Winter 1994

San José Studies, Winter 1994

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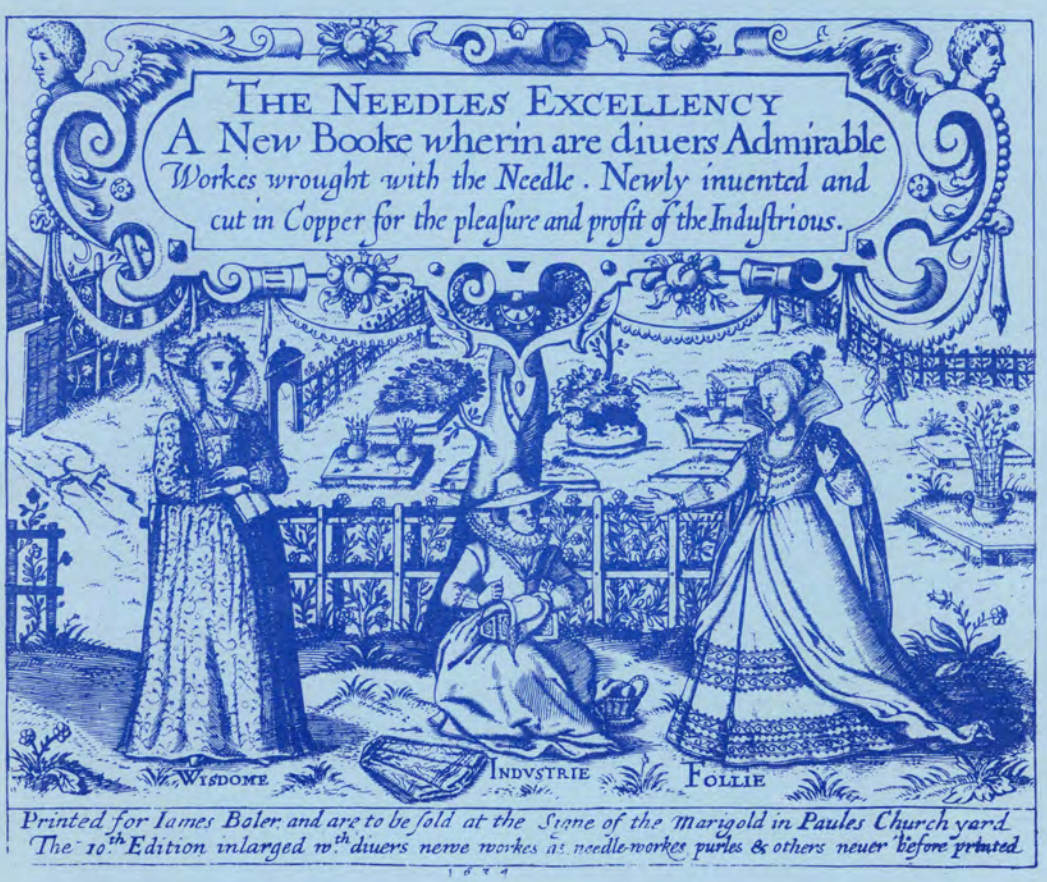

Volume 20, Number 1
Winter 1994
$5.00

San José Studies

Volume XX, Number 1 Winter, 1994

PRINTER Quality Offset Printing, Inc
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

 ISSN: 0097-8051

San José Studies

San José State University's Interdisciplinary Journal of Bay Area and California Cultures

Volume XX, Number 1 Winter, 1994

Essays

Interview

Fiction

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Essays

"The Ladies Have Prevailed": Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*

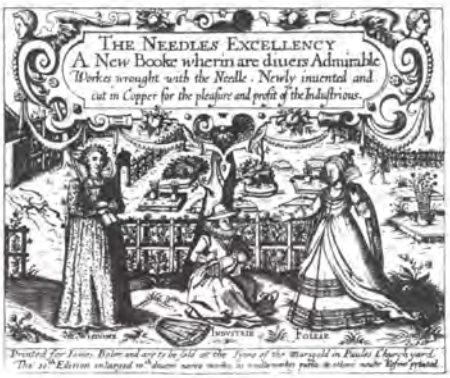
Catherine La Courreye Blecki

Women seldom influence the main action in Shakespeare's histories and tragedies; they may have a position of prominence, but they rarely have the position of authority or power to change the outcome of the play. Even as dominant a woman as Lady Macbeth, for example, who is a co-conspirator in the murder of Duncan, is left out of Macbeth's plans to murder Banquo, Lady Macduff, and her children. In *Coriolanus* (1609/10), however, three women successfully act to save the city of Rome.[1] Recent critical opinion about the women in *Coriolanus* tends to ignore the function of the women as a group and the ironic nature of their victory. To my surprise, the women do not figure at all in the discussion by feminist Carole Mc Kewin, "Counsels of Gall and Grace: Intimate Conversations between Women in Shakespeare's Plays." Yet the significance of all three—separately and together—is clear from their joint action in act 5; they are the only ones successfully to oppose Coriolanus. As their eloquence and their silence reveals, no man—not a general, not a surrogate father—can move Coriolanus; only the "ties of Nature" made visible in the three women and his young son combine to stop his implacable and murderous force. A group of women with this kind of power deserves our attention. What is their nature and function in the play?

As a group, the three women represent a spectrum of women's adult roles: friend, wife, mother, widow. Although they are separate characters, Shakespeare often treats them as a symbolic group, a community of women. For example, although Valeria only speaks a single line during the spectacle of Coriolanus's triumph (2.1), her presence suggests that the triad of women is important visually and symbolically. The special power of the group dynamic is reinforced in act 3 when Volumnia leaves the women and joins the men to persuade Coriolanus to moderate his position in standing

for consul. They all fail in their efforts. The women are significant thematically as they debate one of the central issues of the play: the value of the heroic life, defined as personal honor in battle. They are divided on this issue at the beginning of the play, but as opposition between Coriolanus and Rome deepens, they are drawn together; and as the final act reveals, the women are united in opposing the destruction of Rome. By juxtaposing their characters and their attitude toward personal honor, Shakespeare reveals the irony and the inadequacy of the kind of life led by the battle-scarred hero as well as the ironic nature of the women's victory over him. For twentieth-century viewers and readers, the play also questions our expectations of women's roles in a patriarchal culture. My discussion will focus on five scenes that are crucial to the unfolding of this dialectic.

The first scene (1.3) in which we meet Volumnia and Virgilia is really a debate about the nature of the heroic life, or the warrior ethic. Though the tone seems lighter after Valeria enters, the substance of their discussion becomes more complex as the women respond to the way Virgilia's young son Marcius behaves.



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Visually, the stage directions describe a quiet domestic scene: "Enter Volumnia and Virgilia, mother and wife to Marcius. They set them down on two low stools and sew" (1.3.1). From the stage directions, as David Bevington notes, the audience expects a feminine scene: "The use of needle and thread helps portray [women's] largely passive role . . . their vulnerability to male stratagems, their perseverance, their reliance on one another" (49). One popular pamphlet on needlework, John Taylor's *The Needles Excellency* (twelve editions from 1631-1640) would seem to support Bevington's generalization. The allegorical engraving of three women, reproduced above, forms the frontispiece of the octavo volume: Wisdom holding her book, "Industrie" plying her needle, and "Follie"

breaking their silence with her chattering tongue. Taylor's poem accompanying the engraving makes his allegorical point explicit: "[The Needles Art] will increase their [women's] peace, enlarge their store, / To use their tongues lesse, and their Needles more" (3). Shakespeare's scene, however, subverts conventional expectation. The women's voices are as sharp as their needles as they debate the value of the warrior code that permeates Roman society. Volumnia, as widow and mother, exercises her greater license to speak freely, while Virgilia, the ideal "chaste, silent and obedient" wife of Elizabethan handbooks, confines herself to brief questions and exclamations.[2] Their differences of opinion over Coriolanus's childhood training, his wounds, and his behavior in battle have the effect of thesis and antithesis in a debate over whether the warrior ethic is the best way of life for a Roman patrician man.

Recent critical appraisal regards Virgilia's response as the more feminine. To Coppelia Kahn, for example, "Volumnia's intense adherence to the masculine code of honour is contrasted to Virgilia's feminine recoil from it. Virgilia fears wounds, blood, death because they may deprive her of the husband she loves; Volumnia covets them as the signs and seals of honor that make her son a man, and her a man, in effect, through him" (127).[3] Kahn privileges Virgilia's response to violence over Volumnia's, but neither response is more authentically feminine than the other. In this debate over the role of women in a patriarchal culture, Jean R. Brink cautions that some feminist critics may be blinded by their own stereotypes of female behavior. In a provocative article on "Domesticating the Dark Lady," Brink discusses nineteenth and twentieth-century criticism on the two women and asks: "Is it possible that post-Victorian stereotypes of female behavior coincide more than we recognize with those of the Elizabethan handbooks?" (107).[4]

These same feminist critics also overlook Volumnia's own misgivings about the heroic life. One of the most striking examples occurs in the simile comparing her son on the battlefield to a harvest man: "His bloody brow / With his mail'd hand then wiping, forth he goes / Like to a harvest man that's task'd to mow / Or all, or lose his hire" (34-7). Volumnia is aware that even a hero is like a plain soldier who must do his job or "lose his hire." Perhaps, as Zvi Jagendorf suggests: "In Volumnia's eyes Coriolanus's work is far from self-rewarding," and he adds a good reason, "The soldier-mower . . . is subjected to the cruelest of wage conditions, which reduce the heroic challenge of all or nothing (victory or death) to a slave's choice between exhaustion and hunger. Volumnia cannot entertain the possibility that her son may fail" (463). The simile also reverses the order of rank between the patrician soldier and the plebeian city for which he works and thus foreshadows Coriolanus's reversal of fortune when the plebeians and tribunes banish him. Both Virgilia and Volumnia perceive

weaknesses in the heroic life, as they consider their husband and son as a warrior.

Valeria's entrance affords yet another perspective on raising a warrior-son. All the women seem to approve that young Marcius is growing up like his father. Valeria describes young Marcius at play when he falls just as he succeeds in catching a butterfly. The frustrated boy "did so set his teeth and tear it. Oh, I warrant how he mammocked it!" (64-5). Volumnia naturally sees the father in the son; Valeria agrees and adds that he is a "noble child." Virgilia, brief as ever, says "a crack, madam," that is, "a lively lad, a rogue (playfully)" (*OED*). Shakespeare does not give us any clear indication of the interpretation he intends; none of the other characters adds a comment about her statement. Thus Virgilia's line could be said ironically, or even disapprovingly, as well as humorously. In production, a look or gesture could signal disapproval. In the Terry Hand production of the play (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1989), for example, Amanda Harris as Virgilia looked shocked when she heard the account (Smallwood 497). Although directors are free to interpret the text, it is also worthy of note that there is a gap in the text here. Virgilia does not make an explicit connection between the way the father and the son act. Those critics who see Virgilia as the sole feminine voice opposed to the warrior code need to look again at this indeterminacy in the text.

Certainly, the conclusion of the scene shows that Virgilia is no meek and passive vessel; she can say "no" to Volumnia and have her own way. She refuses to "play the idle housewife" and visit a pregnant friend, saying "I cannot go" six times. According to Van Dyke, Virgilia's refusal reveals her integrity (140-1) by refusing to go out of the house while her husband is in danger. Does this mean that the other two women do not have integrity when they decide to be sociable? On the other hand, Virgilia seems to reveal a discontinuity in her values when she does not make a clear response to her son's aggressive behavior.

In act 1, scene 3, the women in the play support the warrior code when they think of young Marcius, who is out of danger, but the mother and the wife disagree about the code when their son and husband is in the thick of battle. Volumnia revels in the glory of the clash of arms because it will bring honor and fame to her son and to her, though she briefly reveals her unconscious fears. Virgilia shrinks from the violent side of the heroic code because her husband is mortal and can be hurt, while Valeria, the vestal virgin, finds nothing for alarm. The dialectic of the scene calls our attention to the opposition in attitude and temperament among the three women, as they exert competing claims upon our assent and our sympathies.

The dialectic continues in the next scene where the three women appear (2.1), as part of the procession welcoming Coriolanus home from battle. Their reaction to the triumphant Coriolanus reveals their differing

attitudes. Volumnia enthusiastically welcomes Coriolanus as he greets her in a perfect gesture of *pietas*, saluting his mother on his knee: "You have, I know, petition'd all the gods / For my prosperity" (168-9). Virgilia, on the other hand, dissolves into tears as Coriolanus greets her, his "gracious silence." Valeria, her single line spoken before Coriolanus enters, is a silent on-looker.

The engraving below, by G. B. Cipriani and F. Bartolozzi (1785) ,epitomizes the reunited family: Volumnia, Menenius, his surrogate father, and Virgilia, his wife.[5] The affectionate bond between mother and son is made significant by being placed at the center of the picture, Volumnia's

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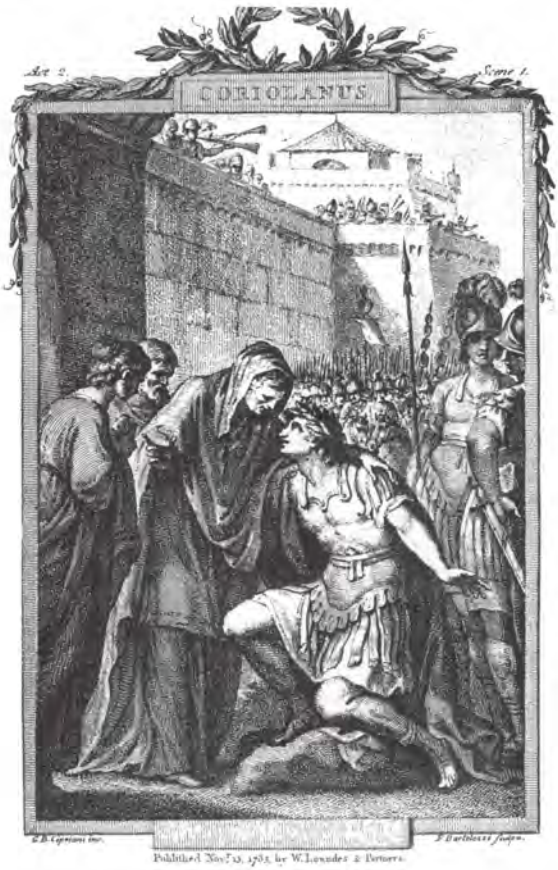

Cor. *You have, I know, petitioned all the Gods for my prosperity.*

arm around Coriolanus's shoulder, each looking into the other's eyes; Volumnia's finger points to Virgilia, and thus to the second circle of affectionate relationships, which includes Menenius. The figure of Menenius looks over Volumnia's shoulder into the face of Coriolanus, thus completing the second circle at the point where it began, focused on mother and son. The engraving captures the intimacy of Coriolanus's family just before the reversals in acts 3 and 4 tear it apart.

The Third Act

The debate over the value of the warrior life in the first two acts continues in the confrontation between Volumnia and Coriolanus in act 3, as Volumnia leaves the women and joins the men to try to persuade Coriolanus to give up his warrior's armor for a politician's robe. In this scene, we can see what the other women might have offered by their presence. This is true especially for her foil, Virgilia, who has been the only person so far to oppose her successfully. Virgilia's affectionate empathy with Coriolanus and their mutual love of privacy, even solitariness, combined with her opposition to his military life, suggest that she might have been a good ally for Volumnia. Valeria also might have offered a different slant on the heroic life as Coriolanus defined and lived it. As the state's vestal virgin and the sister of the "noble Publicola" or "lover of the people," Valeria's presence might have reminded Coriolanus that her brother's success as governor of Rome was a precedent for combining the skills of the warrior and statesman (Plutarch 122). Not only does Volumnia lack the other women's presence, but without them, her personality's masculine and dominating side is reinforced.

Volumnia's argument with Coriolanus in act 3 reveals the single-minded focus that she has forged in this political crisis. Unlike Coriolanus, who regards his victory over the Volsces as his most significant act, she is concerned for the stability and preservation of the state, as well as for the honor of her son and family. Of the two, the state comes first in this political crisis. This is clearly indicated by her reaction when the First Senator tells them that if this crisis is not resolved, "our good city / [will] Cleave in the midst, and perish" (26-7). Volumnia immediately stops her angry exchange with Coriolanus and advises him: "Pray be counsell'd; / I have a heart as little apt as yours, / But a brain that leads my use of anger / To better vantage" (28-31). Volumnia bases her notion of honor on the Roman value of piety: "I would dissemble with my nature where / My fortunes and my friend at stake requir'd / I should do so in honour" (61-3).

Volumnia's controlling value, then, is not a warrior's personal notion of honor but rather political necessity which must take precedence when country, family, and friends are at stake. In her actions and speech, Volumnia takes on the role of an "order figure," in Northrup Frye's terms; she is concerned for the stability and the preservation of the state" (*Fools of*

Time 57). But without Virgilia and Valeria, Volumnia has only her eloquence to rely on, and when that fails, only her anger and, ironically for this most voluble of matrons, her silence. When Coriolanus continues to be obstinate, Volumnia's eloquence dissolves into an angry taunt; and then rejecting any further argument, she returns the responsibility for action back to him and removes herself from the scene. She has failed to influence her son. Significantly, she will include the other women in the next confrontation with her son before the gates of Rome.

Acts 4 and 5

In the first two brief scenes in act 4, Volumnia and Virgilia are together again, both suffering the consequences of Coriolanus's banishment. In greater sympathy with each other, neither woman is concerned about the heroic life. That issue seems irrelevant since Volumnia no longer has the honors she hoped for her son (and perhaps herself), and Virgilia no longer has the husband she hoped would return to her. Instead, there is a new solidarity in their relationship based on their grief over Coriolanus's banishment. This is the first time that Volumnia is seen as openly vulnerable. Now, she is only concerned with Coriolanus's personal welfare, not with any deeds that will gain honor. When he asserts that he will continue to live the heroic life, Volumnia does not respond with characteristic zeal but only asks: "My first son, / Whither wilt thou go?" Her question cuts through all of Coriolanus's brave talk, but he ignores her attempt at intimacy. She persists with a maternal suggestion: "Take good Cominius / With thee awhile; determine on some course / More than a wild exposture to each chance / That starts i' the way before thee" (33-7), but Coriolanus rejects her suggestion. Volumnia does not insist; like Virgilia, she is silent.

The following scene reinforces the bond between Virgilia and Volumnia as both women exchange angry words with the tribunes who have exiled Coriolanus. Though Virgilia is the less aggressive of the two, she condemns the tribunes for their actions. In fact, those critics who see a mislineation in the first folio in this scene disagree over which woman says line 15, "You shall stay too," as one of the tribunes tries to avoid them, and line 26, "He'd make an end to thy posterity," when one tribune attempts to diminish Coriolanus as a threat. The most significant aspect of this scene for understanding the growing relationship between the women, however, is that both of them reject the temporizing ways of Menenius, who tries to make peace between the tribunes and them. As they leave, Volumnia dismisses Menenius's offer: "Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself, / And so shall starve with feeding" (51-52). Volumnia's parting words have become a key to her character and to her relationship with her son—to those critics who base their perception on Freudian psychology. For Janet Andelman, one of the first to make this argument, Volumnia's "attitude toward food is

nicely summed up when she rejects Menenius's invitation to a consolatory dinner after Coriolanus's banishment. . . . We might suspect her of having been as niggardly in providing food for her son as she is for herself, or rather suspect her of insisting that he too be self-sufficient, that he feed only on his own anger; and indeed, she has apparently fed him only valiantness ("Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me" [3.2.129]) (109). Andelman's analysis is too literal (meat=food) and too narrow when she considers only one metaphoric level of meaning (meat=anger, self-sufficiency). In the context of the scene, the metaphor also refers to Volumnia's rejection of comfort and friendship from a man who wants to be conciliatory to her enemies, the tribunes who roused the people against Coriolanus. Significantly, Virgilia's angry words show that she agrees with her mother-in-law. Although she leaves the scene in silence, she leaves *with* Volumnia. Most critics overlook the solidarity between the women.

In the climactic scene of the tragedy (act 5, scene 3), the women confront Coriolanus and his army before Rome. Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria represent a united feminine power—mother, widow, wife, friend—who agree that Rome must be saved, not just for patricians, or plebeians, but for all the citizens of Rome. Their united presence indicates that for them the survival of family and community is more important than personal happiness or personal vengeance or class supremacy. The women and young Marcius present a visual icon of the suppliant family. As Northrup Frye notes in "The Mythos of Autumn: Tragedy," the suppliant is an ironically powerful figure because "it attacks the deepest fear in ourselves that we possess—the exclusion of an individual from a group" (108). Coriolanus has already been rejected by Rome and has in turn rejected Rome, but the three women and child are his most intimate ties. While he is watching their procession, Coriolanus acknowledges that he can not "stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin" (34-37). This statement is a strong indication that the heroic life does not fulfill all a warrior's needs and aspirations, not even for one as quintessentially a warrior as Coriolanus. The ceremony of greeting reveals the significance of the "ties of Nature" in visual and verbal terms.

Coriolanus salutes Virgilia first, which reverses the hierarchial order that he followed earlier in the scene of his triumph (2.1), when he first knelt to his mother and then, as directed by Volumnia, greeted his wife. The sympathetic and quiet presence of his wife disarms him in ways that the more direct and aggressive Volumnia can not. Virgilia is not a silent presence, as she was earlier. Her greeting reminds him that while his city may have cast him out and while he may have joined with Rome's enemy, he still has the obligation to be lord and husband to her. She does not yield to his warning that his outlook has changed since she saw him in Rome but points out instead that sorrow has changed the women and his son. Virgilia's statements imply that Coriolanus's personal honor as a warrior is

a limited and selfish code because it fails to include his familial obligations. Although their kiss seems to reunite them, Coriolanus's statement reveals that his mind is still on military honor: "O, a kiss / Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!" (44-45).

Before he can salute Volumnia, in an ironic reversal of the *pietas* he owes her (and gives her in act 2), mother kneels to son and explains: "I kneel before thee, and unproperly / Show duty, as mistaken all this while / Between the child and parent" (54-56). Her corrected son immediately understands the unnaturalness of this act and says so. Directly and briefly, she reminds him of his obligation to her: "Thou art my warrior; I holp to frame thee," a point he has already made to himself as he saw her walk in. Volumnia's statement goes directly to her source of power: she gave him birth. Later in this scene she will develop this point, but for now, she turns his attention to the third woman: "Do you know this lady?" Valeria's silent presence evokes the famous greeting from Coriolanus:

> The noble sister of Publicola,
> The moon of Rome, chaste as the icicle
> That's curdied by the frost from purest snow
> And hangs on Dian's temple—dear Valeria! (64-67)

Although Valeria says nothing in response, Coriolanus's greeting suggests the social obligation that she claims from him. In this brief statement, Coriolanus ironically evokes two positive values of the Roman society he is seeking to destroy: the nobility of those like Publicola who have governed Rome well and the integrity of the vestal virgin.

Last, Volumnia introduces his son, "his poor epitome," and closes the ceremony of greeting by stating their purpose: "Even he, your wife, this lady, and myself / Are suitors to you" (77-78). Through this ceremony, the women have sought to reestablish the ties of nature with Coriolanus with their attendant obligations. Although Volumnia's oration and Coriolanus's response to it follow this ceremony, the ritual greeting reasserts the primacy of the bonds of family, and thus of human nature over personal honor, and in the process wins Coriolanus's agreement not to attack Rome. Later in the scene, his silent gesture, holding his mother's hand, completes the action begun earlier, and his words praise the women's role as peacemakers: "Ladies, you deserve / To have a temple built you. All the swords / In Italy and her confederate arms / Could not have made this peace" (206-8). All Rome rejoices, as the second messenger announces to Menenius: "Good news! good news! The ladies have prevail'd, / The Volscians are dislodg'd, and Martius gone. / A merrier day did never yet greet Rome, / No, not th' expulsion of the Tarquins" (5.4.41-43). Although the city welcomes the women in triumph, they are silent. Ironically, the peacemakers have permanently lost their son, husband, and friend, as Coriolanus, following the warrior ethic, insists on returning to the Volscian camp where he is treacherously cut down.

The dialectic of the play has brought the women from their initial division over the warrior code in the first acts, to their passive acceptance of its consequences in Coriolanus's banishment, to their united action against a war that would destroy their city and its citizens, including their heir, young Marcius. What are their feelings at this moment? Shakespeare leaves the question unanswered. In the absence of words or stage directions to indicate their feelings, the audience can create its own conclusion.

In 1624, Thomas Heywood placed the three women in his collection of anecdotes praising women's deeds, calling them "female worthies," because "by these excellent women, all combustions of warre were appeased, a threatened misery prevented, and generall and safe peace set[t]led in the commonweale" (158). Modern responses have been less positive. The 1989 Terry Hand production portrayed the women enjoying their triumph, and in a departure from the text, he included young Marcius in the last procession. Valeria took the First Senator's role, "demanding that Rome cry 'Welcome, ladies, all! . . . [Young Martius's] grandmother glowed with pride at the new fighter whom she now could mould, and his mother followed in sadness and bewilderment. There was another play, exactly like this, one felt, just around the corner" (Smallwood 496). This production ignored any feelings of loss on the part of the women as well as their questioning of the warrior code in the last two acts. Irene Worth, who played Volumnia in three major productions (Peter Hall in 1984, Elijah Moshinsky in 1984, and Steven Berkoff in 1989), speaks of the pathos she feels in Volumnia at the end of the play. Volumnia knows that whether or not "there is a continuation of war, she's lost her child . . . . [After] seeing everything explode in her face[,] she's not quite so sure of the world she was brought up to respect" (Fenwick 27). Based on my analysis of the play, this seems a much sounder interpretation of Volumnia's character. Furthermore, I would extend this loss to the two women who supported Volumnia. Ironically, the ladies prevail, but their silence suggests grief more than victory.

Any viewer or reader of *Coriolanus* or confronts the dialectic of conflicting codes of honor, one defined as personal honor in battle and one as communal, placing the "ties of Nature" first. In this his last tragedy, Shakespeare explores this theme with three women of different temperaments and roles who control civic power for a moment at the end of the play. As I have tried to demonstrate, it is wrong to make Volumnia the villain, as some twentieth-century critics have done, since she is so admirable. She is eloquent, and as passionately loyal to her ideal of honor as Coriolanus is to his. Volumina also is not the only woman who confronts Coriolanus out of civic duty; in the play, a wife and a friend are a part of the triad of women who stop Coriolanus from invading Rome. The ironic juxtapositions of character and scene, and the indeterminacy of some passages in the play (like the puzzling procession of women at its con-

clusion) leave the audience questioning the ironic and tragic implications of the power that men and women wield, and their motives for *using* as well as *yielding* that power.

Notes

[1] Although Shakespeare took the names of the three women from his main source, Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (1579), he strengthens Volumnia's and Virgilia's roles as foils for each other and modifies Valeria's role from a spokesperson for the women of Rome to a friend of the family. In Plutarch, Volumnia and Virgilia are mentioned at the beginning of the narrative and at its conclusion; in Shakespeare's work, they appear in seven scenes that are distributed throughout the play.

[2]Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*, notes such handbooks in "The Woman's Lesson" and the following commentary (53-56).

[3]Other commentators agree with her. Linda Bambler considers Virgilia the closest to the feminine Other in the play (94), while Robert Miola sums up the scene by noting "Virgilia suggests the importance of private space and human love, even for proud and honorable Romans" (172).

[4]After analyzing the roles of the dark lady of the sonnets, Tamora of *Titus Andronicus*, Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Volumnia and Virgilia, Brink argues that "Post-Victorian criticism . . . sets out to 'contain' powerful women, because it habitually sentimentalizes the feminine" (95).

[5]The edition of *Coriolanus* in which this engraving appeared was a part of the series, *Lowndes's New English Theatre* (1782-86).

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Self-Pity Neurosis

Eric P. Levy

Consider the child crying alone before the mirror of parental judgment, staring at the one thing which makes him unworthy of love: his own reflection; his inadequacy as reflected in his parent's eyes.[1] How lonely he feels and yet how plagued by unwanted company—in the form of his ever-intruding self-image. How he yearns for an impossible state where he could feel loved and valued, yet never have to be seen; for such exposure could only mean inevitable rejection. How he yearns to perform forever before approving company—yet never lose the safety of total withdrawal. The only way to do that is with a second mirror: in particular, the mirror of self-pity. With it, he can enjoy loving attention while still hiding all alone. But the self-pity resorted to in this predicament is not the kind that seeks to remove the pain it consoles.

Thus begins the hapless dialectic of self-pity neurosis. In order not to be threatened by the negative self-image reflected in the mirror of parental judgment, in order to escape the humiliation it makes him feel, the subject must turn around and consult a second mirror that reflects how hurt and lonely he feels in front of the first one. He stands back to back with himself—like the Roman god, Janus, who had two faces, one in front and one behind. Each face is looking at its reflection in a mirror. The first mirror reveals his worthiness for rejection; the second mirror reveals his worthiness for love—through reflecting the helpless *pathos* of his shame. Now imagine those two mirrors moving closer together until they touch and form one thick wall of glass. On one side is the reflection belonging to the first mirror and on the other is the reflection belonging to the second. The subject inhabits the interface between them. He has transformed himself, that is, into the coincidence of psychological contraries: deprecation and indulgence, rejection and devotion, self-hatred and self-pity.[2]

But why does the subject languish in such contradiction? Why does he not repudiate the mirrors and define himself on his own? The answer lies in the origin of his predicament. As a result of exposure to the mirror of parental judgment, the subject cannot easily separate who he is from who he should not be. Unlike Descartes who could prove his existence by the mere act of doubting it, the subject we are considering exists *as* an act of self-doubt. He knows himself primarily through that self-doubt. At bottom, his identity is formulated as a state of negative self-awareness and the wish to be consoled for it. In such circumstances, self-reliance is not only unlikely but also imprudent. How can the subject rely on himself if he is already defined as unworthy of confidence? It is much safer to let preoccupation with the mirrors protect him from the danger of overtaxing his own inadequacy. This decision is not made on the conscious level, and for that reason becomes extremely difficult to revoke or even detect. To understand how the decision is precipitated and inveterately renewed, we must inquire more deeply into the self-pity from which it stems.

The mirror of self-pity is not an ordinary mirror where the subject outside is wholly independent of the reflection which repeats it. Instead, in the act of self-pity, the fundamental aim of the subject is to become so passionately involved with his reflection that the distinction between outside and inside no longer applies. Subject and reflection are embraced by the same heart-rending experience. Each sees in the other the image of his own deepest longing, the image of himself as he most yearns to be. But the image each sees is the reverse of the one seen by the other—though together they simulate a single self.

To the subject looking into the mirror, the reflection represents a fervent wish: to be the witness of pain rather than its actual victim. That is a controlling fantasy of self-pity neurosis: to become the reflection in the mirror looking pityingly at the one suffering outside. After all, only the one outside the mirror is burdened with a real life and real pain. Better, therefore, to identify with the perspective in the mirror—the perfect witness with no life but pitying the dear face who stands outside and looks in. It is as if the secret grief of Narcissus concerned, not his inability to kiss the face he admired in the mirror, but the impossibility of living there himself on the other side, as the reflection. Self-pity neurosis thus involves a delusion no psychology has yet encountered: the fantasy that one is his own reflection. The person outside the mirror is the poor sap actually exposed to the indignities of living. The one shielded inside the mirror has only to pity them both.[3]

But what is the fantasy of the reflection inside the mirror while witnessing all this pain? If its compassion is sincere, why does it allow the subject to dwell so obsessively on his own suffering? Surely a kinder response would be to reflect how the need for pity drains the self-respect and dignity which alone can end such pain. But self-respect and dignity are

the last things the reflection inside the mirror wants to encourage, for fear the one outside would not need its consoling company anymore. The pity tendered by the reflection is sordid and despicable, secretly gratified by the suffering it confronts. As long as the subject sees only his own need for pity, he will never face the challenge of real life, but will turn to the reflection who pretends to cry for the suffering it is determined to prolong. Behind the wish to alleviate one's own pain, by becoming its pitying witness, is the wish, through helplessly pitying that pain, never to become strong enough to end it.[4]

What then is the true face of the reflection in the mirror of self-pity? Behind the mask of concern, what eyes glare back at the distress and despondency pleading outside? Or, to be more precise, since the disguise of self-pity is so minutely convincing, what eyes, furtive and invisible, peer through the peephole of the pupils in the eyes belonging to the mask? To answer this question, we must travel inside the looking glass, and meet the perspective on life residing there.

"Come in," beckons the figure ordinarily hidden behind the reflection in the mirror. "You will see." And the mirror swings open, like the door of a medicine cabinet—or the lid of a coffin. There is room inside that mirror, to him who knows how to find it: the impossible, imaginary space between the unseen or back side of the reflection and the black backing behind it—a place as unknown yet inevitable as the dark side of the moon. The hidden figure at home inside the mirror was hurt by defective love in childhood. Of course, that part will fear real life and eventual adulthood; for, if love demands too much of children, how much more it must require of grown-ups. If criticism and rejection would humiliate a little child, how much more must they disgrace someone supposed to be adult. How much love must make grown-ups wish they were children again, so that grown-ups would take pity on their pain. Thus reasons the perspective inside self-pity, refusing to relinquish control of the adult it becomes. Imagine he looks like a mummy, with one long ancient filthy bandage wound continuously around his body from head to toe. He merely pretends to suffer pain, even though, beneath their ragged coverings, the wounds of childhood have long since ceased to bleed. But he is not as weak as he seems. Touch him and those bandages of dried blood turn into the scales a snake, ready to strike at any threat to its security.

The hidden figure inhabiting the mirror of self-pity relishes confinement. The last thing it wants is for the one on the other side to renounce withdrawal and live in the open, deciding clearly what he wants out of life and accepting the consequences of achievement. Such readiness would carry him far beyond the shelter of self-pity and self-doubt. The one inside the mirror keeps life safe for the weakened emotional character formed by love-defective childhood: no confidence and hence no fortitude,

no strength to persevere through the conflicts of the present, no courage to forswear the securities of the past.

The invisible figure in the mirror is self-love frustrating itself, self-love that dares not speak its name. Its origin is the primal trauma in front of the mirror of parental judgment. There the child is categorically denied the right to be himself. Instead, he is identified and treated as if he really were deserving of the judgment reflected in the pillory of the glass. The child attacked by the parental mirror must protect himself at any cost—even if that means destroying the very sense of self-worth and readiness for growth attacked by the mirror in the first place. Hence, he may eliminate pain by raising its power. He may sacrifice the sense of dignity in order not to feel humiliation any longer. He may convince himself he can never have what he wants, transform himself into a helpless, hopeless yearning for what his worthlessness can never achieve—by this means the child liberates himself from the demands of one mirror (parental judgment) by placing himself before another (self-pity).

The fantasy of helpless vulnerability to shame is the classic defense mechanism of love-defective childhood where the child combats a fault-obsessed mirror much bigger than he is. His ploy is simple: since he cannot win, succumb. Let the pain inflicted by his adversary become his own invincible ally. In this way, suffering is simultaneously punishment for not being who he should be and exoneration for being who he is. This is the great danger hiding in the mirror of parental judgment: shame promises total innocence; the greater the sense of inadequacy, the less need to do anything but feel sorry for himself because of it.

Self-love is perplexed by contradictions in love-defective childhood. On the one hand, self-love is encouraged, for the child suffers pain, and the need to protect oneself from pain is one expression of self-love. But on the other hand, self-love is thwarted because, in this case, the child's pain derives from the parental mirror which shows him why love is exactly what he does not deserve. Thus, self-love is frustrated even as it is aroused. To overcome this impasse, self-love must ground its own fulfillment in frustration.

Hence, instead of wishing to defeat pain, self-pity neurosis wants pain to be victorious, so that life becomes one sustained act of enforced surrender. If real life—as represented by the first mirror—offers nothing but ridicule and shame, then why bother struggling? Why not make frustration in real life prove that fantasy is more fulfilling? Or even better, why not let frustration in real life prove that only fantasy is worth being real? There is one desperate craving behind this preference for fantasy: the wish to live without having a real life, the wish to be loved without being exposed. Life must somehow be sealed off from living and love must somehow never be shared. It is the wish to gain refuge from life, sheltered by self-pity for one's own inescapable frustration. It is the wish for an ideal

state where one is strong enough to live but too weak to face life, strong enough to pity but too weak to feel pain.

The Paradox of Self-Pity

This seminal paradox of self-pity neurosis can make sense only if we understand that human beings engage in two kinds of fantasy: one that wishes to come true and one that does not. The first kind yearns for some specific satisfaction which would achieve both an end to the fantasy and a desired alteration of actual life. The second enjoys fulfillment only through fostering frustration. Its aim is to prevent actual fulfillment, to turn life into the yearning for fulfillment which in reality must never come. Instead of seeking fulfillment in real life, this second kind of fantasy seeks to enclose actual life within an airtight wish which reality can never penetrate. It is the wish only to wish, to have no life but wishing, to inhabit a fantasy that can never come true.

Self-pity neurosis infects the sufferer with two conflicting needs: the need he has and the need to have it: the need for fulfillment and the need for frustration. There is obvious need in frustrated yearning, but there is also secret or unconscious satisfaction. The need for fulfillment becomes the means of gratifying the need for frustration. The need to escape the anguish of persistent suffering is exploited by the need to remain tormented by it. Needing satisfies the need to need—the compulsion to want what one never has. Needing or yearning keeps the sufferer withdrawn from life, able to enter it only through fantasy.

This is the great reversal achieved by self-pity neurosis: real life or freedom from fantasy itself becomes the fantasy that can never be attained. Real life is always just beyond whatever restriction, pain, weakness, or inhibition currently prevents the sufferer from living it. Real life must remain in vivid yet inaccessible proximity, as if separated from the viewer by a clear pane of glass. Breaking that glass in order to find fulfillment in life is made impossible. In fact, the very attempt to enter life and participate freely with others makes the glass more impenetrable than ever. Exposure to life triggers the negative way of seeing oneself learned or derived from the mirror of parental judgment. Insecurity with others triggers negative self-consciousness and turns the subject into an awareness of his faulty reflection. Thus, life itself becomes another version of the mirror of parental judgment, and he is the inadequate one standing before it. To enter life would be to enter a mirror and become the reflection: a permanent spectacle of inadequacy and shame. Withdrawal is then the only recourse. Always it is the subject on one side and life on the other.[5]

But watch him now forlornly gazing at the life he cannot have. To look at life is to see his own exclusion from it. To look at life is to become increasingly aware of his own sense of deprivation and neglect. The more he looks, the more sorry for himself he feels. Thus, life is changed from a

mirror of negative judgment into a mirror of self-pity. The viewer sees life only in terms of what he is so piteously missing.

A tremendous ambiguity marks the attitude toward life so typical of self-pity neurosis. On the one hand, life and the others living it are viewed with extraordinary clarity and attention. On the other hand, the more distinctly they are seen, the more invisible they become; for all that matters to the viewer is the pain they make him feel. All he notices is his own response: self-consciousness in company or self-pity when alone. The clear pane of glass he carries with him through life is also a compound mirror, reflecting either his shame or piteousness, depending on local conditions. Whenever he has to confront life, he walks toward it backward, like Perseus stalking Medusa, his eyes always focussed, not on life directly, but on its reflection in the mirror held in front of him. In this way, he remains a perpetual spectator who can see life only from one point of view—immutable preoccupation with his own pain.

Life encountered directly would be too contaminating. It would overwhelm and destroy. Life immerses one in change. The subject would have to respond and grow. He would have to be compassionate, patient, capable of love. Compassion exposes one to pain—others' pain. Love involves responsibility. Everything in life has an emotional price. How much easier to watch and feel just momentary emotion than to be a participant who risks plunging himself into all these feelings and arousing the expectation that he pay them back. For, when someone is given love, he is expected to give something of himself in return. Reality is simply too dangerous. How much better to live hampered by the fear of humiliation and the need to be pitied for it. That way, the pain of self-doubt that one suffers can hide a smug gratification with his plight: a shameless, strength-sapping masturbation at his own distress: a squalid and diseased satisfaction of his most desperate, cowardly desire—the fantasy that frustration offers more than does fulfillment; for only frustration allows weakness to maintain its protecting strength.

The exploitation of self-doubt to gain exemption from the rigors of self-respect is one side of self-pity neurosis. But there is another that is equally dominated by unconscious fantasy. This second side exploits the *conscious* preoccupation with personal inadequacy as a means, not of avoiding self-respect, but of simulating its possession—without, however, enduring the demands for moral stamina which this attribute ordinarily entails. The paradoxical extraction of dignity from shame relies on the same manipulation of withdrawal by which self-doubt becomes the means of shirking the burden of self-respect. As we have seen, a recessed or unconscious perspective, symbolized for us by the figure hidden behind the reflection in the mirror of self-pity, gloats over the subject's preoccupation with shame, because such withdrawal wards off the risk of gaining self-respect. Similarly, from a second recessed perspective the same

preoccupation with shame can be made to signify, not abjection, but eminence. This subsidiary perspective can be symbolized by another hidden figure—this one looming insidiously behind the subject's back, as he withdraws from the cause of his excruciating self-consciousness: other people and the unflattering identity which the mirror of their judgment impresses upon him.

The same act of withdrawal, by which the subject retreats from others in order to focus on self-pity for the shame they cause him, can simultaneously serve a different purpose. The psychological distance from others resulting from withdrawal can be made to signify, not abjection or loneliness, but proud self-reliance. Instead of identifying as he who suffers disapproval, the subject becomes he whom disapproval exalts—but only from the recessed perspective symbolized by the witness standing behind his own back. Once the subject retreats in shame from others, his withdrawal can be emptied of its demeaning content. All that remains of the withdrawal is distance from others—a distance interpreted as the result, not of shame, but of scorn for common contact. Hence, the witness gains strength from withdrawal, even as the subject is sapped by it. What for the subject is a retreat caused by shame becomes for the recessed witness a remoteness filled with pride.

Of course, the transformation of abjection into its opposite is pure illusion, since the subject harbouring this recessed perspective continues to suffer as much as before. But, at a level much deeper than his conscious mind can admit or understand, he no longer cares about that suffering. More precisely, he no longer identifies as the subject it afflicts. Instead, he sees that subject as someone expendable, a decoy whose self-image quandary is not his concern. Much more important is the use to which that stupid suffering can be put—generating for its witness a belief in his own superiority to others. Withdrawal now implies not humiliation, but aloofness. In this way, the witness sustains the fantasy that withdrawal is his achievement rather than his fate. Withdrawal allows him to identify with the act of negation rather than with its target or victim. The witness makes rejection signify, not his own negation, but his own self-importance: it is not he who is negated but everyone from whom he has withdrawn. Nothing in this life is good enough for him; he can be satisfied only by himself and it is a privilege to be in his company.

Thus withdrawal, by functioning as a clear pane of glass separating the subject from those who upset him, serves also as a two-sided mirror, reflecting a different image depending on which side the viewer stands. From the perspective of the witness on one side, withdrawal reflects his unique and exclusive worth. But from the implied perspective on the other side, the act of withdrawal becomes a mirror in which others see reflected the witness's dissatisfaction with them. It is as if the witness were able, through exploiting the subject's obsession with the mirror of negative

judgment held up to him by others, to generate a second mirror which projects onto others the very sense of rejection causing the subject's withdrawal in the first place. It is a mirror within a mirror, like the brackets within brackets of an algebraic equation. But the witness wins this distinction only through the subject's defeat: his smug detachment, originally a means of defense, eventually becomes an end in itself—to the detriment of the subject it serves.

To understand this mechanism, we must remember the first principle of self-pity neurosis: the conscious preoccupation with self-image pain can serve the needs of unconscious fantasies spawned by that pain. Paradoxically, the origin of these fantasies is the need to escape pain but, once started, they will create pain in order to go on. The fantasies develop into autonomous psychological mechanisms that blindly refuse to stop and resist indefatigably any effort to turn them off.

The True and False Self

Self-pity neurosis is the attempt to end the strain of being oneself by increasing awareness of one's own pain.[6] The subject fills himself with suffering in order to be purged—as if gorging on garbage until the eventual vomiting leaves him fragrant and clean. By this means, he empties himself of himself. A serene and irreproachable identity replaces a faulty and unsure one. The invisible figure in the mirror exploits the subject's awareness of negation in order to be excused from life; the invisible witness behind the subject exploits that same preoccupation in order to reflect negation onto others and thus affirm himself. In the first case, the subject's pain preserves the fantasy of exclusive privilege or exemption; in the second, it feeds the fantasy of inviolate perfection. Of course, the distinction here is only in emphasis, for both fantasies derive from the same pampering self-love, the same need to feel worthy of real life and love without risking full involvement with them. Something else will always remain more engrossing: concern for oneself.

When the subject confronts the negative mirror, he sees nothing but his pain. Pain here means, not just self-image negation specifically, but any insistent anxiety or uncertainty about oneself, including the inability to live one's life without such subversive commentary and monitoring. The more the subject stares at this mirror, the less confident of doing anything else he becomes. Yet, the weaker the subject feels, the bolder the unconscious fantasies exploiting weakness grow. There is no energy left to overthrow them. As the subject depletes himself in front of the mirror, the invisible figure behind the reflection and the invisible witness behind the subject looking at his reflection share a wink of obscene complicity. They have blinded the subject to his true self, leaving him prey to the false one.

The true self is fulfilled through real life.[7] The false self is fulfilled through fantasy. Its defining project is to find protection from those

demands in real life which the false self most fears: responsibility, resolution, fortitude, self-sacrifice. The life that the false self envisions is repetitively simple. Nothing changes. There is nothing to be done but perpetuate the same wishes and frustrations, the same habits and excuses, the same questions and the same answers. This gives the false self control over life, like an anxious gardener who stifles growth because he fears being overrun by his plants. The false self wants to prolong the lie that real life is not worth the effort of living; for there one is recurrently and unbearably afflicted or deprived. It is the voice inside that says, "It's too hard," whenever the true self tries to rise or "It costs too much," whenever the true self strives to redeem its own worth. But giving in to the false self only weakens the true one.

Why is the subject so easily seduced by his false self? Why can't he be faithful to the true one? The answer lies in the fact that at a fundamental level—the level at which the sense of identity itself is formed—the subject cannot distinguish between such truth and falsehood. More precisely, he cannot tell which one to trust and which one to fear. The true self turns him toward life, but life is exactly where he doesn't want to be, lest he become more insecure about his identity than ever. The false self, in contrast, spares him the effort of exerting his identity. It lets the subject exaggerate the pain of self-doubt to such an extent that the problem of identity seems to disappear. Self-pity will assume the virtues of the true self. Self-pity will show responsibility by watching over his helplessness. Self-pity will persevere when he can only cry; it will sacrifice itself to save him from the danger of becoming sure of himself.

Thus far, one might almost think that the false self is cruel only to be kind—cruel, that is, in order to arouse self-pity. But there is no kindness at the core of self-pity. There is simply an inverted selfishness that must refuse itself everything except the power of self-denial. This is the reflex of a self made so unsure of itself that confidence can come only through frustration. The subject fears his own need for fulfillment and so sets himself against it. Fulfillment is dreaded as a voracious snake that would swallow and absorb his identity. If he were fulfilled, he wouldn't need self-pity, and life without self-pity is just too defenseless. There would be no more barrier between him and the hard, honest toil of subduing his own weakness.

Such exposure is not to be permitted. The barrier must never be removed. The subject must stay in front of the mirror, crushed by the excruciating futility of being himself. Let the burden of his identity so overwhelm the subject that he thinks of nothing but his own exhaustion and the impossibility of enduring it. That way, the false self reigns supreme, and the subject remains the dupe of his own self-pity.

Pain is the only truth in which the subject can believe, but he never sees how it sustains an enormous lie. The more the subject despairs of

satisfying his needs, the more imperious they become. The greater their frustration, the stronger the illusion that satisfaction is their due—and far more deserved than anyone else's. Inside the subject's suffering is an aristocratic vanity: "Can there be misery loftier than mine?" (Beckett 2). The very agony of frustration overthrows its shame: "I'm incapable of fulfilling my own life" becomes "It is beneath me to be concerned with life. My pain will live it for me." This is the attitude of the false self that treats the subject it oppresses with rancorous contempt: "Think, pig. Think how miserable you are—and how helpless. You can't do anything for yourself except pant and shiver."

Of course, the immediate result of this torment is to turn the subject toward self-pity: the fantasy that the purpose of life is to emphasize the difficulty of living it. But there is a deeper motive to the insinuations and slander of the false self—one far more treacherous. It is to make the subject do something calamitous which will destroy forever his chances for growth and fulfillment. This can be accomplished either by goading him into some desperate action to relieve his pain or by distracting his attention with negative thoughts at some crucial moment so that a dire accident to himself or another occurs. In either case, the damage to his remaining confidence is catastrophic, and the subject's movement through life is irreversibly hampered or impaired. Thus, the subject suffers the tragedy of his own blindness, while the false self triumphantly applauds.

But the victory lasts only as long as the subject sustains the fantasy that nothing is more important than his own helplessness. Once he seeks to define himself in terms of accomplishment instead of regret, to strive toward what remains instead of yearning for what is lost, the true self can emerge from the shadow of the false one and the will to live can displace the will to cry. But renouncing the tragedy of helplessness requires the catharsis of pity and fear: pity for the pains suffered in childhood and fear that adulthood might repeat them. Rather than becoming more confident of his mature strength, as will any grown-up when successfully protecting the weakness of a child, the adult protecting his *own* childhood weakness becomes more vulnerable to it. This unfortunate paradox is explained by the origin of the vulnerability concerned: self-image pain. As the child withdraws in mortification from the mirror of parental judgment, he enters a domain where nothing exists but his pain and nothing matters but the wish for it to stop. But wishing for relief is more important than actual rescue; for the child now feels his dignity only when he hurts. He is safe from shame and worthlessness only when suffering from them, because then he can identify with piteous helplessness to be other than he is. Shame is replaced by self-pity for his unbearable plight.

Yet at some point and at a fundamental level, the adult must repudiate this psychological defense mechanism. For the important thing about a negative childhood is the effect one allows it to have. But the task

of repudiation is not an easy one, since it requires that the subject recognize his exploitation of his own pain. To understand the meaning of wisdom, one must first understand the meaning of folly. The subject must admit that the purpose of preoccupation with misery is to leave a trail of tears on his way through life, so he can always find his way back to childhood where nothing more was asked of him than to suffer the humiliation of failure. But the renunciation of weakness imposes the responsibilities of strength, a burden which a mentality accustomed to frustrated resentment never wants to bear. Life is sometimes like a jig-saw puzzle, vulnerable to disaster that can shatter it to pieces and requiring the willingness to reconstruct piece by piece, with patience. But a mentality bred on fantasy has no use for patience; for fantasy offers the illusion of instant gratification, and makes patience seem a waste of time. There is no end to the lies by which the false self seeks excuse from life. There can be, however, a beginning to the refusal to believe them.

Notes

[1] P. Elkisch refers to a *literal* parental mirror: "It is while he is in closest propinquity—in her lap—that the young child can use his mother's eyes as a mirror: there he sees himself . . ." (241).

[2] My account of self-pity neurosis relates to self-psychology as Peoples and Parlee describe it: "From the deeply entrenched Freudian model of instinctual drives, in which the personality is built up through the press of sexual and aggressive impulses in conflict with defenses against their expression, the analytic landscape has begun to shift to what are called *relational-structural* models, in which the personality—with all its nascent impulses, needs and desires—is understood to be centrally structured according to the pattern and quality of interactions with primary caregivers" (33).

[3] In the specular psychology of J. Lacan, self-knowledge involves *alienation* from self: the infant comes to know himself as a self only through identifying as an Other. The present paper relates obsessive self-consciousness to *refusal* of self. More precisely, preoccupation with the pain caused by the negative self-image serves the unconscious fantasy of not having to be a self, faced with the task of leading a real life.

[4]As the argument of Shengold shows, psychoanalysis has tended to interpret the negative reflection as an "unassimilated introject" or "unassimilated superego force" (111). In the present essay, however, the negative reflection ultimately concerns, not the unsynthesized superego figure in itself, but the will to exploit the overwhelming sense of vulnerability and helplessness which such a figure imposes. In this way, the individual identifies, not with the independence of the adult, but with the impotent dependence of the child.

[5]In conventional psychoanalytic theory, as A. J. Eisnitz indicates, "If a particular aspect of the self representation is connected with forbidden unconscious wishes, the superego causes aggression to be mobilized and directed against that aspect of the self representation" (281). But, in my interpretation, the reproaches of the superego are exploited by protective self-love in order to bar the ego from situations which ask too much of it.

[6]To Bergler, masochism arises when repressed rage at libidinal frustration is itself libidinized, and vented inside the child (6). In contrast, the present essay derives masochism from unconscious fantasies pertaining, not to the libido, but to the negative self-image. Bergler's theory assumes an innate self-image somehow produced by the libido, as when the infant learns to trust the maternal smile by connecting it with his own buccal relaxation after "the libidinous pleasure [of] sucking" (8). How the infant knows his own facial expressions, and educes causal explanations of them is not explained.

[7]Miller discusses the "true self" in the context of holistic psychology, where the term signifies the "transpersonal essence of human personality" (53).

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Mozart between the World Wars: The Testimony of C. M. Girdlestone

He asked me what I thought of the worthy Mozart and all his sins. I replied, however, that I should be only too happy to renounce all my virtues in exchange for Mozart's sins.
— Felix Mendelssohn

Charles B. Paul

Probably no composer has ever received such acclaim in the media and in musical performances as did W. A. Mozart during the bicentenary of his death in 1991. This "gigantic tribute" to Mozart involved "record companies, museums, publishing houses, libraries, and performing arts institutions in Europe, America, Japan, and anywhere else that Western classical music is appreciated" (Livingstone 77). Yet before the 1940s, Mozart had been dismissed by a large part of the educated public, and even of the music world, as lightweight, simple, emotionally arid, dainty, and as frivolous as the eighteenth century had presumably been.

Part of the re-evaluation of Mozart in the second quarter of this century was due to a man I had the very good fortune of meeting and corresponding with for two years, Cuthbert Morton Girdlestone (1895-1975). It was the great French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) who first brought Girdlestone and myself together. I had found his book, *Jean-Philippe Rameau*, invaluable when I was writing my doctoral dissertation and my first three published articles. Hence I was so bold as to strike up a friendship with him, first by correspondence, then by numerous meetings we held during my sabbatical leave in Paris in the spring of 1974. The copious letters he wrote to me contain a wealth of information and insights on France and England, French literature (which he taught), and the music of Rameau and Mozart. Since some of this material is of great historical value (and I wish I had written to him earlier), in this article I am

presenting excerpts from his letters discussing his life and his observations on the reputation of Mozart between the two world wars, Mozart's piano concertos, and the pioneering book Girdlestone himself wrote on these masterpieces. Some of his comments simply expand matters already broached in studies by Girdlestone and others, but many of these comments are new and often given in anecdotal form. (I've spelled out the abbreviations in the letters he wrote me and have translated the few foreign expressions.) To make sense of Girdlestone's comments, however, a brief history of Mozart's reputation from the early nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century is in order.

Mozart's Reputation

A number of causes account for either the neglect or the belittling of Mozart's music up to the 1930s, if not beyond. The premier cellist Pablo Casals (1876-1973) remembers that in his youth one of Mozart's "symphonies was used to fill up an empty space in a programme where the main dishes were Beethoven, Wagner, etc. He was thought of as a trinket, charming, delicious, yes—but a trinket all the same" (Solman 41). If we are to believe William Livingstone, matters had not greatly improved in the United States by the 1940s, when general audiences "still thought of Mozart as a dainty porcelain figure, a composer of deedle-deedle music, just tinkly tunes suitable for clocks or music boxes" (77). How different these views are from our own as well as from those of Mozart's contemporaries is best expressed by Dyneley Hussey.

> The formal perfection of Mozart's music . . . has led many people to regard it as no more than the polished, dainty, highly ornamented, and entirely happy product of an age of elegance. His contemporaries thought otherwise. To them the chief characteristic of his music was its passionate melancholy. They found in it difficulties and complexities similar in kind, if not perhaps in degree, to those which a modern audience encounters at a first hearing of a work by, say, Bela Bartok. (viii)

A second cause for the misapprehension of Mozart's music was put forward by Henry Raynor. He argues that the Romantic age, which influenced Western sensibility until about World War One, "was baffled by Mozart because his music never seemed to be a direct reflection of its composer's experience. Romantic artists (not only composers) and their critics expected any work of art to be closely associated with their lives." But, warns Raynor, "attempts to find Mozart in his operas are as absurd as efforts to find the voice of Shakespeare in the soliloquies of Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear or Othello" (140-41).

A third cause for the slighting of Mozart's music was the propensity of musicians and their audiences, especially after the mid-nineteenth century, to judge Mozart's music through Beethoven's. "By concentrating on those of Mozart's works felt to be akin to the 'sublime' and the 'demonic' in Beethoven—for instance, the D minor Piano Concerto and *Don Giovanni*—they fostered a tendency to Beethovenize which persisted in varying degrees throughout the century" (Ottoway 190). Despite the efforts of such outstanding music critics as Donald Tovey, W. J. Turner, and George Bernard Shaw to redress the balance in favor of Mozart and Haydn, the novelist Anthony Burgess remembers from his youth in the 1920s the widespread "assumption that Beethoven and his successors were sending messages while Mozart was merely spinning notes" (154).

This patronizing attitude was in keeping with a fourth cause for the slighting of Mozart's music, a cause E.J. Dent called a tendency "towards ethical aspiration" (11). We see it, Dent remarked, in Beethoven who, while he admired his predecessor's music, said that he could never write an opera on "a subject as immoral as those of *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*." Other people turned "away with horror and contempt" from both the music and the librettos on the specious argument that these operas (and *Così*) had been written in Italian, and that all Italian opera was riddled with "frivolities and insincerities" (Dent 177).

Nowhere is this slighting of Mozart's music better revealed than in the reception of the two genres Mozart excelled in, perhaps even surpassing other composers, namely, opera and piano concertos. In 1913 Dent authoritatively asserted that *The Abduction from the Seraglio* had "never attained real popularity anywhere, not even Germany," and that *Idomeneo* "never at any time became a regular repertory opera" (4). In Germany, in the first half of the nineteenth century, *Don Giovanni* could not become popular until it had been translated into German. Of the numerous translations, the favorite was one done in 1789 by C.G. Neefe, Beethoven's teacher at Bonn. It was definitely comic in style, as may be judged "from his list of characters. Don Giovanni becomes Herr von Schwänkerich; Don Ottavio, Herr von Fischblut; and Leporello, Fickfack" (Dent 175-76). Mozart's operas were treated with even less respect in France and Italy, where, until at least World War One, neither *The Magic Flute* nor *The Marriage of Figaro* drew large audiences. The Italians, Dent said reprovingly, "have shown quite plainly for over a hundred years that they have no use for Mozart at all," preferring first Rossini, then Verdi (Dent 8). Indeed, the latter was one of the few great composers without any interest in Mozart, sneeringly naming him a *quartettista*, "a composer of chamber music" reserved for the elite (Dent 8). Poor Mozart! He was too Italian for some Northern Europeans and too northern for some Italians!

Production of Mozart's operas in the United States was similarly limited before the Second World War. At the New York Metropolitan

Opera, for example, in the fifty-five years between 1883 and 1937, *Don Giovanni*, Mozart's most popular opera, was performed eighteen years only, being surpassed in number of years presented by twenty-five operas.[1] During those same years *Figaro* was played for ten years and *The Magic Flute* for nine years. No other Mozart opera was performed at the Met over those fifty-five years. Even when staged, Mozart's operas were often distorted, especially by being sung in a language other than the original—*Don Giovanni* in German, for example, and *Die Zauberflöte* in Italian—though this was sometimes the case with other composers' works as well. Since 1938, by contrast, *Don Giovanni* has become the tenth most-performed opera at the Met, with 25 productions in the forty-eight years until 1985; *Figaro* and *The Magic Flute* are also being performed at about twice the frequency of the earlier period, and other Mozart operas staged since 1938 include *Cosi, The Abduction, Le Clemenza di Tito,* and *Idomeneo* (Annals 1-13).

While Mozart's operas were often mutilated in performance, his piano concertos, with the exception of the D minor, were simply neglected. Yet they are, in Dent's words, the works "which represent his individual personality most intimately and completely" (88). One of the reasons for the low esteem in which these works were held during the last century, explains Dent, was the doctrine that the concerto as a genre, because it presumably was only a vehicle for virtuoso display, was necessarily inferior to the symphony (89). Indeed, virtuoso material and technique were what most pianists were raised on in the first half of that century and what they played in public. In his history of great pianists Harold Schonberg tells us that at that time they were brought up on a repertoire now hardly played. Anton Rubinstein, one of the greatest pianists of his day, "as a student in the 1830s, had a repertoire consisting of Hummel, Herz, Moscheles, Kalkbrenner, Diabelli and Clementi. No Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert." As Mendlessohn disgustingly exclaimed, in Munich even "the pianists had no idea that Mozart and Haydn had also composed for the piano. They had just the faintest notion of Beethoven, and considered the music of Kalkbrenner, Field and Hummel more classic and scholarly" (Schonberg 124-25).

The great pianist Arthur Schnabel sarcastically damned the musical taste of Vienna in which he was raised in the 1890s. "In this most musical city on earth, and in the midst of musicians," he had never heard of Mozart's piano concertos, the Hammerklavier Sonata, the Diabelli Variations, or the Goldberg Variations (27). In England things were no better with respect to Mozart. The influential historian of music Cecil Gray could as late as 1928 dismiss his piano concertos as "wayward and nonchalant in form, full of charming ideas which he hardly takes the trouble to work out" (King 46-47). Overall, says Schonberg, when early twentieth-century pianists played Mozart at all, they played him as if he were "but a

small-scale, rococo, pretty-pretty figure." Absent in their playing were "vigor, tension, full-scaled dynamics, and big tone and superb organization"—all elements essential to bring out what the great Mozart biographer Alfred Einstein called Mozart's "daemonic element" (Schonberg 422).

Since the 1930s, however, "an entire industry has grown up around the composer and his music. Musicologists have sought out neglected works. Conductors have explored the furthest reaches of his instrumental music. . . . Vocalists have developed a whole new specialty of Mozart singing" (Kupferberg 243-44). At least seventy Mozart societies have sprung up in fifteen countries, five of them in the United States (Kupferberg 244). As with nearly all pre-1800 music, that of Mozart was finally given its just due by performers, scholars (including Girdlestone), and the new media. What contributed to dispel the neglect and gross misunderstanding of his music so prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

Radio, television, video, and recordings—78s, LPs, cassettes, and compact discs—all contributed enormously to increase the musical literacy of the music-loving public and musicians' greater acquaintance with Mozart. Thanks to the radio and the record, especially the LP, his five great operas have "won a seemingly permanent place" in the British as well as the American, German, and Austrian repertoire (King 51). In addition, Herbert Kupferberg notes that in "an almost uncanny way, the Mozart symphonies all seemed to fit very comfortably onto one side of an LP." As for his piano concertos, Kupferberg adds, their first complete cycle in the United States "was given not in a hall but over New York station WOR. . . . Even television made an important contribution, with the now-vanished NBC Opera Theater producing English-language versions of *The Magic Flute* in 1956 and *Don Giovanni* in 1960, the latter with a cast that included Cesare Siepi and the young Leontyne Price" (Kupferberg 224-25).

During the critical period from the 1920s through the 1950s the most influential advocates of Mozart among performers were the composer-conductor Richard Strauss, the conductors Thomas Beecham and Bruno Walter, and the pianists Myra Hess and Lili Kraus. According to Bruno Walter (1876-1962), who worked as assistant conductor with Gustav Mahler at the Vienna Opera House at the beginning of this century, it was Mahler who convinced a skeptical public and the Opera's Board of Directors that Mozart was "box office." After Mahler's death in 1911, Walter as conductor continued to champion Mozart in both Munich (1913-22) and Vienna (1936-38). When Walter left Austria in 1938 he could exult that in both cities "Mozart had become real box office. More than Verdi, more than Wagner" (Solman 41).

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) also "contributed to the re-education of the public in operatic appreciation" (King 51). Indeed, many of Strauss's operas—not only *Der Rosenkavalier*, but also *Die schweigsame Frau*,

Ariadne, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and *Capriccio*—bear the imprint of numerous Mozart operas. Strauss was also influenced by Mozart in the writing of superb female voice duets (Krause 87, 177).

Furthermore, Strauss as assistant and then full Kappelmeister of the Munich Opera House (1894, 1896-98) revived *Cosi fan tutti*, then considered a trivial opera, and later, as joint director of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (1919-24), conducted *Don Giovanni* with the restored final sextet. The late George Marek, who heard many of his performances in Vienna, declared that Strauss's love of Mozart's music included virtually all of it. "He particularly admired the piano concertos" (72, 108-09, 248-49, 315). Yet these concertos took longer than Mozart's operas to gain public favor. Saint-Saëns's performances of twelve of these concertos in London in 1910 were not followed up in any country until a generation later, notably by the pianists Lili Kraus (1905-) and Myra Hess (1890-1965). However, it was the conductor and impresario Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961) who did more than any other musician to enhance Mozart's reputation at home and abroad, on the stage, in the concert hall, and in the recording studio.

Without any government subsidy, Beecham "recruited, trained and conducted—as well as maintained—three entirely new orchestras between 1909 and 1961 . . . the Beecham Symphony, the London Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra" (Jefferson 55). So widespread was his fame that between 1899 and 1960, excluding opera orchestras, Beecham guest-conducted 18 British and 44 foreign orchestras. In addition to promoting Mozart with his own orchestras and as a guest conductor for more than seventy years, he also edited the Mozart Requiem, presented (as he boasted) "almost the first *Cosi*" in London (Jefferson 115), translated into English two of Mozart's great operas (Jefferson 238), and played with his wife Betty eleven of the piano concertos which he deemed "the most beautiful compositions of their kind in the world" (Jefferson 238). Beecham's recordings of Mozart include five operas, ten symphonies, sundry overtures, and numerous concertos including two for the piano, K. 414 and K. 451 (Procter-Gregg 198).

Like the media and performances (live and recorded), scholarship too played a critical part in the "revival" of Mozart's music. Despite the belittling of this music before the 1940s, a number of scholars labored to effect a more accurate and deeper understanding of its quality. Among their pioneering works was a substantial biography published in 1828 by George Nikolaus Nissen, Constanze Weber Mozart's second husband; Ludwig Ritter von Köchel's thematic catalogue (1862) which, "as any music lover knows, had assigned a numerical sequence to the whole of Mozart's output," but also tried "to indicate printed or manuscript sources for practically every composition" (King 17, 34); and Otto Jahn's musical biography (published in 1867, revised by Herman Abert in 1919-21), noted

for its "lucid presentation of a huge mass of material, much of it new, collected by intensive research and, above all, critically assessed" (Alec Hyatt King in *The New Grove Dictionary*, IX, 464-65).

In the early part of this century Mozart scholarship included four outstanding works. Alfred Einstein's *Mozart, His Character, His Work* "summed up a lifetime's thoughtful study of the music and was "rich in new ideas and stimulating criticism" (King 40-41). Théodore de Wyzewa and Georges Saint-Foix's five-volume work broke new ground in Mozart studies by viewing his music "in relation to every scrap of music which he might have played" (King 38-39). And E. J. Dent and C.M. Girdlestone distinguished themselves by writing the apparently definitive treatment of the two genres Mozart excelled in—the opera and the piano concerto respectively.

Professor of music at Cambridge University, music critic, and translator, Dent (1876-1957) had first written a number of studies on Italian Baroque opera, including an authoritative biography of Alessandro Scarlatti, before he published his *magnum opus*, *Mozart's Operas: A Critical Study* (1913, revised in 1947 and 1955). This work became "a standard work, was translated into German in 1922, and has strongly influenced performers" (King 40). Anthony Lewis and Nigel Fortune point out that "given his research interests, it is not surprising that operatic activity in Britain owes Dent a special debt. He was involved in the historic production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at Cambridge in 1911, when the work was still practically unknown to the British musical public" (*The New Grove Dictionary*, V, 376). Furthermore, Dent's translation of this and other Mozart operas "did much to bring opera to a wider audience"—helped by his linguistic facility and his "easy literary style" (Radcliffe 5-9). Girdlestone wrote me, in a letter dated July 13, 1974, that in his youth Dent had been "an idol of mine because of his book on M's operas and his cult of the *Magic Flute*; he also introduced me to Rameau and we remained friends 'to the end'" (2).

C. M. Girdlestone

Girdlestone was born in 1895 in Bovey Tracy, Devon, England.[2] In a letter dated January 4, 1974, he told me that he was descended from an "undistinguished family," comprised of forgotten parsons, farmers, village weavers, all known as stemming from East Anglia, and some living in Los Angeles. The only exception to this genealogical obscurity, Girdlestone modestly wrote, was a third cousin of his father, an orthopedic surgeon who ended up as professor at Oxford University.

C.M. Girdlestone himself began his schooling at Southey Hall, Worthing, and continued it after 1906 at the Ecole Libre de I'Immaculée Conception and the Lycée of the city of Pau, near the Pyrenees mountains

in southwestern France. While at Pau he climbed the Pyrenees; six decades later, he was still walking long distances in these mountains, near the Cirque de Gavarnie at the age of seventy. I was not too surprised at this bit of autobiographical information, because when I visited him when he was seventy-nine years old, we walked long distances in the palatial park or grounds of St. Cloud (three stars in the Michelin Guide), where seven miles west of Paris he had retired.

He passed the Baccalauréat at Toulouse in 1912 and Bordeaux in 1913 and obtained the License-ès-Lettres at the Sorbonne in 1915. Another autobiographical note, written by Girdlestone on May 4, 1973, sheds further light on his schooling.

> My father intended me to go to Paris in 1914, after a further year at home with private lessons with one of the Lycée masters. His plan for me

> consisted in three years there, during which I should take the License-ès-Lettres at he Sorbonne and study music—piano, flute, "theory," etc.—at the Schola Cantorum. The pianist with whom I had lessons in Pau was a "scholiste" and an excellent advertisement for the Schola and the Schola idea must have come

> from him. A further spell in Germany was to follow. My dear father (God bless him!) "*voyait grand*!" [had big ideas]. I doubt whether I would have been equal to all this and whether I would have been content to imbibe for so many years without ever giving out. Fortunately, I think, for me, the world disaster of the war upset these ambitious plans and my years of Sorbonne and Schola study were cut down to one, October 1914-July 1915, after which a brief introduction to Cambridge and the war occupied me till 1919; by which time all thoughts of musical training had been given up.

The Schola Cantorum of Paris had been founded by the composer Vincent d'Indy and two musicians as a center for the study of Gregorian and Palestrinian music and, to a lesser degree, of pre-Romantic music. D'Indy is best known today as a pupil of César Franck and as the composer of the *Symphony on a French Mountain Air*. But as I had pointed out in an article published in 1972,[3] d'Indy, an ultra-nationalist and extreme rightist, had also established the Schola as an attempt to offset the presumably nefarious influence of Italian and German composers upon French music since the death of Rameau in 1764. As I sent Girdlestone a copy of my article, he provided me—in the same letter—with the following information about d'Indy and the Schola. In the boarding house he stayed in for nine months near the Schola on the Left Bank of Paris there were at the beginning of World War One

> only five students in residence, four of them *Scholistes*. . . . The Schola itself was well attended, mostly by women, with a few "unfits" and some neutral foreigners; many of the male teachers were of course mobilized.
>
> My attendance at his *solfège* classes—the rump of the intended studies!—and the nearness of the school put me in touch with the spirit of the place almost as much as if I had been a full-time *scholiste*. My future wife, whom I met only near the end of my stay, had of course fuller memories, as she was a violin student there for several years; the four music students in the boarding-house were also old hands and helped me to understand what life had been like before the war. One of them . . . simply idolized d'Indy, and every word that fell from the master's mouth was treasured up and

> retained; I learned a lot about the master's ideas from him.
>
> D'Indy himself I spoke to only once, at the *solfège* exam which he conducted. He asked me a poser; I think it was how many quavers there would be in a bar with a signature of 27/72, to which I answered (I think) 3/8. He murmured: "*Il raisonne bien*" [he reasons well], and went on to something else. He asked me whether I should be continuing my musical studies and I had to answer no. . . .
>
> He was a worshipper of Beethoven, as his book shows, his early music (*Le chant de la cloche*) was Wagnerian and he certainly admired Wagner's music, whatever he felt towards the man. He was highly contemptuous of Mozart and Haydn (whom he knew imperfectly, I think); in his introduction to W. Rust's sonatas he calls their sonatas "*recueils de formules*" [collections of formulas]. . . . But this sentiment was also Hubert Parry's, and indeed many other benighted minds in the post-Beethoven era shared it. . . .

Girdlestone entered Trinity College, Cambridge University, in the Fall of 1915, then served for three years with the British army in France and Egypt. He returned to Cambridge in 1919 until 1926, living there first as a student, then from October 1922 on for four years as a lecturer in French. He took his B.A. at that university in 1921 and his M.A. in 1923, when he also married Anne-Marie Micheletti, the former fellow student he had met at the Schola Cantorum.

In 1926 he was appointed Professor of French at Armstrong College, Newcastle, in the University of Durham (later King's College) and held that position until his retirement in 1960. At the University of Durham he served three times as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and once as Dean of the Faculty of Commerce. After his retirement he lived at St. Cloud until his death on December 10, 1975.

Between his teaching and administrative duties and frequent trips between France and Great Britain, he managed to write seven books and sundry articles for periodicals and encyclopedias. The two books on literature include a study of the great nineteenth-century Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral and a critical edition of Paul Claudel's *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, co-edited with A. Lytton Sells. He also wrote a biography of L-F.R. de Carbonnières (1755-1827), whose two pioneering works on the Pyrenees contain "remarkable descriptions of mountain scenery." Girdlestone

completed but did not publish *Church Architecture in Durham and Northumberland from the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century*. The three published books on music include *La tragédie en musique (1673-1750) considérée comme genre littéraire* (1972), *Jean-Philippe Rameau: His Life and Work* (in both English and French)—in my estimation one of the two best books on that much-neglected composer—and, of course, his book on Mozart (also in both French and English).

The Correspondence

When I corresponded with him for over two years and talked with him tête à tête for five weeks in Paris and St. Cloud, Girdlestone nearly always gave me the impression of wearing his vast erudition and his important contribution to musicology lightly. In that sense he was in the tradition of both English and French scholars writing until around World War Two. He saw nothing unusual in his having written books on French literature, Provençal poetry, eighteenth-century music, and northern English architecture. And despite the precise and learned knowledge of musical form, theory, harmony, vocalization, *et cetera*, which he displayed in his major works on music, he disclaimed possessing any special musical expertise. Yet, as cited above, he learned music from an early age and was good enough to be enrolled in the prestigious Schola Cantorum headed by d'Indy and to play in his orchestra. In fact, it was as an orchestra player that Girdlestone discovered Mozart's piano concertos. I'll let his own words speak of that momentous discovery.

> My own instrument was the flute, tho' I have strummed the piano since I was about four. The flute I worked at methodically—I daren't say professionally for I was always an amateur; the piano I never learnt seriously except for a few months with an excellent teacher in Pau who was a pupil of the Schola, and gave me tips in musical exposition similar to those my essay master gave me in literary ditto. I played the flute in University and other amateur orchestras for nearly 45 years and owe a great deal to that experience. Playing the Matthew Passion was probably what moved me most; also Brahms's *Requiem*; both these came back several times in my life. I haven't often played in Mozart concertos; I remember being terrified by the larghetto of K. 491 and the finale of K. 482. Actually, the first concerto I heard was the D minor, played at the Schola under d'Indy's

> baton, with a pupil as soloist. I cannot say whether the execution was good or indifferent, but it was reasonable enough to give me a *coup de foudre* [love at first sight], and to impel me to discover all others of his concertos I could find. The first I played in, oh irony! was the mighty C major, K. 503, with a quite inadequate ad hoc amateur band. . . . Here again, I was too struck by the grandeur of the work, and also by its difficulty, to ask myself how bad the rendering was! Both these concertos have remained my favorites. K. 503 is among the most badly played, especially the "side" movements, always taken too fast and too skimpily. (July 13, 1974, page 5)

There are scattered comments in his book about the reputation of Mozart when Girdlestone began writing about him. Two of these deserve quotation. The first is on the common view of Mozart as a kind of fop.

> If there is a tradition more popular than any other and slower to die, it is that of a dapper, powdered, beribboned and bewigged Mozart, the darling of the court and drawing-rooms of Vienna and expressing in his music nothing more than the superficial elegance and frivolity of eighteenth century aristocratic life. (*Mozart* 76)

The second is a wittily phrased comment on how common opinion before the 1940s drew distorted thumbnail sketches of some great composers.

> That opinion saw in Mozart "above all an entertainer—a 'divine' one, possibly, but an entertainer all the same. Comparable opinions saw in Beethoven nothing but the 'Titan,' in Bach, the mathematician,' in Haydn, the 'Papa,' in Chopin, the elegiac author of certain nocturnes. That Bach and Beethoven should have 'danced,' that Haydn and Mozart may have wept, that Chopin should have sung of energy and warlike spirit: this was cut out of their story." (*Mozart* 453)

Girdlestone's book abounds in many such passionate and witty statements, but for my money's worth the telling phrase, the restrained wit, the indignation couched in irony are nowhere better expressed by him than in the letters he wrote to me from 1973 to 1975. The most vivid and anecdotal comments were written in a long letter penned over two days (July 12 and

13, 1974), where he fleshes out some of the comments he had made in his book and where he adds anecdotes that round out the picture he had drawn earlier of Mozart's changing reputation.

> Now I must say how much your encomium of *Mozart and his Concertos* warmed my heart. I have lived through a historic period in the posthumous reputation of Mozart. When I was young, that is from 1913 onwards to, say 1930, Mozart "enjoyed" the same patronizing misunderstanding as French classical music.[4] It was not, however, limited by cultural frontiers: with a few honourable exceptions, it covered all "Western" lands, and resisted the more enlightened modern understanding, it seems to me, longer in the outlying areas like North America and Australia; at least the most recent expressions of it that I have come across have been in such non-European Anglophone countries, where some research might reveal traces of its survival.
>
> I went back to Cambridge in late 1919 and lived there till 1926 when I was appointed to Newcastle. It was in the years 1919-1923 that I explored Mozart more and more passionately and extensively, mostly on my piano with piano arrangements and my clumsy deciphering of scores in the *Gesamtausgabe* [the complete works of Mozart].
>
> . . . As I grew more convinced that I was right in my admiration so did I become more conscious of the ignorance or contempt around me.
>
> I remember my delighted surprize when a fellow undergraduate called Greg (the name has stuck), a horn player, told me how he thrilled to Mozart. He must have been the first to do so. I discovered a few others but none very emphatic in expressing their opinion. I remember another laddie in Newcastle (= after 1926), but I think his love was for a "1780" kind of music generally because, after hearing a J.C. Bach flute and string quartet, he said almost disappointingly: "I thought only Mozart wrote music like that." On the whole, even my

contemporaries at Cambridge still had the old-fashioned attitude. . . .

The chief focus of what Mozart cult there was in Cambridge was an elderly lady, wife of the University librarian, Francis Jenkinson, a good amateur pianist. She exaggerated airs of excessive frailty and *douceur* [gentleness, softness, sweetness] and her playing was mincing and rather languishing. (She was also a lover of Couperin and Rameau.) She could be irritating and I sometimes felt like shaking her or playing the Appassionata at her, ffff. But her love for Mozart, and understanding, was genuine, in spite of its expression (e.g., Isn't this beautiful? I don't think I can *bear* it? . . . and one expected a swoon.)

BUT she had two pianos, *and* she befriended the wife of a country parson who came in once a week to give piano lessons.This rather pitiful lady was engaged every Tuesday evening to play Mozart concertos on two pianos with the pseudo-old lady. (I say pseudo because although c. 45-50, she dressed like a grandmother and always wore a face cap.) . . . She must have been tired out by a day's pianoforte instruction and her playing was completely colourless. But she provided the orchestra and in due course I must have heard all the 23 concertos, including K. 242 in its two-piano version. I was aware of what was lacking in both ladies' execution but I did at least hear the works fairly complete. I remember that K. 453 and 456 I had never heard or played before then. . . .

Mrs. Jenkinson had admirers and well-wishers who *humoured* her curious whim for Mozart; I sometimes crossed swords with them. "So *restful*," said one old dame. "Almost reaching Beethoven," said an old man of the minuet of K. 516. One afternoon we sat in the Jenkinsons' beautiful, very English garden and Mrs. Jenkinson proposed suiting flowers with composers. She started off. Rameau = (I think) verbena (or lemon plant) (not bad for this

pungency.) The game went on till I crashed in with a resounding "Beethoven = a Sun Flower," which so shocked everyone that the game stopped.

Well, for aural knowledge of the concertos at an early stage I owe much enjoyment to Mrs. Jenkinson, though I make fun of her. . . .

C.B. Oldman, at the British Museum, was already an established Mozartian, a bit older than me. He showed me a moving tribute to Mozart by a classical scholar of an earlier generation, Fowler, which I still react to. And in 1919-21 appeared Abert's two fine volumes, which I read and digested in 1922.[5]

It was in the 1930-40s that the *nouvelle vague* [the new wave] began to triumph. When I was translating my book into English about that time I read bits of it to a critical friend. She was (and is) 8-1/2 years younger than me, and said that my expressions of defence of my hero were unnecessary, out of date, like banging at an open door: no one any longer held the views I was attacking. A series of Mozart concerts at a London theatre, mainly concertos, was attended by shoals of youngsters, bandying about Köchel numbers. Mozart was unmixed! I remember asking a chamber group at Dieppe [in Normandy], in 1920 or 21, to give a recital devoted to Mozart; I was told that a concert "*tout Mozart*" would be "*ennuyeux*," [that an all-Mozart concert would be boring.] All I obtained was K. 478 (a good choice, however). How taste had changed in 15 years! I think that, after 1930, the ancient contempt of Mozart (which d'Indy was great in expressing) became "passé," though it survived for a while.

What was so infuriating was that, whenever one said "Mozart," one was answered with "Bate-hóven!" (I have heard Bach dragged in sometimes to counter Rameau and Couperin).

A page from Girdlestone's July 13, 1974 letter.

Now I must say how much your encomium of <u>Mozart</u> & <u>his concs.</u> warmed my heart. I have lived thro' a historic period in the posthumous reputation of WAM. When I was young, that is from 1913 onwards to, say, 1930, WAM "enjoyed" the same patronizing misunderstanding as French classical music. It was not, however, limited by cultural frontiers; with a few honourable exceptions, it covered all "western" lands, and resisted the more enlightened modern understanding, it seems to me, longer in the outlying areas like N. America and Australia; at least the most recent expressions of it that I have come across have been in such non-European Anglophone countries, where some research might reveal traces of its survival!

I went back to Cambridge in late 1919 and lived there till 1926 when I was appointed to Newcastle. It was in the years 1919–1923 that I explored WAM more and more passionately and extensively, mostly on my piano with pf. arrs. and my clumsy deciphering of scores in the Gesamtausgabe. Some day I may write up, in self-complacent detail and senile garrulity, the stages of these Années de pèlerinage. Just now, I attend to manifestations of musical opinion generally as I came in contact with them. As I grew more convinced that I was right in my admiration so did I become more conscious of the ignorance or contempt around me.

I remember my delighted surprise when a fellow undergraduate called Greg (the name has stuck), a horn player, told me how he thrilled to Moz. He must have been the first to do so. I discovered a few others but none very emphatic in expressing their opinion. I remember another laddie in N/cle [= after 1926], but I think his love was for a "1780" kind of music generally because, after hearing a J.C. Bach flute & str. quartet, he said almost disappointedly: "I thought only Mozart wrote music like that". On the whole, even my contemporaries at Cambridge still had the old-fashioned attitude!

My real stays and supporters were a few exceptional members of an older generation. My discovery of Wyzewa & Saint-Foix was an event but for a long time only vols. I & II (1910) were published; the 3 others came in the middle and late 20's. [I did not meet S. Foix till 1939 or 40.] E.J. Dent was an idol of mine because of his books on Mo's operas and his cult of the <u>Magic Flute</u>, he also introduced me to Idomeneo and we remained friends "to the end". But he paid only occasional visits to Cambridge at that time.

The chief focus of what WAM cult there was in Camb. was an elderly lady, wife of the Univ. librarian Francis Jenkinson, a good amateur pianist. She exaggerated airs of excessive frailty and her playing was mincing and rather languishing. (She was also a lover of Couperin and Rameau.) She called the Waldstein and I sometimes felt like shaking her on playing the Appassionata at her ffff. But her love for WAM and understanding, was genuine in spite of its expressions (e.g. "Isn't this beautiful?" "I don't think I can bear it!" ... and one expected a swoon).

BUT she had two pianos, and she befriended the wife of a country parson who came in once a week to give piano lessons.

Readers might also be interested to learn the circumstances that led Girdlestone to write his book on Mozart as well as the comments he made about Mozart's piano concertos and the manner in which he felt they should be played. Girdlestone told me that he finished the last page of the draft on Mozart on May 12, 1937, while listening to the radio broadcast of George VI's coronation (Letter of July 13, 1974). But, says Arthur Hutchings, a colleague of his at the University of Durham, the publication of this book, first written in French and published in 1939 by Fischbacher in Paris, "coincided with the outbreak of World War Two; copies were difficult to obtain, and its importance as a commentary upon a widely misunderstood subject was not fully reognized until an English translation appeared in 1948" (In *The New Grove Dictionary*, VII, 407).

One of the reasons Girdlestone decided to write about Mozart's piano concertos is because nowhere "in all the composer's work is there a form wherein he expressed himself so completely." Having been written from Mozart's eighteenth to his 36th and last year, "they are the most varied and most extensive witness to his artistic life." For this reason and because no two concertos are alike, his music "should be played as it is and the pianist should be like it, vigorous, graceful, delicate, merry, witty, sombre, sparkling, deep in turn, and always clear" (*Mozart* 16, 55, 495).

Responding to my compliments on the overall format of the book, Girdlestone wrote on July 13 and 14, 1974:

> Of course I relish your praise, but particularly because you praise me for doing what I tried to do = mingle the personal and the factual. I was always afraid of giving just the geography of a movement and so I put a lot of myself into it, realizing nevertheless the danger of sentimentality. . . .
>
> I tried to vary as much as possible the presentation of each concerto. It was unthinkable to introduce, and deal with, 23 works in the same way—a series of program notes. As you have noticed, I enjoyed bringing the 'in and out of time' bit in K. 456. I remember seeking to vary K. 459 very willfully. And I always sought to keep the concerto studied within the stream of Mozart's work. I called the book "Mozart *et* ses concertos pour piano" and was infuriated when some fool at Cassell's altered the title to "Mozart's piano concertos," which incidentally made nonsense of a remark on p. 491, para. 2 (Dover)[6]; I got it put right in the two American reprints /editions;

> the French one has never been touched. The virtue of this genre in WAM is precisely that, with only a few breaks, to follow it takes you through all the significant years of his life. But I could go on in this strain indefinitely!

I too could go on citing indefinitely from Girdlestone's letters on such interesting matters as French nationalism, British culture, architecture, and Rameau. I will forbear from doing so except to bring up two sundry matters on Mozart that Girdlestone briefly mentioned. He agreed with such eminent critics as Donald Tovey that it was not Beethoven who was the first "to emancipate the orchestra" in the concerto. It had already been done even before Mozart, by J.S. Bach and his son Karl Philip Emmanuel, among others. For this very reason, "a good execution" of Mozart's piano concertos

> depends still more on the conductor than on the soloist. An intelligent conductor and a good orchestra with a mediocre pianist will give better result than a first class soloist with a conductor and a band which are not his equals. For each instrument in turn is treated as a soloist and should be conducted accordingly. (*Mozart* 496)

In the latter part of 1973 I mentioned in a letter that I had been teaching a course on autobiography and the confessional novel at San José State University. Girdlestone replied that, excepting St. Augustine's *Confessions*, J.J. Rousseau's *Confessions* written between 1764 and 1770 was the first confessional book of any significance. What was new here, Girdlestone went on to say, was "the element of baring one's soul." Then he added this very revealing observation:

> I consider that this self-expression comes into music c. 1750, as well. Long ago, a reviewer of my *Mozart* called his concertos a sort of musical confession or journal—I forgot the exact term; and indeed self-expression is something new in music. If one finds it earlier it must be very exceptional. I am sure that this hangs together with the literary 'confessions' or journal and is, or course, just another manifestation of the same 'pre-Romantic' spirit. (Letter of January 27, 1974, page 4).

On the same date Girdlestone also told me that the first edition of his Mozart book—the one he wrote in French—had been published at his own expense. However obscure Girdlestone's name had been before World War Two, the book, in its English version, received only rave notices from the

reviewers after the war. Here is a sample: "a subtle monograph" (Einstein 346); "by far the most valuable study of any group of the instrumental music" (King 40); "remarkable work" (Witold 45); "a masterly essay" (*Julliard Review*, 2.2 (Spring 1955): 49). The strongest praise, however, came from Herbert Weinstock, one-time music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune*: "astonishing book," "remarkable insight and unfailing sensitivity," "a book worth placing beside 'Mozart's Operas' by Edward J. Dent," and "altogether, this is an important and endlessly useful book" (*New York Herald Tribune*, September 21, 1952, Book Review).

Weinstein and the other critics were right on the mark. We can thank Girdlestone and other Mozartians (musicologists, critics, performers, impresarios, *et cetera*) of the interwar period for the wide range of Mozart's music we can play and listen to as well as for our unspoken premise that, as Girdlestone himself put it, "Mozart's musical thought could be profound when expressed in other keys than D minor and G minor." In the same article he was speaking for all of these Mozartians when he said that the homage proferred to Mozart during the bicentennial of his birth in 1956 marks "the distance we have travelled since the 1920s, when some very *grosses légumes* [big shots] still looked on Mozart as very *petite bière* [thin stuff]" (*Blackfriars* 486-87).

Notes

[1]In order of popularity these 25 operas were: *Aida*, *Lohengrin*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Gounod's *Faust*, *La Traviata*, *Tristan*, *Die Walküre*, *Pagliacci*, *La Bohème*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Rigoletto*, *Tannhaüser*, *Il Trovatore*, *Carmen*, *Das Rheingold*, *Parsifal*, *Die Götterdammerung*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Tosca*, *Siegfried*, Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Hansel und Gretel*, Massenet's *Manon*, and *La Gioconda*.

[2]The biographical information on Girdlestone is drawn from his letters to me, standard music reference books, and *Essays Presented to C.M. Girdlestone*. University of Durham, King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1960, a *Festschrift* written by former students and others upon his retirement.

[3]"Rameau, d'Indy, and French Nationalism." *The Musical Quarterly*, 58.1 (January 1972): 46-56.

[4]Girdlestone took the phrase "patronizing misunderstanding" from the opening of my review of Rameau's *Complete Theoretical Writings* in the Spring 1974 issue of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, pp. 148-54. I had earlier sent him a copy of this review, in which I used this phrase to describe the attitude most people outside France hold towards French music.

[5]W.W. Fowler, *Stray Notes on Mozart and His Music*. Edinburgh, 1910 and Hermann Abert, *W.A. Mozart*. Leipzig, 1919-21, an enlarged fifth edition of Otto Jahn's *W.A. Mozart*.

[6]This paragraph deals with the E-flat string quintet, K. 614, discussed in the chapter covering Mozart's last piano concerto, K. 595. The paragraph ends as follows: "As our book is entitled, not: *Mozart's Piano Concertos*, but: *Mozart and His Piano Concertos*, we consider we have the right to dwell upon it at some length, even though we have got beyond the last of our composer's concertos."

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Interview

Ursula K. Le Guin at SJSU: "The Future Is a Metaphor"

Lowell H. Holway

Author of fifteen novels, several volumes of poetry, essay collections, children's books, and literary criticism, Ursula K. Le Guin is a writer skilled in many genres, although she is most celebrated for her writing of science fiction and fantasy. Her best-known works include *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed*, the *Earthsea* quartet, and *The Lathe of Heaven*. She has won five Hugo Awards, four Nebula awards, the National Book Award, and the Harold D. Vursell Memorial Award from the Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

The following comes from an April 29, 1993, interview with Ursula K. Le Guin that was conducted during her visit to San José State University. Le Guin's visit was part of San José State University's 1993 Major Authors Series.

Berkeley Childhood

Q: I'd like to start with a question about growing up with your parents. Your father, of course, was an anthropologist, and your mother was interested in the interaction of cultures. She's the author of a classic study, *Ishi in Two Worlds*. I'm interested in that in particular because your mother published her first book a little before you started to publish. What was your mother's influence as a role model for you?

Le Guin: She wasn't the greatest model for me because she didn't start writing until she was in her 60s or 70s.

Q: But when your mother published *Ishi in Two Worlds*, you were just starting off as a writer.

Le Guin: Well, she was already published; she had had considerable success with *The Inland Whale*. One of her children's books had also already been published by Parnassus, a Berkeley children's book publisher. They made gorgeous books. So although she started late, Ma got going fast. I had been sending stuff out and getting it rejected, except for the poetry, year after year—methodically receiving rejections. I was just happy one of us was getting published. We weren't competitive about it. But she was kind of upset. She thought her getting ahead of me was going to be destructive to me. She actually cried about that. My feeling was at least one of us got a book published.

Q: But, of course, that was long after you left home.

Le Guin: Yes, but we came back every year; I had kids and she wanted to see the grandchildren.

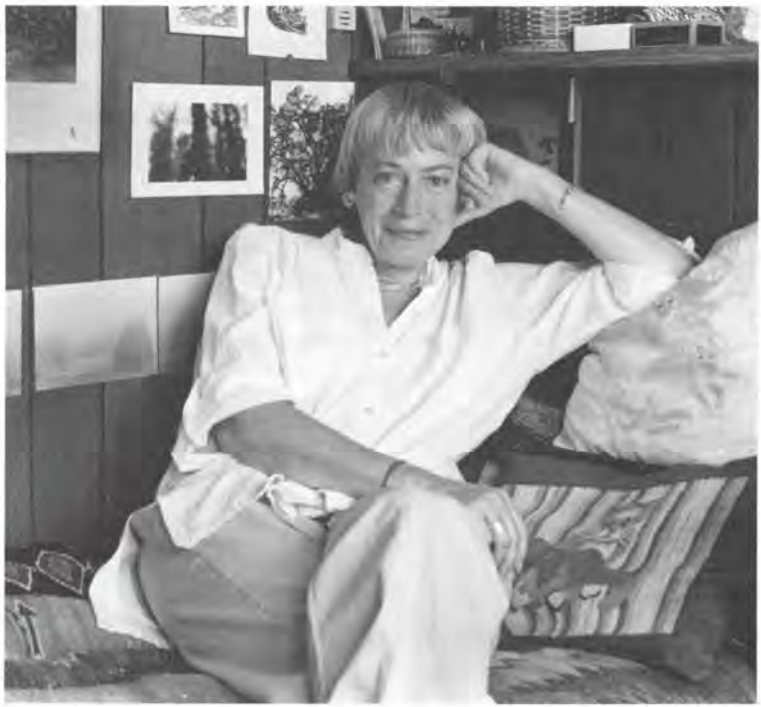
Q: You were born and grew up in the Bay Area, specifically in Berkeley. I wonder what kind of influences you think growing up in the Bay Area had on you.

Le Guin: What can you say about growing up in a place? Berkeley was a great place to grow up in during the 30s and 40s—a lovely little city. We spent summers in the Napa Valley and never went anywhere else. I had been up as far as the Oregon border once by car, visiting some of my father's Yurok friends when I was about nine. That was the only trip I ever made. I just lived here. I was very stable, very middle class, you know. I had three older brothers, all of whom became academics, too. It is addictive. I was in training to be one, but I married my doctorate instead of getting it.

Q: You started your career as a published writer once you arrived in Portland, a city not then considered a magnet for writers. Yet the Northwest is home to quite a number of science fiction writers now.

Le Guin: It is now. It sure wasn't then.

Q: Was there a group of you? Did you feel as if there were other people writing there when you were starting off?



Photograph by Marian Wood Kolisch; used by permission.

Le Guin: I have to tell you I really don't think in these terms. I'm a writer, I write—it doesn't matter where. If you want to go lick publishers' feet, you can, but it doesn't get anybody much of anywhere, unless you want to play certain games, games which I don't play. If you want to write, you write, and it really doesn't matter where you are. It's not like being an actor or a musician. As a musician, you have to be in a place where they play music, or else you don't get a job. But as a writer, so long as you have your contacts in New York or wherever your publisher is, it doesn't matter where you are.

Portland was where my husband got a job. We'd been living in Moscow, Idaho, which was a little too far afield for both of us. When he got a job at Portland State, we went to Portland and thought it was a really cool city and nice place to bring up kids. That was it. We wanted to live on the West Coast. He's from Georgia, but he'd fallen in love with the West, fortunately. So living there had nothing to do with my writing at all. But Portland is a nice city for a writer if you don't want to be bothered. Portland's a little bit Bostonian—they don't make a fuss. I like that—you don't have to play the hero all the time.

Well, there was me, and after a while there was Vonda McIntyre in Seattle and Kate and Damon Knight in Eugene. Then came an influx into the Bay Area, Bob Silverberg and a lot of other people from the East. The West Coast is heavy science fiction at this point; it certainly wasn't when I started.

A Writer in Portland

Q: Did you have friends who were writers in the Northwest or in Portland in particular during the 60s?

Le Guin: I never hung around in literary circles. I was very lone-wolfish as a young writer. There were some older writers who were very kind to me and who tried to help me get published, but I didn't hang out in a literary group. We just found our friends where we found them. There is now a literary scene in Portland, a very interesting group. But it's not a tight group. I do workshops with young writers and people who teach workshops—that's really my circle. It's a teaching-and-writing circuit rather than people sitting around being writers.

Q: What kind of support do you have as a writer?

Le Guin: I'm not in one of these famous networks of famous writers. You could do that in Portland if you worked awfully hard at it, but I'm not that friendly. What exists now—which didn't exist at all when I was a young writer—are self-generated workshop groups, peer groups. I'm in two of those. I have a fiction group—there are seven or nine of us—and a poetry group. Each of them meets once a month. We bring work and we criticize it mutually. I'm with some excellent writers in both of those groups. It's very exciting, and I love it because we're all taking it very seriously. Also, as I get older and lazier, this forces me to write; I've got to have a story or poem for that group. It puts a little fire into me, to make me write.

Q: Are these groups like the workshops you teach?

Le Guin: Yes, it's very similar. My teaching uses the same workshop technique, as egalitarian as possible. Everybody reads, everybody criticizes. They have the same process, only one is a peer group, while in a teaching situation, I do have to ultimately take responsibility.

Q: What sort of workshops do you teach? Do they contain unpublished, unknown writers?

Le Guin: Well, it runs the gamut. My favorite workshop is called "Flight of the Mind," which is only for women, on the MacKenzie River—it's absolutely terrific. Those go from completely unpublished beginning writers—usually not very young, in their late 20s and up, but beginners—up through quite accomplished writers.

Q: I wanted to talk about your graduate work. You studied at Columbia in Italian and French Renaissance literature. I was wondering how that influenced you. I thought it was an unusual beginning.

Le Guin: I was doing it so I could support myself, so I could teach, hopefully, something more than beginning French. I was working towards a doctorate—the union card—so I could live, because I knew that I couldn't survive on my writing for a long time to come, if ever. Very few people do. And back then—we're talking the 50s—there weren't workshops and writing programs. There were some creative writing courses; most of them were ghastly. Some man standing up there telling people how to write. Oh God! They were awful.

So, if you couldn't live off selling your work, there weren't very many options. Either you taught English, or you taught French, or you were a night watchman. My talents were definitely toward language, but I never wanted to take English. I didn't want to be told what to read in my own language. That would have interfered with what I had to do. Instead I went off into foreign languages, which I loved. Obviously all this French and Italian stuff got into me; it got into my bones. But I don't know how it comes out in my work.

Q: Does it affect your poetry at all?

Le Guin: Probably. I don't know. I do it, but I don't analyze it.

Science Fiction

Q: In your essay "Why are Americans afraid of Dragons" you say at one point that an adult is "a child who has survived." I suppose you are referring to the difficulties of growing up.

Le Guin: In part. It takes considerable strength of will and character to grow to adulthood when you come right down to it. Of course there are a great many people who reach adult years without having bothered to grow up.

Q: Science fiction has changed a lot since you started publishing thirty-one years ago. It's taught in universities, and 1800 titles a year are being

published in the science fiction/fantasy genre. I was wondering what you have to say about that change in popularity.

Le Guin: Well, that's a huge question. First, about science fiction and academe, yes, it is being taught. It's not as commonly sneered at or dismissed. Not everyone says "Of course I don't read that!" anymore. But there's still a lot of that. The canon is pretty badly chipped, but the canon still remains realism. I was at a meeting of the International Association for Fantasy and the Arts, a very good academic meeting, in Florida. A lot of the people there were members of the Science Fiction Research Association, which is the academic entity of people who teach science fiction in high school and colleges; they're very nice people. And I think a lot of those people have paid for their interest in science fiction. They're not rising to the top in their English departments. They have been marginalized. We haven't won that fight by a long shot, and I think people should be aware of that. Realism is still the only fiction identified as "literature"—a gross error in fact and taste.

But looking at it from the point of view of what's being written rather than what's being studied, I feel good about science fiction now. I spent this last year being an editor of the *Norton Book of Science Fiction.* Norton finally decided it was time, and that in itself is a significant move. But they didn't seem aware that science fiction was taught in schools. I mentioned this to them because I wanted an academic, a friend, as co-editor—Brian Attebery. They said, "Do they teach science fiction in schools?" I said yes, indeed it is!

Anyway, I spent a year reading science fiction from 1960 through 1990, the book's time period. I hadn't read a lot of stuff from the 80s. I had ODed in the 70s, stopped reading science fiction. I was delighted to see how many good writers have been coming out, good young writers, good middle-aged writers.

Q: How did you come to work on the *Norton Book of Science Fiction*?

Le Guin: I am told that, over the years, several notable people in the field had approached them and said, "Don't you think it's time to do a Norton book of science fiction?" And they said, "Oh, no, no." Our editor, Daniel Conaway, is a young man; he loves cyberpunk; and I assume that he went to them and said, "It's time to do it." And so they said, "All right, do it."

Q: So in a sense you're helping expand the canon yourself.

Le Guin: I hope so. It's a beautiful book. We've got sixty-seven stories from 1960 through 1990. And I must say there's not a story in that book

that we don't like. All three of us who edited it—Karen Fowler has also worked on it— like all these stories, which is really saying something. Usually, in an anthology, you end up with some stuff you put in for academic reasons or something, but we didn't do that. We just liked the stories.

Q: There are about half a dozen doctoral dissertations written about you, as well as many books, book articles, and journal articles. What do you think of all the attention? Are you able to keep up with all the scholarly interest in your work?

Le Guin: Well, most of them don't even tell me they're doing it. I do get some letters. I get interminable letters from South Africa or Italy or somewhere saying "May I ask you a few questions?" I say, "All right," and then I get eight pages of questions asking, "What is your spirituality?" and things like that. It can be a little problematic, but people have to write theses about something.

Q: You say you overdosed on science fiction in the 1970s; you said you stopped reading science fiction for a while. I'm interested particularly in your shift into realism in the 70s.

Le Guin: What shift? The first two stories I published came out within a month of each other. One was realistic fiction, set in my made-up Central European country, the other story was a fantasy. I've always written both. It's just that I got typecast. Malcolm Bradbury says, "Once a writer is known for one thing, it is almost impossible to do anything else, even if you do. It is with genres as with sports cars; once inside one, you will never get out of it again—except perhaps by death or the taking of a pseudonym, whichever is easier."

Q: And you were paid for the fantasy.

Le Guin: That was fairly influential on me at that point, but it didn't make me stop writing the other stuff. It's funny how you break through—no matter when you break through, it seems like it opens like a door.

Q: I was thinking of more of *Orsinian Tales*. You had incredible success with *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. Within five years or so, you were being taught as a classic. . . .

Le Guin: A 15-minute classic.

Q: That's right; suddenly you were being taught on college campuses. I wonder about the pressure of suddenly finding yourself considered a classic in science fiction. A book like *Malafrena* could have been a new world to conquer, or on the other hand, maybe it was just getting away from the expectations of a suddenly vast readership that you found yourself stuck with.

Le Guin: I'm not very responsive to that kind of pressure. I never wanted to "be a writer." I wanted to write and publish, but I didn't want to play writer, I didn't want to be that person, like I'm being right now. This was not what I went into it for, and it's nowhere near the center of it. The writing and the teaching are the center. The first draft I wrote of *Malafrena* goes back into my mid-twenties, so it was in no way in response to anything happening in the 60s. It was a response to the fact I had published enough that publishers were willing to take a chance on me. Putnam wanted another book—that was the only pressure. I said, after whatever it was I'd just written, "I don't have anything ready unless I revise *Malafrena*." My editor said, "I always wanted you to revise *Malafrena*." So I did, and that's how it happened to come out then. Of course, it wasn't a revision, it was total rewrite.

Q: To some, the term "writer" describes someone who writes. How do you distinguish between a "writer" and someone who "plays writer"?

Le Guin: When I talk about "playing writer," I'm talking about being a public figure. It consists often of a certain amount of public behavior. Sometimes it consists of playing a role, acting the role of the artist. What I was trying to say was—maybe it's my Germanic heritage or something—but I was just interested in getting work done rather than in playing any role of being a writer. It's complicated. I discovered that I love to do readings, performing. I love to get up in front of an audience and read to them. That's a performance art, and I'm very interested in doing performance poetry, in which the writer and the actor sort of become the same person. So it's very complicated. I can't give you a simple answer.

Q: I was wondering if you could give me some general information about the background of *Orsinian Tales*.

Le Guin: In my early twenties, Orsinia was the first place that I began to hit my stride in writing about. Some of those stories are actually older than stories that were published earlier. I began being published as a science fiction/fantasy writer—as sort of a genre writer. After I had gotten a reputation there, the publishers were willing to take risks on me that they hadn't been willing to earlier. At that point I could publish *Orsinian Tales*

individually and as a collection, as well as *Malafrena*, a novel which takes place in the same not-very-heavily-invented central European country.

Q: You've made comments in your essays about realistic fiction that make it sound as if you never write anything realistic. For instance, I have one quotation here from 1971 in which you describe science fiction, and then you say all the rest is either "politics or pedantry or mainstream fiction, may it rest in peace."

Le Guin: Yes. I was writing for the in-group there. You get incredibly defensive in science fiction, particularly back then when 95% of the time you were simply dismissed as if you were a prostitute. Still sometimes when I'm introduced to people, they get that funny look, and they say, "Oh, yes, my children have read your stuff." There is incredible arrogance and disdain toward any of the genre fields. So when you get in a cheerful little ghetto, like science fiction was in the 60s, you do tend to wave your elbows and say provocative things. I still do. It's a nice ghetto! It's just that I don't want to stay in the ghetto all the time.

Q: Speaking of the science fiction ghetto, I heard you compare literature and genre writing in an interview. You said something to the effect that there is what the critics call literature, and then there is what people actually read.

Le Guin: Yes. Of course, that isn't true. Obviously, people also read Dickens and Toni Morrison, thank goodness. I was talking about the exclusive identification of realism with "literature"—it is so phony. So one says things like that to irritate.

Q: That reminds me of what you were saying about the expectation for you to "play writer," to go on book tours, and to be interviewed.

Le Guin: The book tour expectation is economic. The publishers have discovered they can save money by making the author do all the PR work. I have seen authors nearly kill themselves on book tours. They're told that they ought to do this and that it's up to them to sell their book, but why the hell is it up to the writer to sell the book? What's a publisher for? You know, they put up the money, they make the book, and they should sell the book. They're just duffing out on that. It makes me very cross. They milk their writers.

Q: In the early days, though, what was it like as a young writer who was probably grateful for the attention on the one hand, but intimidated on the other?

Le Guin: Yes, oh yes, it's very scary when you first get out. Now it is so commonplace. Every spring and autumn, the writers come through in great flocks driven by the PR people. They do readings in every bookstore in town, and then they pass on to the next town, and the next herd comes through. It's getting a little bit routine. I love doing readings, but a book tour is a real killer, unless you are very energetic or very young. It's a terrible thing to do to a middle-ager. They always, of course, do both readings and signings together. If you're popular, you can be there for three or four hours sitting in a bookstore talking to a new person every two minutes. We're not politicians; we're just artists. We're not really good at that sort of thing. Or it's not good for us, or for our work.

Le Guin's Law

Q: In "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" you discussed the inverse correlation between fantasy and money, calling it "Le Guin's Law." Does Le Guin's Law still apply today?

Le Guin: It used to be true before they invented the paperback baloney-fantasy that's ground out by the yard. When I said science fiction is in good shape, I was not including fantasy. I'm not sure whether fantasy is in very good shape or not. There certainly are some good writers, but the field as a whole is very fragmented, full of baloney.

Q: Is there more of a market for science fiction stories than there is for realistic short stories?

Le Guin: When I started there was a good deal of market for realistic short stories. In the 70s and early 80s, most of those magazines disappeared, and even now, there are not a lot, though it's better than it was. I used to hate to teach young writers to write realistic short stories because there was no market. You had to tell your students, "Here's a wonderful little art, but you may not be able to sell any of it!" You can get it published in the literary magazines, which don't pay and mostly have a small readership. Unless you can break into *Kenyon Review* or something, you get a couple of hundred readers, which is a minimal return for all that work. But, you know, artists are crazy; they'll go ahead and do that.

Now there are a few more realistic fiction markets. However, it still is much easier to break in as a science fiction writer with short stories. That's how most of them do start, although you can start with novels, too.

There's still several major science fiction magazines that pay; they don't pay a lot, but they pay a little, and they're professional. They come out every month or two. They have large readership, so you know you have readers, which is, after all, important to a writer.

Q: You sometimes complain about a particular brand of science fiction, in America, that consists of nothing but weapons and space ships.

Le Guin: You're quoting from way back. That stuff still exists, even the Jerry Pournelle side of science fiction, but it's the other side of science fiction from what I do.

Q: Do you think fantasy is more attractive to female writers than science fiction is?

Le Guin: Everybody always says that, then they count the figures, and it's not so. It's not a feminine field at all. All the founders of fantasy are male writers, including the major one—Tolkien. Surprisingly enough, women came into fantasy probably later than they did into science fiction. The readership seems to be absolutely across the board. You can get figures on this stuff from *Locus* magazine that Charlie Brown puts out in Oakland. It's a very interesting little trade magazine for the science fiction and fantasy fields. He takes polls every year by age, gender, job, status, information like that. It lists who writes and who reads, and it's absolutely fascinating. One curious thing is that the readership gets older and older every year. I mean, it's not that the young aren't reading it, but the old people keep reading.

Q: I heard an interview you gave in which the interviewer confused a statement made by Genly Ai for something you had said as yourself. Do you often find an expectation for you to be like your characters or for you to espouse their views.

Le Guin: Oh, yes. I do it, too, to other novelists. And many times people have met me and said with real disappointment, "But you're so short!" I don't quite understand this. Yes, I'm short. I grew as far as I could! Are writers supposed to be eight feet tall?

Q: I was wondering if that applies to confusing you with Ged from *A Wizard of Earthsea*, or characters like Virginia Herne and David Hall from *Sea Road*. Do they confuse you and your husband Charles with your characters?

Le Guin: That hasn't happened too much. That is one blessing of writing over on the fantasy-edge of things—people realize that it is made up. Some people who read realistic fiction think it all comes straight out of the artist's life, and some novelists foster that belief, talking about using their friends and all that stuff. I guess some authors do work that way. I don't. There is sometimes confusion in people's minds. They really confuse fiction and nonfiction. Some people really don't know the difference, and that worries me—that's getting a little toward paranoia.

Q: Wouldn't it worry you more if they confused the science fiction with nonfiction?

Le Guin: Some of them do. Some of them do a little damage to their heads with various substances and then the lines get really blurred. That's one reason I have an unlisted telephone number.

Q: You said once that if a character doesn't have a will of its own, the character may be dead, stillborn.

Le Guin: Well, it is kind of mystical. None of us seem to be able to explain it or say more than the fact that characters do act like split-off personalities: they get a will of their own, they say things you don't expect, they do things you don't expect. You have to figure out why they're doing that, and then quite often you have to adapt what you thought the book was going to be, in order to follow this new development.

I think any psychologist could probably think up some good explanations of how this works. For instance, it's a little bit like guided imagery, where you deliberately start a fantasy in your mind as a psychological, therapeutic technique. I've done that technique, and it's not that different from thinking up a novel, except in the one, you're trying to do something therapeutic for yourself; in the novel, you're pursuing an object outside yourself, which is a work of art. And that difference is immense.

Once I was writing a little book called *Eye of the Heron*, in which I thought I had a hero. However, the hero insisted upon getting himself killed off about a third of the way into the book. I kept saying, "Hero, you can't do this! Please, I have this book, there's more book!" Still he did it, so I was stuck. I thought I had known where the story was going. I had to realize very gradually that the story had a heroine, that *she* was going to carry this story, and that this was the first time that I had actually had a woman carry the central story. Earlier, as a young writer, I'd mostly written about men, in both realism and in science fiction. It was a tremendous change in my own direction, and I learned it through what the character did. So it's not as

if it's my fault or to my credit; it just happened. Total irresponsibility. Artists love to claim irresponsibility. Don't believe them.

Ambiguity in Good and Evil

Q: In some of your works, like *Eye of the Heron*, the good and bad are completely good and bad. On the other hand, in works like *The Left Hand of Darkness*, there's a great deal more ambiguity in the presentation of good and evil. When you start a book, do you have in mind whether or not you're going to write a polemical book?

Le Guin: I did in one case: *The Word for World is Forest*. That was Vietnam. I was writing a polemical novel and I made no bones about it. I cast the story in terms more ecological than having to do specifically with the war, but the parallels are obvious, and one of the characters is Vietnamese. It's noticed—there are arrows pointing.

Regarding *Eye of the Heron*, I will defend it as not being as simplistic as everybody says. I think there's stuff going on in that book that people don't want to notice. The bad guys are kind of bad, but what do you do with a bunch of Botany Bay Brazilians, you know? They didn't have a very good start. On the other hand, our heroine is one of them, and her father is not a bad man. He's trapped.

Everybody says it has a happy ending; I think they're crazy! That ending is not happy. Those people are walking off, seventy of them, into a wilderness. They probably won't make it. Who would think they're going to make it? I've always been puzzled by the response to that ending, but people choose to see the book as a simplistic parable. But I say it ain't. You always get defensive about the book that's pushed aside.

Q: With regard to your characters coming to life almost by themselves, Ged is one of your characters you describe as having come to life. Then later, after the first three *Earthsea* books, you said that he said, "That's it, there's no more." However, Ged came back in *Tehanu*.

Le Guin: Yes. I had an uncomfortable feeling about not following up on Tenar, a feeling that I had not finished the story as a whole. However, I knew that Ged had no more adventures, so when I started writing *Tehanu*, I was totally confused about what was going on. It took all these past sixteen years of feminism and living for me to figure out what the rest of the story was, and to figure out how to handle a Ged who had lost his power—how to do that without simply drawing a picture of humiliation and defeat. I had to come to a very complicated series of realizations to be able to write that book. Then what happened was that it wasn't so much Tenar that came alive, it was the child, Therru. She was the character that gave me that

book. I didn't have it until she appeared, and as soon as she appeared, there was the book. Oh, this is what this is all about! The ultimately powerless person, the abused small girl child. It's about the low man on the totem pole, right? So that's what gave the book to me.

Q: Where do you usually start a novel? Do you start with a character or an idea, or is it different each time?

Le Guin: It's different each time. Sometimes it's a piece of scenery, and sometimes some phrase will start resonating. Sometimes it's a flicker of a plot for a story, like two people in some kind of relationship. It's always different. You just have to be listening and waiting, and then you realize that this is one of those seeds that's going to grow into something, and you grab it. I think most writers scribble notes down, meaningless sentences in which they feel there might be a story.

Q: How real are your books to you when you are writing them?

Le Guin: That's a very interesting question—a very interesting, unanswerable question. You're talking about where artists, particularly storytellers, live when they're making up a story. Of course I don't confuse this with my real life. But where a dancer is when she's dancing, or where a writer is when she's writing, I don't know. It is of course absolutely real in some ways—the best thing in my life. I miss it when I'm not there, I mourn for it, I want to be there. This is what I do; this is my work. I want to be doing my work. However, you don't "believe" it in the sense of thinking it's ordinary life. It is, after all, something one can make up. There is always that aspect of play, of make-believe. Even if you're trying to put your whole life into this story, all the same it is still something you're making. It isn't eternal. It only happens while you're writing it and while it's being written, and then it's done. If nobody reads it, it doesn't exist at all. So it's very strange stuff, really strange.

Q: Do you work on more than one project at a time?

Le Guin: I never did, even at my most prolific. They came one at a time. I very seldom worked on two stories at one time. Poetry, though, always can fill in; when I'm writing a novel, I may write poetry too. Poetry and fiction are slightly different genres, not very different, but slightly different. I never wrote two stories at the same time; my mind will not hold them.

Q: I was wondering, since you've come back to Earthsea, if there's a possibility you might be coming back to the Hainish novels.

Le Guin: The last several stories I've written are science fiction in the Hainish universe; they have people from worlds I've written about before. I had a lot of fun with it. I invented some new technology. Irresponsible artists, much less dangerous than irresponsible scientists and *their* technology.

Q: Do you see any potential—metaphorically or otherwise—in exploring the situation in Eastern Europe right now, perhaps more *Orsinian Tales*? In a sense, Orsinia is a neighbor to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Le Guin: I don't know. It's so grim. It's so horrible. There's a very interesting story by Fay Weldon in the current *New Yorker* called "Wasted Lives"—an incredibly bitter story! I think maybe Fay has said about all—from the West—one can say at this point.

Q: I understand you're working on a screenplay of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Would you elaborate on how the views you expreess in the novel have changed in the last 25 years?

Le Guin: The first thing happened a couple of years after publication, when the feminist movement really got going. All the feminist critics and writers leapt upon me and beat me and said, "Don't say 'he,' don't say 'he,'" and "Why do they all act like men?" and "Why do they do man-things?" and stuff like that. At first, I resisted indignantly—which usually means you know they're right. But what do I say if I don't say "he"? There are intractable problems in the novel that can be solved in a screenplay because you're not talking in the third person. You don't need third-person pronouns in a screenplay. You say "you" most of the time.

We can also show Estraven with Estraven's children, Estraven doing things that we think of as women-things, as well as man-things. I'm doing this with Paul Preuss, a science fiction writer who lives in San Francisco. He's a good writer, a novelist, who has done more screen writing than I have. We're working on this together, and having a ball working it out. It's going to be a good screenplay. We're freelancing.

Q: How far along are the planning stages?

Le Guin: We're on the final revision this December. So if anybody knows anybody with upwards of $8 million, give him my address.

Q: I'm sure you must be concerned about letting a film-maker take control of your story. Since you're working on the screenplay, I suppose that reduces the chance of you being disappointed.

Le Guin: Nothing reduces the chance. Woody Allen is not a man I want to quote very much anymore, but he was the one who said, "Take the money and run." Because the writer, as novelist or as scriptwriter, is never, ever going to have any control over a Hollywood movie. The trouble with something like *The Left Hand of Darkness* is there are almost no people outside Hollywood who have the money to pay for production like that, with all the snow and ice and all the androgynous makeup. So, at some point, if we sell it, I'll have to just hope they don't totally screw it up.

Q: You'll have to watch out for another *Bladerunner.*

Le Guin: I hate that movie. I hate that movie because I love the book so much—*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Q: I can just imagine the Steven Spielberg-type of special effects in *Left Hand of Darkness* with morphing and other computer graphics for the kemmer phase.

Le Guin: You could get so gross with that—you could get so gross. We want to get a little steamy from time to time, but special effects are not where it's at.

Q: How much were gay issues on your mind when you were writing *The Left Hand of Darkness*? Nowadays it's easy to see the parallels, but back then it may not have been.

Le Guin: At the time, gay issues were on my mind very little. In 1967, when I wrote it, what was being talked about was the question of just what is gender. What are men and what are women? Gay issues were latent, but not being talked about yet. That took a long time to surface. I was so unthinking about it that I actually built into their physiology the fact that if there are two of them together and one was into kemmer, the other one more or less has to go into the other sex. Well, practically speaking, if you want to have children, that's a good idea, but actually what would it matter otherwise? The more we thought about it, Paul and I decided that what went on in a kemmer-house would be completely free-for-all. So that's another thing that we could bring out in the movie that is latent in the book, just not mentioned.

Q: Speaking of gay issues, I know that your political commitments are important to you. I was wondering if you'd care to comment on the obligation of a writer to discuss his or her political commitments. At the same time, you've commented on the desire to avoid being polemical or being "up on a soap box," as you've put it. It must be a difficult road to travel.

Le Guin: Yes, you walk a winding road there, but the fact is if you're any kind of public person, then what you say matters to a few people at least. It matters what you say. It matters what you write. If you say hateful things, you're increasing the amount of hatred.

Q: You say you're getting lazier. Do you think you're going to drop off in production, or even retire?

Le Guin: I have dropped off in production, but I would love to write more screenplays. I would love to do an original screenplay that was not based on a book, but that's even harder to sell. I also love poetry and performance work. I love collaborating with composers and dancers and that sort of thing, so actually a lot of my work has ended up where six months' work takes place in a single performance, as stage things do.

Q: Like your poem "Stone"?

Le Guin: Which was written for a dance troupe. That sort of thing doesn't leave as much track behind it as a story or a novel does, but it's very satisfying.

Q: Years ago there was a video adaptation of your book *The Lathe of Heaven* produced by PBS. Is the video available commercially?

Le Guin: I am currently engaged in a real war of attrition with WNET Channel 13 in New York. All that they do is keep it in their archives. I keep saying that this is nonsense. If they can't pay to reproduce it on television, at least they can try to sell it to a video producer. I have gotten nowhere; it's totally and absolutely unavailable. In fact, I couldn't get a copy for you. But we'll get it someday.

Q: Of all your essays, poetry, short stories, and novels, what are your two or three favorite works, for whatever reason?

Le Guin: I usually dodge that one and say, "Oh, my favorite is the next one," but I was thinking that's a little dishonest. Just limiting it to the

fiction, I have a particular fondness for *Always Coming Home*. There's an awful lot of loving work that went into the book. I was pretty satisfied with how it came out. The recent work tends to be what an author wants to talk about most, you know. In *Searoad*, particularly the last part of the book, I was pushing myself pretty close to my own limits. I am very satisfied with what happened in "Hernes." It took two years to write sixty pages. It's really scary when it goes that slow and that hard. You wonder if you are just doing something stupid.

Q: Where do you see the future going?

Le Guin: That I never know, I never know. I just do what comes next to be done.

Q: It's rather revealing of a science fiction writer to claim never to know where the future's going.

Le Guin: I always said that I don't write about the future, I've never written about the future. The future is a metaphor, a very useful, huge metaphor. You can play with it, but I'm not extrapolating or predicting. I'm just playing.

Fiction

Tracking Charlie

James Spencer

Eugene is standing in the doorway of the sheepherder's cabin that overlooks the western slope of the ranch, focusing his binoculars on a cone of dust rising from the plateau. At the point of the cone is a rusty blue pickup truck pulling a horse trailer with one fender about to fall off. Eugene is swearing under his breath. The pickup belongs to Charlie Taco, who practically raised Eugene after his father's death. It was Charlie who calmed Eugene's tantrums in his graham cracker days. Charlie, who took him to the ranch for weekends and summers while his mother forged ahead with her marital experiments and nervous breakdowns. Charlie, who taught Eugene the ways of the animals, who has no idea what kind of life Eugene lives in San Francisco and would be blown out of the saddle if he did know.

The cloud of dust stops as neatly as a smoke signal. Charlie has hit a stretch of bedrock where dynamite and sledge hammers have never managed to level a decent roadbed. It will take Charlie ten minutes to lurch and yaw through the frozen rapids of ancient volcanic bubbles and boulders, and another twenty minutes to rattle up the canyon along the rust-red cliffs, cross the creekbed and come down the ridge to the cabin. And Eugene stands in the cabin doorway on his fiftieth birthday, two hours into a very bad acid trip, knowing there is no way he can carry on a conversation with Charlie just now. He slides down against the door jamb and sits on the floor. Despite sinewy, well-exercised muscles he wobbles like a baby made to sit too soon. There is a huge ball of yellow-red-black goo inside his stomach. He feels a hand on his shoulder and sees Meg kneeling on the floor beside him.

"I can't handle it, Meg. I can't talk to him."

"You have to."

"This was not supposed to happen."

"But it has."

"Aunt Maybelle promised not to let anybody else up here this weekend."

"Maybe she forgot."

"There's no way he'll understand this, Meg. He brags about me all over the valley. He thinks I'm his kid. He lives my life, or what he knows of it."

"Maybe it's time he started living his own life."

Eugene would like to tell her about Charlie's life—how Grandma Jefferies found him abandoned in her haystack seventy years ago, how some family humorist pinned the surname Taco on him in honor of his little pie face and south-of-the-border complexion, how Charlie lived in a barn all his life with the status of a serf. But Eugene is losing it. He is unable to round up enough words to say what he is thinking, even when he is able to remember what he is thinking long enough to think about looking around for some words to say it. Outside the cabin the world is swarming together and apart—red rocks, trees, sky, clouds, distant mountains transformed into billions of luminous rainbow lines streaming and intersecting and blossoming and fading in an endless cycle of annihilation and renewal. Eugene turns to look inside the cabin for something solid, but the knotholes in the cabin walls are swimming around him, swarming together in masses of wet black mouths ready to fasten onto his skin. Inside his abdomen a fat python is stirring its coils. He wonders if he is going to vomit.

"I feel like I'm dying," he says.

"Acid never killed anybody."

"I've never felt this bad."

"You took too much. I told you."

"I always have bad trips."

"No you don't."

"Yes," he gasps with his eyes closed, clutching his distended belly. "But I cry. Then it's OK."

"So cry."

"I can't. I feel as if something wants me to die."

"Then die."

It's not that Meg is unsympathetic; she knows how to get out of your way so you can look at yourself. He tries to separate her face from the swarms of knotholes, remembering more than seeing her high forehead, the fall of ash-brown waves around her cheeks, the delicate nose and jaw that give her face a pre-pubescent quality even at forty. She strokes his shoulder.

"Don't worry," she says. "I'll look after you."

In the two years he's known her he has taken care of her a few times, now it's her turn. He feels a wave of gratitude and he wants to tell her how much he likes her level-headedness and other things about her, such as the

little recoil her head makes when he looks into the depth of her large hazel eyes, but these thoughts too go spinning out of reach and his attention is caught by an alarming behavior of the knotholes: When they swarm together like that, between the swarms there should appear empty areas the knotholes have migrated out of. However, when his eyes pounce on the areas that should be empty between the swarms they meet only more knotholes forming into dense masses where the empty areas should be. Yet his eyes cannot catch any new knotholes in the act of coming into existence. There must be a finite number of knotholes in the cabin walls. But how could they all be clustering everywhere and not be leaving empty spaces between the clusters? No matter how quickly he moves his eyes, he finds no answer. It's as if the laws of nature have been suspended. Nothing makes sense. He is lying flat on his back. He feels the floorboards hard under his head and he has no control of his limbs. His jaw is a block of granite. He makes a great effort to move it. He hears a vaguely familiar voice far off, at the edge of the world.

"Who am I?" the voice says.

"Julius Eugene Jefferies," another voice answers. "Attorney-at-law. Age fifty. Social Security number 554-03-9143." A pause. "Anything else?"

A pause.

"What am I doing here?"

"Trying to hold yourself together, I think."

His lips try to mouth the words silently, as if the muscular contractions will render the meaning of this complicated assessment. What comes instead is a fragment of memory, a face, and a wave of warm feeling for an entity out of some other space-time. He hears a tinny voice that he associates with his own vocal cords.

"How are you, Meg?"

"Fine," the entity known as Meg responds. "Some hallucinations. I'm fine."

"You didn't take too much?"

"No, you did."

"Is there something strange going on?"

"You could say that."

"Maybe they're here, Meg."

"Who?"

"The Indians."

"Right."

"I'm serious."

In the last century Eugene's ancestors stole this Martian landscape of lava rock cliffs and canyons from the local Indians by the simple expedients of homesteading and genocide. When Eugene came home from Berkeley with an anthropology text describing the massacres of the tribes, his cousins

met the news with accelerated gum chewing and preoccupied drilling for ear wax. His uncles and great uncles sneered: "What do them professors know? Grandpa Jefferies bought that land for a dollar an acre from the first settlers. Besides, them Indians was killing our sheep." Eugene is usually so out of step with his blood kin that he sometimes wonders if he is Indian himself.

"It was Ishi's country, Meg. We shot them like animals. All except Ishi."

He feels like crying at last, but something shoulders between himself and the crying, grabs his head and snaps it toward Meg and the cabin door. She is peering across the canyon.

"What is it?" he says.

"Charlie."

"Oh, shit," he says, and something lifts him to his feet. He had forgotten Charlie. He stumbles to the window by the rusty woodstove and presses his face against the glass. He sees dust rising over the chaparral patches at the head of the canyon. Charlie will be at the cabin in five minutes. Eugene collapses into a rickety chair and drops his forehead onto an oilcloth-covered table, and tries to think. The checkered oilcloth is cool and slick against his face. His left eye peers into a square red universe and his right eye into a square white universe. The two universes are trying to merge with each other to form a single, pink universe.

"Charlie," Meg says.

"Charlie," Eugene says, jerking his face free of the two universes. "Yes." He shakes his head; it feels like the tank of his old pickup with the gasoline slapping around inside it after a tight turn. He clutches his head in both hands.

"You've got to cover for me, Meg. Distract him."

"How?"

"Anything. Do a striptease."

"Be serious."

"Jesus." Charlie of all people.

"Why don't you just tell him?"

"He hates dope fiends the way some people hate Iranians."

One day over thirty years ago Eugene drove down to Berkeley and a lifestyle so alien to Charlie's experience that Eugene never really tried to explain it to him. They were always glad to see each other, but underneath, with each passing year the gap widened and neither of them knew the remedy or even, perhaps, the problem. Now, across the chasm of thirty-odd years Eugene is listening to Charlie's pickup truck banging over the boulders around the side of the cabin and Eugene is thinking that if it's too late to build new bridges it is not too late to use the old bridge of simple consideration and at least be standing in the doorway to greet Charlie when

he pulls up in front, but this means that Eugene will have to do something about getting his feet under him, and at this moment even allowing for his long legs his feet seem to be about three miles away, so tiny in fact that he wonders whether they will even support his body let alone receive a message from his brain in time to react in any effective manner. Sure enough, before he can get his feet planted flat on the floor he hears Charlie's engine quit, the metallic thump of Charlie's door shutting, and Charlie's boot hit the stoop. Then all five feet two inches of Charlie's tough, skinny frame and Charlie's grinning, saddle-brown face seem to fill all the space in the doorway.

"Hey, fella!" Charlie's voice booms as if it should be rising from a much bigger and younger chest cavity. "Happy birthday!" Charlie is bouncing on the balls of his feet like a boxer revving up the way Eugene remembers him from long ago and Charlie's eyes are sparking like a couple of Fourth-of-July sparklers over the bulging cheekbones and intricate map of wrinkles. Electrified tufts of white hair stick straight out from under a battered black Stetson. Eugene is somehow propelled onto his feet and grinning too (he and Charlie never could master the stoneface style of the male Jefferies) and Eugene is pumping Charlie's hand and he has somehow managed to introduce Charlie to Meg, he can tell this by the fact that Charlie and Meg are now shaking hands with the enthusiasm of long-lost lovers. Charlie is bouncing and sparking and saying something to Meg about this fool kid who hasn't been home in two years and once it was three years and he's been worried crazy about him down there with all them dope fiends and politicians, still the kid can take care of himself all right he never let nobody put it over on him he's a fighter just like his grandaddy and great grandaddy they was U.S. Deputy Marshals down in Sacramento, you know, his great-grandaddy's six-guns are down there in the museum at Sutter's Fort right today with notches in the handles just like on TV and Eugene himself here, he's about the best shot anybody ever saw in these here mountains it makes his own uncles so mad they won't even talk about it. . .

Veins of light are crawling all over Charlie now and he is changing size and shape although still recognizable as Charlie, and Eugene has completely lost his grip on the sense of Charlie's words but to be on the safe side Eugene nods enthusiastically every time Charlie looks his way just as if he's fully tracking the conversation and Eugene fastens an expansive grin on his face that has a grotesque comic-book quality caught briefly in the cracked mirror on the wall behind Charlie because the grin appears to bisect Eugene's long, narrow face from ear to ear with a belt of gleaming white piano keys, but the grin is to let Charlie know that everything is completely OK with Eugene and it even begins to look as if Meg is going to succeed in keeping Charlie so occupied that they will get through this all right, and then part of Eugene's mind pulls up short. Something is not OK,

Charlie has always been a talker, but this nonstop talking is something else, Charlie is nervous about something there is a fracture in his reality somewhere he's doing some fancy footwork trying to plaster it over with this hectic prattle of the past and there can be only one cause of the fracture and that is Eugene's weirdness, so Eugene makes a mighty effort to get enough pieces of himself together to say something that will sound reasonably normal to Charlie and there comes the brilliant idea of putting Charlie completely at ease with the ultimate reassurance which also has the great appeal of being the truth, and what he says is, "I love you Charlie."

Immediately Eugene sees that he has said something wrong, for Charlie recoils a step or two toward the door with his mobile face working strangely and his eyes darting back and forth between Meg and Eugene and landing finally on Meg as the most likely source of a lifeline and sure enough Meg bestows upon Charlie one of her rare and beautiful sunburst smiles and without hardly missing a beat Charlie winks at Meg and jerks his thumb over toward Eugene and says, "Yes, sir, this guy is a lover all right, he thinks I don't know about some of the goins-on back in his high school days, but this is a small town you know and there ain't much happens that don't get spread all over the valley in four-five days, there was a few broken hearts all right when Gene here left town and went off to college let me tell you, well I shouldn't be tellin tales so I'll be gettin on now, I got my camp set up over to Burney Flat, Callahan's missin a few head of sheep and I come up to have a look at the fences over there and see what I can see so I'll be leavin you two youngsters to yourselves now if you need anything just fire off two fast shots or make a smoke signal, Gene knows how, I taught him before he was even in school yet, not regular school anyways..."

Charlie is maneuvering to the door and out through it while he talks, so the last part of his speech is delivered outside as he walks to the pickup a little too fast, Eugene thinks, following Charlie to the door and waving to him as the old pickup wheezes and grinds into life and lurches around the corner of the cabin and out of sight. As the rattle recedes, Eugene leans against the door jamb and slowly exhales a breath that feels as if he's been holding it since Charlie walked in.

"Thanks, Meg."

"He's beautiful."

"I blew it."

"Maybe not."

"People don't talk like that up here."

"I'll bet you can smooth it out tomorrow."

Eugene is suddenly impressed by the force of gravity. It wants to drag him to the floor, flatten him like a pancake, melt him like a cube of butter, spread him from wall to wall and suck him through the floorboards

down into the pores of the earth. He clutches the door frame to keep his body upright and in minimal contact with everything underneath him.

"I have to get out of here."

"Sure," Meg says. "Let's go."

Eugene steps out and breathes deeply. Cool mountain air with a tang of oak and dry grass fills his lungs, the morning sunlight hits his face and shoulders and he suddenly feels like the first man on a new planet. He hears Meg rattling around behind him in the lander, collecting their life-support equipment, then she is out with him and the airlock snaps shut behind her.

"Which way?" she says, smiling, and tiny lightning bolts shoot from her hair in the sunlight.

He takes her hand and leads her past the swayback barn that was once the pioneer cabin. He feels better out here under the open sky where he is able to look across the ridges and canyons all the way to Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen on the horizon. Even though the rocks and trees and grass and the sky are still veined and crawling in every direction the activity does not seem to be aimed at overwhelming him personally, it seems more like the universe simply going about its ceaseless, impersonal and very complex business of daily living. For a moment he is even able to enjoy Meg's uncoordinated but sensual walk, as if the top half of her long-waisted body is slightly surprised at the direction her hips and legs decide to take her. Eugene is still heavy, though, as if he has landed on a planet with about one and one-half times the earth's mass. Every step demands effort, lifting his foot up, setting it down without stumbling, moving forward. He wonders if he lives his life like this, fighting his own world. It is the way he feels after the wreck of a marriage.

"What was going on back there?" Meg says.

Eugene shakes his head.

"Something wanted me dead. It wouldn't surprise me if the cabin is built on top of an old Indian camp."

He leads her across the ridge through scattered boulders and sparse dry grass, downhill to the spring. Clear, cold water trickles into a red lava-rock basin, green grass and sparkling flowers cascade downhill, watered by the overflow. An occasional fly buzzes in the stillness, a bird flutters down to drink. From here Eugene can look out over ridge after ridge growing fainter in the mountain haze. If he aims his binoculars into this ocean of air in the canyons he can see that it is alive with organisms swooping, darting, gliding and floating on long strands of web finer than silk, even clouds of tiny creatures swarming, seemingly as abundant as life in the water ocean. He remembers the brilliant, windy spring day he first stood here as a child with his hand in the leathery palm of Charlie Taco. After every catastrophe in his life Eugene has come here to sit awhile in this speck of paradise left over from the beginning of the world, and remember who he is.

Today, though, whatever was after him in the cabin is here too. He lies on the grass by the spring, groaning and clutching his belly, his legs, his shoulders, his head. He does not know where he feels worst. What he would really like to do is get rid of his body. Meg sits next to him with her hand on his shoulder.

"What the devil is it?" he gasps.

"You took too much."

"I only took it to see more."

"Well, now you're seeing it."

"But what is it?"

"Does it have anything to do with Charlie?"

"Like what?"

"He did a lot for you."

"I did a lot for him, too. I damn near took my uncles to court to give Charlie a living wage. I was only in high school."

"Then you went away to college and became somebody he doesn't know."

"He doesn't realize that."

"But you do."

Eugene holds his belly gingerly. His gut feels twice its normal size, as if it is looking for a way out and can't find it. When he does not reply, Meg says, "Maybe it is the Indians."

"I don't believe that stuff."

"Ten minutes ago you did."

"What if it's true? What am I suppose to do?"

"The answer must be around here somewhere." She looks at the boulders, the rock outcroppings above the spring, the rust-red cliffs along the other side of the canyon. "Have you ever noticed, the basic color of this country is the color of dried blood?"

Eugene rolls up onto his hands and knees.

"Good God," he says.

"What?"

"The ring. Come on."

He gets to his feet and leads her along the edge of the ridge toward a spur that juts out into the canyon. Charlie had once shown him the irregular ring of stones, about the right height for sitting. An Indian place, Charlie said, and would not go near it. The ring lies half a mile above a stand of pines that now hide an Indian graveyard.

Eugene edges through the dense chaparral, trying to remember the trail. Branches splinter and claw. He backs out, scratching his cheek, tearing his shirt, and tries another way. Finally he squeezes through a narrow gap and Meg follows. He sees the stone ring, with a large boulder in

the middle. The thing that has been trying to drag him into the bowels of the earth is here, waiting.

"Do you feel it?" he says.

"I feel something."

"I'm going in. Do you want to come?"

Her head shakes, yes.

"I can handle it."

"OK. I'll go through it first. Wait till I'm out."

His heart is pounding. There are spots in front of his eyes. He walks, holding himself upright against the mass of Jupiter. The force feels personal now, malevolent. It does its best to pull him to the ground before he can reach the central stone, but he fights it, he will not go down or be driven off, this land is a part of what he is. There have been other occasions, far from here, when he felt the grip of a force like this, but never so unrelenting. Is this its home? Does it follow him with its long reach wherever he goes, while he remains unconscious of it, focused on the world outside his skin? He realizes that he is inside the ring and still on his feet. In slow motion he sees his arm rise and his hand touch the central stone. Everything stops. Sound stops. The air is motionless. Then he is out the other side, not remembering how he got there. He observes Meg walk toward him, touching the central boulder on her way. Her face tells him that she is strongly affected, but not as he is.

"What an experience," she says, looking back.

It takes him a while to find his voice.

"I didn't just imagine it, then."

"Not unless I did too."

"Do you want to go in again?"

She shakes her head. "Once is enough."

"Wait here," he says, and wills his legs into motion. When he stands beside her again his skin is cold with sweat and he is fighting nausea.

"It's the Indians," he says. "Let's get out of here."

He is still shaky when they sit down against a crumbling stone wall on the ridge. A meadow opens out in front of him, littered with rusty boulders and tufts of yellow grass. The broad, rounded back of the ridge undulates like a mile-long whale in mid-ocean.

He feels that he has won something, yet even with Meg beside him he is bone-heavy with loneliness. Whatever this thing is, it must have been working on him since he was a small child, wanting him gone, dead, extinct. How strong is it? How many others has it driven off? Another

people besides the Indians have come this way and gone. Behind the stone wall, grooved in the bedrock, are traces of a pioneer road that brought Conestoga wagons down from the high passes into California. Across the canyon a hotel once served the survivors of those expeditions. Except for a few rocky graves, if you know where to look, the hotel and all its guests have vanished as completely as Ishi's people. This country is not for the living. Even ranchers do not live here. They use the land for winter range and hunting. Right now, except for Charlie, and Meg beside him, there might be no other human being within ten miles in any direction. A cool wind hisses in his ears and rattles the oak leaves overhead. What has he won, if anything?

Out in the middle of the meadow stands a house-high boulder, blasted from the throat of some long extinct volcano. On the far side is a sloping, irregular face where a child can climb to the top. Eugene has spent many hours on this rock, sometimes hunting, sometimes withholding death, watching the cautious life of the animals. He has seen strange things. He has even seen a half-grown rabbit frolicking with a baby fox. Eugene was not aware of any malevolent force then, trying to kill him or drive him away.

A question grabs him like a startled cat. Has he, personally, done something wrong here, aside from the crimes of his ancestors? What is it? He did not kill Ishi's people. He would have fought to save them. He has even renounced hunting. One more reason for his oddball status in the family is that he does not eat meat. But the Indians killed, and ate meat. It must be something else. What has he *not* done? When the Indians killed, they apologized to the spirit of the animal and thanked it for giving up its life so they could live. (He had to go to a university to learn this.) Has he ever apologized to an animal he killed? He can imagine the abuse he would get from a cousin or uncle who caught him praying over a dead animal.

"You're very quiet," Meg says. "How are you doing?"

Eugene returns from a great distance, yielding to the tug of her words.

"I used to hunt here. From the top of that boulder."

"With Charlie?"

"He taught me. Do you know you can sit up there in plain sight and even move around and scratch your head, blow your nose, eat a sandwich, and if you move at just the right speed the animals will not only not run away but they'll come closer to investigate?"

"And then you shot them?"

"Sometimes."

The bloated snake is stirring in his belly. He changes his position. He is seeing all this from a considerable distance.

"Eugene?"

"I remember every animal I ever shot. Even the ones I don't want to remember."

There are sounds now, a myriad of tiny squeaking, chirping sounds, and fluttering sounds like a faint, rapid drumming. The sounds seem to come from just behind his ears, but when he turns his head the sounds still come from behind his ears.

"What about them?" Meg says.

"What?"

"The ones you don't want to remember."

He is still trying to locate the source of the sounds.

"Eugene?"

He shakes them out of his head.

"One year I came up here with a borrowed rifle. My uncle didn't tell me it shot high. The deer panicked and ran in circles. I had time to reload twice. I got it on the fourteenth shot."

His own determination had sickened him. He had so wanted to escape from himself that he took a pull on his canteen and dropped a tab of Sunshine acid that he always carried with him in those days. Back at the cabin, blood-soaked from carrying his gutted deer, with the world warping fast into alien landscapes, he found himself in a stone-age hunting camp. Uncle Og and Uncle Wook were stomping about, reenacting the day's slaughter, and corpses hung everywhere in the trees near the cabin and Eugene's cousins plunged their bloody arms into ripped-open body cavities, throwing gobbets of fat and pieces of body parts to the ground where the dogs snarled and gulped the pieces whole, and somewhere a bone saw sang of dismemberment, and Eugene looked at his own buck dangling in the wind and suddenly felt himself upended, hanging from the tree by his heels, slit open from throat to groin, his eyes bulging out and his antlers dragging in a puddle of his own blood.

He remembers them all. The tactics of the hunt, the quality of the shooting, the size and health and behavior of the animal, especially the ones he would rather not remember: The deer that leaped to its death over a hundred-foot cliff, like Ishi's people did, rather than be shot. The deer, twisted backward around its shattered spine, that died making sounds like a baby crying.

Eugene is on his feet. He is running toward the boulder in the meadow. He is climbing the familiar foot- and handholds. Then he is standing on top, the place where long ago he first had intimations of the size of the world and his own insignificance. He can see the high peaks in the east and the volcanoes brooding in the north, and the great valley losing itself in the haze to the west and south. He spreads his arms wide and inhales, it seems, the whole atmosphere. His body begins to yell. The sound is deafening. "I'm sorry!" his body yells. "I'll never hurt you again!" Then

his body turns to the east and yells, "I'll never hurt you again! I'm sorry!" His lungs expand and expand. He wonders how his body can hold so much air. It yells to the north, and he is surprised that his larynx does not shatter. Surely they must be able to hear him all the way up in Oregon. His body turns to the west and yells: "I will never hurt you again! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I will never carry a gun again as long as I live!" And then as if something is still incomplete, a pressure still unspent, his neck arches back as far as it will go and his open mouth and throat aim directly overhead and a roar begins that he cannot imagine coming from his body it has to come from something as big as the earth itself but out of his mouth, driven by the seemingly endless roar and into the sky shoots a column of dazzling light in all the colors of the rainbow, a volcano of brilliance that spreads out into a canopy of parallel zig-zag rainbows filling the sky, spreading to the horizon in all directions. Then comes an inhalation while the column and canopy slowly fade, then another roar and another volcano replenishing the sky, and another, and then it stops and the brilliance subsides and begins to shower down over the mountains and into the valley and the meadow and onto Eugene, and Eugene's body sinks slowly to a sitting position on top of the boulder.

After a long time, it seems, he feels a breeze stir within the transparency of his body. A coolness on his face. Thought returns. He feels blown open, purified, calm. He hears footsteps. Meg is standing by the boulder with her hand up, shading her eyes.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes." His voice is hoarse. "I'm fine."

"Do you want to stay up there some more?"

"No."

He slides down carefully. He stands beside her, watching the meadow undulate. The infinite threads of light shuttle through everything, weaving himself and Meg, the boulders and trees and sky into a single fabric. He shakes his head in disbelief.

"Where did all that come from?"

"Sounds like it's been there a long time," Meg says.

It feels remarkably good, being near her. He hugs her.

"Thanks," he says.

"You did it."

"Thanks anyway."

As they walk back toward the wagon road the mountain sounds reenter his awareness. The single piercing note of a flicker. The hiss of pines downhill. Far off, perhaps the rattle of Charlie's broken fender. If the wind is right, sound will carry a mile or so across the canyon from Burney Flat. At the rock wall Eugene sits down. The sun is warm, but he begins to shiver. His teeth chatter. He hugs himself, trying to stop.

"Why am I shivering? What's the matter with me?"
"Nothing."
"The hell. I've never done this before. What is it?"
"You told me you shiver sometimes when you hear the truth."
"Don't you?"
"Sometimes. Maybe you've just had a big dose of it."
Eugene shudders, skeptical.
"There's even some stuff about it in the literature," Meg says.
"Which literature?"
"Psychology."
His teeth are rattling. He hugs himself to stifle a spasm.
"Great. How do I stop it?"
"You could start lying to yourself."
"Seems to me I do enough of that already."
"We could make love. I hear that works sometimes."
"Do you want to?"
"You know me."
"I don't know about taking off my clothes. I might shiver worse."
"It's all right," she says, unbuckling his belt. "Leave your shirt on."
"You seem to be taking care of me a lot, today."
"I told you I would."
"Do you want something under you?"
She pats the ground.
"The grass is soft. Come."

He lies with his eyes closed, breathing her perfume. The shivering subsides. Flowers bloom in his head. When he opens his eyes, streamers of Meg's hair are flowing out into the meadow. He floats on her, light as a cloud. Between the streamers he can see down into a tiny forest with trails and caverns, and rocks as big as a house, but small. Tiny creatures meet there, wave and tell each other stories and go their way again. What are the stories? he wonders. He slides like water down a streamer and drops off onto a trail. Where did the creatures go? He peers under the edge of a leaf in the deep shade. It gets exciting. What will he find there?

"Eugene?"
"Huh?"
"What are you doing?"
A pause. Eugene laughs.
"I can't get it together, Meg."
She laughs too.
"I'm not doing very well either," she says. "Maybe I should be on top."
"OK. Let's try."

They get tangled in clothes, laughing, and finally get disentangled. He strokes her back and her breasts under her shirt. He remembers that he is supposed to get an erection. He feels love, and strong affection, but it does not seem to have any special effect on his genitals.

"What do we do now?" he says.

She giggles.

"I'm not sure."

His teeth start chattering. She bites his ear and they attack each other with teeth and tongues, rolling in the grass. First she is on top, then he, then she, in the sweet smell of crushed dry grass. Suddenly she stiffens and raises her head.

"Somebody's coming."

He rolls over to look. Between the tree trunks, coming down the wagon road is an occasional leg in faded jeans. Then short bow legs moving fast.

"Good God, it's Charlie."

They hurry to get dressed. Meg fluffs her hair. They do not even have time to speculate before Charlie is within shouting distance.

"What's the matter here? You kids OK?"

"Yeah. Sure."

"I could hear you yellin all the way over to Burney Flat. Never heard such a racket. I near busted a axle, gettin over here." He bares a few teeth, squinting. "You sure you're OK?"

Eugene suppresses a shiver. Charlie has grown a lizard face and his body is covered with scales. Eugene wishes it were tomorrow.

"I'm fine. Really."

"Well, you sure didn't sound fine. Sounded like somebody was gettin killed over here. Sounded like you was yellin you was sorry about something." He peers at Meg. "You kids have a fight?"

Meg smiles and shakes her head.

"We're fine, Charlie. Having a great time."

Charlie is eyeing both of them, unconvinced.

"Well, I ain't one to pry," he says to Meg, "but I raised this fella here from a pup, he's like my own flesh and blood, and if something's bothering him that much I durn well want to know about it."

Eugene remembers Charlie's stubborn streak, and a time or two when Charlie stood up for Eugene against the whole family in spite of his serf status. Clearly, he is not going to leave until he has got to the bottom of it.

"Charlie, I was telling the animals I'm sorry."

"Animals? What animals?"

"All the ones I've killed."

Eugene does not know what to expect, but the last thing he expects is the beatific grin that spreads across Charlie's face, revealing dark caverns of empty gum. Charlie bounces on the balls of his feet once or twice and then tips his head back and laughs. He slaps his thigh.

"Damn!" he says. "Damn! Well, that gol-durn explains a lot of things! Sure enough!" The Fourth-of-July sparklers are going again. "And you wasn't gonna tell old Charlie!" He shuffles with excitement. "Listen here, Gene, what would you say if I told you I quit huntin twenty-five years ago? Nobody knowed it, but I did. Bein up here as much as I am, you get to know these critters, see? There was one old buck used to come back to this ranch for maybe ten, twelve winters. He'd hide in the brush up under the cliffs where it's thickest and a dog would go in there after him barkin and he'd bark right in his face and that buck wouldn't move a muscle. The dog's owner would think the dumb dog was just after a rabbit or something and call him out. That buck was as smart about some things as a human being. You can't shoot a human being in cold blood. I had that old buck right in my sights one time, not twenty yards away. Just plain dumb luck, I just stumbled on him with the wind blowin toward me. He was a real old buck by then, he knew a thing or two. He knew it was no use. He could see he was a goner. He just stood and looked at me. Waitin. I couldn't do it. I lowered my gun and stared at him. He couldn't hardly believe I was gonna let him go. He ducked his head and raised it and looked at me again. I could swear he thanked me. Then he turned and ran, still pretty fast for an old buck. No, it ain't nothin to be ashamed of. I quit killin that year. I never told nobody, Gene. You're the first. I used to go huntin with you folks, all right, but if you ever noticed, I never hit nothing. I told everybody my eyes was goin bad. Hell, my eyes was as good as yours. I couldn't stand the killin was all. If I ever shot, it was to warn them dumb deer to get out of the country."

Eugene has slid lower in the grass against the wall. The shivering has struck again while Charlie talked. Eugene tries to suppress it by clutching his shoulders. The python is shifting its position. Eugene's teeth rattle and his body twists convulsively. He feels the nearness of death. Charlie is leaning over him, filling half the sky.

"Gene?" he says. "Gene?"

Eugene cannot remember hearing fear in Charlie's voice before.

"It's nothing, Charlie."

"The hell it ain't! I knew something was wrong right away!" He shoots an accusing glance at Meg, then kneels next to Eugene. "Here, I'm getting you to a doctor." He reaches for Eugene's arm. "Meg," he commands, "get his other arm. The two of us can drag him to the pickup if he can't walk."

"No," Eugene says, between clenched teeth, shivering. He tries to pull his arm away, and is surprised by Charlie's strength.

"Oh, no you don't, young fella," Charlie says. "I'm gettin you to a doctor right now. This ain't normal. You could have pneumonia. Worse."

"Charlie, it's OK. Meg is a doctor."

"Her?" He looks at Meg, skeptically.

"Not a medical doctor. But she knows about these things."

Charlie lets go of Eugene's arm.

"*What* things?"

"Charlie," Meg says quietly, "Eugene has taken some acid."

Charlie shoots to his feet, not at all like a man of seventy-two. Eugene's body spasms. He is not ready for this.

"Some *what?*"

"Acid. LSD."

If Charlie's reaction surprised Eugene before, it does not surprise him now. Charlie's mobile face works swiftly through disbelief, fear, pain, betrayal, grief, anger. The combination overwhelms his speech centers. He clenches his fists at his sides.

"You mean. . .you mean. . . Gene, I never thought that you, of all people. . . Well, I'll be. . . God *damn!*" He opens his mouth, then closes it, then opens it. "You've been hooked on that stuff all these years!" he declares. "Ever since you went down there to Berkeley! Right?"

Eugene's body is convulsed.

"Not hooked, Charlie." His teeth are chattering. "You don't get hooked on. . ."

"Don't tell me!" Charlie yells. "I know all about that stuff! Look at you! *Look* at you! I always thought you was a fighter, Gene! And you give in to them! You plumb give in! You let em talk you into it! I know how it works! I read the newspapers! I knowed it all the time!" he yells, in aggrieved exasperation. "I knowed it! It explains a lot of things! It sure does, boy." He turns away. "*Jesus!*"

Eugene is inside Charlie's mind. Charlie has just glimpsed the face of an alien god.

"Charlie, listen. . ."

"*No!*" Charlie shouts him down. He hits his thighs with both fists. His face works as if he wants to cry. "Jesus!" He starts walking away through the trees. "*God damn it to hell!*" he yells at the universe.

Eugene groans, rolling over onto his hands and knees. He is shivering too much to stand.

"Why did you tell him?"

"I don't know. It seemed like the thing to do."

"Dammit. I trusted you."

"Give me a break, Gene. I'm stoned too."

He is struggling to get up.
"What are you doing?"
"Help me up."
"Are you sure?"
"Help me up."
She helps him to his feet. His body tries to double over and collapse
"What do you want?"
"I have to go find him."
"No."
"You wait here."
"You may need me."
"This is between Charlie and me."

As he walks he sees black spots in front of his eyes. The trees dance and writhe, and the earth rolls under his feet. Every few steps he stumbles, but miraculously catches himself. The veins of light crawl and thicken around him. He leans against a tree, forcing deep breaths into his chest. He keeps reminding himself what he is doing. He is tracking Charlie. The memory of Charlie's ancient, leathery face working through its emotions keeps the fragments of Eugene from flying off in all directions.

He walks through the scattered oaks and chaparral to an open stretch of rocks and dry grass where the ridge slopes into the canyon. Eugene can make out a faint trail of bent grass between the rocks. He sits down on a boulder for a minute or two, shivering, with his head between his knees. Then he gets up and continues. The trail leads around a stand of chaparral, and vanishes. Eugene studies the grass under the brush. Nothing. The ground crawls with its own footprints of energy, that is all. He circles, trying to pick up the trail. He circles wider. He climbs up on a boulder, trying to see more of the country, into the woods and brush, into the steep arroyos that open below him and drop off into space between the cliffs. Christ, if Charlie has tried to go down one of those. The dirt and rocks can give way before you know what's happening. Charlie is over seventy. One wrong step. Eugene starts toward one of the arroyos, but fear stops him. The ground, the cliffs themselves are changing shape. He doesn't have a chance. If Charlie doesn't want to be tracked, Eugene is not going to track him. Eugene learned that long ago, when Charlie taught him to track.

Eugene lies down on a patch of grass among the boulders to let the black spots fade. As close as he is to Meg, he feels a loneliness, a poverty of family. Apart from Aunt Maybelle, a Mexican-Indian foundling is really all he has. No matter what he accomplishes in life, to his blood kin he will always be the Berkeley weirdo, the outsider. He thinks of the infant Charlie in the haystack as Grandma Jefferies described him, "grinning and blowing bubbles as if he had just been crowned the Prince of Wales." He thinks of the silly surname some family humorist gave Charlie long ago, and how

Charlie refused to see the indignity of it. He thinks of all that Charlie taught him about the plants and animals, and wonders where Charlie had learned it with only a fourth-grade education. Was it in the blood? What a trip. If only he could cry. He had better stop feeling sorry for himself and get back to Meg. He'd lived without Charlie for thirty-odd years. With luck, he could make it another thirty.

In the woods he finds Meg waiting for him. She has come halfway. He leans on her until they get back to the rock wall. It seems to have become their little home away from home. He lies down with his head in her lap. He recognizes her in the face crawling with light, changing from young woman to girl, to old woman, to withered crone, to angel. She smooths his hair, waiting. For what? His body is filled with concrete, hardening. The python is gone, the emptiness; the concrete is better. He hears a thumping sound, of rock on rock. Has his heart become a rock? He looks up at Meg, who is looking at the trees. He turns his head. A twenty-foot-tall pteranodon is bearing down on them.

The pteranodon looms over them with its head poised to swoop down on Meg and snatch her away in its great beak. Eugene opens his mouth to yell and then notices that the pteranodon is wearing scuffed cowboy boots and speaks with Charlie's voice. The reptilian skin falls away and Charlie emerges. Jesus, now what? As the hammering of Eugene's heart subsides, Charlie looks down at Eugene with his hands on his hips and his bandy legs braced against the ground swells. Charlie throws his hat back and scratches his white thatch.

"Dammit, Gene, this is real hard for me to say, but I owe you an apology. Here I am, thinkin I'm so damn good and them folks that takes drugs down there is no better'n a bunch of criminals and what did I do for twenty years but get soused every dang night of my life, so drunk sometimes I couldn't get in my pickup and when I did I drove it into a ditch. Got throwed plumb out of it once through the windshield and got my legs all tore up, lucky it wasn't my head. I wasn't worth a hoot in hell for work, for years, and your uncles they wanted to send me away somewheres but your Aunt Maybelle she stood up for me and give me the room in her barn and looked after me and cleaned up my messes and even then I dang near burned down her barn four, five times."

Charlie is on another verbal roll and this time he is not patching any cracks in his reality, he is coming straight at Eugene with his litany of wrongdoing like a song, like a great ray of light, and the concrete inside Eugene is beginning to crumble and he feels Meg smoothing his hair and as Charlie continues talking Eugene feels a cold wetness running down his cheeks and making puddles in his ears and it is all beginning to rip loose now as the sobs rise up from everything in him that hurts or ever has hurt. Maybe it's going to be a good trip after all.

Again, Richard

Kevin Phelan and Bill U'Ren

Richard. My friend Richard is pretty competitive, though not in a real obvious way like on a basketball court or out at the driving range. With Richard competition usually means something a little more subtle, a little more refined. At our regular dinners, it has taken the form of what he likes to call, in his exaggerated English accent, "Parlour Games." When it all started back a few years ago, there were a number of different versions we used to play, but now, by process of elimination, only one remains—a simple contest with an elaborate title and history that I can't exactly recall, though I'm sure Richard would be happy to tell you about it.

Essentially, we go around the room and each person gets the chance to tell some true story—I guess that's really the main idea. Now if you can't see the competition in a game like that, then you probably don't know someone like Richard; if you can, then you'll probably understand why, as the dinner approaches each month, I find myself storing up bits of information, hoping when it's my turn, the story I tell will come across without a lot of effort and, if I'm lucky, wind up being mildly entertaining. This time, even before the front doorbell rang, I was prepared to report the account of Eddie and Veronika's honeymoon in South America. Unfortunately, it wasn't until we were nearly finished eating that Richard finally gave me the nod. I uncorked the bottle of wine, filled everyone's glass, sat back, and began.

•

Eddie and Veronika. After thinking it over, Eddie decided that begging for his life might be the best approach given the time and context of the situation. This course of action would assure a simple execution by pistol, and thus enable him to avoid a prolonged and painful death that, most likely, was just around the corner anyway. His reasoning worked like

this: given that an assailant is generally reactionary, especially in a moment of high stress, it seemed logical that simply sitting there, calm and relaxed, while he elevated his gun, would give him the exact opposite of what he wanted. There's no satisfaction for a guy simply in firing a couple shots at your head—he doesn't know you, and you're not of any political consequence—so percentage-wise, the pleasure factor of killing you in such a calm state would be low.

That's why Eddie decided that remaining calm would be a big mistake. He believed that if he appeared too detached or lackadaisical, the criminal, like any criminal, would've taken the obvious next step—torture. He might even decide to milk the situation, making Eddie suffer so much that he might actually beg to be killed. Yes, Eddie could see that happening, and he could imagine his newfound enemy thoroughly enjoying himself as he drove a machete into Eddie's intestines and twisted it around, while asking rhetorical questions like "So we're going to be a hero, eh? We're going to be Mr. Tough Guy?" Of course Eddie didn't speak Portuguese, so he couldn't have been sure what the guy was saying, but most likely, it would've been something in that general ballpark.

Yes, the strategy then was to beg for life, pleading with as much gusto as possible. And as the tears streamed down his face, the captor would have no choice but to simply fire away—satisfied that he had indeed given the American something he did not want.

Eddie's wife Veronika probably wouldn't have understood this kind of reasoning, but at that point, she really wasn't on his mind. Sure, he loved her, but it was too late. By now, the rest of them had probably taken her away to some hidden straw hut to do what they wanted, and if she survived that, she'd be facing the same problem he was facing right now.

Unfortunately, Veronika was beautiful, even more so than other women possessing what could be defined as empirical beauty. She had a touch of dishevelment about her that was actually more compelling than any obvious good looks might have been. And it was this dirty, imperfect beauty that caused her to become the object of desire for so many. To them, she was more attainable—almost like she could've been one of them. She wasn't.

Eddie began to yell her name aloud, shamelessly proclaiming his love for her, begging that he be spared so they could spend the rest of their lives together. "Veronika! Veronika!" Whether or not anyone understood him was of little importance now. Eddie had added a nice touch to the simple begging-for-his-life-scenario, and he could tell from the guy's eyes that, any translation aside, the screaming was going over well.

●

Richard Always Brings Wine. Ann and I had gotten everything we needed for dinner at an import shop on Nob Hill. They carried a lot of gourmet specialty items you couldn't find at the Safeway or Food 4 Less, so I made a list and floated a check. The wine I'd leave to Richard. He wasn't what you'd call a connoisseur or anything like that, but he was English and extremely polite. By default I knew he would take care of it, as he always did. The past couple of times he even went so far as to bring bottles of both red and white, to make sure they matched whatever we were cooking.

Ann liked Richard, but she thought his old-fashioned habits, those English social graces and mannerisms they show a lot on PBS, were contrived. She felt he was taking his image a bit too far. After all, he had been here in the states five years already, and his accent still sounded like he'd just stepped off the plane. Maybe heavier.

I first met him through a series of temp jobs I'd taken after the big layoffs. Over almost a two-week period, I went to work at seven different places and saw Richard at more than half of them, his distinctive voice and near-orange hair making him difficult to ignore. Around the third or fourth job, he finally recognized me and said, "Well, if it isn't my shadow." I hated him just like you'd hate anyone who'd say that, but then he kept inviting me out for drinks. "Hey old man," he'd say, even though I was barely 33, "how about knocking off early and heading over to Mather's?"

Richard had originally moved here with an American businesswoman he'd met while busing tables in the Embassy cafeteria. After three straight weeks in her hotel room, they decided to get married. "I thought I was in love," Richard confided in me later. "I thought that was it." But as I would witness first-hand over the next three or four years, Richard fell in love pretty easy, and out of love even easier.

Ann and I would have dinner with him maybe a couple of nights a month, often meeting his dates for the first and last time. In four years, there were only a handful who we ever saw again: the aerobics instructor from Nautilus, the architect with the big hair, and maybe the tall court reporter from Belmont. Ann and I joked that Richard probably never realized he'd been out with them already.

Tonight was no different. This time her name was Mina, and she was a dethroned Albanian princess. "An immigrant like me," he had said over the phone, "in that way we have a lot in common." Richard lately had been thinking that while he loved America, American women just weren't right for him. So I suspected that Mina might be the first in a new series of Richard dates, all of whom would possess the one pre-requisite: a foreign visa.

●

Eddie's Parking Tab Grows. In the strange smelling grass hut, Eddie began quietly agonizing over the fate of his car. It was sitting in a $10 a day slot at the airport. "How do they deal with those things?" he kept wondering. "How long do they go, racking up charges on your parking tab, before they figure something might be wrong?"

Eddie started multiplying in his head, over and over. He began to sweat even more. How much could it cost? Then he seriously started thinking of ways to let someone know about the car, about how it was abandoned there. He remembered the parking stub in his breast pocket. The car keys were in his pants. If he could just get the two together—slip the parking stub around the key ring—then when they found his body, they might know.

●

Richard, Last Time. About a month earlier, when it was still hot and the lawn was still green, Richard brought over Juliana, a woman both Ann and I had known from the ad agency. Actually, we didn't really know her, she was just some partner's secretary, but we knew who she was. Unlike us, she hadn't been laid off and forced into a series of endless temp jobs. She was still with the firm.

When Juliana and Richard first arrived, I couldn't quite tell if she recognized either of us. A little bit into the evening, Ann confided in me that she'd had a drink once with her and some other people from the electronics division, but Ann didn't think Juliana would recognize her now.

"I had short hair back then," Ann said, handing me the oven mitts. "And maybe it was still blonde. I can't remember exactly."

I tried to think back to that time period—it must have been back when we first met—but I could hardly picture Ann with a short, blonde cut. Especially in comparison to the long, reddish-brown hair she had now, her natural color. If I couldn't remember, the odds on Juliana coming through were pretty slim, as well—hopefully. Otherwise, it could get pretty awkward. It was easy to imagine the instant stop it would put to the evening. "You guys got laid off? That's awful. I feel sorry for you." And then there would've been the hour's worth of patronizing comments about how the firm wasn't that great any more, how it was too big now and everyone was so boring, and how we were better off making our own hours. Fortunately, Richard mentioned that he'd seen our friend Carter downtown, and that seemed to avert everyone's attention for the moment.

●

Eddie and Veronika Used to Watch Television. Eddie always figured that when he got close to death, his thoughts would become a little more interesting, or at least a little less mundane. Looking at the guy with the machete though, it was clear that this wasn't happening. Eddie's mouth was dry, his hands were sweaty, his heart was moving just a little too fast, and all the while, his brain kept replaying a sequence he and Veronika had seen on "Cops" the week before. Officers had been called out to help an older guy beaten up by some kids in a mini-mall parking lot. The man was on the ground bleeding everywhere, and a crowd had formed along the sidewalk. On the fade out, the camera panned down to his wet crotch just in case anyone had missed it earlier. At the time, Eddie thought it was real funny.

•

Richard and Mina Arrive. While I was in the kitchen fumbling with the curry instructions, Ann was straightening things up and setting the table. Normally, we wouldn't go to so much trouble for our friends, but we'd both grown used to the process with Richard and even looked forward to it. I guess we didn't mind a fancy evening every once in awhile anyway. With Richard, of course, that was the status quo.

They arrived about five minutes late, standard for Richard, and both of them were dressed in black—he in a jacket and T-shirt, she in a sleeveless linen dress. It fit her skinny body tightly and Richard was holding her bare shoulders as I let them in.

"Greetings," he said, moving around her to shake my hand. Then after the introductions, all of which Richard handled with his usual delicate flair, he handed me three bottles of wine. "Which one goes with curry?" Ann asked, "White or red?"

"Why don't you just open them all," Richard suggested. I went into the kitchen to find a corkscrew and some wine glasses, mentally preparing myself for an above-average night of drinking. Across the room, I could see Ann reaching over to take Mina's handbag and Richard's jacket.

"So Mina, when did you move to America?" I heard Ann ask in the background.

"Not soon enough," the voice said, and from the sound of Richard's forced laughter I could tell they were heading down the hallway towards the living room. I stalled for time in the kitchen, unnecessarily stirring the saffron rice and checking on the bread. "Be out in a minute," I yelled. I was gearing up, getting ready to be on. Richard was somewhat aggressive in conversation, so you had to pay attention. There were things to consider, things that might make you or, more importantly, someone else look foolish. I'd had some experience in the past with him unwittingly playing

Ann and me against each other, planting the seed for a small fight that might pop up later and go on for the rest of the week. Some guys have a real good sense of what not to say when another guy's wife is around. Richard, however, is not one of them.

●

Carter Reinvents Himself. While Ann had offered the sectional couch, Richard and Mina chose to sit across from each other at the table. Then, after thinking about it for a second, they both moved down one chair to the right so that they could be together.

When I finally returned with the glasses and carafe, the three of them were involved in a conversation about Mina's year-old house, the trouble she was having selling it, and how hard it was to get rid of anything on the market nowadays, let alone something good.

"What about that offer you had on Friday?" Richard asked, and it became clear that this topic rarely surfaced between the two of them. It was already Wednesday of the following week.

"Haven't heard back from them," she said, putting her wine glass on the table. "Haven't heard back from them and don't expect to. People always start looking on Fridays, and by Sunday they've usually found something they like better. It's a buyer's market." Mina traced her fingers around the stem of the wine glass and then took another sip.

"How come you're selling your house?" I asked.

"She's looking for something smaller." Richard said, abruptly. "As it stands now, she only uses about half of it. I mean there are only so many bedrooms one person needs."

"Right. I just want something smaller," Mina added. "Plus I spend almost half my time at Richard's anyway." I looked across the table at Richard for a reaction, but he was staring straight ahead at the bookcase.

"Did I tell you guys I ran into Carter last week?" he announced, subtly changing the subject.

"Really?" I laughed, instantly forgetting the other thing we were talking about. "I haven't seen him in months."

"He was inside Dow's Market, buying a bottle of Gatorade."

"What'd he look like?" Ann said, which wasn't an odd first question considering that appearance was everything to Carter. I'm not saying he was Mr. Neat or Joe Groomed-Guy or anything like that, he wasn't, but almost every time you saw him, he looked like an entirely different person. At the last job Richard and I had together, Carter was head of the mailroom, which gave him free reign to wear anything and everything he wanted. For a while, he was Mayfield's resident hippie, complete with a goatee and hair down to his waist. But then one night he had it all cut off in front of fifty

people at Lumpy's Cocktails, each of whom paid two bucks to see it happen. From that moment on, he became a fixture around Mayfield, and the subject of his different personas was always a great warm-up story to tell on these nights with Richard. Ann and I both really enjoyed discussing the intricacies of Carter's latest incarnation. And Richard didn't seem to mind either—I guess for him there wasn't any pressure to come up with an appropriate ending because it was an ongoing process.

After the episode at Lumpy's Cocktails, Carter wore a lot of berets and old used suits, and he hung out at coffee shops for hours, usually sitting in the corner window seat by himself, buried in papers and empty sugar packets. The environmental terrorist phase didn't start until after that summer when he shaved off the goatee and traded in his used clothes for tan fatigues, flannel work shirts, and all-purpose hiking boots. Singlehandedly, he installed a recycling route that ran from Mayfield to Bell Port and, on every other Sunday, as far north as Woodruff. He even stopped the tire plant from dumping waste into Miller's Pond by chaining himself across their drydock.

Richard, Ann, and I had witnessed a number of other Carter phases first-hand, but they were only one or two-week deals back when the phenomenon was in its infancy. Lately, some of them have carried on for months at a time, often stretching from one season to the next. By last Christmas, Carter had switched to black spectacles, round collared shirts, and thick cloth pants with suspenders. His hair was gelled wildly in each direction, resembling a car wash chamois, and he often had axle grease or oil across his hands and cheeks—the inventor phase. For weeks he'd disappear, and then one day turn up in the center of town, trying to demonstrate some new device in the midst of lunch hour traffic.

"So come on, Richard. What was he wearing?" Ann asked, on her way to the kitchen. "A pith helmet? A suit of armor?"

"A monk's habit?" I offered, loud enough so Ann could hear.

"No," Richard laughed, cutting me off. "He was dressed in these long cloth shorts and some hi-tops, and he was carrying a brand new basketball. One of those red, white and blue models."

"A basketball player, huh?" Mina said, real perplexed.

"Yeah, and his hair was sort of blond," Richard offered with a little hesitation.

•

Me and Ann, Originally. As I left for the kitchen to refill everyone's drinks, I began to think about Mina and her possibilities with Richard. They were slim, of course. Simply considering all the women Richard had brought to dinner in the past, and how many of them were still around—

none—it made sense to think that anyone's chances were, at best, a long shot. Mina, though, seemed to rise slightly above the rest.

Sure, from my phone conversation with Richard, I knew she had her negatives, a lingering ex-husband for one. And probably, there was more. But Mina also had an upside. She was older than Richard, which I've learned is a plus with him; and she had a foreign appeal that would probably take him months to grasp and even longer to find uninteresting. Above all, though, she had a uniquely polished sense of independence. Mina was the first woman I'd met that'd been willing to disagree with Richard, and, more importantly, had been able to do it without upstaging him.

I didn't even feel guilty for judging her so quickly. After all, it was a part of the process with Richard and these monthly dinners—no different than the wedding china we'd use to serve the food or the fancy cheese and crackers I'd prepare as an appetizer. Besides, I found myself liking almost everything about Mina right off—from the comfortable short haircut and subtle humor, to her ability to take what had to be an awkward occasion, meeting Richard's married friends, and allow herself to relax and have a good time.

●

Richard, the Diplomat. The kitchen door swung back open and Ann stood there with some green oven mitts covering her hands. "Ooops," she said, "bad news," and we all turned around to see a little smoke creeping out the door. There was a short silence in the room, and then Ann looked at me and tried to laugh. "Why don't you and Richard run over to Verona and get a pizza or something. If, of course, that's okay with everyone."

"No problem," Richard answered immediately, handling the situation with his usual diplomacy. "I've already opened the red wine anyway."

●

Richard and Mina. Haskell's Liquors, about a block or so up the street, was still open, and I noticed Richard walking in that direction. He handed me the other pizza and said to go on ahead without him. "Otherwise, they'll catch cold," he blankly added, smiling. I nodded in agreement, but couldn't be sure if Richard was truly concerned about the pizzas or if his stop for whiskey was just a way to avoid my inevitable questions about Mina. "So she's actually staying over now and again," I would've said to open things up. "That's something new for you, Richard."

"It's really not a big deal," he would've answered back, looking down at his shoes. "It doesn't mean anything."

"How can you say that? It's got to be a record for you—more than one date. It's your personal best." I'd add, mildly kidding him.

"You're forgetting about Barbara, my American businesswoman," he'd say back. After that, the two of us would've gotten into a discussion about commitment like we usually did, and then Richard would've asked me how Ann and I did it.

I'm not sure where the conversation could have progressed from there, with me and Richard there were only a few possibilities. I've learned to be cautious while talking with him, you have to. In the beginning, we used to discuss anything—success, failure, even the wildly implausible dreams I'd always had. Now though, I know better, I know that whenever you mention anything around Richard, even the smallest idea, he'll store it in the back of his mind, waiting for the right moment somewhere down the road to bring it up.

So instead of all that, he walked off to Haskell's, and I headed home with the pizzas.

●

Ann and Mina. When I got back, Ann was in the kitchen washing out the burnt curry and the rest of the stuff. Mina was with her, dumping some mixing bowls into the dishwasher as Ann started on the oven. "I know it's supposed to be your turn," Ann said, as I walked in. "But it's much easier to get everything clean before it all dries."

Mina agreed, and by the way she said it, I could tell that the two of them had been talking and probably didn't want me in there much longer. Maybe I'd interrupted something. In either case, it was the first time this had happened with one of Richard's dates, so I grabbed a big plate, threw down one of the pizzas, and headed out to the living room. "Hurry up and eat while it's hot," I said absentmindedly, still a little confused.

"We'll be right there" they both answered, as the swinging door rattled behind me.

Richard showed up a couple of minutes later, holding a fifth of something in one hand and a bottle of tonic in the other. "Drinks, anyone?" he began, but then cut himself short when he realized I was the only one sitting there. He took another look around the place, then stared back at me for a second. At that moment, you could hear the girls' voices in the kitchen, so I didn't need to explain. Richard sat down, grabbed a piece of pizza, and put the whiskey back in the bag. I wasn't sure, but it seemed like he had a relaxed expression on his face, one of relief. Then, as he bit into

his slice of pepperoni, extra cheese, he mumbled, "So have you got a story ready?"

●

Veronika and Eddie. The next morning Eddie woke up on a dirt road a few miles from the hotel. As he rolled over, it seemed for a second like he was still back home in Beaumont. He even reached across to wake Veronika and tell her the alarm was going off. Then the pain set in. It was an ache all over his body, one so consistent and thorough, he couldn't pinpoint its origin.

Leaning back and brushing off his forehead, Eddie looked down at the camping clothes he was wearing, a simple green and khaki outfit Veronika had chosen back at the airport. He remembered everything that had happened. The band of muggers, the machete, his silent plea for a painless death, everything. It all came back quickly, leaving him in a bit of a daze, sitting there on the side of the dirt road. What happened? Reluctantly, he replayed the scene to himself, but stopped each time he got to the part where he began screaming Veronika's name. It was morning now, maybe even afternoon, he wasn't sure. His feet were bare and his wallet and car keys were missing. There was that, and there was also the pain.

After Eddie got back to the hotel, the police took him over to a hospital near the airport. On the way, one of the sergeants pulled out a note pad and jotted down information, descriptions, and anything else Eddie could remember, most of which was conveyed through a series of hand gestures and facial expressions. Eddie couldn't answer the officer's next batch of questions because they were in a language that he didn't understand.

The nurse guy in the emergency room brought in a few damp towels and had Eddie wash up in a bathroom across the hall. "We'll probably have to take some blood," he added, "but let's wait and see what the doc says." Of all the people in the hospital, the orderly spoke English the best, so Eddie started asking him all kinds of questions—what was happening, where was his wife, what were the police going to do—but the nurse only shrugged and took him down the hall to wait for a doctor. "I can't really help you with that right now" was how the guy put it. "You've got to rest."

Eddie stripped to his underwear and laid back on the cold butcher paper lining the old vinyl bed. The damp towels hadn't done much to rejuvenate him. He was still in a daze, the pain was still strong, and he tried his best to ignore it and think only about Veronika. He grabbed a cold compress from a tray next to the sink and put it across his forehead. A few minutes later, he drifted off.

Eddie could hardly hear the doctor through his dream. As she pointed to his side and got another orderly to wheel him into a bigger room full of lights and equipment, three more doctors arrived and started talking to her. The nurse popped a needle into Eddie's forearm.

●

Richard, Mina, Ann, Veronika and Eddie. "Keep going," Mina said, pouring herself some coffee. "What happened then?"

Ann sliced off another piece of Chocolate Orvin, a frozen dessert we'd prepared the day before, and urged me on as well. Richard was still nibbling at his first helping, and he leaned forward in his chair, waiting.

"After that, the doctor tells Eddie it's the third case they've seen at the hospital that week." I continued. "And then Eddie gets the idea that maybe he's been poisoned or drugged. Or maybe he's gotten some tropical skin disease and the whole thing's a big hallucination. But the doctor tells him, "Eddie, I wish that was the case." Really, it turns out they found this scar in his side, freshly stitched—and not too well either, she tells him."

"A scar?" Ann asked, a little confused.

"I think I missed something," Mina said, reaching for a napkin.

"Well, down in Rio, there have been these roving groups of muggers ever since there've been tourists. And they lure foreigners up on hikes into the mountains, where they take all their stuff and leave them stranded. But some gangs take it a step further. They bring along these hack doctors who go in and grab organs from people to sell on the black market—for transplants. Eddie, it turns out, had his kidney stolen."

I said the last line real matter-of-factly, and then reclined in my chair, just to let everyone know that the story was over. In the past, I've had trouble with that, endings I mean. Sometimes everyone's still sitting there, waiting for me to continue, only I can't because the story's already over. This time, though, the collective groan from the group let me know they'd understood I was finished. Richard tried to soften it, "amusing," he said, kind of laughing.

"Y'know," Ann added, "I've heard that one before. But it was in Peru and the people were from a St. Louis trailer park."

"Wait, how many times has something like this happened?" Mina asked, a little perplexed.

Before I could give her an answer, relaying exactly how I'd heard it from Clarence, how it'd really happened to his brother Gilbert's neighbors, and how it occurred just a few weeks ago, Richard responded with a laugh. "No, honey," he said to Mina with his best English accent, "I'm afraid our fine host has been putting us on. And rather well, I might add."

Ann got up and grabbed the whiskey Richard had bought during the pizza run.

"Anyone else want some?" she asked. And after the four of us nodded, she grabbed a few tumblers out of the kitchen and set the bottle down in the center of the table.

Richard sat back calmly and poured himself a shot. "You know, with all these ideas you're giving Mina, I'm afraid I might wake up in an empty bed tomorrow with a few stitches in my side," he added, splashing a little into my glass. I looked back at him and then stared down at the remains of my Chocolate Orvin. I was thinking about my story, and about all the different ways I could've told it, and maybe how some of them might've been better.

●

Ann, Mina, an Airplane and a Rabbit. I must admit that in the months since Richard began this strange parlor game, I've developed one simple strategy: it's best to go first. For years I've had trouble speaking in front of people, even friends, so starting things off allows me to get it over with quick, avoiding the agony of anticipation. Richard, on the other hand, is quite the opposite—he enjoys being the last one, and whatever extra pressure that goes along with it.

As I sat back vaguely listening to Ann work her way through the airplane crash story, my mind began to wander. I tried to pay attention, but it was difficult. I'd heard that story many times before—even told it myself—and now all the original interest and suspense was gone. For some reason, I was thinking instead about Eddie and Veronika, their wedding, the bad honeymoon, and how things must be so different for them now. My thoughts weren't really anything specific, I guess. To be honest, I don't really even know anything specific about them, just the facts Clarence had told me, all the facts I'd included in my story. Richard gave me a look across the room, and it seemed like his thoughts were wandering too.

After that, I had even greater trouble following along during Mina's turn. She recounted a short, but somewhat elaborate story involving a job her father had taken when he was very young, well before his rise to power. From what I could understand, he'd been a caretaker for a government official, a senator of some sort, and his job involved everything from collecting the mail and gardening to feeding the pets and securing the house. Anyway, the punch line was that her father had failed miserably in an attempt to hide the accidental death of the senator's pet rabbit. When the truth of this came out, Mina's father endured quite of bit of ridicule, and even became the butt of some of the senator's occasional jokes. Overall it

was probably an entertaining story, although, unfortunately, it seemed to lose a great deal in the translation.

●

Richard. Before beginning his turn, Richard made a point of clearing away the dirty dishes and "freshening-up" everyone's drink. Clearly, he had an instinctive talent for entertaining, almost like a ringleader, and it became apparent to me that this was the reason Ann and I enjoyed having him to dinner. The flipside, of course, was that while the two of us had, over the years, lost the energy to entertain people—specifically each other—Richard's desire remained intact and even continued to grow.

"Does anyone mind if I dim the lights a bit?"

●

Again, Richard. I didn't think that he could top his previous story about being a model at the art college, but I probably should have known better. Richard consistently outdid himself. Somehow, each new story he told managed to surpass the previous one—an especially impressive feat considering how he'd recently begun using smaller, less sensational subjects, and that he'd given up unexpected twists and surprise endings altogether. It seemed as if he was gradually getting closer to telling us a story virtually about nothing.

This time it started out easy enough. Richard began by talking about his childhood, about the house that had been in his family for hundreds of years, and about how damp and dreary it could get sometimes, especially during winter. His father had always wanted to sell the place and move somewhere with a better climate, but that never happened. Richard thought this was partly because his parents didn't want to be known as the people who sold off the family land and also, more realistically he guessed, because his father had already sunk a lot of time and energy into the place.

They'd spent five years clearing away the berry and sage brush in the huge rear field, another couple of years refurbishing the two-story guest cottage, and a sizeable chunk of money installing a sixty-five foot television antenna. It was the largest antenna in all of Warwicke Valley, Richard said, and it took the help of twenty locals and three trucks to finally raise it up over the barn. At first, people came from all over the neighborhood to join them in watching television. Sometimes it'd just be a few friends, but every once in awhile, usually on Sundays, whole families would arrive in cars and on bicycles. It was a really great time, Richard said. His father, always proud, would stand out at the front gate, waiting to greet people and welcome them into his home. After that, even as time passed on and the

visitors became fewer and fewer, Richard said his father never again mentioned selling the property and moving away.

And that was it. That was Richard's story—his father, their house, and an antenna that now was probably no more than a piece of scrap metal. I have to admit that when he started off it didn't sound like anything, or at least no more than some random facts thrown together, like a forgettable daydream. But thinking about it now, maybe there was something else to it. Even though it didn't really have a distinct beginning or end, and even though the stuff in between didn't really sound like much, just a piecemeal recollection, I could tell his story was better than mine. It was just one of those things you knew, but couldn't exactly put a finger on why. Maybe it seemed more realistic or maybe it was just easier for us to relate to. I wasn't sure. Maybe it had nothing to do with the story at all. Maybe it was just Richard. But somehow it made me feel dumb for having gone on and on about Eddie, his new wife, and their big trip.

"I liked that one," Ann said, looking over at Richard. Then it was quiet, and everybody just sat there for a few minutes, not saying much of anything. I picked at the remains of my Chocolate Orvin, not exactly hungry, just for something to do, and then my mind moved on to Richard, and how he and I have known each other all these years. Sometimes I laugh at how little we actually understand each other, and how the things we sometimes talk about are of such little importance—box scores in the paper, new movies, television shows, the cars we'd someday buy, even our jobs.

Later, upstairs in bed, I was still thinking about Richard, and thinking about myself, all comfortable, secure and bored, and I replayed the story I'd told, over and over, becoming increasingly certain that I'd taken it in the wrong direction right from the start.

Contributors

Catherine La Courreye Blecki is a Professor of English at San José State University. Her students in "Shakespeare's Politics" and Dr. Fauneil J. Rinn, with whom she team-taught the class, are responsible for raising the questions that led to this article. A companion article ("An Intertextual Study of Volumnia: From Legend to Character in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*") has been published in the anthology *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 23 (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1993): 81-93.

Lowell H. Holway earned an A.B. in English and Creative Writing from Dartmouth Colllege. Currently writing a thesis on comedy in the novels of Graham Greene, he will receive his M.A. from San José State University in 1994.

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Charles B. Paul, Professor (Ret.) of Humanities at San José State University, was educated in Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the U.S. He has written a book on the history of science and three articles on J.P. Rameau, and co-authored a magazine-length article on the source of Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest*. He is spending most of his retirement travelling, writing reviews of high school world history texts and a book on exoticism in French music, and serving on the Executive Board of the Beethoven Society at SJSU.

Kevin Phelan and Bill U'Ren are both natives of San Francisco and graduates of UCLA. Their fiction and translation work has appeared in such journals as *Glimmer Train, South Carolina Review, Cutbank, Washington Review,* and *Aethlon.*

James Spencer has taught at Stanford and San Francisco State. His stories have appeared in *Ontario Review, Chelsea, Transatlantic Review,* and *The Gettysburg Review*, among others. His poems have appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, Perspective*, and numerous others. His plays have been produced in New York, San Francisco, and parts between.

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Acknowledgments

This publication is possible only through the support of The Friends of *San José Studies* and their Guarantor, Benefactor, and Patron subscriptions. The trustees and staff of *SJS* wish to acknowledge these supporters and hope to see their ranks grow.

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Now in its twentieth year, *San José Studies* appears three times annually—winter, spring, and fall. Publication is possible only through the support of the Guarantor, Benefactor, and Patron members of the Friends of San José Studies.

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