he glares wordlessly at the posters with rage and loathing. There immediately ensues a mob scene of hungry people scrabbling for rice, giving added focus to Billy's mounting frustration and rage.

Billy and Guy confront each other in a trash-littered alley illuminated by moldering, smoky fires. In the scenario, Weir writes: "In the half-light they both cast huge grotesque shadows on the wall as they stand, facing each other, trying to regain control of their breathing," a clear allusion to a *wayang* scene. Here are Prince Arjuna and Semar, his dwarf-

advisor, facing each other in a moment of anguished crisis. "I believed in you," Billy screams. "I thought you were a 'Man of Light.' I made you see things . . . I made you feel something about what is right . . . *I created you!*"

The next scene finds Billy back in his bungalow, staring desperately at the wall, at the photographic montage of suffering Javanese faces. He whispers, "My God . . . Oh my God . . . My God, My God." At this precise point an amazingly lush soprano voice begins singing something we have heard once before in the film. The music is never explicitly identified but in fact it is the second of Richard Strauss' "Four Last Songs." As the soloist (Kiri Te Kanawa) begins singing "Und die Seele . . ." from the third stanza, Billy groans in pure agony. He mutters, "What then must we do?"—a quote from Luke 3:15 with which he had earlier taunted Guy Hamilton for being an "uninvolved journalist." On that occasion Billy had told Guy that it was a quote which Tolstoy had asked himself when confronted with Moscow's poor: "What then must we do?"—that is, we rich, who are in a position to do something to help the poor.

Billy/Semar's moment of truth is upon him. All of his "puppets," and the master *dalang* himself, have failed. His great pretense at being both Chinese and American, functioning equally well in Javanese and Western cultures, has come to naught. Nothing is working. Billy stares in agony at the eyes staring back at him. He begins pounding furiously on his typewriter. WHAT THEN MUST WE DO WHAT THEN MUST WE DO WHAT. . . . Meanwhile a stunningly beautiful Western voice is singing in the background, adding powerful emotional weight to the scene. Our understanding of the power of this scene is enhanced considerably if we take a slight digression and examine the words and circumstances under which Strauss wrote the music.

Strauss' Aria

In his old age, the composer Richard Strauss took one last trip to his beloved Italy, where he wrote a few last songs (*Vier Letzte Lieder*) which were, in effect, his farewell to music. Shortly after he wrote them, he died, without even hearing their premier performance at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The first

song is called "Spring," the second "September," the third "On Going to Sleep," and the fourth "Dusk." The use of the third song by Weir at this precise point in Billy/Semar's moment of supreme agony is both intentional and mysterious. As he stares at the haunting eyes in the montage of photographs on his wall, Billy hears these words of the Western song:

Now that the day has wearied me,
My ardent striving should welcome
Starry night like a sleepy child.
Hands, drop all you're doing,
Brow, forget all you're thinking.
All my senses just want to sink into sleep
And my unguarded soul
Wants to soar away, flying freely,
To live intensely in ways unimaginable
In night's magic circle.¹⁰

Is it possible that this voice is calling to Billy/Semar to give up all his striving? If so, the song would represent Billy's moment of ultimate temptation. Billy, on the other hand, terrified by this seductive voice, is pounding furiously on his typewriter, vocally repeating each word he is typing, as if to drown out, by motion and by his own voice, what the music is encouraging him to do. WHAT THEN MUST WE DO? WHAT THEN MUST WE DO???

We should note that Weir used this powerful technique in another film as well. In *Gallipoli* (1981), the night before the fateful charge, the Captain listens to an aria ("Au Fond du Temps Saint" from Bizet's opera *The Pearl Fishers* (*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, 1863)). In his interview following the Cannes Film Festival, Weir explained that, in the case of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, he would regularly assemble the actors and tell them to listen to the music, stating: "This is the passion I want to communicate through the film" (*Cinematographe* 27).

What we may conclude from this excursus is that, at the peak moment of Billy's crisis, he is longing to give it all up and die, to escape into the "magic circle of the night." It is a

¹⁰We are grateful to Professor John Osborne, Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages, University of Tennessee/Knoxville, and to Ms. Ulrike Frazier for this translation.

moment of supreme temptation and irony.

Billy's denouement

The next scene shows Billy determinedly making his way through the lobby of the Hotel Indonesia up to Guy's room. In the fast-paced action of Billy going into the hotel, getting the key, riding up in the elevator with two suspicious-looking men, walking down the hall to a room, the camera seems to linger for a split second on the number of the room: 719. It is Guy's room; why the specific number? Perhaps an answer can be found from several clues: the way in which Billy seems to look upon Guy as the "Unmet Friend," a "Man of Light," but above all in the curious way in which, at the very beginning of the movie, Billy explicitly quotes from the Gospel of Luke, citing chapter 3 verse 10 for the phrase "What then must we do?" Does Weir intend this second number to refer to Luke 7:19: "Are you he who is to come or should we wait for another?" The room number is not in Koch's novel, so Weir has clearly inserted it himself.

No sooner has Billy entered room 719, and hung from the balcony the sign for Sukarno—"SUKARNO FEED YOUR PEOPLE"—then security thugs break in, shoot him and hurl his body out of the window.

Billy/Semar has finally taken on the great master *dalang* of Indonesia himself, Sukarno, and in a moment of supreme personal sacrifice, he has spoken the truth to Sukarno. Yet, his great moment seems utterly pointless; the sign is hauled back inside just before Sukarno's motor cavalcade sweeps by. On the mundane level, Billy's noble action, resulting in his death, is a wasted one, as Sukarno never sees the sign. But on the level of the *wayang*, there is nothing that is not seen. (What is of primary import in this communal event of the *wayang* is the fact that the play is being performed, since the performance itself is viewed as efficacious.) Billy's last act was that of the master *dalang* who alone is allowed to conduct the exorcism ceremony (*ruwatan*) to summon and subdue the evil spirits, of which Sukarno himself was one. This may help explain Billy's ambiguous smile before he dies.

There are other signs and hints that Weir intends for the viewer to be reminded of Christian motifs and concepts. For example, when

Billy says to Guy, "I thought you were a Man of Light!" or when Billy asks himself during one of the scenes in the bungalow darkroom, "Could he be the Unmet Friend?"—we are confronted by language which can only be called symbolic. Has Weir, having launched Guy and the others as Javanese noble characters, also begun to cautiously work in carefully chosen Christian religious motifs as their Western counterparts? There is a temptation to interpret Billy's self-sacrifice, and his earlier sense of creating dramatic situations (and even characters), in this light. Then again, perhaps this is nothing more than a skillful *dalang* (Weir) who, following the nature of both the puppet theatre and the cinema, feels compelled to add improvisational, and contemporary, touches to the basically allegorical story being enacted on the screen.

Just like the audience of a traditional *wayang kulit* performance, the viewer of *The Year of Living Dangerously* can concentrate on the puppets (the characters themselves) or on their shadows (Billy's interpretations, his files on each character), both of which are only partially true. The dramatic play of opposite tensions in Billy/Semar's denouement is exquisitely painful for us as adults. In the end, Billy must accept both sides of his nature—Chinese and Australian, dwarf and god, male and female—in order to reach a spiritual peace. Just as Guy and Billy are "divided men" (each with parents of different nationalities) and hence "not quite at home in the world," so is Linda Hunt divided between the male role she assumes in the film and her own persona as an actress. Through her memorable performance, she truly becomes the androgynous Semar, both god and servant, clown and sage. In general, women play pivotal roles in this film as motivating factors for the male leads, but they remain incompletely drawn characters in themselves. Weir manages to skirt some of this dichotomous structure through the brilliant decision to cast a woman (Linda Hunt) in the role of the male photographer, Billy Kwan.

The film, like the *wayang*, opens and closes with a kind of *kayon*, a tree of life. The closing of the door of the plane, as Guy/Arjuna and Jill/Srikandi are united inside, is similar to the kind of "wipe" the *kayon* would perform at the end of a *wayang* performance, with the completion of one cycle. The puppets "rest"

until awakened by the *dalang* for their appearance as flickering shadows against a screen. We, the viewers, leave the film/*wayang* performance like little children, struck by the deep sense of wonder at the powerful

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opposites in the world which, as the *Gita* says, motivates all things. □

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Saúl Yurkievich

QUIET

Translated by Cola Franzen

The door opens slightly
you hear steps
 a silhouette
you see
through
 the curtain
and you don't know
if it is
 the one who gives
 or
 the one who collects
and you stop and
your heart beats
 quietly
quiet I wait

SEEKING OUT THE ABSENT ONE OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S *FILM*

Esse est Percipi": thus Beckett opens the scenario for his only cinematic venture, the 22 minute, black-and-white film entitled (predictably enough) *Film* (1964). But, lest philosophically inclined readers of the script are tempted to attribute great significance to the Berkeleian dictum that "to be is to be perceived," the author hastens to assert that "[n]o truth value attaches" to it. Rather, it is to be "regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience" (11). To the psychoanalytically inclined reader, however, such a disclaimer beckons irresistibly. What, indeed, can be made of an author's first foray into visual media which takes as its starting point a formulation of subjectivity that locates identity precisely at the level of the visual?¹

What occurs to *this* reader is that Beckett was not the only 20th Century theorist to have been captivated by Berkeley's proposition. In the field of psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan was appropriating a version of it into his theory of subjectivity even as Beckett was writing his major novels of the thirties and forties. For Lacan, the necessity of being perceived (by oneself) in order to be at all became the nucleus of his mirror stage essay. In his paradigm of how the self is constituted, the pre-linguistic infant is held up to a mirror in which he sees himself and thereby (retroactively) comes to understand himself as a subject in the world. Since this mirror image is always more replete than the child's experience of his fragmented and as yet uncoordinated body, his imaginary identification with the replication he sees of himself is necessarily a "misrecognition." As Laura Mulvey has noted:

The mirror phase occurs at a time when the child's physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that

he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body. (60)

In this way, the child can trade in, as it were, his inadequate and powerless experience of self for a more complete (though always illusory and inaccurate) sense of identity. The mirror stage, according to Lacan,

is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality, . . . and to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (4)

In this drama, in other words (a drama which plays itself out continuously for the rest of the subject's life) a felt insufficiency must always be compensated for by anticipating the moment when the perceived image of oneself can be assumed. But this assumed image will always be "alien" insofar as it comes from outside rather than inside the subject. The account of the child's misrecognition of himself in the mirror is a kind of "originary" paradigm of an individual's ongoing relationship to the world in which he or she perpetually becomes a subject. The image perceived in the mirror is succeeded by a never-ending series of images understood to be self-reflections as they are perceived in the mother's face, others' faces and more generally in the various screens by which a culture represents itself to itself.

Kaja Silverman (1989) has elaborated Lacan's theorizing of the "screen" in such a way as to emphasize how a culture's dominant ideologies are internalized and constituted simultaneously with an individual's subjectivity. The "alien" assumed image, in other words, is always permeated by, indeed,

¹Silvie Debevec Henning (1981), in her study on *Film* and its textual doubles, includes an illuminating discussion of how Beckett both relies upon and departs from Berkeley's philosophy.

determined by, the ideologies of the culture which produces it. Silverman has also pointed out how it is possible to find in Lacan's account of the image/screen the possibility for a contestation of dominant ideology, suggesting that a person can (presumably through his or her own cultural productions, or perhaps even through a subversive reading or reception of existing cultural productions) hold out before him or herself a different screen, one which does not so much abolish as challenge what, taking a necessary license with Lacan's formulation by insisting upon its ideological grounding, I will call the dominant cultural screens. (75)

It is not surprising, given the obvious similitude between mirror and cinematic screen, that the elaboration of Lacanian theory of subjectivity should be carried out perhaps most insistently in the last two decades in the context of film theory. Some of the most compelling film theory has focused on the cinematic screen specifically as *cultural screen*, and has tried to account for how film plays a part in the constitution of the subjectivity of its spectators. This is true, for example, of the suture theory of Oudart and Dayan, who tried to show how a film's ideology is locked in through the mechanism of the shot/countershot sequence. It is also true of the kind of feminist film theory "inaugurated" by Laura Mulvey, who, along with many others since, has analyzed cinema for the specific ways in which it perpetuates certain culturally dominant ideologies of gender. Intertextualizing film theory within the Lacanian account of the mirror stage, Mulvey has pointed out that

quite apart from the extraneous similarity between screen and mirror (the framing of the human form in its surroundings, for instance) the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego. (61)

While watching a movie, in other words, one enters into the imaginary (literally, the realm of images and identification with them) and thereby into the paradigmatic structure of the mirror stage again, where, through misrecognition of oneself on the screen, one can swap inadequacy for "the armour of an

alienating identity."

Although Beckett might have been skeptical about the efficacy of "challenging" the "dominant cultural screens," the drama of the Lacanian mirror stage is a familiar enough scenario throughout his writings, and most remarkably in *The Unnamable*, where a "succession of phantasies" are indeed "manufactured" by external mirroring entities for the benefit or torment of a central consciousness who proclaims his insufficiency as though to ward off the anticipation he is provoked into feeling. The promise of "armour" against the powerless experience of non-subjectivity in the world is apparently not enough to mitigate the fact that any assumed identity will necessarily be an "alienating" one. The *Unnamable* is the story of the subject who is not only wise to, but embittered by the banality that any sense of self he can have in the world must be predicated on a misrecognition: hence the repeated desire in Beckett's fiction for the "mirrors to shatter" (as one of his narrators puts it) and for the image of his body reflected in them to "vanish in the havoc of its images."

But it is in Beckett's *Film*, with its emphasis on the relationship between perception (of others, of oneself) and identity and its dependence on and explicit manipulation of the cinematic screen, that he can be seen most clearly to theorize subjectivity at the level of the look and the gaze. As Ruth Perlmutter has suggested, the flight of *Film's* protagonist from perceivedness is

really a flight from being entrapped by cinema, specifically, the system of looks and responses on which the cinema is based: the nature of looking and being looked at; the shifting points of view between subject, viewer, and omniscient narrator; the constituency of the cinematic image with its *aura* of presence. (86)

By understanding Beckett's film within the context of the two strands of film theory I have mentioned above, it becomes possible to explore his relationship to the ideologies of gender that have been perpetuated by traditional cinematic productions, even though *film* might not at first glance seem to have anything to do with gender.²

In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,"

Laura Mulvey persuasively demonstrates how traditional cinema has reproduced and reinforced a dichotomization of perception and identity, with men typically in the active position of looking, and women in the passive position, and connoting "to-be-looked-at-ness." If there is an implied viewer of most cinema, then, that viewer is male; for women to partake as subjects (rather than objects) of the gaze, they must undergo a masculinization, thereby identifying with the male perspective. Kaja Silverman (1989) has elaborated on Mulvey's initial formulation, pointing out that women in cinema have come to be designated as the "objects" of desire only because desire has been so insistently directed towards them through the agency of the male look.

If feminist theory has reason to lament that system of representation, it is not because woman so frequently functions as the *object* of desire (we all function simultaneously as subject and object), but because the male look both transfers its own lack to the female subject, and attempts to pass itself off as the gaze. The problem, in other words, is not that men direct desire toward women in Hollywood films, but that male desire is so consistently and systematically imbricated with projection and control. (71-2).

As Beckett states in the general directives at the beginning of his scenario, *Film* is a visual dramatization of a "sundered" protagonist's "search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception" (11). A short synopsis of *Film* will demonstrate how it clearly posits subjectivity as depending upon an explicitly external visual agency, even

when that visual agency (traversing as it inevitably must the cultural screen) is the subject's own. The camera perspective is entirely limited to, and alternates between, only two subjective views: that of the protagonist as Object (designated as "O" in the scenario) and as Eye ("E"). It should be pointed out that an equivalence between subject and eye is already set up in this manner of designating the two "halves" of the protagonist; the opposite of Object in other words would seem to be Subject *as* Eye, or as that which perceives, rather than that which is perceived. E pursues O as he hastens through a cityscape, enters a building, climbs a staircase and locks himself in a sparsely furnished room. On the way to the room, they encounter other characters whose faces, when held in E's gaze for a few moments, register what Beckett calls the "agony of perceivedness" (16). Once in the room, E continues to observe as O removes all possible perceiving eyes from the room (eyes belonging to pets, photographs, a drawing on the wall) and then falls asleep in a rocking chair. Most of the time, we share E's perspective as he tries to gain access to O's face. The occasional moments of O's perspective are, by contrast to E's, vague and out of focus. Since O protects his face from being seen by keeping it averted from E at all times, we never see O except from the back, and we never see E at all, or not until the final moments of the film. Only when O falls asleep and E has circled around to face him is the long awaited perception of O's face attained.

Described in this way, Beckett's *Film* seems indeed to be, like his fiction, another documentation of a reluctant object (O) as he unsuccessfully resists the subjectivity offered to him via the images in which he is invited to misrecognize himself: the series of eyes—"animal, human, divine" (11)—that he encounters and eliminates, until he is confronted by a bafflingly externalized version of himself. The suggestion would seem to be that even one's perception of oneself, insofar as it has been culturally constituted, is experienced as an external reflecting screen.

Moreover, one might be tempted, given a reading of *Film* that remains within the drama of E's pursuit of O, to postulate that, in contrast to the Hollywood tradition Mulvey describes, Beckett's *Film* interrogates and resists the privileging of the male gaze in cin-

²Ruth Perlmutter (1977) is one of the few critics to take into account recent film theory in her analysis of *Film*, and points out in a note that Beckett's film is "almost a textbook illumination of many of [the] critical concerns" of phenomenologists such as Bazin, Mitry and Merleau-Ponty (92n.). Enoch Brater (1987) notes Beckett's affinity with the Surrealist cinema of the 1920's (especially that of Bunuel) as well as his homages to Chaplin. Raymond Federman (1966-7) calls *Film* an "avant-garde effort" directed *against* a general tendency of avant-garde cinema to "achieve a confusion of, the multiple elements of the film" (276). As far as I know, however, there are no discussions of *Film* (in or out of the context of film studies) that include a treatment of how gender is constructed in the film.

ema, insofar as its two subjective camera viewpoints, both belonging to a "sundered" male protagonist, eventually culminate in a face-off that submits this protagonist to the "agony" of his own "perception." Related in this way, *Film* would seem to be the drama of the male gaze turned back on itself, a cinematic *mea culpa* in which the masculine perspective is withdrawn from the female images upon which it had been conventionally trained (and through which it constituted itself by attributing any felt lack to those images), and focussed instead upon itself in an unmitigated admission of its simultaneous neurotic aggressivity and emotional bankruptcy. Moreover, Beckett's *Film* would also seem to deviate from conventional methods of "suturing" over the site of production of a film's ideology; thus, one might conclude that the ideology of gender is exposed in Beckett's work rather than naturalized and covered over as it is in conventional cinema. However, a closer analysis of the shot by shot sequences of *Film*, particularly in the context of Oudart and Dayan's account of cinematic suturing, begins to suggest how both suture theory and the drama of E's pursuit of O are conspicuously male constructs which rely for their coherence on the unacknowledged but nonetheless structuring exclusion of a female subjectivity.

Consider, now, Dayan's account of how the operation of suture manipulates the spectator of a film. Presented with a given shot on the cinematic screen, the viewer at first experiences a feeling of possession over the image, and perceives himself as "fluidity, expansion, elasticity" (448). Obviously this is a pleasurable, proprietary feeling. But, according to Dayan (drawing from Oudart), this feeling only lasts until at some point the viewer becomes conscious of the frame of the screen, at which point "the triumph of his former possession of the image fades out" (448). Now he "distrusts" the camera, which seems to be "hiding things."

The spectator discovers that this possession of space was only partial, illusory. He feels dispossessed of what he was prevented from seeing. He discovers that he is only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the glance of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent. This ghost, who rules over the frame

and robs the spectator of his pleasure, Oudart proposes to call "the absent one." (448)

This initial plenitude, followed by disillusionment and a sense of rivalry with an "absent one" all occurs during the course of one shot. The viewer's disgruntled consciousness of an absent one threatens to disrupt the fictional (and ideological) flow of the film, because he begins to ask who controls the image, if it is not himself. As though to forestall such questioning, traditional cinema automatically mollifies the viewer by following the shot in question with a "countershot," that is, a cameral angle almost perfectly opposite to, or face to face with, the first cameral angle, so that what was missing from the first field of vision (i.e., everything outside the frame of the screen) is now filled in and accounted for. Moreover, the countershot also characteristically reveals a human figure to be looking in the direction that the camera had been pointing in the first shot: a character who seems to answer that question about who controls the image. Thus, as Dayan notes:

The absent one's glance is that of a nobody, which becomes (with the reverse shot) the glance of a somebody (a character present on the screen). Being on the screen, he can no longer compete with the spectator for the screen's possession. (449)

In this way, then, the reverse shot is said to "suture" the "hole opened in the spectator's imaginary relationship with the film field by his perception of the absent one" (449).

Thus, through this naturalizing process a culturally constructed fiction comes to be perceived as a natural, universal truth. When the "absent one" is accounted for by a character on the screen, the viewer is fooled into forgetting his question about who controls the image. As Dayan puts it:

The character whose glance takes possession of the image did not produce it. He is only somebody who sees, a spectator. The image therefore exists independently. It has no cause. It is.

In other terms, it is its own cause. By means of suture, the film-discourse presents itself as a product without a producer, a discourse without an origin. It speaks. Who speaks? Things speak for themselves and of course, they tell the

truth. Classical cinema establishes itself as the ventriloquist of ideology. (451)

What makes Dayan's account so germane to an analysis of *Film* is that it assumes for its efficacy a certain kind of viewing subject: one who necessarily desires to possess what he sees; one who reads the frame of the cinematic screen as a delimitation which signifies lack of possession, and posits, furthermore, possession by someone else; one who then enters into a competitive, rivalrous relationship with that imagined "absent one" who apparently possesses what he does not possess. And finally, one who will be placated by the "suturing" movement of the countershot and who will be relieved when "a benign other steps in and obscures the presence of the coercive and castrating Other" (Silverman (1983), 204). I am using the masculine pronoun here because I want to suggest that the spectator proposed by this theory of suture, and by *Film*, is a specifically male one: male in his desire for mastery over the image, male in his experiencing of rivalry with another for that mastery. And furthermore, the "absent one" is also, as projected rival, a male entity. He has, as Silverman (1983) points out, "all the attributes of the mythically potent symbolic father: potency, knowledge, transcendental vision, self-sufficiency, and discursive power" (204). Indeed, as Silverman notes elsewhere (1988) "what has not yet been adequately acknowledged by the theory of suture is the degree to which the compensatory representation [of a character within the profilmic world for the "absent one"] is coded as male" (13).

How then might we describe, in Oudart and Dayan's terms, the experience of the spectator as Beckett's *Film* proceeds and as one shot yields to the next? After a static shot of an eye in close up, we are shown a pan across brick building facades in a city environment. What seems to be an aimless meandering gaze soon, as it moves obliquely downward towards the sidewalk, becomes a concentrated directional gaze trained on a specific object: O, as he scrambles rapidly along the wall, explicitly trying to avoid being seen. In the terms presented by Dayan, we might suppose that until O comes into the picture, the innocent viewer is still experiencing a sense of control and possession over the field of vision offered to the sweeping gaze as it passes

freely over the building facades. When O appears, however, then shrinks away and averts his face, we might suspect that at this point, the viewer becomes aware of the frame, partly because a certain amount of time has passed, but more likely because O, by his gesture of self-protection, has just acknowledged the presence of someone who seems to be looking at him. The "absent one" at this point makes his presence felt for the viewer.

But (at least in the context of suture theory) this is an overdetermined "absent one," whose presence is reinforced repeatedly via the most overt and heavy-handed measures: as O moves, so does the "absent one": it soon becomes clear that O is being "tracked" in no neutral way by a mere recording device, but by an entity that has a palpable presence in the fiction of the film itself. This presence is soon confirmed by the reactions of the man and woman who, after being jostled by O, come into close up view as the camera approaches them, and then direct at us the exaggerated expression of horror which Beckett has termed the "agony of perceivedness." Their reaction is echoed by the recoiling of an elderly flower woman on a staircase, whom the "absent one" confronts after following O into a building.

Film departs from the usual system of suture in classical cinema insofar as the anticipated countershot is delayed far beyond the point at which it would function to pacify the viewer's displeasure at being denied control over the image. This delay is due in part to the refusal of O to look towards the camera, and thus provide a plausible point from which a countershot could emanate. As O approaches the couple in the street some hope arises that the couple will provide that plausible perspective, and on some level, perhaps, the viewer anticipates the cut that will inaugurate the desired countershot.³ The cut comes, but not with the expected effect. Instead of pointing back in the direction of the "absent one," as though from the perspective of the couple, the camera has merely moved up closer to this couple, and records them briefly from what we must assume is the indistinct perspective of O. It is doubly frus-

³Enoch Brater has also noted how, by refusing to take up the perspective of the couple at this point, Beckett "keeps the image they see from us" (81).

trating that this new perspective is even less satisfying than the first, and certainly does not compensate for what the first perspective could not see.

For the rest of the film, there are cuts, from shot to shot, but none of these cuts, at least until the final "investment" of the film, offers a suturing countershot. In fact, the cuts function rather to exacerbate a viewer's anxiety about who the "absent one" might be. The reactions of the couple and the flower woman confirm only that this absent one is present to them in the world of the film, but insofar as their perspectives are never taken up by the camera, we cannot see what they see, and so thereby settle the question as to where, exactly, the controlling other is located: inside or outside the realm of the film. Is the viewer in competition with this other, or not? ⁴

It is not insignificant that, at the enunciative level of the film, no one except O and the as yet unidentified entity behind the camera are allowed to become subjects in the visual discourse of the film. As soon as we are denied a countershot emanating from the couple, we gather that this film is, as it were, a dialogue (or dual monologue, since they do not mutually address each other) of looks between the camera and O. What then becomes clear is that no suturing countershot can take place until the "absent one" succeeds in confronting the face of O. Only then will a cut from the first to the second perspective yield the prohibited field of view. The "absent one's" pursuit of O, then, in the context of suture theory, becomes a dogged quest to bring himself into visibility—for O, and thus for us. Confronting O will be the means by which he will insert himself into the story of the film, and finally (he hopes) accomplish the work of suture. And it is precisely the limitation of the camera's subjectivity to O's and E's viewpoints that makes the film so exclusively a search for and flight from the suture that will

cover over their complicity.

If Beckett's characters could be said to be playing with a "dominant cultural screen," that screen includes the convention of suture in which a (male) audience's anxiety about lack is covered over by a countershot which will quell the question of who controls the cinematic image at the level of its enunciation. E and O stand in for the conventional human figures who inhabit the shot/countershot sequence. Instead of mutually complying with the convention, however, one entity avoids the suture, while the other one vigorously pursues it. Such a reading seems to inform Ruth Perlmutter's observation that the real flight in *Film* has been from the entrapment of cinema itself—the shot/countershot wherein the character's gaze is met by another; reflexive images which duplicate him or extend his personal space; framed or graphic devices that remind him that all consciousness is structured and allusive. (91-2)

I would suggest, however, that the "real flight" Perlmutter refers to here is not necessarily the most centrally structuring element of the film. As we will see, the traces of a denied subjectivity, indeed, of a subjectivity that must at all costs be excluded, abound through *Film*. And here, I must sketch out the significance of another "absent one" who is not accounted for by the story of suture this film seems to posit.

Once he thinks he is safely enclosed in the room, O sets about obscuring or removing every pair of eyes which might threaten to afford a countershot of him: he covers the window and the mirror, puts out the cat and dog, rips up what appears to be a crude representation of a deity on the wall, veils the fish and the parrot, then sits down to look at photographic records of his past life. Here, he rehearses the chronological story of the process that has presumably resulted in his present subjectivity.⁵ This process involves a series of multiple subjections to the look of

⁴Though approaching the issue from a phenomenological rather than a psychoanalytic perspective, Ruth Perlmutter has noted how *Film* is "continually circling around the central phenomenological notion at the heart of both cinema and reality: absence. *Film* is about absence—the absence of the subject from the viewer and the means of production (God or any external authority that produces meaning; the technical processes of the cinematic apparatus; direct experience) and, obversely, the absence of the viewer from the means of production and the subject" (88).

⁵Martin Dodsworth (1975) discusses the way in which these photographs "invite us to tell a story to ourselves" about O. For Dodsworth, *Film* is ultimately a disappointment; in it, he says, "there is a regrettable return to the cockiness of youth . . . an elevation above morality and human value which is objectionable also in Cage and is a blight on all anti-art that does not ironise its own aspirations into comedy" (181).

others, and each instance is coded according to the social or cultural institution it represents. In the broadest terms, then, O passes through the (both enabling and oppressive) apparatuses of the family, a formal education, marriage, military service, and parenthood, as we see him being looked at by his mother, a pet dog, a schoolmaster handing him a diploma, his fiancée, and his daughter (the military service is connoted by a uniform). In one of the photos, a curious doubling of the moment of recording is brought about by the presence in the foreground of an arm and camera, taking a picture of O as a young man with his fiancée. The specularity of this story of subjectivity is thus made explicit—each of these photos is not just a record of a determining moment in the development of O's identity, but a record of the very act of recording itself by which that identity comes into existence. This amounts almost to a kind of overt dramatization of what Kaja Silverman (1989) has theorized as the "photo session," where the (cultural) gaze is felt like "the clicking of an imaginary camera which photographs the subject and thereby constitutes him or her" (57). What we are watching is O looking at himself being looked at and recorded by the eyes of specific people in his life, the cultural institutions in which he is implicated, and the camera which reiterates these already wrought inscriptions. What is more, the slip in one of the photos that records the camera recording the couple acts as a reminder that O is being watched (from over his shoulder) by yet another set of eyes and/or a recording camera. As though to extricate himself from this *mise en abyme* of constituting looks, O moves backwards through this series of photos and rips them up, one by one, until he is left with the "first" picture of the mother and infant. He must strain harder to tear this photo into pieces, suggesting that it has some originary or inaugural status as the earliest instance of perceptual subjection.

That O must work harder to destroy the eyes of the mother in his vain attempt to free himself from the "gaze" is only one symptom among many of an underlying hostility towards the mother that runs throughout *Film*. What might not immediately be evident to the viewer as O flips through and then destroys these photos, is the way in which the iconography distinguishing the mother is

identical to the iconography that marks the other two female figures O has encountered on his way to the room: each is a mature, intently perceiving woman wearing a flowered hat. The representation of the mother in these photos provides retrospectively for a chain of observations and associations not quite accounted for by the would-be self-contained drama between E and O.

And here it ought to be acknowledged that a discussion of *Film* strictly according to suture theory is an analysis that must artificially suppose for its account a viewer who has not read Beckett's Grove Press scenario for *Film*, or has not been lectured to about *Film*, or has not in some way been pre-disposed to experience the film as the referent of the discourse that accompanies it. Indeed, most audiences of *Film*, given its relative unavailability, are made up of Beckett scholars and enthusiasts, and not of unsuspecting spectators whose interaction with the film as a shot by shot sequence is innocent of the textual matrix that coexists with *Film*'s actual materiality in the world.⁶ Thus, there are, for most of us, things we know about *Film* which it does not show us itself, not the least important of which is the information provided by Beckett in his "Notes" to the Scenario, that the room O occupies

obviously cannot be O's room. It may be supposed it is his mother's room, which he has not visited for many years and is now to occupy momentarily, to look after the pets, until she comes out of hospital. (59)

This apparently incidental detail is followed by a curious, but telling, disclaimer: that the identification of the room as O's mother's room "has no bearing on the film and need not be elucidated." The role of the mother in *Film*, then, is a very intriguing one indeed: she is an explicitly recognized phenomenon

⁶Perlmutter has called the film "an allegorical visual representation of its palimpsest, the film script" (83n.) and Ruby Cohn (1973) has noted that more people have probably read the script than seen the movie. At least two critics, in fact, appear to have written about the script without having seen the film: both Charles C. Hampton, Jr. (1968) and Ernst Fischer (1969) make references to the opening scene of the script in which numerous people are seen going to work in the morning. Neither critic seems aware that the scene was not included in the final print of *Film*, due to technical difficulties in the shooting.

in the scenario, but a disavowed, repressed presence in the film itself. The remark in the script is not filmically incorporated; in fact, it forbids its own incorporation on the screen, and must be kept below its consciousness. Thus the presence of the mother becomes the guilty secret of the film which can only be divulged like an hysterical symptom. Her presence on the screen has been suppressed, but she nevertheless "returns" in her analogical and representational forms: as the genteel but stern lady of the couple in the street, as the elderly flower woman on the stairs, and in the snapshots of herself in the family photographs where, as the scenario again tells us, her "severe eyes" are "devouring" the infant O.

What I am suggesting here is that the mother comes to be proposed to us as the etiological source of O's ambivalence about perceivedness; his eagerness to flee all gazes can be traced back to the coercive and severe gaze of the mother. If there is to be a repository for male hostility in this story, then, that repository will be (as it is, after all, in traditional cinema) the threatening, devouring mother.⁷

Note, after all, the role she plays in her manifestation as the woman on the street. Up until she has been jostled by O, we suppose *Film* to belong anachronistically to the genre of the silent film. As her male companion prepares to complain about O's rudeness to them, however, she turns to him and dramatically utters the film's first, and only, sound: a fierce "Shhh." This interdiction has the effect of stifling not only the man, but everyone else in the film as well.⁸ Moreover, it signals to us that this is not after all a silent film, but a "talkie" which has been silenced by the mother whose presence it cannot acknowledge, because she has been given just enough voice to forbid it. As a disguised revisitant, then, the mother gives the command that debars access to language and the

symbolic, thereby restricting the subjects of the narrative to the realm of the imaginary, and even perhaps to an endless reliance on specularly for self-affirmation. Such a reading of this sequence in the film is supported by a comment made by Raymond Federman with regard to the man who has been shushed by the film's only sound:

Forbidden to express his inner reaction in words, he stares agonizingly, mouth gaping, into the camera. The same expression appears on the face of the flower-girl, when, unable to express her terror verbally, she transfers this fear to her eyes. (282)

Clearly, here, Federman would seem to agree that the "anguish of perceivedness" is a direct result of a denial of access to the symbolic.

With this in mind, it is not hard to see E's pursuit of O as a kind of protective gesture: O's blurred and passive vision is not strong enough to vanquish the female obstacles in his path. E, on the other hand, ensures that these obstacles are decisively subdued: the woman in the street and her companion "hasten away" after experiencing the "agony of perceivedness," and the flower woman "sinks to the ground and lies with her face in scattered flowers" (21). In an extended discussion, before the actual shooting of *Film*, Beckett, his co-director Alan Schneider and cinematographer Boris Kaufman hashed out the technical difficulties they might encounter.⁹ A good portion of the discussion (what can be deciphered from the tapes of it on deposit at Syracuse University) circles obsessively around the elderly flower woman who is so decisively annihilated by E on the stairs of the vestibule. Schneider, anxious about the amount of time the camera would spend trained on this woman from O's perspective, as he crouches out of her view beneath the staircase, presses Beckett repeatedly for a

⁷Perlmutter notes, for example, that "Oedipal fears are implicit in the recoil from the fixed 'severe' stare of the mother" (88) and that "O's furtive actions . . . can be interpreted as a rejection of his mother's traces and an unwillingness to confront the primal relationship" (89).

⁸Ruby Cohn suggests the "'Sssh' may . . . signal silence for realistic questions" (208) which can only be answered "metaphysically."

⁹I am indebted to Stan Gontarski's article on *Film* for having alerted me to the existence of the tapes of the pre-production discussion. Gontarski's studies of Beckett's work are invaluable for their documentation of what he calls the realistic, psychological, even autobiographical material that Beckett strips away from successive drafts of his works to achieve a more abstract and formalistic final product. What interests me more than whether Beckett achieves the formalism he strives for, however, is what constitutes the (dangerous) content that must be edited out in the process.

psychological explanation for this lengthy shot. Beckett is reluctant at first to supply such an explanation, and seems in fact irritated that Schneider is posing the shot as problematic. Finally, Beckett rather impatiently insists that it is normal for a man like O (a man who never refuses to look) to want to scrutinize details of the objects that get in his way. Later, Schneider circles back to the vestibule scene, and questions the presence of the flower woman at all—anxious that she will detract from the dynamic being built up between E and O, thus reducing or weakening the intensity of their interaction. The ongoing drama between the protagonist's perceiving eye and his self as object of perception, or in other words, his flight from and pursuit of suture, must be maintained at all costs. To dwell too long on the flower woman, to have her present at all, risks having her become witness to the closed circuit of the protagonist's self-perception, risks, perhaps, her taking on a subjectivity of her own within the film. As the discussion moves to what Beckett describes as the quality of the world of the film (that everything goes a bit slow, but not in slow motion), Schneider reassures Beckett that he has found the perfect gal for the part of the flower woman: a very frail looking old woman who seems as though she might collapse, and who will take a long time to descend the stairway. Once the frailty of this actress has been established, the filmmakers are finally able to move away from her and on to other topics.

What Schneider has emphasized in this discussion is that the most troubling opposition in *Film* is not after all the one between E and O, but between them and the female "obstacles" that threaten to disrupt the "intensity" of their relationship. The compulsiveness with which the filmmakers return to the flower woman on the stairs in their discussion reproduces the anxiety surrounding her within the film. E and O, in this respect, are not at odds with each other at all, insofar as E ensures that O is able to continue, unimpeded, on his journey to the mother's room, the scene of the crime where he was brought into the world of perception in the first place.

Although Beckett stipulates that this "obviously" cannot be O's room in the Grove Press scenario, in the taped conversations he intimates *why* the ownership of the room should

be obvious.¹⁰ Schneider remarks, at a certain point in the tapes, that everyone who has read the working script for the film thinks the room is O's. In other words, as far as Schneider can see, there is nothing in the script to suggest that it could *not* be O's room. Beckett replies to the effect that a man like O would never live in a room (with a window, for instance) in which he would be so vulnerable to perceiving eyes. The corollary to this is, however, that such a room is precisely the kind of room O's mother *would* have, as though she is, in contrast to the son, indifferent to, or even satisfied with, the necessary specularly of *her* identity. What differentiates son from mother, indeed, male from female, according to the logic of *Film*, is the relation each bears to being in perception. On the side of the feminine would seem to be an acceptance and perpetuation of specularity; on the side of the masculine, a denial of and resistance to it. If a man is made to *feel* that his subjectivity relies on the external agency of the cultural gaze, it is only because he is inevitably caught within the (willfully specular) mother's domain. Starting with the mother's "severe" gaze, and extending through the chain of institutions she inaugurates, identity is, for a man, a series of entrapments originating and ending in the maternal space (her womb, her room).

Is it the culpable mother who is identified with the coercing "absent one," then, even and perhaps most explicitly, in the final cuts of *Film*, where the face-off between E and O does not quite answer that question of who is in control of the perceptual apparatus? When O's face comes into full view, as he wakes to find E confronting him, there is a cut to his perspective. This effectively brings E's face into view, and we understand, for the first time, that both hitherto hidden faces are the same. But contrary to the rules of suture in conventional cinema, this shot/countershot

¹⁰Rosemary Pountney (1988) has also found an explanation in one of Beckett's early drafts of *Film*, where he writes, "It cannot be his (he would not keep pairs of eyes and a mirror). It may be supposed that it is his mother's room" (126). This early draft testifies to the ambivalence Beckett felt about how explicit he should be in acknowledging the mother's presence in the film. In it, he toys with the idea of including a photo of O on the wall, inscribed "To my Mother, without rancour, Xmas 1929" (126). This photo was apparently replaced by the drawing of "God the Father."

sequence does not provide us with a slightly over the shoulder view of the human figure whose perspective we are meant to be sharing. As Dayan has explained, the purpose of the shot/countershot in the fiction film is to provide a character *within* that fiction who will account for the mechanism by which the camera sees what it sees. The cinematic image must always be "reasserted as somebody's point of view(447). Dayan asks us to take note, however, that

when this cinema adopts the personal form, it does so somewhat obliquely, rather like novelistic descriptions which use "he" rather than "I" for descriptions of the central character's experience. (447)

In other words, in order for the countershot to accomplish the work of suture, it must provide for us not only the view seen by the character whose perspective we take, but some evidence of that character (a fragment of head and shoulder, for example) *within* the frame of view, to stand in for the absent one and encourage us to forget his presence. Dayan notes that "[w]hen the camera *does* occupy the very place of a protagonist, the normal function of the film is impeded" (447).

Hence, even the long awaited countershot of E's face at the end of *Film* fails to accomplish the suture he has sought, for the camera remains within the completely subjective viewpoints of E and O. Since the attempt at suture has failed, in Dayan's terms, the viewer of *Film* must still presumably be uneasy about who controls and orders the images on the screen. Or to put it more precisely in the terms set up by *Film*, the viewer wonders who is it that maneuvers E and O into their specular relation to each other? If E and O are identical, then who submits this character to his own gaze? This "absent one" is not accounted for by the trick of the slightly oblique countershot, but it is, nevertheless, associated with the ghostly traces of the mother's influence. □

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T. Alan Broughton

THE LIMITS OF TRANSLATION

*Yet in the decline and decadence of things, the cicadas dear to the good Socrates
abide. And here certainly they still sing in ancient Greek.*

—Van Gogh, to his brother Theo.

A lizard, the sun, broken stone
of an emperor's foot. Fig tree,
sparrow, and rain on the purpled fruit.
Cicadas singing in Greek,
crickets in Hittite,
hawk in Sumerian screech.

You know these tongues by their sounds
but cannot speak back. Listen,
but do not reply till you trust
your own voice to carry its part.

The rampant lion clings to its crumbling arch
while locusts burst their shells and rasp.
Your world shows all the signs
of being older than it was
but how do you know what this says?
Trajan heard gulls
long before you were born,
but still they mew and dive.
The death you imagine
is never the one you live.

Ron MacLean

SHAKY GROUND

My memory of the earthquake has been reduced to sounds: shattering glass and cracking wood, the grinding of the earth, the anguish in Beth's voice. That anguish is still tangible to me weeks later, when wounds should have begun to heal. Instead, I've grown used to living with a certain level of tension, as if steeling myself against the constant possibility of danger will make me better prepared. The city has patched itself back together. Store windows have been replaced, lots plowed and debris cleared. Soon the only traces of the earthquake will be in the memories of those who lived through it. I will remember the fear: the terrible knowledge of how little I control my life.

"Hi. It's Mona."

The recorded voice of the girlfriend that walked out on me five years before played back at me from my answering machine as I singed my finger on the English muffin I'd just burned in the toaster. Even on tape, the awkwardness was evident in Mona's voice. I was beginning to lose my appetite.

"So how are you?" A laugh. "God, this is awful . . . Hard enough, but a recording."

I tossed the charred muffin at a green plastic trash can.

"Who's Beth? Wife? Girlfriend?"

I turned off the burner under the soup and felt my ears go red. Beth, my wife, was working late again, making the world safe for capitalism.

"I'm coming to California," Mona's voice said. I stared at the machine. "Saturday. I thought it might be nice to see you. What do you think?" Pause. "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. Maybe I'll call Saturday."

Click. It was Tuesday night. On Thursday morning there would be an earthquake, 6.1 on the Richter scale.

east of Los Angeles. Wealthier than we can afford. We bought a house there the year after we were married; the year after I decided to give up on art and get a responsible job; the year after the year after Mona. Beth's parents gave us the money for the down payment. Two bedrooms. Ranch style. Beth pointed out I could use one of the bedrooms as a studio if I wanted. I didn't want. At the time I was tired of waiting for someone, anyone, to recognize the brilliance of my painting. I was content as an art director at a small advertising agency.

Thursday morning. The smell of drying rain. I rolled onto my back, sprawled across the bed, long legs tangled in the cool sheets. My favorite time of morning is the short stretch after Beth gets up, when I can spread out, fluff both pillows under my head and pretend I don't have to go to work. I popped one eye open. Beth pulled a black camisole over her head and swished toward the closet. The clock ticked relentlessly. Beth emerged from the closet in her gray pinstripe suit, pink oxford blouse and paisley tie.

"Morning," she said. She leaned over to kiss me on the forehead. She smelled of hair spray and toothpaste. "You getting up?"

I opened the other eye. "Eventually." There was a silence during which I thought about telling her that Mona was coming. Beth had always worried about Mona. She feared I had married her on the rebound. I figured I'd tell her later. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the clock. "Shit. I'm late."

"David, not again."

I buried my head under a pillow.

"Fine. You're on your own."

We were an hour away from the earthquake. Early morning sun peeked under the window shade and carved a rectangle of light in the room. Beth walked through it and out the door.

Beth and I live in Arcadia, a sleepy suburb

Beth is an economist. A financial whiz. Immensely practical. Sometimes annoyingly so. She's passionate about her work. She used to be passionate about her hobbies. Model trains. Hiking. Skiing. I fell in love with her energy and her love for the outdoors, with her determined belief that there was more to life than work. That, and she's beautiful—short and athletic, with silken blond hair. I remember her in t-shirt and hiking boots, hauling a 30-pound pack as if it were nothing. I had a hard time believing she was a business type.

"So what's an earthquake feel like?" Mona asked, stirring a cup of decaf cappuccino with a miniature spoon.

We sat inside a small coffee shop on Melrose Avenue, watching the Saturday shoppers go by. Electrical tape covered a long, jagged crack which ran down the plate glass window. On the radio, Ray Davies screamed the lyrics to a 20-year-old Kinks song.

I shuddered. "The sound is the worst part. Like God grinding his teeth." My stomach started to rumble. "I don't want to think about it."

Two or three other tables were occupied, by people our age, late twenties, or younger, in shorts and t-shirts. A small line of people waited at the counter. Everyone talked about earthquakes. I shut my ears to it.

"So who's Beth?" Mona asked. Her green eyes were as penetrating as I'd remembered them.

"My wife, the economist."

"She working, or does she not want to meet me?"

"Working," I said, feeling the tips of my ears go red. It was true, but it was also true I hadn't yet told her Mona was coming.

She nodded her head and sipped her drink and I told her the story of Beth and I.

"No more painting? Not at all?" she asked when I'd finished.

I shook my head. "Seemed pointless. I had to make a living."

"Miss it?"

I motioned to the waitress for more coffee. "No."

"You could never give it up. I don't believe you."

"You'll have to." The waitress filled my cup. "What's your story?"

Mona shook her head and chewed on the end of a plastic stirrer. "Most of last year I worked on Senator Kerry's re-election campaign." Two red spots appeared on her cheeks. "I'm still at the museum of science Art director. I met Alan there." The spots on her cheeks grew to the size of quarters. "We were together two years. It was great."

A thirtyish man with a receding hairline and an expanding belly moved past us, carrying two cups. A small woman followed him and they sat behind us. I leaned my forearm on the table and raised my eyebrows. "Was?"

Mona ran a hand through a tangled mass of red hair. "I got pregnant right around the time I started working on the Kerry campaign. I was excited about the baby and the election. Alan thought I should give one of them up. I didn't. I got sick. Doctor told me I had to slow down." She flashed me a tired grin. "I lost the baby, won the election and lost Alan."

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The radio announcer said that the death toll from the earthquake was up to forty-three. "I'm sorry."

She shrugged, rubbed red from her eyes and tried to laugh. "There's a conference at the Pasadena Civic. Museum wanted to send someone." She stirred her coffee. "Just wasn't supposed to work out this way, you know?"

"I know."

A teenage boy with a flattop haircut rode a loud skateboard along the sidewalk. Talking Heads sang on the radio, a song from 10 years ago. I felt old.

One night shortly after Beth and I were married I came upon my palette, tucked in the corner of a damp closet. It was late, after Beth had gone to sleep. I sat on the floor, holding it, and though the moonlight shed only shadow on it, I could feel the colors, the combinations of dried paint from past moments of inspiration, in a way that unnerved me. I had removed a tube of paint as well; I squeezed some out and rubbed it between a thumb and forefinger. Within a few minutes I had spread paint on my arms, my chest, my face. I looked down at the tube in my hand and felt exposed. I put things away and slunk off to the shower.

On Monday the stock market dropped 500 points and Beth came home late, looking like a punch drunk boxer. I didn't know what to say. We sat on the couch for a while, just looking at each other. We went to bed, and fell asleep watching t.v.

An eerie quality of light drips through the windows at three a.m. I awoke to the ghostly sound of an unfamiliar voice. The television. I rubbed at my face, trying to push sleepiness away. Beth slept fitfully beside me. The voice on the television caught my attention.

"... the one seismologists expect will register between eight and nine on the Richter scale." A thin, hawk-like man with deep-set eyes leaned back, arms casually folded as he spoke. "All routes out of the city would be jammed," he said, stroking his chin, a trace of a sadistic smile on his face. "Freeways would become graveyards. Fires alone could be expected to kill 10,000 people."

I wanted to hold Beth. I wanted to tell her that the stock market would recover. I wanted to tell her there wouldn't be any more earthquakes. I slid out of bed and switched off the t.v. There was a cracking sound as the house settled. It made my neck freeze. I went toward the spare bedroom.

Shadows fell in long diagonals across the empty kitchen. A car drove past the house; the floor shook a little and I felt ashamed for being jumpy. In the spare room closet I found the paints that I hadn't touched in two years, and a canvas. I squeezed paint onto my pallet and stared at it a moment. The paint seemed to stare back at me, expectant, as though I now had a responsibility to do something with it. I dipped the tip of my index finger and held it close to my face, then swirled the tiny blob of color with my thumb. Inhaling deeply, I wondered if I would find a scent that awoke long-dormant passion. It smelled like an old friend. No more, no less. I wiped my fingers against the canvas, leaving blue smudges. Having thus begun, I found the boldness to continue.

Mona and I sat toward the front in a half-empty movie theater on a Tuesday night, watching "The Undead." A night scene rendered the theater nearly dark. Mona elbowed me in the ribs and passed me a half-empty bottle of champagne she'd snuck in.

"So you're mad," she whispered, swallowing.

"She's working too hard. I'm tired of not talking to her." I took a long drink, warming up to my subject. An aftershock rattled the theater. People gasped and whispered. On the screen a man walked down a dark rainy street and the music said that something bad was about to happen to him. "She's so wrapped up in her work. We spend our time maintaining a lifestyle we don't have time to enjoy."

A bald man with a head like a chicken hissed at us from three rows behind. I lowered my voice. "We used to do things together. I can't remember the last time we went to the mountains."

A flashlight clicked on, and behind it I could see the acne-stained face of an adolescent usher in a blue polyester suit and black bow tie. He sucked in his breath like a member of some primitive tribe about to endure a rite of passage. "I'll have to take that." He pointed at the champagne in Mona's hand.

Mona giggled in a way that sounded like she was choking. The teenage usher blushed and held out his hand. "This is perfect," she said. "We've been caught."

I gave the boy my best responsible adult grin and tried to reason with him. "Come on," I said. "We're being quiet and we're keeping our feet off the chairs." Mona, as if to support me, sat up rigidly straight.

The man behind us hissed and cursed. On the screen a girl screamed as her brother's arm was torn off at the shoulder. Mona was convulsed with laughter. Our usher was getting angry. His voice cracked. "If you want to come to the lobby, you can talk to the manager." His eyes were determined. Someone in front of us coughed, and I followed the sound until I saw Tony and Albert, two teenage boys from down the street. I shrunk into my seat, feeling foolish and guilty. I took a long drink before handing the kid the nearly empty bottle.

"You're right," I said to him. "You're absolutely right."

One Friday afternoon when Beth and I were dating, I was stuck in traffic on I-5, on my way to meet her in Reno for some cross-country skiing. I remember fuming, thinking

I had better things to do with my time than sit in stalled traffic. After all, I was a promising artist; my time was important. I remember looking around me and seeing a whole lot of people who also thought their time was important. And I felt small. I felt like it was time to grow up. Shortly after, I stopped painting.

Dusk settled on a Wednesday night and I painted in the semi-darkness, in hiding, using glowing shades of purple. The front door squeaked open and I heard Beth's footsteps on the wood floor. I put down the brush, wiped my hands on a dropcloth and went out to greet her, closing the door behind me. Beth dragged herself toward the kitchen table, laden with manila folders, a frayed copy of the *Wall Street Journal* tucked under one arm. She unloaded the pile on the table and sighed.

"Hi," she said. Her eyes had a sunken, ghostlike quality. "I'm exhausted." I kissed her forehead, stroked her hair and pushed a cardboard container from Jack in the Box at her.

"Chicken strips," I said, touching the side of the box. "Still warm."

She began to wade through the ocean of folders and papers.

I wanted to tell her about Mona. About painting.

"Six hundred points in three days," she muttered. There was a desperate intensity in her eyes and in the way she hovered over her work. "Do you know how many people have been ruined by this?"

I shook my head.

"Thousands. We got a call today. There's a good chance Japan is going to call in long-term bonds." She rested her forehead on the table and took a deep breath. "Everybody's talking about '29, about snowballing. I keep thinking I should have seen it coming. But how could you forecast that? How can you tell people it's in their best interest not to sell? They think we're lying, trying to protect ourselves. Maybe they're right." She dragged both hands through her hair, leaving it in a slightly disheveled state that I recognized from the days when I thought I knew her.

"You're an economist, right? Not a stockbroker? I thought there was a difference." I stopped, pushing my lips together and hold-

ing my breath. This wasn't coming out right. I shrugged. "Why do you have to take this so personally?"

I fumbled with the papers on the table.

"Years of building a career." She snapped her fingers. "It can go down the tubes like that." She looked like a shipwreck survivor still treading water. "No control. No warning."

My fingers, plunging through the pile of papers in nervous frustration, landed upon something solid. A red cloth bound book, so old the title had worn off the cover.

"What's this?"

She looked up, puzzled at having her thoughts derailed. She answered at the same time I saw the title page.

"Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus."

All my blood raced to my toes.

"I'm trying to find the date California is supposed to fall into the sea."

I searched her eyes for amusement. I didn't see any.

There's a photograph tacked to my office bulletin board. A Polaroid of Mona and I with a stuffed elephant she'd won at a shooting gallery at the county fair. She loved the fair, especially the mutant vegetables: zucchini the size of watermelons, tomatoes the size of basketballs. She said such things were proof that anything was possible in life. Several times I've started to take that photo down, feeling a vague sense of guilt, as though it represented some small betrayal of my marriage. Yet it's still up, and I ask myself what it is I love about that picture: the woman in it or the bright future I thought it promised.

Beth agreed to go camping for the weekend. I talked her into it. I got home early Friday night and started packing. Rummaging through the back of a desk drawer looking for flares, I came upon a box of slides of my old paintings, from two gallery shows I had done. Warily, I opened the box and began to look through them.

The phone rang. It was Beth. She sounded tired. The stock market had dropped another hundred and fifty points.

"I'll be another half hour or so," she said. "How about if we just grab dinner tonight

and leave in the morning?"

Six o'clock. I grabbed a beer from the refrigerator, opened a bag of Cheetos and sat down to wait.

Seven o'clock.

Seven-thirty. The empty Cheetos bag lay crumpled on the floor next to four beer bottles. At ten after eight the phone rang.

"David, I've got a problem. All hell's breaking loose here."

"Yeah?" I wasn't going to make this easy for her.

"I'm not going to be able to go this weekend. I'm really sorry."

Silence.

"You're angry."

"Can't they get along without you?"

"I need to be here."

More silence. I felt my face getting hot.

"Why don't you go anyway? It would be good for you."

"That wasn't the point."

A hissing of voices in the background. "Look, David, I've gotta go. I'm sorry."

I told myself I understood. I knew that the circumstances called for understanding. I put the phone down gently and opened another beer. In the desk drawer I found a portable slide viewer. I called Mona's hotel and invited her over.

The broken bough of our front yard pine tree dropped low enough to provide a comfortable seat against the trunk. Slides, viewer and beer rested on the branch in front of me. I leaned against the trunk and watched the sky.

A light-colored rental Chrysler pulled up at the curb. I sipped my beer and watched Mona get out. I couldn't see much of her. A silhouette; the texture of her skin; the soft fall of her hair. She looked young. She looked like the person I'd fallen in love with.

"Hey," I said. "Over here."

Mona settled in beside me on the tree. "What'cha doin'?"

I christened another six-pack, passed her a beer and the viewer. She pressed the black button to click on the battery-powered bulb. A smile played around the corners of her mouth. "Brings back memories."

"I haven't looked at these in years."

"I remember this one." The smile spread over Mona's face. "The first sale."

I nodded.

"The show at the Institute of Contemporary Art. Great party. Remember?"

Just slightly. A chill crawled up my spine to think about it. I was 24. I was hot. I was going places. "That was one of the best nights of my life."

"Me too."

"Know what I remember most about it?"

Mona leaned back against me and I put my arms around her waist. "No. What?"

"Dancing with you until we were sweating like pigs and then walking back to your apartment in the rain." We laughed together. A car drove by. "That night was the first time we made love."

"Yup."

I shivered, and Mona looked back at me.

"Everyone should get to feel like that—king for a night. Like all your dreams are bound to come true."

"What dreams?"

"A studio loft in the Village. Galleries clamoring for my work." We laughed. "Selling enough to keep painting. You."

Credit the beer and the power of nostalgia. Mona leaned up and we kissed a long, slow, patient kiss that crossed over a lot of time. She turned over on top of me and I lost my balance, nearly causing us both to slide off the tree. I sat up quickly, straddling the bough, slightly apart from her.

She put a hand over her eyes. "Great, Mona." She blushed. "Lucky slip?"

I shrugged. "Enough to make me think twice." I moved over beside her and put my arm around her shoulder. We both stared at our feet, which dangled inches above the ground.

We talked until well after midnight. She said she was going to go.

"What are you doing this weekend?"

"I was thinking about the San Diego Zoo."

The moon slipped behind a cloud. I felt inspired. "Let's go."

"Are you serious? You mean now?"

"Right now."

The moon was full. The Chrysler had a sun roof and a V-8 engine. I wrote Beth a note, then introduced Mona to I-15. We took the long way to San Diego, driving all night along desert highways, windows open, Talking Heads on the tape deck.

Beth's face appears to me at odd moments. Particular expressions of hers are frozen in my mind. A February weekend in the mountains near Tahoe. We were cross country skiing, and Beth had fallen in a ridge between two trees. Her skis were tangled above her and she was half sitting, half lying down, unable to get her balance to stand up. Fear mixed with laughter in her eyes. I released her skis and tried to pull her out, but ended up falling in on her. I held onto her, laughing, relieved. From where we sat, it looked as though the trees climbed for miles into the sky. The valley stretched before us, looking beautiful and harmless. Insulated by the snow, I sat amazed at the power and the strength and the fragile touch of life.

Sun beat down on a Saturday afternoon. From the upper deck of a two-tier bus I looked out through sunglasses and a sinus headache at three giraffes. Mona and I were at the San Diego Zoo. We'd reached Balboa Park at six a.m., pulled into the parking lot and slept a few hours in the Chrysler.

"Giraffes hearts grow to two-and-a-half feet long," our tour guide said in a voice that practiced cheerfulness. She was probably a junior at San Diego State, studying accounting or some equally practical subject. "They have the highest blood pressure of any mammal."

Mona sat stiffly beside me, her eyes hidden behind impenetrable dark glasses. "Okay, so what's going on here. Are we getting involved in something?"

I laughed. "I love you."

"I love you too. That's not an answer."

The bus engine groaned and we moved ahead to a dusty rectangular enclosure with five timid animals in the center.

"Kenyan gazelles practice springbok," our guide said, "a herd exercise where they jump six or seven feet in the air for no apparent reason."

I turned toward Mona. "I want to punish Beth."

"Not good enough."

"I know." I shrugged. "You make me feel successful. I haven't felt that way in a long time."

Sun picked out purple highlights in Mona's hair. "We were so confident. So sure that we

were special. That disappointment couldn't touch us."

"I dug out the paints the other night. A couple of times this week. After Beth has gone to sleep."

Mona's smile had sadness in it. "I'm glad you're painting. Why so secret?"

"I don't know. No pressure maybe. No expectations."

We passed under the shade of a giant eucalyptus tree. Our guide's amplified voice crackled through the loudspeaker behind us. "Ostriches are very powerful. They can disembowel a lion with one swift kick." An ostrich walked across the enclosure, not looking at all powerful, kicking up dust and bobbing its head like one of those toys in a car's back window.

"You miss Alan?" The bus jerked forward and moved up a small hill in the shade. "Sorry. Stupid question."

Mona stared forward. "When I lost the baby, I had this ache, like someone had blown a hole in me. I'd be at work, I'd get these pains that would double me over. I'd go into the bathroom and just lean against the wall and cry. Losing Alan made it even deeper." The bus stopped again. "Some days I'm fine, then all of a sudden I start to weep and I can't stop." Tears swelled her eyes. "But I don't know what I would have done differently."

Two elephants below us stood in the shade of a eucalyptus, nuzzling each other. The tour guide explained, "Elephants throw dirt on their backs to protect their skin. It's very sensitive and they do get sunburned."

I put a hand on Mona's shoulder. She smiled. "What about you?"

"I love Beth. I want to make it work."

The bus swung around a corner and sunlight stabbed at our eyes. "I hope you do."

Because of a soldier of fortune convention in town, we couldn't get Mona her own room that night; but we slept on opposite edges of the bed. There might as well have been a wall between us. We were downright noble.

I awoke with a warm, cloudy feeling in my head and the vague sense of movement around me. I rolled over, momentarily disillusioned, expecting to see Beth half-clothed in our bedroom. Instead I saw Mona in a t-shirt, fumbling through an overnight bag. Through barely opened eyes, I watched her move silently into the bathroom and shut the

door.

An ill-fated urge prompted me to call Beth. I waited anxiously as the phone rang, heard the distant sound of Mona humming in the shower.

"Hello?" Beth's voice was groggy.

"Hi," I said. "I miss you."

"Thanks." She laughed softly, yawned.

"What are you doing up so early?"

"What are you doing sleeping so late?"

She told me about her meetings, about the market quieting down. I told her I was glad. I was.

"Hey," she said. "I'm really sorry about this weekend. You enjoying yourself?"

It took me a minute to answer. "Yeah."

I don't remember hearing the water turn off. All I remember is hearing Mona's voice coming through the door.

"David?"

I cringed. Her voice was right behind me.

"Hey, David, I thought . . ."

She stopped as soon as she saw the phone in my hand, but it was too late.

Beth's voice pounded like a gavel in my ear. "Who's that?"

Beth asked me to move out. There were things she wanted to think through. I wasn't in a position to argue. I didn't feel as innocent as technically I was. Mona promised she'd write. I reassured her it wasn't her fault. Not even close.

I packed some clothes without thinking what, or for how long I'd be gone. I felt empty inside. Beth drove me to the bus station. I was going to visit my brother in Seattle.

At the side of the road, a fire hydrant, bent by the earthquake, was surrounded by mud from a broken water line. A breeze blew through the car windows.

"Do you see that?" Beth asked, pointing to an object that had just caught my attention: a

bright white light surrounded by a vague halo shone out of the night sky. As she spoke, I thought I saw something metallic detach itself and move away, leaving a cloud of brightly colored gases that began to spread rapidly.

"Yeah." I felt the hairs of my neck grow stiff. I tuned the radio to an all-news station. Beth pulled the car to the side of the road. Others were doing the same.

The cloud's white center began to expand and, as though the sky were a piece of litmus paper freshly dipped in acid, its edges turned bright green, orange and purple in an expanding arc.

"I'm scared," Beth said, transfixed. A weight seemed to descend on us; the pressures of the last few weeks gathering into this mysterious force that hung above us. Thoughts ran through my mind: nuclear missiles, deadly gas, alien attack. The white orb grew like a balloon that would pop and take our whole world with it.

Then, just as suddenly as it started, it began to fade. The colors weakened slightly. The expansion stopped. Beth looked at me with a gaze that wanted to hope but didn't trust enough. The radio announcer cleared it up: an errant missile had gone off from Vandenburg Air Force Base and left a brightly colored cloud over the San Gabriel Valley. There was no danger. I watched the tension flow out of Beth's face and I smiled. The cloud began to shrink and the colors to fade. Beth pulled back into traffic, driving toward the bus station, toward indefinite separation. In another minute the cloud would be gone, every trace erased from the sky, and we'd be left with confusion, with a fear that we were somewhat ashamed of, as though the whole incident were something we'd imagined. □

Ron MacLean has published work in The Little Magazine and Other Voices.

Stanley H. Barkan

TWO POETS BY AN OPEN WINDOW

(for Menke Katz and Yussel Greenspan)

W_{inter}.
Two poets
and a candle
lived in a room
with an open window.

A wind came
and blew out
the candle,
and there was no light
for either poet
to write by.

So the first poet said:
"I will speak my poem,
and you will remember it;
you will speak your poem,
and I will remember it.
Thus, we will become
each other's books."

The second poet
readily agreed,
and both poets proceeded
to speak their poems
into the windy
candleless dark
by an open window.

Time passed . . .
and the second of the two poets
—perhaps from a cold caught
from a wind from an open win-
dow—
sickened and died.

"Now," said the first poet,
"who will be my memory?
O, dear friend,
with you have I died too!"

Two poets for one,
struck down by
a single *ruach*—
a wind come out
of the crack of an open window
to blow out both their lights.

Bruce E. Fleming

MR. OVERTON'S SOLUTION: ON SYSTEMS IN THOUGHT

The narrator of *The Way of All Flesh*, Samuel Butler's now little-read coming-of-age novel and spiritual autobiography, is a certain Mr. Overton, author of light theatrical comedies and godfather to Ernest Pontifex, the young man whose life story he is writing. Overton's purpose in narrating Ernest's story—he makes very clear—is to lay bare the spirit-crushing aspects of Victorian patriarchy and religious hypocrisy. For Overton, these two have combined to produce religious dogmatism. And religious dogmatism thrives because it is based on systematic belief, a consciously erected system of thought that repels all attackers and is continually shoring up its defenses.

It is for this reason that both Mr. Overton's identification of the problem and his proposed solution—which I will be considering here—are relevant to our intellectual situation in the 1990s in America. For we currently find ourselves within a period rife with systems of thought, albeit what we might call systems of the second degree: the systems that currently hold center stage in our intellectual world are sceptical systems, systems-of-no-system. The issue for Mr. Overton is that of systems of any sort, all of which he rejects; the content of these systems of the second degree is precisely this as well. Yet since they too are systems, they too are amenable both to Mr. Overton's criticism, as well as, it may be, to his solution.

The bulk of this novel—written in the 1870s and 1880s but not published until 1903, a year after the author's death—consists of the description of Ernest's lamentable subservience both to his parents and to received religion as taught by his father, a Church of England priest. (This is also the most satisfying part of the book in purely literary terms, because the narrator's attack is two-pronged: he convinces us simultaneously of his hero's inherent goodness through the adoption of Ernest's point of view, and of the utter vileness of Ernest's

two hypocritical parents by resorting to narratorial omniscience when this fails.) To be sure, Ernest's liberation from his father is in a sense effected by fate rather than himself, for it begins only when he is sentenced to prison for propositioning a woman he had taken to be a prostitute but who, in fact, turns out to be an "honest woman."

This prison sentence simultaneously alienates Ernest from his parents and causes him to abandon his own duties as priest, which he had dutifully taken up; he does not yet know that Mr. Overton is holding in trust for him a large sum of money from a deceased aunt that will make him financially independent. In prison he had finally read the Bible for the first time with an "open mind," and had decided that there was not sufficient justification to accept what it said as truth. Upon his release he therefore turns, for the first time in his life, to other writings. Abandoning the religious dogmatism of his father, he begins searching for truth among what Butler regards as a series of competing secular dogmatisms—systems of organized philosophy. Overton (and through him Butler) disapproves of this, on the grounds that no system of thought can ever be impervious to disproof:

He was continually studying scientific and metaphysical writers, in the hope of either finding or making for himself a philosopher's stone in the shape of a system which should go on all fours under all circumstances, instead of being liable to be upset at every touch and turn, as every system yet promulgated has turned out to be. (319)

Ultimately Ernest, digesting and discarding the Empiricist philosopher Bishop Berkeley, decides that "no system based on absolute certainty was possible," and is "contented," which pleases Overton a good deal more.

To my relief [says Overton] he told me

that he had concluded that no system which should go perfectly upon all fours was possible, inasmuch as no one could get behind Bishop Berkeley, and therefore no absolutely incontrovertible first premise could ever be laid. (319)

The Way of All Flesh is a deliciously didactic book, especially for post New-Critical readers who are used to being told that they may not identify author with either narrator or hero. Of course these are not identical in precise details, but certainly their point of view is so, with Overton speaking for Butler and Ernest being a "before" picture of them both. Clearly Butler means Overton's approval of Ernest's somewhat belated discovery to serve as a recommendation for the reader. We are being told that systems in thought are by definition untenable.

Yet who can deny that we do erect and adopt such systems? Indeed contemporary thought—to which I will be returning below—insists that all thought is created in the context of a system. Certainly mankind seems impelled to search for a structure of ideas or thoughts that underlie, are taken to be logically prior to, or otherwise substantiate all others; to identify a limited set of principles or sentences that, once learned, allow us to treat all others as subsidiary. The world is far too complex and full of data to allow us to take account of all of it; we deal with this plethora of sensations by foregrounding some and refusing even to perceive others (as Gestalt psychology has shown) or by dividing it up into like groups which give structure to what we see and can ingest (as Foucault has pointed out in *The Order of Things*, writing of the way knowledge is organized by our taxonomies, themselves contingent).

Certainly—to take a particular example of this simultaneous organization and limitation of perception by our structures—no one who has dealt with the history of critical reception of literary works can fail to be impressed by the way works "ahead of their time" (as we say, meaning works for which there was no established type) are rejected as senseless or barbarous according to the understanding of the permissible forms of literature and yet subsequently are "seen" to be the precursors of other forms entirely. For what this means is that a type has subsequently been established that allows us to re-

write our perception of the world in which they first appeared. As a result it is senseless to castigate the people of that time for not seeing what was not yet the case, to scorn the critics who failed to "understand" the greatness of (say) *Moby Dick*, for it is we who have created that greatness. And this, ultimately, may be T.S. Eliot's perception (in "Tradition and the Individual Talent") that literature of the present? actually changes the nature of that of the past. We know so much more than our predecessors, he says—and they are what we know.

The value of a system of thought is clearly that it transcends the particularities of time and place—even (or especially) if it includes determinations of time and place within it, such as that of Heidegger for the former and that of Hegel for both. Of course, the inclusion of time and place within the system often has the appearance of acknowledging these as external factors. The Marxist system, for example, has attempted to distance itself from other systematic thought precisely on the grounds that other systems are determined by the "ground" of all thought, which is to say the social conditions in which such thought develops. Yet insofar as the one set of concepts held to be primary is precisely that of the Marxist system, it too becomes no less systematic (and frequently dogmatic) than any other—as the application of this system to actual political systems in Eastern Europe has shown.

The intellectual history of the late twentieth century in America may be understood as a posing of the question of the validity of systems of thought *per se*, which is another way of referring to the well-known self-reflexive stance of most of our contemporary philosophies. One major strain of thought in America, a strain dominant among many intellectuals through the 80s (and showing signs of strength even into the 90s) is that which insists upon the theoretical (rather than, with the Marxists, temporal/geographical) contingency of all systems. As a result this constitutes a variant on skepticism: the denial that there can be a system in thought, a system-of-no-system. The patron saint of this strain of thought is Ferdinand Saussure, with his perception (in the *Course in General Linguistics*) that reference is produced not by an inherent unitary link between the sign and that which

it signifies, but instead by a system of interlocking relations between the signs themselves, so that the system of signs in fact floats in a kind of hermeneutic limbo, somehow referring to things outside of itself despite its inherently self-contained nature. And the evident conclusion we make from this is that there is no moral (or societal, or epistemological) imperative for one system of reference over another: cubism is just as "real" as the paintings of the Barbizon school, Stein as potentially valid as Dickens.

This perception holds the key not only to semiotics—a term which still leaves many contemporary thinkers somewhat in the dark—but to the now-moribund structuralist movement of the 30s to the 60s and to the post-structuralism which is playing out its final act on the stages of America's less than avant-garde universities, where it has now become orthodoxy. Semiotics, it seems to me, is best seen as a discourse whose very possibility was created by Saussure's deflection of attention from a relation between the sign and the world to the relations between signs. Prior to Saussure's split of sign and signified, there was essentially nothing to say about the way meaning came to be: it could be shown, as if with a wave of the hand, because it was held to be self-evident. After Saussure (or perhaps, after the criticism by the late Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, of what he perceived to be the errors of his earlier *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*), the attention was directed away from this relation about which there was nothing to say towards relations that could be described in great detail: the relations between any given sign and other signs, descriptions of what meant what rather than explanations of them. In a sense, the Saussurian revolution was a turn away from theory to description, just as the *Philosophical Investigations* turned philosophy towards descriptions of the way language actually worked.

The political implications of this insistence on the inherent contingency of all systems—and hence by definition, of all systems of thought as well as those of signification—were drawn by Foucault, working from Nietzsche, and in America through the Foucauldian works of writers like Edward Said (*Orientalism*) and a spate of contemporary writers who treat perceptions of non-

Western worlds as creations by a dominant culture of a shadowy Other world (as in V.Y. Mudimbe's *The Creation of Africa*). For if all signification is contingent to the system of which it is a part and has no inherent connection with a world outside, then it is tantamount to fascism (as well as mistaken logic) to assert that any one system has inherent primacy over any other. We may think that we are right, but this is only within the value system which holds certain things to be the criteria of being right, or other things to be identical with the good. With a different set of values, a different conclusion will be reached.

Yet of course the problem is that all systems of thought may in this sense be contingent on their presuppositions—save the system of thought which tells us this. And those who defend such systems-of-no-system defend their own system no less vehemently than those of the old-time, "first-order" dogmatism such as that of Ernest Pontifex's father. Writers attempting to question this curious systematizing of relativism, such as Allan Bloom in his *The Closing of the American Mind* (which I will be considering briefly below) were tarred with the brush of right-wing reactionism—much the way those who criticised the institutionalization of Marxist thought in "socialist" countries were held not only to be dangerous, but to have missed the ineluctable sense of the system which was prior to all others systems.

The paradox we are faced with now, therefore, is the construction, by thinkers of a handful of various stripes, of systems of thought which themselves deny being systematic. In the hands of a Derrida, this stance can be exhilarating, heady stuff—though the hardening of the categories (to use Wayne Booth's phrase) of Derridean deconstruction into a methodology for doing literary criticism shows us the way in which inherently nihilistic stances themselves inevitably take on substance and come to control the centers of power that they once criticised. (Frank Lentricchia examines this phenomenon in *Beyond the New Criticism*.) And the dogmatism of so many proponents of radical relativism in the 1980s and into the 1990s—if one did not recite the credo of this relativism one was racist, sexist, and philosophically stupid—is another context in which many people came

to see the divergence between what a philosophy says and what it does, the curious way in which the denial of all systems itself passes the invisible line into becoming a system, and in the hands of the right (wrong) people, a stick to be used to beat others.

In his much-discussed bestseller of the late 80s, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom discusses this situation of living in a world of relativisms quickly hardening into absolutisms. Much has been made in the critical reactions to this book of Bloom's grouching against such givens of modern life as rock music and divorce on demand. Yet it seems to me that the philosophically most potent subject in this entire book is to be found not in the consideration of precise facets of modern life of which the body of the text is composed, but instead in the work's introduction, and that it offers an important example of the paradox I am referring to here. I mean Bloom's insistence that the relativism of perception which Westerners use as the basis for their reaction to non-relativistic Third World cultures is itself culturally specific—specific, precisely, to the Western culture which provides the givens of perception to those doing the considering.

Bloom is speaking of mandatory university courses in Third World cultures which inevitably, he says, have a "demagogic intention." Their point "is to force students to recognize that there are other ways of thinking and that Western ways are not better." Yet Bloom sees a problem (or, as I would say, a paradox) in this situation. For "if the students were really to learn something of the minds of any of these non-Western cultures . . . they would find that each and every one of these cultures is ethnocentric. All of them think their way is the best way." Relativism, or self-doubt, then, is not universal, but particular to the society doing the perceiving, the Western one. And Bloom makes this point clearly:

Only in the Western nations, i.e., those influenced by Greek philosophy, is there some willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one's own way. One should conclude from the study of non-Western cultures that not only to prefer one's own way but to believe it best, superior to all others, is primary and even natural—exactly the opposite of what is intended by requiring stu-

dents to study these cultures. What we are really doing is applying a Western prejudice—which we covertly take to indicate the superiority of our culture—and deforming the evidence of those other cultures to attest to its validity. (36)

The paradox Bloom outlines consists in the fact that our very attempt to avoid cultural self-centeredness is itself culturally self-centered, our attempt to be value-neutral in our perception evidence of our inability to escape the confines of our particular intellectual system. (This particular development of Western thought from its quite different Enlightenment bases is what Bloom deplors, and it is his deploring this development that has acted as such a lightning rod for reader ire.) What seems salutary about this reminder on Bloom's part, it seems to me, is the insistence that there is a difference between systematic thought and the world outside—and that the most philosophically self-coherent system (such as that of universal doubt) can itself be shown to be limited in application by the introduction of evidence from this world outside (such as the perception that not everyone on the earth thinks this way) which by definition could not have been foreseen by the system itself.

In philosophical terms, of course, it may be that this is simply a working out of Gödel's incompleteness theorem—which Douglas Hofstadter, in turn, perceives to be a version of the ancient Cretan liars' paradox (wherein Epimenides, a Cretan, made the statement that "All Cretans are liars"), and which he paraphrases as saying that "all consistent axiomatic formulations of number theory include undecidable propositions" (17). In technical terms this means that absolute certainty in mathematical systems can never be reached; here its practical equivalent is a consciousness of the limitations of human intellect, a kind of humility before the existence of other minds, other things. I would describe this humility as a willingness to accept that though we may polish the creations of the mind to the point where they are fiendishly perfect and self-enclosed, we can never be sure that the world which exists outside of us may not prove us wrong. Indeed, if I were to identify one single characteristic of contemporary thought, it is that it suffers from the sin of

superbia, pride—an intellectual version of the notion that things must be a certain way because we say they are so.

Of course, thinkers fond of the systematization of no-systems approach would be quick to situate this viewpoint itself in its proper philosophical and temporal perspective: presupposing as a given the Cartesian split between mind and matter (so that mind can perfect something which nonetheless fails to take account of the world), the scientific distantiation from the world that is taken as the basis for the empirical world view which so many of these systems-of-no-system put into question, most notably Heidegger in *Being and Time*. (Indeed, Descartes is the big bogeyman of most contemporary thinkers, as he is of Heidegger.) These defenders of systems-of-no-system, of course, would assert that there is no value-free articulation possible, and hence no way to oppose a world "out there" to a world as perceived by the individual. And even Peirce, who insisted on the capacity of the world to bump our foreheads and bruise our limbs and called it "Secondness" (as a twin to the mind's "Firstness" that somehow combined with it, in good Hegelian fashion, into a third term that included them both), has been largely read in the modern world as an idealist pure and simple, rather than the problematic hybrid of idealist and realist that he was.

And of course, there is a dogmatic version of this attitude of humility with regards to thought: it is precisely the organized religion against which Ernest Pontifex was rebelling, which insists that "Der Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt": man proposes, God disposes. Indeed, what I have called the sin of intellectual pride is a sin only within the givens of religion, which stands perennially in danger of making a content out of its the very insistence on the ineffability of a power beyond our comprehension. As long as the church can keep its position of societal primacy, of course, these two are synonymous: in a curious way the Protestant Reformation had already won its points by the realization of its sheer possibility, based on the notion that there is more than one way of conceiving of these qualities of ineffability and transcendence.

All of which leaves us in something of a quandary. Nowadays we have little difficulty dealing with dogmatisms of the first

order; intellectual sophistication begins with dogmatisms of the second order. Yet what are the implications of taking seriously a thorough-going skepticism with regards to systematic thought? Does this land us back in the lap of first-order dogmatism? On one hand there is the assertion that all systems of thought are relative; on the other is the attempt by others to take this seriously and say that even systems such as these must therefore by definition be so, that relativism itself must have its limit. And here we are back at the Cretan liar's paradox, or Gödel: does the latter prove or disprove the former? There must, in Hofstadter's gloss on Gödel, be an alternative to either true or false, and thought alone will not decide the issue.

Leaving what? Perhaps a kind of Johnsonian "realism" of action: every student of philosophy knows the story of Dr. Johnson kicking the stone and saying "thus do I refute Bishop Berkeley." Of course this both is, and is not, a refutation, a refutation by action as opposed to a refutation by thought. And from the position of thought, this is no refutation at all. Was this what Ernest Pontifex meant by "getting behind" Bishop Berkeley?

The orthodoxy regnant in Ernest's Victorian world was one of religion's absolutism, a systematization of thought at the first degree: certain things are so, and no questions are to be asked. Today, we find ourselves having to question an orthodoxy whose systematization of thought is at least of the second degree: nothing is inherently so, and no questions are to be asked. But the place we find ourselves may be the same—the more so in that both worlds constitute an attack on patriarchy and the institutions which support it. At another point in the text than that which I have quoted from above, Overton describes the situation at the time through a reflection on the situation of his hero on the day when he exits from prison. At this point in his life, Overton reflects, Ernest has a changed and an unchanged part; these correspond to changed and unchanged parts of the world outside. And he continues:

All our lives long, every day and every hour, we are engaged in the process of accommodating our changed and unchanged selves to changed and unchanged surroundings; living, in fact, is nothing else than this process of accom-

modation A life will be successful or not according as the power of accommodation is equal to or unequal to the strain of fusing and adjusting internal and external changes.

This, it seems, is a combination of Peirce's "Firstness" with his "Secondness"—and seems to imply the Cartesian point of departure that seems so inescapable in my reasoning above. Yet this is not the end of Overton's reasoning:

The trouble is that in the end we shall be driven to admit the unity of the universe so completely as to be compelled to deny that there is either an external or an internal, but must see everything both as external and internal at one and the same time, subject and object—external and internal—being unified as much as everything else.

Here Butler anticipates all of the anti-Cartesian, post-Hegelian thought I have been referring to above. Yet he does not leave this holding the palm of victory more firmly than that which it has overthrown. Overton continues cheerfully as follows: "This will knock our whole system over, but then every system has got to be knocked over by something."

So here we are back at the question of systematization of thought *per se* with which I opened above; clearly the question being raised here concerns the validity of any system of thought, even of skepticism as a system. And the solution Overton proposes seems to go Dr. Johnson one better, as it were, a Dr. Johnson who neither subscribed to Berkeleyan idealism, nor felt that kicking a stone proved anything at all.

Much the best way out of this difficulty is to go in for separation between internal and external—subject and object—when we find this convenient [that is, Cartesianism as a point of departure], and unity between the same when we find unity convenient. This is illogical, but extremes are alone logical, and they are always absurd, the mean is alone practicable and it is always illogical. It is faith and not logic which is the supreme arbiter. (295-296)

This position, as it happens, is that which Ernest has adopted with respect to the received religion with which he was brought

up: that religion cannot be proven logically, and must (if at all) be accepted on faith. This at once robs religion of its imperative and its dogmatism: we may well accept it, but this must be an individual decision, and cannot be either arbitrated or legislated.

It is at this point that Butler/Overton produces his summing-up, his denial of system that at the same time resists the impulse to be made into a system. And it is this solution which, I would like to propose, may provide a way for us today out of the thicket of endless self-reference in which we find ourselves today.

They say all roads lead to Rome, and all philosophies that I have ever seen lead ultimately either to some gross absurdity, or else to the conclusion already more than once insisted on in these pages, that the just shall live by faith, that is to say that sensible people will get through life by rule of thumb as they may interpret it most conveniently without asking too many questions for conscience's sake. Take any fact, and reason upon it to the bitter end, and it will ere long lead to this as the only refuge from some palpable folly. (296)

Life, therefore, in which systems of thought become objects of use, things to be gone through and disposed of when circumstances mitigate for their being so. Of course, it will be objected, this is what most people do who have never been instructed in philosophy, even if they do so without knowing it: philosophy is precisely the art of developing out of precise actions the implied bases on which it implicitly rests. And yet Ernest knows this is so, apologizing to Overton for having taken so long to come to the conclusion that most people know long before their twenty-sixth year. Indeed, his hero remains a certain Townsley, a golden boy who is well-bred, rich, good-looking, and perhaps rather stupid, so that he has never gone through the rigors of thought that have plagued Ernest. (One thinks of the dumb blondes of both sexes that Thomas Mann's quintessentially Romantic/Modernist gentleman artist, Tonio Kröger, idolized.)

It may be that this conclusion of Ernest and Overton will seem no less dogmatic than the received religion from which it is ostensibly a diversion: Overton talks unembarrassedly of

"the just"—thereby proposing a system akin to G.E. Moore's intuitionistic understanding of "the good" whose effect was to valorize the cliquishness of the Bloomsbury circles that received it so eagerly.

Yet the relevant point here is surely that of Bloom: that we do not cease to talk of "the just"—or indeed, cease to talk in any absolutist terms whatever—because we understand that others hold different notions of these. Instead, we simply understand that all absolutist terms are absolute only for a limited time and place, a particular set of circumstances. Yet this realization is not in itself sufficient to cause us to abandon them; for this to happen the situation in which they obtained must itself change. In short, we conceptualize according to particulars in the world: when particulars change, our conceptualizations change. All words are inventions, and this includes those that deny that all words are inventions.

The realization of the contingency of human thoughts, the frailty (to use a religious term) of mankind in the face of the universe, is a realization that lies too deep for tears: it may undergird a way of life, but it cannot

provide the justification for a system of thought. It gives us an orientation in life, but not a content to it. And it is this sense of providing that Mr. Overton's solution may be a viable one for us today, a way out of the paradoxes with which our urge to systematic thought has presented us in the final years of the twentieth century. □

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Vivian Lamarque

THE GENTLEMAN OF THE FOOTPRINTS

Translated by Renata Treitel

At five that evening in the light of the sky
things looked so well outlined o would that
the gentleman were there to see them with her
the things of the universe outlined.
Instead the gentleman wasn't there to see them? had he left?
Yes, the streets had stolen his steps, had set his
footprints in a line with the tips turning the other way.

THE IDEA OF DISAGREEMENT IN THE CRITICISM OF MARTIN S. DWORKIN

In the December, 1956 issue of *The Progressive*, there is a letter to the editor, written by Robert G. Weyant of Kent, Ohio, commenting upon a review by Martin S. Dorkin of *Storm Center* (1956), "a film about a small town's persecution of a librarian who refused on grounds of civil liberty to remove a book favoring communism from public library shelves."¹ The letter praises Dworkin for being "honest enough to be critical of a motion picture with whose theme he is in obvious agreement,"² and "courageous enough to state a criticism of a minority organization" (Weyant 29). The organization referred to by Weyant was the Catholic Legion of Decency, which, after sharply criticizing *Storm Center*, had invoked the "Special" classification rather than outright condemnation.

Appearing in the same issue is another letter to the editor, from John Michael, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who describes himself a, "a devoted Fan"³ of Martin Dworkin, and then proceeds to question a statement made by Dworkin in his review of *Storm Center*, to wit, that the film does not specifically "confront the problem for democratic countries of the absolute obedience in Catholicism to the definition by constituted agencies of the church of what may be read, seen, heard, or otherwise experienced without imperiling eternal salvation, ("The Hurricane's" 34). Michael points out that "while the Legion of Decency is an agency of the Catholic Church, it is not one to whose judgements Catholics owe 'absolute obedience'" (Michael 29). The Legion, Michael adds, issues no orders; it

only makes recommendations. Responding in the same issue to this observation, Dworkin states that "Mr. Michael—like Father Dulles⁴ and other Catholics who recognize the official bounds of the Legion's authority—may be underestimating the practical force of its classifications and recommendations."⁵ Then, following a description of how the Legion's authority works in practice, he concludes that "to raise the qualifications of its powers as they are strictly defined, which Mr. Michael has done, may therefore be more academic than actually operative" ("Dworkin Responds" 30).

I have described in some detail an exchange of letters, now over thirty-five years old, and long after the name and function of the Legion of Decency have been changed, because it exemplifies the application by Dworkin of an idea of disagreement that is central to an understanding of his criticism. Before dealing with this idea, however, its place in his thinking, how it has been applied in his criticism and why it is of particular importance today, at a critical juncture in the history of education in this country, some background is necessary.

By 1952, the year he published an article dealing specifically with the subject of disagreement, Martin Dworkin was already an experienced professional writer, having published poems and short stories as well as numerous articles on a wide range of subject, extending from photography to political theory. In addition, he had already begun to write film criticism regularly, which was to continue throughout the decade of the fifties and into the early sixties for such journals as

¹Martin S. Dworkin, "The Hurricane's Clouded Eye," *The Progressive* 20.10 (October 1956): 34.

²Robert G. Weyant, "Letter to the Editor," *The Progressive* 20.12 (December 1956): 29.

³John Michael, "Letter to the Editor," *The Progressive* 20.12 (December 1956): 29.

⁴Michael mentions in his letter that Father Avery Dulles, S.J., had recently published an article on the Legion of Decency in the Catholic weekly, *America* (June 2, 1956).

⁵Martin S. Dworkin, "Dworkin Responds," *The Progressive* 20.1 (December 1956): 30.

*The New Leader, The New Republic, The Progressive and The Canadian Commentator.*⁶

It was between 1945 and 1952, while both a student and a professional writer, that Dworkin hammered out the approach that has informed his criticism to this day. Struck by the persistence of disagreement among philosophers (the ongoing search for a universal methodology notwithstanding), and stimulated after World War II and his return from the service to civilian pursuits by contact with such outstanding teachers at the New School for Social Research in New York as Felix Kaufmann, Kurt Riezler, and Leo Strauss, his thinking was to bear fruit (all too briefly, he has maintained) with the publication of "Disagreement: the Situation of Reason."

The article was written as a reply to the philosophical position of his doctoral adviser, Felix Kaufmann, who had died suddenly in December, 1949. Kaufmann had been working in the field of scientific philosophy, attempting, along with collaborators like Hans Reichenbach and Herbert Feigl, to use the methods of logical analysis scientifically in order to clarify meanings. One gets an idea of the caliber of this man as well as a brief indication of their disagreement in the moving tribute Dworkin wrote to his beloved teacher, entitled "Last Conference," which was published as a part of "Felix Kaufmann: A Memorial."

While many of us might have doubts concerning his conception of philosophy as clarification, and of the history of thought as a progress toward clarity, the impact of his enthusiasm, of his sincerely humble approach to thinkers and thinking carried far beyond this disagreement or that.⁷

And more to the point being made here, We walked to the subway, talking of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, still munching grapes from a holiday basket that had been in the office. He enjoyed riding in the subway, he said, far more than in an

automobile such as Mrs. Kaufmann had just bought two weeks before. One could study on the subway; he could always shut out the surrounding noise by turning off his hearing-aid. On the way to Riverdale, we compared the contents of our briefcases, and then, said goodbye. The next evening he was dead, although most of us did not know of it until Sunday, as the family characteristically had not wished to intrude upon the Christmas celebrations of his many friends. Socrates had said that the true philosopher is always dying; but there is more. Something of philosophy always, dies as well; even as the endless seeking goes forward, the beloved seekers perish ("Felix Kaufmann" 14).

Dworkin did not find another doctoral adviser, and so did not complete his doctoral studies. Perhaps, after Kaufmann died, he never really tried.

To return to "Disagreement: the Situation of Reason," it was from a point of view that was more sharply critical of the conception that there is one method or doctrine to which all the others had to give way that Dworkin wrote:

That there is one truth to the adherent of any particular religion, and many philosophies is the ineluctable circumstance of reason—providing a continuing ground for entertaining a caveat against what can become an overweening admiration for philosophical method.

For it is often argued, from one philosophical vantage or another, that the persistence of many issues in the agorae of debate is attributable to nothing more than that the protagonists will never admit that they are wrong. Such an argument builds upon an implicit assumption of a universal methodology, to whose canons all must perforce adhere.⁸

Then, examining further the issue of the one "true" philosophical method, Dworkin points out how limited the logical arguments employed in any methodology are, when it is a question of altering an individual conviction.

In the course of being convinced, or of

⁶See Bernard J. Looks, "An Important But Neglected Voice: The Film Criticism of Martin S. Dworkin," *New Orleans Review* 15.3 (November 1988): 38-43.

⁷Hans Reichenbach, Herbert Feigl, Martin Dworkin, "Felix Kaufmann: A Memorial," edited by Howard Bennett, *12th Streets: A Quarterly* III. 2 (1950):14.

⁸Martin S. Dworkin, "Disagreement: The Situation of Reason," *The Scientific Monthly* LXXV.2 (August 1952):118.

"changing his mind," a person is involved to an extent transcending the simple opposition of logical alternatives. He is a whole person, with a unique and inescapable past, and not simply the part of his psyche responsive to logical ordering. Although his private attitude may be of only ancillary relevance so far as the purely logical validity of any statement is concerned, it is of the first significance to anyone whose concern is to communicate with him. Choice from among contending alternatives is a matter of conviction; a person chooses one or another for reasons, and not simply as the creature of an inevitable momentum that alone determines which way he will go, and when. ("Disagreement," 118)

Finally, what is the significance of disagreement in a world in which any person is free to choose from among contending alternatives? I would suggest that Dworkin's entire critical approach rests upon the answer he gives to this question.

As the great, uncharted dialogue goes forward, as alternative confronts alternative and yields or is transformed to rise again, the issue of disagreement is seen as not simply one of controversy, but of conviction: of the perennial attainment of individual convictions. Each particular person must be met, and given reason, why he should choose one view rather than another. A doctrine conceiving its own validity as absolute, necessary, and exclusive does not in its very nature take into account the vital uniqueness, of individual personhood, that can choose for itself to be more truly itself. ("Disagreement" 119)

In dealing with the audience of those who must choose for themselves, Dworkin takes as his model the example in Plato's *Republic*, and argues that it is not necessary for the success of the method of dialogue to persuade all who participate. "It is for the benefit of those who desire to learn and can yet do so" ("Disagreement" 118) that Socrates weighs reason "against unreason, truth against falsity, justice against injustice, reality against appearance" ("Disagreement" 118). For example, he doesn't hope to persuade Thrasymachus, who remains adamant in defense of the doctrine that justice is power.

Thus, "the unconvinced character in the dialogue is revealed not as a representation of unresolvable dilemma and indecision, but as an exemplified alternative, held up for scrutiny on the part of the participating observer." ("Disagreement" 118)

It was to be expected that a man who considered disagreement to be the necessary situation of reason, and had taken as his model for that situation the relationship between Socrates the teacher-critic, and his audience, would, as a critic of film, regard that relationship as an indispensable guide in the formation of his own critical approach. Indeed, in "The Suburbs of Criticism," one of a series of articles written during the fifties in which he explores the relationship between the film producer, the audience and the critic, Dworkin defines criticism as "essentially a discipline of rhetoric, of persuasion; its method is analysis, and its highest function is the enrichment of the interior conversation."⁹ Clearly, he was writing for an audience of educated readers, for individuals capable of choosing for themselves, as befits citizens in a democracy.

In "The Money and the Message," another in the same series, Dworkin, eschewing polemics, takes the movie industrialists of the fifties to task, not, as one might think, for being concerned, primarily about the box office (indeed, he was alone among critics during the fifties in arguing that it was not possible to understand film except through the box office), but for accepting as "fact" the idea that "message" films cannot be profitable. The public chooses entertainment rather than to be propagandized, they claimed, and is willing to pay for it. To this, Dworkin replied that it is true "that the public prefers to be entertained, rather than harangued. Hence, it is not surprising that 'message' movies have failed to draw the public when their messages have been too poorly delivered. There are enough examples of films which have stated their good intentions in terms of good cinema—good art, to point the simple moral here: that what you say in films takes on its life and interest from the way you say it. A film that is merely a vehicle to transport some message, however worthy,

⁹Martin S. Dworkin, "The Suburbs of Criticism," *The Progressive* 20.6 (June 1956): 29.

will surely mire in boredom."¹⁰

Having shown that he thinks good films can make a profit, Dworkin goes on, in the following passage, to challenge the assumption made by the movie industrialists that because they design films to entertain that no learning or uncritical habituation takes place:

The really fundamental fact of the movie business is not that the public demands to be entertained, and will pay only rarely to be informed. All films are "message" films; all films make propaganda—if only for daydreaming; all films take sides somehow on the issue of ideological intentionality: whether the audience is to be treated as a mass, whose constituent units are assumed to have no individuality, and whose anonymity is to be seduced to move in predetermined directions—or whether it is to be treated as a group of individuals, to be persuaded to choose freely. This is the underlying issue of all the mass media of our time, defining the responsibility of those involved. ("The Money" 34)

Thus, an important part of Dworkin's idea of disagreement—that the audience be treated as a group of individuals who are free to choose—is, in effect, denied by the movie makers, who, Dworkin charges, are being irresponsible and therefore undemocratic. Moreover, there would appear to be a close connection between Dworkin's idea of disagreement and his idea of education. In fact, it can be said that his idea of disagreement is in essence an idea of education. In a truly prophetic passage, making connections that are not fully understood to this day, Dworkin writes that

To "give the public what it wants" in the bald sense of the market place through the mass media is to give the public no choice. The illusion of freedom in the creation and selection of all the manufactured experiences with which we are constantly bombarded is the truly dangerous narcotic of our times. The freedom proffered by the industrialists of the movies and the other mass media is too often the freedom of addicts, choosing among brands of opium and flavors of lotus leaves. ("The Money" 35)

As for the movie audience itself, even as he

criticized the film producers for what they were doing to it, and held up an idea of what that audience ought to be, Dworkin deplored the actual low level of concern on the part of the public with the quality of what it was seeing. This, he attributed to the widespread notion that entertainment is without significance, and angrily asserted that "for an understanding of a world dominated by popular attitudes—tyrannized in fact, by 'the revolt of the masses'—it should be obvious that the popular arts may be the most significant of all" ("The Suburbs" 30).

In 1954, the show business trade paper *Variety* conducted a comprehensive survey of the influence of film criticism on film audiences. The survey of exhibitors revealed that, based upon admission sales, the mass audience paid little attention to either film reviews or to serious criticism. In commenting on these results, which seemed to others to be proof of the low state of film criticism, Dworkin develops further his idea of what a critic's relationship to his readers ought to be. Rejecting as a goal for criticism the remarkable power over the American theatre exercised at the time by a few New York newspaper critics, which he describes as an extreme case of what happens when criticism affects the box office directly, Dworkin goes on to say that

No matter how much people may use critical opinions as guides, critical judgment may not refer to commercial success or failure for proof of its validity. The standards of the critic of films, as those of critics of any other aspect of culture, ought to provide leadership, to be sure—but not in the sense of the celebratedly typical revolutionary demagogue, who races after the mobs to find out where they are going, in order to lead them. ("The Suburbs" 29)

Finally, Dworkin cautions "against the false paradise of conscientious agreement" ("The Suburbs" 30), arguing that "Jerusalem of intelligent participation in the film experience, in fact, may be built only in 'suburbs of dissent,' where critics and audiences eternally disagree, as those who see for themselves eternally must" ("The Suburbs" 30). With this vigorous affirmation of his idea of disagreement, Dworkin was placing himself in admiring but critical opposition to W. H.

Auden's bitter view, as expressed in the poem "We Too Had Known Golden Hours, namely that 'the suburb of dissent'"¹¹ as something to which sensitive educated people had been reduced as a result of the destruction of an earlier, presumably better society at the hands of today's demotic society.¹²

At the urging of his friend and colleague, Lawrence A. Cremin, Dworkin decided, by the early sixties, to give up writing film criticism regularly and to continue what had already become a close association with Teachers College, Columbia University. There, throughout the sixties and into the late seventies, Dworkin was a lecturer in philosophy.¹³ He was also a research associate at the Institute of Philosophy and Politics of Education¹⁴ at Teachers College and editor of his own series, *Studies in Culture and Communication*, published by Teachers College Press. Among the books included in this series were a number of important works on cinema for which Dworkin wrote introductions which are among the most profound commentaries on film and society written in this country since the end of World War II.¹⁵

During the late seventies, at a time of growing commitment to ideologically motivated criticism in academic circles, Dworkin returned to the idea of disagreement, giving it

further amplification in the distinction that he drew between criticism and ideology in his general editor, foreword to Lewis Jacob's collection of the film writings of Harry Alan Potamkin, an important American ideologue critic of film in the early thirties.

As we have seen, Dworkin had charged the movie industrialists of the fifties with depriving the public of a choice by creating an illusion of freedom which was no better than the freedom of addicts who choose from among different kinds of narcotics. With regard to the fundamental issue of ideological intentionality, the industrialists who controlled cinema and the other mass media were subverting democracy by treating audiences as anonymous masses to be seduced and led in directions decided in advance, rather than as individuals to be persuaded to make free choices. Creating a sense of great urgency for Dworkin was the insight and conviction that the popular arts, and, in particular, cinema, the most persuasive of those arts, were of decisive importance in a world more and more controlled if not tyrannized by popular attitudes.

This insight concerning the persuasive power of cinema was to reappear in "Criticism and Ideology: A Note on Cinema," Dworkin's foreword to the Potamkin book, where it is related first to the purposes of religionists in this country, who discovered this power well before the first World War, and then to those of ideologues of both the "Left" and the "Right" following the war.

So much and so deeply does cinema, for the sovereign example, involve individuals in collective imagining, so fully are the prepared and projected visions of motion pictures interiorized and assimilated into the mind and spirit, that it is no wonder that religionists take them seriously at once. And it is no wonder too, that the criticism, of the cinema in the years of political, social, and economic cataclysm and depression, following the World War of 1914-18, should turn so fervently ideological, appropriating the language of earlier religious concern and converting it to new dogmatic purposes.¹⁶

Following logically from the realization of the great persuasive power of cinema was the fundamental issue of ideological intentional-

¹⁰Martin S. Dworkin, "The Money and the Message," *The Progressive* 19.2 (February 1955): 34.

¹¹W. H. Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (New York:Random House, 1967) 318.

¹²A. L. Rowse offers this interpretation of Auden's poem in *The Poet Auden: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988) 92, and says that the poem certainly speaks for him.

¹³He originated courses at Teachers College in *Aesthetics and Education*, and in *Education, Ideology, and Mass Communication*.

¹⁴Under the auspices of the institute, Dworkin directed "studies of ideology in theories and practices of formal and informal education, focusing on modes of persuasion and propaganda, and cultural agencies of art, public ritual, and mass entertainment."

¹⁵See "National Images and International Culture," Foreword to Lewis Jacobs' *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History*. With an Essay, *Experimental Cinema in America 1921-1947* (1968); "The Writing on the Screen," Foreword to Gene D. Phillips, *Graham Greene: The Films of His Fiction* (1974); "Criticism and Ideology: A Note on Cinema," Foreword to Lewis Jacobs, *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Alan Potamkin*, (1977).

ity, which had remained central for Dworkin. But it was now partisan cultural criticism, that is, criticism limited by ideology, an extension of the politics of the new totalitarianisms of the twentieth century, that he was taking to task. "If one may speak at all of cultural criticism in the totalitarian state," Dworkin writes, "its role is necessarily defined as inflexibly as is that of the arts, the critic primarily performing a recognizably sacerdotal function as guide to doctrinal orthodoxy and official approval" ("Criticism and Ideology" xvii). Specifically concerned in "Criticism and Ideology" with the impact of Marxist ideology upon the artistic judgments in the criticism of Harry Alan Potamkin, who died in 1933 at the age of thirty-three, Dworkin writes that even what Potamkin waved as red flags in his film criticism were often also banners for serious, critical understanding of the arts in general and the cinema in particular—that is, given time sufficient for critical consideration, and the necessary condition of liberty" ("Criticism and Ideology" xxi). And further, to the question being raised here,

For Potamkin to write the way he did, and for us to be able to read him, in agreement or not, in his own time as now calls for an openness; for argument and the publication of ideas that was . . . impossible—or accidental and very rare . . . in the kind of society and political system for which he thought he was working. What this has to do with his artistic judgments is a question we must ponder, one that brings up many of the most difficult problems of philosophy, religion, and politics, concerning the nature of the arts and their function in the formation of consciousness, of thought itself. (Criticism and Ideology" xxi)

Finally, regarding openness to disagreement, which he situates at the heart of criticism as distinguished from ideology, Dworkin points out that

An art open to untrammelled criticism, implying all the indeterminacies of man's reasoning for himself, is no longer invulnerable as ideologically orthodox and therefore sacrosanct. An ideology open to criticism, to disagreement, is no longer ideology . . .

Thus it is of the very nature of critical reasoning that there is acknowledgment of and provision for disagreement—an essentiality that actually empowers and even requires the reasoner to contend with the most dogmatic positions. With these, of course, he would probably disagree—or, if he did agree, it would necessarily be for *reasons*, and not only in accordance with dogmatic authority. ("Criticism and Ideology" xix)

Let it be said, that in bringing out in his own series a collection of the film writings of "perhaps the best, but unquestionably the most influential, of American ideologue film critics, Harry Alan Potamkin" ("Criticism and Ideology" xx) and contending with him in his admiring but critical general editor's foreword, Dworkin provides further evidence that he practices the idea of disagreement that he preaches. Moreover, it is a practice that may be followed with profit by scholar, today as concern mounts over the destructive polarization that increasingly afflicts the academic community.

A third of a century has now passed since the launching of Sputnik in 1957. During this time, American institutions of higher learning have increasingly become battlegrounds of conflicting ideas of education. Questions of what should be taught, who should be taught, and who should teach have been in bitter contention. A dangerous polarization divides academia's men and women of intellect. Nor have other areas of our national life been spared these acrimonious divisions, which inevitably involve issues of society, politics and culture as well as those of education.

Today's academic reformers, with roots deeply embedded in the reforming zeal of the 1960's, are often tenured professors as well as administrators, with power in academia. Many consider themselves part of a continuing struggle for the advancement of social democracy in America. They understand the educational aspect of this struggle to require

¹⁶Martin S. Dworkin, "Criticism and Ideology: A Note on Cinema," General Editor's foreword to *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Alan Potamkin*, Selected, Arranged and Introduced by Lewis Jacob; in the series Studies in Culture and Communication (New York: Teachers College Press, 1977) xvi.

radical changes in the humanities to reflect the educational needs and interest, of groups that are perceived as "oppressed" by the reformers.

It is not surprising that this movement of reform, with such comprehensive intentions, has produced a sharp reaction on the part of many of those who were already established in the humanities and who now seek to conserve traditional ideas and practices. The real danger in this growing confrontation is that as the traditionalists continue to react to the assault of what is an avowedly ideological movement of reform they are tending to become ideological themselves, thus giving the appearance of substance to the claim, so widespread in academia today, that all criticism is ideological.

I for one can only regard this prevailing tendency of our intellectuals to ideologize, with foreboding. And one can only hope that those in departments of literature and the many others undoubtedly who seek a middle ground will succeed, as Gerald Graff put it, in bringing "the different ideologies and meth-

ods of the literature department and the university into fruitful relation and opposition."¹⁷ But this can only happen, I submit, if the diversity of view, on the academic left as well as on the academic right gradually manifests a new spirit, marked by a fuller acceptance of disagreement as being the situation of reason, requiring in a democracy, as Dworkin stated, such a degree of openness to criticism as to constitute a repudiation of ideological dogma. For, to accept a situation in which our intellectuals consider themselves partisans in a historically determined clash of unalterably opposed ideologies is suicidal, as so much of the history of the twentieth century amply demonstrates. Granted that many difficult questions remain and must be pondered, yet, as Dworkin points out, the fact "that we are able to think and decide, applying criticism to the judgment of criticism, may itself be one kind of answer and a considerable one" ("Criticism and Ideology xxi). □

¹⁷Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 250.

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Pedro Salinas

YES

Translated by Joe Bolton

Everything says yes.
Yes the sky, the blue,
and yes, the blue sea,
seas, skies, blues
with foams and breezes,
joyful monosyllables
repeating endlessly.
One yes answers yes
to another yes. Great dialogues
repeated within our hearing
above the sea
from world to world: yes.
The air reads like a text
of yes after long yes, flashes
of massive machinery,
so much fallen snow,
flake on flake, covering
the earth with an enormous,
white yes. Grand day.
Today we can come near
what is unspoken:
thought, love,
the bones behind our foreheads:
they are the slaves of yes.
It is the only word
that grants the world today.
Quick, love, to desire,
to desire with the intensity
of momentary madness,
to desire those things
impossible, yet longed for,
left unsaid so many times,
for so long, which today
we cry out for.
Certain today
—today, nothing more than today—
that every no was false,
an appearance, a delay,
an innocent skin.
And that it was secretly,
quietly preparing itself
for the measure of this longing,
all we desire in vain,
but with great delight: the yes.

Jeffery Alan Triggs

HURT INTO POETRY: THE POLITICAL VERSES OF SEAMUS HEANEY AND ROBERT BLY

One of the stubborn issues in modern poetry is the question of its proper, or most effective, political role. Since the time of the romantics, poets have tended by nature and habit toward inwardness, but certain exigent occasions, wars and revolutions, have continually "hurt" them into public utterance. Still there is always an uneasiness attending these public occasions, a sense that the true business of the poet lies elsewhere. Modern poets have only rarely played an active part in the public events surrounding them, and they have been likely to waver between Shelley's injunction to act as "unofficial legislators" and Yeats's more sobering advice: "I think it better that in times like these / A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth / We have no gift to set a statesman right."

The poets who followed the New Critical approach, at least, were unambiguous when it came to adjudicating the rival claims of poetry and propaganda on a poet's loyalty: passionate commitment meant nothing less or more than passionate commitment to one's art. Political poems were to be judged, not by the effectiveness of their discourse, but by their success as linguistic objects. The tense but relatively quiescent decade of the 'fifties helped to foster such an ideal. An era of outward calm produced a poetry of personal concerns, which could be considered political only by implication. The "well wrought" poem's external, formal balance held in check its inward ironies, its seething and often paradoxical emotions. It is not surprising that modern Marxist critics like Terry Eagleton consider the New Critical approach "a recipe for political inertia, and thus for submission to the political status quo."¹ This seeming calm, of course, was shattered in the 'sixties, when once again social violence and the vio-

lence of war stimulated the "unofficial legislator" in many a poet, while at the same time blasting the formal strictures of the New Critics in favor of what came to be known as open form. It is worth noting that political poetry in recent times, as the pun in my title may suggest, is almost certain to be adversarial rather than celebratory, a poetry of protest against one "political status quo" or another.

The poets I shall be concerned with here, Robert Bly and Seamus Heaney, embody very different approaches to the problem of a poet's social and political responsibility. Both began their careers writing personal, even pastoral lyrics, but turned because of what they perceived as political necessity—in Bly's case the Vietnam War, in Heaney's case the "troubles" in Northern Ireland—to poetry of overtly political significance. Both have remained devoted in their own ways to the craft of poetry. Their difference stems from the traditions to which they have allied themselves and the balances they have struck between the rival claims of dissertation and of craft.

More than most American poets this side of Ezra Pound, Bly has excited extremes of critical appreciation. He has been called, on the one hand, "a windbag, a sentimentalist, a slob in the language," dangerously imitable "by fledgling poets."² Another view considers him a sort of poetic guru, comparable in his way with Blake, Whitman, and Lawrence, and concerned "to domesticate the sublime."³ What both of these appraisals remark from their different perspectives is Bly's persistent and rather calculated pursuit of a public and controversial role.

Bly's early poetry seems, if anything, rather

¹Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 50.

²Eliot Weinberger, "Gloves on a Mouse," *The Nation* 229.16 (November 17, 1979): 503.

³Charles Molesworth, *The Fierce Embrace: A Study of Contemporary American Poetry* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1979) 138.

too scrupulously personal. The lyrics in his first published volume, *Silence in the Snowy Fields* (1962), assiduously cultivate what came to be known as "deep images," autonomous moments of perception joined together not rationally but through the surreal syntax of the unconscious mind. The speaker is alone in nature, open to its invitations for communion, and perfectly free, therefore, to tamper with its constituents:

The small world of the car
Plunges through the deep fields of the
night,
On the road from Willmar to Milan.
This solitude covered with iron
Moves through the fields of night
Penetrated by the noise of crickets.
("Driving Toward the Lac Qui Parle
River")⁴

Bly's technique here is to seek the kind of excited and heightened awareness that the Russian Formalists and the Spanish surrealist poets sought in dislocated or estranged language. Aside from the fairly quotidian reference to "the road from Willmar to Milan," all the images subtly deviate from common usage. The inside of the car is a "small world," a "solitude covered with iron," which "plunges" rather than simply driving through "deep fields of the night." "The noise of crickets," surely something commonplace in itself, "penetrates" the speaker's solitude as if it were a sharp instrument. The word may even bear subtly phallic associations. The effort is to give ordinary, personal experience a mystical intensity by estranging the language used to describe it. The danger of such a technique is that the language, which has, after all, ordinary allegiances that antedate the poet's use of it, may resist his effort to make it do transformative work. The heightened experience may seem merely bizarre, a kind of solipsistic phantasy.

"Surprised by Evening," another fairly typical early poem, illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. Although the poem makes use of the plural personal pronoun, it is clearly the speaker's solitary consciousness manipulating the imagery.

"We," in this instance, suggests not so much that the speaker has taken a social or political stance, as a purely linguistic attempt to impose a kind of universality on what is very much a private experience:

There is unknown dust that is near us,
Waves breaking on shores just over the
hill,
Trees full of birds that we have never
seen,
Nets drawn down with dark fish.

The evening arrives; we look up and it is
there.
It has come through the nets of the stars,
Through the tissues of the grass,
Walking quietly over the asylums of the
water.
The day shall never end, we think;
We have hair that seems born for the
daylight.
But, at last, the quiet waters of the night
will rise,
And our skin shall see far off, as it does
under water.

(*Selected Poems* 41)

Once again, the method here is to produce a sense of mystery before nature by deviating significantly from the expectations of common usage, though Bly tries to ballast these deviations with some fairly ordinary sentences ("The evening arrives"; "The day shall never end, we think"). Grass is not usually described as being composed of "tissues," hair is not usually "born," nor does skin "see" in the usual sense of that word. And while the evening arrives fairly normally, Bly quickly personifies it as "walking . . . over asylums of water," rather in the miraculous manner of Jesus. One can see why Eliot Weinberger, perhaps disingenuously, is moved to characterize Bly's poetry as "a festival of pathetic fallacy" (504). Indeed, for Bly estranging language seems sometimes to constitute the essence of poetry itself. Insofar as such language does heighten our awareness, however, it is a valid technique, though perhaps not enough in itself to create a major poetry. One can well imagine the nets of dark fish, or the microscopic "tissues of the grass"; these images are disturbing in a strange, rather

⁴Robert Bly, *Selected Poems* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 45.

unspecific way. Perhaps the best approach to a poem like this is through free association, which, as George Steiner notes, "is a device exactly calculated to pierce the membrane between inner and outer speech, to deflect into the diagnostic light and echo-chamber the unpremeditated rush and shadows of self-colloquy."⁵ The problem is the extent to which Bly's images allow themselves to be deflected "into the diagnostic light" as publicly available referents, even as purely linguistic constructs, or simply reverberate in the hermetic isolation of the poet's consciousness.

Bly himself is aware of the problem of isolation in such personal poetry, and admits as much in a comment on the *Snowy Fields* poems: "I don't feel much human relationship in these poems, and the hundred thousand objects of twentieth-century life are absent also" (*Selected Poems* 27). He claims that his purpose was "to gain a resonance among the sounds," as well as "between the soul and a loved countryside" (*Selected Poems* 27). This vein being worked, his solution was to follow Neruda toward the "impure" poetry of politics. The Vietnam War, of course, provided his occasion, though he notes that even before the war, he had begun writing a series of poems about business figures, poems "of judgment rather than of affinity" (*Selected Poems* 62). It was the "psychic urgency" of the war, however, that impelled him to write a full-voiced poetry of protest. In an essay on political poetry, Bly speaks of the need of a poet, once he has fully grasped his own concerns, to leap up to the "psyche" of the nation: "the life of the nation can be imagined . . . as a psyche larger than the psyche of anyone living, a larger sphere, floating above everyone. In order for the poet to write a true political poem, he has to be able to have such a grasp of his own concerns that he can leave them for a while, and then leap up into this other psyche."⁶ This statement acts both as an apology for the poems of *Snowy Fields* and as a program for the poems of *The Light Around the Body* (1967) and *The Teeth Mother Naked at Last* (1970). Whether and how Bly was able

to make such a "leap" remains, as we shall see, in question. It is certain, however, that he tried the leap and found it exhilarating. Bly comments interestingly on the effect of reciting political poetry aloud at protest gatherings:

I experienced for the first time in my life the power of spoken or oral poetry. A briefly lasting community springs to life in front of the voice, like a flower opening . . . The community flowers when the poem is spoken in the ancient way—that is, with full sound, with conviction, and with the knowledge that the emotions are not private to the person speaking them. (*Selected Poems* 62)

Bly's last sentence is particularly interesting in its suggestion that political poetry offered him an escape from the solipsism of *Snowy Fields*.

It did not deflect him from his devotion to the "deep image," however, nor did it suggest a radically new technique other than his adoption of what he calls the "Smart-Blake-Whitman line" (*Selected Poems* 194). Rather, the surreal technique of personal consciousness attempts to absorb, at whatever risk, the new political subject matter. As William V. Davis aptly remarks, "the private individual dream of many of the poems in *Silence* is extended and elaborated . . . until it becomes the public nightmare as the outer world impinges upon the inner individual consciousness."⁷ We see this very clearly in poems like "War and Silence":

The bombers spread out, temperature steady.
A Negro's ear sleeping in an automobile tire.
Pieces of timber float by, saying nothing.

* * *

Bishops rush about crying, "There is no war,"
And bombs fall,
Leaving dust on the beech trees.

* * *

One leg walks down the road and leaves

⁵George Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 79.

⁶Robert Bly, *Talking All Morning* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1980) 100-01.

⁷William V. Davis, "Defining the Age," *Moons and Lion Tails* 2.3 (1977): 88.

The other behind; the eyes part
And fly off in opposite directions.

* * *

Filaments of death grow out.
The sheriff cuts off his black legs
And nails them to a tree.

(Selected Poems 72)

In spite of the new subject matter, the style here is of a piece with that in *Snowy Fields*. The language similarly estranges itself from everyday usage, presumably with the intent here of suggesting the chaos of modern war. The effect, however, is still of mystical, personal revelation. To see this more clearly, one has only to compare "War and Silence" with war poems by Wilfred Owen or Keith Douglass. Bly's surreal, alienated images, his "Negro's ear" and amputated leg evaporate like the images of a dream upon waking when one considers Owen's soldier "yelling out and stumbling / And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime" or Douglass's dead German, "mocked at by his own equipment / that's hard and good when he's decayed." The problem may lie in the nature of the "deep image" technique itself. In one of the *Cantos*, Pound jokes about Yeats pausing "to admire the symbol / with Notre Dame standing inside it." Commenting on these lines, Denis Donoghue notes that Yeats's "Symbolist imagination" tends "to dissolve the external object" in its own favor.⁸ The symbolist can only achieve his desired effect by a certain "vacancy," taking his "eye off the object, or looking through it" (Donoghue, *We Irish* 49). The surrealist of Bly's stripe works with a similar disadvantage. His calculated dislocation of ordinary language and syntax tends to dissolve external objects or reduce them to fragmentary projections of the self. The poems of *Snowy Fields* openly disintegrate natural objects and reform them as objects of a mystical consciousness at one with nature. Such a strategy has obvious limitations, however, for political poetry, as it can only reluctantly allow the external world and it is here that political events take place—an independent existence.

One of Bly's answers to this problem de-

rives from his new role models, Smart, Blake, and Whitman, and involves incorporating into his work certain syntactical devices of formal rhetoric, particularly anaphora, to articulate an external world resistant to the importunities of his imagination. Syntax, as it is allied with grammar, is by its nature rational and conventional in a way diction is not. In a poem like "Counting Small-Boned Bodies," (Selected Poems 73) it offers a quasi-logical structure for Bly's phantasmagorical imagery:

Let's count the bodies over again.

If we could only make the bodies smaller,
the size of skulls,
we could make a whole plain white with
skulls in the
moonlight.

If we could only make the bodies smaller,
maybe we could fit
a whole year's kill in front of us on a
desk.

If we could only make the bodies smaller,
we could fit
a body into a finger ring, for a keepsake
forever.

A good part of the effectiveness here derives from the disturbing clash of syntax and diction. The repeated syntax of conditional sentences suggests a kind of reasonableness very much at odds with the poem's flux of horrible images and taking no notice of these images. The effect is ironical, rather in the manner of Swift's "Modest Proposal." It touches on Bly's favorite protest theme, the insulating distance and insensitivity of the war's directors to the particular horrors of the war itself. This irony contributes a new note to the scale of Bly's effects, and it resists what might otherwise spoil the poem, the insistently private and sentimental nature of surreal imagery. As it stands, one of the most disturbing elements of the poem is the aesthetic quality of the isolated, "deep" images ("a whole plain white with skulls in the moonlight"). The dreamscape of *Snowy Fields* has indeed turned to nightmare in this poem, but the weightlessness of the unconscious still attaches to it. Even Molesworth recognizes the "crux" of

⁸Denis Donoghue, *We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986) 49.

writing political poetry in a language that "must be hushed or ecstatic":

Part dream-vision, part diatribe, the [political] poems seem laughable to anyone who is unsettled by all-embracing pathos or all-damning bile. Satire and ecstasy make strange bedfellows and often produce a tonelessness, a cancelling out of effect, in the service of an ineffable wisdom. (118-19)

"Counting Small-Boned Bodies" resists such tonelessness largely because of its formal syntax and the balance of irony and pathos which it affords. Bly is not often able to achieve such a balance however.

"Hatred of Men with Black Hair" (*Selected Poems* 75) asserts a link of racial hatred between Americans' behavior toward the Vietnamese and their infamous treatment of the Indians. The effort is to render the presumed racist violence of Americans at once threatening and absurd:

We fear every person on earth with black hair.
We send teams to overthrow Chief Joseph's government.
We train natives to kill the President with blowdarts.
We have men loosening the nails on Noah's ark.

State Department men float in the heavy jellies near the bottom
Like exhausted crustaceans, like squids who are confused,
Sending out beams of black to the open sea.
Each fights his fraternal feeling for the great landlords.

In such lines (Bly would term them Smart-Blake-Whitman lines), anaphoric rhetoric reins in but cannot completely control the hysterical excess of the images. Bly would obviously like to enlarge his occasion by offering a historical dimension (the Indian connection) and by hinting at apocalyptic consequences (our tinkering with "the nails on Noah's ark"). Still there is something merely jejune about his suggestion that the State

Department and by metonymic extension the government of the United States act with the energy and intelligence of squids. The poem has the force and the severe limitations of a paranoid fantasy. Its estrangement from the normal terms of discourse is not such that it renders its object more perceptible or compels us to view its object with heightened awareness. Rather the poem's fantastic nature limits its articulations to the fragmented consciousness of Bly himself. There is certainly a great deal of "Indian blood" that Americans cannot forget or wash away, but it is definitely not, as Bly asserts, "underneath all the cement of the Pentagon / . . . preserved in snow." Lines like these seem merely bizarre in a way that does no justice to the Indian cause. In effect, "Hatred of Men with Black Hair" is as personal a poem as anything in *Snowy Fields* and cannot but fail as propaganda. But even if we take it as a form of pure poetry, its success is questionable.

It may be that surrealism (the Spanish example notwithstanding) cannot offer Bly a fitting decorum for poetry about war. Surrealism is adept at exposing the absurdity or irrationality lurking beneath ordinary experience, the quiet life in Minnesota, for instance. The experience of war, however, is itself manifestly absurd, as Paul Fussell notes on more than one occasion (see especially "My War," *The Boy Scout Handbook and Other Observations* and *Wartime*). In dealing with war, the irrationality suggested by surreal techniques is distractingly superfluous. Out of touch with the real absurdity of war, Bly often appears merely inebriated with protest, as in these lines from "Asian Peace Offers Rejected Without Publication" (*Selected Poems* 68):

These suggestions by Asians are not taken seriously.
We know Rusk smiles as he passes them to someone.
Men like Rusk are not men only—
They are bombs waiting to be loaded in a darkened hangar.

The title is meant to suggest a newspaper headline, and thus the poem wishes to invoke something of the public nature and objectivity of American journalism, but it succeeds neither as journalism nor as poetry. "Men

like Rusk," whether one agrees with them or not, are precisely "men only"; this is the essence of their humanly tragic fallibility. Denying them humanity in such a glib manner, Bly makes no valid contribution to our understanding of the war in Vietnam. Even his "Asians" are not granted a realized existence. Bly takes them no more "seriously" than as props in his unconscious. The second part of the poem, which succeeds better than the first, does so by forgetting the "politics" of the opening lines altogether and returning to the safe, interior landscape of "deep imagery":

Lost angels huddled on a night branch!
The waves crossing
And recrossing beneath—
The sound of the rampaging Missouri—
Bending the reeds again and again something inside us
Like a ghost train in the Rockies—
About to be buried in snow!
Its long hoot
Making the owl in the Douglas fir turn
his head . . .

Bly's "lost angels" are more real than his "Asians," and the owl turning its head in the last line is the most vividly realized image in the poem. The ending of the poem could have been written for *Snowy Fields*. But isolated images do not make for effective discourse in a political poem; simple contrast does not necessarily create coherence.

Occasionally, however, Bly's contrasts of American peacefulness and Asian violence are effective, as in "Driving Through Minnesota During the Hanoi Bombings" (*Selected Poems* 74). Here the surreal juxtapositions reflect something less arbitrary than the jumble of Bly's unconscious: the jarring and uniquely modern experience of war reported electronically in a peaceful environment.

We drive between lakes just turning
green;
Late June. The white turkeys have been
moved
A second time to new grass.
How long the seconds are in great pain!
Terror just before death,
Shoulders torn, shot
From helicopters. "I saw the boy being

tortured with a telephone generator,"
The sergeant said.
"I felt sorry for him And blew his head
off with a shotgun."
These instants become crystals,
Particles
The grass cannot dissolve. Our own
gaiety
Will end up
In Asia, and you will look down your
cup
And see
Black Starfighters.

These lines are chilling in the way certain televised reports of the war were chilling. A horrible act of war is depicted simply, in this case through the sergeant's reported speech. Bly does not insist on its absurdity, but it seems absurd because it intrudes on the peaceful sanctuary of life in America, where people go about their ordinary lives, farming, enjoying a spring day, drinking coffee. Both events are real but appear surreal precisely because they do not belong together. The estrangement of our perception does not seem so much a contrived linguistic event as a natural outcome of our bombardment with electronic information, and it prepares quite naturally the hallucination of looking down a coffee cup and seeing war planes. As in the television reports, Bly brings the war home to us and makes us uneasy at its intrusion. But even this approach is not without its problems. As Phillip Knightley suggests in *The First Casualty*, the bizarre phenomenon of war scenes broadcast continually on television, far from hastening the end of the war through a change in national consciousness, had the effect of numbing us and making the war seem less real.⁹ Paradoxically, it is this kind of numbness that a reader senses in Bly's poem, rather than horror or the righteous indignation of protest. The poems where Bly is righteously indignant tend to slip over the line into bathetic propaganda. A poem like "Driving Through Minnesota," on

⁹Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975).

¹⁰Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) Chap V.

the other hand, leaves us helpless, numb, and hallucinant before events.

Paul Fussell has argued that it is extraordinarily difficult, though not impossible, to describe modern warfare with real adequacy.¹⁰ It is perhaps even more difficult for Bly. The Vietnam war is not, after all, his personal experience, except as he may experience it second-hand. As we have seen also, his allegiance to the traditions of international surrealism, an approach deeply rooted in personal consciousness, makes it problematic for him to achieve a level of universal as opposed to personal significance. This question, of course, is not as simple as it seems, for in a sense nothing is free from history. Terry Eagleton would point out that all writers, whether they wish to do or not, represent certain "*ideologies* the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times."¹¹ Thus in one sense Bly's poetry is politically suggestive even when it is most personal and perhaps in ways contrary to his overt intentions. On a common sense level, however, Bly's poetry wrestles with the problem of achieving public significance. Bly himself is scornful of poets who "do not bother to penetrate the husk around their own personalities, and therefore cannot penetrate the husk that has grown around the psyche of the country either" (Quoted by Davis 78). As we have seen, however, such penetration is not really so easy. It is very risky and involves struggling with one's surrounding language, culture, and society to strike a balance between local, political objectives and the provisionally universal objectives of literature. As we shall see, Heaney achieves such a balance more often than Bly. Bly's effort, increasingly, is to find mythical, or pseudo-mythical, analogies for his essentially personal consciousness, ritual enactment for his mystical intuitions. His glibly "Jungian" references to a supposed national "psyche" are telling in this respect. His attempt to propound an apocalyptic myth based on the opposition of masculine and feminine consciousness, fitful though it is, reflects this need.

The long poetic sequence known as "The

¹¹Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) viii.

Teeth Mother Naked at Last" (*Selected Poems* 76) reprises and to an extent sums up Bly's various approaches to political poetry. As such it often seems a jumble of "deep images," anaphora, "television" news clips, and protest hysterias:

B-52s come from Guam. Teachers
die in flames. The hopes of Tolstoy fall
asleep in the ant heap.
Do not ask for mercy.

* * * * *

The room explodes.
The children explode.
Blood leaps on the vegetable walls.

* * * * *

Marines kill ducks with three-hundred-dollar shotguns
and lift cigarette lighters to light the
thatched roofs of huts.
They watch the old women warily.

* * * * *

As soon as the President finishes his
press conference, black wings carry
off the words,
bits of flesh still clinging to them.

* * * * *

It is a desire to eat death,
to gobble it down,
to rush on it like a cobra with mouth
open.
It is a desire to take death inside,
to feel it burning inside, pushing out
velvety hairs,
like a clothesbrush in the intestines—

That is the thrill that leads the President
on to lie.

Lines like these show Bly risking all the weaknesses we have discussed, and they suggest various reasons why the poem as a whole cannot succeed. But the breadth of a poetic sequence offers Bly the opportunity to succeed quite powerfully, if provisionally, in individual passages:

If one of those children came toward me
with both hands
in the air, fire rising along both elbows,
I would suddenly go back to my animal
brain,
I would drop on all fours screaming;
my vocal cords would turn blue; so

would yours.
It would be two days before I could play
with one of my own children again.

These lines were suggested obviously by the famous photograph of a child running down a road covered with burning napalm. They record an objective scene along with Bly's outraged response, a guttural response that for once he shared with the majority of his countrymen. And here at last he rises to the role of the political poet at his best: that of the private man impelled to be a public spokesman, hurt into poetry of more than private significance. Still the best moments in "The Teeth Mother" are such isolated passages. The "mythology" Bly would use to knit his sequence together is of a rather puerile sort and will not bear comparison with the more rigorous mythologizing of Robert Graves. It is really in passages like the one about the burning child, rather than any pseudo-mythological reference to the "Teeth Mother," a matriarchal goddess who devours "hairy and ecstatic men," that Bly succeeds as a political poet, but as we have seen his success is at best troublesome and provisional.

Unlike Bly, Seamus Heaney seems hardly to have worked at becoming a political poet. The role was virtually thrust on him as a resident of Northern Ireland, and with it a remarkably early fame that some critics have begrudged him. But like Bly's, Heaney's first books, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969), were essentially personal. The poems in *Death of a Naturalist* are absorbed in concrete imagery without being particularly surreal. Perhaps in reaction to Yeats, Heaney easily accepts the existence of an external world with its plurality of independent objects. Many of these poems deal specifically with farming, though farming has never held the central position in Heaney's poetry that it does, say, in the poetry of R.S. Thomas or Wendell Berry. Farm culture provided the furnishings of Heaney's youth, and it is as such that farm imagery pervades his first book. As Helen Vendler perceptively remarks, "at first, Heaney aggrandized and consecrated his infant world."¹² Heaney's

effort seems to be to come to terms with this world before attempting to explore its wider resonances. A number of the early poems deal with his father's activities as a farmer. These poems are at once caressing and distancing; they register the child's awe before his father and the young man's stock-taking and separation. In "Follower," Heaney pictures his father at work behind a "horse-plough":

I stumbled in his hob-nailed wake,
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;
Sometimes he rode me on his back
Dipping and rising to his plod.

I wanted to grow up and plough,
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.
All I ever did was follow
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
Yapping always. But today
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me, and will not go away.¹³

These are lines that would have pleased the New Critics with their craft, the balance of the sound system, as well as the carefully controlled paradox that forms the center of the poem's essentially internal discourse. Like most of Heaney's farm poems, it is retrospective, pitting the speaker's present state of awareness against his innocent consciousness as a child. Something quite similar is at work in the famous "Digging" (*Selected Poems* 10-11), where Heaney quite explicitly compares his own work as a writer with the traditional labor of his father and grandfather.

Under my window, a clean rasping
sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly
ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the
flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

* * * * *

¹²Helen Vendler, *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988)150.

¹³Seamus Heaney, *Selected Poems 1965-1975* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1980) 18-19.

By God, the old man could handle a
spade. Just like his old man.

The cold smell of potato mould, the
squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like
them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Though its perspective is interior (it is clearly what Steiner would call "inner speech"), this is a beautifully *realized* lyric. Heaney's language, which can be seen as literary and "estranging" in its own way (the pen is described earlier as being "snug as a gun"), is nonetheless on easy terms with the external world, trusting to the concrete otherness of things to which it may refer. Having established this relation, it is free to luxuriate in others: internal, linguistic, "musical" relations, which do not have the effect of isolating the experience in Heaney's consciousness. Instead, we are given free access as readers to the experience that consciousness manipulates.

As we shall see, Heaney accomplishes this in part by submitting to a number of traditions which are compatible with the decorum of personal poetry. Like "Digging," many of the early poems place the child's point of view, which the speaker assumes, in opposition to the point of view of adults, the "I" against the "they."

As a child, they could not keep me from
wells
And old pumps with buckets and wind-
lasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky,
the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board
top.
I savoured the rich crash when a bucket
Plummeted down at the end of a rope.
So deep you saw no reflection in it.

Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some

spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echo-
ing.
("Personal Helicon," *Selected Poems* 27)

Here the child is explicitly solipsistic, a Narcissus essentially alone in nature and alive to its invitations. But unlike Bly, Heaney is not tempted to tinker with the constituents of nature. A poem like this establishes Heaney's relation to a number of strains in British and European Romanticism. The perspective of the child, "big-eyed" and "beneath all adult dignity," is reminiscent of the Rilke of *Das Buch der Bilder*. On the other hand, the rather luxurious diction (consider the wealth of assonance, as well as the alliterative and assonant sound structure in "I savoured the rich crash when the bucket / Plummeted") suggests Keats and Hopkins. If Heaney has not yet set out to define himself as part of a specifically Irish linguistic tradition, there is, perhaps, something of Patrick Kavanagh's parochialism in the early poems.

The problem for Heaney is how to assimilate these influences and convert his "big-eyed" childhood and "big-eared" youth into a maturity capable of exploring the deeper and wider resonances of his experience. Not all critics would agree that he has done so. The English critics in particular have their reservations. A. Alvarez, who considers Heaney "an intensely literary writer," argues that his work never escapes the traditional British discomfort with modernism.¹⁴ Because of this, it "challenges no presuppositions, does not upset or scare, is mellifluous, craftsmanly, and often perfect within its chosen limits. In other words, it is beautiful minor poetry" (17). Calvin Bedient takes a similar position, asserting that "Heaney scarcely projects a point of view. Most of what he writes is no more, if no less, than potato deep earth-bound if earth-enriched, placidly rooted in top soil, far from unfathomable."¹⁵

I would argue, on the other hand, that when

¹⁴ A. Alvarez, "A Fine Way with the Language," *The New York Review of Books* 27.3 (March 6, 1980): 16.

¹⁵ Calvin Bedient, "The Music of What Happens," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 8.1 (Fall-Winter 1979): 110.

Heaney does turn to political poems, his rootedness acts as a check on the tendency of political poetry to drift toward propaganda. It offers a balance of craft and discourse that is so often lacking in Robert Bly's work. One reason may be that Heaney has never given himself over as completely as Bly to the dictates of the "cause." Though he lived for years in the midst of terrorist violence, the poet in Heaney stubbornly refused the notion that his role be identified wholly with the public cause. The poet's "*raison d'être*," as Heaney puts it, is primarily "involved with marks on paper."¹⁶ It is also essentially a matter of private consciousness. The violence of the public world may force itself at times on such a consciousness, though not necessarily to predictable effect. In an essay entitled "Belfast," Heaney tries to put his finger on the poet's ambivalent relation to public events:

On the one hand, poetry is secret and natural, on the other hand it must make its way in a world that is public and brutal. Here the explosions literally rattle your window day and night, lives are shattered blandly or terribly, innocent men have been officially beaten and humiliated in internment camps—destructive elements of all kinds, which are even perhaps deeply exhilarating, are in the air. (*Preoccupations* 34)

What is perhaps most interesting here is Heaney's confession that in some paradoxical sense the poet may find such events "deeply exhilarating." The poet is, first, a fallible human being, and only second, if at all, the proponent of a political cause. (Of course, in Terry Eagleton's sense, this attitude can be said simply to reflect a particular "ideology.")

Heaney has never embraced political poetry with the single-minded enthusiasm of Bly. Political poetry is only one of a number of strategies Heaney uses to deepen and broaden his personal experience. Heaney's political poems take several distinct forms, of which we may isolate the three most important: poems that directly refer to the political

situation in Northern Ireland, poems that refer to the situation by implication, and poems about linguistic imperialism, the problem of the Irish writer forced to use the English language as his vehicle of expression.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the first group of poems (which most nearly approximates Bly's sense of the political poem) has been considered by critics the most questionable of success. Even such sympathetic readers as Denis Donoghue and Donald Hall have openly expressed their preference for the "long perspective"¹⁷ of the so-called "bog poems," which in Hall's phrase, tease Heaney "into the truest poetry."¹⁸ I would agree about the "bog poems," but I think it is arguable that even in the most overtly political of his poems about Belfast, where, as Donoghue notes, "the only vantage points are held by soldiers" ("Poets Who Have Learned Their Trade" 45), Heaney never slips as precipitously as Bly into rancorous propaganda. Perhaps this is because he is never willing to risk as much as Bly on the occasion. A poem like "Casualty"¹⁹ lacks the hard edge of Bly's politics; when Heaney does not succeed, he is likely to fall into sentimentality:

Sometimes, on his high stool,
Too busy with his knife
At a tobacco plug
And not meeting my eye,
In the pause after a slug
He mentioned poetry.

This story of a pub-crawling friend, "blown to bits / Out drinking in a curfew / Others obeyed," while it verges on being maudlin, is still full of what Heaney calls elsewhere "the music of what happens" ("Song," *Field Work* 56). It is this "music," in all its dense particularity, to which Heaney is ultimately loyal. Because of this, Heaney is more sure of his personal perspective than Bly, even as this makes him more ambivalent in his discourse.

¹⁷Denis Donoghue, "Poets Who Have Learned Their Trades: 'Field Work'," *The New York Times Book Review* (December 2, 1979): 45.

¹⁸Donald Hall, "The Nation of Poets," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 6.1 (Fall-Winter 1977): 158.

¹⁹Seamus Heaney, *Field Work* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979) 21-24.

¹⁶Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979) 34.

The poem, "Stump," for instance (*Selected Poems* 75), seems to present quite plainly a tragic, Northern Irish scene, and yet it keeps much of its mystery, especially in its ambiguous suggestions of the speaker's consciousness:

I am riding to plague again.
 Sometimes under a sooty wash
 From the grate in the burnt-out gable
 I see the needy in a small pow-wow.
 What do I say if they wheel out their
 dead?
 I'm cauterized, a black stump of home.

The perspective, interestingly, is the same as that in "Digging": the speaker looks down from a window, suggestive perhaps of his "literary" viewpoint, privileged at once and confined. What he sees below is the "real" world of people who labor and suffer and whose relation to himself he would, however difficultly, construe. The first line is quite ambiguous. Is the speaker "riding to plague" in the sense that he is venturing imaginatively to encounter the plague of sectarian violence, or is he somehow, in his literary role, plaguing the "needy" sufferers, who may not need the words he has to offer? The speaker's hesitance in the penultimate line to present himself as their spokesman might suggest the latter interpretation. In either case, however, the experience is one of searing, cauterizing sympathy for their plight. It transfigures the speaker (a neatly surreal touch) into "a black stump of home," gravely wounded and alienated from his own surroundings and certainties. Even this image involves the ambiguities of a possible pun. Is the speaker, perhaps, "stumping" in a *political* sense, and if so, does the context suggest his awareness of its ineffectiveness? Both senses exercise claims on our attention. Clearly, the poet is troubled into his protest, and there is nothing of Bly's rather smug satisfaction in it.

In *The Renewal of Literature*, Richard Poirier makes a valuable distinction between literature of "difficulty" and literature of "density." The first suggests the modernist propensity for difficult surfaces, a literature of

puzzles that would "perpetuate the power of literature as a privileged and exclusive form of discourse."²⁰ According to Poirier, the second kind of writing "gives, or so it likes to pretend, a fairly direct access to pleasure, but which becomes, on longer acquaintance, rather strange and imponderable" (130). Pound and the Joyce of *Ulysses* are paradigms of difficulty; Stevens, Frost, and George Eliot are paradigms of density. I would suggest also that Bly and Heaney are distinguishable according to these terms. Bly, as a surrealist self-consciously posing in the modernist tradition, is difficult. Heaney, writing such deceptively accessible political poems as "Stump," is dense.

The "bog poems" have an exquisite density. This series of poems from *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975) was suggested by the discovery of a number of ancient bodies preserved in the peat bogs of Denmark. At the time scientists speculated that the bodies, some of which had their throats slashed, were those of sacrificial victims. The "bog people" offer Heaney various possibilities for poetic treatment. In one sense, they are art objects, presented like Keats's Grecian Urn or Rilke's Torso for imaginative contemplation. As such, their objective presence acts as a tease and a check on the poet's subjective imagination. At the same time they function as symbols of the deep racial experience of the north, to which Heaney, as an Irishman, feels himself allied. They allow him, as it were, a further digging, more than "potato deep," into his own consciousness, conceived here as a product of continuous history. As Gregory Schirmer notes, "Heaney has developed the image of the bog into a powerful symbol of the continuity of human experience."²¹ The bog people, tangible products of this continuity, appear as virtual message carriers of the unconscious. In fact, they suggest a mythology closer in spirit to Jung's than the one Bly insists upon. At the same time, they offer, as ancient "victims," telling parallels to the situation in Northern Ireland. "The Tollund Man" (*Selected Poems* 78-79), one of the earliest of the "bog poems," is typical of Heaney's indirect approach to po-

²⁰Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1987) 98.

²¹Gregory A. Schirmer, "Seamus Heaney's 'Salvation in Surrender,'" *Eire-Ireland* 15.4 (Winter 1980): 143.

litical writing. Heaney contemplates the body first as an object, at once fascinating and horrible:

In the flat country nearby
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand for a long time.

Adroitly mixing Christian and pagan traditions, Heaney now teases out what one might call the Tollund Man's mythological features. He is a "bridegroom to the goddess" of the bog, who "tightened her torc on him / And opened her fen, / Those dark juices working / Him to a saint's body." Only at this point does Heaney "risk blasphemy" by considering the Tollund Man's political implications. He will "consecrate" the bog and "pray" to the Tollund Man to "germinate / The scattered, ambushed / Flesh of labourers, / Stockinged corpses / Laid out in the farmyards." The Tollund Man becomes, for Heaney, a "saint" of political victims. The political effect Heaney seeks here is not obvious, nor is it especially hopeful. One important aspect of the "continuity of human experience" is its violence, which leaves the poet mournful and ironic: "in the old man-killing parishes / I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home." Yet as Helen Vendler points out, these poems "lift [Heaney] free from a superficial piety that would put either sectarian or national names to the Ulster killings" (155-56).

Perhaps the poet's gift, if not "to set a statesman right," is to register a human grief, complex and indirect, at his excess. This is what Bly does, too, on the rare occasions of his best political poetry, such as the passage on the burning child. That Heaney succeeds more often and more richly is attributable to a

number of factors. Unlike Bly, he has not allied himself to a tradition which is essentially inhospitable to public utterance. Heaney's writing has always displayed a becoming humility before the external world. The depth of the bog establishes a continuity between the personal and the cultural which enables Heaney to speak at once personally and as a representative of his culture; it is an external depth, not a personal abyss. At the same time, Heaney has never allowed public utterance to become the *raison d'être* of his work. When he addresses public issues, it is because they have hurt him into a poetry which seeks always a return, even if only provisionally, to sanity, the strange benignity of living. (Indeed, one hopes that Heaney's recent comments envying the Eastern European poets their stressed political situation do not signal a significant shift in his own poetic practice.) Speaking of Yeats's later poems, Heaney notes that "they ask, indirectly, about the purpose of art in the midst of life and by their movements, their images, their musics they make palpable a truth which Yeats was at first only able to affirm abstractly, in those words which he borrowed from Coventry Patmore: 'The end of art is peace'" (*Preoccupations* 112). Like Yeats, Heaney has been a poet first, with a poet's interest in the tangle of language, and aware always of a poet's decorum. This may seem like an old New Critical judgment; it may suggest simply a necessary prejudice of the liberal-humanist ideology. But we need to take stock of our recent poets, claiming what may be lasting or valuable in their additions to our culture and discarding what is misguided or inept. □

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THE OUTLAW AS FIGURE, THE FIGURE AS OUTLAW:
NARRATIVITY AND INTERPRETATION IN SAM PECKINPAH'S
PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID

All narrative may be in essence obituary. . . .¹

—Peter Brooks

One of the central techniques of both poststructuralist and reader-centered methods of criticism is to employ the language of narratives as possible metalanguages.² That is, in the words of Gerald Prince, texts contain "reading interludes" (or moments of conspicuously deployed metalanguage) which can be taken as "an index of the stance taken by the narrative with regard to its own communicability and readability, as an indication of how it ostensibly wants to be read . . . and as a factor determining to some extent the response of any reader other than itself."³ In this view interpretation continues a process that the text has already begun. With this process in mind, I want to explore possible readings of Sam Peckinpah's oft-neglected *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973) based on how the film itself appropriates interpretive responses to its own content.

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid is conveniently suited to such an endeavor because it foregrounds what we have come to call "the reader in the text." Most obviously there is the enigmatic figure of Alias, a news writer (portrayed by Bob Dylan), who Kris Kristofferson has said was conceived to "be sort of like the Fool

in *Lear*, an observer through it all."⁴ Furthermore, Peckinpah has stated that he thought of Alias as "the writer who portrays the legend"⁵—and for our purposes the writer is always a displaced form of the reader (and vice-versa). As Robert Scholes states in a deconstruction of the traditional "production/ consumption" (or writing/reading) opposition, "the writer is always reading and the reader is always writing."⁶ Thus as readers of the text of *Pat Garrett* (like Seymour Chatman, I mean by "reader" not only those in armchairs, but audiences in movie houses, theatres, etc.⁷), we perceive/read Alias perceiving/reading many of the same events. Perhaps his role in the film is best summed up in Garrett's command to him in Lemuel's saloon: "Give us a nice read."

But I will deal more completely with Alias later, and turn now to the central character as well as central reader in the text: Pat Garrett. To speak of Garrett as the reader in the text should not be surprising. Most of the film's commentators agree that, as in so many ver-

¹Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Random House, 1985) 95.

²Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982) 240.

³Gerald Prince, "Notes on the Text as Reader," *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, eds. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980) 237.

⁴Quoted in Garner Simmons, *Peckinpah: A Portrait in Montage* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982) 173.

⁵Sam Peckinpah, "Straight Shootin' Sam," interview with Brian Huberman and Jerry Holt, *Southwest Media Review* 3 (Spring 1985): 19.

⁶Robert Scholes, *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985) 8. For another discussion of this point, see Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction Between Text and Reader" (Suleiman and Crosman 106-07). Iser notes how readers "receive" texts by "composing" them.

⁷Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978) 41.

sions of the Kid's legend, its psychological and moral themes center in Garrett, and in fact it is generally acknowledged that *Pat Garrett* is one of Peckinpah's most subjective films—that is, a large proportion of the scenes are projected from Garrett's point of view.⁸

Now, thanks to the 1988 release (to television and on cassette) of the "Restored Director's Cut" of the film, it is finally possible to gauge just how central Garrett's subjectivity is to Peckinpah's vision of the legend. Among other scenes, the uncut version includes the famous absent frame narrative cut by MGM, in which Garrett is ambushed and killed by John Poe and other Chisum company-men in 1909, almost thirty years after the death of Billy.⁹ In the prologue portion of the frame narrative, as Garrett is shot and begins to fall from his buggy in slow motion, Peckinpah cuts in shots of a chicken's head being blown off, in addition to shots of Billy and a younger Garrett shooting chickens buried to their heads in sand. The "resulting montage [makes] it appear that both the younger Garrett and Billy [are] shooting the older Garrett" (Simmons 184). Then Peckinpah completes the cut to the scene at Old Fort Sumner 28 years before where Billy and his bunch are shooting chickens, thus beginning the inner narrative of Garrett's now mythically fated stalking and killing of the Kid. Thus the studio-excised frame narrative is discursively crucial to the film because the entire inner narrative becomes by implication a flashback in the dying Garrett's consciousness; as Garner Simmons remarks, "the story of Billy's last days becomes Garrett's memory at the moment of his own demise" (171).¹⁰ Therefore the inner narrative is Garrett's interpretation or re-presentation of that climactic moment in his life, and in our cultural *mythos*, when he guns Billy down.

⁸For a detailed discussion of point of view in the film, see Paul Seydor, *Peckinpah: The Western Films* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1980) 183-226. For a thorough as well as suggestive study of the myth of the Kid and Garrett as it has evolved in American culture, see Stephen Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1982).

⁹For a precise account of the many problems and conflicts which plagued Peckinpah over the long course of production of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, see Seydor (185-202) and Simmons (169-88).

And the interpretive spiral descends further when we notice that this is in turn the older Garrett's representation of the earlier Garrett's interpretive attempts not only to find Billy (i.e. to decipher his trail), but to sort out his (Garrett's) own relationship to his society, his times, himself, and of course to Billy.

However, Garrett's interpretive quest can be condensed, if we pay attention to the strategic metalanguage of the text, to his search for Billy. I propose that the film thus can be discussed as a metacritical meditation upon the nature of reading/interpreting which is played out through Garrett's psyche as well as the socio-historical saga of Billy the Kid and the closing of the frontier.

Garrett twice asks—once from Black Harris and once from Gates—for "signs" on Billy. The metaphor is unavoidable I think: for Garrett, Billy is the elusive signifier to which he must attach a signified in order to complete the structure of the sign. The hunt for Billy is therefore a quest for his meaning. (Peckinpah's film, in this regard, must be regarded as a meditation upon the nature of the symbol/sign in the canonical American literary tradition of Emerson, Melville, Hawthorne, James, Faulkner, and Pynchon.) Garrett knows that such a quest is made difficult because, as Garrett tells the businessmen at Governor Wallace's, Billy "ain't exactly predictable." In more familiar critical terminology, we would say that Billy, as signifier, is undecidable. Peckinpah in fact goes to some lengths to create a purposefully indeterminate Billy: thus the character's combination of integrity and expediency, loyalty and selfishness, innocence and sexuality, saint and sinner might be summed up in what Stephen Tatum calls Billy's "Mona Lisa Smile" (160).¹¹ This very unpredictability or undecidability alienates Garrett from Billy. He tells Sheriff Baker that there "comes an

¹⁰Compare James Coburn's remarks on MGM's catastrophic reediting of the film: "There were three scenes that justify [the film] that are missing from the MGM version. It was to be told from Pat Garrett's point of view rather than from Billy's, and it was done so purposely. . . . The entire narrative of the film becomes Garrett's flashback at the moment of his death" (quoted in Simmons 183-84).

¹¹Seydor (205, 220) also finds much to say on Billy's enigmatic smile.

age in a man's life when he don't want to spend time figuring what comes next." In linguistic terms, we would say, as is pointed out elsewhere in the film, that "[Billy's] got too much *play* in him," (emphasis added) and Garrett wants to stop the ever-sliding capability of the signifier; in narrative terms he assumes the role of the reader/writer who wishes for closure.¹²

In short, Garrett becomes an analogue of a particular type of reader—what I will call (for want of a better term) the "traditional reader," or one who resists the textuality of the text and instead insists upon constructing a final and authoritative meaning, a kind of E.D. Hirsch on horseback. Therefore it is most fitting that Garrett is a lawman. In his saloon, old Lemuel bitterly taunts Garrett for "sittin' there with all that law crammed inside of ya just bustin' to get out." Garrett is full of law—or the lawful figure in the film. And, as Barbara Johnson says, the "law is the forcible transformation of ambiguity into decidability" (quoted in Culler 239). Conversely, Billy, as *outlaw*, is tautologically outside the law—literarily and socially, he is a lawless "figure." In the metaphorical scheme I have been advancing Garrett has no other choice but to destroy Billy if the "letter" of the law is to be fulfilled.

Death would obviously seem to be the simplest and most elegant metaphor for any kind of narrative closure.¹³ Billy's death is only the final death in a film literally saturated with death. Corpses pile up in the usual Peckinpah

mode, but with a difference: the cinematography emphasizes autumnal colors, and many characters—Garrett, Billy, J.W. Bell, Pete Maxwell, Mr. Horrell—tell tales of violent, often meaningless, deaths; from Sheriff Baker's justly praised death tableau to the end, the film is haunted by dirge-like variations on the melody of Dylan's ballad "Knockin' on Heaven's Door." Finally, much could be made of several characters—Bowdre, Bob Ollinger, and Sheriff Kip McKinney—who, dying or not, speak as if they are already dead.¹⁴ Garrett, however, is again the most important figure in this regard. He is dead from the beginning, both structurally—given his murder in the frame narrative—and psychologically—his wife correctly tells him (in another scene cut from the original MGM release yet also unfortunately cut from the "uncut" version; it is available only in the version originally released to television) that he is "dead inside."

Garrett is thus the central embodiment of closure or stasis in what many critics have seen as a film depicting a world bereft of redemptive possibility; *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is often described as if it were *The Waste Land* of Peckinpah's canon.¹⁵ This line of reasoning tends to reduce the film to a conventional American cultural allegory wherein Billy blatantly symbolizes the once wild and open West which Garrett kills in a ritual reenactment of the closure of the frontier. After all, as Dennis Denitto says in a discussion of the Western film, "the chief instrument of transformation [of the West] was the law."¹⁶ And certainly such readings are congruent with Peckinpah's well-known theme (especially in his Westerns) of a depleted, mechanical present contrasted with a heroic and mythical past.

¹²"Closure" is a most problematic term, obviously in need of some clarification. J. Hillis Miller has discussed the aporetic nature of closure in narrative: its contradictory function of both "tying up" and "unraveling" is a function of an inherent instability in language and thought. See J. Hillis Miller, "The Problematic of Ending in Narrative," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1978): 3-7. For my purposes I prefer Miller's following definition: "the neat folding together of elaborate narrative materials in a single resolution" (5). As will immediately be seen, I want to expand the usefulness of the term from its application in narrative theory to an additional application to the interpretive process.

¹³Three well-known studies have influenced my thinking about narrative closure: Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967); D.A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981); and, most obviously, Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot*.

¹⁴Bowdre: "They killed me—I'm gut-shot for sure." Ollinger: "He's killed me too." McKinney: "I hope they spell my name right in the papers." Of these three, only McKinney survives.

¹⁵See Seydor (214), and especially Tatum, who bases his analysis of *Pat Garrett* as a manifestation of Northrup Frye's ironic *mythos* on the film's "landscape of closed possibilities" (158). From a psychoanalytical perspective, a similar point is made by Terence Butler in his *Crucified Heroes: The Films of Sam Peckinpah* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1979) 85-86.

¹⁶Dennis DeNitto, *Film: Form and Feeling* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) 385.

But Peckinpah's Westerns repay our repeated attention because they self-reflexively transgress generic expectations and generate multiple and conflicting layers of meanings. If, for example, we think of Garrett as a type of reader I call "traditional," then the film implicates such a reader in a socio-political act. The critical assumptions which allow us to contain the text inside an allegorical framework, be it sociological or, as in Paul Seydor's case, psychological, inevitably force us into Garrett's interpretive boots: to transform the undecidable into the decidable, to corral the signifier into a static signified, to decide upon an authoritative meaning is to participate in Billy's death and the destruction of the open West.

At this point it would be instructive to remember the original frame narrative. The autumnal colors, elegiac score, and in fact every discursive element of the inner narrative are all mediated through *Garrett's* consciousness: a closed life creating a closed world through the typically Romantic aesthetic act of imposing a transcendent stasis upon the open-endedness of experience. But it is equally important to remember that, even though Garrett is the "lawful" reader bent on closure, he also clearly sympathizes with Billy and allows him many opportunities to escape to Mexico.¹⁷ Laura Mulvey's Lacanian reading of the Western helps us understand Garrett's narrative as a product of a "split subject."

In some "afterthoughts" on her now eponymous article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey speculates on the structural properties of the Western, in which, like many Proppian folk-tales,

"marriage" makes a crucial contribution to narrative closure. However, the function's presence also has come to allow a complication in the Western, its complementary opposite "not marriage". Thus, while the social integration represented by marriage is an essential aspect of the folk-tale, in the Western it can be accepted . . . or not. A hero can gain in

stature by refusing the princess and remaining alone (Randolph Scott in the *Ranown* series of movies). As the resolution of the Proppian tale can be seen to represent the resolution of the Oedipus complex (integration into the symbolic), the rejection of marriage personifies a nostalgic celebration of phallic, narcissistic omnipotence.¹⁸

Remembering that the Lacanian "symbolic" represents castration and "subjection" to the Law of the Father, Mulvey's comments remind us how important the excised scene of Garrett confronting his wife is to the psychological logic of Peckinpah's film, particularly when this is related to Garrett's visit to Chisum (the virtual Law in Lincoln County), where we learn that Garrett has borrowed money from Chisum to buy some land. This conflation of marriage, property, and Law represents Garrett's "integration into the symbolic," but should be read in the context of the loss of Garrett's "pre-Oedipal" existence as outlaw and friend of the Kid (the association of "Kid" and childhood becomes especially resonant here).¹⁹ Mulvey thus offers a way to understand Garrett's "splitting" as a salient feature of the Western hero:

The tension between two points of attraction, the symbolic (social integration and marriage) and nostalgic narcissism, generates a common splitting of the Western hero into two, something unknown in the Proppian tale. Here two functions emerge, one celebrating integration into society through marriage, the other celebrating resistance to social standards and responsibility. (18)

Just as Garrett's marriage to a Mexican woman

¹⁸Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by 'Dual in the Sun,'" *Framework* 15/16/17 (1981): 14.

¹⁹At another point in the film the Kid reminds Garrett that he (Billy) once rode for Chisum while Garrett was an outlaw. Then Billy says that "the Law's a funny thing, ain't it?" This obviously suggests that the Law is an arbitrary construct, but more importantly, Billy's ironic remark corroborates Lacan's thesis in his famous reading of "The Purloined Letter" that "it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject." See Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988) 29.

¹⁷Garrett's sympathy for Billy is most dramatically rendered in what Seydor calls "the subtle but quite unmistakable implication" that Garrett plants the gun in the outhouse in Lincoln which allows Billy to escape (188-89n).

complicates his desire for "integration" into (Anglo) society, it would be psychologically appropriate if in Garrett's narrative there would surface other repressed modes of reading more resistant to closure.

I have already mentioned Alias as a reader in the text and we need now to return to him. What sort of reader is he? The legend-maker, as Peckinpah would have it? Or the detached ironic Fool described by Kristofferson? Many critics have complained that the character is muddled or that Dylan's performance is confused. But these are voices insisting on decidability in a film which has much to say about that very motive. There might then be some advantages in examining Alias as a purposeful muddle. After all, in the barber-shop when Garrett asks him who he is, Alias offers only the most open-ended responses: "That's a good question." His very name is an anti-name—the essence of the sliding signifier. Appropriately, he changes his hat in every scene, one of the most successful and suggestive of the few comic touches in the film. As a reader, Alias's role is delineated in his character, or more properly, his anti-character. What kind of reader/writer so problematizes identity?

The answer is not difficult: Keats formulated it long ago. Alias has no self because he is detached and thus "negatively capable," to adapt Keats' phrase. This sort of artist-figure has been endlessly valorized in modernist criticism from Arnold to Eliot and Trilling, and was finally transformed into the "disinterested" reader (as opposed to Garrett, whose "self" is always at stake in his readings) championed by New Criticism in its pursuit of irony, paradox, and ambiguity. To cite only the most famous example, Wimsatt and Beardsley, in their patristic New Critical essay "The Affective Fallacy," called for a criticism based on the "psychological principles of aesthetic distance, detachment, or disinterestedness."²⁰

Alias seems to fit the mold well. Appropriately, he rides with Billy, the ambiguous signifier, but he exists on the margins of the gang, is rarely part of a two- or three-shot, and typically is shot in close up as the emo-

tionless observer with a quizzical and ironic expression on his face. He also serves as a kind of structural mediator between Billy and Garrett, always peripheral to the action, yet also always at hand in important scenes involving either (see Seydor 217).

Suppose we call Alias the "modernist reader" in deference to the symbiotic relationship between modernist literature (effacement of the authorial voice) and New Criticism's values (effacement of the reader). If Alias is the disinterested figure at home in ambiguity, then we might assume that he is the perfect complement to Garrett's closure-oriented reading. But, as we did with Garrett, we should reinsert Alias's mode of reading back into the text to ascertain the effects of such a reader. Does, for example, Alias as reader allow Billy's undecidability to flourish in an affirmation of textuality and open-endedness (or phallic narcissism, to put Mulvey's negative spin on this issue)?

Even though Alias's characteristic position is on the margin of the action, our post-structuralist moment in criticism has taught us to be skeptical of any claims for a subject-position outside or above, to realize, in fact, that the marginal is always central. Therefore Alias's very disinterestedness must have consequences in the narrative. Since any stance, interpretive or political, which aspires to be objective, detached, or non-ideological inevitably reifies any given set of circumstances (i.e., indirectly privileges the *status quo*), fittingly Alias, through the negativity of inaction, allows Garrett to destroy Billy. Alias does nothing to help Billy avoid Garrett's fatal manhunt (except for warning him near the end that Garrett is coming to Maxwell's, which Billy already knows) or to stop Garrett. Alias even ironizes the suggestion that Billy escape to Mexico, suggesting that it would be a good place to live, but "that depends on who you are." His single positive act on Billy's behalf is to kill one of the bounty hunters, but this seems only designed to keep Billy alive so that Alias may insinuate himself into the gang in order to chronicle the epic struggle between Garrett and the Kid. As mythographer, Alias needs the legend, a plot which has played itself out to the end, so that he can tell it again and again.

Instead, the paradigmatic scene involving Alias occurs in old Lemuel's saloon: he is

²⁰W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954) 33.

appropriately on the edge, or even outside, of the frame *reading* the "airtightness" (another interesting representation of closure) as Garrett methodically maims and kills members of Billy's gang. Even after Billy's death, Alias simply stares quizzically after the fact as Garrett ponders the events and finally rides away.

In other words, Alias as reader is also implicated in a socio-political act. Though this act is composed of inaction, his disinterested stance closes off other possibilities—such as positive attempts to manipulate events of the narrative toward some alternative outcome. Thus there can be no neutral position in reading. To rest in ironic detachment or ambiguity is not to fully confront undecidability, but paradoxically to decide on certain textual values which contribute to the closing off of the sign/text, to *decide* what the text can be by limiting it to certain Kantian aesthetic ends. In other words, for Alias, Billy is an aesthetic object, hypostatized and mythologized in the legend he will supposedly write. The traceable consequences of his disinterestedness contribute to the tragedy: the signifier has been dominated and Billy will die in order to live in the formal eternity of "art."²¹

It should come as no surprise, therefore, in a text so suffused with self-reflexivity as *Pat Garrett*, that the actual artist, or original reader/writer of the filmed story we witness, makes an appearance just as the narrative is about to close. Peckinpah himself, in a surprising departure, appears as Will the coffin-maker, to speak directly to Garrett, another reader/writer.²² In terms of narrative progression, Will's scene is utterly gratuitous and unmotivated; it can thus have only a purely discursive function. Operating again on the principle that the marginal decenters the "central," and given who is speaking as

Will, if ever there was an appropriate interlude in the film in which to listen for metalinguistic comment, this should be it.

The entire scene, previously available only in the version released for television, has been virtually ignored by critics. Yet it is one of the most compelling and uncanny moments in all of Peckinpah's work. As Garrett takes his final steps toward the showdown in Pete Maxwell's house, the mist suddenly thickens when he turns to see Will/Peckinpah in the shadows working on a coffin. So eerie and dreamlike is the ensuing confrontation that it is tempting to regard it as a literal dream (within a dream, we remember) on Garrett's part, a projection of his divided desire. However, the entire scene, especially given the prophetic tone and cryptic quality of Will's short speech, is so suggestive and ambiguous that interpretive temptations multiply rapidly for an attentive reader.

Will begins by making an overt comment on interpretive closure to Garrett, but he might as well be speaking to all readers: "You finally figured it out, huh? Go on—get it over with." Will's tone here is unmistakably derogatory, even bitter. And should we be too eager to conclude that he is speaking merely of Garrett's success in finding Billy's hideout, Will's strange, taunting remark to Garrett as he walks away after saying nothing, should disabuse us of this notion: "When you gonna learn you can't trust anybody, even yourself, Garrett?" Since Garrett *can* trust himself to find Billy—and probably could have done so much sooner—it is quite possible to regard this question as addressing larger psychological and philosophical concerns about the very problem of "figuring it out." Certainly the question speaks pointedly to the interpretive issues thus far posed in this essay: to those who opt for decidability it is the sternest of warnings. We might call Will the voice of interpretive agnosticism, aware that all interpretation is untrustworthy, blind, and therefore unfinished. Will thus speaks as the "postmodern reader." No wonder he so sarcastically orders Garrett, the putatively traditional reader, to "get it over with," since Garrett's presumptuous task is to kill/finish the unpredictable Billy, the synechdochic "figure" of the West.

But of course as a filmmaker Peckinpah's very purpose is to interpret and thus neces-

²¹For an excellent discussion of Alias as mythmaker, and how the casting of Dylan as Alias enhances this theme, see Seydor (218).

²²Peckinpah does not include his name in the acting credits. I know of only one other instance where he appears in his own film, and it also suggests a highly self-reflexive—almost Vertovian—playfulness on his part. In *Convoy* Peckinpah plays the part of a filmmaker filming, coincidentally, another character played by Kristofferson. For this information, and for much valuable insight into Peckinpah, I am indebted to Professor John Simons.

sarily to decide—to create a “reading” of psychological and socio-cultural data through an emplotment on the screen. Peter Brooks reminds us that “plot” also refers to a “measured area of land” (11), thus linguistically connecting narrativity itself to the taming of frontiers and to gravesites. If plot is “the logic and dynamic of narrative, and narrative itself a form of understanding and explanation” (Brooks 10), then narration is finally a form of cognitive mastery. The artist, like all readers, “figures it out” by transforming process, flux, and the undecidable significations of experience into a structure or product. This has been the ideological linchpin of Romantic and Modernist aesthetics: art and death come together as transcendence of the arbitrary and contingent.”²³

Perhaps this explains Peckinpah’s choice to portray a coffin-maker. Despite Will’s obvious sympathy for Billy and his bitter opposition to Garrett and the Law (his last words to Garrett could hardly be more clear: “You chicken-shit, badge-wearin’ son-of-a-bitch”), in a sly comment on his own culpability, as artist and mythmaker, in Billy’s “death,”—Will is building a child’s, or “kid’s,” coffin—and on the more general relationship of narration and closure, Peckinpah may be playing upon the dilemma he shares with Garrett, Alias, and all readers/narrators (as opposed to narrators). Certainly if he has learned, unlike Garrett, that he can’t trust even himself, then he has put himself in a position, by way of Will, to call into question his own creation as a finished, unified product or closed system of signification.²⁴

Will’s most cryptic of all comments to Garrett in fact suggests just this subversive function:

You know what I’m gonna do? Put everything I own right here. And I’m gonna

bury it in this ground and I’m gonna leave this territory.

If we entertain the possibility that Peckinpah himself is speaking through Will, then these short lines may initiate a great many interpretive conjectures. Peckinpah could, for instance, be commenting upon his own frustrations with a film which was sabotaged, and eventually cut to shreds, by the studio system he so loved to hate. And so he unceremoniously announces it dead and buried and moves on. Or, in the subtle allusion to Huck Finn’s paradigmatic flight, we might hear Peckinpah’s allegiance to the frontier myth of unrestricted possibility encoded in the figure of Billy. Or, is Peckinpah signalling us that he is giving up on this myth and thus leaving the frontier?

Finally, without dismissing any of these possibilities, Peckinpah may be granting us a vision of interpretation and narration as processes embodied in the dialectical movement of closing/opening, stasis/movement, destruction/creation, satisfaction/desire. He seems to be allowing for the fact that, as Wallace Martin expresses it, “the narrator could truly end only by rejecting the very impetus to narrate in the first place. The dialectic of desire and satisfaction cannot be stopped.”²⁵ The film Peckinpah both creates and rejects would therefore become a moment in that larger interpretive process which Peckinpah as artist and reader continually (re)enacts. It becomes a product that participates in the process but is never enough because the process is never finished. At the same time, the film itself becomes an embodiment of the process through foregrounding the process itself in the actions of Garrett and Alias, the readers in the text. This in turn may invite the audience of readers to face their own inevitable participation in the creation of the film (and, ergo, their world) which at first they thought to be merely observing from a neutral position outside.

Will’s scene suggests even more in this regard. For, both structurally and tonally, it resembles nothing more than the enigmatic grave scene in *Hamlet*. Both are uncanny metacommentaries saturated by the presence of imminent death. A well-known

²³Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 88.

²⁴The many different versions of the film suggest an interesting metacommentary here: *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, like Peckinpah’s masterpiece *The Wild Bunch*, exists only in the form of several contested versions, none of which can claim for itself a final authority. Perhaps the studio interference which Peckinpah obsessively courted marks a space where the repressed returns in his work. Thus his own “plots” become forever suspended, always unfinished.

²⁵Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986) 85.

Shakespeare enthusiast, Peckinpah hints at such comparisons in the very name of his coffin-maker. *Hamlet*, very likely the most interpreted text in Western literature, also suggests itself here because it remains the most notorious canonical text which thematizes the process of interpretation. Its hero, so concerned with fulfilling the Law, is commonly perceived as the essence of indecisiveness; like Garrett, Hamlet is plagued by the indecidability of signifiers while relentlessly pursuing interpretive closure. Appropriately, each leaves a mass of bodies in his wake.

However, no matter what Christian humanist resolutions we may cautiously attribute to Shakespearean tragedy, in Peckinpah's film death provides no resolution at all for its haunted protagonist. After Billy's death, Garrett is exhausted as he slumps in a porch swing, but he is more haunted than ever by Billy's life and significance, as the frame narrative makes clear. As J. Hillis Miller says, "Death, seemingly a definitive end, always leaves behind some musing or bewildered survivor. . . . Death is the most enigmatic, the most open-ended ending of all" (6).

As both Garrett and Alias ponder Billy's death in the closing moments of the inner narrative of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, Miller's insight seems justified enough. But Peckinpah expands it even more. We are left not only to ponder Garrett pondering, but to ponder Garrett's death in the frame narrative as well. The film closes in a death that, in narrative terms, has motivated only a re-opening of the lives and legends of the Kid and Garrett. For Garrett's death not only ends the film, it begins it. In a way, then, our only avenue to interpretive closure is to endlessly begin again.

Brooks claims that,

If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for the end*. (52)

However dubious Brooks' own totalizing narrative of narrativity may be, Peckinpah's film itself problematizes such a narrative desire as politically and socially motivated through a stunning narrative achievement which questions its own "desire for the end." Garrett's last words, the last words spoken in the film, ostensibly hurled at John Poe, who has attempted to mutilate Billy's corpse, also serve as a Lacanian comment upon his own desires and upon Brooks' narrative desire: "What you want and what you get are two different things."²⁶ □

²⁶It seems rather appropriate that I "end" this essay with a note which reopens the entire issue of endings. Susan Winnett's recent feminist critique of Brooks' narratology—"Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure," *PMLA* 105 (1990)—proposes that Brooks' narrative paradigm is "tied to an ideology of representation derivable only from the dynamics of male sexuality": arousal, discharge, and quiescence/finality (506). Winnett then attempts to derive a "counterexample" of female narrative desire in which meaning or "sense-making" would be prospective rather than retrospective. I would suggest that *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, as a text which thematizes and resists its own desire for the end, might provide ample material for counterreadings which would locate the film's narrative discourse relative to sexual politics. Such a project, I would add, might suggest that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Peckinpah's films may not be simply seamless projections of male fantasy, but relatively heterological representations of male desire.

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T. Alan Broughton

RECOGNITIONS

As far as the sorrow, dear Mother, is concerned, which we have and continue to have in separation and loss, it seems to me it is instinctive, that without that we could not resign ourselves to separations, and that probably it will help us to recognize and find each other again later.

—Van Gogh, to his mother

We both insisted I leave
but I stayed for months
as close as your breasts.
I have seen my own son
heaved bawling into air,
never again tethered so near
another beating heart.

Leaving the house you
shaped,
I strode in a world
made just for me,
flailing and snatching.
I gave you one more room
to clean from habit.

Now when we meet beneath
the same pine trees,
old resemblances puzzle.
Was he the one who wobbled
with outstretched arms
across first lawns? Or she
the voice who sang of cake
and little horses to come
on the far side of fever?

How often we rehearse
this final scene:
you stand and gaily wave
where the sidewalk ends.

BETWEEN HYSTERIA AND DEATH: EXPLORING SPACES FOR FEMININE

Subjectivity in de Palma's *The Sisters* and *Body Double*

In one minute you will have to predict what our unsuspecting subject will do. . . and those of you peeking in at home, peek along with him.

—Ted Craft, gameshow host for "Peeping Toms" in *The Sisters*

Brian de Palma's films, particularly those preoccupied with the woman's body as site of and agent for violence, like *The Sisters* (1973), *Carrie* (1976), *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and *Body Double* (1984), have drawn responses ranging from outraged feminist protest to often celebratory fascination with his visual excesses.¹ The fascination with his cinematic spectacles centers, for the most part, around de Palma's pyrotechnics onscreen—oft remarked homages to Hitchcock,² high tech visual effects, and self-reflexive Godardian camera work to name but a few. This spectatorial pleasure is foregrounded by de Palma's status as an *auteur* who, through his various films, works with linked thematics of split identity and voyeurism, as well as easily iden-

tifiable stylistic homages to grandmasters of the cinema like Hitchcock. While such unproblematic recuperation is suspect in its unthought self-satisfaction and its attendant inclination to smooth over the violence done to women onscreen, the feminist outrage, though useful in its anger, is restrictive in its tendency to dismiss the often overtly feminist concerns that engage de Palma's films. The uneasy problematic of recuperating space for political analyses without plunging into apolitical textualization of the films is perceptively examined in Bruce Babington's analysis of *Carrie* and Wendy Steiner's as well as Asselle and Gandhi's discussions of *Dressed to Kill*: the analyses point out the films' sometimes sexist attitudes, but attempt to open up sites for resistance within the films' multiplicity of discourses and visual images.³

Helpful as these recuperations are, I suggest that de Palma's particular centrality to feminist concerns lies in the very split he tries to negotiate—between visual spectacle and political statement(s): the films, in the flamboyance of their visual manoeuvres, foreground and indict the scopophilic technologies within and without the cinema that (re)produce asymmetrical, gendered subject positions in contemporary Western society. The technologies enabling de Palma's filmmaking recognize their complicity in a scopophilic economy organized around the predominance of the visual. As Luce Irigaray suggests, such an economy consigns women to the role of marginalized other; not allowing them to speak their sexuality, it denies them the position of speaking subject:

[W]oman's desire has . . . been submerged

¹For a sampling of articles voicing a feminist protest, see S.K. Bathrick, "Carrie; Ragtime: The Horror of Growing Up Female," *Jump Cut* 14 (1977): 9-10; M. Citron, "Carrie Meets Marathon Man," *Jump Cut* 14 (1977): 10-12; George Morris, "Summertime Blues: *Dressed to Kill* and *No Place to Go*," *Film Comment* 16 (Sept/Oct 1980):54-5; David Denby et al., "Pornography: Love or Death?" *Film Comment* 20 (Nov/Dec 1984): 29-30. For some commentary that celebrates de Palma's visual technique and his focus on voyeurism, see Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema: Master Spy, Master Seducer," *New Yorker* 56 (Aug 1980): 68-71; Laurent Bouzereau, *The De Palma Cut* (New York: Dembner Books, 1988); Susan Dworkin, *Double De Palma* (New York: Newmarket Press, 1984).

²William Fisher's essay on de Palma's strong misreadings (in the Bloomian sense) of Hitchcock historicizes both directors' works, providing a valuable reading of de Palma's "perspective" on Hitchcock as a modernist or post-modernist practice. See "Re: Writing: Film History: From Hitchcock to DePalma," *Persistence of Vision* 1 (Summer 1984): 13-22.

³Bruce Babington, "Twice A Victim: Carrie Meets the BFI," *Screen* 24 (May/June 1983): 4-18; Wendy Steiner, "De Palma's Romances," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 21 (Summer 1982); Giovanna Asselle and Behroze Gandhi, "Dressed to Kill" *Screen* 23 (Sept/Oct 1982): 137-43.

by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks. Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation.⁴

In the particular cluster of de Palma's films centering around women and their eroticized bodies, a comparatively early film, *The Sisters*, often read as de Palma's overtly feminist film,⁵ overtly indicts the master narratives manipulating the (women) objects of the voyeur's look even as it reflects on the constructions of gendered subject positions in a technologized, voyeuristic society. For the characters in the film and for its spectators, succumbing to the seductions of the voyeuristic gaze is always more dangerous than it is pleasurable: the indictment of the ordering scopic economy is thorough. In contrast, a later film like *Body Double* proceeds by indirection to its concerns; though the plot revolves around the gaze as did that of *The Sisters*, it stresses the seductive pleasures of voyeurism. Yielding to the voyeuristic fascination of the gaze, characters in the film and its spectators are positioned as always already guilty of the violence they/we perpetuate. Thus *Body Double's* delight in visual spectacle becomes a means to undermine the voyeuristic subject positions forced upon us by a technologized society, stressing all the while that we (re)produce such positioning inasmuch as we wish to resist it. Flaunting the de Palma signature in its visual pyrotechnics and its preoccupations with voyeurism and sexuality, the film exploited the backlash of controversy that the earlier releases *Carrie* and *Dressed to Kill* incurred over their pornography.⁶ Ironically, then, *Body Double's* com-

mercial success, its comparatively light-hearted treatment of the "serious" problematics of sexual/gender identities, indicates possibilities of resistance within a scopophilic society that the more nihilistic *The Sisters* forecloses. The earlier film's pessimism denies positions for resistance outside the control of its master narratives and allows only silence within their stranglehold.

"It was all a ridiculous mistake, there was no body."

—Grace Collier to Detective Kelly in *The Sisters*

The controlling image of Siamese twins (at once one and other) in *The Sisters*, first introduced by the stylized conjoined fetuses within the womb in the credit sequence, establishes the film's central enigma—who is Dominique and why does she kill? But more importantly for this analysis, the image establishes de Palma's recurrent concern with doubling and split identity in a specifically feminist context. Though Danielle, the good twin, is superficially at ease as womanly object of the gaze, Dominique, the evil twin, comes forth to stab the voyeur in his genitals. In the person(s) of Danielle/Dominique, at once one and other, is allegorized the paradoxical positioning of woman, at once placid object and threatening subject.

The only person who "sees" Dominique, in any sense, in the temporal present of the film is Grace Collier, reporter/voyeur—herself paradoxical master and mistress of the look. From her apartment across the street from Danielle Blanchion-Breton's (in framings reconstructing those of *Rear Window*), Grace sees a black man scrawling "help" in his own blood on the window; she sees Dominique, face distorted, twisted in body, stabbing him. Grace Collier, significantly, is also the only witness to the otherwise absent black victim, whose body is unidentifiable because untraceable.⁷ When the police finally arrive on the scene in the persons of Detective Kelly and his cohort, they are less interested in

⁴Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 25-6.

⁵Robin Wood, "... " *American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film*, eds. Britton et al.

⁶For a summary of reviews and de Palma's reactions, see Dworkin, 22-3 and 132-3, and Bouzereau, 69-71.

⁷Both *The Sisters* and *Body Double* inscribe the cultural other in the black Philip Woode and Sam Bouchard's masquerade as the Indian as significant absences in a white ordered society. This problematic is beyond the present scope of the paper, but it seems related to de Palma's quixotic representations of gendered others in the women he portrays.

checking on the body than in harassing "Miss Civil Liberty" Collier, reporter for the *Staten Island Panorama*, in retaliation for her articles on the police force. Not to be stymied, Grace determines to get her story and solve the murder and, to this end, hires private detective Larch to check the scene of the crime and find the body. She herself trails Danielle and Emile to the Loisel Institute in pursuit of the elusive Dominique, only to be captured by the Svengalian Emile and hypnotized into taking the dead Dominique's place. Dominique who is responsible for the killing, lives now in the recesses of Danielle's mind, only mentally summoned when Danielle is sexually aroused, and then is intent on killing the man responsible for her/their arousal. Sharing her persona, Grace watches as Emile forgets the dangers of sexual play and asserts erotic mastery over Danielle, only to be stabbed to death. The police arrive on the scene, arrest Danielle and attempt to get Grace to reveal the whereabouts of the black corpse, but Grace is adamant in the denial of her story.

This narrative, playing as it does with the problematic of looking/witnessing, is itself situated in a cinematic strategy that repeatedly connects the act of looking at the visual spectacle with the gaze(s) that construct gendered subjects in the material world. In the opening sequence for example, the visual play on the blind woman who strips in front of the watching male in the bath house sets up the film's explorations of the technologies for looking. As the camera zooms in on the voyeuristic Phillip Woode, he is startlingly repositioned on a TV screen within the outline of a keyhole, with the logo "Peeping Toms" superimposed. A gameshow voiceover takes control and host Ted Craft remarks, as the camera pans the audience, "In one minute you will have to predict what our unsuspecting subject will do . . . and those of you peeking in at home, peek along with him." Not only are the spectators in the theater positioned as peepers and gendered as male (in our identification with Woode), but we are asked to recognize the apparatus that construct their (and our) peeping subjectivities.

Where the cinematic apparatus offers a public, and legitimate, voyeurism, the technology of television allows a private, and insidi-

ous, at-home freedom to peep. The positions of Peeping Toms that are given us by the film's opening sequence are ones that we construct ourselves, not only in the darkness of the cinema but through our cultural positions as objects of the gaze and peepers within a scopophilic economy. In the opening sequence, Danielle, who masquerades as the blind woman, and Woode are both constructed by the spectator's and the camera's eye in ways directly relevant to Laura Mulvey's scathing critique of the camera's pleasures in scopophilia, pleasures that she rightly insists are played up to by the hermetically sealed fantasy of narrative cinema.⁸ Yet the narrative, far from being hermetically sealed, intriguingly hints that Woode's gaze within the TV show is the ironic trigger to his death and invites us, the spectators, to participate in his guilt by participating in the sexual violence of his look. Danielle, picking up his look, responds to Woode's interest onscreen the gameshow, and later invites him to ask her out. The ensuing night of sexual intercourse summons Dominique (Danielle's dead Siamese twin and other persona) to kill the looker. If Dominique were not summoned, she would not exist: she has to be constructed by the male gaze, which is also the spectator's, in order to exist.

The film's concern with sexual identity is self-evident: Dominique kills only when Danielle is sexually manipulated, and sex is manipulation in this film. Emile Breton, Danielle's lover and ex-husband, is also Dominique's killer: the master psychiatrist deciding who is to live and who is not, he performs the dreadful cleavage that kills Dominique in a macabre b & w tv sequence which seems to constitute both part of Danielle's memory and Grace's hypnosis. He forces Grace, on discovering her in the Loisel Institute, into the role of patient by giving her another identity, and hypnotizes her into sharing Dominique's repressed self. Repeated framings of Grace in bed next to Danielle, watching helplessly as Emile fondles Danielle, recreate Dominique's aversion to his advances. The hypnosis sequences of the twins' past (suggestively, we sometimes see Grace

⁸Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" rpt. in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 46-56, esp. 59/60.

in place of Dominique) in grainy TV footage, the cuts to Emile's distorted face, the fades into a watching, hypnotized iris all indicate Emile's attempts to make over Grace, to shape her subject position by controlling her story. Grace's regression in the last sequence of the film suggests, indeed, that she has succumbed to Emile's master narrative (the "mind fuck" as Liz Blake in *Dressed to Kill* and Sam Bouchard in *Body Double* term similar attempts at control).⁹

Danielle/Dominique may have killed Emile, the master narrator, but the seduction of his narrative continues. For the women in the movie, to succumb to its seductions is to lose their narratives constructed at such cost in a phallogocentric world. Grace Collier's loss of her reporter self, for example, hints that she needs to be re-educated out of her role as voyeurist reporter (a role emphasized by shots of her with binoculars, watching Larch in Danielle's apartment, and shots of her watching the history of the twins and the Loisel Institute) into her role as object of the gaze. Grace as reporter constantly transgresses the bounds of male control as in her encounters with Detective Kelly and Larch. Far from buying into a liberal humanist position that proffers the independent woman reporter as an answer to the male hero, the film questions the terms of that proposition, indicating variously that the Grace's subject position is threatening to the order of the world in which she lives. Though it is one that is constantly undercut by her status as woman, the persona of "Miss Civil Liberty" determined to make her way to a bigger by-line depends on a masculinist ethic. The paradox of Grace's position is re-iterated by the tension between the role of daughter needing to find the right man that her mother constructs and that of prying reporter that Grace builds for herself. The tightrope she walks finally topples her into the no (wo)man's land she occupies at the end of the film.

The astringent irony of the last scenes reinforces the film's bleak nihilism. The penultimate scene establishes the detectives' phallogocentric narrative, the narrative of jus-

tice, as Emile's narrative of desire ends. The camera cuts from the gothic Loisel Institute where Grace is being taken away by her parents to a man, Kelly's plainclothes' cohort, stationed beside a car in front of a white house. As he looks up over his shoulder, the camera follows in a close up eyeline match of the gabled house and moves in for an extreme close up of a window high up in the eaves. The ensuing cut, to a voiceover of Kelly's affable "Well, Miss Collier," reveals a medium shot of Kelly seated in Grace's bedroom, Grace in a white nightgown on her bed, and Mrs. Collier between the two, her distorted head intervening between the camera and the conversation. The scene cues us in visually for the conventional resolution scene where the detective takes control, as in films from the genre of detective/noir suspense (the last scenes of Curtiz' *Mildred Pierce* provide a good example).

But, as Kelly tells Grace about Danielle Breton's arrest for the first degree murder of Emile Breton, he confesses to his inability to find the body of the black man she had witnessed being killed. Grace underlines his lack of control over the narrative of law and order in her refusal to repeat the story, "It was all a ridiculous mistake, there was no murder." Though Kelly takes her refusal as an incentive for further apology, the camera in slow synchronization to Bernard Herrman's haunting music tracks around the detective, repositioning him momentarily between a huge Raggedy Ann doll and Grace Collier. In this ironic visual comment, Grace and Raggedy Ann are (as were she and Danielle) sisters in bed, partners as doll objects. The camera completes its 360 degree track and the conventional shot/reverse shot structure of Hollywood continuity editing resumes as Grace repeats her denial of the killing. The scene ends with a medium shot of Grace in bed, a distorted shadow to her left, being gradually superimposed by a shot of the missing couch in which the body is hidden. A ruminating cow stands beside the couch completing the picture of rustic peace in some remote Canadian landscape while the camera languidly withdraws to reveal railway tracks, a railway shed, and a tractor approaching. As the camera continues its movement backward, Larch disguised as a telephone lineman is revealed feet first: he stands posi-

⁹ See Steiner, 393. Revealingly enough, in commenting on this phrase of Liz Blake's in *Dressed to Kill*, she notices the connection in the film between voyeurism and psychoanalysis, both indicative, finally, of the will to control.

tioned on a telephone pole, binoculars focused on the couch. Over this last image is superimposed "The End."

The last of the subject positions given us, Larch's, is the most futile, and ironically the most appropriate to our spectatorial status: we sit, in the theatre's darkness, watching narratives that further the frustrated violence of our voyeuristic roles. No viable alternatives are allowed us. Kelly's attempt to regain control over the narrative, for example, and to direct Grace's former story to its allotted slot in his re-opening of the murder case is equally frustrated: he is denied a solution as are we. Presented as we are with Grace/doll in bed, the riddle of Danielle/Dominique cannot be closed; though we may have solved the riddle of Dominique's killings, the narratives that force her to such brutality are still seductive. The visual imagery of technologies for peeping (TV screens in gameshows, at *Life Magazine*, in the hospital) is related to the sadistic control of institutions of medicine and the law (the scalpel wielded in the surgery of twins, the cleaver that replaces the scalpel for the operation itself, the knife that the police have to find). The images force the violence of Danielle/Dominique's subject position upon us. She/they are sideshow freaks, a visual allegory for the violence of the cultural positioning of women as objects of pleasure and control, as is Grace in bed with her doll. Grace in her white nightgown and the ruminating cow next to the couch are related not only by the graphic match of the superimposition: in her doll world, she is more an object than is the cow in its placid rusticity.

The film's brutality, it would appear, lies not so much in the visual savagery of Dominique/Danielle's stabbings as in its black comment on constructions of gender in patriarchal society, its searing examination of the scopophilic mastery of technological culture. Even as the scenes link the images of Grace and the cow, they connect the images of Kelly waiting futilely for Grace's story and Larch waiting endlessly for someone to collect the couch. Indeed, the investigations of the detectives, public (Kelly) and private (Larch), are indicative of their determination not to see and to maintain the borders of a regulated voyeurism that depends on its phallocentrism to enforce its legitimacy. In the film's radical

nihilism, none of Grace's narratives find voice as they are all silenced; she comes to occupy the hysteric's space which allows for no narrative. This hysteric's space, in Irigaray's rethinking of Freudian psychoanalysis, is where woman's power is kept in reserve at the same time that it is repressed and outside language:

Hysteria is silent and at the same time it mimes. And—how could it be otherwise—miming/reproducing a language that is not its own, masculine language, it caricatures and deforms that language: it "lies," it "deceives," as women have always been reputed to do. (Irigaray 137)

Retreating into hysteria, Grace withdraws from an impossibly phallogocentric world. Inasmuch as it is a protest, it is a protest that cannot be heard within the film's diegesis—Kelly, for example, thinks that she denies him her narrative as a ploy to make him apologize further. Only we, the spectators, may recognize it for what it is, if we are so inclined.

"Don't touch me! Corpse sucker! I've seen your type on those horror movies on late night TV, you're a necrophiliac!"

—Holly Body to Jake Scully in *Body Double*

That *Body Double* is a frothier film playing to the demands of an audience familiar with de Palma's earlier successes is perhaps to its advantage as the strategies for resistance that it sketches are strategies not outside but always already *within* the guilty pleasures of scopophilic voyeurism. The narrative of *Body Double*, much as did that of *The Sisters*, revolves around the problematics of sexual identity. But, where in the earlier movie, the psychiatrist's narrative is clearly the most powerful and does the most violence, in the later film, Sam Bouchard's attempts to impose a master narrative are never as powerful as he would like them to be. While Jake and Holly, the participants and survivors of his attempts at control, offer no unproblematic strategies of resistance, the film avoids the dark pessimism that informs *The Sisters*.

Body Double focuses on the way an out of work actor, Jake Scully, is set up by a friend, Sam Bouchard, to watch Gloria Revelle's masturbation routine each evening, so that Sam (in reality her husband, Alexander Revelle) disguised as an Indian can murder her. Jake,

having witnessed the gruesome killing as he was intended to do, subverts his function as unsuspecting witness when he discovers that an erotic dancer, Holly Body, does a routine disquietingly similar to Gloria's. Jake tracks down Holly, unveils Sam's identity as Alexander Revelle, and finally solves the last piece of the puzzle as he tears through the Indian's mask to reveal a murderous Sam/Alexander. As a vengeful Sam attempts to bury Holly and Jake alive, Jake arises from the grave to save the day, or the night as the case may be.

The opening sequence of the film signals de Palma's penchant for foregrounding the spectator's complicity in creating the spectacle of film. *The Sisters* begins with images from a TV game show; *Body Double* opens with a sequence from a low budget gothic/vampire film. Lush gothic credits in dripping blood red letters are superimposed on a overpainted sunset behind palm trees. The artifice alerts viewers to the parodic play on Hollywood vampire flicks, as does Pino Donaggio's eerie score, replete with wolves howling. In a typical de Palma shot, the camera moves slowly backward past sensuous marble angels and tracks languidly down beneath a headstone to an open coffin to shock us with a blond, punk vampire who turns, baring his fanged mouth. As the camera freezes in an extreme close-up of the awfully open mouth, the music dies, and an off-screen voice exclaims, "Action, Jake. Jake, action." Not only are we positioned in a film within a film, but we are asked to gaze with the camera at the humorous spectacle of a vampire who literally cannot close his mouth to take his bite and complete his sexual conquest over his victim and his spectator. Jake Scully, even in this first shot as frozen vampire, is already castrated as performer and agent. This is further underlined by the following sequence when he surprises his girlfriend atop her lover and in consequence is forced to move out of her house. Unemployed and homeless, Jake is perfect victim for the seduction of voyeurism which promises total control behind the lens of the telescope.

In playing on the opening spectacle of a film within a film, de Palma is careful to connect his protagonist's, Jake's, debilitating claustrophobia to the ordeal of being filmed and having the camera's eye "right on top" of

him. As the camera dolly sweeps up and out of his way, Jake is hauled out of his tomb, and embarks on an incoherent explanation: "I was in the coffin, I closed my eyes. I thought everything was going to be O.K. I opened my eyes-and the camera was right on top of me, and I don't know, I couldn't move." His claustrophobia causes Scully to be fired from his job, and, much later in the movie, will become central to his inadequacy in dealing with the Indian who feels free to bury him alive. Jake's castrating phobia is thus associated from the start with the voyeuristic technology of the cinema: Jake's position as object of the camera's gaze is linked to his inability to "perform" as a vampire, to prey upon his victim and to "act" as actor and as person. Once set up behind Bouchard's phallic telescope, its sights trained on Gloria's supposed body, Jake constructs a narrative in vindication of his inability to perform before the camera. Ironically, his position as voyeur behind the dictating lens of the telescope proves no less debilitating than his position as object of the gaze.

Jake's titillation by the body doing its erotic routine (a body not Gloria's but Holly's) cannot be separated from his attempts at following Gloria Revelle into Bellini's, his gaze at her undressing behind parted curtains, his impulse to pocket the panties she discards in the trash. There is no question of Jake being in love with Gloria; his fascination with her is an attempt to impose his narrative on the pastiche of a woman with the face of one and the body of another, both women whose thoughts he is never privy to and at whose actions he can only peek. The Gloria who goes shopping to seduce a lover who never appears is a two-dimensional poster woman, reminiscent of a Godard film. The image she projects—Californian tan, impossibly slim, breathily sexual¹⁰—is inseparable from her identity as the "real" Gloria Revelle, woman, wife, mistress and object. Each "role" is as insubstantial as the next, a play of surfaces with no depth as are the telescopic lens shots that initially capture her onscreen which are

¹⁰See Dworkin, 100-1. De Palma's concentration on Gloria's image is recounted in Dworkin's anecdote about the actress, Deborah Sheldon, being forced to lose weight around her thighs for the shot of Gloria Revelle in the clinging white skirt when Jake follows her into the Rodeo Collection.

also, revealingly enough, point of view shots from Scully's perspective: Gloria in sunglasses, in a white dress, in her white car, as she waits in her driveway and Scully watches. She does not "perform" as does Holly Body, but everything she does is on display, marketing a particular mode of life for the consumption of Jake and the spectator, both impotent and unable to act.

Gloria's status as image is particularly foregrounded by the lyrically romantic fantasy sequence on the beach after she runs up the tunnel to lead the frozenly claustrophobic Scully out into the daylight after his encounter with the Indian. The high tech visual effects, the dizzying pans of the background as the revolving couple embrace in the foreground become a homage to the cinematic apparatus constructing the scene rather than the romance of Jake and Gloria. In synchronization with Pino Donaggio's cloying score, the camera pleasures itself in a routine almost reminiscent of Holly Body's. De Palma, in fact, filmed the painted studio backdrops and the beach separately with a 360 degree camera, process plated them, and filmed the actors embracing on a turntable in front of this moving background in order to achieve the effect he wanted (Dworkin 75-7). The parodic pastiche of romantic cliches that he assembles is a strategy repeated in *Dressed to Kill* where Kate Miller's encounter with the intriguing stranger at the Art Museum functions on much the same dynamic as Wendy Steiner so aptly points out (388-9). Though Gloria resists the encounter at the last, muttering, "No, no, I can't, I can't do this—not here," and clacks her way back down the tunnel, she is most seductive to Jake, and to us, the spectators, when out of reach.

Freed of the tight close-up onscreen with Gloria, Jake is delivered from the necessity to act by her escape down the long, womb-like tunnel. Jake's identity as voyeur depends on distancing the object of his gaze, otherwise he risks impotence when "performing" for the camera, as in the scenes in the tunnel with the Indian, or on-camera in the opening sequence. Incapable of pursuing her because of his recurrent claustrophobia, Jake is also unable to follow through on his sexual fantasies. The deep focus photography positions Jake's profile in tight close-up as he looks down, frustrated, in the foreground, while a

miniscule Gloria runs down the tunnel.

The cut immediately following the shot of the tunnel is a medium shot of Jake back in his voyeur's paradise, telephone in hand, telescope in front, as he paces about abortively trying to call Gloria: "Hello Gloria, this is Jake. I'm the guy that almost—fucked you at the beach today." Unable to complete his call, he resorts to the empowering telescope: in a series of POV shots, we see the Revelle house, first in darkness, then windows lighted as the security guard and Gloria enter the house. Reverse shots of Jake at the telescope, caught up in his voyeur's magic, go from medium shots to close-ups as he watches the Indian moving into the upper level with an upright drill in his hand, the image a parody of the impotent Jake behind his phallic but static telescope. The camera zooms in as the Indian conceals himself and watches Gloria undress, and Jake, also in close-up, watches him watching her. Immobilized behind the telescope, snared in the seduction of the gaze, Jake hesitates just a little too long before snatching up the telephone, ironically initiating Gloria's killing by the act of completing his call. As he screams an incoherent warning down the phone, the Indian rises and attempts to strangle her with the phone cord.

Jake's call is trigger to the murder; the narrative is set in place by his position behind the eye of the telescope. Jake wants to "see" what is going to happen as much as do the spectators of his narrative: he/we are prey to the striptease, not of Holly's disrobing, but of narrative disclosure.¹¹ He enters the house too late, gets knocked down by the Indian's dog, and sees the bloody drill tip emerging through the ceiling. Upstairs, the Indian completes the murder in a painstaking sequence which allows us to witness his first abortive attempt as the drill comes unplugged. A low angle medium shot of his legs completes the scene as the drill emerges like a giant steel phallus into an unseen Gloria. The instrument of violence is heavily coded as male, the phallic drill becoming a visual allegory for the violence of the sexual act, and, by extension, of our desire to know the end of the

¹¹See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 89. Barthes remarks, significantly but in passing, on the striptease staged by narrative suspense, the erotic gap that tantalizes the reader with further revelation.

narrative. The drill is, moreover, linked metonymically through the visual imagery of the sequence to the telescope and the violence that it perpetrates on Gloria through the insistent POV shots from Jake's perspective. Jake's inability to stop the murder because of his fascination with the telescope's spectacle links him, as it does his spectators fascinated with the cinematic image, to the violence that the Indian performs with his drill.

The strength of Jake's investment in his role as voyeur is highlighted when he tries out for a role in a porn movie while attempting to locate Gloria's body double: he defines his role in the video by defining his role in Sam's narrative when he repeats, "I like to watch." Though he successfully consummates the act with Holly Body, the moment of sexual consummation is concealed from the camera. There is, in both the film we watch and in the video, "no come shot"; we, the spectators, as well as the cameramen shooting the video are cheated of the proof of Jake's prowess as the voyeur, significantly, can only perform off-camera, or in the darkness of the theatre. In contrast, Holly Body, the punk porn star, is delineated by her role as object of the gaze; her name plays with connotations of the (un)holy body of woman in the Western imagination as well as with the body of Hollywood, site of pleasure for the camera and its spectators.¹² Even her notorious blue video, "Holly Does Hollywood," is a comment on the voyeurism of the film industry. The stress on Holly as part of the business of Hollywood is also indicative of the status of women in cinema, seducers of and seduced by the eye of the camera. As Holly remarks in her TV interview, watched by Jake in Sam's futuristic bedroom, she "gets off on being watched." If Jake would like to watch, Holly likes being defined by her body, being watched, though she is careful to define the parameters of her looked-at-ness:

I do not do animal acts. I do not do S & M or any variations of that particular bent. No water sports either. I will not shave my pussy. No fist-fucking and absolutely no coming in my face.

Later, as she accompanies Jake to his party, she clarifies yet further that she cannot get into acts with women, though she has no problems with those who do. Though the parameters that she proclaims are a means of control over the business of her body, they are equally the parameters for accepted, straight heterosexual sex without any "bent" apart from the sheer dynamics of exhibitionism, sex for the camera, the peepers, the voyeurs. All the kinkiness, within these boundaries, is strictly the dialectic of the look, of watching and being watched.

The technologies of the look, in *Body Double*, offer possibilities for resistance in their parodic visual images, unlike *The Sisters* where they prove ultimately unnegotiable for Grace Collier who retreats to her child's bedroom, re-constructed in the image of her doll. Gloria Revelle, of course, dies quite summarily, but her *body double*, Holly, unlike Dominique or Grace Collier, resists her co-optation into Jake's, and Sam's, narratives. She performs as object of the gaze for the camera (as did Danielle for the TV gameshow), but she is not destroyed by the seductions of its gaze. Holly uses the camera for her pleasure as well as for her viewers'; she refuses to be confined to the role of object, moving from the position of the looked-at-object to that of the looker/subject, "getting off" on her spectators' arousal by her act. Unlike Grace or Danielle/Dominique, she does not retreat into death or doll status, silenced of narrative.

Jake inhabits a space the obverse of Holly's in his position as male voyeur and protagonist. Paralyzed by the camera in his role as vampire and as protagonist, he is deprived of any control over his story. Only in the last sequences of the film is Jake able to "act": in refusing to follow Sam/the Indian's directions, he literally rises from the grave, a feat he is unable to perform in the opening sequence, and saves Holly. Jake, indeed, finally completes his bite—into the body double in the vampire film—in the closing sequences. But, while he has come through as actor in both senses, as performer and as agent, Holly refuses to legitimate his performance by play-

¹² See Susan Rubin Suleiman, "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism" in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). Suleiman concisely and insightfully indicates the place the female body occupies in the Western cultural imagination. The rest of the essays in the volume, as well, analyze the spaces for feminine subjectivity in the positioning of the female body in literature, film and art.

ing into his status as hero. Jake, though resurrected as low budget star is no master narrator, even as much as Sam Bouchard or Rubin the director of the low budget vampire flick, or, by extension, even as much as the master voyeur and manipulator, master "mind fucker" de Palma himself for whom Sam and Rubin are, as it were, stand-ins.

These interlocking narratives which hold its actors in thrall provide much of *Body Double's* fascination. Though so complexly positioned, the actors in the film are not rendered static; they undermine the power of narratives in which they act by redefining the parameters for their roles. In contrast, the scopophilic narratives of a technologized culture in *The Sisters* leave its actors with no voice save that of death or hysteria; the earlier film finally indicates the futility of attempting to find ways of moving *outside* the stranglehold of its cultural narratives. Though *Body Double* leaves nobody uncensored, neither Jake nor Holly, it asks not so much for a way out as for strategies of resistance within the guilty cycle of pleasure and danger. Caught as we are precisely within this dialectic, our complicity as spectators of de Palma's cinematic spectacles enables the violence of his image. Yet we are ourselves constructed by the camera, placed in the theatre's darkness with its fantasies, as is Jake Scully in the coffin by Rubin and behind the telescope by Sam Bouchard. But by the same paradox we are never held to one position; we see and act differently as the imperatives of the situation demand, as indeed do Jake and Holly.

This emphasis on the process of the film, its duplicitously constructed and constructing tendencies, is insistently linked in both *The Sisters* and *Body Double* to questions about subjectivity, the always already gendered subject, that is nonetheless in the process of being perpetuated. The final sequences of *Body Double* tell us as much. A high angle shot cranes into the open grave where a suddenly awakened Holly crouches in revulsion away from Jake: "Don't touch me! Corpse-sucker! I've seen your type on those horror movies on late night TV, you're a necrophiliac! Yechhh!" Necrophilia is late night TV's *other* to the romantic heroism of daytime soap (as exemplified in the lyrically romantic scene with Gloria), but Jake Scully

loses out on either. Humorous though the comment is, its astringent appropriateness is foregrounded by the closing credit sequence when a resurrected Scully the vampire bites into the body double. Scully makes women into living corpses in his persona as vampire and he has been responsible for Gloria Revelle's death by his inadvertant complicity in Bouchard's violent narrative. But his attempts at control are entangled in a web of changing power positions; as voyeur or as victim, Jake is not hero, but nor is he villain.

It is in Holly's refusal of his advances, perhaps, that our possibilities for resistance lie, constrained though these may be. Preferring the darkness of the grave to her "role" as rescued heroine in Jake Scully's drama, Holly Body (re)defines the parameters of her position. Unlike Grace Collier, Holly's body in its movement from TV screen to grave does not move from speech to hysteric silence; rather, her vociferous resistance is to be heard long after the movie ends and the blood drips down the bared breasts of Jake's victim. Unlike so many women in de Palma's movies who remain silenced through death (Danielle/Dominique, Gloria Revelle, Kate Miller in *Dressed to Kill*), or through nightmare trauma (Grace Collier, Sue Snell in *Carrie*, Liz Blake in *Dressed to Kill*), Holly Body is quite able to scramble out of the grave without Jake's helping hand. De Palma, director and shaper of Gloria's and Holly's bodies and the roles/coffins he wants them to fill, is, of course, implicated in Jake's as well as Holly's roles, caught within the circle of guilt and pleasure. But it is in that tangled series of guilty manipulations onscreen that we find our spaces for resistance as we shuttle constantly between the positions of peepers and those at whom they peep. Neither wholly unquestioning consumers of Hollywood visual spectacles, nor competely consumed by its pleasures as spectators, our strategies for resistance lie between the two, in suspecting our always complicit status.*

*I am indebted to Trevor Pronga whose insightful paper on de Palma's *Carrie* and perceptive comments were catalyst for this exploration of de Palma's feminist agenda. □

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CROSSING TRAJECTORIES IN *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*

The themes of isolation and alienation—an unfulfilled desire to connect and to make sense of the world—are amply documented among the critics of Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. McCullers herself stated, "The broad principal theme of this book is indicated in the first dozen pages. This is the theme of man's revolt against his own inner isolation and his urge to express himself as fully as possible."¹ Within this theme the mute John Singer is the magnet drawing Mick Kelly, Jake Blount, Dr. Copeland, and, to some extent, Biff Brannon. Singer's "eyes made a person think that he heard things nobody else had ever heard, that he knew things no one had ever guessed before."² Blount, Copeland, and Mick seek an impossible connection with Singer, while Biff observes and thinks: "They talked, and the mute's expression changed as he watched them. It was a funny thing. The reason was it in them or in him?" (114). Biff's observations and ruminations give us a more objective perspective of Singer's effect on the other characters, a clearer lens through which we can see their hunger for understanding and human contact.

The above themes have been expounded on thoroughly, and I have no quarrel with them, except that they overlook a key aspect of the novel—the linked opposing trajectories of Mick Kelly and Biff Brannon. These trajectories start at opposite poles and cross somewhere in the deadly time-space of the novel. Mick Kelly begins in androgyny with high energy, enlightenment, and artistic transcendence. At the end of the novel she has become trapped in the flesh of a sexual being, heading toward confusion, exhaustion, and the

loss of artistic drive. Biff Brannon, on the other hand, begins in the morass of his sexual past and moves upward toward androgyny with its concomitant artistic awareness.

Mick begins as the androgyn—the tomboy dressed in shorts and tennis shoe—sat the top of her trajectory in terms of artistic vitality and vision, where we see her literally climbing to the top of a roof: "There was something about getting to the very top that gave you a wild feeling and made you want to yell or sing or raise up your arms and fly" (28). Mick is enlightened. The muse speaks to her personally, vibrantly, distinctly: "It was a funny thing—but nearly all the time there was some kind of piano piece or other music going on in the back of her mind. No matter what she was doing or thinking it was nearly always there" (29).

At this juncture Mick is strong and confident: "M.K.—That was what she would have written on everything when she was seventeen years old and very famous" (29). She identifies with "MOTSART," another "young kid" who had "made up all these beautiful pieces for the piano and for the violin and for a band or orchestra too" (31). Mick can identify with Mozart because she herself is an artist and a musician. She paints pictures at the free art class and attempts to make a violin out of an old ukulele. She seeks out the strains of music wherever she can find them, even if it means stalking the rich part of town to find homes in which radios are tuned to classical pieces. In contrast, Mick does not identify with her older sisters and does not want to become like them. "I don't want to be like either of you," she says to her sisters, "and I don't want to look like either of you. And I won't. That's why I wear shorts. I'd rather be a boy any day, and I wish I could move in with Bill" (35). With one sister, Etta, primping "all the day long" and the other one "good-looking but thick in the head," it is easy to see why Mick cannot identify with

¹Oliver Evans, "Author's Outline of *The Mute*," by Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of Carson McCullers* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1965) 195-215.

²Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (New York: Bantam, 1953) 20.

them. Her dreams and plans have no space within the traditional role of woman she sees around her. For Mick, the androgyny is unconscious, for the people she identifies with and wants to emulate are all male. She sees Bill and Harry Minowitz as having valuable thoughts and real options in the world, and her artistic mentors are Mozart and Beethoven; whereas womanhood offers her nothing but foolishness (her sisters) or drudgery (her mother).

While Mick's trajectory begins high in spirit and androgyny, Biff's starts low while his developing androgyny is still contaminated by Alice's presence: "Being around that woman always made him different from his real self. It made him tough and small and common as she was" (11). Biff has rejected male sexuality, but we are not sure exactly why. He reminisces about a happy first year of marriage, a strenuous sex life between himself and Alice when "the bed came down with them twice in three months" (201). The implication is that he fell out of love with Alice's character, and we see Alice's own sister Lucille commiserating with him. Then we know he took up with prostitutes "Gyp and Madeline and Lou." Later, "suddenly he lost it" and "could lie with a woman no longer" (201). At one point Alice calls him a freak and implies odd sexual behavior, but this sentence is not finished and we are left to speculate: "Well, I've known you to do things no man in this world would be proud of. I've known you to—" (11). In any case, his male sexual activity has ended. When he ruminates about that "special physical part kept always guarded" by people, and his hand moves "nervously toward his genitals," he notes that the special part is no longer, for him, his genitals: "Not. Any more" (24).

Biff does not mourn the loss of his "maleness," but rather embraces a metamorphosis into a more enlightened entity. Unlike Mick, Biff *consciously* chooses androgyny: "By nature all people are of both sexes. So that marriage and the bed is not all by any means. The proof? Real youth and old age . . . And he even proved it himself—the part of him that sometimes almost wished he was a mother and that Mick and Baby were his kids" (113). As the historian, observer, and interpreter, Biff is more aware of the other characters' motivations than they are, and more (if not

fully) aware of his own. He keeps "a complete file of the evening newspapers that dated back without a break for twenty-one years" (18). Most of his time is spent watching and trying to understand what is going on around him. He is extremely sensitive to others and feels a tenderness for "freaks."

Biff, then, plays a double role in the novel. He helps us interpret the other characters' actions, and is transformed himself into artistic, enlightened androgyny. As the novel progresses, Biff's artistic nature becomes stronger and more developed. A clear indication of this is the progressively more detailed and vivid descriptions given of his window display preparations. In the final description at the end of the book, he takes fresh summer flowers, making a foundation of "tea olive strewn over the bottom, cool and green," then a "red pottery tub filled with the brilliant zinnias." Biff himself comments that the display ends up being "downright artistic" (303).

While Biff reaches his artistic peak at the end of the novel, Mick reaches hers in Part II. She walks around in the night and listens to music coming from radios in the rich part of town. She dwells in an "inner room" in which she imaginatively thinks of "foreign countries and plans and music . . ." (138). Rather than being afraid of walking alone at night, as other girls might be because a man might "come out from somewhere and put his teapot in them like they was married" (86), Mick is confident she could run fast enough or give her attacker a "good sock." At Vocational High, she does not take stenography like the other girls, but gets special permission to take mechanical shop.

Vocational High, however, is the setting for Mick's gradual change toward female sexuality and loss of her artistic energy. Mick recognizes that she is an outsider at the school and begins planning to be "with some bunch almost as much as she thought of music" (88). In this desire to join her peers and to become a member of a group, Mick unwittingly takes the first steps toward social femininity. She has a party and dresses up in her older sisters' clothes, puts on make-up, and invites boys and girls from her new school. But in the midst of this initiation, she reverts back to the tomboy when the other neighborhood kids crash the party: "Everybody was a wild kid playing out on Saturday night and she felt

like the very wildest of all" (98). In her last fling of wildness, she leaps into a drainage ditch for a finale. When she gets home and takes off the ripped and soiled outfit her sisters had loaned her and puts on her shorts, she realizes that "she was too big to wear shorts any more after this" (99). But this same evening, the last night she clothes herself in the androgyn's raiment, is when Mick discovers Beethoven. Sitting in the side yard of a house she used to visit in the summertime, she has the most intense musical experience of her life while listening to his Third Symphony, and then:

Suddenly Mick began hitting her thigh with her fists. She pounded the same muscle with all her strength until the tears came down her face. But she could not feel this hard enough. The rocks under the bush were sharp. She grabbed a handful of them and began scraping them up and down on the same spot until her hand was bloody. Then she fell back to the ground and lay looking up at the night. With the fiery hurt in her leg she felt better. She was limp on the wet grass, and after a while her breath came slow and easy again.

(101)

The beauty of the music is too great for Mick, and she must translate it into physical pain. After this orgasmic epiphany, Mick whispers out loud, "'Lord forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do,'" and wonders why she says this (101). Clearly it is because she *has experienced* orgasm and is only subliminally aware that she has transgressed some norm of behavior. Her rapture, however, carries two negative elements within it: the frustration of being unable to fulfill its promise through personal artistic expression and a foreshadowing of Mick's later defloration by Harry Minowitz.

At this point Biff's attraction to Mick begins to move beyond the platonic or even "motherly" stage:³ "He watched her [Mick] as she

³While Mick's story is told fairly sequentially and orderly through the novel's time-space, Biff's is not. We find out more about his earlier life later in the novel, through his memories. In terms of his trajectory, however, we see his progression in terms of androgyny and artistic awareness through his *actions* and *thoughts*.

stood behind the counter and he was troubled and sad. He wanted to reach out his hand and touch her sunburned, tousled hair—but not as he had ever touched a woman. In him there was an uneasiness, and when he spoke to her his voice had a rough, strange sound" (102). How can we identify this feeling as sexuality when it is not "as he had ever touched a woman"? The feeling is sexual, but not the sexuality of a man toward a woman, but an androgyn toward an androgyn. While Mick is unable to recognize him as a fellow androgyn, Biff, with his greater insight and awareness, is able to sense something in *her* which draws him to her in a mesmerizing, obsessive fashion. He walks through her neighborhood, hoping to catch sight of her, and when interviewing Harry Minowitz for a job, Biff can not restrain himself from asking about her. Biff is unable, however, to understand intellectually *why* he is attracted to Mick. Knowing that it is "wrong" for a grown man to be sexually attracted to a thirteen-year-old, he feels that it is "not quite right. Yes. Wrong" (198).

Biff's guilt about his feelings for Mick causes him to send a contradictory message to Mick, for she thinks he dislikes her and is still angry about some gum she stole from the cafe years ago. She continues to think of him as this gruff, angry man, in fact, until the end of the novel when Biff is no longer interested in her. At that point she thinks: "He didn't have this grudge against her any more, so he must have forgotten about the pack of gum. Now he always wanted to talk to her" (301). Once Biff has lost his obsessive attraction to her, he can easily talk with her as he can with any other customer in his cafe.

While Mick reaches her peak of artistic awareness the night of the party and heads downward on her trajectory from there, Biff is becoming gradually more artistic and androgynous. He thinks about adopting a couple of little children and takes up playing the mandolin. He uses Alice's perfume and hair rinse, and takes pleasure in making a "genteel, artistic display" in the front window of the cafe.

For Mick, however, the path is all downhill. Bubber's shooting of Baby marks the beginning of change, opening "a veritable flood-tide of tragedy" for Mick and her family.⁴ Mick is "tired of hanging around with the

kids" and no longer has that deep intuitive connection with them (Heart 139). Thus, she makes a terrible mistake thinking she will teach Bubber a lesson by telling him that Baby is dead, people are hunting for him, and he will go to Sing Sing where they have little electric chairs just his size. Bubber is naturally traumatized by this news, tries to run away, and is never the same again. Mick's deep connection with her little brother is severed: "But he was a different kid—George—going around by himself always like a person much older and with nobody, not even her, knowing what was really in his mind" (153).⁵

Mick's unwitting rejection of Bubber, then, continues her metamorphosis into female adulthood and loss of the artistic power of androgyny. She works throughout the winter on her music and still plans to become famous, but has moved the date back from seventeen to twenty. She is beginning to have a sense of time and an awareness that she is running out of it. The key figure, however, in Mick's passage from androgyn to woman, is her childhood friend and neighbor, Harry Minowitz. One winter afternoon fifteen-year-old Harry comes over to help with her English homework as she sits on the back steps. Mick ends up wrestling with him like a child, but they are no longer children: "As they walked across the dark back yard for some reason she felt funny. There was nothing to

feel queer about, but suddenly it had just happened" (212). Of course, this "queer" feeling Mick has is that of budding sexuality. Fertilized with their caring friendship and physical closeness, the bud bursts into full color on the fateful day of the picnic in the country. For both Mick and Harry, the initiation into adult sexuality is a tragedy. Harry leaves town and becomes a mechanic because he cannot face his mother, while Mick "felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not" (236). Mick is no longer a tomboy getting high on the music in her head, for she has lost her head in female sexuality: "It was like her head was broke off from her body and thrown away. And her eyes looked up straight into the blinding sun while she counted something in her mind. And then this was the way. This was how it was" (235). Contrast this loss of her head, this blindness, this passive resignation, to the heightened sensory experience of her orgasmic union with beauty after listening to Beethoven.

Physically, Mick has been initiated into womanhood. The next steps out of androgyny are social and cultural: "Then in late June there was a sudden happening so important that it changed everything" (270). The "happening," of course, is that Mick accepts a job in Woolworth's to help with the family's money problems. She takes it at the beginning of the summer, but knows she will not be able to quit when school starts: "It was like she had been trapped into something. The job wouldn't be just for the summer—but for a long time, as long as she could see ahead. Once they were used to the money coming in it would be impossible to do without again" (272). Ironically, Mick asks Singer if she should take this job, and he nods yes. She sacrifices her androgyny, her autonomy and individualism as an artist, to become a woman, to take her social position as an adult daughter in the family, a female worker in the marketplace.

Mick has followed her trajectory to its depths. As Biff says about her, "She had grown older. Her rough and childish ways were almost gone. And instead there was something ladylike and delicate about her that was hard to point out" (305). Mick has accepted her cultural role as woman—wearing silk stock-

⁴Alice Hall Petry, "Baby Wilson Redux: McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*," *Southern Studies* 25.2 (1986):196-203.

⁵The falling out with a younger sibling is a recurrent theme for McCullers and typically occurs at the point when the older child enters the adult world through an awareness of male or female sexuality. In *Heart*, Bill brushes Mick off when he begins to deal with adult problems: "Sometimes she hated Bill more than anyone else in the world. He was different entirely from what he used to be" (38). In McCullers' short story "Sucker," the narrator brutally attacks his younger brother after a dismal rejection by a young woman. "'Don't you know when you're not wanted?'" he says to Sucker (8). "Sucker was gone when I woke up the next day. And later when I wanted to apologize as I had planned he looked at me in this new hard way so that I couldn't say a word" (9). As the narrator struggles with adult sexuality, he cuts off his connection to his younger brother, and thereby to his own childhood. The same thing occurs in *The Member of the Wedding* when Frankie begins to turn away from John Henry. See "Sucker" and *The Member of the Wedding*, *Collected Stories of Carson McCullers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

ings no matter how impractical; wasting her small salary on dangling earrings and a silver bangle bracelet; smiling all day so that "she had to frown a long time to get her face natural again" (299).

Mick has also lost her muse: "But now no music was in her mind. That was a funny thing. It was like she was shut out from the inside room" (301). She no longer has the energy to fight for her artistic vision because "now she was always tired" (301). Mick does think about buying a piano by putting aside two dollars a week, and she ends her last scene in the book with a determination that it is "All right! O.K.! Some good," but this lament sounds more like wishful thinking than an actual plan that might be accomplished (302). Mick remembers what happened to George and to his little red bicycle. When the family could no longer make payments on it, it was taken away. Feebly, Mick fantasizes that if any men came to take her piano away, she would knock them down.

While Mick is fantasizing, Biff observes that he is no longer obsessed by her: "And Mick. The one who in the last months had lived so strangely in his heart. Was that done with too? Yes. It was finished" (305). Mick, who has almost become a woman (she still orders an ice-cream sundae with her beer), has no more power over him. In addition, Biff has moved on to a higher state in which he loves people rather than a particular person: "Who would he be loving now? No one person. Anybody who came in out of the street to sit for an hour and have a drink. But no one person" (304). He has passed the need for connection to an individual, transcending it with a love for humanity.

The expansion of Biff's spirit culminates in an epiphanic experience comparable to Mick's rapturous union with Beethoven. Late in the night Biff is standing alone in the cafe, listening to a foreign—"German, French, or Spanish"—voice of doom (305). Lost in meditation, he contemplates the riddle of Singer's life and death, when:

... suddenly he felt a quickening in him. His heart turned and he leaned his back against the counter for support. For in a

swift radiance of illumination he saw a glimpse of human struggle and of valor . . . His soul expanded. But for a moment only. For in him he felt a warning, a shaft of terror. Between the two worlds he was suspended. . . . The left eye delved narrowly into the past while the right gazed wide and affrighted into a future of blackness, error, and ruin. And he was suspended between radiance and darkness. Between bitter irony and faith.

(306)

What Biff sees is the human condition—the struggle of hope and valor against dark forces beyond knowing or control. For a split second (it is a position impossible to maintain) he stands at the intersection of dialectical opposites "between irony and faith." Freed from the constraints of sexual identity, Biff is finally able to see. He has moved, at the end of his trajectory, into enlightenment. "As he went to the door his walk gained steadiness. And when at last he was inside again he composed himself soberly to await the morning sun" (307).

Mick's trajectory begins on the rooftop and travels downward to a low point at the end of the novel when "She is frustrated in her attempts to study art, disturbed by what she has learned of female sexuality, and haunted by nightmares in which houses collapse upon her."⁶ We leave Mick angry and frustrated, and can only imagine a life for her similar to her sisters' and mother's. Biff's epiphany at the end of the novel, however, signifies his rise to androgynous artistic vision and to enlightenment. While Mick and Biff have not touched in human warmth or contact, their trajectories have crossed and are now complete. □

⁶Constance M. Perry, "Carson McCullers and the Female *Wunderkind*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 19.1(1986): 3645.

L. Taetzsch is a writer and artist who has published essays in *Central Park* and *The High Plains Literary Review* and stories in *Chiron Review*, *Pacific Review* and *Asylum*, among others.



FEATURED ARTISTS

Stanley H. Barkan is a poet and director of Cross Cultural Communications.

Joe Bolton's first book, *Breckenridge County Suite*, was published by The Cummington Press in 1989. He has new work in *The Antioch Review*, *The New Criterion*, *Poetry*, *The Yale Review*, and *The North American Review*. A 1989 NEA Fellow, he teaches at the University of Arizona.

Yves Bonnefoy is generally considered to be one of the greatest living French poets, as well as one of this century's creative and critical geniuses. His poetic career spans nearly four decades, from his earliest volume, *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*, published in 1953 to *Ce qui fut sans lumière*, which appeared in 1987. Author of numerous books and essays on poetics and art history as well as translations into French of Shakespeare and Yeats, Bonnefoy has held the Chair of Comparative Studies in Poetics at the College de France since 1982.

Daniel Bourne teaches at the College of Wooster, where he edits *Artful Dodge*. His poems and translations from the Polish appear in a number of places, including *Field*, *American Poetry Review*, and *Partisan Review*. He has just completed editing the section on Poland for *Shifting Borders*, an anthology of Eastern and Central European poetry forthcoming from Associated University Presses.

Zdena Bratrsovská lives in Prague and has published two books.

T. Alan Broughton is a professor of English at the University of Vermont. He has published four novels, four books of poetry, and a collection of short stories. His latest collection of poems is entitled *Preparing to Be Happy*.

Svetlana Burianová graduated from the Philosophical faculty. She lives in Prague as a freelance Russian and English interpreter. She has published one book of poetry.

Peter Cooley's fifth book, *The Astonished Hours*, has just been published by Carnegie-Mellon. He has taught creative writing at Tulane since 1975.

Cola Franzen's most recent translations are *Poems of Arab Andalusia*, *City Lights*, 1989, and *Diary of a Voyage*, by Guillermo Núñez. The Chilean painter, who recounts the story of his arrests, imprisonments, and eventual exile by the Pinochet regime.

Phyllis Sanchez Gussler grew up in California and Alaska. She moved to North Carolina ten years ago, where she enjoyed an eight-year period of indentured servitude to the data processing profession before returning to graduate school and writing poetry.

Richard Katrovas is the author of several volumes of poetry and teaches at the University of New Orleans.

Vivian Lamarque's first book, a poetry collection, *Teresino*, won the Viareggio Prize Opera Prima. She has translated *Soleil de Minuit* by J. Prévert and *Pieces sur L'Art* by P. Valéry.

Christopher Merrill is the author of two books of poetry, *Workbook* and *Fevers & Tides*; editor of *the Forgotten Language: Contemporary Poets and Nature*; and co-translator (with Jeanie Fleming) of André Breton's *Constellations*.

Elizabeth Gamble Miller is an associate professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Southern Methodist University, where she teaches Spanish-American poetry and literary translation. Her four book publications include Hugo Lindo's poetry and the fables of David Escobar Balindo in bilingual editions. She has been editor of the American Literary Translators Association newsletter since 1984 and is on the board of *Translation Review*.

Rita Signorelli-Pappas has had poems published recently in *Poetry*, *National Forum*, and *Negative Capability* and has new work forthcoming in *Kansas Quarterly*, *Saint Andrew's Review*, and *San Jose Studies*.

Sandra Nelson is the Editor-in-Chief for the *Cream City Review*. She has published over 113 poems and short stories in more than 68 magazines and anthologies.

Jan Rejzek is a freelance journalist and music critic. She has published two books.

Lucinda Roy is an associate professor of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Her collection of poems, *Wailing the Dead to Sleep*, was published in London, and she is the recipient of the Baxter Hathaway Poetry Prize for her slave narrative poem *Needlework*. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in magazines in the U.S. and the West Indies.

Pedro Salinas was born in Madrid in 1892 and died in Boston in 1951. He taught at the Universities of Murcia, Seville, Paris, Cambridge, and Puerto Rico. His complete poems appeared under the title *Poesía junta*.

David Sander's poems and translations have appeared in various small magazines including *Poetry East*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Stand*. He is currently associate director of the University of Arkansas Press.

Lisa Sapinkopf's translations of Yves Bonnefoy's poems won the Columbia University Translation Center Prize. Her translations of Bonnefoy and other authors have appeared in *Pans Review*, *Poetry*, *The Boston Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Michigan Quarterly*, *New Orleans Review*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Translation*, and numerous other journals.

Josef Simon has published *The Desert Bird* and several other books of poetry.

Katherine Soniat's most recent collection of poems, *Cracking Eggs*, was published by the University Presses of Florida. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *The Georgia Review*, *The North American Review*, *The Ohio Review*, *The Yale Review*, and the *The Minnesota Review*. She teaches at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Barry Spack's teaches at the University of California at Santa Barbara. His seventh collection of poems, *Brief Sparrow*, appeared from Illuminati in 1988.

Michael Spence's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Sewanee Review*, *Yankee*, *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and others. His book *The Spine* was published in 1987 by Purdue U. Press. In 1990 he was awarded a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Karel Šýs graduated from The Prague School of Economics. He is the editor of the magazine, *Tvorba*. He has published seven books of poetry.

Renata Treitel is a teacher, poet and translator. She was educated in Italy, Argentina and the United States. She has published one collection of poetry, *German Notebook* (1983).

Ivan Wernisch has published five collections of poetry. He lives in Prague.

Saúl Yurkievich an Argentinian poet, critic, and professor of Latin American literature at the University of Paris. He has published some dozen volumes of poetry. His latest book is *A imagen y semejanza*.