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# NOTRE DAME REVIEW



IS IT ART?  
... IS IT POLITICS?



Yasumasa Morimura, *Portrait (Futago)*, 1988, color photograph,  
82.75 X 118". Courtesy of Luhring Augustine

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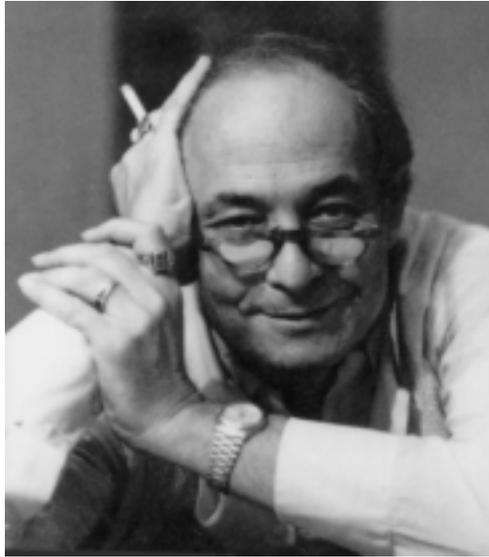
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Photo of Richard Elman: Pedro Meyer. Cover Design: Patrick Ryan



## RICHARD ELMAN

1934 - 1997

Richard Elman was one of the contributors to the inaugural issue of the *Notre Dame Review* and one of its most loyal friends. He was also a steadfast political writer and, during the second half of the twentieth century, that was not an easy thing to be. He dared to be unfashionable. And being unfashionable, not tacking with the cultural winds, has turned out to be a major political statement in the eighties and nineties. He was partisan without being a partisan: he was no one's apparatchik. More directly, his ground breaking reports from Nicaragua (collected in *Cocktails at Somoza's* and fictionalized in *Disco Frito*) made both warring sides there unhappy. During the mid-seventies, Richard amassed a large manuscript describing contemporary American literary figures' (especially its Brahmins') involvements with the CIA and, though never published in full, its talked-about existence did not make him popular.

In the early eighties, Richard gave acerbic, insightful commentary on NPR's *All Things Considered*. That gig ended when he launched a hilarious dissection of the people who were voraciously collecting South African Krugerrands. It apparently offended too many NPR listeners and producers. NPR was attempting to prove itself politically correct to the Reagan-era Congress, which meant taking on more conservative commentators, then in ascendancy. Richard was out of step, again, with the times: the greed decade was galloping by him. Reverence for the rich was effectively reasserting control.

And Richard, happily, lacked that in spades: one of my earliest memories of him was when I was a student at Columbia in 1969 and we were part of a luncheon group honoring George T. Delacorte, a donor to the school (I was there since my financial aid bore Delacorte's name). Richard was the first to leave. "May your millions increase," he said to the dapper Delacorte upon exiting and George did not receive it as a compliment. Anyone who eschews fashion in the late twentieth century, who writes what he believes, not what others believe, is always in danger of falling victim to our culture's most potent weapon, neglect.

But Richard was tireless. He wouldn't let the bastards get him down (hard to do these days, since they are so good at what they do). When he was struck with cancer it was a shock; he was not in the mood to die. That was the last thing on his mind. And the suddenness of its onset and the rapidity of its progress was astounding. And he went through those days with the courage that had accompanied him throughout his life.

He still wished to write and was still sending out work. His last novel yet published (which he finished up and saw through production here at Notre Dame, while he was the visiting Abrams Chair in Jewish Studies during 1990-91), *Tar Beach*, was an act of literary resurrection, a hymn involving all the themes of his earlier work, but leached of rancor and made radiant. Now three books are to emerge in succession, alas, posthumously, beginning with a literary memoir, *Namedropping*, this summer from SUNY Press, followed by two novels, *Love Handles* and *The Music Master's Diary*, from Sun & Moon. Even as the disease and treatments took their toll

Richard wanted to be active, to have his mind focused. He wrote me in late fall, “If you know of somebody for whom I can review. . . .” Even that most thankless of journeyman tasks meant life to him, the chance to be who he was, honest, direct, generous in the service of literature. He closed that note with a quote from Karl Marx, prompted by my concern at the grim prognosis of his illness, “The invitation to abandon illusions concerning a situation is an invitation to abandon a situation that has need of illusions.” Richard knew which illusions to have and which not to have. And it is with great humbleness that we dedicate this issue to his memory.

—*William O'Rourke*

**THE POVERTY OF RUTUBEUF**

*Richard Elman*

*A translation of a petition to King Phillippe II  
from the 13th century French*

My indigence is so abundant  
I lack everything I want  
and call myself abundantly poor.  
In the name of God, I beg you, Sire,  
give me such means to live  
as you in charity can give.  
Others who helped me with good deeds  
in crediting me toward all my needs  
no longer have much faith to let  
me thrive so poorly in their debt.  
For your part, toward thy remote throne,  
all my poor hopes repose alone.

The high cost of living, and my tie  
to family who won't be beaten down and die  
flattens my purse and leaves me broke.  
I meet people who cleverly joke  
when refusing me, not inclined to give me succor;  
they only want to guard their lucre.  
Death, for his part, has done all  
to wound me, Sire, as you may recall,  
(on two occasions parted from good conditions);  
and then there was that far off expedition  
to Tunis, savage barren desert lands,  
with all those cursed infidel bands.

Good King, if it comes to me you've stepped down,  
 all my world will lack a crown, and I shall  
 abdicate also. Nobody's hand reaches out. I'm finished.  
 Coughing with cold, yawning from hunger, diminished,  
 without a sou, and in distressful danger,  
 I don't have a blanket, nor a bed;  
 and nobody's poorer, except the dead.  
 Sire, I really don't know where to go.  
 My ribs, accustomed to sleeping on straw,  
 know a bed of straw is nothing like a bed,  
 and in my bed is nothing but straw.

Sire, I attest to you in dread  
 I have nothing with which to cadge my bread.  
 In Paris I live in the midst of riches  
 but there's nothing for me from those sons of bitches.  
 I see very little wealth, and very little comes my way,  
 and because my needs are so few  
 my personal saint of the church is Saint Peu.  
 Though I know who the Father was, the Our  
 means a house emptied out of furniture  
 because the high cost of living took it all out:  
 with belief in my credit clouded with doubt  
 truly, like the fretful porcupine,  
 only the ribs sticking out on me are mine.

*Nota Bene: This 13th Century Jongleur lived most of his life in Paris, though born in Champagne, and wrote a series of complaints which I am translating as "On Misfortune." He is perhaps the first of the City poets, a forerunner of Villon and even Baudelaire.*

## MONTENEGRO

*Christopher Merrill*

*January 1993*

The morning television programming was devoted to America. The lieutenant colonel translated what was on the screen—first, “The Making of a Continent,” with aerial views of the Grand Canyon, then an animated history of the United States. Revolutionary War, he said, summing up a succession of images beginning with the Boston Tea Party. The officer did not know what to call a cotton gin, but a smile of recognition crossed his face when a shirtless black man appeared on an auction block.

“Nigger,” he said with solemn authority.

“Slave,” I corrected him.

I had spent the morning with Miroslav, arranging to interview General Radomir Damjanovic, commander of the Montenegrin forces. Damjanovic was a good soldier, according to the EC monitor in Dubrovnik who had lined up this interview for me weeks before. The monitor had even offered to drive me to Herzeg-Novi, the resort city on the Montenegrin side of the border, to meet the general. But when Croatian authorities refused to let me cross the border, I decided to travel the extra 2,000 kilometers (Dubrovnik-Split-Zagreb-Budapest-Belgrade-Podgorica) to talk to Damjanovic. Perhaps he could explain why his forces had wreaked such havoc in Dalmatia.

I had other reasons for coming to Montenegro (Crna Gora in Serbian—i.e. Black Mountain), chief among them the wish to explore the truth of a statement made by a native son, Milovan Djilas: “The great myths—a doomed Serbia, the flight of its nobility into the Montenegrin mountains after the fall of the empire at Kosovo, the duty to avenge Kosovo, Milos Obilic’s sacrifice, the irreconcilable struggle between Cross and Crescent, the Turks as an absolute evil pervading the entire Serbian nation—all these myths took on their sharpest and most implacable aspects here.” Serbian

nationalism was rooted in this small (population 600,000) mountainous republic—Vuk Karadzic was its first historian, Slobodan Milosevic and Radovan Karadzic grew up here—but a growing number of Montenegrins no longer thought of themselves as Serbs. And they led the increasingly vocal opposition to Montenegro's political leadership, the communists-cum-Serbian nationalists loyal to Milosevic. "I feel sorry for the Montenegrins," the EC monitor had told me. "They're stuck with the Serbs, for better or worse. But they also committed their share of atrocities along this coast."

"The man who celebrates peace"—that was how Miroslav translated his own name, reserving his invective for the "stupid politicians" responsible for the war, which he claimed had cost him 25,000 deutsche marks on deposit in a Slovenian bank. Once based in Croatia, where he had fought against old friends, at least he was spared the shame of some of his fellow officers whose wives, he said, worked in Croatian munitions factories while their sons fought in the HVO.

"I know of a Croat who killed his wife and son because they were Serbs," he declared.

When I gave him a dubious look, he switched off the TV and showed me two items from the latest issue of the JNA newspaper—how effectively the army would respond to NATO intervention and the number of journalists killed last year in the war. Then he returned to the article he was slowly typing up for the paper. I was very frustrated, having already devoted parts of two days in Belgrade to rearranging this interview. And the more I watched the soldiers mill about a line of young men waiting to be inducted, the more I understood why the JNA remained Yugoslavia's most entrenched institution. An army can survive for a long time on inertia.

"What to do?" the lieutenant colonel said with a shrug.

The phone did not ring until noon. Miroslav answered it and listened for several minutes without saying a word. When he hung up he told me to write out ten questions.

"Quickly," he urged. "We will fax them to the general. He must fly to Belgrade now."

"Then when will I meet him?" I said in despair.

But the lieutenant colonel had something else on his mind: finding the right translator for the interview. “Only a beautiful woman will do,” he said. “And in matters of love age means nothing.”

Podgorica’s heyday, if it had ever experienced such a thing, must have come during the brief period when it was the capital of the Serbian empire, nine hundred years ago. In those days it was called Ribnica, after the river that flows into the Moraca, a minor emerald deity meandering through the town. In fact, the Moraca is about the only thing to recommend to Podgorica (literally, under Gorica Mountain), which bears no trace of any glory it may once have known. The city of 130,000 lies in the Zeta plain, a fertile agricultural region from which the medieval Serbian principality encompassing much of present-day Montenegro took its name. The Serbian noblemen defeated at Kosovo found refuge in Zeta, which at the time was relatively independent. And Ottoman rule over the principality, from the 15th century until the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when Montenegro was formally recognized, was nominal. Hence the lack of Turkish influence on places like Podgorica—a charmless modern town “built without eloquence,” Rebecca West wrote in 1937. Sadly, after it was all but destroyed in the Second World War, the town was rebuilt in the same uninspired manner, this time according to socialist architectural terms, and renamed Titograd, which was what it was still called in the only tourist brochure available—a German-language edition with photographs, from the coastal resorts, of nude sunbathers. By any name the capital of Montenegro remained a dismal affair.

I had taken a room in a hotel along the Moraca, and on my return from JNA headquarters I half-heartedly asked the clerk if he knew how to put me in touch with Slavko Perovic, the poet who headed up the Liberal Alliance, the main opposition party.

“Let me give him a call,” said a large, well-dressed man who had dropped into the hotel to use the telephone. Within minutes he had set up an interview with his cousin. “Shall we go?” he said.

“What a change from my dealings with the JNA,” I told him when he drove off.

“Serbs are impossible to talk to,” he said. “No good can come if we stay with them.”

Two thirds of his countrymen felt the same, according to Borislav Vukotic. He was a proud Montenegrin, a gregarious sea captain who had named his sons after his country’s leading historical figures—Petar Petrovic II, the poet-prince known as Njegos, and Nikola Petrovic, Montenegro’s only monarch, who had won independence from the Turks. Freedom from Serbia was what Montenegro now needed, thought Borislav, who not only supported the UN sanctions that prevented him from working but also NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serb military positions.

“They’re warriors in the East,” said the sea captain with a dismissive backstroke, a common gesture here. “Only intervention will stop them from spreading their disease all over Europe.” And he used the same gesture when he showed me the draft notice he was bringing to his older son, Petar. Once already Borislav had told an induction officer to fuck off when Petar had been drafted at the beginning of the war. His promise to do so again if the JNA picked up his son was no idle threat in a land whose warrior origins lie close to the surface.

Down a street of drab facades we drove until we came to a boutique, where we found his older son arguing on a portable phone with a newspaper editor. Petar was demanding a retraction—the paper had called him a Serb—and when he hung up in anger he announced, “I am Montenegrin.” So it seemed. On one wall was the national banner, on another was a painting of King Nikola, and the racks were flush with designer clothes from Italy, which Petar had smuggled through Albania.

“Ninety percent of my customers are in the Liberal Party,” he explained, fingering a Crna Gora medallion. “I must keep them satisfied.”

While Borislav set out a tray of orange juice, cognac, and coffee, Petar called his brother, who arrived minutes later with the two prettiest women I was to meet in the Balkans. The physical beauty of Montenegrins, the tallest Europeans, is legendary, and it was my good fortune to learn that Maja Domovic, the younger of Nikola’s friends, would be my translator.

(Eat your heart out, Miroslav!) Hers was a classical beauty—olive skin, high cheekbones, shoulder-length black hair—darkened by melancholy. Maja had nearly completed her English studies at Sarajevo University when the war broke out; when the University of Novi Sad refused to transfer her credits she returned to Podgorica to work for Slavko Perovic. Her brother had fought in Trebinje; every night on TV she expected to see his name listed among the dead; if he was called up again, her family would send him into hiding.

“My life has been cut into ribbons, one piece here, others over there,” she said when we set out for the mountain town of Cetinje. Nikola was at the wheel, in designer sunglasses and sporting a revolver. “Everyone’s armed in Montenegro,” Maja explained.

The brilliant light and mild temperature—a welcome change for a traveler from the north—brought to mind the high deserts of New Mexico. And it grew brighter yet beyond the orchards, vineyards, and rounded hay piles at the edge of town, when we began to climb through the stark hills and stone outcroppings of the *karst*. It is said that when God created the earth He used the leftover rocks to make Montenegro, and here was a fierce landscape of crumbling stone terraces, ruined sheepfolds, stunted oak trees. Hitchhikers lined the road, along which a peasant was leading a pair of horses laden with chopped wood. Maja repeated a Montenegrin expression: *Mountains make big people*. Indeed, the old woman strolling near the summit outside Cetinje was more than six feet tall.

Coal smoke hung over the town, the capital of Old Montenegro, a thirty-by-sixty kilometer patch of harsh territory which was the only Slavic land outside Russia to remain independent for much of its history. Three times the Turks destroyed Cetinje without conquering the Montenegrin tribes. Fabled for their fighting abilities, the tribes, thirty-six in all, organized the clans and *zadrugas* of this frontier society in the same manner as the tribes in Albania, administering an Old Testament style of justice. An eye for an eye, and so on. Tribal law did not give way to a civil code until the reign of Njegos (1830-51), though the paramilitaries who rampaged through Dalmatia last year revealed the code’s fragile hold on society. Or

were they just obeying the imperatives of another Montenegrin tradition—the *hajduks* and bandits who specialized in raiding and plundering villages and towns along the coast? The myth of independence cut both ways. “It was from Cetinje that the tribes were called to mutiny and rebellion,” Djilas wrote, “and individuals to human freedom—for faith and fatherland.”

But Montenegrins were also adept at playing the Great Powers off one another, a diplomatic inheritance spurned by the current leadership when Italy offered it a sizable aid package in 1991 in return for its support of Lord Carrington’s peace plan. Carrington proposed a loose association of sovereign or independent republics, sufficient guarantees for minorities, and no border changes—in hindsight, the best plan of all—but breaking ranks with Milosevic, who refused to grant to Albanians in Kosovo the same autonomy he demanded for Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia, proved to be impossible for Montenegrin President Momir Bulatovic. The former Communist lacked the nerve and cunning of his illustrious predecessors—the men of the Petrovic clan, who ruled here for two centuries.

A word about Njegos, the Petrovic looming largest in the Montenegrin imagination, and not simply because he was nearly seven feet tall. He was a bishop, a prince, and the greatest Serbian poet. All Montenegrin schoolchildren memorized his poems, which had lately enjoyed a revival in Serbia, too. Small wonder. The myth of Serbdom was his theme, and his masterpiece, *The Mountain Wreath*, a verse drama published in 1847, celebrates the Christmas Eve extermination of Muslims carried out by a band of Serbian warriors determined to cleanse the Slavic lands of the Turkish “spitters on the cross”—converts to Islam. Njegos wanted to eradicate this “domestic evil,” in life as well as poetry; to redeem the loss of the Serbian empire and restore the Montenegrin state, he justified evil as a defense against evil, “the adder in our breast.” *The Mountain Wreath* is realpolitik in decasyllabics derived from the folk epics; its popularity reinforced the belief that Montenegrins were the purest Serbs. A distortion of our history, said Maja, though not until World War One did some Montenegrins begin to distinguish themselves from Serbs. Montenegrin heroism was indeed rooted in Lazar’s defeat at Kosovo, which Njegos

exploited in his bid to throw off the Ottoman yoke and which many Montenegrins were now challenging in their drive to free themselves from the Serbs.

For even older than the myth of Serbdom was the memory of the Montenegrin tribes. And certain tribal habits endured: the spirit of lawlessness, for example, behind the recent invasion of Dalmatia. Or the quirky tradition of forgiveness embodied in *Izmirenje*, a ceremony in which a murderer would beg the victim's relatives to forgive him in order to end a blood feud. Hubert Butler attended an *Izmirenje* in 1937, and what he witnessed was remarkable. In the churchyard by a monastery, one hundred bare-headed men from the murderer's family lined up opposite a hundred men in top hats from the victim's family. A priest read out the sentence—the victim's brother shall be the godfather of the next child baptized from the murderer's family—and called for everlasting friendship and respect between the two sides. The men embraced and kissed, then sat at separate tables to eat, in silence, a feast prepared by the murderer's family. Slavko Perovic's call for Montenegrins to pay reparations to the citizens of Dubrovnik invoked this spirit of *Izmirenje*.

Perovic was a charismatic figure, in some respects Njegos's heir, minus the Kosovo trappings. As public prosecutor he had opposed the Greater Serbia propaganda issuing from the politicians and state-controlled media; and when he and hundreds of his followers were sacked from their positions, he acquired the mantle of moral authority. His party, founded in 1990, supported Markovic's reform efforts, for which it was branded an outfit of anti-Serbian terrorists. In fact, the liberals counseled change by democratic means. David and Goliath. The poet's sling was his belief in the political process; his foe, the JNA, which had joined with Milosevic to preserve its privileges. If once he had envisioned a confederation of Yugoslav republics making a peaceful transition to democracy, Perovic knew that the blood spilled in Croatia and Bosnia ruined any possibility of the South Slavs reuniting. Thousands of his supporters took to the streets when the war began. The day after he spoke out against the shelling of Dubrovnik, his death notice was plastered to buildings and trees around the

country, prompting him to talk openly of independence—a message that resonated with Montenegrins.

The liberals' gain of twelve seats in December's parliamentary elections emboldened Perovic to imagine a sovereign state, a custom-free zone with close ties to the West, which might even hasten Serbia's democratization. But his phone was tapped, his followers were harassed, and the MIG fighter jets swooping low over Cetinje were daily reminders of the state's power. Perovic was working, with no money and an ailing heart, against propagandists who, in his words, made Goebbels look like an amateur. Two bodyguards were always with him.

This day, as it happened, he was battling pneumonia, but he appeared eager to talk to a poet. He and his wife occupied a flat, on the top floor of a four-story apartment building, which resembled a Greenwich Village loft (from one wall hung a guitar, banjo, and violin, the other walls were taken up with bookshelves and prints), and under the skylight this pudgy man with a wan, boyish face seemed closer in spirit to a poet than to a prosecutor. But he was the closest thing in the Balkans to Vaclav Havel, and he was blessed with the same wit the Czech playwright had used to such advantage during the Velvet Revolution. At tense moments in negotiations with the Communists over the transition of government Havel would ask for a minute of silence followed by a minute of laughter. Perovic for his part was telling me in mock seriousness that the earth is made up of two poems—"The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe and Njegos's only love poem, "Night Gathers the Age."

"If I recite Poe to my wife, she knows I've been drinking for four days," he said between coughs. "But if I read to her from Njegos, she knows I've gone mad."

"But true madness," he went on, "is the Serbian political climate, a church organ Milosevic plays like an evil genius; the intelligentsia supplies the score. Even Belgrade University was founded on the Kosovo myth, and for more than a century now Serbs have gone there to learn how ridiculous they are. They should be ashamed they lost that battle, but they turn it into a point of honor. They were slaves for five hundred years. They should be

ashamed of that, too. And since Montenegrins never had their own university many of us studied in Belgrade, which helped to plant the Greater Serbia idea here. The Serbs call us the purest Serbs, but they can't divide us from our memory of 950 years of freedom as Montenegrins. We didn't lose our battles. We weren't slaves. But now our young people are leaving, and refugees from Bosnia are arriving. This is how Serbia will collapse. And the father of this miracle is Dobrica Cosic, who thinks he's Tolstoy. Karadzic is one of his sentences; others are Arkan, Mladic, Milosevic. He is that rare novelist who gets to see his books lived rather than read. Do you know why Yugoslavia disappeared? Because we didn't know the other cultures. Hate grew from our ignorance. For example, Bosnia's Muslims were Yugoslavia's noblest people—you could see it in their art, literature, music—and I can't describe the shame I feel over Serbs raping women and destroying everything sacred. It's barbaric, which is why it will take decades to decontaminate Serbian political space. For myself? Perhaps what I'm living through will be poetic material some day. My wife doesn't like to hear me called a poet-politician, because that's what Karadzic is. We have a special kind of Montenegrin chicken which should be bright—we call it pearl—but it must try at least thirty times before it can pick up a piece of corn. That's Karadzic."

Then he was coughing again. There was something in his apology for being sick that suggested he considered his illness an affront to the national character. When I recalled the story of a Napoleonic colonel meeting a Montenegrin family of seven living generations—the longevity of Montenegrins is well known—the poet gave me a weary smile.

On the drive out of town—the mountain light glowing as the sun set over Lake Skadar, which divides Montenegro from Albania—I asked Maja what people did for a living here.

"I don't know," she said with a shrug. "I just know they don't work very hard and they live well. If not for Serbia, they'd work even less and live much better."

"The Serbs like to joke," I began to say.

"Yes," she interrupted, flushing with anger. "How lazy we are. But

Montenegrins know how to work. They just don't want to work for Serbs."

Nikola dropped us off at my hotel, and we went to the bar to translate Perovic's "Swans Will Be Shot Again":

Nothing makes you happy  
Not the sun nor the rain birds games  
You just disappear

Dead smiling  
Noble  
You turn into a monument—the royal "we"

No fish swim in your rivers  
No butterflies flit above your waters

In your eyes I see  
Swans will be shot again

"Do you like it?" said Maja. "Slavko has an artist's soul. Not like Karadzic, who only wants power. Karadzic is a bad poet, though they say he's a good psychiatrist. Very calm. But it's the calm ones who are the most insane here."

Boxes of televisions, stereos, VCR's—the apartment resembled the showroom of an electronics store. And the young men in black leather jackets who brought me here to use a looted facsimile machine from Dalmatia (the hotel did not have one, the clerk had called them for help) had distinctly mercantile attitudes to their holdings. They made an interesting pair, these black marketeers. One had a wife and daughter in Banja Luka, a leveled house in Sarajevo, and a mistress in Podgorica; the other, a pot-bellied man with a boyish face, had a bad temper. When he switched on a television set with the remote control and saw Bosnia's UN Ambassador, he cried, "Turkish!" and pretended to kick in the television

screen. Then he faxed my article on censorship in Croatia and Serbia to someone in Kosovo. Once he realized his mistake he raised his fist at me and laughed. “Only in the Balkans,” Ivo Andric wrote, “can anything happen anytime.”

The black marketeers insisted I join them for dinner back at the hotel, and I did not think it wise to turn them down. Our host, a grizzled Slovene with a gold medallion of Tito hanging from his neck, was in charge of their operation. He liked to lean back in his chair and, scratching his belly, tell the young men, whom he called his Ministers of Finance, to count their money. When the first platter of smoked fish arrived, he sent it back and ordered another dish. The hotel clerk hovered around the table until the old man invited him to take a seat. The clerk toasted him, and then, wheeling around, pulled a revolver from his belt and made for the door on the run. He had just gained the terrace overlooking the river when he fired off four shots into the night—a variation on an old custom, as it turned out. Because many churches did not have bells, Montenegrins used to fire their rifles to signal the start of a church service, a practice certain to catch God’s attention.

Only now did I realize that everyone at the table was armed.

After the last course, the old man unwrapped the tin foil from around a marble-sized chunk of what I took to be hashish, worked it into the blade of his dinner knife, and, when he had got it lit, offered it to me. The honored guest, *et cetera*, *et cetera*.

“Hashish?” I asked with some trepidation, and inhaled. But the smoke burning my nostrils was like nothing I had ever tasted.

The Ministers of Finance were laughing. “Jesus Christ,” they said in unison, making the sign of the cross. The clerk gave me an envious look. I did not understand what was happening. The old man smiled. “Opium,” he said. I tried to pass the knife back to him. “For you,” he said.

My head began to spin.

“Are you cold?” said Orus. “A monk must be strong.”

We had come to the last room of the unheated museum adjacent to the

Orthodox monastery, and I was anxious to leave. I had returned to Cetinje with an ambitious plan: to tour the monastery, the Petrovic palaces, and embassies built by the Great Powers after the Congress of Berlin, then to hitch a ride up Mt. Lovcen, Montenegro's tallest peak, to see the mausoleum containing Njegos's remains. But the monk's lecture had gone on all afternoon, forcing me to abandon the rest of my tour, and now I was in danger of missing my interview with General Damjanovic, since I had to hitchhike back to Podgorica. Not that Orus cared. His mind was on eternal matters. He was a study in black—black habit, long black beard, black ponytail—and his eyes burned with belief. From time to time, he sternly addressed the pair of young men trailing us; their interest in the monastery, it was plain to see, was a function of their desire to escape the draft. Orus was testing their faith and willpower.

“If you want to be a monk,” he kept saying, “you have to be a warrior.”

He had a point. The monastery, which from Cetinje's founding in 1484 served as the court of Old Montenegro, was the headquarters for uprisings against the Turks. A symbol of defiance, rebuilt after each sacking of the town, it housed the first Serbian printing press, on which Njegos published *The Mountain Wreath*, until the type was melted down and turned into bullets to use in the wars that his successor, Prince Danilo, waged against the Ottomans. Next door was Montenegro's first prison, built by the poet-prince, whose strict sense of justice—Turkish prisoners were decapitated, their heads lined up above the monastery for all to see—permeated society. A truant, for example, needed only to bring a severed Turkish head to school to be excused for missing class; and while Nikola put an end to beheadings in 1876, through the First World War Montenegrin soldiers cut off the ears and noses of their enemies—a tradition that Orus did not condemn. And present-day atrocities he absolved in order to restore the theological underpinnings of the warrior society, the people having lost their way under the Communists. The monastery was closed down after the war—there was even a plan to paint it red—and when the Patriarch came to reopen it in 1990 he was threatened with an axe. Twice the monastery was stoned. One day an old Partisan woman accosted the monk.

“I didn’t destroy the churches and monasteries to live this long,” she cried.

But the collections of Russian icons and ceremonial attire in this room were intact, though on one wall was a painting riddled by wormwood. “Tito’s advisor was the Devil,” Orus explained, “so he made Yugoslavia into a demonic state. If you wanted to go to church, you went to jail.”

“Then why did you become a monk?”

“You can make theories about a jar of honey and not know what it tastes like. Monasticism must be tasted. I wanted to get to the roots of our culture. And our culture was created by monks.”

No monk was more important to Orus than Njegos’s uncle, Petar I, Montenegro’s only saint, who is remembered for leading his men into battle crying, “If God is not on my side, let the first bullets hit me!” Whether or not the Turks believed the bishop had divine support for his campaign against them, it was during his reign (1782-1830) that Sultan Selim III recognized Montenegrin independence. When Petar died, his corpse was laid out in a winding sheet sent by Catherine the Great, a diplomatic nicety which reinforced the traditional alliance between Russia and Montenegro—and, so it seems, preserved his remains; their incorruptibility was proof of his holiness, according to Orus. But Njegos himself described his decision to canonize his uncle as a political matter (transforming four centuries of theocracy into a sovereignty was no small thing), a detail which did not figure into my guide’s narrative. He was busy showing me Petar’s casket, along with a piece of the true Cross and, in a gold box, the right hand of John the Baptist.

A study should be made of the role that relics played in the Yugoslav wars of succession. After Tito died, Lazar’s bones were dug up and paraded around Yugoslavia, a traveling exhibit which mustered support for the cause of Greater Serbia. On 28 June 1989, the relics were on display in Gracanica monastery in Kosovo, where the Serbian Patriarch, flanked by priests in scarlet robes, marked the six hundredth anniversary of the defeat at Kosovo by lighting two ten-foot candles in honor of the martyrs; a million Serbs, armed with pictures of Lazar and Slobodan Milosevic, flocked to nearby

Kosovo Polje to hear the Serbian President say, “The Kosovo heroism does not allow us to forget that at one time we were brave and dignified and one of the few who went into battle undefeated. Six centuries later, again we are in battles and quarrels. They are not armed battles, though such things should not be excluded yet.” The veneration of Lazar’s relics, then, helped Milosevic to focus Serbian discontent into rage against the descendants of the Turkish renegades.

“We know Petar’s remains are incorruptible,” Orus was telling me, “because his vestments are changed every fifty years, the same time period between each war in the Balkans.” He let out a sinister laugh. “We have a thousand years of culture, but every fifty years we destroy everything.”

The monk grabbed my arm. “The West doesn’t see the East,” he cried. “It sees only the East infected by the West. The real East remains unknown. But when it is revealed the West will be ashamed, for deep in the heart of every man lies the wish for theocracy, at least in Montenegro.” The differences between East and West were thus insurmountable. “Western man pleases himself. Eastern man pleases God. We have a zeal for truth. Faith demands effort, and in the West there’s no effort. God must be at the center of the service. You cannot serve God by killing people, like the Vatican.”

Enough already. “So the Serbs are innocent of any atrocities in this war,” I said, pulling away.

“A man who is new to his faith, like Bosnia’s Muslims, will kill his family because they know he’s living a lie,” he said, recovering his composure.

“But Islam took root there more than five hundred years ago,” I protested.

Orus shook his head. “Muslims are Serbs,” he insisted.

Bosnia’s religious history is complex in the extreme, notwithstanding the claims of Croatian and Serbian nationalists who have argued since the nineteenth century that the Muslims are Croats or Serbs who converted to Islam under Ottoman occupation. “May their Serb milk be tainted with the plague,” Njegos wrote of the Montenegrin converts to Islam, thousands

of whose descendants still live in the neighboring Sandzak region. But it would be closer to the truth to say that with the Turkish invasion many Bosnians (and some Montenegrins) embraced Islam as a welcome alternative to Croatian and Serbian prosecution. Indeed, there were three churches in medieval Bosnia—the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Bosnian Church, about which little is known. Myths flourish in the absence of hard facts, and the myth of the Bosnian Church’s ties to the Bogomil heresy continues down to the present. Bogomil, a tenth-century Bulgarian saint, founded a dualistic church often accused of subscribing to Manichaeism, the belief that there are two principles of good and evil and that the earth, as the embodiment of evil, must be rejected. It was the Bosnian Bogomils, so the story goes, who converted to Islam, though there is little evidence that the Bosnians *were* Bogomils. “Conversion is a complex process,” writes Michael A. Sells. And it is worth noting that the Islamization of Bosnia was 150 years in the making, during which time both Catholic and Orthodox Christians practiced their faith and even gained some converts. The two Montenegrins contemplating joining this monastic order were not unlike those in medieval times who changed creeds to advance their careers.

Or of the monk himself, as it happened.

“What were you doing while the monastery was closed?” I said.

“Teaching art history at the University of Belgrade,” he replied matter-of-factly.

I was still trying to digest this piece of information when we went outside. Orus demanded to know why I was traveling alone. When I explained that my wife had her own career, he became quite agitated. “Then you cannot be truly married,” he said. A look of pure hatred swept across his face, the prelude to a diatribe on why women, who are short-headed, must serve men, who are made in the image of God. His invective brought to mind the Balkan legend, repeated in ballads and poems and novels, of women immured in walls and bridges in order to keep the gods of destruction at bay. This monk was the sort of man who would think nothing of burying a woman alive.

A Soviet-made MIG fighter jet screamed past. When Orus asked again why I was traveling without my wife, I pointed at the jet's vapor trail.

"That's one very good reason," I said.

"When I don't hear them, that's when I start worrying," he said. "Come back in peace so you can see our new set of ruins." And with that he ushered the prospective monks into the church.

There is no historical basis for the massacre at the heart of *The Mountain Wreath*. It was Njegos's genius to fashion out of whole cloth this tale of ethnic cleansing—the extermination of the so-called Turkish renegades. Here was an answer to the epic cycles occasioned by the Serbs' defeat at Kosovo, a poetic drama which in the fullness of time became a blueprint for the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims. "Destroy the seed in the bride," wrote Montenegro's last Episcopal prince. And there was abundant evidence that JNA troops and Serbian paramilitaries were now taking him at his word, systematically raping thousands of Muslim women. *Gynocide* was the word coined to describe the crime against humanity prophesied by the poet, confirming Djilas's assertion in his study of Njegos that "Art is action." That is why Czeslaw Milosz concludes in "*Ars Poetica?*" that poems must be written "only with the hope/ that good spirits, not evil ones, choose us for their instrument."

Miroslav did not succeed in finding a beautiful woman to translate General Damjanovic's remarks. And the two men he did line up had even less English than he did. They were waiting for me, along with Miroslav, a liaison officer, and the general, in an ornate private room of the JNA officer's club. The general, a sturdy, slack-jawed man in a suit and tie, placed two typewritten pages down on the coffee table and poured out *slivovica* for everyone. "Where would you like to begin?" he said, as if from a great distance. It hardly mattered: the answers, which he was anxious to check off with a pencil, bore no relation to the questions I had sent him. It is necessary to explain the causes of this dirty war, he intoned. On January 7, 1941, the Ustasa started killing Serbs. On January seventh of this year

the Pope called for intervention against Serbia. History repeats itself, et cetera, et cetera. To hear him read from a prepared text made his answers sound truly bizarre—to wit:

From 1977-1987 more mosques were built in Bosnia than in the previous five centuries. They were preparing a Muslim state for war, to genocide the Serbian people.

Serbia is one of the most democratic nations anywhere.

There are many Germans in the Bush Administration. The data says the increasing tension comes from the CIA. Muslim countries gave too much money to the Bush election.

I read your papers. You have many problems with your educational system. You must be more like Japanese companies.

If the UN intervenes, war may start everywhere, maybe even in the United States.

We hope Serbs will be the winners in both moral and military senses.

Of course the general refused to discuss Montenegrin atrocities in Dalmatia, though he claimed with a straight face to have captured black Muslims near Dubrovnik; that fifty Turkish soldiers had flown into Sarajevo with Bosnia's Deputy Prime Minister the day he was shot; that peace was at hand, because Serbs and Montenegrins wanted to live by negotiations.

"But the peace talks are breaking down," I argued, "because Karadzic won't negotiate."

No one said a word. Miroslav, the translators, the liaison officer, the general, all stared at the typewritten sheets, as if for guidance. I decided to break up the monotony of this performance.

"What kind of MIGs were you flying over Cetinje this afternoon?" I said.

The general's face reddened with anger even before Miroslav had finished translating my question. He stabbed his pencil into the top sheet and resumed reading.

"What kind of MIGs were they?" I said again.

Now everyone at the table was glaring at me.

“It can’t be much of a military secret,” I continued. “They were flying very low.”

The general had had enough. “We have many kinds of jets,” he snapped before the liaison officer could stop him. “Many kinds. What you saw today were not armed.”

It was Stephen Tvrtko, Bosnia’s most powerful medieval ruler, who built the town of Herzeg-Novi, in 1382, to gain access to the sea and freedom from dependence on Dubrovnik ships and merchants. On the bus ride from Podgorica to Herzeg-Novi, a half-day’s journey through snow-swept mountains, I read up on Trvtko’s reign (1353-91), which refuted the arguments of those Western politicians who, taking their cues from Milosevic and Tudjman, called Bosnia a modern artificial creation which had never been independent. In fact, when Trvtko was crowned king of Bosnia and Serbia in 1377 (he later added Croatia and Dalmatia to his title), he governed the largest independent realm in the western Balkans. Alas, Ragusans did not appreciate his efforts in Herzeg-Novi, and though he used the harbor to import salt he was forced to accommodate the merchants in Dubrovnik. Herzeg-Novi thus remained a little sister to the Princess of the Adriatic; its envy did not diminish over the centuries, despite its reputation for being an artistic and literary haven—Njegos went to school here, Andric had a house by the water. The bus descended along a narrow twisting road cut into the rocky slopes, where only scrub oaks and wild pomegranates grow, and dropped steeply down to the open plains at the edge of the Bay of Kotor. It took only minutes to travel from winter to spring, from snow to vines and fig trees and men working in their gardens. There were even Dutch and German tourists among the guests at the Plaza Hotel where I had booked a room, though most came from Belgrade.

Djilas suggested that “the man on the coast could exist without the Montenegrin, but without the man on the coast the Montenegrin would be reduced to savagery,” an idea that Mira Matijasevic wholeheartedly subscribed to. She was a singer-songwriter idled by the closing of the

nightclubs, and as we strolled along the stone walkway around the waterfront she recited, in rhyming English, her love poems, which left me with no interest in seeing the drawing she had done of Stevie Wonder. Up a long hill, past mimosas and oleanders, palms and cypresses, we came to Savina monastery, a complex of Gothic, Baroque, and Renaissance buildings overlooking the bay. A monk with a long stride hurried across the lawn to greet us, lavishing praise on the singer for her miniskirt. The less you wear, he told her with a lascivious smile, the closer you are to God!

The cracks in the walls of the two churches next to the monastery were only partially cemented over, the sanctions having stalled the city's recovery from the devastating 1979 earthquake. Inside the larger Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, however, the undamaged iconostasis gave me a chance to measure the aesthetic distance between Montenegro's hinterland and the sea. The bitter fervor of the monk in Cetinje, in his bleak unheated cells, seemed a world away from this screen of icons and gold filigree that sealed off the sanctuary. The eighteenth-century painter, Simeon Lazovic, working in the ancient style of the Mount Athos iconographers, had created nearly eighty portraits of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints, obeying the Byzantine theological injunction "to reflect the image of God," hundreds of years after the fall of Constantinople. So much for artistic progress. The work was infused with spirituality, and I was reluctant to leave. But there were fifteenth- and sixteenth-century frescoes to see in the smaller church. Newly discovered, they were still emerging from behind layers of paint, which gave them an unfinished air. White patches surrounded the saints and scenes from the New Testament. The restorers had run out of money.

Outside, an elderly monk called to us from a window on the second floor of the monastery, tossed me an orange, and disappeared. But Mira was not hungry. The orange and lemon trees in her parents' courtyard, she explained, had yielded more than two hundred pounds of fruit last year, some of which her mother brought to Trebinje to feed to refugees, and she had had plenty, *hvala*. I bit into the orange, which was so tart that I gagged until I spit it out. All at once there was gunfire in every corner of the

town—the start of the Orthodox New Year’s Eve celebration.

“There’s such tension here between beauty and life,” Mira sighed. “No one wants to work, so they sit in cafés all day and envy people. It’s very poisonous.”

The Dalmatian coast ends in Prevlaka peninsula, a finger curling around the entrance to Kotor Bay. The disposition of this narrow rock-and-pine covered stretch of land preoccupied Montenegrins and Croats along the coast; for the distance to the mainland across the strait is only one kilometer, and whoever controls Prevlaka controls the bay—a deep natural harbor where the Yugoslav Navy kept its entire fleet. If Croatia, citing historical claims dating back 600 years, positioned guns on the peninsula, Yugoslavia would lose its naval base: a seemingly impossible situation to resolve.

The bay was awarded to Nikola at the Congress of Berlin—the monarch’s shining moment. Like his uncle Njegos, Nikola staked his soul on the myth of Serbdom, even offering early in his reign to abdicate in favor of the Serbian dynasty: anything to unite Serbs in a single state. But Montenegro’s formal recognition changed the balance of power in the Balkans, and Nikola became a force to reckon with, more than quadrupling the size of his territory. That was when his problems started, not because he was, in Rebecca West’s words, “a conscious buffoon” who liked to dress up in the national custom, but because he had expanded into lands where, as historian Ivo Banac notes, “the tradition of Montenegrin specialness and statehood did not obtain.” The Montenegrin belief that it was leading the pan-Serbian charge weakened as Nikola moved into Old Herzegovina and along both shores of Lake Skadar, incorporating highland tribes with strong Serbian ties and thousands of Muslims, including Albanians. Then, during the Balkan Wars, he captured southern Sandzak, Metohija, and more shoreline along Lake Skadar; occupied Shköder, which he gave up only at the behest of the Great Powers; and set his sights on the whole of Herzegovina.

But even more than land Nikola coveted acceptance in the courts of Europe, and by the time he crowned himself king in 1910 he was known as “the father-in-law of Europe,” having married off most of his seven daughters to royal houses. It was a dubious honor, for the Angel of History regarded his matchmaking with a mischievous eye: two of his daughters, married to Russian princes, were responsible for introducing Rasputin to Empress Alexandra, while the marriage of his oldest daughter, Zorka, to Petar Karadjordjevic, grandson of the founder of independent Serbia, cost Nikola his crown. Petar seemed a safe choice at the time of the marriage in 1883. He had no use for the Dual Monarchy, unlike the Obrenovici, who held the Serbian throne with backing from Vienna, and he had little chance of becoming king. Nikola could thus adopt a moral stance—guardian of pan-Serbianism—without practical consequences: a useful strategy for an autocrat with a poetic bent (and none of his uncle’s talent) condemned to govern in a land without economic prospects. Then King Aleksandar was assassinated in a military coup, in 1903. Petar’s unexpected ascent to the throne did not improve Nikola’s standing at the court in Belgrade, for the king had designs on Montenegro (compensation for Zorka’s untimely death in 1890?); before long Nikola was viewed as an impediment to Montenegrin unification with Serbia, not only among Serbs but also among Montenegrins educated in Belgrade and abroad. The monarchs’ competing versions of pan-Serbianism had violent repercussions, once Serbian agents began to foment revolt against Nikola’s authoritarianism and allegiance to things Montenegrin (including traditional dress). The Black Hand planned uprisings among the tribes, smuggled bombs to Cetinje, and Montenegro, according to one student leader, “became the stage of bloody conflicts, rebellions, protests, bombs, executions, chains, persecutions, of explicit collision between Serbdom and Montenegritude, between love of freedom and reaction.”

Things came to a head when the Central Powers conquered Serbia in the First World War. Petar’s government, fearful that Nikola would take advantage of the situation, convinced him to sue for peace; and though his army was undefeated he left his country in January 1916, never to return. His soldiers, believing he had betrayed them, surrendered to the

occupying Austro-Hungarian forces, then his government-in-exile was so completely outmaneuvered by Serbian diplomats that Belgrade dictated the terms of Montenegro's post-war destiny, and finally he was deposed. Petar was crowned King of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and Montenegrins were henceforth considered Serbs.

Which is to say: Nikola was duped out of his crown.

But the story does not end there. The Serbian-scripted election, in November 1918, in which Montenegrins voted to unify with Serbia, closing a millennial-long chapter of independence, created deep divisions in this frontier society. On one side were the Whites—so-called because their candidates were listed on white paper—who favored unilateral unification with Serbia, on the other were the Greens who opposed what they viewed as Serbian annexation of Montenegro. It was the ancient split between townspeople and villagers, the educated and the devout, Podgorica and Cetinje. The Greens had more popular support, but they were not as well organized as the Whites, whose victory at the polls was costly. The Greens laid siege to several towns, where they were routed by the White militias and Serbian army, as well as to Cetinje, where they held on until 6 January 1919, Orthodox Christmas Eve. Here life imitates art: just as the Turkish renegades in *The Mountain Wreath* were slaughtered on Christmas Eve, so Montenegrins chose that night to fight one another in the flesh. By morning the Christmas Rebellion was over, some Greens surrendering, others fleeing. But the Whites retaliated, looting and burning Green villages, raping women, executing prisoners, even flaying two men alive. And the pitched battles between the Greens and Whites continued long after Nikola's death, in 1921, on the Côte d'Azur. Nor had the two sides patched up their differences, though Slavko Perovic and the liberals, the Greens' descendants, had reversed the terms of the argument. What was once a force of reaction—Montenegritude—was now a movement for freedom. The Whites, or Serbian nationalists, were still in power, but it was by no means clear their tenure would last.

All the more reason for them to hold on the Prevlaka.

The Great Powers were preoccupied with Saddam Hussein the day I called on two EC military monitors to discuss the uneasy truce between Yugoslavia and Croatia. We sat on the deck of their house facing Prevlaka—perhaps the next flash point in the region—and while the U.S. bombed Iraq in retaliation for a foiled assassination attempt against George Bush, in the Balkans all the talk was of NATO air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, who were on the verge of rejecting the Geneva Peace Accord. Bush might leave his presidency on a decisive note. Or would Bill Clinton enter office with a flourish, marshaling forces to bring the Third Balkan War to a close? But the monitors believed that intervention, which might have worked a year ago, was no longer feasible.

“Both sides are wrong,” said one, “and it’s not our place to judge how this should turn out, since atrocities have been committed on both sides. I say, let them fight it out, draw up new borders, and learn to live with that. The U.S. can’t be the world’s policeman: there are too many problems. The fact is, only now is World War Two coming to an end. We have to let them figure out their future for themselves, let them make their own mistakes.” He leaned back in his chair. “This is the most beautiful country in the world—and the most fucked up. And do you know why I’m staying on longer than usual? Because I think both sides are wrong.”

A Yugoslav battleship steamed toward the strait. When it rounded the tip of the peninsula and headed out to sea the monitor said, “We haven’t seen them do that before. Maybe they’re testing the Allies because of the bombing in Iraq. Telephones must be ringing in every Western capital.”

A visit to the assistant police chief. One of the two armored vehicles outside military headquarters had a flat tire, and inside were scores of uniformed officers with nothing to do. Accustomed to interviews prefaced by lengthy histories of national grievances, I was surprised when Goran Zugic, a strapping man who made a habit of tapping his money pouch against the edge of his desk, began by quoting Ivo Andric: “Wise people write, fools try to remember.” But what followed was a fool’s history. The Krajina was ethnically cleansed because of Ustasa atrocities, Vukovar was leveled because of the systematic expulsion of Serbs. Dubrovnik was shelled

because if it had artillery it could fire on Trebinje, the village of Cilipi was razed because of the nearby airport, and so on.

When I steered the conversation toward smuggling, Goran brightened. The black market he blamed on the sanctions; the speed boats leaving early each morning for Italy and returning under cover of darkness, laden with goods, he called “winter tourists.” Montenegrins needed food, clothing, and medicines, and who was he to keep enterprising men from supplying them?

“Some criminal practices will stop of themselves after the war,” he assured me. “And some will have to be stopped by force. But there will be no peace until we settle the question of Prevlaka. We don’t necessarily think Yugoslavia has to have it, but never Croatia.”

Huh?

She was a tall woman with frizzly black hair and large brown eyes. Her voice was deep and husky, her blouse and tights were black, her violet miniskirt was the brightest thing in the bar. “I love the Serbs,” Gordana announced, a cigarette in one hand, a beer in the other. “The whole world is against us, and what do we say? Get lost. We’re a proud people. The West can’t tell us how to act.”

It seemed she was an authority on America, having traveled there as a guest of the Rotary Club. “Do you know what I told them at their meetings? ‘You know nothing about democracy.’ Never have I see so many fat, self-satisfied people. And the food—it’s not like it is here!”

*Here* was, or used to be, Dubrovnik. An architect by training, Gordana did not regret the damage done by the JNA to the walls and palaces of her home town. In fact, she was positively gleeful at the thought of all the work facing her former colleagues at the Institute for Reconstructing Dubrovnik. “I saw the Croats arming themselves,” she said. “I knew what was coming. My mother didn’t believe me. You know what they did to you in 1941, I told her. They’ll do it again.” So they had taken refuge in Belgrade—in a big house in the fanciest part of town, she boasted. “But go ask the Croats why they had to blow up my video store, or why someone else is living in

my flat. We have nothing to be ashamed of, but Serbs are so stupid. They know they're right, but they don't think they have to explain themselves. Then the world turns on them, and they don't know why."

I told her I had heard Croats and Slovenians speak every bit as passionately against Serbs as she was doing to them.

"But there's one difference," she laughed. "They're wrong. We're right. On Kosovo, too. Do you know what those people do? They have fifteen, twenty babies! Look at me: I have one." She glanced around the room. "And where the hell is he anyway?"

Gordana ran out of the bar to find her son. It was some time before she returned with a little boy who gazed at her as if he was unsure of her identity. "Do you know why the Albanians have their own schools and doctors? Because Serbs give and give, and no one's ever grateful for what they do. They gave to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and look what happened. Serbs started the last two world wars, and if you don't watch out they'll start World War Three!"

I asked her if she was designing houses in Belgrade.

"I have a new business," she said with a malicious smile. "Smuggling. I import everything. Look at these clothes—straight from Paris! The sanctions will never stop us."

Dinner at the Writers' Club, once the home of Ivo Andric. Three tables, a space heater, seascapes on the walls. The other guests—an old man with shaking hands, the proprietor's four children—were not writers, and in the tiny bookstore adjacent to the dining room, where I picked up a paperback edition of John Cheever's stories, none of Andric's work was available. The Nobel laureate cuts an intriguing figure. Born in Travnik and raised in Sarajevo, he called himself a Serbian writer, despite his Croatian surname. As a student in Vienna and member of the Young Bosnia movement, Andric fought for the unification of South Slavs; for his revolutionary zeal he was imprisoned by the Austrians and rewarded with diplomatic postings by the Yugoslavs. The villains in his universe were easily identified. In his dissertation, *The Development of Spiritual Life in*

*Bosnia Under the Influence of Turkish Rule*, Andric minced no words about the contagion that Njegos feared: “The effect of Turkish rule in Bosnia was absolutely negative. The Turks could not even bring a cultural content or a higher economic mission to those southern Slavs who converted to Islam; for their Christian subjects their rule meant a coarsening of customs and a step back in all respects.” And Njegos had a decisive influence on his thinking. Andric described the poet-prince as “the personification of the struggle at Kosovo, the defeat and the indomitable hope.” The same can be said of the novelist, another “Kosovo warrior” out to redeem that loss.

Andric’s *bête noir* was *devsitma*, the Ottoman practice of taking boys, Muslim and Christian, for training in Istanbul. But as with so much in the Balkans, *devsitma* was both a curse and a blessing. Some parents mourned the loss of a son, others were grateful for the career opportunities that *devsitma* offered in the military or at the court. Indeed, sometimes their sons returned to Bosnia as high officials, the most famous of whom, at least in literary terms, was Mehmed Pasha Sokolovic, who commissioned the building of the bridge in Visegrad, the subject of Andric’s most popular novel, *The Bridge on the Drina*. Few readers will forget the scene in which a Serbian rebel, caught in an act of sabotage, is impaled on the bridge, each detail of his suffering vividly rendered. And that bridge is the only significant Ottoman structure still intact in Visegrad. Serbian paramilitaries used it as a killing site last spring when they cleansed the city of Muslims. Its literary history is not finished.

The old Croat refused to tell me his name. A nervous, heavy-set man, dressed in a thick overcoat, scarf, and hat even in mild weather, he could not walk more than a few steps along the waterfront without stopping to catch his breath. He would clutch my arm, looking this way and that, as if wary of being recognized. He had good reason to be afraid of his neighbors. It was not, as he claimed, his membership in Amnesty International that upset them, nor that he had spent his working years in California, as a checker at Safeway. They did not care that he had left his wife, nor that she continued to send him his Social Security checks—his only income now that he could

not travel to Dubrovnik to withdraw money from his bank account. It was not even, or at least not entirely, that he was Croatian; at least 6,000 Croats lived in the area, not all of whom received the threatening phone calls and letters he did. Besides, with a bad back and high blood pressure, he could hardly be considered dangerous. But some things are not forgotten. The old man had Ustasa written all over him.

“Lies,” he hissed when I asked him about World War Two. “The economy rules in war. Why would you take someone from Dubrovnik to kill them in a concentration camp when you could do it right in their home? This is a poor country. There weren’t enough trucks or trains to take many people to Jasenovac. I think no more than 60,000 people died there, mostly of disease, and they were Croats, Gypsies, Jews. Not 700,000. And not all Serbs!”

Small wonder that Montenegrin irregulars had burned out his ancestral home and left a cow’s carcass to rot in his living room.

Today I am broken, Gordana tells me one afternoon in the bar, from dancing until daybreak. One week—that was all I was going to stay, but I am having too much fun. She and her friend, Nina, must explain to me why it is in America’s interest to have a divided Europe and a weak Yugoslavia. You can’t take the competition, says Gordana. You’ll take Kosovo and Vojvodina, separate Serbia and Montenegro, then use us as colonies, says Nina, a surly refugee from Dubrovnik. She is studying Spanish at Belgrade University, which remains closed for lack of heating fuel, but she has not learned the Spanish—and Gordana’s—way of leavening her invective with wit; her only rhetorical trick is repetition. She never tires of saying, That is why you journalists don’t tell the truth about this conflict. But Serbia will survive, Gordana insists. We have the best writers, artists, football team. We *expect* to be the best. We have nothing to prove. We created the history, we won the wars, we had our kings and kings and kings. But Croatia and Slovenia never had anything. That’s why they have inferiority complexes. Do you know all the receipts in Ljubljana are printed in German now? Nina orders a Coke and asks, Why does the

West think we are so bad? Well, I say in exasperation, raping and murdering twenty thousand Muslim women is not very good public relations, is it? She throws up her hands. Croatian soldiers massacre women and children. Our soldiers would never do such things. Whatever raping there was, Gordana adds, was only revenge. Crimes cannot be forgiven in our religion. A crime is a crime until you die, and in the other world you will be judged. Our soldiers could not do what the Western press says, Nina declares. Serbian men would never rape Muslim women, says Gordana. Why? I say. She glares at me for a moment before saying, in a caustic voice, Because they smell. And do you know why UNPROFOR is like a man's balls? They're all observers. We do not like Milosevic either, he's too soft. But Seslje is coming! Then everything will be cleansed.

“They came to our homes and took what they wanted. If anyone opposed them they were killed. They were shooting all around our village. They took away the men and raped women and children.” So a young Muslim woman from a village near Prijedor told Helsinki Watch representatives the week before I arrived in Herzeg-Novi. Fifteen men had raped her neighbor. “We had to carry her from the village. She didn't know where she was, didn't even know her own name. She was a virgin. I didn't see her being raped. Her mother came into our house crying, screaming that she couldn't do anything. She was raped in the basement of her house. We carried her into her house. She was badly bruised. Her mother watched from the window. There was another group too busy looting to join in. She was very beautiful, but they didn't care. As long as you are Muslim. They scream and yell; are not nice. Our houses are very near. I could hear her screaming and crying and begging: ‘I'm a virgin.’ ‘Well, this is why we chose you,’ they said. She spent two months in a hospital with the psychiatric cases. I don't know if she was pregnant, but if she was, she would not want the baby.” Needless to say, stories like this will be repeated thousands of times, for journalists and human rights workers and war crimes investigators, before the wars of Yugoslav succession are over.

The phone call from the military monitors woke me from a sound sleep. My bus was leaving early in the morning, and I was in no mood to get out of bed. But at their insistence I dressed and went down to the bar. They wanted to hear about my last encounter with Gordana.

“The hatred here is much worse than anything I saw in Beirut or Cyprus,” one monitor said when I had finished. “There they just hate you. Here it’s with their whole body.”

The other monitor was reminded of a Croat he used to visit in Herzegovina. “Every Sunday he would serve ham, cheese, bread, and wine—a whole feast. And he made me feel welcome. Then one day I had a new translator, a young woman. When she went out to the car to get something, the man said, ‘She’s Serb, isn’t she?’ ‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Then fuck her to death,’ he said, and showed me and his whole family how to fuck a woman to death. What an example to set for his children. When the translator came back the tension was thicker than you can believe. I never returned to that house.”

The first monitor leaned toward me. “There’s something you should know,” he said in a conspiratorial murmur. NATO was on high alert. The last time this had happened, in December, the monitors had burned their papers and files only to discover that a U.S.-led multinational force was invading Somalia—to the surprise and disappointment of many in the Balkan theater. But perhaps this time the international community would act differently. The monitors were taking no chances: they had lined up a speedboat, for five hundred deutsche marks, to whisk them to Bari.

And what will you do? they wanted to know.

“I’m on my way to Macedonia,” I said. “I guess I’ll keep my fingers crossed.”

VISITING TEREZIN

*Marcela Sulak*

It is so much less crucial than life and death.  
Behind these walls I know I will see tomorrow's sun.  
Behind these walls I know the way *Arbeit Macht Frei*.  
I know you will stay with me as long as I hold  
with whitening fists, as long as I fuck you and look  
the other way you will be here. There is no other  
part of you to cry for, but my cries  
fly beyond these walls, this sunset, like bats  
that wind around and around the citadel  
darker than passion, darker than the hole in your life.  
You demand my indignation, but it isn't a matter  
of life and death. I don't have to be here  
pressed against your unshaved face. No one is forcing me  
to dig these shallow graves—all that will, perhaps,  
become of our passion, of the legs  
wound darkly around your white hips,  
winding like the flight of bats around and around.  
*Hier, mein Lieber, hier*, and we are gone. All  
that must remain are the shallow empty graves and our cries  
fluttering ceaselessly in the wind like pieces of paper  
thrown out of the window on which is written  
*now we love*.

**VALESSKO**

*Marcela Sulak*

1.

In Terezin the son of a Nazi soldier said  
after his shining shoes stopped beating and his hair,  
paler than the winter sun, was extinguished  
in the shade of well-fed trees, it is strange  
how small and weak I feel. No one knows  
his eyes are not brown, that green crouches  
there like a refugee behind the stones in the river.

To forgive is easier than to be forgiven—  
and it is the fate of the ones who have nothing—  
again and again the same hurt. Those who have  
and those who desire.

2.

If you press your face to the side of the church  
skinned like an animal, without a bell, doors  
cemented shut, windows empty as the eyes of prisoners,  
on the top of the river-girdled hill you can hear  
a heartbeat plump and persistent as your own.

3.

I am of Valesko and we do not break or die.  
We endure everything. We are like the earth.  
We believe in God because we know  
what it is like to live forever.  
Pain does not kill us though we would want it to.  
Though we try to accomplish it, we cannot be ruined.

Though we grow twisted as cancer,  
no one has the strength to cut us down.  
We know because they have tried for centuries now.

4.

It is strange, someone told me at the church  
when my cheek was cold from the beating bricks,  
the center of the earth is spinning faster than the surface.  
But I thought it strange the way the flowers though unseen  
filled the night with fragrance and the road twisted down  
as we walked through the dry gullies like rain.

**ONLY A PAPER MOON IN ARGENTINA  
DURING THE DIRTY WAR**

*Willis Barnstone*

Mario and I talked ourselves blue guns talked  
in Buenos Aires Mario Kabbalah  
Dirty War after his lecture we walked  
to the Saint James Café the algebra  
of mystics Juan de la Cruz Mario knew  
the numbers Jesus called by Galilee  
to turn the waters into doves a Jew  
performed his miracles it was only  
a paper moon outside but witness of  
the plateless Ford that rounded up some men  
and threw a woman in its trunk I heard  
the woman scream we couldn't help no love  
of miracle or numbers helped again  
the paper moon witnessed the disappeared.

**DEMONS**

*Willis Barnstone*

My father always said to stand up tall.  
It made me happy. We were walking on  
a street in Colorado, a sweet fall  
before his leap. In August the huge bomb  
cremated Hiroshima and the war  
was gone. An afternoon in Mexico  
in our Quaker peace camp, the radio  
reported that the sun exploded. Whore  
of Babylon. That fall the demons slept.  
We had, as always, just a few good days  
and then I wandered East. If he had lived  
what would I be? More confident? His grace  
was bright. Less poet? After his leap I wept  
and learned the night. His tall sun has survived.



KEN SMITH

*An interview by Romana Huk and Joe Francis Doerr*

One must imagine the following interview as having taken place over the course of a decade. It begins in 1988, with conversations between Ken Smith and Romana Huk at the poet's home and in a London pub, and continues in 1998 with Joe Doerr at the University of Notre Dame. The first segment is steered into discussion of Smith's early years of writing at the University of Leeds—at the beginning of the sixties when poets such as Geoffrey Hill, Jon Silkin, Tony Harrison, Wole Soyinka and Jeffrey Wainwright all found themselves taking part in an extraordinary literary moment staged in the city's working class environment; the second segment catches up with Smith all these years later, during an American reading tour.

1988

*What brought you to Leeds in 1960?*

I distinctly recall that I went there because of the Gregory Fellowships. I'd read some poems by this fellow Silkin and I figured I'd like to get to know *him*; that was why I went to do a degree at Leeds.

*Even though by that time he was a student, not a fellow.*

For the first year I thought he'd finished, gone—I thought I'd arrived too late. And Price-Turner was another kettle of fish.

*Why do you say that?*

Oh, I don't know. I don't think I ever got to know him at all. He was on much less of my kind of wavelength, I think, than was Silkin. He didn't really seem to participate much in things at the university—didn't seem to give readings or go to readings. There *was* an ethos about Leeds that encouraged poetry; poetry was an accepted human activity there. There were frequent meetings, you got to know people . . . and of course we drank a lot in those days. We drank in the Eldon, and a lot of that was to do with the magazine *Poetry & Audience* which came out every week then. For me, the attraction of Leeds was really that there was this magazine *Poetry & Audience* and that there were other students I got to know through it who were writing. I guess the circle that I moved in was all to do with *P & A*. And there were readings—*P & A* put on readings. So eventually I got to be assistant-editor (and that got me to do all the work, I think). Dick Milner was editing it back then; Jeff Wainwright was a year behind me, and Jon Glover too.

*Were they good friends of yours?*

Yeah, oh yeah. It was our task to “bring up” these young men, get them interested in the magazine, and so on.

*You started to co-edit Stand when?*

I think it was '63, as I graduated. It was a marvelous way of getting to know Silkin. Seeing the way he put together a poem, and seeing how he took apart a poem, you know, in criticism, was important—he's really very scrupulous: *he attends to every word*. I accused him sometimes of being *overly fussy—nobody* cares that much about every word! But *he* does. And I gained a lot from watching that. That I suppose went on for two or three years; we both left at the same time, he to Newcastle and I to Devon. I think it was 1965. I in fact went as far in the opposite direction from Silkin as I could, if only because I was beginning to feel the influence of “the

master.” There comes a moment when the apprentice has got to break away. And that means head off in the other direction.

*You said in an old British Council interview that you were almost “parasitically” dependent on Leeds and on Silkin.*

Yes. It was at that time that I wanted to discover the *whole* world, really; I wanted to get out of Leeds. I mean, I was becoming one of those aging students who graduated but didn’t go away. I’d find myself on a Saturday morning going down to the Eldon and boozing with the *Poetry & Audience* people, which was great, but I was by then teaching and working and it suddenly struck me: “I’m getting to be one of those people who hangs upon a university bar to keep himself ticking.” So it was really a matter of striking out and going away.

*What would you say you’ve kept of all that? Is “Fox Running,” for example, a partial child of “A Peaceable Kingdom”?*

I never thought of it that way.

*Maybe I’m making a facile comparison of fox images—they’re so attractive in both poems. Your fox seems to be an urban ancestor of Silkin’s first-fallen fox—but this is perhaps something that upon a little more reflection I wouldn’t choose to put forth.*

I think you *could* critically put that forth. I never thought of it that way. I have no conscious awareness of fox’s genealogy. I mean, to me the fox character was just so blazingly clear for the poem. I don’t know—it’s really hard to pin down influences. Certainly there are those interests in common between us, the ones you mentioned earlier—the oppression of the Jews, the oppression of the working class, the feelings that I had, and still do, for the whole group of people, the masses of people who were moved from country to city. That *was* in fact the Industrial Revolution, as was the life of those classes in those cities, cities like Leeds for instance. I guess that gives Silkin and me some *human* concerns in common.

*I like the words “concerns in common” much more than I do the word “influence.” Harrison has them too; he might be said to speak for those classes, for the inarticulate.*

I feel I don't speak *for* people, I speak *to* them. But Tony certainly does vocalize the inarticulate, and we have that concern pretty much in common. And I think there are class roots in common between us, too, although his childhood was urban and mine was rural. Tony is almost a classic example of—I'm thinking of that fellow who wrote about working class life in Leeds—

—*Richard Hoggart?*

Yes. Tony has almost stepped out of the pages of Hoggart.

*Do you share any other texts as imaginative sources? The Uses of Literacy and Hoggart's more recent books are important, I know; he was a Leeds man and a student at the University. Are there any others? I realize sometimes sources remain influential at a subliminal, or subconscious, level when you're writing.* I think that's right. We did share, I think, a taste for that kind of history that's represented by Thompson and his history of the working class, for instance, and for me particularly there were those class histories by the Hammonds—J. L. and Barbara Hammond—called *The Town Labourer* and *The Village Labourer*. Their texts on Industrial Revolution conditions are scrupulously supported by massive footnotes detailing just what those conditions were, and what they *are*. And I recommend *The Bleak Age*. Those texts were the sort of texts that weren't on the reading lists, but that the ambiance of Leeds led one to read.

*Who or what do you think was responsible for these sorts of poetic and social ambiances?*

I think it all goes down to Dobrée. I only met him once, I think, but his influence for good was marvelous. His influence extended—he had retired by the time I was a student, but, you know, he was still *there*; and it was really on the wink of a message from Bonamy Dobrée that I put in for the Gregory Award, which was what first got me going—I got one that year. (I

think he wrote a note to the editor of *Poetry & Audience* suggesting that he might suggest that Ken Smith *might* apply for a Gregory Award . . . . That was the influence of Dobrée. Though retired, he was still working for Leeds as a cohesive center for poetic activity. He was the one who hired Geoffrey Hill, and of course by the time I got there, there was this marvelous build-up of poets—Silkin had stayed on to do the degree, Price-Turner was around, and so was Redgrove—so there were quite respectable, fully-producing poets at the university.

And important to me were the professors who were part of a tradition of humanism, of teaching and care. Out there, there was some new breed who, it seemed to me, had been allotted to do a Ph.D. in Milton, and that's what was in their suitcase, and that was it, you know; no sort of curiosity there. Whereas I felt that Leeds had rather a preponderance of these marvelous, learned men—like Wilson Knight, for example, who was my tutor, and whom I adored . . . . We'd be sitting in a damned tutorial, having read *Prometheus Unbound*, and he would allow the discussion to plow itself into the ground—revealing that nobody had really read this text properly—and then he would sit back and say, “The last time I spoke with Shelley, he said ....” And then he would go on, and we'd be thinking, “What the hell is this? What *is* this? God Almighty!” I think the second time he did it somebody had the courage to ask him what on earth he meant—what did he mean he'd spoken to Shelley—and he said, “Well, I speak with them all.”

*He was joking?*

No no, he was *not* joking. He was a spiritualist. He and his brother Jackson were both spiritualists. Jackson Knight. Wilson said that when his brother was wrestling with his translation of *The Aeneid*, I think it was, there were certain passages that he had to consult with Virgil on, which was very helpful. No, they faithfully believed that they could communicate; and this then for Wilson was the communication of literature, the fact that it went on communicating.

*Were you ever a student of Geoffrey Hill's?*

We all were. Geoffrey taught poetry in those days; subsequently he didn't, he just taught Shakespeare. But in my days if you were doing English, you did his poetry course. I think only in that sense did Geoffrey teach me anything—as this marvelous lecturer. Again, it was a scrupulous analysis of texts that Geoffrey went in for. I got to know him later, after I'd been there a year or two. There was a period of time during which Geoffrey was sort of approachable; you could actually go for a drink with him. Couldn't have been for long, though. He can be utterly unapproachable.

*When he was approachable, did you speak with him about your own poetry?*

No, not so much about actual texts—we talked more about poetry *making*. I remember him talking about this character Sebastian Arrurruz that he was inventing, and stuff like that. And I remember staying with him once; he was showing me coins I saw again later, rising with Offa. It was things like that—to do with making rather than with criticizing. So I think that for a while we had this poetic friendship, Geoffrey and I, which lasted for some years, on and off. It rather dried up in '78, I think it was; he himself just became so unapproachable—I think that was about the time he was pulling out of Leeds.

I guess the people I talked to a lot and knew well were either to do with *P & A* or they were political. I've not said this yet, but it *was* a very left wing university in those days.

*Do you think that kind of political ferment was going on at other universities?*

I don't think it was, no. I wasn't aware at the time, though, that it was just Leeds it was happening at. Leeds *was* a sort of hotbed of radical politics in the early sixties. It had this pretty strong tradition of inspiring all these people to go out and sell bloody newspapers, go to meetings and organize demonstrations. You know, you'd hear of a strike going on in some factory down in South Leeds, and off they'd go to sell newspapers and help with the picketing—it was the beginning of the Revolution! [Laughs.]

*Among the students, then, you think there was a unifying left wing ethos?*

Yes, I think there was. A fairly large left wing—and that had as much influence on people like Silkin and me—Harrison too, it seems—as the literary end of things. What I’m guessing is that there really was a spectrum of people that ran through literature and politics, and we all flirted with that social workers’ party for a while. I think Silkin and I were on the edge of joining them.

*Why not?*

Well, for the simple reason that they were incredibly intolerant. “And essentially, writing poetry is not going to create the Revolution,” they would say. “Go ahead and write your poems anyway, but they’ve got to be social-realist, or they’ve got to be this, they’ve got to be that . . .” —incredibly narrow, when you got down to it. There *was* some weekend conference that I went to at the university, run by the Trotskyites, during which one of them, with no qualifications to do so, was giving a seminar on Wilfred Owen. And the conclusion was that Owen was a sort of bourgeois, liberal Christian poet, and really not worth discussing because he wasn’t a radical, wasn’t a socialist . . . .

*That whole radical tradition is deeply embedded in the history of the Leeds area, isn’t it?*

Yes.

*How did Leeds as a place contribute to these political developments?*

There was a strong working class tradition which lapped at the doors of the university then, perhaps more than it does now. All of that new area of the university was formerly terrace housing; the university and the people lived closer together than they do now. I think too that that radical tradition which is basically northern—northern, urban, and industrial—still had some vibrancy, still had some life in that time. At any rate we used to think so when we drank in working men’s pubs.

*Let me ask you about Stand. All of you published in or even helped edit Stand at one time or another, but later everyone worked their way away from it. I'm wondering why you decided to leave Stand at a certain point, and why, aside from a few pieces here and there, you (all of you) have quit publishing there?*

I left *Stand* because I was sick and bloody tired of addressing envelopes, chasing up subscribers, packing six thousand magazines into envelopes and parcels for bookshops once every three or four months when the damned magazine came out, and not really making any editorial decisions. I thought, "Ah! I'm out—I'm out, that's it! I've had it." I *had* moved away—I'd moved to Exeter in '65, when I'd decided I was gonna strike out for the territory, partly because it was in the interests of my own work, *and partly because I was becoming too much like Silkin*. And there wasn't much point in writing poetry like Silkin—what's the point of that? So I went down to Exeter and took that side of the magazine with me—in other words, I consented to do all this bloody doggy work. Which I then did for about four years until '69, then I went to the States. It *is* Silkin's magazine. And I think it reflects Silkin and I think it *has* to be Silkin's magazine. I think the best magazines are published usually by *one* person, by one editor, who is strong-willed enough and dedicated enough to do all the bloody work.

*Although you did have an influence.*

I had an influence, yes, but I think that influence declined when I was at one end of the country and Silkin was at the other.

*Other magazines like PNR seem to be a bit more visible . . . . For Silkin, I think, the others "going over to PNR" symbolizes a change in political orientation, too; he speaks as if his were the last stand going, so to speak. Do you think that's true—do you think you're moving away from that sort of political drive?*

I am, I think. I don't know about anybody else, but I am. Personally I can't see anything can be done politically anymore. I think that the battle is lost. God knows what the answer is, but I don't see anything in writing a political poetry anymore. But I don't know how long that kind of position can be tenable either.

*Are your feelings a reflection of Labour's inability to do anything in this country? Absolute inability to—there's no opposition to this bloody woman. As far as I can see, that's it. I think that she's now got enough authority to write history—and we will be written out of it, is how I feel.*

*The newspapers attest to the fact (without condemning it) that she can be quite a tyrant.*

She is a tyrant. She's a tyrant. What's interesting is that we don't actually have a constitution, as you know. We have a constitution, yes, and all sorts of things are quoted in the name of it—but *this constitution is not written down anywhere*; we don't have a written constitution. And what in fact has happened is that all the power has been concentrated into the Prime Ministership; she's got it all, and we actually don't have *any* power at all.

*Although all the strikes going on this summer—everywhere, in every sector, even in the prisons—might indicate that others are coming to the same awareness. You see no hope in that?*

Not really. I'm probably being particularly gloomy; there's this summer, I don't know. But my feeling is—well, there's the poll tax, for instance, which is going to come in; they're starting it in Scotland. It's going to mean all sorts of central registers as to where everybody is; we'll all be computer numbers. As a tax, it seems to be unworkable; it seems to be highly unpopular, it's going to double the cost of local taxes for most people. And so one thinks to oneself: "Well, surely this is it; surely we won't stand for this." And I think we once thought; "Surely we won't stand for the nationalization of the North Sea assets from gasoline and petroleum, which we as customers, and taxpayers, actually invested in." Now it all belongs to the bloody great big conglomerates that owned it before. To me it seems we've passed that point as a people when we could actually oppose what's going on. They're just going to roll over us now . . . .

*If one has a working class perspective—if one writes from that and writes to that—is it necessarily a pessimistic one now?*

It would be for me, if it were that way. I can't see even writing about my father anymore; I keep saying good-bye to him, and closing the door on him, and he opens it up—

—*and comes out in Wormwood again.*

Well, there I'm specifically linking his violence with the violence of myself, and the violence of those men in prison. So what I'm trying to do there is bring this violence out into the open and try to face up to it. But I don't know what to do from there. I'm not sure I won't just stop writing altogether.

*If you don't write "an English poetry," as I think Martin Booth says in The Tribune, what do you write? Do you feel that you're an English poet, or have you begun to write to a more European, continental audience?*

I tend to think of myself more as a European than as an Englishman.

English/British is a very difficult definition to come to terms with. *British* I dismiss because that's a political entity. In some ways I am English, yes, and *northern* English, and from particular English traditions, Protestant traditions and so on. That's the way I think I will always be. But I think on a more sophisticated level I identify with Europe and I think of myself as a European. I think in the last few years I've spent more time in Europe than I have in England. (I mean psychologically in Europe.) And in some ways I've sort of turned my back on the States, on going there; when I travel now, I travel in Europe. Partly because I can see that Europe is the only way to go, for God's sake; although I'd only consent over my dead body to a United States of Europe, my feeling is that it's the only way out of this impasse in which this country is involved. Plus, you know, I think it's time the barriers came down; I like the idea of being European.

*What do you think a particularly British perspective is like right now—what, in other words are you dismissing? What kind of tradition are you escaping?*

I'm trying to escape a whole tradition of British poetry as represented by just about everybody that I can think of in this century. Eliot and Auden—

whose work has never really appealed to me. I've always had this theory, really, that the first world war wiped out a generation of poets, and in the absence of these poets, these rather lesser people got to be rather important.

*Are you, like Silkin, inclined to look back to the World War I poets and their poetry?*

Yeah, I am.

*Did you by chance do your work on them at Leeds as Silkin did?*

No—I only ever did a B.A. at Leeds. I didn't go into anything special. I discussed doing an M.A., but I would have wanted to do it in Spanish poetry. In the end I just didn't do it; I got a teaching job instead.

So what I'm trying to get away from is what I call a whole "polite" generation of "official" English poetry that really doesn't do much for me. What's happening again, I think, is that yet another generation of young Oxbridge graduates are coming down and taking over the reviews and doing it all again. I think this is now the third or fourth generation I've seen do this. It doesn't annoy me; it's of no interest, really, to me; but I can't help feeling that *that's not what I'm interested in*—that's not literature, that's not writing, that's not the imagination that I'm after.

*You're moving into prose. Why do you think that's happening?*

I don't know, I kind of like prose—it seems to me to open up areas that I can't open up with poetry. When I was writing the prison book I was just obsessively writing, that was it—day after day after day.

*They're very complicated metaphors the prose allows you to—*

—it allows me to explore the metaphor, to almost explode the metaphor sometimes—so that, you know, I can push a ridiculous idea to its zenith of ridiculousness. Whereas I can't do that in a poem because that comes down as "wit"—that comes down as a poetry of cheap tricks and thrills. So that I'm much freer in prose to just muck about, not to really worry about whether I'm writing anything.

I think I've gotten myself into a corner with writing a poem. I'm really frozen in the act. *I can't. I can't imagine what it's like to write a poem.* I can't imagine what anybody does when they sit down to write a poem. Where do they begin—is it “Once upon a time,” or “As I went out the door,” or “As I walked out down Bristol Street”—you know, I can't imagine where one begins at all. Although *I have* been working on a poem that just won't—it won't take off.

*Don't you think that has something to do with the subject matter?*

Yeah, partly. I think partly my subject matter has gone dead on me. Prison has gone dead on me. I've finished writing that book, and maybe what I'm going through is the aftermath of writing a book. Complicated by the fact that I've had a heart-attack as well.

*Why did you begin that work? Did it hold some sort of attraction for you?*

Yeah, oh yeah. Very much so. I mean, when the job came up, I wasn't at the point in my life when I needed a job. But this ad in the paper came up marvelously, right on cue, and I thought a lot about it before I actually wrote a letter and applied. I thought: “Do I really want to do this? This is a *hell* of a career!” So I thought: “Well, there's nothing to stop me from applying.” Then I got an interview—and there was nothing to stop me from going to the interview.

*That's how we all end up doing what we're doing!*

Then they offered me the job, and what was I going to say—no? No. Because I think I've always had an interest in prison. What I'm interested in are people who are outsiders—not *because* they're outsiders, but because they're outsiders they therefore have another perspective on our behavior. Like Gypsies, like Indians, like bums, like anybody who's outside the main stream of society, they have an interesting perspective that I want to know about. I want to know how they see us on the outside—we urbane and civilized people. Prison, I've found, is a marvelous commentary on civilized society. It really explores the *myth* of civilized society, it seems to me. Civilization has got a hole in it, a black hole in it—it's called prison. And it

will *always* have this hole, because it will always have people who, for one reason or another, we *will* put in prison. People simply will not obey the bloody rules; then what to do with them? Banish them? We haven't got the colonies to banish them to anymore. We could execute some of them, but we don't do that anymore. So we put them in prison.

*Where they end up being our shadows as you cast them there in poetry. In Wormwood I feel like I'm reading about myself, not them.*

Well—because in *Wormwood* I found that I had to write about *me*. I mean, I could go on writing ad nauseum about prison and what it's like, but there's always the question of the narrator—what am I doing there, how do I feel about it, how do I impact on them, and what do we have in common, in fact. What we have in common is that we're all men—capable of violence, I realized. And after a while I felt that what I was studying *was* male violence, really, and the results of it. But in some ways I'm not sure that it's not an experience that hasn't crippled me as well . . . . I can't imagine any other job worth doing. I can't envisage teaching or anything like that.

1998

*When you were interviewed by Romana Huk some ten years ago, you mentioned the possibility of your quitting writing altogether. You haven't. What kept you from making good on that threat?*

Oh, I'm always thinking of that, or threatening to do it. It's not really a threat. I think it must have been one of those occasions when I felt I hadn't much to say. It was a dry period, and whenever I get them I think, "Well, that's the end of the story, I'm finished, that's it, there won't be any more. Is it too late to learn a trade? Get another job?" And I think on that occasion I had been working in the prison. Writing about prison had become rather obsessive, and I think I deliberately decided to leave writing alone for a while. Of course the writing came back; it always does. I always say if you quit, who are you going to tell? Who's going to want to know?

*You worked for some time as writer-in-residence at Wormwood Scrubs Prison and wrote about your experiences there in your book Inside Time. In a situation*

*such as that, in which activity of any kind is so severely limited, how did you find the experience of encouraging such an intense human activity as writing?* It was interesting. The first time I walked in on the Wing which is full of lifers, mostly murderers, there were people standing at the gate looking through the bars, clutching manuscripts because they'd heard I was coming.

*Champing at the bit?*

Champing at the bit. I was tremendously surprised by how much writing goes on in prison. I think the truth is that there are many more people in the world who write than actually admit to it. So I was tremendously encouraged to find that there were a lot people writing, and they wanted to express themselves in all sorts of ways, whether it was poetry, or narrative, or just stories about themselves. A man might be coming up for a parole review and would have to present a paper about himself. Some of the men got into writing whole life stories, which were essentially examinations of how they got to where they are. That's an example of the introspective activity that writing often is. Writing is self-discovery, and therefore a valuable exercise. So, I felt that I was doing a good job that was necessary and needed.

*You mentioned in the interview with Romana that what drew you to Leeds was that there seemed to be an "ethos" there that encouraged writing. Was there anything approaching an ethos among writers in Wormwood Scrubs, or is prison writing, as you put it in your book on the subject, simply used as a kind of "currency"?*

I'm not sure about the ethos, although there was some ethos amongst men who did it, but currency yes, in that a man might want a little poem to send to his girlfriend on her birthday, and he might ask another man who can do it to write it for him. Perhaps the man has got a little portfolio of poems that he rents out, and the guy who commissioned it will send it out as his own. There might be some currency in that he'll get some tobacco out of it. If you're in prison and you've got some skill you can use it to survive. You might get a certain amount of tobacco out of it, or you get, perhaps, a

certain amount of self-respect out of it, because it's something you can do to survive in these rather dreadful circumstances.

*Did you find that writing was used in other ways, for other purposes?*

The best of those writing were using it in the self-exploratory way I mentioned: to explore and express themselves. Some of them were using writing as an act of self-deception. In fact, there were some of them that quoted poems that you knew they'd never written because the poems were from the canon. I think I had a guy quoting John Donne as his own one day. There were all sorts of bizarre situations.

*What have you learned about yourself from your experiences in *Wormwood Scrubs*?*

Well I learned a certain amount of humility, I think. I realized that at various points of my life I could have taken a different turn and ended up in there. In fact, there are some poems in the *Wormwood* collection towards the end of it where I imagine myself as a prisoner waiting for "me" to come in so I can talk to him. A bit of mirror-work, I suppose.

*You once mentioned it's the outsider's experience that interests you most. Why?*

I'm interested in the perspective of any individual who's outside the mainstream of excepted opinion, of current opinion. This includes Gypsy perspectives, Black perspectives, Indian perspectives—they see things that the people who are inside the shell of society don't see, or perhaps don't see as clearly. That's the perspective I need and value; it's part of what I use in my work. That's part of what I like about travel, because when you're traveling you're an outsider, and you see all sorts of things that people who live in that particular place have ceased to see. Prisoners are outsiders, although they're also insiders. They might see how the media may sensationalize the circumstances surrounding their own trials, or they see how the police might have cooked the evidence, so that gives them a new perspective. They just don't believe what they see in the newspapers anymore, they just don't believe what is said to be truth. Those are valuable perspectives, because often these people do know better as to what is actually happening.

*What do you suppose society can learn from its prisoners?*

I don't know, the trouble is society knows very little about its penal system which is why I wrote *Inside Time*. Until I wrote that, people had no idea what it was all about. I find much of the rehabilitation process to be counterproductive: if you repress somebody for years and years, when eventually they come out they're not going to be in very good shape to deal with it, or even find a job. That leads to the cycle of recidivism. It's hard for them to break this circular pattern. By and large, society doesn't give a damn about its prisoners, it just locks them up and forgets.

*The poetry and prose you've published since Wormwood continues to be quite political in a sense even though ten years ago you claimed to see no reason to continue writing a political poetry. Do you recall why you felt that way then?*

I think it was due to the circumstances in Britain then; perhaps to the circumstances in America as well. It was the Reagan-Thatcher years, when it was very difficult to know what was going on at all. Things were happening that no one could see clearly, as if there were screens around everything. Political activity at a grass-roots level had died down considerably. I think at that time, everything had damped down; nobody felt that they could influence anything. State institutions, state industries were being broken down, parceled up, and sold off. It was outright theft. Gas refineries in the North Sea, the railway system, power stations—all that actually belongs to the people. It belong to us. We paid for their building. We paid through our taxes, we paid through our bills. They had begun to take them away from us, and the fat cats were getting rich on it. That's always happened throughout history: the enclosures in the 17th and 18th centuries for example, or the dissolution of the monasteries. The persecution in France of the Cathars and the Templars wasn't about heresy, it was about property and the seizing of that property. Theft. It was grand theft. This is just the latest in a whole series of historical thefts, I think. During the Thatcher years I think I felt there was just no way of protesting, no way of affecting things. I think I was reflecting the way most everyone felt at the time, but at the end of the day you can't quit. If you quit, again, who would you tell? Who wants to know? I think I'm a bit more hopeful now, frankly.

*Does the current political state of the world continue to strike you as an occasion for poetry?*

Yes. It does. Perhaps not as something that I directly address, but I think reflect. Observations as to what you see in the street, observations as to the way people live, observations as to how people are challenged in their rights, how they are impoverished in their work—all of these things are broadly political concerns that I would address perhaps obliquely. I don't think I want to write political poetry of the type that was written, say, in the thirties in Britain and in the States, because I don't see that you can address a crowd of people and get them to take up arms against a sea of trouble. It won't happen.

*Could you comment on the current state of politics in the UK now that Thatcher is out and Tony Blair is in? Has the political atmosphere changed at all?*

It may be a little too early to tell. In May last year, when the Tories were finally out after eighteen years, I think there was a great mood of rejoicing and a sense of hope. That, I think, has died down and people are beginning to say "well, what's different?" We have the same policies, we're working with the same budgets, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, as ever. The government currently seems to be depriving the welfare budget so that single mothers and disabled people are getting less or none. The policies and the "welfare to work" schemes are rather similar to what you have here in the States. I think nothing much has really changed, partly because I think the Tories left behind such a bloody mess that there isn't much possibility for change, there's not much slack. The government is still privatizing things, and corporate officials are still making enormous sums and bonuses and share options and all the rest of it. The rich still have their snouts in the trough. So I'm really quite skeptical about New Labor. Personally, Tony Blair is beginning to get on my bloody nerves with his big smile and his endless assurances that he's sharing everything with everyone, but when you actually analyze what he says it's just more gobbledygook.

*You once felt that Thatcher had the power to "write history," and that she had plans to write out of history those who opposed her. In the end, she didn't have that kind of power. What was it that stopped her?*

I think her own party stopped her. They eventually voted her out or replaced her because I think they felt that she was becoming a megalomaniac. I think, however, the same processes are going on, that history is being edited very succinctly. I worry now more about the invisible empires of Murdoch and people like that. They control the information, they control what goes on the television and what's in the press, the great "dumbing-down" process is advancing quite rapidly, so it's really hard to know what's going on. I'll give you an example that happened very recently. Chris Patton who was the last governor of Hong Kong wrote a book in which he was highly critical of China and the whole repressive system. Murdoch, who owns Harper-Collins and has a vast market in China in his interest, contracted to publish that book. After he'd read Patton's manuscript, he ordered his editors to excise certain passages dealing with political corruption and human rights violations. Patton quite rightly said "No, you're not going to do that, it's censorship." I think he's now being paid off with a huge sum of compensation, and he's taking his book somewhere else. In other words, censorship and the editing of history are very obviously alive and well. Later, it was pointed out that the same company, the same publishing house, bought Maggie Thatcher's memoirs for about five million; John Major's for about three million. No book will ever make up such an advance, it's impossible to do so. So obviously, what's going on is that these politicians, who over the years have given Murdoch all sorts of favors and deals, are being paid off. They write their rather boring memoirs that probably nobody much reads and very few buy, but they're happy they've got their pay. We'll never know what really went on.

*You wrote a book, Berlin: Coming in From the Cold, about the fall of the Berlin wall. You were there to see the wall come down. Could you talk a bit about that experience?*

I had written the prison book and it was really quite successful, so on the back of that I thought I could start to make a living writing prose, non-fiction. I really rather like writing essays, not critical essays but factual essays, and so I proposed to my publisher my idea for the book. I'd been in Berlin and I'd seen this wall, and I was really quite taken up with this vast,

dividing it in two. So I proposed this book, got an advance, and off I went long wall covered with wonderful graffiti running through the city and to Berlin when lo and behold, the damn thing began to fall down. And I thought “for once I’m in the right place at the right time.” So I proceeded to write. It was a very exciting time. The easterners poured through into the West, and everybody was extremely excited, and the champagne corks were popping. It was the end of 1989, and the New Year celebrations were tremendous. Disillusion very quickly set in, however. The westerners discovered that their eastern brethren were very poor, rather unhappy, and felt badly done by. The Germans have an expression which is: “Fish and guests are alike, after three days both begin to stink.” So the excitement very quickly wore off on both sides. It was not long before the easterners realized they were getting a pretty bad deal out of all this. There were some benefits to their system: all sorts of social benefits; you had a right to a job, it might be a bloody boring job, but it was a job; you had crèche facilities, you had education facilities, you had health facilities—all of this was immediately cut. The people in West Berlin were unhappy too because they’d had quite a good deal before the fall. They were the western outpost in the East, the glittering lights out there in the dark, so they had lots of tax breaks and things like that. For instance, men in West Berlin had always been exempt from military service—not anymore they weren’t. Eventually, it all went out.

*Did poetry play a part in the destruction of the wall?*

It played some part in the opposition in the East in that there were quite a number of writers who were in trouble with the regime because of their outspokenness, and there was a whole community in various parts of East Berlin. So yes, it played some part. I remember a bit of graffiti that said “Freedom for All Lovers and Poets.” Rock music, and music in general, played quite a big part. There were quite a number of bands that played right up against the wall so that people from the East would flock to their side of the wall to hear it. The attractions of the West were obviously of particular interest to the young. They couldn’t stop television from coming in, for example. The seduction of the West was part of the whole process

that finally brought down the wall and broke up the East German government . So yes, art, various kinds, played quite a significant role.

*The effect poetry has on politics isn't always positive. I'm thinking of the situation in the former Yugoslavia, and the effect that the Serbian national epic poem "The Battle of Kosovo" has had in inspiring so much bloodshed. It looks as though that battle is about to be fought once again. What are your feelings about that whole situation and its relation to poetry?*

In relation to poetry it scattered, amongst other people, the poets so that quite a number of the Bosnian poets have left. They're in Berlin, they're in Croatia, they're in Amsterdam, they're in Paris, they're in London. It's become a sort of new Diaspora. I'm officially co-editor of a magazine called "Stone Soup" that is really edited by a friend of mine from Sarajevo, Igor Klikovac, an interesting young poet with lots of energy. "Stone Soup" is dedicated to trying to keep alive the culture and languages of the former Yugoslavia while being a bridge between the East and West. Part of its remit is the whole of eastern Europe so we quite often publish Eastern European poets in translation and in the original language. As far as "The Battle of Kosovo" is concerned, this is one of the "bad" uses to which poetry is being put. It has become part of the whole Serbian delusion of their own grandeur. Okay, they had five hundred years under the Turks and that's not nice for anybody, but it's made them extremely arrogant. They believe in themselves, but they don't really believe in anybody else, plus they loathe Muslims. It has rendered them, I think, bestial. What they did is absolutely disgusting, and I don't think that they are really aware of the dimensions. I know I'm getting away from poetry but I think it is an element of what people believe about themselves. Two or three years ago I was in south Hungary right on the border of Voidovino which is the former Hungarian province now part of Serbia, and I was just on my own in a hotel room so I took a flick through the channels to see what they were looking at. I picked up this Serbian channel and it was goddamned unbelievable! There was no purpose to the channel, there were no commercials, there was no news, there was nothing, just an endless series of all the shots of the violent parts from violent movies strung together without any continuity—they just led

one into the other. So, for instance, a door opens and in comes somebody with a machine-gun and goes [makes sound of machine-gun firing], and then a building blows up—just quick clips. My thought was that it was encouragement for anybody watching to just go out and kill people; to live an extremely violent life. I know that's TV, but I think all these things are connected. I was in Belgrade before all this started—I think it must have been '85, before Milosovic—but I couldn't help noticing that the grip on information was very, very tight. I was part of a week-long poetry event with people from all over the East and West coming in, and every now and again a camera would come up, and a guy would come up with a microphone, and all any of them wanted to know was, "What do you think of Belgrade? What do you think of Serbia?" And the minute you started to say anything critical—on to the next. They were just constantly editing the input. All they wanted was for one to say, "Oh it's wonderful! I love the Serbs! I love Serbian literature! I love Serbian poetry!" Of course, there are some good poets. Lalic, for example, was a very good poet and part of a very vibrant scene, but what it has turned out to be is—well, if that's what poetry does, I'm not sure that I want any of it.

*You and Judi Benson edited an anthology called Klaonica: Poems for Bosnia. What did you discover about politics and poetry in the process?*

There were some people who didn't want to be in it. I think partly because some of them were pro-Serb. I won't name any names, but they just didn't reply and I think I know why. Basically, I started that anthology off as this horror was beginning to develop, and I had written a poem in response to it and it suddenly occurred to me, what do all the other poets think of this? How are other poets responding to this? So I very rapidly put out faxes and phone calls and letters, and the response was really quite tremendous. I was very impressed. We got a lot of good poetry, and the book was produced very quickly. Judi Benson, who is my wife, by the way, saw what I was doing and said, "I want to be in on this." So we did it together which made it easier. Then we arranged to put all the proceeds from this toward Feed the Children. From my point of view, that's poetry being useful. If some children get fed that wouldn't normally get fed, and if it's all the result of

poetry, then I'm happy. Not happy for the occasion, but happy for the result.

*You had lost touch with Jon Silkin for some time. His death last November certainly has many people speculating on the future of Stand magazine. Did you have a relationship with him between the time you left Stand and his death?*

A declining relationship really. I left *Stand* magazine in 1969 when I came to the States. We continued to meet up sometimes in the states, sometimes in England. We continued to have something approaching a friendship, and I continued to send work to *Stand*. A couple of years ago, he had me as one of the judges of the *Stand* poetry competition. But, I just found that relationships with him became increasingly difficult as he got older, and that his combative habits just got worse. Everything was a competition, everything was a fight, an argument, a conflict. I think that when I was much younger and I worked with Jon, I was probably a bit like that myself. There was this awful, endless bitching and fighting which eventually I just walked away from. At some point I think there was a sea change in me that said, "Fuck it, I just can't go on with this silly bitching and arguing." In the end I just really tried to have as little to do with it as possible. I understand that towards the end he became extremely bitter, he didn't feel that he had the recognition he deserved, and maybe that's true. But I have the opinion myself that you can't really expect anything. If the world's good to you, it's good to you, and if it ignores you and shits in your face, then that's just tough. As for the future of *Stand*, a recent issue came just before I left, but I didn't have time to read all of it. I did read the editorial page in which they report his death, and the three remaining editors Pybus, Glover, and Lorna Tracy say that they want the magazine to go on, and that they're searching for an editor to take it over, someone young with a lot of energy. I know that none of those three wants to do it themselves. Personally, I feel that it was Silkin's magazine, and that it should die with him. It's been going for over twenty-five years, and I think it's become rather staid and stiff. I think it's done a lot of good work, it's helped the careers of a lot of creative writers, and informed quite a large section of the public, but I think it's done its work. I think it should die with Silkin, I really do.

*Jon Glover wrote a lengthy obituary for Silkin in a recent issue of PN Review in which he places Silkin “justly as one of the great poets of the twentieth century.” In your opinion, is Jon Silkin worthy of such high praise?*

Yes, I'd qualify it a bit, but I think he was a fine poet. He did have a problem of sometimes entering into huge convolutions of language so that his meaning was lost. I once wrote an essay on a long poem of his, “Amana Grass,” in which I claimed that the language became unnecessarily convoluted, and that this seemed to be rather like his relationship with other people. He read the essay and he quite agreed with me. He actually wanted me to publish it, but at that point in time I decided I was not going to be a critic, and I never wrote another critical work. The essay is still buried, deeply buried, I'm never going to let it out. Over the years he would try to get me to publish it, but I always refused because I decided years ago I didn't want to go in that direction, and if I made an exception, I'd make others. So I made it my bone of contention to sit on this bloody essay and not let him have it.

*You've been working on a long sequence in progress, “Eddie's Other Lives.” Could you speak about it?*

I left the United States and went home twenty-five years ago. I was thinking: “I wonder what my poetry would have been like if I had stayed? Would I have become an American poet? Would I have written different things than what I wrote?” I would have led a different life, so I assume I would have written different poetry. Then I thought, “Let's just experiment here and see what I might have written.” It's like an imaginary life. I'm projecting myself into this “Eddie” who writes this way, and the poems proceed from there. Officially the sequence is supposed to be finished, but it's actually part of my purpose here on the road. When I get to Boston in a couple of weeks time I'll be meeting the producer I work with at BBC radio, and we'll spend a week there collecting sounds for this program. The sort of programs that we make don't just contain poems; they also contain sounds that accompany the poems. The final program will be broadcast a week after I get back to London. It will consist of the text and all the sounds; the sounds of trains for instance—I love American trains. I want to reflect a lot

of the confusion of America: the messages that are lost, the information that you never get ahold of. I want to use a lot of telephone sounds. Those voices on the telephone—"I'm sorry but your call cannot be completed as dialed." As I travel, I'm reading some of the "Eddie" poems at readings, and what I fancy we will do is alternate between my voice reading in the studio and my voice reading in, say Indianapolis, or Chicago, or at Notre Dame, so we can cut in and out.

*It sounds like a hypertext project.*

It's a sort of a hypertext project. It feels a little bit like, although I've never written music, but it feels a little bit like writing opera or something, using all these other sounds: coming off them, bouncing into them, repeating and maybe echoing and that kind of thing. This will be the third of the programs we've made. The fourth will be one we're making in Romania in the summer. I've now begun to get a steady income from working with the BBC, and I love radio. I love working in it. So life is improving all around.

*Sounds very interesting. When can we expect the finished product?*

The text will be in the new book which comes out in October from Bloodaxe.

*Wild Root?*

*Wild Root.* The text will be in there. The BBC program will go out on the twelfth of April.

*Now for the most important question: are you confident that you'll continue to write after this point?*

Yes. Yes. Definitely. No problem.

**THE TELEPHONE IS IN THE KEY OF C**

*Ken Smith*

she says, breathless, home again  
from the long corridors of air and traffic  
over the ocean's curve, where I have prayed  
to all the gods of wind and water

for her safe return, keeping the stillness  
still for her. The stories tumble  
over each other, interrupt each other,  
all she's met, ate, heard, trembled at

in the country of endless explanations  
and too many sudden noises, the freeways  
and the announcements yelling in her skull  
from the continent of her own tongue.

All falling away, almost in her grasp,  
a word forming in the ear of her hearing,  
glimpsed in the moment that's gone now,  
the stray bullet snug in its target.

In the year of the comet, with vodka,  
phenobarb and plastic bags on their heads  
39 grownups all went off to board the UFO,  
each with a roll of quarters for the shuttle.

*The telephone is in C. And the dryer,  
that's just a basso profundo klaxon  
that won't quit, that and the microwave,  
that and the cuckoo clock and the planes.*

Sleep is what she needs, and a dream  
through which geese on the inlet,  
near and then distant, fading south  
beyond the night swamps into summer.

The rustle of magnolia in the wind  
and the stars over all, a nightbird  
calling over water, the oncoming  
of the great trains' wild concertos.

**NOISES OFF**

*Ken Smith*

Some dream or other, the moon wash  
through the window blinds, the night city  
with its night sounds. I'm on the road again  
in my other life, the lights glittering  
in the late distance, the wind  
broken out of Canada and laced with sleet.

So here I am in this little town  
between ocean and ocean with my bag  
and my out of state cheques and no money.  
I'm rich in bad paper and dead currency  
and they say *money never lies idle*  
but what do they know of it?

It's always this aching hour of the night  
in some place called French Lick  
or Mud City Indiana, the connection  
half a day away to some unhappy town  
where the furniture is made of neon  
and sings in praise of K-Mart and the 7-11.

And there is always racket, machinery  
that bleeps to say your dinner's done,  
your laundry's dry, horns, talking trucks,  
the chatter of the video arcades  
and the low murmur of the soaps  
and the endless wailing of the cops.

Alarms no one ever answers, bells  
that ring till the electricity runs out,  
and then a door opens on a sudden blast  
of heartbreak music, betrayal's beat,  
the same old blues of separation,  
men's inconsistencies and women's.

**A DREAM OF DISASTER**

*Ken Smith*

Now where we are we will always be,  
the moon high on second hand light,  
her dark weight lugging the tides  
between ebb line and nepe.

We never got there, driving through Ohio  
when the brakes failed, someone  
pulled a gun, or in the airspace  
of the wide Atlantic some instrument

gave in to entropy and heaved us seaward.  
We are the names on the lists.  
This is our baggage floating in the sea.  
We are the percentage of the reckoning.

And the moon up there is our crazy sister  
who just never got started, and we  
are on our way to join the angels  
in their interminable barbershop quartets.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF CLOUDS

*Ken Smith*

It all happens so fast, in the long grass  
looking up, or staring from the bus  
going West: the staid kingdoms of the clouds

collapsing into violent republics, empires  
forming and fading on fast forward.  
The cartographers never catch up,

the mapmakers turn broody and suicidal,  
the subtitles in an unknown tongue,  
white on white and all too fast.

In a half an afternoon the history of Russia,  
in an hour the discovery and conquest of the New World,  
in minutes the development of moveable type.

*The late bloom is on the sedge  
reads the soundtrack. And the blossom  
no sooner flowers than it falls.*



Laurie Hogan, *Winged Petroleum, Allegory of Bayonne*, 1995, oil on canvas, 54 X 42". Courtesy of Peter Miller Gallery



Laurie Hogan, *Mars*, 1995, oil on canvas, 38 X 30".  
Courtesy of Peter Miller Gallery

## OCTOBER SONG

*Martha Gies*

I phoned my brother Michael and asked him to come and see me. I told him I'd been thinking about the sixties, and I wanted to hear him retell one of his stories.

The sixties ravaged our family. After Daddy died unexpectedly of heart disease in 1964, the rest of it—the drugs, the wandering, the sexual high dives—seemed inevitable.

It wasn't until after we got off the phone that I realized why I was in this mood. It was nearly October. In 1990, we lost our youngest sister, Toni, to metastatic breast cancer in October. We were approaching the fifth anniversary, although I don't know if I'd even acknowledged that yet. I've heard our bodies know the anniversaries of grief before our minds do. Something in me was already responding to the turning of the year, the night's chill, the shorter days, the new stars. Even in the city you could see Vega, so bright now in the west, and Cygnus, the swan constellation, directly overhead.

You'd think that now—what with Daddy dead and Toni dead—Michael and I would be even closer. But what with one thing and another, we are often too busy to get together. I'm at home writing and he is at Intel, where he provides technical support for the engineers designing computer boards at their UNIX work stations. Evenings we both have classes. He's taking something called Discrete Structures and teaching two classes in Tai Chi. Weekends he studies at home, as does his wife, Angi, an engineer from Bucharest who is working towards her master's degree. I'm with my friend Geronimo. We talk in cafés about writing, watch films on videotape, or we go dancing. Geronimo grew up dancing with his sisters in the strobe-lit soul clubs of the San José Valley, and he's a joyful, tireless dancer. Sometimes, when there's a get-down blues band playing in a club with a big dance floor and good ventilation, I can get Michael and Angi to come with us.

Dancing with Michael takes me back to our childhood, when music was our healing balm. In the fifties, the four of us kids would shimmy, two-step, cakewalk and reel around the living room to the deafening sound of the Dixieland records our parents brought us straight from Bourbon Street, and meanwhile some babysitter would stand slumped against a doorframe, her body language an acknowledgement that the situation was way out of control. In the sixties, dancing was how we moved through the pain of our father's death, and dancing was how we staved off our fears for our mother. We lost ourselves in dances full of little hops and long glides, feeling like the Fabulous Flames, who backed James Brown. We did the groove, the mashed potato, and a synchronized line dance called the J Fred, where we spelled out each of our names. We kept Aretha cranked up 125 percent. Our attachment to music was so complete (and our isolation so severe) that we took Sam Cooke's murder harder than JFK's.

Two decades later, when the cancer was killing Toni, Michael tried to get the four of us siblings out dancing. He began to look through the entertainment pages for some ersatz Motown sound. Toni's husband nixed that date, I remember. Then it turned out that the same weekend we were to have gone out, Toni broke a cancer-riddled rib. "Godalmighty, Michael," I said on the phone. "She had a coughing spell during the night and she heard this snap! It's a good thing we weren't out on some dance floor when that happened."

"I'm sorry we *didn't* go," he said. Then we were both silent on the phone.

\* \* \*

Anyway, Michael said he'd come over. I can't actually remember him ever refusing me anything. I said I'd cook dinner.

I was at the stove when he came through the door carrying a six-pack of Rogue River red ale. I stirred a pound of dry rotini into the boiling water as he stashed four of the bottles in the refrigerator. As I brought the dinner to the table, he talked about this Chinese guy he used to study with. "When we were done, it felt like somebody had poured lighter fluid on my legs and

lit them," he said. "I like that in a Tai Chi class."

I checked the table. It's a long table, refectory length, covered with a piece of blue cloth which I bought from the school children who wove it in the Guatemalan highlands. Yellow napkins, white plates, red candles, everything was in place.

"Now what in the hell are discrete structures?" I asked, after we sat down.

"Boy, that's a hard one," Michael said. "If I knew I wouldn't be taking the class."

"Just give me the twenty-five-word course description."

"It involves notations and techniques that we use in math, in my case, writing the compilers which translate computer programs into machine code."

"Well that's just perfectly clear."

"It doesn't necessarily condense well," Michael said.

There was darkness at the windows, and a breeze stirred the big maple, heavy now with brown pods. I knew which story I wanted to hear.

"Tell me again how you got out of the draft."

He looked at me in a certain way he has, pausing to let the next remark sink in. "You carry this guilt for a long time," he said. "Like I should have had to go through that experience." His close-cropped hair and beard are grey now, but he has that same level gaze he had as a kid.

"I remember this one guy, Ron, who was our class clown in high school. He was an artist," Michael said. "He came over to the house to visit me when he got back from Vietnam. He told me about living totally on his own in the jungle. 'I'll give society a try,' he said, 'but if it doesn't work out, I'll just go out to the woods and live on my own.' There was nothing funny about Ron anymore."

"Ron Weaver," I said. I'd known him, too. I tipped Michael's glass forward and emptied the ale into it. We watched the foam subside.

"I left Antioch after the summer of 1967," he began, finally. "My draft notice beat me home. I drove across country, and they mailed it. I was disappointed because Antioch was this big liberal arts college, and I thought

that meant something. I thought I'd have a couple of months to clear my head before it hit. But good old Antioch had immediately notified the draft board that I was not a student anymore.

"Well, not a draft notice. It was a letter saying my status had changed, but everybody knew what it was.

"My initial thought was I should make it *my* experience rather than theirs. Instead of waiting to get drafted, I went down to recruiting and tried to sign up with the Air Force. They sent me to Portland to do their physical.

"But by the time I got to the induction center, I was thinking I could change my strategy: if I marked all these little boxes—the homosexual boxes and the drug boxes—I could get out legitimately, while making it look like I was trying to get in. I could turn this thing around."

"Good thinking," I said.

"I tried it, but it didn't work," he said. "The Air Force rejected me because they consider themselves an elite group. They turned junkies and faggots over to the Army."

I passed Michael the salad, holding the big bowl while he tongued out glossy pieces of Romaine lettuce. "Before you get to the part about the Army," I said, "tell me the part about your pre-induction physical with the Air Force."

"You are undressed and you are in a long line. You are wearing briefs, and they are wearing full uniforms." Michael swigged the last of the ale in his glass. "It's surprising how much you learn about the features of the service."

"This was October, 1967, right?"

"Just before the Tet Offensive," Michael said. "The Army was drafting everyone at that point . . ."

"You mean they'd used up all the brown and black boys by late 1967." I was thinking of Geronimo, who was Filipino and drafted early, in 1963.

"The game was different now," Michael agreed. "They were stuffing anyone and everyone into the cannons and blowing them out."

I remembered. In 1964 we had 23,000 men in Vietnam; by the end of

1967, it was nearly half a million. I remember being afraid the next one in our family to die would be Michael.

“I went around and said good-bye to everyone,” Michael said.

But not to me. In October, 1967, I was living in a single rented room in a Montreal lodging house, studying Spanish, Chaucer and Russian history at Sir George Williams University, awkwardly involved in two separate love affairs, and working a forty-hour week at a used and rare bookshop on rue Sainte-Catherine, where I earned sixty-five dollars a week. I couldn't get home to say goodbye.

“Strategy number three,” Michael said. “I'd read a little bit of William Burroughs and I decided I'd go to Vietnam and be a junkie.”

“That sounded good,” I said.

“From Burroughs' point of view,” Michael said, and we both grinned.

We had finished our dinner now. I took the plates to the sink and brought two fresh bottles of ale back to the table. We leaned toward each other, elbows planted.

“So I went back up to Portland, and stayed at the YMCA,” he said. “A couple of friends picked me up and got me stoned. I remember they had this late thirties model Chrysler four-door sedan, with running boards. At three in the morning they pulled up to the curb in front of the Y and I fell out of the car through the suicide door. I was totally tanked.

“The next moment it was six a.m., and time to go to the induction center. The room hadn't even stopped spinning for me.

“I thought, I'll get to Fort Lewis and they'll call me a hippie and chop off my hair. So why get into it with these *clerks*? I figured there's no reason to get *upset* with them. I was just moving through their little ceremony.

“But I had this piece of paperwork that had come out of my pre-induction physical, and the Air Force guys had annotated the shit out of it. It had all this writing in the margin.

“I felt myself getting kind of channeled off, away from the mainstream, down a special chute.

“Around this time, Arlo Guthrie had put out this record, *Alice's Restaurant*, which had this song, ‘Group W Bench.’ And it was really like that:

there were a few of us who ended up in the line to talk to the shrink.”

“The short line,” I said.

“Definitely,” he said. “I went in to talk to the shrink. He asked me which drugs I’d taken, and when we got to LSD I said, ‘Yes,’ and he just flipped. He started screaming about how it had been the ruin of our country. That made me laugh. I thought this guy’s got a problem; LSD is a trigger for him. He started becoming irrational. The more I laughed the madder he got. He banged his fist on the desk. I thought he was going to hit me. He said, ‘We’ll get to the bottom of this. I’m going to send you to a civilian shrink!’”

Michael pried the cap off the ale I’d set in front of him and took a pull off the brown bottle. “Like that was going to scare the crap out of me,” he said.

“Then they let me put my clothes back on, but I was still in a holding pattern. I started reading magazines. It had become real obvious that I was not being processed. They were all getting stamped through and I was sitting on this bench.”

“You were special.”

“Which meant there was something wrong with me. People started staying away from me. They all knew they were going and that I wasn’t.”

I looked into Michael’s brown eyes. That charade in Portland may have saved his life. But for him it’s more complex than that.

“They called my name and I went to the front desk. The clerk said, ‘You’ve been permanently rejected from the Armed Services. I bet *that* really hurts your feelings.’

“And I said, ‘What happened to the civilian shrink idea?’

“The clerk said, ‘I guess they thought that was too much trouble.’ He was like, ‘What do you want here? You’re out!’

“But I was thinking, What happened to the shrink? That sounded like a great idea. I’d always wanted to see one of those guys.”

“Tough luck,” I said.

“Yeah, right,” Michael said. “The desk clerk said they’d issue me a bus ticket, but it would take awhile. So I went over to Fifth Avenue Records,

and I bought Arlo Guthrie's *Alice's Restaurant*."

I got up, went into my study, and came back with a stack of Michael's letters. As we leafed through them, my eyes took in the greetings: "Dearest Martha," "Mi amiga, Marta," and even "Dearest Martha love." There was no letter for October, 1967.

I turned the letters face down. Michael finished his ale. There were two more cold ones in the refrigerator, but I sensed he was about to leave.

"Just a minute," I said. I went over to the tall cabinet where I have the tape desk. "I want you to listen to just one cut."

It wasn't Arlo Guthrie. I don't own any Arlo Guthrie. It was Sam and Dave singing "When Something Is Wrong with My Baby."

Apropos of nothing.

I cranked the music way up, then came back to the table and sat down by Michael.

*When something is wrong with my baby  
Something is wrong with me  
And if I know she's worried  
Then I will feel that same misery . . . .*

We sat and stared across the room at the speakers. Michael's old set of speakers. His old amp and tuner, too. Outside the wind blew and the big maple rubbed against the west window, while overhead, the stars continued to track their missing loved ones: Cygnus began his slow dive toward the west where his friend Phaeton drowned, and Vega, high in the lyre of Orpheus, sent night music to Eurydice in the underworld.

We usually skip the slow songs, but Michael turned to me with a look I could have read clear across the sky. We both stood at the same moment and pushed our chairs into the table. He put his right hand across the small of my back and I felt his cotton shirt against my cheek.

*Just what she means to me now  
Oh you just wouldn't, you just wouldn't understand . . . .*

## MARTHA GIES

Sam Moore and Dave Prater. They got together at a Miami nightclub called the King of Hearts in the late fifties. Dave was cooking at the club and jumped up on stage while Sam was singing. I never saw them in person, but I've heard they wore day-glo green suits. Their song "Soul Man" came out in 1967, a big year for them.

Michael and I danced slowly around the room, listening to Sam and Dave, as they worked those close harmonies which I thought only siblings could make.

**THE SUNLIGHT ON MARCH SNOW**

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*Robert Lietz*

The sunlight on March snow points home.  
I make a thing of blood  
and of the poster art, nothing much to tell,  
assuming the cash-drawer literacy,  
the hotter days ahead transfiguring complaint.  
*Fifty years of northern winter after all!*  
And how the heart repeats itself, remembering  
the grain where children hid,  
the uses of school steps, the choiring of children  
still in an abandoned sacristy.  
*Too cold for all this standing out of doors!*  
When asked nobody spoke. When asked  
we stepped down curbs, into these fog-dulled scenes,  
this drawn innocence, this look of love  
become its own reiteration. Couldn't he see  
the ways the day's end coral bleeds, raddling  
these peddler's things, or these blue materials  
of shrugs, of eyes that stare down years  
ahead of them, beset by sallies of bad dreams, by  
the intrusions once and under-rub of grief,  
the moods by which kids did as was supposed,  
bearing themselves to seem at ease,  
concealing physique that they might  
leave a place unexercised?  
*Too cold for all this standing out of doors!*  
And here, in the abiding seasonals, half a century  
splashed wide, they speak a penance matched  
to hearts, and matched to these sea-blues or greens

of their confessionals, thinking of the hooves  
and bright batons, the looks of marauders leaving  
the cranberries on fire, disturbing the ranks  
of immigrants, the voices of great aunts, remembering  
aunts of the last century, taking the buoying  
wine, the tethering cinnamon, the ads for wines  
and shoes by catalogue, these mass-mailings  
now for rapture and striptease.

*Fifty years of northern winter after all!* I think  
of the smoky rooms. And of the rooms  
where honeys and the daylight seemed to burn,  
think of the carnal holidays, knowing  
the wines and honeys, the prodigal repertoire  
the honeys will bear remembering, absorbing  
a father's eyes, and, finally, that authority  
undone, for all the maddening incense  
and promotions and pastilles.

## FRAGMENTS FROM THE BLUE GUIDE TO INDIANA

*Michael Martone*

### THE JEFFERSON PROVING GROUND GUN CLUB

#### *Jefferson Proving Ground*

During the recent decommissioning of federal military installations, the sprawling Jefferson Proving Ground, an army ordinance testing range in Jefferson, Jennings, and Ripley counties, was donated to the town of Wirt. Inspection of the property by the local populace yielded the disappointing intelligence that, after over one hundred years of weapons testing on site, a civilian use for the area would be difficult to implement. Unexploded ordinance of all types littered the tree denuded valley of the Muscatatuck River.

Initial plans for an international airport serving Holten, Dabney, New Marion, and Versailles had to be scrapped as did the ambitious hope for a free trade zone specializing in the importation and warehousing of spent nuclear fuel rods, asbestos lagging, and lead pipe. Happily, the imaginative townspeople of Wirt, led by their mayor Alberta Neville, conceived of a use conducive to infrastructure already in place. Now in its third year of operation, the Jefferson Proving Ground Gun Club is the world's only non-military skeet and trap facility exclusively designed for the discharge of large bore firearms and artillery.

The club is able to provide ample target practice, both stationary and kinetic, for a wide variety of weaponry. Rifled cannon, howitzer, mortar, triple A, recoilless rifle, and Gatling gun can all be easily facilitated. At the pro shop one may find, for purchase or for rental, 88's, 105's, 155's, 2 inch, 3 inch, 5 inch, even 16 inch land or sea batteries, 20mm antiaircraft, 40mm antitank, quad fifties, Bofors guns, bazookas, all kinds of shoulder mounted

arms both wire and laser guided, self-propelled grenades, rocket launchers deploy ammunition including antipersonnel or armor piecing, cluster bomblets, flack and shrapnel as well as high explosive and incendiary rounds. The club even has several antique heavy cannons mounted on railway carriages which lob shells from the B&O siding at Wirt over to ground zero at Nebraska fifteen miles away.

Once again, thanks to the heavily used facilities at the gun club, the students at nearby Hanover College can change classes in time with the tempo of exploding shells, feel the vibration of the landing rounds through their feet as they did before privatization with the gunners of the U.S. Army pulling the lanyards.

**PATH OF THE PADRES**

*Linda Scheller*

The morning sun glints on dark water  
dammed and trapped,  
drowning the canyon far below the boat.  
We ride slowly past fishermen  
and their litter, adolescents in powerboats  
and treeless shores, gold on one side,  
green on the other. At the reservoir's end  
we disembark to walk among the red maids,  
tidy tips, popcorn flowers, lupine,  
brodiaea, golden poppies, cobweb thistle.  
Here the Yurok women sought wild onions,  
planting rings of smaller bulbs for gardens  
in the tall, whispering grass.  
Here the Yurok men stalked antelope  
and tule elk, passed by grizzlies  
and the giant garter snake, now  
all ghosts. We rest beside the creek  
clotted with fertilizer-fed algae  
and muddied by the cattle  
that leave stubble in their wake.  
Beneath our feet a grinding rock reverberates  
with memories of pounding stones and songs.  
Listen, the water murmurs.  
Padre de la Cuesta is coming.  
Remember how the people were forced to leave  
their houses of tule, their baskets of acorns.  
The padre and his soldiers on horseback  
drove the Yurok through the canyons

to the mission fifty miles away.  
Yurok men who did not care to leave  
their hunting, gaming, fishing, and dancing  
were tied by their thumbs and dragged in a line  
behind the soldiers' horses. Many arrived  
at San Juan Bautista with bleeding opposable  
stumps. Those who escaped the endless progression  
of work and prayer were hunted and shot.  
Miners killed women and children on sight,  
diseases came for which the plants and smoke  
held no cure, and now the vacant canyon  
is stalked by corporations that prey on beauty  
and eat indigenous cultures whole.  
The wind sighs, the flowers tremble.  
A new dam has been approved,  
a larger reservoir is planned.  
The ancient forest of sycamores  
and brilliant mosaic of orange lichen  
will drown and vanish beneath brown water.  
The wheels of the conquerors  
will crush the bones and songs of the past,  
rolling over diminished peaks  
silhouetted against the dirty sky.

The boat carries us back,  
gliding toward our cars.  
In the still, deep water  
we pass a flock of grebes  
swiftly diving for fish  
and surfacing again like cork.  
Grebes mate for life, dancing on the water

in their annual attraction  
and the babies ride their mother's back  
as she swims. The grebes float beside us,  
neither fearful nor aggressive,  
constant in their care for one another,  
unchanging over ages. Their numbers  
will rise with the water  
as they drift on the flooded canyon,  
diving down to the Path of the Padres  
to pluck the fish  
from the graves of the Yurok.

**HARVEST**

*Linda Scheller*

They arrive in the fog before dawn  
in unmarked yellow buses  
and stuttering sedans filled beyond capacity,  
men and women with dark hair  
hidden beneath tight-fitting caps,  
huddled around the fire  
at the edge of the fields.

The heavy sky is a shawl of poison  
and they work in its embrace,  
nurturing the wealth of their conquerors.

Bent over the earth—the home  
they care for but do not own—  
icy fingers and aching arms  
reach and gather the harvest  
while their dreams ride their backs  
like children on horses.

The leaves whisper ancient stories,  
the benediction of family  
and the seasons of birth and childhood,  
work and death. Beneath their toil  
the earth smells sweet  
like sheets washed in the river  
and dried in the sun—  
the bed that waits, already made,  
for those who gaze at it every day  
and those who look away.

**AFTER THE WAR**

*William Logan*

That was before the time I carried a gun.  
The hearings ran on for weeks, and then months.  
Through the rippled glass, my name  
still wrote a gilt verse in ancient Coptic.

Checked suits were all the rage that year,  
but I cannot recall one newspaper headline  
or who won the batting title.  
One winter morning a woman had broken

her heel in a sewer grating.  
She stood on the sidewalk weeping,  
and clutching her red leather handbag.  
She looked like my mother, or how I imagined

Mother had looked, twenty years before,  
when she had come alone to New York.  
The dresses of course were different then.  
When young she had lived in Philadelphia

in a house owned by gangsters.  
Her father had been an oatmeal salesman,  
and through the Depression they had never  
lacked oatmeal or a Negro servant to stew it.

They were wary of Jews.  
It might be true that they hated the Jews,  
they gave no thought to such things.  
As for the man who would be President,

in a country house in Cornwall, you could see  
the bullet scar in a wall of the room  
where he slept with his mistress, who was his driver  
and a famous brunette.

We did not know about such things.  
My mother was a brunette, in those days.  
That was before we knew how many had died.  
There were rumors—or rumors of rumors.

Had died in the camps, I mean.  
I remember a smell from the basement carpet,  
the mounds of homely horn-rims and gold watches,  
the beautiful ropes of human hair

sorted into mute and various colors.  
By then it was much too late.  
Long after the trials and the sentences,  
my mother became a blonde.

MERCY*R. D. Skillings*

Lasker went to Gloucester on a job. He told Ellen he'd be back in a week but two weeks passed, then a third, and he never called. She didn't mind at first; she was glad to have him out of the house. They fought when he wasn't working, and it was worse when she had a job and he didn't.

Finally she got worried, she thought, *Oh my God, he's drinking again;* and on her next day off borrowed Edna's car, drove up to Gloucester and cruised the waterfront till she saw a sign with the familiar name of an old hangout of his, source of legends from earlier times.

Two grizzled elders were playing cribbage with arthritic deliberation while the bartender read a newspaper. She drank a beer and smoked a few cigarettes, but no one came in. When the bartender glanced up she said, "Do you know someone named Lasker?"

His slightly-deferred jog of the head might have meant anything.

"What time does he usually come in? I'm a good friend of his," she wheedled. "I mean he's my husband."

The bartender looked at her. "He's in and out."

"Is he drinking?" she said.

"Just coffee."

Ellen began to relax. She felt vastly grateful. Getting Lasker off the booze was one of her proudest accomplishments. "Do you know where he's staying?"

"Nope," the bartender said.

The door opened to admit a lanky, bearded man in a black chamois shirt.

"Jaybo!" she cried, "I should've known you'd be up here too. Have you seen Lasker?"

"Yeah. He's around. Pretty much."

"Is he working?"

“Yeah. Well,” Jaybo said. “The job’s over. I don’t know.”

“Where is he? Is he shacked up or something?” Once the words were out she knew.

“I hate to be the one to tell you,” Jaybo said.

“God damn it,” Ellen said, banged her elbow on the bar, bent chin to heel of hand and tapped her front teeth with her fingernails.

Jaybo stood awkwardly looking down at her. One night when Lasker was passed out and they were blotto themselves they had stepped out to look at the stars and wound up screwing in the dirt among the August tomato plants, but by the time they got their clothes brushed off and parted in haste—he home to his old lady, she back to the house and snoring Lasker—the night already felt ignominious, and afterwards both affected to have been too drunk to remember it.

“I know I shouldn’t ask,” Ellen said. “It’s just female curiosity, I guess.”

Jaybo glanced out the window. Three girls in well-fitted jeans and proud sweaters strode by, loud with brash laughter. He swallowed, turned back to Ellen. “Buy you a drink?” he said.

“Thanks. I’d better not. Actually I’d like about fifteen double zombies,” Ellen said. “What’s she like? Is she beautiful? Is she young?”

“She’s not so much,” Jaybo said, busy with his wallet.

“Yeah,” Ellen said. “I don’t even want to know. I’ve got to get out of here. I must be getting old. A few years ago I would’ve sat here all day and when they came in I’d be this screaming banshee, upset their little idyll.”

Jaybo twirled his untasted bottle mournfully.

“I shouldn’t say anything,” Ellen said. “She’s probably a friend of yours.”

“She’s nothing to worry about,” Jaybo said.

“Yeah,” Ellen said wryly, without conviction. “Tell Lasker I said hello.”

Jaybo walked her to the car. She knew he felt bad, but what could he do? He and Lasker were buddies. “Well, take care,” he said.

“On second thought, don’t even mention I was here,” she said.

Ellen turned the radio up and drove back to the Cape, while daylight died. On the two-lane road before Orleans, she could barely make out her

favorite graffito on the pink overpass—*God's Country Rock Till You Drop*—and tried to mute her woe with thought of swerving into the next pair of headlights.

She couldn't blame Lasker. She might have done the same, given the chance, though she never would have let him find out. But what amazed was how much it hurt, how instantly desperate she felt, how sharp, how undiminished, was this familiar stab of betrayal.

Was nothing ever learned? Why had they stayed together all these years, each wrecked by the other? It was like an addiction they couldn't kick. They could no more stand to be together than apart.

Finally, to break the spell, they'd got married. Recalled now, the bravado of those nuptials seemed preposterous, all the more so for being utterly sincere— she in the antique dress with its erotic rustle of petticoats, which she had vowed to wear in fantasy at least once a week for the rest of her life; he suave as a boulevardier in the fantastic silk suit he had liberated from some attic, embellished by his favorite tie with gaudy cockatoos roosting in the foliage of what close up proved to be a female crotch; the golden July afternoon blending into a mellow twilight of pink stars in a lavender sky; the communal feast on the lawn, passersby welcome; the huge bag of Maine homegrown in the kitchen, joints the size of cigars; their fiddler friends making the whole block resound till midnight, while the benign cop car kept going by, going by; the old lady with child in hand peering through the privet hedge, saying, "Look at the gypsies!" and the more with-it one's reply, "Those are hippies, Gramma."

They honeymooned at home, ate leftover tabouleh, felt like lucky castaways. They were poor, but everyone was poor. Who needed money? Everybody was family and once the rent was made there was always somehow enough extra for all to eat, sleep under a roof, drink and smoke, and what more did anyone want than love and music, which were free?

She and Lasker were hardly hippies, at least in their own lexicon, though by the end of the Vietnam War who could tell a hippie from anyone else? They had gone to P-town in the summer of '65, stayed through the winter, then simply never left, rejoicing to have shucked the straightjacket of

respectability, quit the rat-race, slipped the mean fear of inadequacy and failure that had dogged them both. The gulls, at ease on still pinions, furnished a more essential security, confidence that nothing mattered, that no real harm could come, so long as they shunned rules and routine, valued pleasure rightly, and kept faith with nature.

Soon the war and the burgeoning welfare system swelled the town with young refugees. Rebellion ruled and the good times rolled. They danced every night in the sweaty mob at Piggy's, partied and lazed away the winters; then, from June to Labor Day, slaved to pay the summer rent, grew frazzled and gaunt. It was like living in a vortex, exhilarating so long as centrifugal force held them to the steep sides, but the abyss always yawned. It dizzied Ellen to think how many had gone down, how nearly she and Lasker had gone down.

The failure of love was awful, ordinary, foredoomed. Who could stick marriage any more? Their bickering had soon resumed, followed by infidelities suspected but unconfirmed. They broke up, moved out, moved back in, left town, came back. Reconciliations ceased to survive the next minor clash or win the heart, grown secret and hard. Their friends couldn't keep track of whether they were *en famille* or not.

Lasker's relentless drive, once he had finally quit drinking and drugs completely, was in its own way a disaster, not the domestic boon she had envisioned. Now that the ethos of macho debauchery had lost its cachet, only work, work and more work could sate his need for excess. All his angry energy fixed on making money, and he hated to see Ellen idle or adrift, nor did he dally at home himself. He left early, returned for supper, went right out again, and when he wasn't working he was surf-casting or clamming, playing cards or tooling around in his truck.

By the early eighties new people were buying and building in town, people not in flight, nor in exile once arrived, people with nothing to hide or forget or recover from. It shocked Ellen to count how many friends had disappeared, died or dried out and waned into reclusiveness, how many of those who remained had got rich and wore rings, or no longer spoke to people they used to get stoned with, how common were BMWs, how rare and conspicuous the old junk-heaps with thunderous mufflers.

Everything was changing, except Lasker. Well, the hell with him. She would winter alone and enjoy it, drink her fill, hang out at the Surf Club with some swarthy fisherman or eager-eyed young painter—right in the giddy middle of which, of course, inevitably, Lasker would reappear. Oh, the bastard! If only he'd called she wouldn't have worried, wouldn't be back at wits' end again.

As the car topped the rise above Beach Point, the lights of Provincetown came into view, the “diamond necklace” that had thrilled her beyond forgetting the first time she saw it, that ever after always made her heart beat slightly out of control, but this time it held no mystery, no presentiments of romance, but only a cold glitter, a promise for tourists. The real town was dingy, sordid and sad, with winter coming on.

She thought, *I don't want a lover. For once in my life all I want is peace and quiet. I really should, I really could, try and write my children's book. Why not?*

When Ellen drove in Edna came smiling to the door. “I didn't expect you back till tomorrow. Was Lasker there?”

Ellen sat down wearily, and told her tale while Edna sliced a zucchini-walnut bread and poured some tea.

“So what are you going to do?” the older woman asked. Her children grown, she was long-divorced, had had a succession of lesbian lovers, the last of whom had recently left her, “to play” in the current parlance; so now she was looking again. Her neat little house with its irregular windows and nooks was cozy and warm, her liquor supply always ample.

“I think I'd like to cry,” Ellen said, “but I don't want to.”

“Mad, sweetie,” Edna said, “is what you ought to be.”

“Oh, I am. I'd like to rip his balls off,” Ellen said with a grimace. “What I really should do is go out to Ohio and see Jimmy. He's my oldest, dearest friend, he's a very good painter. He's gay. He's the only man I ever got along with. We were always going to collaborate on a book to celebrate our childhood friendship. I was going to write it, he was going to do the illustrations. . . .”

She shook her head, squinting back the bitter tears. “Of course we’ve only been talking about this now for twenty years.”

“I think you should get out of this town,” Edna said. “Go somewhere else. Get a new life.”

“Where?” Ellen demanded. “There isn’t anywhere else. You know that.”

“What do you mean?” Edna said indignantly. “There’s everywhere else.”

“You’ve been here longer than I have,” Ellen said.

They sat looking out the window into the dark, and it dawned on Ellen that Lasker might never come back. A sleek black cat sprang into Edna’s lap and let her knowing fingers knead its spine till its purring trilled and it stood stiff on all fours, nose and tail stuck straight up.

“I guess I’ll go home,” Ellen said hastily.

“I’ll give you a lift,” Edna said.

“Thanks, I’d rather walk,” Ellen said, getting up with a groan. “It’ll give me a chance to stretch my legs. My back’s been hurting again.”

“You could stay here,” Edna said, giving Ellen a hug. “If you wanted someone to talk to.”

“Well, no, but thanks a lot,” Ellen said.

“Ciao, then,” Edna said. “I’ll be here.”

Ellen limped glumly down Commercial Street. The stars were clear; the harbor was quiet except for one yelping gull—then absolute silence, no one in sight. A few hardy roses still bloomed but the trees were bare. She tried to take her rightful zest in the sharp change of season, felt only a dreary resentment. She had worked all summer with hardly a minute to herself. Now that the world was hers she couldn’t enjoy it.

In the middle of town two bushy-haired men tumbled out of the Governor Bradford and rolled in the gutter, punching each other feebly and growling. Her heart sank when she realized it was Billy and Bobby. “What are you guys doing?” she hissed. “Here come the cops.”

Across Lopes Square Patrolmen Washburn and Damos were advancing in step—but slowly, slowly—hoping the combatants would wear themselves out or flee. Ellen walked on. “Here come the cops,” she called over her shoulder, but they only rolled off the sidewalk into the gutter, then seemed to fall asleep. *And this is only November*, she thought with foreboding.

Sharp pains were shooting down both legs by the time she reached her street in the West End. The lights in her apartment were on and her spirits soared with hope that Lasker had raced her home, was penitently, impatiently awaiting her. She ached with fatigue, need for a bath and a long, secure sleep.

But there at her kitchen table were Katrina and Steve, whom Ellen hadn't seen in three years, since the wild week they had met, wed and fled to Vermont, one of the great escapes of all time in the eyes of veteran observers. What the pair had in common none could say, except they had got each other out of town. Katrina, whose catastrophic decline had been hidden from her in an alcoholic haze, had drunk no more; and Steve, a native, was finally free of his mother's domineering care, and happy up north in the woods. He loved to hunt and fish, hated the ever-lengthening summers that had inundated his home town with hordes of urbane strangers.

"Can we stay with you for a few days?" Katrina said. "Steve's mother's dying."

"Don't say that," Steve said. "I keep telling you."

"Anyway," Katrina said, "she's in the hospital, full of tubes. The doctor says, 'I don't know how aggressively we should treat this.' She's eighty years old, everything's gone: heart, kidneys, lungs..."

"She's only seventy-eight," Steve said.

"Seventy-eight," Katrina said in exasperation, and opened a new pack of Camels. "Nobody lives forever. Steve can't stand to stay at home without her there. He thinks it's bad luck."

"You can have the other bedroom," Ellen said. She made a pot of coffee, and they never moved from the kitchen table for three solid hours.

"Don't talk that way," Steve kept saying. "Don't say she's dying because it'll come true and then it'll be your fault."

"He believes in Magic Thinking," Katrina said. "You think something, and then it comes true."

"It's worse when you say it," Steve said. "It means you want her to die."

"I don't," Katrina groaned. "I just want what's best for her."

Ellen gazed at the floor with her pained clown's smile.

None of them had taken their coats off yet. They had drunk all the coffee and Coke in the house, and now started on the tea. Ellen craved a drink, but didn't dare tempt Katrina, who seemed to be riding on some psychic high.

"Why can't people accept death?" she said. "We're supposed to be rational beings. Steve always used to say she was the bane of his life. The truth is, she waited on him hand and foot."

Steve slumped in his red and black checked jacket, chin on chest, eyes half shut. At the hospital in Hyannis he had been too dazed to heed the doctor's circumspect words. He hardly remembered his father's demise ten years before, but this opened a blank vista. It sapped his sense of reality just to approach the bed where the strangely-beautiful, gaunt specter lay, intent upon drawing its next breath. He had never been able to placate his mother, nor ever seen her oblivious to him. His father had been like a cynical uncle with no complaints, dead in his corner for half a day before anyone realized he was not dozing, and after the funeral nothing had changed. Now Steve felt lost and betrayed. He had never thought of women as mortal; only men died. He began to grasp how alien a wife was, how behind men's backs women ruled by guile.

He lurched up suddenly and reeled into the extra bedroom. The springs jounced and they heard a long, despairing sigh. Katrina made a face and shrugged, and after a moment Ellen went in, pulled his boots off and put a blanket over him. He had covered his head with a pillow and she patted his shoulder.

"Get some sleep now," she said and shut the door, wishing she could go to bed herself and ease her back.

But Katrina was going full blast. "What I'd like is for him to show a little strength," she said. "He bosses me around, but he's completely helpless. His mother spoiled him, so I've got this big baby on my hands. I really need him to show some strength now. Or what's a man for?" she demanded.

"Chercher la femme, I guess," Ellen said gloomily.

"He'd never look at another woman," Katrina said.

"Well, that's good at least," Ellen said.

Katrina laughed with a ring of contempt. "I had to go to Vermont to learn what reality is. I woke up one day and said, 'Who's this middle-aged, fat slob in the mirror, and who's that jerk she's with?'"

"You look great," Ellen said.

"But seriously," Katrina said, "everything's changed, but nobody's noticed."

"I know what you mean," Ellen said.

"That's our last cigarette," Katrina said, crushing it out, crumpling the pack. "I'll roll the butts if you have any papers."

"I don't," Ellen lied.

"In that case," Katrina sighed, "it's bedtime." She washed the cups and emptied the ashtray. "How are you, by the way?"

"Oh," Ellen said, trying not to quaver, "I'll tell you tomorrow." She got into bed gingerly and lay on her side with her knees drawn up, but couldn't fall asleep.

She thought, *Maybe I should have married Jimmy*—as Lasker always taunted her when she got bitchy—dear, kind, beautiful Jimmy. They could have had a happy home and no troubles, but not in Dayton.

Both abhorred their birthplace, but though Jimmy had often talked of leaving he had stayed, and next month he would be forty. Having come out ten years ago, he had grown into the soul of responsibility, worked in the Civil Rights Movement, and during the seventies, little as he liked a public role, had acted as a spokesman for gay political circles.

He had a good job, a house, a car, insurance, the whole bourgeois panoply except a wife, but he was always depressed, always desperate, always beset by his demons of doubt. It choked him to say he was a commercial artist. He was a success by the standards of that world he despised, a success of sorts in the art world of the Midwest, if the opinion of his peers and critics counted, but his shows seldom sold anything, the canvasses piled up in his studio, and he painted less and less.

Opposite Ellen's bed hung one of his early works, a somber oil of two old women sitting side by side, hands folded in their laps. A gleam from the street lighted their white faces like a single pair of eyes in a black void, and Ellen caught a sudden glimpse of his long loneliness. He couldn't abide the

gay bar scene and had grown solitary as the years passed. She thought, *I absolutely must go home for his fortieth birthday. The minute Katrina and Steve leave I'll give him a call.*

She woke at seven, exhausted and distraught, thankful at least that her guests were gone, and skimmed the *Globe*. Page 1 had a picture of President Reagan—*The National Cuckoo*, Lasker called him—grinning, waving, boarding a helicopter. The lead story outlined revised Pentagon doctrine that tactical nuclear war fights were winnable, within limits imposed by mutual aversion to all out exchange, nor would NATO losses be so dire as the timorous claimed. Page 2, the Iranians: a sea of shouting mouths and shaking fists. Page 3, recession. Page 4, teen-age suicides. Page 5, a mysterious new disease characterized by failure of the immune system.

At noon Katrina called from the hospital. “Would you believe?” she wailed. “Once they’ve started dialysis it can’t be stopped. Now she’ll probably live for months. Steve’s convinced himself she’s going to get better.”

“Oh God!” Ellen said.

“He’s driving me crazy,” Katrina cried. “I’m just beginning to find out the kind of man I married.”

“Dear God!” Ellen gasped, coming undone.

Chastened by her tone, Katrine said, “I’m sorry for all the turmoil.”

“Never mind,” Ellen said, “I can stand it if you can.”

But the rest of the day went to waste. She harangued the dog and cat, let them in, let them out, went to the store for cigarettes, never for one moment ceased to rage about Lasker.

At dusk Katrina and Steve drove in and sat down at the kitchen table. “She’s dead,” Katrina said. “She just stopped breathing. She must have wanted to.”

Eyes shut, hands in pockets, Steve slumped in his coat, knit cap down over his ears. In the deepest bunker of his mind his instincts rallied to resist the obliterating fact that amidst the shining machines, in the sunny room with the pastel print above the bed, with nurses and doctors purposefully striding past the door, she had somehow, incomprehensibly, without a word, simply departed forever.

“She’s dead!” Katrina cried. “Dead, dead, dead!”

He hung his head lower. His mother had never seemed to have any concerns apart from him and his older brother, and both eventually had found wives and fled.

“I had to make the funeral arrangements,” Katrina said. “I had to call his brother for him. He’s flying in from Fort Myers tomorrow. I’m sick of this. I need a rest. I’ve got to get some air. Come for a walk with me.”

Ellen gamely got into her coat, started to say something comforting to Steve, but, checked by the bathos of his stolid bulk, closed her mouth, and followed Katrina out the door.

They had not gone far before intermittent jabs pierced the muffled ache in her coccyx and a chill wire of fire jiggled the length of her left femur, ceased for a few steps, then jolted her with a deadly bolt. She flinched and caught her breath, unable to attend to Katrina’s world of wrongs.

“Why can’t people accept death?” she was saying. “What’s the big deal? Since it’s inevitable. I have no trouble facing it. It’s perfectly natural. Life’s bad enough.”

“I’ve got to stop a minute,” Ellen gasped.

“Let’s go in here,” Katrina said.

“Katrina!” Ellen said apprehensively. “This is a bar.”

“I know,” Katrina said, leading the way. “I never liked this place. It’s too gay. At least I won’t meet anyone I know. I’m just going to have a Coke.”

They got sat down at a window table. The only other patron went tilting past them toward the door. He had a bright red face, dazzling white crewcut, and a look of petrified fear.

“Endy!” Katrina cried in delight. “How are you?”

He lurched to a stop, gaped at her with despair. “My health is very poor,” he said, with difficulty opened the door and staggered out.

“He doesn’t even know I’ve been gone,” Katrina said with aggrieved surprise.

“He looks like he could use a vacation,” Ellen said.

The waitress came, a grey-haired lesbian in a discreet cowboy suit and boots. “Yes, ladies?”

“Just a Coke, I guess,” Ellen said.

"I'll have a rum and Coke," Katrina said.

"Oh God!" Ellen said, recognizing the futilities. "I suppose I'd better have some rum in mine too."

"I haven't had a drink in three years," Katrina said. "Actually I never spent a sober day in this town."

"I don't think you should do this," Ellen said.

"I'll only have a few," Katrina said. "It probably won't even affect me."

Ellen laughed with gruesome rue.

"What an awful day!" Katrina said.

"Well, it's over," Ellen said, appalled by how fragile she felt, how helpless to intervene, console or even effectively care.

They had another round, which went down unregarded, and the waitress brought a third, Katrina staring out the window all the while. In the blustery night dead leaves scuttled along the gutter. "It's still a magic place," she said. "I just realized I still love it here."

"Yeah," Ellen admitted, "it gets in your blood, all right."

"Not only was I not sober when I was here before," Katrina mused, "I was not married either."

"Oh God! Ellen said, banged both elbows on the table, clutched half her face in each hand, dug her fingernails into her cheeks, stretched a terrible rictus, rolled white eyeballs up. "Hadn't we better be going?"

"I think I'll just sit here a while," Katrina said offhandedly. "This is a great window. Tell Steve. . .well, you'll think of something I'm sure. Say I ran into some old friends."

Ellen made her painful way home, annoyed that Katrina showed interest in no troubles but her own, nor felt compunctions about using a friend to deceive her husband.

Steve was sitting at the table like a bent nail, just as they had left him. To Ellen's version of their excursion he made only a mumbled grumble, and she retired in haste.

Next morning when she got up he was still sitting there, baleful and blank. "Kat never came back," he said.

“Oh God!” Ellen said, escaped to work and fended off questions about Lasker. With reckless rage she wrestled the rained-in cans of slop down the ramp, got the worst one done with never a twinge, and stood there, hands on hips, congratulating herself on her pluck, whereat, without having budged, she was struck by a ghastly bolt that turned her face blue and made her armpits drip.

“I’ve got to go home,” she whispered to no one, untied her apron, let it drop, edged one foot ahead at a time, stunned by the magnitude of her problem. She felt electrocuted and brought back to life, but numb. After a few blocks however the absence of pain began to be elating, and experimenting with a lengthened stride she decided that her back had simply cured itself with a final, supreme spasm. All her joints felt newly oiled and she seemed to float. “I’m on my way,” she hummed jauntily, “to see Jimmy in Oh-High-Oh, and leave these P-town blues behind.”

Steve was still sitting at the table, expelling gas from both ends, his rank socks competing.

“No Katrina, eh?” Ellen said.

“She’s got the car keys,” Steve said. “Everything’s locked in the car. We’re supposed to pick up my brother at the airport at noon.”

“She’ll be back any minute, I’m sure,” Ellen said hopefully.

“That woman will drive me insane,” he said.

“Maybe you should go look for her,” Ellen said, and nodded firmly at him.

“Oh I can’t,” he said, and his eyes took on a glaze.

“Why not?” Ellen said.

“I’m so weak,” he said. “I haven’t eaten anything in two days.”

“There’s food in the refrigerator,” Ellen said.

“Oh I couldn’t,” he said. “I couldn’t eat.”

Ellen didn’t want to be cruel to a man whose mother had died and wife run off, but she was also determined not to wait on him, and hungry herself, which posed a dilemma—not to mention her desire for privacy and a bath.

“But now you’re hungry?” she probed.

“Yes,” he said. “I guess I could eat something.”

“Well, make something,” she said. “Scramble some eggs.”

“I’m not really hungry,” he said.

So she made him a three-egg omelette with green peppers, mushrooms and onions, a taste of Tabasco and a cooling dollop of sour cream.

He wolfed it down and looked around for more.

“Now,” Ellen said, pointing to the door, “go find Katrina.”

“That Goddamned woman will drive me insane,” he said.

“You’d better go look for her,” Ellen said.

“I’m not going to go,” he said urgently, “you go.”

“Me?” Ellen said. “Why should I go? You go.”

“I can’t. You go find Katrina for me,” he said, and his eyes glazed over.

“Tell her when I get her home I’m going to shoot her.”

“Please!” Ellen said. “Go!”

“No you go,” he said and sank into his clothes, giving off an emanation.

Ellen surrendered. She had lost her appetite, as well as all hope of a bath. She was furious at Katrina too, for having dumped him on her, and where was she anyway? Ellen had found her once, tripped over a knee-high picket fence, with a gashed throat, drenched in blood. Maybe she was never coming back either.

“I’ll go,” she said.

Steve said dreamily, “When Lasker gets back will you ask him to help me do something?”

“What, Steve?”

“Lasso Katrina,” he said.

Ellen went. Her leg immediately shrieked, deep in the bone, and tears blurred her eyes. Past Cookie’s she hobbled without looking in; Katrina was banned there forever for some long-forgotten fracas. Nor would she be in the *Cove*, soon to close for the season, nor the A-House, all gay men, and surely, after last night’s debacle, not the Crown & Anchor again, but possibly the Old Colony, Bradford or Surf. But first she would try the Fo’c’sle, likeliest of all, where the kindly sun gilds the morning, and the days flow together, years on end.

And yes, there she was, half visible in the shadow within, one bench back from the west window, looking bedraggled and shaky, with a schooner

of beer and a fresh pack of Camels.

“What a night!” she said. “I’m afraid to remember it.”

“Katrina!” Ellen wailed. “You’ve got to help me. I can’t deal with this guy. He’s your husband. You’ve got to get him out of my house.”

“Oh!” Katrina cried with a sob of comprehension. “How can you ever forgive me?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ellen said, ashamed of herself, “but you’ve got to move over to his mother’s house. You also have the car keys, and his brother’s plane comes at noon, which you’re supposed to meet.”

Katrina groaned. “I just remembered I nearly died the last time I was in this town.”

“That was your only time in this town,” Ellen reminded her.

“I’d better go,” Katrina said with a distracted, strained face, drank half her beer, pocketed her Camels and stepped down into the street, but softly not to jar innards or skull.

Ellen rested a while, testing the urge to have a few beers herself and chat with the bartender, who after all had never left any doubt of his warmth for her. They could play the jukebox and enjoy the empty a.m. together; then she could get them some scallops for lunch, and the day would ripen as people drifted in for the long, sociable afternoon, with a night of titillating possibilities in store.

But heartache blighted even fantasy. Had Lasker been home she might have welcomed a fond flirtation, but instead she was frazzled past all pleasure, and soon grimly followed in Katrina’s tracks, pain jittering down her legs.

As she rounded the corner and came in sight of her house, Steve and Katrina were just getting into their car. He rolled down the window, waited for her with the engine running, kept both hands on the wheel, knit cap down over his ears, eyes straight ahead, revving the engine louder and louder.

Hunched in her coat, Katrina leaned across him and said, “We reached his brother. He’s going to take care of the funeral. We’re leaving. Thanks, Ellen.”

Steve popped the clutch, sped off, spraying Ellen’s ankles with sand,

braked at Back Street, turned, roared engine, screeched tires, was gone.

Marveling, Ellen got herself into the bathtub, and the phone rang. In frustration, afraid to hope it was Lasker, she climbed painfully out of the tub, put a robe on, sat down at the kitchen table, and on the ninth nerve-racking ring picked it up and said, "Hello?"

"How are you?" said Jimmy. "It's me."

Ellen's heart overflowed; tears bathed her face. "We must be psychic!" she exulted. "You've been on my mind all week."

"I'm afraid I've reached a point," the dear, considerate voice said, and went on dispassionately to describe how he had stretched a canvas for the first time in a year, then been unable to enter his studio.

"I realized it was just another road to nowhere," he said. "Last year I spent a month with my sister in Minneapolis. I thought it might help. She's happily married, with a nice husband, three kids. It only depressed me all the more to face my own failure after that.

"I wound up in the hospital again, my bronchitis went absolutely berserk—I never wrote you—and then I got a new shrink, who changed my medication, which turned me into a zombie, and I lost so much weight I looked like a skeleton. I quit him finally and I'm off everything now except for valium as a last resort. I've gained most of my weight back, but I really don't know where I'm going from here."

"Art is your life!" Ellen cried, and her voice cracked. "You just have to get back to it."

"I'm tired of the rejections," Jimmy said. "After two whole years of holding it Doubleday finally sent back my *Alpha Bestiary* with note saying it was very good, but it would be impossible to sell such a book unless the artist had a national reputation—which I will never have."

"You will," Ellen said, "you will." But for the first time she doubted. Jimmy said distinctly:

"If you meet it on the Forest Floor  
The Somber Feathered Finderboar  
Will stun you with pungent breath  
Then claw or tickle you to death."

“I’d give anything to see that plate,” Ellen said.

“Very handsome creature, very sinister,” Jimmy said, and his voice picked up with pride.

“You need to get back to oil painting,” Ellen said. “That’s your real *métier*.”

Jimmy said, “I’ve got literally hundreds of canvases gathering dust. And people pay perfectly horrid prices for decorative crap to put on their walls.”

“You have to start from scratch again,” Ellen said.

“Once a week,” Jimmy said, “I bring my grandmother over and she sits on the stoop and watches me work in my garden. That makes as much sense as anything. I’m sick of Ink Incorporated. If I have to hear another racial joke I think I’ll quit.”

“You should sell your house and move down here,” Ellen said. “I know you think it’s too frivolous.”

“My old enemies,” Jimmy said grimly, “solitude and futility.”

“You should try P-town,” Ellen said, but knew he never would. He liked to visit, but that was enough for him. On his last sojourn in Utopia she had inadvertently found herself walking behind him down Commercial Street. Several young men in tank tops were leaning out of a second-floor, guest house window, commenting, caroling on the passing anatomies, with catcalls, much laughter and applause from bystanders. Jimmy, doubtless deep in reverie, awoke to a chorus of, “Nice heinie!”

Ellen could almost see his hackles rise, and she let him tread on alone, rigid with disdain. P-town was too rich for him, Dayton too poor.

“You have to fight your battles at home, I think,” he said.

He always ended thus—stoical, steeled neither to win nor be defeated—and after fervent farewells, hortatory, sanguine as ever on her part, heartened and grateful on his, they hung up.

Ellen eased back into the tub, puzzled with distress. She had been overjoyed by his call, even if he did sound worse than usual. To her he had everything—talent, beauty, brains, grace—in spite of his disappointments, inveterate complaints and hypochondria. That he relied on her to bolster his ego had always gratified her pride, but today, for the first time, she felt a jealous chagrin, his woes having grown so vast apparently, so ungovernable,

that he could think only of them and never pause to ask after hers, though of course, as both knew all too well, those could always be encompassed by the one, fatal name: Lasker.

But, apart from his inflexible family, from which he had always been able to find refuge at Ellen's house, why was Jimmy so despairing? He had not been unhappy as a child, nor in youth; he regretted being gay only on his Puritanical parents' behalf; but not long after she had left Dayton—she could not pinpoint precisely when—he had begun to refer to himself, ever less lightly, as “a miserable wretch.”

Twenty years ago he had been the last person to talk to her father, a sensitive, bookish gambler who idolized Mohandas Gandhi. The two—one barely more than a boy—sat up late, drinking whiskey and discussing suicide; Jimmy had finally conceded that in some circumstances it was a justifiable resort, and early next morning before anyone else in the house was awake her father had gone down in the cellar and shot himself.

Neither liked to remember this old bond of grief, and they never alluded to it, though she knew he blamed himself. She blamed no one, least of all her father, the first love of her life, nor Jimmy, the second, both idealists for whom life had somehow proved desolating.

But Lasker, the third, the last, the resilient, the rambunctious one, for whom life was never enough, who seemed to thrive on strife, on havoc, why was he the one to whom fate had doomed her? Why? How had these things come about?

It struck her now, up to her scuppers in the luxury of almost too-hot water, that everything might yet be redeemed, if only she chose, if only she had the courage to leave Lasker.

Jimmy needed her; Lasker did not, never had, never would, or not in the way she needed him. She could go and live with Jimmy, cheer him up, get him back to painting again; they could do their long-promised, much-lamented children's book together and be happy in a normal, stable, steady home.

And suddenly realizing that she had forgotten to tell him she was coming home for his birthday, she began to savor the pleasures of calling him back the minute she got out of the tub. How happy he would be!

Meanwhile she mulled, and the more she mulled the greater and grander grew the idea of leaving, until it seemed salvation. Jimmy's house was large and sunny, with a nice kitchen. What joy to do some real cooking for a change, what a pleasure to pamper someone appreciative who would not decamp the minute dinner was done. And a garden! What a blessing! To be loved, cherished, listened to, cared for! Who needed sex? And anyway, who could be sure such mysteries in time might not be happily resolved?

She began to weave a rich vision of bliss in Dayton, with a vindictive thread of Lasker coming back in the spring to find her gone. Let him work out his life by himself in grim P-town, if he ever did come back!

She thought, *I can't wait to hear Jimmy's voice when I tell him. I wish I could see his face.*

But a shadow crossed her mind, she felt a need to hurry, to act decisively, lest her nerve fail, and she recalled, with odd incongruity, standing on the porch in her pajamas, staring across the neighbors' roof at the huge, hazy sun of the ever-reverberating dawn that had announced, and subsequently pulverized, her mother's widowhood.

The soap had floated away, drawn to the far end by the running water. She bent forward with the combined purpose of retrieving it and turning off the faucet, heard herself scream before she knew why, then involuntarily continued screaming in a high, strange voice that distended her throat, squeezed free of her maw like a gigantic bat unfolding its wings, buffeting, blinding her. She slid back in the tub and tried to writhe, but was paralysed, and the unbearable pain went on and on and on without diminishing while her will dissolved and she prayed to die.

Then it stopped—sweet respite of silence—but terror and humiliation gripped her, and cold sweat rolled down her brow. The water was getting hotter, rising toward her chin. She dared not move lest the pain revive and she slide beneath the surface. She could cry for help, but who would hear? Her feet were scalding; steam clouded over the mirror.

She thought, *I can't just give up;* and in desperation, warily, secretively, not to provoke the black bat, she budged one foot, felt a grisly twinge, and lay back panting, sweat freezing her face, till the water began to spill into

her ears and lick her lower lip; angrily then she tried to sit up, and shrieked in that stranger's voice, while deeper immersion impended.

But the deadly medium buoyed her, as did shame at this ludicrous fate. By dint of minuscule adjustments of position and cautious explorations of limits, after many alarms and despairs, she got a heel and a knee under her, took a deep breath, clenched her eyes, and rose straight up, dripping and pink.

She hardly felt human, gone her goddess days when Lasker marveled to behold her naked. In bed with her knees drawn up, she no longer minded her aching coccyx, because her whole left thigh was numb. Bitter intuition told her how problematical it was that she could make it to Dayton for Jimmy's birthday two weeks hence.

But what else was ahead? Suppose the unbearable pain returned? Suppose it stayed? Where was Lasker, now she really needed him? She could see his swashbuckling swagger, his grave insouciance, as he reinvented his life and wild times for his new, wide-eyed, young cherub, made a myth of his bitch of a witch of a wife, if he ever mentioned such an ogre. The name Ellen probably did not exist up in Gloucester.

She slept and dreamt the world had tipped and she was sliding off.

In the morning she awoke so stiff it took her twenty minutes to get sat down at the phone to call her employer. "I think I did it moving those barrels," she said.

"I know the routine," Halburd said cheerfully, completely canny, "I don't need you right now anyway."

"Halburd," she said. "I can hardly move."

"You're not terribly fond of work anyway, are you?" he said. "Come in when you're feeling better."

Scared, she made her arduous way back to bed. The cat and dog jumped up with her. Sometime in the sweaty, dream-riddled afternoon Tringle put his head in the open window, looking for Lasker.

"You're still here!" he said.

She hadn't seen him in five years, or was it ten? Where had he been? He hadn't changed at all. When he heard about her back he said, "You're a

Virgo, aren't you? Your mercury's retrograde."

"I think it's stuck there," Ellen said.

"Never happen," Tringle scoffed. He ran off, as always, on his inveterate track, rapping happily about the stars, the oscillations of yin and yang, the ancient, secret signs. "What I can tell you?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said, "I'll be fine," but things got worse. Edna was out of town or incommunicado. No one else dropped by—not that she wanted company—and finally she took a taxi to the doctor, who gave her a prescription, told her to rest on a hard surface till the pain went away, meanwhile move as little as possible.

She filled half a dozen bowls with dried cat and dog food and water, and put a quilt and blankets on the floor midway between refrigerator and bathroom.

To eat or answer calls of nature now exacted absolute attention or else the screams recurred in that puppet's voice she came to detest. She dozed or brooded while light suffused the darkness, swelled, held sway, faded, yielded once more to night. Turning her head she could see under the stove tiny mounds of dirt and dead insects with their feet in the air.

On the fourth day her back felt better and she groped around the house for a minute, but was so depressed she lay down again at the first twinge.

Her spirits went on sinking. She hardly ate. The pills made her groggy. She kept thinking about Jimmy's birthday—a funereal occasion it would be, with only his grandmother to help him celebrate.

Ellen was glad she had not mentioned her birthday plan; to have to cancel it would only have got him down. She would call again when she felt better; it wouldn't do for them both to be in the dumps at the same time; and now, as she queried herself more calmly, she was not quite sure what she wanted of the future. She could start with a casual trip to Dayton and see how that went. The old, bitter riddle bedevilled her still. Why couldn't he have loved her, in the first place, as she had him? What hope was there, after all, for them, at this late date?

Every day she thought, *Tomorrow will be better*. But it proved worse. She knew what depressions were, expected to hit bottom and start up, but the plunge accelerated. She began to loathe her own existence; even her will to

hope vanished.

By the ninth day her back was undeniably better, but still she lay and watched the changing light. She could smell herself. Every failure, every flaw, every dark folly of her life pointed toward this awful culmination. Where had the years gone? For what? Jimmy had painted his paintings at least, but she had invested herself in Lasker, was locked up in him forever, never could trade Provincetown for Dayton, not even for Jimmy.

On the morrow she woke suffocating, with the cat crouched on her chest, the dog breathing down at her. Their worry was so palpable that she caught a clear glimpse of her own prostrate form.

Revulsion drove her to her feet without forethought. She was so mortified she didn't notice the absence of pain. Her back seemed a dim episode in a distant past. She was up, vertical. That was the main thing, the only thing, in fact, and she had lost some weight for sure—no small reward!

The dog pranced, eyes gleam; the cat stretched complacently, yawned, sat back, began to bite its tail for fleas. She was ravenous and laughed aloud shakily. A strayed husband, a sciatic attack! What was all the fuss about?

The sun streamed through the windows. It promised to be one of those wondrous, over-ripe days, paradisiacal and still, with a thrilling hint of ill-health, a scent of something unwholesome on the balmy air, one of those hallucinatory prodigies of late fall that last and last, that grant the acolyte a glimpse of eternity, nostalgic gift of the green, motionless bosom of the Gulf Stream, a hope of no winter at all, but only an endless fall and early spring.

She heard the postman. Two letters came through the slot. Her heart swelled to see Jimmy's elegant calligraphy on one, his sister's childish melange of print and scrawl on the other.

Jimmy wrote, *Dearest Ellen, I have lost faith and want to leave. I'm sorry to do this. The catch is I can't live for others and don't want to for myself any more. I hate to leave you with this horrible thing.*

His sister began, *This is the hardest letter I've ever had to write.*

Ellen was dully not surprised. The letter told of Jimmy's suicide four days before. He had left notes for his friends, stapled a sign to his door: *DON'T COME IN. CALL THE POLICE.*

Someone happening by broke down the door and found him, still warm, hanging from his storage loft.

He had willed his body to medicine, his paintings to anyone who wanted them.

Ellen lay back down on the floor. For a while the network of fine cracks in the ceiling occupied her eye, proceeding from nowhere to nowhere, branching and re-branching, sourceless clusters, consolatory and complete, but still there was no denying the consequences of the distracted phone call. One word of her visit would have saved him.

In deep calm she trekked to the liquor store, and lay down on the floor again. She kept thinking, *I've got to go see Jimmy and talk this over.*

Toward dusk, steadied by half a fifth of vodka and the exhaustion of all tears, she got out the cardboard box of his letters, cards and memorabilia, and began to read it through, piece by piece, the accumulation of twenty years and more, in case some clue were waiting there.

It all came as a revelation, and somehow was all the same, unchanging, a familiar reflection of her own letters, as they must have been of his. His always began with the weather—out the window—night or day, half a page at least, rapturously portrayed. Then came fervent thanks for her last letter, saying how much it had meant to him, how he depended on them, as on the links of an anchor chain. Next came good wishes in her struggles for self-mastery, and hopes that her relations with Lasker had improved, or were ended, once and for all. Then followed commentary on what he was etching or painting, how hard he was working, how tired he was, how aggravating his health, how frail and groping his ego.

From year to year he chronicled his regimen of pills and diet, bewailed his bouts of depression, his calvary of herpes and shingles, his allergies, and respiratory and intestinal infections, his incredibly high blood pressure.

At first with boyish joy, then increasingly baffled remorse, he recorded his ardent romances, so full of expectation, so soon cooled, that always left him lonely and demoralized.

Time and again he said he longed to have a good cry with her, *to even the odds*, as he often said, always closed with the words, *Wink at the Sun & Moon for Me.*

On a recent postcard he complimented her on her beautiful handwriting and asked for the make of pen she used, but it had gone unanswered.

At midnight she went to the window, saw not a single star, knew what she must do. It was the only way to keep faith, after all her blind betrayals, the only redemption possible, the only true path.

Loath to do herself violence, she tried to think where she could get some sleeping pills without implicating anyone. Heart clement, head clear at last, she pitied whoever must find her, thankful at least it would not be Lasker.

The vodka was gone. She got to her feet and found on the top pantry shelf a last inch of blackberry brandy, relic of god knew what festivity or dolor, tipped it down slow as honey, rinsed the bottle and stood it in the dish rack.

She thought, *I'd better get on with this*, and a bright, exacting light stilled the room. She was surprised, impressed after her lifetime of hesitations, by how sturdy, how resolute she felt as she delved in the drawer by the sink for knives. One of them she knew was very sharp, the black-handled one Lasker used to gut fish. At the grate of the blade upon her thumb she threw up without warning, easy as a baby.

She lay back down and dreamt of a children's book. Jimmy had always said, "You write, I'll illustrate." It was the size of a monument, covered with unreadable script, laid flat in the grass of a vast cemetery. Two children were walking toward it, hand in hand. As she approached them they turned. It was her and Jimmy with grotesque, adult grimaces, and she woke flat on her back on her kitchen floor, head pounding, palate raw with bile, bereft of all but loss, an exile in her own home, alone in a posthumous world.



Yasumasa Morimura, *Mother (Judith I)*, 1991, color photograph on canvas, 102.5 X 71". Courtesy of Luhring Augustine



Yasumasa Morimura, *Six Brides*, 1991, color photograph on canvas, 47 X 55". Courtesy of Luhring Augustine

**VICTORY OVER THE SUN**

*Robert Archambeau*

Here come the Futurists.  
One wears a spoon in his buttonhole.

One signs an unknown hieroglyph.  
One sings vowels, another consonants.

Here come the Futurists. It is 1913.  
Kruchenykh, Matiushin, Goncharova,

Burliuk who leads his giant brother,  
“I—Burliuk” on both their brows.

Here come the Futurists. Come, Kazimir Malevich,  
saying “let the familiar recede,

let all by which we’ve lived  
be lost to sight.”

They come. Let all by which they’ve lived  
be lost to sight—

let Moscow, drunk, serf-shouldered,  
(a stunted mongrel, a cold and coal-blackened thief)

be lost. The massing of troops,  
the Czar who calls a madman to heal his bleeding son,

the hunger,  
the boy who beats his brother in a tailor's grimy shop—

let these recede, be lost to sight.  
Here come the Futurists. It is 1913.

A flash, a clash of metal, projectors flash again:  
They have begun.

They sing of victory over all we know,  
a roar against the daily sun.

Then it is 1914, 1940, it is Moscow, Leningrad,  
the Gulag, Buchenwald, it is the exile's empty room,

a daughter, grieving.  
Here come the Futurists, long gone into the dark

with their victory over the sun.

**FAITH ISN'T IN THE HANDS**

*George Looney*

after Caravaggio's *The Sacrifice of Isaac*

The pressure of Abraham's thumb is prayer  
turned to bitter salt.

The doorway in the distant stone house

echoes the shadow that blooms on his face.

Faith isn't in the hand  
that holds the knife. Faith is the name of

the woman in the kitchen of the house.

She bends over broken  
glass, the plate her husband said was his heart

before he threw it against the wall.

*Fix that*, he yells.

*Fix it the way you fix everything.*

*Be an angel.* His rough fingers press

a curse into the sudden  
ache in his chest, just as the angel

on the mountain is allowed to end

all this madness  
about duty and blood. No angel

remembers any blood except for  
the music in the ear.

And the man who's just felt an angel

push through his ribs, whose wife is  
    Faith, has fallen  
to a floor of dirt, the red curse of

his fingers on his chest a hand in bloom  
    to hold his heart  
which bleats and bleats and becomes

the sad and bitter salt of a prayer.

**ARLINGTON**

*Libby Bernardin*

The day came from the sky in dark clouds.  
By noon, no sun and tourists wrapped in coats  
scarves held about faces by black leather gloves.  
Four together where Lincoln glares at mallards  
skimming the edge of ice, his hands graceful  
forever over his cold chair.

Somewhere above him off to his right a soldier  
pauses in watch on the hill—below Lincoln  
and fixed to his left—the Vietnam War  
Memorial where the stone hand rests on a buddy's back.  
A squirrel scampers near their unmoving feet  
and as a woman reaches for the cold fingers  
she sees the others gaze toward her—  
like Vermeer's girl, her glance  
as measured as the 21 seconds to count a pause  
maybe take a bullet on land or in wars at sea  
the girl guarded, the pearl from her ear  
gleaming as the spot of white on her parted lips;  
the woman shy now so she turns to Lincoln's mallards  
pearl green feathers stilled as a dead soldier's hand.

Across the pond on mirrored walls—black coats  
black boots, red scarves watching themselves watch  
a Korean patrol, slickers as stiff as stone, faces  
austere as though snow has fallen here  
but Vermeer's girl across town sheltered, Lincoln  
sheltered like those bones in Bosnia: "Love cannot win

over people who don't believe in love," said the slain  
Muslim's father. And the tourists? The soliders?  
Constant, like these mallards eddying about  
the edge, another storm coming tomorrow.

**THE FOUNDING FATHERS**

*James L. Weil*

The question is what  
they meant. The answer

is industrial,  
as if all our clerks

and clerics need to  
be kept busy like

Talmudic scholars.  
Or is it we need

something handed down,  
even if unmeant

to be? Or is it  
just about fathers?

## THE DAY THEY MACED OUR LADY

*Peter Michelson*

Sixties nostalgia is not warm and fuzzy for everybody. A short while back, for example, George Will or John Leo or one of those guys blamed sixties wackiness for all the educational miseries of the nineties, including an inexcusable inflation of self esteem. I have to admit that, whatever the current state of my own self esteem, it got a boost from the sixties. Perhaps that's why they seem like a golden age. That's also the last time I remember anything like a collective social consciousness. But then, of course, I'm a white guy. And the thing about a golden age is that it takes on mythy proportions.

Moreover, while mythification tends to make for better poetry, demythification tends to make for better essays. So I don't aim to polish up the golden age here. For me the most golden years were 1964 to 1969. Those were the years I began my writing career, and they were the years I taught at Notre Dame. The Vietnam war and its protestant counter-culture is of course the essential context. The crucial corollary is that the general culture was not prepared for this eruption, much less were the university and I. This essay is not about me, though I do play a part; it is about a moment when world-historical and Notre Dame circumstances coincided to form a critical mass. If that sounds a bit high toned, not to worry—we'll approach it like Moses, by way of its hinder parts.

The Notre Dame University Student Academic Comission's Conference on Pornography and Censorship, to give its official title, was scheduled to present poetry readings, theater productions, an art exhibit, films, and panel discussions from Wednesday, February 5 through Sunday, February 9, 1969. This was about six months after the 1968 Democratic Party nominating convention in Chicago, the apex of war protest in the golden age. The porn and war protest connection was obscenity, in its broadest sense. Obscenity is a rhetorical trope. The idea was, is, and ever shall be to get in someone's face. In the sixites that someone was "the establishment," then defined as

those who prosecuted and/or supported the war, though the application had elasticity. At Notre Dame, not theretofore a hotbed of political action, student protests began in the spring of 1965, my second semester there. The ROTC held its annual parade ground review in the stadium parking field. Students, perhaps twenty-five of them, staged a sit-in on the parade ground. Michael Ryan, one of the instigators, asked me to join. I hemmed and hawed. Instead, several colleagues and I, with our wives, pushed our baby buggies around the periphery of the grounds, toting signs in support of the students. Thus began my career as a firebrand.

I was subsequently perceived as a catalyst of student protest. Would that it were true. In fact, even as the poet said, the child was father to the man. There was an inspiring core of morally and aesthetically intense students at Notre Dame, more or less marginalized by their very intensity. They performed avant garde plays, screened experimental films, published aggressive mimeograph magazines, wrote poetry and polemics, and of course they protested the war. By the fall of 1968 they were less alone. They were game for anything that might challenge the complacency of the campus and the middle class culture it reflected, for example the substantial and surprisingly effective protests against the on-campus recruitment by Dow Chemical Company (maker of napalm) and CIA (maker of the mischief) that fall. The optimism generated by Lyndon Johnson's withdrawal from the presidential race and the anti-war campaigns of Gene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy had devolved from Martin Luther King's and then Kennedy's assassination, Mayor Daley's "police riots" in Chicago that summer, and the subsequent election of Nixon. The peace movement had been rejected. There was a distinct sense of frustration and injustice and a vague sense of confrontation hovering in both the national and local air.

This was the atmosphere awaiting the Pornography and Censorship Conference. Still, Notre Dame was Notre Dame, justly known for the buoyancy of its jazz and recently instituted literary festivals. And even the lumpen mass of students did tend to rise to such occasions. They certainly did for Allen Ginsberg, who opened the conference with a reading to an overflow Washington Hall audience. He sported a Notre Dame t-shirt with good natured *joie de vivre*. Apparently he had not understood that he was to

be a part of a conference but allowed as how he could probably accommodate the theme. After exorcising the war with “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” he got down and dirty. He read “Please Master,” a breathless invocation of cock sucking, butt fucking, and masochistic ecstasies. It is calculated to get in practically everybody’s face, and certainly straight faces. It’s a poem of immaculate vulgarity. But it also evokes Ginsberg’s love for Neal Cassady, then dead almost exactly a year. He had written it in May, and he read from his notebook draft. It was at once elegiac and a coming out party.

Only Ginsberg could make history with such impeccable tastelessness. And he did make history, his introduction of the poem making history more generous than it otherwise would be. I don’t remember whether he read his rather chaste “Elegy for Neal Cassady” or whether he connected “Please Master” with Cassady at all. What I do remember is that he raised unequivocal obscenity to the dignity of art, and he raised the consciousness of his audience accordingly. He was a homosexual, Ginsberg began with a deliberately gentle compassion, but he took no special satisfaction from that fact. The poem he was about to read, he said, celebrated homosexual love. But the audience needn’t be distracted by that, he said, it could regard the work as a love poem taking its place in a long erotic tradition. I nearly wept. The sense of human community in the auditorium was palpable. Then he read the poem—“Please master can I touch your cheek. . . can I kiss your ankles and soul. . . can I touch my tongue to your rosy asshole. . . press my mouth to your prick-heart. . . .” It got increasingly articulate.

Possibly there was outrage. Possibly there was drooling. Possibly there were those who didn’t know whether to spit or go blind. The conference had promised porn, and Ginsberg had delivered. And essentially the audience had received it in the spirit Ginsberg had invoked. Even the slightly snide yearbook, the 1969 *Dome*, later remembered that “Ginsberg regaled Notre Dame with his sheer vitality. . . he could hardly fail to engage his audience; little as they understood, they heard poetry and loved every minute of it.” The fat was in the fire . . . with hardly a sputter. Similarly the next night, when the Theater of the Ridiculous, a prominent off-off Broadway troupe, gave its first performance of Ron Tavel’s *Lady Godiva*, a parody of porn, politics, and a whole lot in between. In the meantime,

though, the whatchamacallit began hitting the fan.

The conference was conceived, planned, and implemented by students, just as the jazz and literary festivals were. In the backwash of events, however, several of the organizers were faulted for various sins of commission, from naivete to bad faith. It was a bum rap. Essentially they assumed what Ginsberg's reading and the Theater of the Ridiculous performance demonstrated to be so, that the Notre Dame community, including students, were quite capable of encountering porn without hysteria, moral degeneracy, or disorderly conduct. When such stuff came, as it happened, it came from L.A. of all places and from moralists too moral to tell wrong from right. But there were two sets of students involved, each with different takes on the beast with two backs. One set was the patrons, those associated with the Student Union and/or with its Academic Commission. They were technically in charge and responsible for the conference. Their conception envisioned academic propriety, as manifest in the discussion sessions correlated with each artistic event.

The other set was soldiers, art and literature types enlisted by the patrons to select and assemble the art, films, artists, writers, etc., that were to be the conference exhibits. Their conception envisioned a festival of pornographic works. Their energy, perspective, and agenda provided the substance and gestalt of the conference. The operative distinction was in the different inflections of *conference* and *festival*. Unlike the patrons, the soldiers had an aesthetic commitment. The counterculture was where they plighted their troth. Its pop-art integration of art and social life was their definition of cultural vitality. They weren't Marxists in any coherent sense, but *revolution* was standard golden age bravura and applied alike to art and society. Academic discussion as such, especially about art, was suspect unless it had some socially redeeming content. In this case that meant genuine obscenity and pornography.

Contrary to rumor, the idea for the conference did not come from me. It was proposed by John Mroz, who had founded the Sophomore Literary Festival, was a Student Union Academic Commissioner and, of course, a patron. I think his interest had been piqued by an earlier law school symposium on censorship. I was first contacted about the prospect of such

a conference in the spring of 1968 by Rick Kelly, an art student who became the Sergeant-Major of the soldiers. Kelly was interested in the avant garde and had recently returned from a trip to the Utah desert, where he had dug a 500 foot trench “earthwork,” one of the early experiments in that genre I believe. According to John Matthias, Kelly, rather pleased with the magnitude of his project, explained it to his art teacher, John Mooney, as a rationale for his two week absence from the studio. Mooney nodded and asked Kelly if he’d noticed the yellow line in the middle of the Lincoln Highway while enroute. Kelly said that he had. Well, said Mooney, that line runs all across the continent, from New York to San Francisco. . . think about it. Mooney himself at the time was working on an art project that involved beaming holographs from the eastern shore of Lake Michigan into Chicago. There were some interesting people at work, students and faculty alike.

I had published articles on Andy Warhol’s factory, Tavel’s and John Vaccaro’s Theater of the Ridiculous, the underground film scene, as well as on porn and censorship, so there was a logic whereby Kelly might consult me about prospective art and artists for the conference, though he would have called it a festival. Long after the mace had settled, something called the Student Life Council issued a lengthy report on how the festival blew up in everybody’s face. Among other things, the report described me as a “confidant of the Notre Dame students, available to them for bull sessions and advice, agreeable to them with his (i.e. my) spirit of criticism, freedom, joviality and good living.” I suppose this is plausible, though I continue to puzzle at *good living*. More than a few of the students could afford better cars and better wine than I. And I do recall that the *Observer*, in one of its journalistic “roasts” satirizing assorted campus characters, opined that I was in serious need of a color coded wardrobe guide. So I assume I was not considered a credible source of sartorial advice. I surmise that Kelly consulted me in my critical and maybe my joviality capacities. I did laugh when he said that there were plans afoot to have a porn festival at Notre Dame. Nonetheless, I supplied him with names of gallery owners, writers, film makers, and others I thought would make pertinent contributions to the topic. It’s not impossible that by good living the Student Life Council

meant to commend the erpicurean taste of my pornographic advice to Kelly, which I think it is fair to say elevated the tone of campus hedonism.

The thing about Notre Dame students in those heady days was that once they took a handoff they ran like the Four Horsemen, possibly a legacy of institutional genetics. Kelly and his soldiers assembled a lineup that is formidable even in retrospect. Poets Ed Sanders and Gerard Malanga were to succeed Ginsberg; the Theater of the Ridiculous, including director Vaccaro and the transvestite actor and underground celebrity Jackie Curtis hit South Bend like a tsunami; films were scheduled by avant garde film makers now, and some even then, considered classics in histories of the genre: Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, Carolee Schneeman, George Kucher, Andrew Noren, Robert Nelson; Ed Sanders' satirical folk-rock group, The Fugs, were scheduled, surely the only rockers ever to invoke Heraclitus, Plato, Blake, Southey, Whittier, the CIA, and "River of Shit" all in the same program if not in the same breath; Paul Krassner, editor of *The Realist*, one of the earliest and best of the underground journals, and Phyllis Kronhausen, pioneering sexologist and erotic art expert, were both on tap; and then there were was the erotic art exhibit, a complex project under the best of circumstances—assembling works from the west coast, Chicago, and New York—and one that turned into a nightmare. In short, the students had put together a program that was a judicious and lively cross-section of a decade's cultural creativity perhaps rivaled only by that of the 1920s.

But things began unraveling with the art exhibit. The New York art work was consigned to the Santini Brothers for transport. The Santinis—for some reason I imagine seven of them, like the dwarfs—apparently treated themselves to a preview, were scandalized, and declined to ship the show. This obliged a couple of the soldiers to get to New York, rent a truck, reload the show, and drive day and night through a blizzard to reach South Bend in time for the scheduled opening.

Meanwhile, the porn menace was perceived to be spreading. The seven Santinis had done their bit, but this was essentially the work of Citizens for Decent Literature (CDL) on the other side of the continent in Los Angeles. The honcho of this cabal for illiteracy had been invited, presumably by the

patrons, to provide a contrapuntal perspective of decency. He was notable for having been instrumental in the defeat of Abe Fortas' nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court. When the CDL man arrived in South Bend he got busier than Tonya Harding at an Olympic ice rink and was just about as classy. He hysterically alerted the local D.A., the South Bend cops, the Indiana State Patrol, and the Bishop that the festival was about to let loose smut like a cloud of anthrax. All of the above—OK, maybe not the Bishop—went into action like a Keystone Kops highlight reel.

\* \* \*

We are now on the afternoon following Ginsberg's reading and preceding the evening performance of *Lady Godiva*. The art show has at last been assembled in the Student Union but not hung, as they say. It is propped against the walls, on chairs and couches for the previewing committee (not to be confused with the seven Santinis). The committee consists of the chairmen of the art and the architecture departments as well as the V.P. for Financial Affairs, a priest. The committee is of the opinion that this stuff is porn and does not recommend public exhibition. Its opinion is advisory only, and we momentarily leave the patrons and a few soldiers contemplating this advice.

Over in the library auditorium Ginsberg is responding to questions from an audience that had expected him to be part of a panel on pornography and literature that was also to include a professor and the CDL man. The professor has for some reason gone south, and the CDL man, as we know, is elsewhere busier than TonyaHarding, etc. So Ginsberg is on stage solo when an agitated soldier arrives to announce that the art show may not be hung, as they say. This aggravates the audience which, after some discussion, wonders if Ginsberg agrees that this development looks like censorship. Since he agrees, the obvious question is, now what? Ginsberg is scheduled for imminent departure to the airport, and he prefers not to recommend actions that he himself cannot participate in. Pressed by the audience, he opts for the subjunctive. If he were to be around longer, he says, he would probably stroll over to the Student Union where the art

show, though not hung etc., is on public display. Clarity unfolds like a lotus blossom.

Here the reader might well wonder if the CDL man has not made a tactical blunder leaving Ginsberg to his devious devices, to say nothing of the whereabouts of the Keystone Kops escapades I promised. As for the latter, we are still in what both Aristotle and Mack Sennet would agree is the *complication* of the plot. As for the CDL man, his name is Clancey, and so far from blundering he is moving with literally uncanny precision toward that terrible moment when he lowers the boom. He ignores the panel on literature and porn because he knows that even in 1969 *the word* has virtual sanctity in the eyes of the law. And he knows that *art*, hung or otherwise, is a word invoking its own sanctity, what with its gilt frames, fancy museums, and lewd collections of cardinals, and is far too highbrow a prey. Knowing all this the CDL man exhibits the instinct of the bounty hunter for opportunity: he goes to the *movies*. Though ever alert for redeeming social value, a crucial factor in obscenity litigation since the 1933 *Ulysses* decision, courts are less inclined to see it in the high prurience quotient of photography, unsafe at any speed. The first showing of films has been scheduled for the Continuing Education auditorium at the same time as the library panel. And it is here that the CDL man camps out, shrewdly anticipating a graphic assault on his decency by flailing penises, gaping vaginas, and in the best of all possible worlds, their conjunction.

The plot thickens when at about the same time of day three things come together, as they say. The library panel audience arrives at the Student Union in no mood to be deprived of pornographic art. This has suasive effect on the deliberations of the patrons, who promptly see the logic of pornography in a pornographic art show. They open the show to the public. A wise decision, since three hundred determined viewers are already milling about among the chairs, couches, walls, and smutty art. The show may be casually displayed, but it's hung enough for them. Over at Continuing Education, meanwhile, the auditorium house lights and flickering screen images are in perverse counterpoint, coming on and going off with methodical incoherence, like strobe lights on thorazine. A film starts then stops. Likewise another. Perhaps a third. This audience, too, is getting

restive. What's with the alternating current? What weird citizen is in charge of the rheostat? Finally another film starts, the house lights calm down, the audience settles back. All but one. The CDL man is on the edge of his seat. The surge of systole and diastole in his veins is obscene, likewise his distended purple lips, the glitter in his eyes. A penis? Vagina? Conjunction? It doesn't matter. He realizes he is looking at Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*. At that moment the auditorium goes either blindingly white or black, I can't remember which.

In fact there are flailing penises and flapping breasts in *Flaming Creatures*, though I recall no gaping vaginas, and there is certainly no commission of congressional sins. *Normal Love* is to be Smith's next film. I cannot remember what obscene particulars the CDL man might have seen in the film in the fifteen minutes of the film's showing. It doesn't matter. What matters is that New York state courts have found the film obscene and banned it. This makes the CDL man's day. In fact he's luckier than he knows. *Flaming Creatures* was not scheduled for this showing and would not have been shown at all. In the hubbub of the CDL man's earlier call to quarters, the D.A. has notified the university officials of the film's problematic legal status. What New York has found too hideous for consumption is not likely to find sanctuary in Indiana, let alone at Our Lady. Accordingly, the patróns have agreed to drop the film. But two soldiers have got wind of this and have commandeered Continuing Education's projection room. After several false starts, described above, they let *Flaming Creatures* burn. They've hogtied the projectionist, barred the door, and they're confident that no one now can stop them from seeing what the New York avant garde hath wrought. But even as they gloat in defiance of Mrs. Grundy, word of the coup has leaked to the authorities, which is to say those who know what to do. They go to the source. They go where neither soldier has imagined. They go to Continuing Education's master switch. So, on second thought, at the moment of the CDL man's epiphany the auditorium obviously went black. The blinding light came a few moments later, after the SWAT team had blown the projectionist room door, captured the rebels, and secured the area. In that great illumination a patrón scurried to the stage and announced that the entire film program was henceforth cancelled. Thus it was

that the education at Continuing Education was discontinued.

Now the disgruntled would-be film audience joins the disgruntled library panel audience at the art show. They will take their filth as they find it, even if it's under the rubric of art. In a couple hours' time about 1,800 people gorge themselves on smutty still-lives. Still, there is a growing sentience of this their winter's discontent. They mutter darkly of the patróns, the university administration, the law, of oppression, the supression of *their* (under duress they assume proprietary rights) study and/or indulgence of porn and. . . censorship indeed. Prophetically, as they drift away to supper in anticipation of the evening's performance of *Lady Godiva*, the patróns furtively cancel the art show. The soldiers, now paranoid of the law and confiscation, quickly stash the show in their truck and head for the countryside. By the next day they've hidden it on an obscure farm over the state line in Michigan. It's not clear if, like Douglas MacArthur, they shall return.

That night *Lady Godiva* plays "prurience" to the hilt. At one point a sexy actor bumps and grinds amid drum rolls and a bevy of adoringly expectant actresses. Tension mounts as, with a flourish, he unzips his fly. A gold tassel pops out. Delirium reigns. Does it get a laugh from the CDL man? No one knows. But his shadow hovers over the gaiety. Before the performance David Kahn, an avant garde film buff, announces a convening for tomorrow afternoon of festival "delegates" (the official designation for all us slaving porn freaks) to discuss the film program cancellation. It sounds innocent enough, but Kahn's flaming red hair is a signal to the bulls. Later Kahn asks if I will chair the discussion. The Student Life Council report, previously noted, also characterizes me as one who "speaks the language of those who oppose University policies." Though I can say hello and goodbye in eight of them, I've never been all that good at languages. It is true that several university administrations have been pleased to say goodbye to me in their inimitable policy lingo. But for the Notre Dame record, so far from opposing university policies was I that I heartily approved them. I returned library books on time and in good shape and encouraged students to do likewise. I met my classes regularly, conducted them competently if not brilliantly, and regarded colleagues who did not as derelict. And I certainly

approved the university policy of paying my wages in legal tender, though a bit more of it would have expanded my good living savvy and improved my instructional expertise on that score. Moreover, I know for a fact that Kahn requested my services precisely because I was known to be a good citizen. Thus do I refute the malingered disinformation that I was a scofflaw.

Nonetheless, the moment I agreed to chair the discussion was the beginning of the end of my affair with Our Lady, to say nothing of what would have been the most discerning porn festival—or conference, for that matter—of postmodern times. John Matthias and I entered the meeting not quite knowing what to expect. Unbeknownst to us the Keystone Kops were getting revved up. There were about three hundred students in the Student Union, where the psychic aroma of the lately vacated art show lingered. Kahn and his soldier colleagues framed the issue more directly than announced. Film maker Andrew Noren was present with his film *Kodak Ghost Poems* (subsequently retitled *The Adventures of the Exquisite Corpse*). The debate was to be whether to show this film and possibly also *Flaming Creatures* in the face of the cancellation of films by the patrons. I finally got to see Noren's film two years later at the Chicago Art Insitutue, where Stan Brakhage lectured on it and declared Noren one of the three best young film makers in the land. On this day, however, no one in Michiana, possibly no one outside New York City, had seen the entire film, though part of it had been shown prior to *Flaming Creatures* the previous day. Unlike *Flaming Creatures*, it had no legal proscriptions, or so it seemed. It is pertinent that neither film was illegal in Indiana.

Before the debate Phillip Faccenda, the university president's envoy and a lawyer, gives a curiously impenetrable presentation presumably on the legal status of the film. But as Matthias later puts it, he addresses legalistic questions legalistically, and when he finishes no one has the vaguest idea of what the situation is. As it turned out there were reasons for Faccenda's double talk. Remember the CDL man? His hysteria had cranked up several levels since the aborted showings of *Flaming Creatures* and *Kodak Ghost Poems*. He'd been howling like the Hound of the Baskervilles. . . in the D.A.'s ear. The D.A. has issued a warrant for the seizure of Noren's film. Even as Faccenda speaks to the students, plainclothes city cops are in the

Student Union to execute the warrant. Faccenda knows this; he had effectually invited them on campus, told them to wear plainclothes. He also knows, or should know, as should the D.A., that the warrant is illegal. It conspicuously violates principles of prior restraint in both the U.S. and Indiana constitutions, and the state laws on the point had been specifically confirmed the previous April by the U.S. Court of Appeals. Faccenda is between the devil and the deep blue, wanting to persuade students that showing the film is a bad idea without spilling the legal beans of suasion for fear of a ruckus.

The students already know about bad ideas; they are the subject of the festival. And the beans start spilling as the debate proceeds. Beefy bulls in suits and ties that must have been bought on the Russian black market begin sidling along the walls, surrounding the students. The subtle arm of the law. The debate goes on, pro and con. The cops scan the crowd for the can of film. Nobody's mentioned a warrant, but suspicion is rampant. The students are not cowed, but they're nervous, irritable. We're in a Mexican movie. Andrew Noren, in a purple velvet jacket set off by ruffled collar and cuffs, smiles enigmatically. Where the hell *is* the can of film? I'm moderating pros and cons like Oprah Winfrey. Matthias whispers that the cops are intimidating. I ask them to leave. They look at one another, begin slithering back the way they came, inconspicuous as day-glo. Somebody ought to revise the cop college curriculum. We've been here two hours. It's time to vote. The students say let's go to the movies.

Now we're in Nieuwland Hall, a largish lecture room not quite large enough for 300 people. Kahn and Noren are doing something technical with the projector. The smell of cops is in the air. People are nervous. I'm asked to say something. I say something, concluding that the cops will be after the film so stay in your seats, don't resist, and you'll be all right. This is theoretically credible advice, but several dozen people, including myself, don't have seats so its practical application is limited. But it's all moot in about a minute as the cops kick in a back door. The cop college curriculum on this tactic is obviously pretty good. A couple of students by the door have seen some movies, and they ask the cops for a warrant. Technically they're right. But they don't understand that cops assigned to

kick in doors don't carry the warrant. The cops don't stop for a lecture on the difference between civil rights and tactical maneuvers. They head for the projector. There is much shouting and hullabaloo. Not a single person stays in a seat. I am trying to scramble over seat backs and people toward the projector, a little like a hippo extricating itself from a mud wallow. Meanwhile, Noren has slipped the film to Kathy Cecil. Kathy Cecil is a bright eyed miniature built like a four-foot pencil in a miniskirt, under which she puts the reel. Kahn has thrown himself over his projector, shouting, Sanctuary! Sanctuary! The cops slide to a halt, momentarily baffled. They spot film leader trailing below Kathy Cecil's hem. Now what? This situation is not covered by the cop college curriculum. They improvise brilliantly. They each take an arm, lift her up, and shake her. The reel falls to the floor. They drop her unceremoniously and run for the door.

A current surges through the students and, shrieking like banshees, they stampede after the cops, trampling Kathy Cecil in their righteous progress. Between the cops and the stampede Kathy Cecil is having a bad hair day. But by the time I get there she's back on her feet and pushing through the door with the herd. Once outside it turns out this little pencil can really run. The cops surround the film bearer and are making their way toward O'Shaughnessy Hall. The shortest route would be diagonal across the quadrangle. But the cops opt for orderly law abiding right angles and stay on the walkway. This gives the students a geometrical advantage, indicating that the cop college curriculum needs a math component. The cops' pace is between a brisk walk and a trot. They're apparently trying to maintain their poise and escape simultaneously. Cop discipline is countered by student speed and abandon. They intersect about thirty yards from the fort. At the point of engagement the students aren't sure whether this is the revolution or a snowball fight. Whatever, snowballs are their only munitions, and they circle the cops pelting them with malicious glee. There are kamikaze dives for the film bearer, who is knocked off his feet. Bodies are flying as I arrive. I jump in to back the pack off fallen warriors, students and cops alike. I collide with a cop. Later the cops will threaten students that if they file a suit for illegal seizure of the film, the cops will charge me with assaulting an officer.

Meanwhile, the cop and I exchange glances, recognize mutually salvific motives, and cooperate futilely in chaos management. But other cops are losing their poise in the melee. They reach for their penultimate weapon, not pistols, but mace. A feather in the cap of the cop college curriculum. Mace is ineffective against snowball artillery but does drive back the infantry enough that the cops scoot safely into O'Shaughnessy and bolt the door. Having caught up with the parade, I feel obliged to act like its leader. I go to the door and make demands—that the cops identify themselves, produce a warrant, admit me, a bona fide faculty member, to the building. . . . The cops reply that I can come in from the cold or I can take a long walk on a short pier. As far as they're concerned the seminar on censorship is over.

Actually, the festival has one last gasp. By now the patróns are in shock and cancel the whole shebang. But the *Lady Godiva* cast is all made up, in costume, and ready to go. Of course they are always made up, in costume, and ready to go. Nonetheless, they're indignant that their finale performance is cancelled two hours before curtain. Now the soldiers take over. Washington Hall, the scheduled venue, is ruled unavailable for a rump performance. They approach the padre in charge of the Student Union. He's a hard-nosed guy. Porn if you must, he says, but there damn well better not be any smoking. Time has confirmed his perspicacity. Today *Flaming Creatures*, *Kodak Ghost Poems*, and dirty art can be shown anywhere in the country except Cincinnati. But one way or another, cigarettes are banned everywhere you go. Let's face it, with a prophet in their midst, the C.S.C.'s had the wrong guy running the university.

That night has to be one of the vital moments in Notre Dame history. Somehow word spreads, and people from all persuasions of the university and the community pack into the Student Union Ballroom and sit on the floor. Porn is no longer the issue. Neither is the avant garde. The Theater of the Ridiculous could be performing *Peter Pan*. The issue is censorship and all its implications. As the crowd is cramming in, Konstantin Milonadis, an artist-in-residence from eastern Europe, shouts as me, "About politics you are imbecile, but about *this*," his gesture embraces the

brotherhood of art and the free human spirit, “about this we agree!” When the golden tassel makes its appearance, the crowd roars approval. And no one smokes.

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In many ways “the fall of porn and rise of censorship” festival was a comedy of errors. It continued into the post-game show. At one point during negotiations for the return of Noren’s film, for example, several faculty people were invited to the police station to see selected scenes from the film. Apparently this was to demonstrate that releasing the film would imperil the community. The cop projectionist, admirably suited to kicking in doors but less so to film criticism, provided running commentary. He said such things as, “Now this we call full frontal nudity,” and then explicated the slippery slope from nudity to full depravity. But one legacy was not so amusing. A little over a year later student demonstrators at Kent State and Jackson State universities were shot by the National Guard and local police respectively. I thought then, and still do, that the mock epic battle of O’Shaughnessy Hall was one of a series of events, including the demonstrations at Columbia University in 1968, that helped precipitate those shootings.

When South Bend police came on campus to confiscate Noren’s film, they had been tacitly invited by Faccenda, tacitly because Faccenda, apparently mindful of a break with tradition, did not want to issue an invitation as such. This point is documented in the Student Life Committee’s report. The Reverend Theodore Hesburgh, the university president, was not involved in that negotiation. But once the incident was widely reported as a “demonstration” at Notre Dame, Hesburgh apparently felt obliged to assume a take-charge posture. He issued the famous “Fifteen minutes or out” letter to the students. In that peculiar document he rationalizes “the forces of law on this or any other campus. . . as a last and dismal alternative to anarchy and mob tyranny.” Apparently he thought that the events I’ve described above were actually a case of “civilization versus the jungle.”

Hesburgh was a nationally prominent figure, and the media jumped on his announcement like a ravenous dog on a bone. Not even Clark Kerr, the infamous president of Cal Berkeley, had gone so far. A week later Hesburgh was interviewed about his get tough policy on the *Today* program at NBC. He seemed a bit surprised that his interlocutor took his pronouncement so literally, as if he had intended some Thomistic allegory. He even attempted an apologia for student dissent. But NBC didn't put him on for qualifications, it put him on to get tough. He had to accommodate expectations. He had to say "student unrest today is practically in epidemic proportions." And he had, after all, invoked anarchy, mob tyranny, the jungle. So he had to say the problem was "violence." That's what they wanted to hear. And whatever else he told them, he told them what they wanted to hear. Cops had a place on campus. And that, Hugh Downs concluded with his winsome smile, "makes a lot of sense." It made sense to some people a year later at Kent State and Jackson State. Unfortunately, they were the people in charge. This time there were no snowballs and no mace. This time there was ultimate reality. Whether or not those kids got fifteen minutes, they did get what a lot of people wanted to hear—though I don't think for a minute that Fr. Hesburgh was among them. Still, it was a reminder that, as John Matthias later put it, "the other guys are faster. And they draw."

TWO COUNTRIES

*Mark Brazaitis*

1.

“Two Women, One Heart.”

I remember hearing the song on the radio  
on my way across the loping black roads of Kentucky  
to visit Matt Walker. With his beard full,  
he looked twice his age. Or perhaps I thought this  
because he was grown-up,  
the owner of a collision repair shop,  
his last name painted in crooked letters on a front-lawn sign.  
Over coffee at the local diner,  
he confessed to loving two women,  
the one he was dating, dark-haired and half-Indian,  
and the one he would soon see in Texas,  
hair the color of butter and legs toned  
from the three-times a week aerobics class she taught.  
“Christine,” he said. “Rhymes with dream.”  
It didn’t, but I understood.  
Our hearts were large and greedy,  
and we were young enough to think  
the world couldn’t fill them.

2.

Coming back to Guatemala,  
I feel like a snake trying to find its old skin.  
It fit once, perfectly,  
or so I thought, dreaming in Spanish,  
berating the bus drivers’ *ayudantes*  
with native indignation.  
I learned the form ‘vos,’

sang ranchera songs with the radio,  
 danced salsa, swinging my hips.  
 A friend said, "You're more *Guatemalteco* than gringo."  
 I raised a bottle of Gallo to the flattery I believed.

A tourist now, I slither around streets  
 I used to know the cracks of,  
 find myself at the ends of strange cul-de-sacs.  
 From a church, I heard the loud prayers of Evangelicals,  
 asking to be re-born.  
 I retreat to my room, drink tepid cans of Gallo  
 and imagine conversations with people  
 I used to see every day in the park.

3.

The children I knew in Santa Cruz Verapaz have grown up;  
 some work sorting asparagus in the factory on the highway,  
 others have gone to try their luck in the capital.  
 Several who have found jobs in town  
 wave to me from doorways where their parents used to stand  
 as I raced by on my Shimano;  
 it was red and had a high seat,  
 and I rode it over trails cut like signatures into mountains.  
 One morning I changed a tire beside a creek,  
 dipping the tube into cold water  
 to see where it leaked.  
 The air bubbled like breath.

When, after I'd been in Guatemala two years,  
 my students convinced me to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner,"  
 I surprised myself: I cried.  
 I hadn't thought of what I was missing.  
 Baseball games, *Politics and Prose*, snow;  
 my mother, father, sister—my cat and car.

Before then, I didn't know if I would go back.  
Two countries, one heart.

4.

I loved your smell  
and how your voice could sound  
like the subway, Broadway, Central Park.  
You had trouble sleeping  
and I staggered with you into unrestful mornings,  
cab drivers as reckless and industrious at dawn  
as they'd been at midnight.  
A city with insomnia.  
A woman of the dreams I would have dreamed  
had I been able.

No matter the hiss of trucks sweeping Amsterdam  
of the remnants of another weekend;  
no matter the annoyed car horns  
and buses grumbling.  
This morning your room is warm and the sunlight soft,  
and we can even whisper and be heard  
when stoplights hold the traffic  
with their bloodshot eyes.

5.

Matt Walker had to sell his shop.  
The super dealer in the next town sucked up his work.  
One of its eight painters now, he is married, two kids,  
I think, although perhaps I only want to believe this.  
We've lost touch. I can only picture him  
as I am—traveled and ready to rest  
in the solace the heart offers  
when it is full enough.

**ON THE ROOF OF HOTEL EL PASAJE**

*Mark Brazaitis*

She wants to know my name,  
where I'm from,  
how old I am.  
Her questions come as quick as water  
rippling over rocks.  
"There is another gringo here,  
in the far room. His name is Stan.  
Do you know him?"  
I shake my head, ask her name.  
"Blanca." She's eighteen,  
lives in Santa María, not far from here,  
works from eight until six every day,  
Saturdays and Sundays included.  
She quit school after *segundo basico*, eighth grade.  
"My work is fine. It's not too hard.  
The *dueño* isn't mean, only fat."  
She laughs.  
When she was two, her parents thought of going  
to the United States.  
"I'd like to go, but I've seen enough tourists  
to know what it must be like."  
I try to see what she sees: thousands of gringos  
with too much time and too long hair  
dragging backpacks everywhere.  
"My mother died when I was five.  
My sister cooks. At night,  
I watch *telenovelas*:  
*María del Barrio. Tu y Yo.*

*Café con Perfume de una Mujer.*

I know the theme songs by heart.”

My request is impulsive,  
inspired by the roof-top view  
of volcanoes and clouds,  
her shining, dark eyes,  
and a desire to be young again.  
If she cannot trust me to understand,  
she can trust the breeze,  
the sky giving way to stars.  
I don't know her nor she me.  
Today this is not obstacle enough:  
she sings.

**A MAN WHO WAS AFRAID OF LANGUAGE**

*Jerry Harp*

The houses, the trees, and the dust had become  
Sentences having nothing to do with themselves.  
He seldom left his apartment now, the only refuge

He could endure, the dank spaces  
And dim lights, the phone and radio unplugged.  
Even printed words went on shifting

And crossing while stray phrases, echoes of phrases  
Took up the burden. He tried to think  
Of the same thing again and again.

He closed the blinds, but the boys still came  
With their taunts and jokes and vulgar songs.  
Sunlight slanted into their eyes.

A woman in blue made ambiguous gestures.

## REVIEWS

THE FALLING HOUR

David Wojahn. University of Pittsburgh Press. 1997.

*Joe Francis Doerr*

The title of David Wojahn's fifth collection of poetry, "The Falling Hour," is derived from dance marathon slang for that moment of utter exhaustion or "marathonitis," when the mind of the dancer is especially subject to hallucinations which are visited upon him just prior to his body's simply giving out. The speaker in these poems, who does indeed appear to 'dance' between his own past and present to a gritty blues dirge for the length of the book, is a kind of modern Orpheus whose Hades is contemporary, urban, and very American. In his quest for lost inspiration in the underworld of thought & memory, he visits the stomping grounds of Howlin' Wolf and Hubert Sumlin, listens while a ghostly Louise Brooks laments having gone "Hollywood," and, like a latter-day Odin, brings back the story of alien runes found on a scrap of wreckage in Roswell, New Mexico. Wojahn seems to welcome the onset of marathonitis, finding in it an occasion for transformation. For while the book, dedicated to his late wife, poet Lynda Hull, who died in an automobile accident in 1994, is undoubtedly a monument to loss and a requiem of grief, it is something more as well. It is a celebration of the resilience of life and of human connection; a gravid drum roll filled with promise; that split-second between dirge and Dixieland when mourning becomes electric. Wojahn is acutely aware of the possibility of poetry as a vehicle for transformation. The epigraph he has chosen to introduce his work is from Ovid's "Metamorphoses", X which reads:

And sang in harmony, "O founded powers  
 Who rule the underworld, this life of ours,  
 This mortal life we live in upper air  
 Will be returned to you. To you, therefore,  
 We may speak the whole truth and speak it out  
 as I do now, directly."

"The Falling Hour" is arranged in six untitled, though thematically self-contained, sections displaying the range of Wojahn's writing, the style of which has never been stronger. Many of the poems contain the image of a man or male creature who finds himself suddenly without a partner, suddenly at the end of the family line; a tortured creature who must descend into the depths of sorrow and near-dementia in search of some shred of sanity embodied in his now lost muse. Perhaps not surprisingly, the beginning of this journey, a clinical, though quasi-ceremonial, 'male-milking' (for captive-breeding purposes) of a sedated tiger named Rajah, is set to the apocalyptic strains of Nirvana before giving way to Jimmy Cliff's Rasta-man take on the nature of "Babylon." If all goes as planned following the "dry-ice burial" of the tiger's sperm, Rajah will be resurrected "in the wild" as may the Orphean poet if he survives the cold and bitter knowledge of Ovid's underworld. Very much on cue, Wojahn advances towards Hades in "Hey Joe," in which a night of drinking and the Jimi Hendrix jukebox hit provide the tools necessary for the excavation of memory and the discovery of the 'gateway' to the underworld. In this poem, the television over the bar of a seedy tavern is stuck on Court TV and broadcasts coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial. While the jukebox plays, Nicole Brown's dog takes on the image of Cerberus, the guardian hound of the infernal regions, as it

[...]circles and barks, manic panting against  
 the shouts. The leaps, the choke chain loose  
 against the reddened slick cement,

## R E V I E W S

falling back each time until his flank  
    is lathered and drenched, circle and wail, his slippery  
        paw prints to be mapped and measured, circles

in circles, tightening, his howl against ensanguined cries,  
    until it seems he turns to us, his muzzle  
        pulsing huge from every screen, the click

of his nails as he paws at the nether world's gates.

In "After Wittgenstein" Wojahn chronicles the aftermath of a drive-by shooting, arranging some twenty-two lines in strata stacked and separated by single dingbats as though they were geologic striations. The descent has begun, not only into Hell itself but into language as well. Wojahn is strip-mining both and laying bare their features: "And here's the Gorgon's seething head, the snarling face." / The world is everything that is the case." Wittgenstein's game has been engaged. The object is to approach language as though it were constructed of an assembly of reminders arranged for a particular purpose. Wojahn's purpose appears to include the exploration of the visual arrangement of words and their connection to what he insists must be most important for all of us: human dignity. The truth of dignity's absence is represented in this case by the stark image of senseless violence: "The girl is bleeding from the shoulders and the face / and writhing on the ER table." Wojahn urges the reader to keep both eyes open so as not to be blinded by this increasingly familiar image. He wants us to be appalled by it, and he wants us to question our own easy acceptance of it as an inevitability. In drawing so many parallels between the story of Orpheus and his own journey, it would appear that Wojahn has acknowledged a belief in what George Steiner calls the "topology of culture," those "invariants and constants underlying the manifold shapes of expression in our culture." Wojahn realizes that if society is subject to such a template, then it too may have begun a preordained descent into darkness as real and as numbing as his own. In "After Wittgenstein" he wonders whether there may be some

way out of such a template's confining dimensions.

Sections II, III, and IV find Wojahn attempting to break out of the confines of cultural topology. In these sections, which read like a catalogue of encounters in the world of the dead, Wojahn is back to the game of exploding the "fascist form" of the sonnet, an old trick he perfected in his second book of poetry, "Mystery Train". The fourteen-line structure is maintained as is a rigid slant rhyme, but lines are broken in half and allowed to dangle, giving the appearance of an inflexible form that has been purposely dropped and fractured, or perhaps beaten from the inside out. In section II, these sonnets introduce us first to a series of feral children undergoing institutional rehabilitation and then to a tortured father-figure, also institutionalized after what appears to be an attempt at suicide. The sequence moves through a series of hospital vignettes and comes to rest at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in St. Paul, Minnesota, but not before reminding the reader exactly where he is in "VI. THE SHADES: AENEID, BOOK VI":

Even here in hell, the strict Virgilian grandeur,  
the cellblocks of the dead in fluent hexameters,

Cocytus and Styx, Tartarus and the Vale of Tears,  
and here Aeneas meets his ghostly father—

Wojahn's "Virgilian" guides are many; they come and go without warning but leave lasting impressions that serve as beacons in this labyrinth of words. Shades of Geoffrey Hill, for instance, color the start of section III in Wojahn's tongue-in-cheek political poem "Social Realism: Ceausescu Ode":

Great Hero Great Guerrilla Fighter, Barehanded-  
Slayer-of-the-Fascist-Horde, Wehrmacht helmets

## R E V I E W S

cobbled beneath Thy feet Homeric.  
Suliman Darius Cyrus Offa, the Mighty Impaler Vlad.  
To sing not of the partisans, stopping to reload

Klashnikovs, having videotaped Your groveling demise.

The hilarious but ominous “Before the Wine and Cheese is Served” is vintage Wojahn, a distillation perhaps of the first few pages of his very fine essay “Ferality and Strange Good Fortune: Notes on Writing and Teaching” which appeared in the Summer 1997 issue of Shenandoah magazine. In the essay, Wojahn muses over his position in academia as a teacher of creative writing, and the institution’s insistence that as a faculty member of the English department he concern himself with “social commodity reification and eudemonic valorization” rather than the simple exposition of human dignity. In its irreverence, Wojahn’s sonnet is somewhat reminiscent of Bob Hass’s “Picking Blackberries with a Friend Who Has Been Reading Jacques Lacan.” It reads like a writer cum faculty-member’s worst nightmare, or perhaps the aftermath of a particularly painful external review:

The chair himself will introduce the speaker, his eyes  
reptilian on the crowd.

The Foucault toady shuffles papers

while the chairman notes we’re “undertheorized.”  
Our Foucault minion’s flown from Yale. He chatters

about “power” awhile. Chaucer and power. Marlowe  
and power. Dryden, Khomeini, and film noir

and power.

And most disturbing:

Sixteen tweedy sleeves fly up in unison  
like footage caught by Leni Reifenstahl—

to prove we are not undertheorized.

Wojahn finds himself and other “institutionalized” poets moving through an academic underworld in which, lamentably, power has taken precedence over literature. In his essay, he likens the modern poet to an endangered species living out its life on a preserve: “although we greedily accept the hay bales, horsemeat and quick-frozen mice, we like to believe that the deans and chairs think twice before they place their heads inside our jaws.” He admits to having “a kind of feral relationship to literature” as a maker of objects of beauty which may indeed be perfectly useless but have linked him to an “endlessly long literary tradition whose uselessness has nevertheless been an essential aspect of all human culture.” Ironically, it is this “uselessness,” he values above all else.

In the haunting final sections of the book, direct references to Lynda Hull surface more and more frequently in poems such as “Ghost Supper,” “Dirge and Descent,” and “Oracle.” Wojahn churns out image after image of Lynda or “L” in photographs, on videotape (“her final reading”), or in his own thoughts. Orpheus is quickly approaching his prize, but Wojahn seems to understand that memory and its companion, poetry, combine to make a kind of “gaze” as detrimental to the prize as the gaze of Orpheus was to Eurydice. He explores this dilemma in what is perhaps the most haunting of all these later poems, the sonnet “God of Journeys and Secret Tidings,” which begins “Eurydice is better off in hell. / Isn’t that what Rilke says?” This seems to be a turning point in the work, and two distinct images dominate afterward: the mythical Enkidu, and the practical cormorant. In “Gallery IX: A Carved Bone Ring of Cormorants,” a neck-ring which could “fit almost perfectly your lover’s wrist” becomes the objet d’art for an exercise in ekphrasis in which a parallel between the questing poet and the diving cormorant, harnessed and used by Edo period fishermen to retrieve elusive, underwater prey, is drawn. In the lines “I will circle and return to

you, my neck snapped back, / dark water and the twitch of silver in my mouth” one almost feels that Orpheus will succeed in bringing back his Eurydice after all. It is the final poem, “Before the Words,” however, which dashes these hopes entirely, but leaves one with a profound sense of unexpected triumph. In the “Epic of Gilgamesh,” Enkidu, the best friend of Gilgamesh, is a wild man molded of clay who lives among the beasts of the field. He is condemned to death by the gods for his part in slaying the storm bull of heaven. Gilgamesh undergoes a journey not unlike that of Orpheus to bring his friend back from the land of the dead. The final poem in “The Falling Hour” addresses the fate of Enkidu, and, by extension, drives home the central theme of the book: the impossibility of a successful Orphean journey. However, Wojahn does not concede failure entirely, he sees the possibility of a very different kind of success engendered by such a journey: metamorphosis. His book ends with these concluding lines, a sure sign that at least the poet will persevere in a new guise:

And the lamentation *selah* fills the pages,  
fills too oh lord the vaulted caverns of the world

below. The companion Enkidu is clay.  
*Selah selah selah*. The tablets have been broken  
and the tablets now shall be restored.

I, for one, can't wait to see what happens next.

**OUR LADY OF EUROPE**

Jeremy Hooker. London: Enitharmon Press/Dufour Editions, 1997.

*Jere Odell*

Jeremy Hooker's most recent book of poetry, *Our Lady of Europe*, sharpens his focus on the poetry of place. In such poetry the place becomes more important than the author and always more important than the poem that presents it. This is a learned humility and not the practiced failure it might seem to the poets of persona. Hooker's poetry is patient and quiet; steering away from the boast and bombast, it prefers the subtle image and the quiet effects of juxtaposition and collage.

Though Hooker's poetry may seem reticent to some, *Our Lady of Europe* is a refreshingly ambitious book; the places he has chosen as his subject threaten to overcome anything written about them. Each of the book's five sections is devoted to a different landscape: "A Troy of the North" to the Netherlands, where Hooker has lived, his wife's homeland; "Written in Clay" to the rest of continental Europe, especially the paintings, churches, and battlefields; "Crossways" to Palestine, mostly its holy places; "Motherland" to Greece, sometimes modern, always ancient; and "Imagining Wales" to Wales, especially through the visions of Waldo Williams and David Jones, who both begins and ends this book. The images of these places, their artifacts and their terrain, scarred or beautiful, fill the poems, instead of, as one might have expected from another poet, the ego's response to foreign stimuli. Sometimes Hooker uses landscape to uncover the deep connections between places, even across long distances and years; the shared histories behind a seemingly disparate Europe. This happens with the most drama in the middle section, "Crossways." Jerusalem, Jerricho, Bethlehem, and Tel Gezer are not Europe, but are an inescapable part of recent and ancient European history and culture. For example, here's the third section of "Tel Gezer," Hooker's poem exploring a much contested piece of territory:

From a deep cleft on the Tel,  
 a hawk flies out of the ground  
 and sheers off, circling, wind-ruffled.  
 Grassblades quiver under it.  
 And here the hawk has preyed since  
 before Pharaoh destroyed Gezer  
 and Solomon rebuilt it of mud  
 and stone, or the Assyrians  
 perfected the art of exile; since  
 long before the kibbutz formed  
 a small, green pool below,  
 in the dustbowl of stony hills.

Tel Gezer: where the road  
 from Egypt to Syria  
 crosses the road from Jaffa  
 to Amman, with the Mediterranean  
 a long, bright sliver in the west.  
 Mount of Temptation for a people  
 with everything to lose,  
 and a people with nothing;  
 who look down on the valley of Aijalon  
 where the moon stood still,  
 and Latrun, the House of the Good Thief,  
 and over the hard hills of Judea  
 towards Emmaus on the road to Jerusalem.  
 Each name in this place is a sound  
 of approaching thunder—it would hollow  
 the skull with a blast of fire  
 to see what it means.

Tel Gezer at the crossways:  
 destination of roads  
 from Warsaw and Buchenwald;  
 exodus of Arabs from Abu-Shusha  
 and El-Biryeh and El-Kubab,  
 on the road to refugee camps,  
 kicking up the dust of Palestine.

In addition to its poetics of place and its ambitious study of the embattled idea of Europe, Hooker's book pursues the myth of the Great Mother. Above the crossways and violences of all places, Hooker finds one or another version of Our Lady, sometimes it's a statue of the Virgin Mary, other times it's a Greek goddess, or an homage to David Jones's Queen of the Woods, or even Hooker's spouse, Mieke. We meet the Great Mother most readily in the poem "Verdun," where we also see the incongruities in the places the poems attend. Here's an image of violence rusting away in the rural vegetation:

On a bluff a machine-gun post,  
 an iron mask with two eye-holes,  
 looks down on new growth.

Inside, the remains of a gun,  
 rusted and twisted.  
 The emptiness smells of fear.

The mask that blinded  
 has survived the face. It overlooks  
 slopes with harebells and young pines.

And, a few sections later, here's an image of Our Lady, her chapel amid war-rubble:

EN MEMOIRE DE FLEURY DEVANT DOUAMONT

She is Our Lady of Europe,  
her chapel stands on rubble  
under pines, on blasted,  
cratered ground.

The woods are dark and still  
where the village was,  
but the chapel in a glade  
is filled with sunlight.

A white butterfly wanders in  
and flutters outside the porch  
as though it, too, were in the picture.

In this collage-styled poem Hooker presents two chapels (or two facts of the place) allied and at odds. One producing death, the other promising peace. Here, and elsewhere, his book gives the reader space to remember both.

*Our Lady of Europe* will find readers in England (and other places overseas) already familiar with Hooker's poetry; it deserves, as well, many good readers and writers of American poetry, who could learn from its neighborliness and honest love of places. For a poetry book of this quality, it's time to go abroad.

**THE GROUND THAT LOVE SEEKS**

Paul Matthews. Five Seasons Press, 1996.

*Katie Lehman and Tom O'Connor*

“Poetry is a path as well as a pleasure,” writes English poet Paul Matthews, whose recent book of poetry, *The Ground That Love Seeks*, explores the need for a language in which the imagination works to transform the human spirit. A quoted preface by Robert Duncan describes a possible spiritual awakening through poetry and also echoes his commentary on H.D.’s poem *Heat*, which divides poetry into two orders: the first encompassing that which “we must know all about if we [are] to be accomplished students,” and the second embodying what he found in H.D.’s poem: “a personal revelation” encapsulating “the ground for a possible deeper communion.” Paul Matthews’ poetry belongs to this second order, containing the ground where hope and healing can exist—when all difference and similarity in language, in people, and in experience come together in an interconnected form.

Matthews chooses for this ground a language which must shape itself through the poetic imagination. In the first section of the book, “The Grammar of Darkness,” he strives for a meaningful communication in which language can overcome the destructive forces we face in our everyday lives. In the poem “Blank Pages,” the fear of annihilation challenges his self-awareness as he stares at a blank piece of paper:

anxious  
 no word of my own  
 should smear it.  
 Impossible.

This will to create, arising in the poem, is both within himself and within the horse who “bounds into the meadow.” This impetus in nature for movement is the same force in his writing: “he rears against my hand as

I write this.” The poet’s risk to create must challenge the nothingness which opposes it.

The poetic energy released through Matthews’ language bears a resemblance to the imagism of H.D.’s work. Matthews’ poetry creates a natural object and subject, enmeshed together in a language where objectivity and subjectivity become one being—the poem, itself an alchemical creation. Exemplifying this in the poem “The Verge,” he again challenges the nothingness which is a precursor to any creation:

Because it’s impossible  
that the Rose be spoken  
speak  
and at the verge unfurl  
perpetual crisis  
where the heart fails  
or that red sustains it.

This poem wonders at human nature’s inherent struggle acknowledging that:

at this verge where all systems fail  
poetry begins  
We start imagining.

Just as William Carlos Williams believed that the writing of poetry is not an elevated event but one grounded in everyday occurrence, Matthews’ poems embody a similar presence:

Who are you?  
in a turnip field.  
No words  
but the eyes ask it.

In Matthews' poetry, the eyes ask sight to tell beyond telling; words ask language for the communion they seek. "Beyond wharves and words, / beyond every ache and lack" exists a name worthy of the risk and anguish necessary in the quest to discover it. In order to succeed the poet must abandon a preconceived knowing:

No one really enters a wood  
 unless they are prepared  
 to give up their language.

This abandonment implies a trust that a new or unknown language will replace the outworn pattern. In the second section, "The Fabulous Names of Things," the poet revels in the delight of language's ability to metamorphose human consciousness, creating new connections: "Welcome to the stone that has no mouth to cry with. Welcome to the leaf that trembles on the edge of speaking."

In the third section, "The Ground that Love Seeks," Matthew implores language to create a "purpose in the mind" and to then find "God's ground to stand on." This section ends in a meditation on the developmental stage of childhood, and launches the fourth section, "The Long Grass of Childhood," in which he surveys fragmented memories and the miraculous ability children have to create myth in the natural world. In these poems there is the remembrance of "a fierce perfection," and a "river in flood," as well as "springtime fields" where to be lost is "to find yourself." The poet must risk the desolation of being lost and, like the child, trust again in his true relation to a strangely familiar world. In the poem, "The Path of the Poets," Matthew incorporates a child's trust: "Let go let go and give yourself / into the hands of women."

His last section, "In Yielding," finds hope in the foundation of a spiritual path. The poet's life is invigorated by the Feminine, by his family and by his own quest for spiritual awakening. He presents the ultimate offering of his work to the world in the poem "Go, My Songs":

Go, my songs, and beg  
forgiveness from the ones  
you brought into confusion.

And:

Go, my songs. The air  
upon the open field  
is reft of melody.

The ground that love seeks is only realized through the risk that is required by both writer and reader in discovering through poetry a personal revelation. The accomplished student would do well to read Paul Matthews' work and to risk as much.

**BREAKFAST IN BABYLON**

Emer Martin. *Mariner/Houghton Mifflin*, 1997. 321pp. \$12.00

Welcome to “Babylon”—the slimy, stone sidewalks of Paris; the dope and debris stuffed squats of London; the prostitute and dealer infested alleyways of Amsterdam.

Meet two of its chief inhabitants—Isolt, a young Irish woman in exile, a tinker for the 90’s, a perpetual foreigner wandering the third-world basement of the first-world; and Christopher, the hoodoo man, Isolt’s misogynist partner, an American expatriate, a washed-up dope dealer tied to the world by little more than his addiction.

This is the world found in Emer Martin’s *Breakfast in Babylon*, a wonderfully authentic trip through the underbelly of Europe. In this young writer’s award winning debut, Martin gives us a healthy dose of the bizarre, lurid life of a lost generation. Her fresh, sharp prose moves forward with a relentless trajectory, twisting the tragic and unredeemable into the wonderfully absurd and often comical.

While fiction at the millennium

seems resigned to the task of offering the commonplace as something new or extraordinary, Martin reminds us what a joy it can be to read fiction of a different variety, fiction which makes the foreign and bizarre feel immediate and familiar. A reader feels wonderfully filthy after spending an afternoon with Martin’s cast of misfits, begging on the pavement or conversing in a café, ordering rounds of beer with the pocket change of the working class.

Martin’s *Babylon* is a world without a place for the members of a young diaspora that “have all been born with homeless souls.” The novel engages in, but rises above, an interrogation of patriarchy (religious, social, familial) through a young woman who belongs more to her exile than to her home country. Transient lives search for connection and choice as they wander the streets of Babylon—not a bad place for a laugh, a bit of hash, or even breakfast, but a place where “You can not wake the good God up.”

—*R. Thomas Coyne*

**THE HUNGER MOON**

Suzanne Matson. W. W. Norton, 1997. 252pp. \$23.00

Good characters, those whom we find compelling, try to reinvent themselves. This novel, Suzanne Matson's first, explores the lives of three women who attempt to redefine themselves and change their circumstances. Their stories are absorbing because of the risks involved in their personal growth as well as our knowledge that success is not merely a matter of determined will.

Renata discovers that she is pregnant. Believing that the father, her surfer boyfriend Brian, is not a suitable parent, she takes off for Boston and does not tell Brian about his son Charlie. Renata becomes friends with Eleanor, a retired judge and recent widow, and June, a young college student. They share time taking care of Charlie, and come to depend upon each other as they slowly shed their solitary lives.

Amidst the drama of motherhood, the emptiness and calculation of an eating disorder, or the vertigo of memory loss, each discovers that she is afraid of the potential cost of

her desires. The women can either bound forward to satisfy their hunger for love and stability, perhaps choosing to ignore their fears, or they can retreat back into their isolation.

It is this difficult inclination to secure stability by avoiding relationships, while knowing that comfort comes from others, which Matson deftly describes. But somehow a force of nature draws us to the challenge. Like a dance between Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, "Neither seemed able to stray too far from the other's orbit without gravity pulling them back, fusing them together." And that dance is beautiful. Relationships are strangely worth the bother.

In her last book of verse, *Durable Goods*, Matson, an accomplished poet, celebrated the things we can have and can aim our hope toward, like becoming a new bride, finding a son lost at sea, watching Armstrong on the moon. *The Hunger Moon* is an interesting reply. Here Matson recognizes the difficulty of learning that the lives we construct may not pan out. Hope may be met with pain.

—Kevin Johnson

**DRA—**

Stacey Levine. Sun & Moon Press, 1997. 150pp. \$12.95

In this, her first novel, award-winning short story writer Stacey Levine tells the sometimes comic and oftentimes unsettling tale of a nondescript woman, Dra—, searching for a nondescript job in a nondescript world. Fanatically obsessed with achieving a state of gainful employment, any employment, Levine's title character maneuvers through a surreal landscape of seemingly endless corridors, pneumatic tubes and basements upon basements trying to report to her much-desired worksite. But, alas, our poor feckless heroine never quite makes it there, finding herself continually sidetracked by unrelenting bouts of crying and narcolepsy, her own hypochondria and a slew of quirky characters doling out twisted psychoanalysis.

While the book on the whole serves as an interesting commentary on the ultimately maddening pursuit of jobs and careers that plays such a defining role in our culture today, Levine's invocation of Kafka

is too often trite and un compelling. The author does manage to create an adequately disturbing world of dreariness muted by a hazy film of grey that would cast even the most stalwart optimist into an inescapable pit of bloom and insanity. But, unfortunately, it's a place we've seen before. And when pitted against a real life world replete with images of preteen snipers, crack babies and cannibalistic serial killers, Levine's world seems hardly necessary to remind us that something, somewhere has gone terribly wrong.

—*Kathleen Canavan*

**THE CELIBACY CLUB**

Janice Eidus. City Lights Books, 1997. 199pp. \$9.95

"If Elvis is alive and well and masquerading as a Hasidic Jew in the Bronx, well, then, anything is possible, and I do mean anything," writes Janice Eidus in the first of nineteen unpredictable stories that comprise *The Celibacy Club*. This eclectic and immediate collection spiritedly delves into many of our nation's collective preoccupations

and emerges with surreal tales, pairing fantastic characters with everyday New York life. As we spin from a matzoh-munching Elvis sighting to the sensual attraction of a ping-pong master/vampire, Barbie emerging in the 90's at a group therapy session and the inner torments of a phone-sex operator, the ridiculous is skillfully made relevant. Twice winner of the prestigious O. Henry Award, Eidus wields charged humor and unanticipated poignancy to create manic snapshots of contemporary American obsessions.

—Amy Christopher

## EDITORS SELECT

Joe Amato, *Bookend: Anatomies of a Virtual Self*. SUNY, 1998. In a glut of discourse on new media and poetry, *Bookend* is refreshing: a thoughtful synthesis/analysis of writing, especially poetry, and the self in a technological age. The anatomies that make up the book cross and blend genres effortlessly, breaking into poetry at some points, literary history at others; they bring together media and literary theory, criticism, culture, and the place of the individual poet in this swirl.

A. Manette Ansay, *River Angel: A Novel*, William Morrow & Co., 1998. Ansay's third novel (after the well-received *Vinegar Hill* and *Sisters*) set in semi-rural Wisconsin, takes on the subjects of spiritual renewal and belief, through the device of what appears to be semi-divine intervention and apparition, the truth or falsity of which is the small town of Ambient's competing concern when a dead youth is found plucked from a river and found displayed Christ-child-like mangled in a barn. The two levels of mystery, one grim and secular, the other elevated and fable-like, compete for the reader's attention and admiration.

R. M. Berry, *Leonardo's Horse*, Fiction Collective 2, 1997. Short story writer (*Plane Geometry and Other Affairs of the Heart*) Berry's remarkable first novel, which exudes as much pleasure as it inspires, a post-modern narrative of the then and now. Here is Vasari's "Life" of Leonardo da Vinci (the failure) enriched from the ground up with details you can taste and smell.

Rikki Ducornet, *The Word "Desire."* Henry Holt and Company, 1997. As with *The Fountains of Neptune* and her other acclaimed novels, Rikki Ducornet's new story collection is a crystal-work of poetic dimensions. Its twelve stories are so organically shaped that they seem to be made of molecules, not words, even as they range across North Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas at different historical periods and with an ambition no less than to limn desire as a sacred text that has been copied out again and again by a fallible scribe.

Jay Neugeboren, *Don't Worry About the Kids: Stories*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. Novelist, memoirist and short-story writer Neugeboren's twelfth book and second story collection paints a harrowing portrait of mid to late 20th-century social life: marriages, divorce, broken and mended families, the races at odds and at play. These stories are as eloquent as they are powerful.

Sophia Romero, *Always Hiding*, Morrow, 1998. A charming first novel about an undocumented

Filipina mother in New York and her daughter, left behind in the Phillipines. The prose is witty and direct; the escape of both mother and daughter from Manila society is sometimes harrowing, ultimately hopeful.

Alex Shakar, *City in Love: The New York Metamorphoses*. Fiction Collective 2, 1997. Taken together, the seven stories in Shakar's first collection form a portrait of New York. But this is an archetypal portrait in the way that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a history of the world as revealed in bodies changed to different forms. The transformations in *City in Love* are the attempts of would-be authors, astrologers, business people and others who are attempting to become their desire. Its imagery is vivid and fused with an inventive narrative structure.

J. V. Cunningham, *The Poems of J. V. Cunningham*. Swallow Press, 1997. Cunningham was one of the most unfashionable American poets of his generation—and one of the best. He wrote the best epigrams and plain style lyrics since the Renaissance.

Like his colleague and one-time mentor Yvor Winters, he favored abstract language employed with great accuracy. Timothy Steele provides a useful introduction and commentary. Cunningham's poems are a bracing antidote to the bardic and the banal.

Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997. When all of the tabloid interest in Hughes's *Birthday Letters* fades, it may well be that his versions of Ovid are remembered as more substantial poems than his versions of Sylvia Plath. Michael Hofmann, who doubtless got Hughes started on these poems with his commissions for the *After Ovid* anthology, writes that "it's a beautiful match." Hughes is as broad as Ovid and as subtle, as violent and as erotic, as elegant and as folksy—and often all at the same time."

Thomas McGrath, *Letter to An Imaginary Friend*. Copper Canyon, 1997. McGrath's great poem is finally available in a single volume. There are poets and critics here and abroad who regard the four parts of

this extraordinary narrative to be the American poem of the second half of the century.

Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, editors, *Poems for the Millennium: Volume 2*. University of California, 1998. This vast anthology completes the chronicle of experimental poetry in the twentieth century begun in Volume 1, "From Fin-de-Siecle to Negritude." Volume 2 runs "From Postwar to Millennium," and includes such poets as Holan, Olson, Rukeyser, Jabes, Celan, MacLow, Pasolini, Bachmann, Finlay, Ginsberg, Adonis, Rich, Baraka, Takahashi, Waldman, and Bei Dao.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Robert Archambeau's** long poem *Citation Suite* was recently published by Wild Honey Press in Ireland. His book on John Matthias will be published next year by Ohio University Press. He teaches at Lake Forest College. **Willis Barnstone** has published more than 40 books of poetry, scholarship, translation, and memoir. Forthcoming works include *Selected Poems*, *Moon & Sunbook* and *Selected Translations*. A Guggenheim Fellow and NEH recipient, Barnstone is Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature, Spanish, and East Asian Cultures at Indiana University. **Libby Bernardin** is the author of *The Stealing* (McGraw Hill). She is a South Carolina Literary Fellow and her poems have appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *Negative Capability*, *The Devil's Millhopper*, and other journals. She teaches English at the University of South Carolina. **Mark Brazaitis** is the winner of the 1998 Iowa Short Fiction Award. His collection, *The River of Lost Voices: Stories from Guatemala*, will be published this fall by the University of Iowa Press. **Joe Francis Doerr** is an NDR editorial assistant pursuing an M.F.A. and a Ph.D. in English at Notre Dame. Selections from his thesis received a 1997 Academy of American Poets Prize and appeared in *PN Review*. **Richard Elman** is the author of 28 books of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction, including the novel *Tar Beach* and the story collection *Disco Frito*. A wide-ranging career included work as a news reporter and documentary producer. He also taught widely, serving in 1990 as the Abrams Professor of Jewish Studies at Notre Dame. He died on January 31, 1997. **Martha Gies** has published fiction and essays in many journals, including *ZYZZYVA*, *Other Voices*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Clinton Street*, and has been a winner of the PEN Syndicated Fiction Project. **Jerry Harp's** work has appeared in *Commonweal*, *Delmar*, *Light*, and the anthology issue of *Versé*. **Laurie Hogin's** paintings enjoy a national reputation, having been shown at the Kemper Museum of Art, the California Center for the Arts, the Kohler Art Center and elsewhere. She is a professor of painting at the University of Illinois, Champaign. **Romana Huk** teaches in the English department at the University of New Hampshire. She has published many essays on contemporary poetry and co-edited with James Acheson *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, a volume which includes her own long essay on the Leeds poets. She is now working on a book about the poetry and fiction of Stevie Smith. **Robert Lietz** is a professor of English and Creative Writing (fiction and poetry) at Ohio Northern University. His poetry has appeared in more than 100 journals in the U.S. and Canada. **William Logan's** next book of poems, *Vain Empires*, will appear from Penguin in the spring of 1998. A book of early criticism, *All the Rage*, is also due out from Michigan. He teaches at the University of Florida. **George Looney** received the Bluestem Award for his first book of poetry, *Animals Housed in the Pleasure of Flesh*. He also received the *New Letters* Literary Award for poetry and the Eyster Prize from *New Delta Review*. He is Editor-in-Chief at *Mid-American Review*. **Michael Martone** is the author of five books of fiction. *Seeing Eye*, the most recent, was published by Zoland Books. **Christopher Merrill** is the author of three volumes of poetry and editor of *The Forgotten Language: Contemporary Poets and Nature* and *A John Hay Reader*. He has published translations of the work of Ales Debeljak and edited the Selected Poems of

Tomaz Salamun. Merrill's prose works include *From the Faraway Nearby: Georgia O'Keeffe as Icon* and *The Old Bridge: The Third Balkan War and the Age of the Refugee*. *Only the Nails Remain: A Balkan Triptych* will appear in 1999. **Peter Michelson's** books of poetry include *Pacific Plainsong* and *The Eater*. He has also written two books on aesthetics. **Yasumasa Morimura's** work has been short-listed for the Guggenheim Museum's Hugo Boss Prize. His photographs have been featured in museums world-wide, including most recently, the Hara Museum ARC, Japan. **Jere Odell** is a former managing editor of *NDR* and a graduate of the Notre Dame M.F.A. program. He has published poetry and translations in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Private Arts*, and elsewhere. He is presently teaching first-year Creative Writing at Notre Dame. **Linda Scheller** lives in California's Central Valley where she teaches at Westport Elementary School. Her work has appeared in *Seattle Review*, *The Ledge* and *Plays*. **R.D. Skillings** has had a twenty-five year association with the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. He is the author of three short story collections, *Alternative Lives*, *P-town Stories (or the Meatrack)*, and *In a Murderous Time*. **Ken Smith's** most recent collection is *Tender to the Queen of Spain* and his next, *Wild Root*, will be published in 1998 by Bloodaxe. He recently edited *Klaonica: Poems for Bosnia* with Judie Benson (Bloodaxe) and *Beyond Bedlam* with Matthew Sweeney. In 1997 he received the Lannan Foundation Award for poetry. **Marci Sulak** currently lives in Germany. Her poetry has appeared in several journals. **James L. Weil** is said to hold the "record" for Keats portrait poems. A long one that ran in the *Notre Dame Review* is the principal poem in his new book, *Bill's Shaker Chair* (Kelly-Winterton Press).

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